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JENNY GEORGE '12 had her first solo performance show at Twins Jazz (DC) in September. A 17-year old vocalist, Jenny has traveled all over the world with Chapel Square Combo. She has performed at venues ranging from Blues Alley in DC to Le Duc des Lombards in Paris and worked with many renowned artists. She hopes to study music therapy with a jazz focus in college.

FIRST QUARTER HONOR ROLL

High Honor Roll

Jacob Coray '16, Harper Orwin '12

Merit Honor Roll

Jenny George '12, Jason Hammerman '16, Hilary Kraus '15, Juliet Landeck '15, Conor Powell '13, Gabrielle Stevenson '17, Zoe Winter '17

Regular Honor Roll

Ethan Abbe '13, Maria Bayzie '13, Tommy Boswell '15, Harry Coward '16, Samuel Curtis '12, Denra Davis '14, William Egge '18, William Goodman '16, Samuel Gotter '16, James Gregory '17, Sam Gross '16, Ashley Haas '13, Sebastien Hopkinson '12, Aiko Igaski '13, John Jex '18, Joseph Keller '13, Jared Kleiman '15, Susannah Laane '17, Michael Laemmler, Jr. '18, Taylor Lavelle '13, Brendan McAuliffe '13, Lane Nokes '15, Marina Pharis '15, Lwazi Rennert '16, Romney Rose '18, Jacob Selmonosky '17, Nathan Zeller '13



MACHIJAH PERSAUD '13 was named 3rd runner up in November's Miss District of Columbia Teen Pageant. Peer contestants also named her Miss Congeniality. Machijah danced in a white dress of her choosing for the opening number, appeared in swim wear and an evening gown, and placed in the top five after answering questions in front of the judges, family, friends, and her sponsor.



PETER SZYMANOSKI '14 became an Eagle Scout last May and was inducted into the honorary Order of the Arrow. As a scout, Peter has served in nine leadership positions, logged over 85 hours of community service time with his troop, and earned 45 merit badges—24

beyond the minimum required for Eagle Scout. Last summer, he participated in the BSA's High Adventure Camp at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. The 10-day program involves challenging point-to-point hiking with full gear through rugged terrain with high elevation gains. Peter covered a total of 225 miles through training hikes and the Philmont program.



IZAC ROSS '06 (right) received his BFA in Service Design from SCAD, the Savannah College of Art and Design, with a minor in both Interaction Design and Industrial Design. Izac graduated Summa Cum Laude and received The Outstanding Academic Achievement Award for Service Design as well as the 2011 Student Leadership Award. In February, he placed second in the Interaction11 competition ([click here to learn more](#)) and recently completed a service design project for Philips Lifeline in Massachusetts. Izac has accepted a position at Moment Design in Soho. Izac's mother, who shared this update, writes, "Thank you again for helping Izac and for believing in him!"

Congratulations, Izac, on your many outstanding accomplishments!



C/A MIDDLE AND LOWER SCHOOL STUDENTS discussed famous scientists and their lifestyles during art class...then created portraits of their favorites which were used in the set design of The Kennedy Center's production of "The Amazing Adventures of Dr. Wonderful and Her Dog!"

2011–12

Speaker Series



COMMONWEALTH ACADEMY

The 2011–12 Speaker Series is off to a great start. In addition to hosting lectures at school, C/A co-sponsored Dr. Russell Barkley's presentation "Where is my child's self-control? Understanding the relationship of AD/HD to executive functioning and what it means for managing AD/HD." Don't miss these lectures and workshops in 2012:

Spotting Teen Depression

Gary Nelson, DMin
Thursday, January, 12 @ 7:30 p.m.

Raising an Academically Successful Child

Ann Dolin, MEd
Wednesday, January 25 @ 9:30 a.m.

Parenting Strategies for Building Self-Esteem and Increasing Motivation

Gayle Alexander, LPC, MA, NC, Steve Maczynski, LPC, MA, NCC
Thursday, February 2 @ 7:30 p.m.

Sleep Disorders in Children

Polly Panitz, MD, FAAP
Sponsored by CHADD, Northern Virginia Chapter
Wednesday, March 7 @ 7:30 p.m.

The Art and Science of Getting Your Child to Listen to You

Steve Harner, PsyD
Tuesday, March 27 @ 7:30 p.m.

Click here for more information:
CommonwealthAcademy.org.



BOYS HS BASKETBALL

The Boys Varsity Basketball team kicked off the season with a community service project. They filled bags and boxes with food for delivery to needy families and stocked shelves at Food for Others. Since then, our 15 players have worked hard as a team and demonstrated consistent improvement as they look for their first season win.

SCOREBOARD

11/19 v. Kingsbury	21–59 (L)
11/20 v. Barrie	42–43 (L)
12/2 v. Sienna	39–53 (L)
12/6 v. GW Community	43–52 (L)
12/9 v. Kingsbury	45–65 (L)



Thanks to all our fans and coaches for the continued growth in our athletic program. [Click here or visit Edline for the details on upcoming games.](#)



GIRLS UNDEFEATED

The C/A Girls Basketball team's tough play has paid off in their past three games. Including a forfeit by the opposing team, their record stands at 4–0.

SCOREBOARD

12/2 v. Sienna	38–22 (W)
12/5 v. German School	26–15 (W)
12/9 v. Kingsbury	20–6 (W)

MS BASKETBALL

The MS Boys Basketball team worked hard during their first two games of the season against The German School and Kingsbury. The team continues to build a strong foundation as they look forward to a victory in 2012. Go Cougars!



SOCCER

SCOREBOARD

10/4 v. Capitol City	2–4 (L)
10/6 v. Kingsbury	4–2 (W)
10/25 v. New School	1–5 (L)

CROSS COUNTRY

Sam Curtis '12, Gabriel Portocarrero '11, and Lwazi Rennert '16, ran in an October cross-country meet. We continue to look for interested runners as we grow our club into a full cross country team!



Writing at C/A

By Mari Foret, Director of Communication

Googling “writing proficiency in America” to find some current statistics generated this surprising summary attached to writingteacher.org—which I read with both skepticism and hope:

“Over 95% of America’s eighth-grade students and high school seniors are proficient writers, with one in four writing at an advanced level, according to results of a nationwide test.”

However, my much-lower expectations were affirmed when I continued reading:

“There is only one problem with the news clip above. It’s not true.”

In April 2008, the *New York Times* reported that only 33% of America’s eighth grade students, and 25% of high school seniors, were proficient writers. Yet according to The Survey on Teaching Writing, conducted by the National Writing Project the previous year, over 66% of respondents believe writing well is essential to success in college and 74% believe it is essential in almost any job, “regardless of what type it is.” Decades after *Newsweek’s* infamous cover story “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” (Dec. 1975) which blasted schools for “spawning a generation of semi-literates,” the conversation about writing proficiency continues. And rightfully so. Written communications have never been so complex or varied...from formal research papers and proposals to persuasive and informational texts and emails. But complaining about the problem is no longer sufficient. The public is demanding change...and Commonwealth Academy is making change happen.

Contributors:

Matt Johns, MEd
MS Director, Writing Department Chair

Jane Furey, MEd
LS Writing, English, Social Studies

Jane Hanson, MA
MS Writing

Photos by:
Miriam Card, MA
HS Writing and New Media

THE LOWER SCHOOL: CULTIVATING FEARLESS WRITERS

Beginning in lower school, the writing curriculum at C/A is both purposeful and thoughtful. “The most important thing I do,” says lower school teacher Jane Furey, “is build a community of writers. The children sit together and collaborate. They think out loud, and often move as they create. They feel brave as writers.”

Having courage as a writer requires confidence, something Ms. Furey builds daily in a multitude of ways. She works with students at their current level and guides them through the continuum of writing super sentences, perfect paragraphs, and effective essays. She asks her students about their writing in a positive way, “What is the thing you like best so far about his piece?” or “What is working so far with this writing?” Presenting auditory and visual writing models, and jointly composing messages and stories in shared writing, help students feel more confident. As independent writers, students write paragraphs, essays, and respond to short daily writing prompts to build writing skills and stamina. Quarterly opportunities to share their writing with parents—reading poems or presenting a PowerPoint—also build confidence and pride in their work.

“The most important thing I do is build a community of writers.”

~Jane Furey, LS Teacher

Ms. Furey also tries to mimic the life of writers. “I want my students to understand the real lives of writers and how they do what they do. They write every day and they read a lot. So I read daily to my children to supplement their silent reading.” As students study authors such



A LOWER SCHOOLER uses a graphic organizer to outline a personal memoir about the day he got his first LEGO® set, which was from the Star Wars collection.

as Tomie de Paola and Dr. Seuss, they look at word choices, writing styles, and sentence patterns and then try to imitate the author’s style in their own writing projects.

Daily writing across the curriculum is essential—whether writing birthday cards, bake sale menus, personal memoirs, or sensory stories and poems. Throughout the year, students write nonfiction and fiction paragraphs, essays, and reports, utilizing the same four steps of the writing process taught in Middle and High School: pre-write, draft, revise & edit; and finalize. Ms. Furey models and demonstrates each stage of the writing process through mini-lessons, and with the use of graphic organizers and technology. Writing fluency is increased as students gain proficiency in Microsoft Word, Read & Write 9, Microsoft PowerPoint, and Kidspiration.

Personally inspired by professor of education Lucy Calkins (Teachers College, Columbia University), Ms. Furey believes that every child has a unique voice and experience. “I want to bring out the color,” says Ms. Furey.

PROBLEM:

Very few teachers require their students to write more than a few hours per week, and two thirds of students say their weekly writing assignments add up to less than an hour.”

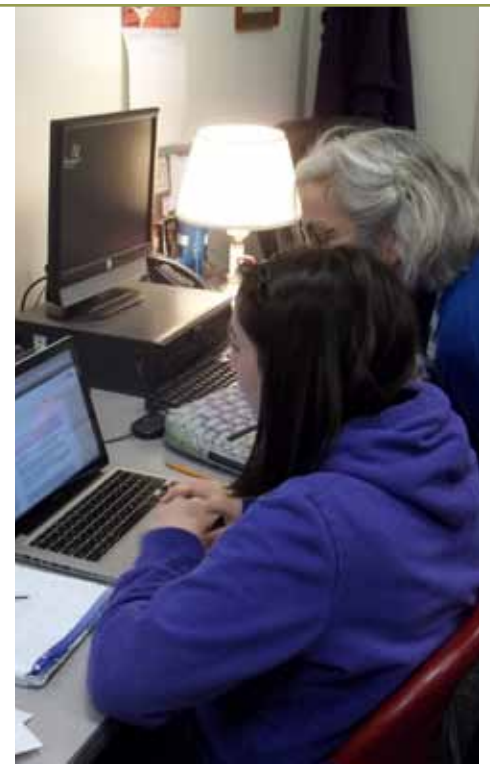
(Applebee & Langer, 2006, as reported by Alliance for Excellent Education.)

SOLUTION:

One of the most distinguishing features of the C/A curriculum is our Writing class for lower through high school students. Beginning in Grade 3, C/A dedicates a full period of instruction to the mastery of writing—five days a week for ten years. The process taught in Writing is used and reinforced in other subjects across the C/A curriculum...English, literature, history, and science.



MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS use Inspiration to map out and organize the ideas they will include in a narrative paper about five people they admire.



CLASSES OF 10 OR FEWER STUDENTS ensure that teachers are available to provide feedback and help students assess their writing at every critical phase of the process.

MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL: WRITING FLUENCY

The writing program in Middle School and High School share a common, focused goal: every student will understand and master the four-step writing process (pre-write, draft, revise & edit, and finalize) and apply it to all subject matters. Accomplishing this goal requires the unique curriculum offered at C/A: a dedicated, daily writing course from grades 3–12, combined with consistent teaching of the process by all subject teachers. When one considers that writing is how most people demonstrate their knowledge or further their cause, whether at school or at work, it's a wonder more schools don't place such great emphasis on skill development.

Writing education teaches students to effectively consider their audience and purpose when communicating. It helps clarify thinking and serves as a creative outlet to express ideas and opinions. Writing at C/A helps students understand

the connections between reading, writing, listening, and speaking—ultimately helping them broaden their world view and interests. As they progress through the grades, students become more effective communicators and prepare for the rigors of college level writing. At the same time, they develop critical thinking skills and learn to recognize universal human concerns and cross-cultural values.

The writing program provides students with the necessary resources and strategies to hone their skills as they explore personal essays, narratives, expository writing, descriptive writing, persuasive arguments, research papers, creative writing, and poetry. Students also learn how to responsibly and effectively use blogs, message boards, email, and other web-based communication mediums.

HIGHLIGHTS

Avoiding plagiarism is serious business and addressed thoroughly in a special Middle School unit. Students learn how to cite text, pictures, and videos; create bibliographies; follow MLA standards; understand the difference between

PROGRESSION OF SKILLS IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL:

Mastery of sentence formation and paragraph structure with an emphasis on parts of speech and organization.

Mastery of the three paragraph essay with emphasis on organization and main ideas.

Mastery of the five paragraph essay, with emphasis on critical thinking, strong thesis, and research

Master longer essays with emphasis on synthesis of sources; prepare for ACT/SAT writing and college essays

Mastery of a written thesis following MLA standards

paraphrasing and a direct quotation; and more.

Cross-curricular writing opportunities abound. In grades 6 and 7, for example, World Geography students choose a country for in-depth study. As that country's "ambassador," they research important issues the country faces, and present an issue of their choice, along with a solution, in a written proposal to a mock United Nations Council. Meanwhile,

after studying the 27 amendments to our Constitution, eighth grade Civics students tackle persuasive communication when they write and present a 28th Amendment on an important issue facing the country.

In ninth and tenth grade, Writing students first practice, then perfect, their ability to write a five-paragraph essay that incorporates academic research and individual analysis. In eleventh and twelfth grades, Writing and SAT Prep are a combined course. Through trips to Fairfax public libraries and instruction in the EBSCO database, students learn real and virtual library research skills and how to discern credible sources, whether found in print or cyberspace.

Seniors are also required to write a senior thesis, a college level academic paper following MLA standards. Students' topics are rooted in their academic classes and they work closely with both their Writing teacher and academic advisor throughout the four step process they learned when starting at C/A. Grades are based on accuracy of content, the strength of the argument, and the writing itself.

At the end of each year, both the Middle School and High School celebrate writing with an Art & Poetry Show. During a poetry unit, students get to know a poet intimately in literature, analyze professional examples of the poet, and write their own poetry after studying styles and formats. Students, along with their teachers, select a poem of their writing for publication, and read it to their peers and faculty. The much-anticipated event also includes a display of student artwork and visual highlights of their academic year.

MIDDLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Many of our students come to C/A with language-based or organizational learning differences and require extra support to achieve mastery in writing at grade level. Our writing program includes a specific support class called Writing & Language to provide needed remediation in these areas. Teacher Jane Hanson, a Certified Academic Language

Therapist, emphasizes sentence structure *and* grammar to improve fluency and comprehension. During the language portion of the class, students focus on strengthening reading fluency, spelling, and comprehension. During the writing portion, students focus on writing a solid paragraph, while exploring the same genres their peers are working with. Various creative projects, coupled with skill development in language and writing concepts, offer opportunities to demonstrate mastery of materials studied.

Currently, students in Writing & Language are enjoying a letter writing campaign—The Great American Mail Race. To prepare to participate in the Mail Race, students researched middle schools in all 50 states. Each student selected three schools and composed letters about themselves and C/A in the hopes of receiving a return letter. Like an educational version of a chain letter, the recipient is also asked to write to another school. Our participation in this national program was requested by a student in Sarasota, Florida.

According to *Good Education* magazine (Dec. 2010), more than 60% of college students require remedial work in writing, reading, and/or math. In 2005, college educators estimated that half of high school graduates were not ready for college-level writing.

(Good Education, Achieve)

At C/A, we consistently hear that our graduates are ready for writing in college. "As teachers," says Matt Johns, "we are confident that our students will succeed at the next level. But it is incredibly rewarding to hear, year after year, our alumni thank us for teaching them how to efficiently communicate their thoughts and ideas in writing."



THE SENIOR THESIS is drawn from areas of academic study of interest to the student. Past topics have included "The Role of the Women's Movement on the Nursing Industry," "Evolution of the Secret Service Program," "The Effects of Xeriscaping on Long-term Fresh Water Supply," and "A Revisionist's Analysis of the Cold War."

TECHNOLOGY AND THE ART OF WRITING

Technology influences writing at every turn—from its effect on language and usage, to how written communication is delivered and read, to its ability to enhance and support the writing process.

At C/A, students study the differences in writing for electronic media, such as blogs, and conventional papers or proposals. More important, they incorporate technology in every step of the writing process. To make this possible, every student has access to a computer in every writing class, for the entire period. Whether using laptops, desktops, or iPads, students are plugged in 100% of the time.

Students new to C/A's Middle School take a semester in computers to ensure their skills are proficient to assist the writing process. They reinforce skills using Type to Learn; Microsoft Word, Publisher, and PowerPoint; Inspiration; and other software programs that are needed for specific accommodations.

WRITING WITHOUT PAPER

This year, we introduced an electronic organization system using Google Docs and Cloud technology to help facilitate the writing process and executive functioning skill development as we prepare students for the growing electronic global world. For all Writing classes, we mapped our master notebook system to a digital version using Google Docs and corresponding color-coded digital folders, along with sub-folders for tabs. (All senior classes notebooks were also converted, making 12th grade a virtually paperless year.) Students can access their e-binder anywhere, anytime, confident that they always have the most current version of their work, as well as class notes, assignments, and teacher



NINTH GRADERS use iPads docked to keyboards to edit compositions created by electronic dictation.

feedback on the Cloud. Each student is assigned a Google account, issued by C/A, which they take with them when they leave C/A so that they have continued access to their files.

Google Docs and e-binders offer more than organizational advantages. Teachers can instantly make a comment on a document, notify the student by email, and leave an electronic edit trail. Teachers can highlight a sentence, comment, add or delete a sentence, create text, or make suggestions to student work as they guide students through the writing

process. Parents can also view the entire writing process online, observing student/teacher involvement.

In addition to student documents, the majority of assignments, class notes, quizzes, etc. are either created in the Cloud or scanned and uploaded to make all Writing classes predominantly paperless. Of course, some students prefer having their papers printed out as they edit, and specific courses or lessons such as SAT Prep require paper-based materials. But by and large, paper is obsolete when it comes to writing at C/A.

“Google Docs and e-binders enable the teacher and student to have full collaboration outside the classroom. No longer are we restricted to interaction during school time.”

~Matt Johns, MS Director and Writing Department Chair





MATT JOHNS begins his paperless Writing class by posting a warm-up on the SmartBoard, which is later filed away in each student's e-binder in Google Docs.

THE WORKINGS OF A PAPERLESS CLASSROOM

By Matt Johns

Everyday, I post a warm-up writing prompt on the SmartBoard that's written (and later filed away) on a Google Doc. As my students enter the classroom, they know to immediately turn on their computer, log into their C/A-issued Google accounts, and open a new Google Doc for the daily warm-up. When finished, they file it in the "Warm-Up" section of their e-binder, and we begin the day's lesson. Throughout each writing unit, we work on one or two grammar, punctuation, or style lessons. After providing and reviewing notes that I have written on the SmartBoard software, I ask students to complete practice exercises on selected websites. Sometimes, those exercises are assigned for homework; if so, they are first adapted and uploaded to Edline, our online web-locker where each teacher has a class webspace. I post homework assignments, give quizzes, and share class notes all through electronic means on Edline. Aside from individual skill lessons, students work on a writing project that engages the four stages of the writing process, utilizing a technological tool at each step. Students save their writing in different sections of their e-binders so they can access their work wherever there's an internet connection. Students are taught how to convert files into pdf and image files, and attach documents to emails. If a paper assessment is given, which has only happened twice this year, their papers are scanned and emailed, and later filed properly into their e-binders.

As this system was designed, we knew we needed two things: regular, dependable, uninterrupted access to a computer with internet access, and right-minded teachers willing to adapt their curricula and teaching practices. Students, too, will hopefully drive this push to be electronic-based as most of their lives revolve around technology.

TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES USED DURING THE WRITING PROCESS

The core of the C/A writing program is a four-step approach taught in all subjects: pre-write, draft, revise & edit, and finalize. Technology plays a role in each step; here are just a few examples of the technology and software we use:

PRE-WRITE

- Inspiration software
- EBSCO, the largest database of peer reviewed articles and journals
- Fairfax County Library database
- EasyBib, a bibliography maker.

DRAFT

- Microsoft Word
- Google Docs

REVISE AND EDIT

- Read and Write Gold (text to speech software)
- Dragon Dictation (speech to text software)
- iPads with microphones
- Grammar Bytes

FINALIZE

- A combination of web dictionaries, thesaurus, and bibliography generators

In addition, we use a variety of software to help students tell stories auditorially and visually. Some examples include PREZI, Microsoft PowerPoint, Animoto, Jing, and VoiceThread.



▲ **WHERE WERE YOU DURING THE EARTHQUAKE?** C/A faculty and staff were at school, attending a full-day workshop by CHADD entitled "Teacher to Teacher: Classroom Interventions for the Student with AD/HD."



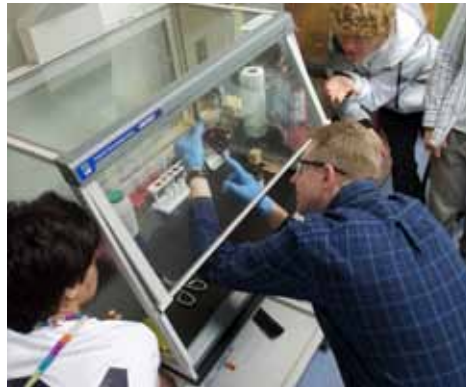
▲ **BOTTLE ROCKETS.** Lower schoolers build and launch bottle rockets as they study Newton's Three of Laws of Motion.



▲ **HALLOWEEN** was celebrated throughout the halls and classrooms of C/A. From the LS writing exercise, Mystery Candy, to HS chemistry, Halloween provided a fun framework for learning. And of course, there were the requisite ghosts, goblins, superheroes, and iconic characters in glorious costumes, plus snacks, games, and dancing. ▼



▲ **LS MATH.** Lower schoolers brush up on math skills while playing "Less Than You."



▲ **HS CHEMISTRY.** Students learn about acids and oxidation-reduction.



▲ **HS HISTORY.** In a co-curricular activity with the art department, students chose an ancient Chinese dynasty, learned and wrote about its influence on society, and painted fans with symbols representing the dynasty.



▲ **GEOMETRY.** Students learn about the power of triangles as structural shapes in construction during Mr. Robertson's geometry class.



▲ **FOOD FOR OTHERS.** Lower schoolers practice categorizing and math skills as they sort, count, and pack food to send to Food for Others for distribution to the needy.



▲ **MS PHYSICAL SCIENCE.** Students timed the rate it took ice to melt as they studied the chemical changes of solids to liquids.





▲ **FANNIE MAE'S HELP THE HOMELESS WALK.** C/A students and faculty walked the walk in November and raised \$2,640 for Food for Others.



▲ **HOMECOMING DANCE.** The Cha Cha Slide was a great hit at the High School Homecoming Dance in October.



▲ **ESCAPE TO THE ORIENT.** Thanks to a wonderful effort by CAPA, 135 parents, faculty, and staff enjoyed a fun-filled, Orient-themed Café Night—and raised \$30,000 for C/A's educational program. Beautiful decorations, fabulous food, and great auction and raffle items made for a very successful evening of fellowship and fun.



▲ **WEDNESDAY CLUBS.** C/A middle and high school students explore their passions—from art, to robotics, to mixing music, and more—every week during Wednesday Clubs.



▲ **HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DR. JOHNSON!** Lower Schoolers crowd into Dr. Johnson's office to wish her a happy birthday.

Tune into **You**Tube to see the C/A Cougars in action!

Want more from life than still shots? **Click here to check out our videos at youtube.com/CommonwealthCougars.** You'll find over 40 great videos of our kids in action...in the classroom, at dances, and on field trips. Be sure to click on "subscribe" so you'll be notified when a new video is uploaded.

Facebook and Twitter will also keep you in the know.



LIKE us on Facebook

facebook.com/pages/Commonwealth-Academy/50842722577



FOLLOW us on Twitter

twitter.com/CACougars

C/A ON THE ROAD

The Washington DC metro area offers limitless opportunities to support in-class learning with hands-on exploration. In addition to our traditional Calleva team-building trips in September, C/A students have journeyed out to many sites, including:

Chinatown
Cox Farm
Ice Skating
Jamestown
La Tasca Restaurant
Library of Congress
Lincoln Theater
Lisner Auditorium
Mount Vernon
National Arboretum
National Archives
National Gallery of Art
National Museum of the American Indian
National Museum of Natural History
National Zoo
University of MD Chemistry Department
US Capitol



JAMESTOWN. Fresh off of studying the Age of Exploration and the first European colonial efforts, MS US History students analyzed recreations of Jamestown's fort, a Powhatan village, and the *HMS Discovery*, which brought over many of the first settlers.



LINCOLN THEATER (AND BEN'S CHILI BOWL). Eleventh graders closed out their unit on Edgar Allan Poe at the Lincoln Theater where they saw the Chamber Theater production, *Encore!*, a compilation of five short stories including Poe's *The Tell Tale Heart* and a dramatic excerpt from his poem *The Raven*.



MT VERNON. On a tour through the historic Mt. Vernon estate, MS students saw firsthand what a successful plantation looked like. At the resource center, they studied artifacts of Washington's home, analyzed his life, and learned more about the role the first president played in stabilizing the development of our country's government.

HELP CLOSE THE GAP WITH A GIFT TO THE 2011–2012 ANNUAL FUND

The Annual Fund is off to a great start, raising over \$5,000 in the first few days of responses! Please make C/A a priority as you consider your end-of-the-year charitable gifts. The Annual Fund helps bridge the gap between the total cost of educating our students and the amount covered by tuition.

EVERY GIFT MATTERS!

Our goal is 100% participation of parents, faculty, and the board of trustees, and widespread support of alumni, grandparents, and friends.

Every gift is important and goes to work immediately to benefit our students.

Please send your check or pledge to Commonwealth Academy today. If you have questions about the Annual Fund, contact Cathy Feehan at 703.548.6912.

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