

THEME: RE-WRITING ENSLAVEMENT

Rationale: One of the ways which both white authors and authors of color continue to contribute to the current and vital conversation about race in this country is by grappling with the reality and legacy of American chattel slavery, be that through poetic realism, satire, alternative history, or straight-up science fiction.

Therefore:

EVERY STUDENT MUST READ:

***The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead**

Cora is a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia. An outcast even among her fellow Africans, she is on the cusp of womanhood—where greater pain awaits. And so when Caesar, a slave who has recently arrived from Virginia, urges her to join him on the Underground Railroad, she seizes the opportunity and escapes with him.

In Colson Whitehead's ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no mere metaphor: engineers and conductors operate a secret network of actual tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. Cora embarks on a harrowing flight from one state to the next, encountering strange yet familiar iterations of her own world at each stop. *The Underground Railroad* is both the gripping tale of one woman's will to escape the horrors of bondage—and a powerful meditation on the history we all share.

AND MUST CHOOSE ONE OTHER TEXT FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST:

***The Good Lord Bird* by James McBride**

Henry Shackleford is a young slave living in the Kansas Territory in 1856--a battleground between anti- and pro-slavery forces--when legendary abolitionist John Brown arrives. When an argument between Brown and Henry's master turns violent, Henry is forced to leave town--along with Brown, who believes Henry to be a girl and his good luck charm.

Over the ensuing months, Henry, whom Brown nicknames Little Onion, conceals his true identity to stay alive. Eventually Brown sweeps him into the historic raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859--one of the great catalysts for the Civil War. An absorbing mixture of history and imagination, *The Good Lord Bird* is both a rousing adventure and a moving exploration of identity and survival.

***Underground Airlines* by Ben H. Winters**

A young black man calling himself Victor has struck a bargain with federal law enforcement, working as a bounty hunter for the US Marshall Service in exchange for his freedom. He's got plenty of work. In this version of America, slavery continues in four states called "the Hard Four." On the trail of a runaway known as Jackdaw, Victor arrives in Indianapolis knowing that something isn't right -- with the case file, with his work, and with the country itself.

Victor believes himself to be a good man doing bad work, unwilling to give up the freedom he has worked so hard to earn. But in pursuing Jackdaw, Victor discovers secrets at the core of the country's arrangement with the Hard Four, secrets the government will preserve at any cost. *Underground Airlines* is a ground-breaking novel, a wickedly imaginative thriller, and a story of an America that is more like our own than we'd like to believe.

***Kindred* by Octavia Butler**

Dana, a modern black woman, is celebrating her twenty-sixth birthday with her new husband when she is snatched abruptly from her home in California and transported to the antebellum South. Rufus, the white son of a plantation owner, is drowning, and Dana has been summoned to save him. Dana is drawn back repeatedly through time to the slave quarters, and each time the stay grows longer, more arduous, and more dangerous until it is uncertain whether or not Dana's life will end, long before it has a chance to begin.

***A Mercy* by Toni Morrison**

In the 1680s the slave trade in the Americas is still in its infancy. Jacob Vaark is an Anglo-Dutch trader and adventurer, with a small holding in the harsh North. Despite his distaste for dealing in "flesh," he takes a small slave girl in part payment for a bad debt from a plantation owner in Catholic Maryland. This is Florens, who can read and write and might be useful on his farm. Rejected by her mother, Florens looks for love, first from Lina, an older servant woman at her new master's house, and later from the handsome blacksmith, an African, never enslaved, who comes riding into their lives. *A Mercy* is a small but dense poetic masterpiece by Toni Morrison, one of only three American women and the only African-American, to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

As you read, keep in mind the "rationale" for this summer's reading theme. Pay close attention to characterization, symbolism, use of narrative devices, and tone. Annotate your novels as you go. This will help immensely in September. When class convenes in September, the first day of class will be taken up with a test on *The Underground Railroad* (possible types of questions could include identification; matching [quotes and characters]); short answer; essay). There will ALSO be a take-home essay involving *The Underground Railroad* and your other chosen text.

ENJOY!!!!