

English I Summer Work

Reading Assignment: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Welcome to your first high school assignment! In English I, you will be reading through some of the earliest recorded works of Western literature. In my humble opinion, these first works of literature are some of the best stories we have today!

Your summer reading assignment is to read through *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is the very first work of Western literature we have today. It's a great story about two powerful individuals who go out and fight monsters in order to win fame and protect their city. If you think this premise sounds similar to the plot of a superhero movie, you're not wrong. Superheroes like the Avengers or the Justice League have many similarities to the heroes of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (and many of the other works you'll be reading in 9th grade. This story also contains the first threat of a zombie apocalypse (if you're reading carefully enough to catch it). So this is far from a "boring" work.

In addition to being an entertaining read, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* wrestles with several important issues concerning what it means to live as a human being. Some of the questions this book raises include:

- What does it mean to be a civilized human being?
- What does it mean to be a hero?
- What does a good friendship look like and how can we find good friends?
- How should we cope with the death of a friend?
- How do we overcome our fear of death?

There are several other questions and themes the story explores, but these are some of the most important ones we'll be discussing in class discussions!

There are many different translations of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. I recommend you use the N.K. Sanders translation of the work (ISBN: 978-0140441000), which you can find on Amazon here: <https://www.amazon.com/Epic-Gilgamesh/dp/014044100X/> Most online booksellers should carry this version, and you may even be able to find it in the library system. Just make sure that you are using the N.K. Sanders translation.

I look forward to discussing the big ideas of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* with all of you come August.

-Mr. DeGraaf

Writing Assignment

Please write a 250-500 word essay (MLA, double-spaced) about one of the two topics below.

1. **Option #1:** Gilgamesh accomplishes many heroic deeds over the course of the story. But he also makes a lot of immoral actions, especially at the beginning of the story. Is Gilgamesh a hero? Why or why not? Defend your claim with evidence from the story.
2. **Option #2:** Toward the end of the book, Gilgamesh decides that he wants to become immortal. Why does Gilgamesh desire immortality, and is this a good desire to have? Why or why not? Defend your claim with evidence from the story.

Project Assignment

Please complete one of the two projects below.

1. **Option #1:** Conduct interviews with one person from three of six age groups. You must ask each person two questions: “What does it mean to be a good friend?” and “How do you try to be a good friend to people in your life?” Record the interviewee’s answers and write detailed notes about them. This does not need to be an essay, but you organize your answers in some way (e.g. a chart or a graph that compares/contrasts response).

Age Group 1: 15-18

Age Group 2: 19-25

Age Group 3: 26-35

Age Group 4: 36-45

Age Group 5: 46-55

Age Group 6: 56+

2. **Option #2:** There are many similarities between the heroes of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and modern American superheroes. In light of that, create a comic strip depicting one of the following events in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
 - The fight between Gilgamesh & Enkidu
 - The fight between Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and Humbaba
 - The fight between Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Bull of Heaven
 - Gilgamesh’s journey to Utnapishtim

Your comic strip should be between 2 and 4 pages long and include at least 6 panels. Be creative!