

2019-2020

Greetings Class of 2020!

First of all, let me applaud you for choosing to continue the rigor and challenge of Advanced Placement classes at Martin High School. While I am sure that you understand that the work involved is arduous, you also anticipate the preparedness that a course such as AP Literature will provide for your college career. Not only do you have the opportunity to obtain college credit through this course by taking the AP Literature and Composition Exam in May, you also will be exposed to college-level reading and writing tasks. Our goal for AP Literature students is that every student learns to understand ambiguous texts by engaging in disciplined thought.

So how does one learn to understand ambiguous texts? How does one gain the discipline to read and think and engage with written text? The answer: practice. Thankfully, reading is a skill like riding a bike—it is something we learn as children, and rarely does this skill escape our memory. However, the complexity and quality of those skills may improve or digress over time. Let me explain this way: when I was a child, I rode my bicycle nearly every day. I could ride with no hands, using just my body to balance and even turn corners. I could also jump curbs and pop wheelies. Today, nearly 40 years later, I am still able to ride a bike, but because I don't ride and practice bicycle tricks every day, I would probably end up in the local emergency care center if I tried any of those tricks. My skills aren't as sharp as they once were due to lack of practice. I have noticed a similar truth about reading and reading fluency. If I do not read with regularity and discipline, my reading fluency decreases, I become frustrated with reading, and I am not as apt to engage thoughtfully with the text. Thankfully, with practice, I can become a better reader. So can you. I want to provide you with as many opportunities as possible to read critically. During the year, each student will independently read at least two novels and two plays from a College Board reading list. (Parents should be aware that many of these novels focus on mature and/or controversial subjects and themes.) We will also read four-five novels and/or plays together as class study that are suggested by the College Board, as well as an array of poetry.

Let me get to the *real* question on everyone's mind: what is the summer read, and why must we have one? Many question the purpose of a summer reading assignment. The goal of a summer reading assignment is not to make students of southwest Arlington miserable, to encourage them to stay inside and live the life of a hermit, or to punish students for taking advanced classes. The purpose of this summer reading assignment isn't to "weed out" students or even to get a head start on the school year. The purpose of this summer reading assignment is to encourage students to practice reading with disciplined thought while engaging with the text. I know that reading fluency can improve every time we pick up a book, but I also know that reading fluency can decline if we avoid reading. I want to encourage you to read every day. Go to the beach, visit the mountains, work a summer job, sleep until noon—but please, every day read literature that will challenge you to become a more disciplined and insightful thinker.

We will begin the year studying the archetypal journey and symbols. Over the summer, I'd like for you to choose one of the novels listed at the end of this letter to read and annotate. What do you annotate? Anything that might have to do with a journey. There is a list of questions you may want to consider as you read on the back of this handout. **Write these ideas on sticky-notes or in the margins of your book. It is important that you annotate as you read. When you return to school in August, you will turn in your books for an annotation grade.** (Your annotations will serve as an excellent way to review for the AP exam in May.) Our discussion will then ensue, looking at archetypes and symbols, and using Thomas C. Foster's *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* as a resource. This book might serve you well as you study literature; you may want to dust off your copy from your study in PAP English II.

Often students ask if there are other books which I recommend in addition to the books on the summer reading list. You may want to read Chopin's *The Awakening* and review *The Grapes of Wrath* since they will be frequently referenced next year. You might also check the website for the Pulitzer Prize Fiction winners and finalists for good reads, as often times portions of these novels are seen on the AP Literature and Composition exam which I encourage you to take in May. It is beneficial to become accustomed to the complexity and challenges that these novels offer. If you would like to get a head start on the novels that we will read together as a class, you can read *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, *Heart*

of *Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, and/or *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Because one of the most time consuming aspects of your senior year is completing the acceptance and scholarship application processes, I also encourage you to use the summer to explore college web sites and to peruse online application and essay topics. In late fall when you actually get started, you should already be knowledgeable about what you must do, not only to meet academic deadlines, but also to present yourself to acceptance and scholarship committees in the most impressive “package” possible.

Your senior year will be one of the most exciting yet challenging of your educational experience: the initiation which began with learning the ABCs will now culminate as you make college choices and ponder lifelong career plans. Indeed, I am privileged to have the opportunity of monitoring your progress along this last stage of your high school journey. AP English IV is a time both to perfect and to celebrate your writing and reading accomplishments, so bring your annotated novel to class the first day when we launch your last first day of classes at MHS!

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask via email—rdunn1@aisd.net. Have a wonderful summer!

2018 Summer Reading Novel Choices

1. ***The Shipping News* by Annie Proulx** Quoyle, a hapless father of two young girls, returns to his ancestral home in Newfoundland and struggles to reclaim his life. Quoyle confronts his personal demons, along with the unpredictability of the Newfoundland climate and the seeming predictability of small-town life.
2. ***All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy** This is the tale 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. (from penquinrandomhouse.com)
3. ***Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier** Sorely wounded and fatally disillusioned in the fighting at Petersburg, a Confederate soldier named Inman decides to walk back to his home in the Blue Ridge mountains to Ada, the woman he loves. His trek across the disintegrating South brings him into intimate and sometimes lethal converse with slaves and marauders, bounty hunters and witches, both helpful and malign. At the same time, the intrepid Ada is trying to revive her father’s derelict farm and learning to survive in a world where the old certainties have been swept away. As it interweaves their stories, *Cold Mountain* asserts itself as an authentic odyssey, hugely powerful, majestically lovely, and keenly moving.
4. ***The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien** They carried malaria tablets, love letters, 28-pound mine detectors, dope, illustrated bibles, each other. And if they made it home alive, they carried unrelenting images of a nightmarish war that history is only beginning to absorb. Since its first publication, *The Things They Carried* has become an unparalleled Vietnam testament, a classic work of American literature, and a profound study of men at war that illuminates the capacity, and the limits, of the human heart and soul.
5. ***Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain** According to Ernest Hemingway, it was the "one book" from which "all modern American literature" came, and contemporary critics and scholars have treated it as one of the greatest American works of art. *Huckleberry Finn* chronicles Huck’s journey down the Mississippi with Jim, a runaway slave. Huck struggles with his ideas about basic decency and societal ideas about slavery and race.

Questions to guide your annotation:

- Where do the characters begin? What motivates the characters to begin? What is the purpose of the trip?
- What is the setting like at the beginning? How does the setting change?
- What obstacles do the characters face? How do the characters respond?
- Where do the characters end? How do the characters develop over the course of the journey?