

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We're at the halfway point of your student's eighth grade year and our Honors English class has been a wonderful hub of activity and growth. In the spring semester, we're going to continue our rigorous study of literature (including H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*, and Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's *Peter and the Starcatchers*), but I wanted to let you know that I'm also adding a new element to the course – a self-directed project-based learning experience called 20Time.

In today's business world, we need innovative thinkers who have a passionate drive to solve some incredibly complex problems. Forward-thinking companies know the value of encouraging workers to pursue personally meaningful projects as they exercise their critical thinking skills and create exciting new products to improve life (and the bottom line). At 3M, for instance, workers are given 15 percent of their time to pursue personal projects. One result of this program? Post-It Notes, one of the company's best-selling items. At Google, engineers are given 20 percent release time and encouragement to pursue fresh ideas that will benefit the company. One impressive result? Gmail.

The value of intrinsic motivation in learning and achievement cannot be overstated. To this end, I've borrowed from the research of Daniel Pink and a team of Google-certified teachers to bring 20Time to our freshmen this spring. Each week for the next two quarters, 20 percent of our time will be devoted to a language arts-based project that your student chooses based on his/her unique interests. (Don't worry, 80 percent of our time will still be devoted to our traditional course of study.) During 20Time, though, I will guide, model, and hopefully inspire your student to find joy in wrangling with a challenge where there is no single "right" answer.

Understandably, students and parents will want to know how I plan to evaluate this unique project. To encourage innovative thinking, I will grade only a student's process, not his/her finished product. I have built a variety of rubrics and tools to give students regular feedback on their work and those tools will be openly shared with your student ahead of scoring time. Basically, if your student chooses a project that he/she finds meaningful and works diligently on the project, he/she will do well on this assignment. The final assessment piece will be an end-of-project speech wherein students present what they did and what they learned from this process. This 3-to-5-minute speech will fulfill the school district's speech proficiency requirement that all students complete at the end of their freshman year; I'm hopeful 20Time will make the speech proficiency even more meaningful than it has ever been before in my classroom.

All of the work needed to complete this Common Core-aligned project will be done in class, but you may discover your student wants to continue working on the project at home. Please encourage this. I hope you've had the experience of "flow" with a work project or hobby – that marvelous zone when time slips by unnoticed because you are so engrossed by the task at hand. If your student finds flow with this project, then we have much to celebrate.

As always, don't hesitate to contact me via email if any questions or concerns arise as we work through the semester together. Thanks so much for your continued support of your student and our class!

Warmest regards,

Malori Crossley, 8<sup>th</sup> Honors English teacher