

Dearest Seventh Grade Families,

First and foremost, a very *warm* welcome to all of you! I cannot wait to get to know your children as accomplished readers and writers, but also as dynamic young people brimming with opportunity! I adore the energy, spontaneity, and natural creativity of middle school students; it is what triggered my Masters of Teaching in both elementary and secondary English education at the University of Virginia, and it is what propels me into the classroom each joyful morning, excited for what the day will bring. I *love* my job!

Some logistical notes:

- This year, we will be following – for the most part – Nancie Atwell’s Language Arts curriculum. I feel so very lucky to be able to implement this spectacular program; our small class sizes and Gilmour’s deep belief in individualized instruction make this possible. Nancie Atwell is, in short, my pedagogical hero; although her highly-acclaimed curriculum is rooted in students’ habitual writing and reading, she also believes in teacher-led community instruction. This means that *each and every day*, students will be writing for thirty minutes and they will be reading for twenty; we will spend ten minutes analyzing poetry, followed by a direct-instruction “mini-lesson” on any number of English skills (i.e., what an editorial looks like, how to use a semi-colon, how to write a catchy title, etc.), and finally, we will savor model literature in daily ten minute read-alouds. We will be busy, productive, prepared, and most of all, fulfilled.
- Because students will be working hard in our class – every class, all class – homework will not be complicated, but it will be important. **Each night, I expect students to read for at least thirty minutes.** Of course this reading does not need to happen all at once. Perhaps students might read for ten minutes on the way home, ten minutes after dinner, and ten minutes before bed. I strongly believe that good reading habits need to be solidified in middle school; if reading for pleasure does not become a habit now, it will undoubtedly fall by the wayside when high school, and its even stronger demands, arrives. I will be keenly aware of students’ progress because I will individually conference with them during *each class*, and their page number and comments will certainly “give away” their reading habits. That being said, I completely understand that we all are different readers, and I will quickly and privately become aware of each student’s capabilities. Ultimately, if students fall behind on their nightly reading, I will notice and they will, subsequently, lose points. I expect each student to read approximately twenty-five books this year, though again, this is a subtle goal – not a mandate. Every reader is different.
- **Students also need to write for at least one hour over the weekend.** Writing, too, needs to become a habit and students need to write at home to supplement their in-class individual writing projects. Writers’ quantity often influences quality.
- Other nightly homework will be assigned sporadically, and only if it is truly indispensable. I will never assign “busy work.” Homework will always be posted on the GA Middle School website.
- **I expect all students to be published professionally**, in a contest or national publication, in our school literary magazine or newspaper. Please let me know if you hear of any other opportunities for student publication!
- We have an ever-growing classroom library! I always embrace book recommendations, though students are more than welcome to read books from home. The important thing is that they: read, read, read, read, read, read.

On a personal note, my husband and I are joyfully expecting our first baby, our daughter, on December 16! During my special family time, your own children will be well taken care-of; I have already begun to plan an organized unit that will take place during my maternity leave in January.

Thank you – from the bottom of my heart – for your willingness to invest in a special school like Gilmour, for your support of our English class, and for your wonderful work as caregivers. As teachers, we ask that your students always give us their best work. And I know that as parents, that is exactly what *you* are doing: sending *your* best work to meet me at the classroom door every day. I am grateful. I already join you in being proud of your children.

Please take a moment to fill out the attached free-write sheet. You may return it in a confidential sealed envelope, or simply have your student hand it in. Obviously, there is no “due date.” Your advice and comments are invaluable – today, and always. Contact me via e-mail at schaeferc@gilmour.org or through my office phone at 440-473-8151.

With gratitude,

Mrs. Coreen Schaefer
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