

Honors American Literature Summer Reading Assignment 2016

Choose **one** of the following books: (Book descriptions are from www.amazon.com. Please note that some of the options contain mature content. Parents/guardians are encouraged to review the book choices before the student makes a selection.)

- *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Volume I: The Pox Party*, by M.T. Anderson

Young Octavian is being raised by a group of rational philosophers known only by numbers -- but it is only after he opens a forbidden door that learns the hideous nature of their experiments, and his own chilling role them. Set in Revolutionary Boston, M. T. Anderson's mesmerizing novel takes place at a time when Patriots battled to win liberty while African slaves were entreated to risk their lives for a freedom they would never claim. The first of two parts, this deeply provocative novel reimagines past as an eerie place that has startling resonance for readers today.

- *Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of WWI* (Joseph Bruchac)

In the measured tones of a Native American storyteller, Bruchac assumes the persona of a Navajo grandfather telling his grandchildren about his World War II experiences. Protagonist Ned Begay starts with his **early schooling at an Anglo boarding school**, where the Navajo language is forbidden, and continues through his Marine career as a "code talker," explaining his long silence until "de-classified" in 1969. Begay's lifelong journey honors the Navajos and other Native Americans in the military, and fosters respect for their culture. Bruchac's gentle prose presents a clear historical picture of young men in wartime, island hopping across the Pacific, waging war in the hells of Guadalcanal, Bougainville, and Iwo Jima. Nonsensational and accurate, Bruchac's tale is quietly inspiring, even for those who have seen *Windtalkers*, or who have read such nonfiction works as Nathan Aaseng's *Navajo Code Talkers* (Walker, 1992), Kenji Kawano's *Warriors: Navajo Code Talkers* (Northland, 1990), or Deanne Durrett's *Unsung Heroes of World War II: The Story of the Navajo Code Talkers* (Facts On File, 1998). For those who've read none of the above, this is an eye-opener. —*Patricia Manning, formerly at Eastchester Public Library, NY*

- *Thieving Forest* by Marsha Conway.

Conway's novel, four recently orphaned sisters in 19th-century Ohio are abducted by Potawatomi Native Americans, and a feisty fifth, Susanna Quiner, the youngest, is forced to brave the untamed forest in order to rescue them. Aiding her on her quest is Adam, a crusty tracker, and Seth Spendlove, a secretive young neighbor. Meanwhile, the kidnapped sisters are overcome with fear and uncertainty. Susanna's long journey finds her struggling with a situation that forces her to grow up quickly. Though overwritten at times, Conway's book renders the Black Swamp region very well; the environment itself, seemingly endless and unmoved by Susanna's human trial, is so evocative as to feel like a formidable antagonist. The scope of this old-fashioned pioneer adventure yarn is also impressive, and the full arc of Conway's characters' development, combined with a satisfying ending, is memorable.

- *A Soldier's Heart* – Gary Paulsen

Addressing the most fundamental themes of life and death, the versatile Paulsen produces a searing antiwar story. He bases his protagonist, Charley Goddard, on an actual Civil War soldier, a 15-year-old from Minnesota who lied about his age and ended up participating in most of the war's major battles. At first Paulsen's Charley is fired up by patriotic slogans and his own naive excitement; in a rare intrusion into the narrative, the author makes it clear that ending slavery was not the impetus: "Never did they speak of slavery. Just about the wrongheadedness of the Southern 'crackers' and how they had to teach Johnny Reb a lesson." But Charley's first battle immediately disabuses him of his notions about honor and glory. A few sparely written passages describe the terror of the gunfire and the smoke from the cannons. Interwoven with these descriptions, a brilliant, fast-moving evocation of Charley's thoughts shows the boy's shocked realization of the price of war, his absolute certainty that he will die and his sudden understanding of the complex forces that prevent him from fleeing. Paulsen wages his own campaign for the audience's hearts and minds strategically and with great success. Elsewhere, as in *The Rifle*, he has told stories in service to a message; here the message follows from the story ineluctably. Charley comes across fully human, both his vulnerabilities and strengths becoming more pronounced as the novel progresses. Warfare, too, emerges complexly-while a lesser writer might attempt to teach readers to shun war by dint of the protagonist's profound disgust, Paulsen compounds the horrors of the battlefield by demonstrating how they trigger Charley's own bloodlust. Charley cannot recover from his years of war; in a smaller but more hopeful way, neither may the audience. Paulsen's storytelling is so psychologically true that readers will feel they have lived through Charley's experiences. Ages 12-up.

After reading the book complete the following:

- *Write a summary for each chapter (you may want to do this as you are reading)
- *Create a list of important characters
- *Note at least ten specific details about the setting of the novel

You can write this in a word document or on one of the following: Weebly, Google drive, or Microsoft Word.

This summer reading assignment is due within the first two weeks of school; however, students are strongly encouraged to submit their assignment on the first day of school.

Questions? Please e-mail Mrs. Bishop at diana.bishop@cobbk12.org