

# Summer Reading Prompts 2019

Read Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and August Wilson's *Fences*. Then respond to two of the following prompts. Each response should be between five to seven pages, should be double-spaced, and should incorporate exact text from each novel. Reminder: The amount of text you use select should be what is necessary to thoroughly answer the questions and to fill the paper length requirements. Do not assume that because you have three examples or because you've reached five pages that your analysis is thorough enough. These are not five paragraph essays. If you know of more examples, use them.

**Option 1:** Read the following poem by Robert Hayden, and respond to the question that follows:

### Those Winter Sundays

Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, **breaking**,  
**When** the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,  
**who had** driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's **austere** and lonely offices?

In what way do the protagonists of each play relate to the above poem? How about their children? What connections exist between the parental relationship described above and the relationships in each play? Explain your thinking via your five to seven-page response.

**Option 2:** In the novel *House of Sand and Fog*, Andre Dubus III writes, "America, the land of milk and honey.' But they never tell you the milk's gone sour and the honey's stolen." This quote asserts that the American dream--the promise that if one works hard, they can accomplish anything they want in America-- is a false reality. In many ways, *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences* also highlight the downfall of the American dream. In what way do these plays work to show that the American dream is harder to achieve than it seems? Explain your thinking via your five to seven-page response.

**Option 3: Augusten Burroughs once said,** "I, myself, am made entirely of flaws, stitched together with good intentions." This quote shows that sometimes a person's flaws destroy even the best of his plans. How does this quote relate to Willy Loman and Troy Maxson? What personal flaws does each character demonstrate and how specifically do those said flaws lead to their downfall? Explain your thinking via your five to seven-page response.

**Option 4:** Katherine Anne Porter once said, “The past is never where you think you left it.” Porter implies that one’s past can continue to influence him throughout life. How is this assertion proven true within *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences*? How do the pasts of the characters influence their present moments and potentially the future? Explain your thinking via your five to seven-page response.

### **Structuring your Paper**

The format of this paper is an essay, not a constructed response. This means that you will have a full introduction with attention-grabber, bridge and thesis. You should use the quote in the prompt as your attention-grabber quote and then just work in your bridge and thesis. Remember, this is not a five-paragraph essay, so your thesis does not necessarily have to have three separate claims, though it can.

When you move into the body of your essay, there are two ways you could organize it.

You can prove all your claims about one novel, and then move on to the next and focus just on that novel. However, this should not be one big paragraph. You will have to structure separate paragraphs for all the different examples you will use to prove your points.

The second option would be to start with a claim that you will prove in both novels. State the claim, prove it in the first novel, then transition to a new paragraph and prove the same claim within the second novel.

However, you set it up, remember that your paragraphs should start with a strong topic sentence that identifies the overall claim. Then you should prove that claim in one novel. When you move on to the next novel or the next claim, start a new paragraph. You can continue to do this throughout the paper until you’ve proven all of your points.

Because the structure where you move from one novel to the next is newer, I’ve included a graphic organizer and a sample essay that demonstrates that format for you. Remember, you should prove each of your points using exact text and novel references. Note: no outside research is necessary for you to complete these assignments. The essays should reflect your original thoughts. If you find it absolutely necessary to use an analysis aid for the purposes of understanding the novel, any idea you reference from an outside source should be noted with an in-text citation and included on a works cited page.

- Do not forget to work in transitional phrases and sentences at the end of each paragraph.
- Your paper should end with a strong conclusion that summarizes your main ideas and closes with a mirroring statement that reflects a take-away message related to your attention-grabber strategy.
- The rubric I will use to grade each of your essays is attached. I've also attached a sample essay that demonstrate one comparison organizational structure.

**Sample Question: Andrew Bernstein once said, “A hero has faced it all: he need not be undefeated, but he must be undaunted.” To what extent do characters within *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Separate Peace* adhere to this quote?**

### Sample Response

Andrew Bernstein once said, “A hero has faced it all: he need not be undefeated, but he must be undaunted.” In this quote, Bernstein expresses that a hero has often experienced many adversities and even failures, but when doing so, has never lost hope in himself, and in the world. This theory reigns true for the characters Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Phineas in *A Separate Peace*. Both Atticus and Phineas experience unimaginable tragedies, yet do not allow those experiences to consume them with hate. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus shows his heroism through his integrity and willingness to believe the best in people; while Phineas is the hero of *A Separate Peace* because he teaches Gene how to live at peace with himself. Atticus and Phineas both prove to be heroes because they remain optimistic, sincere, and loving, even in spite of the challenges thrown at them.

The most admirable and heroic thing about Atticus and Phineas are their ability to believe the best in people even though people have shown them their darker sides. Throughout the novel, Atticus proves that he will always give people the benefit of the doubt. The first example that proves this is when Scout comes home from school and tells him about her horrible day with

Miss Caroline. Atticus proves he is no “run of the mill man” through his reaction. In this situation, Atticus does not become a defensive parent who automatically jumps to defend his daughter, Scout. Instead, he thinks about what must have prompted Scout’s teacher to act in such a way. He tells Scout, ““First of all...if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” He then goes on to explain that Miss Caroline is an outsider and does not understand the ways of Maycomb. Instead of condemning Miss Caroline, Atticus has faith that she will react differently in the future as a result of her experience. Phineas shows this same type of trust in a much darker scenario.

Phineas holds to his dreams and belief in people, even after he experiences great tragedy. At the onset of the novel, it is no wonder that Phineas is such a happy character. After all, he is athletic, popular, and somewhat squirrely: he gets away with whatever he wants. However, it is surprising that Phineas can hold up this persona when he loses all that loves and cherishes—his athletic ability. After falling from the tree, Phineas is handicapped and must walk with a cane. One would assume that this would cause him depression, or to even become hostile towards sports in general. This assumption would be wrong. Phineas’s accident simply causes him to push his dreams of Olympic glory onto his “best friend,” Gene. He pushes Gene to become a better athlete, and in doing so, brings himself satisfaction. Though he does it secretly, Phineas also holds on to his dreams of going off to war. For months after his accident, Phineas wrote to military personnel, begging them to allow him to enlist. His disability did not make him give up on his dream. Near his death, Phineas even shows optimism for Gene’s character. After Phineas finds out that Gene purposely caused the fall, Phineas asks, “It was just some kind of blind impulse there...it wasn’t some kind of hate you’ve felt all along” (Knowles 183). Even after

Phineas knows the truth about what Gene did, he still wants to remain optimistic about the type of person Gene is. Phineas is so optimistic that he is unable to consider the fact that Gene would do something truly evil. To remain this positive under such hard circumstances is truly remarkable and heroic. Coinciding with their optimism is the sincerity both Atticus and Phineas demonstrate.

Another heroic quality Atticus possesses is his sincerity. Atticus does not put on a false face to please those around him. Unlike his sister Alexandra, he does not demonstrate a fake kindness towards those around him only to turn around and talk about them later. He does not choose to lie in any situation, and the kindness he extends to his children in public is the same behavior he shows in his own home. The sincerity of Atticus's character is shown many times in the novel. Atticus demonstrates kindness to Mrs. Dubose, even after she hurls insults at he and his children. Even after he leaves Mrs. Dubose, he only speaks kindly of her to his children, going so far as to regard her as the bravest person he ever knew. Perhaps the best example of Atticus's sincerity is demonstrated through the character Miss Maudie. At one point in the story, Miss Maudie is trying to explain to the children why their father is so much better than Boo's father. She tells them, "Atticus Finch is the same in his home as he is in the public streets." Here, Miss Maudie shows that Atticus is always sincere and consistent. He is true to himself regardless of where he is and in spite of who approves or disapproves. This type of sincerity is also demonstrated by Phineas.

Phineas is a very sincere person and as such, very trusting. Although mischievous at times, Phineas was always very honest and had the very best of intentions at heart. This quality was admired by all those around him—even adults. While most of the teachers at Devon school were described as being serious, critical, and even stuffy, all of them seemed to be relaxed

around Phineas. They often seemed refreshed by his genuine innocence and boyhood charm. Up until the accident, Phineas never had to be anything but himself. Gene discovered this fact when Phineas returned to school, pretending to feel better than he actually did. Gene contemplates Phineas's behavior and says, "Resting himself so that we could go in with a show of energy...but it was never a convincing show. Phineas was a poor deceiver, having had no practice" (104). In the previous scene, Gene finally acknowledges Phineas for who he was. Phineas did not have the capacity for deceiving anyone, as he was always honest and sincere. Phineas's own honesty may also be why he was so eager to believe Gene at the end of the story. After Gene tries to explain why he hurt Phineas, Phineas states, "It's okay because I understand and believe you" (183). Even after the inconceivable evil Gene demonstrated, Phineas trusted and forgave him. This sort of sincerity is rare, but so is the sort of faith that Atticus and Phineas demonstrate.

At the end of the novel, Atticus demonstrates a heroic faith in the goodness of other people, even after one man has tried to kill his children. Upon the realization that Bob Ewell intended to kill Scout and Jem, Atticus acknowledges that he couldn't even conceive of such an evil. However, that trauma does not cause him to change his heart. When he thinks that Jem killed Bob, he refuses to hide the truth. After the truth is uncovered, Atticus still has faith in the goodness people overall. At the end of the novel, Scout is describing a character in the story who was initially thought to be the villain. However, she summarizes the end of the novel by revealing that the character was a good person after all. Upon the revelation, Atticus states, "Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them." In this line, Atticus shows that he believes the best in people, even though he had just been shown the worst part of human nature. To remain undaunted in his faith in love after such an experience is truly heroic. To have undaunted

love and acceptance of others is what Lee advocates for her readers, and it is not so different from the message that Knowles also sends.

Phineas's nature is also one that Knowles feels will bring peace. According to John Knowles, Phineas is the ideal image of how men are to behave, at least those men who want to live lives of serenity. The overall message of the book is that regardless of whether or not there is a World War going on, men will always create wars within themselves, at least men who are unlike Phineas. At the end of the novel, Gene learns the ultimate life lesson from Phineas. Gene learns that to be at peace with himself, he must be at peace with others. If they want true peace, men cannot be consumed by power struggles and jealousy. At the end of the book, Gene conveys that most "wars" do not involve any kind of weaponry, but rather involve some sort of ignorance in the human heart (Knowles 193). Gene realizes that war occurs anytime someone is against another being. Gene states:

"Phineas never hated anyone...all of them, all except Phineas, constructed at infinite cost to themselves these...lines against the enemy they thought they saw across the frontier, this enemy who never attacked that way—if he ever attacked at all; if he was indeed the enemy" (Knowles 196).

The above line implies that people often create imaginary enemies, and in doing so, only harm themselves. However, like Atticus, Phineas was different; he refused to turn to hatred or resentment. This may be one reason Phineas had to die at the end of the novel. Knowles might be saying that it is impossible for men like Phineas to last in a world so consumed by hate. Either way, it took the loss of Phineas for Gene to realize what would bring peace to his own life—love.

Overall, Atticus and Phineas’s ability to stay optimistic, sincere, and loving in the face of adversity most certainly deemed them the heroes of their respective novels. Their behavior provided a compass for other characters in the novel and for readers themselves. By remaining hopeful after his accident and trusting after his betrayal, Phineas taught Gene how to live his own life more completely. Atticus’s optimism for others and his steadfast integrity enabled his children to stand up and do the right thing. Atticus never pretended to be anyone else, and he never expected the worst of people, even after Bob Ewell sought revenge in the lowest possible way. Clearly, these two men encompassed Bernstein’s definition of a hero. Atticus and Phineas were exposed to the darkest sides of human nature, and though they did not come out unscathed, they came out undaunted in their faith in themselves and their faith in others. If readers could hold on to the same kind of faith and integrity, perhaps the mockingbirds and the people of this world would have a lot more peace.

*(Note: the above paper was a PARTIAL sample to show you structural expectations. Your responses need to be longer.)*

**Grading Rubric—for each prompt, I will use the following rubric to grade you.**

Introduction	Opens quote attention-grabber which smoothly connects smoothly to the work being discussed. Bridge includes the titles and authors of the texts, and the paragraph	Is missing one of the previous requirements	Is missing 2 of the previous requirements	Is missing 3 of the previous requirements	No introduction evident.
--------------	--	---	---	---	--------------------------



	ends with a clear thesis statement.				
Topic Sentences	Each paragraph begins with a sentence that states what the paragraph is proving/what the topic is. Topic sentences stay in third person point of view. Topic sentences clearly identify the claims being made in the paragraphs.	1 mistake.	2 mistakes	3-5 mistakes.	More than 5 mistakes.
Supporting Details	Uses references to novel events to support the claim, utilizes exact text support in every body paragraph, and re-explains the text support to the overall argument. Ends with a transitional sentence, and stays focused throughout.	Paragraph does all of the previous things, but it does not use enough details to be considered, "thorough".	Paragraph is lacking one to two requirements.	Paragraph is lacking more than two requirements.	Body paragraph does not follow any of the requirements, or is not complete.
Conclusion	Re-states the thesis, highlights the main argument	Has all of the requirements, but does not include enough summary detail.	Missing 1 requirements	Missing 2-3 requirements	No conclusion

	for each thesis point, and ends with a “take-away message” that connects to attention-grabber technique, does not include any new information .				
Word Choice	Meaning of word choice is clear, it stays in third person point of view, demonstrates transition and flows smoothly. (under five errors in word choice)	6-8 errors in word choice	9-11 errors in word choice	12-15 or more errors in word choice	15 or more.
Grammar	Uses accurate punctuation , spelling, subject verb agreement and capitalization.( Less than 5 mistakes.)	6-10 errors in grammar	10-15 errors in grammar	15-20 errors.	More than 20 grammatical errors.
MLA Format	Paper is in Times New Roman, double-spaced, has correct running header,	2 mistakes	3 mistakes	4-5 mistakes	Over five

	correct first page header, works cited page, and title.				
Length/Thoroughness and Accuracy of analysis	Paper was a minimum of five pages and a maximum of seven. Writer considered the text in its entirety. Writer correctly analyzed the text and answer provided was accurate.	Paper was slightly less than five pages but writer still considered the text in its entirety and paper was finished. Writer correctly analyzed the text and answer provided was accurate.	Paper was 4 and half pages and/or contained some analysis inaccuracies.	Paper contained several inaccurate claims/answer or paper was less three pages	Paper is not finished or answer is completely inaccurate
Organization	Thoughts are organized. No information is repeated. Topic sentences and transition let reader know the relevance of ideas, etc. Paper stays focused on question and does not have any irrelevant thoughts or information	1-2 organizational mistake.	3 mistakes in organization.	4-5 mistakes in organization.	More than 5 organizational mistakes.
Works Cited and Outside Sources (if applicable only)	Student paraphrased ideas from outside sources in his/her own	2-3 errors	4 errors	5 errors	More than 5 errors or no outside sources were used/cited.

	words. Student included an in-text citation for ideas that came from outside sources. Student included an MLA formatted works cited page for any ideas that came from outside sources.				
--	--	--	--	--	--