

English

English Department Curriculum Overview

English at Francis Parker is an intimate, collaborative, and creative practice.

Inside the English classroom, students' desks are arranged in circles or their chairs around a seminar table. Each academic year, English teachers and students are members of a small community in which students' intellectual, aesthetic, and personal discoveries are elicited. The heart of English teachers' work at Francis Parker is to arrange for, encourage, model, coach, and, when necessary, insist on thoughtful expression in individual voices. The heart of students' work in English is a variety of projects and texts leading a variety of individuals to the pleasures of literacy and of confident, competent self-expression; the heart of students' work is also collegial, as in workshops and seminars they experience the whole as greater than a sum of parts, taking part in a searching, open-minded, many-voiced conversation.

Outside the classroom, our communal dialogue begins on the first day of school, when students share their responses to the all-school summer-reading. That discussion continues throughout the year at every Morning Meeting, which ends with a student or staff member reading a poem of their choosing. In years when there is a Showcase of Student Plays produced, student writing is performed. The communal conversation comes to a close at the end of the year, with the publication of an ambitious student literary magazine and the presentation of faculty/staff written speeches about each graduating senior. The collective creative process also involves extracurricular activities and independent creative projects, including Senior Projects. The Francis Parker community is a space of publication and engaged literary discourse.

At Francis Parker, we believe that to take the time, effort, and care to consider not only what we say but how we say it, and to pay close, careful attention – whether as participants in a revision workshop, readers of a monumental poem, or audience members at a spoken-word performance – to the words of others are not only indispensable human responsibilities but also educated pleasures no one should have to live without.

English Department Course Offerings

English I (1 credit)

In English I, we use writing and reading as extensions of thinking. We focus on craft, the writing process, and the use of rhetoric as a means of communication and expression. We read texts closely, producing and developing our own ideas and allowing ourselves to be influenced by what we read and question what we read. We learn from past and contemporary masters of English letters. We write academic papers. We write creatively. We use the imagination - stretch, unhinge, create. Please remember “there is no sight without fire.” (Ezra Pound, Canto 98).

English II (1 credit)

Sophomores study vocabulary in the context of the reading material. Usage and sentence structure will be addressed throughout the year. Students will write frequently in a variety of genres, including journal responses, poems, short fiction, memoir, and formal analytical essays, and will read in all genres, including lyric poetry, drama (a Shakespeare play), short stories,

novels, and literary criticism.

English III (1 credit)

This course approaches American literature less as a natural evolution or a set of specific stylistic characteristics than as a varying series of responses to the historical, technological, intellectual, and political conditions of everyday life in the United States. In the course of our literary analyses, we will address how American literature grapples with notions of personal and collective identity, the social conditions of marginalized populations, and what being **American** has come to mean over the course of time into the contemporary moment. We will concentrate heavily on honing our writing skills with special attention to strong sentence composition and carefully crafted self-expression. Students will also be asked to reflect upon their roles as part of a larger community of academic inquiry where each personal voice is valued. Assigned readings will include novels, poems, short stories, a play, and a graphic narrative. Since visual culture plays an important role in our investigation of this period, we will also watch excerpts of films during the course of the semester. Class meetings will combine lecture and discussion formats. Passionate and thoughtful participation is required.

English IV (1 credit)

Welcome to the final English class of the secondary school experience. For this very reason, this class is designed to ensure students are prepared for what lies ahead in regards to academic research and writing. This is a college-preparatory course. The class focuses on developing a wide variety of writing modes, from professional communication to scholarly annotations to engaging creative nonfiction. We also discuss and practice delivering well-crafted, effectively executed presentations. Over the course of the year, we read a host of genres, from the personal essay to the novella to Shakespearean drama.

AP English Literature and Composition (1 credit)

Prerequisites: B+ in the second semester of English III, recommendation of the English III teacher, and permission of the teacher of this class.

Enrollment in this class is contingent upon the successful completion of a summer reading and writing assignment.

This course will be most appropriate for students with brisk reading speed and good comprehension, some interest in poetry, and a willingness to work hard to improve their writing about literature. Emphasis will be on reading (mostly monumental) canonical works – poems, plays, novels, and essays – and on learning to describe their artistic achievements in a lively personal voice. Historical and cultural contexts as well as contemporary literary theory will be introduced and discussed.

English Department Electives

*The following elective courses are being offered to gauge student interest; they will actually occur subject to sufficient enrollment. **Students are advised to put second and third choices for all electives.***

Film Studies I: Great Filmmakers (*½ credit*)

The title of *auteur* has been historically bestowed upon those filmmakers whose works express some artistic signature that distinguishes those filmmakers against the noise and dross of basic or unambitious creations. In this course, we'll be examining the work of *auteurs* from around the world and the genres where they excel. Who deserves to be called "Great"? What makes a great filmmaker? Join us to find out.

Creative Writing I: Reading & Writing Poetry (*½ credit*)

In this course, students will engage in a wide variety of projects and games, all centered around 20th and 21st-century poetry (and also including, from the 9th century, a little of the Anglo-Saxon poetic form). Students will draft and revise their own poems, in free verse and forms, starting from many models, games, and prompts. In a writing workshop, students will contribute ideas for the revision of their peers' drafts. We will also work on performing poetry; the class will plan and host a poetry reading. Because poets also read poetry, the course will ask students to devise their own reading lists, focusing on three or four contemporary published poets, who will become their textual mentors and whose work they'll present to the class at intervals. Attending one poetry reading each semester will be required. Students interested in serving as an editorial board for the 2023-24 literary magazine will have that opportunity in April and May. The course may be taken for either the fall or spring semester, or both.

Black Music Studies: How Black Culture Changes American Society (*½ credit*)

From the spirituals of enslaved peoples to contemporary artists like Beyonce and Kendrick Lamar, this class seeks to understand the impact of Black music on American culture. Moving chronologically through American history, we will explore the ways that Black music has impacted politics, fashion, literature, visual arts, activism, and the cultural landscape at large. We will listen and view the performances of influential Black artists such as Billie Holiday, Chuck Berry, Sly and the Family Stone, Whitney Houston, and Tupac Shakur. We will listen to monumental albums such as *What's Going On?* by Marvin Gaye, read essays by authors such as Amiri Baraka, and watch documentaries such as *Summer of Soul*. Students in this course will learn to listen, view, read, speak, and write critically about music, Black culture, and American society. Those interested in music and Black history are heavily encouraged to enroll for this course!

New Voices Playwriting at Francis Parker (*Fall during Projects, 1/4 credit*)

In this course, held during Projects during the first semester, students will write several short plays that speak authentically in their own voice. Exercises will prompt students to explore character, dialogue, and dramatic action. There will be an emphasis on giving and receiving feedback and revision. Plays written in the class will be eligible for Francis Parker School's Showcase of Student-Written and Directed Plays. The class is open to students in all grade levels.