

Summer Reading Assignment

Diversity in Literature

(Junior/Senior English Elective)

- **Book Selection:** *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell ISBN-13: 978-0316017930

*You are responsible for locating a copy of the book. You can check your local library to borrow a copy, or purchase your own copy through a new/used bookstore or online retailer (Amazon, eBay, etc.). You may also be able to find a digital copy (PDF format) of the book online by using Google or another search engine.

- **Assignment Directions:**

1. **Before You Read:** Before you begin reading *Outliers*, take a few minutes to answer the “Pre-Reading Questions” below.
2. **While You Read:** As you read *Outliers*, provide a brief objective summary (a paragraph) of each chapter and then provide another paragraph that expresses your thoughts on what you have just read. *An example has been provided below to show you what this should look like.* Please review this example to give you an idea of what it is I’m looking for. You will notice some thoughts on the content of the chapter and on the way in which Gladwell presents his information to readers. You will also see I made connections to personal experiences and to other materials I’ve encountered (consider things like essays, news articles, books, movies, television shows, songs, etc.). Follow the same format as the model I have provided and make note that the “My Response” section should be as long as the “Summary” section, if not longer. I am much more interested in hearing about the thoughts and connections you had while reading than I am about your regurgitation of the material. There is no minimum word count or page requirement, but please know that this is your first impression and a chance to show me that you thoughtfully engaged with the text. This assignment and its corresponding discussion will account for 100 points. Failure to complete it to the best of your ability will impact your final grade for Quarter 1.
3. **After You Read:** When you have finished reading *Outliers*, take a few minutes to answer the “Post-Reading Questions.”
4. **Presentation:** Type up your responses using the format presented on the attached example, print them, and have them ready to turn in on the first day of school. No handwritten or late work will be accepted.

Pre-Reading Questions:

1. How do you define “the American Dream”?
2. Do you believe that the American Dream is open to everyone? Explain.

Post-Reading Questions:

* Before you respond to these two questions, think about the factors that Gladwell attributes to success.

1. How do you believe Malcolm Gladwell would define “The American Dream”?
2. Do you feel as though Gladwell believes the American Dream is open to everyone? Explain.

Example:

John Doe (your name)

Mr. Brookholt (teacher name)

Diversity in Literature (class name)

20 August 2021 (due date)

Outliers Responses

Introduction: *The Roseto Mystery*

- **Summary:** The introduction begins with two definitions of the word “outlier.” The first definition describes it as “something that is situated away from or classed differently from a main or related body” (3). Gladwell then goes on to talk about a brief history of the Italian people that reside in Roseto Valfortore. He talks about the difficult life these people had (i.e., physical laborers, barely literate, and desperately poor) until they traveled to America and found better opportunities. They bought land on a rocky hillside in Pennsylvania and named their town Roseto after their homeland. Soon, with the help of a young priest, the town came to life and was very self-sufficient. A visiting physician named Stewart Wolf discovered that people from Roseto under the age of sixty-five rarely had heart disease. Wolf was shocked by this since, at the time (1950s), heart attacks were an epidemic, so he decided to conduct a study of these people. Much to his surprise, he discovered that no one under the age of fifty-five had died from a heart attack, and that the death rate from heart disease for men over sixty-five was about half that of the United States as a whole. Upon a closer examination, he discovered that the people of Roseto were mostly dying from old age and not from health related issues: Roseto was an outlier. Gladwell’s second definition describes an outlier as “a statistical observation that is markedly different in value from the others of a sample” (3). After discovering that Roseto’s atypical results were not due to diet or exercise, Wolf looked at genetics and regional location to see if they could help him explain this abnormality. Unfortunately, they could not. Wolf finally realizes that Roseto was so far from the national norm because culturally and socially they were able to insulate themselves from the pressures of the modern world. They focused on family, friendships, walking, and other pleasurable non-materialistic things.
- **My Response:** I wasn’t quite sure what to expect from this book, but I found this introduction to be very approachable and interesting. I was already familiar with the term outlier, but more from a mathematics standpoint as opposed to an English one. This section really made me think about the importance of studies and statistics outside of the classroom environment and reminded me of why studying them is so vital. I’m also a big fan of the mystery genre, and I found myself trying to figure out the cause of Roseto’s success right along with Wolf. I was pretty surprised that culture seemed to be the biggest factor of health and longevity for these people, and it really made me think about how my own health might be impacted from the way I was raised and the things I place value on. Culturally, I feel like most Americans are at a deficit. Everyone I know places such great value on hard work and the acquisition of material possessions. My dad worked two jobs when I was a kid so we could live in a nicer area and have all the things he never had as a kid. As a parent now, I find myself following in his footsteps. So many of us think that

money and things lead to happiness and success, but do they really? I read an essay once about the steady decline of American leisure time. It spoke about how Americans are overworked and overstressed. Those two factors alone can certainly take a toll on someone's health and quality of life. Moments like hanging out on the porch with friends, walking to a local coffee shop or bakery, or living with multiple generations under the same roof seem so foreign to me and the people I know. We always speak about how life is better today than in the past, but this chapter makes me re-evaluate that even more than I already have been lately. I'm looking forward to future chapters and to seeing how Gladwell defines success.