Dear College Families,

I would like to introduce you to our Stage 4 Year 8 English course for 2017. It is our hope that you will partner with us as we encourage our students to delight in, critique, reflect on, and compare a wide range of imaginative, factual and critical texts from various cultures and perspectives.

As for all other courses our students study at the College, in English all topics and texts are approached from a Christian perspective. We endeavour to instill in them a Biblical worldview and to equip our students to interact thoughtfully and competently with the world in which they live. We organise our English units around themes with which we feel students will easily engage and that will be beneficial to them as they encounter relevant real-world issues. This may entail, for some of them, dealing with challenging ideas and concepts, however these will be approached under the oversight of our teachers who will engage students in thoughtful, mature and respectful discussions.

As mandated by the BOSTES Year 7-10 English syllabus, our programs include both fiction and non-fiction texts and explore various textual forms: poetry, novels, drama and film. Students engage with both the ‘big ideas’ of the texts and their details; analysing language, meaning, perspectives, and their own worldview.

In 2017 we are continuing to work closely with students to clearly embed their skills and knowledge of grammar, punctuation, spelling, reading comprehension and writing for a wide range of audiences, contexts and purposes. We encourage students to engage regularly with Wordflyers, our online literacy program, to build skills essential for excellent writing and future NAPLAN success.

In Term One, students will be immersed in fantasy fiction as we study Tolkien’s classic The Hobbit. Students will experiment with re-writing the text to create their own playscript, some of which may be performed at the Stage 4 Performance Night later in the year. Students will build on their knowledge of the Fantasy genre, as explored in Year 7, and deepen their understanding of the craft of writing to build an entire ‘world’ that functions wholly within a fictional context. Using figurative language in a powerful, meaningful way will be developed along with interesting characters and plot twists to understand the character arc and archetypal elements of the hero’s journey.

Students will be introduced to Elizabethan theatre in Term Two as they come to know and understand the life and works of William Shakespeare. Specifically, students will be guided through a class reading of Twelfth Night along with the modern film appropriation, She’s a Man. Through an exploration of sonnets, students will develop their knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare’s language patterns and vocabulary so that they may appreciate the relevance of the human experiences explored in his writing that continue to resonate with modern readers/audiences.

Term Three will see classes delve into visual literacy in our unit ‘Deciphering the Truth’ and examine the power of the many realms of media – print, electronic and social media. The manipulation of images and the speed at which information travels in our media savvy world shifts and distorts fact to fiction. We must consider Romans 12:2: “Do not conform to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” From this passage we understand that as Christian parents and educators, we are to help our young people to engage critically with the world, but to be thoroughly distinctive from it. Students will examine the impact of the media to educate the masses and grow our awareness of environmental issues. We will explore a range of non-fiction texts drawn from print and electronic media examining contemporary concerns, both domestic and international.
Assessment tasks will require students to compose and perform an original playscript based on a scene from their fantasy text, submit an extended response to Shakespeare and analyse print and film advertisements. This builds on the work completed in Term 4 2016, where students responded to unseen and unheard materials in a listening/comprehension reflection task. These assessments are designed to provide students with an opportunity to formally demonstrate their skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing, which are mandated in our syllabus.

In addition, of course, we are very keen for all our Stage 4 students to participate throughout the year in the Premier’s Reading Challenge (PRC). Our LRC is well-stocked with appropriate texts for this and English teachers will aid students in the selection of texts. Students will be issued with their PRC Logon and password early in Term 1 so that they can access the booklists and manage their progress. Students will be required to complete a manual log and submit this to staff for verification in Term 3. Parents are strongly encouraged to engage in the process of selecting novels with their children to partner in the wide reading of culturally enriching, diverse texts. Discussions between parents and their children about the value of reading for pleasure is one of the strongest predictors of student success in English, which transcends all other subjects through high levels of literacy.

If you have any questions or concerns about the Stage 4 English course, please feel free to contact me.

Yours in Christ,

Linda Hogan
Head of Faculty - English