

TEXT: *DRAGONHAVEN* BY ROBIN MCKINLEY

Dragons are extinct in the wild, but the Makepeace Institute of Integrated Dragon Studies in Smokehill National Park is home to about two hundred of the world's remaining *Draco australiensis*. Humans have never seen a baby dragon . . . until Jake discovers a dying dragon that has just given birth, and one of the dragonlets is still alive.

"A sharply incisive, wildly intelligent dragon fantasy. . . . Penetratingly insightful . . . Quietly magnificent."
Kirkus, starred review

"McKinley renders her imagined universe so potently that readers will wish they could book their next vacation in Smokehill." Publishers Weekly, starred review. (<http://www.robinmckinley.com/>)

In an effort to foster active, critical reading skills, we are taking a somewhat different approach to our summer reading selection and assignment this year. There will be no written work assigned with the reading. Instead, we the senior teachers expect you to spend your time simply reading and annotating this intriguing and enjoyable novel. When you return to school in August you will sit for a timed essay over the novel comprising one full class period. You will be allowed to use your book with annotations for the essay, which will be essential since relevant and purposeful quotations will be required on the essay. The essay will count for your first major grade of the quarter.

The reading list for your senior year in English is extensive, and we want to prepare you for the kind of *focused* reading you will need to do all year in order to be successful—now *and* in college. The kind of annotations you make in your book will determine the ease with which you are able to write your essay and defend your thesis with quality, relevant evidence. Unlike the dialectical journal you wrote last summer, we do not want you to merely note *all* significant passages, but rather passages that are significant to a specific focus. It is extremely important that you read the book and make your own annotations—not all classes may be given the same essay prompt, and therefore doing your own annotations is vital to be able to know how to get to the necessary quotations quickly when composing the essay. In addition, merely copying someone else's annotations is tantamount to cheating, and the NCHS Honour Council Guidelines will be followed by teachers if this is suspected. Some tips for successful annotation (from the Harvard College Library) are included on the opposite side.

It is recommended that you have roughly 5-10 annotations per chapter (you'll notice the chapters are pretty long), but ultimately, since you will need to provide *many* quotations in your essay, you should annotate any quotation relevant to the broad topics below. Ideally, you should read a text purely for enjoyment, and then annotate during a second read-through. While this is ideal (and the novel well worth more than one reading) you should also be fine annotating during a first read. On the first day of class, your teacher will designate a day for the timed writing—you must bring your book to write the essay, or you will have to write without it (and thus not be able to quote, and thus suffer a serious deduction of points).

Finally, the broad topics you will wish to consider and focus on during your reading and annotating connect to some of the major concepts of the senior English curriculum. The interpretations of these concepts within the novel are up to you.

- Stewardship of Creation
- Language and Communication

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS TAKEN FROM THE HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY WEBSITE:

Annotating: “Dialogue” with yourself, the author, and the issues and ideas at stake.

From start to finish, make your reading of any text thinking-intensive.

- First of all: throw away the highlighter in favor of a pen or pencil. Highlighting can actually distract from the business of learning and dilute your comprehension. It only seems like an active reading strategy; in actual fact, it can lull you into a dangerous passivity.
- Mark up the margins of your text with WORDS: ideas that occur to you, notes about things that seem important to you, reminders of how issues in a text may connect with class discussion or course themes. This kind of interaction keeps you conscious of the REASON you are reading and the PURPOSES your instructor has in mind. Later in the term, when you are reviewing for a test or project, your marginalia will be useful memory triggers.
- Develop your own symbol system: asterisk a key idea, for example, or use an exclamation point for the surprising, absurd, bizarre . . . Like your marginalia, your hieroglyphs can help you reconstruct the important observations that you made at an earlier time. And they will be indispensable when you return to a text later in the term, in search of a passage, an idea for a topic, or while preparing for an exam or project.
- Get in the habit of hearing yourself ask questions—“what does this mean?” “why is he or she drawing that conclusion?” “why is the class reading this text?” etc. Write the questions down (in your margins, at the beginning or end of the reading, in a notebook, or elsewhere. They are reminders of the unfinished business you still have with a text: something to ask during class discussion, or to come to terms with on your own, once you’ve had a chance to digest the material further, or have done further reading.

Look for repetitions and patterns:

These are often indications of what an author considers crucial and what he expects you to glean from his argument. The way language is chosen or used can also alert you to ideological positions, hidden agendas or biases. Be watching for:

- Recurring images
- Repeated words, phrases, types of examples, or illustrations
- Consistent ways of characterizing people, events, or issues

“Interrogating Texts: 6 Reading Habits to Develop in Your First Year at Harvard.” *Harvard College Library*.
<http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/lamont_handouts/interrogatingtexts.html#annotating>.

ENGLISH IV SUMMER READING RATIONALE

The objective of the NCHS English Department's Summer Reading assignment is two-fold:

1. To foster a love of reading (for both pleasure and edification) by assigning engaging works of fiction, both classic and contemporary.
2. To keep those essential analytical and critical reading skills honed for the next year.

This year's choice for Senior level summer reading is *Dragonhaven*, by Robin McKinley. The novel is a work of Young Adult fantasy fiction (appropriate for ages 12 and up) that presents an alt-universe depiction of our world in which everything is the same ... except dragons are real, and also an endangered species. The novel clearly addresses several important themes which will be further developed during the literature of the senior curriculum:

- The nature and importance of language and communication
- Stewardship of creation
- Individual choice and action (as well as enduring the consequences of choices)

In addition, this work clearly supports all five of the Marianist Characteristics of Education (with a strong focus on Family Spirit; Service, Justice, and Peace; and Adaptation and Change).

The choice to move from a more "classic" literary text to a much more contemporary one this year in no way diminishes the seriousness of the ideas present within. Though genre fiction is often belittled, there are important truths to be found therein. As Tolkien (highly revered for both his scholarship and fiction) said,

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make....

For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun.... Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker....

--J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories"

Evidence of students' understanding of the deeper themes and engagement with the text will be assessed by use of a timed in-class essay upon the students' return to school in August, as well as class discussion of the text. In order to prepare for the essay, students are asked to annotate their books while reading, and they will be expected to use these annotations during the essay to provide evidence for the argument of their essays. Besides the reading and annotating, no other assignment will be required for the summer. The essay will be assessed according to usual English Department standards.