

## ASK Program Course Overview

Alternative Search for Knowledge(ASK) has been an interdisciplinary, curricular offering at Hall since 1976. The ASK Program consists of classes in English and social studies for an identified group of students, grades 10-12. These students are or have been performing below their academic potential. In addition to the double period core program, students receive assistance with their other classes, mentoring and counseling throughout the day. The staff consists of a full time English teacher and program coordinator, a .8 social studies teacher and a .5 social worker for about 50 students.

The ASK program focuses on improving student performance for the two academic classes taught within the core classes and for other classes in which the student is enrolled. For that reason the “Enduring Understandings,” “Essential Questions,” “Knowledge and Skills” apply to the specific thematic topic within the ASK curriculum—English or social studies—as well as to the overall improvement of student performance and motivation. As a part of their mentoring, ASK students receive social work services, and that, too, ties into the Enduring Understandings. The ASK program replicates the curriculum of other English and social studies courses to meet the needs of capable students at risk.

Included below are some of the most common thematic topics covered by the ASK curriculum. The course material may be presented as English and social studies interdisciplinary units or as separate subjects. The ASK curriculum adheres to the mission statement of Hall and to the department, district and state standards. For each theme, the “Knowledge” and “Skills” measured are identified in the “Objectives” section of the ASK document. Assessment tools include class discussion, individual and small group conferences, readers’ journals, essays, notes and creative writing (stories, poetry, and visual representations). A writing rubric is used for essays, and other assignments utilize adapted rubrics.

## **Thematic Topic One: Self-Discovery and Personal Growth**

### **Enduring Understandings**

1. Learning about one's self is a life-long process and struggle.
2. Personal growth can occur from adverse experiences as well as positive ones.
3. People perpetuate negative behavior and attitudes unless they confront the issues rather than avoiding them.
4. Seeking help for personal struggles is a sign of strength, not weakness.
5. Individuals cope with stress, hardship and/or loss in individual and unique ways, but often follow identifiable patterns.
6. People may explore personal growth through reflection and self-expression (poetry/creative writing).
7. By discovering one's "voice," individuals can more easily be true to one's self.
8. By developing independent reading skills according to interest and talent, individuals can also learn about themselves.

### **Essential Questions**

1. How does one know when an individual is in need of help or when the person should seek help for him or herself?
2. What are the support systems available to people? Who should one turn to for help and guidance? What is the role of the advisor, mentor or "god-teacher?"
3. How does one benefit from the experiences of another? How do the struggles, triumphs and setbacks provide meaning for the observer?
4. What is the grieving process?
5. How does someone make enduring, positive changes in his or her life?
6. How does someone respond appropriately to and resolve conflicts?
7. When should an individual capitulate or compromise his or her values to conform to the community?
8. How can someone work effectively with others of different backgrounds, interests and personalities?
9. How does one take ownership of the choices he/she makes?
10. How can one learn to express ideas and emotions effectively and creatively?
11. What is "voice?" How does one establish and discover one's "voice?"

### **Activities and Resources**

Literature for class analysis and discussion reflects issues of growth and personal development that relates to the lives of our students. For example in the *Education* unit, students will read narratives from a diverse authors, including the following: Piri Thomas (*Down these Mean Streets*), Sherman Alexie, Wally Lamb (*She's Come Undone*), a variety of poets (Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou) and short story writers. Documentary films (*Waiting for Superman*) supplement the unit. Every Friday, students participate actively in Poetry Fridays that include readings, analysis, performances and

individual/group writing. Topics are thematic and personal and encourage students to creatively discover their voices. Independent reading accounts for one third of the students' English grade, and each student is directed and guided to make appropriate personal choices about their reading.

As a part of the mentoring aspect of the program, students explore their own educational histories and previous choices. Specifically students in ASK are attempting to make changes in academic and personal patterns that have previously led to poor school performance and other difficulties. By writing personal narratives meeting with teachers and the ASK social worker and seeking additional help, ASK students seek self-discovery and personal growth.

1. Assignments: Students write essays or reader's journal entries about material presented in class. Most questions have options and focus on an understanding of the selection as well as the application to the students' personal experiences. Students must relate the material to other readings, films or personal experiences. In addition this thematic topic is covered in the independent reading assignment.

2. Assessment Strategies: For reading assignments students follow the guidelines used in CAPT assessment. They include Initial Understanding; Developing Interpretation; Developing a Critical Stance and Developing a Connection to Other Reading or Experiences. Students must support their observations about a text with references, either by quote or example. For more formal essays, the assessment may vary according to type of assignment (narrative, persuasive essay, exposition) but will include essay structure, language conventions and content. Punctuality is also part of the assessment, as students in ASK need the reinforcement of study skills. For informal writing in the journal, students are assessed by their willingness to participate openly.

## **Thematic Topic II: Society, Family, Community and Personal Values**

### **Enduring Understandings**

1. Family relationships shape individuals' decision making.
2. There are many definitions of family.
3. Society and community influence one's decisions and affect one's values.
4. Societies may oppress or oppose individuals or may conflict with individuals' value systems.
5. Rebellion is sometimes the appropriate choice for individuals who face an oppressive social structure.
6. American law balances the needs of community, society and the individual.
7. Laws may not always be applied fairly and equitably to all people and consequences for violation may also vary.
8. State and Federal law may be in conflict with each other and may be in conflict with individuals' belief system.
9. The Constitution, Bill of Rights and Amendments are central to America's values; in addition to their historical importance, they are living documents subject to constant challenges and reinterpretation.

10. American society is more an amalgam than melting pot of distinct and blended cultures, religious groups and ideological partisans.

### Essential Questions

1. What family values should a character honor, use or discard in his or her life?
2. What constitutes a family? What are other family structures?
3. How do the decisions of an individual affect society? What are the consequences of violating laws or values of society?
4. How does American law reflect the values of society or communities? How have these values changed over time?
5. When should an individual rebel against the laws of society?
6. How does an individual's point of view affect the interpretation of laws or values?
7. When and why do state laws conflict with each other? When do they conflict with individuals' belief systems?
8. What are the effects on society and individuals of historic and contemporary challenges to the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the Amendments.
9. Who are the some of the sub-groups that make up Americans? How do their values and beliefs compare with one another?

### Activities and Resources

Students read, view and discuss issues that involve the individual, family and community. For example issues with regard to the death penalty are explored in contemporary news stories, legal challenges and movements like the *Innocence Project*. Units with regard to different Amendments are presented. Personal narratives, poetry and documentary films (like *The Exonerated*) are used.

Contemporary application of The Bill or Rights are analyzed, like freedom of speech and the right to bear arms in the same way. Conformity and rebellion are often investigated in units having to do with protest movements, free speech and in stories and films. Alternative, modern family structures are explored in publications (*Newsweek, New York Times, Time, New Yorker*), news commentaries (*Sixty Minutes, PBS, 48 Hours*) and contemporary fiction and poetry. Students learn about groups in American society (like Native Americans, Muslims, and ideological liberals, conservatives, etc).

Often ASK students are dealing with family issues that may be impeding academic progress. While delving into the content of the curriculum, students also explore their own family structure and dynamics, especially when they are affecting performance.

This occurs with the assistance of the social worker in formal and informal counseling, and with specific assignments designed to have students share their stories.

1. Assignments: Students work on family issues with the assistance of the ASK social worker, and are encouraged to write about these issues in their personal narratives. Essay topics ask students to explore issues relating to society, family, community and personal values with regard to the reading as well as in the lives of students.
2. Assessment Strategies: Students may also be asked to take notes, outline or respond with short answers. Class discussions that involve analyzing information are also used.

## **Thematic Topic III: Coming of Age/ Loss of Innocence**

### **Enduring Understandings**

1. Coming of age is a universal archetype involving conflict, choice and growth that transcend limitations of gender, race, culture or economic position.
2. Coming of age implies positive or negative changes that are generally permanent.
3. Coming of age involves a loss of innocence that results in changed behavior or attitudes, and which often entails the grieving process.
4. Coming of age and loss of innocence may affect communities, society, nations or the entire world (e.g. Vietnam, 9/11, Iraq/Afghanistan, School Shootings).
5. Individuals have unique coming of age experiences but share commonalities with others from different time periods and geography.

### **Essential Questions**

1. How does one define coming of age?
2. Why is coming of age a universal pattern?
3. What are the typical experiences that result in coming of age or loss of innocence?
4. How does the loss of innocence change the attitude or behavior of the individual?
5. What are the characteristics of adolescent values, lifestyle, attitudes and voice?
6. How does a society experience coming of age and loss of innocence?
7. What are the consequences of loss of innocence?
8. How is the grieving process related to a loss of innocence?
9. How do characters manifest conflicts with coming of age experiences?

### **Activities and Resources**

Students will read novels, short stories, poetry, drama, memoirs and essays about issues with regard to coming of age. They will investigate patterns and archetypes associated with this thematic topic, and will look at the experiences of characters that represent cultural diversity. Classic novels of this genre include *Catcher in the Rye*, *A Separate Peace* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but is widespread in contemporary literature like *She's Come Undone*, *Rule of the Bone*, and *Perks of Being a Wallflower*. This theme is easily accessible in contemporary films (and students will cover this theme in their independent reading). In social studies students will explore contemporary issues that relate to coming of age in many cultures, but especially American. Students also address their personal connection to these issues, especially when experiencing difficulties with the transitions of their lives.

1. Assignments: in addition to studying the archetypes and thematic patterns to this thematic topic, students will write about their own experiences. They will see how coming of age experiences by fictional characters and memoirists apply to the investigation to their own lives. Students will learn about handling the trauma of loss of innocence and, through discussion and counseling, apply the outcomes to them. Students will learn about voice and persona as a tool for communicating the personal experience.
2. Assessment strategies: see above.

## **Thematic Topics IV: Heroism and the Test of Personal Limits**

## **Enduring Understandings**

1. The heroic journey is a universal archetype that transcends gender, race, culture or economic position.
2. The heroic journey transforms the individual and the community.
3. The hero is emblematic of his or her culture's values or confronts a corrupt value system.
4. Heroic qualities may include strength of physique, character, morality, service, creativity or action. Heroes may also be found in those that face physical, mental and emotional challenges.
5. Society may reward or renounce heroism by the individual.
6. Heroes do not always succeed in their quests or may die in the process of transforming society.
7. Heroic action may take the form of simple deeds that every individual is capable of performing.

## **Essential Questions**

1. What does it mean to be a hero?
2. How has the definition of a hero changed over time?
3. How do different cultures define and value their heroes?
4. How does society benefit from the deeds of the hero?
5. Why does society ostracize or renounce heroes?
6. In what ways can society and the hero conflict? What are the possible outcomes of this conflict?
7. How did individuals that must overcome physical, mental, emotional or environmental challenges display heroic qualities?

## **Activities and Resources**

Students will investigate how society recognizes the hero (and the anti-hero) and the will learn about the archetypes associated with the hero and his/her quest. Students will read stories, poetry, novels and essays, and will view films about what it means to be a hero, especially in the modern age. Students will learn that individuals that overcome odds and challenges are indeed heroic, and that heroes come from any ordinary citizen. In books and stories like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, students will learn the value and possible consequences for opposing a social norm. Students will also read about contemporary factual events where these incidents occur. A unit on overcoming obstacles is also part of the curriculum.

1. Assignments: Students will write about patterns of heroism and apply these to their experiences. Students will connect the patterns of various cultures and time periods and will relate these to their own conceptions of heroism. Students will compare what obstacles they have had to or must overcome to characters they read about or see portrayed in documentary films.
2. Assessment strategies. See above.

## **Topic V: Accepting Differences and Embracing Diversity**

### **Enduring Understandings**

1. Differences are defined by personal and societal perception.
2. People naturally generalize and stereotype as a way of ordering and classifying information.
3. The consequences of stereotyping are often destructive for all affected.
4. Differences in society are a universal inevitability and should be valued positively.
5. Differences have caused conflict and major wars throughout history and have been a barrier to world peace.
6. The perception of the American “melting pot” has changed over the years to an amalgam of distinct cultures and groups.
7. The immigrant experience in the US has followed identifiable patterns.
8. US citizens have the responsibility of caring for other cultures and the conflicts caused by differences among people of other nations.
9. All individuals possess unique talents and gifts, but face extraordinary challenges.
10. A good citizen is a good Samaritan that recognizes the importance of reaching out to and assisting those less fortunate.

### **Essential Questions**

1. How do societies define difference, acceptance and tolerance?
2. How do personal differences impact one’s experiences?
3. Why do people stereotype others? What are the consequences of that stereotyping?
4. How are world conflicts related to the inability to accept difference?
5. What role should Americans take in the conflicts of other nations?
6. How do laws reflect differences in society and community? What protection do citizens receive? How consistently are laws applied to all citizens?
7. What is racial profiling?
8. How do other societies handle differences in religion, gender and political ideology?
9. How do we learn to embrace rather than reject our differences?
10. How can we assist others less fortunate than ourselves?

### **Activities and Resources**

Students will explore issues with regard to diversity, racism, sexism, prejudice and stereotyping throughout much of their reading and writing. Additional units about overcoming physical, mental and emotional handicaps as well as the cultures of specific groups (native American, for example) will be presented. Students are also encouraged to assist others, perform community service and value the ideal of selfless giving. Classroom reading will reflect a diversity of authors and backgrounds as well. News topics, current issues and government material will also be examined for the purpose of understanding and respecting differences. This will be investigated from a global perspective.

Students also are encouraged to embrace their individuality and improve their tolerance for and acceptance of others.

1. Assignments: Students will write about issues of diversity when they read, view or discuss the material. They will also be asked to examine their own attitudes about this topic. Classroom discussion will be conducted in an atmosphere of tolerance, and students will be encouraged to reach out to others (including the multiple handicap facility adjacent to our classroom).
2. Assessment strategies: see above.