AP English Language and Composition Syllabus

COURSE OVERVIEW

AP English Language and Composition is a course that students can elect as their English requirement for their junior year. Admission to the course is by application, and incoming students are expected to read at or above grade level, to have mastered the five paragraph essay, and to apply correctly the conventions of standard written English. The first semester introduces the students to the canons of rhetoric including the strategies for developing a piece of prose, the relationship between the writer and the audience, and rhetorical devices used to manipulate the language for an effective delivery of the message. As students read a variety of non-fiction genres, they become part of the conversational continuum, in which they respond with their own prose to the ideas of prior generations of writers and pass along their own views to future readers. During the second semester, students exercise their sharpened critical reading and writing skills in an overview of the American literary tradition, where they listen to the voices that shaped our culture, discuss topics that challenge their beliefs, and propose fresh perspectives on the American experience. Assessments include frequent essays, which are graded on the 9 point scale (transposed to numerical equivalents) used by the College Board to evaluate AP exams, tests, quizzes, and presentations.

SUMMER READING

Students are required to read three books during the summer before their admission into AP English Language and Composition: *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X with Alex Haley, and *On Writing* by Stephen King. Students are assigned to groups in which they must work cooperatively to evaluate and critique one of the selections, after which they will lead the class in a discussion of the book.

Assessment. Starting with Samuel Johnson’s statement, “There are, in every age, new errors to be rectified and new prejudices to be opposed,” students write an analytical essay in which they must synthesize ideas from *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

INTRODUCTION TO RHETORIC – SEMESTER ONE

During the first semester students are introduced to the skills that will help them break from the familiar five paragraph essay format on which they have previously relied and begin to experiment with more sophisticated modes of expression. By exposing them to a wide variety of non-fiction genres, we train them to recognize the subtleties of a writer’s thesis and purpose.

1. The first order of business is to provide students with a common vocabulary with which we can effectively analyze a piece of writing. Students are given a handbook of rhetorical terms which they learn to identify and use. Students are
directed to the Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Talented Youth website to explore the concept of the elegant and balanced sentence, and the coordination and subordination of ideas. To follow up King’s *On Writing*, students read Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language,” which expands on the necessity for precise diction. They create a T-chart to examine the relationship between what an author says and how he says it. Students listen to Mali’s poem “Totally Like Whatever” in which they recognize the humorous consequence of ineffective expression. They are given the SOAPSTone model of analysis with Emerson’s “Concord Hymn,” as an initial exercise in identifying the speaker, audience and purpose. Students apply these ideas in an analysis of “The Gettysburg Address” for which they use their knowledge of history as a backdrop for understanding Lincoln’s effective use of diction and tone to achieve his purpose. Finally, students are introduced to the author’s appeals to an audience’s sense of reason, emotion or ethics through their study of King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

**Evaluation.** Students are given the AP Prompt by Orwell on Ghandi (CEEB 2000) as an introduction to the 40 minute writing prompt. They are introduced to the 9 point grading scale and practice scoring with both the benchmark essays and peer essays. These essays are treated as a rough draft and returned with teacher comments for revision. Second drafts are further revised to correct highlighted errors in syntax and diction.

2. Students spend the bulk of Semester One reading passages and writing samples from the various modes of rhetoric. Each night for homework they read a selection critically to identify author’s purpose and tone, distinguish the audience and the author’s appeals to his audience, note effective use of diction and syntax and rhetorical/literary devices, and relate themes to contemporary life. For each essay they read, students are expected to look up unfamiliar words and add them to their personal lexicons. Each day in class students begin with a brief writing prompt tied to the theme of the essay that they read for homework; they then spend the bulk of in class time sharing insights into the authors’ works.

**Narration.** In Angelou’s “Champion of the World” students discuss how description, dialogue, allusion and irony support the story. In Ellison’s “On Being the Target of Discrimination” students appreciate the use of second person point of view. In Mayblum’s “The Price we Pay” students make the connection between organization and punctuation (or lack thereof) and the author’s purpose.

**Assessment.** Students practice with a second 40 minute prompt, Dillard’s “Death of a Moth,” which is revised after peer and teacher editing for a grade. Students write a 100 word narrative.

**Description.** In White’s “Once More to the Lake” students explore the rich imagery, distinguish the relationship between description and narration, and note the placement of topic sentences at the end of paragraphs. In Selzer’s “The Discus Thrower” students observe the author’s economical use of simile and
metaphor. In Soto’s “The Green Jacket” students identify the paradox of the author’s condition.

**Assessment.** Students write a descriptive essay using concrete nouns, vivid verbs and fresh figures of speech in order to create a dominant impression. Essays are peer edited before grading.

**Exemplification.** In Hall’s “Proxemics in the Arab World” students discuss the difference between thesis and purpose, note the effective use of the anecdote as well as comparison and contrast in the essay, and discuss the use of the rhetorical question. In Sykes’s “The Values Wasteland” students note the effective use of analogy, and identify examples of the author’s appeals to the audience’s sense of reason, emotion and ethics. In Quindlen’s “Advertisement for Oneself” students are introduced to the concept of organic writing and practice writing a personal advertisement as an imitation of the form.

**Assessment.** Students write an AP style essay in which they defend, challenge or qualify Sykes’s thesis. Essays are peer edited before grading.

**Comparison and Contrast.** In Catton’s “Grant and Lee: A Study in Contrasts” students observe how structure supports meaning, note the use of transitional phrases and detect the audience’s preconceptions. In Chapman’s “The Prisoner’s Dilemma” students note diction and tone, applying them to the fallacy of begging the question. In Gould’s “Evolution as Fact and Theory” students contrast the author’s assumption that the audience doesn’t agree with his assertions with Chapman’s assumption that his audience does agree with his assertions. In Ross’s “Football Red and Baseball Green” students note the choice of both general and specific detail, the use of the expletive, and the author’s higher purpose. Students then listen to Carlin’s “Football and Baseball” comparing and contrasting his tone with Ross’s.

**Assessment.** Students prepare an oral presentation in which they choose a topic to present as a comparison and contrast. They are required to show a higher purpose. Presentations are evaluated by the students themselves, by their peers and by the teacher. Students write a 40 minute prompt on the Coke correspondence (CEEB 1998).

**Definition.** In Gleick’s “Life as a Type A” students examine the writer’s bias. In Naylor’s “Mommy What Does ‘Nigger’ Mean?” students note the author’s tone and choice of details, both general and specific, and observe those she omitted.

**Assessment.** Students write a 40 minute prompt on Truth’s speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” Essays are peer edited before grading.

**Cause and Effect.** In Kozol’s “The Human Cost of an Illiterate Society” students identify parallel structure, asyndeton, and allusion. As a further exploration into
dyslexia, they are given a decoding activity from the website *All Kinds of Minds* that is a simulation of the learning disability. Students then read Rogers’s “What is the Worth of Words” and Tretz’s “Sonnet 1337” to explore the changes of the English Language in the 21st Century.

**Argument and Persuasion.** Students are introduced to inductive and deductive reasoning and logical and pathetic fallacies before reading the essays in this section. Students are also expected to recognize rhetorical devices identified in their handbooks in each of the selections they read. Emphasis is placed on appreciating the author’s ability to manipulate language effectively rather than memorizing obscure terms. In Jefferson’s “The Declaration of Independence” students focus on the author’s use of parallel structure, anaphora, chiasmus and conduplicatio for emphasis. In Steele’s “Affirmative Action: The Price of Preference” students look at the author’s strategy for refuting the opposing viewpoint and find examples of anadiplosis, anaphora and conduplicatio. In Roger Wilkins’s “Racism has its Privileges” students note the author’s use of reverse ethos. In Mencken’s “The Penalty of Death” students examine the author’s use of antithesis and humor in making an argument. Students compare and contrast Mencken’s essay with Polites’s column from the My Turn section of *Newsweek* “I Want Constantine’s Murderer to Die” for tone and appeal to the audience. Students also explore satire with Swift’s “A Modest Proposal,” examining the methods by which he manipulates language to achieve an ironic tone.

**Assessment.** In preparation for the synthesis question on the new AP English Language exam, students choose a topic for which they write a researched argument. They must locate five articles and one graphic in the form of a chart or editorial cartoon and use these resources in support of their thesis. This assignment is the culmination of their study of rhetoric, so they are required to develop a thesis intended to persuade a specific audience which they must identify, using a variety of the modes of rhetoric and rhetorical devices, and applying the MLA guidelines for citation. Students also practice a 40 minute prompt with “The Onion” (CEEB 2005). They compare their essays with benchmark essays and revise prior to grading.

**Mid-Term Examination.** Students write two essays from prompts taken from previous AP English Language examinations.

**AMERICAN VOICES – SEMESTER TWO**

**The Puritan Ethic: Foundation and Reaction**

Novel – Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
Essay – Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Gifts”
Poem – Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Love is not All”
Film – Michael Mann *The Last of the Mohicans*

*The Scarlet Letter* is the anchor for this unit that examines the Puritan origins of many attitudes that Americans hold today, particularly the attitudes surrounding love and morality. Hawthorne’s novel is an outstanding example of Nineteenth Century writing, and students learn the complex and subtle diction, syntax, characterization and plot that form the basis of literature from that period. In addition to improving critical reading skills, students have the opportunity to practice style imitation. Edwards’s sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” provides historical perspective for the novel, and Hawthorne’s Romantic treatment of infidelity in early Boston offers students the opportunity to examine multi-layered points of view within one literary work. Emerson’s essay “Gifts” provides students with another sample of Nineteenth Century prose and serves as a catalyst for discussion on modern expectations on the subject. Millay’s poem “Love is not All” is a modern reflection of Hester’s dilemma, and the film *The Last of the Mohicans* provides another look at the Romantic hero, while introducing the concept of the American as individual.

**Assessment:** Students write an analytical essay, choosing from among several topics, on *The Scarlet Letter*. As an additional exercise in syntax, the teacher publishes sample sentences from the essays (anonymously) that exhibit weakness in structure or meaning. These sentences provide a forum for students to suggest revisions that will strengthen the writing. Students create a “Thyspace” page for a character from *The Scarlet Letter*, in which they write in the voices of each of the characters.

**America in Conflict: Loyalty and Law**

Novel – Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Autobiography – *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*

Essay – Mark Twain, “How to Tell a Story” and “The Damned Human Race”

Poems – Walt Whitman, “When I Beheld the Learned Astronomer”

Paul Dunbar, “Sympathy”

Speech – Alfred M. Green, “Speech in Philadelphia, 1861”

Film – Ken Burns, *Mark Twain*

Rob Reiner, *Stand by Me*, based on “The Body” by Stephen King

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides the students with a rich resource both as a source of discussion on the themes of slavery, friendship and the creation of one’s personal ethics, and as a model of effective characterization through carefully crafted dialect. In addition, the novel provides abundant examples of satire which the students can analyze to determine how diction is related to tone. Twain’s two essays provide insight into the writer’s personal code of ethics, attitudes which are further illustrated by segments from the Burns film. Students hear other voices in the conflict over slavery through *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* and Green’s “Speech in Philadelphia, 1861” (CEEB 2003), and Dunbar’s poem “Sympathy.” Students also read Whitman’s “When I Beheld the Learned Astronomer” which adds another dimension to the time period. The
Assessment. Students write an analytical essay, choosing from among several topics, on The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. As an additional exercise in syntax, the teacher publishes sample sentences from the essays (anonymously) that exhibit weakness in structure or meaning. These sentences provide a forum for students to suggest revisions that will strengthen the writing. Students will work in groups to create skits, set in contemporary times, which illustrate scenes from the novel and convey a major theme.

The American Community: Myth of the Small Town

Play – Thornton Wilder, Our Town
Illustrations – selected from Norman Rockwell’s works
Poems – Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology, selected poems
Short Story – Sinclair Lewis, “Small Town America” excerpt from Main Street
Film – Scott Hamilton Kennedy, OT: Our Town

Through a variety of media, students explore the myth and reality of life in an American small town. We begin by reading and discussing Wilder’s play in class. Supplemental activities include the examination of various illustrations by Norman Rockwell, focusing on the details that tell a story; reading and analyzing selected poems from Masters’ Spoon River Anthology and an excerpt from Lewis’s Main Street, and comparing the attitudes of the speakers with those of the characters from Our Town; and finally, watching Kennedy’s documentary OT: Our Town, which depicts an existence that is both parallel to and opposite their own.

Assessment. Students write a personal essay about small town life. They must identify their audience, purpose and tone, in addition to synthesizing ideas from their own experience and at least two of the works studied in this unit. The essay must demonstrate control of the English language through the use of several modes of rhetoric, precise diction, varied syntax, and effective rhetorical devices.

Questioning our Values: The Jazz Age

Novel – F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby
Essay – Miriam Hill, “Wealth makes waves at N.Y. beach resort”
Karl Shapiro, “Auto Wreck”
Film – Jack Clayton, The Great Gatsby, screenplay by Francis Ford Coppola

The changing values of the early Twentieth Century are revealed through the characters of Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby, each of whom represents a facet of the American theme of loss of innocence. The novel’s rich imagery helps students appreciate the author’s command of language. Students research the culture of the Jazz Age that provides a backdrop for the novel through a webquest that helps them to understand the
social dynamics among the characters. Frost’s poem “The Silken Tent” and Shapiro’s poem “The Auto Wreck” present closer views of the themes of idealized love and unexpected disaster that are featured in the book. Viewing the film afford students the opportunity to appreciate how a work of literature can be effectively translated to a visual medium.

**Assessment.** Students keep a journal in which they record observations, based on the events of each chapter, of a character other than the narrator. At the end of the book, students can revise their journal entries prior to grading. Grades for the journal will be based on the accuracy with which each character is portrayed, and the depth and breadth of understanding of the major themes demonstrated by the author as conveyed through the character’s voice.

**Final Assessment:** Students are required to sit for the AP English Language and Composition Exam in May. In preparation for this test, students practice with a complete sample multiple choice section, and they read, annotate and pre-write for three sample open response questions. The class discusses the readings, questions and answers from the multiple choice section, analyzing the correct responses, identifying the types of questions, and preparing strategies to maximize their performance. The class also discusses the wide range of approaches a writer could take for each of the open response questions, and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each. Because the AP Exam is a condition of the course, students do not take a final exam.

**TEACHER RESOURCES**

**Books**


**Films**

**Internet**
http://ctyjhu.org
www.allkindsofminds.org
www.americanrhetoric.com
www.apcentral.collegeboard.com

**Periodicals**
*The Boston Globe*
*Newsweek*