

Oakland Catholic High School
AP English Literature and Composition
Summer Reading 2026

Dear AP Literature students,

This summer, I hope that you will do lots of reading for pleasure, experimenting with different genres, authors, and topics. Mostly, I want you to read every single day. To prepare for my class, you should do some thoughtful reading of and note-taking on AP-level texts, including two novels—one that I choose, and one that you choose.

First, some notes about notes:

I want you to keep a paper notebook for my class, that you will add to during class discussions. Please choose a notebook that will be your dedicated AP Lit notebook for the year. You can choose a simple composition-style notebook, or something fancier—but make sure that it is something with plenty of space that you will enjoy using every day. On our first day of classes in August, I will ask you to show me at least 3 pages of handwritten notes about *each* of your novels (that's 6 pages total). This is a very open-ended assignment, so I hope you will feel empowered to create something that will represent your ideas and insights about your reading. Of course, your notes should be more sophisticated than just summaries of the novels—they should show your interaction with the ideas, events, and characters of the book. Think in terms of

• Quotes Questions Characters and Big ideas

Second, please read the following books:

1. *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë. Any unabridged edition is fine. Please read thoughtfully and take notes. When we return to school, we will discuss the big ideas.

2. **At least one** of the ten novels listed on the next pages. All of these titles have appeared on recent AP Lit exams (2019-2026). I have curated the list to highlight a range of writers, from the nineteenth century through the modern day. Any of them will give you some strong background as you prepare for AP Literature. You are even invited to read several!

Content note: Please be advised that, as readings for a college-level literature course, several of these novels deal with mature themes. The College Board has indicated they are applicable to the goals and reading level of the AP Literature course. Before committing to your choice, however, I suggest you browse a couple of reviews or summaries to make sure you will feel comfortable with and prepared for your novel. When you return in the fall, I hope we can have meaningful discussions about how literature helps us make sense of both the beauty and the pain of human experience.

For both novels, please note that you should read a paper copy (not an e-book!), that you should annotate as you read, and that you should take notes. Within the first week of school, you will write **in-class essays** on these novels to begin to get familiar with the kind of writing that is expected of you on the exam.

AP Lit Choice Novels - Listed chronologically. Summaries are from barnesandnoble.com.

Northanger Abbey, by Jane Austen (1817)

The novel's unlikely heroine is Catherine Morland, a remarkably innocent seventeen-year-old woman from a country parsonage. While spending a few weeks in Bath with a family friend, Catherine meets and falls in love with Henry Tilney, who invites her to visit his family estate, Northanger Abbey. Once there, Catherine, a great reader of Gothic thrillers, lets the shadowy atmosphere of the old mansion fill her mind with terrible suspicions. Catherine finds dreadful portents in the most prosaic events, until Henry persuades her to see the peril in confusing life with art.

Wuthering Heights, by Emily Brontë (1847)

From the moment of his adoption by the Earnshaws, the foundling boy Heathcliff devotes himself to their young daughter Catherine. Growing up together, the two share a love that blossoms into romance, until Catherine's hurtful betrayal. But Heathcliff's emotions know no bounds and acknowledge no limits—not even death. Determined to secure the family estate of Wuthering Heights as his own, the tyrannical Heathcliff vents his bitterness on his and Catherine's heirs, manipulating lives and shaping destinies under the influence of a passion that has curdled into obsession.

Middlemarch, by George Eliot (née Mary Ann Evans) (1871)

At the story's center stands the intellectual and idealistic Dorothea Brooke—a character who in many ways resembles Eliot herself. But the very qualities that set Dorothea apart from the materialistic, mean-spirited society around her also lead her into a disastrous marriage with a man she mistakes for her soul mate. In a parallel story, young doctor Tertius Lydgate, who is equally idealistic, falls in love with the pretty but vain and superficial Rosamund Vincy, whom he marries to his ruin. Dorothea's and Lydgate's struggles to retain their moral integrity in the midst of temptation and tragedy remind us that their world is very much like our own.

Mrs. Dalloway, by Virginia Woolf (1925)

Clarissa Dalloway, elegant and vivacious, is preparing for a party and remembering those she once loved. In another part of London, Septimus Warren Smith is suffering from shell-shock and on the brink of madness. Smith's day interweaves with that of Clarissa and her friends, their lives converging as the party reaches its glittering climax. Virginia Woolf's masterly novel, in which she perfected the interior monologue, brings past, present and future together on one momentous day in June 1923.

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)

A classic of the Harlem Renaissance, this beautiful, haunting story follows a woman's search for love, independence and, ultimately, self-discovery. A lyrical novel that has become a Southern masterpiece, this is a story that deserves to be read, re-read and savored.

Sula, by Toni Morrison (1973)

Nel and Sula's devotion is fierce enough to withstand bullies and the burden of a dreadful secret. It endures even after Nel has grown up to be a pillar of the black community and Sula has become a pariah. But their friendship ends in an unforgivable betrayal—or does it end? Terrifying, comic, ribald and tragic, *Sula* is a work that overflows with life.

Ceremony, by Leslie Marmon Silko (1977)

Tayo, a World War II veteran of mixed ancestry, returns to the Laguna Pueblo Reservation. He is deeply scarred by his experience as a prisoner of the Japanese and further wounded by the rejection he encounters from his people. Only by immersing himself in the Indian past can he begin to regain the peace that was taken from him. Masterfully written, filled with the somber majesty of Pueblo myth, *Ceremony* is a novel that is itself a ceremony of healing.

The House of the Spirits, by Isabel Allende (1982)

The House of the Spirits brings to life the triumphs and tragedies of three generations of the Trueba family. The patriarch Esteban is a volatile, proud man whose voracious pursuit of political power is tempered only by his love for his delicate wife Clara, a woman with a mystical connection to the spirit world. When their daughter Blanca embarks on a forbidden love affair in defiance of her implacable father, the result is an unexpected gift to Esteban: his adored granddaughter Alba, a beautiful and strong-willed child who will lead her family and her country into a revolutionary future.

Sing, Unburied, Sing, by Jesmyn Ward (2017)

Jojo is thirteen years old and trying to understand what it means to be a man. He doesn't lack in fathers to study, chief among them his Black grandfather, Pop. But there are other men who complicate his understanding. When his absent White father is released from prison, his mother Leonie packs her kids and a friend into her car and drives north to the heart of Mississippi and Parchman Farm, the State Penitentiary. At Parchman, there is another thirteen-year-old boy, the ghost of a dead inmate who carries all of the ugly history of the South with him in his wandering. He too has something to teach Jojo about fathers and sons, about legacies, about violence, about love.

There There, by Tommy Orange (2018)

A wondrous and shattering award-winning novel that follows twelve characters from Native communities: all traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow, all connected to one another in ways they may not yet realize. Among them is Jacquie Red Feather, newly sober and trying to make it back to the family she left behind; Dene Oxendene, pulling his life together after his uncle's death and working at the powwow to honor his memory; and fourteen-year-old Orvil, coming to perform traditional dance for the very first time. They converge and collide on one fateful day at the Big Oakland Powwow and together this chorus of voices tells of the plight of the urban Native American—grappling with a complex and painful history, with an inheritance of beauty and spirituality, with communion and sacrifice and heroism.