AP Literature Research Topics/ Ideas
Long List

Assignment: The following list of abstract topics have been implied or expressed in the questions on various English (AP*) Examinations since the middle 1980s. Students should read enough literature from each of the categories to be familiar with the topics and the authors who address these topics.

This list can be used as a basis for practicing the analysis or argument timed writing essay, for completing drafted writing, for pairing reading assignments, or for writing a complete research paper. Each Topic is followed by a specifically stated English (AP*) Prompt to guide each specific assignment.

Students will get practice forming an individual stance using evidence from a list of short stories, Essays, speeches, non-fiction, and novels grouped by theme.

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Accepting Death:
Choose works of literary merit that explore death in their writing. Then write a carefully nuanced research paper that examines the attitudes or traditions that affect how literature views death. Then, using these readings, develop conclusions about this complex subject.


Golding, William. Lord of the Flies.


Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Adapting to Change:
Some writers seem to advocate changes in social or political attitudes or in traditions. Choose works of literary merit that advocate some kind of change. Then write a carefully nuanced research paper that examines the attitudes or traditions that the writer wishes to modify. Then, using these readings develop conclusions about this complex subject.

Baldwin, James. *Collected Essays*.
Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*.
Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*.

**Golding, William. Lord of the Flies.**
King, Martin Luther. *Why We Can't Wait*.

**Orwell, George. Nineteen Eighty-four.**
Steinbeck, John. *Travels With Charly*.
  _ _ _ *Grapes of Wrath*. 

**Twain, Mark.** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*


Voltaire. *Candide*.

Wharton, Edith. *Ethan Frome*.

Alienation (Problems of Assimilation) because of Gender, Race, Class, or Creed:

Select works from a list of literary works in which a conflict exists because the will of the majority opposes the will of an individual. Then using these readings, develop conclusions about how these conflicts have moral and ethical implications for both the individual and society.


Cather, Wila. *My Antonia*.

**Chopin, Kate. The Awakening.**


De Crevecoeur, J. Hector St John. *Letters from an American Farmer*.


Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*.


**Golding, William. Lord of the Flies.**


**Hurston, Zora Neale. Their Eyes Were Watching God.**


King, Martin Luther. *Why We Can't Wait*.


Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. 


Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners.*
Mailer, Noran. *Armies of the Night.*
McPhearson, James M. *Marching Towards Bethlehem.*
Okada, John. *No-No Boy.*
Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club.*

**Twain, Mark.** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

Valdez, Luis. *Zoot Suit.*
Vonnegut, Kurt, Jr. *Cat's Cradle (1963) and Slaughterhouse Five (1969)*
Wright, Richard. *Native Son.*
Conflict / Adversity / Courage:
Choose works from a list of works of literary merit in which the characters are forced to act
courageously in times of adversity. Then, using these readings develop conclusions about the
way these characters "can gather strength from distress and grow brave by reflection" even in
cases where their actions may not be perceived by the public to be courageous at all.

**Beowulf**
Dillard, Annie. *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters.* New York: Harper and
Row, 1982.
Inc., 1968.
1979.
_ _ _ *Triumph and Tragedy: The Second World War.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin
Company, 1981.

**Golding, William. Lord of the Flies.**

McPhearson, James M. *Marching Towards Freedom.*
_ _ _ "Warfare: An Invention, Not a Biological Necessity." *Writing About the World.* Vol. 1.
Queen Elizabeth I of England. "Speech to Her Troops at Tilbury (1588)" *The College Board
Advanced Placement Examination.* 1992. (maybe in the British Lit textbook)
448-456.
**Tolkien, JRR.** *The Fellowship of the Ring series.*
**Twain, Mark.** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*
Dreams/Ambition/Worry/Regret:
Select works from a list of literary works in which the characters' dreams/ambitions cause an attempt to recapture or reject the past. Then, using these readings develop some conclusions about how the feelings of reverence, bitterness, or longing affect the characters' ability to achieve these dreams.

Baldwin, James. *Collected Essays : Notes of a Native Son / Nobody Knows My Name / The Fire Next Time / No Name in the Street / The Devil Finds Work / Other Essays.*
Chekhov, Anton. *Selected Short Stories.*
Thomas, Dylan. *Selected Essays.*
Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman.*
McPhearson, James M. *Marching Towards Freedom.*


Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery*.


Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*.
Family Relationships:
Some works depict a conflict between a parent and a child. Choose works of literary merit that explore this conflict. Then write a carefully nuanced research paper that examines the sources of the conflict and their thematic implications.

**Bronte, Emily. Wuthering Heights.**
**Olsen, Tillie. "I Stand Here Ironing." The College Board Advanced Placement Examination. 1992.** (in our white textbook anthology)
**Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.**
**Shakespeare, William. King Lear.**
Hopefulness:
An effective literary work does not merely stop or cease; it concludes. According to British novelist, Fay Weldon, "The writers . . . who get the best and most lasting response from readers are those who offer a happy ending through moral development--some kind of spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation, even with self, even at death."


**Bronte, Emily. Wuthering Heights.**


**Faulkner, William. "I Decline to Accept the Decline of Man."** Nobel prize acceptance speech http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-speech.html


**McPhearson, James M. Marching Towards Freedom.**


**Thoreau, Henry David. Walden and Civil Disobedience.**

**Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.**


Illusion / Woodenheadedness / Absurdity:
"Woodenheadedness, the source of self-deception, is a factor that plays a remarkably large role in government [and life in general]. It consists of assessing a situation in terms of preconceived fixed notions while ignoring or rejecting any contrary signs. It is acting according to wish while not allowing oneself to be deflected by the facts." Tuchman, Barbara. from *March of Folly.*


**Beckett, Samuel.** *Waiting for Godot.*

**Golding, William.** *Lord of the Flies.*


Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience.*

**Twain, Mark.** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*
Independence:


Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies.*


McPhearson, James M. *Marching Towards Freedom.*

Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense.*


Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience.*

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

Knowledge/Wisdom:

"For in much wisdom is much grief, and increase of knowledge is increase of sorrow." The first chapter of Ecclesiastics, the Bible.

Bacon, Francis. "Of Truth."
Berry, Wendall. The Loss of the University." Irish Place.

Golding, William. Lord of the Flies.
Machiavelli Nicolo. The Prince.

Shakespeare, William. King Lear.
Thoreau, Henry David. Walden and Civil Disobedience.
Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.
Language as a Key to Identity

“It goes without saying, then, that language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is the most vivid and crucial key to identity: It reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity. There have been, and are, times, and places, when to speak a certain language could be dangerous, even fatal. Or, one may speak the same language, but in such a way that one's antecedents are revealed, or (one’s hopes) hidden. This is true in France, and is absolutely true in England: The range (and reign) of accents on that damp little island make England coherent for the English and totally incomprehensible for everyone else. To open your mouth in England is (if I may use Black English) to "Put your business in the street": You have confessed your parents, your youth, your school, your salary, your self-esteem, and also, your future."  

James Baldwin  

(1979)


Rojkind, Richard. A Hunger of Memory.
Shaw, George Bernard. Pygmalion. Available online at <http://www.online-literature.com/george_bernard_shaw/pygmalion/>

Thoreau, Henry David. Walden and Civil Disobedience.

Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.
Love / Infidelity / Friendship / Distrust / Jealousy / Loneliness:

Love and infidelity, friendship and distrust, jealous and loneliness--these are the oxymorons that define the ambiguity of human experience. The eighteenth century British novelist Laurence Sterne wrote, "No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a . . . mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time."

Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies*.


**Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet***

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience.*


Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*


"I think it is fair to say that the current ardor of the American faith in money so easily surpasses the degrees of intensity achieved by other societies in other times and places. Money means so many things to unspiritual as well as temporal that we are at a loss to know how to hold its majesty at bay . . . ."


---


---


---


---


Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience.*


---

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

Manners:


Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Wilde, Oscar. The Importance of Being Earnest.
Many science and nature writers describe important encounters they have had with unfamiliar aspects of nature. Their changing responses to these observations develop a philosophy of respect for nature. For instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson developed this philosophy: "A life in harmony with nature, the love of truth and virtue, will purge the eyes to understanding her text."

**Twain, Mark.** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*
Passion versus Responsibility:

A recurring theme in literature is the classic war between passion and responsibility. For instance a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotions may conflict with moral duty.


**Bronte, Emily.** *Wuthering Heights.*

**Golding, William.** *Lord of the Flies.*


Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience.*

**Sophocles.** *Antigone.*

**Twain, Mark.** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*
Pleasure and Disquietude:

A critic has said that one important measure of a superior work of literature is its ability to produce in the reader a healthy confusion of pleasure and disquietude. Choose works from a list of works of literary merit that have this effect. Then write a carefully nuanced research paper that examines the sources of the pleasure and disquietude and their thematic implications.


**Golding, William. Lord of the Flies.**

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience.*

**Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.**
Self Confidence/Ego Disease/Pride
Appreciation (Recognition of Worth)
Perfection/ Self Delusion:

Some works examine the universal problem encountered in a decision that many times has to be made between two ways of living. Choose works of literary merit that emphasize how getting to know yourself and living true to that perception is a theme for those works. Then write a carefully nuanced research paper that analyzes how self-knowledge leads to some kind of happiness or how the lack of self-knowledge leads to some kind of unhappiness.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. "Quality of America's Fighting Men."

Golding, William. Lord of the Flies.
McPhearson, James M. Marching Towards Freedom.
Thoreau, Henry David. Walden and Civil Disobedience.
Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.
Sin/Temptation/Evil:


Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies.*


Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*
The Limitations of Society
Ridicule/Satire:

Some works are written to criticize some limitation implicit in today's society. Choose works of literary merit that are critical of a similar American value. Briefly define the common limitation implicit in the works chosen; analyze how the characters in the works respond to or are affected by this similar standard; then write a carefully reasoned research paper that argues for or against the validity of the implied criticisms.

Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man.*
Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies.*
James, Henry. *Daisy Miller.*
Jonson, Ben.
King, Martin Luther. "Why We Can't Wait."
McPherson, James M. *Marching Towards Freedom.*
Nabokov, Vladimir.
Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*
Wright, Richard. *Native Son.*
Violence/ Cruelty/ Fear/ Revenge/ Punishment/
Hatred/ Evil:

Violence is a predominant thread in the setting of many works of literary merit. Choose works of literary merit in which the reader is confronted with a scene or scenes of violence. Then write a carefully nuanced research paper which explores the nature of this violence, its effect on the characters or the reader, and its application to the universal human experience.


Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*.

**Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Great Gatsby.**

**Golding, William. Lord of the Flies.**

Green, Graham. *Brighton Rock*.

Heller, Joseph. *Catch-22*.


McPhearson, James M. *Marching Towards Freedom*.


**Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.**

Whitehill, Joseph. "Day of the Last Rock Fight"

Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. 