Dear Parents,

Good afternoon and welcome to another exciting school year at Barack Obama Academy of International Studies. I would like to take a few moments to introduce myself and let you know about my expectations for students in 7th grade Language and Literature.

My name is Dave Mathews and I have been teaching in the district for 12 years. I have taught previously at Westinghouse High School, Manchester K-8, and Obama Academy. I am a U.S. Army veteran and a graduate of York College of Pennsylvania and Slippery Rock University. I also coach the MS Boys Soccer team here at Obama Academy.

It is my belief that every child can learn and that anything can be achieved through hard work. To that end, my expectations for all students are very high and I take seriously my responsibility in helping them achieve their academic goals and develop a strong work ethic.

School districts across Pennsylvania, including Pittsburgh Public, have adopted the new Common Core State Standards. You can find information on the Common Core at the Pennsylvania Department of Education web site www.pde.edu. With the adoption of the Common Core the district has overhauled and aligned much of the curriculum and while the literature we will study in 7th grade remains largely the same, the way we approach that study is more rigorous.

My goal for the 7th grade Language and Literature classes is to develop an environment of respect and rapport where all learners work in harmony to support one another’s learning and achieve our common goals. In order to develop that environment there are policies and procedures in place about which the students and I will speak at great length. Though I suspect my expectations are similar to your child’s other teachers, I use something I call The Six Ps as a system in my class. I believe that these tenets are not only important for their development as scholars but as people.

The Six Ps are:

**Present:** I expect students to be in school and class above 90% of the scheduled school days. In the event a student is absent a note from home or doctor should be turned in to their homeroom teacher.

**Prompt:** Students have 4-5 minutes to travel from one class to another. I expect students to be inside the classroom and gathering their materials for the day by the time the late bell rings. If a student has a need to use the bathroom between classes they should first report to class to obtain permission so they are not late. Students who are excessively tardy for class will be referred to school administration for discipline.

**Prepared:** Each day students should have a writing instrument, a binder with a 2” binding with paper to use as their Reader/Writer notebook, a copy of the text we are studying when applicable and any assignment which is due that day. Students should also be mentally prepared to tackle the day’s lesson. Students will also benefit from having a flash drive to store class projects.
**Polite:** It is important that students and I work together to build an environment of respect and rapport. I will be polite and respectful to students and expect they treat others in the same manner. Students who treat others disrespectfully or otherwise disrupt the learning environment will be referred to administration.

**Patient:** All students learn at different rates and at times even the most capable student will struggle with material. I encourage students to be patient with themselves knowing that as a community of learners we will all work together to make sure we are all successful. I encourage students to communicate their struggles with me so together we can uncover ways to clarify anything they are struggling with.

**Passionate:** I believe it is difficult to be good at something if you don’t love it. I encourage students to find something about Language and Literature that they love whether it reading and discussing fiction, writing poetry, or delivering speeches. If a student has a particular talent, for example drawing or singing, we will try and incorporate that talent into a culminating project.

In addition to the Six Ps, I also expect students to remain in their seat unless given permission to move, raise their hand if they need to sharpen a pencil or use the restroom, follow my instructions the first time, and keep their hands to themselves. It is important that order is maintained in the classroom so that all children have an opportunity to learn.

The 7th grade Language and Literature curriculum is made up of nine units, each focusing on developing reading, writing, speaking, and research skills. We will begin each unit by identifying an overall statement of inquiry which is tied to the literature we will study. For example, statement of inquiry for unit one is: “Students will understand that much can be learned from those who have faced obstacles in life.” In unit one, we will read and discuss autobiographical and biographical texts of famous people with a focus on how that type of writing differs from other types of writing, how writers of biographies and autobiographies gather information, what we can learn from the experiences of others, and how our own experiences shape the stories we tell and the stories we read. Each unit will contain a pre and post assessment of the skills on which that unit focuses.

The culminating project for each unit will be a formal writing piece focused on the overall unit question and a creative piece which will give students an opportunity to use special talents to show what they’ve learned. The culminating project for unit one asks that students write a response to literature for one of the works we studied and write a personal narrative about a moment in their lives which has helped shape who they are. In order to better align the curriculum with the expectations of the IB program, I will be adding a piece to each culminating project. The addition will be in most cases a PowerPoint presentation.

Students can expect to receive homework between three and four days per week. Any student who does not complete a homework assignment will not receive credit for that assignment and must complete and turn in a missing homework slip. I will follow up with parents by phone or email to let you know about the missed assignment. Students who have an excused absence on the day any assignment was issued or
on its due date will receive an extension equal to the number of days the student was absent. In each case I will let the student know what their adjusted due date is.

Each assignment is weighted based on its category. Below you will find a list of each assignment category and the percentage of the report card grade each type of assignment is weighted.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classwork</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Because all students will have plenty of opportunity and support in completing assignments, it is my policy that extra credit opportunities will not be given.

During novel study much of the homework will be independent reading of assigned chapters. I believe 7th graders are beyond the days of popcorn reading and need to develop the stamina to read for extended periods of time. It is important that students complete their assigned reading each evening so they can complete activities and be part of the discussion the following day. There will be an activity or quiz on those assigned chapters the following day to check to make sure the reading was accomplished.

Formal writing assignments at the end of each unit will be completed using all stages of the writing process from brainstorming to organizing to drafting and editing to the final published copy. The process for completing a formal piece of writing typical takes from 3-5 days. I plan on scheduling final copies of those assignments to be due on Mondays to allow students the weekend to revise and edit their drafts and complete the final copy. I will grade and comment on each students’ essay as quickly as I can but so as to not sacrifice quality for quickness it may take as many as three days for essays to be returned. Students will be permitted to make final adjustments based on my feedback to improve the quality of the writing and their grade or they may choose to accept the grade as is.

In assessing culminating projects, I will use the IB MYP assessment criteria for Language and Literature. Student work will be assessed using the four criteria listed below each on a scale from 1-8.

- **Text Analysis** to include the ability to identify and comment on significant aspects of the text, identify and comment on elements of the writer’s craft, justifying opinions and ideas based on textual evidence and identifying similarities and differences between texts.

- **Organizing Text** including employing organizational structures that serve the context and intention, organizing opinions and ideas in a logical manner, and using referencing and formatting tools to create a presentation style suitable to the context and intention.

- **Producing Text** which is ability to; produce texts that demonstrate thought and imagination while exploring new perspectives and ideas arising from personal engagement with the creative process,
making stylistic choices in terms of linguistic, literary and visual devices, demonstrating awareness of impact on an audience, and selecting relevant details and examples to support ideas.

**Using Language** including the use of appropriate and varied vocabulary, sentence structures and forms of expression, the ability to write and speak in an appropriate register and style, correct use of grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling along with the use appropriate non-verbal communication techniques.

Our goal, by year’s end, is for all students to be scoring in the 7-8 range for all four criteria.

If you would like daily classroom updates including assignment due dates please join my private Facebook group “Language and Literature 7 room 219.”

I hope you find this letter informative and helpful as we approach our journey through this school year. If you have any questions or concerns I encourage you to reach out to me through my board email dmathews1@pghboe.net or by phone or text message at 412-716-5241.

Regards,

David C. Mathews
Language and Literature Teacher
Barack Obama Academy of International Studies

Approved: Ms. Aisha Robinson, Director