



Soon to be AP Literature Senior Writers and Readers,

I look forward to meeting all of you and discussing our summer reading when you return as full-fledged seniors in August. I thought I'd provide an introduction to each of the books on the summer list and share the merits of each of your choices.

First, let me impress on you the value of actually reading this summer. You may have previously seen reading as work or drudgery, but research shows that the most successful people read broadly and regularly.

Some of you may argue that you don't have time to read, but we all waste a portion of time that could be spent in reading.

- *You're stuck in a car on a family trip?* Don't forget your book. You will forget to ask, "Are we there yet?"
- *You have to wait 30 minutes at an appointment?* Instead of scrolling through social media, read a book on your phone.
- *You're bored and stuck at home?* Turn off the television and the Xbox and get lost in another world and another life beyond your own.
- *You have a friend who is also reading the same book?* Make a pact to discuss your summer reading after a certain amount of chapters. Meet at the coffee shop with your books and notebooks. You'll look cool, have a latte, and "get a latte" done in preparation for my class.

I want you...

- to read good literature for information and entertainment.
- to develop empathy for others, fictional or real.
- to seek insight into the human experience and consider beliefs and cultures beyond your own.
- to develop your own voice as a writer, by first recognizing and imitating the vocabulary and style of great thinkers and authors.
- to develop the reading stamina required in college and beyond.
- to delve deeply into all reading and especially into God's best seller, *The Holy Bible*, which contains the wisdom of our Creator, and the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ.

Oh, and I want you to begin the first quarter of your senior year with a good grade on summer reading assignments. (Of course there will be assignments and tests!)

My advice: Read and reflect on **one book in June** (and take notes on characters, events, and themes). Then **read the other 2 in July and August** (and take notes on characters, events, and themes), and you will confidently enter my classroom next August ready to think, discuss, and write!

God bless your summer!

Your soon-to-be English teacher (Lord willing),

Mrs. Janelle Phipps

Summer Required Text:

***All the Light We Cannot See* Anthony Doerr**

This Pulitzer Prize winning novel is written in short chapters alternating between the parallel lives of Marie-Laure Blanc, a blind French girl who must survive WW2 in Saint-Malo, and Werner Pfennig, an orphaned young German engineering protégé who is trained by the Nazis to intercept and destroy enemy radio broadcasts. The novel at times moves from present tense to flashbacks, and, beyond the war that the two characters must navigate and survive, the novel's central conflict is a search for a fabulous, cursed diamond.

AND choose 2: (or more—They are all good!)

***Invisible Man* Ralph Ellison**

Published in 1952, *Invisible Man* is considered by many as one of the top 100 books written in America. It is also provided as a choice on the AP Literature exam free response open question more than any other novel. The story of an unnamed (invisible) young black man addresses numerous racial, social, intellectual and personal identity struggles of the early 20th century. The book has been criticized and banned for unpleasant realities, but, as Ellison accepted the 1953 National Book Award, he stated that its significance was one of “experimental attitude.”

***Sing, Unburied Sing* Jesmyn Ward**

In this National Book Award winning novel, JoJo and his sister Kayla live on a Mississippi farm with their grandparents and occasionally their drug-addicted mother Leonie. Jesmyn Ward's story includes ghosts and visions and the growth of a young black boy on a journey fraught with danger and hope.

***The Marriage Portrait* Maggie O'Farrell**

Set in Renaissance Italy, young duchess Lucrezia de' Medici must leave behind her comfortable aristocratic childhood and marry into a troubled and unfamiliar court. As she sits for her marriage portrait, it becomes increasingly clear that her life is in danger if she does not produce a male heir for her husband the Duke of Ferrara. Before you read this NYT bestseller, read Robert Browning's dramatic monologue “My Last Duchess,” another fictional work based on the the real life Duke of Ferrara.*

***Gilead* Marilynne Robinson**

A 2005 Pulitzer Prize winning, novel, *Gilead* is written as a fictional memoir of elderly, white Reverend John Ames, a Congregational minister in secluded (also fictional) Gilead, Iowa. Nearing the end of his life, Ames recounts his history and that of his father and his abolitionist grandfather, also Congregational ministers, in order to leave a legacy for his seven year-old son.

***Things Fall Apart* Chinua Achebe**

This classic novel written by Chinua Achebe depicts the story of Okonkwo, a proud and successful Igbo man who struggles with the arrival of European colonialism and Christian missionaries. The first part of the novel highlights Okonkwo's personal history and longstanding Igbo culture and traditions. The second and third parts introduce the personal and societal changes caused by the influx of European culture and beliefs.

***Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë**

Jane Eyre is a *bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age story of the title character, an orphan who searches for her place in the world. Though she faces cruelty, mistreatment, and deceit, she is the ultimate female heroine. Though she lives in the Victorian Era when women had few options outside of marriage, she perseveres in the face of adversity and chooses her own path.

***Cry, the Beloved Country* Alan Paton**

Set during the time of apartheid and social upheaval in South Africa, this novel follows the parallel stories of a black Zulu priest Stephen Kumalo and a wealthy white landowner James Jarvis whose search for their sons intersects in difficult and moving ways. Throughout his journey Stephen Kumalo's character displays the pain and beauty in a faithful life and the power and generosity of a faithful God. *A note about style:* Since the book contains the use of Afrikaans words, there is a glossary at the end to check for meaning. Paton also uses dashes rather than quotation marks to identify characters' speech.

***The Botanist's Daughter* Kayte Nunn (NEHS common reader)**

From the publisher's summary of this historical novel: In Victorian England, headstrong adventuress Elizabeth takes up her late father's quest for a rare, miraculous plant. She faces a perilous sea voyage, unforeseen dangers, and treachery that threatens her entire family. In present-day Australia, Anna finds a mysterious metal box containing a sketchbook of dazzling watercolours, a photograph inscribed 'Spring 1886' and a small bag of seeds. It sets her on a path far from her safe, carefully ordered life and on a journey that will force her to face her own demons. In this spellbinding botanical odyssey of discovery, desire, and deception, Kayte Nunn has so exquisitely researched 19th-century Cornwall and Chile you can almost smell the fragrance of the flowers, the touch of the flora on your fingertips.

Note: Seniors who are members of the National English Honor Society are invited to read this novel so that they might enter an essay contest in the second quarter.

***My Last Duchess Robert Browning**

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked

Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave
commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

For adept literary analysis of this poem, read this essay:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/144033/robert-browning-my-last-duchess>