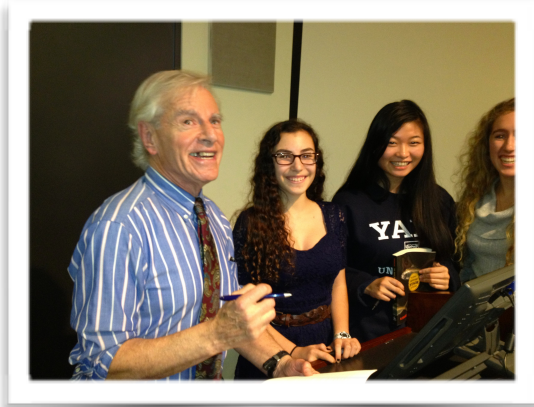


## H. Bruce Franklin War on the Environment



On Thursday evening, November 7, 2013, Dr. H. Bruce Franklin, author of The Most Important Fish in the Sea, addressed the collected Norfolk Academy Fellows. Dr. Franklin spoke on the topics of war and war on the environment. He asserts that the American victory in WWII, followed by the dawn of the “Cold War” only a couple years later, ushered in an age of assault on the environment through excessive nuclear and chemical weapons testing. Some of these same chemical weapons were modified to become the herbicides and pesticides that came to define our agriculture as well as our

lawns. It wasn't until Rachel Carson's Silent Spring in 1962 that the American public first began to become aware of the potent toxins we were pouring on our environment, all in the name of eradicating unwanted insect and weed pests. Several of these chemicals are still with us, still in our environment, and still exacting their toll on our health.

Dr. Franklin was moved to write about the virtually unknown menhaden in The Most Important Fish in the Sea when he witnessed the total capture of a vast school of menhaden while fishing off the coast of New Jersey. While researching his book, he began to realize just how important a species *brevortia tyrannus* is. The menhaden performs a number of miracles: it filters our waters, converts phytoplankton to protein, and serves as the major forage fish for almost every predator species, both finned and feathered, in and on the ocean. Due to pollution, overfishing, and predation, menhaden numbers have crashed to historic lows, down 90% since the early 1980's. The range of the species continues to shrink, too. Once fisherman saw schools that were 40 miles wide that stretched from Maine to Cape Cod. Those schools are gone now; menhaden are increasingly rare north of New England. More menhaden, measured in pounds, have been caught since the 1940's than all other fishes combined. Ironically, the fish has no food value for humans. It is processed for Omega 3 fish oil, an additive to a host of food and other products, and fish meal - animal feed - in what is known as a reduction fishery. The schooling nature of menhaden makes them an easy target for purse seiners. Despite their staggering fecundity, their numbers have collapsed to the point that every Atlantic state, with the exception of Virginia, has banned the reduction fishery in state waters. According to Dr. Franklin, the reduction fishery that persists in the Chesapeake Bay represents one more chapter in the war on the environment that began in the 1940's. He believes that the menhaden, and all the species that feed on menhaden, can only be saved by banning the reduction fishery in the Chesapeake Bay. It very likely is the “most important fish in the sea.”

