

American Literature Syllabus

2026-27

Castro Valley High School

Mr. Olazabal | Room F8

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www.bit.ly/mro_english

Greetings!

Writing and literature are tools for reflection, growth, and community. Without the contributions of each member of society, there would be nothing to learn from these works. As such, no study of composition, literature, or speech can be complete without understanding the context in which these were written, studied, and taught. In the case of our class, this course is a result of the contributions of not only the authors and teachers who created and curated the course materials, but also the ancestral voices, both willing and unwilling, of all our community members. The content of this course cannot help but reverberate with the voices of those whose labor and suffering built all that we hold dear. These include the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, immigrants, migrants, enslaved people, incarcerated people, and so many others whose contributions are crucial to the foundation of our country. Echoes of their exploitation and their hope call us to pause, reflect on, acknowledge, and build each other up from all that was for the sake of all that will be.

Course Description

This college-preparatory course asks students to consider and question both traditional and contemporary assumptions behind the terms, "American" and "literature." Students will be required to read, analyze, and discuss all literary genres (with an emphasis on the novel). Study of the literature will routinely involve the history, culture, and diversity of American voices. Reflective, argumentative, and analytical essays will be required.

Course Focus Standards & Skills

- RL.4 - Word choice & meaning
- RL.5 - Analyzing text structure
- RL.9 - Comparing topics and themes
- RI.5 - Analyzing text structure
- RI.6 - Evaluating purpose and point of view
- RI.8 - Evaluating arguments
- RI.9 - Comparing topics and themes
- W.1 - Argumentative writing
- W.2 - Informative/explanatory writing
- W.8 - Analyzing and citing research
- SL.1 - Collaborative discussions
- SL.2 - Use and evaluate information
- SL.3 - Evaluate oral arguments
- L.3 - Using and analyzing context
- L.5 - Understand and analyze nuance in language

Materials *(see me if you need assistance obtaining materials)*

- College Ruled Composition Book
- 3x5 Index Cards
- Multiple Pencils
- Multiple Blue or Black Pens
- Independent Reading Book
- Current Class Text
- School-issued laptop and charger
- *Optional: water bottle*

Anticipated Course Texts

- *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
- *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller
- *There, There* by Tommy Orange
- *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger
- Independent Reading Choices
- *Short texts as needed.*

Grading System & Accountability

Grades

This class is standards-based and uses a proficiency scale grading system to evaluate your mastery of skills and course content. Your overall grade will be an average of your performance across the four central Common Core domains: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language, each weighted at 25%.

Likewise, within each domain your work is broken down into two categories: formative and summative. Formative work is weighted at 10% of the final grade; summative work is weighted at 90% of the final grade.

Formative work encompasses any of the learning tasks that build up to a summative assignment. These assignments typically include things like reading questions, quickwrites, worksheets, mini-projects, quizzes, etc. This work is tracked using the following symbols: + = Complete, Accurate, and Thorough, ✓ = the work is mostly complete or may contain inaccuracies, and - = the work was submitted but is not complete or contains many errors. Aside from this system, feedback on this work is typically given orally to the whole class, a group, or an individual depending on the situation.	Summative work includes a larger assignment like a closed-book test, an in-class essay, etc.
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Course Competency & Process Requirements

To pass this course, students must demonstrate basic competency across all domains. Practice and process work (like outlines, drafts, and graphic organizers) are graded within their respective domains and are strictly required.

- **Essential Course Milestones:** To fully demonstrate your learning and pass this class, you are required to submit all major final essays and take all major unit exams.
- **Unit Completion Policy:** Because each unit is designed to measure specific essential skills, missing a major essay or exam means we cannot assess your learning. Therefore, missing these major assessments will result in an incomplete/failing grade for that unit, regardless of points earned in other categories.
- **Step-by-Step Writing Policy:** Great writing is a process! Final essays will only be accepted and graded if the accompanying practice and process work (outlines, rough drafts) has been completed and signed off on first. To ensure you are on the right track, these tasks must be approved in their assigned chunks rather than turned in all at once at the end.
- **Prep is Key:** Process work is designed to prepare you for final assessments. If you choose not to complete the process work, you forfeit the privilege of using notes when they are allowed and will be required to complete the assessments from memory. Sharing materials is not allowed.
- **Assessment Verification:** All assessments are subject to verification via oral exam at teacher discretion. If a student fails to perform in such a way that reflects the original

exam score, the original score may be invalidated, and the student can choose to take the assessment again with Mr. O or can choose to accept a zero.

Reassessment Agreement

Per the CVHS English Department agreement, students who earned a D+ or lower on any single major writing assignment can be reassessed during Trojan Time. Additional retake opportunities are at the teacher's discretion and are subject to the following requirements:

- **Initial Submission:** Your initial attempt on the assessment or assignment must have been submitted on time and fully completed. Late work is not eligible for reassessment.
- **No Missing Work:** You must not have any missing or incomplete assignments in the gradebook. If you have missing work, you must fully complete any assigned study guides or graphic organizers in class and have it approved prior to the retake.
- **Multiple Choice:** You may do test corrections for multiple-choice sections to demonstrate learning, but multiple-choice exams may NOT be retaken.
- **Conference:** A student desiring reassessment must confer with Mr. O during Trojan Time or by appointment to request and create a study and reassessment plan. Make arrangements early and often!
- **Location:** All reassessment work must be completed in the classroom.
- **Time Limit:** Students have two weeks from the date a grade is posted in Aeries to initiate the reassessment process.
- **End of Semester:** Nothing submitted in the last two weeks of the semester is eligible for reassessment. Reassessments stop two weeks before the end of the semester.
- **Late Work:** Late work is not eligible for reassessment.
- **Formative** work is not eligible for reassessment.

Proficiency Grading Scale

Overall grades will average assignments and be computed as follows:

A	4.0 - 3.5	Advanced	The student can apply, extend, or transfer their learning to new, complex, or unfamiliar situations.
B	3.49-2.5	Proficient	The student shows a clear understanding and accurate application of curriculum and standards.
C	2.49-1.5	Foundational	The student shows partial understanding of the curriculum or standards with some errors or gaps in reasoning.
D	1.49-0.5	Minimal	The student shows minimal understanding of the curriculum standard or requires significant support.
F	0.49-0	No Evidence	The student shows little understanding of or made no attempt at the standard.

Classroom Policies, Expectations, and Information

Late & Make Up/Absent Work

Work is considered late if it is turned in after the due date. Late and make-up work must be submitted via the turn-in basket. Students have two calendar weeks to turn in their work after the due date. There is no grade penalty for late work; however, late work is not eligible for reassessment. Additional absences do not extend the two-week window.

In the case of an excused absence, students have double the number of days they are absent to submit their work (i.e., 2 days absent = due 4 days after return). In the case of an unexcused absence, all work is due upon return.

Accommodations are provided in accordance with IEPs and 504s.

Technology Use & Cell Phones

Students are expected to bring their district-issued devices to class each day, fully charged and ready for use.

Cell phones must be off and stored in the pocket chart during class unless specific permission is given each time. Smartwatches, earbuds, and headphones are not allowed during class, even if no audio is playing. Permission must also be requested each time before recording audio, taking photos, or capturing video.

All non-school devices must be silenced and put away out of sight during class time, including after completing work and during restroom breaks. Phones/mobile devices/listening devices may only be used with explicit teacher permission for instructional activities or through approved health/IEP accommodations. Unauthorized use will result in device confiscation after the first incident.

Hall Passes

Students will be allowed four hall passes per quarter to use for emergencies, with teacher permission, at appropriate times. Only one student may use the pass at a time. Students should not leave class during the first and last 10 minutes of the period, during direct instruction, or when students are presenting. Devices and backpacks must remain in the room while the pass is in use. While out on a hall pass, students must wear the classroom lanyard hall pass.

Slurs & Hate Speech

Slurs should not be spoken out loud during class. When reading a text aloud, do not read any slur (such as the “n-word”) aloud. In writing, exclude the word whenever possible; if it is necessary to include it as part of a quotation, censor the word by using * or -. In recordings, the teacher will make a reasonable attempt to mute, delete, or skip any instances. When outdated terms appear in course content, substitute the outdated terms with words that are appropriate in modern contexts. If students are unsure about a term, they should ask the teacher for clarification, saying something like, “Can you tell me the appropriate word to use when discussing the people in this material?” When in doubt, ask!

Slurs and hate speech are never allowed at school, regardless of intent. Using slurs and hate speech will result in an immediate referral to your Principal.

Cursing and Foul Language

While profanity does appear in literature, using it in class is prohibited except when quoting literature, AND the use of profanity is necessary to fully understand the quotation.

Extra Help

Students needing extra time can request a Trojan Time with Mr. O. If you cannot attend Trojan Time, extra help is available during lunch and after school most days.

Behavior Expectations

1. Follow all school rules.
2. Generally, all students should STAND:
 - a. Be **Safe**
 - b. Work **Together**
 - c. **Aspire** to do their best
 - d. **Never give up**
 - e. Value the **Diversity** of opinions and backgrounds of others
3. Come to class on time and be ready with class materials at your desk at the bell.
4. Take care of your needs (locker, bathroom, etc.) before or after class.
5. Do your own work. Don't share papers, use another student's work or ideas, or use AI/the Internet and submit the work as your own.

- 6. No food or drink in class, only bottled water.
- 7. No makeup or aerosol sprays in class.

Plagiarism:

Any incident of academic dishonesty will be handled according to the student handbook.

Expectations:

You can expect me to do my best to listen to and accommodate your needs for the class. I will come to class on time, organized, and prepared to teach. I will respect you and your opinions, and I will expect you to also respect your peers and me. I expect everyone to come to class prepared to actively learn and do their best.

Contact Information

Reach out via **ParentSquare**, email me at **tolazabal@cv.k12.ca.us** or call at **(510) 537-5910 x3978**. I will do my best to return correspondence within two working days.

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Please detach and return this bottom portion.

2026-7 American Literature Syllabus Signature Page

My signature indicates that I have read and understand the information outlined in the course syllabus.

Student

Student First & Last Name _____ Period ____

Student Signature _____

Adult at Home

Adult at Home's First & Last Name _____

Adult at Home's Signature _____