

ENGLISH IV AP SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT, 2011

TEXTS: *THE QUEEN'S THIEF* SERIES BY MEGAN WHALEN TURNER

The most important thing to me with YA fantasy is the dramatic truth.... But we lie to children.... We lie. We tell them all bullies are cowards that back down when you stand up to them. Or be yourself and you'll be happy. And we think as they grow older that they'll see through it. Sometimes good people don't get to be happy.

And then we get to YA literature. The great truth teller to teens everywhere. And sometimes we're still lying. That's why we have those fantasies set in pseudo pre-industrial and feudal periods, but still enlightened enough to have a woman warrior. They may be well-intentioned lies, but these are not young children. They might not be sophisticated enough to see through the lies, but give them the truth, believe that they are ready for it or they wouldn't be reading the book. —*Megan Whalen Turner*

This year's choice for the AP Literature and Composition summer reading is *The Queen's Thief* series by Megan Whalen Turner. This series consists of **FOUR** books—*The Thief*, *The Queen of Attolia*, *The King of Attolia*, and *A Conspiracy of Kings*.

Your summer reading assignment consists of the following:

In an effort to foster active, critical reading skills, we are taking a somewhat different approach to our summer reading selections and assignment this year. There will be **no** required written work assigned with the summer reading this year. Instead, I expect you to spend your time practicing close reading skills and critically annotating these four novels.

As you are each about to head into college, and this AP class is centered on college preparation, I fully expect you to engage yourself in the text and work to find individual relevance and meaning. As seniors, you need to self-monitor and hold yourself accountable for all texts we explore by being active, not passive, readers. With that said, when you return to school in August you will be expected to sit for a timed writing over all four novels where you will make inter-textual connections between the stories and find a common thread uniting the series.

This essay's thesis is purely up to you, as long as you can find strong, solid, and meaningful commonality amongst the texts. This is where your annotations will prove absolutely critical. You will be allowed to use all four books and your annotations/notes from the summer when completing this assignment. On the first day of class I will let each period know the exact date of their timed essay.

The amount of annotations and the way in which one annotates is something unique and specific to each and every student. Thus in turn, I will have no formal requirements regarding annotations—but please keep in mind your essay to come and be looking to find connections and reoccurring themes/motifs throughout the series.

To help you focus your annotations, I have provided some questions to guide your reading and analysis of each story. Remember, annotations need to be a sort of dialogue between you, the text, and the author. Don't merely underline or highlight something "important" and then be on your way. Immerse yourself in the work!

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WHILE READING, USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND CONCEPTS TO HELP FACILITATE YOUR ANALYSIS OF EACH STORY:

The Thief

- Belief systems—What are the advantages and disadvantages of having two (or more) systems of belief? What conflicts may arise as a result? Similarities and differences between religion and monarchies?
- Do stories lose credibility or become diluted when passed down from generation to generation? How can we as readers decide which is the “most accurate” version of a story? Is there such a thing? (Think about the many different variations of fairy tales/folklore/legends etc.)
- Characters and their perception of hierarchy and class structures. Does “class” truly exist? Or is it a social construct?
- Literary techniques employed by Turner—irony, foreshadowing, double meaning, etc.
- Death and Immortality

The Queen of Attolia

- Emotions and sentiments. Can one truly share their emotions with another? Or are we limited by language and other social constructs?
- Regret
- Ethics and Morality—What society deems acceptable may not always match with our individual ethical code. How do we deal?
- Human Nature—the dark side of humanity. What happens when we regress to pure instinct and disregard personal responsibility?
- Obligations—family, society, politically, etc.
- Terror vs. Despair—which one is worse? Why? How are they different?
- Faith
- Leadership

The King of Attolia

- Monarchies—what kind of behavior should those in power exhibit? Why? Who governs those in power? (Checks and Balances?)
- Rationality vs. Irrationality—Are all actions controlled and calculated?
- Passivity— Is it an effective method for achieving any goal? When and why should someone intervene?
- Manipulation
- Loyalty
- Sympathy/Compassion
- Personal Responsibility
- Should the needs of a country (or larger group) take precedence over those of the individual?

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A Conspiracy of Kings

- How does power and responsibility affect one's personal relationships?
- Betrayal—Can it be both an act of cowardice and of bravery? How?
- Dreams—How are poetry and dreams related?
- Social hierarchies—are they just? Fair?
- Difficulty of choices
- Intimidation as a means to rule
- Surrendering one's moral code—what is the cost?
- Underestimating individuals—the consequences
- What does it mean to be a king? (or person in power)—What qualities, choices, and actions validate the right or negate such an ability to lead?
- Human fallibility
- Heroes

These are only meant to offer some direction in your investigation of each text— you will need to find your own themes and interpret each work fresh for yourself.

Keep in mind you have to make connections between **ALL FOUR STORIES** for your essay.

Be watching for:

- Recurring images
- Repeated words, phrases, types of examples, or illustrations
- Consistent ways of characterizing people, events, or issues
- Characters dealing with common struggles and conflicts— whether they be internal or external

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS TAKEN FROM THE HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY WEBSITE:

Annotating: “Dialogue” with yourself, the author, and the issues and ideas at stake.

From start to finish, make your reading of any text thinking-intensive.

- First of all: throw away the highlighter in favor of a pen or pencil. Highlighting can actually distract from the business of learning and dilute your comprehension. It only seems like an active reading strategy; in actual fact, it can lull you into a dangerous passivity.
- Mark up the margins of your text with WORDS: ideas that occur to you, notes about things that seem important to you, reminders of how issues in a text may connect with class discussion or course themes. This kind of interaction keeps you conscious of the REASON you are reading and the PURPOSES your instructor has in mind. Later in the term, when you are reviewing for a test or project, your marginalia will be useful memory triggers.
- Develop your own symbol system: asterisk a key idea, for example, or use an exclamation point for the surprising, absurd, bizarre . . . Like your marginalia, your hieroglyphs can help you reconstruct the important observations that you made at an earlier time. And they will be indispensable when you return to a text later in the term, in search of a passage, an idea for a topic, or while preparing for an exam or project.
- Get in the habit of hearing yourself ask questions—“what does this mean?” “why is he or she drawing that conclusion?” “why is the class reading this text?” etc. Write the questions down (in your margins, at the beginning or end of the reading, in a notebook, or elsewhere. They are reminders of the unfinished business you still have with a text: something to ask during class discussion, or to come to terms with on your own, once you’ve had a chance to digest the material further, or have done further reading.

Look for repetitions and patterns:

These are often indications of what an author considers crucial and what he expects you to glean from his argument. The way language is chosen or used can also alert you to ideological positions, hidden agendas or biases. Be watching for:

- Recurring images
- Repeated words, phrases, types of examples, or illustrations
- Consistent ways of characterizing people, events, or issues

“Interrogating Texts: 6 Reading Habits to Develop in Your First Year at Harvard.” *Harvard College Library*.
<http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/lamont_handouts/interrogatingtexts.html#annotating>.

ENGLISH IVAP SUMMER READING RATIONALE

The objective of the NCHS English Department's Summer Reading assignment is two-fold:

1. To foster a love of reading (for both pleasure and edification) by assigning engaging works of fiction, both classic and contemporary.
2. To keep those essential analytical and critical reading skills honed for the next year.

This year's choice for the AP Literature and Composition summer reading is *The Queen's Thief Series*, by Megan Whalen Turner (consists of **four** books—*The Thief*, *The Queen of Attolia*, *The King of Attolia*, and *A Conspiracy of Kings*). Each novel in the series is a quick-paced and relatively short read; though consisting of four novels, combined, this series is equivalent in length to about one and a half to two "literary" novels. The novels are works of Young Adult fantasy fiction (appropriate for ages 12 and up) that present a pseudo-historical world similar that of Ancient Greece (with many ahistorical aspects to it). The series clearly addresses several important themes which will be further developed during the literature of the AP senior curriculum:

- Storytelling, perspective, and the unreliable narrator
- Appearance vs. reality
- Individual choice and action (as well as enduring the consequences of choices); as a part of this, the novels also delve into the question of whether a leader must make morally questionable decisions as a necessary function of his position, especially as those decisions affect the lives of others
- Fate (and divine intervention) vs. free will
- The complexity and requirements of loyalty and service
- The complex nature of love (can be read in light of C.S Lewis' concepts found in *The Four Loves*)

In addition, this work clearly supports all five of the Marianist Characteristics of Education (with a strong focus on Faith; Service, Justice, and Peace; and Adaptation and Change).

The choice to move from a more "classic" literary text to a much more contemporary one this year in no way diminishes the seriousness of the ideas present within. Though genre fiction is often belittled, there are important truths to be found therein. As Tolkien (highly revered for both his scholarship and fiction) said,

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make....

For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun.... Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker....

--J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories"

Evidence of students' understanding of the deeper themes and engagement with the text will be assessed by use of a timed in-class essay upon the students' return to school in August, as well as class discussion of the text. In order to prepare for the essay, students are asked to annotate their books while reading, and they will be expected to use these annotations during the essay to provide evidence for the argument of their essays. Besides the reading and annotating, no other assignment will be required for the summer. The essay will be assessed according to usual English Department standards.