

Start of Year Assembly: Shibui and Kintsugi

Welcome to you all. I celebrate your return and hope that you had a wonderfully relaxing and refreshing break. To those who join us for the first time today, whether in the Thirds, the Fourths, or the Sixth Form, I offer the warmest welcome. I hope you will have a wonderful time in the years ahead, and I am sure you will bring fresh talent and enthusiasm to the school.

This morning, I would like to reflect on the successes we have enjoyed as a school and look forward to the year ahead. There is little doubt that last year ranks as one of our best ever. We won not one, but two national trophies in hockey and in cricket. This year has begun with yet more success, as our U15 team travelled on Sunday to Arundel to take part in the national final of their cricket tournament. They did brilliantly to reach the final four in the country, as lost only to the eventual winners. In academic terms, we have also hit the heights. The GCSE and A-level results were superb and place us amongst the best schools in the country. This gives us a tremendous springboard from which to approach the year ahead. We should be proud of all that we have achieved, and excited about what we will do next. In order to guide our thoughts I have been reflecting about this assembly and what I should say. My reflections have brought me to introduce the perhaps unusual topic of porcelain, specifically Japanese porcelain, and two Japanese ideas that I hope will be of interest.

When we think about pottery and porcelain, the mind goes first to China, where the art of making beautiful things out of fired clay began and was perfected. The earliest pot that we have found in China dates back to 20,000 years ago. Porcelain was not produced until about 200 BC, still almost 2000 years earlier than we managed to make it in Europe.

However, it was in Japan rather than China that I first began to take an interest in porcelain. The Japanese do not have quite such a history of making porcelain, but they have made elements of it their own. What they make is beautiful, fascinating, and may have a message for us this morning as we look ahead to the new academic year.

Many Japanese pieces of porcelain are made with a particular concept in mind. The Japanese describe the concept as *shibui*. An object which displays this quality is a *shibusa*. *Shibui* is an aesthetic of simple, subtle, and unobtrusive beauty. It is characterised by simplicity, naturalness, everydayness and imperfection. It can be hard for those of us brought up in the Western tradition of aesthetic beauty to understand *shibui*. *Shibui* has been described as elegant simplicity. Effortless effectiveness. Understated excellence. Beautiful imperfection.

Here are some images to illustrate what I mean. *Shibui* can be found in pottery. Or garden design. Or interior house design. It is also used to describe personal qualities. Expert singers, actors, potters, and artists of all other sorts are often said to be *shibui*; their expertise causes

translates as “golden joinery”. It is the art of taking broken pottery and repairing it, using lacquer mixed with powdered gold. It is very beautiful, and also gives us a profound thought

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