

Reading and Writing Illness Syllabus
Mr. Hartshorn
Office: C208, Classroom: C215
Email: karl_hartshorn@wrsd.net

Course description

The literature of illness is unique. Uniting the oft-opposed sciences and humanities, it juxtaposes some of the most advanced and technical dimensions of the medical industry with some of the most fundamental aspects of what it means to be human: to feel pain and empathy, to contemplate mortality and suffering, to navigate social conventions and the loss of such parameters. Through discussions, diverse texts, and a variety of writing and projects, we will engage this literature with two aims. From a literary perspective, we will investigate and explore the various forms and techniques authors employ to construct and depict illness and consider how literary conventions meld with science and medicine. From a larger humanist perspective, we will address questions of how we as individuals and societies write and talk about illness; how we as readers read and react to it; and how these works influence our understanding not only of illness but of ourselves and others.

All our work in Reading and Writing Illness will be guided by the following essential questions:

- How does literature interact with science and medicine?
- How/why do authors construct and depict illness?
- How/why do these representations of illness influence our understanding of illness?
- How/why do these representations of illness influence our understandings of ourselves and others?

And goals:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to achieve the following objectives

- Articulate answers for the essential questions
- Further develop comprehension, analysis, and composition to more effectively express those answers
- Effectively support analysis, argument, and ideas with evidence and through research
- Become more mindful and conscientious of how we ourselves and others experience and express illness

Our individual and class goals for this year are directly related to [the expectations and core values of the high school](#) and the [Common Core framework](#)

To accomplish all these things, we'll need some guidelines. This syllabus is a flexible fluid thing and we'll work collectively to develop and adapt the course and class policies as we work through this year, but here are a few key points:

Class Policies

Communication

I am here because of you! Please take the time to talk to me, email me, or ask questions about the materials or other things on your mind. If/when we're in school, I'll be in either C208 or C215, but email is the best way to contact me: karl_hartshorn@wrsd.net

Approach

Try! Have fun! Think critically! Take chances! Express your ideas! Keep an open mind and use your imagination to expand it further. Take learning risks, make mistakes—we often learn more from being wrong than being right, ask questions, think deeply and creatively.

Class Practices

- Be respectful
- Be responsible
- Be present

Tech

Our primary platform will be Google Classroom. All class notes and most of the coursework and curriculum will be available through Classroom. If you have suggestions, please make them. If you're uncertain about how to do something, please let me know.

Phones, ear buds, and Chromebooks will be used as tools to support education. When we're not using them for these purposes, they will be put away. Inappropriate use will result in disciplinary action.

Attendance/Participation

This is an interactive course. Discussion, writing, reading, group work, and deep thinking are necessary for success, so attendance to and **active participation** in class are critical. You should arrive on time having completed all work and be prepared to share your ideas and listen to others' ideas.

Academic Integrity

If you're using a source beyond your own brain, give credit to the source and cite it! If you're using AI, stop it! AI will probably be critical for your future work, but it won't help you improve the reading, writing, or thinking skills we're trying to develop currently.

Per the [WRHS Student Handbook](#): All students' academic work must reflect their own honest efforts. Cheating and plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to copying or letting others copy homework, papers, lab reports, or quiz or test answers; acquiring or disseminating quizzes or tests before they are administered; using information from the Internet or other outside sources without proper attribution; employing AI to create responses of any kind.

Assignments and Assessments

Grading: Your grade will be calculated on a total points system with the total points you earn divided by the total possible points. The resulting percentage will be converted to a letter grade according to the scale in the WRHS handbook. You will be graded on a variety of assignments, which will include (but not be limited to) the following categories:

Assessments: These could range from quick homeworks (~5 points) to essays/projects (~60-80 points). They will be designed to assess and evaluate student learning.

Coursework: **Coursework is a critical part of the course.** These assignments provide a place to practice and develop skills and a way for me to assess where you are at in the learning process and where changes need to be made to improve that process.

Classwork may include class activities, review work, independent reading, workshopping, projects, reading questions, group work, notebooks, quickwrites, debates, class participation and citizenship, and a lot of other things. (usually 5-20 points)

Homework may include questions on Classroom, reading, studying and reviewing material, work on larger projects/essays, and a lot of other things. This work is critical to moving you and the class forward.

Grading Scale: Some of your work will be graded on completion, some of it will be graded on quality completion, and some will be graded more critically on specific criteria such as comprehension, analysis, evidence, and sources/citations.

Deadlines

Deadlines and due dates will be set to support students and meet teacher's needs (for example, the end of class, 11:59 pm, 7:30 am)

Late Work

Late work is discouraged, but it will be accepted with a deduction of 10-50% at the discretion of the grader and depending on context and circumstances.

Please note: It is the responsibility of the student to account for any work missed. Whether missed due to absence or incomplete assignment, zeros will be inputted until missing assignments are completed. Please see WRHS Student Handbook for additional information.

Our Course of Study

While I have a lot of materials and plans, the course is often impacted by current events, occasionally influenced by fortuitous circumstances, and always shaped by the students in the class. The core of our course is in place, but you give it life through your work and participation! This coursework and class may change as we go. I'll try to keep this course of study updated.

Quarter 1

Cancer

Primary text: John Green *The Fault in Our Stars*

Students will read and watch a variety of short stories, poems, and excerpts including but not limited to: "Shaving" by Leslie Norris, "Illness as Metaphor" excerpt by Susan Sontag, *The Cancer Journal* excerpt by Audre Lorde, "Approximate Weight of my Favorite Tumor" by Sherman Alexie, "I Long to Be King" by Zhao Xiaogang, "Embedding the Cancer Port" by Robert King, "'No longer if we'll get cancer but when" by Melanie Braverman, "The Wolves" by Paisley Rekdal, "sometimes i wish i felt the side effects" by Danez Smith, "Ronan" by Taylor Swift, "Leonato's Dream" by Olds-Vega, "A Labor of Love" by Kowoloff, and *Me, Earl, and the Dying Girl* directed by Gomez-Rejon

Alzheimer's

Primary text: Lisa Genova, *Still Alice*

Students will read and watch a variety of short stories, poems, and excerpts including but not limited to: student narratives, "With Dad" directed by Soren Sorenson, *With Dad* by Stephen Dirado, "In Fear of my Mother Being Diagnosed" by Megan Fallay

From this point students can gain more autonomy. We'll probably dive into other focused topics based on student choice (possibly addiction, mental illness, ethics), do student-selected book groups, and complete an independent project.