

AP English 11: American Literature and AP Language and Composition Course Syllabus	2015-16
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Teacher: Andy West

**Grade level: 11
West Linn High School**

Course Description/Overview:

AP English 11 is a hybrid junior-year course at West Linn High School, blending the traditional English 11 American Literature curriculum with The College Board's AP Language and Composition curriculum. The course exposes students to the major periods, writers, and texts of American Literature, and also, as The College Board puts it, "engage[s] students in becoming skilled readers of prose written in a variety of rhetorical contexts, and in becoming skilled writers who compose for a variety of purposes. Both their writing and their reading should make students aware of the interactions among a writer's purposes, audience expectations, and subjects, as well as the way genre conventions and the resources of language contribute to effectiveness in writing."

West Linn High School offers two AP English courses. The senior-level course is AP English: *Literature* and Composition. This junior-level course is AP English: *Language* and Composition. This junior-level course approximates a college-level writing course. Students study rhetoric, read non-fiction, and write a variety of original essays, in a variety of rhetorical modes.

Major Units and Themes:

Each major unit in the course will focus on either a thematic concept (for example: gender-based stereotypes or the "self-improvement myth") or on a major rhetorical mode (for example creative biography or the research paper). Each unit will include:

- 5-10 substantial short non-fiction pieces (essays, speeches, historical docs, etc)
- a longer work, often fictional
- a rhetorical and writing focus (voice, audience, diction, research, organizational strategies, persuasive techniques, etc)

Learning Goals and Objectives: *Students will...*

- read a variety of texts, written for a variety of purposes
- write for a variety of purposes, in a variety of formats
- practice all the steps of the writing process, including planning, drafting, and revising major essays, and then reflecting objectively on their strengths and weaknesses
- strategically employ specific rhetorical aspects of their own writing for intended effects
- practice "close reading" of texts, becoming time-efficient in doing so
- demonstrate the ability to develop an original claim about a text and support that claim with specific textual evidence
- demonstrate proficiency with Standard English prose as per department writing rubrics. (establishing claims, developing claims with evidence, utilizing cohesion, crafting impactful introductions and conclusions, using appropriate style and conventions)
- demonstrate an ability to think critically about philosophical, cultural, religious, political, economic, and social issues
- analyze images as texts
- demonstrate proficiency in using MLA format to document their research

Course Policies, Procedures, and Behavior Expectations:

- **Please be responsible for yourself and for your own learning. Own your learning.** ... What do I mean? I mean, do not place the responsibility for your own learning onto others, (Mr. West, West Linn High School, college, "Society," parents, extra-curricular involvements, etc). You are primarily responsible for your own learning. There will be many ways for you to individualize our English class activities, most notably in our writing program. The more you put into them, the more you will get out of them. The first and largest share of the responsibility for your learning lies with you.
- **Please respect yourself, your classmates, our room, the curriculum, and me.**
- **Accept that you are not writing "for" the teacher, but are writing "for" yourself.**
- **Phones:** are a distraction to class. Even if just on your desk or in your lap, your phone commands your attention and disengages you. Please turn it off and put it away. Thanks.
- **Don't plagiarize.** The penalty for plagiarism is a zero for the assignment. We'll use the WLHS Honor Code.
- **Don't share information online** about class, homework, quizzes, tests, assignments or other class-related topics. I usually consider doing so "cheating." Unsure? Think of it this way: chat, don't cheat.
- **using the internet for ideas of what to write about or as an aide in reading a text:** using the internet for ideas of what to write about or as a aide in reading a text borders on plagiarism and actually prevents you from ever learning how to come up with ideas on your own. Yeah, sure, sparknotes might have a "better" idea about that writer's use of irony than you do, but when you use sparknotes, you never practice developing your own ideas. You reduce yourself to a repeater, not a free, independent, critical thinker. Using someone else's intellectual skills instead of developing your own is the opposite of education. In general, stay off the internet unless you're using it as a research tool.
- **Absences and the late policy:**
for an excused absence: you have two school days to make up any missed work. Thereafter, the unexcused late policy applies. This is the same as the school-wide policy.
for an unexcused absence or unexcused late work: I will deduct 10% of the *earned* grade for each day an assignment is late, up to 5 days or 50%. After that I won't accept the late work. I count each day that school is in session as a "day" regardless of whether your class met that day or not.
- **Deadline extension policy:** our ultimate goals are quality work and maximum learning. If you need extra time for an assignment, talk to me **before** the due date. I'm usually flexible. I'd prefer you took an extra day or two and did something quality rather than rushed. 9 pm, or 11pm, or 2am the night before it's due is too late to just send me an email. Additionally, please don't make asking for extensions a regular habit.
- **Grades online:** I regularly update grades online, almost always at least once a week. I grade papers in the order in which I receive them. If yours is late, it will be last.
- **Don't plagiarize. Don't talk online about a quiz or test.** Did I say those ones already?
- **Extra handouts** are stored in the appropriate drawer by the door. If it's empty, check online.

Grading policies/practices:

- Grades are calculated on a point system, with no weighting for individual categories of assignments. The number of points for an assignment is based on the relative importance of the assignment. Typically, a homework assignment might be worth 25 points, a test 100, and an essay 100. By far the most common cause of lower grades is missing assignments. You simply cannot afford to have zeroes in the gradebook if you want to earn a good grade in this course. You certainly cannot not write one of the major essays.
- I will typically grade essays with letter grades. These will be converted to points as follows:
A+ = 100% A = 97% A- = 92% B+ = 88% B = 85% B- = 82% C+ = 78% C = 75% C- = 72%
I don't usually give a D or F on an essay, but will instead ask for a rewrite. If that rewrite is not completed, I'll record it as a 60%.
- Units will culminate in major tests, which will include my approximation of AP Test-like questions and processes.
- I give frequent 3-point reading quizzes. Read your homework and you'll do well on these.
- Taking the course AP Test in May is required.

Summer Reading:

As a component for this AP course, students must complete a substantial summer reading program prior to school beginning in late August. This year, that includes reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, one of the following: *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, *Desert Solitaire*, or *A Sand County Almanac*, and four essays: "A Modest Proposal," "Just Walk on By: Black Men and Public Space," "Mother Tongue" and the "Declaration of Independence." Students must also define some key terms for the course.

The Writing Program: Premises and Procedures

I believe in the following premises, and then, informed by those premises, will implement the following procedures:

Premises:

- Writing is a process, involving several different and distinct intellectual procedures; the student should be willing to practice these individually, then re-assemble them later
- The student should try to write "the perfect essay" on the AP test and later in college, but not every time s/he writes an essay in this class; what we do in class is practice
- Grades on essays are a means, not an end; the student should be able to earn the grade s/he wants. Revision will be necessary in some cases.
- Students benefit from increased freedom and personalization of assignments, but the student must initiate, implement and finally evaluate each attempt to address an issue
- Not all student writing will be nor needs be read by the teacher. A writing activity can be useful and valid without ever being read by the teacher.
- The teacher has a finite amount of time to provide feedback on each student's writing process. This is sometimes more productive during initial stages of the writing process rather than on final products.
- There are three junior AP classes. That's about 85 students. The teacher cannot spend 30 minutes grading every student's essay, every other week.
- Students can and should be involved in assessing their own writing.
- College-credit earning scores on the AP Exam require a specific type of writing.
- In general, Mr. West's personal biases for writing include: 1. clarity, 2. succinctness and simplicity of language, 3. originality of thought and content, 4. fluidity (smooth sentences with a variety of rhetorical structures), and 5. an appropriate and balanced tone. This is not to say you have to write this way, or won't get high grades writing other ways. This is just

my own biases, which students eventually come to understand. Some writing purposes / assignments will necessitate different writing traits than these.

- **Writing with Intention** is our central goal. The self-aware writer recognizes the distinguishing traits of his own style, including its strengths and limitations, and knows *when* and *how* to accentuate or limit certain elements (like tone, style, voice, rhetoric, diction, etc), for the intended effect, as determined by exigence, purpose and audience.

Based on these Premises then, these Procedures:

- We will start by self-assessing ourselves as writers
- Students will be required to set individual writing goals, develop plans to address them, and frequently reflect on progress made toward them
- We will study and critique models both of excellence and of mediocrity
- Students will be tested over the list of "Proofreader's Marks"
- We will have in-classroom portfolios, containing writing, reflections, feedback, drafts, and notes
- We will complete teacher-directed "mini-workshops" to address specific aspects of the writing process (examples: introductions, smoothly incorporating textual support, MLA format, etc)
- We will practice timed writing, including high-stakes test / exam timed writing
- Rewrites: Students may choose at any time to revise an essay, if doing so will help him or her learn (if it's only about the grade, we'll come up with something else). Student-generated rewrites can earn up to one letter grade improvement, but that's not automatic (no lower grade will be given). The rewrite must be accompanied by both the original and a reflection in the portfolio.
- Students will be required to rewrite two major essay each semester, at the end of the semester as part of assembling the portfolio.

Writing Games / Activities: we will make periodic use of the following:

- **The Thought Pot:** a periodic, anonymous, non-graded, non-credit creative writing activity.
- **Write On / Write Off:** an occasional 8-student bracket where two students face off against one another by completing a timed writing activity in front of the class, which the class will then critique before selecting a winner. The bracket of 8 will become 4 will become 2 before determining a "winner."
- **Chimp, Chump, Champ:** see poster in the classroom...
- **The Blue Crate:** I have hundreds of former students' graded essays. We will use these in a variety of ways.
- **The Mailbox:** next to the classroom door is a class mailbox.

Materials for the course:

1. a **notebook** for note-taking
2. a **journal** for low-stakes writing activities
3. a **Writing Portfolio [provided]** for storing essays including preliminary work on them
4. a **folder** for storing other class handouts
5. the **text(s)** we are currently reading at the time

Texts used in the class:

Bullock, Richard. *The Little Seagull Handbook*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2011. Print.
Cohen, Samuel, ed. *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2011. Print.
Kelley, Joseph, ed. *The Seagull Reader: Essays*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2002. Print.
Root, Robert L. *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers Of/on Creative Nonfiction*. 5th ed. New York: Longman, 2010. Print.
Roskelly, Hephzibah, and David A. Jolliffe. *Everyday Use: Rhetoric at Work in Reading and Writing*. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2005. Print.

Major Units for the year (in no particular order):

Summer Reading and Course Intros

4-5 weeks

The Grapes of Wrath; Nature nonfiction, essays

Focus on Rhetoric and Writing: Personal Response Essay and manipulating voice

Gender-Based Stereotypes: Essays and *The Awakening*

4 weeks

Selected essays on the roles of women, historic and contemporary; *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin

Focus on Rhetoric and Writing: Definition Essay and organization

The Self-Improvement Myth: The Self-Help Industry and *The Great Gatsby*

5-6 weeks

Selected Essays from *50 Essays* and *The Seagull Reader: Essays*; readings from contemporary Self-Help texts including *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*; *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925)

Focus on Rhetoric and Writing: Compare / Contrast Essay and organization

Cause and Effect in Social Issues: Cowboys and Indians

3-4 weeks

Selected Essays; "Indian Education" and "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me" by Sherman Alexie;

"The Significance of the Frontier in American History" by Frederick Jackson Turner (1893);

"*The Searchers*" [film] John Ford, John Wayne, 1956

State Writing Test Preparation and the Oregon State Writing Test

2 weeks

Personal Narrative and *The Catcher in the Rye*

4-5 weeks

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger (1951); Selected Essays; Possible Field Trip: Oaks Amusement Park to go roller skating

Focus on Rhetoric and Writing: Personal Narrative Essay

Creative Biography: the Harlem Renaissance, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Alice Walker and Creative Nonfiction

5-6 weeks

"How It Feels to Be Colored Me" by Zora Neale Hurston (1928); "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" by Alice Walker (1983); *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston (1937); Selected Essays

Focus on Rhetoric and Writing: Creative Non-Fiction and a historical figure from the HR

Hemingway Scholarship: *A Farewell to Arms* and critical scholarship

4 weeks

Read the novel, research a variety of academic scholarship

Focus on Rhetoric and Writing: the research paper and citation

Controversy: Race, Rhetoric, and *Huck Finn*, in Public Schools

4-5 weeks

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (1885); Selected Essays from *50 Essays* and *The Seagull Reader: Essays*

Writing Focus: Argumentative / Persuasive Essay

AP Test Preparation

2 weeks

Review of Course Materials; Practice Tests

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Web site: <http://www.wlhs.wlww.k12.or.us/Page/3718> Close to all handouts, assignments, schedules, and homework are linked to the pages of my school web site

Final words:

I ask these things of you: please own your learning, recognize that you yourself are primarily responsible for your learning as a reader and as a writer, and proceed in good faith. It's not about a grade. It's about learning. Please also remember that I will not "grade" every piece of writing that you do, not even every major essay, but that that fact does not invalidate your writing. You write to improve, not for a grade. Relax about your grade. Don't get too stressed out. Take the long view: the year is long. Stay healthy. Eat right and exercise. Become comfortable about not doing every assignment in every class perfectly. You'll get there. Have fun. Be creative. Be willing to try something new. It's gonna be a great year.