

## English

### English Department Curriculum Overview

English at St. Francis is an intimate, collaborative and creative practice.

*Inside the English classroom*, students' desks are ranged in circles or their chairs around a seminar table. For the ten months of the academic year, English teachers and students are members of a small community in which each student's intellectual, aesthetic and personal discoveries are elicited. The heart of English teachers' work at St. Francis is to arrange for, encourage, model, coach, and, when necessary, insist on thoughtful expression in individual voices. The heart of students' work in English is a variety of projects and texts leading a variety of individuals to the pleasures of literacy and of confident, competent self-expression; the heart of students' work is also collegial, as in workshops and seminars they experience the whole as greater than a sum of parts, taking part in a searching, open-minded, many-voiced conversation.

*Outside the classroom*, our communal dialogue begins on the first day of school, when every member of the school community – students, faculty, and staff – shares his or her response to the all-school summer-reading. That discussion continues throughout the year at every Morning Meeting, which ends with a student or staff member reading a poem of his or her choosing. During the Showcase of Students Plays in the spring, student writing in a variety of genres is performed on two nights running, typically to a sell-out crowd. The communal conversation comes to a close at the end of the year, with the publication of an ambitious student literary magazine and the presentation of staff-written speeches about each graduating senior. The collective creative process also involves extra-curricular activities, like the songwriting and theatre clubs, and independent creative projects, such as student-created mix tapes, chapbooks and creative-writing Senior Projects. The St. Francis community is a space of publication and engaged literary discourse.

At St Francis, we believe that to take the time, effort, and care to consider not only what we say but how we say it, and to pay close, careful attention – whether as participants in a revision workshop, readers of a monumental poem, or audience members at a spoken-word performance – to the words of others are not only indispensable human responsibilities but also educated pleasures no one should have to live without.

### English Department Course Offerings

#### **English I** (*Ramirez; 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 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** (*Salerno; 1 credit*)

Sophomores study vocabulary in the context of the reading material. Usage and sentence structure will be addressed throughout the year. Students will write frequently in a variety of genres, including journal responses, poems, short fiction, memoir, and formal analytical essays, and will read in all genres, including lyric poetry, drama (a Shakespeare play), short stories, novels, and literary criticism.

**English III** (*Paice; 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** (*Paice, Salerno; 1 credit*)

This course explores how literature and film communicate notions of personal and collective identity, the social conditions of marginalized populations, and construction of gender. We concentrate heavily on honing our writing skills with special attention to strong sentence composition and close, creative reading. Most immediately, we will address the most effective ways to craft an engaging personal statement for college admissions. Class meetings will combine lecture and discussion formats. Passionate and thoughtful participation is required.

**AP English Literature and Composition** (*Salerno; 1 credit*)

*(Prerequisites: B+ in 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 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. Students enrolled in this class are expected to sit for the AP English Literature examination in May.

**Race in American Cinema** (*Paice; 1 credit*)

This course examines racial representations in American cinema. Seizing on the way racial identity is often accentuated, sensationalized, demonized, and eroticized on screen—most often with too little apparent regard for the political contexts in which they operate—we will conduct close readings of a range of movies from cinematic blockbusters to the work of auteurs like

Spike Lee, Quentin Tarantino, Sofia Coppola, Mel Brooks, and John Singleton. Capturing the political complexity of these films, we will explore how filmic representations of race -- along with gender identity and sexuality -- produce a matrix of potentially ambivalent meanings. There will be a textbook with supplementary readings provided.

**Writing and Reading Poetry** (*Ramirez; Fall and/or Spring; 1/2 or 1 credit*)

In this course, students will engage in a wide variety of projects and games, all centered around 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century poetry (but also including, from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a little of the Anglo-Saxon poetic form). Students will draft and revise their own poems, in free verse and forms, starting from many models, games, and prompts. In a writing workshop, students will contribute ideas for the revision of their peers' drafts. We will also work on performing poetry; the class will plan and host an evening poetry reading at the school in the spring. Because poets also read poetry, the course will ask students to devise their own reading lists, focusing on three or four contemporary published poets, who will become their textual mentors, and whose work they'll present to the class at intervals. Attending one poetry reading each semester will be required. Students interested in serving as an editorial board for the 2017-18 literary magazine will have that opportunity in April and May. The course may be taken for either fall or spring semester, or both.

**New Voices Playwriting at St. Francis** (*J. Jones; 1/4 credit*)

Aimed at teaching the basics of playwriting, students will learn how to transform imagination into characters, dialogue, and action by writing monologues, dialogues, and short plays. Students will create and act through writing new works that speak authentically in their own voice. Student-written plays will be submitted to the Actors Theatre of Louisville New Voices Young Playwrights Contest, where winning plays are developed and fully produced in an evening of world premieres performed on stage at Actors Theatre by members of the Acting Apprentice Company. In addition, plays written in the class will be eligible for St. Francis School's December drama production, the Showcase of Student-Written and Directed Plays. This class will meet once a week during the Projects period during the first semester. The class is open to students in all grade levels.