

Independent Reading Policy
Read. Write. Repeat.
Literacy Matters!

Reading is a critical life skill. Students who read well get better grades in school, score higher on standardized tests, and are better able to focus on, draw conclusions about, and make sense of their world. It is not unreasonable for teachers to expect and require students to read, and we do. But every year, we do so with less support from students, parents, and people within the educational establishment who should know better. Many people (including some teachers!) have surrendered to a modern culture that often works against literacy. They do not read themselves, and they don't expect kids to read, either. Yes, technology encourages fast-paced distractions, and students have all manner of athletic, musical, and social events to fill up their time – not to mention the cocoon of digital entertainment and communication most teenagers now live in – but literacy should be a priority in every student's life and the adults who care about them should support, encourage, require, and *demand* lots of reading!

According to recent research, less than a third of American 13-year olds read daily. High school students average two hours of TV watching per day but only seven minutes of reading, and 20% of high school seniors read nothing but text messages. Half of 18- to 24-year olds read no books. Even reading scores for adults have deteriorated significantly since 1992, and more than 11 million American adults are functionally illiterate, meaning they cannot read well enough to understand a bus schedule or the instructions on a medicine bottle. Given this, is it any wonder our students score in the bottom half of the spectrum for average reading scores when compared with 30 other industrialized nations, far behind Poland, France, and Canada? Does this concern you? It should, especially if you are a non-reader and/or the parent of one. Why? Because two-thirds of American employers ranked reading comprehension as one of the most important skills for high school graduates, and 38% of those employers said current graduates are deficient in this area. That means those non-readers are not getting hired even for low-level work, and we have to look outside the United States to find enough research scientists to staff our labs and develop our new technology. The research can be summed up like this: People who read have more opportunity in life and better chances at success. It's that simple.

Ironically, research also indicates that students in lower elementary grades are reading more than ever before. This, however, stops when students enter junior high school. On average, Fairfield students are only in our classrooms for an hour a day. During that hour we can show them strategies for improving their reading and challenge them to read more difficult text than they might otherwise attempt on their own, but we can't follow them around for the rest of the day to make sure they practice. We can't go to their homes every evening and see if they have their noses in books. All we can do is make reading practice a class requirement. A coach requires players to come to practice for two hours after school; a band director requires 30 minutes of home practice each evening; a math teacher requires students to do homework equations to practice a skill learned in class. So too we *require* our students to practice reading outside of class. And just like a coach sees a player's improvement on the court or a band teacher hears improvement in a student's playing or a math teacher sees test scores improve, we too require *evidence* of reading practice: book talks, written reviews, comprehension tests, etc. Reading practice is calculated as 20% of students' overall grades, so those who don't do any independent reading cannot get a grade above a B-. It's not punishment; it's practice. And, yes, literacy is *that* important.

Students are encouraged to read and enjoy as many self-selected books as they want, and it is a school-wide requirement that students always carry a reading book. But for a reading score in this class, ninth graders must read two books per term: one with the class and one from a reading list. Due dates will vary depending on the length and difficulty of the books, and students will have to complete some or all of this reading on their own time and/or during open Intervention time.

A person who won't read has no advantage over one who can't read.

**9th Grade Independent Reading Assignment
First Term**

Choose one of these books that you have not read before and read it completely by the due date. While some of the titles may be checked out from the teacher or the school library, students are ultimately responsible to obtain a copy of the book in time to read it. **Circle the title of the book you will read.**

<i>The Pigman's Legacy</i> by Paul Zindel	<i>The Wednesday Wars</i> by Gary D. Schmidt
<i>Rumble Fish</i> by S.E. Hinton	<i>Gentlehands</i> by M.E. Kerr
<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis	<i>The October Country</i> by Ray Bradbury
<i>Goodbye Vietnam</i> by Gloria Whelan	<i>And Then There Were None</i> by Agatha Christie
<i>Sing Down the Moon</i> by Scott O'Dell	<i>A Separate Peace</i> by John Knowles

Finish reading the book and be ready for a short test on **October 25/26, 2017.**

Students: Complete this section.

I, _____, have read the guidelines for Independent
(Print student name legibly.)

Reading Practice, and I agree to read the book I have circled above (with the approval of my parents) by the due date. As required by the school policy, I will carry a reading book with me at all times to all classes, and when I finish this book, I will begin another one of my choosing. I understand that failure to do so will have a profoundly negative effect on my grade in this class. I understand that any form of cheating on reading tests will result in the loss of all reading points and a poor citizenship grade. I understand that reading is the single most important thing I can do to improve my academic standing, my general intelligence, and my chances for success in school, and I will endeavor to read widely and much in my daily life. I understand that there is nothing my teacher wants more than for me to become a lifelong reader, and I will try not to let him/her down in this respect.

Student Signature

Date

Parents/Guardians: In class we read and discussed the class policy for Independent Reading, and students were asked to summarize that policy for you and discuss how they will meet the Independent Reading Practice requirement. Please sign below to indicate that your student has informed you of the reading requirements and that you have discussed your student's reading choices. Thank you!

Parent Signature

Date

Return this completed form to your English teacher by **October 12, 2017.**