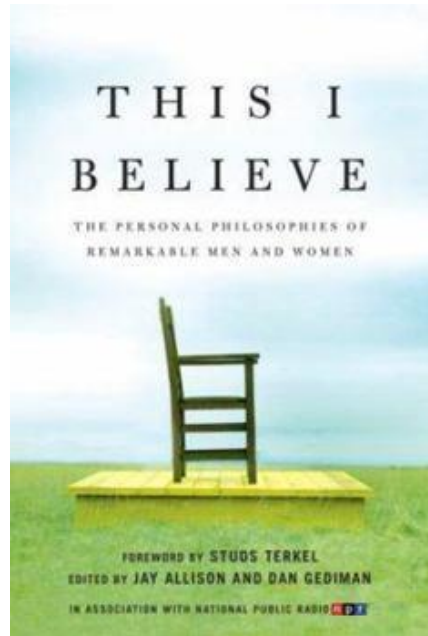


AP English Language & Composition Summer Reading Assignment 2026

This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women
Edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman



WELCOME TO AP LANG

This course is about understanding how writers communicate ideas, shape arguments, and connect with audiences.

This summer, you will read selections from *This I Believe*, a collection of personal belief essays written by people from many different backgrounds and experiences. These essays are short, personal, reflective, and full of strong voices.

As you read, focus not only on what each author believes, but also on how the author communicates that belief through rhetorical choices such as tone, diction, syntax, anecdotes, imagery, structure, repetition, humor, reflection, and emotional appeals.

STEP ONE — READ & ANNOTATE

Read eight essays from *This I Believe*.

- two essays you strongly agree with,
- two essays you disagree with or question,
- two essays that emotionally resonate with you, and
- two essays chosen entirely based on personal interest.

You **MUST** annotate every essay you choose.

Strong annotations might include:

- identifying rhetorical choices,
- noticing tone shifts,
- analyzing diction,
- commenting on sentence structure,
- identifying patterns or repetition,
- reacting to ideas or arguments,
- questioning the author’s reasoning,
- making connections between essays,
- noticing moments of vulnerability or authenticity, and
- analyzing how the author connects with the audience.

STEP TWO — RHETORICAL REFLECTIONS

For EACH essay, complete a handwritten rhetorical reflection. Your reflections should be analytical, specific, thoughtful, and substantial. Strong responses should move beyond summary and fully explain how the author’s rhetorical choices shape meaning and affect the audience.

- the essay title and author,
- the essay’s central belief or message,
- the most significant rhetorical choice used by the author,
- an explanation of HOW that rhetorical choice strengthens the message,
- an analysis of the essay’s tone,
- one important quote from the essay, along with an explanation of why it matters, and
- a complexity reflection explaining what deeper idea, tension, or critique exists beneath the surface of the essay.

ASSESSMENT & DUE DATE

At the end of the SECOND week of class, students will submit their completed rhetorical reflections, submit their annotated essays, and complete an in-class essay assessment connected to the summer reading.

FULL SAMPLE RHETORICAL REFLECTION

Essay & Author:

“Salvation” by Langston Hughes

Central Belief:

Blind conformity can distance people from genuine belief and identity. Hughes suggests that people, especially young people, often feel pressured to publicly perform beliefs or emotions that they do not privately understand or fully feel.

Most Significant Rhetorical Choice:

First-person narration and irony.

How the Choice Strengthens the Message:

Hughes uses first-person narration to place readers directly inside the thoughts and emotions of his younger self during the church revival. Because the story is told through the perspective of a child, readers can clearly see the confusion, pressure, and fear he experiences while waiting to be “saved.” The irony develops through the contrast between what the adults around him expect him

to feel and what he actually experiences internally. While the congregation believes he is having a spiritual awakening, Hughes privately feels uncertain and trapped. This irony strengthens the message because it reveals how social expectations can pressure individuals into performative behavior rather than authentic belief. Readers begin to understand that Hughes is not criticizing faith itself, but rather the emotional pressure people sometimes place on others to conform publicly.

Tone:

The tone is reflective, conflicted, vulnerable, and quietly critical. Although Hughes narrates the experience from an older perspective, he captures the emotional discomfort and guilt he felt as a child. The reflective tone allows readers to understand both the innocence of his younger self and the larger social critique he develops later.

Important Quote + Why It Matters:

“I was really crying because I couldn’t bear to tell her that I had lied.”

This moment is significant because it shifts the essay from external pressure to internal emotional conflict. Hughes is not crying because he found salvation; instead, he is crying because he feels guilty about pretending to have experienced something he did not actually feel. The quote highlights the emotional consequences of conformity and emphasizes the tension between honesty and expectation. It also humanizes Hughes because readers can sympathize with the fear and guilt he experiences as a child trying to satisfy the adults around him.

Complexity Reflection:

Although the essay appears to focus on religion, Hughes ultimately critiques the pressure young people feel to meet social expectations, even when their private experiences do not align. The essay explores larger ideas about identity, conformity, authenticity, and performance. Hughes suggests that people sometimes outwardly perform belief before they genuinely understand it internally. The essay is complex because it does not fully reject religion or spirituality; instead, it questions what happens when public expectations overpower personal truth.