

LAGUNA BLANCA SCHOOL
SUMMER READING 2026 FOR STUDENTS ENTERING
AP LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

All Laguna Blanca students entering Grades 5-12 in the fall are required to read books this summer. Because the reading will form the basis for class discussion and writing assignments in English classes during the opening weeks of school, we ask that students use a pen/pencil to do a close reading. A close reading means to make notes in the margins, mark confusing and/or favorite passages, highlight interesting information, and comment on significant language.

The books (the specific required edition as indicated by the ISBN # listed below) can be purchased at Chaucer's Bookstore, 3321 State Street, Loreto Plaza, Santa Barbara, CA. I also encourage you to look for the book on Thriftbooks online for a discounted price.

REQUIRED READING Please read the following **TWO books**. You will have an assignment or essay for each book at the beginning of the year. **It is highly recommended that students read these books closer to the start of school so they remember the reading for in-class work.**

***Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson (ISBN 978-0812984965)**

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit law office in Montgomery, Alabama, dedicated to defending the poor, the incarcerated, and the wrongly condemned. *Just Mercy* tells the story of EJI, from the early days with a small staff facing the nation's highest death sentencing and execution rates, through a successful campaign to challenge the cruel practice of sentencing children to die in prison, to revolutionary projects designed to confront Americans with our history of racial injustice.

***Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism* by Amanda Montell (ISBN 978-0-06-299316-8)**

What makes cults so intriguing and frightening? What makes them powerful? What causes people to join – and more importantly, stay in – extreme groups? Through juicy storytelling and cutting social commentary, Montell exposes the linguistic elements that make a wide spectrum of communities cultish, revealing not only how cult language affects followers of groups as notorious as Heaven's Gate but also how it pervades our modern start-ups, fitness brands, and Instagram feeds. Incisive and darkly funny, this enrapturing take on the curious social science of power and belief will make you hear the fanatical language of *Cultish* everywhere.

Choice Book

Please choose at least **ONE book (fiction or non-fiction)** from the list below to read over the summer.

Non-fiction

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End, Atul Gawande

Medicine has triumphed in modern times, transforming birth, injury, and infectious disease from harrowing to manageable. But in the inevitable condition of aging and death, the goals of medicine seem too frequently to run counter to the interest of the human spirit. Gawande, a practicing surgeon, addresses his profession's ultimate limitation, arguing that quality of life is the desired goal for patients and families. Gawande offers examples of freer, more socially fulfilling models for assisting the infirm and dependent elderly, and he explores the varieties of hospice care to demonstrate that a person's last weeks or months may be rich and dignified.

Born a Crime, Trevor Noah

Trevor Noah's unlikely path from apartheid South Africa to the desk of *The Daily Show* began with a criminal act: his birth. Trevor was born to a white Swiss father and a black Xhosa mother at a time when such a union was punishable by five years in prison. Living proof of his parents' indiscretion, Trevor was kept mostly indoors for the earliest years of his life, bound by the extreme and often absurd measures his mother took to hide him from a government that could, at any moment, steal him away.

A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf

A Room of One's Own is an extended essay by Virginia Woolf. While this extended essay in fact employs a fictional narrator and narrative to explore women both as writers and characters in fiction, the manuscript for the delivery of the series of lectures, titled *Women and Fiction*, and hence the essay, are considered nonfiction. The essay is seen as a feminist text, and is noted in its argument for both a literal and figural space for women writers within a literary tradition dominated by patriarchy.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, Rebecca Skloot

Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her enslaved ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine. The first “immortal” human cells grown in culture, they are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years. If you could pile all HeLa cells ever grown onto a scale, they'd weigh more than 50 million metric tons—as much as a hundred Empire State Buildings. HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the atom bomb's effects; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions.

Educated, Tara Westover

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.

***The Cheating Culture*, David Callahan**

Cheating on every level—from highly publicized corporate scandals to Little League fraud—has risen dramatically in recent decades. Why all the cheating? Why now? Callahan pins the blame on the dog-eat-dog economic climate of the past two decades. An unfettered market and unprecedented economic inequality have corroded our values, he argues—and ultimately threaten the level playing field so central to American democracy itself. Through revealing interviews and extensive data, he takes us on a gripping tour of cheating in America and offers a powerful argument for why it matters.

***Between the World and Me* by Ta Nehisi-Coates**

In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation's history and current crisis. Americans have built an empire on the idea of "race," a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men—bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?

Fiction

***A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry**

With a compassionate realism and narrative sweep that recall the work of Charles Dickens, this magnificent novel captures all the cruelty and corruption, dignity, and heroism of India.

The time is 1975. The place is an unnamed city by the sea. The government has just declared a State of Emergency, in whose upheavals four strangers--a spirited widow, a young student uprooted from his idyllic hill station, and two tailors who have fled the caste violence of their native village--will be thrust together, forced to share one cramped apartment and an uncertain future.

***The Color Purple* by Alice Walker**

A powerful cultural touchstone of modern American literature, *The Color Purple* depicts the lives of African American women in early twentieth-century rural Georgia. Separated as girls, sisters Celie and Nettie sustain their loyalty to and hope in each other across time, distance, and silence. Through a series of letters spanning twenty years, first from Celie to God, then the sisters to each other despite the unknown, the novel draws readers into its rich and memorable portrayals of Celie, Nettie, Shug Avery, and Sofia and their experiences. *The Color Purple* broke the silence around domestic and sexual abuse, narrating the lives of women through their pain and struggle, companionship and growth, resilience, and bravery.

***Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad**

Heart of Darkness, a novel by Joseph Conrad, was originally a three-part series in Blackwood's Magazine in 1899. It is a story within a story, following a character named Charlie Marlow, who recounts his adventure to a group of men onboard an anchored ship. The story told is of his early life as a ferry boat captain. Although his job was to transport ivory downriver, Charlie develops an interest in investing in an ivory procurement agent, Kurtz, who is employed by the government. Preceded by his reputation as a brilliant emissary of progress, Kurtz has now established himself as a god among the natives in "one of the darkest places on earth." Marlow suspects something else of Kurtz: he has gone mad.

***Crying in H Mart*, Michelle Zauner**

The New York Times bestseller from the Grammy-nominated indie rockstar Japanese Breakfast, an unflinching, deeply moving memoir about growing up mixed-race, Korean food, losing her Korean mother, and forging her own identity in the wake of her loss. It was her mother's diagnosis of terminal pancreatic cancer, when Michelle was twenty-five, that forced a reckoning with her identity and brought her to reclaim the gifts of taste, language, and history her mother had given her.