

## HONORS AMERICAN LITERATURE SUMMER READING 2015

**Honors American Literature students are required to read John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Check the ISBN number when you purchase your copy so you bring to class the correct edition: 0143039431. In the first week of school, you will be tested on your understanding of the novel. The book will also be discussed in seminars and you will write a formal essay on the novel.**

**For the 2nd book**—the “choice book”—you may select a classic or a modern work, a novel of recognized literary merit, or a contemporary best-seller, so long as the author is **American**. Whatever your decision, select a work that you think you will truly enjoy. Many of you probably have a novel or two that you have been looking forward to reading but have not had time for; if so, this is your chance.

If you do not already have a novel in mind, the junior English teachers have developed a list of suggested options below. If none of the suggested novels intrigues you, you may wish to browse your local bookstore or library, check the many “Top Ten” lists published each month, or obtain a recommendation from a relative. You will *not* be given an objective (i.e., multiple-choice) test in August on the choice novel assignment; however, you *may* be required to make an oral presentation and/or write an essay and/or complete some other sort of graded assignment based on your choice novel.

### 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Louisa May Alcott- *Little Women* - the novel follows the lives of four sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March—as they go from childhood to womanhood around the time of America's Civil War.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* – Greedy, piratical Colonel Pyncheon builds his mansion on ill-gotten ground, setting the stage for generations of suffering. Years later, a country cousin and an enigmatic young boarder attempt to reverse the tide of misfortunes surrounding the house in Hawthorne's evocative blend of mystery and romance

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* - The work is an epic sea-story of Captain Ahab's voyage in pursuit of Moby Dick, a great white whale. The detailed and realistic descriptions of whale hunting and the process of extracting whale oil, as well as life aboard ship among a culturally diverse crew, are mixed with exploration of class and social status, good and evil, and the existence of God.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - Stowe's powerful abolitionist novel fueled the fire of the human rights debate in 1852. Denouncing the institution of slavery in dramatic terms, the incendiary novel quickly draws the reader into the world of slaves and their masters.

### 20<sup>th</sup> Century “Classics”

Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* - a masterwork of twentieth-century literature set in a bleak, dystopian future. Guy Montag is a fireman who starts fire rather than put them out in order to destroy the most illegal of commodities, the printed book. Montag never questions the destruction until he meets an eccentric young neighbor, Clarisse, who introduces him to a past where people didn't live in fear.

Pearl S Buck, *The Good Earth*- this novel dramatizes family life in a Chinese village before WW I.

Willa Cather, *My Antonia* - set in Nebraska, the novel has five sections that correspond roughly to stages of Antonia's life, through marriage and motherhood, except the middle volume, "Lena Lingard," is about Jim Burden in college and his affair with Lena, Antonia's friend.

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* - *The Sound and the Fury* is the tragedy of the Compson family, featuring some of the most memorable characters in literature: beautiful, rebellious Caddy; the

manchild Benjy; haunted, neurotic Quentin; Jason, the brutal cynic; and Dilsey, their black servant. Their lives are fragmented and harrowed by history and legacy.

Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* - The quintessential novel of the Lost Generation, it is a poignant look at the disillusionment and angst of the post-World War I generation. The story follows the flamboyant Brett and the hapless Jake as they journey from the wild nightlife of 1920s Paris to the brutal bullfighting rings of Spain with a motley group of expatriates.

Zora Neale Hurston – *Their Eyes Were Watching God* - Janie Crawford, an African-American woman in her early forties, tells a best friend (Pheoby) of three major periods of her life, including powerful memories of Tea Cake (the husband she loved) and of Florida's Okeechobee hurricane.

Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* - a satire of American culture, society, and behavior in the early 1920s. George F. Babbitt is committed to making money but then rebels against middle-class American life and its pressure toward conformity.

Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* - At its center is the deaf-mute John Singer, who becomes the confidant for various types of misfits in a Georgia mill town during the 1930s. Each one yearns for escape from small town life. McCullers spins a haunting, unforgettable story that gives voice to the rejected, the forgotten, and the mistreated.

JD Salinger- *Franny & Zooey* - "Franny" (a short story) takes place in a college town and tells of an undergraduate disenchanted by selfishness and inauthenticity around her. In *Zooey* (a novella), the character with that name comes to Franny's aid, offering brotherly love and advice.

Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* - giving a good sense what it was like to grow up in America between 1912 and 1920, the novel focuses on Francie Nolan, who relies on her imagination and her love of reading to provide a temporary escape from poverty.

John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*- this novella published in 1947 tells of a pearl diver, Kino, and explores human nature and weaknesses, especially greed and evil.

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* - set against the backdrop of the 1890s New York aristocracy, focuses on how Lily Bart adjusts to traditions and conventions but resents them.

### **More Recent Fiction & Nonfiction**

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* - Antonio Marez is six years old when Ultima comes to stay with his family in New Mexico. She is a curandera, one who cures with herbs and magic. Under her wise wing, Tony will probe the family ties that bind and rend him, and he will discover himself in the magical secrets of the pagan past-a mythic legacy as palpable as the Catholicism of Latin America.

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* - this 1969 autobiography about the early years of African-American writer and poet Maya Angelou illustrates how strength of character and a love of literature can help overcome racism and trauma.

Erik Larsen, *The Devil in the White City* - Based on real characters and events, the book is set in Chicago around 1893, telling about the architect behind the 1893 World's Fair and also about Dr. H. H. Holmes, a serial killer who lured victims to their deaths in his Murder Castle.

Malcolm X – *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* - this has been called a “spiritual conversion narrative” since it shows the evolution of Malcolm X's influential views on black pride, black nationalism, and pan-Africanism.

Norm McClean, *A River Runs Through It* – The two novellas and short story in this collection are based on his own experiences and the beauty he found in reality, rendering a careful record of what it was like to work in the woods when it was still a world of horse and hand and foot, without power saws, "cats," or four-wheel drives. Populated with drunks, loggers, card sharks, and whores, and set in the small towns and surrounding trout streams and mountains of western Montana, the stories concern themselves with the complexities of life. \*\* Mature content. Get a parent's permission\*\*

Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory* - the book consists of influential essays by a Chicano intellectual. The book, consisting of separate essays, tells of the author's educational history and how he lost touch with cultural values that he once held in common with his family.