

Wyoming High School Book Rationale

Title: Homegoing

Author: Yaa Gyasi

❖ **Intended Audience:**

- Junior / Senior Students

❖ **Brief Summary and Educational Significance:**

- *Summary:* *Homegoing* is a multigenerational novel that traces two family lines across three centuries, beginning with half-sisters in eighteenth-century Ghana who never meet. Effia marries a British slave trader and remains in Africa, while Esi is captured and sold into slavery in America. Through alternating chapters, the novel follows their descendants through the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and their reverberating effects on both continents.
- This work holds significant educational value for our AP Literature curriculum. Gyasi's innovative narrative structure—spanning eight generations through interconnected short story-like chapters—provides students with a sophisticated model of how contemporary authors experiment with traditional novel forms. The text deepens students' understanding of how historical trauma shapes identity across generations and geography, complementing our curriculum's focus on the American experience while expanding it to include the African diaspora. *Homegoing* also enriches our exploration of themes central to AP Literature: the construction of identity, the weight of inherited history, family legacy, and the relationship between personal and collective memory. As a critically acclaimed debut novel by a young African-American author, it represents important contemporary literary voices and demonstrates how fiction can illuminate historical complexities that textbooks often oversimplify.

❖ **Purpose of teaching the work and how it will be used:**

- The novel will be used to develop the college-level critical thinking, literary analysis and composition skills necessary for the AP Literature and Composition Exam. The book has been referenced on previous exams multiple times, is consistently used as an example for essays and provides students with a rich text that uses a wide range of literary strategies (motif, allusion, non-linear structure, etc.) that can be used to successfully answer any literary analysis free response question.

❖ **Potential Problems:**

- *Homegoing* contains mature content appropriate for our junior and senior students but which requires thoughtful preparation. The novel includes depictions of slavery's brutality, including violence, sexual assault, physical abuse, and dehumanizing treatment of enslaved people. There are scenes involving racism both overt and systemic, including racial slurs (though used in historical context). The text also addresses difficult topics such as addiction, particularly in chapters dealing with twentieth-century descendants, as well as poverty, incarceration, and the ongoing effects of systemic oppression.
- Some chapters contain sexual content, though it is not gratuitous and serves the narrative purpose of illustrating power dynamics, trauma, or relationship development. The novel's episodic structure, while literarily significant, may initially challenge students accustomed to more traditional linear narratives with a single protagonist. Additionally, the large cast of characters across multiple generations and continents requires careful attention from readers.

❖ **Addressing Potential Problems:**

- Our approach to teaching *Homegoing* prioritizes context, preparation, and student agency. While reading the novel, students will explore historical background on the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism in West Africa, and the multi-century scope of the

narrative. This context helps students understand that the difficult content serves an educational purpose: to honestly portray historical realities and their lasting impact.

- We will prepare students for challenging content through content advisories before specific chapters, creating a classroom environment where difficult material can be discussed with academic rigor and emotional awareness. Our discussions will emphasize analyzing *how* and *why* Gyasi includes difficult scenes—examining her authorial choices and their literary effects—rather than dwelling on graphic details. This analytical approach maintains appropriate distance while honoring the seriousness of the subject matter.
- To support comprehension of the novel's complex structure, students will create a family tree and timeline as reading aids. Class discussions will help students appreciate how the fragmented structure itself constitutes a sophisticated literary choice that mirrors the historical fragmentation of families and identities.
- Importantly, while *Homegoing* deals with painful history, it is ultimately a story about resilience, survival, and the enduring power of family and identity. Gyasi's novel helps students understand how the past shapes the present while honoring the humanity and agency of individuals across generations. This balance makes it not only appropriate but valuable for our advanced students who are preparing for college-level literary study and engaged citizenship.

Prizes/ Awards / Honors:

- National Book Critics Circle's John Leonard Award for Best First Book (2016)
- PEN/Hemingway Award for a First Book of Fiction (2017)
- American Book Award (2017)
- National Book Foundation's "5 Under 35" honors (2016)
- Dayton Literary Peace Prize (Runner-up for Fiction, 2017)

Professional Review:

An [NPR review](#) describes Yaa Gyasi's debut as a "sprawling epic, brimming with compassion" that traces the "terrible impact of slavery" across generations of an African family. The review praises the novel's structure, which uses distinct voices to give "rare and heroic voice to the missing and suppressed" stories of history.