TORAH ACADEMY OF BERGEN COUNTY

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The mission of Civic Spirit, to enhance civic belonging, knowledge, and responsibility in their student and faculty communities, aligns with what I would like to foster in my students at TABC. Prior to applying for the Civic Spirit Educator Cohort, I observed that my students' ability to discuss difficult issues was weak. They frequently only mentioned bold, simplistic ideas they had heard on social media or from other students. They struggled to respect ideas outside their worldview and poorly defended their own positions. How could I, as an English teacher, work to expand their ability to listen to others and express their own ideas?

During my time at Civic Spirit, I engaged in a deep dive into how to answer this question. I developed four key components to address this, which I then incorporated into instructional planning arcs for the English curriculum at TABC. Over the course of high school, students focus on one of these skills each year in English class. Lessons are woven into the curriculum throughout the year.

1. **Freshman year: Civic Discourse**. In their first year in high school, students focus on learning how to listen and speak. Students begin the year by learning about the importance of civic discourse. Throughout the year, students engage in lessons and activities that challenge them to speak while listening to opposing opinions. They design a civil discourse protocol as a class, and at the end of the year, they write a reflection about what they learned through this process.
2. **Sophomore year: Understand Perspectives and Avoiding Bias**. Building on what students learned about the importance of listening to opposing viewpoints, sophomores learn how to recognize an author's perspective and point of view. They learn how to evaluate sources and media through a five-page research project about the origins of evil, following reading *Lord of the Flies*.

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3. **Junior year: Argument and Debate.** Through a focus on rhetoric, students learn how to debate and argue their points persuasively. Students learn how to argue with others in mind, including learning classical rhetorical strategies and how to synthesize ideas. The focus of the year is the American Experience, and students read and study classic and contemporary American texts, studying how these texts engage in a grand conversation about what it means to be an American.
4. **Senior Year: Personal Narrative and Expression.** In their final year of high school, students write and think critically about themselves and their place in the world. On the cusp of the biggest change they have yet experienced, students consider what it means to be Jewish and American. The year concludes with a multi-media project, building on their speaking, researching, and synthesizing skills that they learned throughout high school. Students will present their projects to the class and reflect on their process. The project includes a written "autobiographical artist statement" about themselves and their process of creating their project.

Speaking at the Episcopal Church's event Civil Discourse in America, lawyer and activist Rabbi Steve Gutow said, "civility is simply demonstrating respect for the dignity of our fellow humans—even those humans with whom we have sharp disagreement. Civility is allowing others to speak, and having the humility to admit that we may have something to learn. Civility favors truth over cheap gain, and patience over knee-jerk judgment." Through the lessons I have designed for the English curriculum, I hope students will emerge from TABC with an understanding of the importance of civility. Ultimately, civility is an expression of empathy and understanding. It is a way to reach across to others and learn from them. In our society, which has become vitriolic and violent, empathy, civility, and just being a good person are all the more crucial.

Check out one of their instruction guides!

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Assessment	BA	Literary Analysis	Literary Analysis	Literary Analysis
Writing Skills		❑ Thesis development ❑ Paragraph Coherence ❑ Academic TISAS Paragraph	❑ Finding Evidence ❑ Paragraph Coherence ❑ 3-Paragraph Essay	❑ Supporting Evidence ❑ Developing Intros & Conclusions ❑ 5-Paragraph Essay
Grammar Focus		Pre-test	Parts of Speech Subject/Predicate Clauses	Sentence Structure Run-on/Complete Sentences Objects/Direct Objects
Content Skills		Characterization	Conflict	Plot Plot Devices
Civic Focus		Importance of civil discourse: Lesson linked to text that explains the importance of civility across differences.	Introduce discussion protocol for civic discourse: Students engage in graded discussion using sentence frames for dialogue.	Value-based discussion: Students are introduced to the idea of shared values in discussions

Argument	Creative Writing
❑ Choice of Evidence ❑ Sentence Coherence ❑ Analysis of Evidence ❑ 5-Paragraph Essay	❑ Choice of Evidence ❑ Sentence Coherence ❑ Analysis of Evidence ❑ Personal Response
Pronouns Commas	Punctuation Capitalization
Argument Rhetorical Devices	Literary Genres "Coming of Age" Literature
Students design their own values-based civil discourse protocol. Students practice their protocol and discuss how a discussion protocol can impact understanding across differences.	Reflection: students reflect on their experiences learning about civil discourse. They conclude with a whole-class discussion and written reflection.

Writing Civic TABC Instructional Planning Arc for ninth grade English Language Arts.