

## Ninth Grade Summer Reading Assignment: *The Maltese Falcon*

### ***Due Dates:***

- This writing assignment will be due on the second Monday of the school year.
- Test – the first Monday after we return

### ***Directions:***

1. Read and enjoy the book. Yes, there is a movie, and yes, it is different from the novel, so please make sure the information you use comes from the book. It is an Honor Code violation for you to watch the movie instead of doing the required reading. Remember, too, that you will be TESTED on it the first Monday after we return.
2. Write a one page summary of the plot. This should be in complete sentences. Use a bulleted or numbered format (like this handout, for example). Though it does not need to be typed, your summary should be a clean copy and should be proofread for errors.
3. Write a brief (SEVERAL SENTENCES) description of the following characters: Sam Spade, Brigid O'shaughnessey, Miles Archer, Effie Perrine, Caspar Gutman, Joel Cairo, Wilmer. After you've described the character (physical appearance, role in the story, connections to other characters, etc.), write a quotation from the book said by or about each character that illustrates your description. Punctuate and cite these in correct MLA format.
4. Read the definitions below and find two examples of each convention. Write out the quotes that exemplify the conventions completely, exactly as they appear in the book. Include page number.
5. As you read, continue to look for other examples of these conventions. Mark them in your book. Be prepared to discuss these other examples in class.
6. Think about what Hammett is saying about the theme of human nature. What kind of people are we, according to him? What drives us? You don't need to write anything about this, but you do need to be prepared to discuss this topic and offer examples from the text that support your argument.

### ***Definitions:***

Archetype: An archetype is a character type, symbol, plot, image, that is universal. In other words, it is recognizable to readers and used by writers across cultures and time periods. For example, the color black is associated with evil while white is associated with innocence and purity. *The Maltese Falcon* is a book that exemplifies several archetypes. Especially watch for and mark images of darkness / night time as you read.

Genre: The genre is the category into which a work can be classified. Genre labels are most commonly based on: time period in which the work was written (ex: 19<sup>th</sup> century literature), gender and / or nationality of the author (ex: British literature), format (ex: fiction, drama, poetry, etc.), topic (ex: mystery, romance, science fiction, etc.). *The Maltese Falcon* is a hard-boiled detective mystery novel, by Dashiell Hammett, an American author, published in 1939. All of those genre labels can be applied to the book at the same time, so it is twentieth century American fiction, specifically a hard boiled detective mystery novel.

Conventions: Conventions are the expectations a reader has for a particular genre. In a western, for example, readers expect gunfights and horse rides, among other things. In a mystery, readers expect some kind of a crime to be committed and a detective to solve that crime. The following is a list of conventions for hard-boiled detective fiction. You need to find two examples of each convention. Mark them in your book AND write it out on paper.

1. **The Viper-Like Temptress:** Also known as a “femme fatale” - beautiful but deadly. This woman uses her beauty and seductiveness to get what she wants from men. She often plays the innocent, helpless “damsel in distress” to manipulate men into doing things for her. She uses her body / looks / voice for her personal gain, regardless of the ethics involved. She doesn't care what happens to those she uses as long as she gets what she wants.

2. **Terse Dialogue / 1930s / 40's slang:** This means that often the dialogue is “short and sweet” – snappy, back and forth. Lots of slang is used. This includes words such as “heater” for guns and “dames” for women.
3. **Depictions of the Seedy Side of Life:** According to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, “seedy” means “worn and shabby, unkempt, disreputable,” and “squalid.” This kind of setting has been called the “harsh side of reality.” Seedy settings often include images of darkness, illegal or unhealthy behavior (drinking, for example), violence, interaction with criminals or other “unsavory” characters, and doing things that might be ethically questionable or downright illegal. Scenes often occur at night or in places that “decent” people would not hang out.
4. **Violence:** American detective stories tend to have a lot of violence – shootings, fist fights, etc. Look for examples of these.
5. **The Anti-hero:** This main character is the opposite of the traditional concept of a hero. He is not evil, but he’s not exactly moral or noble. He often straddles the line between good and bad, and even “bends” the law to get what he wants. He “works the system” so he is no “Knight in shining armor.” He is a tough guy, a loner, and he struggles between corruption and integrity, selfishness and unselfishness showing elements of all four. He has been called “smart-talking and hard-drinking.” However, though he may not be traditionally moral, he lives by his own strict moral code, which means he will do what he thinks is the “right thing,” at least according to him. He “brings justice to the weak and death to those who prey on them” no matter what it takes. To him, the ends justify the means, so he’ll do whatever it takes to bring that “justice.”

Remember – you may email me during the summer if you have questions.  
Dr. Katz – [fkatz@stratford.org](mailto:fkatz@stratford.org)

Have a great summer, and enjoy the novel! See you in August!