The Great Train Robbery by Michael Crichton

The Summer Reading program, sponsored by the English Department at Padua Franciscan High School, is designed to entice students to read and recognize notable contemporary literature. We wish to engage student interest, encourage critical thinking, and challenge our students as readers. As such, some titles on the list may contain sensitive material and deal with more mature themes than some students may have encountered previously. The target audience of all the selected literature is young adults; however, not every book will suit every reader, which is why there are different titles from which students may choose. More information about all of the novels can be found through the local libraries or through amazon.com.

Students are requested to share their Summer Reading choice with their parents and/or guardians. Additionally, the English Department strongly encourages students and parents/guardians to discuss the content, themes, and overall inherent literary value of the selected novels.

Happy Reading!

General Note: These reading questions are meant only as a guide to the novel. These will not be collected or graded. Your grade on the novel will be based on an objective test and a follow-up essay that will be given within the first week of school. For your own benefit, it is highly suggested that you also keep a list of major plot happenings, characters, settings, etc. per chapter. We look forward to seeing you in August!!!

1. What is the gold that Pierce steals supposed to be used for?
2. How many keys were needed to open the safes?
3. What was Mr. Trent’s secret “sporting” obsession?
4. Why was Elizabeth Trent not asked to testify at Pierce’s trial?
5. Why was Clean Willie unavailable to testify at the trial?
6. What distinguishing mark did Barlow have on his face?
7. What public event provided sufficient distraction to enable Clean Willy to escape from Newgate Prison?
8. Where was the station guard during the sixty-four seconds it took Agar to copy the keys?
9. In Victorian slang, what is a “barker”?
10. What was supposedly stolen – it was actually an insurance scam – from the train that resulted in an outside padlock being added to the luggage car door?
11. What was substituted for the gold, to give the safe proper weight?
12. How was Agar able to get aboard the luggage car?
13. What was the purpose of a “Bateson’s Belfry”?
14. How much mountaineering experience did Pierce actually have before he climbed out of the train window?

15. How was the gold removed from the train?

16. Why did Pierce change into Agar’s clothing after returning from the luggage car?

17. Where was Agar when Alice “turned nose” on him?

18. Where does Pierce finally tell Harranby the gold is hidden?

19. When, at the trial, the judge asks Pierce “why did you conceive, plan and execute this dastardly and shocking crime?” what is Pierce’s reply?

20. For his part in the robbery, Agar was exiled to Australia, but what was the fate of Pierce and Barlow?