

Dear Parents and Guardians,

A Very Large Expanse of Sea by Tahereh Mafi is the required summer reading book for in-coming 8th graders. This novel contains language and subject matter that may be considered mature.

When we at Winthrop Middle School select a novel for summer reading, we first make sure that it is accessible to as many students as possible, meaning that we keep the reading level in mind. *A Very Large Expanse of Sea* has a rating from *Accelerated Reader* which indicates that the vocabulary level is at the lower middle school level, but the length of the novel provides an appropriate challenge for older middle school students.

We also look for novels that are current in Young Adult Fiction, and that will be thought-provoking. We look to use the shared reading experience to foster classroom discussions and reflections. All the novels that are required or directly taught, as well as our classroom library collections, are chosen in support of the Mission Statement of the Winthrop Public Schools that we . . .

“educate, develop, and support all students to reach their full potential and appreciate the diversity in our world as conscientious members of society”.

We feel that by providing exposure to many types and genres of literature we can help accomplish that goal. The spectrum of middle school summer reading incorporates a mix of protagonists who face challenges and discrimination due to a variety of circumstances: adoption, physical deformities, Tourette's Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, racial discrimination, gender identification issues, etc. A goal is to foster awareness, broaden perspective, and increase empathy.

When considering reading material, we strive to select high-quality, highly regarded titles. *A Very Large Expanse of Sea* is offered through Scholastic Books, which is the premier vetting and resource outlet for schools; it received 4.5 out of 5 stars from Goodreads; was a Longlist selection for the National Book Award in 2018 for Young People's Literature; and has been optioned to be made into a major motion picture.

As you can see, teachers consider many factors when selecting literature for our students. We sincerely hope this helps address any concerns parents and guardians may have.

For more information, please read this excerpt from “CommonSense Media”:

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

“Parents need to know that *A Very Large Expanse of Sea*, by Iranian American author [Tahereh Mafi](#) (*Whichwood*), is a fiery, relatable, quasi-autobiographical novel of being a post-9/11 Muslim high school sophomore. Main character Shirin wears a hijab, swears like a sailor, loves breakdancing -- and against all odds, falls in love with the most popular, good-looking basketball player in her sports-crazy school. His name is Ocean (hence the title), and he feels the same about her. There's quite a bit about the harmful effects of prejudice and stereotyping -- and how to overcome your own bias and see things as someone else does, which forms a positive contrast to the barrage of hateful or clueless behavior from many teens and adults. There's lots about the experience of growing up as the child of [refugee immigrants](#) and the struggle to be and be seen as yourself without all the baggage others put on you. There is strong language, mature situations, and banter. Shirin and other Muslim kids suffer constant prejudice, bigotry, and threats of violence. Bullies attack her in freshman year, knock her down, and try to rip the hijab from her head.”

As you can see, this is a rich and complex text which will hopefully lead to robust and meaningful classroom discussions.

Sincerely,

WMS English Department