

Oak Crest Middle School
Honors English Program: A Guide for Parents and Students
7th Grade

At Oak Crest, each teacher wants every child to achieve his or her personal best, and this is more likely to happen if the child is placed into classes appropriate to the child's needs, abilities, and interests.

We offer two levels of English classes at both the seventh and eighth grade.

- 1). *College prep* classes provide a *rigorous* curriculum that meets the needs of the majority of students.
- 2). *Honors classes* are designed for students who *excel* in English language arts and *require a faster-paced, more in-depth, and challenging* course of study.

Both college prep and honors classes have the following attributes:

- Follow a rigorous curriculum.
- Require students to work toward mastery of the California Common Core State Standards.
- Prepare students for high school English.
- Develop critical thinking skills.
- Require students to write argumentative essays, narratives, responses to literature, and summaries.
- Provide opportunities for students to improve listening and speaking skills through Socratic Seminar and speech delivery.
- Select novels from the same board-approved list of titles.
- Use the same textbook.
- Utilize technology to help improve reading and writing skills.

Honors classes differ from CP in the following ways:

- Greater depth and complexity of study.
- Advance beyond current grade level standards and work on skills in the next grade level standards.
- Students work independent of teacher assistance more often.
- Pacing is quicker.
- Required course reading is more often done as homework outside of class rather than during class.
- Writing is more sophisticated (stronger vocabulary, more complex and varied sentence structure, greater depth of thought and analysis) and more extensively researched.
- Assigned readings may be at a higher level of difficulty.
- Homework typically requires students to think critically and **synthesize** the material that they learned in class that day. As a result, homework generally takes longer.
- Grammar techniques are more sophisticated and complex.

When making your choice, please consider:

- Students can move from Honors to College Prep or College Prep to Honors **within the first 4 weeks** of the school year.
- **After the 4 week deadline**, students must remain in their course of choice until the semester ends in January.
- **At the semester**, an Honors student may move to a College Prep course; however, students **may not** move from College Prep to Honors mid-year. In order to complete the expectations of second semester in an Honors course, students need the foundational knowledge and skills presented in the first semester. As a result, they will need to wait until the following year to take Honors.
- We have open access. Students **may** take College Prep English in 7th grade and move to Honors in 8th grade, and it's not uncommon for students to take College Prep courses throughout middle school and move to Honors in high school.
- The ultimate goal is for your child to be happy, healthy, and **appropriately** challenged.

Checklist of General Expectations for Students ENTERING 7th Grade Honors Classes

Please use the following charts to determine which level of English is most suitable for your child.

Skills and Knowledge: When students **enter** a 7th grade Honors class, they are expected to be able to demonstrate **3 or more** of the following skills. **Please note:** This is where students currently are, **not** where they hope to be.

- Write well-developed, insightful paragraphs using a variety of sentence structures and above grade level vocabulary.
- Understand and identify the 8 parts of speech
- Go beyond the surface of the text to discover a deeper meaning rather than to simply summarize
- Discover theme in a passage
- Identify figurative language in a passage
- Articulate an argument in response to a text
- Actively read over their writing to enhance and improve it, as well as proofread.
- Exceeds Standards on CAASP

Academic Qualities: In addition to demonstrating many of the skills listed in the category above, an Honors English student will be most successful if s/he also demonstrates **at least 5** or more of the “Honors English Student” qualities below.

College Prep English Student:	Honors English Student:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is strong academically in English. <input type="checkbox"/> Is hard-working and self-motivated. <input type="checkbox"/> Learns best with thorough instruction and practice of new concepts. <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciates challenges, but also benefits from assistance and practice with complex, critical-thinking and non-routine strategies. <input type="checkbox"/> Thrives with structured guidance when learning applying, and extending new concepts. <input type="checkbox"/> Actively participates in the learning process. <input type="checkbox"/> Independently reads various genres. <p>Disclaimer: If your child does not exhibit many of the qualities above, don't worry. The goal of the College Prep English class is to get all students to these levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> English is one of his/her gifts or passions. <input type="checkbox"/> Has an exceptional work ethic, is a self starter, highly self-motivated, and works well independently. <input type="checkbox"/> Masters concepts quickly without the need for much repetition; requires faster-paced, rigorous curriculum. <input type="checkbox"/> Values and is not discouraged by the challenges of complex, critical-thinking opportunities; can achieve this with minimal assistance and often takes ideas to a higher level. <input type="checkbox"/> Seeks out and actively contributes to classroom discussions <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys reading higher level, complex texts in a variety of genres. <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys the writing process and understands the need for multiple revisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Is inquiry-driven, which is demonstrated by thinking critically about world issues related to the assigned reading and writings (goes beyond surface meanings, makes connections and inferences) <input type="checkbox"/> Manages time well (able to juggle school work, family obligations, and extra-curricular activities). <input type="checkbox"/> Organized (students will typically work on multiple assignments over several days, and will need to keep track of different due dates).

Frequently Asked Questions

1. My student is struggling quite a bit with the Honors 7 assignments and exams. She has always been an A student, and she is seeing grades she has never seen before. Is this the right class for her?

It is very common for the transition from 6th grade to Honors English to be difficult. Often, students have been able to get A's without pushing themselves and/or without studying in elementary school. Our Honors curriculum has been designed to be challenge Honors students, so it moves faster and goes deeper than what most students experience in elementary school when they are in a multi-level class. Many of the students are used to being big fish in a small pond, and now they're in a big lake with a lot of other big fish, some who have more knowledge about certain concepts than they do, so it can be intimidating. In this course, the majority of the assignments are going to require students to not just show they know information but to take that information and apply it in a new situation, or to make a statement about a character or a theme and then support it with evidence. Also, they will need to truly study for quizzes and tests. After we read a story, the quizzes won't just test basic reading comprehension, but they will have multi-level questions where they will have to apply concepts we're learning to an aspect of the story. For example, a question may ask how a story would be changed if it were written in a different point of view. Some struggle is normal as students adjust to the rigor, but if your student is overwhelmed and seems unable to adapt to the more demanding curriculum, it may not be an appropriate placement.

2. My student is struggling in Honors English, but I don't want to pull him out because then he won't be ready for Honors in high school. What should we do?

Even if a student fits the Honors profile, sometimes he may not be ready to handle Honors in seventh grade. The transition to middle school alone can be stressful and overwhelming, and the well being of the child is always paramount. Sometimes, it just takes an extra year or two for a student to gain some maturity, gain organization skills, or develop his critical thinking skills to the level that will make Honors manageable for him. Often, once a student adjusts to middle school, they are ready to take on the additional challenge of Honors English.

3. What if I think my child can do well in an honors course, but he doesn't want to take it?

We get this question a lot. A general rule of thumb is that if the parent wants it more than the child, usually, the child ends up miserable, and nobody wins. To do well in an honors course, the student must be passionate about English and demonstrate a desire to push him/herself in ways never before experienced. Putting a child in this accelerated course against his or her will is not advisable for seventh graders. The best advice we can give is to give your child time to adjust to middle school, and bring up the topic again as the student is about to enter 8th grade.

4. If we realize that my child is not in the right class, can we make a change?

Absolutely. While it's best to try to get students accurately placed as soon as possible, sometimes students just need a chance to see for themselves where they would best fit. Students are free to move up to Honors or from Honors to College Prep within the first 4 weeks of the school year. After that, students must wait until the end of first semester to move out of Honors. Due to pacing and foundational skills established in the first semester, we do not make moves from College Prep to Honors at the semester. It is simply not in the best interest of the student as there is a final and culminating portfolio due at the end of the year.

English 7H/Period 6

January 6, 2017

Competition, the Motivation for Advancement

It is the Cold War in 1957. The Russians and Americans are having a Space Race. They are neck and neck trying to get the first person into space. Time is ticking. Each country is slowly advancing. Motivated by each other, competing to be the best. The Russians win the Space Race, but this doesn't stop the Americans. They work even harder and land the first man on the moon. By competing with each other, both countries are able to make scientific achievements and develop all sorts of new technology. People often argue about competition, and if it will bring down society or advance it greatly. Some say it reduces people's self-esteem when they don't win, others say it motivates people to try harder in everyday life. In the science fiction short story "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Hazel and George live in a utopian society where everyone is made to be physically and mentally equal through special handicaps enforced by the government. The equality of everybody removes all competition, and society remains stagnant. In the article "Competition Makes a Comeback" by June Kronholz, the author explores the positive and negative effects of competition on kids who participate in various academic bowls and bees. Competition is necessary for high achievement because it motivates people to do better in everyday life leading to advancement in society.

Because competition motivates people to do better, competition is essential for advancement in society. In "Harrison Bergeron," Hazel tells George that he has no competition and that he should remove some of his handicaps to rest. George replies that it won't work: "Then other people would get away with it-and pretty soon we would be right back in the Dark

Ages again, with everybody competing against everyone else.” (Vonnegut 2). This quote is ironic because their society is actually in a Dark Age. The lack of competition creates no advancement at all. When everybody is forced to be equal, nobody wants to compete with each other and try to do better than somebody else. They all won't work hard because they know they are equal, they all get paid the same, have the same living conditions, and the same everything, there is no need to work hard. Therefore, nobody will try to invent anything new that can help advance their society; there is no reason to advance. There is nothing motivating people to work harder than somebody else. With no competition, there is no advancement in society. People need to compete with each other in order to improve things. Furthermore this strains the importance of having competition for a society to achieve great advancements. Companies compete with each other to release the best and newest product. Apple and Microsoft are always launching new technologies, competing to produce the best computer and phone. This rivalry motivates both companies to innovate, making advancements in society through competition. Another aspect of competition is revealed in “Competition Makes a Comeback,” an article by June Kronholz which view competition through kids participating in various academic bees and bowls. The article states that Americans thrive on competition: “It's why our phones are better, our farms are more productive, our athletes run faster...” (Kronholz 2). Competition pushes people to make new discoveries, and develop better inventions, which greatly advance society. New technologies make life easier by taking the manual burden from workers, and automating those tasks in a tiny computer chip or a machine that produces 100s to 1000s of items quicker. Everyone always wants to be number one, so everybody competes to be the best. The competition motivates everyone to constantly think of new ideas and ways to advance society.

Whether it's just a faster way to grow crops, or a new phone, these ideas are beneficial. A small advancement in agriculture and technology can lead to worldwide changes. Athletes compete with each other to get first place, win a World Series, or win a Super Bowl. They want to win no matter what and work super hard to climb to the top. Similarly inventors and scientists compete to make the best invention or be the first discover a new cure. The competition makes them work harder and faster. All these new inventions and medicines advance our society. Competition is essential for great advancement in society.

Some people will argue that competition is bad because it can crush a child's dreams and impairs self-esteem. When kids lose, they may give up and quit, or cry. However, losing will only motivate people to work harder and want to win even more. So next time they will study and work harder so they can do better than they did the last time. In "Competition Makes a Comeback," by Jane Kronholz, they interview Caitlin Snaring and she said: "Losing made me want to win even more...got me fired up to win the 2007 contest" (Kronholz 3). When Caitlin lost, she didn't give up. She used her defeat as motivation to push herself to work harder. To win the 2007 contest. Instead of diminishing her self-esteem, she was motivated to work harder. Similarly, Michael Jordan didn't make his high school basketball team, but that didn't stop him from playing. He worked, and worked, and worked. He never gave up and competed with every other player to make the team. Now he is one of the best to ever play the game. If people don't succeed, they can't just give up. They need to persevere until they accomplish their goal. When people compete against each other, they do better. They never give up, creating brilliant new inventions everyday, that advance society. Competition is the driving force that motivates people to make advances in society great.

Just as in the 1957 Space Race , when Americans and Russians competed with each other to launch the first person into space. Americans lives still depend on competition. The Russians may have done it first, but it didn't stop the Americans from giving up. Later in 1969, the Americans landed the first man on the moon. The competition between these two countries motivates them to try harder, and by doing so, they both bring out the best in themselves and are able to achieve great technological advances. Similarly, companies compete with rival companies to release the newest product. Companies are motivated to think up of new inventions, and discover cures for a disease. They do all of this through competition with one another. Competition is an essential part for advancement in society. Without it, our society would fall behind and be lost in time.