

Four Rivers Currents

March / April 2019

From the Principal's Desk...

WALKOUTS AND MISSION: TRAINING FOR CITIZENSHIP

Our students are telling us there are problems in the world that can't wait for solutions. I, as school leader, say I hear that. So let's get to fixing those problems, which is where our school mission and students active participation in our democracy are in synch.

On March 18, 2019, over 80 students across all grades in our school walked out at 10:00 am. They marched to the Greenfield Town Common and protested against gun violence in our schools and society. They stood in silence for 17 minutes to commemorate the 17 students who were killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018. Students gave speeches, held signs, and drew attention to their message. The next day, on suspension for leaving school without permission, over 50 students gathered at the Greenfield Public Library to work on their assignments. They also met with Hannah Karcinell, a survivor of the Parkland shooting in her first year at UMass, deepening their understanding of issues that inspired their protest in the first place.

Students who walked out that day did leave school without permission and received a standard consequence for that action—an out of school suspension. We notified students and families ahead of time that this would be the consequence, so that they could make informed choices about whether to engage in an act of civil disobedience or not. Accepting consequences when a cause is that important is part of the act itself.

As a school, we walk a line between admiration and support for students who care deeply about their world and our responsibilities as a school. Parents expect their children to be under our care while at school; when students walk out, we can no longer ensure their safety or care. At the same time, we want to prepare students at Four Rivers to engage important issues and contribute to a better world. We want them addressing issues of gun violence. We want them addressing legal and legislative issues surrounding gun control. We want them taking a stand and trying to make a difference.

The organizing group of students wrote a letter to our faculty in which they said their walkout embodied some of the most important learning outcomes our school aims towards: "As our teachers and mentors, you have taught us to be creative thinkers, critical thinkers, and the importance of active citizenship. You have given us the skills necessary to organize and execute this walkout." While they said they understood our position as teachers means we have different responsibilities and they did not expect us to walk out with them, they did ask us to take a stand, to not wait to act, and to look for ways that our school can address an issue like school violence—even if not in our plans for the day. They asked what we as adults and their teachers plan to do about issues of gun violence, and other concerns they have that they feel their elders have not properly handled. They challenged us to “reexamine the mission of Four Rivers and work with us to make sure our school ‘lives up to its vision,’” and does not contradict our current activism endeavors, which, based on the reputation and foundations of the school, it does not.” Our students—and young people all over the world—have things to say about our current state of affairs, and we ought to listen. The full text of their letter is at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FIdA7pE_X6EPR1zkyVVLtSPdMAnBiZvgRmDwCawVldo/edit

Our faculty and staff had our own discussion following the walkout. How did people feel
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Peter Garbus, Principal

Grade 7 News

COULD IT REALLY HAPPEN? Expedition Update

After examining the extinction of passenger pigeons as a case study, seventh grade science classes have been considering the claim that it might be possible to “de-extinct” passenger pigeons using biotechnology. After building background knowledge about the bird and its role in the ecosystem, students conducted several science circles considering these questions: What caused the passenger pigeon to go extinct? Should we bring the passenger pigeon back?



It was wonderful to hear students asking each other to consider the ecological implications of “de-extinction.” The logical next question of course is for students to ask, “Could it really happen?”, and dig deeply into the biology behind the question, “How do chickens (and other living things) come out of eggs?” Using tests of their own design students have determined that eggs themselves are not alive, contain no cells, but do contain many of the chemicals of life. They spotted a critical difference between fertile eggs and those that hens lay when there is no rooster around, studied the conditions needed for eggs to incubate and carefully observed the day by day development of what was happening inside a chicken egg. Using zebra fish eggs, they were able to spot cells dividing to make more cells and currently they are building cell models in order to understand how cells divide themselves and what exactly is being copied when a cell divides. Next they want to dig deeper into DNA to learn how it works and if it might be the key to this whole idea of de-extinction.

In Humanities, students began the expedition with the elements of science fiction, using them to analyze the 1950s sci-fi comic “Judgment Day”. They studied and wrote their own examples of Afrofuturism and Visionary Fiction. Seventh grade student Ursula Snow explains:

“Science Fiction is a very powerful form of writing. Some might even say it can change the world. I think that writing in general is a powerful tool, and science fiction helps sharpen that tool. Science fiction can make people look at the world in different ways. It can show us new technologies and new ways of living. For example in the comic “Judgement Day,” the author not only introduces new technologies, but the story also mimics our world today. The story teaches us that racism and segregation aren’t helpful in our world, and the only way to succeed is to join together. Although based on imagination, science fiction can show us how our world could be in the future. It gives us an awareness of what we are doing to our planet, and what is happening around us. It can even give us ideas of ways to make our world a better place.”

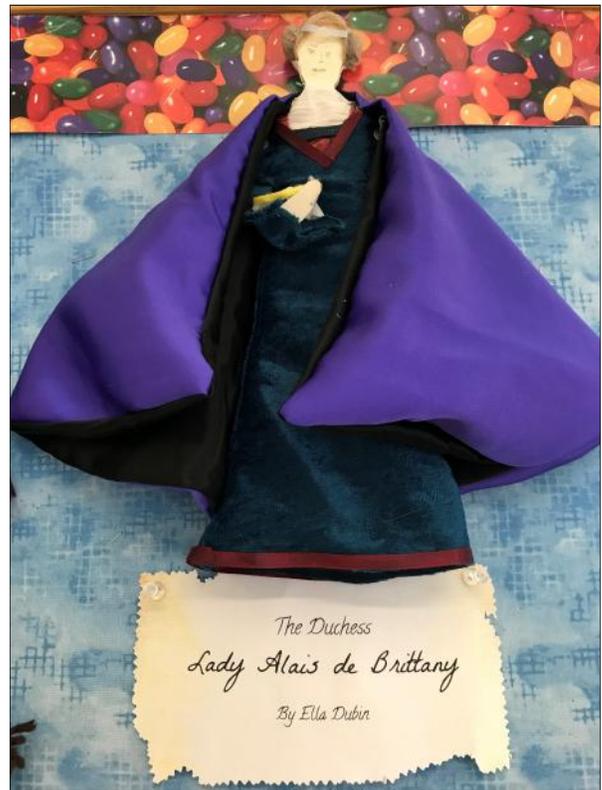
The students then tackled the science fiction novel “The House of the Scorpion” by Nancy Farmer, practicing their literary analysis skills by examining it for sci-fi elements, character, and theme. Students discussed their analyses in literature circles while working on individually-set discussion skill goals. Currently, we are in the process of constructing group essays, and soon we will be writing our own research essays using questions, generated from the book, about biotechnology.

~ Ms. Locke and Ms. Dunnington ~

Grade 8 News

MEDIEVAL TIMES STUDY

In 8th grade Humanities, our study of Medieval times continues. The students researched specific medieval roles, for example cooper, dapifer, and serf. They then created a two-dimensional medieval character based on their research. They finished their character studies by composing a medieval ballad about or from the voice of their medieval character. Some students chose to go for a grade of “exceeding” by reading or singing their ballad during our Medieval Ballad Reader's Theatre!



DIVISION 2 NEWS

BIOLOGY — Ms. Stamas

Tenth grade biology students have been investigating bacteria and antibiotic resistance. They first were introduced to a young woman who was diagnosed with a strain of community MRSA bacteria. To learn more about what MRSA is they designed their own experiments to examine where in our school we could find the presence of non-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. They used sterile technique to culture different bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Serratia marcescens* and *Escherichia coli*. They designed their own experiments to see if different types of antibiotics and antibacterial soap were effective at killing these bacteria. Through all of these investigations the students have been discussing how resistance to an antibiotic develops and how bacteria pass on these traits to their offspring.



ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE — Ms. Beardslee

The sun is out! Ninth graders kicked off their exploration and investigation into the final standard in Environmental Science class: Water. In small groups, students are responsible for collecting data on stream health at a specific site for the rest of the semester. During the first visit, students collected data for pH, stream velocity and temperature. They then drew maps of their sites and considered factors affecting runoff and erosion and imagined other tests we could consider as a class that



might lead them to be able to fully determine water quality. They also began brainstorming stream study research questions which will form part of a longer term investigation in pairs. Stay tuned!



ENGLISH — Ms. Ritchie

As part of their I-Search research project, the ninth grade students spent a morning at Forbes Library in Northampton. Students checked out books on their topics, explored the galleries, and talked to librarians about the resources and services public libraries offer. The students spent the past eight weeks learning about their topics, and then they held an I-Search Fair on April 5th at Greenfield Community College, where they presented their research to an audience of parents, teachers and Four Rivers student peers.

DIVISION 3 NEWS

SOCIAL STUDIES

Juniors

In 11th grade modern world history class, students have been examining the issue of plastic pollution worldwide. The expedition kicked off by asking students to collect and keep track of all their plastic waste for a week. We were amazed at how much there was. Then they read the June 2018 National Geographic magazine and watched the documentary film, *Plastic Ocean*, to build background knowledge for two projects. The first project was a mini-action on the plastic waste issue where students had the choice of creating a plastic Instagram account, building plastic art, or writing letters to corporations and political leaders. The study in World History culminated with a Model UN project where students represented specific countries around the world and attempted to craft a global plastic pollution resolution. In the days to follow, the juniors traveled to New York City to visit the United Nations to see where global problems are really addressed.



Seniors

In 12th grade American civics class, students have been working with content based on understanding perspectives on power in American life. They have done this through personal action projects, through an examination of music, and by reading specific historical case studies in American democracy. The case study readings have covered the anthracite coal strike of 1902, the struggle for African-American voting rights, as well as women's rights and the push for a constitutional Equal Rights Amendment.

Juniors and their teachers in New York City: On the steps of the New York Public Library (top), and looking down on the General Assembly at the United Nations (above).

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about the students' actions? How did people feel about the school's actions? And what's next? Many of us go into education with a strong sense of purpose and commitment to ideals. Many of us believe in taking a stand and speaking up for just and righteous causes. As shared in our discussion, teachers felt pride and admiration for the principled stand our students took. At the same time, there's a recognition that this is our job. We have a responsibility to all of our students, to their learning. We started a shared document with ideas for how we can do our jobs as educators and hear students' demand for change.

It is our school's mission "to prepare students for lives of learning and service." What does that look like when students tell us they are afraid that someone could shoot them at their school? What does that look like when scientists say climate change is upon us and politicians can't agree to mitigate the causes? My answer is that we want our students to stay in school with us to learn about issues, develop ideas about how to make the world a better place, and hone the skills of investigation, critical thinking, and communication to get their ideas and arguments into the mix. We want our programs to help students become "ethical people who contribute to a better world." Part of our job is to show students how they might contribute. It's our job to help them see what's needed to create that better world--and give them hope that we can do it.

We fulfill our mission as a school by preparing all of our students for active citizenship. That means they know something about science and the ways human activities have impact on water, air, and soil. They know something about how human societies have organized themselves in the past, both doing good and doing harm to one another. They can find information, evaluate its reliability and validity, and draw conclusions about what that information means. They can use words and numbers to explain relationships and communicate their thinking. They also learn to care about themselves, their classmates, and anyone around the world who might be impacted by their actions and behaviors.

Our mission calls for us specifically to prepare students to address the following question: "How do we find the healthy, sustainable interrelationship of the natural world, technology in its many forms, and the human community?" I find this question both daunting and inspiring. Some of us look around and see such desperate troubles in the world; they leave us confused, fearful, depressed, hopeless. Yet there is also possibility in the question. There are people and ideas and movements out there focused on what's healthy and sustainable. When we focus on that question, when we examine these interrelationships, we prepare our students to make change.

In fulfilling the fundamental and essential responsibilities of teaching students how to think, how to care, and how to act, I want us to be careful not to teach them our own personal views of what to think. We teach a diversity of students with a diversity of perspectives and opinions. While some students might choose to protest, others may not make that choice. We are not like university professors whose personal and academic viewpoints are the very subject of learning itself, open to the engagement and critique of students at that level. Our students are younger and more influenced by our views--contrary to how it seems, perhaps. It's not that we have to remain neutral; but we do have to be cautious with how we deploy that influence. Our job as educators is to provide meaningful, engaging learning opportunities that build students' knowledge, skills, and character to define their own values.

What we do now--after the walkout? What changes should we pursue? How do we bring those changes about? My answer is we study, we investigate, we seek to understand, and we search for the best ideas about where change is needed and how to do it. I accept the challenge our students have posed: to listen to them, to think about the mission of our school, and to look for ways within our program to connect their learning to things that matter. Our faculty and staff continue their discussion of the same challenge. I hope you and your students will continue as well. We all have important work to do. Right now. ~ Peter Garbus, Principal ~

COLLEGE ADVISING

SENIORS continue to hear back from colleges. Schools that have already said YES! to our students include:

Champlain, Clark University, Colorado State University, Drexel, Eckerd, Ithaca College, Keene State, Lesley University, Lyndon State, Marymount Manhattan, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Montana State, The New School, Rochester Institute of Technology, St. Michael's, Sarah Lawrence, Smith College, Temple University, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Connecticut, UMass Amherst (including Honors College), UMass Lowell, University of New Hampshire, University of Vermont, Vassar, Wentworth Institute of Technology, Western Colorado State, Western New England University, Westfield State, Whitman College.

Andy Stenson: astenson@frcps.org

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NURSE'S NOTES

Believe it or not SPRING has arrived! Two items to keep in mind:

1. "FLIP FLOPS" are inappropriate for Sports / Wellness. They offer no support and can contribute to injury. Please make sure your child has sneakers at school to change into for all running and extended walking activities.
2. ALLERGIES: If your child exhibits watery eyes, frequent sneezing; and nasal congestion please contact his/her physician to discuss over-the-counter allergy medication such as Claritin or Zyrtec which do not cause drowsiness. Allergy medications are best given in the morning **before** going outside.

Please contact me if you have questions or concerns.

~ Jeanne Milton, RN ~

ULTIMATE NEWS

The spring ultimate season has begun. We have 6 teams playing: 3 boys' and 3 girls' teams. We have close to 100 participants and have some very strong teams! The school calendar has all the information on practices and games. Our home tournament will be on May 4th. Come on out and watch our athletes perform.

SUMMER ULTIMATE

Four Rivers runs a Summer Ultimate Intensive; this year it is the week of June 24 - 28. This is a great program for anyone who wants to keep playing in the summer, improve on their skills, have fun, and meet old friends and make new ones. Sign up here:

<https://fourriverssummerultimate.weebly.com/>

or email Terry Plotkin at

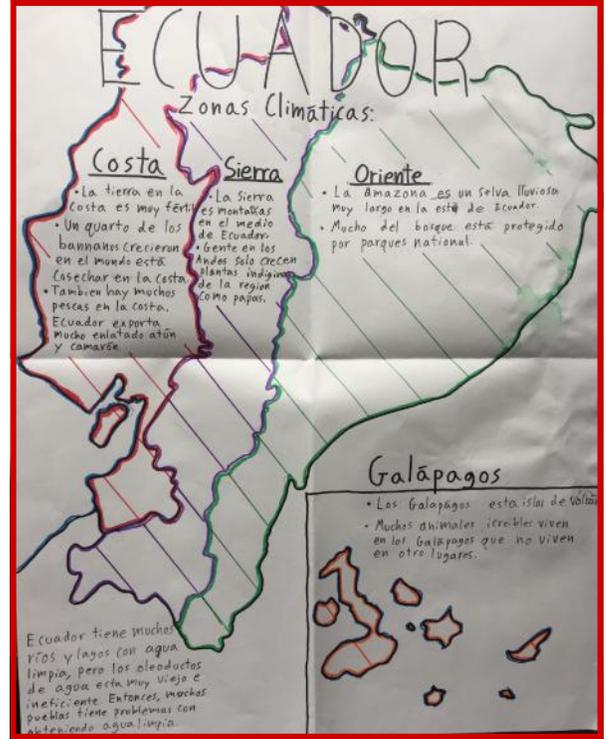
terryplotkin@gmail.com.

See you on the field.

SPANISH 3 — Ms. Beardslee

Students in 10th grade Spanish are reading and considering questions about travel abroad through the eyes of the beloved Daniel. Daniel, a character in a story the class is reading, is an American adolescent who visits family in Quito, Ecuador. He loves photography and so students have been able to discuss and describe different pictures they themselves have taken. Daniel also experiences different culture shocks over the course of his first few days in Quito and we have discussed those in class and compared them to our own experiences. Students will be working on a longer term photo and artist statement challenge and using more hypothetical situations in conversation to compare Daniel's experience to their own. Adelante!

Map of Ecuador by Aidan Delorenzo



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Four River Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people and lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, technology and community – pervade the teaching and learning at the school. Four Rivers works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and learn from the many resources of Franklin County.



Four Rivers Charter Public School
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