

## **Sample Semester APHIST Book Report**

*An American Tragedy*, by Theodore Dreiser (1925); Historical Fiction (863 pages)

### **Introduction (15 points)**

**Brief Summary of the Book (5 pts.):**

*This book is about the pitfalls and price of excessive ambition towards social mobility and wealth.*

**Author's Background (10 pts.):**

*Dreiser, one of America's greatest novelists, specialized in writing fiction that reflected his era's conflicting values and history. Often, his novels were at odds with the more conservative and hypocritical views and values of his contemporaries, but his critics didn't keep him from producing some of the best social historical fiction in American History, such as Sister Carrie (his first), and The Titan. In all of his works, Dreiser specialized in immersing himself in his environment, and then, by "pulling himself out", tells his story. Since he was raised in a strict German-American household, many of his themes involve exploring the secular pleasures life can provide.*

### **Analytical Summary (45 points)**

**Brief Summary of the plot (5 pts.):**

*This book tells the story of Clyde Griffiths, who, from a background of poverty, works his way into "high society". In order to get there, he murders the "common woman" who loves him, in order to marry an upscale woman so he can achieve his goal of "being somebody important in life".*

**Analytical Summary #1 (10 points):**

*Page 21: "... he seemed more keenly observant and decidedly more sensitive than most of the others - appeared indeed to resent and even to suffer from the position in which he found himself." Clyde Griffiths grew up in a very religious family, as did I. This quote reminded me of when I was Clyde's age; I was a pastor's kid, and that meant I was, in church or out of church, "on display". There were many times (too numerous to count), when I felt the glare of members of the congregation watching me, even when I was DOING NOTHING! I was very sensitive about that situation, and I often resented (and suffered) being in those situations. But the key point I'd like to make is that I didn't wind up killing an innocent 23 year old woman in my early 20's like Clyde Griffiths!*

**Analytical Summary #2 (10 points):**

*Page 267: "... they were excellent examples of that native type of Americanism which resists facts and reveres illusion. Titus Alden was one of that vast company of individuals who are born, pass through and die out of this world without ever getting one thing straight. They appear, blunder, and end in fog." So often as a teacher, I've seen students (as well as adults) delude themselves into thinking that all they have to do to be a success is to wait for "the phone to ring", and the "magical job" that is "their due" will be theirs! I've seen so many refuse to see the reality that they need to get an education and invest in themselves for the future; yet, these people hold on to this illusion that "somebody" will see the "magic that is them", even though these individuals haven't made themselves marketable. It is as if, Dreiser writes, they are in a "fog"; thankfully, that "fog" lifted for me early in my college experience. Or, to be more accurate, I steered myself out of the fog given*