

Why You need to be Literate!

We make a big deal about literacy at Northgate High School and about how important it is for you as pupils to have good literacy skills. But what do we mean when we say 'good literacy skills', and why do they matter so much?

Literacy encompasses the skills of reading, writing and spoken communication; being literate is not only important for you to succeed in your life at school, but also for you to reach your potential in the wider world when you leave education. You practise your literacy skills everyday: when you're writing your text messages; when you read the timetable to find out when your bus will be arriving; when you answer the phone at home and take a message for your mum or dad. These are all simple exercises that you won't even realise you're doing, but they are preparing you for the world outside the school gates.

But why do we have to learn these skills anyway?

The National Literacy Trust (NLT) is a charity who raises awareness about the importance of literacy, not just amongst children, but with parents, teachers and the government too. The research they carry out gives us some startling insights into the importance of being literate.

A report from 2009 called *Literacy Changes Lives*, writes: "Adults with low or very low literacy skills are more likely to be in low-paid jobs, or unemployed."

Another NLT publication, *Literacy: State of the Nation* states that: "one in six people in the UK struggle with literacy; a quarter of young people do not recognise a link between reading and success in later life."

These worrying figures show an issue that is important in our society, and one that needs to be tackled head-on.

But what does it mean for your own futures? If you can develop your literacy skills you could improve your chances of doing well in your exams, getting into the college of your choice, and ending up with a good job; all things that make literacy directly relevant to your life at the moment.

So what are we doing to help you at Northgate High School?

My job at Northgate High School is to support the work of the English Department and Mrs Galley, who is not only Head of English, but also the Literacy Co-ordinator for our school. All the teachers at our school work hard to make sure that your literacy skills are supported and developed across the

curriculum, even if it's in really simple ways like reminding you to use capital letters for the days of the week and to use a dictionary; sometimes the simplest things can make all the difference.

It's my job to help come up with plans and projects to embed the skills discussed in this article. We already do a lot to support literacy at Northgate High School: in the library we have the Reading & Writing Challenge and various book clubs; we have our school-wide Everyone Reads in Northgate (ERIN); and as part of your English lessons you now have fortnightly 'literacy lessons' which focus on your reading, writing and speaking & listening skills. (If you're very lucky, you may even have been taught by me in one of these sessions!) Your classrooms are full of bright and colourful wall displays that demonstrate key spellings and connectives for you to use, and in the English block we have our handy literacy displays which give you helpful reminders for paragraphs, punctuation and when to use those tricky capital letters.

But we can do so much more, especially if you and your parents are willing to participate.

I am currently creating a literacy section for our website. These pages will include lots of helpful resources and tips for you and your parents to use at home to stretch and challenge yourself. We are also planning a school Readathon, to raise money for charity, which will give you the chance to get friends and family to sponsor you in reading as many books as you can. Mrs Galley is also discussing the possibility of tutor time literacy sessions, when you would play games and complete challenges that are aimed at developing the literacy skills that are vital to your success inside and outside school.

If you, or your parents, have any ideas about what we could do to develop literacy at Northgate High School, or have any questions about literacy at Northgate High School please contact me, Mrs Chambers, at: KChambers@ngate6.org or Mrs Galley at: ZGalley@ngate6.org

Mrs Chambers