Hey guys,

Over the next year or so, you're going to find out that Slagel's a pretty nice guy. For instance, he's giving you the summer off from your other classes. Science? Forget about it. And don't even think about math. Language? Give it a rest. It’s summer.

He’s also going to feed you popcorn and red vines all year long, or as long as his Costco card works.

And as far as English, Slagel's even supplying this book you'll be reading over the summer. This makes up for his people bringing mongooses and mosquitoes to the islands. And the alphabet. We also brought the alphabet. Sorry about that.

Speaking of the alphabet, this book is written in it. It's entitled To Kill A Mockingbird. It’s a classic. It’s possible you’ve read it before, but let’s assume you read it wrong. Or if not wrong, at least not completely right. There are issues here. Black folks being persecuted. Rabid dogs being shot. Mockingbirds apparently being killed. I’m not sure I like where this is going.

Some of you are wondering if there’s a film version floating around out there somewhere. The answer is “yes, there is, a wonderful adaptation starring Gregory Peck,” and if you choose to watch that in lieu of reading, you will have a pleasant evening, but you will fail, both on the exam and in life. It turns out the film is in black and white, and while the book is also in black and white, your imagination is in color. That makes all of the difference. Read it.

For those of you thinking, Well, is there a SparkNotes version available? Once again the answer is “yes.” Here’s the problem with SparkNotes—If you want to find out why people die, read a biology textbook or the SparkNotes version of Hamlet. If, however, you want to know WHY DO PEOPLE HAVE TO DIE, AND HOW SHOULD WE LIVE UNTIL THEN? and you anticipate experiencing the reality of death yourself someday, and you will, read Hamlet.

I'd read To Kill A Mockingbird carefully, I'd read it late in the summer, and I'd be ready to talk about it the first week of class. Until then, have a pleasant summer. Stay away from mosquitoes and mongooses. Mongeese. Na mongoose. And avoid the alphabet as much as you can.

Peace,
Slagel