



Missoula County Public Schools  
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Forward Thinking, High Achieving.

October 2, 2019

*"We ride buses, trains, and cars across, over, and under concrete plains.  
Being Indian has never been about returning to the land.  
The land is everywhere or nowhere" (Orange, page 11).*

Families of 10th grade students:

In our next unit in English Language Arts (ELA) classes, students will be reading Tommy Orange's first novel *There There*.

Tommy Orange's first novel *There There* is a wondrous and shattering portrait of an America few of us have ever seen, and it introduces a brilliant new author at the start of a major career.

*There There* is a relentlessly paced multigenerational story about violence and recovery, memory and identity, and the beauty and despair woven into the history of a nation and its people. It tells the story of twelve characters, each of whom have private reasons for traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow. Jacquie Red Feather is newly sober and trying to make it back to the family she left behind in shame. Dene Oxendene is pulling his life back together after his uncle's death and has come to work at the powwow to honor his uncle's memory. Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield has come to watch her nephew Orvil, who has taught himself traditional Indian dance through YouTube videos and has come to the powwow to dance in public for the very first time. There will be glorious communion, and a spectacle of sacred tradition and pageantry. And there will be sacrifice, and heroism, and unspeakable loss.

This novel grapples with a complex and painful history, with an inheritance of beauty and profound spirituality, and with a plague of addiction, abuse, and suicide (Good Reads).

This novel centers around some compelling and complex themes. In the classroom, we will spend most of our time working on character development and analysis of the central ideas. *There There* is partnered with several pieces of poetry and non-fiction literary texts so that students can compare these key attributes within a wide range of contexts. By choosing texts from differing perspectives, we create a rich environment for student discussion and reflection.

Through collaboration with the MCPS Indian Education for All Department, ELA teachers have aligned district prioritized standards, created text-dependent discussion questions and thought provoking writing prompts. This continued partnership has informed how teachers will address the sensitive, and somewhat raw, topics presented throughout the novel. This is an unprecedented opportunity to guide classroom discussion through the complex and painful history portrayed throughout the novel.

We want to reassure you that certain excerpts and words may be summarized or omitted from the student readings due to sensitive content, based on teacher discretion. Any time we read about sensitive topics in the world, we take care and thought to make sure that every student feels safe in completing the assigned reading and participating in classroom discussion.

If you have any questions about this novel, please consider a conversation with your child's teacher first to understand how your child's classroom is approaching the content in the texts. If necessary, the principal of the school or the staff of the MCPS Teaching and Learning Department are also available for conversations.

We take our job of preparing students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in college and careers very seriously; we are committed to your students' success. Thank you for letting us be your partner in the growth and development of your student.

Sincerely,



Dr. Elise M. Guest  
Executive Director of Teaching and Learning



Raymond D. Kingfisher  
Indian Education for All