

**AP English Literature: Mr. Cote**  
**Summer Assignment 2020**

**Title:** *The Stranger* by Albert Camus (1942), translated by Matthew Ward (1988)

Depending on the status of the pandemic, copies may or may not be available to borrow from SHS or from a local library, but you may choose to purchase your own copies. Another option is to use the following link:

<https://bxscience.edu/ourpages/auto/2019/2/28/69275970/The%20Stranger%20-%20Albert%20Camus.pdf>

Whatever form of the text that you use, be sure that the translator is Matthew Ward. Translations can be significantly different, leading to interpretations that are particular to those differences.

The novel is “strange” enough without our having to compare translations.

**Summer Assignment, Part 1: *The Stranger*:** Albert Camus’s *The Stranger* has been viewed critically as an example of absurdist literature, and, in turn, the protagonist Meursault has been analyzed as an antihero. (See the information about existentialist literature below this assignment description for clarification, as well as the attached essay “Entranced by Reality” by Ian Marcus Corbin and Camus’s speech to the Nobel committee to accept his Nobel Prize for Literature.) Discuss your interpretation of Meursault in a formal, 4-5-page essay with a clearly established thesis statement that answers this question: In what way does Meursault fit the definition of an antihero? Explain your thinking using direct references and quotations both from the text and from Camus’s speech; use MLA formatted in-text citations with page numbers. Be sure to incorporate in your discussion some of the aspects of existentialism explained below. Double-space the text and use New Times Roman, 12-point font. E-mail your essay to Mr. Cote ([kcote@stoningtonschools.org](mailto:kcote@stoningtonschools.org)) no later than Monday, August 3, 2020. If you do not receive a reply message from the teacher confirming the receipt of your essay, please print both your initial send message and your essay and mail them to Stonington High School (176 South Broad St., Pawcatuck, CT 06379). Be sure that the package is postmarked on or before August 3.

The following definitions may assist you in clarifying your interpretation.

- **absurdist literature:** characters are often alienated from themselves and their environment in an irrational world (Meyer 127).
- **antihero:** a protagonist who has the opposite of most of the traditional attributes of a hero. He or she may be bewildered, ineffectual, deluded, or merely pathetic. He or she has little control over events. Often what antiheroes learn, if they learn anything at all, is that the world isolates them in an existence devoid of God and absolute values (Meyer 2174).

### **Existentialism**

A chiefly 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical movement embracing diverse doctrines, but centering on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for his acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong, or good or bad.

### **Existentialist Thought**

Existentialism is just one way of looking at the world we were born into and making sense of our place in it. People who think in the following ways call themselves existentialists:

- **Alienation**—Man is ultimately alone, separated from others physically and spiritually.

- **Life is Absurd**—Man is thrust into an uncaring, chaotic universe. He discovers that nothing is certain, for there are no external standards or laws—no rules upon which he can base his decisions. The universe has lost its meaning. Life is ruled by chance; therefore, man does not have a destiny. (God is dead. ~ Nietzsche)
- **Universe is Chaos**—Since the future is unwritten, all is chaos. Man alone imposes order upon chaos through his choices.
- **Existence**—Flowers, animals, and stones all exist. But people exist in a different way. Individuals are unique—they are able to think about themselves and the world in which they find themselves and make choices.
- **Human Individuality**—Humans can choose because they are free, and the choices they make establish the future into which they project themselves; individuals are free to choose their own paths, but they must accept the risk and responsibility of their actions. Man must make decisions, and he alone is responsible for the decisions he makes.
- **Live Courageously**—In spite of the frustration of making crucial decisions in a world without meaning, the existentialist rejects suicide because it is not courageous. He believes that life is a task to be performed, and that man can only find meaning in life through commitment (to a task or to a personal relationship with another, be it comrade, lover, or even God). Without the task or personal relationship, there is only Angst (fear, dread).
- **Existence precedes essence**—We exist first, without any purpose or destiny; then, through our decisions, we develop our essence. In other words, we start out alienated, but through acting and searching we create meaning for ourselves.

**When Existential forces impinge upon the lives of human beings, there is:**

- Superficiality in conversation, manner, and appearance
- Alienation
- Inactivity, paralysis
- Decay, pollution
- Sterility
- Lust rather than love
- Lack of direction, aimless wandering
- Indecision
- Absurdity

**Summer Assignment, Part 2: The College Essay:** Since many of you are seeking early-action or early-decision and consequently have already begun your college essays, no instruction time will be spent on them; instead, you will submit a draft of your essay on the first day of class; if we begin school with distance-learning, then you must email your essay to me at the address above on the first day of academics. If you have not yet started your essay, then you must write one in response to a prompt either from the Common Application or from a school-generated application. (Students who already have written their essays should have responded to a prompt.) I will grade the papers and return them in time for you to write a second draft well before the October-November application deadlines. Please double-space the text and use New Times Roman, 12-point font. Be mindful of mandated word-count limits (see essay prompts below).

**College Essay Guidelines**

The college essay is a short narrative; the purpose of the essay is to show a side of yourself that cannot be gleaned from the other parts of your application; *showing* in an essay means using numerous sensory details, including a controlling image; details must be balanced by reflection so that the reader need not

infer everything; your diction should be natural but not overly familiar. Keep in mind that you have about two seconds to hook your reader.

With those guidelines in mind, write a narrative essay in response to an actual college essay prompt. Consider your loved-ones, your priorities, your values, or your hopes and fears. If your essay sounds like a transcription of a job interview, then you've misunderstood your purpose; story is everything.

### College Application Essay Tips

- Choose a subject that you feel is important.
- Write many rough drafts.
- Stay on topic.
- Make your essay specific to each school.
- **Include details that make you unique.--Do not underestimate the importance of details.**
- Make sure you have fluent, logical structure.
- Be interesting; do not ramble.
- Use proper spelling, grammar, and usage.
- **Write something you would want to read.--That's how you pay your debt to your audience.**
- Do not criticize or complain about the task of having to write an essay.
- Speak with clarity.
- If you are not funny, do not try to be.
- Let your voice shine through.
- **Put yourself in the position of the reader.--She will read hundreds of essays; make yours count.**
- Have one clear descriptive idea, not a bunch of separate examples.
- Before editing, complete careful revision(s). Look for what is missing or what can be taken out of the essay.
- Write honestly about something you feel strongly about.
- Cut out the fillers; don't just say what you think they want to hear.
- Answer all questions, or all parts of the question, being asked.
- Be meticulous with final editing.
- Let people edit your essay, but not your voice!

### 2020-2021 Common Application Essay Prompts

The seven Common Application essay prompts are listed below. The essay length remains **capped at 650 words** and must reach a **minimum of 250 words**.

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

“Through the Common App essay prompts, we want to give all applicants--regardless of background or access to counseling--the opportunity to share their voice with colleges. **Every applicant has a unique story.** The essay helps bring that story to life.”

--Meredith Lombardi, Associate Director, Outreach and Education, for The Common Application.