

Summer Reading for AP Literature and Composition Students (2026)

For your summer reading for this course, you will be reading two short selections:

1) Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* (1915)

Description of the Work: *The Metamorphosis* is an expressionistic* (see definition below) novella by Franz Kafka about Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman who wakes up one morning to find he has transformed into a giant insect. The story explores themes of alienation, absurdity, and the dehumanizing effects of modern life.

Literary Focus:

- Understand the value of literary distortion and magical realism as a sub-genre. (This novella is highly realistic except for the major distortion of Gregor Samsa being transformed into a "monstrous vermin.")
- Understand modernism as a literary movement.
- Analyze the details of a text by breaking it down into various "lenses," such as symbolic, biographical, economic, and psychological.

2) *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* (1969), a play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee

Description of the work: This expressionistic* biodrama recounts the major influences on Henry David Thoreau that led to his famous night in jail for refusing to pay a poll tax in protest of the Mexican-American War and slavery. The play uses this event as a starting point to explore Thoreau's life, philosophy, and the concept of civil disobedience, featuring scenes with various people in his life that highlight themes of justice, conformity, and the role of government in an individual's life. It remains relevant for its commentary on war, protest, and individual conscience.

Literary highlights to consider as you read:

- symbolism
- structure
- comedic elements
- stagecraft (the set, lighting, and sound techniques, etc.)

Both works highlight characters who are alienated from society for a variety of reasons. Characterization is a strong focus in the first unit. Both works use distortion to some degree and are considered expressionistic in style.

***Expressionism** in literature was a modernist movement primarily in Germany (1910–1925). Instead of depicting objective reality, writers distorted it radically to convey subjective emotions, psychological states, and existential angst. Its general themes are focused on human alienation and the mechanization of society.

For each work, there is background material to read and watch that should help you understand it better. Once school starts, these words will be the foundation of the skills we will focus on in the first 9 weeks of class.

The Assignment: There will be a reading test on this material, which will count as a major grade in the first grading period. This includes questions about the background material in this document and in its links.

Taking our own notes on important details in the works (characters, plot, etc.) and taking notes on the video content should help you pass these tests quite easily. The notes are for you, and not me. This is what college students are expected to do.

Note-taking Tips to Pass the Test

Take notes on the following:

- The background notes and videos provided on the next page
- The key scenes and the characters' names and actions in those scenes
- The key conflicts of the main characters.
- The key plot details of each scene.
- The basic themes of each work.

Background Material for *The Metamorphosis*

Read or view these resources and apply the ideas to the texts as you encounter them. Taking notes is highly recommended to help you properly absorb, retain, and apply this information to the texts. You will be tested on the background material in relation to the works, as well as the content of the works.

I. 5 Characteristics of Modernist Literature

Here are a few distinguishing characteristics of modernist literature.

1. Experimentation: Modernist literature employed several different experimental writing techniques that broke the conventional rules of storytelling. Some of those techniques include blended imagery and themes, absurdism, nonlinear narratives, and stream of consciousness, which is a free-flowing inner monologue.
2. Individualism: Modernist literature typically focuses on the individual, rather than society as a whole. Stories follow characters as they adapt to a changing world, often dealing with difficult circumstances and challenges.
3. Multiple perspectives: Many modernist writers wrote in the first-person perspective with multiple characters to emphasize the subjectivity of each character and add depth to the story by presenting a variety of viewpoints.
4. Literary devices: Many modernist writers rely on literary devices like symbolism and imagery to help the reader understand the writing and to create a stronger connection between the text and the reader.

Source: [Modernist Literature Guide: Understanding Literary Modernism - 2024 - MasterClass](#)

II. Existential Philosophy Video

▶ **Existentialism: Crash Course Philosophy #16**

III. Freud's Theory of the Unconscious Video

▶ **Freud's Structure of Personality Theory** (You do NOT have to answer the questions at the end of the video.)

Background for *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*

I. ▶ An Introduction to the Words and Life of Henry David Thoreau | PBS to Thoreau

II. ▶ POLITICAL THEORY - Henry David Thoreau

Ebook of *The Metamorphosis* <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5200>

You can find *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* on Amazon or just about any reputable used books site.

This document (with the links) can be found on the Huffman ISD website and the Hargrave HS website under the summer reading folder.