

AP Literature and Composition Summer Reading 2020

This year, I have radically changed our AP Lit summer assignment. The reading list is new, the number of required books has been reduced, and the way you show will document your interaction with your book over the summer will focus on reflection over a final, polished paper.

What you will read: You will choose one book from the list below. The list has been created to offer novels and collections that represent a wide range of human experience. I would recommend using Goodreads.com to get a sense of each book you are interested in.. This is a really good list that should have something for everyone. If you are a big reader, you may want to check out other books listed here once you have completed your title for class.

How you will document your reading: As you read, you will be responsible for sharing three reflections; the first one when you are one third of the way through the book, the second once you have completed two thirds, and the third when you are finished. Information on what to include in these reflections is presented below. These reflections may be typed, handwritten, audio/video blogs, or some other form of communication (check with me if you want to do something unconventional).

Each of your three reflections should document the following:

- **your understanding of theme** - Reflect on the meaning of the book. Why did the author write this book? What aspects of the human experience are being explored? What does the book have to say on these topics? Does it offer answers, or just raise questions? What do you think about what the book is saying? Is the book challenging your beliefs or making you think about things you haven't considered before? How do the themes relate to the era in which the book was written? How do they relate to our world today?
- **your sense of the style of the novel** - Describe the choices the author is making in *how* the work is written. Who tells the story? How is the plot arranged (chronological? flashbacks? stream of consciousness)? What is the tone? Is it highly metaphorical or symbolic? Descriptive? How are the characters presented? What about syntax (sentence length and complexity)? Beyond simply describing, how do these choices relate to the content of the work?
- **your experience reading the book** - This is the place to talk about your journey through the book. This could be a place to talk about ease/difficulty of the text, your reading process, your level of enjoyment, how your prior knowledge/experience is affecting your experience with the book, or any other reflection on your personal engagement with the book.

Final accountability: During the first two weeks of school, you will write an in-class essay on your text. The essay will be based on an AP prompt and graded using the AP exam rubric.

The list. Most of these descriptions are from Goodreads.com. You can look up the novel there and read user reviews. The reviews on Goodreads are generally more useful and insightful than those on Amazon.

***All the Pretty Horses* - Cormac McCarthy (1993)** - *All the Pretty Horses* tells of young John Grady Cole, the last of a long line of Texas ranchers. Across the border Mexico beckons—beautiful and desolate, rugged and cruelly civilized. With two companions, he sets off on an idyllic, sometimes comic adventure, to a place where dreams are paid for in blood.

***Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* - James Weldon Johnson (1912)** - Narrated by a biracial man whose light skin allows him to "pass" for white, the novel describes a pilgrimage through America's color lines at the turn of

the century--from a black college in Jacksonville to an elite New York nightclub, from the rural South to the white suburbs of the Northeast.

***The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* - Junot Diaz (2007)** Things have never been easy for Oscar, a sweet but disastrously overweight, lovesick Dominican ghetto nerd. From his home in New Jersey, where he lives with his old-world mother and rebellious sister, Oscar dreams of becoming the Dominican J. R. R. Tolkien and, most of all, of finding love. But he may never get what he wants, thanks to the *Fukøe*—the curse that has haunted the Oscar's family for generations, dooming them to prison, torture, tragic accidents, and, above all, ill-starred love. Oscar, still waiting for his first kiss, is just its most recent victim.

***The Book of Unknown Americans* - Cristina Henríquez (2014)** After their daughter Maribel suffers a near-fatal accident, the Riveras leave México and come to America. But upon settling at Redwood Apartments, a two-story cinderblock complex just off a highway in Delaware, they discover that Maribel's recovery--the piece of the American Dream on which they've pinned all their hopes--will not be easy. Every task seems to confront them with language, racial, and cultural obstacles.

***Catch 22* - Joseph Heller (1961)** The novel is set during World War II, from 1942 to 1944. It mainly follows the life of Captain John Yossarian, a U.S. Army Air Forces B-25 bombardier. Most of the events in the book occur while the fictional 256th Squadron is based on the island of Pianosa, in the Mediterranean Sea, west of Italy. 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.

***Catcher in the Rye* - J.D. Salinger (1951)** Holden Caulfield is about to be kicked out of yet another prep school, so he takes off early and spends a few days roaming New York city before having to confront his parents. Why is Holden so disillusioned with the world and all the “phonies” that populate it?

***Brave New World* - Aldous Huxley (1932)** *Brave New World* is a dystopian novel by English author Aldous Huxley, written in 1931 and published in 1932. Largely set in a futuristic World State, inhabited by genetically modified citizens and an intelligence-based social hierarchy, the novel anticipates huge scientific advancements in reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipulation and classical conditioning that are challenged by only a single individual: the story's protagonist.

***Everything I Never Told You* - Celeste Ng (2014)** “*Lydia is dead. But they don't know this yet.*” So begins this exquisite novel about a Chinese American family living in 1970s small-town Ohio. Lydia is the favorite child of Marilyn and James Lee, and her parents are determined that she will fulfill the dreams they were unable to pursue. But when Lydia's body is found in the local lake, the delicate balancing act that has been keeping the Lee family together is destroyed, tumbling them into chaos.

***The Handmaid's Tale* - Margaret Atwood (1985)** Offred is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. She may leave the home of the Commander and his wife once a day to walk to food markets whose signs are now pictures instead of words because women are no longer allowed to read. She must lie on her back once a month and pray that the Commander makes her pregnant, because in an age of declining births, Offred and the other Handmaids are valued only if their ovaries are viable. Offred can remember the years before, when she lived and made love with her husband, Luke; when she played with and protected her daughter; when she had a job, money of her own, and access to knowledge. But all of that is gone now . . .

***The House on Mango Street* - Sandra Cisneros (1984)** Told in a series of vignettes – sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous—it is the story of a young Latina girl growing up in Chicago, inventing for herself who and what she will become. Few other books in our time have touched so many readers.

***In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* - Daniyal Mueenuddin (2009)** A major literary debut that explores class, culture, power, and desire among the ruling and servant classes of Pakistan. This collection of linked stories illuminates a place and a people through an examination of the entwined lives of landowners and their retainers on the Gurmani family farm in the countryside outside of Lahore, Pakistan. An aging feudal landlord's household staff, the villagers who depend on his favor, and a network of relations near and far who have sought their fortune in the cities confront the advantages and constraints of station, the dissolution of old ways, and the shock of change.

***Invisible Man* - Ralph Ellison (1952)** First published in 1952 and immediately hailed as a masterpiece, *Invisible Man* is one of those rare novels that have changed the shape of American literature. For not only does Ralph

Ellison's nightmare journey across the racial divide tell unparalleled truths about the nature of bigotry and its effects on the minds of both victims and perpetrators, it gives us an entirely new model of what a novel can be.

***Giovanni's Room* - James Baldwin (1956)** In a 1950s Paris swarming with expatriates and characterized by dangerous liaisons and hidden violence, an American finds himself unable to repress his impulses, despite his determination to live the conventional life he envisions for himself. After meeting and proposing to a young woman, he falls into a lengthy affair with an Italian bartender and is confounded and tortured by his sexual identity as he oscillates between the two.

***Maurice* - E.M. Forster (1914)** Maurice is heartbroken over unrequited love, which opened his heart and mind to his own sexual identity. In order to be true to himself, he goes against the grain of society's often unspoken rules of class, wealth, and politics.

***Mrs. Dalloway* - Virginia Woolf (1925)** Heralded as Virginia Woolf's greatest novel, this is a vivid portrait of a single day in a woman's life. When we meet her, Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway is preoccupied with the last-minute details of party preparation while in her mind she is something much more than a perfect society hostess. As she readies her house, she is flooded with remembrances of faraway times. And, met with the realities of the present, Clarissa reexamines the choices that brought her there, hesitantly looking ahead to the unfamiliar work of growing old.

***Native Son* - Richard Wright (1940)** Right from the start, Bigger Thomas had been headed for jail. It could have been for assault or petty larceny; by chance, it was for murder and rape. *Native Son* tells the story of this young black man caught in a downward spiral after he kills a young white woman in a brief moment of panic.

***Never Let Me Go* - Kazuo Ishiguro (2005)** Hailsham seems like a pleasant English boarding school, far from the influences of the city. Its students are well tended and supported, trained in art and literature, and become just the sort of people the world wants them to be. But, curiously, they are taught nothing of the outside world and are allowed little contact with it. Within the grounds of Hailsham, Kathy grows from schoolgirl to young woman, but it's only when she and her friends Ruth and Tommy leave the safe grounds of the school (as they always knew they would) that they realize the full truth of what Hailsham is.

***No No Boy* - John Okada (1978)** In this work, Okada gives the perspective of a no-no boy, a Japanese-American man who would neither denounce his Japanese heritage nor fight for the U.S. Army during WWII. This novel takes place after the main character spent two years in a Japanese internment camp, and two years in prison after saying no when asked to join the U.S. Army. Okada's novel *No-No Boy* shows the internal and external struggles fought by Japanese-Americans in that time period, be they no-no boys or not.

***Passing* - Nella Larsen (1929)** Irene Redfield, the novel's protagonist, is a woman with an enviable life. She and her husband, Brian, a prominent physician, share a comfortable Harlem town house with their sons. Her work arranging charity balls that gather Harlem's elite creates a sense of purpose and respectability for Irene. But her hold on this world begins to slip the day she encounters Clare Kendry, a childhood friend with whom she had lost touch. Clare—light-skinned, beautiful, and charming—tells Irene how, after her father's death, she left behind the black neighborhood of her adolescence and began passing for white, hiding her true identity from everyone, including her racist husband. As Clare begins inserting herself into Irene's life, Irene is thrown into a panic, terrified of the consequences of Clare's dangerous behavior. And when Clare witnesses the vibrancy and energy of the community she left behind, her burning desire to come back threatens to shatter her careful deception.

***Ragtime* - E.L. Doctorow (1975)** Published in 1975, *Ragtime* changed our very concept of what a novel could be. An extraordinary tapestry, *Ragtime* captures the spirit of America in the era between the turn of the century & the First World War. The story opens in 1906 in New Rochelle, NY, at the home of an affluent American family. One lazy Sunday afternoon, the famous escape artist Harry Houdini swerves his car into a telephone pole outside their house. Almost magically, the line between fantasy & historical fact, between real & imaginary characters, disappears. Henry Ford, Emma Goldman, J.P. Morgan, Evelyn Nesbit, Sigmund Freud & Emiliano Zapata slip in & out of the tale, crossing paths with Doctorow's imagined family & other fictional characters, including an immigrant peddler & a ragtime musician from Harlem whose insistence on a point of justice drives him to revolutionary violence.

***Siddhartha* - Herman Hesse (1922)** Herman Hesse's classic novel has delighted, inspired, and influenced generations of readers, writers, and thinkers. In this story of a wealthy Indian Brahmin who casts off a life of privilege

to seek spiritual fulfillment. Hesse synthesizes disparate philosophies--Eastern religions, Jungian archetypes, Western individualism--into a unique vision of life as expressed through one man's search for true meaning.

***The Street* - Ann Petry - (1946)** *The Street* tells the poignant, often heartbreaking story of Lutie Johnson, a young black woman, and her spirited struggle to raise her son amid the violence, poverty, and racial dissonance of Harlem in the late 1940s. Originally published in 1946 and hailed by critics as a masterwork, *The Street* was Ann Petry's first novel, a beloved bestseller with more than a million copies in print. Its haunting tale still resonates today.

***The Woman Warrior* - Maxine Hong Kingston (1976)** A five-part genre-bending work considering immigration, class, and Chinese-American identity, *The Woman Warrior* sketches a nuanced portrait of the artist as a young woman. Mixing together myth and memoir, fantasy and fact, Kingston reflects on her childhood, the lives of her mother and aunts, and her awakening as a writer.