

World Literature  
*The Epic of Gilgamesh* Summer Reading Assignment

**NOTES**

**Practice College Application Essay:** As required, part of the summer work for seniors in all English classes is to submit the first proofread draft of the college application essay (no more than 650 words) on the **FIRST** day of school. Refer to separate handout for essay prompts, or visit: <https://appsupport.commonapp.org/applicantsupport/s/article/What-are-the-2020-2021-Common-Application-essay-prompts>

**Summer Reading**

*Gilgamesh: A New English Version* – translated by Stephen Mitchell  
ISBN: 978-0743261692

If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Johnson via e-mail:  
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**Introduction**

Mesopotamia. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The second and third millennia BCE. The story is simple and compelling. The King of Uruk, Gilgamesh, who ruled about the time of 2500 BCE, is two-thirds god, one-third human. He is a bully who abuses his people. To tame him, the people of Uruk call on the gods to help, and the gods create the wild and handsome Enkidu. The two become friends and defy the gods in their violent adventures. Gilgamesh must face the very human conditions of loss and death.

The images in the epic are spectacular; there are frightening passages of hand-to-hand combat, revenge plots, sexual awakenings, and the sad image of a dying friend. The universal theme of friendship is the theme that drives the epic of Gilgamesh, which is considered the first hero's journey, and the earliest Western literary work.

From Mesopotamia, the story, which was based on earlier Sumerian legends of Gilgamesh, was first written down long after King Gilgamesh was supposed to have ruled. The most complete version of the epic was preserved on eleven clay tablets in the collection of a seventh century BCE Assyrian king and was found by A. H. Layard, a British archaeologist, in 1850.

**Annotating the Text**

While reading, annotate the poem marking:

- Characterization of the main characters
- Figurative language
- Setting-era (location, era, historical events)
- Repetition, contrasts and contradictions, tough questions, allusions, etc.

NOTE: Be prepared to explain your system of annotation (marking of the text); this is a skill we will continue working on throughout the year.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Prepare responses, evidence, analysis, and other assertions in paragraph form for the following questions. Make sure to incorporate direct quotes from the text as support citing the lines you quote. **Submit your TYPED summer reading responses to Turnitin.com on the first day of class.** Also prepare questions of your own to bring to the discussion. These questions can pertain to a specific quotation, character, plot point, theme, or insight. You will be graded on your preparation, participation, and contributions to the discussion.

### Quoting the Text

When quoting passages from a novel or poem, stand-alone quotes are not allowed. Respond, use textual support to back up your statement by first introducing the quote, and then comment on the quote after the citation. NOTE: Shorter phrases/passages work better—no need for block quotes. Since this particular version of the epic poem does not use line numbers, cite the page number instead.

### Examples from *Gilgamesh*:

Gilgamesh is known for his brute force as he is believed to be “the strongest man in the world, they say / with muscles like rock” (Mitchell 76).

His powerful strength and knowledge is also evident when sailing towards the Waters of Death: “They sailed without stopping, for three days and nights, / a six-week’s journey for ordinary men” (172).

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1. Describe the relationship between nature or wilderness and culture.
2. To what extent does the idea of achieving immortality through fame exist? Is the idea convincing?
3. Is immortality possible? Is immortality desirable? Explain.
4. How might humans come to terms with death according to the epic?
5. What makes a person heroic? Is Gilgamesh a hero? Explain.
6. The Hero’s Journey is primarily a male story. Is the same quest available to women in the story? What might traditionally be the female version of a heroic quest?
7. What is the role of women in the story? Aruru (goddess that creates Enkidu), Ishtar, Ninsun, the Harlot, Siduri, and Utnapishtim’s wife. What do these roles suggest about the significance of women in this ancient culture?
8. What is the purpose of this story?

**\*\*Again, see separate document for details, directions, and essay prompts for the Practice Common Application College Essay.** (For more information, visit <https://www.commonapp.org> or <https://www.commonapp.org/ready>, a series of ready-to-use resources, presentations, training videos, etc. covering everything from account creation through submission.)