

**Carmel Valley Middle School**  
**Honors English Program: A Guide for Parents and Students**  
**7th and 8th Grade**

At Carmel Valley Middle school, each teacher wants every child to achieve his or her personal best, and this is more likely to happen if the child is placed into classes appropriate to the child's needs, abilities, and interests.

We offer two levels of English classes at both the seventh and eighth grade.

1). **College prep** classes provide a *rigorous* curriculum that meets the needs of the majority of students.

2). **Honors classes** are designed for students who *excel* in English language arts and *require* and *desire* a *faster-paced*, more *in-depth*, and *challenging* course of study.

**Both college prep and honors classes have the following attributes:**

- Follow a rigorous curriculum.
- Require students to work toward mastery of the California Common Core State Standards.
- Prepare students for high school English.
- Develop critical thinking skills.
- Require students to write argumentative essays, narratives, responses to literature, and summaries.
- Provide opportunities for students to improve listening and speaking skills through Socratic Seminar and speech delivery.
- Select novels from the same board-approved list of titles.
- Use the same textbook.
- Utilize technology to help improve reading and writing skills.

**Honors classes differ from CP in the following ways:**

- Greater depth and complexity of study.
- Advance beyond current grade level standards and work on skills in the next grade level standards.
- Students work independent of teacher assistance more often.
- Pacing is quicker.
- Required course reading is more often done as homework outside of class rather than during class.
- Writing is more sophisticated (stronger vocabulary, more complex and varied sentence structure, greater depth of thought and analysis) and more extensively researched.
- Assigned readings may be at a higher level of difficulty.
- Homework typically requires students to think critically and **synthesize** the material that they learned in class that day. As a result, homework generally takes longer.
- Grammar techniques are more sophisticated and complex.

**When making your choice, please consider:**

- Students can move from Honors to College Prep or College Prep to Honors **within the first 4 weeks** of the school year.
- **After the 4 week deadline**, students must remain in their course of choice until the semester ends in December.
- We have open access. Students **may** take College Prep English in 7th grade and move to Honors in 8th grade, and it's not uncommon for students to take College Prep courses throughout middle school and move to Honors in high school.
- The ultimate goal is for your child to be happy, healthy, and **appropriately** challenged.

**Checklist of General Expectations for Students ENTERING 7th Grade Honors Classes**

**Please use the following charts to determine which level of English is most suitable for your child.**

**Skills and Knowledge:** When students **enter** a 7th grade Honors class, they are expected to be able to demonstrate **4 or more** of the following skills. **Please note:** This is where students currently are, **not** where they hope to be.

- ☐ Write well-developed, insightful paragraphs using a variety of sentence structures and above grade level vocabulary.
- ☐ Understand and identify the 8 parts of speech
- ☐ Go beyond the surface of the text to discover a deeper meaning rather than to simply summarize
- ☐ Discover theme in a passage
- ☐ Identify figurative language in a passage
- ☐ Articulate an argument in response to a text
- ☐ Actively read over their writing to enhance and improve it, as well as proofread.

**Academic Qualities:** Read through the chart below to help determine which course is most appropriate for your child.

<b>College Prep English Student:</b>	<b>Honors English Student:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Is strong academically in English.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Is hard-working and self-motivated.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Learns best with thorough instruction and practice of new concepts.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Appreciates challenges, but also benefits from assistance and practice with complex, critical-thinking and non-routine strategies.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Thrives with structured guidance when learning applying, and extending new concepts.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> May need multiple opportunities to practice a skill before becoming proficient.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> May need more scaffolding concepts - may need material broken down into smaller parts.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Often needs assistance with writing (step by step instructions) and revising (identifying strengths and weakness)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Scored Standard Exceeded on SBAC in 5th and 6th grade.</b></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> English is one of his/her gifts or passions.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Has an exceptional work ethic, is a self-starter, highly self-motivated, and works well independently. Can push through and complete an assignment even if uncertain.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Masters concepts quickly without the need for much repetition; requires faster-paced, rigorous curriculum.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Values and is not discouraged by the challenges of complex, critical-thinking opportunities; can achieve this with minimal assistance and often takes ideas to a higher level.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Seeks out and actively contributes to classroom discussions</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys reading higher level, complex texts in a variety of genres.</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Actively participates in the learning process.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Independently reads various genres.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> May require more teacher direction when analyzing a text (ex. identifying themes, author's claims, and aspects of plot)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Performs better when able to focus on one assignment/project at a time.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys English class, to a point.</li> </ul> <p><b>Disclaimer:</b> If your child does not exhibit many of the qualities above, don't worry. The goal of the College Prep English class is to get all students to these levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys the writing process and understands the need for multiple revisions.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Can independently write and revise an essay with minimal teacher guidance rather than re-teaching. Can self edit and reflect.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is inquiry-driven, which is demonstrated by thinking critically about world issues related to the assigned reading and writings (goes beyond surface meanings, makes connections and inferences)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Manages time well (able to juggle school work, family obligations, and extra-curricular activities).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is organized (students will typically work on multiple assignments over several days, and will need to keep track of different due dates).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is stimulated by English class and thrives on the discussion and writing tasks involved.</li> </ul>
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### Frequently Asked Questions

**1. My student is struggling quite a bit with the Honors 7 assignments and exams. She has always been an A student, and she is seeing grades she has never seen before. Is this the right class for her?**

It is very common for the transition from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to Honors English to be difficult. Often, students have been able to get A's without pushing themselves and/or without studying in elementary school. Our Honor's curriculum has been designed to be challenge Honors students, so it moves faster and goes deeper than what most students experience in elementary school when they are in a multi-level class. Many of the students are used to being big fish in a small pond, and now they're in a big lake with a lot of other big fish, some who have more knowledge about certain concepts than they do, so it can be intimidating. In this course, the majority of the assignments are going to require students to not just show they know information but to take that information and apply it in a new situation, or to make a statement about a character or a theme and then support it with evidence. Also, they will need to truly study for quizzes and tests. After we read a story, the quizzes won't just test basic reading comprehension, but they will have multi-level questions where they will have to apply concepts we're learning to an aspect of the story. For example, a question may ask how a story would be changed if it were written in a different point of view. Some struggle is normal as students adjust to the rigor, but if your student is overwhelmed and seems unable to adapt to the more demanding curriculum, it may not be an appropriate placement.

**2. My student is struggling in Honors English, but I don't want to pull him out because then he won't be ready for Honors in high school. What should we do?**

Even if a student fits the Honors profile, sometimes he may not be ready to handle Honors in seventh grade. The transition to middle school alone can be stressful and overwhelming, and the well-being of the child is always paramount. Sometimes, it just takes an extra year or two for a student to gain some maturity, gain organization skills, or develop his critical thinking skills to the level that will make Honors manageable for him. Often, once a student adjusts to middle school, they are ready to take on the additional challenge of Honors English.

**3. What if I think my child can do well in an honors course, but he doesn't want to take it?**

We get this question a lot. A general rule of thumb is that if the parent wants it more than the child, usually, the child ends up miserable, and nobody wins. To do well in an honors course, the student must be passionate about English and demonstrate a desire to push him/herself in ways never before experienced. Putting a child in this accelerated course against his or her will is not advisable for seventh graders. The best advice we can give is to give your child time to adjust to middle school, and bring up the topic again as the student is about to enter 8th grade.

**4. If we realize that my child is not in the right class, can we make a change?**

Absolutely. While it's best to try to get students accurately placed as soon as possible, sometimes students just need a chance to see for themselves where they would best fit. Students are free to move up to Honors or from Honors to College Prep within the first 4 weeks of the school year. After that, students must wait until the end of first semester to move out of Honors. Due to pacing and foundational skills established in the first semester, we do not make moves from College Prep to Honors at the semester. It is simply not in the best interest of the student as there is a final and culminating portfolio due at the end of the year.