

ELA 10

SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT

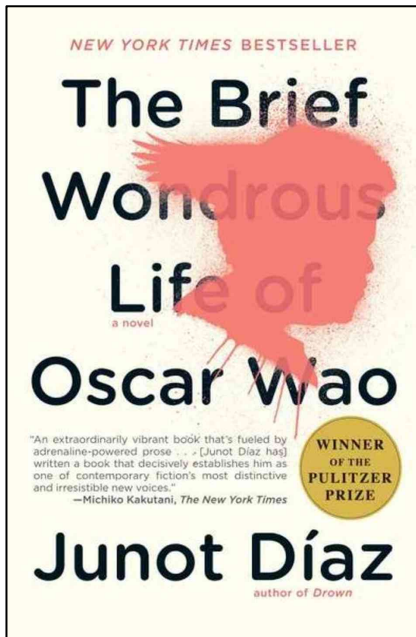
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Hello, future 10th graders! In order to prepare yourself for a wonderful year, please complete the following work **before** THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL.

STEPS

1. Complete The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao **before** the FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL.

REQUIRED NOVEL



This is the long-awaited first novel from one of the most original and memorable writers working today. Things have never been easy for Oscar, a sweet but disastrously overweight, lovesick Dominican ghetto nerd. From his home in New Jersey, where he lives with his old-world mother and rebellious sister, Oscar dreams of becoming the Dominican J. R. R. Tolkien and, most of all, of finding love. But he may never get what he wants, thanks to the fukú - the curse that has haunted the Oscar's family for generations, dooming them to prison, torture, tragic accidents, and, above all, ill-starred love. Oscar, still waiting for his first kiss, is just its most recent victim. Díaz immerses us in the tumultuous life of Oscar and the history of the family at large, rendering with genuine warmth and dazzling energy, humor, and insight the Dominican-American experience, and, ultimately, the endless human capacity to persevere in the face of heartbreak and loss. A true literary triumph, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* confirms Junot Díaz as one of the best and most exciting voices of our time.

2. Complete the attached assignment (page 2) **before** the FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL.
3. Be prepared to write an **in-class essay** the FIRST WEEK OF THE SEMESTER.
** During the essay, students may use one handwritten 4 x 6 index card containing notes on characters, plot, setting, etc. The card is NOT required, but if students use a card, it will be collected and kept at the end of the essay test. Typed and/or cut and pasted notes are NOT acceptable.

NOTE: We will be using this novel during our first unit. Do not start out the new school year behind!

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO

Directions: Please provide answers to the following questions.

- **Must be typed and printed for the FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL**
- **Must be answered in complete sentences**
- **Must answer all parts of the question**

Note: There may be words/phrases/historical references that you may not understand; however, you have plenty of resources to help you get around this! Please do research or e-mail me if you feel lost. There are no excuses for not completing this assignment in its *entirety*.

1. **Readers' reactions to this novel since it emerged in 2007 have been extreme, extremely in favor and extremely against making the effort to get at and understand Oscar's life story. Are there things that as a reader you were turned off by as you read the text? What motivated you to keep going? Choose one aspect of the novel that appealed to you and discuss. Choose one that did not appeal to you and discuss.**
2. **Diaz makes Dominican history central to the book, almost a character itself. What do you think the stream of history-related footnotes running below the fictional narrative provides for the reader? Who seems to be writing the footnotes? The narrator? The author?**
3. **Can you think of other countries besides the Dominican Republic that have a similar relationship to the United States, a similarly strong connection between the families that remain in the home country and those that left? What can Diaz' work tell a reader today about other contemporary immigrant cultures? Or, immigrant experiences in the past?**
4. **The reader never meets Oscar face-to-face, instead his story emerges piece by piece from other sources, namely from Yunior. When Diaz was asked why he chose this narrative style he replied in part, "I felt like one of the biggest absences was hiding in plain sight, which is that we actually never meet directly the protagonist. The protagonist, Oscar, is always filtered through this other narrator, Yunior. Part of it was this desire to make Oscar simultaneously present but also entirely invisible. It was a strategy to talk a lot about how do you put a story together from fragments and how you put a story together from absences." What absences in the story would you like to read more about? Oscar's father? La Inca's childhood? Yunior's own experiences in the Dominican Republic?**
5. **Is Yunior a trustworthy narrator? Where does he get his information? What's his motive in telling Oscar's story? Why do you think Diaz doesn't reveal Yunior's exact name and role until mid-way through the book?**
6. **Is Diaz's tale about Oscar? Or is it about Yunior?**
7. **How would you classify this novel: Coming of age story? Immigrant fiction? Historical fiction? What difference does a classification make to a reader? In what category do you think Diaz would put his novel?**
8. **Diaz draws particular attention to the situation of black Dominicans, black by skin color, descended from Africa, but living in a culture that vilifies the physical traits of Africans, from kinky hair to dark skin. How did Oscar and Lola deal with their blackness? What about their mother, Hypatia Belicia Cabral?**
9. **Oscar Wao is a name his peers at college give him after an episode in which he dresses up as Doctor Who for Halloween, resembling oddly Oscar Wilde in Yunior's opinion. Oscar Wao, what do you think Diaz hoped to establish by using this name in the title? What do you think "Wao" means to Oscar?**

10. Nuevo York is, according to La Inca as she ponders sending Beli away: "...nothing more and nothing less than a pais overrun by gansters, putas, and no-accounts. Its cities swarmed with machines and industry, as thick with sinvergüenceria as Santo Domingo was with heat..." Why then is New York appealing to her as a place for Beli to go?

11. Diaz plays with stereotypes of Dominican male virility, with Oscar asking roommate Yuniór one night, for example, "I have heard from a reliable source that no Dominican male has ever died a virgin. You who have experience in these matters--do you think this is true?" What do you think Diaz' motive is in emphasizing such stereotypes? What do you think the ending says about these stereotypes, when Oscar finally loses his virginity? Oscar and other members of his family have recurring dreams of a faceless man. Why do you think Diaz uses this motif? Is there anyone in the narrative who is faceless?

12. Oscar's death is no surprise, or is it? Did you expect Oscar to die the way he does? If not, what did Diaz' narrative lead you to expect?

13. When asked whether he was making direct political statements about contemporary America in the book, Diaz replied,

- a. "I just can't imagine that one is a writer in the Americas and not in some way directly confronting the enormous, the tremendous, the colossal power of the United States and the consequences of that power. Even if you're writing a comedic novel, something of this is going to leak in somewhere. I think for me, it's not so much that any more political or any less political than anyone else. My problem was that I was writing a book in the Americas. And no matter how much you try, you are eventually going to graze against that question, what it means to live in a world where there's one country that is so asymmetrically powerful and what are the consequences of that power? It's a hard question to avoid."

Did you make any connections between Diaz' text and today's political climate?

HONORS ELA

In addition to BWLOW (Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao) students will be required to select an ADDITIONAL text and complete an ADDITIONAL assignment.

Please choose from the following titles:

	<p><i>Three Cups of Tea</i> By, Greg Mortenson</p>		<p><i>The Namesake</i> By, Jhumpa Lahiri</p>
<p>Anyone who despairs of the individual's power to change lives has to read the story of Greg Mortenson, a homeless mountaineer who, following a 1993 climb of Pakistan's treacherous K2, was inspired by a chance encounter with impoverished mountain villagers and promised to build them a school. Over the next decade he built fifty-five schools—especially for girls—that offer a balanced education in one of the most isolated and dangerous regions on earth. As it chronicles Mortenson's quest, which has brought him into conflict with both enraged Islamists and uncomprehending Americans, <i>Three Cups of Tea</i> combines adventure with a celebration of the humanitarian spirit.</p>			<p><i>The Namesake</i> takes the Ganguli family from their tradition-bound life in Calcutta through their fraught transformation into Americans. On the heels of their arranged wedding, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli settle together in Cambridge, Massachusetts. An engineer by training, Ashoke adapts far less warily than his wife, who resists all things American and pines for her family. When their son is born, the task of naming him betrays the vexed results of bringing old ways to the new world. Named for a Russian writer by his Indian parents in memory of a catastrophe years before, Gogol Ganguli knows only that he suffers the burden of his heritage as well as his odd, antic name. Lahiri brings great empathy to Gogol as he stumbles along the first-generation path, strewn with conflicting loyalties, comic detours, and wrenching love affairs. With penetrating insight, she reveals not only the defining power of the names and expectations bestowed upon us by our parents, but also the means by which we slowly, sometimes painfully, come to define ourselves. <i>The New York Times</i> has praised Lahiri as "a writer of uncommon elegance and poise." <i>The Namesake</i> is a fine-tuned, intimate, and deeply felt novel of identity.</p>
	<p><i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> By, Maya Angelou</p>		<p><i>Rocket Boys</i> By, Homer H Hickam, Jr.</p>
<p>In this first of five volumes of autobiography, poet Maya Angelou recounts a youth filled with disappointment, frustration, tragedy, and finally hard-won independence. Sent at a young age to live with her grandmother in Arkansas, Angelou learned a great deal from this exceptional woman and the tightly knit black community there. These very lessons carried her throughout the hardships she endured later in life, including a tragic occurrence while visiting her mother in St. Louis and her formative years spent in California--where an unwanted pregnancy changed her life forever. Marvelously told, with Angelou's "gift for language and observation," this "remarkable autobiography by an equally remarkable black woman from Arkansas captures, indelibly, a world of which most Americans are shamefully ignorant."</p>			<p>One of the most beloved bestsellers in recent years, Rocket Boys is a uniquely American memoir. A powerful, luminous story of coming of age at the end of the 1950s, it is the story of a mother's love and a father's fears, of growing up and getting out. With the grace of a natural storyteller, Homer Hickam looks back after a distinguished NASA career to tell his own true story of growing up in a dying coal town and of how, against the odds, he made his dreams of launching rockets into outer space come true.</p> <p>A story of romance and loss and a keen portrait of life at an extraordinary point in American history, Rocket Boys is a chronicle of triumph.</p>

WHILE READING:

- a. You must **select** and **record** 1 quote for EACH SECTION of text specified in the table below.
- b. For each quote, please answer 1 of the following questions:
 - i. First-person point of view: The above books are told from unique perspectives. Record one quote that you feel best captures the personality of the narrator. Describe the narrator's personality and why you chose this quote.
 - ii. "Turning points" are memorable moments that change our views and/or our lives. Record a quote from the novel that represents a turning point for your narrator. Explain how he or she was before and how this moment changed him or her.

Three Cups of Tea			
Chapters 1 – 6	Chapters 7 – 12	Chapters 13 – 18	Chapters 19 – 23
The Namesake			
Chapters 1 – 3	Chapters 4 – 6	Chapters 7 – 9	Chapters 10 – 12
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings			
Chapters 1-9	Chapters 10 - 18	Chapters 19 – 27	Chapters 28 – 36
Rocket Boys			
Chapters 1 – 7	Chapters 8 – 14	Chapters 15 – 20	Chapters 21 – 26

FORMATTING:

- Typed
- Quote recorded
- 4 – 5 sentences of commentary provided

EACH QUOTE WILL BE GRADED USING THE FOLLOWING RUBRIC:

4 pts	3 pts	2 pts	1 pts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quote chosen strategically represents the specified section of text- Quote thoughtfully reflect the prompt specified- 4 – 5 sentences of insightful commentary have been provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quote chosen strategically represents the specified section of text- Quote mostly answers the prompt, but may have lapses- 3 – 4 sentences of commentary have been provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quote chosen represents the specified section of text- Quotes attempt to answer the prompt, but has lapses- 3 sentences of commentary have been provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quote does not reflect the specified text- Quotes do not answer the prompt- Less than 3 sentences of commentary have been provided

- 2 points if handwritten
- 2 points each day late