

# American Literature Honors

## Summer Reading Assignment

Mr. Gilbert

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***The Underground Railroad*** by Colson Whitehead.

Available on Amazon.

***Citizen: An American Lyric*** by Claudia Rankine.

Available on Amazon.

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In American Literature, we will read. You will read in this class more than you've read in your entire life. The class is intended to prepare you for Advanced Placement Language and Composition as well as perfect your skills for the FSA. But, we will also have serious conversations about life and literature, answering questions that have plagued (poor choice of words, I know) humanity for years, particularly authors and poets. We will express our creative sides as well write until our hands hurt.

We will focus this year on representation in American Literature, reading across the spectrum of authors – from traditional writers like Faulkner and Melville to more contemporary ones like Colson Whitehead and Lauren Groff. The goal will be to challenge your mind, heart, and attention span while also helping you succeed in all walks of life, particularly when it comes to testing and writing and thinking. The goal will be to know what it means to be human and what it means to be American.

I know many of you are coming from a difficult freshman year, with multiple teachers and an entire fourth quarter lost in the classroom. I am willing to work with you concerning the summer reading but I cannot help you unless you e-mail me. These books are ones I think everyone will love – they'll make you laugh, cry, and remember what it means to read. Please enjoy them while also taking your time when it comes to the work. The portfolio you are to do is on the following page.

Mr. Gilbert

# ***The Underground Railroad***

## ***Literary Portfolio***

<b>Category</b>	<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>	<b>Points Awarded</b>
<b>Front Cover</b>	Create an artistic representation of the book. Please do not copy and paste the original cover art to your front page – make it your own interpretation.	One page	10	
<b>Table of Contents</b>	Make a Table of Contents detailing each of the items below. Start with Introduction. Number the pages appropriately.	One page	10	
<b>Introduction</b>	This section should offer background information for the reader – you must describe the historical and cultural background of the novel.	One page	15	
<b>Memorable Scene</b>	Choose a memorable or significant scene from the novel and write about it. Describe the scene (what happens, why is involved, etc.) and why it is significant to the novel. Add an illustration if you'd like.	One – two pages max.	20	
<b>Quotations</b>	Compile a list of fifteen significant quotations from important moments in the novel. It can either be significant in terms of plot or just impactful writing. Use MLA format to cite the page numbers for each quote. Explain why each quote is important – not a summary of the quote – but how it is important to the novel.	One – two pages max.	30	
<b>Novel Commentary/Analysis</b>	For each chapter of the novel answer HOW – How does the scene influence the story? How does the plot move? How does the author reveal the theme? How do the actions of the main characters influence the story?	Two pages max.	30	
<b>Character Analysis</b>	Describe the major characters of the novel. Give their vital statistics. Are they the protagonist/antagonist? What is their purpose to the protagonist/antagonist? What is their relationship to the other characters? What is their profession? Etc. (Minimum of 5)	One – two pages max.	30	
<b>Themes</b>	Describe and explain the themes of the novel (3). What general issues, contrasts, emotions, feelings, qualities, etc. are repeatedly addressed? Be sure to use quotes to support your choices.	One page	20	
<b>Literary Devices</b>	Choose three (irony, symbolism, language, setting, etc.) and describe and explain it. Be sure to use quotes to support your choices. One paragraph of 7 – 8 sentences per device.	One page	20	
<b>Opinion</b>	Express your opinion of the novel. Move beyond "I liked/didn't like the novel." Would you recommend this book to others? Why?	Two pages max.	10	
<b>Back Cover</b>	Provide the bibliographic information for the novel in correct MLA format. Provide a brief biography of the author.	One page	10	
<b>Total Points</b>	Please bind your portfolio and use sheet protectors for separate pages. Do not staple or use paper clips. No handwritten items please.	20 pages max.	250	

*Citizen: An American Lyric*  
*Reflection Essay*

*Citizen* is an extraordinarily relevant and powerful example of the potential of poetry and literature. It reflects a shared experience within the African-American culture while also analyzes popular culture and society as whole. In the first week of school next year, we will have a Socratic seminar discussing the elements of Rankine's book length poem. We will address the structure – dismantling your current conception of what poetry is – while also launching into an important discussion about American Literature.

In an essay that is not formulaic but, instead, reflective and personal, evaluate Rankine's work. Consider the form (how it is written), the syntax (the words and style it was written) as well as the content (what it is actually saying). Also consider your personal reactions and emotions during the text. We will tie this partially into another unit later in the year. This essay has no requirements except that it be at least 1500 words. This means you must take the text itself and respond to it.

This will be a difficult assignment if you're doing it right – i.e. it's thoughtful and personal. You may tie the work into personal experience. You may tie it into news headlines or culture. We will connect these two texts with a third text on the second day of school when we get back as a kind of quick unit to get everyone familiar with the structure of my class as well as all of us getting comfortable with one another as quickly as possible.