

May 2009

Dear Future Honors American Literature Student:

Welcome to Honors American Literature! This course is designed to give you the opportunity to challenge yourself with powerful literature, invigorating class discussions, analytical and creative writing, and high-level thinking. It is generally more demanding than your previous class experience and will require your hard work and commitment to learning. We hope that you will find the course enjoyable as well as challenging.

Our reading will focus on classics in American literature as well as historical events and movements associated with them. In order to use class time efficiently, you will read your first ALIS (American Literature Independent Study) novels this summer. **Please select and read two novels** from the list below. Choose your novels carefully as one of your choices will guide your ALIS focus for the entire year.

Anthem, Ayn Rand
The Martian Chronicles, Ray Bradbury
The Things They Carried, Tim O'Brien
Fallen Angels, Walter Dean Meyers
All Quiet on the Western Front, Eric
Marie Remarque
A Raisin in the Sun, Lorraine Hansberry
The Color of Water, James McBride
Yellow Raft on Blue Water, Michael
Dorris

The Glass Castle, Jeanette Walls
Bless Me, Ultima, Rudolfo Anaya
The Secret Life of Bees, Sue Monk Kidd
My Antonia, Willa Cather
The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway
The Shining, Stephen King
Ghost Story, Peter Straub
The Tortilla Curtain, T.C. Boyle

Directions for analysis:

Read your novels as an active reader, always with a pen in hand. As you read, please annotate (write in the margins or use sticky notes) by doing the following:

1. Before you even begin, make observations and form predictions about the text and its title. Form those ideas into questions that can guide your reading; try to answer those questions as you read.
2. Read thoughtfully; as a good annotator, you should always monitor your comprehension, predict, agree and disagree, recall related experiences, ask questions, and connect the text to your life, other texts, and our society. Further directions and expectations follow on the next page.
3. *Bring your annotated books on the first day of class*; if you have questions, please email one of the Honors American Literature teachers.
4. **Bring your annotated books the first class day; if you have questions, please email one of the teachers.**

In the first week of class, you will write an in-class response which makes an argument about the significance of one concrete or abstract motif and its relationship to a thematic idea in the text. A motif is a repeated symbol. Concrete motifs are tangible or discernable (like a red hunting hat, the color pink, or a blue sky), whereas abstract motifs are ideas (like loneliness or fear). Be certain that your end-of-chapter reflections make observations about this focus.

We look forward to meeting you in August.

Mrs. Ackerman
Mrs. Davis
Mrs. Lee
Mr. Robinson

Annotate Without Fear!

As you read any text, your goal is to *produce* information instead of merely absorbing or accepting it. With a feisty pen in hand, seek continually to make connections, ask questions, do reflections over character changes, relationships between plot elements, etc. as you read.

Step One: Pick a good pen.

Step Two: Fill up the margins with you, you, you. Consider yourself as important as (if not more important than) the author of the text you're reading.

Making Good Connections

Here are some ideas for types of connections to make (these are just to get you started—you do not need to limit yourself to them):

Text-to-self (T-S): Connections between the text and your life

- Ex: Anderton's paranoia reminds me of my own concerns about my students growing too reliant on technology.

Text-to-text (T-T): Connections between the text and any other novel, story, film, poem, song, etc.

- Ex: The society in *Minority Report* seems empty, shallow and corrupt like the society in *Fahrenheit 451*.

Text-to-world (T-W): Connections between the text and the real world

- Ex: The interactive billboards and signs at the Gap in *Minority Report* reflect the increasingly personalized approach that Amazon.com and other web companies are taking.

How to Ask a Great Question

As you read, try to put your confusion and desire for explanation into the form of authentic questions. An authentic question is question that has no easy answer; it is a question that sparks lively discussion and debate.

Examples: (When you write these questions, make them specific—address specific characters and passages directly)

- What does this passage reveal about this character?
- What motivates this person to behave this way?
- Why do you think this character says this about that character?
- Why does this character react this way? Would you have reacted the same way?
- What does the author want us to think about this character?
- What might this object symbolize? Why do you think the author brings it up several times? What does this object have to do with this character?
- Why do you think the author compares ____ to ____? What is significant about this metaphor?
- Why is the author's unusual style or grammar significant in this passage?
- Through these descriptions, what larger statement is the author making about society? Human nature?
- What are we supposed to learn from...?
- What would have happened if...?

Preparing for the first week of class:

- Bring your annotated books the first class day; if you have questions, please email one of the teachers.
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