

Mental Health Literacy in 8th Grade, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we embark on our final unit of the school year, we want to reach out to you about exciting new content that we are piloting this spring. Due to the generosity of the Foundation for Belmont Education, we were able to purchase sets of 6 different middle school novels that all have characters who struggle with a mental health issue. We have been working with a variety of professionals in the mental health field, including a school psychology professor from Lesley University, Jason Frydman, our 8th grade school counselor Joe Quinn, and our Upper School social worker Ashley Peterson, to craft this unit with the intention of destigmatizing issues of mental health and helping students to make connections between the experience of some of the characters and their own or those of their peers. While Mr. Quinn will be delivering some lessons to students and we will provide some general background information about various mental health challenges, we will also be studying character development in the texts as well as the impact of text structures with each of the books. We've also been consulting with an English education professor from Lesley University, Brooke Eisenbach, who is helping us to craft the unit from a literary perspective.

We chose the books with attention to the author's relationship with mental health issues; four of the texts are #ownvoices books where the author is writing from the perspective of having experienced the mental health challenge themselves. The final two are written from authors who have had a family member struggling with mental health conditions.

Here are the book choices for this unit, along with the mental health conditions and text structures we'll be investigating:

Guts by Raina Telgmeier (anxiety, graphic novel)
OCDaniel by Wesley King (OCD, hero's journey)
Good Enough by Jen Petro-Roy (eating disorders, novel in journal format)
Forget Me Not by Ellie Terry (anxiety, characteristics of OCD, novel in verse)
The Year We Fell From Space by Amy Sarig King (depression in a parent, hero's journey)
What About Will by Ellen Hopkins (substance abuse disorder in a sibling, novel in verse)

We are looking forward to providing students with the important opportunity to discuss mental health and build literacy skills as we finish up the school year!

Kind regards,
8th grade English Teachers
Michelle Connors, Caitlin Corrieri, and Joe Pisco