

Ian Ruskin Brings Thomas Paine to Life in “To Begin the World Over Again”

On November 18, 2024, the school auditorium was transformed into an 18th-century arena of revolution, enlightenment, and impassioned debate as Ian Ruskin delivered a masterful performance of his play, *To Begin the World Over Again: The Life of Thomas Paine* for the students in our Première. This 70-minute one-man show brought to life the story of one of history's most influential and often misunderstood figures: Thomas Paine.

Thomas Paine's groundbreaking pamphlet, *Common Sense*, was a focal point of the evening's performance. Published in January 1776, the pamphlet was a catalyst that shifted the tide of American sentiment. At a time when many colonists still clung to the hope of reconciliation with Britain, Paine's fiery arguments dismantled this illusion. His lucid, accessible prose — written for ordinary people — made the case that independence from Britain was not only desirable but essential for preserving liberty. He boldly argued that monarchy was an outdated and oppressive institution, and that America had the chance to create a fair and just society free from tyranny.



Paine's appeal lay in his ability to translate lofty Enlightenment ideals into language that resonated with the masses. His words ignited a revolution of thought, galvanizing the colonists to abandon the dream of reconciliation and embrace the cause of independence.

Ian Ruskin's performance captured this transformative energy. With passages from *Common Sense* and Paine's other writings woven seamlessly into the script, the audience was transported back to a time of intense political struggle and idealistic ambition that struck a chord with today's world.

The play did not shy away from the hardships Paine endured. From the dangers of revolutionary France to his estrangement from many of his contemporaries, Paine's life was as tumultuous as the times in which he lived. Yet, through it all, he retained an unshakable optimism, embodied in his belief that humanity could indeed “begin the world over again.”

The performance was made possible thanks to the generosity of ALFA and FSE.