

Welcome to 8th Grade English Language Arts!

Dear Parent(s) and/or Guardian(s),

Welcome! I am very enthusiastic about this new school year and hope that this letter will help you start planning and thinking about the exciting time ahead for you and your child.

Within Core 8-1 your child will study American history, physics, energy, chemistry, genetics, ecosystems, mathematics, literature, and the writing process. As teachers, we try to reinforce concepts from every area in all our classes to ensure students see a more global connection as well as see that reading, writing, problem solving and creativity are concepts and skills they encounter naturally in every part of their learning. I will be your child's English language arts teacher this year.

This letter will help you understand what I expect in my ELA classroom. I require all students to use a 3-ring binder (with dividers) for various writing and reading activities including: warm-ups, vocabulary building, handouts of grammatical, writing and reading information, note taking and a writer's notebook (composition book). Your child will also be expected to have a separate spiral notebook to use as a reading journal. In this journal, students will create reflections that capture thinking, ideas, and overall comprehension. More information and guidelines will come home about this in the next two weeks. Your child is also required to set a reading goal of anywhere from 30 pages to 200 pages per week. Please talk to your child about his or her goal and allow for some "down time" for reading.

As the year progresses, your child will also begin creating a writing piece a week—some of these will be assigned and facilitated by me: character sketch, memoir, argument essay, research paper, multi-genre paper, literary analysis, rhetorical analysis, etc. Many of these, however, will be chosen by your child depending on his or her passion. This means from one child I might receive poetry, from another a novel (chapter by chapter) and, from another, a letter to his grandma. I call these assignments Author Choice pieces—they allow your student to choose and direct his or her own learning and growth. Revision, editing, conferencing, redirection, and publishing will all be a part of the writing expectation no matter which genre of writing he or she chooses. My goal is for your child to find or sustain a love of writing (at least learn to tolerate it, and understand the importance of writing as a communication tool)!

If you need to call or meet with me (or our entire core), this can be arranged. Please call the school at 254-7000 and I will return your call as soon as possible. If you are concerned with something you've heard, call me as well; please don't use email to express your displeasure. I like to use email for information purposes only—a child will be out of town, you can help with a field trip, etc. (Thank you!)

Grades: I will try to post academic and behavior assessments to Parent Bridge every Sunday evening; you and your child will need to rely on Parent Bridge to keep up with how your child is doing both academically and behaviorally. If you do not have access to Parent Bridge, please contact me if you want me to send a weekly progress report home with your child. I post on Sunday evenings so that students and parents have a chance to see what is missing or low,

receive that information or work by the first of the week and have time to get work completed by the end of the week. The warm-up at the beginning of the class is designed so that I have time to help students get caught up with work, re-teach students something that they may have missed the first time, and to talk (okay, nag) to students about turning their work in on time if they are late with an assignment.

Make up work: The district policy is two days for every day absent. It is the best interest of the child to make up work as quickly as possible. I will try to work with you and your child as best I can—please stay in touch. Work that is assigned before your child is absent, however, is due the day your child returns to school. This is especially important to note for long-term projects, writing assignments and journals. It's very hard to catch up in my classroom if a child is too far behind. That is also why good class attendance is crucial.

Enrichment: There will be several opportunities over the year for students to challenge themselves beyond classroom work. Look for assignments that tie to American history and science. All work must be turned in and assessed by me. These enrichment activities will be a part of the body of evidence I will use to assess students' academic achievement. Note: These assignments are not extra-credit, but a chance for your child to push his or her potential.

Our goals as a core are to help your child become an independent and collaborative problem solver, thinker and creator. We hope that he or she enjoys his or her last year as a middle schooler, but also that he or she grows as a responsible and thoughtful citizen of the community and world.

Looking forward to a great year! Thank you for sharing your child with me.

Clay Wittrock