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The Spectrum

◆ *e cineribus et ad astra* ◆

NOVEMBER • VOL. 41, FALL ISSUE

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

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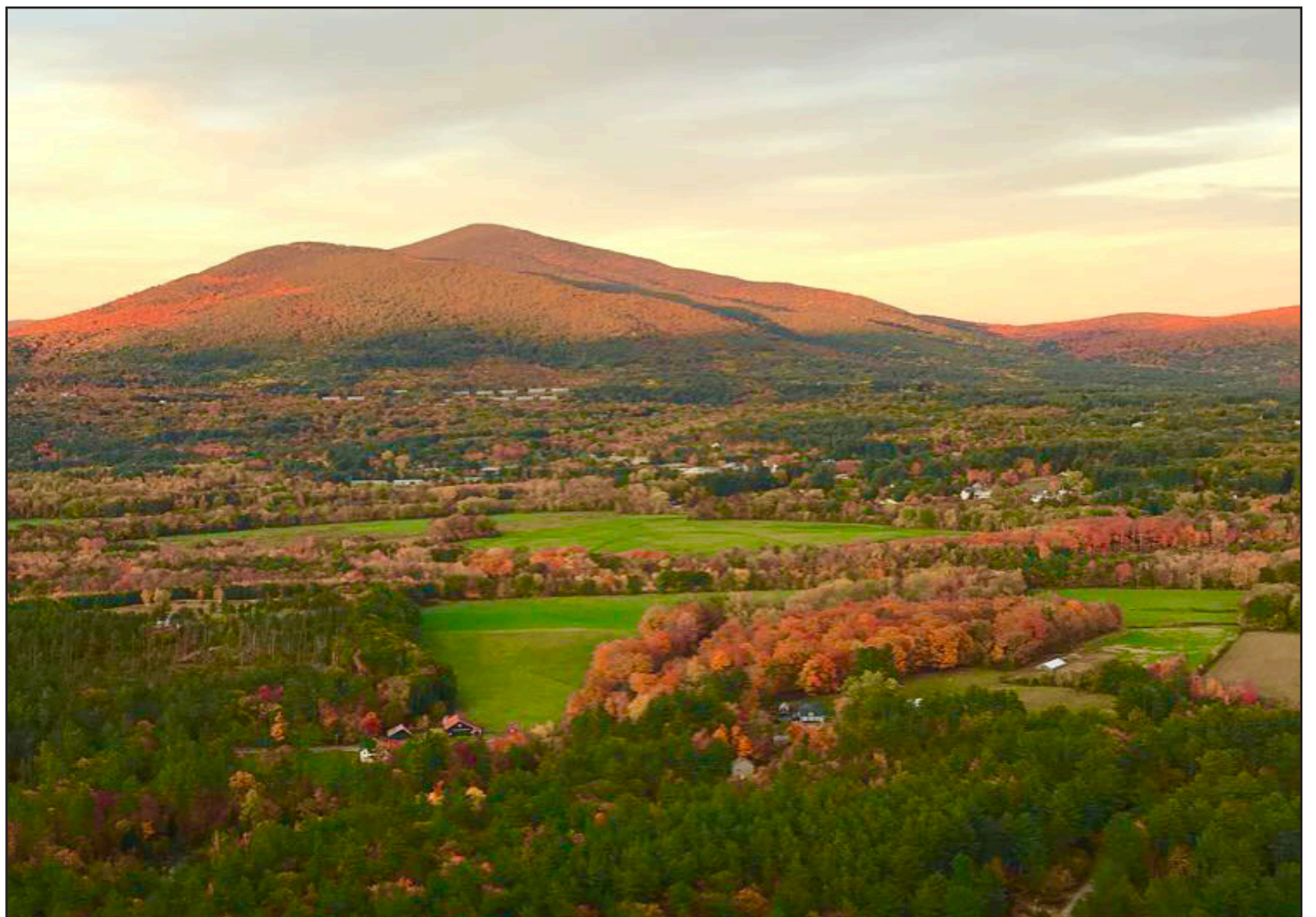
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Wow! The leaves are red on the mountain! ~Fall vibes~
ELIZABETH SUN

Heteronormativity: Bending Straight Norms

By AVNI MISHRA '23
Spectrum Staff

In January, former Dance Moms star and current influencer Jojo Siwa announced that she was part of the LGBTQ community and had been in a loving relationship with her girlfriend for several years. The revelation surprised many on the Internet, despite Siwa suggesting that she was not exactly a cookie-cutter heterosexual in her TikToks. Being a popular influencer that many young kids look up to, Jojo Siwa coming out is definitely a significant milestone in queer representation for children. However, though she received overwhelming support, opposition also flooded in. Enraged parents declared they would never let their children watch her content ever again. Some were in disbelief that Siwa was anything other than straight. Since these individuals halted support for the star under the pretention that she identified as straight, it begs the question: why did we assume any differently?

Heteronormativity, or the assumption that heterosexuality—exclusive attraction to the opposite gender—is “normal,” has been instilled in society for centuries. This ideology prevents queer individu-

als, especially queer children, from validating their identities, as their identity lies outside of the societal norm. Many people, allies included, often fail to recognize that this normalization exists, making it difficult to combat this form of homophobia.

Heteronormativity starts young, with obvious examples of it present in how we talk to children about sexuality. People do not realize that any comment about romantic relationships sends a message about sexuality. Children's clothing, for example, often contains quips about future relationships, such as “Sorry boys, I'm not allowed to date!” on girl clothing and “Future ladies' man” on boy clothing. This assumes that the child is romantically attracted to the opposite gender and does not even introduce the possibility of an alternative. Further, in conversation, adults often ask their children about whether their opposite gender friend is their significant other. While these comments seem insignificant, they communicate that heterosexuality is the default, and straying from that default is abnormal. In reinforcing heteronormativity, even accepting parents may create environments where children are too scared to come out, believing that there is something wrong

with them instead.

The double standard that exists in response to queer representation also promotes heteronormativity. When hearing about queer representation in children's media, adults often claim that they must protect their children from sexually suggestive media. However, this argument falls through when considering how both queer and heterosexual relationships are shown to children. For instance, many felt outraged at people shipping two of the male main characters of the recent Disney Pixar film, *Luca*, claiming that it was inappropriate to see minors as romantic partners. However, the two characters, Luca and Alberto, are thirteen and fourteen in the film, around the same age as Aang and Katara from *Avatar: the Last Airbender* are when they share an onscreen kiss in the series finale. Aang and Katara's relationship, though much more explicitly suggestive, received little to no retaliation, further enforcing the notion that heterosexuality is more acceptable to show to children, while homosexuality is dirty or overly sexual.

Along with confronting heteronormative standards in their everyday lives, queer children face the stressful hurdle of coming out to friends and family. On the surface,

it seems obvious that a child needs to clarify their sexual identity to the world—how else are they expected to know? But taking a step back and examining why one needs to come out reveals a truth: coming out seems necessary because people assume an individual is heterosexual. In clarifying their sexuality, an individual corrects this assumption. Queer people fear clarifying this pretention because they are afraid that others will be confused or disappointed by their deviation from “the norm.” That fear deters many from being honest about their identities to themselves and others. By eliminating the assumption that everyone defaults to heterosexuality, there is no need to come out.

All in all, heteronormativity creates hostile environments that make it difficult for queer people to exist comfortably with their identities. It's especially harmful because allies and even LGBTQ+ people may internalize these beliefs and allow some hate into deceptively safe spaces. But people can help eliminate societally engrained homophobia: whether it be through affirming queer identities to others or donating to charities like The Trevor Project, every fight for queer lives is a fight for normalizing queer identities.

Intro

Letter from the EICs

By JASMINE WU '22 & REBECCA ZHANG '22
Editors-in-Chief

Oh, fall—the time of pumpkin spice, cardigans, and... an insurmountable pile of leaves to rake. With all the chaos of the past years, New England autumn is the only constant in our life (well, if you're not considering global warming...), and we're here for it.

We've been craving consistency and normalcy since the pandemic began, but what are we really returning to? From the normalization of

hate crimes to unattainable beauty standards, these themes are explored in this issue's articles. Norms, normalization, normalcy, however you phrase it: all encompass the rhythm of life we've unconsciously settled for.

So as we settle into fall's comforting embrace, remember that normalcy can be redefined. And so, if you're looking for a change in your normal, join us here at *The Spectrum* every Thursday in 152 W :) (Sorry, couldn't help the plug!)

Happy fall y'all,
Jasmine and Rebecca

Meeting Principal Dean

By SANJANA RAO '22 & NOSARA MAXWELL '23
Spectrum Staff

Mr. Dorey's familiar scally cap was replaced with a new face when Joan "Joanie" Dean became ABRHS's principal. Moving from New York City, Ms. Dean found herself in an unfamiliar environment last July. Now, she looks ahead, using her past experiences to guide her as she navigates her crucial role in this community.

Having taught in primarily preparatory and private schools, Ms. Dean's transition to a public school was a significant change. "I had been teaching and working in an independent school for 21 years, and I loved it there, but I felt like I wanted to be part of a system that would serve more people and possibly be more equitable," she said. In New York, she missed the public service that she had first come to love while teaching in the Peace Corps.

As a child, Ms. Dean was encouraged by her parents—both teachers—to stay true to herself as she pursued her career. Her fifth-grade teacher also inspired her interest in STEM: "[She] really encouraged me... it wasn't

so cool as a girl to be good in math and science then, so I felt really supported."

In response to how her friends, family, and colleagues might describe her, Ms. Dean stated, "they would describe me as honest. I think they would say I'm hard-working. Sometimes I work too much," she laughed. "I think they would describe me as down to earth. And, you know, I like to connect with people, so maybe personable."

As Ms. Dean transitions into her role, she wants to implement her values in ABRHS. "Community is most important, so the first thing I really want to do is just support this great school as it is, and do whatever I can to become part of the community," explained Ms. Dean. "I think life and teaching in school is all about relationships, people and connections," she added. Ms. Dean encourages colleagues and students to reach out to her; she hopes to build genuine relationships and break down the barrier between administration and students.

A piece of advice that Ms. Dean received from a former mentor was that "[i]t's fine to be right and it's fine to be smart [b]ut if you can't be kind first,

The Spectrum

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then it doesn't really matter how smart you are." In a time where life teeters between academics, friendships, and other obligations, Ms. Dean hopes students will strike a balance in order to

thrive.

It is exciting to have someone with a fresh perspective take charge at the high school; Ms. Dean will undoubtedly be a valuable addition to admin-

istration. Coupled with her extensive experience and dedication, her influence will undoubtedly help ABRHS flourish.

Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings and its Stereotypes

By MILENA ZHU '22
Co-Chief Layout Editor

The movie screen's eerie glow illuminated the theater as my friends and I tiptoed to our seats. As I settled into mine, *Shang-Chi* began, resembling a Chinese mythological movie (think *Fellowship of the Ring* intro but ~Asian~). The soothing Mandarin voice-over brought familiarity, reminding me of rainy afternoons spent with my mom. I walked out giddy, babbling with my friends as we exited O'Neil Cinemas. Seeing Asian representation and hearing Mandarin in a big blockbuster lit up my heart. However, dazzled by the graphics and Michelle Yeoh, I had overlooked many issues with the film's handling of Asian themes. *Shang-Chi* is not the "Asian Black Panther," and Disney should not be applauded for performing the bare minimum when telling Asian stories.

Although it's touted as the pinnacle of a new era for Asian media representation, *Shang-Chi* fails to properly communicate the issues facing the Asian community. The film makes surface-level references that perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

Surprisingly, the movie starts off well. It subverts the model minority myth, the idea that Asians are naturally smart and hard-working. *Shang-Chi* screenwriters defy stereotypes, showing that Asians are not a monolith of STEM white-collar workers; the movie first deceives the audience into praising

Shang-Chi as the stereotypically successful Asian with a montage of suits and cars, only to reveal his blue-collar job as a valet.

However, the movie quickly backtracked, giving *Shang-Chi* and his friend, Katie, stereotypical Asian credentials. He's a genius who speaks multiple languages, and Katie graduated from UC Berkeley with honors. Their lot in life no longer presents the Asian blue-collar workers as successful in their own right, but rather as failures who supposedly "underutilize their potential." No plot progression benefited from this undermine, and it only served to undermine the original mitigation of the model minority myth.

Additionally, the movie trivialized microaggressions through superficial examples. While *Shang-Chi* socializes with friends, the movie reveals that a high school bully once called him Gangnam Style. Profound. Screenwriters minimized other forms of microaggressions as well, categorizing them as the universal Asian experience without elaboration. "Gangnam Style" inadequately represents the otherization and self-hatred produced by microaggressions, dismissing anti-Asian racism as mere bullying.

Equally important, screenwriters almost implemented a stereotype. Originally, they intended *Shang-Chi*'s sister, Xialing, to have a colored hair streak to play into the visual cue of the radical Asian

girl. This trope is an effect of the model minority myth and homogenizes Asian women as submissive; a strong, independent woman then becomes an anomaly. The actress, Meng'er Zhang, vetoed the hair streak, refusing to play into the Hollywood trope.

Similarly, the movie lacks a cohesive Asian-related theme or unique commentary about Asian experiences. *Shang-Chi* uses Chinese culture as an aesthetic with a hodgepodge of ninjas, ancient dojos, and mythological creatures rather than as the story's foundation. This superficiality stems from the source material's core: the racist comics of the '70s and '80s. *Fu Manchu*, the villain of this era, existed in Chinatown's darkness and represented the Yellow Peril that white Americans attributed to Asian immigrants. The rhetoric of the Yellow Peril—Asians as the downfall of white civilization—still exists today, with Asians shouldering the blame for COVID-19. Though the material has evolved, remnants of racism persist. The Mandarin is barely an improvement from *Fu Manchu*, and the skill of *Ta Lo*'s talented fighters is treated as luck rather than merit: they derive their prowess from ancient magic, while Western heroes like *Tony Stark* work hard with technology. The climax was muddled with underdeveloped, fragmented ideas of filial piety, honor, and stereotypical Hollywood tropes.

So, with all these issues, why is

Shang-Chi beloved by many? In reality, *Shang-Chi* received 53 percent and 42 percent approval ratings in Taiwan and Hong Kong respectively. This may be because the movie focuses on antiquated Chinese traditions, misrepresenting current customs. However, in the United States, this issue does not manifest within Asian Americans, as many maintain less contact with modern-



Shang-Chi, grrr.
EMILY HILTUNEN

Bits

Introducing Bits Section

By SOPHIE ZHANG '22
Bits Editor

Hey Bitsies!
Welcome to your go-to place for the latest news and stories from the AB community: Bits (Breaking in *The Spectrum*) We started Bits last year as a response to the many newsworthy events that occurred in the nation and our own community. With Bits, The Spectrum has provided more timely coverage of topics such as the Atlanta Shootings in March and the “lesbian” censorship incident this summer.

Every Tuesday or so, we’ll be publishing our Bits articles on our website (thespectrumabrhs.com). Keep an eye out for them in the morning email or on our Instagram (@theabspectrum). We’ll also be printing some articles in our physical newspapers such as the Fall Issue that you’re reading right now!

Thank you so much for your support and patience as we navi-

gate The Spectrum’s newest evolution. The Bits team and I guarantee that we’ll help keep you informed, engaged, and curious about our AB community.

Lots of love,
Sophie Zhang

P.S. If you have anything that you want Bits to report and investigate, leave a comment on our website! The url is <https://www.thespectrumabrhs.com/>. Check it out!



Scan with your phone camera
ONLINE SOURCE



Read the Bits article about AB’s reaction to the Atlanta Shootings in March.
REBECCA ZHANG

“Lesbian” Censored on Chromebooks

By ISHA AGARWAL '23
Spectrum Staff

Last year, YouTube videos containing the word “lesbian” were blocked on school Chromebooks. While administration has since removed the censorship, its social impact of sexualizing queer women still stands. This pervasive fetishization stigmatizes and undermines the validity of lesbian relationships, harming the queer community.

As you may have noticed, a school-installed software on our Chromebooks blocks YouTube videos containing certain keywords. This filtration is in accordance with the Children’s Internet Protection Act, which requires public schools to block any content that is “obscene, child pornography, or harmful to minors.” Until July 2021, videos with the word “lesbian” in the description, including educational videos like “Word Origin: Lesbian,” were blocked, as shown in the image below. On the other hand, videos with words such as “gay,” “queer,” and “transgender” were not.

According to Amy Bisiewicz, the Director of Educational Technology at Acton-Boxborough Regional School District, a filter was applied last year after an incident involving younger students who accessed “inappropriate sites based on the keywords they used in search engines. As a result, a filtering rule for ‘lesbian kissing’ was applied to our configuration,” she said. Ms. Bisiewicz further added that the filtration was unintentional and that the administration removed it when alerted. She ensured that the AB Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will vet the list of filtered words to ensure that such incidents do not happen again.

Nevertheless, the incident perpetuates the sexualization of queer women. “I don’t believe many people stop to consider how powerful filtering tools are,” Ms. Bisiewicz said. Blocking the word “lesbian” tells lesbian students that their identity is taboo and something to be ashamed of—that indecency and lesbians go hand-in-hand. Thus, even with unbiased intentions, the filtration has harmed students and upheld systemic queerphobia.

The LGBTQIA+ Experience at AB

While the censorship incident has been resolved, queerphobia and its underlying stereotypes persist at AB. The GLSEN 2019 study found that 59.1% of LGBTQIA+ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexuality and 42.5% felt unsafe because of their gender expression.

Nearly 100% of LGBTQIA+ students have heard “gay” used as an insult.

In fact, several AB students have heard anti-LGBTQIA+ slurs and demeaning phrases such as “that’s so gay” being used in school. An AB student commented, “It’s really hurtful because so many of us are in the closet. We hear what other students say, and it affects us.”

In addition to queerphobia, queer women also face sexism. Lesbian relationships are often viewed through the “male gaze.” Ms. Ryden, advisor of the ABRHS Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) said, “[for] women that identify as [queer], there is a certain amount of fetishization... so [their relationships] are put in terms of desire and pleasure for [straight men] rather than the emotional weight a relationship bears for those two women.”

The media perpetuates the male gaze by sexualizing and trivializing lesbian relationships. For example, searching “lesbian” on Instagram will result in photos of women in compromising positions. On the other hand, relationships between men often appear more “family-friendly” and legitimate. As one student put it, “people who don’t accept gay people will try to make [gay] women date men much more than they will try to make [gay] men date women.” Another student mentioned how a classmate would ask them every day if they were “still gay today.”

The lack of lesbian representation in the media furthers the stigmatization. “Whenever... I want to see myself on screen, it is so hard for me to actually find what I want to look for” said Maci Montenegro '23, an ABRHS student who identifies as a lesbian. “It’s just frustrating to not be able to see myself.”

The constant invalidation of LGBTQIA+ women often makes it harder for them to even realize their sexuality. A student explained how the fetishization of queer women “made it very difficult for [her] to realize that [she likes] women because the way it’s shown in society is gay men are gay, but women are not.” In addition, Biz Brooks '23, a non-binary ABRHS student, described how “a lot of people that are assigned female at birth... are taught that they have to just accept things and internalize them rather than going back against them.” This submissive behavior can make it harder for people assigned female at birth to resist societal norms and be open about being LGBTQIA+.

What You Can Do

Queerphobia is heavily inter-

twined in society, so supporting LGBTQIA+ rights against heteronormativity and cisnormativity is important. You can be an ally in many ways. This section is a starting point for allyship, though it is by no means an all-inclusive guide.

The first step is education. An ally should educate themselves on basic terminology, including various identities and how to respectfully refer to LGBTQIA+ people. An ally should also read LGBTQIA+ stories and follow queer influencers on social media. Joining the GSA is an excellent way to learn about LGBTQIA+ experiences and advocate for change.

After learning about the LGBTQIA+ community, it’s crucial that you apply that education. Normalize pronoun sharing, don’t assume someone’s gender or sexuality, and call out queerphobia. When meeting new people, introduce yourself with your pronouns and use they/them pronouns before you learn someone else’s. Finally, the most important step to being an ally is standing up whenever someone makes a queerphobic remark. Call out your friends whenever they make those “jokes.” While these actions are simple, they have the potential to change lives.

Lastly, in addition to understanding queerphobia, remember to appreciate the LGBTQIA+ community. As Ms. Ryden said, “you often talk about the struggles [marginalized groups] face... While that is important to address so that you can continue moving forward, there’s also the flip side, where you want to celebrate the resistance, celebrate the pride, celebrate everything that this community has done.”

Conclusion

Queerphobia exists within our community—the school’s censoring incident and the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ experiences demonstrate that. While the administration’s removal of the censorship indicates progress, there’s still a long battle ahead. After all, it is incidents like censoring the word “lesbian” that fuel the sexualization of queer women, intersecting sexism and homophobia.

Even though systemic queerphobia is deep-rooted in society and will require an overhaul of traditional beliefs, your individual efforts matter, too. Each and every ally to the LGBTQIA+ community is invaluable. You can make a difference in someone’s life just by introducing yourself with your pronouns or shutting down an offensive joke. Your actions, your voice, and your empathy do make a difference. Never underestimate your power to push for change.

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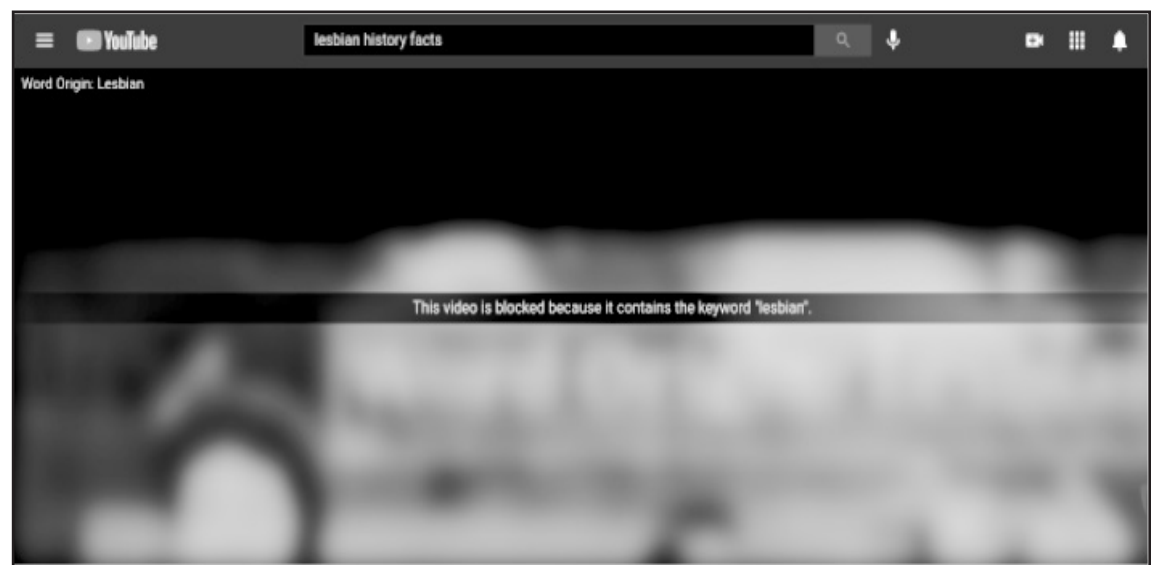
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“Lesbian” was censored on school chromebooks.
ISHA AGARWAL

News

A Return to Normalcy: The “Seven-Drop-One” Schedule

By EMILY XU '23
Chief Copy Editor

For the past few years at ABRHS, each new school year has come with a new schedule. However, the 2021–2022 school year marks the return to the “seven-drop-one” schedule, which debuted in fall 2019. Previously, students attended all seven of their classes every day, and each class was around forty-five minutes. With the dropping schedule, students drop one class every day and have fifty-seven minute-long periods. This dropped class becomes a student’s first period class the next school day, so students have classes at different times of day. Noticing that students and staff alike were satisfied with the dropping schedule, administrators reimplemented it for the 2021–2022 school year. These scheduling changes are beginning

to bridge the gap between administrative decisions and community input.

Betty Baker, an associate principal at ABRHS, expressed that many factors went into the decision-making behind the “seven-drop-one” schedule. Since 2014, the district has explored different scheduling options and has garnered input from over one thousand students, six hundred parents/guardians, and one hundred faculty members. Stanford University’s Challenge Success, which offers strategies to increase student engagement and wellbeing, was also considered. Moreover, Franklin and Westford’s dropping schedules served as inspiration. “We were looking at five goal areas,” explained Ms. Baker, including “longer class periods for more time to do some extended learning... an increase in the likelihood that students wouldn’t have

homework every day or too many assessments on any given day... student wellness... maintaining a reasonable length for our lunch period... and a way to gain back lost minutes from the later start times.” With longer periods, teachers could spend more time on collaborative work and project-based learning; dropping a class also decreased homework, improving student wellbeing. Ms. Baker noted that some teachers were concerned with the dropping schedule from a planning standpoint, but overall, the benefits associated with the dropping schedule outweighed these costs.

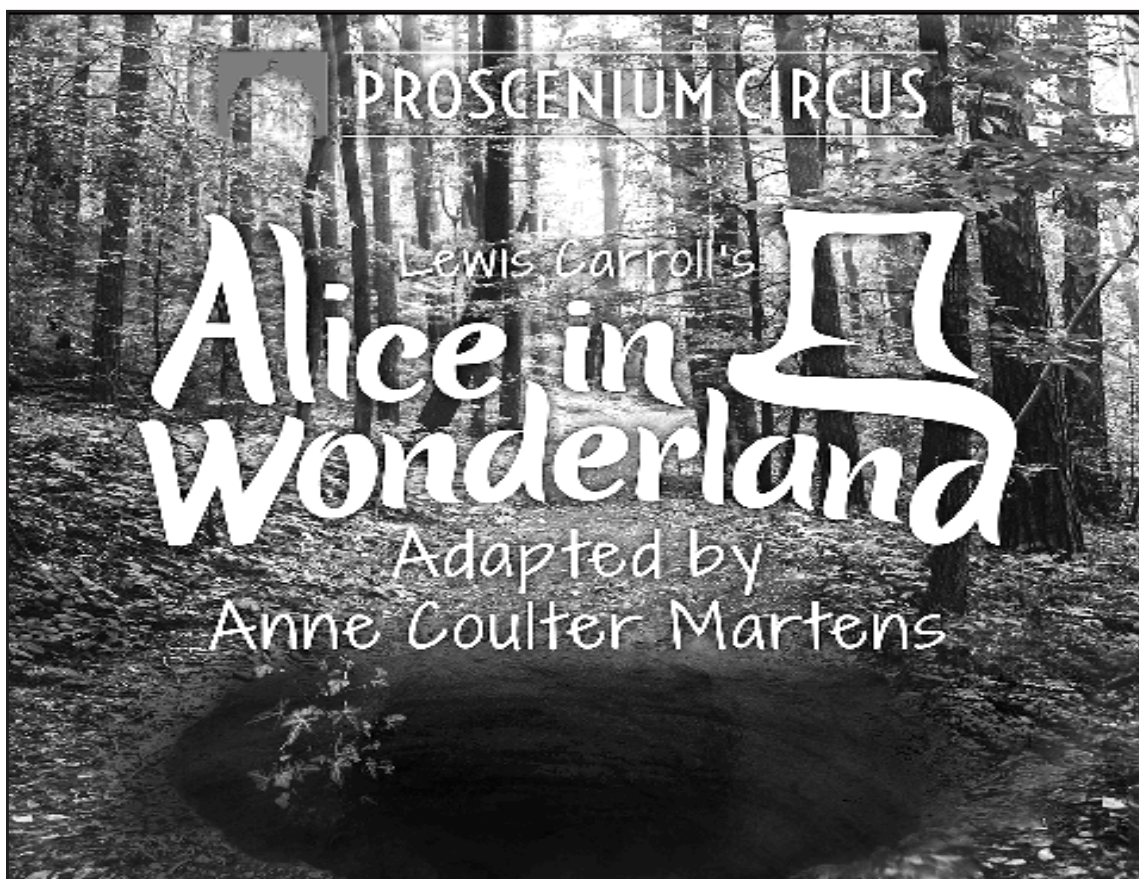
Why did the dropping schedule fail to return for the 2020–2021 school year? Ms. Baker explained it simply: “because of the hybrid schedule, we weren’t able to do it.” Maurin O’Grady, an associate principal, added that “had last year been a typical year and COVID-19

didn’t exist, [the schedule] would have [returned].” When choosing to reimplement the “seven-drop-one” schedule this year, Ms. Baker expressed that administrators were concerned about adding yet another change for students and faculty. “People have been through a lot of change. I like what this schedule has to offer in terms of the goals we have around extended learning, but it’s another change. I was particularly worried about that for teachers: now they’ve had to pivot multiple times within a short period of time.”

Does the “seven-drop-one” schedule improve student welfare? Many students, including senior Aparna Kamath, believe so. Aparna remarked that she “prefer[s] it because it gives you a break from a class every day, which helps to destress. There’s also less of a rush to finish your homework every

night.” Aparna added, “With the dropping schedule, I can see more of my friends at different times for lunch. There’s less monotony to our schedule, and it’s refreshing to have classes at different times.” She did note that remembering what day and color it was (ex: Blue G Day) is sometimes difficult, but the advantages far outweigh this minor complaint. Overall, it’s clear that the dropping schedule has achieved its goals and even exceeded expectations in specific areas.

The scheduling changes are merely one example of initiatives taken to involve student voices in administrative decisions. The success of the dropping schedule may be the start of a closer relationship between students and administration. Who knows what next year will bring? There may even be a period dedicated to petting therapy apacas!



PC’s Fall Play *Alice in Wonderland*

By MEGHAN LAWSON '23
Spectrum Staff

With COVID-19 regulations loosening in Massachusetts, theater programs have begun returning in-person to the stage. This included Acton-Boxborough Regional High School’s theater department Proscenium Circus (PC). New Director Margaret Maguire championed PC’s return, and this fall, the group kicked off its new season with the classic *Alice in Wonderland*. The play’s opening night was October 29, succeeded by five additional performances the next week.

Before the pandemic, PC performed *Twice Charmed* and *Freaky Friday* in-person in Fall 2019. The theater department then began its festival season with *A Matter of Life and Death* right before lockdown in March 2020. With COVID-19 restrictions preventing an in-person show last year, PC presented *Warchester Academy*: a virtual musical written by dedicated AB drama students. Although the traditional PC format calls for a fall musical, there was no singing in *Alice in Wonderland*. In an interview with *The Spectrum*, Director Maguire revealed that while many theaters are reopening, CDC guidelines consider any

activity with singing to be high-risk. Singing and dancing was unfortunately not an option, but PC was still determined to return to the stage. Cast member Emma Early echoed this sentiment, reiterating how *Alice in Wonderland* created community unity. “I cannot think of a better cast and more wonderful show to get back into this art form with a renewed sense of play, enthusiasm, and imagination.” COVID-19 has continued to complicate performing arts’ return and while virtual musicals are entertaining, both the audience and the cast were eager to return to in-person theater.

Although millions of people across the world know the story of *Alice in Wonderland*, many are unfamiliar with the story’s origins. In 1865, Charles Dodgson, better known by his pen name Lewis Carroll, wrote *Alice in Wonderland* in London. While attending Oxford, Dodgson befriended the dean of the Christ Church College Henry George Lidell. One day, Charles took Lidell’s daughters out for a picnic and made up a story using the eldest daughter’s name, Alice, and thus the story was born.

Adapted from a story of fantasy and wonder, the play may have seemed to be a fairly standard show where the actors navigate *Wonder-*

land’s fantastical setting; however, PC’s version strayed a bit further from the textbook interpretation of the show. Director Maguire explained that the show was in the style of devised theatre; “sometimes the children [were] furniture, fake walls, doors, and sometimes people in *Wonderland* watching things. It [was] meant to look like it [was] happening on the spot, even though it [was] obviously planned.” To accomplish this, the show used the stage as a playground, with the students acting as children playing together to tell the story. Cast member Eli Jarsky elaborated, “each time we rehearse a scene, there’s a high chance someone will try saying their line slightly differently or act a certain way they hadn’t before. Everyone constantly changes when we practice together, and this growth inspires me to work harder and improve my own choices.” The play’s style has allowed the actors to work together in new ways that enhance each other’s performances. Although PC’s *Alice in Wonderland* was not exactly what Charles Dodgson first envisioned, it captured the imagination and wonder that his story embodies. PC worked through adverse circumstances in a triumphant return that opens the door for many other exciting performances.

The Monthly Advisory

By JOY WANG '23
Spectrum Staff

Advisory is an unquestionable aspect of ABRHS student life. Yet, there has been more experimentation with the frequency and structure of the period recently. Two years ago, advisories met every Tuesday, where students gathered in classrooms to connect with each other and their advisor, a faculty member. Last year, the school set daily advisory periods in both the remote and in-person learning programs and mixed students of different grades. But changes occurred once again this September: advisory has now become a monthly activity. While only three monthly advisories have occurred so far, the recent changes raise questions of advisory’s purpose and how it can be used most effectively.

According to Ms. Rosenman, school counselor and wellness coordinator, the goals of advisory have changed over the years. Initially, the period was intended to create opportunities for students to connect with a teacher without grades and to interact with other students they may not share classes with. Additionally, it created space for students to unwind during the day, participate in school-wide activities, focus on mental wellness, and meet state-mandated anti-bullying education requirement. Those goals still remain relevant today, but student-staff opinions and the low frequency of meetings have created new challenges to overcome.

The administration is trying to balance various priorities this year, as “elevating student voice[s] is more important school-wide,” Ms. Rosenman explains. In order to connect all the students and educators, advisory classroom sizes will increase to a standard classroom size in an “unfortunate trade off.” However, this does not mean less emphasis on interpersonal connections, nor is it overlooking the importance of wellness. The administration’s School Improvement Plan aims to use advisory to address student engagement, inclusive practices, and social emotional learning. As such, the School Wellness Advisory Committee (SWAC) was established in 2018 to compare other

schools’ models and discuss implementation at ABRHS. In short, advisory will constantly evolve to meet the needs of the community, and this year is another chapter in the experimentation process.

When asked about their experiences in previous years, some students reported participating in a wide variety of activities: they baked, played games, and wrote cards. During the Student Council meeting on October 20, members also had positive memories to reminisce on and reported feeling generally more comfortable when advisories met frequently with peers of the same grade.

However, several students reported something akin to a silent study hall experience. Other responses reflected frustration and boredom with watching videos or having an extended advisory period; they found it difficult to connect with other students they rarely met in a non-interactive environment. Even topic-specific advisory groups, such as the remote music interest advisory held last year, were met with disappointment as some students felt the subject was not always the focus of the period.

The strength—but also weakness—of the thirty-minute period lies in its flexible agenda. In order to truly appeal to and build rapport among the student body, advisory periods ought to be multifaceted. Students are not a monolithic group, and some enjoy advisory in all its forms while others see no purpose in the period. Therefore, it is important to discuss how advisory can benefit all students as well as consider what advisors need to do for the period to be a positive experience. Advisories can be used for team-building activities, mental wellness time, educational presentations, and much more. But it is the ABRHS community’s responsibility to determine its place and purpose.

Since the beginning of the school year, students have only experienced a couple of advisories, so it may be too early to draw conclusions. It remains to be seen how the monthly advisories will generally be used—it is only with time that these periods will be refined to appeal to student interest.

Normalcy

How Hate Crimes Have Been Normalized in Social Media

By ANUSHA SENAPATI '24
Spectrum Staff

Think about the last time you scrolled through social media and encountered news of a recent social catastrophe. I'm guessing it wasn't so long ago. Now, consider what you did with that information: some of us have probably guiltily scrolled past or maybe even ignored it. Though hate crimes are now shared more frequently on social media, normalization of hate crimes rises with their increased visibility, blurring the line between allyship and performative activism.

Interestingly, our favorite celebrities play a large role in the normalization of hate crimes. With accounts racking up millions of followers on social media, many influencers feel pressured to post information about recent events, regardless of their knowledge or comfort level in the subject matter. This produces mixed results, including comparison and backlash. For instance, when fans compared posts from Kylie Jenner and Selena Gomez, they noticed that Gomez used her platform to repost Black Lives Matter events while Jenner did not. As a result, many criti-

cized Jenner for being less "useful" than Gomez.

There are several issues with sharing hate crime information on social media—namely performative activism, or supporting a cause for attention rather than for creating real change. Influencers repost information for recognition while a movement is at its height, but quickly return to their everyday lives (and posts) when action deescalates, with social media users following suit. While sharing on social media can be helpful, it is important to take a step back and remember why we should be raising awareness of hate crimes: to address the systemic roots of hate and dismantle them.

Further, stereotypes perpetuated by popular media contributes to the normalization of hate crimes. Stereotypes desensitize us to hate crimes by reinforcing falsehoods about a marginalized group. For example, popular TV shows have historically portrayed African Americans to be criminals, constructing a stereotype that leads some to believe that African Americans cannot be trusted and that they are violent. Over time, our perception of people is skewed by these generalizations, which

ignores people's intersectional and multifaceted identities. The media's stereotypes are especially dangerous for impressionable youth as they normalize black-and-white categories and discrimination. As people lose their ability to distinguish between what is "normal" and right, they often attribute the hate crime to a victim's inherent criminality rather than seeing it for what it is: a crime that resulted in the loss of human life.

Along the same lines, public sympathy for perpetrators of hate crimes reveals how deeply entrenched the normalization of hate crimes has become. On March 16, Robert Aaron Long murdered six innocent Asian people. Although the event was horrific and garnered national attention, people began to sympathize with Long. Excuses for his behavior started from mental health to the idea that he was simply having "a bad day." It is blatantly problematic to excuse murder—especially when racism and deliberate intention is involved. Additionally, contemplating a murderer's mentality also takes the focus off of the minorities—the victims of hate crimes—and the need for education, which can help prevent future hate crimes.

The pitfalls of activism on social media, stereotyping, and ignorance to minority groups' struggles have directly and indirectly normalized hate crimes. Not only do these hate crimes harm minorities, but they also affect generations of young people's perceptions of how they should react to discrimination and hate.

To effectively combat hate, there are several steps you can take, such as spreading accurate

and helpful information, keeping an open mind about minorities' challenges, and looking at the media's depiction of hate crimes critically. Additionally, remind yourself that seemingly insignificant stereotypes can be incredibly harmful, and catch yourself when you make judgements based on bias. Such steps will ultimately lead us towards a society, where hopefully, the normalization of hate crimes decreases.



Social media: a catalyst or a cure to the normalization of hate crimes?
ONLINE SOURCE

New Climate Mentality

By MAYENLI COMFORT-MARYAM '23
Spectrum Staff

Climate change has become a new "norm": though it dominates news, discussions, and politics, there is little progress towards changing its path. The past decade has seen some of the most alarming weather events, from disastrous hurricanes to destructive wildfires. As abnormal weather becomes more common, people become increasingly desensitized to the magnitude of the change, viewing it as a normal occurrence. The unwillingness of the public, especially in developed countries, to take responsibility for climate change furthering its normalization.

Unless you're experienced in climatology or environmental science, our perception of "normal" weather patterns is fundamentally flawed. Even then, we perceive past climates as merely the past, not something we've experienced. Our assumption of what weather is supposed to look like is flawed because we are only on Earth for a relatively short period of time. If you grow up in an era where disastrous weather events occur frequently, then that becomes "normal" to you, even though it's really abnormal.

Frequent news of abnormal weather further reinforces our small-scale mentality, causing us to be unfazed by them. For instance, addressing ocean pollution was a highly popular topic in 2017. Everybody was trying to "save the turtles" by using metal straws and wearing Pura Vida bracelets. Are the turtles saved? No, but we don't care anymore because sea life suffering is no longer abnormal. Highlighting issues is a good start, but the public's initial enthusiasm quickly fades, it fails to invoke real, lasting change. We've become so familiarized with the stomach-dropping images of climate change that it does not evoke as much emotion or will to create environmental change as it once did.

Much of the apathy surrounding climate change comes from devel-

oped countries, even though its inhabitants are the biggest contributors to climate change. According to a United Nations report, the richest 1 percent of the world emits twice the amount of greenhouse gas emissions as the poorest 50 percent. From 1850 to 2011, more than 79 percent of all emissions were produced by developed nations, but developing countries bear the brunt of climate change's effects, which exacerbate their existing problems. This is evident in places like rural India, where uneven rainfall patterns diminish crop yields, and sub-Saharan Africa, where harsher temperatures turn farmland into desert.

Despite their contribution to climate change, many citizens of developed nations are unconcerned about its risks as they face fewer of the consequences since their economies and societies are fossil fuel based. This manifests itself in minute, performative actions; when guilt pricks at our consciences, we shake it off through mini tasks like picking up litter, celebrating Earth Day, and posting scenic pictures on Instagram rather than addressing the problem at its root. However, short-lived performative actions don't create any real change if we don't commit to doing them on a regular basis.

To alleviate the current climate crisis, we must face hard truths: yes, we are directly responsible for the damage others are experiencing, but there are steps we can take to improve the climate situation. We can invest in energy efficient appliances and bulbs, source meat from local butchers or eat less red meat, and reduce food waste by composting. And yes, your mom was right, taking shorter showers and unplugging appliances when not in use makes a difference too. We can't just care about climate change when there's another hurricane or when another species goes extinct. We, as a global collective, have to make a continuous dedicated effort to curb these horrible events—Instagram slideshows and infographics do not count.

How Will the COVID Pandemic End?

By AMY MENG '25
Spectrum Staff

On March 12, 2020, AB announced that due to the threat of COVID-19, the district would temporarily close its schools. Although the closure was originally set for a week, some people ended up spending the rest of the school year and the majority of the next without entering a school building. Since that day, our lives have been consumed by the pandemic, and it's been confusing. Many of us have struggled to keep up with the media's different takes on the virus, and our hopes have fluctuated with the waves of news. Through it all, we've looked to the horizon, hoping to catch a glimpse of normalcy. Though we've long anticipated the return to a COVID-free life, it seems that the virus's presence will blend into the new normal; it will continue to exist (on mute) in society's background, and we will learn to accept it.

The scientific community now agrees that COVID will become endemic, meaning its presence will continue but stay low-key. Why? COVID can't go away. Only two diseases in history have been wiped out completely: smallpox and rinderpest, and both eradications were achieved with aggressive vaccination campaigns. However, that's not applicable here. According to the CDC, Delta is one of the most contagious viral strains ever; it's more than twice as transmissible as previous COVID variants, which were already highly contagious. If there was any hope in the beginning that COVID would disappear, Delta destroyed the prospect.

That being said, if everyone isolated themselves for the next few years, we could wipe out COVID. However, this is obviously not ideal or possible. This means that COVID will continue to exist as long as we continue our daily activities. Since eradication will not happen, we can look to historical pandemics for other answers.

Two of the most prominent pandemics were the bubonic plague and 1918 H1N1 influenza, but these pandemics didn't end so much as they faded. In both cases, the virus infected so many people that a majority reached immunity (known in scientific terms as herd immunity), and there weren't enough people to infect anymore. Once the viruses reached this point, they lost scope and magnitude, but didn't disappear; they just became more sporadic. Since COVID won't go away either, the "end" of COVID will likely mirror the "ends" of these past pandemics.

It looks like we're approaching an endemic virus, but we're going to get there a different way. We're not letting COVID tear through the population this time, simply because we don't have to: we now have vaccines and booster shots. There are two main reasons why booster shots are necessary; first, some groups, especially older people, don't adequately establish immunity after the first doses. According to a CDC report, vaccines are 95 percent effective at preventing COVID hospitalization in ages 18-64, but only 80 percent effective in ages 65+. FDA data finds that older age groups tend to experience fewer side effects because their immune systems are less robust. Second, immunity tends to decline over time, which is seen in all age

groups. Booster shots serve to re-establish defense against the virus. This reinforcement is necessary for everyone, but again, older people are prioritized.

Unfortunately, mass vaccination rates are a mess right now. According to Our World in Data's dashboard, vaccination rates range from 78 percent in Massachusetts to 48 percent in Idaho. Less than half of the world population has been partially vaccinated, and the percentage in some countries is as low as 2 percent. Affluent nations need to help with vaccine rollout and encourage people to get the shots. While vaccine progress definitely leaves something to be desired, we're getting there.

When vaccination rates rebound, COVID seems destined to become a normal sort of background: the virus won't dominate our lives forever. According to former FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb, we seem destined to reach a normal where pandemic precautions will become optional. Simply put, life will retain shades of the pandemic, but the new normal will be close enough to the old normal. Vaccination will eventually become routine along with COVID, and herd immunity is destined to happen by some means. We'll reach a point when COVID will become quiet background noise and we'll stop listening to it—most of the time.



The COVID-19 vaccine. Big and little bottles for big and little people.
ONLINE SOURCE

Normalcy

A Deep Dive Into Stan Culture

By AVNI MISHRA '23
Spectrum Staff

On February 2, 2020, the top global trending hashtag on Twitter was #AWKJSJFKSJFLA, a nonsensical keyboard smash of letters. Fans of the popular K-pop group BTS popularized the tag in anticipation of BTS's music release announcement. In recent years, stan communities have grown immensely, dominating trending pages and amassing thousands of followers. However, these communities, present on nearly every social media platform, have also been entangled in numerous controversies—from mass cancelling, or halting support for celebrities, to promoting parasocial relationships, which are unhealthy relationships where one party is emotionally dependent on another who is unaware of the former's existence. It's like a bad YA love story but worse. Nevertheless, some argue that stan communities' benefits outweigh their thorny reputations. But just how did these communities grow to become so popular? With the rise of social media, fans gained access to large scale connections that created and normalized stan communities, ultimately breeding toxicity and unrealistic expectations that can harm both the stan and the artist.

What does "stan" even mean? The word's creation can be traced back to rapper Enimem's 2000 song of the same name. His song told the story of a fan named Stan,

who felt so enraged at being ignored by a celebrity that he drove himself and his girlfriend off of a bridge. Adopting the connotation of an insane fan, the word "stan" itself is a combination of "stalker" and "fan."

Today, the word does not carry nearly as much weight. While a fan who might go to such extremes can still be called a stan, the definition has expanded to include fans with unwavering dedication to an artist. These stans keep up with an artist's every release and contribute to stan communities by creating fan edits, fanart, and fan accounts.

Though overzealous fans have existed throughout history, social media has transformed current stan culture into a larger phenomenon than ever before. By looking up an artist's name, a new fan can find hundreds of stan accounts, opening communication between users of shared interests and creating strong bonds that keep stans returning. In this way, stans can find accepting and caring support systems that they may not have in real life. It can also benefit the artist, providing them with a loyal fanbase that they can rely on to support and promote their projects.

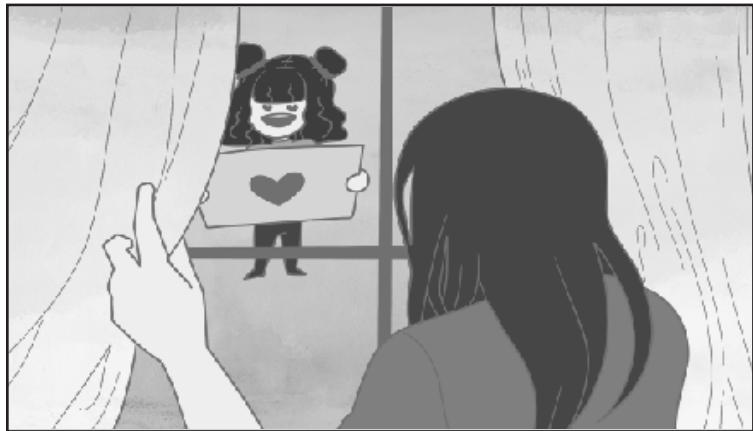
However, these seemingly positive benefits can quickly turn sour. A stan's dedication can also result in them attacking those who do not support the same people they do. These fan wars have caused media critics to lose their jobs, social media users to have their addresses

leaked, and celebrities to be shamed off the internet. With the frequent occurrence of these online battles, it's easy to see how these drawbacks can tarnish an otherwise congenial community's reputation.

Furthermore, the appeal of these family-like communities can easily propagate obsessions. The stan may depend on these communities emotionally, despite never meeting the members in real life. Pair this with the echo chamber that is social media algorithms, and stans who are separated from these systems can experience isolation. This dependence is also reflected on the celebrity. If the stans' happiness hinges on the content the celebrity produces, the celebrity feels constant pressure to provide for their fanbase, often forgoing their own mental health in the process.

In other instances, instead of dependence, the stan can start to feel entitlement over the celebrity, which stems from engaging in a parasocial relationship. These one-sided obsessions can make it easy for individuals to demand more from the object of their affection, like in normal relationships. In the case of stan culture, stans have stalked and threatened violence on their favorite celebrities. The ubiquity of stan culture has normalized these stalkerish relationships, pushing stans to further extremes for attention from their favorite celebrity.

Despite the apparent drama that exists within and as a result of stan communities, they still continue to thrive and expand in the social media age. Since the pandemic began, people worldwide have turned to celebrities for entertainment. It's no wonder that these communities have only garnered more attention and participants. To combat stan communities' problems, stans need to recognize their place as fans by finding healthier outlets of their dedication. By acknowledging the distance between the fan and the celebrity, fans can break down these parasocial relationships and stop placing emotional dependency on stars who do not even know their name.



Notice me senpai vibes
ONLINE SOURCE

Mobile Gaming Today

By EDDY ZHAO '25
Spectrum Staff

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people went digital for work or school. Amidst the dozens of mind-numbing Zoom meetings and hours of scrolling through social media, they discovered an engaging escape from reality: mobile gaming. These days, it's easier than ever to play video games anywhere you want. For some, indulging in a quick round of Pokemon Go is an entertaining way to take a break. Yet, the normalization of mobile gaming also reveals an underlying human desire for convenience and efficiency as people rely more on the digital world.

While confined to their homes, the time people spent on mobile devices in particular has soared. To illustrate, a study conducted by the International Data Corporation and advertising platform LoopMe concluded that 63% of respondents reported an increase in gaming time over the pandemic. Further, researchers found that 75% of the increase in mobile gaming activity driven by the pandemic would continue indefinitely. Quarantine limited face-to-face interaction and typical pastimes like playing group sports or hanging out with friends, so people turned to a convenient way to connect with friends and family online: mobile gaming. This

trend promises to continue because through navigating fantastical worlds, people temporarily set aside their worries and fulfill the human desire to socialize in the comfort of their homes.

Speaking of socialization, many people experienced isolation during the pandemic, which fueled the need for a convenient source of entertainment that emulated real-life fun. Moving away from the time-consuming setups of board games, people found downloading and tapping into an app much more time-efficient. Mobile gaming's convenience is a prime factor in why it became so popular during the pandemic; since people can avoid the work of setting up a physical game and derive the same pleasure from playing (cue the addictive levels, catchy music and colorful graphics of today's mobile games), it's unsurprising that mobile gaming holds greater appeal. Add in the ability to socialize with friends online, and it's no wonder why mobile gaming is so popular today.

As mobile gaming evolves with technological innovation, it shows how as people create more streamlined forms of entertainment, they also become more dependent on those technologies. Moving forward, it is important to consider the role technology has played—and continues to play—in our lives.



Oopsie, now you have a mobile game addiction
ONLINE SOURCE

The Harmful Effects of Conforming to Beauty Norms

By VAISHNAVI MURTHY '24
Spectrum Staff

In 2020 alone, Americans had over two million cosmetic procedures done: over two million people felt the need to change their appearances. With social media's prevalence, we've turned to likes for validation, and changing how we look has become less of an option and more of a need. Many people view conformity as a form of self-improvement, but this mindset only masks social media's unattainable standards. Additionally, conforming to beauty norms harms self-esteem and mental health, as it unconsciously forces a dysmorphic or distorted self-image. Marketers exploit this insecurity, tempting us by advertising products that can supposedly fix our "flaws."

We've all conformed before, whether it's in changing the way we talk, dress, or act, but what makes it so common? In a social influence study, researchers Morton Deutsch and Harold B. Gerard discovered two significant types of conformity: informative influence, or the desire to be correct,

and normative influence, or the need to be accepted. For example, if you agreed with the majority of people on the solution to a math problem despite being unsure of the answer yourself, you would be acting under informative influence. If you wore jeans that cut off your circulation because it's "cool," you would be swayed by normative influence. Teens are hypersensitive to peer acceptance, so we're more likely to base our identities off what we view as socially "acceptable" in order to avoid rejection. When we prioritize changing our appearances to please others, we normalize valuing outside opinions over our own.

Social media, in particular, promotes the notion that beauty will give us respect, success, and perfect relationships. Beyond that, our conceptions of beauty and how to conform to today's standards are more dangerous. Before apps like Instagram and Snapchat, we would look at a picture of a celebrity and think: "I wish I looked like them." Now, we look at versions of ourselves through filters and think: "I could look like that," or "why don't I look like that in real life?" Snapchat filters, for

example, allow users to adjust their jawlines, smooth blemishes on their skin or even create unrealistically large eyes or lips. Medical journal JAMA Facial Plastic Surgery explains that filters confuse our brains, blurring what is plausible. Ultimately, this can lead to issues such as body dysmorphic disorder (commonly coined "selfie dysmorphia"), a condition where individuals are

constantly preoccupied with their body's imperfections. Unfortunately, this insecurity regarding natural appearance and the pressure to look like our "flawless" selves normalizes the use of cosmetic intervention, skin-color-changing creams, and specialty makeup products.

So, what drives the continuation of beauty standards? According to the *New York Times*, they're rooted

in capitalism. The goal? To exploit our insecurities so that we will buy products to conform to current beauty ideals. If "beauty" is achievable, then cosmetic industries will go out of business. When customers buy into the conformity mentality, makeup brands and cosmetic surgeons continue to profit. As time passes, standards change, and we follow suit. But if "normal" is not possible anymore without physically changing ourselves, is it really normal? We can never really meet our society's ever-changing standards. And they're designed to be that way.

We've established that everyone conforms at some point in their lives, knowingly or unknowingly. Why is it such an issue, then? Well, the idea of who we are becomes muddled over time, and we lose the best parts of growing up. When we look back on our childhoods, do we only want to remember how we were constantly trying to fit in? While conforming isn't always wrong—it's often a natural instinct—we have to make sure that we aren't compromising parts of ourselves to be included. It's important that we accept our true selves before changing how we look.



Mean Girls was onto something
ONLINE SOURCE

Normalcy

Lack of Geographical Knowledge in the United States

By DHRUVIKA DEEKONDA '24
Spectrum Staff

If I were to ask you to name all fifty states including their capital cities in four minutes, would you be able to do it? Unless you're a part of the 20 percent of Americans who have a strong grasp on US geography, the answer is no. According to National Geographic, 11 percent of young Americans struggle to locate the US on a map. Are you part of that 11 percent? Let's hope not. But that 11 percent this just emphasizes the rise in illiteracy problems. Geographic illiteracy has become increasingly normalized, which hinders students from grasping critical knowledge necessary to engage in world affairs.

Firstly, understanding geography is a powerful tool, as the people who have a stronger grasp of it appreciate and understand their role in the world. As former president Barack Obama observed, "the study of geography is about more than memorizing places on a map. It's about understanding the complexity of our world, appreciating the diversity of cultures that exist across continents. And in the end, it's about using all that knowledge to help bridge divides and bring people together." Learning about the geography of other countries isn't just memorizing locations; it molds our minds to grasp the world's complexity and how we're connected through common experiences.

Besides appreciating diversity,

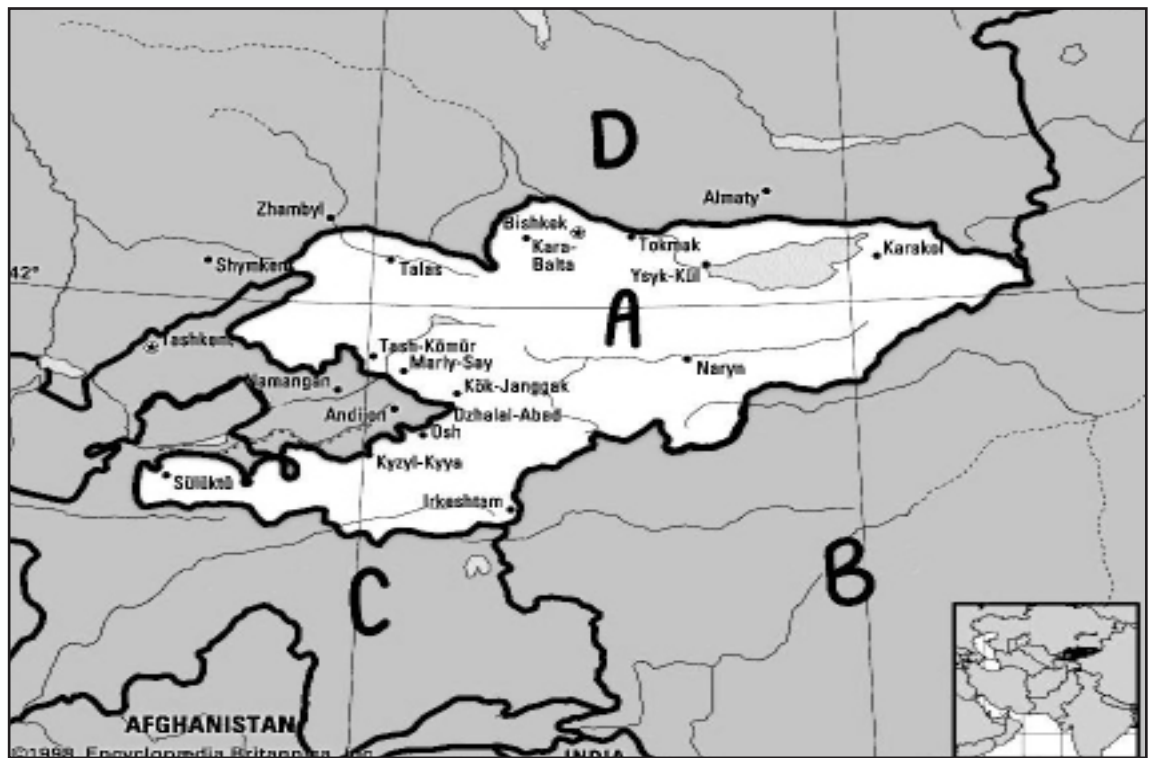
geographic understanding maintains a well-informed society. Take for instance the US: it's involved with almost every country regarding their military, social, economic, and political matters. Yet, according to National Geographic, only 17 percent of American students could find Afghanistan on a map a year after the September 11 attacks, even though the US military had deployed troops there. As Christina Lin, an *AsiaTimes* writer, points out, geographic ignorance is so widespread that it may actually "constitute a national-security threat," as many are struggling to connect current events to places on a map, much less understand the significance of their geographic locations. This in turn harms people's critical think-

ing abilities about the US's role in global affairs.

However, our education systems don't seem to reflect geography's importance. Both the 2014 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the 1994 NAEP measured eighth graders' geographic literacy, and given the nation's meager investment in promoting geographic understanding, the results were unsurprising. In 2014, 48 percent of eighth graders demonstrated a basic understanding of geography, a mere 5 percent increase from 1994. There is almost no difference between the past and present proficiency levels, which reveals how schools aren't engaging students in geography. While other subjects like World History, which explores our interconnected

pasts with other nations, are seen as essential to a student's education, why shouldn't geography, which visualizes international connections, be similarly prioritized?

Geographic illiteracy in America has been far too normalized, and sooner or later, it will hurt students, limiting their sense of the present. Understanding geography isn't just helpful for navigating one's surroundings; it also fosters a deeper knowledge of the world, helping people improve comprehension of global affairs, current events, and form more nuanced perspectives on them. Thus, it's crucial to promote geography as a subject comparable to history, not leaving understanding to chance or optional studies.



Do you want to disprove the article? Are you good at geography? Test yourself with this short quiz!

1. Identify country A
2. Identify country B
3. Identify country C
4. Identify country D

Hint for the quiz!
ONLINE SOURCE

Should Acton-Boxborough High School Redefine Grades?

By MRUNAL DEORE '24
Spectrum Staff

Have you ever studied diligently for a test and were still gravely disappointed at your score? Started questioning your whole future because of that one B you received in a math class? I have and I bet you have too. Grades are supposed to measure a student's comprehension of a topic and reflect the quality of their work, but are they really conducive to learning? More often, achieving good

grades is like digging a hole with a spoon: you're working constantly for them yet you obtain a meager result. Other than betraying your hard work, grades reinforce test-taking anxiety, ineffective learning strategies, and stereotypes around race and academic achievement. The normalization of academic validation reinforces perfectionism in education, ultimately resulting in unnecessarily high expectations and unhealthy mindsets.

Students' self-worth has become increasingly tied to their achieve-

ments and not hard work, which plays into the fixed mindset that teachers have discouraged since kindergarten. Academic validation puts unnecessary pressure on students and forces them to rely on their grades as a measure of their self-worth. According to a 2002 psychology study, 80 percent of college freshmen based their self-worth on their grades rather than other things such as family or appearance. So how does the anxiety around grades detract from the importance of learning itself? Don't you have to learn in

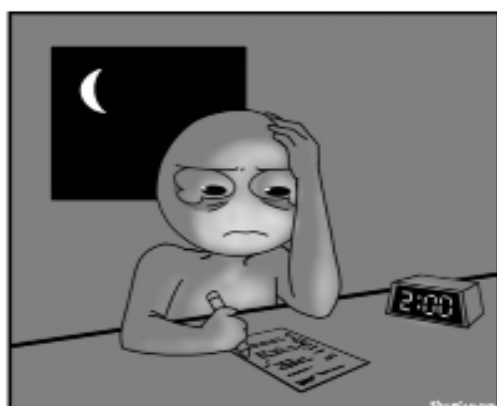
order to get good grades? No matter how assiduous you are, though, it's difficult to succeed if test-taking anxiety always accompanies you. There is a colossal amount of stigma around grades because they are connected to fear; you have to do well on the next test because if you fail to meet your self-set "norms," your future feels jeopardized. However, this mentality detracts from other equally important aspects of life like social life and self care and reinforces the belief that hard work doesn't pay off. That evolves into a fixed

mindset: forgetting about the topic once you get a certain grade hinders long-term information retention.

Further, the norm of certain races being associated with good grades harms minority students. For so long, there have been stereotypes associated with race and grades, mainly surrounding Asians. While comments like "All Asians are good at math" seem like compliments, they invalidate the stress Asian students carry and can make them feel ashamed if they fail to meet these norms. As an Asian, I can easily disprove these stereotypes. Where is my talented math genius gene? When are my Ravi (from *Jessie*) powers going to start activating? Asians are hit the hardest by stereotypes because these falsehoods are normalized to the point that most people don't see them as harmful; Asian students constantly feel like they have to meet an unhealthy standard or face an impending wave of self doubt.

Grades are a big part of society today, but they can also harm students' mental health. They question your ability to do things, make you believe that hard work isn't worth it, and take focus away from other important aspects of life like social skills. Instead of letting grades define us, maybe it's time to take another approach: after all, if we can create these methods of measuring competence, we can also break through these unhealthy expectations.

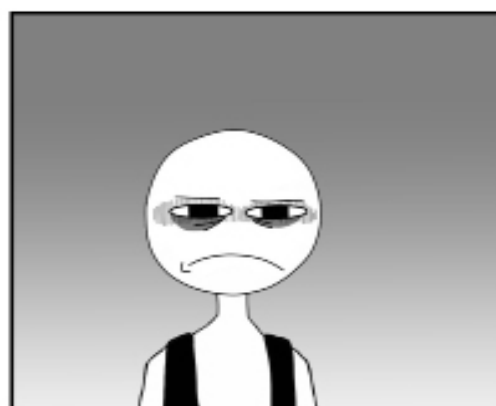
The AB High School Grind (in a Nutshell)



When you stay up late doing homework for a class...



...Only to realize the next day...



...That you dropped it.

By KATERINA KHOMIAKOVA '25

Op-Ed

Teens vs. Local News

By ADI RAMAN '23
News Editor

It spreads through word of mouth. It's on your TV screens. It's plastered right on your very own high school newspaper. News is inescapable. Yet, excluding our very own humble newspaper, students are often unaware of local news in the district.

The Spectrum has its own news column concerning broader changes in the district and *Breaking in The Spectrum* (Bits) with weekly news updates. We've covered everything from school plays to town elections, but it can be difficult to care about town news when it serves as an update rather than a life-altering notification.

For instance, town elections occurred earlier this year to choose new members of the Acton Select Board. If a group of students read an article about the elections, they would likely understand it and make their own conclusions; yet, only a fraction of them would do further research on what issues the town currently faces or what the candidates' policies are. This can be attributed to the simple fact that people tend to only thoroughly research subjects that they already have an interest in. Moreover, the Pew Research Center reports that interest in local news positively correlates to age. At a stage of life when we focus on friends, school, sports, and clubs, it's not surprising that teenagers have little interest in local politics.

However, teenagers often find themselves learning about national politics. General elections naturally garner nationwide attention due to extensive media coverage and the potential implications should one candidate win over another. Most teenagers knew the candidates' names in the 2016 and 2020 elections but were not exposed to nearly as much news about their local government.

Regardless, there are exceptions to this so-called rule. A recent one includes the debate over removing the high school's mascot, the Colonial. Many took passionate stances, raising questions about tangible change. How would AB's sports uniforms be changed? What would the new mascot be? Disregarding stances, the event illustrated how conspicuous change leads to heavier community interest and involvement. Further, the conflict gained attention from students because it related to the school itself. This key fact allowed the mascot to spark student interest in local news.

It is essential that students understand their local leaders; for example, seminars where the Select Board comes to the high school and explains their role could be one way to interest students. We live in an age where the digital world is growing inversely with our attention spans, so us teenagers often find ourselves using social media for a "quick fix" of entertainment that eventually becomes inconsequential to our livelihoods. It may seem difficult to pay attention to local news when a majority of students plan on leaving the district in pursuit of job opportunities or higher education. However, in a smaller district where the community and the schools are largely intertwined, we students have the potential to work with local leaders and improve our town. National issues matter as well, but we should never focus on them so much that we become farsighted.

Beyond local politics is the simple truth that local news unifies our district. Learning about the achievements of one and even the struggles of another produces a tighter-knit community. If students can take that one extra step to become better acquainted with their town, we will be one step closer to making the Acton-Boxborough area something more than a dot on a map.

Spicy Seasonal Snacks Save Souls

By PORTIA LI '23 &
MICHAEL HE '23
Spectrum Staff

It's hard to deny that the pumpkin spice latte has become an American fall staple. Each year, this famed coffee variation brings in millions of sales. Along with being a distinguished drink itself, the pumpkin spice latte comes with its lesser-known younger siblings, ranging from the famed Trader Joe's fall snacks to pumpkin-flavored Oreos at your local CVS. This seasonal flavor fixation extends past fall: in winter, peppermint jingles into our hearts. Many have deemed these seasonal foods overrated, but these seasonal snacks are essential to society because of their role in creating the ambiance of each coming season.

As the summer comes to a close and school looms ahead, seasonal snacks keep people sane. Ceaseless rain all throughout fall adds a sense of despair to autumn, creating dullness impossible to conceal. Yet, fall still manages to produce an everlasting impression. How did this come to be? The mastermind behind this change is nothing more than the food that comes with it. These snacks

add new flavor—literally and figuratively—to the snack section and the season. For instance, fall brings a variety of pumpkin-flavored options such as PSLs, pumpkin bread, and pumpkin ravioli. Nobody should underestimate the power of these iconic fall foods since they compensate for the inherent dread associated with fall. Some may dismiss seasonal snacks as insignificant, but they transform society.

The flavoring change in seasonal snacks encourages the discovery of enjoyable flavors previously unknown to our taste buds. Specially flavored seasonal snacks are a rarity and often in high demand upon their release. Trendy consumers are not only attracted to its outward novelty but to the allure of the flavor itself. Think about it this way: why try a bland, basic cheesecake when you can indulge in the fanciful new flavors of a pumpkin-spiced cheesecake? Each season carries its own set of flavors, compelling our taste buds to constantly chance unexplored flavors. From peppermint-flavored Ghirardelli chocolates to the tangy flavor of gingerbread cookies, seasonal snacks provide the satisfaction of trying something new each sea-

son, keeping our taste buds on their feet!

Ultimately, trends run our society, and at every moment, people try to keep up with them. You may have found yourself buying a new pair of shoes after hearing about it from your friends: the same goes for food. Everybody wants what they can't have, and people make an extra effort to obtain those desires to look and feel special. In keeping up with each season's snacks, a limited-edition drink that is only available for a three-month window validates our need for staying trendy. Unlike normal foods, seasonal snacks satisfy your hunger while giving you a self-confidence boost.

From easing the dread of back-to-school months to providing delicious changes in flavor in common foods, seasonal snacks are the key to surviving through each season. As seasons come and go, so will seasonal snacks; however, their contribution to our world leaves an everlasting impression. Seasonal snacks create variation within common snack flavors, (pumpkin) spice up seasons, and offer a much-needed emotional validation as a reward to staying on-trend.



Eating pumpkin pie on an Autumn evening - Robert Frost (probably)
ONLINE SOURCE

Tom's Return: Why Did Tom Brady Leave the Patriots?

By ERIC ZHAO '25
Spectrum Staff

When asked whether he will rejoin the Patriots in 2020, Brady responded, "I don't know what the future looks like, so I'm not gonna predict it." After the Patriot's 2019 Wild Card loss to the Titans, quarterback Tom Brady was flooded with questions like these in the postgame press-conference.

Seventy-nine days later, Brady would sign a \$50 million contract with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, breaking his twenty-year stint with the team that he had cemented his legacy with. Many doubted a forty-year-old quarterback could join a new team during a raging pandemic and succeed. But in 2021, Brady disproved these skeptics, reaching a second career-best—forty touchdowns—and defeating the reigning champion, the Chiefs, 31-9 in Super Bowl LV for a seventh title. The Patriots, meanwhile, struggled with quarterback Cam Newton, experiencing their first non-playoff season in over a decade and first losing season in twenty years. So why did Brady leave New England? Why did he leave the Patriots? The answer? A series of growing respect issues led to the downfall of his relationship with the team.

Since Bill Belichick became

head coach, the Patriots have struggled to retain enough wide receivers. While most of these receivers were small, quick, and smart, consistently catching the ball, they were just not field-stretching players. However, because they fit the Patriots offensive scheme and brought success, the Patriots made no revisions. As the Patriots continued to win, receiving became an afterthought, and the quality of these receivers deteriorated in the latter part of Brady's career. The Patriots also struggled to find receiving talent through the draft, an annual event held where college players are selected to NFL teams. Drafting receivers was not Belichick's strong suit, and from 2009 to 2020, the Patriots drafted only eleven wide receivers. Nearly all of them failed at the professional level, with only one lasting more than three seasons with the team. The team's receiving corps became a weakness; the Patriots shifted their offense to moving the ball on the ground until the 2019 season, when offensive issues became apparent. Attempts to resolve the situation failed, as Brady did not trust his teammates to catch the ball and became increasingly frustrated towards the lack of offense.

Furthermore, Belichick irked Brady, who, after twenty years and six championships, felt underap-



Drinking from the fountain of youth, eh?
ONLINE SOURCE

preciated. Belichick strives to treat each player, undrafted rookies and respected veterans alike, with the same tough, "not good enough" attitude. While veteran players gained some leeway and respect, Belichick often criticized experienced players in front of the team, including Brady. At the 2018 Milken Institute Global Press Conference, Brady was asked whether he felt the team respected him, to which he responded with: "I plead the fifth." Alex Guerrero's, Brady's trainer, commented, "[Bill] never evolved. So you can't treat someone who's in his 40s like they're 20." For instance, quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo's draft and Jarrett Stidham

signaled that Belichick was ready to move on from Brady. Ultimately, upon owner Robert Kraft's request, Garoppolo was traded away. A team player, Brady took pay cuts and restructured his contract to benefit the Patriots. However, he struggled to come to a fair agreement at the end of his Pats career. While it appears he never received enough respect, Brady often dismisses these sentiments.

In the 2021 NFL Draft, the Patriots drafted quarterback Mac Jones, who has impressed many so far. Meanwhile, Brady thrives in Tampa Bay, the team reigning as champion and in contention for another Super Bowl. The Patriots,

on the other hand, are still finding their identity, hoping to return to the playoffs. On October 4, Brady returned to Gillette Stadium to face the Patriots in a game dubbed as "The Return" and pulled out a 19-17 victory over his former team in the second highest-viewing Sunday Night Football game. Afterwards, Brady and Belichick briefly caught up in the locker room, with Brady expressing he "appreciates everything he's done for [him]." This legendary quarterback may be lying through his teeth when discussing his true feelings for the team, but certainly he created an era of unprecedented success for the Patriots.

Op-Ed

How Quarantine Has Psychologically Affected Students

By NICOLE YU '25
Spectrum Staff

Normally, I enjoy spending time with family, but for some reason, they were a nuisance during quarantine. A plethora of reasons could have contributed to my irritation: ever-increasing Google Classroom assignments, an endless stream of pandemic articles, or the uncertainty of the pandemic. I wasn't alone in feeling this way. Lockdown left many bored, frustrated, and irritable. New stressors like—online school, working from home, and a lack of financial security affected households across the globe. For many, mental healthcare is inaccessible, and this is unlikely to improve for many years. As a result, quarantine's psychological impact will have a long-lasting

impact.

By cutting off in-person connections, online school has negatively affected some students' mental health. Many factors caused stress during quarantine, particularly the sudden transition to virtual learning for students. A school district in Austin, Texas reported a 70% increase in failing grades after switching to virtual learning. Pre-pandemic, students were already stressed by grades, and virtual learning increased those pressures significantly. Teachers taught virtually through videos and slideshows, and the number of independent assignments increased. For many, these formats were ineffective and difficult to manage. Online school also impeded interpersonal connections with teachers, classmates, and coun-

selors. Students received fewer opportunities to bond with peers and express their feelings. The parent-child relationship might have also changed as parents took a more active role in their children's education. Parents and friends are usually trusted and supportive individuals, but quarantine reduced the opportunities to talk to others and relieve stress. As such, it's no surprise that many students arose from quarantine with less than ideal mental and emotional health.

Indeed, many long-lasting mental illnesses emerged from quarantine. There could be various reasons these illnesses developed: social isolation, working from home, virtual learning, or losing a job altogether. Whatever the cause, long-term mental illnesses lack a cure; there is only

treatment. Thus, a person must rely on external help such as therapy for most of their life. That external support was hard to find during quarantine, and various online therapy resources lack efficacy.

Quarantine blocked access to mental health support. Many faced financial difficulties, so they could not afford therapy. People sought help at different levels, and not everyone successfully received help. As noted by the Commonwealth Fund based on the 1918 influenza pandemic, quarantine's effects lasted for several generations. Thus, mental health is unlikely to improve even as people recover from their financial situations enough to seek therapy. Some people who need help may not qualify for therapy, while others may not

be able to find help despite qualifying for it. On the other hand, self-diagnosis and self-treatment in the absence of professional help can have disastrous effects, such as reliance on drugs and alcohol. Unfortunately, there is no single strategy to combat the nation's shortcomings in mental health care because various areas have different causes: a lack of financial resources, low supply, or high demand.

COVID-19 has changed mental health for the worse and will continue to affect it in the future. There is already evidence of a worsening healthcare system, and there will be a prolonged period when healthcare is inaccessible, exacerbating quarantine's effect on mental health.

International Crisis: Afghanistan

By SAMUEL LIU '23
Spectrum Staff

As a plane took flight from Afghanistan's Kabul Airport, a man fell from the sky: it was Fada Mohammad. He faced an impossible decision: be subjected to a vicious terrorist group, the Taliban, or attempt to flee the country. Opting for the latter, he desperately raced towards the airport. With countless others, he swarmed the US Air Force cargo transport plane, but the plane took off without allowing anyone inside. Fada and other Afghan citizens clung to the side of the aircraft, but not one of them escaped the country. Why were they pushed to such an extent?

The War in Afghanistan raged for twenty years after 9/11 spurred the US to deploy troops in the country to find Osama Bin Laden and punish the Taliban for harboring al-Qaeda leaders. Even after Bin Laden was killed, the US remained and even increased its military presence as domestic insurgencies arose. However, beginning on August 31, America finally withdrew from the conflict-torn area, believing the war had become too expensive and unfruitful. Subsequently, the Taliban resurged and overwhelmed the Afghan government. Even though the war was costly and the US had already accomplished its initial goal, the military pullout created disastrous effects for the Afghan people and put the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO) in a precarious position.

The American pullout ignited fear in many Afghans' hearts, forcing thousands to flee the country. Terrorist groups like the Taliban have historically been proven to be irrational actors, as they do not consider international laws and basic human rights. With complete control of the country, the Taliban can impose its ideologies upon all inhabitants of Afghanistan. Moreover, the Afghan people who had served as intelligence agents for the US are in even graver danger as the Taliban seeks to exact revenge upon them. Thus, there have been public outcries for the US to help evacuate Afghani citizens, and so far the United States has evacuated around 120,000 people. The other 36 million people under Taliban rule must now find their own ways to survive.

Further, the horrors in Afghanistan have weakened the NATO, which is an international organization consisting of over thirty nations, including the US. Its primary goal "is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means." Member nations depend on NATO for national security, as NATO is based on the principle that an attack on one is an attack on all: any enemy attacking these countries will face the wrath of all thirty. The organization is funded proportionally by its constituent countries, and the US economy funds over 70% of

NATO, so it's considered an extension of American power. Unfortunately, NATO allies have criticized the removal of troops and point to the deterioration of Afghanistan as evidence, creating the greatest debacle NATO has faced since its founding. Furthermore, because the US withdrew due to domestic economic concerns, *CNN* writes that others believe that the US is still operating under an America First paradigm. These issues have contributed to the beginning of NATO's death, as allies such as the European Union have stated that the pullout is a "catastrophe for the Afghan people [and] a failure of the Western world." Should NATO collapse, disaster would follow: the international security organization that guarantees the safety of its allies would no longer exist, creating the possibility of nuclear weapon proliferation in self-defense.

The American pullout of Afghanistan unintentionally sparked intense instability across the country and the globe. As the Taliban took control, people everywhere could not guarantee their own safety. Despite its positive intentions, this action ultimately created an international crisis. Such an idea is applicable to all decisions: whether they be foreign policies or in our own lives, good intentions can have disastrous consequences.



Climate Change Protest
ONLINE SOURCE

The Changing Climate

By MEI SHAO '25
Spectrum Staff

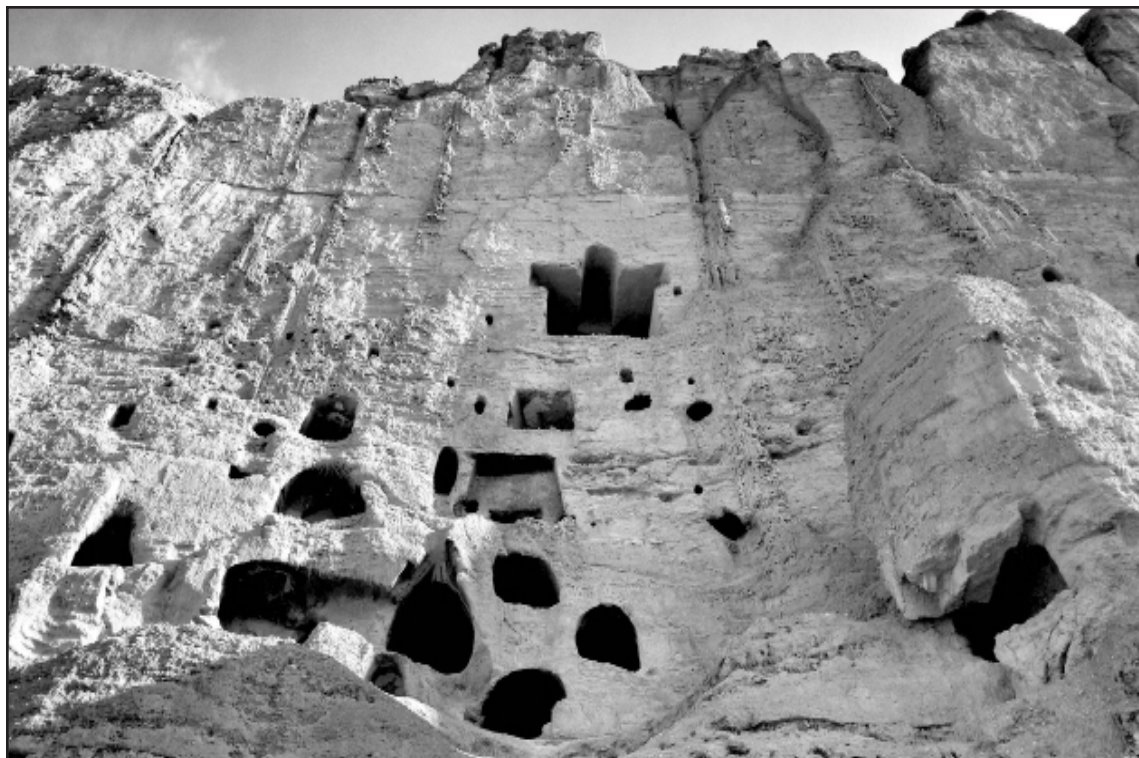
Climate change has been put on the back burner since the pandemic began, but it's no less important. Recent events such as extreme weather patterns have brought it back into the public's eye. Legislators and private companies continue to drag their feet—it's absurd to expect them to take global warming seriously. Thus, climate change's repercussions are now the public's burden, but even we aren't being taught the proper facts.

Before we talk about this issue, we must clearly establish that 97 percent of climate scientists believe that climate change is real, is caused by humans, and will threaten humans in the future. However, the word "future" is ambiguous—it could mean in a hundred years or tomorrow. The recent floods and heatwaves in our area that caused school to close last summer signify that we are already running out of time. Although bills are in the works, they are designed to improve infrastructure for climate mitigation rather than to decrease carbon emissions. Many senators, who play a crucial role in the climate legislation process, also hold valuable stock in fossil fuel, which creates a conflict of interest. Additionally, many companies made pledges to lower their carbon emissions level by 2020, yet have come nowhere near their goals.

What does this mean for us, the next generation? It's not only intuitive, but scientifically proven that teaching a subject in schools increases awareness and action. However,

the undercoverage of climate change in school curriculums is a complex issue. Firstly, the topic's highly politicized nature makes it difficult to teach in American schools, as lawsuits have arisen over "schools imposing political beliefs on students." Even when climate change is taught, the discussion is usually shallow and gets footnoted in favor of less controversial topics. Though there has been an initiative to include climate change in the Common Core curriculum, various Republican states have resisted this change. Additionally, many teachers lack confidence in their ability to teach this issue: climate change is not only a polarizing issue, but an existential one. After all, scientists project a near apocalyptic future, yet some dismiss the threat and others fall into apathy. How can a teacher deliver such somber news to their young and impressionable students? Thus the vicious cycle of negligence continues, leaving future generations unprepared to curtail the impacts of global warming.

So, what can we do? Unfortunately, it's out of our hands. Any solution to this problem would require a well-funded and large-scale campaign to train teachers and inform the public about climate change. In the meantime, if you feel responsible for taking care of this planet, take it upon yourself to research climate change and find causes to support. Educate yourself and voice your opinions to others. Small actions like reusing paper or turning off the lights before leaving a room may seem insignificant, but taken together, they will make an impact.



Bamiyan, Afghanistan
ONLINE SOURCE

Off-Topic



Look at that fur. All full of crust and dust.
ONLINE SOURCE

On Crusty White Dogs

By NAKISA RAZBAN '23
Off-Topic Editor

Fellas, if you've spent any time on social media over the last few months (I know you have—that screen time is in the double digits, babe, go outside), you may have encountered a strange uproar from a very specific demographic: crusty white dog haters. Whether it be on Twitter or TikTok, these people have suddenly decided to bash these poor pooches for nothing more than their looks. The internet is so shallow, I don't even have words smh. These unkind individuals are accusing crusty white dogs of being ugly and annoying and are even calling out their owners! As a proud crusty white dog owner (shoutout to my terrier mix Olive, love ya), I feel that it is my duty to defend the honor of these little yipping balls of fur.

Let's start by examining the elephant (or dog?) in the room: the crustiness. Where does it come from? If you don't mind putting on your science goggles for a second, there's actually a really interesting explanation to this! The crusty red around certain dog's eyes comes from their tears. Their tears contain porphyrin molecules which are rich in iron and turn red (or oxidize) when in contact with oxygen. What are the broader implications of this? ALL DOGS ARE CRUSTY, but since white ones have lighter fur, the red is more visible. So yes, Sid, your precious golden retriever is just as crusty as my terrier.

Now that you've passed your chem test (oxidation is a chemical change :)), let's talk about these dogs' personalities. Crusty white dogs are often portrayed as feisty and easily upsettable little monsters that spend their days barking at the dust under the bed. However, this is a grave misunderstanding because

so many of these dogs behave this way due to their owners! If they are not socialized properly or trained not to bark, how can we expect them to be perfect little angels? Blame the owner, not the dog.

We've reached the final boss in conquering your phobia of these canines: their owners. Hate against crusty dog owners is often accompanied with ideas such as: they are annoying, they talk about their dogs too much and they defend their dogs too much. Am I helping combat this stereotype by writing a passionate article defending these dogs? No. BUT my points are still correct because I'm an outlier (wow, chemistry AND statistics, y'all are getting free tutoring over here). Let's begin by examining one of the main crusty white dog owners: The Karen™, aka misogynistic middle-aged women who believe the world is both flat and revolving around them. My first thoughts about the hate against them? Fair enough, they deserve it, but why do we associate cute little dogs with horrible people? As I said above, blame the owner, not the dog. There are countless incredible, kind, generous and overall perfect crusty white dog owners who... also happen to be very gifted writers. What's that you say? It sounds like I'm describing myself? Aww, shucks. *Debbie Ryan ear tuck™*.

We've learned a lot today, friends, and we've grown as people in the process. Perhaps the problems don't come from the dogs at all but rather the culmination of their made-up internet personas. Let's dissociate these dogs from all this negativity and simply give our pooches a belly rub, shall we? Here is my final attempt to convince any remaining haters out there to change their minds: stop. Thank you~

The Good, the Bad, the BuzzFeed

By ADI RAMAN '23
News Editor

Ah, BuzzFeed. Where millennials gather to share their Hogwarts Houses? Perhaps. The media company has received a lot of attention for one reason or another, as demonstrated by their YouTube channel's success...until all of their popular employees quit (cue the "Why I Left BuzzFeed" videos). BuzzFeed's website, however, is loaded with assorted quizzes. They can be very helpful; that is, if you're looking to find out what type of cake you are. In January 2019, BuzzFeed laid off many of their quiz-creating employees due to an influx of quizzes created by users themselves. I took the liberty of perusing said quizzes to evaluate their applicability to you, dear reader and compiled some here. You're welcome.

Everything will be rated out of 5 for both usefulness and accuracy.

"Be An Art Snob For A Day To Reveal Your True Inner Animal"

The quiz has some classics such as "Starry Night," the "Mona Lisa," and "Girl with a Pearl Earring." At the very least, it was kind of like walking through an art exhibit. I'm an eagle, apparently. Do with that information what you will.

Rating: 2.5/5. It's nothing special, but a promising start on our journey through the BuzzFeed quiz multiverse.

"Go On A Diagon Alley Shopping Spree & We'll Give You A Cool Book To Read"

I mean, come on. We couldn't rate BuzzFeed quizzes without a Harry Potter-themed one. As the name suggests, the questions focus on what items you'd buy from Diagon Alley, including brooms, clothing, and potions. I have now learned that I should read "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." I'm not sure how helpful that was to me personally considering I've already read the book, but I appreciate the thought behind this unconventional book recommendation method.

Rating: 4.5/5. I have to acknowledge the surprising applicability of this quiz.

"What Piece of IKEA Furniture Are You"

Well, they couldn't all be good. Call me a skeptic, but I find it hard to believe that BuzzFeed can compare me to such a nuanced and complicated thing like IKEA furniture with only my favorite pattern, holiday, and HGTV show (*Flip or Flop* is the best one, Tarek and Christina's marriage problems aside). You're delu-

ed if you say *Property Brothers*). At the very least, I can now go around telling everyone that I'm a Regolit floor lamp. Riveting.

Rating: 0.75/5. There's a reason why this was the only one out of the three that wasn't approved and edited by the BuzzFeed Community Team.

I guess I can say that there is some use in taking a BuzzFeed quiz, but I'm not sure how impressive that is considering how low the bar was in the first place. However, some of them most certainly fell in line with my initial perceptions (I'm looking at you, IKEA lamp). So, BuzzFeed quizzes. Many love to hate them. I love to hate them. And now, albeit with a few diamonds in the rough, I can officially conclude that they are pretty useless after all.



QR Codes to Quizzes

JOIN AB'S ASIAN ACTIVISM CLUB

Dear Asian Youth

Wednesdays at 3 pm
in the woodshop

Everything You Need for the Perfect Autumn-Filled Day

By ERIN TOBIN '23
Spectrum Staff

As the sound of crunching leaves fills the air and the scent of pumpkin spice wafts through the streets, autumn is upon us once more. It's important to appreciate fall by partaking in seasonal activities, so let me be your guide to the perfect fall day!

Nothing encapsulates fall quite like pumpkin spice lattes, and with the school year kicking off, we could all use a caffeinated pick-me-up. Starbucks' legendary pumpkin spice latte is still available, but it also introduced the pumpkin spiced cold brew, which puts a modern twist on a seasonal classic. If chain stores aren't your thing, just up the street sits Acton Coffee House, a local café. Upon entry, its storefront offers an assortment of artisan chocolates accompanied by the delicious aroma

of roasted coffee beans. Acton Coffee House is a perfect place to buy a pumpkin spice latte while supporting a local business; plus, they also sell gluten-free treats.

As the day wears on and the lighting approaches peak-golden-hour, it's imperative to take advantage of beautiful autumnal landscapes as backdrops for your Instagram posts. For those looking for a homey, small-business vibe, Westward Orchards in Harvard is the perfect place to begin. It has everything: apple cider donuts, wooden cut-outs for photo-ops, welcoming staff with the cutest embroidered cat sweaters—even Boston Creme pies, if you're looking to take a sweet treat home. It's ideal for giving your page more of an "earthy granola" feel. Next is Concord Center, which is an oasis for those who like to read in public. From its dainty gift shops to perplexingly crooked

crosswalks, Concord Center has the cutest stores to take photographs of, and if you're looking to take a stroll, just a twenty-minute walk away lies the historic North Bridge.

Finally, classic fall movies are the perfect conclusion to the perfect day. If you like creepy mansions and Chris Evans in white cable knit sweaters, *Knives Out* is the movie for you. In the same sense, if Timothée Chalamet running around in sweater vests and oxfords seems appealing, watch Greta Gerwig's 2019 adaptation of *Little Women*. For film connoisseurs, Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* and *Grand Budapest Hotel* are aesthetically pleasing films.

Hopefully, these ideas were able to inspire times of foliage-filled photos and exploration of the pumpkin spice-y possibilities that this beautiful season has to offer. What's your favorite fall-time activity?



Stomp. Crunch. Whee!
ONLINE SOURCE

Off-Topic

Hollywood to Bollywood: Recommendation Starter-Pack

By SAHANA PRABHU '23
Spectrum Staff

Have you ever wanted to expand your horizons through film? Both the pop culture world and Hollywood have many films that parallel Bollywood. Bollywood, which is the Indian film industry, is widely popular and something I and many others have grown up watching. It never hurts to broaden your horizons, so let me recommend some high-quality Bollywood films that correspond with your favorite Hollywood tropes!

To start, let's take a movie from one of the biggest franchises, *Black Widow*, and a movie from Bollywood, the popular *Baahubali*. *Baahubali* is a hero, just like *Black*

Widow; he defeats an entire army of an enemy tribe and does so graciously. Like how *Black Widow* is motivated by her family, *Baahubali*'s mother and wife give him a purpose to fight. Both heroes are passionate about protecting the people they love, making *Baahubali* the perfect fit for those interested in an action-packed and heart-warming story.

Next, we have *The Fault In Our Stars*, a romantic film about two teenagers navigating their way through life with cancer. This movie is similar to India's *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, a film with a main character who falls in love with someone diagnosed with cancer. These films both show the perseverance many with terminal diseases display, and

they teach many lessons about how to lead a fulfilled life.

Another popular Hollywood movie is *She's The Man*. This Hollywood film is about a girl who disguises herself as a man to play soccer because of the discrimination she faces in the sport. Bollywood's *Dangal* is about a former wrestler who accomplishes a similar feat. *Dangal* is a former wrestler who wishes that his children were boys since he can win a wrestling championship, but he has three girls. He makes his daughter wrestle anyway, even though it is taboo for women to wrestle. This movie taught me a lot about female empowerment and how anyone can do anything they set their mind to.

My final recommendation for

you to check out is *Koi Mil Gaya*. This movie is about a disabled man who is unable to fall in love and live his life. By the end, he is granted many wishes including supernatural abilities. This movie is a great fit for anyone who enjoyed *Wonder. Wonder*, a film about overcoming disabilities, is similar to *Koi Mil Gaya* since both protagonists refuse to let their disabilities stop them from achieving their goals. They learn that they don't have to meet someone else's standards of how they should live, and the protagonists of both movies teach kindness to others. This movie taught me how to take things into perspective and will teach you a lot about that as well.

Talking about heroines and heroes, life and death, and so much

more, will hopefully persuade you to expand your interests in film. I've learned several life lessons from Bollywood movies, and I would love it if you took the time to explore some as well. I hope you watch some of these because these films teach people a lot about life, love, compromise, overcoming unimaginable circumstances, and so much more.

You can watch these movies on Netflix, Prime Video, HBO Max, and Disney+. Once you start watching Bollywood movies, you'll find a whole new genre to explore! Bollywood movies are so diverse in their subject matter that you can easily draw parallels to Hollywood movies. Let me know if you find any!



Such power. Such superhero-ness.
ONLINE SOURCE

Every Movie in the MCU, Ranked

By KERA MATTHEWS '24
Spectrum Staff

At the start of 2021, my dad suggested that we watch every movie in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). After reluctantly agreeing, I jumped on the Marvel bandwagon. That's when I realized my life would never be the same. Throughout my journey, I've developed some strong opinions, and I'm excited to share them here!

(Note: Phases are used in the MCU to group movies together by their relevance to an overarching conflict.)

Marvel Phases Ranked:

4. Phase 2 (*Iron Man 3*, *Thor: The Dark World*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and *Ant-Man*): None of the phases are bad, but Phase 2 barely furthered the character development from characters introduced in Phase 1. *Guardians of the Galaxy* was, admittedly, a cultural reset, but as a whole, I don't find myself itching to revisit this phase.

Favorite movie from Phase 2: *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*

3. Phase 1 (*Iron Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Iron Man 2*, *Thor*, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, and *Marvel's The Avengers*): This phase kickstarted my obsession with the MCU, so it would be criminal to put it last. However, it is objectively the lowest quality of the four phases, so its production is bound to be worse than newer movies.

Favorite Movie from Phase 1: *The Avengers*

2. Phase 4 (Ongoing but includes *Wandavision*, *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, *Loki*, *Black Widow*, *What If...?*, and *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*): This phase is off to a great start! It's held up despite the conclusive finales in Phase 3, which isn't easy. Unlike Phase 1, this phase has phenomenal production and compelling storylines. However, this phase is a bit disjointed since there are so many action-packed plot points that don't connect to a bigger picture. That being said, the anticipation for future projects makes these concerns easily ignorable.

Favorite Movie from Phase 4: *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*

1. Phase 3 (*Captain America: Civil War*, *Doctor Strange*, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*, *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, *Thor: Ragnarok*, *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, *Captain Marvel*, *Avengers: Endgame*, and *Spider-Man: Far From Home*): With heavier content and three (!!!) Avengers movies, it's undeniable that this phase stands out. The origin stories were more sophisticated, and a long-foreshadowed villain finally made their appearance. Enjoyment-wise, these movies captured my attention from the get-go. Tread caution, though, because this phase brings PAIN.

Favorite Movie from Phase 3: *Avengers: Endgame*

My Ranking of all the Projects from

Best to Worst:

1. *Avengers: Endgame*
2. *Avengers: Infinity War*
3. *Black Panther*
4. *Thor: Ragnarok*
5. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*
6. *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*
7. *The Avengers*
8. *Captain America: The First Avenger*
9. *Wandavision*
10. *Thor*
11. *Spider-Man: Homecoming*
12. *What If...?*
13. *Guardians of the Galaxy: Volume 2*
14. *Spider-Man: Far From Home*
15. *Loki*
16. *Black Widow*
17. *Guardians of the Galaxy*
18. *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*
19. *Doctor Strange*
20. *Captain America: Civil War*
21. *Ant-Man*
22. *Iron Man 3*
23. *Iron Man*
24. *Avengers: Age of Ultron*
25. *Thor: The Dark World*
26. *Iron Man 2*
27. *Captain Marvel*
28. *Ant-Man and the Wasp*
29. *The Incredible Hulk* (don't watch this one, ever)

Overall, only one movie is a miss. The rest of them are special to me for different reasons, and the MCU is always an exciting adventure that never fails to surprise me! If you aren't a fan already, I recommend hopping on the Marvel train!



Fall foragin'. All full of shroom-y vibes and chillin'!
ONLINE SOURCE

~Fall Vibes Playlists~

By NAKISA RAZBAN '23
Off-Topic Editor

It's autumn fellas, and that means you need playlists to go along with your apple picking expeditions

and car rides under color-changing leaves! I've got something for everybody here, with classical, jazz and pop playlists. I hope they elevate your ~fall vibes~ to pumpkin spice latte levels!



CLASSICAL



JAZZ



POP

Off-Topic

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RIYA SHAH

Favorite Quote Picks

By CHIEF STAFF

Ever wondered what our favorite quotes are? We know this *essential* question has plagued your sleepless nights. Sleep tight tonight!

“What, you egg! [Stabbing him]” – Macbeth

“They say nothing lasts forever but they’re just scared it will last longer than they can love it.” – Ocean Vuong

“It’s like I have ESPN or something.” – Mean Girls

“Oh wait, I was once an electrical engineer.” – Barbie Life in the Dream House

“But while I may look impassive, I’m frantically paddling my feet underwater, always overcompensating to hide my devouring feelings of inadequacy.” – Cathy Park Hong

“Leave the gun. Take the cannoli.” – The Godfather

“Ouch! That’s too tight, you ambulatory meat sack.” – Barbie Life in the Dream House

“She picked up a potato. I saw it hit the floor, then roll under the stove.” – Cathedral, by Raymond Carver

“Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.” – Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre

“[R]acial trauma is not a competitive sport.” – Cathy Park Hong

“To play a wrong note is insignificant. To play without passion is inexcusable.” – Beethoven

“I’ll set it to extra crispy.” – Barbie Life in the Dream House

“Word-work is sublime... because it is generative: it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference—the way in which we are like no other life.” – Toni Morrison

“When and where does this “real world” occur?” – Almost Famous

“Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it” – Ferris Bueller’s Day Off

“You know, I’ve never met someone who talks so much and says nothing at the same time” – A Little Bit of Heaven

“You talkin’ to me?” – Taxi Driver

“I miss you more than I remember you.” – Ocean Vuong

“Everyone can cook, but only the fearless can be great.” – Ratatouille

“The world is filled with nice people, if you can’t find one be one” – Dodie Clark

“You’ve got a fast car / Is it fast enough so we can fly away?” – Tracy Chapman

“The sun will rise, and we will try again.”

“I wanna be the king” – Sarah Kinsley

“I have struggled to prove myself into existence.” – Cathy Park Hong

“College Board is a scam.” – my friend

“Bella, where the hell have you been, loca?” – Twilight

“We keep our heads down and work hard, believing that our diligence will reward us with our dignity, but our diligence will only make us disappear.” – Cathy Park Hong

“‘Jeff, I think you should play the role of my father.’ ‘I don’t want to be your father.’ ‘That’s perfect. you already know your lines.’” – Community

“You once told me that the human eye is god’s loneliest creation. How so much of the world passes through the pupil and still it holds nothing. The eye, alone in its socket, doesn’t even know there’s another one, just like it, an inch away, just as hungry, as empty.” – Ocean Vuong

“I have dirt on you. Now I know everything. Can you imagine what will happen when everyone finds out about your act? The price of my silence is 0.21 BTC, transfer them to me by August 26 to his bitcoin wallet bc1qw220sye4cxya05ahpuw9lwfu7acwql660h73tq otherwise, I’ll tell everyone. And then you will feel very bad. Time has passed.” – BrettWon BrettWon, some random guy on our website.

“This is fine.” – a dog, on fire (but also us.)

Shifting: A Fan’s Greatest Fantasy

By ELSA LEWIS AND SHREE JAY-
AKRISHNA '25
Spectrum Staff

Imagine you’re walking back from the Quidditch pitch after winning your first match of the season against Slytherin. Seeing Draco Malfoy’s ferret-like face filled with disappointment fills you with joy. Hermione congratulates you, and Ron pats you on the back. While walking up to the painting of the Fat Lady, you cringe from her horrific singing. Opening the common room door, you see Gryffindor celebrating as Fred and George pass around bottles of butterbeer and firewhiskey. Across the room, Nearly Headless Nick decapitates himself for the pleasure of some first years, much to everyone’s amusement. Meditation? Lucid dreaming? No, this is shifting! Your subconscious mind leaves your original body as you shift into a different reality. We wish this fantastical experience could be possible, but unfortunately, no evidence proves shifting’s validity.

People believe that shifting is real so that they can achieve the happiness, romance, and friendships they fantasize of. @Natskaban, a popular TikTok with 194.4k followers, regularly shifts to Hogwarts, a school from Harry Potter. She is one of many who are in love with Draco Malfoy. In her desired reality, she believes that she is dating the wimpy pureblood. She’s also a user of #DracoMalfoy, a hashtag with over 28.7 billion views (the fact that people want to look at videos of Draco Malfoy is something we can’t comprehend). When talking about the

cheese-stick-resembling Slytherin, she says, “I am lucky to be able to breathe the same air as him.” For some reason, @Natzkaban’s many followers believe her stories about shifting and seek to experience their own dream realities.

While many lovers of Draco Malfoy believe in the inexplicable, some are logic-oriented. People who turn to science believe that shifting is not real and is instead a type of dream. In an interview with The Washington Post, Laura Rosser Kreiselmaier, a holistic psychotherapist, said “it seems to be maybe a form of self-hypnosis.” She observed that “altered states of consciousness have been around as far back as we know.” She believes that drugs or alcohol might be the true reason behind this misconception. Others believe that in addition to self-hypnosis, shift-

ing could also be a form of lucid dreaming, where a person is aware they are in a dream. Currently, it is difficult to say without any definitive scientific backing.

After celebrating your win on the Quidditch pitch, you and your fellow Gryffindors go to bed. Falling into a deep slumber, you wake up in your normal world far, far away from Hogwarts. The minute hand on your clock only seems to have moved five minutes since you last saw it. Though some believe that they shifted into an alternate reality, this was merely a dream. Now we ask you: do you think shifting is possible? Will you believe the Draco-lovers and misguided TikTokers? Or, will you choose to side with the people that think that shifting to a different reality is a crazy notion, one that is not reasonable nor possible?

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Off-Topic

Currently Trendy Foods Put to the Test: Great or Gross?

By FREYA WILKINSON '23
Spectrum Staff

Do you ever come across random recipes and shake your head, mystified as to who would ever dream up such concoctions?

Over the past few years, weird food trends have exploded in popularity due to their uniqueness and virality. However, you might be surprised to discover that many of these funky combinations actually work. Trying all of these different recipes on your own is a lot of work, so we'll simplify things and put these viral recipes to the test ourselves. They'll be ranked on a scale of one to five, from atrocious to *chef's kiss* delicious! These recipes will be followed by my fellow chefs of various levels, which will hopefully produce the most accurate results! Now, let's begin.

Scrumptious food trends

First, we will start off with "Fancy Mug Mac and Cheese." This isn't your ordinary mac and cheese, because get this: it's made using a microwave. Crazy, right? Well, you will be shocked to find out it works!

We started with raw pasta and water in a coffee mug, added various spices, and microwaved it. After a few minutes, we were surprised to see it was successfully cooked! Also, the pasta tasted deliciously cheesy, as all mac and cheese should be. I highly recommend you give this one a try! Rating: 4/5

Next, we have a sweet twist to a classic breakfast drink: coffee! This is the famous dalgona coffee. Let's see what happens! Dalgona is a traditional Korean sweet, and this dalgona coffee has its roots in the candy. The "whipping" is the key part! We whipped coffee, sugar, and water together, and after what felt like hours (and turned out to be pretty close—45 minutes!) we suc-

cessfully achieved whipped status. We dolloped the whipped coffee into a glass of milk, and—voila—there was the dalgona coffee. The taste? Delicious! While it honestly is definitely not worth the effort on a daily basis, this yummy treat would be an amazing treat to make with friends. Rating: 5/5

Absolutely, disgustingly revolting food trends

After such surprisingly delicious treats, these next two recipes may sour your appetite. Let's begin with an interesting drink: lettuce tea. Known for its supposed sleep benefits, lettuce tea seems to be the latest health fad. You may be wondering, does lettuce tea really help you sleep? Well, don't fret, you asked

(well, not really, but ehh) and we delivered! We began with a chunk of lettuce, and simply covered it with boiling water. That's it! It tasted bland, and the wilted lettuce looked gross. This tea didn't really make us sleepy. And further research shows that this tea has no scientific studies and likely creates a placebo effect. Rating: 2/5

Last, and definitely least, we have hot cheeto pickles. Cheetos are some of the most common ingredients in viral recipes lately. Using a big jar of store-bought pickles, pour out the juice and infuse Flamin' Hot Cheetos with it. After putting the pickles back into the newly-infused juice, they should be left to ferment for a certain amount of time (this is

unclear and differs depending on the recipe). This was the grossest of all. The vinegar taste combined with the Flamin' Hot Cheeto cheese, and well, it curdled our taste buds and made us question if food is good. And food is always good. *Dramatically sobs* This was by far the worst of the viral recipes; however, it was so uniquely disgusting that we wouldn't be surprised if it pleased the most *ahem* unique palates. Rating: 1/5

Were you surprised to find out that some of these food trends actually ended up working? There seems to be so many viral recipes online these days that it feels impossible to attempt just one. However, there are countless hidden gems that can only be found if you give them a try!



Fancy Mug Mac and Cheese
ONLINE SOURCE



Dalgona Coffee
ONLINE SOURCE



Lettuce Tea
ONLINE SOURCE



Hot Cheeto Pickles
ONLINE SOURCE

Some of the Chaff's Favorite Words

By CHIEF STAFF

Words are like jelly beans: they come in so many shapes, sizes, and colors, and we are eternally grateful that a box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans exploded in the universe. Seriously, where would we be if we had to rely on words like "sad" and "bad" to communicate? Anyways, here's a comprehensive list of spicy words to make you word nerds and dictionary aficionados tingle with glee!

Thesis words:

Unveil - "Reveal" but cooler.

Veil - It's like unveil, but you unveil!

Undermine - A fantastic way to show how one factor may be more important in causation.

Overshadow - The opposite of undermine. See also: override, outweigh, etc.

Perpetuate - Would make English teachers cry with joy. Perhaps also: internalize.

Highlight - A stunning way to propose your argument: "[Author]

highlights [concept]"

Accentuate - See "highlight." But it's prettier.

Plague - "A PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES!" but such a good thesis word.

Transition Words:

Indeed - Stevens? Is that you? (No, it's Rebecca Zhang.)

However - A staple to show contrast. We all adore it.

While - Contrast in a clause. The more descriptive version of "however."

Moreover - Far superior to "in addition," "additionally," or whatever other blasphemous synonyms for "and" people use.

Further - When "furthermore" had a glow up.

Thus - Sometimes ugly (if it's at the beginning of a sentence), sometimes beautiful (if it's in the middle of a sentence!)

Miscellaneous Yummies:

Pulchritude - O, it's so ugly yet so

beautiful.

Kerfuffle - Whenever I say "kerfuffle" (because yes, we should all say "kerfuffle" more!), I think of a distraught duck.

Translucent - Rolls off the tongue. Opaque is also pretty.

Smush - Smush, schmush, crush, mush.

Segue - For the spelling.

Wistful - Sounds like what it means! Also, perhaps it should be spelled with "wh"?

Serendipity - Serendipity! Ser-en-Di-P-i-TY. Ah, so smooth.

Discombobulated - Is "bob" short for discombobulated? I think it should be.

Lilting - Just. Beautiful.

Crisp - Isn't "crisp" so crisp?

Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia. - I send my condolences to anyone with this fear.

A Punctuation Battle

By JASMINE WU '22 &
REBECCA ZHANG '22
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Punctuation. We've all seen those cheesy quotes on the side of your English teacher's desk. "Let's eat grandma!" is concerning, while "Let's eat, grandma!" is just an everyday sentence. But commas are only an introduction into the wonderful world of punctuation. Here at The Spectrum, punctuation pleases us, so please enjoy some of our favorites.

Oxford Commas

The oxford comma is quite a controversial piece of punctuation. But if you're a hater, take a look at this sentence: she likes grilled cheese, ricotta and apple, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. See that little hero between "apple" and "and?" That's a wondrous oxford comma. Imagine the sentence without the comma: she likes grilled cheese, ricotta and apple and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. What kind of sandwiches does she like? We'll never know! In lists of paired items, oxford commas truly save the day.

Semicolon

As a past English teacher has coined it, the "sexy semicolon" joins two associated sentences seamlessly. Personally, I pop in a semicolon when I don't feel like writing a transition or to simply clarify the previous sentence. Is that a very good tip? No. Is it a useful tip? Yes! But only do so when it makes sense.

For example:

In comparing them to moths, Nick suggests that the guests are simply drawn toward the light; that light attracts them.

Colons

The cold colon: a dramatic, beautiful way to end a sentence. Colons deliver those mind blowing definitions with a theatrical flourish. Of course, they're integral in note-taking, lab reports, and everyday lists, but they truly shine in paragraph-form writing! In English essays, I use colons to give examples of my

analysis or define a spicy idea. And in conclusions, colons can tie together your argument in one beautiful clause.

A quick example from our Letter from the EICs this issue:

"Norms, normalization, normalcy, however you phrase it: all encompass the rhythm of life we've unconsciously settled for."

And another from our completely, totally unbiased review of The Spectrum that was in the Back-To-School Issue:

"Finally, this was it: the hallucinatory scent of fresh ink, drifting from a copy of The Spectrum's Back-To-School issue, which had fallen from a locker door in a forlorn yet graceful state."

Em Dashes

It's a comma! It's a colon! It's... an em dash! As the most remarkable innovation, the em dash vaunts its versatility in writing. I crave the sight of pen licking paper, black ink melding into a line, and the writer roaring for that eureka moment—their invention of the em dash.

They're the perfect punctuation for appositives or add-ons. To be honest, every single one of my college essays contains at least one em dash. Needless to say, we love em dashes here at The Spectrum—and you should too :)

An appositive (and physics-related!) example where an em dash is truly just superior to a boring set of commas:

"To appear still from a certain perspective, your velocity—both magnitude and direction—must match that of the frame of reference."

Another example again from our lovely review of The Spectrum last issue:

"But I was suddenly struck with a realization—my reverie was no pipe dream..."

Armed with these precise, powerful, passionate pieces of punctuation, you may now go forth and pave your own way in the world! And, of course, impress everyone you ever meet.

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3 - 4:45 PM**

Off-Topic



It's a heart inside of another heart. Deep.
ONLINE SOURCE

A Tier Ranking of Recent Pop Hits

By HARSHINI MAGESH '23
Spectrum Staff

2021 has been quite an eventful year for pop music, with new artists and styles transforming the industry. Since this summer brought us so many new bops, I decided to rank some of the most popular songs that dropped in the last three to four months. Here is an overview of my ranking system:

S - Mind-blowing. Extremely unique sound and elicits strong emotion from the listener.

A - Understood the assignment. Must have an addicting melody.

B - How did that song go again? These are good for the first few listens, but are easily forgettable.

C - Not my vibe. I wouldn't say these songs are entirely bad, but... they aren't the type of music that I would listen to.

Let's get ranking!

S tier: "Happier than Ever"
- Billie Eilish

Going into the song, I thought that this would have the expected melancholy and ASMR-type sound typically seen in Eilish's music. The first half of the song is very chill and ballad-like, with only the minimalistic use of the ukulele as an accompaniment. However, it then unexpectedly transitions in the middle to a full-blown rock song. The gradually increasing volume, multiple vocal layers, and blasting

guitars, combined with the emotion in her voice, is what makes this transition utterly GODLY. The music video also does a great job portraying emotion, creatively using metaphors to symbolize the song's message, such as Eilish swimming underwater to represent the suffocation she felt in a relationship.

A tier: "Stay"
- The Kid LAROI ft. Justin Bieber:

With nearly 20 billion streams on TikTok and 830 million on Spotify, "Stay" is undoubtedly one of the year's smash hits. Layered with synths and infused with continuous energy throughout, it leaves the melody ingrained in the listener's head. I didn't vibe with the song initially, but I was soon humming the hook without even knowing it. The music video of this song didn't really stand out to me, but I can say that the TikTok trend definitely did, with people using drones to film themselves doing the dance from a 360-degree aerial view.

B tier: "Shivers"
- Ed Sheeran

I was initially going to include "Bad Habits," but I changed my mind after watching the music video for this song (which I'll get to shortly). I didn't hate the song, but I felt that it lacked novelty in its chorus. The music video is a whole other story; never in hundred years did I think that Ed Sheeran riding Thomas the Tank Engine would be all it took to bring back my child-

hood nightmares (if you're wondering about the backstory, I was one of those kids who found entertainment in those creepy Thomas and Friends memes). If you're someone who likes music with a hint of horror, this song is right for you.

C tier: "Permission to Dance"
- BTS

We finally arrive at the last song on this list, which I would, unfortunately, rank as C tier. I like BTS's music, but "Permission to Dance" didn't come close to meeting the standards set by their previous releases. It sounded generic to me—maybe it's because of the excessive autotune, the shallow lyrics, or the unnecessary vocables (the "nananana" at the end), but I think that this song would fit better in *High School Musical* than in BTS's discography. Also, who thought that a neon green mullet was a good hairstyle (RM's hairstylist, I'm looking at you)? Nonetheless, the song has a cheery message, so I understand that some people may enjoy it.

In my opinion, a good song has a unique melody and meaningful lyrics, both of which contribute to the emotion and connection that the listener feels. As for bad songs, I think that they're completely subjective—for example, jazz music isn't really my vibe, but I know a lot of people enjoy it. Nonetheless, you made it to the end. Whether you read the entire thing, parts of it, or just the ending, I hope you felt enlightened afterward.



Cool guitar person doing cool guitar things
ONLINE SOURCE

The Love Doctor Answers

By JULIA KANG '22
Columnist

<3 Greetings <3 I hope all you lovely readers out there have had a wonderful beginning of the school year. Not to mention, it's now fall: the best time to...fall in love! Latte foam art, tiny pumpkins, fuzzy, comfy socks—autumn is the best time of the year to cozy up with a new boo!

Q: So I've been pretty unclear about my relationship with this guy for a while now: we've been texting each other but sometimes in school I feel like he's kind of ignoring me? He barely acknowledges my existence in front of his friends. But we dressed up as a couple for Halloween—he was the devil to my angel uwu.

A: Hmm. Hm. Hm. Hm. Hm. Hm. Hm. Hm. Hm. Hm. Hm. Let's unpack this step by step, okay? Now, I don't mean to scare you. There's nothing jarringly horrible about this. Maybe he's just a...private person? But maybe then he wouldn't have dressed up with you. Did he dress up with you to school? If he did, I'd say that's an okay sign that he's into you. Everything else though? Could be worrisome. If he's ignoring your existence on the regular, he might not be that serious about whatever y'all have going on. This is the worst advice I can give, but ultimately, it's your judgement call. If you think the Halloween costume was cute, then go you! But maybe there's more to his devilish costume than you think, he could be a devil on the inside as well. Watch out—and best of luck!

Q: I have a MAJOR crush on this girl in my English class, but the only times I've ever talked/interacted with her are when I avidly agreed and responded to her points during

Socratic seminars and on Google Classroom discussions. Do I have a chance?

A: Yeah, that sounds pretty good. Your odds could be much, much worse. At least by replying to her, she's forced to recognize your existence. My hope is that, as per common Socratic seminar courtesy, you mention her name when you "agree with her" or "extend on her argument." Ah yes, nothing like modern romance!

Potential next steps: make a "group chat" with people in your class so you can get her number and then individually slide in her dms, or even slide in through Google Classroom/email. Hope this helps!

Q: Is making instant ramen for someone a good-enough first date? I feel like the standards for the first date are really high, but I'm just not at that level of financial security yet.

A: That is more than awesome. At least, for me. Maybe we're meant to be? JK! I'm just playing... unless?! Anyways, consider the person you're asking out. Are they a noodle obsessed fiend like me? Or do they (strangely) find other foods more palatable? As for "first-date" standards, chill. You're a high-schooler, nobody's expecting you to dish out a couple hundred for some Michelin meal. Honestly, I bet like 98 percent of people out there consider grabbing coffee at Starbucks (or the superior Dunkin', obviously) a "good-enough" first-date.

And that's all for now! And remember, as you lovely readers churn through the next few months of school, snow, cold, and potentially seasonal depression, don't forget what's most important: love. Hit me up with more steamy questions to warm up your winter!

With oodles of noodles and love,
Dr. Kuang

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JULIA KUANG

Off-Topic

Dr. Seuss's new poem is out: What Pet Should You Get?

BY TINGHAN WANG '24

Jokes aside, these past couple of years have forced us to seriously reconsider our intro/extroversion, so discover which pet best suits your personality and lifestyle now in this fun quiz!

1. Let's start off with a classic: what is your favorite season?

- A. Summer
- B. Spring
- C. Fall
- D. Winter
- E. What is fall? I only know autumn.

2. Which word speaks to your soul? Or, you know, which one do you like the best?

- A. Mobbles
- B. Cherry blossoms
- C. Cozily
- D. Glistening
- E. "Cherry blossoms" is two words

3. Potatoes are a universal food. In your opinion, what's the best way to eat a potato?

- A. French fries
- B. Potato salad
- C. Traditionally baked
- D. Mashed
- E. With ketchup

4. No quiz is complete without a question about dessert: what's your favorite?

- A. Ice cream
- B. Fruit
- C. Caramel apple pie
- D. Gooney brownies
- E. Candy. Or sugar by the spoonful.

5. We're jumping all over the place here so you can't rig your results! Preferred weather?

- A. Sunny days around 60 degrees F
- B. When it rains and there are puddles everywhere
- C. I don't care because I'm always indoors
- D. When it's so cold you have to burrow deep deep deep into fleece blankets
- E. I CALL THE THUNDER AND LIGHTNING! Hurricanes rise at my command!

6. RBF, IYKYK? What expression do you find yourself wearing the most?

- A. Happy smile
- B. Peaceful "listening" face
- C. Skepticism
- D. Thoughtful frown
- E. Sticking out tongue

7. This quiz is all out of order, so after dessert we ask: what's the most important meal?

- A. Lunch
- B. Breakfast
- C. Snacks
- D. Dinner
- E. Sugar

8. Here's a softball: color preferences?

- A. Bold, bright neon.
- B. Pastels
- C. Muted warm tones
- D. Monochromatic
- E. Glitter is a color

9. Taking this quiz is your priority, but if you weren't doing this, what would you be doing?

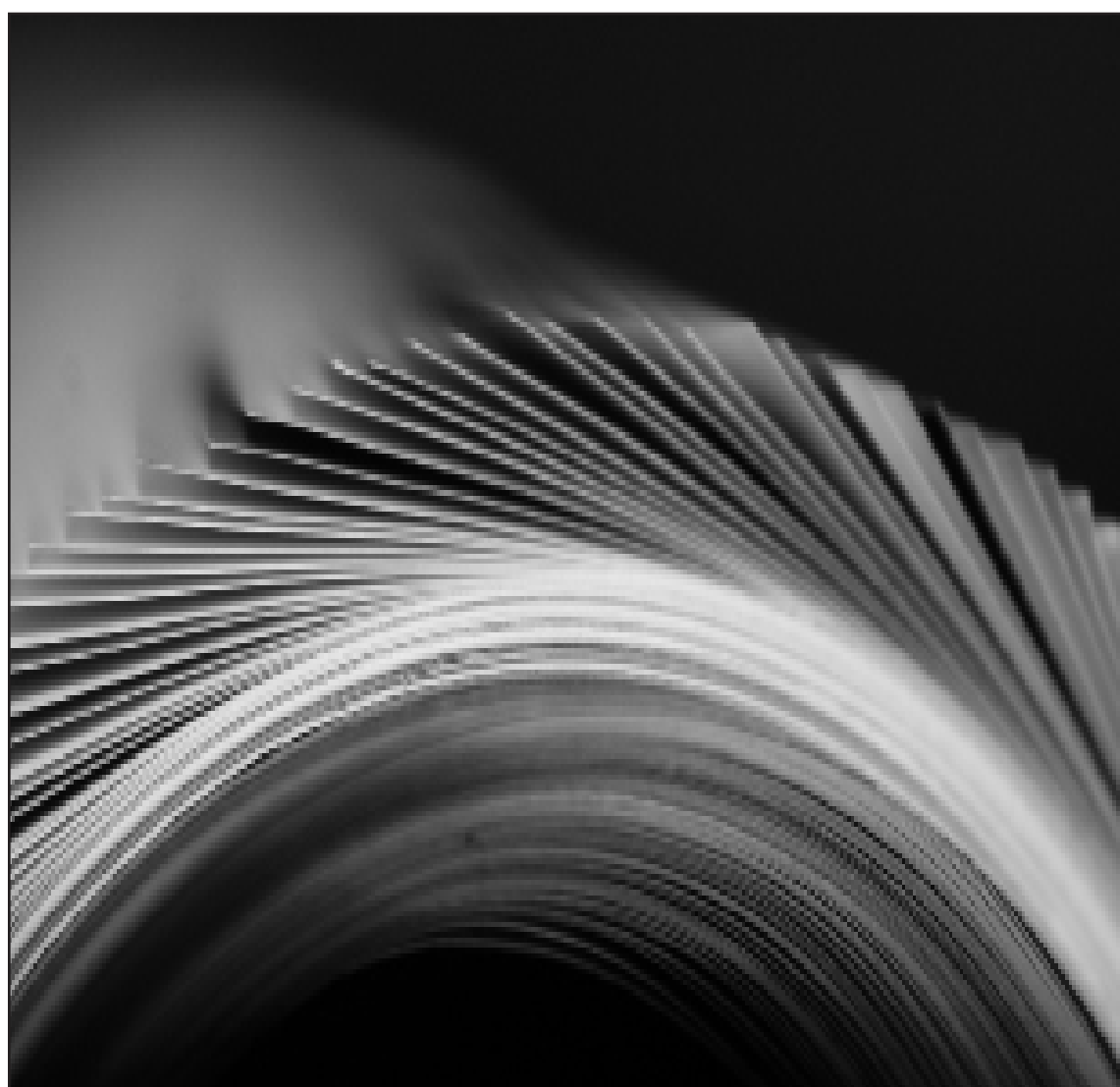
- A. Some sort of social or outdoor activity
- B. Teatime or a quiet stroll in the gardens
- C. Reading a book
- D. Meditating or pondering deep dilemmas
- E. Extreme sports

10. We're all human here and very imperfect. What we'd rather be doing oftentimes is pushed away... so what are you usually doing?

- A. Reorganizing my desk for the 10th time
- B. Sleeping
- C. Daydreaming
- D. Crying
- E. Eating



Check out your results by scanning the QR code!



It's a book, but it's flipping.
ONLINE SOURCE

BookToker's Book Guide

By SUINAINA TIPERNINI '23
Spectrum Staff

Tearing through a good book in a matter of hours is, in my opinion, one of the best feelings. Recently, I've found that when I search for a book (from TikTok recommendations) at the library, it's out, and multiple people already have it on hold. So what makes these books so special? Let me, your trusty BookTok guide, take you through the ins and outs of the trendiest books. You can decide if they're worth waiting months to read.

We Were Liars by E. Lockhart:

We've all dreamt of owning a private island off the coast of Massachusetts, and that's exactly what Cadence Sinclair has. Along with her cousins, she spends her summers on her grandfather's island. The book explores her previous experiences on the island as narrated by her present self. It follows Cadence's struggle in decoding a mysterious event that evades her memory. Sprinkle in some intense family drama that drives everyone apart, and BOOM! An ending that leaves you with your mouth hanging open. After reading *We Were Liars*, I couldn't stop thinking about it. This book does have some vague language and confusing time leaps which requires close reading to un-

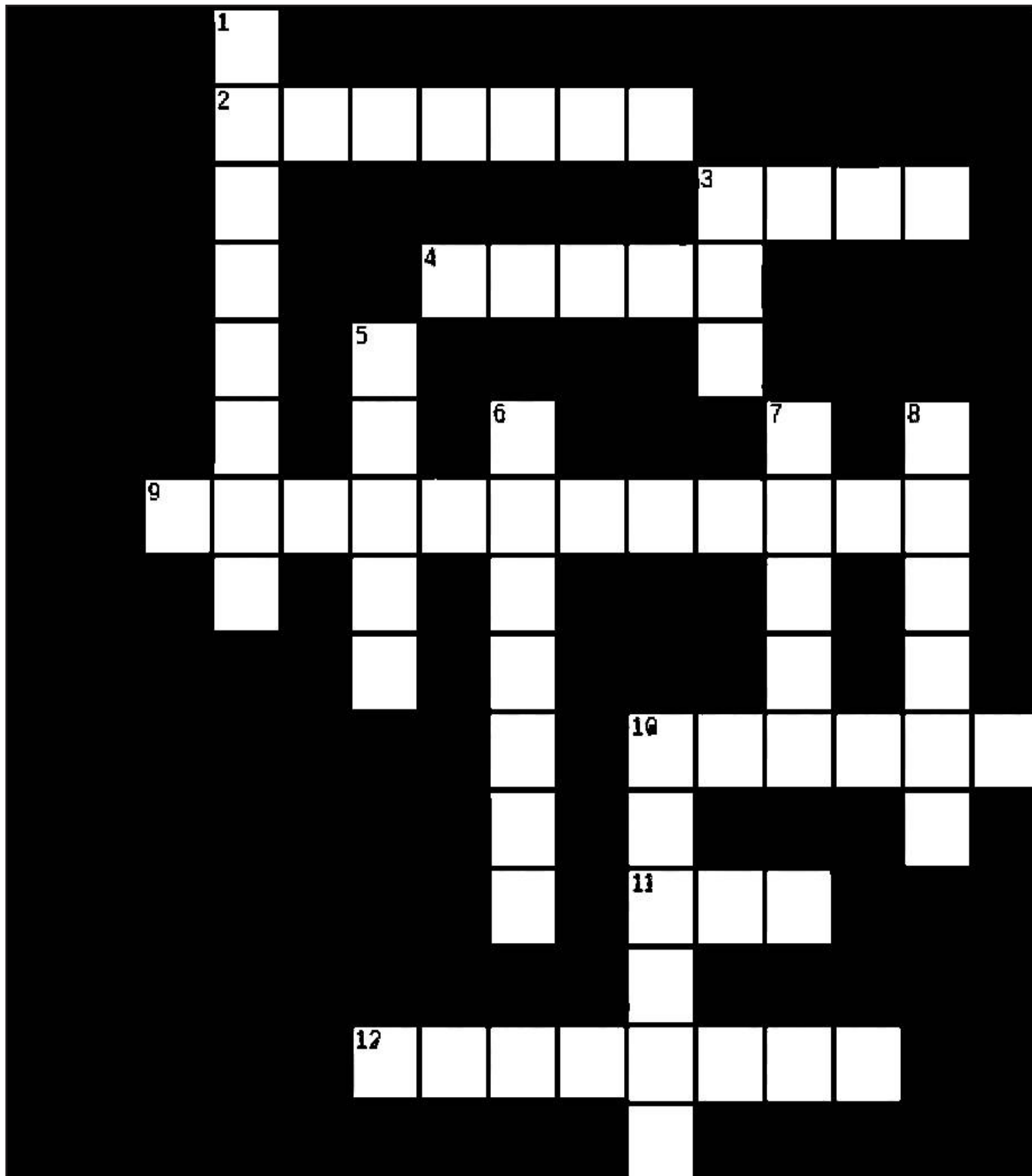
derstand some events, but it's the perfect option if you want to immerse yourself in a book that will leave you questioning everything.

The One by John Marrs:

It's the future. Scientists can use your DNA to find your soulmate. Do you want to know who your biological other half is, or will you go your whole life wondering? When this scientific breakthrough comes out, the many people's lives fall apart. This book keeps you guessing. Everything you think you know is wrong. Almost every single chapter left my mind racing with questions, begging to know more. I kept thinking, one more chapter, just one more chapter, and before I realized it, I had finished. I think this book presents an interesting take on the idea of soulmates and that they may not be the true love everyone seems to be looking for. The end of the book actually left me rooting for a serial killer. I know, crazy. If thrillers are your cup of tea, this book is perfect.

Nobody will have the exact same experience with a book, so some of the things I liked about a book you might not like, and vice versa. If you want to give reading outside of school a shot, these books will have you reading in all your free time.

Off-Topic



Crossword Clues

- Across
- Demeter, goddess of the _____.
 - Leaf fork.
 - Domesticated from an ancient grass in Mexico.
 - “_____ and everything nice!”
 - Same phonetic spelling as “colonel.”
 - Black, green, jasmine, chrysanthemum, hibiscus.
 - Ingredient in 9 Across.

- Down
- “_____ roasting on an open fire!”
 - “But loving him was _____”
 - The second fruit from “PPAP,” a viral music video from 2016.
 - Birds _____ south.
 - Squished apple + time = ??
 - Where vascular plants perform photosynthesis.
 - “Have a break, have a _____”

Check out thespectrumabrh.com for answers!

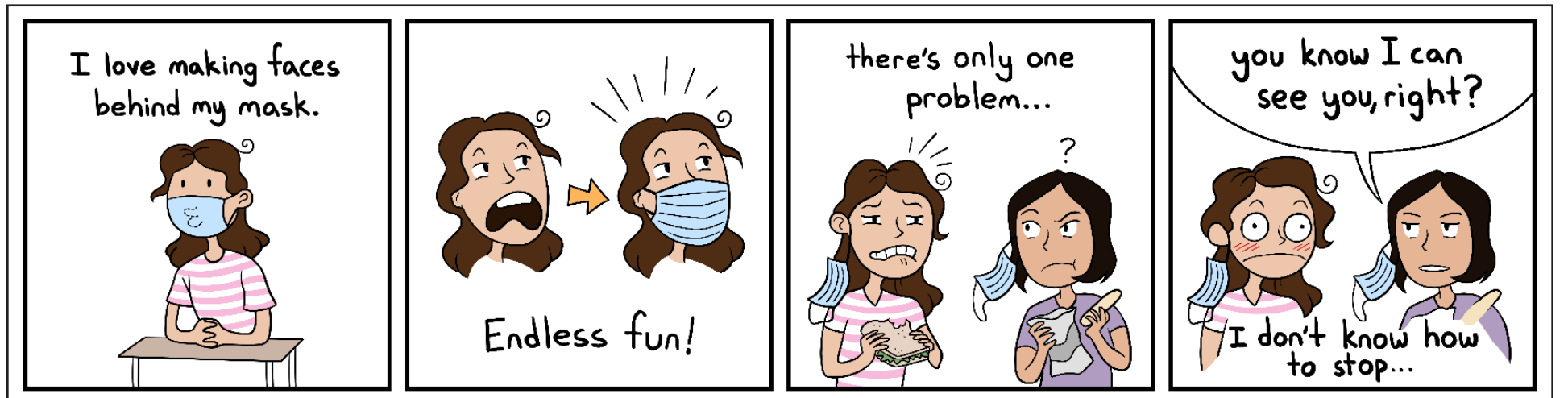
Geography Quiz Answers

- A: Kyrgyzstan
- B: China
- C: Tajikistan
- D: Kazakhstan



Boots and cats and boots and cats
ONLINE SOURCE

Expressing Yourself is Great! Sometimes...



Emily Hiltunen / Spectrum Staff

Baking with Hana: Pumpkin Cream Cheese Muffins



Phoebe Abadi / Spectrum Staff