



### Extracts from a classroom letter

*Dear Students of Class Ten,*

*I thought I would write you a letter sharing what I feel about my times with you all, our energy levels, and the culture that is created in the English classes.*

*Recently, I felt I would like to pause the English class, and 'check-in' to see where each of you is, in terms of the subject, the dynamics in the room, the emotions you experience, and your relationship to me (not only as your teacher, but as a person and another member in this community).*

*Here's how I would respond to these points myself! When we gather for a class, I definitely sense enthusiasm and cheer from most of you. Many of you make an effort to come on time, stay attentive and participative through the class, and it is often a feeling of excitement that I too bring to it. However I would like to add that, it would be a good habit and a respectful thing to learn to show your readiness once you are in the class, perhaps put a book away, pull up a chair for someone, make sure the space is neat, and so on. Rather than wait for someone to announce that it is class time, it would be pleasant if all take that initiative. The 'class' doesn't begin when the book is opened and the teacher starts talking, does it? Perhaps we are conditioned*

*to believe that. But let's look at it this way: it begins when you enter the space and sit in a group. You immediately become part of a collective and what you say or do starts to impact others. If you were at home in your bedroom, alone, it would be a different matter. So what does it mean to be in that classroom space, alert and sensitive, to the surroundings, the people and the content to be studied?*

*As we talk and listen to each other, I have also been sensing some group habits that make me uncomfortable: laughter when someone shares, snubbing, putting someone down, being overly tentative and pausing a lot, trying to attract laughter or attention with a comment or joke. These are all perfectly normal human behaviors! But of late, I have been feeling that in a classroom space, they distract, cause hurt feelings and take us away from topics. Of course there are other group habits like responding constructively to each others' presentations, asking questions of each other, working together on a project which I do notice and appreciate. When you write a letter back to me, could you share what you have noticed about what motivates you to speak or behave in a certain way, in the class?*

*What kind of a class member are you? How do you contribute to the atmosphere in a constructive way? It will help you*





recognize a habit and loosen it a bit. I know that for most of these comments, your response might be, “It’s just a joke. See, the other person is laughing too.” But embedded in these jokes are messages to the other about their ability or their personality. So let’s see how to make this a bit transparent for each other.

I do not mean we have to bend to each one’s emotional needs and patterns, but to become aware of the interplay of those emotions and one’s personal quirks that might be impacting the class, the peers, the content or the teacher. Starting to be overly polite and artificial to each other so as to prevent hurt or protect ourselves can still be part of a game we play. How can there be honesty with oneself about the currents of motive, desire and emotion? Please share your thoughts with me.

When it comes to the curriculum and the ‘work’, it isn’t meant to be a mechanical process where I ‘demand’ some assignment from you, you ‘demand’ the corrections back and you and I keep going through this, as if we are performing services to each other. Let’s look at it as an active engagement on my part and on your part. Yes, I do ‘assign’ homework and expect it back but I care to see what you have written, I read between the lines, I try to understand what you may have been feeling while doing the assignment. Similarly, do you read my responses, do you feel

things when you read them, do you see how to take it into account for the next time? Do write and share these comments in your letter to me.

Finally, what would you say about patience towards yourself in all this? If you are someone who constantly compares yourself with the others, puts yourself down, and feels tongue-tied to speak, it is going to become very difficult for you to learn, to grow and to enjoy. If you are someone who gets easily impatient with others and feels things are a waste of time, you also will find it hard to grow, to learn and to enjoy many things in the future.

If you would like to give me feedback about how the curriculum has been, how you have been supported or not by me, or what excites you in this course, please share that too. Thanks,

With love,  
‘Teacher’s Name’

This extract of a letter a teacher wrote to the tenth standard students, midway in the year, happened when that perfect class recipe seemed to collapse and there was a need to take a broader view. Recipe: The lesson plan! The group of ready, receptive students! The teacher in control of content and group dynamics! The stipulated time in which the lesson will unfold! The necessary few ‘AHA’ moments! The time for quiet work and assignments! The closing remarks!

Some of the dictionary meanings of the word ‘lesson’ are: a piece of instruction; a reading or exercise to be studied by a pupil; an occurrence from which something can be learned; an instructive example. However, friends, what really happens (the ‘occurrence’ mentioned in the dictionary!) is possibly an upturning of this cart and a realization that one is actually in a space of much more dynamism and lack of control than one thinks. It can still be ‘an occurrence from which something can be learned’, though! Instead of the recipe model, we ask ourselves: what can be co-created by teacher and student in a classroom situation as partners rather than as a transactional mode or a service-oriented mode? A classroom is also a space and time to deconstruct, reflect and question ourselves on, so that living together in a school community is not seen as separate from learning together in a classroom!

In this deconstruction it becomes clear that a class has many moving parts. There are options of different work modes: pairs vs group discussion vs individual work. There is the material used: is it up to date? Is there a varied collection? What might be learning issues in the class group? These are essential factors to keep in mind while creating lesson plans, conducting classes, managing children, and assessing them. Education courses and trainings keep us informed of these elements in the light of research on the way learning



may actually happen. But in this letter the teacher wanted to draw attention to broader themes and not the nitty gritty as much.

Emotions. One may never be able to have enough training for two elements that emerge as organic realities of the classroom. One is the group atmosphere that is created over time, the democratic spirit in the air, and students' emotions (their history with each other, blocks to the subject, attitudes). In essence, what students bring to the class, psychologically. The other element is the teacher's emotions in the room, the things we carry to class and the ways we respond to what we call disruptions. All this becomes an essential part of what unfolds in the classroom. Teachers and students need to acknowledge their own and each others' feelings at play in the class and not consistently relegate them to an outside space ('Let's deal with that after class'). Perhaps this can lead to a broader ability to listen and see through what is happening, rather than habitually reacting to each others' emotional needs.

In response to this letter, students wrote their own and outlined many personal thoughts and feedback which became invaluable to the teacher. Extracts from some of the students' letters:

'When we behave in certain ways, sometimes there's an awareness to it but sometimes we are quite unthinking. It's true my first reaction is that it's just a joke. But it's not my only reaction. I am also thinking that maybe I hurt that person's feelings or maybe I distracted the class. I am sorry that we make you feel uncomfortable. Sometimes we forget your feelings as you are seen as 'the adult' or 'the teacher'. ...PS. This letter has been reread and edited!'

'English class is just one bit of our relationship. There are other aspects to the way we see each other.'

'It is true that when we gather for class, often I am caught up in a book which I can't put down. Sometimes, I don't feel that the class has 'gathered' if one or two people are still missing, and this leads to a sense of disrespect to the people there, which I am beginning to realize, and I hope to correct. Perhaps it is not, as you say, purely functional and a collective is really being formed.'

In hindsight, one realized how this letter worked not just as a sharing from the teacher's side, but as a different form of communication, as an appeal to their conscience, as a reminder of what we are all coming together for, as a model of informal writing, and as an informal assessment of the course!



## Growing with books

Students begin their reading adventures in the junior library, housed in the junior school. This small room, accessible at all times via staircase or slide, has a curated collection of picture books, stories in English, Kannada and Hindi and some non-fiction organized into colour-coded reading levels. A large bay window, a shiny uncluttered red-oxide floor and three open shelves filled with books in all shapes and sizes provide instant invitation to browse, pick out a book and dive into another world. Between or after classes, during a free period, there is always a lone child curled up with a book or a couple of students sprawled or huddled over books in this space.

Apart from individual access to the library space at all times, every age group across school has a time-tabled library period, usually for one and a half hours each week. In this class, each child gets time to browse, borrow and return books; the rest of this time is used for group interactions and activities around books. Rearranging books, dusting shelves, creating displays, repairing books, discussing conventions, brainstorming solutions to issues that may arise in the library: all these activities might happen during this time as well. The library class most often, far from being a sober, quiet space, is full of activity, noisy chatter, even loud, animated discussions. Occasionally we have to appeal for solo 'DEAR time' (drop everything and read time).

At ages eight to nine, students demand read-alouds almost every library class; they like to talk about books, want to tell favourite stories, share illustrations and bring much-loved books from home. They enjoy doing art, craft and dramatization activities that echo stories. Discussions ensue on kinds of stories, characters, their experiences and emotions, and whether we experience and relate to them in our own lives.

"How come he is allowed to borrow ten books? Auntie, do something, all the pages in this book are coming out! Do I have to take a Kannada book home? My parents can't read Kannada. Yuck, look how messy the shelves are! The Gruffalo book is lost! I saw it last term, the Saralas had hidden it in their shelf. Hey, what's that Dr Seuss book doing in the sand-pit? Look auntie, she's reading Harry Potter." Every statement, exclamation, complaint is a valuable opportunity to clarify, discuss conventions, establish boundaries, to co-create and set the culture of the open library.

The main library at CFL is the tallest, most impressive building of all on campus not only because it has a beautiful pond, three storeys and a bell tower, but because it has so many stories! Age ten upwards, students are proud to become main-library users. This means they can enter the hallowed precincts any time of the day, can walk around with

thick, dense chapter books, can use the computer to access their individual accounts in the library software, can lounge around reading magazines while draped on sofas and floor cushions. An initial challenge for these new lilliputian users is the maze of shelves, the sheer number of books, the way books are labeled with numbers, organized by author rather than by reading levels as they are accustomed to in the junior library. The library teacher, or sometimes a senior child hanging around, helps to explain the layout of the shelving, initiating the younger ones into the mysteries of how to locate a good book. Library adults devise treasure hunts and activities to unpack how the Dewey Decimal classification works, and they encourage students to explore different sections of the library.

At this age, students, like hungry caterpillars, devour everything they see. They are open to all recommendations without filters; they read wildly and prolifically. There are some who prefer imaginative fiction; others are curious about how things work, which helps them dive deep into non-fiction, whether about machines, bird diversity or how tsunamis and volcanoes occur. An occasional child, bewildered even after a year by the maze of books, prefers to retire unnoticed with a picture book to a sofa until the library adult coaxes her to borrow an interesting book.

We have a simple borrowing recipe for each week which helps ten to twelve year olds enjoy a balanced variety of books: a chapter book or two, a picture book, a non-fiction book, a Hindi and a Kannada book to supplement the language program. Students are actively encouraged to recommend books to each other, and they enjoy this process immensely. Each year students create lists of favourite books which serve as guides to good books for specific age groups. Adults in the library class actively introduce new authors, talk about different kinds of books and genres within fiction, help students explore the different sections within non-fiction, and also bring magazines and newspapers to their notice by reading out excerpts.

A year or two later, in middle school, the library class becomes more focused and aims at slowing down reading. We try to draw attention to themes, messages in books, to understand authors' lives, the times and context in which the story is written. In the last few years, our 'in-between shelves' are burgeoning as there is a lot of complex yet sensitive writing for young adults which our teen readers thrive on. A middle school group might read a novel together, or read poetry for a few weeks, or read excerpts of novels or stories around a theme which any subject class might throw up. Topics range from apartheid to evolution. There could be specific issues that the group is dealing with such as exclusion and bullying, and the library class may bring together stories around these





themes. By the time they are fifteen, students are clearly able to recall books that have affected or inspired them deeply, that have brought new understanding or broken some bias or prejudice. Such outstanding books are honoured with custom-made blurbs, stars and awards.

For teenagers at fourteen and fifteen peer pressure is a strong influence on their reading trajectories. It is also the age when the media and commercial market forces combine to impact young people. Strong comparisons and status hierarchies come into play. With online retailing and credit cards, it is easy to obtain unlimited supplies of books with inappropriate and even objectionable content. Are young students challenged by these books? Are attention spans being compromised? Do all the books they read espouse similar world views? Perhaps so. Adults who hold the library space for older students have very interesting discussions on these questions!

Each year students from one middle or senior school group go on a book-buying trip for the library. This event paves the way for important discussions on what is a good book, how to skim, assess the value, the appropriateness of a book, how to widen the point of view and perception of the particular child to consider the tastes of other students, to look at reading needs of the wider school community.

In the senior school, as reading is more challenging and layered, book talks and discussions become longer and more

intense. The student learns to share personal responses to the plot, character, themes of the book and learns to be critical but not dismissive. Sometimes groups may do written book reports or profile favourite authors, reflect on their own reading journeys over the past years and present, in a mature way, their observations on authors' works and evolving styles.

Thematic reading continues in senior school. Everything becomes grist for the library class: events in school, visitors bringing in new perspectives, events shaking the world from garbage disposal to communal riots. A variety of sources are used to help students unpack these themes: newspaper clips, magazine articles, non-fiction writing on the environment, excerpts from popular writing in the fields of medicine, psychology, new advances in science, history, modern society, novels, plays, poetry, short stories, speeches, journalistic pieces, talks, audio and video clips, music, films. Students are encouraged to question what they read, re-view dominant perspectives, look at historical and biographical contexts that give rise to different points of view, tease out layers, contradictions, subcultures and alternate realities that co-exist around us.

An open vibrant community library is not just an impressive building packed with good books; it truly becomes a voyage of discovery across a student's life: to understand the world and oneself through reading and books.







## Mtoto Mela!

As the teacher group discussed mela options for this year, many of us, increasingly, seemed to be honing in on the theme of ‘childhoods’. One motivation behind this was the sense that we and our students have very little close contact with ‘other’ lives. The idea that we all live in bubbles is not new for us. There is a strong tendency to cluster in groups based on similar interests and backgrounds, a force that creates significant sorrow even within the school. We often ask ourselves and the students, is it possible to notice the quick creation of an ‘us’ and a ‘them’, and to understand why we do it?

It would be foolish to think that a mela could transform our rather deep-rooted human tendencies to judge and divide, but we very much wanted to try to shake our assumptions and ideas at least a little bit. What if we could organise a children’s conference, one where children from around the country got together at CFL for several days? Wait, instead of the adults organising it, could the students do it themselves?

These two ideas came together easily in our planning for the 2018 Mtoto Mela (mtoto means ‘child’ in Swahili). A primary aspect of the mela was an interaction with Indian schools. A parallel attempt was made to initiate contact with schools abroad to learn about children and their lives across the oceans; we wrote letters or emails to each other and had several Skype conversations. These were children from a range of schools across the world: Roman Catholic Junior High School, Retca School, and Shark’s Football Club, all in Ghana; Warraphat School, Thailand; Nirmal Batika Academy, Nepal; Bernardo O’Higgins School, Chile; HeartSong-Canto del Corazon, Costa Rica; Inverness Education Centre Academy, Nova Scotia, Canada; and a school in San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico.

We also explored to varying degrees, depending on the age group of the students, questions such as “What does childhood mean?” and “When does childhood end?”

Regarding the primary aspect of connecting with school children in India, adults and students at CFL chose which schools they would like to interact with for the mela. Before the CFL mela conference in late November/early December 2018, all our children visited the schools which they would eventually be hosting at CFL. This was part of the preparation and helped in building familiarity and bonds between individuals and groups. It also meant that once our students knew those children better, they got a sense of what kind of activities to have during the CFL Mtoto Mela conference.

Over two separate weeks in November and December 2018, CFL students played organisers and hosts to 120 children and adults from eight schools around India. These were Adarshila Learning Centre, Sakad, Madhya Pradesh; Azim

Premji School, Yadgir, Karnataka; Kalkeri Sangeet Vidyalaya, Dharwad, Karnataka; Karigarshala, Bhuj, Gujarat; Imlee Mahuaa, Kondagaon, Chhattisgarh; Prakruti Badi, Chennakotapalli, Andhra Pradesh; Tibetan Children’s Village, Bylakuppe, Karnataka and, Vidya Vanam, Anaikatti, Tamil Nadu.

Apart from these schools, there were a smattering of very meaningful day-long visits to and/or hosting of children from schools in Bangalore: Ananya School, Annaswamy Mudaliar School, Bachenhatti Post Government School, and Shradhanjali Integrated School (under the aegis of the Association for People with Disability).

It didn’t need much for a basic human connect to happen naturally amongst the children. Getting familiar with one another or discovering similar interests, usually presumed to be pre-requisites for camaraderie, proved unnecessary to relate with peers from widely different backgrounds. Playing together created a bond, a spiritedness amongst children, almost instantaneously.



Having said this, it is also true that perhaps the hardest part was for children from different schools to just “hang out” with each other in informal spaces. Children from all the schools tended to “hang out” mainly with each other. There were of course the exceptions and it was nice to suddenly see children from visiting schools interacting in informal spaces with each other.

For CFL students, organising this mela brought to light challenges that surface while working in a group – getting distracted by stray conversations; difficulty in confronting peers; tendency to instruct or be passive; not achieving much work in the time assigned; varying levels of commitment to the task. An adult, at this point, is inclined to think that soon children are likely to be worried and will be approaching us for help. But there was no such worry or anxiety in them! Instead, spontaneity reigned. They seem to have unbridled

faith in it: they changed plans whenever needed, managed to procure materials not earlier organised for, and shifted their expectations depending on the situation. They fully accepted what unfolded in the time that they hosted children from other schools. We adults on the other hand, may have taken deep breaths and compulsively reassured ourselves that “all will be well”!

On the whole, the students across ages really worked well together; with enthusiasm and energy thrown into the mix. Through a democratic and short deliberative process, albeit aided by their familiarity with each other over the years, they based their decisions of who will do what on interests and skills. Within each committee, while it seemed that students gravitated to tasks that came to them easily or ‘naturally’ as a result of their strengths, interests and skills, there were examples of students taking the initiative to acquire new skills, to push themselves out of their comfort zones.

The learning curve for students was steep – after certain ‘mistakes’, they were quick to self-correct; they also learned to listen to one another or, in some cases, give way to the wisdom of older students or a teacher. In such cases, it was nice to see collaboration, which was evident in all the areas through the six months.

One question that came up was the effectiveness or usefulness of vertical age groups (committees that had students from age 8 to age 18). What is the value of such groups? This can be looked at through different lenses. If viewed from the lens of effectiveness (time, delivery, quality), we observed that it took a lot of time to be inclusive of everyone in a committee, to settle down, for all voices to be heard, to come to a consensus on ideas. Would this be called effective? Perhaps not. However, viewing this through another lens, it provided an opportunity for students to be part of a group process that included various voices, it showed them what a democratic, participatory process could look like, it also showed all of us the thresholds that each of us has for such processes (we became impatient and irritated, we stopped listening, we were frustrated).

In light of the fact that everything went smoothly, it is easy to forget difficult and challenging situations. For us, many questions (old and new) have (re)surfaced and remain, thus making it an area to further engage in, well after the mela.

In observing the children, as usual one saw several mixed threads, difficult to disentangle from each other without over-generalising or assuming a pattern where there might have been none! However, we can say with some confidence that there were many instances when what stood out was the ‘common humanity’ that we all shared. Those moments were precious.

Our heartfelt thanks to all the children and teachers from schools in India who hosted us and participated wholeheartedly in this year’s Mtoto Mela, as well as the teachers and children from schools overseas who enthusiastically gave time and energy to forge connections with us at CFL. We hope these connections can be maintained over time.



## Land, ho!

The phrase “land work” can bring a very narrow, simplistic image to our minds: a lot of digging and carting of soil! However, this kind of work actually offers many possibilities and opportunities to learn and to understand, in many modes. We would like to briefly explore the different ideas that influence our engagement with the land at CFL.

We take care of our campus with a clear set of ideas, criteria and philosophies. When students understand this, they have a framework to be able to comprehend land-use patterns in the larger landscape. Working on the land makes students feel familiar with and confident on the campus, connecting with the school in a different way. It often brings a sense of ownership and belonging. Students then enjoy the campus: bird-watching, walks, observation, quiet time, playing outdoors.

Working on the land has always been a part of the curriculum for all age groups since we moved to our current location in 2000. We have divided the land into different areas that we manage differently: fruit growing areas, vegetable growing areas, the ornamental area and conservation areas. Each of these spaces gives us opportunities to engage with the land and that helps us to understand the place in a very different way.

Physical engagement with the land such as digging, raking, planting, carrying is a very real part of nature education.



It is valuable for students to feel a sense of confidence and comfort with their bodies. Working with the hands and the body on the land can bring about an awareness that is a very important part of a child's education. Sensory experience is a crucial part of a child's day at school. The garden offers opportunities for students to practice their observation skills. This can enable some kind of a deeper connect with the place.

Working in the garden or on any other land-care project is an opportunity to work cooperatively on real tasks. There are weekly sessions of land work (as a class) as well as the daily community work time in a vertical age group. This time provides an opportunity for students to interact with each other and with the adults in a different context and situation, different from the classroom setting. Working together allows for open-ended conversations between students as well as with the adults. The students are encouraged to take on responsibilities on the land in different ways. The jobs that we take up with each group give them a sense of working through a process; in the vegetable garden, for example, they do all the tasks necessary to raise seedlings, transplant them, water them, weed the beds and watch over their growth.

The garden provides a way to understand seasonality and life cycles. We are in a geographical area where there is a stark difference between the wet and dry seasons. We can become conscious of this while working in the vegetable garden and also while working in parts of the campus that we are looking to conserve. During the rains, the school campus becomes lush and green. In the dry season the colours change to shades of brown, and the feeling of the land changes completely. We are more aware of the water problems we face as we see the land drying out. We have a very real context in which we can understand all the water conservation measures we have taken in the school.

Working in the vegetable garden, students also understand the role of food in our lives. The garden allows us to think about nutrition and how what we eat is directly connected to our health as well as the health of the land. Students learn about where food really comes from, and they see the link between growing, cooking and consuming. We all get a sense of the effort involved in producing food, and this also allows us to see how we use and care for the land sustainably.

The skills and messages students pick up from this approach cover a range of ideas from ecology and sustainability to consumerism and health. We often hear that these conversations are continued at home.

For many of us adults and students, working on the land is not an activity that takes up a significant part of our lives. The physical exertion in the sun, getting dirty and getting

bitten by ants, can feel overwhelming, and it becomes an activity that has a potential for a lot of resistance. How do we overcome this without forcing students to 'work'? As we mentioned earlier, working on the land is part of the curriculum for all students, so there is a familiarity from consistent contact. Often the jobs that need to be done are repetitive, so it is important to keep the interest alive by making sure that students get an exposure to a variety of work.

Working on the land becomes a powerful tool for a community to feel a connect with the earth in a day and age where society gives the opposite message. So it becomes ever more precious that we find many ways in which we can relate to the earth. The alienation that we feel today from the planet that we live on is so complete in most strata of society. This lack of relating to and basic awareness of our landscapes makes the destruction that we face seem inevitable. Nurturing a love for the land in the young may be one thread of hope.





## Comings and goings

Prabhat Jain, who was at CFL for the past two years, has moved back to Indore with his wife Priyanka. Prabhat was mainly teaching physics and was also involved with the games programme as well as helping to maintain our website. We wish him all the very best; we will miss his affectionate presence.

The CFL library continues to attract much interest across the country, and we have had many visitors interested in understanding it. Our old friend Gyaltzen Jamyang, an education officer at the Tibetan Department of Education, brought a group of librarians for an exposure visit and a three-day library workshop conducted by Usha Mukunda and Sujata Noronha (from the Bookworm Trust, Goa). The principal of Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, Parveen Sheikh, along with two teachers, Ishrat and Nirupama, visited us for a few days with an interest in the ethos of the library as well as in the overall philosophy of the school. Three teachers from the Swadhaa Waldorf School in Pune, Shefali, Shyam and Sumana, also visited and interacted with the library programme for a few days. Nagesh Nagappa, a government school teacher from Tumkur, Santoshi

Lewis and Fiona Vaz, fellows of Amani Institute social innovations management wing, the principal of the Hummingbirds School, Bipin Dhane (along with a colleague, Dharmesh), Risha Borooah from Azim Premji University and Proma Basu Roy, from Shikshamitra, Kolkata, all visited us briefly for a day to understand the library.

Siddhartha Menon, an old friend of CFL from Rishi Valley school, visited for a few days and conducted poetry reading and discussion sessions with students of various ages (Siddhartha is a published poet himself). He also had a conversation with the more serious runners in the school about aspects of long-distance running. Maria Spada and Mark McCoin were with us for a couple of weeks, and Mark, who is a professor of art in the US, gave a talk on contemporary art and music to the older students. Vikram Sridhar, a storyteller based in Bangalore, gave a lively rendering of tales to a whole-school assembly and also interacted with some middle schoolers over the day. Mr Samar Bagchi, a science educator from Kolkata, presented us with some simple yet fascinating science experiments, for the entire school as well as specifically with the senior students. Dr Sunderam, a sleep expert from the US, gave a

fascinating talk on the current scientific understanding of sleep and also on some aspects of good sleep hygiene. Gaku Yamaguchi, a primary care physician living in Hawaii, did some craft work with the middle schoolers and spoke about aspects of Japanese history in the context of his growing up. Priti David and Vishaka George, from PARI (People's Archive of Rural India) gave a presentation on their work and were also involved with helping our students document their various school visits and conversations during the mela. Alok Utsav, a former student, interacted with the seniors one morning as a part of their General Studies module on the media. A group of Azim Premji University students, accompanied by Professor Seema Purushothaman, visited to see the campus from a sustainability point of view. Dr Shantala Hegde, from NIMHANS, interacted with senior students on her interests in the brain, music and emotion. Dharamjit and his colleagues from Ayang in Majuli, Assam, visited both to understand the library and get a broad perspective on the school. Sumita Chakraborty, a neuroscience scholar and science educator, visited for two days and spoke with the senior students on biology. She also helped students understand how to prepare slides for viewing under a microscope. Milap Salot, a CEPT (Ahmedabad) graduate, visited for three days as part of a fellowship in which he is exploring modes of learning.

Long term visitors and old friends: Shane and Chaiti, and their little daughter Kaira, were with us for several weeks in the first term, helping out with many aspects of campus life, particularly in the garden and kitchen, and in discussing the global dimension of food production and consumption. Pre-rna Sridhar, an alumna of The School KFI, spent some weeks on campus as a part of her gap year after graduating from school, and worked with many age





groups across many activities such as craft, walks and games. Anastasia Mee, a student of Brockwood Park, was at CFL for two months, very involved in the mela as well as in art and craft activities and in the kitchen. Andrew and Maggie, former teachers at Brockwood Park and now writing and researching on education worldwide, visited for a few days, speaking with teachers and students on schooling. Sharan Prakash, a biology researcher from the US, spent some weeks in the school and had some stimulating discussions and classes with the senior biology students. This section in the newsletter would not be complete without a mention of Gerard Bayle, who once again was with us in the third term, working hard on drama productions across age groups.

A family of traditional carpenters from Wayanad, Kerala, spent several months on campus helping us renovate the junior school thatch as well as the pottery shed. Our thanks to Padmanabhan, Madhusudan and the rest of the group for their beautiful work.

The senior school play night was one to remember, this time introducing us to the theatre of the absurd. The

Mallika group performed two plays by Samuel Beckett, directed by Gerard Bayle with assistance from CFL teachers.

The first, *Come and Go*, a dramatic monologue of 10 minutes, required immense composure by the actors and very measured and deliberate delivery of lines. The second, a performance of one act from *Waiting for Godot*, elicited varied reactions from the audience. 'Very disturbing', felt some members of the audience, 'comical', shared others. And this was perhaps the intended effect of this tragicomedy.

Many groups through the school decided to stage performances together on another evening. From dances, to comedic plays in English and Hindi, to a rendition of the Broadway musical, *Cats*, T.S. Eliot's poetry brought to life. Thank you to the parents involved in directing, costumes and make-up to help bring these productions to stage, and of course, to Gerard Bayle, whose touch was present to varying levels in each.

We were treated to an evening of mystic music by a group of musicians from Rajasthan, Mahesha Ramji and his accompanists. They also had inter-

actions with several groups across the school, introducing children to their stories and craft. They gave a spectacular concert to the entire CFL community one evening which we thoroughly enjoyed.

As in past years, several parents, former parents and alumni have reached out to help the CFL community in many areas—the kitchen, fundraising, some curricular programmes, and the library. We thank these individuals immensely for all their energy and effort.

We invite applications from individuals interested in self enquiry, who have specific skills to offer in terms of teaching, administrative duties and pastoral care (our needs may change from year to year). Applicants should be excited by living on a campus in a rural setting. If you are interested in working with us, please visit our website (<https://cfl.in/working-at-cfl/>) and follow the procedure outlined there.







### **Friends of CFL: a fund-raising appeal**

For the past few years, we have been introducing our micro-charity fund-raising idea, the “Friends of CFL” programme, to our newsletter readers. This past year, we were very successful in this effort and we have managed to meet our target. We are sincerely grateful to each and every individual who has supported us.

To explain to our new readers: CFL has consciously chosen to work with a ‘deficit budget’. Each year we offer unlimited and uncapped scholarships to any of our families who request them. Therefore, every year there is a gap between the running costs of the school and the contribution from parents. This makes CFL accessible to any student whose parents are serious about a different kind of education and who wish to join us in our philosophical exploration. The scholarship model has worked well all these years.

We have two sources to cover the annual deficit: the income from our corpus (endowment fund) and the generous donations we receive each year from well-wishers and friends. So far we have managed to meet our scholarship needs each year quite successfully, thanks to the considerable time and energy spent by several individuals in the community (parents, alumni and teachers) towards raising funds.

For the year 2019-20, we anticipate that we need to raise a sum of Rs 20 lakhs (approx US \$ 28,700) to help meet our deficit. If we have 400 “Friends of CFL” each donating a sum of Rs 5,000 (approx US \$70), we can cover our deficit for the year.

If you are interested in joining the “Friends of CFL” programme, please do contact us by sending an email to the address below with “Friends of CFL” in the subject box. Thank you very much for your support.

**Donor information: Centre For Learning is a registered charitable society. Donations to the society are exempt from Income Tax to the extent provided for under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961. If you wish to avail tax exemption in the USA, please email us for details. For more information, please visit <https://cfl.in/support-us/how-can-i-help-cfl/>**

We are trying to correct spelling and other errors in our mailing list. Could you drop us an email at [info@cfl.in](mailto:info@cfl.in) to point out any mistakes in your mailing label?

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