



VIEW FROM THE CHALK FACE

Lent 2021

Week 4 (w/c 25 January)

The education world is one of structure, regime and pattern. We haven't moved on very much from the termly pattern that we all experienced as children, a structure initially set up around Christian festivals and the harvest. The beginning of a new calendar year, and new term, gives us the opportunity to take stock and although we may not commit to resolutions, we can all strive to be resolute. The January darkness adds an extra dimension to this lockdown but with the arrival of snowdrops, daffodils and vaccine, there is light and hope ahead of us.

I spoke in assembly recently about how one begins and ends periods of life and I want to pick up this theme in this medium too. In Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Act 2 Scene 2, it says that 'all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances.' It goes on to talk about the seven ages of life, from an infant, 'mewling and puking in the nurse's arms,' to 'Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.' A beginning and an end. Life is full of them and the familiarity can give comfort as well as poignancy. At the moment, the usual beginning and end of terms look different to what they once were; it was with great sadness that the U6 and Year 8 couldn't leave properly last summer and end that phase of their journey with their friends. This term saw the beginning of the Langley education for one teacher, Mrs. Whatrup, who has come to teach Psychology at the Senior School, and a number of pupils. We warmly welcome them all, although the home learning environment is not quite the surroundings that they envisaged for their beginning at Langley. Due to the restrictions, I haven't actually met any of them in person!

The beginning of a personal statement, as the U6 will testify, is a difficult thing to do, as is the opening line of an essay, a book or play. 'Call me Ishmael' is an impressive original. The impression we make at the beginning of time at school, university, a sports club, a new cast, new job is important. What we wear, the words we choose, our body language need to be thought through to make those initial impressions as positive as possible. Although I am not convinced, it is said that in interviews a decision is made in the first 10 seconds.

In the arts, the entrance is critical to how we see the character. The opening number in *Hamilton* sets the mood and tempo of the show, where Alexander Hamilton has come from and who he wants to be. Film entrances build up tension and can create a picture in our mind before we actually see the character. We hear the, now distinctive, breathing of Darth Vader before we see him. In *Silence of the Lambs*, Jodie Foster's character, Clarice Starling, walks tentatively along the line of cells until she, and we, see the motionless, staring Hannibal Lecter.

Endings can be smooth and happy, but also sad and difficult. How we end something often says much about us as people and will leave a legacy. Margaret Mitchell, the author of the 1936 Pulitzer prize winning novel, *Gone with the Wind* ends with, 'After all, tomorrow is another day.'



Donald Trump's ending, his exit, from his time as President and from residing in the White House, has been the news story of the year; some would say, the theatre of the absurd. There is a way to begin and a way to end; to show grace, composure and humility in the face of loss are much prized attributes. 'The king is dead, long live the king' shows the immediacy of some transitions, indicating the cyclical nature of our lives.

I end with a recent beginning and an historical end. The inauguration of Joe Biden last week was captured in the most verbose manner by Angela Gorman, the US Youth Poet Laureate. Please do take time to look up her entire speech – there is plenty of melodrama, but alongside the theatrics, there is a real sense of truth, hope and strength. Her capturing of collective collegiality spoke strongly to me; a sense of shared experience and shared journey.

'So we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. If we merge mercy with might and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birth right.'

In terms of endings, 'Elvis has left the building,' is right up there with the very best, but it is to George Washington that I turn. Self-deprecation, humility, context and hope. His 1796 leaving address ended thus:

'I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my country will never cease to view them with indulgence; and that, after forty five years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions of rest.'

I wish you and your families health and happiness and may 2021 become the year that we would want it to be.

Best wishes,



Jon Perriss
Headmaster