

## **Am Stu - plans and policies, '09-'10**

Welcome to American Studies! The “essential questions” addressed by this course are the following:

- what does it mean to be an American?
- what factors (philosophical, political, economic, technological, etc.) have shaped American culture?
- how have American culture and values changed over time?

The course carries credit for both English and social studies. Some of your assignments will involve literature or creative writing, some will involve historical research and analysis, and some will combine the two disciplines or extend to others, such as art or music. Classroom activities will usually fall under the heading of one of the individual disciplines, involving the discussion of literature or of an historical period, skill-oriented sessions on research, vocabulary or grammar, reading quizzes, etc., but there will also be discussions and simulation activities that will cross disciplines. Sometimes you will meet in small sections with only one of the teachers.

**The curriculum and major projects are organized as follows:**

### **Marking period 1: foundations and beginnings**

History: the colonial world; the establishment of the Constitution; Jefferson and Hamilton; Jackson and the reformers

Literature: Puritan writers; Thoreau, Walden and “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”; Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter

Begin work on the literary research paper

### **Marking period 2: the Civil War to the turn of the twentieth century**

History: the Civil War and Reconstruction; the frontier and the treatment of Native Americans; industrialization, urbanization, and unionization

Literature: Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass; Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Completion of the literary research paper

### **Marking period 3: 1900-1940**

History: the Progressive era; WWI; the Roaring Twenties; the Great Depression

Literature: Cather, O Pioneers!; Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby; Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (will carry over into quarter 4)

History research paper

Field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art

### **Marking period 4: the 1940's to today**

History: WWII; the Cold War; the Civil Rights movement; the Great Society; the resurgence of conservatism; contemporary America

Literature: One of the following: Miller, Death of a Salesman or Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451; poetry; grammar and Regents review

Final, oral project on some aspect of contemporary culture

### **Policies regarding assignments and assessments:**

#### **I. At-home papers:**

Papers will be evaluated for content, organization and style. Some papers will be read and graded by both teachers, and some by only one. Papers graded by Jeanne will have their grammar mistakes marked using the English department grammar symbols, which are listed on a sheet that you will receive. If you do not understand a notation on your paper, please ask.

During each quarter, each student will have two "bank days," which are free late days. If you are using a bank day, you need not tell the teacher your reason. Once the bank days are gone, points will be deducted if papers are late. You may not use bank days for reading assignments, to carry over an extended vacation or for the last paper of a marking period.

Some papers in each quarter will be rewriteable for a higher grade. The following policies apply to rewrites:

-if the grade on the rewritten version is higher, that is the grade that will be used for the quarter average. If the grade goes down, the rewrite will not count in the average.

-there is no "minimum grade" to qualify a paper for rewriting, but don't bother rewriting an E paper in the hopes of receiving an E+. E+ papers occur by the grace of the powers that be, and cannot be produced by an act of will. Sorry.

-the student must attach the original, graded paper to the rewritten version. No rewrites will be read without the original. So don't toss out those papers! (Besides, many colleges now require a graded school essay as part of the application. Save your papers so you'll have a good selection to choose from.)

-in order to improve the grade on the paper, the student must address the issues described in the comment at the end of the original version. Making a few grammar corrections will not help if there are weaknesses in content or structure. Rewriting means committing yourself to a serious effort to produce a better paper, not spending a few minutes typing in minor cosmetic changes, unless grammar errors are the only flaws.

How much should your parents help you with your papers? While we do not consider parental help cheating, unless your parents do the actual planning, writing, or editing for you, we believe that you are best off working independently. If you need help with any stage of the writing process, make an appointment to see one of the teachers. We feel it is better if you don't work with your parents for two reasons:

1. Your parents are not with us in class, and they might not fully understand the assignment or the teachers' expectations. Their input might confuse rather than help you.
2. While having someone help you makes the work easier and sometimes produces better results, too much help can hinder your learning. The New York Times published an article about students at Ivy League colleges who e-mail their papers home for their parents to edit, but our aim is to give you real writing skills so you don't have to stoop to such practices.

If you or your parents feel that they really must read your papers, they should abide by the mantra of the writing coach: always help the writer, not the paper. That is, the goal is to help the writer develop better writing strategies, not to "correct" the paper. We don't see any point to our grading your parents' writing.

Of course, all of the above comments apply to tutors as well as parents.

## **II. Reading quizzes:**

There will be periodic, unannounced reading checks in history. These checks count towards the "homework" part of the grade.

In literature, reading is usually assigned in large chunks--normally a weekly assignment of about 60-100 pp., depending on the difficulty of the material. There will be a reading quiz every time a chunk of reading is due. These quizzes are designed not only to determine whether or not you are doing the reading, but also to improve your comprehension and retention of detail and your ability to pick up on important ideas and repeated images as you read. The quizzes also improve the quality of class discussions, as we can get to the meaty issues faster if students come to class already clear on the basics. If you take notes on the literature as you read, you may use these notes during the quizzes.

Reading Spark Notes or other "aids" instead of the assigned reading is cheating, as is copying such summaries and pretending they are your personal notes to use on the quizzes. Reading study aids in addition to the assigned literature is not technically cheating and does not violate class

rules, but if you do it, Jeanne believes that you are cheating yourself. If you have trouble understanding the material, read it more slowly or read it twice. You are free to call Jeanne at home to ask about a passage that confuses you (472-2889, before 10 PM please,) or to write your questions down as you read and ask the next day during class. If you turn to study aids to solve your reading comprehension problems, you may get good grades on the quizzes but you will not improve your reading skills, and the next time you have to read material of an equal level of sophistication you will be no better off. If you stick with the program, do the reading carefully and seriously, and avoid taking short cuts, we promise you improved reading skills by the end of the year.

Because Jeanne takes the development of reading skills so seriously, the reading quizzes will count in both the “tests and papers” and “homework” categories. If you do poorly on a quiz, you may retake it for a grade up to 75. Retakes are oral and are normally “pickier” than the original quizzes, as they will focus on details that have not come up in class discussion to ensure that your knowledge comes from reading. Except under extraordinary circumstances, you must retake quizzes within two weeks of receiving the original grade. If you really know the material, retakes usually take no more than five minutes.

### **III. Classroom participation**

1. Everyone must give and receive respect.
2. Students should make it their mission to contribute thoughtful comments at least once during a class period and speak loudly enough to be heard by everybody.
3. Students should ground their opinions with proof from the text.
4. Students should take notes as other students speak.
5. No side conversations, note passing or text messaging should occur.
6. Vulgar language is permissible as long as it is not directed at any individual present (“This book sucks” is OK), unless a member of the class is uncomfortable with this rule and indicates this to Jeanne or Jen privately.
7. Students may excuse themselves for the bathroom as needed. However, students may not abuse this privilege by absenting themselves frequently or for extended times.
8. Periodically, a student may be asked to be a “process observer” in order to help us reflect on and improve our classroom community.
9. Students are expected to come to class on time. There will be a sign-in sheet posted for those arriving late. When we determine your grade for classwork, we will take into account not only the number of latenesses but the amount of time by which you have been late.

#### **IV. Cheating policy**

As previously stated in this document, using Spark Notes or other study aids in addition to doing the reading is not cheating, but we discourage the practice. Having your parents or tutors help you with papers, as long as they are not doing the work for you, is not cheating, but we discourage the practice. These forms of help should be avoided unless you really can't function without them, because their use may retard the development of your ability to read and write on your own.

The following behaviors are unequivocally forms of cheating:

1. Incorporating secondary source material into your writing without proper citation. This includes taking ideas or fragments of sentences. Changing some of the words doesn't help.
2. Copying other students' papers or copying others' class notes to study from (unless you were absent on the day the notes were taken, in which case copying them is fine.)
3. Using means to pretend that you have done assigned reading when you haven't. Such means include reading study aids instead of reading, asking classmates to summarize the reading for you, or reading or copying a classmate's reading notes to use on a reading quiz.
4. Using other students' research for homework checks--for example, if you were asked to find three passages documenting a certain trait in a character, "borrowing" someone else's passages is cheating.
5. Asking a classmate to help you cheat, even if he refuses. Such a request puts the person you ask in an uncomfortable situation, which is unfair.
6. Yielding to a classmate's request to help him cheat. We understand that it can be difficult to say no to a friend. But in such a case, you have to.

#### **Other matters:**

##### **I. Qualifying for AT English in senior year:**

The qualifications for placement in next year's AT English class are as follows:

1. You must want to take AT English.
2. In each quarter of this year you must maintain an average of Good+ or above on reading quizzes on literature.
2. In each quarter of this year you must maintain an average of Good or above on papers.

##### **II. Standardized tests:**

You will be taking the following standardized tests:

1. The high school English department administers a yearly grammar test. In the fall there will be a diagnostic pre-test. Over the course of the year we will study the grammatical concepts that appear on the exam. At the end of the year you will take the departmental

post-test. Your score on this test will count for approximately 10 percent of your fourth-quarter grade in English.

2. At the end of the year you will also take Regents exams in English and American history. Over the course of the year you will write a few in-class Regents-type essays to practice for the English exam. Your grade on this exam will count for about ten percent of your fourth-quarter grade in English if the exams are graded before Am Stu evaluations are due. The history exam will probably not be graded in time to count in the grade.

### **III. Movie nights:**

We hope to have quarterly, voluntary movie nights in which we show films that relate in some way to the time period or concepts we are studying in class. We think these films will help you to get a sense of the look and feel of various places and periods in American history.

Parent's signature: I have read this document and understand the policies governing the AmStu course.

---