Mamaroneck High School Curriculum Overview

English Elective: Psychology and Literature, Grades 11–12

Note: Teachers retain professional discretion in how the learning is presented based on the needs and interests of their students.

Course Description

Psychology and Literature explores what happens when we read stories through the lens of the mind. Students study the ideas of Sigmund Freud, including repression, the interpretation of dreams, the structure of personality, and the talking cure, and use them as tools for reading literature more deeply. They also question those ideas, weighing their strengths and limits and considering how they hold up today.

The course moves from the historical roots of psychology in the late 1800s to modern memoir and fiction, and it ends with students' own research into a psychological question of their choice. Along the way, students write often and reflectively, from dream journals and reading responses to literary analysis and a research paper.

Classrooms are built around discussion and collaboration. Students take part in Socratic seminars and literature circles, share their perspectives, and connect what they read to their own lives and to the world around them.

Course at a Glance

The course is organized into five units, and teachers may adapt the order and pacing.

- **The Historical Roots of Psychology:** Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" alongside the competing "rest cure" and "talking cure" of the 1880s, exploring repression, gender norms of the era, and why Freud's ideas were revolutionary
- **Dreams:** Freud's theory of dream interpretation, applied to students' own dream journals and to novels read in literature circles
- **Personality:** Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, read through Freud's theory of personality to understand the forces that shaped Chris McCandless
- **Therapy and Storytelling:** Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* and the question of whether telling a story again and again helps a person work through trauma or keeps them stuck in it
- **Research:** an independent inquiry that applies psychological research, including modern perspectives, to a topic of the student's choice

What Students Read

Students read fiction, memoir, and nonfiction side by side with selections from Freud and other psychological writing.

Core texts: "The Yellow Wall-Paper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer

Psychological readings: selections from Sigmund Freud on repression, dreams, personality, and therapy, along with writing on S. Weir Mitchell's "rest cure" and research sources students find for their own inquiry.

Literature circles: in the dream unit, students choose a novel to read and discuss in small groups.

What Students Write

Writing in this course is both analytical and personal. Students use psychological ideas to analyze literature, and they use writing to reflect on their own experiences, dreams, and growth.

- **Comparative reflection:** an essay tracing a theme of the student's choice across two texts from the historical unit.

- **Dream journal:** students record and interpret three of their own dreams, then judge how well Freud's theory holds up.
- **Personality writing:** reflections on how Chris McCandless changes over the course of *Into the Wild*, and a creative piece imagining the student's own future self.
- **Research paper:** a 3–5 page paper applying psychological research to a question of the student's choice, built step by step through an annotated bibliography and outline.

Skills Students Build

Students build these skills through steady practice, not just in a few big assignments. Frequent, informal writing, such as journals, reading logs, and reader responses, builds toward polished, formal essays and a research paper that students draft, revise, and publish. Along the way, students get regular feedback from teachers and classmates and share their work with real audiences, so they grow steadily as writers.

Above all, students learn to see themselves as writers. They develop their own voice and style, and they learn that revision means far more than correcting errors. It can mean rethinking an argument, reorganizing a piece, or rewriting a section from scratch. Like professional writers, students seek out feedback from teachers and classmates and use it to shape their work. Writing also becomes a way of thinking, helping students make sense of the literature, nonfiction, and discussions they encounter and the world around them.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Writing

- Apply a theoretical lens, such as Freud's ideas about dreams or personality, to analyze a literary text, supporting their interpretation with well-chosen evidence.
- Compare how a theme develops across two or more texts.
- Write reflectively about their own experiences, connecting personal insight to the ideas they study.
- Research a psychological question, evaluate and combine multiple sources, and cite them correctly.
- Build an argument that takes a clear position on a complex question and supports it with evidence.
- Revise substantially, not just edit, in response to feedback.

Reading

- Identify central ideas and themes and analyze how they develop over the course of a text.
- Analyze how a text's structure and point of view shape its meaning, as in the connected stories of *The Things They Carried*.
- Evaluate the reasoning behind a theory, weighing its strengths and weaknesses rather than accepting it whole.

Speaking and Listening

- Prepare for and contribute to Socratic seminars and literature circles, citing evidence and building on the ideas of others.
- Discuss sensitive topics, such as trauma and mental health, thoughtfully and respectfully.

Standards

- New York State Next Generation English Language Arts Learning Standards
- MUFSD Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Curriculum Framework