



History Department

650 Laurelwood Drive, Waterloo Ontario, N2V 2V1
Telephone: (519) 880-9979 Fax: (519) 880-9718

Website: <http://sjam.wrdsb.on.ca>

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As part of your son or daughter's work in HSB 4UI: Challenge and Change in Society, we examine the topic of suicide in detail. I am writing this letter to ask permission for your son or daughter to watch a film called The Bridge during this unit.

Our week-long unit on suicide starts with the theoretical and with an analysis of the first-ever study done on suicide in 1900, and ends with modern day Canadian statistics and analysis. Specifically we examine:

- Emile Durkheim's Suicide study (1900) and its relationship with "social integration" and **social change** (the main topic of our course)
- the "myths and facts" about suicide
- "when to be concerned" and what to do when concerned
- the current statistics in Canada and other parts of the world
- analysis of suicide risk by age, gender, society and lifestyle conditions
- a case study on aboriginal suicide
- the six-million dollar "suicide barrier" built over the Don Valley bridge by the City of Toronto (when we attend our "Toronto Multicultural Neighbourhood Tour" Field Trip)

The Bridge, released in 2007, is a standard film release available from most local video stores, including Rogers Video. Though controversial, this film addresses and emphasizes a number of issues we strive to get across to the students about this topic, including:

- dispelling the myth that talking about suicide encourages it (studies show the opposite to be true)
- that suicide is a permanent solution to an often temporary problem
- that suicide affects many people, such as family members, loved ones and acquaintances of those who kill themselves
- that survivors of suicide attempts often regret the attempt almost immediately
- to encourage individuals to get help for any mental health or emotional issues they may have as soon as possible, and to encourage others to do the same

The Bridge is described in its press release as follows:

"The Golden Gate Bridge is an iconic structure; a symbol of San Francisco, the West, freedom – and something more, something spiritual, something words cannot describe.

over...

The director and crew spent an entire year focusing on the Bridge. Running cameras for almost every daylight minute, they documented nearly two dozen suicides and a great many unrealized attempts. In addition, the director captured nearly 100 hours of incredibly frank, deeply personal, often heart-wrenching interviews with the families and friends of the departed, as well as with several of the attempters themselves.

THE BRIDGE is a visual and visceral journey into one of life's gravest taboos, offering glimpses into the darkest, and possibly most impenetrable corners of the human mind."

While the positive messages this film ultimately demonstrates makes it worthwhile to show in a Grade 12 class dealing with this subject matter, the HSB teachers fully understand the graphic images shown may make some students and parents uncomfortable. These include footage of individuals jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge to their deaths. While no images of people landing or injured are shown, these scenes do have the potential to disturb and may not be suitable for all students, even those in Grade 12. Therefore we want you to know that viewing this video is completely optional. While there will be an open-ended reflective assignment based on this, students may choose to visit the library while the film is being shown and complete a similar reflective assignment about suicide in general. Students will not be centered out or penalized in any way if they choose this option. They may even start watching the film and then leave for the library at any time if they feel uncomfortable. Please be advised we will spend considerable time debriefing the film when it concludes. Also, Administration and Guidance Counselors will be notified when it is to be shown – students will be encouraged to see their counselors or their teachers about any issues that arise because of the film.

Our hope, as educators, is to facilitate a positive dialogue about a very significant topic that is too often avoided when all studies say it should be discussed openly in a supportive forum. Please be assured the HSB teachers will treat this topic with the seriousness and sensitivity it demands.

Thank you for filling out the bottom portion of this letter and returning it to me via your son or daughter. If you would like to discuss this further, or would like to chat about the course or this subject, please feel free to call me at the school anytime at 880-9979 or e-mail me at Jeff.Chard@wrdsb.on.ca .

Thank you,

Jeff Chard
Head of History
SJAM

Student: _____

_____ Yes, my son or daughter has permission to view The Bridge

_____ No, my son or daughter does not have permission to view The Bridge

Date: _____ Signature: _____

