

AP English Literature and Composition

Summer Assignment

Welcome to AP English Literature and Composition!

Your summer assignment has three components :

1. Read the book *Krik? Krak!* by Edwidge Danticat in its entirety. As you read, annotate for key motifs and themes (i.e. the main topics and universal ideas the author is exploring).
2. Prepare for a timed, in-class essay during the first week of school on one of the key themes of the text. You can prepare by annotating regularly as you read.
3. Write a short personal reflection:

Due on Google Classroom by 5 PM on Monday, August 17

Krik? Krak! is a collection of short stories by Edwidge Danticat; information about the author and setting are attached.

After reading and annotating, write a **one-page response** to any of the questions below or develop a response using a prompt of your choosing. This assignment is meant to help your teacher meet you as an intellectual *and* as a person, so it is more informal than a literary analysis paper, but it should nonetheless be free of grammatical errors. Be sure your response is **no more than one full page**.

Questions to consider for your response:

- Which story did you find most personally meaningful? Why?
- What parts of it did you relate to? Why?
- Which characters did you relate to? Why?
- Which characters reminded you of people in your life? Why?
- What connections did you see between Danticat's work and other books you've read? What was unique, in comparison to other books you've read?
- Which sentences did you find most meaningful or significant? Why?

Krik? Krak!

By EDWIDGE DANTICAT (1995)

Background on the Author:

Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti in 1969 and grew up during a tumultuous period in the country's history. By the time Danticat was four years old, both of her parents had left Haiti for the United States, but Danticat stayed with her aunt and uncle in Port-au-Prince, the capital. While there, she learned Haitian storytelling traditions, which is where *Krik? Krak!* gets its title. In Haiti, “*krik?*” is a request to tell a story, and obliging listeners answer “*krak.*” Danticat began writing stories as a child, and in 1981, when she was twelve, she joined her parents in Brooklyn, where she began speaking English instead of her native Creole (a blend of African dialects and French). After attending Barnard College, she went to Brown University to earn an MFA in creative writing. All of Danticat's books deal with the Haiti that Danticat knew as a child, its tortured history, and the complicated politics that caused her to leave the country.

Background on the Setting of the Text:

Haiti, in the West Indies, occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. About the size of Maryland, Haiti is two-thirds mountainous, with the rest of the country marked by great valleys, extensive plateaus, and small plains.

Explored by Columbus on Dec. 6, 1492, Haiti's native Arawaks fell victim to Spanish rule. In 1697, Haiti became the French colony of Saint-Dominique, which became a leading sugarcane producer dependent on slaves. In 1791, an insurrection erupted among the slave population of 480,000, resulting in a declaration of independence by Pierre-Dominique Toussaint l'Ouverture in 1801. Napoléon Bonaparte suppressed the independence movement, but it eventually triumphed in 1804 under Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who gave the new nation the Arawak name *Haiti*. It was the world's first independent black republic.



The revolution wrecked Haiti's economy. Years of strife between the light-skinned people of color who dominated the economy and the majority darker-skinned black population, plus disputes with neighboring Santo Domingo, continued to hurt the nation's development. Haiti's former wealth all but disappeared, replaced by an extreme poverty and illiteracy that only worsened over the next few centuries. In 1957, a fraudulent election made a doctor named François “Papa Doc” Duvalier Haiti's president. Duvalier became a despotic ruler and declared himself “president for life.” His *tonton macoutes*, a ruthless secret police named after

a mythical Haitian monster, terrorized the nation, arresting or killing the government's critics. Duvalier allied himself with the Dominican Republic's dictator, Trujillo (who in 1937 had massacred Haitians at the Dominican border). But while Duvalier's political power and wealth increased, Haiti became the poorest country in the Americas. Duvalier stole as much money and land from his people as possible, using foreign aid money for his personal gain. The small percentage of educated Haitians fled the country for economic or political reasons.

When Duvalier died in 1971, his son, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, continued his legacy of political tyranny and economic exploitation while making superficial reforms to improve Haiti's international reputation. “Baby Doc” was deposed in 1986 because of opposition from both the Haitian people and the United States government. He left behind a power vacuum that resulted in military control, despite many attempts at democratic elections. In 1991, democracy seemed to be established with the election of Jean Bertrand Aristide. However, Aristide was overthrown months later by a military coup. In 1994, the United States government, under pressure from its Haitian citizens, restored Aristide to the presidency with threats of military invasion. Several democratic elections followed, but Haiti's political status remains unstable, and its economic conditions are still the worst in the western hemisphere. Communities of Haitian immigrants and their Haitian-American descendants, including Danticat, remain in the United States.