

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 12th grade students as we work to prepare them for the diverse points of view they will experience in their college and career journeys. The AP 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 experience was drawn from Richard Wright's own memories of Chicago's racist real estate practices. Wright's masterpiece forces us to witness the inhumanity of our society and how to change it.

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 soulmate. 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 August. 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 typed double-entry notes on each of the summer reading books. **These will be submitted electronically via Canvas, exchanged with peers, and assessed.** I will have samples of successful double-entry notes on our Canvas page 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 or simply check out the FAQs at the end of this doc.** 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 take notes with the essay question in mind. The notes must be typed and will be submitted via Canvas in August.

You need to write **two essays** in MLA format, one on each of the first two listed books. 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 Canvas 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. Avoid 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. On-time submission is also a requirement should you decide to apply for membership in the National English Honor Society.

Here are the essay prompts for each book:

Essay on *Native Son*: "And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency."

– Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*

Use Richard Wright's *Native Son* as your source text. Consider how cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole (MOWAW). To craft an effective argument you must clearly and specifically name and operationalize three different surroundings and how those surroundings shape the character of your choosing and contribute to the MOWAW. Your choice of surroundings and character will have an impact on how provocative and engaging your essay can be. Consider how choosing Bessie, Mary, Bigger, or Jan and their particular surroundings will shape your argument about their psychological and ethical traits and the MOWAW. You must conclude your argument by claiming what would have been missing from the meaning of the work as a whole if Wright had not placed the character of your choosing in the particular surroundings you analyzed. Be sure to specifically name the three surroundings that shape your chosen character and to 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 Canvas by Monday August 22nd. You will not be eligible for the National English Honor Society if your summer work is not submitted completely and on time.

Essay on *Cat's Eye*: Palestinian American literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said has written that "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted." Yet Said has also said that exile can become "a potent, even enriching" experience. Use Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* to analyze a character who experiences such a rift and becomes cut off from "home," whether that home is the character's birthplace, family, homeland, or other special place. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the character's experience with exile is both alienating and enriching, and how this experience illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. To craft an effective argument you must clearly and specifically name and identify three ways the character experiences exile, how the experience of exile functions to both alienate and enrich, and what, specifically, it contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole (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 must conclude your argument by claiming what would be missing from the meaning of the work as a whole without the three specific types of exile experienced by the character you chose. Remember that you can choose any character from the novel, but the entire essay must be about that one character. AVOID PLOT SUMMARY ENTIRELY. Give your essay a title that gives me an indication of your argument. Submit via Canvas by Monday August 22nd. You will not be eligible to apply to the National English Honor Society if your summer work is not submitted completely and on time.

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; highlight selectively and make marginal notes. about 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, double-entry notes, and 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 August. We will have very specific discussions and I will be calling on you to analyze excerpts of the text.

FAQs

Do I need a physical copy of the books?

Yes, need to bring *Native Son* and *Cat's Eye* to class in August. We will be using them for in-class writing tasks, discussions, interactive learning tasks, etc. You could purchase *How To Read Literature Like a Professor* electronically if you prefer because we will not be referencing the physical text in class.

How many double entry notes do I need for each book?

Think about the notes as an opportunity to practice analyzing author's choices and as a place to practice crafting thesis statements and as a place to generate questions to ask members of the classroom community. You should pause periodically to type out an excerpt of the text and to do some analytical work with the excerpt. These notes are for you and your learning. You will be able to use them for reading quizzes, presentations, interactive learning tasks, essay revisions, etc.

Feel your power to take control of your learning and view the notes not as an external task, but as an internal opportunity to do some deep thought-work.

Some of your peers may submit 20 pages of notes, others may submit five. I am not counting the number of notes you take. I am reading them to get a sense of your ability to analyze the author's choices. The most dominant word in each set of notes should be the author's last name – I should be seeing phrases like Richard Wright argues, Margaret Atwood explores, Wright's use of x symbol suggests, Atwood's choice to do x can be interpreted as y, etc. These notes aren't really about whether you liked the book in the same way that we don't focus too much on whether we like a concept in Calculus or Physics. Our focus here is to analyze and explore each author's choices and how those choices contribute to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Do I have what it takes to be successful in AP Lit?

Yes – absolutely! As long as you are willing to read and write and think and learn this will be an amazing class for you. The first step is enjoying the time to read challenging and provocative novels. I love teaching this class and I am excited to prepare you for university-level thinking. The readings, notes, and essays are your entry ticket into this college-level course.

How long should I take to write each essay?

For the AP Lit exam, you will only have 40 minutes so for this summer task I suggest no more than an hour. Set a timer and type an analytical essay that responds directly to the prompt. You do not need to restate the prompt or summarize the novel – you need to offer a decisive provocative argument in response to the prompt. This is where your double-entry notes can help you generate your argument, weave in an illuminating excerpt, etc. After you've typed your first draft of the essay, I would take some time away from it and then revisit it and read it aloud and see where you can be more analytical, more assertive, and more clear. You should delete any summary of the novel and focus instead on inserting composition moves that analyze the author's choices and how those choices contribute to the MOWAW.

So what do I need to do before the first day of class?

Use this checklist:

- Read Thomas Foster's *How To Read Literature Like a Professor*
- Read Richard Wright's *Native Son*
- Type up and submit notes on Richard Wright's *Native Son*
- Type up and submit an essay on Richard Wright's *Native Son*
- Read Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*
- Type up and submit notes on Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*
- Type up and submit an essay on Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*
- Get excited for a legendary class that will prepare you for college

Enjoy your summer and the opportunities to read, write, think, and argue. You are lucky to be able to read such important texts by authors like Richard Wright

and Margaret Atwood and to get to engage in discussion with your peers about the ideas explored in each text. I can't wait to start the class and see what you think in August.

Dr. Brett

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