



From the Headmaster

American author Fran Lebowitz once said, *“Think before you speak. Read before you think.”* This is a philosophy shared at the RGS where the written word is still regarded as one of the most powerful influences. There is no doubt that reading nourishes the mind, gives perspective, nurtures empathy, and provides an education in the broadest possible sense.

The theme of this year’s World Book Day was, *You are a reader*. It challenged every one of us to pick up a book and re-engage with a love of literature and reading. Our Head of English, Ms Wijesinghe, addressed the whole school at assembly this week and reflected on the meaning of this phrase.

“The statement – You are a reader – had me thinking: wouldn’t the world be a better place if we were all readers? By this I don’t mean that we would be more intelligent or knowledgeable. I think it would make the world a better place because there is no better way to feel empathy than through literature. But what is empathy? It’s hard to define and even harder to teach, but I believe that teaching empathy is the most important aspect of my job, over and above teaching you how to spell or write essays. Empathy is the ability to place ourselves in someone else’s shoes. If we knew what it felt like to be on the receiving end of racially or sexually-motivated hatred, would we abuse others? If we knew what it felt like to struggle in poverty would we judge those less fortunate than us? If we knew what it felt like to flee our homes in war, would we bomb other countries? We cannot experience everything first hand but we can try to understand the lives and feelings of others, and reading enables us to do so.”

In an increasingly global context to our daily lives, mistrust and prejudice are often fuelled by an inability to empathise and sympathise, often through limited horizons and through fear of the unknown. Books remain one of the most important vehicles to break down barriers and to make our students as worldly, tolerant and balanced as possible. The RGS World Book Week 2022 provided students with a diverse range of literary options. Thought-provoking, challenging and broadening, the books included everything from the Nazi occupation of Italy in World War II; to a journey on the seemingly impossible task of measuring the world; to immigration and coming to terms with sexual identity; to consent, the objectification of the female body, and the ways in which social expectations can limit individual freedoms; to political issues and sensitivities.

The books were unashamedly challenging and engaged with ‘big ideas’ which went beyond our boys’ normal spheres of engagement: books which were developmentally beneficial as well as being outside their usual reading habits. The value of this approach is encapsulated succinctly by American philosopher Mortimer J. Adler: *“In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through to you.”* Reading for pleasure; learning for life.

In the context of the current situation in Ukraine, however, the importance of empathy could not be more topical. I spoke to the boys this week and reminded them how it is at times such as these that rather than abstract concepts, our values and what we stand for really come to the fore, they are living and real: kindness and compassion, integrity and respect, tolerance and inclusion. And never has a focus on empathy been more important, more appropriate. As Malorie Blackman once said, *“Reading is an exercise in empathy; an exercise in walking in someone else’s shoes for a while.”*

Our prayers go to all those who are ravaged by war, fear and despair and we must continue through thought, word and action to do all we can to help those oppressed and those in need, as well as supporting each other through these challenging times.

Latest News

CHEMISTRY: 8,668 students took part in the UK Chemistry Olympiad, and the RGS achieved an excellent set of results, especially in a paper which was described as *“particular challenging”* by the RSC; the modal score for the country is merely seven marks! **Jan Czarnek** did superbly and achieved the top RGS score of 39, particularly impressive result for a Lower Sixth student. Fifth Form student **Freddie Weir** took the test two years early and achieved an excellent Silver. In total we achieved 7 Gold, 20 Silver and 14 Bronze awards. Golds were awarded to: **Dan Cobley** (U6), **Jan Czarnek** (L6), **Seb Evans** (U6), **Matt Gray** (U6), **Alex Jones** (U6), **Luca Watson-Hart** (U6) and **Michael Wu** (L6).

ENGINEERING: Our junior team progressed to the Grand Final of the SATRO Problem Solving Challenge, after winning their heat. The team comprising **Anay Gandhi** (2P), **Edward Lefever** (1E), **Theo Odhams** (1E), **Joe Pontin** (3C), **Ben Robertson** (2L) and **Angus Scott** (3P) used engineering ingenuity, teamwork and creativity based on STEM skills to tackle a challenge focused on timing and the ability to light a lamp.

INTERNATIONAL LINKS: Second Form students had a live interactive assembly with RGSG Dubai. The students fired questions at each other, learning more about daily life and school life in Dubai and Guildford, and the similarities and contrasts. A fascinating discussion, it was great to hear about the opportunities students have in Dubai, but not so much about their two- and half-day weekend!

KING’S LECTURE: The RGS was delighted to welcome Martin Tyler to deliver this term’s King’s Lecture. From Anfield to the Auditorium in successive nights, the fervour and passion of the capacity crowds were well-nigh identical! Martin attended the RGS as a student from 1956 to 1964, and then continued his link with the School as an RGS parent. Martin started the talk by flicking through his tiny, red pocket diary from 1956 including scrawled reflections from his school days, including such profound comments as *“Didn’t do much at school today!”* With football his burning passion from childhood (and his most animated diary entries relating to sport at the RGS!), his favourite memory remains scoring literally hundreds of goals on Top Court, on a goal post painted on the side of the Chemistry lab. Click [here](#) to read the full review.

Sports News

FENCING: The RGS recorded back-to-back victories against Charterhouse School: winning 45 – 22 in Foil, and 45 – 37 in Épée.

FOOTBALL: The 1st XI fought back from two goals down to record a 2 – 2 draw against Wimbledon College, with goals from **Reuben Anthony** (L6) and **Max Deacon** (L6).

HOCKEY: After a well-deserved half term break, RGS teams were back in action with fixtures against Hurstpierpoint College and Whitgift School. The Under 15s secured a clean sweep of wins against Hurstpierpoint with the Under 15Cs particularly impressing with a 6 – 1 victory. There were several outstanding performances against the traditionally strong Whitgift teams; however, the highlight was undoubtedly a gritty, determined 1 – 0 victory for the Under 16Bs.

