

Mr. McBride  
Sophomore Honors English  
Room 731

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## **Introduction**

I received my BA in literature from Bard College, not too far down the river from here, and I lived in the Mid-Hudson Valley for several years after graduating. During that time I worked for Ulster County BOCES and pursued a career as a musician. In 1995 my wife and I moved to Menlo Park, California, in the heart of the Silicon Valley, about 30 miles south of San Francisco. At that time I went back to school to get my masters degree and certification to teach English. I received a Masters Degree in Education from Stanford University in 1997, and I spent five years teaching at Saratoga High School in Saratoga, California. My wife and I moved back to the Capital Region in 2002. We have three children and live in Schoharie, New York.

## **Course Objectives**

Our class will also focus on the development of writing, thinking, and speaking skills. The ability to think critically, clearly, and creatively, and to express oneself articulately and knowledgeably, will be stressed throughout the year. We will be writing regularly, both formally and informally, in a variety of modes, looking to build a sense of confidence in our writing skills. We will be examining the relationship between reading and writing. How can we apply our skills and insights as readers to our own writing? How can our own engagement in the act of writing lead to a better understanding of the works of published authors? Perhaps most importantly, we will ask what it means to write and think clearly and critically. Clarity of thought and expression is a quality often easier to identify than to define. It is expected that each student will make a goal of improving his or her skills in this regard.

You are encouraged to be individual and creative in your work in class this year. The reading and writing skills we will focus on should serve the end of helping you to understand literature and to express yourself clearly and competently: your reading and writing, however, should ultimately reflect your own ideas and opinions and beliefs. A more mature understanding of what these personal ideas, opinions, and beliefs are, come to through an examination of the ideas of writers of different times and places, and through earnest self-reflection facilitated by a commitment to refining one's own written expression, is a central goal of our Sophomore Honors English class.

## Course Description

### Literature May Include:

- Short Stories
- *This Boy's Life*
- *Hamlet*
- *Cyrano de Bergerac*
- excerpts from *The Iliad, the Odyssey, The Aeneid, and The Divine Comedy*
- *Survival in Auschwitz*
- *Lord of the Flies*

### Writing

- Short fiction
- Expository
- Persuasive
- Reflective

### Language Skills

- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Presentation

## Classroom Environment

All members of the classroom will treat each other at all times with civility and respect. I would like to create a feeling in the classroom of relaxed seriousness of purpose, in which humor and enjoyment of discussion are valued, and speculation encouraged. Dialogue with the teacher and other students about subject matter pertinent to the content of the course should be unfettered by feelings of self-consciousness or intimidation. Serious, critical response to texts will be modeled and encouraged, and in turn expected of students.

Toward this end, the following classroom rules will be observed:

- All school rules will be followed in the classroom, with particular emphasis placed on academic integrity.
- Cellphones have become a big source of distraction in the past few years. Students are asked to observe the following rules of cellphone etiquette to prevent this distraction from compromising everyone's educational experience.
  - Cellphones must be put away during class. If your phone is visible, I will ask you to put it away. If I have to ask you a second time, you may be required to put it on the desk at the front of the classroom to be picked up when class is over.
  - You may not charge your cell phone in the classroom. Please don't ask, please don't do it.
  - If your cellphone rings during class and you have reason to believe someone is trying to contact you due to an urgent matter, please step out of the classroom to take the call. It is assumed that this is a circumstance that will happen infrequently if at all.
- You must listen when another person is addressing the class, whether this person is the teacher or another student.
- Through common courtesy, show respect for the principles, property, and pursuits of other class members.

- Please do not ask to use the bathroom – instead, fill out a pass in your agenda book and have me sign it. Please try to manage your passing time in such a manner that you will not need to use the restroom too frequently.
- Please remove sunglasses and earphones/buds devices when class is in session.
- Please be ready to give your full attention to the teacher when the bell rings.
- Unless instructed otherwise, please remain in your seat until the bell rings to signal the end of class.
- Eating, drinking, or chewing gum is permissible so long as it does not create a mess or pose a distraction. This permission may be revoked if students fail to properly dispose of trash in the classroom.

### **Material Needed in Class Everyday**

- The text we are studying
- Three ring notebook with a section devoted to English handouts
- 8 ½ by 11 college ruled spiral notebook that will serve as an in-class journal
- Pencil and pen: #2 lead, blue or black ink, please

### **Homework Policies**

Homework will be assigned regularly throughout the course of the year. A thorough understanding of the homework policies in place in this class will allow you to maximize both your learning and your grade. Homework most often consists of 400 word journal assignments or assigned reading.

1. Journal assignments are worth up to 20 points. Journals turned in on time, demonstrating full effort and meeting the 400 word requirement will earn between 18 and 20 points. Work showing less than full effort will receive fewer points. Late journal assignments are accepted, but will earn at most 15 points.
2. There will be occasional unannounced reading quizzes on assigned reading. These quizzes, unless otherwise specified, will be worth 10 points for each night of assigned reading on which you are being tested.

### **Composition Guidelines**

Final copy compositions should follow standard manuscript requirements:

- Typed, double-spaced, or clearly printed
- 12 point type
- Include a title and a heading with name, period, and date

All compositions should be written first in rough draft form. These rough drafts may be proofed for errors by anyone willing to assist. The corrections, however, must be completed by the student. Exceptions to these rough draft guidelines may be made for in-class writing. Rough drafts will often be submitted with final copies.

## **Online Journals**

Each student will be assigned his or her own password-protected online journal. The journal can be accessed by clicking on a link from the class web page ([www.pagefarm.net](http://www.pagefarm.net)), and entering the assigned password. I have access to the online journal and will post my responses to journal assignments in each student's journal. Students are always welcome to complete journal assignments on paper if Internet access is not convenient for them. The Online Journaling system will also be used to give students access to online forums in which they can communicate with other class members.

It is highly recommended that all journals should be written in Google Docs and then copied and pasted into the online journal. Checking to make sure journals have been uploaded properly is the responsibility of the student – technical difficulties will not be accepted as an excuse for late work.

## **Absences and Make-Up Work**

In the event of an absence, students are responsible for finding out what work or assignments were missed. This can be done by checking the class calendar or asking another student in class. Work due on the day that was missed should be turned in the day a student returns to class. Please label late work with the date due and the date turned in and hand it to me directly. If you are absent on the day of a test or quiz, you should be ready to take it in class on the day you return. If sufficient class time is not available, you must make arrangements with me to make it up. Work may only be made up for excused absences.

Due dates for long term assignments are given well in advance. If there is a legitimate reason why you will not be in class on the day an assignment is due, or you will be unable to complete an assignment by the due date, please see me in advance (more than 24 hours before the due date) to explain the reasons and work out alternative arrangements. Unexcused absences on the day a presentation is due will result in no credit for group work presentations, or, at most, a grade of C for individual presentations. Major assignments are marked down 10% if they are turned in late. All late work will be returned without teacher commentary.

## **Grading**

A student's final grade is the percentage of points earned against points possible. Different types of assignments are not weighted differently, but the course is designed to approximate the following percentages of credit bearing work: Literature and Composition 40%, Homework 30%, Unit/Final Exams 20%, and Vocabulary and Grammar quizzes and tests 10%.

Individual grade questions will not be addressed during class time. Please make arrangements to see me at a mutually convenient time. I reserve the right to amend these policies during the course of the year.