



Westminster Christian Academy

11th Grade Summer Reading

11th GRADE AMERICAN LITERATURE

SUMMER READING 2026

Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Rosenberg

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 possibilities and opportunities presented by life in the United States of America, is a central theme discussed at the beginning of our course. We will analyze and evaluate this dream both historically and in the context of our current culture. Your summer reading assignments will introduce you to the themes of this class. First, read *one* of the following nonfiction memoirs. The authors of these books discuss the American Dream from their perspectives. Be ready to discuss your chosen book when you return to school in August, in class discussions and in an in-class essay. If you annotate while reading, by underlining important and interesting passages, making comments, and posing questions in the margins, you are more likely to engage with the text meaningfully and be better prepared for discussion and the in-class essay later.

Read ONE of the following nonfiction books:

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.

***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 her tumultuous early years in this compelling story of a childhood 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 returns, Reyna prepares for her journey to “El Otro Lado” to live with the man who has haunted her imagination for years, her long-absent father.

* **Content Note:** This memoir includes painful family separation, abandonment, and difficult childhood experiences that may be emotionally intense for some readers.

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

ISBN: 978-0-7432-4754-2

A remarkable memoir of resilience and redemption, and a revelatory look into a family at once deeply dysfunctional and uniquely vibrant. When sober, Jeannette's brilliant and charismatic father captured his children's imagination, teaching them physics, geology, and how to embrace life fearlessly. But when he drank, he was dishonest and destructive. Her mother was a free spirit who abhorred the idea of domesticity and didn't want the responsibility of raising a family. *The Glass Castle* is truly astonishing because it is a memoir permeated by the intense love of a peculiar but loyal family.

***Warning about language and content: Walls says that if she had considered the number of adolescents who would want to read her book, she wouldn't have quoted her father so liberally. Some will find her father's language offensive; if in question, please choose one of the other books. Additionally, there are moments of abuse described; if in question, please choose one of the other books.**

SUMMER READING ON-DEMAND IN-CLASS TIMED ESSAY

Instructions: You will be required to complete a reading response for your choice memoir as an in-class, on-demand essay during the first week of school. To help preserve academic integrity and avoid AI-generated responses, this writing will be completed in class during a timed session. You will have access to **only your novel and your annotations** while writing.

Please come to the **first day of school** with your novel **completely read and thoroughly ANNOTATED**. You should understand the characters, conflict, plot, and major themes, and you should mark important passages, questions, and observations throughout the text. Your novel should be clearly marked up; do not arrive with a blank book and expect to do well on the in-class essay. We will check your novel for annotations.

The on-demand essay will ask you to respond to questions similar to the ones listed below and will be completed within the context of class during the first week of school. This assignment will also help us establish a baseline of your writing ability and your ability to read, think about, and analyze literature independently.

Summer Reading POSSIBLE Essay Prompts:

1. How are characters developing as the story progresses? How do you personally feel about specific characters? Are some characters more dynamic than others (do they change during the story)? How have the events or other characters influenced or motivated the actions of certain characters?
2. What are some of the recurring themes, ideas, images, and/or symbols (we call these “motifs”)? Why do you think the author might be repeating these recurring elements? How do these motifs add to the meaning of the story?
3. What are the major conflicts in the story? Why have these conflicts formed, and how are these conflicts developing? Would you categorize these conflicts as external (from outside sources) or internal (within the characters)?
4. Can you relate or make any connections to the characters in this book? How have you been able to empathize with these characters? How do specific parts of the story remind you of your own life?
5. Who is the narrator of the story? How does the narrator of the story influence or affect how the story is told? Why would the author have selected this particular narrator for the story? How might a different narrator change or alter the story?
6. Evaluate the writing style of the author. What are the techniques that the author frequently makes use of, and how effective are these techniques? You have also looked at how the author develops a tone for their subject through word choice.
7. If you could be or become one of the characters from the story for one day, who would you choose and why? Which character would you most certainly not want to be and why? Include elements of your own personality and interests to help explain your reasoning.
8. What is the overall mood (feeling given to the reader) created by this story? What are some examples of how the author creates this mood or feeling within their audience?
9. Choose one passage from the story that you believe is vital in understanding the overall text. Write the passage down (including citation) and then explain the importance of the passage. Include a discussion of any literary elements you notice being used to create meaning.
10. What, in your opinion, is the overall theme or message of the story? How does the author develop this message or theme throughout the text? What are some scenes or events in the story that directly point to this message?
11. What is your overall opinion of the story? In your evaluation or review, consider which elements of the story are effective/enjoyable and which elements of the story you might change or improve. Provide specific examples of the strengths or weaknesses of the book.

Rubric for Summer Reading In-Class Essay

15-14	13-12	11-10	9-8	7 or below
Responses are richly developed with personal reflection and multiple, specific, cited examples from the text. Responses display close and careful reading of the text. Accurate citation included.	Responses are developed with some specific references or details from the text. Some personal connections or reflections were made. Accurate citation included.	Responses are partially developed, with some ideas not fully explained or supported with examples from the text. Some accurate citations are included.	Responses are very general and lack Specific examples from the text. Responses are underdeveloped.	Responses show little to no evidence of actual reading OR Responses are significantly underdeveloped

Novel is thoroughly annotated: 5 points

TOTAL: 20 points