

I am so glad that you signed up to take Advanced Placement English Literature! It is a challenging, fun, thought-provoking course. It is also a lot of work! The following Summer Reading Guidelines are to help you prepare – and to give you something interesting to think about over the summer.

Summer Reading Part 1: Classic American Novel

Listed below are some of the novels that were studied in Grade 11 American Literature at McLean during the 2025-2026 school. If you attended McLean, you may have read at least one of these books. For your summer reading, **do not** choose a book you have already read. Instead, **read one novel on the list that is new to you**. Borrowing a library copy is fine, and links to the Montgomery County Public Library catalog entry are provided below. However, since you will be submitting an essay on your reading *after* the school year starts, you will want to renew the book long enough to keep it as a reference during the early weeks of September. Annotating also helps! (See page 2 of this document for some tips on annotating texts.)

In Cold Blood by Truman Capote [MCPL Catalog link](#)

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald [MCPL Catalog link](#)

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston [MCPL Catalog link](#)

The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger [MCPL Catalog link](#)

Summer Reading Part 2: Poetry

You should also read the three poems in [this poetry guide](#). Choose one of those three poems and annotate it in the chart provided.

Summer Reading Bonus Part: Free Read

Find something else (novel, poetry, drama, graphic novel, nonfiction) that catches your interest this summer. If you'd like recommendations, let me know! Or you may refer to the following links for recommended summer reads:

- [Montgomery County Public Library's High School Summer Reading List](#)
- [New York Public Library's Spring 2026 Picks for Teens](#)
- [Books to Read Before you Die from Penguin Books](#)
- [American Library Association Recommended Reading for Young Adults](#)

Finally, if you are looking for a literary studies book to help you prepare for your AP experience, a literary terms dictionary or reference guide can be incredibly useful. One of my favorites is *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* published by Penguin (ISBN # 978-0141047157). However, this is not required. You may also want to begin to explore the [College Board website](#), and in the late summer, I will provide you with more information to register for our specific class site. Throughout the year, you will be accessing important dates in the AP testing schedule, practice test questions, and other teaching aids via this site.

Feel free to email me by clicking [Ms. Demos](#) with questions or concerns this summer. I look forward to our work in the fall!

Annotating a Literary Text

In AP English Literature and Composition, students focus on literary analysis and the author's use of literary devices to convey a theme. While you read, you may want to annotate *your chosen book*,

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looking beyond the plot for the layers of meaning that make the book interesting. Every so often, stop and record **OBSERVATIONS** about different elements that you see in the novel. You may write a few sentences to elaborate on and connect those observations to the points that the author is making about humanity and life, including points about psychological, historical, political, and/or social issues. If you are writing these observations on a separate piece of paper, provide specific examples and quotes (always follow a quote with the page number) to support them. At this point, you have already recorded a discussion about the novel (in the margins of the text or on paper) and you are that much closer to understanding the **BIGGER ISSUES** in the text.

What is an Annotation?

1. Writing down questions is a good starting point. Write them down as you read.
2. Underlining important information, significant passages, and writing a brief explanation for these underlinings can be part of your annotations.
3. Rereading sections that you do not understand and looking up unfamiliar words is helpful. When you annotate, you should consider the following literary elements:
 - **Characters/Characterization:** Indirect/direct characterization; flat vs. round characters; static vs. dynamic characters; archetypes—protagonist and antagonist. It can also be useful to keep a list of character names for quick reference
 - **Narrative Voice:** Note first person, third person omniscient, third person limited, alternating person, stream of consciousness, epistolary, reliable vs. unreliable
 - **Setting:** Identify the setting, note changes in setting, and consider the importance of the setting to plot and development of ideas
 - **Juxtapositions:** any differences between two subjects, places, persons, things, styles, or ideas
 - **Figurative Language:** metaphor, simile, personification, symbol, imagery
 - **Allusions:** common cultural references, often historical, biblical, or mythological
 - **Diction Choices and Tone:** attitude toward his/her subject
 - **Irony:** a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant (verbal), what should happen and what does happen (situational), or between what the characters understand and what the readers understand (dramatic)