

Summer Assignment 2026

(adapted from Susan Barber and Brian Sztabnik)

“The role of a writer is not to say what we can all say, but what we are unable to say.”

-- Anais Nin

- The written assignment that will be given to you on Tuesday, September 2nd will be in correlation with your fiction book.
- The due date for the assignments will be Tuesday, September 2nd.

Introduction

Your summer assignment is a chance for you to read and to listen to a variety of texts, explore ideas, and write in response to what you are reading and thinking. The assignment has three parts and all work is due the second week of school.

I have linked to all the texts that are available online, but in some cases you may need to go to your local library to get a copy of a novel. In many cases, I have included extra links if you are fascinated by what you read and are interested in exploring more.

As Voltaire said, “Think for yourself and let others enjoy the privilege of doing so too.” Enjoy the privilege of reading great texts. Enjoy the writing process. In short, have a great summer!

Part I -- Organizing

Text -- [How I Take Notes](#) and [10 Note-Taking Tips](#)

***After watching StudyTee’s notes system, I want you to think about how you can benefit from this organization method that will be used for this summer and throughout the year. Get a notebook of your choice with the style of paper that you prefer (lined, graph, blank, bullet point, etc.). We will use this notebook to create notes for the major works that we study, so find one that you really like. ***

Why it is important -- The process of learning something often starts out feeling disorganized and unwieldy; the most important aspects are not always salient. Consolidation helps organize and solidify learning. This notebook will serve as a means to consolidate what you have learned throughout the year, allowing you to retrieve the significant progress we make. Make it your own. Decorate it if you like or keep it clean and clear.

Part II -- Seeing

Text -- [The Nerdwriter Analyzes Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks"](#)

Evan Puschak has his own [YouTube channel \(NerdWriter\)](#) in which he offers video essays. I admire these essays that range from art, to film, to politics, to literature. He is thoughtful, well-researched, and has a keen sense of timing and audience awareness. In this video essay he analyzes one of the iconic 20th century American paintings, "Nighthawks." Pay attention to not only what he sees, but also notice the biographical and historical context he weaves into his analysis. I admire how he uses both images and words to teach you about the painting.

Assignment #1 --For your first set of StudyTee notes, I want you to write two pages. Choose a work of art that has meaning to you. It can be a work of literature. It can be a painting. It can be a song. It can be any creative endeavor that has some fascinating artistry. I want you to analyze that work of art on a similar level to Evan Puschak (the Nerdwriter). If you look at his show notes on the YouTube page for the "Nighthawks" video essay, he has done a fair amount of research. I want you to do the same. In your notes, find an organized way to explain its [artistic merit](#) and value. Don't just provide a summary of what it is, analyze how it operates and why it is important.

Why it is important -- I want you to use your notes to enrich your personal language, background knowledge, and vocabulary. For that to happen, these notes should be so much more sophisticated than a summary. They should reveal the complexity of the work of art. You have to articulate not only what it means to you, you should also have a broader appreciation for the artist, the cultural and historical context in which it was created, and how the work has transcended time and remains relevant.

Part II -- Reading

Text 1 -- [Leo Babauta's Why I Read \(+ a Dozen Book Recommendations\)](#)

Assignment #2 -- Write a page of notes about your relationship with reading. Share an honest assessment of the role that it plays in your life. Think about how you would conceptualize and categorize the impact reading has had on you. I value honesty over flattery. If reading is not your thing, say it. If you love it, then let me know. I don't care so much which side you take. More important than what you choose is the truth of your reflection. I want to read about why you feel the way that you do. I want to get to know you as a reader.

Why it is important -- This is the first step in me getting to know you as a reader. What's more important than that?

Text 2 - - (see tables below)

Assignments #3 and #4 -- Read one **FICTION** and one **NONFICTION** from the lists below. You can go to [Goodreads](#) learn a bit more about each book. It is worth your time. There are so many great books on these two lists to choose from and I want you to pick a book that you will enjoy.

Then create 3 pages of notes about each book (6 pages in total). How you organize those three pages is up to you. I know that this is vague and undefined, but look at it another way. I am empowering you to do what you feel is right. You have the freedom to do what you want. You can create whatever you want. All I'm asking you to do is create three interesting pages of notes about your reading experience. When there are little to no rules, the possibilities are endless. It is up to you to make it awesome!

Fiction Recommendations

<i>Klara and the Sun</i> by <i>Kazuo Ishiguro</i>	<i>Behold the Dreamers</i> - Mbue	<i>The Correspondent</i> - Evans	<i>Tom Lake</i> by Patchett	<i>Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow</i> - Zevin
<i>Homegoing</i> - Gyasi	<i>In the Time of the Butterflies</i> - Alvarez	<i>Kindred</i> - Butler	<i>The Leavers</i> - Ko	<i>Little Bee</i> - Cleeve
<i>The Love Songs of W.E.B Dubois</i> - Jeffers	<i>Mudbound</i> - Jordan	<i>The Namesake</i> - Lahiri	<i>The Nix</i> - Hill	<i>Pachinko</i> - Lee Min-jin
<i>Demon Copperhead</i> - Kingsolver	<i>This is Happiness</i> by Williams	<i>Purple Hibiscus</i> - Adichie	<i>Salvage the Bones</i> - Ward	<i>The Secret History</i> - Tartt
<i>You Made A Fool of Death with Your Beauty</i> - Emezi	<i>The Life Impossible</i> by Matt Haig	<i>The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store</i> by McBride	<i>The Lincoln Highway</i> - Towle	<i>Remarkably Bright Creatures</i> by Van Pelt

Nonfiction Recommendations

<i>The 272</i> - Rachel Swarns	<i>Battle of Ink and Ice</i> - Hartman	<i>Between the World and Me</i> - Coates	<i>The Achilles Trap</i> by Steve Coll	<i>Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here</i> by Jonathan Blitzer
<i>Just Mercy</i> - Stevenson	<i>The Best Minds</i> - Rosen	<i>They Can't Kill Us Til They Kill Us</i> - Abdurraqin	<i>The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row</i> - Hinton	<i>Built from the Fire</i> - Luckerson

Why it is important -- A mature thinker chooses and develops his or her own criteria in order to evaluate the quality of texts. I respect your ability to make connections to other texts, ideas, cultural perspectives, eras, and personal experiences and when you have control over how you do that, you often exceed my expectations. So do it.

Text 3 – [Poetry Foundation Poem of the Day](#)

Assignment #5 -- Poetry Foundation features a poem each day from a diverse list of present and past poems. Choose two poems from any dates over the summer and create notes for each. The notes should focus on an [analysis](#) of each poem. Look for parts that are interrelated. Find the individual aspects of the poem that give it meaning. [Here](#) is a good example of a complex analysis of a popular middle school poem. A more sophisticated analysis of an e.e. Cummings poem can be found [here](#).

Why it is important -- Thoughtful readers write to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately by selecting apt and specific evidence, organizing the evidence into broader ideas, and conveying the impact of its meaning.

Text 4 - Podcast Edition

Assignment #6: After listening to an episode from one of these [podcasts](#), write a reflective piece on what sparks your creativity. As a teacher, my wish is to create students who are passionate, innovative, and creative, so I'd like to know what you learned from the podcast you listened to and how it will be useful in your quest to change the world :)

Part III -- Write a Letter to Me

[Now that you have read my letter](#) I would like for you to write a letter to me telling me about you, but like most things in life, there's a twist. Here are three of my favorite poems: "[The Summer Day](#)" by Mary Oliver, "[Instructions on Not Giving Up](#)" by Ada Limon and "[Good Bones](#)" by Maggie Smith. Read and think about these poems deeply; let them roll around in your mind and your soul. Then write your letter introducing yourself to me; include your thoughts on ONE of these poems. Remember: "it's not what you look at that matters; it's what you see."