

Honors English II Summer Reading 2015-16

Due the first day of class

Overview:

In Honors English II we will explore an array of global literature—voices from around the world that speak profoundly to the cultural and historical perspectives they represent. These writings will explore a vast expanse of issues ranging from the abuse of power and the horrors of war, to the consequences of cultural conflict and the benefits and burdens of social change, to the search for truth and meaning and the transformational power of the hero's journey. This summer reading assignment (you must do **PART I** and **PART II**) will help you to enter the course with some background on the essential questions, ideas, and concepts we will be dealing with during the semester.

I look upon travel as a means of spiritual testing. What gives value to travel is fear. It is the fact that, at a certain moment, we are so far from our country . . . we are seized by an instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits. This is the most obvious benefit of travel. At that moment, we are feverish, but also porous, so that the slightest touch makes us quiver to the depth of our being. By exercising our most intimate senses, we understand a culture. It is through travel that we learn about ourselves. (*Albert Camus*)

Paraphrase the above quote. What does it suggest about reading literature from around the world? On a separate sheet of paper, write or type your detailed response.

PART I: *THE GOOD EARTH* (Bring the book to class.)

- Read *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck. Before you read the book, visit the following website: <http://www.psbi.org/document.doc?id=128> (a pdf file that can be downloaded and printed) and read the biographical section, research and write definitions for the words in the “Words to Research” section, and look over the character list.
- **Do the fifty questions from the webpage above as you read the book.** You will hand these in on the first day of class. We will discuss this book further in class.

PART II: GLOBAL LITERATURE BOOK OF CHOICE (Bring the book to class.)

Purchase one book from the following list. You will read and annotate it, and then you will prepare a book talk on the world of the book to present to your classmates.

PLEASE NOTE: Some books may contain language and situations intended for mature readers. You should have parent or guardian approval in selecting the book you read.

Novels

Cry, The Beloved Country by Alan Paton

In the Time of Butterflies or *Before We Were Free* by Julia Alvarez

Life of Pi by Yan Martel

The Book Thief by Marcus Zuzak

The Septembers of Shiraz by Dalia Sofer

Fantasy Novel

The Braided Path by Donna Glee Williams

Graphic Novel

Maus: A Survivor's Tale, Part I by Art Spiegelman

Graphic Memoir

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by Marjane Satrapi

Nonfiction

A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beh

God Grew Tired of Us: A Memoir by John Bul Dau

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban by Malala Yousafzai

Thura's Diary: A Young Girl's Life in War-Torn Baghdad by Thura Al-Windawi

During the process of reading the book, you must **annotate the text**. (Since you own the book, it is ok if you mark in it. Go ahead—you won't get in trouble! Sticky-notes will work, also, but they sometimes fall off the page.)

For instructions on why and how to annotate a text, read the following humorous (but serious, too!) 1941 article by Mortimer Adler.

(The article is followed by some additional tips on what annotation entails, as well as instructions for your book talk.)

HOW TO MARK A BOOK¹

by Mortimer J. Adler

You know you have to read "between the lines" to get the most out of anything. I want to persuade you to do something equally important in the course of your reading. I want to persuade you to "write between the lines." Unless you do, you are not likely to do the most efficient kind of reading.

I contend, quite bluntly, that marking up a book is not an act of mutilation but of love. You shouldn't mark up a book which isn't yours. Librarians (or your friends) who lend you books expect you to keep them clean, and you should. If you decide that I am right about the usefulness of marking books, you will have to buy them. Most of the world's great books are available today, in reprint editions, at less than a dollar.

There are two ways in which one can own a book. The first is the property right you establish by paying for it, just as you pay for clothes and furniture. But this act of purchase is only the prelude to possession. Full ownership comes only when you have made it a part of yourself, and the best way to make yourself a part of it is by writing in it. An illustration may make the point clear. You buy a beefsteak and transfer it from the butcher's icebox to your own. But you do not own the beefsteak in the most important sense until you consume it and get it into your bloodstream. I am arguing that books, too, must be absorbed in your bloodstream to do you any good.

Confusion about what it means to *own* a book leads people to a false reverence for paper, binding, and type—a respect for the physical thing—the craft of the printer rather than the genius of the author. They forget that it is possible for a man to acquire the idea, to possess the beauty, which a great book contains, without staking his claim by pasting his bookplate inside the cover. Having a fine library doesn't prove that its owner has a mind enriched by books; it proves nothing more than that he, his father, or his wife, was rich enough to buy them.

There are three kinds of book owners. The first has all the standard sets and best-sellers—unread, untouched. (This deluded individual owns wood-pulp and ink, not books.) The second has a great many books—a few of them read through, most of them dipped into, but all of them as clean and shiny as the day they were bought. (This person would probably like to make books his own, but is restrained by a false respect for their physical appearance.) The third has a few books or many—every one of them dog-eared and dilapidated, shaken and loosened by continual use, marked and scribbled in from front to back. (This man owns books.)

Is it false respect, you may ask, to preserve intact and unblemished a beautifully printed book, an elegantly bound edition? Of course not. I'd no more scribble all over a first edition of *Paradise Lost* than I'd give my baby a set of crayons and an original Rembrandt! I wouldn't mark up a painting or a statue. Its soul, so to speak, is inseparable from its body. And the beauty of a rare edition or of a richly manufactured volume is like that of a painting or a statue.

But the soul of a book *can* be separated from its body. A book is more like the score of a piece of music than it is like a painting. No great musician confuses a symphony with the printed sheets of music. Arturo Toscanini reveres Brahms, but Toscanini's score of the C-minor Symphony is so thoroughly marked up that no one but the maestro himself can read it. The reason why a great conductor makes notations on his musical scores—marks them up again and again each time he returns to study them—is the reason why you should mark your books. If your respect for magnificent binding or typography gets in the way, buy yourself a

cheap edition and pay your respects to the author.

Why is marking up a book indispensable to reading? First, it keeps you awake. (And I don't mean merely conscious; I mean wide awake.) In the second place, reading, if it is active, is thinking, and thinking tends to express itself in words, spoken or written. The marked book is usually the thought-through book. Finally, writing helps you remember the thoughts you had, or the thoughts the author expressed. Let me develop these three points.

If reading is to accomplish anything more than passing time, it must be active. You can't let your eyes glide across the lines of a book and come up with an understanding of what you have read. Now an ordinary piece of light fiction, like, say, *Gone with the Wind*, doesn't require the most active kind of reading. The books you read for pleasure can be read in a state of relaxation, and nothing is lost. But a great book, rich in ideas and beauty, a book that raises and tries to answer great fundamental questions, demands the most active reading of which you are capable. You don't absorb the ideas of John Dewey the way you absorb the crooning of Mr. Vallee (*a popular singer of Adler's time*). You have to reach for them. That you cannot do while you're asleep.

If, when you've finished reading a book, the pages are filled with your notes, you know that you read actively. The most famous *active* reader of great books I know is President Hutchins, of the University of Chicago. He also has the hardest schedule of business activities of any man I know. He invariably reads with a pencil, and sometimes, when he picks up a book and pencil in the evening, he finds himself, instead of making intelligent notes, drawing what he calls "caviar factories" on the margins. When that happens, he puts the book down. He knows he's too tired to read, and he's just wasting time.

But, you may ask, why is writing necessary? Well, the physical act of writing, with your own hand, brings words and sentences more sharply before your mind and preserves them better in your memory. To set down your reaction to important words and sentences you have read, and the questions they have raised in your mind, is to preserve those reactions and sharpen those questions.

Even if you wrote on a scratch pad, and threw the paper away when you had finished writing, your grasp of the book would be surer. But you don't have to throw the paper away. The margins (top and bottom, as well as side), the end-papers, the very space between the lines, are all available. They aren't sacred. And, best of all, your marks and notes become an integral part of the book and stay there forever. You can pick up the book the following week or year, and there are all your points of agreement, disagreement, doubt, and inquiry. It's like resuming an interrupted conversation with the advantage of being able to pick up where you left off.

And that is exactly what reading a book should be: a conversation between you and the author. Presumably he or she knows more about the subject than you do; naturally, you'll have the proper humility as you approach him. But don't let anybody tell you that a reader is supposed to be solely on the receiving end. Understanding is a two-way operation; learning doesn't consist in being an empty receptacle. The learner has to question himself and question the teacher. He even has to argue with the teacher, once he understands what the teacher is saying. And marking a book is literally an expression of your differences, or agreements of opinion, with the author.

There are all kinds of devices for marking a book intelligently and fruitfully. Here's the way I do it:

1. *Underlining*: of major points, of important or forceful statements.
2. *Vertical lines at the margin*: to emphasize a statement already underlined.
3. *Star, asterisk, or other doo-dad at the margin*: to be used sparingly, to emphasize the ten or twenty most important statements in the book. (You may want to fold the bottom corner of

each page on which you use such marks. It won't hurt the sturdy paper on which most modern books are printed, and you will be able to take the book off the shelf at any time and, by opening it at the folded-corner page, refresh your recollection of the book.)

4. *Numbers in the margin*: to indicate the sequence of points the author makes in developing a single argument.

5. *Numbers of other pages in the margin*: to indicate where else in the book the author made points relevant to the point marked; to tie up the ideas in a book, which, though they may be separated by many pages, belong together.

6. *Circling of key words or phrases*.

7. *Writing in the margin, or at the top or bottom of the page, for the sake of*: recording questions (and perhaps answers) which a passage raised in your mind; reducing a complicated discussion to a simple statement; recording the sequence of major points right through the books. I use the end-papers at the back of the book to make a personal index of the author's points in the order of their appearance. The front end-papers are, to me, the most important. Some people reserve them for a fancy bookplate. I reserve them for fancy thinking. After I have finished reading the book and making my personal index on the back end-papers, I turn to the front and try to outline the book, not page by page, or point by point (I've already done that at the back), but as an integrated structure, with a basic unity and an order of parts. This outline is, to me, the measure of my understanding of the work.

If you're a die-hard anti-book-marker, you may object that the margins, the space between the lines, and the end-papers don't give you room enough. All right. How about using a scratch pad slightly smaller than the page-size of the book—so that the edges of the sheets won't protrude? Make your index, outlines, and even your notes on the pad, and then insert these sheets permanently inside the front and back covers of the book.

Or, you may say that this business of marking books is going to slow up your reading. It probably will. That's one of the reasons for doing it. Most of us have been taken in by the notion that speed of reading is a measure of our intelligence. There is no such thing as the right speed for intelligent reading. Some things should be read quickly and effortlessly, and some should be read slowly and even laboriously. The sign of intelligence in reading is the ability to read different things differently according to their worth. In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through you—how many you can make your own. A few friends are better than a thousand acquaintances. If this be your aim, as it should be, you will not be impatient if it takes more time and effort to read a great book than it does a newspaper.

You may have one final objection to marking books. You can't lend them to your friends because nobody else can read them without being distracted by your notes. Furthermore, you won't want to lend them because a marked copy is a kind of intellectual diary, and lending it is almost like giving your mind away.

If your friend wishes to read your *Plutarch's Lives*, Shakespeare, or *The Federalist Papers*, tell him or her gently but firmly, to buy a copy. You will lend someone your car or your coat—but your books are as much a part of you as your head or your heart.

¹From *The Saturday Review of Literature*, July 6, 1941. By permission of the author.

ANNOTATING THE BOOK YOU CHOSE

- **Required: a minimum of 50 insightful annotations.**

There are many ways to interact with the text as you read. Just record your thoughts as they pop into your head. Try these strategies:

- **Ask questions.** Is there something that confuses you? Write it down. You might find the answer later through discussion, research, or epiphany.
- **React.** Is there something that made you angry? Shocked you? Made you cry? Say so.
- **Give your opinion.** Is there something that you could have said better? Is this particular part of the book a work of sheer genius? Record your opinion.
- **Locate important passages.** Are there pages, paragraphs, or sentences that say something profound? Sound poetic? Make you say, “Wow”? Do they seem to hint at (or scream) the book’s theme? Copy them down and comment on them.
- **Connect to your life or to other works you have read.** This will help you to bring relevancy to what you read and spot archetypes and recurrent literary themes. Tell how it connects.
- **Bother to look up unfamiliar words.** They might be the key to accurate comprehension and interpretation. Jot down a short definition or synonym.
- **Track themes.** If you notice a recurring theme, start making note of the parts of the book which reveal it. Use a key word or phrase to indicate what the theme is.
- **Find examples of figurative language.** Extended metaphors, epic similes, personification—tell how these are used to contribute to a larger or overall meaning.
- **Title chapters that aren’t titled.** This will help you locate information later and remember what you have read.
- **Make predictions.** Are they accurate or not?
- **The world of the text.** What details help reveal the world of the text and its inhabitants?

BOOK TALK: FOCUS ON THE WORLD OF THE BOOK

Prepare a book talk on the world of the book (even if it is not a real place) to share with the class. You may create a multimedia presentation if you wish (PowerPoint, Prezi, etc.) to accompany your book talk. Save it on a USB drive. You will need to hand in a hard copy of your work, as well. Include the following:

1. How would you describe the world of the book? Is it a real place or a fictional setting? Does the author reveal the historical period? Country or locale? Season of the year? Weather? Time of day? What are the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells? What other details establish a sense of place in this book?
2. How does the setting affect the lives of the characters? Are the characters in conflict with the setting? If so, how? What do the characters want? Does the setting keep them from getting what they want? If so, how? What does the setting tell us about the characters? Describe their culture. What feelings or attitudes do the characters have toward the setting? Fear? Dislike? Respect? Other feelings or attitudes?
3. How would you describe the atmosphere or mood created by the setting? Is it gloomy? Cheerful? Mysterious? Threatening? Other descriptions?
4. Copy a passage from the text that you think best reveals the setting. Include the page number. What exactly *does* the passage reveal about the setting?
5. What elements of the book’s setting relate to your own experience?