



Delaware Valley High School

AP English Literature & Composition

Summer Assignments 2020

- Please carefully read all directions on the following pages before beginning.
- We staunchly suggest that you print out this whole packet for summer annotating and for notebook (and assessment) purposes once classes start.
- **Note that all written work must be done in your own neat handwriting – photocopies or typed copies of your work will not be accepted.**
- All complete-sentence answers should be on neat, unfolded, lined paper and tidily stapled together when complete.
- **All work is due on the first day of classes.**
- If you have questions, email your respective teacher.

 CollegeBoard

AP[®]

AP Literature & Composition
2020 – 2021

Summer 2020 Reading Assignments:

- Poems: “The Fish” (Elizabeth Bishop)
 “Sonnet 138” (Shakespeare)
 “After Apple-Picking” (Robert Frost)
 “The Writer” (Richard Wilbur)
 “Is About” (Allen Ginsberg)

- Short Fiction: “The Moths” (Helena María Viramontes)
 “The Shawl” (Cynthia Ozick)

To be completed *by* and turned *on the first day of school*:

- ALL questions for all poems and both short stories
- Answers must be complete sentences.
- Answers must be in YOUR OWN HANDWRITING – typed and photocopied answers will not be accepted.
- Use neat lined paper.
- Clearly identify the poem and story for which you are answering questions.
- Staple all pages neatly together.

Read and Study the following documents, also in this packet:

- AP Course Description
- Literary Terms Definitions
- Summary of *New Criticism*

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Online Availability for Poems and Short Fiction

(Just in case you have printing problems, etc.)

Poems:

“The Fish”

<https://poets.org/poem/fish-2>

“Sonnet 138”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50386/sonnet-138-when-my-love-swears-that-she-is-made-of-truth>

“After Apple-Picking”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44259/after-apple-picking>

“The Writer”

<https://poets.org/poem/writer>

“Is About”

<https://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/ginsberg-is-about.html>

Short Fiction:

“The Moths”

<http://www.cabrillo.edu/~anajarro/classes/TheMoths.pdf>

“The Shawl”

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1980/05/26/the-shawl>

Summary of New Criticism

AP Literature Students Read and Analyze Like New Critics

“New Critics treat a work of literature as if it were a self-contained, self-referential object. Rather than basing their interpretations of a text on the reader’s response, the author’s stated intentions, or parallels between the text and historical contexts (such as author’s life), New Critics perform a close reading, concentrating on the relationships within the text that give it its own distinctive character or form. New Critics emphasize that the structure of a work should not be divorced from meaning, viewing the two as constituting a quasi-organic unity. Special attention is paid to repetition, particularly of images or symbols, but also of sound effects and rhythms in poetry. New Critics especially appreciate the use of literary devices, such as irony, to achieve a balance or reconciliation between dissimilar, even conflicting, elements in a text ... Because it stresses close textual analysis and viewing the text as a carefully crafted, orderly object containing formal, observable patterns, the New Criticism has sometimes been called an ‘objective’ approach to literature.” (Adapted from *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* by Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray.)

“New Criticism maintains that a close reading of literary texts will reveal the multiple meanings and nuanced complexities of their verbal texture as well as the oppositions and tensions which are balanced in the organic unity of the text.” (Greig E. Henderson and Christopher Brown, University of Toronto)

Typical Questions a New Critical Approach Considers:

- How does the work use imagery to develop its own symbols? (i.e. making a certain road stand for death by constant association)
- What is the quality of the work's organic unity? In other words, does how the work is put together reflect what it is?
- How are the various parts of the work interconnected?
- How do paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension work in the text?
- How do these parts and their collective whole contribute to (or not contribute to) the aesthetic quality of the work?
- How does the author resolve apparent contradictions within the work?
- What does the form of the work say about its content?
- Are there central or focal passages that can be said to sum up the entirety of the work?

AP English Literature & Composition: Course Description

Source:

<https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/ap-english-literature-and-composition-course-description.pdf>

An *AP English Literature and Composition* course engages students in the careful reading and critical analysis of imaginative literature. Through the close reading of selected texts, students deepen their understanding of the ways writers use language to provide both meaning and pleasure for their readers. As they read, students consider a work's structure, style and themes, as well as such smaller-scale elements as the use of figurative language, imagery, symbolism and tone.

Goals

The course includes intensive study of representative works from various genres and periods, concentrating on works of recognized literary merit ... The pieces chosen invite and reward rereading and do not, like ephemeral works in such popular genres as detective or romance fiction, yield all (or nearly all) of their pleasures of thought and feeling the first time through. The AP English Literature and Composition Development Committee agrees with Henry David Thoreau that it is wisest to read the best books first; the committee also believes that such reading should be accompanied by thoughtful discussion and writing about those books in the company of one's fellow students.

Reading

Reading in an AP course is both wide and deep. This reading necessarily builds upon and complements the reading done in previous English courses so that by the time students complete their AP course, they will have read works from several genres and periods — from the 16th to the 21st century. More importantly, they will have gotten to know a few works well. In the course, **they read deliberately and thoroughly, taking time to understand a work's complexity, to absorb its richness of meaning, and to analyze how that meaning is embodied in literary form ...** Careful attention to ... textual detail provides a foundation for interpretation ...

A generic method for the approach to such close reading involves the following elements: the experience of literature, the interpretation of literature and the evaluation of literature. By experience, we mean the subjective dimension of reading and responding to literary works, including pre-critical impressions and emotional responses. **By interpretation, we mean the analysis of literary works through close reading to arrive at an understanding of their multiple meanings.** By evaluation, we mean both an assessment of the quality and artistic achievement of literary works and a consideration of their social and cultural values. All three of these aspects of reading are important for an AP English Literature and Composition course.

[S]tudents in an AP English Literature and Composition course **read actively.** The works taught in the course require careful, deliberative reading. And the approach to analyzing and interpreting the material involves students in learning how to make careful observations of textual detail, establish connections among their observations, and draw from those connections a series of inferences leading to an interpretive conclusion about the meaning and value of a piece of writing.

Poems for Close Reading and Analysis

ALL QUESTIONS FOR THE POEMS ARE TO BE ANSWERED:

- ON NEAT, LINED PAPER
- IN YOUR OWN HANDWRITING (nothing typed will be accepted)
- IN COMPLETE SENTENCES
- WITH EXPLANATORY DETAIL
- WITH TEXTUAL SUPPORT, AS NEEDED
- WITH CLEAR IDENTIFICATION OF EACH WORK

“The Fish” – Elizabeth Bishop

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips 10
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice, 20
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
- the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly-
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,

the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.

I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass. 40

They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
- It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw

that from his lower lip
- if you could call it a lip
grim, wet, and weaponlike, 50
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.

A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away. 60

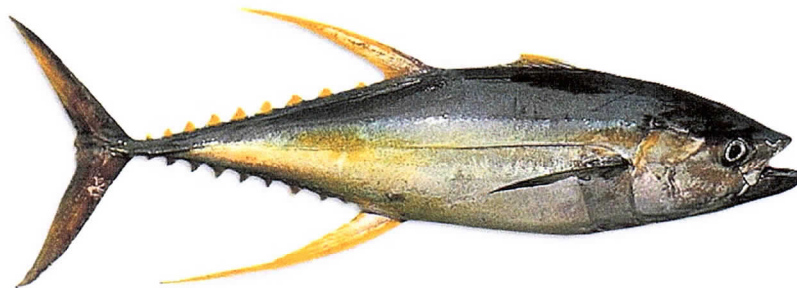
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.

I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine 70
to the bailer rusted orange,

the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels- until everything 74
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow! 75
And I let the fish go. 76

Reading-for-Meaning Questions for “The Fish” by Elizabeth Bishop

1. What are the multiple dictionary meanings for the word “tremendous” as used in line 1? What connotations are attached to the word? How does the richness of that word prepare readers for the complexity of the poem?
2. In what ways are many of the images paradoxical in their emotional evocations? Where does the poem create imagery out of the speaker’s imagination rather than her present observation?
3. Much of the imagery is exposed by figurative comparisons or is itself figurative. Find examples of both uses of figures, and trace what they convey in the way of ideas and / or emotions.
4. What literally is the “rainbow” (69)? To what is it transformed in lines 74-75? What accounts for that transformation?
5. Explain how the tone of the poem shifts and develops. What is happening to the speaker as she observes and comments upon the physical aspects of the fish?
6. Why does the speaker “let the fish go” (76)? Is the fish symbolic?



Sonnet 138 – William Shakespeare

When my love swears that she is made of truth
I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutored youth,
Unlearnèd in the world's false subtleties.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;
On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
And wherefore say not I that I am old?
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love, loves not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

Reading-for-Meaning Questions for Shakespeare's Sonnet 138

1. How old is the speaker? How old is his beloved? What is the nature of their relationship?
2. How is the contradiction in line 2 to be resolved? In lines 5-6? Who is lying to whom?
3. How do “simply” (7) and “simple” (8) differ in meaning? The words “vainly” (5), “habit” (11), “told” (12), and “lie” (13) all have double denotative meanings. What are they?
4. What is the TONE of the poem – that is, the attitude of the speaker toward his situation? Should line 11 be taken as an expression of (a) wisdom, (b) conscious rationalization, or (c) self-deception? In answering these questions, consider both the situation and the connotations of all the important words beginning with “swears” (1) and ends with “flattered” (14).
5. Identify the *meter and rhyme scheme* of this poem.

After Apple-Picking

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every flock of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.

One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

QUESTIONS

1. How does the poet convey so vividly the experience of “apple-picking”? Point out effective examples of each kind of imagery used. What emotional responses do the images evoke?
2. How does the speaker regard his work? Has he done it well or poorly? Does he find it enjoyable or tedious? Is he dissatisfied with its results?
3. The speaker predicts what he will dream about in his sleep. Why does he shift to the present tense (18) when he begins describing a dream he has not yet had? How sharply are real experience and dream experience differentiated in the poem?
4. The poem uses the word *sleep* six times. Does it, through repetition, come to suggest a meaning beyond the purely literal? If so, what attitude does the speaker take toward this second signification? Does he fear it? Does he look forward to it? What does he expect of it?
5. If sleep is symbolic (both literal and metaphorical), other details also may take on additional meaning. If so, how would you interpret (a) the ladder, (b) the season of the year, (c) the harvesting, (d) the “pane of glass” (10)? What denotations has the word “Essence” (7)?
6. How does the woodchuck’s sleep differ from “just some human sleep” (42)?

The Writer

In her room at the prow of the house
Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,
My daughter is writing a story.

I pause in the stairwell, hearing
From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys
Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff
Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:
I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,
As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.
A stillness greathens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,
And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor
Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling
Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago,
How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to fright it;

And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door, 20
We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature
Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove
To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,
For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits
Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,
Beating a smooth course for the right window
And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,
Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish
What I wished you before, but harder.

Richard Wilbur (b. 1921)

QUESTIONS

1. What "easy figure" (11) of speech is presented by such language as "prow" (1), "chain hauled over a gunwale" (6), "cargo" (8), "passage" (9)? What is being compared to what? Why would "the writer"—either the daughter or the speaker—be justified in rejecting that figure?
2. The daughter seems to be rejecting both the figure of speech and the thought that it represents (11). Why might the thought be as unacceptable as the figure that expresses it?
3. Lines 16 through 30 develop the image of the trapped starling. Why should it be interpreted as a symbol? How is its meaning more complex than that of the figure developed in lines 1–15?
4. The poem symmetrically divides into two 15-line units, each developing a different figure of speech. What is the function of the additional three lines with which the poem ends?

“Is About” by Allen Ginsberg

On June 3, 1926, Allen Ginsberg was born in Newark, New Jersey. The son of Louis and Naomi Ginsberg, two Jewish members of the New York literary counterculture of the 1920s, Ginsberg was raised among several progressive political perspectives. A supporter of the Communist party, Ginsberg's mother was a nudist whose mental health was a concern throughout the poet's childhood. According to biographer Barry Miles, “Naomi's illness gave Allen an enormous empathy and tolerance for madness, neurosis, and psychosis.”

As an adolescent, Ginsberg savored Walt Whitman, though in 1939, when Ginsberg graduated high school, he considered Edgar Allan Poe his favorite poet. Eager to follow a childhood hero who had received a scholarship to Columbia University, Ginsberg made a vow that if he got into the school he would devote his life to helping the working class, a cause he took seriously over the course of the next several years.

He was admitted to Columbia University, and as a student there in the 1940s, he began close friendships with William S. Burroughs, Neal Cassady, and Jack Kerouac, all of whom later became leading figures of the Beat movement. The group led Ginsberg to a “New Vision,” which he defined in his journal: “Since art is merely and ultimately self-expressive, we conclude that the fullest art, the most individual, uninfluenced, unrepressed, uninhibited expression of art is true expression and the true art.”

In 1954, Ginsberg moved to San Francisco. His mentor, William Carlos Williams, introduced him to key figures in the San Francisco poetry scene, including Kenneth Rexroth. He also met Michael McClure, who handed off the duties of curating a reading for the newly established “6” Gallery. With the help of Rexroth, the result was “The ‘6’ Gallery Reading” which took place on October 7, 1955. The event has been hailed as the birth of the Beat Generation, in no small part because it was also the first public reading of Ginsberg's “Howl,” a poem that garnered worldwide attention for him and the poets he associated with.

In response to Ginsberg's reading, McClure wrote: “Ginsberg read on to the end of the poem, which left us standing in wonder, or cheering and wondering, but knowing at the deepest level that a barrier had been broken, that a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America.”

Shortly after *Howl and Other Poems* was published in 1956 by City Lights Bookstore, it was banned for obscenity. The work overcame censorship trials, however, and “Howl” became one of the most widely read poems of the century, translated into more than twenty-two languages.

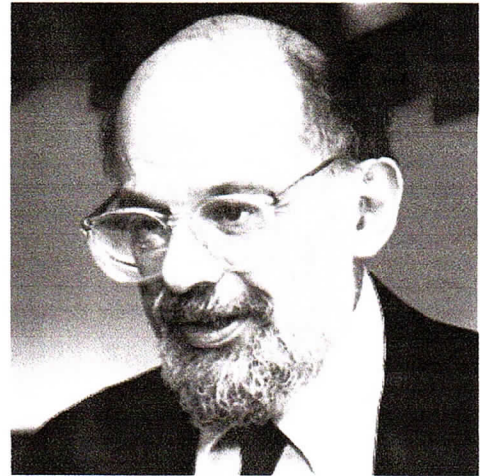
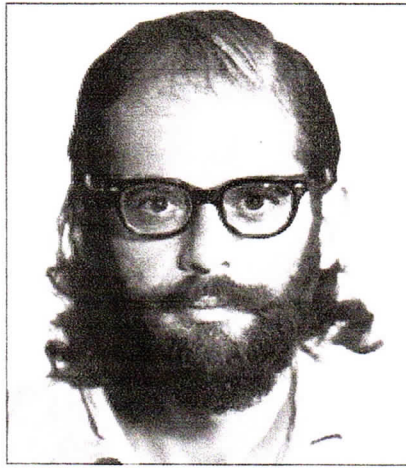
In the 1960s and 1970s, Ginsberg studied under gurus and Zen masters. As the leading icon of the Beats, Ginsberg was involved in countless political activities, including protests against the Vietnam War, and he spoke openly about issues that concerned him, such as free speech and gay rights agendas.

On April 5, 1997, in New York City, he died from complications of hepatitis.

"Is About"

Dylan is about the Individual against the whole of creation
Beethoven is about one man's fist in the lightning clouds
The Pope is about abortion & the spirits of the dead . . .
Television is about people sitting in their living room looking at
their things
America is about being a big Country full of Cowboys Indians Jews
Negroes & Americans 5
Orientals Chicanos Factories skyscrapers Niagara Falls Steel Mills
radios homeless Conservatives, don't forget
Russia is about Czars Stalin Poetry Secret Police Communism
barefoot in the snow
But that's not really Russia it's a concept
A concept is about how to look at the earth from the moon
without ever getting there. The moon is about love & Werewolves,
also Poe. 10
Poe is about looking at the moon from the sun
or else the graveyard
Everything is about something if you're a thin movie producer
chain-smoking muggles
The world is about overpopulation, Imperial invasions, Biocide,
Genocide, Fratricidal Wars, Starvation, Holocaust, mass injury &
murder, high technology
Super science, atom Nuclear Neutron Hydrogen detritus, Radiation 15
Compassion Buddha, Alchemy
Communication is about monopoly television radio movie newspaper
spin on Earth, i.e. planetary censorship.
Universe is about Universe.
Allen Ginsberg is about confused mind writing down newspaper
headlines from Mars—
The audience is about salvation, the listeners are about sex,
Spiritual gymnastics, nostalgia for the Steam Engine & Pony
Express
Hitler Stalin Roosevelt & Churchill are about arithmetic &
Quadrilateral equations, above all chemistry physics & chaos
theory— 20
Who cares what it's all about?
I do! Edgar Allan Poe cares! Shelley cares! Beethoven & Dylan care.
Do you care? What are you about
or are you a human being with 10 fingers & two eyes?

[1996]



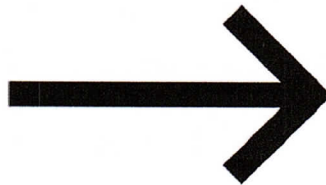
Exploring the Text

1. “Is About” is, in a sense, a definition poem. Which definition seems most persuasive to you? How do you think the poem defines the title itself?
2. From among the characters who populate the poem (Dylan, Beethoven, the Pope, Poe, Buddha, Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Shelley), select one you know well. Is the reference accurate, as you see it? How does it contribute to the meaning or effect of the poem?
3. What techniques does Ginsberg employ to affect the tempo of each line? Consider line length, punctuation, and the sound of the words. How does the resulting pace inform your understanding of the poet’s intentions or mood? Identify a list or a series of images or concepts in the poem that you find particularly striking. How does the juxtaposition of items in this list or series develop tension or resonance within the poem?
4. How does the element of surprise function in the poem? Identify an unexpected association or definition that particularly affected your reading or understanding of the speaker’s intentions or ideas.
5. How would you describe the tone of the poem? How does Ginsberg create that tone?
6. How would you answer the last two questions of the poem (ll. 23–24)?
7. If asked, what would you say “Is About” is about?

Short Fiction for Close Reading and Analysis

ALL QUESTIONS FOR THE STORIES ARE TO BE ANSWERED:

- ON NEAT, LINED PAPER
- IN YOUR OWN HANDWRITING (nothing typed will be accepted)
- IN COMPLETE SENTENCES
- WITH EXPLANATORY DETAIL
- WITH TEXTUAL SUPPORT, AS NEEDED
- WITH CLEAR IDENTIFICATION OF EACH WORK



The Shawl

CYNTHIA OZICK

Cynthia Ozick was born in 1928 in New York City, where she fell in love with literature as a child in the Bronx. The child of Lithuanian immigrants, she was strongly influenced by both the literature of her Jewish tradition and the New York writings of Henry James. She earned her BA at New York University and her MA in English literature at Ohio State University. Ozick is highly regarded for her ideas as well as her stories. "Even when you disagree with her, she electrifies your mind," wrote critic Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in the *New York Times* in 2000. Ozick continues to write both fiction and essays; in 2008, she received the PEN/Nabokov Award. "The Shawl" is perhaps her most famous piece. Published in 1980 in the *New Yorker* and selected for inclusion in *The Best American Short Stories of the Century* (1999), it delivers a powerful glimpse into the personal horrors of the Holocaust. In an interview published in the spring 1987 *Paris Review*, Ozick discussed writing about the Holocaust: "I don't want to tamper or invent or imagine, and yet I have done it. I can't not do it. It comes. It invades."

Stella, cold, cold, the coldness of hell. How they walked on the roads together, Rosa with Magda curled up between sore breasts, Magda wound up in the shawl. Sometimes Stella carried Magda. But she was jealous of Magda. A thin girl of fourteen, too small, with thin breasts of her own, Stella wanted to be wrapped in a shawl, hidden away, asleep, rocked by the march, a baby, a round infant in arms. Magda took Rosa's nipple, and Rosa never stopped walking, a walking cradle. There was not enough milk; sometimes Magda sucked air; then she screamed. Stella was ravenous. Her knees were tumors on sticks, her elbows chicken bones.

Rosa did not feel hunger; she felt light, not like someone walking but like someone in a faint, in trance, arrested in a fit, someone who is already a floating angel, alert and seeing everything, but in the air, not there, not touching the road. As if teetering on the tips of her fingernails. She looked into Magda's face through a gap in the shawl: a squirrel in a nest, safe, no one could reach her inside the little house of the shawl's windings. The face, very round, a pocket mirror of a face: but it was not Rosa's bleak complexion, dark like cholera, it was another kind of face altogether,

eyes blue as air, smooth feathers of hair nearly as yellow as the Star sewn into Rosa's coat. You could think she was one of *their* babies.

Rosa, floating, dreamed of giving Magda away in one of the villages. She could leave the line for a minute and push Magda into the hands of any woman on the side of the road. But if she moved out of line they might shoot. And even if she fled the line for half a second and pushed the shawl-bundle at a stranger, would the woman take it? She might be surprised, or afraid; she might drop the shawl, and Magda would fall out and strike her head and die. The little round head. Such a good child, she gave up screaming, and sucked now only for the taste of the drying nipple itself. The neat grip of the tiny gums. One mite of a tooth tip sticking up in the bottom gum, how shining, an elfin tombstone of white marble, gleaming there. Without complaining, Magda relinquished Rosa's teats, first the left, then the right; both were cracked, not a sniff of milk. The duct crevice extinct, a dead volcano, blind eye, chill hole, so Magda took the corner of the shawl and milked it instead. She sucked and sucked, flooding the threads with wetness. The shawl's good flavor, milk of linen.

It was a magic shawl, it could nourish an infant for three days and three nights. Magda did not die, she stayed alive, although very quiet. A peculiar smell, of cinnamon and almonds, lifted out of her mouth. She held her eyes open every moment, forgetting how to blink or nap, and Rosa and sometimes Stella studied their blueness. On the road they raised one burden of a leg after another and studied Magda's face. "Aryan," Stella said, in a voice grown as thin as a string; and Rosa thought how Stella gazed at Magda like a young cannibal. And the time that Stella said "Aryan," it sounded to Rosa as if Stella had really said, "Let us devour her."

But Magda lived to walk. She lived that long, but she did not walk very well, partly because she was only fifteen months old, and partly because the spindles of her legs could not hold up her fat belly. It was fat with air, full and round. Rosa gave almost all her food to Magda, Stella gave nothing; Stella was ravenous, a growing child herself, but not growing much. Stella did not menstruate. Rosa did not menstruate. Rosa was ravenous, but also not; she learned from Magda how to drink the taste of a finger in one's mouth. They were in a place without pity, all pity was annihilated in Rosa, she looked at Stella's bones without pity. She was sure that Stella was waiting for Magda to die so she could put her teeth into the little thighs.

Rosa knew Magda was going to die very soon; she should have been dead already, but she had been buried away deep inside the magic shawl, mistaken there for the shivering mound of Rosa's breasts; Rosa clung to the shawl as if it covered only herself. No one took it away from her. Magda was mute. She never cried. Rosa hid her in the barracks, under the shawl, but she knew that one day someone would inform; or one day someone, not even Stella, would steal Magda to eat her. When Magda began to walk Rosa knew that Magda was going to die very soon, something would happen. She was afraid to fall asleep; she slept with the weight of her thigh on Magda's body; she was afraid she would smother Magda under her thigh. The weight of Rosa was becoming less and less, Rosa and Stella were slowly turning into air.

Magda was quiet, but her eyes were horribly alive, like blue tigers. She watched. Sometimes she laughed—it seemed a laugh, but how could it be? Magda had never seen anyone laugh. Still, Magda laughed at her shawl when the wind blew its corners,

the bad wind with pieces of black in it, that made Stella's and Rosa's eyes tear. Magda's eyes were always clear and tearless. She watched like a tiger. She guarded her shawl. No one could touch it; only Rosa could touch it. Stella was not allowed. The shawl was Magda's own baby, her pet, her little sister. She tangled herself up in it and sucked on one of the corners when she wanted to be very still.

Then Stella took the shawl away and made Magda die.
Afterward Stella said: "I was cold."

And afterward she was always cold, always. The cold went into her heart: Rosa saw that Stella's heart was cold. Magda flopped onward with her little pencil legs scribbling this way and that, in search of the shawl; the pencils faltered at the barracks opening, where the light began. Rosa saw and pursued. But already Magda was in the square outside the barracks, in the jolly light. It was the roll-call arena. Every morning Rosa had to conceal Magda under the shawl against a wall of the barracks and go out and stand in the arena with Stella and hundreds of others, sometimes for hours, and Magda, deserted, was quiet under the shawl, sucking on her corner. Every day Magda was silent, and so she did not die. Rosa saw that today Magda was going to die, and at the same time a fearful joy ran in Rosa's two palms, her fingers were on fire, she was astonished, febrile: Magda, in the sunlight, swaying on her pencil legs, was howling. Ever since the drying up of Rosa's nipples, ever since Magda's last scream on the road, Magda had been devoid of any syllable; Magda was a mute. Rosa believed that something had gone wrong with her vocal cords, with her windpipe, with the cave of her larynx; Magda was defective, without a voice; perhaps she was deaf; there might be something amiss with her intelligence; Magda was dumb. Even the laugh that came when the ash-stippled wind made a clown out of Magda's shawl was only the air-blown showing of her teeth. Even when the lice, head lice and body lice, crazed her so that she became as wild as one of the big rats that plundered the barracks at daybreak looking for carrion, she rubbed and scratched and kicked and bit and rolled without a whimper. But now Magda's mouth was spilling a long viscous rope of clamor.

"Maaaa—"

It was the first noise Magda had ever sent out from her throat since the drying up of Rosa's nipples.

"Maaaa . . . aaa!"

Again! Magda was wavering in the perilous sunlight of the arena, scribbling on such pitiful little bent shins. Rosa saw. She saw that Magda was grieving the loss of her shawl, she saw that Magda was going to die. A tide of commands hammered in Rosa's nipples: Fetch, get, bring! But she did not know which to go after first, Magda or the shawl. If she jumped out into the arena to snatch Magda up, the howling would not stop, because Magda would still not have the shawl; but if she ran back into the barracks to find the shawl, and if she found it, and if she came after Magda holding it and shaking it, then she would get Magda back, Magda would put the shawl in her mouth and turn dumb again.

Rosa entered the dark. It was easy to discover the shawl. Stella was heaped under it, asleep in her thin bones. Rosa tore the shawl free and flew—she could fly, she

was only air—into the arena. The sunheat murmured of another life, of butterflies in summer. The light was placid, mellow. On the other side of the steel fence, far away, there were green meadows speckled with dandelions and deep-colored violets; beyond them, even farther, innocent tiger lilies, tall, lifting their orange bonnets. In the barracks they spoke of “flowers,” of “rain”: excrement, thick turd-braids, and the slow stinking maroon waterfall that slunk down from the upper bunks, the stink mixed with a bitter fatty floating smoke that greased Rosa’s skin. She stood for an instant at the margin of the arena. Sometimes the electricity inside the fence would seem to hum; even Stella said it was only an imagining, but Rosa heard real sounds in the wire: grainy sad voices. The farther she was from the fence, the more clearly the voices crowded at her. The lamenting voices strummed so convincingly, so passionately, it was impossible to suspect them of being phantoms. The voices told her to hold up the shawl, high; the voices told her to shake it, to whip with it, to unfurl it like a flag. Rosa lifted, shook, whipped, unfurled. Far off, very far, Magda leaned across her air-fed belly, reaching out with the rods of her arms. She was high up, elevated, riding someone’s shoulder. But the shoulder that carried Magda was not coming toward Rosa and the shawl, it was drifting away, the speck of Magda was moving more and more into the smoky distance. Above the shoulder a helmet glistened. A light tapped the helmet and sparkled it into a goblet. Below the helmet a black body like a domino and a pair of black boots hurled themselves in the direction of the electrified fence. The electric voices began to chatter wildly. “Maamaa, maaamaaa,” they all hummed together. How far Magda was from Rosa now, across the whole square, past a dozen barracks, all the way on the other side! She was no bigger than a moth.

All at once Magda was swimming through the air. The whole of Magda traveled through loftiness. She looked like a butterfly touching a silver vine. And the moment Magda’s feathered round head and her pencil legs and balloonish belly and zigzag arms splashed against the fence, the steel voices went mad in their growling, urging Rosa to run and run to the spot where Magda had fallen from her flight against the electrified fence; but of course Rosa did not obey them. She only stood, because if she ran they would shoot, and if she tried to pick up the sticks of Magda’s body they would shoot, and if she let the wolf’s screech ascending now through the ladder of her skeleton break out, they would shoot; so she took Magda’s shawl and filled her own mouth with it, stuffed it in and stuffed it in, until she was swallowing up the wolf’s screech and tasting the cinnamon and almond depth of Magda’s saliva; and Rosa drank Magda’s shawl until it dried.

[1980]

Exploring the Text Questions

1. How would you describe Rosa, Stella, and Magda, the three main characters of the story? In what ways does the action of the story undermine their ability to act out their roles as mother, big sister, and baby, respectively?

2. Note the rich use of imagery and figurative language in the first three paragraphs. What is the effect of the “chicken bones,” the “little house,” and the “elfin tombstone,” for example? How does the imagery contribute to the story as a whole?
3. In paragraph 7, Ozick writes of Magda, “Sometimes she laughed—it seemed a laugh, but how could it be? Magda had never seen anyone laugh.” What is Ozick suggesting about joy?
4. Paragraphs 8 and 9 are single sentences: “Then Stella took the shawl away and made Magda die.” “Afterward Stella said: ‘I was cold.’” The next paragraph opens, “And afterward she was always cold, always.” What is the importance of the reader being catapulted into the future by this sequence of lines?
5. What is the effect of the irony and imagery in the final two paragraphs?
6. How would the story differ if it were narrated in the first person by Rosa? Why do you think Ozick tells the story in the third person?
7. What associations does a shawl have? In what ways is it ambiguous? Do you agree with Ozick’s choice of a title for the story? Why or why not?

The Moths

HELENA MARÍA VIRAMONTES

Helena María Viramontes (b. 1949) grew up as one of nine children in East Los Angeles. She has a BA from Immaculate Heart College, an MFA from the University of California, Irvine, and is currently a professor of English at Cornell University. Her mother's plight—raising nine children with a husband who "showed all that is bad in being male"—moved Helena to write of Chicana women's struggles. While writing for several underground literary publications, Viramontes published her first collection of short stories, *The Moths and Other Stories*, in 1985. In 1995, her first novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*, was published, followed by *Their Dogs*

Came with Them in 2007. The latter is her most ambitious work, drawing on her teenage years, the explosive decade of the 1960s, and the lives of young women coming of age at the height of *El Movimiento*. The story included here is the title piece from her 1985 collection about the relationship between a young woman and her *abuelita*, or grandmother.

I was fourteen years old when Abuelita requested my help. And it seemed only fair. Abuelita had pulled me through the rages of scarlet fever by placing, removing and replacing potato slices on the temples of my forehead; she had seen me through several whippings, an arm broken by a dare jump off Tío Enrique's toolshed, puberty, and my first lie. Really, I told Amá, it was only fair.

Not that I was her favorite granddaughter or anything special. I wasn't even pretty or nice like my older sisters and I just couldn't do the girl things they could do. My hands were too big to handle the fineries of crocheting or embroidery and I always pricked my fingers or knotted my colored threads time and time again while my sisters laughed and called me bull hands with their cute waterlike voices. So I began keeping a piece of jagged brick in my sock to bash my sisters or anyone who called me bull hands. Once, while we all sat in the bedroom, I hit Teresa on the forehead, right above her eyebrow and she ran to Amá with her mouth open, her hand over her eye while blood seeped between her fingers. I was used to the whippings by then.

I wasn't respectful either. I even went so far as to doubt the power of Abuelita's slices, the slices she said absorbed my fever. "You're still alive, aren't you?" Abuelita snapped back, her pasty gray eye beaming at me and burning holes in my suspicions. Regretful that I had let secret questions drop out of my mouth, I couldn't look into her eyes. My hands began to fan out, grow like a liar's nose until they hung by my side like low weights. Abuelita made a balm out of dried moth wings and Vicks and rubbed my hands, shaped them back to size and it was the strangest feeling. Like bones melting. Like sun shining through the darkness of your eyelids. I didn't mind helping Abuelita after that, so Amá would always send me over to her.

In the early afternoon Amá would push her hair back, hand me my sweater and shoes, and tell me to go to Mama Luna's. This was to avoid another fight and another whipping, I knew. I would deliver one last direct shot on Marisela's arm and jump out of our house, the slam of the screen door burying her cries of anger, and I'd gladly go help Abuelita plant her wild lilies or jasmine or heliotrope or cilantro or hierba-buena¹ in red Hills Brothers coffee cans. Abuelita would wait for me at the top step of her porch holding a hammer and nail and empty coffee cans. And although we hardly spoke, hardly looked at each other as we worked over root transplants, I always felt her gray eye on me. It made me feel, in a strange sort of way, safe and guarded and not alone. Like God was supposed to make you feel.

¹Also yerba buena, or "good herb," a plant in the mint family that is steeped to make a tea-like beverage.—Eds.

On Abuelita's porch, I would puncture holes in the bottom of the coffee cans with a nail and a precise hit of a hammer. This completed, my job was to fill them with red clay mud from beneath her rose bushes, packing it softly, then making a perfect hole, four fingers round, to nest a sprouting avocado pit, or the spidery sweet potatoes that Abuelita rooted in mayonnaise jars with toothpicks and daily water, or prickly chayotes² that produced vines that twisted and wound all over her porch pillars, crawling to the roof, up and over the roof, and down the other side, making her small brick house look like it was cradled within the vines that grew pear-shaped squashes ready for the pick, ready to be steamed with onions and cheese and butter. The roots would burst out of the rusted coffee cans and search for a place to connect. I would then feed the seedlings with water.

But this was a different kind of help, Amá said, because Abuelita was dying. Looking into her gray eye, then into her brown one, the doctor said it was just a matter of days. And so it seemed only fair that these hands she had melted and formed found use in rubbing her caving body with alcohol and marihuana, rubbing her arms and legs, turning her face to the window so that she could watch the Bird of Paradise blooming or smell the scent of clove in the air. I towed her face frequently and held her hand for hours. Her gray wiry hair hung over the mattress. Since I could remember, she'd kept her long hair in braids. Her mouth was vacant and when she slept, her eyelids never closed all the way. Up close, you could see her gray eye beaming out the window, staring hard as if to remember everything. I never kissed her. I left the window open when I went to the market.

Across the street from Jay's Market there was a chapel. I never knew its denomination, but I went in just the same to search for candles. I sat down on one of the pews because there were none. After I cleaned my fingernails, I looked up at the high ceiling. I had forgotten the vastness of these places, the coolness of the marble pillars and the frozen statues with blank eyes. I was alone. I knew why I had never returned.

That was one of Apá's biggest complaints. He would pound his hands on the table, rocking the sugar dish or spilling a cup of coffee and scream that if I didn't go to mass every Sunday to save my goddamn sinning soul, then I had no reason to go out of the house, period. Punto final.³ He would grab my arm and dig his nails into me to make sure I understood the importance of catechism. Did he make himself clear? Then he strategically directed his anger at Amá for her lousy ways of bringing up daughters, being disrespectful and unbelieving, and my older sisters would pull me aside and tell me if I didn't get to mass right this minute, they were all going to kick the holy shit out of me. Why am I so selfish? Can't you see what it's doing to Amá, you idiot? So I would wash my feet and stuff them in my black Easter shoes that shone with Vaseline, grab a missal and veil, and wave good-bye to Amá.

I would walk slowly down Lorena to First to Evergreen, counting the cracks on the cement. On Evergreen I would turn left and walk to Abuelita's. I liked her porch

²Pear-shaped vegetable similar to a cucumber.—EDS.

³Final point, period.—EDS.

because it was shielded by the vines of the chayotes and I could get a good look at the people and car traffic on Evergreen without them knowing. I would jump up the porch steps, knock on the screen door as I wiped my feet and call Abuelita? mi Abuelita? As I opened the door and stuck my head in, I would catch the gagging scent of toasting chile on the placa.⁴ When I entered the sala,⁵ she would greet me from the kitchen, wringing her hands in her apron. I'd sit at the corner of the table to keep from being in her way. The chiles made my eyes water. Am I crying? No, Mama Luna, I'm sure not crying. I don't like going to mass, but my eyes watered anyway, the tears dropping on the tablecloth like candle wax. Abuelita lifted the burnt chiles from the fire and sprinkled water on them until the skins began to separate. Placing them in front of me, she turned to check the menudo.⁶ I peeled the skins off and put the flimsy, limp looking green and yellow chiles in the molcajete⁷ and began to crush and crush and twist and crush the heart out of the tomato, the clove of garlic, the stupid chiles that made me cry, crushed them until they turned into liquid under my bull hand. With a wooden spoon, I scraped hard to destroy the guilt, and my tears were gone. I put the bowl of chile next to a vase filled with freshly cut roses. Abuelita touched my hand and pointed to the bowl of menudo that steamed in front of me. I spooned some chile into the menudo and rolled a corn tortilla thin with the palms of my hands. As I ate, a fine Sunday breeze entered the kitchen and a rose petal calmly feathered down to the table.

I left the chapel without blessing myself and walked to Jay's. Most of the time Jay didn't have much of anything. The tomatoes were always soft and the cans of Campbell soups had rusted spots on them. There was dust on the tops of cereal boxes. I picked up what I needed: rubbing alcohol, five cans of chicken broth, a big bottle of Pine Sol. At first Jay got mad because I thought I had forgotten the money. But it was there all the time, in my back pocket. 10

When I returned from the market, I heard Amá crying in Abuelita's kitchen. She looked up at me with puffy eyes. I placed the bags of groceries on the table and began putting the cans of soup away. Amá sobbed quietly. I never kissed her. After a while, I patted her on the back for comfort. Finally: "¿Y mi Amá?"⁸ she asked in a whisper, then choked again and cried into her apron.

Abuelita fell off the bed twice yesterday, I said, knowing that I shouldn't have said it and wondering why I wanted to say it because it only made Amá cry harder. I guess I became angry and just so tired of the quarrels and beatings and unanswered prayers and my hands just there hanging helplessly by my side. Amá looked at me again, confused, angry, and her eyes were filled with sorrow. I went outside and sat on the porch swing and watched the people pass. I sat there until she left. I dozed off repeating the words to myself like rosary prayers: when do you stop giving

⁴Plate. — Eds.

⁵Living room. — Eds.

⁶Traditional Mexican soup made with tripe. — Eds.

⁷Stone bowl used for grinding foods or spices, similar to a mortar and pestle. — Eds.

⁸"And my Mama?"

when do you start giving when do you . . . and when my hands fell from my lap, I awoke to catch them. The sun was setting, an orange glow, and I knew Abuelita was hungry.

There comes a time when the sun is defiant. Just about the time when moods change, inevitable seasons of a day, transitions from one color to another, that hour or minute or second when the sun is finally defeated, finally sinks into the realization that it cannot with all its power to heal or burn, exist forever, there comes an illumination where the sun and earth meet, a final burst of burning red orange fury reminding us that although endings are inevitable, they are necessary for rebirths, and when that time came, just when I switched on the light in the kitchen to open Abuelita's can of soup, it was probably then that she died.

The room smelled of Pine Sol and vomit and Abuelita had defecated the remains of her cancerous stomach. She had turned to the window and tried to speak, but her mouth remained open and speechless. I heard you, Abuelita, I said, stroking her cheek, I heard you. I opened the windows of the house and let the soup simmer and overboil on the stove. I turned the stove off and poured the soup down the sink. From the cabinet I got a tin basin, filled it with lukewarm water and carried it carefully to the room. I went to the linen closet and took out some modest bleached white towels. With the sacredness of a priest preparing his vestments, I unfolded the towels one by one on my shoulders. I removed the sheets and blankets from her bed and peeled off her thick flannel nightgown. I towed her puzzled face, stretching out the wrinkles, removing the coils of her neck, towed her shoulders and breasts. Then I changed the water. I returned to towel the creases of her stretch-marked stomach, her sporadic vaginal hairs, and her sagging thighs. I removed the lint from between her toes and noticed a mapped birthmark on the fold of her buttock. The scars on her back which were as thin as the life lines on the palms of her hands made me realize how little I really knew of Abuelita. I covered her with a thin blanket and went into the bathroom. I washed my hands, and turned on the tub faucets and watched the water pour into the tub with vitality and steam. When it was full, I turned off the water and undressed. Then, I went to get Abuelita.

She was not as heavy as I thought and when I carried her in my arms, her body fell into a V, and yet my legs were tired, shaky, and I felt as if the distance between the bedroom and bathroom was miles and years away. Amá, where are you?

I stepped into the bathtub one leg first, then the other. I bent my knees slowly to descend into the water slowly so I wouldn't scald her skin. There, there, Abuelita, I said, cradling her, smoothing her as we descended, I heard you. Her hair fell back and spread across the water like eagle's wings. The water in the tub overflowed and poured onto the tile of the floor. Then the moths came. Small, gray ones that came from her soul and out through her mouth fluttering to light, circling the single dull light bulb of the bathroom. Dying is lonely and I wanted to go to where the moths were, stay with her and plant chayotes whose vines would crawl up her fingers and into the clouds; I wanted to rest my head on her chest with her stroking my hair, telling me about the moths that lay within the soul and slowly eat the

spirit up; I wanted to return to the waters of the womb with her so that we would never be alone again. I wanted. I wanted my Amá. I removed a few strands of hair from Abuelita's face and held her small light head within the hollow of my neck. The bathroom was filled with moths, and for the first time in a long time I cried, rocking us, crying for her, for me, for Amá, the sobs emerging from the depths of anguish, the misery of feeling half born, sobbing until finally the sobs rippled into circles and circles of sadness and relief. There, there, I said to Abuelita, rocking us gently, there, there.

[1985]

Exploring the Text *Questions*

1. The story opens with the narrator's grandmother applying potato slices to the narrator's fevered brow. Compare this opening with the conclusion of the story. What is the significance of the contrast between the gentleness at the beginning and end of the story, and the rough treatment the narrator typically gives to family members ("I hit Teresa on the forehead," para. 2) and receives from them ("He would grab my arm and dig his nails into me," para. 8)?
2. How does the work Abuelita asks the narrator to do—planting, cooking—help the teenager deal with her pent-up anger?
3. As the narrator cares for her dying grandmother, she begins to ask herself, "when do you stop giving when do you start giving" (para. 12), continuing the repetition of the word "when" throughout the following paragraph. What is the significance of this repetition for the fourteen-year-old narrator? What might she be questioning in her own life?
4. Trace the references to hands in this story. How do you interpret the poultice balm of moth wings that Abuelita uses to shape the narrator's hands back into shape? What is the significance of this act?
5. What is the role of religion and spirituality in this story? Why does the narrator think to herself when she is in the chapel, "I was alone. I knew why I had never returned" (para. 7)? What conflicts does religion cause in her family?
6. Note the references throughout to Amá, the narrator's mother. When Amá is crying in Abuelita's kitchen, why does the narrator choose not to kiss her? Why at the end does the narrator say, "I wanted. I wanted my Amá" (para. 16)? What is the nature of the relationship among these three generations of women? What does the narrator want it to be?
7. What do the moths represent in the story?
8. Describe the ways in which the narrator is an outcast in her own family. What does her grandmother seem to understand that the girl's immediate family members do not?
9. Does the narrator's fearlessness about death strike you as unusual? Why do you think she is comfortable enough to bathe her dead Abuelita? Consider the sensuous descriptions throughout the story.

AP Literature & Composition

Literary Terms by Subject (Verse)

Style

Apostrophe A figure of speech in which someone absent or dead or something nonhuman is addressed as if it were alive and present and could reply

Connotation What a word suggests beyond its basic definition; a word's overtones of meaning

Denotation The basic definition or dictionary meaning of a word

Ekphrasis The poetic representation of a painting or sculpture in words

Epigram (1) A short, witty poem expressing a single thought or observation. (2) A concise, clever, often paradoxical statement.

Extended figure (also known as sustained figure) A figure of speech (usually **metaphor, simile, personification, or apostrophe**) sustained or developed through a considerable number of lines or through a whole poem

Figurative language Language employing figures of speech; language that cannot be taken literally or only literally

Figure of speech Broadly, any way of saying something other than the ordinary way; more narrowly (and for the purposes of this class) a way of saying one thing and meaning another

Juxtaposition Positioning opposites next to each other to heighten the contrast

Metaphor A figure of speech in which an implicit comparison is made between two things essentially unlike

Metonymy A figure of speech in which some significant aspect or detail of an experience is used to represent the whole experience

Onomatopoeia The use of words that supposedly mimic their meaning in their sound (for example, boom, click, plop).

Personification A figure of speech in which human attributes are given to an animal, an object, or a concept

Rhythm Any wavelike recurrence of motion or sound

Sentimentality Unmerited or contrived tender feeling; that quality in a story that elicits or seeks to elicit tears through an oversimplification or falsification of reality

Simile A figure of speech in which an explicit comparison is made between two things essentially unlike. The comparison is made explicit by the use of some such word or phrase as like, as, than, similar to, resembles, or seems

Synecdoche A figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole. In this class it is subsumed under the term *Metonymy*.

Syntax Word organization and order.

Structure

Alliteration The repetition at close intervals of the initial consonant sounds of accented syllables or important words (for example, map-moon, kill-code)

Anapest A metrical foot consisting of two unaccented syllables followed by one accented syllable (for example, understand)

Anapestic meter A meter in which a majority of the feet are anapests

Approximate rhyme (also known as imperfect rhyme, near rhyme, slant rhyme, or oblique rhyme) A term used for words in a rhyming pattern that have some kind of sound correspondence but are not perfect rhymes (for example, arrayed-said)

Assonance The repetition at close intervals of the vowel sounds of accented syllables or important words (for example, hat-ran-amber, vein-made).

Ballad meter Stanzas formed of *quatrains* of iambs in which the first and third lines have four stresses (tetrameter) and the second and fourth lines have three stresses (trimeter). Usually, the second and fourth lines rhyme (abcb), although ballad meter is often not followed strictly.

Blank verse Poetry with a meter, but not rhymed, usually in iambic pentameter

Consonance The repetition at close intervals of the final consonant sounds of accented syllables or important words (for example, book-plaque-thicker)

Couplet Two successive lines, usually in the same meter, linked by rhyme

Dactyl A metrical foot consisting of one accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables (for example, merrily)

Dactylic meter A meter in which a majority of the feet are dactyls

End rhyme Rhymes that occur at the ends of lines

End-stopped line A line that ends with a natural speech pause, usually marked by punctuation — the opposite of *enjambment*

Enjambment Or run-on line, a line which has no natural speech pause at its end, allowing the sense to flow uninterrupted into the succeeding line — the opposite of an *end-stopped line*

English (or Shakespearean) sonnet A sonnet rhyming ababcdcdefgg. Its content or structure ideally parallels the rhyme scheme, falling into three coordinate quatrains and a concluding couplet; but it is often structured, like the *Italian sonnet*, into octave and sestet, the principal break in thought coming at the end of the eighth line.

Feminine rhyme A rhyme in which the stress is on the penultimate (second from last) syllable of the words (picky, tricky)

Foot The basic unit used in the scansion or measurement of verse. A foot usually contains one accented syllable and one or two unaccented syllables

Free verse Nonmetrical verse. Poetry written in free verse is arranged in lines, may be more or less rhythmical, but has no fixed metrical pattern or expectation

Half rhyme (Sometimes called slant rhyme, sprung, near rhyme, oblique rhyme, off rhyme or imperfect rhyme), is consonance on the final consonants of the words involved

Heroic couplet Poems constructed by a sequence of two lines of (usually rhyming) verse in iambic pentameter. If these couplets do not rhyme, they are usually separated by extra white space.

Iamb A metrical foot consisting of one unaccented syllable followed by one accented syllable (for example, rehearse)

Iambic meter A meter in which the majority of feet are iambs, the most common English meter

Internal rhyme A rhyme in which one or both of the rhyme-words occur within the line

Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet A sonnet consisting of an octave rhyming abbaabba and of a sestet using any arrangement of two or three additional rhymes, such as cdcdcd or cdecde

Masculine rhyme (also known as single rhyme) A rhyme in which the stress is on the final syllable of the words (rhyme, sublime)

Meter Regularized rhythm; an arrangement of language in which the accents occur at apparently equal intervals in time

Octave (1) An eight-line stanza. (2) The first eight lines of a sonnet, especially one structured in the manner of an Italian sonnet

Perfect rhyme A rhyme in which is when the later part of the word or phrase is identical sounding to another. Types include *masculine* and *feminine*, among others.

Pentameter A metrical line containing five feet

Quatrain (1) A four-line stanza. (2) A four-line division of a sonnet marked off by its rhyme scheme.

Refrain A repeated word, phrase, line, or group of lines, normally at some fixed position in a poem written in stanzaic form

Rhyme The repetition of an identical or similarly accented sound or sounds in a work. Lyricists may find multiple ways to rhyme within a verse. *End rhymes* have words that rhyme at the end of a verse-line. *Internal rhymes* have words that rhyme within it.

Rhyme scheme Any fixed pattern of rhymes characterizing a whole poem or its stanzas

Scansion The process of measuring verse, that is, of marking accented and unaccented syllables, dividing the lines into feet, identifying the metrical pattern, and noting significant variations from that pattern

Sestet (1) A six-line stanza (2) The last six lines of a sonnet structured on the Italian model

Spondee A metrical foot consisting of two syllables equally or almost equally accented (for example, true-blue).

Stanza A group of lines whose metrical pattern (and usually its rhyme scheme as well) is repeated throughout a poem

Syntax The arrangement of words to form phrases, clauses and sentences; sentence construction

Terza Rima A three-line stanza form borrowed from the Italian poets. The rhyme scheme is: aba, bcb, cdc, ded, etc.

Tetrameter A metrical line containing four feet

Trimeter A metrical line containing three feet

Triple meter A meter in which a majority of the feet contain three syllables. (Actually, if more than 25 percent of the feet in a poem are triple, its effect is more triple than duple, and it ought perhaps to be referred to as triple meter.) Anapestic and dactylic are both triple meters.

Trochaic meter A meter in which the majority of feet are trochees

Trochee A metrical foot consisting of one accented syllable followed by one unaccented syllable (for example, barter)

Genre

Ballad a narrative folk song. The ballad is traced back to the Middle Ages. Ballads were usually created by common people and passed orally due to the illiteracy of the time. Subjects for ballads include killings, feuds, important historical events, and rebellion.

Elegy A type of literature defined as a song or poem, written in elegiac couplets, that expresses sorrow or lamentation, usually for one who has died.

Epic A long poem in a lofty style about the exploits of heroic figures. These often come from an oral tradition of shared authorship or from a single, high-profile poet imitating the style.

Lyric a song-like poem written mainly to express the feelings of emotions or thought from a particular person, thus separating it from narrative poems. These poems are generally short, averaging roughly twelve to thirty lines, and rarely go beyond sixty lines. These poems express vivid imagination as well as emotion and all flow fairly concisely.

Narrative poem A poem that tells a story. A narrative poem can come in many forms and styles, both complex and simple, short or long, as long as it tells a story. A few examples of a narrative poem are epics, ballads, and metrical romances.

Ode Usually a lyric poem of moderate length, with a serious subject, an elevated style, and an elaborate stanza pattern. The ode often praises people, the arts of music and poetry, natural scenes, or abstract concepts.

Sonnet A fixed form of fourteen lines, normally iambic pentameter, with a rhyme scheme conforming to or approximating one of two main types—the Italian or the English

AP Literature & Composition

Literary Terms by Subject (Prose)

General

Allegory A narrative or description having a second or symbolic meaning beneath the surface one

Allusion A reference, explicit or implicit, to something in previous literature or history

Anecdote A short account of an interesting or humorous incident

Artistic unity That condition of a successful literary work whereby all its elements work together for the achievement of its central purpose

Cacophony A harsh, discordant, unpleasant-sounding choice and arrangement of sounds

Euphony A smooth, pleasant-sounding choice and arrangement of sounds

Genre A type or class, as poetry, drama, etc.

Imagery The representation through language of sensory experience

Mood The pervading impression of a work

Moral A rule of conduct or maxim for living expressed or implied as the "point" of a literary work. Compare *Theme*.

Prose Non-metrical language; the opposite of *verse*

Theme The main idea, or message, of a literary work. Themes often explore timeless and universal ideas and may be implied rather than stated explicitly.

Tone The writer's or speaker's attitude toward the subject, the audience, or herself or himself; the emotional coloring, or emotional meaning, of a work

Topic The subject matter or area of a literary work. *Not to be confused with theme.*

Setting The context in time and place in which the action of a story occurs

Symbol (literary) Something that means more than what it is; an object, person, situation, or action that in addition to its literal meaning suggests other meanings as well, a figure of speech which may be read both literally and figuratively.

Verse Metrical language; the opposite of *prose*

Voice The distinctive style or manner of expression of an author or a character in a book

Character

Antagonist Character in a story or poem who opposes the main character (protagonist). Sometimes the antagonist is an animal, an idea, or a thing.

Character (1) Any of the persons involved in a story or play [sense 1] (2) The distinguishing moral qualities and personal traits of a character [sense 2]

Characterization The process of conveying information about characters

Deuteragonist the second most important character, after the protagonist, often a foil or eventual antagonist

Direct presentation of character A method of characterization in which the author, by exposition or analysis, tells us directly what a character is like, or has someone else in the story do so

Dynamic character A character (sense 1) who during the course of a story undergoes a permanent change in some aspect of character (sense 2) or outlook.

Flat character A character (sense 1) whose character (sense 2) is summed up in one or two traits

Foil a character who contrasts with another character (usually the protagonist) in order to highlight various features of that other character's personality, throwing these characteristics into sharper focus.

Hero A man who is endowed with great courage and strength, celebrated for bold exploits, and favored by the gods

Hubris Overbearing and excessive pride

Indirect presentation of character That method of characterization in which the author shows us a character in action, compelling us to infer what the character is like from what is said or done by the character

Protagonist The main character of a novel, play, or film

Round character A character (sense 1) whose character (sense 2) is complex and many sided.

Static character A character who is the same sort of person at the end of a story as at the beginning.

Stock character A stereotyped character.

Tragic Flaw A flaw in the character of the protagonist of a tragedy that brings the protagonist to ruin or sorrow

Dialogue

Aside A brief speech in which a character turns from the person being addressed to speak directly to the audience; a dramatic device for letting the audience know what a character is really thinking or feeling as opposed to what the character pretends to think or feel

Colloquial Informal, conversational language

Dialogue (1) Conversation between characters in a drama or narrative. (2) A literary work written in the form of a conversation.

Dialect A regional variety of a language distinguished by pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary

Diction Word choice

Euphemism Substituting a mild, indirect, or vague term for a harsh, blunt, or offensive one

Figure of speech Broadly, any way of saying something other than the ordinary way; more narrowly (and for the purposes of this class) a way of saying one thing and meaning another.

Hyperbole A figure of speech in which exaggeration is used in the service of truth

Invective Denunciatory or abusive language.

Monologue (1) A dramatic soliloquy. (2) A literary composition in such form

Proverb A short, pithy saying that expresses a basic truth or practical precept

Pun A play on words, sometimes on different senses of the same word and sometimes on the similar sense or sound of different words

Sarcasm Bitter or cutting speech; speech intended by its speaker to give pain to the person addressed

Soliloquy a device often used in drama where by a character relates his or her thoughts and feelings to him/herself and to the audience without addressing any of the other characters.

Slang A kind of language esp. occurring in casual or playful speech, usu. made up of short-lived coinages and figures of speech deliberately used in place of standard terms

Understatement A figure of speech that consists of saying less than one means, or of saying what one means with less force than the occasion warrants.

Dramatic Structure

Exposition The part of a play (usually at the beginning) that provides the background information needed to understand the characters and the actions.

Conflict A clash of actions, desires, ideas, or goals in the plot of a story or drama. Conflict may exist between the main character and some other person or persons; between the main character and some external force—physical nature, society, or “fate”; or between the main character and some destructive element in his or her own nature. A struggle that takes place in a character's mind is called *internal conflict*.

Rising action That development of plot in a story that precedes and leads up to the climax

Climax The turning point or high point of a plot

Falling Action The falling action immediately follows the climax and shows the aftereffects of the events in the climax

Denouement (Also called the resolution) the conclusion of the story. Conflicts are resolved, creating normality for the characters and a sense of catharsis for them and the reader. Sometimes a hint as to the characters' future is given

Irony

Irony A situation, or a use of language, involving some kind of incongruity or discrepancy. Three kinds of irony are distinguished in this class:

Dramatic irony An incongruity of discrepancy between what a character says or thinks and what the reader knows to be true (or between what a character perceives and what the author intends the reader to perceive).

Irony of situation A situation in which there is an incongruity between appearance and reality, or between expectation and fulfillment, or between the actual situation and what would seem appropriate.

Verbal irony A figure of speech in which what is said is the opposite of what is meant

Narrative Mode

Epistolary novel a novel written as a series of documents.

First person point of view The story is told by one of its characters, using the first person.

Flashback A literary device in which an earlier event is inserted into a narrative.

Flashforward A literary device in which a later event is inserted into a narrative.

In medias res (into the middle of things) is a Latin phrase denoting the literary and artistic narrative technique wherein the relation of a story begins either at the mid-point or at the conclusion, rather than at the beginning, establishing setting, character, and conflict via flashback and expository conversations.

Limited omniscient point of view The author tells the story, using the third person, but is limited to a complete knowledge of one character in the story and tells us only what that one character thinks, feels, sees, or hears.

Linear structure a plot that follows a straight-moving, cause and effect, chronological order

Objective point of view The author tells the story, using the third person, but is limited to reporting what the characters say or do; the author does not interpret their behavior or tell us their private thoughts or feelings.

Omniscient point of view The author tells the story, using the third person, knowing all and free to tell us anything, including what the characters are thinking or feeling and why they act as they do

Narrator the speaker or the “voice” of an oral or written work. Although it can be, the narrator is not usually the same person as the author. The narrator is one of three types of characters in a given work, (1) participant (protagonist or participant in any action that may take place in the story), (2) observer (someone who is indirectly involved in the action of a story), or (3) non participant (one who is not at all involved in any action of the story). The narrator is the direct window into a piece of work.

Nonlinear structure is when the plot is presented in a non-causal order, with events presented in a random series jumping to and from the main plot with *flashbacks* or *flashforwards*; or in any other manner that is either not chronological or not cause and effect, for example, *in medias res*.

Point of View The angle of vision from which a story is told.

Stream of consciousness Narrative which presents the private thoughts of a character without commentary or interpretation by the author

Unreliable narrator a narrator whose credibility has been seriously compromised. Unreliable narrators are usually first-person narrators.

Plot

Anticlimax A sudden descent from the impressive or significant to the ludicrous or inconsequential

Catastrophe The concluding action of a classical tragedy containing the resolution of the plot

Comic Relief A humorous incident introduced into a serious literary work in order to relieve dramatic tension or heighten emotional impact

Dilemma A situation in which a character must choose between two courses of action, both undesirable

Deus ex machina (god from the machine) The resolution of a plot by use of a highly improbable chance or coincidence (so named from the practice of some Greek dramatists of having a god descend from heaven at the last possible minute—in the theater by means of a stage machine—to rescue the protagonist from an impossible situation).

Indeterminate ending An ending in which the central problem or conflict is left unresolved

Inversion A reversal in order, nature, or effect

Motivation An emotion, desire, physiological need, or similar impulse that acts as an incitement to action

Mystery An unusual set of circumstances for which the reader craves an explanation; used to create suspense

Paradox A statement or situation containing apparently contradictory or incompatible elements

Plot The sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed

Plot manipulation A situation in which an author gives the plot a twist or turn unjustified by preceding action or by the characters involved

Plot device An object, character, or event whose only reason for existing is to advance the story. Often breaks *suspension of disbelief*.

Prologue An introduction or a preface, esp. a poem recited to introduce a play

Red herring a literary tactic of diverting attention away from an item or person of significance

Scene A subdivision of an act in a dramatic presentation in which the setting is fixed and the time continuous

Suspense That quality in a story that makes the reader eager to discover what happens next and how it will end

Suspension of Disbelief An unspoken agreement between writer and reader: "I agree to believe your make-believe if it entertains me."

Subplot A plot subordinate to the main plot of a literary work

Surprise An unexpected turn in the development of a plot

Genre

Comedy A type of drama, opposed to tragedy, having usually a happy ending, and emphasizing human limitation rather than human greatness.

- **Comedy of manners** Comedy that ridicules the manners (way of life, social customs, etc.) of a certain segment of society
- **Satire** A kind of literature that ridicules human folly or vice with the purpose of bringing about reform or of keeping others from falling into similar folly or vice.
- **Scornful comedy** A type of comedy whose main purpose is to expose and ridicule human folly, vanity, or hypocrisy
- **Romantic comedy** A type of comedy whose likable and sensible main characters are placed in difficulties from which they are rescued at the end of the play
- **Farce** A type of comedy that relies on exaggeration, horseplay, and unrealistic or improbable situations to provoke laughter

Escapist literature Literature written purely for entertainment, with little or no attempt to provide insights into the true nature of human life or behavior.

Fable A short narrative making an edifying or cautionary point and often employing animal characters that act like human beings

Fantasy A kind of fiction that pictures creatures or events beyond the boundaries of known reality

Interpretive literature Literature that provides valid insights into the nature of human life or behavior

Myth any story that attempts to explain how the world was created or why the world is the way that it is. Myths are stories that are passed on from generation to generation and normally involve religion. Most myths were first spread by oral tradition and then were written down in some literary form. Many ancient literary works are, in fact, myths as myths appear in every ancient culture of the planet.

Novel a book of long narrative in literary prose.

Novella (also called a short novel), a written, fictional, prose narrative longer than a novelette but shorter than a novel.

Parable A simple story illustrating a moral or religious lesson

Tragedy Drama in which a noble protagonist — a person of unusual moral or intellectual stature or outstanding abilities — falls to ruin during a struggle caused by a *tragic flaw* (or hamartia) in his character or an error in his rulings or judgments.