

Advanced Placement Literature and Composition
Summer Assignment 2019-2020 School Year

This year, you will have one text to read and an accompanying writing assignment. In order to receive full credit, you must complete the assignment and turn it in on the first day of school. If you have any questions, you may email me at heather_carter@dekalbschoolsga.org.

Summer Reading: Why?

AP Literature is all about immersing yourself in a handful of rich, multi-faceted texts that are categorized as “works of literary merit.” A book with literary merit is one that, over time, continues to be universally relevant. These works may be a little difficult to get into at first, but once you read them, you will discover that they have an enormous capacity for application, discussion, and enjoyment. While some books offer entertainment; works of literary merit offer deep, lasting satisfaction. Since you and I will only have one semester together, it is important for us to use the summer to read one of these texts. (Also, I am excited about exploring this novel with you!)

Assigned Text:

Cry, the Beloved Country by Alan Paton

Description of Text:

Cry, The Beloved Country is set in pre-apartheid South Africa. The novel recounts the story of Stephen Kumalo, a poor Zulu pastor, and his son Absalom. Kumalo’s journey takes him from his simple village home in Natal to Johannesburg, South Africa, a sprawling city rife with racial injustice. There, as he searches for the truth about his son, Kumalo develops the capacity for hope.

Assignment One: Read the Text

First, read this novel carefully and thoughtfully. It may be wise to preview the discussion questions first, and annotate places in the text that relate to those. However, this is just a suggestion; annotating is not a requirement. Read the novel in the way that best supports your understanding of it.

Please understand that if you do not read this novel, it will be apparent to me at some point, no matter how many online summaries you peruse. Since we will spend the first two weeks discussing, analyzing, and writing about this novel, it will become difficult for anyone who is unfamiliar with it to succeed. Reading this novel will have an immense bearing on how the course begins for you.

Assignment Two: Respond to the Text

After reading the novel, provide thoughtful, thorough responses to each question below. Make sure your responses are typed and numbered. I am not going to give you a minimum length requirement because that is not the point. Understand that a good response will demonstrate your knowledge of the text and your critical thinking about it. A good response will also be thorough in its examination of the topic and will contain multiple references to the text. It goes without saying that your responses should be well written and in paragraph form (no bullet point lists or incomplete sentences).

1. **Thematic Subject: Human Frailty and Sin**

Although Kumalo is a priest and often has the highest intentions, we see some examples of his moral failings. For instance, when he visits his son's wife-to-be, in his efforts to hurt her, he asks if she would take him if he desired her. Where else do we see Kumalo falter? How do you reconcile these two sides of Kumalo? Using details from the text, discuss Paton's choice to characterize Kumalo as flawed and how that might relate to the novel's overall meaning.

2. **Thematic Subject: Racial Relations in South Africa**

Toward the end of the novel, Kumalo and the demonstrator express very different opinions about the white man. Kumalo asks rhetorically, "Where would we be without the white man's milk? Where would we be without all that this white man has done for us? Where would you be also? Would you be working for him here?" (301). To this, the demonstrator responds, "It was the white man who gave us so little land, it was the white man who took us away from the land to go to work. And we were ignorant also. It is all these things together that have made this valley desolate. Therefore, what this good white man does is only repayment" (302). How do Kumalo and the demonstrator reconcile their different points of view? What idea does Paton convey through the contrasting perspectives of Kumalo and the demonstrator?

3. **Style**

The writing style in *Cry the Beloved Country* is often said to be reminiscent of the Bible, a book that spans multiple genres. In that regard, like the Bible, *Cry the Beloved Country* may be considered part history, part psalm, and part prophecy. In what ways does the novel contain elements of a psalm (a sacred song or poem)? In what ways is the book an accurate history of a nation? In what ways is it a prophecy? (You may want to do a little research on the novel's historical context in order to respond to this question. You may also want to consider specific elements of Paton's writing style.)

4. **Physical Setting**

Famed literary editor Maxwell Perkins, upon reading *Cry, the Beloved Country*, told Paton that one of the most important characters in the novel was the land of South Africa itself. How does Paton make the land seem like a character? Use details from the text to support your response. You may want to consider specific elements of Paton's writing style, as well as the novel's content.

5. **Point of View**

Cry, the Beloved Country is written from the perspective of a third person omniscient narrator. While the novel mostly reveals the thoughts of Stephen Kumalo, the perspective shifts from time to time to reveal the thoughts of other characters, even some who are anonymous. At one point, the novel shifts to a second person point of view. Some passages are written in the past tense and some are written in the present tense. Discuss how these unique elements of narration serve a purpose that relates to the novel's overall message.