

Dear incoming 9th graders,

The book you will read this summer will at times seem a bit strange: its setting is in a foreign land (Mesopotamia) and it is very old (around 5,000 years old). However, as you will find, stories, no matter how old, have significant power to tell us truths about who we are as human beings. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is just such a story as it chronicles the life of Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, and his search for meaning and purpose. You will not like him at first, but the longer you walk with him, the more you will see his search for lasting significance is strikingly similar to our own.<sup>1</sup>

It will be very important for you to annotate (in pencil) as you go along. Here are some questions for you to consider (and annotate) as you read:

- What kind of leader is Gilgamesh? Does he change over time?
- Why are limits or boundaries important for human beings? I am thinking more about moral limits and boundaries.
- What are the results of honoring/dishonoring the gods?
- What is the role of friendship in the story?
- How do gods/goddesses/supernatural creatures impact the story?
- What is death's impact on the characters in the novel?
- Why does Gilgamesh seek eternal life?
- Are there any similarities between stories in the Bible and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*?
- Why is Gilgamesh considered an epic hero? (see back page for features of epic literature)

**You do not have to read the introduction. Begin reading on page 61. There is also a glossary in the back of the book that tells who the characters are.**

The first week of school (after the Rhetoric retreat) we will have a Socratic seminar AND a test or essay. For the Socratic seminar, you will prepare written answers beforehand to questions I will give you on the first day of school. The questions for the Socratic seminar will be similar to or relate to the questions above. So, if you are a faithful reader, you will have no trouble with the Socratic seminar questions, provided you annotate well regarding the questions above. The prepared questions AND your participation in the Socratic seminar will combine for a test grade. I will also give you a rubric on the first day of school I will use to grade your participation in the seminar. The test will follow the day after the Socratic seminar.

#### **Characteristics of epic literature:**

- The hero is usually "larger than life"; he is important to his nation or the world.
- The setting is vast, covering great nations, the world, or the universe.
- The hero performs deeds of great courage and nobility; his actions may require superhuman courage.
- Supernatural forces — gods, angels, and/or demons — take an interest in the hero.
- The poet objectively tells the story.
- The poet opens by stating the theme, often invoking the Muse.
- The story opens *in medias res* — in the middle of things — giving the necessary explanation later.

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<sup>1</sup> And please do not read any abominable summaries of the book because you are all very intelligent and do not need summaries.