



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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Thoughts for the Week

By **Richard Marotta, Ph.D., Headmaster**



Today was such an interesting day in our school. While the upper school students were taking midterm exams in which they were asked to pull together a semester's worth of work, the students in the lower school were celebrating pajama day as a way of creating a comfortable and alternative appearance for the day. Both activities stood in contrast with each other: one was focused and intense and the other relaxed and productive.

My AP English students took the midterm this afternoon. As I walked through the room and watched them thinking and writing, I thought about today and, indeed, the entire semester. What an extraordinary fall and early winter it has been! The national election has challenged many preconceptions about American life and democracy;

international politics has undergone and continues to undergo what could be major and trend setting cultural and governmental shifts; public and indeed private life calls for a reassessment of what is important for both the larger culture and our individual culture intellectuality.

As I think about this, I started reflecting on the literature we had read this semester in AP English and in AP French. From Euripides to Hemingway, Bronte to Shakespeare, Gide to Camus, each of the works we read and discuss forced us to reflect on the nature of writing, representational art, thinking, culture and ourselves. Each discussion of a literary work brought us to new and renewed understanding of how we use language and narrative to explain the world in which we find ourselves.

When Aristotle wrote that art is a mirror of human life in his discourse on mimesis, I think that he saw how important art, all art, is to helping us interpret our experience, the experience of others, and the experience of our culture. Literature has this power: it allows us, even forces us, to reflect on our lives and cultures through the lens of narrative or poetic representation of those conditions. For example, when we read *Hamlet*, we as readers had to understand the complex relationship between public and private life; we had to look into another *person's* heart and mind to understand and empathize with that experience. We as readers cannot isolate ourselves from the experience, thoughts and feelings of others. In short, we were forced to think about experience, not as a slogan but as a complex linguistic representation of the human condition.

Our school does this every day. It is thrilling to know that each morning we enter into an environment in which thinking is the primary activity. Aristotle would have cringed with the reduction of life to a slogan. Now more than ever, thinking needs to be everyone's primary concern and activity. We need to demand it of ourselves; we need to demand it of others.

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