

## BRITISH LITERATURE:

Please investigate the following novels and select ONE to read over the summer. While films exist for some of these titles, they are NOT consistent with the stories from which they drew their inspiration. In fact, they are more likely to interfere with than improve your understanding of the text and they will RUIN EVERYTHING. Please refrain from viewing any movie adaptations until you have completed the book.

- *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro  
A dystopian novel following the lives of three boarding school students.
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, Mark Haddon  
A mystery relating the investigative exploits of a 15-year old boy.
- *Atonement*, Ian McEwan  
A war drama exploring the consequences of one girl's half-innocent mistake (challenge text).

We will be spending a lot of time with the classics in the year ahead. This summer, however, I'm interested in your thoughts on and experience with some contemporary British fiction and its more experimental storytelling techniques. Your impressions will, in turn, fuel our discussion about the evolution of narrative, the universality of themes, and the legacy of Britain's literary canon.

### Background

All of these novels engage the concept of "unreliable narration." An unreliable narrator is one who lacks credibility. He is, to put it plainly, a dubious source of information.

There are any number of reasons why a narrator might be unreliable. She may be depending on memory to reconstruct events. She may lack crucial information. She may withhold significant detail, provide inconsistent testimony, or demonstrate morally ambiguous behavior that triggers the reader's skepticism. Whatever the cause, though, this narrator fails to persuade us that *her* interpretation of events can be trusted.

Why would a writer authorize such a person to tell his story? Well, unreliable narrators create a whole lot of tension. But they also provoke us to examine our assumptions about *truth*, *memory*, and *story*. Unreliable narration compels readers to question the idea that fiction is entirely separate from life. We are all, to some extent, unreliable narrators when it comes to our own experiences. We all tell stories that deliberately or inadvertently fictionalize, exaggerate, or omit aspects of our lives.

As you read your chosen text, think about the following questions:

- How does the narrator demonstrate his or her unreliability?
- What details exist in the story to provoke suspicion?
- What is the difference between truth and perspective?
- What are some situations where one's perspective can affect what is true or real?
- How do we draw the line between truth and invention? How do we tell stories about ourselves in the 21st century—and are these stories grounded in truth or invention?

## Assignment

Please complete *both* of the tasks outlined below. The first task requires you to log your reading response as you progress through the novel. The second task asks you to design and “update” a fictional social media account for the book’s narrator. Each social media update should correspond to one of your reading response entries.

You’ll need to keep a running document for these tasks. I suggest using Google slides or a Google Doc, with each slide or entry alternating between journal response and social media updates. Be ready to share your narrator’s social media updates and turn in your journal response logs when class starts in the fall!

### Task #1: Journal Response

Your journal response document should include a minimum of 10 entries. Each entry needs to convey the following material ...

- ✓ Date
- ✓ Pages or chapters read
- ✓ Brief summary of content
- ✓ Response

In your response, consider making predictions, analyzing developments, asking questions, or articulating connections between what you have read and various alternative contexts (other stories, personal experience, or real world events for example).

Here’s an example of how you might complete a single journal entry/slide:


<b>7/15</b> <b>Yertle the Turtle</b> <b>Dr. Seuss</b>	<b>Slide #1</b>  Pgs. 1 - 5
<u>Summary:</u> Yertle the Turtle is introduced as the king of the pond. One day he surveys his domain and, despite the contentment of his turtle subjects, decides he needs to expand it. He reasons that he can increase his greatness simply by increasing his altitude: "If I could sit high, how much greater I'd be!"  "What a king! I'd be ruler of all I could see!" In order to accomplish this goal, he demands that his subordinates pile themselves up, one on top of the other, in order to elevate his throne. From this vantage, he can see more of the surrounding landscape—and in his mind, seeing what is beneath him is equivalent to possessing it.	
<u>Response:</u> Having read similar stories focusing on power-hungry monarchs, I anticipate that things won't end well for Yertle. His wealth, self-importance, and disregard for the lives of others reminds me of General Zaroff from "The Most Dangerous Game." Both characters think they are superior to other members of their species. Yertle also shows excessive pride, which of course led to the downfall of such dramatic characters as Oedipus, Julius Caesar, and Victor Frankenstein. In their respective stories, each of these characters were deposed from positions of power and authority because they overstepped their bounds and succumbed to the fatal flaw of hubris. In the same way, I predict that Yertle will fall from his high and mighty throne. Will he suffer some sort of humiliation on the way down? I think this would be appropriate.	

**Task #2: Character Social Media Account**


Ignore the fact that social media platforms like Instagram don't exist in the world of your novel. Now imagine your narrator maintaining an Instagram account. For each journal entry that you draft, add a relevant update to that narrator's account. This update must include at least one image, one caption or status remark, and a few comments from your narrator's online "friends." Feel free to draw, screenshot, or photograph your own scene for the image—just make sure that the image is relevant to the story and its caption is consistent with the voice of your narrator.

Here is an examples of how you might complete a social media entry/slide:

**7/23** **Slide #2**  
**Yertle the Turtle**  
**Dr. Seuss**



**turtlepower** It is clean. It is neat. The water is warm. There is plenty to eat.  
**SeussFan96** So pretty!  
**turtlepower** wait till you see my new throne, tho



**turtlepower** One of my personal heros. :)  
**Rnixon** Noice!!!  
**SubordinateTurtle** please get off my neck.

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Below are two more examples to inform your slide progression. Be creative! I look forward to seeing your work and discussing your interpretations of the book in August!

**7/29** **Slide #3**  
**Yertle the Turtle**  
**Dr. Seuss** Pgs. 6 - 7

**Summary:**

Yertle claims that he is the ruler of all kinds of unimpressive things: a cow, a mule, a blueberry bush, a cat. He is interrupted, however, by a long-suffering turtle at the bottom of the tower. This turtle, named Mack, politely advocates for his fellow subordinates by informing the king that they are in great pain. Yertle is indifferent to their plight. He silences Mack and intimidates the rest of his subjects into piling more of themselves beneath his throne. This pleases him until he notices that the rising moon "dares to be higher than Yertle the King!"

**Response:**

Yertle's pride is extravagant and ironic. This is because the things that he congratulates himself on possessing -- like bushes and livestock -- are completely unremarkable. It's easy to laugh at his arrogance in this context. His lack of compassion for the suffering populace, on the other hand, is pretty disturbing. How did he get this way? Is there any backstory on Yertle's formative years? What led him to develop such a toxic sense of entitlement? Has he always been a tyrant or did some significant event in his life catalyze his descent into cruelty?

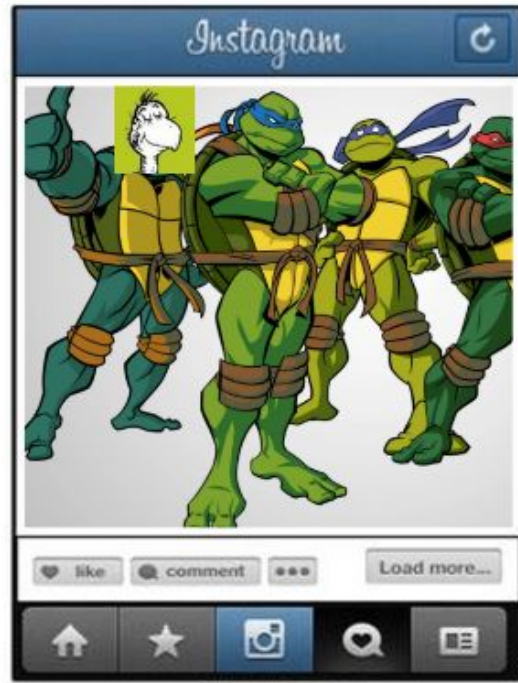
This part of the text also made me think that Yertle is delusional. He's invented a version of himself that suggests he is far more powerful than he really is. There's just a total disconnect between what he to be true and what is true. He insists that he is a great ruler of an extraordinary domain, for example, but the truth is that he is an insignificant bully presiding over a modest pool of water.

7/15

Slide #4

**Yertle the Turtle**

Dr. Seuss



**turtlepower** I am the English empire of all Turtle-dom!!!  
**3rdfromthebottom** my back hurts  
**turtlepower** SILENCE!

**turtlepower** chillin' with my homies.  
**BewareTheIdsOfMarch** That's not you.  
**turtlepower** lol. Yeah it is. I been working out.  
**BewareTheIdsOfMarch** You just photoshopped your face onto Michelangelo's body.  
**turtlepower** ... no i didn't

Below is a copy of the InstaGram template I used. Or Google “social media templates” for other app options. You can screenshot by pressing Command+Shift+4 and cropping the image.



Another famous British poet is George Gordon Byron. His journey to the Near East in 1809 inspired several of his poems, especially "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", whose publication made him immediately popular. In 1823 he joined the Greeks in the fight for liberty against the Turks, and died there of fever at the age of 36. Some of his poems were full of dramatic, romantic and sometimes deeply moving lyricism, others were sentimental, still others full of satire and sarcasm. English literature, body of written works produced in the English language by inhabitants of the British Isles from the 7th century to the present. { "188217": { "url": "/art/English-literature", "shareUrl": "https://www.britannica.com/art/English-literature", "title": "English literature", "documentGroup": "TOPIC PAGINATED LARGE", "gaExtraDimensions": {"3": "false"} } }. Contents. English literature. Article. Media.