

Eleanor Roosevelt High School Summer Assignment 2019
College Writing/British Literature

Dear Incoming College English Student:

Since ninth 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 undergoes a traditional heroic journey (Joseph Campbell), 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 ourselves deeply if we wish to maintain a coherent identity.

The novels you will read this summer, *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf and *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, explore the construction of identity, how it develops through our responses to others' views of us and through our own fluctuating consciousness over time. The characters in these novels 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.

Although *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *White Teeth* (2000) are not in direct conversation with one another, it may be useful to imagine them as such. Written seventy-five years apart, the two novels depict equally vivid, though staggeringly different, versions of London, as well as characters shaped by their experiences with war. Another commonality between Woolf's novel and Smith's is the distinctive style in which each is written. *Mrs. Dalloway*, written at the peak of Woolf's career, is a groundbreaking, modernist text that relies upon narrative innovations to construct the inner lives of her characters. In effect, Woolf's experimentation changed the way novels would be written in the years that followed. *White Teeth*, written when Smith was only twenty-one and still in college, was an immediate critical success and has been described stylistically as eclectic, modern, postmodern, postcolonial, and even hysterical. In fact, in a 2013 interview Smith said she admires "Virginia Woolf's way of being a modernist" and uses Woolf's techniques of characterization as a "model."

The process of imagining *Mrs. Dalloway* and *White Teeth* in conversation with one another will push you to examine their commonalities (in the way of theme, style, setting, etc.) as well as their differences. Since the two novels are dense with details and stylistic innovations, you will find it necessary to **re-read** passages (or even the entire novels) once you've completed your initial reading. If this sounds like a lot of work, remember that this is a college-level course. Furthermore, the re-reading process will deepen your understanding of the overlaps between the two texts while sharpening your skills as a reader.

As you read, consider the following questions: **(a) What is unique about the narrative form in which each novel is written? (b) How does this form lend itself to the novel's themes and messages? (c) How do the different characters' lives intertwine? (d) How does one character's experience influence and transform another's? And most importantly, (e) How does each novelist explore the question of how our identities are shaped?**

Besides a set of Cornell notes on each novel, this assignment consists of two pieces. The first is analytical, and will culminate in an in-class essay. The second 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 very last year at ERHS.

Sincerely,
Ms. Fink efink@erhsnyc.net

Eleanor Roosevelt High School Summer Assignment 2019
College Writing/British Literature

AS YOU READ: Notes

Keep a **handwritten** running list of ideas (questions, comments, etc.) that occur to you as you read, in Cornell notes format (template attached online). I'm expecting you to write at least one note for every 5 pages you read, on average. While you re-read passages in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *White Teeth*, you should add more notes to your existing notes for each novel.

Two options to approach this are:

- a) **Ongoing Notes:** Write notes in tandem with reading; any time you think of an idea, jot it down.
- b) **Section Notes:** After you have completed a segment of each book, stop and write notes to reflect and comment on what you have just read. This may be helpful for students who feel like constant note-taking is disruptive to their reading process. Smith makes this simpler by providing separate chapters, while Woolf's structure is more complicated. Attached online you'll find a set of segments and page numbers for *Mrs. Dalloway* that may serve as useful stopping points.

AFTER YOU READ: Analytical

When you're finished with both novels, answer the aforementioned questions (see the bolded text on page 1) in about 5 pages of writing. These should be typed and printed (in Times New Roman double-spaced 12 point font). Aim for 5 pages of answers in total, not 5 pages for each novel.

The purpose of these notes is to help you process these complex novels. Shortly after your return to school you will write an in-class essay comparing them. Your notes and the answers to the questions in this assignment will be crucial to your performance on this exam, the first major grade in this class.

AFTER YOU READ: Creative

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'll notice that both Woolf and Smith employ similar strategies in the interwoven narratives of their respective novels.)

For this assignment you will select a moment from your own life (or from your imagination) and experiment with narrating that moment from three different perspectives. Think of an interesting, unusual, or powerful moment, one you could write about for 2-3 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 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.

Have fun, but be sure to follow the conventions of grammar and mechanics. Do not submit work that has not been proofread. This is a college course and that you will be held to college-level standards.

* Both PART ONE and PART TWO must be uploaded to Turnitin by the first day of school. You will receive instructions for creating your Turnitin account before the end of June.

* It should go without saying that plagiarism on this may result in your removal from the course.