

## Michael Metzler

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*"Lawyers, I suppose, were children once."*

*- Charles Lamb*

Dear English 10 Students:

Do you remember this quotation from the beginning of *To Kill A Mockingbird*? The author, Harper Lee, chose it to suggest that there's something very special about being a child, but eventually we grow into adulthood to become lawyers, scientists, teachers, or the next Serena Williams. As we grow, we learn many life lessons, and in that novel the children characters are in a continual state of learning. They observe both the good and the bad in the adult world around them, but they learn nonetheless. There is something beautiful about pure learning -- feeling uncomfortable about not knowing something and excited about taking action to gain new understanding. Whether it's learning that touching a hot stove burns our fingers or staring into a solar eclipse could burn our eyes, it's still exciting to learn and to...well...burn with curiosity.

I'm hoping we will have the same kind of excitement within the walls of our high school learning community because, at any moment, we may be called upon to make challenging choices about right and wrong without the luxury of the guidance of others. Reading and thinking and learning can help equip us to follow our own internal moral compass - what Gandhi called "that still small voice within." It can also set us free. Consider the intensity and effort you will devote to getting your driver's license soon. Your real quest is not those car keys, it's freedom. And learning, particularly new understanding of language and literature, provides that same kind of freedom. Literature, whether we find it on the Internet or in English class (ahem...or in our summer reading), has the ability to open our eyes to new people, new places, new ideas. We can experience the mistakes, the tragedies, the hopes and the triumphs of fascinating characters. Some of them are nothing like us. Some of them are exactly like us. Some of them we might become. And whether we love or hate these characters, love or hate the books, we still walk away with new understanding, new knowledge.

Now, you've probably heard that "knowledge is power." Well, knowledge is freedom from ignorance, and one who is free is always more powerful than one who is chained. We can find similar freedom in language, our ability to write and speak effectively. Whether it's writing a college application essay, sending an e-mail to the president, making a point in an interview, or composing lyrics to a song, communicating well will give us far more freedom than that little piece of plastic we keep in our wallet.

I'm excited about what I'm going to learn from you this term, so I thank you in advance for setting me free.

Warmest regards,

Michael Metzler