

AP Language and Composition

Summer Assignment 2016

Course Description:

AP English Language & Composition offers students a year of intense training in reading and writing that not only prepares them for the AP Language examination, but also for successful university study and life-long learning. The class focuses on rhetorical analysis of fiction and non-fiction, including sources in non-literary disciplines, a few philosophical documents, and a sampling of British, World and American Literature. Students learn to identify an author's purpose and analyze strategies by examining the ways people think and use language. Students read and analyze models of good writing and write compositions of various lengths and complexity, and participate in peer response and vigorous revision.

This summer you will be busy as you prepare to enter AP Language & Composition. The nature of the class demands that you begin the school year with the appropriate knowledge and skills necessary to prepare for the AP English Language & Composition Exam in May and the AP English Literature Exam your senior year.

Listed below are assignments to be completed this summer:

Assignment #1: "This I Believe" Essay

According to National Public Radio (NPR), "Fifty years ago, millions of Americans sat by their radios and listened to *This I Believe*. For five minutes each day, they heard from statesmen and secretaries, all of whom spoke about their most deeply held beliefs."

A few years ago NPR decided to bring back the **This I Believe** series. Each week NPR broadcasts one short essay of 500 words (3 minutes) submitted by a listener. Your assignment is to read the information, requirements, and several examples from the NPR website, and then write your own "This I Believe" essay.

1. Go to <http://thisibelieve.org/> . Put your cursor on the "**Participate**" bar at the top of the page and then click on "**Essay Guidelines**" in the drop down menu.
2. Once you know the prompt and the guidelines, consider carefully what you will write about. 500 words isn't much, so be concise but don't lose your style. Outline or jot down your ideas.
3. Write the essay. The final should be typed (12-font, double-spaced, Times New Roman). Include the word count at the end of the essay. The website states 350-500 words, but you will write at least 500 words!

Assignment #2: Annie Dillard: “Living Like Weasels”

1. Read the attached essay.
2. Write a one paragraph translation of paragraphs 14-17. See page 4 for models.
3. Answer the questions (structure, syntax, diction) on page 5-6 in short paragraphs.
4. Write a Personal Response (page 6); ½ page.
5. Write an Interpretive Summary (page 6).

Note: Type all answers and use 12-font, double-spaced, Times New Roman.

Assignment #3: Read

In preparation for this class as well as AP Literature, reading is essential. I highly suggest you spend the summer reading. Read as much as you can; read everything! *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *Native Son* by Richard Wright, and *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath are good novels to start with since they **will challenge you** and **prepare you** for the type of critical analysis necessary for success in AP Language and AP Literature.

Should you have questions about any part of this assignment, please contact me at beriharris@iusd.org. **All assignments are due the first day of class.** Have a wonder-filled summer, and let's have a rewarding year of discovery in AP English Language and Composition.

Beri Harris/AP English Language & Composition Teacher

AP English Language/Annie Dillard's "Living Like Weasels"

I

1. A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks? He sleeps in his underground den, his tail draped over his nose. Sometimes he lives in his den for two days without leaving. Outside, he stalks rabbits, mice, muskrats, and birds, killing more bodies than he can eat warm, and often dragging the carcasses home. Obedient to instinct, he bites his prey at the neck, either splitting the jugular vein at the throat or crunching the brain at the base of the skull, and he does not let go. One naturalist refused to kill a weasel who was socketed into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake. The man could in no way pry the tiny weasel off, and he had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel dangling from his palm.
2. And once, says Ernest Thompson Seton—once, a man shot an eagle out of the sky. He examined the eagle and found the dry skull of a weasel fixed by the jaws to his throat. The supposition is that the eagle had pounced on the weasel and the weasel swiveled and bit as instinct taught him, tooth to neck, and nearly won. I would like to have seen that eagle from the air a few weeks or months before he was shot; was the whole weasel still attached to the feathered throat, a fur pendant? Or did the eagle eat what he could reach, gutting the living weasel with his talons before his breast, bending his beak, cleaning the beautiful airborne bones?

II

3. I have been reading about weasels because I saw one last week. I startled a weasel who startled me, and we exchanged a long glance.
4. Twenty minutes from my house, through the woods by the quarry and across the highway, is Hollins Pond, a remarkable piece of shallowness, where I like to go at sunset and sit on a tree trunk. Hollins Pond is called Murray's Pond; it covers two acres of bottomland near Tinker Creek with six inches of water and six thousand lily pads. In winter, brown-and-white steers stand in the middle of it, merely dampening their hooves; from the distant shore they look like miracle itself, complete with miracle's nonchalance. Now, in the summer, the steers are gone. The water lilies have blossomed and spread to a green horizontal plane that is terra firma to plodding blackbirds, and tremulous ceiling to black leeches.
5. This is, mind you, suburbia. It is a five-minute walk in three directions to rows of houses, though none is visible here. There's a 55 mph highway at one end of the pond, and a nesting pair of wood ducks at the other. Under every bush is a muskrat hole or a beer can. The far end is an alternating series of fields and woods, fields and woods, threaded everywhere with motorcycle tracks—in whose bare clay wild turtles lay eggs.
6. So, I had crossed the highway, stepped over two low barbed-wire fences, and traced the motorcycle path in all gratitude through the wild rose and poison ivy of the pond's shoreline up into high grassy fields. Then I cut down through the woods to the mossy fallen tree where I sit. This tree is excellent. It makes a dry, upholstered bench at the upper, marshy end of the pond, a plush jetty raised from the thorny shore between a shallow blue body of water and a deep blue body of sky.
7. The sun had just set. I was relaxed on the tree trunk, ensconced in the lap of lichen, watching the lily pads at my feet tremble and part dreamily over the thrusting path of a carp. A yellow bird appeared to my right and flew behind me. It caught my eye; I swiveled around—and the next instant, inexplicably, I was looking down at a weasel, who was looking up at me.

III

8. Weasel! I'd never seen one wild before. He was teen inches long, thin as a curve, a muscled ribbon, brown as fruitwood, soft-furred, alert. His face was fierce, small and pointed as a lizard's; he would have made a good arrowhead. There was just a dot of chin, maybe two grown hairs' worth, and then the pure white fur began that spread down his underside. He had two black eyes I didn't see, any more than you see a window.
9. The weasel was stunned into stillness as he was emerging from beneath an enormous shaggy wild rose bush four feet away. I was stunned into stillness twisted backward on the tree trunk. Our eyes locked, and someone threw away the key.

10. Our look was as if two lovers, or deadly enemies, met unexpectedly on an overgrown path when each had been thinking of something else; a clearing blow to the gut. It was also a bright blow to the brain, or a sudden beating of brains, with all the charge and intimate grate of rubbed balloons. It emptied our lungs. It felled the forest, moved the fields, and drained the pond; the world dismantled and tumbled into that black hole of eyes. If you and I looked at each other that way, our skulls would split and drop to our shoulders. But we don't. We keep our skulls. So.
11. He disappeared. This was only last week, and already I don't remember what shattered the enchantment. I think I blinked, I think I retrieved my brain from the weasel's brain, and tried to memorize what I was seeing, and the weasel felt the yank of separation, the careening splashdown into real life and the urgent current of instinct. He vanished under the wild rose. I waited motionless, my mind suddenly full of data and my spirit with pleadings, but he didn't return.
12. Please do not tell me about "approach-avoidance conflicts." I tell you I've been in that weasel's brain for sixty seconds, and he was in mine. Brains are private places, muttering through unique and secret tapes—but the weasel and I both plunged into another tape simultaneously, for a sweet and shocking time. Can I help it if it was a blank?
13. What goes on in his brain for the rest of the time? What does a weasel think about? He won't say. His journal is tracks in clay, a spray of feathers, mouse blood and bone; uncollected, unconnected, loose-leaf, and blown.

IV

14. I would like to learn, or remember, how to live. I come to Hollins Pond not so much to learn how to live as, frankly, to forget about it. That is, I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular—shall I suck warm blood, hold my tail high, walk with my footprints precisely over the prints of my hands? – but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical senses and the dignity of living without bias or motive. The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at last ignobly in its talons. I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should. And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will.

V

15. I missed my chance. I should have gone for the throat. I should have lunged for that streak of white under the weasel's chin and held on, held on through mud and into the wild rose, held on for dearer life. We could live under the wild rose wild as weasels, mute and uncomprehending. I could very calmly go wild. I could live two days in the den, curled, leaning on mouse fur, sniffing bird bones, blinking, licking, breathing musk, my hair tangled in the roots of grasses. Down is a good place to go, where the mind is single. Down is out, out of your ever-loving mind and back to your careless sense. I remember muteness as a prolonged and giddy fast, where every moment is a feast of utterance received. Time and events are merely poured, unremarked, and ingested directly, like blood pulsed into my gut through a jugular vein. Could two live that way? Could two live under the wild rose, and explore by the pond, so that the smooth mind of each is as everywhere present to the other, and as received and as unchallenged, as falling snow?
16. We could, you know. We can live any way we want. People take vows of poverty, chastity, obedience—even of silence—by choice. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse. This is yielding, not fighting. A weasel doesn't "attack" anything; a weasel lives as he's meant to, yielding at every moment to the perfect freedom of single necessity.

VI

17. I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, and to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you. Then even death, where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. Seize it and let it seize you up and aloft even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your mushy flesh fall off in shreds, and let your very bones unhinge and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles.

SAMPLE WEASEL PARAGRAPHS

The assignment:

As far as possible, translate Dillard's "reflection" (paragraphs 14-17) into your own words. Push yourself to clarify her most difficult thoughts. (In pushing yourself to be clearer, you may wish to use sentences that begin "In other words..." "To put it another way..." etc.) In this assignment you do not have to adopt Dillard's tone, but you must strive to compose a faithful, coherent, flowing rendition of her thought.

14 I would like to learn, or remember, how to live. I come to Hollins Pond not so much to learn how to live as, frankly, to forget about it. That is, I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular—shall I suck warm blood, hold my tail high, walk with my footprints precisely over the prints of my hands? – but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical senses and the dignity of living without bias or motive. The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at last ignobly in its talons. I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should. And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will.

The Responses:

The following samples are the opening paragraphs from four student papers with scores of 2 (Poor), 4 (Inadequate), 6 (Adequate), and 8 (Effective). Read them carefully; then try to identify which is which.

I still come to Hollins Pond, to learn my lesson, and to forget parts of it. I don't think that I can be physically like the weasel but I can still head lessons from him. Hopefully I can learn not to be judgmental, and try to live a better life for myself, yet I am different from the weasel. I live with millions of choices in my life while the weasel's choices are those of survival. I guess the lesson is that we are very different, and our choices are different, but we react to our choices the same way. That is to say, we forget the past, we attack the future, and we both move forward.

I wish to free myself of the contaminated views and rules which are dictated by the expectations within man's society. Nature and necessity, your guiding principles in this world, should guide your life. I will learn from observing this natural world that there is much beauty in liberating your intrinsic senses, while following your specific fate without protest. The weasel lives on basic instinct, never fearing the inevitable, but rather graciously accepting it. Humans obsessively fight the natural progressions of life, and are therefore never victorious in their pathetic struggles. I would like to live as free and open to change as the weasel, choosing to accept fate and the omnipowerful flow of life.

Necessity and choice. Choosing between the two to decide your way of life. The weasel picks necessity, people pick choice. Is it actually possible for people to live only by necessity? Our lives are ruled by motive and bias while the weasel knows none of this. The weasel knows nothing of death, while we try to defy it the best we can, only to spend the later part of our lives in misery, awaiting the day that death claims our seemingly meaningful lives.

I feel as if the primal part of me is buried deep inside and I long to bring it back to the surface. I do not want to have to think about everything I am doing, but to act on instinct in order to regain the innocence of simple physicality untainted by analysis and harsh introspection. As humans in modern society, we tend to frown upon simple needs like the need for food and elevate such needs as that for spiritual transcendence or intellectual growth. I want to return to the simple necessities so that I will not be afraid of natural processes such as aging and death and will not brood on past experiences but only to live in the present.

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE/More“Weasels”

We have read and reacted to (and now summarized) Annie Dillard’s “Living Like Weasels”; but our business as writers is still bigger. Now we need to examine the craft of the essay, to study how it works bit by bit, so that later—in our own writing—we can use the strategies we discover. For each of the questions below, please type up thoughtful answers in complete sentences (or even short paragraphs).

STRUCTURE

(The relationship and arrangement of a composition’s parts)

One way of considering the structure of this essay is to divide it into 4 segments. Though Dillard published the essay in 6 segments, it seems to fall naturally into 4 divisions: paragraphs 1-2; 3-7; 8-13; and 14-17.

1. What is the specific focus and concern of each of the four sections?
2. How would you describe the relationship between segments one and two? Two and three? Three and four? (You might consider such relationships as contrast, restatement, chronology, experience/reflection, cause/effect, climax in a series of events, summary, or something else.)
3. Why do you think the author arranged her essay in this particular order? How would her essay be different, for example, if she began with paragraphs 3-7 or 8-13? What would be gained or lost? What other changes in organization would then be necessary?

SYNTAX

(the author’s arrangement of words to form phrases, clauses and sentences)

4. Many of Dillard’s sentences are short (sometimes even one word), particularly those at the beginning of paragraphs. What effects do her short sentences have?
5. How many times does Dillard ask questions? Whom is she questioning? Is it always the same audience? Does she expect or imply an answer? If not, what seems to be her purpose?
6. Reread the second sentence of paragraph 3: “I startled a weasel who startled me...” Where else in the essay does Dillard use a similarly reflexive structure—that is, a structure that seems to turn back upon itself? Can you suggest a reason for this syntactical repetition?
7. In paragraph 15 Dillard opens many sentences by repeating the opening word or phrase of the preceding a sentence. What seems to be the effect of these repetitions? What point do you think they help to convey?

(more on next page)

DICTION

(an author's choice of words, and what those words denote and connote in the context of the work)

8. Dillard makes extensive use of comparisons. Look at each comparison in paragraph 8 and comment on its effect. What is the cumulative effect of all six of the comparisons? (This question involves not only diction but imagery and figurative language.)
9. Count the words in the essay that suggest violence. In which paragraphs do they mostly occur? What might be the cumulative effect of these words?
10. At the beginning of paragraph 17, Dillard uses a device called polysyndeton, which is the needless repetition of "and" (or any other conjunction) in a series. What effect does this produce?
11. Dillard often describes things in antithetical terms, such as the look between her and the weasel as one between "two lovers, or deadly enemies." In paragraph 4 she refers to "Hollins Pond, a remarkable piece of shallowness," and in paragraph 15 to her desire to "very calmly go wild." What might be Dillard's purpose in employing these antitheses?
12. Would you describe Dillard's voice as formal or informal? Personal or impersonal? Direct or evasive? Do you find it an attractive voice? What words or phrases seem to suggest something about the speaker's personality?

WRITING A PERSONAL RESPONSE:

In paragraph 16, Dillard claims that "we can live any way we want." Write a paragraph that

- (1) explains what she does not mean by this;
- (2) explains what you believe she does mean;
- (3) asserts your agreement or disagreement with her claim;
- (4) justifies your position (you need give only one justification).

WRITING AN INTERPRETATIVE SUMMARY

Complete the following sentences in your own words (see paragraph 17, sentences 1-3):

- (1) "I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you." In other words, I think...
- (2) "Then even death, where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part." In other words, even death...
- (3) "Seize it and let it seize you up aloft even, till your eyes burn out and drop..." In other words,...