



# Deer Park High School

710 W. San Augustine • Deer Park, Texas 77536 • 832.668.7200

## English Language Arts Department

Dear Parents and Potential Students of AP English Language,

You have requested AP English Language for the upcoming school year. The AP English Language course teaches students to become skilled readers of prose written in a variety of periods, disciplines, and rhetorical contexts, and to become skilled writers who compose for a variety of purposes. Students will learn to recognize the interactions among a writer's purposes, audience expectations, and subjects as well as the way generic conventions and the resources of language contribute to effectiveness in writing. Successful students will earn college credit for Composition 101.

Summer reading assignments provide several advantages for students, including maintaining skills over the summer, fostering independent learning, understanding course expectations, establishing a common framework for discussion and study, and promoting lifelong learning. Students at Deer Park High School who enroll on the AP English Language course are required to complete summer reading assignments.

Summer Reading Part One: Students will purchase *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder, read a portion of the novel, and complete a series of questions and definitions. Students are free to complete the novel, but the class will be working through the rest of the novel during the school year. **Please see assignment specifics below.**

Summer Reading Part Two: Students will also purchase one literary novel (their choice!) and complete an in-class assessment essay over the novel. This assessment will take place during the third week of school. **Please see assignment specifics below.**

These two assignments will be combined into a major grade, the first of the year. The major grade will be based on the following:

50% *Sophie's World* questions and definitions

50% In-class essay on novel selected by the student

See below for assignment specifics. For additional information and resources, please feel free to contact me at [mcarson@dpisd.org](mailto:mcarson@dpisd.org).

Sincerely,

Mr. Carson



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### Part One: *Sophie's World* Assignment

"He who cannot draw on three thousand years is living hand to mouth."  
Johan Wolfgang von Goethe



The College Board assumes a student cannot be truly fluent in the English language unless she or he can analyze a given text's rhetorical situation. Many students—including superb writers—struggle with this focus on context. They do not have the outside knowledge to provide insightful commentary, and they do not understand how the texts they read link to other texts they have read. In other words—contrary to what most students think going into this class—the AP English Language exam is as much about cultural literacy as it is about literacy literacy.

Hence *Sophie's World*. Gaarder's novel is a work of fiction but also an easily manageable account of Western history and philosophy from Socrates through Freud. If you read and answer the study guide questions, you will have a better understanding of important cultural touchstones and central philosophical ideas. You will also be better critical thinkers, able to rhetorically situate and synthesize the complicated texts (and situations) you will come across on the AP exam, SATs, college curriculums, and throughout your adult life.

**Note you will be reading only 146 pages of the book over the summer ("The Garden of Eden" chapter through "The Postcards" chapter).** We will be working with the rest of the novel during the school year.

#### A. Chapter Questions ("Garden of Eden" chapter through "The Postcards" chapter)

-**Complete one question from each chapter (see below).** In the sections with more than one choice, choose one. In the sections with only one choice, complete that question. Answer all questions with complete sentences. Make sure to answer all the questions within each question.

-Use loose-leaf paper or a composition book to complete the questions.

-Please include text quotations, include quotation marks around the text, and write the author's last name followed by the page number in parenthesis at the end of the sentence where the quote is used.



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-Your commentary should be insightful and well written, connecting the author's text to the question. Everything written in this section should be your own words, and no outside sources should be used.

-Your response should be at least 50 words in length.

-Record the word count for the paragraph at the end of each entry.

-Edit for correct punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Write in complete sentences.

### Epigraph

1. "He who cannot draw on three thousand years is living hand to mouth." Goethe  
What does it mean to live hand to mouth? Why does this have negative associations for Goethe? Should it have negative associations?

### Garden of Eden (choose one)

1. Why do the three words in the letter Sophie receives have such a powerful effect on Sophie? How does this conversation in the mirror about names challenge Sophie? What possibly troubling aspect of existing does it reveal?
2. Why does Sophie feel like she has been "brought to life by a magic wand"? What paradox does this awakening hold? In other words, what has to be realized to appreciate the world around us?
3. In trying to figure out the origins of the world Sophie runs into a logical conundrum. What is it? Putting aside personal beliefs for the moment, why does this problem seem intractable? Explain.

### Magic Top Hat (choose one)

1. This chapter works with analogy of the top hat and the rabbit. What does the rabbit represent? What does the magician? What does the rabbit's fur? What risks come with being in the fur? What risks come with being out of the fur?
2. Why does the philosopher pity those with habit? Who have habituated themselves to the world? Explain the analogy of the flying father.
3. Why does Sophie's mother think she's on drugs? How could drugs both fuel and kill this faculty for wonder? How does this interaction highlight a problem for the would-be philosopher?

### The Myths (choose one)

1. Norse myths assumed a precarious balance between two forces. What are they? How have modern day comic book movies and franchises manipulated this assumption in interesting ways? Give an example.
2. People cannot live without what? Why can't people just be happy in ignorance? Be the beasts of the field? According to the author of these mysterious letters, what is the point of myths? Give an example from the book.
3. Xenophanes. Who was he and what was his theory about the gods? Why is this an important historical and philosophical development? What do you think of his theory? Does this disprove the existence of the Greek Gods or could it be argued that this actually proves the existence of gods?

### The Natural Philosophers (choose one)



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1. When studying early philosophy, why are we more concerned with how they arrived at conclusions rather than what they concluded? Think of the question in relation to the chapter as a whole and what these early philosophers broke away from. In other words, think of the question historically: what was new and important about this approach?
2. Name the three philosophers from Miletus and give a concise summary of their respective process of study and conclusions. Which one do you think came closer to the truth? Why or why not?
3. Many argue that Heraclitus and Parmenides reflect two ways of thinking about history, philosophy, art, and life. How can this be? Think of what it means to be a rationalist and what it means to be a sensualist. Think of an example of a person or idea that “sides” with each and what dangers and advantages come with each way of thinking.
4. What’s up with Anaxagoras? What makes him unique historically and remarkably prescient (or, rather, perceptive)?
5. How change happens is a problem we seldom confront. Most of these early philosophers were punished and killed for simply thinking about it too much. Why is this focus perceived as threatening?

### Democritus (choose one)

1. Why are Legos the most ingenious toy in the world? (BONUS: How do the Lego movies capitalize on this ingeniousness?)
2. The atoms of Democritus have two essential qualities. What are they? What is the “soup” problem Democritus speaks of? Why is this important to the atom theory?
3. Why is Democritus theory especially striking considering what we now know thanks to science? What is the term the author of the book uses to describe him? How is the description different than that given to Parmenides?
4. So if Democritus solved everything, what’s left to figure out? What’s missing from his theory? Whose theory does Democritus’ atom theory most resemble (of the Natural Philosophers—Anaxagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles)
5. Democritus was often called the laughing philosopher and Heraclitus the weeping. Any idea why? Do you think this is a good way to think about them? Could the description of each be inverted? Why or why not?

### Fate (choose one)

1. Why does Sophie have difficulty writing the mysterious philosopher? What does this have to do with rhetorical analysis and language generally?
2. What is the importance of the inscription over the entrance of the Temple at Delphi? Is there any possible irony here (there is; figure it out)? Think about how it relates to the Greek plays you know about (likely Oedipus Rex and Antigone).
3. This chapter names two Greek historians and one doctor. Tell me who they are and why they are important to the history of philosophy. There’s no need to look this up. The answer should be obvious from the chapter’s context clues.

### Socrates (choose one)

1. Why did philosophy develop in Athens? How does this relate to democracy today? How is this relevant for AP Language (the course you are about to begin)?
2. Where do the Sophists come in? What “ism” should we associate with them? What does it mean for something to be socially induced? What is an absolute norm? Why would some Athenians find Sophists obnoxious?



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3. Who was Socrates? Why is he possibly the most enigmatic figure in the history of philosophy? Compare him to another historical figure.
4. In some ways the Art of Discourse is the exact opposite of what we expect from school and teachers? How so? In other words, what is the Socratic pedagogy? What role does the teacher have? Make sure to define Socratic irony here.
5. What is the difference between a philosopher and a sophist? Quote Socrates here. What makes the philosopher a true lover of wisdom? What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?
6. Socrates was willing to die for his conscience. What does this mean? He also insisted on questioning his way to the truth, on using reason. This makes him a \_\_\_\_\_ (begins with an r)?
7. Discuss what Socrates meant by “the right insight leads to the right action.” This is another key difference between a philosopher and a sophist. Do you agree with Socrates said here? Give an example from your own experience that proves or disproves what he says about the relationship between happiness and bad actions.

Athens (choose one)

1. What is special about the Parthenon, artistically speaking? Relate this to philosophy. What ironies are hidden here?
2. What words were invented by Athenians? Define two that are used today and consider why they were coined in Athens and how they are used today.

Plato (choose one)

1. What is special about Plato’s Academy? What is taught there and how is it taught? Why would they focus on these subjects?
2. Sum up how Plato is responding to the pre-Socratics. How are his concerns different? Make sure you discuss the immutable and the flowing and why this makes philosophy a unique and sometimes detested profession.
3. What is the Platonic “Form”? What is his “Theory of Ideas”? How is this different than the atoms and four elements of the pre-Socratics? What had Plato cleverly deduced as illogical about the suppositions of earlier philosophers?
4. Plato seems to say we can’t have true knowledge about the world. What does he mean? How does this relate to soap bubbles? The word “opinions” is relevant here. You should also discuss “sensory perception.”
5. People throw around phrases like “déjà vu” all the time. How could this relate to the Platonic conception of yearning? What does it mean to live in the shadows?
6. Explain the Myth of the Cave and tell me why the conclusion is so horrible but historically predictable.
7. Describe the Platonic ideal state. What is it trying to accomplish? What benefits does it have? What drawbacks? Make sure to discuss how women fit into this ideal state.

The Major’s Cabin

1. Answer the four questions Sophie finds in the Major’s Cabin. Do not simply repeat Sophie’s attempts to answer. Honestly respond to them to the best of your ability.

Aristotle (choose one)

1. What is Aristotle’s background? How does this relate to the opposite tack he takes to philosophy (compared to Plato)?
2. How is Aristotle’s Form chicken (or horse) different than Plato’s? How does this change Plato’s understanding of the soul?
3. What does it mean to “double the number of things”? Why is this a problem for the philosopher?



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4. Why does Aristotle privilege the senses more than reason? Does he throw out reason entirely?
5. What are Aristotle's four causes? Which one does not apply today? Explain how modern science differs. Is this in any way problematic? Why would this modern science version of things be hard for people to accept?
6. Give an example of Aristotle's logic. This is called a syllogism. People who reason effectively, who think effectively, at least understand how this process works. Explain why this form of reasoning is so important.
7. Describe Nature's Scale. Also: How does he describe the divide between living and non-living? What makes them different for Aristotle?
8. What is "the Golden Mean"? Give an example of someone who follows the Golden Mean and someone who does not.
9. What are Aristotle's views on politics? Do you agree? Why or why not?
10. What are Aristotle's views on woman? How are they different than Plato's? The philosopher/narrator gives an historical aside here. What does he claim?
11. One more. Sophie has an interesting conversation about the naming of things. Why is the naming of things so fundamental to our humanity? Do you agree with Plato's take on this or Aristotle's?

### Hellenism (choose one)

1. Analyze Sophie's response to question number 3 on her religious values test. Analyze rhetoric here. How does she organize her argument? Why is this a useful and effective organization?
2. Why is Alexander the Great important and how does he link Greek philosophy to the rest of the world?
3. How is the Hellenistic world like the world of today?
4. Who were the cynics? Explain to me the etymology of "cynical."
5. What is monism and how does it reflect stoic values? How were stoics different than the cynics? Explain mean of "stoic" today and its relation to the original philosophical stoic school.
6. Who were the epicures? Explain what they thought about pleasure and how it is more complicated than it might seem at first glance. How does this relate to their views on death?
7. Who is Plotinus and how do his views reflect and diverge from those of Plato?
8. What are the two variants of mysticism? How are they different?

### The Postcards (choose one)

1. This chapter is really a break from the lessons. Consider this a cynical critique of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. What do I mean by this? Why is this important to the history and study of philosophy?
2. What does Sophie get from the Major's cabin? What does she do with it? Speculate here. What is the importance of the mirror? Don't look this up. It defeats the purpose of philosophical speculation. Remember the key is wondering, not knowing.

**Note that you will have 14 paragraphs (one for each chapter) by the time this assignment is complete (at least 700 words).**



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### Part Two: Self-Selected Novel



This open-ended assignment will allow you to choose a novel that appeals to you. Simply go to Barnes and Noble or Half Price Books and wander through the store's Fiction & Literature section. Select a novel that interests you. Read the first couple pages. Maybe look up a review. Buy the book. Enjoy! If you don't like the book, buy a new book.

Some guidelines for choosing the novel:

- You cannot choose novels from outside this section of the store. Ask a representative at the store if you need help finding the section or if you are unsure if the book you have selected qualifies as literature. I'm also available via email.
- You **may not** choose a drama (play), poetry, or a short story collection for this assignment, but please feel free to buy these too. Nothing better than summer poetry!
- If you choose a book that has turned into a movie, be prepared to discuss the differences between the book and the movie in the assessment.
- You may not choose the following novels:

*Old Man and the Sea* or any other text taught at Deer Park before tenth grade.

*Ethan Frome*

*Frankenstein*

*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*



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*Farewell to Arms*  
1984

*Kite Runner*

*Slaughterhouse Five*

*Sound and the Fury*

*A Brave New World*

*Beowulf*

*Vanity Fair*

*The Poisonwood Bible*

*Gilead*

*Wiseblood*

*Station Eleven*

If you cannot go to the store to choose, you may order from Amazon. I also have a list of titles most often found on the AP Literature Exam (which you will take senior year) on my website. These tend to be higher-level texts, but if you are up for the challenge, they will be worth your time.

### **Assignment**

-Read the text and make occasional margin notes. Consider how the events in the book relate to the book's theme. Pay special attention to moments that might relate to anything that you read in *Sophie's World*. Ask questions. Show substantive engagement with the text.

-Know that you will have an assessment on the book in the third week of school. This essay will assess your knowledge of the novel's plot and theme. We will also do a few other in-class activities with the book in the first three weeks and throughout the year.