



Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness*
AP English Literature and Composition
Summer Reading 2024

“I’ll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination.”



AP English Literature Summer Reading Assignment

2024 - 2025

Students enrolled in AP English Literature for the 2024-2025 school year are required to actively read and complete a series of journal entries on the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin. This assignment will comprise a major portion of the first quarter grade. The journal will comprise two test grades, and a conventional test on the book will also be given the day of journal collection. Much of September will be devoted to study and discussion of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and it will continually be

referenced throughout the year. Your efforts on this assignment will have substantial consequences, so please put in your strongest effort.

The Left Hand of Darkness

Ursula Kroeber Le Guin (1929 - 2018), one of the world's most influential writers of speculative fiction, was the second child of two prominent cultural anthropologists, and her work is informed by an interest in indigenous peoples, especially peoples on the west coast where she lived most of her life. She started publishing poetry and short fiction in the late 1950s and became famous in 1968 with the appearance of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, a coming-of-age fantasy novel first marketed as a children's book, and then for a more general audience. She wrote over thirty novels and novellas, over a hundred short stories, poetry, operas, literary criticism, and various other genres. She is most famous for her fantasy and science fiction, but wrote extensively outside those genres as well.

The Left Hand of Darkness was first published in 1969, and remains one of Le Guin's most acclaimed and influential works. It is part of a series commonly referred to as the "Hainish Cycle," an alternate history in which human beings did not evolve on Earth ("Terra" in the novel) but were the result of a civilization of beings called "Hain," who set up interstellar colonies long ago. After the collapse of Hainish civilization those different colonies lost contact with each other and evolved separately. *The Left Hand of Darkness* concerns an early point of renewed contact between those worlds, and follows Genly Ai, a human sent to another planet to convince the inhabitants of that planet to join an interstellar confederation. The novel is a richly textured exercise in world-building, as well as an exploration of the challenges and riches of understanding different cultures and how their identity is reflective of their environments.

You are to complete five reflective journal entries while reading *The Left Hand of Darkness*, one on each of the following readings:

Journal Entry 1:	Chapters 1-4
Journal Entry 2:	Chapters 5-8
Journal Entry 3:	Chapters 9-12
Journal Entry 4:	Chapters 13-16
Journal Entry 5:	Chapters 17-20

Active Reading Strategies for *The Left Hand of Darkness*

- *The Left Hand of Darkness* is not too difficult to read, but it will require patience and concentration, especially in the first half. If you get lost or are confused, quickly glance at the Wikipedia article on the Hainish Cycle, which provides a sufficient backstory. (DO NOT read the summary of the novel itself.)
- Do not read SparkNotes or any other such materials with *The Left Hand of Darkness*. I want you to have an original reading experience.
- Read with a pen or pencil in hand, making notes in the margins of the text when you are confused, amused, moved, or find some startling significance in a particular passage. Read wide-awake, actively and carefully.

Specifics about the Journal Entries

- The journal entries are to be completed as you read *The Left Hand of Darkness*, not afterwards. They are meant to help you read the novel actively.
- AI programs such as ChatGPT are not to be utilized on this assignment, and their use constitutes academic dishonesty. Just as I want you to have an original

reading experience with *The Left Hand of Darkness*, I want you to have an original writing and thinking experience when writing the journal entries.

- You may type or handwrite the journal. If you type it, please sensibly format and double-space; if you handwrite it, make sure it is written neatly.
- Label the journal entries accurately, so I know which chapter(s) you are referring to. (For example: the third entry should be labeled "Entry 3: Chapters 9-12.")
- The journal will be collected the second week of school and will comprise two test grades.
- Grammar and mechanics matter. I expect words to be spelled correctly, sentences properly punctuated, apostrophes properly used, etc. DO NOT write in fragments or run-on sentences.
- See the "Journal Entry Addendum" supplement about on the last pages of this document.

In Summary

To make it clear what you have to do, here's the summer reading assignment simplified as far as possible:

- Read *The Left Hand of Darkness* and complete five accompanying journal entries while you are reading.

That's it...enjoy the summer!

Journal Entry Addendum

What constitutes a good journal entry? Simply put, I want the journals to be interesting, lively, well-written discussions that evince engagement with the text. There are various ways to accomplish that. Below is a list of what to do and not to do when writing journal entries.

DO NOT: Summarize the plot as an end in itself.

DO: Provide context for your insights about the readings by providing some plot specifics to clarify what part of the text you're referencing.

DO NOT: Pretend to love the book because you think that's what an English teacher wants to read; or, conversely, complain and blame whatever struggles you're having with the reading on what you imagine to be the author's ineptitude.

DO: Provide an honest and thoughtful reflection of the experience of reading the book; regardless of whether you're finding it a joy or a struggle, read and write with an open mind and the aim of deepening understanding and appreciation.

DO NOT: Get bogged down in endless specifics without connecting those specifics to any larger point, or write in broad generalizations without much in the way of specifics.

DO: Balance broad generalizations with specific illustrative detail.

DO NOT: Go off on tangents about life or your own experiences without a clear connection to the reading.

DO: Write germane tangents about life or yourself that relate clearly to the reading, if you feel it's appropriate and interesting; and make sure to make the connection to the book clear.

DO NOT: Stick quotes from the novel into the entry without regard for grammatical integrity or context.

DO: Weave direct quotes from the reading into your own writing, and make sure you elaborate on the significance of the quotation and properly explain the context.

DO NOT: Write the entry as one long block of text with no paragraphing, or—and this is even worse—randomly indent once in a while to provide the appearance of paragraphing.

DO: Use paragraphing as an organizational tool, to indicate a shift in topic.

DO NOT: Write mechanically, with every sentence the same length.

DO: Vary the sentence structure to help make your writing more readable.

DO NOT: Try to make the entries sound academic by using unnecessarily complex language.

DO: Write clearly, naturally, and with the aim of making authentic, sensible insights about the readings.

DO NOT: Use ChatGPT or any other AI software application for any of this. Writing is concentrated thinking, and having anyone or anything else do it for you instantly short-circuits any intellectual growth that should occur from the task.

DO: Write the entire journal yourself, using your own brain.

DO NOT: Write boring journal entries. I will be reading every word of these, and no reader wants wants to be bored.

DO: Write interesting, lively responses to the readings.

Please let me know if you have questions about the journal, or any questions about the AP Literature summer assignment.