

Hey there, Rising 11th Graders!

Mr. Weimer, your future English teacher, here. I'm writing today to introduce myself (Hi!) as well as to share a few words on the whole Summer Reading thing and how what you choose to read this summer will set you up for success in our class together next year. I want to emphasize that this summer you have a choice on what you read. Gone are the days when you would be required to read an assigned text for summer reading. You're almost Juniors now, so congratulations, you have the power of choice now! Here's your objective:

In short, read whatever the heck you want!

Pick just one book. Any book. Fiction. Non-fiction. Classic. Contemporary. Sci-fi. Fantasy. Horror. Poetry. Super philosophically deep. Not deep at all. Whatever! The key is to choose something that you get excited about reading. And no cop outs. If your reaction to this objective is something along the lines of "But I don't get excited about any books" then your challenge is to find a book that you can get excited about. There are books out there for everyone, so find one that you vibe with! I am attaching a list of some of my favorite authors in this letter. Peruse if you choose.

Also, I expect you to be prepared to discuss what you liked about the book you chose during the first week of the upcoming school year. You will also be doing some informal writing in class about what you liked about the book you read and why you think someone else should read that book. Please note that you will *not* be writing an essay on the book that you choose to read, so don't stress about anything wild or intense like that. Instead, you'll be expected to establish your credibility and demonstrate that you read something over the summer through informal writing.

And that's it.

In short, find a book that interests you. Read it. And be ready to discuss what you liked about that book with me and others.

However, if you're the sort of person who likes to work smart (and not hard, as they say), you are also invited to start thinking about the Junior Symposium Project. No worries if you don't know what that is. I'm attaching the full description of the Symposium Project to this letter for you, but in essence, the Symposium is a year-long project that challenges you to choose an author, read three books by that author, and to write about why someone should read those books by that author. In other words, feed two birds with one scone, knock out some summer reading as well as one (two, or three if you're an overachiever) of your Symposium books at the same time! I highly encourage you to consider this option. For more detail on what the Symposium Project is, take a quick look at the next page of this letter.

The last thing I want to bring your attention to is next year's reading list. If you like to buy all of the books at once, cool! Alternatively, I will also be giving you at least a two week's heads up for whenever you'll need the next book for class throughout the school year. Get them all at once or acquire the books one at a time as you need them. Either method works. That being said, we'll be jumping right into Harper Lee's classic novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* the first week of school. Please make sure that you have your very own copy of Lee's novel ready to bring to class by Tuesday, September 3rd.

If you have the means, please consider supporting an independent bookstore. Some of my favorites include Politics and Prose (DC), Mahogany Books (DC), Curious Iguana (MD), and

Midtown Scholar (PA). Without further ado, here's the required reading list for our course next year.

- Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Jeph Loeb's *Batman: The Long Halloween*
- Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*
- Art Spiegelman's *Maus*
- Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*
- Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*
- Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*
- Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*
- F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*
- Malaka Gharib's *I Was Their American Dream*

So yeah, that's pretty much it from me today. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns (big or small or anything in between), please don't hesitate to reach out to me anytime over the summer at [mweimer@gunston.org](mailto:mweimer@gunston.org). And, oh hey! Congratulations on (nearly) completing your Sophomore year. Have a great summer and see you on the first day of school!

Yours,  
Mr. Weimer

# JUNIOR SYMPOSIUM FAQ

Here it is. The intensive writing project that provides students experience in meaningful reading and critical analysis of literature about stories, characters, and ideas that you are passionate about. At the beginning of the school year, you will embark on this quest by selecting an author of focus for the year. You and everyone else in your class will spend an impressive chunk of the school year closely reading at least three of the author's works, focusing intently on the storytelling, character development, ideas, and how all of those elements help us better understand how the world works and who we want to be in that world. From your reading, you will then devise an original thesis statement reflecting your understanding of the central ideas and themes that you've found in your author's works. Following approval of your thesis statement, you will craft your paper, which must clearly and cogently defend your thesis.

One purpose of this project is to enhance your skills in reading, writing, critical thinking, logic, reasoning, and time management while at the same time providing you with a valuable independent learning opportunity in which you have the opportunity to think and write about something that is important to you. Along the way, you will develop your own personal philosophies about the human condition and the relationship between storytelling and who you are. Additionally, in keeping with Gunston traditions, the completion of this milestone will be celebrated by the entire school community.

## What is a Symposium?

Traditionally, a symposium is a conference in which a group of people (scholars and/or nerds, particularly) get together to talk about a subject that they've researched and thought about extensively, honoring the dialectical tradition of qualifying, developing, sharing, discussing, and further improving their ability to construct and express ideas. Committing to such a project also develops skill sets in areas such as but not limited to problem solving, time management, research, organization, composition, logical reasoning, citing sources, and collaboration.

## What is the prompt?

Put simply, the primary objective is to read three books and to argue as to why the stories in those books are relevant and significant and worth reading and thinking about. Of course, this explanation is a grossly reductive oversimplification of the project, but it may help to imagine that your goal is to convince others to read your author's books by giving a clear, concise, and cogent answer to the question: *Why should anyone read this book?*

## How do I get an A on my Symposium essay(s)?

Manage your time appropriately. Do NOT cram. Second, I give an (almost) overwhelming amount of feedback on your analyses and drafts; make use of that feedback and revise, revise, revise. Also, before going to bed every night, ask yourself if you did anything to make your symposium better. If not, consider getting back to work. You don't have to pull an all-nighter or anything; instead, chip away at the project. That is, get into the habit of reading and writing a little bit every day. You can also talk to me on the regular. I'm a nerd. I like talking about books. Oftentimes, discussing what you're reading will help you develop your thoughts (as does talking to family and friends). Remember: Nulla dies sine linea. Let no day go by without a line to show for it.

## What kind of books can I choose for the project?

There are really only two rules:

- One. Most importantly, you must choose an author that *you* are excited to read. This project is for you. It's all about what *you* think and what *you* find interesting. Don't do this for anyone else. Do it for you.
- Two. The author must have written at least three stories. Novels. Plays. Short stories. Novellas. A healthy mix of all of the above is good.

## Who are some of your favorite authors? Can I use them?

Yes! Here's a list of some of my favorite authors with my favorites by them:

- André Aciman (*Call Me By Your Name*)  
Douglas Adams (*Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*)  
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Americanah*)  
Louisa May Alcott (*Little Women*)  
Sherman Alexie (*True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*)  
Isabel Allende (*The House of the Spirits*)  
BB Alston (*Amari and the Night Brothers*)  
Julia Alvarez (*In the Time of the Butterflies*)  
Isaac Asimov (*I, Robot*)  
Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaid's Tale*)  
Jane Austen (*Pride and Prejudice*)  
James Baldwin (*The Fire Next Time*)  
Alison Bechdel (*Fun Home*)  
Britt Bennett (*The Vanishing Half*)  
Judy Blume (*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*)  
Ray Bradbury (*Fahrenheit 451*)  
Bill Bryson (*A Walk in the Woods*)  
Octavia Butler (*Kindred*)  
Albert Camus (*The Stranger*)  
Angela Carter (*The Bloody Chamber*)  
Willa Cather (*O! Pioneers!*)  
Michael Chabon (*Kavalier and Clay*)  
Ted Chiang (*Story of Your Life*)  
Agatha Christie (*Murder on the Orient Express*)  
Sandra Cisneros (*The House on Mango Street*)  
Ernest Cline (*Ready Player One*)  
Ta-Nehisi Coates (*Between the World and Me*)  
Michael Crichton (*Jurassic Park*)  
Mark Z. Danielewski (*House of Leaves*)  
Don DeLillo (*White Noise, Underworld*)  
Philip K. Dick (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*)  
Naiose Dolan (*Exciting Times*)  
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes series)  
Glennon Doyle (*Untamed*)  
Dave Eggers (*The Wild Things*)  
Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*)  
Laura Esquivel (*Like Water for Chocolate*)  
William Faulkner (*As I Lay Dying*)  
Gillian Flynn (*Gone Girl*)  
Jonathan Safran Foer (*Extremely Loud*)  
Ken Follett (*The Pillars of the Earth*)  
Neil Gaiman (*American Gods*)  
Roxane Gay (*Bad Feminist*)  
Charlotte Perkins Gilman ("The Yellow Wallpaper")  
Malcolm Gladwell (*Outliers*)  
John Green (*Looking For Alaska*)  
Andrew Sean Greer (*Less*)  
Ursula K. Le Guin (*Earthsea*)  
Yaa Gyasi (*Homegoing*)  
Kristin Hannah (*The Nightingale*)  
Yuval Noah Harari (*Sapiens*)  
Frank Herbert (*Dune*)  
Patricia Highsmith (*The Talented Mr. Ripley*)  
Khaled Hosseini (*The Kite Runner*)  
Zora Neale Hurston (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*)  
Shirley Jackson (*The Haunting of Hill House*)  
NK Jemisin (*Broken Earth*)  
Francisco Jiménez (*The Circuit*)  
Edward P. Jones (*The Known World*)  
Robert Jordan (*The Wheel of Time*)  
Kazuo Ishiguro (*Never Let Me Go*)  
Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*)  
Lily King (*Writers and Lovers*)  
Stephen King (*It, Carrie*)  
Jon Krakauer (*Into Thin Air, Into the Wild*)  
Jhumpa Lahiri (*The Interpreter of Maladies*)  
Madeleine L'Engle (*A Wrinkle in Time*)  
CS Lewis (*Narnia*)  
E. Lockhart (*We Were Liars*)  
Jack London (*The Call of the Wild*)  
Gabriel Garcia Márquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*)  
James McBride (*The Color of Water*)  
Cormac McCarthy (*The Road*)  
Madeline Miller (*The Song of Achilles*)  
David Mitchell (*Cloud Atlas*)  
Alan Moore (*Watchmen, The Killing Joke*)  
Silvia Moreno-Garcia (*Mexican Gothic*)  
Toni Morrison (*Beloved*)  
Walter Mosley (Easy Rawlins series)  
Haruki Murakami (*Kafka on the Shore*)  
Celeste Ng (*Little Fires Everywhere*)  
Joyce Carol Oates (*The Wheel of Love*)  
Tim O'Brien (*The Things We Carried*)  
Maggie O'Farrell (*Hamnet*)  
George Orwell (*Animal Farm, 1984*)  
Taylor Jenkins Reid (*Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*)  
Sally Rooney (*Normal People*)  
JK Rowling (*Harry Potter*)  
Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*)  
Karen Russell (*Swamplandia*)  
George Saunders (*Tenth of December*)  
V.E. Schwab (*The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*)  
Maria Semple (*Where'd You Go, Bernadette*)  
Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle, Oil!*)  
Karin Slaughter (*Pieces of Her*)  
Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*)  
John Steinbeck (*Grapes of Wrath*)  
Marjane Strapi (*Perspolis*)  
Cheryl Strayed (*Wild*)  
Amy Tan (*The Joy Luck Club*)  
Donna Tartt (*The Secret History*)  
Angie Thomas (*The Hate U Give*)  
Sally Thorne (*The Hating Game*)  
JRR Tolkien (*Lord of the Rings*)  
Mark Twain (*Huck Finn*)  
Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*)  
Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*)  
Jeannette Walls (*The Glass Castle*)  
Colson Whitehead (*The Underground Railroad*)  
Elie Wiesel (*Night*)  
Oscar Wilde (*The Portrait of Dorian Gray*)  
Virginia Woolf (*Orlando*)