

# *Ms. Harrison's Classroom Constitution<sup>i</sup>*

## *An Introduction to our Constitution:*

This constitution was designed to address issues of illiteracy, aliteracy (also known as: students who are able to read, but choose not to), and types of reading in the classroom. So often we hear that students “hate” reading; don’t have a favorite book; don’t read for pleasure outside of class, and find no pleasure when reading in class- these things have to change. Reading has the ability to provide students with imagination, information, a new way to view the world, and it is our responsibility to make these ideals cohesive in our classroom.

## *Preamble:*

We the people of this English classroom of America, in order to develop a passionate love of reading, establish a new mindset and insure adaptability, provide for a wide array of interests, and secure the blessings of reading beyond standardized testing- to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the classroom of Ms. Harrison.

## *Article I: The Legislative Branch- Our Students*

**Section 1: The Legislature-** All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a body of Students of this Classroom, which shall consist of every student’s voice.

**Section 2: Student Needs-** The Student Power shall be vested in the body of Students to secure their need of authentic reading materials in the Classroom<sup>ii</sup>. Such materials should include (but will not be limited to) “newspapers, magazines, blogs and websites” (Gallagher 29), and any other materials that are deemed relevant to student life (that may be approved by Teacher and District for Classroom use).

**Section 3: The Rights of the Students-** As the Legislative Powers, Students have the ability, (nay, the obligation) to question the Teacher’s motives in reading specific texts in class. Within questioning, Students will work closely with the teacher to determine the meaning and authenticity of said text. If under further scrutiny the Powers determine that their Rights are being violated, the Students shall not be inhibited to approach the Teacher with their concerns.

## *Article II: The Executive Branch- Our Teacher*

**Section 1: The Teacher-** The executive Power shall be vested in a Teacher of the Classroom. She shall hold her Office during the term of the school-year, and, together with the Students placed for the same term, govern said Classroom.

**Section 2: The English Department-** The Powers of the Teacher of the Classroom will be part of a larger English Department. In being part of a larger English Department, the Teacher will be required to coordinate topics and materials with other Classrooms. This requirement may at times leave decisions out of the hands of both the Teacher and Students.<sup>iii</sup>

**Section 3: Limits on the Executive Power-** If the Teacher finds herself in violation of our amendments, she must undergo an in-depth evaluation of her curriculum.<sup>iv</sup> If she finds that the curriculum is maladjusted to her current Students' needs, she is under obligation to reform said lessons.

### ***Article III: The Judicial Branch- Our School District, Our Administrators, and Our Parents***

**Section 1: The Judicial Powers-** The judicial Power of the Classrooms of America shall be vested in our school District, and in certain cases, the Administrators of our building. The Judges, both of the District and Administration, shall hold their determining Power over the acceptability of novels in said Classroom.

**Section 2: Trial by Jury, School's Jurisdiction, Jury Trials-** As the Powers of judicial review on novels in the classroom, Teachers and Students have the right to form evidence supporting novels they wish to have added in their lessons; evidence must be thoroughly researched, and support a substantial argument for teaching said novel.

**Section 3: Standardized Testing-** At times the District and school Administration will be required by the State to administer standardized testing based on reading. However, while working with the testing, the Teacher and Students will not allow standardized testing to become the core foundation of the Classroom's goals.<sup>v</sup>

**Section 4: The Power of the House of Representatives-** The Powers of the House will include the parents and guardians of the Students in the classroom. These Parental Powers have the right to question and work with the teacher to bring about the most effective and meaningful education of their children.

# *Our Classroom Bill of Rights<sup>vi</sup>*

## **First Amendment: The Freedom of Speech**

The Teacher shall make no law respecting the enforcement of “liking” novels, or prohibiting the right of the Students to peacefully protest in the continuation of unlikable novels.<sup>vii</sup>

## **Second Amendment: Protection From “Readicide”<sup>viii</sup>**

The Teacher shall make every effort to introduce reading into the classroom as a valuable classroom asset, and Students shall make every effort to view reading in the classroom in a new light.

## **Third Amendment: Prohibition of “I can’t”**

The Students shall make no excuses of “I can’t” in their abilities to read in the classroom. This being stated, the Teacher shall do everything in his or her power to help their Students’ reading levels advance, but shall also work closely with their Students to choose materials that are appropriate for their level (no unreasonable materials shall be given to students).<sup>ix</sup>

## **Fourth Amendment: Protection From Unreasonable Testing and Assessment**

The right of the Students to secure understanding of their reading, papers, and quizzes shall not be violated, and no meaningless pop-quizzes shall be issued. But upon probable cause, supported by the need to push thinking to its utmost capabilities, authentic assessments may be issued.<sup>x</sup>

## **Fifth Amendment: Prohibition of Cruel and Unusual Punishment**

Cruel and unusual punishment of drawing out a novel that the class has deemed as inferior cannot be inflicted on the Students. If suspected, it will result in a diplomatic, necessary discussion; Students’ rights to choose materials will be weighed with the Teacher’s desires to teach said novel.<sup>xi</sup>

## **Sixth Amendment: Protection From “I don’t have a favorite book”<sup>xii</sup>**

No person shall part from this classroom at the end of term without a favorite book. Upon entering the Classroom, Students will agree to work cooperatively with the Teacher to develop literary interests, and the Teacher will aid in the process of finding said novel.

## **Seventh Amendment: Powers of the Students // Protection of Rights (not otherwise enumerated in the Constitution and Bill of Rights)**

Upon completion of reading this document, as well as participation in the Classroom, Students will be able to submit further amendments to our Classroom Constitution; the Teacher and Students will conference about said amendment, and a classroom vote will be taken. If the majority of the Classroom is able to come to a consensus, and the amendment is in congruence with the District law, said amendment will be added to our Constitution.

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<sup>i</sup> Modeled off of the Constitution of the United States (adaptations of Article titles have been made to better fit a classroom setting).

<sup>ii</sup> Gallagher, Kelly. *Readicide How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse, 2009

“Three factors that serve as major contributors to Readicide: 1. There is a dearth of interesting reading materials in our schools. 2. Many schools have removed novels and other longer challenging works to provide teachers and students with more test preparation time.” (29)

<sup>iii</sup> Classroom Observation: From discussing with my mentor teacher, she has mentioned that one of the biggest burdens in teaching a novel is that you must use the materials provided by the English Department at your school. She also mentioned that coordinating her lessons with others in her department is often difficult and disjointed.

<sup>iv</sup> Classroom Observation: In my placement I have seen how my mentor teacher has used the same curriculum for many years, without making adaptations to the differentiation of student interests/needs over time. These units are often detached from the students’ lives, and do not engage them during class.

<sup>v</sup> Gallagher, Kelly. *Readicide How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse, 2009

“A curriculum steeped in multiple-choice test preparation drives shallow teaching learning” (8)

<sup>vi</sup> Modeled off of the Bill of Rights for the United State (adaptations of Amendment titles have been made to better fit a classroom setting).

<sup>vii</sup> ENG318 evidence: when we read for pleasure, we do not often force ourselves to finish a book that we absolutely hate, so we should not make a practice out of forcing students to read books in school that they hate.

<sup>viii</sup> Gallagher, Kelly. *Readicide How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse, 2009

“Readicide: noun, the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (2)

<sup>ix</sup> Gallagher, Kelly. *Readicide How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse, 2009

“The National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that secondary school students are reading significantly below expected levels.” (2)

“The 2005 ACT College Readiness Benchmark for Reading found that only about half the students tested were ready for college-level reading...” (3)

<sup>x</sup> Classroom observation: The only methods of interacting with the novels used in my placement are worksheets and pop quizzes. My mentor teacher claims that she uses the quizzes to make the students pay attention (because she says otherwise, they wouldn’t). Her students, on the other hand, say that the pop quizzes are the worst part of reading the novels, because they are too hard and don’t help them understand the story.

<sup>xi</sup> Classroom observation: After reading two novels with my students in placement, and surveying several groups on why they were unhappy with how the novels were progressing, many students claimed that the teacher used too much in-class time to read and talk about the novel- many claimed that her attention to detail was “overkill”, and caused them to dislike the novels.

<sup>xii</sup> Classroom Observation: When working with a group of two male students on the classroom novel, I was able to ask the students what type of literature they typically enjoy reading. Both of these students indicated that they in fact do not have a favorite type of novel, nor a favorite book. They claim that the only reading they do is in-school, and never for themselves.