

NOTE: Mr. Schneider has packets of this assignment in his office for students who register for AP Eng Lang during the summer. The only thing he does NOT have is copies of the memoir *An American Childhood*. Students need to buy their own copies.

OVERVIEW of SUMMER ASSIGNMENTS AP English Language and Composition

Do the assignments in THIS ORDER:

1. Read *Voice Lessons* handout and make the BOOKMARK ([Directions are on the handout.](#))
2. READ and annotate the article “To Fashion a Text”; then write about it in your JOURNAL (This will be the FIRST journal entry and it should be 2-3 pages long. (See questions* below)
3. READ and annotate *An American Childhood*
4. Write the JOURNAL as you read the memoir

* “To Fashion a Text” is Annie Dillard’s reflection on the process of writing her memoir, *An American Childhood*. Discuss the following in your journal and be sure to write in complete sentences:

- What is the difference between memoir and autobiography?
- Dillard says her memoir is about two things: what are they? Are you surprised? Explain.
- What did Dillard INCLUDE in the memoir and why? (See pp.143-153).
- What did she leave out? (See pp. 153-154) Why?
- What is her advice to memoir writers?
- What is Dillard’s argument about the value of non-fiction (as opposed to literary fiction and poetry)? Do you agree?
- According to Dillard, what impels the writer? How is writing a book like rearing children? Have you ever felt this way about anything you have written? Why or why not?

Summer 2010 Assignment AP English Language and Composition

Seoul International School
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Annie Dillard (1998)

<http://www.nuitblanche.com/imageElement/10857.jpg>

WELCOME TO “REALITY” ENGLISH!

We will be spending a substantial amount of time in the first quarter on the sub-genre of non-fiction known as the *memoir*. This summer you will read and study Annie Dillard’s *An American Childhood*, a classic example of this form. The text spans Dillard’s life from age 5 through high school. As you read, you will connect her experiences of coming of age with your own.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make sure you have:
 - ❖ A copy of Annie Dillard’s *An American Childhood*;
 - ❖ An A5 size notebook (148 x 210 mm) to be used as your summer journal;
 - ❖ Dark blue or black ink pens for writing in your journal;
 - ❖ Sticky notes and/or colored pens to annotate the text.

2. **Handwrite** ALL responses **IN** the JOURNAL using DARK BLUE or BLACK INK! (Typed pages will NOT be accepted!)
3. If the chapters are not numbered in your edition, number them (see my numbering on p. 2ff).
4. Do NOT leave this assignment to do the week before school starts.
5. **JOURNAL IS DUE ON MONDAY, AUG. 9 (first day of school).**
It counts as 10% of your Quarter 1 grade.

SUMMER READING AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

A. GENERAL: Reading and Annotating

As you read, use your sticky notes to mark passages **in Parts 1-3** (exclude Prologue and Epilogue) that stand out for their *skillful treatment** of:

- ❖ Places
- ❖ Dillard's parents
- ❖ people (other than parents)
- ❖ significant experiences

Skillful treatment* refers to interesting and effective use of **diction, detail, imagery, syntax and/or **tone** (hereafter these referred to as “**Voice Lessons**” or “**VL.**”)

If you are asked to **Focus** on a particular chapter, you are to annotate in MUCH MORE DETAIL than in the other chapters of the memoir. We will spend time in class discussing these chapters.

B. VOCABULARY: As you read, keep a list of VOCABULARY WORDS. I expect words to come from throughout the text, not just at the beginning. Devote a couple of pages in the back of your journal to this list. I expect to see at least **20 words**, with **definitions**, the **PAGE NUMBER** on which the word appears in the text, **the sentence** in which it appears (yes, copy it out) and **a sentence of your own on the subject of your OWN experience** in which you use the word correctly and with enough context that I know you understand the word.

C. JOURNAL RESPONSES: In addition to any other annotations you make (refer to section A above), write in response to the questions below for each section of the memoir. LABEL each response: Prologue 1 a) etc. Avoid plot summary! ANALYZE ideas and writing techniques!

1. Prologue (2 chapters):

- a) Describe the structure of the prologue; how is it organized?
- b) Write a page or so about a place you associate with your childhood, especially the topographical features.

- c) Write a page or so in which you begin “In _____ (year) when I was ____ (age) _____ (tell of some event that caused you to “wake up” to some sort of self-awareness about your surroundings, about life, anything!) Take your cue from Dillard.

2. Part I (12 chapters)

- a) In this section, we follow Dillard’s life from age 5-10 (1950-1955). Take note of Dillard’s comments about self-awareness and the interior life (chps. 1-2)
- b) How does Dillard portray her parents (chp. 3, 5, 6, 10)?
- c) Thoroughly analyze her portrayal of JoAnn Sheehy and the nuns (chps. 4-5) according to VL. How is Dillard playing around with point of view (specifically, her POV as a child vs. that of the adult who is telling the story in retrospect?
- d) **Focus** on chp. 7 (“The Alley”) and thoroughly annotate according to VL.
- e) Comment on the geography motif in chp. 8. What other connections (such as recurring motifs and emerging themes) do you notice in this chapter?
- f) **Focus** on chp. 9 (“A Chase”). What is the relationship between the “prologue” (paragraphs 1-2) and the rest of the chapter? Analyze the plot structure and Dillard’s use of suspense. What VL are most prominent? (Hint: examine her syntax.)
- g) In chp. 10, Dillard discusses the role of humor in her family’s life. She refers specifically to *The New Yorker*. Have a look at the online version (<http://www.newyorker.com/>) and click on “cartoons” (on the upper right hand part of the page). Read the current issue’s cartoons and make some generalizations about the type of humor expressed in them. Print out ONE *New Yorker* cartoon (from ANY issue; try finding one from the 1950s!) and paste it into your journal. Then explain what is humorous about it and why you liked it.
- h) Below is the original “Frog goes into a bank” joke (see chp. 10). Do you have a favorite joke? If so, what is it? What do Koreans find humorous? What do they laugh at?

A dog enters a Credit Union in the hopes of securing a low-interest home loan. During the interview, the loan officer, a Mr. Paddywack, asks the dog if he can produce any sort of collateral. After rummaging around a bit, the dog produces a small, porcelain object with a sort of handle and some decorative bits painted bright colors. Not sure how to proceed, Paddywack brings the object to his supervisor, who replies...

(The joke alludes to the children’s song, “This Old Man.”)

This old man, he played one
He played knick-knack on my thumb
With a knick-knack paddywhack,
Give your dog a bone
This old man came rolling home.

(+9 more verses)

"It's a knick-knack Paddywack, give the dog a loan!"

(next page)

- i) Note Dillard’s attention to detail in chp. 11. How does she characterize her grandmother (*oma*)? How is the theme of youth vs. age evident in this chapter?
- j) By chapter 12, Dillard is 10 years old and the year is 1955. What significant things does she write about in this chapter and what VL are most in evidence? What themes does she revisit? Why is this chapter an effective conclusion to Part I?

3. Part II (20 chapters)

- a) In chp. 1, Dillard says, “We children lived and breathed our history—our Pittsburg history, so crucial to the country’s story and so typical of it as well—without knowing or believing any of it.” Substitute “Seoul” for “Pittsburg” and finish the paragraph, writing about your understanding of “the air of history” in which you live.
- b) In chp. 2, Dillard writes about her love of reading and her experiences at the public library. How is this chapter interspersed with comments about race? Dillard mentions titles of books she loved to read. What are some of *your* favorite books?
- c) In chp. 3, Dillard describes dancing school and “boys.” How does this chapter compare to Part I, chp. 9 (“A Chase”)? What are the salient features of Dillard’s style that make her experience universal (“discovery” of the opposite sex and rituals of socialization)? What socio-economic class does Dillard belong to? What about you? When did *you* first “discover” the opposite sex? How does Korean society socialize its youth regarding relationships and eventual marriage? What are the expectations? What do you think of them?
- d) In chp. 4, Dillard’s father returns from his river trip. Comment on the effect of Dillard’s weaving this trip throughout the memoir. Just for fun: have a look at the trailer for *Night of the Living Dead*, in which Dillard’s father appeared briefly in 1968: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gUKvmOEGCU>
- e) **Focus** on chp. 5: analyze the tornado and the streetcar experiences according to VL. Comment on the structure of this chapter. What do tornadoes and streetcars have to do with each other? With “the inexpressible joy of children”? Find an image of the Bernini sculpture of Saint Teresa of Avila (search terms: Teresa Bernini), print it, paste it into your journal and explain the allusion to the saint at the end of this chapter.
- f) In chp. 6, Dillard focuses on her mother and her mother’s love of certain words and phrases (give some examples). Discuss Dillard’s characterization of her mother. Give some examples of interesting words and phrases that *you* like, either in English or Korean (please provide a translation).
- g) If you are unfamiliar with McCarthyism, see: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/arthur-miller/mccarthyism/484/>, and then explain why Dillard’s mother was so opposed to McCarthy. How does Dillard return at the end of the chapter to a thematic thread running throughout the memoir: being “awake”? Write a page about your attitude toward conformity. How are Koreans expected to “conform”? In what ways are you made to conform in your life? Is conformity necessarily a bad thing? Name one thing you oppose and explain why you oppose it.
- h) In chps. 7-8, Dillard returns to the power of reading. Analyze her portrayal of the effect of reading had on her life through her reading about the French and Indian

Wars. What was your favorite game as a child? Did you play primarily indoors or outdoors?

- i) In chp. 9, Dillard returns to several motifs introduced and explicated throughout the memoir to this point. What are they and why does she return to them now? What are her comments on the limits of memory? Do you agree?
- j) In chp. 10, Dillard discusses biblical language, specifically the idea of “Who is my neighbor?” In chp. 11 she tells us how she became interested in rocks. What is the effect of juxtaposing these “unrelated” chapters? Choose a passage from each chapter to analyze according to the appropriate VL and explain what it reveals about Dillard.
- k) In chp. 12, Dillard makes another “discovery” about herself. How is it related to her interest in her microscope?
- l) In chp. 13, Dillard returns to her theme of “awakening” and “being alive” in the context of describing a specific place, Paw Paw, West VA. Point out some good examples of VL and discuss them. What does she mean by “too much noticing”? Briefly discuss a place that has had an effect on *you*, that “woke you up” in some way.
- m) **Focus** on chp. 14. What are the important themes in this chapter? How does Dillard bring together the various motifs she has introduced previously and with what effect? Annotate closely the section on the Polyphemus moth. Find a picture of this kind of moth, print it and paste it in your journal. (If you don’t know who Polyphemus is, please see: <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/polyphemus.html>)
- n) In chp. 15, Dillard is 13 years old (1958) and is fascinated by science (Pasteur, Salk, Sputnik), the Panama Canal and inventions like the light bulb. Toward the end of the chapter, she reflects on her optimism as well as her awareness of aging. She alludes to a song sung by Ella Fitzgerald, one of the great jazz vocalists of all time. Listen to the song at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESQHBjnvkCc> and explain how Dillard was affected by it. What has been *your* experience with loss? Write a page about it.
- o) In chp. 16, Dillard’s grandfather dies. She returns to certain motifs that should by now be familiar to you. What are they and what is the effect of including them in a chapter about moving into *oma*’s house?
- p) In chp. 17, Dillard returns to the subject of books, many of which dealt with war since the 1950s was a period in which World War II was still fresh in everyone’s minds. How many of the books she mentions do you recognize (list them)? What are the books of *your* generation (2000-2010)? If war informed Dillard’s generation, what informs yours? Why does Dillard value books so much? Comment specifically on the last six paragraphs of the chapter. Since you read and studied *The Catcher in the Rye* in ninth grade, explain the allusion in the last sentence.
- q) In chp. 18, how is the dance at the Country Club a rite of passage for Dillard and others her age? Compare her portrayal of boys in this chapter to that of Part II, chp. 3. Point out some interesting uses of language and comment on their effectiveness.
- r) In chp. 19, Dillard returns to the subjects of boys and church. How does she relate these two very different subjects? (I hope you have noticed by now that she does this a lot!) What is the effect of the last paragraph in the chapter?
- s) In chp. 20, Dillard returns to the subject of her father and his boat. What is the emphasis this time? Why does the subject matter of this chapter form an effective conclusion to Part II? What is the effect of the last paragraph? In what ways has it

begun to strike *you* that adults (including parents) get some of the world “wrong”? Explain.

- t) Dixieland Jazz runs throughout the memoir. Read up on the subject at <http://www.jazzitude.com/histjazzage.htm> and listen to at least three different jazz groups that Dillard’s father would have been familiar with. List them. Start here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79xeGcBBdf4>

4. Part III (6 chapters)

- a) **Focus** on chp. 1: How does Dillard portray Andrew Carnegie and his philanthropy? Find a picture of Giacometti’s sculpture, “Man Walking,” print it and paste it in your journal. At age 16, how is Dillard affected by this sculpture? Do a detailed annotation of the “Man Walking” part of this chapter.
- b) In chps. 2-3 Dillard describes her awareness of herself as an adolescent. Analyze the VL she uses to portray her state of mind and her feelings at this crucial stage of life. Does anything about her experience resonate in your own life (you are now the same age she was in these chapters)?
- c) In chps. 4-6 Dillard describes the various ways she rebelled as an adolescent. Describe these in terms of the VL she uses to communicate this experience. Have you ever felt rebellious? Write about ONE rebellious thought or act you have had recently.

5. Epilogue (2 chapters):

- a) In chp. 1, how does Dillard manipulate point of view (from beginning to end), and with what effect?
- b) What important themes does she touch on in chp. 1? What important motifs recur here?
- c) In chp. 2, there are allusions to Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. You read this book in tenth grade. Explain the effect of these allusions.
- d) How is chp. 2 a fitting conclusion to her memoir? How does it parallel the prologue? Point out important VL and explain their effect.

6. **Wrap up:** Write a 2-page journal entry in which you discuss how Annie Dillard, who grew up in the 1950s, is not so much different from teenagers today. In what important ways is she most like teens of the 21st century? In what ways is she not? What connections did you make with your own life as you read Dillard’s memoir?