

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
AP Literature and Composition  
Summer Reading and Writing Requirements

**In this course, we will tackle challenging issues and different points of view by reading texts that may contain mature themes, topics, and content that intellectually stretch 12<sup>th</sup> grade students as we work to prepare them for the diverse points of view they will experience in their college and career journeys. The texts selected for this course play a critical role in challenging students to develop their own ethical and intellectual responses to literature. Richard Wright's *Native Son* contains mature material that readers should be prepared to approach thoughtfully.**

1) Richard Wright's *Native Son*

Set in the 1930s, the portrayal of poverty and feelings of helplessness experienced by people in the inner city is as meaningful today as when it was written. *Native Son* is the story of Bigger Thomas, a black youth whose tragic life was drawn from Richard Wright's own experiences and memories of the Chicago ghetto. Unforgettable and tragic, Wright's masterpiece forces us to witness the inhumanity of our society.

2) Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

*Cat's Eye* presents the retrospective of Elaine Risley, a middle-aged acclaimed artist who discovers that she cannot move into the future as she is still trapped in the past because of the childhood trauma caused by Cordelia, Elaine's tormentor and soul-mate. Elaine was so deeply scarred by the sinister "power-games" of her childhood years that she lost herself, her memories, and "became" a cat's eye: cool as cold marble, detached, and almost devoid of feeling.

3.) Thomas Foster's *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*

This book is a must-read for those preparing to embark on reading literature at a high level. You will not have to write an essay on this book, but you will definitely want to take detailed notes on the chapters in it. You should read this book before the other two as it will prepare you for reading literature in a new way. Although your notes on this text do not need to be submitted for credit, you must read this text in order to be successful in this class.

**Read each work thoughtfully and carefully. We will discuss each separately and together when we return to school in September. We will want to explore such matters as narrative voice, characterization, and social commentary. Keep this question in mind at all times: if literature is indeed the reservoir of human experience, what do these books suggest about our humanity, individually and collectively? Each author posits an argument; what do they argue through the text? Authorial choice is the awareness that authors make deliberate choices with intended consequences. In your notes and essays, you will need to analyze the choices authors make and how they impact the reading experience. For example, the name of a character, the setting, key images, the narrative style, the symbols – every single diction choice in the book is an authorial choice you can analyze.**

**You should purchase each of these books. That way you can make notes, highlight passages, and underline at will. I also strongly urge you to reread each book. We will use *Cat's Eye* and *Native Son* for essays on the AP Literature & Composition exam in May.**

### Required Summer Writing

You must maintain detailed double-entry notes on each of the summer reading books. **These will be exchanged with peers and assessed.** I have samples of successful double-entry notes on our website available for you to peruse. If you have any questions about the level of detail and analysis required in these notes please do not hesitate to ask me **prior to departing for summer break.** Take the time to make sure you understand the requirements of the task. Double-entry notes should offer your high-level

analysis of portions of the text that you deem significant. These notes should be maintained throughout the duration of your reading. **There is no set number of notes; you should pause every few pages to consider the author's choices and craft analytical notes for yourself.** These notes will prove invaluable when you go to write your essay. Read the text and takes notes with the essay question in mind. The notes must be typed and will be submitted via google classroom in August.

Please plan to write **two essays** in MLA format, one on each of the first two listed books, to be submitted by the **first day of class**. You should not spend more than an hour crafting each essay. We will use them as a way of practicing for the AP Lit timed essays. Study the prompts before reading each book to give you a purpose for your reading. We will be able to submit electronic copies of our essays and notes via google classroom in August. Each paper should be typed (12 point), double spaced and **two-three pages each (approximately 500-750 words)**. Also, include a title that indicates your argument, a work cited page, and all of the other nuances of MLA formatting. Each response must demonstrate a thoughtful **argument** about the text. Quoting thoughtfully from the texts is mandatory. Keep your audience in mind; it's me. I have read these books. Eschew summary and offer only original analysis, interpretation, and argument. Failure to read the texts, keep double-entry notes, and write the essays will negatively impact your grade and our experience at the beginning of this year. The summer reading work constitutes a major portion of your first quarter grade.

Here are the essay prompts for each book:

***Native Son*:** According to critic Northrop Frye, "Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divisive lightning." Use *Native Son* as your source text. Select a character who is a tragic figure that functions as the instrument of suffering of others. Then write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by that figure contributes to the tragic vision and meaning of the work as a whole (MOWAW). To craft an effective argument you must clearly and specifically name and identify the ways the character causes suffering for others and how that suffering contributes to the MOWAW. Your choice of character and motives will have an impact on how provocative and engaging your essay can be. Consider the extent to which the character is both a victim and instrument of suffering. You may want to conclude your argument by claiming what would have been missing from the meaning of the work as a whole if Wright had not created a character who serves as the instrument of suffering for others. Be sure to specifically name the type of suffering caused by your character and provide illuminating textual excerpts in your essay that show this. **AVOID PLOT SUMMARY ENTIRELY.** Give your essay a title that gives me an indication of your argument. Submit via google classroom.

***Cat's Eye*:** A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist of a bildungsroman (*Cat's Eye*). Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole. To craft an effective argument you must clearly and specifically name and identify the pivotal moment, how it functions, and what, specifically, it contributes to the MOWAW. Do not merely summarize the plot. You must explicitly name what you believe the meaning of the work as a whole to be. You may want to conclude your argument by claiming what would be missing from the meaning of the work as a whole without single pivotal moment within the bildungsroman. **AVOID PLOT SUMMARY ENTIRELY.** Give your essay a title that gives me an indication of your argument. Submit via google classroom.

### Reading Suggestions

1. Skim each text before reading: front cover, back cover, inside notes, preface, introductions, table of contents, section titles. Think about the title. How does the title indicate the meaning of the work as a whole?
2. Try to make connections to other texts, songs, movies, experiences, etc so we can discuss these connections in class. Making these connections helps us to remember what we read.
3. Read without distractions (phone, etc.).
4. Be patient. Meaning does not always become clear at the outset of a task or in an instant. Be willing to occasionally reread, especially at the beginning of a text until you get settled in with the characters' names, the setting, the story line and - very important - the author's style of writing.
5. Take notes while you read; if the book is your own, highlight selectively and make marginal notes. If the text is a borrowed book, use post-it notes to mark what seem to be significant scenes, descriptions, quotes. ALWAYS be looking for the work's central tension(s). Keep asking yourself: "What's happening here?"/"What is the author arguing?" Take notes on every authorial choice.
6. Learn unfamiliar words. Knowledge of language elevates us; it enables us to articulate ideas, to communicate clearly and respectfully with others. Keep a vocabulary journal on each book (not required but highly recommended).
7. Pace your reading throughout the summer. Look at your schedule and make sure that you leave enough time at the end of the summer to give each book and each essay fair and careful treatment.
8. If you read a book early in the summer, please plan to skim over it again before we begin our discussions in the fall. We will have very specific discussions and I will be calling on you to analyze excerpts of the text.

Enjoy your summer and the opportunities to read, write, think, and argue. I am looking forward to starting the class in September.

Dr. Brett

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