

# Literature love

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**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Last summer, the summer before my junior year, the most important year in my high school education, I had to read *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote for my school's mandatory Summer Reading Policy. I did read a lot, just not the book we were supposed to read.

I read books I wanted to read. I also babysat my little sister, hung out with my best friend, and took trips to Pennsylvania, so I had many opportunities to read. At first, I was very excited about *In Cold Blood*, but once I started reading it, I became more and more disinterested and eventually I began to skim, passing over the story line. Reading this book was like pulling teeth, it was unbearable. My school's summer reading policy originally offered the choice to read one of five books.

Then after you read the book that was most appealing to you, you had to fill in a set of work sheets making you pull out elements of the story such as symbols, characters, settings and quotes. However, last summer the school changed the summer reading to one book, three quotes and a mindless question. Assigning one book may be easier for the teachers, but besides the fact that the reports are not used in class, the writing leaves a student without making his/her own creative decision. When students are given homework, it is usually to prepare them for an upcoming lesson, or to review a lesson that had already been taught. The case of the summer reading policy applies to neither of those. Most often students receive their summer work, and rush through it last minute knowing that it is not going to be marked as an actual grade, if it is even marked at all.

Of course, the concept of the summer reading policy is that reading is beneficial for a student, the way my school goes about it leaves students gaining nothing from the experience. The summer reading is not to be blamed; it is the mind behind the assignment. Although we are fortunate enough to be blessed with intelligent and passionate English teachers, they often take the summer reading policy for granted, not valuing its importance. If a teacher does not like the book assigned why would they want to dedicate a lesson to it or even consider a discussion based on the book? Teachers not using the summer reading, gives a student the idea that they do not care so why should the student? Students are expected to learn from teachers, but aren't we learning that literature isn't important from these examples? Francine Prose, author and teacher, writes that students are not learning the importance of reading from their teachers. It is, she says, a teacher's job to not only show students the importance of reading; but to make them fall in love with books.

Some teachers just are not doing their job. Summer reading should spark a love of literature in students, not drive them away. There is a book out there for everyone, but Jerold Jenkins reported that forty-two percent of college graduates never read another book after college, and one-third of high school graduates never read another book for the rest of their lives. Our society not only accepts these heartbreaking facts, but we continue to participate with them. With statistics like these, it is not difficult to see how the purpose of the summer reading is flawed. When we don't love literature our society suffers.

The fact that a child would rather sit and watch mindless television for hours than be engrossed in a book that can enhance his vocabulary as well as engross and educate him is appalling and cries for change. Of course, not everyone plans to grow up and become a writer, teach literature or even review it, but everyone needs to be able to comprehend or analyze things, which starts with literature. When a teacher creates a biased lesson or an un-interesting one the student, has not only been robbed of an education but has also been deprived of creating his own opinion. Assigned summer reading is important to keep a student's mind going during the months in which school is not in session, but when it is not taken seriously or the student's interests are not considered is their really a valid reason for a book to have been assigned? As a future journalist, I know the importance of a good story, but many other sixteen-year-olds lack that knowledge and it is up to the educational system as well as those who worry about future generations to help the cause. There is nothing wrong with summer reading, but my school's policy needs to change before it can help anyone.

Instead of giving every student in a grade the same book to read, the staff should select books that vary in genre to keep students interested. Not only does a school need to offer different books, but it should also use the summer reading in lessons so that students will learn from what they are doing. It takes more than a single assignment to get a student to fall in love with words, but there is a first step to everything.