

# *Ella Minnow Pea* by Mark Dunn (Published by Anchor, 2002)

Approved for use in Advanced Placement Communication Arts III

## Summary

The fictional island of Nollop is situated southeast of Charleston, South Carolina, and is named after the famed Nevin Nollop, creator of the pangram "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog." This epistolary story is told through the eyes of 18-year-old Ella Minnow Pea, the heroine of the book, and satirizes the politics of a dictatorial Nollopian Council, which bans the use of letters that have fallen from the commemorative statue of the pangram. This decree has far-reaching implications, and Ella soon finds herself racing to find an end to the chaos as citizens of the island are banished for using the forbidden letters. The humor is enhanced by Ella's own limited use of the letters and her attempts to circumvent the council's ruling by resorting to phonetic spelling.

## Connection to the Curriculum

Dunn's astounding use of the English language proves to be a literary delight for those who appreciate the subtleties and complexities of literature. This book provides an exceptional opportunity for students to study diction and syntax and how it contributes to the author's purpose. The novel features an expansive and often exotic vocabulary, encouraging students to use contextual clues to construct meaning from the text. The use of the epistolary structure enables students to come to know the characters through their voices, and allows for the opportunity to deconstruct how the author differentiates characters through voice. The novel also explores the concepts of dictatorship and totalitarianism, providing a vehicle for students to comprehend political satire. Additionally, the humor in the book makes this an enjoyable read and one that is sure to please the most reluctant of readers.

## Standards

### Course Objectives (Benchmarks)

**Reading:** 1.1- The students use skills in alphabets to construct meaning from text. 1.2- The students read fluently. 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

**Literature:** 2.1-The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text.

**Writing:** 3.1- The students use writing as a tool for learning throughout the curriculum.

### Possible Skills Taught (Indicators):

#### Reading:

- 1.2.1- The student adjusts reading rate to support comprehension when reading narrative, expository, technical, and persuasive texts.
- 1.3.1- The student determines meaning of words or phrases using context clues from sentences or paragraphs. 1.3.2- The student locates and uses reference materials available in the classroom, school, and public libraries (e.g., dictionaries, thesauri, atlases, encyclopedias, Internet) that are appropriate to the task.
- 1.3.4- The student identifies, interprets, and analyzes the use of figurative language including similes, metaphors, analogies, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, personification, idioms, imagery, and symbolism.
- 1.3.5- The student discriminates between connotative and denotative meanings and interprets the connotative power of words.
- 1.4.1- The student identifies characteristics of narrative, expository, technical, and persuasive texts.
- 1.4.2- The student understands the purpose of text features and uses such features to locate information and to gain meaning from appropriate level texts.
- 1.4.3- The student uses prior knowledge, content, and text type features to make, revise, and confirm predictions.
- 1.4.4- The student generates and responds logically to literal, inferential, evaluative, and critical thinking questions before, during, and after reading the text.
- 1.4.5- The student uses information from the text to make inferences and draw conclusions.
- 1.4.6- The student analyzes and evaluates how authors use text structures to help achieve their purposes.
- 1.4.11- The student analyzes and evaluates how an author's style (word choice, sentence structure) and use of literary devices work together to achieve his or her purpose for writing text.

#### Literature:

- 2.1.4- The student analyzes themes, tone, and the author's point of view across a variety of literary works and games using textual evidence and considering audience and purpose.
- 2.1.5- The student identifies, analyzes, and evaluates the use of literary devices in a text.

#### Writing:

- 3.1.1- The student uses the writing process in various formats.

## A Note on the

**Text:** (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

*This text is a satirical look at censorship and an allegory of totalitarianism. It includes the worship of an imaginary leader.*

## AP Connections

One of the most prominent skills tested in the AP Language exam is the analysis of how an author's style (use of diction, tone, and syntax) contributes to his or her purpose. *Ella Minnow Pea* is an excellent novel to use to explore how diction and syntax, in particular, contribute to the author's tone and demonstrate the author's overall purpose. The novel provides multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate critical thinking skills, and the advanced vocabulary that is used in the novel promotes higher-level reading skills. This novel, as well, provides an enjoyable literary experience for lovers of words and is a demonstration of literary prowess at its best.

## Additional Unit Design Connections

Coming soon:

To be completed during future curriculum development activities