

**Saint Francis High School
American Literature
Summer Reading 2020**

All American Literature students are required to read Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*. Check the ISBN when you purchase your copy so you bring to class the correct edition: ISBN 13: 9780062277756.

During the first week of school, you will be tested on your factual understanding of the novel. The novel will also be discussed in seminars and you will write a formal essay on the novel.

For the 2nd book, please choose one title from the provided list. For the 2nd book, you may be required to write a personal and/or creative response. During the first week of school, you will be provided with a list of guided questions for this response. Depending on your assigned teacher, there may be additional assessments. Come prepared by finishing the two books before the first class.

***I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou**

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.

***All The Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr**

Marie-Laure lives with her father in Paris near the Museum of Natural History, where he works as the master of its thousands of locks. When she is six, Marie-Laure goes blind and her father builds a perfect miniature of their neighborhood so she can memorize it by touch and navigate her way home. When she is twelve, the Nazis occupy Paris and father and daughter flee to the walled citadel of Saint-Malo, where Marie-Laure's reclusive great-uncle lives in a tall house by the sea. With them they carry what might be the museum's most valuable and dangerous jewel. **description courtesy of Amazon.com

***Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer**

Nine-year-old Oskar Schell has embarked on an urgent, secret mission that will take him through the five boroughs of New York. His goal is to find the lock that matches a mysterious key that belonged to his father, who died in the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11. This seemingly impossible task will bring Oskar into contact with survivors of all sorts on an exhilarating, affecting, often hilarious, and ultimately healing journey. **description courtesy of Amazon.com

***The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd**

Hetty “Handful” Grimke, an urban slave in early nineteenth century Charleston, yearns for life beyond the suffocating walls that enclose her within the wealthy Grimke household. The Grimke’s daughter, Sarah, has known from an early age she is meant to do something large in the world, but she is hemmed in by the limits imposed on women. This exquisitely written novel is a triumph of storytelling that looks with unswerving eyes at a devastating wound in American history, through women whose struggles for liberation, empowerment, and expression will leave no reader unmoved. **description courtesy of Amazon.com

***Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* by Barack Obama**

The author recounts his life up to his enrollment in Harvard Law School. Many readers are surprised by the early experiences that influenced our nation’s 44th president. He lived in diverse environments--Hawaii, Jakarta, Los Angeles, Kenya-- where he learned about others and himself.

***In Dubious Battle* by John Steinbeck**

The setting is California during a fruit-workers' strike in the 1930s. Jim Nolan is an activist who tries to organize abused laborers so they can have fair wages and working conditions. Strikers enjoyed few legal protections, but two thousand fruit pickers strike against the Growers' Association, so life becomes hectic and hazardous for Jim. If you enjoyed Steinbeck’s *Of Mice And Men* and wish to sample another Steinbeck work, this is a good choice, but be aware this is grim social commentary.

***The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan**

Four mothers who were born in China end up living in San Francisco. They meet on a regular basis to play mahjong, and their four daughters grow up knowing each other. All eight characters have compelling stories, and the novel can feel at times like a collection of short stories, but the book is united by their interaction and by the recurring idea that mothers and daughters form special bonds despite tension and conflict. We see the characters when they are children, when they fall in love, when they reach maturity, and much more.

***Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut**

This is the most challenging novel among the “choice” selections due to non-chronological narration. Billy Pilgrim travels through time. Some events take place in Germany during World War II. Billy is in Dresden when that city is destroyed (this is based on the author’s own experience of being a prisoner of war), but sometimes the action jumps to Billy in later decades. Billy is captured by an alien spaceship and taken for a time to another planet where Billy is placed on exhibit. When Billy returns to Earth and talks about the Tralfamadorians (they can see in four dimensions), people think he is crazy. Many readers like to repeat the catchphrase popularized by this novel--”so it goes.”