

English IV AP Summer Reading Instructions

English IVAP prepares you for the rigorous AP English Literature and Composition exam in May. As you may deduce from the title of this exam, this course focuses on literature and, most importantly, writing. To this end, English IVAP builds and strengthens your skills in reading complex pieces of literature, both poetry and prose; teaches you to think critically about that literature; and teaches you to write coherently, insightfully, and maturely about the style and themes present in the literary works we study. I'm not going to lie: it is a tough course, and you will feel like you've been run over by a large truck... with snow tires... and chains on the tires... carrying a tractor trailer... loaded with steel beams... that would support a large government underground shelter. But MAN will you HAVE FUN DOING IT! I promise.

PART I: OUTSIDE READING

You have three reading assignments. You MUST read the book in the FIRST category, but you have a CHOICE which to read in both the SECOND category. All of the novels are contemporary novels and are relatively easy to read. Please read a synopsis of the novels first before you decide which to read! I don't want your delicate sensibilities to be offended. We will spend the first five weeks talking about both of the required readings (*Things Fall Apart* and *Hotel/Blues/Red Tent*), but you will write an essay the week you return on each reading without benefit of discussion first. Be forewarned! Each of these novels has appeared on the AP exam for several years!

Note: Alexie's novel contains graphic language and content that may be unsuitable for some readers. *Diamant* is less explicit, but there is some gore and sexuality.

MUST READ

Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe

EITHER:

1. *Hotel at the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, James and Jamie Ford
2. *Reservation Blues*, Sherman Alexie
3. *The Red Tent*, Anita Diamant

PART II: READING QUESTIONS

You DO NOT NEED to write formal answers for the questions; however, YOU MUST ANNOTATE YOUR BOOKS WITH PASSAGES THAT HELP SUPPORT AN ANSWER FOR EACH QUESTION. **BOTH OF YOUR BOOKS WILL BE GRADED FOR ANNOTATIONS.**

NOTE ON ANNOTATING: I do not expect to see annotations on each page, but I do expect to see evidence of reflective reading. I also expect to be able to tell that you read the entire book. You may mark some things as you read, but the majority of your annotations will occur after reading and reflecting on the work and when locating passages that help you discuss the questions.

THINGS FALL APART:

1. Why does Achebe choose to bring in the European colonial presence only in the last third of the novel?
2. In what ways might Obierika be considered a transitional figure between the old and the new Igbo societies?
3. What sources of misunderstanding seem to make the conflicts between the Europeans and the Africans inevitable?
4. Achebe has written, "Our ancestors created their myths and told their stories with a human purpose;" hence, "any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose." In light of his beliefs, how would you interpret the human purpose(s) and message(s) of *Things Fall Apart*?
5. Now the obvious question: why did things fall apart?
6. What are the major themes and symbols at work in the novel? Identify and find support.

HOTEL AT THE CORNER OF BITTER AND SWEET/RESERVATION BLUES/THE RED TENT

1. Identify the central conflict in each novel.
2. *Hotel and Blues*: What does the treatment of Chinese & Japanese/Native Americans suggest about the view of Americans toward them? Of the Japanese/Indians/Chinese toward Americans? *Red Tent*: What does the treatment of women in biblical times suggest about the ways men viewed them? What role do women play in that time period? How does Dinah subvert those roles (or does she)?
3. For what society does each author write his/her novel (be careful—Diamant does not write her novel for people in biblical times... duh)? What attitude does he/she display in the novel by writing it? How does he/she hope society will change as a result of reading the novel?)
4. What are the major themes and symbols at work in the novel? Identify and find support.

Hotel/Blues/Ashes/Red Tent Discussion Guide

Hotel at the Corner of Bitter and Sweet:

1. *Hotel* has an interesting narrative frame that transports readers seamlessly between past and present. What effect does the author create by using flashbacks to tell the story rather than a simple, linear narrative? How does this narrative structure support the theme(s) of the novel?
2. How does the Panama Hotel serve both as this novel's governing metaphor and the site of a cultural atrocity? As we follow the revelations and treasures it provides, we are compelled to ask larger questions about the nature of truth, guilt, and responsibility. How does Ford address these questions? Which characters seem to be aware that what is at stake is an entire nation's guilt and how do those characters address this conflict?
3. Racism is a persistent theme in this novel. It is responsible for the internment of Keiko and her family, for Henry's and Keiko's mistreatment at school, the common conception that all Asians were Japanese, and even for Sheldon's (and the jazz club's) treatment. In what ways do the book's "minority" characters respond to the hostility of their white neighbors? How does bigotry manifest itself in the thoughts and behavior of characters like Mr. Lee—whose racism is keenly ironic in light of how he treats Henry as opposed to his intentions for Henry's future—Chaz and his father, and Henry's teachers? Are we meant to see these characters as typical of their place and time?
4. Continuing the same vein: which characters defy the racism that dominate cultural perceptions of the time period? How do they treat the "minorities" of the novel? What message is Ford conveying through these characters?
5. The Japanese internment camps are a part of our nation's history that Americans either ignore or evade, seeming to choose instead to focus on the Holocaust and the German concentration camps in Auschwitz and other places. Why do you suppose this is? Why do you suppose Ford brings this buried history (some may say American embarrassment) to the forefront of his novel? Is it somehow safer to do so when this book was published in 2009? Does she have a further agenda than just American absolution and education? How might it respond to—and perhaps help heal—the tragedy of 9/11? Explain.
6. Father-son relationships are a crucial theme in the novel. Talk about some of these relationships and how they are shaped by culture and time. For example, how is the relationship between Henry and his father different from that between Henry and Marty? What accounts for the differences?
7. What does the novel say about the meaning—or making—of ethnic identity?
8. You knew this had to be coming: what similar themes does this novel share with *Things Fall Apart*?

Reservation Blues:

1. The songs that appear at the beginning of the chapters set the tone and identify the content and major themes not only in the chapter but also in the novel as a whole. What are some of these themes and what is the tone of the novel overall? Be specific.
2. What is the attitude of the Indians toward the Indian Health Service, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs? Are their attitudes toward these government agencies tied to their attitudes toward the white man? Explain.
3. Storytelling, dreams, myths, and mysticism/magical realism are traditionally an important part of Indian history and culture. According to Alexie, how is story-telling looked upon in modern times on the reservation? What role do stories, dreams, and myths play in this novel? Give specific examples and explain.
4. Often in the novel we are molested by the images of horse being shot and of horses screaming. What do these images mean, both symbolically and historically?
5. Alexie uses names in this novel as representative of certain ideas and/or historical markers. Some of these include but are not limited to Betty, Veronica, Sheridan, Wright, and Armstrong (use your mobile devices to look up these characters). What do you think Alexie is doing here? Are they meant to be facetious or a comment on Native American history and relations with the white man? Explain.
6. The Spokane Indians react adversely and severely to Coyote Springs, and even more severely to any success they may experience. Why do you think this is?
7. What does the novel say about the meaning—or making—of ethnic identity? How does Alexie specifically draw a parallel between the historical and social experiences of blacks and Native Americans? Why?
8. You knew this had to be coming: what similar themes does this novel share with *Things Fall Apart*?

Angela's Ashes:

1. The Catholic Church plays a crucial role in *Angela's Ashes* and in Frank McCourt's life. How does the Church affect its members both positively and negatively? What is Frank's attitude toward the Church?
2. What role do women play and what influences do they hold within their families? Discuss the ways in which Angela struggles to keep her family together in the most desperate of circumstances.
3. Despite the McCourts' poverty and loss, *Angela's Ashes* maintains an inspiring message to an otherwise tragic memoir. How does McCourt accomplish this?
4. What role do the Irish songs and lyrics play in *Angela's Ashes*? How do these lyrics contribute to the unique voice of this memoir? How do you think they continue to influence his memories of his childhood?
5. How do his experiences in America affect Frank's years in Ireland? Why do you think he focuses so much on going back to America?
6. McCourt writes at the beginning of the novel, "worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood." In what ways has he shown this to be true? How did being Irish and being Catholic contribute to his misery?
7. What does the novel say about the meaning—or making—of ethnic identity?
8. You knew this had to be coming: what similar themes does this novel share with *Things Fall Apart*?

The Red Tent:

1. Examine Jacob's relationship with each of his wives and the relationships of each wife with the others.
2. Examine Dinah's relationships with each of her mothers: how are they similar and how are they different?
3. Mothers and mothering carry specific connotations and responsibilities for women in this time period. Discuss these connotations, obligations, and responsibilities. How do they both free women from their confines and how do they further subjugate them? What does the novel seem to be saying about the making of one's voice and identity?
4. Discuss the importance of Dinah's relationships with Inna, Tabea, Werenro, and Meryt. What does she learn from each woman?
5. What effect does Dinah's point of view as an outsider/observer have on the narrative? What effect does this have on the reader?
6. The book travels from Haran (contemporary Iraq/Syria), through Canaan and into Shechem (Israel), and into Egypt. What is important about the cultural differences Dinah encounters vis-a-vis food, clothing, work, and male-female relationships.
7. *The Red Tent* is a kind of bildungsroman where we see Dinah grow from childhood to old age. Just as much as the novel journeys across space and time, Dinah also faces a psychological and spiritual journey. Discuss how she changes and matures. What does she learn from this journey? How does she grow?
8. You knew this had to be coming: what similar themes does this novel share with *Things Fall Apart*?

Things Fall Apart Discussion Questions, part 1

DIRECTIONS: Read each question and answer *using/citing textual evidence*! You may work in groups, but everyone must turn in their own set of notes with the group final copy to be graded! Group think, individual accountability!

1. Describe Okonkwo. Consider him as an Igbo heroic character:
 - a. Infer from the reading: what are the admired strengths for people in this culture? Harder one (and it always throws people off): admired failures in this culture (first, brainstorm what the heck that even means; second, I wouldn't ask if there weren't any)?
 - b. What are Okonkwo's strengths and weaknesses? How do his weaknesses contribute to his fall? Are there any strengths that may have saved him, or was he destined—*like a tragic hero*—to fall? Explain.
 - c. Is there any place in his society for him after colonization? Explain your claim.
2. Unoka vs. Okonkwo:
 - a. How does the negative example of Okonkwo's father shape his character and actions?
 - b. How does Achebe utilize the dichotomy (look it up) he delineates in Okonkwo and Unoka's relationship at the beginning of the novel to set up the thematic developments throughout the rest of the novel? (Hints: think microcosm to macrocosm, and identify specific themes to discuss).
3. Consider the impact of Achebe's use of "African English."
 - a. Who is Achebe's intended audience(s) be? How do you know? (Think carefully about this)
 - b. How does Achebe's use of untranslated Igbo words like *egwugwu* and *iyi-uwa* contribute to his purpose for and message in the novel?
 - c. What values are reflected by the proverbs and folktales Achebe integrates into the story? Give specific examples and explanation of examples! (Also note that some of the stories are gender-specific).
4. Describe the setting (time, place, culture) of the novel.
 - a. Attend to Achebe's presentation of the details of everyday village life in Umuofia, as well as the centrality of ritual, ceremony, social hierarchy, and personal achievement in Igbo culture.
 - b. What is the role of war, of religion, and of the arts? Answer all three of these!
5. Examine family life and the living arrangements in Okonkwo's home:
 - a. What differing roles and functions do men and women have in Igbo society?
 - b. What does Okonkwo's attitude toward women seem to be? Evidence?
 - c. His attitude toward children? Evidence?
 - d. How do these attitudes contribute to his fall?

Some questions have been borrowed and/or modified from <http://studylib.net/doc/8051247/things-fall-apart>

Things Fall Apart Discussion Questions, part 2

DIRECTIONS: Again, work in groups to answer these questions. *YOU MAY BULLET YOUR RESPONSES*, but I do need to be able to understand what you are saying and meaning. Thus, be thorough and use page numbers of text to support yourselves, but don't write an essay per question.

1. Ezinma is believed to be an *ogbanje*, meaning those who “come and go.” Child mortality rates were high, the majority of children dying in early childhood, hence the reason many children did not receive names for many years. If a series of such deaths took place in a family, it was believed that the same wicked spirit was being born and dying over and over again, spitefully grieving its parents.
 - a. What is done to break the cycle of *ogbanje* birth and death (Ch. 9)?
 - b. How does the Igbo belief in *ogbanje* and the efforts to break the cycle of birth and death compare to the reasons for “throwing away” twins?
 - c. Does Achebe seem to validate the belief in *ogbanje*?
 - d. And what the heck is Achebe doing with the episode wherein Ezinma must locate and identify her *iyi-uwa* anyway?
2. Note the instances when Okonkwo fails to heed the advice of others, especially of Obierika.
 - a. What are the consequences?
 - b. Three times in Part I, Okonkwo breaks Igbo taboos: what drives him to do so in each case?
 - c. What are the consequences to Okonkwo, to his family, and to his community?
3. Postcolonial theory: The purpose of ethnic and postcolonial scholars is to show the manner in which texts display certain ideologies, whether positive or negative, through a particular cultural lens. For example, Joseph Conrad wrote *The Heart of Darkness*, a story of one white man's journey through the Congo. In this novel, the reader sees the Africans portrayed as barbarous and primitive, uneducated, and highly superstitious, even murderous, and on the brink of complete madness (if not the very definition of madness itself). The contrast is made more conspicuous because we readers see it through the eyes of the English imperialist narrator. However, Achebe writes with a different lens and with another purpose.
 - a. Describe his “cultural lens” and the purpose for which he writes.
 - b. What aspects of pre-British colonial Igbo culture does Achebe seem to question or criticize?
 - c. How does Achebe use characters like Obierika, Okonkwo, and Nwoye to offer such social criticism of Igbo society?
 - d. Can we rightfully apply the labels we so commonly throw around when we discuss literature (like sexist or barbaric or superstitious)? Why/why not?

Some questions have been borrowed and/or modified from <http://studylib.net/doc/8051247/things-fall-apart>

Kite Runner, Space Between Us, Memory Keeper's Daughter Seminar Prep Questions

Jot notes on paper with page numbers AND annotate your answers in your book for easy reference for in-class and online seminar discussions. Use colored post-its or tabs or something to differentiate each category and make your notes easier to find. Your annotations and notes will be a grade. An easy one, at that.

SYMBOLS:

Examine each novel's symbols. Trace their development through the novel and explain how they create meaning and tie to a theme. You will have several tabs for this section.

MOTIFS:

Examine each novel's motifs. Trace their development through the novel and explain how they create meaning and tie to a theme. You will have several tabs for this section.

CHARACTER:

On the inside cover of your book, identify each significant character. Provide a brief description and list their central conflicts. Briefly note any development the character undergoes in the course of the novel. Identify page numbers that help support your analysis of each character.

THEMES:

Trace the development of the main themes in each novel. There are several!! Don't be afraid to identify additional themes for your novel. Use coded tabs for specific events and page numbers! You will have lots of tabs so don't be scared. Here are a few to get you started:

- Relationships (brother/brother; father/son; friendship; Afghanis in exile)
- Loyalty, Humanity, Compassion
- Guilt, Free Will
- Redemption
- Sacrifice
- Journey

STRUCTURE:

Find examples of and be prepared to explain the effect of each of the following as it appears in the novel.

- Stereotypes/Archetypes
- Irony
- Setting (time *and* place) as character
- Pathetic fallacy
- Opening and closing frames/scenes
- Narrative Structure (flashback, incremental, alternating views)