

Summer Reading Assignment 2025

AP Language & Composition

Honors English III

English III

Read *Just Mercy* (Adapted for Young Adults) by Bryan Stevenson

Watch Ted Talk at link provided and complete accompanying worksheets

Essays - write TWO well-developed essays (at least two pages each) using the prompts provided. Be sure to follow MLA format (reference Purdue Owl Writing Lab) and include the following:

Introductory paragraph

Hook

Overview of essay topic

Thesis (your stance on the subject)

Body paragraphs (at least three)

Topic sentence - claim

Evidence

Commentary

Concluding paragraph

Call to action (what is it that you want the audience to understand and do?)

These are **BOTH ARGUMENT essays** and must therefore have **YOUR STAND** on the issue.

Essays and Ted Talk worksheets for BOTH fall and spring semesters are due on Wednesday, September 3rd

Questions? Email me at kpeyton@nazarethacademyhs.org



TED TALK - WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT AN INJUSTICE (BRYAN STEVENSON)

LINK: https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice/transcript

1. Who taught Stevenson about the power of identity? _____ How does he describe this person?
2. What shaped the way this person saw the world?
3. What powerful words did this person say to him?
4. What was the second thing he had to promise?
5. What did he refuse to do with his brother and sister? _____
6. Fill in the Numbers: "In 1972, there were _____ people in jails and prisons. Today, there are _____ million. The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. We have _____ million people on probation and parole."
7. Name one urban community where 50 to 60 percent of all young men of color are in jail, prison, on probation, or parole.
8. Finish This Quote: "We have a system of justice in this country that treats you much better if you're rich and _____ than if you're poor and innocent. _____, not culpability, shapes outcomes."
9. What right have 34% of African American males lost in Alabama?
10. Finish the Statement: Stevenson shares that is only United States is the only country in the world to:
11. What is the death penalty in America defined by? _____ Why?

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-BRYAN STEVENSON

12. What type of era did he say that African Americans lived in from Reconstruction to World War II?

13. Finish This Quote: "In South Africa, people understood that we couldn't overcome apartheid without a commitment to _____ and _____. In Rwanda, even after the genocide, there was this _____, but in this country we haven't done that."

14. Why does Germany not have the death penalty?

15. How many more times is an African American defendant likely to get the death penalty when compared to someone who is white?

16. Who did Stevenson meet when he was a young lawyer?

17. What would he do during his meetings with her and two of her friends?



18. Finish This Quote: "I've learned very simple things doing the work that I do. It's just taught me very simple things. I've come to understand and to believe that each of us is more than the _____ we've ever _____, I believe that for every person on the planet."

19. What does Stevenson believe to be the opposite of poverty? _____

20. Stevenson motioned to have his "14-year-old, young, poor black kid" tried like a "privileged, _____ year old corporate executive."

21. What did an older African American gentleman whisper in Stevenson's ear?

22. Finish This Quote: "I came into this courtroom to tell this young man, keep your _____ on the _____ on."

23. How much money does California intend to put towards the death penalty over the next 5 years? (Side note- This TED Talk is from 2012)

24. True or False; The violent crime rate has remained unstable over the last three decades. (Circle your answer.)

25. What did you think of this TED Talk? What did you learn? Explain your answer below.

Just Mercy Argument

In a well-developed essay, take a position on one of the main arguments in the book *Just Mercy*, by Bryan Stevenson, that "*Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done* (17-18). Support your position with appropriate evidence from your reading, experience, and/or observations.

***Just Mercy* Argument**

Carefully read the following passage from Bryan Stevenson's book *Just Mercy* concerning his position on death-in-prison sentences for juveniles. Then, in a well-developed essay, defend, challenge, or qualify Stevenson's claim that death-in-prison sentences for juveniles should be outlawed because children and young adults are "unfinished products, human works in progress" and that one "cannot judge a person's full potential by his juvenile misconduct." Support your position with convincing evidence from your reading, experience, and/or observations.

We argued that the ban on the death penalty [for juveniles] had implications because a death-in-prison sentence is also a terminal, unchangeable, once-and-for-all judgment on the whole life of a human being that declares him or her forever unfit to be part of civil society. We asked courts to recognize that such a judgment cannot rationally be passed on children below a certain age because they are unfinished products, human works in progress. They stand at a peculiarly vulnerable moment in their lives. Their potential for growth and change is enormous. Almost all of them will outgrow criminal behavior, and it is practically impossible to detect the few who will not. They are "the products of an environment over which they have no real control - passengers through narrow pathways in a world they never made," as we wrote in our brief.

We emphasized the incongruity of not allowing children to smoke, drink, vote, drive without restrictions, give blood, buy guns, and a range of other behaviors because of their well-recognized lack of maturity and judgment while simultaneously treating some of the most at-risk, neglected, and impaired children exactly the same as full-grown adults in the criminal justice system.

... Former juvenile offenders who had later become well-known public figures filed supporting documents, including very conservative politicians like former U.S. senator Alan Simpson from Wyoming ... Senator Simpson knew firsthand that you cannot judge a person's full potential by his juvenile misconduct (270-271).