English 121: *Introduction to the Western Literary Tradition*

Course description

This section of 121 introduces students to touchstone literary texts of the Western canon, from Sophocles to Kafka. Our primary inquiry is to consider the way literature expresses and influences ideas about knowledge, power and language. The Western literary tradition exhibits a deep ambivalence about knowledge: who provides it (divine source or human endeavor); who claims it and for what purpose. Similarly, the tradition is rich with troubled portraits of human striving and the use of power (authority). Lastly, language as a vehicle to deliver (or obstruct) knowledge and power is a primary topic we consider while we read some of the most canonical -- and thrilling -- literary passages in Western culture.

Students learn about the social and political contexts of each text. Students are introduced to literary terms pertinent to the genre at hand (poetry, drama, the novel and the short story).

Required Texts:
Sophocles. *Oedipus the King.*