

Middle School Tools: Reading with Power and Precision

Instructor: Lauren Bailes (lpbailes@gmail.com).

To apply: request an application from the course instructor.

Course Description: This course lays a foundation for future college prep high school work by focusing on the analytical and inferential reading skills necessary to boost students' reading comprehension. The best practice for good reading is simply reading good books. In this course students will learn to pay attention to structure, language, characters, literary devices, and connotation – as critical clues to meaning. In order to read with power and precision, readers must first recognize that each genre requires them to utilize a distinct skill set. This semester-long course will use a strategy-based approach that focuses on providing students with skill sets that transfer across genres and texts. Each of the four units in this course will focus on a text and, through the reading of that text; students will learn how to identify the skills needed to access a particular genre *and* how to apply those skills to future texts they encounter.

Analytical reading is the essential reading comprehension skill measured on the SAT, ACT and AP exams.

Prerequisites: None

Grades: Ideally suited for 6th to 8th grade students.

Overview:

- Students will collaborate in self-determined groups for the purposes of peer revision, class discussion, and critical interpretation
- Students will read three novel-length texts and several short texts in three units, each focusing on a different genre (narrative fiction, narrative nonfiction, science-fiction/fantasy, and short story).
- Students will recognize the distinct features of each of the four genres studied in this course
- Students will recognize common patterns in each genre and learn to use these patterns to further their analysis of texts
- Students will learn to 'read with minds wide open' so they learn to pay attention to:
 - Character and character development
 - Conflict
 - Point of view
 - Setting
 - Social issues
 - Tone and mood
 - Theme
 - Figurative language
- Students will use evidence from texts to support their analysis and explication of the texts
- Students will demonstrate mastery of the material through interaction, writing, and activity-based assessments

Course Objectives:

- To help students develop reading processes that are both efficient and effective
- To help students recognize rhetorical, structural, and linguistic choices that writers make and aid students in making their own choices about how to apply reading strategies
- To develop students' collaborative skills and critical eyes, especially in regards to the varying opinions of their fellow students and the texts they encounter

Ideal Student:

- At least 6th grade or at least 11 years old. Some degree of self-motivation, organization, and focus on learning will be beneficial to the student.
- All students, regardless of past reading experience, are welcome to register. The class work will build on a baseline reading assessment that will be given at the start of class.
- Projects and groups will be differentiated based on the student's abilities so that all students have a challenging and nurturing environment in which to grow their reading abilities.
- Available to collaborating with others weekly. I do accept a few students whose schedules do not permit them to be a part of weekly collaboration. Please discuss this with me when you apply.

Text:

A Wrinkle in Time, ASIN: B004RGSDCA
Madeleine L'Engle

Edward's Eyes, Patricia MacLachlan
ISBN 10: 1416927441

Witness, Karen Hesse
ISBN 10: 0439272009

Instructor's Qualifications: MA in Literacy Education from Teachers College, Columbia University; BA in English Literature and Secondary Education from Eastern University. I've taught in homeschool co-ops, organized outcome-based summer literacy instruction for the Harlem Children's Zone and taught middle school English in the New York City public schools for four years. I am a in the second year of a PhD in Educational Administration at The Ohio State University. I continue to support Teach for America and KIPP Schools as they develop more rigorous Language Arts curricula. I was homeschooled and took both the AP Language and AP Literature exams.