

Counting Down to the Exam

Exam Tips: English Literature



Observations of the Chief Faculty Consultant

The Chief Faculty Consultant, Gale Larson, provided the following advice after the 2001 AP Reading:



- Tell students to read the prompt of each question very carefully. To think about the implications of the question, to begin thinking about how they will organize their responses, and to focus on what is asked of them are all important strategies in beginning the writing task.
- Often, students are asked to select a play or a novel to answer a particular question. Make sure they know that the work they have selected should be appropriate to the question asked. See to it that students have a fair range of readings that they feel familiar with, ones with which they can test the implications of the question and make the decision of the appropriateness of the work to the question asked. Without this flexibility they may force an answer that will come across as canned to the AP faculty consultant.
- Remind students to enter into the text itself, to supply concrete illustrations that substantiate the points they are making. Have them take command of what they are writing with authority by means of direct quotation of pertinent information from the text, always writing into the question and never away from it. Help them to keep their point of view consistent, to select appropriate material for supporting evidence, and to write in a focused and succinct manner.
- Remind your students that films are not works of literature and cannot be used to provide the kind of literary analysis required on the exam.
- Advise your students that, when starting an essay, they should avoid engaging in a mechanical repetition of the prompt and then supplying a list of literary devices. Instead, get them to think of ways to integrate the language of literature with the content of that literature, making connections that are meaningful and telling, engaging in analysis that leads to the synthesis of new ideas. Pressure them into using higher levels of critical thinking; have them go beyond the obvious and search for a more penetrating relationship of ideas. Make them see connections that they missed on their first reading of the text.

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