

English 9 Summer Reading 2023-2024

English 9 students are required to read **ONE** book over the summer prior to the start of the 9th grade school year. Students must also complete the study guide for the novel, *The Weight of All Things*, in preparation for a formal writing assignment and reading assessment during the first week of the school year.

If you would like to check-out a copy of the novel and pick up a copy of the study guide above, please stop by the AHA lobby during summer hours.

The class-wide read will be *The Weight of All Things* by Sandra Benitez.

- Sandra Benitez was born in Washington D.C. and spent ten years of her childhood in El Salvador while her father was based there as a diplomat. She currently lives in Minnesota.
- Awards:
 - 2004 Hispanic Heritage Award for Literature
 - 2006 United States Artists Gund Fellow
 - 1998 American Book Award, for her novel *Bitter Grounds*
- Context:
 - *The Weight of All Things* takes place in the Republic of El Salvador (the “Republic of The Savior”), the smallest and most densely populated Central American nation-state. Although a fictional journey, the story begins and ends with historical events that mark the beginning of a civil war (1980-1992) that would eventually take the lives of at least 70,000 civilian noncombatants and forcibly displaced another one million Salvadorans from the ranchos, villages, rural hamlets, and urban neighborhoods they called home. El Salvador’s war may have ended in 1992, but the task of explaining and making sense of the many causes and consequences of the civil war continues. Salvadorans still grapple with the ongoing impact of the war’s violence and displacement.

(source: <https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/the-liberal-arts-at-wheaton-college/christ-at-the-core-liberal-arts-at-wheaton/core-book/2019-2020-core-book-the-weight-of-all-things/the-weight-of-all-things-reading-guide/>)

Summer Reading Guide

Complete this guide while you are reading the novel. Please write in complete sentences.

Chapters 1-2

1. What event occurs at the funeral of Archbishop Romero?
2. What do you know about Nicolás' mother from the text?
3. Describe the relationship between mother and son. Pick two specific examples from the chapter.
4. Why does Nicolás decide to go to the hospital to search for his mother rather than look among the people at the Cathedral? (Which people go to the hospital and which people go to the Cathedral?)

Chapter 3

1. What is Nicolás' full name? What is his nickname? Explain his nickname.
2. What is his mother's name?
3. Why is it that Nicolás and his mother have been living in separate parts of the country?
4. What questions cause Nicolás to leave the open eating place?

Chapter 4

1. List the different fighting groups Nicolás hopes to avoid:
2. The people on the right claimed to fight against the tyranny of communism. Against whom did the group on the left fight?
3. Nicolás assumes his mother has gone ahead of him. Why does this reasoning fail?
4. How does he plan to find her?
5. Why do you think he sits where he does on the bus?

6. What adventure does Nicolás have en route to El Retorno?

Chapters 5-6

1. What has happened in El Retorno since Nicolás' departure yesterday?
2. What does Nicolás save from the church?
3. What is the source of Nicolás' devotion to la Virgen Milagrosa?
4. El Rancho is a two-hour' walk from El Retorno. Note the difficulty of the journey. (page 32)
5. What fear does Nicolás have about el rancho?
6. What is the name of the dog?
7. What is the condition of el rancho?

Chapters 7-10

1. Who is la Ziguana, and what effect does she have on Nicolás?
2. Where does Nicolás spend the night?
3. What awakens him?
4. How does Nicolás behave when he sees Tata?
5. Who is Dolóres, and why is she at El Rancho?

6. What are the goals of the People's Army?
7. What does she predict will happen to Tata's home?
8. What does she mean by "the sacred meal of the people"? (End of chapter 10)

Chapters 11-12

1. What decision have Dolóres and Tata come to regarding Nicolás?
2. How will he get there?
3. What message comes to Nicolás when he sleeps in the cave? What do you think it means?
4. Why do Gerardo and Elias go to Tejutla?
5. What information does la Niña Tencha give about her four sons and daughter?

Chapter 13

1. What news does Senor Alvarado give the men about conditions in San Salvador?
2. How does Senor Alvarado solve a problem for Nicolás?
3. What do his actions reveal about this man?
4. What is Nicolás' main message to his mother?
5. What does he not tell her?
6. What is the last piece of information that he adds to the letter?
7. Read the last paragraph of the chapter. What mood does it create?
8. How is the *farmacia* symbolic? [Hint: What is the name of the store?]

9. Explain the meaning of the last line: "Throughout his life, it was unsolicited kindness that the scent of tangerines evoked."

Chapters 14-15

1. Describe Dr. Eddy.
2. How does la Nina Tencha make Dr. Eddy useful to the village?
3. What is Nicolás' role with Dr. Eddy in chapter 14?
4. How have Nicolás and Tata become useful to the PFL at the rancho?
5. What happens to Nicolás?
6. Nicolás remembers the time Archbishop Romero came to Arcatao to celebrate Mass and to encourage the people in their fight for justice. What specific details come to mind about the river?
7. Who is Basilio Fermin? What does he say about the symbol of the lamb?
8. What was Nicolás' question to his mother? What was her response to him?
9. How does Nicolás explain his return to health?

Chapters 16-17

1. Which two carvings does Nicolás place in the niche against Our Lady's statue? Of what are they a symbol?
2. What is Tata's reaction to Nicolás' story about writing a letter to his mother?
3. Where do Nicolás and Tata agree to meet if they are separated?
4. What mission brings Nicolás to Retorno with Elías and Gerardo?

5. What occurs there?
6. How has the revolution affected Nicolás?
7. What question does Nicolás ask the la Virgen Milagrosa?
8. What gift does he plan to give to la Nina Tencha one day? What message will he also give to her?
9. What is significant about the birth of the baby in this chapter? (Think of the situation in which the people find themselves.)

Chapters 18-20

1. What is the reason for the guerrilleros' celebration?
2. What is the menu?
3. Why is Nicolás in a somber mood? (p. 110)
4. What reason does Dolores give for the condition of the soil?
5. What do the people talk about as they sit around the campfire?
6. In the cave Nicolás asks his grandfather if they are "an act of revolution" as Dolores had said. What does Tata reply?
7. Which group appears at el rancho one week later?
8. What happens to el rancho? To the guerrilleros?

Chapter 21

1. What does the army take from the dead guerillas?
2. Just as the soldiers are leaving the carnage, who appears on the scene?

3. Recall the message to Nicolás at the end of Chapter Eleven. What does Nicolás say he “dreamed” now?
4. Why does he say that this message was a dream?

Chapters 22-24

1. How does Nicolás demonstrate “Soy como el león” in this chapter?
2. Why do the soldiers take Nicolás to Tejutla?
3. How is Nicolás spending his days? How does he spend his nights?
4. Compare the meals the army has with the meals the guerillas enjoyed.
5. What goal is foremost in his mind?
6. Where did he hide his knife, his money, and the lion?

Chapters 25-26

1. What is the significance of the dream?
2. Who are Ofelia and Chabela, and how do they relate to Nicolás?
3. To what does Chabela compare Nicolás? What effect do her words have on him?
4. What important discovery does Nicolás make in the little store?
5. The title of the book appears at the end of chapter 26. To what does it refer?
6. What do you think causes Nicolás to face the truth?

Chapters 27-28

1. Where is Tata when the chapter opens? Why?

2. Where had he gone to look for Nicolás? What did he learn?
3. How is Nicolás spending his nights?
4. What message comes to him while he is in the pantry?

Chapters 29-30

1. What accusation against Nicolás does Ofelia make and why?
2. How does Nicolás escape?
3. When Senor Alvarado asks Nicolás who hurt him, the boy responds, "It was either the army or the guerrillas. In the end, they're all the same." What does he mean by that statement?
4. As he is leaving Senor Alvarado's home, what experience does Nicolás have?
5. Who phones Senor Alvarado and why?

Chapters 31-32

1. Where do Nicolás and his grandfather meet?
2. The Sumpul River separates which countries?
3. What happened to Tata there eleven years ago?
4. What does Nicolás learn about his mother? About his future?

Chapters 33-34

1. What news do the new arrivals to El Retorno bring?
2. Why is Nicolás not too excited to see Basilio Fermin?
3. Where do the people plan to go? How will they travel there?

4. How will people make sure that they will stay together when they travel?

5. How far is La Arada from El Retorno?

6. Why doesn't Nicolás go to the clinic at El Carrizal?

Chapters 35-36

1. What dangers surround the people? Which groups plan to attack them?

2. Where does Nicolás suggest the people go? Why?

3. What happens to the people headed for Honduras?

4. Where will Nicolás, Tata, and Senor Basilio head now?

5. How does Nicolás behave toward the zopes? Why do you think he does this?

6. What does Nicolás do with the M-16 rifle?

7. What is the final line of the chapter? What does it symbolize?

EPILOGUE

1. What is Nicolás' future?

2. Who or what influenced his choice of career?