

AMSTD 2026

Summer Reading Guide

The summer reading is intended to give us a speedy launch into common texts for the Fall. You should arrive in class on your first day with books and annotations in hand. We will use the essential questions to focus our discussion of the texts, so consider them carefully as you read. There will be some discussion of the texts in class, and they will also be incorporated into writing assignments in the fall trimester.

Assigned Readings

The Lathe of Heaven by Ursula K. Le Guin (Scribner, 2008)

Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer (Anchor Books, 1997)

American Dreams: The United States since 1945 by H.W. Brands (Penguin, 2011)

Capitalism and Freedom by Milton Friedman (University of Chicago, 2020) - read the introduction and chapters 1, 2, 6, and 7

Please make sure that you purchase the precise edition specified above. Purchasing a different edition could result in different pagination, meaning that your verbal and written citations of the text will be misaligned with the class.

We want to make sure that all students have access to summer reading texts. *If you need financial support to purchase the summer reading texts for the American Studies course*, please email Jason Gough, English Department Chair (jgough@seattleacademy.org), and include the following information:

- (1) Your full name
- (2) Your grade level during the 26-27 school year and the course you are enrolled in (for example: 11th grade, American Studies)
- (3) The full address (number, street, city, state, and zip code) where your texts should be mailed

Reading Guide Questions:

Before you launch into your reading, do a little bit of background research. Having some context on the author and their historical circumstances goes a long way to helping you understand a text. Start with Wikipedia. Scope out the top Google hits. You should have a conversational knowledge of these authors and texts before you crack the first page. The essential questions are to guide your thinking and give you a lens of focus for your annotations.

For all the texts:

How do you decide right from wrong? Where does your moral knowledge come from?
(When in doubt, you can always annotate for this question!)

Reading Guide Questions by Text:

For *Into the Wild*, consider:

- How does Chris's story fit into other American traditions of exploration, self-discovery, and individualism?
- How should one balance principle and pragmatism when they conflict?

For *The Lathe of Heaven*, consider:

- In the text, how do characters approach understanding how to “do the right thing”?
- How do the characters Orr and/or Haber know when it is better to go with the flow or impose their will on the world?
- What is the difference between passivity and powerlessness in the text?

For *American Dreams*:

- How has competition with the Soviet Union shaped America's role in the world?
- What is the “American Dream” and which groups have been excluded from it?

For *Capitalism and Freedom*:

- What is the proper role of the federal government?
- How does Friedman see the free market as the ultimate solution to social problems?

Annotation Guidelines

Margin Comments: Your primary task is creating margin comments. These are *complete ideas* written in the margins of your book. They quickly summarize what's happening in the passage. Be specific; use names and nouns. You can also make inferences about what's happening in the text. Margin comments keep your brain tracking and synthesizing the main ideas as you read. We're willing to accept a bit of variation in the symbols you use to mark things, but we aren't willing to compromise on margin comments as the heart and soul of annotation.

***: The star.** BIG IDEAS. Use this when you see a passage that cuts to the heart of the main idea or essential question. If you really want to emphasize the big ideas, you could use a different color of ink. Writing the star itself isn't sufficient- you'll need a margin comment to pull out the big idea so you can return to it during discussion.

?: The question mark. Use a question mark to note the places where you have questions. WRITE the question down so you won't forget it. Make it a priority to ask your questions during discussion!

Content Note

Into the Wild and *The Lathe of Heaven* (and other texts we will read this year) have scenes that may be surprising and/or challenging to read. They deal with death, violence, stereotypes, inequity, and sexuality with varying degrees of explicitness. While these are mature themes, we believe that such passages serve important thematic and aesthetic purposes in these texts. Our discussions will focus on the course's essential questions and how they link to the text's explication of personal growth, American culture, moral decision-making, and alienation. Please contact Megan Lucchesi at mlucchesi@seattleacademy.org if you have specific questions about the content of these texts. We would like to remind students to prioritize their mental health, and at times it might be appropriate to take breaks from reading, whether during summer reading or during the school year.