

Name _____
Summer Reading Activity/ English 12 Comp.
Spence

Directions: Read three books from the attached list. Complete a writing assignment for each book from the three options below. You may repeat them. Each should be 300-500 words (1-2 pages). All three are due on the first day of school and will incur a 10-point penalty each day if they are late. Evidence of use of resources like Sparknotes, Cliff's Notes, etc. will be penalized or not receive credit.

Writing Assignment Options

Book Review

A book review is a type of expository writing that explains the meaning of a book and the techniques used to convey that meaning. It is more than a summary of the book. The purpose of the review is not simply to state whether you liked or disliked the book. Your purpose is to let other readers know what the book is about and what merit it has. A review includes the following information and structure:

- a. **Introduction**: a paragraph that introduces the author, title, and genre. It includes a discussion of the writer's reputation and/or other works as appropriate. Is the writer an expert in this subject?
- b. **Brief description**: a paragraph that identifies essential people, situations, and settings.
- c. **Central idea**: not "what happens." It is the concept or theme the author conveys through the information presented in the story.
- d. **Evaluation**: discuss the extent to which the author has successfully presented the central idea. Is there any part that was particularly memorable? Is the book genuine (truthful, honest)? Did the author's information seem truthful? What were the sources the author used to gather this information? Is it limited in coverage? Is it for a specialized audience or only those with specialized interests? Are you now aware of things that you did not know before? Did the writer exaggerate or overgeneralize in order to sell the book?
- e. **Conclusion**: at the end of the review, present your final comments and your overall impression of what you feel the work achieves. Would you recommend the book as powerful reading? You may wish to consult The New York Times Book Review or other magazines and publications that contain book reviews for guidance in form.

"I think" Paper

An "I think" paper is your reflection on or thinking about what you have read. As you read, think about events, places, people, circumstances, etc. Formulate a theme or focus or a problem that you then address, develop, or resolve through your writing. Generally what you should write about is an experience that caused you to think while reading the book. Perhaps it is a phrase or sentence or a passage that speaks to you and makes you think. Pick a keyword or phrase and write about the significance of that word or phrase. Identify an aspect of the book that makes you think and write about it at length. You decide on the focus based on your reading.

Parallel Narrative

When we read, we see ourselves in similar situations as the characters in the book. A parallel narrative is a piece of writing in which you recount passages in a book, share reactions, and relate incidents or ideas in the book to your own experiences or those around you. Identify an aspect (or aspects) of the book that triggers such a reaction and write about it at length. In a sense, write a story about yourself or someone you know that is like the one developed in your book. It can be true or fictional.

*Remember: The finished pieces of writing based on your book are due on the first day of school.
Be certain to make it clear on which book your writing is based.*

The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Scarlet Letter is the story of three New England settlers at odds with the puritan society in which they live. Roger Chillingworth, an aging scholar, arrives in New England after two years' separation from his wife Hester to find her on trial for adultery. For refusing to reveal her lover's identity, she is condemned to wear the letter 'A' sewn onto her clothes. Roger resolves to discover and destroy the man who has stolen his honor. For the next seven years, the participants in this bizarre love triangle privately suffer the consequences of betrayal, cowardice, and humiliation. Slowly but surely, the need for redemption grows in each as the story hastens toward its dramatic close. *The Scarlet Letter* is Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterpiece.

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. 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 Henry. 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.

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.

The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

The exemplary novel of the Jazz Age, F. Scott Fitzgerald's third book, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), stands as the supreme achievement of his career. T. S. Eliot read it three times and saw it as the "first step" American fiction had taken since Henry James; H. L. Mencken praised "the charm and beauty of the writing," as well as Fitzgerald's sharp social sense; and Thomas Wolfe hailed it as Fitzgerald's "best work" thus far. The story of the fabulously wealthy Jay Gatsby and his love for the beautiful Daisy Buchanan, of lavish parties on Long Island at a time when, *The New York Times* remarked, "gin was the national drink and sex the national obsession," it is an exquisitely crafted tale of America in the 1920s that resonates with the power of myth. A novel of lyrical beauty yet brutal realism, of magic, romance, and mysticism, *The Great Gatsby* is one of the great classics of twentieth-century literature.

A Separate Peace* by John Knowles

Set at a boys' boarding school in New England during the early years of World War II, *A Separate Peace* is a harrowing and luminous parable of the dark side of adolescence. Gene is a lonely, introverted intellectual. Phineas is a handsome, taunting, daredevil athlete. What happens between the two friends one summer, like the war itself, banishes the innocence of these boys and their world.

Catch-22* by Joseph Heller

Catch-22 is like no other novel. It has its own rationale, its own extraordinary character. It moves back and forth from hilarity to horror. It is outrageously funny and strangely affecting. It is totally original. Set in the closing months of World War II in an American bomber squadron off Italy, *Catch-22* is the story of a bombardier named Yossarian, who is frantic and furious because thousands of people he hasn't even met keep trying to kill him. *Catch-22* is a microcosm of the twentieth-century world as it might look to someone dangerously sane. It is a novel that lives and moves and grows with astonishing power and vitality – a masterpiece of our time.

Fences* by August Wilson

The author of the 1984-85 Broadway season's best play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, returns with another powerful, stunning dramatic work that has won him new critical acclaim and the Pulitzer Prize. The protagonist of *Fences*, Troy Maxson, is a strong man, a hard man. He has had to be - to survive. For Troy Maxson has gone through life in an America where to be proud and black was to face pressures that could crush a man, body, and soul. But now the 1950s are yielding to the new spirit of liberation in the 1960s... a spirit that is changing the world Troy Maxson has learned to deal with the only way he can...a spirit that is making him a stranger, angry and afraid, in a world he never knew and to a wife and son he understands less and less...

A Painted House* by John Grisham

A Painted House depicts the simple but hardscrabble life of an Arkansas farming family during the early '50s, and a seven-year-old boy named Luke Chandler. Luke hates harvest time. Not only must he head out to the fields and pick cotton until his fingers bleed and his back aches, his cantankerous grandfather is even more irritable than usual, knowing that the success or failure of this year's crop may well determine the family's future. Plus, there is the invasion of migrant workers the family must hire to help pick the fields. The tension builds until these two indomitable forces inevitably clash, culminating in a shocking denouement that forces young Luke to deal with some very grown-up issues. And the worst is yet to come, for nature has a few things to throw at the Chandler family, as well. Grisham's portrayal of one young boy's rude awakening to the harsh realities of life is, at turns, heartwarming and heartbreaking. The tension is subtle but constant, with undercurrents that build toward a crescendo of explosive emotion. Parts of the story are grim, and the struggles often seem endless. But at the heart of it all is the essence of the human spirit and the story of one family's ability to love and survive in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Bleachers* by John Grisham

"High school all-American Neely Crenshaw was probably the best quarterback ever to play for the legendary Messina Spartans. Fifteen years have gone by since those glory days, and Neely has come home to Messina to bury Coach Eddie Rake, the man who molded the Spartans into an unbeatable football dynasty." Now as Coach Rake's "boys" sit in the bleachers waiting for the dimming field lights to signal his passing, they replay the old games, relive the old glories, and try to decide once and for all whether they love Eddie Rake — or hate him. For Neely Crenshaw, a man who must finally forgive his coach—and himself—before he can get on with his life, the stakes are especially high.

***Born on the Fourth of July* by Ron Kovic**

"[Kovic is today] a mature, perceptive, contemplative man who has written the most personal and honest testament published thus far by any young man who fought in the Vietnam War....Kovic...comes from exactly that blue-collar background...that bore the major burden of providing the bodies for Vietnam. And what is so remarkable about Kovic's writing is that whereas one is perfectly prepared to forgive him occasional lapses into bitterness, self-pity or excesses of rage, he retains the most extraordinary self-control throughout."

***In Country* by Bobbie Ann Mason**

Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* explores the legacy of war from the perspective of Sam Hughes, a teenager whose father died in Vietnam before she was born. In the summer of 1984, Sam, her 35-year-old uncle Emmett – himself a veteran who may be suffering from exposure to Agent Orange – and her grandmother set out from Hopewell, Kentucky, on a road trip to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C. Growing up in an era where video games and television reruns of *M*A*S*H* are more "real" than the entries in her father's military journal or her uncle's tormented memories, Sam must come to her own terms with the war's lasting effect on her family and her small community.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

Angelou's autobiography of her childhood in Arkansas. An unforgettable memoir of growing up black in the 1930s and 1940s in a tiny Arkansas town where Angelou's grandmother's store was the heart of the community and white people seemed as strange as aliens from another planet.

***Blue Highways* by William Least Heat Moon**

William Least Heat-Moon's journey into America began with little more than the need to put home behind him. At a turning point in his life, he packed up a van he called Ghost Dancing and escaped out of himself and into the country. The people and the places he discovered on his roundabout 13,000-mile trip down the back roads ("blue highways") and through small, forgotten towns are unexpected, sometimes mysterious, and full of the spark and wonder of ordinary life. Robert Penn Warren said, "He has a genius for finding people who have not even found themselves." The power of Heat-Moon's writing and his delight in the overlooked and the unexamined capture a sense of our national destiny, the true American experience.

***Black Boy* by Richard Wright**

Black Boy, an autobiography of Richard Wright's early life, examines Richard's tortured years in the Jim Crow South from 1912 to 1927. In each chapter, Richard relates painful and confusing memories that lead to a better understanding of the man—a black, Southern, American writer—who eventually emerges. Although Richard, as the narrator, maintains an adult voice throughout the story, each chapter is told from the perspective and knowledge that a child might possess. Yet, because the narrative is told with such force and honesty, the reliability of Richard's memories is not questioned. By the story's end, as Richard comes of age, the voice of the narrator and of the nineteen-year-old young man he has become merge into one.

Native Son* by Richard Wright

In 1940s Chicago, a young black man takes a job as a chauffeur to a wealthy white family, which takes a turn for the worse when he accidentally kills the wild and crazy teenage daughter of the couple and then tries to cover it up because he knows that he will not receive justice.

***Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin**

The book is a real-life account of the experiences of a white author, John Howard Griffin, who temporarily transforms himself into a black man for six long and intense weeks. This is so that he can personally experience black oppression and exploitation. It begins on October 28, 1959, with the author's dramatic decision to undergo medical treatment to change the color of his skin – a historic act for a white man at a time of rabid white racism. The book then develops as an autobiographical diary, recounting almost on a day-to-day basis, till August 17, 1960, the author's multiple experiences as a black man; the good, the bad, and the ugly that he personally encounters. How he is denied the very basics of life like food, water, rest, shelter, and toilet. How even his mind is destroyed through hate and fear. How his only identity is as a consumer or laborer, or for the leisure or pleasure of the whites.

A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

This drama is about Walter Lee Younger, a young black man struggling with his station in life. Sharing a tiny apartment with his wife, son, sister, and mother, he seems like an imprisoned man. Until that is, the family gets an unexpected financial windfall...

***China Men* by Maxine Hong Kingston**

The author chronicles the lives of three generations of Chinese men in America, woven from memory, myth, and fact. Here's a storyteller's tale of what they endured in a strange new land.

***Kindred* by Octavia Butler**

"How could anybody be a slave?" A woman from the twentieth century, Dana is repeatedly brought back in time by her slave-owning ancestor Rufus when his life is endangered. She chooses to save him, knowing that because of her actions a freeborn black woman will eventually become his slave and her own grandmother. When forced to live the life of a slave, Dana realizes she is not as strong as her ancestors. Unable to will herself back to her own time and unable to tolerate the institution of slavery, she attempts to run away and is caught within a few hours.

The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass

Raised as a plantation slave, Douglass went on to become a writer, orator, and major participant in the struggle for African-American freedom and equality. In this engrossing narrative he recounts his early years of abuse; his dramatic escape to the North and eventual freedom, abolitionist campaigns, and his crusade for full civil rights for former slaves.

The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

A classic from the moment it first appeared in 1952, *The Invisible Man* chronicles the travels of its narrator, a young, nameless black man, as he moves through the hellish levels of American intolerance and cultural blindness. This is NOT H.G. Wells' time travel novel.

As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner

In the story, the members of the Bundren family must take the body of Addie, the matriarch of the family, to the town where Addie wanted to be buried. Along the way, we listen to each of the members on the macabre pilgrimage, while Faulkner heaps upon them various flavors of disaster.

***Roots* by Alex Haley**

The story of the young African boy named Kunte Kinte, who in the late 1700s was kidnapped from his homeland and brought to the United States as a slave. Haley follows Kunte Kinte's family line over the next seven generations, creating a moving historical novel spanning 200 years.

***A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway**

This is the story of Lieutenant Henry, an American, and Catherine Barkley, a British nurse. The two meet in Italy, and almost immediately Hemingway sets up the central tension of the novel: the tenuous nature of love in a time of war.

***The Snows of Kilimanjaro* by Ernest Hemingway**

"The Snows of Kilimanjaro" contains some of Hemingway's finer short stories. And like many of his works, they resemble his life. Everything from his childhood to his later years in Africa is material for these tales.

Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

The telling of the story is about Captain Ahab's obsessive pursuit of the malevolent white whale.

***A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith**

Francie Nolan, avid reader, penny-candy connoisseur, and adroit observer of human nature, has much to ponder in colorful, turn-of-the-century Brooklyn. She grows up with a sweet, tragic father, a severely realistic mother, and an aunt who gives her love too freely – to men, and to a brother who will always be the favored child. Francie learns early the meaning of hunger and the value of a penny. Like the Tree of Heaven that grows out of cement or through cellar gratings, resourceful Francie struggles against all odds to survive and thrive.

Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck

Set during the Great Depression, it traces the migration of an Oklahoma Dust Bowl family to California and their subsequent hardships as migrant farm workers. The narrative chronicles the struggles of the Joad family's life on a failing Oklahoma farm, their difficult journey to California, and their disillusionment once they arrive there and fall prey to a parasitic economic system.

East of Eden* by John Steinbeck

Spanning the period between the American Civil War and the end of World War I, the novel highlights the conflicts of two generations of brothers.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

A barefoot young troublemaker, Huck, tired of his humdrum world and his selfish, plotting father, decides to sail a raft down the Mississippi River. Joined by his escaped slave friend Jim, he experiences a series of unforgettable adventures.

***Rabbit, Run* by John Updike**

Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom was a high school superstar only a handful of years ago. Now he is a young married father, trapped in the suburban 60s, unhappy with a cluttered house, a drunken wife, and a son who will never be the athlete he was. Will this former basketball star find a way to make his life better, or will he run like a rabbit? The title says it all and Harry Angstrom does indeed run whenever things don't go his way.

***Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut**

Kurt Vonnegut's absurdist classic *Slaughterhouse-Five* introduces us to Billy Pilgrim, a man who becomes unstuck in time after he is abducted by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. In a plot-scrambling display of virtuosity, we follow Pilgrim simultaneously through all phases of his life, concentrating on his (and Vonnegut's) shattering experience as an American prisoner of war who witnesses the firebombing of Dresden

***Watership Down* by Richard Adams**

The story follows a warren of Berkshire rabbits fleeing the destruction of their home by a land developer. As they search for a safe haven, skirting danger at every turn, we become acquainted with the band and its compelling culture and mythos. Adams has crafted a touching, involving world in the dirt and scrub of the English countryside, complete with its own folk history and language (the book comes with a "lapine" glossary, a guide to rabbitese). As much about freedom, ethics, and human nature as it is about a bunch of bunnies looking for a warm hidey-hole and some mates.

***The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury**

It is a marvelous, if mostly dark, quilt of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. In an ingenious framework to open and close the book, Bradbury presents himself as a nameless narrator who meets the Illustrated Man--a wanderer whose entire body is a living canvas of exotic tattoos. What's even more remarkable, and increasingly disturbing, is that the illustrations are themselves magically alive, and each proceeds to unfold its own story.

***Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley ***

"Community, Identity, Stability" is the motto of Aldous Huxley's utopian World State. Here everyone consumes daily grams of soma, to fight depression, babies are born in laboratories, and the most popular form of entertainment is a "Feelie," a movie that stimulates the senses of sight, hearing, and touch. Though there is no violence and everyone is provided for, Bernard Marx feels something is missing and senses his relationship with a young woman has the potential to be much more than the confines of their existence allow.

***Sirens of Titan* by Kurt Vonnegut**

New starships are nothing but trouble. It's something Roscoe Cook heard his old commander say, often quite loudly. But he never believed it until he got a starship of his own, and faced the task of getting the ship and its temperamental crew ready to sail.

***Inherit the Wind* by Jerome Lawrence**

The story centers around a schoolteacher who is on trial for teaching evolution the theory that man evolved from lower primates such as monkeys in his classroom, a violation of Tennessee's Butler Law.

***Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose**

The story's focal point, known only as Juror Eight, is at first the sole holdout in an 11-1 guilty vote. Eight sets his sights not on proving the other jurors wrong but rather on getting them to look at the situation in a clear-eyed way not affected by their personal biases.

A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams's masterfully written drama explores the extremes of fantasy versus reality, the Old South versus the New South, and primitive desire versus civilized restraint.

The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams

In this award-winning play, Amanda's husband left the family long ago, and she remains stuck in the past. Tom works in a warehouse, doing his best to support them. He chafes under the banality and boredom of everyday life and spends much of his spare time watching movies in cheap cinemas and at all hours. Amanda is obsessed with finding a suitor for Laura, who spends most of her time with her glass collection. Tom eventually brings Jim home for dinner at the insistence of his mother, who hopes Jim will be the long-awaited suitor for Laura.

***The Ox-Bow Incident* by Walter Van Tilburg Clark**

Set in 1885, *The Ox-Bow Incident* is a searing and realistic portrait of frontier life and mob violence in the American West. First published in 1940, it focuses on the lynching of three innocent men and the tragedy that ensues when law and order are abandoned. The result is an emotionally powerful, vivid, and unforgettable re-creation of the Western novel.

***For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway**

In one short chapter Hemingway lays out the blueprint for what is to come: Jordan's sense of duty versus Pablo's dangerous self-interest and weariness with the war. Complicating matters, even more, are two members of the guerrilla leader's small band: his "woman" Pilar, and Maria, a young woman whom Pablo rescued from a Republican prison train.

***The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath**

The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath is an engrossing story/memoir about a young woman facing possible lunacy. The book trails Plath through an internship for *Woman's Wear Daily*, a fashion publication, where she is known as a bright writer with much potential. As her stay in New York lengthens, her mental health deteriorates leading to a nervous breakdown.

The Awakening* by Kate Chopin

Set in New Orleans and the Southern Louisiana coast at the end of the nineteenth century, the plot centers around Edna Pontellier and her struggle to reconcile her increasingly unorthodox views on femininity and motherhood with the prevailing social attitudes of the turn-of-the-century South. It is one of the earliest American novels that focuses on women's issues without condescension.

Ethan Frome* by Edith Wharton

Set in a fictional, wintry New England town, an unnamed narrator tells the story of his encounter with Ethan Frome, a man with dreams and desires that end in an ironic turn of events. The narrator tells the story based on an account from observations at Frome's house when he had to stay there during a winter storm. The ending is one of the best in literature.

The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway

The tale of an epic battle of wills between an old, experienced fisherman and a giant marlin is said to be the largest catch of his life. It opens by explaining that the fisherman, Santiago, has gone 84 days without catching any fish at all. He is apparently so unlucky that his young apprentice, Manolin, has been forbidden by his parents to sail with the old man and has been ordered to fish with more successful fishermen. Still dedicated to the old man, however, the boy visits Santiago's shack each night, hauling back his fishing gear, feeding him, and discussing American baseball — most notably Santiago's idol, Joe DiMaggio. Santiago tells Manolin that on the next day, he will venture far out into the Gulf to fish,

confident that his unlucky streak is near its end.

***The Horse Whisperer* by Nicholas Evans**

His name is Tom Booker. His voice can calm wild horses. His touch can heal broken spirits. And Anne Graves has traveled across a continent to the Booker ranch in Montana, desperate to heal her injured daughter, the girl's savage horse, and her own wounded heart. She comes for hope. She comes for her child. And beneath the wide Montana sky, she comes to him for what no one else can give her: a reason to believe...

(Thanks to Barnes and Noble online for the reviews and summaries of these titles.)