



Wichita East Senior IB World Lit Summer Reading

Interpreter of Maladies by Jhumpa Lahiri

The Elephant Vanishes by Haruki Murakami

These texts will be used to ground our study of literature in the first weeks of school, and **we will start with them on the first day**. Then we will return to them later in the semester. There will be an **objective test** over the books in the first week of school, and you will be both **discussing and/or writing on the issues related to the questions below**.

• *Interpreter of Maladies*

1. Lahiri has said, "As a storyteller, I'm aware that there are limitations in communication." In what ways are communication or miscommunication portrayed in the stories? Identify examples of both.
2. How does Lahiri portray two contrasting cultural communities: the United States and India/Pakistan?
3. What roles do cultural displacement and/or assimilation play in these stories? Identify examples.
4. Note particular instances of isolationism and alienation and the way they aid in characterization.
5. What significance do routine and ritual play in the stories? What rewards and consequences seem to emerge as a result of maintaining or violating routines and rituals? Identify examples.
6. What is the role of food in the collection of stories? Identify important examples of how food illuminates themes and relationships.
7. Do the characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* seem to be in control of their lives or subjects of forces beyond their control? How so?

• *The Elephant Vanishes*

Please read the following short stories carefully, though you're welcome to read them all: "The Wind-Up Bird and Tuesday's Women," "The Second Bakery Attack," "The Kangaroo Communiqué," "Sleep," "Lederhosen," "Barn Burning," "The Little Green Monster," "Family Affair," "A Slow Boat to China," "The Last Lawn of the Afternoon," "The Silence," "The Elephant Vanishes."

1. How does Murakami establish the alienation of his characters? What do the stories indicate about the possibility for humans to develop meaningful, intimate relationships? Identify examples.
2. In spite of the Japanese context of all the stories, how do they express the effect of the West on Japanese popular and social culture? What roles do references to Western art, literature and music play in the stories? Do you see Murakami as supportive or critical of Western ideas and culture?
3. Murakami is himself an accomplished marathon runner and triathlete. What roles do images of the body and of physical fitness play in these stories? How are they related to thematic and character development?
4. Take a minute to research online the historical tension between China and Japan. This may help you think about the story "A Slow Boat to China."
5. What role do fantasy, the surreal, and the unexplained play in the stories? What effect do these devices have on the reader?
6. Murakami is an ardent lover of music (and he and his wife at one time owned a jazz club). Do not hesitate to research references to particular songs or pieces of music. What roles do music and references to music play in the stories?
7. In a recent speech, Murakami said, "Each of us possesses a tangible living soul. The system has no such thing. We must not allow the system to exploit us." Where and in what ways do these stories provide evidence that the individual is in conflict with a soulless "system"?