**Senior AP English Summer Reading**

**1. Read one of the books in the attached chart. You can choose to:**

* check it out from your public library
* purchase it on your own
* read a free, online/pdf version (for all books in the public domain)

**2. From the attached list of essay prompts, choose one prompt that fits your chosen book. Write an essay that:**

* is at least 3-5 full body paragraphs with brief intro or thesis
* uses at least 2 quotes per paragraph (with internal citations)
* has a works cited page ***for the version of the book that you read***
* demonstrates that you closely read and critically analyzed your chosen text
* fully answers the chosen prompt
* meets all the requirements of the senior essay rubric (see below)

**3. Submit your essay in BOTH of the following ways:**

* Bring a printed-out copy of your essay to English class on the first day of school.
* Upload it to turnitin.com as soon as you receive log-in information for your class.

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| **Senior ESSAY Rubric**  |
| **Thesis Statement/Topic Sentence*** Summarizes the argument •Directly answers given assignment
* Argument is not a fact. •Topic sentence supports thesis

**Evidence (Quotes/Paraphrase)*** Every argument claim is supported with textual evidence
* Quote is relevant to topic sentence •Quotes = appropriate length
* Every quote is introduced and provides context

**Analysis/Argument*** adequate explanation of the quote •Connects quote to TS and argument/thesis •Adds new insight/non-repetitive •Is not summary

**Organization*** Paragraphs arranged in logical order •Transitions within and between paragraphs •Paragraphs work together to build overarching argument

**Introduction & Conclusion Paragraph*** Intro: title, author, genre •clear thesis •broadly discusses topic
* Conclusion: restates thesis in new way •does more than summarizes and makes a final comment
 | **Grammar*** no runons/fragments •use simple, present-tense verbs
* spelling •capitalization •possessives
* typos/carelessness •correct comma usage
* correct preposition usage

**Formal Academic Style*** only use 3rd person pronouns
* use transitions effectively within a body paragraph
* formal language •no contractions •no unclear pronouns
* no wordiness •no redundancy
* varied sentence structure •clear sentences (not awk)
* active verbs

**MLA Formatting** * quotes and citations formatted correctly
* indents, spacing, heading, and layout
* works cited – book with an author, translated, periodical, website, anonymous book
 |
|  **Content Grade****11A+ 10A 9A- 8B+ 7B 6B- 5C+ 4C 3C- 2D+ 1D 0F** | **Language Grade****11A+ 10A 9A- 8B+ 7B 6B- 5C+ 4C 3C- 2D+ 1D 0F** |

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| TOTAL GRADE: A+(22) A(20) A-(18) B+(16) B(14) B-(12) C+(10) C(8) C-(6) D+(4) D(2) F(0) |

*\*Caution: shorter does not always equal easier!*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author**  | **Title** | **Date**  | **Description** | **pgs** | **Link to free online version** |
| Achebe | *Things Fall Apart*  | 1958 | African novel; clash between fictional Nigerian tribe and white people; wrestling champion gets exiled  | 148 | https://d3jc3ahdjad7x7.cloudfront.net/K6VMedMRtwYZgIkkMchdXL4L1NPrA9UgqYAgYZtFvNWU9Scc.pdf |
| Atwood, Margaret | *Alias Grace* | 1996 | Based on real murders of man and housekeeper in 1843; servant convicted, doctor investigates  | 468 |  |
| Atwood, Margaret | *Cat's Eye*  | 1988 | disturbing story of a young girl whose life is scarred by the cruel treatment she receives at the hands of her friends. The novel follows the girl from childhood into middle age, tracing the effects of her early experiences on her adult life. | 420 |  |
| Austen, Jane | *Emma* | 1815 | Victorian novel; Young and beautiful Emma Woodhouse meddles in the love lives of her friends. A series of misunderstandings eventually teaches Emma that she doesn't know what's best for everyone. | 512 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/158/158-h/158-h.htm |
| Baldwin, James | *Go Tell It on the Mountain*  | 1953 | passionate story closely paralleling the author’s own family background; focuses on John Grimes, a black boy growing up in a religious home in Harlem in 1936 under the stern hand of his preacher father, Gabriel | 272 |  |
| Bronte, Charlotte | *Jane Eyre* | 1847 | Victorian novel; lots of mystery and romance; orphaned girl grows up and becomes a nanny in an old mansion that belongs to a mysterious man with lots of secrets | 492 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1260/1260-h/1260-h.htm |
| Bronte, Emily | *Wuthering Heights*  | 1847 | Victorian novel; girl falls in love with a boy her father adopts; their love is doomed, and they enact revenge upon the next generation  | 416 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/768/768-h/768-h.htm |
| Camus, Albert | *The Plague*  | 1947 | existentialist novel; town faces outbreak of bubonic plague; explores how humans face death/mortality  | 320 | http://www.24grammata.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/The\_Plague\_\_Albert\_Camus-24grammata.com\_.pdf |
| Chekhov, Anton | *The Cherry Orchard*  | 1903 | Russian play; aristocratic landowner sells family estate  | 248 | https://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/ac/chorch.htm |
| Chopin, Kate | *The Awakening*  | 1899 | feminist novel; woman feels stifled in her marriage, experiences a sexual awakening when she meets man on vacation; leads to an affair | 96 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/160/160-h/160-h.htm |
| Conrad, Joseph | *Heart of Darkness*  | 1899 | white man goes on journey up the African Congo River; conflicts between races, cultures, and sanity | 78 | https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/heart-of-darkness.pdf |
| Crane, Stephen | *The Red Badge of Courage*  | 1895 | American Civil War soldier wants to prove his bravery in battle  | 88 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/73/73-h/73-h.htm |
| Defoe, Daniel | *Moll Flanders*  | 1722 | smart, pretty woman tries to escape poverty through marriage  | 198 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/370/370-h/370-h.htm |
| Dickens, Charles | *David Copperfield*  | 1850 | Victorian novel; first-person narrator tells about his life, adventures, and struggles growing up  | 482 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/766/766-h/766-h.htm |
| Dickens, Charles | *Great Expectations*  | 1861 | Pip lives with his abusive older sister and her kind husband Joe Gargery in the Kent marshes. One day, Pip visits the elderly Miss Havisham, a bitter old woman who teaches her adopted daughter Estella to break men's hearts. | 544 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1400/1400-h/1400-h.htm |
| Dickens, Charles | *Oliver Twist*  | 1839 | Victorian novel; boy is born in a poor house, has a series of adventures being a pickpocket in a gang with the Artful Dodger and the criminal mastermind Fagin. | 138 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/730/730-h/730-h.htm |
| Dostoevski, Fyodor | *The Brothers Karamazov* | 1880 | Russian novel; revolves around the murder of Fyodor Karamazov, a grasping Russian landowner with three legitimate children | 824 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28054/28054-h/28054-h.html  |
| Dostoevski, Fyodor | *Crime and Punishment*  | 1866 | Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov kills a pawnbroker for no apparent reason. The reader knows what he did before knowing why he did it, and the story is told as a gradual revelation of the hero’s motives. | 565 | https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2554/2554-h/2554-h.htm |
| Ellison, Ralph | *Invisible Man*  | 1952 | young black man from the South does not fully understand racism; moves to Harlem and becomes an orator for the Communist party; encounters many people and situations that slowly force him to face the truth about racism and his own lack of identity.  | 581 | https://bpi.edu/ourpages/auto/2010/5/11/36901472/Ralph%20Ellison%20-%20Invisible%20Man%20v3\_0.pdf |
| Faulkner, William  | *Absalom, Absalom!*  | 1936 | a multi-layered story being told by Quentin Compson, a young student sitting in his room at Harvard, to his roommate who asked, “What is the South like?” The story is told as a series of memories, or gossip collected from different narrators, some of whom are reliable and some of whom are not. | 313 | https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.185612/2015.185612.Absalom-Absalom\_djvu.txt |
| Faulkner, William | *As I Lay Dying* | 1930 | Southern Gothic novel; told from multiple perspectives; a family goes to bury their mother  | 267 | https://archive.org/stream/AsILayDyingFullTextWILLIAMFAULKNER/As+I+Lay+Dying+Full+Text+WILLIAM+FAULKNER\_djvu.txt |
| Faulkner, William  | *The Sound and the Fury* | 1929 | Stream of consciousness, multiple narrators; The novel centers on the Compson family - over the course of the 30 years or so related in the novel, the family falls into financial ruin, loses its religious faith and the respect of the town of Jefferson, and many of them die tragically. | 326 | https://miltonthed.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/1/6/14162844/the\_sound\_and\_the\_fury\_by\_faulkner\_william.pdf |
| Forster, E. M. | *A Passage to India*  | 1924 | During a trip to the Marabar Caves, Adela thinks she finds herself alone with Dr. Aziz in one of the caves, and subsequently panics and flees; it is assumed that Dr. Aziz has attempted to assault her. Aziz's trial, and its run-up and aftermath, bring to a boil the common racial tensions and prejudices between Indians and the British who rule India. | 368 | https://archive.org/stream/ost-english-apassagetoindia/APassageToIndia\_djvu.txt |
| Heller, Joseph | *Catch-22* | 1961 | satirical/absurdist; WWII; Yossarian and the fictional 256th Squadron are based on the island of Pianosa. The novel looks into the experiences of Yossarian and the other airmen in the camp, who attempt to maintain their sanity while fulfilling their service requirements so that they may return home. | 624 | https://archive.org/stream/Catch22/Catch%2022\_djvu.txt |
| Hemingway, Ernest | *For Whom the Bell Tolls* | 1940 | This novel tells the story of Robert Jordan, a young American in the International Brigades attached to a republican guerrilla unit during the Spanish Civil War. As a dynamiter, he is assigned to blow up a bridge during an attack on the city of Segovia. | 480 | https://archive.org/stream/forwhombelltolls03hemi/forwhombelltolls03hemi\_djvu.txt |
| Homer | *The Iliad*  | 800BC | prequel to *The Odyssey* - about Trojan War  | 704 | Different translations are available - we recommend the Robert Fagles translation: https://zodml.org/sites/default/files/%5BHomer%5D\_The\_Iliad\_%28Penguin\_Classics\_Deluxe\_Edition.pdf  |
| Hurston, Zorah Neale | *Their Eyes Were Watching God*  | 1937 | The main character Janie Crawford, an African-American woman in her early forties, recounts the story of her life to her best friend Pheoby Watson through an extended flashback. Readers learn about her life in three major periods, corresponding to her marriages to three very different men. | 219 | https://uniteyouthdublin.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/88253919-their-eyes-were-watching-god-by-zora-neale-hurston.pdf |
| Huxley, Aldous | *Brave New World*  | 1932 | Dystopia - set in a futuristic World State of genetically modified citizens and an intelligence-based social hierarchy | 280 | https://www.huxley.net/bnw/one.html |
| Ibsen, Henrik | *A Doll's House* | 1879 | a play; deals with the fate of a married woman in Norway; she lacked reasonable opportunities for self-fulfillment in a male-dominated world. | 68 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2542/2542-h/2542-h.htm |
| James, Henry | *The Turn of the Screw*  | 1898 | Ghost story | 78 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/209/209-h/209-h.htm |
| Johnson, James Weldon | *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*  | 1912 | the fictional account of a young biracial man, living in post-Reconstruction era America. He lives through a variety of experiences, including witnessing a lynching, that convince him to "pass" as white to secure his safety and advancement | 100 | https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/64/the-autobiography-of-an-ex-colored-man/ |
| Kafka, Franz  | *The Trial*  | 1915 | man is arrested and tries to figure out why; absurdist/existentialist  | 176 | https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/the-trial.pdf |
| Marlowe, Christopher | *Doctor Faustus* | 1592 | play; man sells soul to the devil for ultimate power during his lifetime...you can probably guess that this doesn't turn out great for him in the end  | 114 | http://www.lem.seed.pr.gov.br/arquivos/File/livrosliteraturaingles/faustus.pdf |
| McCarthy, Cormac | *All the Pretty Horses* | 1992 | tells story of John Grady Cole, who at sixteen finds himself at the end of a long line of Texas ranchers, cut off from the only life he has ever imagined for himself.  With two companions, he sets off for Mexico on a sometimes idyllic, sometimes comic journey to a place where dreams are paid for in blood | 301 |  |
| Miller, Arthur | *Death of a Salesman*  | 1949 | play; Willy Loman is an aging, failing salesman with a lot of family drama and a tragic end  | 139 | http://www.wcusd15.org/kershaw/ENG%20302/DS%20Death%20of%20a%20Salesman%20Complete.pdf |
| Morrison, Toni | *Beloved*  | 1987 | (Same author as *Song of Solomon*)ghost story about freed slaves; very challenging and strange  | 321 |  |
| Morrison, Toni  | *The Bluest Eye*  | 1970 | (Same author as *Song of Solomon*) young African-American girl in 1941; thinks her dark skin makes her ugly; deals with issues of racism and sexual abuse  | 224 |  |
| Mukherjee, Bharati | *Jasmine*  | 1989 | Story of an Indian women who immigrates to America and searches for her identity and love.  | 256 |  |
| O'Connor, Flannery | *Wise Blood*  | 1952 | The novel concerns a returning World War II veteran who, haunted by a lifelong crisis of faith, resolves to form an anti-religious ministry in an eccentric, fictionalized Southern city after finding his family homestead abandoned without a trace. | 256 |  |
| O'Neill, Eugene  | *Long Day's Journey into Night*  | 1956 | The work concerns the Tyrone family, consisting of parents James and Mary and their sons Edmund and Jamie. Mary is addicted to morphine and Edmund is ill with tuberculosis; takes place during one day; semi-autobiographical. | 280 | https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.182217/2015.182217.Long-Days-Journey-Into-Night\_djvu.txt |
| Orwell, George | *1984* | 1948 | Dystopia - Big Brother controls every aspect of life  | 328 | https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/1984.pdf |
| Paton, Alan  | *Cry, the Beloved Country* | 1948 | Novel set in South Africa during the time of apartheid (racial segregation)  | 316 |  |
| Shakespeare, William | *Antony and Cleopatra*  | 1607 | play/tragedy; follows the relationship between Cleopatra and Mark Antony from the time of the Sicilian revolt to Cleopatra's suicide during the Final War of the Roman Republic | 143 | https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/download/pdf/Ant.pdf |
| Shakespeare, William  | *As You Like It*  | 1599 | play/comedy; follows its heroine Rosalind as she flees persecution in her uncle's court, accompanied by her cousin Celia to find safety and, eventually, love, in the Forest of Arden. | 109 | http://shakespeare.mit.edu/asyoulikeit/full.html |
| Shakespeare, William | *Othello*  | 1603 | play/tragedy about a jealous husband  | 114 | http://shakespeare.mit.edu/othello/full.html |
| Sinclair, Upton | *The Jungle*  | 1906 | Depicts the harsh conditions of immigrants working in the Chicago meat packing industry in the early 20th century  | 304 | https://wwnorton.com/college/history/america-essential-learning/docs/USinclair-%20The\_Jungle-1906.pdf |
| Steinbeck, John | *East of Eden*  | 1952 | Same author as *Of Mice and Men*; brings to life the intricate details of two families, the Trasks and the Hamiltons, and their interwoven stories; set in the Salinas Valley, California, between the beginning of the twentieth century and the end of World War I | 691 |  |
| Tolstoy, Leo | *Anna Karenina*  | 1877 | Epic Russian tragedy; tragic love story  | 594 | http://www.planetpdf.com/planetpdf/pdfs/free\_ebooks/Anna\_Karenina\_NT.pdf |
| Vonnegut, Kurt | *Slaughterhouse Five*  | 1969 | a science fiction-infused anti-war novel by Kurt Vonnegut about the World War II experiences of Billy Pilgrim. It follows his time as an American soldier and chaplain's assistant, to postwar and early years - occasionally traveling through time itself. | 288 |  |
| Wilde, Oscar | *The Importance of Being Earnest*  | 1895 | play; comedy/satire; two rich British men get into shenanigans over the women they love; makes fun of British manners and high class society  | 81 | http://www.gutenberg.org/files/844/844-h/844-h.htm |
| Williams, Tennessee | *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*  | 1955 | play; Set in the "plantation home in the Mississippi Delta"of Big Daddy Pollitt, a wealthy cotton tycoon, the play examines the relationships among members of Big Daddy's family, primarily between his son Brick and Maggie the "Cat", Brick's wife. | 208 | http://shsdavisapes.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/76523768/Cat%20on%20a%20Hot%20Tin%20Roof.pdf |
| Wright, Richard | *Black Boy*  | 1945 | memoir by black American author Richard Wright; describes his youth in the South and his eventual move to Chicago, where he establishes his writing career and becomes involved with the Communist Party; provides honest and profound depiction of racism in America | 448 | https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.5717/2015.5717.Black-Boy\_djvu.txt |

**AP Essay Prompts**

* **This is a list of AP Essay questions asked during the AP Test over the past twenty years.**
* **Before choosing your prompt, annotate each one to see which will best fit your chosen book.**
* **Notice that each question asks you to relate specific details from the book to the overarching meaning of the work as a whole. In order to do this, you have to brainstorm ideas you have about what the book is saying overall: about a theme, or about human nature, experience, relationships, or life.**

**2017.** Select a novel, play, or epic poem that features a character whose origins are unusual or mysterious. Then write an essay in which you analyze how these origins shape the character and that character’s relationships, and how the origins contribute to the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2016.** Many works of literature contain a character who intentionally deceives others. The character’s dishonesty may be intended either to help or to hurt. Such a character, for example, may choose to mislead others for personal safety, to spare someone’s feelings, or to carry out a crime. Choose a novel or play in which a character deceives others. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the motives for that character’s deception and discuss how the deception contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2015.** In literary works, cruelty often functions as a crucial motivation or a major social or political factor. Select a novel, play, or epic poem in which acts of cruelty are important to the theme. Then write a well-developed essay analyzing how cruelty functions in the work as a whole and what the cruelty reveals about the perpetrator and/or victim.

**2014.** It has often been said that what we value can be determined only by what we sacrifice. Consider how this statement applies to a character from a novel or play. Select a character that has deliberately sacrificed, surrendered, or forfeited something in a way that highlights that character’s values. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the particular sacrifice illuminates the character’s values and provides a deeper understanding of the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2013.** 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. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2012.** “And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency.” --Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces* Choose a novel or play in which 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.

**2011.** In a novel by William Styron, a father tells his son that life “is a search for justice.” Choose a character from a novel or play who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice. Then write a well developed essay in which you analyze the character’s understanding of justice, the degree to which the character’s search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the work as a whole.

**2011, Form B.** In *The Writing of Fiction* (1925), novelist Edith Wharton states the following: At every stage in the progress of his tale the novelist must rely on what may be called the illuminating incident to reveal and emphasize the inner meaning of each situation. Illuminating incidents are the magic casements of fiction, its vistas on infinity. Choose a novel or play that you have studied and write a well-organized essay in which you describe an “illuminating” episode or moment and explain how it functions as a “casement,” a window that opens onto the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

**2010.** 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. Select a novel, play, or epic in which a character 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. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**2010, Form B.** “You can leave home all you want, but home will never leave you.” —Sonsyrea Tate Sonsyrea Tate’s statement suggests that “home” may be conceived of as a dwelling, a place, or a state of mind. It may have positive or negative associations, but in either case, it may have a considerable influence on an individual. Choose a novel or play in which a central character leaves home yet finds that home remains significant. Write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the importance of “home” to this character and the reasons for its continuing influence. Explain how the character’s idea of home illuminates the larger meaning of the work. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**2009.** A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning. Select a novel or play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the characters or themes of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**2009, Form B.** Many works of literature deal with political or social issues. Choose a novel or play that focuses on a political or social issue. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the author uses literary elements to explore this issue and explain how the issue contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**2008.** In a literary work, a minor character, often known as a foil, possesses traits that emphasize, by contrast or comparison, the distinctive characteristics and qualities of the main character. For example, the ideas or behavior of a minor character might be used to highlight the weaknesses or strengths of the main character. Choose a novel or play in which a minor character serves as a foil for the main character. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the relation between the minor character and the major character illuminates the meaning of the work.

**2008, Form B.** In some works of literature, childhood and adolescence are portrayed as times graced by innocence and a sense of wonder; in other works, they are depicted as times of tribulation and terror. Focusing on a single novel or play, explain how its representation of childhood or adolescence shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2007.** In many works of literature, past events can affect, positively or negatively, the present activities, attitudes, or values of a character. Choose a novel or play in which a character must contend with some aspect of the past, either personal or societal. Then write an essay in which you show how the character’s relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2007, Form B.** Works of literature often depict acts of betrayal. Friends and even family may betray a protagonist; main characters may likewise be guilty of treachery or may betray their own values. Select a novel or play that includes such acts of betrayal. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the nature of the betrayal and show how it contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2006.** Many writers use a country setting to establish values within a work of literature. For example, the country may be a place of virtue and peace or one of primitivism and ignorance. Choose a novel or play in which such a setting plays a significant role. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the country setting functions in the work as a whole.

**2006, Form B.** In many works of literature, a physical journey – the literal movement from one place to another – plays a central role. Choose a novel, play, or epic poem in which a physical journey is an important element and discuss how the journey adds to the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

**2005.** In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), protagonist Edna Pontellier is said to possess “That outward existence which conforms, the inward life that questions.” In a novel or play that you have studied, identify a character who outwardly conforms while questioning inwardly. Then write an essay in which you analyze how this tension between outward conformity and inward questioning contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid mere plot summary.

**2005, Form B.** One of the strongest human drives seems to be a desire for power. Write an essay in which you discuss how a character in a novel or a drama struggles to free himself or herself from the power of others or seeks to gain power over others. Be sure to demonstrate in your essay how the author uses this power struggle to enhance the meaning of the work.

**2004.** Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Choose a novel, or play, and, considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers answers. Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

**2004, Form B.** The most important themes in literature are sometimes developed in scenes in which a death or deaths take place. Choose a novel or play and write a well-organized essay in which you show how a specific death scene helps to illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

**2003.** 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.” Select a novel or play in which a tragic figure functions as an instrument of the 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 of the work as a whole.

**2003, Form B.** Novels and plays often depict characters caught between colliding cultures -- national, regional, ethnic, religious, institutional. Such collisions can call a character’s sense of identity into question. Select a novel or play in which a character responds to such a cultural collision. Then write a well-organized essay in which you describe the character’s response and explain its relevance to the work as a whole.

**2002.** Morally ambiguous characters – characters whose behavior discourages readers from identifying them as purely evil or purely good – are at the heart of many works of literature. Choose a novel or play in which a morally ambiguous character plays a pivotal role. Then write an essay in which you explain how the character can be viewed as morally ambiguous and why his or her moral ambiguity is significant to the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

**2002, Form B.** Often in literature, a character’s success in achieving goals depends on keeping a secret and divulging it only at the right moment, if at all. Choose a novel or play of literary merit that requires a character to keep a secret. In a well-organized essay, briefly explain the necessity for secrecy and how the character’s choice to reveal or keep the secret affects the plot and contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. You may select a work from the list below, or you may choose another work of recognized literary merit suitable to the topic. Do NOT write about a short story, poem, or film.

**2001.** One definition of madness is “mental delusion or the eccentric behavior arising from it.” But Emily Dickinson wrote Much madness is divinest Sense—To a discerning Eye— Novelists and playwrights have often seen madness with a “discerning Eye.” Select a novel or play in which a character’s apparent madness or irrational behavior plays an important role. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consists of and how it might be judged reasonable. Explain the significance of the “madness” to the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**2000.** Many works of literature not readily identified with the mystery or detective story genre nonetheless involve the investigation of a mystery. In these works, the solution to the mystery may be less important than the knowledge gained in the process of its investigation. Choose a novel or play in which one or more of the characters confront a mystery. Then write an essay in which you identify the mystery and explain how the investigation illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**1999.** The eighteenth-century British novelist Laurence Sterne wrote, “No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man’s mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time.” From a novel or play choose a character (not necessarily the protagonist) whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict with one character illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. You may use one of the novels or plays listed below or another novel or work of similar literary quality.