

# English IV IB – Summer Reading Assignment 2025

**Text:** *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

Welcome to your final year of IB English! Your summer reading centers on *The God of Small Things*, a Booker Prize–winning novel rich with literary craft, complex structure, and layered meaning. It is an excellent choice for your IB Individual Oral and for Paper 2 comparison essays. This assignment requires thoughtful, independent engagement with the novel and its cultural context—not plot summaries, SparkNotes-style overviews, or AI-generated responses. Your work must reflect your original insights and evolving questions as a reader.

You will complete two assignments before the first day of school:

- (1) Close Reading Journal
- (2) Cultural Contextual Inquiry

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## *Part One: Close Reading Journal – Literary and Thematic Analysis*

### **Task:**

**Select six** significant passages from different parts of the novel (spread out chronologically).

For each passage, write a double-spaced, full-page analytical entry that shows careful reading and critical thought.

Each entry should:

- **Analyze Roy’s authorial choices:** Consider imagery, diction, irony, repetition, tone, shifts in time or perspective, structure, etc.
- **Connect to broader motifs and themes:** Examples include silence, forbidden love, imperialism, caste oppression, the passage of time, "love laws," or memory and trauma.
- **Reflect on the reader’s emotional experience:** How does Roy create empathy, discomfort, or tension? How are you personally moved or challenged?
- **Identify lingering questions:** What confuses you? What contradictions or ambiguities do you notice, and how might they be intentional?
- **At least one journal entry must connect the passage to a global issue**, such as gender expectations, caste discrimination, environmental degradation, or colonial legacy.

### **Important:**

- Your journal must prioritize deep analysis over summary.
- Focus on exploring *how* Roy’s craft produces meaning—not just *what* happens.
- Use first-person reflections when relevant ("I noticed...", "I was struck by...", "I questioned...") to emphasize authentic engagement.

## Part Two: Cultural Contextual Inquiry

### Task:

Choose three prompts below. For each, write a double-spaced, full-page reflection that incorporates at least one image (photograph, artifact, map, historical document, etc.). Images must be properly cited.

Each reflection should:

- Explain the cultural, religious, or historical background you researched.
  - Analyze how this context *deepens, complicates, or reframes* your understanding of specific characters, events, or themes in the novel.
  - Explore moments where unfamiliar cultural references might lead to misinterpretation if not properly understood.
  - Offer your own insights or lingering questions—don't just summarize your research.
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### Prompts (Choose 3):

#### a. Syrian Christianity in Kerala

Investigate the historical roots and cultural distinctiveness of Syrian Christians in South India. How does this complicate the Ipe family's identity and status in the novel?

#### b. Hindu Temple Elephants

Research the ceremonial and sacred role of elephants in Kerala. How does Roy's depiction of elephants illuminate themes of power, commodification, or spectacle?

#### c. The Indian Caste System

Trace the caste system's origins and practices, especially in Kerala. How do caste dynamics operate within the novel's characters and conflicts? Where do you notice internalized caste hierarchies?

#### d. The Concept of "Untouchability"

Explore the history and consequences of caste-based exclusion. How does Roy depict "untouchable" experiences? How might Gandhi's attempts to reframe this group create both opportunities and limitations?

#### e. The Meenachil River and Environmental Memory

Investigate the historical and ecological importance of the Meenachil River. How does Roy use its symbolism to explore memory, trauma, and postcolonial decay?

#### f. Malayalam Language Use

Identify at least twelve Malayalam words or phrases in the novel. Select 2–3 that Roy chose *not* to translate. Why might she have left them untranslated? How does this choice shape the reader's experience and interpretation of cultural authenticity?

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## Final Reminders

- This assignment is designed to reward genuine intellectual effort and curiosity.
- If your work sounds generic, overly formal, or disconnected from specific details, it will not earn full credit.
- Be prepared for a test on the novel during the first week of school.