

Michael Metzler

*"There's a lot of ugly things in this world.... I wish
I could keep 'em all away from you. That's never possible."
- Atticus Finch*

Dear English 9 Students:

The above quotation is from a book we'll read this year, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. It's about parents and children, justice and injustice, and young people figuring out what's right and wrong about the adult world. As high school students, you're at a significant moment in your lives when you are expected to pass from childhood into young adulthood and to start figuring things out on your own. It's also a time when you may come to learn that the example of some adults may not be all it's cracked up to be.

Before we bash the adults too severely, however, we need to be cognizant of how much the adults in your lives love and care about you, and how much they have to offer. Like Atticus, your parents may not be too thrilled about exposing you to the "ugly things." That's why we have safe spaces like schools and, in particular, why we have literature (like your summer reading, for example). Literature helps to expose us to fascinating and wonderful and sometimes horrific aspects of human nature. We can be transported to other worlds, and our minds can be expanded ten-fold. But it all happens in that space between our ears, and we get to experience it from the relative safety of the printed page. So, if we encounter ideas that are troubling to us, we have the reassuring confines of the classroom -- our pleasant peers and our tolerant teacher -- to help us grapple with one of the most painful and wonderful experiences of all: expanding our horizons.

As we begin our time together, I ask you to remain an active rather than passive participant in your schooling life. Don't just move classroom to classroom, plopping yourself down and saying, "OK teacher, tell me what to do." Simply going through the motions creates dull, boring and disengaged citizens who sap the energy out of others. Try to become someone who "sucks the marrow out of life," as Henry David Thoreau put it. Find something interesting to explore in every encounter in every classroom every day. I told my own children that smart people are never bored. They'll find something to interest them no matter where they are. And I believe that you are all smart and curious. So, get after it and have fun.

I think Napoleon Dynamite put it best when he said, "Goshhhh!" (I have no idea why that matters, but I felt that if I'm going to quote a bunch of wise people, I should include this profound statement.) See, we're having fun already trying to figure out if this is, in fact, profound.

Thanks in advance for spending this special time of your life with me.

Warmest regards,

Michael Metzler