

# 'High tea' brings young, mature women together

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After reading Jayne Jaudon Ferrer's book of poetry, "She of the Rib," Hilliard Middle-Senior High School teacher Natasha Drake did some deep thinking – about the beauty of womanhood.

Then she began to think about how she could share her thoughts and a little bit of culture with her female students at HMSHS.

"We, as educators, are told that we must create culture for our students, especially when few cultural experiences are available to them," she said.

So despite the space and resource limitations she faced, Drake decided to provide a bit of that culture to the girls in the school's English honors classes.

"All the girls in these classes were invited," she said. "The only stipulation was that they had to come dressed for tea."

So over 40 young ladies and their teachers and school administrators gathered on Oct. 5 at Hilliard Middle-Senior High School for "high tea." The room was decorated with the family china on loan from the adult women, with each table decorated to coordinate with that china's theme.

Although the young women weren't required to wear hats and gloves, Drake says that will be her next "adventure." This go round, she was thrilled to see the young women dressing, and acting, like young ladies.

Laura Corrada, who teaches English at HMSHS, has hosted tea time at the Ritz-Carlton on Amelia Island, so she explained the rules of tea to the girls.



After the explanation, the girls enjoyed tea and cucumber sandwiches, scones with Devonshire cream, egg salad, watercress sandwiches and chocolate-covered strawberries.

Ferrer was on hand to speak to the girls about her poetry, sharing the story of how she became an author. She encouraged the girls to make the time to write down their thoughts, feelings and emotions, even if it's just "for fun."

Ferrer not only talked about the book that inspired Drake to organize the tea party, but she talked about her second book of poetry, "Dancing with my Daughter," as well. Ferrer told the audience that the book wasn't inspired by her children, since she is the mother of all boys.

Instead, she spent a year interviewing and observing friends with daughters. She also took care of her mother after she developed Alzheimer's



**At left, a student enjoys the food served with the tea, while guest speaker and author Jayne Jaudon Ferrer addressed the group, challenging them to aim higher as young women.** Submitted

Disease. She found the roles reversed between her mother and herself, and her description of her experience caused lots of tears during Drake's tea party.

Drake said Ferrer spent time afterward talking to the girls who are preparing to graduate, asking about their future plans. She added that the girls "bombarded" her classroom the following Monday to get their copy of Ferrer's book autographed by the author.

"I've never had students respond that way to literature," Drake said.

There were other signs that the tea party made a lasting impression. Drake was asked by one of the girls to help plan her 18th birthday party, which she wanted to mimic the tea party.

Drake said she realized that this young lady, and many like her, didn't have a mother or grandmother to teach her the "lost graces" she sought

to impart through the tea party.

"There is beauty in being a woman. There are social graces that are slowly being lost in our society, and this provided one more opportunity to impart some of them to our young ladies," Drake said. "These are the moments that shift my love for teaching into overdrive."

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