

# Freshman Honors English

## Summer Reading Suggestions

May 2021

As a part of the freshman honors curriculum, you are expected to read and write with fluency and ease.

To be excellent at something, human beings need to spend hours upon hours practicing that skill. Therefore, we think it is important you spend time during the summer reading and writing, practicing those skills on your own before we spend time working on them academically as a class. **However, nothing is specifically required of you. Everything listed below are merely suggestions.**

### Reading Portion:

If you are looking for a good book to read that not only fits with our overall curriculum but which works specifically well for your age group and abilities, we recommend the following books:

- *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith
- *Cold Sassy Tree* by Olive Ann Burns
- *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck
- *Peace Like a River* by Leif Enger
- *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie
- *Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier
- *Silas Marner* by George Eliot
- *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan
- *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

You should be able to purchase any of these books at any good bookstore or check a copy out from the library.

Before starting any independent reading, you should review the following:

- Read “Before You Read: Questions to Ask Yourself about a Book” and “The Elements of the Novel”

### Writing Portion:

Much of our understanding of literature as well as grammar comes from our understanding and our practice of writing. With that said, over the summer you should try to write as much as possible by keeping a Writer’s Notebook. When school begins, we will utilize our Writer’s Notebooks throughout the entire school year.

- Keep a Writer’s Notebook all summer long. This Writer’s Notebook can be spiral bound, journal size, or a bunch of loose-leaf papers stapled together. The way you organize your writing is up to you. Bring the notebook to class the first week of school (even if it is empty).
  - In this Writer’s Notebook, you should try to make consistent entries over the summer about any and all topics you feel like writing about. A writer’s notebook is a great place to write down ideas you have for writing, thoughts and feelings you have about the world, and any writing in any format you wish to create.

Have a wonderful summer! We are looking forward to meeting all of you in the fall.

Sincerely,



Mrs. Callahan



Mrs. Mileo

Honors English 1-2 Teachers

# Before You Read: Questions to Ask yourself about a Book

## When was this book written?

The date when the book was written can tell you a lot about the author's background and point of view. The earliest date on the copyright page tells you when the book was first published. (You'll find the copyright page on the back of the title page, at the front of the book.) For books up to sixty or seventy years old, the earliest copyright date is approximately when the book was written. Older books, however, may show only the date for the current edition, not the date the book was first published. If you think the book you're reading may have been written more than sixty or seventy years ago, look for an author biography at the beginning or end of the book. This biography may mention when the book was written; at the least, it will usually tell you the years the author was alive.

## Does this book belong to a genre I recognize?

A genre (zhan 'r) is a category of books with similar styles, themes, or subjects. Romances, westerns, science fiction, fantasy, horror stories, and mysteries are all popular fiction genres. Being aware of genre in the books you choose will give you clues to your reading habits. Do you usually read novels or nonfiction? Survival stories, sports biographies, romances, or spy thrillers? Maybe there's a good one you haven't read yet – or maybe its time to try something new.

## What is my purpose in reading this book?

Knowing why you're reading a book will help you decide how to read it. Suppose you're reading a book mainly for enjoyment – say, a Stephen King thriller that all your friends are reading. You'll probably read straight through from beginning to end, absorbed in the plot. You might skip over a long description to get back to the action, but you wouldn't ruin the suspense by skipping to the end and then going back.

Now suppose you're reading a book mainly for information -a guide to windsurfing, for example. If you're new to the sport, you might read more slowly than usual, absorbing every detail, looking up key terms you don't understand, making notes of important points. If you're an experienced windsurfer, on the other hand, you might skim the book very quickly, looking for new information, or skip straight to a particular section that interests you.

## The Elements of the Novel

A **novel** is a long fictional story normally running between a hundred and five hundred book pages (more than fifty thousand words). In most novels the key elements are **characters** and **plot**. A **plot** is a coherent series of related incidents, each of which results from conflicts – struggles – that come about when a character's desires are blocked in some way.

**Conflict** is what gives a story its energy, what propels the plot and keeps us reading. This is just as true for novels; the conflict is likely to take place **externally** between the main character and another character or some hostile force in nature. In more complex novels, particularly modern novels, the conflict is more likely to be psychological, taking a place **internally** between warring feelings within a single character's mind. Another crucial element in a novel is its **setting**, or time and place. Setting can offer clues to the social and economic backgrounds of the characters. It can also have a marked effect on the novel's **mood** or atmosphere.

When we study a novel, we must always ask: What is this story, beneath its surface, really about? On the surface, a novel might be a trip down a river on a raft or a ship captain's hunt for a white whale. But it also can have deeper messages, or **themes**-beliefs about human nature or the meaning of life suggested through the story's event.

In our search for meaning, we need to ask ourselves about two other elements that play important roles in fiction: **point of view** and **tone**. As soon as the storyteller starts the novel, we should begin asking: From whose point of view is this narrative being told? Does the storyteller speak in the **first person**, as an *I* in the story, or in the **third person**, standing outside the story? Should I believe the narrator completely? What aspects of the story might the narrator be ignorant of or biased about or unwilling to reveal?

We also become aware of the **tone** created by the novel's point of view. Is it marked at all by **irony**, the contrast between expectation and reality? Is the story **satirical**-that is, does it ridicule human faults or social institutions? Or is the story simply an objective picture of life, devoid of any "comment" by the author? Tone is closely tied to **style**, the writer's characteristic form of expression. Some writers use a great deal of long words and complicated sentences; others may write in plain, informal language or even in slang. Some novelists include many long descriptive passages; others stick mainly to action and dialogue. If you find yourself reading book after book by the same author, you've probably found a writer whose style suits your taste.

With its big canvas, with plenty of time to explore characters and settings and ways of life, the novel can gather the reader right into its heart. A good novel can become more fascinating and more real than your actual surroundings. If you're a reader, you've already experienced that pleasure of "getting lost in a book."