

**AP Literature and Composition
Summer Assignment**

Due: The first meeting of the class in September, 2009

Welcome to Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition, a full-year course concerned with the reading and analysis of difficult and, hopefully, rewarding works of fiction. A summer reading and writing assignment is a requirement of the class for all students. It is one way of introducing you to the sort of literature you'll be reading next year and for the AP teachers to get a sense of where you'll be starting from as writers, readers and thinkers as we plan our year together. **You must complete both part A (novel) and part B (poetry).**

The Objective: To show through a reflective writing your insights into challenging literature of different genres and to examine your own understanding of your strengths and weaknesses as a literary analyst.

The Assignment:

Part A: The Novel

1. Select and purchase (or borrow) one of the following titles; you may read about the books on-line at www.amazon.com, ask parents/friends/siblings who may have read them or peruse copies at the bookstore to help you make your choice. Pick the one that interests you most.

The Blind Assassin (Atwood)
Death Comes for the Archbishop (Cather)
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter (McCullers)
Empire Falls (Russo)
The Poisonwood Bible (Kingsolver)
The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay (Chabon)

2. Read the book and, as you do, make whatever notes and/or marginal notations you need to examine the underlying themes/character development/stylistic devices/connections to the text that might help you to arrive at insights about what the novel is doing at levels deeper than the merely literal (*i.e. move beyond plot summary!*).

3. Using these notes, please write a paper that is between 3-4 pages long (double-spaced, 1" margins, 12-point type (Times New Roman or equivalent) in which you do both of the following (you should divide your time evenly between the two parts):

- a) Explain what deeper truths or universal meanings you believe the author was trying to arrive at through the novel (Think "big picture" here – why is this book considered to be of a high quality? What important messages does it convey to you? How might it help you see the world/your own life in a different manner?). ***Use apt, specific***

references to the text, please, and try to say HOW the author got you thinking as you did.

- b) Discuss your own reading/analysis *process*. What was easy about reading and thinking on this book? What was difficult? In essence, tell the story of your reading experience. Be self-reflective, honest and thorough as you write.

Part B: The Poem

1. Select a poem **written in the last 10 years**. You should select the poem according to your own taste, but it should ideally be a poem you have not read/studied before and one that has some ambiguity for you to explore; that is, if it is too easily digested on a first reading, your writing in response to the poem will be more difficult to do.
2. We recommend that to find the poem you'll work with, you purchase (or borrow) a current anthology of contemporary poetry to browse. We recommend the *Best American Poetry* series (one is published each year, edited by David Lehman and a guest editor) as well as Billy Collins' *Poetry 180* and *180 More* – each of which is available at larger bookstores in the area.
3. Write a 1-2 page analysis of what you think the poem's "message" (or theme) is (it's very possible there are multiple messages – pick those most relevant to you) and make sure to give specific examples from the poem to support **HOW** you arrived at your analysis. We are interested in seeing how well you can point to specific words and poetic devices to illustrate how you arrive at meaning. Please write in the first person.

Good luck. The papers will be collected at the first class meeting. You may expect that the assignment will constitute a grade toward your first quarter average.