

## Honors English I Summer Reading 2019

**Book:** *The Smell of Other People's Houses* by Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock

Parents need to know that *The Smell of Other People's Houses* is Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock's award-winning debut young adult novel. It's a historical drama about four poor or middle-class Alaskan teens whose storylines intersect in 1970, only 11 years after the territory became the 49th state. The adolescents deal with heavy themes such as teen pregnancy, abuse, poverty, parental abandonment/incarceration/alcoholism, racism, and more, but the writing and pacing are accessible for middle school readers. Despite the occasionally mature subject matter, readers will learn a great deal about self-sufficiency, grit, humility, and the importance of generosity.

**Assignment:** Choose two of the following and answer in discussion form. Be thorough and specific. May be neatly hand written or typed. These are due to me on the first day of class.

1. Alyce compares the Tongass rain forest along the coast where she and her father fish to the skinny black spruce forest that defines her home in Fairbanks. She says "Same state, two climates, each as different as my parents; and like my parents there's a part of me in both" (p. 52). As you think about the adults in your life, what elements of them do you see in yourself? How have they become part of your identity? Do you welcome these traits or wish they were not there?
2. What is the significance of the red strip of fabric that Dumpling wears in her hair? Where did it come from? Why does she wear it? Why might the author have chosen this particular symbol for her novel?
3. When Ruth tells her grandmother that she named the baby after her in hopes of having a "do-over", her grandmother claims "I don't deserve that" (p. 222). Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you agree with Ruth's decision? Why or why not?
4. Characters in this novel regularly define themselves and others by their social and economic status – the kind of boots they can afford, the homes in which they live, the food they serve at their dinner tables etc. how does money (or lack thereof) play a role in the development of the characters in the novel? How does it influence the strengths and struggles they face? Does money matter that much in life? (your opinion here)