

Hopewell High School Cambridge Lit Summer Reading Assignment

The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver

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. Against this backdrop, Orleana Price reconstructs the story of her evangelist husband's part in the Western assault on Africa, a tale indelibly darkened by her own losses and unanswerable questions about her own culpability. Also narrating the story, by turns, are her four daughters—the self-centered, teenaged Rachel; shrewd adolescent twins Leah and Adah; and Ruth May, a prescient five-year-old. These sharply observant girls, who arrive in the Congo with racial preconceptions forged in 1950s Georgia, will be marked in surprisingly different ways by their father's intractable mission, and by Africa itself. Ultimately, each must strike her own separate path to salvation. Their passionately intertwined stories become a compelling exploration of moral risk and personal responsibility. (<http://www.kingsolver.com/books/the-poisonwood-bible.html>)

What to do: Complete the assignments below. These will help you have the characters and plot (as well as some strong indicators of theme) well in hand before you return.

What to expect when we get back: Assignments 1 and 2 are due on the first day back. We will begin immediately with reading checks, discussions and writing on the novel

Assignment #1: Read the book (It's over 500 pages, so please don't wait until the last minute). Please use the "trade" edition – the larger paperback. It is available through local bookstores but I would recommend finding a used copy on Amazon. It has frequently been recommended on the AP exam and, therefore, is worthy of your attention.

Assignment #2: Using the study questions below as your guide, read *The Poisonwood Bible*, marking significant passages with post-its (if it's borrowed) or in the margins (if you own it). After you have marked your book with these questions in mind, select a single chapter (at least 10 pages) with particularly efficient annotations. Copy that chapter. Put your first & last name on it and turn that in for scoring. These may be used as bases for class discussions.

Unsure how to annotate? Here are a few good sites for you (the first is especially good):

http://www.birnbaumlearners.com/uploads/1/4/8/6/1486903/how_to_annotate_a_text.pdf

http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/teachers_corner/197454.html

<http://lauramiller.typepad.com/lauramiller/2009/03/how-to-write-in-a-book.html>

Study Questions for *The Poisonwood Bible*:

1. How does Kingsolver present the double subjects of captivity/ freedom and of love/ betrayal? What kind of captivity and freedom does she explore/ what kinds of love and betrayal? What are the causes and consequences of each kind of captivity, freedom, love, and betrayal?
2. Studying a work with multiple narrators offers the opportunity to explore style. For instance, in *The Poisonwood Bible*, each daughter's voice/distinctive point of view is created clearly by her syntax and diction. Make note of distinctive examples of word choice and sentence structure that aid in creating attitude, tone, and mood.
3. Kingsolver says, "I'm a biologist. I know that everything eats something else." The novel utilizes a great deal of animal imagery. How do the realities of the natural world permeate the novel? Make note of key examples. What role does biology play on each of the character's experiences? What motifs and messages are revealed through these repeated references? What is the human relationship to nature?

Assignment #3: This assignment is due no later than September 29. **Nathan's Journal:** In this novel, we hear directly from all of the Price family except Nathan. The Reverend, though, is a character who definitely has something to say. After reading the novel, choose one event or situation and tell the story from Nathan's point of view. How would the solitary male Price write about this situation? What words would he be likely to use? What aspects of the event would he describe in detail? What would he avoid? This should be a 3- 5 page, double-spaced typed paper. Use Times New Roman, 12-point font, please, and correct MLA header and headings. Make sure to note, using internal (parenthetical) citations what pages in the book describe this event or situation. Review the attached rubric for more specifics and make sure to staple this to your paper when you turn it in.

Name _____

Cambridge Literature

Date _____

Poisonwood Bible Nathan's Journal Summer Assignment Rubric

(note: all elements will be assessed by a checkmark system)

| Element | Score |
|--|-------|
| Written in first person and "sounds" like Nathan | |
| Offers a detailed analysis from Nathan's perspective on the specific event/situation | |
| Portrays a thorough knowledge of Nathan's unique habits and personality | |
| Presents comments regarding at least 4 other characters from Nathan's point of view | |
| Uses strong description and imagery to envision Nathan's point of view | |
| Grammar, usage, mechanics are all correct | |
| MLA format is correct | |
| Follows requirements of the assignment | |
| Overall Quality Score | |

Comments: