

NEW BEGINNING

The third quarter begins Monday (2/6). Everyone gets a fresh start and, hopefully, bad habits will atrophy in favor of beneficial and salubrious ones.

Changes...as always, there will be changes. Vocabulary will change slightly, current events have a new twist, our reading program has changed, and I have become an unintelligible (nothing new there) houseplant with a penchant for dirty laundry. Please keep apprised of information in the newsletter.



READING

DISCUSSION GROUPS

The second semester will focus on reading and discussing novels within small groups. Students (and parental units) will have a little time and wiggle room to alter choices and groupings, but by Monday (2/6) students need to have a copy of the novel they will be reading.

The choice of a novel is often a contentious and touchy issue. I do not wish to step on any toes or push a student into reading a subject matter they are not ready for or comfortable with. I emailed the list of novels and groups to families last Thursday (2/2). Please let me know if you have concerns or desires to switch novels as soon as possible. Your help, respect, and diligence are appreciated.



RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

[a repeat from last week]

Instead of short stories this semester we will be reading and discussing a longer piece of fiction. During the third quarter we will be reading The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The Rime will alternate weeks with our discussion novels. We will be starting next week, but a nice “heads-up” is always a good idea.

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is unique among Coleridge’s important works— unique in its intentionally archaic language (“Eftsoons his hand drops he”), its length, its bizarre moral narrative, its strange scholarly notes printed in small type in the margins, its thematic ambiguity, and the long Latin epigraph that begins it, concerning the multitude of unclassifiable “invisible creatures” that inhabit the world. Its peculiarities make it quite atypical of its era; it has little in common with other Romantic works. Rather, the scholarly notes, the epigraph, and the archaic language combine to produce the impression (intended by Coleridge, no doubt) that the “Rime” is a ballad of



ancient times, reprinted with explanatory notes for a new audience.

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is written in loose, short ballad stanzas usually either four or six lines long but, occasionally, as many as nine lines long. The meter is also somewhat loose, but odd lines are generally tetrameter, while even lines are generally trimeter. The rhymes generally alternate in an ABAB or ABABAB scheme, though again there are many exceptions. Many stanzas include couplets in this way—five-line stanzas, for example, are rhymed ABCCB, often with an internal rhyme in the first line, or ABAAB, without the internal rhyme.

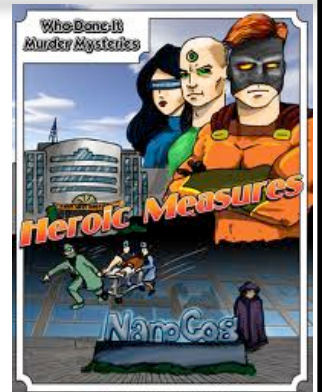
The best part, however, is that we will be reading and discussing a graphic novel version of the “Rime.” I will be posting each segment as we read and discuss it. Additionally, we will be using the help of Iron Maiden and others to help understand this classic piece of literature.

WRITING

MURDER MYSTERY

Our end of the semester culminating activity, a Murder Mystery party has been pushed back to this week. The story we chose (“A Heroic Death”), coupled with the complexity and timing of the moon and stars, combined with a desire to plan a meaningful celebration have caused us to push it to the longer Core day. AM’s murder mystery will occur on Wednesday (2/8) and PM’s on Thursday (2/9).

The task is to become the character...in dress (yes, a simple costume is needed), manner and speech (become the character), and background (“know” the character based on the information provided and interpret how s/he would be or act). Food donations are needed. We worked long and hard last semester and a little active sleuthing will be a refreshing change of pace for a couple of days. Please let me know if you can provide healthy snacks for the activity (crackers, cheese, fruit, vegetables, etc.)



PERSUASIVE WRITING

[a repeat from last week]

We will begin our unit focusing on persuasive writing. Initially, this was slated to be our “Storytelling” time, but the Flex students are participating in that onerous task—which frees us to complete our district mandated persuasive writing.

We will be working together to generate a list of controversial and current issues. Students will find a partner and choose a topic. Each partner will choose an opposing viewpoint on the subject to research and present.

Our first product will be a paper utilizing the five-paragraph form. We have done this in years past, but it is always a good idea to revisit our old friend—the five-paragraph essay. It provides a comfortable and clear format for the students to present their arguments.



The second product students will complete will be a debate. Students will debate their partner in front of the class. Judges will be drawn randomly from the audience (students), I will moderate, and we will poll the class after the debate to determine who was swayed by the arguments. There will be a format we will follow, but it is an entertaining process. There will not be “Springer” moments, but it will not exactly put the students to sleep.

You can help by assisting in the generation of debatable topics, helping with research, and aiding in the development of the paper and debate.



HISTORY CURRENT EVENT #9

The new format for current events is a cross between Jon Stewart’s “Daily Show”, Saturday Night Live’s news segment, and The Anchorman. Students still need to prepare a current event the day before they present, but the presentation style is group instead of individual.



As far as student preparation goes...it is similar to first semester. Students need to read a significant news item and summarize it. The summary can be a paragraph, bulleted list, or use the “who, when, where, & what” current event form. The “who, when, & where” can/should be copied from the article, but the “what” still needs to be paraphrased. Students still need to be able to locate the current event on the map and I still need a copy of the article. Students can staple the article to their current event summary or email me the article.

On the assigned day, students who have an article prepared will meet and practice in the hallway during reading time. Students need to be comfortable with the information in the news item otherwise the practice time is of little use. I do check the articles to assist and advise them. Students who are not prepared will present the next day.



The daily show group members have at least two anchors, a map/weather person, and several in-the-field reporters. Groups are free to assign other roles as well. The main purpose is still to present current events, but the style, format, and “other” elements are up to the daily show group. The daily show group practices the order of the presentations, transitions, and their theme song.

In years past, several groups have really gotten into the presentations. We have had mock commercials, “gossip”

corners, grooming advice, counselor moments, etc. Many students embrace the format while others yearn for the comfort and anonymity of just submitting the article. Regardless, it is a change that is needed to break up the format of current events.



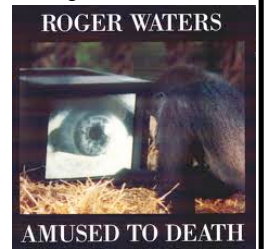
ANCIENT GREECE

The world marches on and so do we. Ancient Greece is our next topic of conversation and study. We will be reading and working through the chapters for the next several weeks. Students will be taking two quizzes on the text. The quizzes will coincide with the current event quizzes—two bird, one stone. The first quiz is next Friday (2/17) will include chapters 25-27 and the second quiz on Friday, March 2 will include chapters 28-31.

As per usual, we begin with the geography of Greece. Next Friday’s quiz will include a map portion with the major geographical features of the region. Later this week we will concentrate on the emergence of democracy in the region and the ascension of Athens and Sparta. Along the way I hope to reinforce good note-taking techniques and creating connections.

I am trying to provide a sense of parallels in history by constantly and continually asking what was going on in the world at the same time and how contributions in one civilization drifted into and affected others. Dates are somewhat irrelevant, but a sense of time is important. As an example...we discussed the fact that the Chinese in 500ce created paper and it took almost one thousand years for Europeans to adopt the technology. How and why did it take so long for the knowledge to cross the Silk Road? What did that mean for the civilizations along the road?

Our society is modeled significantly on the ideas of the Ancient Greeks—how and why? What aspects can we see in our modern society and are they important? Thomas Jefferson said, “An *informed citizenry* is the only true repository of the public will.” More recently, however, Al Gore has said, “The *well-informed citizenry* is in *danger* of becoming the ‘well-amused audience.’” Can they both be correct?



To end the pontification...I will simply say that Roger Waters created an entire album exploring his disillusionment with modern Western society, focusing specifically on the influence of television and the mass media. The album was inspired by the book Amusing Ourselves to Death, a critique of television and its related culture by Neil Postman. Amused to Death is a concept album. This one is organized loosely around the idea of a monkey randomly switching channels on a television, but explores numerous political and social themes, including critiques of the First Gulf War. Check it out if you have the opportunity.