



Westminster Christian Academy

11th Grade Summer Reading

American Literature

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This junior-level course is a survey of both classic and modern works of American literature and culture. The American Dream, a belief in the possibility and opportunity presented by life in the United States of America is a main theme discussed during the beginning of our course. We will analyze and evaluate this dream both historically and in our current culture.

Your summer reading assignments will introduce you to the themes of this class.

To complete your summer reading, you will need to:

1. First, READ *one* of the following nonfiction memoirs. The authors of these books discuss the American Dream from their own perspectives.

2. ANNOTATE the book as you are reading to show how you are making meaning of the story as you read. You can annotate for literary elements including character description, setting, imagery and symbolism. You should also pay attention to key lines/quotes, as well as ask questions. Most importantly, you should annotate for places you see the people in the story pursuing the American Dream.

**Your teacher will ask to see your annotations when you arrive at school in August.

3. Be ready to discuss your chosen book when you return to school in August. You will be asked to write a short, IN-CLASS ESSAY (15 Points) where you will explore the manner in which a person from the memoir pursues their version of the American Dream, evaluating how effective or ineffective the manner in which they pursued their dream. You will also PRESENT to your class about your reading.

Read **ONE** of the following nonfiction books:

***The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride**

ISBN: 978-1-59448-192-5

This book is, indeed, a tribute to the author's mother. In it, the author, a man whose mother was white and his father black, tells two stories: that of his mother and his own. Tautly written in spare, clear prose, it is a wonderful story of a bi-racial family who succeeded and achieved the American dream, despite the societal obstacles placed in its way.

***The Distance Between Us* by Reyna Grande**

ISBN: 978-1451661781

In this inspirational and unflinchingly honest memoir, acclaimed author Reyna Grande describes her childhood torn between the United States and Mexico, and shines a light on the experiences, fears, and hopes of those who choose to make the harrowing journey across the border. Reyna Grande vividly brings to life her tumultuous early years in this compelling story of a childhood spent torn between two parents and two countries. As her parents make the dangerous trek across the Mexican border to “El Otro Lado” (The Other Side) in pursuit of The American Dream, Reyna and her siblings are forced into the already overburdened household of their stern grandmother. When their mother at last returns, Reyna prepares for her own journey to “El Otro Lado” to live with the man who has haunted her imagination for years, her long-absent father.

***Where the Light Fell: A Memoir* by Philip Yancey**

ISBN: 978-0593238509

Where the Light Fell is a gripping family narrative set against a turbulent time in post-World War II America, shaped by the collision of Southern fundamentalism with the mounting pressures of the civil rights movement and Sixties-era forces of social change. In piecing together his fragmented personal history and his search for redemption, Yancey gives testament to the enduring power of our hunger for truth and the possibility of faith rooted in grace instead of fear. Searching for answers, Yancey dives into his family origins, taking us on an evocative journey from the backwoods of the Bible Belt to the bustling streets of Philadelphia; from trailer parks to church sanctuaries; from family oddballs to fire-and-brimstone preachers and childhood awakenings through nature, music, and literature. In time, the weight of religious and family pressure sent both sons on opposite paths—one toward healing from the impact of what he calls a “toxic faith,” the other into a self-destructive spiral.

***Educated: A Memoir* by Tara Westover**

ISBN: 978-0399590504

Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, Tara Westover was seventeen the first time she set foot in a classroom. Her family was so isolated from mainstream society that there was no one to ensure the children received an education, and no one to intervene when one of Tara’s older brothers became violent. When another brother got himself into college, Tara decided to try a new kind of life. Her quest for knowledge transformed her, taking her over oceans and across continents, to Harvard and to Cambridge University. Only then would she wonder if she’d traveled too far, if there was still a way home.

***Warning about abuse: Many will find the depiction of physical abuse Tara experiences at the hands of her older brother difficult to read; if in question, please choose one of the other books.**

***Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America* by Firoozeh Dumas**

ISBN: 978-8-12-968378

In 1972, when she was seven, Firoozeh Dumas and her family moved from Iran to Southern California, arriving with no firsthand knowledge of this country beyond her father’s glowing memories of his graduate school years here. More family soon followed, and the clan has been here ever since. *Funny in Farsi* chronicles the American journey of Dumas’s wonderfully engaging family: her engineer father who lost his job during the Iranian revolution; her elegant mother, who never fully mastered English (nor cared to); and Firoozeh herself, who as a girl changed her name to Julie, and who encountered a second wave of culture shock when she met and married a Frenchman, becoming part of a one-couple melting pot.