

## **SOPHOMORE SUMMER LETTER**

Dear Sophomores,

This year you will be studying **Medieval Literature**. The Curriculum Committee has chosen an ambitious reading list that includes many of the greatest epics, poems, and plays our Western literary tradition has to offer. I am confident that this introduction to the classics will deepen your appreciation of literature and will help you to become better writers.

### **English Summer Reading**

To get a jump on the year, the Curriculum Committee has assigned *The Song of Roland*. It is the oldest extant French epic poem and it tells the story of the defeat of Charlemagne's rearguard in the year 778. I'm sure you'll enjoy this inspiring work, which has been translated into English by the great Dorothy Sayers. There are several editions of this book, so be sure you get one translated by Dorothy Sayers.

**A couple notes on the text of *Song of Roland*:** The word "paynims" means "pagans." The poet uses the term to refer to Muslims, whom he also calls "Saracens." Also, the original poet makes heavy use of assonance—a repetition of similar vowel sounds—to connect the final syllables of the lines in each laisse (stanza.) In order to translate this literary device into English, Sayers sometimes uses different forms of a proper name depending on what the assonance requires. So for example, Oliver is sometimes called "Othon" or "Olivére." Finally, the poem was originally written in Old French, which was an inflected language. This means that many proper names have an accusative form and a nominative form. So Charlemagne will sometimes be called "Charles" and sometimes "Carlou." Ganelon is also called "Guènes" and Marsile is also called "Marsilion." While these things may at first seem odd to a modern, English reader, now that you've been warned, I hope you won't find them too difficult to navigate. A more complete explanation of the original language and Sayers' translation choices can be found in her Introduction, which I recommend you read.

### **History Summer Reading**

For your Medieval History class, the curriculum committee has assigned *Joan of Arc* by Mark Twain. This is the story of one of the Church's best-known saints, told in the words of one of America's greatest writers. Students may purchase any edition of this book or listen to it as a book on tape. Students must have completed both *The Song of Roland*, and *Joan of Arc* by the first day of class and should be prepared to discuss these works during the first couple weeks of the school year. There is no written assignment over the summer, so just read and enjoy!

### **Books for the Year**

Next year you will be reading several photocopied selections from larger works. The school has compiled a Medieval Lit Reader which will be distributed the first week of school. All other works of literature must be purchased by each individual student by the beginning of the school year. Many of these books are available at major book stores, but I suggest ordering them all online because it is usually cheaper. They can all be found at <http://www.amazon.com>. Used copies can be found on the Amazon website. Used books can take longer to ship to your house, so don't wait until a week before school starts to order! Students are required to use the particular editions listed below. For example, you must purchase the version of *Purgatory* that is translated by Dorothy Sayers and not another version.

Continued on Back

Students may not use abridged editions of any of these books.

*Song of Roland*  
Translated by Dorothy Sayers

Penguin Classics  
ISBN 0140440755

*Gunnar's Daughter* by Sigrid Undset  
Translated by Arthur Chater

Penguin Classics  
ISBN 014118020X

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*  
Translated by Tolkien

Mass Market Publisher  
ISBN 0345277600

*Purgatory* by Dante  
Translated by Dorothy Sayers

Penguin Classics  
ISBN 0140440461

*Richard III* by Shakespeare

Folger Shakespeare Library Edition  
ISBN 0743482840

I look forward to seeing familiar faces again in the fall. Enjoy your summer and be sure to read!

Mr. Peter Halpin  
High School Dean