



# JOSEPH KUSHNER HEBREW ACADEMY

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## RAE KUSHNER YESHIVA HIGH SCHOOL

### ENGLISH CLASSROOMS EXPAND SELF EXPRESSION OPPORTUNITIES IN WRITING WORKSHOPS AND EXPLORE LITERATURE FROM SHAKESPEARE TO 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

English classrooms are complex places. Whether students face a blank page needing to be imagined and composed or a full page needing to be read and understood, a central fixture of our time together in class is that we simultaneously share the same thing yet understand it or accomplish it individually. Individual learning styles and identity play a part in English studies. We all read the same novel, discuss the same poem, write a paper from the same assignment description, yet come to this work uniquely. It's exciting to witness and a pleasure to teach.

In 9th grade's English Writing Workshop students have been meeting once a week and waking up to their language use by: reflecting on past writing experiences, further developing self-expression, fine-tuning pre-existing writing skills, and developing new and productive writing strategies adaptable to the multiple writing contexts that they will confront in high school, college, and the world beyond. Students who learn to gain control over the skills and strategies emphasized in this class, have greater success in all other subjects. But aside from the practical gain, as Gordon Pradl tells us, "In telling the stories of our reality, both private and public, spiritual and material, we assert a future. The future, though always apparently beyond our control, is in actuality a continuing alternative, one we actively construct out of our understanding of past events. Gain control of a person's language and you determine his fortune, because you have usurped his natural capacity to interpret his own perceptions, indeed you narrow the very range of those perceptions." Writing Workshop is interested in expanding possibilities for self-expression.

Meanwhile, English 9, English 11, and English 12 are writing about literature. After visiting the origins of American Literature, by reading and writing about Irving, Poe, Thoreau, and Emerson, English 11 jumped into a 20th century masterpiece, Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. We have the luxury of lingering over this beautiful prose every morning. Shakespeare studies are currently the focus for both seniors grappling with *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* every afternoon and freshman are coming to terms with *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. Our literary studies emphasize close reading as well as a critical perspective. In all of these classes we study canonical literature that reveals what it means to live with love, hate, joy, and grief; we examine the value of true friendship and the sting of sincere betrayal. In short we read, study, think, and discuss what it means to be human.

