

I am very excited about teaching next year's A. P. English Literature and Composition class. The information below describes your summer reading and essay assignment. I know that you will enjoy Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. The summer reading program is an important feature of the A. P. English program (and the English program as a whole), and it serves two functions: 1) to keep you active as readers, broadening your horizons, and 2) to forestall summer brain death through writing about what you have read. This important requirement will ease your transition into the A.P. Literature Program.

For one of the works that you read, you will write an essay of 750-1,000 words from the suggested topics. You should date your essay and write the starting and finishing time. As you read, take notes. This will assist you in writing the essay.

When you return in August, you will turn in your essay the first day of class.

If you need to speak with me, please call 726-9845. If email is more convenient, please contact me at gboyd@prhs.sau48.org.

The Works

**A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving

*Student's Choice (2): Go to from the College Board's "101 Great Books

Recommended for College-Bound Readers" and select **TWO NEW** reads. The list can be found at the following website: <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/plan/boost-your-skills/23628.html>.

The Assignment

For one of the works you read, you will write an essay of 750-1,000 words (about two typed, double-spaced pages) on one of the topics below. The year notation before each topic indicates the year in which the question appeared as an open-ended question (#3) on the AP English Literature examination.

- 1966: An individual's struggle toward understanding and awareness is the traditional subject for the novelist. In an **essay**, apply this statement to one novel of literary merit. Organize your **essay** according to the following plan: 1) Compare the hero as we see him in an early scene with the hero as we see him in a scene near the end of the novel. 2) Describe the techniques that the author uses to reveal the new understanding and awareness that the hero has achieved.
- 1967: Frequently in novels, an important character violates the laws, the conventions, the rules of conduct of a society. In presenting such characters and actions, the author's purpose may be (1) to arouse our sympathy for the character who is violating the rules of society; (2) to divide our interest sharply between sympathy for the character and desire to support the principles of society; (3) to arouse our "satiric mirth" at the character who is violating the principles of society; and (4) to laugh with the character at the conventions that are being violated. Write a well-organized essay, illustrating in some detail two or more of these purposes.
- 1971: In retrospect, the reader often discovers that the first chapter of a novel introduces some of the major themes of the work. Write an **essay** about the first chapter of a novel in which you explain how the chapter functions to set forth major themes.
- 1973-- An effective literary work does not merely stop or cease; it concludes. In the view of some critics, a work that does not provide the pleasure of significant closure has terminated with an artistic fault. A satisfactory ending is not, however, always conclusive in every sense; significant closure may require the reader to abide with or adjust to ambiguity and uncertainty. In an **essay**, discuss the ending of a novel or play of acknowledged literary merit. Explain precisely how and why the ending appropriately or inappropriately concludes the work. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**Mrs. Boyd
2009-2010
AP English Literature and Composition
Summer Reading Assignment**

- 1984: From a novel or play of literary merit, select an important character who is a villain. Then, in a well-organized **essay**, analyze the nature of the character's villainy and show how it enhances the meaning of the work. Do not merely summarize the plot.
- 1987: Some novels and plays seem to advocate changes in social or political attitudes or in traditions. Choose such a novel or play and note briefly the particular attitudes or traditions that the author apparently wishes to modify. Then analyze the techniques the author uses to influence the reader's or audience's views. Avoid plot summary.
- 1989: In questioning the value of literary realism, Flannery O'Connor has written, "I am interested in making a good case for distortion because I am coming to believe that it is the only way to make people see." Write an **essay** in which you "make a good case for distortion," as distinct from literary realism. Base your **essay** on a work from the following list or choose another work of comparable literary merit that you know well. Analyze how important elements of the work you choose are "distorted" and explain how these distortions contribute to the effectiveness of the work.
- 1990: Choose a novel or play that depicts a conflict between a parent (or a parental figure) and a son or daughter. Write an **essay** in which you analyze the sources of the conflict and explain how the conflict contributes to the meaning of the work.
- 1991: Many plays and novels use contrasting places (for example, two countries, two cities or towns, two houses, or the land and sea) to represent opposed forces or ideas that are central to the meaning of the work. Choose a novel or a play that contrasts two such places. Write an **essay** explaining how the places differ, what each place represents, and how their contrast contributes to the meaning of the work.
- 1992: In a novel or a play, a confidant (male) or confidante (female) is a character, often a friend or a relative of the hero or heroine, whose role is to be present when the hero or heroine needs a sympathetic listener to confide in. Frequently the result is, as Henry James remarked, that the confidant or confidante can be as much the "reader's friend as the protagonist's." However, the author sometimes uses this character for other purposes as well. Choose a confidant or confidante from a novel or play of recognized merit and write an **essay** in which you discuss the various ways this character functions in the work.
- 1994: In some works of literature, a character who appears briefly, or who does not appear at all, is a significant presence. Choose a novel or play of literary merit and write an **essay** in which you show how such a character affects action, theme, or the development of other characters. Avoid plot summary.
- 1995: Writers often highlight the values of a culture or a society by using characters who are alienated from that culture or society because of gender, race, class, or creed. Choose a play or a novel in which such a character plays a significant role and show how that character's alienation reveals the surrounding society's assumptions and moral values.
- 1996: The British novelist Fay Weldon offers this observation about happy endings: "The writers, I do believe, who get the best and most lasting response from readers are the writers who offer a happy ending through moral development. By a happy ending, I do not mean mere fortunate events*a marriage or a last-minute rescue from death*but some kind of spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation, even with the self, even at death." Choose a novel or play that has the kind of ending Weldon describes. In a well-written **essay**, identify the "spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation" evident in the ending and explain its significance in the work as a whole.
- 1997: Novels and plays often include scenes of weddings, funerals, parties, and other social occasions. Such scenes may reveal the values of the characters and the society in which they live. Select a novel or play that includes such a scene and, in a focused **essay**, discuss the contribution the scene makes to the meaning of the work as whole. You may choose a work from the list below or another novel or play of literary merit.