

Dear Friends and Families of MMS,

Our librarian has a good problem. Many kids have books checked out, and many are overdue. That's great news because it means we have serious readers among us. It is also a problem for our collection management. If you have a reader in your household, can you please help round up the fugitive books and get them back to us?

I don't have any "must know" items in the balance of this email, so don't feel an obligation to work through the whole thing. Now that I have been here a bit more than three weeks, I do have some observations to share, more from the perspective of a fellow parent and aging educator. Take it, as a Roman cook might say, "cum grano salis."

How is a friendship like a rubber band?

Many middle-schoolers experience a distancing and separating from childhood friends as a natural part of the middle years. A friendship built on legos and Minecraft that thrived in 4th grade might be finding a way to a natural separation. Life interests and social groupings diverge and one kid gets enthralled by scouting while the other takes up lacrosse or skating and the weekends end up with fewer playdates and eventually new friendships emerge. This is normal but it can also be painful. (It happens in 9th grade, too.) I have observed this shift in friendships many times. The two friends strive to hold onto their old relationship, and that can feel like pulling a rubber band between them. When it inevitably snaps, both kids can hurt. I am not one to minimize teenager emotions. In fact, given that their amygdala are fully developed way before their gray matter (and that's why you get those intense emotional outbursts over minor issues), they cannot always express their emotions in rational terms. Separating from old friendships can hurt, but it's normal. It's part of growing up, and we as parents can help them find closure as friendships change. Tell them it's part of growing up.

What did the young monk learn at the river?

Let me start by apologizing again for my maunderings. You won't be surprised to learn I taught English for 20 years and love a captive audience for my writings! Let's imagine two monks walking down a forest path. They could be Franciscans, Buddhists, or even the warrior monks from the Marvel movies. One is older and experienced. The other obviously an apprentice with a newly tonsured hair. Both are sworn to poverty, chastity and obedience. The path leads them to a flowing river with lots of rocks causing the water to gurgle and crest. A young woman is standing at the edge of the path uncertain about how to get across. The older monk takes in the scene and swoops the young lady into his arms without breaking stride. He carefully crosses the river ensuring that not a drop of water sprays her. As soon as he regains the pathway, he sets her down, bows and continues on his journey. The younger monk follows, astonished at what he has seen. But they settle into swift, silent travel. After brooding for fifteen minutes, the younger monk breaks out, "Brother, how could you touch a woman? That's against the laws of our order!" The older monk stops and turns to the youth. "I put that woman down a mile back. Why are you still carrying her?" Those of you who watched the PBS Bill Moyers interviews with Mythologist Joseph Campbell might recall this story. The reason I am retelling it is that we might have to help our kids put down a grudge or a memory or a burden that they have been carrying long after the incident. A kid might hold onto the hurt of a mean-spirited statement or action that was wounding. (I am not a fan of forced apologies. I only want to end an issue with an apology that is sincere and after the recipient accepts it.) But I also know from my own parenting that letting go of something can be liberating for both parties. Is this why the Disney song was such a big hit? "Let it go. Let it go!"

Will this pharmaceutical make you smarter?

Imagine one of the big drug manufacturers coming out with an over-the-counter supplement that they claimed would improve our kids' performance. What if they ran a huge campaign to get all fifty million American school-aged children to take the supplement eight or twelve times a day. What if they manufactured slick, attractive packages that appealed to the children's sense of autonomy. Would you automatically embrace the hype and sign up? I expect you absolutely would not. You would go to Hartford and lobby the General Assembly to intervene. You would sign a pledge called "not in my house!" And you would be correct. Or, what if a hardware company tried to convince you to buy each of your children a battery-powered belt-sander for them to tote around in their bags to be used at odd moments when they needed to take the edge off a surface? By now you must be questioning my intelligence. But let's consider the universal access we have granted our children to cell phones and smart watches and other devices. Yes, this is part of my ongoing war against unrestricted, unmonitored, and unlimited access to cell phones. If I had my way there would be a warning label that says, "Use of this device may impact the child's sense of self." Teenagers are already by age and nature prone to finding their status in a pecking order. The social media sites accelerate that, and practically no one ever feels comfortable in the rankings. Given the many warning signs of mental health concerns, I urge you to see past my silly paragraph and at a minimum take the cell phones away from your children when they should be sleeping.

If you have read this far, thanks. You have a strong school community full of caring adults. We used to have a rule of thumb that if you believe half of what the kids say about us, we will believe half of what they say about you. As the days start to count down, please reinforce your family expectations for good citizenship at the school. With a name like McMorran, I regularly heard from my old man, "What we hear about you Tommy, reflects on us. Your good reputation is ours, too." When I was 13, my father was 38, so he wasn't an old man. I wish I had recognized that back then. He's still a good dad today! It might feel as though they simply won't listen, but they are -- I have talked to the hand, too, but they are listening.

Have a great weekend.

Tom McMorran, Ed.D.

Interim Principal