

English III Honors - The American Experience

Course Description:

This multicultural course guides students to explore various works of American literature, primarily from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Through this course, students develop their abilities to read, critique, and respond to complex literature while gaining a genuine appreciation of select American works as presented through various historical periods. Units of study are organized thematically, and all units focus on the essential question of what it means to be American and how the concept of the American Dream has been represented and critiqued through various authors' works. The course encourages students to develop their own perspectives as they read closely, analyze critically, argue logically, and express their ideas clearly. Texts, which are varied in length and content, are selected to provide a well-rounded literary experience that will prepare students for college and lifelong reading. As a hallmark of all Holy Cross English courses, lessons are guided by the underlying philosophy that more discerning, experienced readers will be better able to negotiate the narratives that they confront in life. In alignment with the school's *Portrait of the Crusader*, students will share their ideas and perspectives with kindness, thoughtfulness, and mutual respect, particularly when learning about viewpoints that might differ from their own. Thus, students will practice respecting the beliefs of others while appreciating the diversity that represents what it means to an informed and empathetic global citizen.

Essential Questions of the Course:

Literature:

- What is the purpose of storytelling? How do stories work to resurrect and render the past?
- What does "American literature" mean?
- How do authors convey a sense of an American identity or "roots"? How do those roots correlate to a collective identity?
- How does literature reflect and affect history?
- How are ideas and literary themes presented across genres and styles?
- What are the different ways a text can be read and interpreted? How does a given interpretation impact the significance of the text?
- How have authors represented and critiqued the concept of the American Dream?

Language:

- How do we craft our language and style based on audience and purpose?
- How do we develop and hone our writing and speaking skills?
- How does learning new vocabulary deepen our comprehension of new ideas and perspectives?
- In what ways can conversation and feedback help us develop our thinking and writing?

Life:

- How does our interaction with literature help us navigate our personal narrative and experiences?
- How does a personal and national identity develop? How do these identities interact?
- How can the literature we read enhance the way we can express ourselves in life?
- What does it mean to be American? How does literature help us explore this question?

Required Texts/Readings:

- *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien (summer reading)
- *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne
- *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, Lawrence and Lee
- *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *Fences*, August Wilson
- *A Farewell to Arms*, Ernest Hemingway
- *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams
- Selected supplemental poetry, non-fiction, short stories

Please note: Each unit lists reserved readings. Teachers will select specific readings from this list; students will not necessarily read all of the listed selections.

Course Curriculum:**Unit One: Rendering the Past Through Storytelling (3-4 weeks)**

In this unit, students begin to discuss the purpose of storytelling and the ways in which fictional texts (and imaginative literature in general) convey important truths and help people make sense of the past. They review their summer reading, analyzing select chapters from *The Things They Carried* in order to examine Tim O'Brien's concept of "story truth" versus "happening truth" and explore how they inform his view of the war experience and its effects on people/communities. Throughout the course, students develop and hone reading comprehension, critical analysis, effective writing, and speaking skills.

Required Reading Prose:

Summer reading review and reflection: *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien

Concepts and Skills:

- Analyze the summer reading novel for literary elements and devices; evaluate the author's craft.
- Track the development of theme(s) over the course of the text.
- Determine how the work reflects the time period while offering universal truths about war and its effects.
- Write a short, preliminary literary analysis to support an original claim. Draw evidence from literary and informational texts to support individual analysis and reflection. Present a clear claim, relevant text evidence, and sound reasoning to connect the evidence to the claim, and insightful commentary.
- Use the conventions of Standard English.
- Write an original poem focused on an assigned theme. Select a form based on personal preference.

Assessment Options:

- (Formative): original poetry, "Where I'm From"
- (Formative): constructed responses from select chapters in preparation for literary analysis.
- (Formative): Socratic seminar focused on varied chapters from the novel
- (Summative): literary analysis or series of short paragraph analyses based on summer reading.

Unit Two: Roots, Responsibility, and Resilience (8-10 weeks)

In this unit, students read the primary romantic work, *The Scarlet Letter*, representing the Puritan Era. Students reflect not only on the ways in which the novel conveys one's sense of identity and personal values, but also how those values are simultaneously challenged and refined by overarching social expectations and conventions of the larger [Puritan] community. Students grapple with the notion of responsibility to self and others, specifically the ways in which responsibility may simultaneously liberate and restrict one's spiritual and emotional growth. In addition, students reflect on the challenges arising from the attempt to establish and maintain a sense of personal/spiritual integrity amidst cultural restrictions, and the ways in which flouting one's personal truth may render severe consequences for both an individual and a community.

Required Reading Prose:

The Scarlet Letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Reserved Reading Poetry:

"Half-hanged Mary," Margaret Atwood; "To My Dear and Loving Husband," and other selections by Anne Bradstreet. "Huswifery," Edward Taylor.

Concepts and Reading Skills:

- Learn and apply specific reading strategies to prose and poetry: identify author's purpose; use context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase; determine main ideas and supporting details.
- Analyze the novel for literary elements: trace the development of character and conflict over the course of the text; examine how character and conflict illustrate theme and how the theme develops over the course of the text; analyze the importance of point of view and setting to this novel.
- Interpret figurative language and literary devices in the novel, such as symbolism, allegory, allusion, paradox, and irony in context and analyze their role in the text.
- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed). Evaluate the author's craft.
- Read poetry of the period for meaning and narrative voice. Interpret figurative language and common poetic devices. Determine how sound devices impact the mood of poems.
- Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage.
- Determine how specific works reflect the time period.
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Writing:

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. Share original connections and insights.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using well-structured event sequences, well-chosen details, and a consistent narrative voice.
- Create a purposeful structure for each essay and establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of Standard English.

Assessment Options:

- (Formative): constructed responses, short essay quizzes, informal discussions based upon *The Scarlet Letter* and other literary works of the unit
- (Summative): narrative essay, "Exploring Your Roots"
- (Summative): literary analysis (*The Scarlet Letter*)

Unit Three: Confronting Injustice/Seeking Independent Thought (3-4 weeks)

In this unit, students continue to explore nineteenth-century literature, specifically works that illustrate New England Transcendentalism as conceived by Ralph Waldo Emerson and shaped by Henry David Thoreau. Students continue to reflect upon the ways in which literature shapes the American experience, particularly how citizens have a moral responsibility to challenge social and political injustice in order to work toward a better, more democratic society, while also developing a sense of moral integrity and independent thought essential to an evolving society and effective government.

Reserved Readings Prose:

Excerpts from "Nature" and "Self-Reliance," Emerson; Excerpt from *Walden*: "Where I Lived and What I Lived For," Thoreau.

Reserved Readings Poetry:

"Thanatopsis" and "To a Waterfowl," Bryant; "The Rhodora," "Concord Hymn," and "The Snow-Storm," Emerson; "A Noiseless Patient Spider" and "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," Whitman; "There's a Certain Slant of Light;" "Because I Could not Stop for Death," "Hope is the Thing with Feathers," "The Morns are Meeker," and other selected poetry by Dickinson.

Required Reading Drama:

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, Lawrence and Lee.

Concepts and Reading Skills:

- In essays and arguments, determine the author's thesis (main idea) and supporting evidence.
- Analyze the components of the author's style: word choice, sentence structure, and text structure. Evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging
- Demonstrate an understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. Connect connotation to mood and tone.
- Recognize the use of rhetorical strategies to enhance the beauty and/or persuasiveness of a text.

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- Read poetry of the period for meaning and narrative voice. Interpret figurative language and common poetic devices. Determine how sound devices impact the mood of poems.
- Determine how the works studied in the unit reflect the time period.
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Writing:

- Write well-structured, concise literary analyses with a clear claim, strong text evidence to support each claim, and sound reasoning to connect the evidence to the claim.
- Use rhetorical strategies to enhance analyses.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Assessment Options:

- (Formative): reading comprehension quizzes, short analyses, informal discussions
- (Formative): analyses of select poetry
- (Formative): original romantic poetry illustrating Transcendentalist philosophy/concerns
- (Formative): analysis of figurative language (paradoxes, metaphors, analogies) across *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* in preparation for seminar assessment of the play
- (Summative): seminar assessment/project analyzing the use of figurative language in the biographical drama, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* to convey the character/philosophy of Henry David Thoreau

Unit Four: The Promises and Problems of the American Dream (6-8 weeks)

In this unit, students will read works from the early and middle twentieth century. Students will explore the concept of the American Dream and how it is reflected and critiqued in the literature.

Required Reading Prose:

The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald. "Paradox and Dream," John Steinbeck.

Reserved Readings Poetry:

"I Hear America Singing," Whitman; "I, Too," and other selections by Langston Hughes; "America," and other selections from Claude McKay. "The Gift Outright," "Design," and other poems by Robert Frost. "We Wear the Mask," Paul Laurence Dunbar. "The Hill We Climb," Amanda Gorman. *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot

Required Reading Drama:

Fences, August Wilson.

Concepts and Reading Skills:

- Analyze the novel and the play for literary elements and devices; trace the development of themes over the course of the text.
- Determine what characteristics are unique to drama.
- Interpret figures of speech (e.g., symbolism, allusion, paradox, irony) in context and analyze their role in the text.
- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.
- Read poetry for meaning. Distinguish poetic forms, meters, and styles. Analyze the impact of sound devices on meaning and engagement.
- Determine how works reflect the time period.
- Conduct research focused on a contemporary social issue that answers a self-generated question. Then narrow or broaden the inquiry and synthesize multiple sources on the subject.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Writing:

- Write a literary analysis essay with a clear claim, relevant textual evidence, sound reasoning, and apt commentary.
- Write an argumentative research essay on a contemporary social issue. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both. Draw a valid conclusion supported by evidence.
- Write using accurate MLA format for documenting citations and Works Cited. Avoid Plagiarism.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Assessment Options:

- (Formative): original poetry about the American experience and/or dream
- (Formative): reading responses, informal group and seminar discussions over the literature
- (Formative): draft research question, thesis statement, and conducting research notes
- (Summative): research essay on a contemporary issue
- (Summative): seminar assessment, including written and oral component (*Fences*)
- (Summative) literary analysis (*The Great Gatsby*)

Unit Five: Love and War (4-6 weeks)

In this unit, students will read literature of the early twentieth century. Students will explore the ways in which topics of love and war have been presented in the literature, particularly through Hemingway's work, *A Farewell to Arms*. Connections will be drawn to O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, as Hemingway's work about World War One functions as an influence of O'Brien's writing about the Vietnam War especially regarding the universal themes expressed about the effects and experience of war.

Required Readings Prose:

“A Very Short Story,” “Chapter VI,” and *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway.

Reserved Readings Poetry:

“Dulce et Decorum Est,” “Anthem for Doomed Youth,” Wilfred Owen. “In Flanders Field,” John McCrae. “The Man He Killed,” Thomas Hardy. “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” Tennyson. Excerpts from “The Waste Land,” Eliot.

Concepts and Reading Skills:

- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account.
- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.
- Analyze passages in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Writing and Speaking:

- Write a literary analysis essay with a clear claim, relevant textual evidence, sound reasoning, and apt commentary.
- Prepare for and engage in a Socratic Seminar using clear claims, relevant evidence and sound reasoning.
- Write poetry focused on a specific topic or theme. Use varied forms, figurative language and sound devices. OR
- Write a narrative that includes an engaging beginning, a credible sequence of events aligned with the novel. Use descriptive, vivid language aligned with the mood and tone of the novel.

Assessment Options:

- (Formative): reading responses, seminar discussions, group work/discussions
- (Summative): literary analysis
- (Summative): Socratic seminar
- (Summative): creative project– series of poems about the novel and/or the topics of love and war; or they create an additional chapter to *A Farewell to Arms* in Hemingway’s style

Unit Six: American Desires and Delusions (3-4 weeks)

Students continue to read twentieth century literature, focusing specifically on realistic drama and modernist poetry. Students will explore the ways in which the past influences the present and the extent to which an individual’s relationship to the past can either confine or liberate, distort or clarify one's sense of self.

Required Drama:

A Streetcar Named Desire, Williams.

Reserved Poetry:

“The Broken Tower,” Hart Crane; “God’s World,” Edna St. Vincent Millay; “in Just-”, “next to of course god America i”, “anyone lived in a pretty how town,” e.e. Cummings; “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Eliot. “Taste and See,” Denise Levertov.

Film:

A Streetcar Named Desire, 1951, directed by Elia Kazan.

Concepts and Reading Skills:

- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by an American dramatist [Williams’ *Streetcar*].)
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
- Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Writing and Speaking Skills:

- Write an analysis essay or series of constructed responses focused on the playwright’s use of irony in *Streetcar*. Craft a clear claim, relevant textual evidence, sound reasoning, and apt commentary.
- Prepare for and engage in a Socratic Seminar using clear claims, relevant evidence, and sound reasoning.
- Write original poetry imitating an American poet’s style and structure. Use varied forms, figurative language, and sound devices.

Assessment Options:

- (Formative): seminar discussions, constructed responses, dramatic readings
- (Formative): compare/contrast *A Streetcar* play with the 1951 film version (effectiveness of casting; evaluation of the director’s adaptation of the film ending versus the play’s; etc.)
- (Formative): informal and seminar discussion of poetry, analyses of poetry, oral readings
- (Summative): literary analysis of play (in class essay on *Streetcar*)
- (Summative): seminar assessment (examination of irony in *Streetcar*)
- (Summative): poetry project– students select an American poet (either living or dead) to research; they will select at least one poem from the author’s body of work to analyze; they will also include an original poem imitating the poet’s style and structure

Grading Policy:

Mastery (summative assessments): 40%

Formative: 40%

Class Participation and Engagement: 20%