

## AP Literature and Composition Summer Reading Assignment

### Part 1: Contemporary Literature (REQUIRED)

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz [ISBN: 978-1-59448-329-5]

From the very first page, Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* will feel different from pretty much every other book you have read (at least in school, anyway), more like a conversation or a movie than a novel, and that fresh, new, inventive use of language garnered Díaz a Pulitzer in 2008 and largely accounts for the presence of *Oscar Wao* on nearly every list of the top ten novels of the 21<sup>st</sup> century yet compiled. Because of the blend of high and low diction, the novel can seem deceptively simple, so here are a few suggestions to help you get the most out of the book:

- Look up pop culture references (Wikipedia)
- Read up on the history of Dominican Republic
- Maybe check out a map of the DR
- Note the various narrators (like, who is the primary narrator? Why did Díaz choose to have him tell Oscar's story?)
- What do you think about the use of language? How does it affect your thoughts about the story?
- Males and females in the novel derive power from different sources, and they are expected to behave very differently, especially with regard to sex. Note the ways both genders experience positive and negative consequences of the rigid system in which they exist.
- As you read, outline the structure of the novel and the revelation of information – why did Díaz organize the story this way? How does it affect your view perception of the various characters?
- Create questions for discussion. (Yeah, like write them down. ☺)
- Here's an interesting issue that just came up: Junot Díaz has been accused of making inappropriate advances toward women. (Google it.) Does this affect your perception of his art? How do we reconcile the personal lives of artists (novelists, actors, directors, comedians, etc.) with the value of their art? (These questions are not rhetorical. I think this is a really thorny issue, and I am always curious about what other people think.)

### Part 2: Senior Summer Reading (REQUIRED, SEE REVERSE)

#### NOTES:

- Consulting online guides (such as Wikipedia or Sparknotes) as a supplement to or a substitute for reading the book violates the Honor Code.
- You will need a hard copy, not an e-book, of all books required for this class.

**SENIOR SUMMER READING**  
***The Road to Character* by David Brooks [ISBN: 978-0-812-98341-8]**

This year, the conversation about your summer reading will be an activity at the senior retreat on August 18 and 19. We will discuss, both in small groups and as a class, the main ideas of this best-selling book, chosen especially for the Class of 2020 by our new Head of School, Mr. Baldecchi. The central question in this book is how to not only do good, but be good. It explores how to live a life of depth and meaning over success and achievement. *The Road to Character* provides an opportunity for us to rethink our priorities as we strive to build rich inner lives marked by humility and moral depth. Author David Brooks focuses on the deeper values that should inform our lives.

We encourage you to watch David Brooks talk about his book using the YouTube links below:

**David Brooks: “The Moral Bucket List”**

<https://youtu.be/INpPg9eWkXU>



**David Brooks: “Should you live for your resume or for your eulogy?”**

<https://youtu.be/MILWTeApqIM>



Please note that watching these YouTube segments should **supplement** your reading **NOT** replace it. During your discussion, you will be asked questions that require that you give specific examples from the text. To encourage you to read closely and to prepare you well for the group discussions, you will highlight and make notes in the margins of *The Road to Character* whenever you see something that strikes you as important. Your English teacher will do a book check on the first day of classes, so please be sure you bring your book to class.

**Essential Questions:**

Read this list of essential questions **BEFORE** you start reading the book. These questions will help guide your thinking as well as help you annotate while you read the book. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to these questions.

- What is character?
- What qualities define a person of character?
- What qualities do you think are important to have on your college or work resume?
- What qualities would you like to be remembered for having after you die?
- To what extent do you agree that character is not how we act when everything is going well -- it is how we react to failure?
- Do you agree that “failure builds character”?

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