

# High School Dual-Credit English Classes: A Literature Assignment

Mary Burrows

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Many United States high schools offer their students courses for college credit. These "dual credit" courses enable students to earn both high school and college credit, thus bridging the gap between high school and college. A recent article in *Education Week* (April 20, 2005) cites a report from the National Center for Educational Statistics indicating that 71 percent of schools offered dual-credit courses during the 2002-2003 academic year.

Those in favor of such courses argue that their low-cost tuition motivates students who might not consider college to do so. Students suffering from "senioritis" may experience more challenging courses presented in a different format from courses they have been receiving. Those arguing against the existence of dual-credit courses wonder about reasons high schools add advanced curricula at the same time that colleges must add developmental courses.

Benefits and drawbacks notwithstanding, dual credit courses exist, and I teach them. Currently I teach 55 high school seniors in dual-credit English taught concurrently with their senior English. Students receive transcribed credit from Texas State Technical College West Texas for ENGL 1301, Composition I, in the fall semester, and for ENGL 1302, Composition II, in the spring. I teach some students who would be exempt from ENGL 1301 and ENGL 1302 because of their SAT/ACT scores, but who must take my course, nevertheless, to fulfill their senior English credit. TSTC West Texas administrators have encouraged this shared educational mission with the local community. Several of my students have chosen to attend TSTC West Texas, not only for transferable courses, but also to receive two-year degrees from our college.

Teaching at the high school poses several challenges for me as a college teacher. I have two sections of English 4/ENGL 1301 that meet back-to-back daily. My first stop each workday is at the high school. I arrive for tutorials and remain for first and second periods. My high school courses have approximately 88 class-meeting times as opposed to the normal 48 class-meeting times per semester at colleges. The focus of the class is different, as well. Senior English, in much of Texas, involves a survey of British literature. Composition I at my college focuses on the modes of discourse; Composition II is literature based, but an introduction to literature, not a British literature survey as in a sophomore or junior-level British literature course.

The students at TSTC West Texas, for the most part, have chosen to attend the

school because of its fast track to the workforce. Many have not been part of “college prep” high school courses. When I teach these students I focus on immediate uses of the skills we are learning, practical necessities for expressing ourselves clearly. At the high school, on the other hand, the students in my classes are accustomed to writing standard five-paragraph essays with clear theses, coherent paragraphs, topic sentences, and supporting details. I ask them to include literary quotations with correct citations

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and to push them to write more and more.

They have had little grammar since middle school; I stress sentence types and structures and hammer home the horrors of committing such fatal sentence errors as comma splices and sentence fragments.

The Composition II class at TSTC West Texas corresponds in some ways to the English 4 curriculum. I have adapted some of the assignments from my traditional TSTC West Texas approach to teaching literature to the high school seniors’ needs for more group interaction and more choices for responses to assignments.

For example, at TSTC West Texas, in Composition II, I might simply assign a short story, quiz the students on it, and conduct a discussion of the elements of fiction that are

present in the story. I might follow up with a writing assignment about short fiction similar to the one below.

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This third out-of-class essay will give you your final opportunity to explore one of the elements of short fiction. Choose a story from the options below. Read the story you choose carefully with a particular eye toward the appropriate fictional element: in this case, setting, Style and Tone, Symbolism, or Theme.

Choose one from the following list:

### **Setting**

1. Discuss the role and significance of the setting in Poe’s “Masque of the Red Death.”
2. Discuss the role and significance of the setting in Clark’s “The Portable Phonograph.”

### **Style and Tone**

3. Elaborate on the notion that the style employed by Hemingway in “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” serves to highlight his notion that life has no meaning.
4. Talk about how Collier uses irony in “The Chaser.”

### **Symbolism**

5. Discuss the symbolism in “The Parable of the Prodigal Son,” from The Gospel of St. Luke.

6. Detail the impact that symbolism has in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown."

### Theme

7. Expand on the idea that the theme in Joyce's "Araby" is one of devastating self-realization.
8. Discuss the old waiter's view of the world in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place."

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At the high school, rather than presenting literary elements in that lumped-together fashion, I put students to work. When we move from *Beowulf* to Chaucer in our chronological journey through British literature, I incorporate a concept called "Reading Circles" that I learned from a colleague who gained the idea from a conference workshop. In order to let students take charge of their own learning and to make use of their hyperkinetic energy levels and to counteract their tendency toward quick boredom, I ask them to form their own groups. In my first period this fall, they have produced four groups of five and one group of seven.

After re-reading the tales, I have chosen "The Miller's Tale," certain that they will enjoy its earthiness, "The Clerk's Tale," "The Pardoner's Tale," "The Nun's Priest's Tale," and "The Wife of Bath's Tale," deciding the latter three are widely anthologized for good reason.

To illustrate what I want the groups to do, we read together "The Prioress's Tale" and we talk about the plot, the characters, the setting, the point of view, the symbolism, the attitude, the theme, the language, and current connections to that tale. I do this to model the "roles" students will assume as they present their group's tale.

Each group selects a tale from sample selections I have given them. I then distribute the "Roles" sheet (below) to the each group and ask them as a group to decide which person in the group will fulfill each part. I combine several of the roles listed below to accommodate the numbers in the groups.

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## Overview of the Roles for Canterbury Presentations

### Plot Analyzer

Your role is to locate the sequence of events to develop a timeline for the selection. Look for causes and effects through the action and dialogue. Remember that not only people but also animals and forces of nature can influence human reactions. Make notes of specific details and where they are located in the selection to back your assertions.

Questions to consider:

- What is the plot of the story?
- How does the plot develop?
- What is the initial incident?
- What is the basic conflict?

*“If characters are dynamic or round, in what way do they change? What causes the change?”*

- What events make up the complication?
- What event is the climax?
- What events make up the falling action and resolution (denouement)?
- How does the author disclose the plot?
- Is this plot believable?

### **Character Detective**

Your role is to identify and describe the characters in the selections. Use specific details to construct the physical, mental, and psychological profiles of the characters. Make notes in the selection of where the pieces of the characters are located. You may want to draw webs for the characters or draw and label the characters themselves.

Questions to consider:

- Who are the main characters?
- Identify and describe the protagonist and the antagonist.
- Who are the supporting, or other, characters?
- How does each character figure in the story; i.e., what purpose does each serve?
- Are the characters round or flat?
- What characters are static or dynamic?
- If characters are dynamic or round, in what way do they change? What causes the change?
- What traits or characteristics do they have?
- How does the author disclose the characters?
- Are the characters believable?

### **Setting/Point of View Searcher**

Your role is to describe the location of the selection and through whose eyes the author chooses to narrate the selection. You need to determine what role the background, objects, and culture play in determining the outcome of the story. Make notes of specific details and their locations within the story to share with your fellow students.

Questions to consider:

- What is the setting for this story?
- When and where does the story take place?
- What atmosphere or mood do the setting's details create?
- What are some of the details of the setting that create this mood?
- Is the setting of the story real or imagined?
- Does the setting change during the story? If so, how does it change?
- Classify the tale according to the chart distributed in class– what genre is it? (examples: chivalric romance, myth, Breton lais, beast fable, prose allegory, mock-heroic, Fabliau, sermon, exemplum, saint legend, miracle of the Virgin, moral tale)
- Relate the Tale to the Teller in the frame of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.
- What is the point of view of this story?
- Does the narrator strike you as reliable?
- How has the point of view shaped or determined the style?

*“Your role is to detect the hidden meanings that objects, people, places, numbers, animals, almost anything, may have in the selection.”*

### **Symbolism and Allegory Hunter**

Your role is to detect the hidden meanings that objects, people, places, numbers, animals, almost anything, may have in the selection. Look for repetition and patterns in dialogue or actions. Make notes of details and their locations in the selection.

Questions to consider:

- What is symbolism?
- How is symbolism demonstrated in the story?
- Do certain characters, actions, and/or events seem to stand for something?
- What is allegory?
- How is allegory demonstrated in the story?
- What is the difference between fable, parable, and myth?
- How are fable, parable, and myth demonstrated in the story?
- If symbolism, allegory, fable, parable, and myth are not clear in the story, how does the author allude to them?
- What specific examples of symbolism, allegory, fable, parable, and myth allow you to see in clear and concrete detail the dominant idea the author is writing about?

## **Attitude Expresser**

Your role is to determine the levels and types of language the author uses to create the emotional quality of the story. Pay attention to the way the characters speak, to figurative language, to adjectives and adverbs, to the kinds of nouns and verbs the author chooses. Remember the person who carries a chip on his shoulder. What

*“Your role is to determine the levels and types of language the author uses to create the emotional quality of the story.”*

kind of attitude is he displaying? Is the author sympathizing with the character, laughing with him, or laughing at him? The tone sets the mood or atmosphere of the story; the attitude reveals what the author thinks about it. This is a challenging role, so don't despair; just do your best.

Questions to consider:

- What tone does the story portray?
  - What attitude does the story portray?
  - What tone does the main character portray?
  - Is the tone and/or attitude humorous?
  - Is the tone and/or attitude serious?
  - Is the tone and/or attitude ironical?
  - What words and/or phrases in the story show the tone or attitude?
- If tone or attitude is not clearly stated by the author, how does the author disclose either, or both? What effective words does the author use to help tell the story or describe a character?
  - What rhetorical choices does the author use to effectively arrange and form the elements of the story?
  - What words does the author use to create clear and immediate images in your mind when you read the story?

## **Idea, Theme, Meaning, Message Deliverer**

Your role is to decide what the author is trying to say about life, mankind, and the human condition in general though the selection in particular. There may be more than one message that can be inferred. Try to decide what the main idea is and what its corollaries are, if any. Make notes and note their locations in the selection. You should also be prepared to discuss why you think these are the messages that the author is sending.

Questions to Consider:

- What is the dominant idea of the story?
- What is the major theme of the story?

- What is the meaning of the story?
- What is the message of the story?
- Is the idea, theme, meaning, or message clearly stated?
- Is the idea, theme, meaning, or message only alluded to?
- How does the author clearly state the idea, theme, meaning, or message?
- How does the author allude to the idea, theme, meaning, or message?
- Does the title give any clue as to what the theme will be? What is the clue?
- How does the main character react to the conflict he/she faces?
- Do certain passages seem to point especially toward the theme?
- What are those passages?

### ***Illuminator***

Your role is to find passages the class would like to/should hear read aloud. These passages should be memorable, interesting, puzzling, funny, or important. Your notes should include the quotations but also why you chose them, and what you want to say about them. You can either read the passage aloud yourself or ask fellow students to read roles. Find the poetic version of the Tale you are presenting and the lines from the poem that correspond to the lines of prose. Read, or have read, those lines in poetry.

*“Your role is to connect what you are reading with what you are studying or with the world outside of school.”*

Questions to consider:

- What were you thinking as you read?
- What did the text make you think it about?
- What do you think this text/passage was about?
- How might other people (of different backgrounds) think about this text/passage?
- What are the most important ideas/moments in this text/section?
- What was the most important change in this selection? How and why did it happen?

### ***Connector***

Your role is to connect what you are reading with what you are studying or with the world outside of school. You can connect the selection to events in your own life, news events, political events, or popular trends. Other important sources of connections are other books, stories, and poems you have already read. The connections should be meaningful to you and fellow students.

Questions to consider:

- What connections can you make to your own life?
- To what other places or people could you compare this selection?
- To what other books or stories might you compare this selection?
- To what other characters or authors might you compare this selection?
- How does this selection relate to those that came before it?

*“You can draw organizational maps or trees to show how one person, place, or event relates to the others.”*

### **Word Watcher**

While reading the assigned selection, watch out for words worth knowing. These words might be interesting, new, important, or used in unusual ways. It is important to indicate the specific location of the words so that the class can discuss the words in context.

Questions to consider:

- What effective words does the author use to help tell the story or describe a character?
- What rhetorical choices does the author use to

effectively arrange and form the elements of the story?

- What words does the author use to create clear and immediate images in your mind when you read the story?
- Which words are used frequently?
- Which words are used in unusual ways?
- What words seem to have special meaning to the characters or author?
- What new words do you find in this section?
- What part of speech is this word?
- What is the connotative meaning of this word?
- What is the denotative meaning of this word?

### **Illustrator**

Your role is to draw what you read. This might mean drawing a scene as a cartoon-like sequence or an important scene so readers can better understand the action. You can draw organizational maps or trees to show how one person, place, or event relates to the others. Be prepared to explain how your drawing relates to the text. Label your drawing so we know who the characters are.

Questions to consider:

- Why did you choose this scene to illustrate?
- How does this drawing relate to the selection?
- Why did you choose to illustrate it the way you did?
- What do we see—i.e., who and/or what is in this picture?
- What, if anything, did drawing it help you see that you had not noticed before?
- What did this quotation/passage make you think about when you read it?
- What are you trying to accomplish through this drawing?
- Ask fellow students: “What do you think this means?”

### **Critic**

Your role is to research one or two critiques of the selection we are reading and to give a brief summary with highlights of what has been written. Be objective in your summary. Remember, you do not have to agree with the writer, but you do need to be objective in presenting his/her opinion. Use TexShare. Student Gold is valuable in this regard. Be sure to document your sources.

*“I am especially interested in the student nominations for best presenters and questions about content.”*

Questions to consider:

- Who is the critic?
- Is any background information given about him/her?
- Can you find critiques about the specific selection, or is it mentioned in a general critique of the author’s work?
- If the critique is specific, what are the main points?
- If the critique is about the overall works, what are the main points?
- Having read the selection, do you agree with the writer? Why or why not?

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Having distributed this overview of the project, with a due date firmly in mind, students go to work reading the stories, researching their portions, and being prepared to present their information to the class.

Classmates are charged with assessing others’ presentations according to the criteria below. They place checks, check-pluses, or check-minuses in the criterion squares or leave the squares blank if the presenter does not accomplish that task. The bottom of the sheet allows a place for student votes for best presenter (with reasons to support this choice) and a place to comment on the informative value of the

presentation. I am especially interested in the student nominations for best presenters and questions about content. I type up their comments and give them to the students labeled as "peer comments" at the bottom of my own evaluation sheets.

Evaluation of Presentations

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Students' Names													
<u>Visual Aid</u> : presenter gives handout, shows poster, uses PowerPoint													
<u>Delivery</u> : presenter faces audience, makes eye contact—doesn't just read off a sheet without looking at audience—is dressed professionally—is fluent													
<u>Content</u> : person recites meaningful section; clearly explains significance; includes bio/historical info; demonstrates satirical techniques; refers to text; provides new information; demonstrates literary techniques													
<u>Time</u> : presentation is no shorter than 3 minutes—no longer than 8													
<u>Organization</u> : introduction and conclusion tie the presentation together; presenter answers questions from students; involves class in discussion or activity													

COMMENTS:

Which presenters from these few days did the best job, in your opinion? Please tell why you think they did the best job.

Do you have any unanswered questions about the material any of your classmates presented? What are those questions?

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Each student then turns in an essay tying together some of the assertions they made about their tale and their role explaining the tale, arguing about the significance of the patterns they have discovered.

Because students work at different paces and may not use class time to the best advantage, during the week of preparation time, I show the recent movie *A Knight's Tale*. Although the movie is full of anachronisms, it generates interest in Chaucer and energizes their research and their presentations.

In a traditional college class, I would not have time to allow class time for research. Neither would I have three days to devote to *A Knight's Tale*. The "We Will Rock You" music from *A Knight's Tale* would fall flat on my college students' ears, but my high school students are into Friday night Texas football – Sweetwater is in the heart of football-crazy Texas football country.

I will go back to the Roles for Presentation when I teach *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. I will not use them as much in the spring when students are involved in individual research about novels and writing term papers. The high school students have energized my teaching and pushed me to do my best to introduce them to some great works of literature. These are refreshing students from a small town – almost anachronisms. What a joy to teach them Chaucer and Shakespeare!

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