



Westhill High School
Summer Reading 2015:
AP Literature and Composition (12)

The Book

*A gripping vision of our society radically overturned by a theocratic revolution, Margaret Atwood's **The Handmaid's Tale** has become one of the most powerful and most widely read novels of our time.*

Offred is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, serving in the household of the enigmatic Commander and his bitter wife. She may go out once a day to markets whose signs are now pictures because women are not allowed to read. She must pray that the Commander makes her pregnant, for in a time of declining birthrates her value lies in her fertility, and failure means exile to the dangerously polluted Colonies. Offred can remember a time when she lived with her husband and daughter and had a job, before she lost even her own name. Now she navigates the intimate secrets of those who control her every move, risking her life in breaking the rules.

*Like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Handmaid's Tale* has endured not only as a literary landmark but as a warning of a possible future that is still chillingly relevant.*

© <http://www.amazon.com>

The Assignment

1. Please **read and annotate *The Handmaid's Tale***. All Advanced Placement Literature and Composition students will be required to submit a selection of their best annotations to turnitin.com when we return in August.

Be aware that this is a rich and challenging novel that will be studied in detail as part of our coursework when we return to school in the fall. We do not expect you to be an expert on your summer reading book; however, we do expect you to come to class prepared to discuss the book with your peers.

2. Please use *The Handmaid's Tale* to complete the following timed-write essay:

Many works of literature deal with political or social issues. Identify a political or social issue that is examined in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Atwood uses literary elements to explore this issue and explain how the issue contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

We recommend that you spend one hour writing this essay. It will be evaluated as a *draft* and you will have an opportunity to revise your essay before it is graded.

3. In addition to reading and writing about *The Handmaid's Tale*, AP Literature and Composition students are expected to complete the school-wide summer reading assignment.

Due Dates

- The school-wide assignment - *The Other Wes Moore* - is due **by 9/4/15 (Friday)**. Please make sure that everything you hand in is your own original work; be aware, your teacher will ask you to submit portions of your summer reading to turnitin.com.
- *The Handmaid's Tale* summer reading assignments are due by **9/9/15 (Tuesday)**. You will need to bring a copy of the novel with you to class; if you are unable to purchase a copy please contact Ms. Wheeler. You may also email her at cwheeler@StamfordCT.gov if you have any questions about this assignment.

Additional Information

Close reading is an opportunity to analyze and scrutinize a specific passage from a work of literature.

Think of **close reading** as chance to put a piece of text under your own mental microscope. When we practice **close reading** we pay attention to every detail in a passage – from word choice to punctuation!

Ultimately, **close reading** is a way for each of us to keep track of our thoughts as we are reading and begin to create an original interpretation of a work of literature.

If we ignore “the small stuff” the best we can hope for as readers is to skim the surface of a rich and complex text.

Annotation Strategies

- *Use sticky notes to identify major plot events.
- *Underline words that are new or unusual. If you need to look them up, jot down a quick version of the definition in the margin or on a sticky note.
- *Mark details that tell readers about a character.
- *Identify and mark potential symbols and in the margin or on a sticky note write down a few ideas about what the symbols represent.
- *Ask questions while you read!
- *Write down ideas or impressions that pop into your mind while you are reading.
- *Remember that literary devices are tools that writers use to construct meaning. If you want to mark or highlight an example of a simile, make sure you also jot down a couple of notes on how that simile adds to the idea or point the writer is trying to convey to her readers.