



Morning Comment

Cultural Captains, Jenna Howell and Xanthe Pearce

Cultural Assembly, Friday 23 August 2024



Good morning. We picked the *Survivor/I Will Survive Mashup* at the start of the year because we felt that it matched our attitudes towards culture. The song talks about surviving no matter what the circumstances are. We've found throughout our lives, culture has helped us to survive through any hardship.

But what is culture? The word culture can have a couple of different meanings depending on context. It can refer to the arts, the way in which groups, such as sports teams or friend groups interact with each other, or the ideas and social customs of a country. What's more, it's the lessons woven into myths, stories, and legends that have shaped our world. We stand on the shoulders of countless generations who have shaped our cultural heritage, and now inherit not just a legacy of artistic achievement, but a responsibility to nurture and protect this invaluable treasure.

I often think about the enormity of the world that we live in. I am just one individual out of 8.7 million species of animals, one out of 8.2 billion people on this planet currently, and a product of 4.5 billion years of evolution, innovation, and growth of this planet we call our home. There is so much to learn and discover about our Earth. However, there is one thing I know for certain. As humans, we have always placed culture – arts, music, dance, drama – as one of the core values of our society. Archaeologists have found cave drawings and musical instruments from 40,000 years ago. What these historical artworks teach us is what it means to be human. Because that's simply what culture is, being human. I mean, let's be honest there is nothing about painting a picture that is going to help us fight off a lion. But that's what makes the arts so great, they enrich our lives in a way that helps us to transcend mere survival. Our generation has gone through countless events



that have tested us and made our day to day a little harder: The earthquakes, Port Hills bush fires, the mosque shooting, and most notably the COVID-19 lockdowns. For each of these events the response for most people was not equations and essay writing, but people coming together, public artworks, creating meaning through dance, and showing their love. Culture is, at its core, love.

Whatever your activity or hobby is, I guarantee you that culture is part of your life. We all listen to music on the way to school, get mad when the DJ doesn't play our favourite song at Formal, dance with our friends, go to concerts, write poetry. Even in your respective groups or teams the culture of your group is an amazingly important thing. Culture is a foundation that we can build our world upon. From the grand moments like the opening of the Olympics, to simple moments like singing happy birthday at parties, it simply leaves an imprint on everything we do and connects us to a broader community in the world. Not only can it entertain and express but it is our silent partner in our moments of triumph, offers company in our moments of grief and inspires in ways we may not even know.

Whether you are part of a team sport, a music group, or a dance troupe, it improves your day, not only by moving your body or listening to music, but you're connected in real time, or having a laugh. No matter what kind of day you've had, you know there's a safe space culture has built for you to go. Things we may not even realise we do can be traditions passed down through generations. To appreciate culture is to appreciate humanity itself. Diversity of thought and beauty of difference, it's a shared experience that is a haven for quite truly anyone who has the joy of being involved. Not only is it fun, entertaining, inspiring, and moving, but it's the heart of our collective existence.

To conclude, it doesn't matter if you prefer being on the stage, a lab, a library, a workshop or a sports field, culture is a huge part of everybody's life. It's a beacon that brings us together and guides us through any kind of time in our lives. The beautiful thing about culture is that it isn't static. Any one of us has the chance to make the history books and change the world around us. So, keep the culture alive, embrace it, enjoy it, you'll survive and you'll flourish.