

## **LREI High School English Department Junior and Senior Year Electives 2010-2011**

During junior and senior year students will take five English electives across three different seminar categories: American literature, world literature, and writing workshop. Students are required to take at least one class in each category, with the selection of the remaining two classes left to student choice. **Course expectations** for each category are as follows:

**American Literature and World Literature:** Students are expected to complete nightly reading and annotation, conduct close reading analysis, lead class discussion, and write at least one analytical essay. Students will become familiar with reading literary criticism and/or conducting research in relation to the texts of the course. The culminating final project will incorporate close reading, research, and an oral presentation.

**Writing Workshop:** Students are expected to complete nightly reading and annotation, participate actively in discussion, and offer productive feedback during workshops. Students will write extensively and intensively both in class and at home. Freewriting, focused freewriting, and writing exercises will lead to longer pieces of work (drafts) that will ultimately become a part of at least two portfolios. The final grade of the trimester will be based on the portfolios and a final revised and polished piece in the genre of the course.

### **American Literature**

- City of Dreams - New York in Literature
- Classic American Literature
- Oh, Boy!: Exploring Masculinity in Contemporary American Culture
- Modern American Literature
- There's No Place Like Home: The Return from War

### **World Literature**

- Comparative World Literature
- Fierce and Fabulous: Feminist Women Writers, Artists, and Activists
- From Fiction into Film: The Art of Adaptation
- Madness in Literature
- Monsters and Misfits in Literature
- You Animal: Perspectives on Humans and Other Animals

### **Writing Workshop**

- Creative Writing
- I've Got Something to (Es)Say: Writing the Non-Academic Essay
- Journalism
- Poetry Writing Workshop
- Writing Memoir, Finding Voice

## **American Literature**

### **City of Dreams - New York in Literature**

New York is too vast to capture in one work of art. There is no New York story, only countless New York stories. Perhaps it is incomprehensible. But that hasn't stopped writers and other artists from trying to get at the truth - or truths - of it. The poetry and prose we read in this class should be considered parts of an ongoing, collective and necessarily fragmentary rendering of the New York experience. Our authors probe New York's social, psychological and moral landscape. They capture the tumultuous, rude, often violent drive of the place. They measure its great personalities alongside its huddled, anonymous masses. They attempt to unravel its mosaic of class, race and ethnicity, register its shocking contrasts and unlock its layered mysteries. New York writers bear witness to the city's endless capacity for surprise, its rapid fire transitions and its surreal juxtapositions. Most of all, perhaps, they dissect its dreams. New York is, above all, a city of dreams. And with its dreams, the obsession with inventing oneself anew that is at the heart of the New York personality. The result of this collective effort is a mythology that rivals that of Greece or Rome. Students will supplement their study of this mythology in a number of ways. They will explore places in the city that figure in the texts they are reading, they will look for parallels to the literature in other art forms, and they will keep a journal that renders their own imaginative experience of the city, their own contributions to its unfinished mythology. Texts will include Colum McCann's *Let The Great World Spin*, Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money*, and Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*.

### **Classic American Literature**

This course focuses on classic American prose writing of the 20th century. The classical literature of any culture reflects the culture from which it springs in aesthetically powerful ways: its hopes, dreams, possibilities and myths, as well its deceptions, tensions, hypocrisies and contradictions. Classic American literature wrestles with the unprecedented range and contrasts, and the often violent intensity, of the American experience. In this class we will track the evolution of the American literary imagination in the twentieth century as it grapples with issues of race, class, gender, multiculturalism, industrialization, urbanization, and mass society. We will observe how American writers have reacted to and interpreted the tumultuous events of the "American Century," and, in effect, have written its cultural history. The syllabus will include a wide range of short stories by such authors as Ernest Hemingway, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Toni Cade Bambara, Willa Cather, Bernard Malamud, Tobias Wolf and others, as well as longer works including Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*.

### **Oh, Boy!: Exploring Masculinity in Contemporary American Culture**

Notions of masculinity permeate American culture, telling us what it means to "be a man." In this class, we will turn a critical eye to these notions, exploring the ways they are transmitted, the purposes they serve, and the implications they have. We will look closely at the stereotypes that surround boyhood and manhood, investigating the consequences of both conforming to and resisting these normative masculine ideals. By using a variety of sources, such as literature, non-fiction, plays, films, mass media, and current events, we will delve into the assumptions we, as individuals and as a culture, have about boys and men. The following are some of the key questions that will be discussed throughout this course: What does it mean to "be a man"? What are the stereotypes associated with masculinity? How are both men and women affected by these stereotypes? How do race, culture, education, socio-economic class, religion, etc., influence a person's understanding of masculinity? Potential texts and film include *Drown* by Junot Diaz, *Vernon God Little* by DBC Pierre, *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kaufman, *Raising Victor Vargas*, directed by Peter Sollett.

## **Modern American Literature**

TBD

### **There's No Place Like Home: The Return from War**

Stories of home and homecoming pervade American literature and film. In this course, we will examine many of these stories, focusing primarily on the experiences of soldiers coming home from war. How do notions of "home" transform or stay the same after life-altering events, such as war? What do soldiers carry home from war? How are their relationships to home shaped by what they have witnessed, done, or experienced? What happens to those who remain on the homefront while loved ones are away? How do their lives and their sense of home change? Why can coming home be so difficult? Homer's classical epic, *The Odyssey*, will serve as a central text of the course and will allow us to explore issues of "the return" along thematic lines. As we move through the *Odyssey*, we will pair the epic with shorter texts by American authors from various regions and times, ranging from the Civil War to the War on Terror. Additional texts may include Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*, Jonathan Shay's *Odysseus in America*, Brian Turner's *Here Bullet*, and Yusef Komunyakaa's *Dien Cai Dau*. We will also read selections of short stories, first hand accounts, and articles that help to complicate and extend our discussions of the return from war. Through reading and discussing these texts we can begin to examine the ways American soldiers can return home safely, and how we, as individuals and as a nation, can care for them once they return.

## **World Literature**

### **Comparative World Literature**

TBD

### **Fierce and Fabulous: Feminist Women Writers, Artists, and Activists**

Think feminism is dead? Think again. Today's young feminist writers are engaging in an amazing and challenging dialogue about the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, politics, and human rights in every medium from novels and poetry to 'zines and films. From the feminist literary canon to the feminist blogosphere, we will trace the patterns and complexity of words and women, identity and politics, social justice and activism. Readings will include themes related to girls and body image, women artists, women of color, global feminism, and queer youth. Speakers from the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Third Wave Foundation, and the Astraea Foundation will expand our discussion of social justice feminism and philanthropy. Other speakers have included leaders from GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services), Equality Now (women and human rights) and experts on the Guerrilla Girls (feminist art). Visits to the Barnard Center for Research on Women, the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, and Bluestockings feminist bookstore will also be scheduled.

### **From Fiction into Film: The Art of Adaptation**

"Adaptation" refers to both the product and the process in which a piece of literature becomes a film. In this class, we will be learning about adaptation, in both senses of the word. We will be pairing texts with the films they have inspired, examining the relationship between the two works. After a careful reading of the text, we will study the film, analyzing the choices made by the screenwriter and the techniques employed by the director, in bringing the written word to the big screen. Using literary and film theory, we will explore the powers and limitations of words and images, their similarities and their differences. Some of the guiding questions for this course will be: What makes for a "successful" adaptation? What is gained when adapting a

piece of literature into a film? What is lost? How are theme, tone, and character translated from words into images? Potential texts and film include *Fight Club*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *City of God*.

### **Madness in Literature**

In this course, students examine literary representations of “madness” and “insanity” from the ancient Greeks to the present day. They ask and answer questions concerning madness and literature including its symbolism, meaning, social functions and why so many mad characters are women. Students investigate political and moral corruption, passion and sexual desire, gender roles, racial and ethnic difference and conformity. The course is meant to challenge conceptions of madness, sanity, how we live and how we view ourselves. Some selected readings: *Wuthering Heights* (Bronte), *Equus* (Schaffer), *Oedipus the King* (Sophocles).

### **Monsters and Misfits in Literature**

Monsters and misfits have been widely depicted in literature and art throughout the ages. In this world literature course, we will compare characters who live outside the “norm”, who deviate from the expectations or boundaries of society. We will explore the depiction of these “monstrous” characters as both outcasts and heroes and how they emerge out of cultural fears, anxieties, and fascinations. We will discuss how characters are shaped and misshaped by the forces of conformity and exclusion. Other themes for discussion will include ideals of beauty, appearance, religion, race, sexuality and gender. Authors and texts may include Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, as well as selections from children’s books, folktales, and fairy tales from around the world.

### **You Animal: Perspectives on Humans and Other Animals**

Animals, wrote Claude Levi-Strauss, are good to think with (1963). This course, rooted in Levi-Strauss’ observation, will question how humans understand and depict non-human animals, and how this affects our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Countless works of literature, movies, cartoons, and reality TV shows include animals, precisely because of the many ways human lives are intertwined with those of other animals. Yet, we often don’t pay close attention to how these animals are represented. We will put these animals in the spotlight by reading stories, watching films, documentaries, and television shows, monitoring current events, and taking field trips to parks, zoos, and animal sanctuaries. We will ask what the varied representations and understandings of animals we encounter can tell us about the different cultures, ideas, beliefs, philosophies, and assumptions which produced them. We will explore such questions as: What are the differences and similarities between human and non-human animals? Why are certain animals edible while others are not? Why has Mickey, a talking mouse, become such a powerful cultural icon? Did Michael Vick deserve to go to jail? Potential materials include *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair, *The Life of Pi* by Yan Martel, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, *Best in Show*, directed by Christopher Guest, *Grizzly Man*, directed by Werner Herzog.

## **Writing Workshop**

### **Creative Writing**

In this course, students will practice the craft of creative writing primarily through their own writing, but also through the reading and discussion of published works. Throughout the trimester, students will work on writing and revising several original pieces with attention to character, dialogue, voice, setting, conflict, and form. The class will be conducted workshop style: students will regularly share and respond to each other’s work. Readings will be taken from various sources and may include the following authors: Ann Beattie, James Baldwin,

Raymond Carver, Michael Cunningham, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Jhumpa Lahiri, Flannery O'Connor, ZZ Packer, Grace Paley, George Saunders, and John Updike.

### **An Introduction to Journalism**

While the fiction writer can create his or her own scenarios, the journalist faces the constant challenge of making the truth compelling. In this course, we will begin to meet this challenge. We will begin with an overview of the topic, exploring the history of journalism, the role of the media in today's society, and the vital issue of journalistic ethics. After this, we will turn to our primary focus: the craft of journalistic writing. To this end, we will spend most of our time writing, sharing, and editing stories culled from the daily life of LREI. Because different types of stories call for different approaches, each student will spend two weeks assigned to a specific "desk": news, sports, features, or arts. Each section will be responsible for developing, reporting, writing, and editing its own stories, with occasional input from the students in other sections and the teacher.

### **I've Got Something to (Es)Say: Writing the Non-Academic Essay**

"The essay," wrote Aldous Huxley, "is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything." But, what exactly is an essay? It is here that our course begins. We will spend the trimester exploring this question by reading and writing essays that fall into three broad categories: culture, nature, and politics. This class will be run as a writers' workshop, and we will spend a great deal of time taking our essays through the writing process, focusing on both structure and content. This course is a great opportunity for you to strengthen your essay writing skills, while developing your ideas, thoughts, and opinions about topics that are of genuine interest to you. You will write three essays over the course of the trimester, publishing one in the online anthology we will create for this class.

### **Poetry Writing Workshop**

Poetry can be dangerous. It can be funny, lyrical, personal, and political. It can play with language; it can take risks. What are the limits of poetry? Where do our impulses to write poetry come from and how do we harness these impulses? In this poetry writing workshop, we will practice the craft of poetry through our own writing and through the reading of published works. The class will be conducted workshop style: students will regularly share and respond to each other's writing. Students will explore various writing techniques through numerous short exercises, which will provide material to be crafted into more polished poems. Emphasis will be placed on revision and the writing process, as well as experimentation and risk taking with language, form, voice, and imagery.

### **Writing Memoir, Finding Voice**

This course is designed for students who enjoy or want to discover the challenges and rewards of writing memoir and personal narrative. Memoir writing requires us to explore our memories and imagination while also taking risks with sharing our life stories for the purpose of creating honest, meaningful pieces. Texts and excerpts by professional writers will serve as the springboard for exploring student lives and experiences. Authors include Edwidge Danticat, Joan Didion, A.M. Homes, Jamaica Kincaid, Frank McCourt, Nancy Mairs, and Colson Whitehead.

## English Electives by Trimester for 2010-11

### Trimester One

You Animal (**World**) -Celine

Writing Memoir (**Writing**) - Ileana

Modern American Literature (**American**)

I've Got Something to (Es)Say (**Writing**) - Celine

Fierce and Fabulous (**World**) -Ileana

Creative Writing (**Writing**)

### Trimester Two

I've Got Something to (Es)Say: Writing the Non-Academic Essay (**Writing**) - Celine

There's No Place Like Home (**American**)-Jane

Modern American Literature (**American**)

Creative Writing (**Writing**)

Madness in Literature (**World**) - Ruth

From Fiction into Film: The Art of Adaptation (**World**) - Celine

City of Dreams - New York in Literature (**American**) -Nick O

### Trimester Three

Oh, Boy!: Exploring Masculinity in Contemporary American Culture (**American**) - Celine

Poetry Writing (**Writing**) - Jane

Comparative World Literature (**World**)

Classic American Literature (**American**)-Nick O

An Introduction to Journalism (**Writing**) - Peter