

Advanced Placement Literature and Composition
Summer Reading and Course Overview

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Congratulations! You have taken the first step towards success in college by accepting the challenge of Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition. You are about to begin a course that will broaden your horizons and help you become a better reader of the world and of literary text. Naturally as you become a more sophisticated reader you will also become a better writer. The work begins now, as you plan to complete your summer reading and accompanying assignments prior to the start of next school year. We are looking forward to a rewarding year with a talented group of students. This course offers rewards beyond your typical English course so do not be daunted by the work.

Why read during the summer?

- Research proves that reading increases vocabulary and that reading and writing are inextricably connected to each other. Good writers are good readers.
- Written and oral communication is most effective when you have a command of language and a broad vocabulary.
- Reading can be one of the most satisfying and personal life-long habits you can develop.
- Your ability to read critically will serve you great stead in any career and academic pursuit.

Reading Critically

The summer reading and course work will require that you read to remember as you will be asked to actively participate in discussions and make connections with future texts months after you read them. You will take an exam on the summer reading within the first week of the school year, or as early as the first day of school. To that end you will want to complete your reading prior to the first day of school. Try to purchase your own copy of the book so that you may keep it and write in it.

Actively reading means having a conversation with the text. Each book is written for a purpose and you will not get the full experience of the text if you do not actively participate in the reading process. In other words, you must not assume that a work will “work on you” just because you have read it. You are not an empty container ready to be filled with knowledge, nobody is, you must seek the knowledge, ask questions, reflect on how what is being said works with your current knowledge on the subject. You must always ask why something is being said and how effective the medium is. If you can, make comments in your book, keep a conversation going in the margins of the pages.

***The focus of AP Literature is on the art of fiction and the ways in which the elements of literary language can be used to create an experience or reaction.**

Everyone must find their own style of annotating a text but here are some guidelines to begin:

- Underline important terms
- Circle words that are unfamiliar (and look them up)
- Write key words and definitions in the margin
- Signal where important information can be found with key words or symbols in the margin (such as ?, !, *)
- Write short summaries in the margin at the end of chapters
- Write any questions you have regarding a text in the margin
- Note elements of the author's unique style and voice

*Note that simply highlighting a passage is not sufficient without some type of annotation to go along with it.

Summer Reading Assignment for AP Students

The AP examination in English Literature and Composition requires extensive preparation and reading. Your summer reading is an important part of that preparation to help you grow as a reader and critical thinker. The exam always has three essay questions and about 55 multiple-choice questions. One of the essays is open-ended and asks that you choose a work of literature for response. Some of the best essays have come from works read over the summer.

Required Assignments

Assignment #1 Read TWO Novels of Literary Merit

Although we highly recommend you read as many books as you can this summer, you are required to read at least two of your choosing from the list below. You must obtain *your own* hard copy of these books, as you must actively read and annotate each novel (directly on the page or by using post-it notes). Bring your annotated copies of each book on the first day of academics.

***Tinkers* by Paul Harding**

An old man lies dying. Propped up in his living room and surrounded by his children and grandchildren, George Washington Crosby drifts in and out of consciousness, back to the wonder and pain of his impoverished childhood in Maine. As the clock repairer's time winds down, his memories intertwine with those of his father, an epileptic, itinerant peddler and his grandfather, a Methodist preacher beset by madness. At once heartbreaking and life affirming, *Tinkers* is an elegiac meditation on love, loss, illness, faith, and the fierce beauty of nature. Pulitzer Prize, American Library Association Notable Book, PEN / Robert Bingham Fellowship for Writers Award...

***The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood**

The Blind Assassin opens with these simple, resonant words: "Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge." They are spoken by Iris, whose terse account of her sister's death in 1945 is followed by an inquest report proclaiming the death accidental. But just as the reader expects to settle into Laura's story, Atwood introduces a novel-within-a-novel. Entitled *The Blind Assassin*, it is a science fiction story told by two unnamed lovers who meet in dingy backstreet rooms. When we return to Iris, it is through a 1947 newspaper article announcing the discovery of a sailboat carrying the dead body of her husband, a

distinguished industrialist. Brilliantly bringing together such seemingly disparate elements, Atwood creates a world of astonishing vision and unforgettable impact.

***Beloved* by Toni Morrison**

Staring unflinchingly into the abyss of slavery, this spellbinding novel transforms history into a story as powerful as *Exodus* and as intimate as a lullaby. Sethe, its protagonist, was born a slave and escaped to Ohio, but eighteen years later she is still not free. She has too many memories of Sweet Home, the beautiful farm where so many hideous things happened. And Sethe's new home is haunted by the ghost of her baby, who died nameless and whose tombstone is engraved with a single word: *Beloved*. Filled with bitter poetry and suspense as taut as a rope, ***Beloved*** is a towering achievement.

***Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood**

Oryx and Crake is at once an unforgettable love story and a compelling vision of the future. Snowman, known as Jimmy before mankind was overwhelmed by a plague, is struggling to survive in a world where he may be the last human, and mourning the loss of his best friend, Crake, and the beautiful and elusive Oryx whom they both loved. In search of answers, Snowman embarks on a journey—with the help of the green-eyed Children of Crake—through the lush wilderness that was so recently a great city, until powerful corporations took mankind on an uncontrolled genetic engineering ride. Margaret Atwood projects us into a near future that is both all too familiar and beyond our imagining.

***A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini**

Propelled by the same superb instinct for storytelling that made *The Kite Runner* a beloved classic, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is at once an incredible chronicle of thirty years of Afghan history and a deeply moving story of family, friendship, faith, and the salvation to be found in love.

Born a generation apart and with very different ideas about love and family, Mariam and Laila are two women brought jarringly together by war, by loss and by fate. As they endure the ever escalating dangers around them—in their home as well as in the streets of Kabul—they come to form a bond that makes them both sisters and mother-daughter to each other, and that will ultimately alter the course not just of their own lives but of the next generation. With heart-wrenching power and suspense, Hosseini shows how a woman's love for her family can move her to shocking and heroic acts of self-sacrifice, and that in the end it is love, or even the memory of love, that is often the key to survival.

***A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess**

A vicious fifteen-year-old droog is the central character of this 1963 classic. In Anthony Burgess's nightmare vision of the future, where the criminals take over after dark, the story is told by the central character, Alex, who talks in a brutal invented slang that brilliantly renders his and his friends' social pathology. *A Clockwork Orange* is a frightening fable about good and evil, and the meaning of human freedom. When the state undertakes to reform Alex to "redeem" him, the novel asks, "At what cost?"

The Scarlet Letter

Like all of Hawthorne's novels, "The Scarlet Letter" has but a slender plot and but few characters with an influence on the development of the story. Its great dramatic force depends entirely on the mental states of the actors and their relations to one another, —relations of conscience, — relations between wronged and wrongers. Its great burden is the weight of unacknowledged sin as seen in the remorse and cowardice and suffering of the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale. Contrasted with his concealed agony is the constant confession, conveyed by the letter, which is forced upon Hester, and has a double effect, — a healthful one, working beneficently, and making her helpful and benevolent, tolerant and thoughtful ; and an unhealthful one, which by the great emphasis placed on her transgression, the keeping her forever under its ban and isolating her from her fellows, prepares her to break away from the long repression and lapse again into sin when she plans her flight.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Commonly named among the Great American Novels, the work is among the first in major American literature to be written throughout in vernacular English, characterized by local color regionalism. It is told

in the first person by Huckleberry "Huck" Finn, a friend of Tom Sawyer and narrator of two other Twain novels (*Tom Sawyer Abroad* and *Tom Sawyer, Detective*). It is a direct sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

The book is noted for its colorful description of people and places along the Mississippi River. Set in a Southernantebellum society that had ceased to exist about 20 years before the work was published, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an often scathing satire on entrenched attitudes, particularly racism.

***Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley**

Mary, Percy, Lord Byron and John Polidori decided to have a competition to see who could write the best horror story. After thinking for days, Shelley dreamt about a scientist who created life and was horrified by what he had made; her dream later evolved into the novel's story. This is the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who creates a grotesque but sapient creature in an unorthodox scientific experiment.

Frankenstein is infused with elements of the Gothic novel and the Romantic movement. At the same time, it is an early example of science fiction. Brian Aldiss has argued that it should be considered the first true science fiction story because, in contrast to previous stories with fantastical elements resembling those of later science fiction, the central character "makes a deliberate decision" and "turns to modern experiments in the laboratory" to achieve fantastic results.^[4] It has had a considerable influence in literature and popular culture and spawned a complete genre of horror stories, films and plays.

***The Bonesetter's Daughter* by Amy Tan**

Like much of Tan's work, this book deals with the relationship between an American-born Chinese woman and her immigrant mother.

The Bonesetter's Daughter is divided into two major stories. The first is about Ruth, a **Chinese-American** woman living in San Francisco. She worries that her elderly mother, Lu Ling, is gradually becoming more and more **demented**. Lu Ling seems increasingly forgetful, and makes bizarre comments about her family and her own past.

The second major story is that of Lu Ling herself, as written for Ruth. Several years earlier, Lu Ling had written out her life story in Chinese. Ruth arranges to have the document translated, and learns the truth about her mother's life in China.

Assignment #2

Read the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows. "Beautiful new words to describe real emotions."
<http://www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com/>

Select 20 words that connect with the novels you've read and/or your own personal experiences. Then, using Google Docs, journal about them. Include the word, definition, and a few sentences about how the word connects to your novel or life in some way. You may choose to t-chart your journal entries (words and definition on one side and explanation of choice on the other side).

How to annotate a book:

Either make notes on a separate piece of paper or write in your personal copy of the book. Identify important events, characters, stylistic devices, recurring themes and so on. You may use these annotations as a resource on the summer reading essay exams, and a personal copy of the book that is annotated will allow you to quickly locate important information without a great deal of hassle.

Look for the following stylistic elements and address how these elements contribute to the effect of your various marked passages.

- *Tone/attitude/mood*—the attitude of the author toward his/her subject or audience; the emotion evoked in the reader by the text.
- *Diction*—the author's choice of words that impact meaning; e.g., formal vs. informal, ornate vs. plain/matter of fact, simple vs. complex, etc. With dictions discuss the connotation of the words and how each word adds to meaning.
- *Figurative language/figures of speech*—language that describes one thing in terms of something else (e.g. metaphor, simile, personification, symbolism, metonymy, synecdoche, etc.)
- *Detail*—concrete elements of the text relating to such matters as setting, plot, and character. Items would be details that contribute significantly to such elements as revealing character, establishing tone, and communicating meaning.
- *Imagery*—language that creates a mental picture of some sensory experience.
- *Point of view*—the vantage point from which a story or poem is told.
- *Organization/structure*—how an author groups, formats, or orders his/her ideas.
- *Irony*—a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant (verbal), between what a character thinks and what we as an audience know (dramatic), or between what a character and we as an audience expect and what actually happens (situational).
- *Syntax/sentence structure/phrasing*—the way a writer orders his/her words, patterns in grammar (including the use of repetition of words, images, phrases, and the use of parallel structure) ideas, punctuation, etc.
- *Motif*—a recurrent allusion, image, symbol, or theme.
- *Symbol*—a person, place, thing or event that stands for itself, but has a broader meaning as well; that is, something that has both literal and figurative meaning.
- *Allusion*—a reference to a past historical person, place, event, or literary work used for the purpose of both comparing and enhancing the idea discussed.
- *Theme*—a life insight, issue, or lesson.
- *Characterization*—is essential in understanding the motivations of the major and minor characters of the novel; make note of the physical and psychological traits of these characters—try to understand why they say what they do, why they act the way they do...etc.