The Answers to 4 Questions

SGS Teachers Share:
1. Why They Got into Teaching,
2. How They Came to SGS,
3. A Favorite Lesson, and
4. Advice for Their Students

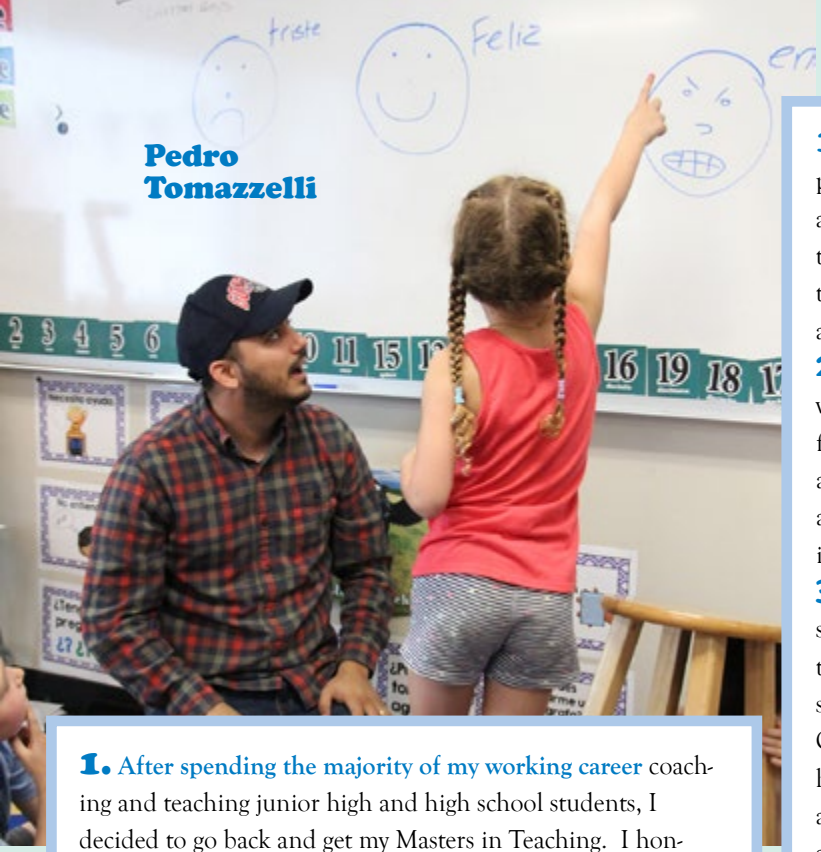
1. I love teaching kindergarten because it feels like a special privilege to be the person who welcomes little people into their first experience at "big kid school." Seeing students learn and grow when everything is new is really rewarding. I also have a lot of empathy for the parents who are sending their babies away for the first time and it is fun for me to develop relationships with each family.

2. I completed a student teaching practicum with Erika's kindergarten class in 2022 and I just fell in love with the people, the program, and the campus. The faculty at SGS is like a family, and I am grateful each day that I get to work alongside so many exceptional educators.

3. My favorite lesson to teach is probably when we choose our "superpowers" for the neighborhoods unit. Students must reflect on their work and experience in the first semester of kindergarten to decide which SGS core value they are already good at, and which they would like to work on as we move through our communities project. A lot of kids said that giving "best efforts" was their superpower. Some students chose "honesty" as their weakness and told stories about times they lied to their dad or their teacher. Other students chose "respect" as their weakness and talked about remembering to raise their hands or keep their hands to themselves.

4. Nothing has to be perfect, and as long as you are giving your best efforts, the product will be something worthwhile.

— Shantel Woodland, Kindergarten Teacher



Pedro Tomazzelli

1. **After spending the majority of my working career** coaching and teaching junior high and high school students, I decided to go back and get my Masters in Teaching. I honestly love all the grades I have taught over the years, but there is something special about 4th graders. They are at such a unique point in their life. They are curious, excited, intrigued, loving, and just so fun. They are still willing to show you love and affection, and accept your guidance with enthusiasm.

2. **I actually attended and graduated from NWC** in 1996... I had a deep loathing for the Dragons, LOL! I ended up going to SFCC and from there, The University of Montana on a full soccer scholarship. When I came back, I was playing on a coed soccer team, when the referee talked to me about coaching soccer with him at Saint George's... during the game! After thinking it over, I decided I would love to get back into coaching. As I showed up that beautiful summer day, I discovered I was going to be coaching BOYS soccer. I was so drawn to the quality of the community, the high expectations the kids had for themselves, and their willingness to be risk-takers. I love this school and the people who make it what it is, past, present, and future Dragons.

3. **My favorite activity to teach** in the 4th grade is probably science. All of fourth grade science intertwines from one to another. We get to teach about microworlds, which leads into invasive species, which leads to water quality, which leads into macroinvertebrates, and then to biomes. It is all connected, and it connects our beautiful campus and water sources. They do water testing and upload their data to the riverkeepers website. They take ownership of their beautiful campus, explore it, study it, and enjoy it.

4. **We talk a lot about this in the 4th grade:** The only things in life that YOU can control are your attitude, effort, and response. OWN THOSE THINGS!

— Heidi Schillinger, 4th Grade Co-Teacher

1. **As someone who has lived outside the U.S.** for a significant part of my life, learning languages and cultures has always been a big part of my life. Learning a language has significant benefits to the executive function of the brain, and there is no better time to start than elementary school since their brains soak up all that language like sponges.

2. **I started working at Saint George's** in 2021, and there were a few things that attracted me to this school. The beautiful campus and the fact that teachers are encouraged to use it as a teaching tool, the strong sense of community that thrives at SGS, and the emphasis on languages and cultures, as it is an international school.

3. **My favorite lesson** is a 4th grade restaurant unit, where students learn food vocabulary, likes and dislikes, foods and traditions from Spanish speaking countries, and a restaurant simulation to prepare students to order in a restaurant for real. Once students are very confident in their vocabulary, and we've had several times to practice, students call De Leon's and order a meal in Spanish. We then bring the food to campus and have a classroom party playing our favorite Spanish games while enjoying some delicious food.

4. **One of the things I try to pass on to my students** is to always approach new situations with an open mind and a willingness to try, even if they do not think they will enjoy it.

— Pedro Tomazzelli, Lower School Spanish Teacher

Heidi Schillinger

1. **I have always loved art.** As a child, I was lucky to have two grandmothers who were artists, and we would make art together when I visited. I took art classes through high school, and went on to get my master's degree in art. I also enjoyed working with kids from a young age. Growing up I babysat, volunteered in my church's nursery, and worked at summer camps. I love the energy and excitement kids have as they learn about the world around them. Now I get to do my dream job and make art with kids all day. It's the best!

2. **I came to Saint George's** in 2003. After four years of teaching in a public school, I was excited to have smaller class sizes and more flexibility in planning lessons/choosing my curriculum. Plus, after the first time I drove on to this stunning campus, I just knew I had to work here.

3. **I love doing clay projects** with students. I haven't met a kid yet that wasn't excited to work with clay. Since clay is three dimensional, it makes us use our brains in different ways. Students who find drawing challenging may connect more with sculpting. And while I find all types of art pretty magical, there is something so interesting about the transformation clay makes from a ball of mud into a beautiful shiny creation.

4. **Never stop creating.** Find your creative passion and make time to do it for the rest of your life. Whether that is making art, music, dancing, acting, or something else, having a way to express yourself on a regular basis is important. Your creative outlets can bring so much joy to your life, and they are great opportunities to build your community and connect with others.

— Jennifer Davenport, Lower School Art & Upper School Ceramics Teacher

1. **I started teaching a World Geography class** when I did my student teaching at Northwood MS. When I took over the 6th grade position here at SGS, the class was already verging on a World Cultures type vibe so I went with it and it has turned into a trip around the world to learn more about how people live their daily lives. It is constantly evolving and changing, and that is why I love it. 6th graders are a great group to teach because they are still young enough to see you as an authority figure and are also still goofy and like to have fun. It's a nice balance!

2. **I began teaching at SGS** in 2012 as a .4 11th grade US History teacher and have been teaching 6th grade since 2014 so I believe this is my 10th year teaching this class. I came to the school as a varsity basketball assistant coach for Pep and it evolved into a teaching and coaching position.

3. **One of my favorite lessons to teach** is about how the Earth works. I have a student stand in the center of the room and they become the sun. Another student orbits them, spinning at a tilt of 23.5 degrees while also orbiting the sun. It is very entertaining to watch as they attempt to move really fast while tilted, spinning, and orbiting at the same time! We then break down hemispheres, equator, tropic zones, the arctic and Antarctic Circles, and their minds are blown when we talk about places on Earth receiving 24 hours of sunlight or no sunlight based on the location and tilt of our Earth. The goal is to get the kids to understand that our Earth, its tilt, and people's location on it matter and affect how people choose, or are forced, to live.

4. Don't take life in middle and high school so seriously. Things happen that may seem big at the moment, but they won't later on. Enjoy your time with your friends and family, enjoy being a kid and don't stress about the "little" things when they arise.

— Brad Kirsch, 6th Grade Teacher

1. **I was taking classes after work** while living in Seattle and enjoyed taking sport related classes such as racquet ball and karate. Once while waiting to play a game of racquet ball, I asked the instructor how he ended up teaching sports at the college. He mentioned he used to teach PE in public schools and decided to get his master's degree so that he could instruct at the college level. It was that brief interaction that sparked my interest into becoming a physical education teacher.

2. **I began teaching at SGS** in September of 2004. My closest friend Jerry White was teaching at SGS at that time, and he suggested that I consider applying for the new PE position at the middle school. I applied during the spring of 2004 and visited the campus and met with Jamie Tender, who was the Head of the Middle School at the time. I was immediately floored by the amazing campus and the opportunity to design a brand-new PE curriculum.

3. **I enjoy teaching many units, games, activities,** but I think my favorite is the unit called Survivor Challenge. I initially came up with this idea to start the school year off with my freshmen classes. The purpose was to afford the students with teambuilding initiatives and challenges that required communication, problem solving, outdoor skills, physical stamina, and fun. The kids learn about the 10 essentials for survival, archery skills, the basics of starting a "leave no trace" fire, and collaborating to build a tent blindfolded, and collect water from the river using bottles and pipes.

4. **Don't take yourself too seriously.** Be curious, and go outside.

— Jim Tuck, Middle School Physical Education and Upper School Health & Fitness Instructor

1. **I've always enjoyed doing math** and learning the sciences throughout my time in school and always liked working with students. As I have worked with a variety of ages, 5th or 6th grade were preferred because I knew I wanted to work with younger students but still be able to engage in deeper thought and discussion.

2. **I love being outdoors** hiking, camping, fishing, etc. My family actually relocated to Spokane for better outdoor recreational opportunities. So, when I started looking for a teaching job, SGS quickly caught my attention because of all the awesome outdoor opportunities it had. I was very eager and excited to start teaching at SGS in 2022.

3. **I particularly enjoy teaching math, specifically pre-algebra.** It is often the first time students are introduced to variables and problems and it is fun to watch them learn and take on such a new topic.

4. **If there is something that you are interested in,** go do it and get involved no matter what anyone else thinks.

— Bethany Baldwin, 6th Grade Teacher

1. **As a child I was always making art**, so I think I always knew I wanted to pursue something creative. When I started to think of a career path in high school, I was enrolled in a fashion design class and for a moment I wanted to become a fashion designer. After some thinking and realizing I enjoyed babysitting, I decided to mix my love for art and helping children to pursue my degree in art education. Seeing students discover the world through art still amazes me. I love how art can connect people in all walks of life.

2. **This is my first year at SGS** and I was attracted to the community, the beautiful campus and how we value the arts here.

3. **I love open-ended art lessons the best.** Students all think differently and are attracted to different art media, so this allows for many possibilities. Currently my 10th graders are working on the theme of "artists communicate." We discuss a few different artworks and ask the questions, "What is the artist trying to communicate to the viewer with this art?" and "How did they use the materials to effectively communicate that idea?" Sometimes artist communicate feelings like warmth or love, other times they want to draw attention to something they think is important for the viewer to know/learn. Students can deep dive into any type of artwork and practice skills for their final work, whether that is drawing, painting, digital art, stop motion, sculpture or collage. With this lesson, students develop a concept, learn to use their artist voice and discover that art is powerful.

4. **Trust the process!** The process of making art, the process of your day to day and the process of your journey in life.

— Allie McBride, Upper School Art Teacher

1. **I have always been a voracious reader** and love the art of storytelling, no matter the form. I love books, theatre, television, spoken word, music—anything that involves a soul expressing. Finding ways to teach and produce these stories is always a joy. I had many inspiring teachers along the way (shout out to Ms. Tillison and Ms. Hoskings).

2. **I began teaching at Saint George's School** in the fall of 2019. That date tells you I experienced the wild pandemic ride right off the bat! The things that attracted me to the school, such as small classroom sizes, creative professional autonomy, and a strong community, are all the things that paid off during the pandemic teaching years!

3. **I love teaching Shakespeare!** As I tell my students, the reason we study Shakespeare isn't because he is the only great writer in the world. There are plenty of voices around the world and throughout time that could arguably rival The Bard. We study Shakespeare because, in addition to the universal themes he explored, he is also one the most widely referenced authors in history. Studying Shakespeare allows us to analyze other works inspired by his plays and to recognize millions of cultural allusions. Shakespeare also serves as an excellent vehicle for my students to learn about iambic pentameter, rhyme schemes, sonnets, public speaking, stage directions, characterization, and more!

4. **People have more than one version of themselves** throughout their life. Do not stress about what you want to do forever because forever is not a reality. Stay socially minded, find your community, and create!

— Brook Bassett, Middle School English Teacher, MS/US Drama Director

The 5th Question:

If they were trapped on a desert island, what books or movies would each of these teachers choose?

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1. Growing up in a rural area with a family that liked to camp and backpack into even more rural areas, I was always curious about all things related to nature. That was my gateway and was further supported by my parents and an excellent high school biology teacher, Mr. B, in Chewelah. Moving beyond high school I just followed this passion which led me to getting a PhD in Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology and my continued push to publish research.

2. When I was pursuing my PhD, I had the opportunity to be an instructor for a course and that experience opened my eyes to how much I enjoyed the process of thinking about pedagogy and inspiring curiosity in students. At Saint George's I have the academic freedom to shape my courses around my strengths and vision, which is something that I appreciate and the reason why I started teaching here. The student body and wider community is are reasons I continue to teach here and why I came back after a hiatus at Tulane University.

3. One unit I like to teach is genetics because the students get exposed to all the molecular techniques used in the foundational studies and learn how to work with molecules that are so small we cannot even see them. These techniques include DNA extraction, Polymerase Chain Reaction, and DNA electrophoresis. Coming out of this unit opens up a whole new way to think about how science is done and a better understanding of what modern science looks like in research laboratories.

4. When thinking about what you want to do with your life, find something that positively impacts your community. That is where you will find the most satisfaction.

– Ian Townley, Upper School Chemistry & Biology Teacher

1. It's a funny story, really tied to circumstance. I originally wanted to take French but my high school in San Antonio, Texas only offered Spanish! It turned out to be a blessing in disguise because my Spanish teachers were some of the most dynamic, creative, and compassionate educators who made language come alive. I ultimately majored in Spanish and loved my studies and experience in Spain so much that I went to graduate school (twice!) ~ Foreign Languages & Cultures at WSU and Hispanic Studies at Brown University. I taught numerous undergraduate Spanish language and conversation courses. Those classes and students were always highlights of my day!

2. When my son was born in 2017, it was really important to me to be able to raise him closer to family. I was living on the west side, but having lived in Spokane previously, I already knew of SGS. When the opening for a MS/US Spanish teacher was posted, I knew I had to apply! Coming to SGS was one of the best decisions ~ I have met some of my closest friends here and was supported through one of the most difficult times in my life.

3. If I had to choose only one activity, it would be reading with students. Each book we read opens up a new world to explore a different Spanish speaking country, whether it is food, celebrations, geography, or history, while also acquiring and improving language skills. I am very proud of our robust reading program in the secondary curriculum. I believe that students learn empathy and the power of stories—those we read about, those that are unsaid, and those that we go on to tell.

4. I love quotes! Here are a few of my favorite nuggets of wisdom: "Never lose the good of a bad experience." "Being kind is more important than being right. What people often need is not a brilliant mind that speaks but a caring heart that listens." "Never bypass an open restroom."

– Jamie Billings, Middle & Upper School Spanish Teacher