

Summer Work 2023-2024: AP Literature & Composition

Greetings, Class of 2024. In preparation for AP Literature, this summer you must read two books and write one essay. I recommend taking notes—see below for a sound method of studying any and every novel—but I will not be collecting them.¹ The essay is due on the first day of class.

I highly recommend the following editions, whether new or used:

- A. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*. Translated by Oliver Ready, Penguin, 2014 (ISBN 9780143107637). Publisher link: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/318117/crime-and-punishment-by-fyodor-dostoyevsky>
- B. Peter Kreeft, *The Best Things in Life*. InterVarsity Press, 1984 (ISBN: 9780877849223). Publisher link: <https://www.ivpress.com/the-best-things-in-life>

I. How to read *Crime and Punishment*—or any novel

1. *Before Reading*:
 - a. Read the *title page* and (if applicable) *epigraph*. What they imply?
 - b. Read the *back cover* and *biographical sketch* of the author. How do they contextualize the book in history—in other words, when and where was it written?
 - c. Is there a *table of contents*? If so, what do the number of chapters, and any chapter titles, suggest about the book you're about to read?
 - d. *Warning*. Before reading a novel for the first time, skip any introduction not written by the author. Such essays may be useful later, but they are likely to prejudice new readers with interpretations and plot spoilers.
2. *While Reading*:
 - a. Keep a running list of *characters*: their names, titles, quirks, and significant roles in family, society, plot. Consider drawing a family tree or relationship web.
 - b. Keep a running list of *settings*, in both time and space. Make a timeline and use a map.
 - c. Summarize what happens in each chapter (*plot*). In one or two sentences, capture the major event. Each time you resume, reread and revise your summaries.
 - d. Keep a list of “important” passages, even if you can’t understand precisely why they matter (*spidey sense*). Write down the page number and briefly describe the passage.
3. *After Reading*:
 - a. First, *review*. If your plot summaries are a fair guide to the book, good. If not, rewrite them with additions, deletions, precisions.
 - b. Second, *reflect*. Once your summaries are sound, answer two questions. *Who is the main character* and *What is the single most important event in the book*? If this seems difficult, start small: *Who* changes most, and *which* event most dramatically alters the story? Then widen the lens: *how* does the protagonist change—in personality, circumstance, outlook, or life? And *why* does the protagonist change—what act, event, or happening causes it?
 - c. Third, *invent*. Retitle the book using your answers to the previous question. Begin the title with *a phrase featuring the main character*, then add a subtitle with *an extended clause recounting the main character’s response to the crucial event*. The idea is to reimagine the novel as if it had been published in the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century, when lengthy book titles were the norm, for they functioned as movie trailers. Here are two famous, real examples:
 - i. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come: Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream Wherein is Discovered, The*

¹ Adapted from Susan Wise Bauer, *The Well-Educated Mind* (Norton, 2003), chapter five.

manner of his setting out, *His Dangerous Journey; And safe Arrival at the Desired Country* (1678).

- ii. Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last strangely deliver'd by Pyrates.* (1719).

- d. Finally, *discern*. Novels are about humankind, or human nature. What does *this particular novel* say about us? Consult your list of “important passages.”

At one chapter a day, you can finish *Crime and Punishment* in six weeks. Slow and steady wins the race.

II. How to read *The Best Things in Life*—or any dialogue

Since Kreeft’s book is driven by ideas rather than plot—although there is a story in the background—answer the following questions for each of the twelve chapters or “dialogues.” In parentheses below, I’ve provided examples from the Pixar film *Finding Nemo* (2003).

1. Who are the *characters* in this chapter? Describe each one in a phrase (“Marlin: obsessive and overprotective clownfish dad”). Note changes in later chapters (“In the belly of the whale, Marlin finally learns to let go”).
2. What is the *topic* of this chapter? What is it *about*? (“*Finding Nemo* is about disability: one fish after another has a broken fin, a scarred body, a mental disorder, an unwanted addiction, a severe allergy, etc.”)
3. What is the *theme (message, lesson)* of this chapter? What does it ultimately say about the *topic*? (“*Finding Nemo* teaches that disability is not destiny but opportunity: it may seem, in Marlin’s words, as if the disabled *just can’t do these things*, but in fact the very circumstances that seem to create insurmountable difficulties are a chance to adapt and accomplish things that otherwise might not have been done, at all. Perseverance is the essential ingredient—*just keep swimming.*”)

At one chapter a day, this book takes two weeks. The last chapter is long and a bit difficult.

III. Essay Assignment

In 1000 words, compose a dialogue between Socrates and a major character from *Crime and Punishment*. If Socrates suddenly dropped into nineteenth-century Petersburg, what would he say to Raskolnikov, Razumihkin, Marmeladov, Avdotya, Porfiry Petrovich, or Sonya—and how would he say it? How would his interlocutor respond? Invent a conversation that reveals how carefully you read each book; be creative but faithful. Type and print it in MLA format (Times New Roman font, size 12, double-spaced, one-inch margins). Work hard: I will read it carefully, and a weak summer essay can derange your entire Semester One grade. The penalty for late essays is 10% per weekday. I may run it through “academic integrity” software. As a matter of English Department policy, plagiarism in any way, shape, or form results in a grade of zero on the assignment and a report to the Upper School Principal. If you have any questions, email me well in advance of the start of the year at sholler@ecseagles.com.

N.B. This whole assignment is good practice for the entire year. Feel free to discuss the books and even the essay with your peers, but do not let anyone else do your work, whether another person or a website like LitCharts. Honest attempts may fail (earning 25%, 50%, or 64%), and non-attempts receive a zero, but dishonest attempts earn a zero and a poor reputation. Don’t dig your own grave before senior year starts.