

English 11 Summer Reading:

The Namesake (Jhumpa Lahiri) and *There There* (Tommy Orange)

Please select one option for each book. You're welcome to pick the same option for both books, or to do a different option for each book. **Each assignment must be at least 750 words (per book), for a total of 1500 words.** All three of these options are meant to enhance your reading, as well as the first discussions we'll have together as a class.

1. **Discussion questions:** One of my favorite literary quotes is Walt Whitman's "Be curious, not judgmental." (It has since been made even more famous by Ted Lasso.) I think letting curiosity guide us is an excellent way to live—and to read. For this assignment, I just want you to stop at the end of each chapter and write a discussion question—AND I want you to answer your own question. The best discussion questions are about something you're genuinely curious about—Why does the character make this choice instead of that one? What is the setting adding to this part? Why does this part make me uncomfortable? It's great to make connections to the characters and the books, but for the most part your answers should stick to the text. A bonus for selecting this option is that posing and answering discussion questions is how I'll run most class periods, so this will prepare you for that process.
2. **Playlist for a character:** Make a playlist for a character in the book and explain why you've chosen each song for that character. Be specific in your explanations—include which songs would've comforted that character or brought them joy in certain parts of the book. I was imagining you'd make one for your favorite character, but it could be for any character. Maybe it'd be an interesting exercise in empathy if you selected your least favorite character. There's no minimum number of songs, but remember that minimum word count of 750. You're welcome to include lyrics, but your OWN words must make up the word count. Include as many specific scenes and details from the book as possible. Don't just write a playlist of songs you like, though you can certainly include songs you like. Really try to capture this character's tastes and moods as you consider which songs to include.
3. **Explore the class theme:** Our English 11 theme is "The Great American _____." Over the course of this year, we'll fill in that blank with "novel," "drama," "truth," and "poem," as we explore different literary genres. We're starting with The Great American Novel, and your summer reads are two of my nominations for that elusive title. (We'll start the school year with two more—F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. All four books were included in *The Atlantic*'s March 2024 list of Great American Novels.) For this option, come up with your personal definition of what a novel would need to be or do to qualify as "The Great American Novel"—and then discuss to what extent this book does or does not meet that definition. Maybe you'll have a list of specific criteria and you can use that to frame your response. Be specific and include lots of examples from the text.

Please type your responses. (And of course do make sure these thoughts are all yours, no AI or Sparknotes, etc.—I want to know what *you* think!) You'll eventually turn these in on Classroom, which I'll have more information about in the fall. I'm so looking forward to meeting you all and having fun/meaningful discussions about literature with you.

—Ms. Johnson