

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: HOW AND WHY DOES MAN SEARCH FOR MEANING IN LIFE?

Welcome to Honors Shapers of the World! “Shapers” is an interdisciplinary humanities course in which students explore how individuals and their experiences have had a significant and sometimes everlasting impact on society. Students examine common threads which link such disciplines as literature, art, philosophy, history, music, and science in the development of human civilization.

Summer reading is not only meant to introduce you to the course’s requirements, but to also make you aware of the kind of in-depth reading, research, and writing that is expected. In order to prepare you for what is expected from you in this class, it is imperative that you complete the following assignment before you return in September. What is the best way to approach this assignment? First of all, have fun with it! Be creative, consider things you may normally not think about, observe the world around you, and ask lots of questions. This means recording lots of notes, ideas, definitions, thoughts, whatever may pop into your mind. There really is no right or wrong in these types of assignments. What is expected is that you take your time, digest it fully, be productive, and know when you return in September you will be able to provide a thorough discussion of what you’ve accomplished and what you’ve learned.

Man’s Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl

Imagine you are a young, up and coming psychologist working in Vienna in the middle of the 20th century. You’re bright, and can boast of having attended lectures by Freud. You have been working with suicidal cases, and have formulated a theory which challenges the different approaches to psychoanalysis that have been developed thus far. The only problem is: you are a Jew during the Nazi era.

You try to hide your manuscript as you are processed on arrival at Auschwitz, but it is taken from you. Nothing in your life has any meaning: you are only a number, a source of biological energy while you are able to do manual labor and a source of raw material when you are dead. What doesn’t get used will be incinerated or buried in a mass unmarked grave. “Arbeit macht frei” proclaims the gates at Auschwitz - work will make you free.

Against the odds, you survive. While in the death camp system, you find yourself continuing to act the part of the psychiatric analyst, observing human behavior all around you. And you begin to notice that physical strength and stamina are not indicators of who will survive. Some of the fittest physical specimens are the quickest to die. No, there is some other factor that makes a person a candidate for survival (if the disease, work, undernourishment and lack of sleep don’t ultimately kill you): and, oddly enough, you already knew what it was. Your manuscript applied to the life in the camps, predicted who could survive and who would succumb.

Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's memoir has riveted generations of readers with its descriptions of life in Nazi death camps and its lessons for spiritual survival. Between 1942 and 1945 Frankl labored in four different camps, including Auschwitz, while his parents, brother, and pregnant wife perished. Based on his own experience and the experiences of those he treated in his practice, Frankl argues that we cannot avoid suffering but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose. Frankl's theory—known as logotherapy, from the Greek word logos ("meaning")—holds that our primary drive in life is not pleasure, as Freud maintained, but the discovery and pursuit of what we personally find meaningful.

At the time of Frankl's death in 1997, *Man's Search for Meaning* had sold more than 10 million copies in twenty-four languages. A 1991 reader survey by the Library of Congress and the Book-of-the-Month Club that asked readers to name a "book that made a difference in your life" found *Man's Search for Meaning* among the ten most influential books in America. It has been voted several times as one of the most thought provoking books of all time and one of the top 10 books that inspire.

YOUR TASK: This summer, you will be **READING** and **ANALYZING** Victor E. Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. **THIS BOOK IS AN AMAZING READ!** It really does make you look at the world from a different perspective. As you **READ, ANALYZE** and **TAKE NOTES**, think about the following questions and be **PREPARED TO DISCUSS** and **WRITE** about *Man's Search for Meaning* when we return on September 5th!

- After reading *Man's Search for Meaning*, what is **YOUR OPINION** on one of the oldest debates in psychology; **Are Humans "Basically Good" or "Basically Bad"**? Are we worthy of the name wise humans? Cite examples from the book to support your point of view, also cite any other examples that support your point of view?
- According to Dr. Frankl, **"Everything can be taken from a man or a woman but one thing: the last of human freedoms to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."** What does this statement mean to you? Do you **AGREE** with this statement? Why or why not?
- Dr. Frankl quotes Nietzsche **"He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."** What does this statement mean to you and do you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with this statement. How could a statement like this help your fellow humans?
- After reading part 2 of *Man's Search for Meaning*, how according to Dr. Frankl can we start to live more **MEANINGFUL, RESPONSIBLE LIVES?**
- Dr. Frankl stated; **"An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior."** Do you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with this statement and what is your reasoning behind it?
- According to Dr. Frankl what is the point of **SUFFERING** in life?

It cannot be emphasized enough the importance of your summer work. This not only prepares you for the beginning of the school year, it also aids in your comprehension of the requirements for this course.

**ALL WORK FOR THIS SUMMER PACKET IS TO BE DONE INDIVIDUALLY.
THIS IS NOT A COLLABORATIVE ASSIGNMENT.**

I would love to hear from you over the summer as you grapple with *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor E. Frankl. Feel free to email me at jambrosio@blindbrook.org. See you in September.

-Jon P. Ambrosio