

9th Grade Literature and Composition Instructor's Syllabus

A VRC Curriculum Syllabus

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A Verification and Renewal Curriculum (VRC) Syllabus

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Course Description:

This literature and composition course introduces students to a deep engagement with classical works of literature across genres as instrument to improve their own writing. Through exercises that imitate both various forms and styles of writing, students are exposed a wide range of possibilities of linguistic expression. This serves as a preparation for the rhetoric course where students can then direct their capacities of expression towards persuasion.

Learning Outcomes:

- Write short essays in simple prose to practice the elements of rhetoric needed for various situations
- Analyze characters, plot, setting, and literary devices (such as symbolism, metaphor, and irony) to interpret the meaning and author's purpose
- Expand their writing voice by imitating a wide range of good writing

Course Materials:

- Gideon O. Burton. "Progymnasmata" in "Silva Rhetoricae" (2016).
<https://rhetoric.byu.edu/Pedagogy/Progymnasmata/Progymnasmata.htm>
(**REQUIRED for all**)
- *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*. Translated by George A. Kennedy. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003. (**REQUIRED for instructors only**)
 - a primary source on how to teach the progymnasmata, how each exercise differs from the others, and classical samples
- George Orwell. *Animal Farm*. London: Collins Classics, 2021. (**REQUIRED for all**)
- Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*. New York: Harpers Perennial, 2006. (**REQUIRED for all**)

- W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007. **(REQUIRED for all)**
- Frederick Douglass. “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro.” <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/frederick-douglass-meaning-july-fourth> **(REQUIRED for all)**
- James Madison. “The Federalist #10.” https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed10.asp **(REQUIRED for all)**
- Plato. “Apology”. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. <https://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html> **(REQUIRED for all)**
- John Steinbeck. *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2006. **(REQUIRED for all)**
- Jack London. *The Call of the Wild*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998. **(REQUIRED for all)**
- Marcus Aurelius. *The Meditations*. Translated by George Long. <https://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.html> **(REQUIRED for all)**
- Marcus Aurelius. *The Meditations: The Annotated Edition*. Translated and edited by Robin Waterfield. New York: Basic Books, 2021. **(REQUIRED for instructors only)**

Additional Teacher Resources:

- Rhetoric resources: <https://rhetoric.byu.edu/>
- For switch-writing: <https://rhetoric.byu.edu/Pedagogy/Declamation.htm>
- Instructors are recommended to adopt and adapt the timeless *Great Questions* to help guide conversations in this course. Please explore the general descriptions of these through the following resource posted by Great Question Foundation: <https://www.tgqf.org/the-great-questions/>.

Class Breakdown and Expectations:

This course engages students holistically using all of their faculties to facilitate understanding. This course follows three stages: deep reading (*mutala'a*), class sessions (*dars*), and review (*mudhakara*).

- Deep Reading (*mutala'a*): Students should closely prepare all required sections prior to class sessions and identify key topics and terms. Optionally, students may benefit from preparing an outline of the topics covered and a list of key terms and definitions.

The method of deep reading trains students to begin to “self-teach” themselves from a textbook and to engage it critically: jotting down questions to be asked, noting places of inconsistency, and challenging evidence. Traditionally, deep reading only involved books and commentaries.

The purpose of preparation is for students to familiarize themselves with the material and to grasp the structure of the upcoming lesson. When preparation is done well, a student is able to intelligently engage with the teacher in class sessions so that everything a teacher discusses is familiar to the ear and easily able to be placed within the larger study of biology.

- Class Sessions (*dars*): Students should keep a class notebook in addition to their textbook where they add notes (*mulahaza*) based on the class lecture and discussion. Students are encouraged to ask questions.
- Review (*mudhakara*): Students should gather in person or virtually for group review outside of class hours before the next class session. They should read through the material together and take turns reteaching the material from their notes to their peers. This is a place for students to work with each other to seek clarity and engage in deeper conversation and independent research around the material.

Evaluation:

<i>Attendance and Participation</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Progymnasmata Exercises</i>	<i>35%</i>
<i>Imitation Exercises</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Switch Writing (Final)</i>	<i>15%</i>

Attendance and Participation:

Effective learning requires constant communication between instructor and student. Vigorous nodding may strengthen a student’s neck, but it does not allow an instructor to

assess what has been understood and to what degree. Much of this course is taught as a dialogue: students should ask questions when they do not understand, seek confirmation when they are unsure, and attempt application once a rule has been learned. The instructor shall, in turn, adjust the pace of the class to the students, repeating concepts and challenging students as necessary.

Good participation is judged more on quality than on quantity. A few genuine, well-placed questions suggest that a student is attentive and eager far more than rambling tangents, repetitive requests for clarification, and jokes said in poor taste.

It hardly needs to be said that chatting is not allowed.

Progymnasmata Exercises:

The progymnasmata was crucial to the teaching of prose composition and practice of elementary rhetoric in the West from the Hellenistic period to the Renaissance. The curriculum provides basic training in the conventional literary forms of Western cultures. The classical progymnasmata consisted of 14 exercises: fable, narrative, anecdote, proverb, refutation, confirmation, commonplace, encomium, invective, comparison, personification, description, argument, and legislation.

Students will be assigned a progymnasmata essay bi-weekly. The instructor will explain the literary form for the essay along with a classical example of it. Students will then have two weeks to write the essay, and the instructor will return written comments for each essay including points of weakness to attend to in the next assignment. The instructor will also give general verbal feedback on the essay writing during class sessions.

Switch Writing:

Switch writing is a debate exercise in which students are presented with a polarizing question such as “Should there be pineapple on pizza?” The question should rouse strong opinions in students to have the intended effect. Then students are tasked with writing a speech defending the side that they do not believe and are informed that they will engage in a debate defending that side against the opposing side (that they believe in). This exercise demands that the students think deeply about their opinions, how they can fashion arguments persuasively. The following week students present their writing to the opposing side of the issue. Following each presentation, a back-and-forth ensues between the two sides.

Switch writing is assigned twice in this course: once at the beginning and once at the end. The beginning exercise is intended to introduce students to the difficulty of persuasive writing. The final exercise serves as a culmination of their work throughout the course. Students are expected to employ the techniques they have learned in the progymnasmata exercises and can reflect on their growing ability to put themselves in their opponents shoes when writing their own essays.

Imitation Exercises

Unlike disciplines like mathematics and logic, linguistic style is not a mechanical science but an art that depends on developing a refined ‘taste’ or intuition for language. A beginner learns good rhetoric through explicit rules, but these rules make for poor crutches when writing for oneself. Instead, the rules of rhetoric ought to be practiced with examples until they are embedded in the subconscious, joining the repertoire from which a writer naturally composes his work. To accelerate this process, a common practice is to recommend that a student first consciously imitate the style of great writers of the past so that he may incorporate them into his own style unconsciously. The following imitation exercises are designed to fulfill this purpose.

The first part of the exercise will be to complete a stylistic evaluation of the given passage. The stylistic evaluation involves gathering data on the style of the passage into a table such as the number/percentage of simple/compound/complex/compound-complex sentences in the passage and the number/percentage of different kind of sentence openers in the passage. The student should then write a short paragraph noting the aspects of the author’s style that stand out to him.

The second part of the exercise will be to rewrite one or two paragraphs of his choice from a previous essay imitating the style of the model passage. For each sentence in the model, write a sentence containing the same kind, number, and order of clauses as the model while drawing the content from your previous essay. If the model sentence contains an adverb clause, the imitation sentence should contain an adverb clause. If the model sentence is introduced by a participial phrase, the imitation sentence should lead with a participial phrase. If the model sentence has three noun clauses in parallel structure, the imitation sentence should likewise include three noun clauses in parallel.

This exercise must be completed entirely by hand on lined paper. Feedback on how to improve on the next imitation exercise will be returned by the instructor the following week.

To read more on the value of imitation, read Gideon O. Burton – <https://rhetoric.byu.edu/Pedagogy/Imitation.htm>.

Literature Summaries and Advisories

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*. What begins as a farm animals' rebellion for justice soon becomes a tale of betrayal and tyranny. Orwell’s fable warns how easily power can corrupt, as one pig rises to dominate all the rest. Though short, the novel powerfully illustrates how noble ideals can be twisted by ambition and deceit. Its message is easy to grasp, making it accessible even to young adults while still profound for mature readers. This is an excellent introduction to political allegory and historical reflection.

Parental Advisory: Political violence, betrayal, executions.

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*. In a future society built on comfort and control, individuals are stripped of family, faith, and meaning. Huxley's dystopia warns of a world where people are distracted by pleasure and engineered to avoid pain. The book raises vital questions about what it means to be human, and the dangers of a life without moral limits. Though fictional, it mirrors modern concerns about technology, freedom, and truth. It is a sobering and thought-provoking read.

Parental Advisory: Immorality, drug use, challenges to traditional beliefs.

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. With eloquence and sorrow, Du Bois reflects on life as a Black man in post-slavery America. Blending history, autobiography, and cultural commentary, he challenges the reader to reckon with injustice, not through anger, but through dignity and deep thought. His call for education, virtue, and moral clarity rings with strength and grace. This book is a foundational text for anyone seeking to understand race in America through the eyes of a believing and disciplined man. It is both timely and timeless.

Parental Advisory: References to racism, historical oppression, emotional intensity.

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. The Joad family, forced off their land by drought and debt, travels west in search of work and dignity. Along their journey, they face injustice, hunger, and despair—but also moments of profound generosity and faith. Steinbeck portrays the dignity of hard-working families and critiques the cruelty of unchecked greed. The novel calls readers to recognize the value of patience, sacrifice, and the support of family during trials. It's a moving and often spiritual story that champions endurance and moral clarity.

Parental Advisory: Poverty, family suffering, childbirth, labor violence.

Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*. Buck, a domesticated dog, is torn from his home and forced into the brutal world of Alaskan sled teams. As hardship and violence strip away civilization, he returns to instinct, strength, and survival. London's story is more than an animal tale—it is a parable about endurance, loyalty, and the untamed forces within nature and the soul. It's an unforgettable journey into hardship, challenge, and the mystery of creation. Essential for its clarity, drama, and insight into struggle and transformation.

Parental Advisory: Animal cruelty, death, scenes of violent survival.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*. Written by a Roman emperor as personal reflections, *Meditations* offers wisdom on how to live with purpose, humility, and resilience. Marcus Aurelius encourages self-discipline, reason, and acceptance of life's hardships. Though originally written for himself, his words speak across centuries and provide readers with a powerful introduction to Stoic philosophy and the virtues of self-

control, duty, and perspective. It rewards careful reading with practical insight into both personal and public life.

Parental Advisory: Philosophical themes, reflections on death and suffering, challenges to emotional expression, brief philosophical references to physical desire.

TERM 1		
<i>Week</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch Writing I • Introduction to the Progymnasmata • Progymnasmata: Fable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Switch Writing I
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch Writing I Presentation and Debate • Progymnasmata: Narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Pro. 1: Fable • Reading: George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i> – Ch. 1-3
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: The Ideal Speech – Kairos, Audience, Decorum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ https://rhetoric.byu.edu/Encompassing%20Terms/Encompassing%20Terms.htm • George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i> – Ch. 1-3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Pro. 2: Narrative • Reading: George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i> – Ch. 4-7
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i> – Ch. 4-7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Imitation Exercise I – <i>Animal Farm</i> • Reading: George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i> – Ch. 8-10
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i> – Ch. 8-10 • Progymnasmata: Anecdote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Pro. 3: Anecdote • Reading: Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> – Ch. 1-3
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> – Ch. 1-3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> – Ch. 4-6
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> – Ch. 4-6 • Progymnasmata: Proverb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Pro. 4: Proverb • Reading: Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> – Ch. 7-10
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> – Ch. 7-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Imitation Exercise II – <i>Brave New World</i> • Reading: Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> – Ch. 11-13
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> – Ch. 11-13 • Progymnasmata: Refutation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Pro. 5: Refutation • Reading: W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> – Ch. 1-4
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> – Ch. 1-4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> – Ch. 5-7
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> – Ch. 5-7 • Progymnasmata: Confirmation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Pro. 6: Confirmation • Reading: W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> – Ch. 8-11

12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> – Ch. 8-11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Imitation Exercise III – <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> Reading: W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> – Ch. 12-Afterthought
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> – Ch. 12-Afterthought Progymnasmata: Commonplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Pro. 7: Commonplace Reading: Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro.”
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: James Madison, “The Federalist #10”
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> James Madison, “The Federalist #10” Progymnasmata: Encomium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: Plato, “Apology” Writing: Pro. 8: Encomium
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plato, “Apology” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 1-5

TERM 2		
Week	Topics	Assignments
17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 1-5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Pro. 9: Invective Reading: John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 6-9
18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 6-9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Imitation Exercise IV – <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> Reading: John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 10-13
19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 10-13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 14-17
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 14-17 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Pro. 10: Comparison Reading: John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 18-20
21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 18-20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Imitation Exercise V – <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> Reading: John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 21-25
22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 21-25 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Pro. 11: Personification Reading: John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 26-30
23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Steinbeck, <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> – Ch. 26-30 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: Jack London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> – Ch. 1-2
24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jack London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> – Ch. 1-2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Pro. 12: Description Reading: Jack London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> – Ch. 3-4
25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jack London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> – Ch. 3-4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Imitation Exercise VI – <i>The Call of the Wild</i> Reading: Jack London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> – Ch. 5-6
26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jack London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> – Ch. 5-6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Pro. 13: Argument Reading: Jack London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> – Ch. 7
27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jack London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> – Ch. 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: Marcus Aurelius, <i>The Meditations</i> – Books 1-3
28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marcus Aurelius, <i>The Meditations</i> – Books 1-3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: Pro. 14: Legislation

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Marcus Aurelius, <i>The Meditations</i> – Books 4-6
29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcus Aurelius, <i>The Meditations</i> – Books 4-6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Imitation Exercise VII – <i>The Meditations</i> • Reading: Marcus Aurelius, <i>The Meditations</i> – Books 7-9
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcus Aurelius, <i>The Meditations</i> – Books 7-9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch Writing II • Reading: Marcus Aurelius, <i>The Meditations</i> – Books 10-12
31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcus Aurelius, <i>The Meditations</i> – Books 10-12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch Writing II
32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch Writing II Presentation and Debate 	