American Literature

Final Exam Study Guide

FORMAT

Section I: Identifications – 1 point each; multiple choice; read the quotation and answer the questions. You must be able to identify the passage and the author in order to answer the questions correctly.

Section II: Short Questions – 1 point each; multiple choice; read the question carefully and choose the best response.

Section III: Vocabulary – 1 point each; matching; match the term to the definition.

Section IV: Critical Reading and Analysis – 2 points each; multiple choice; read the identified passage and choose the best answer to each question.

Section V: Essay – 10 points; short essay; choose one of the essay prompts and write a paragraph that completely answers the questions within the prompt with accuracy and clarity.

MATERIAL

* Othello – William Shakespeare
  + Characters:
    - Othello – Moor or North-African descent, military leader for the Venetian (Venice, Italy) army (General), married to Desdemona (daughter of a Venetian Senator).
    - Iago – principal villain of the story, Venetian, Othello’s ensign, married to Emilia.
    - Desdemona – Venetian upper class, daughter of Brabantio (a senator), married to Othello.
    - Cassio – Florentine (Florence, Italy), Othello’s Lieutenant.
    - Emilia – Iago’s wife, Desdemona’s caretaker while in Cyprus.
    - Bianca – Cyprian prostitute, in-love with Cassio
    - Roderigo – Venetian, in-love with Desdemona, plots with Iago to destroy Cassio and Othello, betrayed by Iago.
    - Brabantio – Desdemona’s father, a Venetian senator
  + Plot:
    - Iago introduces the audience to his plot to take down Othello, citing that he was skipped over for a promotion and as a result wants revenge upon the general. He uses Roderigo to put his plan into action, getting Roderigo to tell Brabantio that his daughter has run off to marry Othello, a Moor.
    - Brabantio, angered by the news of his daughter’s marriage, rushes to see Othello to demand he be punished for enchanting Desdemona. When Othello is summoned, almost simultaneously, by the Duke, Brabantio accompanies him to meet with the Duke and charge Othello with marrying his daughter against her conscious will. He claims Othello has bewitched her somehow. The Duke calls Desdemona in, who confirms that she married Othello, but denies any wrong-doing and asserts that she loves him. Othello is then sent to Cyprus to fight the Turks. Desdemona plans to accompany him, as well as Iago and Emilia.
    - Once in Cyprus, news quickly spreads that a storm at sea destroyed the Turkish fleet and Othello and his men may celebrate an easily won victory. Othello also wishes to celebrate his yet unconsummated marriage. That night the whole city will become a large party.
    - Iago and Roderigo plan to get Cassio drunk so he will become belligerent. Then Roderigo will pick a fight with him and make him look bad in front of the other men. This will lead to his dismissal from Othello’s army. Iago’s plan works and Cassio is fired. Iago is promoted. Iago comforts a dismayed Cassio, but suggesting he get his position back by going through Desdemona. Cassio agrees to Iago’s plan.
    - Iago explains that he believes Othello (and Cassio) may have slept with his wife and he wants revenge. Therefore he will destroy the marriage of Othello and Desdemona, by using Cassio. His plan is that the now disgraced Cassio will ask Desdemona for her intervention with Othello, but unbeknownst to Cassio, Iago will start putting ideas in Othello’s head about Cassio and Desdemona having an affair. When Cassio appeals to Desdemona, Othello will think they are lovers.
    - Iago first puts the idea of an affair in Othello’s mind, but Othello tries to dismiss it. However, he keeps catching Cassio with Desdemona and she keeps defending him to Othello. He starts to become jealous and suspicious. Iago snatches several opportunities to manipulate the scene and make Othello think things that are not true. When Emilia finds Desdemona’s handkerchief and gives it to Iago, he hides it in Cassio’s bedroom and he finds it and uses it publicly. Othello becomes angry with Desdemona for losing the handkerchief and privately he assumes she gave it to Cassio. Iago also sets it up so Othello can spy on Iago and Cassio having a conversation about Desdemona (but it is really about Bianca) and Othello believes it confirms his suspicions.
    - Othello asks Iago to kill Cassio. Iago enlists Roderigo to do the deed, hoping that Cassio and Roderigo will kill each other, and then no one will know Iago’s role in the destruction of Othello. Roderigo is starting to suspect that Iago has tricked him and robbed him. Iago convinces him otherwise, at least temporarily. Roderigo attacks Cassio, but Cassio kills Roderigo. Iago stabs Cassio, but he does not kill him, though Cassio does not know it was Iago.
    - Finally, Othello kills Desdemona, after accusing her of adultery. She denies all wrongdoing but willingly submits to his murderous hands. Emilia bursts into the room while Desdemona is dying and hears her take the blame for it. Othello admits he killed her and Emilia tells him how wrong he is. The truth finally starts to come out.
    - In a final confrontation, everyone finds out the truth. Iago kills Emilia for telling everyone about his role in the destruction of Othello. Then he runs away, but is caught. He refuses to tell anyone why he did what he did. Othello is devastated and kills himself. Cassio survives and is promoted.
  + Major themes:
    - Race – There are many occasions where Othello is judged or treated differently because he is of African descent and not European. He is looked down on by Brabantio and is referred to by Iago as a variety of animalistic nicknames. The interracial marriage between Othello and Desdemona ends in disaster, not because it is interracial but because of the interference of others; however, Othello’s “blackness” is something that he attributes to his lack of faith in his wife, or in other words, because he is black, he fears that his wife will be more likely to cheat on him. Therefore, his own fears lead to his ultimate demise.
    - Gender – Desdemona is strong-willed prior to her marriage; she chooses to go against her father’s wishes and marry Othello. Also she insists on traveling with him and takes it upon herself to try to help Cassio find favor with Othello again. However, once married, she does become submissive to her husband – even to the point of claiming to have killed herself, when we know Othello murdered her. Emilia, on the other hand, openly disobeys her husband by telling everyone the truth about his scheming. She also speaks very openly about the idea of adultery being justifiable if the price is right.
* *The Great Gatsby* – F. Scott Fitzgerald
  + Characters:
    - Jay Gatsby (James Gatz) – the title character whose mysterious past and affluence make him a spectacle to the other rich people living on Long Island. His house, in West Egg, is often the place where everyone goes for lavish parties. Throughout the novel, the reader is given bits and pieces of his background in order to see how he became Gatsby. He grew up James Gatz, served in the military in WWI, spent some time at Oxford during his service, loved Daisy, worked for Dan Cody, made his fortune through bootlegging, and has built everything in his life for the purpose of winning the affection of Daisy.
    - Nick Carraway – the narrator who is also an active participant in the story. We see everything from his perspective. He is Daisy’s cousin and Gatsby’s neighbor. He comes from the Midwest and is, at first, very dazzled by the luxury of the New York lifestyle. However, after the death of Gatsby, he becomes disillusioned and recognizes the vanities of high society.
    - Daisy Buchanan – Daisy is Nick’s cousin and Gatsby is in love with her; however, she is married to Tom. She is selfish and vain, using all around her for her own entertainment or to bolster her own ego.
    - Tom Buchanan – old money, rich and powerful. Married to Daisy, Tom also has had several mistresses, including Myrtle Wilson. He is selfish, racist, and ruthless.
    - Jordan Baker – professional golfer, friends with Daisy, briefly dates Nick.
    - Myrtle Wilson – Tom’s mistress
    - Mr. Wilson – Myrtle’s husband, gas station owner.
    - Mr. Wolfshiem – shady character, friends with Gatsby, claims to have fixed the 1919 World Series
  + Plot:
    - Nick moves into the house on West Egg, next door to a mansion of mammoth proportions. He looks up his cousin, Daisy, and her husband, Tom Buchanan and pays them a visit on East Egg. There he meets Jordan Baker, a professional golfer.
    - Shortly after moving into his house, he notices the lavish weekend parties at the mansion next to him. He starts to hear the rumors about his neighbor, Jay Gatsby.
    - Tom takes Nick into the city one day and there Tom meets Myrtle, Tom’s mistress. He is a bit shocked by the openness of the affair and when Tom breaks Myrtle’s nose.
    - Nick is invited to Gatsby’s party and once there he notes the spectacles he witnesses: countless people of varying levels of wealth and privilege, music, drinking, dancing, etc. He runs into Jordan there and sticks by her side. Eventually he meets the man, himself, Gatsby.
    - Gatsby and Nick become friends quickly and Gatsby drives Nick into the city, where he meets Wolfshiem. Nick is not too fond of Gatsby’s work associates.
    - Gatsby shares with Nick his love of Daisy and asks Nick to invite her over. He does, and Gatsby and Daisy reconnect.
    - Tom starts to become suspicious that his wife and Gatsby are involved and starts to snoop around. He finds out that Gatsby has made his fortune through illegal activity and that Gatsby is, in fact, after his wife.
    - At a particularly awkward outing to New York, Tom confronts Gatsby about Daisy. Daisy, at first, says she loves Gatsby, but starts to backtrack and it soon becomes clear to everyone except Gatsby, that Daisy will never leave Tom.
    - On the way home from New York, Daisy is driving Gatsby’s car and hits Myrtle, killing her. Her husband recognizes the car, since Tom had driven it earlier that day, and confronts Tom, who immediately reveals that it is not his car, but he knows who it belongs to.
    - Mr. Wilson is convinced that Gatsby is the one who not only killed Myrtle but was having an affair with her, so he goes to Gatsby’s house and shoots him, killing Gatsby. Then he commits suicide.
    - Nick is mortified by the death of Gatsby, but even more so by the complete lack of persons to help plan the funeral and mourn for the man. Gatsby’s father, Mr. Gatz, shows up for the funeral and a random guest of the party-going scene, Owl Eyes, is the only other person to attend the funeral.
    - Nick is completely disillusioned and is shocked to see how easily Tom and Daisy move on with their lives and even Jordan, who he decides to break up with, has already gotten engaged to another man. Nick no longer wants to live in New York and presumably heads back to the Midwest.
  + Major Themes:
    - Old money V. New money:
      * Old Money = wealth and privilege passed on from one generation to the next. These people are well-connected politically and socially. They are typically well educated and marry within their class. They reside on East Egg.
      * New Money = wealth, sometimes excessive, but earned within one or two generations, not passed down. Wealthy enough to buy privilege, but their names don’t carry the same weight as the Old money folks. They reside on West Egg.
    - A Flawed Society – In this novel, we see through Nick’s eyes and with him, we are easily dazzled by the luxury of New York life, but underneath that shiny surface, lies a rotting, corrupt society. By the end of the novel, the reader, and Nick, is disgusted by the sad reality that society is not as glorious as it seems. People are selfish and careless. The rich get away with their bad behavior. And friendships only exist while there are things to be gained through them.
* *The Things They Carried* – Tim O’Brien
  + The Three Tim O’Briens
    - Author – real life, writer. Served in Vietnam, but the stories are not his reality
    - Narrator – 43 year old narrative voice, 20 years after Vietnam. Writes his stories and those of the other soldiers he knew in the war.
    - Character – 19 year old soldier in the Vietnam War.
  + Other soldiers to know:
    - Jimmy Cross – lieutenant, loved Martha, in charge of Alpha Company
    - Kiowa – Native American, Baptist. Carries a bible and a hatchet.
    - Curt Lemon – blown up after stepping on a grenade
    - Ted Lavender – used a lot of tranquilizers and marijuana. Shot in the head coming back from going to the bathroom.
    - Rat Kiley – medic, carried candy and comics
    - Strunk, Jensen, Bowker, Dobbins, Azar – all named soldiers in Alpha company
  + Stories to know:
    - “The Things They Carried”
    - “Love”
    - “Spin”
    - “On the Rainy River” (Honors)
    - “Friends” (Honors)
    - “Enemies” (Honors)
    - “How to Tell a True War Story” (Honors)
    - “The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong” (Honors)
    - “The Lives of the Dead” (Honors)
    - “Ambush” (Honors)
  + Plot:
    - A collection of short stories set before, during, and after the Vietnam War, O’Brien takes the reader through the journey of a group of young soldiers from the Alpha Company as they deal with the painful realities of war. Dealing with issues of the draft, life and death, love, loss, pain, killing, and survivor’s guilt, O’Brien shares details that give a reader a window from which they can experience the emotional toll war has on soldiers. Sometimes sad, sometimes funny, almost always poignant, the moments captured by O’Brien may be fictional, but have the essence and gritty realism of a true war story.
* “The Gettysburg Address” by Abraham Lincoln
  + A speech given in Gettysburg when Lincoln dedicated a memorial to the fallen Union soldiers of the Civil War.
  + He emphasizes the sacrifice made by the many who died so that our country could live.
* “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” by Pierce Ambrose
  + A short story about Peyton Farquar, a Confederate plantation owner who falls into a trap set by the Union army and attempts to blow up a bridge that is important to the Union. His punishment is death by hanging. The story takes place while he is on the platform, about to be hanged. As he falls, he thinks about his family. Then the story takes on a dream-like quality as the rope snaps and he falls into the river. He loosens his noose, dodges a few bullets, and swims to the far shore. He walks home and just as he is arriving at his front gate, the world goes blank and the reader is quickly pulled back to the platform where he is hanging and has died. The use of slightly off imagery (slow motion, enhanced vision, etc.) is what gives the reader the dream-like qualities of the story, but is also the clue that lets the reader know that the entire story is taking place within the dying mind of a hanged man.
* Short pieces by Mark Twain:
  + “Life on the Mississippi”
    - Non-fiction
    - Twain’s description of what life was like growing up in a port city along the Mississippi River. Life revolved around the river and the steamboats that utilized it to transport goods and people. The job of a steamboat captain is romanticized and glorified by the child’s perspective of young Twain.
  + “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”
    - A story within a story, the narrator begins by informing the reader that he is traveling and visits a man, at the prompting of a friend, who tells the story of a character named Jim Smiley who used to live in the area. Jim was a notorious gambler and bet on anything he could with anyone he could. Daniel, the frog, was the subject of many of his gambling ventures, but was one day foiled when a stranger put birdshot in Daniel’s mouth making it impossible for him to jump.
* “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin
  + Mrs. Mallard receives the news that her husband has been killed in a train accident. She retreats to the privacy of her bedroom, where she cries briefly for the death of her spouse. However, before long, her mourning ends and she realizes that her responsibilities as a wife are now over and she will have complete control over her own life, for the very first time. This newfound independence is overwhelming and appealing. She feels liberated and strong. As she descends the stairs to join her sister, the front door opens and her unwitting husband enters. She dies on the spot. The doctors claim it was “joy” that killed her – she was so happy to see him alive that the shock was too much for her weak heart. However, the reality is that it was her sudden loss that shocked her – the joy and elation she felt at the prospect of a free and independent life was plucked from her at the sight of her living husband. This is the shock that kills her.
  + This story was controversial and many did not want to publish it. Chopin’s works were even banned in some places at the time of her writing. However, today, her works are celebrated.
* “Civil Disobedience” by Henry David Thoreau
  + An essay by Thoreau that emphasizes the Transcendentalist view on man’s need to be independent of society, to do what IS right, even if it is not legal.
* “Walden Pond” by Henry David Thoreau
  + Excerpt from the longer work, Thoreau describes the concept of owning property and that a poet can extract more value from a piece of land than a farmer. Thoreau wrote this while living in the woods at Walden Pond for a year, in a cabin.
* “Nature” by Ralph Waldo Emerson
  + Emerson, the father of Transcendentalism, writes of the importance of a connection between man, God, and Nature (the Oversoul). He emphasizes that nature often reflects the emotion of the observer. And he famously calls himself a translucent eyeball.
* “Self-Reliance” by Ralph Waldo Emerson
  + An essay that focuses on the idea that man should be independent and free, to rely on one’s own conscience, not that of society.
* “Concord Hymn” by Ralph Waldo Emerson
  + A poem dedicated to the memorial at Concord, Massachusetts.
* “Old Ironsides” by Oliver Wendell Holmes
  + A poem about the USS Constitution (Old Ironsides), a ship that was set to be demolished. He compares it to a warrior and claims if it must be destroyed, it should be done so at sea, like a warrior dying in battle.
* “The Unknown Citizen” by WH Auden
  + A poem about the unknown citizen that is praised by society for being average in every way. Yet, the citizen is unknown because no one exists that fits the description.
* Poetry by Walt Whitman
  + “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”
  + “By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame”
  + “I Hear America Singing”
  + “A Noiseless Patient Spider”
* Poetry by Emily Dickinson
  + “Because I could not stop for Death”
  + “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died”
  + “There’s a certain Slant of light”
  + “My life closed twice before its close”
  + “The Soul selects her own Society”
  + “The Brain – is wider than the Sky”
  + “There is a solitude of space”
  + “Water, is taught by thirst”
* “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” by Flannery O’Connor
  + A short story in the style of the Southern Gothic, where a tramp, Mr. Shiftlet, comes to stay with an old lady, Lucynell Crater and her handicapped daughter, Lucynell Crater. He does some odd jobs on their farm, fixing the place up, while admiring the car that they have. The old Lady desperately wants a son-in-law, and makes a deal with him – if he marries her daughter, he can have the car; she will pay for the parts he needs to fix it up. He unhappily agrees and marries the daughter. However, while taking her on their honeymoon, he abandons her at a diner and drives off into a storm that may or may not be a tornado. The characters are not likeable, but are all somewhat pitiable. There is a grotesque quality to each of them and even their names are significant – Shiftlet is shifty, constantly on the move and never tied down, not even to a particular history. The Craters and literally stationary and are trying to draw Shiftlet in, to force him to stay with them.
* “Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan
  + This essay by author Amy Tan, is about her use of language and her many “Englishes.” She describes growing up in a bilingual household with Chinese parents and speaking both Chinese and English. She talks about the way she speaks English with her mother and family, and how it is more formal when she speaks with other writers or academics. She explains that she used to be embarrassed by her mother’s English, but now she celebrates it.
* Vocab:
  + Acrimony – bitterness or sharpness of temper, manner, or speech; hostility
  + Affinity – attraction for someone or something with which one feels a closeness or kinship
  + Ambivalent – having mixed, often opposing, feelings about something or someone; indecisive
  + Cessation – a stopping, either final or temporary
  + Emaciated – very thin or wasted away, especially from lack of nourishment; scrawny
  + Enclave – a distinct region or community enclosed within a larger territory
  + Engender – to bring into being, to produce
  + Exacerbate – to make more severe, bitter, or violent
  + Illicit – not allowed, improper, or unlawful
  + Indigenous – naturally living or growing in a certain area; native
  + Inexorable – not to be persuaded, stopped, or moved by entreaty or plea; relentless
  + Infatuated – filled with excessive, shallow, or foolish love or desire
  + Insatiable – never satisfied; greedy
  + Poignant – painfully moving, affecting, or touching
  + Proselytize – to persuade someone to convert to a faith, belief, or cause