

Humanities Accelerator Course (HAC) Launch Module

Lesson: Introduction to the HAC

Lesson Overview

Focus Question: What is the Humanities Accelerator Course (HAC), and how might I relate to and engage with it?

Key Understandings:

- Students will be able to describe the purpose and structure of the HAC.
- Students will start connecting themselves to goals of the course.

Language Objectives:

- Receptive Language: Locate key details about the purpose of the HAC in the text.
- Productive Language: Discuss the purpose of the HAC.

Culminating Task:

- Group Summary, “Our Course Understanding” and Exit Ticket, “Pulse Check: How Are You Feeling?”

Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

Note for Teachers

This Introduction to the Humanities Accelerator Course (HAC) is intended to guide students through a first look at and an initial understanding of the course goals and structure. It intentionally invites students to interpret the purpose of the course and how they relate to it as learners. Instructional moves are suggested throughout the text and task series. Links to these instructional moves have been provided and should be implemented as best suits students and teachers (considering instructional moves already in place, any needed routine introduction, and student learning needs). Teachers should consider culminating tasks to better understand both what students understand about the course and how they relate to and feel about the work ahead (a Group Summary and Exit Ticket are suggested for this purpose). This series of text and tasks is meant as an introduction that is:

- Brief—no longer than a single period so that students can quickly get to the heart of learning activities later in the Launch Module.
- Flexible—it will likely need adjustments to match the experience and needs of the specific school using the course. This might include adjustments to language in the Proposal to reflect local choices and structures, or an alternate processing task to reflect regularly used literacy activities of the local school.

Materials

Handouts (available to all students, either electronically or hard copy):

- Text—[Proposal](#): The Humanities Accelerator Course, Addressing the Needs of Secondary Students
- Tasks
 - Text Annotations
 - Word - Phrase - Sentence or Save the Last Word for Me
 - *Group Summary
 - Gallery Walk or Wrap Around
 - *Exit Ticket

Note: Links and details for tasks are provided in the Text and Task Sequence below. Teachers should adapt and use some or all of these, depending on student moves and instructional moves they already use. Tasks important to capture student learning are *starred above.

Text and Task Sequence

Note: Teachers should start their class as they usually might with greetings, a community builder, or opener, etc. The sequence below details the sequence of reading, processing, and sharing learning to introduce students to the course:

1. *Set purpose for reading and task*: Understanding the course: What is HAC? Why are we doing it?
2. *Read the Proposal*: The Humanities Accelerator Course, Addressing the Needs of Secondary Students
 - Following this [Text Annotation Implementation Guide](#), have students read through the text one time and then annotate for a central [idea](#).
3. *Process the Proposal*: Students work in small groups to discuss the text.
 - Consider either [Word - Phrase - Sentence](#) or [Save the Last Word for Me](#) to engage students in a collaborative review.
 - Use [strategic grouping](#) and encourage [translanguaging](#) as needed.
4. *Summarize student learning*: In the same small groups, students draft responses to the following questions:
 - What is the Humanities Accelerator Course (HAC)? Why are we doing it?

- How is HAC structured?
 - What are the goals for HAC? How do they connect to you?
 - What will we learn? ¹
5. *Share out:* Student groups share their summary answers. Consider a collaborative or student-led format for this sharing, such as a [Gallery Walk](#) or [Wraparound](#).
 6. *Exit tickets:* Individually, students complete [exit cards](#) in the form of an [S - I - T](#).

(Text for students starts on page 4.)

¹ To note: this last question will be left largely unanswered from this activity and will be answered more concretely in the [Content Preview](#). Posing a question with an open answer is a way to introduce the idea at the start of class that students and teachers won't always immediately know the answer.

Proposal: The Humanities Accelerator Course, Addressing the Needs of Secondary Students

What's the matter with high school?

Ask yourself a question, and give yourself an honest answer: How well do you read? How well do your friends read? How many of your peers or classmates do you think have no problem reading? For some of you, reading may be no problem. For others of you, reading may be one of your key challenges at school. And when you struggle with reading, so many things about high school get harder.

Now ask yourself another question, especially if you or someone you know struggles with reading: Do you think your high school coursework is going to help you close the gap in how well you currently read with how well you are expected to read? Will high school help you improve your reading enough that you can achieve the goals you have for your life?

The answer in a typical American high school is, in short, no.

High schools are not set up to help you if you cannot yet read at grade level. Instead, students who need the support to read on grade level are often tracked into a lower-level, “remedial” class based on some test score or teacher recommendation. This tracking completely separates out from students who struggle with reading from students for whom school comes easily. What’s more, this tracking system plays out, all too often, based on race. Recent research has found that Black and Latino students living in poverty are far more likely to be enrolled in low-track classes than their White and Asian classmates.²

To be clear, it’s not as if the remedial or “lower track” courses do better at catching students up to their peers who are currently performing well. Multiple millions of dollars have been spent on reading interventions to try to improve the reading skills of older students. All too often in remediation attempts, the very students who need more time and attention with grade-level materials are denied that opportunity. Remedial coursework is not designed to catch kids up, nor is it based on what we know to be true about how our brains learn. As a result, it all too often becomes a mind-numbing class filled with worksheets and compliance exercises designed to keep kids busy but not actually help them learn.

Tracking, however, isn’t the only reason a typical high school is not set up to help students achieve their very best. As nearly any student can tell you, there is also a significant problem in many high schools of students not feeling connected to school. The siloed nature of courses, rigid structures and schedules, centering of white histories, stories, science, and mathematics present challenges. There is also a significant lack of opportunity to build meaningful relationships with teachers, which leaves students of all identities disconnected from their academic work. What is the result? High schools do not create nourishing communities that honor all students’ personal identities, cultures, and communities. High

² McCardle, T. (2020). A critical historical examination of tracking as a method for maintaining racial segregation. *Educational Considerations*, 45(2). <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.2186>

schools could do much better to who students are, how they see themselves, and recognize their existing skills and funds of knowledge as valuable.

So what do we do about it?

We don't need academic interventions; we don't need to repeat what has failed for over half a century. Schools and their students need what Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings has called a "[hard reset](#)." This course is a new way to do 9th grade. It is a one-year humanities course (meaning your ELA and social studies/history courses are combined) that is an acceleration model focused on students developing their identity, community, literacy, and criticality. The course is a fundamentally different approach than those offered in traditional 9th-grade classes. It is a course focused on making sure each and every student is well served by their school through centering the needs of students who are most often marginalized by public schools³: Black or Indigenous people of color and multilingual learners.

What is the course going to be like?

Humanities Topics

In this class, topics between literacy and social studies will be connected under the umbrella of humanities. The content of the course, the humanities topics and units students move through, must serve dual purposes: meet required state social studies content standards and connect major events happening outside of school to literacy and social studies learning inside of school. In this way, the course will be empowering and relevant, much more so than a typical social studies or ELA class might have been.

Course Structure

No Tracking: In this class, you will not be tracked. Critical to the success of the design, implementation, and sustaining of the HAC is a structure that takes direct aim at the racist policy of tracking students through high school course assignments. In this class, you and your peers are not tracked by old records of academic performance or teacher recommendations or parent requests.

Multiple Class Periods (or sustained minutes): In this class, you will have time and support. A team of teachers and paraprofessionals will team or co-teach for this extended block of time. We will have a three-period course; the first two periods are allocated to ELA and social studies courses, and the third is reserved for personalized learning including needed supports within the context of personalized learning.

What beliefs guide the creation of the course?

To be something distinct from the traditional 9th-grade start to high school, HAC must intentionally create a nourishing community for all students. As such, we've designed the class based on four core [tenets](#)—core principles of HAC that represent essential elements of the course to which learning experiences and materials must be aligned. They are interdependent and will have multiple points of crossover.

³ Note to teacher: Please revise this language to better align to the population(s) most underserved in your school community.

<p>Identity</p>	<p>The first of the four core tenets of this course is identity, which Dr. Muhammad names as being composed of “who we are, who others say we are (in both positive and negative ways), and whom we desire to be.”⁴ The instructional materials and practices honor that identity is intersectional, layered, and evolving. The instructional materials and practices make clear that academic frustrations are not due to any lack of student ability, and they support students to identify themselves as successful learners.</p> <p>The course creates space for students to affirm, cultivate, challenge, and develop their own identities such that they become capable readers, writers, and speakers who can confidently negotiate the world.</p>
<p>Community</p>	<p>The second of the four core tenets of this course is the idea of establishing an authentic learning community in which all students feel a sense of welcome, belonging, and psychological safety. In the context of this course, community includes the relationships, classroom environment, and practices that together serve to promote individual and collective learning and growth.</p> <p>Community must be intentionally and explicitly developed to strengthen student understanding of their identity and identities of others, cultivate criticality, and build literacy knowledge and skill.</p>
<p>Literacy</p>	<p>The third of the four core tenets of this course is the idea that literacy is a life skill, and all students are capable and deserving of developing reading, writing, and speaking that will serve them throughout their whole lives. Students will learn to read to ask and answer questions about texts, both what is on the page and what is omitted. Students will develop their lens for understanding and questioning whose stories are told—and whose stories are not told.</p> <p>Equally important is building knowledge through study of topics grounded in both state social studies standards and student identities and interests. As a result, students will strengthen their understanding of their identity and identities of others, cultivate criticality, and foster community.</p> <p>In the context of this course, literacy is defined as reading, writing, and speaking at grade level, with sufficient, individualized, and personalized support designed around each student’s individual needs.</p>
<p>Criticality</p>	<p>The final core tenet of this course is the idea of criticality, which is defined as reading texts (including print, visual, etc.) with an understanding of how power, oppression, racism, and equity impact society. Content and tasks of the course are oriented towards a critical lens, providing the structure and space for students to engage authentically in work that identifies and interrogates power and privilege in service of anti-oppression and anti-racism.</p> <p>Students will engage as socio-politically conscious members of their communities, with the power, skills, intellect, and curiosity to actively engage in issues, groups, topics, etc. that matter to them in a way that makes the world more just, liberated, and joyful.</p>

⁴ Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literature*. Scholastic. p. 67