

English 9 Summer Reading:

Circe (Madeline Miller) and *The Penelopiad* (Margaret Atwood)

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 9 theme is "Hero's Journey," and we'll really unpack that word "hero" together. The first time I read *The Odyssey*, it was my student teaching semester, and that teacher described Odysseus a hero seemingly without questioning it. (I questioned it!) I like the idea of meeting two important women in Odysseus' life—Circe and Penelope—even before we meet him. We'll see Odysseus filtered through their perspectives first. For this option, define what the word "hero" means to you and determine which—if any—of the characters in the book meet your definition. Please discuss at least three characters, and remember that minimum word count of 750. Be specific in your responses and include lots of examples from the text. (It'll be interesting to see if your opinions on the characters change after we read Homer's *The Odyssey*, our first text of the year.)

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