Dear Students,

Welcome to the 8th grade! Can you believe it? It seems that summer break flew by so quickly. I hope that you had a fun, relaxing vacation, and that you’re ready to begin working now, your last year of middle school in preparation for high school.

I’d like to share a little with you about how and why I became an 8th grade English teacher. I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher. When I was just a toddler and for years after that, I would play school with my dolls and eventually, my Barbies. I would set up my classroom and teach them whatever I was currently learning in school or from my parents. I learned to read in first grade. I loved going to the public library and using my library card to check out a bag full of books that I would read often to my “students” at home. Reading was so amazing to me because I could vividly picture the story, and I was drawn into the book as if I were one of the characters. It seems like a cliché, but I truly found an escape through reading. I could go places I only dreamed about, and experience adventures that weren’t possible for me as a little girl and eventually young adult.

It was first my 8th grade language arts teacher and then my 11th grade American Literature teacher, who made me realize that I wanted to teach English. Through their amazing teaching, they helped me realize that I loved books. I loved words. I loved the way sentences created pictures in my mind. I loved putting my thoughts and ideas onto paper and expressing my feelings with written words. I wanted to share that love with others, and I wanted to do it in a way that made them love reading and writing just like my teachers had done for me.

I will confess, first of all, that I don’t write nearly as often as I’d like. I used to dream of being an author, but I know that to be a great writer, you have to write and write and write. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve found it extremely difficult to find time to write, so I’ve fallen behind on that dream. I will also confess that my reading has sadly decreased in the past two or three years. I used to read a book a week over the summer and other breaks and a book a month during the school year. Again, I’ve been struggling to find the time to read like I used to, but I have set a goal to begin reading more, beginning with a book a month during this school year. Do you have any recommendations for me?

Actually, I have several recommendations for you if you don’t know of any good books. Over the years, I have read dozens of young adult novels. I actually prefer them over adult literature most of the time. When I was in middle school, we didn’t have the amazing selection, genres and authors that you have today. You are extremely fortunate to have so many great books at your fingertips. If you don’t agree with me, and in fact, are starting to wonder if I’m a little crazy, I hope that I can change your mind (about both of those thoughts) by the end of the year. Some of my favorite teaching moments occur when students tell me at the end of 8th grade that this was the first year they finished a book on their own, or that they hated to read before this year. Reading is a lifelong skill and hobby that can be a part of your entire life if you embrace it, and part of my job is to help you work on that. I hope that we’re both successful with it! I’m truly excited to begin this year with you and hopefully help you create a love of the written word, both your own writing and other’s.

So now it’s your turn. How do you honestly feel about reading and writing? I really want to know. If you hate reading and/or writing, tell me. Of course, if you do, my plan is to change your mind by the end of May. On the other hand, if you’re a fellow book/word lover like me, I’d like to know that, too. In a one page letter, tell me your thoughts. Introduce yourself so I can get to know you a little bit, and then touch on a few of the following things:

1. What grade did you earn in LA last year?
2. What did you enjoy reading last year?
3. What was difficult for you to read last year?
4. Do you avoid reading? How do you get around it?
5. What part of writing do you enjoy most? Least?
6. What kind of student/person are you? Do you enjoy learning?

Your answers to these questions will help me determine where to begin to ensure that we have a fun, challenging class that we’ll both enjoy.

I’m looking forward to our year together!

Yours truly,

Mrs. Torrance