

May 18, 2011

Dear New AP Student,

Although I often hear people calling this class AP Lit, this is not so. AP Literature is an twelfth grade course, while AP Language is reserved for you new little juniors. This class is not only about reading books and studying those books. It's about discovering the motives that authors have for writing what they may, understanding the choices they make involving language and rhetoric, and why they decided that these choices would be most effective. It sounds complicated when said in this fashion, but I can assure you that this is not a difficult class if only you are determined not only to make a good grade, but to gain true and useful knowledge regarding language; because that is what this course will graciously afford you as long as you allow it.

Everyone always frets about the supposed overly rigorous and, at times, foolishly lengthy assignments of Mrs. Buchanan's AP Language class. It may be that this is true when compared to other language arts courses, and even true compared to her tenth grade class. But when compared to some college courses, the work is really not so much. I admit that the first nine weeks can seem overwhelming. Socratic circles take more time than most other assignments which could possibly be assigned; there are often multiple assignments within a single week; and Mrs. Buchanan's extremely expectant nature, while very effective in pushing you in the direction you should be going, can make you feel like you'll never reach the level of ability that she asks of you. But once again, this is not so. Never will you be expected to do something of which you are incapable. In that very first quarter, I sometimes thought I could never do as well as I wanted to. However, I proved myself wrong and excelled in this class all throughout. Do not feel threatened by the big bad college-level class that this is. According to most people I know, college is not so hard. The first nine weeks will do nothing more than whip you into shape.

To be perfectly honest with you, this is the class that has whipped me the most throughout my entire school career. There is so much knowledge to gain; so much room for growth; so much room for growing up. Although I learned very much about rhetorical strategy, and language choice, and relating to your audience, and all that mush, perhaps the area which this class has best trained me in is believing in myself. Mrs. Buchanan always says, "Make your choices and own them." And in this class, trust me, you'll have to. There are no second chances to change your mind, to adjust a few sentences. Not on the AP Test, and not often in real life. The nature of this class demands certainty in every choice you make. If you feel that someone has the wrong idea about a novel you've read, be prepared to say why they are wrong and to continue to say why they are incorrect. Evaluate the opinions of others, but do not be swayed. Address the fact that no one is wrong because opinions belong to everyone and are not concrete. Address this fact, validate the thoughts of others, but do not be made to change your mind unless you become positively certain that you were previously a fool. That is what I have learned, what has helped me the most, and what I am very most proud of knowing.

There are certain qualities which will help to make the year pass much more smoothly for you. Perhaps the most important of these is getting assignments turned in on time. Sometimes, you will look at an assignment and think how much you'll hate to complete it and how you can always do it later and how you'd just much rather be doing something else. Everyone has these feelings, but to be the best student you can be and get as much out of this class as you deserve, you have to be punctual with your assignments. In some classes, ten points are deducted for late entries. In AP Language, you'll lose thirty. Also, you must always be prepared for something different, sometimes things that you'd never expect. Mrs. Buchanan doesn't always do things as conventionally as other teachers would, and she often likes to keep the next day's task a secret. You will never waste a moment in her class that should be spent on learning, so don't expect to sleep or do other work that you find more important. Lastly, just be mature and honest about opinions you have or situations that occur. If you do these things, you will succeed.

Sincerely,

Brooke Culpepper