

Independent Reading

AP English Lit/Language & Composition

Rationale:

In order to broaden your repertoire of texts, you will be reading three books or plays of your own choosing this year—one per quarter. In addition to the reading, you'll be keeping a reading journal. The independent reading assignment is due at the end of quarters 1, 2, and 3. The grade will be added to the following quarter. Each assignment is worth 100 points.

Even though you are required to read only three texts independently, try to read a variety of texts, so not all novels or not all plays, unless you think you need extra work, say reading Shakespeare. The choice is really up to you and you should justify your choices to yourself.

A note on the quality of your work: One observation from AP readers is that students are not able to wrestle with complex texts. I am not so sure that the ability is lacking. Rather, I think it is the desire or the willingness to read hard texts and think deeply about them that is sometimes missing. It does require discipline to train yourself to read complex texts, but so worth it, not only for the AP tests, but also for college and beyond. Lazy thinking gives you mud for brains. Use these assignments as exercises in compressing your brain mud into diamonds. In other words, sloppy, lazy, 9th grade work is not going to cut it.

In addition to giving your brain an added workout, having read and studied these books may be a huge help to you on question #3 on the Lit exam.

What to read?

You should definitely choose something you will be interested. Interested does not mean that the task will be fun in the usual sense. In fact, it may be, should be hard. But doing well and succeeding at something hard can be fun. Please choose from a separate list of authors and titles.

Reading Journal Guidelines

Your journals can be typed (how nice) or handwritten (neatly, in blue or black ink). Please turn in something that screams how proud you are of the work. Each journal has three distinct parts as shown below.

1. Introductory information as shown below (record all this information in order)
 - Title of work and author
 - Genre (play, novel, epic poem, nonfiction text); sub-genre, if applicable (example, not just play for Henry V, but history play).
 - Historical context, such as the year published, the literary period, or any historical or literary connections worth noting
 - Protagonist(s) and description
 - Antagonist(s) and description
 - Brief (no more than 200 words) plot summary
 - Key themes: the main two or three
 - Significant literary elements, such as symbols, motifs, allegory, allusions, special structure, point of view, etc. Don't just say the book has a lot of symbols, list some and describe them.

2. 5-7 journal entries (approximately 1,200 words total). As you read, use close reading techniques to improve them. Keep a journal in addition to any notes you may make in that process. Your close reading may and should prompt ideas for journal entries. Use any of the following starters for journal entries. Never summarize the text!! All journal entries are to be analytical exercises. Be sure to vary your entry types (don't do the same thing over and over again).
- Start with a quotation from a chapter and comment on it. Why is it important? Extend beyond the text itself. Ex: maybe the passage is important for a character, but how about us?
 - Pull out a soliloquy or short scene from a play and analyze it. Why is it important? What is revealed, etc.?
 - Reading between the lines. Sometimes it's what characters don't say that matters. Cite a passage and explain what's really going on. Be sure to show how you know it.
 - Analyze the development of a dynamic character: how is it she/he grows, learns, etc.?(AP tests are full of passages that show character growth).
 - Cite and explain an ironic passage. How does irony function in the work?
 - Cite a passage and analyze the author's style: choice of words, syntax, tone, etc. Why do you think the author used this style for this work? How effective is the passage at achieving the author's purpose?
 - Cite and agree, disagree or qualify a point of view in the work (best for persuasive nonfiction). Give context for the point of view first.
 - Something else? Think of something. We will add to this list as we go.

Important note: any time you cite a passage, it DOES NOT count toward the word count for your journal entry. You do not have to copy an entire passage though. Why not include a photocopy or, if digital, cut and paste.

3. A final overview: choose any of the following (400-500 words) For any of these choices, cite the text in support of what you say.
- Personal reflection: why you liked this book and are glad you read it.
 - Recommendation: choose a person you know, and write an email to him or her giving your recommendation. If this person is another student in our class, be sure to share your book and recommendation with him/her.
 - What you learned about yourself as a reader? What did you learn from studying this book? Be specific.
 - Literature often reflects the time period in which it is created. What have you learned or did you already know about the period in which your work was written?