

English

English Department Curriculum Overview

The English Department at Francis Parker fosters a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where students engage critically with diverse literary texts, develop strong personal voices, and cultivate a lifelong appreciation for literature and language. Our curriculum emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, sound research methods, and social accountability, empowering students to advocate for their perspective and participate meaningfully as active citizens. With myriad electives in a range of topics from Creative Writing to Black Music to Film Studies, the English Department explores genres and artistic conventions through the reading and writing objectives for each course.

English Department hallmarks include seminar-style student-centered classes, innovative educational methods, and close faculty-student interaction. We demonstrate a deep commitment to the fundamentals of grammar and common usage through our closely supported written assignments, from the close reading of a literary text to the revision of a creative nonfiction essay to the careful enjambment of a poem. We pay granular attention to every sentence written by students and provide ample feedback in revision comments. Beyond our curriculum reflecting a wide array of individual voices from different literary traditions, eras, and nations, our classrooms are populated by an equally multivalent chorus of poets, graphic artists, polemicists, lyricists, critics, essayists, screenwriters, and authors.

We play an integral role in defining the past, present, and future practices of reading, interpretation, and writing for our students. Our exploration and teaching cover the examination of the English language, various forms of representation in manuscripts, novels, poetry, drama, film, and hybrid mediums, as well as the societal and cultural contexts that influence these works and are influenced by them.

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)

In English II, we focus on how literature connects to identity, society, history, and culture throughout the world. Students read with a variety of literary genres, including poetry, a novel in verse, metafiction, Shakespearean drama, and text in dialect. Additionally, students engage with historical documents, academic articles, film, music, and visual art. Using these texts, students practice writing and multimedia creation that supports personal, analytical, reflective, and creative expression. Heavy emphasis is placed on the use of sources and evidence in writing and articulating their own understandings. Through this curriculum, students are given the

opportunity to explore concepts and issues related to race, war, violence, gender, and language, and to reflect on their own relationship with them in their unique positionality.

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: Opposable Thumbs (*½ credit*)

What is the role of the critic in the production and consumption of art? This course will closely follow the cinematic cultural revolution (1975-1999) initiated and fostered by two academic journalists occupying and sharing geographic and intellectual territory during the emergence of the Critic and the Teacher as essential cornerstones of film culture. Using Matt Singer's text *Opposable Thumbs: How Siskel & Ebert Changed The Movies* as a blueprint for navigating different film cultures, our class will use the historical contexts provided by the momentous partnership of film critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert to decode meaning in cinema. Spanning decades and continents, the course will ultimately plot the story of cinema as told by its most consequential and transformative heralds.

Creative Writing I: Capturing the Zeitgeist - An Introduction to Creative Nonfiction and Contemporary Culture (*½ credit*)

Creative nonfiction seeks to tell a true story in a compelling manner, at times borrowing elements from fiction such as character, plot, scene, and dialogue. Writers of creative nonfiction may even go as far as using metaphor, symbol, and other figurative and rhetorical devices in their work. Can creative nonfiction borrow from poetry? Absolutely. A creative nonfiction writer has a unique voice and style, the work often relying on the personal and sometimes the deeply personal. This course will introduce students to the different types of creative nonfiction, including but not limited to memoir, literary journalism, travel writing, the lyrical essay, and others. Students will read texts by authors who are experts in the genre and use their works as models for their own pieces. The course will require students to write four long-form prose pieces for the semester, two each quarter, along with shorter weekly writing assignments.

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, politics, identity, and history. Moving by genre, we will explore the ways that Black music has impacted the sounds, aesthetics, and politics of society. Students will explore Black artists such as Billie Holiday, Chuck Berry, Sly and the Family Stone, Whitney Houston, and Tupac Shakur. In addition to listening and viewing performances, students will read essays by authors such as Amiri Baraka, analyze lyrics, and watch documentaries such as *Summer of Soul*. Students should expect to participate in daily discussions, frequently compose writing, and create multimedia products. Additionally, students will engage in a semester-long research project that focuses on an album, artist, or topic of their choice to demonstrate their critical analysis skills and share acquired knowledge. Students in this course will learn to listen, view, read, speak, and write critically about music, Black culture and history, and American society.

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

In this course, held during Projects during the first semester and taught by a visiting artist through Actors Theatre of Louisville, 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 this December. The class is open to students in all grade levels.