

AP English Language and Composition – Curriculum Map

Course Overview

AP Comp. (as our school designates the course as distinct from AP Lit., which is offered in the senior year) is a senior year seminar designed to engage students in becoming more skilled readers of prose texts drawn from a range of periods, disciplines and rhetorical contexts, and to become more accomplished writers who compose for a variety of purposes.

Throughout the year, our efforts to determine what a given text might “mean” are paired with an equal emphasis on determining *how* that text manages to produce that meaning *in language*. Because these readings are intended to inform the students’ own growth as writers, students are encouraged to learn to read with a writer’s eye.

As a college-level course constructed along the guidelines described in the AP English Course Description, students are expected to invest themselves in routine reading and writing assignments over and above the level normally required of high school students (as a rule, students are expected to devote at least an hour to their course work outside of class for every hour spent in the classroom—though student workloads often exceed this ratio).

In an effort to promote their development as active readers, students, who are provided with their own copies of all readings, are expected to annotate their texts thoroughly and to produce informal written responses to them (see annotation guidelines and reading log descriptions below) prior to class discussions.

The course takes an extremely process oriented approach to the instruction of writing, and students are presented with a variety of strategies (which are understood to be recursive) for generating, drafting and revising their formal essay assignments. In addition to creating regular opportunities for peer review, student work is routinely commented upon by the instructor who, on the manuscripts themselves and in extensive endnotes, addresses both larger rhetorical issues (‘macro’ concerns such as audience, purpose, organization and development) and particular, sentence-level matters (such ‘micro’ concerns as diction, syntax, grammar, mechanics and usage). Time is routinely set aside for conferencing with students about their early drafts. Indeed, students are frequently reminded that, despite the heavy reading load, the most important “texts” in this course are the ones they themselves produce. In the case of “informed” essay assignments—those that draw on other authors’ words and views—students are instructed in, and expected to conform to the conventions of MLA in-text citation (Diana Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference* is used as an instructional resource).

Finally, and in accordance with the recent changes in the AP English Language and Composition exam, students are given frequent opportunities to engage—both creatively

and analytically—with graphic and visual images that are presented as alternative “texts” in their own right.

Note: Where appropriate, a listing of representative readings is included after each unit. These titles may vary from year to year. An appendix listing instructional resources and including representative assignments and handouts appears at the end of this syllabus and is meant to inform the description of “Instructional Units: that follows.

Standards Addressed:

I. Oral Expression and Language Study

- 1. Oral presentations require effective presentation strategies;*
- 2. Listening critically to comprehend a speaker's message requires mental and physical strategies to direct and maintain attention.*

II. Reading for All Purposes

- 1. Increasingly complex literary elements in traditional and contemporary works of literature require scrutiny and comparison;*
- 2. Increasingly complex informational texts require mature and interpretation and study*

III. Writing and Composition

- 1. Literary or narrative texts develop a controlling idea or theme with descriptive and/or expressive language;*
- 2. Informational and persuasive texts develop a topic and establish a controlling idea or thesis with relevant support*
- 3. Writing for grammar, usage, and mechanics and clarity requires ongoing refinements and revisions.*

IV. Research and Reasoning

- 1. Informational materials, including electronic sources, need to be collected, evaluated, and analyzed for effectiveness.*
- 2. Information from primary and secondary sources is used to establish relevance, significance, and accuracy in answering research questions.*
- 3. Effective problem solving strategies require high-quality reasoning.*

Instructional Units

• Unit One: Writing as Inquiry

In addition to establishing individual student's membership in a supportive community of writers, this unit is designed to get students thinking about how writing can serve as a primary means of exploring their own reactions to the world around them. In addition, this introductory unit is intended to assist them in locating, validating and strengthening their own individual voice. The primary assignment is the 2,500 Word Inquiry Exercise (see below).

Primary readings include:

Joan Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook" & "Why I Write"
George Orwell, "Why I Write"
Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave"
Frank Conroy, "Think About It"
Jim Holt, "Say Anything" (a review of *On Bullshit*)
Mark Twain, "You Can't Pray a Lie"

Standards Addressed: I. II & III

• Unit Two: Transcendentalism

This unit introduces students to the major ideas of the Transcendentalists (principally, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman). In both their reading logs (posted on our on-line class blog) and in their formal writing assignments, students are invited to address the relevance in their own lives of such key concepts as non-conformity, solitude, spirituality and the influence of Nature on the human experience. "Minor" assignments have students responding to Emerson's "Divinity School Address" in an adopted voice, and visually rendering key concepts encountered (see below). The major essay for this unit invites students to explore over the course of multiple drafts the relevance of ideas encountered in their own lives (see below). For several years now, nominations for the NCTE Achievement in Writing Award have been drawn from responses to this early assignment. Vocabulary is taught in the context of the readings and assessed through regular quizzes formatted along the lines of the SAT.

Primary readings include:

Emerson, *Nature* (excerpts), "The Divinity School Address" & "Self-Reliance"
Thoreau, *Walden* (excerpts) & "On Civil Disobedience"
Whitman, *Song of Myself*

Ancillary readings include:

E.B. White, "A Slight Sound at Evening"
Edward Abbey, "Down the River with Henry David Thoreau"
Luc Sante, "Be Different! (Like Everyone Else)"

Standards Addressed: II & III

• **Unit Three: *The Scarlet Letter***

As with the other novels taught in this “composition” course, our focus when reading Hawthorne is less on literary tropes (though these are addressed) than on rhetorical strategies. Students are not required to write standard exegeses; rather, they are invited to address in the context of past, personal readings and experiences their own response to key issues encountered in this classic romance. Hawthorne’s novel is used to examine the enactment of Transcendentalist ideals in literature, and to introduce the central themes of feminism and religious intolerance—both of which will be expanded upon as the semester continues. Reading log prompts are designed to draw attention to the novel’s thematic content; and, working collaboratively, students are required to introduce and lead discussions of individual chapters. Typically, the major essay—which is taken through multiple drafts—presents students with an opportunity to examine the dynamics of shame and the appropriateness of its use as a method of controlling behavior. In some years, however, students are instead offered the opportunity to address the novel as a “proto-feminist” work and to examine the extent to which Hawthorne fails to honor in the end the feminist themes he himself introduces. Vocabulary is taught in the context of the novel and assessed through regular quizzes.

Primary readings include:

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

Ancillary readings include:

Nina Baym, “Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*”

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (excerpts)

Standards Addressed: II & III

• **Unit Four: *The Handmaid’s Tale***

Atwood’s dystopian novel is used to continue the themes of feminism and religious intolerance introduced by Hawthorne’s novel. Additionally, students are invited to consider the question of who controls language (and what outlets remain for marginalized voices). Offred’s elided narrative is discussed as much for its rhetorical stance as from the perspective of point-of-view. Again, students are invited to seek out personal connections to the novel in their reading log entries. Instead of a major essay (that is deferred to the unit on Satire), students are given two opportunities to practice an AP-type essay under conditions that mirror the exam setting. The first is a close textual analysis of a passage drawn from the novel; the second is an open-ended essay asking students to develop an argument regarding the proper relationship between church and state in American society. In addition to refreshing and refining students’ understanding of the rhetoric of persuasion, these practice essays provide an opportunity to introduce strategies appropriate to timed

writing assignments, and to discuss the scoring of these essays (based on my own experience as an AP Reader).

Primary readings include:

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Ancillary readings include:

The Book of Genesis (selections)

George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"

Merlin Stone, "When God was a Woman"

Bill McKibben, "The Christian Paradox: How a Faithful Nation Gets Jesus Wrong"

Standards Addressed: II & III

• Unit Five: Satire

Atwood's "Historical Notes" to *The Handmaid's Tale*, which arguably provide the rhetorical thrust for the entire novel, are used to introduce the concept of satire.

Throughout this unit, the rhetoric of satire is introduced and discussed—with particular attention paid to differentiating between satire, with its larger social aims, and parody, which is discussed as a lower, comedic form. Students are invited to 'deconstruct' the method of individual satires and parodies in their reading logs. The culminating essay for this unit invites students to produce their own satires (which are taken through multiple drafts). The most successful of these essays are printed in a special issue of the local newspaper. Additionally, students are required to present an essay and lead a discussion of it.

Primary readings include:

Jonathon Swift, "A Modest Proposal"

David Sedaris, "Youth in Asia"

Judy Brady, "Why I Want a Wife"

David Barry, "A Solution to Housework"

Ian Frazier, "Coyote vs. Acme"

Jessica Mitford, "Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain"

Ellen Goodman, "The Company Man"

Horace Miner, "Body Rituals Among the Nacerima"

Mark Leynor, "The Making of Tooth Imprints on a Corndog"

Selections from "Shouts & Murmurs" (The New Yorker)

Standards Addressed: I. II & III

- **Unit Six: Deconstructing Satirical Images**

This follow-up to our lengthy unit on satire asks students to consider a range of satirical images (drawn from such sources as *Adbusters* and other alternative media) in an effort to explore writing about nonverbal “texts”. Students present an image to the rest of the class and follow up with a short paper in which they analyze the way in which the satirical image plays upon the tropes and assumptions of the source image.

Standards Addressed: I, II, III & IV

- **Mid-Year Exam**

Rather than assess students on the instructional content delivered to date, we use the two-hour testing block to have students sit for a partial AP Comp. exam. Drawn from released exams, this end-of-the-semester test generally consists of two multiple-choice sections paired together with two essay questions (one of which asks students to analyze a passage they have not read before, the other of which tends to be more open-ended). After the holiday break, students’ performance on all sections of the exam is thoroughly reviewed during class.

Standards Addressed: I, II & III

- **Unit Seven: Holiday Reading Assignment / The Book Review**

Prior to the holiday break, students are presented with a list of non-fiction books (they may lobby for an alternate title). They choose one, read it, and, upon their return present a formal review of the book to the entire class. Several representative book reviews (drawn from publications ranging from *The New Yorker* to *Time*) are presented to the students, and the organizational strategies of each is examined and discussed. After their presentations, students write and submit a formal review of the book they read over break. (See below for list of titles).

Standards Addressed: I, II & III

- **Unit Eight: *The Plague* & Existentialism**

Camus’ novel, along with ancillary readings, is used as a way to introduce students to the basic tenets of existentialism. As a philosophy, existentialism is compared to the radical idealism of other writers (Plato, Emerson, etc.) encountered earlier in the year. Though no formal essay is produced for this unit, the readings provide ample opportunity for practicing timed writing in response to prompts. Rieux’s observation that man is essentially more good than bad, Kierkegaard’s belief that “the crowd is the untruth,” Heidegger’s query, “Would living for ever add meaning to life?”—these and other “triggers” supply the topics for students to explore both in their reading logs and in practice timed essays. Students routinely score each other’s responses to the latter, and representative samples of successful essays are reproduced on an overhead and discussed by the entire class. In addition, and in an effort to understand better the dynamics of the

assessment tool, students begin to regularly develop their own multiple-choice questions (each containing a stem, a correct answer, and four legitimate foils)—a practice that continues on through into May.

Primary Reading:

Camus, *The Plague*

Ancillary Readings:

Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”

Sartre, “Why Write?”

Kierkegaard, *Either / Or* (selections)

Standards Addressed: I. II & III

• **Unit Nine: The Death Penalty / Informed Persuasive Writing**

Tarrou’s observations about capital punishment, and his long disquisition likening it to the plague, provide the launching point for an informed persuasive essay assignment in which students are asked to position their own arguments about the death penalty relative to those offered by a range of other writers (*The Plague* itself, of course, is also considered a “source” for this essay). After reading and discussing a range of argumentative pieces, students practice the art of integrating another writer’s words into their own (formatting their in-text citations along the guidelines established by the MLA)—all while continuing to ensure that their own argument remains central to the essay. At least one of the sources provided contains graphical information and statistics, and students are encouraged to do additional research on their own. Some of the basic vocabulary of argumentation—terms such as claim, warrant, fallacy, etc.—are covered as well as the three basic types of appeals (*logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*) the relative merits of which are discussed in the context of the readings.

Primary Readings:

George Orwell, “A Hanging”

John Stuart Mill, “A Speech in Favor of Capital Punishment”

Edward Koch, “Death and Justice: How Capital Punishment Affirms Life”

Jack Greenberg, “Against the American System of Capital Punishment”

Lance Morrow, “Why the Death Penalty Does Us No Credit”

The U.S. Department of Justice, “Capital Punishment Statistics”

Standards Addressed: I. II, III & IV

• **Unit Ten: *Fight Club*: How Culture Co-opts Critique**

As with the first two novels of the year, *Fight Club* is considered not independently of, but in conjunction with *The Plague*. Initially, our focus has us comparing and contrasting

existentialism's noble response to central aspects of the human conditions with those offered by a somewhat puerile version of nihilism (this is the instructor's bias). The deeper we get into the novel, however, the more our discussions (and the students' entries in their reading logs) veer more toward the matter of cultural critique. The narrator's / Tyler Durden's wry and concise observations—about consumerism, conformity, the perils of modern manhood, etc.—all offer ample prompts for practice AP essays (which continue to be routinely scored and discussed by the class as a whole). We conclude our examination of the novel with a consideration of Palahniuk's afterword to the current edition in which he considers the extent to which the novel's central themes have been corrupted by mainstream culture. In a culminating practice essay, students are asked to explore this culture phenomenon—one in which a particular "text" (which is understood to be any contemporary cultural artifact) is co-opted by mainstream society and celebrated in ways that seem antithetical to its initial intent. (See assignment below).

Primary Reading:

Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*

Standards Addressed: I, II & III

• **Unit Eleven: Focused Exam Preparation**

In the weeks immediately before and after spring break (which at our school falls in April), our focus narrows toward specific preparation for the exam in May. Alternating between sample multiple-choice sections and essay prompts from released exams, students are given ample opportunity to hone their close reading and analytical writing skills. In addition, we read numerous essays drawn from our text, *75 Readings Plus*. Selection of individual essays is left largely up to the students, who are asked to select a reading, thoroughly annotate it, and then lead a class-wide discussion of it. In preparation for their role as discussion leaders, students generate writing prompts along with multiple-choice questions related to the passage. With the advent of the recent changes in the exam format, students are additionally given one more opportunity after spring break to produce an informed, persuasive essay. This unit is currently under construction, but will likely focus on the debate over troop reductions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and will draw on resources from *An Iraq Reader* as well as articles and opinion pieces from current publications such as *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, *The National Review* and others.

Standards Addressed: II & III

• **Unit Twelve: The College Essay**

After sitting for the exam in May, students spend the rest of the week getting a "jump start" on their college essays. Much time is devoted to discussing issues of audience and purpose for this important writing task, and a range of application questions are reviewed and considered. Students complete a self-survey, review past writings (particularly in their journal and reading log entries), and spend time brainstorming possible topics. All

students are required to produce at least one draft of an essay and to meet individually with the instructor to discuss it.

Standards Addressed: I. II & III

For an up-to-date, representative sampling of course 'artifacts' (handouts, essays assignments & rubrics and other instructional materials), please visit our class webpage at:

<http://ap-english-language.tellurideschool.ths.schoolfusion.us/>