



Westminster Christian Academy

9th Grade Summer Reading

Honors Expository Writing

[The Poisonwood Bible](#) by Barbara Kingsolver

When you return from summer break, you will be graded on:

- Summer Reading Annotations

Over the course of the first two weeks of class, you will also participate in and be graded on:

- Summer Reading Discussion
- Summer Reading Expository Writing

To prepare for these assessments, **annotate** for and consider these ideas while reading:

1. RELIGION AND FAITH: How do religion and faith form a person's life and life choices? How can religion be corrupted or used dangerously? Annotate for how the characters in the novel struggle against or follow their religion and faith. Consider, particularly, the impact of Nathan Price's religion and faith (and how he chooses to wield it) on his family and the people of the Congo.
2. GROWTH AND COMING OF AGE / IDENTITY: What influences, shapes, and guides who a person becomes? Annotate for the people, experiences, culture, religion, traditions, and education that mold a person's identity. Consider focusing on 1-2 major characters.
3. RACE, RACISM, AND CULTURE: How do race, racism, and culture play a part in how people understand and relate to one another? Which characters show the widest chasm in their understanding of another culture? Who seems to bridge the gap? Annotate passages about race, racism, and culture, whether positive or negative.

These annotations can be **highlighted** or **underlined**, or a student may choose to use {brackets} or *stars* next to key passages or mark passages with sticky notes. To receive full credit for annotations, **students should mark at least 8-10 passages per theme (24-30 annotations total)**, and they should briefly comment in the margins or on Post-it notes about how the passage reveals the theme. These annotations will not only earn students a grade upon returning to school but will also play a key role in our first major assignment.

Great annotations include thoughts, connections, predictions, or questions. They are insightful and show not just what you're *noticing* (highlights, sticky notes, etc.) but also what you are *thinking*.

Poor/lazy annotations include: wow, omg, what?, huh?, I wonder what will happen next, etc. These types of annotations will not earn credit.

Discussion Questions:

We will discuss the following questions as a class when we return to school. You are welcome to begin considering or answering them over the summer while the reading is fresh in your mind.

1. What are the implications of the novel's title phrase, *The Poisonwood Bible*, particularly in connection with the main characters' lives and the novel's main themes? How important are the circumstances in which the phrase comes into being? Think about the word "balanga" and its different meanings depending upon dialect/pronunciation.
2. How does Kingsolver differentiate among the Price sisters, particularly in terms of their voices?
3. What is the effect of our learning about events and people through the sisters' eyes?
4. What is the significance of the Kikongo word *nommo* and its concepts of being and naming? Are there Christian parallels to the constellation of meanings and beliefs attached to *nommo*?
5. How do the Price daughters' Christian names and their acquired Kikongo names reflect their personalities and behavior?
6. What do we learn about cultural, social, religious, and other differences between the Congo in Africa and the United States of America? To what degree do Orleanna and her daughters come to an understanding of those differences?
7. Why do you suppose that Reverend Nathan Price is not given a voice of his own? Do we learn from his wife and daughters enough information to formulate an adequate explanation for his beliefs and behavior?
8. How does Kingsolver present the double themes of love and betrayal? What kinds of love and betrayal does she explore? What are the causes and consequences of each form of love and betrayal?
9. At Bikoki Station, in 1965, Leah reflects, "I still know what justice is." Does she? What concept of justice does each member of the Price family and other characters (Anatole, for example) hold?
10. Do you have a sense, by the novel's end, that any true justice or redemption has occurred?
11. In Book Six, Adah proclaims, "This is the story I believe in . . ." What is that story?
12. Do Rachel and Leah also have stories in which they believe? How would you characterize the philosophies of life at which Adah, Leah, and Rachel arrive? ¹

¹ Credit to Oprah's Book Club for many discussion questions