

Dear AP English Lit and College English students,

Hey! I'm excited to see you in the fall, and hope you've had a great end to the school year.

I'm writing with instructions for your Summer 2021 Summer Reading Assignment. I'm asking you to read ten short stories by various authors who detail all kinds of experiences and employ numerous stylistic choices and literary techniques. My goal is to introduce you to some truly "good" and "interesting" stories that each have something quite different to say. My hope is that there will be at least one story that you resonate with among these ten (though obviously my *greatest* hope is that you enjoy all of them to some extent).

The stories are located in a google drive folder that you can find by clicking on this link:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14YWCFRgIXr5Bry15a2Bw013ajjrRiVSr?usp=sharing>

It is always good practice to download each of these to notability or print them out and annotate them as you read.

Short introduction to each story:

"Good Country People," Flannery O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor is from Milledgeville, GA and wrote this story in 1955. She's famous for her Southern Gothic style (creepy, dark, twisted, sometimes religious in nature).

"A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings," Gabriel Garcia Marquez

If you took my class in 10th grade, you've read this story before. Something important to note about this story is that it is satirical. I think you'll be able to sense this as you get into it. Marquez is known for using magical realism in his writing (writing in a very realistic manner about events that are clearly fantastical and unrealistic). I'm sure you will notice this, too, and hope you enjoy it! He published this story in 1968.

"The Conscience of the Court" by Zora Neale Hurston

This story is a reflection on the justice system and race in the United States and was published in 1950. Hurston is an amazing writer and is a keen observer of character in this story.

"Cathedral" by Raymond Carver

This is one of the most highly regarded short stories of all time. It was published in 1983. I want to note before you read it that there is some blatant offensive and racist language used by one of the characters in this story. Carver is not trying to make a point that language of ideas like the ones expressed by this person are ok by any means (at least I truly hope that this is not what he is trying to do), rather, it's more likely that he is trying to develop this character (and perhaps show us that this particular character is morally fallible and racist). I'll be interested to hear your thoughts on this when we discuss it.

“Sonny’s Blues,” James Baldwin

James Baldwin is an extremely famous and excellent writer. He was an important figure in the civil rights movement, and much of his writing contains themes such as race, identity, inequality, class, and sexuality. I think you will be impressed by what he does in this story (which he published in 1957).

“Tenth of December” by George Saunders

The most contemporary of all the stories we’re reading—this story was published in 2011. To put it reductively, this story is about a boy who helps a man, who is contemplating ending his life, find the will to live.

“The Birthmark” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

A rather creepy story about a husband on a quest to remove a birthmark from his wife’s “otherwise perfect” face. Published in 1843.

“The Darling” by Anton Chekhov

Published in 1899. Chekhov Russian writer. This is a very sleek story, with little embellishment, and is about an impressionable young woman and her string of husbands.

“A Worn Path” by Eudora Welty

Published in 1941. Eudora Welty is from Jackson, Mississippi. This story centers around an old and frail woman who makes a journey from the country into town on a “worn path” and the many phenomena she encounters along the way. It may be important to note that Welty is white and that the main character is a Black woman.

“The Swimmer” by John Cheever

Published in 1964. A man is visiting a friend when he notices the abundance of backyard pools that populate their upscale suburb. The man suddenly decides that he’d like to travel the eight miles back to his own home by simply swimming across every pool in town. The story goes in an unexpected direction from here.

Assignment

Though you are responsible for reading all ten stories (and can expect a series of reading checks on each one at the beginning of the year), I am asking you to choose **TWO** stories to write about. Again, **among the ten stories, please choose just TWO of them, and write a standard five paragraph analytical essay in which you make a connection between them.**

I’m leaving this prompt quite broad for a reason—I want to see what kinds of connections you organically make between texts. It gives you a lot of agency to follow your instincts and allows me to see what YOU in particular noticed as you read.

Here are some examples of possible thesis statements for this prompt (note: I have completely made these up, these thesis statements don’t necessarily say true things about the stories):

O'Connor's "Good Country People" and Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" tell the stories of disenfranchised people who are down on their luck. The added component of race as a theme in Baldwin's story distinguishes it from O'Connor's, and adds a layer of complication.

"The Conscience of the Court" and "The Story of an Hour" portray very forward, feminist figures. However, Chopin's heroine's narration is quiet and inward, while Hurston's is loud and fierce. Regardless, both figures successfully convey their desire to be heard.

Specific Requirements:

- 600 words minimum, no max.
- Double spaced
- Times new roman font
- 12 point font
- 1 inch margins
- Most importantly: you must quote and analyze the text in EVERY body paragraph.
- Cite author and page numbers when you quote.

This essay will be submitted to Turn It In during our first class in August. No need to print a copy.