

AP[®] French Literature

Syllabus 4

Course Overview

The course objectives are identical to those published by the College Board. Although each student has a textbook, we almost always use an edition with critical notes such as Hachette or Larousse. The course is conducted entirely in French and all student writing is in French as well. [C2] The focus of the class is always the text. Nearly every class consists of discussion, questions, and analysis of the text currently being studied. Sometimes students give oral presentations on characters or themes. Students are evaluated almost exclusively based on their writing of essays and textual analyses. [C5] In other words, from the very beginning of the course, they are required to write exactly as they will be required to write on the examination in May. Some essays and analyses are written at home. Others are completed in class within the time constraints of the 55-minute period and always without the use of dictionaries. Students are encouraged and sometimes required to revise their work, correcting grammatical and lexical errors. The vocabulary of literary analysis, figures of style, and vocabulary in general are consistently emphasized and students are quizzed and reminded frequently of the importance of fine-tuning the tools of expression as well as their use and application. [C4]

C2—The teacher uses French almost exclusively in class and encourages students to do likewise.

C5—The course includes close reading and extensive discussion of texts, with particular attention to character, theme, structure, and style, and to how these elements are related to overall interpretation.

C4—The course teaches students a basic vocabulary of critical terms.

Course Planner [C1]

Our academic year begins in late August and runs through early June. We have four nine-week quarters divided into two semesters. My AP[®] French Literature course often begins with a text or several texts not on the required list. This serves simply to pique interest and to get us started. Within the first week we have begun the formal study of literary terms and figures of style. [C4] We read the works in historical sequence. I find that this strategy works well even though Du Bellay and Labé can be somewhat difficult. Students at least begin to think in terms of a historical and cultural context, which is particularly useful when dealing with themes such as love. We always read several poems by Ronsard along with Du Bellay and Labé. Length of time: two and one-half to three weeks. Evaluation: textual analyses. Next, still during the first quarter, we study *Le Cid* and *L'école des femmes*. Even though students have daily reading assignments, they are always thoroughly reviewed in class because of inherent difficulties in reading the genre and time period. The thorough study of this play takes a little less than three weeks. Students enjoy the play immensely so we take time to savor the pleasure. La Fontaine is the final author studied during the first quarter. The second quarter consists of *Candide*, which takes a good three weeks. Next we study poets of the nineteenth century such as Lamartine and Hugo, along with *Moderato cantabile*. Our midterm exams take place before the end of the semester, that is, before the December break. This means that my midterm exam is devoted to the authors mentioned above and to a sample of reading passages followed by multiple-choice questions. Before taking the exam, students have had practice answering multiple-choice questions from previously published exams. In January, we take several weeks (about three) to study *Pierre et Jean* in great depth. (My students

C1—The course is structured to allow students to complete the entire AP French Literature reading list in text form.

like and appreciate this novel and the style of Maupassant.) March and April are devoted to the study of poetry. Sometimes other poets are included, notably francophone poets, but always we devote at least three weeks to Baudelaire, and two to Apollinaire. When studying Baudelaire we read about eight additional poems and talk about the meaning of the collection *Les fleurs du mal*. Sometimes students enjoy memorizing one of these poems and reciting it before the class, but this can also wait until after the AP Exams. Because of Apollinaire's numerous connections to the other arts, sometimes students enjoy putting together some sort of collage or poster or even a painting related to literature. This has occurred spontaneously on several occasions.

Required Readings

Novels

Duras, *Moderato cantabile*

Maupassant, *Pierre et Jean*

Voltaire, *Candide*

Plays

Césaire, *Une tempête*

Corneille, *Le Cid*

Molière, *L'école des femmes*

Poetry

Apollinaire: "Le pont Mirabeau," "Les colchiques," "Mai," "Automne"

Baudelaire: "Correspondances," "Hymne à la beauté," "L'invitation au voyage," "Chant d'automne," "Spleen" ("Quand le ciel ..."), "Recueillement" (From *Les fleurs du mal*)

Du Bellay: "Heureux qui comme Ulysse a fait un beau voyage," "Si notre vie est moins qu'une journée"

Labé: "On voit mourir toute chose animée," "Je vis, je meurs: je me brûle et me noie"

La Fontaine: "Les animaux malades de la peste," "Le chêne et le roseau," "La mort et le bûcheron," "Le loup et l'agneau"

Teaching Strategies

As is clearly stated in the course overview, the primary strategy is to develop critical thinking among students by careful questioning and by always insisting that students justify their opinions by citing specific references to the text. [C5] I model this attitude in class. I try to be accepting of any student opinion, however

C5—The course includes close reading and extensive discussion of texts, with particular attention to character, theme, structure, and style, and to how these elements are related to overall interpretation.

far-fetched it may initially appear to be, provided that it has some basis in the text. I find that students need some training in order to form the habit of consistently explaining points of view with precise examples and in-depth analysis, but once they understand the expectation, they will automatically provide substantive argumentation. So my role as a teacher is often to “play dumb” or to insist that I don’t understand and that the student explain to me more fully or that he or she must provide “proof.” My class is never in lecture format, but this is not because I disdain lectures. It is simply because I prefer to present historical background or biographical data in 10-minute segments and to incorporate such references as needed to aid in comprehension of the text. Despite my own fascination with history and biography, I see no need to overburden the students with such knowledge. Moreover, an overemphasis on biographical or historical data can result in students needlessly wasting time during the exam in May by displaying their command of such data. For the sake of variety and because students enjoy working together, I provide some opportunities for group or pair presentations. In addition to the benefits of variety and collaboration, students develop their speaking skills and gain poise and confidence in speaking French before a group. [C6] After the exam in May we may read a work that was too long to be included during the time of preparing for the exam. *Le Père Goriot* is a good example of a novel that is not only of intrinsic literary merit, but also interesting from a historical perspective. We often watch a few French films that are representative of the greatness of French cinema, such as films by François Truffaut or Alain Resnais. The AP French Literature class sometimes makes a dramatic presentation at the annual initiation ceremony for the *Société honoraire du français*. For example, in 2005, students performed scenes from Molière’s *L’école des femmes*. If one has a class of uninhibited students, as mine usually are, a dramatic monologue can be used as an activity for the end of the year. A student becomes one of the characters from one of the works studied. He or she dresses as the character and delivers a monologue that reveals the character’s deepest thoughts and may include an imaginary sequel.

C6—Class discussion and essay writing in French are essential components of the course.

Student Evaluation

Each quarter students are evaluated on their major assignments, which are primarily essays and textual analyses. Sometimes one or two may count for a slightly higher percentage but as a general rule, I would say that a student’s grade reflects the average of the grades on writing assignments. I usually have between six and 10 major writing assignments that are averaged into each quarter grade. Semester exams are a minimum of three hours in length. The first semester exam is long and of a high level of difficulty, including at least one long essay, one textual analysis, and a number of texts for sight-reading followed by multiple-choice questions. In other words, it is very similar to an actual AP Exam. [C3, C6] I think that students should have practice taking a long and difficult exam.

C3—The course teaches students the techniques of literary analysis.

Teacher Resources

A good source for detailed studies of several of the works on the reading list is Hatier’s *Profil d’une oeuvre*. These include studies of several of the works on the required reading list.