

English 11 Honors Summer Reading Assignment / Fall 2019

Orwell's short and intense life has for years borne witness to some of those verities of which we were already aware. Parties and churches and states cannot be honest, but individuals can. Real books cannot be written by machines or committees. The truth is not always easy to discern, but a lie can and must be called by its right name. And the imagination, like certain wild animals, as Orwell himself once put it, will not breed in captivity.

— Christopher Hitchens

Like classic Hollywood films, literature is sometimes understood as a relic of a bygone era, a reflection of a different time, a cultural artifact that is no longer relevant. Such books are published and then—for reasons unknown to many students—remain popular for decades in high school English classrooms.

Our summer reading task, then, begins from a place of inquiry: what happens when we think about “old” books differently? More to the point, what do we gain from understanding texts not as fixed things—like items in a museum, let’s say—but as ongoing discussions with meanings that are always in the process of changing?

Your task this summer is to read *1984*, a dystopian science-fiction thriller by British writer George Orwell. The novel, Orwell’s last, tells the story of a downtrodden man and his struggle to rebel against a tyrannical government. Though we will examine it in greater depth when you return, Orwell’s purpose for writing the novel is to articulate serious concerns in the western world following the Second World War. In this sense, the novel works as a kind of myth story in that it resonates within a particular culture and reflects that culture’s values; it is a story that our culture tells itself about itself. What this means, exactly, and why the novel’s legacy is so lasting is the subject of the first unit of our course.

Honors English 11 is concerned not only with what texts mean, but *how* texts create their meaning. If such meaning is always “under construction,” so to speak, then examining the environment that produced the reader seems just as fruitful as examining that which produced the author. *1984* will serve as an essential starting point, a standard by which all other first semester texts will be evaluated. Take your time, invest the energy, and read deeply. This novel will be very important to us.

The Assignment

You have six important tasks this summer.

1. Read the novel in its entirety, including the Newspeak afterword.
2. While reading, use post-it notes to keep track of passages that you find especially interesting, strange, shocking, or revealing. When finished, write out **eight** of the most significant passages that you identified. These passages should be in chronological order. They should include the page number in parentheses and a brief explanation of why you selected them (approx. 100 words each).
 - a. NB: please remember that none of the quotes in your list should be included in the [Sparknotes](#), [Shmoop](#), or [Cliffs Notes](#) summaries available online. If you’re concerned about overlap, please review these sites before completing this task.
3. Mandatory Passage ID: in addition to the eight passages you identified and explained, provide explanations for the following two passages:
 - a. “The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way” (1).
 - b. “There was another crash. Someone had picked up the glass paperweight from the table and smashed it to pieces on the hearth-stone” (223).



4. Identify the most important line. In other words, which passage represents the essence of the novel? Write it out, include a page number, and explain your thinking (approx. 100 words). You may *not* use “Big Brother is watching you” or the novel’s final line.
5. Write me a letter. More than likely, we have never met before. You just read this complex novel. Explain to me what you thought about it, any questions that linger in your mind, any scenes that resonated with you, and anything else about your reading experience that might help me to get a better sense of your work as a student. This writing is informal (e.g. you can use contractions, 2nd person pronouns, etc.) and should be approximately 500 words.
6. To assist us in discussion when we return to class, find a current news article that speaks to one of the following ideas from the novel. Because of the novel’s interest in the power of questionable sources of information, your news article does *not* have to come from a respected news source, nor does it have to be written by a credible writer.
 - a. Write a brief (250 word) explanation of why you chose the article and how it relates to your chosen topic. You must also **print** the article and bring it to class when we return.

Potential Topics for News Article Connection:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A world dominated by three super powers • Perpetual “phony” war • Dreadful nihilism (i.e. lack of belief in love, friendship, science, religion, etc.) • The future as “a boot stomping on the human face—forever.” • Extinction of the very possibility of critical independent thought • Omnipresent surveillance • Falsification of history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse of language, use of inaccurate or opposite words to describe things • Absence of a rich, diverse, plural society • Obliteration of standards of comparison • World of patriots v. enemies (uncritical love of country and leaders, and uncritical hatred of enemies) • Presumed infallibility of a political party • Torture by government as systematic policy

What to Expect on the First Day Back

You will be asked to take a test on the novel when you return to class. The test will cover the basic plot of the book, its major literary elements, its larger themes, and some passage-based work. Following the test, you will be asked to write a claim-driven impromptu essay that will serve as a baseline writing sample and will inform the ways in which we practice writing for the remainder of the marking period.

All of the written work for your summer reading assignment is due on the first day you return and will be submitted to turnitin.com.

An Important Note on Collaboration

Reading in a group can be an exciting and meaningful way to experience a book. If you plan to collaborate with other students and read the novel together, please remember that **your collaboration must end at the conversational level**. This means that you must not share your written work—no matter how little—with anyone else. A reminder of our academic honest policy: our course will not tolerate any action that improperly influences the evaluation of a student’s academic work, gives one student unfair academic advantage over another, or encourages the violation of academic integrity by others. Violations of this policy take many forms—including *plagiarism*—and will result in loss of credit for the assignment and no opportunity to resubmit. Assisting the act of plagiarism is an offence equal to seeking to plagiarize, meaning those who assist in collusion are equally culpable and will face equal consequences. If you are faced with the unfortunate choice of copying or receiving a late grade, please elect the latter. It is *always* the better option.