

**LREI High School English Department  
Junior and Senior Year Electives  
2011-2012**

During junior and senior year students will take five English electives across two different categories: Literature Seminars and Writing Workshops. **Students are required to take at least two Literature Seminars and one Writing Workshop, with the selection of the remaining classes left to student choice.**

**Literature Seminars**

- Author Study: Ralph Ellison
- City of Dreams - New York in Literature
- Classic American Literature
- Dangerous Language
- Fierce and Fabulous: Feminist Writers, Artists, and Activists
- From Fiction into Film: The Art of Adaptation
- Oh, Boy!: Exploring Masculinity in Contemporary American Culture
- Queer Identities: LGBT Literature and Film
- There's No Place Like Home: The Return from War
- Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Memory, Imagination and the Narratives of Slavery
- You Animal: Perspectives on Humans and Other Animals

**Writing Workshops**

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

<b>Trimester 1</b>	<b>Trimester 2</b>	<b>Trimester 3</b>
Dangerous Language (Lit)	City of Dreams (Lit)	Author Study: Ellison (Lit)
Fierce and Fabulous (Lit)	Creative Writing (Writing)	Classic American Literature
Memoir (Writing)	Fiction to Film (Lit)	Toni Morrison (Lit)
Oh Boy (Lit)	I've Got Something to (Es)Say (Writing)	I've Got Something to (Es)Say (Writing)
Poetry (Writing)	LGBT (Lit)	
You Animal (Lit)	Memoir (Writing)	
	No Place Like Home (Lit)	

# Literature Seminars

## **Author Study: Ralph Ellison**

Literature is equipment for living. Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*, is an essential book one needs to study America, living in America, and to define American Literature. In this class, we will closely examine this great work of literature, its narrative structure and its symbols as well as study Ellison's interviews and critical essays to inform our reading of the work and determine its lasting lesson. Texts include: Dostoevsky's *Notes From The Underground*.

## **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 read in this class should be considered parts of an ongoing, collective and necessarily fragmentary rendering of the New York experience. Authors studied in this course 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, 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 supplement their study of this mythology in a number of ways. They explore places in the city that figure in the texts they are reading, they look for parallels to the literature in other art forms, and they keep a journal that renders their own imaginative experience of the city, their own contributions to its unfinished mythology. Major Texts: *The Night Inspector* by Frederick Busch; *The Waterworks* by E.L. Doctorow; *Jews Without Money* by Michael Gold; *Bartleby The Scrivener, a Story of Wall Street* by Herman Melville; "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," by Walt Whitman.

## **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*.

## **Dangerous Language**

Throughout history, societies have repressed, censored, and banned books perceived to be "dangerous" or controversial due to their provocative subject matter, political extremism, or incendiary language. This interdisciplinary course will study some of these "dangerous books" while also exploring broader issues of free speech, censorship, and the language-power dynamics at LREI and beyond. Texts may include *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, *The Color Purple* by Alice

Walker, *Huckleberry Finn*, and others. To supplement the literature, students will read a selection of notable First Amendment cases and current events related to free speech law and censorship.

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

Think feminism is dead? Think again. Today's young feminists are engaging in an amazing and challenging dialogue about the intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, age, ability, and politics in every medium from novels and poetry to blogs 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 the sexualization of girls in the media, male allies, women of color, global feminism, US feminism, young feminists and queer youth. In order to understand feminist thinking from both the past and the present, we will explore issues of feminism along three categories: 1) literature, art, and media, 2) history and theory, and 3) activism. All students will write posts for our feminist class blog, F to the Third Power, and will participate in our annual partnership with GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services) to fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). Possible new partnerships include SCALEAfrica and Ayni Education International, both of which focus on education in Zambia and Afghanistan, respectively. Trips to feminist centers such as the Barnard Zines Collection, the Barnard Center for Research on Women, Bluestockings bookstore, and the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum will be planned. Guest speakers from Equality Now, Feministing, GEMS, Hollaback, the Third Wave Foundation and others are also an integral part of the class.

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

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there any thing of which one can say, "Behold, this is new?" It was here already long ago, it was here before our time. – *Ecclesiastes*

“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 a deconstructionist lens for critiquing our texts, we will explore the various ways writers, directors, readers, and views make meaning from words and images. Some of the guiding questions for this course will be:

- How does an adaptation embody and convey a director's interpretation of a written text? 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?
- What are the differences and similarities between words and images?
- How does the narrator, or narrative voice, move from the page to the screen?
- What can a book or story do that a film cannot? What can a film do that a book or story cannot?
- Does seeing an adaptation change the viewer/reader's relationship to the original text?

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

My theory is that men are no more liberated than women. -- Indira Gandhi

The tragedy of machismo is that a man is never quite man enough.

-- Germaine Greer

Representations 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 representations, 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 normative masculine ideals. By using a variety of sources, such as literature, non-fiction, plays, films, mass media, and current events, we will analyze our cultural and individual assumptions about boys and men. Potential texts include *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, by Tupac Shakur, *Deep Secrets; Boys' Friendships and the Crisis of Connection*, by Dr. Niobe Way, *Drown*, by Junot Diaz, *The Laramie Project*, by Moises Kaufman, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, by John Fante, and *Raising Victor Vargas*, directed by Peter Solett. The following are some of the key questions 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 masculinity?
- How are our perceptions of masculinity shaped?
- How is masculinity demonstrated and/or measured?
- What are the characteristics of positive and negative male role-models?

### **Queer Identities: LGBT Literature and Film**

LGBT themes have been an integral part of literature from Plato and Sappho to Shakespeare and Woolf and beyond. This course explores the intersection of sexuality with race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, politics and the body in both literature and film. We will examine how these issues help to inform writers’ and filmmakers’ political consciousness as well as their aesthetic vision. Of particular interest are themes such as the queer body, male and female desire, violence and survival, love and relationships, trans identity, as well as lesbian and queer feminism. Students will visit local galleries, archives, museums and film houses to expand discussions of queer literary and artistic expression. Guest speakers will provide historical and political context to our readings.

### **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.

### **Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Memory, Imagination and the Narratives of Slavery**

Toni Morrison is one of the most celebrated and honored American novelists of this as well as the last century. Winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature, Morrison's artistic and political project is to give voice to the silence of the African-American experience. The focus of this course will be Morrison's major novel *Beloved*. This text challenges readers to examine Morrison's complex use of language, memory, and imagination as well as analyze how race, class, gender and sexuality inform the black female experience. At the same time, Morrison also asks us to consider the implications of black masculinity. We will also examine a constellation of texts that inform Morrison's writing of *Beloved* such as slave narratives, spirituals, modernist writing by Joyce and Faulkner, and some of her essays on writing and memory. Modern artistic and cultural explorations of African American history and slavery will also be included, such as the Alvin Ailey dance troupe's piece "Revelations." At the end of the course, a study of Morrison's Nobel Prize in Literature acceptance speech will be examined alongside other major speeches such as Obama's 2008 speech on race, and a brief study of modern slavery that includes human trafficking and forced labor.

### **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 these depictions represent and influence our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Countless books, films, 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* animals are being represented, or the impact and consequences of these representations. Over the course of the trimester, we will put animals in the spotlight by reading stories, watching films and documentaries, monitoring current events, and taking field trips to parks, zoos, and museums. We will look at animals to help us understand what it means to be human, by examining the language, cultures, ideas, beliefs, philosophies, and assumptions that constitute and inform the human and animal divide.

## **Writing Workshops**

### **Creative Writing**

In this course, students will practice the craft of short fiction 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 is conducted workshop style. Students regularly share and respond to each other's work. Readings are taken from various sources and may include the following authors: Raymond Carver, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Creston Lea, Dorothy Parker, Flannery O'Connor, Hannah Tinti and John Updike.

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

In 1586, Michel de Montaigne, the godfather of the essay wrote, "I cannot keep my subject still... If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial." This course is rooted in Montaigne's understanding of the essay as a place to chew on and savor those very subjects our minds cannot quite digest. The essays you write in this class will reflect the inner-workings of your mind; tracing, following, testing, and questioning what you think about the world and who you think you are. You will write one major essay on a topic of your choice and the world you live in will be where you do your research. In addition to submersing yourself in your topic (recording your thoughts findings on your own blog), you will read a variety of essays, gathering further information and inspiration for your own work. Over the course of the trimester you will develop the necessary skills for writing a strong essay - style, rhetorical strategy, organization, and structure - by closely examining the works of other essayists and taking your work through the writing process (extensive workshopping, revising, and rewriting). Most importantly, you will develop the research and critical thinking skills needed to develop well-rounded and well supported points-of-view. By the end of this course, you will have a clearer understanding of what you have to (es)say and how to go about (es)saying it.

### **Poetry Writing Workshop**

Poetry can be dangerous. It can be absurd, lyrical, bold, wild, subtle, deliberate, musical, personal and political. It can play with language; it can take risks; it can move us to laughter or tears and everything in between. What are the limits of poetry? And where do our impulses to write poetry come from and how do we harness these impulses? In this 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 regularly share and respond to each other's writing. Students explore various writing techniques through numerous short exercises, which provide material to be crafted into more polished poems. Emphasis is 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.