

Junior High English Language Arts (English and Literature)

Work and Grades

Welcome to junior high English Language Arts (ELA). I am very happy to have the opportunity to teach both 7th & 8th grade this year, my eighth at St. James / Seton Catholic School. This year will be somewhat different than past years in that we will combine English and Literature classes into a single class with a single grade. Below is a brief overview of the types of work we will accomplish.

For English

We use the Shurley English method for English grammar instruction. Shurley English is a student-friendly way to build solid foundations in English grammar. We will start at a very basic level and add elements of complexity throughout the year. Our goal is to gain clarity of understanding of English grammar so that we become better writers, readers, and communicators. We will practice and improve our written and spoken communication skills through various exercises. Students will practice writing various types of essays. Students will also give short presentations.

Generally, each chapter of Shurley English consists of a number of practice exercises, a practice test, and a test. To help students master grammar concepts, teacher-created video instruction will be shared with students, and students will be expected to mindfully view video instruction. Students are expected to use study hall time and school-provided resources (i.e., Chromebooks) to accomplish video instruction.

For Literature

We will practice reading beyond the literal level of stories. We will read novels, short stories, poems, and nonfiction items. We will practice writing about the inferential and thematic levels of the pieces of literature we read. As much as I am able, I will provide students with copies of what we read so that they may highlight and write on them. Doing so will help them become more conscientious as they read, which will make discussing and writing about the literature much easier.

The literature read in class will be the basis for most of the essay-level writing we do during the school year. While we will begin the writing process in class, students are expected to work on formal essays and Individual Writing Assignments (IWAs) outside of normal class time. A description of each is on the back of this sheet.

Students will be expected to complete an Outside Reading Assignment (ORA) each quarter. Additional instructions regarding ORAs are included on the other side of this sheet.

Assistance Outside of Class Time

Students are encouraged to discuss their work, questions they have, and difficulties they face on assignments both during class and outside of class time. To help classroom time management, the teacher may need to give specific, detailed help outside of normal class time. Students are encouraged to bring questions to the teacher before school and during study hall periods. Students may request time after school with 24-hours' notice. Please note that the teacher may not be available after school on certain days due to other school commitments.

Grades – Types and Policies

All assignments, quizzes, and tests will be graded based on points. A student's final grade for the quarter will equal that student's accumulated point total divided by the total points possible. Generally speaking, in-class practices and homework assignments will be worth between 5-30 points. Quizzes and practice grammar tests will tend to be worth 30-80 points depending on difficulty and length. Tests and formal papers tend to be worth 80 or more points.

Late Work, Assignment Corrections, and Test Retakes

Late work, assignment corrections, and re-takes will all be done in accordance with SJS junior high policy. Retest requests **must be initiated by the student**, and retests must be completed **not later than one week** after the initial test was returned to the student. Please note that *Individual Writing Assignments (IWAs) and Outside Reading Assignments (ORAs) do not fall under this policy. IWA and ORA points are final when the window for the grade closes.*

Retests will not simply be a re-taking of the same test form and/or format. While retests cover the same information as the initial test, the form and format of the retest is entirely at the teacher's discretion. Generally speaking, retests are more challenging than the initial test.

Types of Writing Assignments

There will generally be three types of writing assignments in English and literature classes. The focus and goal of each are different. Therefore, the way each is handled is a bit different as well.

1. **Quick Write** – Students will be asked to write short, impromptu pieces on various subjects throughout the school year. The goal of a Quick Write is to help students practice getting ideas on the page in sentences that can be reasonably followed. Students are asked to get their thoughts down without worrying too much about perfect grammar. Generally speaking, Quick Write assignments are completion assignments and are graded as such.
2. **Individual Writing Assignment (IWA)** – IWAs are short (1-3 paragraph) essays that can be turned in several times. IWAs are test-level grades with a maximum score of 100 points. The goal of the IWA is for students to improve their writing mechanics and development of arguments through an iterative process – papers are marked and returned to students for further editing. IWAs have three possible status grades:
 - a. **Rewrite** – The essay does not properly address the question *or* contains so many grammar errors that the writing becomes incoherent. The essay cannot be corrected by making a few changes or shifting things around. A Rewrite is worth 75 points (out of 100).
 - b. **Revise** – This is the most common grade for IWAs. Revise means that the paper adequately addresses the question but can and should be made stronger by working on organization, style, grammar, and/or content. Spelling and punctuation errors may also result in a Revise. A Revise is worth 88 points (out of 100)
 - c. **Accepted** – This is the grade to shoot for. Accepted does not necessarily mean that the writing is flawless. It means that the ideas and arguments developed have been presented clearly and coherently and are backed up with evidence. Accepted IWAs earn 100 points.

Because IWAs can be turned in several times over the course of the assignment period, *papers are not accepted after the assignment period has ended*. Additionally, the teacher has at least 48 hours to grade submitted IWAs. Students who wait until the last few days of the IWA assignment period to turn in a paper will, therefore, only have it graded once. Finally, students who do not turn in an IWA attempt or whose attempt does not meet the scoring criteria above (for example, are largely off-topic or based on false or erroneous information) will receive zero points (out of 100). ***IWA grades cannot be “made up” after the IWA assignment period has ended.***

3. **Essay Test** – Essay tests are used to measure students’ ability to answer questions about literature in an in-depth manner. Essay tests are graded more on content than on grammar, etc. That is, grammar, spelling, and things of that nature affect essay test grades when they affect the teacher’s understanding or ability to understand the student’s answer. Students are allowed to use notes and texts during essay tests. Also, students are given questions from which to choose from at least one class period beforehand so that they may prepare fully.

Outside Reading Assignment (ORA)

To maximize student’s growth in reading, students must read beyond the pieces of literature we read as a whole class. Therefore, students are expected to complete an Outside Reading Assignment (ORA) once per quarter. Outside reading helps solidify fundamental reading skills while allowing students to explore subjects and genres that they find interesting.

Each quarter, students will be asked to read **at least one** novel during the quarter. The teacher will work with each student individually regarding the number and difficulty of novels read during a quarter. Students must coordinate with the teacher beforehand and get approval for novel(s) to be read. ORAs will count for at least one 50-point grade during the quarter. Additional ORA grades will be awarded based on student’s outside reading plan and results.

As a default, ORA grades will be based on the student’s score on the AR test for a given novel. However, please note that ORAs are intended to be flexible and fit students’ ability, interest, and skills. Students are highly encouraged to find a best fit for how they accomplish their ORAs. That is, students may attempt alternative assessments other than AR tests to complete the ORA task. Students must have alternative assessment options approved by the teacher ahead of time, and they must be appropriate for the student, the assignment, and the novel.

Like IWA’s, ***ORA’s cannot be “made up” after the ORA assignment period has ended.***