

Jonathan Briggs didn't plan on becoming a physics teacher. He was a kid who liked to give entropy a hand by taking apart "anything that broke" to play with it. In fact, he still relishes the opportunity to jimmy apart a toaster every now and then. But this impulse to dissect the mechanical world reflected a passion for systems, cause and effect, the way things work. Science provided method—a way to organize investigation, discovery, and description—and physics addressed the question "How?" at the most fundamental level.

As a senior at Williams College, Mr. Briggs was a ski instructor, T.A., and tutor. He enjoyed explaining things to friends and classmates, often with reference to physics concepts. In short, he found himself teaching. Growing up, the Briggs family moved often, following the rising star of his Mr. Briggs's father's publishing career. But from Virginia to Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and, finally, Marin County, good teachers remained a constant.

Bentley Upper Schoolers are fortunate that Mr. Briggs decided to join the ranks of those who inspired and taught him. In his own classroom, he relishes figuring out different angles by which to approach ideas and means of making difficult concepts concrete. His Junior and Senior Physics students, for instance, learn about sound waves by constructing their own musical instruments. In addition to the reward of watching students understand new things, Mr. Briggs also enjoys the way that teaching gives him a deeper understanding of his field. He aptly differentiates between his experience of teaching and learning physics by likening it to "learning how to make a hammer as opposed to knowing how to use one." Even this he is anxious to share with his students. His mini-semester course "A Little Physics for Little Bentley" brought Upper Schoolers to the Hiller Campus to teach basics of static electricity, force, and motion to fourth and fifth graders using balloons, eggs, empty soda cans and other common items.

It comes as no surprise that one so well acquainted with Newton's laws of motion should also enjoy exercising them. On weekends and vacations, one can find Mr. Briggs zipping downhill on skis or skimming over the bay in a sailboat with his parents and siblings.

Though he might not have seen it coming, Jonathan Briggs' infectious curiosity about the world around him—his impulses to build and break and move and make clear—have coalesced into excellent teaching. Bentley is fortunate and proud to have Jonathan aboard.