

European Literature: Twentieth Century

Using Auden's term "Age of Anxiety" as a focal idea, students consider both the breakdown and affirmation of meaning in twentieth-century literature in this final six-week unit.

OVERVIEW

- Through the close reading of "dystopian" works such as *Pygmalion*, *1984*, and *Rhinoceros*, students consider the problems inherent in fashioning a perfect society or perfect individual. At the same time, they also consider how authors of the twentieth century affirm the possibility of beauty and meaning—for instance, in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Federico García Lorca's *Poem of the Deep Song*, or Thomas Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush." To gain a deeper appreciation of the role of beauty in twentieth-century literature, they appraise connections between poetry and music: for instance, the relation of Eliot's *Four Quartets* to a Beethoven quartet, and the relation of Lorca's poetry to the rhythms of flamenco music. Examining how authors rework classical stories and themes (e.g., in Anouilh's *Antigone* or Camus' *Caligula*), students ponder how historical context affects an enduring story or theme. Students complete research papers in which they consult literary criticism and historical materials. They engage in discussions resembling college seminars, where they pursue focused questions in depth over the course of one or two class sessions. At the close of the unit, students have the opportunity to research the literature they have read over the course of the year and the concepts they have studied.

FOCUS STANDARDS

- These Focus Standards have been selected for the unit from the Common Core State Standards.
- **RL.11-12.3:** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- **RL.11-12.6:** Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
- **RL.11-12.10:** By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.
- **RI.11-12.5:** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
- **W.11-12.7:** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- **W.11-12.8:** Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.
- **SL.11-12.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- **L.11-12.6:** Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Common Core State Standards to be as a reference – [Word document](#) / [pdf document](#)

SUGGESTED OBJECTIVES

- Read works of the twentieth century, focusing on the earlier decades.
- Consider aspects of modernism (such as anxiety) in their historical context.

- Explain both the breakdown and affirmation of form and meaning in modernist literature.
- Analyze dystopian literature, considering the problems inherent in fashioning a perfect person or society.
- Explain how poems in this unit reflect on poetry itself and its possibilities.
- Examine the implications of modern versions of classical works.
- Identify and explain the musical allusions and their meanings in twentieth-century poetical works in seminars.
- Pursue focused questions in depth over the course of one or two class sessions.
- Explain absurdist and existential philosophy as it applies to literature and theatre.

SUGGESTED WORKS

- (E) indicates a CCSS exemplar text; (EA) indicates a text from a writer with other works identified as exemplars; (OOP) indicates a text that is no longer sold nor published.

LITERARY TEXTS

Note: Teachers may make the literary selections in a number of ways. They may select works across the genres, or they may focus on a particular genre. The selections should address the ideas of anxiety and beauty in some manner and should offer contrasting responses to the tension and crises of the twentieth century.

- **Drama**
 - *Antigone* (Jean Anouilh)
 - *Caligula* (Albert Camus)
 - *Hamlet* (William Shakespeare)
 - *King Lear* (William Shakespeare)
 - *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Bertolt Brecht)
 - *Pygmalion* (George Bernard Shaw)
 - *Rhinoceros* (Eugene Ionesco) (E)
 - *Waiting for Godot* (Samuel Beckett)
- **Novels**
 - *1984* (George Orwell)
 - *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Erich Maria Remarque)
 - *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley)
 - *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (Doris Lessing)
 - *Pan: From Lieutenant Thomas Glahn's Papers* (Knut Hamsun)
 - *Steppenwolf* (Hermann Hesse)
 - *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Thomas Hardy)
 - *The Metamorphosis* (Franz Kafka) (E)
- **Poetry**
 - "Archaic Torso of Apollo" (Rainer Maria Rilke)
 - "Conversation with a Stone" (Wisława Szymborska)
 - "Counter-Attack" (Siegfried Sassoon)
 - "Dreamers" (Siegfried Sassoon)
 - *Four Quartets* (T. S. Eliot) (EA)
 - *Poem of the Deep Song* (Federico García Lorca) (selections)
 - "Suicide in the Trenches" (Siegfried Sassoon)
 - *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue* (W.H. Auden) (EA)
 - "The Daffodil Murderer" (Siegfried Sassoon)
 - "The Darkling Thrush" (Thomas Hardy)
 - "The Old Huntsman" (Siegfried Sassoon)
 - "The Second Coming" (William Butler Yeats)
 - *The Wasteland* (T. S. Eliot) (EA)

INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Essays

- “Crisis of the Mind” (Paul Valéry)
- “The Fallacy of Success” (G.K. Chesterton) (E)

Nonfiction

- *Letters to a Young Poet* (Rainer Maria Rilke)
- *The Courage to Be* (Paul Tillich) (excerpts)
- *The Ego and the Id* (Sigmund Freud) (excerpts)
- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche)

Speeches

- “Their Finest Hour” (House of Commons, June 18, 1940) (Winston Churchill) (EA)

ART, MUSIC AND MEDIA

• Art

- Georges Braque, *Candlestick and Playing Cards on a Table* (1910)
- Henri Matisse, *Blue Nude* (1952)
- Joan Miro, *The Potato* (1928)
- Kurt Schwitters, *Untitled (Oval Construction)* (1925)
- Pablo Picasso, *Reading at a Table* (1932)
- Piet Mondrian, *Composition No. III* (1921, repainted 1925)

• Music

- Flamenco guitar music (such as that performed by Carlos Montoya or Paco Peña)
- Ludwig van Beethoven, String Quartet No. 15 in A Minor, Op. 132 (1825)

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENTS

- *Note:* After reading and discussing a work or pairing of works as a class, students prepare for seminars and essays by reflecting individually, in pairs, and/or in small groups on a given seminar or essay question. In this way, students generate ideas. (Seminar and essay assignments include more than one question. Teachers may choose one or all of the questions to explore in the course of the seminar; students should choose one question for the essay.) Seminars should be held before students write essays so that they may explore their ideas thoroughly and refine their thinking before writing. Textual evidence should be used to support all arguments advanced in seminars and in all essays. Page and word counts for essays are not provided here, but teachers should consider the suggestions regarding the use of evidence, for example, to determine the likely length of good essays.

Scoring Rubric for Seminar

Reading Literature, Argument Writing

Seminar: Paying close attention to the storm scenes and the role of the fool in *King Lear*, how could the play be regarded as an existential work? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support your position. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Reading Poetry, Informative Writing

Seminar: How do *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Sassoon’s war poems influence and contribute to the existential movement? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Research, Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Using texts from this unit or additional outside sources, write a research paper that answers the essential question: Why (in literature) might the twentieth century be regarded as the Age of Anxiety? Use textual evidence to support an original thesis statement designed to answer this question. The paper should reflect your reasoned judgment about the quality and reliability of sources consulted (i.e., why you emphasize some and not others), a balance of paraphrasing and quoting from sources, original thinking, the anticipation and addressing of questions or counterclaims, and the proper citation of sources. Your teacher may give you the opportunity to share and refine your initial research questions on the classroom blog in order to get feedback from your classmates. (RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.2, RI.11-12.1, RI.11-12.2, RI.11-12.7, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Compare and contrast how both *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Pygmalion* are concerned with fashioning the perfect individual. How do these texts conform to Auden's *Age of Anxiety*? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Art, Speaking and Listening

Examine the Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, and Miró images. Do these works of art have anything in common? Do they depict anything you recognize? Do you think they were made for a particular buyer, a patron, or just because the painters wanted to make them? How might you categorize each work, besides "abstract"? How has the artist evolved by the twentieth century to be an untethered individual? Can you see how these artists might be driven by their own artistic tendencies or desires? What are these paintings "about"? (SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.2, SL.11-12.3, SL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.5)

Reading Poetry, Argument Writing

Seminar: "The Second Coming" is an allegorical poem that describes the state of Europe after World War I. How do the metaphors in the poem convey meaning? Does the poem reveal an existential world view? Why or why not? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support your position. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Examine how the author reworks classical stories and themes in Anouilh's *Antigone* and/or Camus' *Caligula*. Consider how historical context affects an enduring story or theme. Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.2, SL.11-12.1, W.11-12.5, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Oral Presentation

Memorize and recite a one- to two-minute passage from one of the texts. Include an introduction that discusses one of the following issues:

- How the passage deals with the question of meaning and meaninglessness
- How the passage comments, directly or indirectly, on historical events (SL.11-12.4)

Reading Literature, Argument Writing

Seminar: Was Orwell's classic novel *1984* prophetic? Consider the rise, fall, and endurance in the twentieth century of political regimes that restrict personal freedoms. Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support your position. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Poetry, Informative Writing

Seminar: How did Sassoon's war-era poetry contribute to the shaping of existentialism as a philosophy? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Hesse is a master of blending fantasy and reality. He claims his novel *Steppenwolf* has been "violently misunderstood." Consider it as an existential novel. Why could it easily be misunderstood? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: How is Gregor Samsa's transformation in *The Metamorphosis* a metaphor for the existential experience? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Compare Anouilh's *Antigone* with Sophocles's *Antigone* (which students read in ninth grade). Cite at least two sources of outside literary criticism. Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Argument Writing

Seminar: Paying close attention to *Hamlet's* soliloquies, how can *Hamlet* be regarded as a work of existentialism? How does it apply to Auden's concept of anxiety? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support your position. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Speaking and Listening

Reflect on seminar questions, take notes on your responses, and note the page numbers of the textual evidence you will refer to in your seminar and/or essay answers. Share your notes with a partner for feedback and guidance. Have you interpreted the text correctly? Is your evidence convincing? (RL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.1)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Consider *Mother Courage and Her Children* as an allegorical, moral tale where war is depicted as a business. What moral is presented by the story? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Poetry, Informative Writing

Seminar: Consider musical allusions and their contribution to the meaning of twentieth-century poetical works using Eliot's *Four Quartets* and/or Lorca's *Poem of the Deep Song*. What musical characteristics highlight the themes in the poetry? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: What social values are discarded in the dystopian works *1984* and/or *Brave New World*? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Poetry, Informative Writing

Seminar: How does Auden's "September 1, 1939" (in *The Age of Anxiety*) shed light on the works studied in this unit? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Reading Poetry, Informative Writing

Seminar: Relate the loss of hope and despair to one of the dystopian novels in this unit to Hardy's poem "The Darkling Thrush." From where does this hopelessness derive in both texts? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Compare the outcasts in two dystopian works in this unit, *1984* and *Brave New World*. How are their struggles different? How are they similar? Write an essay that uses specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.4, W.11-12.5, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, L.11-12.6)

SENIOR RESEARCH PAPER

- Meeting the "college readiness" goal of the Common Core State Standards requires that students undertake the challenge of exploring a research question in depth and produce sophisticated expository writing in response.

In twelfth grade, teachers and students may use the research process as a guide to writing a college-level, thesis-driven research paper of at least 4,000 words. Teachers may ask students to apply this process to any of the sample assignments in any of the six units, or may suggest another topic for students to research throughout the year.

High School Research and the Senior Research Paper

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

- *Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics* (ReadWriteThink)

TERMINOLOGY

- Absurd
- Affirmation
- Anxiety
- Dystopia
- Existentialism
- Free verse
- Modernism
- Negation
- Neologism
- Postmodernism
- Rhetorical device
- Satire
- Totalitarianism
- Understatement