

Passing Notes

ParkmontSchool
Sessions 1-2, 2020

CORONA EDITION

CLICK
TO GO
DIRECTLY
TO THAT
STORY!



- Parkmont's 50th, Coming Soon!
- Faculty Alum Interview: Rocket Man
- The Road to Rube Goldberg
- News Spin: Parkmont PM Podcast
- Taking the Pulse of Students in Quarantine
- Dispatch from Ecuador
- Putting the 'Parkmont' in PHS 2: Career Edge, Surveys, Clubs
- Spotlight: Matt McClain
- Near Afield: Essential Extracurriculars
- A Class Wordsworth: Surpassing Azkaban
- May Day: Poetry Festival Is a Go
- Session 1: Graphic Design



A Zoom Halloween celebration!

Parkmont's 50th, Coming Soon!

by Ron McClain

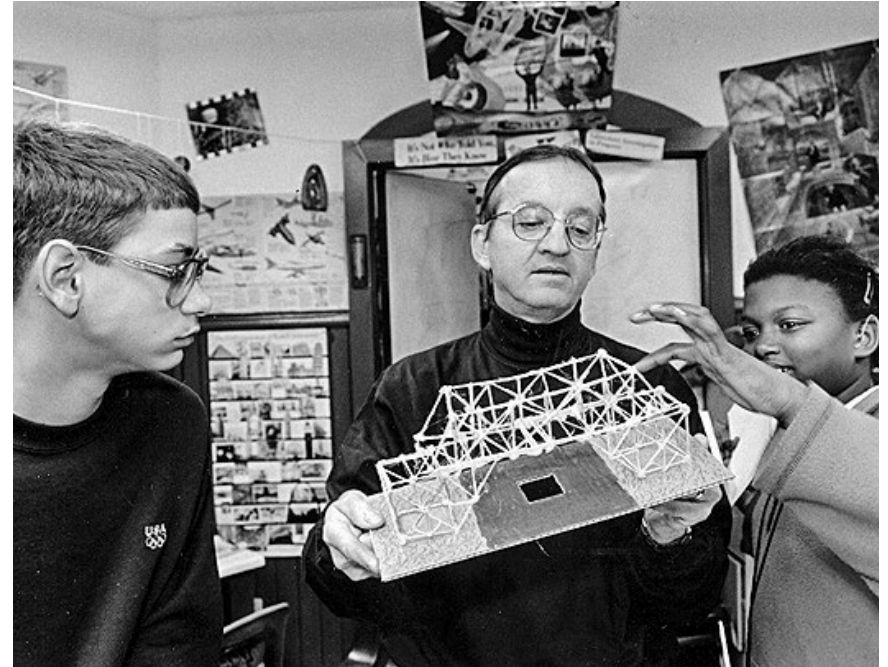
We'll be using all of our platforms, including Passing Notes, to share some of our history over the next 18 months.

Five decades ago, a group of Parkmont parents with a lot of Montessori and other educational experience began conversations that resulted in their opening of a new school in the fall of 1972. The "Park" in Parkmont came from the Parkway School model, founded in Philadelphia by John Bremer, and the "mont" from Maria Montessori. Parkmont opened in Northern Virginia and moved into its own home in Georgetown in 1977. I've been here since '81 and took us through three moves that ultimately resulted in our landing on 16th Street in 1991.

Our first episode spotlights the work of Mike Moyer, Parkmont's answer to Bill Nye the Science Guy. John Bray from our Communications team recently interviewed Mike, and Mike himself provided some pictures of class activities from the hundreds he posted during his time here.

I met Mike when he joined the staff at Edmund Burke in 1974 and was immediately engaged by his interest in doing science with students, always hands-on, in school and out. Along with Burke's co-founder Dick Roth, and Tom Yoder, a Burke math teacher and current Parkmont Board Secretary, we started what became the Edmund Burke-Parkmont golf team, now in its 45th year.

Debbie van Ryn and Debbi Williams jump started our middle school science classes in the '80s, including our adventure trips that spent time in Shenandoah, the Everglades, the Grand Canyon, and Algonquin Park in Canada. Mike joined us in 1990 and taught middle-school classes for the next twenty years. He came in an hour



Structures: Mike admires a sturdy student-built toothpick bridge.

Parkmont's
calendar is
available at
Parkmont.org.
Click here!

early each morning to set up the day's investigation (with the news on in the background, so he was the one that called us down when the first tower was hit on 9/11), and I loved the weekly invitations to come across the hall to see what had been built, tested, dissected, or created from scratch. Science was frequently the subject new students listed as most boring at their previous schools, but this was never the case at Parkmont. As attested by student Zachary Jackson in a 2009 article for the *Northwest Current*, "Mike's class is the most interesting, and the most fun class I have ever been in. Because of Mike, I love science."

As Parkmont's founders knew, there is an enormous amount of learning of all kinds that goes on when students are working on projects together, and any learning activity that includes movement and isn't tied to a seat is a gift for young adolescents.

Mike's work and many of his classes have been continued by Sam Graul, Troy Burki, and now Mariam Haidar. Find out more about his contribution below. ■

Faculty Alum Interview: Rocket Man

Mike Moyer's vocational trajectory passed through a variety of stages before attaining its proper orbit. Watermelon loader, elite prep school teacher, Environmental Protection Agency scientist, video store owner.

Then came the big boost from Ron, an old friend, ex-colleague, and fellow Takoma Park traveler: "Mike, do you want to come teach at Parkmont?"

Mike recalls, "I told Ron 'Uh, I'm pretty happy here. I'm my own boss ... All right, I'll teach one class.' Of course, then I knew that was my calling. Excuse me if I tear up a little bit."

It was the atmosphere.

"It got me," recalls Moyer. "I sold

continues on the next page



Flight: The notorious leader.

Flight: The notorious followers on a field trip to the Wright Brothers Museum.



and bad science; **Structures:** building tepees, bridges and pyramids; **Inventions:** Rube Goldberg contraptions and kites; **Crime Lab:** fingerprints and real mysteries; **Robotics:** making machines that follow instructions; **Flight:** all kinds of flying, “water rockets that went all the way over Parkmont School.”

“Ron had confidence in me,” Moyer said. “I designed the classes myself and wrote the materials. I knew I could teach in a way that needed to be taught. I’d never been able to do that before.”

Moyer’s realm was sixth, seventh and eighth graders. They seemed to enjoy the learning — mostly.

One showed up at Ron’s office, with

continues on the next page

the store and ended up teaching for 22 years. I have very strong feelings about what education should be and Parkmont comes as close to the perfect place that I can think of.”

Any teacher who occupied Mike’s Underground Science classroom after his Main Lesson concluded for the day knows the Chinese proverb that was always on the bulletin board: “I hear, and I forget; I see, and I remember; I do, and I understand.” That’s Mike in a proverbial nutshell.

Moyer, with degrees in environmental engineering, rolled out a ring of hands-on science classes that integrated multiple disciplines. **Scientific Discovery:** what’s good

Inventions: Design, construction, and testing of electrical devices.





a complaint. Ron recalls being sympathetic: “I can’t believe you’re being treated this unfairly. We’re going to have to get rid of Mike,” and, given pause, the student’s reply, “Wait a minute — Robotics! It’s my favorite class. We can’t get rid of Mike.”

Moyer gave open-book tests, as a means to help maximize comprehension of the material by the whole class. “It shouldn’t be that half the class gets 70 percent and half gets 80 percent,” Moyer says. “What about the 20 percent? It takes some people a longer time. That’s why I give the test a second time. Most other schools, you either get it or you don’t, and if you don’t, that’s too bad.”

Down the road and into professional life, one student who got it let Mike know via thank-you note: “I was never going to become a civil engineer until I took your structures class.”

“As I look through these pictures, it’s so gratifying to see these kids looking at blueprints and trying to analyze DNA and shooting off rockets,” Moyer says. “I feel like I helped them become better people.” ■



Inventions: Testing self-made model cars.

The Road to Rube Goldberg

By Mariam Haidar

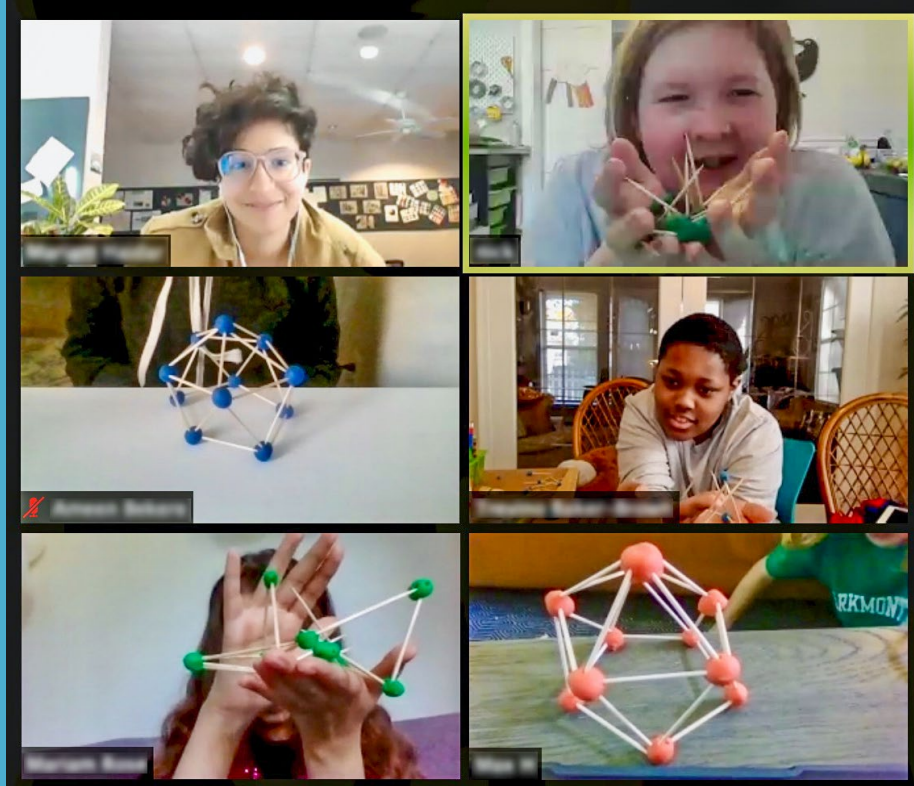
Pandemic restrictions didn't stop Parkmont students from getting in some hands-on fun in their Session 2 Structures class. Every week, the class learned about different architectural techniques and applied the newfound knowledge to a project. From bridges to towers, all of the projects were created with household items. Creativity and innovation were at the forefront.



The architect, Jackson, contemplates his structure.



Jackson gets the benefit of Mariam's virtual hands-on guidance.



Mariam and her students find the structural value of toothpicks.

Students found new ways to create stronger structures. They often surprised not just their teacher but themselves with their capabilities. Students shared insights and techniques to overcome engineering challenges together.

During the session, students presented their favorite architecture and architects, reflecting frequently on what they had learned. A Rube Goldberg competition ended the session. Any material in their house was fair game. Kids used balloon-popping mechanisms and hammers, and even their past projects, to create the ultimate chain reaction. The result was a spectacular showcase of student talent. We were able to transcend the boundaries of virtual learning, tapping into that true Parkmont spirit. ■

News Spin: Parkmont PM Podcast

By Sania Tildon

In Session 2, Parkmont journalism hit a new level: a first-ever PM podcasting class. A group of seven students wrote and recorded three episodes of a digital audio journal. They honed their research and writing skills, learned how to edit, and taught themselves the ins and outs of our new recording software. Students chose to cover challenging topics, including social anxiety, mental health during quarantine, and mass incarceration. Drawing on government and non-profit organization publications, students reported on social justice movements, how schools are adapting to Covid, and Joe Biden's inauguration. For our first season, Nahom DJ-ed, delighting everyone. Multiple staff members suggested he might have a career in radio broadcasting.

In an Arts and Entertainment segment, students discussed television, movies, and music, gathering and sharing information about what resonated with different staff and students. Nijole shared recollections of songs that she listened to with her sister. Bezawit talked about a coming-of-age story, and one of her favorite shows, *Weightlifting Fairy*. Khalil introduced a segment called "Highs and Lows," where podcasters interviewed students and staff about recent challenges and triumphs.

The podcast is another way to bring the Parkmont community closer together, especially while we continue to learn remotely, while also informing listeners about important issues.

I'm excited to continue the podcasting class in future sessions. On the horizon: expert interviews with guest speakers, fiction segments and reader's theater, and a new PM class dedicated to web design, where students will create a companion website for the podcast! There are so many potential topics. I can't wait to see what students dive into next! ■

“Although students were initially reluctant to do research and ‘just wanted to talk,’ after a rocky first episode, they discovered the value of researching and writing, and they came to embrace it. Some students even got carried away. This feels like the contemporary equivalent of a school newspaper. Students get to investigate and share information about the topics important to them. They developed their voices and editing skills over the course of the session. I hope students enjoy hearing their voices and their friends’ voices.”

— SEAN, STUDENT

”

Taking the Pulse of Students in Quarantine

By Nijole Gedutis

In March 2020, shortly after Parkmont Home School launched, students started writing about their pandemic experiences. The “Corona Chronicles” continue, as they reflect upon what it’s like to live through a global pandemic, the election, an insurrection, racial equity, and the importance of exercise and art and personal connections.

Tommy

I have expressed myself creatively by drawing what I feel at the time. Me making art has helped me through my life on so many different levels. Art helps me get through some stuff that I have been through in the past and in the present. Art makes me feel a lot happier than I was before I drew something.

Noelle

Dr. King’s legacy means so much to me. If it wasn’t for his big impact on the civil rights movement, my parents would have probably not moved here for me to get a better life. He was a part of something so big that it impacted millions of African Americans in the US. He shaped the standards of America. Also not just for America; he showed other countries how life is supposed to be, not one race superior to another but we stand all together. I feel that Martin Luther King, Jr. would be happy about the progress that is happening in the US, but at the same time disappointed. He would be happy that there are so many black people working in the Capitol and holding places of power. He would not want to hear about how the police officers are getting away with killing innocent black people. He would not want to hear about protests getting attacked by officers as well.

Arsiema

I wasn’t that surprised [by what happened at the Capitol on 1/6/21]. I knew they would go to the Capitol, but I didn’t expect it to be violent. I saw a video of one of Trump’s supporters saying that they will go to the Capitol to protest to stop the counting. When I watched the news, I saw them climbing to go inside the Capitol and breaking the windows. What I noticed is that there weren’t a lot of national guards,

Parkmont’s
calendar is
available at
[Parkmont.org](https://parkmont.org).
Click here!



and some of them let the mobs go into the Capitol. The ones who were fighting the mobs were either alone or outnumbered. I felt that the world was laughing at the US. If they had peacefully protested, it would have been much better. What makes it worse is that the US had gone to other countries to “correct” their democracy or criticize it, but now other countries have seen what’s really going on and they won’t let this go. It showed that America is divided and it is constantly fighting itself. The two groups are strong by themselves but if they work together, they will be much stronger; but the two sides see working together as a weakness. Those two groups don’t trust each other just because they have different opinions, they tell themselves the other side is wrong.

Alex

I understand that most people had a pretty bad year last year, but I had a pretty good year last year. There were many good things that happened in my year. One of these positive events/experiences was how much time I got to be able to spend with my family because we are trapped in our house. We started to play card games, like Uno, daily and started to go on family walks and bike rides. We started doing this in April of 2020, and we have continued to do this up to the present. Another one of these positive events/experiences was how I was able to exercise every day of the week since this school year began. When the school year began, during session one, I decided to choose Yoga for my PM and my exercise class, and since then I have chosen Yoga for my PM and my exercise class. I have gotten to do yoga for all of the 5 weekdays. I also do Taekwondo on both weekend days, which means I have exercised every day for the past couple of months. I have also noticed my body getting fitter and stronger because of my exercising schedule.

Sasha

I think the leaders have to take charge and listen to the people, and figure out what Trump was doing that caused so much conflict and change those things. I think Trump is going to cause as much havoc as he can until he has to leave office. As you saw on the news many Americans are so happy that Trump is gone and they feel that there is still hope on racism and police brutality and on climate change. We can strengthen our democracy by listening to the people, focusing on what the people want to change and changing our country for the better. ■

Dispatch from Ecuador

By Brianna Campoverde

I was born and raised in Washington, DC but both of my parents are from Ecuador. The first language I learned was Spanish and then I learned English because of school. Before I ever traveled to Ecuador, I wasn't super close to family or familiar with anything that Ecuadorians typically do. Now that I have traveled a lot to Ecuador, I feel more connected to my family there.

This year I have spent a lot of time with family and friends in Ecuador. Now I know more about what my grandma was like and what she normally wore. We even did some photoshoots with some of their traditional clothes.

What's it been like to do virtual school in Ecuador? Well, it isn't all that different from doing it from my house in DC. Luckily, it's the same time zone. The only difference is that I'm with family, so when Ethan gave us the chance to walk during Exercise class, I get my cousins to go to the park with me. Here are some pictures. ■



Storm clouds arrive over an Ecuadorian town.

Left: Brianna in her South American hometown (no, that's NOT a virtual background!)

Putting the 'Parkmont' in PHS 2: Career Edge, Surveys, Clubs

By Willa Reinhard, Zoe McLean, and Mel Kates

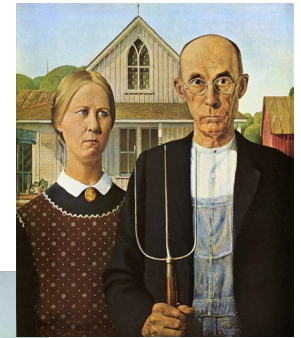
As Parkmont fashioned a new educational platform at the start of the pandemic — and then refined it further as the '20-21 school year began, creating Parkmont Home School 2 (PHS2) — the core academic classes were only one component of the challenge. Parkmont students also learn out in the community — in the world of work and through extracurricular activities — exploring who they are and what interests them. So in this unprecedented Corona year, we found a way to do that as well.

Internship Hack: Career Edge The pandemic pushed Parkmont to reconceive its beloved internship program. Getting out and about in the DC area to work with local businesses and organizations was undermined, but new paths were found to help students build workplace savvy.

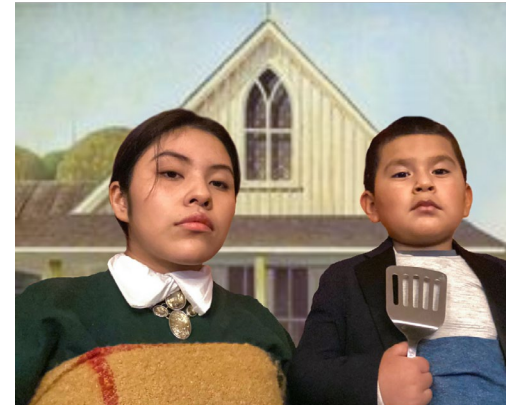
The Career Edge program centers on building career skills through a self-paced online curriculum. In Sessions 1-2, students reflected on their personality types, learning styles, study habits, goal setting, and stress management, to name a few topics. Later in the year, students will compile their biggest takeaways into a presentation, which they will share in their advisory groups. A handful of students took advantage of the chance to do optional service hours in addition to Career Edge. Some students earned credit for their paid jobs and others found online or in-person internships. This option remains open to all students who are interested in exploring their interests beyond the online platform.

Art Recreations: Art recreations were back this fall, and we were so pleased with the creativity in our community as teachers and students

continues on the next page



Above: Grant Wood's "American Gothic"



Left: Karla's family's "Mexican Gothic"



Below: The McClain family's "Parkmont Gothic"

alike interpreted — actually, inhabited — famous works of art.

Surveys: Every week, students receive two surveys. One focuses on a fun topic so kids can learn about each other, and the second focuses on the US Government. Students who complete both surveys are entered into a raffle to win a \$20 Amazon gift card. In addition to sharing information on how the US Government operates, these surveys have been a great way for students to share information with one another, from their favorite dinners to their dreams and goals. These weekly surveys provide students with new ideas, the chance to express themselves, and simple ways to stay connected to their classmates. Here are some of the responses:

Who is your hero and why?

- "Iroh from Avatar the Last Airbender because he is a good person." — **Noah**
- "Luigi from Super Mario Brothers. He teaches me that, even in the face of danger, you can pull through with sheer willpower." — **Erik**
- "My advisor, Matt, because he is always there to help me if I have any trouble." — **Sean**
- "My mom and dad because they're the ones who created me and I love them for everything they have given me." — **Emily**

What's one thing that can instantly make your day better? What's an activity that calms you?

- "Seeing the people I love laugh and be happy." — **Firaol**
- "Talking to the people that I love." — **Brianna C.**
- "A good bowl of guacamole." — **Casper**
- "Getting wet dog kisses." — **Max H.**
- "Looking at the rain." — **Nick L.**



Top Left: "Flower, the Rage Thrower" by Lucas



Lower Left: Banksy's "Flower, the Rage Thrower"



Below: "Transformer-ational" Art by Abe

continues on the next page



What is one specific change you can make (or improve on) to have a productive (remaining) school year?

- "Avoid distractions." — **Sean**
- "Get outside more." — **Abe**
- "Staying on top of my work and making sure I'm better organized this year!" — **Butheyana**

What is a subject (or skill) you would like to learn more about this year?

- "How to grab happiness and not let it go." — **Khalil**
- "Learn another language." — **Firaol**
- "How to heal people." — **Molly**
- "I want to learn French." — **Helen**

What is one specific change you could make (or do more of) so that you have more peace, calm or happiness this year?

- "Start to sing and express myself a lot more." — **Mariam M.**
- "Try to be more positive instead of stressing myself out." — **Noelle**
- "Get more sleep." — **Henok, Dei, Rio, and Arsiema**
- "Take more time away from social media." — **Yanna**
- "Improve my art." — **Kyp**

Clubs & Movie Screenings: The creation of Parkmont Clubs gave students an opportunity to socialize and enjoy teacher-led activities after school.

On Mondays, students headed to Nijole's Zoom room to learn the art of crocheting and knitting, crafting things such as scarves and miniature baskets.

On Wednesdays, Mel hosted the Anime Club, where veteran anime lovers and newbies alike watched the newest episodes of popular anime as they aired in Japan. And finally, on Thursdays, there was Movie Night, where each week a different teacher would screen a movie to share with students. Some of the films: "Fahrenheit 451," "Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark," "Marie Antoinette," and "Ferris Bueller's Day Off." ■



Spotlight: Matt McClain

Teacher, Academic Advisor, Coach

Parkmont Genes: I grew up around this school. But I did not have any concrete plans to be a teacher. But I found that I connect with kids really well. I can remember what it was like trying to get through school. What I saw was an incredible opportunity here to help kids in a difficult time. There are some pretty unique ways the school does that. I like being able to come in and be around people and families I know really well who will work with me to learn new things.

First Ad-Van-ture: It was Nijole's and Michelle's trip to California for an immigration class. I was kind of there as a chaperone but also learning the whole way up the coast — San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco. We were vanning it. It was a lot of driving in a tight space. I learned that you need to take space when you need space. You introduce positivity as the guiding principle from the start.

Haute Camp Sights: A bacon cheeseburger on the campfire and shooting stars at George Washington National Forest's Hone Quarry. Every time we've gone we've seen a ton of shooting stars. It's a really cool spot.

Off Hours: I like to hike. I like to see new places. I recently started rock-climbing. I'm not a great climber. But it allows me to get out and do something cool.

Boot Plug: You can't go very far if you lose your feet. My boot right now is Zamberlan, an Italian, big, one-piece leather retro hiking boot. I love them.

The Head and I: Man, it's easier now than it's ever been. I did not want to attend Parkmont as a high schooler. I went to Blair. But at this point, I like seeing my father as much as I do and seeing how he thinks. I really like what he's done here. I'm fortunate. ■



Matt and Ron at
Cape May National
Wildlife Refuge.



Frisbee under a cerulean sky.

Near Afield: Essential Extracurriculars

By Matt McClain and Ethan Kuhnhenh

Some of the brightest moments in Session 2 this year happened in person and outside the classroom, as staff and students spent Friday afternoons playing together, but keeping the anti-pandemic distance, at the Carter Barron field. These events, which came to be known as “Frisbee Fridays,” were a regular feature on the Parkmont calendar during November. Students met on the Parkmont porch to catch up before we walked up 16th Street to the field. The events featured a core group of returning student leaders, which included Yanna, Butheyne, Dei, Keonte, Nicky, Casper, Stuart, Bailey, Lucas, and Nicholas C.; and new members of our community – Mr. Mikhail, Sean, Miles, Heaven, Max, and Tommy. These sessions provided an important opportunity for new students to connect in person with their Parkmont peers in a non-academic environment – their purpose was to reunite old friends and introduce new ones. Students spent an hour and a half throwing frisbees the length of the field, spinning plates, juggling, playing soccer, and just relaxing in the sun. Although we had to pause the get-togethers as temperatures dropped in December, staff and students alike are looking forward to getting together again on a regular basis this spring. A special thanks goes to Parkmont parent Dana Corsello, who first proposed this idea at Back-to-School Night! ■



Above: Frisbee Friday fun, featuring Yanna and Ethan.



Left: Students and staff in pursuit of a floating frisbee, or perhaps a flying saucer.



The One Among Us, Mariam's psychological thriller.

A Class Wordsworth: Surpassing Azkaban

By Willa Reinhard

In November, students in Nijole's and Willa's middle school English classes eagerly worked on creating original stories and reaching individually set word goals for this year's National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo). By November 30, they had cumulatively written 109,890 words! To put that in perspective, the J.K. Rowling book "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" is 107,253 words long.

Plots covered a wide range, from a lost squid trying to make it across the ocean to see the human world, to the year 3648 where the government needs to decrease overpopulation, to a boy going to Japan to avenge his father's murder

by the mafia, to a group of friends that finds a mysterious rock, and then starts to disappear — one by one.

Arsiema excerpt:

The girl smiled as she put down her queen at the opposite side of the white king. She calmly said, "Checkmate," looking her opponent in the eyes with no mercy left behind.

This was her 10th time winning in chess against her opponent — the one who had taught her the game. Emma was the girl who had won after many ties and losses; she loved playing chess and other games that involved strategy. The other kids smiled and laughed in joy. They were all excited. It was because they would get ice cream since she had won the bet, but Emma felt happy for another reason — she had won against her teacher.

"Now kids, there is no need to create that much

continues on the next page



Arsiema's debut novel, *The Doll in the Forest*.



noise,” said her teacher as she turned and faced Emma. “I accept my defeat, Emma.” Emma stood up and walked off, while the other kids followed her.

Abe excerpt:

I sighed then felt a sharp and stinging pain on my forehead. I removed my helmet to see what it was and I felt something warm. I removed my hand and it was drenched. My heart rate spiked as I tried to calm myself down. I took a cloth to my forehead and reached behind me to get the medical robot. I put it in my hand and pressed ‘Start’.

The robot in this monotone voice said, “How may I help you?”

I said, “Can you stitch this up?” I moved my hair out of the way to show the bot.

The robot flashed a message on the little screen. It said, “By pressing ‘OK’ you consent to having this surgery happen.”

I pressed the ‘OK’ button and put the rag with blood on it into my mouth because there were no anesthetics on hand. As I did, I could taste the bitter taste of the blood seep onto my tongue. I flinched at the taste of it but closed my eyes and tried to think about something else. But once it started, the pain was like nothing else I have ever felt. It hurt so much I just passed out. After what felt like maybe 2 hours, I was jolted awake with one of the adrenaline packets. ■

May Day: Poetry Festival Is a Go

Judges are wending their way through 308 poems submitted for this year’s Parkmont Poetry Festival, searching for treasure. Students from nearly two dozen private and public schools across Washington, D.C., are represented. Forty winning works will be chosen and presented at the Festival reception on May 1 in a virtual celebration of the diverse voices that make up the District’s vibrant school communities.

Susan K. Scheid, a poet, activist and Board Chair of Split This Rock, and Chelsea Iorlano, a poet and Split This Rock’s Director of Youth Programs, are serving as preliminary judges. The finalist judge is Maritza Rivera, a Puerto Rican poet, Army veteran and founder of the weekly Mariposa Poetry Series.

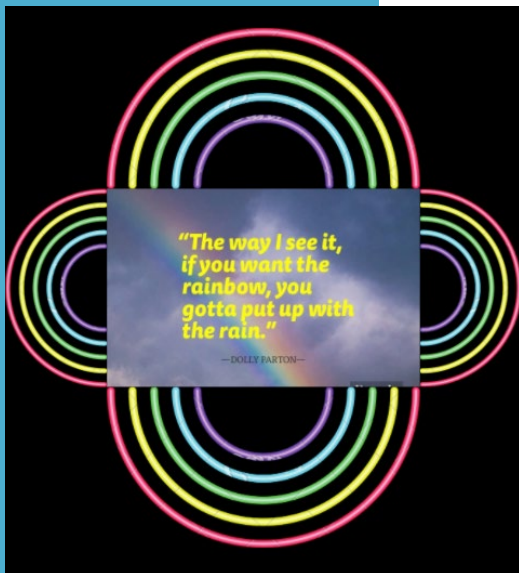
Now in its 39th year, the Festival relies on the generous support of donors who want to celebrate the voices and creativity of diverse high school and middle school students. **Donate Now at www.parkmontpoetry.org/give.** ■

Session 1: Graphic Design

By Lizzie Sampson

This session, students learned the basics of graphic design through a series of tutorials and hands-on learning projects. They learned about color theory, typography, alignment, spacing and balance. Students created unique designs based on open-ended prompts, while learning to use an open-source design platform.

Projects included: Get Out and Vote posters, flyers for a restaurant or business of choice, travel postcards, and moodboards! ■



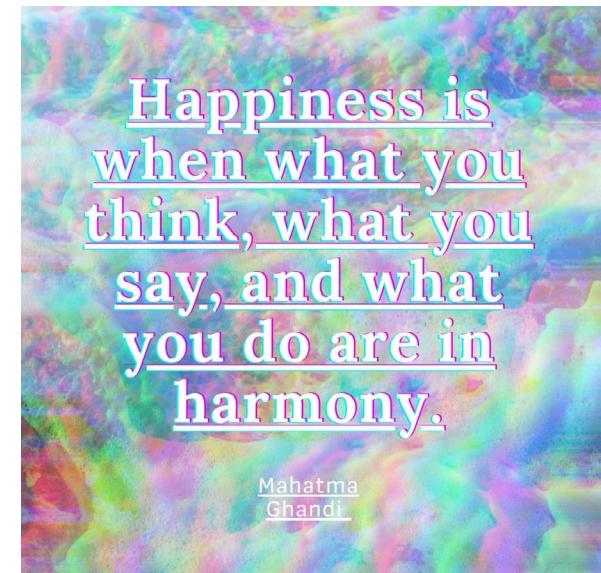
Poster by Matthew F.



Design by Heaven



Poster by Emaree



Design by Keonte



4842 Sixteenth Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20011
(202) 726-0740 • (202) 726-0748 (fax)

Admissions: Ext. 2 • Email: info@parkmont.org
www.parkmont.org