

# AP English Literature and Composition Syllabus:

## Course Overview:

- ❖ The AP English Literature and Composition course is designed with the goal of enhancing students' abilities to explore, comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate complex literary texts. Upon completion of this course a student should be proficient in discussing literature of varied themes, historical contexts, and genres whether it be in an on-demand, timed writing prompt, an in-depth, scrutinized, and revised essay, or in class discussion.
- ❖ Students entering this course must have the initial expectation that they will read, contemplate, and write about literature extensively. We will write an essay every couple weeks (in analytical, argumentative, and expository forms) and will read every day (novels, creative nonfiction, short stories, and poems). They must be willing to challenge and justify their understandings, attempt to see other perspectives, and discuss in a mature and lively manner.
- ❖ As this course also has the goal of preparing all students to pass the AP English Literature and composition exam, it operates in accordance with the information contained in the latest AP English Literature course description (which I ensure by reviewing it at least once per academic year). The course features practice for both free response and multiple choice portions of the test. We attempt to scaffold students' on demand close reading and writing abilities by repeated practice, group scoring, feedback, and reflection on a variety of sample AP-styled questions and prompts.

## Course Texts:

We read a variety of texts (short and long, fiction and creative nonfiction, poetry, etc) that focus on many different universal themes, social commentaries, etc. These texts include time periods from the 1600's forward and represent many cultures (including British and American).

- ❖ The course uses the ninth edition of *The Norton Introduction to Literature (Edited by Booth, Hunter, and Mays)* as the primary Anthology. This text contains stories, poems, and novellas from many different cultures (including British and American) as well as a wide historical and stylistic variety. This Textbook provides

commentaries on many of the stories, example analysis, and sample student essays as well as instruction on writing about literature.

- ❖ Though the textbook contains a multitude of poetry I also draw from a personal collection of poems by favorite authors, such as Symborska, Dunn, Eliot, Auden, Pound, Creeley, Corso, Keats, and Harrison.
- ❖ All students read the following novels (or plays) in addition to the shorter work in the Norton: Heart of Darkness, Frankenstein, Jane Eyre, The Turn of the Screw, The Great Gatsby, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Hamlet, and Things Fall Apart
- ❖ Students also draw from an extensive class library for independent or open-choice reading... highlighted texts include: The Awakening, One Hundred Years of Solitude, The Scarlet Letter, Cat's Cradle, The Catcher in the Rye, and Brave New World.

## Writing Expectations

- Students are expected to write many essays through the course of the year. All of the outside of class long term essays are expected to be revised and polished works. To this end some class time will be devoted to student-teacher and student-student conferences. Feedback also comes from written response to rough and final drafts turned into the instructor, evaluated, annotated, and returned to students. As our school devotes one period each day as a "Learning Lab," during which I am available for questions, students in need of help are expected to see me as necessary.
- For all essay assignments students will receive a rubric. This rubric will express the central guidelines/goals of the activity. Students should use it as a guide to focus the majority of their energy. All rubrics will include elements about the strength of writing, and for this reason students should constantly seek to identify and improve personal structural and grammatical weaknesses.
- Essays that students receive back after grading will have notations made on them to help guide the students toward fixing problem areas and all students are encouraged to revise and resubmit essays. As an absolute minimum, students are expected to review these comments and use them as an additional strategy to improve language, structuring, and rhetorical skills. As the tasks become more complex and the expectations more demanding as the year progresses students who fail to self reflect during the course suffer academically.

## Ongoing activities:

- ❖ The following items are done as mini-lessons in the course of our major units. As we have a block schedule (80 min. periods) at the school, class periods warrant the time to address these things during a portion of the class period. These things never receive single large unit activities, but are seen instead as being support for the skills of vocabulary enhancement, close reading and analysis, and on-demand writing and so are done as supplementary activities. **Please note that the following activities take place throughout the entirety of the year and are not further discussed in this syllabus.** As often as possible the multiple choice or free response questions are aligned with the subjects, forms, or thematic contents identified in the long term projects. The journals and vocabulary are always aligned with the units.
  - **Journal Activities:** Students keep a journal as part of their notebook. In it they are asked to reflect upon difficulties and strengths in their own education, respond to free writing activities, and generally explore ideas that we are entertaining as a class. **Some specific reference is made to journal prompts to provide a taste of the style and range of activities. All lessons contain these sorts of journal projects even when descriptions are not specifically provided in this curriculum.**
  - **Multiple Choice Questions-** every two weeks we read and answer a sample multiple choice section. We discuss what types of information you need to focus on in the close reading of the prompt to fully understand the test and its implications as well as strategies to use while answering the questions.
  - **Vocabulary-** As vocabulary is essential for the ability to understand and discuss literature, we work with literary terminology as well as vocabulary gathered during reading. During each lesson/unit, the class identifies unknown vocabulary being used in the textbook, in sample AP Test materials, and in Novels. We define, study, review, and test on this vocabulary in 10 minute class starters as well as seeing it used in context. **Though this is not described unit by unit (because it would be redundant to do so) students use this vocabulary in their writing (one must use literary terminology to discuss literature) and expand vocabulary knowledge through in context recognition.**
  - **Free response prompts-** Every two weeks we will view a sample AP free response prompt. We either discuss the prompt as a class to identify what it is requesting and possible directions to go in the response, or else the class answers it as a practice timed task.

## Summer Assignment:

- ❖ Before students enter the course they must complete a summer assignment that requires them to read a self-selected (but teacher-approved) literary work and discuss some of the basic aspects.
  - Open novel choice- approved before they leave school recommended texts include Marquez, Heller, Allende, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Twain, etc... We have a classroom library that contains many choice texts, though the students may purchase their own if they wish.
  - Journal activity- Students must develop a reading journal where they discuss their understandings and reactions to the text. Special focus should be paid to: Purpose, language (diction and syntax), imagery, characterization, motivations, tone, plot (and plot twists), settings, and cultural or social commentary,
  - Expository essay: Students must write a 2-5 page paper discussing what they see as the most striking, powerful, problematic, or detrimental features of the story. Explaining their reaction to the text with specific examples.

## UNIT 1- Storytelling basics

This unit is primarily an exploration of the basic language skills employed by authors in order to affect the reader. It uses the end and beginning chapters in the Norton textbook.

- Focus skills and subjects:
  - We open the unit by reading the preface section in Norton, which is a unit on the shape and function of storytelling including stories by Brewer, Carver, and Byatt. We discuss the language of these stories and how they use imagery, figurative language, syntax, diction, and detail choices to create an overall tone, mood, and meaning. At the same time we read and discuss chapters on how to write about literature. These include one chapter about paraphrasing, summary and description, one on the elements of an essay, and one on the writing process. Our reading and discussion requires students to recognize the variety of functions, structures, and methods involved in the telling of a story to create

controlling atmospheres as well as the variety of possible interpretations of human nature.

➤ Read:

- “20/20,” “A Conversation With My Father,” “Flight Patterns,” “Cathedral,” “Sonny’s Blues,” and “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”
- Norton: Preface and Chapters: 32, 33, 34
- Novel: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

➤ Write:

- In our first major essay we place a special focus on paraphrasing, quoting, and the writing process... the intent is to help students think about their own rhetorical techniques and language use as they write. The first prompt requests the students to compare and contrast the language and storytelling methods used by Achebe and one of the authors from our readings in the textbook. Students must determine the author’s purpose and explain how the development of this purpose is similar or different between the two texts. This essay is edited using in class one-on-one conferencing as well as peer feedback, it must go through at least three drafts. Edits focus on discussing things in general and specific detail (at what points might each be most useful and why both are needed) as well as basic organization and structural elements (such as transitions) of the essay.
- During this project students write journals that encourage them to compare the stories we are reading to other examples of storytelling to they have seen in their life (in terms of method, structure, and purpose).

## **UNIT 2- The basis of stories- the literal techniques**

The second major class unit focuses on the first four chapters of the Norton Anthology. We study plot, narration, point of view, characterization, and setting.

➤ Focus skills and subjects-

- Much of this unit is review for our students, so there is a lot of information packed in. We open this unit by discussing what motivates the events of a story... problems, conflicts, internal conflicts, discriminated actions, turning points, etc... viewing the ways that a storyline uses tension to catch and hold the reader in the events. We then move into discussions on point of view and different elements of narration, often referring back to our discussions on tone, and discussing the nature of a trustworthy vs. faulty

narrator and what the speaker's attitude adds or insinuates for a text. Next we discuss the common character elements in a story... protagonist, antagonist, round vs. flat, dynamic vs. static, stereotypes. We finish with a discussion of all of these things in the context of a setting, viewing closely the implications of each.

➤ Read:

- We read short stories including: "Happy Endings" by Atwood, "Sonny's Blues" by Baldwin, "The Cask of Amontillado" by Poe, "Hills like White Elephants" by Hemmingway, and "Bartleby, the Scrivener" by Melville
- Our first major text is *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James

➤ Write

- Our second major essay is an analytical one requiring students to analyze how the narration, characterization, plot structures, and setting of James' novel leads to a reader's impression of the governess's guilt or innocence. In this essay we focus on the student's structural techniques such as transitions, organization, paragraphing skills, and syntactical structures. Feedback is done in both written and discussion format. Students are encouraged to work with thesaurus to improve language selections and work with syntactical variety. As a class we work with improving transitions.
- Journaling activities include free writes on personal reactions to specific scenes. For example students are prompted to discuss what the impact of the governess's relocation to an unfamiliar place, the implications of her feelings for her boss, and the possible interpretations of the children's erratic movements around the estate. These prompts push for students to consider more possible psychological interpretations.

### UNIT 3- Abstract and Figurative Techniques

The third major unit focuses on chapters 5 and 6 of the Norton textbook... symbolism and theme.

➤ Focus Skills and Subjects:

- This unit begins with a discussion of common symbols in society and art. We discuss figurative language, metaphor, simile, archetypes, and allegories as we work with our short stories. Our goal is to see how these symbolic elements can work inside a text to create meanings all their own, or those that parallel the actions of the book. Our conversations then shift toward how themes and motifs are presented in sample texts, seeking to

locate ways that these symbolic and figurative aspects create meanings and commentaries on human psychology and nature, or else societal comments.

➤ Read:

- We read short stories including: “Young Goodman Brown” by Hawthorn, “A Hunger Artist” by Kafka, “The Management of Grief” by Mukherjee, and “Interpreter of Maladies” by Lahiri.
- Our second major text is *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

➤ Write:

- Our Third major essay is an expository/analytical essay that requires students to suggest a theme for *Heart of Darkness* and explain how it is developed through figurative or symbolic means. Students are prompted to recognize that there are a variety of possible symbolic interpretations for characters (especially the natives, the river, and Kurtz). This explanation must include textual quotes as well as identification of symbolic or figurative portions of the text (including imagery used) that reinforce the theme. Our editing focus on the students writing for this unit falls primarily on properly paraphrasing and using textual and illustrative details. Students peer conference and self reflect to evaluate whether their detail choices and descriptions provide explicit, easily understandable, relative and relevant examples for their discussions. Revision or conference time for this essay is available during learning lab.

#### **Unit 4 – The Whole Text... Prose Skills... All-Together Now**

This unit is a conglomeration and review of all the skills from the first three units. It uses chapter 7 from the textbook to help explore how language, literal structures, abstract or figurative elements, etc all coexist in a text to create an overall meaning. During this unit we also discuss the ability to judge a work based on how these elements are or are not successful as well as how well they cohere or contrast. This introduction to literary criticism is crucial to the student’s ability to be a discerning reader. With the basic elements of prose having been introduced students are expected to now use them to critique and analyze texts in a variety of ways.

➤ Focus Skills and Subjects.

- ◆ As we have already addressed all of the primary skills involved in this unit in a knowledge or comprehension way we now deal with students doing jigsaw activities to synthesize, critique, analyze, or evaluate the

elements used in the stories we view. Our real focus is on critical judgment and textual justification.

- Read-
  - ◆ Short Stories- "The Open Boat" by Stephen Crane and "Love Medicine" by Louise Erdrich
  - ◆ Novel- The major text for this unit is Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*
- Write-
  - ◆ This Essay is done as an extended, timed prompt... students may outline elements of the book and use this outline, but must write the physical essay in class. Students write an essay that argues whether various features (especially the narration, characterization, syntax, figurative language, and symbolism) in *Frankenstein* work together to create a powerful socially conscious book or contrast to lead to an ineffective work. Students are encouraged to qualify their answer by recognizing that there are multiple social, political, and religious interpretations... some of which may be relevant and some not. In class peer conferences combine with a submitted and returned rough draft to complete the editing requirements for the essay. The rough draft receives extensive comments relating to the students language, structure, detail selection, organization, and tone.

## ❖ Unit 5- Poetry Speaker and Situation

- This Unit focuses on chapters 14,15, 21, and 22 of the Norton textbook. With our first poetry unit we address various methods of responding to poetry through inquiry forms and personal response. We also focus on having an understanding of the how the speaker's background and situation affect the comments, language, and structure of the text before moving into a figurative interpretation of it.
- Focus Skills and Subjects
  - ◆ During this unit we work on concepts of connotations of language, contexts of speaker and setting, form, syntactical units and structures, and recognition of the literal scene being described in the piece. It is my opinion that a strong basis in the literal concepts presented in a poem alongside an understanding of what context the poem falls in are prerequisite to figurative interpretations.
- Read
  - ◆ Poems read may vary slightly but generally include the following authors: Elizabeth Browning, Jarold Ramsey, Jim Harrison, Linda Pastan, Ezra Pound, Robert Creeley, Liz Rosenberg, John Keats,

Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth Bishop, and Gregory Corso. The idea is to provide students with a wide sampling of styles, personal philosophies, and historical/cultural contexts.

- Write
  - ◆ Our first long term poetry essay requires students to select an author and read/analyze multiple of their poems. They must then research (research skills have been addressed in previous years' curricula) the author and time period and write a discussion (expository essay) of how the author, literary traditions, and environment (context) is evidenced in the poems subject, style, language, and/or structure. Editing needs are dealt with during learning lab or at the end of class. Students are to practice their own editing styles (they must be independently evaluating their language and structure).

#### ❖ Unit 6- Poetry- Tone, Language, and Form

- This unit focuses on chapters 13, 16, 17, 18 and 19 of the Norton textbook. Now that students have received a gentle introduction into poetry interpretation, we begin a more in depth discussion of the terms and techniques involved.
- Focus Skills and Subjects
  - ◆ This unit focuses on the tone, language, structures and terminology involved in poetry discussions. We discuss a wide variation of subjects ranging from precision and ambiguity of language, imagery, and the implications of metaphor, allusions, internal structure, external form, and sound structures. We are looking for students to question why poets make the textual choices that they do in poems. Students must interpret how the imagery, figurative language, tone, etc alter the effect of the poem.
- Read
  - ◆ In addition to the chapters headers students will read poems by Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson, Theodore Roethke, Sharon Olds, William Carlos Williams, Linda Pastan, William Shakespeare, John Donne, Edward Robinson, Samuel Coleridge, Dylan Thomas, and E.E. Cummings.

- Write
  - ◆ Students must write an in depth poem analysis that discusses how the structural, figurative, and language choices in a poem combine to accomplish the poems purpose. The essay receives a round of in class peer conferences to help students edit. This essay has a special focus on student's abilities to use appropriate strong adjectives and modifiers as well as a focus on the technical vocabulary being used to describe the poetic devices/elements. For this essay our revision focuses on the student's ability to use proper diction in their discussions.
  - ◆ Journal projects at this time tend to focus on annotation skills. Students are introduced to inquiry/annotation methods like those outlined by The Great Books Foundation. Students have a series of questions that they use as prompts to explore authors possible motivations for language choices, structural elements, images, and other poetic devices.

## ❖ Unit 7- Drama

- This unit focuses on chapters 26 and 27 of the Norton Textbook. We focus on discussing the differences in dramatic writing as well as what distinguishes the dramatic tragedy from the dramatic comedy.
- Focus Skills and Subjects
  - ◆ This unit focuses on the differences between drama and fiction, focusing especially on character, tone, style, purpose, and how sets and props affect the text.
- Read
  - ◆ As well as the Norton chapters, students read Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Margaret Edison's *Wit*, and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*.
  - ◆ The major piece for the unit is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*
- Write
  - ◆ This essay is an argument essay that asks students to take a stand on whether *Hamlet* is still valid or relevant in modern society. In the discussion of why it is or is not students must discuss the subject, elements, presentation, language etc of the play.

## ❖ UNIT 8- Historical, Cultural, and Other Contexts

- ◆ This unit uses information from Norton chapters 11 and 12. We use much of the same concepts as used in our poetry discussions on context to discuss how the author, literary traditions, culture, and form create contexts evidenced in the meanings and possible interpretations of the literature.
- Focus Skills and Subjects
  - ◆ Our major focus in this unit is historical context. We do, however, explore a variety of contexts and discuss the ways that outside forces alter the method or message of a text. We also spend much time discussing how authors make comments on the society around them through their work.
- Read
  - ◆ Short Stories: Flannery O' Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and *The Blind Man*, F Scott Fitzgerald, *Babylon Revisited* and an excerpt from *Echoes of the Jazz Age*
  - ◆ Novel: F Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
- Write
  - ◆ This Essay asks the students to discuss how the author's philosophies and the cultural context are evidenced in the text *The Great Gatsby*. This essay is done in a short period, students are urged to edit as they write or in short form after writing.

## ❖ Unit 9- (optional novel studies)

- Depending on where in the year we are (how many weeks of school are left), the class has two quicker (one to two week) novel studies units that we work with. We read *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Jane Eyre*. With both we review our discussions of literary techniques from the year: from structural elements, symbolism, contexts, narration techniques, etc. Further instruction is given on elements that students struggle with during the review.
- Writing-
  - Both of these novels lend very well to argumentative prompts. *One flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* culminates in a prompt requiring students to argue whether institutions operate in the best interest of their "clients." Students are expected to support their position with quotes from the text.

The class discusses different implications relating to this question and various questions of power and authority as they read. We discuss quotes that students write in a double entry style journal as they read.

- Jane Eyre culminates in a prompt that requires students to argue why Jane is or is not a strong, heroic character. Does she operate at the mercy of other characters; does she have a strong will? Students must support their interpretation with examples from the text. In class discussions focus on character behaviors and motivations.

## ❖ Unit 10- Open Project Assignment

- As the end of the year and the AP exam approaches students spend more time working with AP prompts, especially the open novel question. In our final unit students make note cards about 4 novels. These note cards cover the theme, style, culture, characters, plot, some choice quotes, etc that were in the novels. In addition to this students are asked to select one novel that they feel helps to round out the time periods and thematic content of the novels they have selected. This is used as a test prep method for the open text question.
- Focus Skills and Subjects
  - ◆ Students focus on an independent analysis of the novel. They are to use this project to review the year's content.
- Read
  - ◆ Students select the text... the following are available and recommended:
    - *The Scarlet Letter*
    - *Catcher in the rye*
    - *100 Years of Solitude*
    - *The Awakening*
    - *Catcher in the Rye*
    - *Cat's Cradle*
- Write
  - ◆ Students must select one from 5 provided open text questions and respond to it using their selected novel.

## ❖ Unit 10- Post- exam work

- ◆ Creating a play...
- After the Exam we work as a class on writing and editing a play in our class. Each student is assigned a character and they must bring them to life. This text is later published in our school's literary magazine. This allows students to practice a different method of understanding tone and language choice in writing.