



Chocolate chip's cousin...
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Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Bars Recipe

Looking for a fun fall recipe? Look no further—try out these pumpkin bars!

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Enjoying the fall colors...
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First Draft of Elections in 2024

In the wake of the controversial election results, the United States is not alone.

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Star spangled banner!
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The Spectrum

◆ *e cineribus et ad astra* ◆

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It doesn't get more fall than this.
Lukas Kanics

Finding Fall Connections

By MAHIMA RAMESH '26
Mainspread Editor

As the beautiful air of autumn surrounds us, there is no shortage of activities to celebrate the season. If you are looking for something low-cost or a splurge, a quick adventure or a whole day of celebration, the best part of fall is not what you do—it is who you do it with. This season offers something for everyone, and in the end, it's the memories you create with your friends and family that make it truly special. In this article, we will explore three enjoyable ways to take in fall. From cooking at home to festivals and outdoor adventures, there's something for everyone to love. And of course, while these are just a few examples, the beauty of autumn will always lie in making your own traditions.

If there is one dish that screams fall, it would be apples. From apple pies to apple crisps, this simple fruit can allow us to do anything! Why not start by heading out to an apple orchard for some apple pick-

ing? Not only is it a relaxing time with friends, but it also provides you with a basket full of fresh, crisp apples. From here, the options are endless. You can have some fun with classic autumn games like apple bobbing, or turn your basket of apples into something special. Whether you're sipping homemade apple cider or baking a warm, golden apple pie (with so many flavor variations to test), these apples can provide the foundation for fostering deeper connections with family to make these delicious fall dishes. Above simple apples, fall brings so many more comfort foods as well, from pumpkin spice everything to Thanksgiving staples like mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce that can be cooked in a variety of variations. Cooking any dish with loved ones is the perfect way to spend time together during the season.

Secondly, fall would not be complete without the liveliness of a local autumn festival. With some friends, you can enjoy the vibrant colors of fall while listening to live music, playing games, or navigat-

ing corn mazes. Fall festivals are also the perfect opportunity to engage with others and connect over expressing your creative side with pumpkin carving or scarecrow making, as well as tasting delicious seasonal treats. Near Boston, we can find a variety of fall festivals to visit. For example, the Boston Common hosts festivals with hayrides, pumpkin patches, and art displays. Additionally, the Topsfield Fair is one of the oldest fairs in the U.S. and it offers critical autumn activities like giant pumpkin contests, live entertainment, and agricultural exhibits. These festivals provide the ideal backdrop to make lasting memories with friends.

Lastly, sometimes the best way to experience fall is to simply step outside. You may simply have small bike rides with friends and family along leaf-lined trails, or start long and exciting hikes in the woods; regardless, the outdoors is a playground during the fall season! The vibrant red, orange, and yellow colors on the leaves make every landscape outside feel magical. You can even consider a camping trip with friends, with late-night bonfires and marshmallow roasts. Looking

for some low-key outdoor activities? You can even embrace yourself outside while raking leaves and jumping into leaf piles, bringing out the inner child within all of us. The fresh air and picturesque scenery of fall bring you the perfect excuse to spend a day outside and appreciate the natural beauty of the season with loved ones.

While these are just a few examples of fun fall activities, the truth is you can find joy in almost anything this season as long as you're spending time with loved ones. You may be out apple picking, enjoying a festival, or on a hike outside, but even just staying in and cozying up with a movie or a favorite TV series can bring you the best time. Whether it be watching Gilmore Girls or Gossip Girl with friends or camping with family, autumn will always remain a season that brings people together through its numerous activities. At the end of the day, it's not about how much money you spend or how long you're out. Fall is about the warmth and joy you share with the people around you. So whatever you choose to do this season, make sure you're doing it with the ones who matter most.

Intro

Letter From the EICs

By SHREE JAYAKRISHNA & ISABELLA HILL
Co-Editors-in-Chief

Hey everyone,

Shree and Isabella here! Senior year has already been a whirlwind, with college applications and Quarter One wrapping up, but we’re thrilled to bring you one of our best issues yet.

From pop culture revolutions to political fanaticism, it’s clear that connection plays a central role in shaping our modern world. Fortunately, The Spectrum’s Fall Edition explores every kind of connection you can think of. We dive into everything from interpersonal relationships to a tribute to your favorite NYT game, Connections, offering fresh perspectives, intriguing reflections, and thought-provoking insights.

That said, the past few months haven’t been all fun and games. If you’re looking for insightful takes on societal challenges and current events, we’ve got you covered. Our writers explore everything from in-depth election analyses to updates on the EEE virus, keeping you informed on the issues that matter most to our generation.

Whether you’re savoring the last glimpses of fall colors, gearing up for Thanksgiving, or snuggling up with blankets before the winter chill sets in, our fall issue has something for everyone. As always, take a moment to relax and enjoy the season amidst the busyness of the school year. We hope this issue sparks thought, conversation, and some fun (have fun with the Crossword and Connections!). Happy reading!

Warm regards,
Shree and Isabella

Lock In, Clock In

By ABHIJIT SANAL ’26
Spectrum Staff

Yeah, I get it. You’re gonna “lock in” this year. Maybe you’ll actually do your math homework on time and read your book for English, but how long are you gonna keep it up? You’re just gonna end up falling back into your bad habits sooner or later. You should just fail everything, to be honest. BUT on a serious note, working isn’t about whether or not you lock in or not. I’m probably not the best person to give this advice, but you can’t just work through something you hate forever. You’re gonna end up burned out, just like last year... unless you switch something up.

Over the summer, I realized I don’t want to struggle for all four years of high school, so I realized I needed to find something that works for me. For the last two years, I started out fine during the first two quarters, but that third quarter really kicked my butt. Every other week, I was going crazy with the amount of tests I had; but now, I’ve started to do work when I’m bored. Of course, it’s not quarter three yet, but I already feel like I’m on a different trajectory than in the past.

It’s not that I like having work, but I’ve shifted my perspective on doing it. I stopped looking at the work for what it actually is and tried to enjoy it. It sounds stupid, but just bear with me a little. For example, when you write an essay, don’t make a thesis based on what your teacher will like, but try to find something that you actually think is an interesting idea. If you like the idea enough, finishing it won’t be that hard.

Eventually, of course, there are tests. Some tests are gonna be really hard, and some will be fine if you did the homework, but regardless, there’s one truth: if you have a test, don’t just grind for it the day before. You have to do all that studying before, so then you won’t be too stressed. But if you do end up staying up late to study, you have to realize that there is always a point where you should just go to sleep.

Of course, your homework and tests definitely matter, but your sleep matters more. Don’t stay up till 1 o’clock doing some stupid,

long homework that you forgot about. Just accept you didn’t do it and go to bed. That late at night, you won’t really remember much, and you’re just gonna be messed up for the next day. Prioritize rest so you can tackle the work with a clear mind and actually retain the information.

Getting a bad grade is almost guaranteed for everyone, although everyone’s definition of a bad grade is different. If you do end up with a bad grade on a test, or thought a test was hard, don’t worry about it too much. Stressing about something you can’t change can only make things worse. Just accept it, don’t think about it until you’re calm again, and when you do, think rationally about how you can improve the next time. Everyone messes up from time to time, just try not to make it a habit.

Don’t try to take on too many things in a day, though; just take things at your own pace. And that goes for pretty much everything; if you don’t feel like studying, take a break, come back to it when you feel better, or switch to a different kind of work. If you’re stuck on the math homework, try finishing your English homework, and maybe by the end of that, your mind will be better prepared to do the math.

If you’re not in the right mindset to do work, forcing yourself through it will probably make you tired and hate the class. I’ve found that doing the homework when I actually feel like it has made it a lot easier to get through the day, stay motivated, and actually focus on the work. When you give yourself space to work when you’re ready, you’ll feel more productive and less stressed overall.

A lot of people end up doing work they absolutely hate, and they end up completely burned out by the end of the year, but you just gotta remember that you have time. You can do the homework later that day, you can go get something to eat if you’re tired, or you can take a walk to clear your head. Don’t get so consumed in the little details that you forget how much flexibility you really have. School’s tough, but if you build up the right systems, you’ll be able to get through it and have fun. It’s all about finding your balance and making sure you’re setting yourself up for long-term

The Spectrum

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Connections & Catfishing

By TINA LI ’27
Bits Editor & Reporting Team

What if your significant other isn’t real? Imagine discovering that everything you knew about them was nothing more than a figment of your imagination. Manti Te’o, a football star at Notre Dame University, met his girlfriend Lennay Kekua via Facebook. She attended Stanford University, and, at 22, passed from a car crash and leukemia the same day as Te’o’s grandmother. Newspapers headlined the tragedy of a talented football player continuing to play his game after hearing of their deaths. However, Te’o’s life flipped sideways once reporters investigated the life of Lennay Kekua, his girlfriend. No record of her existed other than fake photos and profiles on social media. No birth certificate or proof of her attendance at Stanford. Lennay Kekua’s real name was Ronaiah ‘Naya’ Tuiasosopo. Manti Te’o had been catfished — lured into a relationship with someone who didn’t exist.

Why do we fall for catfishers? Catfishing is the process of luring someone into a relationship by a fictional online persona. The anonymity of the internet can create a false sense of safety, putting users in a vulnerable position. People often project their ideal versions of a significant other online, where face-to-face interactions are not required, making it easier to believe in someone who doesn’t exist. Not only that, but it’s human nature to seek

out and crave personal connections, relationships, and validation; these desires can blind us to red flags that otherwise seem obvious. As the relationship deepens, the victim may ignore warningsigns, allowing the catfisher to manipulate them more easily.

People catfish for a multitude of reasons. In the case of Naya Tuiasosopo, she created a fake persona to explore her gender identity, adopting a female role to experience a life she felt she couldn’t otherwise live. Others may do it purely out of boredom, such as teenagers pranking their friends, while some have malicious reasons, like financially exploiting or preying on young children. Factors like poor self-esteem, escapism, and mental health issues can also play a role in the motivations behind catfishing.

In 2024, nearly everyone uses social media, whether it’s to comment on Instagram posts, watch TikToks, or consume endless streams of content. Finding connections and relationships online is now more normalized than ever, putting us at even higher risk of these situations. Technology has advanced significantly since the web was created, and the creation of AI has made it possible for anyone to fake anything online. Catfishing promotes unrealistic relationships and false connections between people.

Finding your perfect half may seem great until the illusion shatters. Discovering your partner is not




the person you fell in love with can make someone question all of their connections outside of the relationship. Trust is fragile, and after that trust is broken to such an extent, it can develop into trust issues with personal and professional relationships beyond the online chat space. Not only that, but catfishing victims can fall into depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. After it was revealed to the public that Manti Te’o was catfished, backlash and scandals followed, even affecting his football career. However, he had support systems. His family, friends, and fans supported him throughout the devastating emotional impact of the situation, and could eventually move on with his life. It’s important to seek professional help if needed, but also to step back from the situation and give yourself room to breathe.

False connections are devastating, leaving emotional scars that can take time to heal. For Manti Te’o, the discovery that his relationship was built on deceit not only shattered his trust but also challenged his identity and sense of reality. However, his story also highlights the importance of resilience. With the support of genuine relationships, self-reflection, and a commitment to personal growth, it’s possible to move past even the deepest betrayals. Te’o’s journey serves as a reminder that while false connections can break us momentarily, the strength of real ones can help rebuild us. Healing is never easy, but it is possible with time, support, and perseverance.



Who is behind the screen?
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News






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Vol. 4 Teacher Interview

By GYAN SREEJITH & HENRY WANG '27
Spectrum Staff

Every issue, The Spectrum interviews a staff member to share their perspective on the Acton-Boxborough community. This fall, we are excited to introduce Señora Savukoski to those who haven't had the pleasure of meeting her, and to provide more insight into her life for those who have. At home, Señora Savukoski is a wife and mother of two children, and her involvement in the AB school district is extensive. With twenty-three years of teaching experience, she currently teaches Intermediate Spanish II, and Spanish I CP and Honors. In addition, she serves as the advisor for the chess club and was the department leader for nine years. She is deeply passionate about fostering a love of language and culture in her students while also encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving through the chess club. Her dedication to both academics and extracurricular activities has made her a well-respected member of the AB community.

Q: How do you think this year is going so far?

A: It's been awesome, and I hope my students feel the same way. The classes are much larger than previous years, yet everyone is still very kind. I feel as if we are building a community. As the impact of COVID on students' learning continues to lessen with each passing year, students' Spanish abilities are showing an upward trend, and this year is no different. From the school's standpoint, I like the focus on safety. The school is doing a good job in strengthening the community, and advisory plays a significant role in this effort.

Q: What is one piece of advice you can give to readers?

A: I believe that progress is much

more important than perfection, both in our day-to-day lives and in the academic world. If you are trying your hardest and putting in the maximum effort you can, there is nothing else anyone can ask from you. You should not get discouraged if you receive a bad grade in a class if you gave it your all. Later in life, when you leave this school, no one will remember the grade you got on some random test. What truly matters is how you treated others—so make the most of high school, enjoy the experience, and be kind, because people will remember your kindness.

Q: What is the most common mistake you see students making?

A: Here at Acton-Boxborough, most people do not enjoy the journey as much as the destination. They focus too much on achieving one thing and then moving on to the next. They forget to enjoy themselves throughout these accomplishments, and overall, most people need to slow down and really relish the moment.

Q: What is the major difference between your high school experience and the one you see today?

A: Obviously, there is the influence of phones. But from a non-material standpoint, the attitudes of students have really changed regarding school pride. I was a really involved student, joining all of the clubs and events. It was normal at my school for everyone to go to every football game and dance, yet in this generation, hardly anyone really goes. I asked one of my classes, which has 30 students, who was going to the Homecoming Dance, and not a single student raised their hand. Again, I believe we need to really slow ourselves down and take the time to enjoy the moment.

Q: If you had to go back and do high-school again, what would you change?

A: Firstly, I loved high school,

but I do not think I would want to go back and do it again if I had the choice. Even if I did have to go, I doubt I would change a thing. I was shy and was not a leader of anything, yet I was super involved in school activities, such as band and Student Council. These experiences made me who I am today; there is no reason I would want to go back and change anything.

Q: Why did you choose to teach Spanish out of all of the subjects?

I grew up in a bilingual household, Finnish-American, and was used to a dual culture background. Even though Spanish and Finnish are very different, this idea of bilinguality stuck with me. Also think about how fun it is to teach Spanish compared to all of the other subjects. I get to teach about different cultures, foods, music, and celebrations; there is so much to do, and I feel lucky to be able to teach it all.

Q: Do you think teaching Spanish to native English speakers is easier than teaching English to native Spanish speakers?

I think both groups have unique needs. There is no way to easily quantify which language is easier to learn. Unfortunately, I believe that our school could do a better job helping native Spanish speakers learn English. Every person has different needs, and certain individuals may have more experience with languages than others.

Q: What's the significance of alpacas in the classroom?

They have this incredible ability to make people smile. We even have therapy alpacas—they just bring joy to both me and the students, creating a fun and uplifting environment. My dream is to have a farm full of alpacas. People often say they're like cats, just bigger!

Email us at theabspectrum@gmail.com or DM us on Instagram with requests for teachers you'd like to see interviewed. We hope you learned something new about Señora Savukoski!

Triple E

By MEENA ADUSUMILLI '27
Spectrum Staff

We often hear about Triple E, but many don't know what it actually stands for—Eastern Equine Encephalitis. This lack of awareness is partly due to the rarity of the disease, with only ten cases reported in the United States and outbreaks occurring every ten to twenty years. While Triple E is not something to be overly fearful of, more education and research are needed to understand its life cycle, symptoms, and prevention methods. Triple E has become a more immediate concern as Massachusetts and other East Coast states have seen cases of Triple E, and a man in Acton, Massachusetts, was diagnosed with the virus on September 5, 2024.

Triple E has a complex life cycle, passing through multiple stages of transmission. First, mammals such as horses, alpacas, and llamas, as well as certain birds like pheasants and pigeons, can become infected with the virus. Mosquitoes will feed on these mammals, becoming carriers of the virus, and then transmit it to humans through bites. While these stages of transmission might seem problematic, they actually provide opportunities for prevention. Since mosquitoes play a crucial role in spreading Triple E, cases peak from July to October, when mosquito populations are highest.

This seasonal pattern allows people to take precautions during high-risk months, saving time, resources, and worry. Due to the various stages of transmission, humans could potentially intervene in the life cycle early on, starting with the infected mammals. Moreover, if it is too difficult to intervene during the mammal phase of transmission, there are two other phases that can be intervened in as well. Even if intervention is difficult during this phase, the two subsequent stages offer opportunities for control. Most importantly, humans are considered dead-end hosts for Triple E, meaning they cannot spread the virus further, which

helps to limit its transmission and contributes to its rarity.

Symptoms of Triple E can vary, much like other illnesses, and range in severity. Common symptoms include fever, headaches, stiffness, seizures, and in severe cases, coma. Some people may remain asymptomatic, which can delay diagnosis. For most individuals, the incubation period—time between exposure and symptom onset—is four to ten days. Triple E has a fatality rate of about 30%, with the highest risk for individuals over 50 or under 15. While the fatality rate is high, only about 5% of those infected will develop life-threatening symptoms, and mild cases typically resolve on their own. Diagnosing severe cases requires specialized tests, such as blood and spinal fluid analysis, conducted by the CDC. The variety of symptoms, combined with the difficulty of diagnosing the disease, makes Triple E challenging to track and manage.

Given the risks, it is crucial to take preventive measures, especially during peak mosquito season. Although there is no cure for Triple E, certain steps can help reduce the likelihood of infection. These include using bug repellents containing DEET, avoiding outdoor activities during peak mosquito hours, eliminating standing water, using mosquito netting, and wearing light-colored clothing to make mosquitoes more visible. Research into potential vaccines is ongoing, and while no vaccine is currently available, some promising developments in research could offer hope for the future. The good news is that Triple E season is nearly over, and the virus remains extremely rare.

Triple E's complex transmission and varied symptoms make it difficult to develop a vaccine or cure. However, it is essential to continue taking preventive measures, particularly in high-risk areas like Acton. Scientific research is ongoing, and experts anticipate that future outbreaks may occur. For those concerned, the key is to stay informed and take sensible steps to protect yourself.



Use the spray to keep the Triple E bugs away!
ONLINE SOURCE

Connection

Introverts or Extroverts?

By ISABELLA HILL '25
Editor-in-Chief

After a long week, do you find yourself unwinding at home, curling up with a good book, or escaping into the comfort of your favorite show, wrapped in a pile of soft, fuzzy blankets? The quiet, the calm—it's a perfect retreat for an introvert seeking to recharge. Or perhaps the best reward lies in the company of friends, with laughter over a lively meal, the thrill of karaoke, and the spontaneity of the night.

Sometimes, though, choosing the first option comes with a hint of shame—does feeling “drained” and needing to “recharge” after a week of socializing and academic stress mean there's something wrong with you? Does it mean that you're...antisocial?

The short answer: no, there's nothing wrong with choosing either A or B; both introverts and extroverts—option A and option B pickers—crave connection and enjoy the company of others. It's simply the way they recharge that differs, whether through quiet reflection or the lively buzz of social interaction.

In a crowded area, it can be impossible to differentiate extroverts from introverts. It's only how the two types of people respond afterward: whether they go home needing to spend time alone or feel energized and want to call or visit a friend. What creates these differences? Well, biologically, introverts and extroverts respond differently to the neurotransmitter dopamine, which provides the motivation and happiness to make friends, seek relationships, and advance in a career. “When dopamine floods the brain, both introverts and extroverts become more talkative, alert to their surroundings, and motivated to take risks and explore the environment,” as Scott Barry

Kaufman, the Scientific Director of The Imagination Institute, explains. Introverts and extroverts need dopamine, but extroverts require more. Introverts are more sensitive to dopamine, getting overstimulated while extroverts become energized. Instead of dopamine, introverts prefer the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, as Christine Fonseca writes in her book, *Quiet Kids: Help Your Introverted Child Succeed in an Extroverted World*. “Like dopamine, acetylcholine is also linked to pleasure; the difference is, acetylcholine makes [people] feel good when [they] turn inward.” There are scientific differences between the two—not personality flaws.

Despite these differences, introverts and extroverts are not really at opposite ends of the spectrum, as we often think. The dictionary reinforces the differences we typically have in mind, describing introverts as “shy, reticent people,” with the example reading, “I'm an introvert and don't like public speaking,” while extroverts are labeled as “outgoing, overtly expressive people,” with the example, “his extrovert personality made him the ideal host.” However, introverts are not inherently anxious and antisocial, and extroverts are not simply more likable and fun. An introvert can host just as fun of a party—it's just that the introvert might need to spend some time reading a good book in a quiet space after the fact. Once again, in social settings, both types of people can be fun and entertaining; it's just the way they react afterwards that sets them apart.

At the end of the day, introverts aren't hermits disconnected from the world, just as extroverts aren't always brimming with endless energy. There is nothing wrong with either one, and both crave connection with others.



Which one are you?
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NYT Connections is Not Just a Puzzle

By MATTHEW LIU '27
Chief Copy Editor

Autumn Leaves Trees Orange. Words Related to Fall. Two categories left! Now you continue guessing, using your last attempt. Lo and behold, you were wrong, and now you have one guess left. Some might give up and forget about the game, while others might agonize over it for a while, still unable to solve the connections. Either way, neither person ends up solving the puzzle. Everyday, in our classes, we continue to play the game Connections by the New York Times. With a group of 16 jumbled words that fit into 4 specific categories, the player can work their way to victory within 4 attempts. The categories range in difficulty, making the game a fun yet challenging way to pass time (especially as it's unblocked on school Chromebooks). But this leads to a deeper question: is it just a game we play in class, or can it be a metaphor for our connections in real life?

Our brains are wired to form associations between ideas, events, or words. The game mirrors this process, making us more aware of how we link things together. For example, we connect a person's name to a memory, or we link events in a story to form a coherent narrative. Even when we're not aware of it, we are subconsciously connecting words, thoughts, and experiences in our minds. These links are reflected in the game, when we receive a sense of satisfaction as we successfully make a connection. The game enhances our ability to think creatively and recognize patterns, training our minds to see relationships even when they're not immediately obvious. Personal growth comes from reflecting on the connections we make—whether through learning or lived experiences. In life, as

in the game, it's essential to take the time to reflect on these connections and recognize how our past, present, and future intersect. Whether it's setting milestones to reach future goals or understanding how current actions build on past experiences, we're always connecting the dots.

Just as the game challenges us to uncover hidden connections between words, life often presents hidden connections between people, ideas, and experiences that aren't immediately visible. Connections between ideas, people, and experiences are often not obvious at a first glance. Rather, they emerge with deeper thought and communication, as well as time. In fact, the most meaningful connections often develop over time, growing stronger as trust is built. Connections in the game can be both simple and complex, just as human connections can vary in depth and significance. Whether it's finding a link between ideas or building bonds with people, these connections shape our understanding of the world in ways we might not see at first but come to appreciate with time. The concept of hidden connections invites us to think about how relationships, ideas, and experiences weave together, often without our immediate awareness. In the game, each word is seemingly independent, but with closer inspection, patterns and relationships reveal themselves. This mirrors life, where we frequently navigate through surface-level interactions, only to realize later how interconnected things truly are. For example, if you just met someone, you begin with small talk. As the relationship grows overtime, there is more trust built through conflicts, experiences, vulnerability, and mutual understanding, which is imperative in a strong connection. If you just saw from the surface, you would not have seen the room and the

complexity for a relationship to grow, which is just like the game.

Lastly, The New York Times Connections will always remain a wonderful way to bond with friends or family. With family and friends, we often discuss the challenges of the day's connections or help others with hints when they get stuck. It becomes a shared experience, and we bond over both the challenge and the fun. This mirrors conversations, where topics often jump from one to another, seemingly unrelated, but still finding ways to make sense. The game teaches us to look deeper than the surface and truly work to find and create the connections that are meaningful and real. It also teaches us about false connections. Sometimes there will be tricks in the game to make you think that you have one, while in reality the words are not the correct connections, representing the fake connections in real life as well. Not all connections are genuine or healthy, even though we may oftentimes feel like they are. Therefore, there is so much importance in making and creating real and genuine connections, and furthering them with deep and thoughtful conversations in order to grow.

What seems like a simple game to pass the time is, in reality, a metaphor for life. The New York Times Connections symbolizes the importance of making connections—cognitively, socially, and personally. It mirrors our natural tendency to seek and value connections, whether it's through finding patterns in words, building relationships with others, or understanding the world around us and ourselves. Next time you're playing The New York Time Connections—whether in school, on the bus, or at home—remember that it's more than just a game. It's a reminder of the connections that shape our lives.

Op-Ed

Can the New England Patriots Return to Their Former Glory?

By ERIC ZHAO '25
News Editor

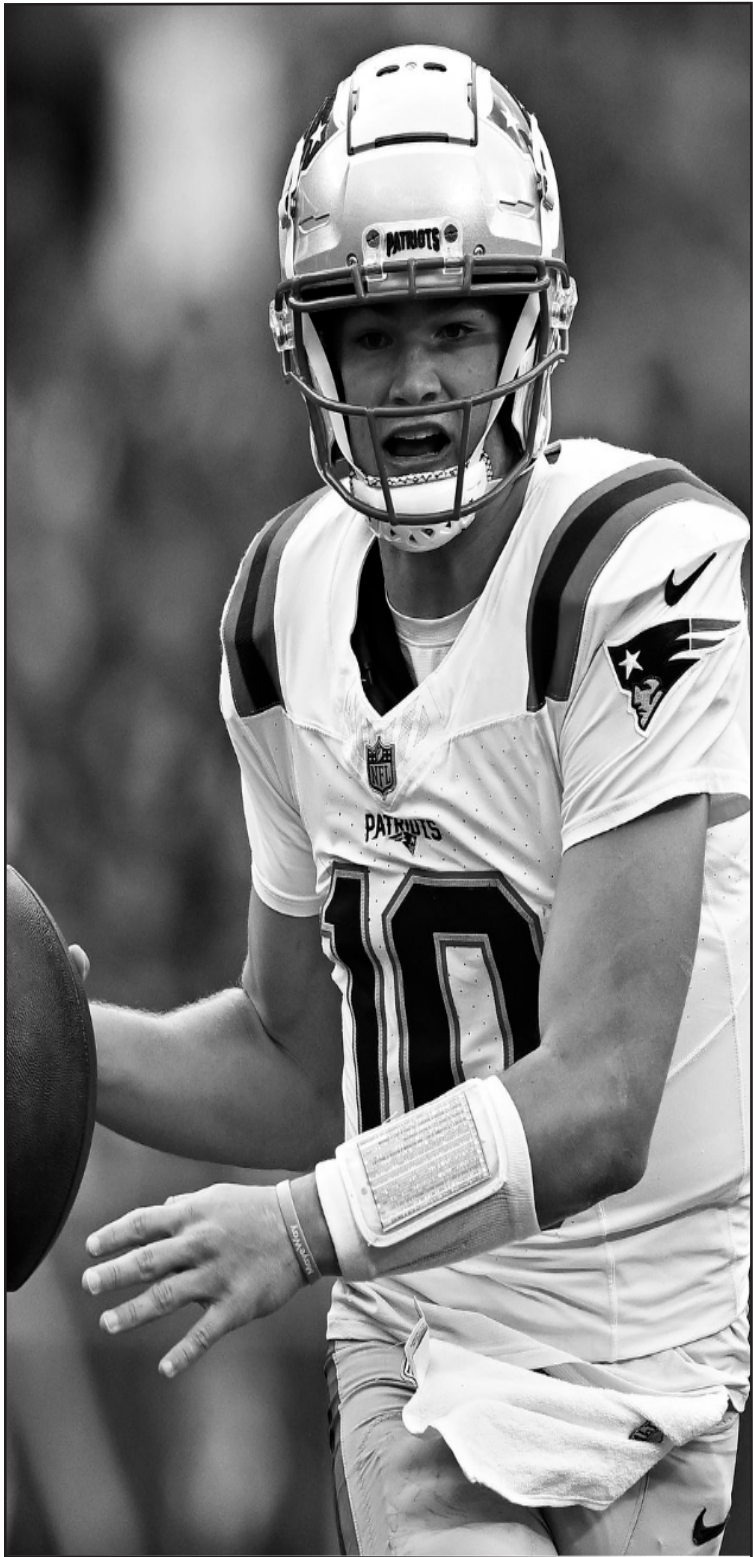
The New England Patriots led by head coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady are most famous for their dominant run between 2001-2019. Together, they produced the greatest dynasty in NFL history. Today, they are far removed from their glory days. The team had a losing record in 3 of the 4 past seasons, and in 2023, the Patriots finished with a 4-13 record, their worst season since 1992. Marred by offensive dysfunction, the offense finished second to last in scoring, averaging just 13.9 points per game (the league average was 21.8 points per game), were shut out twice, and failed to score more than 10 points in 6 games. Poor quarterback play was at the helm of the offensive struggles, with starting QB Mac Jones throwing 10 touchdowns to 12 interceptions before being benched in Week 10 to QB Bailey Zappe, who didn't fare much better. The Patriots also lacked receivers who could create separation from defenders or make explosive plays, with sixth-round rookie Demario Douglas leading the team in receiving yards, and backup running back Ezekiel Elliot leading the team in catches. The team also suffered key season-ending injuries to players like WR Kendrick Bourne, CB Christian Gonzalez, and LB Matthew Judon.

Four days after the conclusion of the Patriots 2023 season, HC Belichick announced a mutual departure from the team, shocking much of the NFL World. The next day, the Patriots announced former Patriots LB Jerod Mayo and then linebackers coach as the next HC of the New England Patriots, making him one of the youngest HC's in the NFL. Mayo stated that while he respected Belichick as his mentor, he had no problem creating his own path, vision and culture as HC, such as being more open during press conferences and naming more people as official titles. The first thing Mayo did was make significant changes to the coaching staff and the coordinator positions. The team made sure to re-sign many of their own key players in free agency, such as G Mike Onwenu and WR Kendrick Bourne, and extending players like RB Rhamondre Stevenson (their best offensive player), S Kyle Dugger, S Jabrill Peppers, and LB Jahlani Tavai. While they re-signed and extended many of their own players, they did not make a lot of free agent signings from other teams. They signed several offensive players to help on the offensive side of the ball, but the players they signed are good depth pieces—none are stars and can make a really large or significant impact by themselves. The Patriots also signed veteran QB Jacoby Brissett as a bridge QB to help aid in the development of their next franchise QB. Overall, The team really

did not make a very large investment on either the offense or defense in free agency. The Patriots defense also took a big hit after trading star defensive edge rusher Matt Judon to the Atlanta Falcons, unable to come to an agreement in contract negotiations. The Patriots poor finish in 2023 landed them the third overall pick in the 2024 NFL Draft, their highest selection since 1993. With QB being the most needy position, the Patriots drafted UNC QB Drake Maye with the third pick to be their franchise quarterback. Although raw, Maye's great athleticism makes him one of if not the most exciting prospect in New England in several decades, and has given fans something to be excited about. With proper development, Maye has all the traits to be a great QB and is the polar opposite of previous quarterback Mac Jones who had a high floor but low ceiling and was NFL-ready coming out of the draft but didn't have great athleticism, arm strength, and was a pocket passer. The Patriots also drafted WR's Ja'Lynn Polk, WR Javon Baker, and OT Caeden Wallace, in the 2nd and 3rd rounds of the draft, their next two most pressing areas of need. The Patriots came lightly regarded in the 2024 NFL season, with most people expecting the team to be improved but still in a "rebuilding" stage, thus still going to be one of the worst teams in the NFL and likely ending up with a top-5 draft pick next season. There were pressing questions on

whether QB Maye would start week 1; the Patriots put that bed to rest by starting QB Brissett in the season opener. The Patriots shocked everyone by defeating the Cincinnati Bengals, a team in Super Bowl contention, 16-10 in the season opener. The Patriots then lost 6 straight games after, dropping to 1-6, including a 24-3 loss to the division rival New York Jets, a blow-out loss to the San Francisco 49ers in which the offense was nonexistent and a loss to an injury-ravaged Dolphins team starting their third-string quarterback. The main issue is the offensive line; the Patriots lack of concern and investment in the offensive line during the offseason, whether that is through the draft or free agency, has them paying the price: The offensive line ranks second to last in sacks given up. The offensive line is ranked dead last in the NFL pressure percentage on drop back passes (54.7%). C David Andrews, one of their best lineman, suffered a season-ending injury in Week 4, and starting G Cole Strange is not expected to return until late in the season at best. The struggling offensive line makes it hard for the QB to find receivers down the field, and it makes it hard to run the ball when the defense knows it's the only play the team can run. Rookies Polk, Baker and Wallace have also struggled in their limited playing time, further slowing the offense. In Week 6 against the Houston Texans, the Patriots announced they would be benching QB

Brissett in favor of rookie QB Maye, hoping that he could provide a boost to the lethargic offense; Maye threw for 5 touchdowns to just 2 interceptions and 543 yards in his first 2 full games starting, showing significant promise. Even though the offense was the main concern for improvement this offseason, and has been the main issue for the last three seasons, the offensive ineptitude continues. While I was hesitant on starting Maye early in the season, especially with the train wreck of an offensive line and lack of offensive talent the Patriots have, Maye has proved up to the challenge in front of him and has elevated the offense as a whole. Equally concerning is the defense, which has taken a massive regression from last year. The defense, ranked 26th, gives up an average of 359 yards per game and struggles to stop the run. This is significantly worse compared to the defense last year, which was ranked 7th, giving up an average of 301 yards per game and considered one of the best units in the league. While this team is currently going through many struggles, it's important to keep in mind for fans that they are a rebuilding team, and it will take time for this team to come back to relevancy. This is just another step in the process—the success of the Patriots dynasty of the 2000's and 2010's wasn't built in a day; and new success won't be either. We're on the right track—it may just take a while.



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Op-Ed

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Year of Elections: A Recap

By ANDREW MOON '27
Spectrum Staff

In 2024, the world is witnessing a “year of elections”. Over four billion voters across more than sixty countries can exercise their voting rights. A common theme across the elections this year—whether in Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Britain, France, or the United States—is the deepening political polarization. Political polarization often leads to pointless disputes that fail to deliver meaningful solutions, raising a crucial question for us in the broader context: “Are today’s political leaders focused on what truly matters?” The fundamental purpose of politics is to serve the people. Whether on the left or right of the political spectrum, political leaders and parties should not forget this purpose and prioritize the needs of the people over political strife.

One significant election held earlier this year is the presidential election in Taiwan—officially known as the Republic of China—where DPP candidate Lai Ching-te’s victory marks a historic milestone, as it is the first time DPP has remained in power for more than ten years across three consecutive terms. Unlike the KMT, which has generally maintained a friendly stance toward China, the DPP has actively advocated for Taiwan’s independence. Lai’s victory underscores the heightened tensions between Taiwan and China, particularly in light of Xi Jinping’s hardline approach. However, what is more interesting is the rise of the

Taiwan People’s Party (TPP), led by Ko Wen-je, which has gained a lot of attention and support in the election, about twenty-six percent of the votes. Many voters in their twenties and thirties chose Ko and TPP, who focused on people’s livelihoods and societal reforms unlike the other two parties that focused on the relationship with the CPP. Taiwan’s youth unemployment rate is currently around eleven percent, with inflation at a high of three percent. As a result, many Taiwanese people prioritized economic concerns over China-Taiwan relation issues in this election. Unlike Taiwan, many other countries experienced regime changes or ruling party defeat. In East Asia, Korea and Japan serve as key examples. A common characteristic is the clear manifestation of political polarization, overshadowing urgent domestic issues. South Korea’s 2024 election reflects the country’s deep political divides with the defeat of the ruling People’s party, despite facing significant challenges to its citizens’ livelihoods. Widely known for the lowest fertility rate in the world, which is 0.7. Additionally, South Korea is currently experiencing domestic issues, including high housing costs, medical disturbances, inflation, and an economic downturn. These problems directly affect the daily lives of Koreans, yet the election was dominated by polarized political discourse. Similarly, Japan’s 2024 general election also reflected widespread voter dissatisfaction as the long-dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost

its majority in the House of Representatives due to a finance scandal, rising inflation, the burdens of family life, echoing Japan’s lost decades of economic stagnation and declining growth. This outcome suggests a critical moment for Japanese politics, characterized by a departure from the complacency of previous years, as voters expressed their desire for change amid growing political polarization.

In the UK, the Conservative Party (Tory Party)’s fourteen-year-long regime ended with a landslide victory for the Labour Party in the 2024 general election. Following Tory Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s aggressive push for Brexit in 2019, Britain eventually left the European Union (EU). This departure was driven by promises of increased sovereignty and economic independence but led to political and economic repercussions, including trade disruptions and social division that continues to challenge the nation today. To make matters worse, the UK economy—already struggling with the COVID-induced recession, inflation, and rising unemployment—faced further turmoil when Tory Prime Minister Liz Truss announced a major tax cut policy in 2022, which backfired. Truss resigned after just forty five days and was known as the country’s shortest-serving prime minister. Frustrated by the worsening economy, the British people turned to the Labour Party for the first time in fourteen years, bringing about a significant change in government. What stands out in this general election is the unex-

pectedly strong performance of the far-right party, Reform UK, which captured fourteen percent of the total vote, indicating growing support for more extreme political positions. Their success reflects deep dissatisfaction amongst a significant portion of the electorate, who are frustrated with mainstream parties.

Just like Britain, the rise of far-right parties is a growing concern across Europe. The 2024 French general election mirrors the political polarization of the pre-World War II 1936 election, where the Popular Front and the National Front faced off amid societal divisions. This year, it was a three-way contest between the far-right National Rally, the left-leaning Popular Front, and the ruling coalition, Ensemble. Initially expected to win, the National Rally surprisingly fell to third place in the final round., narrowly preventing the far-right from taking power.

The defeat of the ruling parties reflects the demands of a public increasingly frustrated with the current economic situation. Voters have clearly voiced their dissatisfaction, yet parties continue to focus on meaningless disputes. These endless ideological battles show no signs of resolution, nor do they demonstrate any willingness to solve problems affecting people’s livelihoods as political leaders prioritize their own agendas over the well-being of their citizens.

Moreover, a common characteristic among countries where far-right parties are gaining power—like France, Germany, and Austria—is the issue of immigration. Increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees have fueled public anxiety over cultural

integration, economic competition, and national identity. The growing influence of far-right parties highlights a fundamental shift away from addressing the needs of citizens. As leaders become increasingly preoccupied with ideological battles and political polarization, the core mission of politics—prioritizing the needs of the people—often gets sidelined. Instead of deepening divisions over issues like immigration and national identity, they should focus on meaningful solutions that improve the lives of their constituents, such as addressing economic disparities, ensuring access to healthcare, and fostering social cohesion, rather than allowing political strife to overshadow the real concerns of the people they serve. Only by returning to this fundamental purpose can political leaders hope to restore trust and build a more inclusive and stable society.

Our nation endured a presidential election on November 5th, and, like the countries mentioned above, our nation is divided with serious political polarization. The outcome of this election has significant implications for the direction of our nation. The entire country awaits the next chapter of the Trump presidency, as we anticipate changes that will alter our everyday lives. By focusing on what truly matters—addressing the everyday concerns of citizens—the U.S. government can strive to rebuild trust and foster a more cohesive society. As Abraham Lincoln once said, our government is “of the people, by the people” and most importantly, “for the people.”

Op-Ed

Evolution of Disney

By BROOKE TANO '26
Spectrum Staff

There is a certain magic in old Disney movies that will never die, continuing to captivate audiences across generations. While many people assume this effect is because of the ‘old’ style animation and whimsical storytelling, the Disney charm comes more from forethought. Aside from entertainment, these films connect viewers with characters emotionally and intellectually, communicating a universal experience. Every story element holds a purpose that ties into themes like loss, friendship, family, kindness, and growth, surrounding world-building with limitless potential. Starkly, Disney’s modern reliance on live-action remakes and shallow narratives lacks substance. To revive its magic, Disney should return to creating animated films and bring back storytelling with cartoon animals and humans instead of using real-life humans with lazy development.

One quality of the appeal in old Disney films was personification. Animators could characterize objects and animals with human emotions while showing struggles profound to the audience. For example, *The Lion King*, *Bambi*, and *The Aristocats* create symbolic and iconic characters. While the design choice has the essence of children’s shows, the films communicate serious topics in an engaging manner to all age ranges, ultimately teaching long-term lessons to the children. These narratives give viewers an emotional connection, helping them to see the depth behind the cute, animated characters. One of my favorites is a short cartoon called *The Little House*, an adaptation of a children’s picture book, depicting environmental problems like urbanization as a consequence of rapid industrialization. Despite the cartoon’s short length, the character development was displayed brilliantly: the animation and color palette were comforting and restorative to the eyes. This particular film connects with modern problems, depicting how deforestation ruins nature excessively. Granted, I was moved to be more appreciative of nature, and I

bet all of us were rooting for the little house to get the home it deserves.

However, present Disney movies are lacking and incredibly empty. *The Lion King*’s live-action remake loses the emotional resonance that was once achieved through animation. The purpose of recreating the film was to use nostalgia to gain attention and views instead of creating something worthwhile and memorable. Instead of investing in creative storytelling and design, Disney recycles its beloved classics like *Beauty and the Beast* and *Dumbo* to get quick bucks. These new films are more modernized to a 21st-century lens, but unable to serve the same ambition. This dilutes creativity, as movies are no longer about telling stories that matter, but about riding the wave of what’s trending. Yes, Disney can remake classics, but at least they should sufficiently capture their significance or expand beyond the original message, just as Disney proved they could when they remade *The Ugly Duckling*.

The noticeable decline in the depth of storytelling especially strikes me in the *Mulan* live-action, which is an embarrassment as a descendant of the original. Without proper writing, all story elements are dull and fail to nurture deep understanding. *Mulan* is superficial and flat, with no characterization whatsoever, and the plot is more straightforward due to lazy writing. Originally, *Mulan* disguises herself as a man to take her father’s place in the emperor’s army, countering the stereotype of the restricted role of a lady. She learns to fight, gains confidence in her character, and befriends her fellow soldiers. When her true identity is revealed, she chooses to fight as a woman, train tirelessly, and ultimately takes on the task of saving the emperor, earning honor. The plot had significant holes that grew bigger as the story progressed. Character development was non-existent: *Mulan* was already so strong that she didn’t even have to train properly. Constantly, a random guy is charging in with romance baiting that drags away from the purpose of the film. Some new elements were added, such as new antagonists, but were barely developed, making

them pointless. Moreover, *Mulan*’s dynamics with the side characters were odd and forced. There was no rigor, and even fighting scenes felt disconnected. Frankly, she was just accepted right away, jumping to an easy resolution. The only considerable element was aesthetically pleasing visuals, but it was not my style. The storyline heavily relies on special effects to tell the story, which is nowhere as substantial as proper storytelling. The remake was not a carbon copy clone, maybe like the ugly sister, as they attempted to apply their contemporary twists for lasting impact and sunk into a bottomless pit of futility. My takeaway from the remake was that people viewed women as shallow, but *Mulan* can prove women can be better than men all of a sudden without fighting hardship against this prejudice. The whole idea is targeted to cash in on feminists and nostalgic people, and draw other audiences just because the idea now is that it is the right thing to oppose sexism. Representation in Disney films now feels more like a checkbox than a meaningful, heartfelt portrayal as characters are inserted for social visibility rather than thoughtfully integrated into stories that reflect real, authentic experiences, which is problematic. This feeds into the cycle of money going toward quantity rather than quality.

Disney’s current approach, driven by profit and trends, erodes the legacy of its classic films. By focusing on quantity over quality, corporations risk losing the magic that made them iconic in the first place. Disney should make films with purpose that connect emotionally with audiences and explore meaningful themes as a source of joy, inspiration, and timeless storytelling. The old Disney movies rose to be a paradigmatic demonstration of profundity because they had a clear idea driving them to propel their magic. To recapture this magic, Disney should return to its roots in purpose. It’s not about going back to traditional hand-drawn animation, but about creating films that have heart, where every design choice, narrative element, and character has a reason to exist. Movies like *Inside Out* and *Zootopia* show that Disney is still capable of creating stories with depth. This shouldn’t be the exception; it should be the standard.

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Critic & Audience

By LUKAS KANICS '26
Spectrum Staff

In our modern age of media, we often seek out reviews from sites such as Rotten Tomatoes and Metacritic to help determine which films, shows, and other forms of media we should spend our limited time on. However, these sites often make a decision to separate the reviews into two groups, “critics” and “audience,” sparking discourse over which is more valuable. On one hand, one might argue that critics are clearly whom you should trust to report professional opinions. Plus, audiences can get upset easily and “review-bomb,” leaving an influx of negative reviews. On the other hand, one may argue that what a couple hundred snobs think is irrelevant to what the average person will like. In this article, we’ll explore both sides of this debate.

First, some may argue that critics are far more trustworthy than an often more biased and less knowledgeable audience. The fact that anyone can leave a review on anything they’d like, often having the need to create an account be the only barrier to critique, means that any half-baked take, prejudiced reaction, or joke can influence the numbers. Furthermore, the crowds can act in waves, often “review-bombing” anything they deem to have “forced diversity” or messaging they disagree with. For example, *Doctor Who* (1963-1989, 2005-present) was review-bombed for its “disneyfied” adaptation of the beloved series, containing Ncuti Gatwa—a queer Black man—playing the titular Doctor and loads of LGBTQ+ representation throughout. Many denounced this new version of the show after one episode contained a scene where the Doctor kisses another man, calling it completely out of character and demanding the show go back to the past version; however, nearly twenty years earlier, an episode of the show aired depicting a very similar scene. In contrast, critics provide insight into what is a worthwhile watch and what is a waste of time. They take their time to ensure that their input is valuable and their opinions are clear. They have knowledge beyond the average person that allows them to

give detail beyond simply stating whether they enjoyed something or not. Overall, many would argue that the refined and filtered views of critics are far more useful than that of the unrefined and unfiltered audience.

Next, the other side of the argument—that the audience is far superior to critics—does have some evidence behind it. To begin, the “wisdom of the crowd” is a real phenomenon where when a large group of individuals is sampled and asked to provide a number, for example, a guess of how many jellybeans are in a jar, the average of their results is often very close to the actual number. Apply this to reviews and it does seem reasonable that the larger, more diverse sample would provide a better metric than critics. Additionally, platforms such as IMDB filter their reviews to try to eliminate botting and “review-bombing” from influencing their scores. Finally, critics often prefer more “artsy” films and often dismiss most of what’s found in the genres of action and comedy, despite the mass praise of such genres, and there are various cases where successful and beloved films have gotten deserved praise from audiences but none from critics. For instance, *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017) received praise from critics, but is now seen as one of the most hated movies of all time, and its sequel, *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019) was trashed by critics but deemed relatively enjoyable by audiences. All things considered, plenty of people prefer the broader sample size and more relatable views of the audience over the critics.

All in all, the question of whether you should listen to a knowledgeable but small group of people or a more diverse and large group that may suffer from more bias goes far beyond reviewing movies and tv shows. It is a very prevalent question in politics and government, with it being asked all the way through the chain from local to federal government. From asking “Should we make it so more people can vote in our elections?” to asking “Are there too few seats on the Supreme Court?”, it is important to see both sides before we, as a nation and as individuals, decide what our answer will be.

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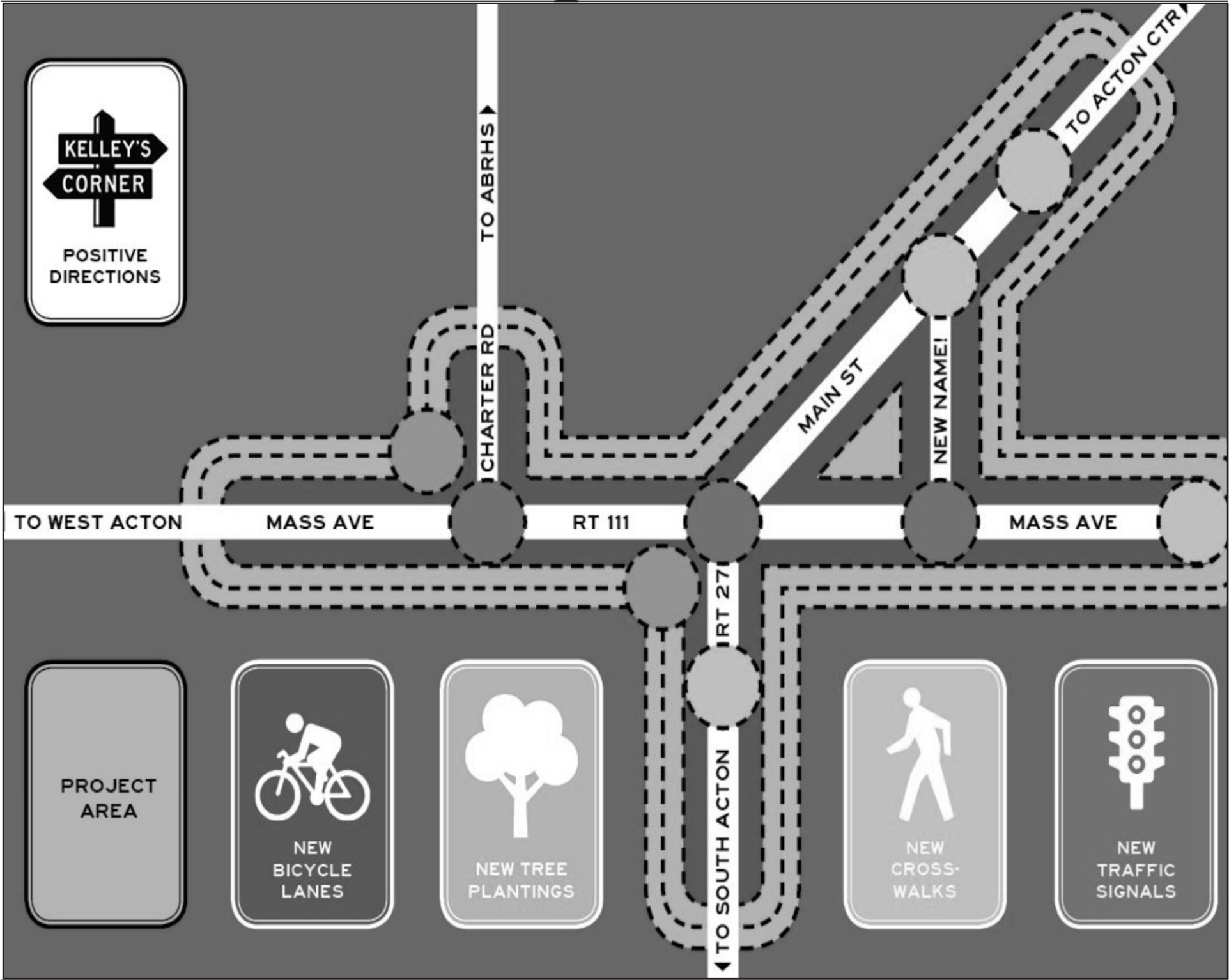
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Op-Ed



The Housing Crisis: What Should We Do About It?

By DANIEL JIANG '25
Spectrum Staff

Tell me: Is your life convenient?

Think to yourself. How do you get to school each morning? How do you get to work? How do you get a bite to eat if you're not in the mood to cook? I'm willing to bet that your method of transporting yourself is either by car, on a bicycle, or by walking.

Are any of these methods truly convenient for you, though? Traffic binds this town to an agonizing mess of backed up cars during peak morning and evening rush hours. You can bike all you want, but you're really just playing chicken with the big semi truck that comes barreling towards you. And, of course, you can walk... with nearly the same circumstances as cycling, however. Roads are too fast, serve too many purposes, and there's hardly any truly safe alternative to get yourself around town.

However, Acton can attempt to mitigate such shortfalls through embracing proper construction of middle housing, which can not only increase convenience for residents, but also boost affordable housing, open more space for land preservation and recreation, and increase sustainability and be less wasteful.

There are many definitions for middle housing, but essentially, this style of development captures the "missing middle" between the

two most commonly found homes in the United States: the single-family house and the multi-family apartment building. As defined by the National Conference of State Legislatures: "Typical middle housing types include multi-unit structures such as townhomes, duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes, as well as cottage courts or cluster homes. From a design and zoning standpoint, missing middle housing is characterized by efficient use of land, thoughtful design, minimal parking, high walkability and public transit quotients, and a strong neighborhood orientation."

Acton comprises mostly single-family, suburban-sprawl-esque neighborhoods. It is everywhere and it is undeniable. As a result, tons of land is used to house its residents, which in turn means more infrastructure and wasted land. Middle housing aims to remove the inefficient land usage significantly, while also not ruining the town aesthetic that so many people desire these days. Using duplexes alone would shrink the land use significantly since each building houses two families — townhomes or fourplexes would most likely reduce the amount of land used even more. If built correctly, some people may not even know that these structures house multiple families, since many middle housing units are built in the same style as a single-family home.

Just from my observations in the six years I've lived in this town, I

can tell people here really enjoy their recreational areas. Investing in more middle housing means more freed space that can be tailored to parks, nature reserves, arboretums, or simply land conservation. That's not to say all freed up space should become a protected woodland, though. One of the fundamental consequences from urban sprawl is the fact that all of our commercial needs are placed far, far away from where we live, because some outdated zoning code mandates that a farm stand cannot be placed next to a single family home. Condensing families into middle housing comes the opportunity of finally promoting healthy mixed-use zoning. Small zones of leisure and shopping can be fit snugly next to these middle housing structures, providing new third places—locations for people to hang out and socialize locally—for residents and tightening the strength of the community in turn.

Finally, residents would save money. Middle housing's affordability means that those who work within the town and don't need a longer commute can live closer to where they work, potentially removing the need for a personal vehicle. A personal vehicle itself costs thousands of dollars a year to operate and maintain, so that's already a huge chunk of savings. Utilities would also come at a cheaper price since there is one set of infrastructure feeding one structure that houses two or more households.

You could even split the utility bill between your tenants, which might be less than whatever you're paying for a single-family home.

To wrap it all off, residents would also benefit from increased safety. Middle housing encourages the restructure of existing infrastructure. The town would be incentivized to build wider sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and raised crosswalks, amongst many other things. More streetlights would illuminate areas at night and roads would have to have their speeds reduced due to the high concentration of people living in the area. If we go as far as to incorporate actual public transportation, then the amount of cars roaming the roads would decrease — which would already be much safer than before.

Of course, there are the *concerns* about the decrease of assets or the fact that "I don't want to live in an apartment because then I get no privacy!"

It's fine if you want to own a home just so that you can sell it off in the future for a profit—I mean, who doesn't want to get into real estate these days? Middle housing isn't going to drag your home value down. If anything, one of the key aspects of middle housing is that it addresses the housing situation for lower income families and provides more affordability to future homeowners. If you want to sag around your 4,000 sq.ft home all day, there's someone out there who wants that same lifestyle, and

they'll pay top dollar for that. Especially in such a desirable town like Acton. Middle housing runs extra options for those who wish to move here, but might not have two million dollars laying around.

Now about this whole misconception of privacy. Haven't you stayed in a hotel before? If I were really being mean I'd compare living in an apartment to just a prolonged stay in a hotel. It's basically the same concept. Middle housing actually doesn't make it feel like you're at some airport hotel, believe it or not! In duplexes there is only one shared wall between your side and the other tenant's side. I see no reason why a developer would make that wall paper-thin: in most cases, it would be extra soundproofed to provide maximum privacy. The same thing applies for all the other types (of triplexes and fourplexes). I mean, it's 2024. If developers are skimping out on walls and soundproofing, especially in shared structures, that's just insane.

I'll wrap it up here. There are a multitude of benefits for residents if we merely switch our style of living. We live in a time of change, after all, and with climate change being a real issue looming at our doorsteps, there's no feasible way we keep living the way we do. Acton should embrace the middle housing market and open its doors for proper mixed-use developments, all for the sake of the people and the environment.

Op-Ed

Fall Recipe

By TIFFANY VALKOVA '25
Chief Copy Editor

The leaves are changing, the mornings are cooler, and the Great British Bake-Off's new season is on again! To celebrate fall, pumpkin chocolate chip bars are a delicious sweet treat to share with family and friends. This recipe combines the flavors of pumpkin cravings when the season rolls around, and the (very necessary) sweet chocolate add-in to everything! Adding on, the bars' blend of textures is a good cross between a cookie and a traditional bar, so you get the best of both worlds!

Major allergens would include wheat and eggs. This recipe yields about 24 square bars, but can be easily adjusted with the proportions of the cuts. In total, it takes about 10 minutes of prep time, 35 minutes to bake, and 15 minutes to cool. The pumpkin pie spice is optional, but can be made from scratch. It typically con-

sists of cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, allspice, and cloves, but not all five spices are included amongst different brands or necessary if you decide to make it yourself. Lastly, instead of exactly making pumpkin chocolate chip bars, you can also put your own spin on it and make it with browned butter or salted caramel renditions!

Ingredients:
2 cups flour
(optional) 1 tablespoon pumpkin pie spice/cinnamon mix
1 teaspoon baking soda
¾ teaspoon salt
1 cup unsalted butter (if butter is salted, remove salt from recipe)
1 cup brown sugar
1 egg
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 cup canned pumpkin puree
1 cup chocolate chips, or to your liking!

Instructions:
Prepare a greased or parchment-paper-lined 9x13 inch baking pan.

Combine the dry ingredients in a medium bowl: flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda, and

salt.
Cream the butter and sugar with an electric or stand mixer for 1-2 minutes in another bowl.
Add in the egg and vanilla until fully combined with the wet ingredients.
Mix in the pumpkin puree.
Combine the dry ingredients with the wet ingredients' mixture.
Fold in your chocolate chips.
Spread batter evenly in the prepared pan.

Bake for about 35-40 minutes on 350°F or until the edges begin to brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out mostly clean. Cool the bars before cutting into pieces and serving!

This is the perfect fall recipe, and it only takes less than an hour to make this delicious dessert! The leftovers can be stored in a container at room temperature for up to about four days. I encourage you to try the recipe and share your creations with your loved ones this fall! Happy baking!

The Spectrum's Connections

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Off-Topic

Love Doc: Relationships 101

By Dr. Loo & Dr. Hugs
Spectrum Staff

Hey all,

It's Dr. Loo and Dr. Hugs, and in today's issue we will talk about relationships—what some might consider to be the epitome of high school. They are often depicted in fiction, whether it be movies or books, but some are way more realistic than others. Some are so mushy you want to barf, and others are so cold and realistic they hurt your heart. However, we will focus on the two relationships in the movies *The Shape of Water* and *Normal People*.

Oh, *The Shape of Water*: the heartwarming tale of forbidden love between a mute janitor and a giant amphibious fish-man. Because when you're both in a secret government facility, who wouldn't fall in love with a slimy creature? Forget dating apps—next time you need a date, just go to the aquarium and find your next catch. Their communication? Absolutely next level. Neither of them can talk, so they exchange long stares and dances; this is a level of connection I can only dream of achieving someday. They do not need words to express their love, just

staring, dancing, hating the government, and loving boiled eggs. Truly beautiful. Of course, it's a fact that the best relationships are the ones that start with stealing classified lab experiments and end with underwater eternal love. The main character, Elisa, gets scars on her neck slit by the monster to transform into gills so that she can live forever with the fish man. Sure, finding common ground with someone from another species is totally realistic. It's not like humans struggle to understand each other in relationships, but hey, just throw in some gills and fins, and suddenly everything makes sense. Look at this: even a human and a monster can find love! Sure, it can be taken as a message to show how love conquers all, but this is unrealistic. Let's face it, love is not this easy; it's much harder. The message that love conquers all—even biological compatibility, is too much. While the movie is pretty good, it's nothing like the real world.

On the other hand, Connell and Marianne's relationship in *Normal People* is a realistic portrayal of a modern relationship because it captures the emotional complexity and imperfections many experience.

They both struggle with insecurities, trauma, and mental health issues, which shape how they interact and often lead to misunderstandings—reflecting the difficulty normal people have in expressing their feelings. The dynamic between them is also influenced by class differences, with Connell coming from a working-class background and Marianne from an elite family, adding layers of tension and feelings of inadequacy. As they grow and change throughout the novel, their relationship evolves in a way that mirrors how people often drift apart and reconnect over time. Their deep bond and interdependence, despite its flaws, also feel realistic as many relationships involve a complicated mix of attachment, personal growth, and challenges in communication. The biggest downfall of this relationship, which is unrealistic, is a man like Connell and a woman like Marianne. Other than that, their relationship is realistic enough for many to relate to.

That's all for this time, see you later!

XOXO,
Dr. Loo and Dr. Hugs.



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Off-Topic

Connections and Crossword Answer Keys

-FORK

CARVING, PITCH, SALAD, TUNING

PARTS OF A TREE

BARK, BRANCH, LEAF, ROOT

TYPES OF WATER

FLAVORED, ICED, SPARKLING, TAP

FICTIONAL DOCTORS

FRANKENSTEIN, HOUSE, STRANGE, WHO

- Across:**
- 2. strawberry
 - 4. brownies
 - 6. steak
 - 8. white castle
 - 12. pumpkin
 - 14. apple pie
 - 15. latte
 - 16. pasta
 - 17. cheese
 - 18. corn dogs
 - 19. cornbread

- Down:**
- 1. popcorn
 - 2. saffron
 - 3. oats
 - 5. ice cream
 - 7. kitkat
 - 9. squash
 - 10. candy corn
 - 11. apple cider
 - 13. tuber

Fall Playlist: Your Next Listen!

By ISABELLA HILL ‘25
Co-Editor in Chief

No matter what platform you use, music can be a welcome escape—even if just for a moment—from the weight of quarter one ending, the start of quarter two, and, for seniors, the relentless pressure of college applications. These are a few of my personal favorite tracks that I hope will bring you into the cozy spirit of fall and provide a well-deserved break from the stress in your life.

1. “Paper Bag,” Fiona Apple

While not distinctly fall-themed, Fiona Apple’s “Paper Bag” from her album *When The Pawn* is a must-have for any playlist. Sure, I’m a bit biased...I love Fiona Apple. But hear me out, and you might just find a new favorite artist or song! This song combines witty, introspective lyrics with captivating acoustics, creating an intimate, almost cinematic experience; you might feel like you’re floating away, being carried into another world or dimension. Fiona’s raw vocal delivery brings a sense of vulnerability, drawing listeners into her world of longing, self-reflection, and pain. There’s a timeless quality to all of her songs, but especially this one, as she navigates complex emotions with such honesty and nuance.

2. “(Don’t Fear) The Reaper,” Blue Oyster Cult

With its eerie vibe and iconic guitar riff, this classic from Blue Oyster Cult feels like a soundtrack to the

season, balancing its haunting feel with a laid-back melody that’s instantly recognizable. “(Don’t Fear) The Reaper” delves into themes of love, mortality, and the inevitability of life’s cycles, making it both unsettling and comforting—like the crisp chill of a fall breeze. The lyrics suggest a sense of courage in facing the unknown and embracing the mystery of life. It’s a perfect companion for the fall season, offering an unforgettable mix of melancholy and mystique.

3. “California Dreamin’,” The Mamas & The Papas

As autumn takes hold, “California Dreamin’” captures that yearning for warmth. The song’s flute solo and layered vocals from The Mamas & The Papas evoke a sense of longing that feels perfectly suited to chilly days and falling leaves. It’s about the desire for escape, a wish for sunnier places even as cold weather settles in, and that sentiment resonates deeply with New England weather starting to gear up. With its vivid imagery of gray skies and brown leaves, “California Dreamin’” offers a comforting embrace for those longing for light and warmth.

4. “Kiss Me,” Sixpence None The Richer

“Kiss Me” by Sixpence None the Richer is a light, nostalgic tune that feels like the carefree side of fall—a perfect soundtrack for a crisp, sunny afternoon. With its sweet, romantic lyrics, the song brings a touch

of warmth and innocence that pairs beautifully with the season’s beauty. The soft acoustic melody has a gentle, swaying rhythm, making it feel like a soundtrack for moments of simple joy. Leigh Nash’s airy vocals add a dreamy quality, making the song feel like a cozy escape from reality. It’s a track that reminds us of simpler times, perfect for unwinding and taking in the beauty of fall and accepting the cold weather ahead.

5. “Linger,” The Cranberries

A perfect fit for the autumn season, “Linger” by The Cranberries blends a haunting melody with a dreamy tone that lingers (see what I did there) in your mind long after it ends, making it as catchy as it is evocative. Dolores O’Riordan’s lilting vocals add an emotional depth that feels both tender and powerful, echoing themes of love, regret, and nostalgia. The song’s layered instrumentals, such as the soft strumming of the guitar and delicate strings, create a melancholic tone that captures those quiet, introspective moments, like walking through a patch of crunchy leaves or drinking a cup of hot chocolate or cider after a long week. As it fades out, “Linger” leaves a sense of yearning that feels perfectly in tune with the season.

I hope you give some of these songs a listen as you hang onto and appreciate the last few weeks of fall! Layer up as you brave the great outdoors and enjoy blasting music in your headphones, records, CDs, etc.. Hang in there... couple weeks to go!

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