



June 5, 2020

Notes from Ojai Valley School

Dear OVS Community,

We are saddened and outraged by the tragic events that have led to social unrest across our nation these past days. These violent acts come at a time when our communities are reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic, and its resulting economic havoc, and they illustrate the need to address the deeply rooted racial injustice plaguing our country.

Whilst there is no template for coping with this kind of national anguish, it starts with acknowledging that we can, and must, do better.

Our role as a school, first and foremost, is to educate and we must accomplish this within the framework of openness and inclusion, maintaining a diverse institution in which all people can learn together and be accepted for who they are. "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view -- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." Harper Lee published these words in 1960 in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one of many novels in our curriculum that focus on racial injustice. Those words haven't lost an ounce of power in the time since.

In our classrooms, we teach students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers. We ask them to challenge, to question, and to respectfully consider each other's perspectives. We do not tolerate discrimination of any kind. Helping students understand these values, helping them find their roles as ethical citizens who will create a world where equity and social justice is realized, not imagined, is part of our charge. Without these essential understandings, our children are no better equipped than previous generations, and we owe it to them to provide the tools that empower change.

There is hope, and one need only look at the students we graduated last week to see it.

Our seniors -- who are pursuing majors in diversity studies, history, engineering, business entrepreneurship, environmental science, forestry, and environmental diplomacy -- developed a profound commitment to social and environmental justice while at OVS, and their passion for making our country and planet better is what we need now more than ever.

In recent days, our faculty and administration have listened and engaged in thoughtful dialogue about the issues confronting our schools and communities. The conversation will continue, and we invite you to share your thoughts and ideas. Together, we can make a

positive difference.

Sincerely yours,

Michael J. Hall-Mounsey
President/CEO

GRADUATION CEREMONIES

We hope you enjoyed last week's promotions and graduation ceremonies. They were all recorded and are available on our [website](#) to watch again. Congratulations to all our graduates!



SPOTLIGHT ON THE CLASSROOM

For the past 11 years, first-grade teacher Nicole Ferro has taught a unit on the civil rights movement and specifically the experiences of one child: Ruby Bridges.

"I was initially drawn to the story of Ruby because she was in her first-grade year when she integrated into William Frantz Elementary School," Mrs. Ferro said. "She was the first black child to desegregate a school in the South and she was the same age as the students I teach at OVS. I remember seeing the Blue Eye/ Brown Eye Exercise by Jane Elliot during my credential program and felt very compelled to really devote part of my curriculum to opening my students' eyes to the inequity and inequality in our country. Ruby Bridges was the perfect way to teach first-graders that our country has struggled for a long time to create an environment where all people are treated fairly and have equal opportunities."

During their unit of study, the students, ages 6 and 7, are introduced to several civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. But a large part of their class discussion focuses on segregation laws.

"We begin our unit with literature about Ruby and then move to a movie based on her first-grade school year at William Frantz," Mrs. Ferro said. "The students keep a movie journal and use this journal to write and draw about this historical time. We also have class discussions on how we would feel if we were put in Ruby's shoes. The unit culminates with an art/writing project in which the class creates a satchel/lunch box from craft paper. Inside



the lunch box, the class writes about some of what Ruby went through, what she did to help our country, and how she must have felt when doing it. This year we had to finish the project remotely and after each child completed their project they sent me a short video detailing some of what they wrote."

WHAT WE READ

Three years ago, English teacher Terry Wilson read a [New York Times article](#) about five teens who vandalized Virginia's historic Ashburn Colored School, and, as their sentence, were handed a reading list. The court's disposition required the students to read and give reports on 12 books from a list of 35 that address some of history's most divisive and tragic periods. That reading list is still used today as part of the English 11, AP English and AP U.S. History [summer reading list](#). Click here to read an [archived story](#) from On The Hill.



BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

As part of our closing duties, the faculty from both campuses engaged in a [music video](#) together by singing one of the defining songs of the 1970s: Bridge Over Troubled Water. The BBC described the song as "a musical first-aid kit to be cracked open in times of need." Paul Simon performed it at benefit concerts for the victims of 9/11 in 2001 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Fifty years after it debuted, Performing Arts Coordinator Andy Street thought the lyrics were still relevant and he encouraged the faculty to record themselves singing it during the pandemic. It feels even more relevant today.

We hope it will comfort you, dry your eyes, and ease your mind.

