

Giving Voice to our Voices

By Sasha Clayton

One of the great privileges and responsibilities of a school is to teach its students how to use their voices. We begin this instruction at Hilldale by requiring students to learn how to stand up in front of a group and recite a group of words with clarity and eye contact. As they grow older, they practice adding vocal color, emotion, and gesture into their recitations. Soon, they learn how to write and express their own words—a feat which requires not only solid delivery skills, but a deep understanding of the material they are proclaiming.

Meanwhile, we have been dissecting the meaning and applications of leadership. John Quincy Adams stated that, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader." In studying this quote, the students are recognizing the leaders around them—past and present, and they are identifying how they, too, can become leaders.

Finally, we talk about the duty that comes with our voices. Once the students know how to speak, and how to lead, they have the responsibility to do so! It is not their opinions that we are striving to form, it is leaders who know how to think, how to formulate their own opinions, and how to express themselves articulately. We should not all agree on any issue. It is only when many ideas are uttered that true inspiration can blossom.

During this election process, our students have had the opportunity to delve into the issues that swirl about all of us. We have worked hard to synthesize these ideas so that all our students can comprehend and participate in the discussion of the issues on a level that is meaningful to them. Once we present the material, they can learn how to think critically, ask questions, formulate opinions, and use their voices.

Now, as we prepare to present our Mock Presidential Debate, we will see all these pieces come together. Students in the audience will ask questions they have generated themselves based on their study of the issues. Debaters, having researched and prepared, will clearly articulate the answers to these questions. All students will participate in our electronic and paper ballot voting process, which informs students that the way to make a difference—the way to be a leader—is to stand up for what one believes in and make one's voice heard.

Our students will electronically cast their votes along with students from around the country participating in the democratic process in a way that has been unavailable in the past. This aspect of the process enforces students' awareness that each of us is part of a greater whole, and yet, each individual voice counts.

We will look to these students as the next generation's leaders. It is my hope that they shall be articulate, educated, and opinionated!