

Eleanor Roosevelt High School Summer Assignment 2012
College Writing/British Literature (Grade 12)

Dear Incoming College English Student:

Since 9th grade, you've been exploring the many ways in which literature describes and reveals the human experience. Individual characters' psychological journeys give us valuable insights into our own. Although not every character can be said to undergo a traditional heroic journey, the evolution of the individual's sense of self is one that requires change, often profound. We must adapt to survive, and we must examine our selves deeply if we wish to maintain a unique identity.

The novels you will read this summer, *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf and *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham, explore the construction of identity, how it develops through our responses to others' views of us and through our own fluctuating consciousness. The characters in these works must renew and revise their self-definition as a result of crucial moments in their lives. You will note that those who best maintain their identity experience profound moments of truth that force them to reconsider their roles and responsibilities in an often unstable world.

Both novels are part of a literary phenomenon critics call "intertextuality." This engagement with other texts enables authors to extend their themes and messages beyond the pages of their novels, and to weave their own concerns with those of another time. Therefore, you should keep track of what those themes and messages are and why they may change from one time period to another. *The Hours*, based on *Mrs. Dalloway*, can be read as a Cunningham's modern-day "conversation" with Woolf's groundbreaking novel. Because of this, it's important that you read *Mrs. Dalloway* before reading *The Hours*. I highly recommend reading *Mrs. Dalloway* again after *The Hours*, as the novel's meaning becomes clearer once you have grasped Woolf's plot, as well as her careful construction of character and narrative innovations.

As you read, consider the following questions:

- What is unique about the form in which each novel is written?
- How does this form lend itself to the novel's themes and messages?
- How do the different characters' lives intertwine?
- How does one character's experience influence and transform another's?

And most importantly:

- **How does each novelist explore the question of how our identities are shaped?**

This assignment has two pieces, one analytical, which will culminate in an in-class essay. The other is a creative assignment. Please see the reverse for an explanation of each.

Have a healthy and restful summer. I am looking forward to the year ahead, as you grow and continue to define your own identity during your last year at ERHS.

Sincerely,

Ms. Fink
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PART ONE:

On the first day of school, you will bring both novels with you along with your notes. As you read, you must keep a running list of notes on loose-leaf paper, or on Post-Its in the two books (or written directly in the margins, should you choose to purchase your own copies of the books). Additionally, you must complete a total of 6-8 pages of answers to the aforementioned questions (see page 1). These may be typed and printed (in Times New Roman double-spaced 12 point font), or written neatly on loose-leaf paper or in a notebook. Upon your return to school, you will be asked to write an in-class essay comparing the two novels. Your notes and the answers to the questions in this assignment will be crucial to your performance on this exam, which is the first grade in the class.

PART TWO:

Many of you are familiar with *The Things They Carried*, in which Tim O'Brien describes his own goals as a storyteller. O'Brien experiments with telling the same story in multiple ways, including writing about himself as a character in a third-person narrative. The story of Curt Lemon's death, of the "man he killed," and of Kiowa's disappearance into the mud are all told again and again, from different perspectives. One of the reasons for using multiple perspectives in a piece of writing is to involve the reader as an interpreter and mediator who pieces together the versions told by individuals into a larger story, and makes meaning of that story. (You will notice that Michael Cunningham employs similar strategies in his telling of the interwoven narratives of *The Hours*.)

For this assignment you will select a moment from your own life and experiment with narrating that moment from three different perspectives. Think of an interesting, unusual, or powerful moment from your own life, one you could write about for 3-4 pages (well-edited, typed in Times New Roman double-spaced 12 point font). This moment should be one that you have shared with others, in some way, whether they were "there" or not. You must tell the story of this moment using three different viewpoints, or three versions of your own perspective, as O'Brien does. This means that you may either choose three different characters to tell your story, or use your own voice, in three different points of view (first person singular/plural, third limited, third omniscient, or even second person, in which you address yourself as an audience). As you write, consider that the voice of each speaker should be distinctive so that your reader will recognize the shift in perspective.

Don't hesitate to have fun, but be sure to follow the conventions of grammar and mechanics. Do not submit work that has not been proofread. Remember that this is a college course and that you will be held to college-level standards.