

A Letter to Students

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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Required	Student-Created
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Dear eighth graders,

As a teacher, it can sometimes be hard to remain optimistic. Every year there are those students who try one's patience, who test one's resolve, who feel they are incapable of doing anything good and seem determined to bring everyone down with them. And then there are just the immature attention-seekers who do anything they can to be the center of attention. Within the first class period or two, I can usually tell who all these folks are, and the rest of the year becomes a battle with their stubbornness as I try to help them see that their behaviors and choices are not only not helping them but in fact **detrimental**. Some never see the light, at least during this school year, and that's why it can be difficult to fight the pessimism: those students left just as they came in, and I wonder if I helped them at all.

This year is one of the few in recent memory that is **devoid** of any such students. Sure, some of you tried my patience at times. Some of you sought attention in inappropriate ways. Yet all of you—each and every student—showed growth and maturity this year, and it has been a true privilege to work with you this year. I can honestly say this has been one of the best years I've experienced in my nearly-twenty years of teaching. I've seen growth in reading skills, gains in emotional maturity, a surge of confidence in **cognitive** ability, and most importantly, an increase in maturity in so many of you that it gives me real hope for the future.

Many of you developed new reading and thinking skills that help you approach problematic texts in new ways. Instead of throwing up your hands and saying, "I don't get it," you dig in and figure out some meaning, understanding that you don't have to comprehend everything perfectly in order to understand the text as a whole. That kind of persistence will serve you well in the future, and I am very pleased to see that so many of you developed that newly-found tenacity.

Several of you noticeably grew emotionally over the course of the year. You learned to keep your anger in check, to keep your frustrations from determining your path, and to see yourself as in control of your own life. This is one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching eighth grade: kids genuinely mature in a very clear way over the course of the year, but some of you seemed to grow emotionally two or three years. **Belligerence** gave way to cooperation; **fatalism** gave way to self-confidence; **apathy** gave way to self-concern. Instead of worrying how you'll make it emotionally in high school, I find myself calmly confident about how you'll handle the challenges of high school.

Many of you became observably more confident in your cognitive

abilities. You came into the class thinking that perhaps you couldn't do the work, that perhaps things might be a bit more challenging than you'd expected, or that it would be just the same struggle as it always is. Instead, you found that your success doesn't come just from your intelligence, which most of us underrate anyway. Most success comes from behaviors and decisions, and as your behaviors and decisions changed, so too your view of your own intelligence, and that **self-possession** produced still more confidence.

Finally, almost all of you grew more mature as the year progressed. You began handling challenges like an adult. You started accepting disappointments with calmness. You learned to set goals and priorities, understanding that achieving those aims often requires sacrifice.

To those of you who chose not to live up to your fullest potential I can only say that I hope at some point in the not-too-distant-future you make the changes necessary for your success. Hard work and focus are never wasted, and it is through challenging ourselves that we grow stronger. Fortunately, you're only a young teen: there's still plenty of time to grow into this adult thing.

To those of you who did your best in this and other classes, thank you. Your focus and hard work are rewards in and of themselves, and they bring rich **dividends**, but I'll willingly (and somewhat selfishly) admit that they make my job easier.

I have only one wish for you as this year closes out: I hope that you can look at your life at any moment and truthfully say to yourself about yourself, "I am doing the best with what I have where I am." If you can always say that about yourself, the brightest of futures awaits.

Thank you again for a wonderful year.

Best regards,

Questions

1. What is the overall thesis statement in this letter? (Circle it)
2. Are all the topics mentioned in the thesis statement covered in the letter? Connect the individual topics mentioned in the thesis statement to the various paragraphs in the letter.
3. Find two examples of parallel structure in this article. Underline them and label them in the margin. (English I Honors Students only)
4. Write a short letter to yourself about how you feel this year went and your hopes for next year. Don't turn it in; keep it and reread it before school starts next year.