

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 6**

**THE GIVER**

by Lois Lowry

**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 Giver*, 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 Giver is set in a “Utopian” society. A Utopia is a place where everything is perfect, or at least everything is supposed to be perfect. In a Utopia, people are treated the same, and there are many rules designed to eliminate conflict or distress. Think about how you view your world, considering both the positive and negative aspects. What is your idea of a perfect world? Give many examples of your Utopia and, if you like, draw some pictures of what it might look like.

**Reading Questions:**

2. In the first chapter, the author writes about members of the community being “released.” What do you think happens to people who are released?

3. In literature, a cliffhanger is a suspenseful situation that occurs at the end of a chapter or scene. What is the cliffhanger in Chapter Two?

4. What is unique about the way children are born and cared for in this community?

5. Each morning, Jonas and his family participate in a ritual where they describe their dreams to each other. Do you like sharing your dreams with family or friends? Why? What do you think this ritual is meant for in the community that Jonas lives in?
6. What things does the committee consider when giving children their life assignments? Imagine you lived in a community like this. What do you think your assignment would be? Why?
7. When Jonas is selected to be the community's "Receiver of Memory" it is described as a very rare honor. However, there are numerous downsides to this as well. What do you see as the most negative aspects of being the Receiver?
8. As the Receiver of Memory, Jonas is the one person in the community that is allowed to lie. What do you think is the reason for this?
9. According to The Giver, pain and suffering can bring wisdom. Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not?
10. The ending of The Giver is somewhat controversial as it leaves the reader free to imagine what happens next. What was your response when finishing the story? What do you imagine happens to Jonas?

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 7**

**THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES**

by Sue Monk Kidd

Active Reading: Actively engaging with the material you read provides a more meaningful and pleasurable reading experience. For instance, 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; when you come across something funny, put a smiley face in the margin; or when you identify an important detail, underline the sentence. Exclamation points are a clear indication the reader has found something exciting. You are encouraged to write notes and questions in your book as well. By doing so, you can make your book a useful “learning tool.”

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**

**FAHRENHEIT 451**

by Ray Bradbury

Journal Directions: As you read *Fahrenheit 451*, 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.

Reading questions:

1. Why does Bradbury begin the book by saying, "It was a pleasure to burn"? Why might it be more pleasurable to burn books than to read them?
2. The characters in this novel are highly dependent on technology in their day-to-day lives. What do you think are the most important aspects of technology in Guy Montag's world? What do you find to be the most important uses of technology in your own life?
3. An epiphany is a life-changing realization by a character. Where and when does Guy Montag experience an epiphany in this story? Explain your reasoning.
4. The Mechanical Hound is one of the most memorable elements of the novel. How might the Mechanical Hound serve as a symbol of Montag's world?
5. Why are books seen as so dangerous by people like Millie and Captain Beatty? (At one point, Beatty even states that "a book is a loaded gun.") Do people ever fear books today? If so, why? In your response, consider the issues of censorship and book banning.

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 9: Western Literature**

**THINGS FALL APART**

by Chinua Achebe

Before reading the novel, examine the glossary to find explanations for many of the Igbo terms and phrases in the novel. Also, read the biographical information provided about the author.

Set in southeastern Nigeria (Igboland) at the turn of the twentieth century, *Things Fall Apart* depicts the impact of British colonial rule on traditional African society. Although the Igbo and their neighbors had traded directly and indirectly with Europeans since the days of the slave trade, European penetration of the interior did not take place until the nineteenth century. At that time, Christian missionaries arrived in Igboland, and by the first decade of the twentieth century, the British had established administrative posts and had imposed direct rule throughout much of what is known today as Nigeria. Together, these institutions de-stabilized an imperfect but harmonious indigenous society.

1. Why was Okonkwo so famous in the clan? What does this suggest about the ideal qualities that are most admired in men of the clan?
2. Okonkwo thinks of his father as a negative example -- as someone not to be. Why is this so? Are there any qualities in his father that can be considered positive ones in the community?
3. Why was Okonkwo's second wife unhappy? How could her unhappiness help to explain the qualities and responsibilities that may make a woman's life meaningful in this society?
4. What can you infer about the laws of this clan? Why did Okonkwo have to leave the village? What rules did he violate? What laws of the village did others violate? What were the consequences? By what process and by whom were the punishments established?
5. Be prepared to describe the way villagers respond to the first white men, especially the neighboring village of Umuofia. What impact did this have on villagers?

6. Who were the first Europeans to settle in the village? What was their purpose in being there? How were they treated at first?
7. What powers did the Europeans take for themselves? Did the villagers resist threats to their traditional way of life? How did they do this? What were some of the reasons for not resisting?
8. What do you think the life and the death of Okonkwo symbolize in the novel?
9. In what ways was traditional village life compatible, or incompatible, with European values and customs as seen in the colonizers?
10. Why is the novel's title appropriate? What is it that fell apart? What future is suggested for the native people at the end of the novel?

## **PURPLE HIBISCUS**

by 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?

*Purple Hibiscus* takes place in postcolonial Nigeria while *Things Fall Apart* describes life in Nigeria as society is just beginning to make this shift. Consider both novels as you answer the questions below.

- 1) In what ways do you feel the country has changed in the time span of the two novels? What has stayed the same? In what ways have things improved or declined for the men, women, and children in Nigeria?

2) Both novels depict the societal problems of domestic violence. In what ways do these problems continue to plague society throughout the world? What are some of the underlying causes? What are potential solutions to these problems?

3) How did your reading of *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus* inform you about life in Nigeria and the experiences of the Nigerian people? How are Nigerians similar to Americans? In what significant ways are they different?

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

**JANE EYRE**

by Charlotte Bronte

1. What obstacles does Jane face at Lowood? What do we learn about her as she responds to unfairness and mistreatment in her early life?
2. Jane is a heroine who breaks with Victorian-era feminine stereotypes. In describing herself, Jane says, "I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer: I sometimes wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and small cherry mouth; I desired to be tall, stately and finely developed in figure; I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked." How does Jane's lack of traditional beauty influence her development and her actions in the novel?
3. Does Rochester ever actually intend to marry Blanche? If so, when does he change his mind? If not, why does he go to such lengths to make Jane believe he does?
4. When Jane learns about Bertha's existence, it throws her whole world into a tailspin. Are Jane's responses to this information logical? Is Bertha more than a plot device? Do your views of Rochester change once this secret is revealed?
5. Jane asserts her equality to Rochester, and St. John. What does Jane mean by equality, and why is it so important to her?
6. Bronte is writing, and Jane is living, at a time when British women had restricted roles in society and very few opportunities for employment. What does work represent to Jane? What does money represent to her? How does she view her inheritance, and how does it permit her a certain degree of freedom?
7. How do Jane and Rochester's roles change from the beginning of their relationship to the end of the novel? Do you think Rochester needs to suffer in order to be worthy of Jane?

## **LORD OF THE FLIES**

by William Golding

1. Why is the age of the book's characters crucial to the novel's effectiveness? If adults had been stranded on the island, would the situation have turned out differently? What if the castaways were a mixed group of boys and girls? Of girls only?
2. In discussing his work, the author once said that "the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system, however apparently logical or respectable." Do you agree with Golding's assessment? Are there moments in the novel where the boys make the right ethical choices? What are the results of these choices?
3. When Simon uncovers the truth of "the beast," he tries to warn the other boys. Why is Simon unprepared for what awaits him? Why do Ralph and Piggy join the dance at Jack's feast, as well as what comes after?
4. Why do the conch shell and the Lord of the Flies itself exert so much influence over the castaways? Do all societies have totems with such symbolic power? Consider the communities of MacDuffie, of home, and of country in your response.
5. In Chapter 2, Piggy questions the boys about their behavior, asking "How can you expect to be rescued if you don't put first things first and act proper?" Describe the ways in which this line illuminates the novel's themes of order versus chaos and man versus society. What irony is exposed in Piggy's words by the end of the novel?
6. This novel addresses the sometimes wide gulf between people's ideals and their actions. How does group mentality affect the boys on the island? Do Ralph, Simon, Piggy, and Jack live up to their respective ideals (whether or not you agree with those beliefs)?

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

**BREAD GIVERS**

by Anzia Yezierska

1. Discuss how *Bread Givers* is a novel about the urban immigrant experience, whose social realities include poverty, family tension, and the ambiguity of success.
2. Discuss how the novel is also about the working-class experience. How do Sara and her sisters fit into the family economy? What kind of work does each do? How does each understand her work life? In other words, what does work mean to each? What does it offer each and how does it limit each?
3. Sara, the novel's protagonist, vows to "make herself for a person," which she attempts to do by becoming "Americanized." What does becoming American mean to Sara? How does it contrast with her own Jewish/Polish culture? What are the conflicts she encounters by being part of two cultures, the new American world and the old European one?
4. How does the novel illustrate the meaning of the "American Dream"? What is the American Promise that Sara works so hard for? What dreams and hopes drive the other characters in the novel? Consider Sara's parents, her sisters, her suitors.
5. Discuss how Sara, in contrast to her sisters and mother, emerges as an independent, strong-willed woman. How does she do this? What values and goals guide her? What makes the other women in the novel less successful in their search for self-determinism?
6. Discuss how the novel ends with the theme of reconciliation between the search for self and family duty.

## **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.

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

**OUTLIERS**

by Malcolm Gladwell

In this acclaimed nonfiction book, Gladwell examines the nature of success from a number of different angles. After reading *Outliers*, you will be quite familiar with the author's "10,000-Hour Rule." In a two-page response, please reflect on this concept and offer your opinions as to whether you agree with the rule. Be sure to include direct references to the examples that Gladwell provides to support his claim; each reference should be properly cited in MLA style.

**A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD**

by Jennifer Egan

In a two-page response, please analyze the fascinating *form* of this novel. How does the book's structure reflect its themes? As you analyze the work, you may wish to consider Egan's usage of multiple narrators, the book's non-linear narrative, and, of course, the PowerPoint chapter.

**THE THINGS THEY CARRIED**

by Tim O'Brien

1. When O'Brien was drafted in 1968, he was, in his own words, "politically naïve," yet he felt the American war in Vietnam was "wrong": "*It was in my view then, and still is, that you don't make war without knowing why...it seemed to me that when a nation goes to war it must have a reasonable confidence in the justice and imperative of its cause.*" Consider several events O'Brien relates in terms of this quote. In other words, how was the war unjust for the author and any other character(s)? Do you think that there are wars that are "just and imperative"? Explain your reasoning.
2. Why does O'Brien relate his childhood love in a story about Vietnam? Who was Linda? What happened to her? How does she fit in with the rest of the book?
3. Is this a novel, a series of stories, an autobiography, or something else? Defend

your response with evidence from the book.

**Summer Reading Thought Questions**  
**English 12: World Literature (Reading and Composition)**

**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). Identify 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?

## **THE HEMINGWAY BOOK CLUB OF KOSOVO**

by Paula Huntley

Paula Huntley writes about her experience teaching English as a Second Language while in Kosava; it is by exploring, reflecting, and considering her experiences with Albanians, in writing, that she gains an awareness of what it means to live in a war torn country, one in which its inhabitants are riddled with fear and the consequence of hate, yet are hopeful in their quest as people of a developing nation. She also recognizes how little Americans know of other cultures; yet, Americans, for the most part, enjoy international acclaim. --- Be sure to look on a map and familiarize yourself with the region of Kosovo.

1. Note the features of a literary journal. Be sure to describe its strengths, weaknesses, credibility, lack thereof, and any other elements a successful literary journal possesses.

2. Familiarize yourself with the terms apartheid, diaspora, KFOR, Kanun of Lek,

3. Using the Internet, research the political parties of Kosova. What are their fundamental differences?

4. On pages 46 – 48, Huntley describes a “parallel society” the Albanians needed to create during Serb occupation. What does it mean to form a parallel society within a country? Be prepared to discuss the need for such a parallel society, its nature, and what it offers to those within it and to explain whether parallel societies exist within the United States.

5. “Tradition can be the cruelest prison of all” (p. 64) is an important metaphor Ms. Huntley uses to describe the situation she finds in Kosova. Using evidence from the text to support your analysis, explain its significance within the text.

6. “Words. The power they have. They can heal and encourage, but they can do such damage” (p. 65). What does it mean for words to have power? Extrapolate the

meaning of this passage as it relates to the conflict between Albanians and Serbs.

7. Huntley uses Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* because she feels the language is accessible to her students. Her students are able to connect to the metaphor of chasing the "big fish" in ways similar to that of the Old Man in the text. From what you learn of Hemingway's text from the excerpts Huntley includes, what does it mean to chase the big fish? Why must they persistently wait for and hope for the big fish to come along?

8. What is meant by the statement "a man can be destroyed yet not defeated"? (It is a quote from Hemingway's novel, which Huntley and her students discuss.) In what ways does this seeming paradox apply to the Albanians of Kosova?

9. The Albanians of Kosova are linked to the country of Kosova as well as their ethnicity as Albanians. What is the significance of this cultural connection? Discuss in depth why it is difficult to differentiate between the two, but also the importance of identifying as an Albanian.

#### Kosovo – the Historical Context

In the Serb nationalists' catalog of fears, which began to gain full expression in the brutal disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation in the latter half of the 1990's, the threat of ethnic Serbs being overwhelmed by the predominantly Muslim Kosovar Albanians always figured prominently. It was therefore only a matter of time before the methods of ethnic cleansing and outright genocide that had been characteristic of the Bosnian War in 1992-1995 would appear in Kosovo, as well. This process was accelerated by the appearance, in 1996, of the Kosovo 'Liberation Army (KLA), whose goal was the creation of an independent, and ethnically Albanian, republic of Kosovo. The militant campaign of the KLA, which included armed attacks on the Serbian federal forces and on ethnic Serb civilians, soon gained the support of many more Kosovar Albanians than the peaceful methods favored by the literary scholar and pacifist Ibrahim

Rugova, who had been the unofficial president of a unilaterally-declared Kosovar republic since 1992. Violence escalated in 1997, when Serbian security forces began a concerted campaign of intimidation and terror against real and perceived supporters of the KLA. This included several massacres of entire extended families of Kosovar Albanians, the forced removal of ethnic Albanians from their communities, and the subsequent flight of hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees from Kosovo. Despite

repeated condemnations by the UN and Western governments, followed by threats of military intervention if the violence were not stopped, the Milosevic government continued to escalate its campaign of ethnic cleansing throughout 1998 and early 1999, resulting in the launching of a NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in March 1999. Milosevic's initial defiance was ultimately broken by the extensive damage caused by the bombing, including the destruction of virtually the entire Serbian power grid, and a peace deal.

When seeking to understand Kosovo as a scene of conflict between ethnic Albanians and Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, it is necessary to be aware of some seemingly ancient history. The significance of the region to Serbian national identity derives from its status in Serb nationalist historiography as the heartland of the medieval Serbian kingdom and as having been originally inhabited almost exclusively by Serbs. In this narrative, the many ancient monasteries and churches dotting the Kosovo landscape represent the deeply Orthodox Christian cultural heritage of the Serbian nation. Furthermore, beginning with the nationalist ideology of the 19th century language reformer Vuk Karadžić, the defeat of Serbian Prince Lazar by the invading Ottoman Turks in the battle of Kosovo Polje (The Field of Blackbirds) in 1389 has been presented as the decisive moment in the history of Serbia.

It is not uncommon for eastern European nationalisms to celebrate military defeats as foundational myths, but in the case of Kosovo Polje this tendency has been taken to almost fetishistic levels. The battle is seen as a glorious sacrifice by Prince Lazar, the Serb defeat as a result of treachery, and the ensuing subjugation of the Serbs by Ottoman Turks as a period of nearly Christ-like suffering, from which the Serbian nation would ultimately be redeemed by the building of a greater Serbia. It is no coincidence, therefore, that as the Yugoslav communist system began to disintegrate in the late 1980's, Kosovo would become the natural setting for a grand gesture by a former Communist Party boss seeking to establish his nationalist bona fides as the leader of the Serbs. Not only did Slobodan Milosevic stage massive nationalist rallies on the Field of Kosovo; he also overturned the constitutional structure of Yugoslavia, the work of the long-standing Yugoslav leader Tito, thus taking away the political and cultural autonomy of Kosovar Albanians who now constituted some 90% of the population of Kosovo.

Peace was finally brokered in June 1999. This included the withdrawal of Serbian federal forces from Kosovo, the disarmament of the KLA, and the insertion of a NATO-manned peacekeeping force (KFOR) in Kosovo. Despite sporadic violence, including revenge killings of ethnic Serbs, the settlement has proved relatively stable, resulting in the creation of a de facto independent Kosovar Republic.

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

**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). Identify 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?

## **LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET**

by Rainer Maria Rilke

This is a collection of a thoughtful German poet's correspondence with an aspiring young writer over a span of six years. The younger man seeks guidance about his literary endeavors initially, but what he really gets from the elder Rilke is a touchingly honest and truly beautiful prescription for how to live and how to love. The book contains ten letters, each of which offers to the reader a warm and insightful brew of advice and beautiful prose.

**Journal activity:** As you read each letter, keep an account of the ideas, language, and beauty that moves you or enlightens you. Please pick five of the letters and write individual responses to each of them, either in a paragraph form, reflecting on the essence of the letters or focus on one or more quotes or aspects. You may also respond to the letters with a letter of your own or with a poem.

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

The mandatory summer reading books for this course are as follows:

**STATION ELEVEN**

by Emily St. John Mandel

**THE POISONWOOD BIBLE**

by Barbara Kingsolver

Your assignment is twofold. First, you should annotate each novel as you read. This does not mean that you need to fill up each page with your own writing (or with highlighting). It does mean that you should be an active reader and attempt to jot down questions and observations as you go. (An “OMG” in the margins is perfectly acceptable.) Your annotations will be checked on the first day of class.

Second, you will create a *dialectical journal* for each book. A dialectical journal is a double-entry journal. On every page, the writer records a key passage of the text on the left-hand side; on the right-hand side, the writer offers a personal response to the passage.

You should find 8-10 passages from each book that you find especially intriguing. (A passage may be from one sentence to several paragraphs in length.) Create a dialectical journal entry for every passage that you pick. Your analyses might focus on characters, dialogue, plot, theme, phrasing, other literary elements, or anything else that interests you about the work.

The dialectical journals for both books will also be submitted on the first day of class; this is a requirement.

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

**A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND**

by Flannery O'Connor

1. O'Connor's Catholic faith serves as the moral foundation for many of her stories. Explain the thematic significance of religion in such stories as "The Displaced Person" and "A Good Man is Hard to Find."

2. Explain how the use of irony, realistic details, and regionalism of character, dialogue, and setting serve as important elements in "Good Country People," "The River," and "A Late Encounter with the Enemy."

3. Regarding her craft, Flannery O'Connor once wrote:

"You have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large startling figures."

Explain how this view informs the reader's understanding of character as it reveals itself in the extreme and grotesque situations portrayed in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "Good Country People."

4. O'Connor's portrayal of evil as a powerful, ever-present, destructive, and often mindless force in the world serves as a recurring theme. Explain how this is true in such stories as "The Displaced Person," "Good Country People," and "A Good Man is Hard to Find."

2. Explain how O'Connor's use of religious metaphors and allusions contribute to the theme of redemptive mercy in "An Artificial Nigger."

3. The concise and swift narrative style which O'Connor employs in constructing her characters contributes to the thematic "shock of evil" in many of her stories. Explain how this is true in such stories as "The Life You Save May Your Own" and "The River."

## **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 rhetorical 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.