

Active Reading Guide for Honors & Advanced Placement Students

*“It is books that are the key to the wide world
If you can’t do anything else, read all you can”*
- Jane Hamilton, “The Book of Ruth”

“But if I read the book in June, I won’t remember what I read!”

This is a common complaint, but this won’t happen to you if you read the work carefully and actively. Please understand that you have not been given this assignment simply to entertain you over the long hot summer months. You must be an active and an aggressive learner. You must learn to study effectively; you must listen actively and read actively if you are to be successful in meeting the high educational standards established by the federal and state governments. This summer reading assignment is designed to help you practice and refine the skills which you already possess and to begin to acquire those which you may be lacking.

What does it mean to *“read actively?”*

Reading well is more than a matter of understanding what all of the words mean and getting all of the facts straight. A *close* and *careful* reading of the text should yield this result, but to read for explicit meaning alone is not sufficient. Often an author does not tell you everything directly, but leads you to make discoveries by drawing inferences about the characters, the situation, or the meaning of the work. To read literature well you have to be an active reader, aware of *what* the author is doing, *how* the author is doing it, and *why*. *A good reader probes beneath the surface of the work, asking the right questions at the right time.*

You have been assigned one work of classic literature which *must be read* during your summer hiatus. Since you will be tested on this work when you return to school in the fall you *must read closely, carefully and actively*. You must develop a good working knowledge of all of the basic elements of each novel, drama or work of nonfiction assigned including its *plot* or *story line*, its various *settings*, its *characters* and its principal *theme* or *themes*.

You must also consider the author's *style of writing*, the *mood* or *tone* of the work and the meaning and significance of any *symbols* or *allusions* that you may encounter. The following Reading Journal assignment and the guidelines for active reading which accompany it should help you to maximize your understanding and appreciation of these works.

General Reading Journal Guidelines

1. As you read, you write your personal responses to the work. You state your feelings about what happens in the story, and you record your thoughts and reactions to the story and its characters in a **spontaneous** fashion. You also record any questions that occur to you about the situations, the ideas, the actions, the characters, the settings, the symbols, the various plot twists and turns, the themes, and any other elements of the work which interest you or mean something to you.
2. It is important that you quickly write down ideas as they occur to you. Don't allow any insights or questions to slip away from you before you have a chance to write them down! Free write - don't worry about grammatical and mechanical correctness at this point. You can proofread and correct your work later.
3. You cannot be wrong in your responses to the text, so take risks and be honest.
 - ...Write down what you like or dislike, what seems confusing or unusual to you.
 - ...Tell what you think something means.
 - ...Look for and cite examples of writing you particularly like or dislike and talk about them.
 - ...Make predictions about what you think might happen later on in the story.
4. Relate your personal experiences which connect with the plot, characters, or settings. It is important that you relate what you have read to your own life in some way. This is very important!

5. Locate and quote brief passages from the work that you either like or dislike and respond to them.
6. Relate each work assigned to another work you've read, to a work of art that you are familiar with, or to a motion picture that you have seen. How are they alike? How are they different?
7. Formulate answers to the following questions:
 - ...Is the ending of the work satisfactory? Why or why not?
 - ...What are the implications of the ending and its effect on the main character?
 - ...Was the main character in the story successful in overcoming a difficult situation or perplexing problem? Why or why not?
 - ...How much do you sympathize with him or her?
 - ...To what extent do you think that the book is worthwhile?
 - ...Did it help you to gain some insight or to come to a greater understanding in any way? Explain.

Let Us Hear Your Voice

The following is a list of suggested sentence lead-ins for you to use in your reading journal:

1. I wonder what this means...
2. I really don't understand this part because...
3. I really like/dislike this idea because...
4. This character reminds me of somebody I know because...
5. This character reminds me of myself because...
6. This character is like [name of the character] in [title of the work] because...
7. I think this setting is important because...
8. This part is very realistic/unrealistic because...
9. I like/dislike this writing because...
10. This chapter/section makes me think...
11. This section is particularly effective because...
12. I think the relationship between _____ and _____ is interesting because...
13. I like/dislike [name of character] because...
14. This situation reminds me of a similar one in my own life. It happened

when...

15. The character I most admire is _____ because...

16. If I were [name of character] at this point in the story I would...

Your reader's journal should allow anyone who might read it to follow you as you experience the classic works you have been reading. Therefore, you should allow us to hear your "**reader's voice.**" We should be able to read your journal and see how you have interacted with the works of literature being considered. You should tell us what you liked and what you didn't like about the selections and *why*. Tell us how they made you feel and what they made you think about. We want to know what you learned from them about yourself, about literature, and about this wonderfully complex world in which we live. If you follow these guidelines and use some of the recommended sentence lead-ins provided here, you should have a most productive and rewarding reading and writing experience.

General Guidelines for Active Reading

1. **Read the text closely and carefully, looking for relevant or telling detail.** These are the building blocks that the author uses to create vivid images, portray characters and fashion a story line.
2. **Look up unfamiliar words and references.** You cannot fathom the potential depth of meaning communicated by the author if you don't take the time to decode the language he or she uses to tell his or her story. Likewise, literary allusions enhance the meaning of a work. You cannot appreciate that meaning if you don't understand the allusions. **Being an active reader means being an aggressive learner.** When confronted with these "locked doors" to deeper understanding, you must relentlessly seek out the keys necessary to open them.
3. **Learn to probe beneath the surface of a work** using the following techniques:
 - A. **Question** - What questions come to mind as you read? For example, why do the characters act as they do? What motivates them? What causes events to happen? Why does the writer include certain detailed information, (relevant detail)? Write these questions down and look for answers as you continue to read.

- B. **Visualize** - Use details from the story to create a picture in your mind. Use your imagination to "see" the story as it unfolds and your understanding grows. If you find yourself confused, try to state your confusion. Use this process to clarify whatever it is that hasn't been clear to you. Writing a brief summary or synopsis of the events in a chapter or section of the work is often very helpful.
- C. **Predict** - Ask yourself, "what is going to happen next?" Look for hints in the story that seem to suggest a certain course of action or a possible outcome. Make a written record of these predictions. Read to see if your predictions are correct.
- D. **Connect** - Bring your own experience and knowledge to the story. Make connections with what you know about similar situations or people in your life. Good, quality literature usually deals with universal themes, ideas that in some way relate to every human life. Think about the possible application of these ideas in your life or in the lives of the people you are acquainted with. Also make connections between one event and another in the story. Try to summarize how the pieces of the "plot puzzle" fit together.
- E. **Respond** - Think about what the story means. What does it say to you? What feelings does it evoke in you? What has the story added to your understanding of people and life in general? Try to state in your own words what the author's main ideas were.

Sample Reader's Journal Entries

Below are samples of reading journal entries. They should serve as a guide for the type of thinking you must do for this assignment. Please follow the instructions that are given in your specific course assignment.

Please remember that you may not use professionally prepared notes of any kind when you take your summer reading tests. You may only use your own summer reading journals and nothing else will be acceptable.

It seems to me that it would have made more sense to put the second chapter before the first. The other thing I'm confused about is if white prisoners were taken in or killed,

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Observation/Personal Reaction/Opinion

...then how could Del have lived with the Delaware and survived without being still with the Indians? Also, it seems if he lived with them, then why is he so against them? Del should understand that the white prisoners think of the Indians as their families. Why should they want to leave?

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Questions

I can understand True Son's loyalty to his Indian family, but killing himself would bring nothing but sadness. I like the way the author used the branches to convey True Son's feelings that Pennsylvania is death (dead branches) and the village is life (live branches). If Half Arrow hadn't come, then True Son probably would have tried to eat the May Apple.

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Personal Reaction

Half Arrow gave True Son gifts from his uncle, father, mother, and sisters, but he didn't give True Son anything from himself.

* * * * *

Plot Summary / Relevant Detail

I like the way the Indians compare the white people to themselves. It shows that they think our way of life is as odd as we think their way of life is. I agree with some of the Indian's thoughts on our way of life. White people of all times and generations put too much worth on material things. Friendship and family are more important than money.

Personal Reaction / Observation

I am starting to feel bad for True Son.

* * * * *

Personal Reaction

First, his Indian father dragged him to the white men. Then, they make him march forever against his wishes. He even had to march all tied up. Next, they turn him over to his "real" father against his will. The commander also

Plot Summary / Relevant Detail

made Del go along to make sure that True Son didn't escape - while the commander said it was to have Del translate for the child.

* * * * *

I think True Son will try to escape after Del leaves.

* * * * *

I admire True Son because after all they have put him through, he still has hope. He still wants to escape and he still thinks that he can. I also admired Half Arrow because he left True Son when he was told to. I think he had faith in True Son to do what's right.

* * * * *

I think he will try to escape after Del leaves.

Entry# _____ June 28 ...Chapter 7

Prediction

Personal Reaction / Observation

Prediction

I can relate to some of the experiences True Son had in this chapter. First, when he had to become accustomed to his new environment and house - I moved about four years ago, and the first night I could not get to sleep. Living in the city was the complete opposite of living in the country - just as it is in the case of True Son. Second, I realize how hard it was for True Son to become familiar with customs which he was taught to hate. My friend moved up to Pennsylvania from Venezuela. Coming from there he spoke Spanish fluently and had to learn the English language just as True Son did. True Son has a hard job ahead of him because our language is very tricky. It took my friend 1 1/2 semesters to learn just the basics. I'll see if he succeeds tomorrow in chapter eight.

Personal Experience

Entry # _____ August 13, Chapters 5&6

I've finished chapter six and I still don't understand the book at all. I don't like the way Ray Bradbury writes. He writes metaphorically - everything means something else, and nothing is its face value. It's confusing. A Light in the Forest was very straight forward. You read what you read, and there were no hidden meanings.

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In chapter five, Charles Halloway finds that Cooger

Personal Reaction / Observation

Relevant / Telling Detail

and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show has come to town. The man with those advertising posters has his hand covered with fine, silken black hair.

What does that mean? Who/what is he? Where did he come from? Why is the "most beautiful woman in the world" so significant to Charles Halloway? What will happen when people go to the show?

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In chapter six, there is a "theater." Jim and Will have watched the "actors" through the open window.

* * * * *

I'm left with even more questions. What is the strange show about? Who are the actors? Why are they there? Is it the "Pandemonium Shadow Show?" Why won't Will go with Jim? When will chapter one's lightning strike?

Questions

Relevant / Telling Detail

Questions

Entry # _____ August 19th, Chapters 15 & 16

The mirror maze is magical. Miss Foley saw herself...it was much like Back to the Future II, when 1985 Jennifer met 2015 Jennifer.

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Why is the mirror maze like that? What could it accomplish? Why did Miss Foley feel her life was in danger? What did Jim see in the mirror maze? Was it the same as Miss Foley saw?

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The maze is very captivating; those inside do not want to leave. Jim would have stayed had it not been for the level headed Will. Jim can basically do anything he wants without fear of danger because he knows Will will always be there to protect him. That is strange, though, because Jim won't get close to anyone for fear of loss. You can't have a friendship that strong without being close.

* * * * *

Now, what is in the leather bag?

Reference to Cinema / Comparison

Questions

Personal Reaction / Observation

Question

Entry# _____ June 7th Chapter 2

To me, chapter two was a little confusing. I did understand, however, that Jim and Will took their weekly jog to the library and had a conversation with Will's father. It seems that

Relevant / Telling Detail

Jim liked books about troublesome events. He also seemed to think that he was being a coward for running away from the storm by putting up a lightening rod.

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Will and Jim had a unique way of making the library come alive by imagining they heard, smelled, and saw things from foreign countries.

When Will and his father saw each other, it seemed as if they hadn't met for a long time. But, when Will's father said, "Grown an inch since this morning," it was clear that they had been together.

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Jim, in this story, reminds me of Mark Twain's characters Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn because of his love for trouble and adventure. Jim's idea to "watch lightening fizz down his drain pipes" seems like something Tom or Huck would do.

**Plot Summary /
Relevant Detail**

**Literary
Reference /**

Entry# _____ July 18th Pages 1-22

The Light in the Forest begins with True Son thinking about his life and his Indian family. For days, True son had heard that the Lenni Lenape and Shawanose white prisoners were to be released, but he hadn't thought that this meant him. All of his life that he could remember he had been Indian. The village had been his home for eleven years.

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I can sympathize with True Son. Why would he have to leave? He wasn't Cuyloga's prisoner but his son. True Son goes and hides, but his father finds him and takes him to the white camp. When Cuyloga is ready to leave, he says to True Son, "Now go like an Indian, True Son. Give me no more shame." I think this shows that True Son would show his feelings and try to escape.

**Relevant / Telling
Detail**

**Personal Reaction
/ Observation**

Del Hardy is the guard that is assigned to guard and translate for True Son. I don't understand why, if Del lived with the Indians, he is so against them now. Did the Indians capture or kill someone he loved?

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I admire True Son's personal strength and hope. He says that he will never go back to white country.

* * * * *

**Relevant Detail /
Question**

**Personal Reaction /
Observation**

...a Mohawk joined them and told them that soon they would meet a large river and on that river was Fort Pitt. They reached it the next day but had to wait because the river was flooded. The morning after, when Half Arrow and True Son came back from the forest, they found the Mohawk tomahawked and scalped.

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I like the way the author conveys True Son's feelings by writing, "Though dogs may fight among themselves they are one against the wolf." I think this shows that even though the Mohawk and the Delaware are enemies, they are allies against the white people.

Relevant / Telling
Detail

Personal Reaction /
Observation /

Entry #1 November 13th Chapter One

The story opens on a farm in England. No specific time frame is established in the first chapter. The animals on Mr. Jones's farm gather late one night to listen to Old Major, a "majestic-looking pig," tell about a strange dream that he had. When all of the animals are assembled Old Major begins to speak. He delivers what sounds like a "political" oration in which he condemns human beings as being cruel oppressors. He calls upon the animals to form an alliance and to rebel against the tyrannical rule of their human oppressors. He then relates the content of his dream, a dream which reveals what the world will be like when Man has vanished and the animals have dominion over all of England. He stirs the animals with the words to a song that he says came to him in his dream. The song calls for all animals to unite and to fight for their freedom.

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Why, I wonder, did Orwell select a "majestic-looking" pig to be the founder and philosophical architect of this revolution? This seems like an odd choice. Why not choose Boxer, the powerful but not-so-intelligent horse, to lead the animals in their "just and noble" cause? He would seem like a more logical choice. We are told that "he was respected for his steadiness of character and tremendous powers of work." If this story is an allegory and pigs are intended to represent a particular kind of human being, then who would

Plot Summary /
Relevant / Telling
Detail

their human counter-parts be? Are we to interpret the pigs as being metaphors for politicians? Are the pigs in this novel going to be like our revolutionary forefathers who fired a rebellion with their passionate words and gave birth to a nation dedicated to the principles of democracy and freedom, or are they going to be evil demagogues like the Nazis who promised their followers wealth and freedom and then bound them together using lies, fear, brute force and an irrational hatred of a "common enemy?"

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One thing that sticks in my mind at the end of chapter one is that these animals are not all of one kind. They are all animals, yes, but there are great differences between the various kinds of animals on the farm. What kinds of problems will this create later in the story? Will the animals be able to overcome their differences and remain united in the fight against mankind, or will they eventually turn on one another?

Questions /
Observations

Personal Reaction /
Observation /
Questions

Entry #2

November 14th

Chapter Two

Old Major dies within a few days of delivering his "political manifesto." The pigs, the cleverest of the animals on the farm, lead the preparations for the rebellion. Two young boars, Snowball and Napoleon, assume leadership roles. Squealer, a pig noted for his ability as a persuasive speaker, forms a triumvirate with Snowball and Napoleon and together they "elaborate Old Major's teachings into a complete system of thought." They call it "Animalism."

Moses, Mr. Jones's tame raven, tries to pacify the animals with stories of "Sugarcandy Mountain" where all animals supposedly went when they died. Some of the animals believed in this vision of an idyllic after-life. The pigs worked hard to persuade the others that there really was no such place.

Boxer and Clover emerged as two of Animalism's most faithful disciples.

The rebellion happens when Mr. Jones, preoccupied with set-backs and misfortunes, gets drunk and allows his dishonest and idle men to ignore the animals basic needs. The animals, driven by frustration and hunger,

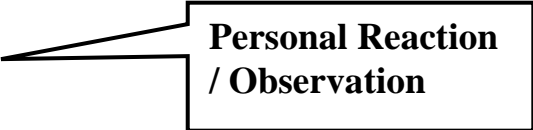
Plot Summary /
Relevant / Telling
Detail

rise up and drive the humans from the farm. It is revealed that the animals have taught themselves to read and write. The pigs had "reduced the principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments." These "commandments" were posted and became the "law" by which the animals on the farm would live.

At the end of the chapter Snowball leads the other animals off to harvest the hay. Prior to leaving the pigs milk the cows but when they return from the fields the milk has mysteriously disappeared.

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The pigs are intelligent and clever and this makes them dangerous. They master the use of language and they are very persuasive in their arguments. The other animals are not great thinkers, but they*



**Personal Reaction
/ Observation**

Some Final Words About the Reading Journal

Your Reading Journal should reflect the following things:

- a. You have read the work with a high level of comprehension.
- b. You have given the work a fair amount of time and you have thought about what you have read.
- c. You have recorded your thoughts spontaneously as you were actively engaged in the reading process.