



## English Department Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. *Grammar? Why are you studying grammar in high school?*

We remember studying grammar well into our high school years, and we're surprised so many other schools stop teaching grammar in middle school. Grammar helps us to articulate our thoughts and ideas to others in a clear, mutually agreed upon way. We know English grammar contains a lot of rules—and different style guides with different rules – and we want your son to have plenty of experience with the terminology and the basic structure of English grammar. To this end, we study grammar intensely freshman and sophomore years. During junior and senior years, our study of grammar continues via application: your son will begin working on formal essay writing. This grammatical practice will help him as a speaker, a reader, and a writer, and it will prepare him not only to learn different protocols in other areas of his life but to be adaptable as well.

### 2. *My son has difficulty reading, and I'm a little worried about all the reading he has to do.*

While your son's difficulty reading may stem from a learning disability, for most people, the root cause is simply lack of practice, and he'll have plenty of practice at Catholic High School, but we aren't just going to toss him into the deep end. Yes, he will have the printed word in front of him, but we also encourage the use of audiobooks. We have a subscription to Learning Ally, which will provide your son with the audio he needs, and we can help him find other online resources to read texts to him. Of course, one of the best ways for you to help him is to read the same works and discuss them with him. This will both hold him accountable and help him to increase in his ability. To quantify the experience he will gain if you encourage that reading, just consider this: if he reads 20 minutes a day, he'll encounter 1,800,000 words in a year. If he reads only five minutes a day, that number drops to 282,000. And at one minute, only 8,000. He may struggle early on, but we're running a marathon, and the work he puts in on the front end will pay off in dividends down the road.

### 3. *What kind of books will my son read?*

Each year at Catholic High, your son will read selections from his Norton textbook as well as novels curated by the English Department. Norton has a long history of publishing excellent anthologies of English text, incorporating not only works that have gained classic or culturally important status but also works that present a diversity of voices.

The novels we've selected fall primarily into two categories: some are mainly just fun books that encourage a love of reading, such as Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*, whereas others are culturally significant, such as *Of Mice and Men*, to select two books from freshman year. These books are not always easy, and the characters are not always nice, but that's life, isn't it? We read these works here, including books with troublesome or morally questionable characters, to help students grow in their understanding of their own morality, their own ethics, and their own integrity. Literature is an essential part of Catholic education, and discussing the dilemmas of what it means to be a human being within a

Christian setting helps us not only to encounter our own cultural heritage but also to see the world and its problems through a Christian lens.

4. *What does the English Department do to encourage writing and critical thinking?*

One of our favorite things to do as English teachers is to facilitate conversation and debate with the stories that we read together in class, and that's one reason why we really want our students to do their reading! Sir Francis Bacon wrote that "reading maketh a man full, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man." From the very beginning, we'll push your son to do his research, support his positions with evidence, and to recognize that gaining perspective doesn't mean forgetting himself. And in junior year, we'll start working with writing more precisely. For those students who really want to improve their ability to write, we offer a Composition class as an elective, and for students who desire to practice thinking even more critically, we offer honors classes for each of the first three years of English and Advanced Placement English IV. We also have a wonderful elective called Themes in Literature that examines the ideas of literary works in a deeper, more philosophical way.

5. *How do you know the English Department is at all successful?*

Aside from our students' success within the classroom, we do have other anecdotal evidence of success from the number of alumni who write or visit and tell us how well-prepared they were for their reading and writing in college, in their jobs, and in their lives. We think we encounter true success in especially the latter: our boys become men who are lifelong learners. But we have pretty decent numbers, too. We have almost no students who require remedial work in English in college (and we'd like to say that number is probably zero), and we've seen great success with the AP Literature exam. 93% of our students who take the exam have scored a three or higher, thereby earning collegiate credit, with an average score of 3.5, compared with a state average of 2.7 and a national average of 3.3

6. *My son isn't sure he wants to attend college. What can he hope to gain from the Catholic High English curriculum?*

He can gain an appreciation for the arts, an exposure to the beauty possible in the English language, and perspective regarding how other people experience the world. He can learn that stories are so much more than entertainment. He can enter into the Great Conversation of what it means to be human. He can know himself, others, and God more deeply. He can learn how to express himself clearly. He can learn how to think for himself. He can learn that hard work and patient growth pay off. He can learn self-discipline. He can gain self-confidence. He can be a Rocket.