

Summer Reading 2018: AP English Language and Composition

The single biggest thing you can do to improve your writing and your critical reading is to READ. This year, I spent ample time talking to the juniors about adding sophistication to their writing; sophistication comes from word choice as well as tone, sentence structure, and creative confidence. My students asked how—"How can we write with more sophistication?" The answer? Read more. They moaned.

Constant exposure to quality writing will change and improve your writing. In the next year, you have a lot of work to do. You must learn to write, argue, and convince an audience beyond the English classroom. You are headed to college soon, and your words hold weight.

Because your school year is so busy, you should challenge yourself to read as much and as widely as you can this summer. Form book clubs with friends, join Goodreads, set a goal with a reward. Whatever it takes, you should be reading. Read newspapers, magazines, fiction, nonfiction.

You should read as much as possible over the summer, and along the way, you will read two books in preparation for our class. Please read carefully as both books will be used for class discussion and assignments in the early weeks of school. One will be the book everyone reads—*In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote. And the other will be your choice of one out of the five below. Please have a physical copy of your books for the beginning weeks of school. Your assignments below should be your own work without the aid of outside resources.

Everybody Reads:

***In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote— (ISBN-10: 0679745580)**

"Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans--in fact, few Kansans--had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there." If all Truman Capote did was invent a new genre--journalism written with the language and structure of literature--this "nonfiction novel" about the brutal slaying of the Clutter family by two would-be robbers would be remembered as a trail-blazing experiment that has influenced countless writers. But Capote achieved more than that. He wrote a true masterpiece of creative nonfiction. The images of this tale continue to resonate in our minds: 16-year-old Nancy Clutter teaching a friend how to bake a cherry pie, Dick Hickock's black '49 Chevrolet sedan, Perry Smith's Gibson guitar and his dreams of gold in a tropical paradise--the blood on the walls and the final "thud-snap" of the rope-broken necks. (From Amazon.com)

Summer Assignment for *In Cold Blood*, due on the first day of class:

- **Mark important passages** that you notice, like, or have questions about
- Choose **three passages** (one from beginning of book, one from middle, one from end), copy them with page numbers, and write a **brief response for each**, explaining why you chose this passage.
- Write **two thoughtful questions** you have about the book; these are not questions that can be answered with a yes or no, or even with one word. These questions would require some discussion or research. You do not need to write answers, just the questions.
- Please type all of these and double-space your responses (quotes can be single-spaced).

Choice Book:

Choose one of the following books to read in addition to *In Cold Blood*.

Summer Assignment for Choice Book, due on the first day of class:

- **Mark important passages** that you notice, like, or have questions about
- Write **two informal journal entries**. One should be written when you are half-way through the reading, and one at the end. These can be discussing the book itself—a character or a conflict—or they can be about something in life—a person you know who is experiencing a similar conflict or a current event that reminds you of the book. You have a lot of freedom with these two entries. The only requirement is that you are clear about the connection to the book and that they be at least a page double-spaced typed.

Haley, Alex and Malcolm X. ***The Autobiography of Malcolm X***.

Malcolm X's searing memoir belongs on the small shelf of great autobiographies. The reasons are many: the blistering honesty with which he recounts his transformation from a bitter, self-destructive petty criminal into an articulate political activist, the continued relevance of his militant analysis of white racism, and his emphasis on self-respect and self-help for African Americans. And there's the vividness with which he depicts black popular culture--try as he might to criticize those lindy hops at Boston's Roseland dance hall from the perspective of his Muslim faith, he can't help but make them sound pretty wonderful. These are but a few examples. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* limns an archetypal journey from ignorance and despair to knowledge and spiritual awakening. (From Amazon.com)

Karr, Mary. ***The Liar's Club***.

In this funny, razor-edged memoir, Mary Karr, a prize-winning poet and critic, looks back at her upbringing in a swampy East Texas refinery town with a volatile, defiantly loving family. She recalls her painter mother, seven times married, whose outlaw spirit could tip into psychosis; a fist-swinging father who spun tales with his cronies--dubbed the Liars' Club; and a neighborhood rape when she was eight. An inheritance was squandered, endless bottles emptied, and guns leveled at the deserving and undeserving. With a raw authenticity stripped of self-pity and a poet's eye for the lyrical detail, Karr shows us a "terrific family of liars and drunks ... redeemed by a slow unearthing of truth." (From Amazon.com)

Larsen, Erik. ***Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History***.

Torqued by drama and taut with suspense, this absorbing narrative of the 1900 hurricane that inundated Galveston, Tex., conveys the sudden, cruel power of the deadliest natural disaster in American history. Told largely from the perspective of Isaac Cline, the senior U.S. Weather Bureau official in Galveston at the time, the story considers an era when "the hubris of men led them to believe they could disregard even nature itself." (From *Publishers' Weekly*)

Strayed, Cheryl. ***Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail***.

At twenty-two, Cheryl Strayed thought she had lost everything. In the wake of her mother's death, her family scattered and her own marriage was soon destroyed. Four years later, ... [w]ith no experience or training, driven only by blind will, she would hike more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail from the Mojave Desert through California and Oregon to Washington State—and she would do it alone. Told with suspense and style, sparkling with warmth and humor, *Wild* powerfully captures the terrors and pleasures of one young woman forging ahead against all odds on a journey that maddened, strengthened, and ultimately healed her. (Amazon.com)

Wolff, Tobias. ***In Pharoah's Army***.

In *This Boy's Life* Tobias Wolf created an unforgettable memoir of an American childhood. Now he gives us a precisely and sometimes pitilessly remembered account of his young manhood - a young manhood that become entangled in the tragic adventure that was Vietnam. Mordantly funny, searingly honest, *In Pharoah's Army* is a war memoir in the tradition of [George Orwell](#) and [Michael Herr](#). (Amazon.com)