This year, as usual, every student in the Upper School is required to read a specific book for his or her English class in the fall. As a rising senior, you should read *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. As always, you should be prepared for a quiz on the first day of school. The book is available in both hard copy and electronic formats; either is acceptable. (Please note: a PDF is *not* acceptable.) Students are expected to annotate and take notes in their own copy of the text.

This will be the first text we study together, as well as one to which we will frequently return throughout the year. In preparation for the first few days of class, be prepared to talk specifically about a passage or example that illuminates the meaning of the novel for you.

In this prize-winning novel, Atwood imagines a near future dystopia in which bio-technology has run amok, populated the earth with genetically “enhanced” animals and plants, and rendered political authority obsolete. All the power is in the hands of corporations who police and maintain their own completely self-sufficient exurban communities. The story is told from the perspective of a character named “Snowman” who may well be the last human left on earth after a mysterious worldwide disaster. His central story, told in flashbacks, focuses on his relationship with another gifted adolescent boy as they grow up together in one of these developments, and the framing narrative follows the dangerous journey that “Snowman” must take if he hopes to survive the post-apocalypse. The novel poses many questions about basic human impulses to test the limits of our knowledge and freedom, to control and manipulate our world, to create and to destroy. It also explores the implications for human beings of being blessed and burdened by language and memory. These themes and questions will frame our journey together through our shared 12th grade English curriculum.

In addition, all students must select and read one additional book from the Student-Teacher Summer Reading List. These books will be discussed in small groups during the first week of school. The discussions will be facilitated by the teacher who offered the book.

**12th Grade History: Post-Colonial Africa Summer Reading Assignment, Frank Fisher**


This autobiography covers a range of experiences and insights about Ghana and about the author, John Dramani Mahama, the current President of Ghana. You will find the book accessible and the writing engaging. The chapters are relatively short and stand alone, so you can sit and read a 20-page chapter whenever and wherever the urge hits you, which makes it a good summer read! Mahama is a good storyteller and portrays his life in an appealing way, but it is interesting to think about his objectives in writing the book.

As background, you should be aware that Ghana, formerly the British colony of Gold Coast, was the first modern African nation to gain its independence in March of 1957. The first President, Kwami Nkrumah, was
a leading figure pressing for the liberation of other African nations. The challenges that Ghana faced upon its independence reflect those of many other newly independent nations in Africa. So, it is useful to consider what glimpses Mahama shows us of this historical context.

The book offers many images of Ghanaian society in the 1970s and 1980s. You get a glimpse of how different urban and rural life was and how the young Mahama moves back and forth between different social and cultural landscapes as he spends time with different members of his family. There are some great anecdotes about American popular culture and its impact on teen life in Ghana. Class and cultural distinctions come up in a variety of ways, and it is intriguing to consider where and how Mahama addresses these issues directly and where he may be a little evasive. Finally, there is a fair amount about politics and Mahama’s experiences growing up in a newly independent nation. All of these themes will serve as useful starting points for our work over the course of the year. We will have a quiz right away when we start the year, and I will be expecting you to write a short paper after your return from break. Please be ready to answer the following basic questions:

- What are connections between Mahama’s family and the former colonial country?
- What factors seemed to create opportunity for people in Mahama’s family and Mahama?
- What are significant differences between Mahama’s life with his father and his life with his mother’s family? (Life in the country in two different parts of Ghana.)
- What examples do we see about tensions between tradition and modernity?
- What does Mahama show or share about Ghanaian politics?
- How many political changes does he address in the book?
- What are different key formative anecdotes?
- What does insight does he show about Ghanaian economics and economic policy?
- What does the reference to the “Lost Decades” in the title refer to?

12th Grade History: Modern European History, Kelley Graham

In order to get a jump on our first book of the year, 1215: The Year of Magna Carta, please read the following article from the Manchester Guardian: Magna Carta: explore the document in full