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Period 8—Ap Literature and Composition with Lyke [REDACTED]

Reading Journal Evaluation

May 30, 2014

One Last Evaluation

Throughout the course of AP Literature and Composition, the reading journal has been a constant driving force. The simple notebook has compelled students to look beyond the surface of a work of literature, to think critically beyond the boundaries of the plot. This invaluable concept has provided me with precious skills, helped me improve upon old abilities, highlighted what still needs to be developed upon, and, overall, has facilitated my growth as a reader and a thinker. For this one last reading journal evaluation, I've found that this quarter, through my journal, I've improved in recognizing the broad techniques used in all literature and how to connect these common methods to a work as a whole.

To begin, throughout fourth quarter, I have learned through my reading journal how to use a character's distinct point of view to determine personality as well track the symbolism used in the duration of the work. When the school year first began, the true potential and effect of an author's choice in point of view never struck me overly striking. For example, during first quarter I recorded in my notes referring to *Beowulf* that the character of Beowulf, "boasts, but his statements come off more as promises rather than vanity" and that Grendel "represents evil since no sword can cut him down" ([REDACTED] *Beowulf*). However, once the class started reading Grendel, I noted Grendel describes Beowulf as, "a man whose body were a ruse, a disguise for something infinitely more terrible" while Grendel himself I recorded to be "rather cynical when he states 'Why can't these creatures discover a little dignity?'" ([REDACTED] *Grendel*). The contrast between the works of literature by their point of view never crossed my mind. Even with an instance so clear in its differentiation of point of view, I still could not pinpoint the depth of its importance. Looking at the two works now, I can see the two viewpoints

impose the idea that a monster is created based on the product of one's actions, not unlike one of the themes in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, with both characters possessing the traits of a true monstrosity. However, as the novel, *As I Lay Dying*, was introduced, I learned how to use point of view to determine a character's personality and even question the reliability of said character. For example, I noted Darl's skill in observation in "where it turns and circles the cottonhouse at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again" (████████ *As I Lay Dying*). Yet, as the novel progressed, as soon as Darl began to shift his tense, I began to question his sanity as well as his dependability in relating the story, thus leading to a conclusion that there is perhaps no solid truth in an individual's narration. By utilizing point of view, my skills have increased in determining the quality of a character's personality as well as the overall dependability of the speaker.

Additionally, the reading journal has taught me the importance of keeping track of symbols. I used to consider symbols only relevant in the one moment they were used. To illustrate, in the play, *The Cherry Orchard*, I noticed that the white cherry orchard symbolized, "memories of Madame Ranevsky's childhood" (████████ *The Cherry Orchard*). Yet, I failed to also draw the connection that its impending destruction meant the loss of Madame Ranevsky's past in which she was trapped. However, in this quarter's novel, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, my tracking of symbols was much more extensive. I noted the importance of the armless figures before they were discussed in class and identified them as symbols for "the helplessness in which each individual possesses toward his or her own fate" (████████ *A Prayer for Owen Meany*). Because of my reading journal, my comprehension towards the importance of symbols has increased to where I can recognize multiple instances of the symbol's occurrence and apply it to the work as a whole.

One of the alternations I have made to my reading journal is including more extensive recordings of my classmate's reflections. For instance, during the unit where the class read *Pride and Prejudice*, I distinctly remember having to share our extended paragraphs with a classmate. Yet, I took

no note of what my teammates had to say. I never used to consider my peers as a resource in analysis and preferred to rely on my own set of skills, no matter how lacking my own abilities were. However, during a discussion on the novel *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, I made sure to take note of one of my classmate's observation of Owen being "lifted up in a way that was different from when he was a small child in Sunday school" (██████████ *A Prayer for Owen Meany*). By recording what my peers have to say, I've improved the variety and quality of the analysis available in a work of literature.

Another alteration I have made is to indicate when I need to return and reanalyze a concept, a goal I have been working all year toward. When I began asking myself questions on the reading, I stopped there and did not always pursue an answer. For example, in *Hamlet*, I asked, "what is the point of the contradiction of, 'I did love you once...I loved you not'", without ever bothering to stop and come to a conclusion (██████████ *Hamlet*). Yet, in *As I Lay Dying*, I wrote, "What is the meaning of Vardaman's fish?", but this time I returned to state that the fish is "Vardaman's attempt at understanding the concept of death" (██████████ *As I Lay Dying*). By returning to answer the questions that strike me while reading, my analysis is more thorough and I am more engaged in the work.

However, even at this stage in the AP Literature and Composition Course, I still find myself struggling in some areas. Only recently I found out how ignorant I still am in grasping the concept of intertextuality. When discussing the novel, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, none of the connections we had made to all the novels we had read all year struck me initially. I never thought to relate and record to the other books. Yet, the discussion caused a moment of epiphany and I now intend to never focus on just one novel at a time, to have a broader view and connect to any work I can.

Additionally, an area I've recently struggled in was keeping up with my personal notes in *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. Being the last book of the year, I wanted the notes to be extensive, elaborate, and full of insight. Yet, because of the hectic time of the year and the fact that I became so absorbed in the novel, I only occasionally paused to take down personal notes. Such a weakness showed in my

noticeably more sparse notes. However, I've attended to this weakness by working twice as hard in the analysis during class and recording all my observations as well as going back to make sure I have answered all of the reading journal questions. Though the notes may be a bit more meager than I had wanted, the book did not lack quality analysis.

To finalize my reflection on a positive topic, I have found myself most proud of my ability to notice connections and contrasts between characters. Initially, I would record character personalities as they were stated, with no further analysis on my part. To model, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I failed to note the vast contrast between the two women, Hermia and Helena, with the former being bold while the latter is self-pitying. Such insight would have emphasized the humor of two men being conflicted over two vastly different characters. Now however, in *As I Lay Dying*, I noted that Jewel, "deals with death emotionally, Dewy Dell focuses on her own personal, immediate issues, and Cash buries his feelings in physical labor" which led me to the conclusion that there is no one universal or true reaction to death (~~in~~ *As I Lay Dying*). In noting these distinct character reactions and relations, I find myself more easily able to write a solid theme statement.

Using the reading journal throughout the year has been a grueling and demanding task. Yet, through all the stress, the journal has pushed me to grow. I find myself reading and thinking critically in a way I never would have thought possible. My recordings have turned from tentative guesses into solid, deep analysis gained from reading critically. The reading journal has left me delightfully surprised at my own analytical capability and will positively affect my enthusiasm for reading long after AP Literature and Composition comes to its inevitable conclusion.