

## SUMMER READING Thought Questions & Journal Questions

**NOTE:** The following questions are designed to enhance your understanding of the reading and help you prepare for discussing the text(s). **Please note that written responses to the thought questions are *not* required unless specifically stated. On the other hand, written responses to journal questions or similar prompts are required and will be handed in to teachers as the first assignment.** While you do not need to hand in any responses to the thought questions, we still encourage you to jot down some thoughts to prepare for discussion. *Please follow the directions for your grade level and/or course.*

### A Note on Sensitive Topics

Our summer reading program is designed, in part, to help students understand the world in which they live. Some selections, as a result, deal with sensitive topics like abuse, violence, discrimination, and mental/emotional health. Although the selections are designed to be instructionally and developmentally appropriate, we understand that some content could be triggering for students who have experienced trauma. If you/your child finds a particular text to be challenging (triggering, emotionally/psychologically), please email English Department Chair Carol Tomkiel at [ctomkiel@macduffie.org](mailto:ctomkiel@macduffie.org). She will be happy to help you navigate the text in question or to suggest an appropriate alternative.

*(Please note that summaries are intended as “teasers,” not as trigger warnings.)*

### Summer Reading Thought Questions Foundations in English: Grade 6/7

#### **THE LIGHTNING THIEF**

by Rick Riordan

**Active Reading:** Active reading means actively engaging with the material you read. As you read, try to imagine yourself as the character. Also, you should make predictions and draw conclusions from the story. When you come across words you do not know, circle them in your book; when you come across something that confuses you, put a question mark in the margin; or, when you come across an important detail, underline

the sentence. You may also choose to use exclamation points when something is exciting or surprising.

Journal Directions: As you read *The Lightning Thief*, keep a journal and record your ideas, impressions, questions, and any other personal reactions to the characters, descriptions, details, and dialogue. If you circled a word you do not know, include it in your journal, define it, and use it in a new sentence to help you remember what it means. As you read and consider the thought questions, record your answers in your journal, which will be collected during the first full week of school.

Pre-Reading:

1. *The Lightning Thief* brings the world of Greek Mythology alive. What do you know about the ancient Greek gods and goddesses? Which gods and goddesses have you heard of before?

Reading Questions:

2. Have you ever been treated unfairly by a teacher (or parent, or other adult)? Describe the circumstances and why you considered the treatment unfair.

3. What do you know about learning disabilities such as ADHD or dyslexia? Do you know anyone who has a learning disability? Do you think a person with a learning disability should receive more time to complete tests or less homework than a person without a learning disability? Explain your position.

4. In Ancient times, the Greeks had gods for many important forces in their lives -- the sea, thunderstorms, farming, music, medicine, poetry, archery, etc. Why do you think they imagined many different gods rather than just one? Would this make life more confusing or less confusing?

5. Young children often imagine that their parents aren't really their parents. What would it be like if you suddenly found out that you had a "real" father or mother you never knew about? What if this person was extremely rich and powerful -- would you accept them as a parent?

6. Do you believe in anything that science can't prove -- such as magic, or ghosts, or creatures like the Loch Ness monster? Why or why not?

7. Have you ever been to summer camp? If so, describe what you did or did not like about it. If not, imagine and describe what you think a typical summer camp would be like – any impressions from television or movies?

8. You have been granted one magical item of your choice. What would this item be, and what power would it have? Explain your choice.

## **Summer Reading Thought Questions** **Foundations in English: Grade 6**

### **THE LIGHTNING THIEF**

by Rick Riordan

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**Journal Directions:** As you read *The Lightning Thief*, keep a journal and record your ideas, impressions, questions, and any other personal reactions to the characters, descriptions, details, and dialogue. If you circled a word you do not know, include it in your journal, define it, and use it in a new sentence to help you remember what it means. As you read and consider the thought questions, record your answers in your journal, which will be collected during the first full week of school.

**Pre-Reading:**

1. *The Lightning Thief* brings the world of Greek Mythology alive. What do you know about the ancient Greek gods and goddesses? Which gods and goddesses have you heard of before?

**Reading Questions:**

2. Have you ever been treated unfairly by a teacher (or parent, or other adult)? Describe the circumstances and why you considered the treatment unfair.
3. What do you know about learning disabilities such as ADHD or dyslexia? Do you know anyone who has a learning disability? Do you think a person with a learning disability should receive more time to complete tests or less homework than a person without a learning disability? Explain your position.
4. In Ancient times, the Greeks had gods for many important forces in their lives -- the sea, thunderstorms, farming, music, medicine, poetry, archery, etc. Why do you think they imagined many different gods rather than just one? Would this make life more confusing or less confusing?
5. Young children often imagine that their parents aren't really their parents. What would it be like if you suddenly found out that you had a "real" father or mother you never knew about? What if this person was extremely rich and powerful – would you accept them as a parent?
6. Do you believe in anything that science can't prove -- such as magic, or ghosts, or creatures like the Loch Ness monster? Why or why not?
7. Have you ever been to summer camp? If so, describe what you did or did not like about it. If not, imagine and describe what you think a typical summer camp would be like – any impressions from television or movies?
8. You have been granted one magical item of your choice. What would this item be, and what power would it have? Explain your choice.

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**Foundations in English: Grade 7**

**THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES**

by Sue Monk Kidd

Active Reading: Active reading means actively engaging with the material you read. As you read, try to imagine yourself as the character. Also, you should make predictions and draw conclusions from the story. When you come across words you do not know,

circle them in your book; when you come across something that confuses you, put a question mark in the margin; or, when you come across an important detail, underline the sentence. You may also choose to use exclamation points when something is exciting or surprising.

**Journal Directions:** As you read *The Secret Life of Bees*, keep a journal to record your ideas, impressions, questions, and any other personal reactions to the characters, descriptions, details, and dialogue you want to ask a question about or find interesting. If you circled a word you do not know, include it in your journal, define it, and try to use it in a new sentence to help you remember what it means. As you read and consider the thought questions, record your answers in your journal, which will be collected on the first day of school.

Pre-Reading:

1.) Understanding the Setting: What was life in the South like in 1964? How was life different for African-Americans and white people? Why?

Reading Questions:

2.) As the novel concludes, were you surprised to learn that T. Ray had not always been the abusive character he is presented as in the story? That he once truly loved Deborah? Do you think his cruelty and abuse of Lily can be related to his experiences with Deborah? Explain your reaction to this question.

3.) Who is the “Queen Bee” in the novel? Why it is appropriate to think of her in this way?

4.) Lily’s feelings about her deceased mother are complex, ranging from her feeling guilty to thinking of Deborah as being perfect, to hating her, and eventually to accepting her for the woman she was. What happens to Lily when she learns her mother had once abandoned her? Was it more difficult for Lily to forgive her mother or herself?

5.) May’s “wailing wall” helps her deal with the intensive emotional pain she feels. Realizing that everyone needs an outlet for strong emotions, try to identify how people cope with grief and suffering. What can happen if feelings are kept inside and never acknowledged?

6.) How would you describe Lily and Zach’s relationship? What drew them together? In 1964, especially in the South, what reaction would people have to them as a couple?

7.) Think about what would happen in a sequel to *The Secret Life of Bees*. Does Lily ever see her father again? What job does she have? What happens with Lily and Zach? What happens to the “house of mothers”?

8.) Rate the book in terms of stars. One star would be a poor rating; five stars would mean you liked the book very much. Why did you rate the book the way you did? Provide specific examples to support your statements.

## Summer Reading Thought Questions English 8

### ***Untouchable***

by Mulk Raj Anand

1. The novel is set in India, which was a colony of Great Britain. Look for examples of where the country and its people are torn between reverence (respect and admiration for the British Empire) and dedication to the establishment of their own culture. You might consider the sections of the novel that include Ghandi to find examples.
2. What is a caste system? Why is it so unjust? Give examples from the novel.
3. Bakha is the protagonist of the novel and one of his major conflicts is with his father. What are some of the issues they disagree about?
4. Bakha is an untouchable, the lowest of the low according to India's caste system. Why do you think he admires the British soldiers so much, especially as they represent another form of oppression that is designed to tell Bakha and those like him that they are less human due to their ethnicity and social position?
5. How does this novel trace Bakha's transformation from submission to rebellion and resistance?
6. What is this novel saying about social injustice? What does it look like? What are its origins? Who or what are its targets and what are the effects, personally and culturally?

## **Summer Reading Thought Questions**

### **English 9: Western Literature**

The following questions are provided to help you guide your reading; you will **not** be required to turn in written responses to them. However, you should use them to make sure that you are understanding the reading, and I encourage you to take notes on your responses to them so that you will be prepared for discussion in the first weeks of class.

You are also expected to **actively read** this book. Circle words that are unfamiliar and look them up, jot down questions in the margins, and mark sentences that you find important or memorable. Looking up words, concepts, and places that are unfamiliar to you will give you a better understanding of the story!

#### **PURPLE HIBISCUS**

by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Fifteen-year-old Kambali's world is circumscribed by the high walls and frangipani trees of her family compound- and by her wealthy Catholic father who, while generous and politically active in the community, is repressive and fanatically religious at home. When Nigeria begins to fall apart under a military coup, Kambali's father sends her and her brother away to stay with their aunt, a university professor, whose house is noisy and full of laughter. There, Kambali and her brother discover a life and love beyond the confines of their father's authority. The visit will, in time, give rise to devotion and defiance that reveal themselves in profound and unexpected ways. This is a novel about the promise of freedom, about the blurred lines between childhood and adulthood, between love and hatred, between the old gods and the new.

- 1) Explain the family dynamics and atmosphere in Kambali's home. Who holds the power? How is it wielded?
  
- 2) How are the new and old religion, language, and culture contrasted with that of the new? Provide at least three examples of how the old and new ways in Nigeria conflict throughout the text.

- 3) Describe the conflicting image of Papa in his private and public life. What do you think motivates him to act the way he does?
- 4) Compare and contrast the environment that Kambili and Jaja experience at home compared to that of Aunty Ifeoma's house. How do Aunty Ifeoma and Eugene differ from one another? Why is Ifeoma so much happier considering she struggles financially while her brother Eugene is affluent?
- 5) What can we learn about making assumptions from this novel? Consider how Kambili's classmates and her own cousin's assumptions contrast with Kambili's true feelings and motivations.
- 6) Describe Papa's relationship with his own father. Why does Papa seek to keep his children away from their grandfather? What kind of man is Papa-Nnukwu? What are his most appealing qualities? What do the things he prays for say about his character?
- 7) Contrast Father Amadi with Kambili's father. How does Father Amadi bring Kambili to life? Why is her relationship with him so important to her?
- 8) What are the problems with Papa's business and the government? How do these events affect Papa? What is ironic about how control is used to suppress the sharing of ideas?
- 9) How are Kambili and Jaja changed through their experiences throughout the novel?
- 10) Why does Kambili's mother keep returning to her husband, even after he beats her? How does she justify her husband's behavior? How should she be judged for what she does at the end of the novel?
- 11) Explain the significance of the novel's title. Why do you think Adichie chose it?

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 10: British Literature**



Please note that written responses to the thought questions are **not** required. However, I encourage you to jot down some thoughts for each question so that you are prepared for discussion during our first couple weeks!

## **Annie John**

by Jamaica Kincaid

1. Do some research on the colonization of Antigua: What were the objectives of England's colonization of Antigua? How did it benefit England? Did it benefit Antigua? If so, how; if not, why/how not?
2. How is Annie's schooling based in British traditions and content? What effect does this have on Annie personally? How much (if any) does Annie learn about her own native culture?
3. How would you define the relationship between Annie and her mother? Be prepared to support your argument with examples?
4. In what ways does Annie rebel from her mother and from the notions of established authority—be it in the family or society at large? Why is Annie so fascinated with the painting of Columbus in Chains? How is this a symbol of her questioning colonialism and European authority?
5. Many of the works we will read at the beginning of British literature silence female voices. In British literature, we will be investigating female voice and how women and girls must fight to establish and share their experiences. Do you think Annie is equipped with the ability to have a strong voice in a new culture?
6. What kind of young woman does Annie grow into? How has she grown and changed since the beginning of the novel? Do you think she has a strong sense of self and of her culture?

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 11: American Culture**

**The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian**

by Sherman Alexei

1. In the chapter, "Hope Against Hope," the geometry teacher is key in teaching Junior what he needs to learn in order to live a life that offers opportunity and happiness. Make a list of five lessons Mr. P teaches Junior. Then pick one and write a paragraph explaining why the lesson you chose is so important. You may use personal experience to support your answer.
  
2. When Junior goes to Reardon, he chooses to follow his own path, not the one that the rest of his family or community follows. What challenges does this decision bring? Make a list of five. Pick one and write a paragraph about it. Why is it such a challenge? Have you ever had similar challenges?
  
3. "If you let people into your life, they can be pretty damn amazing," writes Alexei. How is this true for Junior? Consider his friendships with Gordy, Roger, Coach, Rowdy, and Penelope. How do they challenge and support Junior?
  
4. At Reardon, Junior faces discrimination. Find two to three examples. Be prepared to talk about them: how do they involve stereotyping? excluding? belittling? What are the effects on Junior?
  
5. Junior is called an "apple," by his own people who think he is "red on the outside and white on the inside." In other words, they think he is a traitor to his own people and culture. Do you agree or disagree and why?
  
6. What does family mean to Junior? Consider his relationships with his sister, his grandmother, his parents. What does he learn from them? How do they support him? How do they help him grow?

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 11: American Literature, CP**

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**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 11: American Literature, Honors**

**THE GREAT GATSBY**

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

1. Explain the significance of the title *The Great Gatsby*. In what ways could Jay Gatsby be considered “great”? In what ways could the title be ironic? In other words, what is not “great” about Gatsby and his world?
2. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel about the disillusionment of the “American Dream.” Be prepared to discuss how Jay Gatsby, and others like the Wilsons, are all victims of dreams that are unattainable for some reason. Your response should consider the nature of the dream and whether it is intrinsically valuable or not. It should also consider the methods used to achieve the dream and whether those means are legitimate/moral or not and why.
3. The novel’s narrator, Nick Carraway, describes the Buchanans (Tom and Daisy) as “careless people.” Be prepared to discuss how the rich in the novel are cruel and thoughtless. You might consider Tom’s relationship with both Myrtle and George Wilson, Daisy’s treatment of Gatsby, and Tom’s overall view of people in racial and social classes different from his own.
4. Throughout the novel, there are many descriptions of New York City as a kind of “waste land.” Be prepared to discuss how not only the city but also Gatsby and his friends are filled with despair, frustration and hopelessness. As part of your response, you might also consider the pastoral images in the novel that serve as a counterpoint to the city. What moral values are associated with the midwest, for example, and with the American frontier of the past?
5. Fitzgerald’s novel is rich in imagery, almost poetic in places. Find at least several scenes, actions, or images, such as the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock or the clock that falls off of Gatsby’s mantle, that are figurative, and explain what their

meanings are beyond the literal: in other words, how do they work to reveal character, conflict, or theme.

## **AND**

### ***Between the World and Me***

by Ta-Nehisi Coates

1. What was Coates' childhood like growing up in the ghettos of West Baltimore?
2. What difference does he see between his black world and the suburban white world? How does he try to understand the difference?
3. How does attending Howard University shape his beliefs on racism and on black history?
4. What issues of social injustice does the murder of Prince Jones, Coates' college friend, raise?
5. What does the book suggest about black America's access to "the American Dream," as it is typically depicted?
6. What is the ultimate advice Coates gives his son about growing up black in America? What is your personal opinion of it?

## **Summer Reading Thought Questions English 11: AP Language and Composition**

### **THE GREAT GATSBY**

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

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**AND**

***The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fathers***

By Wes Moore

1. How did both me, the author and his counterpart, grow up enduring similar hardships?

2. Describe Moore's childhood family. How do you think it shaped him?
3. Describe Moore's time at Riverdale. Why do you think the private school was so difficult for him? Describe his time at military school? What effect did it have on him?
- 4.. What influence did Tony have on Wes when they were growing up? Was he the primary or only reason Wes ended up serving a life sentence for murder?
5. How influential was Moore's trip to South Africa where he witnessed apartheid and abject poverty? How was this experience key in making Moore the success he became?
6. What do you think this book is saying about the host of environmental factors that make us who we are: race, family, economic security, education, prejudice, opportunity?

**AND**

***Into the Wild***

by Jon Krakauer

1. Describe Chris McCandlers: his virtues, talents, faults.
2. What motivates him to leave "civilization" and journey to Alaska's Denali National Park?
3. Who are some of the people he meets along the way? What do they have to teach Chris, if anything?
4. Chris reveres the American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau and his ideas on self-reliance, solitude, antimaterialism and the sanctity of nature. How much of Chris' experience is a tribute to these ideals or a questioning of them?

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 12: Literature Across Cultures**

**JOY LUCK CLUB**

by Amy Tan

1. Each of the mothers has endured some kind of terrible loss or struggle. Be prepared to discuss the conflict faced by June's mother, Suyuan Woo; Ying Ying St. Clair; Lindo Jong; and An-Mei Hsu.
2. For what reasons did An-Mei Hsu's family send her away? To what extent is she responsible for her problem?
3. Consider how the motif of "balance" relates to the idea of assimilation in the novel.
4. Be prepared to discuss the ways in which Waverly and the other daughters interact with their mothers. Is there a prevailing attitude in their relationships?
5. "I wiped my eyes and looked in the mirror. I was surprised at what I saw. I had on a beautiful red dress, but what I saw was even more valuable. I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could touch. I was like 'the wind'" (p. 53). Identity: how the presence of inner strength as part of identity is important in the Joy Luck Club. What complicates the ability of the women in Tan's novel to feel certain and secure about their own identities?
6. How are the conflicts confronting Chinese-Americans in the novel similar to those confronting other ethnic groups in the United States?
7. Inadequate or absent communication constitutes an important motif in the novel. Be prepared to discuss examples from the text.
8. Why is there a conflict between June and Waverly?
9. "How to lose your innocence but not your hope. How to laugh forever" (p. 239). What is the significance of this excerpt? To what degree and in what ways do the mothers succeed in passing on a message of hope to their daughters?



10. Describe what the daughters appear to have in common. Identify the elements found in each of the mother/daughter conflicts. To what extent are these conflicts resolved by the novel's end?

11. How does the format of the stories told in the novel mirror its content?

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 12: World Literature (College Placement)**

**JOY LUCK CLUB**

by Amy Tan

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2. For what reasons did An-Mei Hsu's family send her away? To what extent is she responsible for her problem?

3. Consider how the motif of "balance" relates to the idea of assimilation in the novel.

4. Be prepared to discuss the ways in which Waverly and the other daughters interact with their mothers. Is there a prevailing attitude in their relationships?

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10. Describe what the daughters appear to have in common. Identify the elements found in each of the mother/daughter conflicts. To what extent are these conflicts resolved by the novel’s end?

11. How does the format of the stories told in the novel mirror its content?

### **Summer Reading Thought Questions English 12: World Literature (Honors)**

**Please read the following questions and instructions carefully. You have one written assignment, which is detailed below in bold text.**

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by Amy Tan

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2. For what reasons did An-Mei Hsu’s family send her away? To what extent is she responsible for her problem?

3. Consider how the motif of “balance” relates to the idea of assimilation in the novel.

4. Be prepared to discuss the ways in which Waverly and the other daughters interact with their mothers. Is there a prevailing attitude in their relationships?

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10. Describe what the daughters appear to have in common. Identify the elements found in each of the mother/daughter conflicts. To what extent are these conflicts resolved by the novel's end?

11. How does the format of the stories told in the novel mirror its content?

**Writing prompt: Choose one of the thought questions above and write a two page response in which you pursue the question deeply. Make sure you cite appropriate evidence from the text.**

**Summer Reading Thought Questions  
English 12: AP Literature and Composition**

## **A Thousand Splendid Suns**

by Khaled Hosseini

1. The phrase “a thousand splendid suns,” from the poem by Saib-e-Tabrizi, is quoted twice in the novel\_ once as Laila’s family prepares to leave Kabul, and again when she decides to return there from Pakistan. It is also echoed in one of the final lines: “Miriam is in Laila’s own heart, where she shines with the bursting radiance of a thousand suns.” Be prepared to discuss the thematic significance of this phrase.
2. Miriam’s mother tells her: “Women like us. We endure. It’s all we have.” Be prepared to discuss how this sentiment informs Miriam’s life and how it relates to the larger themes of the novel.
3. At several points in the story, Miriam and Laila pass themselves off as mother and daughter. What is the symbolic importance of this subterfuge? In what ways is Miriam’s and Laila’s relationship with each other informed by their relationship with their own mothers?
4. The driver who takes Babi, Laila, and Tariq to the giant stone Buddhas above the Bamiyan Valley describes the crumbling fortress of Shahr-e-Zohak as “the story of our country, one invader after another...we’re like those walls up there. Battered, and nothing pretty to look at, but still standing.” Discuss the metaphorical import of this passage as it relates to Miriam and Laila. In what ways does their story reflect the larger story of Afghanistan’s troubled history?
5. While the first three parts of the novel are written in the past tense, the final part is written in present tense. What do you think was the author’s intent in making this shift? How does it change the effect of this final section?

## **PICNIC LIGHTNING**

by Billy Collins

Be prepared to explicate five of your favorite poems in terms of both meaning and device.

## **THE KITCHEN GOD’S WIFE**

by Amy Tan

1. What is the story of the Kitchen God and his wife? What is the lesson it imparts? Why does Winnie not like it? How does her attitude towards the story reflect her own personal story as a young wife in China?
2. When Pearl returns home after Auntie Du's funeral, she reflects on "the distance" that separates her and her mother. (chapter 2). What are the misunderstandings and secrets between them? How did they come to be? In other words, how do they represent not only each other's fears and regrets, but also hopes and love?
3. On recounting her girlhood in China, Winnie describes the social injustices of life as, "the kind of life everyone had back then, no questions asked, the fate people were born with." (chapter 6) What are some examples of the sexism and classism of her past? Consider her relationships with her family, her friends, and her first husband Wen Fu. How does her later life in America try to overcome these injustices?
4. In chapter 8, Winnie says, "I was not always negative thinking...When I was young, I wanted to believe in something good and when the good thing started to go away, I still wanted to grab it, make it stay." How is Winnie's story about the loss of youthful innocence? How does this loss shape the woman and mother she becomes? Consider both the positive and negative outcomes.
5. World War II is the backdrop for much of Winnie's early married life in China. She uses the word "taonin" to describe it, a word that has no American equivalent but means something like a fear, a sickness, a hot fever whose only thoughts are "escape." (chapter 12) What are some of the terrible dangers Winnie experiences during the war and the Cultural Revolution that follows? What aspects of her character are developed during this period?
6. What does the statue Lady Sorrow Free mean to Pearl and her mother, individually and as a pair? Consider what both learn about self knowledge, loving others, loyalty, duty, fear, hope, regret, contradictions, social taboos, and possibility --especially as they relate to changing the past, claiming the future, and going beyond fate.