

CA

CONCORD ACADEMY MAGAZINE

WINTER 2026



CAN WE MEND OUR
**CIVIC
FABRIC?**

CA alums
share their
approaches
to better
communication



CONCORD ACADEMY MAGAZINE

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Building the We

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MISSION

We are a community animated by love of learning, diverse and striving for equity, with common trust as our foundation.

Honoring each individual, we challenge and expand our understanding of ourselves and the world through purposeful collaboration and creative engagement.

We cultivate empathy, integrity, and responsibility to build a more just and sustainable future.



A LETTER FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL **HENRY D. FAIRFAX**

TEAM GREEN,

This year at CA, we're being guided by a community theme: "Building the We: Responsibility, Connection, and Growth." Asked to move from a perspective that foregrounds "me" to one that opens into "we," I've been considering both the meaning and mechanisms of "community." What *is* this word we use so often? In a world that sometimes seems intent on deepening divisions, how are we continuing to co-create a shared and inclusive identity? How do we *practice* community?

I'd love to hear your thoughts on that. Revisiting this theme throughout the fall semester has helped me explore how this community continues to evolve, not at the expense of our differences but through how, as our mission states, in "honoring each individual, we challenge and expand our understanding of ourselves and the world."

CA's approach to education isn't based on the premise that knowledge is an objective good that can be handed down. Instead, we understand that learning happens relationally. None of us can do it alone. Together, we create conditions that allow us to be vulnerable enough to step from our comfort zone into our growth zone, and connected enough to return from our panic zone, too. Together, we root our ongoing, individual educations in honesty about how we're doing, what we're seeing, and how we want to show up for ourselves and each other, even when that's hard. CA is a learning community that supports young people—and all of us—in maturing into responsibility and our larger relational selves.

The wisdom of community that our students, faculty, staff, and alums share in these pages can't be fully expressed by any single voice alone. This entire issue reflects this theme. Whatever your connection to this school, I hope "Building the We" resonates with you and helps you consider all that you're bringing to and learning in all your relationships.

Go, Green!
Henry

campus



Finding Freedom in Faith

For **Anisa Brown '26**, research has become a way to understand how communities find strength and meaning. “I really love history, and I always have,” she says. Last summer, as a John Winthrop Student Fellow at the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS), she explored the significance of Black churches in Boston during the Civil War.

She focused her analysis on the Twelfth Baptist Church, the oldest standing Black church in the country, in what is now Beacon Hill. She also studied the Masonic African Grand Lodge, among other spiritual spaces throughout the area.

Working in the MHS archives, she read sermons, essays, and speeches that revealed how religious leaders used faith to challenge slavery and injustice. She also visited historical sites across Boston and walked the Black Heritage Trail. Her research culminated in a presentation at an MHS conference in November, where she shared her findings alongside other high school scholars studying Boston’s history.

Anisa’s interest in historical research deepened after taking CA’s Civil War and Reconstruction class in 10th grade. She spent hours in the school’s J. Josephine Tucker Library, and Library Director and Archivist **Martha Kennedy** encouraged her to apply to the fellowship program.

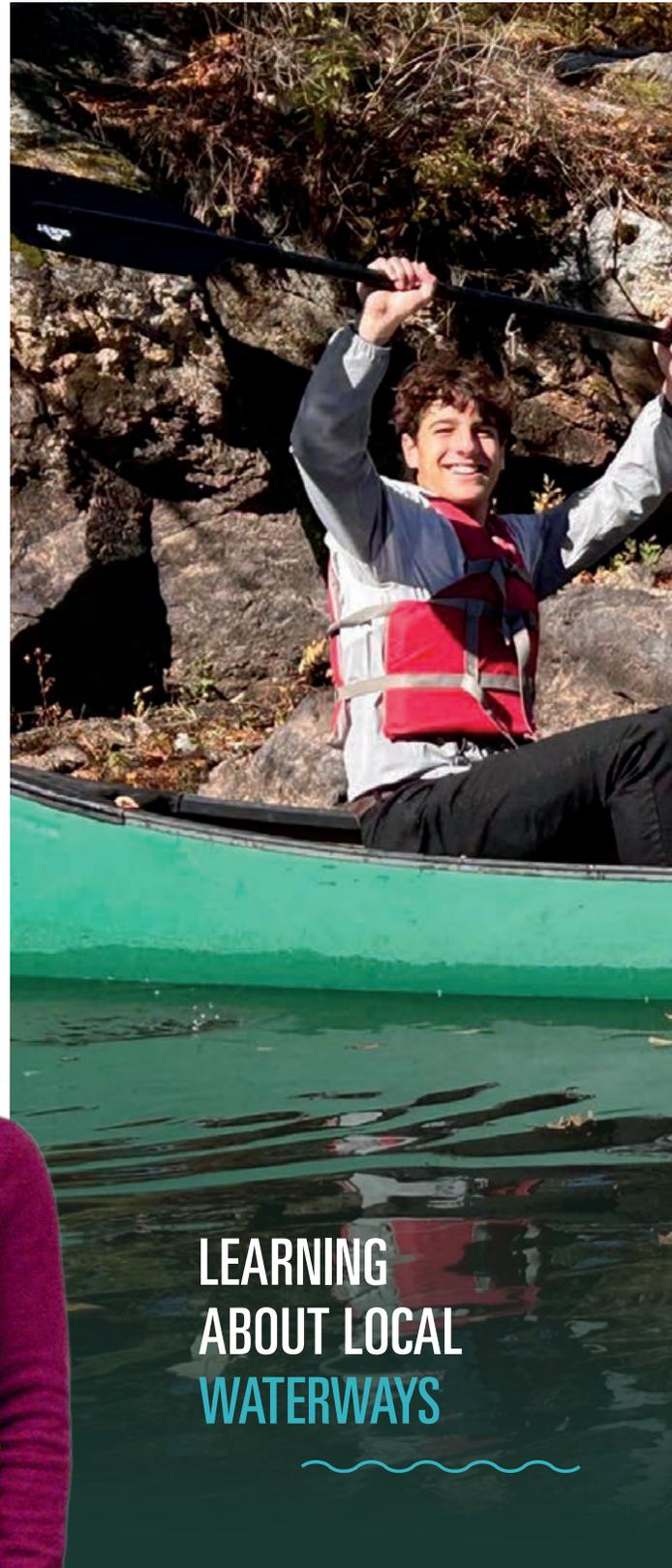
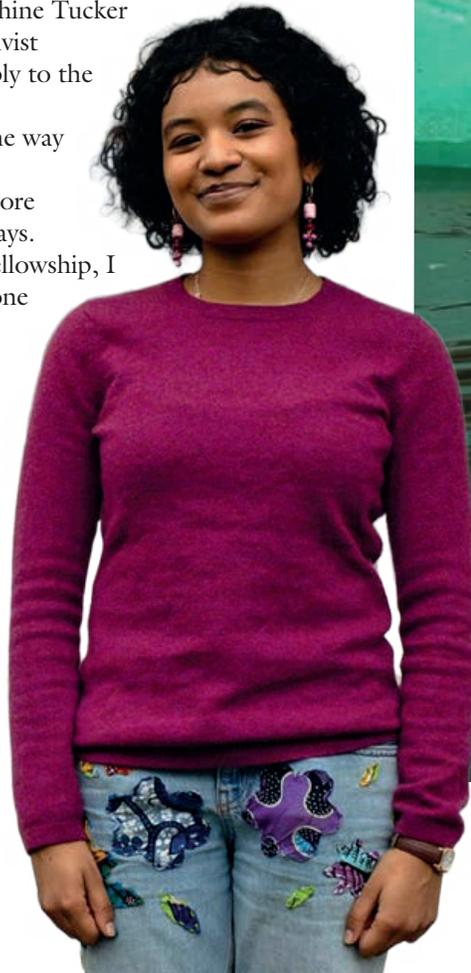
Her fellowship experience changed the way she approaches history.

“It’s made me think of history in a more place-based way—more spatially,” she says. “When I was initially applying for my fellowship, I had such a broad topic. Honing in on one place allowed me to trace deeper, more meaningful patterns.”

She credits CA with preparing her for the rigor of independent research: “CA’s encouragement of students to be self-sufficient, and to do work not just because they’re going to get a grade on it, but because they care about the thing they’re doing, was really important.”

LEARN MORE

concordacademy.org/anisa-brown



LEARNING
ABOUT LOCAL
WATERWAYS



Students in the upper-level environmental science course *Water Resources*, taught by science teacher and environmental sustainability lead **Chris Labosier**, have been learning about the physical processes that shape streamflow and landscape formation, the chemical and biological factors that influence water quality, and the influence of climate change on the hydrologic cycle and ecosystems. Not only have they gotten out on the rivers

themselves, but they've also connected with local water protectors.

In November, Labosier invited two staff members from OARS, a nonprofit watershed organization based in Concord, Mass., to visit both sections of his class. They discussed their work on climate resilience, ecosystem restoration along the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord rivers and tributaries, and their largely volunteer-driven water-quality monitoring

program. Labosier says the visit was a great opportunity for the students, who have explored dams and water quality issues in other geographic locales, to get a local perspective from professionals in the field: "I think this helps bring the course home, and now they see the watersheds in their home communities in a different way."

LEARN MORE concordacademy.org/oars

Crafting Well-Told Stories

Filmmaker, screenwriter, and head of CA's Visual Arts Department **Justin Bull P'25 '28** celebrated a professional milestone in September 2025: the theatrical release of his latest screenwriting project, *The Cut*. Directed by Sean Ellis, this narrative feature film follows a boxer, played by Orlando Bloom, as he prepares for a grueling comeback match by enduring extreme weight-cutting measures.

"I'm constantly exploring that fine line between obsession and perfectionism, pursuing 'greatness,' and the risk of pushing yourself beyond healthy boundaries," Bull says. His screenplays span genres, from the 2021 horror thriller *A Banquet* to CA's most recent student film, the comedy *Cassie Crowe's Mid Life*, created during the 2023–24 school year.

Bull's commitment to character-driven work sets a tone for CA student filmmakers. This year, after six Feature Film Project cycles, he and theater teacher **Shelley Bolman P'27** are piloting a new initiative: The Sitcom Project: Writing and Acting for Television. The turn to serialized storytelling was inspired by the new Centennial Arts Center.

There, for the first time, students have space to build sets and immerse themselves in a true studio experience in the Spencer and Colton P3 (Process, Presentation, and Production) Lab, where they're undertaking set design, screenwriting, and performance in front of a live studio audience.

"Collaborating with students is the reason I work here," Bull says. We can't wait to see the show.

— Vanessa De Zorzi

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concordacademy.org/bull





LIVING LANGUAGE

Over the summer, Mandarin teacher **Wenjun Kuai P'27** took a CA-funded sabbatical trip that was both professional and deeply personal. For 12 days she immersed herself in the history, culture, and immigrant experiences of Chinese American communities in West Coast cities of the U.S.—Seattle, Portland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego—as well as Vancouver, British Columbia.

She stopped in Chinatown in every city. “Each time I stood before that iconic ‘Dragon Gate’ entrance, I felt a profound connection, as if I could see the entire history of that always-busy and noisy neighborhood unfolding through the dragon’s eyes,” Kuai says.

By visiting museums, monuments, and gardens, she says, she “gained a vivid sense of the immense hardship and discrimination the Chinese immigrants faced but also saw their unbelievable strength and determination.”



Kuai has always believed in framing Chinese as a “world language,” rather than a “foreign” one, and this trip made that concept a tangible reality. Eager to bring what she learned into her classroom, she’s creating lessons to help students explore Chinese American history, dialect differences, and the evolution of Chinese language and culture across generations. Having traveled throughout Asia several times with CA students, including in her native mainland China, she now hopes to offer them domestic trips to explore the Chinese American experience.

The trip confirmed for her a central truth: Language is alive with the stories of the people who speak it. “It showed me that my role isn’t just to teach a language but to help my students see their own and each other’s stories reflected in our curriculum,” she says.



LEARN MORE concordacademy.org/living-history

THE MAKING OF MODERN INDIA

A global summit connects CA with Gandhi’s legacy

In November, students in The Making of Modern India, a history course taught by **Topi Dasgupta P'22 '25**, participated in the United Nations’ Second World Summit for Social Development, held in Doha, Qatar, and streamed online. From CA, they joined a global audience to watch the premiere screening of the documentary film *Ahimsa – Gandhi: The Power of the Powerless*, and their feedback was included in the UN’s official report.

At the summit, world leaders and representatives from educational institutions addressed urgent challenges, including inequality, technological change, and social inclusion. “All of the objectives for social progress in the UN’s World Summit coincide with the objectives that Indians had for their own political freedom and societal development in the colonial era,” Dasgupta says. “So it was a natural fit.”

One of her students, **Parker Daniel '26**, says the film’s portrayal of nonviolence and exploration of *ahimsa*, the ethical principle of non-harming, made a powerful impression on him, as did the class. “My favorite part of the course has been exploring how political history connects with deeper questions of identity and morality,” he says. “I really enjoy how Topi encourages us to engage with primary sources and intellectual traditions rather than just memorizing dates and facts.”

LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/gandhi

Signs of the Times

CA introduces ASL

In spring 2024, **Jenny O'Malley '24** proposed introducing an extracurricular American Sign Language (ASL) program at CA as their senior project. This fall, the support of a generous alum allowed the school to offer an eight-week ASL symposium. It drew so much interest that two sections ran simultaneously.

Two members of CA's faculty coordinated with visiting instructors from the Learning Center for the Deaf in Framingham, Mass., learning alongside 35 students. The Monday evening sessions introduced finger spelling and signs for related words, numbers, and basic phrases, prioritizing fun and interaction.

O'Malley, now a sophomore at New York University, was excited to learn that their idea had come to fruition. Currently studying Latin, ancient Greek, and Arabic, they say their love of languages influenced their senior project, but so too did their interest in institutional operations. "I was curious about how the school worked, how curricular decisions were made, and how students could get involved," they say.

Joy Xu '26 took the ungraded course and says it allowed her to enjoy the experience for its own sake and form new friendships. "Everyone was learning and struggling together," she says. "While we were figuring things out, we'd laugh a lot, because sometimes we would sign something wrong, and it would be really funny."

She learned to spell her name and express herself by signing her emotions, and she says the physicality of ASL helped her learn: "You're doing it with

your hands, and doing it with your body actually helps you remember."

Emmy Summers '28 particularly enjoyed the games they played, such as telephone. Learning ASL is "intimate, because you're not using spoken words," she says. "You're much more vulnerable. It's like learning another language, but you have to use much more emotion when you speak." For that reason, she says, the symposium was an ideal format.

"The teachers did a fantastic job with the instruction and creating a fun, warm space," says **Monica Ripley**, CA's ceramics teacher and one of the course coordinators. She often noticed students practicing together outside of class.

Carmen Welton, head of the Modern and Classical Languages Department, was O'Malley's senior project advisor. She says the symposium was meant to encourage student exploration and not intended to be as robust as language acquisition through formal classes.

"Jenny's idea, from the beginning, was to offer something outside of the academic structure," she says. "When we decided last spring to try to do it, it was pretty easy to incorporate. Jenny had done all the work, and they did it well."

O'Malley says CA's relational culture made it easy to approach administrators, who were happy to help: "It was cool, because it was a different type of guidance than I was used to."

Initially O'Malley considered private lessons modeled on individual music instruction, but then realized students would miss the benefits of speaking in groups. Welton suggested a symposium,



CA students practice American Sign Language during a weekly class taught by instructors from the Learning Center for the Deaf.

and O'Malley surveyed students about what language they'd prefer to learn.

When ASL proved to be the most popular choice, O'Malley began researching local instruction and contacted the Learning Center for the Deaf. "I couldn't imagine doing something like this at any other school," they say. "I'm really glad I got the opportunity and that something came out of it. I'm glad so many people are interested in something I was able to create."

Welton says she would like to see the ASL symposium set a precedent—as a format for future ASL courses building on the basics, and potentially for other languages at CA.

— Heidi Koelz

LEARN MORE concordacademy.org/asl



LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

Last summer, **Lily Kim '27**, now CA's junior class president, attended the Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership Seminar (HOBY) in Massachusetts. She says it was a transformative experience that broadened her perspective on service, community, and resilience.

As a boarding student from California, she says she embraced the opportunity to "swim in new waters." An improv-based leadership workshop challenged her to embrace flexibility, for example. And she says she learned powerful lessons from discerning how students with diverse backgrounds and perspectives approached leadership, collaboration, and interaction in ways that reflected the values and priorities of their distinct communities.

Lily says that training has helped her approach situations at CA this year with greater understanding. "Empathy and the most sincere connections often come in my quietest moments when I am actively listening," she says.

LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/lily-kim

ADAPTABILITY

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VISUAL ARTS



1

Fall Art Show

Student work from fall 2025 visual art classes was displayed in the Centennial Arts Center in January.

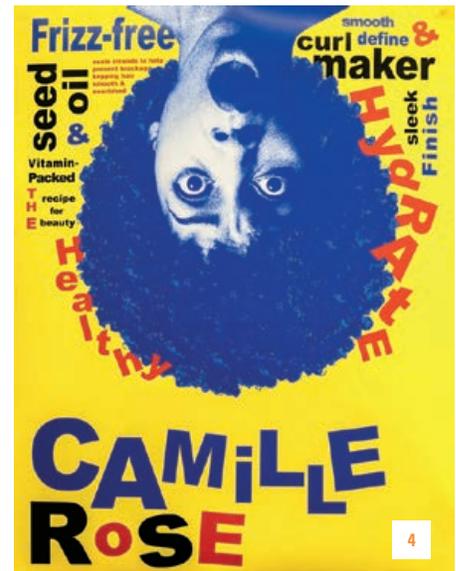
- 1. Nicole Orangi '26**
Huichol yarn painting, sashiko, embroidery on Kinusaiga
- 2. Aki Thangtharnkeat '26**
Ink, gesso, charcoal on collaged vellum and sulphite paper
- 3. Isla Smith '29**
Ceramic sculpture
- 4. Adrianna Betances '29**
Graphic design
- 5. Krithik Devarajan '28**
Oil on canvas
- 6. Aleki Zdraveski '26**
Fashion design, colored pencil on paper
- 7. Berwin Adams '28**
Photograph
- 8. Joy Xu '26**
Oil on canvas (departmental study)



2



3



4

LEARN MORE

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First Year in the C.A.C.

The newly opened Centennial Arts Center (C.A.C.) was in steady use throughout the fall semester



This new home for creative collaboration has been active. In the Spencer and Colton P3 (Process, Presentation, and Production) Lab, students have been creating a sitcom. In November, the P3 proved ideal for a live recording session featuring the CA Jazz Ensemble and the Vocal, Jazz, and Pop Ensemble, and the Performing Arts Department presented *The Prom* (page 14), CA's first mainstage production in the Hammett Ory Theater. During Family Weekend, parents watched dance and music rehearsals. In December, student concerts in the theater and the Music Recital Hall concluded the semester on festive notes.





PERFORMING ARTS

THE PROM

In November, CA celebrated a milestone with the Performing Arts Department's first main-stage production in the new Centennial Arts Center Hammett Ory Theater, staging three sold-out performances of *The Prom*. The musical follows a group of Broadway personalities who travel to a small Indiana town to support a high school student after she's banned from bringing her girlfriend to prom, sparking a countermovement of acceptance and courage.

Directed by theater teacher **Shelley Bolman P'27**, with musical direction by **Michael Bennett**, Linda Coyne Lloyd Performing Arts Department Chair and choral director, and choreography by dance teacher **Patrick John O'Neill**, *The Prom* opened a new chapter for the performing arts at CA. "The technical improvements of the new space are innumerable, allowing us to do things we have really never done before in terms of scenery, lighting, and sound," Bennett says.

LEARN MORE

concordacademy.org/the-prom





ATHLETICS

Go Green!

CHANDLER BOWL

CA won the 2025 Chandler Bowl for Changing Lives rivalry event over Pingree School, 6–2. Including this victory, CA has taken home the coveted trophy eight times in the last nine years.

CA teams celebrated a successful fall athletic season, including another Chandler Bowl victory over league rival Pingree. At the Eastern Independent League (EIL) championships, the **boys cross-country** team earned the EIL title for the second time in three years, **girls cross-country** placed sixth, and over 30 CA runners set personal bests. The varsity teams finished fifth and sixth at the New England Preparatory School Athletic Council (NEPSAC) Division III championship meet, while the boys JV team took first place in its race for the third consecutive year. **Boys varsity soccer** continued its winning ways, competing in the EIL semifinals following a season with just a single loss. In its 10th consecutive NEPSAC tournament bid, the team held the No. 4 seed scoreless deep into the second half of the quarterfinals. CA was unable to pull off the upset, but the program had another strong year overall.



LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/athletics



CAN WE MEND OUR

CIVIC

FABRIC?

STORY BY
HEIDI KOELZ

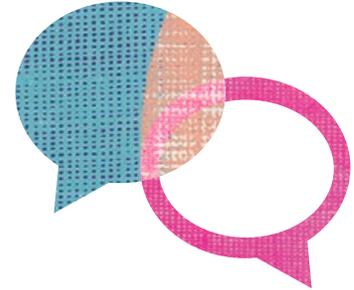
ILLUSTRATION BY
KEITH NEGLEY

PHOTOS BY
COLE STIPOVICH

CA alums share their approaches to better communication

Community work has never been easy. Now, against the backdrop of a hyperpartisan public sphere, listening to learn and engaging in dialogue rather than debate seem like rare skills indeed. What can the people who practice them teach us?

We spoke with three CA alums who offer their distinct perspectives on communication, ones based on research, community-building leadership, and their own lived experiences. Their common thread is a commitment to creating more equitable and inclusive systems—and a focus on how we talk to one another to do so. Here's what they've learned.



impact we can have if we operate at the systems level.”

After serving as the director for the Center for Inclusive Excellence at Framingham State University, he joined YW Boston in 2023. He recently worked with a nonprofit grappling with community tensions that hadn’t consciously considered its values in decades, and his assessment of a government agency uncovered rifts

between leadership and staff regarding psychological safety, communication, and decision-making. To address such sensitive topics, Nguyen often uses a facilitated conversational framework, LARA (Listen, Affirm, Respond, and Add). “There are times it feels kind of forced, but it requires all the parties to agree to using shared language,” he says. “Why not remind ourselves that we want to listen to each other and

affirm when we find moments of connection before we respond?”

But Nguyen stresses that there’s no single way to engage with others. In addition to social identities, he asks his workshop participants to explore various change-agent identities. “Some people are vocal about articulating needs,” he says. “But we also need people who can create coalitions and people who think about solutions. Too often, it’s the same person trying to wear all three hats, so you see a lot of burnout. That’s part of building community too—recognizing you have something to contribute and you don’t have to do it alone.”

Since 2022, he has served on the board of the Natick Organic Farm, in his community in Natick, Mass., where he helped staff establish a shared vision for inclusivity. The farm recently installed multilingual signs in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, hiring native speakers to translate the text. This fall, it purchased an all-terrain wheelchair for members of visiting school and corporate groups to use.

Nguyen says the conversations the board and staff had were as important as those visible changes: “We’re all stronger when we’re able to think more broadly about who our community is and how we can help people feel part of it.”

BUILDING THE



THIS YEAR,
CA IS CENTERING
RESPONSIBILITY,
CONNECTION,
AND GROWTH

STORY BY
HEIDI KOELZ

QUOTES FROM
CA COMMUNITY

PHOTOS BY
COLE STIPOVICH

ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH CONCORD ACADEMY knows how much this school values community. “We are a community” is the first phrase in CA’s mission statement, balanced later by “honoring each individual.” How do we hold these commitments mutually? What does being in community require of us as individuals? What shared responsibilities and intentional relationships enable us to care for one another, grow together, and contribute to something larger than ourselves? What tools and mindsets are necessary for building trust, engaging in honest and respectful dialogue across differences, and supporting lasting habits of connection?

These are some of the questions CA faculty, staff, and students are considering during the 2025–26 academic year, guided by the Council for Community Life’s theme: “Building the We: Responsibility, Connection, and Growth.” Extending last year’s focus on courageous conflict engagement and resolution, the council has asked the campus community to consciously shift from “me” to “we”—not by overlooking individuality, but by embracing mutual care and accountability.

In sharing these voices from campus, we invite you to reflect on how you engage in your communities, at CA and beyond, and what relationships, habits, and structures you want to help cultivate this year.

CONVOCATION

Convocation, a 25-year-old tradition introduced by former Head of School **Jake Dresden**, opened the school year. In his convocation address, **Jeff Desjarlais** spoke about the dynamic of common trust in this ever-changing community, drawing on his 27 years of experience at CA. He suggested that the strength of CA's school culture comes from a continual dynamic of reflection and adjustment, and he emphasized the opportunity available in every moment to build lasting habits of care and connection.



In return for the space to be our own authentic selves, we are asked to respect, to listen to, and to care for the other members of this community, even when we don't fully identify or agree with them.

JEN BURLEIGH '85
CO-PRESIDENT,
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

I hope you find a way into sharing, and allow yourself to grow, to make mistakes, and to take advantage of the support here that will catch you and help you back up.

MAY ZHENG '26
2025-26 STUDENT HEAD OF SCHOOL

Remember, our character and culture don't come from the pursuit of common trust—they come from a shared belief that common trust exists in the first place.



JEFF DESJARLAIS
COUNSELOR AND COACH,
2025 CONVOCATION SPEAKER



CHAPELS

Several mornings a week, the CA campus community starts the day in the Elizabeth B. Hall Chapel, where a member of the senior class has 15 minutes to talk about whatever is on their mind and in their heart. Occasionally, a faculty or staff member speaks as well. Here's a small sampling of voices from the fall semester.

Please, value the time you have with those you love. Go out of your way to check in on your friends, peers, coworkers. Life is too short to be apathetic, so care.

FINN UHRICH '26

Every teacher I've interacted with here, even briefly, has taught me that **every story is worth telling**, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem.

SOPHIA PRIMMER '26

Let yourself be childish. Let yourself be excited by things. Indulge in Disney movies, dumb books, dissonant karaoke, reality TV, really whatever makes you tick. If it makes you happy, it is worth doing. You'd be surprised how many people might relate.

LILA ABRUZZI '26

There is a lot of ugliness and sadness in this world, but there is also a lot of good. The hardest and most beautiful part of being a person is that **we can hold onto both at once**.

LUCY TARGUM '26

Find joy and beauty in the little moments. Embrace discomfort, learn, and laugh about it. Everything will work out!

OLIVIA KOPELMAN '26

Take just a minute or two a day to watch the world. Whether that's lying on the quad looking at the clouds, or sitting on your windowsill watching the moon, or just appreciating the sunset, **our lives are so full of magic**. Notice it.

CAROLINE ESPINOSA '26

Choosing happiness is giving yourself grace, recognizing the way you feel, and allowing yourself to work through it in the way that you need to; choosing happiness is choosing yourself.

DANALIZ ESTEVEZ '26

I have had the joy of hearing nearly 1,000 chapels, and while they do not all stand out clearly in my memory, each one has shaped how I think about the world. Whenever I sit through a chapel, I think of the line from Muriel Rukeyser: **'The universe is made up of stories, not atoms.'**

WILL TUCKER
SCIENCE DEPARTMENT HEAD AND TEACHER

Over time, we stop thinking of kindness as something we go out of our way to do—it just becomes the way we live here, and we should all be grateful for that.

MISHA VARLAMOV '26

Understanding yourself is just as important as understanding others. ... **Learn to feel your emotions; learn to understand them.** And then let them lead you toward the things that matter most.

TAL RICHMOND '26

The present is a gift— open it!

HENRY D. FAIRFAX
HEAD OF SCHOOL, DRESDEN ENDOWED CHAIR



The thing that I find both comforting and overwhelming about geologic time is the idea that the fraction of time that we as humans have existed is so small. **It reminds me to be grateful** for the immense luck that brought us all here today—to sit here in this building that was painstakingly constructed by students before us when only 11,000 years ago it would have been covered in miles of glacial ice.

KILEY REMISZEWSKI
SCIENCE TEACHER

Take time to get to know yourself. You're never the same person twice, and you are always more interesting than you think you are.

OLIVIA KIM '26

Think about those around you who make an impact, who go out of their way to include you, who truly embrace the community they're in. Tell those people you love and appreciate them, and try your best to emulate those parts of them.

LYLE WALDECK '26

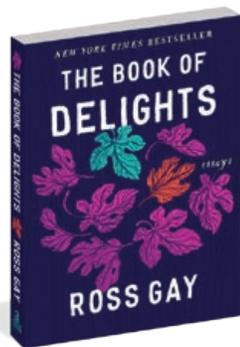
STRIVE WORKSHOPS

To encourage open dialogue and connection throughout the school year, the Community and Equity Office invited the CA community to propose and facilitate workshops to share their cultures, heritages, histories, or other aspects of identity. Six workshops, all aligned with the community theme, took place during the fall semester, with many sessions led by affinity group and student club co-heads. Topics included the experiences of women of color in the feminist movement; the influence of Black culture on fashion; the history of the Middle East conflict; and queer history in ancient, medieval, and Victorian times. One workshop even had participants cooking, as part of an exploration of Chinese American cuisine.

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concordacademy.org/strive-2025



PHOTO: HEIDI KOELZ



COMMON READ

In a September campus meeting, English teacher **Nick Hiebert** introduced this year's community read: a brief essay from Ross Gay's *The Book of Delights*. After students took turns reading it

aloud, Hiebert offered a personal reflection, then invited everyone to pair up and share an example of everyday care they'd witnessed at CA. "Reading something together allows for a quality of attention that I think makes some magical things possible," he said.

The point is that in almost every instance of our lives, our social lives, **we are, if we pay attention, in the midst of an almost constant, if subtle, caretaking.**

Holding open doors. Offering elbows at crosswalks. Letting someone else go first. Helping with the heavy bags. Reaching what's too high, or what's been dropped. Pulling someone back to their feet. Stopping at the car wreck, at the struck dog. The alternating merge, also known as the zipper. This caretaking is our default mode and it's always a lie that convinces us to act or believe otherwise. Always.

FROM "THE SANCTITY OF TRAINS,"
THE BOOK OF DELIGHTS BY ROSS GAY



CONNECT

How are you centering responsibility, connection, and growth in your life? Share your thoughts with your CA friends on social media or email magazine@concordacademy.org.

A group of five young women are standing on a paved path on a green lawn, engaged in conversation. They are dressed in casual, contemporary clothing. In the background, a large, two-story house with a grey roof and white trim is visible, surrounded by trees and a stone wall. The overall atmosphere is bright and social.

alums

CONNECTING CA ALUMS

Your People

My CA friendships aren't limited to my own class. And I'm not alone: After the Centennial Celebration, the Alum Steering Committee heard from several of you about how meaningful it was to see friends from surrounding classes. That's why I'm excited Concord Academy is adjusting its reunion model to better support all the relationships we started as students. This change is the result of nearly two years of planning and incorporating feedback from many alums.

After one final traditional reunion this spring, in 2028 CA will begin hosting multiyear Alum Weekends. So when your class comes back to campus, you'll also see alums from classes before or after yours—more of your people.



For example, I'll see friends from the two classes below mine in 2028 (for our 25th reunions) and the two classes above mine in 2031 (for our 30th reunions). Sometimes a class will have a three-year gap between Alum Weekends, sometimes six—overall, we'll have just as many opportunities to connect. And of course all alums are still welcome to attend every Alum Weekend.

See page 38 or visit concordacademy.org/alum-weekend to see your reunion cycle and when you'll intersect with other years. I encourage you to start making plans!

I can't wait to see how the new Alum Weekend will broaden and deepen our ties, along with all of CA's ongoing programming for alums, including virtual and on-campus events and regional gatherings.

It's an honor to serve CA and my fellow alums. If you have any questions or feedback, I'd love to hear from you at ca_alum@concordacademy.org.

Natalie Krajcir '02
President, Alum Association

CONCORD ACADEMY ALUM ASSOCIATION

Everyone who attended Concord Academy is automatically a member of the Alum Association, which fosters lifelong connections between Concord Academy and its extended community. The association facilitates meaningful opportunities to preserve and promote a love of learning, service to others, and a commitment to diverse perspectives and backgrounds. Through involvement in the life of the school, within the community, and through service to the greater world, the association strives to renew and affirm the core values instilled while at CA.

MISSION-CRITICAL

The Annual Fund supports every facet of the CA experience, every day. With a modest endowment relative to peer schools, Concord Academy depends each year on more than \$3 million in contributions to deliver all that makes CA unique—student clubs, one-on-one advising, the Academic Support Center, Community Weekends, campus bikes, visiting artists and speakers, and so much more.

You can have a big impact by making a leadership gift and sustaining your commitment for the next four years. Will you become a champion of a CA education?



IT'S EASY TO DONATE TODAY:

Give online at
concordacademy.org/give
or mail a check to

Concord Academy
166 Main Street
Concord, MA 01742



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

WELCOME, CA TRUSTEES

Two new members joined the Concord Academy Board of Trustees in the 2025–26 academic year



Adam Geer '99 is the City of Philadelphia's first chief public safety director. He leads the Office of Public Safety in coordinating the city's interagency response to combating gun violence and dismantling open-air drug markets, and his portfolio includes overseeing seven city departments and a staff of over 120. As a member of Mayor Cherelle Parker's cabinet, Geer works closely with the police commissioner to implement the mayor's vision of making Philadelphia the safest, cleanest, greenest city in America with access to economic opportunity for all. Previously, Geer served as the city's deputy inspector general for public safety, a position created after the murder of George Floyd and the social justice movement of 2020. In this police oversight role, he worked with leaders from various city agencies and community stakeholders to improve public trust in the fairness and efficacy of local law enforcement.

Geer began his career as an assistant district attorney for the Philadelphia District Attorney's



Office (DAO). A veteran of the DAO, he was most recently assigned as a prosecutor in the homicide unit, while also serving as the office's director of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Geer sits on the boards of the Sarita and Claire Wright Lucas Foundation, which provides scholarships to women of color who are entering careers as prosecutors; Women Against Abuse; and Prosecution Leaders of Now. He and his wife, Lydia Furst, an attorney in the City of Philadelphia's Law Department, live in South Philadelphia with their two daughters, Zelda and Natasha.

Maggie Yuan P'27 (ex officio, president of CA Parents) is a passionate believer in the power of parent engagement in fostering a vibrant and connected school community. At CA, she has served as a co-chair of the Parent Annual Fund and a team parent for the varsity baseball team, and she has participated in Concord Academy Residential Enrichment (CARE) and the Parent-to-Parent Program, among others.

Professionally, Yuan has extensive experience in research, evaluation, and leadership within the fields of youth development and mental health. She serves on the Arlington Youth Counseling Center advisory board and has a private counseling practice. Yuan holds a bachelor's degree from Cornell University and a doctorate from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She earned a certificate in social impact management and leadership from the Institute for Nonprofit Practice, in affiliation with Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life. In recognition of her contributions to the nonprofit sector, the institute honored her with a Changemaker Award in 2021.

Yuan lives in Arlington, Mass., with her husband, Clifton, and their two sons, Morgan and Cedric '27.

LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/board

WELCOME,
NEW
ALUMS



The day before Commencement in May, members of the class of 2025 enjoyed playing a round of bingo during a breakfast welcoming them into the CA Alum Association.

Seeking Catharsis

Annie Lareau '86 translates personal tragedy for the stage

Why would anyone choose to relive the most traumatic moments of their life, day after day, reenacting those horrific memories on stage in front of an audience of strangers?

It's a question **Annie Lareau '86** has answered often, ever since the premiere of her three-person play at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in summer 2025. *Fuselage* explores a horrible experience from her past: the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988. Eight of Lareau's closest friends from Syracuse University were on that flight, including her best friend, Theodora Cohen. Lareau and her classmates had just completed a semester in London; she had chosen to fly home a day later than her friends.

Lareau says she was always a theater kid. As a little girl growing up in Denver, she attended plays and concerts with her mother, **Marten Ann Poole '58**. In middle school, she joined the drama club. Her love of the stage blossomed during her three years at Concord Academy, where she performed in productions including *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *After Magritte*, and several musicals. In her senior year, she tried her hand at directing for the first time.

"I spent almost every hour of my life in the P.A.C. during those years," she recalls. "Theater allowed me to learn about moving and speaking and storytelling in a way that I don't think would have been possible elsewhere. I could feel the iambic pentameter when on stage doing Shakespeare. Had I just been handed the book in a classroom, I wouldn't have had the

same experience. CA gave me those opportunities."

As a junior at Syracuse earning her BFA in acting and directing, Lareau spent a semester in London through the university's study abroad program for theater majors. "We studied with actors from the London Academy of Performing Arts and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts," she remembers. "We took classes all day and attended professional performances in the evening. I was having the time of my life."

The morning of December 21, 1988, Lareau bid farewell to her five flatmates as they left for the airport. Alone in her London flat and packing for her own flight the next day, Lareau turned on the TV. With growing horror, she learned that the flight her friends had boarded that morning—Pan Am 103—had exploded into a ball of flames over Lockerbie. Among the passengers who perished were 35 Syracuse University students. "I knew all of them," Lareau says.

Nearly incapacitated by grief, trauma, and survivor's guilt, Lareau somehow made it back to campus for the spring semester and again for her senior year. Looking back at a time she now calls "The Great Unraveling," she recalls a phase marked by bad relationship choices, unsatisfying attempts at therapy, and unrelenting attention from the media, who stalked and harassed Lareau and other bereaved Syracuse students because of the story's lurid appeal.

Upon graduating, Lareau had just two wishes: to embark upon a career in the theater and to get as far away as possible from Syracuse and the tragedy it had come to represent for her.

Moving to Seattle, she performed with a national improv troupe, taught classes at Seattle Children's Theatre, and adapted classic works of literature for the stage. Her growing interest in the intersection of theater and education led her back east for a year to earn a master's in education at Harvard, where she studied Carol Gilligan's work on the ways in which girls' voices are metaphorically suppressed. When she returned to Seattle, she founded a nonprofit for teen girls that combined outdoor adventure and wilderness skills with art and music. In the years that followed, she was named artistic director of ArtsWest and then of Seattle Public Theater. She married a fellow actor and raised a daughter, who is now herself a college student in London.

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down public performances in 2020, Lareau began writing a long-postponed memoir about the 1988 plane crash and its aftermath, incorporating elements of the trauma that had never fully left her, the grief over losing so many friends, and the poignant experience of visiting the town of Lockerbie in 2019 to meet some of the villagers whose lives had been impacted by the crash.

In 2022, Lareau left her full-time job with Seattle Public Theater to undergo treatment for breast cancer, then earned an MFA in creative writing. Empowered with more free time and the new degree, her thoughts turned to how she might adapt the yet-to-be published memoir for the stage. The result was the 70-minute play that debuted at Edinburgh Fringe last summer. Over the course of a month, it ran for 25 performances, filling the 140-seat house



Annie Lareau '86
(seated) and Brenda
Joyner in *Fuselage*.

each time. Lareau played the part of herself, and two other actors played all the other roles.

“People ask me how I could bear to go through this experience on stage, day after day,” she says. “I always answer that yes, it’s very difficult to return to that time in my life, but in doing so, I relive the good parts of it as well: the joyful, funny, crazy moments that my friends and I had together in college and during our months in London. I get to spend time with the memory of those friends: Theo, Miriam, Nicole. After years of holding those memories in my mind as something horrible, now I can revisit that time as something that was also wonderful.”

Lareau is currently planning for productions of *Fuselage* in Seattle and Syracuse and exploring possibilities for performances in New York City and London during the 2026–27 theater season. While she continues to work consistently as an actor and director across the country, she is also focusing on her writing, having recently published essays in *HuffPost* and the *Brussels Review*, among others. In addition, Lareau is working on a light-hearted novel set in the 1980s in Key West, Fla., a place she visited frequently as a girl.

“My background in theater has given me skills in my writing around scene building and dialogue that some people struggle with,” she says. “Going all the way back to my time at CA, I’m a kinesthetic learner. As a director, I’m used to moving bodies around in space. And that has fed my writing in a lovely way.”

— Nancy Shoher West '84



Activism Starts at Home

Corie Walsh '12 shares insights from her peacebuilding career

For **Corie Walsh '12**, social change has always meant rolling up her sleeves and getting to work. She organized protests to raise awareness of ethnic violence in Darfur as a 10-year-old, and in middle school she undertook her first hunger strike in solidarity with refugees facing food shortages. During her teenage years, she helped out at a transitional housing program each week. As a young adult, she moved to

Uganda to establish community programs, then to Yemen to implement humanitarian programs.

With parents who were both community organizers, Walsh grew up amid activism in Cambridge, Mass., which is home to many Sudanese refugees. “All the way back in grade school, they were my friends and my fellow community members, not simply a distant cause that needed our help,” she says.

In 10th grade at CA, Walsh was co-head of Students Promoting Empathy, Action, and Knowledge (SPEAK) and a member of the Concord Academy Service Activists (CASA). As a junior, she took an influential class that explored models of social justice, taught by **Elizabeth Bedell**, and as a senior, she did an independent project on comparative genocide studies. In addition to her parents, Walsh credits her CA faculty advisor, **Shep Shepard**, with providing steady guidance and mentorship throughout those years.

“People closest to the problem, in any humanitarian situation, should have a say in what the solution looks like.”

CORIE WALSH '12

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Walsh majored in peace, war, and defense. “Attending a large state school where many people were very different from me shifted and expanded my worldview,” she says. Her senior thesis was on civilian behavior during the Rwandan genocide.

“Among the questions that consumed me was that of how mass atrocities and genocide can happen,” she says. “War itself can have many causes: economic, geographic, political. But how do you get to the point where you are trying to eliminate an entire population? I knew the best way to find out was to build relationships with communities who were going through this.”

After college, an internship in Washington, D.C., led to a salaried position with the nonprofit Mercy Corps, for which Walsh moved to Sana’a, the capital of Yemen, in 2019. Due to increasing conflict, it was at the time undergoing one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. There, her work involved developing programmatic strategy and evaluating performance.

“One of our largest barriers in Yemen was that most of our donors and funders had not been in the country since the war began, and yet they were still setting our agenda,” Walsh says. “I knew that what we really needed to be doing was capturing the voices and expertise of the Yemenis themselves. People closest to the problem, in any humanitarian situation, should have a say in what the solution looks like.”

Ensuring that the right voices are part of the conversation has been a throughline of Walsh’s approach to peacebuilding work. She returned to the U.S. with Mercy Corps in 2020, and in 2021 she began working for Humanity United, a private philanthropic foundation that awards grants to organizations trying to find peaceful solutions to conflict. Now a senior portfolio manager there, she manages strategy and influencing efforts aimed at transforming philanthropy as well as budget and decision-making processes for the peacebuilding team. “The central concern that drives us is how to support the creation of a system that shifts power and agency to peacebuilders on the frontlines,” she says.

But with the closure of the U.S. Agency for International Development in January 2025, among other large-scale funding cuts, everything changed. “The rug got pulled out from under us,” Walsh says. “USAID shut down, and funding for peacebuilding and human rights work around the world stopped suddenly.”

Walsh is currently working for Humanity United remotely from Paris while her husband completes graduate studies there, and she says the world is facing ever-increasing challenges: “We just completed a survey that looked at the global impact on peacebuilding organizations of the recent funding cuts. We learned that 55% of local organizations will soon be completely out of funding.”

Despite the political upheaval of our times, Walsh is not without hope. “Much as we might wish otherwise, we find ourselves in a profound moment of transformation,” she says. “We are compelled to think differently about how funding, decision-making, peacebuilding, and human rights resources should be organized, and we have an opportunity to build a more just way of operating.”

Observing so many people coming together to support neighbors in need, whether by donating, volunteering, or protesting, “helps to counter the negative social structures afoot right now,” she says. “The issues I have worked on around the globe are not so different from the challenges we now face at home. We need to keep sight of the fact that social change doesn’t happen in the voting booth every four years. It happens every day in our communities, and it comes from all of us.”

— Nancy Shohet West '84

CA Reunion Revitalized

A new approach to a beloved alum tradition

There's something special about our CA friends. They help us navigate the passage of time, and they keep us in touch with our core values and aspirations. Even after a long gap, reconnecting with them tends to reveal common threads. And these formative friendships aren't limited by class year, especially at Concord Academy.

That's why CA is launching a new reunion format to support connections both within and across classes. Starting in 2028, CA will host a triennial Alum Weekend. Each class can expect a regular invitation back to campus, three or six years in between—each time with different adjacent classes.

The frequency won't differ much from the traditional five-year model, and alums will have even more opportunities than before to reengage with one another and the school.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Get ready to make more memories with old friends—and new ones, too—through a deeper, more dynamic reunion experience. As always, any alum can register for any Alum Weekend. We can't wait to celebrate with you!

LEARN MORE

concordacademy.org/alum-weekend



ALUM WEEKEND

Starting in 2028, Alum Weekend will be held every three years, allowing alums to reconnect more deeply over a broader period and with a wider range of CA graduates.

2028

Celebrating classes ending in:
2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9

2031

Celebrating classes ending in:
0, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7

2034

Celebrating classes ending in:
0, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9

2028 REUNION CLASSES

| | | | |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| 5-Year Reunion | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
| 10-Year Reunion | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
| 15-Year Reunion | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
| 20-Year Reunion | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
| 25-Year Reunion | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
| 30-Year Reunion | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| 35-Year Reunion | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 |
| 40-Year Reunion | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 |
| 45-Year Reunion | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 |
| 50-Year Reunion | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 |
| 55-Year Reunion | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 |
| 60-Year Reunion | 1967 | 1968 | 1969 |
| 65-Year Reunion | 1962 | 1963 | 1964 |
| 70-Year Reunion | 1957 | 1958 | 1959 |

REUNION 2026: CA will host its final five-year reunion this spring on May 16 and 17 for classes with years ending in 1 and 6. We hope you'll plan to attend. Visit concordacademy.org/reunion for details.

HEARTWOOD SOCIETY

GALE HURD '61

Gale Hurd '61 insists she doesn't want to accomplish anything with the planned gift she made to Concord Academy—she wants CA students to accomplish things. It's important to her that students today and in the future have the same opportunities she did to explore and grow in their own ways.



She recalls the absence of prizes or awards at CA: "The focus was always on measuring yourself against your own potential rather than comparing yourself to others. The teachers challenged your brain, while the nonacademic activities challenged your persistence in finding outlets that were good fits for your personality and abilities."

Hurd gained individual organizational skills by running the recess "candy box." She learned teamwork through the camaraderie of sports and as a field hockey goalie. She says her CA education gave her the confidence to take care of herself ("Thank you, Stuff class!") and taught her that "you don't have to be the head of something to make a difference—you just have to work hard, seek justice, and share what you have." That mindset shaped her life.

She attended Knox College, where, after switching majors from economics to studio art—and despite doubting her talent—she won the college's major art prize for her painting. She later worked in the trust department of a Chicago bank, at a hotel in St. Lucia, and as the assistant general manager of a semipro ice hockey team, where she met her future husband. They married in 1971, then moved to Weybridge, Vt. (and were amicably divorced in 1991). Their son, Ethan Fenn, lives nearby.

Hurd retired in 1999 after 14 years as a victim advocate in the Addison County State's Attorney's office. For decades, she served on school boards and the Weybridge Selectboard; now she sits on the Weybridge Planning Commission and the board of Tri-Valley Transit, which provides free regional transportation. Hurd has helped conserve several thousand acres across Vermont, is funding an expanded wastewater system for Audubon Vermont, and has enjoyed providing educational funding for teens in state custody. She wryly says she's benefited from "being mediocre": Without pressure to meet high expectations, she's been "free to step in and try things without fear of failure."

She hopes other alums will give serious thought to CA's influence on their lives and include a transformative gift in their estate plans. "Even a modest gift has the power to be transformative for an individual student," she says. "It's not 'give until it hurts.' It's 'give until it feels good.'"



THANKS FROM THE HEART

The Heartwood Society recognizes alums, family, and friends who have made a bequest or planned gift to Concord Academy. This recognition circle takes its name from the dense pine heartwood on which, letter by letter during the 1956–57 school year, CA students carved the verses from Corinthians that still take pride of place in the Elizabeth B. Hall Chapel. Today, each chisel mark remains as vivid as when the panels were first installed; the generosity of those in the Heartwood Society likewise leaves an indelible imprint on CA.

Leave your mark.

Cultivating faculty excellence. Creating equitable pathways for students. Catalyzing new cross-disciplinary initiatives. Ensuring institutional stability.

By remembering CA in your estate plans, you can make an enduring investment in a transformational education and every life it touches. Join the Heartwood Society, experience financial and tax benefits for you and your family, and leave a legacy of support well into CA's next century.

LEARN ABOUT PLANNED GIVING:
Contact Shep Shepard at (978) 402-2258 or shep_shepard@concordacademy.org.



For Love & Learning

Teachers Michael Sandler '92 and Sara Langelier '92 are paying it forward



Boston-area public high school teachers **Michael Sandler '92** and **Sara Langelier '92** have a “CA couple” story fit for a romantic comedy. Though they dated during their senior year, they’d been out of touch for more than a decade when, in 2003, they ran into each other on the street in Brookline, Mass. Three years after they renewed their friendship over a spontaneous lunch, they married.

Sandler has taught at Arlington High School since 2008. “I lucked into teaching psychology,” he says. After working in web design, real estate, and restaurants, he finally listened to friends’ suggestions: He earned a master’s in teaching from his undergraduate alma mater, Tufts, then landed his position. In April 2025, he was recognized with a Charles T. Blair-Broeker Excellence in Teaching Award by the American Psychological Association’s Committee of Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools.

“CA fanned the flames of *wanting* to learn,” Sandler says. “We had great relationships with our teachers—amazing teachers who got me thinking in ways I never had before.” He recalls being nervous as a senior, anticipating even greater challenge in college, only to realize how well he’d been prepared.

“As an adolescent, you’re making core memories and figuring out your identity—and what an intimate, accepting place CA was to do that,” he says. “I really felt like I could be myself.”

It’s what he and Langelier hope to offer their students.

Langelier, who began teaching French at Wayland High School in 2001, says she’s particularly enjoying her current AP French class: “They’ve bonded and they’re really playful and fun, but they love French and they love learning.”

Though she wasn’t initially a great French student herself, she studied in Paris during her junior year at Connecticut College. “I wasn’t shy about talking to people, and that’s when it came alive for me,” she



Above: Sara Langelier '92 and Michael Sandler '92 during a visit to Concord Academy in October 2025. **Inset:** Then-seniors Langelier and Sandler dressed for Formal in 1992.

says. She went on to earn a master’s degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. When she first started teaching, she says, she was touched that her former CA French teacher **Nicole Fandel** invited her over to share materials and advice.

Langelier regularly leads student trips to France and French-speaking Canada, and she runs a student sewing club. “It’s a fantastic way to get to know kids on a different level,” she says. “With phones and technology, there are fewer opportunities for kids to interface with adults, and even to be in community with each other face to face. As educators, our jobs are more important than ever.”

2025-26 HALL FELLOW

Rayner Ramirez '88

When 2025–26 Hall Fellow **Rayner Ramirez '88** visited Concord Academy on December 5, he came bearing gifts for CA's library: a boombox, some of his old mixtapes, and a copy of *Working*, Studs Terkel's 1974 oral history of regular Americans discussing their work, which Ramirez had encountered as a CA student. He said that reading it planted the seed for his documentary filmmaking career: "It was the first time I realized that ordinary people's stories are amazing, and I wanted to be part of telling them."

(continued on next page)

The Concord Academy Board of Trustees established the Elizabeth B. Hall Fellowship in 1963 to honor the legacy of former headmistress Betty Hall. For more than 60 years, this endowed lectureship has brought distinguished individuals to speak on campus, many of them CA alums.

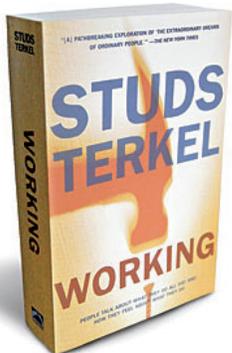
PHOTO: JAKE BELCHER



CA named Ramirez this year’s Hall Fellow to honor his thoughtful, purpose-driven storytelling about the human experience, focused on marginalized communities. An Emmy and duPont award-winning producer, he has combined investigative journalism and cinematic techniques to explore complex causes of conflict and uplift stories of compassion, resilience, and recovery. For two decades, he worked as a network news and documentary producer for *Dateline NBC*, NBC News, and CBS News, and he helped launch the cable channel Fusion, a joint venture between ABC News and Univision. In 2016, he and Amber Payne, his wife and business partner, co-founded the production company Tilt Shift Media. Its mission is to create documentary films with depth and integrity that can change perspectives.

Though others entrust him with their stories every day, when he spoke at CA, Ramirez said telling his own was “kind of uncomfortable.” Perhaps that’s why he began talking about his childhood by establishing historical context: The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 opened the U.S. for the first time to non-European immigrants—people from Asian, African, and Latin American countries—including his family, who came from the Philippines. His uncle emigrated first, then his mother, who worked in New York for two years before she could arrange for Ramirez and his sister to join her. At 10, having previously attended a strict Catholic school in Manila, he found New York

City’s streets and his public school chaotic. In junior high, he began to get into some trouble.



“If it weren’t for this one teacher who believed in my potential, I wouldn’t be here,” he said. That teacher connected him with A Better Chance, a scholarship program that helps prepare and place students from underserved communities in independent schools.

“I was amazed and impressed by this place,” Ramirez said. Right away at CA, he got into the visual arts, photography, and filmmaking, which spurred his interest in visual storytelling. One of his first classes was an animation course; he made a film about a glove missing its match—its “one true glove.” Later, he made several narrative Super 8 films before trying his hand at documentary filmmaking his senior year.

One of his final projects for a film class was a documentary about the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which granted asylum to 3 million people. He interviewed migrants who had come to Boston to work and were pursuing citizenship. “It was a terrible, terrible production,” Ramirez said, “but it opened up my mind to being a teller of other people’s stories.”

He also said CA’s “culture of learning” expanded his sense of possibility. Designing an independent study to learn about the history of the Philippines, he said, “showed me that I could actually be the activator of my own learning and my own education.”

After graduating, during a gap year in New Mexico, he read an article in the *New York Times* about Pagsanjan, a village in the Philippines where *Apocalypse Now* had been filmed. He knew the place: His grandmother had grown up nearby.

“It was told in this sort of orientalist point of view, and that article just bothered me,” he said. “I thought I could tell the story from a different perspective.” He raised a small amount of money, including \$300 from CA—enough to get him into preproduction and hire local crews to film in the Philippines for three days. A year later,



he returned to CA to present the film.

After graduating from Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts at The New School, Ramirez worked as a carpenter while making independent documentaries, before earning his graduate degree in journalism at Columbia University. He went straight into a job at NBC News. “I had this academic pedigree, a very pretentious film pedigree, and I was reading the *New York Times* and the *Economist*—I had not watched TV news in years,” he said. “My North Star in being at the networks was to make sure that underrepresented people’s stories were on the air.”

His first pitch was about the Filipino veterans who had fought alongside U.S. soldiers during World War II and had never received the benefits they’d been promised. “I had lined up everybody,” Ramirez said. “I was really excited. I was going to get the story on air, and they were like, ‘No, sorry. It’s not big enough.’”



Rayner Ramirez '88 (right) speaking with Head of School Henry D. Fairfax at Concord Academy at an all-school assembly in December.

Ramirez weathered many more disappointing responses from the networks, and he worried he had sold out, working for a corporate media conglomerate. “But it never stopped me,” he said. “I just kept pitching and pitching.”

He also made the most of opportunities that came his way. In his first assignment for *Dateline NBC*, he followed a family of migrant berry pickers from their home in Texas to Michigan over the course of a summer. Recalling that their van regularly broke down along the way, Ramirez said, “The hardest part was being an observer, standing back and filming the whole time. It was really difficult for me to do, but it showed me the resiliency of the children.” He kept in touch with those kids

and, many years later, did a follow-up story, after many of them had graduated from high school and college.

For 20 years, Ramirez produced stories about immigration, terrorism, health care, climate change, drug wars, human rights, and natural disasters. But he found the networks confining. “Broadcast news is very limited in terms of storytelling,” he said. “It’s often binary. There’s always good versus evil. You have to find the bad guys in the stories, and it’s not like that. It’s always much more complicated than that.” He took a leap to become an independent producer so that he could tell stories the way he wanted, “from a perspective of asset-framing, not deficit-framing,” he said.

The first documentary Tilt Shift Media produced was about the Harlem Children’s Zone, which interwove interviews with video shot by kids in Harlem in the 1980s and ’90s. “They had been sitting on this for decades because they wanted to tell their own story,” Ramirez said. “For years, Harlem had been depicted by the press very negatively, while people there were working to change and transform these communities. We wanted to tell stories about people of color.”

The project gave Ramirez a chance to look back at the New York he had grown up in during the ’80s, to tell its story from the perspective of communities coming together. “I beat the odds, right, coming from New York City, from an immigrant background,” he said. “Their concept was changing the odds for this community, rather than beating the odds for individuals.”

For Ramirez, it was a paradigm shift. “These stories of people making transformative change in their communities, it’s infectious, it’s inspiring,” he said. “You want to do it—you want to make a change. That opened up our whole world.”

He said that one of the great privileges of his work is listening to people:

“There’s a lot of division—we’re all living in different silos—but I think we all want the same thing for ourselves, for our kids. We all want to feel good about doing something for our community, for others. Some people may disagree about what that action is, but you want to feel good about yourself. I think deep listening to understand is one of the hardest things we can do, especially these days, but we could use a lot more of it.”

Ramirez said responsible storytelling means not being arrogant when entering a community, being open to “even the craziest pitches,” and getting the facts right. “The journalism industry is under attack, and we need to be as factual and as truthful as possible,” he said. “Factchecking is key right now to gain back trust in the process.”

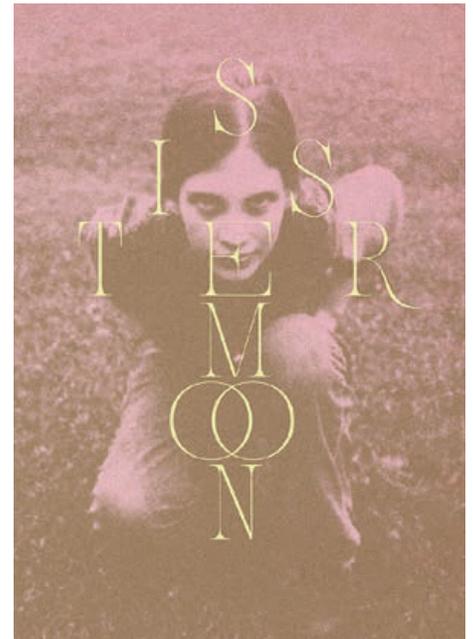
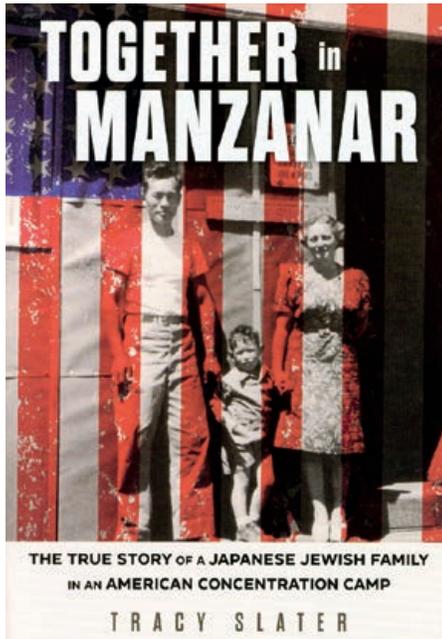
He reflected on the rise of social media and the decline of trust in traditional news sources as disinformation, artificial intelligence, and algorithms have complicated how we stay informed. Ramirez said he’d like to see kids being taught media literacy at a younger age and journalism considered a skilled trade rather than a lofty endeavor. He also highlighted opportunities for young people “to use their phones in a positive way” to learn the skills of fact-based storytelling. “And you guys have a full-fledged studio here in the C.A.C. now,” he said. “It’s really impressive. You should use it.”

Noting the numerous writers and filmmakers in CA’s alum community, he advised students to tap into the Concord Academy network. “And read *Working*,” he added. “It’s just one of those great books that leaves a mark on you and sends you on a trajectory, even if you’re not sure where to start.”

CreativeTypes

CALLING ALL CREATIVE TYPES

Have you published a book or released a film or an album within the past year? Please contact martha_kennedy@concordacademy.org, and consider donating a copy to the J. Josephine Tucker Library's CA alum collection.



BOOKS

Together in Manzanar

Tracy Slater '85

Chicago Review Press, 2025

In *Together in Manzanar: The True Story of a Japanese Jewish Family in an American Concentration Camp*, Slater draws on the journals of two young, married labor activists, Karl and Elaine Yoneda, to recount their unique experience during World War II. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. targets Karl as an “enemy” due to his Japanese heritage. He is forced to help build the Manzanar internment camp in California, where he and his kin are later housed—and where Elaine, of Russian Jewish descent, determines to join him and their toddler son instead of living as a free woman.

Emily Thompson Flowers

Emily Thompson '91

The Monacelli Press, 2025

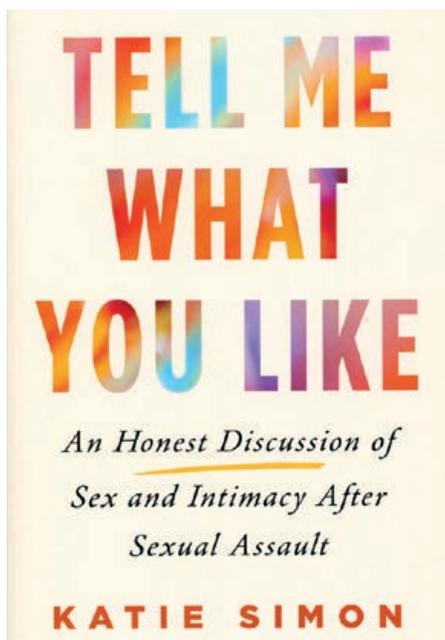
Thompson shares her world-renowned floral designs in this stunning full-color art book, her first. The breathtaking still life installations shown in these pages range from modest centerpieces to expansive, intricate exterior botanical backdrops for high-end fashion shows. Thompson’s use of flora as sculptural material is dramatic, partly because it is a race against time: The flowers’ reliance on water limits their longevity, even as their ephemeral nature enhances their beauty.

Sistermoon

Siri Kaur '94

Void, 2025

Kaur documents a connection between two siblings born 14 years apart and sustained through the camera lens over three decades in her photography book *Sistermoon*. Sharing the same father but with different mothers, Kaur and her confident youngest sister, Simran, began forging a relationship through photography during Kaur’s teenage years. As they continued collaborating as artist and muse, Kaur amassed a collection of images that record the passage of time from childhood to parenthood. Inspired by Sally Mann and Nan Goldin, she develops her own sense of storytelling through photography to relay her family’s tale.



Tell Me What You Like

Katie Simon '10

Citadel, 2025

In *Tell Me What You Like: An Honest Discussion of Sex and Intimacy After Sexual Assault*, years of interviews and frank conversations with people who, like her, have experienced sexual assault inform Simon’s exploration of how they come to terms with their intimate lives in its wake. She finds that there are as many paths to discovering healthy sex and intimacy as there are individual perspectives. *Tell Me What You Like* offers raw, candid, and informative reflections about this innermost and deeply personal aspect of life.

MUSIC

I Will

Larry Goldings '86

Sam First Records, 2025

Widely celebrated as a jazz organist, Goldings also shines as a pianist on this album from his trio, which includes bassist Karl McComas-Reichl and drummer Christian Euman. *I Will*, released both digitally and on vinyl LP, was recorded live at the intimate Sam First venue in Los Angeles and showcases a mix of jazz and pop tunes, Gershwin classics, and Goldings originals.



FILM

Thirsty

Emily Abt '93,

writer and director

Pureland Pictures, 2025

Abt’s narrative feature follows the political campaign of a public defender who tries to unseat the incumbent mayor of Oakland, Calif., as well as her personal journey of trying to keep her family intact. *Thirsty* won the Athena Award for scripts featuring outstanding female protagonists.



Then &



SWING YOUR PARTNER

THEN: A square dance in Academy Garden during Orientation in 2008. The tradition originated in the early 1980s, when Concord Academy began bringing 9th graders to the Hulbert Outdoor Center in Fairlee, Vt., where a professional caller was hired.

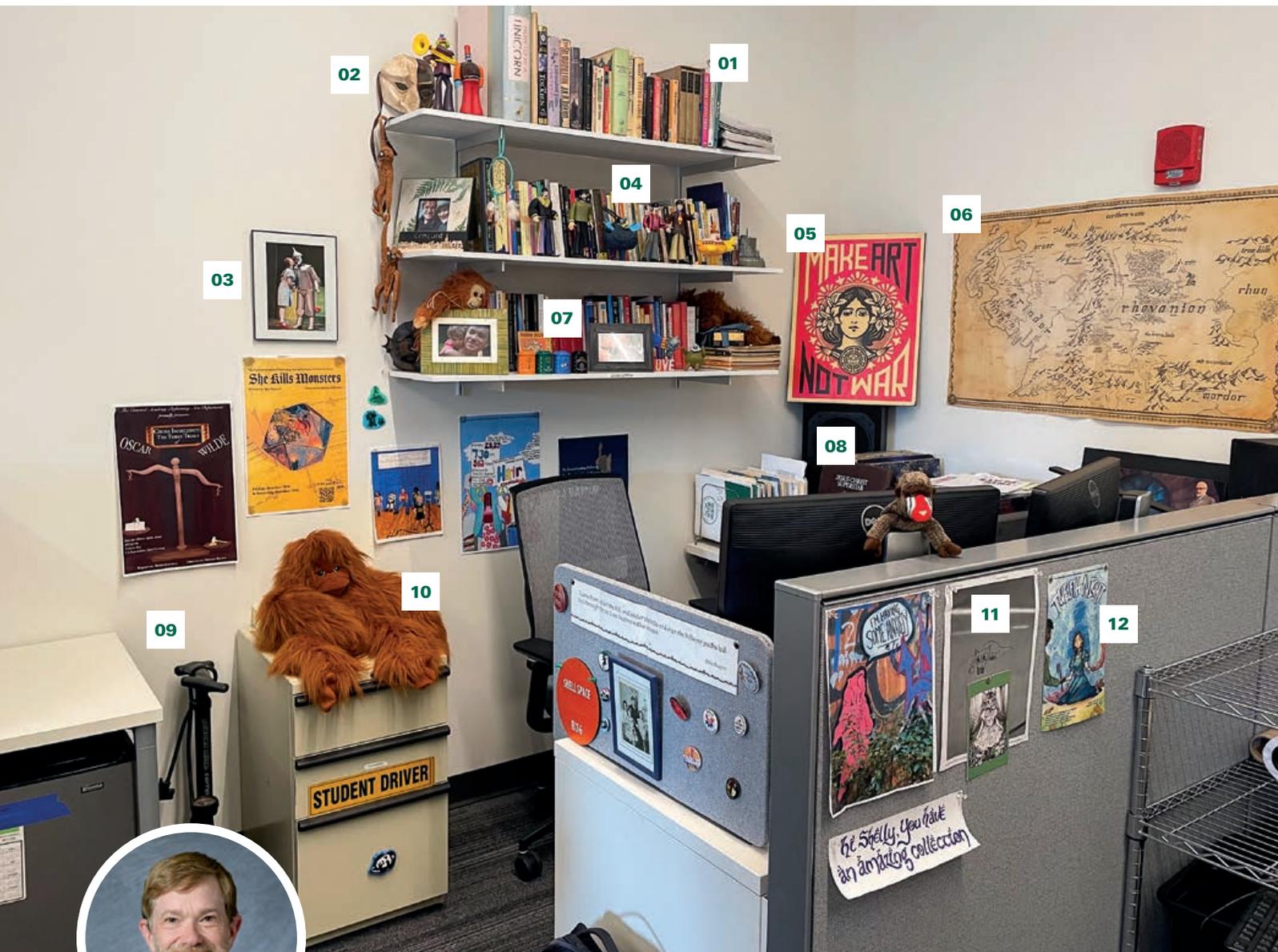
Now



NOW: New students and orientation leaders square dancing on August 30, 2025. The square dance recently moved to the quad, but it remains a longstanding tradition in the days leading up to a new school year—an invitation, for some, to step outside of comfort zones and, for all, to build community.

REMEMBER THIS?

Do you still have memories of square dancing as you got to know the CA community, either in Vermont or on campus? Write to magazine@concordacademy.org if you'd like to share yours.



SHELLEY BOLMAN P'27, THEATER TEACHER

- 01. Books:** Fiction on the top shelf (I'm a fantasy buff) and lots of plays.
- 02. Mask:** I have lots for my classes. This one's just for display.
- 03. Production photo:** That's me as the Tin Man.
- 04. Figurines:** I'm a fan of the Beatles, and tchotchkes.

- 05. Poster:** A reproduced period poster from our 2019 production of *Hair*.
- 06. Map of Middle-earth:** I directed a production of *The Hobbit* in Boston, and this was the prop for the dwarves' map.
- 07. Hanuman Chalisa book:** I visited India in the 1990s, read the *Ramayana*, and fell in love with Hanuman.

- 08. Records:** I just got set up to listen to my LPs here.
- 09. Bicycle pump:** I do a lot of cycling; it's my sanity time.
- 10. Orangutan:** When I was little, my older brother told me that I'd been adopted from the zoo and I was actually a shaved orangutan. In a moment of youthful clarity, I leaned into that rather than

- complaining. Orangutans became my favorite.
- 11. Drawing:** A gift from **Olivia Kim '26**—me as a cat with my cup of tea.
- 12. Posters:** One of many student posters from our shows (others on the wall); I'm overawed by their talent.



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