

One of the two books you will read this summer is a collection, not a novel in the strict sense of the word. The other is a widely-read young adult book which is beloved by adults, as well. The first is by Truman Capote; the second is by Madeleine L'Engle. These two works are very different in tone, meaning that they will *feel* different to you as you read. You are not expected to **like** them: you *are* expected to read them. Please keep that in mind as you complete the following assignments.

Truman Capote *The Grass Harp*

One of the greatest twentieth century writers in America, Capote was responsible for novels such as *In Cold Blood* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the latter of which became a major motion picture in the 1960s starring Audrey Hepburn. He was also one of a number of southern writers whose work is classified as Southern Gothic. Southern Gothic is a style of writing that uses elements of the supernatural (ghosts, visions, hauntings), irony, unusual events and the grotesque (something that makes you cringe) in order to illustrate social issues as well as the character of the American South.

As you read the novella *The Grass Harp*, mark out passages in your books—either with highlighters or by noting them in the margins—in which you notice items which you would classify as Southern Gothic. This can be characters, events, places or even descriptions that fit any of the items listed above.

When you have finished the book, answer one of the following two questions on the **inside covers of your book**.

1. What is Capote saying about communities by writing this novella?
2. What does the judge mean when he says "Love is a chain of love, as nature is a chain of life"?

Madeleine L'Engle *A Wrinkle in Time*

Madeleine L'Engle, author of *A Wrinkle in Time* and other books in the *Time Fantasy* series, was an American writer who theorised that writing was an examination of life. She believed that the structure of a creative work was a reflection of life's structure: "One cannot discuss structure in writing without discussing structure in all life; it is impossible to talk about why anybody writes a book or paints a picture or composes a symphony without talking about the nature of the universe." This is perhaps one reason why the themes that are explored in *A Wrinkle in Time* resonate widely; they are universal themes, meaning they are experienced by nearly everyone. The book deals with good and evil, uniqueness and conformity and the triumph of love over everything. It is also a book about time and space, and it deals with many interesting—and sometimes difficult—principles of modern science. This was a drawback for her when she first sought to publish it. Many publishers refused to pick

up the novel because they could not find a way to market it: they did not know whether to classify it as a book for adults or a book for children. You will possibly run into the reasons for this as you read.

You will be responsible for reading the short novel from cover to cover without exception. While you are reading, pay special attention to the descriptions of things. As many of the places and characters you will meet do not exist, L'Engle's descriptions will become very important for you in trying to picture them. Mark out or highlight passages where descriptions contain a lot of detail.

When you have finished reading the entire book, choose a character which you found to be intriguing in some way. It could be that you found this person off-putting, meaning that you would never want to meet him or her. Or perhaps you found this character to be very interesting and wish you could know more about him or her.

Find a passage within the novel that you think best illustrates how you feel about this character. It may be a description, a bit of dialogue or another character's reaction. Write two to three paragraphs on how you think the passage has shaped your views about the character you chose. For example, if you think the language the author used to describe the character impacted you in some way, discuss how that language affected you. If it was the way other characters reacted, described how that situation influenced you.

When you return in the autumn, I will collect your books, check on the notations you made, the responses you have given to one of the two short answer questions (Capote) and your character responses (L'Engle). You will receive a homework grade based on the quality of your work.