

Pleasantville High School

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English 4 Advanced Placement Language and Composition

Mr. Weems

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Summer Reading and Writing Assignments

Congratulations on being recommended for *English 4 Advanced Placement Language and Composition*, and welcome. I look forward to working with you next year. We have ahead of us a great amount of interesting material to consider and challenging activities to attempt. From the start, I want you to know that I come to class each day with the assumption that you enjoy reading, analysis, and writing, and that honest discussions about literature interest you as well. I expect each student to contribute to our class community as it teases out meaning, tone, and so on in our readings, and to listen/respond respectfully to the ideas others express in class.

We will explore what writing reveals to us about humanity and what connections exist between various art forms and aesthetic, political, and/or philosophical movements in our culture. We will also devote a good amount of our study to understanding and appreciating writing style. You will acquire a vocabulary with which to discuss writing style, and you will be expected to develop your ability to apply that vocabulary to the texts you will read. The nature of the course is designed to integrate the close examination of texts with the student's own experimentation with writing. A successful AP student will not only enjoy reading, but also have a strong desire to explore the possibilities of the written word. I will also work with you to continue the work you have been doing all your life to develop your own writing skills, with the long-term goal of not just refining your writing skills but also of developing/refining your own writing voice. You will be asked to write often and in many different modes. Overall, the curriculum will prepare you for the Advanced Placement Examination in English Language and Composition, which is offered in May. In addition, it will prepare you for the rigors of a standard college-level rhetoric and composition course. In order to begin to prepare you, I am giving you the following reading and writing assignments.

Assignment One: Preparing a glossary of literary terms

In getting ready for the AP Language and Composition test, it is important to get to know the basic literary terms that will be used on the test, as well as referred to in a college rhetoric course. I could compile a list for you, and as a matter of fact, the AP practice book we will use during the year will have a glossary. However, I thought it might be more productive if you were to compile your own glossary. In order to do so, I want you to do a little research. Find books, internet sites, etc., which give lists of common literary terms, especially those used on the AP Language and Composition exam. I want you to compile a list of at least 25 terms, along

with a brief definition for each that is understandable to you. Please don't simply copy the definition from the source. Make the definition yours! It will be a much better learning experience. Please type these terms and file them in a notebook to be checked when the course begins in September.

Assignment Two: Summer reading assignments

Over the summer, I expect you to read two books. Each is different and should be looked at as a unique reading experience. You are going to need to obtain these books on your own. You may borrow them from the library, but I would suggest purchasing them. Here are the titles, along with a description of the books from Amazon.com:

***The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho**

Brazilian storyteller Paulo Coelho introduces Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who one night dreams of a distant treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. And so he's off: leaving Spain to literally follow his dream. Along the way he meets many spiritual messengers, who come in unassuming forms such as a camel driver and a well-read Englishman.

***The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien**

The Things They Carried plays with truth. The narrator of most of these stories is "Tim"; yet O'Brien freely admits that many of the events he chronicles in this collection never really happened.... But just because a thing never happened doesn't make it any less true.... Every story in *The Things They Carried* speaks another truth that Tim O'Brien learned in Vietnam; it is this blurred line between truth and reality, fact and fiction that makes his book unforgettable. --*Alix Wilber*

***V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore and David Lloyd.**

A powerful story about the loss of freedom and individuality. *V for Vendetta* takes place in a totalitarian England following a devastating war that changed the face of the planet. In a world without political freedom, personal freedom and precious little faith in anything comes a mysterious man in a white porcelain mask who fights political oppressors through terrorism and seemingly absurd acts. It's a gripping tale of the blurred lines between ideological good and evil.

Assignment Three: a personal essay:

After reading the first two books (*The Alchemist* and *The Things They Carried*), write a personal essay in which you discuss your experience of reading these two books. Along with discussion of your general experience(s), please include your answers to the following questions: Did you enjoy reading one book more than the other, and if so, why? Did you find yourself more emotionally involved in the characters’ experiences in one book over the others? To what extent did you notice, and perhaps appreciate, the writing style of each author? What questions, if any, do you have about any of the books? (Order your thoughts – including your answers to these questions – in whatever way feels natural to you, but be sure your reader can see the order you have created.)

This essay should be at least three typed pages in length – but not more than five typed pages. I want it written in MLA style. It should be double spaced all the way through, with the proper MLA heading as follows:

| |
|----------------|
| Your Name |
| Mr. Weems |
| English 4 AP |
| Date |
| Title of Essay |

Also, you should include a header, which appears at the top right of each page, with your last name and the page number. DO NOT simply type these items at the top of each page; use your word processor’s Header function so that it automatically does this (most major word processors have this function, consult your manual or an expert if you do not know how to do this).

Please note that a personal essay allows for more writing freedom than the traditional expository essay does. Unlike a formal, scholarly essay, a personal essay allows you the freedom to ask questions, to tell stories, to be free to express yourself as you wish. You do not need a thesis; in fact, you can begin with a story, a declaration, a quote, or anything else you like. From there, go where you wish, provided that you stay focused on discussing your experience with, and thoughts about, the three books. Write from a personal point of view (use “I”) and be honest. Feel free to express first thoughts and later thoughts, puzzling aspects of the book(s), connections you see to other books or to your own experiences, and so on.

In addition to what I’ve specified above, I will look for evidence of genuine reading, so refer to details – and possibly even passages – from the books. I will expect your essay to be cohesive and technically accurate. To be consistent, use the present tense to discuss the events in each book.

For the third book, *V for Vendetta*, you must do something a little different. The novel is what is called a “graphic novel.” It uses the comic book form, but it is not a superhero story or a kid’s book. As a graphic novel, the art work plays an important role in the story as well as the words. I want you to write a separate reaction essay (at least a page and a half) commenting on the message of this story and similar reactions as you did to the other two books. However, I want you to comment also specifically on the graphic form. What did you think of the comic style in general? Did it work for the story? Point out specific places where the art was effective, confusing, etc. Have you read any other graphic novels? Would you read another?

I will collect these essays on the first day of class, and I will grade them; that grade will count as a major grade for the marking period. Please print a second copy of your personal essay for use in class discussion.

Assignment Four: Close Readings of two paragraphs—choose one paragraph from each book: *The Things They Carried* and *The Alchemist*.

We will devote the first few weeks of school to discussion and follow-up activities related to your reading of the novels by Coelho and O’Brien. Please choose from each book a single paragraph that you would be interested in discussing with the class and/or exploring further. Soon into the school year, you will likely be asked to lead a discussion on a passage from one of the books. Be sure to include on each of your copies the page number on which the paragraph is found. In September, you will be doing a *close reading* of each paragraph, examining what you found there, examining how the language was used in that paragraph, so make sure you choose a paragraph where the language is particularly vibrant and affected you in some way. This type of analysis is typical on the AP Language and Composition test, as well as in a college English course.

Enjoy the books and your summer. If there is anything you do not understand about these assignments, please contact me over the summer via my e-mail address listed at the top of this handout. I look forward to seeing you in September and to sharing a year of learning with you. I can’t wait to hear what you think about the books!

—Mr. Weems