

HOLY CHILD

EDUCATING YOUNG WOMEN OF CONSCIENCE AND ACTION

June 15, 2018

Dear Parent or Guardian:

This summer, students will read works of literature that explore issues of race, class, and gender in our efforts to understand how the American tradition of literature came to be established and what it means to be American. This summer's required reading and the optional texts deal with mature themes and complex issues. Provided for you below is a brief summary of the required reading, *Prep*, by Curtis Sittenfeld, and a shorter summary of each of the optional books. If you have any questions or concerns about any of the texts, please contact me as soon as possible.

Curtis Sittenfeld's debut novel, *Prep*, is an insightful, achingly funny coming-of-age story as well as a brilliant dissection of class, race, and gender in a hothouse of adolescent angst and ambition. Lee Fiora is an intelligent, observant fourteen-year-old when her father drops her off in front of her dorm at the prestigious Ault School in Massachusetts. She leaves her animated, affectionate family in South Bend, Indiana, at least in part because of the boarding school's glossy brochure, in which boys in sweaters chat in front of old brick buildings, girls in kilts hold lacrosse sticks on pristinely mown athletic fields, and everyone sings hymns in chapel. As Lee soon learns, Ault is a cloistered world of jaded, attractive teenagers who spend summers on Nantucket and speak in their own clever shorthand. Both intimidated and fascinated by her classmates, Lee becomes a shrewd observer of - and, ultimately, a participant in - their rituals and mores. As a scholarship student, she constantly feels like an outsider and is both drawn to and repelled by other loners. By the time she's a senior, Lee has created a hard-won place for herself at Ault. But when her behavior takes a self-destructive and highly public turn, her carefully crafted identity within the community is shattered. Ultimately, Lee's experiences-complicated relationships with teachers; intense friendships with other girls; an all-consuming preoccupation with a classmate who is less than a boyfriend and more than a crush; conflicts with her parents, from whom Lee feels increasingly distant, coalesce into a singular portrait of the painful and thrilling adolescence universal to us all. (randomhouse.com)

STUDENT CHOICE: NON FICTION – Choose one

The Woman Warrior ~ In her award-winning book *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston created an entirely new form—an exhilarating blend of autobiography and mythology, of world and self, of hot rage and cool analysis. As a girl, Kingston lives in two confounding worlds: the California to which her parents have immigrated and the China of her mother's "talk stories." First published in 1976, it has become a classic in its innovative portrayal of multiple and intersecting identities—immigrant, female, Chinese, American. (penguinrandomhouse.com)

Into the Wild ~ In April 1992 a young man from a well-to-do family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. His name was Christopher Johnson McCandless. He had given \$25,000 in savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Four months later, his decomposed body was found by a moose hunter. How McCandless came to die is the unforgettable story of *Into the Wild*. Digging deeply, Krakauer takes an inherently compelling mystery and unravels the larger riddles it holds: the profound pull of the American wilderness on our imagination; the allure of high-risk activities to young men of a certain cast of mind; the complex, charged bond between fathers and sons. (penguinrandomhouse.com)

The Glass Castle ~ Jeannette Walls grew up with parents whose ideals and stubborn nonconformity were both their curse and their salvation. Rex and Rose Mary Walls had four children. In the beginning, they lived like nomads, moving among Southwest desert towns, camping in the mountains. Rex was a charismatic, brilliant man who, when sober, captured his children's imagination,

teaching them physics, geology, and above all, how to embrace life fearlessly. Rose Mary, who painted and wrote and couldn't stand the responsibility of providing for her family, called herself an "excitement addict." As the dysfunction of the family escalated, Jeannette and her brother and sisters had to fend for themselves. What is so astonishing about Jeannette Walls is not just that she had the guts and tenacity and intelligence to get out, but that she describes her parents with such deep affection and generosity. Hers is a story of triumph against all odds. (simonandschuster.com)

This Boy's Life ~ This unforgettable memoir of boyhood in the 1950s, a true modern classic, introduces us to the young Toby Wolff, by turns tough and vulnerable, crafty and bumbling. Separated by divorce from his father and brother, Toby and his mother are constantly on the move. As he fights for identity and self-respect against the unrelenting hostility of a new stepfather, his experiences are at once poignant and comical, and Wolff masterfully re-creates the frustrations, cruelties, and joys of adolescence. His various schemes—running away to Alaska, forging checks, and stealing cars—lead eventually to an act of outrageous self-invention that releases him into a new world of possibility. (groveatlantic.com)

STUDENT CHOICE: FICTION – Choose one

Caucasia ~ Birdie and Cole are the daughters of a black father and a white mother, intellectuals and activists in the Civil Rights Movement in 1970s Boston. The sisters are close, yet to the outside world they can't be sisters: Birdie appears to be white, while Cole is dark enough to fit in with the other kids at the Afrocentric school they attend. Then their parents' marriage falls apart. One night Birdie watches her father drive away with Cole - they have gone to Brazil, where her father hopes for a racial equality he will never find in the States. The next morning - in the belief that the Feds are after them - Birdie and her mother leave everything behind: their house and possessions, their friends, and-most disturbing of all - their identity. Desperate to find Cole, yet afraid of betraying her mother, Birdie must learn to navigate the white world - so that when she sets off in search of her sister, she is ready for what she will find. (penguinrandomhouse.com)

Anywhere But Here ~ *Anywhere But Here* is the heart-rending tale of a mother and daughter. A moving, often comic portrait of wise child Ann August and her mother, Adele, a larger-than-life American dreamer, the novel follows the two women as they travel through the landscape of their often conflicting ambitions. A brilliant exploration of the perennial urge to keep moving, even at the risk of profound disorientation, *Anywhere But Here* is a story about the things we do for love, and a powerful study of familial bonds. (penguinrandomhouse.com)

Absolutely True Diary of Part-Time Indian ~ Sherman Alexie tells the story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot. Heartbreaking, funny, and beautifully written, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which is based on the author's own experiences, coupled with poignant drawings that reflect the character's art, chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one Native American boy as he attempts to break away from the life he was destined to live. (hachettebookgroup.com)

A Gate at the Stairs ~ Twenty-year-old Tassie Keltjin, the daughter of a gentleman farmer, has come to a university town as a student. When she takes a job as a part-time nanny for a mysterious and glamorous family, she finds herself drawn deeper into their world and forever changed. Told through the eyes of this memorable narrator, *A Gate at the Stairs* is a piercing novel of race, class, love, and war in America. (penguinrandomhouse.com)

Sincerely,

Christina Saraceno
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