

SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT
JUNIOR ENGLISH 2009-10

PART ONE:

Everyone must read Text #1:

Text #1: *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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“*The Scarlet Letter* is a dark tale of love, crime, and revenge set in colonial New England. It revolves around a single, forbidden act of passion that forever alters the lives of three members of a small Puritan community: Hester Prynne, an ardent and fierce woman who bears the punishment of her sin in humble silence; the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, a respected public figure who is inwardly tormented by long-hidden guilt; and the malevolent Roger Chillingworth, Hester’s husband—a man who seethes with an Ahab-like lust for vengeance.” www.barnesandnoble.com

The landscape of this classic novel is uniquely American, but the themes it explores are universal—the nature of sin, guilt, and penitence, the clash between our private and public selves, and the spiritual and psychological cost of living outside society. Read the novel carefully, keeping track of any questions you might have along the way. As juniors, the expectations will be higher. Instead of just trying to understand plot and comprehend the sequence of events that unfolds in the novel, you will be expected to analyze the literature on a higher level.

Everyone must choose ONE of the following:

PART TWO:

Text #2: *My Antonia*, by Willa Cather

Widely recognized as Willa Cather’s greatest novel, *My Antonia* is a soulful and rich portrait of a pioneer woman’s simple yet heroic life. The spirited daughter of Bohemian immigrants, Antonia must adapt to a hard existence on the desolate prairies of the Midwest. Enduring childhood poverty, teenage seduction, and family tragedy, she eventually becomes a wife and mother on a Nebraska farm. A fictional record of how women helped forge the communities that formed a nation, *My Antonia* is also a hauntingly eloquent celebration of the strength, courage, and spirit of America’s early pioneers. www.barnesandnoble.com

Text #3: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain

Huckleberry Finn, rebel against school and church, casual inheritor of gold treasure, rafter of the Mississippi, and savior of Jim the runaway slave, is the archetypal American maverick. Fleeing the respectable society that wants to "sivilize" him, Huck Finn shoves

off with Jim on a rhapsodic raft journey down the Mississippi River. As Huck learns about love, responsibility, and how to make moral choices, the trip becomes a metaphoric voyage through his own soul, culminating in the glorious moment when he decides to "go to hell" rather than return Jim to slavery. Mark Twain defined "classic" as "a book which people praise and don't read;" Huckleberry Finn is a happy exception to this rule. Twain's mastery of dialect, coupled with his famous wit, makes *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* one of the most enjoyable and distinctly American classics ever written.

www.barnesandnoble.com

Text #4: *The Red Badge of Courage*, by Stephen Crane

One of the greatest war novels of all time, this is the story of the Civil War through the eyes of Henry Fleming, an ordinary farm boy turned soldier. The novel marks a departure from the traditional treatment of war in fiction as it captures the sights and sounds of war while creating the intricate inner world of Fleming. This work also probes the personal reactions of unknown foot soldiers fighting unknown enemies. Henry Fleming is motivated not by courage or patriotism but by cowardice, fear, and finally egoism, and events are filtered through his consciousness. www.barnesandnoble.com

After choosing **one** other work of literature from the list above (i.e, Text 2, Text 3 or Text 4), read it carefully and try to find connections between this work of literature and *The Scarlet Letter*. Try to explore thematic connections, character analyses which develop, universal issues explored that correlate between the 2008 teenager and the two novels read.

ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL, you will be responsible for presenting a visual aid (i.e., poster or pamphlet, etc.) that thoroughly reflects the following:

1. How does *The Scarlet Letter* represent society as a whole?
2. How does the Puritan society differ from today?
3. Valid connections between *The Scarlet Letter* and your second text choice (i.e., *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *My Antonia*, or *The Red Badge of Courage*). Make distinct points such as theme, plot conflict, characterization, author influences, etc. Be sure to be able to expand upon these ideas when presenting.
4. Think about what it means to be an American and the struggles and obstacles that have remained the same for Americans even though time has passed.

Furthermore, upon return to school in August, an essay exam will be given on the summer reading. This exam will rely upon your knowledge of both texts chosen. The exam will be graded according to the MCAS rubric. This same rubric is used for grading English midterm and final exams.