Dear AP Lit & Comp Students,

I am eager to begin our study together. I think you will find these three books enjoyable page-turners, as well as complex pieces of literature. They will give us plenty to discuss during our first weeks of class. I am also assigning a brief essay, based on your reading, which can be fairly informal in tone. This essay will help me get to know you as a writer and become familiar with your voice. Detailed instructions are below. I know we will have a wonderful year of reading, writing, and talking ahead. Please feel free to email me during the remainder of the school year if you have any questions, concerns, or would like to give me your feedback on these summer books!

With anticipation,
Ms. Brilliant

Please carefully read the following books over the summer. The theme for our readings this year will be the family unit, with all its complexities, conflicts, love, support, and tensions. We all have spent a great deal of time with our families this spring because of the coronavirus. Families are at the center of many of the most compelling works of literature, and provide a topic ripe for consideration and discussion. All of these works are readily available in libraries and from online booksellers. Ms. Kane kindly provides the following instructions for how to take out e-books from the New York Public Library:

Visit the NYPL website! If you already have a card, you can use it to check out books from their online catalog. If you do not have a card, the library has an option for using the SimplyE app, which functions as a temporary library card. Here is a link to the NYPL website with this information.

1. *The Odyssey*, by Homer, translated by Emily Wilson  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0393356250  
This is a relatively new translation of the famous epic poem. Please don’t be daunted by this ancient text. It’s written in verse (poetry) so meant to be read aloud. Read it aloud as much as possible. Feel free to consult online text guides, such as Spark Notes, as you read, in order to gain clarification along the way. But do NOT substitute these reading guides for the actual text. *The Odyssey* is a beautiful, surprisingly modern story that digs into the drama of family separation and reunion. You must read this specific translation, which is the first ever done by a woman.

2. *Clap When You Land*, by Elizabeth Acevedo  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0062882769  
Here is a completely contemporary work written in verse. It’s a book that can be read by adults and young adults alike, but its focus on a family from the Dominican Republic, their loss and connection, is fit for any reader. It’s a fast read that leaves a lasting impression.

3. *On Beauty*, by Zadie Smith  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0143037743  
Meet the Belsey family: modern, multi-racial, and riven by politics and culture. When they intersect with the more traditional Kipps family, conflict about religion, morality, and identity ensues. This is a weighty but funny homage to the late Victorian classic novel *Howards End*, which we will also read during the school year.
Assignment

1. First and foremost, read these works carefully. Please take notes while reading, jotting down your observations and questions.

2. In a 3-4 page, typed, double-spaced essay, share your feedback of two of these assigned readings. What similarities do you notice? What are the most important differences? How does each writer focus your attention as a reader? What points do you think each author is trying to make that go beyond the specific story and characters but apply more universally? Your essay will likely include the following:

   - Brief descriptions of the major characters
   - Consideration of the narrative point of view in each work. Who tells the story, and how much does the point of view affect the reader’s experience?
   - A discussion of the main character’s journey
   - A discussion of your response to the works. How did you connect to each work personally, and what factors do you think affected your own responses?
   - Your essay should use quotes from each work, citing book and line numbers for The Odyssey and page numbers for the other two works.
   - You may strike a personal, somewhat informal tone in this essay, but it should be gracefully written, with a precise, interesting vocabulary and a distinctive voice. Impress me!