Creative Writing I & II
Curriculum Map

Course Description: This English elective is designed to foster writing development in diverse genres of creative writing including fiction, nonfiction, scriptwriting, and poetry. The emphasis is on strengthening the imagination through focused reading and analysis of exemplars and gradual improvement of student-created work through a workshop-centered revision process. Students will produce clear and coherent writing that is complex and nuanced with development, organization, and style appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Conventions of English will be studied, stressing writing as a matter of craft in which diction, syntax, punctuation, and structure help create emotional resonance with the audience. Students will write, workshop, critique, revise, and develop a portfolio of their work as well as design and create a capstone project according to their interest.

Students will explore fiction and nonfiction and their various subgenres while focusing on the language, techniques, and traditions in various genres and demonstrate the utmost respect for the writing process.

Rationale: By its very nature, creative writing is a varied and disparate enterprise. At times, creative writing demands a structured, logical approach, and yet, at other times, it requires extreme flexibility, a loose-minded openness that grants creativity the unbounded free reign to cavort among the scattered and seemingly random sparks that flare into inspiration.

To this end, the five units of study may be explored in any order, though the Capstone Experience is, by its very nature, an end-of-the-course endeavor in which students call upon the skills they have developed throughout the course to craft a unique, final project.

A note on resources: While there are no specific texts associated with this course at Marlboro High School, numerous excerpts from stories and novels and articles and scripts are used as exemplars for study. These models vary year to year based on available materials. Works of particular foundational importance might include *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White, *On Writing* by Stephen King, *How to Write Bestselling Fiction* by Dean Koontz, *Techniques of the Selling Writer* by Dwight V. Swain, *The Practice of Creative Writing: A Guide for Students* by Heather Sellers, *Writers on Writing* by The New York Times, *Screenplay* by Syd Field, as well as articles in *Writer’s Digest*.

A note on Creative Writing II: This course is for students who excelled in Creative Writing I and who wish to further hone their literary craft. In some instances, these advanced students will work on individualized creative endeavors outside of the realm of the daily class endeavors.
Five Units:

Fiction: narrative/short story
Nonfiction: memoir/essay
Poetry: discovery and creation
Scriptwriting: playwriting, teleplay writing, screenwriting

Capstone Experience

Units in Detail:

Fiction: the short story in particular

The study of fiction begins with an exploration of how authors find, cull, and develop ideas in stories. How do writers sculpt those amorphous ideas into stories that engage? Before that can be examined, the students must free their own creativity. This is done primarily through free writes. These exercises take the typical form of giving students a quote, a series of unconnected words, an obscure picture, or similar-type prompt about which students are to write for a pre-determined period of time, typically ten minutes. During these writing sprints, students will experience a freeing from the constraints of writing that often impede their writing.

A more formal examination of narrative forms the bridge from free writes to written product. This includes discussion of story elements (plot [with specific attention to Gustav Freytag’s classic “Plot Diagram”], character, dialogue, motivation, diction) and literary techniques (figurative language, characterization, foreshadowing, theme, motif, point of view); for each of these, and additional topics, students explore mentor texts and practice crafting their own examples.

From there, students are given ample time to develop their own story ideas (and allow those ideas to percolate and evolve) into a completed short story or chapter of a novel. The length of these pieces, and the parameters for grading, is collectively determined by the class. This includes a discussion of grammatical construction, specifically in regards to the standards and conventions of narrative.

Throughout this unit, and the entire course, it must be openly pondered: What makes writing effective? Is it language and grammar? Is it character or plot? Is it the elicitation of a reader’s emotional response? We must explore why we write, what we hope readers will get from our writing, and what methods are the best for getting there.

Then follows the story critiquing. This is a vital and challenging component of this course. Students read each other’s stories before class and then discuss each story for a full class period in a Socratic-seminar fashion. Students’ comments must be story-specific and should be phrased in a positive, constructive manner. When students offer recommendations to improve stories, those students should take ownership of their comments and offer the advice as if it were their
own story. A student may say, for example, “If I wrote this story, I would . . .” This method is in contrast to saying, “What you should do is . . .”

After this, students will delve into the art of revision. This is, arguably, the most important component to crafting effective writing. Because high school students have only limited experience with the revision process, it is vital that they be shown multiple approaches, be given authentic examples, and be tasked with revising their own writing through no fewer than three drafts. Additionally, there is a brief but worthy revision example in *On Writing* that students may be asked to complete. This can help them understand the difference between the first-draft creator’s mind and the subsequent-draft(s) reviser’s mind.

This process demands one-on-one sessions between student and teacher, as well as group discussions about the role of revision and how a writer actually determines the effectiveness of his work. The expectation must not be on perfection, but on professionalism and learning. The students will begin to develop their process—this must be fostered and encouraged.

**Assessment:** Students must produce an original, complete short story or novel chapter, having taken the work through at least three drafts, showing all work as they progress. This may be done on paper or through Google Docs.

**Nonfiction memoir/essay unit**

This is an optional unit that may be employed if time and student interest permits. The different types and forms of essays should be explored: narrative, expository, reflection, informational, evaluative, inquisitive, analytical, and opinion.

Mentor examples can be found in numerous places: the essays of David Foster Wallace, of Michael Chabon, in published collections, in the *New Yorker*, and in *The New York Times*.

As with fiction, nonfiction demands an attention to process and reader response. To that end, each student should produce an original essay, take it through at least three drafts, and share it with the class as part of a group critique.

**Assessment:** Students must produce an original essay.

**Poetry: discovery and creation**

Poetry is about freedom versus structure, and it is about figurative language as the primary tool for discovering meaning in the world.

Through an exposure to dozens and dozens of poems, students should come to an understanding and appreciation of poetry as its own unique form of creative writing. Students should ask themselves after reading each poem, “What did I notice?” and “How does the poem perform?” These questions will lead to an exploration of language and structure.
There are many ways to inspire students to pen poetry. These methods include free writes, blackout poetry, instant poetry, found poetry, poetry plagiarism, group poetry, all forms of specific poetry (concrete, acrostic, villanelle, etc.) and many other methods.

As with fiction and nonfiction, revision is vital. Some poetry can be just for us, the writers, but work we wish to share with readers must be revised for effectiveness.

**Assessment:** Students will produce six, original and distinct poems.

**Scriptwriting: playwriting, teleplay writing, screenwriting**

Scriptwriting is very much its own beast. Regardless of stage or screen, certain conventions must be understood and mastered for the writer to be effective.

This unit typically begins with the stage play. Students are usually familiar with reading plays, and thus a play’s formatting, but they may be weak in actual theatre conventions. This includes, theatre-specific vocabulary such as proscenium, upstage, downstage, black box theatre (including thrust and in-the-round theatres), and *mise en scène.* Exploring playwriting demands students review several specific examples and play around with writing their own scripts. This can be especially successful when crafting “neutral scripts,” which allow students to experience the freedoms and limitations of the playwriting form.

Teleplay writing and screenwriting push students into even more structured forms of creation. This is most obvious in the discussion of the teleplay and screenplay paradigm. The paradigm is typically credited to Syd Field, whose books are wonderful resources for scriptwriting.

The paradigm builds off of Gustav Freytag’s classic “Plot Diagram,” which includes inciting incident, rising/falling action, climax, and resolution.

In the screenwriting realm, this diagram is easily applied to the three-act structure. This includes, Plot Point I and II, and the Confrontation Point.

In the teleplay world, the half-hour sitcom is a two-act work, and the one-hour drama is a four-act work.

For students to best appreciate how these different structures function, they will be provided numerous blank paradigms and be charged with watching TV and movies and charting those works on the paradigms. For many students, this will be an eye-opening experience, very similar to an animal dissection. Through the paradigms, students will discover the inner workings of these popular forms of entertainment.

Before students can effectively build their own scripts, they must first understand loglines and storylines (specifically with regards to the use of story charting through index cards). This can be learned through whole-class discussion and the creation of original, collective works.

Students will either work in groups (as television shows are typically created) or individually to craft a storyline for a stage play, teleplay, or screenplay, and then produce a significant partial or
fully complete version of the script. Unless time permits, it is acceptable to eschew revision as this unit demands the most frontloading of any studied during the year.

**Assessment:** Students will produce a partial or full script for stage, television, or film. All formatting must be industry standard. The free online Adobe Story program should be used for this. A developed storyline will also be submitted with the script.

**Capstone Experience**

Typically, at some point in early May, students should formally propose their capstone project for teacher approval. The parameters of this project, which will count as the course’s final exam, should be determined by the class. Such projects include novel excerpts, short stories, poetry collections, partial or complete scripts, and all sorts of integrated projects, these often with an artistic component.

Ideally, the course should end with a Publication Celebration in which all students’ work is celebrated and each student has an opportunity to share work before the class, other friends, teachers, and administrators and parents.

**Assessment:** Students will produce an original work reflective of diligent labor that demonstrates a clear respect for the craft of writing.

**Standards addressed throughout the course:**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A**

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B**

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.C**

Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D**
Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12 here.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B

Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1.A

Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1.B

Resolve issues of complex or contested usage, consulting references (e.g., Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage, Garner's Modern American Usage) as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.2

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.2.A

Observe hyphenation conventions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.2.B

Spell correctly.

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3.A

Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte's Artful Sentences) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.A

Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.B

Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., conceive, conception, conceivable).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.C
Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.D

Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.A

Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.B

Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.6

Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

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