

Summer Reading Topics for Consideration

As you read your book(s) from the suggested list, begin to think about how some of the various topics listed here may apply to your book(s). These topics are provided here for you so that you may read with a purpose in mind. Remember, during the first two weeks of school, you will be asked to complete a writing assessment whereby you will write about your additional book(s) based on one of the topics below.

Again, in order to best prepare you for this assessment, you are encouraged to keep a set of notes and/or an outline as you read your suggested book(s).

1. **[Gender Issues]** Consider the gender of the characters in your novel. How are male and female characters portrayed? How does the work portray their roles in society? How does gender influence the choices that are available to the characters and the decisions that they make?
2. **[Positive/Negative Characters]** In the novel that you've read, some of the characters are given positive, sympathetic portrayals. Others have negative, perhaps even villainous portrayals. Still others may begin with negative qualities and gradually become more and more positive. Rarely does an author rely on the reader's personal sense of morality to determine which characters are positive and which are negative. Instead, there are details, actions, and characteristics that help define who is "good" and who is "bad." It's easy to know the difference in old westerns — good guys wear white hats; bad guys wear black hats. But even then, there are other details that help you know what is going on, details that even help you construct hierarchies (e.g., slightly bad to fully evil).
3. **[Dreams & Reality]** Take a look at the characters in the novel that you've read. Each of the main characters in the novel is introduced to you with certain dreams, plans, and expectations. In the course of the novel, these main characters must come to terms with the difference between their dreams and the reality of the world around them.
4. **[Realism and the Setting]** Do a close examination of the setting in your novel. What are the primary locations? How are these places made realistic — how does the author use extended description, background information, and specific detail to make the setting come alive for readers? How do the main characters fit in the settings — do they seem at home? Out of place? How do their reactions and interactions with the setting affect the realism of the locations?
5. **[Shaped by Period]** Writers can't help but be influenced by the events and people that they see around them. The question is to what extent does that influence become part of the works they write and how do they communicate their feelings and beliefs about the world around them.
6. **[Setting & Characters]** Consider the relationship between the characters and the setting for your novel. Think about the way that the characters are described, their characteristics, the conflicts that they face, the actions they take, and their emotional reactions. Compare these qualities to the setting — to the way that it is described, to the particular things that are described, and to the words that are used to describe the place(s) where the novel takes place.
7. **[Title]** How does the title of the novel that you've read relate to the novel itself? Is the title descriptive? Somewhat of a moral for the novel? A statement of the theme? Something else altogether? Why has the writer chosen this title over other possibilities?

8. **[Class Issues]** Think about the role that social class plays in the novel that you've read. What social classes are represented in the novel? To what extent is each class depicted? Are all the classes given equal representation? How do the classes shown in the novel relate to the classes that realistically existed in the time and place where the novel takes place? As you go through your novel, consider two important questions: how does the author feel about the different social classes, and how can you tell the author's opinion?

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