

Summer Reading – *My Life and Hard Times*

IB English Years 1 & 2

Ms. Sorensen & Mr. Esthus

This summer we celebrate one of Columbus's very own literary celebrities, humorist and cartoonist James Thurber! As part of the IB English curriculum, we will be exploring Thurber's acclaimed autobiography *My Life and Hard Times*.

"Widely hailed as one of the finest humorist of the twentieth century, James Thurber looks back at his own life growing up in Columbus, Ohio, with the same humor and sharp wit that defined his famous sketches and writings. In *My Life and Hard times*, first published in 1933, he recounts the delightful chaos and frustrations of family, boyhood, youth odd dogs, recalcitrant machinery, and the foibles of human nature." (barnesandnoble.com)

Annotation

We are firm believers in writing in books! You should annotate the text to mark your observations and reactions to the text – what surprises you? confuses you? upsets you? If you start to notice patterns in the text -- MARK 'EM! They will come in handy later! If at all possible, buy a copy of the books so that you can make it your own! (ISBN-13: 9780060933081)

If you borrow a book from the library, use post-it notes in the book to record your thoughts. You will need to bring a copy of the book to class during the first few months of school.

Assignment

After you read, spend some time to think critically about the prompts I have given you. For each prompt, write a response that demonstrates your understanding of the text. We are not requiring a specific length for these, but use the rubric as a guideline.

You will share your responses with us on Schoology when we return to school in the fall.



***My Life and Hard Times* Response Prompts**

After reading *My Life and Hard Times*, write thorough and well-supported responses to the following prompts. These topics will guide our discussion of the work at the beginning of the year. Your responses should be written in paragraph form.

Prompt 1

In "Preface to a Life," Thurber challenges the conventional expectations of the autobiography. What does he feel the autobiography can/cannot accomplish? Include quotes from the text in your explanation.

Prompt 2

In "Preface to a Life," Thurber argues, "To call [writers like him] "humorists," a loose-fitting and ugly word, is to miss the nature of their dilemma and the dilemma of their nature. The little wheels of their invention are set in motion by the damp hand of melancholy."

Thurber's life stories are humorous and on the surface may seem simplistic; however, many of these stories include commentary about society and human nature. Explain how this applies to at least two stories from the work. Include specific examples from the text in your explanation.

Prompt 3

What do you feel is Thurber's purpose for including "A Note at the End"? Choose a quote that you feel best sums up his argument. How does reading "A Note at the End" affect your understanding of the book as a whole?

Grading Criteria

Excellent/Good responses (A/B):

- answer all parts of the prompts.
- demonstrate independent interpretation and analysis.
- integrate and cite relevant quotes from the text to support claims.
- are well-organized, revised, and edited.

Adequate responses (C):

- answer all parts of the prompts.
- demonstrate some independent interpretation and analysis.
- integrate specific examples from the text to support claims.
- are well-organized, revised, and edited.

Poor/Unacceptable responses (D/F):

- answer some parts of the prompts.
- summarize the text or rely on outside resources.
- are based on vague claims and/or include generalizations about the text.
- are poorly-organized and contain errors in language mechanics and usage.