

Dear CSI Families-

One of my goals in English is to help all students—even those who may “hate to read”—develop a love of reading and to expand their reading experience. I’m hoping that we can work together to recapture, in some cases, the pleasure and passion of readers. For students who are already voracious readers, my goal is to help them continue to broaden their reading horizons through new genres and authors. Please take a few minutes to read this letter.

Very early in the year, I will work with students to set some reading goals. These are individualized and will provide challenge for my most avid and most resistant readers. We will have time every week for students to read books of their choosing. Why is this type of independent reading so important to me?

- **Reading improves writing and language skills.** Often juniors who struggle on the English portions of the ACT are my most infrequent readers. When they ask how they can improve their skills in time for a retake, I can help, but a strong reading habit would have helped much more. We will also use students’ independent reading books as a tool for teaching literary technique.
- **Reading builds stamina** to prepare students for the demands of high school and college. Just like I wouldn’t run a marathon (let’s be honest, even a 10K) without proper training to build stamina, I don’t expect students to develop into highly proficient readers without time to build their reading stamina. It is estimated that college students read anywhere from 200-600 pages per week (often much more depending on major) and, more pressing for ninth graders, high school reading requirements and expectations are increasing each year.
- **Reading relieves stress and provides imaginative rehearsal for life.** School can be stressful. Life can be stressful. Reading can provide a wonderful escape from the daily grind and introduce you to places and people unknown. Many young adult books contain situations we hope our children are prepared to face if needed—relationship issues, substance abuse, loss of a loved one, peer pressure, personal health and safety. Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Wintergirls* paints a haunting picture of the life of an anorexic. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*, by Sherman Alexie, opens our eyes to life on an impoverished Indian reservation and the challenges of an “outsider” starting a new school. Each time we read, we imagine what it would be like to be in the situations put forth in the book...we rehearse, in a sense, what we would do.

Now a word about my classroom library and my belief about letting kids read. I spent much time this summer reading to help develop my classroom library. I will work hard to recommend books to keep your child interested and challenged. This said, you need to know that I will not remember all of the details of the books I recommend, and I may recommend books based on author or other students’ experiences without having read them myself. There will be books with controversial topics and colorful language. Some of the most popular young adult novels center on controversial topics; some of them have language kids aren’t allowed to use in class or in your home. I personally think this will not corrupt young people any more than the games they play or the movies they watch—the most important thing is that they are reading!

Because I respect your role as parents and the beliefs and traditions you hold sacred, if you want me to more closely monitor your child’s choices, by all means, call me and we’ll work out a plan that we can both contribute to. You are also, of course, always welcome to visit your local library or bookstore to help your child choose books for independent reading. **If you would prefer that your child not be allowed to borrow books from our classroom library, please let me know.**

Thanks for your support,

Jill Rilley

P.S. I am always accepting donations for our library. We have no budget for these books—all are either purchased by me or are donations. So, if you can part with a book—send it our way! ☺