

TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS,

A central goal of English is to maintain a reading habit in the busy lives of students. Reading is a foundational skill for leading a literate life. There are a number of reasons why students should become avid readers. Here are some of them:

Reading makes you smarter. Reading provides your brain with unique exercise. The more you read while your brain is in its developmental stages (birth through your early 20s), the smarter you'll be as an adult.

Reading relieves stress. Adolescence is stressful. Reading takes you out of the present and into another place and time; it is a perfect escape.

Reading builds a mature vocabulary. Research has shown that the larger your vocabulary bank is upon graduating from high school, the more likely it is you'll be successful. The best way to build your vocabulary is to read.

Reading makes you a better writer. Students who read the most write the best. Better fluency. Better development of ideas. Better diction. Better sentence structure.

Reading is sometimes hard, but "hard" is necessary. After high school, you will be confronted with hard reading. Cell phone contracts. Tax forms. Insurance paperwork. People who read the most are the best equipped to handle the difficult reading that awaits you in the real world.

Reading prepares you for the world of work. People who leave high school with strong writing skills are more likely to get hired. And once hired, they are often more likely to be promoted.

Reading well is financially rewarding. People who read well are more likely to earn higher salaries and are less likely to make financial mistakes. The more you learn, the more you earn.

Reading opens the door to the university and beyond. The reading demands of college are significantly harder than high school. Students who read the most in middle and high school will be those who find themselves best prepared for university work. Reading builds stamina.

Reading arms you against oppression. James Baldwin said, "It's expensive to be poor." Reading is knowledge; knowledge is power. It is much harder to oppress well-read people. That's why governments in oppressive societies burn books and limit Internet access.

And the most important reason to read:

Reading is rewarding. Reading takes us to different worlds. Reading helps us to look in the mirror, to find ourselves. In short, reading is fun. I can't imagine a life without reading. As Mark Twain said, "A person who doesn't read is no better off than a person who can't read." Reading builds richer lives.

There is a lot of talk in the media that "students today won't read," but we believe students substitute distractions (texting, Facebook, video games, TV, etc.) if they feel no passion for reading. In

our experience, students who haven't been readers since early elementary school will suddenly become quite passionate about reading with the right book in their hands.

One way I try to get the right book into your child's hands is to grant him/her access to my classroom library. I have worked hard to develop this library, as research shows that availability of books is a major motivating factor to get preteens and teens to read. Schools who are surrounded by books at school (and at home) read more. Students who read more, read better. I have found having my own classroom library has dramatically increased the amount of reading my students do.

As a parent myself, I want you to know I am sensitive to having appropriate reading material in my classroom library. That said, what is considered "appropriate" may vary from one parent to another. Some parents might see the value in having their children reading a book like *Crank*, which delves into a teenager's drug addiction. Other parents might find it objectionable. Please be aware that the selections in my classroom library, just like any public library, range from elementary-level to university-level reading materials. As parents, I ask you to remain aware throughout the year to the books your child has chosen to read and assist in gauging appropriateness. Rest assured the books in my classroom library are checked out on a voluntary basis only. I am hoping we can work together to capture the pleasure and passion of reading.

Thanks for your support,

Sarah Greene

P.S. My classroom benefits every year from donations. Please send books you no longer need to our school, especially ones you've loved, if you can stand to part with them. Better yet . . . come to class and share a book with us. Share your passion for reading; get to know our amazing students. I would love to have you join us sometime.

The greatest gift we can give our children is the gift of reading. It takes time, commitment, and most of all, fire. ~DAVID BOUCHARD

Letter adapted from Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle, from 180 Days. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.