

Advanced Placement Literature and Composition Cover Sheet

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Philosophy and Focus

This is a yearlong course that will build on the skills and experiences you have acquired in previous language arts courses, particularly involving critical and creative thinking about literature. The Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition course is predicated on a purposeful study of reading and writing. Our study of English is a process involving an exploration of the interrelationship between reading and writing, concentrating on the identification, interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the formal elements of literature and composition. Throughout the course, you will be introduced to the complexities of literary analysis and encouraged to apply exemplary depth of thought to essays, discussions and activities—providing not only contextual commentary about a work but universal and thematic as well, expounding readily on, for example, the author’s purpose or the human condition. Furthermore, while you cultivate active and close reading skills, you are encouraged to develop effective writing skills across a variety of modes. Through the reasoned articulation of reading and writing, you will develop an understanding of the relationship between the two and your position in the learning process.

The Reading

This course requires reading across a variety of genres and periods to encourage an understanding (and hopefully an appreciation) of many literary voices. Each unit involves examination of a main novel or drama accompanied by various poems, short stories, non-fiction works (essays and literary criticism), images, and perhaps theatrical adaptations or films. Additionally, each unit may necessitate a study of the historical and/or biographical context including literary movements and/or critical approaches. Our methodology to the reading will involve the *experience* of literature, the *interpretation* of literature, and the *evaluation* of literature. The individual sets the foundation for the literary experience, but before limiting an evaluation to a subjective reading, the objective skills of close reading analysis are prerequisite. Recognizing the many approaches and methods to understanding literature will unlock the many meanings of the literature. The reading requirements may seem intensive, yet your reading expectations are fairly simple: complete the assigned readings on time. Of course, completing a reading also involves a certain level of comprehension, as you will be discussing and writing about everything you read. The works themselves are selected for their ability to challenge both your reading and thinking skills.

In addition to the reading required for our in-class course of study, you are required to read 500 pages per quarter outside of class. The outside reading and the data sheet writing assignment that accompanies it are meant to provide broad exposure to major works of literature, a stronger foundation from which to cull for the AP exam in May (should you choose to take it), an introduction to college-level reading requirements, and an opportunity to tailor the course to your interests. The list of books for outside reading is comprised solely of works used on AP exams.

The Writing

This course requires writing across a variety of modes to encourage an interactive exploration of the learning process through literature. Each unit involves critical and creative writing assignments that assess formative and summative as well as subjective and objective thinking about the literature. Furthermore, the writing corresponds to the reading paradigm delineated above. You will write exploratory pieces such as journal entries and personal response papers to develop an understanding of your individual *experience* in reading literature. You will write expository pieces such as analytical essays that express varied *interpretations* of texts through scrutiny of the elements of style (figurative language, symbolism, etc.) and rhetoric (syntax, tone, etc.). And you will write *evaluative* pieces such as persuasive or argumentative essays that involve making judgments about the impact of the literature through reasoned application of interpretive skills.

Of course, the writing process also involves instruction and assessment. A completed, polished composition in one of the above modes will not (or at least should not) happen overnight. You will be introduced to and encouraged to appropriate and implement various compositional techniques, such as specialized vocabulary; effective organization; multiple levels of discussion including literal, inferential and universal (and a balance between detail and analysis); stylistic features including rhetorical and tonetic devices; and varied sentence and syntactical structures. The objective is for you to develop an individual style that is effective, articulate and stylistically mature while also insightful and engaging. My commentary on your work is meant to help you improve your writing efficacy. The expectation is that you will not only read my comments but take them to heart. A certain dedication to self-improvement when it comes to writing and thinking is encouraged (and appreciated). Every unit will involve writing instruction, practice, and assessment throughout the writing process—both before and after completion of written work.

In addition to the writing specific to each unit, you will be required to complete Annotated Glossaries and Poetry Responses throughout the year. The Annotated Glossaries require you to identify and reflect analytically on one single literary or rhetorical device per entry. Credit is awarded when and only when an entry is complete and accurate. You must resubmit incomplete, inaccurate, uninspired or just plain sloppy entries until success is attained—that is, until successfully fulfilling all of the requirements of the assignment while also demonstrating mature written expression. This promotes the mastery of a skill, not the accumulation of inferior writing. Poetry Responses require you to reflect personally (as opposed to analytically) on one poem per entry and write a single, full-page response.

Grading

Your grade in this course will be based on your performance in a variety of learning outcomes in two main categories:

- Work Habits (10%)
 - Participation
 - Reading Worksheets/Graphic Organizers/Activities
 - Study Guides/Reading Journals

- Skill-Based Assessments (90%)
 - Annotated Glossaries
 - Poetry Responses
 - Reading Quizzes
 - Unit Exams
 - Major Essays
 - Major Projects
 - District Writing Assessments

Most units will end with an AP-style exam comprised of multiple-choice questions to assess your critical reading of selected passages (both prose and poetry) and a timed writing to assess your ability to interpret and/or evaluate specific issues related to the main novel or drama for that unit. Some assignments will be worth more than others. Formative assessments are generally worth fewer points than summative assessments, but there are more of the former, so it is best to complete all of the work as this may, for example, offset a poor exam score. Additionally, some out-of-class writing assignments (such as the Annotated Glossaries) carry a revision clause—if the grade earned is not an A, you must revise and resubmit the work. If you do not meet the revision requirement, you will not receive any credit. Innumerable revisions are allowed within a certain time limit. Writing process mini-lessons, commentary on returned work, writing conferences, and peer editing activities will be invaluable to improvement. See **Responsibilities and Behavior** below for the late work policy.

The Exam

As you may be aware, this course involves a standardized exam taken in May. Although all of the reading, writing and thinking work we do in this course act as preparation for the exam, some familiarity with the exam and its structure is necessary. As I stated above, the final test for most units is an AP-style exam. Not only do these exams simulate a mini AP exam, they are also scored similarly—a 9-point essay scoring scale, 78-100% converted curve for an A, 45% multiple choice/55% essay, etc. Additionally, you will study the exam itself and read AP exam questions and essays scored by AP graders. This familiarity demystifies the real exam and encourages reflection on and, perhaps, improvement of your writing and thinking practices.

Responsibilities and Behavior

This will not be a strict lecture class. I am not “Mr. Wisdom” dispensing sagacity like Pez™ candy. Your responsibility as a student is to remain visible. Take an active, positive role in class life and you will be rewarded. Listen to others, laugh at yourself, ask questions and offer *supportable* answers. Because you are such an important cog in our AP machine, absences of any kind will affect more than just your grade of the moment. Comprehension of the material may suffer. **Student responsibilities after an absence:**

- Check the Course Calendar for any missed work.
- You have two class periods to make up work without penalty after returning from an excused absence. (This includes assignments, quizzes, tests, etc.) If you need more time, arrange it with me immediately.
- Other than excused absences, you will have **two weeks** from the due date to receive any credit for a given assignment, quiz or test. If you complete the work during this time, **I will dock 3 points from the score** and mark it late. In this way, a 5 point assignment and a 50 point assignment are equal in the eyes of lateness—you lose the same amount of points. This can be very costly to your grade, though, so do not develop a habit of turning in assignments late.
- No credit will be given for assignments more than two weeks late unless otherwise arranged. (Do not assume any such arrangement—come talk to me!)
- **Quizzes and Tests missed due to unexcused absences will receive no credit.**
- **All Quizzes and Tests missed due to excused or school related absences must be made up in my presence.**

A word about the use of various book notes *in place of reading the novels*

In a word, this is *cheating*, as the assignment is to *read* the novels. Additionally, it defeats the most important purpose of the assignment, which is to improve your thinking, reading and language skills. We learn to read by reading; we improve by practicing. We learn to think by actively formulating our own conclusions, not by passively assimilating the hard-earned thoughts of others. By reading well-written books, we also learn to write well because we unconsciously improve our vocabulary and learn the patterns of good sentence structure. There is no magic pill for the acquisition of these skills; reading is the only way. Stop whining—this is AP!

Money Issues

You will be responsible for acquiring all of the texts for this course. By buying your own texts, you can mark, bend, fold, tear, highlight, underline, exclaimate, question, drop, roll, and drown these books and in doing so, become a reader. In some cases (see me if you have a need), I may have copies to lend, but that eliminates the opportunity to mark, bend, fold, tear, etc. Additionally, I provide a pdf copy of all the course texts on my website. If you can't acquire a book, you'll have to settle for a digital copy.

Questionable Content

Remember, this is not a typical high school course. It would disserve both myself and you if I attempted to censor our reading based on what I might teach a regular high school class. The list is as follows:

SUMMER

A book from the summer reading list (any version)

A play from the summer reading list (any version)

SEMESTER 1

The Great Gatsby ISBN 0684801523
Slaughterhouse Five ISBN 0440180295
Hamlet ISBN 0521618746
Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead ISBN 0802132758

SEMESTER 2

Heart of Darkness ISBN 037575377X
The Handmaid's Tale ISBN 038549081X
Song of Solomon ISBN 0452260116

Additionally, we may view film versions of some of these works in an effort to further develop understanding of the novels and their transcending impact on society beyond the printed word. Signing this cover sheet provides permission to participate in our continued learning experience with these texts by viewing the films. I stand behind my choice of texts and supplementary material as containing merit on many levels. If, however, you or your parents are concerned about any of the texts, I will be very willing to discuss with you the reasons for their inclusion in our course of study.

The ISBN indicates the copy I will be using for instruction and, thus, the pagination; you are not bound to those versions, of course, but translating page numbers is your responsibility.

Administrivia

1. Revision is not merely editing; it is re-vision—looking again at your written work. You will be revising your writing frequently. If at first you don't succeed...
2. Extra credit may rear its head, but you will only be eligible for said credit if you have turned in or earned points on **every** assignment/assessment.
3. The logic of this course is as follows: What you get out of this class is in direct proportion to what you put in.
4. Ambiguity, complexity and unorthodoxy will be your companion in this class. Be prepared to change your beliefs concerning right answers and stupid ideas.

Invaluable Quotations

“You forget what you want to remember, and you remember what you want to forget.” – Cormac McCarthy

“Finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind.” – Miguel de Cervantes

“Analyzing literature is like *the law*—it doesn't matter what you *think*; it only matters what you can *prove* beyond a reasonable doubt.” – Nate Hoffman

“Anyone who ever gave you confidence, you owe them a lot.” – Truman Capote

“Every text is a lazy machine asking the reader to do some of the work.” – Umberto Eco

“No, I don't like the work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work,—no man does—but I like what is in the work,—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself, not for others—what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means.” – Joseph Conrad

Student Name (print): _____

Student Signature: _____

Parent or Guardian Signature: _____