

Advanced Placement Major Works Data Sheet

Guidelines: Category by Category



For All Categories

- Write small but legibly.
- You may type this, if you like, using the file available on my website.
- Add notebook paper to the back of the MWDS to add information that would not fit in the boxes.



Historical information About the Period of Publication

- Look for important events in politics, religion, science, art – anything that helps you put the work in context.
 - Who were the political leaders in England and the U.S.?
 - Was it a time of war?
 - When you do a little research about the novel, do you find historical events that are important to understanding the novel?
 - Workers' rebellions?
 - Economic depression?
 - Industrial revolution?
- Bulleted items are fine.



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, especially if you have large handwriting.
- You will need this for review purposes.
- Include as much detail as possible.
(about 10 bulleted points)

Describe the 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 conversational?
 - Terse?
 - Does he/she emphasize strong action verbs or use lots of descriptive adjectives?
 - Does he/she use poetic language (lots of similes, metaphors, imagery, etc.?)
 - Does he/she use mostly short, simple sentences or long, complex sentences?
 - Is he/she more abstract or concrete?
- **Select 3 or more style traits that characterize the work.**



An Example that Illustrates Style

- For each style trait you listed, give two examples.
- Quote the text literally.

Quotes

- As you are reading the work, underline, highlight, scribble in the margin, use sticky notes to mark interesting spots.
- On the MWDS, list 5-7 important quotations from the work.
 - *Seven is safer. If I don't like a few of them, I can reward what you did well.*
 - Look for brief quotations that provide a key to understanding characterization or the theme of the work. Do this yourself. Do NOT pull quotes from some online study guide.
 - (From *The Scarlet Letter*, 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 for me 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 earlier about Hester Prynne, 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.”

Characters

- Role in the story includes simple character descriptions.
 - 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.
- Include about 5 characters.

Setting

- You must include time AND place.
- Be as specific as you can.
 - What cities or regions are used in the work?
 - **Describe** important estates, locations or houses.
- You may not know the exact year(s) for the setting of the work, but you should be able to make a rough estimate.

Symbols

- 3 – 5
- This is difficult for many students. Try to do it on your own, but if you really have trouble here, you may use sources like SparkNotes to get ideas.
- Don't skip the section, but don't fret over it either.
- Be sure to give a brief/clear explanation for each symbol, with *textual support*.



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.”



Old AP Questions

- List the years of past AP questions that might apply to this work. Give a brief description of which question you are indicating.
 - Ex: 2002 – moral ambiguity

Possible Theme(s) and Topics for Discussion

- 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?
 - “Guilt” is technically a correct description of a major theme of *The Scarlet Letter*.
 - “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.
- What was the author trying to say about society or human nature?
 - 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.