

# Phaedrus Course Catalog

The following are courses that have previously been offered at Phaedrus. Please look through them as you make your decisions for your desired schedule. Your choices include these options, but not limited to those listed below. If you have a new idea, please suggest your proposal to Pam and Cory, and we can discuss whether we can make this option possible. You are strongly encouraged to take three English courses and three social studies courses throughout the school year.

## English

*\*We strongly recommend taking at least one literature-based course each year.*

### **Book Club**

This course is designed for students to learn how to enjoy reading for pleasure and will teach them how to run their very own book club one day. Students concentrate on contemporary books that have been successful for groups in the recent past. Students are required to keep a journal, in which they write about significant quotations and moments along the way. Students also participate in online discussions on eChalk about the books to continue our conversations outside of class.

*\*In the past, this class has run as a traditional Phaedrus course; this year, there will be multiple outside reading Book Clubs throughout the school year. Students will be required to participate in at least one Book Club during the year.*

### **Classic Literature**

In this literature course, students read short stories and novels, watch films, and write analytical and creative essays in response to these texts. The course focuses on the idea that classics are not simply 'books that every person is forced to read at school.' Instead, their themes and characters are timeless depictions of human relationships as well as human nature. Students participate frequently in class discussion through writing exercises and rich discussions.

### **Contemporary Poetry**

This course is devoted to the reading and writing of poems written from the year 1950 to the present day. Students spend time learning the various techniques and literary devices of contemporary poets and then try to emulate these styles in their own writing. Members of the course write analytical reflections on poetry and critically interpret meaning as well. The course also serves as a writing workshop, where students edit their peers' work carefully. Students teach, learn, read, and write in this interactive course.

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## **Creative Writing**

Creative Writing is designed to engage students in a wide variety of writing experiences - prose, poetry, personal narrative, short stories- through a workshop setting. Students keep journals, write in and out of class, and work with their peers and instructor(s) to understand and enlarge their approaches to writing. At the end of the course, students create a Final Portfolio of their revised drafts and spend a good amount of time preparing for this larger assignment.

## **Cultural Identity**

In this literature course, students define and explore their own cultural identities in relation to those of the characters in the readings. The course focuses primarily on the role that identity plays in decision-making, parent-child relationships, and the characters' emotional states-of-mind. Central texts include: Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (the novel and the film) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Students are required to complete daily reading assignments, participate in class discussion, and respond in writing to frequent writing assignments.

## **Dreamers and Schemers**

Dreamers and Schemers is a literature course in which students read short stories and novels, watch films, and write analytical and creative essays in response to these texts. The course focuses on the theme of unfulfilled dreams, the desire to attain them, and the ultimate danger in reaching for the impossible. Students participate frequently in class discussion and are responsible for teaching class throughout the semester. Texts include works by: F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Charles Dickens, John Knowles, and more.

## **Gender as an Issue in Literature**

This course focuses on both reading and writing. The reading list includes (but is not limited to): Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Students are asked to read, respond informally in a journal to what they have read, and share their views in a seminar-type of class. In addition, they write analytical or critical essays on the literary works they have discussed, bringing rough drafts to class to be critiqued by their peers. The drafts are then revised and edited before being submitted for evaluation.

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## **Harlem Renaissance**

The Harlem Renaissance was a dramatic and complicated period of tremendous political, social and academic growth for black Americans. In this course, students explore various texts including essays, poetry, music, art, novels, memoirs, and literary criticism from and about this critical time period. Evaluations are based on contributions to class discussion and ability to express understanding through analysis and writing. Students research topics of interest, write numerous reflections based on texts' themes and characters, and debate controversial topics in class discussion.

## **Junior Writers' Workshop**

*\*Mandatory for all Juniors*

Junior Writers' Workshop is a course devoted to writing, editing, and revising a variety of essays. Students are expected to write analytical, creative, and persuasive pieces with attention to detail, specific examples and evidence, and voice. The course also serves as a workshop, as the title suggests; members, therefore, learn peer-editing techniques and strategies that they ultimately apply to their own individual pieces. The goal is for students to recognize their capabilities as writers and gain confidence as they continue their writing careers.

## **Literature vs. Film**

This course explores the relationships between literature and cinema. While examining the more subtle influence that cinema has had on literature, our main focus is the cinematographic adaptation of literary texts. Students are expected to read short stories and novels, and discuss their use of literary devices and techniques in depth; then, students view the film adaptations of these literary works and analyze the value of the text versus the screen performance. In addition, students may also view the film first and read the text second, and are again expected to draw parallels and contrasts to establish the impact of each genre for the viewer and reader.

## **Memoirs**

Memoirs is a course devoted to the reading and writing of personal and non-fictional accounts of life experiences. Students read numerous books, short stories, and excerpts to learn the various styles, techniques, and approaches writers often take when constructing a memoir. Members of the course also write many analytical essays about the themes, questions and ideas raised, and language used in the texts. These written responses encourage students to delve deep below the surface of the stories to uncover additional meaning. In addition, they write their own personal memoirs and reflect upon their own experiences in the styles of the other published writers whom we have studied.

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## **Personal Essay Writing**

*\*Mandatory for all Seniors*

This course is a senior elective that encourages students to write clearly and meaningfully from their own experiences. Writers in the class are required to read good writing, to keep journals, to share their writing with others in the course, to critique the work of peers, and to finalize a number of their pieces for inclusion in a portfolio, which will be the basis for evaluation at the end of the course. Students will also contribute several finished works to a class collection to be published in the Alternative School.

## **Public Speaking**

Public Speaking requires students to build on their speech-making abilities. Through graduation speeches, panel interviews, toasts, demonstration presentations, and more, students learn preparation strategies for speaking effectively in front of a group. Members of the class are also responsible for editing each others' written work, as well as critiquing their performances. Other speaking games and activities are also utilized to maximize each student's progress as a public speaker.

## **Shakespeare**

This "Taste of Shakespeare" class studies three of Shakespeare's plays: *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Assignments include reading and writing interpretations of scenes, rewriting scenes in modern language, performing scenes, writing reviews of films or stage productions of the plays, and creating projects based on and incorporating text.

## **Short Story Reading and Writing**

In this reading and writing course, students explore the incredible variety and complexity in the stories of human beings. They also discover the infinite possibilities in their own and others' writing. The class is designed to allow students to appreciate what some call a "dying genre," and bring short fiction back to life. Short stories are unique because they come in so many different forms, lengths, styles, and voices. The goal of the course is for students to learn to both emulate these different voices and create their own in their writing. Students share writing with peers, critique their classmates' work, and read and write many assignments.

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## Social Studies

### **Comparative Religion**

This course is designed to allow students to experience and learn about other religions. The class provides an opportunity for students to research and delve into their own beliefs, as well as share their ideas and questions with other students. It also allows them, perhaps, for the first time, to explore how other people worship and exchange thoughts on a variety of topics in a non-threatening manner.

### **Conspiracies and Scandals**

This class is student-driven and delves into various historical conspiracies and scandals. The premise of the students' research is to discover whether or not there is truth to information and data regarding many of the well-known, more sensational episodes in history. The students deal with topics such as: the assassination of JFK, Watergate, 9/11, the existence of the Illuminati, and a variety of other subjects and events chosen by the students. Students research these topics and present their findings to the class for discussion.

### **Contemporary American Society**

This course is designed for students who have a keen interest in contemporary American society and current events. Students study various economic, social and political trends, and the issues they raise for future voters and citizens. Areas of both domestic and foreign policy are addressed. Students are taught to access, organize and evaluate information from a wide variety of sources in order to make informed judgments. Students use the Internet, video, interview, and printed news sources for research.

### **Economics**

*\*This course is mandatory for all students*

This course is a seminar-style discussion class designed to give the students the basic principles of economics and life skills. It presents the tenets in a fundamental manner that allows the students to use the information in everyday situations to prepare them for their own experiences after school. Some of the activities that the students participate in are: trading stocks, buying a car, learning how to choose a bank, and figuring out their own daily finances. Overall, this course is geared to preparing young people for life.

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## **Films and Time**

This course is designed to give students the opportunity to analyze films that were produced from the 1930s through present day. The films may, or may not, examine actual historical people or events, but the students are required to be knowledgeable about the time period in which the films were produced. They are also required to determine how character and plot development coincide with the decade, or time period, and the influence of social, political, and economic factors on the film.

## **Historical Films**

This course explores history through documentaries and commercial movies, using an array of music and films to analyze and evaluate the depiction of actual events in history and the climate of the times. Students use research techniques, written and verbal presentations, and a final culminating video to compare the music/movies to actual events. Students also address the issues of audio/visual literacy as we use the music/film mediums as a tool to learn history.

## **History of American Music**

Understanding and appreciating American music leads to a better understanding of our nation's history. While America has always been the "melting pot" of culture, American music is our most visible, popular, and accurate reflection of the American experience. This class provides students with the vocabulary for listening, appreciating, and writing about music. Students trace our musical origins back to Africa and Europe, and come to understand how music has changed throughout the last 150 years. Students will also examine the role that music has played as a commodity, and address the future of music in the digital age.

## **Holocaust**

The Holocaust class allows students to explore history and literature of the time period of the Holocaust. Lectures, readings, discussions, guest presentations, and films focus on such subjects as: the history of Germany and Europe from the end of WWI through the end of WWII, the history of the Jews and others who were victims of Hitler during these years, the specific events of the Holocaust, and the ways in which individuals and groups responded to these events.

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## **Law and Government**

*\*This course is mandatory for all Juniors*

This course is designed to make the students more aware of their government and the laws that govern this country. This class looks at current events around the world and how it impacts on each student's life (politically, economically, and socially). Students track global trends and assess their consequences on our society. Through the use of a variety of media sources (i.e. newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, etc.), students also discuss the impact of the media on our thought processes and see how media influences our opinions on subjects that matter to the political and social situations of today.

## **Man's Inhumanities to Man**

This course is designed to teach students about the world around them and the events and issues that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that helped create the current environment. Genocides and human rights issues are the focus of this class, including: the Jewish Holocaust, the genocide in Rwanda, the genocide in Cambodia, and the situation in the Sudan today,

## **Political Geography**

Political geography is a course designed to discuss the geographical basis of political conflict and international relations. Emphasis will be on power and conflict in the regional framework. Students are expected to understand such topics as: the rise of ethnic conflicts as a major development in global political disputes, changes and patterns in the world political map and contemporary geopolitical questions, international organizations, international law, environmental issues, global environmental politics and other relevant issues.

## **Political Science**

This course investigates the nature of states, the functions performed by governments, voter behavior, political parties, political culture, and public opinion, among other topics. Students study a wide range of theorists including: Plato, Tzo Sun, Machiavelli, Rousseau as well as many others. Area studies focus on questions of modernization and industrialization, as the class strives to understand the differing developmental logic of non-Western cultures.

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## **Psychology**

Alternative School psychology/sociology is a class designed for students to discuss realistic issues related to their lives. Topics such as depression and suicide, social deviance, learning styles, personality development and many others serve as educational devices for discussion for the students. The aim of this class is to give students a general overview of topics that are realistic and applicable. The structure of the class is discussion-based where the students are expected to contribute their views on the topic at hand. Cooperative-learning, creative projects, papers, journal reflections and films are the foundation for this class.

## **The 1960s**

This course is designed to give the students an understanding of the tumultuous time of the 1960s. The course is broken into three parts: the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War Era, and the culture of the 1960s. Discussions focus on the social, political, and economical situations, and the course then culminates in a luncheon during which each student plays the role of a person from the 1960s. With the use of a variety of media, the students become more familiar with the time period.

## **The 1980s**

This course is designed to give the students an appreciation of how significantly culture can change in just a few years. Students review the political and social cultures of the 1960s and 1970s as an introduction to the 1980s. The 1980s was a time of great technological change in areas such as personal computers and *Star Wars* technology. As a country, our outlook also became more conservative. In addition, the influence of Communism waned and the Cold War ended. Students then examine the impact of Reaganomics. Finally, students are able to look at the media sources from the decade in which they were born, but of which are perhaps too young to have any memories.

## **US History**

*\*This course is mandatory for all students*

The objective of this class is to achieve an understanding of the development of the United States of America from the colonial period to the present day. The formation of the government, with the creation interpretation and use of the Constitution, is crucial to this understanding. Students primarily study the time period between post-Civil War to the present as the bulk of their studies. All students take the New York State Regents exam after taking this course.

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## Visual Media

This course is designed to help students understand the role that visual media plays in presenting events involving the United States. Students use a variety of sources, including commercials, TV, movies, and music video to trace the evolution of America's morals, ethics, and reality.

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- Independent Study options are also available based on student requests and teacher availability
- At times, there will also be Mini-Courses offered as an additional part of our curriculum, in which students will research a topic-of-choice within the particular content areas

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## A-School Social Science Research Course

This course is designed to ensure that all A-School students have the skills required to write a college level social science research paper. The research project is based on the research paper for the National History Day Project. This project allows students to experience “becoming an historian” from selecting a topic, to researching the topic, to writing the final draft of the paper and annotated bibliography. Emphasis will be placed on wide but balanced research and use of both primary and secondary sources, analysis and interpretation of sources, putting information into historical context, overall organization and presentation of information, and correct citation of sources. Students will be encouraged to come up with an original thesis to defend in the paper. This course will build on what students have learned in their English classes since the ninth grade “I-Search” experience, but will also help students to differentiate the requirements for an English paper compared to a social science paper. Much of this course will be done online supplemented by small group and individual meetings periodically.