



Critical Reading and Creative Writing

by Dr. Stanley

Goal:

The main goal of this course is to help students develop their critical thinking skills. Students are assigned 1-2 novels or several short stories over the course of the semester. All students are expected to complete reading assignments each week for homework. This is important. Not only will it help students to develop a healthy and regular relationship with literature, it will allow them to get more out of the course. By knowing the novel, students will be able to engage more with class discussion. They will learn to consider the writer's intentions and the decision making that goes into constructing a novel. They will learn to recognize the structure of writing, its patterns and the themes it emphasizes. They will learn that literature does not exist in a void but can always be connected to the world, to history, to lived experience and to their own lives. Hopefully, this course will help them to develop an appreciation of literature that exists outside of school. An appreciation that will enrich their lives and help them recognize the beauty of writing.

Lesson Structure:

This course offers a seminar-based learning environment where students participate in Socratic dialogue. The goal is to engage students' minds while also helping them to gain confidence in speaking and presenting their ideas to a group. Each class is based on a unique theme or question relevant to the novel we are studying. During class, students will read selected examples from the text. As each quote relates to the main question or theme of the class, students will understand how to develop a response supported by evidence and analysis. In a way, the class structure mimics an essay where a thesis is stated and supported. By organizing the course in this way, I hope to encourage students to have their own ideas and to develop an active relationship with learning, rather than a passive one where they just receive information. Students will also often be asked to write for 20-25 minutes during class. This form of short writing requires patience and forces students to just sit with themselves and think. It slows time down. The importance is not how much is written, but the amount of effort and focus students put into their work. Aside from reading and writing, class-time will be used to help students to contextualize the novel within history, improve media/ cultural literacy and become familiar with new vocabulary and literary devices.

Assignments: Each week students will be expected to complete writing homework. While assignments are not graded, they are commented on. It is each student's duty to read my comments and edit their work. Writing is a process. Once something is submitted, it is not finished. This course will help students practice a variety of writing types including structured essays, opinion pieces, short answer analysis, group projects and creative writing. The goal is to foster an interest and love of writing as a means of personal expression.