

Honors Sophomore English Summer Assignment

Please fill out this quick [Microsoft Forms survey](#) to confirm that you received this summer assignment.

In preparation for our dystopia unit in the Fall, you will need to read two dystopian classics over the summer. Our entire first unit will revolve around these books (so the first 4-6 weeks of school), and you will take multiple choice comprehension tests covering the two books you read on September 6/7. Students who have thoroughly read the books tend to perform well on those tests. Students who have skimmed, rushed to finish in the last few days, or relied on Sparknotes and other online summaries of the books tend to do poorly on the tests and will have little to say in their writing or class discussions. Given that the test is in early September, I would aim to read the novels in August to avoid forgetting the details.

The first book is George Orwell's *1984*. Written in 1949, the novel is often regarded as one of the most important books of the 20th century and is a staple of high school and college reading curricula. To be clear, **all Honors 10 students need to read George Orwell's *1984*.**

For your second dystopian classic, please select one of the following:

- *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932) – Aldous Huxley's profoundly important classic of world literature, *Brave New World* is a searching vision of an unequal, technologically-advanced future where humans are genetically bred, socially indoctrinated, and pharmaceutically anesthetized to passively uphold an authoritarian ruling order—all at the cost of our freedom, full humanity, and perhaps also our souls.
 - Why pick this one: Students who love *BNW* often cite its thought-provoking setting, Huxley's satirical / absurd humor, and the philosophical debates that drive the work. Also, with Huxley's emphasis on a scientifically and technologically driven system of government, self-described “STEM kids” tend to enjoy the ethical discussions of genetic engineering and other dilemmas of progress.
 - Why not pick this one: Some students want more of a plot-driven work. *BNW* has a plot, but it's not the “what's going to happen next” that keeps us turning the pages.
- *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1985) – **Warning: Graphic Content** – In Margaret Atwood's dystopian future, environmental disasters and declining birthrates have led to a Second American Civil War. The result is the rise of the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian regime that enforces rigid social roles and enslaves the few remaining fertile women. Offred is one of these, a Handmaid bound to produce children for one of Gilead's commanders.
 - Why pick this one: Students have told me this was an incredibly powerful read because they appreciate Atwood's willingness to show the oppression of women for what it is—she has even stated, “There's a precedent in real life for everything in the book. I decided not to put anything in that somebody somewhere hadn't already done.”
 - Why not read this one: For those considering *The Handmaid's Tale*, I want you to be fully aware that the book centers around women who are reduced to sexual slavery. **The novel features violence, rape, and graphic language. If you or your parents are uncomfortable with this book at this time, I strongly urge you to select *Brave New World* instead.**
 - NOTE: While Hulu's television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* has been quite successful, watching the show does not replace reading the book. The comprehension test is designed to reward those who have read the book.

All three books are readily available for purchase at book stores or online (paperbacks for each are available on Amazon for under \$10). You may also check them out for free through a local library. **While they last, copies of all three books are available in my classroom (p-6) until June 17.** Come by between classes, after school, or on a Wednesday, and I can check these out to you for the summer.

I look forward to working with you next year. If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to email me at levelh@issaquah.wednet.edu. Have a great summer!

Mr. Level