Pre-Reading

1. James Joyce was influenced by many cultures and different mediums of art. He did not hesitate to incorporate other people’s ideas or even their words directly into his work. EH. Drouais, an eighteenth-century French artist, painted a self-portrait of himself as a boy, which he titled Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. It is likely that Joyce’s title for his semi-autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was borrowed from Drouais.

Think about the title of a work from any medium—art, music, literature, film, television—that you believe would make a good title for an autobiography of your life. Write down the title, artist (if applicable), and medium it’s from. In a paragraph or two, write an explanation about why you believe this title reflects your life.

2. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is considered one of the premiere novels of modernist literature. One objective of the literary modernist movement was to reveal the significant meaning of everyday life, including how characters’ thoughts flow and react to events around them. Joyce is admired for his use of the stream-of-consciousness style (also known as interior monologue) of writing, in which a character’s thoughts flow into each other, often without linear progress or standard grammar.

Think about your day today. Choose two or three moments that are significant to you. Then, in the stream-of-consciousness style, freewrite your thoughts about these moments. Find a way to connect the events you write about, and be sure to explain why these moments were important to your day.

3. The story begins with the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, as a young child and ends with the conclusion of his college studies. In between, Stephen experiences many changes. He struggles with self-confidence, religion, patriotism, and theories about artistic beauty.
Imagine you are writing an email to a childhood friend. You have not seen your friend in ten years. Tell him or her about how you’ve changed over the years, in particular, what you thought life as a teenager would be like compared to how life is now that you are a teenager.

4. While *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is linear in that the story follows its protagonist from childhood to early adulthood, it is not linear in many ways. Like much of modernist literature, the novel contains flashbacks, has long internal musings, and omits many years in Stephen's life. Modernist writers do not use a straightforward narrative structure. Modernism is a more intellectual approach to literature.

Some people like this intellectual approach because it creates interest and raises questions. Some people find this approach burdensome and uninteresting, preferring a more direct narrative structure. Do you prefer stories that are more linear, or does the stream-of-consciousness style appeal to you? Write a newspaper editorial in favor of one of the writing styles. Provide examples of other works to support your opinion. If you need assistance in determining your preference, it might be helpful to read a few paragraphs from works in each style.

5. Catholicism plays a large part in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. From the beginning to the end of the novel, all the characters are reacting—positively and negatively—to the role of Catholicism in Ireland. People's lives are strongly directed by the Church's influence.

Stephen is educated through Catholic boarding schools. His family discusses religious matters when he is home during holidays and breaks. He is required to attend a Catholic retreat for boys. Throughout his life, Stephen discusses his evolving attitude toward the Church with his friends.

Using the Internet or other source, research the role of Catholicism in early twentieth-century Ireland. Then, summarize your research in a brief essay.
Chapter I

6. An epigraph is a short quotation that appears in front of a poem, book, or chapter that explains something about what follows. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man begins with an epigraph that is a quote from Ovid's Metamorphoses. The quote translates as, “applying his mind to obscure arts.”

After reading the chapter, determine what you think is the significance or meaning of the epigraph, and write a few sentences to explain your answer. Then, write an epigraph that you think is appropriate for the first chapter. The quote can be from any source, or it can be of your own creation; however, it must relate to the chapter and be appropriate for the classroom.

7. Stephen has a crush on his neighbor Eileen and hopes to marry her someday, but he is told that he can’t because she is a Protestant. This information upsets Stephen, and he crawls under the table. Dante warns him that if he does not come out from under the table, eagles will claw his eyes out. Obviously, the threat is false; Dante’s intent is to frighten Stephen into behaving.

When you were a child, did an adult ever use a ridiculous or scary threat to coerce you into behaving? Describe the incident and the threat. Was the threat effective? If you haven’t had such an experience, describe an incident you’ve witnessed of a child misbehaving, and create an outrageous threat that you think will get the child to behave.

8. Stephen attends Clongowes Wood College, a Catholic boarding school for young boys. Some of his classmates are nice, but one, Nasty Roche, “is a stink.” Roche makes Stephen uncomfortable. After asking him his name, and Stephen responds, “Stephen Dedalus,” Roche asks, “What kind of a name is that?”

Joyce places heavy emphasis on the meaning of his characters’ names, especially his protagonists. Research the myth of Dædalus. Imagine you are Stephen Dedalus as an adult. Based on your research, write how you believe he would answer the question, “What kind of name is that?”
9. One night, Stephen is studying geography. He looks at a map of the world and has a difficult time taking it all in. The scene demonstrates that at a young age, Stephen has a curious mind, and he is capable of observing the vastness of life, especially pertaining to the smallness of his place in the grandness of the earth.

Stephen examines what he has written on the flyleaf of his geography book. It is a list that starts with himself, then his classroom, and then his school, expanding outward until ending with the universe.

Write a list of at least five places where you spend time—school, home, a sports venue, a religious institution, a music facility, etc. List the places in order of their importance in your life. Then, write a paragraph in which you explain why you listed the places in that order.

10. At Clongowes Wood College, Stephen encounters a bully named Wells. In one instance, Wells shoulders Stephen into a square ditch (the cesspool). In another instance, Wells asks if Stephen kisses his mother. Stephen feels uncomfortable and is uncertain as to how to respond. In the end, it doesn’t matter because his classmates laugh at Stephen regardless of the answer.

Imagine that Stephen has access to Twitter, which would allow him 140 characters to answer Wells’s question without simply saying “yes” or “no.” Using no more than 140 characters, write a creative response Stephen could give to Wells. Your response must not contain any offensive language or expressions.

11. Stephen ends up in the school infirmary, most likely because of being in contact with the cesspool. He becomes nervous that he might die from his illness and asks Brother Michael, a usually kind priest who cares for him in the infirmary, about his fears. The priest responds that it is possible he could die. Stephen then thinks of the words to a song that Brigid had taught him, and the words move him deeply; he finds them both beautiful and sad.

Think about a time when you’ve been sad. Then, think of a song that reflects the sadness you felt, but conveys it in a beautiful way. Write the lyrics of the song and then write a brief explanation of how the song expresses the sadness you felt and why it is also beautiful.
12. While Stephen is in the infirmary, he notices that Brother Michael is down-cast. Brother Michael announces that Charles Parnell has died. Stephen has a vision of a crowd of people overcome with grief. He is unable to understand the significance of Parnell’s death, but he knows that many people are deeply saddened by the man’s passing. Stephen has a vision of Dante, a devout Catholic, walking proudly past the grieving crowd.

Research the life of Charles Parnell. Then, write an essay expressing your opinion as to whether he was good for Ireland. You must support your opinion with information from your research.

13. Stephen returns home for Christmas. This year, Stephen is deemed old enough by his parents to sit at the dining table during the Christmas meal. His parents are at the table, as are his Uncle Charles, Dante, and Mr. Casey, a friend of Stephen’s father. During the meal, an argument arises over politics and religion.

What are holiday meals like for you? Can they be as heated and argumentative as the one in the novel, or are they generally more pleasant? Write a journal entry about a memorable holiday meal you’ve had with your family. Or, if you prefer, you can make a list of topics that you believe should not be discussed at the dinner table, along with a brief explanation for each of why you feel the topic is inappropriate.

14. As the meal progresses, Dante and Mr. Casey’s argument escalates. Dante believes that priests are to be respected at all times, and their words should be listened to with great admiration. Mr. Casey believes priests have become too involved in Irish culture. He is a strong supporter of Parnell, who was a Protestant.

List the points that Dante and others make during the argument. Then, as objectively as possible, evaluate each character’s points and decide who made a better case for their position. You do not have to agree with the character’s position; you must simply determine who was most effective in getting their point across. Write a brief explanation for your choice.