

2021 Summer Science Reading Assignment for Seniors

Book: Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman

Author: Richard P. Feynman

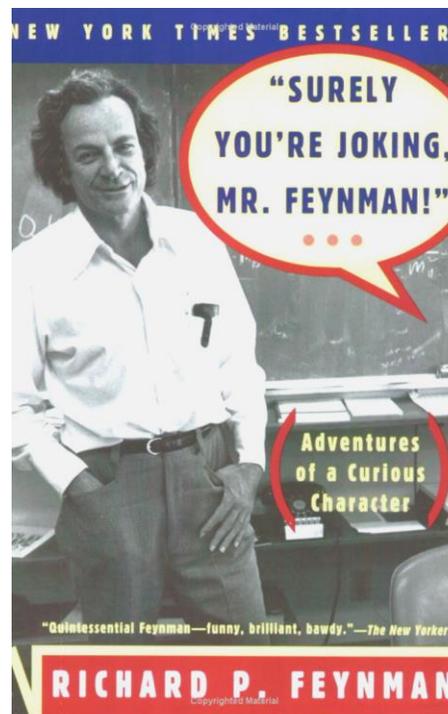
ISBN-13: 978-0393316049

Price through Amazon.com ≈ \$10 (or PDF available for free)

The Book: Richard Feynman was a famous Nobel Prize winning physicist of the 20th century. He was well known for his deep understanding of how science and society are related, his playful and creative way of thinking, and his penchant for getting into unusual situations. The book is an autobiography that covers his childhood, college years, efforts working on the atomic bomb, travels around the world, and more. Feynman is no saint (*see Note 2) however, there are many important science and life lessons to be learned throughout the book.

The Assignment and Options: Write a meaningful reflection (most common), essay, short-story, "illustrations with text", multiple choice questions, or another format (email for approval). Your work must meet or exceed the following criteria:

- It demonstrates you read the whole book (NOT just random excerpts)
- It contains direct references from the book with page and paragraph number (they can be inline numbers [23], then cited at the end)
- It requires at least the same amount of work as writing a ~2-page reflection (average 1000-1500 words).



An Example Multiple-Choice Question and Answer with Reference:

Q: As a kid how did Feynman fix the poor man's radio that was making a terrible buzzing noise?

- a) With just an over-sized screwdriver that barely fit into his pocket.
- b) By outwitting someone to look into the problem and fixing it for him.
- c) By pacing back and forth, and thinking about it.
- d) By banging it on the side a couple of times when the man was not looking.

A: c (pg. 20, par. 5-7) So the guys says, "What are you doing? You come to fix the radio, but you're only walking back and forth." After a moment Feynman simply switches two components inside and the radio begins to work properly. The man then continues to tell everyone, "He fixes radios by thinking!"

This assignment is due before Senior Orientation at Mass Academy (or the day before seniors start classes, whichever comes first), and can be uploaded (preferred) or turned-in physically.

Email me if you have any questions.

Congratulations on finishing your unique junior year and enjoy your summer! - Mr. Ellis

Note 1: This book is available in PDF format and will be linked on the class website. You can read it in this format as long as you still reference the page and paragraph numbers used the PDF. This book exists on audiobook, however, listening to it does NOT count as the reading assignment. If you want to hear Feynman's actual voice then I suggest listening to the "Six Easy Pieces" audiobook or by watching other video clips of him on the internet.

Note 2: There are several stories in the book about Feynman trying drugs, hanging out in bars, and objectifying woman. If you are uncomfortable with these topics, you may skip those stories or chapters. Although Feynman lived in a different time when perspectives were different, that does not make it right. A wider philosophical idea to consider is; Do you throw away all the beneficial contributions of a person if they do harmful things, whether or not they are professional athletes, famous actors, favorite musicians, prominent scientists and inventors, etc.?