Independent Reading—2nd Quarter Prompts

You will be given 60 minutes to write an in-class essay on your choice novel. You may use your novel, annotations, and an outline. You may respond to any of the following prompts:

1. In retrospect, the reader often discovers that the first chapter of a novel or the opening scene of a drama introduces some of the major themes of the work. Write an essay about the first chapter of your novel in which you explain how it does so and how it shapes the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2. A recurring theme in literature is the classic war between a passion and responsibility. For instance, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with moral duty. Examine a character who confronts the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibili­ties. In a well-written essay show clearly the nature of the conflict, its effects upon the character, and its significance to the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

3. Some works of literature use the element of time in a distinct way. The chronological sequence of events may be altered, or time may be suspended or accelerated. Show how the author’s manipulation of time contributes to the effectiveness of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

4. Morally ambiguous characters – characters whose behavior discourages readers from identifying them as purely evil or purely good – are at the heart of many works of literature. Examine a morally ambiguous character who plays a pivotal role in your choice novel. Then write an essay in which you explain how the character can be viewed as morally ambiguous and why his or her moral ambiguity is significant to the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

5. Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers answers. Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.