AP Literature and Composition Summer Assignment

“What an astonishing thing a book is. It's a flat object made from a tree with flexible parts on which are imprinted lots of funny dark squiggles. But one glance at it and you're inside the mind of another person, maybe somebody dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, an author is speaking clearly and silently inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs. Books break the shackles of time. A book is proof that humans are capable of working magic.”

[Cosmos, Part 11: The Persistence of Memory (1980)]”
— Carl Sagan, Cosmos

The primary purpose of the AP Literature and Composition class is to give students a college-level reading and writing course which prepares them not only to take the AP exam in May, but much more importantly to encounter sophisticated texts with confidence, independence, and critical inquiry, while exploring the art of the human mind and human creativity.

You will receive a detailed description of the course in August; however, for now, all I want you to do is focus on this pre-course assignment, which is designed to assist you in developing a strong schema (or framework) to help process and fully appreciate some of what we will work with next year.

All of the following assignments are due on the first day of school — No exceptions, so plan out your work. You are responsible for each assignment listed below unless it is optional (see instructions).

**REQUIRED:**

**TEXT:** The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde  
OR  
Frankenstein by Mary Shelley

**Assignments:**

- **Assignment 1:** Complete the allusions worksheet and define extra allusions per instructions. (See Page 2) You will have a quiz the first week of school over these allusions, and the worksheet will be checked and discussed.
- **Assignment 2:** Read the following poems (“Charon’s Cosmology,” “Odysseus,” and “Separation”), which contain mythic allusions and answer the questions following each. (See Page 3 and 4) – This exercise is not graded on a “correct” interpretation – I simply want to see how you think about poetry since we will work with A LOT of poetry this year.
- **Assignment 3 (optional):** Viewing of Hamlet (Kenneth Branagh Version if unfamiliar with the play).
- **Assignment 4:** Read The Picture of Dorian Gray or Frankenstein and complete the short essay assignment (see page 4) – **A few copies available for check-out – see me in room 131** [You have two text options based upon previous exposure with Dunn and Mills; if you have previously read one of the above, choose the text you have not read in a previous class].

- *****Optional ONLY:** Book list for some good titles to read if interested (see page 5)

Please feel free to contact me with questions over the summer. I may not respond immediately due to traveling, but I will respond.

Have a wonderful summer

Mr. Russell  
chad_russell@dpsk12.org
ALLUSIONS WORKSHEET

This is a “research” assignment of literary, Biblical and mythological allusions. On a separate sheet of paper please identify the source of the following allusions, what each means in the context of the original piece, and what each means now. These allusions often appear in both the essay and multiple-choice part of the test. Knowing where they come from and what they mean will help your understanding and analysis of literature. After completing the first ten, define the allusions listed at the bottom of the page, and try to write a one-sentence example of the allusion similar to the first ten. We will then be adding to the list as the year progresses.

EXAMPLE: ALLUSION: She went on a Quixotic adventure.

ORIGINAL SOURCE OF THE ALLUSION: Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes

WHAT IT MEANS IN THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT: Alonso Quixano was a man who whose imagination was captured by the Knights of the Round Table. He changed his name to Don Quixote and traveled the countryside rescuing people and getting into all sorts of trouble.

WHAT IT MEANS NOW: To go on an “impossible” quest – to be a bit of a dreamer with no real hope of being successful.

1. ALLUSION: He was “betrayed by a kiss.’
2. ALLUSION: As the cave’s roof collapsed, he was swallowed up in the dust like Jonah.
3. ALLUSION: “A weed by any other name is still a weed.”
4. ALLUSION: In the play Raisin in the Sun, George Murchison calls Walter Lee Younger “Prometheus.”
5. ALLUSION: Don’t go “tilting at windmills.”
6. ALLUSION: “I wash my hands of this!”
7. ALLUSION: Sometimes life seems like a Sisyphusian endeavor.
8. ALLUSION: He had the buffoonery of Falstaff tempting Prince Hal.
9. ALLUSION: It was a Herculean task.
10. ALLUSION: It felt like one of the nine levels of hell.

Other allusions: Define as the above example, but try to create an example similar to those found in one-ten above.

Poems to Read and Write About

“Charon's Cosmology” by Charles Simic (1938- )

With only his feeble lantern I'd say it doesn't matter
To tell him where he is No one complains he's got
And every time a mountain Their pockets to go through
Of fresh corpses to load up In one a crust of bread in another a sausage

Take them to the other side Once in a long while a mirror
Where there are plenty more Or a book which he throws
I'd say by now he must be confused Overboard into the dark river
As to which side is which Swift cold and deep

Why do you think Charles Simic uses no punctuation? Does it have anything to do with the tone of the speaker towards the topic?

In the third stanza, the speaker says, "No one complains.” Who does he mean? Who are the possible complainers?

Why do you think Charon throws the mirror or book overboard? What do they represent? What do they indicate about Charon? What do they indicate about the people who took them to the grave? Or about the people who buried the dead with these objects?

“Odysseus” – W. S. Merwin (1927 - )

For George Kirstein

Always the setting forth was the same,
Same sea, same dangers waiting for him
As though he had got nowhere but older.
Behind him on the receding shore

Identical reproaches, and somewhere
Out before him, the unraveling patience
He was wedded to. There were the islands
Each with its woman and twining welcome
To be navigated, and one to call "home."
The knowledge of all that he betrayed
Grew till it was the same whether he stayed
Or went. Therefore he went. And what wonder
If sometimes he could not remember
Which was the one who wished on his departure
Perils that he could never sail through,
And which, improbable, remote, and true,
Was the one he kept sailing home to?

- Who was "the unraveling patience/He was wedded to"?
- Who were the women who were on each island?
- Who wished ill for Odysseus and who was "improbable, remote, and true"?
- What does it mean that Odysseus could not remember at times who wished him ill and who was loyal? Is this a fault with Odysseus or with the women or with life itself?
- This poem is not just about Odysseus. Who or what does Odysseus represent? What does he symbolize? Is Odysseus a positive or negative symbol or is the answer more complex than that?

"Separation"  W. S. Merwin (1927-)

Your absence has gone through me
Like thread though a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

- "Separation" is a poem that complements "Odysseus" though that may not have been intentional on the poet's part. In what way can this poem be considered a complement to W. S. Merwin's first poem “Odysseus”?

Hamlet (OPTIONAL if needed) - If you are not familiar with Shakespeare’s tragedy Hamlet, please take some time to view the Kenneth Branagh version of the tragedy OR familiarize yourself with the play. We will not be reading the play, but we will discuss and look at some passages. It will help you as we discuss passages, and possible allusions in the Oscar Wilde reading.

The Picture of Dorian Gray OR Frankenstein Assignment:

Allusions made to historical events or figures, to places or times, to other literary works, often provide the richness of a literary text. The meaning of some literary works is often enhanced by sustained allusions. Study of these references, in fact, determines the difference between understanding a text on a superficial level and understanding it on a more academic one. Upon completion of the novel The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde OR Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, write a well-argued essay (500 words or 2 pages double spaced) in which you explain the allusion in The Picture of Dorian Gray to the Narcissus myth OR Wilde’s purpose in using Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet…); OR explain a purpose of the allusion to the Prometheus myth in Frankenstein. Please write from your own thoughts using ONLY the novel as a source – I want to see your thinking, not an online summary source, which is often wildly inaccurate.

You will submit this essay to turnitin.com after receiving the class code on the first day of class.
**END OF REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS**

**OPTIONAL ONLY:** If you are looking for a great summer read without the pressures of annotating, answering questions, and being assigned by an instructor, I would highly recommend any of the following texts. All of these have the potential OR have already shown up on the AP Literature and Composition exam. This is optional, but I might have these titles added to a list of choice reading later in the year – so it could be a good time to read one now and have that part finished. Also, they are all amazing texts!

1Q84 by Haruki Murakami (Magical Realism/Fantasy) The year is 1984 and the city is Tokyo. A young woman named Aomame follows a taxi driver’s enigmatic suggestion and begins to notice puzzling discrepancies in the world around her. She has entered, she realizes, a parallel existence, which she calls 1Q84 – “Q is for ‘question mark.’ A world that bears a question.” Meanwhile, an aspiring writer named Tengo takes on a suspect ghostwriting project. He becomes so wrapped up with the work and its unusual author that, soon, his previously placid life begins to come unraveled. As Aomame’s and Tengo’s narratives converge over the course of this single year, we learn of the profound and tangled connections that bind them ever closer.

Bless Me, Ultima** by Rudolfo Anaya (Realistic Fiction) Antonio Marez is six years old when Ultima comes to stay with his family in New Mexico. She is a curandera, one who cures with herbs and magic. Under her wise wing, Tony will probe the family ties that bind and rend him, and he will discover himself in the magical secrets of the pagan past - a mythic legacy as palpable as the Catholicism of Latin America. And at each life turn there is Ultima, who delivered Tony into the world...and will nurture the birth of his soul.

Catch-22** by Joseph Heller (Historical Fiction) Set in Italy during World War II, this is the story of the incomparable, malingering bombardier, Yossarian, a hero who is furious because thousands of people he has never met are trying to kill him. But his real problem is not the enemy – it is his own army, which keeps increasing the number of missions the men must fly to complete their service. Yet if Yossarian makes any attempt to excuse himself from the perilous missions he’s assigned, he’ll be in violation of Catch-22, a hilariously sinister bureaucratic rule: a man is considered insane if he willingly continues to fly dangerous combat missions, but if he makes a formal request to be removed from duty, he is proven sane and therefore ineligible to be relieved.

I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez (Realistic Fiction) Perfect Mexican daughters do not go away to college. And they do not move out of their parents’ house after high school graduation. Perfect Mexican daughters never abandon their family. But Julia is not your perfect Mexican daughter. That was Olga’s role. But it’s not long before Julia discovers that Olga, who died in an accident, might not have been as perfect as everyone thought. Was Olga really what she seemed? Or was there more to her sister’s story? And either way, how can Julia even attempt to live up to a seemingly impossible ideal?

Life of Pi by Yann Martel (Adventure/Survival Fiction) When Pi, the son of a zookeeper, is sixteen, his family emigrates from India to North America aboard a Japanese cargo ship, along with their zoo animals bound for new homes. The ship sinks. Pi finds himself alone in a lifeboat, his only companions a hyena, an orangutan, a wounded zebra, and Richard Parker, a 450-pound Bengal tiger. Soon the tiger has dispatched all but Pi, whose fear, knowledge, and cunning allow him to coexist with Richard Parker for 227 days while lost at sea. When they finally reach the coast of Mexico, Richard Parker flees to the jungle, never to be seen again. The
Japanese authorities who interrogate Pi refuse to believe his story and press him to tell them "the truth." After hours of coercion, Pi tells a second story, a story much less fantastical, much more conventional— but is it more true?

*One Hundred Years of Solitude*** by Gabriel García Márquez (Magical Realism) *One Hundred Years of Solitude* tells the story of the rise and fall, birth and death of the mythical town of Macondo through the history of the Buendía family. Inventive, amusing, magnetic, sad, and alive with unforgettable men and women—brimming with truth, compassion, and a lyrical magic that strikes the soul—this novel is a masterpiece in the art of fiction. (NOTE: We will be looking at excerpts from this novel later in the year).

*Oryx and Crake*** by Margaret Atwood (Science-Fiction) Snowman, known as Jimmy before mankind was overwhelmed by a plague, is struggling to survive in a world where he may be the last human, and mourning the loss of his best friend, Crake, and the beautiful and elusive Oryx whom they both loved. In search of answers, Snowman embarks on a journey through the lush wilderness that was so recently a great city, until powerful corporations took mankind on an uncontrolled genetic engineering ride.

*The Age of Innocence*** by Edith Wharton (Historical Fiction) Set in the high society circles of late nineteenth century New York, Wharton beautifully contrasts the intensity of true passion against the complacency of a loveless but proper marriage; delicately questioning the expected behavior of the upper social class. Through Wharton’s exquisite, detailed portrayal of the affluent class, she invites the reader to experience the charmed life of the "Gilded Age"... a life that would change dramatically by the end of World War I.

*The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead (Historical Fiction) Like the protagonist of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Cora, a runaway slave, encounters different worlds at each stage of her journey on the famed Underground Railroad— hers is an odyssey through time as well as space. As Whitehead brilliantly re-creates the unique terrors for black people in the pre–Civil War era, his narrative seamlessly weaves the saga of America from the brutal importation of Africans to the unfulfilled promises of the present day. *The Underground Railroad* is at once a kinetic adventure tale of one woman’s ferocious will to escape the horrors of bondage and a shattering, powerful meditation on the history we all share.

Book summaries adapted from Amazon.com

***denotes titles that have appeared on an AP Literature Exam