

May 2009

Dear Incoming Freshman,

The English department welcomes you to SHA! To help you prepare for high school English, you will be expected to complete a summer reading requirement prior to the first full day of school. You will read two novels: *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver (ISBN #978-0-06-091554-4) and *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (ISBN #978-0-14-200174-5).

The freshman English course is a survey of American literature. The thematic focus of freshman English is *the search for identity*. In English class, you will study how the birth and growth of America's identity is reflected in American literature. You will study American authors, as well as the characters they create, to develop an understanding of what makes individuals unique. Throughout the year, you will also develop a better understanding of your unique identity by looking at the factors that have influenced you throughout your life.

As you read your two novels this summer, you will encounter two strong protagonists (main characters): Taylor in *The Bean Trees* and Lily in *The Secret Life of Bees*. Both of these characters are discovering their identities. When reading, please keep the following questions in mind:

*How does Taylor/Lily struggle with her identity? What happens to make her rethink who she is and who she wants to become?*

*What people and events influence Taylor's/Lily's life? How do these people and events help to change how she views herself?*

*How does Taylor/Lily gain a better understanding of herself and life by the end of the novel?*

As you read, practice active reading by underlining passages when Taylor/Lily meets someone or experiences something that causes a change in her identity (how she views herself). Write a brief note in the margin or on a post-it note to summarize what the passage reveals and why it is important. These underlined passages will help you with your summer reading project and will be discussed in class during the first weeks of school. Your teacher will also check your book to give you credit for your effort in using active reading strategies.

On the first full day of classes, you will need to turn in a completed summer reading project. For this project, you must create two bookmarks, one for each novel. The front of each bookmark should contain an illustration that reflects the search for identity within the novel. It can show a character, portray a scene, or capture a symbol from the novel. The back of the bookmark should contain a timeline that reflects the plot of the novel by listing the significant events that worked to create/change the main character's identity. Your bookmarks need to fit inside an average novel; other than this, there are no specific size or shape requirements. Bookmarks will be graded on accuracy, completeness, and creativity.

The bookmark project will be the first portion of your summer reading grade. In addition, your English teacher will incorporate your summer reading into your English class through various methods that may include an essay, a presentation, a creative project, and/or a test.

While completing your summer reading requirement, your most important job is to read carefully so that you are well prepared to begin your high school English class. Feel free to contact me with any questions via email at [kcaruso@sacredheartschools.org](mailto:kcaruso@sacredheartschools.org)

Sincerely,

Kimberly Caruso  
English Department Chairperson  
Sacred Heart Academy