

**11<sup>th</sup> Grade IB Language and Literature  
Summer Reading Assignment: 2024-25**

The following is your summer reading assignment for English next year, with me, Mr. Ruedi. Please feel free to contact me this summer if you have any questions or concerns. I can be reached by e-mail at [hruedi@uplifteducation.org](mailto:hruedi@uplifteducation.org).

**Read both of the following texts before school next year.**

**Summer Reading Texts:**

*The Oresteia* by Aeschylus (Robert Fagles translation required)

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**The Oresteia: Agamemnon; The Libation Bearers; The Eumenides Paperback – February 7, 1984**

by [Aeschylus](#) (Author), [Robert Fagles](#) (Editor, Translator, Introduction), & 1 more

★★★★☆ 342 ratings

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In the *Oresteia* Aeschylus addressed the bloody chain of murder and revenge within the royal family of Argos. As they move from darkness to light, from rage to self-governance, from primitive ritual to civilized institution, their spirit of struggle and regeneration becomes an everlasting song of celebration. In *Agamemnon*, a king's decision to sacrifice his daughter and turn the tide of war inflicts lasting damage on his family, culminating in a terrible act of retribution; *The Libation Bearers* deals with the aftermath of Clytemnestra's regicide, as her son Orestes sets out to avenge his father's death; and in *The Eumenides*, Orestes is tormented by supernatural powers that can never be appeased. Forming an elegant and subtle discourse on the emergence of Athenian democracy out of a period of chaos and

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Read the play *The Oresteia*. This means you are reading three plays that all make up *The Oresteia*: *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. We will be discussing and analyzing each play in class. **You will have a graded discussion and a timed writing over this text.** I recommend annotating the text. Marking and annotating allows the active reader to ask questions, comment on meaning, and **mark events and passages he or she wants to revisit.**

**Pre-Reading before *The Oresteia*:**

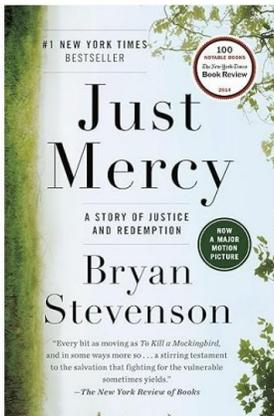
*The Oresteia* trilogy was written by Greek playwright Aeschylus in 5th century BCE. The trilogy tells the cursed story of the house of Atreus and the way the curse affects each family member. The first play, *Agamemnon*, follows the return of King Agamemnon to his home after the Trojan War. He expects to find a 'welcome home party' waiting for him, but instead his wife and her new lover murder him upon his arrival. The second play, *The Libation Bearers*, follows Agamemnon's death and the consequences inherited by his children. His son Orestes feels compelled to avenge his father's death by killing his own mother. His mother's ghost commands terrible creatures called harpies to haunt her son until vengeance is paid for her death. The third play *The Eumenides* tells the story of Orestes handling the harpies and going to trial for killing his mother. The goddess Athena organizes the trial and plays a significant role in it. The trilogy deals heavily with conflicting understandings of justice and the nature of law.

*Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit. The case drew Bryan into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinkmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever.

*Just Mercy* is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer's coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice (Amazon).

**We will examine excerpts of this non-fiction narrative in Quarter 1! You may choose to read this over the summer if you would like to get a head-start on reading assignments.**



Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption Paperback – August 18, 2015

by Bryan Stevenson (Author)

4.8 ★★★★★ 39,110 ratings

4.6 on Goodreads 232,407 ratings

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Editors' pick Best Nonfiction

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE STARRING MICHAEL B. JORDAN AND JAMIE FOXX • A powerful true story about the potential for mercy to redeem us, and a clarion call to fix our broken system of justice—from one of the most brilliant and influential lawyers of our time.

"[Bryan Stevenson's] dedication to fighting for justice and equality has inspired me many others and made a lasting impact on our country."—John Legend

As you read these two texts, annotate:

- Read and annotate very carefully because we will be discussing and analyzing both novels in class. **You will be able to use your annotated texts for a graded discussion first quarter.**
- Marking and annotating a text is like having a conversation with a book—it allows the reader to ask questions, comment on meaning, and mark passages to revisit.

How to Annotate:

- Make brief notes on the page or on a sticky note marking important plot events, narrative shifts, or themes, images, and details that form a pattern throughout the text (motif).
- Circle words that are unfamiliar or unusual—try to figure out the word's meaning through contextual clues and supplement with a dictionary.

## Summer Reading Writing Assignment

Using your summer reading text, write an analytical paragraph response for **THREE** of the following questions before the first day back to school:

- 1) Near the end of *Agamemnon*, what truth is Clytemnestra asking the Chorus and Aegisthus to accept? Why does she emphasize "that is what a woman has to say" (p. 171)?
- 2) In the opening of *The Libation Bearers*, why is Electra in doubt about whether a "[j]udge or avenger" should be asked to deal with the murderers (p. 182)?
- 3) At the end of *The Libation Bearers*, why are the Furies who come to torment Orestes for killing Clytemnestra described in the **same** way as the Furies who Apollo said would torment him if he did not revenge his father?
- 4) When Athena establishes the court on the Crag of Ares (in *The Eumenides*), why does she warn the Athenians to "never banish terror from the gates, **not outright**" (262)?
- 5) Considering the movement from violence to peace in the trilogy, to what extent does Aeschylus suggest suffering is necessary in order for individuals and societies to learn and evolve?

### The Oresteia: Supplementary Support Materials

#### Character List:

**Clytaemestra** (pronounced kleye-tem-es-tra): Clytaemestra is the only character to appear in all three plays of the trilogy. She dominates the action of *Agamemnon* but has smaller roles in the other two plays. Many critics consider Clytaemestra the most impressive and fascinating woman in Greek tragedy. Her most important characteristic, as pointed out by the watchman in *Agamemnon*, is her "male strength of heart." She is proud, efficient, shrewd, and strong, and all these traits come into play when, practically unaided and without arousing suspicion, she plans and carries out a plot to commit murder. Indeed, Clytaemestra is so confident and so superior to those around her, including *Agamemnon*, that she often alludes to her plans more or less openly without fear of being detected. Clytaemestra is by far the strongest character in the play. This is most clearly demonstrated when, at various points, she forces *Agamemnon*, *Aegisthus*, and the Elders of Argos to bend to her will.

**Orestes** (pronounced or-es-tees): Orestes is the central figure of the trilogy. He is the main character of the second and third plays, and, though he does not appear in *Agamemnon*, he is mentioned frequently and his return home is predicted. Orestes' most important characteristic is his belief in the justice of his cause and his determination to carry out the command of Apollo despite the moral and emotional qualms he occasionally feels. After the slaying of Clytaemestra, Orestes is embittered and on the verge of madness, but he never doubts that he has done the right thing. Even years of torment by the Furies in *The Eumenides* do not weaken this belief. Thus, though his dilemma is real and frightening, Orestes is a one-dimensional character who cannot arouse real empathy. That Aeschylus intended this is shown in *The Eumenides*, where Orestes is turned into a human symbol in the great moral conflict that is

fought out on stage between Apollo, as representative of Zeus, and the Furies, as representative of the primitive, pre-Olympian religion.

**Electra:** Electra does not have anything near the importance given her by other playwrights; Aeschylus uses her mainly to provide information for Orestes and to help strengthen his resolution by her presence. She has no real part in the plot to kill Clytaemestra and Aegisthus, and disappears early in *The Libation Bearers*, the only play of the trilogy in which she appears.

**Agamemnon:** Agamemnon is a powerful king, a great conqueror and leader of men, but as characterized by Aeschylus he has certain crucial weaknesses that lead to his downfall. Agamemnon is complacent, egotistical, and shallow. In his dramatic confrontation with Clytaemestra, Agamemnon blusters a bit and echoes some conventional religious sentiments, but he is easily trapped by her wily use of his own defects as weapons against him. Clytaemestra murders Agamemnon to avenge Iphigenia but would not have succeeded if his other sins — the desecration of the Trojan temples and his sacrilegious insolence in walking on the tapestry — had not aroused the wrath of the gods against him.

**Aegisthus** (pronounced ay-gis-thus): Aegisthus appears briefly in *Agamemnon*. Through an old enemy of Agamemnon and an accomplice in his murder, Aegisthus seems at base to be an ordinary man with no special attributes. He has common sense and some political ability but is no match for Clytaemestra, the woman whom he aids and eventually marries. It's clear that Clytaemestra is the real ruler of Argos, though she pays Aegisthus some deference for the sake of appearances since he is a man and therefore officially the king.

**Apollo:** God of the sun and prophecy. He appears as the defender of Orestes in *The Eumenides*.

**Athene:** Goddess of wisdom and war and patroness of Athens. In *The Eumenides*, she establishes the new court, casts the deciding vote at the trial of Orestes, and afterward placates the Furies.

**Cassandra:** The prophetess daughter of the king of Troy, she is the concubine of Agamemnon in *Agamemnon*. Her curse is that her prophecies are true, but no one believes her.

**Cilissa:** The former nurse of Orestes

**A Herald:** Announces the return of the army in *Agamemnon*.

**Hermes:** The messenger god and patron of travelers, a mute character in *The Eumenides*.

**Pylades:** The companion of Orestes

**A Watchman** Speaks the prologue of *Agamemnon*.

**The Elders of Argos** The chorus in *Agamemnon*.

**Captive Serving Women** The chorus in *The Libation Bearers*.

**The Furies** The chorus in *The Eumenides*. Ancient creatures, three goddesses of vengeance and retribution who punished men for crimes against the natural order. They were particularly concerned with homicide, unfilial conduct, offenses against the gods, and perjury.