

AP English Language 2023 Summer Assignment

Hello and welcome to AP English Language and Composition! Your summer homework assignment is meant to give you a taste of life in AP Language next year. There are two parts to the assignment: reading a novel and writing three mini-essays. If you have any questions as you complete the assignment, please email your instructor.

Part One - Reading *Ella Minnow Pea*

Read and annotate *Ella Minnow Pea* by Mark Dunn. You can locate this text at a bookstore or online at most retailers: Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com, or BookShop.org (if you're inclined to support independently-owned bookstores).

Amusing, intellectually engaging, and filled with wordplay, *Ella Minnow Pea* is a cautionary tale about authoritarian rule, blind obedience, and the ultimate power of language. *Ella Minnow Pea* is an epistolary novel—a work composed entirely of letters. Dunn uses this format to highlight the lengths that people will go to be heard, especially when the power structure is determined to keep them silent. **A SPECIAL NOTE:** As the novel progresses, Dunn uses fewer and fewer letters of the alphabet. As a result, familiar words gain new spellings to compensate for the missing letters. On paper, a word may make no sense, but try saying it out loud to see if you can determine its true meaning despite the strange spelling.

Please start reading right away. As you read, annotate (make notes in the margins of) your book:

- **Ask Questions.** Sometimes a simple "?" in the margin will do. At other times, it's best to write out the question in full.
- **Make connections.** Draw arrows or symbols to link ideas, or make notes like "see page 36" to link related passages.
- **Add personal comments or asides.** Record what you think and feel while reading.
- **Define terms.** Define any difficult words that you want to understand and remember.

In addition to notes on the content of the book, take note of the author's writing style:

- Word choice
- Sentence structure
- Rhetorical and/or literary strategies or devices
- Organizational patterns or arrangements that contribute to the book's message(s)

A SPECIAL NOTE TO HIGHLIGHTERPHILES: Underlining or highlighting keywords or phrases can also be helpful, but try not to overdo it. And always make a note in the margin to accompany your underlining or highlighting.

Part Two - Writing the Mini-Essays

When you have finished reading the book, **choose three** of the following five focus questions. Your answers should be a bit like a mini-essay: clear beginning, middle, and end, typed, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, and printed out to be discussed and turned in the first days of class. Each question will take about 1½-2 full pages to respond to adequately. Your responses should be thorough, intelligent, and supported with specific examples (quotes, summaries of various events or plot points, etc.) from the text. Please remember to include in-text citations to document your examples.

1. Why do you think Dunn chose to make *Ella Minnow Pea* an epistolary novel? What advantages accrue from telling a story through the letters of its characters? How might this book be different if it had a single narrator and point of view?
2. *Ella Minnow Pea* is a celebration of language and a warning against censorship. It also explores how absurd language can get when it is forced to conform to rigid, even silly, rules. Although this is a work of fiction, what truths about language does it explore?
3. How is Nollop affected by the enforced impoverishment of its language? In particular, what effects does this shrinkage have on the relationships and interior lives of Nollop's citizens? Do these developments strike you as believable? What is this novel trying to say about the way language shapes our relationships with others and our sense of self?
4. Compare *Ella Minnow Pea* to *1984*. Which of these books seems the most believable? Does the fact that *Ella Minnow Pea* is a comic novel make it less serious than *1984*?
5. Works of satire, like *Ella Minnow Pea*, use techniques such as exaggeration, irony, juxtaposition, and/or humor to ridicule their subjects. Evaluate the extent to which Dunn uses these techniques to successfully critique its subject and to make a larger social commentary. (Note: your mini-essay does not need to include ALL of these techniques)