October 15, 2014

Dear Fellow Readers:

I am excited this year to begin exchanging reading letters electronically! Over the course of the school year we will exchange letters back and forth (via email) about what is being read and how you are approaching reading on an independent basis. I will be able to ask you specific questions about your reading style, skills, and preferences. It’s important to keep the same email going back and forth so we can always access the entire conversation this school year. We will be referencing those earlier letters in later conversations. If any of you do not have access to a computer at home and need help completing this letter electronically, please let me know so I can plan some in-class time to do so. You can always write it in your reading notebook and turn your notebook into the basket if you need to.

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| **There are lots of ways to approach writing your reading letter.**  **In your letter you can…**  • Write about what you feel as you read a book and why  • Tell what you notice about how an author writes  • Tell why you think an author writes a particular way  • Tell what you liked or didn't like about a piece and why.  • Talk about how you read a particular text and why  • Write about what a book said and/or means to you and why.  • Tell about what the book reminds you of - what other experiences from your own life (those all-important text-to-self connections)  • Write about what surprised you.  • Ask questions about the text or ask for help.  • And write back about ideas, feelings, experiences, and questions.  • Use the response starters on the bookmark I gave you to help if you're stuck for something to write about.  ***Please DO NOT write plot summaries. I have read many of the books you are reading and rather than wanting to know what the book is about, I really want to know how you are reacting with/interpreting/making meaning of the text.*** |

As a bare minimum, you need to write a letter to me (or a friend) at least once during the weeks assigned. You are always welcome to write more. Please keep in mind that this is only the minimum requirement. You are welcome (and encouraged) to pass a literary letter to a friend or me as often as you wish. At the beginning of the school year, our letters will primarily be between us. As the year goes on, you may want to write a reading letter to a friend. If you do this, please “cc” me in the conversation so I can “listen in” on your conversation and give you credit for the week.

You may write and respond to letters both during and outside of reader's workshop time.

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| What to include in a reading letter?  In addition to your thoughtful responses about what you are reading, (see above for ideas) each reading letter needs to include:  • the reading letter you are working on (i.e.: “Reading Letter #2”)  • the date of each letter (i.e.: “September 18, 2013”)  • a greeting and a closing, just as you would in a friendly letter (i.e.: “Dear Lauren” and “Yours in reading”)  • the name and author of the book(s) about which you are writing (i.e.: The \_ Outsiders by S.E. Hinton)  • a quote from the text to support some aspect of what it is you’re writing about (see example below for an example of how to notate this accurately)  • your responses to any questions I might have asked you in my response to your letter  • your very best grammar and conventions  Your reading notebook email string is a record of your history and development as a reader. ***Please see the sample letter below.*** |

I can't wait for us to begin our conversations this year about reading. I can't wait for your letters - for the chance to learn from you, learn with you, and help you learn more about yourself as a reader.

Yours in reading,

Lauren :)

P.S. (Which by the way means *post script,* or after writing) If you choose to write electronically, please use your reading history document and create a second page! Do not begin a new document.

**- SAMPLE READING LETTER –**

*September 15, 2013*

*Reading Letter #2*

*Dear Lauren,*

*I just finished reading, The Other Wes Moore, by Wes Moore. This is a memoir that had been recommended to me by a couple of people (students and fellow teachers) last spring and I was just able to get around to reading it. It is a compelling story about two men named Wes Moore growing up in Baltimore, Maryland. One grows up to be a famous scholar, veteran, and business leader. The other ends up committing a murder and ends up serving a life sentence in jail. The story alternates between one Wes and the other and follows, roughly the sequence of their lives. The non-incarcerated Wes Moore has a series of conversations with the other Wes Moore and it is through these interviews that the story unfolds. The reader gains a glimpse of how their lives were similar (both Wes’ lose their father’s at an early age) and how their lives are different (one Wes’s mother sacrificed much to send him to a private school and the other mother struggled with her own drug addiction). The choices and the circumstances they were each making led them to very different places as well as their luck in life.*

*I was surprised by how hard life seemed to be for both of them, growing up as young black men in the 1980s. They tell about the racial tension within the city and how being black was sometimes enough to be suspected of doing illegal activities. In one account, a story is told of a wedding party that is made to sit on the curb during a rainstorm because they are suspected of hiding the other Wes Moore during the hunt to bring him in (he shot an off-duty police officer). If that occurred to young white people in Boulder, Colorado, I can only imagine the lawsuits that might come from it.*

*To me, one of the most powerful lines from this book came in Wes Moore’s Epilogue, “Failing doesn’t make us a failure. But not trying to do better, and to be better, does make us fools,” (p. 181). In my desire to do everything “right”, not quite making it can be a source of frustration. I appreciate the idea of these feelings being part of the “ebb and flow of life.” We don’t become better individuals without messing up some along the way and learning how to do things better. Both Wes Moore’s, in the end, continue to make their lives better (even from within jail).*

*I think we need to have an ongoing conversation about race in the United States. This is the only way we are all going to have an honest perspective of what it is like for all people and how we can go about making treatment of all fair and just. It doesn’t seem fair and I have a lot to learn. Reading The Other Wes Moore is helping me gain some of this important perspective.*

*Yours in reading,*

*Lynn *