

June 2020

Dear Students and Parents,

For the last decade, English teachers at Notre Dame have used Renaissance Learning, a platform which gives us access to Star Reading Assessments (an important diagnostic tool), as well as Accelerated Reader, to help students grow as readers. The Accelerated Reader program was implemented to foster *independent* reading. Students could read titles of their choice, and collect AR points year-long through comprehension quizzes or other evidence of reading. Completion of the grade level target counted for 8% of their overall mark in English.

Even though the Notre Dame English Department remains fierce proponents of the literary word, we also recognize that many students do not go far enough with AR to address reading deficiencies. Current learners need more exposure to informational texts (essays, articles, reports, blogs, podcasts, and other multimedia on diverse topics), as well as regular opportunities to engage meaningfully with the ideas they encounter -- in order to build **essential literacy across disciplines**.

Our transition to remote, synchronous and asynchronous, learning in recent months, has further highlighted the importance of being agile and responsive to student needs, while maintaining a high standard of instruction.

None of us know exactly what school will look like in 2020/2021, but the English Department is taking some proactive measures to ensure that students continue making progress in core competencies, even in uncertain times:

1. We are suspending the AR program for the next academic year to place the emphasis on **reading as a necessary life skill**, rather than something one opts to do only if it's easy or enjoyable. Independent reading will be integrated into all English classes, and related skills will be assessed regularly through a variety of coursework. It's worth noting here that the province-wide Graduation Literacy Assessments in Grade 10 and 12 put equal weight on Comprehension and Communication.

2. We have acquired a **digital subscription to *The New York Times* for the whole school**. With an Academic Pass, all students (age 13 and over) can enjoy access to extensive NYTimes resources through the summer months. Like every publication, the *NYT* has its biases; it is merely one of many possible starting points. We encourage all students to explore other quality content available online. Reading up on what's happening in the world and following links to new topics of interest will help learners at all levels prepare themselves for further studies.

It is our sincerest hope that students will discover in words a never-ending challenge, but also beauty, joy, wonder, and their own power to effect a difference...

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Chan  
English Department Head

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## Instructions for Accessing the *New York Times*

Anyone (over the age of 13) with a valid [myndrs.com](https://myndrs.com) email address can grab an **Academic Pass** by following these steps:

- Visit [nytimes.com/passes](https://nytimes.com/passes). Create a free NYTimes.com account **using your school email address with the approved domain(s)** -- in our case: [@myndrs.com](mailto:@myndrs.com).
- **Check your email inbox for our confirmation message.** Click on the link in your confirmation message to validate your email address and claim your Pass. If the confirmation email didn't arrive, check your spam folder. If it isn't there, send an email to [edu@nytimes.com](mailto:edu@nytimes.com) from your school email address to request confirmation.
- **You have successfully claimed a Pass when you see the *Start Your Access* screen.** Now you can enjoy access to NYTimes.com, INYT.com and NYT mobile apps from any location, on or off campus, just by logging into your NYTimes.com account. You may download NYTimes mobile apps at [nytimes.com/mobile](https://nytimes.com/mobile).