Dear Advanced Placement English Seniors,

The AP English Literature course is designed to prepare you for the AP Literature and Composition test as well as to offer you the experience of the intellectual depth and rigor of college-level coursework. As you were informed in last year’s AP Language and Composition letter, research indicates that those who read more read and write better and have stronger vocabularies. Our research indicates that at many of the best high schools, AP English students read up to twenty texts each year. It is our goal to model our class experiences after the country’s best programs, so we will do a considerable amount of reading over the summer and during your senior year.

During your junior year, you may have had limited exposure to fiction, as many eleventh-grade Language Arts courses such as A.P. Language and Composition focus primarily on rhetoric. This summer, we are asking you to reacquaint yourself with literature by reading and preparing three books from the book lists included with this letter. The books have been selected for their quality, themes, stylistic interest, intellectual relevance, canonical influence and their appearance on the AP English Literature test. These texts will assist you in making connections in next year’s coursework as well as prepare you for the AP test in early May. We are also asking that you complete the Analysis Packet for each novel, as we believe that the applied study required to complete the packet for each text will give you an early start on test preparation and the kind of critical reading necessary for the class. One of the most challenging aspects of the AP Literature and Composition Exam is the final essay question, which provides an essay prompt and requires students to answer the prompt by discussing a novel or play from memory. We have found that it is important for students to read and prepare a range of works in order to be ready for that question; the Analysis Packet will serve as a resource for you as we synthesize our understanding of literature and prepare for the exam. Furthermore, your packets will be a resource for the assignments you will receive in the fall on your summer reading books.

Our study of some of the great ideas of the Western world and our critique of them will enlarge our worldview, and that is exactly what will be required of you in college. Many former students return each year to tell us that their professors were impressed with their familiarity with books and ideas that they were now studying in college. So this summer work will benefit you during the school year, and more importantly, you will have an easier time in your university’s general education requirements.

Now the assignment. Please select and read 3 books from the lists included below. You may only choose books that you have not already read. For each book, please print out the Analysis Packet before you read and work on the packet throughout your reading of the text. We expect a completed Analysis Packet when you return to school in the fall that explores your reading, research, and thinking as you work your way through each book.
We're interested in your effort and getting a sense of how you think as well as what you think. Your responsibility is to make your understanding clearer to you as well as to us. You may certainly use online resources (which you should cite). In fact, seeking out and reading literary analysis, criticism, discussions, and reviews as part of your experience of a text can enrich and deepen your thinking and understanding. However, you are expected to think for yourself when you are asked to do so rather than present a summary of other people's ideas. As for the Analysis Packets, please note that there is no single valid response or “right answer” for the sections on the packet. We will not use the packets to check to see that you found the exact same textual evidence or ideas that we came up with. Rather, we are looking for you to engage with the text and document that engagement. We hope that these packets provide a vehicle for you to gather meaningful details and prepare an analysis of each text that will be used for your first assignments in the fall.

Some of your first quarter assignments will come from these three summer books. From your summer reading, you will be asked to complete a variety of tasks, which may include essays, critical reviews, or précis. Your summer reading is the beginning of the work that will earn you a high grade in English.

The summer preparatory work is also meant to prepare you for the following kinds of performances: a) seminar discussions, b) objective tests, c) AP-style timed essays, and d) papers that summarize and discuss a critic’s analysis of a novel. These are the kinds of activities we will work toward as we write and question and talk our way through our reading all year.

If you have any questions about the summer assignments, we encourage you to attend the AP Summer Boot Camp program. The AP Tutors are all students who have studied with us, and teachers will also be in attendance. Any of us would be happy to answer your questions.

We look forward to our classrooms being alive with the electricity of ideas and renewed acquaintances when you return to start your senior year. Have a great summer, and we look forward to meeting you in the fall.

Happy reading,

The Language Arts Department
AP Summer Reading list
Choose three books to read this summer, selecting one from each of the following categories:

18th or 19th Century Novel

Mansfield Park, Jane Austen
Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë
Silas Marner or Middlemarch, George Eliot
Madame Bovary, Gustave Flaubert
Brothers Karamazov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky
The Portrait of a Lady or The American, Henry James
Moll Flanders or Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe
Great Expectations, Charles Dickens
Tristram Shandy, Laurence Sterne
Moby Dick, Herman Melville
Vanity Fair, William Thackeray
War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy
Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë

American Novel

The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald
The Sun Also Rises or For Whom the Bell Tolls, Ernest Hemingway
The Scarlet Letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne
The Things They Carried or Going after Cacciato, Tim O’Brien
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain
The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck
The Jungle, Upton Sinclair
The Sound and the Fury, William Faulkner
Catch 22, Joseph Heller
Love Medicine, Louise Erdrich
The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan
The Catcher in the Rye, J. D. Salinger
The Awakening, Kate Chopin
Johnny Got His Gun, Dalton Trumbo
Bless Me Ultima, Rudolfo Anaya
All the Pretty Horses, Cormac McCarthy
Native Son, Richard Wright
Cat's Eye or Blind Assassin or Alias Grace, Margaret Atwood (Canadian)
The Color Purple, Alice Walker
Ethan Frome or The House of Mirth, Edith Wharton
No-No Boy, John Okada
America is in the Heart, Carlos Bulosan
Ragtime, E. L. Doctorow
Snow Falling on Cedars, David Guterson
Typical American, Gish Jen
Woman Warrior, Maxine Hong Kingston

20th Century Novel

Mrs. Dalloway or To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf
Ulysses or Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, James Joyce
The Castle, Franz Kafka
Brave New World or Point Counter Point, Aldous Huxley
One Hundred Years of Solitude, Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Under the Volcano, Malcolm Lowry
Good Terrorist, Doris Lessing
Midnight's Children or The Moor's Last Sigh, Salman Rushdie
The 42nd Parallel or 1919, John Dos Passos
The Fall or The Plague, Albert Camus
Pnin, Vladimir Nabokov
The Remains of the Day, Kazuo Ishiguro
Sons & Lovers, D. H. Lawrence