

AP English Language & Composition Syllabus

Course Overview

The following course design was developed using the guidelines outlined in the *AP English Course Description* published by the College Board.

This introductory, college level course is designed to strengthen and deepen students' reading and writing skills. Throughout the course of the year, students will be exposed to nonfiction, as well as some fiction, from a variety of periods and written for a variety of purposes. As they read, they will explore and practice the techniques writers employ in order to convey and achieve their writing purposes and connect with their audiences. In the course of this study, students will increase their awareness of rhetoric and how language is crafted to achieve particular effects. Through close reading and frequent writing assignments, students will develop their abilities to work with complex and challenging texts while strengthening their composition skills.

The year opens with a focus on the students developing a stronger identity as a reader and writer and developing their ability to respond with insight to what is happening in the world around them, becoming a stronger participant in the larger dialogues occurring in their school, their community, and their nation. With this in mind, the course was developed with a thematic focus, encouraging students to explore with more depth their identities as readers and writers and the concept of identity as informed by personal experience, family, race and culture, and history and politics. The readings for the course are comprised of a number of nonfiction and a few fiction works that address these themes from different perspectives and are reflective of the population of the student body.

Many of these chosen readings are based on the represented author's list found within the AP English Course Description with some additions based on the goals of the course and the goals of the vertical curriculum within the English Department. The course textbooks include *Everyday Use: Rhetoric at Work in Reading and Writing*; *Everything's an Argument* and a number of supplemental essays and texts.

Course Planner

Strategies Used Throughout the Year

Discussion

At the beginning of the year, students will begin practicing developing questions using the text/personal/world questioning strategy developed by Leila Christenbury and Patricia Kelly. This strategy will not only give students a format by which to begin developing strong questions that delve more deeply into the readings that we will discuss, but also provide a framework through which to discuss the role of the author in relation to his audience and subject matter. These student-developed questions will initially serve as a supplement to teacher guided discussions and ultimately provide the basis for discussions of class texts. Students will also learn the principles of the Socratic seminar, a strategy the class will implement for some full-class and smaller group discussions.

Close Reading

Throughout the year, various strategies will be used to support students' close reading of texts. Annotation, dialectical journals, guided group and class discussions, and says/does analyses will all be used to assist students in developing their close reading skills.

Timed Writings

Throughout the course of the year, students will complete several timed writings: some former questions from AP tests, some questions that have been developed based off of readings completed in class. The goal of the timed writings is to build students' ability to respond on demand and in a limited amount of time to the various writing situations they will encounter on the AP exam.

Vocabulary

In order to help students decipher the difficult texts found on the AP exam, we will slowly develop our vocabulary with a list of ten words each week. Over the course of the week, four students will be responsible for demonstrating the use of the vocabulary in context. These demonstrations will be held every day so that students encounter the vocabulary in a variety of contexts.

Writing Conferences

Writing conferences will serve as a key element in the students' development as writers. For each major paper, they will prepare and participate in conferences regarding the development of their subject and the crafting of their essay. Depending on the assignment, students will conference with their peers and/or with the teacher regarding their writing purpose and whether or not they have effectively achieved that purpose.

Additionally, conferences will focus on the continued development of students' use of vocabulary, syntax, structure, support, and rhetorical strategies in order to achieve their writing purpose. With the assistance of these conferences, students will undergo a thorough self-evaluation and revision process for each major paper.

Writing Notebooks

Students will begin a writing notebook within the first few weeks of school and retain this notebook throughout the year. This will serve as a place for students to explore various topics and strategies through more informal writing experiences (journals, imitation exercises, quote responses, etc.) than the major papers described below. It will also serve as the place for students to record their prewriting and self-evaluations for their major papers as well as their reflections on writing conferences. Since this notebook will be a yearlong project, it will allow the students a unique opportunity to see and reflect on their development as a writer at the end of the year, when they will develop a portfolio of their work.

First Quarter: *The Development of the Essay and an Introduction to Close Reading and Rhetoric.*

The quarter will start off with an exploration of what it means to be a reader and writer.

Students will read a number of essays including Joan Didion's "On Keeping a Notebook," Eudora Welty's "One Writer's Beginnings," Virginia Woolf's "Angel in the House," Francis Bacon's "Of Studies," and Leslie Marmon Silko's "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective." The class will study these essays exploring the relationship between reader and writer. With each essay students will account for purpose and audience while also being introduced to various rhetorical strategies and modes. Concurrent with this focus, students will also explore (in backwards chronological order) American literary periods and contextualize each text within their literary context.

Throughout the first quarter, students will study rhetorical purpose and language with a focus on developing a strong understanding of diction, tone, and various syntactical strategies while being introduced to the five canons of rhetoric. Each week new rhetorical strategies and rhetorical modes will be introduced and explored through class readings and then mimicked through various writing activities (journals, individual and collaborative writing assignments). Students' study of rhetoric will be supplemented with activities and readings from *Everyday Use: Rhetoric at Work in Reading and Writing* (Chs. 1, 2, 3 and 4). Students will be expected to do a long form analysis of one of their summer reading books.

Major Paper #1: Expository Essay

During the course of the first few weeks, students will reflect on their own experience as a reader and writer as they explore the experiences of others through class reading and discussion. As a part of this ongoing discussion, students will prepare an essay exploring the following comment by Judith Cofer Ortiz: "Books kept me from going mad. They allowed me to imagine my circumstances as romantic: some days I was an Indian Princess living in Zenana, a house of women, keeping myself pure, being trained for a brilliant future. Other days I was a prisoner: Papillon, preparing myself for my great flight to freedom." Students will analyze the role reading and language has played in their own lives, pulling examples from their summer reading as well as from other books they have read. An initial draft will be completed in class after a thorough review of the elements of an essay and a discussion of various modes of writing. Following individual student/teacher conferences on their drafts, students will revise and complete this expository piece.

The class will continue to emphasize close reading, annotation and the study of rhetorical purpose and language as we begin reading *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. We will focus on the development of the speaker's persona while also making a thematic shift from focusing on the role of reading and writing to studying the development of identity. Students will practice close reading of various rhetorical strategies through guiding questions that will be provided and discussed in groups and as a class. Students will account for their individual reading through various reading logs and development of their own shared inquiry questions. All these assignments will be completed in their reading journal.

The reading of NOTLOFD will be peppered with a variety of texts focused on the use of education and literacy as a tool of struggle. Readings include but are not limited to Malcolm X's "Learning to Read", Benjamin Benneker's "Letter to Thomas Jefferson" and Martin Luther Kings "Letter from Birmingham Jail".

Major Paper #2:

After reading and discussing several texts relating to systemic disenfranchisement and inequality, students will determine which rhetorical devices are most effective in writing. Students will write an argumentative essay using examples from at least 3 of the texts we have read as a class.

Second Quarter: Continued Exploration of Rhetoric and Introduction to Argument

Major Paper #3

We will continue our discussion of rhetorical context – purpose, audience, and strategies– and delve further into an exploration of style by examining a series of essays about encounters with nature including but not limited to E.B. White’s “Once More to the Lake,” Anne Dillard’s “Living Like Weasels” Henry David Thoreau’s “Walking” and by Donald Culross Peattie’s “The Rattler. Also, during the course of the quarter, students will be introduced to the structure of argument and discuss various rhetorical strategies used in developing argument.

Next, we will read Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre*. As we read, students will continue to practice close reading strategies and analyze societal expectations. Time permitting, we will branch into Jean Rhys’ *The Wide Saragasso Sea* to examine different viewpoints and the shifting roles of women in societies around the world. At the end of this unit, students will write an argumentative essay in response to the question “Is *Jane Eyre* a feminist novel? A critique of the class system? Or something else entirely?”

Major Paper #4 – Argumentation – Toulmin Model

As we study argumentation, students will explore concepts presented in Chapters 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, and 15 of *Everything’s an Argument*, including the sample readings contained therein. The class will not only practice analyzing and understanding arguments presented by other authors but also develop their own arguments using the Toulmin model as described in *Everything’s an Argument* and the classical argument structure outlined in *The Informed Argument* (supplemental teacher text). As presented in the main class text, students will discuss the idea that *Everything’s an Argument*.

Concurrent with our exploration of the basics of argument writing, the class will read texts relating to utopian/dystopian ideals. Selections include but are not limited to, excerpts from Plato’s *The Republic*, Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* Sir Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Experience” and William Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*.

The texts of the quarter explore various notions of an ideal (or perhaps horrific) world. The students will develop an argument paper which argues for what they conceive of as the most ideal way to construct society. Together, the class will review ideas and concepts brought up in various readings and brainstorm ideas for the creation of a perfect state. Students will have to pull support from their observations, experiences, and readings in order to support their idea of a

perfect society. Also, after more than a quarter of close reading and analyzing rhetorical strategies, students will be asked to implement some of those strategies as they craft this paper.

After the initial brainstorming session, students will walk through a prewriting activity in which they explore their subject matter, their audience, their experiences, and the interrelationships between these three. This will give them a point from which to begin crafting their assignment. An initial draft will be peer edited, a second draft reviewed by myself, and then a final draft completed and turned in for final evaluation. During these conferences students will be asked to discuss and begin cataloguing the rhetorical strategies they are using to effectively present their topic and connect with their audience.

Additionally, students will begin studying visual arguments in advertisements and film. During the class' transition from a thematic focus on family to race and culture, students will watch and analyze the images and argument presented in the film *An Inconvenient Truth* (or possibly *Good Hair*). The questions and strategies laid out in Chapter 15 of *Everything's an Argument* will provide the basis by which students analyze the images in the film as well as other images presented in class. As we begin looking at more visual arguments, students will also be introduced to the OPTIC strategy (giving an overview of visual; noting parts of visual; title and its significance, interrelationships – exploring interrelationships of parts and title; drawing a conclusion about the visual as a whole). Additional visual images (cartoons pulled from the *New Yorker*, advertisements, and paintings related to class readings) will be analyzed and explored through the course of the year.

Also, as part of test preparation, students will write a number of timed writings throughout the year. These timed writings will be based on class readings and will either explore the strategies the authors use to develop their arguments or will respond directly to those arguments.

Major Paper #5 – Argumentation – Definition

The fifth major paper for the year will focus on the definition of what constitutes an appropriate mascot. Students will examine the beloved Pittsburg mascot of the pirate and examine whether the pirate stands up to the definition of “an appropriate mascot”. Student will cite examples (both appropriate and inappropriate) from other institutions and back up their criteria with formal observations, interviews and/or surveys that they have conducted themselves.

This assignment requires students to review the MLA citation and research strategies learned during their sophomore year and used for the AP English Language and Composition summer homework. They will make use of the required writing handbook (Prentice Hall's *Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action Ruby Level*) and *Everything's an Argument* (Chs. 21-22) as they evaluate, choose, and cite sources. Final drafts must include citations and a works cited list.

As they craft their essays, students will again explore the relationship between the writer (themselves), the subject matter and the intended audience. A rough and final draft will be completed with time set aside for peer editing and self-evaluation of the rough draft. Semester Final – Two hours –Three essays: one argumentative essay and two rhetorical analyses from prior AP exams.

Third Quarter: Deepening Our Understanding of Argumentation and an Introduction to Synthesis

During the second quarter, students will deepen their understanding of argument and authors' use of rhetorical strategies, reviewing figurative language and rhetorical modes. As the class continues their study of argumentation, students will explore the concepts laid out in Chapters 14, and 17-20 in *Everything's an Argument*, focusing specifically on the use of figurative language, fallacies, and the importance of delivery in spoken arguments. As always, an exploration of authors' purpose, rhetorical strategies and style will guide class discussions and readings. Timed writings close reading assignments, and the writer's notebook assignments, as described above, will continue to be important strategies in evaluating and supporting students' understanding.

Thematically, we will continue our exploration of culture and begin bridging into a focus on how history and politics in the United States affects how we identify ourselves and with whom we identify ourselves. Texts will include "Black Men and Public Space" by Brent Staples, "How it Feels to Be Colored Me" by Zora Neale Hurston, and the study (reading and viewing) of various political speeches, including speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, John F. Kennedy, and current political figures, among others.

Major Paper #6 – Rhetorical Analysis

The students' study of political speeches will culminate with a major paper exploring the rhetorical strategies used to convey the speaker's argument in one of the speeches studied in class. Students will view or listen to the speech as well as read the text, annotating, and analyzing the effectiveness of the strategies used. Students will prepare for a writing conference with the teacher in order to review their rough draft. During this conference, student and teacher will discuss the rhetorical strategies the student chooses to focus on as well as the development of the analysis. A second draft will be peer edited and followed by a final draft.

The next unit will explore the American dream and whether or not it is presently alive and well today and how it has changed over the decades. As the class explores this topic, students will also study class in American society. Primary texts for this unit include *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the PBS documentary *Affluenza*, "Alienation and Social Classes" by Karl Marx, "Conspicuous Consumption" by Thorstein Veblen, "On Dumpster Diving" by Lars Eighner, and excerpts from "Class Matters," a New York Times special series published in the spring of 2007.

Major Paper #7 – Synthesis Essay Gatsby

As a continuation of our discussion on the American dream and class, students will complete a synthesis essay addressing the following: Is the American dream alive and well today? What forces work to keep the American dream alive? What forces are undermining the American dream? Students will be expected to develop an argument incorporating insights and a discussion of passages from *The Great Gatsby* and three of the other readings in the unit. Students must use correct MLA citation and include a works cited list with their final draft.

After students close read and annotate passages from the assigned texts, comparing the ideas presented therein, they will again complete a prewriting exercise exploring their subject matter, their audience, their own experiences, and the interrelationships between these three. This exercise will help the students develop a focus for their writing. The first rough draft will be peer edited and the second rough draft will be discussed during a student/teacher conference. Final drafts will be evaluated for the effective development of the argument, incorporation of multiple sources to support the essays proposition, and revision of multiple drafts.

Fourth Quarter: Preparing for the AP Exam, Evaluating Personal Development as a Reader and Writer, and Personal Statements

During the fourth quarter the class will continue their discussion of rhetorical strategies, style, and argumentation as well as continue practicing the implementation of such strategies in their own writing. Timed writings, review of multiple choice stems, multiple choice practice tests, guided discussions, close reading assignments, and written responses will be key components of the final review for the AP exam.

For the final unit, the class will explore the use of satire and humor in writing. Students will read various selections from *The Onion*, Jonathon Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, Dave Barry's *Lost in the Kitchen* in addition to a variety of television satire including (but not limited to) *The Simpsons*, *The Daily Show* and *Last Week Tonight*. Students will investigate the rhetoric of satire (exaggeration, parody, reversal etc.) are used in order to call attention to an issue and/or bring about a social change. Students will try their hand at creating satire as well as writing rhetorical analyses of satirical texts.

After the AP exam students will participate in literature circles. They will have a choice of texts to read: *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams and *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger. In groups students will focus on the strategies the authors use to develop the theme within the novels and the personal journeys of the characters. Each group will keep a dialogue journal that will be passed from student to student in addition to completing close reading assignments. Groups will also develop shared inquiry questions to support their exploration of the novel. Each group will plan a final Socratic seminar to be conducted in their group and reviewed by the teacher. Additionally, each group will prepare a presentation exploring how the theme is revealed through the characters.

Major Paper # 8 – Personal Essay

The novels above all Students will be asked to choose a significant moment in their life that reveals something about their character or something that they have learned about life or about themselves. Students will also be asked to choose an object (photograph, memento, film, etc.) that represents that moment or what that moment reveals. After completing the prewriting assignment exploring the relationship between the subject, the reader, and the writer, students will compose a 500 word personal statement exploring that moment, using the object as a focus for their brainstorming and writing. Rough drafts will be peer edited and reviewed by the teacher before final drafts are included in the students' portfolios.

Student Evaluation

Students are informally and formally evaluated based on their consistent engagement with course material, their progress, and their performance on various assignments. The expectations for written assignments will evolve as students build their written and analytical skills. Papers, timed writings, and other assignments that earn a high score at the beginning of the year would not earn the same score at the end of the year.

Essays will be graded on the AP scale. In order to understand this scale, students will review sample essays and the AP rubrics before starting to work on any assignment. Students will conference with the teacher and with their classmates before submitting major papers for feedback. All papers will be graded according to a rubric so that students understand how to improve their work. Additionally, students and teacher will conference periodically throughout the course so that students have a better understanding of how to improve their writing. During these conferences, students and teacher will discuss the student's mechanical and rhetorical strengths and weaknesses. Students will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit essays to show improvement in their writing.

Student work, depending on the individual assignment, will receive a grade of 1-9 or a Pass/No Pass. Students will have the option of rewriting major papers in order to improve the paper and the grade. Tests may be made up within one week of the original test date.

Final grades will be calculated based on the following formula:

- 20% In-Class Tests/Quizzes (including multiple choice tests, and the first semester final exam)
- 30% Major Papers
- 20% Homework/Classwork/Participation (including writer's notebook, participation in group and class discussions, close reading assignments, etc.)
- 15% Summer Homework/Timed Writings
- 15% All other Writing Assignments and Writer's Portfolio

Recommended Supplies:

1. 3-Ring Binder with a set of five dividers (1.5-2")
2. Index Cards (At least 250)
3. A set of Highlighters (Orange, Yellow, Blue, Green Pink)
4. College Ruled Paper
5. 1 Spiral Notebook (70 pages or so, college-ruled)
6. Black or Blue Ball Point Pens
7. Post-it Notes
8. Flash Drive