

Guidelines for Major Works Data Sheets

Literary Period: Consult your golden nugget or the internet to see where this work falls on the literary timeline. Looking at the date of publication is a start, but you must go further than that. Many literary time periods overlap, so you must consider what the work is about and how it is written before you try to peg it into a particular literary period. What are the characteristics of the literary period and what is your rationale for placing the work in that period?

Biographical Information about the author: Look for important details from the author's life – not trivia. What influenced his/her writing? Bulleted items are fine.

Characteristics of the Genre: A work may belong to more than one genre. Provide definitions for the genres to which the work belongs. (You may copy definitions from handbooks of literary terms, online sources, etc. – I'm not going to worry about plagiarism here. This does not have to be in your own words, and you don't have to give credit for where you got the information.)

Plot Summary: This DOES have to be in your own words. Attach pages as needed. You will need this in the spring to help you review for the exam. Include as much significant detail as possible.

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Characters: Role in the story includes simple character descriptions, including their relationships to others. Arthur Dimmesdale was the minister who fathered Hester Prynne's child. His significance is that he was a central character who struggled with hidden guilt and sin. Adjectives to describe him might include: sensitive, tortured, hypocritical, guilty. You are required to include at least five, but I encourage you to not only include all major characters, but many minor ones. For most of the works you read this year, this will be a long list. When the AP exam rolls around, you cannot be fumbling on an essay trying to remember if it was Mr. Bumble or Mr. Brownlow who tried to aid Oliver. Flubbing names can cost major points. This will help you review in the spring. Take the time to make a complete list.

Setting: You must include time AND place. Be as specific as you can. You may not know the exact year(s) for the work, but you should be able to make a rough estimate. Mid-nineteenth century? Around 1850? 11th century? What cities or regions are used in the work? Remember setting also includes political, social, economic, and/or religious aspects of the environment as well. Consider various aspects of the setting and write down details about aspects that seem significant to a deeper understanding of the work.

Significance of the Opening Scene: Opening scenes usually provide important hints about the theme of a work. They may create tone or foreshadow future events. Best answers will clearly connect something in the opening chapter (or scene of a play) to the theme of the work. The answer is NOT, "This is where the author introduces the characters and gets the story going."

Significance of the Closing Scene: Same rules apply as for the opening scene. The answer will NOT be, "This is where things basically wound up and everything worked out. If Character A had not done Action B, then Result C would not have occurred." Instead consider the implications of the story's end.

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Point of View: Refers to who is telling a story, who is narrating it. Can be told in three main ways: first person, second person, third person. It is the angle of considering things, and often has impact on how the story, and what story, is told. Your job is to first identify the point(s) of view, but more importantly, to consider the implications.

Author's Purpose for Writing: The reason an author decides to write about a specific topic. Probably not arbitrary. Would YOU sit down to write a book without considering what you want to write about and why? Start with PIE: P=Persuade, I=Inform, E=Entertain. (add an S and you have Satirize, but that's essentially to persuade/inform, no?) Although it is a start, as AP students you are required to go beyond this simple response. About what is the author trying to persuade or inform? What is being satirized and why? Make your response specific to this work.

Symbols/Images/Motifs: Consider what recurs throughout the work and how it varies. For instance, are there instances of water? Is it always a liquid or do we see it as snow or fog? Is it in a lake, flowing from a tap? What kinds of meaning can we discern from the form the symbol/image/motif takes as well as the symbol/image/motif itself?

Possible Themes: Let's use fully stated themes, not general topics. Technically, "love" or "love vs. hate" is a theme. It's not a useful way to talk about theme in order to prepare for the AP exam. What was the author saying about love? Again using *The Scarlet Letter* as an example, "Guilt" is technically a correct description of a major theme of that novel. However, "unresolved guilt is a destructive force with the power to destroy body and soul" is a more useful way to talk about theme. A student who can write this sentence is closer to being ready to write an analytical essay. Put a lot of thought into this. You will not write "A" level essays until you discuss theme with insight. By next May, you will need to be able to read an essay prompt, select an appropriate novel, and identify an important theme in a matter of just minutes. Do NOT use study guides to help you. Sparknotes will not hold your hand through the AP exam. What was the author trying to say about society or human nature? Consider these possibilities from *Julius Caesar*: Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. There is a time for rebellion against a government. A powerful orator understands that emotion is a more powerful tool than logic. The uneducated masses are ruled by mob mentality rather than by morals or reason. A despotic ruler may be a better leader than a moral man who lacks an understanding of human weakness. A man's character may be judged by the way he treats those beneath him. --- Note: Students who write about theme effectively are risk takers. Your statement about theme should not be so risky that it seems ludicrous. Neither should it just state the obvious. A good theme will invite argument. Not everyone would necessarily agree that your statement is true or even that it was something the author was trying to suggest. Your statement should be an idea that you think you could support with details from the novel or play – something that would allow for meaty discussion. List as many themes as you can; fill the space if possible.

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Author's Style: Please do NOT copy this from another source. Develop your own ability to analyze style. Is the author descriptive and ornate? Formal and academic? Informal – even colloquial? Terse? Does he emphasize strong action verbs or use lots of descriptive adjectives? Does she use poetic language (lots of similes, metaphors, imagery, etc.?) Does inverted syntax (reversal of normal word order with subject-verb-object) make his writing formal and difficult to understand? Does she use mostly short, simple sentences or long, complex sentences with lots of adverbial clauses? Is she more abstract or concrete? How does the writer tend to develop characters? Are plots typically complex? Is the conflict typically internal or external? How does this author tend to resolve conflicts in his or her works? Does the writer tend to include allusions, symbols, or the or other literary devices/techniques? Style can include not only HOW the writer writes, but—when looking at multiple works by the same author—WHAT the writer tends to choose as subject matter. Select three or more style traits that characterize the work. (Note: An author's style is not necessarily static.)

Examples that illustrate style: For each style trait you listed, give an example. Quote it literally, include the page number of the excerpt, and provide a brief explanation as to how this example exhibits the trait.

Memorable Quotes: As you are reading the work, underline, highlight, scribble in the margin, use sticky notes to mark interesting spots. On the MWDS, list at least five important quotations from the work. (If there are more that you think are significant, please include them.) Look for brief quotations that provide a key to understanding characterization or the theme of the work. Do NOT pull quotes from some online study guide. (Using *The Scarlet Letter* as our example, you might select, "This rose-bush, by a strange choice, has been kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness . . . we shall not take upon us to determine." You may use ellipsis, but include enough of the quotation to recognize its significance.)

Significance of Quote: Significance is rarely related to plot summary or obvious details about a character. ("This quote shows that the character was sweet or had red hair or that the girl was going to get the guy in the end." Blech!) Better comments tie the quotation to the theme of the novel. Look for some symbolism or universal truth that the author was trying to illustrate. (For the quote listed above, you might comment, "Like the rose by the prison door, Hester is a woman who survives in an austere setting. There is a particular beauty about a rose or a woman who can thrive in such a harsh world.")