

AP English Language and Composition

Course Overview

This year long course is designed to introduce students to the core concepts of rhetorical composition and analysis through a complete array of non-fiction and fiction texts. By focusing on language students enter into dialogue with the text under scrutiny, allowing them to establish authors' purposes and strategies, while situating both the authors and themselves within the larger context of the ongoing cultural questions which have defined Western Civilization.

To this effect, the course is organized by Francis Bacon's thesis from his short essay, "of Studies": "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man." Bacon's gender preference aside, this is our core principle; grades, selection of assignments, and overall purpose all stem from this root. We begin the year by reading Bacon's essay and puzzling out his seventeenth century prose. We then return to it at the opening of the second semester to engage in a more formal rhetorical analysis and then work through an imitation, thereby working with our founding document in multiple modalities.

Over the course of both semesters we work with a variety of expository, analytical, and argumentative texts as well as have numerous opportunities to compose in many genres in a myriad of settings. Readings cover such a wide range of topics as memoirs, personal essays, public oratory, foundational documents, sermons, devotional literature, science, argument, letters—both personal and open, as well as longer narratives (i.e., *The Scarlet Letter*). Students not only compose in various rhetorical modes (with a focus on mixing them for rhetorical effect) but also engage in a longer research project that asks them to grapple with a currently unresolved cultural issue and argue for one of the competing sides (e.g., the morality of stem cell research, the influence of media on politics, etc.). Additionally, each semester students construct reviews for at least two books of appropriate difficulty (novels, non-fiction, essay collections) that are analytical and evaluative.

This is a college-level course and expectations are correspondingly challenging. Students are faced with many ongoing assignments, readings, and activities that overlap and intersect at various times. This requires solid time management and techniques and tools for keeping the vast array of information easily and quickly accessible. I offer many opportunities for support as this is a eleventh grade class in our school and students need some help with the transition, but I also strive to allow for their nascent academic independence to grow and flourish.

The course is constructed in accordance with the guidelines described in the AP English Course Description.

Course Synopsis

Semester 1

Introduction to non-fiction genres and close reading analysis

Through readings and exercises in *The Brief Bedford Reader* and guided classroom discussion we engage in intense study of non-fiction genres. Each genre is introduced with a clear and concise description of the techniques and strategies writers employ in, say, comparison and contrast or classification. Accompanying this prefatory information are examples, both

by professionals and students. Students are also introduced to a panoply of rhetorical terms in a sophisticated context which we then apply in our classroom discussions and written analyses.

Students complete reading, comprehension, style, and vocabulary questions as well as independently directed journal responses prior to class. During class, pre-designated groups are assigned discussion topics that demand closer textual scrutiny. As groups share their findings with the class we begin to develop a better working model of rhetorical strategies that make the essay under investigation and the genre work—and what doesn't. Furthermore, I also engage in direct reading instruction to aid students in improving their comprehension and annotation skills as well as metacognitive strategies.

Every week we engage in at least one, if not more, formal writing assignments that works specifically with the genre we are studying. These come in a variety of forms: a longer, formal analysis of a narrative, an application of the principles of the genre under study (e.g., a description intended to communicate a specific tone; a process analysis that humorously describes how to lose a boyfriend, go broke, etc.), or an on demand essay, which could come in many forms, usually one of the numerous released questions from the College Board. Some papers are multi-draft where I thoroughly comment, others are peer edited, and others still are single draft on-demand essays that we review and discuss afterwards; students meet with me in individual conferences to address specific essays and/or specific problems in their writing periodically. We also practice close reading with released multiple-choice questions with passages that reflect the topic under study.

The Brief Bedford Reader also allows us to critically assess images that serve a multitude of purposes. Each genre is supplemented with images—for example, images that make arguments, narrate events, illustrate cause and effect, etc. These are a starting point that we expand with discussion of purpose, visual strategies, and criticisms such as oversimplification, or propaganda.

A sample schedule of a month of work (October 2006) is provided in the Appendix below.

***The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne**

Supplemental Texts: Ralph Waldo Emerson, selections of “Nature”; Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”; Thomas Jefferson, “The Declaration of Independence”; Jonathan Winthrop, selections from “A Model of Christian Charity”; Ian Frazier, selections from “Utopia, The Bronx” from *The New Yorker* (6.26.2006); Eric Foner, selections *The Story of American Freedom*.

Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is an American academic standard, and I feel that it deserves well-merited attention. But we do not read the novel as only a literary text. I see it as much more. It is Hawthorne's artistic polemic against the vanities and vices of the Transcendentalists and of his friend, but philosophical enemy, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

To achieve this end we engage in two key undertakings: 1) understanding the cultural milieu of New England in those incredibly fertile years, especially in regards to the Transcendentalist movement, and 2) identifying and appreciating Hawthorne's sources and sympathies through analysis of his style. Both of these require a sophisticated analysis and taxes our students to the utmost.

We first work on coming to terms with Emerson’s seminal “Nature” and then read, analyze and compare chapter 1 from *TSL*. We then work through Hawthorne’s literary language and develop a working analysis of his purpose as expressed through that language: his engagement with the uncertainty of perception, our solid reliance on familiar traditions, the power of nurture (as opposed to Emersonian nature). We then frame Hawthorne’s and Emerson’s ideas within the greater context of American political thought and then set about analyzing the conflicting Christianities of the text (radical individualism or communalism/legalism). Through this entire process we move between texts looking for parallels or disjunctures in rhetorical features which are clues to the greater argument at stake.

Students then write a multi-draft paper which addresses some larger issue presented by *TSL*: self-reliance vs. conformity, nature (i.e., the forest) vs. nurture (i.e., civilization), God’s law vs. human law, etc. Student essays hinge on analytical readings of each author’s language in order to support their own arguments.

17th & 18th century devotional literature

This is a short unit to round out the semester. Although we engage seventeenth and eighteenth century writing throughout the year (Bacon, Winthrop, Jefferson, Elizabeth I, Patrick Henry, Newton, Franklin), here we have the opportunity to really grapple, on a daily basis, with obscure diction and syntax. This is a chance to practice close reading of difficult texts dealing with difficult issues, issues of faith, which require philosophical thinking and metaphoric language. We read and analyze selections from the King James Version of the Bible (“The Sermon on the Mount”, 1 Corinthians, and Job); John Donne’s Meditation XVII, “No Man is an Island”; Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” This is supplemented with the practice multiple choice selection from Sir Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici*, provided by the College Board.

Trope research and presentation

Students are engaged in an ongoing research and presentation cycle. Students sign up for a literary trope and presentation date. Twice a week they present their findings complete with definitions, examples, and practice exercises that should engage the class. We then use these terms as items in our literary toolbox that allow us to dissect and reassemble text in discussion and in our essays. Students are encouraged to practice applying tropes in their essays—earning bonus points for effective use.

Daily practice in analyzing diction, detail, imagery, syntax, & tone

Through daily practice we focus on features of literary and rhetorical language. These come from a variety of literary sources and give students a chance to focus their energies on small excerpts. Students have the opportunity to imitate and manipulate stylistic techniques, these usually, with any luck, crop up in their own writing. The daily activities dovetail nicely with both our independent and guided readings as well as our analytical and creative writing.

Writing: the virtue essay

The virtue essay dovetails with both the classroom expectations (which is based on virtue ethics) and with the non-fiction writing of the course. Completing the essay is a two-week production process where students first develop initial ideas, construct a tentative thesis, and

then commence a small-scale research project modeled on the development of the essay of definition as outlined in *The Brief Bedford Reader*.

Students update their thesis to match any new information which may have been discovered, either through introspection, interview, or research. Then they construct an outline that describes the different non-fiction genres that will be used to flesh out their definition. Popular genres are example and analysis, but many have attempted narration, cause and effect, classification and comparison and contrast. Along with this rhetorical outline, they must include a rationale for why the chosen non-fiction genre(s) is effective in relation to the thesis and selection of support.

After drafts are produced we often work together in peer editing groups to help critically assess our progress. Students peer editing guides direct both their reading of the peers' texts and aid in their evaluation of their own work..

The Book Review

The book review is a large independently directed assignment that requires students to read, comprehend, analyze and evaluate a work of significant merit. Students have an enormous number of high-quality choices ranging from novels (primarily American) to collections of essays to biographies to histories to science pieces. I encourage students to branch out into areas they haven't had an opportunity to investigate. I perennially recommend Richard Hofstadter's dense *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* to the ambitious; Vonnegut's satires to the disaffected; and Emerson's essays to the cerebral. These challenging books help stimulate discussion—both class and individual.

Students manage their reading time independently while developing reading responses in the form of the dialectical journal. These journals then lead to an extended paper (6-12 pages) that analyzes the author's purpose—always avoiding plot summary with novels--and evaluates the work and author's effectiveness. After these are complete, students then meet in a one-on-one conference where we discuss issues, items of significance, etc. from the novel. If the analysis is satisfactory, I grade the assignment there; if not, I suggest developing or additions or a possibly re-write. Students include a works cited in MLA format for any outside research they conduct.

Two reviews per semester are due.

Intermezzo

Viewing and analysis of *The Bicycle Thief*

Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (*Ladri di biciclette* [1948]) is the academy award winner for Best Foreign Film from 1949—an honorary award that was not an official category at the time. It is a compelling narrative; but it is not “Hollywood” in the least. Students must learn to “read” de Sica's visual and auditory versions of diction, imagery, syntax, detail, and tone in order to understand his greater rhetorical purpose. Students take notes that aid in discussions as we progress through the film. Our discussions help to weave together the various strands of analysis that we have been generating. Students prepare a short formal paper.

Millicent Marcus' analysis in *Italian Film in the Light of Neo-realism*

After we have completed our paper we then turn to Millicent Marcus' analysis of *The Bicycle Thief* in her award winning anthology of essays. We read her (for some, difficult) analysis in class. After we have a solid understanding of her piece we compare student writing to professional and discuss the analytical processes and writing techniques that professionals employ.

Semester 2

Thoreau, selections from *Walden*

To introduce us to college-level close reading we work with a few selections from Thoreau's important work. *Walden* is a logical extension of the previous semester's work with Emerson, Hawthorne, and Transcendental philosophies. We spend substantial amount of time decoding his metaphors and their challenging implications.

Since Thoreau's style presents a significant challenge to most high school students, I focus on close reading through guided practice in order to help students make the leap to true college-level reading. I use Advanced Placement style multiple-choice questions to assess comprehension, retention.

***Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Edward P.J. Corbett**

We work intensively to understand and employ the methods of the great Classical rhetoricians during the second semester. Through the use of Corbett's indispensable text, we are introduced to an even more (than, say, *The Brief Bedford Reader*) rigorous and critical analysis of images and words that are meant to persuade us. We quickly delve into the workings of the three Aristotelian modes of persuasion: logos, ethos, and pathos.

We spend a significant amount of time learning the workings of deductive logic and the syllogism, and, finally, the enthymeme—both written and oral. Once we have a firmer grasp on logical analysis we then turn to a discussion of the common fallacies—so that we may recognize them and not let the core of our own arguments slip away. While we practice identifying and mapping the appeal to reason in professional documents (Madison's "Federalist No. 10" and Dorothy Sayers' "Are Women Human?") we turn to ethos and pathos. After reading and discussion we practice discerning between ethical and emotional appeals by analyzing a series of excerpts from famous speeches (Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death," King's "I have a dream," Churchill's "Blood, sweat, toil, and tears," among others) and developing a written vocabulary and style of our own to express these analyses.

We also elevate our discussion of style—looking at it as a form of argumentation itself. This is a challenging unit for most students. It combines in a sophisticated manner all the various strands of the year's work: genre, mode, style, technique, tropes, critical thought. We cap our textbook work with John F. Kennedy's "Inaugural Address." We then apply all of our skills to an excerpt from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, "The Revolt of Mitylene." Thucydides' text is challenging in many regards; not the least is the highly developed argumentation. Here we have a real world example where the fate of hundreds of lives hangs on the turn of a phrase. We produce a multi-draft paper which incorporates the full range of rhetorical analysis terms and techniques and considerations. I give students written feedback at each stage of the drafting process.

Finally we turn our focus to released questions from previous AP tests and begin to hone our timed writing (and reading!) proficiency. This leads us into AP test prep in earnest.

Continue analysis of diction, imagery, detail, syntax, & tone

We continue with the same assignments from semester one. When we've had 100 repetitions, we bring the ongoing assignments to a close.

We engage in extended analysis of diction and syntax and tone during the second semester. We primarily extend our diction analysis skills by engaging passages from *The AP Vertical Team in English Handbook*. We also spend at least a week on a more developed sense of syntax working specifically with Norman Mailer's recounting of the death of boxer Benny Paret. With Mailer's essay we create a syntax chart as described in the *AP Vertical Teams Handbook*. The chart clearly illustrates how seemingly smooth and modern writing exploits manipulation of syntax to evoke meaning. In regards to tone, we integrate it with argumentation in analyzing Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" and Aldai Stevenson's "Cat Bill Veto."

Analysis of quotes

As our understanding of diction, imagery, etc. becomes more thorough, students are asked to respond in their journals to provocative quotes that approach topics from alternative, sometimes contradictory, directions. The aim here is to broaden students' abilities to appreciate and evaluate alternative views and nuance while garnering appropriate support—a practice they have worked on for a number of months in their virtue essays. I then explicitly link the critical thought process from these journal writes to the argumentative essay questions released by the College Board—as discussion or group reading/writing or on-demand writing tasks.

Analysis of science articles

Over Spring Break students choose 10 articles from recent editions of *The Best American Science Writing* and integrate all of their reading skills from the year to not only understand the topics under discussion, but also to identify a author's thesis, his or her argumentation strategy (ethos, pathos, or logos), and also to analyze the writer's style and evaluate the style's effectiveness. We work on these primarily for the exposure to non-literary sources of argumentation. Here are also argumentative models for their research project. Students generally consider these provocative and interesting.

Writing: Virtue Essay

This semester we continue the previous ongoing assignment, but we seek to deepen it both rhetorically—by incorporating more advanced writing techniques and working in less familiar genres—and intellectually—demanding better evidence, more clearly developed thought-experiments. Again, we use this rigorous thinking, writing, and editing to aid us in analysis and application of our rhetorical choices.

Argumentative Research Paper

The argumentative research paper is the major project for the second semester. Students choose one of many current unresolved debates (such as the benefits or costs of large-scale pharmaceuticals, or the effect of mass media on elections), conduct in-depth investigation,

and construct a paper that then argues for one side of the debate using researched sources as their evidence.

Students are required to find at least five sources, a minimum of two from print media, and at least one that is an image, chart, or graph. For each source they are required to interrogate the relevance and reliability of each source (*The Brief Bedford Reader* supplies a very useful guide). I closely and carefully peruse these assignments, offering substantial feedback in an effort to improve students' critical reading skills. After they have gathered evidence and developed their thesis, they write a bibliographic essay which surveys and critiques the available sources for their topics. All citations are in MLA format.

The writing process is a multi-draft peer and teacher reviewed process that takes at least two weeks. This rewriting cycle is necessary to not only hone style, but also to keep the focus on argumentation and not mere reporting.

Reprise: The Book Review

We continue with the same assignment from semester one with two new books for this semester. The second book review is waived if students take the Advanced Placement Test.

Coda:

***Grendel*, John Gardner**

We turn to John Gardner's philosophical novel after the AP test. It serves as a culmination of the year's ideas, which commenced with a short introduction to epistemology, and a bridge to next year's AP Literature course, by expanding our rhetorical analysis to encompass symbolism, philosophy, lit theory and other features of literary analysis.

We carefully analyze the complex and allusive language of *Grendel*'s stream of consciousness narration. We also read supplementary material on Hobbes, Machiavelli, Emmanuel Levinas, Plato, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Whitehead as well as introductory material on their competing philosophies. Armed with these two tools we attempt an ambitious analysis Gardner's text, which is incredibly allusive as well as elusive. Working together, we are able to begin to assemble a coherent theory of our own as to Gardner's intent.

We then synthesize our analysis and develop our own positions on personal purpose, the place of philosophy, philosophy's interaction with religion, and the function of morality. It is incredibly challenging, but, I hope, prepares them for the deeply philosophical AP Literature class, and, with any luck, for a rigorous liberal arts environment at one of the great universities.

Resources

Core texts:

Corbett, Edward P.J. and Robert J. Connors. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Dean, Nancy. *Voice Lessons*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin Press, 2000.

Gardner, John. *Grendel*. New York: Vintage Books, 1987.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Rev. ed. New York: Penguin Classics, 2002.

Kennedy, X. J., Dorothy M. Kennedy, and Jane E. Aaron. *The Brief Bedford Reader*. 9th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007.

Strunk William, E.B. White, and Roger Angell. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1999.

Supplemental Texts:

Bacon, Francis. "Of Studies"

Bible, KJV

Donne, John. Meditation XVII.

Edwards, Jonathan. "Sinners in the hands of an Angry God"

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Nature." *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*. New York: Library of America, 1983.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-reliance." *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*. New York: Library of America, 1983.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner, 1999.

Foner, Eric. *The Story of American Freedom*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998.

Frazier, Ian. "Utopia, The Bronx." *The New Yorker* June 6, 2006. 45-6.

Jaynes, Julian. "The Consciousness of Consciousness," in *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. New York: Mariner Books, 2000.

Jefferson, Thomas. "The Declaration of Independence." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002.

Marcus, Millicent. "De Sica's *Bicycle Thief*: Casting Shadows on the Visionary City." *Italian Film in the Light of Neo-Realism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Plato. *The Republic*. Desmond Lee, tr. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003.

Swift, Jonathan. "A Modest Proposal."

Thoreau, Henry David. "Walking." *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*. Ed. Philip Lopate. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Thucydides. "The Revolt of Mitylene" in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Richard Crawley, tr. New York, NY: E. P. Dutton. 1910.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

Winthrop, Jonathan. "A Model of Christian Charity"

Resources:

College Board. "AP Course Description." New York: College Board, 2006.

College Board. *The AP Vertical Teams Guide for English*. 2nd ed. New York: College Board, 2002.

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974.

Lopate, Philip. *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.

Trimmer, Joseph and Maxine Hairston, ed. *The Riverside Reader*. 8th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005.

Abels, Kimberly. *The University of North Carolina Writing Center*. 14 Oct 2005. <
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/>>

Tufte, Virginia. *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*. Cheshire, CO: Graphics Press, 2001.

Tufte, Edward R. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Cheshire, CO: Graphics Press, 2006.

Tufte, Edward R. *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within*. 2nd ed. Cheshire, CO: Graphics Press, 2006.