

Literature & Writing: Summer 2022 Course (8th-10th grade)

Taught by Emily Huang, Stanford University '25

This course is targeted to students in grades 8, 9, 10.

In this 12-week course, three major units will be covered (4 weeks per unit): fiction workshop, literature & film, and personal writing. Students will have the opportunity to hone their craft of writing both creatively and critically. We will read a variety of selections of famous fiction works & authors that exemplify these techniques. The units will be interspersed with “bonus” philosophy workshops, in which students will have the opportunity to learn basic philosophy concepts such as logical fallacies and argumentation construction.

Throughout the course, students will have the chance to read a variety of short stories, read one full length novel and watch the accompanying film adaptation, and write three essays of their own (one creative, one formal, and one of flexible choice TBA). There will also be extra assignments for students who are interested in further improving and learning more about the topics we cover in class, including philosophy.

By the end of the course, students will have gained familiarity and skill with writing fiction and personal essays, and be able to apply these skills to their work in the future (including school assignments and high school/college application essays).

Please find the syllabus below.

UNIT ONE: Fiction Workshop

This unit is a survey style course intended to help students hone the craft of writing fiction, with an emphasis on world/character-building and different subgenres of fiction (science fiction, magical realism, etc.). The skills learned in this unit will be applied to later units and continuously practiced.

Students should also prepare for Unit 2 (study of full-length novel “The Accidental Billionaires” by Ben Mezrich) by reading as much of the novel as they can over these four weeks, especially because the novel is long (34 chapters). Formal reading homework will continue to be assigned once we begin Unit 2.

WEEK 1

Class 1

- Introductions
- Presentation/discussion: elements of fiction
 - Focus: world building
- In-class reading: “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula K. Le Guin
 - Follow-up discussion: study world-building techniques, science fiction elements
- Writing exercise: build your own world
- Homework: finish writing exercise and read “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury

Class 2

- Warm-up writing exercise: openings
- Discussion: personal takeaways from homework & reading
- Presentation/discussion: elements of fiction
 - Focus: character building
- In-class reading: “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” excerpt
 - Follow-up discussion about magical realism & subgenres
- Writing exercise: character-building, get to know your character
- Homework: interview with character

WEEK 2

Class 3

- Brief presentation & warm-up writing exercise: climaxes
- Discussion: personal takeaways from homework & reading
- Presentation: POV
- Writing exercise: alternative fairy tale
 - Follow-up peer share & feedback
- Conference/work time
- Homework: fiction or alternative fairy tale

Class 4

- Warm-up writing exercise: endings
- Presentation: exploding the moment
- In-class reading: “Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood
 - Discussion: what makes a good ending?

- Writing exercise: alternative endings
- Wrap-up discussion & looking ahead on syllabus

Bonus: Intro to Philosophy

- Group read of Confucius excerpt: Analect 3.18
 - Follow-up discussion
- Group read of Sophocles' "Antigone" excerpts
 - Follow-up discussion
- Optional essays/readings assigned

UNIT TWO: "The Accidental Billionaires"

This unit is a literature & film structured course that will give students the opportunity to conduct a deep dive into the book "The Accidental Billionaires," written by well-recognized, cinematic biography author, Ben Mezrich. This book follows the story of the founding of Facebook, the politics of tech and the fallout between Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin, and the humble yet dark start to such a booming and esteemed, yet feared company. Students will end the unit with knowledge of a classic book and tech origin story, knowing how to effectively study (both read & write about) literature, and compare literature to its film counterpart (Oscar-winning film "The Social Network," written and directed by the famous Hollywood duo, screenwriter Aaron Sorkin and director David Fincher).

WEEK 3

Class 5

Pre-homework: Read chapters 1-9

- Introductions (if needed)
- Guided discussion about chapters read
- Writing exercise: world building (with unit 1 practice applications)
- In-class reading time
- Watch corresponding parts of film
- Homework: read chapters 10-19

Class 6

- Guided discussion

- Presentation: Freytag's Pyramid & Hero's Journey
- Writing exercise: imagined dialogue & narrative prose
- In-class reading time
- Watch corresponding parts of film
- Homework: read chapters 20-28

WEEK 4

Class 7

- Guided discussion
- Study on Freytag's Pyramid/Hero's Journey in the story (is it applicable?)
- In-class reading time
- Final essay assigned
- Watch corresponding parts of film
- Homework: finish reading the book

Class 8

- Guided discussion
- Writing exercise: reflections
- Conference/working time on essay
- Finish watching film
- Homework: turn in final essay

UNIT 3: Personal Writing - Creative Nonfiction & the Memoir

This unit will introduce students to the mode of personal writing, and various techniques and styles students can employ to make their personal writing more effective, such as elements of creative nonfiction. Through a series of small writing exercises, students will learn what makes an effective personal essay and work towards writing their own full-length memoir.

WEEK 5

Class 9

- Presentation: what is a memoir?
- Writing exercise: earliest memory
- Discussion

- Writing exercise (2 parts): Place (welcome/unwelcome)
 - Peer feedback
- Homework: flesh out earliest memory into full essay

Class 10

- Presentation: creative nonfiction
- Writing exercise: dramatization (comparison of real vs. dramatized)
- Discussion
- Writing exercise: Object
- Homework: finish writing exercises

WEEK 6

Class 11

- Presentation: POV & dialogue
- Writing exercise (2 parts): Body Part (comfort/discomfort)

Bonus: Logical Fallacies

- Brief presentation: argument construction & logical fallacies
- Individual time: look through [Thou Shalt Not](#)
- Fun break: identification practice
- Optional writing assigned: fallacy “scene” writing (individual or pair)

Classwork

- Final essay assigned + work time
- Homework: finish writing exercise & work on final essay

Class 12

- Presentation: in media res openings
- Closing discussion: takeaways
- Feedback
- Writing exercise: flip the script (POV change)
- Conference/working time for final essays
 - Peer workshop
- Final thoughts
- Homework: turn in final essay