

AP Language and Composition Summer Reading Projects **Due on the second day of class, fall semester 2011-12**

There are two very different parts of your summer reading project. One asks you to closely read a novel-length work of non-fiction, collecting quotes and determining its writer's purpose and themes; the other provides vocabulary which is integral to the course and introduces analysis techniques. Please complete BOTH and bring them on the second day of school.

About AP: Advanced Placement Language and Composition is designed to take the place of a college level reading and composition (writing) class. The class is open to 11th grade and 12th grade students.

Our class syllabus has been submitted to, and approved by, the College Board, "a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board is composed of more than 5,700 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,800 colleges...¹"

Throughout the year, we will be reading material that is used at the college level; material that deals with controversial subjects; material that may take work to comprehend.

*In May of 2013, you may take the AP Language and Composition exam, created by the College Board. Your score on this exam may enable you to get **both** high school and college credit for the class. You do not have to take the AP Lang. and Comp. class in order to take the test. You must pay a fee to take the test.*

Purpose of Summer Assignments: to demonstrate the skills necessary to succeed in a college-level class: study habits, organization, critical thinking while reading, and willingness to work hard. ***Should you not have this assignment submitted or in-hand the second day of school, August 21, you and I will have a discussion assessing your ability to succeed in AP Language and Composition.***

Purpose of Part One:

Close reading skills are indispensable in your higher level high school and college classes. This assignment is designed to introduce the type of reading and writing assignments you will do in AP Language and Composition. The assignment (and I) assume that you already understand how to read for plot elements, so the assignments require you to think beyond plot to the writer's purpose and the strategies he uses to achieve his purpose. of this

Purpose of Part Two:

[PART TWO of the summer assignment] is designed to familiarize you with the close reading and analysis you will be doing in AP Language and Composition. To get the maximum benefit from this packet, you should read the passages provided and answer the questions that accompany them. Then, compare your answers with the ones provided—this will let you know how prepared you are for the class. Some of these assignments will be collected when you return from summer break. You may also be asked to write an essay that analyzes the movie review "Calculating Rhythm" which is included in this packet.

**If you are interested in seeing some of the assignments that we did in AP Lang during 2011-12, check my website: [// worddivas.yolasite.com](http://worddivas.yolasite.com) If you misplace the summer reading assignment, you may find it there also.

¹ Collegeboard.com

Reading assignment—PART ONE

Book: The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother by James McBride

Assignment: Complete on loose-leaf paper for your book. Include the following:

Heading: At the top right-hand corner. Your name, the date, the class

Title: author (last name, first name); title (remember to underline); date you started reading; date you finished reading.

Following pages: A) copy four short excerpts from the book which impressed you, put each excerpt on its own separate page. B) Put quotation marks around the excerpt and cite the page number(s) in parentheses. C) Underneath each excerpt, explain why you believe it's important to the purpose of the book, the theme, or to the reader's understanding of the book. This should be a few sentences, minimum.

Final Page:

Part I: In three/four carefully constructed sentences, indicate the theme(s) or the author's purpose in writing the book, or in writing the book the particular way he does. This should not be "just to tell his story." Think about what message he might want to send in telling the story/stories.

Part II: In three or more carefully constructed sentences, write out your personal reactions to the book.

Bring in these pages and your book* on the second day of instruction. A

timed writing assignment will be given within the first week that will test your close reading skills and your ability to write about literature.

Caution: Many students feel the temptation to turn to *Cliff's Notes*, Wikipedia, or Sparknotes.com versions of their books when faced with the prospect of summer reading. If you feel tempted to use a "study aide" or to take shortcuts like watching a video instead of reading, ask yourself why. If you are not a strong reader, writer, or thinker, perhaps AP is not for you. If you decide to accept the challenges of college level work, then you accept the challenge of reading this summer.

If you are interested in reading other books recommended to college-bound students, see the list on the following website for "College Board" recommendations:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/plan/boost-your-skills/23628.html>

General Notes on Tonal Analysis² —PART TWO

Tonal analysis is the study of the techniques used by a writer to convey his tone (attitude towards his subject.) For the AP test, you will be analyzing prose writing which includes: speeches, historical documents, autobiographical works, essays, and narratives.

A good preliminary technique to use in order to begin the tonal analysis of a writing sample is the SOAPS technique. SOAPS stands for the following:

S – *subject* the writer is describing

O – *occasion* for the writing

A – *audience* the writing is directed towards

P – *purpose* of the writing

S – *speaker's characteristics/attitudes/views*

The **SOAPS** information is useful in helping you to determine the tone of the writing. All prose writing has a tone, and good prose writing usually has a very specific tone which the writer is trying to convey. The tone is conveyed in many different ways, but we will concentrate on four specific techniques that writers use. They are: imagery, diction, syntax, and structure.

Imagery – These are the descriptive details that were used by the writer. You must learn to understand the reasons why the writer selected the details in the writing. Do the details create a certain atmosphere or mood? Usually, imagery is carefully controlled by the writer to convey a consistent tone. For example, if I wanted to communicate how much I hated something, I would only use negative details to describe it. These negative details would make my hatred clear to the reader. Pay attention to the details which are used. Try to see what unifies them and why they were selected.

Diction – This refers to the words used by the writer in his/her writing. There are many words in the English language which are highly connotative—that is, they have meanings and associations which go beyond the literal definitions. For example, look at the following list of words which essentially describe the same thing (beauty) and see how the words differ in their connotative meaning: lovely, attractive, cute, beautiful, hot, pretty, sexy. Usually, the diction helps the writer to convey his tone clearly. Learn to distinguish which words are used by the writer to make his tone clear.

Syntax – This refers to the sentence structures present in a piece of writing. Some common syntactical features which are used by writers include repetition and parallel structure. The use of a short sentence can emphasize a point clearly, while a long sentence can be used to delay or obscure the main point. A good writer uses different syntactical strategies to convey his tone clearly.

Structure – This is a term which covers a broad category of devices a writer can use to manipulate his writing. Structure includes such things as organization, arrangement of ideas, point of view used, style of writing used, etc.

In this class, we will be studying writing samples to determine what tone is present in them and then analyze how the aforementioned structures are used to make this tone clear. This first step—learning to see and understand these structures is the most difficult. It requires “active reading” in which you ask questions about the reading. Ask “why” and “how” questions instead of “what?” While an understanding of the content of the writing is important, the emphasis is on how the writer conveys his/her tone. The exercises we will do in class will emphasize this skill. As you become more comfortable and proficient with this skill, we will move on to organizing and defending your findings in a persuasive essay.

² Adapted from Mr. Hom, found on the World Wide Web

USING THE SOAPS TECHNIQUE

(adapted from the College Board's *Building Success* manual)

The purpose of this section is to illustrate ways in which SOAPS can be applied. Although SOAPS may seem somewhat artificial at first, you will find that it provides a starting point for any type of prose (non-poetic forms of writing).

OVERVIEW

As you engage in the following activity, ask yourself how the following situation might be applied to your analysis of prose.

This is an example of a prose piece whose purpose and meaning changes with context.

A Church Bulletin

Directions: Read the following announcement, which was originally printed in a church bulletin. Then complete the exercise below it as you dissect the article for SOAPS.

FLASH...FLASH...FLASH...FLASH

CHANGE OF PLANS FOR INSTALLATION SERVICE

Due to scheduling conflict with the Superbowl, the Board of Trustees of the church as changed the time for the installation of our new minister from 4:45—3:30 p.m..

Television consoles will be set up in the education wing of the church. Kickoff is at 4:30.

We invite you to join us for an afternoon of celebration—the service of installation, reception following the Superbowl, and dancing into the evening. Child care will be available.

Clergy: You are invited to robe and process. Please meet in the Board Room by 3:15.³

Subject: _____

Occasion: _____

Audience: _____

Purpose: _____

Directions: The church bulletin was reprinted in a national magazine that often dissects and comments upon our popular culture. The bulletin was headed “The Religious Life.” In this very different context, the meaning of the piece changes. Indicate below its new subject, occasion, audience, and purpose.

Subject: _____

Occasion: _____

Audience: _____

Purpose: _____

³ From the 1989 Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Examination

Answers to “A Church Bulletin” SOAPS Analysis

SOAPS Analysis of original church bulletin:

Subject: The change of plans for a church installation¹ service.

Occasion: The upcoming Superbowl game and the installation service and the fact that they are scheduled at the same time.

Audience: The members of the church (both clergy and members of the congregation) who were planning to attend the installation service. The bulletin suggests some members of the church would rather watch the Superbowl instead of attending the installation service. To persuade them to attend the installation service, incentives, (television consoles, post-game reception, dancing, and child care), are provided to entice these members to attend.

Purpose: The purpose of the bulletin is to inform the members of the church of the change to the scheduling of the church installation service. It is also designed give incentives to people to attend the service, especially those who don't want to miss watching the Superbowl game.

¹ A ceremony in which a new member of the clergy (e.g. priest or minister) is officially accepted as a member of the church

SOAPS Analysis church bulletin when it appears in a national magazine under the heading “The Religious Life:

Subject: Since the magazine “often dissects and comments upon our popular culture” we can assume that the subject is broader. In this case, the subject is the decline of religious values in America. The church's attempt to accommodate its members who are more interested in the Superbowl than attending an important church function is viewed as example of how Americans no longer give religion a priority. The church itself is also criticized as a contributor to his problem; instead of holding its members accountable to a higher standard, it yields to their needs (the desire to watch the Superbowl).

Occasion: The occasion in this case is also slightly different. The occasion seems to be a time when many people feel America is experiencing a decline in values. The editors of the magazine feel that the bulletin perfectly illustrates this decline.

Audience: This time, the intended audience is a group of people with conservative/traditional values. They have strong religious values and feel that people should place religion as one of the highest priorities in their lives. In addition, they seem to value discipline and self-control, and they would be offended by the lack of such values in the church bulletin. They would see the bulletin as an example of why America is experiencing a decline in values—the people are getting lazier and the church is not making them accountable.

Purpose: The purpose of the bulletin is to mock and criticize the laxity of modern society in general. The situation in the bulletin is used to illustrate the general decline of values that is occurring in America. If the church, which is viewed as one of the last bastions of morality and values, now has such low standards, then other institutions, (schools, political institutions, businesses, the family, etc.) are probably even lower. The church is criticized the most because it is supposed to be responsible for instilling these values.

Passage for Analysis

Instructions: Read the following passage by Dylan Thomas which describes the varying attitudes and reactions of the speaker to his experiences on a spring morning. Then answer the questions which follow the passage.

- (5) It was a shooting green spring morning, nimble and crocus¹,
with all the young women treading the metropolitan sward²,
swing their milk-pail handbags, gentle, fickle, inviting,
accessible, forgiving each robustly abandoned gesture of
salutation before it was made or imagined, assenting, as
they revelled³ demurely towards the manicure salon or the
typewriter office, to all the ardent⁴ unspoken endearments
of shaggy strangers and the winks and pipes of clovenfooted
sandwichmen. The sun shrilled⁵, the buses gamboled⁶,
(10) policemen and daffodils bowed in the breeze that tasted of
buttermilk. Delicate carousal⁷ plashed⁸ and babbled from the
publichouses which were not yet open. I felt like a young
god. I removed my collar-studs and opened my shirt. I
tossed back my hair. There was an aviary⁹ in my heart, but
(15) without any owls or eagles. My cheeks were cherried warm,
I smelt, I thought, of sea-pinks. To the sound of
madrigals sung by slim sopranos in water-filled valleys
where I was the only tenor, I leapt on the bus. The
bus was full. Carefree, open-collared, my eyes alight,
(20) my veins full of the spring as a dancer's shoes should
be full of champagne, I stood, in love and at ease and
always young, on the packed lower deck. And a man of
exactly my own age—or perhaps he was a little older—
got up and offered me his seat. He said, in a respectful
(25) voice, as though to an old justice of the peace, 'Please,
won't you take my seat?' and then he added 'Sir.'

By Dylan Thomas

1. crocus—(n.) a plant with long-tubed flowers and slender linear leaves, usually associated with spring
2. sward—(n.) a portion of ground covered with grass
3. revel—(v.) to take intense pleasure or satisfaction
4. ardent—(adj.) characterized by warmth of feeling typically expressed in eager zealous support or activity
5. shrill—(v.) to utter or emit a piercing sound (in the poem it is used to mean having a sharp or vivid effect on the senses)
6. gambol—(v.) to skip about in play
7. carousal—(n.) a drunken revel
8. splash—(v.) splash aviary—(n.) a place for keeping birds confined

Questions for Dylan Thomas passage: Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Defend/Support your answers.

1. What does the writer use the word “shooting” to convey in line 1? What does it suggest about the landscape he is describing?
2. What does the detail, “milk-pail handbags” suggest about the location of the description? Explain.
3. What do the destinations in lines 6-7, “manicure salon” and “typewriter office” suggest about the women that are being described?
4. What does the imagery in lines 8-9, “...shaggy strangers and the winks and pipes of clovenfooted sandwichmen.” allude to? What is the writer suggesting about the sandwichmen through his imagery?
5. What are the “publichouses” that are described in line 12? What clues support your answer?
6. What does the writer mean when he states in lines 14-15, “There was an aviary in my heart, but without owls and eagles.”? What do the “owls” and “eagles” symbolize or represent? Explain/Support.
7. What contrast occurs in lines 19-26? What is ironic about the situation?
8. What is conveyed about the relationship between the speaker and the man who offers him a seat and calls him “Sir”? Explain/Support. How does this make the speaker feel?
9. How does the writer want the reader to react to the ending of the poem? (Is it sad? Tragic? Humorous? Insightful?) Explain/Support your answer.

Answers to the Dylan Thomas passage. (Note: In most forms of literary analysis, a degree of interpretation is always evident. However, the interpretation must conform to the overall meaning and purpose of the work. Try to see how the following answers all conform to the overall meaning and purpose of the poem. Pay particular attention to the argumentation and support used to defend the answers.)

1. "Shooting" is used to convey the explosion of plant growth that is taking place in the spring. Greenery is poking out of the ground, trees, bushes, etc. It conveys the images of new growth (plant "shoots") and movement and explosive force (as a gun "shoots" a bullet).
2. If the image is literal (the women are actually carrying milk-pails for handbags), it suggests a rural or pastoral setting. The town is quaint and simple, as are its inhabitants. If the image is not literal, it suggests that the speaker perceives the town to be quaint and simple. Perhaps the arrival of spring makes him view the town more romantically and emotionally, and the description conveys his longing for such an idyllic setting.
3. It suggests there are different classes of women in the scene. Wealthier women seek manicures at the salons while working class women go their office jobs (typewriter office).
4. This is a rather complex image. It evokes the legend of satyrs, which are mythical beasts which are half men and half goat. (This explains the presence of "clovenfooted" in line 8.) Traditionally, they were shepherds, which is why there is the allusion to "shaggy strangers." The "shaggy strangers" allude to sheep--(sheep have shaggy hair/wool)—and the fact that the shaggy strangers are afraid to compliment the women ("ardent unspoken endearments") makes this allusion clearer since sheep are characterized as being docile and meek. Satyrs are known for their lustful pursuit of sexual gratification, and this explains the "winks" they give the women. Additionally, Satyrs, are often depicted playing pan-pipes, a type of flute. This explains the "pipes" in line 8 the speaker uses this fanciful imagery to describe the men who are admiring the townswomen.
5. The publichouses, or "pubs", refer to bars where alcoholic drinks are served. The word "carousal" suggests drinking and good times, something associated with bars.
6. The "aviary" in his heart suggests a sense of freedom and excitement. Birds generally symbolize freedom since they can fly. Birds in a aviary tend to be excitable since they are confined and observed by people. Owls traditionally represent wisdom and knowledge while eagles represent valor and strength. Why would the speaker's heart lack these traditionally positive characteristics? Knowledge, wisdom, valor, and to a lesser extent, strength are associated with restraint and control. Knowledge and wisdom are gained through discipline and effort, as are valor and strength. In the context of the passage, the speaker is suggesting that his heart was filled with emotions, such as joy and happiness, which are not restricted or inhibited. He wants to emphasize the spontaneous and uninhibited nature of his feelings and emotions.
7. The main contrast is how the speaker, who imagines himself to young and energetic, is abruptly and painfully reminded of his true age. What makes it worse is that the man who offers his seat to the speaker is apparently as old or older than the speaker, making it seem as though he is even older than he actually is. The man's "respectful" voice and use of "Sir" suggests that he considers the speaker to be an elderly man who deserves both respect and his seat. It's ironic that the speaker, who is young at heart, is not viewed or treated as a young man.
8. The man apparently feels the speaker is a great deal older than himself, and he feels the speaker would have difficulty standing on the bus. Therefore, he graciously and respectfully offers his seat to the speaker. The speaker is bothered by the man's deference towards him ("as an old justice of the peace"), and by his use of "Sir" to address him. The speaker views the man's charity and kindness as an affront because it spoils the illusion he has of himself as a spirited young man.
9. While the speaker may feel indignation and disappointment when his self-delusion is revealed, the writer wants the reader to find the situation to be humorous. In the first half of the poem we are exposed to the grandiose and hyperbolic ways the speaker views the common scenes of his surroundings. He elevates everything he sees with imagination and exaggeration. In the second half of the poem, he begins viewing himself in the same grand manner. Clearly, he is letting his imagination get the better of him, and he needs to get back to reality. The humor is conveyed through the irony present at the end of the poem—a man, who appears older than the speaker, offers the speaker his seat on the bus, making him painfully aware of his true age and appearance. The only person he was able to fool was himself, and we all laugh at his foolishness

From 1991 AP LANG AND COMP TEST: QUESTION 2

Students taking the 1991 AP Lang. & Comp. exam were asked to read and analyze the following passage by Richard Rodriguez, the first college-educated member of his family. To get a sense of what you will be required to do in AP Lang. & Comp. next semester, close-read the passage and answer the questions which follow it. Then compare your answers to the ones which are provided. Do not be discouraged if your answers are incorrect; it is more important that you understand why the answers provided are correct.

My mother is not surprised that her children are well-off. Her two daughters are business executives. Her oldest son is a lawyer. She predicted it all long ago. "Someday," she used to say when we were young, "you will all grow up and all be very rich. You'll have lots of money to buy me presents. But I'll be a little old lady. I won't have any teeth or hair. So you'll have to buy me soft food and put a blue wig on my head. And you'll buy me a big fur coat. But you'll only be able to see my eyes."

Every Christmas now the floor around her feet is carpeted with red and green wrapping paper. And her feet are wreathed with gifts.

By the time the last gift is unwrapped, everyone seems very tired. The room has grown uncomfortably warm. The talk grows more listless. ("Does anyone want coffee or more cake?" Somebody groans.) Children are falling asleep. Someone gets up to leave, prompting others to leave. ("We have to get up early tomorrow.")

"Another Christmas," my mother says. She says that same thing every year, so we all smile to hear it again.

Children are bundled up for the fast walk to the car. My mother stands by the door calling good-bye. She stands with a coat over her shoulders, looking into the dark where expensive foreign cars idle sharply. She seems, all of a sudden, very small. She looks worried.

"Don't come out, it's too cold." somebody shouts at her or at my father, who steps out onto the porch. I watch my younger sister in a shiny mink jacket bend slightly to kiss my mother before she rushes down the front steps. My mother stands waving toward no one in particular. She seems sad to me. How sad? Why? (Sad that we are all going home? Sad that it was not quite, can never be, the Christmas one remembers having had once?) I am tempted to ask her quietly if there is anything wrong. (But these are questions of paradise, Mama.)

My brother drives away.

"Daddy shouldn't be outside," my mother says. "Here, take his jacket out to him."

She steps into the warmth of the entrance hall and hands me the coat she has been wearing over her shoulders.

I take it to my father and place it on him. In that instant I feel the thinness of his arms. He turns. He asks if I am going home now. It is, I realize, the only thing he has said to me all evening.

Reading Questions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Support your answers with details from the passage and clear explanations.

1. What is the subject of this passage? (What is Rodriguez describing?)
2. What is the occasion of this passage? (What event(s) caused Rodriguez to write this?)
3. Who is the writer's intended audience? (What characteristics does Rodriguez assume his audience to have?) (Consider the age, socio-economic background, values, and experiences of the audience.)
4. What seems to be the Rodriguez's purpose in writing this passage? What point or message is he trying to convey?
5. Based on the passage, what are the characteristics of the speaker (Rodriguez)? (Consider his age, socio-economic background, values, and experiences.)

Answers for 1991 Question 2: In reading these answers, pay close attention to the details and explanations that are used to support and defend the answers. Details are crucial—answers which are not supported are not valid, even if they happen to be correct.

1. There are actually two subjects in this passage—one that is immediate (it is specifically stated) and one that is implied. The immediate subject is Rodriguez's recollection and description of his family's Christmas gathering. However, it is important realize that he is not interested in describing a specific Christmas gather; instead, he is trying to encapsulate the typical "routine" that is followed in all the family Christmas gatherings since he and his siblings have grown up and become successful. Therefore the description is representative of the way all the Christmas gatherings are now conducted. (This distinction is important, as you'll find out later.) The implied subject is broader, and is implied by the descriptions emphasized in the passage. There is a sad tone present in the description—the gatherings seem ritualistic and ceremonial—done out of obligation and/or custom. Rodriguez doesn't seem to include details that describe joy, happiness, or love—details that would fit our expectations for a successful family gathering during Christmas. Instead, he gives details of people having to leave early, "We have to get up early tomorrow." and his lack of intimacy with his father, "He asks if I am going home now. It is, I realize, the only thing that he as said to me all evening." This suggests that the subject is about the alienation and separation that occurs within families as the children grow older and take on the responsibilities of their own families. A certain estrangement develops in their relationship, and while it may be inevitable, Rodriguez finds it tragic and sad. The presence of details that convey the materialism embraced by the family, "expensive foreign cars; shiny mink jacket" and the mother's feet "wreathed with gifts" suggests possible reasons for this alienation. Perhaps the children are now caught up in more materialistic pursuits—their careers, success, etc.—that have compromised or replaced their interactions as a family. Whatever the cause, Rodriguez is aware of the changes that occurred in the relationship between his parents and himself and his siblings, and he feels this is a great loss.
2. The occasion of this passage is a Rodriguez family Christmas reunion. But as stated in #1, this specific occasion and Rodriguez's impression of it comes from his observations of a series of such family occasions. His feelings and insights are based on the collective characteristics of these past gatherings.
3. This is usually one of the most difficult questions for students to answer. Up to this point you might have assumed that everything you read was specifically written for you. While this may be somewhat true in your school textbooks, which are designed for high school readers, the fact remains that most writing is geared towards a specific audience with specific characteristics. A good writer makes assumptions/predictions about his audience and carefully crafts his writing to exploit these characteristics. Most of the writing we will read in AP Lang. & Comp. is not written for teen audiences. You often have to determine the characteristics of the writer's intended audience to understand why he used specific writing strategies (word choice, imagery, organization, etc.) In this passage, Rodriguez is writing to a more mature audience, perhaps one that is similar to his age. These are middle-aged adults who have their own lives (families and careers), and who now realize that their relationships with their parents has become diminished or lessened because of this. We can assume that the audience has strong family values—a belief that one should respect and value one's parents. This would make them aware of and sympathetic to Rodriguez's tragic view—of the distance that grows between parents and their adult children. The audience respect for family values would also make them aware that something is amiss in Rodriguez's family Christmas gathering, and make them aware of the darker observations and implications that Rodriguez is making.
4. As mentioned in previous responses. Rodriguez's purpose is to point out the changes that occur within families as the children grow older and become more distant from their parents. While the children are "well-off"—"...two daughters are business executives...oldest son is a lawyer" their material and financial success comes at the expense of their family's closeness and intimacy. Rodriguez feels conflicted in this dilemma—all parents want their children to be successful, yet he questions the ultimate price this will have on their relationship. Ultimately, Rodriguez feels compelled to accept the inherent tragedy of the situation—the children should strive to be successful, even if it alienates them from their parents. When he ponders asking his mother if anything is wrong, he answers parenthetically, "(But these are questions of paradise, Mama.)", acknowledging that we do not live in a perfect world (paradise) and therefore there are no perfect solutions. Yet, despite his rational understanding of this dilemma, Rodriguez cannot deny his emotions that this is a tragic aspect of life.
5. Rodriguez shares many of the same traits of his audience as described in question #3. He is middle-aged and has a successful career (as a professional writer; he is also English professor). He is obviously introspective and very observant—he seems to suggest that he's the only sibling to recognize the changes in his family. In some ways, he seems to have Romantic sensibilities—he yearns for the family closeness and intimacy that seemed to have existed during his childhood, and he questions the benefits that education and material success have given him and his siblings. While Rodriguez attempts to rationalize his family's situation as being normal and perhaps inevitable, he seems unable to validate the sacrifice of family intimacy for independence and material success.

(Note: It took me (Mr. Hom) approximately an hour to answer these questions—and I'm familiar with the passage. This process is slow initially, but you'll get better if you persevere.)

Final Assignment #1

Carefully read the article “Calculating Rhythm” by David Denby. ON ANOTHER SHEET OF PAPER: Answer the following questions on the article using complete sentences. Clearly explain and support your answers.

1. In sentence #1, what is the word “groaning” used to convey? (Do not merely give a dictionary definition of the word “groaning.”)
2. In sentence #5, explain how the expression “super-bland pop star” is an oxymoron.
3. Why is sentence 5 so long? Explain/Support/
4. What tone does sentence 6 emphasize? Explain/Support.
5. What is the function of the two rhetorical questions in sentences 7 and 8? (What effect do they have on the reader?)
6. The writer uses the word “polymer” in sentence 10. Polymer is another word for plastic. Discuss how the two words, “polymer” and “plastic” differ in their connotations. Explain how the writer’s description of Britney would differ if the word “plastic” replaced “polymer.”
7. Sentence 12 uses the simile, “She’s [Britney’s] as doll-like as Barbie’s kid sister. Explain the writer’s purpose for using the simile. (What is he trying to convey about Britney through the comparison?)
8. Describe how the title of the article “Calculating Rhythm” serves the purpose of the writer in this article. (How does the title of the article make the writer’s attitude towards Britney clear?)

NOTE: You may be asked to write an in-class analytical essay on this article during the first week of class.

The Current Cinema

CALCULATING RHYTHM BY DAVID DENBY

(1) Continued report from the theatres: the kids at a late-night showing of Britney Spear’s debut movie, “Crossroads,” were groaning at what a sweet nothing the picture was. (2)The laughter was good-natured enough. (3)They weren’t offended, and neither was I: the movie would first have to exist on the screen for anyone to be offended by it. (4) “Crossroads,” which was written by Shonda Rhimes and directed by Tamra Davis, is built around Britney’s song “I’m Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman,” and it’s about her passage to adulthood in the summer after she graduates high school. (5) What it’s really about, of course, is the very delicate marketing problem of turning a super- bland pop star into an acceptable human being onstage, and its solution is so coy and hedged that the movie seems almost to be making the audience complicit in its calculations for success: we will show Britney dancing on her bed in the scantiest of undies but also make her the class valedictorian and a virgin; we will show her longing for freedom and escaping from her small town with a couple of friends but also have her phone home at every pit-stop between Georgia and Los Angeles; we will show her attracted to a young man with sexy stubble (Anson Mount) and allow the thrilling impression that he has killed someone, but make him in the end a knightly fellow who rescues women from their troubles. (6)And so on, right to the last shot. (7)Do they succeed? (8)Will Britney Spears become a movie star? (9) Maybe, but, without putting too fine a point on it, there’s something wrong with her face. (10)In closeup, her eyes appear too widely spaced and her upper lip too soft, and her flesh seems made of a lab-developed polymer that has been lacquered a golden hue, like Peking duck. (11) When she’s not singing or dancing, the camera finds Britney shockingly indistinct and ordinary—young without the recklessness of youth, successful without the brazenness of power. (12) She’s as doll-like as Barbie’s kid sister. (13)To commit herself to any particular personality trait—to have a personality—would be to limit her appeal in some way. (14)So she doesn’t, or can’t, and there’s nothing to do but wonder at the absence at the center of the screen.

THE NEW YORKER, MARCH 4, 2002

Final Assignment #2

Carefully read the article “Acting Out” by Antony Lane. Then, using complete sentences, answer the questions that follow the reading. Use specific details from the article and clear explanations to support your answers

Acting Out

“Spider-Man 3”

by Anthony Lane

There is one great scene in “Spider-Man 3,” and you can pretty much leave the theatre once it’s over, but for those three or four minutes you wouldn’t want to be anywhere else. An escaped convict named Flint Marko (Thomas

Haden Church) flees the New York City police and tumbles, as you do, into a Particle Physics Test Facility. He finds himself in a sandpit, subjected to what we are told is “demolecularization,” a process familiar to anyone who pounds crackers to make a cheesecake crust. Once the experiment is over, the sand lies still; then it stirs and heaves, and, like a crumbling Lazarus, Marko rises again, his legs sifting and scattering with the effort. Finally, he staggers upright to reveal his transfigured self: Sandman, his flesh and blood blown away for good, and an odd look— part mourning, part implacable resolve—dimly discernible on his granular face. From here on, he will be storming dust, a wondrous mixture of the quick and the dead.

It is thrilling to imagine what Guillermo del Toro, who made “Pan’s Labyrinth,” or the James Cameron who brought us “Terminator 2: Judgment Day,” would do with Sandman. Both directors are obsessed with shapeshifters— with their sad restlessness, their ability to conjure threat out of the apparently fragile. The director of “Spider-Man 3,” Sam Raimi, is unconcerned by such niceties; to him, Sandman is just a bullying baddie against whom Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) must pit his web and his wits. The film is certainly well stocked with villainy. Besides Sandman, there is the New Goblin (James Franco), better known as Harry Osborn, of whom I had personally had my fill by the end of the first movie. He is the son of the late Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe), and his agonized, drawn-out desire to make Spider-Man pay for that death makes Hamlet’s revenge look like a snap decision. We also have Venom (Topher Grace), who is introduced, with something close to panic, two-thirds of the way through the film. Until then, he has been known as Eddie Brock, who takes over from Peter Parker—the earthbound, off-duty Spider-Man— as a photographer for the Daily Bugle. Eddie then gets fired, and his response, in a radical solution to youth unemployment, is to don a sticky black body stocking and a mouthful of fangs.

The most pathetic aspect of “SpiderMan 3” is that stickiness. In an early scene, a meteorite crashes to Earth, and from it crawls what seems to be a tiny garbage sack with half a mind of its own: not a bad image of where this film belongs. And, would you believe, the first person this superblob attaches itself to is, yes, Peter Parker. It doesn’t choose him; nobody has targeted him—of all Earth’s inhabitants, he just happens to be close by. Is this truly the best that the filmmakers can be bothered to do for our delight? Just how easily and stupidly pleased do they presume we are? Peter’s college professor (Dylan Baker) declares that the black stuff “amplifies characteristics of its host.” Fine, and I vaguely understand what occurs when it latches onto Eddie. The first host, however, is Spider-Man himself, and this is where the film becomes so embarrassing that you have to crouch down and stuff popcorn in your ears.

The joke about Peter has always been how uncool he is. “You are such a nerd,” his girlfriend, Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst), sighs, thus giving a breath of hope to all the nerds in the audience. Once infected by the black stuff, he should by rights become an übernerd, but the movie can’t decide what it wants. One moment he is being eyed by girls in the street, and the next they are shying away from him, as he struts along like John Travolta at the start of “Saturday Night Fever.” You laugh, but the sound of it dies in your throat. Peter then dances in a night club, but unveiling a mean and moody Tobey Maguire is roughly as convincing as asking Norah Jones to rap. Dumbest of all is the change of hair style, as Peter stops combing his bangs sideways and lets them flop down over his brow. He looks like the bronze medalist in a teen-age Hitler-impersonation contest. Spider-Man, meanwhile, gets his own makeover, oiling into a different outfit (black is the new red), and hanging out moodily on church spires. What is being amplified here?

If “Spider-Man 3” is a shambles, that’s because it makes the rules up as it goes along. By the end, for instance, Sandman has become the size of an office block, each swinging fist as big as a truck, his personality reduced to brutishness. I half expected him to come after Spider-Man and Mary Jane carrying a gigantic bucket and spade. By what criterion did he grow so mountainous? Is he like a Transformer, or more like a genie? The fact is that if the fantastical is to flourish it must lay down the conditions of its magic and abide by them; otherwise, we feel cheated.

(Tolkien knew this better than anyone.) Some viewers will take the New Goblin, whose name sounds like a small-circulation poetry magazine, to be a vessel of unnatural forces, while others will see him, when he fires up his rocket-powered skateboard, as a rich kid with too many toys. That’s the problem with this third installment of the franchise: not that it’s running out of ideas, or lifting them too slavishly from the original comic, but that it lunges at them with an infantile lack of grace, throwing money at one special effect after another and praying—or calculating— that some of them will fly.

In May of 2006, the Wall Street Journal suggested that the budget for Raimi’s film had swollen to more than two hundred and fifty million dollars, possibly to three hundred million. That’s a lot of dough. The government paid less than that in foreign aid to Haiti last year. Still, if the movie performs as expected, the outlay will be swamped by the profit, and one

cannot fault Sony and Columbia Pictures for their business sense. What matters, to a moviegoer, is that costs appear to rise in inverse proportion to formal coherence: the more you spend, to judge by Spider-Man 3,” the less control you exert over the finished product. Domestic scenes that would not pass muster in a TV soap are allowed to drag on forever (“I want to be there for you,” “You weren’t there for me”), while major plot shifts—the teaming up of Venom and Sandman, say—are patched together in seconds. Fine character actors, such as James Cromwell and Theresa Russell, are handed a token scene and then flicked aside like chewed gum. Bryce Dallas Howard, whose pale and unnerving looks would make her a perfect villainess, is fobbed off with a role of smiling fluff. Laziness mingles with overkill, violence with mawkishness: most of the characters weep at the slightest provocation, but heads are beaten, burned, and sheared off by passing subway trains. “People really like me,” our hero says at the start, adding later, “They love me!” Not for long, Whiny-Man, not for long.

The New Yorker, May 7, 2007

Questions on “Acting Up”

Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Use details from the reading and clear explanations to support your answers.

1. It is clear that Lane disliked Spider-Man 3. In the 1st paragraph, how does he mock the “demolecularization” process? List the details that do this and clearly explain how they make the mockery clear to reader.
2. What is Lane’s purpose in making references to Guillermo del Toro and James Cameron in the 2nd paragraph? (How does he view these two directors, and how does he make his views about them clear?)
3. In the 2nd paragraph, Lane makes an allusion to Hamlet. Based on the description, what can we infer about Hamlet’s revenge in Shakespeare’s play? Explain/Support your answer.
4. In the 3rd paragraph, Lane criticizes the lack of continuity and consistency in the movie. Explain how the description of the “black stuff” and its qualities is used to make this clear to the reader. What does Lane suggest would be a more consistent portrayal of Spider-man when he is “infected by the black stuff?”
5. Using only one sentence, summarize the main point of the 5th paragraph.
6. Who are the two objects of Lane’s criticism in the 6th paragraph? What criticisms does he make about these two targets? To which of the two objects of Lane’s criticism are the last two sentences of the essay directed? Explain/Support.
7. How might Lane’s decision to focus his criticism on one of the two objects he criticized in the 6th paragraph have been influenced by his job as a movie reviewer? In what way do the last two sentences of the 6th paragraph indirectly compliment one of the objects of his criticism? Explain/Support.