

Grade 11: AP Language and Composition

Summer Reading Thought Questions

NOTE: AP Language is conceived as a college-level class. The following works deal with mature themes, including graphic language.

COMING OF AGE IN MISSISSIPPI **by Anne Moody**

Moody's autobiography offers a stark contrast to the image of post-war affluence and prosperity that is widely associated with the 1950s.

1. What experiences were formative in the development of Anne Moody's identity as an African American and as a woman? Are there certain events in either her childhood or youth that stand out as having shaped her understanding of herself? What motivated her to join the movement?
2. The book provides a look at the Black freedom struggle from a youth perspective. What does it tell us about splits within the Black community regarding the civil rights movement? For instance, how do her family and other Blacks in Canton react to her activism? How did she view the ministers? What is the reason for this conflict? What was Moody's responsibility to her family? To the larger Black freedom struggle? Should she have withdrawn from her activities because of the danger to her community? Why or why not?
3. What were the particular problems and advantages of being a woman in the movement? What does the book reveal about the organizational structure of the civil rights movement? What about women's roles within the movement?
4. How does Moody's *diction*, or word choice, influence our understanding of her world? What is her desired effect in using occasional coarse language, including racial epithets?

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THE THINGS THEY CARRIED

by Tim O'Brien

1. *"They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried."*

In this passage, Tim O'Brien refers to the tangible, and more importantly, the intangible things being carried by his fellow soldiers during, and in some cases, after the war in Vietnam. Make sure you can identify the following characters and the intangible burdens they carried.

Lieutenant Jimmy Cross	Kiowa
Rat Kiley	Henry Dobbins
Ted Lavender	Norman Bowker
Mitchell Sanders	Tim O'Brien

2. When O'Brien was drafted in 1968, he was, in his own words, "politically naive," yet he felt the American war in Vietnam was "wrong":

"It was in my view then, and still is, that you don't make war without knowing why...it seemed to me that when a nation goes to war it must have a reasonable confidence in the justice and imperative of its cause."

Consider several events O'Brien relates in terms of this quote. In other words, how was the war unjust-without moral imperative, for the author and any other character(s)?

Do you think there are wars that are just and imperative? If not, why not? If so, which ones and why?

3. What are the circumstances surrounding O'Brien's killing of the young Vietcong soldier? Why does he relate the death in such graphic detail? Why does he imagine the life and personality of this man who was an enemy and a stranger to him?
4. Why does O'Brien relate his childhood love in a story about Vietnam? Who was Linda? What happened to her? How does she fit in with the rest of the novel?
5. Many years after the war, O'Brien's daughter asks her father why he is always writing about Vietnam. O'Brien ultimately tells the reader that telling the stories of his friends (and enemies) is a way to give tribute, ask forgiveness, and find peace. Explain how.
6. Is this a novel, a series of stories, an autobiography, or something else? Be prepared to defend your response.

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THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP

by John Irving

1. Feminism comes in many different forms in the novel, from Jenny's straightforward brand to the Ellen Jamesians' angry, aggressive type. What does feminism mean to Garp? What does his friendship with Roberta suggest about the limitations or excesses of traditional gender roles?
2. The narrator's voice is often detached and ironic—even when delivering the most emotionally charged moments in the novel. In what ways does the narrator contrast and play against the novel's dramatic elements? How is it both similar and different from the voice of Garp himself?
3. Explore the ways in which Garp's anecdote of "The Under Toad" gains thematic weight by the end of the novel.
4. Webster's defines *metafiction* as "fiction which refers to or takes as its subject fictional writing and its conventions." How do the other stories within *Garp*, such as "The Pension Grillparzer," influence our perceptions of the novel's themes? Does Garp's authorial voice reflect our understanding of him as a character?
5. Consider the following excerpt:

"Usually, with great patience and restraint, Garp would say that the autobiographical basis—if there even was one—was the least interesting level on which to read a novel. He would also say that the art of fiction was the art of imagining truly—like any art, a process of selection. Memories and personal histories—the 'recollected traumas of our unmemorable lives'—were suspicious models for fiction, Garp would say. 'Fiction has to be better made than life,' Garp wrote."

What does Garp mean by this approach to writing? Based on the ways that events and people from his life show up in his stories, is Garp's statement valid?

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AMERICAN BORN CHINESE

By Gene Luen Yang

1. A *graphic novel* is a book-length comic that mines the same depths of character and theme as a standard text novel. Why do you think Yang chose this form to tell this particular story? How do the illustrations help to convey meaning in a different manner than prose?
2. Pick a single page from the book and analyze its *form*. How do the pictures create meaning here? To what extent do the panels tell a mini-story within the larger tale? Are there any recurring motifs on the page? What about the framing of characters in the panels? The use of color and shading? The dialogue?
3. The myth of the Monkey King is a centuries-old tale that is celebrated in many different forms in China. In *American Born Chinese*, just how does the ancient story influence the present-day dramas of Jin and Danny? Eventually, we see the end of the Monkey King's quest: how does the apparent melding of Eastern and Western religious beliefs echo the book's themes?
4. The Danny/Chin-Kee story is portrayed in a somewhat different style than the other two tales, especially with regard to Chin-Kee's stereotypical appearance. How would you describe the visual style in these passages? Pay attention to the use of laughter in the Chin-Kee story. What form of media does this evoke? What does it suggest about traditional American views of Eastern cultures?
5. Both Jin and Wei-Chin enjoy playing with transformer toys. Why is this significant? In what ways do both boys transform in order to adapt to mainstream American society? How do the boys' actions speak to the larger immigrant experience in this country?