

..... a year by year look at St. Xavier's English curriculum

Freshmen...

... begin with the expository paragraph. Unity, development, organization, and coherence are set up as goals for the student's writing. But writing is not seen merely as an "end product." The process of writing is emphasized as the student discovers the value of pre-writing and multiple drafts. Grammar is presented early in the year, usually in concert with the student's own writing, so that questions of usage and mechanics grow out of the student's own efforts. In addition, students study introductory stories in Western mythology, enriching the study of freshman literature as well as providing a basis for recognizing mythological allusion in future years. Finally, vocabulary is studied on a regular basis.

The basic texts include a composition text, a basic vocabulary workbook, a basic grammar workbook, an introduction to mythology, and an anthology of readings designed especially for St. Xavier, as well as various novels assigned by teachers.

Sophomores...

... build on the composition skills acquired during their freshman year. The expository paragraphs and essays evolve into early attempts at literary analysis. Sophomores learn to use direct quotes as a means of supporting their assertions about works of literature. Assignments require careful reading of texts, followed by analysis of techniques such as setting, character, and point of view.

Sophomores read works by American authors, primarily, and encounter some background on American literary movements. But the emphasis is not on literary history or on individual authors; rather, we present the works by genre – fiction, drama, and poetry – so that students develop the skills to read and analyze each type of literature that they will encounter in future study. Students read a variety of short stories, at least two classic novels, a number of plays including Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and many poems. Vocabulary study and usage review continue, as well, on a weekly basis.

Juniors...

... sharpen their skills in analysis and in writing. The focus of the junior curriculum is British Literature, and much of the reading comes from an anthology of British Lit. Junior teachers supplement liberally with outside reading – from novels to modern essays - to enhance the student's learning experience. In addition to the typical literary analysis, juniors also work on their "personal statements" required for most college applications. As preparation for the SAT, vocabulary and usage study continues.

Seniors...

... choose from a broad selection of elective courses. Two Advanced Placement options are offered – AP Language and Comp. and AP Literature and Comp. Courses such as Contemporary Short Story, Shakespeare, American Authors, The Other Voices of American Literature, Science Fiction and World Literature allow seniors to read, discuss and write about a variety of challenging works of literature. In addition, Non-Fiction, American Film, and Creative Writing are popular options for those who wish to expand their studies beyond the realm of traditional literature.

The heart of our English curriculum is our writing program, and writing skills are stressed in all four years at St. X. Indeed, up to 50% of a student's grade in English is based on his composition scores. We emphasize the critical correlation between writing and thinking. Composition, after all, is "thinking recorded." Therefore, the freshmen are introduced to the "complex deductive paragraph," a very logical rhetorical pattern which they can use to organize and develop their thinking. From this traditional base, the students progress to more advanced levels of writing focusing on invention and personal voice, but the emphasis on clear thinking remains in the forefront.