

May 21, 2007

Dear AP English III student,

We look forward to having you as a student next year. As you move from Pre-AP to AP English, a knowledge of satire becomes more essential. This summer's satire assignment should help you succeed in both AP English III and AP English IV by sharpening your skills.

To begin the school year, you have a two-fold assignment over the summer.

- 1) Select and read a book from the TAYSHAS list. We will begin working with your selection on the first day of school.
- 2) Complete the summer satire assignment by Tuesday, Sept. 4.

The Summer Satire Assignment

- 1) Background material on satire is attached to this letter. Read this material carefully, highlighting the important points.
- 2) Read either Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (the preferred selection) or Catch-22 by Joseph Heller (the alternate selection).
- 3) Find four examples of satire from your novel. Copy the passage, give the chapter, and write a paragraph for each example. Within the paragraph, you should clearly explain the object of the satire and the point the author is making through the satire. This work must be typed. Use an easy-to-read font and 12 point type.
- 4) Watch a satiric movie. Some options would be Dr. Strangelove, any Monty Python film, or any Christopher Guest film. There are many good movies from which to choose. As you watch the movie, take careful notes on examples of satire that you see. Be prepared to discuss and/or write about the movie.

If you have questions, contact us in room C214 (Bufkin) or C209B (Gilliam) or through e-mail kathy.bufkin@risd.org or miranda.gilliam@risd.org.

Enjoy your summer reading. See you in August.

Miranda Gilliam
AP English III

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AP English 3

Satire

Definition: Satire is a literary technique in which foolish ideas or customs are ridiculed for the purpose of improving society. Satire may be gently witty, mildly abusive, or bitterly critical. Short stories, poems, novels, essays, and plays all may be vehicles for satire. In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain satirizes false sentimentality in literature by parodying such excesses in the poetry of Emmeline Grangerford, which is written only about dead people. Huck comments sarcastically, “I reckoned that with her disposition she was having a better time in the graveyard.”

Satire

(from an out-of-adoption English 4 textbook)

Mixing humor with criticism may seem a little like trying to mix oil with water. Yet this is the kind of mixture that the satirist achieves. At the same time he is making us smile or laugh, he is telling us that something is wrong. He may even be pointing an accusing finger at *you*.

To understand how humor and criticism can be combined, consider your own experience. Have you ever been in an argument that suddenly disintegrated into laughter? If so, it probably happened because you and your opponent suddenly saw yourselves in a satirical light – you saw the ridiculousness of what you were arguing about, or you realized the absurdity of the argument itself and the way you were behaving. Or, when you have done something embarrassing and are busy criticizing yourself, has someone else ever pointed out the humor in what you have done? If so, that person has helped you to see yourself as a satirist might see you. Recognizing the humor, the incongruity, or the absurdity in an action which also deserves criticism is the essence of the satiric view. The satirist, master of this blend of criticism and humor, suggests reform, but he usually evokes a chuckle as well.

The word “satire” evolved from the Latin word *satura*, meaning “full” and also referring to a bowl of mixed fruits or a salad. As you read these selections, you may well picture the writers as salad makers, adding a pinch of this, some bits of that, and stirring the whole mixture into a highly seasoned delicacy.

Traditionally, satire was classified according to two basic types, named after the Roman satirists Horace and Juvenal. “Horatian” satire is light and amusing, whereas “Juvenalian” satire is bitter and shocking. But between these two extremes lies a vast range of attitudes; amusement and contempt may be blended in varying proportions. You might imagine these two qualities as the oil and the vinegar in a salad dressing, differing in proportion according to the chef’s taste.

We use the term “satire” to designate a distinct type of literature. However, unlike poems and short stories, which are called poems or stories according to the way they are put together, satires are so named because of the way the author treats his subject. Poems, stories, essays, novels, and plays may be satires, but they are still poems, stories, essays, novels, and plays. In other words, satire is a matter of *point of view* rather than form.

Like any other writer, the satirist has an infinite number of subjects at his disposal. As you read, you will see how the satirist’s tone will vary according to the

seriousness of his subject. For instance, a young girl's romantic silliness is suitable for treatment in the Horatian manner, whereas a social condition which permits people to suffer in abject poverty is appropriate for treatment in the Juvenalian manner. Politics and politicians are natural objects of satire of both kinds.

Jonathan Swift, the well-known satirist who wrote *Gulliver's Travels*, put some of his thoughts on satire into verse:

Perhaps I may allow, the Dean
Had too much Satyr in his Vein;
And seemed determined not to starve it,
Because no Age could more deserve it.
Yet, Malice never was his Aim;
He lash'd the Vice but spar'd the Name.
No Individual could resent,
Where thousands equally were meant.
His Satyr points at no Defect,
But what all Mortals may correct.

Swift says that the satirist should aim his satire where it will do the most good – at responsible parties and correctable faults. He demands, too, that satire not descend into petty backbiting or mudslinging.

If a satire is well done, if it really comes close to the truth about human beings and social systems, we can usually appreciate its meaning long after the specific person or group who inspired the satire is forgotten. Consider as an illustration the following statement by lawyer and author Clarence Darrow: “When I was a boy I was told that anyone could become President; I’m beginning to believe it.” Darrow had a specific president in mind but anyone familiar with the log-cabin tradition of democratic government who has seen someone other than his own favorite candidate elected can appreciate the ironic intent of Darrow’s remark without knowing exactly whom Darrow had in mind.

On the other hand, it is also true that the person who knows exactly what or whom the satirist has in mind is likely to enjoy and appreciate the satire more. This is particularly true of caricatures, in which the satirist focuses upon a specific person, exaggerating and distorting their features and characteristics. The newspapers are full of caricatures in the form of political cartoons. But unless one knows something about the object of the caricature, the humor is usually lost on him

Satire

from *A Glossary of Literary Terms*

Satire is the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation, or scorn. It differs from the *comic* in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself, while satire “derides”; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt existing outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual, or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation, or even the

whole race of man. The distinction between the comic and the satiric, however, is a sharp one only at its extremes.

Satire has usually been justified by those who practice it as a corrective of human vice and folly; Pope remarked that “those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous.” Its claim (not always borne out in the practice) has been to ridicule the failing rather than the individual, and to limit its ridicule to corrigible faults, excluding those for which a man is not responsible.