

May 15, 2009

English IV AP Students:

Welcome. I am looking forward to a great year with all of you.

The work begins this summer, and it takes the form of reading the following novels:

• ***Revolutionary Road* by Richard Yates (Vintage) ISBN-13: 978-0375708442**

April and Frank Wheeler are a young, ostensibly thriving couple living with their two children in a prosperous Connecticut suburb in the mid-1950s. However, the self-assured exterior masks a creeping frustration at their inability to feel fulfilled in their relationships or careers. Frank is mired in a well-paying but boring office job and April is a housewife still mourning the demise of her hoped-for acting career. Determined to identify themselves as superior to the mediocre sprawl of suburbanites who surround them, they decide to move to France where they will be better able to develop their true artistic sensibilities, free of the consumerist demands of capitalist America. As their relationship deteriorates into an endless cycle of squabbling, jealousy and recriminations, their trip and their dreams of self-fulfillment are thrown into jeopardy. Yates's incisive, moving, and often very funny prose weaves a tale that is at once a fascinating period piece and a prescient anticipation of the way we live now. The quiet desperation at thwarted dreams reverberates as much now as it did years ago. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, this novel conveys the exacting cost of chasing the American dream.

–*Amazon.com*

• ***A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving (Ballantine) ISBN: 0345361792**

A sprawling, Dickensian novel. When you are finished with it, some of you will say it's one of the best books you've read. Moving and funny. Tragic and comic. A story of faith, of love, of destiny.

A thorough familiarity with both of these is essential. The first and most important rule of this class is that you read the assigned books (more on that later this summer). These two works will provide the material for our initial discussions in the class. As well, both are potentially useful for the AP test. I encourage you to **mark the books** as you read so that you can find passages during discussion.

Two other notes: Don't watch the film of *Revolutionary Road* prior to reading the novel. Bring both books the first day of class.

If you find yourself with any questions this summer, you're welcome to email me. I would welcome your comments and questions.

I'm looking forward to the coming year. I hope you are too.

Sincerely,

Mick VanValkenburg