

Mr. McBride  
AP Language and Composition  
Room 731

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## **Introduction**

I received my BA in English Literature from Bard College in 1988, 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 an AM in Education from Stanford University in 1997, and I spent five years teaching at Saratoga High School in Saratoga, California before returning to New York in 2002 and coming to Guilderland High School.

## **Course Overview**

The ultimate goal of this year's English Language and Composition class is the improvement of each student's ability as a reader and writer of the English language. Reading and writing are both complex tasks requiring the mastery of a number of discreet skills. Our class this year will be devoted to developing those skills necessary to read with subtlety and understanding and to write with clarity and power. Students who have attained mastery of the skills taught in class this year will find themselves well prepared for the AP Language and Composition test next spring. Our aim, however, will be set higher than a competent performance on one afternoon's examination. Language facilitates all knowledge of the world not derived from personal experience. It is the agent of our interaction with the world, connecting us to the past through the written record of human thought and activity and to the future through the preservation of our experience and observations to posterity. This is the spirit that will hopefully inform our studies.

A comfortable degree of cultural literacy is perhaps foremost of the skills required to read and write competently, and its attainment will be a goal throughout the year. The first semester of class will focus on the theme of the individual and nature, looking at the relationship between humans and the natural world. We will examine the development of human thinking about and understanding of the world over the last 3000 years, looking primarily at the European tradition as reflected in the literature of four distinct periods, the Classical, the Renaissance, the Romantic, and the Modern. Through our reading, we will be following the development of philosophy from ancient to modern times. What are the ideas that have most occupied the minds of people both past and present? What commentary has been made on these ideas by writers of the past and present? What are the cultural cornerstones upon which the edifice of intellectual history rests? And what are the features of the writings that have proved most influential over time? A mostly chronological reading of essays, poetry, and fiction representative of different time periods will give us a sense of the development of human thought and expression.

Writing skills targeted during the first semester will center on the production of the personal and expository essay forms. The writing of college admission essays, a task many students will be completing next fall, offers an occasion for students to apply skills learned in class to an essay upon which much may be at stake. The expository essay form also will also be examined in great detail. We will spend time in class learning the close reading skills essential to achieving the goals of competence outlined above. The terms of rhetorical analysis will become familiar and important tools of understanding and criticism, both of our own writing and that of others.

The second semester of class will focus on the theme of the individual and society. How does the individual reconcile himself or herself to the demands of social imperative? How does written and spoken discourse work to influence the direction and constitution of our society? What commentary has been made on this theme in the past and what commentary is being made in the present? We will approach these questions through a careful examination of the writers of the past and present, focusing especially on the use of language to influence the thought of others. We will analyze public debate unfolding as our society seeks consensus on issues of current national and local concern. Many of our texts will be taken from the pages of newspapers and journals, perhaps even from the congressional record. The writing skills focused on during the second semester are primarily argument and persuasion. Students will develop a sophisticated understanding of the intricacies of logical argument and seek to marshal their skills as writers toward the goal of influencing the opinions of others. As we approach the date of the AP Language test, time will as well be spent in a close analysis of the test itself.

### **Writing Assignments**

There will be a significant amount of writing in this class. Each quarter students will be required to write approximately ten 500-word essays as journal assignments, several in-class essays, and at least one longer paper written outside of class. Students will be required to share their work with other students and should be prepared to read and respond to the work of others; an awareness of audience is crucial to develop sophistication in one's writing, and a student who writes all year for the teacher only will not develop this awareness.

Given the amount of time students will spend writing and the consequent amount of time I will spend reading student writing, I am committed to making the writing assignments as meaningful and interesting as possible. Please complete them in this spirit. The sincerity of your effort, which is a quantifiable component of good writing, will factor into your grade. This will be true of the holistic grading used to evaluate your performance on the AP Language exam as well. Good writing inevitably requires self-examination, and a tone of sincerity in your written and oral participation is often the best evidence that this self-examination is occurring.

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 class.

### **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.

### **Vocabulary and Grammar**

Vocabulary in AP Language will center on the study of Greek and Latin word roots. There will be three quizzes each quarter. There will also be three grammar lessons each quarter that focus on giving students skills necessary for building their confidence in writing properly. Grammar lessons will also help prepare students for the new writing section of the SAT.

### **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: composition 25%, unit/final exams 25%, homework 25%, reading, vocabulary, and grammar quizzes 25%.

### **Online Grade Access**

Student grades are accessible to both students and parents online at through a link posted on the class website. A handout with an explanation of how to access grades online and a key to the individual student's grades will be given out at the beginning of the school year to students. A similar handout with instructions for parents to access student grades will be given out at parent's night. Grades will not be posted in class anytime this year. Individual grade questions will not be addressed during class time; please make arrangements to see me at a mutually convenient time.

## **Homework Policies**

Graded homework in this class principally constitutes the ten 500 word essays assigned each quarter. Essays completed on time that demonstrate a thorough effort will be awarded between 18 and 20 points. Essays that in my estimation represent less than a full effort will receive 16 or 17 points. The highest score possible for a late essay is 15 points. Essays will be considered on time based on the date they are posted to the online journal or if they are handed in to me at the beginning of class. If you have technical problems accessing your online journal, you may submit the essay in hardcopy to me in class the day it is due; technical problems will never be grounds for an extension of the deadline.

Other homework consists primarily of reading assignments. Reading assignments are assessed on unit tests, the final exam, and by unannounced quizzes.

## **Classroom Environment**

All members of the classroom will treat each other at all times with civility and respect. 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.
- You must listen when another person is addressing the class, whether this person is the teacher or another student.
- Please do not ask to use the bathroom— instead, fill out a pass in your agenda book and have the teacher sign it.
- If the teacher sees or hears a student’s cell phone, the student will be asked to place it on the teacher’s desk, to be picked up at the end of class.
- Through common courtesy, show respect for the principles, property, and pursuits of other class members.
- Please remove sunglasses and Walkman devices when entering the classroom.
- 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 will be revoked if students fail to properly dispose of trash in the classroom.

## **Material Needed in Class Everyday**

The text we are studying

A three-ring binder with a section devoted to English handouts

Pencil and pen: #2 lead, blue or black ink, please

## **Composition Guidelines**

Final copy compositions should follow standard manuscript requirements:

Typed, double-spaced, or clearly printed

12 point type

Use one side of the paper only

Leave 1 or 1¼ inch side margins

Include a title and a heading with name, period, and date

Major written assignments should be written first in rough draft form. These rough drafts may be proofed for errors by anyone willing to assist. The student, however, must complete the corrections.

### **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 48 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. Late major assignments are marked down 10% and will be returned without written commentary.

I reserve the right to amend these policies during the course of the year.



Mr. McBride  
Language and Composition AP 11

**Course Information Sheet**

*I have read and understood the policies and procedures outlined in the course information sheet above and agree to comply with the expectations described.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature