



SMYRNA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Patrik D. Williams, Superintendent

February 10, 2022

Dear Families:

Smyrna High School is one of many high schools in our state to offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses with the curricular content established by the College Board. These AP courses, while offered in public and private high schools, are designed to immerse enrollees in college-level content for college-level credit, as noted on the respective syllabi provided to each student. The College Board's senior English class, for example, is *AP Literature and Composition*, and the course includes Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Song of Solomon*, among many other literary works that address academic, cultural, racial, and generational diversity. Consequently, the following "College Board Disclaimer" appears on the syllabus students receive in August of each academic year, along with the caveat that parents/guardians are invited to review the content with their students, acknowledge doing so and engage the teacher in any thoughtful discussion of questions or concerns:

"College Board Disclaimer: In an ongoing effort to recognize the widening cultural horizons of literary works written in English, the AP English Literature Development Committee will consider and include diverse authors in the representative reading lists. Issues that might, from a specific cultural viewpoint, be considered controversial, including references to ethnicities, nationalities, religions, races, dialects, gender or class, are often represented artistically in works of literature. The Development Committee is committed to careful review of such potentially controversial material. Still, recognizing the universal value of literary art that probes difficult and harsh life experiences and so deepens understanding, the committee emphasizes that fair representation of issues and peoples may occasionally include controversial material. Since AP students have chosen a program that directly involves them in college-level work, the AP English Literature and Composition Exam depends on a level of maturity consistent with the age of 12th-grade students who have engaged in thoughtful analysis of literary texts. The best response to a controversial detail or idea in a literary work might well be a question about the larger meaning, purpose or overall effect of the detail or idea in context. AP students should have the maturity, the skill and the will to seek the larger meaning through thoughtful research. Such thoughtfulness is both fair and owed to the art and to the author.

[Teacher Invitation to Parents]: After reviewing the syllabus for AP English Literature and Composition, please complete the following acknowledgement via Google Form. Feel free to include any questions or concerns that you may have. I will be happy to discuss the course with you!"

--Excerpted from the *Smyrna High School Syllabus for AP English Literature and Composition*.

The Smyrna School District does not discriminate in employment, educational programs, services or activities based on race, color, marital status, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or any other protected category or status in accordance with state and federal laws. Inquiries should be directed to the District Superintendent.



The College Board annually determines all of the material on the AP exam, and it is the College Board, alone, who lists Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* as a literary work students must be prepared to analyze. Each corresponding AP course must be directly aligned to the AP exam to best support our students in order to help each individual score high enough to merit college credit. In fact, even though the literary content of the exam changes yearly, *Song of Solomon*, along with other works that contain college-level content, has appeared regularly in the AP exam rotation over time in both the multiple choice and the free response sections. Ultimately, successfully completing *any* Advanced Placement course enhances a student's chances of being accepted into a college of his/her choice with credits already earned, potentially saving our families thousands of dollars in tuition.

All of our AP courses offered at Smyrna High School are strictly voluntary, and students who sign up for them are introduced to postsecondary curricular content established by the College Board, as noted on the course syllabus. Parents make the decision for their own students whether or not to enroll in the study of mature, college content, and we are happy to accommodate their wishes. In short, there is no district requirement to take this particular course or any other AP course offered at Smyrna High School. Should any parent of a student enrolled in this particular course wish for his/her student to read an alternate work in lieu of *Song of Solomon*, all that is required is a simple request of the teacher to offer a substitution that remains consistent with the College Board's curriculum.

Finally, any and all questions about the specific content of any Advanced Placement exam and corresponding aligned courses, including *AP Literature and Composition*, should be directed *exclusively* to the College Board.

Sincerely,

Patrik Williams
Superintendent