English 11 encourages both teacher and student autonomy, in order to provide for the kind of creative, authentic, and deep teaching and learning necessary to prepare all students for college and careers. The course is intended to be customizable for teachers and students, while maintaining a firm foundation in the skills demanded by the Common Core State Standards. For students to remain engaged and inspired as they enter the second half of their high school careers, they must pursue questions that interest them and grapple with big ideas and complex texts. The word “inquiry” in the course title emphasizes this search to make meaning, and the subject of that inquiry is the multitude of different ways that individuals experience life in this country. Those experiences are shaped by an infinite variety of factors, allowing every student to bring an authentic point of view to the conversation. Expanding their vision to take in diverse perspectives, consider ideas from across multiple eras, and share their own thinking with wider and wider audiences, students continue to take full control of their own learning.

This course is intended for teachers and students to find their own learning pathways, and it is set up to encourage online sharing and collaboration across classrooms and across schools. English 11 is the first course to be offered to teachers completely in a Web environment. Teachers may choose to use models and lessons provided by the district office or to create their own, using the county models as a guideline. For more information on specific themes, texts, and tasks, contact the teacher or the resource teacher at individual schools for the teacher’s syllabus.

Each nine-week unit is structured around three organizational factors, with specific decisions about each determined by the grade-level team at each school:

- **Themes**: Each nine-week unit is structured around a theme, along with several focus questions to spark discussion around that theme. Each semester teachers choose two themes from among five models provided by the Department of Secondary Curriculum, or they may also create their own themes.

- **Texts**: The conversation among multiple texts should be the focus of study throughout the unit. In addition to the core text that will be the subject of whole-class study, students are expected to explore a wide variety of written and visual texts from diverse perspectives, varying time periods, and multiple genres to analyze varied language and syntax and to explore the theme further.

- **Tasks**: Students are expected to show their learning through three common tasks each quarter that reflect the three writing types expected in the Common Core State Standards. Within or beyond the instruction for these tasks, teachers should also provide students with opportunities for authentic inquiry, chances to present their learning to classmates or a wider audience, and choices in what they read and how they demonstrate their mastery of the unit objectives.
**Semester A**

Below are outlines of five thematic units that could each serve as the structure for a nine-week course of study. Teachers are encouraged to use two of these units as they are, adapt them for the needs of their students, or even create their own, using these as models.

**Class in America**

Since our nation’s birth, millions of people have arrived on its shores, drawn to America as a land of possibility and promise. America has often been seen as a place where one’s social class is not a predictor of future success, a place where even a person starting with nothing can build wealth and achieve success through honest, hard work. This unit critically examines the idea that America is a land of opportunity for all. The texts in the unit contribute various ways of thinking about the social and economic factors that shape American culture and society. They encourage us to think about how economic factors influence our experience of success, fulfillment, and happiness.

**Education and Learning**

Learning is an ongoing process of struggle and growth. No matter what we do, we are constantly learning new things and building on our previous knowledge. During this unit students will examine how we think about education—both formal and informal—as well as why we value the complex, difficult, and sometimes painful process of learning in general. Students might also consider the implications that education has for other aspects of American life, such as class, economics, and gender roles.

**Humor and Society**

Despite E.B. White’s admonition that “Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind,” reading and thinking about the ways that writers and other artists make us laugh can offer useful insights into the ways we think about our world. Humor often divides us—what was funny to Shakespeare’s audience might not even be comprehensible to a viewer of South Park, and vice versa—but it can also establish bonds between people who laugh at the same jokes. In this unit, teachers and students will give some thought to the role that humor plays in their own lives as well as how it has often served as a means for speaking truth to power. Given the broad span that humor covers, and the widely varying perspectives of both teachers and students, the readings and visual texts chosen for use in this unit will certainly reflect personal preferences. Teachers should, as always, exercise good professional judgment and consider the needs and values of their students and their school community in selecting texts that may be provocative or unusual. They should also consider opportunities to examine texts from multiple time periods, as well as those that may illuminate something about the selected core text.
Race, Culture, and Identity

A person can spend a lifetime trying to figure out who he "really" is. This struggle to know oneself is often shaped by—and also complicated by—such factors as race, ethnic background, and culture. This unit examines the extent to which race and culture shape a person's identity, as well as the roles race and culture play in American society. The texts in the unit include characters or speakers who are engaged in the struggle to define themselves both within and beyond the boundaries of race and cultural background. Students are encouraged to think about how racial and cultural issues manifest in their communities, as well as where and how such issues arise in their own lives.

Stories of Place

The relationship between human beings and their surroundings has been the source of powerful and moving writing, both fictional and nonfictional. Whether a writer's purpose is to call for preservation of the natural world, describe his own encounters with his surroundings, or make an argument about the places people live, the style and craft of these texts often mirror the beauty they celebrate. In this unit, students encounter a wide variety of voices, including essayists who make subtle arguments about the place of people in the natural world and novelists who base their tales on the conflict between individuals and their often hostile environments.

Core Texts

Here are a few of the many approved core texts that teachers might use to focus the students' study of these themes.

- *The Accidental Asian* by Eric Liu
- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain
- *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho
- *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy
- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X and Alex Haley
- *China Men* by Maxine Hong Kingston
- *Donald Duk* by Frank Chin
- *The Color of Water* by James McBride
- *Fences* by August Wilson
- *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *Heart of a Woman* by Maya Angelou
- *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett
- *A Hope in the Unseen* by Ron Suskind
- *House Made of Dawn* by N. Scott Momaday
- *Hunger of Memory* by Richard Rodriguez
- *Into the Beautiful North* by Luis Alberto Urrea
- *Native Son* by Richard Wright
- *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell
- *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau

Students will also read a collection of essays, poems, stories, or other short writings related to the unit themes. In addition, they will conduct research and write about the connections among the texts they read.
Semester B

Below are outlines of five thematic units that could each serve as the structure for a nine-week course of study. Teachers are encouraged to use two of these units as they are, adapt them for the needs of their students, or even create their own, using these as models.

Gender Roles and Expectations

While biology may determine whether an individual is born female or male, societies shape expectations for how women and men behave in a culture. Our nation was founded on the notion that “all men are created equal,” but it took nearly 150 years before women gained the right to vote and almost two centuries before they gained the legal right to equal education and employment opportunities. More recently issues such as sexual orientation and human trafficking have entered into the public discourse about gender. This unit explores how writers and artists help frame the conversation about the role gender plays in both our public and our private lives.

Home and Family

We often ask each other, “Where are you from?” to unearth some clues of the experiences that shape us. Such a simple question can have an intriguing and complicated answer. This unit invites students to think about the physical and psychological habitat of home. Students will also examine what makes a family, and how family life influences our experiences in the social, economic, educational, religious, and political spheres. Our society’s interpretation of what constitutes a family and home has come a long way from the nuclear family archetype that dominated cultural references of the mid-1900s. Students are encouraged to think about their own sense of home and community, as well as how their family experiences have shaped who they are today, as well as their hopes for the future.

The Human Psyche

The human mind, in all its fascinating complexity, has both intrigued and mystified us for as long as we have been able to express our thoughts. The mind, which closely connects to but also extends far beyond the brain, remains something elusive and intangible, despite science’s continued efforts to unlock and explain its mysteries. In this unit students are encouraged to examine the intricacies of the human psyche, how it influences our emotions, our interactions with others, and our perception of the world. While many of the core texts in this unit lend themselves to a study of madness or depression, this unit need not only focus on the disoriented or distressed aspects of the human psyche. Students are encouraged to explore a variety of texts that inspire our curiosity in learning more about the inner workings of the human mind.
Language and Communication

Because this theme is so broad and all-encompassing, teachers may wish to take the unit into any of several different directions. A focus on spoken and written rhetoric will allow students to see how language is used in the public forum to persuade, incite, control, and sometimes mislead. Words as well as images are used not only by governments and organizations trying to change the thinking of their audiences, but also by talented individuals who can use the power of communication to change the world around them. Alternatively, looking through the lens of the history of our language and how it has changed over time may give students a stronger foundation to ask questions about usage, meaning, and connotation. A broad variety of texts from diverse perspectives, genres, and time periods will lead to original connections, unique paths of inquiry and, ideally, a newfound joy in the power of the English language.

Power, Oppression, and Conflict

What does it take to lead? What are the responsibilities of those with power over others? What steps can be taken when this power is abused and used to destroy instead of building up? This unit addresses serious issues of power, politics, and war, but can be approached from many different angles. Depending on what units students have studied during the first semester, teachers may consider the intersections of race, economics, or gender with power, or they may focus on other ways that power is wielded in society: who has it, and how people may attempt to change it. Students should be encouraged, as part of the inquiry tasks of the unit, to explore contemporary or historical conflicts at all scales, and consider how they themselves exert control over their own lives.

Core Texts

Here are a few of the many approved core texts that teachers might use to focus the students’ study of these themes.

American Chica by Marie Arana  
The Awakening by Kate Chopin  
The Crucible by Arthur Miller  
Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller  
Dreams from My Father by Barack Obama  
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer  
Fallen Angels by Walter Dean Myers  
Macbeth by William Shakespeare  
March by Geraldine Brooks

One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest by Ken Kesey  
Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen  
Revolutionary Road by Richard Yates  
The Road by Cormac McCarthy  
A Room of One’s Own by Virginia Woolf  
The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne  
That Night by Alice McDermott  
Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston  
Why We Can’t Wait by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Students will also read a collection of essays, poems, stories, or other short writings related to the unit themes. In addition, they will conduct research and write about the connections among the texts they read.
### Examples of English 11 Common Tasks

In each quarter, teachers will develop three common tasks for all students to complete, matched to the three types of writing identified by the [Common Core State Standards](#):  

- **ARGUMENT**  
- **INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY**  
- **NARRATIVE**

Within or beyond the instruction for these tasks, students must have at least one opportunity per quarter to conduct **research** and one opportunity to **present** their work. Teachers should also offer students **choices** of topic or product when possible, and look for opportunities to blend the writing types. The list below contains sample common tasks that teachers can use or adapt as they plan their units. Teachers are also encouraged to create their own tasks matched to the Standards.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>R = opportunity for research</th>
<th>P = opportunity for presentation</th>
<th>SC = encourages student choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Present a multimedia argument in a form of your own choosing, offering your own personal response to the focus question and using evidence from a variety of online and print sources.</td>
<td>R P SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Write a blog post in response to a text from the unit, including links to a variety of online sources.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Evaluate how effectively a documentary achieves its purpose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Create and share with an authentic audience an argument that contributes to the national conversation on a contemporary issue.</td>
<td>R P SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Write an op-ed in response to an argument raised by one of the collected readings.</td>
<td>R SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Create a narrated video or podcast that synthesizes information from multiple sources to make an argument.</td>
<td>R P SC</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Make an argument in response to a visual text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Write an argumentative essay in response to a quotation from a text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Present an argument about an issue that concerns the local community.</td>
<td>R P SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Write an argument that uses narrative strategies such as anecdote, dialogue, or description.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY TASKS

1. Write an essay that explains an important connection between the core text and another work. [SC]
2. Create an annotated bibliography of sources that comments on the credibility and usefulness of each. [R]
3. Explain and analyze the argument put forth by a visual text. [P]
4. Write an analysis of a text in which the style and rhetoric are particularly powerful, persuasive, and beautiful.
5. Produce a visual or audio presentation that examines how ideas from two texts interact with one another. [R][P][SC]
6. Compare texts from two different historical periods on a common theme or topic.
7. Compare how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.
8. Write a formal research paper that answers a self-generated question or solves a problem. [R][SC]
9. Synthesize sources from widely varying perspectives to explore a topic. [R][P][SC]
10. Present an objective summary of a complex text, such as a philosophical or historical argument. [P][SC]

NARRATIVE TASKS

1. Write an original dramatic scene or short narrative featuring characters or voices from two different texts in the unit. [R][P][SC]
2. Write a narrative that explores the unit theme. [R]
3. Write a scene inspired by a visual image. [SC]
4. Write a brief original scene written from the perspective of a character in the core text other than the narrator.
5. Write a character sketch that demonstrates how a character’s identity is shaped by an aspect of the unit theme (e.g., class, race, gender, place).
6. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of an experience.
7. Rewrite a scene from a text that changes the genre to achieve a particular effect. [SC]
8. Write a brief narrative that uses dialogue as the central technique for character development.
9. Write a narrative that incorporates research. [R][SC]
10. Construct a narrative that illustrates an idea or concept. [P][SC]

[R] = opportunity for research  [P] = opportunity for presentation  [SC] = encourages student choice

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