

Form II English Summer Reading Assignment 2019

In Form II English, we strive to create a culture of literacy, not only by engaging entire classes in meaningful discourses on common texts, but also by giving individual students opportunities to choose what they read. One of the major components of this assignment is your quest for literature that fits the qualifications below and is of interest to you.

1. Select two works with narrative elements (novels, memoirs, and/or biographies) that are at or just above your reading level and that include protagonists who are close in age to you (within a few years). To find these books, you must first assess yourself as a reader, and then you must seek out sources that are likely to point you in the right direction. Talk with friends and family members who are readers, ask librarians for suggestions, comb the stacks of local bookshops, consult bestseller lists, do a little Internet research: explore.

2. Chronicle your reading experiences with each text, using the template below. [Note: Create a separate log for each text that includes a proper MLA heading, title, and works cited entry.]

| Toby Belch Mr Pariano or Ms. Bond Form II English Summer 2019 <p style="text-align: center;">Summer Reading Log #1</p> Text: Cisneros, Sandra. <i>The House on Mango Street</i> . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. Print. | | | |
|---|----------------|---|----------------------|
| Date | Time of Day | Place | Number of Pages Read |
| 20 June 2019 | early morning | Ann Arbor, Michigan; back deck at in-laws' | 55 |
| 22 June 2019 | late afternoon | Petoskey, Michigan; Bay Front Park | 30 |
| 1 July 2019 | midday | Stratford, Ontario; Balzac's coffeehouse | 25 |
| 5 July 2019 | early evening | Wayne, Pennsylvania; dining room at home | 24 |

3. Compose a 700- to 1000-word essay in which you note and explain *one* fundamental difference and *one* fundamental similarity between the two protagonists in the books you have read – an essay in which you bring to the surface essential qualities of the protagonists that the common, casual, or careless reader is not likely to notice. Your piece is to be written for an intelligent and interested audience; however, you are not to assume that your audience is an informed one (i.e. knows well the books about which you write). It is, therefore, imperative that you incorporate a brief overview of each book into your essay, preferably in your opening paragraph. It is also imperative that you use specific evidence from the books to help illustrate your ideas and support your claims. Such evidence may assume the form of quoted passages, paraphrases, and/or summaries. [Note: In this piece, refrain from using block quotations, meaning those that are made up of more than four lines of prose.]

Formatting Requirements

All work is to be presented in an easily readable typeface set to a standard size (e.g. 11 or 12 points). Double-space the entire text of your essay, including your heading and title. Your heading is to include your name, your instructor's name, the course title, and the date; and your title is to be centered. (Please refer to the examples included in this document.)

Evaluation

Your work will be evaluated based on its completeness; its adherence to formatting requirements; and the extent to which it reflects focus, organization, sense of audience and purpose, and clarity of expression.

Due Date

You are to be ready to present your work, in hard copy form, to your teacher on the first day of the 2019-20 school year.

SAMPLE ESSAY RESPONSE

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Form II English

4 September 2019

A Comparative Analysis of the Narrator-Protagonists

from *The House on Mango Street* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Several decades and over eight hundred miles separate Esperanza Cordero, the narrator-protagonist of Sandra Cisneros's novella *The House on Mango Street*, and Jean Louise (Scout) Finch, the narrator-protagonist of Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Esperanza

lives a cramped existence with her mother, father, and three siblings in a rented house in mid-1980s Chicago. As a fourteen-year-old, she spends much of her time navigating the dangers of a world that views her as too young, too female, and too Latino to be of any significance. Her great hope is to one day have a house of her own — one that truly reflects the strong, independent woman she aspires to become. Jean Louise, on the other hand, tells her story in a voice indicative of potential achieved. Educated and eloquent, she looks back on her adolescence in an attempt to make sense of events that rocked her family, as well as the entire hometown of her youth, Depression era Maycomb, Alabama. Prejudice, hate, and tragedy reign in Maycomb, but so too do justice, love, and triumph. To accept these dichotomies and to come to understand how they can co-exist is the great challenge Scout (Jean Louise's nickname when she was young) is forced to undertake in *Mockingbird*.

On the surface, Scout and Esperanza differ significantly, for the former is white and the daughter of a single parent who is a venerable attorney and state congressman, and the latter is brown and the daughter of parents who suffer from depression and dreams deferred. Yet beneath the surface, both girls exhibit a poise and confidence that only those who are destined to become impactful women demonstrate. Scout does so when she stands before her first grade class and unflinchingly corrects her teacher about her handling of Walter Cunningham, a fragile boy whose family can only afford to pay their monetary debts through labor and produce, and when she diffuses a potentially violent situation by standing between her father and an angry mob of men who are looking to exact vigilante justice on the jailed client he is representing, a black man named Tom Robinson. She is perhaps most poised and confident, though, when, in the midst of tragedy, she sets aside her dogged determination never to adhere to the rules of ladyhood and, like a proper hostess, gracefully serves a group of "righteous" women who have congregated at a missionary circle hosted by her Aunt Alexandra. Like Scout, Esperanza's

confidence is tied closely to her willingness to buck gender conventions and to protect the vulnerable. At first glance, it seems Esperanza's primary, if not only, focus is on positioning herself to someday have a house of her own; however, upon further examination, it becomes clear she regularly thinks of others in need, and despite her youth, reaches out, or dreams about reaching out, to them. Her altruistic gestures range from memorizing and reciting all of Lewis Carroll's poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter" for Ruthie, a young woman prone to debilitating headaches who has recently separated from her husband, to boldly threatening, with sticks and a brick, a group of boys whose intentions with her friend Sally are less than honorable. Esperanza even extends herself to those she does not know personally, for she imagines how she might someday serve as a savior of the homeless and destitute: "One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house" (108).

While Esperanza and Scout both exhibit the ability to balance courage and compassion in their words and actions, where they are in their lives when they reflect on this balance varies significantly. Seemingly little time passes between Esperanza's act of writing and those events about which she writes. When she does use the past tense, it's to convey something that occurred in the very recent past: "Darius, who doesn't like school, who is sometimes stupid and mostly a fool, said something wise today, though most days he says nothing" (39). Such a short period of time between the event (e.g. Darius saying something wise) and the act of writing about it limits one's perspective on the meaning or significance of the event, thereby compromising, to a certain extent, the narrator's reliability. But what Esperanza loses in the areas of perspective and reliability, she makes up for in the areas of immediacy and intensity. It is easy to imagine Esperanza rushing home to write about Darius saying something wise because she *senses* this is somehow a monumental event; it is also easy to get swept up in that kind of

energy and trust what Esperanza is thinking and feeling is valid, authentic, and somehow important. Jean Louise, on the other hand, lets a significant amount of time pass between the events that shape her story and her crafting of the story. She never directly states how much time has passed, but, as evidenced by the stark contrast in her syntax and diction as a protagonist (Scout) and narrator (Jean Louise), it is reasonable to assume that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is told from the perspective of an adult looking back on her childhood. Whereas young Scout, arguing with her older brother about the futility of school, says things like, “Yeah Jem, but I don’t wanta study cows,” (22), Jean Louise presents a much more refined persona two short paragraphs later by commenting, “I contented myself with asking Jem if he’d lost his mind” (22).

All this begs the questions: Which story, and storyteller, do we *trust* more? Which story, and storyteller, do we *value* more? Are we willing to trust and value *equally* stories told by a Latino girl and a white woman? And, finally — and perhaps most importantly, how content are we with where we ascribe trust and value?