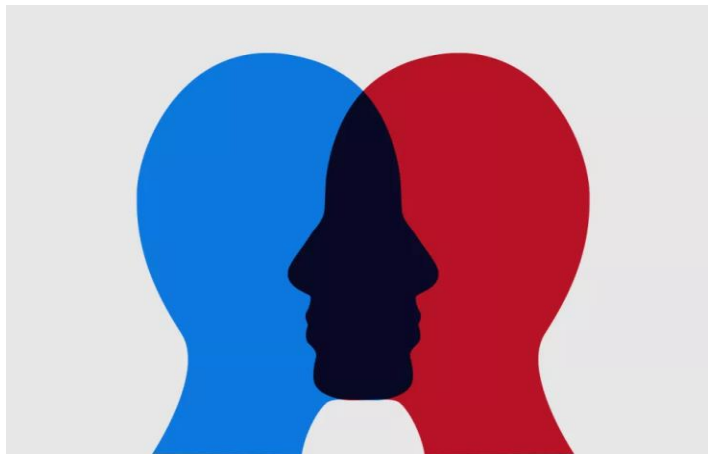


**“JANUARY,
The first month of the year,
A perfect time to start all over again,
Changing energies and deserting old moods,
New beginnings, new attitudes”**

—Charmaine J Forde

It's the time of year for **resolutions**, **GOALS**, and **to-do lists** galore. Perhaps it's the time to reflect on values, too - and evaluate the extent to which we empathize with others or understand and share another's feelings. As Atticus Finch famously said in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his [or her] point of view....Until you climb into his [or her] skin and walk around in it."

Reading literature encourages **empathy**, and the need to meaningfully understand other perspectives; this is also reflected in the [Common Core State Standards for reading literature](#). The "craft and structure" standards include this objective: "analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature." As a result, good readers work to deconstruct the perspectives and cultures of characters, and empathy becomes a tool to do so.



Northern Illinois Professor Tom McCann argues that empathy is not a "feeling" but rather a "practice" and a "process" in the article "The Practice of Empathy." A 2014 article from *Education Week* by Jeffrey Wilhelm and Michael Smith cites a study by David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, which states that "reading literary fiction" positively impacts "one's ability to understand others' mental states and deepens empathy."

The lines below from literature taught at each of the grade levels offers students the opportunity to practice their ability to see other perspectives and understand others' feelings. It mirrors the myriad texts offered in ninth through twelfth grade English classes that evoke empathy and allow students to develop this skill :

"I opened my mouth, almost said something. Almost. The rest of my life might have turned out differently if I had. But I didn't" from *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini taught in English 1 and English 1 Honors.

The youngest Mirabal sister, Maria Teresa, writes this in her diary in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*: **"The fear is the worse part. Every time I hear footsteps coming down the hall, or the clink of the key turning in the lock, I'm tempted to curl up in the corner like a hurt animal, whimpering, wanting to be safe. But I know if I do that, I'll be giving in to a low part of myself, and I'll feel even less human. And that is what they want to do, yes, that is what they want to do."** This novel is taught in English 2 and English 2 Enriched.



English 3 students read the play *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman about the 1998 murder of University of Wyoming student, Matthew Shepard, in Laramie, WY. Father Roger Schmidt is quoted saying, **"You think violence is what they did to Matthew—they did do violence to Matthew—but, you know, every time that you are called a fag, or you are called a...dyke...do you realize that is violence? That is the seed of violence. And I would resent it immensely if you use anything I said...to somehow cultivate that kind of violence...Just deal with what is true. You know what is true. You need to do your best to say it correct[ly]."**

Seniors enrolled in Contemporary Literature read *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas which includes this quote from the protagonist, **"To every kid in Georgetown and in all 'the Gardens' of the world: your voices matter, your dreams matter, your lives matter. Be roses that grow in the concrete."**

May the new year offer all kinds of growth and newness, as poet Naomi Shihab Nye writes in the poem "Burning the Old Year,"

**"So much of any year is flammable,
lists of vegetables, partial poems.
Orange swirling flame of days,
so little is a stone."**

However, most would agree that resolutions, particularly to be kind and empathic are exactly what individuals and society needs in January - and all year round.

Articles from division administrators are provided on a regular schedule in our Community eNewsletter to keep parents and community members informed. Questions on this article may be directed to Ms. Mary Howard, language arts division head, at mhoward@d94.org or by phone at (630) 876-6363.