

To: Pre-AP English 10
From: Ms. Traxler, Mr. Lizotte, and Mr. Kuszak
Re: Summer Reading Assignment

Welcome to Pre-AP English 10. This course is designed to help you develop your reading and writing abilities through the exploration of various works of literature, including novels, short stories, essays, plays, and poetry. Particular emphasis will be placed on honing your critical thinking skills, analyzing and writing interpretations of text, and communicating effectively in both oral and written forms. We look forward to working with you as we embark on an enjoyable and challenging year.

In order to begin the school year with a shared literary experience, please read Tobias Wolff's memoir *This Boy's Life* over the summer. As you do, please complete the following assignments:

Assignment 1 – As you are reading *This Boy's Life*, keep a *Commonplace Book* of significant quotations from the memoir and your thoughts about them, as described in the attached page from *Writing Analytically*.

Please purchase an actual book, i.e. a writing journal, for your *Commonplace Book*, one to which you will become attached and in which you will want to write over the course of the year since we will use it all year long. Use a pen with which you enjoy writing, one that feels good on the page. Please **DO NOT** use a spiral bound notebook of lined paper that you might purchase at an office supply store, as those don't inspire the kind of care and thoughtful reflection we want to see in your *Commonplace Book* entries.

How much should you be writing in your *Commonplace Book*? Well, you should write enough to show substantial engagement with the rich and complex ideas presented in the memoir. Since writing is thinking, we want you to demonstrate a lot of thinking.

Assignment 2 – Once you have finished the book, choose the three most interesting, strange, or revealing quotations you have noted in your *Commonplace Book*. List them (directly quote sentences or passages) at the top of your document. Please cite page numbers so you will be able to get back to that text. Finally, choose the top-ranking quotation from the list above. Continuing in the same document, write an explanation of 1-1.5 pages in length exploring why you chose the quotation and how it relates to the meaning of the memoir as a whole. Papers should strictly adhere to MLA guidelines (double spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, 1" margins).

Summary of Assignments Due the First Day of School –

- *Commonplace Book* entries for the entire book, per Assignment 1
- Hard copy of Assignment 2

It is very important that you carefully read the memoir and complete the assignments outlined above, as all Pre-AP English 10 teachers will expect you to be able to seminar, to write, and/or to take a test the first week back, so please make sure the book is fresh in your head and actually with you in class.

Tips

- Please proofread your work carefully before submitting it. Very few things are as distracting as proofreading mistakes.
- Do not use outside sources, such as the so-called “analysis” provided on certain Internet sites; you will bore us since we have read it before. More importantly, we are interested in your ideas, not the bland drivel of some failed literature major.
- *This Boy’s Life* is widely available at new and used bookstores and in libraries. Purchasing your own copy of the memoir will allow you to underline important passages and make notes in the margins as you read.
- Remember, the purpose of these assignments is to allow us to start the year off with a common experience. But beyond that, we hope you enjoy reading the memoir and become intrigued by the ideas it explores.

A word about *This Boy’s Life*: Tobias Wolff’s memoir has won widespread critical acclaim and provides us with an excellent opportunity to examine and discuss a number of important social issues. However, the book does address sensitive topics and contains some profane language.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us.

Have a great summer, and see you in September!

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Keep a Commonplace Book (from *Writing Analytically*)

Professional writers have long kept commonplace books—essentially, records of their reading. Most such books consist primarily of quotations that the writers have found striking and memorable. This practice is closely related to Pointing, Paraphrase x3, and Passage-based focused freewriting.

The word “place” comes from the Latin *locus* in classical rhetoric and is related to places that rhetoricians thought of as reliable starting points from which a writer could launch arguments. A commonplace book is a collection of ideas, a storehouse for thinking that a writer might later draw on to stimulate his or her own writing.

The goal of keeping a commonplace book in a course is to bring you closer to the language you find most interesting, which you inscribe in your memory as you copy it onto the page. (Aim for two quotations with citation from each reading.) It’s remarkable what you will notice about a sentence if you copy it out, rather than just underlining or highlighting it. Moreover, you will find yourself remembering the original language that has struck you most forcefully in the reading. That way you can continue to ponder key words and phrases and to stay engaged, almost physically, with what the writers have said.

In addition to being a record of your reading, the commonplace book is also a record of your thinking about the reading. Try to write a sentence or two after most of your quotes, noting what you find of interest there, perhaps paraphrasing key terms. Alternatively, you might append a paragraph after all of your quotes from the reading, responding to them as a group. Remember not to judge the passages you select in like-dislike terms.