

Summer Assignment: *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri

Overview:

Welcome to Honors English 4: Global Perspectives Through Literature! This is a World Literature course that tasks us with exploring and examining texts across the Earth's continents that showcase richly diverse cultures. Most importantly, this course helps students to achieve our School's Mission more closely than ever: by investigating the voices, perspectives, and experiences around the world through novels, poetry, drama, and multimedia.

We begin with Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, a multigenerational saga that chronicles Gogol Ganguli's journey to accept both the Bangladeshi and American sides of his identity. This simplistically styled, comfortingly frank coming of age novel thus illustrates the American Immigrant and bicultural experience, and through this text, we will consider how this dual cultural identity is often explored through the novel genre. We will therefore begin Senior Year by asking ourselves about Americans' roles and challenges in a global society, focusing on the complexity of what it means to be American in the 21st century. I challenge you to consider the ways in which you relate to Gogol, and the ways in which his experience mystifies you.

Summer Reading Assignments:

- 1) Before Reading:
 - a. Complete the **Researching the Author** and **Establishing Cultural Context** steps on the next page.
- 2) During Reading:
 - a. Take high quality **Chapter Notes (4)**
 - b. Complete **Journal Entries (3)**

Start of School (After Reading):

- 3) Week 1
 - a. Show & use your **handwritten notes** during class discussions
 - b. Submit your **Journal Entries** to Turnitin.com
- 4) Week 2
 - a. Complete a **Progress Check** (quiz)
- 5) Week 3
 - a. Complete a **Literary Analysis Essay** (4 pages) & submit to Turnitin.com

Researching the Author & Establishing Cultural Context

1. Explore media sources to gather information about Lahiri's (seemingly autobiographical) purpose and the cultural context of her breakout novel, *The Namesake*.
 - a. Choose 1:
 - i. Watch the entire [Interview with Lahiri](#)
 - ii. Listen to the entire [NPR Interview](#)
 - b. Choose 1:
 - i. Read the entire [National Endowment for the Arts](#) article on *The Namesake*
 - ii. Read each article on [Hindu traditions](#) in this PDF file

Chapter Notes: Read-Pause-Reflect Method

- Break up notes into the following sections: **Chapters 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12**
- As you read, create a bulleted list of notes and quotes, labeling each with a page number when possible (see sample below).
- On each line, jot down shorthand notes for any interesting observations; look for things such as:
 - major plot events
 - major themes
 - recurring motifs
 - new characters or settings / interesting description or imagery
 - changes to existing characters
 - interesting literary devices or rhetorical strategies
 - significant quotes (IMPORTANT)

Things to consider:

1. **Consider chapters** – Is there any thematic significance to the organization of the story? Do chapter titles, if chapters have titles, have any significance?
2. **Consider the characters** – Address how they have changed and the significant events that have affected them in each chapter or section of the novel.
3. **Note the Setting** – List the locale, time period, and length of time that passes in each section of the novel.
4. **Consider themes and motifs** – Reflecting on your earlier notes can be helpful with this, especially as you progress through the piece. Do you see any repetition of concepts? Images? Significant meaning in the piece?
5. **Consider the author's style** – What literary devices are important to the author's style? Which are used most often? What effect do they have?
6. **Quotations** – Make note of powerful lines or scenes, lines that are well-written or are particularly interesting to you, and lines that reflect important qualities or changes in characters. Record in your notes the page number and some description of the quotations that you find important.

Journal Entries

These journals can be casual in nature, and should show your understanding of the major themes of the novel. Consider your impressions of the novel's meaning as it unfolds, and your personal experience in each stage of the reading.

Please **type** these 3 Journal Entries and be sure to restrict them to no more than **300** words per journal entry. You are **only required to write 3 Journals**. You may do additional entries for extra credit (there are 10 total entry choices), which I call Should Dos.

1. Journal 1

After Chapter 1

Prompt: Write about a ritual - wedding, funeral, Confirmation, *bat/bar mitzvah*, etc. - that you have attended with family or friends. Focus on the ritual's significance to your family, faith, and community. Connect your reflections on what you read concerning family, faith, and community through ritual customs in Chapter 1, referencing at least 1 quote for evidence.

OR

After Chapters 2-3

Prompt: The novel describes Ashoke and Ashima's very different views of their life after moving to the suburbs. Ashoke loves his new teaching job, but Ashima is lonely, homesick, and bored. Write about how these two characters perceive the same circumstances from different vantage points, and how the two different points of view shape your perceptions of the Gangulis' life. Reference at least 1 quote from Chapters 2 or 3 for evidence.

OR

After Chapters 4-5

At the end of Chapter 5, Gogol's father Ashoke finally tells him about the train accident that he survived as a young man, and that led to Gogol's naming (years later) after the Russian author whom Ashoke was reading at the time. Write a comparison between the 14-year-old Gogol from Chapter 4 with the college-student Gogol in Chapter 5, paying close attention to how Gogol is changing or staying the same. In your response, consider the degree to which you see similarities or differences between yourself and Gogol. Reference at least 1 quote from Chapters 4 or 5 for evidence.

2. Journal 2

After Chapter 6

Prompt: Go outside and choose an object or landmark. It could be in nature, or something man made. Write a descriptive paragraph of this object, paying close attention to sensory imagery: *sight, touch, sound, smell, and taste*. Then, provide a quote from Chapter 6 that uses figurative language to provide a similar sensory experience to the reader. Remark on the details that make the passage so evocative to you.

OR

After Chapter 7

Prompt: Write about your own name or nickname. What does this name mean? Why was it given? Does it have any special symbolism or meaning? Do you know of other people or fictional characters who have the same name? If so, how does it feel to share this name with them? After reflecting on this personal connection, consider why names matter to individuals and families. Referencing a quote from Chapter 7, discuss the significance of the symbolism in Gogol's name.

OR

After Chapter 8

Prompt: Write about Gogol's strengths and weaknesses as a character, providing specific examples of situations in Chapter 8 that bring out the best and/or the worst in him. Consider the degree to which Gogol has changed or stayed the same since earlier in the novel. Finally, referencing your quote(s), discuss the ways in which you are similar to or different from Gogol in those examples.

3. Journal 3

After Chapter 9

Prompt: Think about which events in Chapters 1-9 carried the most tension or momentum for the plot. Then, reread the scene at the end of Chapter 7 in which an adult Gogol remembers walking along the breakwater at Cape Cod with his father. Make a personal connection: what is your “Cape Cod Scene” - that core memory that would matter so deeply to you in a time of grief? Write about why this memory matters to Gogol, and how the flashback functions as a turning point in the novel, referencing a quote from the scene directly.

OR

After Chapters 10-12

Prompt: Write a character sketch of Gogol, ten years after the conclusion of the novel, when he is just over 40 years old. What will he be like, and what will have been his successes and challenges as he nears middle age? Explain how understanding Gogol’s maturation as a character demonstrates the novel’s major themes and issues. Reference a quote from Chapters 10-12 that you think justifies your prediction.

Themes: *Immigrant Experience, Family/Tradition/Ritual, Independence/Rebellion/Growing Up, Identity/Naming, Love/Marriage/Intimacy*

OR

After Chapters 10-12

Prompt: Consider the following big ideas in the novel. Form a theme statement that articulates what you believe Lahiri’s message is about one of them that you choose. Then, find a quote in Chapters 10-12 that reflects the final development of that theme. Which relevant issues does Lahiri address in the development of this theme? What does she have to say? What specifically from your evidence can justify your impressions? What personal connections can you make to this theme?

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