

**ENGLISH II HONORS**  
**DR. VAN GUNTEN**  
**SUMMER READING 2017**

**Instructions:** Choose and carefully read two books from this list. You will have a written-response type test on your chosen books during the first three days of class in August, 2017.

**Jessica Park, *180 Seconds*.** Some people live their entire lives without changing their perspective. For Allison Dennis, all it takes is 180 seconds... After a life spent bouncing from one foster home to the next, Allison is determined to keep others at arm's length. Adopted at sixteen, she knows better than to believe in the permanence of anything. But as she begins her third year in college, she finds it increasingly difficult to disappear into the white noise pouring from her earbuds. One unsuspecting afternoon, Allison is roped into a social experiment just off campus. Suddenly, she finds herself in front of a crowd, forced to interact with a complete stranger for 180 seconds. Neither she, nor Esben Baylor, the dreamy social media star seated opposite her, is prepared for the outcome. When time is called, the intensity of the experience overwhelms Allison and Esben in a way that unnerves and electrifies them both. With a push from her oldest friend, Allison embarks on a journey to find out if what she and Esben shared is the real thing—and if she can finally trust in herself, in others, and in love.

**Cal Armistead, *Being Henry David*.** Seventeen-year-old “Hank” has found himself at Penn Station in New York City with no memory of anything—who he is, where he came from, why he’s running away. His only possession is a worn copy of *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau. And so he becomes Henry David—or “Hank”—and takes first to the streets, and then to the only destination he can think of—Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. Cal Armistead’s remarkable debut novel is about a teen in search of himself. As Hank begins to piece together recollections from his past he realizes that the only way he can discover his present is to face up to the realities of his grievous memories. He must come to terms with the tragedy of his past to stop running and find his way home.

**Silas House, *Eli the Good*.** Bicentennial fireworks burn the sky. Bob Seger growls from a transistor radio. And down by the river, girls line up on lawn chairs in pursuit of the perfect tan. Yet for ten-year-old Eli Book, the summer of 1976 is the one that threatened to tear his family apart. There is his distant mother; his traumatized Vietnam vet dad; his wild sister; his former war protester aunt; and his tough yet troubled best friend, Edie, the only person with whom he can be himself. As tempers flare and his father’s nightmares rage, Eli watches from the sidelines, but soon even he cannot escape the current of conflict. From *Silas House* comes a tender look at the complexities of childhood and the realities of war — a quintessentially Southern novel filled with music, nostalgic detail, a deep respect for nature, and a powerful sense of place.

**Melissa De La Cruz, *Alex and Eliza*.** 1777. Albany, New York. As battle cries of the American Revolution echo in the distance, servants flutter about preparing for one of New York society’s biggest events: the Schuylers’ grand ball. Descended from two of the oldest and most distinguished bloodlines in New York, the Schuylers are proud to be one of their fledgling country’s founding families, and even prouder still of their three daughters—Angelica, with her razor-sharp wit; Peggy, with her dazzling looks; and Eliza, whose beauty and charm rival those of both her sisters, though she’d rather be aiding the colonists’ cause than dressing up for some silly ball. Still, Eliza can barely contain her excitement when she hears of the arrival of one Alexander Hamilton, a mysterious, rakish young colonel and General George Washington’s right-hand man. Though Alex has arrived as the bearer of bad news for the Schuylers, he can’t believe his luck—as an orphan, and a bastard one at that—to be in such esteemed company. And when Alex and Eliza meet that fateful night, so begins an epic love story that would forever change the course of American history. In the pages of *Alex and Eliza*, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Melissa de la Cruz brings to life the romance of young Alexander Hamilton and Elizabeth Schuyler.

**Meg Wolitzer, *Belzhar*.** Devastated by the death of her first love, 15-year-old Jam Gallahue is having difficulty moving on with her life. After nearly a year of being mired in grief, her parents send her to a boarding school in rural Vermont that specializes in "emotionally fragile" teens. Once there, she is surprised to have been one of five students selected by the legendary Mrs. Quenell for a class called Special Topics in English. It seems that the entire semester—Mrs. Q's swan song before retirement—will be devoted to the works of Sylvia Plath, and the

students are given special red leather journals in which to record their reactions to the assigned readings. Jam is unenthusiastic at first until she realizes that these are no ordinary journals. When she and her classmates, all of whom have endured debilitating losses, begin to writing in their pages, they are transported to their former lives, at least for a while. The teens bond over their experiences in what they call Belzhar, and are able to share their stories and look out for and protect one another. As the semester progresses and the notebooks begin to fill up, they must each confront some inner demons and make some tough choices about their future paths. Wolitzer spins a smart and engrossing tale of trauma, trust, and triumph. She is respectful of the intelligence and sophistication of the teens while acknowledging their vulnerability and lack of life experience. Their voices ring true and the emotional truths are authentic—even for those readers unwilling or unable to embrace the magical realism.

**Laurie Halse Anderson, *The Impossible Knife of Memory*.** Hayley is the daughter of a veteran, and his PTSD colors every aspect of their lives. After serving his country, Andy is trying to rebuild some stability for himself and his daughter, but each day is a challenge for them both. Hayley lives with the constant threat of her father harming himself or others while also dealing with feelings of abandonment after essentially losing her parental figures. She copes through snark and skepticism but begins to let her guard down when her charming, easygoing classmate, Finn, gives her a much-needed taste of normal teenage life. A relationship with Finn opens the door to the possibility of trusting again, but it's not easy. Through Hayley's tenuous search for balance, Anderson explores the complicated nature of perception and memory, and how individuals manage to carry on after experiencing the worst. Readers will be thoroughly invested in this book's nuanced cast of characters and their struggles. Hayley's relatable first-person narration is interspersed with flashbacks of Andy's brutal war experiences, providing a visceral look at his inner demons. The endearing Finn and Hayley's bubbly best friend, Gracie, add levity to the narrative, even as they, too, grapple with their own problems. With powerful themes of loyalty and forgiveness, this tightly woven story is a forthright examination of the realities of war and its aftermath on soldiers and their families.

**Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely, *All American Boys*.** A bag of chips. That's all sixteen-year-old Rashad is looking for at the corner bodega. What he finds instead is a fist-happy cop, Paul Galluzzo, who mistakes Rashad for a shoplifter, mistakes Rashad's pleadings that he's stolen nothing for belligerence, mistakes Rashad's resistance to leave the bodega as resisting arrest, mistakes Rashad's every flinch at every punch the cop throws as further resistance and refusal to STAY STILL as ordered. But how can you stay still when someone is pounding your face into the concrete pavement? There were witnesses: Quinn Collins—a varsity basketball player and Rashad's classmate who has been raised by Paul since his own father died in Afghanistan—and a video camera. Soon the beating is all over the news and Paul is getting threatened with accusations of prejudice and racial brutality. Quinn refuses to believe that the man who has basically been his savior could possibly be guilty. But then Rashad is absent. And absent again. And again. And the basketball team—half of whom are Rashad's best friends—start to take sides. As does the school. And the town. Simmering tensions threaten to explode as Rashad and Quinn are forced to face decisions and consequences they had never considered before. Written in tandem by two award-winning authors, this tour de force shares the alternating perspectives of Rashad and Quinn as the complications from that single violent moment, the type taken from the headlines, unfold and reverberate to highlight an unwelcome truth. In this Coretta Scott King Honor Award-winning novel, two teens—one black, one white—grapple with the repercussions of a single violent act that leaves their school, their community, and, ultimately, the country bitterly divided by racial tension.