

English Literature and Composition

THE COURSE

Introduction

An AP English Literature and Composition course engages students in the careful reading and critical analysis of imaginative literature. Through the close reading of selected texts, students deepen their understanding of the ways writers use language to provide both meaning and pleasure for their readers. As they read, students consider a work's structure, style and themes, as well as such smaller-scale elements as the use of figurative language, imagery, symbolism and tone.

Goals

The course includes intensive study of representative works from various genres and periods, concentrating on works of recognized literary merit such as those by the authors listed on pages 52–53. The pieces chosen invite and reward rereading and do not, like ephemeral works in such popular genres as detective or romance fiction, yield all (or nearly all) of their pleasures of thought and feeling the first time through. The AP English Literature and Composition Development Committee agrees with Henry David Thoreau that it is wisest to read the best books first; the committee also believes that such reading should be accompanied by thoughtful discussion and writing about those books in the company of one's fellow students.

Reading

Reading in an AP course is both wide and deep. This reading necessarily builds upon and complements the reading done in previous English courses so that by the time students complete their AP course, they will have read works from several genres and periods — from the 16th to the 21st century. More importantly, they will have gotten to know a few works well. In the course, they read deliberately and thoroughly, taking time to understand a work's complexity, to absorb its richness of meaning, and to analyze how that meaning is embodied in literary form. In addition to considering a work's literary artistry, students reflect on the social and historical values it reflects and embodies. Careful attention to both textual detail and historical context provides a foundation for interpretation, whatever critical perspectives are brought to bear on the literary works studied.

A generic method for the approach to such close reading involves the following elements: the experience of literature, the interpretation of literature and the evaluation of literature. By experience, we mean the subjective dimension of reading and responding to literary works, including precritical impressions and emotional responses. By interpretation, we mean the analysis of literary works through close reading to arrive at an understanding of their multiple meanings. By evaluation, we mean both an assessment of the quality and artistic achievement of literary works and a consideration of their social and cultural values. All three of these aspects of reading are important for an AP English Literature and Composition course.

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Moreover, each corresponds to an approach to writing about literary works. Writing to understand a literary work may involve writing response and reaction papers, along with annotation, freewriting and keeping some form of a reading journal. Writing to explain a literary work involves analysis and interpretation and may include writing brief focused analyses on aspects of language and structure. Writing to evaluate a literary work involves making and explaining judgments about its artistry and exploring its underlying social and cultural values through analysis, interpretation and argument.

In short, students in an AP English Literature and Composition course read actively. The works taught in the course require careful, deliberative reading. And the approach to analyzing and interpreting the material involves students in learning how to make careful observations of textual detail, establish connections among their observations, and draw from those connections a series of inferences leading to an interpretive conclusion about the meaning and value of a piece of writing.

Most of the works studied in the course were written originally in English, including pieces by African, Australian, Canadian, Indian and West Indian authors. Some works in translation may also be included (e.g., Greek tragedies, Russian or Latin American fiction). The actual choice is the responsibility of the AP teacher, who should consider previous courses in the school's curriculum. In addition, the AP teacher should ensure that AP students will have studied, at some point in their high school years, literature from both British and American writers, as well as works written from the 16th century to contemporary times. In addition to British and American literature, teachers are encouraged to include in their curricula other literature in English. (See the *AP English Literature and Composition Teacher's Guide* for sample curricula.)

In an ongoing effort to recognize the widening cultural horizons of literary works written in English, the AP English Literature Development Committee will consider and include diverse authors in the representative reading lists. Issues that might, from a specific cultural viewpoint, be considered controversial, including references to ethnicities, nationalities, religions, races, dialects, gender or class, are often represented artistically in works of literature. The Development Committee is committed to careful review of such potentially controversial material. Still, recognizing the universal value of literary art that probes difficult and harsh life experiences and so deepens understanding, the committee emphasizes that fair representation of issues and peoples may occasionally include controversial material. Since AP students have chosen a program that directly involves them in college-level work, the AP English Literature and Composition Exam depends on a level of maturity consistent with the age of 12th-grade students who have engaged in thoughtful analysis of literary texts. The best response to a controversial detail or idea in a literary work might well be a question about the larger meaning, purpose or overall effect of the detail or idea in context. AP students should have the maturity, the skill and the will to seek the larger meaning through thoughtful research. Such thoughtfulness is both fair and owed to the art and to the author.

Although neither linguistic nor literary history is the principal focus in the AP course, students gain awareness that the English language that writers use has

changed dramatically through history, and that today it exists in many national and local varieties. They also become aware of literary tradition and the complex ways in which imaginative literature builds upon the ideas, works and authors of earlier times. Because the Bible and Greek and Roman mythology are central to much Western literature, students should have some familiarity with them. These religious concepts and stories have influenced and informed Western literary creation since the Middle Ages, and they continue to provide material for modern writers in their attempts to give literary form to human experience. Additionally, the growing body of works written in English reflecting non-Western cultures may require students to have some familiarity with other traditions.

Writing

Writing is an integral part of the AP English Literature and Composition course and exam. Writing assignments focus on the critical analysis of literature and include expository, analytical and argumentative essays. Although critical analysis makes up the bulk of student writing for the course, well-constructed creative writing assignments may help students see from the inside how literature is written. Such experiences sharpen their understanding of what writers have accomplished and deepen their appreciation of literary artistry. The goal of both types of writing assignments is to increase students' ability to explain clearly, cogently, even elegantly, what they understand about literary works and why they interpret them as they do.

To that end, writing instruction includes attention to developing and organizing ideas in clear, coherent and persuasive language. It includes study of the elements of style. And it attends to matters of precision and correctness as necessary. Throughout the course, emphasis is placed on helping students develop stylistic maturity, which, for AP English, is characterized by the following:

- a wide-ranging vocabulary used with denotative accuracy and connotative resourcefulness;
- a variety of sentence structures, including appropriate use of subordinate and coordinate constructions;
- a logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques of coherence such as repetition, transitions and emphasis;
- a balance of generalization with specific illustrative detail; and
- an effective use of rhetoric, including controlling tone, maintaining a consistent voice, and achieving emphasis through parallelism and antithesis.

The writing required in an AP English Literature and Composition course is thus more than a mere adjunct to the study of literature. The writing that students produce in the course reinforces their reading. Since reading and writing stimulate and support one another, they are taught together in order to underscore both their common and their distinctive elements.

It is important to distinguish among the different kinds of writing produced in an AP English Literature and Composition course. Any college-level course in which serious literature is read and studied includes numerous opportunities for students to

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write and rewrite. Some of this writing is informal and exploratory, allowing students to discover what they think in the process of writing about their reading. Some of the writing involves research, perhaps negotiating differing critical perspectives. Much writing involves extended discourse in which students develop an argument or present an analysis at length. In addition, some writing assignments should encourage students to write effectively under the time constraints they encounter on essay exams in college courses in many disciplines, including English.

The various AP English Literature and Composition Released Exams and AP Central provide sample student essay responses written under exam conditions — with an average time of 40 minutes for students to write an essay response. These essays were written in response to two different types of questions: (1) an analysis of a passage or poem in which students are required to discuss how particular literary elements or features contribute to meaning; and (2) an “open” question in which students are asked to select a literary work and discuss its relevant features in relation to the question provided. Students can be prepared for these free-response questions through exercises analyzing short prose passages and poems and through practicing with “open” analytical questions. Such exercises need not always be timed; instead, they can form the basis for extended writing projects.

Because the AP course depends on the development of interpretive skills as students learn to write and read with increasing complexity and sophistication, the AP English Literature and Composition course is intended to be a full-year course. Teachers at schools that offer only a single semester block for AP are encouraged to advise their AP English Literature and Composition students to take an additional semester of advanced English in which they continue to practice the kind of writing and reading emphasized in their AP class.

Representative Authors

There is no recommended or required reading list for the AP English Literature and Composition course. The following authors are provided simply to suggest the range and quality of reading expected in the course. Teachers may select authors from the names below or may choose others of comparable quality and complexity.

Poetry

W. H. Auden; Elizabeth Bishop; William Blake; Anne Bradstreet; Edward Kamau Brathwaite; Gwendolyn Brooks; Robert Browning; George Gordon, Lord Byron; Lorna Dee Cervantes; Geoffrey Chaucer; Lucille Clifton; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Billy Collins; H. D. (Hilda Doolittle); Emily Dickinson; John Donne; Rita Dove; Paul Laurence Dunbar; T. S. Eliot; Robert Frost; Joy Harjo; Seamus Heaney; George Herbert; Garrett Hongo; Gerard Manley Hopkins; Langston Hughes; Ben Jonson; John Keats; Philip Larkin; Robert Lowell; Andrew Marvell; John Milton; Marianne Moore; Sylvia Plath; Edgar Allan Poe; Alexander Pope; Adrienne Rich; Anne Sexton; William Shakespeare; Percy Bysshe Shelley; Leslie Marmon Silko; Cathy Song; Wallace Stevens; Alfred, Lord Tennyson; Derek Walcott; Walt Whitman; Richard Wilbur; William Carlos Williams; William Wordsworth; William Butler Yeats

Drama

Aeschylus; Edward Albee; Amiri Baraka; Samuel Beckett; Anton Chekhov; Caryl Churchill; William Congreve; Athol Fugard; Lorraine Hansberry; Lillian Hellman; David Henry Hwang; Henrik Ibsen; Ben Jonson; David Mamet; Arthur Miller; Molière; Marsha Norman; Sean O'Casey; Eugene O'Neill; Suzan-Lori Parks; Harold Pinter; Luigi Pirandello; William Shakespeare; George Bernard Shaw; Sam Shepard; Sophocles; Tom Stoppard; Luis Valdez; Oscar Wilde; Tennessee Williams; August Wilson

Fiction (Novel and Short Story)

Chinua Achebe; Sherman Alexie; Isabel Allende; Rudolfo Anaya; Margaret Atwood; Jane Austen; James Baldwin; Saul Bellow; Charlotte Brontë; Emily Brontë; Raymond Carver; Willa Cather; John Cheever; Kate Chopin; Sandra Cisneros; Joseph Conrad; Edwidge Danticat; Daniel Defoe; Anita Desai; Charles Dickens; Fyodor Dostoevsky; George Eliot; Ralph Ellison; Louise Erdrich; William Faulkner; Henry Fielding; F. Scott Fitzgerald; E. M. Forster; Thomas Hardy; Nathaniel Hawthorne; Ernest Hemingway; Zora Neale Hurston; Kazuo Ishiguro; Henry James; Ha Jin; Edward P. Jones; James Joyce; Maxine Hong Kingston; Joy Kogawa; Jhumpa Lahiri; Margaret Laurence; D. H. Lawrence; Chang-rae Lee; Bernard Malamud; Gabriel García Márquez; Cormac McCarthy; Ian McEwan; Herman Melville; Toni Morrison; Bharati Mukherjee; Vladimir Nabokov; Flannery O'Connor; Orhan Pamuk; Katherine Anne Porter; Marilynne Robinson; Jonathan Swift; Mark Twain; John Updike; Alice Walker; Evelyn Waugh; Eudora Welty; Edith Wharton; John Edgar Wideman; Virginia Woolf; Richard Wright

Expository Prose

Joseph Addison; Gloria Anzaldúa; Matthew Arnold; James Baldwin; James Boswell; Jesús Colón; Joan Didion; Frederick Douglass; W. E. B. Du Bois; Ralph Waldo Emerson; William Hazlitt; bell hooks; Samuel Johnson; Charles Lamb; Thomas Macaulay; Mary McCarthy; John Stuart Mill; George Orwell; Michael Pollan; Richard Rodriguez; Edward Said; Lewis Thomas; Henry David Thoreau; E. B. White; Virginia Woolf

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ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Read carefully the following poem by Marilyn Nelson Waniek. Then write an essay analyzing how Waniek employs literary techniques to develop the complex meanings that the speaker attributes to *The Century Quilt*. You may wish to consider such elements as structure, imagery, and tone.

The Century Quilt

for Sarah Mary Taylor, Quilter

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|
| Line 5 10 15 20 | My sister and I were in love with Meema's Indian blanket. We fell asleep under army green issued to Daddy by Supply. When Meema came to live with us she brought her medicines, her cane, and the blanket I found on my sister's bed the last time I visited her. I remembered how I'd planned to inherit that blanket, how we used to wrap ourselves at play in its folds and be chieftains and princesses. Now I've found a quilt ¹ I'd like to die under; Six Van Dyke brown squares, two white ones, and one square the yellowbrown of Mama's cheeks. Each square holds a sweet gum leaf whose fingers I imagine would caress me into the silence. | 25 30 35 40 45 | among her yellow sisters, their grandfather's white family nodding at them when they met. When their father came home from his store they cranked up the pianola and all of the beautiful sisters giggled and danced. She must have dreamed about Mama when the dancing was over: a lanky girl trailing after her father through his Oklahoma field. Perhaps under this quilt I'd dream of myself, of my childhood of miracles, of my father's burnt umber ² pride, my mother's ochre ³ gentleness. Within the dream of myself perhaps I'd meet my son or my other child, as yet unconceived. I'd call it <i>The Century Quilt</i> , after its pattern of leaves. |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|

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from *Mama's Promises* by Marilyn Nelson Waniek.
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¹ A quilt is a type of bedcovering often made by stitching together varied pieces of fabric.

² Burnt umber is a shade of brown.

³ Ochre refers to a shade of yellow.

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Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the following passage from Maria Edgeworth's 1801 novel, *Belinda*, the narrator provides a description of Clarence Hervey, one of the suitors of the novel's protagonist, Belinda Portman. Mrs. Stanhope, Belinda's aunt, hopes to improve her niece's social prospects and therefore has arranged to have Belinda stay with the fashionable Lady Delacour.

Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze Clarence Hervey's complex character as Edgeworth develops it through such literary techniques as tone, point of view, and language.

Clarence Hervey might have been more than a pleasant young man, if he had not been smitten with the desire of being thought superior in every thing, and of being the most admired person in all companies. He had been early flattered with the idea that he was a man of genius; and he imagined that, as such, he was entitled to be imprudent, wild, and eccentric. He affected singularity, in order to establish his claims to genius. He had considerable literary talents, by which he was distinguished at Oxford; but he was so dreadfully afraid of passing for a pedant, that when he came into the company of the idle and the ignorant, he pretended to disdain every species of knowledge. His chameleon character seemed to vary in different lights, and according to the different situations in which he happened to be placed. He could be all things to all men—and to all women. He was supposed to be a favourite with the fair sex; and of all his various excellencies and defects, there was none on which he valued himself so much as on his gallantry. He was not profligate; he had a strong sense of humour, and quick feelings of humanity; but he was so easily led, or rather so easily excited by his companions, and his companions were now of such a sort, that it was probable he would soon become vicious. As to his connexion with Lady Delacour, he would have started with horror at the idea of disturbing the peace of a family; but in her family, he said, there was no peace to disturb; he was vain of having it seen by the world that he was distinguished by a lady of her wit and fashion, and he did not think it incumbent on him to be more scrupulous or more

attentive to appearances than her ladyship. By Lord Delacour's jealousy he was sometimes provoked, sometimes amused, and sometimes flattered. He was constantly of all her ladyship's parties in public and private; consequently he saw Belinda almost every day, and every day he saw her with increasing admiration of her beauty, and with increasing dread of being taken in to marry a niece of 'the *catch-match-maker*,' the name by which Mrs Stanhope was known amongst the men of his acquaintance. Young ladies who have the misfortune to be *conducted* by these artful dames, are always supposed to be partners in all the speculations, though their names may not appear in the firm. If he had not been prejudiced by the character of her aunt, Mr Hervey would have thought Belinda an undesigning, unaffected girl; but now he suspected her of artifice in every word, look, and motion; and even when he felt himself most charmed by her powers of pleasing, he was most inclined to despise her, for what he thought such premature proficiency in scientific coquetry. He had not sufficient resolution to keep beyond the sphere of her attraction; but frequently, when he found himself within it, he cursed his folly, and drew back with sudden terror.

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Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Palestinian American literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said has written that “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” Yet Said has also said that exile can become “a potent, even enriching” experience.

Select a novel, play, or epic in which a character experiences such a rift and becomes cut off from “home,” whether that home is the character’s birthplace, family, homeland, or other special place. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the character’s experience with exile is both alienating and enriching, and how this experience illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. You may choose a work from the list below or one of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

The American
Angle of Repose
Another Country
As You Like It
Brave New World
Crime and Punishment
Doctor Zhivago
Heart of Darkness
Invisible Man
Jane Eyre
Jasmine
Jude the Obscure
King Lear
The Little Foxes
Madame Bovary
The Mayor of Casterbridge
My Ántonia

Obasan
The Odyssey
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich
The Other
Paradise Lost
The Poisonwood Bible
A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
The Road
Robinson Crusoe
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead
Sister Carrie
Sister of My Heart
Snow Falling on Cedars
The Tempest
Things Fall Apart
The Women of Brewster Place
Wuthering Heights

STOP

END OF EXAM

22. Which of the following best paraphrases the meaning of line 36?
- (A) When the end of the year has come
 - (B) When the chronicles no longer tell of trees
 - (C) When art no longer imitates nature
 - (D) When nature has ceased to exist
 - (E) When the forests are finally restored
23. Which of the following best describes the poem as a whole?
- (A) An amusing satire on the excesses of modern prophets
 - (B) A poetic expression of the need for love to give meaning to life
 - (C) A lyrical celebration of the importance of nature for human beings
 - (D) A personal meditation on human courage in the face of destruction
 - (E) A philosophical poem about human beings and nature

Questions 24–33. Read the following passage carefully before you choose your answers.

What had been wanted was this always, this always to last, the talking softly on this porch, with the snake plant in the jardiniere in the southwest corner, and the obstinate slip from Aunt Eppie's magnificent Michigan
Line fern at the left side of the friendly door. Mama, Maud
 (5) Martha, and Helen rocked slowly in their rocking chairs, and looked at the late afternoon light on the lawn, and at the emphatic iron of the fence and at the poplar tree. These things might soon be theirs no
 (10) longer. Those shafts and pools of light, the tree, the graceful iron, might soon be viewed possessively by different eyes.

Papa was to have gone that noon, during his lunch hour, to the office of the Home Owners' Loan. If he
 (15) had not succeeded in getting another extension, they would be leaving this house in which they had lived for more than fourteen years. There was little hope. The Home Owners' Loan was hard. They sat, making their plans.

"We'll be moving into a nice flat somewhere," said Mama. "Somewhere on South Park, or Michigan, or in Washington Park Court." Those flats, as the girls and
 (20) Mama knew well, were burdens on wages twice the size of Papa's. This was not mentioned now.

"They're much prettier than this old house," said Helen. "I have friends I'd just as soon not bring here. And I have other friends that wouldn't come down this far for anything, unless they were in a taxi."

Yesterday, Maud Martha would have attacked her.

Sample Questions for **English Literature and Composition**

- (30) Tomorrow she might. Today she said nothing. She merely gazed at a little hopping robin in the tree, her tree, and tried to keep the fronts of her eyes dry.
- “Well, I do know,” said Mama, turning her hands over and over, “that I’ve been getting tired and tired of doing that firing. From October to April, there’s firing to be done.”
- (35) “But lately we’ve been helping, Harry and I,” said Maud Martha. “And sometimes in March and April and in October, and even in November, we could build a little fire in the fireplace. Sometimes the weather was just right for that.”
- (40) She knew, from the way they looked at her, that this had been a mistake. They did not want to cry.
- But she felt that the little line of white, somewhat
- (45) ridged with smoked purple, and all that cream-shot saffron, would never drift across any western sky except that in back of this house. The rain would drum with as sweet a dullness nowhere but here. The birds of South Park were mechanical birds, no better than the
- (50) poor caught canaries in those “rich” women’s sun parlors.
- “It’s just going to kill Papa!” burst out Maud Martha. “He loves this house! He lives for this house!”
- “He lives for us,” said Helen. “It’s us he loves. He
- (55) wouldn’t want the house, except for us.”
- “And he’ll have us,” added Mama, “wherever.”
- “You know,” Helen sighed, “if you want to know the truth, this is a relief. If this hadn’t come up, we would have gone on, just dragged on, hanging out here
- (60) forever.”
- “It might,” allowed Mama, “be an act of God. God may just have reached down, and picked up the reins.”
- “Yes,” Maud Martha cracked in, “that’s what you always say—that God knows best.” Her mother looked
- (65) at her quickly, decided the statement was not suspect, looked away.
- Helen saw Papa coming. “There’s Papa,” said Helen. They could not tell a thing from the way Papa was walking. It was that same dear little staccato walk, one
- (70) shoulder down, then the other, then repeat, and repeat. They watched his progress. He passed the Kennedys’, he passed the vacant lot, he passed Mrs. Blakemore’s. They wanted to hurl themselves over the fence, into the

(75) street, and shake the truth out of his collar. He opened his gate—the gate—and still his stride and face told them nothing.

“Hello,” he said.

Mama got up and followed him through the front door. The girls knew better than to go in too.

(80) Presently Mama's head emerged. Her eyes were lamps turned on.

“It's all right,” she exclaimed. “He got it. It's all over. Everything is all right.”

(85) The door slammed shut. Mama's footsteps hurried away.

“I think,” said Helen, rocking rapidly, “I think I'll give a party. I haven't given a party since I was eleven. I'd like some of my friends to just casually see that we're homeowners.”

24. The chief effect of the first paragraph is to
- (A) foreshadow the outcome of Papa's meeting
 - (B) signal that change in the family's life is overdue
 - (C) convey the women's attachment to the house
 - (D) emphasize the deteriorating condition of the house
 - (E) echo the fragmented conversation of the three women
25. The narrator reveals the family's fundamental feeling for the house and its location primarily through
- (A) depiction of earlier scenes of family stress
 - (B) direct allusion to family ancestors
 - (C) analysis of the family's respectability
 - (D) evocation of ordinary sensory pleasures
 - (E) description of onerous family chores
26. Helen's comments about “this old house” and her friends (lines 25–28) are best described as
- (A) an effort to be witty
 - (B) a true and sad observation
 - (C) a weak rationalization
 - (D) a sarcastic attack on Mama
 - (E) an obviously fervent hope
27. Maud Martha decided to say “nothing” (line 30) chiefly because
- (A) her family's fate depended on a momentous decision being made that particular day
 - (B) she was very fearful of Helen's wrath and was loath to contradict her
 - (C) for once she found that she agreed with what Helen was saying
 - (D) looking at the robin, she was entranced and did not wish to break the spell
 - (E) she could not understand the heavy burden Papa had to carry

