English 8 – Summer Reading Guide
The Pearl by John Steinbeck

****This Reading Guide is meant to be a resource to help as you read over the summer. You are not expected to come into class with these answers filled out on the first day, but it will be helpful for you to look at this as you read and use it as you prepare for your summer reading assessment that your teacher will assign after the first day of classes.****

Based on a Mexican folk tale, The Pearl centers upon Kino and his family, their struggles with poverty in their coastal village, and the great pearl that changes everything. Although short and captivating, Steinbeck's story brings you deep into human nature, for the "essence of pearl mixed with the essence of man and a curious dark residue was precipitated." Here are a few ideas to turn a joyful reading into an insightful one, too.

1) Examine how Kino changes over the course of the story and consider how the attitudes toward the pearl also change.

2) Besides the pearl, what can you identify as valuable in this story?

3) Luck, chance, fate, the gods—what forces propel the events of this story?

4) Steinbeck offers this story as a parable, which is a story offering a lesson. What lessons do you draw from this tale?

5) Consider Kino and Juana's circumstance of oppression. Spain has colonized Mexico, and the pearls and other riches harvested by the poor had "raised the King of Spain to be a great power in Europe in past years, had helped to pay for his wars, and had decorated the churches for his soul's sake." Steinbeck seems critical of the imbalance of power. Look closely at how this dynamic shapes Kino and Juana's experience. How do the doctor, the priest, and the traders fit into the power structure of the community? How do they respond to Kino and Juana?

6) Pay attention to the songs, which act as a spirit, force, or story Steinbeck tries to capture. When do they emerge? How do they help us understand Kino and Juana's story? In ways, these songs connect back to the oral tradition of their history: "His people had once been great makers of songs so that everything they saw or thought or did or heard became a song."

7) Pay attention to sight and visions. The narrator warns readers, "All sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted," and "In this Gulf of uncertain light there were more illusions than realities." Consider what the great pearl leads characters to see.