



Westminster Christian Academy

11th Grade Summer Reading

Honors American Literature

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This junior level course is a survey of both classic and modern works of American literature and culture. The American Dream, the American Mosaic, and the question of what it means to be “an American”—both historically and in our current culture—are three major themes woven throughout the curriculum.

Your summer reading assignments will introduce you to the themes of this class. First, read *one* of the following nonfiction books. The authors of these books discuss the American Dream from their own perspectives. Be ready to discuss your chosen book when you return to school in August. If you annotate as you read (underlining important and interesting passages, making comments and posing questions in the margins), you will be more likely to interact with the text in a meaningful way and be better prepared to discuss it later.

1. Read *one* of the following nonfiction books:

- *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride
This book is, indeed, a tribute to the author's mother. In it, the author, a man whose mother was white and his father black, tells two stories: that of his mother and his own. Tautly written in spare, clear prose, it is a wonderful story of a bi-racial family who succeeded and achieved the American dream, despite the societal obstacles placed in its way.
- *Don't Sing at the Table: Life Lessons from My Grandmothers* by Adriana Trigiani
New York Times bestselling author Adriana Trigiani shares a treasure trove of insight and guidance from her two grandmothers: time-tested, common sense advice on the most important aspects of a woman's life, from childhood to the golden years. Seamlessly blending anecdote with life lesson, *Don't Sing at the Table* tells the two vibrant women's real-life stories—how they fell in love, nurtured their marriages, balanced raising children with being savvy businesswomen, and reinvented themselves with each new decade.
- *Scratch Beginnings: Me, \$25, and the Search for the American Dream* by Adam Shepard
A fascinating and eye-opening account of the grand social experiment the author undertook in response to Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*. Subtitled “Me, \$25, and the Search for the American Dream,” *Scratch Beginnings* chronicles Shepard's successful efforts to raise himself up from self-imposed rock bottom in one year's time—a personal odyssey that is sure to inspire anyone who reads about it, instilling new faith in the solid principles on which our democracy was built.
***Warning about language: Shepard lives in a homeless shelter for much of the book, so he associates with men who use pretty salty language. Some will find this language offensive; if in question, please choose one of the other books.**

- *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls
A remarkable memoir of resilience and redemption, and a revelatory look into a family at once deeply dysfunctional and uniquely vibrant. When sober, Jeannette's brilliant and charismatic father captured his children's imagination, teaching them physics, geology, and how to embrace life fearlessly. But when he drank, he was dishonest and destructive. Her mother was a free spirit who abhorred the idea of domesticity and didn't want the responsibility of raising a family. *The Glass Castle* is truly astonishing--a memoir permeated by the intense love of a peculiar but loyal family.
***Warning about language: Walls says that if she would have considered the number of adolescents who would want to read her book, she wouldn't have quoted her father so liberally. Some will find her father's language offensive; if in question, please choose one of the other books.**

**You will be required to keep a Reading Journal for the non-fiction book of your choice from the above list of four. (See instructions for the reading journal on the following page)

2. **Second, read *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald**, the classic novel about the American Dream. (read the novel, do not simply watch the movie) Below please find questions for reflection and discussion. You are not responsible for keeping a reading journal, but annotating as you read will help you make meaning. There will be an objective test over the novel sometime within the first two weeks of school. After our class discussion of the novel, you will be assigned a related essay, but you do not need to worry about that now ☺.

Summer Reading – Keeping a Reading Journal (Choice memoir only, not *The Great Gatsby*)

In order to help you successfully complete this year's summer reading assignment, you will be asked to keep a journal as you read. In this journal (can be typed or handwritten), you can record your thoughts as you progress through the story. Below you will find several prompts that you should use to focus your journal entries. Your reading journal will be your first graded assignment for your Junior English class. Additionally, the reading journal will serve as a helpful tool for the first major essay assignment in our class, which will require you to use your summer reading novel as a source.

Instructions:

- Date each entry.
- Fully develop your response with examples and explanations including cited textual evidence.
- Create FOUR different journal entries. (perhaps divide your novel into four sections and respond to one per section).
- Each entry should be a minimum of THREE paragraphs (about 1 page each)
- You may use personal language such as "I" or "me" since these responses are not formal essays.
- Complete the journal only for your CHOICE novel, not *The Great Gatsby*

Summer Reading Journal Prompts

1. How are characters developing as the story progresses? How do you personally feel about specific characters. Are some characters more dynamic than others (do they change during the story)? How have the events or other characters influenced or motivated the actions of certain characters?
2. What are some of the recurring themes, ideas, images and/or symbols (we call these "motifs")? Why do you think the author might be repeating these recurring elements? How do these motifs add to the meaning of the story?
3. What are the major conflicts in the story? Why have these conflicts formed and how are these conflicts developing? Would you categorize these conflicts as external (from outside sources) or internal (within the characters)?
4. Can you relate or make any connections to the characters in this book? How have you been able to empathize with these characters? How do specific parts of the story remind you of your own life?
5. Who is the narrator of the story? How does the narrator of the story influence or affect the manner in which the story is told? Why would the author have selected this particular narrator for the story? How might a different narrator change or alter the story?
6. Write a letter to one of the characters from the book. Attempt to offer this character advice based on their situation or conflict. You should include at least two specific events which this character is a part of during the story. You may also ask questions.
7. Evaluate the writing style of the author. What are the techniques that the author frequently makes use of and how effective are these techniques? You have also looked at how the author develops a tone for their subject through word choice.

8. If you could be or become one of the characters from the story for one day, who would you choose and why? Which character would you most certainly not want to be and why? Include elements of your own personality and interests to help explain your reasoning.
9. What is the overall mood (feeling given to the reader) created by this story? What are some examples of how the author creates this mood or feeling within their audience?
10. Choose one passage from the story that you believe is vital and important in understanding the overall text. Write the passage down (including citation) and then explain the importance of the passage. Include a discussion of any literary elements you notice being used to create meaning.
11. What, in your opinion, is the overall theme or message of the story? How does the author develop this message or theme throughout the text? What are some scenes or events in the story that directly point to this message?
12. What is your overall opinion of the story? In your evaluation or review, consider which elements of the story are effective/enjoyable and which elements from the story you might change or improve. Provide specific examples of the strengths or weaknesses of the book.

Rubric for Summer Reading Journals

5	4	3	2	1
Responses are richly developed with personal reflection and multiple specific examples from the text. Responses display close and careful reading of the text. Accurate citation included.	Responses are developed with some specific references or details from the text. Some personal connections or reflections made. Accurate citation included.	Responses are partially developed with some ideas not fully explained or supported with examples from the text. Some accurate citations included.	Responses are very general and lack specific examples from the text. Responses are underdeveloped.	Responses show little to no evidence of actual reading OR Responses are significantly underdeveloped