Course Outline: AP Language and Composition  
Cordova High School  
Lynn Backes


Overview:
This is a two-semester course offered to advanced level juniors. As an AP class, it is intended to be the equivalent of a college freshman composition course. At the end of the second semester, students take the AP Composition and Language test for possible college credit. The score on the AP test does not impact the grade for the course. The curriculum for this course is based on a modified writing workshop approach and relies heavily on prose models. In both semesters, the students are required to produce original essays and to analyze the essays of professional writers. Students also practice the test-taking skills they will need for the AP test. First semester deals with various types of personal essays and prose analysis while second semester focuses on the more traditional “expository modes”, such as argument.

The AP English Language and Composition course is designed to help students become skilled readers of prose written in a variety of periods, disciplines, and rhetorical contexts and to become skilled writers who can compose for a variety of purposes. By their reading and writing in this course, students should become aware of the interactions among a writer’s purposes and how the resources of language contribute to effective writing. Our AP English Language and Composition course runs within the frame of American literature, but non-fiction is emphasized as we study the writings, speeches, historical events and visual images that have shaped the American paradigm of thought and the literature that has blossomed from it.

This course allows students to compose for wide-ranging purposes and on a variety of subjects from personal experiences to public policies, from historical analysis to popular culture. Philosophical, religious and ethical assumptions are drawn from our reading as students analyze how an author’s language is used for its persuasive purposes. Students’ awareness of their own composing processes—the way they explore ideas, research with an awareness of validity and documentation, reconsider strategies, and revise their work—are highlighted as we study the rhetoric of America.

General Goals/Purposes:
The students will:
- Write effectively and confidently in their college courses and in their professional and personal lives.
- Write research, expository, analytical, and argumentative pieces that form the basis of academic and professional communication, as well as the personal and reflective writing that fosters the ability to write in any context.
- Read complex texts with understanding and write prose that is rich and complex.
- Analyze the rhetoric of literature, visual images, historical documents, and contemporary pieces in terms of rhetorical devices and how they are used to enhance the author’s ideas.
- Support opinions, analyses, or conclusions by appropriate use of research and evidence while organizing complex ideas in a clear, concise, and persuasive manner.
- Study the language itself—differences between oral and written discourse, formal and informal language, and historical changes in speech and writing.
- Speak both formally and informally on given topics to develop skill and confidence in public speech.

**UNIT 1**

**Summer Reading:**
*Black Boy* by Richard Wright
*The Crucible* by Arthur Miller

The students discuss the major themes presented in the summer reading in order to deductively arrive at an understanding of the values and philosophies that are prevalent in American literature. We discuss the religious and philosophical make-up of the American Judeo-Christian paradigm of thought and the thinking that has gone into the building of this country. We study all writing as a persuasive and political act. All writing adheres to the guidelines for formatting and citations according to MLA.

**UNIT 2**

**Fall Term**

Through the year, students study grammar and vocabulary independently and as a full class using Michael Clay Thompson’s *4Practice* series of 4-Level analysis and his vocabulary program *Word Within a Word*. We use the first five to ten minutes of class to study/analyze sentences, parts of speech, phrases and clauses; punctuation, including parallel structures and subordination; and also vocabulary, including analogies, connotative and denotative meanings, and word choice. Sentences are drawn from our readings, and students answer specific questions on all of these topics.

Because we have a strong Pre-AP program, the class is front-loaded with a review of rhetorical modes and devices. Students take notes and review the resources of language: diction, imagery, syntax, tone, figurative language, etc. in order to speak and write critically. Students annotate the following pieces, marking up rhetorical structures and contexts, meanings, etc. and after small group and full class discussion, students write short analytical responses in class to questions of style, purpose and meanings.

**Reading:**
*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* by Jonathon Edwards
from *The Autobiography* by Benjamin Franklin
*Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America* by Benjamin Franklin
The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is taught for its ambiguous language, rhetorical structures and its challenge to the paradigm of thought. Students are given a study guide for each chapter with questions designed to analyze characters through word choice, look at settings through images, and develop assertions as to Hawthorne’s purpose and choices in writing. Specific passages are analyzed for their rhetorical features in order to adequately offer character analyses, ideas on purpose, and ambiguity of language.

The Crucible by Arthur Miller (Read over summer.) We spend a short time talking about Miller’s purposes and make comparisons to a 10-minute clip from Guilty by Suspicion, with Robert DeNiro, about The House Hearings on Un-American Activities. Students write informal responses to questions about purpose of the text and film.

Writing 1st Semester:
Description: use of concrete sensory detail; methods of organizing a description, using connotation to create mood; diction (choosing “vivid” words); prewriting techniques; developing a writing process; introduction to prose analysis
Narration: differences between narrative essay and short story; writing introductions and conclusions; uses of anecdote; recognizing purpose; creating a dominate impression; stance; writing a thesis for an analysis essay

Unit 3
Spring Term

Reading
The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald
Students read this book over the winter break and answer study guide questions on the choices Fitzgerald makes with color, setting, character names, and the American vs. British paradigm of self-made vs. generational wealth. During this unit, students are expected to question every detail that Fitzgerald incorporates to develop his meaning. We study the importance of point-of-view, audience awareness, and the magic of small details. Students end with an in-class essay: Is Gatsby great?

America & Americans by John Steinbeck
Students mirror Steinbeck’s style as they choose a group to which they belong to provide the paradox and irony that are indicative of the group.

Incident by Countee Cullen
Each student writes a short narrative of an incident that defines him/her.

Writing 2nd Semester:

Character Sketch and Memoir: methods of characterization; double purpose; split point of view; universality; using description and narration for other purposes; humor and techniques for creating humorous tone; introduction to comparison-contrast analysis

Personal Reaction: voice and persona; transitions; closure; allusion; types of organization
Concurrently with these four units, students will also study:

**Writing Process:** developing an effective, flexible voice and style; developing a repertoire of prewriting/inventing techniques to use for various types of writing tasks; developing an effective editing and self-editing process

**Diction Analysis:** effects of word choices and the techniques associated with word choice (connotation, repetition, concrete sensory language, selection of detail) on purpose, tone and mood

**Syntax Analysis:** grammar review; sentence leveling and combining; effects of syntactic devices on tone, mood and meaning

**Tone Analysis:** what is tone; identifying tone; recognizing irony and humor

Students also learn practice various analysis methods and analyze prose models. They also begin practice on test-taking skills through analysis of sample AP test questions (both essay and multiple choice) and answer and writing to AP-style questions on their tests.

While we study for the AP exam, students read many short selections and approach the pieces through a wide variety of strategies. Students work in pairs, in small groups, as individuals, and as a member of the full class. We operate in a writer’s workshop format, analyzing, writing, experimenting with openings, thesis statements, body paragraphs, commentary, etc. We do not write essays on every passage; instead, we talk about approaches, analyze pieces, practice thesis statements, etc. Students give each other feedback, revise, ask questions, develop arguments, etc. We post numerous writing samples on the overhead projector and discuss their merit and/or flaws. Students begin to see themselves as writers who value feedback and decision-makers with a wide chest of tools from which to approach writing tasks.

During this time, we also look at the released questions for the objective portion of the exam and work in groups to understand and discuss the questions. We begin to write with time restraints in class, and by the time the students take the exam, they have taken two timed objective tests. Students take a comprehensive literary terms exam during the third quarter; the exam includes multiple choice definitions, but also assesses a student’s ability to use the terms in analyzing several new passages.

**Released AP passages used in preparation for the exam:**

**Prose Analysis**
from “Dust Tracks on the Road” and passages from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurtson
“Owls” by Mary Oliver
Okefenokee Swamp
Article on Paret
Coca-Cola correspondence
Adlai Stephenson’s veto of “The Cat Bill”
“I am a Cripple” by Nancy Mairs
excerpt from “On WWII” by Ernie Pyle
“Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros
Passage by Sir George Saville
“The Company Man” by Ellen Goodman

**Essay of Argumentation**

Excerpt from *Antigone* on pride.

Television and Presidential Elections Synthesis Essay

**On Photography** by Susan Sontag

Students are asked to research articles having to do with the topic to help formulate opinions.

Comparison of Orwell and Huxley

Students are asked to research articles having to do with the topic to help formulate opinions.

“If We’re Gonna Have Guns…” by Mike Royko

Students are asked to research articles having to do with the topic to help formulate opinions.

**Final Writing Assignment:**

After the AP exam, we read *Native Son*, study passages from *Inventing Elliot*, and watch the films *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Raisin in the Sun*. We discuss the implications of the American Dream. The final writing assignment is an essay of argumentation, discussing the American Dream, its inception, its nuances and possibilities. Students draw evidence from current events/history, literature and personal experience.

**Final Exam:** Students are expected to take the AP exam in May as part of their final.

**GRADING**

Grades are weighted according to the following guidelines:

- **Formal Writing Assignments:** 35% of grade
  
  Formal writing assignments are designed to assess progress in writing and understanding of the meanings of assigned readings. Essays are graded with an AP rubric, using a 9 point scale.

- **Tests/Quizzes:** 30% of grade
  
  Students are given short quizzes on nearly every reading assignment. These quizzes are designed to assess reading comprehension and to keep the students on track with their reading. Students are given a comprehensive literary terms test, and several assessments of understanding of vocabulary and grammar. Final exams are counted in this category.

- **Grammar:** 10% of grade

- **Vocabulary:** 10% of grade

- **Classwork/Homework/Participation:** 15% of grade

  Daily assignments, including in-class essays and smaller writing assignments, vocabulary packets, grammar lessons, drafts for formal writing, etc. are all counted in this category.

**Teacher Resources:**


Resources


