

From Worry to Wonder

Jen Danish

Head of School

Welcome to Grace for an evening of learning more about your child's classroom, their hopes and dreams—and this year— what they are wondering about as we begin again all together on campus. We are so glad to be with you tonight and throughout this coming year. Our work in partnership with you and in support of your child's growth and development is the catalyst that makes so much possible. Thank you for all of the large and small ways that you help us to teach and love and nurture your children. We can't wait to show you the classroom communities we have created.

I'm sure many of you spent some moments this summer worrying about your children and how they would approach another school year. It's so natural and even automatic to be in a state of worry as parents from the moment our children are born. Will they eat enough to grow to a healthy percentile? Will they sleep through the night - ever? Will they learn to use the potty or stop using their pacifier? Year after year, our lighthouse of worry swings around to a new place on the shore of childhood. We carry so much anxiety about the lives and progress of our most precious children. It becomes a habit. A routine. And as they grow up, we realize we have to find ways to manage that constant worry so as not to hold them back or make them become filled with worry too.

And then we all lived through a pandemic. And the worries went from will they or will we get sick to will they keep up with their learning if they aren't in person? Will they forget how to make friends or be in a community? Can they see their grandparents or cousins or aunts and uncles again? Add to this all of the other dark events that kept accumulating over the last few years - racial injustice, climate change, world wars - and it was hard to imagine ever leaving our homes and entering life as we knew it again.

This past summer I was lucky to visit the childhood home and museum of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Hyde Park, NY. As I sat in a darkened room and watched an intro video of the time at which he became president, I was flooded with a sense that we have had a similar period of uncertainty, dramatic change, and real fear present in our country. With a little perspective on the last years of this pandemic and its impacts, I found myself looking towards this opening of school with a vast optimism and anticipation. You see, I too have spent many minutes, hours, days, months and now years worrying about my own children and family, of

course, but also yours. Along with our Grace team including our Board, I have reacted, responded and tried to make the best decisions possible to keep us safe and get us back to school. And that constancy has brought me lots of worry but also a deep desire to get back to something else. And I think that something else is a sense of wonder and a joy in the work of being in a school with curious and ever changing young children.

As we kick off the rest of this year, I want to invite all of you to join me in crossing a bridge together. I want us to lock hands and see ourselves leaving the constant vigilance of worry about illness and all that came with that and step closer to wonder. I even invite you to wonder about your worry. Interrogate your fears and ask more questions. I am not suggesting that this will be easy. But please know your children and their teachers are on this bridge too. And what I see is all of us getting really curious together even when we may be afraid and especially when we have a big question we want to answer. And we can wonder about the world and why things are as they are without having a quick solution. I believe that this posture of wonder will allow us to go deeper and learn and see more than we ever thought possible. Most of all, our children will be freed to wonder and be curious along with us. And that is where the magic happens.

The Wonder of Learning and the Role of the Atelierista

Jessica Bortiz

Atelierista & Art Teacher

For those of you who may not know me, my name is Jessica Bortiz, and I am the Atelierista and Art Teacher. I am also mom to David in Grade 5 and Alma, a Grace alumna. I am so excited about the new energy at Grace and the renewed focus on curricular alignment and deep, purposeful learning. A big part of my role is to support those endeavors through my work with faculty and students. I collaborate with faculty to integrate philosophy, theory, and practice, and to find ways to ensure the “100 languages” - the multitude of ways children experience and demonstrate learning - are alive in the curriculum. I’m also leading a schoolwide initiative to make learning visible by documenting the thinking and learning that happens here at Grace. When learning is visible, students feel empowered, teachers are attuned to students, and families can witness the magic of a group of people doing the hard, joyful work of learning together.

The role of “atelierista,” the concept of “100 languages,” and the emphasis on visible learning are all borrowed from the world-renowned schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The second worldwide exhibit of the work of Reggio schools was titled, “The Wonder of Learning.” Isn’t that a beautiful phrase? Truly, what a wonder learning is. We are individuals who come together in this place each day to share ideas, try new things, learn from our mistakes, and most importantly, support and learn from and with each other. You are our partners in this wonderful journey of learning. So let us wonder - In what ways can we support each other so that together, we can support our amazing students. As Reggio educator Amelia Gambetti said, “Our job is too difficult and too beautiful to do alone.”

Grace: A Hub of Community Togetherness

Kate Kelliher

Assistant Head of School for Academics

Good Evening, Everyone, on this first evening of fall. The fall equinox begins at 9 pm tonight—appropriately so, since the autumnal equinox once marked the start of a new year. The new school year is a new beginning for all of us, full of enormous possibilities and unexpected discoveries—and lots to wonder about.

My name is Kate Kelliher, and I have the privilege of being your Assistant Head of School for Academics. It gives me great joy to see all of you here in the same ‘cozy’ space, united in the purpose of learning more about your children’s classroom and world here at Grace. I recently read an article that referred to schools as “hubs of community togetherness.” A hub of community togetherness. That sounds like Grace to me—and makes me think of all of us right now.

Tonight you’ll get a window seat into your child’s days at school, walk the halls they walk, sit in their (in some cases very small!) chairs and desks. And you’ll get to be together in a hub! Like your children, we hope you make new friends, see old ones, and ponder new ideas.

The beauty of my job is that I’m able to be present in many corners of this small but vibrant (and very busy!) school. I thought I’d share with you some of the beautiful moments I’ve witnessed the past three weeks: preschool students—eyes wide with wonder—chasing a butterfly on the playground; third graders practicing mindfulness during a Morning Meeting; fifth graders leading us in an original

Campfire dance about Recycling and Composting; prekindergarten students practicing yoga; second graders writing their hopes and dreams; kindergarten students learning “a as in apple”; first graders building their reading stamina; fourth graders reviewing standard, expanded, and word forms; and many young people giving it their all during PE, Running club and soccer practices; developing craft and learning how to use Art materials; reviewing the seasons in Spanish; and counting quarter and eighth notes in Music.

One thing is absolutely clear: Your kids feel at home here. They feel safe and free—free to belong, free to make mistakes, free to take risks, free to wonder. And that freedom makes our school a special and enriching place.

I’m honored to be able to share our incredible teachers with you this evening. They are talented, hard-working, and dedicated people who care for and inspire your children every day. I’m going to ask that they depart now so that they may greet you in a few minutes.