

**Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition, 2021-2022**  
**Mr. Orlando—Joseph A. Gregori High School**

**Summer Assignment--Due Monday, August 9, 2021, without exception!**

**First, e-mail me from an e-mail address you'll check over the summer; please include your name. (Thanks if you've done this already!)**

Congratulations on becoming the tenth senior class at Gregori High—while I'm sure you're looking forward to graduation, this year will set the tone, not just for future classes, but also for your college career. I expect you to work hard and to always do your absolute best—anything less is unacceptable!

To prepare for next year, I'm asking you to complete the following:

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**Summer Assignment—Part I**



# *Poetry*

Go to Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/> or download the app (the icon is red with white letters spelling 'POETRY' in three rows).

You have ten weeks of summer, starting with the week of May 30, and ending with the week of August 8.

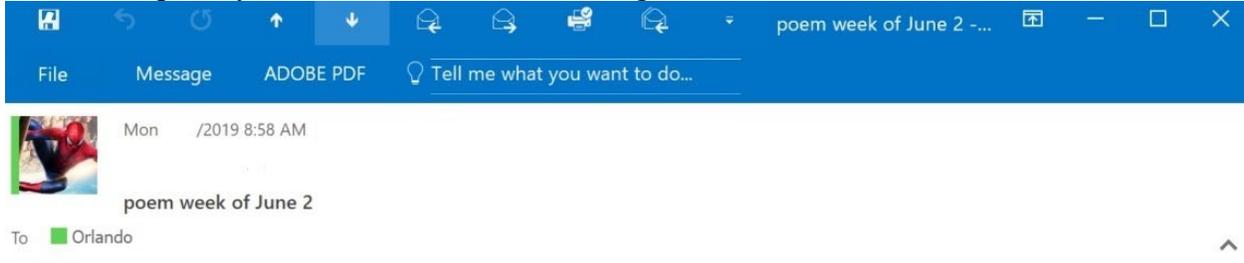
1. Read one poem a week. You may read any poem, but it must be from this site. Read it aloud, so you can hear it. Be thoughtful.
2. E-mail me each week (so by Saturday at 11:59 PM) with the following in the body of the e-mail:
  - a. The title and author of the poem.
  - b. What the poem is about (no more than one sentence).
  - c. What the main message is (the theme; also no more than one sentence; for more on theme, watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H6GCe7hmmA>).
  - d. The tone of the poem (this may have multiple answers, but do your best).
  - e. Your opinion of the poem (again, no more than one sentence).

Please do all of this without looking up an analysis of the poem. I would much rather have you try this and simply do your best, than rely on others and simply relay their thoughts.

The purpose is not to overwhelm, but to have you warm up to poetry by reading a little a week. Do not simply sit down and do them all in one sitting, and then dole them out periodically. This

defeats the purpose. To relieve you of some pressure, then, you may have three weeks off—your choice. By the end of the day on August 7, then, I will have received seven e-mails from each of you.

So when I open my e-mail, I should see something like this:



Mr. Orlando—Here's this week's poem:

- a. "A Blessing" by James Wright
- b. Two people stopping along the road to take a break.
- c. Sometimes we need to escape the fast-paced life to really feel alive. (A cliché would be: stop and smell the roses, but we want to avoid clichés.)
- d. Relaxing, calm, peaceful
- e. There's something enviable about being able to stop and allowing your surroundings to bring you calm.

--Milo Bell

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## Summer Assignment—Part II



# *The Odyssey*

Ideally, you should read the entire text of *The Odyssey*, and I encourage you to try. For our purposes though, a thorough summary of the plot, characters, and settings will suffice.

*Caveat: This assignment should in no way be construed as permission, implicit or otherwise, to use these kinds of sites in place of actual analysis.*

A. First, read the two chapters from *How to Read Literature like a Professor*, "Every Trip Is a Quest (Except When It's Not)" and "One Story."

B. Then, go to: <https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Odyssey/> and work your way through the course.

Focus on the sections "Context," "Characters," "Book Summaries," and Themes." Read, watch the videos, and take handwritten notes—yes, handwritten. I want you to know the plot, the characters (both human and myth), the settings, and the themes. The map is handy, too, to trace

Odysseus' route. (Important note: Course Hero gets theme wrong, but if you listen closely to the videos, the speaker does include them. For more on theme, review the video above).

So when you walk in on the first day of school, I'll expect you to have your handwritten notes, and be prepared for some kind of assessment.

As you read and view the videos, if you have any questions, feel free to e-mail me at orlando.j@monet.k12.us. I will check my e-mail sporadically, so don't be offended if I don't respond right away, but I will respond (barring technological glitches, of course).

## Every Trip Is a Quest (Except When It's Not)

OKAY, SO HERE'S THE DEAL: let's say, purely hypothetically, you're reading a book about an average sixteen-year-old kid in the summer of 1968. The kid—let's call him Kip—who hopes his acne clears up before he gets drafted, is on his way to the A&P. His bike is a one-speed with a coaster brake and therefore deeply humiliating, and riding it to run an errand for his mother makes it even worse. Along the way he has a couple of disturbing experiences, including a minorly unpleasant encounter with a German shepherd, topped off in the supermarket parking lot where he sees the girl of his dreams, Karen, laughing and horsing around in Tony Vauxhall's brand-new Barracuda. Now Kip hates Tony already because he has a name like Vauxhall and not like Smith, which Kip thinks is pretty lame as a name to follow Kip, and because the 'Cuda is bright green and goes approximately the speed of light, and also because Tony has never had to work a day in his life. So Karen, who is laughing and having a great time, turns and sees Kip, who has recently asked her out, and she keeps laughing. (She could stop laughing and it wouldn't matter to us, since we're considering this structurally. In the story we're inventing here, though, she keeps laughing.) Kip goes on into the store to buy the loaf of Wonder Bread that his mother told him to pick up, and as he reaches for the bread, he decides right then and there to lie about his age to the Marine recruiter even though it means going to Vietnam, because nothing will ever happen for him in this one-horse burg where the only thing that matters is how much money your old man has. Either that or Kip has a vision of St. Abillard (any saint will do, but our imaginary author picked a comparatively obscure one), whose face appears on one of the red, yellow, or blue balloons. For our purposes, the nature of the decision doesn't matter any more than whether Karen keeps laughing or which color balloon manifests the saint.

What just happened here?

If you were an English professor, and not even a particularly weird English professor, you'd know that you'd just watched a knight have a not very suitable encounter with his nemesis.

In other words, a quest just happened.

*But it just looked like a trip to the store for some white bread.*

True. But consider the quest. Of what does it consist? A knight, a dangerous road, a Holy Grail (whatever one of those may be), at least one dragon, one evil knight, one princess. Sound about right? That's a list I can live with: a knight (named Kip), a dangerous road (nasty German shepherds), a Holy Grail (one form of which is a loaf of Wonder Bread), at least one dragon (trust me, a '68 'Cuda

could definitely breathe fire), one evil knight (Tony), one princess (who can either keep laughing or stop).

*Seems like a bit of a stretch.*

On the surface, sure. But let's think structurally. The quest consists of five things: (a) a quester, (b) a place to go, (c) a stated reason to go there, (d) challenges and trials en route, and (e) a real reason to go there. Item (a) is easy; a quester is just a person who goes on a quest, whether or not he knows it's a quest. In fact, usually he doesn't know. Items (b) and (c) should be considered together: someone tells our protagonist, our *hero*, who need not look very heroic, to go somewhere and do something. Go in search of the Holy Grail. Go to the store for bread. Go to Vegas and whack a guy. Tasks of varying nobility, to be sure, but structurally all the same. Go there, do that. Note that I said the stated reason for the quest. That's because of item (e).

The real reason for a quest *never* involves the stated reason. In fact, more often than not, the quester fails at the stated task. So why do they go and why do we care? They go because of the stated task, mistakenly believing that it is their real mission. We know, however, that their quest is educational. They don't know enough about the only subject that really matters: themselves. **The real reason for a quest is always self-knowledge.** That's why questers are so often young, inexperienced, immature, sheltered. Forty-five-year-old men either have self-knowledge or they're never going to get it, while your average sixteen-to-seventeen-year-old kid is likely to have a long way to go in the self-knowledge department.

Let's look at a real example. When I teach the late-twentieth-century novel, I always begin with the greatest quest novel of the last century: Thomas Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* (1965). Beginning readers can find the novel mystifying, irritating, and highly peculiar. True enough, there is a good bit of cartoonish strangeness in the novel, which can mask the basic quest structure. On the other hand, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late fourteenth century) and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (1596), two of the great quest narratives from early English literature, also have what modern readers must consider cartoonish elements. It's really only a matter of whether we're talking Classics Illustrated or Zap Comics. So here's the setup in *The Crying of Lot 49*:

- 1) *Our quester*: a young woman, not very happy in her marriage or her life, not too old to learn, not too assertive where men are concerned.
- 2) *A place to go*: in order to carry out her duties, she must drive to Southern California from her home near San Francisco. Eventually she will travel back and forth between the two, and between her past (a husband with a disintegrating personality and a fondness for LSD, an insane ex-Nazi psychotherapist) and her future (highly unclear).
- 3) *A stated reason to go there*: she has been made executor of the will of her former lover, a fabulously wealthy and eccentric businessman and stamp collector.
- 4) *Challenges and trials*: our heroine meets lots of really strange, scary, and occasionally truly dangerous people. She goes on a nightlong excursion through the world of the outcasts and the

dispossessed of San Francisco; enters her therapist's office to talk him out of his psychotic shooting rampage (the dangerous enclosure known in the study of traditional quest romances as "Chapel Perilous"); involves herself in what may be a centuries-old postal conspiracy.

- 5) *The real reason to go*: did I mention that her name is Oedipa? Oedipa Maas, actually. She's named for the great tragic character from Sophocles' drama *Oedipus the King* (ca. 425 b.c.), whose real calamity is that he doesn't know who he is. In Pynchon's novel the heroine's resources, really her crutches—and they all happen to be male—are stripped away one by one, shown to be false or unreliable, until she reaches the point where she either must break down, reduced to a little fetal ball, or stand straight and rely on herself. And to do that, she first must find the self on whom she can rely. Which she does, after considerable struggle. Gives up on men, Tupperware parties, easy answers. Plunges ahead into the great mystery of the ending. Acquires, dare we say, self-knowledge? Of course we dare.

*Still . . .*

You don't believe me. Then why does the stated goal fade away? We hear less and less about the will and the estate as the story goes on, and even the surrogate goal, the mystery of the postal conspiracy, remains unresolved. At the end of the novel, she's about to witness an auction of some rare forged stamps, and the answer to the mystery may or may not appear during the auction. We doubt it, though, given what's gone before. Mostly, we don't even care. Now we know, as she does, that she can carry on, that discovering that men can't be counted on doesn't mean the world ends, that she's a whole person.

So there, in fifty words or more, is why professors of literature typically think *The Crying of Lot 49* is a terrific little book. It does look a bit weird at first glance, experimental and superhip (for 1965), but once you get the hang of it, you see that it follows the conventions of a quest tale. So does *Huck Finn*. *The Lord of the Rings*. *North by Northwest*. *Star Wars*. And most other stories of someone going somewhere and doing something, especially if the going and the doing wasn't his idea in the first place.

A word of warning: if I sometimes speak here and in the chapters to come as if a certain statement is always true, a certain condition always obtains, I apologize. "Always" and "never" are not words that have much meaning in literary study. For one thing, as soon as something seems to always be true, some wise guy will come along and write something to prove that it's not. If literature seems to be too comfortably patriarchal, a novelist like the late Angela Carter or a poet like the contemporary Eavan Boland will come along and upend things just to remind readers and writers of the falseness of our established assumptions. If readers start to pigeonhole African-American writing, as was beginning to happen in the 1960s and 1970s, a trickster like Ishmael Reed will come along who refuses to fit in any pigeonhole we could create. Let's consider journeys. Sometimes the quest fails or is not taken up by the protagonist. Moreover, is every trip really a quest? It depends. Some days I just drive to work—no adventures, no growth. I'm sure that the same is true in writing. Sometimes plot requires that a writer get a character from home to work and back again. That said, when a character hits the road, we should start to pay attention, just to see if, you know, something's going on there.

Once you figure out quests, the rest is easy.

## Interlude



# One Story

WE'VE SPENT QUITE A WHILE thinking about specific tasks involved in the activity of reading, such as considering how this means  $x$ , that signifies  $y$ , and so on. Now of course I believe "this" and "that" and  $x$  and  $y$  matter, and on some level so do you, else we would not be at this point in our discussion. But there's a greater truth, at least as I see it, behind all these specific interpretive activities, a truth that informs and drives the creation of novels and plays and stories and poems and essays and memoirs even when (as is usually the case) writers aren't aware of it. I've mentioned it before and have employed it throughout, so it's no very great secret. Moreover, it's not my personal invention or discovery, so I'm not looking for credit here, but it needs saying again, so here it is: **there's only one story.**

One story. Everywhere. Always. Wherever anyone puts pen to paper or hands to keyboard or fingers to lute string or quill to papyrus. They all take from and in return give to the same story, ever since Snorgg got back to the cave and told Ongk about the mastodon that got away. Norse sagas, Samoan creation stories, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Tale of Genji*, *Hamlet*, last year's graduation speech, last week's Dave Barry column, *On the Road* and *The Road to Rio* and "The Road Not Taken." One story.

*What's it about?*

That's probably the best question you'll ever ask, and I apologize for responding with a really lame answer: I don't know. It's not about anything. It's about everything. It's not about something the way an elegy is *about* the death of a young friend, for instance, or the way *The Maltese Falcon* is about solving the mystery of the fat man and the black bird. It's about everything that anyone wants to write about. I suppose what the one story, the ur-story, is about is ourselves, about what it means to be human. I mean, what else is there? When Stephen Hawking writes *A Brief History of Time*, what is he doing except telling us what home is like, describing the place where we live? You see, being human takes in just about everything, since we want to know about space and time and this world and the next, questions I'm pretty sure none of my English setters have ever really pondered. Mostly, though, we're interested in ourselves in space or time, in the world. So what our poets and storytellers do for us—drag a rock up to the fire, have a seat, listen to this one—is explain us-and-the-world, or us-in-the-world.

*Do writers know this? Do they think about it?*

a. *Good heavens, no.*

b. *Absolutely, yes.*

c. *Let me try again.*

On one level, everyone who writes anything knows that pure originality is impossible. Everywhere you look, the ground is already camped on. So you sigh and pitch your tent where you can, knowing someone else has been there before. Think of it this way: can you use a word no one else has ever used? Only if you're Shakespeare or Joyce and coin words, but even they mostly use the same ones as the rest of us. Can you put together a combination of words that is absolutely unique? Maybe, occasionally, but you can't be sure. So too with stories. John Barth discusses an Egyptian papyrus complaining that all the stories have been told and that therefore nothing remains for the contemporary writer but to retell them. That papyrus describing the postmodern condition is forty-five hundred years old. This is not a terrible thing, though. Writers notice all the time that their characters resemble somebody—Persephone, Pip, Long John Silver, La Belle Dame sans Merci—and they go with it. What happens, if the writer is good, is usually not that the work seems derivative or trivial but just the opposite: the work actually acquires depth and resonance from the echoes and chimes it sets up with prior texts, weight from the accumulated use of certain basic patterns and tendencies. Moreover, works are actually more comforting because we recognize elements in them from our prior reading. I suspect that a wholly original work, one that owed nothing to previous writing, would so lack familiarity as to be quite unnerving to readers. So that's one answer.

But here's another. Writers also have to practice a kind of amnesia when they sit down or (like Thomas Wolfe, who was very tall and wrote on top of the refrigerator—really) stand up to write. The downside of the weight of millennia of accumulated practice of any activity is that it's very . . . heavy. I once psyched out a teammate in an over-thirty men's basketball league quite by accident. We were practicing free throws before a game when something occurred to me, and like an idiot I couldn't keep it to myself. "Lee, have you ever considered," I asked, "how many things can go wrong when you shoot a free throw?" He literally stopped in mid-shot to offer his view. "Damn you," he said. "Now I won't make one all night." He was right. Had I known I could have that kind of effect, I'd have warmed up with the other team. Now consider Lee's problem if he had to consider not merely all the biomechanics of shooting a basketball but the whole history of free-throw shooting. You know, not too much like Lenny Wilkins, a bit of Dave Bing, some of Rick Barry before he switched to the two-handed underhand shot, plenty of Larry Bird (but don't plagiarize him outright), none at all of Wilt Chamberlain. What are the chances any of us would ever make a free throw? And basketball only dates back about one century. Now consider trying to write a lyric poem, with everyone from Sappho to Tennyson to Frost to Plath to Verlaine to Li Po looking over your shoulder. That's a lot of hot breath on the back of your neck. So, amnesia. When the writer gets to work, she has to shut out the voices and write what she writes, say what she has to say. What the unremembering trick does is clear out this history from the front of her mind so her own poem can come in. While she may never, or very rarely, think at all about these matters consciously, she's been reading poetry since she was

six, when Aunt Tillie gave her Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, burns through a couple of volumes of poetry a week, has read most of Wallace Stevens six or seven times. In other words, the history of poetry never leaves her. It's always present, a gigantic subconscious database of poetry (and fiction, since she's read that, too).

You know by now I like to keep things fairly simple. I'm no fan of the latest French theory or of jargon of any stripe, but sometimes we really can't do without it. What I'm talking about here involves a couple of concepts we need to consider. The first, as I mentioned a few chapters back, is *intertextuality*. This highly ungainly word denoting a most useful notion comes to us from the great Russian formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who limits it pretty much to fiction, but I think I'll follow the example of T. S. Eliot, who, being a poet, saw that it operates throughout the realms of literature. The basic premise of intertextuality is really pretty simple: everything's connected. In other words, anything you write is connected to other written things. Sometimes writers are more up front about that than others, openly showing, as John Fowles does in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, that he's drawing on the tradition of the Victorian novel, and on the works of Thomas Hardy and Henry James in particular. At one point Fowles writes an especially Jamesian sentence, full of embedded clauses, false starts, delayed effects, until, having thoroughly and delightfully aped the master, he declares, "But I must not ape the master." We get the joke, and the punch line makes the parody better than if he'd pretended he was up to nothing very special, since it says with a wink that we're in on the whole thing, that we knew all along.

Other writers pretend their work is completely their own, untutored, immediate, unaffected. Mark Twain claimed never to have read a book, yet his personal library ran to something over three thousand volumes. You can't write *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) without being familiar with Arthurian romances. Jack Kerouac presents himself as a free spirit performing automatic writing, but there's plenty of evidence that this Ivy Leaguer (Columbia) did a lot of revising and polishing—and reading of quest tales—before his manuscript of *On the Road* (1957) got typed on one long roll of paper. In each case, their work interacts with other works. And those works with others. The result is a sort of World Wide Web of writing. Your novel may contain echoes or refutations of novels or poems you've never read.

Think of intertextuality in terms of movie westerns. You're writing your first western; good for you. What's it about? A big showdown? *High Noon*. A gunslinger who retires? *Shane*. A lonely outpost during an uprising? *Fort Apache*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*—the woods are full of 'em. Cattle drive? *Red River*. Does it involve, by any chance, a stagecoach?

*No, wait, I wasn't thinking about any of them.*

Doesn't matter. Your movie will. Here's the thing: you can't avoid them, since even avoidance is a form of interaction. It's simply impossible to write or direct in a vacuum. The movies you have seen were created by men and women who had seen others, and so on, until every movie connects with every other movie ever made. If you've seen Indiana Jones being dragged behind a truck by his whip, then you've been touched by *The Cisco Kid* (1931), even though there's a strong chance you've never seen *The Cisco Kid* itself. Every western has a little bit of other westerns in it, whether it knows it or not. Let's take the most basic element, the hero. Will your hero talk a lot or not? If not, then he's in the

tradition of Gary Cooper and John Wayne and (later) Clint Eastwood. If he does speak, just talks his fool head right off, then he's like James Garner and those revisionist films of the sixties and seventies. Or maybe you have two, one talker and one silent type—*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). Your guy is going to have a certain amount of dialogue, and whatever type you decide on, audiences are going to hear echoes of some prior film, whether you think those echoes are there or not. And that, dear friends, is intertextuality.

The second concept for our consideration is *archetype*. The late great Canadian critic Northrop Frye took the notion of archetypes from C. G. Jung's psychoanalytical writings and showed that whatever Jung can tell us about our heads, he can tell us a great deal more about our books. "Archetype" is a five-dollar word for "pattern," or for the mythic original on which a pattern is based. It's like this: somewhere back in myth, something—a story component, let's call it—comes into being. It works so well, for one reason or another, that it catches on, hangs around, and keeps popping up in subsequent stories. That component could be anything: a quest, a form of sacrifice, flight, a plunge into water, whatever resonates and catches our imaginations, setting off vibrations deep in our collective consciousness, calling to us, alarming us, inspiring us to dream or nightmare, making us want to hear it again. And again and again and again. You'd think that these components, these archetypes, would wear out with use the way cliché wears out, but they actually work the other way: they take on power with repetition, finding strength in numbers. Here is the *aha!* factor again. When we hear or see or read one of these instances of archetype, we feel a little frisson of recognition and utter a little satisfied "aha!" And we get that chance with fair frequency, because writers keep employing them.

Don't bother looking for the originals, though. You can't find the archetype, just as you can't find the pure myths. What we have, even in our earliest recorded literature, are variants, embellishments, versions, what Frye called "displacement" of the myth. We can never get all the way to the level of pure myth, even when a work like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Odyssey* or *The Old Man and the Sea* feels "mythic," since even those works are displacements of myth. Perhaps it's impossible; perhaps there never has been a single, definite version of the myth. Frye thought the archetypes came from the Bible, or so he said at times, but such a notion won't account for the myths and archetypes that lie behind and inform the works of Homer, say, or those of any storyteller or poet who lacked access to the Judeo-Christian tradition. So let's say that somewhere back there in the mists of time when storytelling was completely oral (or pictorial, if you count the cave walls), a body of myth began establishing itself. The unanswerable question, it seems to me, is whether there was ever freestanding myth informing our stories or whether the mythic level grows out of the stories that we tell to explain ourselves and our world. In other words, was there some original master story for any particular myth from which all subsequent stories—pallid imitations—are "displacements," or does the myth take shape by slow accretion as variant story versions are told and retold over time? I incline toward the latter, but I don't know. In fact, I doubt anyone can know. I also doubt whether it matters. What does matter is that there is this mythic level, the level on which archetype operates and from which we borrow the figure of, for instance, the dying-and-reviving man (or god) or the young boy who must undertake a long journey.

Those stories—myth, archetype, religious narrative, the great body of literature—are always with us. Always in us. We can draw upon them, tap into them, add to them whenever we want. One of our great storytellers, country singer Willie Nelson, was sitting around one day just noodling on the guitar, improvising melodies he'd never written down, never heard in quite those forms. His companion, a nonmusician whose name I forget, asked him how he could come up with all those tunes. "They're all around us," old Willie said. "You just reach up and pick them out of the air." Stories are like that, too. That one story that has been going on forever is all around us. We—as readers or writers, tellers or listeners—understand each other, we share knowledge of the structures of our myths, we comprehend the logic of symbols, largely because we have access to the same swirl of story. We have only to reach out into the air and pluck a piece of it.