

Summer Reading Assignment 2017
Unit 1: Self-Reflection, Self-Discovery, & Self-Forgiveness

AP Senior English Literature and Composition, C. Sledge

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." - Mahatma Gandhi

In the first unit of our AP English course, we will explore themes and read major literary works that deal with the "self." As a way of embarking on this thematic journey, you will read three works for Summer Reading that deal with various aspects of forgiveness, beginning with the one chosen by our faculty and administration for the "One School, One Book" project: *Left to Tell, Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*, by Immaculee Ilibagiza.

The theme of forgiveness is as old as the earliest literature. We are instructed to turn the other cheek (if struck on one cheek) by Jesus in the New Testament of the *Bible*. Archetypal Greek heroes are only elevated to their status as heroes, in Aristotle's mind, according to his *Poetics*, by recognizing their own culpability in whatever tragedy has befallen them, and, presumably, forgiving themselves. Shakespeare's major tragedies also follow that Aristotelian tradition. More recent literature has likewise perpetuated the theme of suffering, such as that experienced in early tragic plots, which must ultimately lead to forgiveness – of others and of oneself.

The three texts for Summer Reading will reflect the recurring theme of suffering and forgiveness, and our first unit in class this fall will continue the theme with the additional motifs of self-reflection and self-discovery. As you read the three works – the non-fiction work, the novel, and the play – this summer, highlight important quotations and passages that contain literary devices (symbols, motifs, images, and other rhetorical devices). You will use these annotations in answering the essay prompts that you choose to write about.

Consider this excerpt from *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, by Thomas C. Foster:

If you've ever spent time in a literature classroom...it may seem at times as if the professor is either inventing interpretations out of thin air or else performing parlor tricks....Actually, neither of these is the case; rather, the professor, as the slightly more experienced reader, has acquired over the years the use of a certain 'language of reading,' something to which the students are only beginning to be introduced. What I'm talking about is a grammar of literature, a set of conventions and patterns, codes and rules, that we learn to employ in dealing with a piece of writing....

So... in literature....Stories and novels have a very large set of conventions: types of characters, plot rhythms, chapter structures, point-of-view limitations....Memory. Symbol. Pattern. These are the three items that, more than any other, separate the professorial reader from the rest of the crowd.

So, as Foster's title suggests, you need to learn to read like a professor. Learn to recognize patterns and motifs. Go on a hunt for symbols – and don't think you are crazy when you spot them. They are there. Trust that writers know what they are doing, that they are creating a work of art – literary art. It always amazes me that students will go to an art museum and look at works of art and never question that the artist knew what he or she was doing. The artist didn't just accidentally put some images on the canvas (in the case of a painting) without any INTENTION. And yet, when it comes to a novel or story (or any literary work), those same students are skeptical that the writer INTENDED to use certain words, images, symbols, motifs, in order to create a work of literary art that makes a statement (AKA a theme). So the only way to analyze that novel or poem or other piece of writing is to break it down into those creative elements, so that you can re-assemble them and discover a theme. That's what you will be doing as you highlight and annotate the works you read this summer (breaking it down), and that's what you will be doing all year long as an AP English Literature and Composition student. It's the only way that you will learn how to write the kind of essays that earn the highest scores on the AP test.

Assignment: Write two essays that will be due on the first day of school. These essays will be in response to AP literature prompts designed for Essay Question 3, known as the "Open Question" because you are allowed to use various works of literature that you have read in order to respond to the prompt. Your essay needs to be typed, using Times New Roman 12-point font, following the MLA-style format for your heading, pagination, and quotations. I think that you are familiar with the "Quote sandwich" for providing explicit evidence and with paraphrasing or summarizing for the implicit evidence to support your arguments (claims).

Choose two (2) of the following prompts for your essays. One of your essays must address at least two (2) of the Summer Reading books. Your second essay must address a different Summer Reading book. Thus, you will have written about all three (3) of the Summer Reading works.

Summer Reading:

Atonement, Ian McEwan

The Glass Menagerie, Tennessee Williams

Left to Tell, Immaculee Ilibagiza

1. 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.
2. 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.

3. In retrospect, the reader often discovers that the first chapter of a novel or the opening scene of a drama introduces some of the major themes of the work. Write an essay about the opening scene of a drama or the first chapter of a novel (or both) in which you explain how it functions in this way.

4. A recurring theme in literature is the classic war between a passion and a responsibility. For instance, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with moral duty. Choose a literary work in which a character confronts the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibilities. In a well-written essay show clearly the nature of the conflict, its effects upon the character, and its significance to the work as a whole.

Many prompts for the Q3 end with an admonition to “Avoid plot summary,” or words to that effect, so avoid plot summary.

Also, please purchase these two additional books over the summer and bring them to class on the first day of school (with your essays):

How to Read Literature Like a Professor, Thomas C. Foster
Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide, Lois Tyson