

## English 11 Honors Summer Reading Assignment 2017

Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2002)

### Summary

According to Malcolm Gladwell on his website *gladwell.com*, *The Tipping Point* is a "book about change." Specifically, it "presents a new way of understanding why change so often happens as quickly and as unexpectedly as it does." The book's chapters feature a diverse group of case studies - ranging from Paul Revere's famous ride and Micronesia's high suicide rate to the popularity of the children's show *Blues Clues* and the decreasing crime in New York - that help Gladwell examine what makes certain ideas stick and how and why trends catch on. As he explores the mysterious workings of "word of mouth" and links "social" epidemics like smoking and wars to that pesky cold or flu bug, Gladwell also pushes readers to consider what each of them can do to further ideas, influence others, and make a difference in the world.

*Read the book, annotating as you go. Answer the following questions as you read over the summer and as you prepare for the group book discussion when you return to school. Answers can be typed or recorded in a notebook. You will also complete the brief writing assignments listed below. Your responses will be collected in class on September 8.*

Email me with any questions! [scorlew@lasalleinstitute.org](mailto:scorlew@lasalleinstitute.org)

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Gladwell define the "tipping point" of an idea or event? What is significant about this moment, and how does it develop or come into being?
2. Gladwell suggests that there are three ways "to tip an epidemic": *The Law of the Few*, the *Stickiness Factor*, and the *Power of Context* (18). How does Gladwell define each of these concepts? Do you think one of the three is more or less effective/significant/etc.? Why or why not?
3. What are some pros and cons of Gladwell's hypothesis about the development of ideas and epidemics? What group(s) of people might agree with his position, and who might find fault with his way of looking at social concerns, the influence of media, the psychology of personal interaction, etc.?

4. What aspects of Gladwell's hypothesis and his cases studies are reassuring or comforting for us as readers? What might be more upsetting, frustrating, etc.? As a whole, is the book optimistic about the future of ideas, trends, epidemics, people, etc.? Or, is it more cynical, skeptical, etc.? Give examples from Gladwell's cases studies, introduction, conclusion, or afterward.

5. On his website, Gladwell describes *The Tipping Point* as an "intellectual adventure story" that "draws from psychology and sociology and epidemiology, and uses examples from the worlds of business and education and fashion and media." How would you classify the text? What college courses could feature this text, and how might this text apply to students in various majors?

*Write a brief response to the following questions/topics. You will hand this writing in on September 8.*

1. Gladwell suggests that there are three kinds of people who are "critical to social epidemics": *Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen* (34). Do you see yourself in one of these roles? Why or why not? Which traits set you apart from others? How do you - or can you - participate in the positive implementation of other epidemics?

2. Now brainstorm other examples that might fit Gladwell's hypothesis: Where in our culture do you see Connectors, Mavens, or Salesmen? What other ideas or concepts seem particularly "sticky" (or "unsticky")? What kinds of social epidemics do you think might develop in the future?



