

Summer Reading/Writing 2017  
Grade 9 Honors, Mrs. Ragno

Required texts:

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez

The following assignments are due on the first day of class.

In well-organized and well-developed journal entries, respond to each of the following prompts. Type and number each prompt and response on a separate page. Use a size 12, times new roman font and double space.

Americanah

1. The novel opens in the Ivy League enclave of Princeton, New Jersey. Ifemelu likes living there because “she could pretend to be someone else, ...someone adorned with certainty” (3). But she has to go to the largely black city of Trenton nearby to have her hair braided. Does this movement between cities indicate a similar split within Ifemelu? 2. How much does your own race affect the experience of reading this or any novel? Explain whether or not race affects the reader’s ability to identify or empathize with the struggles of Ifemelu and Obinze. 3. Aunt Uju’s relationship with the General serves as an example of one mode of economic survival for a single woman: she attaches herself to a married man who supports her in return for sexual access. But Uju runs into a serious problem when the General dies and political power shifts. Why, given what you learn of Uju’s intelligence and capabilities later, do you think she chose to engage in this relationship with the General instead of remaining independent? 4. Ifemelu feels that Aunt Uju is too eager to capitulate to the demands of fitting in. Uju says, “You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed” (120). Is Uju right in compromising her own identity to a certain extent? 5. In the clothing shop she visits with her friend Ginika, Ifemelu notices that the clerk, when asking which of the salespeople helped her, won’t say, “Was it the black girl or the white girl?” because that would be considered a racist way to identify people. “You’re supposed to pretend that you don’t notice certain things,” Ginika tells her (128). In your opinion and experience, is this a good example of American political correctness about race? Why does Ifemelu find it curious? 6. In her effort to feel less like an outsider, Ifemelu fakes an American accent. She feels triumphant when she can do it, and then she feels ashamed and resolves to stop (175). Which aspects of her becoming an American are most difficult for Ifemelu as she struggles to figure out how much she will give up of her Nigerian

self? 7. Obinze goes to London, and when his visa expires he is reduced to cleaning toilets (238); eventually he is

deported. On his return home, “a new sadness blanketed him, the sadness of his coming days, when he would feel the world slightly off-kilter, his vision unfocused” (286). How does his experience in London affect the decisions he makes when he gets back to Lagos? Why does he marry Kosi? 8. Aunt Uju becomes a doctor in America but still feels the need to seek security through an alliance with Bartholomew, whom she does not seem to love. Why might this be? 9. Is the United States presented in generally positive or generally negative ways in Americanah? 10. The term “Americanah” is used for Nigerians who have been changed by having lived in America. Like those in the novel’s Nigeropolitan Club, they have become critical of their native land and culture: “They were sanctified, the returnees, back home with an extra gleaming layer” (408). Is the book’s title meant as a criticism of Ifemelu, or is it simply an accurate word for what she fears she will become and others may think of her? 11. Why is it important to have the perspective of an African writer on race in America? How does reading the story make you more alert to race and the cultural identifications within races and mixed races? How did this novel enlarge your own perspective?

### In the Time of the Butterflies

1. Analyze the way Minerva treats Señor Mirabal's mistress and her four daughters. How does Minerva's kindness toward her half-sisters add to our understanding of her character? Why does Minerva want to make education a possibility for them?
2. Further examine the theme of courage in the novel. While Minerva Mirabal may be considered more outwardly brave, how is each sister courageous in her own way?
3. The portions of the book written from Patria Mirabal's point of view deal with religious themes and include many biblical allusions. How does Patria develop from an idealistic young Catholic girl to a woman who doubts? When does this change occur? Can it be argued that her faith is stronger in the end, even though she has some serious religious doubts?
4. Why might Alvarez have chosen not to write from the point of view of any of the men? Explore one of the male characters—whether Señor Mirabal or one of the Mirabal sisters' husbands—and discuss how important he is to the underground rebellion.
5. Trace one sister’s beliefs and how they are altered or deepened by what she learns about her family, relationships, and country.

6. The Mirabal sisters are given several reasons to distrust men, starting with their father's affair and discovery of his second family. How does their relationship with their father and knowledge of Trujillo's treatment of women impact their choice of spouse, view of the government, and roles within marriage?

7. The Trujillo regime and his SIM police try to get to the sisters through comments or physical abuse of their husbands. Provide examples of how SIM officials use information or physical torture to extract information or responses from Patria and Mate. Explain how this impacts the sisters and what these techniques say about the regime's weaknesses and level of cruelty.