

Frequently Asked Questions: Catholic High English Department

Q: Do you emphasize grammar?

A: Yes, in the freshman and sophomore years, students study all the basics of grammar. We have found that even though students have been exposed to most or all this material in elementary school, it takes these last two years to synthesize and internalize all the things they think they know about grammar. By junior year, teachers here expect students to have a good grasp of grammar and punctuation rules; they should be able to use those skills in their writing.

Q: Do you recommend audio books?

A: Yes, when a student listens to the words and follows along with the text, he is using two senses rather than one. Many times, poor readers will look at the words and turn the pages but won't really absorb what they are reading. Whether or not students listen to an audio version, they should highlight important passages, look up unfamiliar words, and keep character lists for each book. Reading a book for a test is different from reading for pleasure. Most students have smart phones close at hand. It is so easy to look up unfamiliar words now; there is no excuse for reading over them. Learning Ally and Audible are two sources for audio books. Learning Ally may be free for your son. Ask his English teacher about access.

Q: Should I read the books my son is reading?

A: That's a great idea. Not only can you gauge how well he is reading, discussing the characters and ideas of a book together is great fun. It's also a great way for a parent to connect with a son that can continue into the son's adulthood.

Q: We're already thinking about college entrance exams. What should we do to help our son?

A: Vocabulary is the key. The more words students know, the better they can read and understand. The PSAT, SAT, and ACT all emphasize vocabulary. The typical junior high student has a vocabulary of about 12,000 words--which sounds impressive until you realize that the English language contains more than 600,000 words. We've all got lots to learn. Word game applications can be helpful as well as Internet sites such as Merriam-Webster.com which has a "Word-of-the-Day" program. We also recommend **Quizlet.com** which has programs and applications that can be very helpful for many subject areas. Students create on-line quizzes and share them with friends. A smart phone app makes it possible to study the digital Quizlet flash cards anywhere.

Q: What books will my son be reading during his high school career?

A: See the complete list from this year on the other side of this sheet. We are proud of our "outside reading" program. By the time a student graduates, he will have read 32 books from a wide variety of authors. We include controversial books such as *Of Mice and Men* and *Catcher in the Rye* because they offer great opportunities to discuss difficult issues with students. The social studies teachers will add a few more titles, so your son will have a nice little library when he graduates.

Q: My son has terrible handwriting. What should I do to help him?

A: Encourage him to type his assignment and to print classwork and notes. Elementary schools must teach so many things that teachers can't spend as much time teaching penmanship as in the days when you went to school. As long as his teachers can read what he's writing, mission accomplished. Teachers are impressed with typewritten assignments, as long as the work is the student's own. Teachers at Catholic High are really good at finding plagiarism, so let's not even think about that. Many teachers are now using Google Classroom to collect longer papers and essays. Good keyboarding skills will save your son time and frustration. This summer, you might search on-line for free programs that offer keyboarding practice if your son is not already good at this skill.

Q: I have more questions about your program. How can I contact you?

A: I am happy to address your concerns. My name is Gretchen Gowen and I am the chairperson for Catholic High's English department. The best way to reach me is via my email: ggowen@lrchs.org. The following is the current (2019-2020) book list. Please note that the English teachers will not finalize next school year's list until May. However, we have been happy with this list and will make very few, if any, changes.

It is certainly *not* necessary for your son to read any of these books now. He will have a full month to read each book. That being said, there is nothing wrong with reading a book more than once.

A warning: **Each student must have the same edition of each book for English class.** The easiest solution will be to buy the books from us at a slightly discounted rate. You will have an opportunity to buy the whole year's set at registration and we will deliver the books to the students at the beginning of each month. Look for more information about this in upcoming mailings.

Freshmen:

And Then There Were None -- Agatha Christie

Of Mice and Men -- John Steinbeck

True Grit -- Charles Portis

Farewell to Manzanar -- Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston & James D. Houston

Proudly We Speak Your Name -- Michael J. Moran

Last of the Breed -- Louie L'Amour

The Lord of the Flies -- William Golding

Bless the Beasts and the Children -- Glendon Swartout

Sophomores:

The Chocolate War—Robert Cormier

Animal Farm -- George Orwell

Fahrenheit 451 -- Ray Bradberry

The Once and Future King -- T. H. White

Night -- Eli Wiesel

Rocket Boys/October Sky --Homer Hickman, Jr.

On the Beach—Nevil Shute

Tom Sawyer -- Mark Twain

In addition, sophomores will discuss *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths* by Bernard Evslin

Juniors: (American authors)

To Kill a Mockingbird -- Harper Lee

Huckleberry Finn -- Mark Twain

The Great Gatsby -- F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Grapes of Wrath -- John Steinbeck

Invisible Man -- Ralph Ellison

A Separate Peace -- Frank Knowles

The Catcher in the Rye -- J. D. Salinger

The Lords of Discipline -- Pat Conroy

Seniors: (British and World authors)

All Quiet on the Western Front --Eric Maria Remarque

Four Plays by Ibsen -- Henrik Ibsen

Hamlet -- William Shakespeare

1984 -- George Orwell

Frankenstein—Mary Shelley

A Man for All Seasons -- Robert Bolt

The Death of Ivan Ilyich -- Leo Tolstoy

Much Ado About Nothing -- William Shakespeare