

# Comprehensive Course Syllabus

## Literary Explorations I

### Course Objectives

The purpose of this course is to develop students' processes for building knowledge through writing, discussion, speaking, and research. By practicing skills of close reading, argument, rhetorical analysis, and research, students will deepen their knowledge of culture, literature, and current events. You'll be asked to read, think, and write with a critical eye, learning to ask and answer questions about a variety of written, visual, and other texts to help generate meaning and understanding. You'll also become familiar with the language of rhetoric, a field that concerns itself with relationships between authors, audiences, and ideas; contexts for communication; and means of persuasion.

### INSTRUCTOR:

- Dr. Michael Hancock
- Office Number: A136B
- Office Hours: A, B, D: Mods 2, 4 (9:00-9:55, 11:00-11:55);  
C: Mods 2-4 (9:00-11:55);  
I: 1-4 PM;  
also by appointment.
- Office Phone: (630) 907-5981
- E-mail: [mhanc@imsa.edu](mailto:mhanc@imsa.edu)

### Meeting Days, Times, and Room:

Section 3 (A-B, D): Mod 3 (10:00-10:55), A119

Section 9 (A, C-D): Mod 8 (3:20-4:15), A113

### Text(s) / Materials:

*March* (trilogy) by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell; selections from *AmericanRhetoric.com*; news and informational sources

**Essential Content:**

- Students will understand conventions of literary genres and be able to explain their uses and effects [English A.1, B.4].
- Students will evaluate the influence of historical context on form, style, and point of view [English A.5].
- Students will work collaboratively to come to an understanding of readings [English E.1-2, E.4-5].
- Students will develop greater autonomy as readers and writers by generating and responding to their own substantive questions about authors and literary works [English A.3-7, B.1, C.1, D.1].
- Students will experience writing as an incremental and recursive process by drafting, critiquing, and revising expository works [English B.2-3, C.3-5, D.2, D.4, E.3].
- Students will use research to provide an historical perspective on readings and to relate readings to contemporary issues [English A.8-9, C.2, D.1-4].
- Students will reflect upon literacy learning as a lifelong endeavor and set goals for themselves as literacy learners based on their strengths, needs, and aspirations [English C.1, D.1, E.3, E.5].

**SSLs and Outcomes:**

- I.A: Develop automaticity in skills, concepts, and processes that support and enable complex thought.
- I.B: Construct questions which further understanding, forge connections, and deepen meaning.
- II.B: Find and analyze ambiguities inherent within any set of textual, social, physical, or theoretical circumstances.
- III.A: Use appropriate technologies as extensions of the mind.
- III.B: Recognize, pursue, and explain substantive connections within and among areas of knowledge.
- III.C: Recreate the beautiful conceptions that give coherence to structures of thought.
- IV.A: Construct and support judgments based on evidence.

- IV.B: Write and speak with power, economy, and elegance.
- IV.D: Develop an aesthetic awareness and capability.
- V.B: Make reasoned decisions which reflect ethical standards, and act in accordance with those decisions.

### **Instructional Design and Approach:**

Throughout the course, we'll consider aspects of the American experience, current events, and social tensions through a variety of texts. We'll pay special attention to the ideas, concepts, values, and problems that follow this culture and its people through time.

Along the way, you'll be challenged to produce projects—including essays, presentations, multimodal projects, and other forms of assessment and homework—to make the value of what we read, discover, and discuss come alive.

Ultimately, the goal of this course is to support and inspire inventive, insightful thinking and communication from students.

### **Laptop Policy:**

The default position for your laptop in this class is closed. This means, from the moment class starts, unless I ask you to use it, I don't expect to see it open. We will use laptops frequently for in-class work and research and even for online readings, but to the greatest extent possible, this will be a laptop-free class. I will let you know when you need to use your laptop, but otherwise, your screen should be closed. Research shows that taking notes by hand is more effective than doing so on a laptop, as it improves comprehension and recall and minimizes distractions for yourself and others around you, so get some practice doing that. If you have a special need that requires accommodation in this area, please see me. Facebook, e-mail, games, messaging, phones, etc.: don't.

### **Academic Honesty:**

Any work you turn in should be yours alone and should not have been previously submitted for another class or assignment. Acknowledge your indebtedness for what you borrow from others, and cite your sources consistently and appropriately using MLA format. Do not copy from other sources, published or unpublished, or present others' work, partial or whole, as your own. Students suspected of academic dishonesty will be referred for formal discipline, with possible sanctions including, but not limited to, loss of credit for an assignment and academic suspension. For more details, please see the *Student/Parent Handbook* for IMSA's academic behavior code, which applies to all of our assignments: <https://www.imsa.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019-2020-Student-Parent-HandbookPDF.pdf>.

## Assessment Practices, Procedures, and Processes:

The work of the course is assessed on a percentage basis: A=100-93; A-=92-90; B+=89-87; B=86-83; B-=82-80; C+=79-77; C=76-73; C-=72-70; D=69 or lower. **It is the English department's policy not to round up quarter or semester grades.**

### Grades are calculated according to the following category weights:

Papers: 60%  
Projects and presentations: 20%  
Homework and quizzes: 10%  
Ownership of learning (self-assessed): 10%

### Grades are to be interpreted in the following manner:

A=Exceeds course requirements  
B=Meets course requirements  
C=Needs improvement  
D=Does not meet course requirements

For written work, "A" work is eloquent, cogent, and sometimes profound; "B" work is committed but a bit prosaic, clunky, or off-the-mark; "C" work suffers from serious writing and/or comprehension errors. More detailed guidelines are available on Moodle. Students are encouraged to confer with their teacher before and after assignments are due so that they understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

You may revise your papers (A- or below) within a week of their return for a higher grade; the revision grade will be averaged with the original grade. For revisions, include the original (graded with comments) and revised copies of your paper, along with a brief typed synopsis of your changes (bullet points are fine). The revision policy is intended to help you improve your writing and encourage significant changes, so **revision will not hurt your grade**. If a revised version is less successful than the original, its grade will not count towards the average.

All assignments should be turned in by the day and time and in the format specified in class or on Moodle. **Late papers and projects will be lowered by half a letter grade (five percentage points) for each weekday (Monday-Friday) they are late, and late papers are not revisable. Papers that are more than a week late will receive no credit.** Late homework and missed quizzes cannot be made up, except in the case of excused absences.

## **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME**

**RESPECT:** I expect that my students have ideas to contribute to our discussions and to the world. Even when students have difficulties in class, I believe in their capacity to improve their thinking, writing, and communication. I will strive to take your ideas seriously and to fully acknowledge you as a person with a complex life.

**HELP AND GUIDANCE:** I want you to succeed in my class, and I have chosen this profession because I want to work with you inside and outside of class to make that happen. If you are confused by an assignment or are struggling with something we are doing in class, stop by my office so we can talk about it. If you are having trouble understanding something, contact me early and often. Plan ahead so if you need help, you have time to get it.

**AVAILABILITY:** I will respond to clear, self-contained questions direct to my IMSA e-mail within 24 hours. I will make myself available during office hours and by appointment.

**ENTHUSIASM FOR YOUR IDEAS:** As a teacher, I am interested in helping you understand my ideas and the ideas of authors. I'm even more interested, however, in helping you hone and communicate your own ideas. If you're having trouble connecting the content of the course with the things that interest and concern you most, please come see me during office hours so I can help you find the connections.

**USEFUL FEEDBACK:** I will spend a lot of time crafting comments and feedback on your assignments. It is important to me that you do your best to understand that feedback and produce work that responds to it. If you have trouble understanding my comments on your work, please see me during office hours.

**HIGH STANDARDS:** A high level of quality work is expected in English courses. IMSA students, past and present, have demonstrated the capacity to think critically, speak cogently, and write with power and elegance. I believe that writing and literature are serious, important pursuits that will be crucial to your life, education, and career, whether you end up being a biologist, a mathematician, a doctor, an engineer, a teacher, or a novelist. Grades in my class are not "given," and points in my class are not "lost" from some arbitrary beginning point. Instead, grades in my class are earned through hard work and the difficult process of completing challenging assignments and projects.

## **WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU**

**CONSISTENT ATTENDANCE AND SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION:** At the scheduled start time of class, you should be in your seat and ready for a conversation. Come prepared with questions and observations about our readings, and be willing to share those questions and observations in small groups and in the large-group conversation.

**RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH CLASSMATES' IDEAS:** Discussions of literature—and contemporary ways of thinking about literature—can involve challenging, contentious topics. Even when you disagree with your classmates, it is absolutely crucial to the success of our conversations that you treat them with respect. I will treat you like adults, and I expect you to treat your classmates like adults engaged in a respectful conversation.

**HONESTY:** I assume that you will tell me the truth and that your work represents your own effort. Please match my respect with your honesty.

**COMMITMENT TO PROCESS:** You will probably enjoy many of the texts we read in this class, but there are some you may not enjoy. Even if you realize a certain text is not your cup of tea, work through it and try to find what’s interesting about it, even if it’s hard. Similarly, commit to improving your writing, whether or not you believe you are a strong writer. All of us, including me, still have lots to learn when it comes to writing.

**WILLINGNESS TO SEEK HELP:** I love nothing more than helping students improve their work. I can only do so, however, if students seek out my help. Taking advantage of my help—and, as importantly, the help of tutors at the writing center—will help you become a stronger writer, thinker, and communicator.

**Sequence of Units for Literary Explorations I (subject to change; all assessments are underlined below):**

**Unit 1: Developing critical questions with *March***

- Establish classroom protocol for discussion of *March*.
- The intersections of fiction and nonfiction in *March*.
- Discussion of historical images and sources as compared to *March*.
- Developing critical questions about *March*: interactions between verbal and visual storytelling; questions of interpretation; refining questions and identifying strategies for pursuing them.

**Unit 2: Writing the Essay (verbally and visually)**

- Using critical questions to plan/outline an argument.
- Finding examples of evidence in the text.
- Drafting an argumentative essay.
- Close-reading (“verbal essay” presentation)
- Revising ideas and using feedback.

**Unit 3: Rhetorical analysis and persuasion**

- Introduce/review basic principles of classical rhetoric.
- Practice rhetorical analysis skills using a variety of documents and texts.
- Rhetorical analysis writing.
- Persuasive speaking/debate.

**Unit 4: Semi-independent research project**

- Identifying topics of interest and expertise.
- Finding and documenting a variety of sources about your topic of interest.
- Move beyond expository thinking to argument that advances knowledge.

- Synthesizing varied sources into a cohesive argument.
- Assembling an annotated bibliography.
- Developing core ideas and arguments through prewriting.
- Communicating specialized information and ideas to broad audiences.
- Describing one's project through a written abstract or "pitch."
- Drafting essay on research topic.
- Reformulating research for a new context, form, or audience.