

Summer Work 2021-2022: Senior English

Greetings, Class of 2022. In preparation for next year's English class, this summer you must read two books, take two sets of notes, and write one 1000-word essay. Everything is due (typed and printed) on the first day of class.

- A. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Edited by Maurice Hindle, Penguin, 2003.
 - a. ISBN: 9780141439471 ([publisher link](#)).
 - b. *Note*. Alternate editions are permissible, but since Shelley published the book in significantly different forms (1818 vs. 1831), the text may not always line up.
- B. Peter Kreeft, *The Best Things in Life*. InterVarsity Press, 1984.
 - a. ISBN: 9780877849223 ([publisher link](#)).

You will approach these books in two stages: a “slow and steady” digestion followed by a culminating and ruminating reflection. The first stage differs slightly for each book, and the second stage combines both books into one assignment.

First Approach to MARY SHELLEY: Slow and Steady Wins the Race*

1. *Four Tasks Before Reading:*
 - a. Read the *title page* and *epigraph*. What do they imply about the novel?
 - b. Read the *back cover* and *biographical sketch* of the author. How do they contextualize the novel?
 - c. Read the *table of contents*. What do the number of chapters, and any chapter titles, tell you about the novel?
 - d. *Warning*. Before reading a novel for the first time, skip introductions written by someone other than the author. They may be useful later, but initially they will prejudice you with plot spoilers and interpretations.
2. *Three Tasks While Reading:*
 - a. Keep a running list of *characters*, noting names, titles, distinctives, quirks, and social roles. It may help to draw a family tree or a web of relationships.
 - b. For each chapter, summarize what happens in one or two sentences (*plot*). Focus on major event(s) and essential details. Each time you resume reading, first reread and revise your plot summaries.
 - c. Keep a list of “important” passages, even if you can't understand precisely why they matter. Include the page number and a brief description of the passage in your own words.
3. *Three Tasks After Reading:*
 - a. If your plot summaries are a fair guide to the book, good. If not, rewrite them with *additions, deletions, or general improvements*.
 - b. Once the summaries are sound, answer two questions. *Who is the main character and what is the single most important event in the book?* If this is difficult, start small: *Who changes most? Which event alters the story? Why does the protagonist change, whether in terms of personality, assumptions, outlook, or life situation?*
 - c. *Retitle* the book with a phrase featuring the main character, then *subtitle* the book with an extended clause recounting the main character's response to the crucial event. The idea is to reimagine this nineteenth-century novel as if it had been

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

published in the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century, when lengthy titles were customary and functioned like movie trailers. Here are two famous 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 manner of his setting out, His Dangerous Journey; And safe Arrival at the Desired Country* (1678).
- ii. Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising 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).

By reading one chapter per day, you can finish in a month. I encourage discussing the book with your peers, but do not use one of the numerous character lists or chapter summaries available on the Internet to develop pretend notes, and do not distribute the burden of this writing assignment amongst yourselves. In other words, *do your own work as an individual whose grade (and soul) are at stake*. Honest attempts may fail (earning 55-69%), and non-attempts receive a zero, but dishonest attempts earn a zero, a detention, and (with me) a bad reputation. Don't dig your own grave before senior year starts. The course is difficult.

First Approach to PETER KREEFT: Dialectic & Dialogue

Repeat the above tasks with three changes. First, omit the character list. Second, omit the “tasks after reading.” Third, since *The Best Things in Life* is not a plot-driven book (although there is a plot in the background) but a book about ideas, instead of chapter summaries you will answer the following three questions for each separate chapter or “dialogue”:

1. Who are the *characters* in this dialogue? Describe each character in a phrase (e.g. “Seth Holler—loves poetry”). If a character recurs from previous chapters, note any changes.
2. What is the *topic (subject)* of this dialogue? What is this dialogue *about*?
3. What is the *theme (message, lesson)* of this dialogue? What does this dialogue ultimately *say about* the topic?

At one chapter a day, this book will take two weeks.

Second Approach to BOTH BOOKS: Synthesis Composition

Finally, in 1000 words, compose a dialogue between Socrates and one major character from *Frankenstein*. If Socrates suddenly dropped into Victor's Geneva, the Creature's mountain-hut, or Walton's ship, what would he say and how would he say it? How would his interlocutor respond? Where would the conversation go? You set the stage in terms of specific location, and you invent the conversation, but make sure the dialogue reveals careful attention to both books. Show me how diligently you read each book. As with Kreeft's dialogues, let the exchange and spark and clash of *ideas*, rather than *plot* or *character*, move the composition forward.

Type and print the dialogue in MLA format (Times New Roman, size 12, double-spaced, 1-inch margins). Along with your notes on both books, it is due on the first day of class. If you have any questions, email me well in advance of the start of the year at sholler@ecseagles.com.**

** Written submissions may be run 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.