

## SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

# How Thompson Valley High School Is Using **AP Seminar** as English 10

## A CLOSER LOOK:

## AP Seminar Enhances Teaching and Learning at Thompson Valley High School

Considering big ideas through multiple perspectives and analyzing the line of reasoning in texts is a powerful move for sophomores beginning to explore the world. This course has made me rethink the way argumentation has traditionally been taught in our district. I've moved away from a focus on choosing between pro and con. The text *I Say, You Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* by Birkenstein, Graff, and Durst has furthered that move. A number of concepts—lateral reading, research organization, and credibility considerations—have become more central in my other English classes because of my experiences teaching AP Seminar and learning along with my students.

### MRS. SOLT'S SAMPLE LITERARY TEXTS

- Poetry, short stories, and weekly independent reading focused on literature
- Literary texts from stimulus packets
- Excerpts from *Just Mercy* and *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*



Our students in AP Seminar move beyond superficial analysis to follow their own passions and interests at a level that's far more advanced than students in other 10th-grade classes. But what's most impressive is how much students grow in managing their own time and in working with other people. The class moves at a very fast pace. Students don't have time to waste. They need the support of their classmates when, as teachers, we move into "proctor" mode during the assessments.

This isn't a "it-would-be-nice-if-you-made-friends" class. Instead, students learn that classmates they might not otherwise have a connection with have perspectives and skills that can support their own learning and success. The curriculum is a huge stretch for them. The academic, peer-reviewed sources are far more advanced than the nonfiction articles used in our other sophomore classes. Growth comes from this challenge and, even though I haven't had a 100% pass rate for the AP Exam, every single one of my students has grown tremendously.

## MEET THE TEACHER



**Jennifer Solt, English Language Arts Teacher**  
**THOMPSON VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL**

- Thompson School District
- Loveland, CO

### ABOUT THOMPSON HIGH SCHOOL'S AP SEMINAR PROGRAM

- Fulfills an English 10 graduation requirement
- Offered since 2018
- Has offered AP Seminar as English 10 since introducing the AP Capstone Diploma™ program

## How Thompson Students Are Benefiting from AP Seminar

In 2021, when it's hard enough to decipher credibility in our leaders and media outlets, the skills practiced in AP Seminar are essential life skills. Reading through multiple lenses and multiple perspectives, thinking beyond the binary pro and con, and discussing issues with classmates who may hold different understandings than our own benefits all of our students. Our district competencies (based on Common Core State Standards) overlap in nearly all areas with AP Seminar. The only skills that need teasing out are those related to narrative writing (which isn't a focus standard in our district in 10th grade) and literary analysis.



### Mrs. Solt's Tips for English Teachers New to AP Seminar

**District and School Administration Green Lights:** Begin by getting district-level and school-level support for the course. Do the work of looking at district standards and how they are met with the AP Seminar standards. This was a required step for us because all new courses have to go through the district's curriculum committee, and adding the English credit meant demonstrating the connection.

**Department Buy-in and Opportunities:** Is teaching the course open to anyone in the English Department? If so, consider an internal application/interview. We did this for AP Research because we realized that step would have helped clarify who wanted to teach and why the person selected was chosen. Then make sure the members of the department know what happens in AP Seminar and how it can help build the AP English classes and higher-level thinking during junior and senior years. Teaching AP Seminar can be an isolating experience. It's so incredibly different from other classes and requires so much time as an instructor. Department support is critical.

**Librarian and Counselors:** The school librarian can be an invaluable asset. Mine came in to co-teach database search skills and credibility with me. She's coming back next week to help me conference with students about their mock IRR (individual research report) papers. I send students to her when they need to bounce ideas in the mock assessments off of another adult or need to practice a presentation for someone. Finally, AP Seminar students get stressed as they approach deadlines. School counselors need to know when to anticipate the high-stress periods so they can check in with students. Our AP coordinator is one of our counselors. This is important because she helps us promote the course. She keeps things positive with the other counselors and students, even when they feel overwhelmed by the workload.

My prior experiences and training in project-based learning/problem-based learning (PBL) and design thinking helped prepare me to teach AP Seminar because AP Seminar is so student centered and inquiry based.

**Our students use their time management skills and analysis skills more than any other single skill. In addition, the students gain so much academic confidence after presenting, discussing, researching, and reading at such high academic levels that they're well prepared for a number of advanced courses.**

Learn more about offering AP Seminar as an English course at: [collegeboard.org/apseminarELA](https://collegeboard.org/apseminarELA)