Course Description:

Searching for The Secrets through Short Stories is a fast-paced, honors-level literature and journaling course designed to transition 6th through 10th-grade students from passive readers into powerful detectives of fiction. This four week intensive is more an *experience* than a normal literature class. Students will receive instruction on how to analyze literature while exploring how an author's use of prose and symbols expose feelings, emotions, and messages of truth that might be ignored by the passive reader. The most exciting part of this class however, is that students will learn techniques to rewire their thoughts from a spiritual lens, recognize characters in the stories whose lives are transformed by their thinking patterns, and have a chance to choose a discipline to apply these techniques and discuss through journaling how their experience impacted them. A brief overview will be given in the mechanics of narrative—including plot structure, setting, and theme, while learning to dig deeper through annotating, Biblical allusions, and detecting other literary elements from a theological worldview.

Whether deconstructing the classic themes of Tolstoy to Potok, or practicing the discipline of analytical annotation, students are challenged to pursue spiritual growth and mental renewal. Throughout all four weeks, students will apply Dr. Caroline Leaf's **5-Step Learning Process** (Gather, Reflect, Write, Revisit, and Active Reach) to "take every thought captive" along with the suggestions of Richard Foster on how to actually enjoy disciplining the mind and body during their writing process. This neuro-writing approach ensures that students move beyond surface-level reading into a disciplined "brain surgery" that aligns their thinking with God's intentions. Though designed with honors-level depth, the material is adaptable to each student's grade level, ensuring every participant learns to appreciate literature that stirs the soul and conforms the mind to the image of Christ.

4-Week Course Intensive: Searching for the Secrets through Short Stories

Honors Literature and Writing (Grades 6–10)

Week 1: Foundations of Narrative—The Journey from Hunger to Hope

- **Mentor Text:** “Where There is Love, There is God Also” by Leo Tolstoy
- **Literary Focus: Plot Archetypes (The Journey), Setting, and Motif.** Students analyze how the "basement mindset" of Martin Avdyeitch’s shop influences his initial spiritual isolation. They will map the narrative arc from his grief-stricken silence to the inciting moment of his encounter with the Gospels.
- **Spiritual Integration: The Discipline of Fasting.** Students explore the biblical concept of Fasting as the voluntary denial of a normal function for intense spiritual activity. Analysis focuses on how Martin stops evaluating physical "soles" and begins mending "souls," illustrating that *fasting is feasting* on the Word and the will of God rather than merely abstaining from food.
- **Workshop:** Constructing a **Plot Mountain Diagram** and writing a reflective journal.

Week 2: The Analytical Eye—Annotation and Sacrificial Allusion

- **Mentor Text:** “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry
- **Literary Focus: Active Annotation and Biblical Allusion.** Students practice "talking back" to the text to move from passive reading to active ownership. Analysis focuses on O. Henry’s allusions to elevate the value of sacrificial love over material wealth.
- **Spiritual Integration: The Disciplines of Study or Submission.** Using the four pillars of study **(**repetition, concentration, comprehension, reflection**)**, students reach a "eureka" moment of insight regarding the text's deeper truths. In “submission,”, they examine the "cross-life" of Jim and Della, who find liberation by laying down the burden of needing their own way.
- **Workshop:** Studying Matthew 10:30 in its connection with the text and choosing a discipline of Meditation or Prayer as their journal prompt.

Week 3: The Architecture of Grace—Conflict and Inward Walk

- **Mentor Text:** “Thank You, Ma'am” by Langston Hughes

- **Literary Focus: Annotation Pt. 2 and Conflict Analysis.** Students refine their annotation by identifying the **Man vs. Self** conflict within Roger as he struggles between the impulse to run and the desire to be trusted. They will analyze the "Writer's Toolbox" to see how sensory imagery builds the atmosphere of the shared meal.
- **Spiritual Integration: The Disciplines of Solitude or Simplicity.** Students study "solitude" not as loneliness, but as an inner fulfillment that allows one to be genuinely present to others. In "simplicity," they observe Mrs. Jones' "Divine Center" and her plain, honest speech, which contradicts the main character's initial mindset.
- **Workshop:** Students will choose journaling from themes of "solitude"or simplicity" and how it impacted their day to day interactions.

Week 4: The Believable Character—Inner Countenance and Transformation

- **Mentor Text:** "Zebra" by Chaim Potok
- **Literary Focus: Three-Dimensional Characterization.** Students apply the "Inside and Out" metric, focusing on seven essential traits: **Community, Personality, Physical traits, History, Feelings, Abilities, and Flaws**. They will examine Zebra's past accident and how it necessitates his future growth.
- **Workshop:** Using **Matthew 6:22**, students will choose a discipline they have not yet tried or write gratitude journal and how it affected their outlook and those around them.