



Welcome to MKA's *Side Projects* newsletter, a place to catch up with learning that takes place at the margins of our curriculum. Our focus for the next five weeks will be May Term, a unique program for seniors wherein individuals and teams work on Community Engagement Projects, Creative Inquiries, Entrepreneurial Ventures, Internships, or MKA Teaching Experiences.

Reconnection, Healing, Reflection, Meaning

May Term can be described as an emergent phenomenon. As individuals or small groups pursue their own, self-designed projects and experiences within the constraints of the program, collective themes shine through.

This year, we're seeing clearly the effects of a year when we have all been challenged in myriad ways. As usual, our students are showing up with optimism, resilience, good humor, and creativity. Their projects show us what they currently value and crave: reconnection, healing, reflection, and meaning. To that end, students are collecting and telling family stories, exploring COVID's impact on community and society, connecting with nature, cultivating socially responsible businesses, giving back to MKA by teaching at the Primary or Middle School, or helping us to re-envision aspects of our curriculum and our physical footprint.

In this issue of the *Side Projects* Newsletter, we will share some of the ways students have prepared to launch successful May Term projects, reveal one of our May Term support mechanisms, and look at some early returns from the first week.

Thank you for reading,

- Steve Valentine
Director of Academic Leadership and
Assistant Head of Upper School

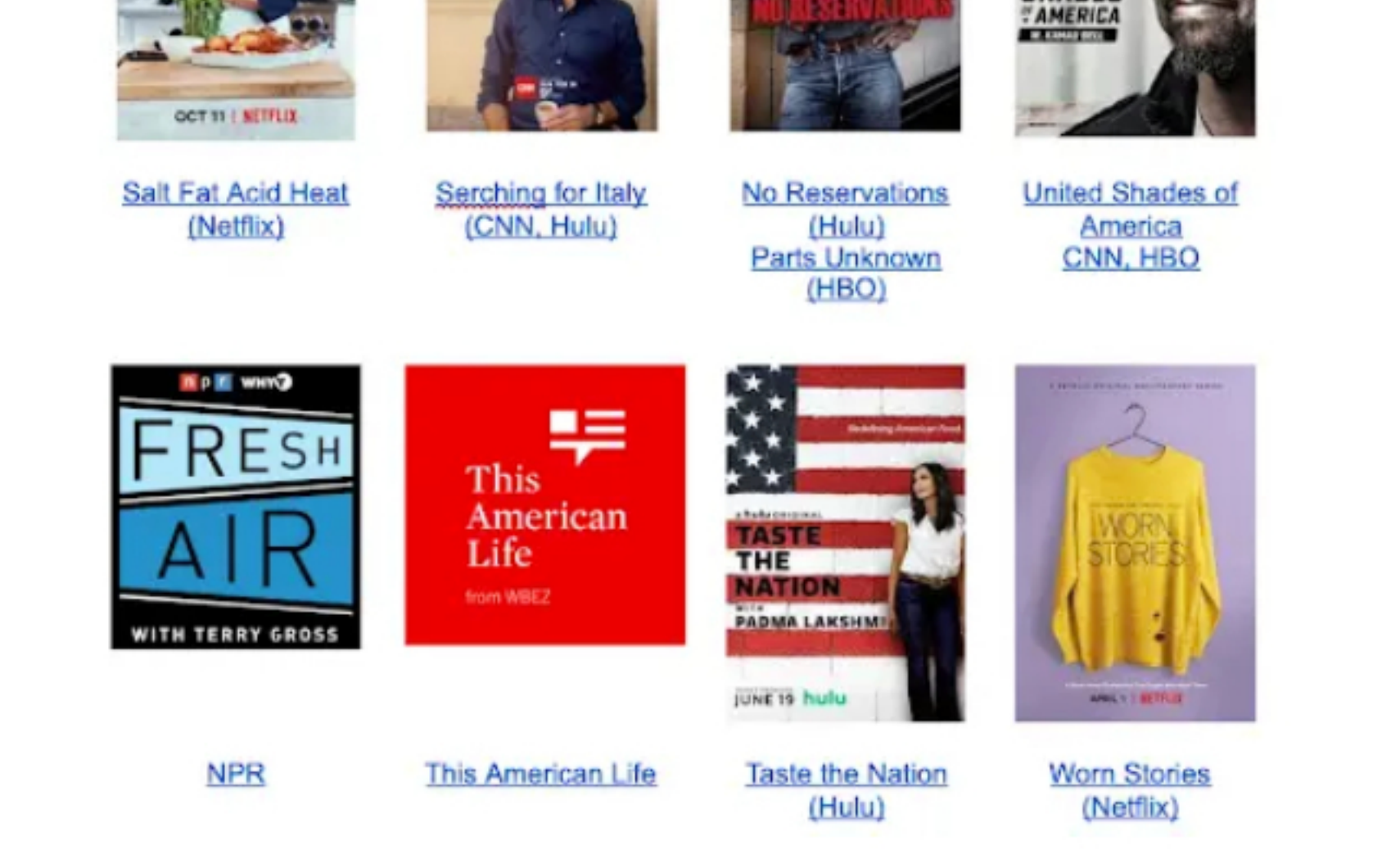
- Jill Maza
Director of Libraries and Research and
Upper School Librarian

PREPARING FOR MAY TERM

The Pitch Process

Before May, seniors went through a unique and challenging pitch process designed to help them test and refine their ideas while simultaneously giving them a window into the way projects gain traction in the real world.

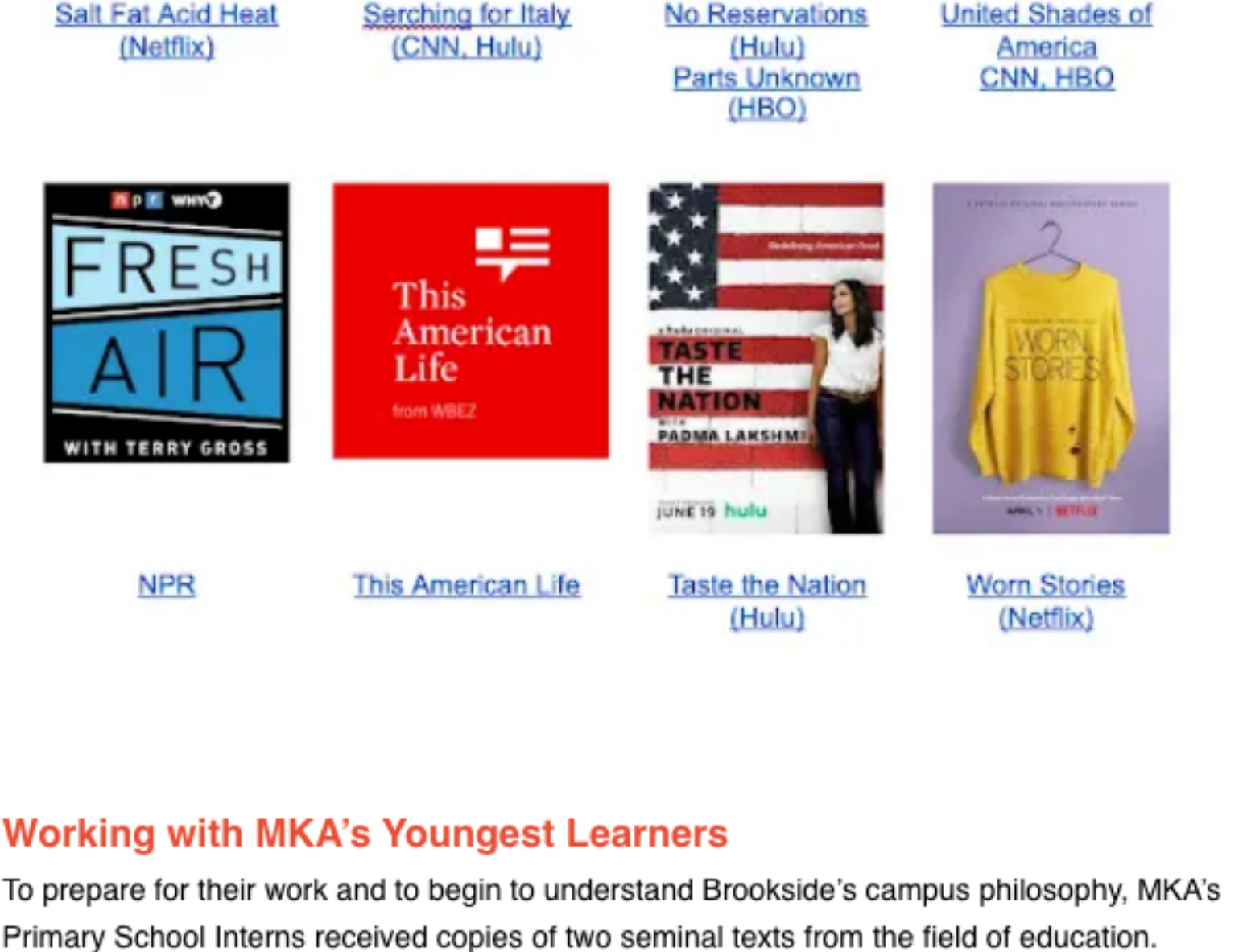
After applying to a May Term program, each senior (or group) prepared a pitch to share with their mentor and a faculty panel. Among other things, seniors needed to sell their plan by sharing their thoughts on many questions -- some big (Why now? Why have you chosen this endeavor to finish out your time at MKA and to fill this unique time in your life? What will you create to show and share your work?) and others more granular (What conversations have you had with your faculty mentor? How will you spend 20 hours each week? What resources do you need?).



Caleb pitches his study of Ancient Greek.

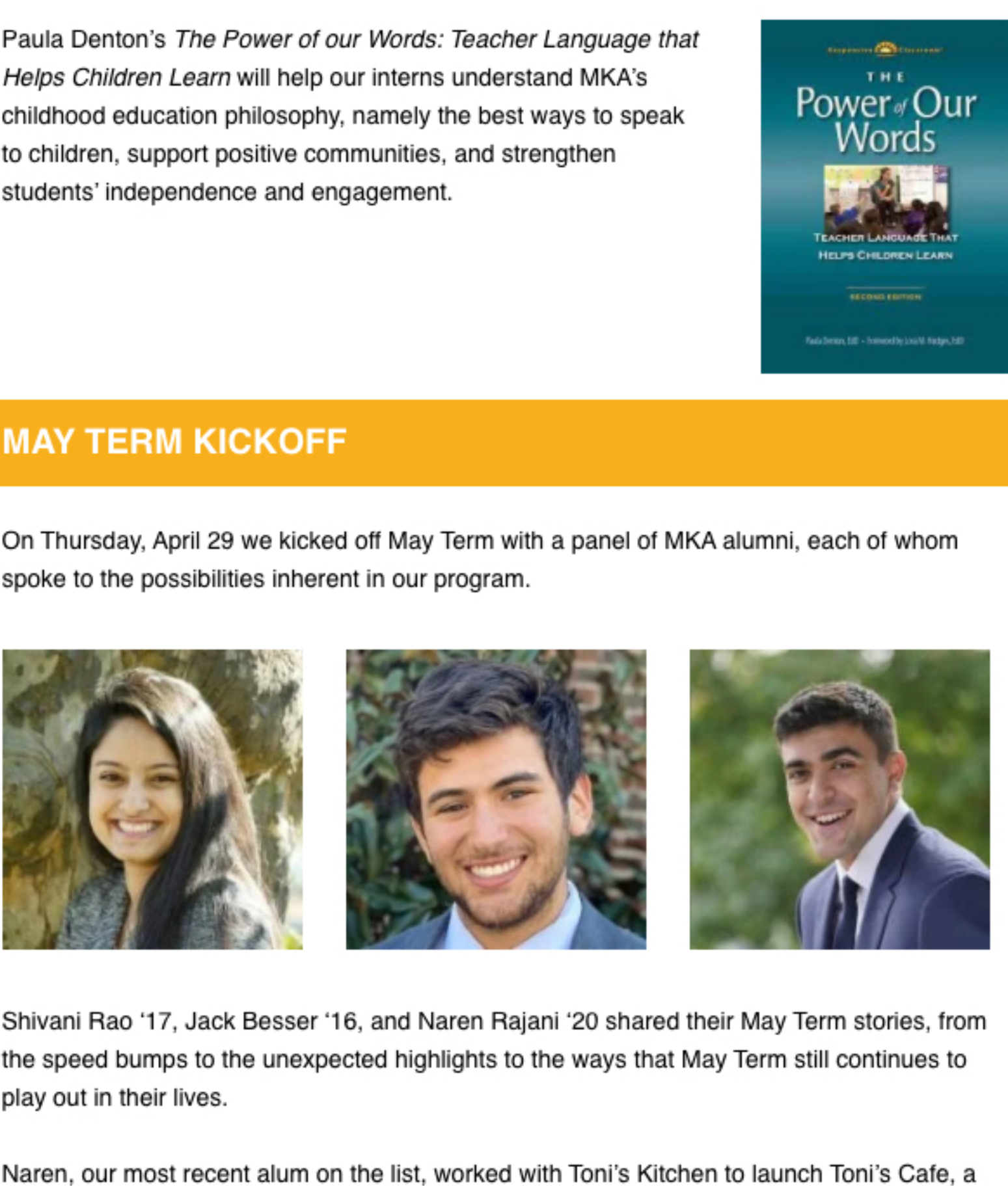
Cultural Anthropology Workshop

After pitches, we ran a special workshop for students whose May Term projects involved storytelling. We focused on the ethical and empathetic considerations of telling someone else's story. To prepare, students studied and reflected on some of the best interviewers working today (pictured below). These considerations became the basis for our workshop, which included direct instruction about how to establish rapport with an interview subject, as well as student input about what they have learned at MKA about research and collaboration. We expect these nascent capacities to be put to the test as student projects begin in earnest.



Working with MKA's Youngest Learners

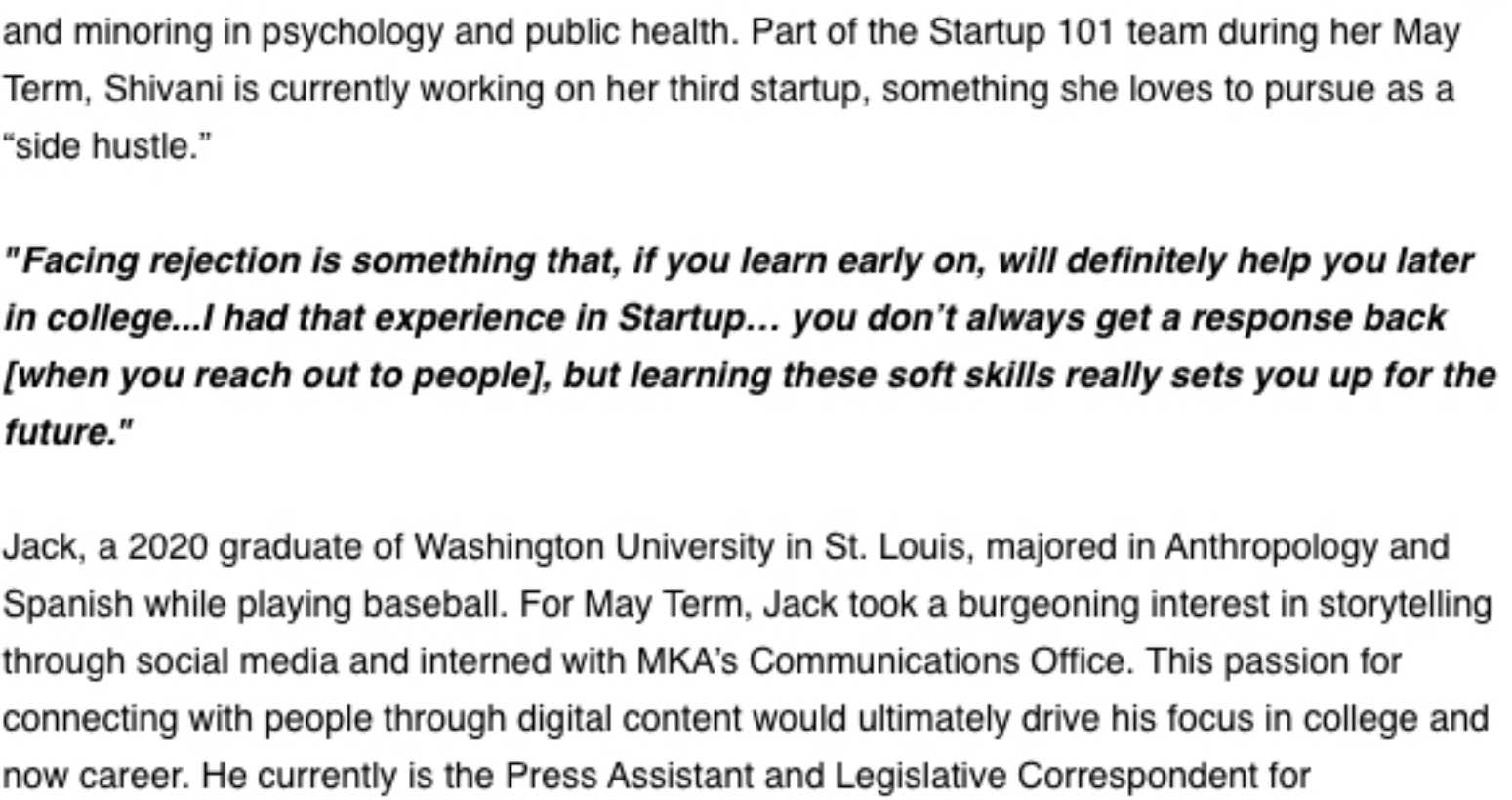
To prepare for their work and to begin to understand Brookside's campus philosophy, MKA's Primary School Interns received copies of two seminal texts from the field of education.



Paula Denton's *The Power of our Words: Teacher Language that Helps Children Learn* will help our interns understand MKA's childhood education philosophy, namely the best ways to speak to children, support positive communities, and strengthen students' independence and engagement.

MAY TERM KICKOFF

On Thursday, April 29 we kicked off May Term with a panel of MKA alumni, each of whom spoke to the possibilities inherent in our program.



Shivani Rao '17, Jack Besser '16, and Naren Rajani '20 shared their May Term stories, from the speed bumps to the unexpected highlights to the ways that May Term still continues to play out in their lives.

Naren, our most recent alum on the list, worked with Toni's Kitchen to launch Toni's Cafe, a food truck initiative designed to increase access to healthy food for local residents. Now a finance major at Georgetown, Naren encouraged seniors to find unexpected ways to connect their May Terms to their interests:

"If your May Term does not line up with what you want to pursue after high school, that's perfectly fine.... I would suggest trying to integrate whatever you want to study in college into your project... Just because your month / May Term is about one thing, doesn't mean you can't intertwine it with finance or journalism or communications or whatever you want to go into."

Shivani, set to graduate from Fennselaer Polytechnic Institute this May, is majoring in biology and minoring in psychology and public health. Part of the Startup 101 team during her May Term, Shivani is currently working on her third startup, something she loves to pursue as a "side hustle."

"Facing rejection is something that, if you learn early on, will definitely help you later in college...I had that experience in Startup... you don't always get a response back [when you reach out to people], but learning these soft skills really sets you up for the future."

Jack, a 2020 graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, majored in Anthropology and Spanish while playing baseball. For May Term, Jack took a burgeoning interest in storytelling through social media and interned with MKA's Communications Office. This passion for connecting with people through digital content would ultimately drive his focus in college and now career. He currently is the Press Assistant and Legislative Correspondent for Congresswoman Cori Bush, specializing in digital communications and content creation to uplift the work the Congresswoman does for Missouri's First Congressional District.

"It's sort of amazing to see how I picked up skills and the spark that was lit just at the Middle School working in [Gretchen Berra's] office, and now I'm working with Congress doing work I never could have imagined in my wildest dreams. . . . [During May Term], really lean into whatever passion you're feeling in your gut; whatever is inspiring that day. Lean into it and see where it goes. You might find something you can carry with you."

As seniors reflected on the panel's stories and advice, many remarked on the lessons learned. In fact, expecting rejection and setbacks, learning to pivot, and using the opportunity of May Term to explore passions or curiosities were all common takeaways.

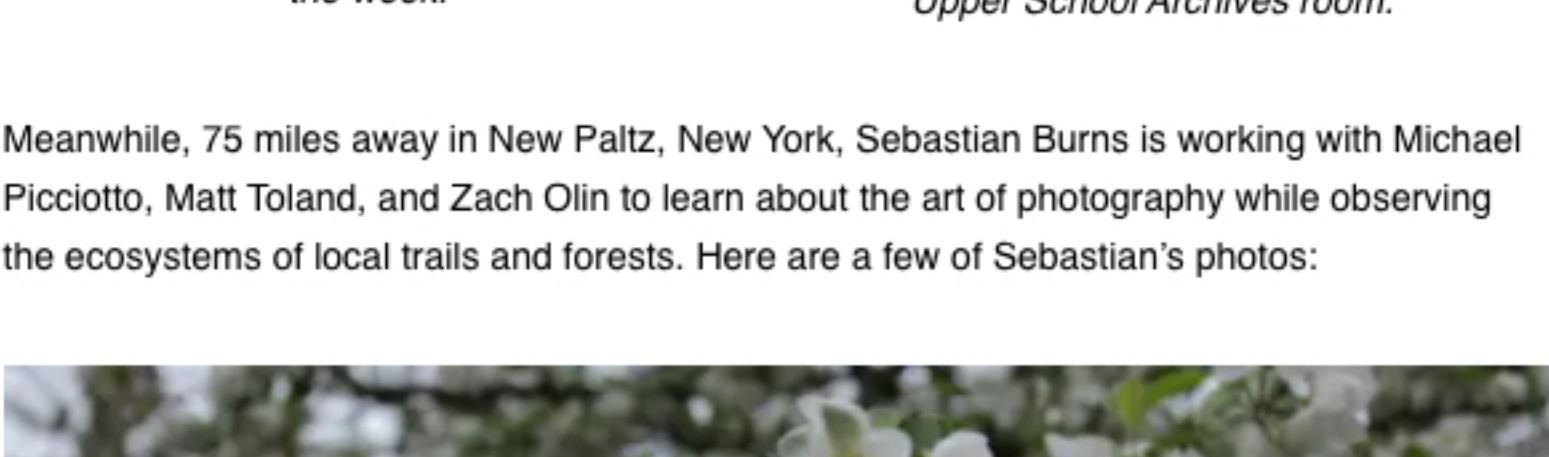
SHARING OUR SAWDUST

Each Wednesday during the month of May, our "meet-ups" will offer students just-in-time guidance and support. This week, we focused on Austin Kleon's creative anthem, a text called *Show Your Work*. Students learned about the importance of "sharing their sawdust" as a way to celebrate the primacy of process over product and attract an authentic audience to their work.

Here's a slide from the presentation:

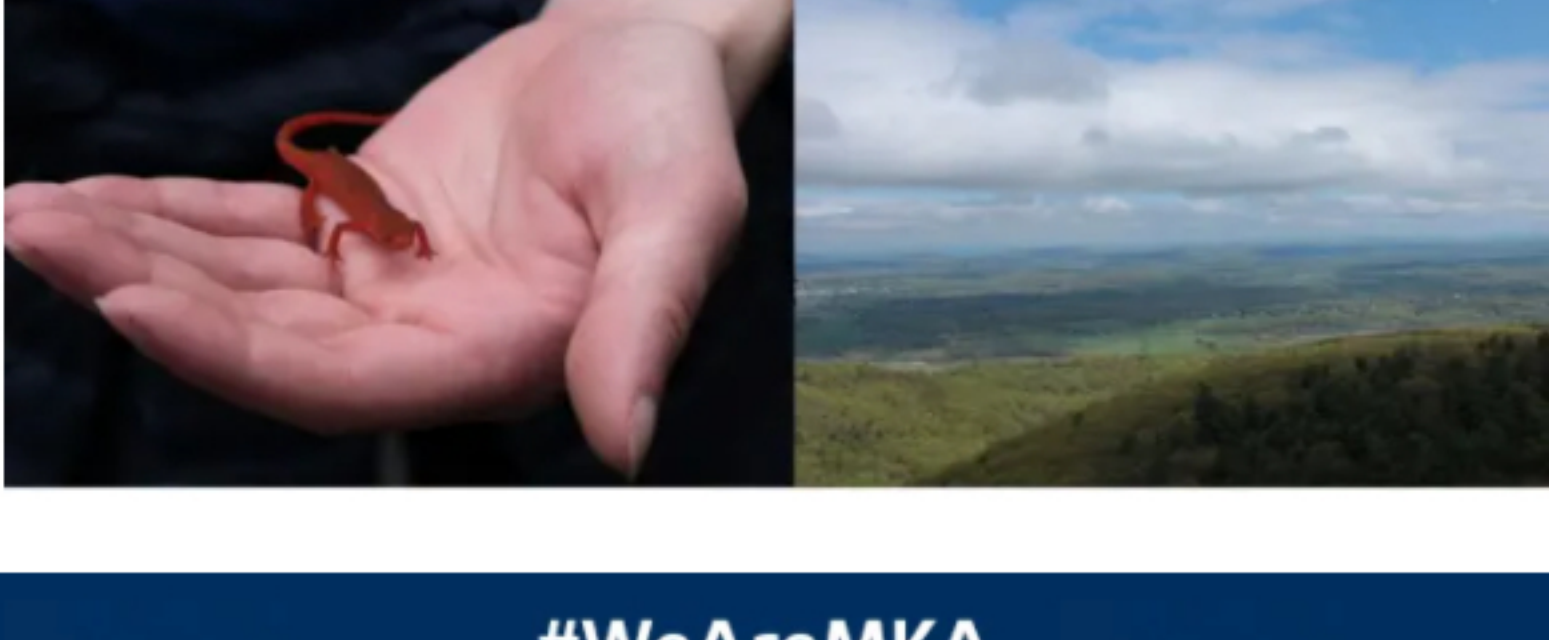


...and some sketches from Sanaa Williams. These sketches will inform her final project, a mural that will highlight the diversity of the MKA community.



VIEWS OF MAY TERM

Jake Gale is working with Tom Ruddy, Middle School Librarian and MKA's Archivist, to both organize a few collections in the MKA Archives and dig up stories from MKA's past.



Jake and Mr. Ruddy laying out their plan for the week. Jake pours over some old records in the Upper School Archives room.

Meanwhile, 75 miles away in New Paltz, New York, Sebastian Burns is working with Michael Picciotto, Matt Toland, and Zach Olin to learn about the art of photography while observing the ecosystems of local trails and forests. Here are a few of Sebastian's photos:

