

Syllabus: English Literature and Composition

Special “A” Academy
Beijing Professor Brett Gamboa

Course Description

On the premise that reading great writing is indispensable for those who wish to write well, this course will provide occasion to read some of the most widely admired texts in English—poems by writers such as John Donne, William Blake, Robert Frost, John Keats, Emily Dickinson and Thomas Hardy; stories or novels by Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, drama from Shakespeare and Sophocles. We’ll read these texts and others that help show what is at stake for writers and readers of each genre. Our foremost concern will be reading closely —striving to understand both the meaning of the texts as well as the kinds of literary devices and tactics the writers use to inform and stimulate emotional responses in readers. Since the course is focused on composition as well as reading, you’ll also write weekly critical essays in which you may experiment with the same tactics to which you attend in those essays. I hope that our discussions about the texts will help you gain insights about the literature and also about the value of the arts themselves, and the pleasures they enable.

Teaching Methods

Our sessions will feature group discussions of your written assignments and peer review exercises. When we turn to published texts, our classes will mingle lecture and discussion.

Expectations and Assignments

I expect you to attend class, participate in discussions, bring books to class, complete readings and assignments on time, and write as efficiently and eloquently as possible. There will be one major essay each week, first brought to class for review (both by me and by your peers) and then submitted as a revised final version. There will also be shorter, in-class writing exercises throughout the program.

Textbooks

Cracking the AP English Literature & Composition Exam: http://www.amazon.com/Cracking-English-Literature-Composition-Preparation/dp/0804125309/ref=pd_sim_b_1?ie=UTF8&refRID=18R5S50XMVGBFTMY9XS

I’d also **recommend** a grammar text such as this one: http://www.amazon.com/Style-Lessons-Clarity-Grace-Edition/dp/0321898680/ref=pd_cp_b_0

Tentative Outline

Week 1: Introduction to Literature

Genre; Analysis; Close reading; Critical terms; Evidence and citations. The first week will introduce literary studies and some methods by which it is undertaken by scholars. We'll begin with short lyric poems, thinking about how they organize language into phonic and ideational patterns. We'll also consider rhetorical devices and terms and begin to study them with a mind to the AP exam. Students will also learn about the construction of the AP exam and how to use these weeks to prepare for it.

Week 2: Poetry

Readings and writing will concern the form and content of lyric and short narrative poems. Our discussions—and your essays—will attend to verbal phenomena like rhyme, rhythm, consonance, alliteration, and more, as well as to syntactic ambiguity, paradox and other ideational features and patterns that can help enliven the experience of poems. Discussions will also consider other art forms and the way that language can harness similar aesthetic potential as pictures, faces, or the natural world. Literary terms and devices will continue to be learned.

Week 3: Fiction

We'll discuss short stories with special attention paid to plotting, diction, narrative style and voice, perspective, conflict, character, genre and much more. Additional literary terms will be discussed and learned for the examination. We will also workshop the first major essay and revise it.

Week 4: Drama

Readings will provoke discussions of the theater and theatricality; dramatic genres; Aristotelian theories of unity, plot, hamartia, anagnoresis and more, and we will incorporate new thoughts on character, representation, and more. Students will read, discuss and write about a play by Shakespeare.

Throughout the course, I'll assign daily readings, we'll analyze texts in class, write responses and read work by other students. We'll also extensively review passages and terms for the AP lit exam and take short practice exams. My hope is that you will finish the course much more aware of major texts in English literature, achieve a better understanding of both the texts and their reputations, and be more able to express your opinions about them in writing.