**10th Grade Semester Projects – Essay Prompts**

**1.** A recurring theme in literature is the classic war between a passion and responsibility. For instance, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with moral duty. Choose two pieces of literary work in which two characters confront the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibilities. In a well-written essay show clearly the nature of the conflicts, its effects upon the characters, and its significance to the works.

**2.** Choose two novels or plays that depict a conflict between a parent (or a parental figure) and a son or daughter. Write an essay in which you analyze the sources of the conflicts and explain how the conflicts contribute to the meaning of the work.

**3.** In a novel or play, a confidant (male) or a confidante (female) is a character, often a friend or relative of the hero or heroine, whose role is to be present when the hero or heroine needs a sympathetic listener to confide in. Frequently the result is, as Henry James remarked, that the confidant or confidante can be as much “the reader’s friend as the protagonist’s.” However, the author sometimes uses this character for other purposes as well. Choose a confidant or confidante from two different novels or plays of recognized literary merit and write an essay in which you discuss the various ways these characters function in the work.

**4.** From two novels or plays choose two similar or contrasting characters (not necessarily the protagonist) whose minds are pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict with one character illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.

**5.** The most important themes in literature are sometimes developed in scenes in which a death or deaths take place. Choose two novels or plays and write a well-organized essay in which you show how a specific death scene helps to illuminate the meaning of the works as a whole. Please include which themes are manifested through a character’s death in each work.

**6.**Many writers use a country setting to establish values within a work of literature. For example, the country may be a place of virtue and peace or one of primitivism and ignorance. Choose two novels or plays in which such a setting plays a significant role. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the country setting functions in the works as a whole, including the work’s similarities and/or differences and how they have contributed to the values featured in the peace of literature.

**7.** In some works of literature, childhood and adolescence are portrayed as times graced by innocence and a sense of wonder; in other works, they are depicted as times of tribulation and terror. Focusing on two novels or plays, explain how its representation of childhood or adolescence shapes the meaning of the works as a whole and how they relate to eachother.

**8.** A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning. Select two novels or plays and, focus on one symbol in each text, write an essay analyzing how that symbols function in the work and what they reveal about the characters or themes of the works as a whole.

**9.** Many works of literature deal with political or social issues. Choose two novels or plays that focus on a single political or social issue. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the authors use literary elements to explore this issue and explain how the issue contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

**10.**  “You can leave home all you want but home will never leave you.” -- Sonsyrea Tate. Sonsyrea Tate’s statement suggests that “home” may be conceived of as a dwelling, a place, or a state of mind. It may have positive or negative associations, but in either case, it may have a considerable influence on an individual. Choose two novels or plays in which a central character leaves home, yet finds that home remains significant. Write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the importance of “home” to these characters and the reasons for its continuing influence. Explain how the characters’ ideas of home illuminates the larger meaning of the work.

**11.** At every stage in the progress of his tale the novelist must rely on what may be called the illuminating incident to reveal and emphasize the inner meaning of each situation. Illuminating incidents are the magic casements of fiction, its vistas on infinity. Choose two novels or plays that you have studied and write a well-organized essay in which you describe an “illuminating” episode or moment and explain how it functions as a “casement,” a window that opens onto the meaning of the works as a whole.

**12.** “And after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency.” Pauline Hopkins, Contending Forces. Choose to compare two novels or plays in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in the characters. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect the characters and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole. Do each of the characters’ surroundings affect the work as a whole in a positive or negative way?

**13.** A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist of a bildungsroman. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole and how the characters progressed differently or in similar manners.