



Freshman English Summer Reading Assignment 2025-26

WELCOME!

Your ninth grade English teachers are already looking forward to meeting you! For now, we wanted to send you a note about the options for the **two** texts you'll read over the summer.

We are asking that you choose at least **one novel from each list**, one that is speculative fiction and one that tracks a character's coming of age. (Note that we are providing links to Bookshop.org, but we encourage you to support your local bookstore or acquire the text from any vendor that works for you.) Before you choose, read summaries and reviews of each option, and feel free to consult the optional content warnings so that you can choose a text that excites and challenges you at an appropriate level. We are also asking you to annotate your chosen texts and do a small creative project (more on that below!).

SPECULATIVE FICTION	COMING-OF-AGE NOVELS
<i>Brave New World</i> by Aldous Huxley • Goodreads summary • Optional content warnings	<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> by J.D. Salinger • Goodreads summary • Optional content warnings
<i>Kindred</i> by Octavia Butler • Goodreads summary • Optional content warnings	<i>Persepolis</i> by Marjane Satrapi • Goodreads summary • Optional content warnings
<i>Never Let Me Go</i> by Kazuo Ishiguro • Goodreads summary • Optional content warnings	<i>American Street</i> by Ibi Zoboi • Goodreads summary • Optional content warnings
<i>The Fifth Season</i> by N.K. Jemisin • Goodreads summary • Optional content warnings	<i>The Kite Runner</i> by Khaled Hosseini • Goodreads summary • Optional content warnings

Can you read more than one text from each column? *Absolutely!* In fact, we encourage you to read as many books as possible this summer (from this list or elsewhere) because the simple fact is that you have to read

good writing to become an excellent writer. [There is a direct relationship between the quality and quantity of writing you consume and the quality of writing that you yourself can generate](#). And both reading and writing are essential practices that support your ability to *think*.

AN INTRODUCTION TO ANNOTATION

We expect you to read both novels in physical forms (real paper books), and we expect you to **annotate** your reading thoroughly. This means writing your ideas directly on the pages with a pen or pencil. Annotating is an essential practice in English courses because it increases your mental engagement with a text, enhances your memory of it, and leaves behind evidence that future-you can use to make meaning out of what you read. (See below for more specific instructions about how to annotate.)

Question: Can I also listen to the audiobook while I read the physical novel?

Answer: Absolutely! Audiobooks are wonderful tools to support your reading comprehension, but listening to an audiobook is not a substitute for reading the physical text.

ANNOTATION TIPS

So, what should you annotate for? We hope that the following notes will guide and inspire you:

- Do you see the author making specific, cool stylistic choices? Annotate sentences and passages that you find especially vivid, impressive, moving, and/or delightful.
- From whose perspective is the story being told? What are the strengths and limitations of that particular perspective?
- How would you describe or characterize the various characters you encounter? What motivates them?
- How do the various characters affect one another? Try to think beyond the literal for this question. In other words, can you see any subtle or implied relationships?
- What are the main conflicts for these protagonists? How do the conflicts of the novels relate to your own experience? In other words, notice any moments that remind you of experiences in your life, and make a note of the connections you see.
- Are there images or ideas that keep popping up? Note any patterns that jump out to you!
- What do you think these authors want to communicate to their readers? What are the central thematic messages of each novel?
- Note that anything that excites you or moves you is worth annotating! If you feel something, mark it.

READY TO GET STARTED?

Here is a checklist of what to do this summer. Please see below for more detailed information.

Read these texts:
☐ One from the Speculative Fiction column ☐ One from the Coming-of-Age Novel column
Do these things:
☐ Annotate both novels thoroughly ☐ Complete the Book Cover Assignment (see below) ☐ Bring both novels to class with you in the fall

When you arrive to Menlo in the fall, your English teachers will expect the following:

1. Your physical texts with annotations

- We will expect to see specific sections underlined and/or highlighted.
- We will expect to see notes in the margins that show you are thinking about the questions/concepts in the Annotations section.

2. Your fresh memory of the novels

We hope you will read these novels whenever you have the time this summer, but we also want to make sure that you have a clear memory of them. If you choose to read the novels in June, please make sure you review them in August.

3. One handmade book cover on 8" x 11" computer paper

- Yes, we want you to bring in a visual! Know that we do not expect you to become a master artist over the summer, but please simply do a thoughtful job with your project.
- We would like you to design a new cover for whichever of the books most interests you. First, forget about the cover on the actual book and any others you may have seen. To you, what is the most important idea, or main lesson, of the novel? How can you represent it visually?
 - Push yourself not merely to represent a character or scene. We want you to think abstractly, conceptually, and thematically. How can you use imagery to do more than merely illustrate a scene or character but to actually represent the main idea of the novel? How can you think abstractly / symbolically to convey a deep truth of this text?

- As a book-cover, your drawing should have the book title and author prominently displayed, as well as your own name (written more discreetly somewhere).
- You may hand-draw or hand-collage (physical cutting and pasting of images), but we want it to be something that you make yourself, not a digital image or collage.
- You should be able to articulate your artistic choices, to explain what you found meaningful and why. We look forward to your creativity!

We realize that you may have some questions while you are reading (which is a good thing!), so please write them down, and we look forward to discussing them with you in the fall! We cannot wait to meet you and to begin writing and reading together! If you have any urgent questions, please get in touch with Ms. Newton at wnewton@menloschool.org.