

Hello Year 10 students, Parents and Carers,

Hope you are all making the most of this beautiful weather we are having! I have been extremely busy in the garden this week. I built a shed on Wednesday, which happened to take all day due to my partner not reading the instructions properly and we had to re-build it 5 times! 😂

I have heard from some of your subject teachers that you are working extremely hard. I know it may be difficult to motivate yourself to do work when you are at home but we need to do it, as it is extremely important we are not behind going into Y11. I will be sending out certificates via email to those students who have been recognised for their hard work.

Today's newsletter is English focused, enjoy doing your activities! Please email in to let us know what you have been up to, I would like to hear about what you have been doing, if you have any photos of the activities/tasks you have been doing send them in also. Stay in touch and most importantly stay safe. Miss Heaton Email Address: rebeccaheaton@birleysecondaryacademy.co.uk

Hello Y10 from the English department!

I hope you are all well, staying safe and keeping yourself busy and entertained during this isolation period. If you have exhausted the English resources on the website already, you'll be pleased to know that new work booklets with accompanying help mats will be uploaded onto the school website by the time you receive this newsletter! These booklets are focused on reading short extracts from great books and understanding their characters, as well as having a go at writing creatively yourself. These should definitely keep you busy!

Reading is a great activity to be doing during this period of isolation. Not only does it allow you to escape for a bit into a good story, it will also massively improve your vocabulary and writing skills when we all get back to normal English lessons in school.

Some people just don't know where to start when it comes to choosing a book or a story- let me help you! Included in this newsletter is a short story called '**Death by Scrabble**' that I'd like you all to read. It's a story we can all relate to in these times- a family cooped up inside playing a board game to pass the time. It's a comical, ironic story about frustration, losing, cheating (come on, who hasn't stolen the odd £100 from the bank while playing Monopoly?) and there's a good twist at the end too. Read it in the garden in the sunshine if you like with an ice-cream, that's what I did.

This may inspire you to read other stories a bit like this one. Why not try some of the books below to get you started? All of these are available online on the Kindle app for example, and the good news is, you can normally download the first chapter for free to see if you like it before you buy.

- 'Unwind' by Neal Shusterman - a book about a world where parents can send their naughty children to be 'unwound'
- 'Divergent' by Veronica Roth - a book about a divided society where young people are forced into defined groups based on their personalities.
- 'Paper Towns' by John Green - a book about a teenager forced out of his boring life into an adventure.
- 'The Princess Bride' by William Goldman - sounds babyish, but it isn't. A classic Shrek-style story of adventure, revenge, fighting, poison and true love.

Feel free to let your English teacher know what you're reading and your thoughts on it- you can even ask us for book recommendations if you're struggling to find a book you like.

If '**Death by Scrabble**' has got you in the mood for word games, also try and play '**Words with Friends 2**' or '**Wordscapes**' on your smart phones / tablets. These are great games for improving vocabulary. I'm hooked on them already!

Stay safe Y10 and hope to see you soon.

From Ms Hoult and the English Department.

Death By Scrabble

Charlie Fish

It's a hot day and I hate my wife.

We're playing Scrabble. That's how bad it is. I'm 42 years old, it's a blistering hot Sunday afternoon and all I can think of to do with my life is to play Scrabble.

I should be out, doing exercise, spending money, meeting people. I don't think I've spoken to anyone except my wife since Thursday morning. On Thursday morning I spoke to the milkman.

My letters are crap.

I play, appropriately, BEGIN. With the N on the little pink star. Twenty-two points.

I watch my wife's smug expression as she rearranges her letters. Clack, clack, clack. I hate her. If she wasn't around, I'd be doing something interesting right now. I'd be climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. I'd be starring in the latest Hollywood blockbuster. I'd be sailing the Vendee Globe on a 60-foot clipper called the New Horizons - I don't know, but I'd be doing something.

She plays JINXED, with the J on a double-letter score. 30 points. She's beating me already. I despise her.

If only I had a D, then I could play MURDER. That would be a sign. That would send a message.

I start chewing on my U. It's a bad habit, I know. All the letters are frayed. I play WARMER for 22 points, mainly so I can keep chewing on my U.

As I'm picking new letters from the bag, I find myself thinking - the letters will tell me what to do. If they spell out INSULT, or ARGUE, or KILL, her name, or anything, I'll do it right now. But, let's be honest, I probably won't.

My rack spells MIHZPA. Plus the U in my mouth. Damn.

The heat of the sun is pushing at me through the window. I can hear buzzing insects outside. I hope they're not bees. My cousin Harold swallowed a bee when he was nine, his throat swelled up and he had to go to hospital. I hope that if they are bees, one of them stings my wife bad.

She plays SWEATIER, using all her letters. 24 points plus a 50 point bonus. If it wasn't too hot to move I would strangle her right now. She's too damn good at this game. And she knows it.

I am getting sweatier. It needs to rain, to clear the air. As soon as that thought crosses my mind, I find a good word. HUMID on a double-word score, using the D of JINXED. The U makes a little splash of saliva when I put it down. Another 22 points. I hope she has lousy letters.

She tells me she has lousy letters. For some reason, I hate her more.

She plays FAN, with the F on a double-letter, and gets up to fill the kettle and turn on the air conditioning.

It's the hottest day for ten years and my wife is turning on the kettle. This is why I hate my wife. I play ZAPS, with the Z doubled, and she gets a static shock off the air conditioning unit. I find this remarkably satisfying.

She sits back down with a heavy sigh and starts fiddling with her letters again. Clack clack. Clack clack. I feel a terrible rage build up inside me. Some inner poison slowly spreading through my limbs, and when it gets to my fingertips I am going to jump out of my chair, spilling the Scrabble tiles over the floor.

The rage gets to my fingertips and passes. My heart is beating. I'm sweating. I think my face actually twitches. Then I sigh, deeply, and sit back into my chair. The kettle starts whistling. As the whistle builds it makes me feel hotter.

She plays READY on a double-word for 18 points, then goes to pour herself a cup of tea. No I do not want one.



I steal a blank tile from the letter bag when she's not looking, and throw back a V from my rack. She gives me a suspicious look. She sits back down with her cup of tea, making a cup-ring on the table, as I play an 8-letter word: CHEATING, using the A of READY. 64 points, including the 50-point bonus, which means I'm beating her now.

She asks me if I cheated.

She's really winding me up now.

She plays IGNORE on the triple-word for 21 points. The score is 153 to her, 155 to me.

The steam rising from her cup of tea makes me feel hotter. I try to make murderous words with the letters on my rack to make myself feel better, but the best I can do is SLEEP.

My wife sleeps all the time. She slept through an argument our next-door neighbours had that resulted in a broken door, a smashed TV and a Teletubby Lala doll with all the stuffing coming out. And then she moaned at me for being moody the next day from lack of sleep.

If only there was some way for me to end this torture.

I spot a chance to use all my letters. EXPLODES, using the X of JINXED. 72 points. That'll show her.

As I put the last letter down, there is a deafening bang and the air conditioning unit fails.

My heart is racing, but not from the shock of the bang. I don't believe it - but it can't be a coincidence. The letters made it happen. I played the word EXPLODES, and it happened - the air conditioning unit exploded. And before, I played the word CHEATING when I cheated. And ZAP when my wife got the electric shock. The words are coming true. The letters are choosing their future. The whole game is - JINXED.

My wife plays SIGN, with the N on a triple-letter, for 10 points.

I have to test this.

I have to play something and see if it happens. Something unlikely, to prove that the letters are making it happen. My rack is ABQYFWE. That doesn't leave me with a lot of options. I start frantically chewing on the B.

I play FLY, using the L of EXPLODES. I sit back in my chair and close my eyes, waiting for the sensation of rising up from my chair. Waiting to fly.

Stupid. I open my eyes, and there's a fly. An insect, buzzing around above the Scrabble board, surfing the thermals from the tepid cup of tea. That proves nothing. The fly could have been there anyway.

I need to play something unambiguous. Something that cannot be misinterpreted. Something absolute and final.

My wife plays CAUTION, using a blank tile for the N. 18 points.

My rack is AQWEUK, plus the B in my mouth. I am awed by the power of the letters, and frustrated that I cannot wield it. Maybe I should cheat again, and pick out the letters I need to spell SLAY.

Then it hits me. The perfect word. A powerful, dangerous, terrible word.

I play QUAKE for 19 points.

I wonder if the strength of the quake will be proportionate to how many points it scored. I can feel the trembling energy of potential in my veins. I am commanding fate. I am manipulating destiny.

My wife plays DEATH for 34 points, just as the room starts to shake.

I gasp with surprise and vindication - and the B that I was chewing on gets lodged in my throat. I try to cough. My face goes red, then blue. My throat swells. I draw blood clawing at my neck. The earthquake builds to a climax.

I fall to the floor. My wife just sits there, watching.