



AP Language Summer Reading Assignment

Read and annotate *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot. You will turn in your annotated books for a grade on the first day of class.

In addition to annotating, please complete the following questions. Remember that when you quote, you need to cite parenthetically with page numbers. Generally, your answers here each need to be a minimum of a well-developed paragraph unless otherwise noted.

1. Look up “night doctors,” the Tuskegee Syphilis study, and “Mississippi Appendectomies.” What were they, and why did they contribute to fears in the black community about seeing white doctors? (This is important, because issues of the Lacks family’s fear and distrust carry through this book as race plays a major role in tensions with both researchers and journalists.)
2. In the short section called “A Few Words About This Book,” author Rebecca Skloot discusses how she has “done [her] best to capture the language with which each person spoke and wrote.” Consider the importance of this idea in the context Skloot discusses it. Why might it be important for writers to present people (or characters, in the case of fiction) in this way instead of correcting their grammar or standardizing their language on the page?
3. Look at the Prologue. How does Skloot attempt to pique (spark) readers’ interest in this story in this section of text? (Develop this answer in 2-3 paragraphs.)
4. Move to the next page and read the section called “Deborah’s Voice.” What does it suggest about Deborah’s education, values, background, and/or culture?
5. How would you characterize Dr. George Gey from the time Skloot introduces him through the end of chapter 8? (Develop this answer in a couple of paragraphs)
6. Readers sometimes struggle to understand Deborah, who can come off as extremely erratic, defensive, and paranoid. After reading the book in full, I’d like for you to elaborate on the circumstances that make Deborah who she is as an adult. What factors contribute to these qualities in her? Also, how else would you describe her? (Develop this answer in 3-4 paragraphs.)
7. How do both religion and superstition impact the way the family understands what happened with Henrietta’s cells and how they cope with life after Henrietta’s death?

These questions will be a 35-point graded assignment, along with 10 points for your annotations. Additionally, we will discuss much more about issues related to this book at the beginning of the semester, so it is imperative that you have completed thoughtful reading and work to be able to contribute to class discussions and further work we do. Please e-mail me at csarol@evansvilledayschool.org if you have questions. In an effort to discourage procrastination from my students, I will not be responding to summer reading questions after Friday, August 9.