

Summer Assignment

English III w/ Mr. Swafford

Hello class of 2023!

English III is traditionally taught as “American Literature,” and its curriculum often traces the arc of American history by way of literary milestones seen as emblematic of America’s central ideals and dilemmas. My class will follow this basic arc, but it will also do something else: explore the many ways that the English language is and has been spoken within America. It’s a fact that there’s not just one way: if you attend the L&N STEM Academy, you’ve likely spent a good chunk of your life in Tennessee, where so-called “Southern Accents” reign supreme. America is a very diverse place with a complicated history, so accents and dialects and ways of using language abound here. Linguists (people who study language through a scientific lens) might even think of some of the dialects you’re familiar with as their own “languages,” like, for example, Southern American English. I will often invite you to think like a linguist in this American Literature course, which might also be called “American Englishes.”

For your summer assignment, you are not being assigned to read an entire book (or, heaven forbid, multiple books). Instead, I’m assigning you to read a single chapter of the 2019 book *Because Internet* by the linguist Gretchen McCulloch. The book as a whole is a study on how the internet has changed, is changing, and will change the English language forever (an idea we’ll circle back around to at the end of this class), but the chapter you’re reading – entitled “Language and Society” – is simply a great primer on linguistic variance. In it, McCulloch talks about *how* linguists study the prevalence of words, where words come from, how the popularity of certain words spread, how the language we use intersects with our identities and technologies, and why the idea of speaking “correctly” could be seen as simply a myth. The chapter is long, but reading it will give you a great sense of how to think like a linguist, setting a solid foundation for many of the ideas we’ll be talking about in class.

You can read Gretchen McCulloch’s “Language and Society” [here](#).

McCulloch opens her chapter with a great rhetorical question: “**Why do you talk the way you do?**” She never truly answers it, because, of course, she can’t: she’s not you. She doesn’t know your life or how you use language. But *you do*, so giving a thorough and thoughtful answer to this question will be your task – after reading McCulloch’s chapter and maybe spending some time casually studying the way your friends and family use language both out loud and online. Feel free to cite any relevant evidence from McCulloch’s text or any research you do on your own.

There is no minimum or maximum length requirement for this assignment, but it should be written in MLA Format and emailed to me (andrew.swafford@knoxschools.org) as a PDF by the first week of class.

I look forward to reading what you discover about your own language!

Andrew Swafford