

English II (Advanced Academics/GT)

Summer Assignment: To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee

The Novel: *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. (Available at local bookstore or on-line. Yes, there is an on-line (free) PDF, but that may cause you problems with annotations. (See below)

Why do we need a Summer Assignment?

The key to being an effective reader is to read extensively. Much like any other skill, reading comprehension improves with practice. Reading the works of great writers also aids us by expanding our vocabulary, improving our sentence structure, and refining our thinking processes; therefore, the key to being a great writer is exposure to (& learning from) the great writing of others. Reading is not something that we expect of you only during the school year, as life-long learners are also life-long readers. Reading and annotating allows students to digest the author's ideas prior to discussing those ideas or interpreting the author's writing techniques in class. It also reinforces the skills students should have already learned even while it keeps them in touch with the issues which other serious minds have wrestled with in their writing.

What we expect you to be able to do in this assignment:

- ✓ Read a literary work of fiction for the story, AND for critical analysis & historical context.
- ✓ Understand how a writer uses the “tools of language” to create a message & meaning.
- ✓ Think critically about the work itself and the thoughts communicated by the author.
- ✓ Explore your own beliefs, ideas, and feelings regarding this work and be prepared to discuss them, but also be prepared to write an evidence-based short analysis paper on it.

The Assignment itself:

1. Read the **WHOLE novel**, every word of it.
2. Keep notes in a notebook OR annotate the pages with “sticky notes”.
What do I put on those notes? Answer: 1. Words you don't know & then you find the definition (a short one! you'll remember. 2. A question you have about the story or the historical/social situation. 3. What you think MIGHT happen. Also, any images or turns of phrase you find interesting or disturbing. (on EVERY note, be sure to put the pg. #)
3. Make a list (on a separate piece of paper) of the characters, plus a few words about who each one is and what makes him or her tick. Just a few bullet points is all that's necessary. DO THIS FOR EVERY CHARACTER! -even the name of the DOG is important!
4. Be ready to take an objective test over the **WHOLE** novel on Day 1 of class. This is a tough test, asking questions about details in the novel, details NOT given in “on-line resources” or summary sites.
5. Be ready to discuss parts of the novel in class, and not in a “Well, I feeeeeeeel that.....” way. (We really don't have time for “sloppy thinking” not based on evidence.) Here, you respond, “I think that.....” and “I think this because.....” & you have a part of the text (w. pg. #) to back it up.

Background information:

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960 to critical and popular acclaim (*people liked it!*). It won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature and has become a standard piece of American fiction in the "literary canon" (*this is the list of books that well-read people generally agree are necessary to BE a "well-read person," a person who can think and converse intelligently with others*). The plot and the characters of *TKOM* are loosely based on Miss Lee's observations of her own childhood in Monroeville, Alabama; the time she focuses on is 1936, when she herself was 10 years old. The story is narrated a grown-up, Jean Louise Finch, telling the reader about the years when she was six and seven year-old "Scout." As a "genre" (*the "kind" of fiction it is: horror, rom-com, historical, etc.*), the novel is classified as a work of Southern Gothic American Literature. It explores a wide variety of themes common to that genre: racial tolerance and intolerance, class prejudice, gender roles, Southern small-town society: its roles & culture, and "the content of one's character."

Due Date: This assignment is to be fully completed when the student enters class on the first day of school.

Connections to other class work: In addition to the numerous assignments specifically on this novel, we will be referring to it through the year; there will be lessons for other works which will require you to cross-reference this novel. **FOR THIS REASON, it is extremely important that you read the whole book (& probably some sections more than once), and that you finish it before school begins.**

If you have questions, please e-mail me: rwightman@shermanisd.net

**Courage & cheer,
RNW**