

Ramapo-Indian Hills English Department
2012 Summer Reading Assignment - **English 3CP/CPE/ American Studies**

Review the book titles listed below and the brief summaries as excerpted from barnesandnoble.com. Please select one of the following books, read it, and complete the assignment as detailed on the “General Directions” handout. The related quotes follow this list.

Bread Givers by Anzia Yezierska

(*This is the **required** title for students enrolled in American Studies; students not enrolled in American Studies may **not** select this title.)

This masterwork of American immigrant literature is set in the 1920s on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and tells the story of Sara Smolinsky, the youngest daughter of an Orthodox rabbi, who rebels against her father's rigid conception of Jewish womanhood. Sarah's struggle towards independence and self-fulfillment resonates with a passion all can share. Beautifully redesigned page for page with the previous editions, *Bread Givers* is an essential historical work with enduring relevance.

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother by James McBride

As a boy in Brooklyn's Red Hook projects, James McBride knew his mother was different. But when he asked about it, she'd simply say, "I'm light-skinned." Later he wondered if he was different too, and asked his mother if he was black or white. "You're a human being," she snapped. "Educate yourself or you'll be a nobody!" And when James asked what color God was, she said, "God is the color of water."

As an adult, McBride finally persuaded his mother to tell her story—the story of a rabbi's daughter, born in Poland and raised in the South, who fled to Harlem after encountering anti-Semitism in her small town. Upon marrying a black man, her family promptly disowned her, causing her to launch a second existence as (to quote her son) "a flying compilation of competing interests and conflicts, a black woman in white skin." *The Color of Water* is a poignant exploration of race, family, and identity, juxtaposing the author's experiences with his mother's stories.

Scratch Beginnings: Me, \$25, and the Search for the American Dream by Adam Shepard

Is the American Dream still alive or has it, in fact, been drowned out by a clashing of the classes? Is the upper class destined to rule forever while the lower classes are forced to live in the same cyclical misery?

Millions of Americans fight for the answers to these questions every day, and here, in *Scratch Beginnings*, one man makes the attempt at discovering the answers for himself. Carrying only a sleeping bag, the clothes on his back, and \$25 cash, and restricted from using previous contacts or his education, Adam Shepard sets out for a randomly selected city with one goal on his mind: work his way out of the realities of homelessness and into a life that will offer him the opportunity for success.

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet by Jamie Ford

In the opening pages of Jamie Ford's stunning debut novel, *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, Henry Lee comes upon a crowd gathered outside the Panama Hotel, once the gateway to Seattle's Japantown. It has been boarded up for decades, but now the new owner has made an incredible discovery: the belongings of Japanese families, left when they were rounded up and sent to internment camps during World War II. As Henry looks on, the owner opens a Japanese parasol.

This simple act takes old Henry Lee back to the 1940s, at the height of the war, when young Henry's world is a jumble of confusion and excitement, and to his father, who is obsessed with the war in China and having Henry grow up American. While "scholarshipping" at the exclusive Rainier Elementary, where the white kids ignore him, Henry meets Keiko Okabe, a young Japanese American student. Amid the chaos of blackouts, curfews, and FBI raids, Henry and Keiko forge a bond of friendship—and innocent love—that transcends the long-standing prejudices of their Old World ancestors. And after Keiko and her family are swept up in the evacuations to the internment camps, she and Henry are left only with the hope that the war will end, and that their promise to each other will be kept.

After you read your novel, please select one of the following quotes to complete your assignment (Please see Summer Reading Assignment 2012 for directions):

1. "The American lives even more for his goals, for the future, than the European. Life for him is always becoming, never being." -Albert Einstein
2. "Only Americans can hurt America." -Dwight D. Eisenhower
3. "We are a puny and fickle folk. Avarice, hesitation, and following are our diseases." -Ralph Waldo Emerson
4. "For this is what America is all about. It is the uncrossed desert and the unclimbed ridge. It is the star that is not reached and the harvest that is sleeping in the unplowed ground." - Lyndon B. Johnson
5. "The American Dream has run out of gas. The car has stopped. It no longer supplies the world with its images, its dreams, its fantasies. No more. It's over." -J.G. Ballard
6. "We need a new spirit of community, a sense that we are all in this together, or the American Dream will continue to wither." -Bill Clinton
7. "The American, by nature, is optimistic. He is experimental, a builder who builds best when called upon to build greatly." -John F. Kennedy
8. "America is not merely a nation but a nation of nations." -Lyndon B. Johnson
9. "There is nothing the matter with Americans except their ideals. The real American is all right; it is the ideal American who is all wrong." -G. K. Chesterton
10. "Humanity's survival does not depend on reducing differences to a common identity, but on learning to live creatively with differences." -Anonymous