

*Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy  
Incoming Sophomore Summer Reading, 2012*

*Students, please use these questions as a guide for your annotation of the summer reading.*

*Your teachers encourage the practice of annotation in all your assigned reading at IMSA, to reinforce the habits of an active reader and as a way to prepare for classroom activities and assessments.*

***Guiding questions for student reading:***

1. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* is the story of an African American woman and her family that touches on many big issues: bioethics, racism, poverty, science, and more. What threads stand out to you and why?

2. What does this book tell us about the history of science and how science has progressed since the 1950's?

3. After reading and considering this book, what do you think are key factors in scientific progress?

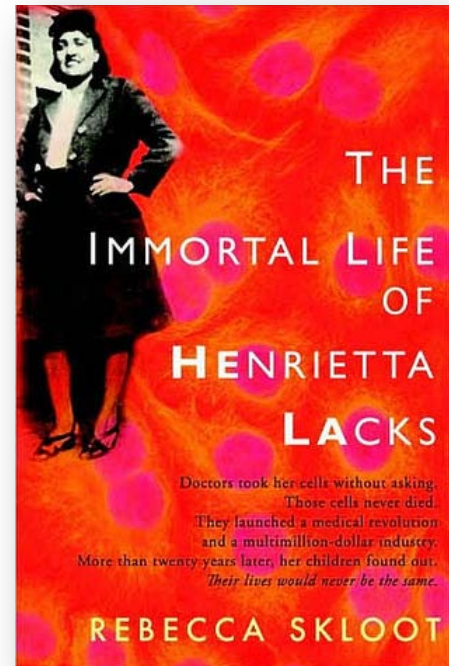
4. The author notes social inequities both explicitly and implicitly. What parts of Henrietta's story might be different if she had been white? What parts might have been different if she was middle- or upper-middle-class?

5. Making healthcare affordable to all Americans has been a recent political focus. What does the story of Henrietta Lacks and her family add to the national discussion?

6. Skloot had to make a lot of choices about how she recounted Henrietta's story and how she structured the book. What do we know about her process from the foreword and endnotes? How does her narrative reconstruction of Henrietta's life impact the story? How do you feel about the reconstruction?

***Why has the English Team chosen this text for summer reading?***

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* demonstrates the power of careful research and well-planned narrative to bring to the public consciousness what might otherwise remain obscure medical history. We believe this text will challenge the incoming IMSA sophomores with questions well-suited to study at a school that seeks to develop creative, ethical, scientific minds. The summary given below can be found on the back cover of the paperback edition, available at most bookstores:



“Scientists know her as HeLa, but who was Henrietta Lacks? Rebecca Skloot takes us on an extraordinary journey, from the “colored” ward of Johns Hopkins Hospital in the 1950s to stark white laboratories with freezers full of HeLa cells; from Henrietta’s small, dying hometown of Clover, Virginia—a land of wooden slave quarters, faith healings, and voodoo—to East Baltimore today, where her children and grandchildren live and struggle with the legacy of her cells. Lacks was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine. The first “immortal” human cells grown in culture, they are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years.

Intimate in feeling, astonishing in scope, and impossible to put down, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* captures the beauty and drama of scientific discovery, as well as its human consequences.”

***What is the purpose of the summer reading assignment?***

The primary purpose of summer reading is to give students the kind of positive reading experience that continues to encourage young people to become life-long readers. This is especially important to incoming sophomores who will share this experience with their peers from across the state.

***What can you expect in your English class at the beginning of the school year?***

Students will discuss this text in class, and their teachers may use it as a springboard for early writing assignments. Students should expect to be assessed on their ability to recognize important details and ideas. The goals of this assessment are to affirm that the student read the text and to provide the teacher some baseline data on the student’s writing and understanding of basic textual elements, such as plot and character. This assessment will take place in the first quarter of the school year.

*If you have questions about the incoming sophomore summer reading program, please contact Ms. Tracy Townsend, English Operational Coordinator ([ttownse@imsa.edu](mailto:ttownse@imsa.edu)), or Dr. Dan Gleason, English Curriculum and Assessment Leader ([dgleason@imsa.edu](mailto:dgleason@imsa.edu)).*

*Portions of this document have been adapted and excerpted from documents produced by UW-Madison, Amazon.com, and the District 125 summer reading information.*