

Course Description

English 9 Honors is an introductory high-school literature and composition course emphasizing close reading, literary analysis, thoughtful writing, and respectful academic discussion. Students will encounter short fiction, poetry, the novel, and drama while learning to examine how writers use character, imagery, structure, language, point of view, and other literary techniques to create meaning.

The course is organized around recurring questions of **character, choice, responsibility, perseverance, identity, individuality, community, communication, and moral courage**. Students move from shorter and more accessible works toward sustained literary analysis, increasingly independent interpretation, and more developed analytical writing.

Honors-level work emphasizes not simply greater quantity, but greater depth. Students are expected to **read more carefully, write more thoughtfully, discuss more respectfully, and notice more deeply**.

A guiding question introduced at the beginning of the year and revisited throughout the course is:

How do ordinary choices reveal extraordinary character?

Course Goals

By the end of English 9 Honors, students should be able to:

- Read literary texts closely and increasingly independently.
- Identify significant details, patterns, and changes within a text.
- Analyze character, conflict, setting, imagery, tone, point of view, structure, and theme.
- Distinguish observation from interpretation.
- Support literary interpretations with appropriate textual evidence.
- Develop a clear and defensible analytical thesis.
- Integrate quotations effectively into analytical writing.
- Explain the relationship between evidence and argument.
- Distinguish literary analysis from plot summary.
- Organize analytical essays into coherent arguments.
- Revise writing for clarity, organization, precision, grammar, and style.
- Apply appropriate MLA conventions.
- Compare literary works across genres and historical contexts.
- Participate thoughtfully and respectfully in literary discussion.
- Listen carefully to competing interpretations and respond with evidence.
- Develop an increasingly independent literary voice.

Unit I — Character Through Short Fiction

Weeks 1–4

Essential Question

How do ordinary choices reveal extraordinary character?

Core Texts

- Langston Hughes, “**Thank You, Ma’am**”
- Eudora Welty, “**A Worn Path**”
- Ray Bradbury, “**The Pedestrian**”

Focus

The opening unit establishes the fundamental habits of Honors English: careful observation, annotation, discussion, and evidence-based interpretation.

The three stories present contrasting forms of character and courage. Students examine generosity and moral authority in Hughes, perseverance in Welty, and individuality and resistance to conformity in Bradbury.

Students begin to ask not simply what characters are like, but **how authors reveal character through action, dialogue, setting, imagery, conflict, and choice.**

Major Skills

Close reading; annotation; characterization; setting; conflict; point of view; theme; textual evidence; analytical paragraphs; quotation integration.

Major Assessment

Character Analysis Essay

Unit II — Poetry I: Learning to Notice

Weeks 5–8

Essential Question

How can a small number of words contain a large amount of meaning?

Core Texts — Robert Frost

- “**The Road Not Taken**”
- “**Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**”
- “**Nothing Gold Can Stay**”

- “Birches”
- “Mending Wall”

Focus

Students learn to slow down their reading and attend carefully to diction, imagery, sound, figurative language, form, repetition, speaker, tone, and ambiguity.

The concentration on several works by one poet allows students to recognize recurring concerns while resisting the temptation to reduce either an individual poem or a poet's work to a single message.

Major Skills

Close reading of poetry; diction; imagery; metaphor; sound and rhythm; speaker; tone; form; ambiguity; comparative analysis.

Major Assessment

Poetry Close-Reading Essay

Unit III — Friendship, Conscience, and Responsibility

Weeks 9–16

Core Text

John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*

Essential Question

How accurately do we understand our own motives, and what responsibility do we bear for the consequences of our choices?

Focus

A Separate Peace expands students' work from short-form character analysis to sustained study of a novel.

Students examine Gene Forrester's retrospective narration, his relationship with Finny, friendship and rivalry, jealousy, guilt, denial, memory, self-knowledge, and the larger presence of World War II.

The novel asks students to distinguish among what Gene does, what Gene says about himself, and what the reader can reasonably infer. Students therefore encounter increasingly complex questions of motive, narration, responsibility, and interpretation.

Major Topics

- Friendship and rivalry
- Jealousy
- Guilt and denial
- Memory
- Retrospective narration
- Reliability and self-knowledge
- Summer and winter imagery
- War and private conflict
- Responsibility and forgiveness

Major Assessment

Literary Analysis Essay

Unit IV — Jewish Voices: Identity, Memory, and America

Weeks 17–21

Essential Question

What survives when a people moves from one world into another?

Core Texts

- Sholem Aleichem, “**Elul**”
- Anzia Yezierska, “**The Lost ‘Beautifulness’**”
- Isaac Asimov, “**Unto the Fourth Generation**”

Focus

This unit examines Jewish literature across changing cultural and generational circumstances.

Sholem Aleichem introduces students to the world of Eastern European Jewish life, community, tradition, humor, and religious time.

Yezierska moves the course into the Jewish immigrant experience in America. Through “The Lost ‘Beautifulness,’” students consider immigration, aspiration, family, class, dignity, assimilation, and the experience of a Jewish immigrant woman confronting American life.

Asimov's “Unto the Fourth Generation” brings the sequence into a later and more assimilated America, asking what remains of ancestry, family memory, and inherited identity across generations.

Together, the texts allow students to trace a progression:

Tradition → Immigration → Assimilation and Memory

Major Skills

Historical and cultural context; narrative voice; characterization; close reading; comparative analysis; identity and literature; distinguishing textual analysis from historical generalization.

Major Assessment

Comparative Literary Analysis

Unit V — Ordinary Life and What We Fail to See

Weeks 22–25

Core Text

Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*

Essential Question

Do human beings recognize the value of ordinary life while they are living it?

Focus

Our Town introduces students to a distinctive form of American drama while bringing the course's emphasis on attention and ordinary experience into sharper focus.

Through Grover's Corners, the Stage Manager, the Gibbs and Webb families, and particularly Emily Webb, students examine everyday life, family, community, growing up, marriage, time, memory, mortality, and the human tendency to overlook what is immediately before us.

The play also introduces important dramatic innovations, including minimal scenery, direct address, pantomime, manipulation of theatrical time, and metatheatrical awareness.

The unit therefore connects literary theme with the larger intellectual habit the course seeks to cultivate: **learning to notice**.

Major Topics

- Ordinary life
- Family and community
- Time
- Memory
- Mortality
- Attention and appreciation

- The Stage Manager
- Dramatic structure
- Minimalist staging
- Metatheater

Major Assessment

Close-Reading / Dramatic Analysis

Unit VI — Perseverance, Language, and Human Connection

Weeks 26–30

Core Text

William Gibson, *The Miracle Worker*

Essential Question

What does it take to reach another person?

Focus

Through the relationship between Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller, students examine perseverance, communication, education, discipline, compassion, independence, family, and the development of language.

The play places two strong female figures at its center. Anne and Helen demonstrate different forms of determination and agency, allowing students to return to the course's opening questions about character and courage from a new perspective.

Following *Our Town*, students can also compare two very different uses of dramatic form. Wilder frequently relies upon narration, minimalism, and theatrical convention, while Gibson makes extensive use of physical action, conflict, gesture, staging, and communication beyond spoken language.

Major Topics

- Perseverance
- Communication and language
- Education
- Discipline and compassion
- Family relationships
- Independence
- Female agency
- Characterization through action

- Dialogue and stage directions
- Physical and nonverbal communication

Major Assessment

Dramatic Analysis / Character Essay

Unit VII — Poetry Revisited: Voice, Identity, and Attention

Weeks 31–33

Essential Question

How does a poet make us see an ordinary experience differently?

Authors

Selected poems by:

- **Emily Dickinson**
- **Langston Hughes**
- **Gwendolyn Brooks**
- **Mary Oliver**

Focus

Students return to poetry after having completed the major fiction and drama units of the course.

Rather than introducing poetry anew, this unit asks students to apply the close-reading abilities developed throughout the year to unfamiliar poems with increasing independence.

The unit also broadens the range of poetic voices encountered in the course and allows students to consider voice, identity, community, perception, interior experience, and attention.

The return to Langston Hughes provides additional continuity: students encounter Hughes first as a short-story writer at the beginning of the year and return to his work as a poet near its conclusion.

Major Skills

Independent close reading; speaker; voice; imagery; diction; structure; ambiguity; comparative analysis; oral discussion.

Assessment

Short Poetry Close Reading / Comparative Response

Weeks 34–35 — Synthesis, Review, and Final Assessment

The concluding weeks return students to the major questions and skills developed throughout the course.

Students reconsider the year's opening question:

How do ordinary choices reveal extraordinary character?

They may compare figures including Mrs. Jones, Phoenix Jackson, Leonard Mead, Gene Forrester, Finny, characters from the Jewish literature unit, Emily Webb, Anne Sullivan, and Helen Keller.

Students also trace their development as readers:

Notice → Interpret → Support → Explain → Compare

Final Assessment

A cumulative assessment incorporating:

- Literary terminology
- Close reading
- Poetry analysis
- Major works
- Short textual analysis
- Comparative interpretation
- Analytical writing

The final examination will emphasize students' ability to apply the literary skills developed during the year rather than simple recollection of plot.

Writing and Composition

Writing instruction is integrated throughout the course.

Students will receive instruction and practice in:

- Developing an analytical thesis
- Topic sentences and paragraph organization
- Selecting relevant textual evidence
- Introducing and integrating quotations
- Commentary and explanation
- Distinguishing analysis from summary
- Introductions and conclusions
- Transitions
- Revision

- Sentence clarity and variety
- Grammar, punctuation, and usage
- MLA formatting and citation

Assignments increase gradually in complexity and independence over the course of the year.

Vocabulary and Language Study

Vocabulary instruction will primarily emerge from the literature students are reading. Students will develop strategies for determining meaning through context, word structure, and appropriate reference materials.

Grammar, mechanics, and usage will be addressed both directly and through student writing, with an emphasis on applying grammatical knowledge to clearer and more effective prose.

Discussion and Participation

Literary interpretation develops through conversation as well as writing. Students will participate regularly in:

- Whole-class literary discussion
- Small-group analysis
- Close-reading exercises
- Write-pair-share activities
- Socratic-style discussion
- Oral and dramatic reading
- Short presentations

Students are expected to support interpretations with textual evidence and engage respectfully with differing interpretations.

Listening is considered an essential academic skill. Successful participation includes not only speaking, but preparation, attentive listening, thoughtful written work, and respectful response to others.

Academic Expectations and Integrity

As an Honors course, English 9 requires consistent preparation, careful reading, thoughtful writing, and active intellectual engagement.

Students are expected to arrive prepared, complete assigned reading, maintain appropriate notes, meet deadlines, and participate respectfully.

All submitted work must represent the student's own reading, thinking, and writing unless collaboration or outside assistance has specifically been authorized. Digital tools, including

artificial intelligence, may be used only when permitted by the instructor for a particular assignment.

35-Week Course Overview

We eks	Unit	Principal Texts	Major Assessment
1–4	I. Character Through Short Fiction	Hughes, Welty, Bradbury	Character Analysis Essay
5–8	II. Poetry I: Learning to Notice	Robert Frost	Poetry Close-Reading Essay
9–16	III. Friendship, Conscience & Responsibility	<i>A Separate Peace</i>	Literary Analysis Essay
17–21	IV. Jewish Voices	“Elul,” “The Lost ‘Beautifulness,’” “Unto the Fourth Generation”	Comparative Analysis
22–25	V. Ordinary Life and What We Fail to See	<i>Our Town</i>	Dramatic Analysis
26–30	VI. Perseverance, Language & Human Connection	<i>The Miracle Worker</i>	Dramatic / Character Analysis
31–33	VII. Poetry Revisited	Dickinson, Hughes, Brooks, Oliver	Short Close Reading
34–35	Synthesis and Final Assessment	Full Year	Cumulative Final

Overall Course Progression

The curriculum is deliberately cumulative:

Character

How do choices reveal who we are?

Attention

How does careful reading reveal what we initially overlook?

Conscience

How well do we understand our own motives and responsibilities?

Identity

What survives as individuals and communities encounter change?

Ordinary Life

Do we recognize the value of everyday experience?

Communication

What does it take for one person truly to reach another?

Voice and Attention

How can language teach us to see differently?

The central goal of English 9 Honors is that students finish the year as **more careful readers, clearer writers, more thoughtful speakers, and more attentive listeners.**