

Summer Reading Assignment – Perspectives 12 Honors and AP Language and Composition

When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi

In both Perspectives 12 and AP Language and Composition, the focus is on how authors use language to achieve their purpose with their audience – what we call “rhetorical analysis.” I think you will find Paul Kalanithi’s book *When Breath Becomes Air* stunning in its story and style. The book is a brief, intense autobiography. Please read both the foreword and epilogue.

In order to get you thinking rhetorically, I have a few tasks for you to complete as you read:

- 1) Kalanithi’s search for meaning led him to read the great authors before he began his studies in medicine. Identify three of his literary allusions and write two paragraphs for each (please choose one allusion from early in the book, one from the middle, and one from near the end):

In the first paragraph, explain the allusion. Who is the author and what is the name of the literary work? What genre is the work (poem, play, novel, etc.)? What literary movement does it belong to (naturalism, romanticism, impressionism)? Use Google to find answers to these questions, but don’t plagiarize a *Wikipedia* page. Instead, synthesize a few sources into a brief summary.

In the second paragraph about the allusion, explain its meaning in the context of what Kalanithi sought to communicate. Start by explaining what Kalanithi was writing about at the time that it was used, and then analyze how the allusion deepens the meaning of the text.

- 2) As you read, underline vocabulary words that you encounter that are outside of your own usage, not including medical jargon (don’t stop to look them up unless you are too confused to read on).

After you finish the book, create a Google Sheet and put each word in one cell with the page number it appeared on in the cell to the right. You do not need to find definitions.

- 3) Kalanithi was “possessed by the question of what...makes a virtuous and meaningful life.” In many ways, his book traces his journey as he tries to answer this question as a literature major, as a surgeon, and as a patient. I want you to choose five events in his life that seem to have taken him to a higher level of understanding of what indeed constitutes a life well lived. Please choose events from all sections of the book – beginning, middle, and end.

For each event, create a subtitle and list the page(s) where it is described. Then write a well-developed paragraph that details exactly what Kalanithi experienced and, more importantly, what understandings about life’s meaning he reached.

You will need your own copy of the book to complete the assignment. Currently, the book is \$15 on Amazon. I encourage you to shop RK News in Kenosha and Barnes and Noble in Racine for the best price.

I hope you find Kalanithi’s story thought-provoking and emotionally moving. If you have any questions about the book or this assignment, please email me at jruffolo@kUSD.edu.

Mr. Ruffolo