

Tuesday, June 17, 2022

To the rising stars of AP Language & Composition,

Welcome to our class, my friends. We might not be introduced formally until the fall semester begins, and the idea that your first experience of Lang & Comp could be the dreaded “Summer Work Packet”— well, I couldn’t bear it. So, I’m writing you this note to say “welcome” and to reassure you of two things.

Reassurance #1: I do not want the summer work to crush your soul...or your summer.

The summer work is meant to provide the opportunity to think freely and with creativity. It is meant to be an excuse to show off your original intellect. Please do not be concerned with giving me the “right” answers. Your work will prove either to be effective or ineffective, interesting or uninspired; “rightness” and “wrongness” are of little concern to me. Take risks. Be original. Don’t be boring. Nothing bad is going to happen to you if you make a mistake.

Reassurance #2: We will have a great time learning together.

The beauty of our class is that it will always be a safe space to geek out. You shouldn’t be afraid to strut your smart stuff. It’s a place where we value original ideas and where we seek perspectives that are not our own. We will prioritize *why* we think and *how* to think, not *what* to think. In our class, the way that you listen to others is as important as the way that you speak to others. The quiet brilliance of the introvert is celebrated, just as is the charisma of the extrovert. Our class is a place where you can thrive.

The remainder of this document contains the course description and instructions for your summer work. I have tried to be straightforward. If something confuses you, change the directions so that they suit you. I mean that sincerely.

I’ll leave you to your summer explorations and discoveries now. Know that I am genuinely excited for our time together. In the meantime, be happy and well.

Sincerely,

Dr. Elise Dardani

AP Language & Composition
Fairfield Ludlowe High School | Dr. Elise Dardani

Course Description

Advanced Placement Language & Composition (2 credits)

The course provides students with a comprehensive experience in studying American literature and prepares them for the Advanced Placement Language and Composition exam. Students will read a wide variety of American prose styles from many disciplines and historical periods and consider how selections of American fiction and non-fiction highlight stylistic decisions. Students learn to understand and appreciate the diverse ways that American authors make meaning in oral, written, and visual texts. Students also identify elements of literary and rhetorical style and use them in their own writing. Through the process of reading, writing, and discussing texts, students become skilled in composing for different audiences and purposes. The course is designed to enable students to analyze complex American texts and to write highly effective and stylistically sophisticated expository writing. AP Language and Composition emphasizes the teaching of writing strategies and requires students to write essays that proceed through several stages or drafts, with revision aided by teacher and peers. Students write in forms such as narrative, exploratory, expository, and argumentative and on a variety of subjects such as personal experiences, public policies, imaginative literature, and pop culture. As the course progresses, students become aware of their own writing process through self-assessment against AP standards for writing, and assessments by their peers and their teacher. Completion of assigned summer reading and writing is a course requirement.

Summer Work Instructions

Part 1: Falling in love with your journal

I challenge you to become, if you aren't already, someone who journals regularly. More, I challenge you to make your journal an important part of your day. You'll know that you've met the challenge when you can't bear to go more than a day or two without writing or drawing in it.

To set you on your love affair, I'll ask you to do almost all of your summer work in your journal. Know, though, that your journal need not be reserved for our English class. I encourage you to mark down your thoughts from all aspects of your life. Such an approach will only strengthen your bond and increase the likelihood that you will continue in journaling bliss for the rest of your days, well beyond the close of this class. **I promise never to collect your journal, to make you tear anything out of it, to read it without permission, to write in it, or to do any disrespect to your sacred book.**

Please bring your journal to the first day of class. Like I said, I will not collect it. I just want to get an idea of who has fallen head over heels for their journals, who has luke-warm feelings, and who has commitment issues.

The way your journal looks is entirely up to you. Lines. Dots. Graph paper. No lines at all. The choice is yours. All I care about is that you love it. I do STRONGLY encourage you to keep a paper journal that requires you to write by hand. Handwriting does amazing things to the brain and for your fine motor skills. It doesn't matter if your handwriting is horrendous. You won't get "points off" for poor handwriting. Maybe your handwriting will accidentally improve. Who knows?

If you insist on keeping a digital journal, then I will respect that. I'll just whisper, "Paper is better" every time I walk behind your desk.

Once you meet the journal of your dreams, here's what you do:

1. Read the embedded ["Famous Authors on the Value of Keeping a Journal"](#)
2. After you read each author's thoughts on keeping a journal, spend a few minutes writing in your own journal. Write down words or phrases from the excerpt that you find to be beautiful, clever, or provocative. Note the degree to which you agree or disagree with what the author is saying. How does the author's experience of journaling compare with your experience of journaling? Don't read and respond to all of the excerpts at once. That would cause a swift end to your love for journaling, I'm afraid. Instead, read and journal about one excerpt in a day so that the entire assignment takes you at least 10 days in total.
3. After you have read and reflected on all of the excerpts, write a short reflection about which excerpt(s) you identify with the most.

Part 2: Read some high quality nonfiction

I love fiction. Don't stop reading fiction. This summer, mix a little nonfiction into your literary diet, though. Below you'll find a list of nonfiction books that I recommend. Choose one that you would like to read and spend time thinking and journaling about this summer. Almost all of them are available on Sora. Please do not feel like you must access your book through Sora, though. Feel free to request it from the library or you may use your own copy.

Choose a book from the list of recommended titles. Pick something that excites you. As you read, journal in response to the following questions:

1. What essential questions emerge from this book?

2. How does this book make you think about these essential questions: What is American Culture? What are American Values? What is American Identity?
3. What does this book have in common with other books you've read, films you've seen, talks you've heard, and art you've viewed? In what ways is this book a unique work?
4. How has your experience of reading this book made you think about your role in or contribution to American society?
5. Are you enjoying this book?
6. Is there anything else you find noteworthy?

Your journal entries should be thoughtful, but they do not have to be long. There is no length requirement. Ideally, you should write a short journal entry after each occasion on which you read for an extended period of time. If that doesn't happen, aim for at least four thoughtful reflections in all.

Recommended Titles and Links to Goodreads

[Spirit Run by Noe Alvarez](#)

[In Cold Blood by Truman Capote](#)

[American Like Me: Reflections on Life Between Cultures by America Ferrera](#)

[Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life by William Finnegan](#)

[Eating Animals by Jonathan Safran Foer](#)

[Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead by Brene Brown](#)

[Me Talk Pretty One Day by David Sedaris](#)

[Educated by Tara Westover](#)

[Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis by JD Vance](#)

[Lab Girl by Hope Jahren](#)

[Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values by Robert M. Pirsig](#)

[Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo" by Zora Neale Hurston](#)

[Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don't Know by Malcolm Gladwell](#)

[The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration Into the Wonder of Consciousness by Sy Montgomery](#)

[The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz by Erik Larson](#)

[The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals by Michael Pollan](#)

[Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

[Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster by Jon Krakauer](#)

[Romance in Marseille by Claude McKay](#) (Technically, this is fiction. If you choose this book, wonder why I decided to include it.)

[The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates by Wes Moore](#)

[The Devil in the White City by Erik Larson](#)

[Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal by Eric Schlosser](#)

[Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking by Susan Cain](#)

[A Voyage Long and Strange: Rediscovering the New World by Tony Horwitz](#)

[A House of My Own: Stories from My Life by Sandra Cisneros](#)

[The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston](#)

Part 3: Read cool stuff. Write cool stuff.

Embedded here are three short readings and their corresponding writing prompts. Please read all three readings and prompts, and then choose one prompt to respond to. Your one-page response is the only bit of summer work that I would like for you to type. It is due on the first day of class.

[Summer Work Prompt #1: Brian Blanchfield on the Day as a Literary Unit](#)

[Summer Work Prompt #2: "Letter to a Photojournalist Going-In" by Tracy K. Smith](#)

[Summer Work Prompt #3: "Living Like Weasels" By Annie Dillard](#)