

Please read ALL the pages in this packet. Included are important assignments that are DUE the first day of school.
Updated 5/14/26.



TOMAH HIGH SCHOOL

901 LINCOLN AVE. TOMAH, WI 54660

Mrs. St. John | IsabellaStJohn@Tomah.education
Summer 2026 9th AP Prep Work

Dear Future English 9 AP Prep Scholars,

Welcome to English Nine AP Prep!

I am thrilled to welcome you into an academically rigorous and engaging class. It will take high levels of motivation and high-quality work to make it through the course, but I have every confidence that you will excel in tremendous ways! Since this course is meant to challenge and encourage you to grow; you will be required to read a novel and complete three assignments over the summer. If you are not interested in reading over the summer or think it would be wise to rely on AI, the internet, or other sources, please reconsider your enrollment in the class. A detailed description of what is expected of you to complete over the summer is below.

Summer Assignments (Detailed directions below): Read *Rocket Boys* by Homer Hickam Jr., complete post-it summaries, complete vocab chart, and read and annotate brief article and questions.

Please wait until July/August to complete everything, so it is fresh in your mind! We will begin the school year further analyzing the book!

Our year will start by analyzing implicit (hidden or underlying) and explicit (obvious) themes and symbols from the novel. Please come ready to analyze, write, and discuss any portion of the book.

October Sky

You may have heard of the movie titled *October Sky*. This movie was inspired by the true story in the novel. You may want to watch this movie to compare how the book and movie are different from one another. Feel free to watch the movie if you would like. Please realize that the movie does not tell the whole story, and you will be completely lost without reading the book.

Why did the summer reading change?

To start, I am sorry for changing the summer reading assignment. It was a difficult decision to make, but it is to benefit you as a student and the entire high school English department. As an incoming 9th grader, you are reading this new novel because it captures American life in the 1960s. Throughout the year, we will read different titles that journey through life in the United States. The change makes for the easiest transition between eras of reading. We are beginning the year reading about the 1960s, then we will venture into modern day (2010-2026), and we'll finish the year reading a dystopian novel set in America. It's going to make for a beautiful year of reading and understanding what it's like to be an American in the past, present, and face the potential fate that looms in the future. Thank you for understanding and being on board with the vision of THS!

To Do in July or August (detailed directions following this letter):

1. Assignment #1: Read and annotate the article, answer the questions, complete **BEFORE** reading.
2. Read *Rocket Boys* by Homer Hickam Jr
3. Assignment #2: Complete 26 "Post-It Summaries" **WHILE** you read.
4. Assignment #3: Find 12 Sophisticated words, **WHILE** you read.

Sincerely,

Isabella St. John

THS ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS EDUCATOR

All assignments listed to the left, are due **Monday, August 24**, when you arrive to class.

No "late work" will be accepted. Anything that is incomplete will be given a "0" with no opportunity to make it up.

1. Please read this article that gives context for the book before you read *Rocket Boys*.
2. Please highlight any unknown words, look up the definition, and write it in the margin.
3. Please write any questions about this article that you have while reading it, in the margin.
4. Answer the questions (there are three) on the last page. Please write at least two sentences per question.

Life in the 1960s | Complete BEFORE Reading

Rocket Boys by Homer Hickham Jr. is based on a true story, taking place in the late 1950s and 60s. This time period is vastly different from America in 2026. The following pages explore and point out the major differences between these two eras helping clarify what the book is about.

Life in the 1960s was a blend of simplicity and transformation. It was a time when families gathered around the TV for evening shows, milk was delivered to your doorstep, and neighbors stopped by unannounced just to chat. Kids played outside until the streetlights came on, and phones were firmly attached to walls. Cell phones hadn't even been thought of yet.

This time period also saw cultural shifts that redefined "normal." Civil rights marches, space exploration, and a growing youth culture began to challenge traditional norms. Rock 'n' roll blared from record players, while diners and drive-ins were the heart of social life.

What did it mean to live a "normal" life during this pivotal decade? It was a mix of tradition and change, where everyday routines met a world on the cusp of revolution. Let's step back in time and explore the heartbeat of the 1960s.

Family Life

Family life in the 1960s centered around the home. Most families were nuclear, meaning the parents and children all lived together, divorce and second marriages were hardly thought of. Fathers were often the breadwinners, while mothers took on the role of homemakers.

Evenings were spent together, perhaps watching television or enjoying a home-cooked meal. Sundays meant attending church and family gatherings, it was rare to spend time with friends, because Sundays were considered a family day. Strict family dynamics were maintained.

It was also expected that sons follow exactly in their father's footsteps. If your dad was a plumber, you would become a plumber, if he owned a restaurant, he would train you to own it next. In the book, Sonny's (the main character) dad is a highly

influential coal mine superintendent. Families were characterized by hard work and dedication, wasting time going to college was unimaginable.

Space Race

At this point in American and world history, space had not been explored at all. People were just starting to dream about venturing to space and reaching the moon. These goals concerning space created high tensions between countries who were at odds with each other. Specifically, the U.S.S.R. (aka the Soviet Union (it's no longer a formal entity and is typically referenced as modern day Russia)) and the United States battled to see who could reach the moon first.

Coal Mining and Small Town Culture

This novel takes place in Coalwood, West Virginia. The economy of the town solely depended on the mine to provide jobs and income for families. Boys were expected to stay in the town and work in the mine when they grew up, even though it was a dangerous, gruesome, and physically demanding job. There were almost no other career opportunities for people growing up in these towns. Kids never left the town to go to college, because no formal education was required to work in a mine. Elementary and high schools began emphasizing math and science when tensions with the U.S.S.R. rose, creating opportunities at science fairs for kids to escape poverty and gain opportunities to go to college to explore their dreams.

The Cold War

During this time, the U.S.S.R. and the USA entered The Cold War with each other. There was no physical fighting, but the two countries were in direct competition to see which one could demonstrate their power and authority by reaching space first. *Rocket Boys* tells the dramatic story of which country made it there successfully first!

Questions Please write at least 2 sentences for each question:

1. Have you ever had a dream that others didn't understand or support? What did you do?

2. Do you think people should follow their passions or choose a safer, more practical path?
Why?

3. How much influence should parents have over their children's future?

Thank you and congratulations, you've completed your first summer assignment!

Name: _____ Hour: _____

Post-It Summaries Assignment #2

Post-It Summaries | Complete **DURING** Reading!

After reading each chapter of the book, please write 3-5 bullet points about what happened on a post-it note. Then, you will stick the note to the chapter "title page."

After reading "Chapter 1: Coalwood," you will reflect on the main events that happened, and write the most important 3-5 things down on the note. Then, you will stick the note on page 1, because that's where that chapter starts.

Please complete a post-it summary for *each* chapter of the book. There are **26 chapters**, which is why it should be 3-5 bullet points. Please do not write more than three sentences.

When you finish the book, you should have 26 post-it summaries; one for each chapter of the novel!

Example of Post-It Summary:

*** Please note that the example is for *The Hunger Games*. You will not be reading *The Hunger Games*. You will be reading *Rocket Boys*. This is just an example to show you what your post-it summaries will look like.

Post-It Summary
The Hunger Games
Chapter 1

- *Katniss is introduced as the main character*
- *She lives in poverty with her mom and sister*
- *It's reaping day, which means 1 boy and 1 girl will be selected for a fight to the death*
- *Katniss' name is entered many times*

Name: _____ Hour: _____ Sophisticated Vocabulary Assignment #3

Sophisticated Vocabulary | Complete DURING Reading

Please be on the look out for sophisticated words while you read. Sophisticated means it is a high-level (something most 9th graders wouldn't know) or an exemplary (fantastic) word!

[illegible]

Name: _____ Hour: _____ Sophisticated Vocabulary Assignment #3

#1 - Write a sophisticated word in the boxes below. You should end up with 12 total, from the book.	#2 - Write the <u>sentence</u> and the page # you found it on.