

Summer Reading for English I Honors

The following questions will help you with your summer reading. Do not write answers to the questions, but keep them in mind as you read. When you complete the reading, you should be able to intelligently discuss the questions with a class group.

General points to remember for all reading:

- 1) **Read actively.** Don't be afraid to underline, highlight, check mark, star, or otherwise note any words, sentences, or paragraphs that strike you as particularly important or catch your attention in some way.
- 2) **Read for more than plot (what happened.)** Pay close attention to character development, setting and style (the author's use of language.)
- 3) **Stop reading** if a particular thought enters your mind about the book. Take time to "think" as well as "read."

Discussion Questions for A Separate Peace by John Knowles

1. Why the title? Clearly, it has thematic significance. What does Knowles mean by his use of "separate?" Is it ironic...or sincere? How so...or how not so?
2. Trace Gene's path to making his peace with Finny, which is the crux of the story. What are the steps in his process of making a "separate peace"?
3. Consider carefully the characters of Gene and Finny. Who is the more complex character and why? Try to determine their underlying motivations.
4. In what ways is this novel a coming-of-age story?
5. Gene survives WW II and returns to Devon. Do a little research on the web concerning the profile of young soldier returning from war. What challenges does he/she face?
6. Throughout the novel, Gene and Finny challenge what it means to be friends. How should a student today go about answering that question?

Discussion Questions for Alas, Babylon:

1. Before you read the novel, speak with relatives or friends about life in the United States in the 1950's and 60's. Specifically, speak to them about the threat of nuclear war and how everyday life in this country was affected by the Cold War. Ask them about fallout shelters, "duck and cover" drills in schools, NORAD alerts on TV, etc.
2. Alas, Babylon is considered one of the first books in a type of fiction known as post-apocalyptic literature. Make sure you can define the term post-apocalyptic. Can you think of any current examples of post-apocalyptic art forms?
3. What lessons about leadership can be learned from the novel? What, according to Pat Frank, are the qualities of a good leader? Do you agree? Would you add or subtract any qualities?
4. In Chapter 4, Helen points out that her children, and all children in the late 1950s, "have lived under the shadow of war--atomic war. For them the abnormal has become normal." Do children today live under a comparable shadow or shadows? If so, what are the possible consequences for them? In other words, what are some modern day "Alas Babylon" situations for the United States that today's children live under?
5. What are the conflicts (physical, moral, intellectual, and emotional) in *Alas, Babylon*?
6. The novel was written and set in the 1950s when equality between the sexes and races did not yet exist to any large degree. How would the novel be different if it were written today and set in more recent times when men and women and the different races are more nearly seen as equals?