

SUMMER READING 2011-2012 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Freshmen

My Sister's Keeper

1. What qualities must a person have to be considered a good parent?
2. Is it ethical to use modern science to create “designer” babies for medical purposes?
3. In what way does loss sometimes help people to put their lives into a more positive perspective?
4. Because we can, should we?

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn

1. How does the historical context of the novel reflect Francie's stages of development?
2. How does ethnic and religious background help to shape a person's identity and values?
3. What value does education (schooling) have in empowering a person to overcome obstacles? How are life lessons sometimes just as valuable?
4. What role does song and singing play in the novel?

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas

1. How can the innocence of children sometimes reveal the ignorance of adults?
2. How can mob mentality affect a society (particularly that of Nazi Germany)? What effects does the suppression of individual thought have on people?
3. How do fear and intimidation often silence people from speaking up against authority?
4. What is the essence of true friendship?
5. Can adults be naïve?

Black Like Me

1. How does fear affect society?
2. What is the definition of dehumanization?
3. How can citizens, including ourselves, break through barriers of prejudice to promote tolerance?

The Secret Life of Bees

1. How does Sue Monk Kidd, the author, use historical context to help define the characters and the personal issues they have to deal with?
2. How can citizens, including ourselves, break through barriers of prejudice to promote tolerance?
In particular, *The Secret Life of Bees* focuses on our need to be loved as the essential human condition. And if the need for love is our most basic emotional need, then what could be more despairing than to feel, unloved and why?

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society

1. The power of books to nourish people during hard times is most notable in this piece of literature. How do books help to endure such times? How is this applicable in your life? Simply put: Do you believe that books have the power to lift people out of the most trying circumstances?
2. Can fiction sometimes make historic events more understandable or does it distort the facts?
3. Numerous Guernsey residents give Juliet access to their private memories of the occupation. Which voices were most memorable for you? What is the effect of reading a variety of responses to a shared tragedy?

Sophomores

Speak

1. How do our social institutions (i.e. school, work, family) cause us to conform and/or compromise our individual values?
2. What is our responsibility to others in terms of disclosing a universal threat/potential danger?
3. Who is a "real American"?
4. Why do we sometimes alienate people who have specific talents?
5. Why is it so important to speak up for yourself? How can internal battles contribute to a person's inability to communicate problems with others?
6. How is it both a relief and a disappointment to leave childhood traditions behind as we get older?

We All Fall Down

1. Is everyone entitled to forgiveness?

2. What predisposes others to carry out random violence on others?
3. Who is best served by forgiveness, the perpetrator of a crime or the victim?
4. What does the title stand for?

Whale Talk

1. How are racism and bias self-defeating?
2. In what ways do we undervalue or underestimate the misfits or outcasts in our society?
3. How do we foster tolerance of others in our lives?
4. What defines effective leadership?
5. How are prejudices formed?
6. How does ethnicity affect one's self image?

The Year We Disappeared

1. How effectively does this story present non-violence as response to violence?
2. Consider the way in which Cylin's life and/or the lives of her siblings, mother, and cousin were affected by what happened. How do their experiences inform readers of the unintended consequences of violence?
3. Who is most to blame for the harm done to the Busby family? Is this book an indictment of an individual or a society?
4. Does this story have a moral? If so, what?

Nothing but the Truth

1. What does it mean to "stick up for your rights?" How far should a person go in doing so?
2. How do people formulate their values? Are values inherited from upbringing or are they something that can be taught?
3. How does one interpret the truth of a situation? Does truth vary based on different perspectives?

Juniors

The Book Thief

1. What is the effect of having Death serve as the narrator?
2. What is the significance of colors in the book?
3. In the novel, words have the power to both destroy and save lives. Discuss.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

1. Which scenes are comical in the novel, and why are they funny? Are these same situations also sad, or exasperating?
2. What is the significance of colors in the book?
3. Despite Christopher's many behavioral problems, do you feel sympathy or empathy for him? What makes him a likeable character?

Into the Wild

1. The author claims that *Into the Wild* is very much a story about a son's relationship with his father. What conclusions did you make regarding McCandless's response to his family?
2. What significance did you attach to Chris's last entry into his journal quoting Dr. Zhivago? "Happiness is only real when shared"?
3. Do you agree with Krakauer's view of Chris McCandless throughout the story? Be specific.
4. Do you think McCandless is mentally ill? What is mental illness?

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

1. Should the book, Huckleberry Finn, be taught? Support your answer with specifics.
2. Why did Twain use a young boy as the narrator of this novel?
3. Provide an example of satire. (Satire: the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, or the like, in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice, folly, etc.)
4. How is the river symbolic?

Snow in August

1. How does Snow in August reflect race relations in the United States at the time of the novel?
2. How does chance affect important events in the book? How are these events "acts of God"? Why are Michael and the Rabbi brought together?
3. Why is baseball so important to Rabbi Hirsch? Why does he relate so strongly to Jackie Robinson?

Seniors

The Devil in the White City

1. In what ways does the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 change America? What lasting inventions and ideas did it introduce into American culture? What important figures were critically influenced by the Fair?
2. At the end of the book, Larson suggests that "Exactly what motivated Holmes may never be known." What possible motives are exposed in *The Devil in the White City*? Why is it important to try to understand the motives of a person like Holmes?
3. How was Holmes able to exert such power over his victims? What weaknesses did he prey upon? Why wasn't he caught earlier? In what ways does his story "illustrate the end of the century" as the *Chicago Times-Herald* wrote?
4. What is the total picture of late nineteenth-century America that emerges from *The Devil in the White City*? How is that time both like and unlike contemporary America? What are the most significant differences? In what ways does that time mirror the present?
5. What satisfaction can be derived from a nonfiction book like *The Devil in the White City* that cannot be found in novels? In what ways is the book like a novel?

Heart of Darkness

1. What are the origins of evil and darkness in this novel?
2. According to the author, is human nature innately evil?
3. How do characters change during this novel and how is this change related to a journey?
4. What makes man civilized?

Handmaid's Tale

1. How is the world of this novel structured to keep certain people in line and why do you suppose it is this way?
2. What is the author saying about alienation in this novel?
3. According to the author, is human nature innately evil?

A Thousand Splendid Suns

1. What represents the turning point in the protagonist's life?
2. Can people control their destiny or are they simply victims of circumstance?
3. What is the author saying about alienation in this novel?

My Losing Season

1. What is the author saying about family relationships?
2. How does one overcome the influence of bad role models?
3. Can good be gained from failure?