

English 11 AA Summer Assignment



I am thrilled to have you in Honors English 11 this upcoming school year! 11th grade is a powerful, milestone year, and I can't wait to go on the journey with you.

To keep your minds sharp over the summer, you are asked to complete the following Reading Assignment. Please read through the directions below. Read deeply, question everything, and enjoy a great story. I cannot wait to hear your thoughts when we return in August!

Mr. Smyth

Step 1: Choose Your Text

Select **one** book from the options below. I have included a mix of contemporary and classic fiction, as well as some compelling non-fiction narratives. Read through the list carefully - there should be at least one that speaks to your interests, passions, and/or curiosity.

Contemporary & Historical Fiction

- ***The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead** (Historical Fiction / Drama)
Based on the real history of a reform school in Jim Crow-era Florida, this Pulitzer Prize-winning novel follows Elwood Curtis, a young Black boy who takes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words to heart, as he navigates injustice and seeks survival.
 - *Perfect if historical justice, criticism of human systems, and masterful characterization is your thing.*
- ***There There* by Tommy Orange** (Contemporary Fiction / Polyphonic Narrative)
This brilliant novel follows twelve characters from Native communities, all traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow. It explores themes centered around identity, urbanization, historical trauma, and sacred tradition.
 - *Perfect if you enjoy complex, multi-perspective storytelling and thematic depth.*
- ***The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan** (Domestic Fiction / Intergenerational Drama)
Four Chinese immigrant mothers and their four Chinese-American daughters in San Francisco come together to eat, play mahjong, and share stories. This beautiful novel examines the intricate, often fraught bonds of mother-daughter relationships and cultural identity.
 - *Perfect if you like to get lost in culture, family dynamics, and emotional storytelling.*

Speculative Fiction, Mystery, & Thrilling Adventures

- ***Kindred* by Octavia Butler** (Speculative Fiction / Historical Drama / Time-Travel) In 1976, a young Black woman named Dana is suddenly and inexplicably ripped from her California home and transported to a plantation in antebellum Maryland. She realizes she has been summoned to save the life of Rufus, a white plantation owner's son who is destined to become her ancestor. As Dana is pulled back and forth through time, her stays in the past become longer and more dangerous, forcing her to navigate the brutal realities of slavery to ensure Rufus's survival—and her own future existence.
 - *Perfect if you are fascinated by the psychological impacts of history, complex moral choices, and stories of resilience and survival.*

- ***Mexican Gothic* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia** (Gothic Thriller / Horror) Set in 1950s Mexico, glamorous debutante Noemí Taboada receives a frantic, disturbing letter from her newlywed cousin, begging for rescue from a doom-laden countryside mansion. What Noemí finds is a chilling family history, an atmosphere thick with dread, and a house that seems to be alive.
 - *Perfect if you enjoy rich sensory imagery, atmospheric tension, and analyzing the dark subtexts of colonialism and patriarchy.*
- ***Firekeeper's Daughter* by Angeline Boulley** (Mystery / Crime Thriller) Daunis Fontaine, a biracial, unenrolled Ojibwe tribal member, dreams of studying medicine. When she witnesses a shocking murder, she reluctantly goes undercover for the FBI to investigate a lethal new drug tracking through her community. She must use her knowledge of chemistry and traditional Ojibwe medicine to root out the truth.
 - *Perfect if you love complex, fast-paced puzzles, criminal investigation, and deep explorations of cultural identity.*

Non-Fiction & Memoir

- ***Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson** (Memoir / Social Justice / Narrative Non-Fiction) A powerful, true story about the redeeming potential of mercy. Stevenson, a young lawyer who founded the Equal Justice Initiative, recounts his experiences defending those most desperate, in need, and forgotten by our justice system.
 - *Perfect for students passionate about law, activism, ethics, and the real-world impact individuals can make.*
- ***Educated* by Tara Westover** (Memoir / Coming-of-Age) **Content Advisory: This memoir contains repeated scenes of physical abuse that some may find difficult/disturbing.** Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, Tara Westover was seventeen the first time she set foot in a classroom. This stunning memoir chronicles her quest for knowledge, which took her from isolated rural life to Harvard and Cambridge.
 - *Perfect for students interested in psychological resilience, the transformative power of education, and complex family dynamics.*
- ***The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot** (Biography / Science Journalism) This book tells the dual biography of HeLa cells—the first "immortal" human cells grown in a lab, which led to the polio vaccine, gene mapping, and IVF—and Henrietta Lacks, the poor Black tobacco farmer from whose body the cells were taken in 1951 without her knowledge or consent. It contrasts the multi-billion dollar biotech industry with Henrietta's family, who couldn't afford healthcare.
 - *Perfect if your interests lie on the intersection of STEM, ethics, history, and social justice.*
- ***Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates** (Epistolary Non-Fiction / Cultural Essay) Written as a letter from the author to his teenage son, this profound book explores the history of race in America and what it means to inhabit a Black body in the modern world.
 - *Perfect if you appreciate poetic prose, rhetorical analysis, and deep philosophical inquiries into society.*

Step 2: Enjoy Reading the Book You Selected

Step 3: Choose and Create Your Product

To demonstrate your understanding of your chosen text and showcase your understanding of literary elements, you will complete **one** of the differentiated product choices below.

Regardless of the option you choose, your project must explicitly analyze at least **three** of the following literary/narrative elements:

- **Setting:** How does the time and place shape the mood, conflict, or characters?
- **Characterization:** How does the author build complexity in characters (internal conflicts, growth, or flaws)?
- **Symbolism:** What recurring objects, motifs, or allegories carry a deeper, abstract meaning?
- **Theme:** What universal truth or message is the author communicating to the reader?
- **Point of View:** How do shifting perspectives or limited POV shape the reader's bias? Is the narrator reliable or unreliable, and how does this impact the information we receive?
- **Narrative Pacing (including foreshadowing and flashback):** How does the author manipulate the timeline or drop clues to build tension?

Option 1: The Thematic Multi-Modal One-Pager (The Visual & Textual Synthesis Route)

Best for creative, visual learners who enjoy blending artistic design with rigorous textual evidence.

- **Task:** Create a visually striking, single-page digital or physical poster [using Adobe Express or Canva (preferred), unlined paper, etc.] that acts as a comprehensive analytical blueprint of the book.
- **Requirements:** Your one-pager must include:
 - The title and author prominently displayed.
 - A central, illustrated visual metaphor representing the book's core **Theme**.
 - An analysis of **Setting** using a combination of a descriptive quote and a visual sketch.
 - A "Character Evolution Map" tracing how a main character changes from the beginning to the end, supported by **Characterization** adjectives and quotes.
 - Two distinct **Symbols** drawn and explained with brief text boxes explaining their deeper meaning.
 - Visual representations/quotes to illustrate the **Point of View** and **Narrative Pacing**.

Option 2: The "Literary Catalyst" Podcast Episode (The Audio & Verbal Route)

Best for students who express their ideas best through speaking, debating, and dynamic audio storytelling.

- **Task:** Record a 5-7 minute solo podcast episode (or a scripted conversational dialogue with a family member/friend who read the book with you) reviewing and analyzing the text.
- **Requirements:**
 - Introduce the book, author, and a brief, spoiler-free summary.
 - Dedicate segments of the podcast to discussing how the Setting and Symbols operate within the narrative.
 - Conclude with an evaluation of the book's ultimate Theme and why this text is relevant to modern audiences.

- *Deliverable:* Turn in the audio file (or link) along with a typed outline/script featuring the exact quotes you referenced during the recording.

See the last page of this document for additional tips for making a podcast.

Evaluation Criteria (What Success Looks Like)

Your assignment will be evaluated upon our return to school using the following criteria:

1. **Depth of Insight (Insightful Analysis):** You move beyond a surface-level summary of the plot and analyze *how* and *why* the author made specific literary choices.
2. **Textual Evidence (Accurate Support):** You weave specific quotes or precise textual examples throughout your product to back up your claims.
3. **Command of Literary Elements:** You clearly and accurately identify and discuss Setting, Symbolism, Characterization, Point of View, Narrative Pacing, and/or Theme.
4. **Craft and Polish:** Your final product—whether visual, or audio—shows care, editing, organization, and a high standard of academic effort.

Due Date: Your project is due on the **first day of school (Weds, August 19th).**

If you have any questions over the summer or need help tracking down a copy of a book, please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email (smythmi@cpsboe.k12.oh.us).

Relax, enjoy the sunshine, and happy reading!

How to Create a Podcast

The "**Literary Catalyst**" Podcast is a creative way to demonstrate your insight. Verbal storytelling requires not just deep literary knowledge, but a command of rhetoric, pacing, and tone. Your goal isn't just to record a book review; it's to engineer a captivating audio experience that sounds like it belongs on NPR or Spotify.

To help you produce a polished, high-quality episode over the summer, I have pulled together a list of the best **free, user-friendly platforms** and a **step-by-step production process** to guide you from your initial notes to the final export.

Part 1: Recommended Platforms

You do *not* need an expensive studio setup to make a professional-sounding podcast. Your smartphone or computer microphone, a pair of standard earbuds, and any of the free platforms below will work beautifully.

1. The All-in-One Beginner Favorites

- **Spotify for Creators** (formerly *Anchor*): Entirely free and web-based (or via app). It allows you to record directly on your phone or laptop, easily drag-and-drop transitions or background music from their free library, and instantly generates a link you can share with me.
- **Podcastle**: A brilliant browser-based studio. It uses AI tools to automatically filter out background noise, adjust your volume levels, and gives you an incredibly clean, professional sound with a single click.

2. The Text-Based Magic (Highly Recommended!)

- **Descript**: This is a game-changer for student creators. When you record your audio into Descript, it automatically generates a written transcript. If you want to edit your audio, **you literally just edit the text document**. Did you say "um" or stutter? Just highlight the word in the transcript, hit delete, and the audio seamlessly cuts it out!

3. The Desktop Classics & Chromebook Solutions

- **Soundtrap** (by *Spotify*): An excellent cloud-based digital audio workstation. This is a perfect, browser-native tool to record, layer audio tracks, and add music.
- **GarageBand** (Mac/iOS users) or **Audacity** (PC/Mac users): If you prefer traditional, downloadable software where you can physically see and cut audio waveforms, these are the gold standards for free audio editing.

Part 2: The Step-by-Step Production Process

A great podcast is 70% preparation and 30% execution. Follow this workflow to ensure your episode hits the expectations for this product.

Step 1: The Blueprint (Outlining & Scripting)

Do not attempt to "wing it!" Listeners can immediately tell the difference between an organic, structured conversation and unstructured rambling.

- **Write a detailed outline or a full script.** Block out your 5-7 minutes into segments.
 - 0:00 - 1:00: **The Hook & Intro** (Catchy greeting, title/author, and a spoiler-free premise).
 - 1:00 - 2:30: **Segment 1: The World of the Book** (Deep dive into **Setting** and its atmosphere).
 - 2:30 - 4:30: **Segment 2: Hidden Codes** (Analysis of **Point of View, Narrative Pacing, Symbolism** and/or **Characterization**, weaving in your specific quotes).
 - 4:30 - 5:30: **Segment 3: The Big Picture** (The core **Theme** and why it matters to teenagers today).
 - 5:30 - 6:00: **Outro** (Final rating/recommendation and sign-off).
- *Tip:* Type your direct quotes in **bold, colorful font** in your script so you know exactly when to read them with emphasis.

Step 2: Setting the Stage (Recording)

- **Find your "Studio":** Find a small, quiet room. Closets are actually the absolute best makeshift recording studios because the hanging clothes absorb echo and background noise!
- **Watch your distance:** Stay about 4 to 6 inches away from your microphone.
- **Bring the energy:** Microphones tend to flatten our voices. Speak with slightly more animation and inflection than you would in a normal, quiet conversation. Smile while you speak—it actually alters your vocal tone to sound more welcoming and engaging!

Step 3: The Polish (Editing)

- **Trim the fat:** Cut out long pauses, loud breaths, or excessive filler words (*like, um, uh, yeah*).
- **Add "Sonic Flavor":** Add a 3-to-5-second snippet of royalty-free intro music at the very beginning, fade the volume down when you start talking, and bring it back up briefly at the very end. (Platforms like *Spotify for Creators* and *Podcastle* have built-in libraries for this). Keep it subtle; your voice should always be the star!

Step 4: Submission (Exporting)

- Listen to your final track all the way through before turning it in.
- Export the file as an **MP3** or **WAV** file, or generate a public share link from your platform.
- Bundle that audio file/link together with your typed outline/script (including your citations) and get ready to turn it in on the first Friday of school.

Have fun with this! Treat your book like a mystery to be unraveled for your audience. If you stumble upon a cool editing trick or need a hand selecting intros/outros, shoot me an email.