

AP English Literature & Composition Spotswood High School 2007  
Syllabus

Course Description

Students who desire a place where they will read, speak, and write about literature of a more complex nature will find a home in Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition. Here there will be an emphasis on insightful thinking and effective presentation of ideas in both oral and written formats.

The reading requirements for the course will require the students' utmost care and attention. Time management will surely be necessary to facilitate the effective study of a myriad of material. There will be assigned summer reading as well as additional texts in daily use in the classroom. The novel, short fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction will be the genres from which reading assignments will be drawn. Through close reading for textual analysis students will be able to address a work's style, structure, themes, figurative language, imagery, tone, symbolism, character development, and social/historical relevancy.

Students will have an opportunity to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. Students will be able to workshop a college application essay. They will write critical essays explicating poetry, short fiction, drama, and the novel. Included here will be the timed format of the AP Exam with its open question dealing with listed literary works. In addition to the open format question, there will be poetry or prose selections requiring essay writing( done for homework) where careful thought can be given to practice skills needed for successful composition. There will be a required literary research paper in which students will have freedom of choice as to the author, poet, or playwright and in which they will set their own thesis and develop evidence that illustrates and demonstrates their ideas. In addition to critical writing there will also be provided opportunities to write creatively. These will include but are not limited to poetry, short fiction, and play scripts. Journals are a required part of the curriculum as well. Not "diaries", but assigned topics and questions that result from an intensive examination of both the literature and nonfiction under investigation. These journals will be collected and evaluated once each marking period.

This course is designed to comply with the curricular requirements described in the *AP English Course Description*. (C1) Through applied academic diligence students will

develop a strong sense of self and emerge as articulate, creative, responsible, and productive members of society.

Topic/Unit: College Application Essay

Approximate # of weeks: 2

Since students are inundated with the college application process, I begin the year with this workshop. Students will hear and critique a series of sample college application pieces after an initial introductory segment about writing this very specific essay.

Discussion of strengths and weaknesses in these college essays, as perceived by the students in the class, takes about 3 to 5 days. After careful consideration, students will set out to draft their own college essay. After 3 days students will return to this workshop with a first draft of their work. Reading aloud followed by large group discussion as well as smaller group/pair/ teacher written responses provide feedback for student writers.

The end result is a final, polished college application essay fit for use in the application process. So here then, students will be able to explore criteria, and draft a successful college application essay.

Topic/Unit: Short Fiction

Approximate # of weeks: 3 – 4

Students will be able to examine a wide range of short fiction and be able to analyze the elements of character, theme, style, literary devices, etc.

Assignment sheets are compiled from short fiction in our textbook, *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia. The students keep these assignments in the literature journal. The journals are collected and graded every marking period. However, the work students have done on a given story is utilized during class discussion daily. Students are encouraged to create at least three points of discussion to be used as augmentation following my guided discussion questions.

In this unit, students will discuss and present orally a story from James Joyce's collection, *Dubliners*, which students read during the summer.

Testing on these short fiction selections results in an essay on a particular effect an author achieves in his/her story and how he/she uses such elements as symbolism, imagery, diction, and organization. I also encourage students to analyze theme and character traits/motivations through the presentation of direct quotation from the texts.

There is also time given for students to write original short fiction. Opportunity is given for first draft peer and teacher conferencing as well as time for students to revise their first draft based upon the feedback provided by peers and myself.

Topic/Unit: "The Play's the Thing..."

Approximate # of weeks: 5 – 6

Beginning with the Greeks, students will be able to probe the origins of early drama and its conventions. Then we take a look at Aristotle's, *The Poetics*, and examine his definition of tragedy and the tragic hero as these terms are then applied to our study of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*. Later, we will still be considering Aristotle's ideas as they can be related to Arthur Miller's character of Willy Loman in, *Death of a Salesman*, which students read in the Summer. Through journal work, note-taking, class discussion, and essay writing students will be able to demonstrate understanding and command of these literary works.

In addition to the above-prescribed curriculum, students read another Greek play during the summer. They had freedom of choice (with the exception of those titles we were to read during the year) as to what play or playwright they would want to experience. A thorough journal was kept on that choice and a creative project that would be presented

to the class was the end result. The objective here is to employ creative means to demonstrate keen understanding of the literature.

While we are still intrigued with Aristotle's tragic hero we read William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. About half is read aloud in class and students read half at home. From carefully kept notes and class discussion students will examine characters, themes, and literary devices. A final essay test asks students to characterize the Prince of Denmark through his soliloquies or respond to a quote by Samuel Taylor Coleridge about the character of Hamlet. Specific quotes and references from the text are mandatory in the preparation of this test. Students will be able to select appropriate direct quotations to support any written discussion of this play.

Finally, time permitting, I show clips from a variety of Hamlet productions: Kevin Kline on the NY stage, Mel Gibson's version, Kenneth Branagh's epic movie, and Ethan Hawke in a very modern interpretation. Students seem to have a real interest and appreciation for the play as well as the point of view of the producer.

As mentioned earlier, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is the final focus of this unit of study. Students have also read this during the summer so we can discuss this readily as students rely upon their previously performed journaling efforts. I provide students with character profile sheets, which I use in my Drama classes and ask them, to pair up and do character sketches. We discuss their views on theme as well as finding evidence to back them up. I like to use the Dustin Hoffman DVD of this play to pull everything together. Students then respond to one of six statements provided by the teacher (closely related to Aristotle's definitions of tragedy/tragic protagonist) during an in class (timed) essay.

Simply because there is so much tragedy here, we also include Oscar Wilde's, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. As a contrast and also as an opportunity to showcase Wilde and the Aesthetics, students explore this comedy of manners and its commentary on the society of the time. Mastery of this play must be demonstrated through a written essay following study.

Topic/Unit: The Novel and Literary Research

Approximate # of weeks: 2 – 3 weeks Literary Research paper is ongoing from September through May when it will be due.

Students will be able to recognize and understand the elements of a novel, be able to analyze theme, characters, and author's purpose. Students will be able to review the scholarship related to a given work, use literary criticism effectively, and compare/contrast works based on style, structure, and themes. These goals will be achieved through a variety of means, including, but not limited to: close reading, small group sharing, large group discussion, journal responding to specific topics, note-taking, oral presentation, and the literary research paper.

Works under consideration are:

*Mrs. Dalloway* (Summer reading) by Virginia Woolf and Michael Cunningham's, *The Hours*

*The Invisible Man* Ralph Ellison \* *Native Son* Richard Wright \*  
*The Bluest Eye* Toni Morrison \*

*The Sound and the Fury* William Faulkner

\*Students had a choice to select one of these for summer reading.

Students will be able to draw parallels and distinctions between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* through discussion and in writing. They will be able to address the differences between the stylistic approaches by Woolf and Cunningham but will be able to make the many "connections" between the two works. Students will interpret these novels but also will consider the social and historical values as they are reflected in the texts, They will be able to answer the question, what do these works (in conjunction with a poem called "The Hours" by Mark Doty) have to say about the "hours" of one's life?

In the assigned research paper, students will be able to examine three novels or three authors and create a thesis statement with which they can engage in an in-depth discussion of said literature. Five sources of literary criticism must be included in this discussion. Therefore students will be able to select effective literary criticism, which will support their thesis, and they will be able to employ correct MLA format in their research papers.

Students will draft a first copy of their paper and will conference with me before a final draft is handed in for a grade. I am also open to any help needed as students ply their way through the research process.

The assignment is made in the early part of the year so as to enable students to read, think, consider deeply which author or authors will draw them in and which they will most enjoy as they do this valuable work.

If a student really has a deep desire to write about a poet's body of work or a playwright's, I will conference with that person and we will come to terms on what would be acceptable content, comparable to others' work involving the novels.

Topic/Unit: Poetry Ongoing throughout the course

It is imperative that students experience all the forms of poetry that time will allow. Students will learn to navigate their way through the Sonnet, Epigram, Villanelle, Sestina, Ode, Elegy, Ballad, Lyric, and Blank Verse.

I supply copies of poems to be studied and we use our textbook as well, *Literature An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama* by X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia.

Students write essays that interpret the poems based upon textual details including, but not limited to, figurative language, syntax, rhyme, meter, imagery, allusion, tone, etc. These essays are revised according to peer/teacher conferencing and sharing within the whole class.

An outlet for creative writing of original poetry is also offered. I do not grade these but students (some) like an opportunity to try their hand at a particular style or theme/issue. These become possible entries for our school's literary magazine. Sharing these in class always makes for a fun activity and serves as a break from other more rigorous pursuits.

Writing Assignments

There have been mentioned throughout this syllabus a variety of writing assignments but I just wanted to be specific about my role in the writing process. We talk a lot about thesis, having a “valid “something to say. Many students do not know how to frame one, so early on this is discussed and pointed out in what we read.

My written comments on students’ papers will often refer to thesis formation and evidence provided. I also address sentence structure and effective use of language, including subordination and coordination. Spelling and use of a well-developed vocabulary are also addressed so that students learn as they rewrite how to improve these aspects of their writing. Logical organization of ideas, use of transitional language, coherence of thought are required in all writing so I make a point of speaking to these as well in my written comments. I will also comment on the writer’s “voice”, this is sometimes difficult for student to develop and maintain. It is exciting when one sees a really keen voice in the making.

I am dedicated to a timely return of work so that students benefit from my comments/suggestions and can make use of them in revision.