Using Conversations in American Literature to Satisfy the AP® English Language and Composition Curricular Requirements

Below is a list of the AP® English Language and Composition curricular requirements, followed by a description of Conversations in American Literature’s approach to fulfilling that requirement, and then a sample assignment demonstrating the approach from Chapter 5, A Meeting of Old and New Worlds: Beginnings to 1750.

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<td>1. The course teaches and requires students to write in several forms (e.g., narrative, expository, analytical, and argumentative essays) about a variety of subjects (e.g., public policies, popular culture, personal experience).</td>
<td>• Writing instruction in the opening chapters, particularly the chapter on argument, emphasizes argumentative writing and use of narrative, expository, and analytical techniques in the service of building an argument (see, for instance, pp. 101-116).</td>
<td>Entering the Conversation q. 6, p. 278: “It has been argued that the ‘city upon the hill’ of Winthrop’s speech given on the Arabella was the beginning of America’s “corporate identity’ (as Sacvan Bercovitch calls it); its view of itself as separate and distinct from human history. Find other examples, either explicit or implicit, in modern public discourse of the idea of America as a city on a hill. In what ways do they argue for American exceptionalism? Do they have other purposes as well? How do they express them? Write a roundtable discussion that includes Winthrop and Reagan from this Conversation along with at least two other writers who have alluded to the city on the hill.”</td>
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<td>• Writing prompts after each reading, after paired readings (TalkBacks), at the end of Conversations, and Suggestions for Writing at the end of Ch. 5-10, all call for writing in a range of forms, from narratives to interpretative essays to researched arguments and reflections. These often ask students to consider the readings’ relationship to other subjects, such as contemporary laws and popular culture.</td>
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<td>2. The course requires students to write essays that proceed through several stages or drafts, with revision aided by teacher and peers.</td>
<td>• Opening chapters include writing instruction that emphasizes the writing process from generating and developing a thesis, to incorporating sources, and revising. (These topics are woven throughout Ch. 3. In Ch. 2 see pp. 62-67. In Ch. 4 see pp. 175-183.)</td>
<td>Grammar as Rhetoric and Style ex. 4, p. 342: “Examine some of your own writing — at least 300 words in length. Identify any examples of subordination. Then, revise the writing by adding subordinate conjunctions that make the relationship among ideas more specific and precise. In what ways has the overall effect of the writing changed? Is it more effective? Why or why not?”</td>
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<td>• Exercises in the Grammar as Rhetoric and Style sections at the end of each anthology chapter have students revise sample writing as well as their own to see how it can be improved by proper use of grammatical structures. See, for example, exercises on cumulative, periodic, and inverted sentences (pp. 815-818).</td>
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| 3. The course requires students to write in informal contexts (e.g., imitation exercises, journal keeping, collaborative writing, and in-class responses) designed to help them become increasingly aware of themselves as writers and of the techniques employed by the writers they read. | • The opening chapters provide students with ample opportunities to write brief informal pieces, which could be used as in-class or collaborative assignments, including pp. 2, 4, 10, and 89.  
• Exploring the Text and Making Connections questions after readings, after TalkBacks, and within Conversations allow for informal responses as well as imitations of other writers’ style or rhetorical strategies (e.g. pp. 399, 606, or 785).  
• Grammar as Rhetoric and Style sections include imitation exercises. | Making Connections q. 2, p. 304: “How would Wilma Mankiller [activist and advocate for Native American rights] (p. 293) likely respond to [Christopher Columbus’s Journal of the First Voyage to America] (p. 279)?” |
| 4. The course requires expository, analytical, and argumentative writing assignments that are based on readings representing a wide variety of prose styles and genres. | • Chapters 1-4 include instruction in the writing process and writing analytical and argumentative essays. Prompts are based on brief readings and visual texts that range from satirical letters (Groucho Marx letter to Warner Brothers) to political speeches (abolitionist Angelina Grimké Weld’s speech at Pennsylvania Hall).  
• In the thematic chapters, readings range from pre-colonial Native American origin stories to the 21st century and include a wide range of genres (e.g., letters, essays, scientific writing, satire, fiction, poetry, etc.) with writing suggestions that ask students to explain and apply ideas from the readings, to analyze the techniques and strategies of the writers, to critique those techniques and strategies, and to develop a position on issues raised by the writers or on the issues themselves. | Expository  
Exploring the Text q. 7, p. 239: “Captivity narratives — an early form of travel literature and a forerunner of fiction — have three common plotline characteristics: a separation, a transformation, and a return. Generally the longest part, the transformation includes adventures, as captives journey into the wilderness, encounter various obstacles and trials, and become more familiar with their captors’ way of life. Explain these structural components in Rowlandson’s narrative.”  
Analytic  
Exploring the Text q. 9, p. 225: “What was the rhetorical situation of Bradstreet and her readers? Analyze the poem ‘The Prologue’, which is often read as an argument that Bradstreet builds stanza by stanza, by considering formal characteristics such as claim, assumptions, counterargument, and evidence.”  
Argumentative  
Entering the Conversation q. 4, p. 305: “In 1912, the Columbus Memorial Fountain was dedicated. Situated in front of historic Union Station in Washington, D.C, it features a globe on top of a monument surrounded by figures, including that of a Native American, representing the Old and the New worlds; a statue of Columbus is in the center, and the following inscription appears on the back of the monument: ‘To the memory of Christopher Columbus, whose high faith and indomitable courage gave to mankind a new world.’ After researching the background of and funding for this monument, write an essay arguing for or against its worth as part of the Washington, D.C., landscape. Use at least three of the sources in this Conversation to develop your argument.” |
### 5. The course requires nonfiction readings (e.g., essays, journalism, political writing, science writing, nature writing, autobiographies/biographies, diaries, history, criticism) that are selected to give students opportunities to identify and explain an author’s use of rhetorical strategies and techniques. If fiction and poetry are also assigned, their main purpose should be to help students understand how various effects are achieved by writers’ linguistic and rhetorical choices. (Note: The College Board does not mandate any particular authors…)

- The majority of the readings are nonfiction, with multiple types—excerpts from long works, essays, journalism, political writing, autobiographies, letters, etc.—represented in each time period. Nonfiction writing is included, for example, from Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Judith Sargent Murray, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, Henry David Thoreau, Susan B. Anthony, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, W. E. B. DuBois, Upton Sinclair, Ezra Pound, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Joan Didion, Sherman Alexie, Malcolm Gladwell, and Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco: writers diverse in terms of viewpoint as well as background and ethnicity.

- Texts were selected for their foundational status in American arts and letters, for their representation of contemporaneous and enduring issues, and for their intellectual and stylistic excellence.

- Extensive questions after each text and each group of texts focus on rhetorical strategies and techniques.

- Fiction and poetry included with each chapter contribute to the thematic complexity; questions focus on close reading of how the writers’ choices serve purpose, and achieve meaning and effect.

- See also brief instructional readings in Chs. 1-4.

### Readings in Chapter 5

- **p. 279**: from *Journal of the First Voyage to America*, Christopher Columbus (1492)

- **p. 209**: from *The Relation of Cabeza de Vaca*, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (1542)

- **p. 254**: from *A Modell of Christian Charity*, John Winthrop (1630)

- **p. 225**: *The Author to Her Book*, Anne Bradstreet (1678)

- **p. 231**: from *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, Mary Rowlandson (1682)

- **p. 259**: from *What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July?*, Frederick Douglass (1852)


- **p. 271**: *Tucson Memorial Speech*, Barak Obama (2011)

### 6. The course teaches students to analyze how graphics and visual images both relate to written texts and serve as alternative forms of texts themselves.


- Every anthology chapter has several visual texts—including photographs, political cartoons, magazine covers, fine art, and advertisements.

- Questions direct students to an understanding of these texts as visual rhetoric.

### Questions q. 3, p. 318: “[In John Gadsby Chapman’s *The Baptism of Pocahontas*] what is your impression of the Native American figures, particularly Pocahontas’s sister—who is holding a baby, her brother Nantaquaus—who is turning away, and her uncle Opechancanough—who is seated, facing the viewer? How do they contrast with the English figures and with Pocahontas? What is the rhetorical effect of these depictions?”
### 7. The course teaches research skills, and in particular, the ability to evaluate, use, and cite primary and secondary sources. The course assigns projects such as the researched argument paper, which goes beyond the parameters of a traditional research paper by asking students to present an argument of their own that includes the analysis and synthesis of ideas from an array of courses.

- Chapter 3 helps students understand the various types of evidence (and the sources they come from). See pp. 101-116 especially.
- Chapter 4 is a guide to the use and synthesis of sources in a student’s own argument.
- Each chapter includes a “Conversation” section that provides students practice in developing a documented essay that presents their own viewpoint supported by analysis and use of several sources.
- In addition, Suggestions for Writing at the end of each chapter can be used as large-scale synthesis projects drawing upon all of the readings in the chapter.

#### Entering the Conversation q. 2, p. 304:

“In his article ‘What Columbus Day Really Means,’ Connell asserts, ‘Most of the media noise around the Columbus Day holiday is about the holiday’s excuse, not the holiday itself’ (par. 3). Write an essay explaining why you agree or disagree with this statement about the celebration of Columbus Day. Use two of the secondary sources along with Columbus’s Journal and/or the Requerimiento to bolster your argument.”

### 8. The AP teacher provides instruction and feedback on students’ writing assignments, both before and after the students revise their work, that help the students develop these skills:

8a) A wide ranging vocabulary used appropriately and effectively

8a) Chapter 2 addresses the importance of diction to achieving the speaker’s purpose (pp. 41-46).

- In the thematic chapters, questions for each reading call attention to the choices the writer makes at the word level, specifically as those choices appeal to a specific audience.

- Grammar as Rhetoric and Style instructs in effective use of modifiers (pp. 1058-1065) and direct, precise, and active verbs (pp. 1271-1276).

#### Exploring the Text q. 4, p. 248:

“Selecting either paragraph 2 or 3 [of Wonders of the Invisible World], analyze how through his choice of language [Cotton] Mather dramatizes the battle between the forces of good and evil; note his use of specific words as well as images.”
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| **8b)** A variety of sentence structures, including appropriate use of subordination and coordination | **8b)**  
- Chapter 2 addresses the importance of syntax to achieving the speaker’s purpose.  
- In the anthology chapters, questions on the readings focus on stylistic issues at the sentence level.  
- *Grammar as Rhetoric and Style* specifically addresses different sentence patterns including subordination (pp. 336-342), coordination (p. 810), appositives (pp. 535-543), parallel structures (pp. 1557-1564), and cumulative, periodic, and inverted sentences (pp. 809-818). Exercises give students the opportunity to try out different sentence structures in their own work and consider the effect.  
**Grammar as Rhetoric and Style ex. 3, p. 341:** “Analyze the use of subordinate clauses in the following passages from seventeenth-century writers. Pay particular attention to how subordination calls attention to specific types of relationships between and among ideas:  
1. Thirdly, when God gives a special commission he looks to have it strictly observed in every article. When he gave Saul a commission to destroy Amalek, he indentured with him upon certain articles, and because he failed in one of the least, and that upon a fair pretense, it lost him the kingdom which should have been his reward if he had observed his commission. — John Winthrop” | **8b)**  
**Questions q. 2, p. 264:** “What patterns can you see in the speech [The Mindless Menace of Violence]—parallel structures, repeated images—that helped [Robert] Kennedy achieve the purposes of the speech?” |
| **8c)** Logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques to increase coherence, such as repetition, transitions, and emphasis | **8c)**  
- Chapter 3 discusses various ways of shaping an argument, including the classical oration (pp. 116-120), induction (pp. 120-123), deduction (pp. 123-126), and the Toulmin Model (pp. 126-131).  
- Questions for Exploring the Text, Making Connections, and Entering the Conversation all include examination of the organization of readings as well as ways the writer achieves a desired purpose and effect through repetition, transitional words and phrases, and devices for emphasis (e.g., anaphora, sentence fragments, analogy). |
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| **8d)** a balance of generalization and specific illustrative detail | **8d)** Instruction in close reading in Chapter 2 directs students’ attention to distribution of detail (pp. 50-51, 57-60).  
• Chapter 3 includes a discussion of different types of evidence and detail students can use in their own writing (pp. 101-102, 104-114, 117).  
• Questions following each of the readings guide students as they explore ways writers support generalizations with different types of specific detail (such as anecdote, facts, statistics, personal experience) or develop generalizations from concrete detail. | **8d)** Exploring the Text q. 9, p. 217: “Cabeza de Vaca’s narrative is simultaneously a documentary account of a lived experience and an attempt to interpret it and give it meaning. Identify one or two places where the more anthropological style of the account gives way to interpretation, and discuss the effect of these two rhetorical purposes in combination. Is the result a confusing or a more powerful description?” |
| **8e)** an effective use of rhetoric, including controlling tone, establishing and maintaining voice, and achieving appropriate emphasis through diction and sentence structure. | **8e)**  
• Chapter 1 presents an overview of rhetoric and models effective use of rhetoric.  
• Chapter 2 introduces close reading and analyzes style, including tone, in the context of achieving a specific effect, meaning, and purpose.  
• These chapters as well as questions following readings throughout the text include opportunities for students to explore how rhetoric is shaped for its context and audience.  
• Throughout the text, questions and writing assignments emphasize the development and importance of tone. | **8e)** Exploring the Text q. 9, p. 253: Reverend John Hale wrote this apologia not in the heat of debate or battle but as a reflection. In it he fully acknowledges the burden he and other leaders must bear for the hysteria, the division, and the executions. What rhetorical strategies does he employ in this document to promote healing within the community of Salem? Include in your analysis a discussion of his tone in this document. |