

Martin Luther King, Jr. Academic Magnet School
for Health Sciences and Engineering

7th Grade English Honors Summer Reading

2022-2023

English Department Summer Reading Policy Statement:

Summer reading serves a number of purposes. First, summer reading is diagnostic. It provides teachers a means of assessing students' critical thinking, reading comprehension, and writing skills. Next, summer reading is academic. It keeps students academically engaged over the summer, and it sets a tone for the level of rigor students should expect in any English class in the coming year. Last, and perhaps most important, summer reading is communal. It provides students a vehicle for cultural literacy, choice, and personal growth and independence of thought.

Generally speaking, students enrolled in each English course will read a book-length text, a novel or a play. Students will also read two shorter texts, usually poems, essays, or short stories, that pair with the lengthier text thematically. Together, the three texts will be used to guide English instruction within the first several weeks of class as both students and teachers work to answer the first unit's essential question. Students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses may be asked to read additional works or lengthier works.

Essential question: What can one generation learn from another?

Novel or play: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry

Accompanying texts: "Thank You Ma'am" by Langston Hughes & "Door to Freedom" by Jacalyn McNamara

Students are expected to obtain their own copy of the lengthier text and to bring it to school when classes resume in August. Copies of the shorter texts are attached to these guidelines.

Students are expected to be active and engaged readers of the summer reading texts. To that end, teachers may issue additional instructions at a later date to guide student reading and responses, so please check Schoology regularly or be looking for a communication from your English teacher this summer.

English Department Alternate Selection Policy:

Should a parent wish for his or her child not to read a chosen literary selection, he or she should contact the child's English teacher prior to the beginning of the unit of study for an appropriate alternative text designated by the English department.

“Thank You Ma’am” (1958)

by Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, and playwright. Hughes is considered one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, which was the cultural, social, and artistic movement of black artists that took place in Harlem from about 1918 until the mid-1930s.

She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails. It had a long strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder. It was about eleven o’clock at night, and she was walking alone, when a boy ran up behind her and tried to snatch her purse. The strap broke with the single tug the boy gave it from behind. But the boy’s weight and the weight of the purse combined caused him to lose his balance so, instead of taking off full blast as he had hoped, the boy fell on his back on the sidewalk, and his legs flew up. The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter. Then she reached down, picked the boy up by his shirt front, and shook him until his teeth rattled.

After that the woman said, “Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here.” She still held him. But she bent down enough to permit him to stoop and pick up her purse. Then she said, “Now ain’t you ashamed of yourself?”

Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, “Yes’m.”

The woman said, “What did you want to do it for?”

The boy said, “I didn’t aim to.”

She said, “You a lie!”

By that time two or three people passed, stopped, turned to look, and some stood watching.

“If I turn you loose, will you run?” asked the woman.

“Yes’m,” said the boy.

“Then I won’t turn you loose,” said the woman. She did not release him.

“I’m very sorry, lady, I’m sorry,” whispered the boy.

“Um-hum! And your face is dirty. I got a great mind to wash your face for you. Ain’t you got nobody home to tell you to wash your face?”

“No’m,” said the boy.

“Then it will get washed this evening,” said the large woman starting up the street, dragging the frightened boy behind her.

He looked as if he were fourteen or fifteen, frail and willow-wild, in tennis shoes and blue jeans.

The woman said, “You ought to be my son. I would teach you right from wrong. Least I can do right now is to wash your face. Are you hungry?”

“No’m,” said the being-dragged boy. “I just want you to turn me loose.”

“Was I bothering you when I turned that corner?” asked the woman. “No’m.”

“But you put yourself in contact with *me*,” said the woman. “If you think that that contact is not going to last awhile, you got another thought coming. When I get through with you, sir, you are going to remember Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones.”

Sweat popped out on the boy's face and he began to struggle. Mrs. Jones stopped, jerked him around in front of her, put a half-nelson about his neck, and continued to drag him up the street. When she got to her door, she dragged the boy inside, down a hall, and into a large kitchenette-furnished room at the rear of the house. She switched on the light and left the door open. The boy could hear other roomers⁶ laughing and talking in the large house. Some of their doors were open, too, so he knew he and the woman were not alone. The woman still had him by the neck in the middle of her room.

She said, "What is your name?"

"Roger," answered the boy.

"Then, Roger, you go to that sink and wash your face," said the woman, whereupon she turned him loose — at last. Roger looked at the door — looked at the woman — looked at the door — *and went to the sink.*

"Let the water run until it gets warm," she said. "Here's a clean towel."

"You gonna take me to jail?" asked the boy, bending over the sink.

"Not with that face, I would not take you nowhere," said the woman. "Here I am trying to get home to cook me a bite to eat and you snatch my pocketbook! Maybe, you ain't been to your supper either, late as it be. Have you?"

"There's nobody home at my house," said the boy.

"Then we'll eat," said the woman, "I believe you're hungry — or been hungry — to try to snatch my pocketbook."

"I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes," said the boy.

"Well, you didn't have to snatch *my* pocketbook to get some suede shoes," said Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones.

"You could of asked me."

"M'am?"

The water dripping from his face, the boy looked at her. There was a long pause. A very long pause. After he had dried his face and not knowing what else to do dried it again, the boy turned around, wondering what next. The door was open. He could make a dash for it down the hall. He could run, run, run, run, *run!*

The woman was sitting on the day-bed. After a while she said, "I were young once and I wanted things I could not get."

There was another long pause. The boy's mouth opened. Then he frowned, but not knowing he frowned.

The woman said, "Um-hum! You thought I was going to say *but*, didn't you? You thought I was going to say, *but I didn't snatch people's pocketbooks.* Well, I wasn't going to say that." Pause. Silence. "I have done things, too, which I would not tell you, son — neither tell God, if he didn't already know. So you set down while I fix us something to eat. You might run that comb through your hair so you will look presentable."

In another corner of the room behind a screen was a gas plate and an icebox. Mrs. Jones got up and went behind the screen. The woman did not watch the boy to see if he was going to run now, nor did she watch her purse which she left behind her on the day-bed. But the boy took care to sit on the far side of the room where he thought she could easily see him out of the corner of her eye, if she wanted to. He did *not* trust the woman not to trust him. And he did not want to be mistrusted now.

"Do you need somebody to go to the store," asked the boy, "maybe to get some milk or something?"

"Don't believe I do," said the woman, "unless you just want sweet milk yourself. I was going to make cocoa out of this canned milk I got here."

"That will be fine," said the boy.

She heated some lima beans and ham she had in the icebox, made the cocoa, and set the table. The woman did not ask the boy anything about where he lived, or his folks, or anything else that would embarrass him. Instead, as they ate, she told him about her job in a hotel beauty-shop that stayed open late, what the work was like, and how all kinds of women came in and out, blondes, red-heads, and Spanish. Then she cut him a half of her ten-cent cake.

"Eat some more, son," she said.

When they were finished eating she got up and said, "Now, here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes. And next time, do not make the mistake of latching onto *my* pocketbook *nor nobody else's* — because shoes come by devilish like that will burn your feet. I got to get my rest now. But I wish you would behave yourself, son, from here on in."

She led him down the hall to the front door and opened it. "Good-night! Behave yourself, boy!" she said, looking out into the street.

The boy wanted to say something other than, "Thank you, ma'am," to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, but although his lips moved, he couldn't even say that as he turned at the foot of the barren stoop and looked up at the large woman in the door. He barely managed to say "Thank you" before she shut the door. And he never saw her again

"Door to Freedom" (1982)

By Jacalyn McNamara

In this memoir, Jacalyn Pauer describes her husband's experiences escaping a war-torn Hungary and how he got his immigration papers to go to America.

A Note from the Editor: Hungary is a country in Eastern Europe that has been torn by invasions throughout the course of its long history. In 1956, the Hungarians revolted against their government, a communist government which had been supported by the Soviet Union. The Soviet government sent in armed forces to crush the rebellion. A group of Hungarians known as Freedom Fighters fought the Soviets but were defeated. Many of the Freedom Fighters were teenagers, and many died. Pal, the boy in this story, was one who survived. The story of Pal's struggle to come to America is true. Pal lives today in Oregon with his wife, who wrote this story.

At midnight on November 13, 1956, 15-year-old Pal hid among trees on the marshy bank of a canal.

The rat-tat-tat of gunfire shattered the silence. A red flare pierced the fog and arced over the swirling waters. In the darkness that followed, Pal slid down the concrete embankment and plunged into the icy current.

For three weeks war had swept across Hungary. Pal had transported food into the city of Budapest and helped treat the wounded. Now, with no hope of breaking through Soviet lines to reach his family, he was escaping to Austria to join the Freedom Fighters.

When Austrian police pulled him almost frozen from the waters, Pal thought the worst was over. Three days later, in the safety of an Austrian refugee compound, he learned the sad truth. Soviet troops had sealed the Hungarian borders. The revolution was over, and he could never return to his homeland.

Alone, carrying only a gold watch given to him by his mother, Pal needed to find the one person in all of Austria he believed could help him. He remembered an address he had seen on letters from his grandfather's oldest friend, a man named Klaus. The old man, Klaus, welcomed Pal with sympathy.

"I cannot go home," Pal said. "What should I do?"

Klaus ran his hand across his balding head. "If I were a young man, I'd go to America. It's the land of the future. There, a man can be free. You should go to America."

Klaus agreed to let Pal stay with him a few days to prepare for his long journey. The old man fed Pal and gave him some clothing—a summer jacket, shirt, and slacks. They were not nearly warm enough for the freezing temperatures, but they were better than the clothes Pal already had. Then Klaus arranged Pal's transportation to Vienna, the city where the American Embassy was located.

Thousands of Hungarians thronged the entrance of the American Embassy. Families huddled together in the cold. Some had camped all night on the frosty sidewalk to be the first in line in the morning.

Pal joined the crowd to wait his turn. He stomped his feet, trying to keep warm. The lines inched forward. By six o'clock in the evening, Pal was still far back in the line when two marines closed the big doors. Cold and in despair, Pal returned to the home of his grandfather's friend.

"The Americans will take only a certain number of Hungarians," he told Klaus. "Today, I couldn't even get close to the doors. I will have to stay there until I can get in."

The next morning, Pal again bid a reluctant good-bye to his only friend in Austria. At the embassy the lines had grown. Would the quota be filled before he could even get in? He wondered. By nightfall, about two hundred people stood in line ahead of him. The marines closed the doors.

Pal had not eaten all day, and he shivered in the cold. A light snow fell around him. Pal knew he would freeze if he spent the night in wet clothes, so he asked directions to the nearest refugee compound, where he could sleep for the night.

He awoke the following day determined to get into the embassy. He sold his watch and ate a hearty breakfast before going to stand in line.

The line was longer than ever. Pal took his place and waited. Heavy snow blanketed the ground. By afternoon, frost had formed on his eyelashes. Pal clenched his numb hands. He needed something hot to drink. Reluctantly, he stepped aside and the long line closed in where he had stood.

Tea burned his lips but aroused his courage. There had to be another way into the embassy, he thought, and he had to find it.

Marines guarded the front doors all day. East of the building was a delivery area surrounded by a ten-foot railing. On the west side was a street. Storefronts faced the barred embassy windows. One set of concrete steps led to a basement section of the embassy.

Pal crept down the steps and touched the doorknob. He turned it. The door was not locked. He opened the door and stepped inside. Sawdust and varnish smells filled the warm air. Pal found himself standing in a woodworker's shop. He saw men working along rows of workbenches.

A man turned to him. "What are you doing here?"

"I... I..." stammered Pal glancing around. At the end of a row of benches he noticed another stairway that he thought might lead to the embassy. "I must have taken a wrong turn." He rushed up the stairs, pushed through the door, and closed it with relief. The main hall of the embassy spread before him.

"Next," someone called, and the orderly rows of people moved forward. Pal got in line. Minutes later he was in the first processing station.

"Who is sponsoring you?" the secretary asked. He remembered that his grandfather had donated to the organization.

"International Rescue Committee," he answered. "Here is their address. You must go there for papers, then return here to the embassy."

His heart sank. He had managed to get in once; could he do it again?

The lines were short at the IRC. He returned that night to the compound with his papers. As he lay on the straw he dreamed of thousands of people frozen like icicles in the street.

In the morning, Pal took one look at the crowd waiting outside the embassy then turned down the side street. He hurried down the stairs and swallowed hard. Then he went through the door. "Gutten Tag," he greeted the workers in their own language, trying to look confident. They nodded in return. He moved slowly through the long rows of benches, then rushed up the stairs two at a time.

Later that day, he smiled at the marines as he left the embassy, clutching his immigration papers under his arm. In a few days, he would be on an airplane bound for America. But as he walked through the flocks of refugees, his triumph felt hollow. All of them shared the same dream, freedom in America. What could he do to help them?

A young boy stood by himself, his thin face hidden by his light jacket. Pal approached him. "I know a secret entrance," he whispered, "Follow me." He led the boy to the stairs. "Just walk through and say hello. Don't tell anyone else about it until you have your papers or they might lock the door." The boy nodded eagerly. Pal held out the remaining money from the sale of his watch. "Here, get something to eat, and good luck. Maybe we'll be neighbors in America."