

The AP English Language & Composition Reading List

Within the AP English Language curriculum are certain books that will assist you in answering free response questions during the exam as well as some of the multiple choice questions. By being well-read you can vastly improve your score, so get reading! Below is a helpful list of some texts to consider and a brief synopsis for each work.

The Fountainhead

The Fountainhead by Ayn Rand is a novel depicting Howard Roark and his journey through his struggling life. Ayn Rand focuses on her objectivist manifesto as she tells the story of Roark and simultaneously persuading her audience that the self will triumph over all else. Rand utilizes amazing rhetorical prowess in *The Fountainhead*, making this novel a great way to introduce students to analyzing rhetorical methods and devices.

The Scarlet Letter

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a story of a young woman who had an affair with a priest. It is a story of sin, guilt, mystery, and adultery as Hester Prynne makes her way through turmoil when she wore a red letter 'A' for adultery. This novel was famous for its use of symbolism, making *The Scarlet Letter* a fantastic tool for looking beyond the surface of a text. This will serve the student well as he or she analyzes various texts during the multiple choice and the free response section of the AP® English Language exam.

The multiple choice exam dictates that the student must be able to look deeply into a passage and see beyond the words. The questions are made to use critical thinking skills that one needs to pick apart *The Scarlet Letter*.

The Grapes of Wrath

This next novel is a text that uses an important rhetorical device, pathos. Pathos is the appeal to the audience's emotions, and *The Grapes of Wrath* shows the reader how to captivate an audience with their own emotions. *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck took place during the Great Depression. Here, we get to follow a group of people that have been terribly affected by the lack of food and work. The various Americans that are focused on show a different perspective on how horrible the Great Depression was the fall and the triumph of the human spirit.

The Kite Runner

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini was a narrative that depicts two boys, Hassan and Amir, as they grew up in the Middle East. Discrimination was covered in this novel as well as rape culture, victim blaming, and how to deal with trauma in a negative and positive way. This novel reveals a different perspective than the Eurocentric views that the western world is used to. Its cultural perspective brings into light a point that is essential in the AP® Language exams, which is that everyone is going to have a different way of looking at your argument. *The Kite Runner* is a great example of using pathos, a tool that is essential to the essays on the AP® English Language exam. This novel also utilized narrative as a method of revealing a concept to the readers. By reading *The Kite Runner* the student learns to see the underlying concepts, which is a great skill to have for the multiple choice section of the AP® English Language exam.

A Thousand Splendid Suns

A Thousand Splendid Suns was the companion piece to *The Kite Runner*. Written by Khaled Hosseini as well, this text follows three women through their experiences growing up in the Middle East. The exploration of point of view is useful to a student because the passages given in the multiple choice section may be nebulous in its point of view. Being able to figure out who is speaking and why the author is having him or her speak is valuable for the exam. The marginalization of the woman's experience is highlighted here and the writing is very concise and to the point. Because of the concise language, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a great example for how to eliminate redundancy in the student's free response question essays.

The Life of Pi

Another great skill to have going into the AP® English Language exam is to be able to think outside of the box. *The Life of Pi* by Yann Martel is a novel that focuses on Pi, an Indian boy that is shipwrecked with wild animals. These wild animals, whether they are real or not, tormented Pi and took him on a journey through spiritual awakening. The reader was told at the end of the novel that there are two stories and he or she had to choose which the real narrative was. Seeing outside of the confines of the story will allow the student to see deeper aspects of other texts. This will become useful when reading the sources for the synthesis essay or the multiple choice passages that need thorough analysis.

The Overachievers

The AP® English Language exam emphasizes non-fiction works over the fiction, making the following book even more important. *The Overachievers* was a non-fiction work by Alexandra Robbins that followed eight high schoolers that were believed to be pressured into the highest GPA and the “best” college. She puts standardized testing in a very negative light as she reports on her findings. This book is important to the AP® English Language exam, because this is a non-fiction source, which embodies much of what the sources will be like for the synthesis essay in the free response section of the exam.

As I Lay Dying

Sometimes it is the journey that matters. In Faulkner’s novel *As I Lay Dying*, a journey was used to support the greater whole of the novel and the argument that Faulkner made. *As I Lay Dying* was a southern gothic novel that embodies the dysfunctional family. The family trekked forty miles toward the city of Jefferson with their dead mother in a coffin. This was her last wish. Through calamities the family went to the city and finally buries her decaying corpse. This novel can be directly related to the free response questions in the AP® English Language exam, because every supporting detail makes a difference. Like every character in *As I Lay Dying* contributed to Faulkner’s overall argument.

Freakonomics

In this non-fiction text the author looks into a different topic in every chapter ranging from cheating teachers to legalizing abortion to lowering poverty. He does this by using other sources and bringing other data. This is important to the AP® English Language exam because the exam’s free response questions will demand that you use a certain amount of the sources provided to craft your argument.

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Soldier Boy

A Long Way Gone was the memoir of a young boy, Beah, who grew up in Sierra Leone amidst the violence. He was taken into an army at a young age and became a child soldier. After becoming addicted to drugs, Beah was rehabilitated by UNICEF. This non-fiction book is another great addition to your AP® English Language repertoire, because learning how to analyze a memoir and pick out the important parts of the argument will assist you in answering multiple choice questions and writing your essay.

How Starbucks Saved My Life

How Starbucks Saved My Life is another memoir. This one is about an executive that loses his job and has to work at Starbucks in order to make a living. The main character learns from his supervisor about minorities and real hard work. This non-fiction work uses time and facts in order to get across a message. These concrete details and support allows the author to proficiently persuade the audience. The credibility that the author creates for himself is a tool that the student will need to create for him or herself. The student can do this by maintaining clear and persuasive language as *How Starbucks Saved My Life* did.

Profiles in Courage

Do you have a love of history? Then *Profiles in Courage* is for you. It is a non-fiction collection of autobiographies written by John F. Kennedy after he researched Senators that tried to stop the Civil War from happening. The relevancy of the work historically shows how people can do great deeds in a terrible time. This message is even more powerful after you have read each of the autobiographies. By doing something like this and adding many supporting examples to your argument, then you will gain a large impact. By reading this

work the student gets used to working with real life texts, which is mainly what the free response sources for the synthesis essay will be.

1984

1984 by George Orwell was a dystopian novel about a man that was trapped in a world where it felt like Big Brother was always watching. The man, Winston, starts a relationship with a woman and began to rebel against the totalitarian society. Winston did this until he was tortured at the end of the novel. *1984* is Orwell's cautionary tale that he argues for very well. Orwell shows examples of what will happen to society, why it will happen, and the effects of this. If you can pick out the rhetorical methods put forth by Orwell, and answer questions about the persuasive technique, then you will be more prepared for the multiple choice portion. This is because the multiple choice section contains passages with rhetorical devices that the student needs to be able to identify.

A Room of One's Own

We will now journey into the world of feminism for *A Room of One's Own*, an essay by Virginia Woolf. This non-fiction piece revealed the plight of the woman and how a woman in that time period lived. Woolf used her persuasive writing in order to reveal the problem of the repression of women. She did this predominantly by using a bedroom as a symbol for equality. Woolf convinced her readers that women deserve a room of their own. Virginia Woolf was an enticing author not only because of her persuasive talent. She used grammar, diction, and syntax in order to truly enhance her own writing and in turn, her argument. One example of this is in the title of the essay. *A Room of One's Own* is a feminist essay, but Woolf specifically uses the word, "one's" instead of "her." This careful diction allowed Woolf to push equality in every aspect of her argument from her style to the words themselves.

Politics and the English Language

This essay by George Orwell showcases the murky political language that English is turning into. He criticizes the politicians that make lies sound truthful, causing strife within the nation. Orwell lays out his solutions in points very clearly, showing how print needs to be. This essay is important to doing well on the AP® English Language Exam, because if you follow his advice on the economy of language, then you will clarify your argument. Orwell's issue with the language was that people cloud their arguments with it, so be sure to read and follow his advice.

Outliers

This non-fiction book is by Malcolm Gladwell, who argues that he knows the story of success. He illustrates how to succeed in everything: from ice hockey to accumulating a Bill Gates level of wealth.

This is important for the betterment of your score, because this author not only seems to have the recipe for success, but he also makes a clear argument that is a wonderful example for crafting your own argument.

The Unknown Citizen

The Unknown Citizen is a poem that was written by W. H. Auden. He criticizes individualism in the United States that he does not believe exists. Auden also spoke of a time before. This was a time where individuals were only to be known for their number. He then discussed controlling government agencies that micromanage people's lives. This poem will be useful because the exam focuses on real world criticisms within unfamiliar texts. The poem was all about criticizing the world in which Auden lived, making this poem great practice for the exam.

Silent Spring

Silent Spring was an environmental look at society written by Rachel Carson. This non-fiction book focused on the destruction of bird species because of the pollution of pesticides. This book led to the banning of the dangerous pesticide, DDT. This was a great book to read, because this was an argument that won the day. Carson got what she wanted, and she also spread awareness for her cause. This was what you want to do on

exam day. *Silent Spring* was also a non-fiction work; therefore, the intense analysis of the work will be good practice for the AP® test.

King Lear

One of Shakespeare's most famous plays, *King Lear*, is another great work to have in your repertoire. This tragedy was about a man called Lear that splits his estate among his three daughters based on how well they flatter him. Naturally, everything fell apart as human nature destroys Lear. This was an important one to have in mind on exam day, because the writers of the exam love to throw in a Shakespeare excerpt in the multiple choice section, and this is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays.

Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar is another famous play by William Shakespeare. Even though the play is called *Julius Caesar*, the psychological tragedy focuses more on Brutus's patriotism and his guilt. The amazing language that is used in the play made the work stand out. Figurative language is so compelling that it would be remiss if we had not mentioned it. To have a great argument you may need some beautiful figurative language, and this is a great example. In the multiple choice section you will have to pick out certain figurative language terms, so practicing identifying them in this work will be helpful.

The Handmaid's Tale

The Handmaid's Tale is a work of fiction that speculated the dystopian future of a Christian theocracy that overthrows the United States government. This is another example of how working with a concrete, definite message through fiction will make your argument cement in the minds of your readers. While this may not be possible to write in fiction on your AP® English Language Exam, you will get extra practice in analyzing that argument under the layers of fable.

Kabul Beauty School

Deborah Rodriguez, the author of the novel *Kabul Beauty School*, writes in her book about her experiences travelling to war torn Afghanistan. This heart-warming tale reveals the social and political issue of war torn nations and the treatment of women. This more modern novel is a great addition to your reading list, because the message of equality is sent through this novel, using subtlety and a ton of pathos. This appeal of emotions allows the audience to get close to the argument and buy into it. Being able to think in different ways, like Rodriguez does, will allow you to see different angles on the multiple choice sections. Some questions do not have a straight forward answer and must be thought of differently.

The Great Gatsby

The Great Gatsby, a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, is the story of an outsider that meets a man named Gatsby. Gatsby is a rich man that covers his insecurities and traumas by throwing extravagant parties. Symbolism runs rampant in this tale as the "green light" that Gatsby stares at longingly represents his unattainable love, Daisy. Fitzgerald uses stunning precision and beautiful phrasing in order to convey his point. He looks at Gatsby as he looks at society, once again using symbolism. This is a great way to strengthen your argument and practice identifying different elements of figurative speech for the multiple choice section.

The Crucible

The Crucible is a play written by Arthur Miller that focuses on Puritans and the Salem Witch Trials. The Salem Witch Trials originated when girls blamed men and women they disliked in order to get rid of them. This play focuses on how religious zeal can cause mass hysteria and paranoia. Having that dramatic aspect added to a historical aspect puts even more power into the play. The story focuses on how characterization can fuel an argument or message. By revealing the character of the individual you can enhance your essays. You can also think about this idea in terms of applying what you know to questions you are given in the multiple choice section. If you are not sure about one of the questions, then apply a work that you understand to the question. This may illuminate the answer.

In Cold Blood

In Cold Blood was written by Truman Capote to document the Herbert Clutter murders. The author does extensive research of these murders and on the criminal Clutter himself in order to get his message across. Without this skill you will not be able to properly answer your free response questions adequately. After all, the most important piece of the free response essays is your argument. You need to be able to make a claim and support it as Capote does. Also, the non-fiction element of Capote's work relates well to other passages that you will see on your multiple choice section of the AP® English Language exam.
