Welcome to 7th Grade: A Starter Kit

Mr. Donelson's English & Social Studies Classes

Dear students and families,

Welcome to 7th grade! I'm looking forward to having you in my English and Social Studies classes, and I wanted to introduce myself before classes begin in the Fall.

My main hope for your summer is that you have lots of time to rest, unplug, and enjoy quality time with your friends and family. The transition from sixth to seventh grade is a big one, and it's my hope that these activities will serve as a preview of some work formats that we'll be doing in my classes. I asked my current $7^{th}/8^{th}$ grade students, and they thought that these tasks would be helpful to make that transition as successful as possible.

The tasks in this Starter Kit which should each take twenty or thirty minutes. This work is meant to be done at whatever pace works for your family, but it will be due on the first day of the new school year. **The completion of this packet will be your first graded task of the school year, so do your best work on each element!**

For parents: the one thing I'll need directly from you is a **signature** after all of the components are completed. Please preview these tasks with your student, and support them as they complete them. For the reading log, the book can be anything your student wants to read. My one rule on this end is that it has to be a hard copy or Kindle, not on a phone or computer.

See you all September!

Mr. Donelson
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What's In This Kit

1. **"About Me."** A letter from you to me, so I know a bit about who you are.
2. **Bell Work.** A short introduction to how we start most classes.
3. **Annotation.** A quick guide to how we write inside what we read, and why.
4. **Reading Practice.** One short article, putting annotation into action.
5. **Independent Reading Record.** A log of what you read this summer.
6. **A Goal for the Year.** One academic, one personal.

Part 1: “About Me”

Write a letter to me! Make it at least one page, either neatly handwritten on lined paper or typed. **Staple your completed letter to the back of this packet.**

Tell me whatever you want me to know. Don't worry about “making it fancy,” but do show me your best thoughtfulness.

If you'd like some prompts to get started:

- What's a book, movie, show, or game you've loved? Why?
- What's something you're proud of from 6th grade?
- What's something you're nervous about for 7th grade?
- What's a topic, place, time period, person, or question you'd love to learn more about?
- What's something most teachers don't know about you that they probably should?
- What helps you do your best work? What gets in the way of it?

Part 2: Bell Work

Each day of the week has its own theme. You can earn 2 points per day if your work is completed with Clarity, Thoughtfulness, and Strong Mechanics. (Wednesdays are a little different—we’re not getting into that here!)

MUG Monday: A few sentences of text are provided, and they’re full of spelling and grammar errors! It’s your job to make all of the necessary corrections; this task brings to light common mechanics issues and builds your revision skills.

> This year writing will be a major focus, its important to understand grammer rules, without them you're writing is difficult to understand.
>
> During each session, well edit one of these sets of M.U.G. sentences, M.U.G. by the way is an abbreviation of "mechanics, usage and grammer"

"Tell Me" Tuesday: Each week I'll give a prompt. Sometimes it will be about a true-story from your life or about yourself, sometimes it will be creative writing… It's open to whatever comes to mind! For this space: Tell me about a movie that you were obsessed with when you were a little kid!

"Thoughtful" Thursday: I will provide a quote or other small piece of wisdom; it's your job to determine both what it means and *why it matters*. What's the big idea?

Quote: If there is no struggle, there is no progress" -Frederick Douglass

"Freedom" Friday: Write about whatever's on your mind! Select a single topic; don't just give a junk drawer of jumbled fragments.

Part 3: Annotation

Annotation is the habit of making printed texts “ugly”! Underline, circle, write notes in the margins, add question marks. It is how a good reader stays awake on the page.

You don't need a fancy system. Here is a starter set of marks you can use:

- **Underline.** A sentence that stops you, surprises you, moves you, or feels important.
- **Circle.** A word you don't know, or one that's doing something interesting.
- **? (question mark).** Something you don't understand, or want to ask about.
- **! (exclamation point).** Something that hits you in some way.
- *** (star).** A moment you think the author especially cares about.

In the margin, write whatever you actually thought— your real thinking. An annotated page is a vibrant record of the reader’s mind.

Practice with the following text: an opinion piece from author Joe Moran. He argues for the value of slowing down and taking your time when reading. This is a great change for you to put into practice his ideas!

Mark it up, using each of the suggested annotation symbols at least twice.

“Slow reading is important, especially in this fast-moving digital age”

Are we doomed to read distractedly in the digital age? Technology seems to curb slow, immersive reading. Scrolling down a web page with your thumb feels like it requires less focus than turning the pages of a book. Reading on a screen, particularly a phone screen, tires your eyes and makes it harder for you to keep your place. So online writing tends to be more skimmable and list-like than print. At the top of a web article, we are now often told how long it will take us, forewarned the words below are a "15-minute read." The online reader's put-down is TL;DR. Too long; didn't read.

Our Brains Are Doing Less Critical Reasoning

The brain scientist Maryanne Wolf argued recently this "new norm" of skim reading is producing "an invisible, game-changing transformation" in how readers process words. We shouldn't overplay the dangers of skimming. All readers skim. Skimming is the skill we acquire as we learn to read more sophisticatedly. From about the age of 9, our eyes start to bounce around the page, reading only about a quarter of the words properly, and filling in the gaps by inference.

More People Than Ever Are Writing

Nevertheless, the Internet has changed the way we read. There's more to read because more people are writing. If you time traveled a few decades into the past, you'd wonder at how little writing was happening outside a classroom. There would be nobody in coffee shops stabbing their laptops with two fingers, or updating social media with the headline news of their lives. Mostly, writing would be farmed out to professionals, and appear only in print. Before the digital era, writing was read long after it was written. Digital writing is meant for rapid release and response. A text or tweet is a slightly interrupted, virtual way of having a conversation. An online article starts forming a comment thread underneath as soon as it is published. This mode of writing and reading can be inclusive, interactive and fun. However, it often treats other people's words as something to be quickly harvested as fodder to say something else. Everyone talks over everyone else, straining to be heard.

Slow Reading Is About Taking Our Time

Perhaps we should slow down. We hear talk about rediscovering the lost virtues of taking our time — by, for instance, spending time on locally sourcing and preparing a meal, or leaving children to explore the world unsupervised and at their own pace. Yet the slow reading movement has yet to take off in the same way. Lately, I have been trying — with difficulty, because I am by nature a skimmer — to read more slowly. I trace the margin with my finger, so I can pause and think about what I have just read and not lose my place. I often read aloud, or at least move my lips, even if that means getting some odd looks in public places. Reading aloud forces you to notice the words, to start giving them the attention the writer gave them.

Online Writing Often "Takes Down"

Online writing is often designed to be mined for its "take home" lesson or perhaps its "take down" of another piece. Most comments focus on whether the commenter agrees with the writer. It rarely mentions what a piece of writing was actually like to read. To a slow reader, the medium, online or print, affects the message. A piece of writing is not simply a "take" on something, but an exercise in pace, rhythm, tone and voice. It can only be fully understood by immersing oneself in the words and their slow unraveling of a line of thought. The slow reader is like a swimmer who stops counting the laps they have done and just enjoys how their body feels in water.

Technology Can't Destroy The Need For Deep Reading

Slow reading feels like a more generous form of reading — as listening is a more generous act than speaking, and more difficult. Slow reading gives the writer the gift of your time, without any guaranteed return, and with the risk you will be bored or discomforted by the writing's strangeness or difficulty. Slow reading is a slow meeting

with the rigid otherness of another person's mind. The human need for this kind of deep reading is too strong for any new technology to destroy. Older technologies often coexist with new ones. The Kindle has not killed off the printed book any more than the car killed off the bicycle. When digital TV arrived 20 years ago, most people thought viewers would zap quickly through the hundreds of channels and television would have to be fast and loud to keep their attention. Instead, the great success of the digital era has been long, box-set dramas that demand huge intellectual and emotional commitment from viewers. As with deep viewing, the hunger for deep reading endures. We still read complex texts like novels. We still seek layered, thoughtful writing online. We still want to savor slowly developed ideas and carefully chosen words. Even in a fastmoving age, there's time for slow reading.

In your own words, what is the "big idea" of this article? (min. 2 full sentences)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Independent Reading Record

Read a book this summer. Any book. Fiction, nonfiction, fantasy, history, biography, mystery, humor, poetry, graphic novel. It should be new to you (not a reread!) and something that you expect to enjoy.

One rule from me: it must be a hard copy or a Kindle. Not on a phone, tablet, or laptop screen.

You'll log six focused reading sessions over the summer; each must be at least 30 minutes. Each entry is short. A parent signs at the end to confirm the reading happened.

I would highly recommend reading much more than is required here. Taking even 10 minutes per day to build a habit of reading a great way to set yourself up for success.

Book Title: _____

Author: _____

How I picked this book:

Session 1

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

Session 2

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

Session 3

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

Session 4

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

Session 5

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

Session 6

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

AFTER READING

Did you finish the book? Yes / No

Would you recommend it to another 7th grader? Yes / No / Sort of

In one sentence, why or why not:

6. A Goal for the Year

Two short answers. Three sentences each, maximum. We will come back to these in the fall.

One thing I want to get better at in school this year, and how I think I might do that:

One thing I want to get better at outside of school this year, and how I think I might do that:

See You Soon!

Bring this completed "Starter Kit" with you on the first day of school. We will go through it together.

Parent or Guardian Signature, confirming that you have reviewed your student's work for completeness and accuracy, including their Reading Log. Thank you for your support!

_____ _____

Parent/Guardian's Name (Printed) Signature

Date: _____