

Course Expectations: ENGL 1488 Speculative Fiction

"I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound or stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow to the head, what are we reading for? So that it will make us happy...? Good Lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. That is my belief." - Franz Kafka

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Welcome to *Speculative Fiction*! Students in this course will read literature that presents apparently alternative societies in provocative manners. In reflecting upon these stories through discussion, research, and writing, students will inevitably challenge their own notions on contemporary society and critique its implications, both near and far. It is likely you have read speculative fiction stories in the past, perhaps *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, or *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, or you're a fan of the *Hunger Games* series. We will call upon our previous experience with this genre of stories, and we will tap into other media such as movies, music and art to round out the context. I am confident that all students will grow in their appreciation for how literature can profoundly affect our view of the world around us.

After initiating the year with the novel *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin and a study of several eclectically arranged short stories, we'll begin with the seminal anti-utopian texts *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell's *1984*. Next, we'll move into more apocalypse-driven dystopias, like Octavia Butler's groundbreaking Afrofuturist novel *Parable of the Sower* and Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*. And if we have time, we'll explore the postmodern trope of the Anti-hero in *A Clockwork Orange*...we'll see! Interspersed will be myriad short stories, articles, essays, song lyrics, music videos, visual art, and the occasional movie or series episode (i.e. *Black Mirror*). Through this supplementary content, students will also be encouraged to broaden their scope of what makes for effective writing and step outside their comfort zones when responding in writing.

For this senior elective, I consider myself more a facilitator than a teacher in the traditional sense, as the students are expected to take ownership of their own learning.

COURSE OBJECTIVE: Students will learn about and apply new manners of thinking about society, alternative approaches to analytical writing, and presentation skills.

COURSE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How are modernity's effects on humanity manifesting themselves in fiction?
- What are the components of a "normal and functioning" society?
- What are the purposes and values of speculative fiction?
- What potential does speculative fiction have for effecting real change in society?
- To what extent is human nature malleable?
- How do form, structure, and technique impact meaning in writing?
- What makes for effective presentation?

CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE (Climate, Culture, Environment, Aspirations)

The content of this course is provocative. As such, the expectation is that students arrive to class ready to engage in and react to the content earnestly, thoughtfully, respectfully, and with an open mind. Small-group and whole class discussions are frequent and paramount, so students need to be prepared and willing to contribute vocally and record notes that result from those discussions. Further, we work on the development of presentation skills, and there will be at least one significant group presentation each quarter.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY & PROFESSIONALISM

As Seniors, I expect you to take ownership and responsibility for your own learning, actions, and work. In order to maintain an atmosphere where you can practice personal responsibility, please note the following expectations:

- *Attendance:* I expect students to arrive on time, whether physically or remotely, and to engage earnestly in class activities. The official school attendance policy will be strictly adhered to in this class. Please read over the school attendance policy regarding tardiness, absences and “N’s.” Students with excused absences are expected to get homework from the course website and turn it in the following day. It is a student’s responsibility to alert me to absences and to coordinate makeup work. Work not completed as a result of unexcused absences will not be accepted.
- *Tardies:* If you are late, you will be held responsible for any work that was completed before you arrived. LHS is large and passing time is limited, but you should arrive on time. Chronic tardiness will impact your grade.
- *Technology Use:* Chromebooks yes; cell-phones no. However, we will be taking notes the old fashioned way, because pen-and-paper remains the most reliable technology we have! Thus, we will be active - not passive - in our classroom engagement. Simple rule: If the teacher is writing it down on the board, you should do the same. **Cell phones will be placed in the door-holder at the start of each class period.**
- *Academic Integrity:* Please review the school’s [Honor Code](#). The use of generative AI technologies (i.e. ChatGPT, etc), unless specifically part of an assignment, will not be allowed and considered a form of plagiarism, resulting in failing grades.

MATERIALS NEEDED

We will use both **mostly printed materials, and some electronic documents**. Therefore, you will need:

- *Your required reading materials* & a system for annotating texts (post-its, highlighters, etc)
- *An organizational system:* for handouts, readings, note-taking etc. (binders & paper folders)
- *A Chromebook* for journaling, accessing assignments, etc. (No personal computers allowed.)
- Again....there will be daily note-taking. Please have the necessary materials.

ASSESSMENTS & GRADES: The Aspen online gradebook can be a very helpful tool to keep track of assignments, but it can also look different from class to class and teacher to teacher. Below are some descriptions to help you navigate our English class gradebook set-up on Aspen:

- I use **TOTAL POINTS** to calculate grades. This means that each assignment is graded out of a number of points equal to the weight of the assignment. The number of points earned at the end of the quarter is compared to the total number of points possible to determine the quarterly grade.
 - Because I use total points for my gradebook, sometimes Aspen struggles to capture the true nature of a student’s quarter grade before I have had time to tackle multiple assignments. Aspen can be helpful to keep track of your assignments, but it can also paint an incomplete picture of your learning and progress. Please be wary of measuring yourself against Aspen and the data it spits out. Students are *so much more* than a number on a screen; each student’s average will reflect a more complex, representative picture as the quarter progresses.
- Within the “total points” calculation set-up, we note two categories into which assignments fall. Here are some examples of what kinds of work fall into each category:

Writing / Projects	Papers, projects and presentations.
Homework / Classwork	Classwork, homework, reading quizzes, participation and asynchronous work

- **End of Year Grade Calculation:** Quarter weights this year will be distributed evenly across four terms. Any kind of “final exam” or “final project” at the end of the year will be folded into your Quarter 4 grade. Communication about all such adjustments will be shared with students in advance of end-of-the-year report cards.
- **Some things to note when I enter grades:**
 - **Punctuality of Work Submission:** I expect work to be completed within the time frame provided. For regular smaller homework assignments, a student may be able to get partial credit for assignments done within two days of the due date; however, beyond that an assignment becomes and remains a zero. I do not allow students to make up a bunch of work at the end of a quarter weeks after it was due.
 - **NOTE:** Upon submission of larger assignments (essays), we enter a grade of B- (for example, an 81/100 for an essay) as a placeholder. While the final grade on that essay will likely be different, the B- placeholder means your overall quarter grade is more accurate now than if there were no grade entered until the essay is officially graded. This way, once it is graded, whether the grade is higher or lower than a B-, your overall quarter grade will not change that much; whereas, without that B- placeholder, in the two weeks or so it takes to grade a set of essays, your quarter grade would either be inaccurately high or inaccurately low.
 - For larger assignments we also enter a very small “in on time” grade. The purpose is to keep track of your punctuality on work completion.
 - Essays that are more than one day late will not only get the zero on the “in on time” grade, but will also lose a third of a grade per day being late. So, for example, if an essay is due on a Tuesday and you turn it in on Wednesday, you’ll get a zero on the “in on time” grade, but no penalty on the essay. However, if you turn it in on Friday and it would have been an A- paper, it is now three days late, so it will receive a grade of B-.
- Any questions students have about grades or the way they have translated to Aspen are welcome and encouraged. We have developed the practice of asking students to **wait 24 hours** after a grade has been released before discussing it with us. During those 24 hours, we suggest re-reading your assignment, reading our feedback, the assessment/evaluation tool, and assignment requirements so as to develop some targeted questions to ask us. These conversations usually result in a much more fruitful discussion about student learning and progress towards our standards.

EXTRA HELP & SUPPORT

- Overwhelmed, confused, or just want to chat about class? Sign up for I-Block, or email me, or catch me after class to plan a time to meet. When I’m not teaching, you can find me in Room 245.

TEACHER INFORMATION

David Walsh, Room 247, and 245 (cubicle in Teachers’ room)

Email: dwalsh@lexingtonma.org <https://sites.google.com/lexingtonma.org/walshenglish> (bookmark!)

Signing below means that you’ve read and understand the contents of this document.

Print your Name (legibly, please): _____

Signature: _____

Block: _____