

Honors English 9 Summer Reading Responses

The Summer Reading program, sponsored by the English Department at Padua Franciscan High School, is designed to encourage students to read and recognize notable contemporary literature. We wish to engage student interest, inspire critical thinking, and challenge our students as readers. As such, the target audience of all the selected literature is young adults, but the title selections for Honors English 9 are chosen in accordance with the AP program. Students are encouraged to find more information about the novels through the local library or through sites like Goodreads.com, but we ask that you purchase your own physical copies of both books. Audiobooks should be considered an accompaniment, not a replacement for physical copies of books (and, please, no e-readers).

Please note that you will be assessed on both these novels within the first days of school to evaluate your understanding of plot, characters, basic themes, etc. In preparation for this task, you should respond to the following comprehension/discussion questions. Please type and print your responses. If you are able, please compose your responses using your Padua Google account (if you have access to it); though, this is not required.

A final note: the English Department strongly encourages students and their families to discuss the content, themes, and overall inherent literary value of the two selected novels. Discussing books is half the fun of reading them, and we aim to foster a culture of lifelong readers here at Padua whenever possible!

Happy Reading!

***Darius The Great Is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram**

Instructions: Choose FIVE of the questions below and respond to each of the five you've chosen in complete sentences. There is no sentence minimum or maximum. Instead, attempt to respond in a way that you feel is most reflective of your understanding of the novel and your skill as a writer and critical thinker. Please provide the number that corresponds to the question before each of your responses.

1. At the outset, the title of the book informs us that our narrator, Darius, is “not okay.” What does this mean in the book? What does it mean to “be okay” or “not okay”? How does this okay/not okay dichotomy affect the relationship between Darius and his father? Between

Darius and others? Why do you think it feels like such a monumental realization/revelation that it could be okay to be not okay?

2. Much of Darius's interpretations of events, especially regarding his father, center on his feeling that his father sees him as an immense disappointment. What are some characteristics that Darius attributes to this disappointment? How does Darius "know" his dad is disappointed in him? Do you think Darius and his father are as dissimilar as he thinks, and as he would have us believe?
3. Darius's mother migrated to the United States from Iran. A diaspora is a group of people who have been scattered to many parts of the globe from one common homeland. According to this definition, Darius and his family are members of the Iranian diaspora in America. How does this position affect how Darius experiences his life as an American? What does his perspective as a teenage narrator add to your thinking about immigrant belonging and identity in America?
4. Darius uses the term "True Persians" to describe those who (among many other attributes) have two Iranian parents; he describes himself as a "Fractional Persian," a mixed identity about which he has lots of mixed feelings. Many young people living in diaspora—whether of mixed heritage, like Darius, or not—may feel they don't fully belong in either of their "homes." Scholars have described this experience as feeling "neither here nor there" but in between, or liminal. When does Darius have this kind of feeling, of not being Persian enough—not a "True Persian"—in Iran? In Portland? How is he made to feel not American enough in America? When and where does he feel belonging?
5. How does Darius feel about his limited understanding of Farsi? How does it limit him? What does it afford him? How does this change over the course of the book?
6. Darius's boss, and later Babou and Sohrab, all tell him it's important to know "where you came from." What do they mean by this? Despite these urgings, while visiting sites and learning about his family history Darius worries that he feels like a tourist. Why is he concerned by this? Later, he returns to this worry, saying, "I felt like I was on an away mission... I felt like an actor...I felt like a tourist." (230) What do you think he means? How do you think he feels by the end of his trip?
7. The names we are given at birth often reveal the desires, hopes, and love of our parents, and have lifelong impacts beyond what our parents can imagine. They can also reveal the stories, mythologies, and values of a society. Think about the names in the book—for Darius, his sister,

his parents, his grandparents, his friends. How did Darius get his name? How does its meaning begin to change for Darius over the course of the book? Do you think he prefers Darius or Darioush? Can he be both?

8. Darius reflects numerous times about what is said aloud and what isn't. What is he not allowed to say out loud? Why? What difficulties does Darius have with his grandfather's impending death? Have you had to mourn the death of a loved one? What did you feel you had to say? What did you feel intuitively, that didn't need to be said? How do revelations about Darius's father lead him to think differently not only about death, but also about the sacrifices we make for love and the value of life?

***A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* Betty Smith**

Instructions: Choose FIVE of the questions below and respond to each of the five you've chosen in complete sentences. There is no sentence minimum or maximum. Instead, attempt to respond in a way that you feel is most reflective of your understanding of the novel and your skill as a writer and critical thinker. Please provide the number that corresponds to the question before each of your responses.

1. In a particularly revealing chapter of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Francie's teacher dismisses her essays about everyday life among the poor as "sordid," and, indeed, many of the novel's characters seem to harbor a sense of shame about their poverty. But they also display remarkable self-reliance. Have our society's perceptions of poverty changed during the last one hundred years? How can you tell? Discuss particular instances from the novel to support your response.
2. Some critics have argued that many of the characters in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* can be dismissed as stereotypes, exhibiting quaint characteristics or representing pat qualities of either nobility or degeneracy. Is this a fair criticism? Which characters are the most convincing? The least?
3. The women in the Nolan/Rommely clan exhibit most of the strength and, whenever humanly possible, control the family's destiny. In what ways does Francie continue this legacy in the novel?

4. What might Francie's obsession with order—from systematically reading the books in the library from A through Z, to trying every flavor of ice cream soda—in turn say about her circumstances and her dreams?
5. Although it is written in the third person, there can be little argument that the narrative is largely from Francie's point of view. How would the book differ if it was told from Neeley's perspective?
6. Some readers argue that the main character of the book isn't Francie, but instead the city of Brooklyn itself. Why might this be the case?
7. Discuss the role of music in the novel in relation to at least three separate characters. How is it significant to each of these characters?
8. Find three instances in which the tree is discussed. Although the tree always represents hope and perseverance, its use in different points in the novel suggests it also has more specific significance. How is the symbol used differently each time? How does it still represent the same idea?