

## English 220 Course Overview and Expectations

Teacher: Ms. Becker

Room: 2208

J blocks/help: Mon., Thur., by appt.

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I came to explore the wreck.

The words are purposes.

The words are maps. I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.

-Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck"

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Welcome to Sophomore Honors English! I hope you had an exciting and restful summer. In this reading and writing intensive course we will consider the human experience as rendered prose, plays, and poetry. Through reading, writing, and discussion, you'll further develop and hone your skills as active close readers, critical thinkers, and effective, sophisticated communicators. My role will be primarily that of facilitator and coach; your success in the course will depend largely on the work you do, in and out of class. What follows is an overview of what to expect from me, and what I expect of you.

In addition to spending a lot of our time together reading closely for language and detail, we will also consider:

### **Sophomore year essential questions:**

- Who has power and why? Who doesn't and why?
- What are the promises and perils of innovation and change?
- What makes a successful, functional society? Why?
- What role do individuals and groups play in changing or shaping their society?
- What happens when individuals and groups with different values or goals interact? Why?

### **Reading:**

In addition to one outside reading assignment per term, texts for study will include:

*An Introduction to Biblical Literature*/excerpts from The New Oxford Annotated Bible

*A Tale of Two Cities* (Charles Dickens)\*

*Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe)

*Oedipus* and *Antigone* (Sophocles)

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare)\*

Poetry (assorted)

**I expect you to come to class having read closely and thought deeply about what you have read. If you haven't done the reading, please let me know privately.**

While I'm not fond of asking students to buy texts, I encourage you to purchase both *A Tale of Two Cities* (Penguin edition) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Folger edition); both are available at New England Mobile Book Fair for around \$7 each. We mark up text in class frequently, so you may want something you can write in.

### **Discussion**

Class discussions will be our time to talk our way through challenging texts and complex ideas. Our classroom, therefore, needs to be a place of safety and inquiry, where we can ask questions freely, and posit theories openly, without fear of being attacked or put down. I expect you to participate regularly, to ask questions of each other, and listen carefully to what your classmates have to say. You'll learn much from them.

### **Homework and Responding to the Reading**

I will ask you to write periodic responses to texts, which will be a place for you to explore the tenor and texture of a text more informally. The prompts will vary depending on the text we're studying. Sometimes, especially when we're just beginning a text, I'll ask you to take notes containing clarifying questions, and/or interesting ideas for discussion. I don't assign busy work; if I ask you to do something, there's a reason.

### **Writing:**

The word 'essay' derives from the French infinitive *essayer*, meaning "to try" or "to attempt". (Note: it does not mean "to prove a thesis"). The best essays are the ones that begin with a specific idea or argument, and end with a more nuanced, sophisticated, clearer and well supported understanding of that idea.

**This is a writing intensive course, and while the five-paragraph essay has its uses, my hope is that the essays you write this year will move beyond the realm of 'proof' and into a place of greater complexity. Be prepared to work carefully through the planning, drafting, revising and editing of the pieces we write.**

Writing assignments will vary from the analytical to the persuasive to the creative and reflective. I will give you detailed feedback on your work and will be available to discuss your writing with you individually; in return, I expect you to keep track of your progress as a writer (more on that to follow) and pay particular attention to the feedback you receive.

### **Miscellaneous:**

Sophomore Speech:

All sophomores write an original illustrative/persuasive speech (5 min. or so in length) on a topic of their choosing and deliver it to their classmates. More details to follow.

Vocab:

Vocab this year will include lists 7-12 from the roots/stems lists (more on that later), and text-based vocab as well.

Grammar/Usage:

We'll review and build on previous learned concepts through on-going mini-units, with an emphasis on deliberate sentence structure and design. The best architectures need a variety of tools and raw materials to design the best buildings; so too with writers and sentences.

### **Nuts and Bolts**

**Grading:** Your grades will be based on writing assignments (take home and in class; roughly 60-70%), quizzes, projects, homework, participation and class work (roughly 30-40%). I use a point system for grading; for example, an essay might be worth 100 points, a vocabulary quiz, 20 or 25, and a homework assignment, 5. At the end of the term, I will divide your total points by the total number of points possible to determine your final grade.

I use engrade, and will make grades available to you after term 1.

**Make up work/late work/extensions/revisions: see separate handout.**

**Plagiarism:** Passing off someone else's ideas or writing as one's own is an act of academic dishonesty and will not be tolerated in any form; it's tacky at best, and, later in life, can get you fired. We will be using Turnitin.com as a way to peer review, edit, and submit work. Inauthentic work will receive zero credit, and in some cases, will result in disciplinary action. If you are EVER in doubt, or have a question, ASK. Most people get caught. It's not fun for anyone. ☹

I know that many of you have many other obligations that make the school day (and week) exhausting; I also know that you've chosen to take this class because you love reading and writing and want intensive, fun, and engaging experience doing both. To those ends, you should know that online book notes (Sparknotes, etc) can provide plot clarification but are a poor substitute for real understanding.

Looking forward to a terrific year,

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