

The two books you will read this summer are completely different in tone, meaning that they will *feel* different to you as you read them. The first book is a collection of short stories broadly unified by their settings; the second book is a semi-autobiographical novel that is nothing like anything you have encountered before. You are not expected to **like** them: you *are* expected to read them, including introductions and afterwords. Please keep that in mind as you complete the following assignments.

## **Sherwood Anderson *Winesburg, Ohio***

Sherwood Anderson was a profoundly influential American author whose works influenced writers such as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck and Thomas Wolfe. His starkly realistic imagery and presentation of small-town American life is a broad commentary on urban America in the Modernist era (1890-1940) and the isolationism it created. Anderson's unconventional syntax, language usage, form, rhythm and plot help to further this theme in *Ohio* and throughout his works. Anderson also exhibits a profound dissatisfaction with language in that it often feels, when reading his works, that he couldn't quite find the right word to express a characteristic, a thought or a feeling. In fact, Anderson painstakingly edited all of his works prior to publication, indicating this was as much the truth.

There are several themes that run throughout *Ohio*; among these are 'the walking dead' (wherein the living are spiritually, mentally, emotionally or psychologically 'dead'), the denial of and uprising against American values, the basic human need for recognition on any level, building/destruction of community and Winesburg as microcosm of the universe. Select **one** of these themes and follow it throughout the book. **Indicate in your text** by marking out passages places where the theme is discussed or is evident.

When you have finished the collection, assess the passages you have marked out that follow your theme. Write a one-page response that discusses the impact this theme has on the text. Refer to and quote from your marked passages as needed. Remember: *a response is a reasoned, supported reaction to the text. It is **not** a plot summary, but instead, you questioning and evaluating the text based on your interpretations of events, characters, style, tone, etc.*

## **Knut Hamsun *Hunger***

A Norwegian novelist who gained international fame for his politics as much as for winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, Knut (pronounced k-*NOOT*) Hamsun wrote his groundbreaking novel *Hunger* (*Sult* in Norwegian) after his own experiences trying to make it as an author in turn-of-the-century Kristiania (now Oslo). What is different about this Modernist novel is that it is completely, utterly *plotless*. This is one of the things that makes it somewhat difficult to read, the other being the events that occur

therein. *Hunger* is, however, a richly rewarding text once you get the hang of what's going on. It is darkly comic, heavily symbolic, disturbing and yet, oddly moving. You will come to love and hate the protagonist. You will question his motivations. Most of all, you will ask yourself, "What's the point?" Believe me, so did he.

In the text, the protagonist often encounters the four (western) elements: fire, air, water and earth. He also, to varying degrees, encounters two additional (eastern) elements: wood and metal. As you read, mark out instances when these elements are present. Note the way in which they bear upon the narrative. Create a chart in which you follow the progress of these elements. Your chart may be a variation of the following, but must include page numbers of occurrences, action (short description of the involvement with the protagonist), and symbolic value (what the symbol is symbolising, such as water for tranquillity, water for life, etc.); include, as well, any notes on whether the symbol is repeated from earlier or alludes to (refers to) any instance previously in a broadly connected way:

Element	Page Number	Action	Symbolic Value	Repetition/Allusion
Water	46	The sea lulls him to sleep	Tranquillity	Pg.45: he stood like a solitary buoy
Fire				

Keep this chart with you as you continue to read. When you have finished the novel, choose the element that you feel had the highest level of symbolic involvement with the text, that which seemed to affect the protagonist in some way. Discuss in a one-page, typed response paper that element and what its function was within the text.

**All assignments are due the first day of class. There will be a 10% late penalty assessed for work not submitted on that day. I may choose to collect your books to check your comments and notations.**