

9th Grade Summer Reading Assignment, 2018

Welcome to High school, and 9th Grade Humanities! This summer, I ask that you read *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a set of poems preserved on clay tablets surviving from ancient Mesopotamia (of the third millennium B.C.E.). The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is one of the best and most important pieces of epic poetry from human history, predating even Homer's *Iliad* by roughly 1,500 years. *Gilgamesh* tells of the various adventures of a hero-king, including his quest for immortality, and an account of a great flood similar in many details to the story of Noah from the *Torah*. It is a buddy/adventure story, and is the oldest thing you can read on planet Earth (older than even *the Bible*).

Some themes of the poem include:

1. Natural Man vs. Civilized Man
2. The Importance of Friendship
3. Mortality and the Meaning of Life
4. Pride and Man vs. the gods

One section that continually fascinates me is the depiction of the Underworld/Afterlife that we see in Enkidu's dream. This is a brief illustration of how ancient Mesopotamians (Sumerians and Babylonians) imagined what happens to people when we die. Do you think that our expectations of an afterlife impact how we live our lives?

There are many translations and editions available in bookstores, libraries and online. However, for this class we will use the Penguin Books edition translated by N.K. Sandars. It is revised into story format, so is much more readable than editions that are more true to the tablets.

ISBN: 978-0-14-044100-0

What You Must Do:

1. Read the book.
2. As you read, underline any words that you do not know ("Toscin," for example) and look them up. Make notes in the margins of your book, or on paper.
3. As you read, complete the **Reader's Guide**—your answers are essentially notes you are making on the story as you read. Your notes will help you on the test and will make certain that you pay attention to interesting/important parts of the poem.

We will have a test over the reading in the first week of classes, and *Gilgamesh* will be important for many parts of our class all year, so read! Also, the Reader's Guide will be due at test time and will be your first daily grade.

Note: Reading *Spark Notes*, alone, will not be enough to make a good grade on the test.

Enjoy the reading!