

12th Grade Accelerated English

Summer Reading

The summer reading for 12th grade Accelerated students is a total of three books. The assignment is as follows:

- All students will read *Cyrano de Bergerac* in fulfillment of the comedy genre.
- Students will choose and read one nonfiction book from the following: *Fast Food Nation*, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, or *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*
- Students will choose and read one fiction book from the following: *Things Fall Apart*, *Purple Hibiscus*, *The Road*, *The Poisonwood Bible*, *The Cloud Atlas*, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, or *The Round House*.
- Students will read the books and respond to the attached topics for each of the books they choose. Response will be graded on development of ideas and connection to the reading. Each response should be typed in MLA format, size 12 font, and double spaced. These entries will be submitted to Turnitin.com. Entries should be printed and handed in on the first Friday of the school year and will be worth one test grade for the first quarter.
- In addition to the written responses for three novels, all students will take a quiz on *Cyrano de Bergerac* on the first Wednesday of the school year.

You must scroll down through the subsequent pages of this document in order to access the topic questions for each literary work. The document is designed so that you can print only the questions/pages you need.

***Cyrano de Bergerac* - Required.**

All students read this play and should prepare for a quiz in addition to answering the questions below. The quiz will be the first Wednesday of the school year.

1. Throughout the play, Edmond Rostand explores the concept of heroism through a unique presentation of a hero who breaks the normal literary expectations of heroism. Using details from the play, argue why Cyrano (1) is considered a hero, and (2) can be considered a non-traditional hero.
2. *Cyrano de Bergerac*'s character is considered a beautiful soul with a grotesque appearance, and his panache is said to be his greatest achievement, as well as the compensation for his physical deformity. Using specific details from the play, support/defend this statement. Be sure your support draws information from all five acts of the play.
3. Discuss the friendship between Cyrano and Christian. While you may elaborate, be sure to address the following in your discussion: (1) Does one man benefit from the friendship more so than the other, or do they both equally gain from their acquaintance? (2) Without the common goal of wooing Roxanne, would the two men be friends at all? (3) Are the two alter egos – meaning, are any of Christian's qualities present in Cyrano, and/or are any of Cyrano's in Christian?
4. Discuss Roxanne's power over both Christian and Cyrano. How does she influence each man? Is she a likeable character? Why or why not? Use details from several acts of the play to support your answer.
5. Much of the play is based on deception. First, discuss the theme of deception as it is presented in Rostand's work. Then, argue whether or not the deceptions committed in the play are justified. Is there ever a time when lying can be considered honorable or, at the very least, acceptable?

Portions of some questions adapted from Barnes and Noble questions for discussion.

Nonfiction Choices. Read One.

***Fast Food Nation* (Nonfiction choice)**

1. Schlosser discusses the eagerness of fast food companies to avoid hiring skilled workers and to rely instead upon highly unskilled workers. How is this presented in the book? What is "zero training" and why is it the fast food companies' ultimate goal? Since fast food companies are providing a steady paycheck, is it really the obligation of fast food chains to take an interest in their workers and to teach them job skills? Why or why not?
2. Over the last several decades, fast food companies have aggressively targeted children in their marketing efforts. How are these efforts developed in the book? Should advertisers be permitted to target children who lack the sophistication to make informed decisions and are essentially being lured into eating high fat, high calorie food through toys and cute corporate mascots? Is it possible that fast food companies - like tobacco companies - are recruiting increasingly younger consumers in order to ensure a steady customer base as their older constituents die from heart disease, diabetes, and other obesity-related disorders? Why or why not?
3. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was the first book to sound a warning call about the appalling abuses inherent in mass-produced beef. In the decades since its publication, the state of meatpacking has received scant attention. What are some of the unsafe conditions and practices presented in *Fast Food Nation* that still exist today? Are they any different than the practices that Sinclair revealed nearly 100 years ago? Explain.
4. What are the author's assertions that the beef processors and fast food corporations are engaging in patterns of unethical conduct? If one accepts these assertions, what can the consumer do to modify his behavior? Can the conduct of an individual have an impact on a company's practices? Why is a company most likely to change its conduct? To generate public goodwill? To respond to employees' concerns? To address diminishing profits? Explain.
5. Since few people would confuse fast food with health food, who bears the greater responsibility for the alarming rate of obesity in children in the United States; the fast food chains that market "supersize meals" to children, or parents who are not educating their children about the benefits of a balanced diet? Can well intentioned parents maintain control over the eating habits of their children? How much responsibility does the school district have in controlling the eating habits of children? Should the federal government be involved because it subsidizes school lunches? Explain.

Questions modified from Harper Collins publishers

***Stiff* (Nonfiction choice)**

1. Roach presents the history of studying human cadavers. How has the study progressed throughout time? Roach discovered that students in anatomy class tend not to enjoy touching them and smelling cadavers, even though they relish the opportunity to study them. Does this surprise you? Why might someone want to work with cadavers? Will the use of cadavers be replaced in studies? Why or why not?
2. Roach describes the smell of decomposing human: "it is dense and cloying, sweet but not flower sweet. Halfway between rotting fruit and rotting meat." But modern embalming methods allow us to present odorless, good-looking, corpses at funerals. How does Roach present this idea in the book? Has modern mortuary science made death more aesthetically pleasing than what goes on at the University of Tennessee? Why would that be necessary and does this cause problems for modern society?
3. Many research studies that made use of cadavers raise questions about maintaining the dignity of the deceased. How does Roach develop this point in chapters four and six? Do you think that the humanitarian benefits of experimenting on cadavers can outweigh any potential breach of respect for the dead? Why or why not?
4. The heart cut from the chest, can keep beating on its own for as long as a minute or two. This, Roach says, reflects centuries of confusion over how exactly to define death. What modern scientific experiments does Roach discuss? Have these helped us to pinpoint the precise moment when life ceases to exist and all that's left is a corpse? Explain.
5. In "Chapter 11", Roach journeys to an island in Sweden, where a forty-seven year old biologist-entrepreneur has made a business that has major corporate backing and an international patent. Describe this business. Would this business gain traction where you live? Why or why not?

Questions modified from W.W. Norton and Company publisher

***Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (Nonfiction choice)**

1. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* opens with Abdul Husain hiding from the police after his disabled neighbor accuses him, his father, and his older sister of setting her on fire. As Abdul burrows in his trash shed, Boo provides brief and stark contrasting descriptions of squatters' living conditions in Annawadi and the buildings surrounding India's gleaming international airport. Why do you think the author opens the book with this particular incident and the contrasting descriptions?

2. The next sections of the book are: "Undercitizens"; "The Business of Burning"; "A Little Wildness"; and "Up and Out." In "Undercitizens," Boo introduces the reader to other Annawadi residents besides Abdul, including Asha, an aspiring Annawadi politician; Sunil, an essentially orphaned trash scavenger; and Manju, Asha's virtuous daughter, who is poised to become Annawadi's first female college graduate. "The Business of Burning" is about how economic hope and official corruption intensify conflicts among Annawadians. "A Little Wildness" details the shocking deaths of several young Annawadians, which get covered up by public officials. Finally, "Up and Out" provides closure to the immediate conflicts presented in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. These closures are largely psychological in nature. While some Annawadians have finally moved "up" in social status, they are certainly not "out"—free from the undercity's grip. Others retain the same undercity position yet have gathered inner strength to go on trying. Each of these sections begins with a quote from an Annawadi resident. Discuss the choice of quotes and their relation to the section titles.

3. Asha asks at the end of the book, as she prepares to engage in educational corruption, "How is it my wrong if the big people say it is right?" Does she have a point? The book shows how difficult it is to act ethically in an unethical world. But is it inevitable that, as Abdul says, an idealistic young person will become "dirty water like everyone else"? Do you ever feel yourself struggling to do good when circumstances are pushing you in the opposite direction?

4. The lives of ordinary woman are an important part of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Do women like Zehrunisa and Asha have more freedom in an urban slum than they would have had in the villages where they were born? What is Meena, a Dalit, spared by living in the city? What freedoms do Meena, Asha, and Zehrunisa still lack, in your view? Compare the experiences of the Annawadi women and girls to the experiences of their American counterparts.

5. After reading *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, who do you feel most hopeful for, and why? Whose future do you worry about most? Develop a position on the success or failure the next generation of slum dwellers face based on the experiences of the Annawadians. Support this position using examples from the book.

Fiction Choices. Read one.

***Things Fall Apart* (Fiction choice)**

1. The book opens with a presentation of the relationship between Okonkwo and his father. Throughout the book there are many discussions of fathers and sons. Discuss what happens with:

Okonkwo and Unoka

Okonkwo and Ikemefuna

Okonkwo and Nwoye

How do these relationships make Okonkwo the character he is? Is his character seen as likeable because of these relationships or do they cast him in a negative light? Explain.

2. Okonkwo can be called a tragic hero; a man responsible for his own destruction. Trace Okonkwo's reversal focusing on events of his own making. What is Okonkwo's tragic flaw? Is this a reflection of his culture or universal? Explain.

3. The book is divided into three parts. What is the overall purpose of each of the three parts? How do the major plot events in each part reflect the purpose? How does each part introduce a new aspect to Okonkwo's character? What aspect is that?

4. Achebe makes commentary about the colonization of Africa in his book. How is this commentary shown? Is it positive or negative? Explain. How is the Christian interpretation introduced at the end of the book? Does Achebe see this as a correct or misguided interpretation? Explain.

5. In Chapter 1 Okonkwo says he hates gentleness and idleness (pg 13). Discuss whether the events of the book support or disprove this statement. Because of these events is Okonkwo a character you are meant to like or hate? Explain.

***Purple Hibiscus* (Fiction choice)**

1. The novel is composed of four sections. Explain the significance of the four section headings, focusing on the key words and concepts: "gods" and "spirits," "breaking" and "pieces," and "speaking" and "silence." Why is the novel structured around Palm Sunday?
2. What is the role of religion in the novel? What is Kambili's relationship to Catholicism? How does it make her feel? What is the relationship of the religion brought by colonialism to the traditional religion of ancestral worship? What is the author saying about the clash between the two ways of life? Who does she feel suffers the most?
3. In some respects, Kambili's story is similar to a traditional form of the novel called a bildungsroman. A bildungsroman follows the intellectual and moral development of a young character, usually a boy, as he discovers a place for himself in the world. While this novel is more modern than traditional, *Purple Hibiscus* is the story of a young character who seeks to define herself in a world beyond the one her father created for her. Discuss how the book might be seen as an example of a bildungsroman.
4. In one of her many descriptions of her aunt, Kambili says "When she barged into the dining room upstairs, I imagined a proud ancient forebear, walking miles to fetch water in homemade clay pots, nursing babies until they walked and talked, fighting wars with machetes sharpened on sun warmed stone. She filled a room" (p.80). In contrast, the narrator in Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* says, "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man." These thoughts evoke very different images of women in Nigerian culture. Discuss the role of women in the novel as it is presented through Kambili's mother and her aunt. As a young woman, how does Kambili view her choices? Is Nigeria's patriarchal past present in the novel? Explain.
5. Silence is almost another character in the novel. Discuss the types of silence in the novel, specifically regarding Kambili. For example, she mentions early in the story that her family asked "each other questions whose answers we already knew. Perhaps it was so that we would not ask the other questions, the ones whose answers we did not want to know"(p. 23). Characterize this silence and why it exists in her family. How does this silence interfere with Kambili's maturation? Does this kind of silence persist until the end of the novel? At another point, early in the story, Kambili must speak in front of her classmates, "I cleared my throat, willed the words to come. I knew them, thought them. But they would not come"(p. 48). How is this silence different from the silence described above? When does Kambili begin to find her voice? Is it problematic to have a narrator who is always struggling to find her words? Explain.

***The Road* (Fiction choice)**

1. Describe the two characters of "the man" and "the boy". For each of the two characters, give two quotations from the book that present the essential qualities of each one's personality. Why do you think McCarthy has chosen not to give his characters names? How do the generic labels affect the way the readers relate to them?
2. Using details from the novel, describe how McCarthy is able to make the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* seem so real and utterly terrifying? Which descriptive passages are especially vivid and visceral in their depiction of this blasted landscape? What do you find to be the most horrifying features of this world and the survivors who inhabit it? How difficult or easy is it to imagine McCarthy's nightmare vision actually happening? Discuss how the people seem to behave in this world. Do you think people would likely behave as they do in the novel, under the same circumstances? Does it now seem that human civilization is headed toward such an end? Explain.
3. The man and the boy think of themselves as the "good guys." Using details from the novel discuss in what ways they are like and unlike the "bad guys" they encounter? What do you think McCarthy is suggesting in the scenes in which the boy begs his father to be merciful to the strangers they encounter on the road? How is the boy able to retain his compassion? What does *The Road* ultimately suggest about good and evil? Which force seems to have greater power in the novel?
4. The sardonic blind man named Ely who the man and boy encounter on the road tells the father that, "There is no God and we are his prophets"(p. 170). What is the context of this quotation and what does he mean by this? Why does the father say about his son, later in the same conversation, "What if I said that he's a god?"(p. 172)? Are we meant to see the son as a savior? Why or why not?
5. *The Road* takes the form of a classic journey story. To what destination are the man and the boy journeying both literally and symbolically? In what sense are they "pilgrims"? What is the symbolic significance of their journey? Why do you think McCarthy ends the novel with the image of trout in mountain streams before the end of the world-"In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery"(p. 287). What is surprising about this ending? Does it provide closure, or does it prompt a rethinking of all that has come before? What does it suggest about what lies ahead? Explain.

***The Poisonwood Bible* (Fiction choice)**

1. What are the implications of the novel's title phrase, the poisonwood bible, particularly in connection with the main characters' lives and the novel's main themes? What are the circumstances in which the phrase comes into being? How important are they?
2. How does Kingsolver differentiate among the Price sisters, particularly in terms of their voices? What does each sister reveal about herself and the other three, their relationships, their mother and father, and their lives in Africa? What is the effect of our learning about events and people through the sisters' eyes?
3. What do we learn about cultural, social, religious, and other differences between Africa and America? Provide details from the book. To what degree do Orleanna and her daughters come to an understanding of those differences? What is Kingsolver's message concerning these differences? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
4. How does Kingsolver present the double themes of captivity and freedom and of love and betrayal? What kinds of captivity and freedom does she explore? Provide details from the book. What kinds of love and betrayal? Provide details from the book. What are the causes and consequences of each kind of captivity, freedom, love, and betrayal?
5. At Bikoki Station, in 1965, Leah reflects, "I still know what justice is." Does she? Explain using examples. What concept of justice does each member of the Price family and other characters (Anatole, for example) hold? Do you have a sense that, by the novel's end, any true justice has occurred? Explain.

Modified from ReadingGroupGuides.com

***The Cloud Atlas* (Fiction choice)**

1. Is this a cautionary tale...a prognosis....a diagnosis? Use examples to support your answer. In Mitchell's tales, what do humans seem bent on doing to one another and why? With little left at the end, what, if anything remains?
2. How do each of the tales fit together...forward and backward? Put the pieces of the puzzle together-showing how one story links to another. How for instance is Luisa Rey connected to Frobisher? What is the role of the birthmark in all the stories?
3. Why does Mitchell use the structure he does? What might he be hoping to achieve through the six interrelated stories? Each is based on a specific genre. Identify which tale is a epistolary, mystery, farce, sci-fi, and post apocalyptic. What is the effect, then, of reversing the tales and going backwards?
4. Using examples explain the role of science. Is it portrayed positively or negatively? What is the novel saying about interfering with nature? Use examples to develop your answer.
5. According to Mitchell "the book's theme is predacity, the way individuals prey on individuals, groups on groups, nations on nations, tribes on tribes." How is this theme developed in the book? Use examples. What is the critical statement Mitchell is making about predators and prey?

Love in the Time of Cholera (Fiction choice)

1. Plagues figure prominently in many of García Márquez's novels. What literal and metaphoric functions does the cholera plague serve in this novel? What light does it shed on Latin American society of the nineteenth century? How does it change its characters' attitudes toward life? How are the symptoms of love equated in the novel with the symptoms of cholera?
2. Dr. Urbino reads only what is considered fine literature, while Fermina Daza immerses herself in contemporary romances or soap operas. What does this reveal about the author's attitude toward the distinction between "high" and "low" literature. Does his story line and style remind you more of a soap opera or a classical drama? Provide examples from the story to illustrate your opinion.
3. Set against the backdrop of recurring civil wars and cholera epidemics, the novel explores death and decay, as well as love. Describe Dr. Urbino's refusal to grow old. How does Dr. Urbino's refusal to grow old gracefully affect the other two characters? What does it say about fulfillment and beauty in their society? Does the fear of aging or death change Florentino Ariza's feelings toward Fermina Daza? Use examples to illustrate how.
4. Compare the suicide of Jeremiah de Saint-Amour at the beginning of the book with that of Florentino's former lover, América Vicuña at the end. How do their motives differ? Why does the author frame the book with these two events?
5. Several times in the book, Florentino Ariza states that he loves Fermina Daza exclusively. Does this seem realistic, given his experiences during the fifty plus years that he is separated from Fermina Daza? How does this reconcile with his avowal that he can love more than one person at a time?

***The Round House* (Fiction choice)**

1. Joe's whole family is rocked by the attack on his mother. How does it affect the relationship between his mother and father, and between him and his mother? Does it alter Joe's view of them? Can trauma force a child to grow up "overnight"? What impact does it have on Joe? How does it transform his family?

2. What is the significance of *The Round House*? What is the importance of the Ojibwe legends that are scattered through the novel? How do they reflect and deepen the main story? What can we learn from the old ways of people like the Ojibwe? Is Joe proud of his heritage? Explain. Discuss the connection between the natural and animal world and the tribe's spirituality.

3. Secondary characters, including Mooshum, Linda Wishkob, Sonja, Whitey, Clemence, and Father Travis, play indelible roles in the central story. Talk about their interactions with Joe and his friends and parents. What do their stories tell about the wider world of the reservation and about relations between white and Native Americans?

4. Towards the novel's climax, Father Travis tells Joe, "in order to purify yourself, you have to understand yourself. Everything out in the world is also in you. Good, bad, evil, perfection, death, everything. So we study our souls." Would you say this is a good characterization of humanity? How is each of these things visible in Joe's personality?

5. "The only thing that God can do, and does all the time, is to draw good from any evil situation," the priest advised Joe. What good does Joe—and also his family—draw from the events of the summer? What life lessons did Joe learn that summer of 1988?