

## **AP Literature and Composition Summer Reading 2018**

The reading for the summer is intended to be high interest, as well as thought-provoking. We have decided to offer three choices. Please consider the choices as you read; and consider that our goal was to select readings that you would enjoy and that you would complete with thought and critical attention.

The summer reading assignments end up being a substantial portion of your first quarter average, especially since the first assignments you will do in class are based on these texts. If you don't do the reading, or don't read with enough attention and focus, the first month of class will be difficult for you. We are trying our best to prepare you for college and treat you like adults. Please embrace this and put yourself in the best position to be successful with this assignment.

**We will begin the year with a graded, student-run discussion.** You should expect that less than ten of your classmates will have read this same text grouping, and the discussion will occur over an hour. **Though you will not be directly graded on your notes, post-its, or other means of organizing your thoughts, you should prepare yourself to speak often and with depth about all of the reading.** You should be able to find any moment in any text with celerity during the discussion. It is up to you for how to prepare for the discussion, but understand that it is obvious when you have not read with enough depth during a discussion with such a small group of students, and that you are being graded on your performance in the discussion, not whether you simply completed the assigned reading. As such, preparation is critical to your success.

**Also, we will use your summer reading for the first few weeks of class. You will need to have read the books carefully and thoughtfully to be successful on the first round of assignments for the year.**

**Please read the "Introduction to the Class" and "Statement about a trauma sensitive space and the role of English class at Malden High School" (both below) before continuing on to the choices. It is important context for what we read, how we read, and why we read.**

*\* Please note that as a college level class you are treated as an emerging adult. The books we will read are excellent pieces of literature, and in many cases the authors and books have been distinguished in various ways, but you may encounter situations and content that have some adult situations and themes.*

### **Statement about a trauma sensitive space and the role of English class at Malden High School:**

English class is not only the study of language--it is the study of how humans use language. There are some technical aspects to how English works, like grammar and usage, as well as some

stylistic choices writers make that we will study and practice. We will also investigate how humans create arguments through the use of rhetoric, logic, and appeals, as well as how writers synthesize ideas and topics--and, we will apply these techniques in our own writing. But humans also use language for understanding our existence in the universe. In doing so, we often tell stories. Whether fiction or nonfiction, humans choose to read and write stories to make sense of their experiences, learn empathy (which requires imagination), and document emotional and factual truths.

Because of this, you may encounter many different types of human experiences, some of which may be hard or uncomfortable to read about. If we are to study humanity, we will certainly find moments of joy, redemption, and beauty. But, we will also likely encounter many traumatic experiences: genocide, slavery, war, death, sickness, violence, racism, extreme poverty, dysfunction, abuses of power, as well as physical, mental, and sexual abuse--and this is not a complete list of human tragedies. Some of this content may, or may not, be a trigger for you; it also may affect others differently. It would be impossible to start excluding any books from our curriculum that might be a trigger and still be left with material to cover.

As English teachers, we believe that though the content may, at times, be difficult, that it is an important part of our study and reflected in the school's mission statement. One of the many reasons we read and study literature is to help us through our own understanding of our role in society and to allow us to empathize with others. As teachers, we can promise to try and create a safe space to read and discuss all material. As students, you can help us maintain a safe and supportive environment for all students in the class.

Being a human is hard. Being in high school is hard. Though English class sets out to develop your skills in critical reading, critical writing, speaking & listening, research, and critical thinking, we believe that a high school English class is also a place where you can learn to grow as a young adult, learn how to communicate with others, share ideas, and work through what it means to be human. We look forward to sharing this journey with you.

### **Introduction to the Class**

What is the process of understanding, in literature and in life? How do the stories we tell shape our view of our place in the world? How do we come to understand who we are in relation to people, time, and geography? How do we integrate the thinking of others into our own? How does my story transform yours? What is beauty? What is meaning? Is it okay for there to be no meaning? Do we really exist? All of these questions and more will be explored in this class.

The class is intended to satisfy Malden High School's English literature requirements, so texts for the course will largely, though not exclusively, be drawn from this literary tradition and we will also be learning some of the historical context of the texts. Since this course is intended to

develop life-long reading habits, you will also be responsible for selecting some of your own reading.

This advanced level English course is intended to replace the freshman year of college English, as described in the most recent College Board AP English course description. As such, it is a demanding and time-consuming class that requires students to read carefully and extensively, to write thoughtfully and prolifically, and to discuss actively and reflectively. In other words, you will hone your ability to express a “critical appreciation” of literature as a work of art. “Critical appreciation,” as David Foster Wallace expressed in his syllabus for “Literary Interpretation” in 2005, “means having smart, sophisticated reasons for liking whatever literature you like, and being able to articulate those reasons for other people, especially in writing.” He continues:

Vital for critical appreciation is the ability to “interpret” a piece of literature, which basically means coming up with a cogent, interesting account of what a piece of lit [sic] means, what it’s trying to do to/for the reader, what technical choices the author’s made in order to try to achieve the effect she wants, and so on. As you can probably anticipate, the whole thing gets very complicated and abstract and hard, which one reason why entire college departments are devoted to studying and interpreting literature.<sup>1</sup>

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### **Option 1: 1968 in History and Literature**

One of our thoughts / ideas / wishes / hopes for teaching AP Literature is to structure a course around the years 1968, 1918, and 1868. We think it would be a fascinating way to think about how literature can represent the times and places in which it is written, as well as make commentary about these settings. Next year would have been perfect too, since it would have represented 50, 100, and 150 year marks of these years, but there is also the reality of being able to purchase all the appropriate materials to pull this course off. So, here is a chance to do a mini summer reading unit with this in mind! This is a great grouping for any of you that gravitate towards history.

#### **Required:**

*Read*

- The Sympathizer by Viet Thanh Nguyen (fiction)

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, David Foster. Course Syllabus 67-Literary Analysis, Section 02, Spring 2005. Source of document unknown.

- The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days That Inspired America by Thurston Clarke (non-fiction)

*Listen*

- [How Has America Changed Since 1968?](#)" (Episode 26) Radio Atlantic Podcast
  - You will need to scroll down to Episode 26.

### **Additional Options:**

- The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (fiction)
- 1968: History in Verse by Ed Sanders (poetry)
- Astral Weeks : A Secret History of 1968 by Ryah H. Walsh (non fiction)
- Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia's Lost Rock and Roll, directed by John Pirozzi (documentary)

### **Option 2: Coming-of-Age in American**

This option is influenced by our relationship with Malden Reads. For those of you that are interested in reading and enjoying some great reads, we offer the following texts. The accompanying podcasts will help you develop overarching themes and questions. Think about the connections between the books too. Please do not select books that you have already read. We know your current English teachers.

### **Required:**

*Read* **three** of the following six books

- The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas (fiction)
- I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez (fiction)
- American Street by Ibi Zoboi (fiction)
- The Book of Unknown Americans by Cristina Henríquez (fiction)
- All American Boys by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely (fiction)
- Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (non-fiction)

*Listen*

- "Who Gets to be American?" (Episode 29) Radio Atlantic Podcast
  - You will need to scroll down to Episode 29.
- "Goodbye Black History Month, Hello Black Future" (Episode 35) Radio Atlantic Podcast
  - You will need to scroll down to Episode 35.

### **Additional Optional Sources**

One of the units we plan to teach next year at the beginning of the year is **\*\*\*Flawless: Adichie's Americanah, Beyonce, Nina Simone, and The Politics of Language**. These texts will help set up some of the essential questions and tie in nicely with some critical theory of race and gender.

Really interested in this topic, there are a couple of poetry books that might interest you too:

- Haiti Glass by Lenelle Moise
  - Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine
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**Option 3:** The Goldfinch by Diana Tartt

This option is for any of you that are craving a literary masterpiece, and want to devote some time and attention to an epic--something with heft and beautifully written and conceived. Ms. Craven has also sponsored this book for summer reading and is excited to read it and join any conversations we have at the beginning of the year. To us, this is what summer reading is about: getting really excited to read a book and have thoughtful conversations with insightful people. We have taught this book in the past and we know there is plenty to do with it when you return to school.

**Required:**

*Read*

- The Goldfinch by Donna Tartt