

AP Literature and Composition

Mr. Schulz

Summer Reading: *The Great Gatsby* & *Their Eyes Were Watching God* comparative essay #1¹

The Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition course is designed to provide students an opportunity to look at literature from unique and different perspectives. Exposure to literature should be deep and broad, and should start with the best literature available. The summer reading assignment is a good example of the types of academic inquiry you should be prepared to practice throughout the course. You will read 2 novels and then choose from a list of essay questions and select 1 to answer in a 4 to 6 page essay. You will compare and contrast *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald from 1925 with *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neile Hurston from 1935. Since there is practically no overlap in the worlds of these novels, together they seem to illuminate each other as well as our understanding of America. The worlds of *Gatsby* and of *Eyes* could not be more different in their points of view, settings, and thematic concerns. Yet together, they give us a view of two Americas between World War I and World War II. The two novels will give us a starting point for our discussion of literature and the way we look at the world.

For each of the following prompts you will compare and contrast one aspect of *The Great Gatsby* to one aspect of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. You will choose from one of the following:

Possible topics:

I. Dreams are central to both *Janie* and *Gatsby*. Write an essay that takes a strong stand on the significance of a similarity or difference between “the dreams” in each of these novels. Questions you may want to consider include: What are their dreams? How do they develop? Do the dreams transform characters or do characters transform their dreams? Do the characters come to understand their dreams in new ways? Are the dreams fulfilled? What does the dreamer’s relationship to the dream tell you about the dreamer? Use this comparison to evaluate the novels in terms of each other.

II. Both novels present a strong case for the seeming inextricability of love and materialism. Make an argument comparing and contrasting the way each author uses the intersection of love and materialism in the novel. Questions you may want to consider include: What romantic relationships in each novel best illustrate this overlap? Does the balance between love and materialism shift depending upon the romantic pair? What does the intersection of love and money tell you about the characters? What does it tell you about gender roles? What does it tell you about love or materialism in general? Use this comparison to evaluate the novels in terms of each other.

III. Examine *Janie’s* “voice” in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and make an argument that compares or contrasts it with women’s voices in *The Great Gatsby*. Questions you may want to consider include: What are the significant speech acts by women in each novel? How and when are women allowed/not allowed to speak? What do these speeches tell you about the particular characters? What do they tell you about race/class/gender/age in general? Use this comparison to evaluate the novels in terms of each other.

¹ This implies there will be an essay #2... It will be assigned after our discussions of the novels at the start of the course.

IV. Devise a topic of your own that intertwines one aspect of the two novels. You are on your own to articulate a theme to explore as well as devise a means to compare and contrast the novels and then use this comparison to evaluate the novels in terms of each other.

Length of the essay should be: 4-6 pages
It is due the first day of the semester.

Note: I do not yet have a district email account, but I am hoping at some point over the summer I will. I am also hoping to have the canvas page for the course up and running well before the beginning of the school year. You will be able to submit your essays online.

I do not have the means to get you physical copies of the novels. You are certainly free to purchase your own copies of the novels, or you can do a quick search online for available PDFs of each novel... there are several available for each, but I do not want to violate current copyright laws by providing and “distributing” links to them. A quick search will provide you free-use copies of both novels.

Guidelines:

Your essay should have a strong thesis that creates an argument about this point of comparison/contrast that you will then support with evidence from the books. Remember that in a comparison/contrast essay it is not enough to say, “Here are things that are similar, and here are things that are different.” You must draw some conclusions about the effect/meaning/purpose of these similarities and differences. Your thesis should point to this significance, and each body paragraph should connect back to what’s significant in the thesis.

It’s not enough to answer the question “what happened?”
Answer the question “Why is what happened important?”

A successful essay will:

- Have a strong thesis that makes a surprising argument that leads to new insights about the novels and provides a road map for the essay.
- Have well-organized paragraphs that support their points with quotes and evidence from the text.
- Include a conclusion that does not simply re-iterate the points that came before, but opens the essay up in a surprising way.²
- Follow MLA guidelines for heading, title, parenthetical citation of quotes, and punctuation around parenthetical citation.

Remember, because you are quoting two novels, you need to use both the author’s name and the page number in your parenthetical citations each time you shift from one novel to the other, e.g. (Fitzgerald 24).

- End with a works cited list, properly citing each novel in MLA format.
- Be free of grammatical and mechanical errors.

² I should also let you know now that I am a huge fan on titles... not technically a requirement, but they add a level of sophistication that can do some interesting things rhetorically.