

AP English Literature Final Project – Original Short Story, Flash Fiction, or Poetry

Project Goals

1. ASSIGNMENT – Create some original fiction or poetry that expresses your unique vision and voice and that represents your best skills and highest-quality efforts.
2. PURPOSE – In this original fiction or poetry, demonstrate a strong, fluid understanding of literary form, literary technique, theme, and specific authors based on our studies of imaginative literature this year.
3. DUE DATE – Bring a polished copy of your work to our class on Tuesday, May 28th, where you will share your work with our class. Also, submit your polished work to turnitin.com by class-time on Tuesday, May 28th.

Assignment: Either choose one of the three options listed below, or create a combination of works from two or all three of the options.

OPTION 1 – “WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW” ORIGINAL SHORT STORY

I. Introduction – Observations by Mark Twain, Flannery O’Connor, and Ernest Hemingway

“Write what you *know*.” —Mark Twain

“I write to *discover* what I know.” —Flannery O’Connor

“I found the greatest difficulty, aside from *knowing what you really felt*, rather than what you were *supposed* to feel, or had been *taught* to feel, was to put down *what really happened* in action: what the *actual things were* which produced the emotion that you experienced.” —Ernest Hemingway

“The hardest trade in the world is to do the writing of straight, honest prose about human beings. But there are ways you can train yourself. . . . When you walk into a room and you get a certain feeling or emotion, remember back until you *see exactly what it was* that gave you the emotion. Remember what *the noises and smells* were and what was *said*. Then write it down, making it clear so the *reader* will see it too and have *the same feeling* you had.” —Ernest Hemingway

II. Assignment

This year we have studied different ways in which fiction writers examine the human condition and create a meaningful experience for readers. Great literature portrays human beings in the midst of experiences that are meaningful and often difficult, and many writers have suggested that the only way to start writing great literature is to begin with one’s own genuine, lived experiences, or to “write what you know.” That is what I want you to do now.

What do you know from your experiences in this world? More specifically, which specific experiences have you had that can be useful for you in creating a fictional character?

Create a fictional character who is based at least partly on what you know from personal experience. Then write a story focusing on that character. Consider the following:

- What are your character’s important traits, including strengths and talents, motivations and desires, fears and worries, recurrent thoughts and feelings, shortcomings and “blind spots,” etc.?
- Moreover, what are your character’s important experiences, including relationships and connections with others, responsibilities and social roles, struggles and conflicts (both external and internal), hobbies and pastimes, significant memories of the past and hopes for the future, and any other important experiences with being in the world?

In your story, use what you have learned about fiction this year by writing an original short story in which you exercise your creativity, develop narrative technique, practice writing realistic dialogue, develop plot and characters, and perfect the use of quotation marks.

Minimum length: 2,000 words

In addition, you may want to incorporate one or more of the following options into your story:

1. Write a story in the style of one of this year's significant writers we have studied.
2. Write a story clearly inspired by one of the works we have studied this year.
3. Write a story in which you incorporate one or more of this year's works in a meaningful way.
4. In *Old School*, the narrator plagiarizes Susan Friedman's "Summer Dance" because the story seems to reveal a great deal of truth about the narrator himself. Write a story that is your own version of "Summer Dance"—i.e., an original story that is "truthful" and "revelatory" about who you are and the life you live in the same way that "Summer Dance" is truthful and revelatory about its author(s).
5. Write a story in which you portray a character who has a lot in common with you, but in which you use a narrative point of view that is different from your own point of view. (In other words, from an "outside" point of view, portray a character who is like yourself.)

EXAMPLE: Here is an original short story—authored by Mr. Robel—that is an example of "writing about what you *know*." It is also an example of option 5 above, which is writing from a point of view that is not your own. I hope you find it interesting: "[Splitting](#)" by [Patrick E. Robel](#). (Note: This story is over 5,000 words, which is *far longer* than yours needs to be.)

OPTION 2 – ORIGINAL WORKS OF FLASH FICTION

I. Introduction

How can a fiction writer pack the *greatest* amount of characterization, plot, and meaning into the *smallest* amount of space? The answer to this question is...through **flash fiction**!

Flash fiction is fiction that is extremely brief while still offering a fully-realized sense of character development, plot, and theme. One might say that the best flash fiction is amazingly *compressed*, packing a great deal of character development and meaning into a very small space. In this regard, one might say that great flash fiction is *like great poetry* in two respects: (1) every single word and detail in a flash fiction piece matters even more than it does in "normal" fiction, and (2) in a great flash fiction story, the author pays especially close attention to "form"—i.e., pays attention to *every dimension* of the story and the way all the story's dimensions *fit together* to form a unified whole. A work of flash fiction often creates one or more vivid "snapshots" that suggest a great deal more about the characters' lives and about the meaning of their experiences than might *first* meet the eye.

This year we have studied two works that could be considered *longer* flash fiction pieces: "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway and "Eveline" by James Joyce.

Here are some examples of excellent flash fiction, from shortest to longest:

1. [“Unnecessary Things” by Tatyana Tolstaya](#) (671 words)
2. [“Everything Is Green” by David Foster Wallace](#) (687 words)
3. [“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid](#) (689 words)
4. [“Smithereens” by Aleksandar Hemon](#) (791 words)
5. [“No One’s A Mystery” by Elizabeth Tallent](#) (921 words)
6. [“The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin](#) (1,017 words)
7. [“Like A Bowl in A China Shop” by Hillary Leichter](#) (1,156 words)
8. [“Hook” by Danielle McLaughlin](#) (1,285 words)
9. [“A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” by Ernest Hemingway](#) (1,500 words)

II. Assignment

Use what you have learned about fiction this year by writing 2 or more original flash fiction pieces in which you exercise your creativity, develop narrative technique, practice writing realistic dialogue, develop plot and characters, and perfect the use of quotation marks.

Minimum total length: 2,000 words

Here are some ideas (and there will be more to come):

1. Write an original flash fiction story in the style of one of the significant writers we’ve studied.
2. Write an original flash fiction story **clearly inspired** by one of the **works we have studied** this year.
3. Write an original flash fiction story in which you **incorporate** one or more of this year’s works in a meaningful way. (For example, [“Unnecessary Things” by Tatyana Tolstaya](#) uses an allusion to a short story we have read.)
4. In *Old School*, the narrator plagiarizes Susan Friedman’s “Summer Dance” because the story seems to reveal a great deal of truth about the narrator himself. Write an original flash fiction story that is your own version of “Summer Dance”—i.e., a narrative that is “truthful” and “revelatory” about who you are and the life you live in the same way that “Summer Dance” is truthful and revelatory about its author(s).
5. Write a story that uses a list or that uses the technique of listing. ([“Like A Bowl in A China Shop” by Hillary Leichter](#) is an example of a “list” story.)
6. Write a story from the point of view of a naïve or innocent narrator, in which the narrator’s naïveté or innocence is central to the story’s meaning and effect. ([“Hook” by Danielle McLaughlin](#) is an example of a story like this.)
7. Write a story that uses 2nd-person narrative point of view. ([“Hook” by Danielle McLaughlin](#) is an example of a story that uses this narrative POV.)
8. Write a story that focuses on a significant conversation or disagreement between two characters. (Stories that focus on a significant conversation or disagreement are [“Everything Is Green” by David Foster Wallace](#), [“No One’s A Mystery” by Elizabeth Tallent](#), and [“A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” by Ernest Hemingway](#).)
9. Write a story that employs the technique of dramatic monologue or that consists mainly of the speech of one character. ([“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid](#) is a story that uses this technique.)
10. Write a story in which irony is central to the story’s effect—either through an ironic “twist” at the story’s end, through an ironic misunderstanding on the part of a character, or both. ([“The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin](#) uses this technique in both ways.)
11. Write a story about a specific object or a specific place that takes on *particular significance*. (Three stories that use this technique are [“Unnecessary Things” by Tatyana Tolstaya](#), [“No One’s A Mystery” by Elizabeth Tallent](#) and [“Smithereens” by Aleksandar Hemon](#).)

OPTION 3 – ORIGINAL POETRY

This year we have also read a number of poems—poems from a variety of eras and poems in different forms. **Write some original poetry of your own, reflecting the forms and techniques we have studied. In your poems, incorporate a variety of poetic techniques, including metaphor, simile, conceit, alliteration/ assonance, rhythm, rhyme, irony, paradox, etc. Poems can range from personal to political, and should employ a variety of speakers.**

Minimum length: Write at least 5 substantial, complete poems (see the descriptions below)

From the following menu of choices, write 5 original poems that represent your best creative work.

Choices (examples to follow):

1. In *Old School*, the narrator writes a poem about a fire-fighter that he decides not to submit to the writing contest because the poem is truthful and revelatory of who he really is and what his life is really like. (Instead he submits an elk-hunting poem entitled “Red Snow.”) **Write a poem that is your own version of the narrator’s fire-fighter poem—i.e., a poem that is “truthful” and “revelatory” about who you are and the life you live.**
2. **Write a poem either that responds to a poem or story by a major writer or that is inspired by a poem or story by a major writer.** Make sure that your original poem displays a close reading and understanding of the original work.
Open this link to read [Examples of Poems that Respond to \(or Are Inspired by\) Other Poems.](#)
3. Mark Strand said that “A poem may be . . . the ghost within every experience that wishes it could be seen or felt, acknowledged as a kind of meaning.” **Write a poem that focuses on a significant, memorable experience and that “captures” this experience, bringing it to life as fully and powerfully as possible.**
Open this link to read [Examples of Poems that Bring to Life a Significant Experience.](#)
4. **Write a villanelle**, which is a French verse form consisting of five three-line stanzas and a final quatrain, with the first and third lines of the first stanza repeating alternately in the following stanzas. These two refrain lines form the final couplet in the quatrain. Note: Dylan Thomas’ “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” is perhaps the most famous example of a villanelle.
Open this link to read [Examples of Villanelles.](#)
5. Wallace Stevens wrote, “The poet is the priest of the invisible.” **Write a poem in which you make visible or knowable a point-of-view or voice that is otherwise “invisible,” unknowable, or “unheard” by most people.**
Open this link to read [Examples of Poems that Make Visible or Knowable an Entity or Point-of-View that Is Usually Invisible, Unknowable, or Unheard.](#)
6. **Write a poem either about a person who is significantly different from you, OR from the point-of-view of a person who is significantly different from you.** Capture the person’s reality and/or point of view as accurately—and as compassionately—as possible.
7. **Write a free-verse poem about any subject important to you, and in your poem, powerfully capture your chosen experience, subject, or point of view without relying on regular rhythm and rhyme.**
Open this link to read [Examples of Free-Verse Poems.](#)
8. **Write a poem in the style of Walt Whitman.**

9. Write a poem that **captures the movement of your mind, awareness, or consciousness** through a specific experience or sequence of moments.

Open this link to read [Examples of Poems that Capture the Movement of One's Mind, Awareness, or Consciousness](#).

10. Write a poem that focuses on **an abstract quality, concept, or emotion** and makes this subject concrete and understandable to the reader through **metaphor, personification, conceit, or imagery**.

Open this link to read [Examples of Poems that Capture an Abstract Quality, Concept, or Emotion](#).

11. Imitation poem (inspired by the first line of a famous poem)

12. Other closed-form poems (sonnet, sestina, ballad)

13. Ode (a serious tribute to an inspirational person or entity)

14. Humorous Ode (a humorous tribute to an ordinary object)