

Dear Rising 12th Graders:

It's Mr. Weimer! I hope this letter finds you well! I'm dropping a line to share a couple of thoughts with you about summer reading as well as to introduce this little thing called The Paradigm Project with you.

Let's talk summer reading first. For starters, you get to choose what you read this summer! Below, you will find a reading list that contains a compilation of biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs. Please choose one book from the suggested book list and read it before the first day of school, September 3rd. That's it! Pick a book and read it!

It's probably also good to know that you will not be asked to write an essay about your summer reading! Bear in mind that you may be asked by your English teacher to talk about what you read through an informal assignment, but please don't stress about composing anything too formal. Instead, challenge yourself to pay attention to the way that the story is being told. Why? Because you're going to be telling your own story through the Paradigm Project, and you may be able to draw inspiration from the story that you read over the summer.

So what is the Paradigm Project?

Perhaps the best way to introduce the Paradigm Project is to talk about what I'm doing right now; I'm composing this letter on the first day of summer vacation, and I feel like it's important to let you know the truth, which is that I find myself already missing the opportunities that we had as a class to share our perspectives, our ideas, and perhaps most importantly, our stories with one another. Quite frequently, I find myself wishing that we had more time for YOU to share your story. The good news is that we will have that opportunity for you to do so—through the Paradigm Project and so much more.

As you will soon discover, I won't be the only one asking you to share your story. Other people are interested in who you are. And as you may remember from our class, Mr. Rogers once carried a note in his wallet that said, "Frankly, there isn't anyone you couldn't learn to love once you heard their story." This is the power of being able to tell your story, whether it's through a college application, a job interview, or the Paradigm Project.

Your story matters. The Paradigm Project celebrates this idea.

I won't get into the nitty gritty details about the Paradigm Project here. However, if you're interested and want to know more about the Paradigm Project, take a look at the bottom of this letter. I am sharing an FAQ with you that addresses the big questions that Seniors like you have asked in the past. As always, if you have any other questions (big or small or anything in between), please feel free to reach out. I'm happy to help at mweimer@gunston.org. Have a great summer and see you on the first day of school!

Yours,
Mr. Weimer

SUGGESTED BOOK LIST FOR RISING SENIORS:

Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*
Simone Biles' *Courage to Soar: A Body in Motion, A Life in Balance*
Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail*
James Clear's *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*
Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*
Ingrid Rojas Contreras' *The Man Who Could Move Clouds: A Memoir*
Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*
Bob Dylan's *Chronicles Volume 1*
Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*
Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*
Malaka Gharib's *It Won't Always Be Like This*
Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers: The Story of Success*
Jane Goodall's *The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times*
John Greene's *The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays on a Human-Centered Planet*
Dave Grohl's *The Storyteller*
Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*
Mira Jacob's *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations*
Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness*
Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*
Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*
Elizabeth Kolbert's *Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future*
Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster*
Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*
Admiral McRaven's *Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...And Maybe the World*
Daniel Mendelsohn, *The Lost*
Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*
Haruki Murakami's *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*
Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite With His Mother*
Michelle Obama's *Becoming*
Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*
Margo Price's *Maybe We'll Make It*
Mariano Rivera's *The Closer: My Story*
Todd Rose's *The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World That Values Sameness*
Marjane Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis*
Kathryn Schulz's *Lost and Found*
Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*
Sonia Sotomayer's *My Beloved World*
Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*
Cheryl Strayed's *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Coast Trail*
Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*
William W. Warner's *Beautiful Swimmers: Watermen, Crabs, and the Chesapeake Bay*
E. B. White's *One Man's Meat*
Malcolm X (with Alex Haley), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
Malala Yousafzai's *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*
Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H Mart*

SENIOR PARADIGM PROJECT FAQ

1. What is the Paradigm Project?

As the final component of Gunston's Writing Project, the Paradigm Project is each **Gunston student's final graduation writing requirement**. The goal of this project is for seniors like you to complete a summative narrative of how your years at Gunston shaped your own language of values, your understanding of the world, and who you want to be in that world. Consider this as a prompt: **What are some moments of insight that you've experienced that have changed the way you see yourself and the world around you?**

In thinking about the experiences that changed the way you see yourself and the world around you, we are asking you to reflect on at least three key moments of insight in any one or any combination of the following areas:

- **Experiences:** Reflect on significant experiences at Gunston and explain how those experiences transformed or impacted you
- **Knowledge:** Discuss an idea or a piece of acquired knowledge and how that influenced you (perhaps an author you've read, an historical event you've studied, etc.)
- **People:** Identify someone who helped to shape your view of the world and explain how they influenced you

Although this is fundamentally a "writing project", it is interdisciplinary in scope in that it challenges you to synthesize the knowledge, skills, habits, and thought processes that you acquired in your courses, athletics, and in special programs like Bay Studies.

2. When is the Paradigm Project Due?

You are expected to share (through email or a hard copy in person) your completed Paradigm Project to their respective Paradigm Mentor **in April of 2025 (the specific due date will be announced in the Fall of 2024)**. Late submissions, even if by just one minute, may result in an immediate failure.

3. What is a Paradigm Mentor?

Put simply, your Paradigm Mentor is the Gunston faculty or staff member who YOU choose to mentor you through the Paradigm Project. If you have questions or need guidance, encouragement, or feedback, they're there for you.

4. What's the first thing I should do?

Find a Paradigm Mentor! Pick any Gunston faculty or staff member you work well with, ask them if they will be your mentor for the Project, and then email Mr. Weimer, letting him know who you've selected. Traditionally, Paradigm Mentors do not mentor more than five Seniors, so if there's someone you *really* want to mentor you, ask them quickly before those spots fill up. Please note: you need a Mentor for the Project! **You are expected to let Mr. Weimer know by Friday, October 4th who your mentor is as well as to confirm that they have agreed to mentor you through the Paradigm Project.** Otherwise, Mr. Weimer will hound you with a daily deluge of emails asking you to complete this first step.

5. Who grades the Paradigm Project?

Your Paradigm Mentor is responsible for assessing whether or not you pass the project. **You are expected to work closely with your Paradigm Mentor to make sure that you're meeting your Paradigm Mentor's expectations.**

6. How is the Paradigm Project graded?

The project is graded through a pass/fail system. There is no universal rubric. Your Mentor makes the call on what constitutes a pass and what constitutes a fail. For instance, some mentors may evaluate the effort you put into the project, while others might only evaluate the final product of your project. Some may want perfect grammar, and some may want you to be more creative or descriptive. **Your mentor, as the one who is reading your writing, will be the one to determine through their own criteria what constitutes the difference between a passing and a failing grade.** Your Paradigm Mentor will also be the one to determine whether or not your project has earned honors, high honors status, and/or Paradigm Award nomination.

7. How long does the Paradigm have to be?

You are expected to compose at least 4,000 words (or its creative equivalent).

8. What do you mean by creative equivalent? Does that mean I can do something that isn't writing?

Kind of. While creativity and finding a form of expression that works for you and your interests is encouraged (though, certainly not required), if you choose to be more creative, you are expected to work with your Paradigm Mentor to define a "creative equivalent" to the amount of effort that it would otherwise take to reflect, structure, organize, compose, revise, and edit a conventional work of writing (i.e. the traditional Paradigm Project) that is 4,000 words. **Ultimately, your Paradigm Mentor is the one who will determine what this creative equivalent is.** Think of this way: maybe you choose to compose a handful of songs and to record them. Taking into account the effort it takes to write the lyrics, compose the songs, and record, your Paradigm Mentor may ask for you to compose a brief explanation behind each song, and though the lyrics and explanations may not equal 4,000 words, your Paradigm Mentor could determine this as a "creative equivalent."

9. What's all of this I hear about earning Honors and the Paradigm Award?

If you go above and beyond, impressing your Paradigm Mentor along the way, your Mentor may award you Honors for your efforts. If your Project is next level, you may be awarded High Honors. If your Paradigm Project really stands out as something special to your Paradigm Mentor then they may nominate you and your Paradigm for the Paradigm Award.

10. Who should I email if I have any questions?

Your Paradigm Mentor will most likely have the answers that you're looking for. Start there. But if you and/or your Mentor have a question, feel free to email Mr. Weimer at mweimer@gunston.org