

**Advanced Placement English  
Norwalk High School  
2011 Summer Reading List  
Mr. Simonsen**

**Advanced Placement Language  
Summer Reading List and Expectations  
Simonsen**

Before we dive headfirst into a year filled with reading and writing<sup>1</sup>, let's spend some time during the summer months getting our brains to think—yes, think, not just allow our eyes to scan the tops of words in an effort to finish the book before the beginning of September and some dreaded assessment. No, our purpose must exist as something different from the status quo. You see, to find true growth, we must make our brains perform and seek knowledge, not just experience what the words in front of us say, but, more importantly, try to understand what they mean and what they can do for our lives.

With that basic philosophy in mind, I selected four pieces, one article from *The New Yorker*, a commencement speech, and two books<sup>2</sup>. So, whether you plan on reading with your toes dug deeply into the sand at Calf Pasture beach, or if you wish to sequester yourself in some un-air conditioned library with a lone light dangling above your head, you must ingest each work and think about what you read.

**“Hellhole” by Atul Gawande** (this is the article from *The New Yorker* magazine). You can google this if you feel technologically adventurous, or you can type in this link:

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/03/30/090330fa\\_fact\\_gawande](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/03/30/090330fa_fact_gawande)

From the annals of human rights, the article examines whether or not long-term solitary confinement represents torture<sup>3</sup>.

**Columbine by Dave Cullen.** On April 20, 1999, two boys walked into their high school and opened fire, killing thirteen people before turning the guns on themselves. The book does not simply recount the day or the brutality; instead, it seeks to know why it happened.

**Blink by Malcolm Gladwell.** The book delves into the world of thinking, of the small difference between a good decision and bad one. It'll make you examine what you do and how you do it.

**Kenyon Commencement Speech 2005 – David Wallace Foster.** A remarkably intelligent and brutally honest author, Foster provides a semi-diatribes to these graduates in an uncommon way that offers them insight, reality, and supposed clarity. You can search this up, or, to make it easy, just type the link below.

<http://publicnoises.blogspot.com/2009/05/david-foster-wallace-kenyon.html>

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<sup>1</sup> I figure I'd get the obvious out in the open first. The core of the class will always remain simple...read, write, and discuss. Let's not get it any more complicated than that.

<sup>2</sup> I love each one of these for different reasons. I adore writing that makes me think and, by the end, allows me to feel just a little bit smarter than I was before I started. I hope these do that for you.

<sup>3</sup> Gawande's article does not fit some podunk, rapid read style that defines many quick newspaper "articles" you encounter; it demands attention, and its 18 pages take time and care to digest. Not a tough read, just a thoughtful one.

Now, you didn't think you'd get off without writing too, did you? Of course not. So, here we go. Let's first make an assumption, something I normally advise against, but for the purposes of getting started, we'll go with it for now. Each of the works owns a considerable level of success. Whether via the bestseller list or through critical acclaim, these authors have touched people in a way that generated thought and forged thinking. Given this, we need to ponder two simple yet complex ideas: how and why?

The conscious choices made by writers, in combination with their voices and styles, exist because they have a commitment to the craft and a desire to evoke emotion from the audience. They write to express, and the way they choose to do it matters just as much as the sentiments expressed. As Nathaniel Hawthorne once said, "Easy reading is damn hard writing".

Thus, my charge to you is this: think about the voice, style, tone, and intent of each author. In no more than three cleanly written pages<sup>4</sup>, construct a piece that examines these ideals and draws logical, thoughtful conclusions about why each writer has tasted success. Feel free to break the mold of the five-paragraph essay and make decisions based on what you believe works best for your desired voice and style<sup>5</sup>. By the way, this is one assignment that asks you to manage all the readings together. Do NOT, under any conceivable circumstances, do a three-page paper for each reading. Way too much folks!

### **The why**

I try to provide you with a logical rationale for each assignment I give. I want you to realize now that busy work will not exist, and that each moment we spend together will have a true purpose driven at the goal of making you better. With this in mind, here we need to not just respond to literature like you have done in the past, but also, and more importantly for the goal of the course, analyze how it happens. If we wish to become excellent writers, learning the craft and not merely experiencing it must stand at the forefront of our efforts. I want confident, prepared, and passionate writers by the year's end, so looking closely at how successful writers go about their business will get us a bit closer to that goal.

### **And if you're confused this summer...**

Don't fret. Build a catapult, wrestle an alligator, or just send me an e-mail at [simonsenk@norwalkps.org](mailto:simonsenk@norwalkps.org). I will get back to you as soon as I can. Promise. You can also check on my webpage (<http://teacherweb.com/CT/NorwalkHighSchool/MrSimonsen/>) for links and info.

Overall, enjoy the summer and let your mind relax. I hope we don't have just a great class next year, but also a memorable experience that leaves you prepared and satisfied.

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<sup>4</sup> For those of you who will inevitably e-mail me, the structure of the response should be 1.5 space, 12 font, black ink, and Times New Roman...and place your name, class, and date in the upper right corner. Go wild and print front to back to prove how eco-friendly you are. Oh, and don't crinkle the edges or spill anything on it...that just drives me wacky.

<sup>5</sup> No one says you have to know your style, but please see that I want you to have one. Be comfortable and think about the irony here: I have asked you to write about author technique and intent, so shouldn't you consider your own and the impact it'll have on me as your audience?