**American History** ​

* **What it’s about:**
  + A Puerto Rican girl in Paterson, NJ, recalls the day JFK was shot.
  + She struggles with cold, bullying, and her first crush on Eugene.
  + The community falls silent in grief, while she battles shame and excitement over a study date.
* **Assignment – Clichés & Obstacles:**
  + **Clichés:** loud salsa music from tenements; “Skinny Bones” nickname; the “Hick” who reads books.
  + **Obstacles:** language barrier (not native English); racial prejudice (Eugene’s mother’s refusal); poverty and cramped housing; strict parental/community expectations.

**The Jade Peony** ​

* **What it’s about:**
  + Young Sek‑Lung helps Grandmama build special windchimes from found scraps.
  + Grandmama believes the chime and its jade peony will call back her lost juggler-spirit after death.
  + A pale white cat with pink eyes appears as the promised sign, and shortly after she dies.
* **Assignment – White Cat; Prophecy; Windchimes:**
  + **White cat:** a supernatural sign that Grandmama’s beloved juggler‑spirit has returned (“all white and had pink eyes like sacred fire”) ​.
  + **Self‑fulfilling prophecy?:** Grandmama’s firm belief in the chime’s power maybe hastened her own acceptance of death—her conviction makes the sign real.
  + **Power of windchimes:** they connect the living to the spirit world, preserve memory (the jade peony), and grant Grandmama a proper farewell.

**Neighbours** (by Tim Winton)

* **What it’s about:**
  + A young couple from quiet outer suburbs move into a busy street of European migrants.
  + On the left lives a boisterous Macedonian family; on the right, a Polish widower who hoards wood.
  + At first the newcomers are shocked by constant noise—spitting, shouting, early‑morning chores.
  + They clash over dog mess, garden plots, a fallen henhouse and even childbirth!
  + Over time, neighbours help one another: rebuilding the henhouse, sharing firewood, vegetables, gifts, midwifery support—and celebrate the birth together.

**Assignment – Cultural Similarities & Differences**

* **Similarities:**
  + Strong family‑centred values (all generations support each other through hard times)
  + Willingness to help neighbours in need (rebuilding the henhouse; midwife’s care)
  + Sharing food and small gifts (cabbages, chocolates, knitted baby clothes)
  + Pride in home and garden (everyone cares for soil, plants, animals)
* **Differences:**
  + **Noise & daily rhythms:** quiet suburbs vs. loud morning watering, spitting, metal‑hammering
  + **Communication styles:** polite reserve of newcomers vs. direct, loud talking of Macedonians and Polish
  + **Domestic customs:** central‑heating coal vs. open‑fire wood‑smoke; cooking ducks/sausages vs. simpler meals
  + **Building practices:** elegant cottage‑style windows vs. improvised wood piles and smashed henhouses
  + **Attitudes to children:** suburban privacy vs. neighbours crowding the fence to watch childbirth and baby care