

**LAGUNA BLANCA SCHOOL
SUMMER READING 2026
FOR STUDENTS ENTERING
AP ENGLISH LITERATURE & COMPOSITION**

All Laguna Blanca students entering Grades 5-12 in the fall are required to read at least one book this summer. We ask that students use Post-it notes or a pen/pencil to mark passages they find important, interesting, or confusing. **Please buy only new books or used books with no markings.**

Please buy the specific edition as indicated by the ISBN # and link listed below.

REQUIRED READING ASSIGNMENT (Writing assignment will follow in class)

***THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY* (1891) by Oscar Wilde (Irish)**

ISBN 978-0-141-43957 ([this edition](#))

Oscar Wilde's novel is the dreamlike story of a young man who sells his soul for eternal youth and beauty. In this celebrated work, Wilde forged a devastating portrait of the effects of evil and decadence on a young aesthete in late-19th-century England. This Gothic novel centers on a striking premise: As Dorian Gray sinks into a life of crime and debauchery, his body retains perfect youth and vigor while his recently painted portrait grows day by day into a hideous record of evil, which he must keep hidden from the world. The novel investigates the human soul, the power of vanity, and the problems of living without any consequences for one's actions. Following a trial in 1895, Oscar Wilde was convicted of gross indecency and sentenced to two years of hard labor, the maximum penalty for his crime. In 2017, Oscar Wilde was among thousands of gay and bisexual men pardoned posthumously for engaging in consensual same-sex relationships.

INDEPENDENT READING

In AP English Literature, the more texts you read, the better prepared you will be for the "open-ended" question on the AP Exam. Also, you will write a formal research paper about ONE of the works from the Independent Reading list (TBD later in the year). Over the summer, you may read a work (or as many works) from the list below, but you are not required to.

***THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* (1920) by Edith Wharton (American)**

Set during the Gilded Age in New York City, *The Age of Innocence* follows Newland Archer, a poised and pedigreed lawyer eagerly awaiting his marriage to May Welland, a paragon of Old New York grace. But the arrival of Countess Ellen Olenska, May's enigmatic and alluring cousin, shatters the tranquility of Archer's carefully structured world. As Archer finds himself drawn into Ellen's world, he grapples with the stark contrast between the two women. May is a portrait of tradition and conformity, while Ellen defies convention. Against the backdrop of high society's glittering facade, Edith Wharton's novel explores the intricate dance between societal expectation and personal fulfillment. In 1921, Wharton became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for *The Age of Innocence*.

***THE AWAKENING* (1899) by Kate Chopin (American South)**

Set in New Orleans and on the Louisiana Gulf coast at the end of the 19th century, the plot centers on Edna Pontellier and her struggle between her increasingly unorthodox views on femininity and motherhood and the prevailing social attitudes of the turn-of-the-century American South. This American novel is widely seen as a landmark work of early feminism.

***CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* (1866) by Fyodor Dostoevsky (Russian)**

Raskolnikov, a destitute and desperate former student, wanders through the slums of St. Petersburg and murders an old pawnbroker woman without remorse or regret. He imagines himself to be a great man—a Napoleon, acting for a higher purpose beyond conventional moral law. But as he embarks on a dangerous game of cat and mouse

with a suspicious police investigator, Raskolnikov is pursued by the growing voice of his conscience and finds the noose of his own guilt tightening around his neck. Only Sonya, a downtrodden sex worker, can offer the chance of redemption. Dostoevsky's masterpiece is both a profound psychological novel and a quintessential crime novel.

***DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH* (1886) by Leo Tolstoy (Russian)**

In the final days of his life, Ivan Ilyich makes a clear split between an artificial life, such as his own, which masks the true meaning of life and makes one fear death, and an authentic life, the life of Gerasim, his servant. Authentic life is marked by compassion and sympathy, while artificial life is motivated by self-interest. Therefore, by dramatizing a particular sort of lifestyle and its unbearable decline, Tolstoy imparts his philosophy that success as it is judged by society, such as Ivan Ilyich's, comes at a great moral cost, and if one decides to pay this cost, life will become hollow and insincere and therefore worse than death.

***DEATH OF A SALESMAN* (1949) by Arthur Miller (American)**

Willy Loman has been a salesman for 34 years. At 60, he is cast aside, his usefulness now exhausted. With no future to dream about, he must face the crushing disappointments of his past. He takes one final brave action, but is he heroic or a self-deluding fool?

***THE HANDMAID'S TALE* (1986) by Margaret Atwood (Canadian)**

In Margaret Atwood's dystopian future, environmental disasters and declining birth rates have led to a Second American Civil War. The result is the rise of the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian regime that enforces rigid social roles and enslaves the few remaining fertile women. Offred is one of these, a Handmaid bound to produce children for one of Gilead's Commanders. Deprived of her husband, her child, her freedom, and even her own name, Offred clings to her memories and her will to survive. At once a scathing satire, an ominous warning, and a tour de force of narrative suspense, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a modern classic.

***INVISIBLE MAN* (1952) by Ralph Ellison (African American)**

The narrator of *Invisible Man* is a nameless young college-educated Black man who struggles to succeed in a 20th-century United States, a racially divided society where reality is surreal. Because the people he encounters "see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination," he is invisible.

***THE KNOWN WORLD* (2003) by Edward P. Jones (African American)**

On a small plantation in Manchester County, Virginia, in the 1850s, a freed Black man named Henry Townsend lives with his wife and the thirty-three slaves he has bought, some of whom he has bought with the help of his former owner. This kaleidoscopic first novel depicts daily life for Henry and his friends ("members of a free Negro class that, while not having the power of some whites, had been brought up to believe that they were rulers waiting in the wings"); for the plantation slaves, one of whom believes that he, too, will be transformed into an owner after Henry's death; and for the county's white inhabitants, who coexist uneasily with their slaves and their emancipated Black neighbors. Jones has written a historical book of tremendous moral intricacy: no relationship here is left unaltered by the bonds of ownership, and liberty eludes most of Manchester County's residents, not just its slaves.

***MEDEA* (432 BCE) by Euripides (Ancient Greek)**

One of the most powerful and enduring of Greek tragedies, *Medea* centers on the myth of Jason, leader of the Argonauts, who has won the dragon-guarded treasure of

the Golden Fleece with the help of the sorceress Medea. Having married Medea and fathered her two children, Jason abandons her for a more favorable match, never suspecting the terrible revenge she will take. Euripides' masterful portrayal of the motives that fiercely drive Medea's pursuit of vengeance for her husband's insult and betrayal has held theater audiences spellbound for more than 2,200 years.

***NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR* (1949) by George Orwell (English)**

Orwell's novel is set in 1984 in Oceania, one of three perpetually warring totalitarian states (the other two are Eurasia and Eastasia). Oceania is governed by the all-controlling Party, which has brainwashed the population into unthinking obedience to its leader, Big Brother. The Party has created a propagandistic language known as *Newspeak*, which is designed to limit free thought and promote the Party's doctrines. Its words include *doublethink*, which is reflected in the Party's slogans: "War Is Peace," "Freedom Is Slavery," and "Ignorance Is Strength." This dystopian novel remains a chilling warning against totalitarianism.

***OBASAN* (1981) by Joy Kogawa (Japanese Canadian)**

A member of the British Commonwealth, Canada is seen throughout the world as a relatively neutral and therefore non-threatening nation. However, the tales of Amerindian and Inuit removals and the internment of Canadians with Japanese ancestry in World War II remain controversial. The novel chronicles Canada's internment and persecution of its citizens of Japanese descent during the Second World War from the flashback perspective of a young child, Naomi Nakane, who is concurrently a 36-year-old teacher. In 2005, *Obasan* was the One Book, One Vancouver selection.

***THE ODYSSEY* (8th c. BCE) by Homer (Ancient Greek)**

The Odyssey begins after the end of the ten-year Trojan War (the subject of *the Iliad*), and Odysseus has not yet returned home because he angered the god Poseidon. Odysseus' son Telemachus is about 20 years old and is sharing his absent father's house on the island of Ithaca with his mother Penelope and a crowd of 108 boisterous young men, "the Suitors", whose aim is to persuade Penelope to marry one of them, all the while reveling in Odysseus' palace and eating up his wealth.

***ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE* (1967) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombian)**

José Arcadio Buendía finds the village of Macondo, Colombia, after wandering in the jungle. Eventually, the village begins to grow, and Buendia continues his efforts to develop its community. Only he finds himself bracketed by the mysticism of tradition and the technology of the modern world. What the primitives see as magic, Buendia explains as the wonders of the civilized world. Alternatively, the villagers accept the technical aspects of new concoctions and contraptions that Buendia cannot fully

explain as magic. His consternation grows beyond expectation as political issues in Colombian society affect the village. Rich with satire, hyperbole, and metaphors, the novel employs magic realism to distinguish between magic and science, fantasy and reality, and the smoke-and-mirrors of the political struggle. Marquez received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982.

***PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* (1813) by Jane Austen (English)**

A comedy of manners, it follows the character development of Elizabeth Bennet, the protagonist of the book, who learns the repercussions of hasty judgment and comes to appreciate the difference between superficial and actual goodness. Mr Bennet, owner of the Longbourn estate in Hertfordshire, has five daughters, but the estate is entailed and can be passed only to a male heir. His wife lacks an inheritance, so his family faces poverty upon his death. Thus, it is imperative that at least one of the daughters marry well to support the others, which is a primary motivation driving the plot.

***SIDDHARTHA* (1922) by Herman Hesse (German)**

This influential book, Hesse's ninth novel, is written in a simple, lyrical style and deals with the spiritual journey of self-discovery of a man named Siddhartha during the time of Gautama Buddha. A major preoccupation of Hesse in writing *Siddhartha* was to attain completeness by immersing himself in Indian philosophy, such as that described in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*—the Buddhist and Hindu teachings. Herman Hesse was a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946.

***SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE* (1969) by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (American)**

Slaughterhouse-Five, an American classic, is one of the world's great antiwar books. Centering on the infamous World War II firebombing of Dresden, the novel is the result of what Kurt Vonnegut described as a twenty-three-year struggle to write a book about what he had witnessed as an American prisoner of war. It combines historical fiction, science fiction, autobiography, and satire in an account of the life of Billy Pilgrim, a barber's son who becomes a draftee, an optometrist, and an alien abductee. As Vonnegut did, Billy experiences the destruction of Dresden as a POW. Unlike Vonnegut, he experiences time travel, or what Vonnegut calls "unstuck in time."

***THINGS FALL APART* (1958) by Chinua Achebe (Nigerian)**

Achebe's debut novel depicts pre-colonial life in the southeastern part of Nigeria and the Europeans' invasion in the late 19th century. The novel follows the life of Okonkwo, an Igbo ("Ibo" in the novel) man and local wrestling champion in the fictional Nigerian clan of Umuofia. The work is split into three parts: the first describes his family, personal history, and the customs and society of the Igbo; the second and third sections introduce the influence of European colonialism and Christian missionaries on Okonkwo, his family, and the wider Igbo community. *Things Fall Apart* (a line from the poem "The Second Coming" by the Irish poet Yeats) is considered the archetypal modern African novel in English and one of the first to receive global critical acclaim.

***THE TRIAL* (1925) by Franz Kafka (Czech Jewish, writing in German)**

The Trial is often interpreted as a reflection of the human condition and the search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. The protagonist Josef K. desperately seeks to understand the charges against him, defend himself, and ultimately, find a way to avoid the impending doom. He encounters various characters within the court system, all of whom contribute to his sense of alienation and bewilderment. K.'s struggle with the legal system becomes a metaphor for the challenges of navigating a complex and often incomprehensible reality.

***THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING* (1984) by Milan Kundera (Czech)**

Milan Kundera, born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, was a student when the Czech Communist regime was established in 1948. After the Russian invasion in August 1968, his books were denounced. In 1975, he and his wife settled in France, and in 1981, he became a French citizen. This unconventional novel is a meditation on life, the erotic, the nature of men and women, and love. The story is set against the background of the Prague Spring of June 1968, the Soviet invasion of the country that followed in August, and the aftermath of the crackdown on liberalization. The tale begins on a philosophical note, discussing Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal return (or eternal recurrence). If, as Nietzsche believed, everything in life happens an infinite number of times, causing the "heaviest of burdens," then a personal life in which everything happens only once loses its "weight" and significance—hence the "unbearable lightness of being."

***WUTHERING HEIGHTS* (1847) by Emily Brontë (English)**

Lockwood, the new tenant of Thrushcross Grange, situated on the bleak Yorkshire moors, is forced to seek shelter one night at Wuthering Heights, the home of his landlord. There, he discovers the history of the tempestuous events that occurred years before. What unfolds is the tale of the intense love between the gypsy foundling Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. Forced to choose between passionate, tortured Heathcliff and gentle, well-bred Edgar Linton, Katherine surrenders to the expectations of her class. As Heathcliff's bitterness and vengeance at his betrayal are visited upon the next generation, their innocent heirs must struggle to escape the legacy of the past.