

2020 Summer Reading: A.P. Language and Composition

I encourage you to read these novels for the enrichment I explain below. Reading the following fictional novels requires viewing them in a different way, looking for five elements other than a plot or antagonist. In AP Lang we concentrate on what writing tricks (strategies) the author employs to achieve his **purpose**, what caused him to create his **message**, (**exigence**), the **audience**, and also the **context** in history.

One comment from the College Board has been that students do not have enough practice reading language, ideas, sentence structure, and syntax from other centuries. Every document, speech, or letter you read in AP Lang is based in a historical context that we cannot ignore. People always write what they live. These classic novels from different centuries reveal so much about the times in which they were written. (context) We cannot ignore the past because it creates the foundation and literature for the present. By reading literature, whether it is nonfiction or fiction, you will gain an understanding of the times in which they were written (context) and therefore help you transfer that understanding to non-fiction pieces you read later.

Warning and Disclaimer: Each novel reveals a dark message about human behavior and society. The language, settings, big ideas, and messages may be uncomfortable to read, but this is often the author's strategy for communicating the message. If we ignore reading literature from the past because we judge it from our present perspective, then we are cheating ourselves out of a valuable understanding of why we feel as we do today.

The Scarlet Letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne

This was written by Hawthorne as an atonement for the tragedy of the Salem Witch Trials. (exigence)

In seventeenth-century New England, Hester Prynne is condemned by Puritan law to wear a scarlet "A" as the symbol of the sin she has committed. There are strong themes of revenge, deception, forgiveness, honesty, humility in this book. which plays off the **context**. Do your best to skim through the alternating descriptive chapters, noting the author's writing style and heavy diction. Look up some of the words you do not know. **skip the first CHAPTER: "the customs house"**

The multiple-choice exam dictates that the student must be able to look deeply into a passage and see beyond the words. The questions are made to utilize critical thinking skills that one needs to pick apart *The Scarlet Letter*.

Walden, by Henry David Thoreau

In the 19th The Transcendentalist movement emerged. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thoreau were groundbreaking authors who challenged their 1800's contemporaries' concern with materialism. Thoreau was also the first author to write about civil disobedience as a means of protest. He influenced Gandhi and later Martin Luther King. In Walden, Thoreau takes a year of his life, live in the woods alone with only the bare necessities to see what he could learn about himself and society. Pay close attention to his reportorial style of writing, the exigency, context, and audience. Note the detailed figurative language he uses to create his documentary. YOU will use this skill constantly in rhetorical analysis.

In Cold Blood, by Truman Capote It was written to document the Herbert Clutter murders. The author does extensive research on these murders and on the criminal Clutter himself in order to get his message across. Without this skill, you will not be able to properly answer your free-response questions adequately. After all, the most important piece of the free-response essay is your argument. You need to

be able to make a claim and support it as Capote does. Also, the non-fiction element of Capote's work relates well to other passages that you will see on your multiple-choice section of the AP® English Language exam.

Their Eyes were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

It is considered a classic of the Harlem Renaissance. The novel explores the main character Janie Crawford's growth from a "vibrant but voiceless teenage girl into a woman with her finger on the trigger of destiny. It has been regarded as influential to both African-American literature and women's literature". This is a great piece for understanding historical context.

Optional, short read that everyone seems to love: **The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath**- this easy read chronicles the mental breakdown of Esther Greenwood—a brilliant, beautiful, talented, and successful young woman. Some claim this is the author's autobiography. The context, message, and audience are important changes from the other books.

In addition, because so many of the AP Language and Composition prompts concern contemporary issues, it is very important that you read up on international and national news. **Every day**, make a point to read or watch news-related articles or programs from two very different sources. **If you choose an online news source, read at least two very different versions of the same news articles, and become especially aware of bias and logical fallacies.** This is something that will be very important when we learn how to write an argument. Become acquainted with specific names of people, places, and events that are often referenced in AP exam excerpts on contemporary topics.