

Welcome to AP Literature and Composition!

Congratulations on choosing to take this challenging and rewarding class. We read some of the greatest literature ever written in the English language. Learning to analyze that literature will be our task for the year, and the endeavor should make you more intelligent readers and writers, skills which will be of tremendous use in your future.

The first semester of 12th grade AP English concentrates on British literature. Whatever your cultural heritage, if you speak and read English now, Britain is your literary ancestor.

It would be quite useful to familiarize yourself with British society prior to the 20th century, particularly its class and economic systems. You will be reading a British novel over the summer to familiarize yourself with the society and the writing style. Watching a movie or two would also be quite helpful (& fun). These are recommended, not required:

Sense and Sensibility (from the novel by Jane Austen)

Emma (from the novel by Jane Austen)

An Ideal Husband (from the play by Oscar Wilde)

Tom Jones (from the novel by Henry Fielding)

Moll Flanders (from the novel by Daniel Defoe)

Although none of these movies are completely realistic, they should still serve the purpose. Watching these movies is not exactly a requirement, but you need to understand the basics of British society. Read a history book if you'd rather.

We continually ask two essential questions in AP Literature and Composition:

What is the meaning?

How is it created?

Try to keep those questions in mind as you read and watch movies this summer. Whether you are analyzing a love poem or a politician's speech, these two questions will serve you well in all your studies senior year, in college, in graduate school, and in life.

The Assignment for Summer Reading:

1. Over the summer you are to **read one British novel**.

One 19th century British novel (by authors such as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot). Do not choose *Wuthering Heights* or *A Tale of Two Cities* (possible fall reading). Especially recommended:

Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Bronte

The Mayor of Casterbridge, by Thomas Hardy

Atonement, by Ian McEwan (20th century, but . . .)

Master and Commander, by Patrick O'Brian (20th century, but . . .)

2. Also, **either read Thomas Foster's *How to Read Literature like a Professor* OR a second serious novel of your choice, OR view two movies/plays worthy of analysis.**

Links to good reading:

http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/rockvillehs/media_center.shtml

(suggestions from the RHS IMC, our own invaluable Ms. Weiss and staff)

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/readinglists/>

(see “recommended reading” on right of page)

<http://www.literaryhistory.com/19thC/Outline.htm>

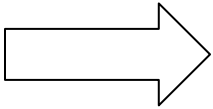
(a little list of Brit lit, and more -- to wit, some Brit lit crit)

3. As you read the British novel, ANNOTATE! You can keep your notes on a separate sheet or use post-it notes. If you have your own copy, of course, you can write in it. **Read the rubric attached carefully; it explains how to annotate** and how the annotations will be assessed. In general, you want to have an active conversation with the book.

4. As you read or view film, make connections. Use the list of 25 analytical questions attached below. For each question, write a brief paragraph making a connection to a story you’ve read or film you’ve seen. For example:

Question one: *Quest*

Connection: In the movie *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, all four girls go on a kind of journey or quest in the summer, and each girl discovers something unexpected about herself, growing up in the process. They all begin young, inexperienced, immature, sheltered, but they all gain self-knowledge through the various experiences.



At least 5 of these connections must be to the British novel you read.

At least 5 of these connections must be to the other novel you read or film you view.

Submit your connections to Turnitin.com.

Class ID: 2733059. Enrollment password: APLit-summer (password is case sensitive)

5. As you read the British novel, collect at least 20 vocabulary words, with context and definitions. There is probably no better way to improve your vocabulary for something like the SAT than to read 19th century British literature.

Back in school in the fall, you will write a full essay on your novel, a timed writing, for your first experience with an AP “open” essay.

We highly recommend that you write at least rough drafts of your college essays this summer, since we do not write college essays as a class assignment in AP Lit.

Feel free to discuss your summer reading with friends. Perhaps together you can brainstorm connections. However, be aware that your written work must be your own. Plagiarism results in a zero for the assignment.

We look forward to working with you in the fall! Happy Reading...

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(NB: when you cut and paste Mr. O'Keefe's name, the punctuation frequently gets lost and messages go astray. You may have to type the whole thing out. Persevere.)

Connections Rubric

	Level of Insight	Completeness	Mechanics
Excellent	Connection is clearly apt and insightful. Quotation aids explanation. 30	All 25 connections are clearly made. 20	Present tense. Few or no errors. 10
Good	Connection is thoughtful and apt. 25	Most connections are made 16	Several errors Lapse from present tense 8
Needs Work	Connection is somewhat apt. Quotation tenuous 20	Only about 75% of connections are made 12	Noticeable errors 6
Connect what?	Little thought evident in connection. 15	50% or fewer connections are made 8	Errors seriously mar meaning 4

Includes a minimum of 5 connections to British novel____ and 5 to other novel or films____
_____/60

Annotation Checklist (You may do all of this with sticky notes).

- Read with a PEN or PENCIL.
- Underline important passages: Characterization, setting, plot turns, irony.
- Circle words you don't know – go back and write a definition in the margin.
- Write questions about content and writing strategies.
- Respond to the content.
- Use exclamation marks, question marks, and stars or asterisks.
- Make connections to other texts you have read, or movies you have seen.

Annotations Rubric for British novel

	Level of Insight	Completeness	Vocabulary
Yeah!	Annotations reveal an understanding of the complexities in the text. Setting, characterization, plot, and use of literary devices are analyzed. 20	Entire novel is covered, with no major lapses 20	At least 20 words are listed (or marked) and defined. Please number them. 20
Not bad	Understanding of novel is clearly indicated, but with less insight than above. 15	Whole sections lack annotations 15	At least 15 words are marked and defined in text. 15
Is summer over?	Little thought or limited to paraphrase Underlining only 10	Only skimpy annotations throughout book 10	10 or fewer words are marked and defined in text. 10

_____/60

The Connection Section

From the outset of the AP Literature class, your teachers want to know whether you can recognize some of the most basic elements and patterns of literature. Consequently, one summer assignment is to make a list of “connections.” Here is a list of patterns in literature (borrowed from Thomas C. Foster, hereinafter just “Foster”); please find or recall stories that have these patterns. For each, write a paragraph in which you connect the pattern or device to a specific story, any story. (*Any* story is acceptable, other than those which are written to destroy rather than enhance meaning. Snuff flicks and pornography assault meaning, denying that life and sex have meaning. Dr. Seuss, by contrast, is pregnant with meaning – levels and layers and whole uteri full of meaning.)

1. **QUEST.** Literature is about exploration. Even the extraordinary *Remembrance of Things Past* by Marcel Proust, plotless and sedentary, set (physically) in one room, is actually an exploration of the most complex tangle on earth – the human mind. So in literature, every time someone walks out a door, and/or goes somewhere, and/or arrives, and/or just barely moves – whether physically or mentally or emotionally or spiritually – the alert reader wants to think about it: did we just start/continue/complete a search, a pilgrimage, an adventure, a – drum roll, please – a quest? Foster, a great college professor and lit critic, asserts flatly that “the real reason for a quest is always self-knowledge.”
2. **COMMUNION.** Robert Heinlein, a sci fi writer of the hippie generation, created a desert world, full of snakes and prophets and sand but not much water. On that desiccated world, sharing water was a very big deal, halfway between sharing a meal and having sex. He invented a word for the act of sharing water: “grok.” Heinlein was drawing on an ancient pattern in literature (and life): sharing food is intensely meaningful. How many cultures decree (or, far more strongly, simply agree) that you can’t kill your guests after you have eaten a meal with them? Consider: in Greek mythology, Apollo is the god of Truth and Light and – another drum roll – food. Hospitality, in the Greek conception of reality, ranks right up there with Light and Truth. Remember, or go check it out: how much of *The Odyssey* is about banquets? “Breaking bread” is a huge event, even if it is common, in literature (and life). So pay careful attention when people eat together in literature.
3. **PRAYING MANTIS.** Are we having anyone for dinner tonight? Sometimes, coming together – even warmly, even heatedly – is quite destructive. The preying mantis (female) welcomes the praying mantis (male, and not praying enough); they copulate; mid-act, she turns around and bites his head off and eats it. His headless body seems to find this quite stimulating, and plunges on for awhile, although it is hard to say that he enjoys it, since he is dead. The mantis is not alone in this perversion of hospitality, just extreme. Think vampire. In literature (and life), it’s pleasant when people like you; it’s really pleasant when people really like you; and even perhaps really-really blah-blah really-really. However, when you get to really-really-really, things change; when someone really-really-really likes you a lot, it may be really-really-really creepy and dangerous. Sometimes (in literature, and in life), you want to back off and think it over; is this real love, or is this a damned vampire? Keep your head; keep your maidenhead; trust too much, and you’re a maiden dead. The flip side of communion: vampires.

4. FOSTER'S FOURTH: SONNETS. In the midst (no – near the beginning!) of an extended list of themes, motifs, symbolic structures, and other echoic devices that draw the reader into new depths of meaning, Foster inserts a specific poetic *form*. That's a little weird, even if sonnets are ubiquitous, powerful, and lovely. The thing is, a sonnet says: (1) I emote, and (2) I love *you*, and (3) the person who loves you is smart and balanced, with a brain attached to the heart. The most erotic organ in the body is the brain, so the three claims built into a sonnet matter. That's enough meaning that sonnets are worth their own APB. Foster, the Flinty prof, offers, a characteristically quirky way to locate sonnets fast: be suspicious when you see a poem that is approximately square (10 syllables wide and 14 lines high = square).
5. ALLUSIONS, I (ECHOES AREN'T THEFTS). Foster, the great lit critic from Michigan, states that “there's no such thing as a wholly original work of literature.” To illustrate his point, he promptly re-states the idea, quoting another lit critic, Northrop Frye (from Canada, taught at Harvard for one glorious year), who said that literature grows out of other literature, so we shouldn't be surprised when it looks like other literature. If imitation is indeed the highest form of flattery, Shakespeare “flattered” extensively, borrowing plots and characters and ideas from Roman authors, English historians, and other playwrights and poets. What this borrowing does is to stir old stories in the mind of the reader, so that you have not only the story you are holding in your hand, but several other stories as well, all jostling creatively in your mind. It's not just English teachers who want you to “compare and contrast”; authors do it too, and want you to join in.
6. ALLUSIONS, II (SHAKESPEARE). When a phrase sounds familiar, and you wonder where it came from, there is a very good chance it is from Shakespeare. Part of the reason for that is that he was in fact a great writer. But there's another reason, which grew out of the first but became an independent phenomenon: American pioneers went west with the basics, which meant a rifle, an axe, a horse a cow, and two or three books. These household libraries nearly always included the Works of Shakespeare (and the Bible). For generations, if an American could read, he or she was almost certain to know some Shakespeare. To get a quick overview of how many phrases we still steal from him, take a look at a list of famous quotations (like Bartlett's).
7. ALLUSIONS, III (THE BIBLE). There's an anthology, a collection of fiction, nonfiction, biography, history, poetry, short stories, aphorisms, speeches, what-have-you, that is called The Book. Capital T. (“Bible” or biblos is Greek for “book.”) Some of it was written in Hebrew; the newer section (just 2,000 years old) was written in Greek. To understand religious life in the world in the past millennia, you need to read this anthology, or at least sections of it. But more, you need to read some of it to understand European and American literature. Huge amounts of European and American literature are unavailable to you if you are unfamiliar with the Bible. Benjamin Franklin rejected the Bible, and then imitated part of it (Proverbs). Jefferson thought the Bible was a mixture of jewels and dung, but he took time to write and then publish an abridged version. For Abraham Lincoln, the Bible was his Dr. Seuss, his Dr. Spock, his Dr. Freud, his whole English curriculum (with Shakespeare); you can't penetrate the Gettysburg Address unless you have read the Bible. The plots, characters, themes – even the setting – of this anthology have shown up in (often dominated) Western literature for centuries.

- Innocence, fig leaves, angels, slavery, redemption, heaven's justice, the flood, the lion's den, fiery prophets, Passover, Christmas, and a thousand more: you cannot know what these words mean in Western literature unless you know something about the Bible. The Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, and other religious texts are becoming better and better known, used more and more often (in allusions); but in the English-speaking world, they have not (yet) had anything approaching the literary impact of the only book called simply THE book.
8. ALLUSIONS, IV (DISNEY & FAIRY TALES). Literature explores and expands the imagination. For most people, nearly everybody, our imaginative life started with children's stories. They form the foundation on which other stories build. Adult literature does not expect to teach you the thrill of heroism or of love, nor to cry about injustice, nor to vow to protect the helpless, nor to feel the hair on your neck stand up for eloquence; many (most? nearly all?) kids learn all this in some pretty juvenile stories. Novelists can (and should and do) borrow from and build on all that primitive energy.
 9. ALLUSIONS, V (GREEKS AND ROMANS). During the Renaissance (that's French for rebirth), intellectual leaders in Europe identified an era of their history that they considered the best, or first class – or “Classical” – and worked self-consciously to restore the ancient intellectual wealth. The Classical era included the zenith of Greek and then Roman power and influence – and art. For hundreds of years, Europeans believed that the Greeks had invented and the Romans had perfected an impressive list of social activities, including philosophy, professional history, drama, highly realistic sculpture, ceramics, mathematics, physics, biology, architecture based on the Golden Mean, democracy, and of course literary criticism. The Renaissance (or newly restored Classical, “Neo-Classical”) era revived things Greek and Roman on a daily basis. References to Greek and Roman literature, including their mythology, are everywhere.
 10. WEATHER SETS. The sun and the moon and the stars all “set,” of course. But there's setting as in “slipping below the horizon,” and there's setting as in “creating a significant time and place.” In literature, any and all references to weather create a significant part of the setting. Foster's comment on rain, for example: “It's never just rain.” Rain can shape plot, tone, setting; it can clean and restore; it can signal rebirth in the spring, or even bring on rainbow/redemption. Alternatively and/or simultaneously, rain can bring on a literal/figurative/mental/ethical fog. But does a sunny sky really mean that God or the gods or a goddess (Mother Nature) or anyone approves of you? Does a hailstorm indicate divine disapproval? Some Naturalists, including for example Stephen Crane in *The Red Badge of Courage*, reject the notion contemptuously. But even when authors reject it, you can watch them play with it as they toss it in the trash. There is a flood of lit crit about all this, and even a disparaging name for when the weather does more than create setting: the “pathetic fallacy.” (See also the friendlier terms *personification* and *analogy*.)
 11. VIOLENCE, MORE THAN MERE PAIN. In literature as in life, there is a lot of violence. Why? And why me? Why the innocent? Why now? Violence rarely (never? almost never) makes good sense, at least not in any easy way. But is it possible to grow without violence? Is birth “violent”? How often do people (especially loyal soldiers) kill an enemy to protect a friend? In other words, how often is violence an expression of

love? Philosophers can ask many questions about pain and suffering, but maybe the real question is not *about* suffering; maybe the real question *is* suffering. Why did terrorists destroy the World Trade Towers? What did they want? What does it mean? In literature as in life, violence is not, cannot, be a simple matter of pain; you must dig frantically for some history, some future, some context – some larger context. It is heart-rending when Anne Frank is killed because she belongs to a social group: she died because she was Jewish. This response raises more a lot questions than it answers. It is awful when soldiers die in a war they did not start and may not approve, when the “why” is distant politics (as in *All Quiet on the Western Front* and a thousand other popular books). Thornton Wilder (remember *Our Town*?) wrote a fascinating novel (*The Bridge of San Luis Rey*) about a rope bridge that collapsed in Peru, killing several people. A local priest sets out to study the lives of the dead: why did these particular people die, subject to violence inflicted by God? Good question, but Wilder does not provide an answer. Violence, like love, invites or even forces writers and readers (and all humans, for that matter) to wrestle with levels of meaning.

12. SYMBOLICALLY SPEAKING. When a patient at a state hospital gets up in the morning and reaches enthusiastically for the box of “Life” cereal, this is not about cereal and sugar, or even vitamins. He is plunging back into the river of life. He is returning to the carnival of life. He is re-entering the arena of life. But wait: how can life be a box of cereal AND a river AND a carnival AND a fight? Actually, the use of symbols is worse than that, or more complex than simple variety. It is easy to imagine someone rejecting a box of cereal and opting *instead* for real life, or ending a habit of drift and crawling *out* of the river in order to live, or getting *away* from the seductive tinsel of a carnival in search of life, or climbing *through* the silly ropes that mark out a tiny artificial struggle and opting for a real life. Each of the symbols we can use for life can also be used to indicate the *opposite* of life. Do we need that confusion? Can’t people just say what they mean? Maybe the answer comes from Botswana, where people shake their heads from side to side to say yes. To understand a word that anyone says, you have to understand their symbols, which may or may not resemble your symbols. Symbols collect meaning in layers, like agate pebbles – complex and beautiful layers, waiting to be polished, fascinating, full of surprises. (Or so it seems to me in my symbolic universe; for you, rocks may symbolize inert, silent, lifeless meaninglessness.) We practice symbolic communication in literature, because we live with it on a daily basis, whether we want to or not. ☺ ☹
13. POLITICS. Foster is pretty contemptuous of overtly and overly political writing; he says it is “one-dimensional, simplistic, reductionist, preachy, dull.” That’s pretty negative. On the other hand, he argues that nearly all literature, including the best, explores political questions. The resolution of the apparent contradiction is not complicated: a book that masquerades as a story but is actually shaped by a narrow political view that the author is pushing is mere propaganda, often repulsive propaganda. On the other hand, an honest exploration of human life must include some awareness of power and confrontation, of ideals compromised by reality, of freedom balanced with social responsibility – in other words, of the central political issues of history. The enemy here is not politics, but sloppy and careless and narrow-minded politics. Real politics, the real

- thing, is pretty universal, and pretty universally appreciated. The great Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was not fooling when he said that he would use beauty (by which he meant great literature) to challenge the power of tyranny. So what does politics look like in literature? It is not a matter of counting ballots or lobbying legislators; it's more about things like clashing values or competing loyalties. *Romeo and Juliet* is a love story, but it is also about whether women should make choices (in politics, that's called feminism), about hatred and family feuds (in politics, that's called peace and justice), about the Friar's efforts to work around the families' and the Prince's decisions (in politics, that's called Church-State relations).
14. FOSTER SAYS SHE'S A CHRIST FIGURE. Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* is generally derided today; Kipling had the temerity to think highly of the British Empire, thus "proving" to many observers that he was an unreliable fool. But the novel, set in India 100 years ago, has Hindus and Buddhists and Moslems and Jains and Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, and some unaffiliated. It's good fun. But most Western literature is less comprehensive, religiously speaking. All English-speaking nations have a long history of links with Christianity. Now, one aspect of Christianity is that its founder urged his followers to imitate him. The question of how to do that, of what it means to "imitate" the founder, has started millions of conversations, hundreds of wars – and, the immediate point – thousands of books. So there's Paul Newman in *Cool Hand Luke*, a drifter and a rebel, who gets arrested and jailed for cutting the heads off parking meters, "just settling an old score." In jail, he entertains his bored fellow prisoners by declaring he can eat 50 eggs, in "a hour." When every cent in the prison is bet on the question, he massages his belly and gets to work. When he succeeds, he lies there, in pain, arms stretched out. Arms stretched out: he looks crucified: the parking meter foe with the painfully swollen belly is a Christ figure. Seriously? Jesus hated parking meters? No, Jesus did not park cars, let alone destroy municipal property when he was drunk; but he did challenge authority, and he did suffer so that the people around him could live better. So spreading Paul Newman out, x-figure, instead of curling him into fetal position to protect his belly, was a way to suggest that the meter-murderer is serious figure – in fact, a Christ figure, who really does make life better. *Cool Hand Luke* may make you laugh, but he will make you cry too, because he is passionately human, painfully alive.
15. FLY FREE. It is an oddity of modern culture that just when mankind learned to fly, the most compelling symbol of freedom switched from a bird (that flies) to a car (that doesn't, generally, and never for long). Oddity aside, birds are free, because they fly. The winds blow free. Swallows make cows jealous, because earth-bound cows must do what man demands of them, while swallows can ignore pompous people. The central historical symbol of freedom (in the West) is the "exodus," the Jews' flight from Egypt 3,000 years ago. The word "flight" means both flying in the air, and fleeing from an oppressor. Foster again, in sum: "flight is freedom." A novel that explores this at length is Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, but there are many others.
16. DOES IT MEAN SEX? In a completely polite and completely boring world, I have heard, people avoid the topics of religion, politics, and sex. But fortunately, literature is less genteel than that, and so is life. Sex: there is a lot of it in literature. Cups, bowls, or

indeed anything open and receptive: that's about sex. Spears, pens, or indeed anything longer than it is wide: that's about sex too. But it isn't just Freudian and Jungian images that bring us to a discussion of sex in literature; sex is an extraordinarily complicated reality, and it is universal. People who do not have a complex attitude toward sex do not – cannot – have a complex attitude toward life. Literature explores life, especially its edges, the beginning and the end (in other words, sex and violence). So watch knights with swords, ladies with cups, men on mountains, women in oceans. Take a second look whenever people are a little more excited than the obvious action seems to justify (like Tom Jones eating chicken).

17. **NAKED PARADOX.** Human sexuality is extraordinarily complex, but the sex act itself is not. Round peg, round hole. So an odd inversion is possible with literature dealing with sex: it can make life glorious, but it can also make life insignificant. Rape, for example, is not about love, nor even about sex; it's about power. It de-humanizes; it transforms princes into toads, beautiful girls into rags, mansions into sewers. It shrinks worth and meaning. A newly minted PhD in History at the University of Maryland (at his graduation in 2009) remarked, concerning his dissertation on the Supreme Court and hard core pornography, that he had seen a lot of the material he wrote about, and it was boring. CS Lewis, who wrote the Narnian Chronicles and other magical works, says that sex is a glorious servant, but a terrible master. So in a serious novel, when the author settles down to describe sex, it is likely that he is really interested in something else, like power or the nature of evil.
18. **BAPTISM.** For most of the history of the West, water has been a key symbol of rebirth. It renews plants, it revives the weary, it gives life. Consider, for example, the music of the civil rights movement: “just like a tree standing by the waterside, we shall not be moved.” (See #7 above.) But in the past century, an odd thing has happened: people drown a lot, and water has become a symbol of death. So which is it: a door to life after death, or just a door to death? That may depend on whether there is a life after death. In any case, whenever anybody gets soaked, immersed, splashed, or even sprinkled or spat upon, you want to watch carefully what happens next. D-Day films, for example, show a lot of bodies in the surf, and it seems for a few minutes that they just died, shot and/or drowned. But then Europe is reborn: D-Day, it turns out, might have been a baptism. Watch water, and especially watch to see who/what comes out of the water. When people plunge into the water, maybe they will just swim and maybe they will drown – but maybe they will emerge changed. Baptism.
19. **GEOGRAPHY.** Writers may know exactly where to situate their stories, because the stories take shape in a specific locale (in reality or in their imaginations). Alternatively, they may sweat about it, and choose locale after prolonged thought. Either way, the *where* of the setting matters: don't overlook it. Consider, for example, the great American novel *Huck Finn*. The setting is the Mississippi River, which Twain loved, after years traveling up and down it as a steamboat pilot. The river is not just the setting; it's also a major character. It provides food (fish) as well as water; it provides a familiar home, and comfort. It is their transport. It provides safety for refugees (most of the time), but the river can also be gravely dangerous when it's aroused. It has good and bad moods. In sum, this “setting” is much more than setting: it's a maternal substitute, and a

- fairly complex *character*. And this *setting-character* shapes a good part of the *plot* – not the slavery and conscience stuff, but the picaresque adventures. *Huck Finn* is an extreme example, but many writers use geography extensively.
20. SEASON. Northrop Frye taught that there is really only one story, and all the little stories we sell and tell are just details therein. I think that’s a little exaggerated, but not false. In the story as Frye tells it, we have four seasons: birth/dawn/spring, then adolescence/day/summer, then maturity/evening/autumn, then death/night/winter. A key question about this cycle is what comes next: a second spin around the block, or escape from the Great Wheel into Elysium/Nirvana/Paradise, or oblivion. That’s a full course-worth of ideas compressed into a couple of sentences, but the key point is simple: watch the seasons. Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is set in spring, in April, when wanderlust seizes young hearts and pilgrims set out to find enlightenment/sex/marriage/adventure. TS Eliot’s grim exploration of disillusionment, *The Wasteland*, opens with a startling remark about spring: “April is the cruelest month . . .” There are a million things to say about the line, but you have to begin with an understanding of the irony of, which is based on your grasp of the cultural expectation that spring is a happy time, a good time to leave on a quest, get married, explore a new world (see #16), or start a war (see #11).
21. TATTOOS AND OTHERS. The world has many strange art forms: scrimshaw, stained glass, ballet, pyramids, making jam . . . One of the oddest art forms has got to be painting your own skin with needles and dye. But odd realities often help make great art. When a tattooed or otherwise marked human specimen shows up, do your best to scrutinize the tattoo; it reflects some serious choices on the part of the tattoo-ee and/or the author. Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* starts off with an extravagantly decorated harpooner; he doesn’t talk much, but he is visually expressive. And another great American writer, Flannery O’Connor, has a wild story about spiritual life and hypocrisy and hardscrabble love that is explored through the lens of tattoos, especially the final tattoo on the last available canvas, “Parker’s Back.” *The Scarlet Letter* is another tattoo story, although her letter is embroidered on her dress, and his is scoured into his skin. The marks you want to scrutinize are not just tattoos, though; watch as well for all the other marks that a good cop would notice, including scars (war stories, slavery stories), lumps (Quasimodo), disfigurements (Captain Hook), deep-shade eyebrows (Heathcliff). Even if you can’t read chicken bones or palms, you should learn to find the meaning (intended, conveyed, received, distorted, or discarded – but meaning) of body blips.
22. THREE EYES, OR BLIND. In Hinduism and Buddhism, a third eye – generally painted in the middle of the forehead – is a symbol of enlightenment, of access to a level of knowledge that two eyes (and all the five senses) can’t get at. Oddly, the same kind of insight/foresight/hindsight/wisdom often shows up in Western literature not with an extra eye, but with no eyes. Tiresias, the blind seer (that’s a see-er) in *The Odyssey*, sees the future. His physical blindness is a nuisance, perhaps, a disability, perhaps – but more importantly, it is a way to get rid of distractions so that he can see other things. In literature (and in life), physical blindness is an invitation to think carefully about sight: do we use our eyes to see things that matter? How often does a pretty face blind us to a beautiful soul?

23. **HEART DISEASE.** The heart is a common metaphor, for love (in Valentines), for courage (in Oz), for strength (in *Braveheart*). We know what it means to have a hard heart, a weak heart, a big heart, or no heart. The metaphor is easy to use in political cartoons: recall the last vice president, Dick Cheney, who (1) had medically discernible heart disease that caused several literal heart attacks, and (2) defended a policy of using interrogation techniques that most people considered to be plain old torture. So what was wrong with his “heart,” people asked – playing on the literal level of reality, but much more interested in the moral level of reality. Heart disease: this common metaphor can and often does show up in extended metaphors, or as a key symbol running all the way through a book.
24. **CAREFULLY CRAFTED ILLNESS.** Blindness and heart disease are physical problems that lend themselves easily to creativity in literature. But there are other diseases that also bounce rapidly and easily from one level of reality to another. Leprosy (see #7) is a common tool. It is a real disease, caused by specific bacteria, but it is also a common metaphor for social exclusion. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, tuberculosis served the same function in literature as leprosy: the carrier was excluded from society, regardless of his/her guilt or innocence or intelligence or other advantages and attractions. Syphilis picked up where tuberculosis left off, with the added literary attraction that it might in fact be the carrier’s “fault” (or might not, but the diseased person was still subjected to social stigma – see, for example, Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*.) Foster opines that, in literature, not all diseases are all equally useful, and that a prime literary disease should be “picturesque,” should be “mysterious in origin,” and should have “strong symbolic or metaphorical possibilities.”
25. **BORROWED SIGHT.** One of the great accomplishments of literature, and especially novels, is that the reader can enter into someone else’s mind, see through someone else’s eyes, “walk in someone else’s shoes,” so successfully. At the end of the 19th century, it seemed that the possibilities of the novel might be played out, and then writer’s started exploring new ways to get at “point of view.” One of the great experimenters was William Faulkner, who puts us inside the minds of some really startling people. For example, in *The Sound and the Fury*, we read the same story (same set of facts, anyway) four times, but through different eyes. The first time, we go through the story through the eyes of a young man (age 33) with severe mental retardation. Then we read the same story, through the eyes of a very intelligent student (at Harvard) who is just about to commit suicide. Third, same story, through the eyes a bitter, cynical, manipulative man. Finally, same story again, but we switch to an omniscient narrator. The work is fascinating, and it requires a novel for its success. The novel’s title is from *Macbeth*, in which Shakespeare explores the mind of a psychopathic killer; the play is insightful, but most of the time we are outside the killer’s mind, speculating. In the novel, we spend 80 pages apiece inside the slow mind, the suicide’s mind, the evil mind.
26. **FOR NOW, IRONY TRUMPS EVERYTHING.** The 20th century was a time of irony. It remains to be seen whether the 21st century will be as loaded with irony, but so far the literature of the early 21st century certainly resembles the 20th. Irony is everywhere. And that takes everything we have said so far and threatens to turn it upside down. If you are beginning to understand that a trip is never just a trip, but is also a quest for self-identity,

the ironic author can play with your expectation, and then just write about a trip. And maybe Cool Hand Luke is *not* a Christ figure; maybe he is a mockery of a Christ figure, a belly-bubbled guy splayed out like a crucifixion just to mess with your mind: did you *really* think a 50-egg-eater was a serious Christ figure? The plays of Tom Stoppard press the limits of irony, with very clever people making fun of the fun that others made. How long can you do that before the mirror shatters and you find yourself abandoned – not in an irony mine, but in silliness?