**Independent Non-fiction Book Study – AP Lang –FALL**

***Assignment Overview:*** You will read a non-fiction book with a group of your peers, analyze it, and compare it with other things that you have and will read this year.

***Today’s Directions:*** On a separate sheet of paper, please write your top three choices – numbered 1 (top choice), 2 (2nd choice), and so on. Make sure your name is on the paper. Following the short assignment descriptions you will find a list of the book, including descriptions or reviews; on the last page you’ll find a succinct list of books, authors, and page numbers.

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| **Choosing a book[[1]](#footnote-1)**  You will choose a book from the list. Read through the descriptions, look at the books, and then decide which book you are interested in reading. Your group will be comprised of students who have also chosen to read the same book; group size will likely range from 4 to 7 students. Although there are group projects, each individual will be held accountable for all assignments.  **Reading Schedule[[2]](#footnote-2)**  The books within each unit will be of varying lengths. On Day 1 your group will be expected to establish a reading schedule. We will have 4 - 5 group meeting days within 5 weeks. You must make arrangements to get a copy of the book by the FIRST meeting. At this time your group will also fill out log sheets noting the page numbers that you will read each night. You must be finished reading the novel by meeting day #5.  If you choose a book that has fewer than 275 pages, please expect to do supplemental research *– finding articles and primary documents that support your SOAPStone analysis.*  **Assignments You Will Be Responsible For During the Course of the Study:** (more information will be given before book study begins)   * **Individual Homework Assignments**   You are responsible for completing nine daily homework assignments.   * **Daily Group Discussions**   On Day 1, your group is expected to review the handouts titled *Guidelines for Small Group Literary Discussions.* In reading this handout, members of your group should become aware of what it takes to be an effective member of a literary discussion group.  At the end of each discussion, you must complete a log sheet covering major points and issues discussed. The purpose of the loge sheets is to document daily discussions for future reference. These log sheets may be graded.   * **Impromptu Group presentations** * **Final Group Assignment** |

**BOOK OPTIONS**

Non-fiction titles culled from various recommendations for AP Language Courses**.[[3]](#footnote-3)**

***An American Childhood* by Annie Dillard**

From Publishers Weekly

Dillard's luminous prose painlessly captures the pain of growing up in this wonderful evocation of childhood. Her memoir is partly a hymn to Pittsburgh, where orange streetcars ran on Penn Avenue in 1953 when she was eight, and where the Pirates were always in the cellar. Dillard's mother, an unstoppable force, had energies too vast for the bridge games and household chores that stymied her. Her father made low-budget horror movies, loved Dixieland jazz, told endless jokes and sight-gags and took lonesome river trips down to New Orleans to get away. From this slightly odd couple, Dillard (Teaching a Stone to Talk acquired her love of nature and taut sensitivity. The events of childhood often loom larger than life; the magic of Dillard's writing is that she sets down typical childhood happenings with their original immediacy and force.   
Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. http://www.amazon.com/American-Childhood-Annie-Dillard/dp/0060915188 9 Jan 2011

# *Beyond the Beautiful Forevers: Life, death, and hope in a Mumbai Undercity* by Catherine Boo

Amazon.com

In this brilliant, breathtaking book by Pulitzer Prize winner Katherine Boo, a bewildering age of global change and inequality is made human through the dramatic story of families striving toward a better life in Annawadi, a makeshift settlement in the shadow of luxury hotels near the Mumbai airport. As India starts to prosper, the residents of Annawadi are electric with hope. Abdul, an enterprising teenager, sees “a fortune beyond counting” in the recyclable garbage that richer people throw away. Meanwhile Asha, a woman of formidable ambition, has identified a shadier route to the middle class. With a little luck, her beautiful daughter, Annawadi’s “most-everything girl,” might become its first female college graduate. And even the poorest children, like the young thief Kalu, feel themselves inching closer to their dreams. But then Abdul is falsely accused in a shocking tragedy; terror and global recession rock the city; and suppressed tensions over religion, caste, sex, power, and economic envy turn brutal. With intelligence, humor, and deep insight into what connects people to one another in an era of tumultuous change, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers,*based on years of uncompromising reporting,carries the reader headlong into one of the twenty-first century’s hidden worlds—and into the hearts of families impossible to forget.  http://www.amazon.com/Behind-Beautiful-Forevers-Mumbai-Undercity/dp/081297932X/ref=sr\_1\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1409928498&sr=1-1&keywords=beyond+the+beautiful+forevers

***Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin**

Googlebooks review

The Deep South of the late 1950's was another country: a land of lynchings, segregated lunch counters, whites-only restrooms, and a color line etched in blood across Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. White journalist John Howard Griffin, working for the black-owned magazine Sepia, decided to cross that line. Using medication that darkened his skin to deep brown, he exchanged his privileged life as a southern white man for the disenfranchised world of an unemployed black man. What happened to John Howard Griffin--from the outside and within himself--as he made his way through the segregated Deep South is recorded in this searing work of nonfiction. Educated and soft-spoken, John Howard Griffin changed only the color of his skin. It was enough to make him hated...enough to nearly get him killed. His audacious, still chillingly relevant eyewitness history is a work about race and humanity every American should read. http://books.google.com/books/about/Black\_like\_me.html?id=ObTddfcqk2gC

***Black Boy* by Richard Wright**

Autobiography by Richard Wright, published in 1945 and considered to be one of his finest works. The book is sometimes considered a fictionalized autobiography or an autobiographical novel because of its use of novelistic techniques. *Black Boy* describes vividly Wright's often harsh, hardscrabble boyhood and youth in rural Mississippi and in Memphis, Tenn. When the work was first published, many white critics viewed *Black Boy* primarily as an attack on racist Southern white society. From the 1960s the work came to be understood as the story of Wright's coming of age and development as a writer whose race, though a primary component of his life, was but one of many that formed him as an artist. -- *The Merriam-Webster Encylopedia of Literature;* http://www.amazon.com/Restored-Established-Library-Perennial-Classics/dp/0060929782 9 Jan 2011

***A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking**

5.0 out of 5 stars **Many Different Angles**, February 3, 2000 By **A Customer**

Most people know that Hawking is a brilliant physicist, but after reading this book, one develops a respect for his other talents as well. Most noticeable is Stephen Hawking's ability to make very complicated ideas seem quite clear through good explanations, clear comparisons to real life events, and a soft humor. The organization of chapers mostly follows a chronological order, which gives a sense of history from Aristotle to present day, yet also establishes concepts in an order that builds on itself. One also realizes that A Brief History of Time was written by a writer, not a scientist who happened to put ideas to paper. This makes a big difference in the enjoyment of a book, since good information in a dry, dull form can be difficult to read (remember trying to keep your eyes open while reading a dull textbook in a subject of interest?). On the other hand, interesting information presented in an interesting manner make A Brief History of Time as much of a 'page-turner' as physics can be.

In summary, a fountain of information from galaxies and black holes to quantum mechanics presented in such a way that is not only as easy to understand as it can be, but is an enjoyable experience to read.

http://www.amazon.com/Brief-History-Time-Stephen-Hawking/dp/0553380168 9 Jan 2011

***The Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson**

Amazon.com Review

Author Erik Larson imbues the incredible events surrounding the 1893 Chicago World's Fair with such drama that readers may find themselves checking the book's categorization to be sure that *The Devil in the White City* is not, in fact, a highly imaginative novel. Larson tells the stories of two men: Daniel H. Burnham, the architect responsible for the fair's construction, and H.H. Holmes, a serial killer masquerading as a charming doctor. Burnham's challenge was immense. In a short period of time, he was forced to overcome the death of his partner and numerous other obstacles to construct the famous "White City" around which the fair was built. His efforts to complete the project, and the fair's incredible success, are skillfully related along with entertaining appearances by such notables as Buffalo Bill Cody, Susan B. Anthony, and Thomas Edison. The activities of the sinister Dr. Holmes, who is believed to be responsible for scores of murders around the time of the fair, are equally remarkable. He devised and erected the World's Fair Hotel, complete with crematorium and gas chamber, near the fairgrounds and used the event as well as his own charismatic personality to lure victims. Combining the stories of an architect and a killer in one book, mostly in alternating chapters, seems like an odd choice but it works. The magical appeal and horrifying dark side of 19th-century Chicago are both revealed through Larson's skillful writing. *--John Moe* --http://www.amazon.com/Devil-White-City-Madness-Changed/dp/0375725601 9 Jan 2011

***Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser**

Amazon.com Review

On any given day, one out of four Americans opts for a quick and cheap meal at a fast-food restaurant, without giving either its speed or its thriftiness a second thought. Fast food is so ubiquitous that it now seems as American, and harmless, as apple pie. But the industry's drive for consolidation, homogenization, and speed has radically transformed America's diet, landscape, economy, and workforce, often in insidiously destructive ways. Eric Schlosser, an award-winning journalist, opens his ambitious and ultimately devastating exposé with an introduction to the iconoclasts and high school dropouts, such as Harlan Sanders and the McDonald brothers, who first applied the principles of a factory assembly line to a commercial kitchen. Quickly, however, he moves behind the counter with the overworked and underpaid teenage workers, onto the factory farms where the potatoes and beef are grown, and into the slaughterhouses run by giant meatpacking corporations. Schlosser wants you to know why those French fries taste so good (with a visit to the world's largest flavor company) and "what really lurks between those sesame-seed buns." Eater bewares: forget your concerns about cholesterol, there is--literally--feces in your meat.

Schlosser's investigation reaches its frightening peak in the meatpacking plants as he reveals the almost complete lack of federal oversight of a seemingly lawless industry. His searing portrayal of the industry is disturbingly similar to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, written in 1906: nightmare working conditions, union busting, and unsanitary practices that introduce *E. coli* and other pathogens into restaurants, public schools, and homes. Almost as disturbing is his description of how the industry "both feeds and feeds off the young," insinuating itself into all aspects of children's lives, even the pages of their school books, while leaving them prone to obesity and disease. Fortunately, Schlosser offers some eminently practical remedies. "Eating in the United States should no longer be a form of high-risk behavior," he writes. Where to begin? Ask yourself, is the true cost of having it "your way" really worth it? *--Lesley Reed* --This text refers to the ***Hardcover*** edition. http://www.amazon.com/Fast-Food-Nation-Dark-All-American/dp/0060938455 9 Jan 2011

***The Immortal Life of Henrietta* Lacks by Rebecca Skloot**

Amazon.com Review

“Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine. The first “immortal” human cells grown in culture, they are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years. If you could pile all HeLa cells ever grown onto a scale, they’d weigh more than 50 million metric tons—as much as a hundred Empire State Buildings. HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the atom bomb’s effects; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions.

“…Rebecca Skloot takes us on an extraordinary journey, from the “colored” ward of Johns Hopkins Hospital in the 1950s to stark white laboratories with freezers full of HeLa cells; from Henrietta’s small, dying hometown of Clover, Virginia—a land of wooden slave quarters, faith healings, and voodoo—to East Baltimore today, where her children and grandchildren live and struggle with the legacy of her cells.” http://www.amazon.com/The-Immortal-Life-Henrietta-Lacks/dp/1400052181

***In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote**

Amazon.com Review

"Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans--in fact, few Kansans--had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there." If all Truman Capote did was invent a new genre--journalism written with the language and structure of literature--this "nonfiction novel" about the brutal slaying of the Clutter family by two would-be robbers would be remembered as a trail-blazing experiment that has influenced countless writers. But Capote achieved more than that. He wrote a true masterpiece of creative nonfiction. The images of this tale continue to resonate in our minds: 16-year-old Nancy Clutter teaching a friend how to bake a cherry pie, Dick Hickock's black '49 Chevrolet sedan, Perry Smith's Gibson guitar and his dreams of gold in a tropical paradise--the blood on the walls and the final "thud-snap" of the rope-broken necks.

http://www.amazon.com/Cold-Blood-Truman-Capote/dp/0679745580 9 Jan 2011

***Lives on the Boundary* by Mike Rose**

Description

Remedial, illiterate, intellectually deficient--these are the stigmas that define the educational underclass to which Mike Rose once belonged. Here, he tells of his personal journey from a Los Angeles ghetto to a major research university, bringing a vital challenge to those who must shape America's educational agenda. http://www.amazon.com/Lives-Boundary-Mike-Rose/dp/0140124039 9 Jan 2011

***Mountains Beyond Mountains* by Tracy Kidder**

From The New England Journal of Medicine

Paul Farmer is a 44-year-old specialist in infectious diseases and an attending physician at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. … Farmer founded a hospital and health center, Zanmi Lasante, in Cange, Haiti, hours from the capital and at the end of a gutted road in a region destitute even by Haiti's standards… For more than 20 years, Farmer has spent many months every year there, often taking care of patients himself and continually improving the treatments offered by the clinic. These now include antiretroviral drugs. Lasante is supported by a foundation based in Boston called Partners in Health, which is headed by Ophelia Dahl and largely financed by Tom White, the philanthropic owner of a large Boston construction firm... Readers may have heard some of this story before (Farmer has received a MacArthur award and the American Medical Association's Dr. Nathan Davis Award) and may have wondered, as I did, where he came from and how one man could accomplish so much. Kidder traces Farmer's trajectory, starting with his unconventional childhood, which included living in a bus and on a leaky boat. He was given a scholarship to Duke, where he majored in anthropology and worked alongside poor Haitian farm workers in North Carolina's tobacco fields. After graduation he spent a year in Haiti, where he met Ophelia Dahl, and then went to Harvard Medical School. *Bernard Hirschel, M.D.*  
Copyright © 2003 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England Journal of Medicine is a registered trademark of the MMS. http://www.amazon.com/Mountains-Beyond-Healing-World-Farmer/dp/0375506160 9 Jan 2011

***Outliers: the story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell**

Amazon.com review

In this stunning new book, Malcolm Gladwell takes us on an intellectual journey through the world of "outliers"--the best and the brightest, the most famous and the most successful. He asks the question: what makes high-achievers different?

His answer is that we pay too much attention to what successful people are like, and too little attention to where they are from: that is, their culture, their family, their generation, and the idiosyncratic experiences of their upbringing. Along the way he explains the secrets of software billionaires, what it takes to be a great soccer player, why Asians are good at math, and what made the Beatles the greatest rock band. http://www.amazon.com/Outliers-Story-Success-Malcolm-Gladwell/dp/0316017930/ref=sr\_1\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1347240732&sr=1-1&keywords=outlier

***The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman**

Amazon.com Review

Lia Lee was born in 1981 to a family of recent Hmong immigrants, and soon developed symptoms of epilepsy. By 1988 she was living at home but was brain dead after a tragic cycle of misunderstanding, overmedication, and culture clash: "What the doctors viewed as clinical efficiency the Hmong viewed as frosty arrogance." *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* is a tragedy of Shakespearean dimensions, written with the deepest of human feeling. Sherwin Nuland said of the account, "There are no villains in Fadiman's tale, just as there are no heroes. People are presented as she saw them, in their humility and their frailty--and their nobility."

http://www.amazon.com/Spirit-Catches-You-Fall-Down/dp/0374525641 9 Jan 2011

***Stiff*** **by Mary Roach**

Adult/High School-Those curious or brave enough to find out what really happens to a body that is donated to the scientific community can do so with this book. Dissection in medical anatomy classes is about the least bizarre of the purposes that science has devised. Mostly dealing with such contemporary uses such as stand-ins for crash-test dummies, Roach also pulls together considerable historical and background information. Bodies are divided into types, including "beating-heart" cadavers for organ transplants, and individual parts-leg and foot segments, for example, are used to test footwear for the effects of exploding land mines. Just as the nonemotional, fact-by-fact descriptions may be getting to be a bit too much, Roach swings into macabre humor. In some cases, it is needed to restore perspective or aid in understanding both what the procedures are accomplishing and what it is hoped will be learned. In all cases, the comic relief welcomes readers back to the world of the living. For those who are interested in the fields of medicine or forensics and are aware of some of the procedures, this book makes excellent reading.  
*Pam Johnson, Fairfax County Public Library, VA*  
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***The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston**

Amazon.com Review

**The Woman Warrior** is a pungent, bitter, but beautifully written memoir of growing up Chinese American in Stockton, California. Maxine Hong Kingston ([China Men](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ISBN=0679723285/$%7b0%7d)) distills the dire lessons of her mother's mesmerizing "talk-story" tales of a China where girls are worthless, tradition is exalted and only a strong, wily woman can scratch her way upward. The author's America is a landscape of confounding white "ghosts"--the policeman ghost, the social worker ghost--with equally rigid, but very different rules. Like the woman warrior of the title, Kingston carries the crimes against her family carved into her back by her parents in testimony to and defiance of the pain.

http://www.amazon.com/Woman-Warrior-Memoirs-Girlhood-Ghosts/dp/0679721886 9 Jan 2011

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| **# of pages** | **Title of Book** | **Author of book** |
| 214 | *An American Childhood* | Annie Dillard |
| 460 | *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* | Malcolm X |
| 290 approximately | *Beyond the Beautiful Forevers* | Katherine Boo |
| 380 approximately | *Black Boy* | Richard Wright |
| 192 approximately | *Black Like Me* | John Howard Griffin |
| 447 | *The Devil in the White City* | Erik Larson |
| 383;356 (depending on source) | *Fast food Nation* | Eric Schlosser |
| 328 | *Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* | Rebecca Skloot |
| 343 | *In Cold Blood* | Truman Capote |
| 272 | *Lives on the Boundary* | Mike Rose |
| 336 | *Mountains Beyond Mountains* | Tracy Kidder |
| 285 (hardcover) | *Outliers* | Malcolm Gladwell |
| 360 | *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* | Anne Fadiman |
| 305 | *Stiff* | Mary Roach |
| 209 | *The Woman Warrior* | Maxine Hong Kingston |

1. Excerpted from assignment handouts [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. More information about all assignments and format of discussions will be given the week before the study begins. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Some books may include profanity or adult content. Make sure that you peruse the book before beginning the assignment so you can make an educated decision about your reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)