

**2016 Summer Reading for AP English Literature & Composition:**  
***A Mercy* by Toni Morrison**  
***Paradises Lost* by Ursula K. Le Guin**

“The truth against the world!”—Yes. Certainly. Fiction writers, at least in their braver moments, do desire the truth: to know it, speak it, serve it. But they go about it in a peculiar and devious way, which consists in inventing persons, places, and events which never did and never will exist or occur, and telling about these fictions in detail and at length and with a great deal of emotion, and then when they are done writing down this pack of lies, they say, There! That’s the truth!”

~Ursula K. Le Guin

*A Mercy* and *Paradises Lost* are set in fictional worlds both strange and strangely familiar. As you move through these narrative landscapes, be aware of your own experiences of disorientation and gradual acclimation. Consider how these works of historical and speculative fiction compel you to see truth dwelling within “lies,” the inescapably familiar embedded in the apparently alien.

As you read, maintain the following for each book:

1. A vocabulary list with definitions for all unfamiliar words (excluding slang and neologisms). You will be tested on vocabulary from these texts, so be vigilant in your list-keeping.
2. A comprehensive list of major and minor characters with a *brief* description of each (no more than one sentence).

After you finish reading, write a paragraph answering each of the prompts below. Each paragraph should contain supporting quotations from the text. Include in-text citations and a Works Cited page in MLA format. Identify your paragraphs by letter (A-H). Share the entire assignment, including lists and paragraphs, with me over Google Drive ([lcui@tarriers.org](mailto:lcui@tarriers.org)) by class time on the first day of school.

***A Mercy***

A. This novel depicts a society marked by various types of difference: race, gender, sexuality, legal status (free, enslaved, indentured), nationality/place of origin, religion, ability, and socioeconomic class, among others. Choose one axis of difference (you may choose one not listed above) and compare the novel’s depiction of this identity category with your own personal experience.

B. Each chapter is written from the point of view of a character. While only two characters are given a first-person voice, we see from almost every character’s perspective over the course of the novel. First, choose a subject or event that two characters perceive differently and discuss

what these differing perceptions reveal about the characters. Next, choose one character whose point of view we never receive and discuss why you think their perspective is excluded.

### ***Paradises Lost***

C. Many of the problems depicted in this novel are specific to life on a generation ship. Choose one of these problems. First, discuss how the problem arises, how characters try to address it, and what it reveals about the world of the novel. Second, reflect on what problems in our own society might correspond to this fictional problem.

D. Discuss the relationship between knowledge and power in this novel. What different forms of knowledge are depicted, and what kinds of power do they require and confer? Is power always directly related to knowledge? Is ignorance directly related to ineffectuality?

### **Comparison**

E. How does each novel reveal the “rules” of the world in which it is set? That is, how do you, as a reader, learn what this society looks like, how human relationships are structured, how things work?

F. Each novel relies on a central allusion to John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost*, which depicts the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden. At which moments does each novel allude to this story? In what ways does each feature a “paradise,” and in what ways does each depict a “fall”?

G. In each novel, love and desire come loaded with specific norms and expectations. In what ways do love and desire drive the plot in these novels? When do they become a fulcrum for conflict and violence, and when do they foster joy and possibility?

H. Write about an aspect of each novel that questions A-G did not give you a chance to discuss. You may choose a theme, a particular moment, an aspect of the author’s style, a connection to the present day, or anything else from your reading that intrigued you.