

American Literature Summer Reading List

Honors American Lit. Students should choose Two (2) Books from the following lists. One book must be fiction and one must be nonfiction.

American Lit. Students should choose One (1) book from the following lists. Students can choose a book off of either list. Students only have to read one book.

Students will take a quiz over their chosen book during the second week of the semester.

Nonfiction:

***The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls**

In *The Glass Castle*, Walls chronicles her upbringing at the hands of eccentric, nomadic parents--Rose Mary, her frustrated-artist mother, and Rex, her brilliant, alcoholic father. To call the elder Walls's childrearing style laissez faire would be putting it mildly. As Rose Mary and Rex, motivated by whims and paranoia, uprooted their kids time and again, the youngsters (Walls, her brother and two sisters) were left largely to their own devices. But while Rex and Rose Mary firmly believed children learned best from their own mistakes, they themselves never seemed to do so, repeating the same disastrous patterns that eventually landed them on the streets.

(www.amazon.com)

***Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* by Barack Obama**

Son of a white American mother and of a black Kenyan father whom he never knew, Obama grew up mainly in Hawaii. After college, he worked for three years as a community organizer on Chicago's South Side. Then, finally, he went to Kenya, to find the world of his dead father, his "authentic" self. Will the truth set you free, Obama asks?

(www.amazon.com)

***Hiroshima* By John Hersey**

When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, few could have anticipated its potential for devastation. Pulitzer prize-winning author John Hersey recorded the stories of Hiroshima residents shortly after the explosion and, in 1946, *Hiroshima* was published, giving the world first-hand accounts from people who had survived it. The words of Miss Sasaki, Dr. Fujii, Mrs. Nakamura, Father Kleinsorg, Dr. Sasaki, and the Reverend Tanimoto gave a face to the statistics that saturated the media and solicited an overwhelming public response.

(www.amazon.com)

***Black Mass: The True Story of an Unholy Alliance Between the FBI and the Irish Mob* By Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill**

A triumph of investigative reporting, this full-bodied true-crime saga by two Boston Globe reporters is a cautionary tale about FBI corruption and the abuse of power. Gangster James "Whitey" Bulger ruled Boston's Irish mob, and his wary collaboration with the Italian Mafia, which he detested, was the cornerstone of the city's balkanized criminal underworld. Few suspected that Whitey Bulger and his partner, crime boss Stevie Flemmi, were both FBI informants; their squealing helped the FBI to put a score of mobsters in jail and wipe out the Angiulo crime family.

(www.amazon.com)

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Fiction:

***The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingslover**

Feisty Marietta Greer changes her name to "Taylor" when her car runs out of gas in Taylorville, Ill. By the time she reaches Oklahoma, this strong-willed young Kentucky native with a quick tongue and an open mind is catapulted into a surprising new life. Taylor leaves home in a beat-up '55 Volkswagen bug, on her way to nowhere in particular, savoring her freedom. But when a forlorn Cherokee woman drops a baby in Taylor's passenger seat and asks her to take it, she does.

(www.amazon.com)

***Mystic River* by Dennis Lehane**

Lehane ventures beyond his acclaimed private eye series with this emotionally wrenching crime drama about the effects of a savage killing on a tightly knit, blue-collar Boston neighborhood. Written with a sensitivity toward character that exceeds his previous efforts, the story tracks the friendship of three boys from a defining moment in their childhood, when 11-year-old Dave Boyle was abducted off the streets of East Buckingham and sexually molested by two men before managing to escape. Boyle, Jimmy Marcus and Sean Devine grow apart as the years pass, but a quarter century later they are thrust back together when Marcus's 19-year-old daughter, Katie, is murdered in a local park.

(www.amazon.com)

***The Last Juror* by John Grisham**

In 1970, small town newspaper *The Clanton Times* went belly up. With financial assistance from a rich relative, it's purchased by 23-year-old Willie Traynor, formerly the paper's cub reporter. Soon afterward, his new business receives the readership boost it needs thanks to his editorial efforts and coverage of a particularly brutal rape and murder committed by the scion of the town's reclusive bootlegger family. Rather than shy from reporting on the subsequent open-and-shut trial (those who oppose the Padgitt family tend to turn up dead in the area's swampland), Traynor launches a crusade to ensure the unrepentant murderer is brought to justice. When a guilty verdict is returned, the town is relieved to find the Padgitt family's grip on the town did not sway the jury, though Danny Padgitt is sentenced to life in prison rather than death. But, when Padgitt is released after serving less than a decade in jail and members of the jury are murdered, Clanton once again finds itself at the mercy of its renegade family.

(www.amazon.com)

***The Dante Club* by Matthew Pearl**

Talk about high concept: in Pearl's debut novel, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell team up with 19th-century publisher J.T. Fields to catch a serial killer in post-Civil War Boston. It's the fall of 1865, and Harvard University, the cradle of Bostonian intellectual life, is overrun by sanctimonious scholars who turn up their noses at European literature, confining their study to Greek and Latin. Longfellow and his iconoclastic crew decide to produce the first major American translation of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. Their ambitious plans are put on hold when they realize that a murderer terrorizing Boston is recreating some of the most vivid scenes of chthonic torment in Dante's *Inferno*.

(www.amazon.com)