

September 2017

Dear 12th Grade Students,

Hello, and welcome to high school! Big stuff is happening, and words cannot express how deeply excited I am to work with and learn from you this semester. I expect our work to be meaningful, transformative, and memorable, and it is my goal to ensure that not *one* of you asks when you'll use this in real life. Spoiler alert: it will all be *very* real. This year, we'll be working through some of my all-time favorite texts, such as *March*, and others related to social justice & civil rights movements. However, let's take a step back from curriculum for a moment, and just get to know one another.

I am a second-year teacher, and still very much a student - not just in this classroom, but actually a graduate school student. I am going for my Masters in Literacy at night, so I too will have homework and projects and things of the sort, so we are quite literally in this whole school thing together. When not in school, I am, believe it or not, a real life person! I am an avid reader (shocker, right?), yoga-lover, musician, writer, professional *Game of Thrones* binger (I'm only on season 5, so please - no spoilers!), big sister, and daughter.

In the classroom, I teach with the philosophy that there are twenty-something students *and* twenty-something teachers. This is not a classic Schaffer miscalculation (you will see, math is not my strong suit), but rather how I see you all. I expect that we will all learn from one another in this space, and all step up to the plate and be leaders here. This is our space to make magic happen, and I am certainly not making it happen all on my own - we have to be in it together. What this means is, I have some basic expectations:

1. ***Come confused:*** I would rather you do the reading and find yourself totally lost, than to not do the reading *for fear that* you'll be totally lost. Do your best, and know that we are in the same boat, and we'll be here for you to work out all your feelings about whatever we're working with.
2. ***Come Prepared:*** Please don't be *that* person who's always mooching paper and pencils off of your pals. If you have trouble accessing these materials, come be honest and speak to me, and I'll be sure to set you up. But laziness has no place in this room, kapeesh?
3. ***Come open-minded:*** We're going to be discussing some controversial and tough issues in here, centered around social inequality and social justice, such as racism, gender, class, and all that good stuff. It is no secret that our political and cultural views may be different, and know that they will be heard and validated in this room, so long as no one else is being attacked or threatened by said views. You are not being forced to agree with anyone; all I ask is that you *listen* and keep an open mind. I have total faith in you here. In a time where there is so much tearing us apart, this a space where we have to support and be there for one another.

There are two things I'd like to discuss here that are not in the course syllabus:

In a world that is working hard at reminding us all of our differences, and is working towards tearing us apart, please join me in creating a space that counters all of this negativity. You will find on our back bulletin board our **Wall of Good Vibes™**. This is a space dedicated to positivity, reflection, and uplifting others. This is a space to visit if you find yourself having a rough day, overcome by stress, or just in need of a little pick-me-up. I will leave post-its in the back of the room, and I invite you to contribute to the wall as you see fit. Additionally, I will provide prompts and activities for the wall as either a beginning or end of class task some days. I also ask that you come to us with prompts, ideas, and insights to share and get us writing and creating. I will be checking the wall diligently, but I trust that you will not spoil the intention and beauty of this space by posting anything inappropriate, hurtful, or negative. Anything of this nature will be taken very seriously and will be met with disciplinary action.

Additionally, several times a week, we will be writing in our **journals**, which I will keep here in class. I will be turning to two of you a week to come up with a **thought-provoking prompt** and to **DJ our writing session**. Now here is what I want to stress about your journals. These are places for you to write about the prompt, or freely depending on what is on your mind. While I will be skimming your journals spontaneously, I will not read anything you don't want me to read, and this can be indicated simply by folding down those pages. If you have any concerns about this, please feel free to come speak to me any time.

I look forward to an incredible, meaningful semester with you all. I expect to learn a great deal from you, and hope that by semesters' end, we have covered many topics and texts that have great value to you. It is my firm belief that words and ideas can change the world, and I hope you too will feel this - guaranteed or your money back.

So, what are we waiting for? Let's dive in, shall we?

Cheers,

Ms. Schaffer 🧐