

WEST HILLS COLLEGE  
ENG 1B: Literature, Critical Thinking, and Writing  
Spring 2016

Course Syllabus

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Catalog Description

ENG 1B introduces representative works from major genres, develops students' close reading and analytical skills, and promotes appreciation and critical understanding of the cultural, historical, and aesthetic qualities of literature. (AA/AS, CSU, UC)

Prerequisite

Successful completion of English 1A (Composition and Reading) or the equivalent.

Course Description, Outline, Topics and Texts

Pray thee, take care, that tak'st my book in hand,  
To read it well: that is, to understand.

Ben Jonson, *Epigrams*

The human is a being that lives in words. Our native habitat is not the land we live in, but the stories we tell, the songs we sing, the dreams we dream, and the dramas we play out. We sometimes merit the name *homo sapiens*—the wise man—but we are much more fundamentally *homo poeta*—the making man. That is what *poetry* is: the thing we make out of language, our first and only essential building material.

This course is a rigorous introduction to college-level literary study and composition. As such, it applies the literary elements, grammar, speaking, and writing skills already accomplished in the course of study in MVCS, and extends them. This class is both the culmination of the high school career and the threshold for the post-secondary career. By the end of this course students will be able to read and write at the college level, and ready to speak intelligently about and interpret wisely the imaginative makings of the world around them.

*Classroom practice*

Much of the work we will do in this class requires your full presence, physical, mental, and spiritual. The work will often be accomplished through discussion, both as a whole class, and in small groups, and good discussion can only occur in an environment of

respect where participants feel safe to speak, and can trust that their partners are fully committed and engaged. To this end, we will aim to eliminate obstacles to our full presence and cultivate an environment where we actually care to listen to and learn from one another.

### *Course Outline, Topics, and Texts*

Semester One: (17 weeks)

#### 1. INTRODUCTORY UNIT #1 (~2 weeks)

Syllabus, Books given

Review Summer Assignment ; Collect Essay #1 on Crime and Punishment:

1999. “No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man’s mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time”—Laurence Sterne.

Describe how Raskolnikov’s compelling desires, ambitions and obligations illuminate the meaning of the novel as a whole. Be sure to identify these desires, ambitions and obligations.

Introduce Literary Terms Study

Choose your first complementary novel

- THE COLLEGE ESSAY

College Essay handouts and overview

Essay #2, Choose a college; find their entrance essay prompt; respond appropriately; see me if you’d prefer a random prompt selection. I

expect multiple revisions of this assignment (one student had twenty last year!) as you learn to control your voice to say exactly what you mean: no more, no less. Usually, I will read your first draft that you are satisfied with, and I will assign two to three different approaches for you to consider in recasting your work (What if you started your essay with the second paragraph, in the middle of the action? Rewrite it in the present tense. What if you told the story from the perspective of how you felt about it THEN? ) Continue the revision process with me. Once you complete three drafts (staple them together as you go), you will automatically earn full credit for this assignment.

- WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

• Here we cover the basics of essay writing which will be repeated and expanded as I introduce each separate writing assignment. We cover:

Topic selection

Essay development: function, placement, and articulation of a thesis; how to build an argument (increasing overall coherence through a tight focus on a well crafted thesis, meaningful transitions, and punctuated returns to the central concerns the thesis states or implies); how structure differs in an in class vs. take home essay environment; how to balance textual details with broad principles and generalizations (CSE: claim/support/explain); how to be sure we

don't simply name literary elements but show how these elements contribute meaningfully to the development of a central theme (answering the "so what" question)

Basic logical structures: analytic vs. explication (or exposition), cause and effect vs. compare and contrast, argument and persuasion (ethos, pathos, logos)

AP Rubric Training: We use essays that were scored by College Board graders to set our own calibration for in class writing. You will also see previous years' students' work to give you an idea of what to expect in the take home environment.

- Particularly when we're reading the novels and stories, I encourage students to consider the author's rhetorical techniques. This provides a great springboard into rhetorical concerns that we cover before and after our essay assignments. For instance, the students read *Crime and Punishment* over the summer. This novel has a famously jolting shift from the novel proper to the epilogue. While many appreciate a happy ending to such a brooding book, most notice that there is some violence done to the harmony of the structure, tone, and voice by the epilogue. We discuss our own conclusions and how we can do damage to a great deal of good work if we fail to maintain our rhetorical structures. Or, for another example, Hemingway is a helpful writer in our rhetorical development when we consider how his masterful control of voice and tone communicate so much in his stories. He, too, provides examples of possible lapsing (a few selections in *The Sun Also Rises* as well as any time he approaches intimacy in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*). When students return to essay writing, we have a common language of rhetorical examples to work from as I suggest improvements and prepare them for future writing assignments.

- The Reading Journal. Three basic kinds of writing are in here:

Assigned one page reflections on an issue a text brings up

Assigned responses to the text from a list of predetermined questions

Creative writing (we usually write short selections in the genre we're reading at the time)

Generally, when we open a new unit, we collect our thoughts informally to explore what we think of a subject before we analyze it

(examples are prompts like these: Why study literature? What is your favorite poem? Why? Has a short story ever changed the way you think or feel about yourself? Explain. What do you wish you didn't have to do in AP English? How would you compare songs to poems? What happened on the worst day you can remember?).

MLA format

Grammar: We cover punctuation, pronoun usage, and other usage concerns (accept vs. except, etc.) as needed. The British novelists make discussions on clause subordination and coordination natural as students need to pay more attention to these concerns reading their longer, more qualified sentences. Particularly in poetry, we consider the parts of speech for literary analysis (What other adjective would work here? Why wasn't it used? Why does this author capitalize some common nouns and not others?). We also study the structure of sound essays to learn what kinds of writing patterns to model (sentence variety, paragraph development, precise language). These concerns span the course, but we hit the most common problems right away.

- Vocabulary

You have an extended list of words chosen particularly for AP English Literature students.

With some works, I will give you an accompanying word list.

Vocabulary will be tested with multiple choice quizzes, written tests, and oral deliveries (you will have to stand, say the word, spell the word, then use the word in a sentence). Our goal is that you master your vocabulary and literary terms in such a way that you can use them gracefully and accurately at the appropriate time (thus, you need to be able to spell the words and write them into a context that shows you can use them). This means your vocabulary and literary terms are learned cumulatively (semester one words are fair game in semester two).

Vocabulary mastery is an important component in establishing and maintaining a tone and voice a reader will find compelling.

Basic English Language History

Timeline of English and American authors, literary periods, and British monarchs

Become acquainted with the general schools of literary criticism (this will assist us as we consider the critical perspectives of T.S. Eliot, Achebe, Tolkien, McCabe, and others)

## 2. Early Medieval

Caedmon, Exeter Book

BEOWULF (2 weeks)

Background information

Analytic Focus: Structure, diction, symbolism, imagery, chiasm

Thematic Focus: quest, glory, faith, evil, society

Read J.R.R. Tolkien's critical essay on Beowulf

We will compare translations (Heaney vs. Donaldson)

We will consider the evolution of the English language by studying translations of the Lord's Prayer from Old English to the present.

## 3. Late Medieval

Lays of Marie de France

THE CANTERBURY TALES (3 weeks)

Background information on Chaucer and his times.

Analytic Focus: Structure, diction, symbolism, imagery, characterization

Thematic Focus: chivalric values, love, pilgrimage

We will consider the evolution of the English language by reading original and translated selections of The Canterbury Tales.

[THE INFERNO (possible substitute for The Canterbury Tales)

Analytic Focus: structure (terza rima), diction, tone, symbolism, figurative language

Thematic Focus: heroic journey, choices, faith]

Anonymous Middle English Lyrics

#### 4. Poetry Unit / English Renaissance

Sonnets: Sir Phillip Sidney, Lady Mary Wroth, Shakespeare

Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* (excerpts)

POETRY UNIT #1 Perrine's Literature (3 weeks) As there are so many titles in the poetry section, I am not listing them individually. This anthology has a strong representation of British and American authors from the seventeenth century to the present. We generally read every poem in each chapter we cover and focus on about five to ten poems per chapter for reading journal responses and in depth analysis.

What is Poetry? and Reading the Poem (1 week)

Denotation and Connotation and Imagery (1 week)

Simile, Metaphor, Personification, Apostrophe, Metonymy and Symbol, Allegory (1 week)

- memorize a poem
- Poetry Test

#### 5. Drama / English Renaissance cont.

OTHELLO (1 week)

Analytical focus: symbol, irony, blood tragedy (revenge tragedy), Latin and medieval developments

Thematic Focus: betrayal, illusion, race, religion

#### 6. Shakespeare, part 2

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (1 2 weeks)

Analytic Focus: allusion, contrast, reversal, lyrical music

Thematic Focus: comic love, dreams, magic

Essay #15, in class essay, 40 min.: 1975 b. Unlike the novelist, the writer of a play does not use his own voice and only rarely uses a narrator's voice to guide the audience's responses to character and action. Select a play you have read and write an essay in which you explain the techniques the playwright uses to guide his audience's responses to the central characters and the action. You might consider the effect on the audience of things like setting, the use of comparable and contrasting characters, and the characters' responses to each other. Support your argument with specific references to the play. Do not give a plot summary.

## 7. Intro to reading prose fiction: achronological

SHORT FICTION UNIT (5 weeks) Unless otherwise noted, all selections include accompanying reading questions that must be completed and entered into the reading journal section of your binder. I also include guiding questions to keep in mind as you read certain texts. Each reading journal is given a due date on centerpoint, but I will not collect every assignment. Some will remain unchecked until our quarterly binder check. Also, some prompts will change from year to year; I've included the previous year's prompts so that you can get an idea of what you will be asked to do.

- Reading the Story and Plot and Structure (1.5 weeks)
- Connell, "The Most Dangerous Game"
- Why is this considered commercial fiction?
- Hemingway, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"
- What keeps this from becoming commercial fiction? Who is the hero? Is the ending ambiguous? Why?
- Greene, "The Destructors"
- What kind of theme is Greene working with?

Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies"

- How does the title relate to the theme?
- Characterization and Theme (1.5 weeks)
- Mansfield, "Miss Brill"
- Pinpoint the setting.
- Wolf, "Hunters in the Snow"
- What kind of comment is Wolf making on human nature?

Essay #3: In class essay, 50 min.: 1982. Explain how violence in a scene or scenes contributes to the meaning of a work [Use one of the short stories we've read thus far]. Do not summarize the plot. Here you must pay particular attention to how the violence elucidates the meaning of the work.

- Joyce, "Eveline"
- Where does Joyce imply that Eveline's paralysis stems from?
- Welty, "A Worn Path"
- Look for the allusions!

Gordimer, "Once Upon a Time"

- How does this relate to modern suburbia?

Point of View and Symbol, Allegory, and Fantasy (1 week)

- Lawrence, "The Rocking Horse Winner"
- Look up "Mammon"; how does this relate to the story? How might we be riding a rocking horse ourselves?
- Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown"

Is this an allegory or a fantasy story? Is there a dream in this story? If so, where does it begin and end?

Read the critical essay by Michael McCabe linking Calvinistic doctrine (from the Puritan catechism) to the malaise of Goodman Brown. Respond to the critical essay in your reading journal. Do you agree with McCabe? Is he being fair to the Calvinistic views of total depravity and predestination?

Essay #4, in class, 45 min.: 1985. A critic has said that one important measure of a superior work of literature is its ability to produce in the reader a healthy confusion of pleasure and disquietude. ["Young Goodman Brown"] produces this "healthy confusion." Write an essay in which you explain the sources of the "pleasure and disquietude" experienced by the readers of the work.

Be sure to consider how Hawthorne employs symbolism and figurative language (among other things) to create this confusion.

- Humor and Irony and O'Connor (1 week)

Camus, "The Guest"

- O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"; "A Late Encounter with the Enemy"; "Greenleaf"

- Essay #5, take home: In a well developed essay, analyze irony in one of O'Connor's stories.

Explain how the irony elucidates a central theme in the story. Make an appointment to see me to be sure that you have found adequate examples of irony to prove your thesis before you write you begin drafting.

Cumulative Story Test

## 8. The Romantic Era / Romantic Era Novel

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (2 3 weeks)

Analytical focus: dialogue, sarcasm

Thematic focus: social conventions, authority, restraint

Essay #6, take home: Compare the structure (setting, development), style (tone, diction, characterization) and themes of Austin and Dickens (using the novels we read as representative). Meet with me if you feel you are having a hard time discovering where these two great authors differ significantly in any given area.

Romantics: some *Lyrical Ballads*? *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Keats' letters on Poetry

## 9. The Victorian Novel

A TALE OF TWO CITIES (3 weeks)

Analytic Focus: double, symbol

Thematic Focus: sacrifice, resurrection, darkness

Essay #7, in class, 40 min.: 1977. In some novels and plays certain parallel or recurring events prove to be significant. In an essay, describe the major similarities and differences in a sequence

of parallel or recurring events in [A Tale of Two Cities] and discuss the significance of such events. Do not merely summarize the plot.  
Choose your second complementary novel

- Test

## 10. Poetry Unit 2: Modern poetry

POETRY UNIT #2 (4+ weeks)

Ch. 8: Allusion, Ch. 9: Meaning and Idea (1 week)

Ch. 10: Tone, Ch. 11: Musical Devices (1 week)

Ch. 12: Rhythm and Meter, Ch. 13: Sound and Meaning (1 week)

Essay # 13, take home: “Scan a poem from [the list] and indicate how the rhythmical effect (including substitutions and variations from the metrical norm) contribute to the meaning” (pg. 940 #1). This is a wonderful exercise because it is, unfortunately, so easy to skip the details when considering the ways an author weaves a theme throughout a work. We have been studying iambs, trochees, anapests, dactyls, duple meter, enjambment...so many things that may seem completely irrelevant. But wait! Look for reflections of the themes you already know to be present in the work as you consider the form. Then, as you make the connections, ask whether the structure could further develop or refine that theme (beyond simple reiteration). Now you see that form not only mirrors the themes you are accustomed to recognizing—the form often adds a nuance of its own into the cumulative tone and meaning of the work.

Ch. 14: Pattern, Ch. 15 Evaluating Poetry (1 week)

- Read 50 + pages from your poet; memorize a poem; write a poem of your own inspired in some way by the poet you’re studying. You will recite a poem from your poet as well as your original poem. [STUMP EDITORS DO NOT NEED TO DO THIS SECOND PROJECT]  
Creative Writing: Students have been writing creatively via journal prompts throughout the year, but this time we write for submission quality. Students write poems to enter our own literary magazine and a local contest (Poetry Santa Cruz). These poems are read by peers and me for encouragement and improvement.

Cumulative Poetry Test

Essay #14, in class (40 min.): This is from the 2004 AP Essay Exam question #2 where students are asked to “compare and contrast [Dickinson’s “We grow accustomed to the Dark —” and Frost’s “Acquainted with the Night”], analyzing the significance of dark or night in each. In your essay, consider elements such as point of view, imagery, and structure.

### 10.5 Modern(ist) poetry

H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Pound: Examples of “Imagism” from *Sea Gardens* (1919)

T.S. ELIOT (~1 week): “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Analytic Focus: modern verse, allusion!, indirection/misdirection, recurrence

Thematic Focus: Modernism, suffocation, drowning, death, incoherence (esp. in relationships, esp. sexual), weakness, impotence, resurrection

We will cover a great deal of critical commentary on Eliot from the University of Illinois collection (<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/index.htm>).

Essay #11, take home: Read the poems and appropriate critical commentary and biographical information posted. Whichever prompt you choose, be sure to incorporate at least three quotations by a critic (or more than one critic).

Prompt options: 1) Explore the subject of death and the symbol of water in any two poems by Eliot. (One must be "...Prufrock" or The Waste Land.)

2) Is the pre 1927 poet (Eliot) really that much different than the 1927 and following poet?

Use two or more poems to defend your case. Be sure to cover basic thematic direction as well as poetic structure. (One must be "...Prufrock" or The Waste Land.)

3) Compare any two differing critics on The Waste Land. Take the side of the critic you agree with the most. Support the critic utilizing the texts of Eliot's poems.

## 11. The Modern Novel

### HEART OF DARKNESS (~1 week)

Analytic Focus: frame tale, narration, point of view, ambiguity

Thematic Focus: darkness, hidden evil, obscurity, colonialism, barbarism

Essay #10, take home: Write an essay considering Chinua Achebe's essay/lecture given on Heart of Darkness ("An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'"). Achebe seeks to discount Conrad's text on the grounds that Conrad is a "thoroughgoing racist."

Students must weigh the cultural factors involved (the climate of Conrad's late 19th century Europe vs. Achebe's mid late 20th century America; how would an average reader of Conrad's day see his novella; how does that differ from the way we read it now?). Students must also consider what responsibilities and duties a writer is under, if any, to speak the conscience of the majority or minority. If an author must write within a clear grid of accepted sentiments, how does this kind of writing differ from propaganda?

## 12. The fictional essay / Reflection on the Canon

### A Room of One's Own, Woolf [Excerpts]

Final project: following Woolf's lead, review the readings of the year and attempt to think about the ways that the "great literature" we read is shaped by forces other than simply the talent of the individual author. Who has access to the time and space to write? Who get to "do literature" and who doesn't? Students will present their findings.