Honors American Literature Summer Reading

Directions

By the end of the summer, read a book that you have never read before. The book should be a minimum of 200 pages, and you MUST be reading it *for the first time*. You may choose one of the novels on the list below if you would prefer to have a list, or you may pick out your own book that is not on the list. You can find some websites that may help you pick out books below.

Additional Info

However you choose, check your choice thoroughly to make sure that you will be happy with the style of writing and that you and your parents will be alright with the content. Keep in mind that what some find acceptable, others may find objectionable. You may use the summaries* provided below or on the websites to pick something that will be entertaining and appropriate for you. I would also strongly suggest you check out a sample and read a page or two at least before choosing. We want you to relish reading outside on a sunny day or inside on a rainy day, without the interference of written work or annotations. Over the summer, you should relax and enjoy your book. After school starts, you will craft a creative project to promote the novel to your peers!

Websites to pick out books

- https://www.whichbook.net/
  Find books you might like based on mood, location, plot type, character type, or similarity to other books.
- https://www.bookbrowse.com/
  Find books you might like based on your answers on a recommendation quiz or by genre or theme.
- https://www.goodreads.com/
  Find books you might like based on other readers' ratings and reviews or by genre.

❖ *A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving: Eleven-year-old Owen Meany, playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire, hits a foul ball and kills his best friend's mother. Owen doesn't believe in accidents; he believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen after that 1953 foul is both extraordinary and terrifying. At moments a comic, self-deluded victim, but in the end the principal, tragic actor in a divine plan, Owen Meany is the most heartbreaking hero John Irving has yet created.

❖ *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy: *All the Pretty Horses* tells of young John Grady Cole, the last of a long line of Texas ranchers. Across the border Mexico beckons—beautiful and desolate, rugged and cruelly civilized. With two companions, he sets off on an idyllic, sometimes comic adventure, to a place where dreams are paid for in blood.

❖ *Black Boy* by Richard Wright: *Black Boy* is a classic of American autobiography, a subtly crafted narrative of Richard Wright's journey from innocence to experience in the Jim Crow South. An enduring story of one young man's coming of age during a particular time and place, *Black Boy* remains a seminal text in our history about what it means to be a man, black, and Southern in America.

❖ *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros: Every year, Ceyala "Lala" Reyes' family--aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, and Lala's six older brothers--packs up three cars and, in a wild ride, drive from Chicago to the Little Grandfather and Awful Grandmother's house in Mexico City for the summer. Struggling to find a voice above the boom of her brothers and to understand her place on this side of the border and that, Lala is a shrewd observer of family life. But when she starts telling the Awful Grandmother's life story, seeking clues to how she got to be so awful, grandmother accuses Lala of exaggerating. Soon, a multigenerational family narrative turns into a whirlwind exploration of storytelling, lies, and life. Like the cherished *rebozo*, or shawl, that has been passed down through generations of Reyes women, *Caramelo* is alive with the vibrations of history, family, and love.

- *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safron Foer: Nine-year-old Oskar Schell is an inventor, amateur entomologist, Francophile, letter writer, pacifist, natural historian, percussionist, romantic, Great Explorer, jeweller, detective, vegan, and collector of butterflies. When his father is killed in the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centre, Oskar sets out to solve the mystery of a key he discovers in his father's closet. It is a search which leads him into the lives of strangers, through the five boroughs of New York, into history, to the bombings of Dresden and Hiroshima, and on an inward journey which brings him ever closer to some kind of peace.

- *Franny and Zooey* by J.D. Salinger: First published in *The New Yorker* as two sequential stories, 'Franny' and 'Zooey' offer a dual portrait of the two youngest members of J. D. Salinger's fictional Glass family.

  Franny Glass is a pretty, effervescent college student on a date with her intellectually confident boyfriend, Lane. They appear to be the perfect couple, but as they struggle to communicate with each other about the things they really care about, slowly their true feelings come to the surface. The second story in this book, 'Zooey', plunges us into the world of her ethereal, sophisticated family. When Franny's emotional and spiritual doubts reach new heights, her older brother Zooey, a misanthropic former child genius, offers her consolation and brotherly advice.

  Written in Salinger's typically irreverent style, these two stories offer a touching snapshot of the distraught mindset of early adulthood and are full of the insightful emotional observations and witty turns of phrase that have helped make Salinger's reputation what it is today.

- *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams: Seconds before the Earth is demolished to make way for a galactic freeway, Arthur Dent is plucked off the planet by his friend Ford Prefect, a researcher for the revised edition of The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy who, for the last fifteen years, has been posing as an out-of-work actor.

  Together this dynamic pair begin a journey through space aided by quotes from The Hitchhiker's Guide ("A towel is about the most massively useful thing an interstellar hitchhiker can have") and a galaxy-full of fellow travelers: Zaphod Beeblebrox--the two-headed, three-armed ex-hippie and totally out-to-lunch president of the galaxy; Trillian, Zaphod's girlfriend (formally Tricia McMillan), whom Arthur tried to pick up at a cocktail party once upon a time zone; Marvin, a paranoid, brilliant, and chronically depressed robot; Veet Voojagig, a former graduate student who is obsessed with the disappearance of all the ballpoint pens he bought over the years.

- *I am not your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L Sanchez: Perfect Mexican daughters do not go away to college. And they do not move out of their parents' house after high school graduation. Perfect Mexican daughters never abandon their family.

  But Julia is not your perfect Mexican daughter. That was Olga's role.

- *The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd: Hetty "Handful" Grimke, an urban slave in early nineteenth century Charleston, yearns for life beyond the suffocating walls that enclose her within the wealthy Grimke household. The Grimke's daughter, Sarah, has known from an early age she is meant to do something large in the world, but she is hemmed in by the limits imposed on women.

  Kidd's sweeping novel is set in motion on Sarah's eleventh birthday, when she is given ownership of ten year old Handful, who is to be her handmaid. We follow their remarkable journeys over the next thirty five years, as both strive for a life of their own, dramatically shaping each other's destinies and forming a complex relationship marked by guilt, defiance, estrangement and the uneasy ways of love.

- *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan: Winnie and Helen have kept each other's worst secrets for more than fifty years. Now, because she believes she is dying, Helen wants to expose everything. And Winnie angrily determines that she must be the one to tell her daughter, Pearl, about the past—including the terrible truth even Helen does

not know. And so begins Winnie's story of her life on a small island outside Shanghai in the 1920s, and other places in China during World War II, and traces the happy and desperate events that led to Winnie's coming to America in 1949.

- *Meridian* by Alice Walker: The second novel written by Alice Walker, preceding *The Color Purple* is a heartfelt and moving story about one woman's personal revolution as she joins the Civil Rights Movement. Set in the American South in the 1960s it follows Meridian Hill, a courageous young woman who dedicates herself heart and soul to her civil rights work, touching the lives of those around her even as her own health begins to deteriorate. Hers is a lonely battle, but it is one she will not abandon, whatever the costs. This is classic Alice Walker, beautifully written, intense and passionate.

- *Player Piano* by Kurt Vonnegut: Kurt Vonnegut's first novel spins the chilling tale of engineer Paul Proteus, who must find a way to live in a world dominated by a supercomputer and run completely by machines. Paul's rebellion is vintage Vonnegut—wildly funny, deadly serious, and terrifyingly close to reality.

- *Summer* by Edith Wharton: A naive girl from a humble background meets an ambitious city boy, and a torrid romance ensues. Despite her pride, independence, and honesty, Charity Royall feels shadowed by her past--especially in her ardent relationship with the educated and refined Lucius Harney. Can passion overcome the effects of heredity and environment?

  With its frank treatment of a woman's sexual awakening, *Summer* created a sensation upon its 1917 publication. Edith Wharton — the author of *Ethan Frome* and a peerless observer and chronicler of society — completely shattered the standards of conventional love stories with this novel's candor and realism. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author declared *Summer* a personal favorite among her works, and liked to refer to it as "the Hot Ethan." Over a century later, it remains fresh and relevant.

- *The Street* by Ann Petry: *The Street* tells the poignant, often heartbreaking story of Lutie Johnson, a young black woman, and her spirited struggle to raise her son amid the violence, poverty, and racial dissonance of Harlem in the late 1940s. Originally published in 1946 and hailed by critics as a masterwork, *The Street* was Ann Petry's first novel, a beloved bestseller with more than a million copies in print. Its haunting tale still resonates today.

- *The Witches of Eastwick* by John Updike: Toward the end of the Vietnam era, in a snug little Rhode Island seacoast town, wonderful powers have descended upon Alexandra, Jane, and Sukie, bewitching divorcées with sudden access to all that is female, fecund, and mysterious. Alexandra, a sculptor, summons thunderstorms; Jane, a cellist, floats on the air; and Sukie, the local gossip columnist, turns milk into cream. Their happy little coven takes on new, malignant life when a dark and moneyed stranger, Darryl Van Horne, refurbishes the long-derelict Lenox mansion and invites them in to play. Thenceforth scandal flits through the darkening, crooked streets of Eastwick and through the even darker fantasies of the town's collective psyche.

- *Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen: An atmospheric, gritty, and compelling novel of star-crossed lovers, set in the circus world circa 1932, by the bestselling author of Riding Lessons.

  When Jacob Jankowski, recently orphaned and suddenly adrift, jumps onto a passing train, he enters a world of freaks, drifters, and misfits, a second-rate circus struggling to survive during the Great Depression, making one-night stands in town after endless town. A veterinary student who almost earned his degree, Jacob is put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It is there that he meets Marlena, the beautiful young star of the equestrian act, who is married to August, the charismatic but twisted animal trainer. He also meets Rosie, an elephant who seems untrainable until he discovers a way to reach her.

  Beautifully written, Water for Elephants is illuminated by a wonderful sense of time and place. It tells a story of a love between two people that overcomes incredible odds in a world in which even love is a luxury that few can afford.

*All summaries from Goodreads.com

Questions? Contact Mrs. Oliver at olivere@fultonschools.org