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My Growth as a Reader, Thinker, and Writer

Over the year in advanced placement literature and composition I have grown immensely as a reader in analyzing everything from novels to poetry, a thinker in my thinking about works and the human situation, and a writer in all of my writing. My timed essays have improved in quality in their content, and my reading notes have also developed from poor plot summary into notes filled with detailed analysis about the characters or techniques used in a work. All of this progress is almost solely due to using my reader's journal, as well as wonderful teaching of techniques to change my previous mono-dimensional thought process. Overall throughout the four quarters of schooling I have become a better reader, writer, and thinker through the use of my reader's journal guiding me along through my growth.

My primary area of growth focus by use of my reader's journal is, obviously, my reading of novels, poetry, or any other work that I must read and therefore analyze. With my reader's journal I have learned that taking notes is a thing of deep analysis of the techniques used by an author and not simply summary of plot elements used in a particular work. A prime example of my preliminary weakness can be found in my notes for my summer reading choice of *The Metamorphosis* written by Franz Kafka in which I provide surface level plot based summary of the novella that does not provide any insight into the themes and meanings that Kafka wanted to evince with his characters. I use notes such as, "Gregor's parents are in debt to the place where Gregor works" ([REDACTED]) which provides no insight into the novel and merely glosses over the importance of such details to understanding the true meaning of the novella. It was only after I finished reading the novella that I made any semblance of a note towards something like

symbolism by stating that, "The rotting apple symbolizes how Gregor is rotting and wasting away" (██████) and even then I do not explain the significance of the apple to any meaning outside of its symbolism to Gregor only explaining how it shows his personal decay. Now my reading has become more acute and critical of moments of symbolism such as these, as they display an excellent casement into the meaning of the novel by way of revealing themes and motifs in a work. Another area where my reading was helped by my notes is shown in the quantity of notes that I took; also exemplified by *The Metamorphosis* in which I took a gargantuan amount of notes, none of which pertained to any analysis or deep thought about the work. This style of note taking really revealed my form of reading wherein I only took the work for face value and basically copied the content of the book into my notebook, not giving nearly enough thought into what I was writing down. The inverse of which is true for my notes for the Anton Chekhov play "The Cherry Orchard" in which my notes were rich in analysis, but scarce in quantity totaling about half of my *The Metamorphosis* notes in a work of comparable length work. This style of notes displayed my growth as a reader because I showed that I could pinpoint areas of true relevance to my analysis and choose them to write down instead of merely taking all of the plot events and cramming them into my notes. An area of my reading which I had much trouble, however, was the use of extracting quotes from my readings to insert into my notes as I never knew how to use them, or when to use them in my reader's journal. This is evidenced by the amount of quotes in my earlier notes, or lack thereof, in which quotes were used sparingly to say the least. Later on my use of quotes grew immensely even by the time we read Hamlet I began to see quotes from the play spring to my notes like, "Hamlet foreshadows his own death with 'the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.'" (██████) One piece of evidence that makes me especially proud is my growth in scores of multiple choice tests which I

correlate directly to using my reader's journal to pick out techniques used by an author to correctly analyze the text and answer difficult questions about it correctly. This is greatly helped by left side reflection notes in which I analyzed what I did wrong and what I could do better the next time to attain a higher score.

Just as my reader's journal helped me with reading and comprehension, it also helped me with the other aspect of the class, composition. My writing skills have grown immensely throughout the year going from essays that solely revolved around the use of plot summary to build a case for a particular prompt, into essays using the techniques such as diction or simile to create an argument for said prompt. Most of this growth is due mostly in part because of my reader's journal as evidenced by the fact that as my notes progressed in their complexity and analysis this change was mirrored in the content of my frequent timed essays. For example in the early timed essays for works such as *Beowulf* I tended to gravitate more to plot summary to use as support for my claims that a certain technique provided the basis for a theme or meaning in the work. This changed however as evinced by my progression to more analytical notes such as, "dark tyranny of despair" examples of alliteration showing the inner turmoil of Walton and seems to foreshadow turmoil for the rest of the work" (██████████) in *Frankenstein* by Mary Anne Shelley which is reflected in my more analytical timed essays in which I relied only on my analysis of techniques to craft an essay for the given prompt. Also the organization of my essays improved greatly as a result of how I structured my notes in my reader's journal as my essays went from very unorganized in everything from paragraph structure in which points were just mashed together, to my theses which were extremely frail in their infrastructure as far as building a strong thesis was concerned. In the region of theses my writing furthermore improved in the form of upgrading from beginner level bi-level theses that did not include the impact on the

reader into tri-level theses that included how the techniques employed by the author made a direct contact into the reader and how that helped develop the theme. This skill of making tri-level theses was helped along with the use of my reader's journal as one can't how the impact on a reader relates to a theme unless one experiences that same impact which I did by keeping track of how I felt about a particular work's use of a certain technique as shown in notes for the novel *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner in which I state that, "Darl uses a very intelligent metaphor on pg. 146 shows he is a truly intelligent individual being driven unjustly to madness by his family." () Notes of this style helped me in my essays by helping me reveal how the reader truly feels about the particular use of a certain technique and how that can be used to provide a window into the meaning of the whole of a work.

In a culmination on my progress as both a writer and a reader I have also flourished as thinker in how I think about the world around me, the human experience, and how I think about works. In the commencement of my year as a thinker I was poor in my abilities; I didn't try to apply the themes and motifs of the things I read and experienced into my life and instead cast them aside as another school project or throwaway activity. Through the use of my reader's journal, however, I have started to apply the lessons from the works I have read and thought about how they pertain to my life. "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller has the story of a main character driven to death by the decrepit path his life is taking which made me think about how I must enjoy my life and make highly informed decisions about my life. This thought process was greatly helped by my reader's journal in which I studied the theme of the work and how it was relevant to me as a human being. Another work that made me contemplate my thoughts was the novel *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner wherein Addie's chapter helps

reveal her manipulative form in her actions and thoughts, but also her opinion on words which is that of words not having any real value or meaning in life or the human condition.

I still have legions of space in which to plant the seeds of growth in regards to how I read, write, and think, but throughout this year acres of this space has matured into fully grown crops of knowledge in which I have reaped the benefits on my reading and analysis of works, my writing of essays, and my growth as a thinker most of which has been nurtured by my keeping of a reader's journal this year to help me in all of these key points and areas.