

8th grade pre-AP summer reading assignment

Ms. Carlisle: Kristin.carlisle@atcschool.org

The **purpose** of the summer reading assignment is to refine reading skills, which are often lost or reduced over the summer months, and to encourage reading for pleasure. Reading closely and analytically requires practice, so completing the summer reading assignment allows you to maintain your level of excellence.

You have one book to read over the summer: *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. This book can be borrowed from the public library or purchased at local bookstores or online. I strongly suggest that you purchase your own copy of the book so that you will have a copy when school begins (we will begin the school year with learning activities focused on this book).

In addition to reading *The Book Thief*, it is also required that you complete a multi-part project: a “response chart” and a creative character “letter exchange” (see below for more specific directions). This project will be your first major grade in 8th grade English!

*****Please Note:** This summer assignment is not something you can put off until the last week of the summer, so get started as soon as possible. Taking notes and marking the book as you go will help you remember what you have read, even if you get your reading done in June. Remember, you are making a commitment as a pre-AP student to complete your work to the best of your ability. I expect a pre-AP performance. Please plan your time accordingly.

“Understand historical context”

Read the information provided at the end of this document BEFORE starting to read the novel. Highlight key points. It provides important historical context that will help you understand the book.

“Response Chart”

Directions: Complete the chart below as you read. Write down your thoughts on each question and then find at least one piece of evidence from the *The Book Thief* that supports your belief. Don’t worry about answering the questions in complete sentences; however, be prepared to discuss your ideas and responses in class. Be sure to review the questions *before* you read, and again after you read sections. This will make it easier to find text evidence.

Example: How does foreshadowing influence the reader’s experience while reading *The Book Thief*? Why do you believe Zusak uses the literary device so frequently throughout the novel?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book
-Because Death is the narrator, the book’s end is not the most important part (Everything must eventually end in death).	“The book thief and her brother were traveling down toward Munich, where they would soon be given over to foster parents. We know now, of course, that the boy didn’t make it” (19).

-If we know what is going to happen, then we are more likely to pay attention to how it is happening.	
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Questions: 1. What is the importance (or symbolism) of Death’s role as narrator in *The Book Thief*?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

2. How would the meaning of *The Book Thief* change if the narrator was just another unnamed human instead of Death?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

3. Why is Death so intrigued with Liesel? What does this say about Death’s character? What does it say about Liesel’s character?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

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4. What is the significance of the titles of the books Liesel steals? What do these titles tell you about Liesel and the time period?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

5. Why did Liesel's mother abandon her? At what point does Liesel understand why her mother had to abandon her?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

6. Both Hans and Max Vandenburg experience extreme guilt. Why do they feel this guilt, and what does each character do with it?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

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7. What does Liesel's relationship with Rudy teach Liesel about herself? Why does she kiss him in the end?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

8. In the beginning of the novel, Death tells the reader, "I am often reminded of [the book thief]... I have kept her story to retell... to prove to me that you, and your human existence, are worth it" (15). After reading the novel, why do you think the book thief's story proves that human existence "is worth it"?

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

9. After reading *The Book Thief*, what do you think the author, Mark Zusak, wants his readers to understand and take with them beyond the actual story? (In other words, why did Zusak write *The Book Thief*, and what is his theme or the universal meaning of the text?)

My thoughts	Evidence from the book

Character “letter exchange”

Write self-reflective letters from several characters (at least 3 different characters) on what the character learned about himself, others, and life. The letters should each be at *least* one page in length (typed, 12 pt font) and written from the **1st person point-of-view of the characters**. The letters should demonstrate **a clear understanding of the characters’ personalities as well as themes in the book and how the “lessons learned” vary based on different characters’ perspectives and experiences**. *Further details:* Minimum three letters. They can be written from the characters to themselves (like a diary), or written to another character. As long as the letters stay true to characters (including appropriate tone and voice), you can be creative in adding details like characters’ thoughts, experiences, or dreams that may not be explicitly present in *The Book Thief*. This will further demonstrate that you know these characters well, like they are close friends of yours.

“Understand historical context”

The First World War

WWI, in which England, France, and Russia fought Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey was one of the deadliest wars in history. The war was at a stalemate until 1917 when the U.S. intervened on behalf of the English and French. Jews fought for their various countries on both sides of the conflict.

The Nazification of German Society

The Nazi party and Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933. Over time the Nazis thoroughly dominated Germany with all institutions of society being Nazified or disbanded. All dissenters, such as democrats, socialists, communists, and the religious were ruthlessly suppressed. Books which contained writings that did not conform to the Nazi ideology of Aryan superiority were burned. Paintings and other works of art that the Nazis disliked were destroyed.

Propaganda

The Nazi party used propaganda, including Hitler's autobiographical book, *Mein Kampf (My Struggle)*, to acquire and maintain control over German society.

Hitler Youth and United German Girls

All children were required to belong to the Hitler Youth (for boys) and the United German Girls; the boys were prepared to be soldiers and girls were prepared to be homemakers and mothers. In 1933 Hitler stated that:

"My program for educating youth is hard. Weakness must be hammered away. In my castles of the Teutonic Order a youth will grow up before which the world will tremble. I want a brutal, domineering, fearless, cruel youth. Youth must be all that. It must bear pain. There must be nothing weak and gentle about it. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from its eyes...That is how I will eradicate thousands of years of human domestication...That is how I will create the New Order."

The Holocaust

In Nazi Germany, Jews, political opponents of the Nazis, socialists, communists, the very religious, the handicapped, and Gypsies were hunted down and placed into concentration camps. The goal of the Nazis was to "purify" Germany of people who were their opponents and of people who didn't conform to the ideal of an Aryan. In addition, non-Jews from Nazi occupied countries, such as Poland, Russia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Holland, and France were killed in the concentration camps. It is estimated that 6,000,000 Jews died in the concentration camps and another 5,000,000 non-Jews died there as well. In addition, the Germans killed millions in the countries that they conquered without bothering to take them to concentration camps.

Kristallnacht

Kristallnacht means, in German, "the night of crystal." On November 9 - 10, 1938 the Nazis coordinated attacks against Jewish synagogues and business throughout Germany, Austria, and German occupied areas of Czechoslovakia. The name comes from the shards of glass from the broken windows of buildings owned by Jews. That night Nazi rioters destroyed 267 synagogues and 7500 businesses. Ninety-one people were killed, and there were numerous rapes.

Jesse Owens -- Hitler had planned to use the 1936 Summer Olympics which were held in Berlin to show the superiority of Aryan athletes. It didn't turn out that way, in large part because of Jesse Owens, an African-American. Owens won four gold medals: in the 100 meter dash, the 200 meter dash, the long jump, and the 4x100 meter relay. He was the most successful athlete at the games. Jesse Owens ran track for Ohio State University and held the world record in the long jump for 25 years.

German Bombing of England and Allied Bombing of Germany -- World War II saw the first sustained aerial bombing of cities as a strategy of war. In those days, there were no precision-guided bombs as there are now. Aerial bombing was inaccurate and many bombs missed their targets. In the summer of 1940, the German Air Force, the Luftwaffe, started bombing military and industrial sites in England. In September 1940 the Luftwaffe shifted its tactics and bombed civilian areas of British cities. The bombing of civilian areas lasted for eight months, until the following May, when Hitler gave up on the idea of invading England and turned his attention to Russia. The British called the bombing campaign "the Blitz." The Blitz only stiffened British resolve to fight.

The German bombing of London was intense. In all, 40,000 - 43,000 civilians in London and other British cities were killed by the Luftwaffe between September 1940 and May 1941. Another approximately 46,000 were injured. 1.4 million were made homeless. Later in the war, the British and the Americans repaid the favor with aerial bombing that killed more than 300,000 German civilians, destroying entire neighborhoods.