

# AP<sup>®</sup> English Literature & Composition

## Syllabus 2

### Course Overview

- I do not follow the exact sequence nor teach the same books outlined here each year, and I add or subtract texts as the year progresses. My thematic organization (“The Tragic Figure in Literature,” “The Search for Identity”) is broad enough to allow for substitutions and additions. Students are never without a reading assignment or an outside paper due date.
- Our year is divided into 9-week quarters. Students may expect to write 2–3 papers (3–6 pages each) outside of class, 2–3 in-class essays (rhetorical or literary analysis), and complete a variety of quiz/short test assignments per quarter.
- I prepare students for both the AP<sup>®</sup> English Literature and Composition Exam and the AP English Language and Composition Exam in one year. Students choose which exam(s) they will take when they sign up in the spring.
- This course is designed to comply with the curricular requirements described in the *AP English Course Description*.

### Course Planner/Student Activities

#### Topic/Unit: *Writing With Style*

#### Approximate # of weeks: 2

After a few days of informal discussion of the summer reading, I begin the year by having students read John Trimble’s short book, *Writing with Style*, two chapters per night. Most problems with student writing, Trimble says, stem from the failure to think well. If students don’t have something to say, they produce what he terms *mumbo jumbo*, writing only for themselves.

Each day I have the students complete exercises associated with the chapters. For example, after reading his chapter titled “Openers” students will critique and revise sample openers, working in pairs or groups. I also use quizzes to assess students’ understanding for chapters such “Punctuation” and “Diction.” [C8]

The benefit of beginning the year with this book is that I am able to establish what I expect for all writing during the year, from critical analyses (Chapter 3) to personal essays. Often I will suggest that students “see Trimble” when I write notes on their papers.

As students finish with Trimble, I distribute the *Brief Bedford Reader* and assign their first paper (See *Bedford Reader*–based Writing Assignments below).

**C8**—The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work, which help the students develop a wide-ranging vocabulary used appropriately and effectively.

## Topic/Unit: Poetry

Approximate # of weeks: 4

Although students use *Sound and Sense* for nightly reading assignments, I supply individual photocopies for poems we read and discuss in class. Some of these poems have appeared in past AP Exams, and many others I have collected over the years. And while I do give a fair amount of attention to pre-nineteenth century writing, I will also slip in a poem from the most recent issue of *The New Yorker*, which may be difficult in a different way, to help students feel comfortable with writing that at first seems daunting (and to prepare them for reading *King Lear*).

To help guide students as they read and explicate poems, I use techniques from Helen Vendler's *Poems, Poets, Poetry—An Introduction and Anthology*.

Students will also keep a poetry-reading journal, where they will record initial questions, impressions, and responses to the poems they are reading. I express to students that I expect the journal to be used in developing the paper, which is described in the following paragraph. [C5]

Students must choose a poem from a packet I supply and write an interpretation of the poem based upon its textual details; those who wish may present their analysis to the rest of the class. This assignment, while primarily drawing upon skills of interpretation, engages students in writing for understanding (as they make notes) and writing for analytical explanation. [C2]

I also ask students to write poems in the course of this unit and to share them with one another and revise them. I write along with them and share my work as well. The poems are not graded, but I encourage students to submit their best ones to the school's literary magazine.

## Topic/Unit: The Tragic Figure in Literature

Approximate # of Weeks: 4

### *King Lear and A Thousand Acres*

I distribute the Jane Smiley novel, *A Thousand Acres*, about a week before we begin reading *King Lear* in class and ask students to read the first half of the novel by the time we are a week into the play. Students automatically make the connections as they are reading both works. [C1]

As we read the play in class, with students volunteering to read parts aloud, I gloss the text and stop frequently to raise discussion questions. For example, I ask them to consider why Cordelia refuses to play along with her sisters in the opening scene and whether she is right in doing so. Discussions that follow often supply insights and force students to examine the text closely. Short in-class writing assignments also ask students to show their understanding of text. I might ask students to read Lear's "Reason not the need" speech (II, 4, 267–289) and to define, in writing, what Lear is talking about by finding examples from their own experience or reading. [C6] (Many will choose to compare Larry Cook's loss of his driving privileges to Lear's loss of his followers.)

**C5**—The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite formal, extended analyses and timed in-class responses. The course requires writing to understand: informal, exploratory writing activities that enable students to discover what they think in the process of writing about their reading (such assignments could include annotation, freewriting, keeping a reading journal, and response/reaction papers).

**C2**—The course teaches students to write an interpretation of a piece of literature that is based on a careful observation of the works textual details, considering structure, style, and themes.

**C1**—The course includes an intensive study of representative works of both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times.

**C6**—The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite formal, extended analyses and timed in-class responses. The course requires writing to explain: expository, analytical essays in which students draw upon textual details to develop an extended explanation/interpretation of the meanings of a literary text.

I assume a certain familiarity with the basic characteristics of the tragic figure as outlined by Aristotle in *The Poetics*, but I take time to review them as we read the play. [C1] I emphasize that Aristotle says that the tragic figure is one of some renown who, through some error or frailty, suffers a fall. It is the action of the figure, not the character him/herself, and the universality of the experience, that inspire fear or pity for the members of the audience. Students apply these criteria to King Lear and Larry Cook in class discussions.

**C1**—The course includes an intensive study of representative works of both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times.

Many students are also familiar with the theories of leadership put forth by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. I review these as we read the play and ask students to consider Shakespeare’s character of Edmund in the subplot of the play as Machiavelli would assess him.

Although students will make references to *A Thousand Acres* as we read *King Lear* in class, I don’t have a full discussion of the book until after I have asked them to respond to an AP (or an AP-style) writing prompt in class. For example: “Often the setting in a piece of literature adds meaning to the work, almost serving as another character. Compare and contrast how Shakespeare and Smiley use setting to enhance meaning.” [C6]

**C6**—The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite formal, extended analyses and timed in-class responses. The course requires writing to explain: expository, analytical essays in which students draw upon textual details to develop an extended explanation/interpretation of the meanings of a literary text.

Students will be asked to keep a dialectical notebook on *King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres*. In the notebook they will record impressions of the two texts as they read them, noting parallel themes, concerns, and settings. The notebooks are used in group discussions and to prepare for the writing prompt on the two texts, described below. [C5]

### **Bedford Reader–based Writing Assignments**

I’m inserting the following description here so there won’t be any confusion about the “Approximate # of weeks” listed for the units that follow. Only a small percentage of class time in the four weeks listed, say, for *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is spent going over the text. I typically assign a book by halves; after the due date for the first half, I assess students’ understanding, normally using passage identification questions (“tell why the passage is significant”), and then we discuss that portion of the novel. Similarly, but using a particular AP prompt for an assessment, we discuss the book as a whole after they have given a fresh response, untainted by my or others’ observations.

**C5**—The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite formal, extended analyses and timed in-class responses. The course requires writing to understand: informal, exploratory writing activities that enable students to discover what they think in the process of writing about their reading (such assignments could include annotation, freewriting, keeping a reading journal, and response/reaction papers).

I use the *Brief Bedford Reader* as a framework for writing assignments students complete through the year. The book is organized according to the traditional rhetorical strategies – narration, description, exemplification, cause/effect, definition, comparison/contrast, and argumentation. Students must read the chapter and the sample selections, choose and articulate a controlling thesis statement, and then write a 3-6 page paper using the particular strategy of the chapter and their personal experiences or observations. For example, a student writes a narrative about his first day volunteering at a camp for severely handicapped children and adults; his thesis: A good deed doesn’t necessarily leave anybody feeling particularly good, because charity turns out to be surprisingly complicated and difficult. (Students often find they will be able to revise and condense the narrative personal essay for their college applications.)

We do a good deal of talking about what makes a strong personal essay and how being able to articulate a meaningful thesis (having something to say) is most critical. I share student samples from past years and we critique these. I encourage students to share first drafts with me, but I do not mark them up; instead we sit after school and go over them. (My recurring question during these sessions is “What were you trying to say here?”) While these papers might seem more directed toward preparing students for the AP Language and Composition Exam, I think the practice of writing and thinking clearly serves them well for any prompt. Students write literary analysis under timed conditions in class and when they do the research assignment (See “Research Assignment” below).

**C9**—The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work, which help the students develop a variety of sentence structures, including appropriate use of subordination and coordination.

My comments on all papers encourage students to vary sentence length and structure. I point out particularly well-constructed phrases and apt word choices, [C9] subtle and appropriate transition statements, [C10] and original illustrative details. [C11] Students must state their thesis statement at the end of the paper, which allows me to comment on how well the writing style (tone, diction, sentence structure, choice of examples) achieves their stated purpose. [C12]

**C10**— The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work, which help the students develop logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques to increase coherence, such as repetition, transitions, and emphasis.

It is important to return papers as quickly as possible. Students, like all of us, are anxious to see how a reader responds to their words. A strategy I use is to divide all of my AP students into four groups, by lottery. I then set four due dates for each paper, stretched over a two-week period. During the first quarter, students in Group 1 must hand in their papers first; in the second quarter, Group 2 students are first, Group 1 last, and so on. I set a goal for myself to finish all the papers of one group before the next papers come in; students usually get their papers back within three days.

**C11**— The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work, which help the students develop a balance of generalization and specific, illustrative detail.

**Topic/Unit: The Tragic Figure in Literature**

Approximate # of weeks: 4

**Part II: *The Mayor of Casterbridge***

Essential Questions: How does Thomas Hardy treat the classical principles of the tragic figure in his 19th century novel? To what extent do the mores of a particular time period define the tragic condition?

**C12**— The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work, which help the students develop an effective use of rhetoric, including controlling tone, establishing and maintaining voice, and achieving appropriate emphasis through diction and sentence structure.

Through writing assignments and class discussions, students will be able to show that they can draw parallels and distinctions between Michael Henchard and King Lear (and Larry Cook). They will also discuss how the element of fate (or chance) works in leading to Henchard’s ultimate downfall. From evidence they glean from the novel, students will determine what was the world view of people in Victorian England and be prepared to compare it to our world view today. [C3]

**Topic/Unit: Short Fiction**

Approximate # of weeks 4

Essential Question: How does the short story work on many levels to create a unified effect?

**C3**—The course teaches students to write an interpretation of a piece of literature that is based on a careful observation of the works textual details, considering the social and historical values it reflects and embodies.

Students should be able to pinpoint and clearly explain the particular effect an author achieves in a piece of short fiction and show how the author achieves that effect through the use of such elements as symbols, imagery, diction, and organization. [C4]

**C4**—The course teaches students to write an interpretation of a piece of literature that is based on a careful observation of the work's textual details, considering such elements as the use of figurative language, imagery, symbolism, and tone.

I try to fit this unit in before the winter holiday break, so that I may distribute the research paper assignment before the third quarter begins. I stagger the due dates for the research paper through the third marking period in the same way I do the Bedford assignments.

I assign stories I have collected through the years, many of which lend themselves to the type of interpretation suitable for the research assignment. Several of the stories come from an out-of-print anthology called *American Voices* (Sally Artseros, ed., Washington Square Press, 1992); a couple of stories were published by former students, and some I've taken from magazines like *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. I usually end with two stories by Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" and "Dry September," which lead into the next unit.

I have many sample short stories with multiple-choice questions from past years of The Wordmasters Challenge that I use for one-day assessment exercises. The questions direct students to look for details they might normally miss in a cursory reading and the stories are short enough that students can read the story, answer the questions, review the answers, and discuss the story in one class period.

We also write short stories during this time but not for credit. (I, too, write a story and share my results with students.) Students complete two or three pages of their story for three or four in-class work sessions; during these sessions they read one another's work and give reactions. Some stories are selected to be read aloud. At the end, I will work with any student who wishes to refine a story to submit it for publication.

### Research Assignment

I call this paper a "modified research paper" because I am not interested in having students quoting extensively from a number of sources to show they know how to do that. Rather, students need to find only one source to apply to one of the short stories they have read in class or for summer reading and then write an original and complete evaluation of the story's artistry, quality, and social and cultural values. [C7]

**C7**—The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite formal, extended analyses and timed in-class responses. The course requires writing to evaluate: analytical, argumentative essays in which students draw upon textual details to make and explain judgments about a work's artistry and quality, and its social and cultural values.

The analysis of the short story must be based on some published work that offers a theory of why people behave the way they do. For example, a student might find a work that explores how childhood friendships and/or traumas may become fixations in adult life and then use this work to discuss what happens in Margaret Atwood's "Death By Landscape." A model for what they are to do is what Bruno Bettelheim does with fairy tales in *The Uses of Enchantment*, applying Freudian theories to explain them.

Citations throughout the paper come from only two sources—the short story itself and the work the student chooses as the basis for the analysis. Students may use any source for as long as it is a primary one. For example, should a student

interpret a story according to the theories of Sigmund Freud, the student must read Freud, not someone's interpretation of Freud. Theories of why people behave the way they do may come from the fields of psychology, philosophy, theology, political science, or sociology.

## **Topic/Unit: The Tragic Figure in Literature**

**Approximate # of weeks: 4**

### **Part III: *Light in August* [C1]**

**Essential Questions:** Is it possible to have a tragic figure, according to the classical outline of what constitutes the tragic figure, in the modern (twentieth- to twenty-first-century) world? To what extent do psychological forces—the effects of our interpersonal relationships with others—shape destiny?

Students discuss how Joe Christmas turns out the way he does, comparing him to King Lear and Michael Henchard along the way. Faulkner's use of other characters who have been warped, in one way or another, by the circumstances of their birth (Gail Hightower, Joanna Burden, Percy Grimm) or by their rigid adherence to fanatical beliefs (McEachern and Hines) provides for rich discussions. This novel is excellent for pulling out selected passages and reading them closely.

**C1**—The course includes an intensive study of representative works of both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times.

## **Topic/Unit: Character in Search of Identity**

**Approximate # of weeks: 3**

### **Part I : *Invisible Man* [C1]**

**Essential Questions:** How and why is the search for self an essential pattern in literature and why is this search so critical to the African American experience? What elements of society act against an individual's search for and understanding of self?

One of the observations students will make as they move from Shakespeare to Hardy to Faulkner and then to Ellison will be about writing style and which particular style they prefer. With *Invisible Man* the cadences of jazz, religious revivalism, and oratory all add to the total effect and provide a nice contrast to the other works we have read.

Students recognize and are willing to trace the steps of the journey from innocence to experience that fit the archetypical search-for-self saga. While many will first learn through their reading of *Cliffs Notes* or *SparkNotes* how Ellison uses names and objects as symbols, they can be pushed to explore other possible meanings and recurring motifs in the work. For example, although the commercially prepared notes might explain how the invisible strings on the Sambo dolls Tod Clifton sells on the street symbolize the strings that white society uses to make African Americans dance to its tunes, they fail to explain how and why Tod Clifton ends up where he is. While no one answer is given in the text, students should be able to discuss several possible reasons.

## Topic/Unit: Character in Search of Identity

Approximate # of weeks: 3

### Part II: *Song of Solomon* [C1]

**Essential Questions:** How does Milkman’s search for identity compare to that of the narrator in *Invisible Man*? What themes from mythology transcend time periods and how are they embedded in the human psyche? How does Toni Morrison create a mythology?

Students should see the distinctions between Part I and Part II of the novel in the treatment of the protagonist, Milkman. Archetypes in the hero’s journey, such as the mentor/guide figure and the figures of the Other and the Wise Fool, are evident, and after reviewing the elements of the hero’s journey—the same elements used in *Star Wars* (outlined by Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers in a PBS series “The Power of Myth”)—students should be able to recognize them and write about them. [C2]

**C1**—The course includes an intensive study of representative works of both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times.

**C2**—The course teaches students to write an interpretation of a piece of literature that is based on a careful observation of the works’ textual details, considering structure, style, and themes.

## Topic/Unit: Character in Search of Direction

Approximate # of weeks: 2

### *Revolutionary Road* [C1]

**Essential Questions:** How does the modern novelist treat characters who are neither tradition-directed nor inner-directed in making their choices? To what extent is the suburban lifestyle responsible for alienating people, one from another?

*Revolutionary Road* by Richard Yates was a delightful find when I used it for a summer reading novel (paired with *Rabbit, Run*—a pairing that works well). I have since added it to the curriculum because, although it’s about suburbia in the ’50’s, it has a contemporary feel and students find it to be quick reading. The insights into character are flawlessly detailed, even as the characters themselves are flawed and shallow. Students infer what Yates is saying about the modern condition in general, discuss how the characters make choices, and compare the novel to other novels, plays, and films for similar thematic messages.

Usually students have taken the AP Exam by this time in the year. I find I can ask questions that allow students to discuss a character’s motivation without relying on the AP format. For example, I might ask students to define a character by how true that character is to him or herself and rank characters accordingly.

## Teaching Strategies

I have embedded my teaching strategies throughout this syllabus. In this section, I will address strategies for keeping students engaged during the time period between the AP Exam and the end of the school year.

## After the Exam

During the period after the AP Exam, I have used books from the English Department book closet. Such finds include *Stranger in a Strange Land* (Robert Heinlein), a science fiction book that seems marinated in ’60’s idealism, *Stop-Time*

(Frank Conroy), a memoir of adolescence in what would now be called a dysfunctional home environment, and *Summerhill* (A.S. Neill), a nonfiction book about a revolutionary school and approach to childrearing. [C1]

**C1**—The course includes an intensive study of representative works of both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times.

*Summerhill* has been the most successful. I don't ask students to read it cover to cover, but to read selected portions for class discussions, which often become quite lively. Students are all too willing to talk openly about their 13 years of schooling and to reflect upon what worked well and what didn't.

The final piece of writing students produce for the course taps into their reflective mood—a graduation speech. Our school's graduation ceremony has spots in the program for two at-large speeches in addition to the traditional valedictorian and salutatorian addresses; students write speeches and compete for these open slots. I spend some time with students talking, once again, about what makes a good piece of writing. Many are aware of the traps of cliché and generalization and, while they might have something to say, they must work to make it fit the occasion and the audience. I share copies of speeches from past graduations and copies of those that I thought were good but were not selected.

All students deliver their speeches in their respective AP classes and, after receiving comments from their peers, have a day or two to revise before handing in to me for a grade. Those students who wish to try out for the spots often will drop by before or after school to continue working on the speeches.

Between writing the graduation speech and reviewing for the final exam (all students must take the final), students have a reason for continuing to work during the final month of school.

## Student Evaluation

In-class writing (test category) consists of two types: free-response questions taken from past AP Exams (which are given under timed conditions only as the exam time approaches) and tests on books. I grade the free-response questions anonymously and holistically, using specific rubrics. Tests on books consist of several passage-identification questions, short-answer questions, and one essay. (I word the essay question to match the type that students will see on the AP Exam.)

Papers prepared outside of class (4–6 typed pages) count more than essays written in class. The research paper (5–10 typed pages) is equal to two papers.

I used portions of the multiple-choice sections of past AP Exams and multiple-choice questions from WordMasters Challenge for quiz grades. I also quiz students periodically on their reading, using passage-identification and short-answer questions.

Quizzes	15 percent
Tests, essays	85 percent
In-class writing/tests	4
Papers prepared outside of class	2
Quizzes:	6–10

## Teacher Resources

Artseros, Sally, ed. *American Voices: Best Short Fiction by Contemporary Authors*. New York: Hyperion, 1992.

Burrows, David J., Frederick R. Lippes, and John T. Shawcross, eds. *Myths and Motifs in Literature*. New York: Free Press, 1973.

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1998.

Vendler, Helen, ed. *Poems, Poets, Poetry: And Introduction and Anthology*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1997.

## Web Sites

AP Central® – [apcentral.collegeboard.com](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com)

WordMasters Challenge – [www.wordmasterschallenge.com](http://www.wordmasterschallenge.com)

The New Yorker – [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)