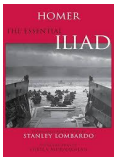
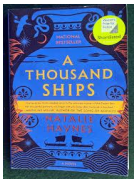


AP Literature and Composition
Summer Reading 2026
Ms. Gavin



Hello, ’27ers! Here are details about your summer assignment.

1. **Read Homer’s *The Essential Iliad***, translated by Stanley Lombardo. ISBN 978-0872205420
   - ➢ Make sure you read this version, as opposed to the entire *Iliad*.
   - ➢ Handwritten reading log due the first day of class. 15 observations total. Details on back.

2. **Read Natalie Haynes’s novel *A Thousand Ships*.** ISBN 978-0063065406
   - ➢ After the *Iliad*’s intensity and chaos, slow down and enjoy this impressionistic, lyrical novel. It’s a modern re-telling of the *Iliad* from the women’s points of view.
   - ➢ Take notes as you read - observations, themes, striking moments, discussion questions, and connections to *The Iliad*. These notes are for **you**, our discussion, and your own review for the in-class assessment; I am **not collecting** them.
   - ➢ Skip chapter 34.

Lit requires intensive **reading**, **writing**, **listening**, and **speaking.** The workload will ebb, flow, and require solid time management; deadlines will not change based on your other commitments.

Reading and discussing great literature (well-written, complex, culturally influential, timeless, thought-provoking) places you in eternal conversations that have been going on ever since humans climbed out of the primordial goo and tried to communicate. Leave room for wonder by reading with the humble assumption that the writer is a skilled artist who knows something that you do not. Abstract questions may not always have one right answer, or may have several right answers. Consider opposing viewpoints and respect others, even while disagreeing. **Embrace the confusion**. These habits create an intellectually vibrant atmosphere.

First week of class:

1. Day one - turn in your reading log for *The Essential Iliad*.
2. In-class summer reading assessment and seminar on both books’ themes, key moments, main characters and what they value most, and significant images or scenes.

“The real community of man…is the community of those who seek the truth, of the potential knowers…of all men to the extent they desire to know. But in fact, this includes only a few, the true friends, as Plato was to Aristotle at the very moment they were disagreeing about the nature of the good. They were absolutely one soul as they looked at the problem. This, according to Plato, is the only real friendship, the only real common good. It is here that the contact people so desperately seek is to be found.” ~Allen Bloom

Lit explores the ways in which writers use language to answer soul-searching questions. No shortcuts. In our “community of those who seek the truth,” there’s no fluffing, bluffing, or bloviating. It’s our obligation to search for it. We have so many great books to read! Feel free to drop me a line and tell me about yourself. Have a great summer. 🙂

Directions for Reading Log

As you read *The Essential Iliad*, keep a **handwritten log** of **thoughtful observations**. Skip chapter 34; it's tragic and may be very upsetting. Each entry should be **3-4 detailed sentences** showing your engagement with the text. I want to get to know you through your thought process. Your entries should show variety, analysis, and interpretation. Number them. You should have at least **15 total entries** from **throughout the book**, including the **introduction**. Anchor each observation in a **passage**. **Cite the book, line numbers, and page number**. **No credit for entries that aren't based on a specific passage, aren't cited exactly, or are plot notes that merely summarize.** Examples of entries are at the end of this packet. **100% your own original work. AI or plagiarism = zero.*

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***The Iliad* is confusing! Where to start?** Homer wrote the *Iliad* centuries ago. Being overwhelmed speaks to its depth and complexity.The narrative begins in the middle, then tells the story through flashbacks that catch you up. It's not you. Stick with it, trust the process, and our conversations will be rewarding if not revelatory.

➔ Before you start reading, get familiarized with the background: the judgement of Paris (involving the golden apple), the Trojan war (including the horse), and the wrath of Achilles.

➔ Review these terms that characterize the Greek epic and apply to the *Iliad*. Many are values the ancient Greeks held dear. Some (not all) of your entries can identify and describe where you see these elements, explaining why they are significant.

☐ kleos	☐ penthos	☐ arete
☐ menis	☐ xenia	☐ telos

➔ The 2004 movie *Troy* stars Brad Pitt as Achilles. Classics scholars deride it: it's cheesy, it doesn't follow the book, Hollywood ruined Homer, etc. Most objectionable might be that it was a global box office hit. In any case, this is a great introduction to the time period and *general* storyline of the *Iliad*. (There's one line that, yes, makes classics scholars burst out laughing. I'll tell you on the first day of school if you remind me.) Watching *Troy* will help you understand the *Iliad*. The vibrant visuals and setting are historically accurate, and a few moments are just beautiful - check out when King Priam visits Achilles' tent to beg Achilles for mercy. Is this an academic film? Not exactly. Is it fun? Yes. Did it interest a whole new generation to this timeless story? Yes. Yes it did. Maybe it will be the same for you.

What else should I look for while reading? What can I consider or write about?

- What is Homer demonstrating about **universals** such as honor, anger, loyalty, glory, betrayal, impulsivity, integrity, strong/weak leadership, courage, grief, sacrifice, the importance of language?
- Analyze striking word choices and images.
- How do Achilles and Hector each view their place in this world? Why do they fight? How do they each view their own mortality?
- Why so much blood? It's been ten years – can't they just hug it out? Who cares if Helen eloped with Paris? Why is Achilles filled with such uncontrollable rage? We get it, the shield is fancy…and? Does revenge ever add meaning to our lives? Are war and glory really worth all the loss in the end? How to account for the desire to be **epic** ourselves? **What's the *telos* of our lives?**

Sample Reading Log Entries

Strong
Entry 3. Book 3, line 54, page 7. I love the fact that King Agamemnon pouts about having to "give back" a slave he kidnapped, then compensates by stealing another one. This isn't just hypocritical, it's childish and not something a strong general would do (certainly not to his best soldier!). The first lines of the whole poem tell us its topic is Achilles's wrath; maybe this is why.

Strong
Entry 12. Book 7, line 32, page 99. I'm not sure why Athena is so invested in Odysseus' success and helps him in this conversation. He's a talker who has never had a problem with words. Maybe, as the goddess of wisdom, she sees Odysseus' cleverness as a reflection of herself? She does call him "my rascal" – is this weird?

Strong
Entry 2. Introduction, page iix. What is the "Greek code" here? I'm not sure; Homer does clarify that "giving someone his glory" means killing him on the battlefield. From what I can tell, the warriors care more about *kleos* – their reputations as skilled and courageous as opposed to returning to their families or evolving.

Strong
Entry 7. Book 4, line 43, page 72. The protagonist screams that he craves "enemy blood dripping down my face," but on the next page (73), he welcomes his enemy into his home, clothes him "in silken finery," and prepares him a meal. It's striking that despite his rage, he still values *xenia* as a tradition to please the gods. "Sorry about the decapitations today, but please – come in. Do sit down. I have lasagna."

Weak
Entry 15. Book 22. Achilles dies and they hold a funeral for him, funeral pyre. The warriors sing his name to Z at the end. Glory/penthos. (Plot - no analysis, no specific citation.)

Weak
Entry 12. Book 21. Patroclus assumes his companion's identity and, in so doing, effectively effaces and emulsifies the boundaries of his own identity. To stem the Trojans' ascendant tide in the wake of Achilles' self-imposed withdrawal, he acts with quixotic zeal, signifying erasure, and is thus slain under that fatal misapprehension, transforming into a poignant emblem of warfare's capacity to obliterate individuality, reducing human beings to interchangeable, commodified symbols within the systemic machinery of conflict, and so on and so forth, with things of that nature, as well, what have you.

Weak reading log entry
Entry 5. Book 8, line 15. L stabs guy in throat, King P. watches - why? What will happen next?

Weak reading log entry
Enty 3. i'm confused

Weak reading log entry
Etry &` / what does lance mean bc vocab }[illegible] n*nst4* |-/~0`slrb