

Chip Barham

Mr. Barham

Adv. Honors English I

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Introductory Letter

Dear Class of 2023,

I like to begin each year getting to know the people I'll be spending so much time with. After all, you will be in here with me for about forty-five minutes a day for 180 days over the next ten months. That's about 135 hours that you will spend in this room, and it doesn't count the hours you will spend on your own completing assignments that I require of you (or the 135 hours you'll spend in each of your other six classes). I'm not telling you this to cast a pall on the year before it even starts; I'm trying to let you know that I understand the time and work this school and this class require of you. It's significant. This year will require a good deal of challenging work from all of us, and it's best to dig into difficult work with people you know and trust, so it's important to start building that trust from the beginning.

As a basic introduction to me, you should know that I have been teaching high school for twenty-three years, that I have a wonderful wife and the five most perfect children anyone could ask for, and that I'm a typical English teacher in that I geek out on anything literary. One of my favorite pastimes is to take my kids to the bookstore, get a cup of coffee at the café, and sit and read for at least a couple of hours. This activity involves two of my favorite things: books and coffee. Another part of our family culture is sarcasm. We love to laugh, and sarcasm tends to be our preferred style of humor. You'll see this first-hand from me on occasion in class, along with some of my other personality quirks, such as a penchant for producing awkward silences, bad jokes, and an uncanny tendency to trail off in the middle of sentences. I know: not an ideal trait for an English teacher, but hey, I'm human, too.

Another part of getting to know me involves learning my background. I grew up in Hermitage, a suburb of Nashville, and I graduated from McGavock High School with a strong background in math and science. In contrast with most other English teachers I know, I don't have an aversion to the sciences. In fact, I spent two years studying engineering in college before changing my major to English. This radical

shift in my academic pursuit really reflected a shift in my belief system. My whole reason for going into engineering in the first place was to make a lot of money. Once I discovered how miserable I could be just pursuing financial gain without a passion for my career, I switched to studying English, which had become a personal passion in my spare time, and I decided to become a teacher so that I could actively work to make this world a better place.

So, I am your teacher now after a couple of decades of teaching because of a change in what I believe, which introduces the most important part of who I am: my beliefs. Our beliefs are at the root of what we do and the ways we behave. They're central to who we are, so they are an important part of our education and our relationship with others, and so it is essential that in this class we establish a safe place for you to discuss your beliefs openly. As for me, the most important thing to know about my beliefs is that they are rooted in my faith in Jesus Christ and in my love for my family and my church. When we talk about themes in literature and about communicating our thoughts, it's essential that we know where we ourselves are coming from—that we know what we believe. That is at the heart of what true education is: learning who we are. So, I encourage you to boldly state what you believe or don't believe, but I also encourage you to be ready and able to discuss your ideas with people who believe differently. It's this ability to understand and discuss ideas despite our differences that creates the strong fabric of a learning community, which is what we will work to be this year. In a quote I just came across this summer, Robert Frost encapsulates what I'm talking about: "Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." This is our goal.

Those are the essentials you need to know about me as we begin to learn about each other. What I hope you can see most from this letter is that I'm excited to meet you and to get to know you more as we work hard together to learn this year. In fact, you're first assignment will be to write a letter back to me, letting me know more about you. Welcome to the class. I'm looking forward to a great year with you!

Sincerely,

Mr. Barham