

2011 Summer Reading Assignment: C.P. English 3

(Essay is due in the first day of class)

PHS English Department Summer Reading Philosophy: In conjunction with Plainfield High School's stated mission to help students develop into lifelong learners, the PHS English Department requires students to complete an independent reading project over the course of each summer. Summer reading assignments are designed to be rigorous, yet flexible enough to accommodate each student's individual needs and interests. Each summer reading assignment includes a writing piece which will engage students' critical thinking skills. All summer reading work correlates directly with course curricula, introducing students to important themes and concepts that will be further explored in their upcoming English classes.

Students must read one of the following books:

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair

The Color of Water by James McBride

The Color Purple by Alice Walker

A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson

Sula or The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian by Sherman Alexie

Essay Prompt: In English 3, students will examine the concept of the "American Dream", its history, and its effect upon American Literature. The origin on the phrase "American Dream" can be linked to The Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that all Americans have the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Throughout our nation's history, the idea of the "American Dream" has been defined many different ways. Many Americans have come to this country with dreams of religious freedom. Others have come to America to seek freedom from oppressive governments. Some people have defined the "American Dream" as the ability for all Americans to get a good education, seek financial opportunities, and create a better life for themselves. African Americans, women, and other minority groups have dreamt of and fought for the same rights promised to all Americans by the Constitution. For many parents, the "American Dream" means having the ability to provide their children with opportunities that they themselves did not have. For

others, it could simply mean that all Americans have the right to “pursue happiness” in any way they see fit.

Read any one of the texts listed above. Then, write a 3-5 page essay analyzing the theme of the “American Dream” in the text you have read. Choose one character from your text, and provide an analysis of that character’s pursuit of the “American Dream”. Essays must be written in MLA format and contain at least three direct quotations from the text. While crafting your essay, you may want to consider each of the following points:

- Where and when is the story taking place? What was America like at this time and in this setting? How might the story’s setting affect the way characters would view the “American Dream”?
- What is the socioeconomic status of the characters in your text? Are they living a life of wealth and privilege, a life of poverty, or something in between? How might this effect their perception of the “American Dream”?
- How do you think the main character in your text would define the term “The American Dream”? What are each character’s goals for the future?
- Describe the circumstances that make it difficult for your characters to pursue his/her dreams? Are they ultimately able to achieve the “American Dream”? Why or why not?
- How does each protagonist feel about being an American? How do these feelings change over the course of the text?

If you have any questions regarding this assignment, please contact Mr. Farrish by e-mail at the following either of the following addresses: Farrishj@Plainfieldschools.org or Mrfarrish99@hotmail.com