

SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

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Dear Parent

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest a close correlation between reading and academic development. To this end, the Sevenoaks School English Department places significant emphasis on the importance of reading for class study, but also as an activity undertaken independently. The more students read for themselves and talk to each other about their reading, the more advanced their skills in imaginative and critical thinking and expression become.

As a means to further develop these kinds of skills, we offer a wide range of initiatives throughout the Lower and Middle School years. These include regular reading lessons and the celebration of National Poetry Day in October and Book Week in March. The Department also runs a number of Reading Schemes in Years 7 - 9.

Year 7: Reading Passports

Our Year 7s are already avid readers when they join the school. In order to harness this inherent enthusiasm, as well as to develop the breadth of their choice of titles, we will distribute an A6 Reading Passport at the start of the course that students maintain throughout the year.

In the passport there are 10 categories: Adventure; Crime and Mystery, Fantasy, Historical; Prize Winners; Real Life; Short Stories; Supernatural; Traditional Tales; and World Literature. Over the course of the year, pupils will read one book from each category. Once they have read the book they complete the relevant page in their Reading Passport and take part in a short interview with their class teacher to discuss the book. They then collect a sticker to add to the page. Once they have completed the Passport, they will be awarded a certificate of achievement.

Year 8: Reading around the World

Once our Year 7s have obtained their reading passport, and moved into Year 8, they embark on a reading journey, of texts written from or about different countries and traditions. The purpose of this is to provide experience of literature from different cultures, some in translation, that they will encounter in later years at Sevenoaks.

Over the course of the year, pupils plan a 'reading journey', which takes them to the five continents. They read a minimum of five books either set in each, or written by authors from the different continents and mark their progress on a map of the world

in their classroom. At the end of the year they give an oral presentation to the class on their journey.

Year 9: The Reading Journal

As students progress through the years, we expect them to demonstrate an increasingly independent critical response to their reading, both of texts studied in class and chosen on their own. The reading journal is a place for them to record their reactions to these texts, and indeed ideas and experiences that relate to all aspects of the course. The study of English Language and Literature does, of course, require reflection on all manner of personal and social experiences outside the classroom, and the more reflective students are about these experiences, the more mature and intelligent their critical understanding will be.

To these ends, students are asked to bring in a blank journal at the start of the year and the class teacher will encourage its use in various ways. Most significantly, they are invited to:

1. Keep a traditional record of their private reading – titles, authors and brief reviews
2. Make independent entries that detail their reaction to the texts being studied in class and for pleasure – in terms of their content as well as language and style. These might include thoughts about character, relationships, setting, action and theme as well as reactions to such things as narrative point of view and voice, structure, symbolism, imagery and so on.
3. Document exposure to relevant experience above and beyond the course, including:
 - Reaction to events in the news (perhaps including newspaper clippings)
 - Films, pieces of music and/or art that provoked interesting responses.
 - Experience of travel
4. Experiment with creative/expressive writing

In the early stages of the Year 9 course, these entries will be very much led by the teacher, but we expect students to take increasing ownership of their journal. Ideally, by the middle of the course and beyond they will be making significant independent use of it, and some teachers will maintain its use right through the school.

The journal is not marked formally, as a piece of coursework, though it is taken in and comments are made. Fundamentally, the aim is to create a dialogue between teacher and student as a means to develop independent reaction to the relevance of literature and language issues in the wider world.

Where are the Reading Lists?

We have worked closely with the librarians in the Johnson library to put together suitable reading lists, which will support the Reading Passport, the Reading Around the World journey as well as suggestions for private reading in general. These lists are available electronically on our on-line learning platform, Fronter and can be accessed from home via the Parent Pages on the school website. Pupils are also invited to make a case for a title that is not on these reading lists, which could then be added to one of the categories.

What can you do to help?

These reading schemes will of course be helped a great deal by the support you bring to them. Showing an interest in your child's reading by talking about books with them, accompanying them to bookshops and libraries – even sharing with them novels that you have particularly enjoyed, will be enormously helpful.

We would also welcome any feedback about these initiatives and if you have suggestions for titles not currently on the lists, please feel free to get in touch.

With thanks and best wishes

The English Department