

Spring 2011

Dear Students and Parents of Students in Enriched English 9,

We are excited that you have enrolled in Enriched English 9 for the 2011-2012 school year. Your choice indicates your curiosity, ambition and desire to integrate and develop your skills as readers, writers, and thinkers. As a student in Enriched English 9, you will read extensively and analyze literature that is more complex and may address themes and situations that are more sophisticated than those found in young adult literature. You will also write more reflective and insightful assignments, participate regularly in class discussions, and carry an increased homework load. We are confident this course will be a challenging and exciting experience for all students involved.

In keeping with these rigorous standards, we are requiring students to read one book this summer that will allow for earlier immersion in coursework once school begins. The literature that is selected for a summer reading selection was chosen by a team of professionals because it coincides with the themes students will be exploring in the English 9 curriculum. The selection criteria follows the guidelines outlined by the district and are aligned with our professional organizations. Each choice has been cited for excellence by independent sources and reviewers and will provide a good introduction to the course. This year we are providing choice: students may select one of three summer reading options. Two selections are contemporary choices and the third is a classic. Please help your student make the choice that fits his/her interests best.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian by Sherman Alexie is a fictional account of one boy's struggle for identity within two cultures. Sherman Alexie has been lauded by *The Boston Globe* as "an important voice in American literature," and he has received several literary awards including the National Book Award in 2007. This novel does contain profane language and sexual references; however, the choice offers a diverse voice and connects to our themes of Coming of Age and Making Choices. As cited by Barnes and Noble, "Sherman Alexie tells the story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot." Others have written, "This novel was everything a book should be. Funny, poignant, and very true to life."

The second choice is *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. Penguin Group describes, "This award-winning, highly acclaimed, and controversial novel depicts a teenager who chooses not to speak rather than to give voice to what really happened to her." The protagonist's silence allows her to cope with a tragic event and work to rebuild her sense of identity. She is "an utterly believable heroine with a bitterly ironic voice who delivers a blow to the hypocritical world of high school. She speaks for many a disenfranchised teenager while demonstrating the importance of speaking up for oneself" (Penguin Group). The novel explores the themes of personal identity, ostracism, and "power" in the high school culture. *Speak* was named a National Book Award Finalist by the American Library Association and was awarded the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in

Young Adult Literature. This novel also contains some language and sexual references; however, the author provides a story connecting to our themes of Coming of Age and Making Choices. *Kirkus Reviews* described, "The plot is gripping and the characters are powerfully drawn, but it is its raw and unvarnished look at the dynamics of the high school experience that makes this a novel that will be hard for readers to forget."

While the first two choices are contemporary, the third choice is a classic, *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles. As cited by Barnes and Noble, "Set at a boys' boarding school in New England during the early years of World War II, *A Separate Peace* is a harrowing and luminous parable of the dark side of adolescence. Gene is a lonely, introverted intellectual. Phineas is a handsome, taunting, daredevil athlete. What happens between the two friends one summer, like the war itself, banishes the innocence of these boys and their world." Published in 1960, *A Separate Peace* won the William Faulkner Foundation Award and the Rosenthal Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. The *School Library Journal* described the novel as an "engrossing tale of love, hate, war, and peace....Intense, mesmerizing, and compelling..." This novel will also provide an excellent introduction to the 9th grade themes.

Students may choose any one of these selections. Each will provide an entertaining, challenging and thoughtful introduction to the course. All of the books are readily available from the public library or book store. Students should be prepared for a test and/or an analytical essay assignment in the first days of the school year.

Thank you for your commitment to your education. We look forward to working with you in the fall.

Sincerely,

Sheila Koenig, Michaela Loo and Tricia Pettis
Language Arts 9 Teachers