

Hello parents of Writing students,

A central goal of Writing is to establish a **reading habit** in the busy lives of seniors in high school. 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. For example, *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult was wildly popular last year, but it is about a school shooting and I think we'd all rather believe that couldn't happen here and don't want to live the details. Yet reading allows us to confront our worst fears and live through them. Students love this book and I recommend it to them.

I won't know the details of every book students read and refer to this semester, 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—past our goal of eight books read this semester to 25 or 40 books in 18 weeks, as many of my former students have. This has tremendous benefits. Here are a few:

- **Reading relieves stress.** Senior year 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. 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 anymore than the movies *The Dark Knight* or *Jackass* might.

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 child soldiers in Sudan mercilessly slaughtering an entire village (*A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah) 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 semester.

I suggest you get a copy of a book and read it if you're concerned about the content. Two summers ago my daughter read *Lolita* in the Advanced Studies Program at St. Paul's School and when I started reading it, I didn't like it at all. When I discussed it with Hannah, I was amazed at her maturity and deep understanding of the purpose of literature—even controversial literature. As a parent, I resisted how much I did not want Hannah inside the head of a man like Humbert, and instead trusted Hannah to make sense of it in coming to know this world. 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 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 semester, 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,

Penny Kittle
September 2, 2010

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 at Kennett. I would love to have you join us some morning. Thank you.

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

student's name

parent's name