January 22, 2013

Friends,

Starting today, your student will begin a major research and persuasive speech unit for eighth grade English Language Arts. We will spend the next 7 weeks researching current social issues, drafting research papers, practicing persuasive speaking techniques, and, ultimately, formally debating the issues in class – all skills necessary for a respectable American citizen (not to mention a high school student, too!)

Sounds like a lot, doesn’t it? Well, yes, it is; however, your student is well prepared for the task and, better yet, there should not be much homework throughout the unit – your student will be given ample resources and in-class work time to complete each task. That being said, please help me to ensure that your student realizes that this is not the best part of year to waste class time. Each day counts. I’ve included a schedule for the next seven weeks with this letter so that you and your student are aware of the unit’s timeline. Please keep this calendar at home; students will receive their own copies!

The assessment for this major unit of study is divided between two separate but major assignments:

1. a research paper complete with citations (~2-3 pages)
2. a prepared speech based upon the research paper which will be delivered during the debate

While students will be required to compile a minimum number of book resources, most of the research will be conducted online due to each topic’s close relation to current events. We will spend two full weeks in our LRC and LRC computer lab to compile these resources. The topics will depend upon the interests of students and the willingness of classmates to research and debate both sides of any issue. A topic will not be debated unless we have teams willing to provide an argument both for and against an issue. This will ensure that students hear both sides of an issue when it is discussed in class and will, therefore, provide for an unbiased learning experience (ideally).

Students will be paired up with a classmate of their choice for the entirety of the unit. Partners are meant to provide support for one another in conducting research, writing papers, and practicing speeches. Please note: even though students will be working with a partner, each student is responsible for completing their own research paper and presenting their own speech during the debate.

During the debate, students may look forward to appearances by members of our community who will provide the students with real world feedback on their presentations. The contribution of these volunteers is invaluable for providing insight and advice throughout each debate. I, however, will assess each student’s performance myself – keeping guest comments in mind, of course. **If you or a friend have any experience in persuasive/public speaking and would like to be involved with our debates, please contact me immediately!**

I’ve listed possible topics for our debates on the other side of this letter. Please look over the list with your student and discuss their top five interests. I will be assigning topics and sides to teams starting tomorrow. I also ask that you sign the page and have your student return it to me on Wednesday, January 23, 201 as evidence that they have shared this information with you.

Thank you for your continuing support throughout the year! Believe it or not, high school is on its way!

Mr. Tommy Kawel

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P.S. Our debates will begin February 26 – the Tuesday following Mid-Winter Break! Students will need your advice to help them prepare for their presentation and argument!

**Possible Topics**

Listed below are possible topics for your student’s research. Students have learned about each of these in class and have developed a list of their top five topics based on personal interest. I will do my best to assign each team their topic and side based on their interest.

* Legality of Same-Sex Marriages – should same-sex marriages be legalized at a national or state level?
* Decriminalizing Marijuana – is marijuana truly a medicine? Should it be decriminalized for recreation?
* Regulation of Fast Food Items – should the government control what we eat?
* Death Penalty – should people be put to death for their crimes?
* Gambling – do the benefits of a casino outweigh the drawbacks?
* Censorship in Music – should music be censored?
* Animal Rights – tested on for pharmaceuticals? Used for food?
* Gun Control – to what degree should the government restrict the ownership and use of guns?
	+ Assault Weapons – should the government ban those firearms considered assault weapons?
* Human Growth Hormone in Sports – should it and other steroids be allowed?
* Religion in Public Schools – should religion be allowed (or taught) in public schools?
* School Dress Codes and Uniforms – should schools impose dress codes or uniforms on students?
* Stem Cell Research – do the benefits outweigh the drawbacks?
* Immigration – should the United States have stricter immigration laws?
* Plastic Surgery for Kids – is cosmetic surgery appropriate for kids?
* Violent Video Games – should they be censored and banned?
* Global Warming and the Government – should the government enact energy standards
* Social Media – should governments and schools regulate use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)?
* Euthanasia – should individuals in the United States have the right to legally end their lives?

**Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**