

**Upper School Humanities: American Studies**  
**Woodlawn School, 2012-2013**

**Course Description**

The Upper School Humanities Program seeks, through integrated instruction, to thoroughly satisfy curriculum requirements for grades 11/12 history and English at Woodlawn School, while simultaneously providing students significant and meaningful exposure to the visual and performing arts, music, architecture, and literature. Students will be pushed to make critical connections between a rich variety of materials and sources in order to develop strong, well-informed notions about culture and identity. The Humanities classes also team with science, math, service, and elective courses whenever possible to further enhance the course content.

The American Studies course examines the history and culture of the United States from its early inhabitants and colonization, through the early 21st century. At all times, students will examine the country's identity throughout history and with a look to the future. With an emphasis on group and individual project work, formal and informal writing assignments, as well as class discussion and debate, students develop into critical thinkers with the ability to articulate questions, distinguish fact from opinion, analyze and synthesize information, and write and speak intelligently about American literature and American cultural development. Through the analysis and interpretation of historical and modern events from political, cultural, economic, diplomatic, and social perspectives, students examine the continuities and discontinuities in American culture.

The study of American history, identity, and art will include a close focus on such key topics as: the American War for Independence, the philosophy of government, the Jazz Age, the Depression, and post-Cold War America. Students will examine works from a wide variety sources and perspectives, in multiple mediums, and utilize the principles of writing and discussion to develop analytical and critical essays, projects, and presentations. Works studied for this course will include: fiction and nonfiction from such authors John Steinbeck, Tim O'Brien, Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, Benjamin Franklin, Malcolm X, Tennessee Williams, and F. Scott Fitzgerald; the music of Stephen Foster, Scott Joplin, Woody Guthrie, Louis Armstrong, and Bruce Springsteen; visual artists such as Winslow Homer, Dorothea Lange, Jasper Johns, and Mark Rothko; and films from DW Griffith, Stanley Kubrick, and Spike Lee.

This course will also encourage students to connect with local history by examining the stories of their ancestors and researching stories in local communities. Students will visit significant local sites, search through local archives, and interview local people to help illuminate areas of study and the overall themes of the course.

\* American Studies students who have elected to participate in either or both the AP Literature and Composition or AP US History sections of the course will meet an additional two, thirty-minute work periods (per subject) each week for AP related coursework, with additional readings and assignments selected specifically for exam preparation.

**Instructors**

Jeff Donnelly, History: [jdonnelly@woodlawnschool.org](mailto:jdonnelly@woodlawnschool.org)

Tim Helfrich, English: [thelfrich@woodlawnschool.org](mailto:thelfrich@woodlawnschool.org)

**Texts**

*Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck

*My Antonia*, by Willa Cather

*The Piano Lesson*, by August Wilson

*The Catcher in the Rye*, by JD Salinger

*As I Lay Dying*, by William Faulkner

*The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald

*The Things They Carried*, by Tim O'Brien

Assorted poetry and short fiction by American authors

*America: A Narrative History*, by George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi

*A People's History of the United States*, by Howard Zinn

*The Wordy Shipmates*, by Sarah Vowell

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**Expectations**

Success in American Studies will begin with willing and regular engagement with the subject matter. Students are expected to come to class prepared each day; this means completing all writing and reading assignments *and* being prepared to share ideas and ask questions in classroom discussions.

Throughout the year, students will work regularly in small groups to lead discussions, complete projects, and prepare presentations. Student are expected to be respectful of their peers at all times and to be thoughtful, hardworking members of their groups.

**Humanities Assessment**

Humanities coursework will be worth one half of both the American Literature and United States History classes. In each trimester, students in history and English will be evaluated out of a maximum of 1,000 points. 500 of those points will come from Humanities assignments.

- A. Projects and Presentations: 300 pts.
  - Students will complete at least three projects during each trimester. Projects are intended to give students room to express ideas creatively. As humanities projects, students should make a considerable effort to draw thoughtful connections between various materials and disciplines. These projects will be jointly assessed by Mr. Donnelly and Mr. Helfrich. Students will have weekly project work time.
- B. Humanities Journal: 100 pts.
  - Students will keep a googledoc journal throughout the school year. Each of the instructors will regularly assign journals designed to push students to make connections with the larger themes of the course and to explore the fields of art, music, film, literature, history, and philosophy. In other words, a journal in history class may be an opportunity to reflect on a reading from English class, a piece of art, a story heard on the news last week, or a trip taken during childhood. The journal is a great place to reach for new ideas and endeavour to make critical connections.
- C. Linking Inklings: 100 pts.
  - At the end of each trimester, students will compose a major paper (4-6 pages) which links various ideas - or inklings - from throughout the trimester. In this essay, each student must offer critical interpretation of specific pieces of art, music, literature, and history. Students will combine these critical interpretations into a cohesive essay that illuminates one or more of the essential questions of the course. Students will submit a formal paper proposal and must receive teacher approval. Students are expected to remain in regular contact with their teachers throughout the planning and composition of this essay.

**History Assessment**

The United States History component of American Studies is assessed based on points earned from regular quizzes and unit tests, from writing assignments, and from class preparedness and participation.

- A. Quizzes and Tests: 250 pts.
  - Students should expect a quiz worth between 5-25 points at least once per cycle, based on textbook reading, supplemental readings, and recent class discussions. Quiz format will primarily be multiple choice and short answer, with map and image related questions appearing frequently. Quizzes will typically be announced 1-2 days in advance, however pop quizzes are not out of the question under certain circumstances.
  - Tests will be 50 point cumulative unit assessments covering 3-5 chapters of text, supplemental reading assignments, and class discussion and notes related to the unit. Test format will consist of multiple choice, short answer, map and image related questions, and matching from time to time. Tests will be announced no less than one week in advance.
- B. Writing Assignments: 150 pts.

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- Each unit test will be closely followed by a related 25 point essay. Additional writing assignments will vary in length and point value, and will include shorter in-class pieces as well as longer, in-depth essays that require research and revision.

C. Class Participation: 100 pts.

- Each student is expected to contribute thoughtfully and constructively to the class discussion during every meeting, and to behave respectfully at all times toward classmates, the instructor, and guest speakers.. Students will be required to work in groups on a regular basis, therefore cooperation and active involvement in group work is an integral part of success in this course.
- Each student is responsible for arriving to class each day with a computer, a pen and notebook, the course textbook, and any current supplemental readings. Students who need to retrieve any of these items after class has started will lose 5 points from their participation grade for each infraction.

*\*A note about notes on computers: Students are welcome to take notes on a laptop or tablet if that is his/her preference. It is expected, however, that focus remain on the discussion at hand and on thorough note-taking, and it is HIGHLY RECOMMENDED that wi-fi be turned off for the duration of class. Acceptable technology use is very clearly stated in the Woodlawn Upper School Student handbook.*

Total United States History Points per Trimester: 500

**English Assessment**

The American Literature and Composition component of American Studies is assessed based on points earned from major papers, small papers, a final exam, and class participation.

A. Major Papers: 150 pts.

- Students will complete two major papers (3 -6 pages) during each trimester. For the most part, these papers will come in the form of a literary analysis of a work, or works, of fiction that we are studying in class; however, there will also be opportunities for students to engage in creative writing. These papers will be assigned a minimum of one week in advance. Students are expected to come up with original ideas, plan thoroughly, and edit very carefully. Major papers should be well-organized, thoughtful, and free of careless grammatical errors.

B. Small Papers: 100 pts.

- Students will complete small papers (1-2 pages) on an almost weekly basis. The subjects for these small papers will be far-ranging. As with the major papers, students are expected to push for original ideas. Subject and plot summary is to be avoided in favor of critical analysis and interpretation of information.

C. Final Exam: 150 pts.

- The final exam will test your understanding and critical analysis of the texts we have studied during that particular trimester. The exam will be comprised mostly of short essay questions. Again, students are expected to provide answers that go beyond summarizing the plot and ideas of a text. Examples of essay questions and responses will be provided.

D. Class Participation: 100 pts.

- Regular and valuable contributions to class make for a significant portion of the student grade. In English class, participation is evaluated primarily on a student's input into classroom discussions. However, the class participation grade also includes an assessment of a student's preparation. Good participation in class depends on one's preparation; therefore, failure to complete an assignment will result in a deduction from the class participation grade. Small reading quizzes may also be used to evaluate preparation. Students are also expected to come to class with a computer, a writing utensil, paper, and the appropriate books. Lastly, general classroom behavior and attitude will be factored into the participation grade. Students will be rewarded for treating peers with respect, listening attentively, and refraining from side conversations.

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Total American Literature and Composition Points per Trimester: 500

**Conclusion:**

The American Studies course provides a great chance for students and instructors to investigate the history, the present, and the future of American identity. Students will explore the myth and reality of the American Dream. We will search for evidence and reflections on the American Dream throughout our nation's historical events and documents, and in the literary works of many important American authors. Additionally, students will be encouraged to localize this study by reflecting on and analyzing their own experiences and their own local history.

Students are encouraged to bring themselves and all of their ideas into this important study. In this class - as in life - connections are everywhere: Look out for them. .