

Megan Mayhew Bergman inspires middle schoolers

Krishiv Shah
Scroll Editor

Megan Mayhew Bergman, an award-winning author, journalist, and activist, visited the school through the Bergeron Writing Fellowship program March 24 -28. In addition to speaking at assemblies, she also spent time working with all seventh grade students in their English classes during the week.

Mrs. Bergman spoke at two assemblies, the first for seventh and eighth graders and the second for fifth and sixth graders. During the assemblies, she answered many questions. When a student asked about her own writing and how to deal with writer's block, she said,

"There's something about being in a space where no one can really access me, and suddenly I can finish a whole essay or a chapter; if I'm having trouble coming up with ideas, I edit."

Mrs. Bergman has written in several different genres and forms of literature. She had always loved books as any writer does, and the first time she got her work published was a submission to a literary journal, and from there she became more ambitious and started to write more professionally, and the first book she wrote wasn't much more than a modified and refined version of her graduate thesis.

During her assemblies with the middle schoolers, she spoke a lot about her inspirations and writing process, and she also elaborated on her research process at a separate lecture that week, which was primarily attended by but not exclusive to adults. When talking about the creativity that comes with writing and the overall importance of it, she said, "It's really important that we don't escape the magic of what creativity can be."

She noted that her experiences with other authors have also shaped how she is as a writer today. She has interacted with several authors who are also friends of hers, most notably Emily St. John Mandel, the renowned essayist and author of *Station Eleven* and five other books. St. John Mandel had come to speak at Middlebury College and discussed her writing with Mayhew Bergman, the Assistant professor of English at Middlebury.

Additionally, she has had notable interactions with both Jill McCorkle and Amy Hempel, both short story writers, though McCorkle has also written several books.

Throughout her entire life, she has always been a reader, and she credits it to bringing her into her love of writing too. In addition to



Photo by Jacob Varghese

Megan Mayhew Bergman addresses the crowd during the assembly for fifth grade and sixth grade. This was her second assembly during her visit on March 25.

figures who are also writers in her life, she is also influenced by artists, scientists, and overall, people who don't just comment on issues in the world; they act on them.

She sometimes draws inspiration from people she knows in real life to create her characters.

She is very adamant about making incredibly realistic characters that feel like they could be people. She has many strategies for doing this. "I'm

"I'm really interested in imperfection, I think, and tenderness. Because I think that's human nature. I think humans are so imperfect."

— Megan Mayhew Bergman

fascinated by all the multitudes the humans around me carry. I'm quite interested in the multitudes I carry, my inconsistencies, and my imperfection. We learn early on that characters are good or bad, like from fairy tales or biblical stories, and I have never met a human that I think is perfect or unflawed. So I think learning how to get that in on the page is a skill, and it's fascinating."

A very notably unique and definitive part of her writing process, which she shared with middle-schoolers during her assemblies, is how she comes up with ideas of what to write about. Like all authors, she researches the topics of interest and what her pieces are about, but she takes it further by getting involved, meeting, and talking with people rather than just researching them.

In this process, she can get a much greater and deeper understanding of people, cultures, issues, and realisations that other people simply cannot come to in the same field because she gets immersed in it to an extent that makes her more knowledgeable. This better perspective allows her to spread genuine information and total truth to others to let them know what is happening in certain situations, which she has

done through her journalism.

Although she has taken on many different types of writing- be it journalism, short- stories, climate activism stories, or even essays, her ability to work in so many other ways gives her even more experience and knowledge of writing as a whole. Her own current focus is her next book, *International Sweethearts of Rhythm*, which does not yet have a release date.

Students could learn from her incredible experiences and were fascinated by what she shared directly from her experiences. In highlighting the importance of editing and writing, she tells aspiring young writers, "Write with great self-belief, but don't edit with great self-belief. Editing is the time to allow the critical voice in, but you should never allow the critical voice in as you're writing because you start to block yourself."

Whether writers or not, it can be said with certainty that all the students she spoke to benefited greatly from her advice, involvement, and overall presence.

Published works

Novels:

- Birds of a Lesser Paradise (2012)
- Almost Famous Women (2016)
- How Strange a Season (2022)

Film:

- It Will Be Different For You (2024)

Journalism:

- The Guardian (Climate Changed, Seascape)
- Harper's Bazaar
- The Atlantic
- New Yorker

Awards

- Reed Environmental Journalism Award (Climate Changed, The Guardian)
- Joyce Carol Oates Literary Prize
- Mark Twain American Voice in Literature Award
- The Story Prize (How Strange a Season was Longlisted for all three)
- New Yorker's Best Books of 2022, Editor's Choice (How Strange a Season)