

St. John Academy

McLean, Virginia

June 17, 2016

8th GRADE HONORS LITERATURE

I am pleased to inform you that _____ has been selected for the 8th grade honors literature class this coming school year (2016-2017). The curriculum will be a rigorous one, with an emphasis on reading, textual analysis, and writing. We will focus on classic literature—including fiction, memoirs, essays, poetry, and drama. Our theme this year will be “Journeys and Friendships” and the readings each student undertakes will look at this theme from a variety of perspectives. A syllabus will be provided to each parent and student in September. The reading assignments will challenge each student to think in new ways about the difficult questions and complex issues posed by the authors they read. It is my hope that by the end of the year, they will have gained a deeper appreciation of great literature and a clearer understanding of its value.

I am assigning two books to be read over the course of the summer. I would like each student to read every day for at least one-half hour. This will ensure completion of the assignment by the time school begins on August 29. In addition to reading the assigned texts, each student is required to keep a “Reading Diary” in a bound composition book (not a spiral notebook). The “Diary” will consist of a paragraph or more written after each day’s reading that: (1) Summarizes what the student has read (this *is not* to be a book report, but rather the student is to identify themes and issues presented by the author); and (2) includes questions or ideas that the day’s reading may have generated in the mind of the student. Although I will not require students to keep vocabulary lists with definitions, each student should have a good dictionary at hand while reading the books in order to better understand the context and meaning of unfamiliar words. I will collect the “Reading Diary” on August 29, and grade it as a project. Discussion, analysis, and formal deconstruction of the two books will be the focus of the first two weeks of class

The two books each student will read this summer (and I would like them read in this order) are: (1) *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Arthur Conan Doyle (the Oxford World’s Classics edition; ISBN 9780199536962); and (2) *The Worst Journey in the World* by Apsley Cherry-Garrard (Penguin Classics edition; ISBN 9780143039389).

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Mr. Philion