

English 9—“Honor vs. Reputation”

Summer reading: Choose **two** of the following (listed from most accessible to most challenging, though all four are ideal summer reading texts in that they are the most accessible texts of the year):

- Adib Khorram, *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* (2018, present day)
- Erika L. Sánchez, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2017, present day)
- Stephen Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999, but set in 1991-1992)
- Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You* (2014, but set in 1977)

Summer assignment: In the spirit of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, you’ll write letters to me (instead of an essay) about your thoughts on these books. You’ll still type the letters as Google docs and then wait to turn them in on Classroom in the fall, but I want you to write more personally and conversationally than you usually will in classroom assignments. Type two letters per book—one when you’re about halfway through the book, and one when you’ve finished it. More details:

- Each letter should be 400-500 words. (*Obviously NO plagiarism, AI, or online summaries.*)
 - Since you’re writing two letters per book, that’s 800-1000 words per book.
 - Since you’re writing letters for two books, **your total word count will be 1600-2000.**
- These letters should NOT be summaries of plot points, but they should reference specific details.
 - I’ve read these books several times, so you don’t need to explain to me what happens. Instead, your letters should tell me what you think about the books. For example:
 - Which characters do you like/dislike? Which scenes are your favorites?
 - Can you relate to any characters or plot points? You can spend up to 25% of your letters telling me about yourself, as long as your details relate to the books.
 - Did either book reinforce or change your way of thinking or seeing the world?
 - In the first letter for each book, you could predict the ending. In the second letter for each book, you could discuss whether you found the ending satisfying.

Notes on why I chose these texts:

- All four of these books are important and terrific companions to our first major text, J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*. Just as *Catcher* deals with depression and mature themes, so do these. I try to straddle the line between content warnings and spoilers, so please let me know if you’d like a list of specific scenes and subjects to be aware of, and I’d be happy to provide them.
- Differentiation and representation are both important to me, which is why I’m offering a choice for the summer before your first year of high school. Select the novels that most speak to you and will challenge you in some way. Reading level is only one way. Learning about other cultures, experiences, and time periods is another. You’re required to read two; feel free to read more!

Tips to help you (and your parents/family!) choose which books to read:

- The two books containing the most mature material are *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. These are also the two books most directly related to *The Catcher in the Rye*; both books even reference *Catcher* by name several times.
- Three of these books feature multicultural families and themes: Darius from *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* has a white father and a Persian-American mother. Much of the book takes place in Iran. Julia from *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* is the daughter of Mexican immigrants. A small portion of this book takes place in Mexico. Lydia from *Everything I Never Told You* has a Chinese-American father and a white mother.
- These books, especially *The Perks of Being Wallflower*, feature LGBTQ+ characters.
- For students interested in mysteries, both *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and *Everything I Never Told You* center around the mystery of a young woman who has just died.
- The only book classified as an “adult” rather than “young adult” novel is *Everything I Never Told You*. It has the highest reading level and is the only one likely to be taught in an AP Lit class.

For the first two weeks of class, we’ll have three different kinds of discussions about these books, and we’ll do a group activity meant to prepare you for writing essays in my class—both in-class and take-home. Also, the first essay you’ll write in English 9 will be a take-home essay over *The Catcher in the Rye*, and you’ll be welcome to incorporate one or more of these summer reading books.

It’s very important that you read and think deeply about at least two books from this list! The summer reading will affect not just one assignment/grade, but several assignments/grades.

I’m so looking forward to teaching you next year. Happy reading!

—Ms. Johnson

P.S. In case you’re interested in knowing what other works we’re reading in English 9, here they are:

- Two poetry units (one in the fall and one in the spring)
 - A packet of contemporary poems by various poets, all connected to summer reading
 - Selected poems from a collection, Safia Elhillo’s *Girls That Never Die*
- Three novels:
 - J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*
 - Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*
 - Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*
- Three plays:
 - Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
 - William Shakespeare, *Othello*
 - Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Summer Reading Assignment	Content / Word Count	Selection of Detail	Accuracy / Depth of Thought	Structure / Conventions
Above Average A+ <u>25</u> A <u>22.5</u> B <u>20</u>	4 letters, each 400-500 words, for a total of 1600-2000 words. Responses to the books (letters), not summaries (book reports). Content is all killer, no filler.	Up to 25% of the response contains connections from your life to these books, and those details feel relevant. At least 75% of this response centers on the books.	Demonstrates you read both books closely and thought about them deeply. The details you mention about both books are accurate and specific.	Well-organized, well-written, and carefully edited for errors. Formatted like a letter. Structured in a way that makes sense and enhances content.
Average C <u>17.5</u>	4 letters, each 400-500 words, for a total of 1600-2000 words. Responses to the books (letters), not summaries (book reports). Content might contain a little filler (not much).	Up to 25% of the response contains connections from your life to these books, though the connections might not always feel relevant. At least 75% of this response centers on the books.	Demonstrates you (probably) read both books. The details you mention about one or both books is mostly accurate but more general than I'd like.	Written in a way that's compelling, even if it could use more careful editing. Structure does not detract from content.
Below Average D <u>15</u> F <u>0-12.5</u>	Does not meet requirements for some reason—may fall short, contain filler, feel like book reports more than letters, etc.	There are so many details from your life here, they feel more like a way to avoid writing about the books than a way to make meaningful connections.	Though you may have read one or both books, your writing does not demonstrate that obviously enough. These letters should leave no doubt in my mind.	Difficult to read for one or more reasons—could be issues having to do with structure, conventions, fluency, etc.

Score: _____ /100