

The (almost) Independent Reading Project (IRP) 2020

Step 1: Use the list below, to select a novel for study. To study a novel not included on this list you must receive pre-approval from me. Novel must be a work of accepted literary merit. Failure to gain pre-approval for a book not included on this list will result in a zero.

Step 2: Read, study, and examine your novel

Step 3: IRP Project (Due 4/30, 5/01)

Step 4: In-Class Timed Writing (4/30, 5/01)

Highly Recommended Novels:

***Beloved* by Toni Morrison**

Beloved explores Mother-Daughter relationships and the psychological impact that slavery has had on the African-American community in this country. Use *Beloved* to comment on the importance of identity and also community.

***The Road* by Cormac McCarthy**

The 2006 novel written by American writer Cormac McCarthy, is a post-apocalyptic novel detailing the journey of a father and his young son over a period of several months, across a landscape blasted by an unspecified cataclysm that has destroyed most of civilization and, in the intervening years, almost all life on Earth. The novel was awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction in 2006.

***The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), by Barbara Kingsolver**

A bestselling novel about a missionary family, the Prices, who in 1959 move from the U.S. state of Georgia to the village of Kilanga in the Belgian Congo, close to the Kwilu River.

***The Things They Carried* (1990) by Tim O'Brien**

A collection of linked short stories by American novelist Tim O'Brien, about a platoon of American soldiers fighting on the ground in the Vietnam War. His third book about the war, it is based upon his experiences as a soldier in the 23rd Infantry Division.

***Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte**

Wuthering Heights is one of the most widely regarded pieces on the AP English Literature reading list. *WH* is a good example of Gothic Romanticism that deals heavily with questions of emotion and violence. It's particularly accessible and discusses class and gender comfortably from the perspective of a woman. This is one of the most frequently cited literary works on the AP Literature exam. It has been included in some form or fashion on 20 different years' tests since 1971.

***King Lear* by William Shakespeare**

King Lear, referenced 17 times since 1971, is the most frequently cited work by Shakespeare. *King Lear* is a brutal play containing themes ranging from familial love and duty to anger and deception. It's a play that provides you with many different elements of story to discuss as well as elements of style. The actual story is too complicated to briefly summarize, so trust the numbers and read this play before taking the test.

Other Recommended Novels:

***Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky**

The main theme of *Crime and Punishment* is redemption via suffering. This is another long but worthwhile read at 545 pages. The purpose of *Crime and Punishment* is to provide a psychological analysis of the young Raskolnikov's crime to reveal how this psychological analysis itself keeps us imprisoned. Intellectualizing events, says Dostoevsky, keeps us imprisoned. As the name tells us, Crime and Punishment and their relationship to each other are major themes in the story. Think about questions of sacrifice when reading studying this piece. Nihilism, the superhero complex, alienation, and poverty are also analyzed at length.

***Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad**

Heart of Darkness is lauded on many of the AP English Literature prep message boards as a go-to literary work for the free response section with good reason. It's a relatively short novella and an interesting read involving mystery, psychology, and adventure. *Heart of Darkness* is particularly useful in questions about the modern world in that it was somewhat prophetically written. It deals with the question of imperialist greed particularly pointedly. Above all else, *Heart of Darkness* effectively explores and answers questions about morality and how the ambiguity of right and wrong can justify actions. Keep this in mind.

***Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte**

Jane Eyre is a highly cited Victorian Romantic novel. At its core, this is a story of a woman yearning for more than what traditional society would allow her to have. Not only is it well known, it's more relevant today due to the recent push for social equity for women.

***Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston**

Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a good example of a stylistic masterwork, which you can benefit from knowing. Hurston juxtaposes the Southern Black dialect with the voice of a literary narrator. If you're asked about her work, the chances are that an understanding of her style and structure will score you points.

***The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner**

Faulkner's fourth novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, is another exercise in style. He used stream of consciousness writing once more to tell a personal story of fear about the corruption of family values. *The Sound and the Fury* provides, most of all, a pathway to impress a reader. This is a difficult book to decipher, but, if you can get a handle on how Faulkner utilizes point of view within it, this piece can be of great value to you in both the multiple choice and free response sections of the exam.

***The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway**

The Sun Also Rises represents the pinnacle, in my opinion, of the Iceberg Theory. That is to say that Hemingway's style of characterization and description, likely considered sparse by most, actually inspired a curiosity in readers that could only have been intentional. This novel is not only representative of Hemingway's style; it is representative of the Lost Generation in itself, insofar as it chronicles fictionalized stories of American expatriates in Europe.

***A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini**

A 2007 novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini. It is his second, following his bestselling 2003 debut, *The Kite Runner*. Mariam is an illegitimate child, and suffers from both the stigma surrounding her birth along with the abuse she faces throughout her marriage. Laila, born a generation later, is comparatively privileged during her youth until their lives intersect and she is also forced to accept a marriage proposal from Rasheed, Mariam's husband.

Catch-22 by Joseph Heller

Catch-22 comments on war by reducing it to a bureaucratic concern. Use this literary work in discussions of plot and how devices, like the Catch-22 rule which constitutes the reason that Heller wrote this piece, serve to form the plot of a story.

Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko

Ceremony is a commentary on how tradition and spirituality can serve as a source of healing. It takes place from the point of view of a service-age Native American man who returns from World War II with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. He is mentally unstable and turns to alcohol to ease his mind, but, eventually, he returns to his spirituality, healing from it.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel set in rural Georgia in the 1930s. It deals with racism and sexism, along with women's rights. The power of language also plays an important role in *The Color Purple*. Walker writes Celie's letters in a way that reflects her progression in emotional and psychological development. This development through language reinforces the idea that access to language, the ability to express one's self, is integral in the development of a sense of self.

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams

Williams used much of his own personal experience in writing *The Glass Menagerie*. This is a four-character play with a main theme of accepting reality. Each character in *The Glass Menagerie* retreats into their own world to escape the realities to which they cannot relate. Look for this selection in free response prompts about symbolism. Laura's array of delicate glass animals is the single strongest symbol in the play and a strong symbol in general. This *Glass Menagerie* comes to represent Laura herself and her escape her own illusory world.

Othello by William Shakespeare

Othello is a story of love and deception built upon a soldier's insecurity with his life outside of soldiering. Questions and prompts about *Othello* may be concerned with issues of an isolated character and characteristics that contribute to that isolation.

The Tempest by William Shakespeare

One of the prominent themes in *The Tempest* is the artist in relation to his creation. Prospero can be viewed as a kind of artist, in that he controls the fate of every other character. It's as if Shakespeare inserted himself into the story as Prospero. *The Tempest* is widely regarded as Shakespeare's "Farewell" performance.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

A dystopian novel by Canadian author Margaret Atwood, originally published in 1985. It is set in a near-future New England, in a totalitarian state resembling a theonomy that has overthrown the United States government. The novel focuses on the journey of the handmaid Offred. Her name derives from the possessive form "of Fred"; handmaids are forbidden to use their birth names and must echo the male, or master, whom they serve.

A Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving

The seventh novel by American writer John Irving was published in 1989, tells the story of John Wheelwright and his best friend Owen Meany growing up together in a small New Hampshire town during the 1950s and 1960s. According to John's narration, Owen is a remarkable boy in many ways; he believes himself to be God's instrument and sets out to fulfill the fate he has prophesied for himself.

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

A landmark 1967 novel by Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez that tells the multi-generational story of the Buendía family, whose patriarch, José Arcadio Buendía, founded the town of Macondo, a fictitious town in the country of Colombia.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four*, often published as *1984*, by George Orwell**

A dystopian novel by English writer George Orwell published in June 1949. The novel is set in the year 1984 when most of the world population have become victims of perpetual war, omnipresent government surveillance and propaganda.

***Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley**

A dystopian novel written in 1931 by English author Aldous Huxley, and published in 1932. Largely set in a futuristic World State of genetically modified citizens and an intelligence-based social hierarchy, the novel anticipates huge scientific developments in reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipulation, and classical conditioning that are combined to make a utopian society that goes challenged only by a single outsider. Huxley followed this book with a reassessment in an essay, *Brave New World Revisited* (1958), and with *Island* (1962), his final novel.

***On the Road* by Jack Kerouac**

This novel, by American writer Jack Kerouac, is based on the travels of Kerouac and his friends across the United States. It is considered a defining work of the postwar Beat and Counterculture generations, with its protagonists living life against a backdrop of jazz, poetry, and drug use. The novel, published in 1957, is a roman à clef, with many key figures of the Beat movement, such as William S. Burroughs (Old Bull Lee), Allen Ginsberg (Carlo Marx) and Neal Cassady (Dean Moriarty) represented by characters in the book, including Kerouac himself as the narrator Sal Paradise.

***The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger**

A story by J. D. Salinger, partially published in serial form in 1945–1946 and as a novel in 1951. A classic novel originally published for adults, it has since become popular among adolescent readers for its themes of angst, alienation and as a critique on superficiality in society. It has been translated into almost all of the world's major languages.

***The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan**

A 1989 novel written by Amy Tan. It focuses on four Chinese American immigrant families in San Francisco who start a club known as The Joy Luck Club, playing the Chinese game of mahjong for money while feasting on a variety of foods. The book is structured somewhat like a mahjong game, with four parts divided into four sections to create sixteen chapters. The three mothers and four daughters (one mother, Suyuan Woo, dies before the novel opens) share stories about their lives in the form of vignettes. Each part is preceded by a parable relating to the game.

***The Reservation Blues* by Sherman Alexie**

The life of Spokane Indian Thomas Builds-the-Fire irrevocably changes when blues legend Robert Johnson miraculously appears on his reservation and passes the misfit storyteller his enchanted guitar. Inspired by this gift, Thomas forms Coyote Springs, an all-Indian Catholic band who find themselves on a magical tour that leads from reservation bars to Seattle and New York--and deep within their own souls.

***The Bonesetter's Daughter* by Amy Tan**

The Bonesetter's Daughter is divided into two major stories. The first is about Ruth, a Chinese-American woman living in San Francisco. She worries that her elderly mother, Lu Ling, is gradually becoming more and more demented. Lu Ling seems increasingly forgetful, and makes bizarre comments about her family and her own past. The second major story is that of Lu Ling herself, as written for Ruth. Several years earlier, Lu Ling had written out her life story in Chinese. Ruth arranges to have the document translated, and learns the truth about her mother's life in China. Much of the novel, like Tan's previous work, is based on her relationship with her own mother, and her mother and grandmother's life stories. The first-edition cover photo is an image of Tan's grandmother Gu Jingmei, taken in about 1905.