

LAGUNA BLANCA SCHOOL
SUMMER READING/WRITING 2026 FOR STUDENTS ENTERING
English Seminar 11/12: Literature Through Cinema
Dr. Tidey

All Laguna Blanca students entering Grades 5-12 in the fall are required to read books this summer. Because the reading will form the basis for class discussion and writing assignments in English classes during the opening weeks of school, we ask that students use a pen/pencil to do a close reading. A close reading means to make notes in the margins, mark confusing and/or favorite passages, highlight interesting information, and comment on significant language. **Please buy only new books or used books that have no marking in them at all.**

Special Note for 2026: *Regardless of which specific 11th/12th English Seminar you are enrolled in, all of the Seminars will do an assignment connected to the required Summer Reading text at the start of the year. If you end up switching*

Seminar sections during Add/Drop, do not worry! The required summer reading text you read for any of the English Seminars will work for the opening assignment in all of the sections, regardless of the specific class/text. Just ensure you have fully completed the summer reading for one of the Seminars; choose the Seminar class that you think you are most likely to be enrolled in.

REQUIRED READING: Please read the following book. Take careful annotations (a few notes on every page) to use for the in-class essay at the beginning of the year. Be prepared for an assessment on the required reading.

WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING (2018) by Delia Owens

The novel is a coming-of-age murder mystery by an American zoologist. It takes place in the 1950s and 60s in North Carolina, where an illiterate girl, Kya, grows up in the marshes, abandoned by her family and forced to survive on her own. The second timeline that intertwines with that of Kya's childhood follows an investigation into the apparent murder of Chase Andrews, a local celebrity. This beautifully captivating novel celebrates resilience and ingenuity in the face of all odds.

CHOICE READING: Choose one book (or more) from the following list to read in addition to *Where the Crawdads Sing*

***The Poisonwood Bible*, Barbara Kingsolver**

The novel is set against one of the most dramatic political chronicles of the twentieth century: the Congo's fight for independence from Belgium, the murder of its first elected

prime minister, the CIA coup to install his replacement, and the insidious progress of a world economic order that robs the fledgling African nation of its autonomy. Orleanna Price reconstructs the story of her evangelist husband's part in the Western assault on Africa, a tale indelibly darkened by her own losses and unanswerable questions about her own culpability. Also narrating the story are her four daughters—the teenaged Rachel; adolescent twins Leah and Adah; and Ruth May, a prescient five-year-old. These sharply observant girls, who arrive in the Congo with racial preconceptions forged in 1950s Georgia, will be marked in surprisingly different ways by their father's intractable mission, and by Africa itself

***Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri**

Navigating between the Indian traditions they've inherited and the baffling new world, the characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's elegant, touching stories seek love beyond the barriers of culture and generations. In "A Temporary Matter," published in *The New Yorker*, a young Indian-American couple faces the heartbreak of a stillborn birth while their Boston neighborhood copes with a nightly blackout. In the title story, an interpreter guides an American family through the India of their ancestors and hears an astonishing confession. Lahiri writes with deft cultural insight reminiscent of Anita Desai and a nuanced depth that recalls Mavis Gallant.

***The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy**

The year is 1969. In the state of Kerala, on the southernmost tip of India, a skyblue Plymouth with chrome tailfins is stranded on the highway amid a Marxist workers' demonstration. Inside the car sit two-egg twins Rahel and Esthappen, and so begins their tale. Armed only with the invincible innocence of children, they fashion a childhood for themselves in the shade of the wreck that is their family—their lonely, lovely mother, Ammu (who loves by night the man her children love by day), their blind grandmother, Mammachi (who plays Handel on her violin), their beloved uncle Chacko (Rhodes scholar, pickle baron, radical Marxist, bottom-pincher), their enemy, Baby Kochamma (ex-nun and incumbent grandaunt), and the ghost of an imperial entomologist's moth (with unusually dense dorsal tufts).

***The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood**

Offred is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. She may leave the home of the Commander and his wife once a day to walk to food markets whose signs are now pictures instead of words because women are no longer allowed to read. She must lie on her back once a month and pray that the Commander makes her pregnant, because in an age of declining births, Offred and the other Handmaids are valued only if their ovaries are viable. Offred can remember the years before, when she lived and made love with her husband, Luke; when she played with and protected her daughter; when

she had a job, money of her own, and access to knowledge. But all of that is gone now...

Martyr! Kaveh Akbar

Cyrus Shams is a young man grappling with an inheritance of violence and loss: his mother's plane was shot down over the skies of the Persian Gulf in a senseless accident; and his father's life in America was circumscribed by his work killing chickens at a factory farm in the Midwest. Cyrus is a drunk, an addict, and a poet, whose obsession with martyrs leads him to examine the mysteries of his past—toward an uncle who rode through Iranian battlefields dressed as the angel of death to inspire and comfort the dying, and toward his mother, through a painting discovered in a Brooklyn art gallery that suggests she may not have been who or what she seemed. Kaveh Akbar's *Martyr!* is a paean to how we spend our lives seeking meaning—in faith, art, ourselves, others.

Parable of the Sower, Octavia Butler

When global climate change and economic crises lead to social chaos in the early 2020s, California becomes full of dangers, from pervasive water shortage to masses of vagabonds who will do anything to live to see another day. Fifteen-year-old Lauren Olamina lives inside a gated community with her preacher father, family, and neighbors, sheltered from the surrounding anarchy. In a society where any vulnerability is a risk, she suffers from hyperempathy, a debilitating sensitivity to others' emotions. Precocious and clear-eyed, Lauren must make her voice heard in order to protect her loved ones from the imminent disasters her small community stubbornly ignores. But what begins as a fight for survival soon leads to something much more: the birth of a new faith . . . and a startling vision of human destiny.

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad

Heart of Darkness is a story within a story, following a character named Charlie Marlow, who recounts his adventure to a group of men onboard an anchored ship. The story told is of his early life as a ferry boat captain. Although his job was to transport ivory downriver, Charlie develops an interest in investing in an ivory procurement agent, Kurtz, who is employed by the government. Preceded by his reputation as a brilliant emissary of progress, Kurtz has now established himself as a god among the natives in "one of the darkest places on earth." Marlow suspects something else of Kurtz: he has gone mad. A reflection on corruptive European colonialism and a journey into the nightmare psyche of one of the corrupted, *Heart of Darkness* is considered one of the most influential works ever written.

***Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert**

Madame Bovary is the debut novel of French writer Gustave Flaubert, published in 1856. The character lives beyond her means in order to escape the banalities and emptiness of provincial life. A seminal work of literary realism, the novel is now considered Flaubert's masterpiece, and one of the most influential literary works in history.

***Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut**

Slaughterhouse-Five 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."

***1984*, George Orwell**

Satire about an alternate London under a totalitarian regime overseen by the omnipresent Big Brother. Winston Smith, a Ministry of Truth bureaucrat, attempts an intellectual rebellion against the Party while he pursues an illicit romance. His actions lead to his imprisonment, torture, and reeducation by the Thought Police.