

Advanced Placement Language and Composition
Summer Reading Assignment
Osceola Fundamental High School
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Devil in the White City by Erik Larson

Welcome to the world of words! You will learn English in a new way this school year. To give you a start, answer the following prompts fully in a journal or Word document. Label each entry with the same ones used below and always use the text to support your responses. Happy reading!!

Entry 1: Welcome to the White City

Read the "Evils Imminent" and "Prologue". What do you notice about the writing? What expectations do you have about this book?

Part I

Larson lays a very solid foundation, just like the Chicago architects, in the exposition of this book. Notice the quantity of historical detail Larson uses to build the story. How does the juxtaposition of Holmes's construction to Burnham's construction build the story? Which side of the story, the white side or the dark side, holds your attention? Explain.

Part II

The pace of the story picks up in this section reflecting the sense of urgency Burnham and his team of architects feel with deadlines looming to open the World's Fair. Contrary to their sense of urgency, Dr. Holmes has become more methodical.

How does Larson build the suspense around the World's Fair? How can it possibly open on time?

On the other hand, what makes Holmes so believable that no one seems to question him? What does Larson suggest in the writing to make him so credible?

Part III

The fair is underway and Holmes is having his way with unsuspecting innocents coming to "the big city". How curious that the building of the fair and its ending were bookended by deaths of famous and important men to the fair's success. Throughout this section Larson drops names of products and inventions and people that seem second nature to 21st century citizens. He continues with his use of contrast to build his story and yet he states on page 289: The fair was

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so perfect, its grace and beauty like an assurance that for as long as it lasted nothing truly bad could happen to anyone, anywhere.

Choose elements of "grace and beauty" that stood out in the reading. What made them remarkable?

Contrast them to elements of darkness that kept appearing. How is it that these elements can exist side by side?

Part IV

Well, it seems the slippery Dr. Mudgett, AKA H.H. Holmes, has been caught...but as with all terrible criminals, he is charged with minor crimes and the major ones catch up with him after his incarceration. What ironies do you find in his story? Explain.

Epilogue

Larson brings the story back to the beginning with Burnham on his Atlantic crossing and the Titanic disaster. He includes Holmes's final requests for his burial. How interesting that this evil man's wishes were honored by the state rather than disregarded and his body donated to science. Was this reasonable or fair given the man's history and crimes?

The effects of the fair continue to resonate in modern society even in the face of terrible destruction. Larson presents arguments for two points of view about the fair's influence on American architecture. Which do you find most compelling? Explain.

Vocabulary: You saw this coming...

Larson uses extraordinary diction throughout the novel. Choose a variety of words that stood out for you because they were new or used in unique and interesting ways.