

Advanced Placement Literature & Composition

2019 Summer Reading

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“We read to know that we are not alone.” — C.S. Lewis

Summer Reading Summary:

- Together, we will read and annotate *A Visit from the Goon Squad* starting in mid-July.
- Participate in the summer reading discussion as you read. You will need to join AP English Literature and Composition on Google Classroom: qxm4o8
- **Summer Reading Details:** AP English Literature students have one novel to read this summer: Jennifer Egan’s 2011 Pulitzer Prize winner *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible* may be used as an alternate choice if you or your parents find *Good Squad* to be objectionable. Earthlight Books on Main Street offers a 20% discount to Wa-Hi students. We would urge you to purchase your copy there if possible. It is listed at about \$12 on Amazon if you choose that route. If purchasing the book creates a financial challenge for you, and you can’t find one at the library, please contact us and we will find a way to get you a book.

As we begin our summer reading, you will want to annotate *A Visit from the Goon Squad* heavily. Look for passages that you like or that puzzle or resonate with you. Note the effective use of various literary devices. If you have borrowed your book from a library, you can jot down responses to the book on sticky notes or slips of paper. If you read these works on your Kindle or e-reader, be sure you know how to print out highlighted text; you will want to share your annotations with the class during the first week of school. You can expect a test and essay over the novel shortly after school begins in September.

In addition to annotating your copy of the novel, you are required to participate in our Google Classroom online discussion (see top of this page). Please write two entries as you are reading the novel. You may ask a question and tell the group what your own thoughts are about your question or simply tell us about a passage that intrigues you, where we’ll find the passage, and what it is that you find so interesting about it.

The **suggested** reading schedule is to finish reading each chapter of *Goon Squad* by the following dates and to comment on them whenever you are ready – which may include going back to earlier chapters if you have fallen behind or have new insights:

Chapter One: Thursday, July 18

Chapter Two: Sunday, July 21

Chapter Three: Thursday, July 25

Chapter Four: Sunday, July 28

Chapter Five: Thursday, Aug. 1

Chapter Six: Sunday, Aug. 4

Chapter Seven: Thursday, Aug. 8

Chapter Eight: Sunday, Aug. 11

Chapter Nine: Thursday, Aug. 15

Chapter Ten: Sunday, Aug. 18

Chapter Eleven: Thursday, Aug. 22

Chapter Twelve: Sunday, Aug. 25

Chapter Thirteen: Monday, September 2 (School starts on September 3rd.)

One final comment: AP Literature & Composition students should be challenged by what they read. Texts chosen for summer reading and the subsequent school year will be typical in college courses. Because this *is* a college course, not a college-preparatory course, requests for alternate reading materials

during the school year are highly problematic. (Choosing an alternate for your *summer* reading should not, however, be viewed as a deal-breaker. Summer reading selections are considered “supplemental” to the curriculum, and are therefore more flexible.) Also note that the school does not supply these texts; they must be purchased new or used or obtained from the public library. If your budget allows, we recommend purchasing them, as they may be needed for extended periods of time. Please contact me, though, if this presents a financial burden to you or your family over the course of the school year. We look forward to meeting you in the fall and to many enthusiastic and rewarding literary discussions.

Some thoughts on the choice of *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

A Visit from the Goon Squad won the 2010 National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction and the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. It should be noted, though, that some of its characters struggle with dark themes and at times use profanity. For this reason, while we recommend reading *Good Squad*, as it is an excellent novel which feeds nicely into our curriculum, we offer Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible* as an alternative. If you choose this alternative, we would ask first that you carefully read the description below of *Goon Squad* and investigate the various links below regarding its merits. If you still choose to read *The Poisonwood Bible*, we ask that you then contact us by early July so we can make necessary modifications to the Classroom discussion so you and possibly others may participate.

We chose *A Visit from the Goon Squad* for a number of reasons. First, the way in which Jennifer Egan moves from story to story, past to present (and even future) and integrates the lives of these seemingly random souls is intellectually fascinating, and ultimately rewarding as the final pieces fall into place. In this novel, we are sometimes moved by the fragile nature of the human condition, while at other times we can't help but laugh out loud at some of the ironies. Some scenes in particular are hilarious, especially when we've only heard about an event from one perspective, and then we finally get to see from another perspective, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the story.

The **structure** of this novel is particularly unique in its use of **point of view** and **chronology**. Not only do the chapters jump from one character's experience to the next, but the points of view of each chapter are sometimes first-person, sometimes third-person, one time in the second-person (which is relatively unique), and one time Egan even gives us a 75-page chapter in PowerPoint, which is a tour de force. If one takes time to truly examine the thought process of the girl who writes in PowerPoint, one would discover that she actually *thinks* in a graphical/technological language. We also learn through these graphic tiles about this girl's love for her brother, who is autistic and fascinated by the silences in popular songs. These are rich and unique characters, whom we come to understand more completely through their own narrative structures.

The chronology, also, bounces back and forth in time and is great practice for students who have primarily read novels that start at the beginning and end at the end. Many 20th and 21st century novels play with time, so this novel is great practice for that concept.

The strength of Egan's writing **style** includes a wide ranging vocabulary (diction), a clarity of description, a skillful creation of mood, and a syntax that varies from chapter to chapter depending upon her design. For instance, notice the widely divergent syntax in the following excerpts from two different chapters:

“The waiter takes our order. And since the ten minutes of badinage I proceed to exchange with Kitty are simply not worth relating, I'll mention instead (in the footnote-ish fashion that injects a whiff of cracked leather bindings into pop-cultural observation) that when you're a young movie star with blondish hair and a highly recognizable face from that recent movie whose grosses can only be explained by the conjecture that every person in American saw it at least twice, people treat you in a manner that is somewhat different – in fact is entirely different – from the way they treat, say, a balding, stoop-

shouldered, slightly exzematous guy approaching middle age” (168).

Compare the informal, first-person, colloquial language and loose punctuation above with the poetic depiction of Ted in Italy below. Notice the use of alliteration and assonance below – typically reserved for poetry – in “took a taxi,” “echoey, empty,” “drifted...dusty,” “much marble,” and so on.

“Ted rose early the next morning and took a taxi to the Museo Nazionale, cool, echoey, empty of tourists despite the fact that it was spring. He drifted among dusty busts of Hadrian and the various Caesars, experiencing a physical quickening in the presence of so much marble that verged on the erotic. He sensed the proximity of the Orpheus and Eurydice before he saw it, felt its cool weight across the room but prolonged the time before he faced it, reminding himself of the events leading up to the moment it described: Orpheus and Eurydice in love and newly married; Eurydice dying of a snakebite while fleeing the advanced of a shepherd; Orpheus descending to the underworld, filling its dank corridors with music from his lyre as he sang of his longing for his wife; Pluto granting Eurydice’s release from death on the sole condition that Orpheus not look back at her during their ascent” (214).

The styles of these passages – and others – vary so greatly due to context of each chapter and its authorial purpose.

And finally, if there is one concept AP Lit students need to learn to decipher more than any other, it is **theme**. Egan’s handling of nostalgia, redemption, and time are fascinating and diverse from one character’s experience to the next. Each faces the limits of time, each seeks a form of redemption, and each handles nostalgia in unique ways – all of which is fascinating to dissect and lends itself to application on the AP Lit exam.

To help you in your reading of this complex novel, below are a variety of links. There are not any significant spoilers, so feel free to jump right in regardless of where you are in the book.

<http://www.filosophy.org/projects/goonsquad/>

With over 50 characters to track, this is an awesome tool. Someone created an interactive character map for *Goon Squad*. Be sure to read the directions. It comes alive when you move the slider on top of the 340/340. You can also hover over a relationship to get more info on the connection between those two characters.

<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/4apw9e/the-colbert-report-colbert-s-book-club---jennifer-egan----the-great-gatsby->

Prior to the opening of the new “Great Gatsby” film, Stephen Colbert had Jennifer Egan on his show to discuss what’s so great about the novel. This five-minute clip is both funny and informative, particularly if you have read *The Great Gatsby*.

<http://jenniferegan.com/books/a-visit-from-the-goon-squad>

This page offers a color version of the PowerPoint chapter, which includes audio for the music pauses (in the middle of the PP presentation).

<http://jenniferegan.com/reviews/a-visit-from-the-goon-squad>

This page links to more than 50 reviews of the novel. Whenever I see a particularly challenging or intriguing movie, I rush home and read the reviews to glean insights as to how other people experienced the film. What did they notice? Book reviews work the same way.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kl86UbQWmyk>

This 54-minute interview with Jennifer Egan about *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is full of fantastic insights about the writing process and the novel itself. If you don't have time for the whole thing, we've broken it down by topic below and put an asterisk by (and bolded) the sections we found to be the most interesting. It is worth your time to watch this.

- 0-7:00 / Intro & writing process
- 7:00-11:52 / Technological impacts on reading and communication
- ***11:52-17:15 / The PowerPoint Chapter**
- 17:15-18:50 / Rock-n-roll pauses and other odd ideas:
- 18:50-25:30 / Music in the novel
- ***25:30-29:00 / The genesis of Ch. 1 of Goon Squad / Stolen bag**
- 29:00-31:00 / Is this a novel or a collection of stories?
- 31:00-34:00 / Time & Proust & Music
- ***34:00-37:45 / Novel or short stories revisited & Ch. 2 & structure**
- 37:45-40:00 / Turning minor character into major character
- Audience Q&A
- 40:00 / *How do you know when the novel is done?*
- ***42:25 / *As the writer, how do you keep track of all of these characters?***
- **(Here, she explains why the chronology is the way it is.)**
- 47:45 / How do you write about people you don't understand? (Includes comments on Lou and Rob)