May 2009

Dear Future English III Advanced Placement Students,

You have been selected as a member of the English III Advanced Placement course for the 2009-2010 school year. For your summer reading assignment, you will need to close read the following works by the first class meeting in August: *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas Foster, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy. **You need to read *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* first as it will set the stage for what you should be looking for as you read *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Road*.** Please note that any edition of the works is acceptable, and they can be purchased at any local bookstore or through the Mitty website. You may read used copies of these books; the Amazon.com link through the Mitty website can help you locate used copies.

***How to Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas Foster** provides answers to those age-old literary questions like: What does it mean when a fictional hero takes a journey? Shares a meal? Gets drenched in a sudden rain shower? Often, there is much more going on in a novel or poem than is readily visible on the surface -- a symbol, maybe, that remains elusive, or an unexpected twist on a character -- and there's that sneaking suspicion that the deeper meaning of a literary text keeps escaping you. In this practical and amusing guide to literature, Thomas C. Foster shows how easy and gratifying it is to unlock those hidden truths, and to discover a world where a road leads to a quest; a shared meal may signify a communion; and rain, whether cleansing or destructive, is never just rain. Ranging from major themes to literary models, narrative devices, and form, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* is the perfect companion for making your reading experience more enriching, satisfying, and fun.

***The Road* by Cormac McCarthy** is set in a post-apocalyptic blight of gray skies that drizzle ash, a world in which all matter of wildlife is extinct, starvation is not only prevalent but nearly all-encompassing, and marauding bands of cannibals roam the environment with pieces of human flesh stuck between their teeth. If this sounds oppressive and dispiriting, it is. Stealing across this horrific landscape are an unnamed man and his emaciated son, a boy probably around the age of ten. It is the love the father feels for his son, a love as deep and acute as his grief.

***The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck** is one of the best-known, most highly regarded works in American Literature. Set in the 1930s during the Great Depression, the novel tells the story of the Joads, an Oklahoma family that has taken to the road in search of a better life in California. Don't be confused by the novel's structure. Steinbeck intersperses the Joad story with chapters that comment directly and symbolically with the plight of dust bowl migrants and on the causes and consequences of a world in which the distance between the haves and the have-nots has grown too large. In the end, *The Grapes of Wrath* is both story and social commentary. Any good read of it will likely alter your understanding of this country and your place in it.

I encourage you to close read all three texts so that you will become more involved in these works and will be able to find and share your ideas about them more easily. You will be asked to take a test, to discuss, and to write about these books upon your return to school in the fall. If, by chance, you have already read any of these books, please reread them so that the details are fresh in your mind. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me either via email (bmadia@mitty.com) or via phone (408-342-4311). I look forward to working with you next year.

Sincerely,
Beth Madia