

British Literature Honours Summer Reading Essay

“This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry...” –William Shakespeare, *Richard II*

“No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”-
John Donne, *Meditation XVII*

Objective:

The British have always seen their society as a peculiar creation, reflecting both a suspicion of foreign influences typical of insular islander cultures and a seductive cosmopolitanism that is the result of its many contacts with diverse groups of people throughout the world. Through its many paradoxical elements, British literature has been the vehicle for preserving the sociocultural traditions of its centuries-old European ancestry while also serving as a springboard for those who wish to challenge the confining aspects of this tradition. The junior summer reading essay asks students to employ the rich British literary tradition to investigate the relationship between cherished custom and innovative ideas in the creation of popular culture.

Requirements:

- Students will read the following works:
 - Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*
 - Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*
 - William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*
- In a well-argued and thoroughly-substantiated essay, students will answer the following questions:
 - Each of the above works could be described as the story of an individual's attempt to challenge the pre-conceived notions of his dominant culture. How do the protagonists in each novel attempt to transform the societies in which they live? How successful are their attempts?

- What arguments do the authors advance about the relationship between individual expression and collective identity? To what degree does society limit an individual's freedom and to what degree does it act as a guarantor of the common good of the entire community?

Deadline:

- Essays are due on Wednesday, August 29th at the beginning of the British Literature Honours class.

Reminders:

- The three questions above serve as specific prompts for **one** cohesive essay. Students should integrate these three prompts into one argument that will be substantiated by an adequate amount of textual evidence.
- As with all formal writing in this course, be sure to cite all outside information according to the guidelines contained in the *MLA Handbook*. Final drafts that do not contain correct source citations will not be accepted.
- Students are greatly encouraged to use their instructor as a guide in the development of their essays. The intellectual life is not a soliloquy, but a conversation among thoughtful individuals. There is nothing wrong with asking for advice on an outline or counsel on sections of a draft. Timely questions on specific issues are the best antidote to confusion. Do not wait until problems accumulate before asking for help.