

Welcome to AP English Literature and Composition. This class is challenging, rewarding, mind-boggling and fun, and I look forward to working with each of you as we delve into great works of literature and philosophy. By the end of the year, you will understand the meaning of the art on my walls, share numerous inside jokes with your classmates, be a part of the "AP Lit. family," and feel even more confident in your reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Your enrollment in this class implies that you are motivated, intellectually curious, and that you *want* to read and discuss great books. In order to begin doing just that, please complete the following assignments before the start of school:

THE TEXTS: *Speak* by Louisa Hall

Excerpts from *Writing Analytically* by David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen (available on my website)

DO NOT CONFUSE ***SPEAK* BY LOUISA HALL** WITH ***SPEAK* BY JESSICA SHARZER**. I WILL NOT EXCUSE YOU FROM THE ASSIGNMENT FOR PURCHASING THE WRONG TITLE.

From the *New York Times Sunday Book Review*:

“This starfish of a book, five voices waving gracefully around a core of philosophical questions, wants to explore the nature of memory; the borders of personhood; how words can illumine and obscure and hoodwink and rescue.

Characters connect to each other across space and time. There’s Stephen Chinn, a tech wunderkind imprisoned after building “illegally lifelike” robots, and Gaby White, a young girl who is devastated when her robot is recalled. Alan Turing, the mathematician and code breaker, writes heartfelt letters to the mother of his best friend and dreams of machines that think. A Puritan teenager named Mary Bradford, having smuggled her dog aboard a ship to Massachusetts, wonders about the difference between human and animal souls and fills a diary with her apprehensions about marriage. In the 1960s, a Jewish refugee, Ruth Dettman, finds the diary and is enchanted. Her own relationship with the computer scientist Karl Dettman has gone cold; nevertheless, she persuades Karl to name the chat program he’s invented — and that he later disowns — MARY.”

Writing Analytically, as those of you who have worked with this text already know, is “a process-oriented guide to analytical writing.” As the authors rightly state, “Writing [...] makes you smarter,” and good analytical writing “is the product of a frame of mind, a set of habits for observing and for trying to make sense of things. Entering this analytical frame of mind requires writers to overcome the desire for instant answers – to resist the reflex move to judgment and to engage course material in a more hands-on fashion. *Writing Analytically* supplies specific tasks to achieve these ends for each of the three phases of the idea-generating process: making observations, inferring implications, and making the leap to possible conclusions. The book encourages writers to assume an exploratory stance toward ideas and evidence, to treat ideas as hypotheses to be tested rather than self-evident truths, and to share their thought processes with readers” (Rosenwasser and Stephen xvii-xviii).

Please see the next page for the strategies you will be using from *Writing Analytically*.

Writing Assignment #1: As you are reading *Speak*, keep a *Commonplace Book* of significant quotations from the novel and your thoughts about them, as described on page 53 of *Writing Analytically*.

Please purchase an actual book, i.e. a writing journal, for your *Commonplace Book*, one that you will become attached to and want to write in over the course of the year. Use a pen you enjoy writing with, one that feels good on the page. Please DO NOT use a spiral bound notebook of lined paper that you would purchase at an office supply store. Those don't inspire the kind of care and thoughtful reflection that we want to see in your *Commonplace Book* entries.

How much should you be writing in your *Commonplace Book*? Enough to show substantial engagement with the rich and complex ideas presented in the novel. Since writing is thinking, I want you to demonstrate a lot of thinking. As a guideline, have five (5) entries for each of the five narratives, spread throughout the novel.

Writing Assignment #2: Once you have read *Speak*, complete **at least three separate entries** in your Commonplace Book, applying a different strategy from *Writing Analytically* (see below) to an important passage or series of passages from *Speak* that you have not yet explored. Be sure to include the entire passage you are using in each entry (yes, write it out at the top of the page).

Strategies from *Writing Analytically*:

- **Seems to be about X, but could also be about Y (129)**
Please complete a “rapid-fire” list with at least five different “Seems to be about...” statements (Steps 1-3). For your Step 4, you need to write **at least** one **substantial** paragraph explaining your choice for the best formulation for Y. What is substantial? More than a few sentences; if you need a word count guideline, I would say 150 words, **not** including any supporting evidence.
- **Reformulating Binaries (60)**
This strategy, done correctly, will really help you avoid the trap of binary thinking.
- **Find the Pitch, the Complaint, and the Moment (54)**
Doing this exercise with a work of fiction can be a bit tricky, as it is tempting to answer these questions regarding *The Pitch*, *The Complaint*, and *The Moment* by moving too far outside of the text and conducting a bunch of research about Louisa Hall, AI, etc. I DO NOT want you to do that! Instead, use the novel itself and draw your inferences about what the novel (the piece) “wishes you to believe,” what it is “reacting to or worried about,” and in what historical and cultural context it is operating. Now, this last part about *The Moment* may seem particularly tricky without conducting a bunch of outside research, but there is sufficient context in the novel itself to help you.

As you are writing your entries and analyzing your passages from *Speak*, be sure that you integrate all quotations gracefully into your own writing and include proper MLA parenthetical citations – if you do not know how to properly integrate and cite quotations, please refer to Purdue Owl (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). Here, you can find several resources on how to properly utilize MLA format.

A FEW MORE THINGS:

1. There will be a reading quiz on *Speak* the first week of school.
2. We will be holding seminars on the novel during the first weeks of school; use your *Commonplace Books* to prepare for seminars!
3. You will be writing an in-class essay on *Speak* when you return to school. This will take place sometime during the first few weeks of class, but only *after* we have had a chance to discuss the novel in seminar.
4. Develop your knowledge of Greek mythology and the Bible. Much of Western literature contains biblical and mythological allusions, and this year you may be assigned a myth or Bible story to teach at some point. Some allusions you will encounter in your readings for this class may include: Garden of Eden/The Fall, Cain and Abel, Garden of Gethsemane/Pilate/The Passion, Trojan War and its heroes, The River Lethe, Sisyphus, The House of Cadmus and Oedipus, The Three Fates/Moirae, Helen of Troy, Leda and Zeus. Some good Internet resources are **biblegateway.com**, Greek Mythology Link (**homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML**), and Mythweb (**mythweb.com**). Familiarizing yourself with this mythology is not a recommendation, it is a requirement for the course.
5. Bring your *Commonplace Books* with you on the first day of school. Please write as legibly as possible, date each entry, and be sure to include MLA parenthetical citations for all quotations from the novel.
6. Buy the books for the course if at all possible. You will be provided a list of the major works we will be studying this year with plenty of notice so that you can obtain your own copies. If you are unable to obtain your own copies, they will be provided. However, AP alums who purchased their own books found this to be highly advantageous, since they were able to take notes in the margins and refer back to these when preparing for exams and portfolios.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the assignments or the course.

I look forward to seeing you at the start of your senior year!

Sincerely,

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