Welcome to Advanced Placement Literature and Composition:
In this advanced course, students will study literature at a college level. In May, each student will take the AP literature test by which, if they receive a high enough score, they will earn college credit. This strenuous course of study will involve works of fiction (poetry and prose) and nonfiction from the Sixteenth century to the present. The goal of the class is to improve the student’s close reading skills, writing skills and their ability to analyze a text and then apply their analysis in the form of essays and terms papers.

Course Objectives
By the end of the academic year, students will be able to:

--Produce college-level academic research papers properly formatted in the MLA style.
--Develop close reading and questioning skills in order to process text
--Utilize guided critical thinking question stems for self-reflection
--Develop approaches for reading, understanding and analyzing works of literature.
--Listen and take effective, organized notes during lectures, class discussions and readings.
--Utilize notes to prepare outlines that in turn will be used to prepare writing assignments.
--Identify and analyze the use of major literary devices.
--Write effective interpretative essays that use contextualized evidence and make clear reference to structure, style, or theme.
--Write effective argumentative essays that use contextualized evidence and make clear reference to figurative language, imagery, tone or symbolism.
--Compose explanatory and exploratory writing assignments using supporting evidence drawn from various texts.

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Please Note: The organizational sequence outlined below is not set in stone but will vary year to year according to time constraints, availability of books, current events and the students’ input, academic needs and aptitudes. The course is organized into units by thematic essential questions that will allow for the substitution and /or addition of books and readings as seen fit by the instructor. This will allow the instruction of the class to grow and remove any hint of staleness. Again, do not worry every book and secondary reading listed will not be assigned every year.

Overview of Marking Period Units

“Evil”

Essential Question: How does man posit evil into the world?

Primary Text:
A Movie: *Flight from Death*  
*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson  
*Turn of the Screw* by Henry James  
*Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad  
*In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote  
*The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka  
*The Power and the Glory* by Graham Greene  
*The Road* by Cormac McCarthy  
*The Death of Ivan Illych* by Leo Tolstoy

Secondary Reading:  
“A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor
“Sisterhood of the Night” by
“To Shoot an Elephant” by George Orwell
Excerpts from Escape from Evil by Ernest Becker
Articles and editorials found in The New York Times
Selected poems
Movies: Apocalypse Now
In Cold Blood

Discussion/Procedure: This unit will be based on the premise that man posits evil into the world in a variety of forms because of his innate insecurity. In his attempt to protect his fragile ego, in conjunction with his fear of death (Flight from Death—TMT theory), man unleashes evil usually with the perception that he is doing right (certainty). The variant forms of evils under our interpretative microscopes will be the evil that is unleashed when good and evil are seen as separate entities and not two sides of the same coin (Dr. Jerkyll and Mr. Hyde and The Power and the Glory); the evil that is unleashed by our delusions in name of love and our need for security and importance (The Turn of the Screw and In Cold Blood); the banality of evil in the name of a “great idea” (The Heart of Darkness); and the evil found in the dysfunction of family (The Metamorphosis). During this unit, the argumentative essay will be modeled and students will write essays that convey clear references to the necessary literary elements. (Once both essays are introduced the students will, for the remainder of the class, have either one type or other assigned for the weekly essay test.) The instructional goal of this unit is to develop a clear understanding of foundational questions students should be asked—and asking of themselves—in order to comprehend and process text. One novel will also be read aloud to the students to model and aid in the student’s reading fluency. And finally, the art of taking notes (high-lighting, underlining and marginalia) will be modeled and expanded upon.

“Reading for Survival”

Essential Question: How is reading still relevant in our technological, highly visual society?

Primary Text: Reading for Survival by John D. MacDonald

Secondary Readings:
“Learning to Read and Write” by Frederick Douglass
“Learning to Read” by Malcolm X
“Listening” by Eudora Welty
“Introduction” found in Fifty Great Essays edited by Robert Diyanni
“Reading the River” by Mark Twain
“Of Smell” by Michel De Montaigne
“How to Tame a Wild Tongue” by Gloria Anzaldua
“Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective” By Leslie Marmon Silko

Excerpts from The Brief Bedford Reader
Articles and Editorials taken from the New York Times

Discussion/Procedure: The first unit is to get the class up and writing. I want students to not only think about what they read but how and why they read. Peer reviews will be modeled and started. Writing styles will be identified and discussed. The art of close reading will be examined using the introduction of the class’s primary text—Fifty Great Essays edited by Robert Diyanni and produced by Penguin Academics. The art of taking notes (high-lighting, underlining and marginalia) will be modeled on the overhead. New York Times articles and editorials will be introduced and discussed for current events and ideas that can be related to the present text. (Periodically the Times will be used in this manner and for this purpose in all future units.) There will be a review of grammar and the standard organization outline will be modeled during which time the components of an essay will be discussed. A look at style and its interpretative explication will be followed by a review and identification of the all-important literary
elements and terms—rhetoric, structure, style, theme, figurative language, tone, diction, imagery and symbolism.

And finally in this unit students will be engaged in expository activities, learning to explain in writing what they are reading. For instance, in our discussion of Reading for Survival, students will be asked to explain, point by point, MacDonald’s argument (based on memory) for reading as the basis for mankind’s continued survival.

“The Freedom of Uncertainty”

Essential Question: What is the danger of being too certain in our perceptions and thoughts about the world?

Primary Text:

*The Wisdom of Insecurity* by Alan Watts  
*The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne  
*The Stranger* by Albert Camus  
*Middle Passage* by Charles Johnson  
*The Sailor Who Fell From Grace From The Sea* by Mishima

Secondary Readings:  
Four Noble Truths of Buddhism  
“Allegory of the Cave” by Plato  
“The Myth of Sisyphus” by Albert Camus  
Articles and editorials from the *New York Times*  
Excerpts from Paul Ricour’s *The Symbolism of Evil*  
Excerpts from Ernest Becker’s *Denial of Death*  
“The Four Fields of Knowledge” taken from *A Guide for the Perplexed*  

By E.F. Schumacher

Discussion/Procedure: The “Law of Reverse Effect” created by Alan Watts is the basis of this unit. According to the law, when someone attempts to act with too much certainty the result is usually the opposite effect, that is when you try to sink in water, you float; and when you try to float; you sink. The goal of this unit is to get the students to start to question the world around them, especially our image-obsessed society (“The Allegory of the Cave”). My hope is that students will become cognitive of not only their pre-conceived prejudices (certainty) but how limiting and dangerous these prejudices can be. I want my students to take ideas not as actions or finalities but as merely ideas that should be consumed, utilized and used without certainty. The themes that will be encountered will be existentialism (*The Stranger*), what is an “inner life” and thus what makes an individual (*The Scarlet Letter*), “consciousness as conflict” and love as the only remedy (*The Middle Passage*), the concept of personality shells (Ernest Becker) that we create to protect our egos and how our desires make us delusional by creating a schism between our expectations and reality (*The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism*). In this unit, students will do a lot of exploratory writing in class and for homework. The first writing assignments will be personal essays to get students to understand their place as readers and interpreters of the world and the literature that they read. One piece of non-fiction will also be read aloud to the students to model and aid in the student’s reading fluency.

“Poetry”

Primary Text: An AP Literature and Comprehension Textbook--TBA

Discussion/Procedure: We will be analyzing a historical survey of poetry in preparation for the AP exam using “the four steps to understanding poetry;” as well as writing practice essays for the AP exam. There will be a major review of grammar and the standard organization outline will be modeled during which time the components of an essay will be discussed. A look at style and its interpretative explication will be followed by a review and identification of the all-important literary elements

Unit 5 (4-5 weeks)  
“Naturalism and Evolution”
Essential Questions: What evolutionary mechanisms, such as camouflage and parasitic relationships, can be revealed in an analysis of character’s motives and actions? And do naturalistic imperatives like determinism guide human behavior?

Primary Texts:
   Maggie: A Girl on the Street by Stephen Crane
   As I Lay Dying by William Faulkner
   House of Mirth by Edith Wharton

Secondary Reading:
   “Nature” by Ralph Waldo Emerson
   “The Flow of the River” by Loren Eiseley
   Excerpts from Darwin’s The Origin of Species
   Articles and editorials from The New York Times
   Selected poems

Discussion/Procedure: Naturalistic fiction is drama about people working out their lives in blood and ordure, in other words fulfilling their evolutionary directive—survive and procreate. The goal of this unit is to remind students that Man is an animal, albeit divine (consciousness) and thus is set upon by the same evolutionary mechanics that can be found in nature. Students will then question if “survival of the fittest” is a fit agenda for our species as they come to see how social and psychological limits defeat the characters in these realistic fictions. The novels under discussion were selected because they cover the spectrum of class. Crane’s Maggie: A Girl on the Street takes place in a New York City slum; while The House of Mirth reveals the deterministic social pressures of the wealthy New York elite at around the same time period.

“Drama”

Essential Question: How do character’s delusions generate dramatic tension?

Primary Text:
   Medea by Euripides
   Oedipus Tyrannus by Sophocles
   Antigone by Sophocles
   Street Car Named Desire by Tennessee Williams
   Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

Secondary Reading:
   “A Woman’s Brain” by Stephen Jay Gould
   Excerpts from The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir
   “Four Noble Truths of Buddhism”
   Selected poem
   “The Myth of Icarus” and “The Myth of Phaeton and Helio” taken from Mythology by Edith Hamilton

Discussion/Procedure: The two inscriptions that appeared upon the Temple of Adelphi—”Know Thyself” and “Nothing in Excess” will serve as the cornerstones of this unit. Yet the main gist of this unit is how delusions often are the chief motivation for a character’s actions in literature as well as real life—the main delusion being arrogance. This leaves us with the eternal question is a person’s character his fate?
“Test Prep”

Essential Question: How can meta-fiction help inspire a meta-cognitive approach to the AP exam?

Primary Text: *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien  
*AP College Board Test Booklet*

Discussion/Procedure: These texts might seem like strange bedfellows but they work. In studying Tim O’Brien’s book the students are introduced to meta-fiction—fiction that is aware of itself as fiction. In the novel O’Brien is conscious of his role as narrator (“How to tell a true war story”) and talks about the process in the writing (the interpretation of events) that compose the book. This adds a solidified third dimension to the interpretative understanding of the text. I then ask the students to take their understanding of meta-fiction and translate it to a meta-cognitive approach to test taking—“make sure you take the test and the test doesn’t take you.” A review of themes that were studied throughout the course then play a role in our preparation. I ask the students to not only deconstruct and ponder questions asked but question who wrote the questions and why? How would you think they would like you to respond? How will they be assessed? The students use empathy to start to understand the test meta-cognitively. We’ll discuss the pitfall of overconfidence (Oedipus) and the inability to make final decisions (Lily Barth). Furthermore, in the vein of “know thyself,” the students prepare their own game plan about how they plan to go about taking the test—which essay question to do first, what multiple choice questions will be fielded first—those on poetry or prose? Testing taking strategies will also be modeled, especially how to answer multiple choice questions (eliminate wrong answers, be weary of red herrings). And of course essays from old AP prompts will be practiced. I find this approach allows the students to have a quiet confidence as they go about their preparation for and execution of the exam.

Post-exam

“Buddhism as Revolution”

Essential Question: What does it mean that one must “destroy the self to renew the self” to evolve as a spiritual being?

Primary Texts:  
*Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse  
*Roshomon* by Ryunosuke Akutagawa

Secondary Reading:  
Selected Haiku  
Excerpts from Joseph Campbell’s *Hero with a Thousand Faces*  
Movies: *The Matrix*  
*Finding Nemo*  
*Kunden*

Discussion/Procedure: This unit is designed as an introduction to Buddhism and the Mythic Quest. To introduce the concept of the hero’s quest, I use excerpts from Joseph Campbell’s *Hero with a Thousand Faces* and then model two prototypical quests by watching two movies—*The Matrix* and *Finding Nemo*. The students get a kick out of realizing certain mythic elements like “the meeting with the goddess” or “crossing of the return threshold” that they’ve already encountered in the books they’ve read over the course of the year. The Buddhist version of the hero’s quest will be studied with Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha*. Buddhist thought makes for a nice exclamation upon the course’s overall emphasis—self-awareness and being. *Roshomon* will then be read to introduce the Zen Buddhist twist on reality and illusion. These short stories are a good summary of the course since they engage the students in such a way that they must utilize their entire interpretive and argumentative skill set in order to unlock the multiple narrations, (points-of-view) found in each story. The students are forced to ask themselves what “really” happened and how and why?
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Please read and review this course description with your parent(s)/guardian; sign and date below that you understand the requirements of this course. Return the signature portion to me (this page); keep the course description in your notebook at all times.

Student’s Name (Printed): _______________________________

Student’s Signature: _________________________________ Date: __________

Parent’s Name (Printed): _____________________________

Parent’s Signature: _________________________________ Date: __________

Parent Home Phone Number: ___________________________

Parent Cell Number: _________________________________

Parent Work Number: _______________________________