

Course Overview: Senior Seminar

Instructor: Michael Metzler
Cell Phone: 585-455-5433 (for emergencies only!)
e-mail address: mmetzler@mercyhs.com
Web site: TeacherMetzler.com & Google Classroom



Course Description:

Course Emphasis – A Critical Thinking Journey for World Citizens and Future Leaders.

This semester course is a discussion-heavy Socratic seminar, encouraging highly curious and motivated students to explore the essential question: “What do we know & how do we know that we know it?” Students will become well-versed in the Socratic discussion approach where questions spawn more questions. We will read heavily across an array of disciplines, exploring ways of knowing (e.g. perception, language, reason/logic, emotion, memory, imagination, faith, intuition) and areas of knowledge (e.g. ethics, arts, history, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, religious knowledge systems, indigenous knowledge systems). Through all our explorations, we will ask how beliefs and claims of knowledge can be justified and scrutinized, and what barriers may impede our quest for knowledge and understanding.

Our overarching goal is to enable students to unify the knowledge they have acquired in a dispersed fashion during the course of their schooling. This is intended not as a synthesis, but as a reflection upon their acquired knowledge with emphasis on the production of a discerning student capable of critical analysis of opinion.

Major Texts & Media Resources:

- [Ishmael](#) by Daniel Quinn
- [Between the World and Me](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- [Lies My Teacher Told Me](#) by James Loewen
- [The Pig That Wants to Be Eaten](#) by Julian Baggini
- [The Book of Questions](#) (Revised 2013) by Gregory Stock
- Myriad Non-Fiction Texts (pretty much anything we can get our hands on)

(NOTE: Because we will not have enough time in class for extensive viewing, some of these films & resources – or portions of them – will be assigned for outside of class. HOWEVER, as with most things, we’ll discuss & negotiate timeframe, workload, etc.)

- [My Dinner with Andre](#)
- [Oleanna](#) (Note of Caution: Sensitive Material – Violence Against Women)
- [MindWalk](#)
- [Being in the World](#)
- [Words & Pictures](#)
- [The Fine Art of Separating People from Their Money](#)
- [Explained](#) (Netflix Series)
- [100 Humans](#) (Netflix Series)
- [A Science Odyssey](#) (PBS Series)
- [Ethics in America](#) series
- [The Anthropocene Reviewed](#) (John Green Podcast)

Some Essential Questions & Areas of Exploration:

Who are we? In What Ways Does Who I Am Shape What I Know?

- **Where Have I Been?:** How Can We Become More Reflective & Critical?
- **Laying My Burden Down:** What Biases & Baggage Do We Carry?
- **Who Cares?:** Is There a Difference Between Sound Skepticism vs. Silly Cynicism?

What can we know & how? Do I Know It or Believe It? (Ways of knowing)

- **Perceptions:** Is the Lens Through Which We See Our World Clouded? How?
- **Emotion:** Can We Feel Our Way Into Knowing? What's Emotional Intelligence?
- **Language:** Who's the Colorless Green Idea on First? (Does Language Help or Hurt?)
- **Reason/Logic:** Socrates Minds His P's & Q's? (How Do Deduction/Induction Help?)

What Are Strengths & Weaknesses of Systems of Knowledge (The Various Disciplines)?

- **Mathematics:** Pi in the Sky? Fibonacci & Mobius (How Can Math Beat Perception?)
- **Natural Science:** Our New Religion? (If There's a Better Method, Can We Identify It?)
- **Social/Human Sciences:** We Can't Put Humans Under a Microscope, Can We?
- **History:** Revise This! Can I Be a Settler If It's Already Settled? Can We Know Our Past?

Can We Ever Agree on Value Judgments? (What's the Right Thing to Do? What's Beautiful?)

- **Ethics:** Turning Right & The Difference Between Can & Should
- **Aesthetics:** Is It Beautiful? The Eye of the Beholder & Knowing it When I See It

Can We Ever Approach Something We Might Call Knowledge...Or Even Truth?

- **Limitations of Knowledge Revisited:** Is Everything Just a Belief?
- **Is Truth A Toothless Truth?** Is There Anything We Can Call a "Capital T" Truth?
- **Digital Dilemma?** Does The Digital Age Help or Hinder?

Homework & Assessment:

At Our Lady of Mercy, we believe that homework is an essential part of the learning process. Purposeful homework tasks help students to build independence, develop and refine skills, and build their confidence as learners. At Mercy, homework is assigned to students in an effort to:

- Help students be READY for the learning that will occur in class
- Engage students in PRACTICE needed to develop fluency in important skills
- Guide students in PROCESSING and reviewing new learning
- Provide students with opportunities to REVISE their thinking
- Help students to BUILD their background knowledge

Assessments:

NOTE: THIS IS A SEMINAR COURSE. EVERYTHING HINGES ON QUALITY DISCUSSIONS!
If our in-class interactions are to be successful, each student must take personal responsibility to complete assigned readings/viewings on time. This is a matter of respect for our fellow learners in our learning community.

Assessments will be a collection of group discussion evaluations, individual journals, team work, reading quizzes, written work & oral presentations. Individual & team assignments will involve reading, writing, viewing, research & hands-on or interactive activities. MOST READING & VIEWING ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE DONE OUTSIDE OF CLASS in order to afford students ample class time for socratic discussions and interactive pursuits including project-based teamwork, demonstrations & exercises.

Late Work - Deadlines:

You must submit all written work on time or risk losing credit. Deadlines matter outside our classroom walls, so they should matter inside our walls, as well. To be an active citizen in a democracy, you must meet the very important DEADLINE of getting to the polls on election day, or your voice will not be heard. If you have your act together, however, there is an exception called an Absentee Ballot, a concept we will discuss in class & incorporate into this policy to assist you.

You must submit all major written work to pass the course.

The new (2021-22) OLM Late Work Policy is as follows:

- Students are expected to submit all assignments by the date established by the teacher.
- Grades on assignments will reflect student understanding of content, however, 20% will be deducted for all assignments submitted late, with the exception of an excused absence.
- No credit will be given for assignments turned in one week past the due date, unless by prior arrangement with the teacher.
- Teachers will work with students to establish deadlines when late work is the result of an excused absence. If work is not completed by the established deadline, the late assignment guidelines will go into effect.
- It is the expectation that the students and parents/guardians will monitor their grades in the online gradebook.
- Teachers will conference with students and parents when there are multiple occurrences of assignments being turned in late.

Grading:

Quarter grades are calculated as a percentage of total points available for the term, with larger assignments garnering more points (e.g. tests & larger written projects typically = 100 points; lighter written work such as daily homework & quizzes typically = 10 to 50 points). So, if there are 1,000 points available and you receive 900, then you have 90%.

FINAL GRADE FORMULA: Quarter 1= 42.5%, Quarter 2=42.5%, Final Project=15%

Final percentages will be converted to Mercy's LETTER grade system each term.

End of Course Learning Goals & Classroom Expectations:

Upon course completion, students should be equipped with a keen understanding of the lenses, systems and forces that can shape what we claim to “know”. They will develop their own internal “radar” attuned to these factors and approach their world with a newfound humility in the face of new knowledge.

Let’s enjoy this journey together!

The Classroom 3 R’s:

Responsibility.....Have it

Respect.....Exhibit it & Earn it

Rip-Roarin’ Fun.....Enjoy it

(Student signature)

(Parent/Guardian signature)