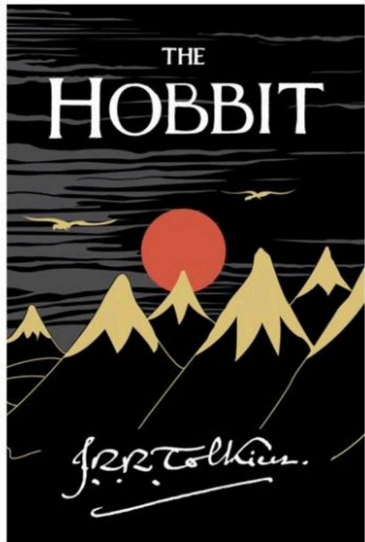
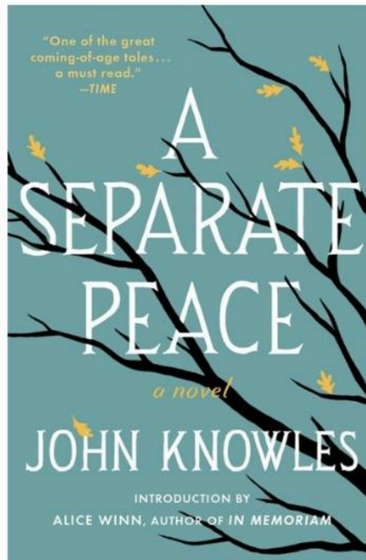
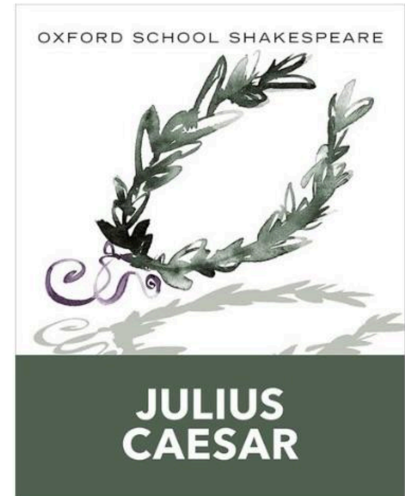
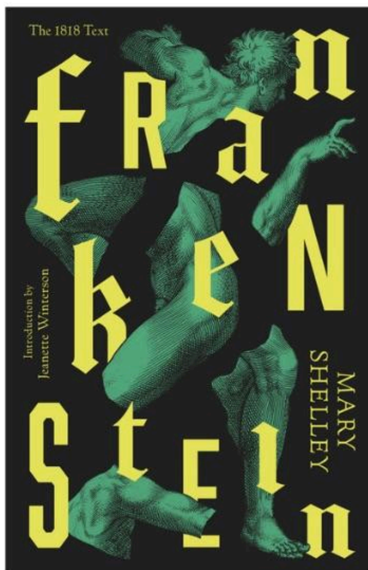
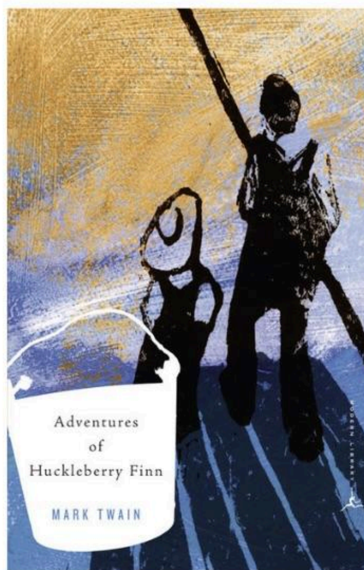
Summer Reading at Ascent Classical Academy: 2026-27

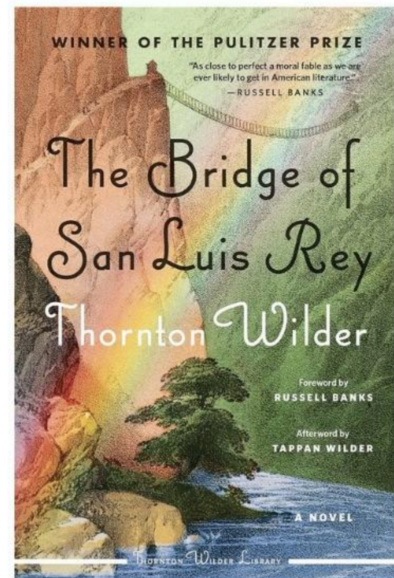












REQUIRED READING

All students in grades 7-12 must read, annotate, and complete a written exercise on an assigned book. Using the ISBN, please purchase the specific editions below so that we are on the same page. Films are a supplement, *not* a substitute for the book, and should be watched *only* after reading the book carefully.

Rising 7th graders: British Literature

- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (William Morrow, ISBN: 9780547928227)
- Supplement: You may wish to see the 2012-2014 trilogy of films directed by Peterson Jackson, although they do *not* adhere closely to the text (available on Amazon Prime Video or Apple TV).

Rising 8th graders: American Literature

- John Knowles (1926-2001), *A Separate Peace* (Scribner, ISBN: 9780743253970)
- Supplement: You may wish to see the 1972 film directed by Larry Peerce (available on Amazon Prime Video or Apple TV).

Rising 9th graders: Ancient Literature

- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (Oxford, ISBN: 9780198328681). For only $5, students can purchase available copies in a different edition from Mrs. Ingram.
- Supplement: You may wish to see the 1953 film directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, featuring Marlon Brando (Marc Antony), James Mason (Brutus), and John Gielgud (Caesar) (available on Amazon Prime Video or Apple TV).

Rising 10th graders: Medieval & British Literature

- Mary Shelley (1797-1851), *Frankenstein* (Vintage, ISBN: 9780307743312)
  Supplement: You may wish to see the 1994 film directed by and featuring Kenneth Branagh, which is a faithful adaptation of the book (available on Amazon Prime Video or Apple TV), or the 2025 film directed by Guillermo del Toro, featuring Oscar Isaac (Victor Frankenstein) and Jacob Elordi (The Creature), although it does *not* adhere closely to the text (available on Netflix).

Rising 11th graders: American Literature

- Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Modern Library, ISBN: 9780375757372)
- Supplement: You may wish to see the 1993 film directed by Stephen Sommers, featuring Elijah Woods (Huck Finn) and Courtney B. Vance (Jim) (available on Amazon Prime Video or Apple TV).

Rising 12th graders: Modern Literature

- Thornton Wilder (1897-1975), *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (HarperCollins, ISBN: 9780063114852)
- Supplement: You may wish to see the 2004 film directed by Mary McGuckian, featuring Robert De Niro (Archbishop of Peru) and Gabriel Byrne (Brother Juniper) (available on Amazon Prime Video or Apple TV).

WRITTEN EXERCISE

All students must choose one of the following written exercises to reflect on their summer reading. The typed paper will be due during the first week of school.

- For middle school (grades 7-8), the word count is 900-1,000.
- For upper school (grades 9-12), the word count is 1,400-1,500.

Option 1: Wisdom about the good life

Here is a working definition of wisdom by scholar Robert C. Roberts: “Wisdom is a heartfelt understanding of the good for human beings where the good is ‘ethical’ but not narrowly so (not just a knowledge of duty, for example); for the wise person the good is also beautiful, attractive, interesting, desirable. Wisdom, thus, has an ‘aesthetic’ dimension.”[1]

Great texts are “great,” among other reasons, because they are wisdom-oriented. We read great texts because, ultimately, they are about *us*. Of course, there are different conceptions of the good, as Roberts points out: “For Plato, the desire that could ground wisdom was the love of the transcendent Good; for Aristotle, it was the desire for human well-being (*eudaimonia*); for the Stoics, love of the rational order in the universe. For Dostoevsky himself, it was the love of Christ.” He adds: “If wisdom is to be acquired through a reading of the great texts, that reading must . . . foster an understanding of the reader’s life in the context of this universe in which we find ourselves, so that the reader can be growing in his or her desire for the good. No one can acquire wisdom without a conception of the good that is consistent enough to enable him or her to love it.”[2]

The goal of this written exercise is to explore two questions:

1. *Analysis of wisdom*: What is the author’s wisdom, or “heartfelt understanding of the good for human beings,” where the good is not only ethical (what should or should not to be done) but also aesthetic (what is “beautiful, attractive, interesting, desirable”)? In short, identify and articulate the author’s wisdom, providing at least 2-3 *specific* examples from the book to support your claim.

2. *Critique of wisdom*: Does the author’s understanding of the good for human beings inspire or challenge me, provoke my agreement, disagreement, or ambivalence (a mixture of agreement and disagreement)—and why? In short, weigh the merits of the author’s wisdom, providing at least 2-3 *specific* examples from the book to support your views.

---

[1] Robert C. Roberts, “Reading Texts and Nurturing Wisdom: Introduction,” in *Finding a Common Thread: Understanding Great Texts from Homer to O’Connor*, ed. Robert C. Roberts, Scott H. Moore, and Donald D. Schmeltekopf (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2013), 5.
[2] Ibid., 3.

Requirements:

- Use first person (“I”) in the critique to personalize your textual engagement.
- Use the MLA format for the heading (including word count below the date), spacing, in-text citations, and Work Cited.
- Refer to at least 2-3 *specific* examples for each of the two questions.
- Integrate at least 3-5 quotations from the text.

Option 2: Letter to a character

Imagine yourself as a contemporary person who inhabits the literary work’s time and setting, whether it is the Third Age of Middle Earth in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit,* a World War II-era New Hampshire boarding school in John Knowles’ *A Separate Peace,* the late Roman Republic in William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar,* late 18th-century and early 19th-century Europe in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein,* the antebellum American South in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* or early 18th-century Peru in Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey.*

The goal of this written exercise is to write a well-crafted letter to a character in your assigned book, responding to the character’s choices, struggles, and development. You may fashion yourself as a plausible character who would be acquainted with him or her. Create an authentic voice, where you sound like a real person writing to another. Adopt a tone that fits your purpose—advisory, confrontational, sympathetic, or reflective. Choose an angle:

- The Advisor: Give the character advice at a critical moment.
- The Challenger: Critique the character’s choices and push back.
- The Ally: Defend and support the character, especially if misunderstood.
- The Reflector: Use the character’s story to explore a larger theme.

A successful letter will demonstrate a clear understanding of the character’s role in the story. It will go beyond summary to grapple with tension or conflict in the character’s choices, acknowledge complexity or ambiguity (avoid oversimplifying the character), and make claims about what the character represents or reveals.

Requirements:

- Adopt a letter format with a greeting, body, and closing. Use first person (“I).
- Use the MLA format for the heading (including word count below the date), spacing, in-text citations, and Work Cited.
- Refer to at least 2-3 *specific* episodes from the story.
- Integrate at least 3-5 quotations from the text.

ANNOTATION

All students must annotate their books, which will be evaluated by the literature teacher during the first week of school. Annotation is intellectual ownership—or making a book your own. In *How to Read a Book,* Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren offer a rationale for why we should annotate:

> If you have the habit of asking a book questions as you read, you are a better reader than if you do not. But, as we have indicated, merely asking questions is not enough. You have to try to answer them. And although that could be done, theoretically, in your mind only, it is much easier to do it with a pencil [or pen] in your hand. The pencil [or pen] then becomes the sign of your alertness while you read.
>
> It is an old saying that you have to "read between the lines" to get the most out of anything. The rules of reading are a formal way of saying this. But we want to persuade you to "write between the lines," too. Unless you do, you are not likely to do the most efficient kind of reading.
>
> When you buy a book, you establish a property right in it, just as you do in clothes or furniture when you buy and pay for them. But the act of purchase is actually only the prelude to possession in the case of a book. Full ownership of a book only comes when you have made it a part of yourself, and the best way to make yourself a part of it—which comes to the same thing—is by writing in it.
>
> Why is marking a book indispensable to reading it? First, it keeps you awake—not merely conscious, but wide awake. Second, reading, if it is active, is thinking, and thinking tends to express itself in words, spoken or written. The person who says he knows what he thinks but cannot express it usually does not know what he thinks. Third, writing your reactions down helps you to remember the thoughts of the author.
>
> Reading a book should be a conversation between you and the author. Presumably he knows more about the subject than you do; if not, you probably should not be bothering with his book. But understanding is a two-way operation; the learner has to question himself and question the teacher. He even has to be willing to argue with the teacher, once he understands what the teacher is saying. Marking a book is literally an expression of your differences or your agreements with the author. It is the highest respect you can pay him.[3]

Adler and Van Doren provide helpful guidance on *how* to annotate, which students should adopt:

> 1. UNDERLINING—of major points; of important or forceful statements.
>
> 2. VERTICAL LINES AT THE MARGIN—to emphasize a statement already underlined or to point to a passage too long to be underlined.

---

[3] Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book: Revised and Updated Edition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 48-49.

3. STAR, ASTERISK, OR OTHER DOODAD AT THE MARGIN—to be used sparingly, to emphasize the ten or dozen most important statements or passages in the book.

4. NUMBERS IN THE MARGIN—to indicate a sequence of points made by the author in developing an argument.

5. NUMBERS OF OTHER PAGES IN THE MARGIN—to indicate where else in the book the author makes the same points, or points relevant to or in contradiction of those here marked; to tie up ideas in a book, which, though they may be separated by many pages, belong together. Many readers use the symbol "Cf" to indicate the other page numbers; it means "compare" or "refer to."

6. CIRCLING OF KEY WORDS OR PHRASES—this serves much the same function as underlining.

7. WRITING IN THE MARGIN, OR AT THE TOP OR BOTTOM OF THE PAGE—to record questions (and perhaps answers) which a passage raises in your mind; to reduce a complicated discussion to a simple statement; to record the sequence of major points right through the book.[4]

The guidance from Adler and Van Doren focuses on works of nonfiction. For works of fiction, a reader should annotate the following features:

- PLOT AND STRUCTURE—*What happens, and how is it arranged?* Mark key events: conflicts, turning points, climaxes, resolutions. Note shifts in time (flashbacks, foreshadowing).
- CHARACTER—*Who are these people?* Annotate when you learn something new or puzzling about a character.
- SETTING—*Where and when does this story take place?* Note how the setting (location, season, time of day) shapes mood, character, or conflict.
- LANGUAGE AND STYLE—*How is the story told?* Mark striking imagery and figurative language (metaphor, simile, symbolism, personification, etc.). Consider repetition of key words or phrases. Notice the tone (formal, intimate, detached, etc.).
- POINT OF VIEW AND NARRATION—*Who is telling the story?* Indicate whether the story is first-person or third-person narration. Consider the reliability or bias of the narrator.
- THEMES—*What larger ideas are emerging*? Note passages that make a claim about life (human nature, society, morality, faith, identity) and tensions (freedom vs. control, reason vs. emotion, etc.).
- QUESTIONS—Record questions that arise as you read.

[4] Ibid., 49-50.