

APE Lit. & Comp. Independent Study Project, Spring 2011

For the Spring 2011 Independent Study Project, you will read a play and respond to it through four tasks on your Edublog. First, you must select a play to read. Read the following list; based on your interests and the information provided here (as well as any additional research you wish to conduct), make your selection and be prepared to turn in the title of the play you will be reading for this project. Your selected title is due Friday, March 4, 2011.

***Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams** (listed 1 time on the Q3 prompt—2000)

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof first heated up Broadway in 1955 with its gothic American story of brothers vying for their dying father's inheritance amid a whirlwind of sexuality, untethered in the person of Maggie the Cat. The play also daringly showcased the burden of sexuality repressed in the agony of her husband, Brick Pollitt.

***The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov** (listed 6 times on the Q3 prompt since 1971)

"How should one live?" is the fundamental question driving most of Chekhov's work, and it is very overtly laid bare in *The Cherry Orchard*. Should the aristocratic family in decline stick to owning their cherry orchard (representative of the grandiose trappings of Russian aristocracy), or give in to modern commercialization in order to survive? What is the value of tradition, and how many trees should one own? Chekhov will not answer these questions, but he poses them in most interesting ways. In addition to wise insights into such fundamental dilemmas, Chekhov also provides a lot of witty banter, and a great slice-of-life view at 19th century Russian high culture. But this is not just a Russian play or a 19th century play; its themes, questions, and prospective answers are relevant for individuals coping with society and history in any place, and at any time.

***Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller *** (listed 7 times on the Q3 prompt since 1986)

A tragedy about the differences between a New York family's dreams and the reality of their lives. The play is a scathing critique of the American Dream and of the competitive, materialistic American society of the late 1940s. The storyline features Willy Loman, an average guy who attempts to hide his averageness and failures behind delusions of grandeur as he strives to be a "success."

***Fences* by August Wilson *** (listed 5 times on the Q3 prompt since 2002)

Although *Fences* focuses on the African-American experience in its portrayal of a black family struggling to get by in 1950s Pittsburgh, the appeal of the play is universal. The conflict at the center of the play is one that could take place in any family.

***The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams *** (listed 8 times on the Q3 prompt since 1990)

The play revolves around a young man begrudgingly supporting the family his father has abandoned. It also features a painfully shy and slightly crippled sister character, whose preoccupation with a collection of glass animals draws her away from reality. Set against the backdrop of the Depression, the family struggles together with the past, the future, and one another.

***Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles *** (listed 6 times on the Q3 prompt since 1977)

This play has never been surpassed for the raw and terrible power with which its hero struggles to answer the eternal question, "Who am I?" The play, a story of a king who—acting entirely in ignorance—kills his father and marries his mother, unfolds with shattering power; we are helplessly carried along with Oedipus towards the final, horrific truth—as suspenseful as a detective mystery, yet with an outcome long ago determined by Fate.

***Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw #** (listed 3 times on the Q3 prompt since 2003)

This play tells the story of Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics (speech), who bets his friend that he can pass off a poor flower girl with a Cockney accent as a duchess by teaching her to speak with an upper class accent.

***Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* by Tom Stoppard #** (listed 7 times on the Q3 prompt since 1981)

The fabulously inventive tale of *Hamlet* as told from the worm's-eye view of the bewildered Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two minor characters in Shakespeare's play. In Tom Stoppard's best-known work, this Shakespearean Laurel and Hardy finally get a chance to take the lead role, but do so in a world where reality and illusion intermix, and where fate leads our two heroes to a tragic but inevitable end.

***A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams** (listed 8 times on the Q3 prompt since 1991)

Tennessee Williams's masterfully written drama explores the extremes of fantasy versus reality, the Old South versus the New South, and primitive desire versus civilized restraint.

**A play title with an asterisk beside it indicates the full text of the play can be found in the blue APE Lit. & Comp. anthology (Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense).*

#There are several copies of these plays available for checkout; see your teacher if you require a copy.