

RUTHERFORD HIGH SCHOOL
SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT
For students entering 12th grade

Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse

Familiarize yourself with the following information prior to reading the novel:

Hinduism and the origins of Buddhism

- Hinduism is based on the ***Vedas***, an ancient group of prayers and hymns brought to India by the Aryans in about 1500 B.C.
- Later a system of social classes or castes was added.
- People are born into a caste and remain there throughout their lives.

There are five castes:

- Brahman - priests who guard the traditions and rites of Hinduism
- The nobility
- Those who engage in commerce
- Servants
- The untouchables - the lowest caste who do dirty jobs like cleaning up human waste

*This religion of castes is called **Brahmanism**.*

- The ***Upanishads*** is an ancient text that explicates the ***Vedas*** and explains individualism; it teaches about the existence of a universal soul.
- Individuals must follow their ***Karma*** (fate) through many lives or reincarnations until they can be united with the universal soul.
- To do this, they must understand the ***Maya*** (illusion of time and space).
- The Hindu religion teaches that the beauty of nature must be ignored because it is an illusion.
- The Hindu religion is very strict; its practice includes prayers, sacrifices, pilgrimages to sacred places, and bathing in sacred rivers.

Buddhism

- First appeared in the fifth century B.C., when a wealthy young man (later to be known as Gotama) left his family and their wealth to look for a way to end human suffering.
- Through meditation, he learned that the path to *Nirvana* (“nothingness” or the escape from the cycle of endless rebirths) is through breaking away from all ties of love and desire
- His followers called him *Buddha*, the Enlightened One.
- Buddhism differs from Hinduism because it offers its followers a code for living, as well as the promise of eternal salvation.

Buddhism teaches four Noble Truths:

- Existence is suffering
- Suffering arises from desire
- Suffering ends when desire ends
- The way to end desire is to follow the Eight-Fold Path.

The Eight-Fold Path to Nirvana includes the following:

- Right belief
- Right resolve
- Right speech
- Right conduct
- Right occupation
- Right effort
- Right contemplation
- Right ecstasy