

# ***A NOTE REGARDING THE LITERATURE USED IN THIS CLASS***

The literature we will study as a class has been selected for two basic reasons. The first one is to provide you with the means to understand many of the literary allusions that you will encounter in the honors program in subsequent years and to sharpen your ability to analyze literature. Some of the works which we will read together (various texts on Greek and other mythologies, including ancient literature such as *The Odyssey* and *Antigone*; the Bible) are included because so much of subsequent western literature is indebted to them in one way or another and because they provide good training grounds for literary analysis. Various short works from other cultures and time periods are included to create opportunities for comparative analysis. A poetry unit and study of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* serve as an introduction to the English language literary tradition and begin threads that will continue throughout the honors program.

The second reason for selecting this year's works is to enhance your cultural literacy, both for your own culture and for the cultures of others. After all, it is pretty difficult to understand your own cultural heritage if you don't appreciate the heritage of those cultures which contributed to it. It is even more difficult to understand the world in which you live if you don't appreciate both the cultural differences that exist and also the many common elements that unite people, however different their backgrounds may be.

You may notice that a number of the works that we study, especially during the second semester Bible unit, are religious literature. It goes without saying that these works are being studied as literature, not as religion. No effort is being made to promote any

particular religion or philosophy. (In fact, the works involved represent several religious traditions.) Nor is any effort being made to force a specific interpretation of a particular text upon you. I'll be mentioning several ways or looking at the works we study, and no doubt students will suggest other possibilities as well.

*"I consider myself a Hindu, Christian, Moslem, Jew, Buddhist, and Confucian."*

**Mohandas Gandhi**

*"If we cannot end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity."*

**John F. Kennedy**

Because of the importance of such literature to a variety of civilizations, both past and present (to say nothing of the amount of later literature that can't be fully understood without some knowledge or these earlier classics) these works can't be ignored in any reasonable foundation for the honors curriculum, but they can be studied in terms of how they developed and what they meant in the society in

which they originated without making any judgment about what they can or should mean to us. It is this approach that will be followed throughout the course.