

Oakland Catholic High School
Honors Senior English Capstone
Summer Reading 2026

Summer Reading Assignment Explained:

In the first semester of Honors Senior English Capstone, you will focus on writing an interdisciplinary research paper, one which integrates at least two different academic disciplines. The goal is for you to have an opportunity to explore fields which interest you, and which you might study in college. Combining multiple fields will involve creativity and critical thinking, skills which will serve you well in college and in the workplace.

In the spirit of interdisciplinary inquiry, for your summer reading assignment, we are asking you to read and annotate a novel that combines literature with another academic discipline. Please find novel choices, including short descriptions, on the following pages. (You need only choose one, though you are welcome to read more!)

On the first day of your Honors Senior English Capstone class, your teacher will collect **your annotations** of your chosen book. Please be ready to show your work. Within the first week, you will also write an **in-class essay** inspired by the intersection between academic disciplines in your book.

Annotation guidelines:

- You should create **25 annotations per 50 pages** of your book. You may round down (ex. if your book is 125 pages, then you should complete 50 annotations).
- Annotations should be **consistently spread** throughout the book. The goal is to provide yourself notes and reminders about any important information for when you write about the book in class.
- Annotations should be **keyed to specific passages**; that is, they should be written directly in your book. Annotations must be words written in the margins to count---they may include underlines, circles, etc---but these alone do not make an annotation.
 - Note: If you choose to borrow your book from a library or friend—do not mark in the book. Instead, use sticky notes in the book to make your annotations.
- Annotations must **demonstrate higher-level thinking**. Your notes should be more sophisticated than just a summary of the book or a collection of random observations—they should show your interaction with the narration, structure, setting, and interdisciplinary aspects of the book. Use the following questions to guide your note-taking:
 1. From whose perspective(s) is the story told? How does this perspective enhance or withhold details from the reader?
 2. What do you notice about how the story is told?
 3. How do the setting(s) affect the story?
 4. Besides literature, what other academic discipline(s) do you find in this text? How does the novel give you a new perspective on this discipline?
 - a. You might consider typical school subjects like science, art, or social studies, but you might also consider disciplines like economics, human geography, philosophy, etc.

Your assignment should reflect your own original work. Copying information from another student or an outside source, such as the Internet, will result in a zero on the assignment as well as disciplinary action.

Honors Senior English Capstone Choice Novels - Listed chronologically. Summaries are adapted from barnesandnoble.com.

Content note: As readings for a 12th grade literature course, several of these novels and short story collections deal with mature themes. Each of these novels has literary merit and is taught in other high school classrooms; many of the themes will be familiar from previous English classes. Before committing to your choice, however, I suggest you browse a couple of reviews or summaries to make sure you will feel comfortable with and prepared for your novel. When you return in the fall, I hope we can have meaningful discussions about how literature helps us make sense of both the beauty and the pain of human experience.

Dracula, by Bram Stoker (1897)

Fledgling English lawyer Jonathan Harker treks into the Carpathian Mountains to complete a real estate transaction—despite the frightening warnings of the horrible dangers that await him. Harker's client is the ancient Count Dracula, who lives in a sumptuously furnished castle—one strangely devoid of mirrors. Harker soon realizes that the Count's interest in London is more than idle curiosity, and is woefully unprepared for the Count's obsession with Harker's fiancée, Mina . . .

Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley (1932)

Aldous Huxley's profoundly important classic of world literature, *Brave New World* is a searching vision of an unequal, technologically-advanced future where humans are genetically bred, socially indoctrinated, and pharmaceutically anesthetized to passively uphold an authoritarian ruling order—all at the cost of our freedom, full humanity, and perhaps also our souls.

The Things They Carried, by Tim O'Brien (1990) *collection of short stories

A classic work of American literature that has not stopped changing minds and lives since it burst onto the literary scene, *The Things They Carried* is a ground-breaking meditation on war, memory, imagination, and the redemptive power of storytelling. *The Things They Carried* depicts the men of Alpha Company: Jimmy Cross, Henry Dobbins, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders, Norman Bowker, Kiowa, and the character Tim O'Brien, who has survived his tour in Vietnam to become a father and writer at the age of forty-three.

Interpreter of Maladies, by Jhumpa Lahiri (1999) *collection of short stories

With accomplished precision and gentle eloquence, Jhumpa Lahiri traces the crosscurrents set in motion when immigrants, expatriates, and their children arrive, quite literally, at a cultural divide. A blackout forces a young Indian American couple to make confessions that unravel their tattered domestic peace. An Indian American girl recognizes her cultural identity during a Halloween celebration while the Pakistani civil war rages on television in the background. A latchkey kid with a single working mother finds affinity with a woman from Calcutta. In the title story, an interpreter guides an American family through the India of their ancestors and hears an astonishing confession.

Never Let Me Go, by Kazuo Ishiguro (2005)

As children, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy were students at Hailsham, an exclusive boarding school secluded in the English countryside. It was a place of mercurial cliques and mysterious rules where teachers were constantly reminding their charges of how special they were. Now, years later, Kathy is a young woman. Ruth and Tommy have reentered her life. And for the first time she is beginning to look back at their shared past and understand just what it is that makes them special—and how that gift will shape the rest of their time together.

The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears, by Dinaw Mengestu (2007)

Seventeen years ago, Sepha Stephanos fled the Ethiopian Revolution for a new start in the United States. Now he finds himself running a failing grocery store in a poor African-American section of Washington, D.C., his only companions two fellow African immigrants who share his bitter nostalgia and longing for his home continent. Years ago and worlds away Sepha could never have imagined a life of such isolation. As his environment begins to change, hope comes in the form of a friendship with new neighbors Judith and Naomi, a white woman and her biracial daughter. But when a series of racial incidents disturbs the community, Sepha may lose everything all over again.

A Place for Us, by Fatima Farheen Mirza (2018)

As an Indian wedding gathers a family back together, parents Rafiq and Layla must reckon with the choices their children have made. There is Hadia: their headstrong, eldest daughter, whose marriage is a match of love and not tradition. Huda, the middle child, determined to follow in her sister's footsteps. And lastly, their estranged son, Amar, who returns to the family fold for the first time in three years to take his place as brother of the bride. What secrets and betrayals have caused this close-knit family to fracture? Can Amar find his way back to the people who know and love him best?

Annihilation, by Jeff VanderMeer (2024)

Area X has been cut off from the rest of the world for years. Nature has reclaimed the last vestiges of human civilization. Expeditions into Area X have ended in disaster or death. In *Annihilation*, we join the latest expedition. The group is made up of four women: an anthropologist; a surveyor; a psychologist, the de facto leader; and the narrator, a biologist. Their mission is to map the terrain, record all observations of their surroundings and of one another, and, above all, avoid being contaminated by Area X itself. They arrive expecting the unexpected, and Area X delivers—they discover lifeforms that surpass understanding. But it's the secrets they carried across the border with them that change everything.