THE MONTCLAIR KIMBERLEY ACADEMY

KNOWLEDGE • VISION • INTEGRITY

Signature Programs

The MKA Core • Culture of Ethics • The Writing Challenge

MONTCLAIR KIMBERLEY ACADEMY

MKA's Mission

Montclair Kimberley Academy is a Pre-K-12 coeducational day school with an exceptional college preparatory program unified by the concepts of our school motto: Knowledge, Vision, Integrity. An MKA education is defined by the following commitments:

Knowledge:
- To cultivate a love of learning in each student
- To develop independent and autonomous learners
- To establish a foundation of academic excellence

Vision:
- To engage each student intellectually and personally with the world
- To graduate students who will excel in college and in their lives beyond MKA
- To recognize complexity and value empathy

Integrity:
- To strengthen each student's intellect, character, and confidence
- To promote each student's full and active citizenship and leadership
- To secure a life-long sense of honor through academic, athletic, and artistic achievement

With traditions dating back to 1887, MKA was formed by the merger of Montclair Academy, Brookside School, and The Kimberley School in 1974.

Montclair Kimberley Academy

MKA owes a debt of gratitude to Dr. Peter R. Greer, Headmaster, 1992-2005, for the vision and dedication that inspired and guided MKA's three Signature Programs described herein.

The MKA *Core*

Culture of Ethics

The Writing Challenge

The
MKA
Core

Philosophy

Timelessness

Centrality

Influence

Originality

Accessibility

William Avery Barras, one of our school's teaching legends (from 1928 to 1956), was known to inspire his students by saying, "If what I am saying goes over your head, raise your head." Great schools challenge their students to stretch their intellectual experience and their thinking as Barras did. In 1999, MKA faculty initiated the Core Works, a unique program to further define the school's serious intellectual purpose and to strengthen its commitment to its motto, "Knowledge, Vision and Integrity." This program, now known as the MKA Core, guarantees that all MKA students explore seminal works and concepts of enduring significance—the contributions of diverse authors, artists, statesmen and inventors. Through this select core of studies, all MKA students from Pre-K to grade 12 encounter some of "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (Matthew Arnold), in addition to some of the best that has been created. Learning about and grappling with such a variety of works and concepts helps students understand some of humanity's essential foundations and aspirations. Experiencing the MKA Core challenges students to expand their knowledge, develop an inspired sense of vision and lead an informed life of integrity.

The MKA Core is also a means of "keeping good ideas alive" for all MKA students. As MKA friend, mentor and esteemed ethics scholar, Dr. Edwin Delattre warned, even the great, powerful ideas of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. could all too easily die:

> ... Ideas do die. Dreams die. They die unless they are transmitted from each generation to the next; they die unless they come to life and retain vitality in the hearts and minds of each generation as it grows toward adulthood and accepts the authority and responsibilities of that station. . . . Ideas are enormously powerful. If the idea is evil, the fruit is bitter, and its effects harmful. Justice is an idea; so is bigotry. They both have hugely dramatic and durable fruits. Cultures rooted in good ideas deserve respect; those rooted in the ideas of tyranny, bigotry and contempt for human dignity do not. This, children deserve to learn. But despite their power, [good] ideas are powerless unless people learn them, learn how to use them, apply them, keep them vital, make them their own by hard and disciplined thinking. . . .

The MKA Core affords students the opportunity to examine closely some of the greatest ideas of human civilization and gives students a foundation not only to learn them but also to keep them vital.

Core Selections

Many of the core works and concepts that constitute the MKA Core have been part of the MKA curriculum for many years. In fact, as early as 1893, the Classical and Scientific courses at Montclair Academy focused on college-preparatory core works. Thus, the MKA Core does not drive the curriculum; rather, the curriculum drives the selection of the Core and ensures that those core experiences, while not an exclusive focus, give direction and energy to a particular course of study. The MKA Core is part of the fabric of MKA's coherent core of Pre-K-12 studies.

Standards for inclusion in the MKA Core are based on the criteria listed below. Initially adapted from The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and modified for MKA's Pre-K-12 environment, these criteria are designed to honor works and concepts that have shaped humanity and should endure.

Centrality: Captures foundational thinking at the heart of the discipline

Originality: Represents a prominent shift in perspective that created a meaningful new vision or a new way of understanding

Influence: Inspires thinking within–and perhaps beyond–the discipline and has an intellectual and/or moral impact

Timelessness: Demonstrates a relevance that endures (and/or has the potential to do so in the future)

Accessibility: Challenges students to think about big ideas within the discipline in meaningful ways that are age appropriate

Even with such clear criteria, selecting the most representative works and concepts from among myriad possibilities was not easy. And while the rich MKA curriculum alone offered so many choices, we broadened our scope to consider many works new to MKA teachers as well. Indeed, faculty often found themselves engaged in healthy philosophical debate during the original selection process as they chose between worthy options. The result, a wisely selected Core, not only upholds the established criteria but also represents diverse viewpoints, makes connections to MKA's Character Standards and reflects many aspects of the human experience. Core selections represented here include selections made by the English, History, Foreign Language, and Fine and Performing Arts Departments. Math and Science are due to add their MKA Core selections next school year. Then the Core will include works or concepts for the entire course of study that all students must take to graduate from MKA (i.e., elective courses that do not satisfy a graduation requirement are not considered as part of the Core).

Once every five years, the faculty formally review and adjust the MKA Core as a whole. The MKA Curriculum Committee, in conjunction with the Academic Programs Committee at each MKA campus, reviews and modifies or approves any suggestions for changes to the selections during the review process. While the goal is to maintain consistency in the Core where possible, this formal review process is integral to ensuring that the selections spring naturally from the curriculum, ensure a diversity of perspectives and truly represent the greatest ideas that we must commit to keeping fresh and alive for our students.

Teaching the MKA Core

This unique program requires faculty commitment to intense study, continued scholarship and collaboration. To ensure that students' learning experiences are of the highest quality, MKA faculty members study closely all of the Core selections that they teach. Colleagues work together and, at times, with experts in the field to ensure that they are ready to teach these important selections with both knowledge and vision. In addition, MKA summer curriculum development grants

provide opportunities for grant recipients to design or refine lessons related to an MKA Core selection. Blauvelt Professional Study Advancement Awards offer additional funding for independent, in-depth, faculty study of Ethics that can further support MKA Core curriculum design.

Faculty members carefully craft lessons that not only include common learning activities and assessments for all students in that course, but also identify the "big ideas" that teachers expect students to understand, retain and be able to apply as a result of their study. Teams of faculty who teach the same Core selections review, adjust and improve their carefully crafted lesson plans together. Through this kind of thoughtful and focused teaching and learning, MKA assists its students to understand each other better and to become citizens of the world.

The MKA Core by Campus

The following pages highlight the enriching sequence of varied selections that students encounter as they progress through the three MKA campuses. Facing each campus' chart of selections listed by grade are a few sample descriptions of the Core that illustrate how the criteria for selection apply. (Math and Science Core selections will be added next school year.)

Promises of The MKA Core

Because the MKA Core guarantees that MKA graduates have a uniformity of exposure to some of the great works and concepts that define the human experience, MKA is able to fulfill the following promises:

- MKA students will engage in common learning experiences and help to create a common foundation for discussion of important and lasting ideas — a carefully built foundation upon which faculty can depend as a reference point for students' learning throughout the years.

- Pre-K-12 exposure to the MKA Core will provide students with the foundation for a true liberal arts education and leave them well prepared for the intellectual engagement required in college classrooms where they will further examine the "big ideas" of human culture.

- The MKA Core establishes lines of inquiry for faculty studies that foster intellectual collegiality among the faculty and enhance communication both within and across the Primary, Middle and Upper School campuses. Faculty work together and with outside experts to ensure quality curriculum, a coherence of study and the highest quality teaching and learning.

Indeed, through students' learning experiences in the MKA Core, we promise that good ideas will remain vital and endure at MKA.

Primary School

From familiar fairytale themes that are common across cultures to the intricacies of *The Preamble to the Constitution of The United States,* the MKA Core continually enriches and challenges MKA's youngest students. The examples below demonstrate how the works and concepts meet the criteria for inclusion in the MKA Core.

White, *Charlotte's Web*
Literature, Grade 1

Charlotte's Web is revered as a **timeless** children's classic. It received Newbery Award honors in 1953 "for literary quality and quality of presentation for children" and continues to appear on well-respected children's book lists. Through humor, pathos, wisdom and beauty, White tells an **accessible** story that explores the **central** issues of life, death, friendship, diversity, justice, courage and moral dilemma.

White uses an **original** mix of fantasy and reality to capture young readers. Students can easily identify with Fern, the novel's eight-year-old protagonist, and her vision and understanding of life. Through the personification of a spider, Charlotte, and of a pig, Wilbur, students learn of the "web" of friendship between two animals who often receive little regard from people. Through Charlotte, they also come to address their fears of death. *Charlotte's Web* celebrates nature's beauty; and the novel's delicate realism, which holds meaning for readers of all ages, **influences** students to engage in serious moral conversations.

African Sculptural Forms
The Arts, Grade 3

One of the greatest contributions that African cultures have made to the cultural heritage of humankind is their richly varied use of geometric form. The aesthetic impact of their works has been substantial, and the **influence** upon the development of twentieth century Western art is resounding. Apparent in the works of Picasso, Braque, Brancusi, Modigliani and others, that impact has led to art movements such as Cubism, Expressionism, Fauvism and Surrealism.

Although there are many African tribes and races and over 1,000 different languages, three distinct types of societies south of the Sahara comprise our focus: 1) nomadic tribes in the desert; 2) sedentary farming cultures in the savanna; and 3) ancient, sophisticated kingdoms of Nigeria and the Guinea Coast of West Africa. While all have their own distinct cultures, beliefs and customs, their **original** art forms are similar in use of geometric abstraction, attention to craftsmanship and intimate connection to the lives and religious beliefs of their creators. In the absence of written documents, Africans often preserved their beliefs and values by conveying them

from generation to generation through their art. The **centrality** and significance of each work, therefore, derives not only from its tangible form and its aesthetic merit, but equally from the concepts and beliefs that it embodies. Such sculptural forms offer an important avenue to an art that was born out of ritual and meaning. They represent a **timeless** art that is inseparable from life as they take on the powerful images of myth and transformation. This study of African sculptural forms is **accessible** to third grade students because it dovetails with the clay program as students continue to experiment with concepts of design.

Grade	Literature		The Arts
Pre-K	Fairy Tales (e.g., "Snow White," "Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters," "Lon Po Po")	*Anansi the Spider* (McDermott)	Representative Works of Paul Klee
K	*The Little Engine That Could* (Piper)	Aesop's Fables (Pinkney version)	*Carnival of the Animals* (Saint-Saens)
1	*Charlotte's Web* (White)	*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter)	*The Nutcracker Ballet* (Tchaikovsky)
2	*Those Shoes* (Boelts)	*The Rough-Face Girl* (Martin)	Representative Works of Frank Lloyd Wright
3	American Tall Tales (e.g., "Paul Bunyan," "John Henry," and "Swamp Angel")	The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States	African Sculptural Forms

Middle School

As students progress from the Primary to the Middle School years, the MKA Core expands to foreign language studies, such as the Legendary Heroes of Ancient Rome in Latin class. Students explore literary classics ranging from Homer's *Odyssey* to Langston Hughes' "Harlem" and historical foundations for government such as Hammurabi's Code of Laws and the Declaration of Independence. The examples below demonstrate how the works and concepts meet the selection criteria.

The Declaration of Independence
History, Grade 8

The **original** cornerstone of American democracy, the Declaration of Independence is **timeless** not only because it has withstood the trials and tribulations of the American people and world history for over 200 years, but also because it contains in it America's most fundamental principles concerning its people, its government, and the rights and responsibilities of the two. This document crystallizes the fundamental concept that the government begins and ends with the people for whom it works.

The Declaration of Independence addresses **central** questions of government, such as "When does a government govern justly?" "What innate rights do people have?" and "When do the people have the right to rebel?" Its **influence** reaches beyond the American sphere, where it serves as a touchstone for how millions of people live their lives, to provide a model for other countries in their pursuit of democracy. The Declaration is **accessible** to students because they are at exactly the age when they begin to question and to truly understand what their rights and responsibilities are, both as citizens and as human beings.

Myths and Stories from Ancient
Greece (e.g., "Pandora's Box" and
"The Trojan Horse") Literature, Grade 5

Greek myths and stories have been a part of western culture for more than 3,000 years. They illustrate how people have developed stories to explain the world around them and to perpetuate the values of their cultures. The **central** themes of these Greek stories—questions about why good and evil exist in the world and the values of honor, bravery and humility—are truly **timeless.** Students find the "good versus evil" struggles and other ethical issues embodied in Greek myths to be very **accessible** and worthy of discussion. They also enjoy examining the mythical explanations given to natural phenomena.

As a literary genre, myths and hero stories have served as the **original** model for new literary forms as diverse as modern drama and video games. They have also **influenced** works in virtually every other artistic medium, including dance, music, painting, sculpture and film. Allusions to Greek mythology often appear in popular media and advertising, as well as in modern literary works. American culture has long tried to imitate the success of these ancient tales and has created "new myths" around movie and comic book heroes, even athletes and rock stars. The shortcomings of these imitators only serve to highlight the enduring qualities of the Greek tales.

Impressionism - French, Level 1

Created in Paris in the 1860s, the impressionist movement marked the **original** frontier between classical and modern art and made a **timeless** impact on the art world. The Impressionists believed that art should be appreciated by all the

senses. Their paintings rely on the viewer's own sensibility and impressions and speak to the common man because they depict everyday life in images, more as an evocation of surroundings and atmosphere than as a realistic rendition. Impressionism changed traditional conventions and ways of seeing the world and challenged the human relationship with reality. Its **influence** created a different understanding of the function of color and revolutionized art as it redefined aesthetics. The **central** and easily interpreted themes of impressionism, such as every day scenes, depictions of childhood, and emphasis on light and color, make these works **accessible** to young people.

Grade	English	History	The Arts	Foreign Language
4	Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales (e.g., "The Ugly Duckling" and "Thumbelisa")	"The New Colossus" (Lazarus)	Music: *Peter and the Wolf* (Prokofiev) Art: Representative works of Alexander Calder Dance: *Revelations* (Ailey) Theatre: Shakespeare's Life and Art	Spanish Level 1: Frida Kahlo French Level 1: Impressionism Latin Level 1: Legendary Heroes of Ancient Rome Chinese Level 1: Feng Shui
5	Myths and Stories from Ancient Greece (e.g., "Pandora's Box" and "The Trojan Horse")	Hammurabi's Code of Laws		
6	*The Extraordinary Cases of Sherlock Holmes* (Doyle) "The Road Not Taken" (Frost)	The Silk Road: Bridges Among Cultures		
7	*To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee) *Odes to Common Things* (Neruda)	The Moveable Type Printing Press		
8	*The Odyssey* (Homer) "Theme from English B" and "Harlem" (Hughes)	The Declaration of Independence The Constitution of the United States		

Upper School

Upper School students explore an extensive range of Core works and concepts—from the writings of Shakespeare to those of Confucius, and from the *Communist Manifesto* to Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural speech. Depending on their arts courses, students may examine Michelangelo's *David* or the film *Casablanca*. They may study Civil War in Rome or *Don Quijote* in Foreign Language class. During their junior and senior years, students move to semester-long English classes where they encounter at least four, diverse Core authors from across the centuries. The examples below demonstrate how the selected works and concepts meet the criteria for inclusion in the MKA Core.

Shakespeare, Macbeth
English, Grade 10

William Shakespeare's Macbeth is a **timeless** examination of the destructive consequences of temptation, ambition, moral depravity and greed. These **central** themes, which drive Macbeth's compelling tragedy, are arguably more relevant in contemporary society than ever before. Through the hopes and the ultimate downfall of its main character, Macbeth enables students to walk in the shoes of a hero who falls victim to the temptations of his own vaulting ambition. The power of Macbeth's potential as a leader and the tragedy of his descent into moral corruption are striking. His depravity is a cautionary lesson. These strong messages make Macbeth one of Shakespeare's most **accessible** tragedies, a compelling and pathos-laden story of triumph and tragedy.

Among the most **influential** touchstones of the Western canon, Macbeth combines thematic power with linguistic beauty. Shakespeare's popularity flourishes as successive generations bring relevant Shakespearean works to the forefront of popular culture. Indeed, Shakespeare stands as an **original** literary and moral beacon, truly the "soul" of past and future ages.

Beethoven, Ninth Symphony
The Arts, Chorale

A historic, monumental and **timeless** work by any standard, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* forever changed our conception of what a symphony could be. At least twice the length of any previous symphony, Beethoven's work was also **original** in its breadth and directly **influenced** later great symphonic works of Berlioz, Liszt and Mahler, among others.

The first of its kind to utilize a chorus, The Ninth Symphony incorporates one into the final movement, a striking and innovative way to use Friedrich Schiller's 1785 poem "An die Freude" ("To Joy"), with its **central** themes of idealism and world brotherhood. Beethoven used a creative approach to make the novel concept of a chorus in a symphony **accessible** for his audience. The final movement begins in D minor, then reexamines themes from the other movements in succession and discards each, in turn, as inadequate. Finally, a baritone soloist introduces Schiller's text in D major, and the chorus joins him for the final, thrilling moments of the piece to make Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* a truly seminal work of art.

King, "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail" History, Grade 11

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail" from his jail cell in 1963 after he was arrested for leading a non-violent demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama. Its **central** theme of justice, a virtue that man has sought to achieve for thousands of years, makes it a **timeless** treatise. In his letter, King provides an **original** definition of justice. Rooted in political philosophy, the distinction that he makes between breaking

just and unjust laws is clear and straightforward. The notion of breaking an unjust law because it does not "square with the moral code of God" and because it "degrades the human personality" speaks to all people.

"Letter from a Birmingham City Jail" allows us to learn from the past and **influences** us to right the wrongs in our society. If we live in an environment where the notion of justice cannot be analyzed and made part of our everyday vocabulary, we are doomed to repeat the wrongs of the past. Justice needs to be defined and discussed if we ever expect to achieve it. King's letter provides an **accessible** way for students to engage in such an essential discussion.

Grade	English	History	The Arts	Foreign Language
9	*Antigone* (Sophocles) *Lord of the Flies* (Golding)	*The Analects* (Confucius) *Siddhartha* (Hesse)	Band: *Rite of Spring* (Stravinsky) Chorale: Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* Strings: Beethoven's Symphonies Communications: *Casablanca* Theatre: Works & Style of Neil Simon Photography: *The Family* (Strand) Fundamentals of Art: *Georgia* (Close) Sculpture: *David* (Michelangelo) Dance: Life and Works of Bob Fosse	Chinese Level 1: Feng Shui Chinese 2: The Silk Road: The Spread of Chinese Culture Chinese 3: Confucius French level 1: Impressionism French 2: Chateau of Versailles French 3: Toussaint Louverture Latin Level 1: Legendary Heroes of Ancient Rome Latin 2: Senate and People of Rome Latin 3: Civil War in Rome Spanish level 1: Frida Kahlo Spanish 2: Día de La Raza Spanish 3: *Don Quijote*
10	*Macbeth* (Shakespeare) *Frankenstein* (Shelley)	*Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels) *Liberty Leading the People* (Delacroix)		
11/ 12**	** Students read a minimum of four Core texts in their English classes. A sample of those works includes: *Wuthering Heights* (Bronte) *Inferno* from *Divine Comedy* (Dante) *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Diaz) *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner) *Home* (Morrison)	"Letter from A Birmingham City Jail" (King) Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address		

Culture of Ethics

"Knowledge, Vision, Integrity" – These ideals inscribed on the MKA school seal shape a Culture of Ethics and Character that is vital and relevant to students' learning and growth and integral to all aspects of the school community. Students are challenged, empowered and trusted to create their own character, to be independent practitioners of informed decision-making and to exercise empathetic judgments in their daily lives. As a result of their experience at MKA, students have the opportunity to develop a life-long sense of honor and integrity—a "moral compass" to guide them through the 21st century as global citizens.

MKA's formal Ethics and Character Development Program, begun in 1993 to celebrate and further strengthen this hallmark of the MKA experience, has become a renowned, Pre-K - 12 Culture of Ethics that permeates all aspects of daily school life. While this Culture of Ethics nurtures students' development of character both in and out of the classroom, it also challenges students to understand ethical foundations for making decisions and to put their knowledge to use through active and informed citizenship. Based on MKA's eight Character Standards for the MKA Community – respect, friendship, responsibility, confidence, temperance, fairness, honesty and wisdom (described below) – students come to understand how both their moral and intellectual habits shape their character. The personal integrity that they build is founded on the consistency between their public and private convictions and actions. Through purposeful

participation in robust curricular and co-curricular opportunities, students explore key concepts and challenges of character formation. Through study, reflection and action, students develop good habits and thereby develop good character. As students progress through MKA, good character is acknowledged and celebrated in much the same way as academic, artistic and athletic achievements are.

MKA's Culture of Ethics builds upon the foundations that parents have laid as their children's first teachers and encourages an ongoing partnership with parents as students internalize the meaning of good character. To fully prepare faculty to be active partners in this process, MKA offers a formal professional development program that provides teachers with strategies for integrating MKA's Character Standards into the curriculum and their discussions with students. As a result of this educational partnership, students engage in complex and constructive moral conversations as they consciously work to develop their own character and their empathetic involvement in their community.

The MKA Code of Honor

Based on the belief that the process of developing personal honor provides students with insight into their beliefs and their personal integrity, MKA's Code of Honor encourages introspection and helps students to develop a moral compass. The community's commitment to the Code creates a school atmosphere where values such as honesty, integrity and mutual respect can thrive. Revised in 2005, the current Code of Honor is the culmination of two years of student-driven work that focused on creating a living document, relevant to the student body. Written completely by students, the Code, which applies to all students in grades 6 through 12, was approved by the administration and ratified by the student body and the faculty. As the students state in Article I, "The purpose of this Honor Code is to instill a sense of honor and an atmosphere of trust among all members of the community."

At the Upper School, students are integral in ensuring that the Code of Honor remains a vital part of school life. Twelve elected student representatives and two faculty members comprise the Honor Council, an Upper School leadership group. The school community entrusts the Honor Council with the significant responsibility to ensure that the values of the Code of Honor are upheld. The Council's primary responsibility is to educate all constituents through learning about and discussing ethical issues that shape the school community.

Character Standards for the MKA Community

The eight MKA Character Standards provide a common language and focus for the MKA community to support students as they develop good character and negotiate the challenges, ambiguities and rewards of making ethical decisions throughout and beyond their school years. With foundations in the works of Aristotle — who identifies many aspects of character development that transcend differences in history, culture and religion — these Character Standards guide students to best define a moral framework for leading a good life marked by integrity. Originally written by a team of faculty and visiting experts, these expectations have been revised and expanded by groups of students to ensure that these standards continue to have meaning and relevance in their daily lives.

All members of the MKA community strive to act, speak and think in ways that are:

RESPECTFUL: We act with civility in our relations with others while still valuing ourselves. We are conscious of the world around us and recognize the worth of all we have and treat it accordingly.

FRIENDLY: We demonstrate good will and compassion in our relationships with others. We understand that in order to have friends we must be friends and treat all with understanding, loyalty and respect.

RESPONSIBLE: We fulfill obligations and complete tasks to the fullest of our ability, and we are accountable members of our community. We volunteer our assistance when called upon and budget our time, efforts and resources sensibly.

CONFIDENT: We uphold a positive image of ourselves regardless of the way others perceive us. We recognize our potential and challenge ourselves to improve the talents and skills we possess. We are able to take pride in our work, while remaining humble and accepting criticism. We express our opinions freely without fear of the judgment of others and always speak up when we see acts of injustice.

TEMPERATE: We balance all aspects of our lives. By devoting personal attention to academics and personal commitments, we maintain moderation. While welcoming relaxation, we exert self-control and strength of will when faced with temptation and challenge.

FAIR: We cultivate an environment where all students may act and speak without the fear of prejudice, intolerance or judgment. We recognize and seek to understand the differences between individuals in the community. While recognizing these differences, we also value the inherent equality among all.

INFORMED: We rely not only on our own experiences to make decisions, but we also actively seek a more thorough understanding of the world. With our knowledge, we envision a more peaceful and empathetic society.

HONEST: We understand the value and necessity of being true to ourselves, as well as others, and we are sincere in words and actions. We take pride in the authenticity of our own work and ideas, and we have the courage and integrity to take responsibility for all of our actions.

Understanding Ethics & Developing Character in the Classroom

MKA's focus on ethical understanding and students' development of their own character permeates every facet of school life, from formal curricular programs to spontaneous teaching moments, and from collaboration on theatrical productions to teamwork and sportsmanship on the playing fields.

At the Primary School, character development is naturally integrated throughout the course of each day as MKA's youngest students learn how to respect one another, forge friendships and assume responsibility for their learning and their actions. Ongoing engagement with MKA's Character Standards is woven throughout the curriculum beginning in Pre-K. Specific, teacher-guided activities help develop the social and ethical capacities of each student. During daily classroom Morning Meeting—an essential component of the research-based Responsive Classroom approach to fostering students' social and emotional development—students actively participate in building a respectful, inclusive and safe learning community. Students develop the habits of good character as they enjoy active greetings, share news and engage in both academic and social activities in structured and positive ways that are respectful of one another. Teachers also spontaneously address MKA's Character Standards and ethical themes and issues as opportunities arise throughout the day. Students develop responsibility through daily jobs in the classroom ranging from snack cleanup to proper recycling of materials.

In addition, the MKA Core provides context for ethical discussions by ensuring Primary School students' familiarity with both modern

and classic literature that presents meaningful examples of the MKA Character Standards in action. For example, in addition to reading familiar fairy tales, Pre-K classes read "Lon Po Po," a Chinese version of "Little Red Riding Hood" that focuses on being appropriately confident, and "Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters" that encourages one to be respectful, friendly and temperate. First grade students explore the themes of friendship and loyalty as the class reads *Charlotte's Web*, and third grade students study American Tall Tales with their larger than life men and women of character and courage. Class plays, often based on literature that focuses on moral issues, such as responsibility, friendship and bullying, provide opportunities for students to bring to life lessons about good character.

At the Middle School, character development continues to be woven into the fabric of daily life, and a formal advisor program becomes an important vehicle for discussing and developing the habits of good character. Students learn that integrity is essential to forming good character, and the words of MKA's school seal—"Knowledge, Vision, Integrity"—take on a more sophisticated meaning as students come to truly understand that learning is about more than acquiring knowledge.

Within the academic classroom, students frequently reflect on the moral implications of subjects they study, including the actions of historical figures, characters in literature, and the contributions of famous scientists and mathematicians. For example, 4th grade students create pictures that depict the MKA Character Standards they recognize in the

stories of Hans Christian Anderson, and 8th grade students assess the character of Odysseus in *The Odyssey* based on MKA's Character Standards, particularly whether Odysseus is appropriately responsible, confident and temperate. The Character Standards are also a foundation for 8th grade students' work on *Project Citizen*, part of the Social Studies curriculum that allows students to explore how the United States government works and to propose public policy that is fair and respectful of all citizens.

At the Upper School, students develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of ethical issues presented during advisor group conversations and in some of their coursework as they are challenged to reflect on how their ethical foundations might influence their actions and character development. For example, 9th grade Civilization classes debate what it means to be a "good leader" when they conduct research to examine the character of Alexander the Great. Is there an ultimate standard of good, or is good connected to time and place? Sophomore history students continue to consider this essential question as they read Marx's and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*. From considering the ethics of laboratory research in science class to examining friendship in Vergil's *Aeneid* in Latin class, students are internalizing MKA's Character Standards on a daily basis. Themes of leadership and citizenship permeate both academic and community conversations and prepare students to assume leadership roles as active and empathetic citizens of their global community. The explicit focus of Global Citizenship and Ethics and Leadership in the

9th and 10th grades provides students with a foundation in ethical principles that inform their development of good habits, strong character and important leadership skills. Whether they are participating in a respectful, whole-school meeting to discuss a community issue or challenging issues of fairness in the student newspaper, students are constantly reflecting and acting on what they have learned about ethics and integrity.

And Beyond the Classroom

Beyond examining character within the advisor group or academic classroom, co-curricular activities provide students with additional opportunities to reflect and focus on their own development of good habits and good character. Whether working together on a theatrical production, displaying sportsmanship on the playing fields or becoming actively involved in the Student Government, students have opportunities not only to put their knowledge about Ethics into practice on a daily basis, but also to assume leadership roles that enrich their community. Student Ethics Committees at the Middle and Upper Schools provide leadership in the area of Ethics and character development. In partnership with the faculty Ethics Coordinator at each campus, they help to drive the conversations and work that shape MKA's Culture of Ethics. Upper School students have many additional leadership opportunities. From Peer Leaders to team captains, from club presidents to class officers, and from Brookside Interns to members of the Honor Council, Upper School student leaders actively model the MKA Character Standards.

INTEGRATED ETHICS:
Because Ethics and Character Development have become integral and interconnected parts of school culture that extend to all aspects of school life, MKA supports and honors the collaborative work of many strands known collectively as "Integrated Ethics." These strands inform not only the curriculum, but also, and perhaps more significantly, the learning that students do on a daily basis beyond the classroom walls. Through their involvement with the many Integrated Ethics strands outlined below, students examine their role in the world through a number of different perspectives and continuously and implicitly engage in answering the question: "How can we develop the moral and intellectual habits of good character?"

- **Through the Lens of Diversity and Inclusion,** students participate in discussions and activities related to Diversity and Inclusion and are encouraged to explore and appreciate differences and similarities, to challenge stereotypes and to acknowledge the range of perspectives within and outside of the MKA community. MKA welcomes, embraces, supports and encourages all

members of the MKA community – its races, cultures, genders and sexualities; its experiences and economics; its aspirations, abilities and affiliations. Students graduate from MKA prepared to engage with the world through strength of ethical convictions and recognition of profound interdependence with others.

- **Through the Lens of MKA's Global Experience,** students prepare to live, learn and work in the 21st century world as intellectually and personally engaged global citizens. All members of the MKA community strive to answer an essential question: "How can I be an engaged member of a global community?" MKA offers both domestic and international travel experiences that extend from and expand upon the curriculum, a required 9th grade Global Citizenship class, and annual Global Round Tables that bring back to campus both young alumni and professionals working in an international context. Through these experiences, students grow to understand that becoming an informed, effective, engaged and sensitive member of a global community requires a constant process of inquiry, action and reflection to understand oneself and act meaningfully, in relation to one's community as well as a greater global community. Both classroom and international experiential learning are essential for students to build bridges between their community and other communities, countries and cultures; to gain knowledge; and to develop empathy.

- **Through the Lens of Educational Technology,** MKA's 1:1 Laptop Learning Initiative not only encourages robust use of technology to enhance learning, but it also consciously helps students to build habits of good digital citizenship. MKA strives to graduate technology-literate students who can create, collaborate and share their thinking and work responsibly to contribute positively to the school community and to the larger community beyond MKA's walls. As students begin their learning journey at the Primary School by exploring technology tools and using them to demonstrate and share their thinking, they are taught to be mindful of their digital footprint. Students' journey from campus to campus provides greater opportunities for students to apply increasingly complex, innovative and independent thinking using technology--all the while understanding issues related to MKA's Character Standards of responsibility, respect, temperance and even friendship that help them to navigate their digital world.

- **Through the Lens of Service Learning,** MKA students put their ethical understandings into action through helping others. Service opportunities include an element of reflection that helps students learn from their experiences and consider their commitment to future service. Students are asked to consider what personal strengths and talents they can share with others and what needs they can identify within their local communities and throughout the world that could be addressed through age-appropriate service. Service Learning Coordinators at each campus, together with other faculty and parent representatives, provide necessary support and guidance for students' service initiatives.

- **Through the Lens of Sustainability,** students become aware of their impact on the environment and how to make informed decisions that help to ensure sustainability at both a local and global level. Targeted efforts

in advisory and student-led clubs at the Middle and Upper Schools encourage responsible and thoughtful actions. Recycling initiatives at all three campuses and gardening activities at the Primary and Middle Schools provide models of and practice for sustainable living habits. The Green Group at the Middle School works actively on campus-wide green initiatives and education efforts, and the Environmental Action Group at the Upper School monitors energy use and recycling efforts. Through these group efforts, students have actively helped to shape the MKA culture by raising environmental awareness and providing the foundations for the community to change its habits.

Professional Development

Faculty professional study—a hallmark of MKA's Culture of Ethics—ensures that faculty are fully prepared to take advantage of major curricular connections and serendipitous teaching moments to help students best understand their own character development and take action accordingly. As members of the MKA community of learners, teachers read, discuss, and reflect on Ethics and the development of good character and spend time integrating their understanding into their curriculum and instruction. In addition, Ethics Team Leaders from each MKA campus coordinate these efforts and assist in shaping the MKA community's engagement with related issues.

Each summer since 1993, MKA faculty have worked with visiting scholars to study and appreciate the timeless relevance of significant works related to Ethics – including the foundations in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,

an important lens for understanding the virtues represented in MKA's Character Standards, and Plato's *Meno*, which has provided a model of Socratic questioning that underscores the importance of inquiry and reflection in developing good character. Faculty also explore more modern works of philosophy, literature and educational research that inform their thinking about Ethics and Character Development in the classroom. An equally integral part of what has come to be known as Integrated Ethics Institute is the time that faculty spend collaborating on developing their curricula to shape students' development of the intellectual skills and ethical competencies they need to thrive in their 21st century world. As they design their lessons with these ideas in mind, teachers strive to include opportunities for students to continually reflect on both their understanding and their personal progress with their own positive character development.

The Blauvelt Professional Study Advancement Award also provides faculty with additional time during the summer to study, reflect and plan ways to further integrate Ethics and Character Development into their classrooms and advising work with students. Designed to support full-time faculty who wish to study and work intensively over the summer, the award challenges teachers to think creatively about designing curriculum and related assessment. Teachers choose to work individually or in pairs on their projects and often collaborate extensively with colleagues during Integrated Ethics Institute and throughout the summer. Mirroring MKA's commitment to service learning, grant recipients take every opportunity to share their completed curriculum plans with colleagues, both within and outside the MKA community.

MKA's Partnership with Parents

MKA is fortunate to have a thriving and active partnership with its parent body—a partnership that has been key to the success of its Ethics and Character Development initiative. In acknowledging that parents are their children's first teachers, MKA looks to parents to continue as partners in teaching and learning from students as they grow. As a result, MKA offers parents opportunities to stay informed about a variety of issues related to Ethics and Character Development, including regular forums with Heads of Campus to discuss relevant issues, such as how to assist students in learning to make positive choices, and *Moral Conversations*, a publication that highlights ethics in action at MKA. Parents also initiate many programs designed to promote character development in MKA students by identifying outside expert speakers to educate the community and helping facilitate the numerous service learning opportunities available to students, particularly in the younger years. As their children move through the school, parents, like teachers, play a pivotal role in preparing students to assume greater responsibility for their own character development.

Recognition for MKA's Culture of Ethics

MKA is known around the country—and even around the world—for its Culture of Ethics and has a long history of being acknowledged for its efforts, including:

- Appeared in *Building Character in Schools* by Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

- Heralded for its efforts by John Costentino in his report from the Blue Ribbon School site visit, 2000: "[MKA's] character education program is not brought to the forefront in a gimmicky or canned manner. It is truly an ethical standard that is portrayed in each student's and teacher's actions on a daily basis."

- Named a National School of Character by the Character Education Partnership, 2003.

- Visited as a model school for best practices presented in *Smart & Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in School, Work, and Beyond (A Report to the Nation)* by Thomas Lickona and Matthew Davidson, 2005.

- Cited in the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Diagnostic Report, 2006: "Personal and character development is an exemplary strength of the school."

- Featured in "From Aristotle to Angelou: Best Practices in Character Education" by Paul J. Dovre, published in *Education Next*, 2007.

- Visited by research teams from both Taiwan and Japan as a model school for Ethics and Character Development in the United States, 2010 and 2012.

The Writing Challenge

Students who write well have mastered one of life's most essential skills. To do so, they must assimilate the complex acts of analysis, synthesis and the clear and convincing expression of ideas. In 1993, MKA faculty instituted the Writing Challenge to help students face these challenges and become better writers. This unique program has become a major benchmark in MKA's writing program, which has achieved measurable results. Through alumni surveys and visits with teachers, MKA graduates consistently report success with their writing at college and in their professional lives beyond. The Writing Challenge clarifies expectations for students in grades Pre-K-12 and helps students to better understand the strengths and weaknesses in their writing. It places a consistent emphasis on writing as a cumulative, continuous process that includes pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and sharing, and encourages students to strive for excellence as they hone both the technical and stylistic aspects of their writing. Using specifically defined criteria, groups of teachers formally assess students' writing at four benchmark grades: 3, 5, 7 and 11. Students take time to reflect on their writing products and their progress and, as a result, are able to set pragmatic, effective goals for improving their writing.

The Writing Challenge and Process Writing

From their introduction to fundamental writing skills in Pre-K, MKA students engage in writing as a process that typically includes five stages: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and sharing. This writing process provides a focused framework for students to translate their ideas into organized, polished text.

In keeping with the most current research about the teaching of writing, MKA teachers developed Writing Challenge Assessment Guides to define criteria for writing excellence in areas such as topic focus and development, organization, and details and support, as well as style and voice, word choice, and technical mastery of grammar and mechanics (including punctuation, capitalization, spelling and usage). To ensure smooth transitions in the writing program between grade levels and campuses, teachers have developed three versions of the Writing Challenge Assessment Guide, one appropriate for Primary School students, one for Middle School students, and one for Upper School students. All three focus on the same essential aspects of good writing and present criteria in age-appropriate language that students can understand and use. At the same time, they depict the increasingly complex skills necessary for good writing as students move from the Primary School through the Middle and Upper Schools (see the sample Middle School Guide on the inside of the back cover).

During their 3rd, 5th, 7th and 11th grade years, students write a formal Writing Challenge essay, which requires them to move through all stages of the writing process as they independently compose an in-school essay, structured to reflect a typical writing assignment at their grade level. A team of MKA teachers, trained in assessment using the established Writing Challenge Assessment Guides, evaluates the students' final writing pieces in a double-blind read where two readers must agree on the score for each criterion. The rubric scoring provides students with detailed feedback and gives students and parents a realistic assessment of students' writing skills. Teachers additionally address how students' writing has developed over time, placing the results of the Writing Challenge in the context of students' growth. These assessments enable students to set specific goals for continuing to improve their writing.

At The Primary School

In preparation for the 3rd grade Writing Challenge, students in the 1st through 3rd grades:

- write daily in a Writing Workshop format that promotes process writing and provides feedback from teachers and peers to guide improvement

- examine models of good writing from literature and from their own writing to help define the qualities of effective writing

- discuss and continually return to criteria for good writing

- become increasingly familiar with the editing process through revision lessons and the use of editing checklists

- partner with their teachers in examining their writing to set goals for improvement and to assess their own progress in achieving those goals

- share their final writing pieces during writing celebrations with classmates, students at other grade levels, and parents or guardians

The formal Writing Challenge, administered in the Spring of the 3rd grade year, reflects the stages of process writing that students follow in the classroom as part of their writing units of study in daily Writing Workshop. The Writing Challenge structures that process into a four-day writing assignment that 3rd grade students complete semi-independently, guided by only one round of feedback from the teacher:

Day 1: Students choose a seed idea from their writers' notebooks and develop it into a draft of a personal narrative that zeroes in on a small event and creatively captures the importance to the writer in an effective story format.

Day 2: Through individual conferences, the classroom teacher guides each student to focus on writing strengths and goals for improving the draft.

Day 3: Students use the foci from the teacher conference and their own observations about their draft to revise their work (e.g., for content, organization, audience, etc.).

Day 4: Students use a dictionary and an editing checklist to edit their work independently and recopy their work to create a polished, final piece.

A team of teachers assesses the formal Writing Challenge pieces according to the criteria established in the 3rd grade Writing Challenge Assessment Guide. During the spring conference, the teacher provides parents with an overview of the student's writing progress by sharing the Writing Challenge piece and the student's writing folder. In the final comment of the year, the teacher provides an in-depth, written summary of the student's writing progress. This summary identifies strengths and weaknesses apparent in both the student's cumulative writing portfolio and the student's performance on the formally scored Writing Challenge assignment. It additionally highlights goals for students to continue to improve their writing.

As the Coordinator of Curriculum for the Primary School explains: "It is affirming to see the 3rd grade children take part in this culminating writing experience. The Writing Challenge embodies students' cumulative experience as writers. It allows students to use the writing skills they have developed to demonstrate how they are able to work through all of the stages of the writing process to produce a published piece in a compressed timeframe and with limited feedback from their teacher or peers. They are proud of what they can do."

At the end of the 3rd grade year, the child's 4th grade teacher receives the child's formal 3rd grade Writing Challenge piece, an additional sample of the student's writing, and a summary of the student's writing strengths and goals. This information serves as the foundation for the 4th grade teacher and the student to discuss individual writing goals when the student enters the Middle School.

At The Middle School

In preparing for the 5th and 7th grade Writing Challenge essays, all Middle School students:

- use the appropriate Writing Challenge Assessment Guide to develop writing pieces across the curriculum and perform self assessments of their written work

- engage in process-writing assignments throughout the year to evaluate their own writing, and receive feedback according to the criteria.

The formal Writing Challenge, administered in April for both 5th and 7th grade students, reflects a curricular focus on expository and persuasive writing and on students' developing independence as writers. The Writing Challenge essay requires 5th grade students to compose an expository essay independently over a three-day period:

Day 1: Students respond to a general writing prompt by planning a formal essay; they are encouraged to brainstorm and outline before they begin writing.

Day 2: After thinking about their essays overnight, students draft a formal essay.

Day 3: Students revise and edit their work to complete a final draft.

Seventh grade students complete a similar writing task in two days as they combine the planning and drafting days (Days 1 and 2 above) into one. The 7th grade writing prompt encourages students to write persuasively in developing an argument with evidence.

A team of teachers does a double-blind assessment of the formal Writing Challenge essays according to the criteria established in the Middle School version of the Writing Challenge Assessment Guide. Two teachers must agree on the score assigned for each criterion. When students receive their results, they review their Writing Challenge essays and the score rubric, and they discuss the results with their teachers. Using this feedback, each student writes a self-assessment of his or her writing process, including strengths and weaknesses, and identifies specific goals for improvement.

The student's self-evaluation and goals and the student's performance as represented on the Writing Challenge Assessment Guide are mailed home to parents or guardians. These documents also help teachers at the next grade level to guide students as they engage in the writing process.

Middle School teachers have found the Writing Challenge to be a very helpful instructional tool. "The Writing Challenge Assessment Guide provides teachers and students with a shared, precise vocabulary to discuss the writing process," explains Middle School English Department Chairperson. "It also enables students to evaluate their own writing and decreases the subjectivity of the evaluation. Instead of vague remarks such as 'I like this piece,' students and teachers can talk in terms of topic development, voice, etc." Moreover, the Writing Challenge is a "useful instrument in the assessment of the writing program at the Middle School. If, for instance, a grade level has consistently poor scores in any area, the teachers at that level can concentrate their efforts on that area. Thus, both teachers and students can use the Writing Challenge as a means of self-evaluation."

The Writing Challenge at the Middle School also provides students with a valuable bridge to Upper School academic expectations. As one 9th grade English teacher notes, "Incoming 9th grade students have an understanding of the elements necessary for strong writing at the high school level. They have benefited from a focus on clarity, structure and solid support of ideas, and have learned to vary their sentence structure and adjust their writing style to the varied reading material. The Writing Challenge requires students to produce a polished and complete product in a short period of time. This process is akin to the Upper School writing environment."

At The Upper School

In preparing for the 11th grade Writing Challenge, students in the 9th through 11th grades:

- focus on critical-reading and literary-interpretation skills as foundations for good analytical writing

- write intensively: Instruction focuses on honing students' approaches to the analytical essay and emphasizes originality of thought. Students receive copious feedback from teachers on their progress; comments on papers reflect the criteria established in the Upper School Writing Challenge Assessment Guide

- refer to criteria for good writing and related feedback as a basis for self-assessment and for setting personal writing goals

- collaborate one-on-one with English department faculty members to address problem areas.

In the fall of their junior year, students devote a full morning to writing the formal Writing Challenge essay. During this single-morning session, students:

- read and analyze a short story that they have not previously read

- plan an analytic response to the short story (with the aid of a list of possible topics to use as a springboard)

- draft an analytic essay that presents a logical, thoughtful and well developed response to the story

- revise and polish their work.

A team of teachers from the English Department assesses these formal Writing Challenge essays through double-blind scoring. Two teachers must agree on the score for each criterion in the Upper School Writing Challenge Assessment Guide. After students receive their Writing Challenge scores, they have an individual conference with an English teacher, who reviews their essays with them and elaborates on the diagnostic feedback that the Assessment Guide provides. These conversations frequently

extend to discussing where the Writing Challenge experience fits within the context of the student's growth as a writer.

As a result, students write a letter to their English teacher that includes a thoughtful reflection on their Writing Challenge experience and the feedback they have received, often identifying where they have come as writers, where they are now and where they see the potential for growth in the future. In addition, an English teacher writes a narrative describing the student as a writer, including a summary of the scores on the Writing Challenge and the conference with the student about his or her writing. Parents and guardians receive a copy of the student's Writing Challenge essay, the scores marked on a copy of the Assessment Guide, and the teacher's narrative about the child's strengths and challenges as a writer and possible next steps for improvement.

"The Writing Challenge enables teachers to teach; it empowers students to learn," asserts the Upper School English Department Chairperson. "The assessment is individual, non-competitive and thorough in its appraisal of each student's writing performance. The goal of identifying 'growing edges' for the writer is achieved by scrutinizing what the student does in a controlled setting and then collaborating with colleagues to prescriptively support the student's development."

Thus, the Writing Challenge offers 11th grade students a unique opportunity to pause and reflect on their growth as writers mid-way through their high school careers—to celebrate their writing strengths and identify their challenges and to guide progress in refining their writing craft as they prepare for college. It also reaffirms for students that their English teachers, past and present, are willing to work one-on-one with them to help them specifically address any "growing edges" in their writing as they move through their final years at the Upper School. Teachers additionally benefit from understanding where their students stand as writers, both individually and collectively, when they examine the results of the Writing Challenge for trends. This analysis provides teachers with a roadmap for addressing not only individual challenges but also any weaknesses common to many members of the class.

How Does the Writing Challenge Inform Teaching and Learning?

Students' Focus on Writing

From Pre-K through 12th grade, the philosophical unity of the Writing Challenge program emphasizes common standards for good writing. The continuity of the Writing Challenge Assessment Guides ensures consistency in both expectations and assessment between grade levels and campuses. These consistent standards have, in turn, helped to foster a consistent emphasis on good writing skills across the curriculum. Moreover, the framework of the program encourages students to engage in writing as a process that requires honing throughout their school years and beyond.

The Writing Challenge Assessment Guides provide teachers, students and parents with a common language to discuss the criteria for good writing and the strengths and weaknesses in students' work. Students use this language as they apply the established criteria in self-assessments and thereby improve their abilities to analyze their own writing. Teachers also use this language in helping students to understand how they can adapt the Guides to address different writing genres. Through the development of such conscious, metacognitive thinking about writing, students can become their own best editors.

Identification of Writing Needs

Teachers are able to use the results of the Writing Challenge to better understand their students' individual needs and to design writing assignments and provide feedback that addresses the needs of students in their classes. Results of the formal assessment also help to identify students whose writing does not meet expectations at the benchmark grade levels (3, 5, 7 and 11). These students have the opportunity to work individually with their teachers to foster specific skill development.

Curriculum Refinement

The Writing Challenge serves as a basis for ongoing faculty study, including the Columbia University Reading and Writing Project Summer Institutes on the Writing Workshop approach and others on writing process instruction. Analyses of each class's Writing Challenge performance and performance trends over time also help the faculty to refine the writing curriculum. As a result, both the Writing Challenge Program and the writing curriculum are always changing to best advance the development of student writers. Teachers at all grade levels periodically refine the Writing Challenge Guides in light of recent research findings and current emphases in the teaching of good writing. In addition, teachers regularly reassess the Writing Challenge to set new goals for enhancing its efficacy. Overall, the ongoing evolution of the Writing Challenge Program makes it a powerful tool for guiding students in their maturation as thoughtful and effective writers.

The Success of the
Writing Challenge

Students confidently meet the writing challenges they encounter beyond MKA.   On alumni questionnaires, MKA graduates attending highly competitive colleges and universities consistently report that they are well prepared to write papers and to exceed the expectations of their professors, even in advanced-level courses.   While many of their college peers are still daunted by the writing process, MKA graduates are finding that they can write thoughtful analytic essays with a real sense of craft and confidence.   On a recent alumni survey, one graduate wrote, "Most college students can't write a decently prepared paper.   MKA's focus on writing was priceless." What better measure could we have of our success?

The Writing Challenge Assessment Guide

An Example:

The Middle School Assessment Guide that appears next is an example of the Guides designed for use with MKA students at all three campuses.

Understanding the Writing Challenge Assessment Guide:

- The headings on the chart's columns identify key criteria by which the quality of a student's essay will be assessed, and the first row specifies the key components of each criterion.

- Each subsequent row describes a different degree of quality for each of the key criteria – ranging from "highly effective" to "ineffective" writing. For instance, a student's "topic development" would be considered "highly effective" if the explanations in the "topic development" column of the "highly effective" row describe the student's writing.

- This type of Assessment Guide (known as an analytic rubric) provides both teachers and students with the opportunity to look analytically at the quality and effectiveness of each of the 6 major components of the piece. For instance, a written piece could easily represent "highly effective" writing in two or three columns and be less effective in other areas. Since the Guide allows teachers and students to make these kinds of distinctions, it can be used in a truly diagnostic way to focus on the specific strengths and relative weaknesses in a given written piece and to thereby determine possibilities for revision or for ongoing goal setting.

	Topic Development	Details/Support	Organization
The degree to which the writing	• establishes a purpose • maintains focus • provides ideas to develop the topic • shows originality, insight or imagination	• presents details that support the main topic of the piece • includes details that support the topic sentences of each paragraph • connects details to create a blended whole	• shows evidence of formal structure (e.g., introduction and conclusion and supporting paragraphs) • creates coherence • presents a logical sequence of ideas • uses appropriate paragraph structure • contains smooth transitions between ideas
Highly Effective *4*	• establishes a clearly defined purpose • maintains focus throughout the piece • provides relevant ideas that obviously further the topic • shows significant originality, insight or imagination	• presents pertinent ideas that strongly support the main topic • uses accurate and elaborated details to support the topic sentence of each paragraph • makes clear and important connections between supporting details	• includes carefully structured introduction, conclusion and supporting paragraphs • achieves coherence • presents a clearly logical progression of ideas • develops strong internal organization within paragraphs, including effective topic sentences • includes clear, smooth transitions between ideas
Generally Effective *3*	• establishes an apparent purpose • maintains focus through most of the piece • provides ideas to further the topic • shows some originality, insight or imagination	• presents ideas that sufficiently support the main topic • uses accurate and somewhat elaborated details to support the topic sentence of each paragraph • makes reasonable connections between supporting details	• includes somewhat structured introduction, conclusion and supporting paragraphs • creates coherence with only minor lapses • presents ideas that progress logically with only minor lapses • develops paragraphs with topic sentences and some internal organization • includes identifiable transitions between ideas
Somewhat Effective *2*	• conveys a vague purpose • demonstrates inconsistent focus • provides ideas with limited relevance to further the topic • shows limited originality, insight or imagination	• presents ideas that provide some support for the main topic • uses mostly accurate but insufficiently elaborated details to support the topic sentence of each paragraph • makes weak or superficial connections between supporting details	• includes poorly structured introduction, conclusion and supporting paragraphs • exhibits limited coherence • presents ideas in an inconsistently logical sequence • uses paragraphs with weak or missing topic sentences and rudimentary internal organization • includes weak transitions between ideas
Ineffective *1*	• does not establish an identifiable purpose • does not have an identifiable focus • lacks ideas that further the topic • does not include originality, insight or imagination	• presents ideas that do not provide support to the main topic • uses inaccurate or too few details to support the topic sentence of each paragraph • makes no identifiable connections between supporting details	• does not include introduction, conclusion & supporting paragraphs • does not have coherence • presents confusing thought patterns, which may be impossible to follow • uses randomly arranged sentences with no unity of thought or paragraphing • does not provide transitions between ideas

Writer's Style/Voice	Word Choice	Grammar/Mechanics
• reflects personal expression through a developed voice • uses a tone appropriate to the audience • includes a variety of sentence patterns • contains smooth, effective and correct sentence structure	• includes correct and effective vocabulary • provides evidence of risk taking for the purpose of enriching language • uses dynamic verbs and precise nouns (instead of overusing adverbs and adjectives)	• exhibits correct usage (e.g., tense formation, agreement and consistency, correct usage of parts of speech, etc.) • exhibits correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization and other mechanics
• uses a distinct and natural voice that enhances personal expression • uses a consistent tone that is particularly well suited for the intended audience • uses a variety of sentence patterns • achieves smooth, flowing and uniformly correct sentence structure	• uses precise, rich vocabulary • takes risks with vocabulary and uses advanced vocabulary correctly • uses many dynamic verbs and precise nouns that do not require modification	• few, if any, grammatical or mechanical errors relative to the length and complexity of the piece
• uses a voice that shows some personal expression • uses a consistent tone that takes audience into consideration • shows some evidence of varying sentence patterns • achieves somewhat smooth and generally correct sentence structure	• uses generally effective vocabulary • takes some risks with vocabulary, but makes some mistakes in word choice • uses some dynamic verbs and precise nouns that do not require modification	• some grammatical and mechanical errors, which do not interfere with the intended meaning or detract from the effect of the piece
• uses a somewhat flat voice with little personal expression • uses an inconsistent tone or one that is sometimes mismatched to the audience • uses sentences that vary only in length • uses occasionally awkward or incorrect sentence structure	• uses simplistic vocabulary with limited word choice • makes an attempt to use better vocabulary, but makes many mistakes in word choice that interfere with meaning • uses verbs and nouns with many modifiers	• multiple grammatical and mechanical errors and/or patterns of errors, which do not significantly interfere with intended meaning, but do detract somewhat from the effect of the piece
• uses no discernable personal voice with no evidence of personal investment • does not account for tone or match it appropriately to the audience • uses sentences that do not vary in length or structure • uses frequently awkward or incorrect sentence structure	• uses weak or inadequate vocabulary • shows no evidence of risk taking in vocabulary use and often uses vocabulary that interferes with meaning • uses weak verbs and nouns with insufficient modifiers	• frequent grammatical and mechanical errors that interfere with intended meaning and significantly detract from the effect of the piece