



Class Title: Red Collegiate English: Conspiracy Theories & Debate

Subjects Covered: Language Arts, Debate, and Public Speaking

Teacher Name: India Horton

Class Day: Monday and Friday

Class Size: 25

Overall Class Cost: \$90

Individual Student Supply Fee: \$15

Class Fee: \$192

Ages or color group served: Red

What level is this class: Level 3

Prerequisites: Students enrolling in HCU Collegiate English: Conspiracy Theories & Debate should be prepared for an interactive, discussion based, feedback, and writing high school English course.

- Be able to read and comprehend high school level material
- Be able to write complete sentences and basic paragraphs
- Understand basic grammar and sentence structure such as:
 - writing a complete sentence
 - Avoid writing incomplete thoughts
 - Use basic punctuation
 - Connect sentences to form a basic paragraph
- Have a willingness to learn and participate
- Be willing to speak and debate in front of classmates
- Be willing to respectfully participate in debates and discussions
- Be able to complete independent assignments 3 days a week at home.
- Have access to a laptop to research assignments and a laptop needs to be available for in person class.
- Be prepared to meet assignment deadlines.

Students DO NOT need to know:

- How to write a thesis
- How to write an MLA research paper
- How to write an APA research paper
- How to conduct formal debate
- How to give a TED style presentation
- How to be an experienced public speaker

These skills will be taught and developed throughout the course.

Attendance

- Students are expected to adhere to the HCU attendance policy.

- Attendance and active participation are important components of the course.
- Students are expected to arrive on time and be prepared to participate.
- Students are responsible for completing missed assignments following an absence.
- Parents should notify HCU when a student will be absent considering the nature of the class.

Student Expectations

Students should come to class ready to:

- Learn
- Ask questions
- Think critically
- Research
- Write
- Speak
- Debate
- Listen
- Collaborate
- Respect different viewpoints
- Accept constructive feedback
- Challenge ideas respectfully
- Step outside of their comfort zone

Most importantly:

Students do not have to walk into this class knowing how to do everything. They simply need to come ready and willing to learn.

HCU will teach students how to research, write, debate, communicate, present and confidently take the stage.

Graduation Requirements: To successfully complete the course and receive credit, students must:

- Pass the course with a final grade of 70% or higher
- Attend the HCU Conspiracy Debate Night. Currently scheduled for the last day of school April 16th at 5:00pm. We need all students to be flexible with a change of date due to unforeseen circumstances.
- Complete all 3 English papers (2 MLA research and 1 APA research papers)
 - Complete required independent assignments
 - Participate in required in person debates and panel discussions
 - Complete required public speaking presentations
 - Complete the final TED style presentation
- Demonstrate a willingness to participate, learn and engage respectfully throughout the course

Attendance

- Students are expected to adhere to the HCU attendance policy.
- Attendance and active participation are important components of the course.
- Students are expected to arrive on time and be prepared to participate.
- If a student misses a debate, there is no opportunity to make this up and the student will lose points. We will try our best to allocate time for missed individual public speaking presentations including the TED talk presentation.

Homework Requirements: There will be weekly independent work assigned with due dates.

Class Description:

HCU COLLEGIATE ENGLISH: CONSPIRACY THEORIES & DEBATE

Research • Writing • Public Speaking • Debate • Body Language • TED Talks

12 Week High School English

Get ready to take English beyond the classroom.

HCU Collegiate English: Conspiracy Theories & Debate is an interactive, college preparatory English course designed to strengthen students' writing, research, critical thinking, communication and public speaking skills through fascinating and controversial conspiracy topics.

Students will investigate conspiracy theories, mysteries, controversial claims and real world questions while learning how to research evidence, evaluate sources, develop arguments and communicate their ideas effectively.

Students will not simply be told what to believe. They will learn how to investigate a claim, examine evidence, consider opposing viewpoints and form conclusions based on research.

Throughout the course, students will:

- Complete 3 major English research papers
 - Write 2 MLA papers and 1 APA paper
 - Learn MLA and APA formatting in person
 - Conduct independent research
 - Evaluate credible and unreliable sources
- Study logical fallacies and persuasive techniques
- Participate in weekly public speaking activities
- Participate in team debates and on stage debate panels
 - Complete TED Talk lecture reviews
 - Develop and present their own TED style talk
- Learn the science of body language and nonverbal communication
- Analyze posture, eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, movement and stage presence
 - Film and evaluate their own presentations
- Develop confidence speaking in front of an audience
- Learn how to communicate effectively through both words and body language

The course will explore engaging questions such as:

Did humans really land on the Moon?

Did we really go to Mars?

Are world maps misleading?

Why does Africa look smaller on traditional maps?

Can we trust the systems that regulate medicine?

Why do people believe conspiracy theories?

Does social media influence what we believe?

What really happened to Amelia Earhart?

Are UFO sightings evidence of extraterrestrial life?

Why are secret societies so fascinating?

Students will also learn that strong communication involves much more than having the right words.

We will take a deep dive into the science of body language and nonverbal communication, examining how posture, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, movement, voice and stage presence can influence how a message is received.

The semester will build toward the HCU Conspiracy Debate Night, where students will put their research and debate skills to the test in front of an audience.

The course will culminate with the HCU Idea Stage, where students will deliver a professionally prepared TED style presentation based on an original idea they have researched and developed throughout the semester.

Students will leave this course with more than English credit.

They will leave with experience in research, academic writing, critical thinking, debate, public speaking, body language, presentation skills and confident communication.

PUBLIC SPEAKING, TED-STYLE PRESENTATIONS & HCU DEBATE NIGHT

This is not an English class where students simply sit at a desk and complete papers.

Throughout the 12-week course, students will develop their ability to research, write, think critically, communicate ideas, defend an argument, and confidently present in front of a live audience.

MONDAYS

- Students will receive lectures, Participate in classroom activities and game style learning, conduct research, develop ideas, conduct wiring assignments, collaborate with teams

FRIDAYS

- It's all about public speaking on the big stage!

Every Friday, students will leave the traditional classroom setting and move front and center onto the stage of our auditorium, which seats more than 600 people.

The stage becomes the students' classroom.

Students will regularly practice:

- Public speaking
- Debate
- Persuasive speaking
- Research presentations
 - Panel discussions
 - Cross-examination
 - Impromptu speaking
- TED-style presentations
- Argument development
- Body language and stage presence
- Voice projection, pacing and delivery
- Audience engagement

Students will become comfortable standing on a large stage, speaking into a microphone, addressing an audience, responding to questions, defending their ideas and presenting themselves with confidence.

The goal is not simply to make students better speakers.

The goal is to prepare students to confidently communicate their ideas in college, careers, business, leadership and real-world situations.

TED-Style Presentation: Start With the Idea

One of the unique components of this course is that students will begin developing their own original TED-style presentation while they are still in the early stages of their research.

Rather than waiting until the end of a research project to present a finished product, students will step onto the stage early in the process and introduce an idea they believe is worth investigating.

Students will present:

- Their original idea or question
- Why they believe the topic is interesting or important
 - What they currently think about the topic
 - What they want to discover through research
- Initial evidence or questions surrounding the topic
 - What they still need to investigate

This early presentation allows students to experience something important about real research:

You do not have to know the answer before you begin asking the question.

Students will then continue researching, evaluating sources, challenging their assumptions, considering opposing viewpoints and developing their ideas throughout the semester.

As their research develops, their presentation develops with it.

By the end of the course, students will transform their research and ideas into a polished 5–8 minute TED-style presentation featuring a strong opening, clear central idea, research-based evidence, storytelling, audience engagement, intentional body language and professional stage presence.

The Science of Body Language

Students will also take a deep dive into body language and nonverbal communication.

Standing on a stage is about much more than the words being spoken.

Students will learn how to intentionally use:

- Posture
- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
- Hand gestures
- Movement
- Personal space
- Stage positioning
- Voice and vocal variety
 - Pacing
 - Pauses
- Confidence and professional presence

Students will also watch and analyze their own presentations so they can identify how their body language, voice and physical presence affect the way their message is received.

Students will learn that body language is not about "reading someone's mind." Instead, they will study how nonverbal communication works within context and how speakers can intentionally communicate confidence, professionalism and engagement.

HCU DEBATE NIGHT

The semester will culminate in HCU Conspiracy Debate Night, an exciting live debate experience designed to put everything students have learned into action.

Students will take the stage in front of a live audience and compete in structured debates based on controversial questions, conspiracy theories, unexplained phenomena and real-world issues studied throughout the course.

Students Will Be Evaluated By a Judges Panel

HCU Debate Night will feature a judges panel that evaluates students across multiple categories.

Students may be assessed on:

- Strength and quality of evidence

- Research and source credibility
 - Argument development
 - Organization
 - Rebuttal skills
- Ability to respond to opposing viewpoints
 - Cross-examination
 - Public speaking
 - Voice and delivery
 - Body language
 - Stage presence
 - Audience engagement
 - Professionalism
- Ability to clearly communicate their thoughts

This Competition Is NOT About Who Is "Right"

An important part of HCU Debate Night is understanding that debate is not simply about proving that one person is right and another person is wrong.

Students are being evaluated on how effectively they communicate and defend their position.

A student can be assigned a position they personally disagree with and still perform exceptionally well.

Judges are looking at questions such as:

****Did the student research the topic?****

****Did they use credible evidence?****

****Did they clearly explain their reasoning?****

****Did they address the opposing argument?****

****Could they defend their position under pressure?****

****Did they communicate their ideas effectively?****

****Did they demonstrate strong public speaking and stage presence?****

The purpose is to teach students that strong communicators know how to research before they speak, think before they react, support their claims with evidence and respectfully defend an idea.

Individual & Team Awards

HCU Debate Night will include both individual awards and an overall team award.

****Individual trophies will recognize students who demonstrate excellence in specific areas of competition, such as:**

- Best Evidence & Research
 - Best Argument
 - Best Rebuttal
- Best Cross-Examination
- Best Public Speaker
- Best Stage Presence
- Best Body Language
- Best Impromptu Speaker
- Best Overall Debater

An Overall Team Champion award will also be presented to the team with the strongest combined performance.

The team award recognizes the collective performance of the team, including research, preparation, argumentation, teamwork, communication and debate execution.

The goal is to create an authentic collegiate-style debate experience where students learn that how you present your evidence and communicate your thinking matters just as much as the information itself.

From the Classroom to the Big Stage

By the end of the semester, students will have gone from developing an initial question or idea to researching it, writing about it, defending it, presenting it and confidently standing on the big stage and the bright lights, in front of an audience.

They will research.

They will write.

They will question.

They will debate.

They will present.

They will defend their ideas.

They will learn to own the stage.

GRADING RUBRIC will be sent home on the first day of school.

Sensitive Topics Notice

Students and parents should be prepared for the possibility that class discussions and assignments may involve sensitive, controversial, or challenging topics.

These topics will be explored in an educational setting with thoughtful guidance, respect, and care. Our goal is to provide students with a safe, supportive environment where they can ask questions, examine different perspectives, conduct research, and learn how to respectfully engage with difficult subjects.

MAJOR PAPER DEADLINES

Paper #1: MLA Investigative Research Paper

Due Week 6

Paper #2: MLA Argumentative Research Paper

Due Week 9

Paper #3: APA Research Paper

Due Week 11

Week 12: Final Debate Preparation

DUE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

Reminder: Dated Planners are mandatory. Please purchase before the 1st day of school.

Throughout the semester, students will continuously build their ability to write, research, speak, present, debate and communicate ideas from the stage.

We kindly ask parents to trust our process and understand that students will be exploring these topics within a structured, loving, and supervised educational environment, where the focus remains on learning, critical thinking, research, and respectful discussion.

Week 1:

WELCOME TO THE RABBIT HOLE

Monday: Students will be introduced to the course, expectations, major assignments, research process, debate format and public speaking requirements.

Students will learn the difference between a conspiracy theory, conspiracy, rumor, opinion, hypothesis, misinformation and evidence.

Students will brainstorm conspiracy theories, controversial questions, mysteries and real-world topics they would like to investigate. All ideas will be placed into the HCU Idea Hat.

Students will also receive the semester assignment calendar and begin learning how to manage research papers, presentations and deadlines.

Friday: The class will review the proposed topics and vote on the topics they are most interested in exploring throughout the semester.

Introduction to the Stage & Body Language:

Students will be introduced to the HCU auditorium stage and learn proper stage behavior, posture, eye contact, movement, microphone use and audience awareness.

Students will participate in short introductory speaking activities designed to build confidence.

Week 2:

RESEARCH & SOURCE EVALUATION

Monday: Writing & Research

Students will learn how to develop a research question, locate credible sources, take research notes and distinguish reliable information from questionable information.

Students will learn about primary sources, secondary sources, academic sources, government sources, news sources, websites and social media.

Students will begin researching their selected topics.

Friday: Public Speaking & Body Language

Students will practice speaking clearly and confidently on stage.

Focus will include posture, eye contact, facial expression, gestures, voice projection and audience engagement.

Students will complete short speaking exercises using information from their research.

Week 3:

MLA RESEARCH WRITING

Monday: MLA Writing University

Students will receive detailed instruction in MLA 9 formatting and research writing.

Students will learn how to create a thesis, organize a research paper, integrate evidence, paraphrase, use quotations, cite sources and create a Works Cited page.

Paper #1 Begins: MLA Investigative Research Paper

Students will begin developing their first major research paper based on their selected topic.

Friday: Stage Speaking & Body Language

Students will practice delivering a short research-based presentation.

The focus will be on eye contact, gestures, posture, voice, pacing and confidence.

Week 4:

DEVELOPING THE INVESTIGATION

Monday: Writing & Research Development

Students will continue researching their selected topics and begin organizing their evidence.

Students will examine multiple perspectives and learn how to present evidence supporting and challenging a claim.

Students will work on their thesis, outline and first draft.

Paper #1 Milestones:

- Research Question Due
- Working Thesis Due
- Outline Due

Friday: Public Speaking & Stage Presence

Students will present a short portion of their research on stage.

Students will receive feedback on organization, delivery, body language and stage presence.

Week 5:

ARGUMENT, EVIDENCE & ANALYSIS

Monday: Writing Strong Arguments

Students will learn how to move beyond simply collecting information and begin analyzing what the evidence actually means.

Students will work on developing arguments, counterarguments, rebuttals and evidence-based conclusions.

Students will continue revising Paper #1.

Friday: Public Speaking & Body Language

Students will practice persuasive speaking.

Students will learn how body language, facial expressions, gestures, movement and vocal delivery can strengthen or weaken a message.

Week 6:

PAPER #1 COMPLETION & PRESENTATION

Monday: Writing Workshop

Students will complete, edit and format their first MLA research paper.

Students will review grammar, organization, citations, source integration and MLA formatting.

Paper #1 Final Due

Students will begin discussing their next major writing assignment.

Friday: Research Presentation Day

Students will present portions of their research on the auditorium stage.

Students will practice speaking without simply reading their paper.

The focus will be on confidence, audience engagement, body language and professional presentation.

Week 7:

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING & TED-STYLE STORYTELLING

Monday: Paper #2 Begins

Students will begin their second major assignment, an MLA Argumentative Research Paper.

Students will develop a position, construct an argument, incorporate evidence, address opposing viewpoints and develop rebuttals.

Friday: TED-Style Speaking & Debate Introduction

Students will begin connecting their academic writing to effective speaking.

Students will learn how to turn an argument into an engaging presentation using:

- A strong opening hook
- A clear central idea
- Evidence

- Storytelling
- Audience connection
- Persuasive language
- Confident delivery

Students will also begin formal debate training.

Week 8:

APA UNIVERSITY & TED-STYLE PRESENTATION DEVELOPMENT

Monday: APA Writing

Students will learn APA 7 formatting and research writing.

Students will compare MLA and APA and learn APA citations, references, headings, formatting and academic writing style.

Students will continue developing Paper #2 and prepare for the upcoming APA research assignment.

Friday: TED-STYLE PRESENTATION & BODY LANGUAGE

Students will study what makes a presentation memorable.

Students will work on storytelling, transitions, audience engagement, vocal variety, eye contact, gestures, posture and movement.

Students will practice presenting their ideas from the stage and receiving constructive feedback.

Week 9:

PAPER #2 DUE, DEBATE TEAM FORMATION & ORIGINAL TED-STYLE IDEA

Monday: Writing & Critical Thinking

Students will finalize and submit their second major research paper.

PAPER #2 FINAL DUE

Students will begin their APA research paper and explore how people form beliefs and opinions, including confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, pattern recognition, misinformation and social influence.

Students will also begin developing their original TED-style presentation idea.

Friday: Debate Team Formation & TED-Style Original Idea Presentation

Students will officially form their HCU Debate Teams.

Teams will be organized and assigned debate responsibilities as students begin preparing for HCU Conspiracy Debate Night.

Students will take the stage and present their original TED-style idea while still in the early stages of their research.

Students will explain:

What their idea is

Why they find it interesting

What questions they have

What they currently believe

What they want to discover

What they plan to research

Students will learn that a strong presentation can begin with a question worth investigating, rather than an answer they already know.

Students will also begin working with their debate teams, learning how to collaborate, divide research responsibilities and prepare to defend an assigned position.

Week 10:

DEBATE UNIVERSITY & TED-STYLE DELIVERY

Monday: APA Research & Writing

Students will continue developing their APA research paper.

Students will work on research, evidence, analysis, organization and APA documentation.

Friday: Debate & TED-Style Communication

Students will participate in structured debate activities and continue developing their presentation skills.

Students will practice:

Opening statements

Evidence presentation

Rebuttals

Cross-examination

Closing statements

Impromptu responses

Students will also learn how TED-style speakers use storytelling, evidence and delivery to make an argument compelling.

Body language during debate will be evaluated and practiced.

Week 11:

APA PAPER DUE & ON-STAGE DEBATE PRACTICE

Monday: APA Writing & Final Workshop

Students will complete, edit and format their APA research paper.

Students will review citations, references, organization, grammar and academic writing.

PAPER #3: APA RESEARCH PAPER FINAL DUE

Students will then shift their focus toward final debate preparation.

Friday: On-Stage Debate Practice

Students will spend the day on the HCU auditorium stage preparing for HCU Conspiracy Debate Night.

Students will participate in full on-stage debate practices designed to simulate the actual event.

Students will practice:

- Opening Statements
- Presenting Evidence
- Argument Development
 - Rebuttals
- Cross-Examination
- Responding Under Pressure
 - Closing Statements
- Team Communication
- Microphone Technique
 - Eye Contact
 - Posture
 - Gestures
- Stage Movement
- Voice Projection
- Professionalism

Students will receive feedback from instructors and classmates and make adjustments to strengthen their debate performance before the final rehearsal.

Week 12:

FINAL DEBATE PREPARATION

Monday: Final Debate Preparation

The final Monday will be dedicated entirely to preparing for HCU Conspiracy Debate Night.

Students will finalize their research and evidence, organize arguments, strengthen rebuttals, prepare opening and closing statements and work with their debate teams.

Students will review the judging categories and expectations for the competition.

Friday: FULL-STAGE DEBATE REHEARSAL

Students will conduct a complete debate rehearsal in the HCU auditorium.

The rehearsal will simulate the environment of HCU Conspiracy Debate Night and include:

Opening Statements

Evidence Presentation

Rebuttals

Cross-Examination

Closing Statements

Body Language

Stage Presence

Microphone Use

Audience Engagement

Professionalism

Students will receive final feedback and make necessary adjustments before the official HCU Conspiracy Debate Night.