

Required Summer Reading for 8th Grade

Soon after reading the two books assigned to your class, please answer the following questions which will help you to think through the meaning of each book. Be ready on the first day of school in September to turn in this study guide *and* to take a quiz on each book as well. You will also be graded on your answers on this study guide.

I. Background information for A Raisin in the Sun:

This play by Lorraine Hansberry shows the difficulties that African American families faced in the 1950's: segregation, discrimination, poverty and the lack of pride in their own African origins.

As the play opens, notice the sense of frustration that plagues many of the members of the Younger family. Even the lighting and setting reinforce their dreary outlook. But Mama's inheritance check (from her deceased husband's life insurance) is coming, and each member of the family has hope that that check will help him or her fulfill a personal dream.

1. List the dream that each family member wants to fulfill by that money?

Mama _____

Walter _____

Beneatha _____

Ruth _____

2. How does Walter destroy Beneatha's dream?

3. After his mistake (above), what was he planning to do which would be a disgrace for the entire family?

4. How does Mama help him to have pride in his family and their race, and what does he do in the end to stand up for them all?

5. How does the end of the play show that a united family is more important than individual dreams? (Refer specifically to what happens in the final scene.)

II. Background Information for *The Scarlet Pimpernel*

The Scarlet Pimpernel is a novel set during the French Revolution. It is important to keep in mind that the French Revolution, while inspired by some of the same ideals of equality and democracy as the American Revolution, was much more violent and targeted an entire class of French citizens, the Aristocrats (or the “aristos”). The aristocrats have been living luxurious lives, free of taxes, while the middle class (the Bourgeoisie) were deprived of privileges and the peasants lived in terrible poverty. After the storming of the Bastille (the French prison), the mob took over the government and dealt out revenge rather than justice. Anyone known to be an aristo or an aristo sympathizer was in danger of being taken by the mob and executed by guillotine in front of a blood-thirsty audience.

In the story, the reader sees that there were English citizens who were sympathetic to the plight of the aristos, who were being executed without fair trials. Some of these Englishmen even risked their lives to travel to France and smuggle these aristos out from under the noses of the executioners. One of these was known only by the symbol of a flower (a scarlet pimpernel) which he left at the scene of each of his rescues. When the story begins, no one knows who this brave Englishman is, not even those closest to him.

After reading the story, answer the question below:

How does Sir Percy Blakeney’s attitude toward Marguerite change throughout the novel? (Answer in two complete paragraphs, the first describing his attitude before the turning point, and the second after the turning point. You will need to identify the turning point yourself at the beginning of the second paragraph.) Use your best writing skills and give specific details from the novel.

