

Dear parents of middle and high school readers and writers,

A central goal of our work in English Language Arts (ELA) is to establish a reading habit in the busy lives of middle and high school students. 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. We won't know the details of every book students read and refer to this semester, and we won't remember the details of all the books we recommend to students. What we seek for all of our 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. School is stressful. Reading takes you out of the present and into another place and time; it is a perfect escape.
- Reading builds stamina to prepare students for college. Reading for an hour or two in one sitting is a basic expectation in 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 you uncomfortable.
- 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 your values.

We believe we have to trust young people more. We have to trust that books won't corrupt them any more than the movies they watch or songs they listen to might. It is more important that they're reading! So you may pick up a book left behind on a nightstand and open and wonder why reading it is a homework assignment, and the likely answer will be, "Your son or daughter chose it." We might have recommended it because we read it and loved it, or the book may be unfamiliar to us because your child borrowed it from another student. The bottom line: We will not place a tight filter on what is read in our ELA classes and we are asking for your support in this. We hope you will talk to your child about what he/she is reading

this semester. We 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 web site, or even Amazon.com. Or call your child's teacher—He or she will tell you what they know. Because we respect your role as parents and the traditions you hold sacred, if you want your child's teacher to more closely monitor your child's choices this semester, by all means, let us know and we'll work out a plan that all parties can contribute to. If you do not voice a differing position to your child's teacher, it means you understand books won't be banned in any GHS classroom and your child will be allowed to choose what he/she reads.

Thanks for your support!

Sincerely,
The GHS English Teachers

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