

# Upper School English Summer Reading Assignment 2025-2026

## AP Literature and Composition

All students enrolled in AP Literature and Composition in the fall must read the required text selection below: *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver. Complete the assignments as you work your way through the novel. Your work will be turned upon returning to school and will be used for coursework when you return to school.

**I hope you have a pleasant summer. Please find time for yourself and your loved ones while also taking care of responsibilities.**

**Please contact me via email with any questions.**

**See you in August,**

**Mr. Jones**

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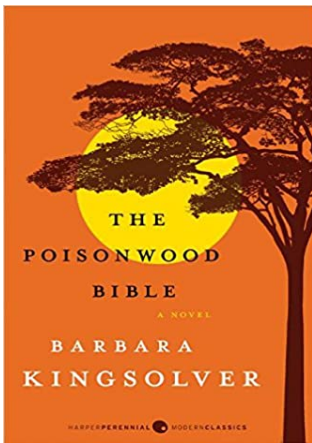
### Required Book

***The Poisonwood Bible***

**By Barbara Kingsolver**

**ISBN-10: 978-0061577079**

The *Poisonwood Bible* is a story told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce, evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. They carry with them everything they believe they will need from home, but soon find that all of it—from garden seeds to Scripture—is calamitously transformed on African soil. What follows is a suspenseful epic of one family's tragic undoing and remarkable reconstruction over the course of three decades in postcolonial Africa.



The novel is set against one of the most dramatic political chronicles of the twentieth century: the Congo's fight for independence from Belgium, the murder of its first elected prime minister, the CIA coup to install his replacement, and the insidious progress of a world economic order that robs the fledgling African nation of its autonomy. Taking its place alongside the classic works of postcolonial literature, this ambitious novel establishes Kingsolver as one of the most thoughtful and daring of modern writers.

## Summer Reading Assignment

### A. Class Context and Guidance:

- Since analyzing characterization is such an important part of AP Lit, it will be crucial for you to think about how the fascinating characters of *The Poisonwood Bible* are developed as we read. Additionally, I want you to contemplate the cross-cultural interactions presented in this novel. It will be important to consider how the intense cross-cultural transition of the Price family affects each family member differently.
- Take your time reading the novel. Don't start reading in late July. Take time to immerse yourself in the culture and characters. Start the year off in positive fashion with well-developed insight about the novel that only time can produce.
- Converse. For me, reading gives me the opportunity to converse with another person's point of view and ideas other than my own. I really encourage you to not speed through the book. I encourage you to converse in your head or with another student about what you are experiencing with this novel.

### B. Assignments

**Assignment 1:** Read Kingsolver's novel. If you want to annotate, then annotate for cultural conflicts throughout the novel. This means annotating situations and details where the cultures in Africa are in conflict with the cultures the Price family bring with them. Annotate conflicts within the Price family. While reading, we want to track their development as characters. Ultimately, how can the concept of home be problematic for an individual. Your optional annotations can be underlined or highlighted portions. They can also include short written notes.

- These notes should not have to be on every page. Please do not come close to jotting notes on every page since that will interfere with the enjoyment of the novel. These represent your impressions of the novel and research on the characters.
- I will NOT ask to see your notes in the book.
- If you annotate, use them to complete assignment two.

**Assignment 2:** The novel consists of seven books: "Genesis," "The Revelation," "The Judges," "Bel and the Serpent," "Exodus," "Song of the Three Children," and "The Eyes in the Trees."

Once your reading is accomplished, write a paragraph for 4 of the books identifying an idea Kingsolver is exploring in that particular book through characterization. Explain why this idea is important to the book up to that point. Explain why this idea is relevant beyond the text to your own life or some other audience.

- When writing, refer to the class context provided above.
- When writing, pull ideas from the "Thematic Topics and Ideas" page below. For each book, pick 1-3 of the ideas to explore in your paragraph.
- Really contemplate the interaction between the Price's Western cultural background with the African culture they encounter. Really contemplate the idea of colonialism and what Kingsolver is trying to explore about colonialism.
- Carefully ponder the power and limitations of the concept of home.

## Universal Themes / Big Ideas

### I. Notes on Theme

- Theme is a message about life. It can be universally applicable. Or, it can be commonly applicable to some common type of person/group in a relatable context.
- Theme is a message about human nature. Mr. Jones likes to view this as a message about human behavior and psychology. Again this can be universally applicable. We as readers and writers can narrow our analysis to types of people/groups in a relatable context.
- A theme is a statement. A topic or subject matter is not a theme. We apply our unit topics to uncover thematic statements author's are exploring about a topic or subject matter

### II. An initial list of themes

- A. An individual's or a community's confrontation with nature
- B. An individual's struggle toward understanding, awareness, and/or spiritual enlightenment
- C. The tension between the ideal and the real
- D. The conflict between human beings and advancements in technology/science
- E. The impact of the past on the present
- F. The struggle for equality
- G. The loss of innocence

### III. Writing thematic statements

- Now take the topics that we focus on when it comes to our texts and craft a thematic statement combining one of these themes with our topics.
- Example: Topic = Tradition and Progress or Topic = Death, War, Peace or Topic = Home and Family
- Example thematic statement: Within family structures, people always hold ideals that inevitably produce tension or conflict as reality interacts with those ideals.
- Example of a thematic statement: "... ultimately illustrating that although parents usually try to guide and protect their children, real life experiences tend to chip away at innocence in a manner that results in changed relationships between family members."

## Thematic Topics and Ideas

Human Behavior	Society	Ethics	Identity	Politics	Nature	Pop Culture
Arrogance Benevolence Citizenship Civility Consumerism Convenience Courage Delinquency Empathy Enthusiasm Hypocrisy Independence Materialism Obedience Ownership Pacifism Protest Rebellion Religion Risk Sympathy Tradition Violence Weakness Wonder Zeal	Art Commercialism Community Diversity Dominance Economics Education Equality History Industry Innovation Labor Life Modernization Opportunity Poverty Privilege Progress Property Race (Racism) Reality Truth Victory	Abuse Arrogance Compassion Complacency Consequence Deception Discrimination Dominance Faith Greed Honor Hope Integrity Joy Judgment Justice Love Patience Perseverance Productivity Responsibility Sacrifice Safety	Adolescence Alienation Belonging Certainty Creativity Doubt Experience Failure Gratefulness Guilt Humor Imagination Individuality Maturity Metacognition Nostalgia Purpose Shame Stress	Authority Capitalism Colonialism Control Democracy Efficiency Globalism Government Leadership Liberty Patriotism Peace Power Regulation Socialism Tyranny War	Adaptation Adventure Adversity Beauty Change Conservation Energy Environment Health Physiology Survival Sustainability	American Dream Fame Luxury Prestige Prosperity Social trends Success Technology

This classroom resource categorizes many of the most important ideas students will explore while they analyze literature. The document itself organizes the major universal ideas into categories so students can start by considering the broadest implications of any piece of literature and then move to formulate thematic statements to explore.

**Thematic Statement Template:** \_\_\_\_(*Author*)\_\_\_\_ writes \_\_\_\_(*title of the work*)\_\_\_\_ in order to illustrate that \_\_\_\_(*universal idea/abstract idea*)\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_(*write a message that is true for most if not all people*)\_\_\_\_\_.

**Model thematic statement:** Voltaire writes *Candide* in order to illustrate that rigid zeal for philosophy and belief systems is an obstacle to reasoned observations of the world and should never get in the way of adding value to a community through a resilient focus on daily work.