

Dear Eleventh Grade AP Proselytes:

You have chosen to enter the realm of American Literature and Rhetoric. Be prepared to become an agile rhetorician. Be prepared to enter a domain where you will read some of the greatest literature created by some of the greatest American authors. You will read tomes cut from the fabric of our culture that will enhance your existence.

You will be reading books that are timeless. You will be reading books that will change the way you look at literature and yourself. You will be reading books that will haunt your dreams for the remainder of your life. (The beginning of this paragraph is an example of *paraprosdokian* – one of the 150+ rhetorical devices you will learn this year. You should look it up. Yes, of course right now! I'll wait for you.) Now that you have only 149 devices to go, you need to know that you will have a quiz on *paraprosdokian* on the first day back.

The class will start this summer as you read four books. You will read *Fences*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Ethan Frome*, and a biography/autobiography of an American author. During the first two weeks of school you will have an AP-style exam or an essay for each of the pieces of literature. If you are not prepared for these assessments you will start the quarter trying to climb out of a hole.

Fences – Make a list of characters (Troy, Rose, Cory, Gabriel, Bono, Lyons) and find a quote for each one. Copy that quote verbatim and then explain how that quote defines the character. Also, explain the internal AND external conflicts of each character ALONG with your justification of your choice. Be prepared to discuss the symbolism of each character's name. Very important.

A Raisin in the Sun – You will find many similarities between this play and *Fences*. You should find many similarities between the two because that is going to be your assignment. We are going to call them parallels. Don't even think about giving me superficial parallels like they are both African American families or that they are both plays. You have to go deep. What are the societal messages? What is the psychology behind their choices and the conflicts they encounter? I just gave you two possible launching points, but that doesn't mean that every time you delve into your plays that they are the only two things you are looking to find. Be creative. If when reading you come across something interesting to elaborate upon, do it. Relevant creativity is rewarded. You will need to identify 10 parallels and write about them in ways that show me that you are a critical thinker and that you can read and analyze deeply. Show me what you can do with a text. Show me that you understand what an author is doing and more importantly why.

Ethan Frome – This one is going to give you a hankering for some sledding. Read this one when it is burning hot out and you cannot stand it one more minute. Peruse the words of Wharton and you will be transported to a cold and blustery New England winter. Their snowflakes will cool you off and so will the ice-cold heart of Zeena.

An author is always saying something about society when he or she puts pen to paper whether it's directly or indirectly. You have to read between the lines and figure out what Wharton is saying about society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. You will spend no less than two pages covering what you perceive to be her thoughts on what was going on back then.

Biography/Autobiography – This one is your choice. Do you feel empowered? You should. Do not come to class having read some biography about Mark Twain that you picked up at a truck stop in Missouri on your way to see the Vent Haven: Ventriloquist Museum

(<http://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/10050>) unless you have colored in all of the pages and completed all of the dot-to-dots. Find a good auto/biography about an American author of your choice with the exception of John Steinbeck or Edgar Allan Poe or Mark Twain or Emily Dickinson (I just used another rhetorical device – polysyndeton). Those people are off limits. You will write about how his/her life may have been reflected in his/her works. You should be able to cull this information from the work you are reading. Put that information into an essay – two page minimum, double spaced, and in Times New Roman – 12 pt. Use your best vocabulary and let me hear your voice.

Eleven AP Language and Composition is not for the weak or lazy. If you have already groaned after reading your expectations for this summer because you don't want to do the work, then this class isn't for you. This is a college, freshman level, academically rigorous course where you are expected to do the work without me holding your hand. You are flying solo. The onus resides squarely on you. It is time to put away the Cliff notes, Spark notes, movies, and any other fallible crutch you may have used in the past. If you cannot handle the workload of this course in conjunction with all of your other courses, you should talk to your guidance counselor about an alternative path. You should do that as soon as possible. If you have chosen this course because you think it will look good on your academic resume', you should talk to your guidance counselor. If you have chosen AP English because you have a love for literature and a thirst for knowledge, you have come home. You will gain an unbelievable amount of knowledge and hopefully wisdom too. You will have a good time, but you will work and think in ways you are not expected to in other classes. You will be working and thinking even when you think you are not. Every single thing we do for the course will be to improve you as a thinker and reader and to prepare you for the exam and beyond.

I am going to have a good time and you are invited to come along for the ride.

Have a great summer.

Sincerely,

Mr. Showalter

P.S. I will *occasionally* check my school email when I'm not at the pool, reading on the veranda, or preparing to jump my motorcycle across Snake River Canyon in order to avenge Evel Knievel's failure, so feel free to send me inane questions, cogitations, or just plain tidings.