

Summer Reading Assignment 2026-2027
Honors American Literature | Oakland Catholic High School

Over the summer, please read at least two books, one from each list. While you are not required to take notes, you should read for a thorough understanding of each text and should be prepared to write a paper about the first text during the first week of school. The second book choice, your research selection, will form the basis for your Junior research paper. Throughout the year, you will deeply analyze this book and write a literary analysis research paper on it. Please bring both books to school on the first day of class. You must purchase your own copy of both books, as you will be referencing the first one throughout the first semester and the research paper book throughout the whole year.

Text 1: Please choose at least one of these texts (but I would highly recommend reading both!) to discuss and write about during the first week of school.

***All brief descriptions are from bn.com. Look up a bit more about each if interested!*

The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls ISBN: **978-0743247542**

The Glass Castle is 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 Walls children learned to take care of themselves. They fed, clothed, and protected one another, and eventually found their way to New York. Their parents followed them, choosing to be homeless even as their children prospered. The Glass Castle is truly astonishing—a memoir permeated by the intense love of a peculiar but loyal family.

The Awakening by Kate Chopin ISBN: **978-1514639641**

Edna Pontellier is a young woman living comfortably in the beautiful city of New Orleans. She is fond of her husband and proud of her sons but finds it impossible to accept that "for women it is a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals." She fights back in the only way she knows, and her solution is extreme. Infamous in its time, *The Awakening* is now recognized as a radical work of fiction—sensuous, arresting, and clear-eyed in its commitment to freedom and independence. Kate Chopin was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1850; *The Awakening* was her third novel.

Text 2: Please choose one of these texts to read for your Junior research paper

***All brief descriptions are from bn.com. Look up a bit more about each if interested!*

The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton

Winner of the 1921 Pulitzer Prize, *The Age of Innocence* is Edith Wharton's masterful portrait of desire and betrayal during the sumptuous Golden Age of Old New York, a time when society people "dreaded scandal more than disease." This is Newland Archer's world as he prepares to marry the beautiful but conventional May Welland. But when the mysterious Countess Ellen Olenska returns to New York after a disastrous marriage, Archer falls deeply in love with her. Torn between duty and passion, Archer struggles to make a decision that will either courageously define his life—or mercilessly destroy it.

The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath***

Sylvia Plath's shocking, realistic, and intensely emotional novel about a woman falling into the grip of insanity. Esther Greenwood is brilliant, beautiful, enormously talented, and successful, but slowly going under—maybe for the last time. In her acclaimed and enduring masterwork, Sylvia Plath brilliantly draws the reader into Esther's breakdown with such intensity that her insanity becomes palpably real, even rational—as accessible an experience as going to the movies. A deep penetration into the darkest and most harrowing corners of the human

psyche, *The Bell Jar* is an extraordinary accomplishment and a haunting American classic.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker***

This is the story of two sisters—one a missionary in Africa and the other a child wife living in the South—who sustain their loyalty to and trust in each other across time, distance, and silence. Beautifully imagined and deeply compassionate, this classic novel of American literature is rich with passion, pain, inspiration, and an indomitable love of life.

Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut***

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 turned draftee turned optometrist turned alien abductee. As Vonnegut had, Billy experiences the destruction of Dresden as a POW. Unlike Vonnegut, he experiences time travel, or coming "unstuck in time."

In Cold Blood by Truman Capote***

On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. As Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, he generates both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. *In Cold Blood* is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence.

My Antonia by Willa Cather

Widely recognized as Willa Cather's greatest novel, *My Antonia* is a soulful and rich portrait of a pioneer woman's simple yet heroic life. The spirited daughter of Bohemian immigrants, Antonia must adapt to a hard existence on the desolate prairies of the Midwest. Enduring childhood poverty, teenage seduction, and family tragedy, she eventually becomes a wife and mother on a Nebraska farm. A fictional record of how women helped forge the communities that formed a nation, *My Antonia* is also a hauntingly eloquent celebration of the strength, courage, and spirit of America's early pioneers.

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne

America's first psychological novel, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a dark tale of love, crime, and revenge set in colonial New England. It revolves around a single, forbidden act of passion that forever alters the lives of three members of a small Puritan community: Hester Prynne, an ardent and fierce woman who bears the punishment of her sin in humble silence; the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, a respected public figure who is inwardly tormented by long-hidden guilt; and the malevolent Roger Chillingworth, Hester's husband—a man who seethes with an Ahab-like lust for vengeance. The landscape of this classic novel is uniquely American, but the themes it explores are universal—the nature of sin, guilt, and penitence, the clash between our private and public selves, and the spiritual and psychological cost of living outside society. Constructed with the elegance of a Greek tragedy, *The Scarlet Letter* brilliantly illuminates the truth that lies deep within the human heart.

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison***

A first novel by an unknown writer, it remained on the bestseller list for sixteen weeks, won the National Book Award for fiction, and established Ralph Ellison as one of the key writers of the century. The nameless narrator of the novel describes growing up in a black community in the South, attending a Negro college from which he is expelled, moving to New York and becoming the chief spokesman of the Harlem branch of "the Brotherhood", and retreating amid violence and confusion to the basement lair of the Invisible Man he imagines himself to be. The book is a passionate and witty tour de force of style, strongly influenced by T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Joyce, and Dostoevsky.

The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane

Henry Fleming dreams of the thrill of battle and performing heroic deeds in the American Civil War. But his illusions are shattered when he comes face to face with the bloodshed and horrors of war. Now he's a raw recruit, Henry experiences both fear and self-doubt. Will war make Henry a coward or a hero? A vivid fictionalised account of the experiences of an ordinary innocent young soldier on the battlefields of the American Civil War, introduced by American writer, illustrator and historian, Wendell Minor.

The Sun Also Rises by Ernest Hemingway ***

The Sun Also Rises is a 1926 novel by American writer Ernest Hemingway, his first, that portrays American and British expatriates who travel along the Camino de Santiago from Paris to the Festival of San Fermín in Pamplona and watch the running of the bulls and the bullfights. An early modernist novel, it received mixed reviews upon publication. Hemingway biographer Jeffrey Meyers writes that it is now "recognized as Hemingway's greatest work" and Hemingway scholar Linda Wagner-Martin calls it his most important novel. The novel was published in the United States in October 1926 by Scribner.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey***

A classic battle royale between the patients at a mental institution and the nurse who oversees them. Grappling with themes of good and evil, this is a narrative that will leave readers checking in with themselves as they inevitably root for the antics of Randle Patrick McMurphy. In this classic novel, Ken Kesey's hero is Randle Patrick McMurphy, a boisterous, brawling, fun-loving rebel who swaggers into the world of a mental hospital and takes over. A lusty, life-affirming fighter, McMurphy rallies the other patients around him by challenging the dictatorship of Nurse Ratched. He promotes gambling in the ward, smuggles in wine and women, and openly defies the rules at every turn. But this defiance, which starts as a sport, soon develops into a grim struggle, an all-out war between two relentless opponents: Nurse Ratched, backed by the full power of authority, and McMurphy, who has only his own indomitable will. What happens when Nurse Ratched uses her ultimate weapon against McMurphy provides the story's shocking climax.

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan ISBN: 978-0143038092

Four mothers, four daughters, four families whose histories shift with the four winds depending on who's "saying" the stories. In 1949 four Chinese women, recent immigrants to San Francisco, begin meeting to eat dim sum, play mahjong, and talk. United in shared unspeakable loss and hope, they call themselves the Joy Luck Club. Rather than sink into tragedy, they choose to gather to raise their spirits and money. "To despair was to wish back for something already lost. Or to prolong what was already unbearable." Forty years later the stories and history continue.

With wit and sensitivity, Amy Tan examines the sometimes painful, often tender, and always deep connection between mothers and daughters. As each woman reveals her secrets, trying to unravel the truth about her life, the strings become more tangled, more entwined. Mothers boast or despair over daughters, and daughters roll their eyes even as they feel the inextricable tightening of their matriarchal ties. Tan is an astute storyteller, enticing readers to immerse themselves into these lives of complexity and mystery.

*** *Contains challenging and controversial material suitable for more mature readers*