

Greetings Rising **Eleventh Grade** Students!

This summer you will read *Ragtime*, by E.L. Doctorow. Note the text summary by Random House: *Ragtime* opens in 1906 in New Rochelle, NY, at the home of an affluent American family. One lazy Sunday afternoon, Harry Houdini, the famous escape artist, swerves his car into a telephone pool outside their house, and almost magically, the line between fantasy and historical fact, between real and imaginary characters, disappears. Henry Ford, Emma Goldman, J.P. Morgan, Sigmund Freud and Emiliano Zapata slip in and out of the tale, crossing paths with Doctorow's imagined family and other fictional characters. *Ragtime* captures the spirit of America in the era between the turn of the century and the First World War.

As we are living at the turn of the century, I thought you might enjoy comparing current issues with those facing the characters in the novel to show how we as Americans continue to “riff” off similar themes. *Ragtime* presents several themes that recur throughout the text:

1) ***The Difficulty Accepting Change***

The characters are faced with new communities, new mores, new Americans and other social change. How does the “new world” intersect with the old one?

2) ***The Impact of Technological Development on Culture***

New conveniences spark new behaviors.

3) ***The Struggle for Stability and Meaning, and***

When everything is new, how does one maintain a way of life that was once important? Or, was it ever really important?

4) ***Imprisonment and False Liberation***

There are all kinds of prisons: emotional, social and physical. How does one find “real” freedom? Note especially the characters Brother, Houdini, Harry Thaw and Evelyn Nesbit.

Directions: Create a journal with separate sections for Assignment 1 and Assignment 2.

Assignment 1

Follow all four themes throughout the text. Find five examples of each theme in the novel; contextualize your work by quoting and citing the text. Write a commentary that tells who is speaking, who is being spoken to, what is being spoken about, and why the issue is important to the text as it unfolds, and **why it is important or of interest to you. 4 themes, 5 entries, 100 possible points.**

American Literature
Eleventh Grade Summer Reading
E. Haywood; elannahaywood@aol.com
2

Assignment 2

Make a connection to the themes in the text and the outside world by clipping a newspaper article or magazine article that parallels those ideas. Find two articles that pertain to each of the above themes. You will have **8 articles!** For each entry: 1) cite the article using the MLA format guide; 2) write a commentary that discusses how the article connects to the text and the theme; 3) Tell why the issue is significant to you.

120 possible points

Read *Dreams of My Father*, by Barack Obama

Assignment 3

Find similarities in Obama's America and Doctorow's America. Using your best language, write three strong paragraphs, each focused on one of three similarities. Use quotations from both texts in your response. **30 possible points**

Assignment 4

Write a summarizing paragraph about what you learned from reading the two texts. Yes, you did learn something. Again, use your best language. This paragraph will be posted for classroom display. Make sure that your voice reflects your interest, motivation and commitment to your eleventh grade year. **20 possible points**