

Foundations of American Thought: American Literature, American History, Government, & Theology

Course Objectives

Building on the skills learned in the Inklings class, this course provides continued growth in critical thinking, academic writing, and biblical hermeneutics while providing a strong foundation in early American literature, history, and government. Students study the founding documents of the United States along with other literary and theological writings. Authors include John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, Frederick Douglass, and others. The students also study law and authority, along with other themes, in the biblical books of Exodus and Amos. We recommend that parents and independent study programs count this class as meeting the requirements for thirty-five high school academic credits: English Composition and Literature (ten credits), American History (ten credits), Bible/Theology (ten credits), and Government (five credits).

Students will analyze and interpret early American literature and biblical books in collaboration with others. Students will

- identify and summarize major arguments in early American nonfiction work and in biblical books
- identify major themes and summarize the plot in works of early American fiction and in biblical books
- identify textual and historical context for a fictional or biblical passage
- support their interpretations of a text with textual citations
- identify and analyze key themes in early American texts
- characterize the different genres of sermon, essay, novel, poem, and short story
- compare and contrast the ideas and writing styles of the various authors studied
- trace the literary development of early American culture and identify key movements

Students will analyze and interpret the early texts of American history in collaboration with others. Students will

- examine and synthesize major historical developments of the United States as expressed in her literature
- identify the ideas that shaped American culture and trace their evolution
- articulate significant historical and cultural ideas in outline and essay form

Students will analyze and interpret the early texts of American government in collaboration with others. Students will

- identify key elements and competing philosophies of government
- articulate the competing ideas and ideologies underscoring the Federalist and Anti-Federalist debates
- identify the philosophies that shaped the U.S. Constitution
- explicate biblical teachings on law, authority, and social justice in Exodus and Amos
- identify the propensities for good and ill in American government and society
- trace and critique the evolution of American philosophies of government

Students will apply knowledge gained from a synthesis of multiple texts and discussions. Students will

- evaluate ideas based on the Bible as the ultimate authority on Truth
- exhibit discernment in moral and ethical issues
- demonstrate a willingness to change beliefs and behaviors due to the insight of others

Students will contribute in intellectual discussion confidently, critically, and charitably.

Students will

- ask relevant, critical questions about texts and ideas
- distinguish between good and bad arguments
- recognize, imitate, and produce sound, compelling, and logical arguments
- assess multiple perspectives with fairness and precision in reading, discussion, and writing
- assert opinions and beliefs with courteous and reasonable arguments

Course objectives will be realized through the intensive reading, writing, and discussion required of the students. The discussion and the writing assignments will serve as the evaluative tools to assess the student's progress toward the set objectives. Student notebooks serve as a catalog of the student's progress through the course of the academic year, and the final term paper is equivalent to a final exam.