

March has been an eventful month. The spread of the Coronavirus has been, and continues to be, one of those 'once in a generation' events that the UK government has had to assess, mitigate against and put in place contingency plans in double quick time. Similarly for the College, balancing the rhythms of the academic year (including the approaching exam season) and the reality of student, parent and staff absences as the outbreak has developed, has been a careful balancing act.

Despite the disruption of the Coronavirus, the College still managed to stage the annual school performance in March. This year, the students put on 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle'. The Arts, and the school production in particular, takes students on a journey that grows them in quite extraordinary ways; the countless rehearsals, learning of lines and final performances develop extraordinary resilience and grit in the participants. I attended the Saturday performance and it still amazes me how students who might be usually quiet and modest in lessons blossom into confident and accomplished actors on stage. Brecht demands a lot of his cast and it was wonderful to see the students rise to the challenge, guided and led by the Drama Department.

By the time you are reading this over 100 English GCSE students may or may not have travelled, depending on the emerging Coronavirus situation, to Cambridge to watch 'An Inspector Calls' by JB Priestley. It is a play that sometimes provokes fierce discussion around social hypocrisy and the boundaries of justice and responsibility. I recently read a critique of the play in a 'right of centre' magazine that was scathing of the plot and Priestley's socialist motives. At the same time the article was keen to explain how Priestley's skilful writing was able to draw in, and dupe, the audience into sharing his world view. In other words, according to the article, Priestley's ideas are preposterous but he is a dangerously clever advocate of them and we have to be beware.

The magazine article is a clear example of how the issues Priestley raises are as divisive in 2020 as they were in 1945 when the play was first performed. The teaching profession carries a great responsibility in educating students to be independent, critical thinkers who make up their own minds around some of the big questions in politics and society. 'An Inspector Calls' is rich material for debate and I know the students enjoy discussing these big questions in lessons which undoubtedly inform their beliefs and thinking.

Experiences such as 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' and 'An Inspector Calls' are essential parts of a rich curriculum that grows passionate lifelong learners in the spirit of the Village College ethos. They also provide students, and especially Year 11 students at this time of year, with the grit to keep working for the upcoming GCSEs when the end isn't quite in sight. If you have a moment over Easter, I hope you can spare a thought for the Year 11s who will spend most of their break revising hard for the approaching exams. In the meantime, I hope you all have a restful Easter.

Doug Brechin

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