

June 5, 2020

Dear 8th Grade Families,

Many of you know that I often talk about how special a place Calhoun is. We learn together, we struggle together, we lift each other up together, and we're all eager to be together again, in the literal sense. The home stretch is over. This is the finish line for your 8th grader, but there's a reason we call their graduation, "Commencement." The biggest adventures, of course, lie ahead, whether you remain at Calhoun or journey elsewhere. In Steve's latest email, he mentioned the amazing resilience and understanding shown by our students, noting that indeed, it was *they* who kept *us* going. Having just watched the Moving Up ceremony for the incoming 6th grade, I saw the same joy, gratitude and perseverance that I'm accustomed to, just on younger faces. That's the work unique to Middle School: children arrive and young adults leave, and we have the extraordinary pleasure of witnessing countless moments of metamorphosis right before our very eyes. What we hear all the time is that we're saints, or "must have *so much patience*," when in fact, we're the lucky ones.

Here is this week's recap:

Advisory - Nayantara & Advisors

This week, 8th graders who will return to Calhoun in the fall met with the Upper School Leadership Team for a high school preview.

English - Shelley

This week we finished our reading of *All my Sons* and prepared for the in-class, open book essay. Although a bit nervous when they began, students all felt good about what they produced when the class ended, having used their outlines and highlighted text to organize their paragraphs and apply supportive documentation. On our last day of class we talked about the experience and then went on to discuss the beginning of *The Catcher in the Rye*, whetting their appetites to continue reading independently. Having reached the end of our journey together, the class ended with a confirmation of the importance of upholding our social responsibility and commitment to social justice, which has been our theme in the literature this year. We said our farewells, all wishing it could have been in person.

Health - Alyssa

Students spent the last health class finishing any missing assignments. They then reflected on their year in health by writing a letter to their future self. Students were encouraged to think about what health skills they can use in the future to help them live a happy, healthy life.

Identity - Sabrina

In our final identity class of the year, we started all together live on Zoom to share appreciation and gratitude for a great year. Students then had the option to remain in the live meeting for an extended check-in or they had a choice of activities to complete in class. Similar to last week, options included: a meditation, journal reflections and writing a final gratitude letter. It has been a wonderful year!

Math - Ben

This week we completed our review (Operation: Whetstone) and took our placement tests for high school. The goal, of course, is to get a perfect fit for each mathematician. Where they begin 9th grade is not set in stone however, there are opportunities next year to further fine tune their section.

Physical Education - Nick

We are continuing with our daily physical activities. On Monday, students received a new list of five different workouts, ranging from a Pilates full-body workout to a Zumba workout, as well as workouts for stamina, speed and agility. Eighth graders should try to complete at least two workouts for the week, though one per day is even better. On Friday, students completed a Google Form to share their workouts. As always, the goal is to keep our students active and moving for at least 20 minutes per day.

Science - Ardalan

In this final week for school classes, students remained busy in science. They created three offspring monsters for their heredity projects and wrote a short explanation of the traits that were and were not present in their monster families. If you haven't seen the drawings, I suggest you ask your 8th grader(s) to see them. The drawings are creative and amazing!

Social Studies - Marco

This week we finished studying the road to disunion. Through the study of this journey, students will be able to identify the causes of the American Civil War. We then focused on Fort Sumter and the first battle of Bull Run as the country officially dove into war. Students looked at the shifting tides of the war and our reasons for fighting. They came to understand how the Civil War shifted from a war to restore the Union into a war to end slavery, as well as the role that the Emancipation Proclamation, Gettysburg Address, and the emergence of African American regiments played in that switch. They also learned how that change led to an eventual Union victory.

Languages

Mandarin - Yutong

During the last week of Mandarin classes, we did some Karaoke where we reviewed the songs we have learned throughout the year. Students used this opportunity to practice their pronunciations and reviewed key vocabulary. Then we studied a couple of videos discussing the Chinese learning experiences in a humorous way. The class also learned new sentences of various topics from their student-teachers.

Spanish - Linda

We finished our last class of the year by taking our final Spanish test. The test was a summary of several topics learned throughout the year such as verb conjugations in all three categories, nouns, chores and activities, interrogative questions, places around the city, and vocabulary related to the pastimes. The test consisted of identifying chores using the infinitive form of the verb and then conjugating the verb according to the proper noun. Writing in full sentences about who does the chores at home, and where some past times take place, were important aspects of the test. The test tied well with our past video project *Quehaceres Domesticos* which students presented in class a few weeks ago.

Music

Active Listening - Kevin

In active listening class we presented our final research projects.

Chorus - Alison

In live chorus class this week, we spent some time talking about the ways that music is a space for refuge and joy in times when we feel hopeless about the state of the world, especially in light of the events of the last few weeks. As part of our conversation, we listened together to an arrangement of the spiritual and protest song, "We Shall Overcome." As we look toward next year, students also shared out ideas and feedback based on their experiences in chorus this year, both online and in person.

Jazz - Kevin

In class this week we reflected on the past year and held conversations regarding musical opportunities in the Upper School.

Electives

Art - Amy

This week art students considered how we can use art as a tool to prompt change, question the status quo, or make commentary on injustice. We looked at work created for and around Black Lives Matter as well as art by activist artists Favianna Rodriguez and Emory Douglas. While we do not have any more classes together, students are encouraged to create their own work for social change. This could be a story, a comic, a play, a poem, a drawing or painting. Here are links to resources that can help with this process:

- [Center for Cultural Power](#) video
- Free graphics from [Just Seeds](#)
- [Black Lives Matter Coloring Book](#) and [Black Lives Matter posters](#)
- [Printmaking with Favianna Rodriguez](#) video

Comedy/Improv - Ed

In our final class of the trimester, students participated in the concluding improvisational comedy workshop led by professional improv performer Nick Kanellis. Editing continues on the video footage submitted by students for the "Two Capitanos Meet" exercise. A link to the completed video will be emailed out to students and families when the editing process is completed.

DJ - Kevin

In DJ class, we have imported our original compositions into the Mixxx app for an end of the year Mega-Mix!

Special Topics in Algebra - Ben

This week we finished our screening of *The Man Who Knew Infinity*. Getting a glimpse of math at its highest levels is inspiring. In it, Ramanujan (played by Dev Patel) explains to his wife Janaki (Devika Bhise) that the work he does can best be described as painting with colors that can't be seen. He appreciated form for form's sake, pursuing mathematics intuitively rather than formally, because he could see it, feel it, and simply "had to." Students in this class know what he meant!

Ukulele - Kevin

In ukulele class, students have been given the opportunity to revisit any of the songs we have worked on this trimester using our curated YouTube list.

Thank you all for taking this journey with me. Working with the outgoing 8th grade has been a pleasure, a challenge, a great deal of fun. We have athletes and scholars, artists and comedians, debaters and mathematicians and agents of change. It's been my honor to serve as their Grade Dean. As we turn into the final week, as always, please reach out if I can be of any help whatsoever. I'll see you at Commencement!

Have a lovely weekend, and a terrific summer.

With great fondness,
Ben