

# Passing Notes

**Parkmont**School

Sessions 4 and 5, 2019

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Ethan, Matt, members of the Coastal Ecology class, and a Carolina lighthouse.



A morning of kayaking awaits the students.

## Roughing It: Parkmont Goes Coastal Carolina

By Ethan Kuhnhenh

2019's Upper School Adventure Class kicked off its trip in mid-May, when students in the Coastal Ecology Main Lesson packed their bags and headed south on an epic nine-day journey through the coastal Carolinas. Our trip, the first to the region in decades, was the culmination of five weeks of intense studying and field research into different coastal and marine habitats and the important ecological webs that make these environments unique.

We were constantly on the move, spending only a night in each location before packing our gear and heading farther up the coast. Most nights were spent in tents! Many students had never camped before, but embraced the opportunity to learn how to make do without the comforts of mattresses and air conditioning.

The goal of the trip was to get students to engage physically, intellectually, and culturally with the amazing places we had studied and now had the privilege to

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Man vs. nature: Graham proudly displays his catch.



visit. Over the course of a week and change, we explored the charming southern city of Charleston, South Carolina; took naturalist-guided boat tours and kayak trips; biked around the sleepy backwater town of Ocracoke; and spent countless hours fishing and catching waves on some of the East Coast's most gorgeous, undeveloped beaches.

We were curious to see how the landscape had changed since

Parkmont's prior visit. As we discussed in class, and now saw in person,

environmental catastrophes, including hurricanes and floods, had washed away miles of island along the Outer Banks. Beach towns on Hatteras Island had outgrown themselves and now sprawled unchecked up the coast.

Other areas, we were happy to see, seemed frozen in time. Charleston's downtown, a National Historic Landmark, has immaculately preserved its Colonial architecture and oozes Southern gothic charm. Federally protected lands like Cape Lookout National Seashore are undeveloped gems in a rapidly urbanizing Southeast, places where you can encounter wild horses and clear night skies. Engaging in these environments, by taking tours, talking to locals, or simply by camping under the stars, allowed us to gain perspective on a part of this country that is often overlooked when we think of the nation's cultural and ecological resources. Hopefully we won't let too much time pass before we can make another trip down South. ■



The Coastal Ecology class sets up camp under a picture-perfect sky.

Yanna looks like she's been ziplining all her life.



## Middle School Trips: Zip, Zoom, Swim

By Troy Burki

In May, the entire middle school made the trek out to Calleva to take on the ropes course in a full day of meeting challenges, strengthening relationships, and building teamwork strategies, as well as having an awesome time. Students had the opportunity to try many different elements that encouraged them to step outside their

comfort zones and to rely on their classmates for help and moral support. They tried the zipline, cargo net obstacles, and several other high rope elements that required collaboration and effective communication to be successful.

The day after Parkmont's 8th grade moving up ceremony, middle-school students, along with teachers Sam, Alex, and myself, took a final trip. We went to Sandy Point State Park to celebrate all that the students had accomplished throughout the year. We were extremely fortunate to have some great weather to enjoy swimming in the Chesapeake Bay, playing games on the beach, throwing the baseball

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Casper masters the ropes.



Middle-school students swim in the Chesapeake Bay.



Alex, Lily, and Sam goof around on the beach.



Sasha soaks up some sun.

around, and playing soccer, as well as having time to just relax and have a good time with friends. After wearing ourselves out with various activities, we had a chance to eat some barbecue and snacks prepared by the teachers along with some help from a few students. Overall, this was a wonderful way to end the year on a high note. ■



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Jacob looks on as Khalil deftly balances a frisbee catch and dinner.

## Spring Exhibition: Art, Academics, Potluck: Bingo!

By Sania Tildon

Families and friends gathered for the annual Parkmont student exhibition and family potluck on May 7th. Student creativity was on full display. Adorning the walls of the lobby and Commons was student artwork from the past four sessions, including portraits, charcoal inspirations, and works of abstract expressionism. Matt's Upper School Immigration class filled the Northeast room with posters about the history of different immigrant groups and their experiences in the United States. Students in Middle School Civics created posters about the Bill of Rights and some famous Supreme Court cases. They also wrote and performed skits to demonstrate the right and wrong ways to interact with police and how to be respectful while protecting one's individual rights.

To experience more of Parkmont firsthand, parents and relatives competed

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in a school-wide bingo game, visiting different classes and participating in activities to earn stamps on their bingo boards. Troy's Middle School Flight class offered an opportunity to earn stamps by creating flying ring crafts, which demonstrate the four main forces of flight: lift, thrust, drag, and weight. Upstairs in Chemistry, guests watched simple blue flames turn different colors — from brick red to neon green. Molly Gess and Brianna Campoverde helped them earn stamps by performing a flame test and matching the correct element to the color it emits when heated.

With the help of Keonte Jones, Helen Abebe, and Latisha Bangura, visitors to Bridget's Speech and Debate class earned stamps by practicing vocal, physical, and speech-writing skills at three different stations. Meanwhile, Ethan's Coastal

Ecology class engaged visitors in identifying the salinity, pH, and temperature of their saltwater aquarium. In the Commons, against the backdrop of student and staff book selections, guests discussed their favorite books with Nijole to earn an additional bingo stamp.

At the end of the evening, families assembled in the Commons, where they submitted their bingo sheets for a prize drawing. The exhibition concluded with a thoughtful presentation by Matt and senior Lidya Demissie about the 2018 spring trip to Alaska. ■



**Troy explains how to create flying ring crafts for parent Julie Gess, Noelle and Mekdi.**



**Lidya and her father make a great team!**



The proud 2019 graduates pose with the even prouder Parkmont staff outside Zion Baptist Church after the ceremony.

## Graduation Day ... 3, 2, 1, Liftoff!

By Matt McClain

Every year, Parkmont celebrates its graduating seniors with a small ceremony in which teachers give speeches to recognize each member of the senior class. We are so proud of the members of the Parkmont Class of 2019, a great crew of nine, some of whom had been with us since the early years of middle school and all of whom we have come to know so well. Here are some excerpts from teachers' tributes to graduates:

### **Sam Graul on Jared Adams:**

If there is any single most integral part to who Jared is at the core of his ethos, it's where he's from, or rather, how where he's from has impacted his choices

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throughout his life. Looking over his years at Parkmont, Jared has come from many communities. In each of these places, along with our own community, Jared worked to advance his goals while never losing sight of what he owed back to those who had been there to support him along the way.

**Ethan Kuhnenn on Latisha Bangura:**

A show titled *Spunk* [this was the play the seniors and staff attended for Senior Night] could really be about Latisha. She embodies the word. The enthusiasm, the charisma, the confidence, the pluck. Latisha strikes me as a young woman who has conquered fears, overcome obstacles and is ready for the next challenge.

**Matthew McClain on Lidya Demissie:**

I asked some of your friends to describe what your friendship means to them. Tigist wrote, “What makes Lidya an amazing friend is her positivity; whatever happens, she always finds a way to make everything funny. She laughs like an old lady, which makes me laugh and I love that. And she is always there for me, every time. She’s honest, trustworthy, and she took me under her wing at a time when I really needed a friend.”

**Willa Reinhard on Carolina Honea-Hughes:**

I have been impressed with your tenacity. You didn’t give up when things got tough, whether it be math, relentless edits from teachers, test retakes, or interpersonal relationships. You have been determined to make this year your best academic year yet and to prepare yourself for college. You have developed close relationships with your teachers that help give you the gumption to ask questions when you don’t understand something. Keep doing all of this.

**Kim Schraf on Alexander Krauzlis:**

Alexander, I believe it will be your instinct for beauty and kindness and the wonders of the world around you — just as much as anything you find between the covers of books — that will focus and liberate you as you embark on the thrilling

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path that awaits you at Siena College and beyond. Remember to look up and out as much as you look down at the page.

**Bridget Mullins on Dwayne Latimer:**

If there is one lesson I could impart, it would be to treat yourself as kindly as you treat others. Encourage yourself the way you do others. Accept yourself the way you do others. You are stronger and smarter than you give yourself credit for. You light up rooms and others' lives. So be yourself, and never apologize, because who you are makes a difference, and you will be greatly missed by your peers, your teachers, and especially, by me.

**Willa Reinhard on Melvin Lazo:**

As part of the ecology class you got to spend 10 days in May in the Carolinas. Matt and Ethan, the trip leaders, describe you being in the water nonstop, splashing in the waves like a kid. You were incredibly easy to get along with and worked well with everyone on the trip. You took on the role of trip griller: even after exhausting, hot days, you would get food going, involving and teaching your peers, generously making sure others had enough to eat before you ate.

**Sania Tildon on Nubia Montecinos:**

You don't waste your words, and when you do speak, your honesty is quick to come through. To hear you speak about the things that you care about — from reproductive rights to mass incarceration — is to recognize a deeply-rooted compassion and concern for other people that shines through not only in what you care about, but in the way you treat your friends.

**Nijole Gedutis on Tomas Rodriguez:**

Parkmont was an even nicer place once Tomas arrived. His consideration for the staff and his fellow students was apparent from the beginning. His relationships were always positive ones, and we knew that if he was friends with someone, only good things were going on. We all wanted to have him remain a part of our community! ■



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## Internship: Career Preflight

*An interview with Kieran Waterman, 11th grade, reflecting on his 10th-grade internship.*

By Willa Reinhard

### Tell me about your internship.

I worked at the College Park Aviation Museum. I helped out with the education aspect, preparing supplies for birthday parties. I would prepare a hands-on activity where little kids might assemble a kite or a wooden plane and goodie bags. I set up a display about types of clouds for the museum.

### Favorite part?

My favorite part was getting to work in the field of aviation, where I hope to work in the future. I had never had that experience before.

### Previous internships?

I had an internship at the KID Museum in 9th grade, and I did similar work there, setting up for events. They call it a maker space and they sort of have hands-on engineering activities like electronics and woodworking.

### Something you are proud of?

I'm proud of the display I created about clouds and weather. They've had it up ever since I finished it. I worked hard on it and I was really happy with the result.

### Why a career in aviation?

Since I was a little kid I've liked airplanes and flight, and I find the whole industry really fascinating. I'd like to be part of that when I grow up. ■



Kieran samples a possible career path at his College Park Aviation Museum internship.

## Introducing: The Marfield Young Writers Program

By Kim Schraf

It's always special to be part of something at its inception, to know that you helped to define and direct its course in some way. This was the opportunity that unfolded for ten middle-school students who helped to launch The Marfield Young Writers Program this year. Parkmont was approached by Ito Briones, chair of the Marfield Prize, a \$10,000 award recognizing a nonfiction writer whose book focuses on

the arts. He wanted to expand the values and mission of the Marfield Prize into the community and to inspire and enrich the writers of tomorrow.

With coordination and oversight from Nijole and myself, our "writers' group" met with Ito six times between February and June for multi-media, hands-on explorations of how a writer responds to art. Ito is a sort of Renaissance man: a biochemist and researcher, medical doctor, and accomplished painter. He brought an original oil painting, drew sketches of each student and elicited their responses, created a video history of the art of portraiture, and taught a tutorial on drawing simple shapes. We never knew quite what

to expect! Ito also knew that the way to a middle-schooler's heart is through the stomach; he always arrived with delicious snacks. Most memorably, though, he regarded each young writer with the respect he would accord a colleague.

On June 5, the entire class attended a reception for the winning author (Susan Orlean, for her excellent entry, *The Library Book*) at the Arts Club of Washington, where our students passed the mic and interviewed Ms. Orlean after her reading. And on June 6, four students were chosen to attend the awards ceremony and dinner. Jacob Roberts, Ian Makles, Faith Dawson-Martinez (accompanied by her mom) and Yanna Contee-Jones joined Nijole and me for an elegant evening. And Parkmont parent Carolyn Parkhurst, who had served as a judge for this year's prize, joined our table. The relationships forged on this maiden voyage have been of great value. We hope that we can continue the journey together, grooming young writers for bright futures! ■



Ito Briones shares one of his paintings with the class at the first Marfield Young Writers meeting.



Parkmont joins the local community in supporting the local community at the Pupil's Run 5K.

## Parkmont People: Running For Ethiopia

By Sam Graul

I had heard tales from our Head of School that once upon a time, Parkmont staff participated in foot races around the Washington, DC, area. Last June, I was proud to see that tradition return, but this time with the addition of 14 of our students. Running has been a passion of mine for years, and it was amazing to help Erin organize our participation in this event.

Pupil's Run 5K is an event organized by OnePupil, a local non-profit that works to fund improvements in childhood education in Ethiopia. The race is a 3.1-mile, out-and-back course along Sligo Creek Parkway in Takoma Park. It turned out that race day, June 1, was as gorgeous a spring morning as you could ask for. We all gathered in the warm-up area to first participate in a group Zumba warm-up and hear some opening remarks from the course organizers, before heading to the starting line.

Fourteen students and six staff members lined up along with many others from the local community, and at the sound of the horn, took off, each at our own pace. We all came in with different levels of running experience, but we all pushed ourselves to get the best race we could.

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The Zumba warm-up proves to be both practical and fun.

What I love about this kind of event is the support that the community shows for itself. People we just met ran side by side with us, cheered us on and offered words of encouragement. As we crossed the finish line, each one of us turned around to cheer the next finisher. A few students even ran back to run alongside their fellow teachers and classmates to help them in their final kick to the finish line.

When the dust settled, every single participant had put in a great effort, had a great race, and most importantly, had a great time. I look forward to the fall and beyond when we will have opportunities to continue

this tradition yet again, and maybe set some new personal bests. ■

## Teacher Spotlight: Troy Burki

**Start:** I usually just say I'm from Seattle, but I grew up in Gig Harbor, at the south end of Puget Sound.

**Fields:** I played football and baseball, starting in second grade. At the end of high school, I had to make a choice. I thought I had a better shot with baseball. I was a left-handed pitcher. It's not as common, and the ball moves in a different way.

**On the border:** I went to Bellevue College in Seattle for two years and then to New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. It was the exact opposite in climate. It rained maybe two times in my two years there. Only wind cancelled games or practice. It would blow the sand everywhere and you couldn't see. My best pitch was a curve. I also threw two-seam and four-seam fastballs, up to 90-91 mph.

**Reconstruction:** I had a torn rotator cuff and had to call it quits in my senior year. I had good coaches and advisors and was able to get my degree and

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Troy pauses, in a rare still moment, in Parkmont's sunflower patch.

graduate on time, majoring in sociology with a minor in management. I was fortunate.

**Calling:** I got into teaching through Teach For America and was placed in Stuttgart, Arkansas. I taught middle-school math and science and helped with technology. I was there for three years. It's where I met my wife.

**Upper 16th Street:** I was looking for a job where I could teach but also help with technology and building maintenance. It's not always common to find a position like that. Usually it's one or the other. I was in Washington in 2015 and applied at Parkmont School. Ron emailed me back. It was really fortunate for me.

**Teaching's payoff:** The moments where you spend a lot of time trying to explain things in different ways and then you see it click for a kid. They bring it up later. You see that it stuck with them or you see them apply it to something like current events. I had great teachers. I'm helping provide guidance and support for kids. I feel like I'm giving back.

**Baseball lesson:** You have to be accountable to the team and make sure you are doing what you are supposed to do, that you can be counted on, living by example and not just saying a bunch of stuff.

**Favorite movie:** *The Shawshank Redemption* or *The Princess Bride*. ■

## Summers Elsewhere: Teachers On The Move

Parkmont teachers flung themselves far and wide over the summer, giving in to the temptations of their geographical curiosities. From the Blue Ridge to East Blue Hill, Bogota to Vietnam, Wonderland Trail to Cambodia, and to Chincoteague and Champlain and Italia and Amarillo. The paths wound around the world, the country and the region, and back to Parkmont to enrich classrooms with first-hand experience. ■

Willa and her son Biosah commune with the wild ponies at Chincoteague, Virginia, their favorite family vacation spot.



Bridget at the Batu Caves in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where the view includes several ornate Hindu shrines, but her favorites were the monkeys that follow you up the steps trying to steal visitors' food.



Nijole, with friend Naomi, in Siem Reap, Cambodia, at Angkor Wat, the largest religious monument in the world.



Erin, with friend Kevin, at Monserrate, overlooking Bogota, Colombia.



Matt takes a deep breath in Val di Funes, Italy.



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Alex in step, hiking 126 miles in six days on the Wonderland Trail around Mount Rainier, outside Seattle, Washington.



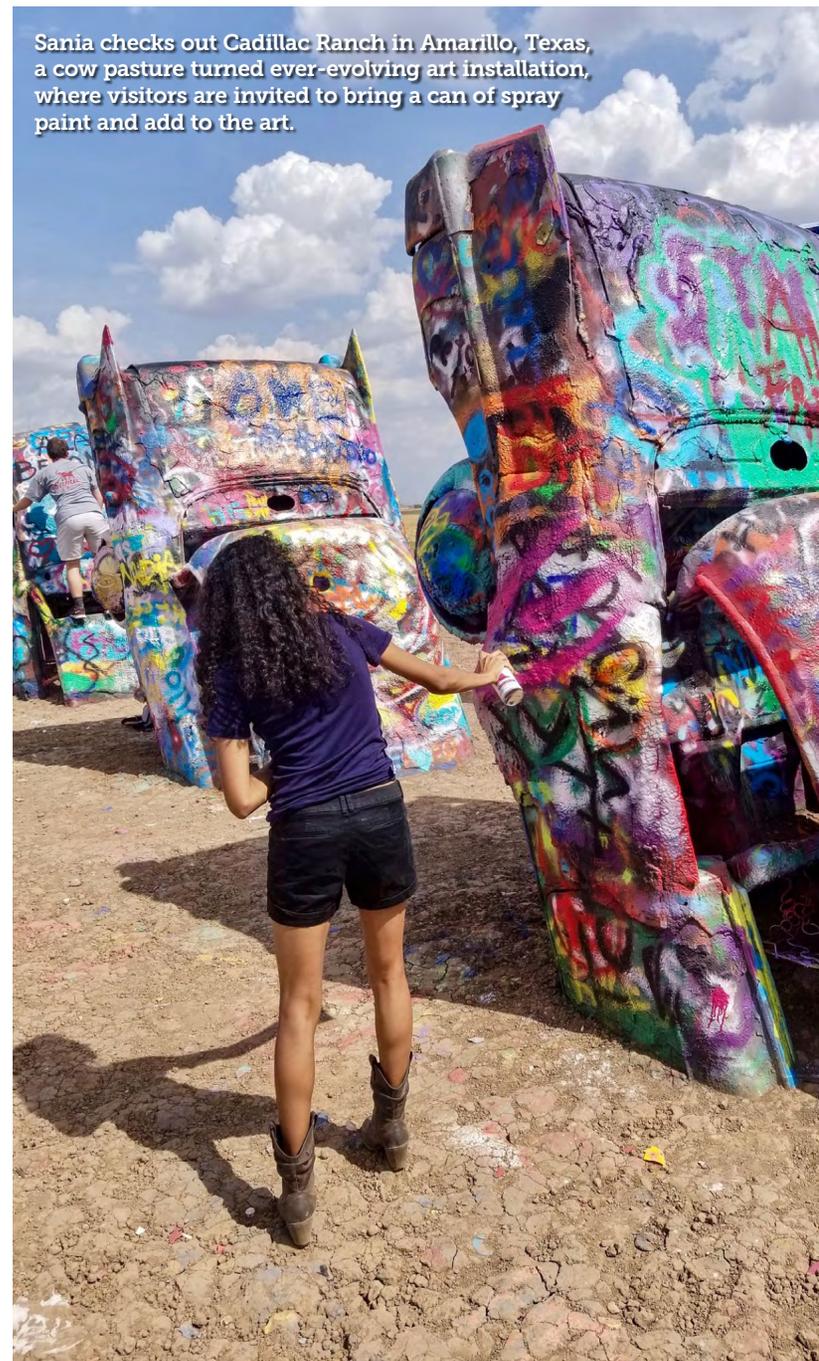
Kim in East Blue Hill, Maine, mid-August, searching for seals, loons and a pair of nesting bald eagles. She found them all!



Sam enjoys a post-camping-kayaking-trip morning along the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia.



Lake Champlain, Vermont, provided a catch of the day for Ethan.



Sania checks out Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, Texas, a cow pasture turned ever-evolving art installation, where visitors are invited to bring a can of spray paint and add to the art.

## Fun Definition: Helping People

By Willa Reinhard

After reading the novel *Refugee* by Alan Gratz this spring, my Middle School English students became eager to get involved in the refugee crisis. They wanted to do something to help kids and families like those depicted in the novel, fleeing dire circumstances in their home countries in search of safety and opportunity.

Students voted to host a movie night to raise money. For early arrivals, they showed the short documentary, *The White Helmets*, a film about volunteers in Syria, followed by the option to watch one of two feature films, *A Quiet Place* (the crowd favorite) or *Central Intelligence*. The event was a huge success, and they raised \$334 from ticket sales, concessions, a raffle, and a matching donation from the school!

The money was donated evenly to two non-profit organizations, Carry the Future ([carrythefuture.org](http://carrythefuture.org)) and the White Helmets ([www.whitehelmets.org](http://www.whitehelmets.org)). The class even received a blog post from Carry the Future on their Facebook page! The students' enthusiasm for helping others led our class to both an energetic and meaningful end to the 18-19 school year. As they were setting up for the event, a couple of the students said, "You know, helping people is actually really fun!"

## Stories from Our Classrooms

By Bridget Mullins and Willa Reinhard

From September through June, one Sunday afternoon each month, Bridget and Willa joined a cohort of other DC-area public, charter and private school teachers to write and revise stories with the goal of each participant thinking and writing about their classroom through a social justice lens. The class "Stories from Our Classrooms" was hosted by Teaching for Change, a DC non-profit. Pieces were helped along through ongoing peer feedback and through guest-author visits. For the final class, participants shared excerpts of their pieces with

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Students are ready for moviegoers to arrive. Left to right: Abe, Ameen, Noelle, Mekdi, Faith, Jacob, and Katia (not pictured, Ian and Bezawit).

friends, family and community members at the Brookland Busboys and Poets. Check out these excerpts from their writing!

**The Teacher Becomes the Student** by Bridget Mullins

Each session, Parkmont students are required to read a book outside of class, write a series of journal responses, and finally, present an interactive project on the book. As a teacher, I have loved the exposure that it has given me to what interests my students. In fact, when a student writes enthusiastically about his or her book, it has often spurred me to add the book to my reading list. At the end of the 2017-18 year, just such an event occurred. In writing about the book *The Hate U Give*, one of my students compared it to a book we had read in class earlier in the year, *How It Went Down*, which is the story of an unarmed teenage black male who was shot by a police officer.

Fast forward a couple months, and I began to see movie posters for *The Hate U Give*. The next time I visited the theatre I saw a preview, and while the concept was nothing new, the words of the main character, Starr, narrating in the preview drew my attention. “I was Starr 2.0, I never gave people a reason to say she’s ghetto.” Why did those words feel so familiar? Why did they resonate deep within my core?

I rushed to see *The Hate U Give* as soon as it opened and found myself pondering this movie and its themes for several days afterwards. Who knew a book chosen by my student could make me think this much?

It was then that I began to realize that my approach to teaching English had been all wrong. I’d imagined that I was supposed to share what had affected *me*, but now I realized I needed to find what would affect *my students*. For many of them, this movie was the reality they had lived their whole lives, and I had been ignoring their experiences. I simply needed to listen: listen to their experiences, listen to their struggles, and listen to their desires for their futures.

**Picking the Right Book** by Willa Reinhard

From the first novel we studied, *Ghost* by local author Jason Reynolds, there was an energy about this group of students that had me planning beyond the pages,

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working hard to make the book live and breathe, to hold onto their curiosity. Each morning, their hands stretched high into the air to pick an entry from the Guinness Book of World Records, because the main character, Castle Crenshaw, aka Ghost, liked to memorize them. When they learned Ghost loved sunflower seeds, Mekdi volunteered to bring some in. We ate sunflower seeds in different ways as we read Reynolds' rich passages about how Ghost and his dad ate their seeds, how the seeds connected them. My student's enthusiasm had me measuring 100 meters at a nearby field, timing them as they ran so they could see just how amazing Usain Bolt's 9.58-second world record was and how insane it was for Ghost to challenge it. They jumped at the opportunity to spend a Sunday afternoon with me at a Kennedy Center performance of another of Reynolds' books, *Long Way Down*.

It was only October, and our classroom was humming. I had picked the right book for them. They "got it," this story about a boy moving beyond what the author describes as "his scream." When Faith responded to my question, "Who is Ghost's antagonist?" by saying, "It's his scream. We all have that," and eight other heads nodded in agreement ... Goosebumps.

## Asbestos Notification

In accordance with Environmental Protection Agency Regulation, C.F.R. ss763.93(g)(4) and ss7763.84, this is to give notice that the Parkmont Asbestos Management Plan documents are maintained in the office of the Head of School and are available for inspection at any time upon request.

For your further information, the management plan was established in 1988. Our most recent EPA re-inspection was conducted in September 2018 by Jenkins Environmental, Inc. Re-inspections are conducted every 3 years.

Should you have any questions or wish to review the Management Plan, please contact Ron McClain at 202.726.0740.



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