

June 1, 2011

Greetings from the English department! As we soon embark on summer vacation, we'd like to take this opportunity to remind you of the importance—and enjoyment!—of summer reading. This year we will do things a little differently in terms of requirements, but as always, we encourage you to read during the summer to keep your skills up to par, and hopefully even strengthen them a bit!

When school starts in the fall, you will be asked to deliver a short “book-talk” on a single book you chose to read and study over the time we are away. This is by *no means* to suggest that you should read *only* one book over the course of the summer; rather, we would *certainly* encourage you to read many, many more! Reading during the summer months not only keeps our current skills “up to par” but also *strengthens* our skills so that we can head into next year’s English classes “at our best”!

What book should you read? Well, that part is completely up to you. We encourage you to be resourceful when it comes to your selection. Take a trip to a used bookstore, peruse our beautiful local library, borrow from a friend, email a past or future English teacher for suggestions—the options are literally endless! EXPLORE a few possibilities, and then choose the one that “speaks” to you most for whatever reason. While we have no specific list of titles from which to choose, consider the following guidelines for best results. Your chosen novel should:

- ✓ Be fiction or non-fiction, from any genre
- ✓ Be a full-length volume, of personal interest to *you*
- ✓ Be a book which you have *not* previously read
- ✓ Be at, or above, your current reading level – challenge is *good*!
- ✓ Be thought-provoking, in order to ensure an interesting and worthwhile book-talk

On the back of this handout, you will find some suggestions for the material you may want to work into the book-talk you'll present to your English class within the first week of school. (Note: If you are a student who does not have English until 2nd trimester, you should be prepared to deliver your book-talk then.) These presentations will be worth class points to be determined by each individual instructor and will certainly provide a great way to kick off the year. What better way is there to start our time together than to hear each other speak about books that were meaningful to us? Not only will we be able to break the ice and get to know our classmates better, we will also each walk away with new ideas for what we'd like to read next!

To best prepare for English in the fall, choose a book that interests you, **read it closely and critically**, and then organize a short but informative presentation that will pique the attention of your classmates and teacher. YOU are responsible for leading your own talk, though *ALL* questions on the backside are “up for the asking” if your planned presentation lacks depth and detail. You should be prepared to discuss all elements of your book, as well as to keep the interest of your audience. We look forward to hearing *ALL* about your selection when we meet up in September or December. HAPPY READING! ☺

OVER FOR BOOK-TALK TOPICS →

Starter Questions For NOVELS

- What is the basic plot premise, boiled down to one to two sentences?
- Who are the few primary characters, and what are a few of their key traits?
- To what extent are the central characters portrayed sympathetically?
- What types of details does the author seem to provide the most throughout the novel? Why?
- What other elements of the novel's structure affect the way it reads? Consider and discuss its point of view and perspective, its tone, and its chapter organization, for example.
- What themes does the book explore?
- How satisfying is the ending? Why?

Starter Questions For BIOGRAPHIES/AUTOBIOGRAPHIES/MEMOIRS

- Is the subject person a celebrity or merely a writer? In what ways has this affected the way the story works and the book reads?
- How much promotion or self-promotion does the writer do for the subject/himself/herself?
- What two or three key developments from the person's life are developed? Why are they significant?
- How does the book affect your evaluation of the person as a human being? Why?
- What structural aspects of the book affect the way it reads? Consider chronology, event selection, starting/ending point, etc.

Starter Questions For GENERAL NONFICTION

- Is the book more informative or argumentative in nature? How can you tell?
- Why does the author seem to think the information in the book is important? To what extent do you agree?
- What is the scope of the book's information?
- What structural aspects of the book affect the way it reads? Consider chapter organization, subtopic selection, and supplemental materials (illustrations, photos, graphs, charts, tables, etc.)
- Would this book be of interest to general readers, or is it more narrow and specialized? How do you know?

For plays, collections of short stories, or collections of poems, e-mail an English teacher over the summer for starter questions. Also feel free to contact any of us throughout the summer with your questions.

FOR EVERYONE: A GOOD BOOK TALK EXPLAINS **HOW THE BOOK WORKS**, NOT JUST WHAT IT SAYS.

IT ALSO **EVALUATES THE BOOK** RATHER THAN JUST DESCRIBING IT.