

Kerr High School
AP English Literature
Summer Reading
2019

Welcome to AP Literature! I'm fairly certain you are parched and thirsty for some juicy reading after a year of analyzing speeches and arguments, so let us jump right in.

After months of deliberation and careful consideration, I have chosen several pieces from as far back as 429 BC Athens, to 1200 AD Scotland, venturing on to Africa 1800s, and finishing up in 20th century Chicago. Grab your literary passport and join me as we meet various tragic heroes and discover their tragic flaws and tragic mistakes. You will learn the difference between an Aristotelian tragic hero and a Shakespearean tragic hero, not to mention gain a whole bunch of insight into the human condition and learn some ancient Greek in the process.

I made sure each piece is available in PDF online. If you choose to use the online documents, be certain you are able to annotate and have quick access to the annotated text for class discussions. The only AP 4 summer writing you will do is five reading record cards. Four of your reading record cards could include all of the required summer reading pieces. It is my expectation that you earnestly read, annotate, and ponder each of the required pieces and be ready to launch into discussion after your summer reading exam. Heavily annotated notes on the two attached tragic hero articles and your handwritten reading record cards will count as one major grade and are due Thursday, August 15, by 3:00 pm. Instructions for the reading record cards are attached.

Your summer reading exam will be on Thursday, August 15. If you are enrolled in the Spring semester, you will need to make arrangements to take the test during the day. All students will complete the multiple choice portion of the AP-style exam during a regular class period, and all students will be required to stay after school to complete the timed writing portion of the exam which will begin promptly at 2:30 and end at 4:15 in time for the late bus. The exam will count as two major grades.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or need clarification. My home email is: harrisonhouse@windstream.net. Have an enjoyable, fun summer!
See you in August.

Required reading:

- 1) *Oedipus Rex (Oedipus the King)* by Sophocles
- 2) *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare
- 3) *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe
- 4) *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

Tragic hero as defined by Aristotle:

Aristotle once said that "A man doesn't become a hero until he can see the root of his own downfall."

A tragic hero is a literary character who makes a judgment error that inevitably leads to his/her own destruction. In reading *Oedipus*, *Macbeth*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *A Raisin in the Sun*, look at the role of justice and/or revenge and its influence on each character's choices when analyzing any "judgment error."

Characteristics:

An Aristotelian tragic hero must possess specific characteristics, five of which are below:

- 1) Flaw or error of judgment (hamartia) **Note the role of justice and/or revenge in the judgments.**
- 2) A reversal of fortune (peripeteia) brought about because of the hero's error in judgment.
- 3) The discovery or recognition that the reversal was brought about by the hero's own actions (anagnorisis)
- 4) Excessive Pride (hubris)
- 5) The character's fate must be greater than deserved.

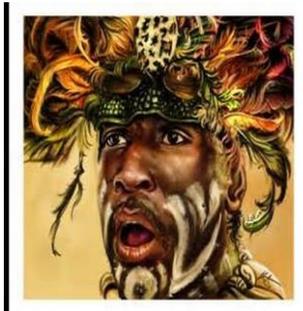
Initially, the tragic hero should be neither better nor worse morally than normal people, in order to allow the audience to identify with them. This also introduces pity, which is crucial in tragedy, as if the hero was perfect we would be outraged with their fate or not care especially because of their ideological superiority. If the hero was imperfect or evil, then the audience would feel that he had gotten what he deserved. It is important to strike a balance in the hero's character.

Eventually the Aristotelian tragic hero dies a tragic death, having fallen from great heights and having made an irreversible mistake. The hero must courageously accept their death with honour.

Other common traits:

Some other common traits characteristic of a tragic hero:

- Hero must suffer more than he deserves.
- Hero must be doomed from the start, but bears no responsibility for possessing his flaw.
- Hero must be noble in nature, but imperfect so that the audience can see themselves in him.
- Hero must have discovered his fate by his own actions, not by things happening to him.
- Hero must understand his doom, as well as the fact that his fate was discovered by his own actions.
- Hero's story should arouse fear and empathy.
- Hero must be physically or spiritually wounded by his experiences, often resulting in his death.
- The hero must be intelligent so he may learn from his mistakes.
- The hero must have a weakness, usually it is pride
- He has to be faced with a very serious decision that he has to make



The Tragic Hero

The tragic play comes from Greece; the genre was established by the fifth century BCE. Plays were performed during an Athenian festival, the City Dionysia, and actors evoked the heroic figures of myth and legend. [1] In his *Poetics*, Aristotle said that tragedy is an imitation of 'events terrible and pitiful'. [2] The tragic hero, said Aristotle, should not be 'a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us'. Neither should he be 'a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense, nor calls forth pity or fear'. Finally, Aristotle cautions, 'Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves'. Aristotle pronounces the hero of tragedy properly to be 'the character between these two extremes – that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous – a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families'. [3]

The *Poetics*, along with the tragedies of the Roman playwright Seneca, were influential in the Elizabethan period. Shakespeare's tragic heroes conform to many of the precepts of Aristotle. They may have royal blood, be renowned military leaders, or both. They may exhibit villainy, but this is not usually the villainy of an out-and-out tyrant, but the result of a tragic flaw in character that leads them to commit errors or acts of violence. Thus, Hamlet's melancholy and inner torment, although partly induced by circumstances, also seem to be part of his own character. Othello's jealousy and failure to recognise Iago's manipulation result in the murder of Desdemona. Antony's excessive love for Cleopatra weakens him, and Lear's pride and rejection of Cordelia bring about his madness and death. As Aristotle suggested, characters who are flawed, rather than wholly villainous, are characters with whom the audience can identify. Seneca's tragic heroes tend to be more extreme, consciously doing wrong and driven by wild passions. [4] Perhaps another aspect of the audience's ability to identify came because Shakespeare varied the classical pattern by including comic elements. [5] For example, much of Hamlet's dialogue is blackly comic.

Shakespeare's tragic heroes are often victims of their own excesses or self-deception. [6] Although they may be prey to manipulative characters, like Iago in *Othello* or Goneril and Regan in *Lear*, some lack of understanding prevents them from seeing the truth. Othello woos Desdemona with charm and the use of storytelling, yet is unable to discern Iago's use of similar techniques, so that he swallows Iago's stories whole. Perhaps one aspect of these heroes' struggle with self-understanding is that they suffer from inner conflict: Hamlet is torn between the desire for revenge and a sense of the futility of life and action, Othello is tormented by the gap between Iago's lies and what he knows Desdemona to be, Antony hesitates between Egypt, where his passions lie, and Rome, seat of his military responsibilities, [7] and Lear's incompatible desires for absolute power and genuine affection push him from order and control into chaos and madness.

To some extent, the heroes all display the flaw of hubris, or overweening pride. Othello believes he has the right to dispose of Desdemona, and Hamlet serenely dispatches Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Antony places his romantic life above the fate of nations, and Lear believes that human affection is his to arrogate, and that he has control over his domain, which he ends by ceding to France. Despite the heroes' inevitable downfall, Shakespeare emphasises that they are noble to the end: [8] Cassio calls Othello 'great of heart', [9] Caesar says of the grave of Antony and Cleopatra that 'No grave upon the earth shall clip in it/ A pair so famous', [10] and Fortinbras speaks an epitaph on Hamlet: 'Let four captains/ Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,/ For he was likely, had he been put on,/ To have proved most royal. And for his passage/ The soldiers' music and the rite of war/ Speak loudly for him'. [11] Shakespearean tragedies end with a poignant sense of what might have been if the hero had been able to overcome his circumstances and his tragic flaw.

Karen Kay

http://www.britaininprint.net/study_tools/tragic_hero.html

READING RECORD CARDS

One of the major problems that confronts students taking the Advanced Placement English Literature Exam is the Free Response question, which requires that each student choose a work from his/her own reading experience to support his/her answer. Reading Record Cards are one means that you can use to prepare for this portion of the exam.

Your grade on these five cards will count as one major grade. Feel free to use this summer's four required pieces in your group of five. Do NOT include *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, or *Fault in Our Stars* in your group of five cards. Cards must be handwritten on at least a 5 x 8 card.

FORMAT

Student name

TITLE

AUTHOR (date born-date died/where lived)

PUBLICATION date of work (original, not current edition)

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN TIME PERIOD (events that may have influenced the text)

SETTING-place/time and how it affects the overall theme

THEME OR MAIN IDEA: in one declarative sentence

Brief PLOT SYNOPSIS:

CHARACTERS (with brief descriptions - identify protagonist and antagonist)

Major SYMBOLS, MOTIFS, and/or ALLUSIONS present

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS of the work (why you remember it)

FOUR QUOTATIONS from the work which are representative of the theme of the work as a whole, with page number and who's speaking

***NOTE: Submitting summaries from or based on Web sites such as Spark Notes constitutes plagiarism, which is cheating. This is NOT acceptable and will earn you a zero.