IGNITE Scholar Reading & Writing(Grammar) Program

Reading/Writing/Grammar with World Issues

Overall Course Summary:

When they build their ability to comprehend a wide variety of texts deeply, students gain more than improved grades. Nuanced and analytical thought becomes easier and more natural. **Students gain facility in articulating and expressing their own ideas, both in writing and in spoken communication.**

Two terms of 6-month course work across various genres--literary, journalistic, and scientific--to build the kind of versatile, flexible reasoning that supports higher achievement throughout students' education and lives. Additionally, although this is not a test-prep course, the texts and **approaches encourage strong SAT/DSAT/PSAT/ACT readiness by building reading precision, advanced vocabulary, and grammatical skills.**

The format fits easily into students' busy schedules. Classes meet **once weekly for 90 minutes** on Friday evenings (EST, Saturday morning KST & SG), starting on **November 10, 2023**. Reading assignments consist of one article or literary selection per week: usually about 5-10 pages, with the occasional longer text. All texts will be provided as PDF files, or as links to online articles. Each text is accompanied by prompts for students' brief (~200 words) written responses, which will receive individual commentary each Thursday (the day before class).

Texts will represent a wide range of topics and difficulty levels; when a text discusses unfamiliar topics or presents more advanced concepts than students are accustomed to, the course will focus on developing strategies for building comprehension and navigating new materials.

The course aims to develop skills and ideas that could potentially build toward goals such as writing contests or conference papers.

Sample assignments:
A reading assignment article from one of the science-focused modules
A (more challenging) reading assignment from the literature module
A more typical reading assignment from the literature module

Starting Date: Nov. 10, 2023, **7:00 pm EST(Fri)** & **9:00 am KST(Sat)**

For every week: Don't feel like you need to respond to every question in the prompt. These are here to get you thinking. Maybe as you think through your answers, you'll find that your answers to several are actually connected! Definitely write about that. Or maybe one particular question will resonate with you more than any other: feel free to just concentrate on that one. Or maybe the questions will spur you to create your own lines of inquiry: as long as these engage closely and actively with the text under discussion, that's welcome!

When you respond to one or more of the prompt's questions, make sure to support your claim with brief quotations, then explain how the quotation backs up your interpretation of the text.

MONTH 1: LITERARY TEXTS MODULE

Identity: Individual, Family, Collective

This module explores how different texts have delineated the boundaries and definitions of personal/individual identity, and its relationships with other aspects of identity: familial, national, ethnic, gendered, occupational, and more. This lens will motivate the prompts that accompany the module's readings. Texts will come from multiple different time periods, and will represent several difficulty levels.

[Selection from *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#)
        PROMPT: Think about Ifemelu's attitude toward nationality: what is her own nationality? How does she interact with other people who share that nationality? What other nationalities does she encounter, and how does she react to them? What perspective might motivate the ways Ifemelu thinks about nationality?

Selection from *My Brilliant Friend*, Elena Ferrante
        PROMPT: Two things to do here! First, think about the ways gender impacts Lila and Lenu and their friendship. Is the fact that they are female a major part of the way they interact with one another? Is it a major part of the way they see themselves and interact with the world? How about as individuals: do you think the two girls have differences in the ways they think about gender as part of their identity?
        Second, think about the ways class impacts the idea of these characters' identities. What class do you think they belong to? In what ways does that shape the ways they live, understand themselves, and interact with the world?

"A Good Man is Hard to Find," Flannery O'Connor (Mild content warning for non-explicit violence and inappropriate racial language.)
        PROMPT: How do race and family roles inform the way the grandmother sees her identity? What is the text's attitude toward the grandmother's identity? (I.e. is the grandmother

right or wrong to see herself the way she does?) What other aspects of identity that we've already discussed are present in the way she maintains her self-image?

Selection from *Fasting, Feasting,* Anita Desai
      PROMPT: What are the motivations we can discern in the parents--individually and together? What do you make of the way the text insists on their absolute unity: is it confirmed by their actions and speech, or do we get clues of some actual distinctions between them? What perspective does the text take, and how might that influence the way the parents are being portrayed?

Song of Myself, Walt Whitman (1892 version, with vocabulary annotations to be provided by instructor. This is a long text and may be explored over two weeks or possibly more, or abridged if needed.)
      PROMPT: Does the speaker's individuality have limits? What can we determine about how it is defined? Is individual identity opposed to society, a part of society, or something else?

MONTH 2: SOCIAL SCIENCES MODULE

Perspective: Malleability and Influence. This module is about the forces that shape human perspectives. We can so often take the shape of our existence for granted, but it's defined by things that have existed for the blink of an eye, in terms of the scale of history: global supply chains, large-scale government interventions, communication technology from basic literacy to the internet, and the still-evolving role to be played by artificial intelligence, among many other factors. At the same time, it's important to remember that some aspects of human perspective seem remarkably durable: notably, our need for community, our longing to connect. We'll read this module's texts through this lens.

"Learning to Read Rewires Brains," *Psychology Today*
      PROMPT: Think about your own experiences of "practiced naturalness." See how the ideas in the article connect to your own life, and see if you can point out new questions or add some complexity. For example, if you have acquired a second language (or more), have you attained "practiced naturalness" as a reader of that language? At what point did that happen? How might this relate to the article's claims? Or, if you have clear memories of learning to read in your first language, can you connect aspects of that experience to the transformations described in the article?

Selections from "A Unified Welfare Analysis of Government Policies," Nathaniel Hendren and Ben Sprung-Keyser, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*
      PROMPT: This text is intended to challenge the group with a piece intended not for a popular audience, but for a scholarly/expert audience within a specific discipline: here, economics. This week's work has two objectives: first, to discuss and implement strategies for gathering a well-grounded idea of the text's main points; second, to explore how these ideas may inform or intersect with your own opinions or experiences. Is the article's core finding

surprising or unsurprising to you? Does it align with your own experiences from life or research, or does it clash with them?

<u>"Assyrian Women of Letters,"</u> Durrie Bouscaren, *Archaeology*
> PROMPT: What aspects of society in Kanesh resonate with you and sound familiar? What elements sound more unfamiliar? Were you surprised by any of these parallels or differences? Most importantly, what factors of Assyrian culture as presented in the article do you think might be responsible for any deep commonalities you notice with modern cultures? What about the factors behind differences?

<u>"What ChatGPT Can't Teach My Writing Students,"</u> Jonathan Malesic, *The Atlantic*
> PROMPT: What do you think about what Malesic says about the ways learning to write has a moral element to it, contributing to the development of a healthy ethical life? Does it resonate with any of your own experiences? On the flip side, have you had the experience of feeling "profoundly understood" by a text? What text, and what was it like?

MONTH 3: LIFE SCIENCES MODULE

Organisms, Habitats, and Unpredictability. This module is about the unexpected ways organisms interact with their environments and one another, both in the past and the present. We'll explore how species continue to evolve and adapt to pressures such as habitat loss, as well as how scientists continue to discover the story of how this process took place in the past.

<u>"This Fluffy Little Anteater May Be a New Species,"</u> James Hall, *Smithsonian*
> PROMPT: Based on the article, what kinds of attributes do scientists rely upon in order to determine whether a group of animals represents a distinct species? How conclusively can they make that determination? What factors lead them to start investigating such questions?

<u>"The Details Are in the Devil's Tumors,"</u> *Hakai Magazine*
> PROMPT: This article frames the disease as just one of multiple factors challenging the Tasmanian devil's continued population stability. What are some of the others? Notice how the scientists learn that simply working to eradicate devil facial tumor disease isn't enough on its own: how are they working to mitigate other problems at the same time, and learn from any mistakes they make along the way?

<u>"From Hunted to Hunter: Neanderthals Preyed on Cave Lions, Study Finds,"</u> *The New York Times*
> PROMPT: A major argument in this paper is that the new evidence supports a view of Neanderthals that sees more commonality than difference between them and modern humans. What bases do the scientists have for this conclusion? Do you find their reasoning convincing, or not? What's your reason for your position?

<u>"You are what you eat—and for orcas, that's bad news,"</u> Rachel Fobar, *National Geographic*

PROMPT: The article repeatedly emphasizes the "surprising" nature of the researcher's finding. Why is it surprising? Do you agree that it's unexpected? (Why?) What kinds of similar/analogous findings do you think scientists can expect to find in the future, based on this research?

MONTH 4: POLITICAL HISTORY MODULE

The Invention of "Rights": Innate, Practical, Moral? This module explores political and philosophical texts from around and somewhat after the Enlightenment period in Europe, during which the concept of "human rights" first began to emerge as something possible to consider on its own. (Previously, a person's rights and duties had largely been seen as the consequences of divine will, or as products of their particular social role, rather than as something held equally and universally by everyone.) A major goal of this module is to grow accustomed to the more complex sentence structures and vocabulary used by serious writers during this period. Another goal is to form a well-developed sense of students' own views on their rights and their origins, and see how those views compare with those expressed by Enlightenment-era thinkers.

"Introductory Chapter" and "What The Real Advantages Are Which American Society Derives From the Government Of the Democracy." from *Democracy in America,* Alexis de Tocqueville
      PROMPT: On what basis does de Tocqueville claim that equality spreads unstoppably through societies? What is his evidence and/or reasoning? How do you think he would define "rights," and what are the bases of rights in his interpretation?

Selection from *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (chapters 1 and 2), Mary Wollstonecraft
      PROMPT: What role does Wollstonecraft give to "reason" in her argument? To whom does she ascribe reason: do men and women already have it equally, or is that something she thinks still has to be achieved? Do different cultures have it equally, or do some peoples and time periods have more reason than others?

"What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (including all poetry quotes), Frederick Douglass
      PROMPT: Why does Douglass spend so much time extolling the Founding Fathers? What role does this play in his argument?
      Does Douglass appeal to an inborn, abstract form of human rights? If so, why does he carefully point out the achievements of people of color--does that imply that they need to make these accomplishments in order to deserve equal rights? If not, why do you think he mentions them?
      Is Douglass more invested in improving his civil rights as an American, or in moving beyond an American perspective?

"Natural and Civil Rights," Edmund Burke
      PROMPT: What are some of the "real rights" and "pretended rights," respectively, that Burke identifies people as having? What is motivating this distinction? What kind of perspective

do you think he's starting from to arrive at this position? Do you largely agree or disagree with him, or do you have a mixed approach?

MONTH 5: NATURAL SCIENCE MODULE

Distant Space, Nearby Relevance. Outer space is, by definition, far away. But Earth is part of the same universe as every other celestial body, so discoveries about space can have surprisingly immediate relevance to life here on Earth. This module will discuss recent discoveries and advancements in astronomy and related fields, through the lens of their relevance to present-day human life.

"The Carrington Event of 1859 Disrupted Telegraph Lines. A 'Miyake Event' Would Be Far Worse," Jasna Hodžić, *JSTOR Daily*
> PROMPT: What about tree rings enabled Miyake to use them to determine the date of the 774-775 CE space weather event? What about that event made an impact on tree rings? What specific aspects of human life have developed since the last Miyake event that would be impacted differently than life back then? If it weren't possible to prevent damage, how do you think humanity could best respond to the outcome?

"With Psyche, a journey to an ancient asteroid is set to begin," Jennifer Chu, *MIT News*
> PROMPT: The article discusses Psyche's possible similarities to early Earth, especially its magnetic field, but doesn't go into much detail about the insights scientists hope to gain from the comparison. Think about the ways Earth's magnetic field influences our planet's properties, and speculate about what we might learn about our own planet from information about Psyche. How might such insights be useful for new research or technology?

"Osiris-Rex: NASA reveals evidence of water and carbon in sample delivered to Earth from an asteroid," Lucinda King, *Phys.org*
> PROMPT: What chemical attributes of Bennu make the researchers so excited? What makes this sample so much more interesting than asteroid components that simply fall to Earth as meteorites? Why is it so important for researchers to be careful about how they open the capsule? What kind of insights do you hope the sample reveals?

"Magnetic Fusion Plasma Engines Could Carry us Across the Solar System and Into Interstellar Space," Matt Williams, *Universe Daily*
> PROMPT: What are the key innovations that MFPEs present over earlier propulsion models (as identified in the article)? Can you think of any ways these innovations could be applied to fields other than space travel, as Neukart seems to indicate they may?

MONTH 6: TECHNOLOGY MODULE

Broad-Ranging Curiosity, Focused Goals, Unexpected Outcomes: Variations in Scientific Approach. Particularly when scientific progress is viewed through the lens of technological development, there is huge variation in the approaches that lead to new discoveries. Some scientific projects are motivated by a generalized curiosity about the way something works. Others pursue elusive, clearly-defined goals, eager for a specific attainment. Still others begin with an identifiable goal, but end up producing results with real-world applications that differ significantly from that goal. This module will look at a number of recent technological advancements and developments, exploring the diversity of perspectives on the goals or outcomes of research.

"Tenacious curiosity in the lab can lead to a Nobel Prize – mRNA research exemplifies the unpredictable value of basic scientific research," Joel Abrams, *The Conversation*
      PROMPT: What is "basic research," and how does the article define research that does *not* fall into this category? Do you think this article is justified in its pointed defense of basic research? Do you agree with the article that it should be undertaken more frequently, or do you think other research approaches deserve their predominating status?

"Superconductivity at room temperature remains elusive a century after a Nobel went to the scientist who demonstrated it below -450 degrees Fahrenheit," Stephen Khan, *The Conversation*
      PROMPT: One goal of including this text is to examine its graphs and explain them. What do they convey?
      What do you think about long-term pursuits of specific goals, like the search for room-temperature semiconductors? Are they a worthy use of research effort, or a waste of time? What's the reasoning behind your position? How would you most like to see a successful room-temperature superconductor be used?

"AI Systems as State Actors," Kate Crawford & Jason Schultz, *Columbia Law Review*
      PROMPT: AI in law enforcement has already had many unintended outcomes and consequences, which this paper explores. This is another paper intended for a professional rather than a popular audience. What kind of audience do you think that is? What do you think about the recommendations the authors make: do you agree that they would be helpful, or do you think that the authors are unduly worried about the problems they identify? Finally, do you think the problems the authors identify are specifically problems of AI, or simply extensions of already-existing social problems (leaving the AI essentially blameless)?

"Botanists Use Machine Learning to Accelerate Research," Samantha Drake, *JSTOR Daily*
      PROMPT: Why, when DNA-based identification approaches are readily available, is it still important to conduct phenotypic identifications? What advantages might AI/ML tend to offer for this task? What kind of related tasks can you expect technology like ARADEEPOPSIS to be useful for?