

A Celebration of Reading with Two Award-Winning Authors

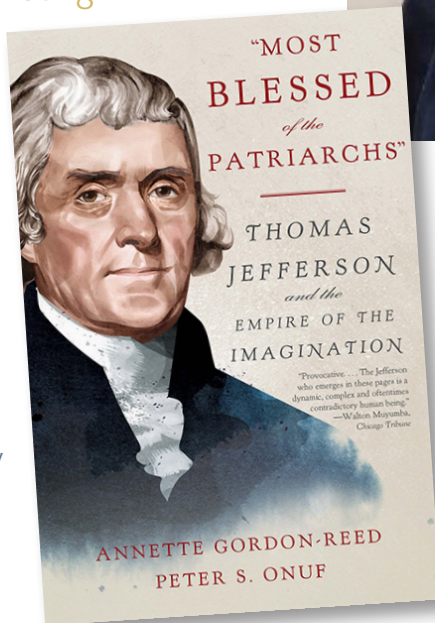
Virtual talks by Annette Gordon-Reed and Erin Entrada Kelly highlighted a weeklong book fair celebrating Convent & Stuart Hall's culture of reading.

Two award-winning authors, Annette Gordon-Reed and Erin Entrada Kelly, joined students, faculty and staff, parents and alumni for virtual talks last November that coincided with Convent & Stuart Hall's annual Book Fair Week, a celebration of the school's Great Texts Philosophy and culture of reading.

Following opening remarks by President Ann Marie Krejcarek and Academic Department Chair for Libraries, Alyson Barrett, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning author and historian Annette Gordon-Reed, who is also a Professor of History at Harvard, engaged Grade 7-12 students in a talk about *"Most Blessed of the Patriarchs": Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination*, her book written with Peter S. Onuf that offers an intimate portrayal of Jefferson in the context of his era.

Emma, Grade 10: Annette Gordon-Reed has inspired me to continue to find ways to connect history to my daily life, to understand that I can make an impact on the future through my actions and be critical yet fair when I analyze historical events and figures.

Alyson Barrett: The gift of her presence is that her work leads us into thought and conversation about the ways history lives in our present. Professor Gordon-Reed's work and presence reflects our Cor Unum aspirations and offers an invitation to dialogue that extends beyond her visit.



"We wanted to try to start from scratch, not relying upon other people's judgements about Jefferson, but coming at it with fresh eyes," Ms. Gordon-Reed said. "In Jefferson we have the good and the bad."

The hourlong talk and Q&A centered on Ms. Gordon-Reed's writing process, drawing from Jefferson's writings and other primary-source material, and her view of history as a "moral enterprise." Referring to Jefferson as a complex embodiment of contradiction — someone who enslaved over 600 people throughout his life yet who was opposed to the institution of slavery — Ms. Gordon-Reed told students that "You have to

balance their [his] knowledge against our morality." It's necessary, she added, to have "humility about the things that we know that they [he] didn't know."

Responding to student questions collated by former History & Social Sciences Department Chair and moderator Anne Porter, Ms. Gordon-Reed traced themes from her book to the present day. "We're really uneasy about race and really uneasy about Black people's place in America," she said. "The sense that African Americans are not really American is still there among a lot of Americans."

Following the webinar and inspired by the talk, high school students and faculty engaged in an afternoon of dialogue reflective of our Cor Unum aspirations.

Alliza, Grade 12: Through her book *The Hemingses of Monticello*, Professor Gordon-Reed pushes us to think about who holds the power in relationships and how the historian reenacts our history through their research and writing. Her presentation sparked a day of thought-provoking dialogue within our community.



The next day, Erin Entrada Kelly, whose works have won the Newbery Medal, the APALA Award and the Golden Kite Award, gave two presentations, speaking first to students in Grades 3 and 4, followed by Grades 5 and 6. "I felt very self-conscious; my feelings would get hurt and I had a low opinion of myself," Ms. Entrada Kelly said of her experience growing up as a Filipina-American in Louisiana. "One thing that saved me was books, because I absolutely loved to read."

Kathleen Esling: The thing I find most critical about Ms. Entrada Kelly's work is that it reminds us that we all have a necessary role in the shuttle crew of our communities, to borrow a metaphor from her latest Newbery-honor novel, *We Dream of Space*. As we contemplate what it means to hold, offer and experience grace within our own school community, Ms. Entrada Kelly's stories show us how no matter where we are or how we may feel at a given moment, we are part of our own constellations, connected to one another and creating an incredible galaxy of thinkers, readers and dreamers.



Speaking from her home writing studio, Ms. Entrada Kelly introduced students to her workspace, angling her camera around the room and holding up the first book she wrote and illustrated in fourth grade. "At a very young age, I started to write because I realized that all I needed was a paper and pencil and I could make my own books," she said. "I really love the idea of having this blank page and writing any story I want."

Ms. Entrada Kelly's stories are about ordinary people who summon the strength to overcome difficulties in their lives, such as bullying and self-doubt. Her 2018 Newbery-winning novel, *Hello Universe*, is told from the perspective of four middle school students and celebrates friendship, bravery and being different. "The most important thing about a book are its characters," she said, offering advice to an audience of young writers as she held up one of her sketchbooks, its pages providing a glimpse into her creative process.

Librarian and Studies in Literature & English Language Faculty, Kathleen Esling, who introduced the visiting author with what Ms. Entrada Kelly called, "the most incredible introduction I've ever had," relayed questions from students. One fourth grader asked why Ms. Entrada Kelly prefers to write about kids. "Young people are very funny and honest," she replied. "Those are two things I really value in people." ☺

Matthew, Grade 4: Meeting her was very inspiring. I love her way of writing and liked the idea of how she used different words to show what the character was feeling in a specific moment in time. I think her talk with us grew my interest in writing and reading.

Keira, Grade 6: Erin Entrada Kelly really engaged our student body with helpful hints on the writing process. She answered questions on overcoming writing blocks and how doodling/art in her notebooks helped her turn ideas into written words.