

Let me begin with a few thoughts on our temporary learning model (in school twice per week, remote learning the others) and on the current COVID pandemic, in general. Together, we are in the midst of a national emergency and health crisis with a considerable amount of uncertainty. This crisis was not caused by you – by students, by young people in schools. And yet, the pandemic and its indirect but undeniable effects on our society are impacting the experiences and opportunities of a whole generation: your generation, especially. The current pandemic shows us that, as a society, we have much work to do; some of that work must include determining our collective values and defining what unifies us as people – locally, nationally, and beyond. These themes will emerge in the literature we’ll study and in the discussions we’ll have in class. I firmly believe it is important to approach our class together, with high levels of understanding, empathy, and patience under these trying circumstances.

Public Speaking and You

Welcome to Public Speaking. As your instructor, I will do my best to help you become a confident and outstanding public speaker. But, as you may already suspect, the real work to improve your speaking ability must be done by you. Perhaps no class in high school requires more active participation by students than a Public Speaking course. Make this course valuable for you and for everyone else in the class.

An essential element to this course’s success will be the establishment of a constructive tone within our group, so that students are comfortable and supportive of each other. Make your experience in this class meaningful! Since students will be critiquing each other, they will be aware of each person’s strengths, weaknesses, and growth in class. Be sensitive to each other. As we deliver speeches, tackle group activities, and study relevant examples of public speaking and other kinds of expression (essays, short fiction, and poetry, for example), I expect that students will work cooperatively and supportively as a group to promote harmony, enthusiasm, and authentic learning. We will read about examples of great speeches. We’ll study rhetorical devices and learn how writers and speakers influence audiences. We will work on creating and developing many types of original speeches, such as an impromptu speech, a “how to” speech, a speech utilizing a prop, reading aloud, a speech about a work of art, a brief commercial, readers theatre, an interview, a speech about an important historical figure, storytelling, a speech about a film or video, and a speech about a work of literature. Expect that we will draw significantly from your hobbies, from your college plans, from sports, music, film, and, importantly – as a senior-year English class – from classic literature (e.g., Modernist poetry or Shakespearean drama, like *Julius Caesar* or *Hamlet*). Ideally, this class must give students as many organized, focused speaking opportunities as possible with minimal teacher-centered presentations, so that students learn by practicing their own skills. In other words, students should learn about speaking to a group by engaging in authentic public-speaking activities.

Senior Inquiry Project

The Senior Inquiry strives to engage students’ imaginations, creativity, and passions. More information will be provided about this long-term project in the weeks and months to come. Put succinctly, every senior will generate an original question or problem, conduct sustained inquiry and research, and write about and present an articulate perspective. Ideally, in the first semester, each student will define an original, foundational topic for the project, create (and, if needed, revise) a proposal, and begin to conduct the inquiry process. In the second semester, there will be significant time for continued research, writing, conferencing, revision, rehearsing, and, finally, sharing the results of the sustained inquiry project (e.g., in the form of a well developed, media-supported presentation).

Our 40 Minutes Together Each Day

In class (and always!), be respectful. Be prepared to work each day. You will need the following supplies.

- 1) your copy of any speech, rubric for assessment, text, and literature that we are using
- 2) a pen or pencil
- 3) a notebook (a folder or three-ring binder) to be used for:
 - a) keeping a supply of lined paper (I suggest at least 50 sheets) for your notes, responses to others' speeches, and written journaling assignments that you'll create
 - b) storing handouts, grading rubrics, notes that you take in class, and journal responses

Be on time to class, and have reading assignments and written work completed *before* class. Obviously, your active participation is essential to a public speaking course – be here! Every two instances of tardiness to class will result in your eligibility for a detention. Please bear in mind that if you come to class without the required materials or without the assigned speech prepared, you will lose credit.

Grades, Assessment, and Communication

You can expect that nearly every assignment for class and speech that you deliver will be graded. Prepare all assignments with appreciable effort and complete all work on time. Please confer with your teacher well in advance if you have any difficulty completing an assignment. When a speaker is unprepared to give a speech at the assigned time, it is to the detriment of the entire group. Furthermore, such delays are unfair. Lack of preparedness at the time an assigned speech is to be delivered will result in an automatic deduction of **two letter grades** for each school day beyond the due date of the assignment. (For example, a B+ would become a D+...an 88 would become a 68...Ouch!)

When assigned a speech-writing project, do not plagiarize or engage in any kind of academic dishonesty. The consequences are serious, starting with a phone call home, a failing grade for the assignment, and a highly negative impact on your average.

Delivering speeches in class, preparing speeches, formal writing assignments, presentations, participation in Socratic seminars, journaling in response to your speeches and the speeches of others, and productive participation in class activities will be important parts of the assessment process and, of course, your report card grade. Be sure cell phones and electronic devices are off during class time. If such devices disrupt class (especially a student's speech!), expect to lose credit. Major assignments like speeches and writing assignments will count toward your quarterly grade roughly two to five times the amount that a typical journal response, participation grade, question set, or student-designed rubric will count.

For major assignments, I will provide you with a written, qualitative evaluation of your work along with the grade that you earned. Keep the evaluations and assessment rubrics that are handed back to you; they will be valuable when it comes time to review your progress and discuss strategies for improvement. If you have questions or concerns about class, see your teacher or send me a message. My school e-mail is the best way to contact me. During class time, I will be able to address specific questions about course content, but I will not be able to discuss your grades on specific assignments, nor will I notify students of their individual averages during class time. For the most up-to-date, complete, and detailed information about your progress in this class, contact your teacher. I'd be happy to discuss your work, as well as strategies that might help you to improve your performance, specifically in the areas of public speaking, writing, reading, assignment completion, and participation.