

AP English Literature and Composition – Summer/September Reading for 2026-27

Welcome to AP English Literature class. My expectation for you is that you come prepared to participate in class. To spark early discussion and to support a year's worth of study, I have selected the works below. You will note that the due dates are staggered throughout the first month of school. Please see the individual works for the due date of each reading and assignment.

The wise student would plan ahead and complete the readings and assignments during the glorious months of summer so as not to be overwhelmed during the notoriously challenging month of September. Remember: you will be completing college applications in the fall.

As you read, it is an excellent scholarly habit to **annotate** the texts. You can do this by underlining passages and writing notes in the margins. If you decide to use a direct quote in a paper or presentation, you can often go back through text you have annotated and find a suitable quote more easily. It also forces you to read closely and pay attention to detail.

Do not use cheater methods. The purpose of an AP course is to teach YOU to read and analyze works of literature, not to read the explanations and analysis of others. On the AP Exam, you will only have access to your own brain. Train it well.

Questions? Contact me at pgraves@vermilionschools.org over the summer with questions.

The Assignments (in condensed form.) Read the entire paper for full details.

1. Acquire a copy of *Death of a Salesman*.
2. Read *Heart of Darkness* and take notes by theme. **Due Monday, August 31.**
3. Read Book 1 (chapters 1-7) of *The Sun Also Rises*. **Due Monday, September 14.**

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

One of the most famous plays written in the 20th century, *Death of a Salesman* is a must for the AP test and the study of American drama. Despite Miller's insistence that it was not the case, the play is about the demise of the American dream and the demoralization of the individual in a capitalist society.

Obtain a copy of this work for your use. We will be reading it in class during the first week of school. The assessment will be an AP style in-class essay.

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad

This short, but powerful novel takes you on a journey to the Congo. The journey is as much physical as it is mental and emotional. Your task with this work is to take notes by theme. Taking notes means that you have specific examples from the text (with page numbers) for each theme. Handwrite your notes on the attached page. These themes will be the topics of group presentations when we begin our discussion of the novel. The reading and notes are due on **Monday, August 31, 2026, in class.** You should also expect an essay over this novel.

The Sun Also Rises by Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway's novel is the quintessential work of American Modernism and a deep dive into the nature of the expatriate community in Europe during the 1920s. The novel begins in Paris before moving to Spain for the bullfights. The true excursion, however, is the exploration of the relationships between the primary characters. **The first "Book" or chapters 1-7 of the novel is due on Monday, September 14, in class. Expect a quiz on that day.** After our discussion of the first book concludes, we will read the remainder of the novel at an accelerated pace.

****Be sure to read pages 5-13 of the edition provided for background information.**

Helpful information about *Heart of Darkness*:

Biography: READ more about Conrad's biography (it's easy to find). Note that Conrad (1857-1924) was a sailor and did sail up the Congo on a steamer as Marlow does in the novel; hence, the novel is semi-autobiographical in a variety of ways.

Publication:

The novel was originally published in three nearly equal sections in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899. Conrad wrote the complete story in one month (December 1898) and was paid \$100 for it. The novel form came out in 1902.

Historical Information:

This is the time of the colonization of Africa. Africa was being explored and mapped by Europeans, but it was still very much the Dark Continent. The novel focuses on the Belgian Congo under the authority of Leopold II of Belgium. Leopold's goal as king was to industrialize and colonize. The Congo region was full of wealth in the forms of ivory and rubber and, of course, cheap/free labor. To say that Leopold exploited the Congo might be the understatement of the century. Leopold got away with devastating the region for about 20 years. At that time (c. 1905), Great Britain and the U.S. pressured Belgium to address the atrocities that they had perpetuated.

The Congo:

A large, but unorganized area (6000 political units) made communication very difficult. The Europeans who went to the Congo to "manage" it were often young, badly trained, and corrupt. These young agents were seeking personal wealth and frequently didn't care how they got it.

Use of a frame story:

This novel contains a frame in which an unknown narrator is on board a pleasure boat called the *Nellie*. As the boat is leaving on the Thames River from London and darkness is falling (some great imagery here), one of the other men on board, Charlie Marlow, begins to tell the story of his adventures on the Congo. Periodically, Conrad reminds the reader of the unknown narrator.

***Heart of Darkness* Themes (Take notes on this page):**

Darkness (obviously)

The corrupting influence of power

Man's inhumanity to man

Racial stereotyping and inequality

Nature as adversary (the enemy)