

## Course Description and Syllabus

### English 9

#### Description

“What does it mean to be an adolescent?” Learning focused on questions of this kind helps students discover different perspectives about their lives and reminds them that the quality of a question often matters more than knowing any one particular answer. Such questions provide multiple avenues for exploration and instruction: students might learn more about themselves by reading two articles about the adolescent brain—one from a popular newsmagazine and the other from a more scientific source—or by reading stories of teens who make a difference in their communities.

Asking and having students answer such questions is one way to guide learning in a rigorous English 9 course. Other aspects of such a course include:

- Reading that challenges students to approach texts with a questioning stance;
- Writing that requires the synthesis of disparate pieces of information and the revision of multiple drafts;
- Varied assessments that are used to inform instruction;
- Student discourse about print and nonprint texts;
- Relevant projects that require students to take ownership of their learning.

Scaffolded strategies and interdisciplinary materials ensure that students become invested in their work and thus involved in answering questions of importance to their lives.

A rigorous ninth-grade English course helps students find pleasure in reading, encourages them to read and think critically, and helps them to see that reading can have relevance to their lives. For example, students read stories in which adolescent characters make important decisions and then compare these characters with themselves. As students read Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, they learn to ask critical questions about the points being made by the writer, about how the writer is trying to influence them, and about which characters’ voices are privileged and which go unheard. Incorporating songs such as “Strange Fruit” and paintings like Maggie Taylor’s *Southern Gothic* into the study of literature allows students to make connections between different art forms and disciplines and to gain a deeper sense of the historical context of the novel. Similarly, when students read, study, and discuss Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, popular songs might be paired with clips from Zeffereilli’s film version of the play to help students see the relevance of this drama to their lives and to encourage them to think about how attitudes toward love, sex, and parental authority have and have not changed since Shakespeare’s time. Finally, students might read all or parts of Ben Saenz’s *Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood*, a love story set in a barrio, and speculate about the different perspectives Romeo, Juliet, Sammy, and Juliana would have about what it means to be an adolescent.

In a rigorous English 9 course, students write both formally and informally: personal narratives or autobiographies, expository or informative essays, short journal entries, casual notes or memos, persuasive columns, poetry, and essays that analyze literature. For example, while studying *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students in small collaborative groups could create a newspaper for the fictional citizens of Maycomb, writing fact- and opinion-based articles about the events described in the book as well as attention-getting headlines. Other writing assignments could ask students to compose memos that Atticus Finch might write to a fellow lawyer, to describe their own personal histories, to write poems voicing teenage Eliezer’s thoughts about Moishe the Beadle in

Elie Wiesel's short memoir *Night*, or to explain recent discoveries about the adolescent brain. Informally, students might write quick responses to a piece the teacher reads aloud, take notes on a lecture, or respond to a peer's queries about a draft. In this manner, students will write with more fluency and begin to master varied forms of writing.

As students write and talk about their writing with their teacher and peers, they revisit the process of writing both conceptually and at the sentence level. Writer's workshops help students draft and revise essays. In this process, students learn to use varied methods of organization, to formulate and refine thesis statements, and to write more sophisticated sentences. They learn grammar in the context of their own writing by revising faulty sentences from personal essays or by parsing and imitating a complex declarative sentence from Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," the story of an adolescent yearning to be treated like an adult. Asking students to choose their favorite writings for inclusion in a portfolio leads them to reflect on what they value in their work, and asking them to create class rubrics helps them analyze what makes a piece of writing successful.

Assessments, both formal and informal, are used to guide instruction and monitor growth. Assessments may occur throughout the class period, as when, after reading Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," the teacher inquires which students can describe a time when they themselves chose not to take a certain path, and then asks those students to begin the discussion. In other cases, the teacher might require students to create two exam questions about a just-studied section of *The Odyssey* and then use revisions of those questions on a quiz. The teacher could ask students to identify and write about a compelling quotation in the first chapter of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* to see how well they focus on Kincaid's rhythmic language. These informal assessments work in tandem and build toward formal assessments, such as tests, speeches, group presentations, and essays crafted to a specific rubric. Such ongoing assessments ensure the teacher has sufficient information to successfully guide the class and to revise instruction as necessary.

Throughout the rigorous English 9 course, students are encouraged to take increasing ownership of their own and others' learning. Discussions are scaffolded so that students first write for themselves, then discuss in pairs, and finally share with a larger group. For example, students reading James Hurst's short story "The Scarlet Ibis" could write a quick, informal evaluation of the narrator's relationship to his brother Doodle to prepare for a group discussion. Then, they might share those evaluations with a partner to gain confidence before contributing to a class discussion. Students also begin to take leadership in discussions. They might watch as the teacher models writing literal, interpretive, and evaluative questions about Julia Alvarez's novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. Then, after responding to those questions in a teacher-led discussion group, students could read *Geeks*, Jon Katz's nonfiction tale of teenage computer hackers, and practice asking literal, interpretive, and evaluative questions about that text in a student-led discussion. Assignments that require independent reading challenge students to choose appropriate reading materials based upon specific criteria, to read in their free time, and to demonstrate their learning through presentations, reports, collages, or discussions. Likewise, compiling and organizing notebooks for class notes and handouts helps students meet deadlines and track their progress. In these and other ways, students take responsibility for their learning.

By encouraging students to read critically, write recursively, discuss collaboratively, and create, present, and view projects that are relevant to their lives, a rigorous English 9 course helps students become active and responsible learners. Students will discover personal answers to the question of what it means to be an adolescent, whether they find answers in the film version

of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in peers' dramatic reading of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "We Wear the Mask," in the autobiographical essays they write, or in interviews with their elders about what adolescence was like in the past. By setting a strong foundation for students' future high school work and refining their abilities as thinkers, readers, writers, viewers, and speakers, a rigorous English 9 course makes it easier for students to feel successful as they learn what it means to be an adolescent.

## Model Course Syllabus

*On Course for Success* (2004) revealed that rigorous English 9 syllabi share several important characteristics. Not only do they describe the course and identify the content it will cover, but also they outline policies to which teachers and students are held accountable. This model syllabus is a composite drawn from the syllabi studied in *On Course for Success*. As a model, it is addressed to students and should be used as a general guideline, adapted according to the policies of a particular district, school, or teacher.

## Course Overview

Welcome to English 9! I feel privileged to journey with you as you enter your first year of high school and venture into a more sophisticated study of literature and writing. I am also looking forward to participating in rich discussions and engaging learning activities with you. In this class, I will hold you to high standards of behavior and academic performance. If you put forth your best effort in these areas, you will be successful.

The curriculum in this course is designed to broaden your literary knowledge, deepen your thinking about important topics, develop your communication skills, connect your learning to other classes, and give you multiple opportunities to work with a variety of people on different tasks. I hope that you will approach this class with the same enthusiasm with which it was designed.

## Course Content

### *Reading*

- Reading Across the Curriculum
- Reading Strategies
- Knowledge of Literary and Nonliterary Forms
- Influences on Texts
- Author's Voice and Method
- Persuasive Language and Logic
- Literary Criticism
- Words and Their History

### *Writing*

- Writing Process
- Modes of Writing for Different Purposes and Audiences
- Organization, Unity, and Coherence
- Sentence-Level Constructions

- Conventions of Usage
- Conventions of Punctuation

### *Research*

### *Listening, Viewing, and Speaking*

- Comprehension and Analysis
- Application

### *Study Skills and Test Taking*

## **Course Materials**

- Pen or pencil
- The book and/or essays we're reading
- Independent reading book (for sustained silent reading)
- Class notebook: You'll need a three-ring binder to organize your class materials. Divide your binder into the following sections:
  - ✓ Class Notes
  - ✓ Writing
  - ✓ Grammar and Vocabulary
  - ✓ Highlighted and Annotated Texts
  - ✓ Graded Tests and Quizzes

## **Course Policies**

*Attendance/Absences/Makeup Work:* Your presence (mind and body) in class is essential. If you must miss class due to illness or other circumstances beyond your control, it is your responsibility to find out which assignments you missed, to acquire the handouts, and to borrow and copy the class notes for the day(s) you were absent. Because you will have at least a week's lead time for papers and other major assignments, the due date remains the same regardless of your absence. If you are ill the day a paper is due, ask a friend to turn it in for you. If an emergency arises (illness or otherwise) and you absolutely cannot complete an assignment, I will need a note from your parent/guardian explaining the situation.

*Late Assignments:* Your responsibilities in this class include keeping your own up-to-date assignment notebook, maintaining pace with the reading, and turning in all assignments on time. If you do not understand an assignment, ask for help far enough in advance to have time to finish the assignment. If you are having personal difficulties apart from class, talk to me before an assigned due date so that we can make other arrangements. Otherwise, each day an assignment is late, I will subtract 10% from the grade. Once I have graded and returned an assignment, you cannot turn that assignment in for credit.

You will be given at least a week's lead time for out-of-class papers and other major assignments, so plan accordingly. If you spend most weeknights working on daily homework for other classes, you will probably need to block out a significant amount of time on the weekend for prewriting, writing, and revising your work.

*Classroom Rules/Expectations:* I expect you to be in class and ready to work when the bell rings. Have your assignment ready to hand in if one is due. Finally, show as much respect toward one another and toward me as I show for you.

*Reading:* Keeping up with reading assignments is crucial to your success in this class. If you have not read the assignment, you cannot thoughtfully participate in class discussion. If you fall behind in the reading, you will become overwhelmed and set yourself up for frustration when it comes time to write a paper. Bear in mind that some of the reading will be difficult, and you may not understand it all the first time. That's OK; I want the reading to stretch your thinking. Do the best you can to understand; meanwhile, write down questions in your notebook that we can address in class. I am always happy to help anyone who asks for help.

*Plagiarism/Cheating:* I begin the year with complete trust and faith in each of you. Please do not abuse that trust by being dishonest. Learning cooperatively is great, and I encourage you to get together to brainstorm and discuss assignments. When you sit down to complete an individual assignment, however, let the work be yours alone. Penalties for plagiarism—another word for cheating—are stiff. If two papers resemble each other too closely, I will split the points. If a paper is obviously copied, whether from a classmate's work or from the Internet, it will receive no credit.

## **Grading Policy**

*Evaluation:* For major assignments I will provide the rubrics or explain the expectations that I will use to assess your work. For general reference, however, here are five similes to represent my expectations for assignments:

- A** Like a banana split with all the toppings and some original ingredients, "A" work goes above and beyond expectations. It not only demonstrates an understanding of concepts discussed in class, but also takes risks and presents additional insights.
- B** Like homemade vanilla ice cream, "B" work demonstrates understanding of the concepts presented in class and shows thought and effort, but it doesn't take any risks or offer fresh insight.
- C** Like yogurt or fat-free ice cream, "C" work is solid but doesn't pack the punch of "A" or "B" work. It's competent but not dazzling.
- D** Like freezer-burned ice cream on a soggy cone, a "D" paper is there, but leaves a bad taste. "D" work just doesn't hang together and probably shows lack of thought and effort.
- F** Like a half-eaten ice-cream cone that has fallen on the floor, "F" work is definitely better than zero, but it is clearly not up to snuff. It is the result of careless work and poor planning.

Letter grades are based upon the percentage of points accumulated over the course of the semester. While these grades are ultimately what will go on your transcript, I hope you will also assess your own learning for each assignment by asking the following questions:

- How would I describe my effort on this assignment (e.g., tried my hardest, didn't really try)?
- What did I learn?
- What am I still confused about?
- What would I do differently to improve my work?
- What resources, if any, did I use to aid me in completing the assignment?

- Did I spend time polishing this assignment, or was it done in a hurry?
- What can I do on my next assignment to perform at or above my current performance level?

If you take the time to think these things through before you turn in an assignment, you should be quite happy with your performance on a given task. Remember, I am looking for effort and quality rather than perfection.

*Extra Credit:* Extra work, at times, merits extra points. I will offer various extra credit opportunities throughout the year.

*Freebies:* I expect your work to be in on time. Still, I know I occasionally get bogged down in work, or something unexpected comes up and I cannot get your papers back to you as quickly as I'd like. I assume the same things happen to you, so each semester I'll give you one "Freebie"—i.e., a one-school-day extension without penalty.

### **Course Procedures**

*Format of Papers:* I expect all papers written outside of class to be typed. Hand in to me the final draft along with all previous drafts stapled to the back. Please adhere to the following guidelines:

- Use white paper and black ink.
- Use a sensible font (for example, 12-point Times New Roman).
- Double-space all text.
- Use one-inch page margins.
- Include on the first page the title of your paper, your name, and your period number.
- Include page numbers on the upper right-hand corner of the page.

*Grammar:* Good grammar is essential to your success in all classes throughout your high school career. It will also serve you beyond high school, in the real world, where you will have to write letters, memos, and other documents. Teaching grammar, however, always presents a conundrum: out of context it seems artificial and pointless; in context it can seem punitive. In this class we will compromise by studying grammar in context but without penalty. You will be held especially responsible for correctly applying the grammatical conventions we review in class in all your written work.

### **Personal Statement**

It is very important that you review your notes and homework frequently! The homework I assign will have one or more of the following aims:

- *Practice* reinforces the learning of material presented in class and helps you master specific skills.
- *Preparation* provides supporting information—history, skills, definitions—for what's forthcoming; it will help when new material is covered in class.
- *Extension* or elaboration involves the transfer of previously learned skills to new situations.
- *Integration* asks you to apply skills and concepts to produce a single product.

I will make every effort to communicate the purpose of homework assignments to you. If you are having difficulties with anything covered in this course, see me as soon as possible. Times when I am available for extra help are included on the next page.

I am excited and proud to be teaching this course. The nature of this course is to challenge and to push you to stretch beyond what you already know and can do. Although I expect you to work hard this year, I will never give you an assignment or expect you to do anything I haven't already done or wouldn't/couldn't have done myself when I was your age. I also want to say now that I appreciate your effort and value each of you as important members of the class, regardless of the grade you earn from me. Your grade does not equate to your value as a person. My wish is to help you discover and cultivate your gifts for use in a meaningful life.

**Additional Information**

I prefer that you ask questions in class. If you do not want to ask a specific question in class, please see me after class or after school. If questions come up outside of regular school hours that cannot wait until the next day, please use the following guidelines:

- E-mail—I prefer out-of-school questions be submitted by e-mail. My e-mail address is: john.doe@school.state.us. I will try to respond to an e-mailed question within one school day.
- Telephone—If you have a question that simply cannot wait, you may call me at home (555-1234) no later than 9:00 p.m. Please do not abuse this privilege by waiting until the last minute to start homework and then finding out you have questions.

*Signature(s):* Discuss this course syllabus with your parent(s) or guardian(s). The yellow copy is for you to keep. Please sign and return the blue copy to me by next Friday. I am looking forward to working with you this year.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Student), have read and understand the Geometry course syllabus and the course expectations.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent/Guardian), have read and understand the Geometry course syllabus and the course expectations.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE PLACE THIS DOCUMENT IN YOUR CLASS NOTEBOOK FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.

## Suggested Texts for a Rigorous English 9 Course

Like the syllabus, the list of suggested texts was compiled through the *On Course for Success* study. It is not intended to be a comprehensive booklist for any single English 9 course. Rather, it represents a diverse collection of texts that have been taught in successful classrooms. It can be used as a point of comparison to a particular district's, school's, or teacher's current English 9 curriculum and as a means to prompt conversation and reflection among teachers within and across school districts.

Author	Title
<b>Drama</b>	
William Gibson	<i>The Miracle Worker</i>
William Shakespeare	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Sophocles	<i>Antigone</i>
Thornton Wilder	<i>Our Town</i>
<b>Fiction</b>	
Julia Alvarez	<i>How the García Girls Lost their Accent</i>
Jane Austen	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
James Baldwin	<i>Go Tell It on the Mountain</i>
Pearl Buck	<i>The Good Earth</i>
Albert Camus	<i>The Stranger</i>
Bill and Vera Cleaver	<i>Where the Lilies Bloom</i>
Charles Dickens	<i>David Copperfield</i>
	<i>Great Expectations</i>
Ernest J. Gaines	<i>A Gathering of Old Men</i>
Betty Greene	<i>Summer of My German Soldier</i>
Rosa Guy	<i>The Friends</i>
Ernest Hemingway	<i>The Old Man and the Sea</i>
Victor Hugo	<i>Les Misérables</i>
Harper Lee	<i>To Kill A Mockingbird</i>
Sinclair Lewis	<i>Main Street</i>
Toni Morrison	<i>The Bluest Eye</i>
Walter Dean Myers	<i>The Glory Field</i>
George Orwell	<i>Animal Farm</i>
Ann Petry	<i>The Street</i>
John Steinbeck	<i>Of Mice and Men</i>
	<i>The Pearl</i>
Mark Twain	<i>Pudd'nhead Wilson</i>
Eudora Welty	<i>Ponder Heart</i>
	<i>The Robber Bridegroom</i>
T.H. White	<i>The Once and Future King</i>
Elie Wiesel	<i>Night</i>
Richard Wright	<i>Black Boy</i>
<b>Nonfiction</b>	
Peter Abrahams	<i>Tell Freedom</i>
Maya Angelou	<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i>
Aristotle	<i>Theory of Tragedy</i>



<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>
Charles Dickens	<i>Fragments of an Autobiography</i>
Frederick Douglass	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>
Olaudah Equiano	<i>The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano</i>
Jessie Fauset	<i>A Review of The Weary Blues</i>
Zora Neale Hurston	<i>Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography</i>
Ann Petry	<i>The Street</i>
Brian Piccolo	<i>A Short Season</i>
Plutarch	<i>The Life of Caesar</i>
Sojourner Truth	<i>Ain't I a Woman?</i>
Booker T. Washington	<i>Up From Slavery</i>
<b>Epic Poetry</b>	
Homer	<i>The Odyssey</i>
Stephen Mitchell	<i>Gilgamesh: A New English Version</i>
D. T. Niane	<i>Sundiata</i>
<b>Poetry</b>	
Anonymous	"John Henry"
Arna Bontemps	"A Black Man Talks of Reaping"
Sterling Brown	"Strange Legacies"
Countee Cullen	"From the Dark Tower"
Emily Dickinson	"A Bird Came Down the Walk" "I'll Tell You How the Sun Rose"
Paul Laurence Dunbar	"Douglass" "We Wear the Mask" "When Malindy Sings"
Robert Frost	"It Bids Pretty Fair"
Thom Gurin	"The Cat and the Wind"
Langston Hughes	"Dream Deferred" "Harlem" "I, Too" "Mother to Son" "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" "The Weary Blues"
James Weldon Johnson	"The Creation"
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	"The Day Is Done"
Claude McKay	"America"
Edna St. Vincent Millay	"The Fawn"
Llewelyn Powys	"Black Laughter"
Dudley Randall	"Booker T. and W.E.B."
Theodore Roethke	"The Meadow Mouse"
Gary Soto	"Space"
Stephen Spender	"The Empty House"
Jean Toomer	"Song of the Son"
Paul Vesey	"To Satch"
Margaret Walker	"For My People" "Lineage"
Phyllis Wheatley	"On Being Brought from Africa to America"
Walt Whitman	"O Captain! My Captain!"

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Short Story</b>	
James Baldwin	“The Rockpile”
Alice Childress	“The Pocketbook Game”
Richard Connell	“The Most Dangerous Game”
Rudolph Fisher	“Miss Cynthie”
Ernest Gaines	“Robert Louis Stevenson Banks AKA Chimley”
Chester Himes	“Black Laughter”
Langston Hughes	“Simple Speaks His Mind “
Guy de Maupassant	“The Necklace”
John Steinbeck	“The Pearl”
Richard Wright	“The Man Who Was Almost A Man”
<b>Song</b>	
James Weldon Johnson	“Lift Every Voice and Sing”
Bessie Smith	“Back Water Blues”
<b>Folk Tale</b>	
Zora Neale Hurston	<i>Mules and Men</i>
	<i>Spirituals</i>
<b>Fairy Tales and Myths</b>	
	<i>Olode the Hunter Becomes Oba</i>
	<i>Osebo’s Drum (A Tale from Ghana)</i>
	<i>Spider’s Bargain with God</i>
	<i>Talk (tall tale)</i>

## References

ACT, Inc., & The Education Trust. (2004). *On course for success: A close look at selected high school courses that prepare all students for college*. Iowa City, IA: Author.