

June 1, 2020

Dear Grace Community:

For so many weeks now, I have missed the opportunity to see you and your children each morning when arriving at Grace. I have missed the children right outside my window on the playground soaking up the time in company of each other as they play games, create worlds, and form bonds that help them to grow more fully into themselves. During quarantine, the pain of our separation is palpable and real each time we sign off from a Zoom chapel or assembly. I have taken to letting people sign off as they wish and say their goodbyes as the participants drop off one by one. It is both heartwarming and heart wrenching to hear little voices call out to each other and their teachers for one last moment.

But this week, as we grapple with the insidious persistence of racism and injustice in our country, I miss Grace and all of you even more and with an ache I cannot shake. The death of more Black people at the hands of the police continues and it reminds us that the ongoing scourge of racism in our country is the real pandemic we are facing. Add to this the unfair toll this virus is having on Black and Brown communities and it is overwhelmingly clear that we have so much work to do to break down and bring real change to a society that hurts some communities more than it helps.

If we were at Grace right now, I know we would be having conversations about how we can help and hold up the work being done that is good and right. One of the most important acts we take as educators is to create space for the celebration and storytelling of voices less represented and heard in our society. We strive at Grace to center positive and inspiring stories about underrepresented people and groups for more than one month or day. We want children at Grace - white and Black - to hear stories not just of Black people's struggle and pain but of triumph and achievement. One such example came in the form of a poem to me this weekend. This poem by Ross Gay imagines the ongoing contributions and legacy of Eric Garner who was killed by New York city police in 2014.

A Small Needful Fact

Ross Gay

Is that Eric Garner worked
for some time for the Parks and Rec.
Horticultural Department, which means,
perhaps, that with his very large hands,
perhaps, in all likelihood,
he put gently into the earth
some plants which, most likely,

some of them, in all likelihood,
continue to grow, continue
to do what such plants do, like house
and feed small and necessary creatures,
like being pleasant to touch and smell,
like converting sunlight
into food, like making it easier
for us to breathe.

Black male victims gasping for air leaves us breathless with grief. And this poem reminds us that these victims are more than the gruesome stories of how they were extinguished. They have whole lives of impact and reach that “make it easier for us to breathe.” Eric Garner was a victim of senseless brutality but he was also someone who created something of lasting significance and power beyond his ending.

As we all continue to grapple with this time in our history while parenting and loving our children, I hope we will remember that it is important to remind them -- especially our white children -- that Black Lives Matter. The world is unfair and filled with horrors we want to shield them from so that they can avoid trauma and pain. At the same time, we can talk to them about hard things and help them to understand in a context that fits their developmental stage. As families, we can double down on sharing literature and stories that uplift Black and Brown humanity. Some of you may remember the parent conversation led by Grade 1 parent and diversity practitioner, Nicole Lee, two years ago. She coached us on having difficult conversations with our children, and you can review her presentation [here on our website](#). She also shared a slide that highlighted what our children are capable of learning and understanding about race and identity as they grow. You can find that slide on the [Children's School of Philadelphia](#) site for reference.

We cannot be together in person right now to help each other through this time, but I do want to offer some more resources for you as you struggle through this challenge in your homes. First, please join me at the [Head of School conversation](#) on Zoom this Thursday at noon for any thoughts you may have but with a special focus on these conversations about anti-racism efforts at Grace and the events of these last weeks. Second, there is a group of parents at Grace with a focus on this work in their professional lives who have gathered with me and Pam Yarrington as a task force across this last year to continue to advance our school's work in equity and inclusion. We will continue that work this summer and hope to have some strategic initiatives to share when we return to Grace this fall.

I send each of you my love and support this first week of June. And I hope to see you at the Clap Out on Thursday. I believe that our community can be a force of good in the larger struggle against racism and injustice. And I pray for our safe and joyous return to each other on our campus in a few months.

-- Jen Danish

Resources for Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism:

For Parents:

<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/26-childrens-books-to-support-conversations-on-race-racism-resistance>

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>

<https://childrensalliance.org/resource/talking-about-racism-resources-parents-and-caregivers>

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/kids-discrimination>

<http://modules.ilabs.uw.edu/module/racing-towards-equality-why-talking-to-your-kids-about-race-is-good-for-everyone/talking-to-children-about-race-and-ethnicity/>

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/talking-with-children-about-racism-police-brutality-and-protests>

<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2014/07/27/talking-to-kids-about-current-events-and-conflicts/>

<https://onbeing.org/blog/the-conversation-we-must-have-with-our-white-children/>

<https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/07/12/talking-to-kids-about-racial-violence/?referrer=http://m.facebook.com>

For Educators:

[Affirming Black Lives Without Inducing Trauma](#)

[Anti Racism Resources](#)

[Being There for Non-Binary Youth](#)

[Bias and Stigma Related to COVID-19](#)

[Black and Asian Leaders - What if We Unite?](#)

[Community Violence](#)

[Discussing Race and Racism with Students](#)

[GLSEN Educator Resources](#)

[Liberate Meditation App for BIPOC](#)

[PBS Asian Americans](#)

[Resources for Talking About Race, Racism, and Racialized Violence with Kids](#)

[Talking to Kids about Discrimination](#)

[Talking to Kids about Racial Violence](#)

[Books For Littles - Igniting luminaries - the next generation of kind & brilliant leaders](#)