



The Taft School

The Summer Reading Committee is delighted to announce its selection for the summer reading book for the 2024-2025 school year: David Brooks' *How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen*. David Brooks is a journalist and author whose opinion pieces regularly feature in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Atlantic*. His most recent book is a meditation on how to pay attention to others, to talk and converse meaningfully with those different from ourselves.

Conversation is central to Taft's school mission. From community lunches to sit-down dinners to Harkness seminars, conversation pervades Taft's culture and philosophy. In fact, in 1929, Henry Waters Taft, brother to our school founder, Horace Dutton Taft, wrote a book, *Kindred Arts: Conversation and Public Speaking*, arguing that it is the core responsibility of educators not just to teach academics but to instill the art of conversation. "The art of polite conversation enriches and embellishes the social experience, thus forming one of the elegancies of life, and it has the more important function of widening our mental horizon," he wrote. Almost ninety years later, William R. MacMullen '78 addressed the school with these words, "Taft is about conversations, and conversations are how a community is built, how we enhance our understanding of each other, how we develop the skills of respectful debate and empathic listening."

David Brooks' *How to Know A Person* provides a series of stories, personal reflections and pieces of practical advice on the art of real conversation, on how to be curious about, and receptive to, others. He challenges readers to become "illuminators," to bring out the best in people, to see them in their fullness, and to engage in deeper conversations to build genuine relationships. His book speaks to central questions that face youth today: how can we see and value each other outside the digital silos of social media? How can we transform our daily acts of small talk into moments of solidarity and togetherness?

For the Taft School, *How To Know A Person* presents us with an opportunity to reflect on how we participate in conversations, whether we are truly listening to and responding to those around us, deeply and empathetically.

Warm regards,

The Summer Reading Committee