

# Summer Reading 2010

## English 10 Honors

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**READ THE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BOOKS AND THE GUIDING QUESTIONS *BEFORE* YOU BEGIN READING EACH BOOK.**

**Keep the questions at hand as you read and take notes, in the books, if they are yours, or on paper. Answers to the questions **SHOULD NOT** be written out. Guiding questions are just to help students with more effective comprehension.**

**Assessment for the first full day of school: Students will be given an objective test on material from both books.**

### *Old School* (Tobias Wolff)

1. What is the effect of the first-person narrative style Wolff has chosen for this novel? Why is this narrative style so appropriate for this story?
2. About his desire to win the competition that would give him an audience with Robert Frost, the narrator says, "My aspirations were mystical. I wanted to receive the laying on of hands that had written living stories and poems, hands that had touched the hands of other writers. I wanted to be anointed" [p. 7]. Is his aspiration admirable? What does the boy not understand about how one becomes a writer? How seriously does he work at acquiring the skills of his craft?
3. In social interactions between boys at the school, much is left unsaid. Why is this? Consider the relationship between the narrator and his roommate Bill White [pp. 11-13, 139-40]. What problems of interpretation arise when so little talking is done? Why is this relationship so problematic?
4. During his visit to Gershon to explain his mistake in whistling the Nazi marching tune, the boy decides not to confide the fact that his father is Jewish. He thinks, "I'd let Gershon think the worst of me before I would claim any connection to him, or implicate myself in the fate that had beached him in this room. Why would I want to talk my way into his unlucky tribe?" [p. 23]. What does this episode --- including his meeting with the headmaster --- tell us about the narrator?
5. Having related his experience of Frost's poem "After Apple-Picking," the headmaster tells the boys, "Make no mistake . . . a true piece of writing is a dangerous thing. It can change your life" [p. 47]. Why is writing dangerous in this novel, and for whom?
6. Why does Ayn Rand's writing have such a powerful effect on him, and why does his initial excitement fade upon actually meeting the author? The boy also learns an important lesson when he rereads the stories of Hemingway, whom Ayn Rand has attacked as a creator of "weak, defeated people" [p. 84]. What does he realize, and how is this lesson important for what happens later [pp. 95-99]?

7. *Old School* is in large part an examination of the process by which a boy tries to become the person he most desires to be. What does Wolff seem to suggest about the process of self-formation?
8. What is most impressive about the story "Summer Dance" and why does it appeal to the boy so powerfully? Why in typing it does he feel "an intuition of gracious release" [p. 126]? Is this his moment of learning how to "begin to write truly" [p. 126]? Why is it important that he never considers his submission of the story --- with slight changes --- a deliberate act of plagiarism?
9. Tobias Wolff gives his readers an intimate view of his main character's faults. How does your response to the boy change as the novel proceeds? What is the effect, particularly, of the last few chapters?
10. The novel's epigraph, from a poem by Mark Strand, end with "the truth lies like nothing else and I love the truth." How does the epigraph relate to the narrator's confusion and his conflicts with himself?
11. The book's final chapter departs from the narrator's story and moves to Mr. Ramsey's story about Dean Makepeace, who had allowed himself to be thought of as a friend of Hemingway. How does this story work as a coda to the novel? What is the effect of the shift in perspective?
12. In what ways is humor expressed in this novel, and what kind of humor is it? What situations and descriptions are comical?

*Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* (J.D. Salinger)

1. How does Buddy Glass idolize his brother Seymour?
2. What is the significance of the Taoist story Seymour reads to Franny?
3. How does the city represent an environment that "creates" the people that live there? Use Buddy, or his past experiences, to explain how this takes place in the story.
4. How does the Matron of Honor function as a character in the story?
5. Do the journal entries give an accurate picture of Seymour?
6. What problems arise in the story when Seymour discusses that his happiness is not his own?
7. What is the point of the note Boo Boo leaves on the mirror for Seymour?
8. How does the title of the story connect to Seymour's character?