



## January 22, 2021: A Day of Inspiration and Healing

Dear CDS Community,

Wednesday morning, most of our community observed part of the peaceful transition of power with the United States Inauguration of the 46th President, Joe Biden and 49th Vice President, Kamala Harris. This was a celebration of democracy, inclusion, and hope as the events began with a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in American Sign Language and ended with the wisdom and poetry of Amanda Gorman. Students engaged in a variety of ways with the events – some watching the entire ceremony, others discussing the Oaths, sharing hopes and dreams, or writing poetry inspired by Ms. Gorman. This was a day filled with opportunities for the students to connect and see themselves in our collective future.

When I was 11, I remember writing to Amy Carter as she was, to me, the only glance of connection I could get from the various men leading the country. I did not imagine that a woman or a person of color would be in the White House. In March, now-Vice President Harris was asked by a 9-year old young woman, Jasmeen Coronado, who was attending a campaign event in South Carolina, [“Is it possible that if I try hard enough in life, that I could become president?”](#)

Without missing a beat, now-Vice President Harris responded, “Absolutely! Absolutely! There is no question. Here's how I think about it,” she told Jasmeen. “We are all born as leaders, and it's just a matter of when you decide to activate that...leading up to you being president. Understand every day of your life you have an opportunity to lead. Today, tomorrow, every day of your life.”

In 2009, I was so inspired by the idea that a Black man was able to represent our country, proudly talking with my boys about the importance of President Obama’s election. Still, I was not able to believe until this week that a woman of color would be the next leader to inspire future generations of students. The idea that we are all leaders and the goal is to activate that potential is such a powerful idea for educators. We all have the opportunity and obligation to find ways to make it safe for students to activate their

leadership. I see evidence of this every day at CDS and love this part of our work.

For many, the entirety of the inauguration event was overshadowed by [Amanda Gorman's performance of "The Hill We Climb."](#) I have watched these five minutes over and over again as I drink in the wisdom, passion, and aspiration of a young woman who has overcome much to be able to do something many of us take for granted.

Ms. Gorman was diagnosed with an [auditory processing disorder and could not say the R sound until a few years ago.](#) Poetry is how she found a voice in third grade, and then reciting her work became part of her own speech therapy. She attended an independent school in Los Angeles and I like to think that her story of success and inspiration can be found in our classrooms as our educators support, connect, and engage students to find their voices and to activate their leadership. We see evidence of this throughout the school on a daily basis, and this is how we live our value of *Being Just and Courageous* every day.

I leave you with her powerful words, sure to inspire generations to come:

Mr. President, Dr. Biden, Madam Vice President, Mr. Emhoff, Americans and the world:

*When day comes we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade?  
The loss we carry, a sea we must wade. We've braved the belly of the beast. We've  
learned that quiet isn't always peace. In the norms and notions of what just is isn't  
always justice.*

*And yet, the dawn is ours before we knew it. Somehow we do it. Somehow we've  
weathered and witnessed a nation that isn't broken, but simply unfinished. We, the  
successors of a country and a time where a skinny black girl descended from slaves and  
raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president only to find herself reciting  
for one.*

*And yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn't mean we are  
striving to form a union that is perfect. We are striving to forge our union with purpose.  
To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters, and conditions of  
man.*

*And so, we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. We  
close the divide because we know to put our future first, we must first put our differences*

*aside. We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another. We seek harm to none and harmony for all. Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true. That even as we grieved, we grew. That even as we hurt, we hoped. That even as we tired, we tried that will forever be tied together, victorious. Not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again sow division.*

*Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one shall make them afraid. If we're to live up to her own time, then victory won't lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we've made. That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb if only we dare. It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit. It's the past we step into and how we repair it. We've seen a forest that would shatter our nation rather than share it. Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy. And this effort very nearly succeeded.*

*But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated. In this truth, in this faith we trust for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us. This is the era of just redemption. We feared it at its inception. We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour, but within it, we found the power to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves.*

*So while once we asked, how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe? Now we assert, how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?*

*We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be a country that is bruised, but whole; benevolent, but bold; fierce, and free. We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation. Our blunders become their burdens. But one thing is certain, if we merge mercy with might and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birthright.*

*So let us leave behind a country better than one we were left with. Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one. We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the West. We will rise from the wind-swept Northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution. We will rise from the Lake Rim cities of the Midwestern states. We will rise from the sun-baked South. We will rebuild, reconcile and recover in every known nook of our nation, in every corner called our country our people diverse and beautiful will emerge battered and beautiful.*

*When day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid. The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it.*

How can we be brave as we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid?

Warmly,  
Shelly