



## Collège Garden City Collegiate Report to the Community

### English Language Arts Dept. - June 2020

To say that the 2019-2020 school year was an eventful year for the ELA department would be putting it mildly. Much like any other department, ELA teachers flowed with the current of world events, even when strange times turned into a torrential storm, whereupon we were forced to reinvent how to deliver the English curriculum. The following are some brief highlights shared from our collective experiences, both inside the classroom and working remotely.

Starting with first semester, pre-pandemic, numerous ELA classes, including History/ Social Studies, took time to visit Monkman's *Shame and Prejudice* Exhibit. Housed at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG), this touring exhibit explores various themes at the heart of Indigenous colonization; through stories of loss, sexuality, and resilience, Monkman's work explores the complexities of the Indigenous experience, both historic and contemporary, across a variety of artistic mediums, including film/video, painting, performance, and installation. This field trip provided a unique opportunity for students to witness Indigenous histories, together with visceral imagery of the Winnipeg North End, from a wholly different perspective, while engaging in provoking discussions relevant to this city and our Indigenous communities.

Our ELA students produce exceptional writing pieces each year in their classes, and many take the opportunity to participate in a variety of external writing competitions. As a department, we encourage students to write for an authentic audience and purpose, and one of the best ways to do this is to share and publish their writing on platforms that extend beyond the school.

Aside from many wonderful assignments, projects, and Threads submissions we received this year, special mention goes out to the students in Ms. Dhillon's Gr. 9 and 12 classes who took part in writing competitions. This year, Semira Mustapha wrote a poem titled "STILL" that came in third place in the Gr 11-12 category in the Manitoba Association of Teachers of English (MATE) Pandora Poetry Contest. Her poem explores the idea of realizing one's worth and helping oneself before stretching ourselves too thin to help others. In addition, Grade 9 student Rhiannon Krauthaker was shortlisted in the grade 7-9 category for entering the CBC's First Page writing competition. The competition asked students to write the first page of a novel set 150 years in the future, with the protagonist facing a topical, modern issue. Her story, "The Lizard King" is set in the Amazon Rain Forest and tackles the climate crisis. Congratulations Rhiannon and Semira, and to all students who challenged themselves by participating in these writing publications!

English Language Arts teachers regularly keep their ears to the ground for newsworthy occurrences, facilitating relevant discussions, even if it occasionally involves interrupting the original scheduled program. This tumultuous year was certainly one for the books, with global interruptions and devastating news that demanded the whole world's attention. Just as remote teaching was beginning to wind down, several ELA classrooms chose to ramp up discussions in response to the Winnipeg rally at the Manitoba Legislature in solidarity with U.S. protests against police violence, opening spaces for respectful, and much required dialogue. In accompaniment with novels by African American writers (*The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, etc.), and various other POC texts, students took part in meaningful online discussions surrounding George Floyd, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the rallies and riots occurring in many American states.



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It's safe to say that our work is not finished, either; while recent events have certainly kindled solidarity and animosity on both sides, they have also provided the spark for lasting change – one that will continue to impact the ELA department, propelling us to reimagine and innovate the work we're already doing in our respective classrooms, whether physical or virtual.