

EIGHTH GRADERS!

We look forward to working with you in the Upper School next year! But first, you'll wrap up your Middle School career; you'll pursue summer plans that include all kinds of adventure and enjoyment; and you've got some great books to read so that we can jump right into our English work, come September!

The general theme of our work in English 9 is "Journeys to Identity." In our reading we'll explore the lives of characters who seek to define themselves while struggling with a variety of forces that can make that definition difficult... but ultimately rewarding in some way that is important to the individual.

During the summer, you'll be reading two excellent books:

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

and

Into The Wild by Jon Krakauer

About The Books...

- *The House on Mango Street* is a work of **fiction**, but Cisneros drew upon her own coming-of-age experiences in creating Esperanza Cordero, a young Latina growing up in Chicago. Cisneros presents the story as a series of **vignettes**, snapshots of Esperanza's experiences (told in the first person *by* Esperanza). At first, you might ask yourself, "How does the chapter I'm reading now connect to the one I just finished?" Be patient with the book: when you finish, you'll realize that you've seen Esperanza's life as a series of photographs and not as a movie. One of the great rewards of reading *Mango Street* is your seeing how the pieces fit together... for Esperanza and for you as the reader. *The House on Mango Street* presents a range of colorful characters from Esperanza's neighborhood. You'll enjoy meeting them all!

- *Into The Wild* is a piece of **non-fiction** written by Krakauer about a young man named Christopher McCandless, who traveled the United States in search of what he considered a real life and a genuine communion with nature. After finishing college, McCandless abandoned what most people would call "the logical path": look for a job, start a career, and live a "normal life." Instead, he headed west from his family home in Virginia, hoping eventually to live in the wilderness of Alaska in harmony with nature.

How should I read these books?

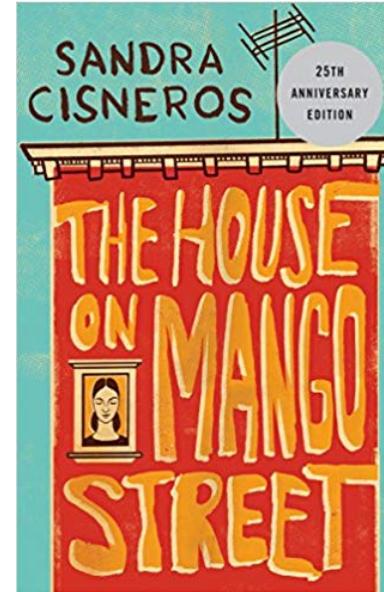
- First of all, we hope you'll *enjoy* the books! Maintain a focus on the fact that these are, first and foremost, *great stories about compelling characters*.
- We will be discussing the books in class, and you'll be writing about and/or taking an assessment on them. So, it's important to read actively/closely:
 - take notes
 - highlight passages that strike you as important
 - write down questions you might have! Your questions will help your section to get off to a good start in terms of class sharing/discussion!
- Keep "journeys to identity" in mind. Who are Esperanza and Chris at the beginning of their adventures? Who do they hope to become/how do they hope to define themselves? What obstacles or challenges do must they negotiate?
- Are there connections – subtle or not so subtle – between their lives? These may not emerge immediately, but you should spend some time thinking about the fact that the differences between Esperanza and Chris are never so great as to
- Keep your own journey in mind, too. Not only will we explore literature connected to identity throughout the year, but you'll talk and write about your own experiences.

Some General Terminology: A Start...

During the year we'll use a number of literary terms as we discuss our books. You know some of these already; some may be new to you. Be prepared to use them even in our first discussions of your summer reading:

- Allusion: a reference—usually indirect—in one work to a person, place, idea or other work in another
- Antagonist: a character who opposes the *protagonist* in some way
- Bildungsroman: a coming-of-age story
- Point of View: the perspective from which a story is told
- Plot: simply defined, plot is characters in action
- Protagonist: the central or leading character in a work of literature
- Setting: the time and place in which a story takes place
- Symbol: an object that represents more than its literal self. Symbolism is the use of such objects to emphasize ideas in a work of literature
- Theme: the main idea or meaning of a work of literature. The theme *may* be stated directly but is often implied
- Tone: the writer's attitude toward/about a character or subject in a work
- Vignette: a scene or sketch that focuses on a single specific moment or incident

References for images: <https://www.amazon.com/House-Mango-Street-Sandra-Cisneros/dp/0679734775>
<https://www.sandracisneros.com/mylifeandwork>
<https://uksurvivalguides.com/true-stories-christopher-mccandless/>
<https://www.amazon.com/Into-Wild-Jon-Krakauer/dp/0385486804>



RCDS Summer Reading, Students Entering Grade Nine

