

PAIDEIA SUMMER
READING GUIDE

CALLING FOR
A BLANKET
DANCE



a novel

"STUNNING."
—Susan Power, author of
The Grass Dancer

OSCAR
HOKEAH

LUTHER COLLEGE

The Paideia program is happy to provide you with your own copy of the 2024 summer reading and this reading guide to go along with it. Oscar Hokeah's *Calling for a Blanket Dance* is your first reading assignment for Paideia. You and the entire first-year class plus many faculty, staff, and Decorah community members will share the experience of reading and discussing this gripping novel that won the Pen/Hemingway Award and was listed by *Time*, *Kirkus Review*, and *BookPage* as one of the best novels of 2022. Set in Oklahoma in the years from 1976 to 2013, it tells a story of indigenous communities scarred by past and present injustices, while firmly grounded in tradition and family relationships in all of their complexity. It is also a story of universal experiences of coming of age in a troubled society. It will introduce a central question that we will discuss as we read all of the texts for Paideia 111: What is the common good? Another way to think of that question to start with is simply: How do we understand what is good not just for ourselves, but for those around us?

You will follow the life of the protagonist Ever Geimausaddle, whose own voice is not heard until the 12th and last chapter of the book. In the other chapters, you come to know him through the eyes of eleven characters from three generations of his Mexican, Cherokee, and Kiowa extended family. Their stories are often emotionally tough to read. Through them, we come to empathize with the often hopeless-seeming struggles that Ever faces. At the same time, we feel the love and determination that surrounds him from all branches of his family and community. As Hokeah explains in an essay that follows the novel:

"The heart of my novel is about this: about family, naw thep'thaygaw, and how families show up for each other . . ." (262)

READING

CALLING FOR A BLANKET DANCE

GETTING STARTED

It is easy to follow the structure of this novel, since each chapter tells its own distinctive short story. More challenging is beginning to see how it all fits together. Put a marker on the family tree at the front of the book, and refer back to it to orient yourself. You will find that the pieces of the picture begin to come together, like one of the quilts sewn by the first narrator, Lena Stopp.

This book can be intense, so give yourself time and space to process the elements of trauma. Take it one chapter at a time and take a break after each chapter to reflect and answer the reading questions. Keep a pencil in your hand to underline words or phrases or sentences that puzzle you, or that seem especially powerful or important.

BACKGROUND AND LANGUAGE

You will have questions about the history of Native American tribes in Oklahoma. Don't hesitate to look things up as you read, and know that you will dig further into the background and history once you get into your Paideia classroom. Here is a place to start:

On the Cherokee Nation: osiyo.tv/timeline/

On the Kiowa tribe: kiowatribe.org/about-us

You will also find that the book is sprinkled with words and phrases from the Cherokee and/or Kiowa language. These won't be readily translatable, but you will figure them out from the context, as in Hokeah's use of the word "naw thep'thaygaw" for "family."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oscar Hokeah is a regionalist Native American writer of literary fiction, interested in capturing intertribal, transnational, and multicultural aspects within two tribally specific communities: Tahlequah and Lawton, Oklahoma. He was raised inside these tribal circles and continues to reside there today. He is a citizen of Cherokee Nation and the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma from his mother (Hokeah and Stopp families), and he has Mexican heritage from his father (Chavez family), who emigrated from Aldama, Chihuahua, Mexico.

You can find the Stopp family (Cherokee) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and the Hokeah family (Kiowa) in Lawton, Oklahoma. Family on his Kiowa side (Hokeah, and Tahsequah through marriage) organized the Oklahoma Gourd Dance Club for over a decade, and he has family members actively involved with the Kiowa Tia-Piah Society, Comanche War Scouts Society, and Comanche Little Ponies Society.

Oscar Hokeah has spent nearly 20 years empowering Native American communities. From his work in Santa Fe, New Mexico with Intermountain Youth Centers and the Santa Fe Mountain Center, he has worked with Pueblo, Apache, and Diné peoples. Currently, living in his home town of Tahlequah, Oklahoma (in the heart of Cherokee Nation), he works with Indian Child Welfare, where he gives back to the community that nurtured and embedded the Indigenous values he passes along to his children.

We are excited to announce that Oscar Hokeah will join us on campus for the fall 2024 Opening Convocation on September 4, as well as an on-stage interview and book signing the evening before.

Oscar Hokeah holds an MA in English from the University of Oklahoma, with a concentration in Native American literature. He also holds a BFA in Creative Writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), with a minor in Indigenous liberal studies. He is a recipient of the Truman Capote Scholarship Award through IAIA, and also a winner of the Native Writer Award through the Taos Summer Writers Conference. Hokeah has written for Poets & Writers, Literary Hub, *World Literature Today*, *American Short Fiction*, and elsewhere.

PREPARE FOR CLASS

Our conversation about Hokeah's book will begin during New Student Orientation. Because the orientation schedule is full of events, you will want to finish reading the book before the start of orientation on Saturday, August 31. Paideia is a course that builds skills in reading, writing, and discussing. **By following the tips in the Guide to Annotating Texts, and writing down thoughtful answers to the questions included in this guide, you'll come ready to discuss in class, and to write your first college paper about this book.** We'll expect to see your book marked up and this Reading Guide in hand with your answers to the questions written on it at your first Paideia class on Monday, September 2. The more thoughtful your answers to these questions, the better the discussions will be and the more you will get out of it.

CHAPTER 1: LENA STOPP (1976)

We begin with the voice of Ever's maternal grandmother, who narrates the story of the trip that her daughter and son-in-law took to visit the other set of grandparents in Aldama, Chihuahua, Mexico. This chapter includes a violent assault.

How do you see the identities of the different branches of Ever's family (Cherokee, Kiowa, and Mexican) shaping the way they try to shape Ever's life in this opening chapter? Where do they come into conflict with each other?

CHAPTER 2: VINCENT GEIMASADDLE (1981)

Lena's ex-husband, Ever's grandfather Vincent, gets sober and finds out he has less than a year to live.

How does Vincent find meaning in this last chapter of his life? What gifts does he give to his daughter and grandsons? Give some specific examples, noting the page numbers they come from.

CHAPTER 3: HAYES SHADE (1986)

Hayes is Lena Stopp's nephew, and only a distant relative to the 10-year-old Ever. He runs a store in the neighborhood and comes to know Ever at a terrible and vulnerable time in the young boy's life.

What is the gift Hayes gives to Ever, why does Ever need it, and how is it meant to help him?

CHAPTER 4: LILA GEIMASADDLE-QUOTONE (1990)

Ever's aunt Lila picks up her violently angry 14-year old nephew on the streets of Anadarko, Oklahoma, after he has visited his father whom he had not seen for years.

Why does Ever feel so angry and alienated from his father? Try to go deeper than the obvious reasons.

CHAPTER 5: QUINTON QUOETONE (1993)

The cousins Quinton and Ever turn 18 and receive a large cash payment.

What do you understand this “ahon’giah” (“per cap”) to be? Put yourself into the shoes of Quinton and Ever. Why might they have spent the money the way they did?

CHAPTER 6: TURTLE GEIMAUSSADDLE (1995)

Ever's mom, Turtle, learns that Everardo, the father of her children, has died.

How does Turtle interpret Everardo's impact on the things she worries about in the lives of Ever and Sissy? What does she mean when she concludes, "I see clearly now that my husband was a pen that left his ink in these paper towels that no one will ever read"? (117)

CHAPTER 7: YOLANDA "SISSY" CHAVEZ (1999)

Sissy, Ever's sister, tells the story of Lonnie Nowater, who marries Ever before he reports for military service in South Korea.

How does Sissy hold herself responsible for her brother's ill-fated marriage to Lonnie? Where do we see signs of empathy and compassion in Sissy's description of her?

CHAPTER 8: HANK QUOETONE (2003)

Ever's uncle Hank describes Ever's reaction when he finds that part of a military memorial was broken during the pow wow where he was hired to be the security guard.

How has the 27-year-old Ever been affected by his time in the military? What seems to have changed about him?

CHAPTER 9: ARACELI CHAVEZ (2005)

Araceli has not been close to her cousin Ever for a long time, but things change at the birth of his baby Tortuga.

What does Araceli mean when she says of the baby, "She was so small but somehow bigger than all of us"? (181)

CHAPTER 10: LEANDER CHASENUH (2008)

Leander, a high-school-aged kid in detention at “the place where they liked to put the toughest Native American kids in Oklahoma” goes to live with Ever and his family.

Early on in the chapter Leander balances on a high ledge, ready to jump. He reflects that the “literal thought of ‘How did I get here’ suddenly became more abstract” (187). In the bigger, abstract sense, how did he get there, and how does he get off the ledge?

CHAPTER 11: OPBEE GEIMASADDLE (2010)

Opbee is like an aunt to Evers. In this chapter, she hunts down the quilts made by Lena Stopp for each of Ever's children, prepared to buy them back for \$1,000 each from the people who have bought them from Evers.

Opbee explains, "We were taught to give or else more would be taken" (204). What does she mean, and how is that idea born out in this chapter?

CHAPTER 12: EVER GEIMAU SADDLE (2013)

In his own voice, 37-year-old Ever tells of the night he spent waiting in line for a chance at his “first-time forever home” for his family. He describes how, when a storm hit during the night:

The brother Hogshooter stood from his powwow chair like a giant rising from the forest, with rain still gushing in, and held the tarp to the top of the porch. His sister quickly grabbed the opposite end. We grabbed the other corners. We had prayed under our breaths to shape shift us all into a single, unified turtle and couldn't help but smile at what we had become. (245)

What meanings can you take from this beautiful passage?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND “NAW THEP’THAY’GAW: AN ESSAY BY OSCAR HOKEAH” (261–65)

Hokeah ends the essay, “Our identities are shaped first by those who love us the hardest, who pick up the edges of the blanket in our honor, but ultimately, by our will to make the future our own.”

How might this statement apply to your own life?

What other questions can you think of that you would like to talk about in class, or even ask the author?

Notice how useful it is to have a physical copy of the book in hand—that is why we provided this one for you. We will require that you buy a print copy of the correct edition of all of the remaining Paideia books for the semester. Please go to lutherbookshop.com to find the list of required books, and ordering information.

READING IN PAIDEIA: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO ANNOTATING YOUR TEXT

This year in Paideia, you will develop new reading processes that help you engage with and retain the material you've been assigned. Learning to write as you read will help you deepen your engagement with what you're reading. This writing can take multiple forms: marginal notes or annotations, reading notes that you keep in a separate notebook, or short writing assignments that your instructor assigns in class. The writing you do as you read will give you confidence to share your ideas in class discussion and will be a useful tool when studying for exams or preparing essays.

I WOULD LIKE TO SELL MY BOOKS BACK AT THE END OF THE TERM. CAN I MARK IN THEM?

The Luther Book Shop director answers, "Yes, we want you to highlight and/or write notes as encouraged by your instructor." However, it is important to note that books need to be free of any water/liquid damage and have all the pages intact in order to be sold back.

WHAT IF I'VE RENTED MY TEXTBOOKS?

The same guidelines apply. "Even if you rented a new book, we expect to get a "used" book back at the end of the semester," the Book Shop director explains.

Below are a few examples of habits that have proven helpful for your Paideia professors. As a reader, you'll have to develop your own system, one that is sustainable and one that reflects your style of note-taking, which will take some practice. Hopefully these examples will give you some new approaches to try.

Friday, October 30

• Darwin, Charles. "Excerpts from Chs. IV, VI, XIV," *On the Origin of Species* (Reader 54-70)

5. What is natural selection and how does it work to the advantage of some members of a species and not others? How does the length of time and the way in which natural selection works compare to the work of domestication that humans undertake? Why does Darwin argue that nature selects only the "good" for each species? *Compare to domestication*
6. What is sexual selection and how does it compare to natural selection in the creation of species? What different roles does Darwin attribute to males and females in the process of sexual selection? What do you think about these ideas? *↳ what are the roles*
7. What does Darwin mean by the term coadaptation? How does this explain relationships between different species of plants and animals and their natural environments? How is coadaptation related to natural and sexual selection? *↳ what is the relationship*
8. How does Darwin's metaphor of life being like the branches of a tree or bush challenge biblical explanations of the creation of life? What does it imply about the way in which different species relate to each other? *↳ relate to bible*

A GUIDED START: USING READING QUESTIONS

I've never written anything down while I read. Where can I begin, especially with a Paideia text that is giving me some difficulty?

The questions in this Reading Guide, and in the Paideia Reader that you'll purchase with your other course texts, will help provide you with focus and direction as you read. These questions highlight important moments and ideas in the text that you should plan to keep an eye out for. Preview the reading questions before you complete a reading assignment. See if you can distill a keyword or phrase from the question; write that word or phrase in the margin of your reader or on a sticky note that you can use as a bookmark.

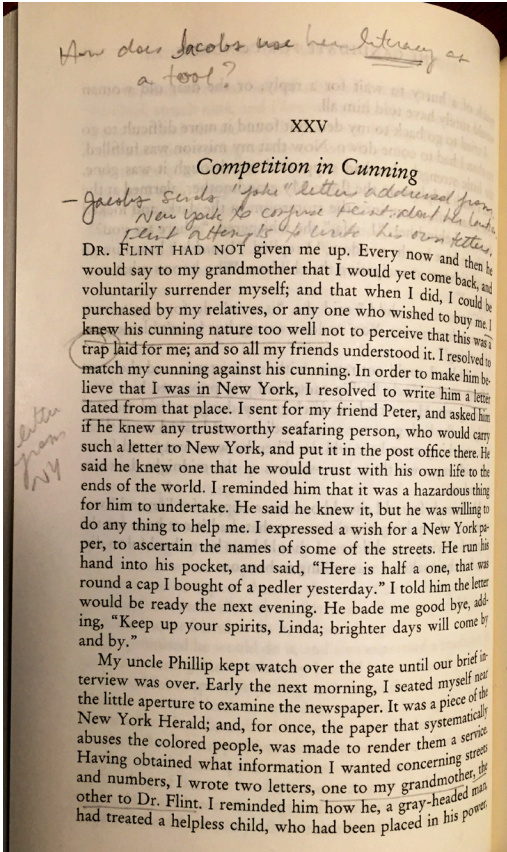
As you read, identify and mark passages that fit each question's main idea.

A simple way to begin annotating might be to list the question number in the margin and then add a note about what the text is showing you where a given keyword or theme is concerned. This method will help alert you to particular themes or significant events that might help guide your reading.

THE "WHAT HAPPENED" APPROACH: SUMMARIZING AS YOU GO

There seems to be a lot going on in this text. How can I use notes to follow the action?

Tracking the action in a text can give you a good idea of where to begin jotting down notes. For Marie Drews, associate professor of English, writing summary notes and questions in the white space at the beginnings or endings of chapters is a common practice. "Especially when I am reading a text for the first time, it's useful for me to write down phrases and sentences that capture what happened in a given chapter after I've finished reading it. Having these notes available makes it easy to remind myself where certain events take place in a book. If I step away from the text for a bit, reviewing my summary statements helps me get back in the action. And these notes also give me a jumping-off point to jot down questions regarding a major idea or problem that might be playing out in a given chapter."

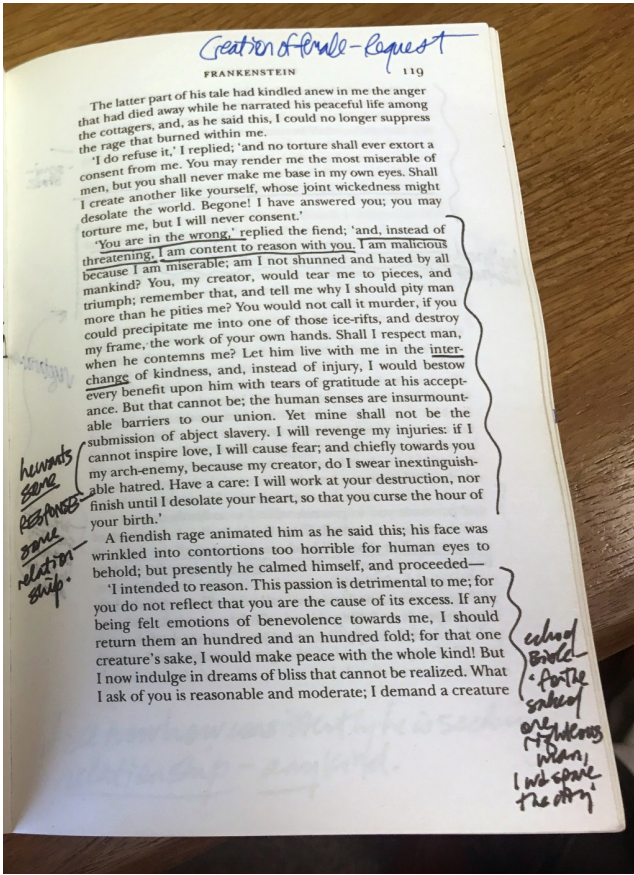


ADDING IN WHAT "I SAY": TAKING DESCRIPTIVE AND EVALUATIVE NOTES

I'm getting in the swing of writing as I read. How can I develop my process further?

Amy Weldon, professor of English, has two different types of notes that she takes as she reads.

Descriptive: I write at the top of the page a literal description of something important whose location I want to remember: "First conversation with Creature," "Definition of 'Armenian,'" "first sight of Turkey." This will help me find that passage quickly when I flip



back through. I also make careful note of passages we talked about in class: I tell students that if it's on the board, it needs to be in your text/underlining/notes.

Evaluative/creative: I underline, write comments about, and otherwise flag a spot where my own attention spikes: "This reminds me of . . ." "This makes me think about . . ." "This hearkens back to that other place on p. 31 where she talks about this . . ." "If I were writing a paper on a broader issue within this text, this is a passage I would use." "We talked about this in class and so I want to remember where it is and think about it some more."