



June, 2025

Dear Members of the Classes of 2026, 2027, 2028, and 2029:

Welcome to summer!

As we do every year, the teachers in the MLHS English Department have chosen books for **REQUIRED** summer reading. A study of these books will kick off the 2025-2026 school year in our English classes. Each selection is accompanied by a series of **FOCUS** questions or ideas to consider as you read to help guide your thoughts.

Unless otherwise noted, you don't have to write anything this summer in response to your reading. However, you should jot down thoughts in the text or on sticky notes as you read. This will help you focus as you read and prepare you for the summer reading assessments that all teachers give during the first few days of school.

All of these books are readily available at libraries, bookstores, and online booksellers. We encourage students to get their own copies so they can write in them and bring them to class in the fall.

The list that follows includes the required texts for each class. Find the course you will be entering in the fall of 2025, and get started right away.

In addition, faculty members throughout the high school have made some book suggestions they thought you might enjoy. Take a look at [THIS COLLECTION](#) of great books recommended by teachers. If these don't suit your preferences, find another book, ANY book, and keep reading!

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Have an enjoyable, restful summer, and we look forward to seeing you in the fall!

Sincerely,

Mr. Henry
Supervisor of English and the Fine and Performing Arts
phenry@mlschools.org

MLHS ENGLISH DEPARTMENT: REQUIRED SUMMER READING 2025

All students should thoughtfully read the assigned book(s). The **FOCUS** for each book will help students to consider ideas and concepts that will serve as key points of discussion and study in September. We do encourage students to take notes during summer reading to aid in discussions and assessments that will take place upon return to school.

Students entering English 9 (ONE book*):

I Must Betray You by Ruta Sepetys

A historical thriller set in Romania, 1989, Sepetys examines the little-known history of a nation defined by silence, pain, and the courageous human spirit. Plot: Communist regimes are crumbling across Europe. Seventeen-year-old Cristian Florescu dreams of becoming a writer, but Romanians aren't free to dream; they are bound by rules and force. When Cristian is blackmailed by the secret police to become an informer, he's left with only two choices: betray everyone and everything he loves – or use his position to creatively undermine the most notoriously evil dictator in Eastern Europe. But at what cost?

FOCUS:

In a *New York Times* interview, Ruta Sepetys talks about the importance of storytelling. She states: "What I want to get across is the strength and fortitude of the Romanian people, particularly the young people... you can be the author of your own destiny... And also that, through story, we have an opportunity for connection. What do I mean? That sometimes, history, it's a bunch of facts, it's a bunch of figures. But when reading, if we have a moment of connection, I think our heart opens. And we have a chance to care for someone that we've never met..."

- How do the personal stories and struggles of the characters foster a sense of empathy and understanding for individuals from different cultural and historical backgrounds, particularly those of people living under oppression?
- Despite the acts of betrayal, how do the characters in the novel, in particular the younger generation, show courage in their pursuit of freedom? How do their experiences compare to your own understanding of freedom?

*Students seeking additional challenge and who are considering pursuing Honors level English for grade 10 may choose to read a second historical fiction novel by Ruta Sepetys. Find titles here: <https://rutasepetys.com/books/>

Students entering English 10 College Prep (ONE book):

Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds

Will has known about the rules ever since his childhood friend was killed on the playground, and he's followed the first two: no crying, and no snitching. When his older brother, Shawn, is shot and killed while walking home from the store, Will knows he is expected to follow the final rule and avenge his brother's death. He knows where Shawn keeps his gun, and he thinks he knows who the shooter is: a member of a rival gang named Riggs. Even if Will has never used a gun—never even held a gun before—rules are rules. But in the elevator on the way down to meet Riggs, Will encounters family and friends who died playing by the rules, and now Will has to decide what he is going to do when the elevator reaches its final stop. (Simon and Schuster)

FOCUS:

- This story's form, free-verse poetic narrative, may be different from the form used in stories you are used to reading. Pay attention to some of the conventions usually associated with poetry (line shape and line breaks, figurative language, rhythm, sound devices). How did the poetic form affect your reading of the story? How does it impact the tone or mood? How did it affect meaning or emotional impact?
- How would you describe the genre of this book? ("Genre" is a term we use to talk about a book's "category." For example, fantasy or science-fiction or realism.) Is it realistic? Is it purely imaginary? Is it a combination of realism and something else? Why do you think the author tells this story the way he does?
- We often talk about literature providing the reader both a window and a mirror. It is a window into a world or experience different from our own and/or a mirror in which we see ourselves and our own experience. To what extent does this book provide a window for you into the experiences of others? To what extent does this book provide a mirror through which you see some of your own life experiences?

Students entering English 10 Honors (ONE book):***Persepolis: The Story of A Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi**

In Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel, *Persepolis*, she uses powerful black-and-white comic strip images to tell the story of her life in Tehran, Iran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. The intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran's last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely entwined with the history of her country... Intensely personal, profoundly political, and wholly original, *Persepolis* is at once a story of growing up and a reminder of the human cost of war and political repression. (from *Goodreads*)

NOTE: When you read a graphic novel, the temptation might be to read quickly. Actually, graphic novels require that you slow down to appreciate the author's message. Carefully examine the images AND the text, and think about how they work together to shape the narrative and impact the reader.

FOCUS:

- Though Marjane grows up in a time and place very different from our own, in what ways does she show that the experience of growing up is universal? Conversely, how does she show the ways in which it can be shaped by setting and circumstances?
- How does a person survive and make sense of their own identity in an oppressive society? In what ways must you change or adapt in order to survive? How can you simultaneously hold true to your own sense of self?
- What methods and tools do authoritative governments use to control and oppress people? What methods and tools do people use, in response, to resist oppression?
- Additional focus point: Satrapi elects to tell her story through the medium of a graphic novel. Consider why Satrapi tackles the difficult subject matter of her story in this way...How do the images and text work together to communicate her story? Could this story be as meaningful if it was not written in graphic novel format?

Students entering English 10: AP Seminar (ONE book):

1984 by George Orwell

Over 70 years after its initial publication, this timeless classic unfortunately remains both relevant and chilling. Orwell's dystopian novel depicts a future dominated by three warring states and a government that suppresses individuality. Winston Smith, the protagonist, seeks truth and beauty in a dehumanizing world.

FOCUS:

What does Orwell suggest about ...?

- the nature of truth
- the power of reason
- the ability of the powerful to distort the truth
- the nature of persuasion
- the relationship between thought and language
- the relationship between intellect and emotion

Students entering English 11 College Prep (CHOOSE ONE book):

EITHER *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone

OR *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice* by Bryan Stevenson

Dear Martin by Nic Stone

In *Dear Martin*, Justyce McAllister is a 17-year-old, extremely intelligent and ambitious student who attends a very exclusive prep school. Despite being one of only two black students in a predominantly white school, he has acclimated well; he is on the debate team, has a good group of friends, gets excellent grades and is planning on heading to Yale. That all changes when he is wrongly arrested for a crime based on race. Up until this moment, Justyce never really considered race. As a coping mechanism, Justyce begins to write letters to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These letters provide Justyce with the outlet through which he can think through issues such as race and social justice.

FOCUS:

- How do our intersecting identities shape our perspectives and the way we experience the world?
- What role does the act of writing letters to Dr. Martin Luther King serve for Justyce? What does he come to realize about himself, his identity, and concepts like race and justice?
- Is justice served in *Dear Martin*? Why or why not? Explain.

Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults) by Bryan Stevenson

First of all, note that you should read the version "Adapted for Young Adults." It's still a high school level book, but the story has been streamlined a bit for school use. *Just Mercy* is a work of nonfiction that follows the author's relationship with and defense of a man falsely convicted and sentenced to death row for murder. Stevenson founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a non-profit organization dedicated to defending the rights of the most vulnerable people in our society: the poor, the wrongly convicted, and those whose lives have been marked by discrimination and marginalization.

FOCUS:

- Consider the factors that led to Walter MacMillian's conviction. What does his case reveal about the way the American justice system works (or doesn't work) for some people?
- In addition to the main story about Walter MacMillian, Stevenson reviews many other cases of wrongful conviction or harsh sentencing. Which cases were memorable for you? Were you angry? Saddened? Did any moments bring satisfaction?

Students entering English 11 Honors (ONE book and an OPTIONAL book):***Pride by Ibi Zoboi***

AND we encourage you to read another OPTIONAL Title

***Pride* by Ibi Zoboi**

Pride is a "remix" meets modern adaptation of Jane Austen's classic, *Pride and Prejudice*. The story is a timely update set in modern times, and critically acclaimed author Ibi Zoboi skillfully balances cultural identity, class, and gentrification against the heady magic of first love in her vibrant reimagining of this beloved classic. From the author's website: Zuri Benitez has pride. Brooklyn pride, family pride, and pride in her Afro-Latino roots. But pride might not be enough to save her rapidly gentrifying neighborhood from becoming unrecognizable. When the wealthy Darcy family moves in across the street, Zuri wants nothing to do with their two teenage sons, even as her older sister, Janae, starts to fall for the charming Ainsley. She especially can't stand the judgmental and arrogant Darius. Yet as Zuri and Darius are forced to find common ground, their initial dislike shifts into an unexpected understanding. But with four wild sisters pulling her in different directions, cute boy Warren vying for her attention, and college applications hovering on the horizon, Zuri fights to find her place in Bushwick's changing landscape, or lose it all.

FOCUS:

- How does Zuri define pride? How is her pride connected to her identity, family, and neighborhood?
- How does Zuri's view of pride evolve over the course of the novel? What moments or relationships challenge or deepen her understanding of it?
- How do the Benitez family and the Darcy family represent different aspects of the American Dream? What values or goals do they each prioritize?
- How do the struggles with class, race, and neighborhood inequality in *Pride* reveal deeper truths about justice, power, and who gets to have a voice in society?
- What role does poetry play in Zuri's life and in the novel as a whole? How does it help her process the changes in her world?

In addition to *Pride*, read a book from the [Faculty Recommendation List](#)

Students entering AP English Language and Composition (TWO books):

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

AND *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

The unforgettable, heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between a wealthy boy and the son of his father's servant, caught in the tragic sweep of history, *The Kite Runner* transports readers to Afghanistan at a tense and crucial moment of change and destruction. A powerful story of friendship, it is also about the power of reading, the price of betrayal, and the possibility of redemption; and an exploration of the power of fathers over sons—their love, their sacrifices, their lies.

FOCUS:

Consider the following concepts as you read:

- Betrayal and redemption
- Friendship, specifically focusing on the relationship between Amir and Hassan
- The changing political circumstances in Afghanistan and their impact

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

Here is a book as joyous and painful, as mysterious and memorable, as childhood itself. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* captures the longing of lonely children, the brute insult of bigotry, and the wonder of words that can make the world right. Maya Angelou's debut memoir is a modern American classic beloved worldwide.

FOCUS:

Read the text carefully and closely. As you read, take notes and find specific examples of the following rhetorical tools:

- Figurative Language
- Diction
- Imagery
- Tone

Explain the purpose of each example and how each example furthers Angelou's central message in the work.

Students entering English 12 College Prep English 12 (ONE book):

The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls

In this deeply personal narrative, Walls recounts her unconventional and often chaotic upbringing with raw honesty, insight, and compassion. From a childhood marked by poverty and instability to her eventual path to success, Walls invites readers into a story that is both heartbreaking and inspiring—a testament to resilience, identity, and the complicated bonds of family.

FOCUS

- When we return in late August, our course will begin by exploring the art of storytelling, personal narrative, and family dynamics—all central to *The Glass Castle*. We'll consider how writers make meaning from memory, how they construct voice and identity on the page, and how they transform lived experience into literature.

For those of you already beginning to draft your college admissions essays, this memoir offers a valuable model. As you read, pay close attention to how Walls uses her experiences not just to describe what happened, but to reveal who she is—her values, voice, growth, and perspective.

Please come to class ready to discuss and reflect on the book. Annotations or reading notes are encouraged, especially as tools to capture your reactions, questions, and observations.

Students Entering English 12 Honors: (ONE book AND an OPTIONAL book):

***The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls**

AND we encourage you to read another OPTIONAL Title

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Please come to class ready to discuss and reflect on the book. Annotations or reading notes are encouraged, especially as tools to capture your reactions, questions, and observations.

OPTIONAL: (in addition to *The Glass Castle*, read a book from the [Faculty Recommendation List](#))

Students entering AP Literature and Composition (TWO books and related short essay):

A Note from your Teacher, Mr. Terzis:

Welcome to AP English Literature and Composition! I'm excited to begin this journey with you as we explore some of the most challenging, provocative, and rewarding works in the literary canon. This course will ask you to think deeply, read critically, and write with insight and precision. It will also ask you to be curious, courageous, and collaborative—qualities I know you each possess.

IMPORTANT! Before diving into the novels noted below, please read the short essay “[How to Mark a Book](#)” by Mortimer J. Adler. This essay will guide your approach to active, engaged reading and explain why marking up a book is one of the most effective tools of serious readers.

This summer, you will read two novels:

***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain**
***James* by Percival Everett**

These two texts are in direct conversation with one another, and we will explore the significance of that relationship in depth. Please annotate both novels thoroughly. Annotation is not just underlining: it is an ongoing dialogue with the text. You should be tracking themes, character development, authorial choices, patterns, contradictions, and anything that sparks questions or reactions. Your notes will be essential for the discussions you will help lead beginning in late August.

When we return to school, expect to participate in thoughtful discussions and activities related to both novels. The work you do this summer will help you begin the year with confidence, insight, and momentum.

Enjoy your reading, and don't be afraid to wrestle with big ideas or ask hard questions—literature thrives on inquiry.

Looking forward to an exciting year ahead!

Best,
Mr. Terzis