

Olathe North AP English III

Summer Reading Assignment 2026

Due August 14, 2026

Summer reading assignment overview:

Read one of the nonfiction books listed below, annotate while reading for your understanding, and prepare to write a synthesis essay over your book when you return to school.

1. **Annotations:** While you read your selected book, annotate (either on sticky notes or in the text if you own it) the text as you do a close reading. You will write a synthesis essay over your choice book within the first few days of school, so be sure your annotations reflect a thoughtful reading of your book.
2. **Be prepared to write a synthesis essay in class:** When you return to school, you will combine knowledge of your book, annotations you prepared, and additional sources (that we will provide) to address important topic(s) from your book. With this information, you will respond to the given synthesis prompt and write a synthesis essay that will show your understanding of the text and demonstrate your writing skills.

Summer Contact Information: If you have questions, please feel free to contact either of the Junior AP teachers at the following email addresses:

Mrs. Brooks – mbrookson@olatheschools.org

Ms. Keltner – akeltneron@olatheschools.org

Book Selection--choose one of the following books to read:

- *David and Goliath* by Malcolm Gladwell
- *Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth* by Sarah Smarsh
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot
- *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer
- *Nickel and Dimed: on (not) getting by in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich

Annotate your book while reading: Use small sticky notes to mark the important parts of the text that you think you will need to remember and think about as you prepare for the synthesis essay. Annotating simply means marking the page as you read with comments and/or notes. The principal reason you should annotate what you read is to aid in understanding. Annotating is also a way of encouraging you to slow down and read a passage closely, so that it will make you a better reader.

Annotating may include:

Words on the page--

- Ask questions, make comments—talk to the text
- Summarize important chunks
- Identify major claims by the author
- Consider audience, context, message, author's purpose
- Connect ideas: text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world

Symbols for clarification--

- Bracket important ideas or passages
- Connect ideas with lines or arrows
- Highlight key words, phrases, or sentences
- Highlight passages that are important to understanding the work

Some things to consider noting in your annotations of a nonfiction text:

- The author's credibility and background: How does this author have the authority or experience to speak about this issue? What might bias the author's argument?
- The author's tone: Does it change throughout the book? How is tone used to serve the purpose?
- The author's intended audience: Who is the intended audience for this book? How does the author tailor the argument to suit the intended audience?
- Claims: Identify where the author is conveying his/her claims. Discuss the effectiveness of each argument. How are these ideas conveyed? Is the author stating it directly or indirectly? Is the argument convincing? Why?
- Purpose: Now that you have identified the author's primary and/or minor claims, what seems to be his/her overall purpose? What does he/she want to show us, and what does he/she want us to do after having read the book?

The AP Language Summer Assignment

Book Descriptions 2026-2027

***David and Goliath* by Malcolm Gladwell: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants**

In his #1 bestselling books *The Tipping Point*, *Blink*, and *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell has explored the ways we understand and change our world. Now he looks at the complex and surprising ways the weak can defeat the strong, the small can match up against the giant, and how our goals (often culturally determined) can make a huge difference in our ultimate sense of success. Drawing upon examples from the world of business, sports, culture, cutting-edge psychology, and an array of unforgettable characters around the world, *David and Goliath* is the most practical and provocative book Malcolm Gladwell has ever written.

***Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth* by Sarah Smarsh**

Smarsh was born a fifth generation Kansas wheat farmer on her paternal side and the product of generations of teen mothers on her maternal side. Through her experiences growing up as the daughter of a dissatisfied young mother and raised predominantly by her grandmother on a farm thirty miles west of Wichita, we are given a unique and essential look into the lives of poor and working class Americans living in the heartland. Smarsh challenges us to look more closely at the class divide in our country and examine the myths about people thought to *be* less because they *earn* less. Combining memoir with powerful analysis and cultural commentary, *Heartland* is an uncompromising look at class, identity, and the particular perils of having less in a country known for its excess.

***The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot**

This book is about Henrietta Lacks and the immortal cell line that came from her cervical cancer cells in 1951. She was a poor black tobacco farmer whose cells—taken without her knowledge in 1951—became one of the most important tools in medicine, vital for developing the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping, in vitro fertilization, and more. Henrietta's cells have been bought and sold by the billions, yet she remains virtually unknown, and her family can't afford health insurance. The book is notable for its scientific writing and dealing with ethical issues of race and class in medical research.

***Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer**

Into Thin Air is the account of the deadliest season in the history of Everest. On assignment for *Outside Magazine* to report on the growing commercialization of the mountain, Krakauer, an accomplished climber, went to the Himalayas as a client of Rob Hall, the world's most respected high-altitude guide. Krakauer examines what it is about Everest that has compelled so many people to throw caution to the wind, ignore concerns of loved ones, and willingly subject themselves to such risk, hardship, and expense.

***Nickel and Dimed: on (not) getting by in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich**

Millions of Americans work for poverty-level wages, and one day Barbara Ehrenreich decided to join them. But how can anyone survive, let alone prosper, on \$6 to \$7 an hour? To find out, Ehrenreich moved from Florida to Maine to Minnesota, taking the cheapest lodgings available and accepting work as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, nursing-home aide, and Wal-Mart salesperson. She soon discovered that even the "lowliest" occupations require exhausting mental and physical efforts. *Nickel and Dimed* reveals low-wage America in all its tenacity, anxiety, and surprising generosity--and was instantly acclaimed for its insight, humor, and passion, this book is changing the way America perceives its working poor.

Synthesis Prompts

David and Goliath Synthesis Prompt:

In *David and Goliath*, Malcolm Gladwell uses examples from the world of business, sports, culture, and cutting-edge psychology to explore the ways the weak can defeat the strong, the small can match up against the giant, and how our goals (often culturally determined) can make a huge difference in our ultimate sense of success.

Carefully read the following seven sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from SOURCE A and AT LEAST TWO of the other sources, and incorporate it into a well-developed essay that argues the extent to which you agree with Gladwell's claim that "giants" have weaknesses, and that underdogs can accomplish the unexpected.

Heartland Synthesis Prompt:

Smarsh was born a fifth generation Kansas wheat farmer on her paternal side and the product of generations of teen mothers on her maternal side. Through her experiences growing up as the daughter of a dissatisfied young mother and raised predominantly by her grandmother on a farm thirty miles west of Wichita, we are given a unique and essential look into the lives of poor and working class Americans living in the heartland. Combining memoir with powerful analysis and cultural commentary, *Heartland* is an uncompromising look at the class divide, identity, and the particular perils of having less in a country known for its excess.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from SOURCE A and AT LEAST TWO of the other sources, and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay in which you develop your position on the most important factors that impact women in poverty.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks Synthesis Prompt:

According to David Korn, vice provost for research at Harvard University, "people are morally obligated to allow their bits and pieces to be used to advance knowledge to help others. Since everybody benefits, everybody can accept the small risks of having their tissue scraps used in research." In *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Rebecca Skloot addresses the ethical issues as well as the medical benefits that came from Henrietta Lacks' cells being taken without her knowledge.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then, in an essay that synthesizes SOURCE A and AT LEAST TWO of the other sources for support, take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that people, in any society, are obligated to give their "bits and pieces" to further advance science and/or medicine.

Into Thin Air Synthesis Prompt:

In his book *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer describes the individuals involved in the 1996 tragedy as being arrogant for daring to believe that they could "tame nature." This sheer arrogance, he argues, is in part to blame for the tragedy that took place on Everest. However, this is not the only issue he addresses in regards to problems with climbing Everest. He describes multiple issues that collide with human arrogance: Commercialism, environmental issues via the trash and dead bodies left there, to the dangers inherent when less skilled climbers attempt the climb.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then, in an essay that synthesizes SOURCE A and AT LEAST TWO of the other sources for support, take a position that identifies what the biggest issue Everest is facing and defends why your claim is accurate.

Nickel and Dimed Synthesis Prompt:

In her novel *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich goes undercover as a low-wage worker in common "unskilled" jobs. She quickly learned the difficulties of minimum wage work, from physical exhaustion to bad work environments to not really having basic needs met on the wages she earned.

Carefully read the following seven sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from SOURCE A and AT LEAST TWO of the other sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that argues a clear position on the issue of working for minimum wage in America.