



*Queens Academy High School*  
138-11 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Flushing, N. Y. 11354

**Phone (718) 463-3111**

**Fax (718) 886-5015**

*Beverly Short, Principal*  
*Bill Manolios, Assistant Principal*  
*Deek Phillips, Assistant Principal*

*Jamaica Campus*  
*142-10 Linden Blvd., Jamaica, N. Y. 11436*  
*(718) 322-3580/Fax (718) 659-9278*

## ***Queens Academy High School English Program of Studies***

### ***The American Experience Curriculum***

#### **Philosophy**

##### **Theme**

The topic of the course is **The American Experience**. The following examples of understandings and essential questions may be used as models to plan thematic units.

- a. Suggested enduring understandings
  - i. American authors represent and illuminate the social and intellectual beliefs of their times, but the best American writers rise above their times.
  - ii. American literature is uniquely American because of the cultural heritage from which it springs.
  - iii. To some people the “American Dream” is a reality, to others just a dream.
  - iv. Who we are influences what we think about the literature we read.
  - v. Our literature helps us to face the challenges of living in a nation of many cultures.
  - vi. American literature is a product of its history with its emphasis on human rights and freedom.
  - vii. Though being an American can mean different things, depending on one’s perspective, we have much in common that unite us.
  - viii. Our literature unites us.
- b. Suggested essential questions
  - i. How has (add any writer’s name) illuminated and yet risen above his times?
  - ii. How has our culture influenced the making of (add any title)?
  - iii. Is the American Dream real or just a dream?
  - iv. How does our identity influence our reading of literature?
  - v. What does our best literature teach us about living in a nation consisting of many cultures?
  - vi. How is American literature a product of its history with its emphasis on human rights and freedoms?
  - vii. What does it mean to be an American?

viii. How does our literature unite us?

## Reading

Students will read one **full-length text** per book period—or its equivalent. Although **vocabulary instruction** is required, each teacher will devise his or her own approach.

**During marking period 1**, students will read one of the Marking Period 1 selections below. The texts should be related to the course theme and should, ideally, be connected to the required writing assignments for the marking period: a Reflective Essay, an Oral History Paper and a Research Paper.

**During marking period 2**, students will explore the touchstone text *Night* in the context of the course theme.

**During marking period 3**, students will participate in Literature Circles or Book Clubs. Literature Circles are student-led discussion groups. Students should, at this point, be using journals (or literature logs) in lieu of role sheets. The journal entries should raise interesting questions about the reading, make connections to students' lives and to the world, discuss important ideas conveyed through the reading, analyze the literary elements (characters, point of view, etc.) and techniques used to convey those ideas and relate the reading to the theme of the course. Journals should be informal in tone and flexible enough for students to include a variety of responses to their reading, including illustrations and creative writing.

Ideally, a Literature Circle session will consist of the following components:

- 5-10 minute mini-lesson
- 20-30 minute small-group discussion
- 5-10 minute planning and reflection

In defining Literature Circles in his 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*, Harvey Daniels offers these 11 key ingredients.

1. Students *choose* their own reading materials.
2. *Small temporary groups* are formed, based on book choice.
3. Different groups read *different books*.
4. Groups meet on a *regular, predictable schedule* to discuss their reading.
5. Kids use written or drawn *notes* to guide both their reading and discussion.
6. Discussion *topics come from the students*.
7. Group meetings aim to be *open, natural conversations about books*, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.
8. The teacher serves as a *facilitator*, not a group member or instructor.
9. Evaluation is by *teacher observation and student self-evaluation*.
10. A spirit of *playfulness and fun* pervades the room.
11. When books are finished, *readers share with their classmates*, and then *new groups form* around new reading choices.

The unit on Literature Circles will conclude with a presentation and portfolio. Each group will introduce its book to the class in creative fashion, i.e. skit, collage, song, etc. And each student will submit a

portfolio of completed work (copies or journal entries and evaluations) with a cover letter introducing that work and reflecting on the experience as a whole.

## Reading Texts

### Titles

### Comments

- **Marking Period 1: Whole Class Text**
  - *Night John*
  - *Black Boy*
  - *The Crucible*
  - *To Kill A Mockingbird*
  - *The Scarlet Letter*
  - *El Bronx Remembered*
  - *A Gathering of Flowers*
  - *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*
  - *Fences*
  
- **Marking Period 2: Touchstone Text**
  - *Death of a Salesman*
  
- **Marking Period 3: Literature Circle Texts**
  - *Warriors Don't Cry*
  - *Bastard Out of Carolina*
  - *Down These Mean Streets*
  - *Drown*
  - *In Nueva York*
  - *Krik? Krak!*
  - *Upstate*
  - *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*

## Writing Texts

- (Class sets available upon request)

## Writing

The **American Experience** curriculum, and the English curriculum in general, will be writing intensive. We want students to understand that writing is a process, to become proficient in many kinds of writing, and to realize that writing can help them to learn.

**Students will understand that writing is a process.** Prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading strategies will be reinforced, as well as the following six qualities of good writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, conventions and presentation. Teachers are expected to model good writing and to improve student writing through shared and guided writing activities. Peer review will be practiced regularly, particularly for major writing assignments, and revision will be encouraged and expected. Thus, teachers are expected to use a **writing workshop model**.

**Students will also come to understand that writing can help them to learn.** They will continue to explore their thinking and extend their knowledge through writing. Thus, they will be expected to apply to their own writing these and other strategies: summarizing, analyzing, close reading, generating vivid imagery, questioning, making connections, inferring, interpreting, synthesizing, note taking, using figurative language and evaluating. They will keep a **reading log or journal** to record their reactions to their reading of literature. They will use the school writing rubric to peer-review and self-assess their writing. To facilitate this process and to familiarize students with technology, teachers will encourage students to type their work. To become more critical and self-reflective, students will be required to maintain a **portfolio** of their writing and to periodically submit their portfolio with written reflection for assessment.

To **build the students’ proficiency in many kinds of writing**, teachers will promote student ownership. They will more often than not provide students with choices, although whole-class writing assignments are appropriate at times. Teachers will encourage and nurture writing that exhibits a strong sense of voice and creativity, even when the assignment is analytical in nature.

**The uniform substantive writing assignment for The American Experience will be the Research Paper.**

To build students’ capacity to write well, teachers will assign **at least 600 words of writing a week**, and they will provide students with time to write in the classroom daily.

**Grading** of writing assignments is informed by what Jonathan Saphier calls the belief in “effort-based ability,” or “the belief that students can do rigorous academic work at high standards, even if they are far behind academically and need a significant amount of time to catch up.” Each course has a minimum pass grade for writing assignments:

English Course	Minimum Pass Grade
Identity	3
Coming of Age	3
	3
Man’s Inhumanity to Man	4
Literature and Justice	4
<b>The American Experience</b>	<b>4</b>
Transitions	4

Only assignments meeting the minimum pass grade will be accepted. Assignments not meeting the minimum standard are given a “Not Yet” grade and specific feedback for improvement. “Not Yet” assignments must be revised and resubmitted for credit. Teachers may help students who receive “Not Yet” grades or refer them to LSS for one-to-one tutoring. Even students who meet the minimum standard must be encouraged to revise and resubmit their writing for a higher grade. All students should be aware of this grading policy.

**During marking period 1**, students will be

- informed of the **grading policy** mentioned above.

- introduced to the journal and portfolio requirements and expectations.
- re-introduced to the concept of plagiarism, to the school writing rubric and to **the Daily Tutoring Period.**
- assigned the following major writing assignment:
  - o **Reflective Essay.** This essay requires students to present a thoughtful, personal exploration of a subject that is intriguing to the writer. The writer uses a questioning and speculative tone. Students should be aware that they are expected to ponder, to probe and to play with an idea. Unlike the traditional school essay, which requires objectivity, the reflective essay requires a more subjectively style. The writer should feel free to use anecdotes, observations, definitions and speculations to develop his or her essay. Another characteristic of the reflective essay deals with the topic of the writing: it can be something as minor as a bug or as major as death. The assignment will be graded using the school writing rubric with a minimum pass grade of 4.

**During marking period 2,** students will be

- assigned the following major writing assignment:
  - o **Oral History Paper.** This project requires that students interview at least one person on some aspect of the American Experience. Students should strive to uncover interesting personal stories. Besides recording factual information, students should strive to capture the interviewees’ reactions to events, the "feel" of the facts, their ideas about the past, their attempts to decide what was important, what was right, and what was a mistake. Students will write up the interview(s) followed by a reaction / reflection to the interview. This assignment may potentially lead to an interesting discussion on what it means to be an American, particularly for groups whose voices have been underrepresented in traditional history and literary texts. It would be interesting to have students compare their experience “uncovering” history with the way they normally “cover” it in history classes. The assignment will be graded using the school writing rubric with a minimum pass grade of 4.

**During marking period 3,** students will be

- assigned the following major writing assignment:
  - o **Research Paper.** Students will conduct extensive research on a controversial contemporary issue and write a research paper that makes use of numerous sources to argue for a particular point of view. This is a formal research paper. Therefore, students must be taught how to conduct library research, how to evaluate and use their sources, and how to use documents and cite those sources using MLA guidelines. This process needs to be heavily scaffolded and needs to be modeled. It would be helpful to students if the teachers broke the assignment down and created a number of benchmarks and due dates. The assignment will be graded using the school writing rubric with a minimum pass grade of 4.

<b>MK PD</b>	<b>Type of Writing</b>	<b>Evaluation Method*</b>	<b>Minimum Pass**</b>
<b>MP 1</b>	<b>Reflective Essay</b>	School Writing Rubric	4
<b>MP 2</b>	<b>Oral History Paper</b>	School Writing Rubric	4

<b>MP 3</b>	<b>Research Paper</b>	School Writing Rubric	4
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\* Tailor-made rubrics (rubrics specific to the writing task) may be substituted for the school writing rubric provided they are designed to be superior assessment tools.

\*\* Any assignment not meeting the minimum standard specified is incomplete and must be resubmitted for credit. Recommend that the student LSS during period zero. Students should be encouraged to revise and resubmit their writing for a higher grade even if they meet the minimum standard.

### **Homework**

Students will be assigned 30 minutes of homework, including reading and writing, on a daily basis. The homework should be both meaningful to and engaging for the students. It will be collected, assessed, and returned promptly.

### **Grading**

Students will know the English Department's official grading policy and teachers will abide by the department guidelines when determining grades. Each teacher will have on file a signed student/teacher contract that specifies the grading policy:

- Classwork
- Major Writing Assignments, Exams and Projects
- Homework\*

\* Students who complete homework assignments are rewarded for doing so. According to the grading policy, students may receive up to additional points on their report card for consistently doing their homework.