

Ivy College Guru

Dr. Gavin Wittje

gavinwit@gmail.com

www.ivycollegeguru.com

Phone: 616-516-3959

2026 Spring Semester English Fundamentals Class Syllabus

A 16-week spring semester session; one meeting per week

Sundays 2 pm – 4 pm from 01/18/2026 to 05/03/2026 (or Saturdays 2-4)

I. Theme for Class

The theme this semester is Asian Americans and Asian American literature, though, as usual, we will be exploring this theme very broadly. Of the authors, only one (David Hwang) tackles themes of Asian-American identity directly, only two authors are Asian (Chinese) American; however, they do all comment on the politics of racial identity and immigration, a topic which seems particularly relevant nowadays.

II. Purpose of the program

My intention for this class is to help students improve their

1. Fundamental skills in English vocabulary, reading, writing, and grammar
2. Standardized test taking ability
3. Enjoyment and understanding of life
4. General knowledge about the humanities and social sciences
5. Educational experience overall

III. Major Contents of the program

The class will consist of the following specific contents and learning objectives:

1. Vocabulary-building
2. Guided reading of well-regarded essays, novels, plays, and short stories
3. Guidance and feedback on in-class and out of class writing assignments
4. Intensive training in grammar (for SAT, ACT, and other standardized tests)
5. Multiple exercises and assignments related to Vocabulary, Reading, Grammar, and Writing.

IV. Textbooks and Study Materials

The class requires a number of books and other materials.

1. *ACT Prep Book 2025-2026 [9th Edition]* by Lydia Morrison (ISBN: 978-1637758595)
2. *Wordly Wise Book 9* (978-0838877098)

3. Novels and books: 1) *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, by Sherman Alexie (978-0316013697), 2) *Short Stories* (in Study Guide) of Ted Chiang, 3) *Snow Crash*, by Neal Stevenson (978-0553380958), and 4) *Sound of a Voice* and *Yellow Face* (in Study Guide or pdf) by Henry David Hwang.

IV. Schedule of the Ivy-Essential English Program (16 weeks)

Week/Date	Reading/Literature	Writing Practice	Vocabulary from Wordly Wise 9	ACT Success
1 1/18	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> , by Sherman Alexie; “The Facebook Sonnet” — Sherman Alexie	Diary 1	Units 1-2	Introduction
2 1/25	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> , by Sherman Alexie; “Indian Boarding School: The Runaways” — Louise Erdrich	Diary 2	Units 3-4	English
3 2/1	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> , by Sherman Alexie; “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar; “Sympathy” — Paul Laurence Dunbar	Diary 3	Units 1-4	English
4 2/8	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> , by Sherman Alexie; “To Autumn” — John Keats	Diary 4 First essay due	Units 5-6	English
5 2/15	“It’s 2059 and the Rich Kids are Still Winning” and “The Great Silence” by Ted Chiang; “The Gift” — Li-Young Lee	Future Op-Ed	Units 7-8	English
6 2/22	“Understand” by Ted Chiang; “Fern Hill” — Dylan Thomas	Superhero story	Units 5-8	English
7 3/1	“The Merchant and the Alchemist’s Gate” by Ted Chiang; “Preludes” — T. S. Eliot	Time travel story	Units 9-10	Reading

8 3/8	“Hell is the Absence of God” by Ted Chiang; “London” — William Blake, “The Garden of Love” — William Blake	Literary Analysis; Second essay due	Units 11-12	Reading
9 3/15	<i>Snow Crash</i> , by Neal Stevenson; “Ulysses” — Alfred, Lord Tennyson	Dangers of Social Media/AI	Units 9-12	Reading
10 3/22	<i>Snow Crash</i> , by Neal Stevenson; “Leisure” — W. H. Davies	Benefits of Social Media/AI	Units 13-14	Reading
11 3/29	<i>Snow Crash</i> , by Neal Stevenson; “The Song of Wandering Aengus” — W. B. Yeats	Conspiracy Theory story	Units 15-16	Reading
12 4/5	<i>Snow Crash</i> , by Neal Stevenson; “God’s Grandeur” — Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Pied Beauty” — Gerard Manley Hopkins	Debate: techno-colonialism/im migration; Third essay due	Units 13-16	Science
13 4/12	<i>Sound of a Voice</i> , by Henry Hwang; “War Photographer” — Carol Ann Duffy; “Valentine” — Carol Ann Duffy	Essay: “What does it mean to be an Asian American?”	Units 17-18	Science
14 4/19	<i>Yellow Face</i> , by Henry Hwang; “The Peace of Wild Things” — Wendell Berry	Racism against Asian Americans?	Units 19-20	Science
15 4/26	<i>Yellow Face</i> , by Henry Hwang; “Those Winter Sundays” — Robert Hayden	Blind Casting	Review 1-10	Science
16 5/3	<i>Yellow Face</i> , by Henry Hwang; A Wreath of Hummingbirds — Cathy Park Hong	Wrap up; Fourth essay due	Review 11-20	Science