

I anticipated meeting our next inductee some time before I actually did. I taught her sister, who told me repeatedly, “she’s the exact opposite of me.” Since I really enjoyed teaching her sister, I wondered what she would be like. Then I met Jillian Sprong and discovered that two sisters could be very different, but equally engaging. Jillian has the demeanor and bearing of a serious scholar, but that is only one facet of her personality. I particularly like seeing a glimpse of Jillian’s mischievous grin—when she clearly gets a joke or reference that others might miss. The balance of scholarliness and introspection, with a touch of whimsy, is evident in something that Jillian wrote for our class, and which appeared in the school literary magazine. She described a drive with her father through a wooded area, and coming into direct contact with three coyotes. She wrote beautifully and metaphorically about the woods before the encounter, as she depicted imagining herself “traversing the wood that I have become so comfortable with,” and “deepening the darkness that already surrounds me.” The whimsy sneaks in when she sees the coyotes and imagines becoming the Road Runner, experiencing the “urge to squeal beep beep and run away.” This light, charming moment does not erase the seriousness of the meditation, and the conclusion that she, too, is part of the natural universe, which can be threatening at times. Jillian, however, is well equipped to confront the metaphorical coyotes that she might encounter. As an analytical and imaginative thinker, she has perceptive insights and the talent to give form to what she uncovers. Jillian’s accomplishments are wide-ranging, from gaining recognition for her soccer playing to competing in track; she makes a difference in the Verona schools through her involvement in Heroes and Cool Kids and VHS student council; her facility with language is not limited to English as she participates in the Mandarin Club and Foreign Language Competition. Jillian Sprong does not have to fear being lost in a darkened wood among coyotes; she is a beacon of talent, strength, and grace that will lead the way out. It is an honor to induct Jillian Sprong into the National Honor Society.