



## The English Curriculum at SYA

### **Course Description**

SYA offers a well-defined and comprehensive English course that prepares students to return to their home school prepared for their next class in English or to enter a competitive university program. The SYA English program is distinctly geared towards the study abroad experience and works in tandem with the overall program's mission to create globally aware, divergent thinkers prepared for a 21st-century reality. The SYA curriculum is structured to reflect the various stages of the study abroad experience and facilitates a cultural immersion experience with a series of assignments and readings created with this goal in mind.

SYA English provides a home base for student intellectual and intercultural growth abroad and is specifically designed to complement the immersion experience presented by the host country. Chosen texts challenge students to improve their critical reading and analytical writing skills and cover a variety of literary movements. The readings engage with themes of alienation, isolation, foreignness or self-discovery, as well as the notion of place and identity, both geographic and internal. Texts selected also support the students in contextualizing both their collective and individual experience throughout the program. In addition to working toward becoming closer readers and more successful writers, SYA English students also reflect on the study abroad experience in a more explicit and sophisticated way, through both informal and formal journaling and expository writing.

### **Reading List**

Carefully chosen texts make real and meaningful connections to both the host country and the study abroad experience. Individual works vary depending on the specific location of the SYA campus and are not necessarily "works in translation," but rather thematically appropriate for both the specific "place-based" student experience abroad and the broader universal experience of encountering another culture. All texts share the intention of relating directly to the student experience abroad and ask students to make connections with their host country and the themes relevant to an immersion experience in a foreign country. Teachers must collaborate with the English curriculum coordinator before the start of the academic year to decide upon appropriate texts.

**Objectives -- Students who complete a year of SYA English will:**

- Read and analyze a variety of fiction and nonfiction to explore a text's complexity and layers beyond the surface level plot.
- Recognize and consider how rhetorical choices impact communication for an intended audience.
- Write well-structured analytical essays using textual evidence to support a clearly defined thesis.
- Write effectively structured expository essays grounded in vivid supporting examples.
- Begin to develop their voices in analytical, expository and creative writing.
- Embrace writing as a recursive process and engage in a frequent revision of their writing.
- Explore how their semantic, syntactical and grammatical choices and errors impact their ability to communicate clearly and persuasively.
- Participate in productive small and large group discussions through both active listening and speaking.
- Contribute positively to the collective learning community.
- Begin to understand how their interpretation of, and reaction to, their environment is colored by their experience, beliefs and values.
- Form connections between their ideas and those of others.

## Guiding Principles

SYA English primarily focuses on developing three of the core student skills highlighted in the [SYA Mission Statement](#):

- *Critical & Creative Thinking* - The ability to create new ideas and challenge assumptions in situations with limited information and/or ability.
- *Intercultural Competence* - The ability to effectively and appropriately understand and communicate with people of other cultures.

These guiding principles focus on helping students develop as critical thinkers and confident and culturally aware learners. Students develop these skills and they are modeled by their teachers in the SYA English course.

### Skills:

- **Literary Analysis Competency:** Students can demonstrate the ability to comprehend, analyze, and critique a variety of increasingly complex and culturally diverse literary texts.
- **Reading Informational Texts Competency:** Students can demonstrate the ability to comprehend, analyze, and critique a variety of increasingly complex non-fiction texts.
- **Writing Arguments and Explanatory Writing Competency:** Students can demonstrate the ability to analyze and critique texts or topics and support claims and reasoning with sufficient evidence for intended purpose and audience, and demonstrates the ability to effectively write informative texts to examine and convey complex ideas for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- **Literary Research and Interpretation:** Students can research and write a cogent and persuasive opinion piece on a matter of general public or academic importance and value.
- **Creating Literature:** Students can apply knowledge of language structure, figurative language, and genre to create extended and complex original texts.
- **Intercultural Competence:** Students can understand how their interpretation of, and reaction to, their environment is colored by their experience, beliefs, and values through an analysis of relevant literary works.
- **Synthesis:** Students can make connections between their ideas and those of others.

## Principles of a mission-driven education

- **Teacher's Role:** Teachers actively communicate and collaborate with each other and all SYA students to:
  - implement the SYA English curriculum,
  - develop and improve course content, and
  - support the development of skills outlined in the Guiding Principles above.
- **Common Themes:** Courses offer content and topics relevant to the study abroad experience. Individual texts may vary by campus, but all material is intentionally selected to complement and reflect on the study abroad experience.
- **Classroom Teaching:** English classes are “student-centered” with an emphasis on discussion and active student participation in both the development of ideas and execution of written work. Frequent workshop sessions and peer feedback are vital components of the daily curriculum.
- **Online Content:** All course content is developed/maintained electronically and accessible online via Canvas.
- **Online Communication:** Teachers are required to post all assignments and guidelines in Canvas with clear expectations articulated for students regarding assessment and schedules. Students and teachers frequently participate in the online community (Canvas and Slack).
- **Teacher as Facilitator/Coach:** Teachers are focused on student interaction, use specific methods of assessment and provide timely formal/informal feedback during face-to-face classes, online and outside of class. Their primary role is to coach students to become improved independent learners with the ability to formulate compelling arguments and develop their unique voice in writing (versus preparing and delivering “packaged knowledge” directly to students during class). Teachers should set aside specific office hours, as well as set up individual conferences with students on a case-by-case basis.

## Challenges of English curriculum at SYA

- **Student perception of English at SYA:** Many students arrive at SYA with the mistaken impression that their courses taught in English are a lower priority than those taught in the local language and their immersion in the host country culture. English, however, is a core class, essential to the students' academic preparation and a requirement for reentry to their home school. In addition, English class at SYA serves an important role in helping students reflect on the overall experience and navigate through the various phases of the cultural immersion adjustment.
- **Honors and AP:** All English classes are "Honors" and therefore must be structured with a challenging and engaging intention to that end. The course is not an AP class and should not be taught as such. Students may elect to sit for an AP English exam if they choose, but it must be made clear to the students that they will need to prepare independently for the exams and should consult their parents and counselors at their home schools to see if this is the right decision for them. SYA's college counseling offices may have preparatory materials for the exams; students will need to speak to their SYA college counselor if they would like to sit for an English AP Exam.
- **Technology Access and Skills:** Students (and teachers) need access to technology (laptop with Internet access) and may need to develop new skills to be fully functional in an online environment. Orientation activities are provided to help students and teachers develop the required skills.
- **The Spectrum of Student Skills and Background:** Teachers and students will encounter a spectrum of different English backgrounds in class, given that there are students from different schools and grade levels in an individual section. SYA does not differentiate between grade level, or level of skill, in the placement of students in the English course. Teachers and Administrators will need to provide additional support: including the provision of options for less-prepared students to "catch-up" during the year (i.e., earn an "A" or "B" in the course). Teachers must agree on a common approach to addressing this issue (tutoring, peer support or necessary course changes). Additional support must be provided to sophomore students with additional meeting times and frequent "check-ins." The number of sophomores at each SYA school site will vary each year. Seniors may also need additional support.
- **College Recommendations:** As the sole English teacher at each SYA campus, with a more substantial proportion of Juniors in the SYA program, teachers may be asked to write college recommendation letters. Students will be directed by the SYA college counselor to make teacher recommendation requests at the end of the academic year. If a request is agreed upon, the teacher must provide the students with a viable means of connecting with them in the next academic year. Students must be

responsible for their follow-up with teachers to determine the logistics of the recommendation letter submission.

- **Dedication to the target language:** English class is one of the few spaces at SYA where English is the language of instruction. English teachers will communicate with their students in English but should be sensitive to the broader language immersion goals of the program. The common language in public areas should be the target language, and teachers should identify more private spaces (i.e., the English classroom) for individual conferences with students.
- **Collaboration:** An English teacher at SYA is the sole teacher of their department on their campus. Teachers must be comfortable in their role as the only onsite teacher of their subject and be able to work collaboratively with the SYA English coordinator and other SYA English teachers remotely.