



## Bishop McGuinness English Department Summer Reading Assignment

**COURSE:** English IV

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**REQUIRED READING:** Select and read one text from the following list. You can procure the text at a local library, book store, or online.

Please explore the brief descriptions of each book below. Choose the book you would like to read, then please follow the instructions for the assignments listed on this document.

Note: Over the summer, if you decide to transfer out of AP Lit. into on-level English Lit., you need to read a book from this list.

### **Book List:**

#### **1. *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

- a. The novel is a coming-of-age-narrative that focuses on fifteen-year-old Kambili and her struggle to 'stretch her wings' as she deals with the reality around her in troubled Nigeria. Kambili's journey is imbued with both awe and terror as her seemingly polished family life comes face-to-face with the tarnished politics around her. In the end, no one will be the same when the dust settles. Kambili must decide if her growing knowledge of right and wrong will indeed shape her worldview or keep her shrouded in ignorance. Motifs seen in the book: African culture, nature, family relationships, religion/faith, silence/speech.

#### **2. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini**

- a. Amir recalls an event that happened twenty-six years before, when he was still a boy in Afghanistan, and says that that made him who he is. Before the event, he lives in a nice home in Kabul, Afghanistan, with Baba, his father. They have two servants, Ali and his son, Hassan, who are Hazaras, an ethnic minority. When Afghanistan's king is overthrown, things begin to change. Motifs seen in the

book: family (particularly father/son) relationships, guilt and redemption, the effects of war, class relations.

**3. *A Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood**

- a. Offred is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian and theocratic state that has replaced the United States of America. Because of dangerously low reproduction rates, Handmaids are assigned to bear children for elite couples that have trouble having children. Offred serves the Commander and his wife. Offred's freedom, like the freedom of all women, is completely restricted. She can leave the house only on shopping trips, the door to her room cannot be completely shut, and the Eyes, Gilead's secret police force, watch her every public move. Motifs seen in the book: individualism/independence, rights, gender roles, education.

**4. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (Available to borrow from the school)**

- a. Okonkwo is a wealthy and respected warrior of the Umuofia clan, a lower Nigerian tribe that is part of a consortium of nine connected villages. He is haunted by the actions of Unoka, his cowardly and spendthrift father, who died in disrepute, leaving many village debts unsettled. In response, Okonkwo became a clansman, warrior, farmer, and family provider extraordinaire. He has a twelve-year-old son named Nwoye whom he finds lazy; Okonkwo worries that Nwoye will end up a failure like Unoka. Motifs seen in the novel: change/tradition, gender roles/masculinity, language as culture.

**5. *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy**

- a. *All the Pretty Horses* begins with the 1949 funeral of John Grady Cole's grandfather. With his death, John Grady's mother will sell their Texas ranch and move away. There is nothing left in Texas for John Grady, who loves the ranch and idealizes the cowboy's way of life. Only sixteen years old, John Grady runs away from home with his friend. On horseback, they head toward the Mexican border, leading the idyllic, storybook life of migrant cowboys. They are joined by a younger boy, the sensitive and stubborn Jimmy Blevins. Together, the three cross over the Rio Grande into Mexico. Motifs seen in the book: innocence/knowledge, fate, responsibility/loyalty.

## **Assignments:**

### **1. Book Writing Assignment:**

- a. 1. Make copies of your three favorite or meaningful passages from the novel you chose (You may either make a copy on a copy machine or take a picture on your phone or ipad; if you take a picture, you will need to print it out to hand in). Pick one passage each from the beginning of the book, the middle, and toward the end. Annotate each passage and bring these copies to the first day of class.
- b. Be ready to do an in-class writing exercise or activity within the first week of school pertaining to the summer reading.

### **2. College Essay (Personal Narrative) - Instructions on following pages.**

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## **Submission Requirements:**

1. **Book Writing Assignment:** Bring to the first day of class: printed, annotated copies of your chosen three passages. If you bought a copy of the book, bring it as well.
2. **College Essay:** Bring a hard copy to the first day of class and be able to access everything digitally through Google.

**Due Date:** First Day of School (for both assignments)

**Assessment:** Be prepared for a writing exercise and/or group activities within the first few days of school.

**Attachments:** College Essay Instructions/Topics/Tips

**Other information:** Please contact either Ms. Engel ([mengel@bmchs.org](mailto:mengel@bmchs.org)) or Ms. Pankratz-West ([cpankratz@bmchs.org](mailto:cpankratz@bmchs.org)) with questions about the summer reading assignments for English Literature.

**\*\*\*Note:** Students must be aware that if they drop a class within the 1st week of school, they must have read the required summer reading for their new class.

## Summer Writing Assignment: Senior College Essay

**Directions:** Below are the 2019-2020 Common App Essay Prompts.

- Choose 1 of the 5 prompts to develop into a thoughtful essay.
- **Format: Printed hardcopy and Google Doc:**
  - Type your essay and bring a printed hardcopy to turn in the 1<sup>st</sup> day of school.
  - Create a Google Doc entitled “Rough Draft Common App Essay” to share with your English teacher on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of school.
- 250 word minimum length – 650 word maximum length
- MLA heading – include the word count here as the last entry in the heading
- Due: 1<sup>st</sup> day of school, August 2020

### **Essay Prompts:**

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

2. The lessons we take from *obstacles we encounter* can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a *challenge, setback, or failure*. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

3. Reflect on a time when you *questioned* or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your *thinking*? What was *the outcome*?

4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or *realization* that *sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others*.

6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

### **General Advice:**

- Do NOT work on this essay with anyone else or read essays online.
  - This should be totally your work, thoughts, ideas, story, experiences, and writing voice.
- Do NOT send/submit this first rough draft to Common App until after the required editing and revision process is completed in English class.

- Please do not email this essay to your prospective English teacher and ask them to read it and make comments.
  - We will be crafting the essay together during the first few weeks of school.
- Read the following tips for some helpful advice on writing your Common App Essay.

### Top 6 Common Application Essay Tips:

**Parents and students often ask us for our most valuable Common Application essay tips, so our savvy team of advisors compiled a list of simple, effective tricks to use as guidelines while you navigate the tricky waters of college essay writing. Try to use them for good and not for evil.**

**1. Think small:** When writing the Common Application essay, too many students feel compelled to try and squeeze their entire life story into 650 words. This, friends, is impossible. It is almost always better to think small first. Find a story or event in your life that really meant something to you. Did you win a competition at the last second? Was your family stranded on vacation with no power for five days? Have you read something recently that blew your mind? Now ask yourself- are any of these stories representative of my larger, most valuable qualities? The perfect essay topic showcases your personality, passions and/or ambitions without trying to do too much at once. Talking about your family's adoption of a three-legged dog and how your pet's perseverance and quirky attitude influenced the way you live your life, will make a better essay than a super general diatribe on why you like dogs, for example. If you find yourself getting lost while writing, ask: what am I trying to say about myself, and am I using a specific, compelling example to tell my story?

**2. Write first, edit later:** When it comes to writing, we are almost always our own worst critics. So many students want and expect themselves to produce pure, uninhibited brilliance the first time their fingers hit the keys, but that is almost never the way good essay writing works. Writing a compelling essay is a process, and the best writing can often be plucked from our stream-of-consciousness efforts. Don't edit yourself before you allow your creativity to warm up and pour onto the page. Never judge your writing until you have a few paragraphs written down first. You can always cut what doesn't work and it is much easier to work with an overabundance of words and ideas than nothing at all.

**3. Kill those clichés:** We're not going to *beat around the bush* here: clichés really *get our goats*. When you take that *trip down memory lane*, telling us about the time you were a *mover and a shaker* putting your *nose to the grindstone* it makes our *blood boil*. We're content and grammar snobs, so we find clichés to be extra unappealing, but we also have enough confidence in your creativity to know that you can do better. Admissions essay readers know it too, and expect you to *think out of the box* without using phrases like "think out of the box." So strike those tired sentences from your essay and do it now. *Never put off tomorrow what you can do today*. It actually hurt us to write that.

**4. It's all in the details:** What is the difference between these two sentences? 1. My favorite activities included fishing and cooking my daily catch. 2. My friends and I woke up early every morning to catch bass on Lake Michigan, cooking our spoils with herbs picked from a local farm. In the first sentence, we understand that you enjoyed certain activities. In the second, yes, we know you like fishing but we also understand your commitment to an activity you engaged in every day and recognize that your fishing trips are a social effort. There is a sense of time and place- we can see the setting, smell the herbs. With a few extra words, sentence two tells us much more about your fishing experience. Many students have a tendency to skew generic in the telling of their personal stories. What makes an essay memorable is often the sum of the little things. If you can paint a clear picture for your reader by providing details, you are much more likely to lodge a marker in their memories.

**5. If Nothing Else, Entertain:** Imagine you're a college essay reader at an upstanding academic institution and it is your job to read dozens of essays a day, every day, for weeks on end. Ninety percent of the essays that pass your desk are stone-cold boring, and maybe ten percent break through the fuzz and force you to pay attention. As an applicant, you want your essay to shine a bright light in the face of that oft-bored reader. No matter what your subject, serious, uplifting, sentimental or pithy, your essay should aim to entertain. This will require many elements working together in harmony. You will need a compelling subject, a direct and powerful narrative, impeccable grammar and a memorable style. A little laughter never hurts either. It is often hard to know whether an essay is truly entertaining until the end stages of writing, but when you are reading over your drafts, the question should always be in the back of your mind: Is this essay fun to read? Some students achieve entertainment value by being controversial. Others load their pieces with comic relief. Some are able to describe events in such detail that a reader simply must get to the end of the essay. No matter what tactics you end up using, your goal should be effortless and compelling readability.

**6. Brand yourself:** In order for your essay to be truly effective, a reader should be able to summarize your subject in a simple sentence. You accomplish this self-branding by choosing a creative topic (or a creative twist on a common topic), and writing about it with enough detail to burn an image of yourself in the reader's brain. When it comes down to you and another similarly qualified candidate, you want an admissions officer to be able to stand up with your application in his/her hand and say, "I like the girl who performed trapeze in the circus," or "How about the girl who saved her grandfather's life?" It will be much harder to remember "the girl who practiced the trapeze, and was also good at riding bikes, and who got an A on every test and who generally worked very hard," or "the girl who really loved her late grandfather and who feels like she embodies a lot of his core characteristics." Focus your story. When you finish writing your first draft, do a branding test- try to label yourself based on your essay and see what you come up with. If you can't easily narrow it down to a punchy description, you probably need to alter or simplify your essay.