

English 1 Honors
Summer Reading Guide
***The Pearl* - John Steinbeck**

Background

The Pearl was written by Nobel Prize winning author John Steinbeck in 1947. A native of California, Steinbeck spent a number of years in his adult life studying the marine life along the shores of the Gulf of the California Baja (the setting of *The Pearl*). It was here that Steinbeck met the Indian people on whom he based his characters in *The Pearl*. It was also where he heard an old story about “the pearl of the world,” which was about a large pearl that was eventually tossed back into the sea from where it was taken.

The Pearl opens with a statement that the tale to be told is a parable. A parable is a story that gives a moral or lesson. Many examples of parables can be found in the Bible. As you read the novel, try to decide what lesson Steinbeck is teaching through his story of the pearl.

Symbolism

The Pearl is heavily allegorical. An allegory is a story in which people, things, and happenings have hidden or symbolic meaning. Allegories, like parables, are used for teaching or explaining ideas or moral principles. The pearl itself is used in many pieces of literature as a symbol of purity, goodness, and perfection. As you read, think about how Steinbeck is using the pearl as a symbol.

Guiding Questions

After finishing *The Pearl*, you should be able to discuss/answer the following:

1. Describe the following main characters: Kino, Juana, Coyotito. What does each represent?
2. What emotions and values are symbolized by Kino’s song of the family? How does the song of evil threaten those values?
3. What does Kino think that the giant pearl will do for him? How does the pearl actually affect his life? How are each of his dreams corrupted or fulfilled in an ironic way by the final chapter of the novel?
4. How do the townspeople react to the news of Kino’s pearl? What generalizations can you draw from their reaction? Do you believe this generalization is true in real life?
5. How and why does Juana look at the pearl differently than Kino?
6. When and why does Kino first realize his old life is gone?
7. How do Kino’s and Juana’s personalities balance each other?
8. Is *The Pearl* a tragic story of loss or one of triumph? Explain your position by analyzing the central conflict throughout the course of the novel.
9. How do the following types of conflict as relate to the novel:
 - character vs. nature – a character faces a problem with some force of nature (a storm, cold, etc.)
 - character vs. character – a character faces a problem with another character(s)
 - character vs. self – a character faces a physical or emotional problem or struggle
 - character vs. society – a character faces a problem with part of society (government, law, tradition, etc.)
 - character vs. fate – a character faces a problem with a force such as fate, God, or luck

English 2 Honors
Summer Reading Guide
***A Separate Peace* – John Knowles**

Background

John Knowles published *A Separate Peace* in 1960, and the novel became an immediate best-seller. Today, it is regarded as a modern classic.

During the World War II years of 1941-1945, Knowles attended a New England preparatory academy much like the fictional Devon School in *A Separate Peace*. Perhaps he drew upon his own experiences as a basis for his story about Gene and Finny.

Relevancy

A Separate Peace is a study of morality and human nature. The theme presented is that the individual contains a savage force within that must be acknowledged. This dark side of human nature not only causes war between nations but also jealousy between friends. The novel seems to emphasize that only by accepting the imperfections of humanity can a person overcome his inner savageness.

Setting

The setting of the novel is Devon School, a private academy in New England; the date is 1942, during World War II.

Main Characters

The following are considered some of the major characters of the novel. As you read the novel, you should become familiar with them and be able to develop an analytical profile on each: Gene Forrester, Phineas (Finny), Leper Lepellier, Brinker Hadley, Chet Douglass, Phil Latham, Stanpole, Prud'homme, Ludsbury

Guiding Questions

By the time you have finished reading *A Separate Peace*, you should be able to discuss and answer the following:

1. What does "a separate peace" mean, and how does it apply to the novel?
2. In what ways is Gene the most suitable narrator for the novel? Why do you think Knowles chose him to tell the story?
3. What would be considered the "turning point" of the novel? Justify your answer with evidence from the novel.
4. Why does Gene say that Finny would be emotionally unsuited for war?
5. How does Gene "grow up"?
6. How is the relationship between Gene and Finny symbolic of the outside world?
7. Why is Devon described so carefully? Why is the hardness of the stairs emphasized? Why is the tree described as an "awesome artillery piece"?
8. What is Gene's purpose in returning to Devon? How does the reader know that Gene has finally accepted what happened and put the experience behind him?
9. In what ways is the nickname "Suicide Society" appropriate?
10. What is a "blitzkrieg," and why is this term significant?
11. Explain why Gene feels that evil lurks in everything that he does? Justify your answer with logical evidence from the text.
12. Explain how Devon's architecture reflect the dual nature of the school itself?
13. How does the war change Leper? How has Brinker changed his views toward the war?
14. What is Gene's final assessment (opinion) of Finny?

English 3 Honors
Summer Reading Guide
***The Scarlet Letter* - Nathaniel Hawthorne**

Rationale

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne serves not only as a prime example of the Romantic movement of the later 19th century but also as a doorway into the Puritan lifestyle of colonial America. Set in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the novel addresses the various social and spiritual hardships of the early Puritans. As Hawthorne focuses on the effects of hidden sin, he also examines such issues as the inequities that exist between the genders and the fickleness of a judgmental society that seeks salvation by accusing others of wrongdoing. Hawthorne's use of complex symbolism and his development of an intriguing plot have contributed to the notoriety that has made *The Scarlet Letter* a staple of American literature.

Historical Background

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, and he spent most of his life there. Hawthorne's family had been members of the original Puritan settlement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Judge John Hawthorne was one of the judges who condemned numerous people to death during the infamous Salem witchcraft trials of 1862. Embarrassed by the severity and intolerance of his ancestors, Hawthorne stated, "I . . . hereby take the shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them. . . may be now and henceforth removed" (Leone et al, eds. 14-15).

After graduating from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, Hawthorne returned to Salem and sought to establish himself as a writer. In various short stories, Hawthorne examined the religious fervor that helped to form New England society, and he would gain public success with the publication of *Twice Told Tales* (1837). This collection of stories prefigured the completion of his most successful work, a novel about a young woman who is indicted by the Puritans for adultery and punished with public shame and ostracism. Although initially it was met with mixed reviews, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) did catch the eye of the vibrant New England literary community (Leone et al, eds. 20-23).

Hawthorne knew and, in some cases, had close personal relationships with numerous notable figures of the time period. He attended college with the famous poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future American President Franklin Pierce. He knew the transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and even stayed at the experimental transcendental community Brook Farm in 1841, an experience that would inspire the novel *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) (Leone et al, eds. 16-19). His closest friend from the literary world was Herman Melville. Hawthorne served as a mentor for the young writer and helped Melville as he completed what would become one of the greatest achievements in 19th century American literature. Hawthorne's encouragement and influence in Melville's literary aspirations are quite evident. Melville dedicated *Moby Dick* (1851) to his friend (Leone et al, eds. 23).

Literary Elements

Setting: The novel is set in the Massachusetts Bay Colony after the Puritans have been settled for over a century.

Characterization: Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, and Pearl are the main characters. Note not only how the characters transform over time but also how the town's perception of the characters changes.

Symbolism: The characters serve as symbols. The author also incorporates the scarlet letter itself, aspects of nature, and specific locations in the town as symbols. If one ignores the symbolism in the novel, then one does not understand the novel at all.

Allegory: The novel has been interpreted as a religious and social allegory.

Theme: Hawthorne examines the effects of sin, most notably hidden sin.

Guiding Questions: Read the preface and "The Custom House" after completing the novel.

1. Consider modern films that are "based on a true story" and then think about what Hawthorne does in "The Custom House." Are Hawthorne's tactics of enticing the audience by giving validity to his story that a regular fictional tale might not have similar to what directors of nonfiction films do today? Justify your answer.
2. Consider the relationship between Pearl, the rose, and the scarlet letter. How are these three symbols interrelated?
3. How does the town's perception of Chillingworth and Hester change during the course of the novel? What does this change in perception say about society?
4. Explain Dimmesdale's internal conflict. How does his sin affect him over time? What does Dimmesdale's experience suggest about the importance of confession?
5. Explain how the scaffold serves not only as a symbol but also as frame for the entire plot of the story. Consider that the traditional story must have a beginning, middle, and end.

Expectations Upon Returning to School:

1. Participate in class discussions about the novel.
2. Successfully complete an objective test on the novel.
3. Write an essay based on the novel.

Works Cited

Leone, Bruno, et al., eds. *Readings on Nathaniel Hawthorne*. San Diego, California: Greenhaven Press, 1996.

English 4 Honors/AP/IB
Summer Reading Guide
***Lord of the Flies* - William Golding**

Rationale

Lord of the Flies by William Golding is one of the most analyzed contemporary novels. On the surface it tells the story of a group of young British boys who are stranded on a deserted island. During the course of the novel, the children have to survive without the aid of adults, and they have to try to cope with their emerging conflicts and fears. Besides the interesting plot, however, there are many deeper levels to the novel. Golding's use of symbolism, characterization, and theme have intrigued readers and critics, and the book has been the basis for many interpretations.

Historical Background

William Golding was educated at Oxford and received a degree in English literature and a diploma in education. Following his graduation, he taught English and philosophy at Bishop Wordsworth's School in Salisbury. After the beginning of World War II, he joined the Royal British Navy in 1940. Golding saw a great deal of action during the war, including his participation in the D-day invasion of Normandy in 1944 (Leone et al., eds. 18). His "war experience was a turning point in his life and formed a vital part of his developing outlook" (Leone et al., eds. 19).

Following its publication in 1954, *Lord of the Flies* "captured the imagination of high school and young college readers in the late Fifties and early Sixties" (Magill, ed. 4:2747). Besides Golding's "superb use of symbolism," this novel is a book which makes the reader explore the question of "the nature of the human personality and the reflection of personality on society" (Epstein 205).

Literary Elements

Setting: The novel is set on a tropical island in the Pacific Ocean during the time of an atomic war at an unknown date.

Characterization: Ralph, Jack, Simon, and Piggy are the main characters. Note how most of the characters deteriorate and change with time. The longer that they are away from civilization, the more they change physically, psychologically, and morally.

Symbolism: Many critics find the symbolism in the novel to be too simplistic. The characters are all symbolic of certain ideals or ideologies, and many of the places and objects also act as symbols.

Allegory: The novel has variously been interpreted as a religious, political, or social allegory.

Theme: Golding's purpose is to explore human nature and his capacity for evil and violence.

Guiding Questions

1. Give specific examples of how the boys' behaviors change during the course of the novel.
2. Discuss the use of the following as symbols in the novel: the conch, Piggy's glasses, the fire, the parachutist, and the "lord of the flies."
3. Explain how Simon differs from the other boys on the island.
4. Explain Golding's commentary on the theme.

Expectations Upon Return to School

1. Participate in class discussions of the novel.
2. Successfully complete an objective test on the novel.
3. Write an essay based on the novel.

Works Cited

Epstein, E.L. Notes on Lords of the Flies. *Lord of the Flies*. By William Golding. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1954.

Leone, Bruno, et al., eds. *Readings on Lord of the Flies*. San Diego, California: Greenhaven Press, 1997.

Magill, Frank, N., ed. *Masterplots: Comprehensive Library Edition*. vol. 4. New York: Salem Press, 1968.8 vols. 2747-2749.