

“A lot of discussions that lead to personal growth make us challenge our assumptions, maybe even our assumptions about ourselves. Discomfort is often a byproduct of your assumptions being challenged; it means that you're pushing yourself and trying to be open-minded and allowing the frameworks through which you see the world to change. Change is uncomfortable sometimes.”—Ms. Getchell

LET'S TALK MONEY

What has your family taught you about your relationship with money?




Jordyn Britton '21

Jordyn is a new student who has attended tuition-charging schools—the Park School, the Chestnut Hill School, and St. Joseph's school—for 13 years. Both of her parents went to public high schools amidst students of the same socioeconomic status and did not have to navigate potentially unaffordable social situations.



Cat Buchatskiy '19

Cat grew up in Ukraine and Brazil, where she experienced political corruption and upsetting class distinctions—she hopes to one day change. She describes her parents as “raging capitalists” but identifies as a communist and advocate for workers’ rights. Cat plans to use her upper-class status and access to excellent education here in the United States to prepare to attack socio-economic problems in her home countries.



Director of Multicultural Services Lewis Bryant

Mr. Bryant grew up in Roxbury in a working-class military family and was aware they were not rich but unaware of his place “closer to the bottom of the economic hierarchy” until enrolling at Nobles as a ninth grader. Now, he identifies as “solidly middle class” and encourages his children to be sensitive and empathetic to those with fewer resources.

How do you imagine a conversation about class at the school?

“I think sometimes we are challenged when we come from families of affluence and we want to talk about experiences, whether or not we think about the impact our sharing could have on someone who doesn't have something similar to share. So, do we tell kids not to talk about it? Do we tell kids to talk about it in groups that could have shared experiences? Or do we help kids talk about it in a way that doesn't demean others? It's very tricky.

“When you're talking about race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and to a certain degree, sexual orientation or gender identity, those are sort of more visible and more acceptable to discuss publicly, so there isn't that challenge. This is, of all the ‘-isms,’ somewhat invisible, or more invisible than others, and that adds to the challenge.

“We can do more to help kids be comfortable in their own skin around relative wealth and to help them be sensitive and thoughtful and empathetic and not come across as insensitive to the reality that everybody doesn't have the same level of financial means. We can certainly do a better job of educating students about how to have those conversations, and when to have those conversations, and maybe even who to have those conversations with. There's a consciousness about it, but has there been a deliberate intentional approach to the process? No. That really goes back to this relative discomfort that we have.”—Mr. Bryant

“I think people have a negative connotation of class and think, ‘We're going to talk about class. We're going to talk about how privileged we are and how bad that is.’ I don't think that's about that. I think it's more about realizing that it's not something we can control and that these power struggles have been predetermined since the Industrial Revolution. We were born into our class...

“Something that I've had trouble with when I've been talking about class at BB&N and in America is that we're not talking about the right problems. For example, the fact that we talk about class inherently assumes the capitalist system. I don't think that's the right way to go about it because then the conversations about class become ‘How can we alleviate the burden of the lower class?’ rather than ‘How can we remove the lower class?’ I think the real conversation is about how the system we have now helps create these inequalities.”—Cat

“Kindness is one of our values, but sometimes I worry that we are being polite instead of kind when we avoid addressing socioeconomic issues in discussion. Sometimes we avoid talking about uncomfortable issues, and it's uncomfortable to talk about socioeconomic class... But we all have some degree of privilege—we are all here [at BB&N], it might not be socioeconomic—and acknowledging it, naming it, thinking about whether we want to be perpetuating it as people likely to have a lot of power, that seems like a critical piece of education.”—Ms. Getchell

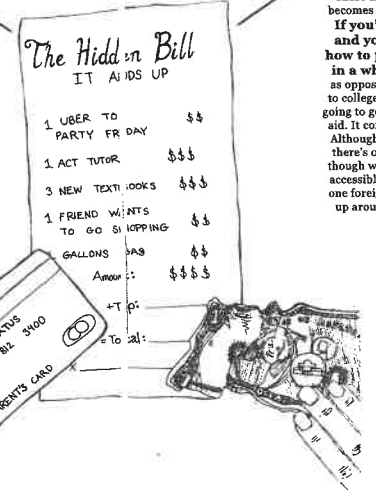
“Honestly, every time I do a summer job, for the most part, I don't really enjoy it. I don't like being constrained from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and I think that's because I'm not constrained by money. I do this work for extra income, to go get ice cream with friends; it's not like my family depends on this money, which is also something that I feel fortunate about... I am motivated to work for the ultimate goal of supporting my family and doing something that I enjoy. That raises the question: will doing all of this—going to college, getting a degree, working, making money—lead to happiness?”—Armeen

“We are definitely very conscious about the way we spend. I was taught at a very young age that money is not something that can just be freely thrown around.”—Armeen

“We were reminded all the time of how lucky we should feel, what a privilege it was to be able to ski on the weekends and to go on school trips and family vacations. We were often told that this is not how it was even one generation ago for a lot of our family members.”—Ms. Getchell

“Both of my parents have made it clear to me that I have a college fund. They make it clear that I am okay for college. But they also make it clear that we are not upper class: we do have budgets, and we can't spend every day all day. They want to make sure I know how to spend and save. We are not poor, but we are also not set for life. When I am out of school, I know I have to sustain myself. They want to make sure I do not go broke in my early 20s.”—Jordyn

“Young people, kids, should understand their economic status is related to their good fortune in terms of the family they were born into. Hopefully, there is an appreciation for that. It's not something that they've earned, yet, and to look down on those who have less just seems foolish.”—Mr. Bryant



What motivates you to work?

“Wanting to live comfortably when older motivates me to work because I know what it's like to not always be as comfortable as you want to be. I want to take care of myself and make sure that I'm set up for the best I can do, and also reward my mom, too, because she was the one who really worked to get me into a school like this and have these opportunities.”—Nate

“I want to have a future where I don't have to rely on my family for money. Everyone in my family has gone to college, and that is something I am working toward. I don't want to be the one that doesn't go to college. But it's not really the money that motivates me, it's the education.”—Jordyn


“I am motivated to work for money to some extent. It is not the most important thing in my life, but obviously I need some form of income to support myself. A common misconception about my ideology is that I'm anti-money, but I wouldn't necessarily say that money or working for money is a bad thing. The problem begins when corporations and monetary pursuit come before our humanity.”—Cat

What role do you think class plays in the school culture?

“There are different times when class becomes a real clear and direct factor. If you're applying to college and you don't have to worry how to pay for it, that puts you in a whole different category as opposed to those who are applying to college and are wondering if they're going to get enough scholarship, enough aid. It comes up around travel abroad. Although we do provide financial aid, there's obviously never enough, even though we try to make it equitable and accessible to every student for at least one foreign travel trip. Class can come up around prom time.”—Mr. Bryant


“I think it's very good that we are bringing up class now because it works on so many different levels of understanding why people are the way that they are. It helps them understand the diversity in our school, which goes beyond just race, religion, and sexual orientation. There's a whole other wall that I don't think people see. By bringing light to that wall, we can do our part to help break it down.”—Nate

“You look back to Middle School, where you had to have the Vineyard clothing, you had to have the Lululemon headbands at all times—all these things add up. The culture that students develop throughout the years turns into this competitive nature of who can out-edge whom with respect to the latest fashion, the latest cars, anything materialistic or superficial like that.”—Armeen




Armeen Golshan '19

Having grown up in an upper-class family, Armeen has been taught to appreciate his good fortune. He recognizes that his privilege has allowed him to travel abroad and access other opportunities many people cannot.



Nate Roach '21

Nate was “middle-lower class” growing up. His mother worked long hours as a nurse to ensure Nate could have the best opportunities, and from her he learned that success comes from hard work. He recognizes class at the school as something that is different for everyone and should be discussed with sensitivity.



English Teacher Sarah Getchell

Ms. Getchell grew up conversing openly about socioeconomic class. The families of both her mom and dad believed they “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps,” which she said seems, to some degree, true. Ms. Getchell lived in “the Newton of Maine” and was taught to value the fact that she didn't have to think about money as much as her family did in previous generations.

—Laila Shadid and Lauren Yun