

Dear Visitation Ninth Graders,

I am thoroughly excited to begin our work together in English class. This summer, I will be anticipating and planning for August. In turn, I'm asking you to do some preparatory work as well.

I'd like you to read at least two texts this summer. (In an ideal world, I'd ask you to read at least five or six. Reading remains the single best way to improve your thinking, vocabulary, and writing skills; but as I do possess a realist side in addition to my idealistic one, I'll settle for a minimum of two books.)

First, I'd like you to choose a novel or a work of narrative nonfiction. You'll then write an essay about this text according to the forthcoming guidelines.

Some texts that have captured the imaginations of Visitation ninth graders in recent years have included the following:

- *Stealing Buddha's Dinner* by Bich Minh Nguyen
- *Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo
- *Pride* by Ibi Zoboi
- *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver
- *Hudson Bay Bound: Two Women, One Dog, Two Thousand Miles to the Arctic* by Natalie Warren

You are welcome to choose from this list OR to choose a book that seems interesting to you and that you have not previously read.

After you finish reading, choose a character from your book and write an essay on the following topic:

An **epiphany** can be described as a sudden moment of insight or understanding that causes a character to change or act in a certain way. In novels, a main or supporting character experiences at least one epiphany during the course of the plot. Your essay will discuss this moment of insight.

Be sure to include an introduction and a conclusion. In the main body of your essay, you should answer the following questions:

- What was the character's epiphany or realization? Be specific.
- What event, occurrence, or moment in the story triggered the character's epiphany? Be specific.
- In what ways did the character change as a result of this epiphany? In other words, what was he/she like before the epiphany, and what is he/she like afterward? Be specific.

Checklist:

- Your essay should be approximately 1.5 and not more than 2 pages in length. That'll be about 500 words.
- Please be sure that your full name and date are in the upper left-hand corner of the paper.
- This paper should be typed and doubled spaced in Times New Roman (or similar) 12-point font.
- Be sure to write a strong topic sentence as part of your introduction. You should include the title of the work, the author, and your main idea in the topic sentence. For example, In *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, the author's epiphany about her own self-worth propels her to independence from her family.
- Use concrete evidence from the text to support your ideas. Include at least two quotes from the book.
- You don't need to summarize the plot. Instead, answer the questions about the character's epiphany.
- Read your writing aloud to catch awkward sentences and phrases. Try your best to find and fix all of your errors.

Due Date: Please complete your essay before the first day of school in August. We will submit the essays online together as part of our first lesson.

Grades: This assignment will help me understand your skills as a reader and writer. I will be able to pinpoint trends across the ninth grade class and plan instruction accordingly. I will also record a grade for this assignment in both the Organization and Preparation and Critical and Creative Thinking categories. Consider this assignment your first impression!

For your second reading assignment, I'd like you to read the classic 1955 play, *Inherit the Wind* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee.

At the close of each scene in the play, jot some notes for yourself. Write a one-to-two sentence summary of the action in the scene, and then record what you consider to be the most important line of dialogue from that scene. You can take these notes on paper, sticky notes, notecards, or digitally. However you choose to do it, be sure you have them with you on the first day of school.

That's it! (And, I acknowledge, that's a lot.) Thank you in advance for your careful attention to and hard work on these assignments. They are important precursors for what I hope will be a fruitful and transformative year.

I very much look forward to knowing you, and I welcome your questions should you have them. I won't read my email every day this summer, but I will check periodically.

In partnership,

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