An Informal Letter to Reflect on my Year in APEH

Dear next year’s AP European History students,

You may have taken AP Human Geography and eagerly signed up for AP Euro, sure that it can’t be *that* much different. Maybe you decided that it was time to step up your academics and added some advanced placement classes to your sophomore schedule. Despite however you may feel about your choice, I want to congratulate you on whatever made you decide upon it.

The difficulty level of AP Euro was a leap from any class I had ever taken. Given, it also contributed immensely to my growth as a student. Many of my freshmen classmates listed themselves to take the course. However, as the dreamy days of summer passed, the days left to do the summer assignment dwindled away and well… quite a few dropped the class. But alas! There were so many of us left! Then throughout the first few weeks of the new school year, more dropped. Do not be discouraged if perhaps your friend who promised to take the class with you drops. Do not allow other people to coerce you into dropping. I got switched around between classes until I was settled into what seemed like the quietest class. Wow was I wrong. My classmates were all interesting, intelligent people who had something to offer. Some provided our comedy breaks, others moved us with what they wrote, and the majority were comrades in the struggle of AP Euro. The other students you meet in this class will help you so much. Every single person has a different perspective on the content than any other. If you want to feel like an expert in this class, listen intently when others offer their view. Incorporate it into your thought process. Write it down, ponder it, debate it. Listening to what the people around you offer to your education is one of the most prominent lessons I learned this year.

In addition to expert listening, AP Euro adds an insane array of skills to what you may already possess. The question of where I should even begin to explain floods my mind with endless possible abilities this class will strengthen for you. Truthfully, I never knew every single detail the APEH textbook, notes, videos, or primary source documents provided me. Even if I had by some miracle, it wouldn’t have been enough to always do well on every assignment. This class requires you to master perspective. You have to imagine transporting yourself back in time and climbing into the shoes of a working woman during the second Industrial Revolution or those of the third estate during the time of the French Rev. Going into this class, I already enjoyed history. Trust me though, in that it becomes increasingly interesting (and fun!) the more you get into it. Raise your hand when Safran asks for volunteers! Race to the board when she jots down names of dead guys and tells you to sign up to be one. If I could’ve done this year differently, I would’ve forced myself to stop being afraid of being wrong and participated more in the student led activities. **Never** dismiss the overwhelming importance of student led Thursdays! Through this jumbled collection of thoughts, my main point is to get you to *immerse yourself in this course.* Walk up the T-8 ramp, into the room wallpapered with art and thank you letters, and focus on what you’re learning. Learn! Grow as a person! One of the biggest benefits I’ve reaped from AP courses is the good feeling I got when I walked out so excited about what I’d just learned. (**Tip**: Tell people who aren’t even taking the class all about what you just learned that day! Even if they don’t ask or aren’t going to remember it, it helps you remember, forces you to understand what you’re learning, and makes you feel incredibly intelligent.) To supplement your understanding of the historical eras, Safran will ask you to make connections to modern day (synthesis!!!). Learn how to do it. Learn it well. Being able to make these connections is useful in all classes, and will continue to be useful for the rest of your life. I used this skill all year. In AP Bio, we connected why certain animals had adapted the way they did. In math, you build upon ideas every day and if you can explain a new concept by drawing on old ones, you’re golden. In English, when you write an essay, making connections to other ideas and literary works enhances your writing (and most of the time the grade you get on it). Aside from perspective, synthesis, and enjoying your classes, this course will teach you how to: quick write coherent essays, use humongous words that astound your friends, answer questions with the most straight to the point response possible, reflect on what has actually happened in the history of the world, plan, outline, find a note-taking style, talk to people you wouldn’t normally, be okay with not having a perfect grade every second. By taking this class, you’re almost guaranteed to walk away a different student.

I’ve always known that I didn’t know everything. But in AP Euro, you realize knowledge really is endless. I could not be more content in knowing that this challenging course taught me so much. In my opinion, history is one of the most underrated and useful tools the world has. Take this class to use it. Take this class to pop the bubble of knowing only about Californian and the beginnings of American history. Take this class so you know at least some of what goes on in our world today and how the media focuses on what they want you to see. I wrote AP European History on my class list because it was the “really hard GPA-boosting” class you took if you had been an honors kid. Take this class and absorb everything Safran tells you with the same eagerness which signed you up for APEH. She doesn’t talk to hear herself talk. Ten minutes of her explaining would clear up a whole weekend’s worth of confusing reading. Do what she tells you. While in the realm of “wow there’s so much to learn”, I discovered that as much as I thought I could organize and cram-study my way through the year, I couldn’t and didn’t want to. In a way that’s hard to put into words, Mrs. Safran can gauge exactly where the class is at and what you should do to make you understand what you’re learning. She knows when you don’t read, when you’re just too stressed to give 110%, etc. She put so much time into her website. It will become the main reason you open your computer. Every video, article, event, and outline she posted on it was incredibly useful.

To take this class you have to want to try. Over the course of this past year, I noticed kids (not AP Euro kids) who had just decided they had better things to do outside of their education. I agree that enjoying life while you’re in school is important. You don’t want to be miserable for all that time. However, while you’re in this class, be present. The best times I had this year in school were when everyone enjoyed what they were learning about. When kids are too busy smiling and laughing to cop that “I’m too cool for this” high school attitude, you know it’s a great class. APEH was a great class. When Sebastian (as Charles Dickens) threw himself over his desk to yell about the death of Dickens’s father in order to advocate for Marxist ideals, I laughed so hard I cried. One of the best pictures I got from this school year is Emile Zola (Xavier) in a boxing stance next to the Catholic Pope (Dante). Best advice to making your APEH class great is to let yourself be *that* interested, *that* nerdy, and *that* loud about what you’re learning. Let Mrs. Safran, with all of her knowledge, wisdom, Europe travels, and jokes, inspire you to want to be a top student. She’ll expect you to put in effort, but she’ll make you want to. Despite my distaste for the dense textbook and my own procrastinating tendencies, there’s a whole lot to love about AP Euro. Have fun discovering the various things I didn’t have time to mention!

Best of luck,

Kristen Ruehlin