

8th Grade English Language Arts & Reading

Teacher: Kalah Thompson

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Tutorials: Tuesday & Thursday from 7:45-8:10am; afternoons by appointment

Class website (also linked in Canvas):

<https://sites.google.com/g.dentonisd.org/coachthompson8thgradeenglish?usp=sharing>

Required supplies:

- Pencil/pen
- Highlighter
- **Composition book:** Students need one **for ELAR only** that stays in the ELAR classroom. All assignments will be completed by hand at school unless accommodations apply.
- **Folder:** Students need one **for ELAR only** that stays in the ELAR classroom.
- Chromebook & charger: used for research and accommodations
- Wired headphones: necessary for audiobook accommodations

Timeline of a Class (90 minutes)

- Gather supplies; review tasks, student sound off on topics of choice, 5-7 minutes
- Grammar pattern analysis (Mon.-Wed.) or vocabulary work (Thurs.-Fri.), 20 minutes
- Teacher read aloud and/or independent reading time, 25 minutes
- Break, 5-10 minutes (good behavior earns the longer break)
- Lesson + independent work time, 25-30 minutes
- Clean up and pack up, 2-5 minutes

Overview of Curriculum

What We'll Read

- Quarter 1: Literary nonfiction from around the world
- Quarter 2: Contemporary and classical fiction; poetry (comparative work)
- Quarter 3: Dystopian fiction and short stories
- Quarter 4: Research into a real world topic of choice

What We'll Write

- Quarter 1: A journalism piece on a local, national, or global topic of choice
- Quarter 2: An argumentative essay for or against a given position
- Quarter 3: An informational essay on theme and literary craft
- Quarter 4: A poetry chapbook:
 - Using structure: blackout poem
 - Using literary techniques: found poem
 - Using rhyme: six word memoir
 - Using rhythm: tanka poem
- **The Notebook:** where each student's thinking will live. Over the year, this becomes a record of what they noticed, what they valued, and how their minds changed. The notebook will include:
 - Observations on art, culture, social life, oneself
 - Meditations on values and other philosophical topics
 - Dialogues with authors/characters using quotations gathered from independent reading
 - Patterns of grammar selected from class read-alouds to be analyzed for style choices

What We'll Analyze

- **Grammar:**
 - In the notebook patterns project (see above), we will review and build on all of the grammar that students have learned so far, but view it through a creative writing lens. The aim is to see how "rules" can serve specific purposes – like to inform, persuade, or enchant the reader and to show the writer's personality.
- **Logic:**
 - Quarter 1: Types of arguments
 - Quarter 2: How to spot a bad argument: introduction to logical fallacies
 - Quarter 3: Introduction to game theory: applying logic to real world situations
 - Quarter 4: Applying logic while navigating the internet

Public Speaking Practice

- Quarter 1: Individual "pitch" for their journalism story
- Quarter 2: Team debate in the "Logic Courtroom"
- Quarter 4: Individual research project presentation with an accompanying slide deck

The Side Hustle

- Ongoing throughout the year
- Once the day's work is complete, students will spend up to 10–15 minutes on an ELAR-related independent project. They choose the focus and how they'll show growth – sticking with it for at least 9 weeks.
- Examples: calligraphy, creative writing, language learning, independent reading, music analysis, typing skills, vocabulary building, chess, or library research.

Course Objectives

By the end of 8th grade, students should be able to:

- Read with sustained attention for 20+ minutes, using texts above their beginning-of-the-year reading level.
- Write fluidly and in their own voice about art, culture, social life, and philosophy.
- Argue a position clearly, using logic and evidence.
- Speak confidently in front of a room of people.
- Show meaningful growth in a self-chosen topic or skill (see “Side Hustle” above).

Aesthetics

To my way of thinking, education is not simply job preparation. The best kind of education trains the mind how to see the world clearly so that we are not fooled, not lost, and not easy to push around. Education is self-help. We learn to know what we like, what we think, and what will make us happy. We train how to read, write, think, and speak well so that, once we've decided what a good life means, we have the tools to go and get it. **I believe that every student, no matter their background, deserves to become a self-reliant and self-reflecting human being**—not just a trained worker or obedient test-taker.

In their notebooks, I will ask students to wrestle with philosophical ideas they pick up in their chosen books. They will pull quotations to think about and argue with. **While I encourage students to ask deep questions and challenge assumptions, my goal is never to direct their beliefs—only to sharpen their thinking.**

Below are a few of my favorite quotations that guide me as a teacher.

“I seek in books only to give myself pleasure by honest amusement; or if I study, I seek only the learning that treats knowledge of myself and instructs me in how to live well.”

— Michel de Montaigne (*Essays*)

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*We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

-- T.S. Eliot ("Little Gidding")

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*A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly.
Specialization is for insects.*

-- Robert A. Heinlein ("Time Enough for Love")

Grading Policy

All work must be the student's own—**written by them**, not AI, a parent, or the internet. Unless a special exception is made, **all work will be completed in class** to guarantee authenticity.

I don't really care about due dates as long as they meet district deadlines for progress reports or report cards. However, work submitted more than a week late may not receive detailed feedback.

I grade reading insofar as I ask them to complete assignments ABOUT things they've read. They can't do these assignments if they haven't read. **I grade participation** in the form of contributions to classwide or group discussions. The only ones who fail are those who sleep through class or make no attempt.

If absent, students are responsible for checking the class pacing calendar (in your email and posted to Canvas) and the hyperlinked notes to get caught up. They should complete missing reading at home, if possible.

Our Classroom Code

This classroom is a space for thinking, learning, and creating. That means we all need to feel safe, respected, and focused. We don't follow rules just to be rule-followers. We follow them to protect the real work happening here: growing into better versions of ourselves. Every time we interrupt or mess around, we waste a bit of that opportunity—for ourselves and for each other. These expectations help make sure that doesn't happen.

Student Responsibilities

- At the bell:
 - Hang your backpack on the hook under your desk.
 - Get the day's supplies (listed on the board).
 - Be in your seat, ready to start, **within one minute of the bell**.
- During class:
 - Listen when someone else is speaking—me or a classmate.
 - Raise your hand to share your thoughts.
 - Stay in your seat unless you've asked to move.
 - Stay awake and engaged.
 - Keep your hands, feet, and words respectful.
- What's NOT allowed:
 - Phone use (now banned by state law, anyway).
 - Headphones (unless we're using them for a lesson).
 - Side conversations, cursing, interrupting, or shouting.
 - Throwing things, play-fighting, or damage to supplies.
- At the end of class:
 - Two minutes before the bell, we'll clean up, return supplies, and get ready to go.
 - You'll wait at your seat—not at the door—until I dismiss you.

Food & Drink Policy

- The 8th grade floor does not permit snacks unless there is a doctor's note or special teacher permission.
- Bring a water bottle.

What Happens If Expectations Aren't Followed

I keep a clipboard for behavior notes—not to embarrass anyone, just to keep track. Here's what happens if you ignore a warning and continue breaking rules:

- 1st time: lunch detention & parent email
- 2nd time: lunch detention & parent phone call
- 3rd time: office referral; lunch detention with administrator or after-school detention.
- Beyond: office referral; admin discretion

How to Be Successful in This Class

- **Be you.** Share your opinions. Remember that not everyone will see the world the same way, and that can be a beautiful thing.
- **Finish what you start.** Ask for help when you need it. Do your best by *choosing* to work hard.
- **Keep an open mind.** There is something interesting or useful in everything. Find that special thing and forget the rest.
- **Feel deeply *and* think clearly.** Emotion and logic are complementary colors—use both often, and in balance.
- **Read daily.** Commit to a book during class reading time, and read again at home as often as you can. Books let us live thousands of lives. They teach us to see the world in new ways and to know ourselves more fully. The better we know ourselves, the easier it is to move through the world with confidence, curiosity, and peace of mind. Let books be your primary teachers. You'll meet authors and characters who show you new experiences and ways of thinking. Argue with them in your writing. Borrow their best ideas, then shape your own perspective and judgment. This is the real purpose of an ELAR class.

When class feels tough and your brain checks out, what's one thing you can do to get your focus back?

Student signature: _____

Parent/guardian signature: _____

(Turn this in by Friday, August 16th for a 100 minor grade.)