**ENGLISH 8**

**Course Description 2018-2019**

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English 8 is a discussion-based class with two overarching objectives—to improve students’ abilities to communicate through language, both verbally and in writing, and to expand their appreciation and comprehension of literature. In addition, students learn how reading, writing, and critical-thinking skills are interdisciplinary, and will help them to be successful in all of their classes, as well as in the world beyond the Friends Academy community.

***Reading***

The literature component of this course will consist of a variety of texts, such as novels, plays, short stories, poetry, and graphic novels. The major texts include:

* *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
* *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare
* *Antigone* by Sophocles
* *Stealing Freedom* by Elisa Carbone

In this course, students analyze how the themes conveyed in the literature they read, even those written long ago, are universal and transcend time. The play and novels will explore such themes as loyalty and betrayal, acceptance of others, perseverance, coming of age, overcoming adversity, making and living with choices, peer and parental pressure, and coping with societal expectations. In order to diversify the texts that have traditionally been read in English classrooms, students will have several opportunities to read stories written by women, people of color, and other voices that have typically been left out of the curriculum. Students will gain multiple perspectives from reading about cultures and experiences that are starkly different than their own, and in the process, may find that that they have more in common with the characters than they initially believed.

Students will be assigned independent reading assignments several times throughout the year and are required to complete follow-up reporting to express major takeaways from the books. These options may include oral book talks, critiques, reviews, art projects, videos, powerpoint presentations, etc. Later in the year, students will be grouped into “literature circles”/book clubs; each group will read a different book and engage in in-depth conversations regarding a particular text. The texts include popular contemporary novels and graphic novels that even the most reluctant readers will hopefully enjoy, and are relevant to students’ daily lives and to issues occurring in today’s society.

***Word Study***

Vocabulary will predominantly be taught in relation to the literature read in class. Students will continue to utilize essential reading skills, such as determining the meanings of unknown words by using context clues and making inferences. They will also study commonly used Greek and Latin prefixes, suffixes, and affixes. Students will be held accountable for accurate spelling and are expected to incorporate higher level vocabulary words in their writing and speech whenever possible.

***Writing***

Students will learn about the qualities that are inherent in all good writing—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation—as well as how to incorporate these qualities into their own writing. Rubrics are used extensively by the students so that they can learn to evaluate their own writing, and by the teacher as a tool for evaluating writing. Students will be encouraged to view themselves as authors, with stories and ideas that are worthy of being written. The writing component begins with a brief diagnostic, which will provide crucial information on students’ strengths and areas for growth. From there, students will continue to refine their writing skills throughout each unit, by producing numerous descriptive, expository, narrative, and persuasive pieces of writing. They are expected to demonstrate the ability to write well-structured and cohesive essays that provide meaningful examples from the text(s) to support their overall claim. Additionally, there will be spaces for students to practice the art of storytelling, in the form of personal narratives. Special attention will be paid to argumentative writing, the written format likely to become the most utilized in the forthcoming years. Review and reinforcement of research skills, such as documentation, fact-checking, and properly citing sources, are covered as well. Since the writing process will be taught as a continuous cycle of editing, students will have ample opportunities to complete revisions before a final grade is assigned. Students are encouraged to attend extra-help in order to learn ways in which they can improve your own writing.

***Grammar***

Grammar instruction will continue from where students left off last year. An initial diagnostic will be administered to all students, and the results will help to determine which concepts in particular will require more attention or review before moving forward. A brief review of the parts of speech will be followed by the study of phrases, clauses, and varying types of sentences. Over the span of the school year, students will also practice and refine their skills in structure, mechanics, punctuation, and usage. Instruction that is both explicit and taught in relation to the literature read in class, will help to enhance existing writing skills, and provide preparation for standardized exams.

***Oral-Speaking***

Public-speaking skills are heavily emphasized in this discussion-oriented class. Students are expected to be actively engaged in classroom discussions by participating at least once per class. Students will learn how to have civil discourse and ensure that every individual’s voice is heard and valued, regardless of differences in opinions. It is crucial that our classroom is a safe, welcoming, and respectful space for various ideas and diverse perspectives.

***Assessment***

Student progress is measured through class participation, consistency and quality of homework, oral presentations, papers, quizzes, unit exams, and occasional projects. *In keeping with the academic honesty policy, the work that any student brings to class should be his or her own, irrespective of whether it is being collected or graded.*