Independent US 2026 Summer Reading / Writing for Freshman
Freshman Humanities and Freshman Humanities GES
Mr. Claro

Reading Requirement

1. For Humanities: Thoughtfully read and analyze *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. While reading, annotate on either sticky notes or write down your annotations in a spiral notebook.

2. For Humanities GES: Thoughtfully read and analyze *The Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. Annotate on sticky notes or write down annotations in a spiral notebook.

3. Expect writing assignments as well as tests over your summer reading the first week of school. Please come to class prepared. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out. My email is: nicholas.jfclaro@theindependentschool.com

4. If you listen to the audiobook version, please try to read along in the book as well as annotating the text so you have that resource available.

Summer Writing Assignments

For Humanities
1: Read the novel in its entirety. This includes the forward and prologue.

2: Your Summer Reading and Writing is **due on the first day of class.**

3: Annotate, annotate, annotate. If you use a digital copy of the text, take notes, and bring these to class. When you read, do so with a pencil in hand and something to write on so you can mark in real-time whenever something stands out to you, causes you to pause, confuses you, etc. I'll provide an annotation guide for further reference at the end of this document.

For Humanities (GES)
1: Read the novel in its entirely. This includes The Author's note at the beginning.

2: Your Summer Reading and Writing is **due on the first day of class**.

3: Annotate as you read! If you use a digital copy of the text, take notes, and bring these to class. When you read, do so with a pencil in hand and something to write on so you can mark in real-time whenever something stands out to you, causes you to pause, confuses you, etc. I'll provide an annotation guide for further reference at the end of this document.

Humanities: ***The Alchemist***

Directions:

Complete the following assignments in conjunction with your reading of *The Alchemist*. Provide evidence with page numbers when instructed. I look for thoughtful responses that demonstrate reading comprehension and evidence thoughtful, analytical approaches to the text. Students will upload assignments to turnitin.com, which I will provide directions for at the beginning of the year.

Assignment:

1: What is the overall message (theme) of the text? Incorporate three (minimum) quotes with page numbers in your response as evidence of this theme. This should be at least several paragraphs in Length; a **maximum** two pages.

2: Create two timelines: one for key events in Santiago's life and the second for key events in your life. How do they compare? These may be created as paragraphs with a date to begin them, or you can draw an actual timeline with explanations attached to each key date. They should - in either case - progress chronologically from the beginning (youth) through old(er) age.

> **a**. Choose 4-6 key events in Santiago's life and include a short paragraph length description as to why each event was important.
> **b**. Choose 3-5 key events in your life with ages or dates and include a short paragraph length description as to why each event was important.

These timelines will be turned into an in-class narrative essay once the school year has started.

Humanities (GES): ***The Life of Pi***

Directions:

Complete the following assignments in conjunction with your reading of *The Life of Pi*. Provide evidence with page numbers when/if instructed. I look for thoughtful responses that demonstrate reading comprehension and evidence thoughtful, analytical approaches to the text that helps you make deeper connections. Students will turn in their dialectical journals the first week of class.

Assignments:
1: As you read, mark key passages that correspond to the three themes mentioned at the bottom of the page. After you complete each section of the book, select the ***four*** best passages to type up and respond to in a dialectical journal. Directions for the journal are attached. Quotes must be kept in order of appearance.

2: Bring your completed dialectical journal to class on the first day of school. You will use this to complete the project you are assigned.

3: You must have a minimum of **16 journal entries**. The entries must correspond with the sections below:

Entries 1 – 4: Chapters 1 – 36
Entries 5 – 8: Chapters 37 -58
Entries 9 – 12: Chapters 59 – 84
Entries 13 – 16: Chapters 85 – 100

Dialectical journal is based on the following three themes of the novel:

- **Coming-of-age/Maturity:** Growing up and maturing (mentally/physically) is a progression; it's not something that happens overnight. When a child loses innocence, they gain awareness and an understanding of the world they live in. Examine Pi's progression during the novel; cite examples of how, through experiences and mental struggles, becomes adultlike and learns to better understand the world he occupies.
- **Faint and Religion:** Pi Patel, while he struggles to survive in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, faces physical and mental hardship. How does religion and/or faith factor into his experience of survival and his ability to overcome hardship? What conclusions does Pi draw regarding different religions and his own faith?
- **Fear:** An overwhelming issue Pi faces as he confronts a 450-pound tiger in a small raft with no help in sight is the ability to control is fear. How does Pi learn to cope with fear? How does fear physically and mentally affect him? How does the role of fear change from the beginning of the book to the end?

4: You will be given a written assignment on *The Life of Pi* during the first full week of school. You are allowed to use your dialectical journal to complete the assignment. You need to have read the novel as well as considered the major themes to appropriately respond to this assignment.

Dialectical Journal Set-up/Instructions

Your dialectical journal for *The Life of Pi* will be a conversation on the page.
On the left you will write important quotations from the novel; on the right, you will explain why the quote is significant in the context of the story.

Set it up like this:

Note Taking	**Note Making**
Citing page numbers, write significant excerpts from the text on this side of the page. The excerpts of text will add meaning to your understanding of one of the following themes: ● Coming of Age/Maturity ● Faith and Religion ● Fear *Cite 16 entries in total*. The entries must appear in chronological order. Entries 1-4 should correspond with all of Part I – Chapters 1-36; Entries 5-8 with Chapters 37-58; Entries 9-12 with Chapters 59-84; Entries 13-16 with Chapters 85-100. Be sure to specify the theme discussed in your entry with a **C**(oming of Age), **R**(eligion), or **F**(ear) as shown below.	Directly across from the significant excerpts, write your original ideas about the importance of the text. This analytical commentary should quickly identify the context of the quote and then answer any of the following: why the quote is significant, how it relates to the category, or any other lingering thoughts/questions about the quote/scene. *Additionally, "A" quality journals will acknowledge the interrelatedness of these themes and the changes that occur, and how they relate to Pi's character development.*
Examples (*please do not use these*): **R** – "Bapu Ghandi said, 'All religions are true.' I just want to love God," I blurted out, and looked down, red in the face" (69). **C** – "It was Richard Parker who calmed me down. It is the irony of this story that the one who scared me witless to start with was the very same who brought me peace, purpose, I dare say even wholeness" (162). **F** – "I looked Richard Parker dead in the eyes. Suddenly his brute strength meant only moral	Pi is frustrated with his teachers and parents who insist that he choose one religion to follow. Instead, Pi seeks a simpler version of faith that does not include the controversies and arguments that adults squabble over. Pi has intense faith, but he is not necessarily religious. I've never really considered that these could be exclusive. Pi realizes that his experience with the tiger brought him to maturity. He has found a sense of self and purpose that he was lacking in his life before he was stranded on the raft. In fact, Pi seems to have matured in his understanding of his predicament and is now applying some of his religious learning to his situation with maturity and clarity. Pi finally confronts the fear that has been mentally exhausting him throughout his

weakness. It was nothing compared to the strength in my mind" (222).	excursion. He realizes that he has nothing to fear since his mental strength far surpasses the tiger's physical strength. Along his journey, he has learned to look inward and thereby control the effects of the externally terrifying Richard Parker. He is master of his mind, and now the boat.

Additional Information for both sections

MLA Format: In the upper left-hand corner, include your name, the instructor's name, class, and date. Center the title of the assignment and double space all in 12 pt Times New Roman. Include your last name and the page number in the upper right-hand corner.

Annotation Guide and Tips:

- Write personal responses to the text
- Note implications of the text—what is the text saying without explicitly saying it (show vs. tell)?
- Note the author's purpose as well as their techniques. What are they saying? *How*?
- Explain the significance of the text.
- Don't know a word? Make note of it; look it up.
- Mark down *anything and everything* that you find interesting!
- Remember: ***All art is subjective***. I don't think there is any one way to "correctly" interpret a text. You and I may have different takes. And yours is valid, **so long as you are able to back up your insights and opinions with evidence *from the text.***

When to Start Reading: Students often ask when to do their reading and assignments during the summer. My suggestion is that you start in July. Give yourself June to relax from the school year then set aside time to carefully read, annotate, and then tackle the assignments. This will give you plenty of time to wrap up before school starts on in August. I look forward to seeing you then!