

College Prep English Summer Reading Assignment – Southern Literature

TEXT: *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy

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Assignment

Read *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy , and:

- A. Annotate the entire novel. You will turn in your annotated book when school begins. Make sure that your name is on your copy of your book.
- B. Complete the related vocabulary assignment (below).

Additionally, be ready to participate in **discussion** and take a **test/in-class essay** at the beginning of the year.

Please remember:

- **This is an INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT.** You may not work with another student to complete it
- **Assignments are due the first full day of classes**, the A day, to be turned in as a **printed hard copy when you come to class.** NOTE: **If you don't have a printed copy with you when you walk through the door, it will be considered late and you will lose a letter grade on each assignment.**
- Work related to summer reading is a **large part of your first quarter grade.**
- You may not watch the movie as a substitute for the book.
- **If I feel you have gotten help from an outside source, we will treat it as an Honor Code violation.** I will turn your work over to Mr. Kallay for investigation.

Part A. Annotation:

Read and mark all parts of the book, including the Introduction. Mark the text and write notes in the margins. Highlighting and underlining (without notes) is not annotation.

Focus your marking on the following four topics:

- The text bears many elements of the **Southern Gothic genre; yet, it also has elements of Southern Literature**, such as hospitality, patriarchy, family heritage, pastoralism, etc. Make sure you mark these examples and be prepared to address this topic in an essay. **SEE LAST PAGE for elements of Southern Literature and Southern Gothic Literature.**
- This text is considered by some critics to be “ a love letter” to McCarthy’s son. Consider how the novel offers hope in such a dismal setting. Mark to help answer the following BIG question: **What is McCarthy’s purpose**, his reason for telling this story? Be thinking of how you’d address this topic in an essay if you were asked.

- Closely related to bullet number two is the topic of McCarthy's voice / style. **Mark places where it is clear McCarthy is, in the words of one critic, a combination of Faulkner's fragmented stream-of-consciousness and Hemingway's terse prose."** How does the style add to the topic of the novel? Be prepared to address this topic in an essay if asked.
- This novel has many **religious motifs, specifically tied to Christ and sacrifice.** Note these in the novel and be prepared to address this topic in an essay if asked.

B. Vocabulary:

- For each of the 50 words listed, find a definition from dictionary.com (out of your head is not an option), write out the part of the definition that applies to HOW the word is used in the context of the sentence **as it appears in *The Road***. Include the part of speech. If you complete **just this part** of the vocabulary assignment correctly, you can earn a maximum grade of C-.
- You do not need to include a separate Works Cited page, **but DO write a Works Cited entry at the end of your definition list. You will earn a C if it is NOT correct.**
- In addition, write out the sentence from the book in which all 50 of the words appear, MLA cited correctly. There is a pdf copy of the book online which will help you find the words you don't notice as you read. Press Control and F and a search box appears. You can search for the word that way, and then just cut and paste. If you complete this section correctly in addition to the definitions, you could earn a maximum grade of an A. Be prepared for a vocabulary test when we return to school. Link to pdf:

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=YnJpZGd0b25hY2FkZW15Lm9yZ3xtci1kdWJlc3xneDo0NTI5ZjRmNDQ3ZmJmMjg5>

VOCABULARY:

Alabaster	Dismembered	Languor	Query	Translucent
Apparition	Effigy	Litany	Remnant	Trotter
Barren	Enshroud	Matrix	Sectarian	Uncanny
Billow	Fashion	Marauders	Serpentine	Vestibular
Canopy	Ferment	Mote	Shoal	Viscera
Cauterize	Glaucoma	Opaque	Shoddy	Warrant
Congeval	Grimace	Palisade	Shroud	
Decant	Immolate	Pendulum	Skein	
Deranged	Impenetrable	Penitent	Taut	
Desolate	Incandescent	Plumage	Temporal	
Dogged	Lathe	Provenance	Thespian	

Characteristics of Southern Literature:

- Strong sense of tradition (manners, hospitality, gentility)
- Strong sense of family heritage, class
- Focus on linguistics/ dialect
- Focus on imagery, particularly pastoral images (land)
- Sense of “loss” from the Civil War
- Focus on race: slavery, anti-slavery
- Patriarchy and Plantation Myth
- Focus on Religion

Characteristics of Southern Gothic:

Southern Gothic is the name given to a literary movement with its roots in the Romantic and Gothic traditions of British literature. Authors that write in the Southern Gothic style borrowed the hyper-aware, emotionally rich style of the Romantics and the Gothic interest in isolation and decay and applied these ideas to their region of the United States to develop a unique literary style.

Overlapping characteristics of Southern Gothic literature include:

- isolation and marginalization
- violence and crime
- sense of place
- freakishness and the grotesque
- destitution and decay
- oppression and discrimination

Significant Southern Gothic authors include Flannery O’Connor, Harper Lee, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, but their cues are taken from predecessors like Ambrose Bierce and Edgar Allan Poe. We see the Southern Gothic style of writing in the modern day through the works of author **Cormac McCarthy**.

Additionally these thematic concerns have made their way into music, TV, and film (some of which are adaptations of author’s work). These include movies like *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, TV shows like *True Blood*, *American Horror Story*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. Bands like Murder by Death have even introduced Southern Gothic themes into their music both in terms of style and subject matter.

Southern Gothic literature relies heavily on imagery and symbolism. Charles Reagan Wilson, Ph.D., Cook Chair of History and Professor of Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi says that, “In the Southern Gothic tradition, everything has meaning...The abandoned plantation house isn’t there just to be spooky. It represents our fixation with history” (*Southern Living*). You will find rich symbolism throughout pieces in this literary tradition. For instance, in Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” the decaying home also alludes to the physical decay (and perhaps moral decay) of the Usher family.

It is common in Southern Gothic literature, to find innocence surrounded by cruelty and corruption. “When southern gothic authors examine the human condition, they see the potential to do harm. Morality is in question for many characters. A major theme for southern gothic writers hinges on

innocence and the innocent's place in the world— where they are often asked to act as redeemer” (Oprah's Book Club). However, through the lens of these authors the question often becomes *can* this corrupt, tainted world even be saved? Can innocence be victorious? Conclusions vary according to author.

One of the most outstanding and noticeable characteristics of this classification of literature is its fascination with outsiders and characters that somehow veer from the social norm. These stories brim with aged characters, mentally and physically disabled characters, black characters, homosexual characters, the socially deviant, and the disempowered. In Southern Gothic stories you have characters like the simple, agoraphobic Boo Radley and African American Tom who is accused of a horrible crime. In O'Connor's "Good Country People" you get backwoods girl Hulga in possession of both a PhD and a prosthetic leg. By assembling a collection of oddball characters, Southern Gothic authors often explore how these marginalized people can be misunderstood and taken advantage of.

Contemporary Southern Gothic

Cormac McCarthy is arguably the most critically acclaimed contemporary practitioner of the Southern Gothic. McCarthy began his literary career with four dark and deeply violent novels set in Appalachian Tennessee: *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Outer Dark* (1968), *Child of God* (1973), and *Suttree* (1979). All four novels owe a debt to the tradition of the Southern Gothic especially that of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. But Robert Brinkmeyer also sees McCarthy's "gothic imagination" as "haunted by a frightening vision of destruction and waste" that is "simultaneously pre- and post-human." At the same time, as Lydia Cooper asserts, McCarthy's "horror-drenched and heavily allegorical aesthetic style" is combined "with historically rooted commentary on social ills, such as issues of race, class, urbanization, and industrialization, to bring into focus repressed social anxieties." "reduced, grotesque, and monstrous aberration of humanity."

After decades of western-themed novels, McCarthy returned to the Southern Gothic with *The Road* (2006). The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is a post-apocalyptic story set in an unspecified southern location. A father and his son traverse a barren wasteland of corpses and marauding bands of cannibals to reach the ocean. Both shockingly violent and contemplative, Jay Ellis reads *The Road* as "haunted both by Old Southern slavery guilt, and by anxiety over New Southern consumption." (*Oxford Research Encyclopedias*).