

Dear AP English Literature student,

Congratulations on your choice of the AP course in Literature (AP English 4) for your senior year.

John Donne wrote that “No man is an island”. We interact. We connect. We depend on each other whether we realize it or not. But in addition to examining our differences, we must also examine our similarities in order to connect our islands

and create a common sense of humanity throughout the world. It is with this idea in mind that I look forward to embarking with you on what is sure to be the beginning of a challenging but rewarding year together.

Your summer work this year consists of two distinct tasks.

The first assignment is designed to help you prepare for college and the AP Literature Exam.

Its purpose is complex:

- To help build confidence and competence as readers of complex texts
- To give you, when you enter the class in the fall, an immediate basis for discussion of literary elements such as theme, characterization, viewpoint, symbolism, plot structure, setting, etc.
- To set up a basis for comparison with other works we will read during the year
- To continue to build upon the repertoire of works you can write about on the AP Literature exam next spring
- To establish the mind-set of a life-long reader
- To offer you the experience of the intellectual depth and rigor of college-level coursework

Part two of the summer assignment is to write a college/scholarship essay. Many of you will be applying for early decision/entrance into the colleges of your choosing. I would like for you to get a head start on that process. The writing of this narrative essay also helps me to see where you are as a writer and how I can help you to improve. In addition, having a draft of an essay allows us to go directly into the editing, revising, and polishing of the writing process when you return to school in August.

If you get stuck, please do not hesitate to text (preferred) or call me for clarification.  
My cell phone # is (713)501-5150.

**YOU ARE NOT BOTHERING ME WHEN YOU CONTACT ME ABOUT SCHOOL WORK.** I will be glad to help if I can. I would much rather hear from you over the summer than hear on the first day of school that you were unable to complete your assignments and will no longer be enrolled in our class.

Remember, both assignments must be turned in no later than Wed. August 1, 2018.

This policy applies to students who have already requested AP English 4 and those who plan to appeal.

Failure to meet this requirement will result in automatic removal from the class. NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Have a wonderful summer. I look forward to learning with you.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Laura Nix

## **A few things that should go without saying but I'm going to say them anyway**

Here are some summer reading blunders you should avoid:

- Procrastinating. These texts require thoughtful contemplation and reflection. Granted, you will be tested on the novel in the first week of school, so it may be best to complete your English assignment gradually or a little later in the summer so you don't forget details, but you certainly shouldn't wait until the week before Aug. 1 to start.
- Believing you can come to class prepared only with your verbal wit. The College Board acknowledges that you are fluent conversationalists – but that some of you “may have fallen into the sloppy habit of offering opinions about a text [you] have not read” (College Board, p. 33). This behavior is not acceptable at this level. Do your classmates, your teacher, and yourself a favor – READ THE TEXT so you can competently participate.
- Depending upon SparkNotes, Shmoop, etc. It is always good to get an overview of what you are reading, but reliance on these types of notes will not help you prepare for your AP test, if that is your goal for taking the class. Furthermore, I am not interested in what SparkNotes or Shmoop say. Indeed, I can (and have) already visited them with regards to each and every work I assign my AP and Pre-AP students. I am interested in your ideas, interpretations, and arguments. I want to know what you think. Referring to those websites as a substitute for reading the assigned literature yourself will color your thinking and prevent you from developing your own ideas.
- Academic dishonesty. Every assignment you do in school is meant to measure your knowledge of something or ability to do something. The grade you receive on the assignment should reflect that knowledge or ability if you have not done your own work. Although there will doubtless be collaborative assignments throughout the school year, this is not one of them. Do your own work. You may not in any way work with someone else on this assignment. If your work shows any evidence of your having copied from a website, a classmate, or any other source, you will receive a zero.

Required reading

*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (Please note that some AP readings/literature throughout the year, including this one, may contain mature language and subject matter.)

Part One - Read *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood and answer the accompanying questions.

I do not have copies of this novel so you will need to purchase one on your own. Any version will do as long as it is a complete text. There will also be a test over the novel during the first week of school.

I have included a link to a Google Slides presentation that might be helpful in your understanding of *The Handmaid's Tale* if you wish to check it out. If you are logged in to your NISD Google account, you should be able to gain access to the link below. If you have trouble, text me and I'll do my best to help.

[https://docs.google.com/a/needvilleisd.com/presentation/d/17\\_wnU1aPJqMAhPXFUJ\\_Mtr7laz-TJvDEHDFfsy4HQnQ/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/a/needvilleisd.com/presentation/d/17_wnU1aPJqMAhPXFUJ_Mtr7laz-TJvDEHDFfsy4HQnQ/edit?usp=sharing)

I highly recommend you annotate directly in the text all passages that you find meaningful, thinking in terms of questions and connections: Why might the author have structured the plot in this way at this particular moment? How has the character changed or stagnated? Why does this language or description or image appeal to you? Focus on passages or moments that delight, intrigue, surprise, bother, or even trouble you. Be a curious, active reader.

Please note: In the first few days of class, you will take a test over the book, be required to participate in a Socratic seminar, and your knowledge of the novel will be assessed with a timed write.

Answer the following questions about the novel. Each questions is composed of multiple parts, all of which need to be adequately addressed using complete sentences. These are not mere comprehension questions; they require thorough, thoughtful answers.

Please type your responses and share them with me via Google Drive at [nixL@needvilleisd.com](mailto:nixL@needvilleisd.com) on or before Wed. August 1. Be sure to include the questions with your answers.

1. How do politics and reproduction interact and define the society of Gilead? To what extent can women exist as humans vs mere vessels in the novel?
2. As in George Orwell's 1984, this totalitarian society uses language itself to create and maintain its social order. How is language used in the novel to dehumanize? How is language used to establish and maintain order?
3. The Commander is certainly complex and dynamic. How, ultimately, do you read his role in the novel? What kind of sympathy or antipathy do you feel for him?
4. *The Handmaid's Tale* is often referred to as a feminist novel because it depicts the suppression of women. However, one could argue that, although it is in a more subtle manner, men are subjugated by Gilead's totalitarian system as well. Explore this idea thoroughly.
5. Carefully consider the role of Serena Joy. What commentary does the novel make about how both men AND women maintain and solidify patriarchy?

6. What do the "Historical Notes" at the book's end add to the reading of this novel? What does the book's last line mean to you?

## Part Two - Write a college essay.

You will need to do a considerable amount of introspection to complete this essay, which is meant to be personal and should reveal your intellect, desire, and character. This is an application essay in which you should not TELL a story - you should SHOW who you are through your personal experiences.

YOU MUST SHOW WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF. Therefore, you should avoid using passive verbs like "is/was" or "are/were" and replace them with active verbs that show action and emotion.

You will be writing about one of your favorite subjects: YOURSELF! Although you should write in first person, avoid overusing personal pronouns like "I" and "my", etc. Although the structure is somewhat open, make sure your reader can follow with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

The essay should be 250-500 words (typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. font). It must be shared with me via Google Drive at [nixL@needvilleisd.com](mailto:nixL@needvilleisd.com) on or before Wed. August 1, 2018.

### Hints and tips:

- 1 – A great application essay will present a vivid personal and compelling view of you to your teacher and/or a college admissions board.
- 2 – Narrow your topic and keep your focus on one great idea. Admissions officers read hundreds of essays each day, and they have many submissions on the same few topics. Try to make yours unique.
- 3 – Avoid writing about the 4 "D's": death, divorce, drugs, and depression. Don't think that you must have had a tragedy or trauma in your life to have an effective essay topic. You can write about common happenings such as riding a bicycle or failing a test; the magic comes in how you approach the topic.
- 4 – Make sure the real you comes out in your essay. VOICE is of utmost importance: your personal voice must be communicated through your writing style.
- 5 – After you have finished, ask yourself if anyone else could have written the essay. If the answer is "yes," it is not personal and individual enough for an admissions essay.

Choose ONE of the following prompts, all of which are common college essay topics nationwide:

- A. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- B. The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- C. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again? Why or why not?
- D. Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?
- E. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, which marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.
- F. Indicate an individual who has a significant influence on you and your personal growth. Describe that influence and how it affects your character.
- G. Tell about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that's important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment make you proud, and how does it relate to the person you are?
- H. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma -- anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
- I. Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern. Specifically how has this issue personally impacted your life?