

AP English Literature and Composition
2021 OPTIONAL Summer Assignment
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Welcome to AP English Literature and Composition! The summer assignment this year is optional, but I do recommend that you do some reading before August 26!

This will be my second year teaching AP Literature; teaching this course last year took me back to my days as an undergraduate. For my first two years of college, I studied American Literature at Sheffield University in England. I chose American Lit because I wanted nothing more to do with Chaucer (although I still loved Shakespeare), but I did want to further explore the works of Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Sylvia Plath. There's an interesting combination! Unfortunately, I had to spend most of my time with my nose in a hefty tome titled *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, reading works that I found uninspiring and have long forgotten. Two things stand out to me from this experience: I had no choice in what I read, and if I didn't love it, I didn't want to read it, let alone discuss it. For your summer reading, therefore, I want you to choose what to read, and read what you (think you'll) love.

But I need to finish the story. After two years of studying works I can no longer remember (I am painting too bleak a picture here; I did love Emily Dickinson and William Faulkner), I transferred to the University of Maryland, where I branched out, taking courses such as Mythology, Film Images of Native Americans (which I highly recommend if the opportunity presents itself), and Victorian Literature. While I still didn't have a choice in what I read, the very nature of the fact that I had chosen these courses meant that I loved the content. I still have many of the books I read in my Victorian Literature seminar.

I hope you have chosen to take AP Literature because you enjoy reading and appreciate literature. But there must be other reasons. What do you particularly like? More importantly, what do you dislike? With that in mind, **send me an e-mail telling me why you chose to take AP Lit**. Please don't tell me what you think I want to hear; I genuinely want to get to know you and find out why you're here.

And Now...The Summer Assignment

While you learned how to analyze an author's rhetoric and style to identify meaning in AP Language, in AP Literature we will focus on using analysis to identify multiple, disparate meanings (themes) in the literature. Your summer reading assignment is designed to help get you thinking this way.

1. **Read *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, by Thomas C. Foster.** I know I said you'd have choice, but this is one book I want everyone to read. And as Foster states in the preface when talking about students' responses to being assigned his book, "Several of the kids said... 'My heart sank when I saw that a book on reading was assigned, but it turned out to be pretty cool/not so bad/all right'" (xxi). Full disclosure: there will be an assignment based on a chapter from this book in the first few weeks of the school year.
2. **Read at least two novels from the list at the end of this document**, and annotate*, paying particular attention to the literary elements used by the author and how the author uses those elements to develop or emphasize larger ideas. Ideally, you will select from different eras, in order to ensure you're reading a broad variety of works. The asterisks identify works that have been listed at least twice on AP exams in

the last 10 years (Vocabulary in Books). I provide this information with a caveat; while it's certainly true that these texts are frequently listed because they encompass numerous and broad themes, it's also entirely possible that *they are repeatedly listed because they are repeatedly assigned* by teachers. In other words, don't disregard texts without asterisks, especially more contemporary works.

*Annotating involves *interacting* with the text and *making meaning* of what you are reading rather than simply reading for plot. Every so often, stop and record OBSERVATIONS about different elements that you see in your novel such as quests, acts of communion, archetypes, symbols, allusions, and themes. (Foster's book explains these elements in case they aren't familiar to you.) Don't simply note the existence of these elements; elaborate on your observations and connect those observations to the points the author is making about humanity and life, including points about psychological, historical, political, and/or social issues. If you are writing these observations on a separate piece of paper, provide specific examples and quotes (always follow a quote with the page number) to support them. At this point, you have already had a discussion about the novel (in the margins of the text or on paper) and you are that much closer to understanding the BIGGER ISSUES in the text. Reminders:

- Underline important information, significant passages, and take notes on this information! Never just underline or highlight something without including a written note that explains the reason for its significance.
- Questions are part of your notes! Write them down as you read; they may be answered as you continue to read, but if they aren't you can ask them during class discussions.
- Reread sections that you do not understand and look up unfamiliar words.

3. Review The Five Essential Elements of Fiction Analysis. The information below isn't new; you learned this in 9th grade and have, I assume, continued to apply it, but never hurts to review.

One: *A character is a person presented in a fictional work, one fitting a type and fulfilling a function.*

- Types of characters: A *static character* does not change throughout the work, and the reader's knowledge of that character does not grow, whereas a *dynamic character* undergoes some kind of change because of the action in the plot. A *flat character* embodies one or two qualities, ideas, or traits that can be readily described in a brief summary. These are not psychologically complex characters and therefore are readily accessible to readers. Some flat characters are recognized as *stock characters*; they embody stereotypes such as the "dumb blonde" or the "mean stepfather." They become types rather than individuals. *Round characters* are more complex than flat or stock characters, and often display the inconsistencies and internal conflicts found in most real people. They are more fully developed, and therefore are harder to summarize.
- Functions of characters: A *hero* or *heroine*, often called the *protagonist*, is the central character who engages the reader's interest and empathy and drives the plot. The *antagonist* is the character, force, or collection of forces that stands directly opposed to the protagonist and gives rise to the conflict of the story. A *foil* is a character who, through contrast, underscores the distinctive characteristics of another. Usually, a minor character serves as a foil for a major character. A *confidant/confidante* is a character who is not integral to the action but who receives

the intimate thoughts of the protagonist without the use of an omniscient narrator. A *mentor* is a character who serves as a guide for the protagonist.

Two: *The point of view is the perspective from which the action of a novel is presented, whether the action is presented by one character or from different vantage points over the course of the novel. These are common narrative positions:*

- The *omniscient narrator* is a third-person narrator who sees, like God, into each character's mind and understands all the action going on.
- The *limited omniscient narrator* is a third-person narrator who generally reports only what one character (often the protagonist) sees and who only reports the thoughts of that one privileged character.
- The *objective*, or camera-eye, narrator is a third-person narrator who only reports what would be visible to a camera. The objective narrator does not know what the character is thinking unless the character speaks of it.
- The *first-person narrator*, who is a major or minor character in the story, tells the tale from his or her point of view. When the first person narrator is insane, a liar, very young, or for some reason not entirely credible, the narrator is unreliable. Some first-person narratives include multiple narrators.
- The *stream of consciousness* technique is like first-person narration, but instead of the character telling the story, the author places the reader inside the main character's head and makes the reader privy to all of the character's thoughts as they scroll through his or her consciousness.

Characterization, an effect of point of view and narrative perspective, is the process by which a writer reveals the personality of a character, making that character seem real to the reader. Authors have two major methods of presenting characters: telling (direct characterization) and showing (indirect characterization).

- In *direct characterization*, the author intervenes to describe and sometimes evaluate the character for the reader. For example, the narrator may tell the reader directly what the character's personality is like: humble, ambitious, vain, gullible, etc.
- *Indirect characterization* allows the author to present a character talking and acting and lets the reader infer what kind of person the character is. There are five different ways that a writer may provide indirect characterization:
 - by describing how the character looks and dresses,
 - by allowing the reader to hear the character speak,
 - by revealing the character's private thoughts and feelings,
 - by portraying the character's effect on other individuals—showing how other characters feel or behave toward the character, and
 - by presenting the character's actions.

Characters can be convincing whether they are presented by showing or by telling, as long as their actions are motivated. Motivated action by the characters occurs when the reader or audience is offered reasons for how the characters behave, what they say, and the decisions they make. Plausible action is action by a character in a story that seems reasonable, given the motivations presented.

Three: *The setting is the physical and social context in which the action of a story occurs. The major elements of setting are the time, the place, and the social environment that frames the characters. Setting can be used to evoke a mood or atmosphere that will prepare the reader for what is to come. Specific elements of the setting include:*

- the geographical location (its topography, scenery, and physical arrangements),
- the occupations and daily manner of living of the characters,
- the time period in which the action takes place (epoch in history or season of the year), and
- the general environment of the characters (social, religious, cultural, moral, and emotional conditions and attitudes).

Four: *The conflict in a work of fiction is the struggle within the plot between opposing forces—the issue to be resolved in the story. The protagonist engages in the conflict with the antagonist, which may take the form of a character, society, nature, or an aspect of the protagonist’s personality. Thus, conflict may be external, a struggle against some outside force, another character, society as a whole, or some natural force; or internal, a conflict between forces or emotions within one character.*

Five: *Theme is the author’s opinion of the central meaning or dominant idea in a literary work. A theme provides a unifying point around which the plot, characters, setting, point of view, symbols, and other elements of a work are organized. It is important not to mistake the theme for the topic of the work; **the theme expresses an opinion about an abstract concept (e.g., freedom, jealousy, guilt, unrequited love, self-pity) but is NOT simply that topic. A theme must make a FULL, arguable, and risky statement or claim that can be supported by the text and others.***

Send me an e-mail any time with any questions. (Don’t forget to tell me why you’ve chosen AP Lit!)
Have an excellent summer and happy reading!

Summer Reading List

Pre-1900

*Wuthering Heights - Emily Bronte
 *Jane Eyre - Charlotte Bronte
 *Great Expectations - Charles Dickens
 Bleak House - Charles Dickens
 A Tale of Two Cities - Charles Dickens
 Mansfield Park - Jane Austen
 *Pride and Prejudice - Jane Austen
 A Doll's House - Henrik Ibsen
 *Crime and Punishment - Fyodor Dostoyevsky
 *Odyssey - Homer
 *Antigone - Sophocles
 *Tess of the D'Urbervilles - Thomas Hardy

Emma - Jane Austen
 *The Portrait of a Lady - Henry James
 The Turn of the Screw - Henry James
 Daisy Miller - Henry James
 Middlemarch - George Eliot
 Anna Karenina - Leo Tolstoy
 *The Scarlet Letter - Nathaniel Hawthorne
 *King Lear - William Shakespeare
 *The Tempest - William Shakespeare
 *Twelfth Night - William Shakespeare
 *Moby Dick - Herman Melville
 *The Picture of Dorian Gray - Oscar Wilde

1900 - 1969

*Catch 22 - Joseph Heller
 *Invisible Man - Ralph Ellison
 *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man - James Joyce
 The Trial - Franz Kafka
 *Metamorphosis - Franz Kafka
 The Loved One - Evelyn Waugh Benito
 *Brave New World - Aldous Huxley
 Cry, the Beloved Country - Alan Paton
 *A Raisin in the Sun - Lorraine Hansberry
 A Farewell to Arms - Ernest Hemingway
 The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man - James Weldon Johnson
 Our Town - Thornton Wilder
 *The Glass Menagerie - Tennessee Williams
 *The Great Gatsby - F. Scott Fitzgerald
 *Death of a Salesman - Arthur Miller
 *The Crucible - Arthur Miller
 The Catcher in the Rye - J.D. Salinger

*Their Eyes were Watching God - Zora Neale Hurston
 As I Lay Dying - William Faulkner
 Cat's Cradle - Kurt Vonnegut
 Waiting for Godot - Samuel Beckett
 *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? - Edward Albee
 *The Grapes of Wrath - John Steinbeck
 House Made of Dawn - N. Scott Momaday
 Light in August - William Faulkner
 *Native Son - Richard Wright
 The Sun Also Rises - Ernest Hemingway
 A Passage to India - E.M. Forster
 The Age of Innocence - Edith Wharton
 Ethan Frome - Edith Wharton
 Go Tell it on the Mountain - James Baldwin
 Slaughterhouse Five - Kurt Vonnegut
 *Heart of Darkness - Joseph Conrad

1970 - Present

*The Color Purple - Alice Walker
 *All the Pretty Horses - Cormac McCarthy
 Bless Me, Ultima - Rudolfo A. Anaya
 Song of Solomon - Toni Morrison
 *Beloved - Toni Morrison
 The Bluest Eye - Toni Morrison
 The Optimist's Daughter - Eudora Welty
 *Atonement - Ian McEwan

Alias Grace - Margaret Atwood
 The Handmaid's Tale - Margaret Atwood
 *Snow Falling on Cedars - David Guterson
 The Poisonwood Bible - Barbara Kingsolver
 Winter in the Blood - James Welch
 The Woman Warrior - Maxine Hong Kingston
 The Diviners - Margaret Laurence
 *The Kite Runner - Khaled Hosseini

Works Cited

- Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines*. Harper, 2014.
- Vocabulary in Books Cited at Least Twice in the Last 10 Years In AP® English Literature and Composition Free-Response Questions*. 10 Aug. 2019, www.verbalworkout.com/popular-books-ap.htm.