

# AP<sup>®</sup> English Literature and Composition: Syllabus 2

Syllabus 1058802v1



Scoring Components	Page(s)
SC1 The course includes an intensive study of representative works such as those by authors cited in the AP English Course Description. By the time the student completes English Literature and Composition, he or she will have studied during high school literature from both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times.	3, 7
SC2 The course teaches students to write an interpretation of a piece of literature that is based on a careful observation of textual details, considering such elements as the use of figurative language, imagery, symbolism and tone.	6
SC3 The course teaches students to write an interpretation of a piece of literature that is based on a careful observation of textual details, considering the work's structure, style and themes.	3
SC4 The course teaches students to write an interpretation of a piece of literature that is based on a careful observation of textual details, considering the work's social, cultural and/or historical values.	5
SC5 The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite timed, in-class responses.	2
SC6 The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite formal, extended analyses outside of class.	2
SC7 The course requires writing to understand: Informal/exploratory writing activities that enable students to discover what they think in the process of writing about their reading (such assignments could include annotation, free writing, keeping a reading journal, reaction/response papers, and/or dialectical notebooks).	3–4
SC8 The course requires writing to explain: Expository, analytical essays in which students draw upon textual details to develop an extended interpretation of a literary text.	3–4, 8
SC9 The course requires writing to evaluate: Analytical, argumentative essays in which students draw upon textual details to make and explain judgments about a work's artistry and quality.	6
SC10 The course requires writing to evaluate: Analytical, argumentative essays in which students draw upon textual details to make and explain judgments about a work's social, historical and/or cultural values.	6
SC11 The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students' writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work that help the students develop a wide-ranging vocabulary used appropriately.	4
SC12 The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students' writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work that help the students develop a variety of sentence structures.	4
SC13 The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students' writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work that help the students develop logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques to increase coherence. Such techniques may include traditional rhetorical structures, graphic organizers, and work on repetition, transitions, and emphasis.	4
SC14 The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students' writing assignments both before and after they revise their work that help the students develop a balance of generalization and specific, illustrative detail.	4
SC15 The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students' writing assignments both before and after they revise their work that help the students establish an effective use of rhetoric including controlling tone and a voice appropriate to the writer's audience.	5

## Course Overview

- I do not follow the exact sequence nor teach the same books outlined here each year, and I add or subtract texts as the year progresses. My thematic organization (“The Tragic Figure in Literature,” “The Search for Identity”) is broad enough to allow for substitutions and additions. Students are never without a reading assignment or an outside paper due date.
- Our year is divided into nine-week quarters. Students may expect to write and rewrite two to three papers (three to six pages each) outside of class and two to three in-class essays (rhetorical or literary analysis) and to complete a variety of quiz/short test assignments per quarter. **[SC5 & SC6]**
- This course is designed to comply with the curricular requirements described in the *AP English Course Description*.

SC5—The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite timed, in-class responses.

SC6—The course includes frequent opportunities for students to write and rewrite formal, extended analyses outside of class.

## Course Planner/Student Activities

### Topic/Unit: *Writing with Style*

#### Approximate number of weeks: 2

After a few days of informal discussion of the summer reading, I begin the year by having students read two chapters per night of John Trimble’s short book, *Writing with Style*. Most problems with student writing, Trimble says, stem from the failure to think well. If students don’t have something to say, they produce what he terms *mumbo jumbo*, writing only for themselves.

Each day I have the students complete exercises associated with the chapters. For example, after reading his chapter titled “Openers” students will critique and revise sample openers, working in pairs or groups. I also use quizzes to assess students’ understanding for chapters such as “Punctuation” and “Diction.”

The benefit of beginning the year with this book is that I am able to establish what I expect for all writing during the year, from critical analyses (Chapter 3) to personal essays. Often I will suggest that students “see Trimble” when I write notes on their papers.

As students finish with Trimble, I distribute the *Brief Bedford Reader* and assign their first paper (see *Brief Bedford Reader* based Writing Assignments below).

### Topic/Unit: Poetry

#### Approximate number of weeks: 4

Although students use *Sound and Sense* for nightly reading assignments, I supply individual photocopies for poems we read and discuss in class. Some of these poems have appeared in past AP Exams, and many others I have collected over the years. And while I do give a fair amount of attention to pre-nineteenth century writing — especially poems by Donne, Dryden, and Wordsworth — I will also slip in a poem from the most recent issue of *The New Yorker*, which may be difficult in a different way, to help students feel comfortable with writing that at first seems daunting (and to prepare them for reading *King Lear*).

To help guide students as they read and explicate poems, I use techniques from Helen Vendler's *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*.

Students will also keep a poetry-reading journal, where they will record initial questions, impressions, and responses to the poems they are reading. **[SC7]** I express to students that I expect the journal to be used in developing the paper, which is described in the following paragraph.

Students must choose a poem from a packet I supply and write an interpretation of the poem's structure, style, or theme based upon its textual details; those who wish to may present their analysis to the rest of the class. This assignment, while primarily drawing upon skills of interpretation, engages students in writing for understanding (as they make notes) and writing for analytical explanation. **[SC3]**

I also ask students to write poems in the course of this unit and to share them with one another and revise them. I write along with them and share my work as well. The poems are not graded, but I encourage students to submit their best ones to the school's literary magazine.

## Topic/Unit: The Tragic Figure in Literature

**Approximate number of weeks: 4**

### *King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres*

I distribute the Jane Smiley novel, *A Thousand Acres*, about a week before we begin reading *King Lear* in class and ask students to read the first half of the novel by the time we are a week into the play. Students automatically make the connections as they are reading both works. **[SC1]**

As we read the play in class, I gloss over the text and stop frequently to raise discussion questions. For example, I ask them to consider why Cordelia refuses to play along with her sisters in the opening scene and whether she is right in doing so. Discussions that follow often supply insights and force students to examine the text closely. Short in-class writing assignments also ask students to show their understanding of the text. I might ask students to read Lear's "Reason not the need" speech (act 2, scene 4, pp. 267–289) and to define, in writing, what Lear is talking about by finding examples from their own experience or reading. **[SC8]** (Many will choose to compare Larry Cook's loss of his driving privileges to Lear's loss of his followers.)

I assume the students have a certain familiarity with the basic characteristics of the tragic figure as outlined by Aristotle in *The Poetics*, but I take time to review them as we read the play. I emphasize that Aristotle says that the tragic figure is one of some renown who, through some error or frailty, suffers a fall. It is the action of the figure — not the character himself or herself — and the universality of the experience that inspire fear or pity for the members of the audience. Students apply these criteria to *King Lear* and Larry Cook in class discussions.

Many students are also familiar with the theories of leadership put forth by Machiavelli

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SC3—The course teaches students to write an interpretation of a piece of literature that is based on a careful observation of textual details, considering the work's structure, style and themes.

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in *The Prince*. I review these as we read the play and ask students to assess Shakespeare’s character of Edmund in the subplot of the play as Machiavelli would.

Although students will make references to *A Thousand Acres* as we read *King Lear* in class, I don’t have a full discussion of the book until after I have asked them to respond to an AP (or an AP-style) writing prompt in class. For example, a prompt might be: “Often the setting in a piece of literature adds meaning to the work, almost serving as another character. Compare and contrast how Shakespeare and Smiley use setting to enhance meaning.” **[SC8]**

Students will be asked to keep a dialectical notebook on *King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres*. In the notebook they will record impressions of the two texts as they read them, noting parallel themes, concerns, and settings. The notebooks are used in group discussions and to prepare for the writing prompt on the two texts, described below. **[SC7]**

### Bedford Reader based Writing Assignments

I’m inserting the following description here so there won’t be any confusion about the “approximate number of weeks” listed for the units that follow. Only a small percentage of class time in the four weeks listed, say, for *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, is spent going over the text. I typically assign a book by halves; after the due date for the first half’s assignment (“tell why the passage is significant”), we then discuss that portion of the novel. We discuss the book as a whole after they have given a fresh response, untainted by my or others’ observations.

My comments on all papers encourage students to vary sentence length and structure. I point out particularly well-constructed phrases and apt word choices, subtle and appropriate transition statements, effective use of rhetoric to establish voice, and original illustrative details. Students must state their thesis statement at the end of the paper, which allows me to comment on how well the writing style (tone, diction, sentence structure, and choice of examples) achieves their stated purpose. **[SC11, SC12, SC13, SC14 & SC15]**

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SC12—The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work that help the students develop a variety of sentence structures.

SC13—The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work that help the students develop logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques to increase coherence. Such techniques may include traditional rhetorical structures, graphic organizers, and work on repetition, transitions, and emphasis.

SC14—The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments both before and after they revise their work that help the students develop a balance of generalization and specific, illustrative detail.

It is important to return papers as quickly as possible. Students, like all of us, are anxious to see how a reader responds to their words. A strategy I use is to divide all of my AP students into four groups by lottery. I then set four due dates for each paper, stretched over a two-week period. During the first quarter, students in Group 1 must hand in their papers first; in the second quarter, Group 2 students are first, Group 1 students last, and so on. I set a goal for myself to finish all the papers of one group before the next papers come in; students usually get their papers back within three days.

**Topic/Unit: The Tragic Figure in Literature****Approximate number of weeks: 4****Part II: *The Mayor of Casterbridge***

**Essential Questions:** How does Thomas Hardy treat the classical principles of the tragic figure in his nineteenth century novel? To what extent do the mores of a particular time period define the tragic condition?

Through writing assignments and class discussions, students will be able to show that they can draw parallels and distinctions between Michael Henchard and King Lear (and Larry Cook). They will also discuss how the element of fate (or chance) works in leading to Henchard's ultimate downfall. From evidence they glean from the novel, students will discuss in an essay the world view of people in Victorian England compared to our world view today. **[SC4]**

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## Topic/Unit: Short Fiction

**Approximate number of weeks: 4**

**Essential Question:** How does the short story work on many levels to create a unified effect?

Students should be able to pinpoint and clearly explain the particular effect an author achieves in a piece of short fiction and how the author achieves that effect through the use of such elements as symbols, imagery, diction, and organization. At the end of the unit, students write a two to three page essay applying this to a story of their choice. **[SC2]**

I assign stories I have collected through the years, many of which lend themselves to the type of interpretation suitable for the research assignment. Several of the stories come from an out-of-print anthology called *American Voices* (Sally Artseros, ed., Washington Square Press, 1992); a couple of stories were published by former students, and some I've taken from magazines like *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. I usually end with two stories by Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" and "Dry September," which lead into the next unit.

I have many sample short stories with multiple-choice questions from past years of The Wordmasters Challenge that I use for one-day assessment exercises. The questions direct students to look for details they might normally miss in a cursory reading, and the stories are short enough that students can read one, answer the questions, review the answers, and discuss the story in one class period.

We also write short stories during this time but not for credit. (I, too, write a story and share my results with students.) Students complete two or three pages of their story for three or four in-class work sessions; during these sessions they read one another's work and give reactions. Some stories are selected to be read aloud.

At the end, I will work with any student who wishes to refine a story to submit it for publication.

I try to fit this unit in before the winter holiday break, so that I may distribute the research paper assignment before the third quarter begins. I stagger the due dates for the research paper through the third marking period in the same way I do the *Bedford* assignments.

## Research Assignment

I call this paper a "modified research paper" because I am not interested in having students quoting extensively from a number of sources to show they know how to do that. Rather, students need to find only one source to apply to one of the short stories they have read in class or for summer reading and then write an original and complete evaluation of the story's artistry, quality, and social and cultural values. **[SC9 & SC10]**

The analysis of the short story must be based on some published work that offers a theory of why people behave the way they do. For example, a student might find a work that explores how childhood friendships and/or traumas may become fixations in adult life and then use this work to discuss what happens in Margaret Atwood's "Death

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By Landscape.” Bruno Bettelheim’s application of Freudian theories to explain fairy tales in *The Uses of Enchantment* serves as a model for what students are to do.

Citations throughout the paper come from only two sources — the short story itself and the work the student chooses as the basis for the analysis. Students may use any source as long as it is a primary one. For example, should a student interpret a story according to the theories of Sigmund Freud, the student must read Freud, not someone’s interpretation of Freud. Theories of why people behave the way they do may come from the fields of psychology, philosophy, theology, political science, or sociology.

## Topic/Unit: The Tragic Figure in Literature

**Approximate number of weeks:** 4

### Part III: *Light in August* [SC1]

**Essential Questions:** Is it possible to have a tragic figure, according to the classical outline of what constitutes the tragic figure, in the modern (twentieth to twenty-first century) world? To what extent do psychological forces — the effects of our interpersonal relationships with others — shape destiny?

Students discuss how Joe Christmas turns out the way he does, comparing him to King Lear and Michael Henchard along the way. Faulkner’s use of other characters who have been warped, in one way or another, by the circumstances of their birth (Gail Hightower, Joanna Burden, and Percy Grimm) or by their rigid adherence to fanatical beliefs (McEachern and Hines) provides for rich discussions. This novel is excellent for pulling out selected passages and reading them closely.

## Topic/Unit: Character in Search of Identity

**Approximate number of weeks:** 3

### Part I: *Invisible Man* [SC1]

**Essential Questions:** How and why is the search for self an essential pattern in literature, and why is this search so critical to the African American experience? What elements of society act against an individual’s search for and understanding of self?

One of the observations students will make as they move from Shakespeare to Hardy to Faulkner and then to Ellison will be about writing style and which particular style they prefer. With *Invisible Man* the cadences of jazz, religious revivalism, and oratory all add to the total effect and provide a nice contrast to the other works we have read.

Students recognize and are willing to trace the steps of the journey from innocence to experience that fit the archetypal search-for-self saga. While many will first learn through their reading of *CliffsNotes* or *SparkNotes* how Ellison uses names and objects as symbols, they can be pushed to explore other possible meanings and recurring motifs in the work. For example, although the commercially prepared notes might explain how the invisible strings on the Sambo dolls Tod Clifton sells on the street symbolize the strings that white society uses to make African Americans dance to its tunes, they fail to explain how and why Tod Clifton ends up where he is. While no one answer is given in the text, students should be able to discuss several possible reasons.

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## Topic/Unit: Character in Search of Identity

Approximate number of weeks: 3

### Part II: *Song of Solomon*

**Essential Questions:** How does Milkman’s search for identity compare to that of the narrator in *Invisible Man*? What themes from mythology transcend time periods, and how are they embedded in the human psyche? How does Toni Morrison create a mythology?

Students should see the distinctions between Part I and Part II of the novel in the treatment of the protagonist, Milkman. Archetypes in the hero’s journey, such as the mentor/guide figure and the figures of the Other and the Wise Fool, are evident, and after reviewing the elements of the hero’s journey — the same elements used in *Star Wars* (outlined by Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers in the PBS series “The Power of Myth”) — students should be able to recognize them and write about them.

## Topic/Unit: Character in Search of Direction

Approximate number of weeks: 2

### *Revolutionary Road* [SC1]

**Essential Questions:** How does the modern novelist treat characters who are neither tradition-directed nor inner-directed in making their choices? To what extent is the suburban lifestyle responsible for alienating people from one another?

*Revolutionary Road* by Richard Yates was a delightful find when I used it for a summer reading novel (paired with *Rabbit, Run* — a pairing that works well).

I have since added it to the curriculum because, although it’s about suburbia in the ’50s, it has a contemporary feel, and students find it to be quick reading. The insights into character are flawlessly detailed, even though the characters themselves are flawed and shallow. Students infer what Yates is saying about the modern condition in general, discuss how the characters make choices, and compare the novel to other novels, plays, and films for similar thematic messages.

Usually students have taken the AP Exam by this time in the year. For example, I might ask students to define a character by how true that character is to himself or herself and rank characters accordingly.

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## Teaching Strategies

I have embedded my teaching strategies throughout this syllabus. In this section, I will address strategies for keeping students engaged during the time period between the AP Exam and the end of the school year.

## Teacher Resources

Artseros, Sally, ed. *American Voices: Best Short Fiction by Contemporary Authors*. New York: Hyperion, 1992.

Burrows, David J., Frederick R. Lapides, and John T. Shawcross, eds. *Myths and Motifs in Literature*. New York: Free Press, 1973.

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1998.

Vendler, Helen, ed. *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1997.

## Websites

AP Central – [apcentral.collegeboard.com](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com)

WordMasters Challenge – [www.wordmasterschallenge.com](http://www.wordmasterschallenge.com)

*The New Yorker* – [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)