

AP Language & Composition
2018 Summer Reading Assignment
100 points (total)

Reading Selections: *The Catcher in the Rye* (J.D. Salinger)
 The Bell Jar (Sylvia Plath)

Assignment: Read these two books over the summer.
There will be a 30- point test on both books on the first day of school.
You are to write one 70-point essay on these books.
See attached essay question sheet.

Due Dates:

Exam on *Bell Jar* and *Catcher* (worth 30 points): 1st day of school

Essay (70 points): 1nd day of school

Failure to turn in the assignment on the due date will result in your having to drop the class. This class employs a strict no-late-work policy.

Class Description: This Advanced Placement Language and Composition class offers quite rigorous, college-level curriculum. If you don't love reading, you will struggle through it. If you are motivated to become a better writer and love reading, you will be happy you signed on. The class combines composition and American literature sorted into eight units: early American, colonialism, nationalism, American renaissance, industrialization and expansion, modernism, post-modernism, current times. We study all periods intensively and use a college-level textbook. The class focuses heavily on composition: compare/contrast, rhetorical devices and strategies, literary techniques and terms, analysis of writing styles, timed essay writings, to get students ready for the AP Language and Composition test in early May. We read at an extremely fast pace, so if this summer reading assignment looks overwhelming, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Consider carefully whether you have the motivation, desire, and stamina to earn the kind of grade you want in this course.

Essay Question – 70 points

Esther Greenwood (*The Bell Jar*) and Holden Caulfield (*The Catcher in the Rye*) are both distinct narrators. The greatness of both stories is due in large part to their unique personalities and voice. Compare and contrast them in these aspects: their use of language and how it reflects their gender, how their stories capture teenage angst, and how each narrator's voice is a reflection of the book's time.

What to do:

- Show concrete proof you have read & understand both novels
- Make sincere effort to find similarities & differences for each point provided in the prompt
- Use formal language, no need for I or you statements (use "the reader" or "readers," "one," or "the audience")
- Use concrete examples from both texts to support your ideas
- Include direct quotes, but no more than 4 or 5 and not longer than 4 or 5 lines each, don't overdo it! Consider listing a bunch of clever words or phrases from each narrator as one example. Look at the words themselves directly and specifically.

- Employ careful editing & proofreading! Impress your teacher!
- Show responsibility & pride in your writing
- Demonstrate your intelligence, creativity, and thoughtfulness
- Show your understanding of the compare/contrast format
- Follow MLA formatting for your final draft
- Print a hard copy to turn in on first day of school, staple it

What NOT to do:

- Give an “online summary” understanding of the texts
- Read a Sparknotes summary and expect to succeed
- Borrow creativity and/or ideas from someone/somewhere else
- Plagiarize: this is a major problem, have academic integrity please!
- Use unsupported ideas, not explained with details from the text
- Write rambling, tangential paragraphs: stick to the appointed topics
- Give plot summary and character descriptions to fill up space
- Use predictable examples: choose the less obvious ones
- Read the books in June and write the paper before the Fourth of July and not review the book again before you come to school in late August. We recommend reading the books in August, or at least reviewing them in August, so they are fresh in your head for the test and discussions during the first week of school.

Formatting Your Essay

You can choose to do one narrator and all three aspects of that narrator, then move on to the next narrator, and cover the same three aspects, then write a concluding paragraph that sums up the comparison, are they more alike, or more different, make a decision. (Here’s the order of paragraphs: Intro; character A language; character A angst; character A time period; Character B language; character B angst; character B time period; definitively more alike or more different; conclusion.)

OR, you can do the first point for both narrators, then the second point for both narrators, then the third point for both narrators, add the conclusion, making it clear if they are more strongly alike or different. (Here’s the order of paragraphs: Intro; character A language; character B language; character A angst; character B angst; character A time period; character B time period; definitively more alike or more different; conclusion.)

OPTIONAL: You may choose to add an addendum to this assignment where you address—informally, in first person, how you felt about the books. Offer your teacher some feedback on the prompt.

Background on these Novels:

The Catcher in the Rye

J.D. Salinger (1951)

This once highly controversial and widely banned novel is about a rebellious teenager growing up in America during the 1950s, also written in the 1950s. It covers a small sequence of time when main character and narrator Holden Caulfield has been kicked out of yet another fancy prep school. He has to make his way back home to New York City and to face telling his parents of yet another expulsion. Pay attention to Holden’s attitude, behavior, and emotional state of mind and try to theorize what these things might say

about the era of the 1950s in America. The book has been banned for the language, and Holden Caulfield's "anti-hero" qualities.

The Bell Jar

Sylvia Plath (1963)

This classic women's coming of age novel is set in 1958, New York and follows the difficult journey of a talented young woman forced to reconcile expectations to conform to the traditional female roles with her passion for poetry. A promising writer, Ester Greenwood, is a college student awarded with an internship at a ladies magazine in New York City. Her journey from glamorous New York City to a mental asylum is dispassionately told. The novel is semi autobiographical and shows Ester's deep descent into madness at a time when mental illness was largely unacknowledged. Pay attention to Ester's thoughts, behavior, and emotional state of mind as her mental health declines. Try to theorize what these things might say about the era of the 1950s in America for ambitious, educated women.

Holden's 1950's America: (in a nutshell)

- Conservative politics: Joseph McCarthy, an atmosphere of paranoia and anxiety surrounding communism
- President Eisenhower focused on family issues and political conservatism; his motto: "Let's take the straight road down the middle."
- Material prosperity: home appliances at an all time high in purchasing: dishwashers, electric knives, can openers, blenders, washing machines, hi-fi stereos, record players. Emphasis on bettering "homelife"
- Generation spinning from WWII, urge to find security at home
- Important values emphasized: family life, church, community, education
- Most popular TV shows: *Leave it to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, depictions of happy, problem-free family scenarios
- Blackballing was in: accusing someone of being a communist, then socially and politically ostracizing them, public scorn, sometimes even criminal trials
- Neon signs, G.I. bill, white bucks, poodle skirts, crew cuts, Tupperware parties, little league baseball, pocketbooks, drive-in theatres, soda fountains
- The beginning of nuclear arms, (the first atom bomb was dropped during WWII)
- The Cold War: deep seeded mistrust of other countries and even our own country: biggest fears: communist world domination, atomic annihilation
- Dark side rising: jumpy, uncertain youth, rebellious with the status quo. Real life didn't equal society's sunny portrayal of life.
- "Home-cooked" values on the outside, corruption on the inside.
- Many historians claim it was "the beginning of America's adolescence"

Esther's 1960's America: (in a nutshell)

- The Sixties were known as "the killer decade" (MLK, JFK, Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy assassinations, "Four Dead in Ohio")
- The Vietnam War, the "heyday of the hippy"
- Social conservatism gives way to counterculture or sub culture
- Elevation of the underdog and the anti-hero (someone who does not represent classic heroic qualities like bravery, selflessness, moral high ground, patience, leadership, etc.)
- Breakdown of the family unit: divorce rates increase, families having fewer children, mixed families increasing

- The rise in single mothers began in the 1960s
- “Turn on, tune in, drop out,” counterculture in the spotlight on the evening news – drug use & experimentation, hallucinogenic
- Largest social protests/movements in American history: Civil Rights, anti-Vietnam war, women’s rights, sexual revolution
- A time of no fixed political or ideological values
- President Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon—no trust in the leadership, so much turn over created instability in government
- The skepticism and sarcasm that was born in the 1950’s became even more elevated, more radical in the 60s
- Celebration of self-gratification, experimentation, self-expression
- Breakdown of traditional values, the decline in church attendance begins in 1962
- Mistrust in media, news, authority in general
- Long, unkempt hair, bell bottoms, tube tops, flowers in your hair, cut off jeans and shorts, tattoos, psychedelic patterns, neon colors

If you have questions about any part of this assignment or the test, you may email the teachers of this course. Do not send a copy of your paper draft and expect us to proofread or edit it. And FYI – we may not respond until mid-August. We’re on summer break too.

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