



2026 – 2027 SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT

12th Grade

Mrs. Dick

AP Literature & Composition

READING REQUIREMENT

- *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck
- *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky

ASSIGNMENT

READ. Do not take this class if you are not self-motivated to read for both enjoyment and understanding. I'm serious — this is not a class to take if you are looking for shortcuts, a GPA boost, or the bare minimum. AP Literature is built around careful, thoughtful reading, and the students who succeed are the ones who are willing to spend real time with books.

Our goal in AP Literature is to actually know the books we read, so I hope you take the time to savor each one. Please write in your novels, but don't make annotations for the teacher – write them for you. If you like to write and circle and highlight throughout, do so. If you prefer to use Post It notes, do that instead. *When I flip through the pages in your books, they should look read.

(1) *Of Mice and Men*

This is a short novel (actually a novella), written in a simple style. Published in 1937, it does use language that could be considered offensive or racist – please read through that historical lens.

I recommend that you read the book twice – once straight through to just enjoy the story. Then pause to think. What do you want to explore about the book? The foreshadowing that you couldn't see until the end? The theme of loneliness vs. friendship? The importance of dreams? Something else? Pick your topic of analysis and then read the book a second time with that focus. Make notes for yourself so that you can participate in a round-table discussion about your topic in the first few days of class and write your first in-class essay.

(2) *Crime and Punishment*

Yes, I realize this is a thick book. With that in mind, I am not asking you to annotate it (as in, I'm not checking each page for written notes), but you should write notes for yourself that will be helpful to remember key elements of the novel (including literary elements, characterization, plot, setting, tone, and vocabulary).

- A. Start with some background reading (attached) that will give you some helpful assistance as you read. Please don't skip this – it will help. 😊
 - Character chart
 - “Names in Russia” and “Significance of Names in the Novel”
 - “About Fyodor Dostoyevsky”
 - “Introduction” notes

- B. **You will prepare to lead a group discussion on FOUR of the twelve questions** provided on the next page – the choice depends on your LAST NAME: A-K will choose from 1-6 and L-Z will choose from 7-12. Make notes in your book or on Post It notes and write out notes as needed. You will lead the discussion, so organize your thoughts in a way that you can speak well and with direct reference to the text (ie. “Let’s all look at the top of page 72...”)

DUE DATE

Bring both of your annotated books (with discussion notes) to the first day of class.

GRADING / EXPECTATIONS

1. Your books should show evidence of having been read: annotations, Post It notes,...
2. Your brain should hold evidence of having read the books: you need to be able to talk comfortably about the characters and plot, deeper elements of theme, and writing elements.
 - For *Of Mice and Men*, you will be expected to arrive in class ready to discuss your area of focus, support your ideas with details from the text, and use your notes to contribute meaningfully to a discussion and an in-class essay.
 - For *Crime and Punishment*, evaluation will focus on the quality of your preparation for discussion leadership. While formal annotation is not required, you should keep organized notes that help you track important literary elements, characterization, plot developments, setting, tone, and vocabulary. For your assigned questions, you will be assessed on how well you organize your ideas, reference specific passages, guide conversation, and demonstrate a strong understanding of the novel.

NEED HELP?

Contact Mrs. Dick at ldick@scamail.org if you have any questions about the assignment. Please note that due to summer travel, I may have limited access to school email during this time.

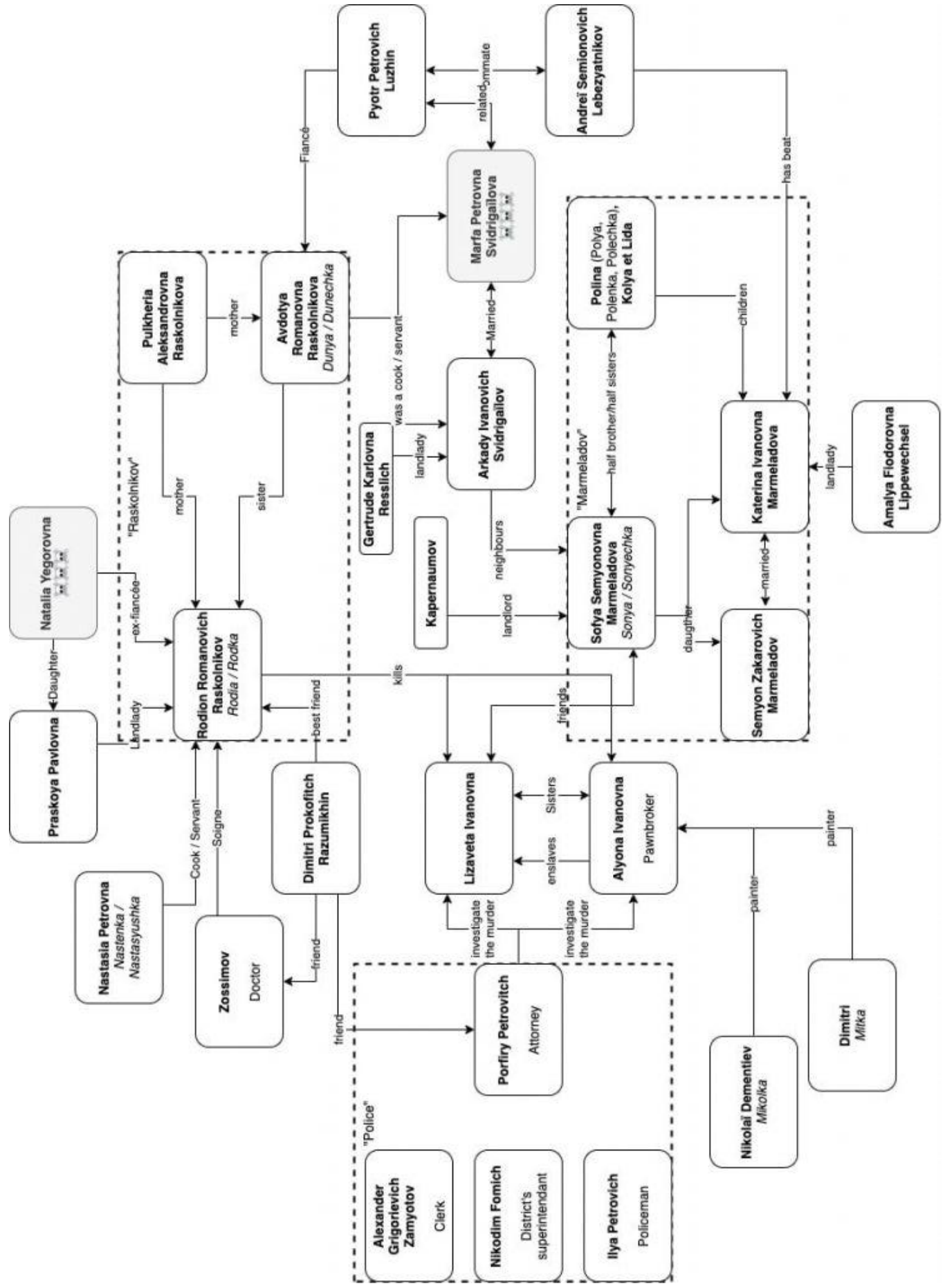
Crime and Punishment – Discussion Questions

If your last name starts with a letter between A–K, make notes in your book and prepare discussion points for FOUR of these questions:

- 1) How does Dostoyevsky achieve and sustain suspense in his novel? Which scenes strike you as being particularly suspenseful? How does he use description to enhance Roskolnikov's turmoil?
- 2) What role does chance play in the development of the novel? In which scenes does coincidence figure heavily in the outcome? Is Dostoyevsky interfering too much with the natural course of events in order to move his story along, or is he making a point about the randomness of life, free will, and divine intervention?
- 3) Compare the characters of Roskolnikov, Luzhin, and Svidrigailov. How is each of these men a "villain," and to what extent are they guilty? How does each man face his guilt, and how does each suffer for it?
- 4) Compare the major female characters: Sonya, Dunya, Katerina Ivanovna. Do you think they are well-rounded characters or stereotypes? How does each figure in Roskolnikov's actions?
- 5) The story of Lazarus appears a few times in the novel. Mark them in the text as you read and consider what might be the significance of this Biblical allusion—as it relates to Raskolnikov?
- 6) Discuss Roskolnikov's theory of the ordinary versus the extraordinary man. What is Dostoyevsky's attitude toward this theory? Can you think of modern-day examples of this theory put into practice?

If your last name starts with a letter between L – Z, make notes in your book and prepare discussion points for FOUR of these questions:

- 7) Razumikhin is one of the greatest friends in all of literature. What are those qualities of him that make him such a good friend to Raskolnikov?
- 8) Why does Roskolnikov reject his family's and Razumikhin's attempts at solace and comfort? Why, when they are at their most loving, does he have feelings of hatred for them? What is Dostoyevsky saying about guilt and conscience?
- 9) It has been said that *Crime and Punishment* offers a critique of what can happen to a person—Raskolnikov—that lives their life based purely on rationalism and intellect. If Raskolnikov represents rationalism and intellect, then what idea(s) does Sonya represent? And knowing the idea(s) she represents, why does Raskolnikov need Sonya so much?
- 10) How does setting—especially the oppressive atmosphere of St. Petersburg—reflect and influence Raskolnikov's psychological state? In what ways does Dostoyevsky use the physical environment to mirror the themes of isolation, moral decay, and redemption?
- 11) To what extent is *Crime and Punishment* a Christian novel? Consider themes of suffering, redemption, sacrifice, and resurrection. Does Dostoyevsky offer a clear path toward salvation, or is it more ambiguous?
- 12) What is the nature of justice in the novel? Is legal justice the same as moral justice? Which characters receive justice, and which don't? What might Dostoyevsky be saying about the limits of human justice compared to divine justice?



NAMES IN RUSSIA

Each country or culture handles names in a different way.

- In the United States, each person has a surname and a first name. You can have more than one first name, but it's completely optional. The surname is inherited from your parents; there is no real choice. You can also have a custom first name.
- In Mexico (and in the Spanish-speaking world), each person has a first name, a patronymic surname (the father's surname) and a matronymic surname (the mother's surname).

In Russia, it's different. Each person has a first name, a patronymic and a surname which also bears the gender (male / female). For example, Dostoevsky names the main character and his sister:

- *Rodion* (First name) *Romanovich* (Patronymic name: son of Roman) *Raskolnikov* (last name)
- *Avdotya* (First name) *Romanovna* (Patronymic name: daughter of Roman) *Raskolnikova* (last name)

In addition, there are diminutives (nicknames) and sometimes even a diminutive of the diminutive. In *Crime and Punishment*, we have:

- *Rodion* which becomes *Rodia* which becomes *Rodka*
- *Avdotya*, which becomes *Dunya* which becomes *Dunechka*

And not everyone uses just any name. The diminutive is used by a close person. The second diminutive is used by a very very close person. Conversely, to show respect or distance, we are not going to say "Sir", but we are going to use the first and last name, ie Rodion Romanovich.

In the novel, Dostoevsky also uses the surname, but it is more associated with a thought, a reflection of another character. For example, *Rodion* will use *Loujin* when he is thinking about himself. But when he's talking to someone, he'll use *Pyotr Petrovich* instead.

SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMES IN THE NOVEL

The main hero, **Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov's** surname, derives from the Russian word meaning schism, a split, or a breakage.

Sofya (Sonya) Semyonovna Marmeladov is Semyon Mardmadelov's daughter. The name Sofya and/or Sonya are of Greek origin, meaning wisdom. Alternatively, Sonya's name can also signify a "love for the divine," which is evident in her interaction with Raskolnikov, eventually guiding him through a spiritual and religious reawakening.

Dmitri Prokofych Razumikhin's surname derives from the Russian word meaning intelligence. Razumikhin is the optimist within the pessimistic novel and the "intellectual shock absorber," often providing a common-sense point of view surrounding Raskolnikov and his family

Avdotya (Dunya) Romanova Raskolnikov's fiancé, **Pyotr Petrovich Luzhin's** surname, derives from the Russian word meaning "puddle." His shallow and self-centered personality is reflected in his selfish intentions to marry Dunya, who he sees as a "business asset" and an object for his own personal gain.

Semyon Zakharovich Marmeladov, Sofya Marmeladov's biological father, is the drunken official Raskolnikov meets at a bar. Marmeladov's surname sounds like the word marmalade, a preservative usually made of fruit. Arguably, the soft texture of the jam-like preservative is similar to Marmeladov's lack of structure and stability towards his work and family life.

Nastasya (Anastasia) Petrovna is the maid/caretaker in Raskolnikov's apartment. Her name is of Greek origin (ἀνάστασις, *anastasis*) meaning resurrection.

ABOUT FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky was born in 1821 at a Moscow hospital where his father was employed as a doctor. The family was poor, but their descent from 17th-century nobility entitled them to own land and serfs. Dostoyevsky's mother, Maria, was loving and religious; his father, Mikhail, tended toward alcoholism and violence, and his cruel behavior toward the peasants on their small estate resulted in his murder when Fyodor was eighteen years old.

Fyodor was the second of eight children. He was particularly close to his younger sister, Varvara, whose unfortunate marriage may have inspired Dostoyevsky's portraits of both Dunya and Sonya. His older brother, Mikhail, shared Dostoyevsky's literary and journalistic interests as well as his early social ideals. Together they attended secondary schools in Moscow, then the military academy in St. Petersburg, followed by service in the Russian army.

Dostoyevsky broadened his education by reading extensively in an attempt to sharpen his literary skills. As a youth he read and admired writers of all nationalities, including Dickens, Hugo, and Zola, and imitated some of Russia's literary geniuses, particularly Gogol. He also began a tortured acquaintance with Turgenev, which was to continue throughout his life.

His first novel, *Poor Folk*, was published in 1846. This tale of a young clerk who falls haplessly in love with a woman he cannot possess led the literary lion Victor Belinsky to proclaim Dostoyevsky as the next Gogol. Dostoyevsky's entrance into St. Petersburg literary society had begun - but his celebrity status was quickly overshadowed by his somewhat obnoxious behavior. Eventually, Dostoyevsky found another group to join, this time a circle of intellectual socialists run by Mikhail Petrashevsky. Given the reactionary climate of the time, the Petrashevsky group's revolutionary ideas were both exciting and dangerous, and, although Dostoyevsky was far from being a revolutionary, his alignment with the faction brought him to the attention of the police. In 1849, he and the rest of the Petrashevsky group were arrested for subversion. Dostoyevsky was imprisoned at the Peter and Paul Fortress where he and others were subject to a mock execution - an understandably traumatic experience which seems to have triggered an epileptic condition that would plague Dostoyevsky throughout his life. He spent the next five years at hard labor in Siberia, where his acquaintance with the criminal community would provide him with the themes, plots, and characters that distinguish many of his greatest works, including *Crime and Punishment*.

Dostoyevsky returned to St. Petersburg in 1859. The next decade was filled with emotional and physical turmoil. In 1864, the deaths of his wife, Maria, and his beloved brother, Mikhail, deepened his debt and drove him to gambling. He embarked on a doomed affair with Apollinaria Suslova, who vacillated between admiring and despising him. He also witnessed the dissolution of his literary journal and formed a disadvantageous relationship with an unscrupulous publisher. Yet the 1860s were also a period of great literary fervor, and in 1865, the publication of *Crime and Punishment* paved the way for a series of novels - including *The Idiot*, *The Devils*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* - that both reclaimed his position in Russia's pantheon of great living writers, and brought stability to his personal and financial affairs. He married his stenographer, Anna Grigorievna Snitkin, with whom he fathered four children, and established himself as a leading conservative who often spoke out against revolutionary activity. In June of 1880, Dostoyevsky attended a celebration of the great novelist, Pushkin, during which he delivered a speech in praise of the writer. His words were met with great adulation, and the event marked what was perhaps the highest point of public approbation Dostoyevsky would ever attain. Little more than six months later, on January 28, 1881, Dostoyevsky died of a lung hemorrhage. His funeral, attended by nearly thirty thousand mourners, was a national event.

INTRODUCTION

When Dostoyevsky started work on *Crime and Punishment* in the summer of 1865 he was depressed and in serious financial straits. A recent gambling spree had depleted his savings, and he owed money for personal expenses as well as bills for *Epokha*, the journal he founded and had been forced to discontinue. Threatened with debtors' prison, he was approached by an unscrupulous publisher who offered a ridiculously exploitative contract under which Dostoyevsky signed over the copyrights to all his existing works and agreed to write a work of fiction by the end of the following year. For all this he was paid the sum of three thousand rubles, most of which was quickly swallowed up by promissory notes; what little remained was squandered at the gaming tables. Destitute once again, Dostoyevsky forced himself to concentrate on his writing, and by that fall had conceived of the idea for a novel-length work about a family ruined by alcohol.

The roots of *Crime and Punishment* can be found in various episodes in Dostoyevsky's life. His original idea, a murderer's first-person confession, came to him during his prison term in Siberia – an experience that profoundly changed his political views and instilled in him a lifelong respect for order and authority. There is also evidence that he conceived of the Marmalelov family as the basis for a novel to be titled "The Drunkards," but which was never published. Finally, Dostoyevsky was reacting to the political climate in St. Petersburg, where the impulses of the revolution could be found in the nihilist and radical movements, which Dostoyevsky abhorred. Regardless of its origins, Dostoyevsky meant the novel to be as close to perfect as possible. He took extensive – now famous – notes regarding its structure, toying with different points of view, character, structure, plot, and a variety of thematic strains.

The efforts paid off. *Crime and Punishment* is a superbly plotted, brilliant character study of a man who is at once an everyman and as remarkable as any character ever written. It poses a simple question, "**Can evil means justify honorable ends?**" and answers it convincingly without didacticism or naivete. Dostoyevsky intimates himself so closely with Roskolnikov's consciousness, and describes his turmoil and angst so precisely and exhaustively, that it is easy to forget that the events take place over the course of a mere two weeks. He encourages us to identify with Roskolnikov: the painstaking descriptions of the student's cramped, dingy quarters; the overpowering sights and sounds of a stifling afternoon on the streets of St. Petersburg; the excruciating tension of Porfiry's interrogation – all serve to place the reader at the heart of the action: Roskolnikov's fevered, tormented mind.

The murder itself is almost incidental to the novel; Dostoyevsky devotes no more than a few pages to describing its execution, although he details the painful vacillations that precede the incident and, of course, exposes every aspect of its aftermath. Similarly,

Roskolnikov's punishment, in the literal sense, is put off until the epilogue, with his sentence – reduced to seven years due to the accused's apparent temporary insanity – to a Siberian labor camp. Thus Dostoyevsky brilliantly invites readers to put forth their own notions of *Crime and Punishment*, and engages us in an irresistible debate: **Who is the real criminal?** Marmeladov, for abandoning his family? Luzhin for exploiting Dunya? Svidrigailov for murdering his wife? Sonya for prostituting herself? The greedy pawnbroker whom Roskolnikov murdered?

Or, to turn the question around: **Who among us is not a criminal?** Who among us has not attempted to impose his or her will on the natural order? Furthermore, we are made to understand that Roskolnikov's true punishment is not the sentence imposed on him by the court of law, but that imposed on him by his own actions: the psychological and spiritual hell he has created for himself; the necessary sentence of isolation from his friends and family; the extreme wavering between wanting to confess his crime, and desperately hoping to get away with it. Compelled, ultimately, to confess his crime – and the confession scene is the only incident in which Roskolnikov actually admits to the crime – we feel that Roskolnikov has suffered sufficiently. Indeed, the epilogue with its abbreviated pace and narrative distance feels like a reprieve for the reader as well as for the criminal. Finally, in Siberia, Roskolnikov has found space.

The public reception of *Crime and Punishment* was enthusiastic – if a little stunned. There was much discussion about the novel's overwhelming power and rumors of people unable to finish it. Readers were shocked by Dostoyevsky's gruesome descriptions and enthralled by his use of dramatic tension. Perhaps the most virulent, and unexpected, criticism came from readers who felt that Dostoyevsky's portrait of the nihilist movement was an indictment of Russian youth and that its premise was inconceivable. For more than a century, critics have argued about the book's message: **Is it a political novel? A tale of morality? A psychological study? A religious epic?** As Peter McDuff points out in his Introduction to the Penguin Classics edition, interpretations may be more revealing of the critic than of the text. Whatever Dostoyevsky's purpose – political, moral, psychological, or religious (and most likely he meant to touch on each of these themes) – one thing is certain. In Roskolnikov, Dostoyevsky has created a man who is singular yet universal. He is someone with whom we can sympathize, empathize, and pity, even if we cannot relate to his actions. He is a character we will remember forever, and whose story will echo throughout history.