

Independent Reading How Did I Get This Way?

Unit Overview

In this unit, you'll examine the ways a character's sense of self is shaped by his experiences. Over the next four weeks, you'll be reading one book, chosen from the list below. You will complete four assignments, each of which will demonstrate your thoughtful engagement with your book.

Here's how we will spend our class time:

- independent reading
- small discussion groups (with people reading the same book)
- one-on-one conversations with Ms. Brody & Ms. Staples

This is what you are responsible for (using class time and homework time):

- reading your book and thinking about it
- completing four projects

Book Choices:

Alexie, Sherman, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

Cameron, Peter. *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You*

Danticat, Edwidge. *The Farming of Bones*

Gaiman, Neil. *Anansi Boys*

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things* (Required for Honors)

Assignments:

At the end of weeks one, two and three, you must turn in one of the following. You may do any three of the 5 choices. At the end of week four, you will turn in a Character Changes Over Time graph.

Due Dates:

Assignment #1 (choose from list - must cover at least $\frac{1}{4}$ of book): Monday, 12/7

Assignment #2 (choose from list - must cover at least $\frac{1}{2}$ of book): Monday, 12/14

Assignment #3 (choose from list - must cover at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of book): Monday, 12/21

Changes Over Time Graph with Explanations: Wednesday, 1/6

Independent Reading Unit - Assignments

Options for Weekly Assignments

Choose any three. You may not do the same one twice. On each assignment you turn in, be sure to write your name, the title of the book, and the # of pages you have read.

1. Write a Statement of Identity for your character. How might your character describe himself? You might choose to make this a personal profile for a dating site, a cover letter and resume, a summer letter to a college roommate they haven't met yet...
2. Write a letter of advice to your character. Think about the situation they're in and the circumstances that limit their choices. Tell them what you think they should do and why.
3. Create a visual representation of your character. Make sure the image also explores your character's circumstances. (If your image is not self-explanatory, include an explanatory statement.)
4. Write an original monologue for your character. Have them tell someone something they do not say in the book. Try to sound like your character would. (Exception: People reading *The Scarlet Letter*, please don't try to sound like a 17th century character in a 19th century novel. That can only lead to disaster. You're welcome to imagine how your character would write/sound if they were alive today.)
5. Write a letter from one character in your book to another. (From, to, or about your character.)
6. List at least 10 items in your character's trash. Write a paragraph to explain why you chose each one. Make sure your explanations are text-based.

Final Assignment (Due Wednesday, 1/6)

For this assignment, you will make a 3-line graph that charts the major influences that shape your character. For your y-axis, you will choose three primary aspects of your character's personality **or sense of self**. Your x-axis will be chronological, and will include major events in your character's life. (Don't worry -- we'll look at examples of this.)

Your graph must be accompanied by explanatory notes in which you **use specifics from the text** to support and explain:

- the importance of each of the three character traits (or aspects of your character's sense of self) that you chose
- the changes you graph in each of the above
- the importance of each of the major events on your x-axis
- the connection between each event and the changes in your character

**Independent Reading Unit
 Assessment Rubric for Weekly Assignments**

Name _____

Book _____ Pages Read _____ Option # _____

| | |
|--|--|
| Analysis | |
| Your work demonstrates a thorough and accurate understanding of the book | |
| Your work identifies significant aspects of your character | |
| Your work identifies ways in which circumstances and events affect your character | |
| Composition | |
| Your work is clear -- easy to understand | |
| (Options 1, 4, 5) Your work is written in a voice appropriate or plausible for the character who is writing/speaking* | |
| (Options 1, 2, 4, 5) Your work adheres to the conventions of syntax, grammar, punctuation and spelling (unless there is a logical and obvious reason to break them). | |
| (Option 3) You convey your meaning through effective use of the elements of visual art (color, spacial composition, light, line, etc) | |
| Work Habits | |
| Your assignment demonstrates deep engagement with the required number of pages (1/4, 1/2, 3/4 of book) | |
| Your assignment is handed in on time | |

*Scarlet Letter readers: please don't try to sound like a 17th century character from a 19th century novel.

**Independent Reading Unit
Assessment Rubric for Final Assignment**

Name _____

Book _____

| | |
|---|--|
| Analysis | |
| Your graph and explanatory notes demonstrate a thorough and accurate understanding of the book | |
| You convincingly support your choices of elements to graph (providing specific evidence for the text). | |
| You convincingly support your analysis of the effects of circumstances and events on your character (providing specific evidence for the text). | |
| Composition | |
| Your graph is clear and easy to understand | |
| Your explanatory notes are clear and logically organized | |
| Your explanatory notes adhere to the conventions of syntax, grammar, punctuation and spelling. | |
| Work Habits | |
| Your graph and explanatory notes are handed in on time. | |

Questions for Book Discussion Groups

At least once a week, you will have a discussion with at least three other people who are reading the same book as you. Each member of the group should take their own discussion notes, which you will hand in. They will be graded for work habits.

Prompts for group discussion notes:

- What easily answerable questions did your group have? What answers did you come up with?
- What harder-to-answer (or unanswerable) questions did your group have? What thoughts/guesses/ideas/conversations did you have around them?
- In your group, talk about the character/s you are tracking for this project. How would you describe them? What do you base your descriptions on?
- How does your group think your character/s would describe themselves? What do you base this on?
- In what ways has/have your character/s changed in this section of the book? What events or circumstances have led to this change?
- What patterns or themes do you see emerging in this book? How do these patterns & themes relate to your character/s?

Special Notes for Honors Students

The God of Small Things is a dense, challenging book. Please remember: taking this course for honors does not mean that I expect you to find the work easy. It does mean that I expect you to take the time and make the effort to do it well. That includes asking questions and coming to Extra Help when you need it.

Here are some things that might help you make sense of this complicated book:

- **Don't ignore time markers.**

The book skips around in time like crazy. Even within chapters there are flashbacks and flash-forwards. Make yourself a timeline and keep yourself oriented. Leave a lot of room on your timeline, as the author repeatedly returns to a couple of specific days, each of which has many events in it.

- **Don't be embarrassed not to know stuff.**

You don't need to be an expert on India to read this book. Roy does explain things. Still, there's a lot to explain. Write down your questions as you go. If you read carefully, you'll find answers to most of them. That said, feel free to ask, and feel free to Google! Here are some areas of knowledge that you may find you have questions about:

- The Indian caste system
- British colonialism in India (historic) / foreign tourism in India (current)
- The history of communism in Kerala (the state in India where the book takes place)
- Kathakali dance (a sacred temple dance)

- **Do not try to skim or half-read this book**

It won't work. It just won't work. There is not a single unnecessary word in it. The details matter. (For example, if you miss the definition of a love-in-Tokyo, you'll be confused for the whole rest of the novel.) If you find yourself spacing out as you read, try your favorite focusing strategy -- notes in the margin, reading aloud, summarizing paragraphs, going for a run and trying again -- whatever works for you.