

**Summer Reading Assignment 2017**  
**Elizabeth Arnstein**  
**American Literature/11<sup>th</sup> Grade English**  
**Visitation School**

**The Method:**

All students **must** read *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck **and** *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. Then **choose one** of these two books to read as well: *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith **or** *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand. Note: You **MUST** read the adult version of *Unbroken* (with a gold and brown cover), not the young adult version, if you choose to read this book. Failure to follow this last guideline will result in an automatic F.

**About the Books:**

*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck is a beautiful, sad story about two men, George and Lennie, who are laborers trying to save enough money to buy their own farm. As the men pursue this dream, they encounter many obstacles, including Lennie's intellectual disability, a lack of money, an angry boss, and discrimination in multiple forms. In spite of the sad storyline, John Steinbeck creates some of the best and most realistic characters I have ever read.

*The Glass Menagerie*: Tom Wingfield lives with his mother and disabled adult sister in a tenement in Saint Louis. Although Tom is desperate to leave his family so that he can live a life of his choosing, he feels compelled to care for his mother, Amanda, who has been abandoned by her husband, and his sister, Laura, who is paralyzed by fear and unable to create a meaningful life for herself. Amanda desperately wants Laura to get married, so she asks Tom to find a nice "gentleman caller" to bring home to Laura. This lovely, bittersweet play is loosely based on Tennessee Williams' own life and is considered one of America's greatest plays.

*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith is the story of Francie Nolan and her childhood in Brooklyn, New York, in the very early 1900s. Francie and her brother, Neely, are poor. Their mother is a janitress, and their father is tormented by alcoholism, but the children grow up in an atmosphere of love and with the knowledge that education and hard work will help them escape their poverty. This is a beautiful coming-of-age story about Francie, and it is a great study on the complexity of relationships within families. When I was your age, it was one of my favorite books – and it still stands up well over time.

*Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand: I absolutely loved this book about Louis Zamperini, an Olympic athlete-turned-World War II soldier. Hillenbrand weaves a fascinating tale about Zamperini's wild childhood, his development as one of the world's best runners, and – most fascinating of all – his time as a castaway on the Pacific Ocean for over a month after the plane he was flying in crashed. Indeed, it is astonishing to think that Louis and his pilot

survived their arduous ordeal with no food and very little water. But the book doesn't end there. In fact, there are two more major chapters in his life: Zamperini's time as a POW in a Japanese prison camp and his life as a recovering alcoholic after his eventual rescue. This work reads like fiction, and I couldn't put it down. That said, by its very nature as a book about POWs in a Japanese prison camp during World War II, the book contains violence. In addition, the book very candidly addresses Zamperini's alcoholism and post-traumatic stress disorder following his release from the prison camps. Therefore, some readers may want to read *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* as their summer reading option.

### **The Assignment:**

When you return to school, you will be expected to write an in-class essay on the works. Students may have the books on their desks during the essay test, and you may mark up your copies of the books to help you easily find quotes or ideas.

I will supply the final essay prompt on the day of the in-class essay, but the essays might reflect on the following ideas:

- How is the idea of loneliness treated in these works?
- What is each character's American Dream and how does he or she pursue it? (If you don't know what the American Dream is, perhaps search Google.)
- Fortitude may be defined as "mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation." How is fortitude demonstrated in these works?
- Examine the contrast between the desire for escape and the awareness of responsibilities as presented in these works.
- If a theme is a lesson the author wants the reader to learn, what is a common theme shared by the works you read for this assignment?

### **How to Approach this Assignment:**

- Read these books whenever the spirit moves you this summer, but I would advise reading them once and then skimming them all again just before school begins.
- Take notes in your books as you read, indicating important lines and passages – especially those that relate to the prompts listed above.
- Perhaps keep a brief reading journal in which you record summaries of each chapter (no more than 1-2 sentences). In general, find a way to help you jot down important information so that you can recall the works more easily.
- On the day of the essay, you may have these works on your desk.
- Please know that I will be referring to *Of Mice and Men* and *The Glass Menagerie* throughout the school year. In fact, you will need to be able to discuss *Of Mice and Men* in class in the spring when we cover *The Grapes of Wrath*.
- If you have questions or concerns, please email Ms. Arnstein at [arnsteine@vischool.org](mailto:arnsteine@vischool.org). Have a great summer! I can't wait to see you in the fall; it's going to be a great year!