Welcome to Grade 11 English. During your junior year, you will read a mix of classic and modern literary works about American identity. Over the summer, as you read Chang-Rae Lee’s Native Speaker, please look for answers to the following questions and annotate for the themes suggested by these questions. A novel about a Korean American’s identity, Native Speaker has much to teach us about heritage, ambition and community.

What does the “list” presented in the first chapter say about the narrator and his wife’s relationship? What do you think she means by a “False speaker of language?” How does this continue to play out in the course of the novel? Make sure to take note of how their relationship develops over time.

At the end of the first chapter, the narrator writes, “I am hardly seen” (7). What might he mean by this? Trace this theme throughout the text, as you read.

Unpack the use of the spy metaphor. What does it highlight about immigrant life? What do we learn about the spy agency that Henry works for? Who are the other characters? And how do they relate to Henry?

What does it say that the narrator swings back and forth between considering what his mother and father would approve of and trying to please his American peers?

What do we learn about Henry and Lelia’s child? How is that loss an important theme in the novel? How does the nature of his death serve as a metaphor for the immigrant/first-generation experience?

Why is Henry’s relationship to Luzan important? What does it reveal about his ability to do his job and how he feels as an American?

Henry meets City Councilman John Kwang. What does Kwang want from the communities in New York? How is his mission a kind of American Dream?

Why does Henry decide to quit his job spying on Kwang? Why is he torn about this mission to spy on Kwang?

How do you think Henry’s values have changed by the end of the novel? Consider what he’s doing for work in the last chapter.
After you’re reading, please consider these more general questions:

What is the relationship between Henry’s upbringing and his current dilemmas at work? What is the connection between his family life and the work that Hoagland asks him to do?

How do we explain the downfall of the political character, John Kwang? Is there a problem with the way he has conceived of being an American or does should his downfall be attributed to those around him?

What does Henry come to believe about identity and who he is by the end of the novel? Would he describe himself using one word?

What does Native Speaker have to say about racism and prejudice? What does Lee suggest is the risk of pursuing one’s dream in America? How is one’s character tested during the pursuit of happiness?

Please read these two VERY short articles for historical/political context:

Black Customers, Korean Grocers: Need and Mistrust; Shoppers Complain Of Hostile Treatment, But Choices Are Few (https://goo.gl/3bWUDS)

THE NATION; The Koreans' Big Entry Into Business (https://goo.gl/AKuNRh)