Summer Reading for English 11H: American Literature Honors

Hello, Rising Juniors. As preparation for the upcoming 2010-11 school year, students in American Literature Honors are required to read a number of books over the summer. The following titles are to be read for the start of classes in August, and we will have discussions/assignments/tests related to these texts in the first few weeks of the school year. These texts will provide you with a broad overview of American literature, furnish the necessary background for its study, and lay the foundation for a successful (for all of us) academic year.

An important note: I ask all of you to resist the temptation to even peek at anything like SparkNotes or its kind. These assignments are meant as a sort of diagnostic check to gauge in what areas each of us needs to improve, so try to determine for yourselves what’s significant, interesting, and worthy of exploration in these books. Use no other (re)sources, please.

Required reading and related assignments:

1) Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*
   Using the MLA paper format (see the Essay-Paper format template on the class website), write a 500-word* analysis in which you consider the uncertainty James creates for the reader about the presence of ghosts. That very uncertainty is your thesis (not whether or not the ghosts are real or not). In other words, why is that uncertainty there and how does it display itself? **Be sure to quote and cite passages from the story that support your claim.**

2) Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*
   Referring to the Close Reading format template on the class website, write a 500-word* analysis of a significant passage from the book (one that develops an important theme in the novel; exposes a significant character trait of a relevant figure; or exemplifies a key aspect of the relationship between or among major characters). Because you will analyze this passage at the sentence level, it is important that you choose a passage of workable length.

3) Choose one (1) more novel from among the following:
   - Saul Bellow’s *Henderson the Rain King*
   - Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*
   - Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*
   - William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*
   - James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*
   - Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*
   - Tim O’Brien’s *Going After Cacciato*
   - Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

   For this work, you will write five one+ page character analyses (in paper format): **choose ONE central character** and track the changes that character goes through over the course of the novel. For example, you would write an analysis of Scout Finch after having read the first 50 pages of *Mockingbird* (not on the list, by the way). Then you'd write another one of Scout after you'd known her for 100 pages (i.e. another 50), and so forth, thereby tracking her development as a character. **Be sure that they span the entire length of the novel, and that you quote and cite passages that support your analyses.**

   **All of this is due on the first day of class (Wednesday, August 18th).**

As many of us are working from different editions, a **Works Cited is required.** You may turn in a single Works Cited with all of the works on it. (see the Essay-Paper format).

*500 words* is not merely a suggested length. Good writing is concise and to the point, and the length restriction is meant to encourage and develop that kind of writing. Anything beyond 550 will result in a grade reduction.

Have a great summer and **enjoy** the reading. I can’t wait to meet all of you in August. Drop me an email if you need clarification or just want to discuss one of the books.

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