

Course Outline

A Novel Existence: Our Search for Meaning through Fiction

Since the inception of recorded history, individuals have struggled to live a valuable existence, to create meaning in a world that often left one feeling isolated and unconnected. In this course, we will be examining numerous writers- from Sophocles to Ellison- and their varied attempts to place themselves and their characters in a significant context--a place where their lives “make sense”. In addition to exploring each of the works listed below, each student will be writing analytical essays to not only demonstrate their understanding, but also to push their thinking further and deeper. We shall also grapple with the challenging field of literary theory by employing psychoanalytical, historical, feminist and mythical approaches, among others.

The demands of this course are rigorous, similar to those you will encounter in an advanced freshman or sophomore level literature course at the colleges you are likely to attend. This course is designed to comply with the curricular requirements described in the *AP English Course Description* and to prepare students to succeed on the AP Literature test in May.

You have already read three of the works we will be studying this year. You should take advantage of every opportunity to read ahead as the pace of the course accelerates.

I. Major Texts (loosely in the order in which we will study them)

George Orwell, *1984*
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *The Thing Around Your Neck*
Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*
Christina Rossetti, “*Goblin Market*”
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
Sophocles, *Antigone*
Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon/Selected Essays*
William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
Virginia Woolf *Mrs. Dalloway/A Room of One’s Own*
Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*
James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man/Dubliners*
Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

*In addition to the major texts, students will study selected short stories, poetry, and

essays from *The Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing*. Meyer, Michael, ed. Bedford/St. Martin's (Seventh Edition – 2005)

**The Bedford Anthology will also be used for instruction on taking essay exams, writing interpretive essays on fiction, thesis-driven literary analysis, and literary research papers (Writing about Fiction pp. 46-59, Reading and Writing pp. 2063-2093, the Literary Research Paper pp. 2096-2111, Taking Essay Examinations pp. 2115-2118)

II. Major Motifs

Connecting Language, Thought and Reality

Works included: *1984*, *Hamlet*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Race, Identity and the American Psyche

Works Included: *Invisible Man*, *Song of Solomon*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Selected Essays by Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison*

The Explosion of the Narrative Form

Works Included: *The Sound and the Fury*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

*Note that the major explorations of the course run through all of the literature studied. We will certainly not confine ourselves to only a limited thematic scope when discussing the myriad layers of a particular piece.

III. Course Requirements/ Structures

1. Timed In-class writing every 1-4 weeks. These questions will be similar to the ones that students will see on the AP Test in May. *These regular in-class essays along with instruction from the Bedford Anthology will teach students to interpret literature based on careful observation of the work's textual details, considering structure, style, and themes as well as the social and historical values the work reflects and embodies. Your papers will be examined for effective word choice, inventive sentence structure, effective overall organization, clear emphasis, and above all excellence of argument including exhaustive supportive evidence and clear, persuasive, elegant connection of this evidence to your overall argument. Students will be given opportunities to rewrite these essays. Feedback will be provided by the instructor in the form of comments and notations on the students' essays as well as lessons taken from the Bedford Anthology (see above). Comments and lessons will include, but not be limited to, wide-ranging vocabulary, logical organization, use of details and rhetorical skills. (100 pts. each)*

2. One 4-5 page (1,200-1,500 word) analytical paper. Students choose their own paper topics based upon a careful analysis of the texts that we have studied thus far. *These essays require students to write to evaluate. They are argumentative, thesis-driven responses to the social and cultural values inherent in the work. Students will be provided opportunity to workshop these papers with their peers and write multiple drafts. (150 pts)*

3. One 6-8 page literary research paper due in the spring. These final papers will examine major themes and motifs as they apply across the fiction that we have studied throughout the course. *Once again, paper topics will be generated through student choice and will embody the social, historical and thematic value of the work. They will require the students to analyze and evaluate a work's artistry and quality and to draw on textual details to explain their judgments.* (200 pts.)

4. You and a partner will assume responsibility for teaching one class during the year. (100 pts)

5. Journal Entries. Students will keep a daily response log in which they react to the literature that they are reading. *The kinds of writing in these logs are varied, but include writing to understand, writing to explain, and writing to evaluate.* (50-100 pts. each quarter)

6. Culminating Project: specifics and weight to be determined later.

7. Participation daily/nightly assignments and classwork (various point values)

III. Expectations

1. Participate valuably each day (quality is key).
2. Be an active listener. Take notes.
3. Take the A.P. Literature exam in May (review sessions will be held at the end of April).
4. Submit assignments on time (Late work will be penalized one letter grade per day.)

IV. Grading Weights

- In-class Essays/Papers/Tests – 40%
- Projects/Performance – 30%
- Classwork/Homework – 30%

