441 Mills Park Drive

Cary, NC

September 29, 2014

Dear Jaguar Parents,

In language arts, unit two spans from mid-October to the end of November. During unit two, students will create their own questions to explore the concept of belonging. Students will read a graphic novel, participate in a Socratic Seminar, will read books in small groups, and will generate a research topic tied to the unit theme, their own guiding questions, and a self-selected book. We will continue to learn new vocabulary words every few weeks and I will teach mini-lessons to teach reading strategies and research skills.

On October 14th, we’ll kick off the unit with a “cultural footprint” activity and a quote block-party, then the next day we will start reading the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. I will have a class set of this book, so students do not need to purchase it.

Mrs. Tomasevitch, one of our media center teachers and I developed the graphic novel unit together. According to Mrs. T:

You might be thinking, *Why would you use a graphic novel?* or even *What is a graphic novel?* A graphic novel is a novel-length book with a combination of text and comic art. Today’s students are surrounded by images and must learn to interpret them: icons on tablets and devices, photos, videos, infographics, charts, maps, and directions given through pictures. They are constantly processing information and making connections through both text and images. Visual literacy also plays an important role in reading comprehension and writing. The ELA standards advocate using multiple resources and formats as tools for teaching, and specifically mention graphic novels. Numerous studies have shown that graphic novels can be educational and motivational for boys, reluctant readers, academically gifted students, English language learners, and special needs students. And, students love them! The graphic novels of today aren’t like those of the past. They often have high-level vocabulary, multi-faceted storylines, and fabulous artwork.

This award-winning graphic novel includes topics such as cultural identity, how we see ourselves and others, and self-acceptance. It’s a complex book of three related stories, with rich vocabulary and vibrant art. The book focuses on essential questions from this unit--What does it mean to belong? What is the impact of fitting in?—and requires student to use the skills of making inferences and identifying literary elements. It includes issues that may make the reader uncomfortable, like negative cultural stereotypes, bullying, racism, and name-calling. But the story’s humor and positive themes of friendship, family, service to others, and transformation make it a thought-provoking and satisfying reading experience. The book will be read in appropriate context, including discussion and lessons before and after reading.

**After this first reading experience, students will read a book that they may choose from the following list. Students should acquire one of the following books by October 22nd**. Today in class, I presented a book-talk on each of these choices. Students may choose which book (or in some cases, books) to read. I do have a few copies of these books for students who are unable to purchase them, borrow them, or check them out from the public or school library. When students have their own books, they may annotate directly in the book to reference during discussion and for writing assignments. E-books and devices are okay too.

Book Choices for Unit 2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* *Wonder* by R.J. Polacio
* *Becoming Naomi Leon* by Pam Munos Ryan
* *Mockingbird* by Katherine Erskine
* *Before We Were Free* by Julia Alvarez (This group will also read *Behind the Mountains.*)
* *Behind the Mountains*by Edwidge Danticat (This group will also read *Before we Were Free.*)
* *Chinese Cinderella* by Adeline Yen Mah
* *Facing the Lion: Growing up Maasai on the African Savanna* by Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton (This group will also read either *Home of the Brave* or *No Ordinary Day.*)
* *No Ordinary Day* by Deborah Ellis (This group will also read either *Home of the Brave* or *Facing the Lion.*)
* *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate (This group will also read either *Facing the Lion* or *No Ordinary Day.*)
* *Of Beetles and Angels*: A Boy's Remarkable Journey from a Refugee Camp to Harvard
* *Outcasts United*: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team That Changed a Town
* *Journey of the Sparrows* by Fran Leeper Bus
* *Bad Boy* by Walter Dean Myers
* *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai

Using these books, the discussion about *American Born Chinese*, and the concept of belonging, students will generate questions about real-world situations. They will use those questions to launch into research and create a "multi-genre" research project before Thanksgiving. Throughout the unit, students will be given time in class to read, research, discuss, and create.

Here’s a visual overview of the unit.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to hear about what your student will be learning in language arts. Please feel free to contact Mrs. Tomasevich or me with any questions.

Kind Regards,

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