AP Language and Composition Summer Reading Essay Assignments

Please choose two of the four essay options and write well-constructed, cohesive responses that rely upon both assigned readings as evidence to support your position. There is no page minimum or maximum for either assignment; however, you should not take more than an hour to complete each one as they are designed to prepare you for the rigor of the timed AP exam next May.

Choice A:
The following passage is from Rights of Man, a book written by the pamphleteer Thomas Paine in 1791. Born in England, Paine was an intellectual, a revolutionary, and a supporter of American independence from England. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay that examines the extent to which Paine's characterization of America holds true today. Use appropriate evidence to support your argument.

If there is a country in the world, where concord, according to common calculation, would be least expected, it is America. Made up, as it is, of people from different nations, accustomed to different forms and habits of government, speaking different languages, and more different in their modes of worship, it would appear that the union of such a people was impracticable; but by the simple operation of constructing government on the principles of society and the rights of man, every difficulty retires, and all the parts are brought into cordial unison. There, the poor are not oppressed, the rich are not privileged. . . . Their taxes are few, because their government is just; and as there is nothing to render them wretched, there is nothing to engender riots and tumults.

Choice B:
American essayist and social critic H. L. Mencken (1880–1956) wrote, “The average man does not want to be free. He simply wants to be safe.”

In a well-written essay, examine the extent to which Mencken's observation applies to contemporary society, supporting your position with appropriate evidence.

Choice C:
“Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant.”
—Horace

Consider this quotation about adversity from the Roman poet Horace. Then write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Horace's assertion about the role that adversity (financial or political hardship, danger, misfortune, etc.) plays in developing a person's character. Support your argument with appropriate evidence from your reading, observation, or experience.

Choice D:

Through tatter’d clothes small vices do appear;  
Robes and furr’d gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtles breaks;  
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.

Shakespeare, King Lear

The lines above are from a speech by King Lear. Write a carefully reasoned essay in which you briefly paraphrase Lear's statement and then defend, challenge, or qualify his view of the relationship between wealth and justice. Support your argument with specific references to your reading, observation, or experience.