

# AP ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

## 2019 SUMMER WORK

May 2019

Dear Prospective AP Literature Students,

I'm thrilled you've chosen to enter the magical world of **nonstop reading** (and, believe me, that's only a slight hyperbole) and **prolific writing** (totally not hyperbole) for your final year at Hart. Not only will you exercise your literary analysis muscles, but you will also expand your mind, develop your poetic palette, hone your writing craft, AND receive college credit if you pass the AP test in May. By signing up for this class, you've taken the first step toward a challenging and rewarding senior year.

Here are the **expectations** that the College Board (and I) have for what an AP Literature student should possess:

- ★ The ability to read accurately and actively
- ★ The ability to engage in intelligent discussion involving active listening and speaking
- ★ The desire to learn more than the obvious or superficial
- ★ Emotional maturity! I cannot stress enough how vital emotional maturity is to your success in this course. You **MUST** be able to read works by authors with vastly different life experiences and viewpoints from your own. You **must** be able to read about and discuss mature topics in a thoughtful and appropriate way. This is a college level course and you're thisclose to being actual college students--start preparing now for the discussion skills you will need next year.
- ★ A sense of personal and social responsibility sufficient to keep up with the workload and contribute to group efforts
- ★ The patience to accept a variety of answers or to use unresolved questions as a starting point for further thinking and exploring ideas in literature
- ★ The willingness to accept constructive criticism from your teacher and peers
- ★ A good command of language or the willingness to work hard to catch up with students who possess such a skill (Trust me, this will help you in college--no matter what your major is!)

Essentially, you should enjoy **exploring new ideas** in reading, and also relish **writing** and **speaking** about those ideas.

Perhaps the most beautiful aspect of literary analysis is that **there are often many "right" answers**. The excerpt I've included in from *How To Read Literature Like a Professor* explores that very idea. Literary works usually have many meanings, so two people can have two completely different interpretations and both be "correct," as long as each can support the claim with evidence from the text. Have **confidence** in your interpretations of the works you read this summer.

Excited? Me too! Here we go...

### Task 1: Choosing a Novel

Choose **ONE** of the following novels to read and intellectually explore (see Task 3 for specifics). Not only do I genuinely **love** these novels, but all of these novels have been nominated for and/or won multiple prestigious literary awards. **Some of these novels contain mature themes, so make sure that you and your parent are comfortable with you reading the one you choose.**

**Option 1: The Leavers by Lisa Ko.** A summary from Goodreads.com: "One morning, Deming Guo's mother, an undocumented Chinese immigrant named Polly, goes to her job at the nail salon and never comes home. No one can find any trace of her. With his mother gone, eleven-year-old Deming is left with no one to care for him. He is eventually adopted by two white college professors who move him from the Bronx to a small town upstate. They rename him Daniel Wilkinson in their efforts to make him over into their version of an "all-American boy." But far away from all he's ever known, Daniel struggles to reconcile his new life with his mother's disappearance and the memories of the family and community he left behind."

**Option 2: *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.** A brief summary of the novel from goodreads.com: "Fifteen-year-old Kambili's world is comprised of the high walls and frangipani trees of her family compound. Her wealthy Catholic father, under whose shadow Kambili lives, while generous and politically active in the community, is repressive and fanatically religious at home. When Nigeria begins to fall apart under a military coup, Kambili's father sends her and her brother away to stay with their aunt, a University professor, whose house is noisy and full of laughter. There, Kambili and her brother discover a life and love beyond the confines of their father's authority. The visit will lift the silence from their world and, in time, give rise to devotion and defiance that reveal themselves in profound and unexpected ways. This is a book about the promise of freedom; about the blurred lines between childhood and adulthood; between love and hatred, between the old gods and the new."

**Option 3: *Wolf in White Van* by John Darnielle.** A brief summary of the novel from goodreads.com: "Welcome to Trace Italian, a game of strategy and survival! You may now make your first move. Isolated by a disfiguring injury since the age of 17, Sean Phillips crafts imaginary worlds for strangers to play in. From his small apartment in Southern California, he orchestrates fantastic adventures where possibilities, both dark and bright, open in the boundaries between the real and the imagined. As the creator of Trace Italian - a text-based, roleplaying game played through the mail - Sean guides players from around the world through his intricately imagined terrain, which they navigate and explore, turn by turn, seeking sanctuary in a ravaged, savage future America. Lance and Carrie are high school students from Florida, explorers of the Trace. But when they take their play into the real world, disaster strikes, and Sean is called to account for it. In the process, he is pulled back through time, tunneling toward the moment of his own self-inflicted departure from the world in which most people live."

### **Task 2: Your (Intellectual) Personal Trainer**

You will also read and intellectually explore *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas C. Foster. This book will be your summer trainer to keep your brain in shape. Yes, it's a nonfiction academic book, but his voice is funny and sometimes (dare I say) sassy. This course is all about analysis and symbolism and Foster gives you what you need to tackle any literary device or deeper meaning that comes your way. You will be using what you learn with Foster in your Summer Novel Assignment (See Task 3). I will also reference this text throughout the year.

### **Task 2.5: "Postlude"**

I've included in this packet the "Postlude" chapter from the most recent version of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* because I think it's an important and motivating chapter that those of you with an earlier edition would otherwise miss out on reading. If you have the most recent edition, you can just read it in the book. Take it to heart and hopefully it will inspire you to tackle your next task.

### **Task 3: Summer Novel Assignment**

You'll be applying what you have learned from *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* to the novel you have chosen (*Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* or *Purple Hibiscus*). To do this, choose **THREE** chapters from *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* and explore how each concept relates to the novel you chose. For example, if you use "Chapter 7: OR the Bible," you will discuss the biblical allusions in your novel. There's A LOT going on in both novels. Take time and push yourself to keep digging deeper. Since you have a choice in which chapters you apply to your novel, I will not take the excuse that "it didn't relate." If a particular chapter doesn't seem to fit, choose a different one! Your responses will be as long as they need to be. I'm not counting sentences. I'm looking for ideas. **Don't skimp on thought! Please type your work and make sure it's clear which part goes with which chapter. You will submit the digital version of this to turnitin.com by 8 a.m. on August 18. The turnitin Class ID is 21292852 and the enrollment key is graves. You must also print a copy to turn in during class on August 18.**

**Logistical note:** It's best if you can purchase copies of the novel you choose and (especially) *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. You can often find cheap, used copies online if your order early. If you are unable to purchase the books, I get it. Get them from the library, but know that you will need them during the first weeks of class (so keep up on your renewals). I also have some copies of *HTRLLP* and the novels that you are welcome to borrow for the summer, so if you can't obtain the necessary materials yourself, come talk to me. We can figure out the solution. I promise.

My email is [legraves@hartdistrict.org](mailto:legraves@hartdistrict.org). It includes my middle initial so it is often harder to remember than other teacher email addresses. Think of it as LegRaves or LeGraves (the latter with a French accent) if it helps you remember or just makes you laugh. I will be checking my work email intermittently over summer break.

**All summer work is due Thursday, August 15, 2018.** Yes, that's the **third day of school**. We will also have an **in-class essay** on your summer reading novel **Friday, August 17, which is the end of the first week of school**. If you take the summer work seriously, you should show up on the first day bursting to talk about the amazing insights you've uncovered with your reading.

I look forward to beginning our adventure together!

*Enjoy your summer,  
Mrs. Laura Graves*

AP Literature Teacher/Journalism Adviser  
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"What an astonishing thing a book is. It's a flat object made from a tree with flexible parts on which are imprinted lots of funny dark squiggles. But one glance at it and you're inside the mind of another person, maybe somebody dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, an author is speaking clearly and silently inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs. Books break the shackles of time. A book is proof that humans are capable of working magic."  
-Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*

## AP Lit Summer work Final Checklist

- Read *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* (including the postlude, attached here)
- Read *The Leavers* or *Purple Hibiscus* or *Wolf in White Van*
- Complete a novel analysis in which you apply **three** different chapters from *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* to either *The Leavers* or *Purple Hibiscus* or *Wolf in White Van* (typed)
- Turn in your novel analysis to [turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com) by August 18 at 8 a.m. **Turnitin.com Class ID 21292852. Enrollment key: graves**
- Print the novel analysis, short story analysis and bring it to class on August 18..

**\*Remember, there will also be an in-class essay on your summer reading novel on Friday, August 20, 2018.**

### Task 2.5: "Postlude"

From the 2014 edition of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas C. Foster

#### Postlude

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#### Who's in Charge Here?

The inquiry came in innocently, as the troubling ones often do. A student. A question. A swirl of issues demanding to be untangled: "Dear Professor Foster, what about..."

As it happens, this is one I've been wrestling with my whole life. Someone I'll call Steven sent me an e-mail with a question many others have asked, directly or indirectly. The short version is this: "How do I know I'm right?" The full version is more vexing. I'll give you a sort of composite between "Steven's" question and those I've received before:

*I do have one question. Say I see something in the story that I think is a symbol (e.g. a blind man), and I share my thought with my friends and they think the same. But in fact the character created the character of the blind man simply because he happened to see a blind man walking down the street while he was writing.*

*My question is, should we really give so much credit to writers by interpreting their works in such a special and meaningful way, especially when he/she hasn't been proven to be a good writer yet?*

This, of course, is the great and troubling question of literary analysis: how do we ever know that we're right, that we're accurate, that we're justified? Actually, there are several questions here, so let's deal with the main two first: can we ever be certain that our reading is correct, and if so, how?

In answer to that one, I would say that **if you are reading carefully--not skipping pieces or inserting words that aren't really there**--and you see something, you can assume it's really present. Take your example of the blind man. Does his presence, taken with other elements of the story, suggest something about seeing or the failure to see? Is someone failing to understand a truth right in front of him? Seeing that connection is not always easy or quick, and sometimes it doesn't exist. In that case, the blindness may not mean much at all. But consider this: introducing a blind character into the narrative commands the reader's attention, and the logistics of moving him around, if he's significant, are so difficult that you need a pretty good reason for deploying him. **So assume that he means something until you can prove otherwise.**

The second part of the inquiry is more intriguing: how can we be sure that we're doing what the author wants us to do? The wise guy in me wants to say, we can't, so get over it. If I could wave a wand and get rid of everyone's sense of obligation to the writer, I would do it in a heartbeat. **A reader's only obligation, it seems to me, is to the text.** We can't interrogate the writer as to intentions, so the only basis of authority must reside in the text itself. **Trust the words and the words only. You can never find the motivation behind them.** Even if the writer told you his intent, as a group they're notorious liars and not to be trusted. Plus, writers do things sometimes because they "just feel right"; that is, not every choice is made consciously, although that doesn't mean there's no reason behind it.

The real issue, though, is the one I framed in the title of this piece: who's in charge here? First a bit of context. In 1967, the little-known (in America, anyway) French thinker on matters literary and cultural named Roland Barthes published a short essay in the equally little-known *Aspen* magazine called "The Death of the Author." The fallout from that bit of whimsy has become the opposite of little known. On one level, it became a cornerstone of the poststructuralist theoretical program; on another, it became a symbol of everything Anglo-Americans hate about continental, and especially Gallic, thought. In other words, it had something for everyone. I have taught this essay a number of times, always with the same results, and those are illustrative of our problems with Barthes and his ilk: "Oh my gosh, he's saying that writers don't even matter. That can't be right! Writers have to be important. Otherwise, how can what we do as English majors, as English graduate students, matter?" And so on.

What first-time readers of the essay often miss, aside from the playfulness and archness of the piece, is that "author" does not equal "writer" perfectly. Yes, we generally use them interchangeably. Yes, that works just fine most of the time. Barthes, however, carefully avoids the French words for "writer," *ecrivain*, sticking with *auteur*. This is, in fact, his point: the writer, he or she who writes, is just fine; the problem comes in with the author, the ultimate *authority* on the text. That personage, the Author (and he consistently capitalizes it so we don't miss the point) as Divine Creator, is dead.

Look at it another way. Most writers whose work you have read are dead. The others will be. At some point, all writers are beyond our reach. I'm not being morbid here, although I'm fully capable of it, but for once I merely state facts. All writers eventually reach the big Remainder Table in the sky. Simply part of the human condition. By definition, then, they reach a point where we cannot appeal to them for clues to meaning. Unlike their physical being, their written work survives, and it is that on which we must base our conclusions.

On that same topic, here's a question: when is the writer dead? Easy, you say? A mere medical question? I think not. Granted, the writer as a biological organism can be said to have died on the date on his or her death certificate. But think about it from another angle: what about the writer as creator of her work? Is there any difference, really, between the day after publication of her novel and a hundred years hence? Have the words changed? Does her ability to control our response to the work change in that century? I think not.

Oh, he could be like Henry James and bring out his "New York Edition" of his work years later, possibly even introducing numerous changes and revisions to the party. In our (well, my) time, Louise Erdrich and John Fowles brought out revised versions of *Love Medicine* and *The Magus*, respectively, so it does happen. Some poets, and William Butler Yeats springs to mind, tinker mightily with poems from the journal to the book stage of development, and sometimes from the initial collection to the *Collected Poems*. But most writers write their work once and, for better or worse, leave it at that. Mostly better. Do it right the first time and be done with it. Said the guy writing a revised version of his book.

This argument also gets around Steven's other concern, about the "unproven" author. If we judge the text, the age or experience of the author does not matter. An example? Sure, why not? Maybe even two. In 1983, no one had heard of Louise Erdrich, including me, although she was only two years behind me at a college that isn't all that large. That's fair; she hadn't produced any novels yet. But then she did, and what a novel. *Love Medicine* won the 1984 National Book Critics Circle award for fiction. First novels are rarely best or even near-best novels (Hemingway and Harper Lee provide two of the few exceptions), but this one ranks right up there. Now, we can argue that because chapters had been appearing as stand-alone stories in literary journals and national magazines for four or five years prior to publication, Erdrich was not completely unknown or unread, but the point stands that this was a first novel. If we accept the premise that

significance is only valid once a track record has been established, then we will miss a wonderful novel--until, at least, the writer "grows up" in terms of reputation. For my part, I would prefer to read the novel rather than the reputation.

Or try this. In the week I was writing this postlude in the summer of 2013, an interesting publishing revelation occurred. In April, a debut mystery novel was published in Britain to good reviews and near-zero sales. In mid-July, at approximately the moment when remaining copies were being rounded up for a bath in the acid vats, the *Sunday Times* newspaper outed the real writer, a first-timer in adult mysteries sure enough, but also maybe the most famous novelist in the world (although Stephen King might argue that one). Robert Galbraith, it turns out, was J. K. Rowling, who wanted to publish *The Cuckoo's Calling* anonymously just to see how it fared with critics when it wasn't under her name. Her previous novel, *The Casual Vacancy*, sold more than a million copies but had not been treated kindly by critics, so she had some motivation. In the weeks following the revelation of her authorship, the new novel shot to number one on Amazon's bestseller list, chiefly on the basis of e-book sales, all physical copies having been swept up instantly, while the publisher, Little, Brown, ordered hundreds of thousands of new copies to be printed. So here's my question: what's the fuss? From a marketing standpoint, I completely understand, but looked at as an aesthetic proposition, does it really matter? Is the book any better or worse as the work of Ms. Rowling than it was the product of her military-intelligence alter ego? **Ultimately, the book must stand or fail on the merits of the text, not the strength of the authorial brand. And to establish those merits, we need to read the book.** We all find, all the time, that critics don't speak for us. Often, sales don't speak for us. Some of my worst reading experiences have involved books that "everyone" was reading and praising. Time and again, experience has shown that while I might be "just anyone," I'm definitely not "everyone." What I like, what I admire, what I dismiss, I can only find out by reading for myself.

The same is true of analysis or interpretation or whatever you want to call what we've been up to for the last few hundred pages. I can usually make a persuasive case for my reading of a novel or poem, but I can't make it your reading. Yes, I do know a good deal about literature and how to have fun with it, but **I'm not you and you are not me.** For that, you should be profoundly grateful. **No one in the world can read *Life of Pi* or *Wuthering Heights* or *The Hunger Games* exactly the way you will--except you.** Often, too often, I find students apologizing for the way they see a work: "It's only my opinion, but" or "I'm probably wrong, but" or some other iteration of this lame act of contrition. **Stop apologizing!** It doesn't help, and it sells the speaker short. **Be intelligent, be bold, be assertive, and be self-confident in your reading.** It is your opinion (but not "just") and you might be wrong, although that's less likely that most students think. So here's my final piece of advice: **Own the books you read.** Also poems, stories, flash fiction, plays, memoirs, movies, creative nonfiction, and all the rest. I don't mean this literally, although as a person who makes a living through books, I'm not against the idea. What I really mean is that you need to take ownership of your reading. It's yours. It's special. It is exactly like nobody else's in the whole world. As much a part of you as your nose or your thumb. We all learn from each other when we read and discuss literature, and our readings change based on those discussions. I know mine do, in all sorts of ways. But that doesn't mean I abandon my own viewpoint, and neither should you.

Don't cede control of your opinions to critics, teachers, famous writers, or know-it-all professors. Listen to them, but read confidently and assertively, and don't be ashamed or apologetic about your reading. You and I both know you're capable and intelligent, so don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Trust the text and trust your instincts. You'll rarely go far wrong.

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