



*"If your only tool is a hammer, you begin to treat everything in terms of nails."
-Abraham Maslow*

Dear Senior English Students:

I'd like you to consider a blank piece of paper, what some have called "tabula rasa" or a blank slate. For many young writers, this seemingly harmless white page can be rather intimidating. Heck, for many seasoned adult writers, it can be pretty intimidating. Composing something – creating something from scratch, seemingly from nothing, and putting it out in the world for public consumption – can make anyone fearful. However, most writers face the challenge with eagerness and excitement, for creating is part of what we humans do. And most writers don't really start with nothing; they have their entire lives with all their experiences to draw from. So, as you face the blank page this term, know that you've got much to draw upon, and try to view it as an anticipated opportunity rather than a dreaded obstacle.

Another way to consider the blank page is in relation to literature. Lots of folks like to make fun of English teachers because we see stuff in a story that the author couldn't possibly have put there (Well, I guess they make fun of us for lots of other stuff too, but, well... let's move on). Consider this: When an author sits down to share a story with an audience, he starts with a blank page. He makes choices about everything in the book: where it's set, who the characters are, whether a guy shoots a sick dog or stares at a green light in the distance, whether someone's home is dusty or clean as a whistle. *EVERYTHING!* So, as you read, please consider everything the author has put in front of you. It's likely important choices were made, and the author wants you to pay attention to the stuff he chose.

And why does literature matter? Because it is literature that helps us truly explore our humanity, to engage others in the world of ideas, ask tough questions and mine for answers about who we are, what we do, and why. It is literature that plumbs the depths of humanity, celebrating what some have called "being created in the image of God" or exposing our "warts and all." It is literature that captures our most complex motivations, our most base behaviors, and our most transcendent accomplishments. We find ourselves in the pages we read, and when we're finished, we become someone new as a result. Please enjoy our reading this term, and embrace becoming someone new.

Now, there's one final way I'd like you to consider the blank page. It has to do with this wonderful stage in your lives. You're Seniors! For years, you've had people writing your story for you. Parents, teachers, peers – they've all tried to put their prints on your page. Well, all of that is about to change if you'd like. At the end of this year, when you exit these walls, you can ask all of those folks to "cut the cord." You'll have the opportunity to pull out a pristine new page, pure and white, and begin to write the rest of your story. *You* will make all the choices. *You* will plan the plot. And, most important, *you* will develop the main character. (You may even wish to start brainstorming right now....)

I'm looking forward to sharing this special time with you and encouraging you to consider the blank page as one of your many tools in life. Let's have some fun with it.

Warmest regards,

Michael Metzler