**Winter Break Reading Assignment**

Read up to page 40, the end of chapter three by Monday, January 6th and complete the following activities. Your responses should be written in cornell note format meaning the heading (bolded below) should be either underlined or written on the left side of the page with your responses underneath or next to the bolded word. Typed or handwritten.

**Pre-Reading “The Dystopian Novel”**

The best-known example of the dystopian novel is George Orwell’s *1984*. Written after the Second World War, the novel foresees a future in which the government uses technology only for the purposes of surveillance of its citizens, denying the fruits of technology to those over whom the government holds sway. Mind control is only one of the ways in which Big Brother keeps his subjects afraid and under control.

*The Handmaid’s Tale* falls within this genre. The novel imagines a time in the future when the United States has been taken over by militant neo-Puritans. Technology has actually been removed in a number of areas of daily life, because of the opportunities it presents for heterodoxy in thought.

Assignment: Read summaries of the following dystopian works: *1984, Animal Farm, Brave New World, and Gulliver’s Travels*. Based on those summaries, make a list of at least five events you predict would be in a dystopian novel centering around a return to an Old Testament view on morality and interpersonal relationships.

**Epigraphs**

An epigraph is a short quotation or series of quotations at the beginning of a work of literature that is placed deliberately to suggest its theme. Read the epigraphs prior to the Table of Contents. One is the story of Rachel and Bilhah, from Genesis. The next is a reference to Jonathan Swift’s “Modest Proposal.” The third is a Sufi proverb that states simply that “In the desert there is no sign that says, Thou shalt not eat stones.”

*Assignment:* Taken all together, what do you suppose these epigraphs will mean in relation to the novel’s message? Write a predictive paragraph that develops your theory.

**Section I: Night**

Chapter 1

*Assignment:*

Read the first sentence. What can you tell about the period just from this sentence? People generally sleep in gymnasiums only in emergencies, after disasters. But this “had once” been a gymnasium, which implies that it was converted to its present use a long time ago. Some major change has taken place, probably not for the good. A “palimpsest” was created when a medieval scribe tried to scrape clean a parchment in order to reuse it. Sometimes the scraping process was not complete enough to obliterate all traces of the original text, which could be read faintly underneath the new one.

What is suggested by the fact that the immediate supervisors of the girls are women but these women are not allowed guns? What is suggested by the fact that the girls have to read lips to learn each others’ names?

**Section II: Shopping**

Chapter 2

*Assignment:*

The setting has shifted. It is now much later. What is suggested by the fact that the narrator observes “they’ve removed anything you could tie a rope to?” Note the play on the proverb “Waste not, want not.” What is implied by the sentence, “Nothing takes place in the bed but sleep; or no sleep”? “Ladies in reduced circumstances” is a 19th-century expression usually applied to impoverished widows. How does the narrator make a pun of it? In the gospels, Martha was one of two sisters. She devoted herself to housework while her sister Mary sat and listened to Jesus. The irony here is that Jesus praised Mary, not Martha; but the new patriarchy has chosen Martha as the ideal.

What is suggested by the existence of “Colonies” where “Unwomen” live? What are the crimes the Martha’s gossip about in their “private conversations”?

**Chapter 3**

*Assignment:*

What evidence is there on the second page of this chapter that the revolution which inaugurated this bizarre society is relatively recent? What evidence to reinforce that idea was presented in the opening chapter? Note that Serena Joy bears more than a passing resemblance to Tammy Fay Bakker (if you don’t know her look it up).