September 2019

Hello parents of ELA students,

A central goal of ELA is to establish a **reading habit** in the busy lives of 8th graders. I am hoping we can work together to recapture the pleasure and passion of readers. This letter is long, but the assumptions it rests upon are too important to be treated in a superficial manner. Please take the time to read this and know what you’re signing before you do.

The best books challenge our beliefs by helping us see through different eyes —to live a different life. Yet reading allows us to confront our worst fears and live through them.

I won’t know the details of every book students read and refer to this year, and I won’t *remember* the details of all the books I recommend to students. What I seek for all of my students is a compulsion to read—for pleasure— for knowledge—for a passion for story or information that will keep them into the pages of a book past our assigned time for reading. This has tremendous benefits. Here are a few:

* **Reading relieves stress**. Middle School is stressful. Reading takes youout of the present and into another place and time; it is a perfect escape.
* **Reading builds stamina** to prepare students for high school and college. Reading foran hour or two in one sitting is a basic expectation in high school and college. In this class we will exercise muscles soon to be strained in the coming years. Reading for fluency and stamina has been proven to improve the reading rate for students. Fast reading develops confidence and an appetite for books as well as teaching vocabulary in context, which improves writing, but it only happens when students find books they *want* to read. But the truth is, some of those books might make youuncomfortable.
* There is a lot of talk in the media that ‘students today won’t read,’ but I believe students substitute all of those other distractions (the internet, TV, etc.) if they feel no passion for the book assigned to them. In my experience, students who haven’t been readers since elementary school will suddenly become quite passionate about reading with **the** **right book** in their hands. But those books might challenge yourvalues. Is that okay with you? Can your child choose to read *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins*,* which delves into a teenager’s drug addiction? I believe we have to trust these young adults more. We have to trust that books won’t corrupt them any more than current movies.

It is more important that they’re reading! So you may pick up a book left behind on a nightstand and open to a passage with the details of a group of Jews being lead to the gas chamber during the Holocaust in *The Boy With The Stripped Pajamas* and wonder why reading it is a homework assignment, and I will answer, “Your son or daughter chose it.” I might have recommended it because I read it and loved it, or the book may be unfamiliar to me because your child borrowed it from another student. The bottom line: I will not place a tight filter on what is read in this class and I’m asking for your support in this. I hope you will talk to your child about what he/she is reading this year.

I suggest you get a copy of a book and read it if you’re concerned about the content. If you want to know more about a book your child is reading, please try the School Library Journal web site, the American Library Association website, or even Amazon.com. Or call me—I’ll tell you what I know.

Because I respect your role as parents and the traditions you hold sacred, if you want me to more closely monitor your child’s choices this year, by all means, call me and we’ll work out a plan that we can both contribute to. If you sign this, it means you understand books won’t be banned in my classroom and your child will be allowed to choose what he/she reads.

Thanks for your support,

Mrs. Alyson Newhouse, Mrs. Ashley De Koch, and Ms. Heather Rosene (GMS)

Ms. Nicole Roehlig and Mrs. Cassandra Johnson (HMS)

P.S. Our classroom benefits every year from cast offs. **Please send books** you no longer need to our library, especially ones you’ve loved, if you can bear to part with them. Better yet… come to class and share a book with us. Share your passion for reading; get to know these amazing students. I would love to have you join us. Thank you.

I have read and agree to the contents of this letter.

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student’s name parent’s name

***Movie Permission for ELA***

Dear parents(s), during the remainder of the year, students will be reading several novels including The Outsiders as well as choice novels in both dystopian and realistic fiction. At the end of each unit, we will be concluding with a movie to compare the novel to the film version. This aligns with the following standard:

**RL.8.7 Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.**

Several of these films are rated PG-13 (including movies such as The Outsiders and The Maze Runner). Due to this, and our middle school policy on viewing PG-13 films, we require parent permission for your child to be able to watch these movies. This aligns with what we will be discussing and reading about in a class and our group setting.

Child’s Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I give permission for my son/daughter to watch PG-13 movies that align with the ELA block.

No, I do not give permission for my son/daughter to watch PG-13 movies that align with the ELA block.

Parent Signature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_