

LANGUAGE ARTS

Wilson Middle School Parent and Student Information
2024-2025



Hello parents of Language Arts students,

A central goal of Language Arts is to establish a **READING HABIT** in the busy lives of middle school students. I am hoping we can work together to capture the pleasure and passion of readers. This letter is long, but it builds upon assumptions that are too important to be treated in a superficial manner. Please take the time to read and know what you're signing before you do.

The best books challenge our beliefs by helping us see through different eyes – to live a different life. For example, *The Program* by Suzanne Young is about a futuristic society where depression and suicide is a widespread epidemic for teenagers. I think we'd all like to believe that this could never happen in our lifetime and don't want to live the details. Yet reading allows us to confront our worst fears and live through them. Students love this book and I recommend it to them.

I won't know the details of every book students read and refer to this year, and I won't remember the details of all of the books I recommend to students. What I seek for all of my students is a compulsion to read – for pleasure – for knowledge – for a passion for story or information that will keep them into the pages of a book past our assigned reading – past our goal of 20 or 40 books in the school year, as many of my former students have. This has tremendous benefits. Here are a few:

Reading is rewarding.

Reading builds a mature vocabulary (fights word poverty).

Reading makes you a better writer.

Reading is hard and "hard" is necessary.

Reading makes you smarter.

Reading prepares you for the world of work.

Reading opens the door to college and beyond.

Reading arms you against oppression.

Reading relieves stress. Middle school life is stressful. Reading takes you out of the present and into another place and time; it is a perfect escape.

Reading builds stamina to prepare students for high school and post-secondary, and life beyond school. Reading for an hour or two in one sitting is a basic expectation for future schooling. In this class we will exercise muscles soon to be strained in coming years. Reading for fluency and stamina has been proven to improve the reading rate for students. Fast reading develops confidence and an appetite for books as well as teaching vocabulary in context, which improves writing, but it only happens when students find books they WANT to read. But the truth is, some of those books may make you uncomfortable.

There is a lot of talk in the media that "students today won't read," but I believe that students turn to all of those other distractions (Internet, social media, TV, etc.) if they feel no passion for the book assigned to them. In my experience, students who haven't been readers since a young age will suddenly become quite passionate about reading with THE RIGHT BOOK in their hands.

But those books might challenge your values. Is that okay with you? Can your child choose to read *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* which delves into a teenager's very challenging life on a reservation battling constant loss and abuse? I believe we have to trust our young adults more. We have to trust that books won't corrupt them anymore than the film *The Dark Knight* or the video game *Fortnite* might.

It is more important that they're reading! So you may pick up a book left behind on a nightstand and open to a passage with the details of a group of child soldiers in Sudan mercilessly slaughtering an entire village (*A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*) and wonder why reading it is a homework assignment, and I will answer, "Your son or daughter chose it." I might have recommended it because I read it and loved it, or the book may have been unfamiliar to me because your child borrowed it from another student or checked it out from the library. The bottom line: I will not place a tight filter on what is read in this class and I'm asking for your support in this. I hope you will talk to your child about what he/she is reading this school year.

I suggest you get a copy of a book and read it if you're concerned about the content. I have been amazed at the maturity and deep understating students have held over the years – even controversial literature – that students have read and formed opinions about. Some of them have been able to read about a potential situation that they might encounter in future years and have learned a safe way to overcome and deal with that situation. Some may relate to a character in a way that makes them form an understanding about themselves that they never thought of before. As a teacher, I have trusted my students to make sense of these difficult topics in coming to know this world. If you want to know more about a book your child is reading, please try the School Library Journal website, the American Library Association website, United Library Services, Good Reads, or even Amazon.com. Or email me – I'll tell you what I know.

Because I deeply respect your role as parents and the traditions you hold sacred, if you want me to more closely monitor your child's choices this school year by all means, call or email me and we'll work out a plan that we can both contribute to. If you sign this, it means you understand books won't be banned in my classroom and your child will be allowed to choose what he/she reads.

Please sign and return the form at the end of this package by **Friday, September 20th**. Thank you for your support,

The Wilson Middle School Humanities Teaching Team
September 8, 2023

P.S. Our classroom benefits every year from cast offs. Please send books you no longer need to our classroom library, especially ones you've loved, if you can bear to part with them. Better yet...come to class and share your passion of reading with a book talk to the class. Get to know these amazing students at Wilson!

Reading Habits

Why Can't I Skip My 20 Minutes of Reading Tonight?

Student "A" reads 20 minutes each day	Student "B" reads 5 minutes each day	Student "C" reads 1 minute each day
3600 minutes in a school year	900 minutes in a school year	180 minutes in a school year

1,800,000 words



90th percentile

282,000 words



50th percentile

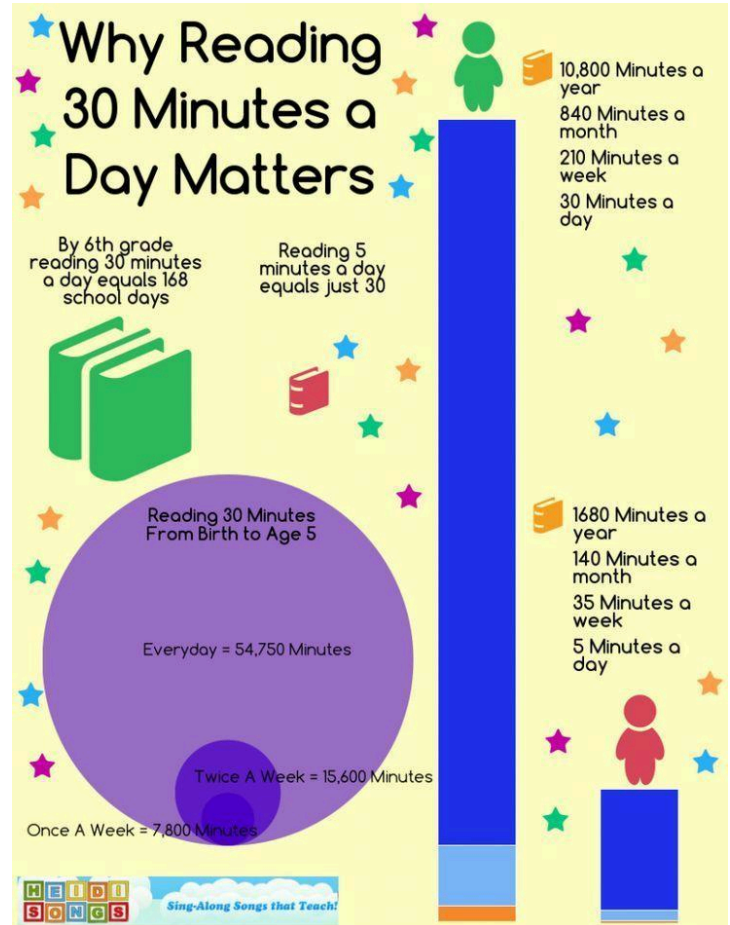
8,000 words



10th percentile

By the end of 6th grade Student "A" will have read the equivalent of 60 whole school days. Student "B" will have read only 12 school days. Which student would you expect to have a better vocabulary? Which student would you expect to be more successful in school...and in life?

(Nagy & Herman, 1987)



This school year, your child will be expected to read at a comfortable pace for a total of **TWO HOURS outside** of class time per week in addition to the daily independent reading they will be doing in both the Literacy component of homeroom class as well as Language Arts class. Students will find time to read if given books that name what's in their hearts. This outside reading will contribute to our reading goals throughout the year. I ask for your support in making this reading a priority throughout the course of the school year. The benefits this will have are endless.

"Books let us walk through our deepest fears and emerge on the other side." – Penny Kittle

Independent Reading 2023/2024

As stated in the information above, independent reading is an integral part of learning and development.

At Wilson Middle School, our school's vision is that we endeavor to develop lifelong readers. We will create a culture to support this. We strive for this goal through building competency, improving self-efficacy, and increasing motivation and engagement in our students.

Reading...

- large quantities in middle school prepares you for the volume of reading in high school and post-secondary.
- it enlarges your worldview and gives you a greater understanding of the complexities of arguments.
- builds background knowledge and builds vocabulary.
- is hard and hard is necessary.
- makes you a better writer.
- requires daily practice.
- makes you smarter.
- prepares you for the world of work.
- will happen when students are given time to read books that name what's in their hearts.
- requires quantity.
- requires quality.
- arms you against oppression.
- literature is more than action or characters. It leaves students transfixed by the resiliency of humanity.
- lets us walk through our deepest fears and emerge on the other side.
- is oxygen for a student's future success.

Over the course of the school year, your child's independent reading journey will be held accountable by on-going one-on-one student/teacher conferences during class time, and the assessment of independent reading will be worth 10% of your child's overall LA mark. The two methods of assessment will be book talks and one-pagers. A book talk will see students speaking about their reading in front of their peers, and a one-pager will see students reflect on and analyze their reading through both written and visual work. These projects will be explained in detail in class. These assessments will alternate on an approximate 6-week rotation. The deadlines for the year are as follows:

Deadline:	Task:
Mid October	Book Talk
End of November	One-Pager
Mid January	Book Talk
End of February	One-Pager
Early April	Book Talk
Early May	One-Pager
Early June	Book Talk

Please note that the exact due date will be determined closer to when it approaches

Language Arts Information

2024/2025

Please **detach and return** this signed form to your child's Language Arts teacher.

I have read and agree to the contents of the information provided above:

student's name

parent's/guardian's name

Any additional comments/questions:

