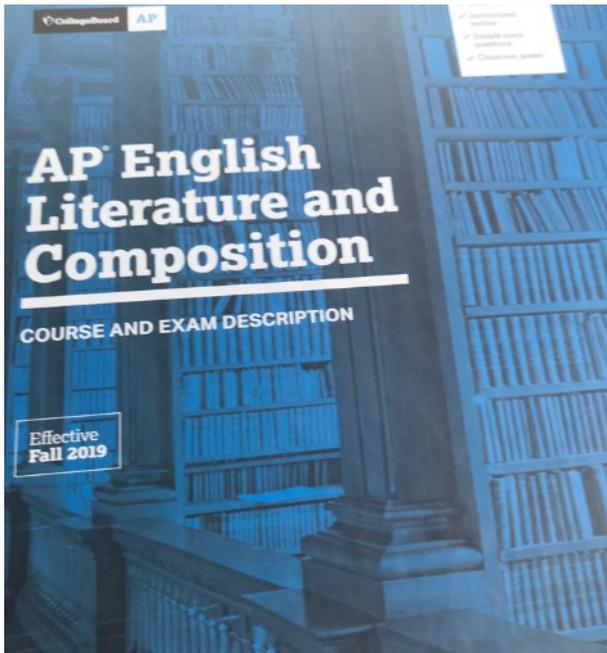


My Plan to Incorporate the New AP Lit CED – More Short Stories

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It's that time of the year again. I can't deny it any longer. As much as I'd like to believe that I still have all kinds of time before the beginning of the new school year, the reality is that (for me) it's just around the corner. Although many of you have already met your students and have started digging into the hard work of analyzing poems, short stories, and even some longer works, I hope that my reflections on the changes that I'm planning for this next year will still be helpful for you.

Like many of you, I was a little apprehensive when I heard about the new Course and Exam Description (CED) for AP Lit last spring, especially because there were so many unanswered questions about how it would change what we'd already been doing. But what gave me solace was the College Board's emphasis that the new CED is just a suggestion, and isn't mandatory. If we like the way we've taught the class in the past, we don't have to change anything. However, as I've worked my way through the binder, I've noticed a few small tweaks that I hope will help my students to be more prepared for the test in May. Keep in mind that these changes reflect that I teach on an A/B block schedule with 90 minute class periods. If I saw my students everyday, I would probably do things a bit differently, but most of these adjustments would largely stay the same.

Fewer Novels and More Short Stories

I know. I had the same reaction at first. Only three major works in a whole year? Surely AP students are capable of reading more novels and plays in a year, so isn't this just letting them off easy? I really don't believe this is the case, though. Most years, I've covered about six novels and plays over the course of a year, not including their summer reading, and most years I feel like I really have to carefully choose what scenes from the book we take a closer look at. At least once or twice per year (often more) there is a lot more to dig into, but we push forward because there isn't enough time. I always find myself wishing that there was a way to give my students more practice with analysis, and essay writing. However, something that the binder helped me realize is that I've never utilized short stories as effectively as I could have. The CED points out early on that the exam weighting for longer works is only 15-18% compared to short fiction, which is 42-49% of the exam.

So my plan for this year is to select three major novels for us to read together as a class with the possibility of adding a short play in April if there is extra time. However, just because we won't be reading whole class novels all year doesn't mean that my students won't be reading as much. Because roughly two-thirds of my class time will be focusing on poetry and short fiction, I've decided to incorporate more choice reading for my students during these units. While we read, discuss, and write about poetry and short stories, my students will have novels that they've chosen to read at home which will be a majority of their homework during this time. Since we'll have 90 minute class periods, we should be able to accomplish the rest of the work we do during class. Although I'm not yet sure how exactly I'll structure their choice reading, it will likely be a combination of book clubs, where groups of students choose on a common novel to read; themes or genres, where students each choose individual books connected to a common theme; and completely independent reading. My students will still read six longer works, but I'll also free up class time to truly dig into the complexities of the texts that we read together in class, all while giving my students more choice in the novels they read. I also like that each short story is a new chance to look at all of those elements that come together to create meaning without having to wait for an entire novel for that to happen. In the end, it will just give my students more practice at reading deeply and developing their interpretations of the text.

Intentional Progression of Big Ideas and Skills

I really like the way the College Board has outlined the specific skills that AP Lit students will be tested on and how to build up the complexity of skills as the year progresses. For this year, at least, I plan on following the suggested progression of skills throughout the first three units. I like the idea of starting small with character development, setting, structure, and narration. It is just enough to give students a variety of literary elements to consider, but it isn't so overwhelming that they won't even know where to start. I also like that the CED suggests that students start the year learning how to write well supported paragraphs instead of essays. Paragraphs don't take as long to write or grade, and therefore students will be able to get much more practice than they would writing full essays all year.

Paragraphs also allow for more specific feedback that will easily translate to the new scoring rubric this year. By the time we get to the third unit, which is also the first whole class novel, my plan is to have my students writing full essays for the rest of the year. Once we've finished with the first three units, I'll likely incorporate the rest of the skills outlined in the binder, but I plan to monitor and adjust the pacing based on my students' growth throughout the year.

Online Personal Progress Checks

Although I'm not sure how extensively I'll use the online resources that the College Board is providing us this year, I do think one major benefit to the online platform is the personal progress checks. One of the advantages to following the suggested units is I am able to have my students complete these short progress checks as we go. This will enable me to quickly see how each individual student is progressing with each of the skills outlined in the binder and gives me a place to start a conversation with each of them about what they need to focus more on. It will also save me the time of having to print and grade tests which is amazing news! I'll also be able to assign further individualized practice to students based on their previous performances as we start gearing up for the test.

The New Rubric

Although it isn't required for us to use the new writing rubric with our students this year, I think it will make teaching the analysis essay much easier. While the holistic rubric allows for more flexibility in scoring essays, I anticipate the analytic rubric will feel much more concrete, and therefore more manageable, for my students. I also appreciate that there are many different ways to earn the sophistication point. I think will help students avoid being too formulaic in their responses and will encourage students to be more nuanced in their analysis. While there are only a few sample essays that have officially been scored with the new rubric, I still plan to use the same sample essays I've previously used before, but we'll be able to look at them in a new way using a different rubric. Even if we don't definitively know the score for every sample essay, the conversations we have about them during class will be incredibly valuable.

Well, there you have it. It feels good to have a plan in place, although I'm sure that I'll have to make some adjustments as I start to put it into practice. However, it makes me feel much better to know that I can use the new framework of Big Ideas and Skills to inform my daily lesson planning. And if all else fails, I can always fall back on what I've done in previous years. At the end of the day, if we're reading, discussing, and writing about literature, we'll be moving in the right direction.

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