

Alumni of
The Oaks



The Oaks
ACADEMY



Since first opening our doors in 1998, hundreds of students have walked through our halls. Throughout their time at The Oaks Academy, each student built a strong foundation in faith and academics, fostered lasting bonds with classmates and teachers, and created memories that withstand the test of time.

As of 2020, there are over 500 alumni in The Oaks Academy community, each with unique and special stories.

We invite you to enjoy this collection of stories in their own words.

When asked what words reminded them of The Oaks, alumni said:

The word cloud features the following words in various sizes and orientations:

- Impactful
- Engaging
- Community
- Home
- Christ-centered
- Loving
- Intentional
- Supportive
- Inclusive
- Family
- Traditional
- Foundational
- Perseverance
- Caring
- Growth
- Peaceful
- Friendship
- Challenging
- Empowering
- Fellowship
- Safe
- Motivating
- Reverence
- Holistic
- Dedicated
- Beautiful
- Spiritual
- Uniting
- Diverse
- Unifying
- Peaceful
- Friendship
- Challenging
- Empowering
- Engaging
- Supportive
- Fellowship
- Holistic
- Family
- Dedicated
- Safe
- Inclusive
- Tradition
- Christ-centered
- Motivating
- Faith
- Foundational
- Growth
- Loving
- Beautiful
- Intentional
- Perseverance
- Caring



Aaron Smith

The Oaks Academy '09 | Cathedral High School '13 | Butler University '17

I think the biggest impact The Oaks had on me was having that mentality of wanting to learn, and not even just in a classroom setting. At The Oaks, I didn't learn just from a textbook. I learned so much without even knowing it.

The Oaks Academy definitely shaped how I think. I'll think inside the box, outside the box, on top of the box. I want to fully think about everything going on, whereas for most people, they're one-minded, one-sided. Coming to The Oaks, I learned that there are a hundred different ways to find the same solution. There's a hundred different ways to figure out how something can go right, how it can go wrong, and how to learn from those mistakes. Here, I learned how to fail and how to keep going.

Aaron is currently on staff with The Oaks After Care, where he helps to lead activities and provide homework support for Oaks students.

Amaris Grimme

The Oaks Academy '09 | Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School '13 | Purdue University '20

The Oaks was a big part of my life. It gave me my lifelong friends and all of my beliefs and morals. The Oaks shaped me. There's still a group of 5 of us from our class that is tightly knit and keeps in touch. Our group text is called 'Those Oaks Kids.' The Oaks is the thing that brought us all together. Last Thanksgiving, the five of us got acorn tattoos with the 2301 Fall Creek street address. I keep thinking about how we all met as acorns and now we're growing into our own trees.

Mrs. Dubach was my favorite elementary school teacher in the world, and she knows that. She's the one who made me realize that I wanted to travel. I would always try to be the line leader because I wanted to hold her hand and I wanted her to tell me stories. She was a huge part of me growing up as a person.

Amaris is finishing her degree in Construction Management Technology and hopes to become a superintendent.





Chloe Miller

The Oaks Academy '17 | Cathedral High School '21

Today I was walking around and saw the paintings and art the school has hanging up, which is something I love about The Oaks. It reminded me how the atmosphere always felt like it was focused around our learning. The Oaks gave me a love for learning in general. Right now, I'm taking physics and pre-calculus, and it's hard, but I can see the beauty in it and why it's important overall.

I grew up with The Oaks. It gave me the ability to be myself. When none of my friends wanted to be drum major in high school, I had a sense of self-confidence and was comfortable enough in my own skin to do it myself. I thought, 'Okay, I'm gonna do this,' and I did. My background from The Oaks helped me have that confidence.

Chloe is the first African American female drum major at Cathedral in nearly 25 years.

Rebekah Williams

The Oaks Academy '15 | Herron High School '19 | Ball State University '23

Humanities was always my favorite, not only because the teachers were great, but because I'm a big story person. I love learning about people even if they aren't there to tell their story. Humanities challenged me but the books we read at The Oaks were just phenomenal. We were really being pushed, like reading *Paradise Lost* as an 8th grader? That's insane.

Latin class really blessed me because we started in 3rd grade, and then I took Latin in high school. There are still several Latin terms or phrases that help me with literary definitions and scientific names. It makes me a better test taker. Everyone's like 'Latin's a dead language, why are we learning it?' I was one of those people for a long time but now I realize it's been very helpful.

Rebekah enjoys painting and is also part of the design team for Discovering Broadway.





Christ-centered

The Oaks set a standard for how to view faith and how it's in every piece of what we do and study. The

Oaks taught us to implement faith in everyday life by doing something repetitive like Lauds. Then we took the same practice and learned how to do that for ourselves.

Tucker Krajewski '10

The Oaks gave me the security to stand up for my faith. My openness to discussion, born out of the discussions I had at The Oaks, enabled me to have meaningful, life-changing conversations. I see my peers' understanding of the Christian faith change and see God's work in my friends.

Emily Padgett '15

The biggest impact of The Oaks on my life is to have a foundation in Christ, and learn applications like Math, Science, History in the context of Christianity. The school helped me make connections in places I didn't expect, and then see that everything points back to Christ.

Micah Ho '11



Curissa Jones-Dabney

The Oaks Academy '10 | University High School '14 | Purdue University '19

The Oaks actually provided a pretty diverse atmosphere for me. Being at The Oaks did help me out a ton as a kid, and I do remember a lot of my teachers that I really loved. Coming back after graduating to visit, I am reminded of how many people went here and how many close relationships there were. I'm glad I had The Oaks as a foundation, I'm glad my mom put me here so that I was always in a Christian atmosphere. I feel if I wasn't in that type of atmosphere growing up, I probably would have been far away from my faith.

In her spare time, Curissa enjoys meditating, sketching, painting and trying new foods.

Justus Kelley *née Coleman*

The Oaks Academy '09 | Cathedral High School '13 | Indiana University '17 | IU Master of Public Health '19

I was a bit of a talkative child. It's not a bad thing, I was just social in the classroom. I'd get moved from one desk to the next, only for the teacher to find I can easily become friends with anyone. There was a time I was sent to the hall for talking and Mr. Vanest came out. I assumed he was there to let me know it's time to come back in. But his whole demeanor had changed, I remember him being vulnerable with me. He told me, 'As your brother in Christ, I really want you to listen.' I don't know why those words stand out to me so many years later, but I still think about them. Even later in life when I was in high school, I was reminding myself that these are my brothers and sisters. They want to get through the lesson and get through the day. Don't give them a hard time. Listen.

Being able to apply so much of what I learned here is incredible. The Oaks is the place to learn what is healthy, what is God's plan, and what is beautiful. I think about things kids are experiencing today, things that no kid should be exposed to. By being in this building, though, God has the opportunity to do something in their heart and give them a safe place. I think back to me at five years old. I was a broken little girl, not knowing how broken I was. Now, as an adult, I'm able to reflect back, and I can see what I learned here about building relationships and what relationships should look like.

Justus won the 2020 Mrs. Indiana for America Pageant.





What The Oaks instills in us as kids stays with us. Learning how to build healthy and positive relationships as a kid - those are things that stay with you as you grow up.



Meredith Farrar

The Oaks Academy '15 | Herron High School '19 | Loyola University Chicago '23

The Oaks cares about you as a person, not as a number or a test score. Obviously teachers want you to achieve great things, but that's not why you're valued. It goes back to the belief that every child is a gift from God. Students are already worth something, not in addition to what they're being taught. It makes me think about what kind of school I want to work for. I wouldn't want to work for a school where kids aren't inherently valued.

I love all my teachers at The Oaks. I was thinking earlier today and I can name the teacher I had for every grade easily, without thinking about it. I think that shows how all the teachers had an impact on me because I remember them vividly. My Oaks experience made me feel really valued, which you take for granted sometimes because it's the norm at The Oaks. I never realized that other people didn't have these experiences until I got to college. Looking back, that's something I did value then but even more now.

Meredith is studying education at Loyola and hopes to be a teacher after graduation.

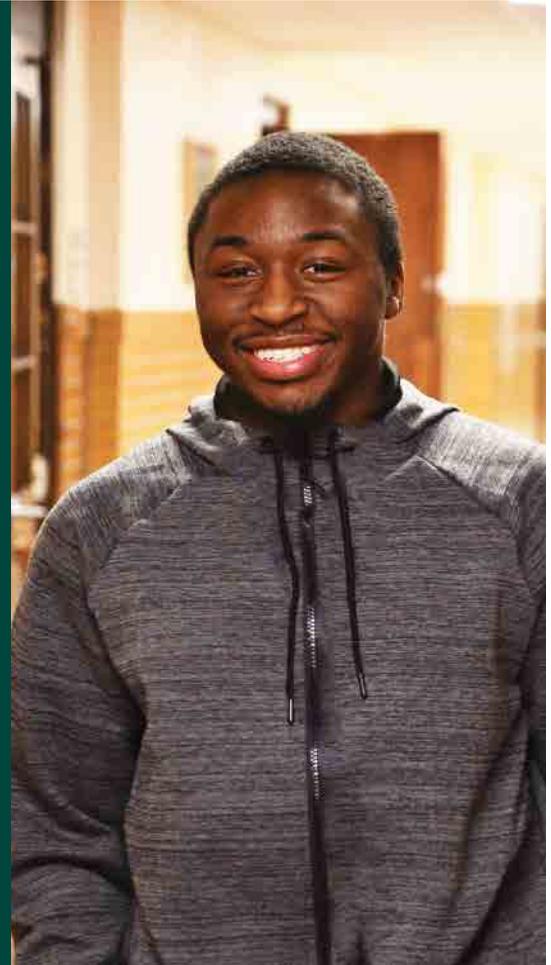
Langston Obie

The Oaks Academy '14 | Herron High School '18

The environment at The Oaks was so important to my parents. They didn't want me to go to school and be worried about getting bullied or being made fun of. They wanted to make an investment in my career. My mom always told my dad she wanted me and my sisters to have a great life, and she felt like The Oaks was a great start. It paid off because we've changed a lot through our time here. We see things differently.

The habit of reflection stuck with me after The Oaks. Originally when we practiced reflection, I didn't understand why we were doing it. I see the benefit of it now. Now I go home and reflect on the day. I'm asking myself questions like, 'I did this today, that's pretty good, but I could've done better with this. Okay, I could've approached this situation a little bit differently. I did pretty good in this situation.' I didn't realize how important reflection was until I actually pushed myself to do it, and now I'm reflecting all the time.

In high school, Langston was captain of the soccer team and led them to the very first sectional victory.



Christian Daniels

The Oaks Academy '14 | Cathedral High School '18 | Indiana University '22



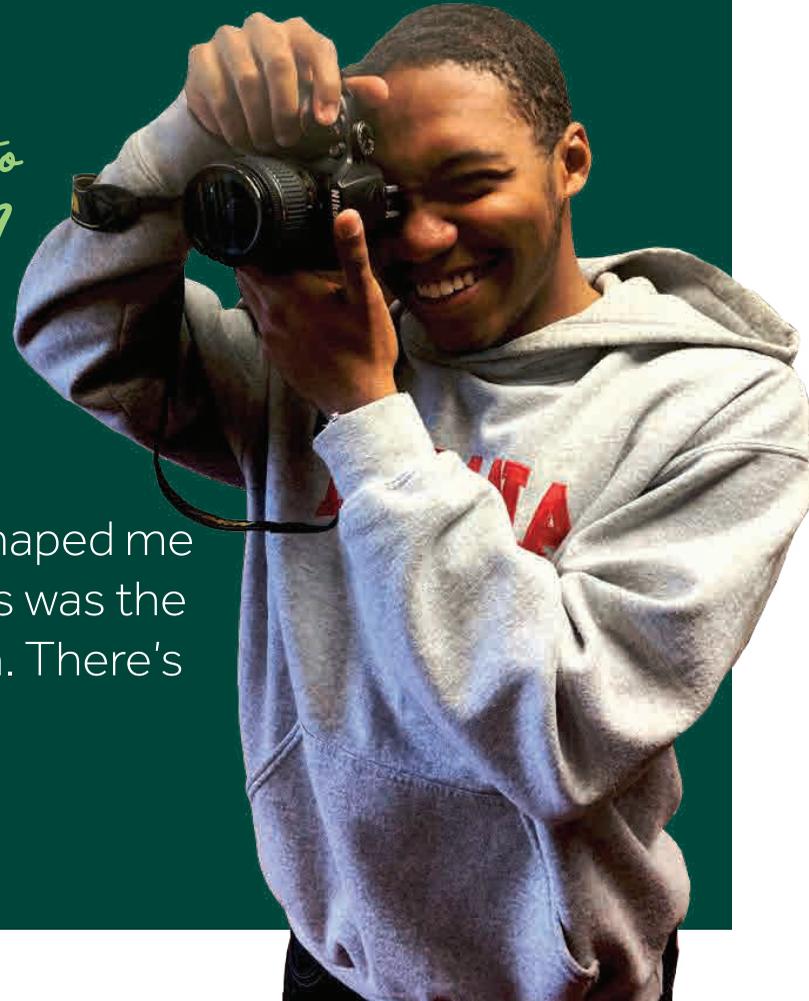
To me, everyone's a blank slate. I don't know your background. I don't know what you come from. I don't really know you, and so I treat everyone the same when first meeting them. I think having friends from all different walks of life and all different experiences helped me get rid of my biases towards people, not judge books by their covers and not let first impressions really drive me. I've noticed a lot of people can't do that. I would say my experiences at The Oaks influenced me by encouraging me to have my own opinion on issues and be willing to form my own opinion about each and every person I meet.

I never really thought about race when I was here, which is kind of weird. I've had conversations with a lot of friends when we've thought back to our time at The Oaks. We see now how unique it was that no one paid attention to race and everyone was just friends. Looking back now, I'm able to understand that The Oaks' student body was all from very different places in life and everyone had very different experiences, but for the most part we all got along really well and things just worked.

Christian is a photography intern with Indiana University's Athletic Department.

What are three words that come to mind when you think of The Oaks?

Family, for one. I've just always thought of it like it's a big family. I'd also say cornerstone, because I honestly feel like my time here shaped me into the person I am and The Oaks was the very foundation of that. I'd say fun. There's a lot of fun here.



Micah Ito

The Oaks Academy '11 | International School of Indiana '15
Purdue University '19

Middle school at The Oaks was a significant season of growth for me as it fostered a Christ-centered environment where each teacher was committed to investing their time and energy into developing their students' minds and souls. Additionally, my first friendships were made at The Oaks as I began to understand the beauty and value of Christian community. The relationships built within these walls were just as, if not more significant and dear to me than the curriculum we worked through. The teachers and students at The Oaks challenged me to become a better critical thinker, student, friend, and Christ-follower.

Micah is a Safety Evaluator with Republic Airways.





Diversity

The Oaks creates a culture of loving, accepting, and celebrating diversity, which I carried on after graduating. That wouldn't have happened if I hadn't come here when I was nine. I learned how to love people well here.

Maggie Bittinger '14

At The Oaks, you're only around people that love you for who you are. This school does such a great job of setting that tone, no matter your race or family's income. This is what we do here. This is how we treat people.

Justus Kelley '09

Going to a school with kids coming from all walks of life was beneficial because that's how it is in the real world when you're interacting with people. The Oaks gives the opportunity for different barriers to be broken down.

Jackson Heru '16

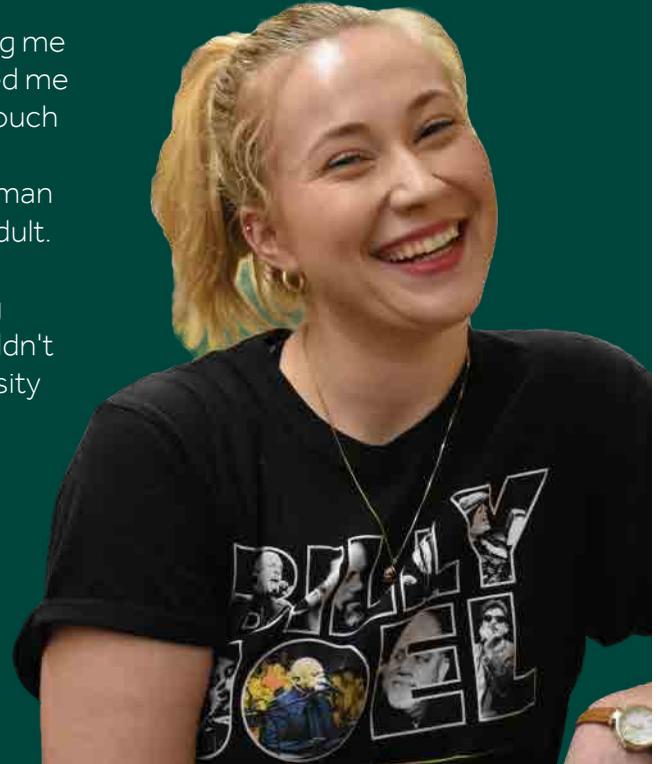
Maggie Bittinger

The Oaks Academy '14 | Cathedral High School '18 | Loyola University Chicago '22

Mr. Homan really impacted me in middle school, especially giving me the confidence to lean into my quirky, nerdy side. He encouraged me to be myself and to ask questions about the world. We kept in touch throughout high school and even into college. I loved having an inspiring relationship with a teacher as a kid. Now I know this human being who impacted me and is still a part of my life as a young adult.

The Oaks creates a culture of loving, accepting, and celebrating diversity, which I carried on in my life after graduating. That wouldn't have happened if I hadn't come here when I was nine. The diversity was a big shock right away, and then I fell in love with the kids, community, and my teachers. Everyone was so loving and supportive all the time. Even when I had teachers I didn't click with as much, I was still constantly loved and supported for exactly who I was.

Maggie has been involved in musical theatre for years, which she is studying at Loyola.



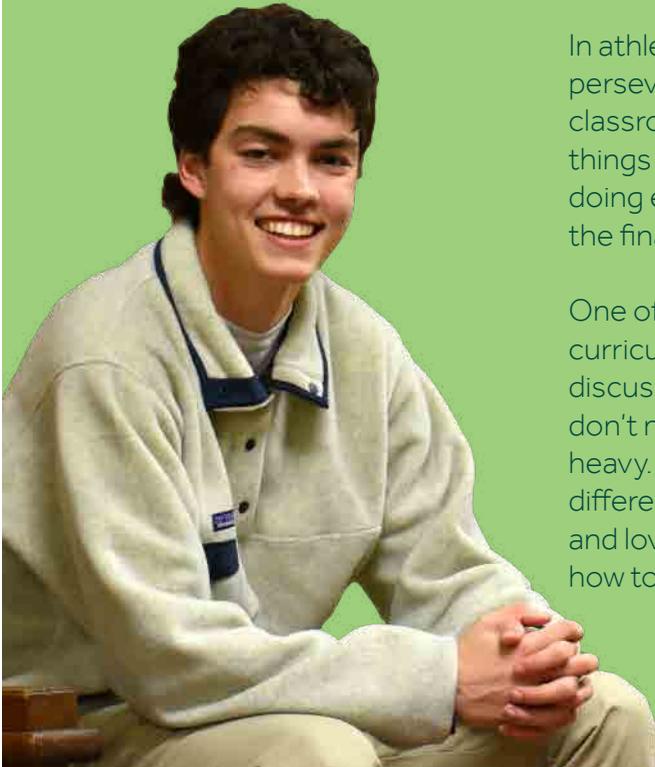
Jackson Hern

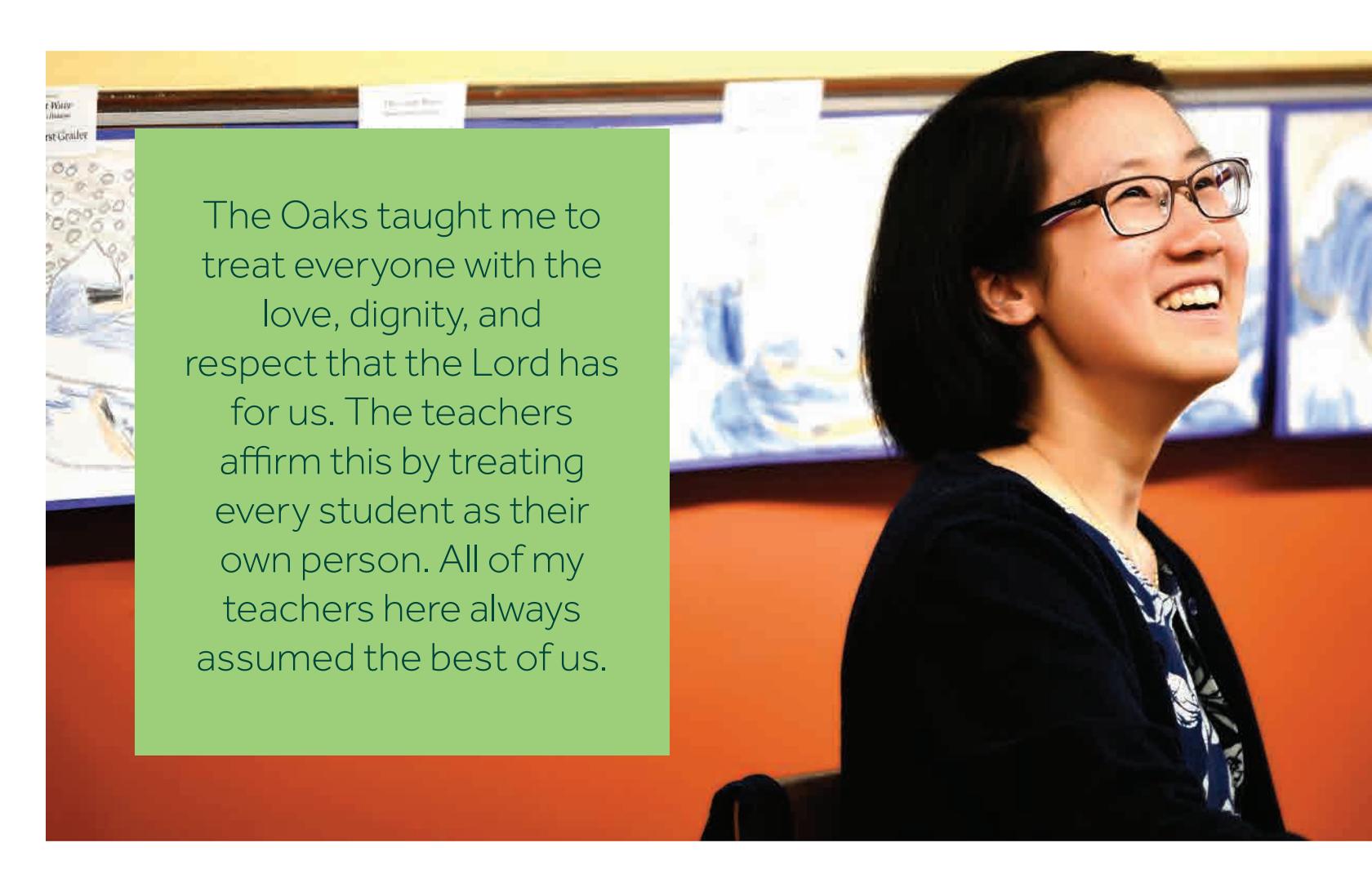
The Oaks Academy '16 | Cathedral High School '20 | Clemson University '24

In athletics, The Oaks did a wonderful job of balancing commitment, perseverance, and diligence, all things we talked about in the classroom, with learning how to win graciously and humbly. Those are things you hear across the board, but then adding on that third layer of doing everything for the glory of God and keeping it in perspective was the final touch.

One of the ways The Oaks taught me to be a leader was through the curriculum, especially in 8th grade, where a lot of our curriculum was discussion-based. We were exploring ideas that some middle schools don't necessarily think are worth getting into because they're deep or heavy. Learning to talk about those things with people who have different ideas and experiences, but are united knowing we are known and loved by God, helped me learn how to be a leader and understand how to bring people together to talk about difficult topics.

In high school, Jackson played on the soccer team and was a reporter for the student newspaper.



A young woman with dark hair and glasses is smiling broadly, looking upwards and to the right. She is wearing a dark blue cardigan over a patterned shirt. The background shows a classroom setting with a bulletin board displaying various papers and drawings. A green text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

The Oaks taught me to treat everyone with the love, dignity, and respect that the Lord has for us. The teachers affirm this by treating every student as their own person. All of my teachers here always assumed the best of us.



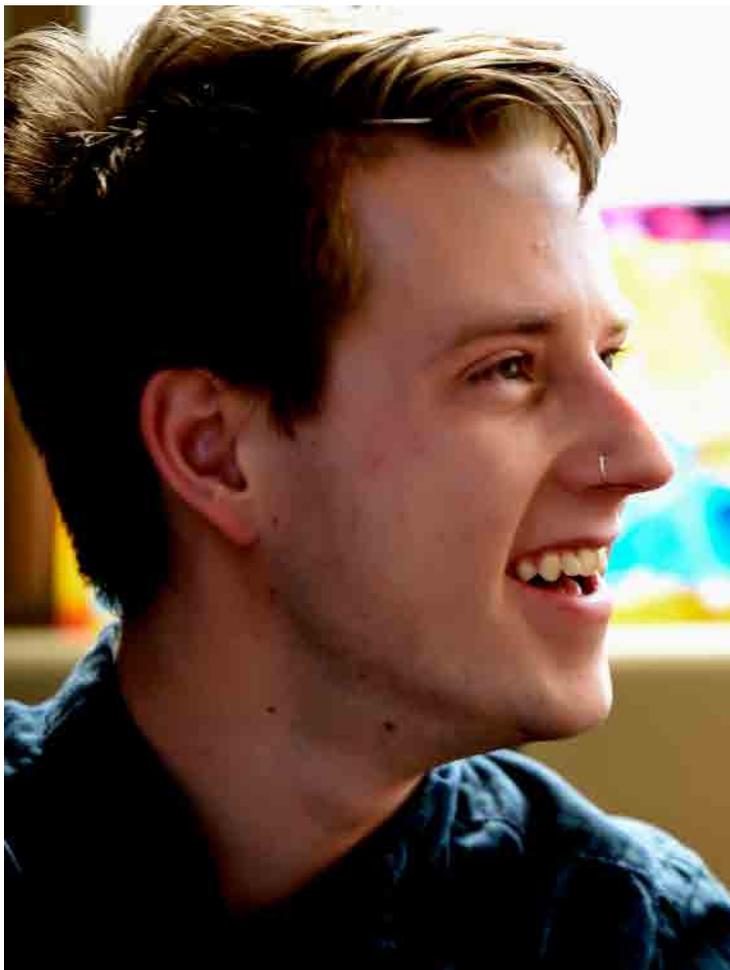
Rebecca Ito

The Oaks Academy '09 | Park Tudor School '13 | Wheaton College '17

My Oaks education was absolutely formative to the things I love, the things I study, and the things I'm passionate about. The connections aren't always obvious—from a love of truth and beauty to the craft of pottery, from classical Western civilizations to the modern Middle East—but they run steady below the surface, anchoring me like roots. Coming back as a teacher has helped me trace them.

It's also helped me appreciate the ways the school has changed. In high school it used to bother me that the building didn't look how I remembered it. Classrooms moved and walls went up, and I missed the place I'd known. I think it was mid-high school when it hit me that The Oaks was more than a nostalgic picture, that it wasn't just about me. The joyous fact was that the school was growing. It was almost bursting at the seams. As I work with my students now, I'm grateful for those changes: it's a vision I didn't have, and it's so much better than anything I could have imagined.

Becca is currently an Oaks Academy Latin teacher.



Tucker Krajewski

The Oaks Academy '10 | Herron High School '14
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga '20

Urban renewal has always been a very central thing for me, something I notice everywhere. I grew up at The Oaks, which was in the middle of a somewhat dangerous neighborhood at the time. It was a neighborhood that was in a transitional phase where a lot of buildings were abandoned, and I grew up in a home that was very similar to that. I see places like The Oaks Academy renewing communities in the best ways. One of the best things that can move into a neighborhood is a school. I went to middle school when it was at Fall Creek, not really knowing what the neighborhood was like. It's been great seeing it improve and seeing it become a safer place, while also continuing to be diverse and inclusive.

Tucker is working as a Product Designer for an Indianapolis-based venture studio for entrepreneurship.

Love of Learning



I have a lot of joy in remembering the fun things that happened at The Oaks while our classes were all being pushed academically.

Sometimes it made people closer with each other because you're like, 'This is really hard, let's do it.'

Rebekah Williams, '15

I loved going on field trips to learn about different wars, history and cultures.

They gave us a different way to see history. I loved going on those trips to see what happened in the past and how we got to where we are now. There are a lot of field trips that I still remember today.

Langston Obie, '14

At The Oaks, we spend time learning how to learn. Classes were challenging, but there was joy for learning. I felt like, 'Wow, this is so interesting. We're learning about the French Revolution right now, and then we have a mock trial.' It was so much fun.

Chloe Miller, '17

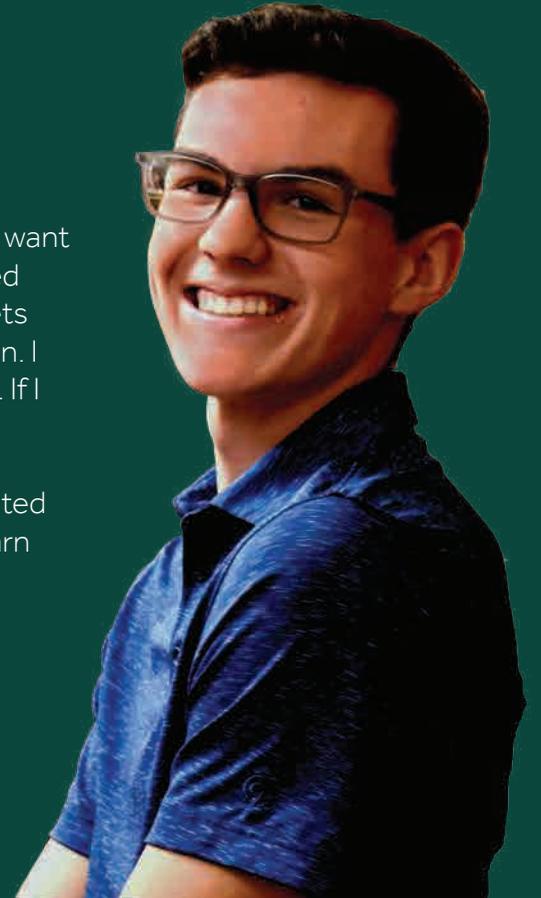
Sam Wilson

The Oaks Academy '18 | North Central High School '22

For a long time, I wanted to be a Marine. I still want to do that but I also want to be a teacher, mostly because of Mr. Kortepeter who really influenced that. He's so good at what he does. He makes learning fun but also gets the work in. We learn, but we enjoy it. He tells good stories, and he's fun. I love kids, and I love helping people, and teaching is the way to do both. If I were to become a teacher this is where I would want to work.

At The Oaks, the teachers show us that everyone deserves to be treated equally. They genuinely care, and they want to be there to help you learn and to help if you have a problem. They would never sit there and say, 'Okay, figure it out.' My teachers would sit down with me and work with me until I understood.

Sam is currently on staff with The Oaks After Care, where he helps to lead activities and provide homework support for Oaks students during after school hours.





Emily Padgett

The Oaks Academy '15 | North Central High School '19 | Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology '23

At The Oaks, I was sometimes required to reflect on why I was asking certain questions as opposed to receiving an answer. Sometimes my questions were answered through honest conversations that often just led to more questions. But no matter how they were answered, they were never mocked. I was never made to feel that I was wrong to have questions. Never was the response not out of love.

At The Oaks, I learned help is always there, from God and others, but we also need to be open to help. I learned not to let my frustrations lead me to shut down and prevent possible solutions. I remember having serious doubts and questions about my faith in seventh grade. I reached out to a few of my teachers hoping to open up a conversation, and I got an email back from every single one of them. They weren't cookie cutter answers to make sure I 'kept the faith,' but rather ones that could only come from people who truly knew me.

Emily is a recipient of the Lilly Endowment Scholarship.

Diamond McDonald

The Oaks Academy '10 | Herron High School '14 | DePauw University '18

The Washington, D.C. trip was my favorite field trip. It opened my mind and expanded my understanding of the world. I was in D.C. as an eighth grader with the people I loved, that I had learned and grown with. The whole trip was experiential learning and that's the reason why I fell in love with law. I think that's why I moved to D.C. after college. If it weren't for The Oaks, I don't think I would have had the opportunity to expand my mind and understanding. I learned there is more out there, and everything I could access through who I surrounded myself with, hard work, dedication, concentration, and hard and long prayer. Opportunities are limitless. I moved to D.C. after undergrad and interned with the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. I attribute much of my leadership and cultivated skills to The Oaks. It was truly the starting point of something great.

Before deciding to go to law school, Diamond worked with Senator Kamala Harris in Washington, D.C.



First Day of School, September 8, 1998



Share Your Oaks Story

TheOaksAcademy.org/MyOaksStory

The Oaks Academy is a Christ-centered school that exists to provide a rich, classical education to children of diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, preparing them to succeed in a rigorous secondary educational program and to demonstrate spiritual, social and emotional maturity.

