

It is a privilege to speak here today in chapel about Goal Two, educating to a deep respect for intellectual values. This Goal invites us to think actively, creatively, critically, esthetically and imaginatively. Now what does all this mean?

Humanity's unique spiritual and secular teachers -- Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, St. Madeleine Sophie, St. Rose Philippine -- are models, crucial individuals who exemplify the life of the mind, not merely through the principles they express but through their own vivid presence. Look around you. You are surrounded by great teachers! This is why I have always loved schools.

Teachers tell stories; they relate parables; they tell jokes; they invoke metaphors; they nudge us; they give us all kinds of evocative and witty nuggets to relate to. Teachers embody intellectual values: kindness, love of living beings, directness, honesty, focus, intensity, respect for a deeper reality, relative calm, relative unconcern for material or worldly goods, radiant energy, inner strength. No teacher ever asks you to be superficial or mediocre. They speak to and inspire the best within us.

One of my favorite mottoes is Samuel Phillips' statement on Goodness and Knowledge (1777) which is the motto of Phillips Exeter Academy: "Goodness without knowledge is weak and feeble, yet knowledge without goodness is dangerous." Literature gives us the ethical framework to discover models of goodness and knowledge.

And by now each of us has a personal bibliography. A top ten.

Salutations. Does anyone recall that greeting from a timeless childhood classic? This is how Charlotte A. Cavatica (Just call me Charlotte) the gum-drop sized heroine of *Charlotte's Web*, greets her friends each day. Even if she has pulled an all-nighter working hard on her web. Is anyone surprised by her enduring legacy? Will we ever again look at a rat without recalling Templeton, the antagonist? And what about the runt piglet, dear hyperactive Wilbur, of the long eyelashes, strong hopes, big appetite, and even larger loyalty?

From the time we are little children, literature encourages us to think, to imagine, to respond. Once we move from picture books to the process of reading for ourselves, we are invited to extend our more narrow version of reality by encountering texts filled with people and places we may never have experienced.

- Penelope at her loom, waiting faithfully for Ulysses's 20 year return
- The tomb where Romeo and Juliet fatefully reunite
- The mysterious painting of the girl in hyacinth blue
- Frankenstein's Creature, wretched and alone in the icy Alps
- Catherine and Heathcliff's search for a higher existence
- The scarlet misery of Hester's letter, and her boldness
- Candide's ordinary bliss cultivating his garden
- Hamlet, who finds significance in the fall of a sparrow

Our readings humanize us, shape our understanding of who we are, and what we believe. A memorable encounter with a text helps us create a new map of the world.

We look to the arts and literature to learn about the joys and sorrows of the human condition. Literature's narratives visit and revisit themes relevant to our lives. For literature is a living, organic record of the interior life of our species, of human nature in all its infinite vicissitudes.

Although the act of reading is a solitary act, as students and teachers, we have the luxury of reading and responding as a chorus, a choir -- in an exchange of ideas and voices -- and in that collaborative discovery, we find responses to our very deepest questions.

A good life, what is it? What does it mean to be human? How can I, with courage and compassion, recognize the differences between us, understand and value other perspectives? Through such exploration, we discover our own place in what Princeton scholar and civil rights activist Cornel West calls the "greater narrative of life."

Do we understand the differences between knowing things, information, knowledge and wisdom? The notion of wisdom focuses on what is important in human living and being. Goal Two surely invites us to reflect upon the value of an examined life.

Socratic philosophizing asks students to engage in a conversation that arouses, disturbs, compels our innermost souls. To search, inquire, wrestle until the truth opens to us. So if you are confused or perplexed, that is a sure sign that you are learning! Pulitzer prize-winning Dominican writer Junot Diaz writes about his faith that real readers have no problem with the unintelligible. Learning asks us to lean into discomfort and take risks.

As did our Spiderwoman Charlotte. "Some pig," she etches in her web, extolling Wilbur's virtues. A miracle! A Spiderwriter whose words rescue Wilbur! A story about life and death, trust and treachery, pleasure and pain, and the passing of time. This text reminds us "that human beings must always be on the watch for the coming of wonders."

Stories nourish the imagination. This is the power of literature. Each day spent in a learning community that is the classroom, I am attuned as a teacher to the same qualities we seek to develop in our students: a sense of wonder, purposefulness, insight, integrity, humor, respect, empathy, gratitude. These values of the mind and the heart, of knowledge and goodness, are the sacred center of this vibrant educational community.

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