Summer Assignment: William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*

Mrs. Galambos

Please read William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* this summer. Once you have read the novel, you will write a 750 to 1,000 word essay based on your reading.

Faulkner’s title is based on a line from a Shakespearean drama, which may be helpful to you in recognizing one of the themes of the work.

*Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player*

*That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,*

*And then is heard no more; it is a tale*

*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,*

*Signifying nothing.*

*From Macbeth (5.5.17-21)*

Several superintendents ago, administrators in our district were given the aforementioned novel to read. A few of them found the task daunting, for they were used to traditional prose—not the stream of consciousness technique the author uses. As a matter of fact, when referring to one portion of the book, an administrator good naturedly joked it was “maddening.” Rather appropriate diction for the subject matter contained in this novel.

Your writing assignment for this work of literature is based on a released 2001 AP Examination Open-Ended Response Question. You will have the luxury of planning, selecting quotes, and writing at a pace with which you feel comfortable, but students in 2001 had forty minutes to respond. We will write many timed in-class essays during your senior year, but I want you to have the opportunity to get a feel for the format and for the style of an AP question as early as possible.
Here is your prompt:

One definition of madness is “mental delusion or the eccentric behavior arising from it.” But Emily Dickinson wrote

   Much madness is divinest Sense—
   To a discerning Eye—

Novelists and playwrights have often seen madness with a “discerning Eye.”

Consider the important role madness or irrational behavior plays in this novel. Explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consists of and how it might be judged reasonable. Explain the significance of the madness to the work as a whole.

*Your essay will be a 750 to 1,000 word analytical piece that examines the preceding topic.

*Your starting point will be to formulate a clear, arguable thesis. Take a stand. A weak thesis usually = a weak paper.

*Use documentation following your textual support. For example: (Faulkner 33).

*Use quotes to support your ideas, not to pad your paper. The desire to use lengthy quotes usually equates to a lack of ideas on the part of the writer. Quotes do not count as part of your 750 words.

*Use Times New Roman, size 12 font.

*Double space this—and all—papers this year.

This essay will be due on the first day of school.

This book is challenging, for in addition to the stream of consciousness technique Faulkner uses, multiple narrators tell the story (almost all disingenuous in various ways), flashbacks occur often, and the rather crass race relations of the early twentieth century are evident. Realize that you must give this book the respect and time it deserves. Turn off your electronic paraphernalia, focus, and read closely. To jump onto Spark or Cliff Notes shows you are unwilling to think for yourself, and I would ask that you reconsider your choice to take this course. I am sorry to have to be blunt, but perhaps this will be helpful to you in understanding the expectations I will have for you this year.

Why are you taking this course? Ask yourself this question and then answer it honestly. You should be taking this course because you want to be the best reader, writer, and thinker you can be in your college freshman literature/composition course fifteen months from now.
You will write a minimum of twenty essays next year for this class. Those essays are expected to be, consistently, the best work you can put forth, and I expect that your writing will improve as a result of what you learn in class.

In addition to your summer reading, you will read several lengthy novels, several dramas, nearly one hundred poems, and a dozen short stories for this course.

Should you have any questions, feel free to stop by Room 1007. If you have any questions as you are reading or writing this summer, e-mail me at dgalambos@ojrd.com.

I look forward to welcoming you back this fall. Until then, have a lovely, safe summer.

Mrs. Galambos

N.B. An unorthodox suggestion: don’t read the novel for the first time in the order in which it was written. You might begin with the second or third book (as narrated by Quentin and then Jason, respectively) followed by the fourth book featuring omniscient narration. Then go back to Benjy’s book, the start of the novel. You will understand as you begin to read.

An unusual book, yes. But well worth your time if you’re willing to put in the work to understand.