

Incoming 12th Grade

Students entering twelfth grade must read the required text, *Bleachers*, and one (1) book from the recommended list. To ensure good recall of major themes and elements of the text, students are strongly urged to take notes on each book and record major characters, conflicts, settings and themes. Objective tests will be administered during the first week of school and students will also write an essay during the first few weeks of the first term.

Required: *Bleachers* by John Grisham

High school all-American Neely Crenshaw was probably the best quarterback ever to play for the legendary Messina Spartans. Fifteen years have gone by since those glory days, and Neely has come home to Messina to bury Coach Eddie Rake, the man who molded the Spartans into an unbeatable football dynasty.

Now, as Coach Rake's "boys" sit in the bleachers waiting for the dimming field lights to signal his passing, they replay the old games, relive the old glories, and try to decide once and for all whether they love Eddie Rake—or hate him. For Neely Crenshaw, a man who must finally forgive his coach—and himself—before he can get on with life, the stakes are especially high.

In *Cold Blood* by Truman Capote

On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. As Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, he generates both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. **In *Cold Blood*** is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence.

The *Color Purple* by Alice Walker

Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is the story of Celie, a young girl abused by her father and then married off to a violent and angry man. She maintains her dignity and strength through her relationship with Shug, a flamboyant blues singer who is having an affair with Celie's husband. With Shug's love comes great courage, and Celie finds a new person inside herself, awaiting bloom.

The *Natural* by Bernard Malamud

The Natural, Bernard Malamud's first novel, published in 1952, is also the first—and some would say still the best—novel ever written about baseball. In it Malamud, usually appreciated for his unerring portrayals of postwar Jewish life, took on very different material—the story of a superbly gifted "natural" at play in the fields of the old daylight baseball era—and invested it with the hardscrabble poetry, at once grand and altogether believable, that runs through all his best work. Four decades later, Alfred Kazin's comment still holds true: "Malamud has really raised the whole passion and craziness and fanaticism of baseball as a popular spectacle to its ordained place in mythology."

Catch 22 by Joseph Heller

Fifty years after its original publication, *Catch-22* remains a cornerstone of American literature and one of the funniest—and most celebrated—novels of all time. Set in Italy during World War II, this is the story of the incomparable, malingering bombardier, Yossarian, a hero who is furious because thousands of people he has never met are trying to kill him. But his real problem is not the enemy—it is his own army, which keeps increasing the number of missions the men must fly to complete their service. Yet if Yossarian makes any attempt to excuse himself from the perilous missions he's assigned, he'll be in violation of *Catch-22*, a hilariously sinister bureaucratic rule: a man is considered insane if he willingly continues to fly dangerous combat missions, but if he makes a formal request to be removed from duty, he is proven sane and therefore ineligible to be relieved. –

The Road by Cormac McCarthy

The Road, in a post-apocalyptic blight of gray skies that drizzle ash, is a world in which all matter of wildlife is extinct, starvation is not only prevalent but nearly all-encompassing, and marauding bands of cannibals roam the environment with pieces of human flesh stuck between their teeth. McCarthy may have just set to paper the definitive vision of the world after nuclear war, and in this recent age of relentless saber-rattling by the global powers, it's not much of a leap to feel his vision could be not far off the mark nor, sadly, right around the corner. Stealing across this horrific (and that's the only word for it) landscape are an unnamed man and his emaciated son, a boy probably around the age of ten. It is the love the father feels for his son, a love as deep and acute as his grief that could surprise readers of McCarthy's previous work. McCarthy's Gnostic impressions of mankind have left very little place for love. But here the love of a desperate father for his sickly son transcends all else.

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley

Far in the future, the World Controllers have created the ideal society. Through clever use of genetic engineering, brainwashing and recreational sex and drugs, all its members are happy consumers. Bernard Marx seems alone harboring an ill-defined longing to break free. A visit to one of the few remaining Savage Reservations, where the old, imperfect life still continues, may be the cure for his distress. Huxley's ingenious fantasy of the future sheds a blazing light on the present and is considered to be his most enduring masterpiece

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

When Janie, at sixteen, is caught kissing shiftless Johnny Taylor, her grandmother swiftly marries her off to an old man with sixty acres. Janie endures two stifling marriages before meeting the man of her dreams, who offers not diamonds, but a packet of flowering seeds ...

This book is one of the very greatest American novels of the 20th century. It is so lyrical it should be sentimental; it is so passionate it should be overwrought, but it is instead a rigorous, convincing and dazzling piece of prose, as emotionally satisfying as it is impressive.