**12th English Elective: Advice on Book Selections for Rising Seniors 2017**

**Pairing: Slaughterhouse-Five and Catch-22**

You would like these texts if…

“you like ironic, satirical humor.”
“you are interested in WWII, war in general, or the effects of war.”
“you enjoy satire.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you don’t like death/violence.”
“you can’t handle navigating non-linear time lines.”
“you’re attached to anything ‘typical’– the best part of the books is how irreverent they are of normal literature.”

The works made me think about…

“what it means to be sane.”
“how satire is used in modern literature.”
“how satire is used to depict war.”
“how people find meaning in the smallest things or in difficult situations.”
“mental health and the effects of war on veterans as well as dark humor.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

“the way the characters think and feel about the war.”
“Vonnegut’s portrayal of Billy and Heller’s interpretation of sanity and insanity.”

The focus of my paper was…

“the darker side of patriotism and the question of free will.”
“the use humor, suspense, human memory and non-chronological storytelling.”
“the cyclical nature of this corruption that breeds never-ending violence.”
Pairing: *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

You would like these texts if…

“you enjoy coming-of-age, slightly dark stories. Angelou’s book is similar to the first half of *The Kite Runner* in terms of its dark themes. *Garcia Girls* goes backwards chronologically.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you have trouble following non-linear timelines”

“you are uncomfortable reading about sexual assault.”

“you want a philosophical topic.”

The works made me think about…

“identity and language in overcoming oppression.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

“the role of language in identity formation.”

The focus of my paper was…

“identity and language and coming-of-age.”

Pairing: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

You would like these texts if…

“you are passionate about social issues and enjoy writing styles that differ from the average novel.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you want an easy read or you do not enjoy stories told from different perspectives.”

The works made me think about…

“the importance of identity and the therapeutic nature of writing.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

“the personality of the text and the importance of each character to the story as a whole.”

The focus of my paper was…

“intersectionality and different aspects of cultural identity and their importance to working through hardship.”
Pairing: The Namesake and How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents

You would like these texts if…

“you like to read about self-discovery and enjoy coming-of-age stories.”
“you like books and discussion about culture and belonging.”
“if you are interested in the transition to American culture for immigrants.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you aren’t interested in exploring the cultural aspects and influences of the work and the authors.”

The works made me think about…

“immigration and how it affects the individual’s coming of age.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

“the relationship between identity (coming-of-age) and immigration.”
“the adapting role of women and how it varies in different locations.”
“the cultural and behavioral expectations placed on children by their parents.”

The focus of my paper was…

“the way immigration complicates coming-of-age.”
“how we find identify when we are straddling two separate cultures and worlds and how immigrant families maintain and honor their cultural roots while adapting to American culture.”

Pairing: Blindness and Fahrenheit 451

You would like these texts if…

“you enjoy novels written by experienced authors who really understand the art of storytelling, who not only discuss very deep and moving themes and ideas, but write them so they are not boring.”
“you enjoy thinking about what human nature forces us to do in the face of a seemingly unsurmountable challenge.”
Avoid these texts, *Blindness* and *Fahrenheit 451* if...

“you do not find the themes of a dystopian society and the parallels that exist between these texts and the real world interesting.”

“you don’t like reading books that have commas instead of any other type of sentence ender like question marks, exclamation points, and periods. It also has no quotes. *Blindness*, that is.”

The works made me think about...

“the dystopian features that we experience in today’s world. Although the novels were written in the 20th century, they still apply today.”

“what humans will or will not do for each other in a disaster situation.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to...

“how the texts connect with one another, discuss similar ideas, but also vary from one another. Additionally, you should also focus on their present day applications.”

The focus of my paper was...

“how, in a dystopian society, a strong protagonist can either save the characters or bring about a rebellion/raise awareness of an issue.”

**Pairing: Brave New World and We**

You would like these texts if...

“You like dystopian stories and different ways of life and cultures.”

Avoid these texts if...

“you want more adventurous stories.”

The works made me think about...

“current government power and actions and the role of technology in today’s society.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to...

“the interactions the characters have with each other and how that impacts their perception of the world they live in.”

The focus of my paper was...

“the role of technology in suppressing free thought and the role of literature and writing as a catalyst for free thought.”

“the quest for identity and individuality in an oppressive society.”
**Pairing: We and Blindness**

You would like these texts if…

- “you enjoy dystopian novels.”
- “you enjoy philosophical novels.”

Avoid these texts if…

- “you don’t like dystopian novels.”
- “you don’t like books with sad endings.”

The works made me think about…

- “the nature or humanity/morality.”
- “rebellion.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

- “the nature of humanity, morality, rebellion, and the way societies are structured.”
- “the style the book is written in.”
- “panopticism.”

The focus of my paper was…

- “morality and humanity/rebellion within dystopian societies.”

**Pairing: Fahrenheit 451 and We**

You would like these texts if…

- “You enjoy dystopian futures, inner struggles, rising against the machine, revolutions, knowledge as power, and psychology.”

- “*We*: A book similar in style to *1984*, theoretical population control tactics, a metaphor for Russia/Germany, a longer, slower-paced book.”

- “*Fahrenheit 451*: A book similar in style to *1984*, theoretical population control tactics, a metaphor for Cold war America/Germany, a short fast-paced book.”

Avoid these texts if…

- “you want a concrete explanation or conclusion at the end because both books are pretty open to interpretation in their final scenes.”
The works made me think about…

“The future of our society, the psychology of the human mind, and the most effective way to control a group of people.”

“what it would be like to live in a totalitarian society, how our world may, one day, resemble the societies that Zamyatin and Bradbury talk about, how people become aware of oppression and organize rebellions.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

“how the average populous reacts to de-individualization tactics, why knowledge is being hidden, real life counterparts, the authors’ intentions, individuality vs mob, discovery of self, free will, fire/glass, perfection, independence, unity, destruction, past vs present vs future.”

“motifs that appear at both the beginning and end of the novels. Specifically, look at the use of “infinity” in We and how that relates to the central goal of the protagonist. For Fahrenheit 451, be aware of the historical context surrounding the novel and how that influences the themes.”

The focus of my paper was…

“mob mentality and the eventual rise of the individual.”

“how citizens in totalitarian societies become aware of oppression and try to overcome it.”

Pairing: Fahrenheit 451 and Brave New World

You would like these texts if…

“you like dystopian worlds with oppressive governments and themes of free will and humanity.”

“you are interested in dystopias and technology.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you prefer books with less action but more artistic language.”

“you do not like reading about science and technology.”

The works made me think about…

“free will, what makes a human a human, how machines play a part in human freedom.”
“both the current state and future of government in the US and around the world, specifically relating to authoritarianism, individuality/citizenship, and censorship.”

“the potentially dangerous effects technology can have to humans as well as how humans react to changes in society.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

“the symbolism in the books. The symbols in the books were very interesting but I did not notice a lot of them when I first read the books. Paying attention to the mechanical hound in Fahrenheit 451 or the Shakespearian language in Brave New World may make your reading experience clearer and deeper.”

The focus of my paper was…

“life in the different dystopias and how people could rebel against the authoritarian regimes as well as how the governments remained in control.”

“the broader idea of the role of uniformity and conformity in utopian societies.”

Pairing: The Circle and Brave New World

You would like these texts if…

“you’re into dystopia and revolution! These texts are a lot about visualizing the future and the internal and external conflicts are really interesting to read about.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you’re not into dystopia and revolution…? I honestly really liked these books so I don’t know what to say for this. But Brave New World is a bit difficult and has a lot of sex in it, so if that is hard for you to read, then stay away from that novel. The Circle is an amazing book though.”

The works made me think about…

“the effects of technology in society. There are two different types of technological developments in the novels, but they have similar effects.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

“how the societies are oppressive and how the desire to rebel starts in the protagonists.”

The focus of my paper was…

“how oppression results in revolution and how technological developments lead to dehumanization and oppression.”
Pairing: *Night* and *The Diary of a Young Girl*

You would like these texts if…

“you enjoy memoirs, world war II books, or novels that deal with religion or coming of age.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you don’t like darker stories. Both of these novels share stories of young people living through the holocaust and both (Night in particular) depict disturbing events in detail.”

The works made me think about…

“how young people are able to come of age and find their own identity in the face of tragedy and how family and faith plays a role in that.”

The focus of my paper was…

“the coming of age process in unusually dark circumstances.”

Pairings: *Candide* and *Gulliver’s Travels*

You would like these texts if…

“you enjoy history and researching historical events, you want books that will be different from anything else you’ve ever read, you don’t mind putting in some extra work to understand the books.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you don’t want to spend a lot of time trying to figure out the context of the books, you want books that have had a lot written about them already, you don’t enjoy British literature.”

The works made me think about…

“philosophy, culture, optimism, and politics.”

When reading these texts, you should pay attention to…

“all of the characters, all of the symbolism, any metaphors or parallels with real life events.”

The focus of my paper was…

“how humans handle tragedies/events that are out of their control.”
**Pairing:** *Desert Solitaire* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (Note: You are not supposed to pair these two together, but these notes give you a sense for what the works deal with.)

You would enjoy these texts if…

“you are an outdoorsy person who cares about the environment.”

“you like funny and crazy characters.”

Avoid these texts if…

“you are not interested in the environmental movements

The works made me think about…

“what nature opens for the individual and why it is so important to our well-being.”

“how we impact the environment and how that impact has long-term consequences we may not be aware of.”

The focus for my paper was…

“the individual’s connection with and responsibility to the natural world.”

**General Advice on the Summer Reading**

My primary advice for the summer reading experience is…

“start early and annotate as much as possible. Having a lot of quotes and good passages in the book to pull from really helps when writing your paper.”

“take really thorough notes and pay special attention to quotes/pages that stand out to you. Take notes on ALL themes, not just yours, so if you change topics, you don’t have to redo a lot of work.”

“pick books that you will really enjoy reading. *Catch-22* is now one of my favorite books; it was much easier to write about it since I liked it so much.”

“annotate a lot, read both works thoroughly, later in the summer. Do chapter summaries; they are helpful when going back to write.”

“read your books at the end of the summer, so they’re fresh in your head for the school year.”

“regardless of how close to the start of the school year you read the texts, you will want to read them again when you start the research paper.”
“pick novels that capture your interests, and that you would enjoy reading and writing about. The reason why I say this is because if you do not do this, not only will the reading and annotating parts of the novel be absolutely unbearable, but also writing about subjects that you do not fully understand or care for is extremely difficult and boring in the end.”

“annotate!”

“rather than just annotating and highlighting, actually bookmark the pages that have important evidence because it becomes hard to differentiate what is needed in the research paper. Start making an argument early on because the research process goes by way faster than you think it might.”

“annotate well and read the books near the end of summer so you remember them better!”

“choose novels that you think you would enjoy and do not just choose novels that have a smaller number of pages, or else you would find yourself struggling to choose quotes and scenes that fit a topic of your choosing.”

“be open to a wide variety of subjects to write on before you narrow down what exactly you're going to focus on.”