Cohasset High School Grade 11 Summer Reading 2026

All college preparatory and accelerated level students entering 11th Grade English are expected to read and annotate one selection from the below reading list.

Annotations should be completed on handwritten post-it notes for every chapter of the text. The annotations (i.e. comments, questions, literary devices, connections) should relate to the following essential questions:

- How does an individual in this work solve or avoid problems and how does the individual's response develop character?
- How does an individual in this work cope with or respond to social, political, or cultural values within the environment?
- How does this work give insight into values in terms of the following ideas: The desire for freedom; the search for personal identity; conflicts between the individual and society?

The annotations will be the basis of a separate assessment during the first week of class. Additionally, you will be allowed to use the text and/or annotations while completing an essay assessment during the first week of class.

Reading List

Geraldine Brooks' *March*: In her second novel, Brooks imagines the Civil War experiences of Mr. March, the absent father in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. An idealistic Concord minister, March becomes a Union chaplain and later finds himself assigned to be a teacher on a cotton plantation that employs freed slaves, or "contraband." Brooks's novel also includes March's friendships with Concord residents Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and drives home the intimate horrors and ironies of the Civil War.

Daniel James Brown's *Boys in the Boat* (adult version: ISBN# 978-0316497039): With a team composed of the sons of loggers, shipyard workers, and farmers, the University of Washington's eight-oar crew team was never expected to defeat the elite teams of the East Coast and Great Britain, yet they did, going on to shock the world by defeating the German team rowing for Adolf Hitler. The emotional heart of the tale lies with Joe Rantz, a teenager without family or prospects, who rows not only to regain his shattered self-regard but also to find a real place for himself in the world. **Amazon.com.**

Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?:* Australian 11th-grader Amal is smart, funny, outspoken, a good student, and a loyal friend. She is also a devout Muslim who decides to wear the hijab, or head covering, full-time. The story tells of her emotional and spiritual journey as she copes with a mad crush on a boy, befriends an elderly Greek neighbor, and tries to help a friend who aspires to be a lawyer but whose well-intentioned mother is trying to force her to leave school and get married. Amal is also battling the misconceptions of non-Muslims about her religion and culture. While the novel deals with a number of serious issues, it is extremely funny and entertaining, and never preachy or forced. The details of Amal's family and social life are spot-on, and the book is wonderful at showing the diversity within Muslim communities and in explaining why so many women choose to wear the hijab. Amal is an appealing and believable character. She trades verbal jibes with another girl, she is impetuous and even arrogant at times, and she makes some serious errors of judgment. And by the end of the story, she and readers come to realize that "Putting on the hijab isn't the end of the journey. It's just the beginning of it."—*Kathleen E. Gruver, Burlington County Library, Westampton, NJ*

Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*: This "nonfiction novel" about the brutal slaying of the Clutter family by two would-be robbers has been called "a true masterpiece of creative nonfiction."

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A nineteenth-century American woman suffers the consequences when she violates a taboo by leaving her husband for the man she really loves.

Ta-Nehisi Coates' ***Between the World and Me***: 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? **Amazon.com**

Ralph Ellison's ***Invisible Man***: A powerful, artistic representation of the dehumanizing pressures that have been put upon the African-American. This story ranks with the best 20th-century American novels.

Leif Enger's ***Peace Like a River***: Young Reuben Land has little doubt that miracles happen all around us, suspecting that his own father is touched by God. When his older brother flees a controversial murder charge, Reuben, along with his older sister and father, set off on a journey that will take them to the Badlands and through a landscape more extraordinary than they could have anticipated. Enger's novel is at once a heroic quest and a haunting meditation on the possibility of magic in the everyday world. **Amazon.com**

David Grann's ***Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI***: In Killers of the Flower Moon, David Grann revisits a shocking series of crimes in which dozens of people were murdered in cold blood. Based on years of research and startling new evidence, the book is a masterpiece of narrative nonfiction, as each step in the investigation reveals a series of sinister secrets and reversals. But more than that, it is a searing indictment of the callousness and prejudice toward American Indians that allowed the murderers to operate with impunity for so long. Killers of the Flower Moon is utterly compelling, but also emotionally devastating. **Amazon.com**

Cristina Henriquez' ***The Book of Unknown Americans:*** When Mayor Toro, from Panama, sees Maribel, from Mexico, it is love at first sight. It's also the beginning of a friendship between their families, whose web of guilt and love and responsibility is at this novel's core. Woven into their stories are the testimonials of men and women from Latin America whose journeys and voices will inspire you and break your heart. *The Book of Unknown Americans* offers a resonant new definition of what it means to be an American. **Penguinrandomhouse.com**

Jon Krakauer's ***Into the Wild***: Christopher McCandless had given $25,000 in savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Not long after, he was dead. Into the Wild is the mesmerizing, heartbreaking tale of an enigmatic young man who goes missing in the wild and whose story captured the world's attention. **Amazon.com**

Jhumpa Lahiri's ***The Namesake***: On the heels of an arranged wedding, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli settle in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Ashoke does his best to adapt while his wife pines for home. When their son Gogol is born, the task of naming him reflects their hope of respecting old ways in a new world. With empathy and penetrating insight, Lahiri explores how we respond to parental expectations and how we come to define who we are. **Amazon.com product description**

Dennis Lehane's ***The Given Day*****:** Lehane's family epic captures the political unrest of a nation caught between a well-patterned past and an unpredictable future. This novel of American history tells the story of two families – one black, one white – swept up in a maelstrom of revolutionaries and anarchists, immigrants, and ward bosses, Brahmins and ordinary citizens, all engaged in a battle for survival and power at the end of World War I. **Amazon.com.**

Cormac McCarthy's ***The Road*****:** A father and his son walk alone through burned America. Nothing moves in the ravaged landscape save the ash on the wind. It is cold enough to crack stones, and when the snow falls it is gray. The sky is dark. Their destination is the coast, although they don't know what, if anything, awaits them there. They have nothing; just a pistol to defend themselves against the lawless bands that stalk the road, the clothes they are wearing, a cart of scavenged food—and each other. **Amazon.com**

David McCullough's *1776*: Esteemed historian David McCullough covers the military side of the momentous year of 1776 with characteristic insight and a gripping narrative. McCullough writes vividly about the dismal conditions that troops on both sides had to endure and also explores the importance of motivation and troop morale. 1776 is the work of a master historian. **Amazon.com Review**

Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone*: O'Brien paints an unvarnished portrait of the infantry soldier's life that is at once mundane and terrifying. *If I Die in a Combat Zone* is more than just a memoir of war; it is also a meditation on heroism and cowardice, on the mutability of truth and morality in a war zone and, most of all, on the simple, human capacity to endure the unendurable. CAUTION: Strong language and depictions of violence/death.

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*: "Salinger's work meant a lot to me when I was a young person and his writing still sings now."**—Dave Eggers**

Mark Salzman's *True Notebooks*: Salzman volunteered to teach creative writing at Central Juvenile Hall, a Los Angeles County detention facility for "high-risk" juvenile offenders. Most of these under-18 youths had been charged with murder or other serious crimes, and, after trial and sentencing, many would end up in a penitentiary, some for life. His account's power comes from keeping its focus squarely on these boys, their writing, and their coming-to-terms with the mess their lives had become.

Gail Tsukiyama's *The Samurai's Garden*: The daughter of a Chinese mother and a Japanese father, Tsukiyama uses the Japanese invasion of China during the late 1930s as a somber backdrop for her unusual story about a 20-year-old Chinese painter named Stephen who is sent to his family's summer home in a Japanese coastal village to recover from a bout with tuberculosis. Here he is cared for by Matsu, a reticent housekeeper and a master gardener. Over the course of a remarkable year, Stephen learns Matsu's secret and gains not only physical strength, but also profound spiritual insight. Matsu is a samurai of the soul, a man devoted to doing good and finding beauty in a cruel and arbitrary world, and Stephen is a noble student, learning to appreciate Matsu's generous and nurturing way of life and to love Matsu's soulmate, gentle Sachi, a woman afflicted with leprosy. **Amazon.com**

J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*: Hillbilly Elegy is a passionate and personal analysis of a culture in crisis. J. D. Vance, a former marine and Yale Law School graduate, tells the true story of what a social, regional, and class decline feels like when you were born with it hung around your neck. A deeply moving memoir with its share of humor and vividly colorful figures, Hillbilly Elegy is the story of how upward mobility really feels. And it is an urgent and troubling meditation on the loss of the American dream for a large segment of this country. **Amazon.com product description**

Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*: Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, the #1 New York Times bestseller from Colson Whitehead, a magnificent tour de force chronicling a young slave's adventures as she makes a desperate bid for freedom in the antebellum South. **Amazon.com**