

William A. Shine Great Neck South High School – Summer Reading and Writing Assignment, 2017

Advanced Placement English Language and Composition

<https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/apcourse/ap-english-language-and-composition>

Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945)

Although much of *Black Boy* is based on Richard Wright's own early life in the Jim Crow south, this work of literature is not exactly an autobiography; rather, this highly stylized first-person account is a bildungsroman, a narrative that traces the protagonist's psychological development as he journeys from childhood through adolescence into early adulthood.

- **Read chapters 1–14 of *Black Boy*.** N.B.: You are required to read only *Part One: Southern Night* (chapters 1–14) and not *Part Two: The Horror and the Glory* (chapters 15–20). Part One is the original version that was published in 1945; Part Two was included in a “restored edition” in 1991.
- For each chapter, you are strongly encouraged to annotate and highlight as well as to keep some sort of reading log or journal. There is no particular format that you must follow. Your notes should be as unique as you are!
- For assistance with annotating and active reading, consult these online resources:
 - <http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/adler.html>
 - <http://slowreads.com/ResourcesHowToMarkABook-Outline.htm>
 - <http://brainstorm-services.com/wcu/readersblock.html>
 - <http://www.farr-integratingit.net/Theory/ReadingStrategies/>
 - <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/616/01/>
 - <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/phelps.htm>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaQhDtNRFFA>

Before reading:

- Define each of the following terms: bildungsroman, point-of-view/narrative perspective, persona, authorial voice, tone, diction, and style. **Record these definitions in the paperback itself, on Post-It notes, or on separate sheets of paper.**
- For assistance with defining literary terms, consult these online resources:
 - <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/litweb10/glossary/A.aspx>
 - <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/575/01/>
 - <https://literarydevices.net/>
 - http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/lit_terms/terms/
 - <http://www.virtualsalt.com/litterms.htm>
 - <http://literary-devices.com/>
 - <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Terms/>
 - <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>
 - <http://mcl.as.uky.edu/glossary-rhetorical-terms>
 - <http://www.virtualsalt.com/rhetoric.htm>

While reading:

- Listen for three distinct voices: Richard, the young protagonist; Richard, an older narrator who looks back on his youth; Wright, the author himself who reflects on a formative time in his life and comments – sometimes obviously, sometimes subtly – on the culture in which he lived. Is the narrator *really* the author, or is he a *persona* of the author?
- As you progress through the assignment, *read like a writer*. In other words, pay careful attention to *how* and *why* Wright uses particular literary techniques, stylistic devices, and rhetorical strategies to create meaning. Read with a pen in hand, ready to take notes. You literally own the text; through your active reading, strive to figuratively own the text.
- Break your reading into three sections: chapters 1–3, 4–7, and 8–14.
- From each section, select ONE significant passage (not merely one sentence) in which the protagonist comes to understand the power of words. For each selection, analyze how words are used by or against the protagonist. Do young Richard’s own words – including what he says and what he does not say – help him or hinder him in his struggle against a particular obstacle or antagonist in the passage you have selected? Do other characters’ words facilitate or impede Richard’s progress? **Record your thoughts in the paperback itself, on Post-It notes, or on separate sheets of paper.**

After reading:

- Carefully reread Richard’s reaction to the German author and social critic H.L. Mencken:

I was jarred and shocked by the style, the clear, clean, sweeping sentences. Why did he write like that? And how did one write like that? I pictured the man as a raging demon, slashing with his pen, consumed with hate [...]. What was this? I stood up, trying to realize what reality lay behind the meaning of the words...Yes, this man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? [...] I read on and what amazed me was not what he said, but how on earth anybody had the courage to say it. (248)
- Reflecting on *Black Boy* as a whole, discuss how Wright as an author uses “words as weapons.” In crafting his narrative – his so-called autobiography – as he does, what specific injustices does Wright protest? Consider the author’s audience and purpose as well as the time period during which *Black Boy* was written. What is Wright’s tone towards his situation and towards his readers? **Record your thoughts in the paperback itself, on Post-It notes, or on separate sheets of paper.**
- For assistance with analyzing an author’s audience, purpose, and tone, consult these online resources:
 - http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/preap/teachers_corner/45200.html
 - http://www.ehow.com/about_6372832_soapstone-writing.html
- To watch a Yale University professor’s lecture on *Black Boy*, consult this online resource:
 - <http://oyc.yale.edu/english/engl-291/lecture-2> (Chapters 2 and 5 should be of interest.)

N.B.: In September, a written assessment on the summer reading assignment will be given. Your annotations and notes will not be collected, but they will serve as preparation for this writing assignment and as a basis for class discussion.