

AP Literature Course Description

Course Overview/Introduction:

Per the most recent AP English Course Description, this AP Literature class will prepare students for the academic demands of the college classroom and the AP Literature Exam. Students will be expected to read critically from a broad array of fiction, drama and poetry and discuss the various technical components and aesthetic processes of these texts. In addition to this, students will be developing the writing skills that reflect a deeper understanding of the complexities of the texts. To break it down, each student can expect a daily writing assignment focused on some aspect of the material at hand; close readings done on a nightly basis; at least one short essay a week with longer writing assignments assigned on a bi-weekly basis; weekly vocabulary quizzes; and daily discussions of the previous night's reading. Because this is a junior-year course, we will not be spending any significant amount of time writing college application essays. This being said, however, I will aid any student who seeks assistance on an individual basis. Otherwise, plan on writing those college application essays next year with Mr. XXXXX.

Course Syllabus/Student Assignments

Topic: Close Reading

Time: Approximately two weeks

After collecting summer reading assignments and discussing the overview/goals of the course, students will be introduced to Deanne Spears' *Developing Critical Reading Skills*. The balance of the two weeks will be spent practicing and discussing the techniques outlined in Spears' book with special attention paid to text annotation and critical analysis techniques (to include close-reading exercises, vocabulary-building tips, various types of inferences, tone, point of view, etc.). Moreover, each student will be responsible for "mastering" a critical technique and will be expected to present a brief annotated passage for class discussion along with a 2-3 page paper explaining the significance of your technique in relation to the passage.

Topic: Short Fiction/Critical Interpretation & Writing

Time: Approximately two weeks

Students will be reading/analyzing approximately a dozen short stories (selection subject to change but approximately 12 samples will be pulled from the Joyce Carol

Oates-edited anthology *Telling Stories*; J.D. Salinger's *Nine Stories*; and the long-running series of guest-edited *Best American Short Stories*). Each story will ask the student to identify and address a pre-assigned and pre-defined component or term. For instance, one mainstay is Joyce Carol Oates' "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" After completing a close reading of the story, students will be tasked with identifying and analyzing the diction used by Connie and Arnold Friend. How does the author utilize diction and syntax to create tension between the characters and how does it affect their development? If this seems daunting, please remember that each assignment will be explained in detail and each student will have ample time for discussion.

Short Fiction/Critical Interpretation & Writing

The assessment method utilized for this unit involves the completion of two essays of approximately 3-4 pages each. Both papers must be polished by the process of multi-draft revision and peer-editing. One of the two papers (student's choice) will be subject to a student-teacher conference in which I will go over the comments/suggestions made by myself and the peer-editors.

Sample Essay Prompt:

"A great deal of information regarding a character's development can be gleaned from his or her actions and body language. Referencing only actions and non-verbal communication (NO DIALOGUE!), analyze the posture and attitude of the characters in J.D. Salinger's "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut."

Topic: Novel

Time: approximately two weeks

In Dubious Battle

I chose *In Dubious Battle* as the first novel of the semester because the novel is engaging and its allusions (predominately biblical) are better understood and more easily discussed by the students. Through a culminating analytical paper, each student will be responsible for analyzing the novel's allusions to the bible and selected passages of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Each student will also spend two days reading periodical publications drawing connections between the labor conflicts in America to the nascent labor issues in China.

Assessment:

The analytical paper that concludes the unit is at the center of a multi-draft process by which the student will have an opportunity to submit up to three drafts of the paper to me so long as each subsequent draft is accompanied with a letter. In addition to the analytical paper (which, incidentally, requires analyzing the effectiveness of *In Dubious Battle* as social commentary), we will read and discuss Steinbeck's 1962 Nobel Prize acceptance speech.

Topic: Novel**Time: approximately three weeks***Snow*

Primarily chosen for its exploration of traditions and changing values in our new, "flat" world (with a nod to Thomas Friedman), Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* is a challenging read that I use to emphasize dynamic characterization, symbolism, and the quest to find one's identity in a rapidly changing society. I have chosen to integrate a research paper component into this unit because most students have little to no knowledge of Turkish customs and history.

Students explore tangentially with this novel. I expect a great deal of discourse over the duration of the unit and the class is oriented in that direction. First of all, because the book is difficult we will spend an additional week over the other novel units to ensure adequate understanding of the dominant themes. In this case, a kind of "fish out of water" reaction to the first few chapters of *Snow* is best alleviated by a sampling of similar texts (i.e., excerpts of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*; Alan Lightman's *The Diagnosis*; and F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"). With these texts I read I then moderate a discussion of what forming a sense of identity is really all about.

Assessment:

While the research paper has merit in that it is yet another opportunity for students to expand their knowledge base, it has little to do with the AP exam, as it were. In light of this, and given the depth and complexity of the novel, I have students write a timed AP essay (graded with the standard AP Expository Writing Rubric) to the following prompt:

Based on your recently developed skills of inference (week 1-2), and combining what you have learned about Turkey from the research you have conducted, craft an essay in which you make informed predictions concerning the social and religious future of the town of Kars.

Topic: Play

Time: approximately two weeks

Macbeth

This unit begins with a two day mini-unit on the appeal of Shakespeare as well as the logistics of producing his plays (then and now). I use The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare, with its comprehensive and well-written introductions and appendices. This is straightforward research and vital, I believe, to aiding in the understanding of some of the more nuanced meanings in Shakespeare's work (i.e. appreciating the social and political implications of Shakespeare's work when it was produced).

Upon completion of this mini-unit, we will read the play together in class. As questions arise, as they often do—"Why is Macbeth so easily manipulated by his wife?" and "What do Macbeth and his wife think will happen after the dust has settled?"-we address them in

class discussions or as part of a “discussion prompt” take home assignment that students return the following day. Generally speaking, most class discussions revolve around Macbeth’s immoral behavior and Lady Macbeth’s greed. Rather than stymie these discussions in an attempt to point out other themes (King Duncan’s patriarchal role and the oddly recurrent plot twist of patricide in many of Shakespeare’s plays, for example), I simply expound upon the dynamics of a dysfunctional relationship by supplying students with short stories (Raymond Carver) and miniature narratives. I also have the students trace the deterioration of Macbeth’s friendship with Banquo as evidenced by their dialogue.

Assessment:

Following the completion of the play, students come in after school on one of three occasions (to facilitate students’ after school schedules) and view *Scotland, Pa.*, the 2001 film adaptation of the play set in rural Pennsylvania in 1975. After all of the students have seen the film they will be given an AP-style timed essay response to the following prompt:

*Compare and contrast at least three major characters in the film with their Elizabethan counterparts from Macbeth. Does **Scotland, Pa.** successfully capture the play’s motives and subtleties as you understood them?*

Topic: Poetry

Time: approximately four weeks

Whereas most students come into a poetry unit hesitant and understandably skeptical of a medium they see as complex, I try to set their minds at ease with a full class examination

of Archibald MacLeish's *Poetry and Experience*. I have found that MacLeish's writing style is engaging and disarming. Specifically, MacLeish explains how poetry is merely an attempt, and often a failed attempt, at explaining human emotions.

As far as aiding students in the technical aspect of poetry, I use John Frederick Nims' *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry*. Students are provided with examples of various literary terms (alliteration, allusion, metaphor, rhyme scheme, patterns, meter, paradox, irony, symbolism) as they relate to poetry and are quizzed with timed written exams regularly. Students are required to respond to a daily poem culled from the Norton Anthology of modern poetry. The format for their response is called SOAPSTone (for Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Speaker and Tone).

Assessment:

Students are required to read seven of Thomas Hardy's poems concerning his estranged wife Emma. They are then told to write a review of the poems based on SOAPSTone and their levels of interconnectedness. Each review is then shared in a small group setting and the papers are peer-reviewed. Once this is complete, and the paper has undergone a multi-stage revision process (to include an unpolished draft conference with me), the students are given a www.slate.com article containing biographical information that explains the profound late life crisis that Hardy underwent following the death of his estranged and long-neglected wife. The affect has often been dramatic and students enjoy discussing in fine detail the newly-acquired significance of the poems. I feel that this assessment method, coupled with the fairly intense study of the literary devices used in the writing of poetry, makes for a well-rounded approach to the AP exam poetry component.

Topic: Novel

Time: approximately three weeks

The Great Gatsby

A favorite of mine and one of the few repeat favorites of students (lending credence to some critics assertions that the themes and “message” of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* are more relevant today than ever before). Students discuss what makes the novel so reflective of the American condition and how our dreams are molded. The class discusses the motives behind Jay Gatsby’s actions; Daisy Buchanan’s inability to take responsibility for her actions; and the underpinnings of a novel that exposes the dark matter of America. Students also read a sampling of Fitzgerald’s short fiction and write, in a journal format, how the Jazz Age played an instrumental role in creating the decadent society in which we now live. Three comparative papers are written connecting characters and settings in *The Great Gatsby* with those evident in Steinbeck’s *In Dubious Battle*.

Assessment:

Students will write an essay response to the following prompt:

About her daughter Daisy Buchanan once remarked, “...I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.” In a well-crafted essay, explain how this comment might be interpreted in 2007.

Upon completion of this essay, and after I have had a chance to read and comment on the paper, I will meet with each student individually to discuss the logic behind his/her thesis. Essentially, I’m looking for abstract connections that get at a deeper meaning here. Most students dislike Daisy Buchanan a great deal by the end of the novel. I have the students read Andre Dubus’ “The Fat Girl” upon completion of the unit and we spend a day discussing Daisy as a victim. Students have an opportunity to consider the greater implications for all of the female characters in the works we have read.

Teaching Method:

My teaching methods are made clear throughout this syllabus.

Loose Ends:

I don't have a section listed above directly concerning vocabulary improvement, but I administer weekly vocabulary quizzes. A great deal of vocabulary enhancement is done in context.

Teacher Resources

Spears, Deanne. *Developing Critical Reading Skills*. Boston. McGraw-Hill, 2006.

Salinger, J.D. *Nine Stories*. Boston. Back Bay Books, 2001.

Oates, Joyce Carol, ed. *Telling Stories: An Anthology For Writers*. New York. W.W. Norton & Co., 1998.

Wolff, Tobias, ed. *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories*. New York. Vintage Contemporaries, 1994.

Steinbeck, John. *In Dubious Battle*. New York. Penguin Books, 1992.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. New York. Penguin Classics. 2003.

Pahmuk, Orhan. *Snow*. New York. Vintage Books. 2005.

Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. New York. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 1972.

MacLeish, Archibald. *Poetry and Experience*. Cambridge. Riverside Press. 1960.

Nims, John Frederick. *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry*. New York. McGraw-Hill. 1992.

Ellman, Richard & O'Clair, Robert, ed. *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. W.W. Norton & Co. 1988.

Hardy, Thomas. *Satire and Circumstance*. London. MacMillan & Co. 1915.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York. Scribner Books. 1995.

Brucoli, Matthew J. *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York. Scribner Books. 1989.

Web Resources

www.slate.com

www.collegeboard.com