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AP Literature and Composition

24 May 2015

Reflection of AP Literature and Composition

*“Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires...”* – C.S. Lewis

It is very unique to be enrolled in a class that changes the way one thinks. C.S. Lewis’ statement above is one which describes this class perfectly, as it embodies the importance of the analytic mindset that I have acquired in this course. Additionally, over the course of my advanced placement literature and composition experience I have discovered a lot of unfamiliar vocabulary and useful literary techniques – but reformed my personal intellectual process in the meantime. My skills and speed in areas of analysis, composition, and thought process have all improved dramatically from last August. Over the past year, my class and literary instructor have provided me with helpful feedback and a positive learning environment, which have enabled me to further succeed in one course of analytic literature than I ever could have imagined.

Ultimately, my Reader’s Journal has allowed me to read more quickly and efficiently, formulate my thoughts and formal arguments effectively, and learn to ask “why” in order to search for a deeper meaning in all aspects of my personal and academic life.

Primarily, my Reader’s Journal as well as class discussions have enabled me to become more observatory reader. Improvements in my note patterns seemingly changed with the season, and each quarter brought new developments in growth. Some of these developments were rapid – differentiating themselves with the speed of the tide rather than the seasons. For example, from the summer homework (*A Raisin in the Sun*) to one of our first novels, *Grendel*, I

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began to pick out certain literary elements rather than mere plot summary. In my summer notes, I often had summary notes such as, “Ruth was semiconscious and collapsed” rather than, “He matures as he tells the story which ultimately makes him like the Shaper” from *Grendel* which ultimately shows the connections that I was already making and improving on from our second novel. However, I still was not fully grasping the significance of literary techniques and elements. Eventually in third and fourth quarter especially, I began to notice common themes and include the significance of literary items in my notes. For example, in our most recent novel *A Prayer For Owen Meany* I frequently made conclusions such as “The narrator met Meany at church and helped him reflect on himself and see the light which helps support the idea of him Owen being a Christ figure which increases with religious theme and symbolism”. Discoveries such as this prove that my Reader’s Journal has gradually led me out the dark woods of plot summary – into a bright new field of purpose identifications. Furthermore, as I reflect on the year’s note progression, two general trends emerge: notes become shorter (as discussed previously) and questions become more frequent. This trend embodies multiple aspects of the AP Literature course itself: Reader’s Journal questions. As my note taking and critical reading skills increased in value, so did the frequency of questions in my Reader’s Journal. During the last part of the year, I noticed a complete transformation from earlier notes such as *Pride and Prejudice*, in which I composed possibly one to three simple questions for the whole novel such as “Why does Mr. Bennet see Bingley without his wife knowing?” During the two most philosophical novels of the year, *Frankenstein* and *A Prayer For Owen Meany*, I asked a lot of questions to

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further my understanding of the novels such as, “What was the point of killing Elizabeth?” or “How is Owen Meany able to amputate John’s hand so calmly?” these questions both relate to characterization and theme – illustrating the focus which I have gained through the guidance of my Reader’s Journal questions over the year.

In addition to recognizing literary elements and their significance, I have also become a literate and effective writer. Beginning in September, my first timed essays scored threes and lower due to the reliance on plot summary and simplistic proof while writing – and effect of my lack of note taking skills. The structure of my thesis statements has never been an enormous issue, but rather the techniques within them have. Early time essays such as *Beowulf* included more imagery and scenic elements to prove the theme – a strategy which I began to identify as ineffective in order for me to make my timed writings more influential, change had to occur within my Reader’s Journal. As my notes become more analytical and less summary, so too did my essays. A simplistic proof for the *Grendel* timed essay relied on Grendel’s observation that “Nothing exists, I exist” The problem is that I failed to notice anything else about the novel then the dialogue between characters. Thus, in my essay, the same problem arose – and I received an average score. However, as the year progressed, the proof for my essays began to rise in significance and effectiveness as I noticed more elements of each novel. One of the best examples of this acquired skill lies within my *Their Eyes Were Watching God* analysis. My best proof in said essay is the observation of “This male dominance gender role was not at home mentally, meaning that in his mind he did not feel safe which leads to the idea that being

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with Janie was not his true home either.” This is a well-structured and high academic composition of analytical thinking and being able to connect ideas to other ideas from only one piece of information. One might say that my Reader’s Journal had the effects of making me feel “at home” by allowing me to write my thoughts and ideas more confidently and clearly as Advanced Placement Literature and Composition proceeded.

Although my critical reading and compositional writing skills have improved, it is the third category of this reflection which has the most application and permanent benefit for me: the thinking process. The psychological insight and ability to question that I have gained from Literature and Composition are skills which I now apply in every category of my life. Prior to this class, I often questioned the importance or relevance of any work I did in school at the time. However, the lessons, motifs, and themes studied throughout this course have contributed to my reformed positive outlook on life. Instead of questioning “why” I should do a certain assignment, or practice more, I simply ask “why not.” Overcoming the difficult essays and tests in this course has given me a renewed sense of confidence within myself and proven that I can overcome obstacles which require hard work. The Reader’s Journal is a big reason for this – I have applied many works to my own life. In almost each novel – *Death of a Salesman*, *Beowulf*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, etc.- characters are faced with a life changing problem, condition, of event. However, I have learned that one must react properly and positively to live through these experiences. The novel that struck me particularly heavily, and still does, is *A Prayer For Owen Meany* by John Irving. Through all of the hardship that Owen is forced to deal with – small

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height, weight, odd voice, teasing – he never loses faith in himself or his religion. Since I do come from a very religious background of Catholicism, this novel compels me to be more like Owen Meany in the sense of faith and believe in myself even when nobody else does. Lessons like this throughout the course of the year give me hope for the future, and are ideals that I will carry forever. It is impossible to describe the eternally unraveling list of specific morals taught by the multitude of novels I have read this year, however there is one general key to analytical thinking that has changed my thought process forever: asking the question “why.” It was a phrase repeated by many throughout the course, but I never seemed to grasp its importance until this very moment. I realize now that if I had not learned to search for the purpose of each aspect of a novel, I would still be writing plot-based essays and taking the simplistic notes like I did in August. The Reader’s Journal discussions have aided in transitioning my thought process away from “what or how” to “why” – and I am very thankful for that. Upon reflection, I suddenly begin to notice things around me and their importance. My homework morphs from and Sunday evening chore to a valuable source of continual enlightenment. Eventually, I emerge from the dark tunnel of lost internal inspiration, and begin to laze in an appreciative light of all the incredible skills and events that I have experienced in this course.

The consequences of this class have been extremely positive, and the only thing I regret is not having more time to slow down and enjoy all of the novels. With more time, my Reader’s Journal notes and questions would have improved exponentially. On the other hand, this course has taught me important time management skills – merely a bonus to the others

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discussed previously. Overall I have become a more observatory reader, and can carefully analyze text by grasping literary elements as well as explain their significance in any given text thanks to the improvements made in my Reader's Journal notes. Also, the composition of my essays has been completely transformed from simplistic proof reading to holistic and meaningful analysis with deepened textual support – as shown by my improvement in timed essay writings from the beginning of the year to now. In addition to analytical skills, I have also gained a revived sense of meaning in the world around me and daily events of life due to the reformation of my thinking process. The challenge of this course is to search for deeper meaning within text, and thus that very challenge becomes a habit outside of class as well. Throughout Advanced Placement Literature and Composition, I have been trained to endlessly think about and question the world around me.