



Upper School Required Summer Reading Assignments

All assignments are due upon the first day of school, August 26, 2025.

Amazon links have been provided for reference; however, please consider supporting independent, local bookstores. Great local options include: [Books and Company](#) in Oconomowoc, [Epilogue Books](#) in Menomonee Falls, or [Boswell Book Company](#) in Milwaukee. [Powell's Books](#), while not local, is a great, independent online store for sourcing new and used books.

The First Chapter

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This summer, we are doing some literary time-travel by reading a classic, Mark Twain's [Huckleberry Finn](#), alongside Percival Everett's brilliant modern retelling, [James](#). Before our first week of class, choose one of two paths to show me how these two books talk to each other (or don't) about freedom, identity, and friendship.

If you choose path A, you will write a precise 350-word comparative essay analyzing how shifting the narrator from Huck to James completely changes the story's world. If you choose path B, you will create an original piece of artwork that captures the complex relationship between Huck and James, accompanied by a detailed 5-to-8-sentence paragraph explaining how your artistic choices (such as symbols, movement, or colors) connect to the deep themes of both novels. Whichever route you choose, make every word or brushstroke count.

We will be sharing our work during the first week of class, and these assignments will be graded.

Human Craftsmanship

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- Read and annotate [Why We Make Things and Why It Matters](#) by Peter Korn
 - Annotations will be checked in class.
- Write around 350 words in which you do the following four things. 1) Identify something that is worthy of extended attention; 2) provide an example of what you're talking about; 3) briefly justify why it is worthy of our attention; and 4) provide a few questions or suggest a few avenues of inquiry to jumpstart discussion. Part one is the most difficult part. (Finding valuable objects of inquiry and asking good probing questions is more of an art than a science.) Simply put, an analytical object is something specific that you find interesting and worthy of further attention. Some examples include themes, interesting descriptions, or character development. I would like these assignments to be thoughtful and free of glaring spelling or grammatical errors, but they

need not be works of art. The point is to force you to gather and refine your thinking a bit before our class discussions.

The World of Tolkien

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- Read and annotate [The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien](#) (Note: there are many editions and versions of *The Hobbit*; while I do plan to assign a specific edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, you may use any complete physical version of *The Hobbit* that you would like).
 - Annotations will be checked in class.
- Write around 350 words on some aspect of what you deem crucial to the fantasy genre as it relates to *The Hobbit*. This discussion could include thematic elements such as greed or revenge, character archetypes like ‘the reluctant hero,’ or the use of non-human characters and magical beasts to fulfill certain roles in the text. You do not need to cover everything about the genre of fantasy– instead, pick one factor (or even one example of one factor) that you deem particularly interesting to you. Please use specifics from the text and be ready to speak about your paper when we return in the fall. While I do not expect perfection, please attempt thoughtful formal writing free of mistakes.

Colonizers: Pioneers, Explorers, Adventurers, and Conquerors

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- Read and annotate [Caroline: Little House, Revisited](#) by Sarah Miller.
 - Annotations will be checked in class.
- Write around 350 words on some theme within this text that may be representative of “a pioneer spirit.” Usually, the pioneer spirit refers to independence, individualism, courage, resilience, and a willingness to take risks in search of reward. How does this novel wrestle with one of these themes? Please use specifics from the text and be ready to speak about your paper when we return in the fall. While I do not expect perfection, please attempt thoughtful, formal writing free of mistakes.

Gothic Literature

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- Read and annotate [The Haunting of Hill House](#) by Shirley Jackson.
 - Annotations will be checked in class.
- Write 350 words in which you do the following four things. 1) Identify something worthy of extended attention; 2) provide an example from the text of what you’re talking about; 3) briefly justify why it is worthy of our attention; and 4) provide a few questions or suggest a few avenues of inquiry to jumpstart discussion. Part one is the most difficult part. (Finding valuable objects of inquiry and asking good probing questions is more of an art than a science.) Simply put, an analytical object is something specific that you find interesting and worthy of further attention. Some examples include themes, interesting descriptions, or character development. These

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Contemporary Literature

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- Read and annotate [Evicted](#) by Matthew Desmond.
 - Annotations will be checked in class.
- Read a fictional book of your choice published in the 21st century.
- Write a 2-page essay in MLA format, defining contemporary literature in your own words.

Adv. Knowing the Good/Adv. Constructing the Self

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- Read and annotate [Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics](#) by Simon Blackburn AND [Meditations](#) by Marcus Aurelius
 - Annotations will be checked in class.
- Write a couple pages in which you grapple with one or two of the following questions in light of the texts you've read. In your response, do not simply summarize the texts. Instead, use them as lenses through which to think seriously about the questions below. You may agree or disagree with the authors, but your goal should be thoughtful engagement rather than arriving quickly at a definitive answer.
 - What seems to make a human life good?
 - Are ethics primarily about rules, consequences, character, or something else?
 - What obligations do we have to ourselves?
 - Can philosophy genuinely transform the way a person lives?

ADV. Reading Character in the 18th Century

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- Read and annotate [Pamela](#) by Samuel Richardson AND [The Vicar of Wakefield](#) by Oliver Goldsmith
 - Annotations will be checked in class.
- Write a couple pages in which you grapple with one or two of the following questions in light of the texts you've read.
 - How do these texts teach readers to judge character?
 - Which characters are easiest to misread and why?
 - What outward signs are treated as evidence of inward virtue?
 - To what extent can a character ever truly be known?
 - What responsibilities do readers have when interpreting others?