

AP Literature and Composition—Summer Reading Assignment

This course requires three critical attributes from you:

1. **An excellent work ethic:** you will be reading major length works—about once a month, writing analytical compositions frequently, and participating in penetrating literary discussions. The homework includes reading, writing, and sometimes journaling. Late work is not accepted. You are expected to be self-motivated: **seeking assistance with your writing as needed**; doing independent research; **writing multiple drafts before submitting one for a grade**. And as in all AP classes, you will be graded as if you are in a first year college class and your work must meet that expectation.
2. **An interest in literature:** this course is not like an AP science, math, or history class in so much as it is not fact driven. The AP Literature exam is not comprised of a series of notes that you study or problems that you solve. It is based on interpreting literature, analyzing and supporting literary theories, and writing three intelligent, analytical essays, plus a challenging multiple choice section. Therefore, those are the kinds of activities that we will do in class. There are basically only ten essential concepts to the course, yet this course is ideal no matter what college major you will be pursuing—the skills of analysis, discussion, and interpretation transcend subject matter.
3. **A willingness to learn:** you must assume that there are aspects about your writing and about literature that I can teach you. This means that you must be open to criticism and as well as other people's ideas and interpretations about a literary work. This class works best when we are all willing to entertain and discuss multiple ideas about literature—literature is not black and white; and exploring the grey areas is what makes this class both intellectually challenging and fun. (Yes, I did say “fun.”)

SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT: You must read a **total of three** works this summer—three works, three summer months; don't wait until August to do all three! You must complete the following tasks and submit the work in typed format. **These compositions are not first drafts—they should represent the best you can do as a writer, a thinker, an arguer, and a reader.**

Assigned works:

1. *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare (You will sign this out.)
2. *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote (Some copies are available to sign out on a first come basis but you may want to buy one for ease of note taking.)
3. *The Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (You will be given a copy of this book to keep. Feel free to write in it.)

Task 1: For **each** work, write a one paragraph discussion of the theme—you are welcome to research the theme, but if you do, be sure to include your sources. Do **not** use these (weak) websites for research: SparkNotes, bookrags, GradeSaver, or enotes. NOTE: a theme is a statement about the human condition or a truth that is universal and/or timeless which the literary work explores. A theme is NEVER one word or one phrase. (For example: "Greed ruins family relationships" is a theme; "greed" is not a theme, merely a topic. Likewise, "light vs darkness" is a motif, not a theme.) (15 points total)

Task 2: After reading all three works, think about a connecting strand among them. You have a Shakespearean play, a non-fiction novelized crime story, and an AP-standard novella. One takes place in Venice during the Renaissance, one in Kansas in 1959, and the last on the Congo in the 1890s. What links could possibly exist among them? Why would my teacher even *think* that there are connections/similarities/parallels? That is what you must ascertain! After determining ONE important connection (there are MANY possible answers), write a 5 paragraph essay that proves that you are right. Follow the English Department Writing Format, and, as you know, thesis statements are the **LAST** sentence in the introduction paragraph. **Quotations are expected.** (30 points total)

Example:

A *Scooby Doo* episode; "A Study in Scarlet" a Sherlock Holmes story; *A Christmas Carol*
Possible connection strands: all include characters searching for answers; all include clearly defined antagonists; all of the settings impact the plots and characters; all include archetypical characters; all incorporate the supernatural or mysterious.