



Washington Township Public Schools

English Language Arts Department

Grades 6-8

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Dear Middle School Parent:

A central goal of the English Language Arts department of Washington Township Public Schools is to establish a reading habit in the busy lives of our students. Through independent reading, we want to develop reading fluency and stamina, which results in increased reading rates and thus, helps students develop confidence, build vocabulary, and improve writing. It is our hope that we can work together with parents to ignite and sustain the pleasure and passion of young readers as well as to instill a comfortable confidence in students as they build stamina for reading in preparation for high school, college, and career. Because reading for an hour or two in one sitting is a basic expectation in college and is often required in any workforce training program, we will exercise muscles soon to be strained in the coming years.

Independent reading will be based on student choice, either through a list provided by teachers, through a student's own research, or through recommendations made by fellow students. We value the importance of choice and know its impact to develop the habits of life-long readers. By choosing a book, students can see that a good book is more than an assignment. It can open minds and provide experiences that they would otherwise never come to know: "A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies.... The man who never reads lives only one" ([George R.R. Martin](#)).

The best books challenge our beliefs by helping us see through different eyes – to live different lives. One of the benefits of reading is that it allows us to confront our worst fears and live through them. For example, many young adult authors confront serious issues that impact teens, such as teen suicide, school shootings, and gender identity. Students will not be forced to read something they are not comfortable with in an independent reading assignment, but they may choose a book that contains intense subject matter and that challenges how they view the world. It is important to know that we will not place a tight filter on what students choose to read independently. What we want is to nurture each student's willingness to read – for pleasure, for knowledge, for understanding – so that they choose to read beyond assigned reading, beyond the goal of one independent reading selection per marking period.

Because we respect your role as parents and the traditions you hold sacred, we understand your right to more closely monitor your child's choices this year. We hope you talk to your children about their reading selections, and we recommend you read with your student so that you can discuss any concerns about the content and foster a deeper understanding of an author's purpose. If you want to know more about a book that your student is reading, please consult the School Library Journal website (<http://www.slj.com>), the American Library Association website (<http://www.ala.org>), or Barnes and Noble's website (<http://www.barnesandnoble.com>).

We look forward to inspiring our students to become life-long readers.

Thank you for your support,

The English Language Arts Department