AP Literature & Composition

Class Introduction and Summer Reading Assignment

**Hello, my mariners—my destined ones (—and what a destiny, indeed, draws us together this year, young people).**

AP English Literature and Composition is a rigorous reading and writing program, the culmination and reward of many years of study in the language arts. But even more, it is also a journey, a deeply personal one often, going straight into the heart of life, itself—into all it might mean. Look at the books listed below, and you’ll get some sense of what I’m talking about. Now, I want you to buy all these books for yourself, so you can annotate them—so you can make them your own in the only way that matters, and because I think you will find each one worthy of your future bookshelf. You can wait to purchase each when I give you the heads-up during the course, or you can acquire them all this summer in anticipation. Except for *Crime and Punishment* (see below), any editions of the books will serve you fine, used or new, with or without augmented critical commentary. Here is the list of titles we will be reading:

*Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl

*Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

*Othello* by William Shakespeare (this is in your textbook, but if you would like a separate copy, you should get the Folger Shakespeare Library edition)

*The Awakening* by Kate Chopin

*Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (***must be*** the Pevear-Volokhonsky translation)

**\*Our class textbook *Perrine’s Literature: Structure, Sound, & Sense AP 12th Edition* will be provided.**

**And now, the DREADED Summer Reading Assignment:**

Actually, it is really simple: read and annotate two books. Dante’s *Inferno* is a must, but, of course you’re welcome to read all three parts of *The Divine Comedy*. My preferred translator is Allen Mandelbaum, but you can go get whichever edition suits you best. And then, this year, I am offering you your choice of five bildungsromans. Again, any edition of the one you choose will work. The list of five is below.

I am not prescribing a particular style of annotation. Do what you think you ought to. I’m interested in seeing what that is. Read the books sensitively, of course. Do NOT hurry through them, either in the hopes to get them out of the way, or because you procrastinated yourself into a corner before the beginning of the fall semester. I have cut the summer assignment in half since I first started teaching AP more than a decade ago in order to give you the time to do it right. Take advantage of that. Not only will the assignment contribute in a big way to your grade for the first semester, but it is also the first part of our journey together.

So, read *The Inferno* by Dante Alighieri, and any one of the following: *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, or (—are you ready for this?) *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

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**“Come, my friends…”**

I have the highest expectations of you, as both students and people, not merely because I feel it is my job to push you, and to hold you accountable, but because the best fruits of our shared journey will require nothing less than your very best. I want it all, every class, every day. I am selfish like that. “Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered,” writes Emerson, “you will never grow.” I do not mean to suggest that my class will exceed its proportions—that you must choose between success in it over success in any other class or endeavor. No, that has never been the case. But I do expect you, like Ulysses, “to become a name [—] to [always] strive, to seek, to find” value beyond that of a grade, or rank, or exam score.

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**Come to school prepared on the first day with:**

1. Your two books annotated.
2. Pencils (I am no fan of pens), and paper.
3. An open mind.

I suppose, rather than “An open mind” for #3 above, I should quote Wordsworth, and ask you to “bring with you a heart/ That watches and receives.” But let’s end with a different poet instead, a kind of god to me:

“Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned the earth much?

Have you practiced so long to learn to read?

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun....there are millions of suns left,
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand....nor look through the

eyes of the dead....nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.”

 Walt Whitman (*Leaves of Grass*)

Champing at the bit to be with you, my mariners.

*Mr. D*

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*You can also find this on-line at HHS website\*\*\*\*\*\*\*