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I would like to offer a few words before we begin the school year.

Imagine we were all living thousands of years ago. In a time before books, TV, and movies, your entertainment would have been quite different. Your “family time” would likely be stories told around a fire in the evenings—stories of great adventure, formidable challenge, and ultimate triumph. Stories that would be handed down from generation to generation. Stories that might sound like this.

Once upon a time, there was a girl in a far off land. She was quite lonely because her parents had been taken away unexpectedly and although she longed for their return, she was left to care for herself. She built herself a home in an abandoned ship and hunted for valuable things she could trade in a nearby town. She grew into a very brave and resourceful young woman – about the same age as many of you here in Keeler Theater today.

One day, she came upon a little creature trapped in a large net. After rescuing the creature, she discovered the creature was in great danger as an evil general was trying to capture it. It seems the creature had important information that would help defeat the general. The creature was lost in her strange land and asked her for help. Although it scared her to leave her home in case her parents returned, she accepted the invitation and followed the creature away.

From the start, the journey was beset with hardship. The general had vast armies at his command but with determination, they were able to stay ahead of their pursuers. Luckily, the girl and her companion met a mentor who gave them aid and temporary shelter. Most importantly, this guide gave her a magic sword. A sword, when in her hand, felt as if she had used it from the day she was born. This sword revealed to her that perhaps she was not fully who she thought she was. Holding the sword before her, she marched into a battle with the evil general and realized her newfound power and strength, proved equal to the general in battle and thwarted his ultimate plans for warfare.

Does that sound like a familiar story? I don’t know about you, but I have read plenty of books and seen many movies that follow a similar arc to this type of plot.

A professor living in America in the 20th century named Joseph Campbell also thought the same about many stories he had studied. In fact, he asked, “what if every story ever told was just a variation of one, single story?” Characters may change and plot lines may twist but what if every story was simply about change within a person—a call to adventure, the aid of a mentor, challenges and danger, a

transformation and return. Campbell called this transformation a “hero’s journey” and believed this was the core of a “monomyth” – one story simply repackaged and retold over and over.

Think of our story a moment ago. This could be an ancient tale told around a fire or a modern take on the hero’s journey with which many of you may be familiar. The distant land – Jakku? The tiny creature – BB8? The mentor – Han Solo? The evil general – Kylo Ren? The girl – Rey?

George Lucas is a big fan of Joseph Campbell’s writing and was heavily influenced by the idea of a “hero’s journey.” But don’t let the *Force Awakens* be your only example. When you read stories, old and new, in class this year, see if you find elements of the “hero’s journey” in the narrative. Many of the stories you will read in our school are considered part of the canon of literature because in addition to providing entertaining plots, they give instruction on how we, as human beings, can grow into our best selves. This is especially important for young people who are naturally going through transformation as they leave childhood and enter adulthood.

Can you think of your time at Country Day as stages within a “hero’s journey?” I would like to think that you can—a call to adventure, the aid of a mentor, challenges and danger, a transformation and return.

First, will you answer the call?

It is true that education is required and you, by law, need to be here today. However, how you approach your education is entirely up to you. In your mind, are your studies something that was “done to you” as in, not my choice, or will you see the opportunity in the unknown? Whether you are in fifth grade or 12th, how will you answer the call this year to your own growth? Will you see it as an adventure?

Second, will you seek the guidance of mentors?

You are blessed students to have such wonderful mentors and guides here at Country Day. Behind me today sits a faculty who is dedicated to your journey. A faculty who care deeply about your learning and development. Your teachers can best support you when you seek them for help. While they are amazing people, they cannot read minds, and you need to express to them your interests, your passions, your challenges and troubles. It is only through sharing with them that they can best help.

Third, will you face your challenges with courage and determination?

Country Day is a rigorous school. Trying to balance the many requirements of a CCDS program including academics, sports, clubs, social life, and family can be difficult and downright stressful. It is in the hard places, however, that you will grow most fully. When faced with difficulties, will you lean in and face them?

Fourth, and finally, will you “slay your dragon?”

For all of us, we have comfort zones. As Mr. Bortz described, we feel safe inside our turtle shells. But outside of our comfort zones, our shells so to speak, are “dragons” that we find scary but also keep us from growing. Not literal dragons, of course, but the way we approach life. You may be afraid of speaking up in class, you may find writing essays difficult, you may find it challenging to make friends, or you may find playing in a sports competition terrifying. Whatever your dragons may be, your journey is complete when you overcome these obstacles. This is the hardest part but also the most fulfilling and gratifying. And, it is this reason why stories about the “hero’s journey” have been told around campfires for many years because while they are entertaining, they are also a cornerstone to an education.

I wish you the best for a fantastic school year and good luck on the next stage of your hero’s journey.