

# PALMARIUM

## Parent Survey



The TCA Parent Survey results this year showed continued strengths in **Safety** and **Character** and some dips in **Academic Preparation and Communication**. Additionally, although showing improvement over the past 3 years, **homework** will continue to be a focus area. The full report to the board can be found at this [link](#) (1:45-2:26 timemark - 41 minutes total).



## Engaging Minds: Beyond the Book Club

Over the past seven years our staff, parents, and board members, have participated in a multitude of book studies. Altogether 29 different books have been read and discussed (a few, have been addressed two times in our *best of series* this past year). Hundreds of different participants have shared in this voluntary effort and I would like to thank each of you that have given up 90-minutes of your time, on an afternoon, after a busy day to meet with others to discuss a book. For 2021-2022 we have four new titles to add to our studies. The goal is for us as a community to wrestle with relevant topics pertaining to our endeavors as a school and as individuals. The selected books are designed to stimulate conversation and intellectual discourse, and not everything in each book will directly align with each principle outlined in TCA's philosophy. Images of next year's titles can be found on page two. If you'd like to be added to the RSVP list for next year's studies let me know at [wjolly@asd20.org](mailto:wjolly@asd20.org)



In this month's **WHY I TEACH: Stories from the Classroom** series, Alicia Miller - Elementary Library Aide, Sherry Wilkowitz - Assistant Principal, and Stephanie Catmull - High School Teacher, share with us about their passion for teaching. In addition you will also find information on next year's *Beyond the Book Club* studies.

The Editor



# Rankings

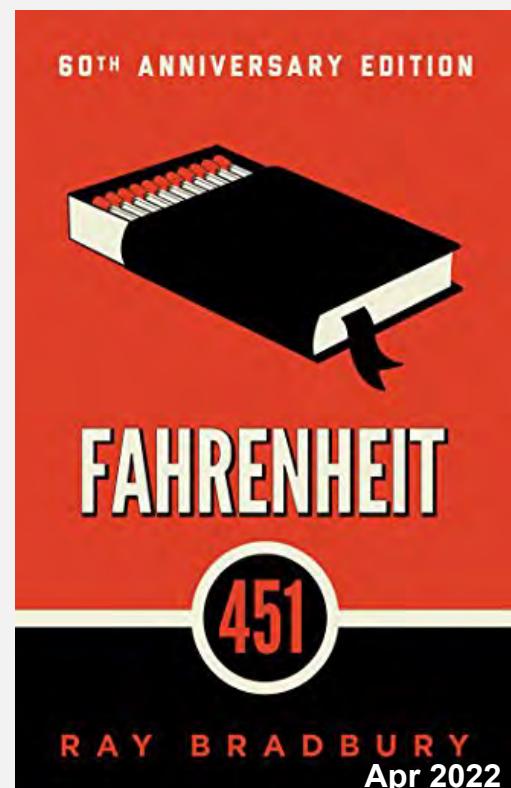
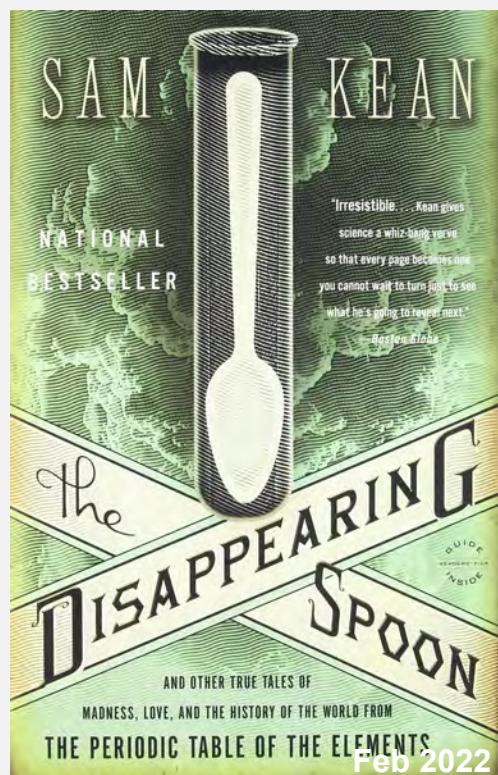
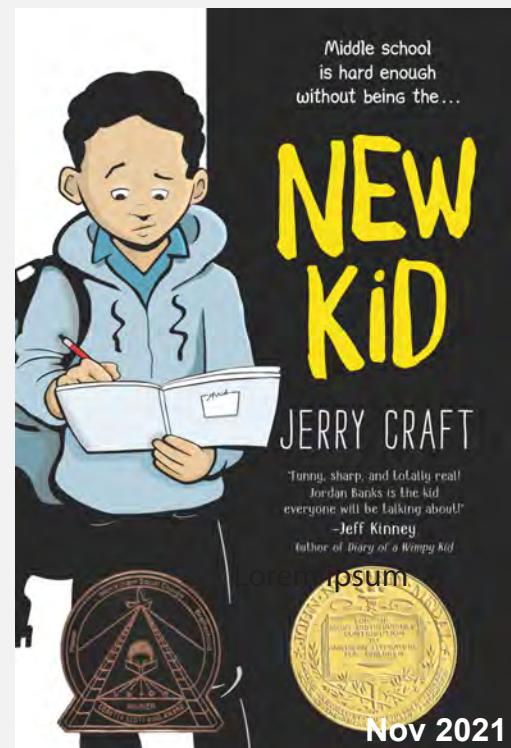
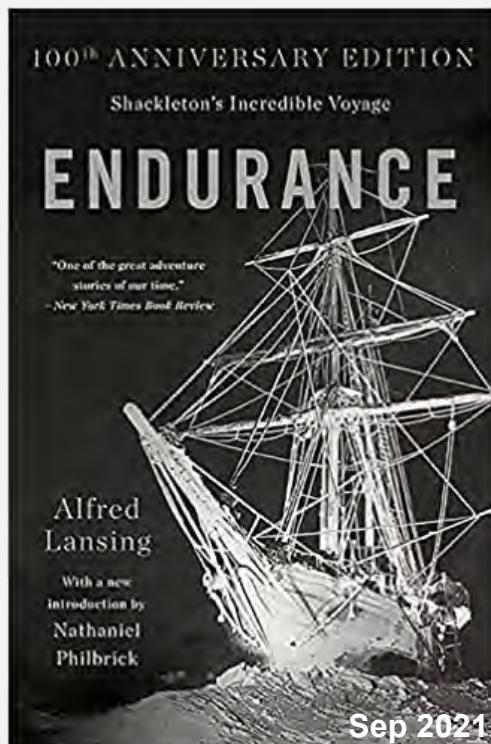
## U.S. News & World Report

Each year U.S. News & World Report releases a ranking of the top high schools in the nation. The 2021 results were just released this month after an analysis of 24,000 high schools. TCA's High School was ranked the #1 school in District 20, the #2 high school in El Paso County, and the #14 school in the state of Colorado. On the national level the rankings placed our High School as the #115 charter school in the nation and the overall #451 ranked high school in the country. Those rankings equate to our high school placing in the top 2-3% of schools. Such results do not happen without the great contributions of our parents, students, and staff across all grade levels. Thanks to everyone that made this possible.



click image above for link

# Engaging Minds: Beyond the Book Club



# SELECTIONS 2021-2022

I have a confession to make now that I have you here on false pretenses ... I am not actually a teacher. My part at TCA is to support Brenda White in the North Elementary Library. Brenda teaches every one of our elementary students every week and has the distinction of being a Titan of the Year recipient. You can imagine then, my sweaty palms and reluctance to fill her shoes on the rare occasion I teach a class for her.

Before I continue, a bit about myself. I grew up in extremely rural Montana. My father had been my High School English teacher and had great success in the field of teaching. His enthusiasm for Education and satisfaction with the work allowed me no hesitation when I applied for college. My college career began in Minnesota as an Elementary Education major. To make a long story short, I married, moved to Colorado, earned a degree in Psychology from UCCS and began work at home, raising my two children. Thankfully, a wise woman advised I write my children's names on the TCA waitlist the day of their birth. So here at TCA they both grow and learn from excellent teachers.

Back to why I teach...or don't. In a pinch, I had the opportunity to teach first graders about gardening and how to plant seeds during the North Elementary Health Jam. The event had to be rescheduled due to weather and it was 'all hands on deck' to make the event work. My teaching block amounted to just under three hours and let me tell you, it was exhausting! That night, I fell into bed and slept the sleep of the just. Here and there, I also get to teach various library classes. My experiences are both joyful and challenging. The students are bright, talkative, and attentive during story time. They also need direction, love socializing off topic



with their classmates, and are particular about their book choices. The dynamics of teaching wear me out and I am thankful daily, as a parent, that TCA is helping me educate my children.

Teachers, I see your efforts every day. It is my joy to help you in the library; to provide you with the resources you need to do the constant work of preparing your students for life ahead. My favorite times are helping you find just the right book to teach your students everything from sharing, to astronomy, to kindness, to exploration. Thank you for pouring into our community by first pouring into the future of our community. Go on your way with passion, love and perseverance and tonight, sleep the sleep of the just!

**Alicia Miller  
Elementary Library Aide**

## **WHY I TEACH: Stories from the Classroom**

I taught 3rd grade at TCA for 21 years. I taught because I love children and helping them to learn and grow into quality adults. I was always happy to be part of their process; there was always the hope of great impact on little lives. A few years ago, I received this letter via facebook from a student who had moved away after 5th grade...

"Hello Miss Wilkewitz, this is Jacob Dreiling. I'm not sure if you remember me – I was a student of yours in third grade at TCA. I just wanted to say that you have made a bigger impact on my academic life than any other teacher or faculty member I've had since. I am so incredibly grateful for your help, it began my journey to a better school and social outlook. I am a senior in high school (in TX) and will be graduating in a couple weeks. Even if you cannot make it, I would like to invite you to my ceremony. I would be very honored to have you attend! Best regards, Jacob."

Of course I had remembered him (one of those students into whom you pour your heart and soul). Truly, I had learned so much that year as well, and I was so honored to be remembered and invited. I ended up going to his graduation and celebrating him with his family and friends. It was a great reminder of why we do what we do.

**Sherry Wilkewitz  
Assistant Principal**



These reflections were written prior to this current school year.

I was nearly blind for three years as a teenager. Needless to say, I ended up in that non-clique category, fitting in nowhere. I swore I would never enter a high school again, because my memories of high school were simply terrible: 1) My family life, like most high school kids, was a capital mess; 2) I was the most un-athletic person ever (literally I walked into walls); 3) I was that "book nerd" who escaped from life into the world of books with the aid of a ginormous magnifying glass; 4) I endured countless surgeries, even having to go to school with a patch over my eye (insert innumerable cruel pirate jokes here); and 5) I was that laughed-at, egghead of a girl in the corner with no friends, and I was miserable. Miraculously, I was valedictorian (since academics was the only thing I seemed to be good at), but I refused to give the graduation speech since my biggest fear was talking in front of people and making a total fool of myself. I thought I was alone, and did not realize that I was the poster child of nearly every high school student – trying to find friends, looking for that one person to talk to, searching for my identity, and struggling to find my purpose in this world.

Still, after high school, I managed to get my BA in Psychology with a minor in English - the two subjects that, unsurprisingly, included my passion for reading, writing, and helping others. I got married and raised 5 children. Yet my biggest achievement began when I was in my thirties, on a sidewalk, when I jogged a block, and then two. You see, I stoked up the courage to try something I was terrible at, and for the life of me, I still don't know what possessed me to even try. There is a joy, though, of not caring anymore what people think of you. So, I thrust aside all those nay-sayers in my head who whispered I would never be able



to ---, and I ventured out to do something I once thought impossible. People would yell, "Run, Forest, Run!" and I would laugh at myself, and pat myself on the back that I was actually running.

That small run led to an eventual marathon, and I understood what it meant – finally – to dig deep. I was intimidated by the miles ahead of me, but I learned to just put one foot in front of the other. I practiced every day, even when I hated that black, unforgiving pavement. I knew what it meant to "hit the wall" when every muscle hurt, and yet kept moving. I learned to focus and make myself incrementally better with every step I took. It was not about winning, since I finished the race in the middle of the pack (I think I was 1,247 out of 2,560, and no, my time does not matter so don't ask). I learned, too, what it meant to have a community of people around me, cheering me on, giving me high-fives at every mile, encouraging my every step. I never had that before, and it helped me soar. I learned to push

something I needed to hear so badly when I was their age. I show them that they have the ability and grit to conquer their obstacles, their own disabilities, their fears. I see the kid in the corner who doubts himself, who feels like he is just done, and I know what that feels like. I see the girl who comes into my room during lunch needing to talk, and I drop everything because I remember the times I had no one to talk to. I see the pain, the determination, the frustration, and the overwhelming joy when they finish something hard. They know (I hope) that I am proud of them no matter what, because teaching is not just about grades. It's those times when you walk into walls, and need a hand up. I see so much in them, their unlimited potential, and that they matter. And with all of this, I know I have made a small difference in the corner of their expanding world. This is why I teach.

In the classroom, I have the privilege of seeing their bright, eager faces as freshman, and love to watch their eyes grow wide when we begin talking about morality. I see them appreciate my passion for reading, and empathize with relatable literary characters who frequently mess up, just like they do. I get a kick out of seeing the spinning hamster in their brain as they think about what they're thinking, and then figure out how to put that into words. They hear my endless "Why?" and they have to reason through the answers besides saying the easy "I don't know." I relish hearing my kids still talk about our debates in the hallways. I thoroughly enjoy the treasured emails from parents sincerely thanking me for opening up long dinner conversations about what we talked about in class. This is why I teach.

One day in August, I conquered the Incline (and all you fellow climbers are now triggered with memories of pain, grit, exhaustion, breathtaking scenery, and victory! – and no, my time does not matter so don't ask). That same intimidating, impossible feeling when I looked up at those 2,500 stairs is the exact same look I get from my

## **WHY I TEACH: Stories from the Classroom**

through, persevere, challenge myself, and never give up.

I learned, then, that I was not only a book nerd, and a college graduate, and a Mom. I was a very amateur athlete, and I could appreciate what that actually meant in terms of grueling discipline. I was wolfing down a previously unheard of slice of life, and I was hungry to share in my experience of reaching the impossible with others. This is why I started to teach.

I wanted to be with kids – in high school – where I had felt rejected from the world. I wanted to somehow "change" all my high school miseries, and give back the lessons I learned in my marathon of life. I walk each day into my classroom full of students who face many of my old struggles, and I now have the privilege of coming alongside them, letting them know they are worth something to this world –

# WHY I TEACH: Stories from the Classroom

students when we begin The Iliad. There is no way we can do this! they cry. The frustration and confusion at the beginning glazes their eyes with fear, and I am that cheerleader, helping them dig in to conquer the impossible. You **can** do this. Just give yourself a chance. I am there when they are tired of practicing, pushing them with just one more chapter. When their brain cramps up and they hit that wall with only a few chapters left, I am their life coach who shows them how to dig deep. When they get to that false summit, and realize they **STILL** have more to go, I stand behind them with encouraging words. When they cross that finish line, I have them look back to the beginning, to where they thought they could never accomplish this impossible quest, and show them that they **CAN** and **DID** push through to the end. Never forget that feeling when life gets hard, because Pain is temporary. That feeling of accomplishment through sheer grit lasts forever. I witness their joy through the struggle. This is why I teach.

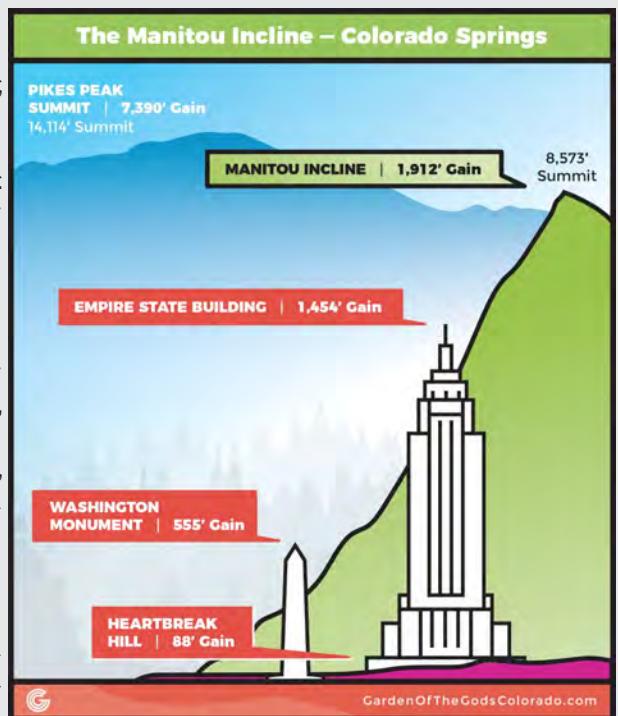
My kids mean the world to me, and they have taught me so much about what it means to have character. One student in particular (she gave me permission to tell her story) is a true case in point. This girl was finding her niche, and just trying to navigate this whole high school thing. She had unbelievable talent, but underperformed in my class. I pulled out my bag of tricks, but I felt like I utterly failed her when I couldn't get her to just turn in her work. I didn't recommend her for honors English the next year, and this crushed me. This crushed her. But her true character, in the midst of utter disappointment, shined through. She pulled herself up by her sinking bootstraps, and pressed inward and upward. She says, if it weren't for me, she would have just coasted through high school. It was that

"failure" that has now led to her greater success as a student and as a person. As Hemingway says, a man [or woman] can be destroyed, but not defeated. This is why I teach.

I am there to wipe away their falling tears. I am there to give them unconditional acceptance. I am there for their ups and downs. I am there to push them when they need to be pushed, and let off the steam when they need a break. I am there to give them accountability. I am there to teach them about life, about realizing that it's ok not to be ok, and to help them figure out balance. I help them express themselves, to appreciate life – both the beautiful and the ugly. I provide them a safe place to talk. I give correction when they need it to steer them back on their path. I am there to watch them become young men and women of character and integrity. I am there to love. I am there to make a difference. I am there for them to see that when they feel as if they cannot take one more step, they can look over at me – that old, nerdy, unathletic, unpopular high school girl – and know they will be just fine. I would never want to be anywhere else. 2 Timothy 4:7: I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

**This is why I teach.**

**Stephanie Catmull**  
High School Teacher



“He who laughs at himself never runs out of things to laugh at.” *Epictetus*