

## **The Course**

### **Introduction**

An AP English Literature and Composition course engages students in the careful reading and critical analysis of imaginative literature. Through the close reading of selected texts, students deepen their understanding of the ways writers use language to provide both meaning and pleasure for their readers. As they read, students consider a work's structure, style and themes, as well as such smaller-scale elements as the use of figurative language, imagery, symbolism and tone.

### **Goals**

The course includes intensive study of representative works from various genres and periods, concentrating on works of recognized literary merit. The pieces chosen invite and reward rereading and do not, like ephemeral works in such popular genres as detective or romance fiction, yield all (or nearly all) of their pleasures of thought and feeling the first time through. The AP English Literature and Composition Development Committee agrees with Henry David Thoreau that it is wisest to read the best books first; the committee also believes that such reading should be accompanied by thoughtful discussion and writing about those books in the company of one's fellow students.

### **Reading**

Reading in an AP course is both wide and deep. This reading necessarily builds upon and complements the reading done in previous English courses so that by the time students complete their AP course, they will have read works from several genres and periods — from the 16th to the 21st century. More importantly, they will have gotten to know a few works well. In the course, they read deliberately and thoroughly, taking time to understand a work's complexity, to absorb its richness of meaning, and to analyze how that meaning is embodied in literary form. In addition to considering a work's literary artistry, students reflect on the social and historical values it reflects and embodies. Careful attention to both textual detail and historical context provides a foundation for interpretation, whatever critical perspectives are brought to bear on the literary works studied.

A generic method for the approach to such close reading involves the following elements: the experience of literature, the interpretation of literature and the evaluation of literature. By experience, we mean the subjective dimension of reading and responding to literary works, including precritical impressions and emotional responses. By interpretation, we mean the analysis of literary works through close reading to arrive at an understanding of their multiple meanings. By evaluation, we mean both an assessment of the quality and artistic achievement of literary works and a consideration of their social and cultural values. All three of these aspects of reading are important for an AP English Literature and Composition course.

Moreover, each corresponds to an approach to writing about literary works. Writing to understand a literary work may involve writing response and reaction papers, along with annotation, freewriting and keeping some form of a reading journal.

Writing to explain a literary work involves analysis and interpretation and may include writing brief focused analyses on aspects of language and structure.

Writing to evaluate a literary work involves making and explaining judgments about its artistry and exploring its underlying social and cultural values through analysis, interpretation and argument.

In short, students in an AP English Literature and Composition course read actively. The works taught in the course require careful, deliberative reading. And the approach to analyzing and interpreting the material involves students in learning how to make careful observations of textual detail, establish connections among their observations, and draw from those connections a series of inferences leading to an interpretive conclusion about the meaning and value of a piece of writing.

Most of the works studied in the course were written originally in English, including pieces by African, Australian, Canadian, Indian and West Indian authors.

Some works in translation may also be included (e.g., Greek tragedies, Russian or Latin American fiction). The actual choice is the responsibility of the AP teacher, who should consider previous courses in the school's curriculum. In addition, the AP teacher should ensure that AP students will have studied, at some point in their high school years, literature from both British and American writers, as well as works

written from the 16th century to contemporary times. In addition to British and American literature, teachers are encouraged to include in their curricula other literature in English.

### **Writing**

Writing is an integral part of the AP English Literature and Composition course and exam. Writing assignments focus on the critical analysis of literature and include expository, analytical and argumentative essays. Although critical analysis makes up the bulk of student writing for the course, well-constructed creative writing assignments may help students see from the inside how literature is written. Such experiences sharpen their understanding of what writers have accomplished and deepen their appreciation of literary artistry. The goal of both types of writing assignments is to increase students' ability to explain clearly, cogently, even elegantly, what they understand about literary works and why they interpret them as they do.

To that end, writing instruction includes attention to developing and organizing ideas in clear, coherent and persuasive language. It includes study of the elements of style. And it attends to matters of precision and correctness as necessary.

Throughout the course, emphasis is placed on helping students develop stylistic maturity, which, for AP English, is characterized by the following:

- a wide-ranging vocabulary used with denotative accuracy and connotative resourcefulness;
- a variety of sentence structures, including appropriate use of subordinate and coordinate constructions;
- a logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques of coherence such as repetition, transitions and emphasis;
- a balance of generalization with specific illustrative detail; and
- an effective use of rhetoric, including controlling tone, maintaining a consistent voice, and achieving emphasis through parallelism and antithesis.

The writing required in an AP English Literature and Composition course is thus more than a mere adjunct to the study of literature. The writing that students produce in the course reinforces their reading. Since reading and writing stimulate and support one another, they are taught together in order to underscore both their common and their distinctive elements.

It is important to distinguish among the different kinds of writing produced in an AP English Literature and Composition course. Any college-level course in which serious literature is read and studied includes numerous opportunities for students to write and rewrite. Some of this writing is informal and exploratory, allowing students to discover what they think in the process of writing about their reading. Some of the writing involves research, perhaps negotiating differing critical perspectives. Much writing involves extended discourse in which students develop an argument or present an analysis at length. In addition, some writing assignments should encourage students to write effectively under the time constraints they encounter on essay exams in college courses in many disciplines, including English.

## **STRUCTURE OF EXAM**

Multiple Choice (45%)

1 hour

4-5 passages to read (a mix of prose and poetry)

45-55 multiple choice questions

3 Essays (55%)

2 hours

1 Poetry analysis

1 Prose analysis

1 "Free Response" essay (they are given a general question/argument about literature rather than a specific passages to analyze)

