

Student Advisory Committee

Throughout 2020 and 2021, Queenwood has been participating in an exciting new program known as 'Just Read'. The aim of the initiative is to encourage wide reading within the school by including twenty minutes of silent reading on the timetable every day. This break from the normal activities of the school day is a time for students to either discover the benefits of reading fiction regularly for the first time or to enhance their existing habits, as well as read a variety of genres. Throughout the year, the program has provided students with opportunities to develop their enjoyment of reading, as well as generally increasing students' wellbeing and happiness. Because this initiative is so heavily focused on the student body, Queenwood created our group - the Student Advisory Committee - to ensure that pupils are getting the greatest possible benefit from 'Just Read' and to provide feedback to the QLiteracy committee.

Our fortnightly newsletter has been one of our greatest achievements during the past year. Each edition is based on a theme reflected in current affairs (e.g., Black Lives Matter and Pride Month) to encourage real world reading. We also created a website from scratch to accompany the newsletter, which was challenging as it can be quite technical, but through teamwork and experimentation, we had learned many practical communication skills and thoroughly enjoyed being able to express our creativity through this outlet that is shared with the senior school. We have also received feedback from fellow students that they look forward to each issue of the newsletter and engage with the books on the recommendation list too, which is not only thrilling for us to hear, but motivating as well as we know we have made an impact on this community of readers.

Another initiative that was positively received were posters created to draw parallels between TV series with books as a way to pique interest in reading and to help students to find books that they might enjoy. We planned activities such as book bingo and a variety of games which were enthusiastically received, especially during Book Week. We have sought to design competitions and activities that further promote the fun of reading and inspire other students to experience the many benefits and thrills of reading books that they personally love.

The success of the Student Advisory Committee demonstrates the power of student voice. As a group of ambitious advocates of increasing engagement with reading, we have worked together to develop the reading culture and atmosphere at school, without having teachers impose restrictions as the entire process involved only students. As well as improving the experience of the wider student body, the SAC has had particular benefit for the girls involved. Being a committee member has been the first leadership experience for many of the girls participating, and has taught them valuable lessons about time management, planning and representing their peers. Involving students from a wide range of year levels has allowed the SAC to extend these opportunities to a varied cross-section of the school, all of whom have definitely made the most of the role, and we have received much positive feedback from the girls about the experience. As the student leaders of the committee, the SAC has been invaluable to us for learning essential skills like communication and project management, and even formal meeting etiquette like minutes and timekeeping! To see the enthusiasm towards reading develop in our peers is both its own reward and motivation for us to continue working, and provides evidence of what students are capable of, if given the creative liberty.

Being a member of the SAC has also presented a unique opportunity to involve student voices within school-wide decision making. Often students feel disconnected from their school community; the general sentiment tends to be that they are not included in decisions made too far up the hierarchy. However, throughout this year, we have actually been able to see physical changes in the school as a result of our initiatives. We were able to observe the evolution of

attitudes towards reading within Queenwood; while some students initially had an indifferent or disdainful regard towards reading, now it is not uncommon to stumble upon students discussing their latest 'Just Rea' picks between classes. Being able to realise initiatives that have enacted change has been a really empowering experience for us. In fact, many members of the SAC voiced that being student leaders in the 'Just Read' program was the first time that actual change had resulted from their ideas.

Being a part of the SAC has meant a lot to us over the past year. In the wise words of Victor Hugo, *to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark*. We are so proud of what we have achieved as a student body, and hope that we have ignited a similar fire within every Queenwood student.

By Jenni, Gloria, Ruby and Jahzara.
SAC leaders 2021