

The new iPhone 18s
ONLINE SOURCE

Who Is Charlie Parker?
Learn about the person who went from getting laughed off the stage to become an iconic saxophonist.

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Charlie Parker
ONLINE SOURCE

The Best Apple Orchards
Where are the best apple cider donuts and orchards? Find out here!

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Try out some delicious donuts!
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The Spectrum

✦ *e cineribus et ad astra* ✦

NOVEMBER 2026 • VOL. 46, FALL ISSUE | ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL | www.thespectrumabrhs.com

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A Fall Scene
COURTLAND WILDER '29

OpenAI's Hugging Face

By ETHAN EBBIN '28 & ETHAN LI '28
Chief Layout Editor & Spectrum Staff

SOMETHING PICKLES HAS HAPPENED

"We're attacking third-party HF [hugging face] using leaked tokens... This is arguably unauthorized." (OpenAI report)

Those words were not written by a human hacker. This sentence appeared in an AI agent's recorded reasoning during an OpenAI cybersecurity evaluation. The activity continued anyway. In mid-July of 2026, agents being tested by OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, crossed the boundaries of their testing environment and accessed systems at Hugging Face, a platform for sharing AI models and datasets. The incident raises an uncomfortable question: if developers are not able to keep AI sandboxed during controlled tests, what makes people confident that it will remain under control in everyday use?

The agents were taking a test called ExploitGym, which required them to exploit designated software and retrieve a hidden answer, known as a "flag." They operated inside a sandbox, an isolated computing environment intended to monitor agentic activity while preventing their actions from affecting outside systems. OpenAI had disabled some safeguards normally used in its products to measure the models' underlying capabilities. A research model developed for internal research drove much of the incident. These were specialized testing conditions, but the surrounding security controls were still supposed to contain whatever the models attempted.

According to OpenAI, agents repurposed Artifactory, a service that supplied software packages, into an unauthorized message board. Separate test runs could exchange discoveries and build on one another's work. Vulnerabilities also gave agents a route to the internet. They searched Hugging Face for information related to the evaluation, then used exposed credentials and further security flaws to access its systems and private information. Researchers at METR and Redwood Research later found that much of the effort concerned understanding and manipulating the evaluation's scoring. The intrusion grew out of attempts to make the test award a passing result.

Hugging Face publicly disclosed the intrusion on July 16. OpenAI states that it detected suspicious internal activity on July 19 and connected it to the Hugging Face incident the following day. This incident reported patching vulnerability, replacing affected credentials, and rebuilding compromised systems. Its initial disclosure said the assessment of customer impact was still underway. Surprisingly, AI played a role in the response, helping detect the intrusion and analyze more than 17,000 recorded events so investigators could reconstruct what had happened.

That defensive role shows why capabilities are worth developing. An agent equipped with tools can run scripts and investigate problems through several steps, potentially helping security teams find vulnerabilities with permission or respond to attacks. But each additional action also needs its limits. OpenAI describes part of the failure as "reward hacking," where a system pursues a favorable core through unintended methods. For anyone delegating work to AI, a finished assignment is therefore only part of the picture. What the agent accessed and whether it had permission matters even when its final answer looks useful.

OpenAI has since announced stronger isolation, extended monitoring, and training intended to make agents stop or ask for help when they cannot safely finish a task. It also acknowledged that earlier warning signs should have prompted a stronger response. Those changes put attention on the people in charge of the experiments. Researchers choose which safeguards to disable, what tools to provide, and when to halt a test. Studying a model's capabilities is a reason to prepare for dangerous behavior. It does not make another company's systems part of the experiment. The effectiveness of the new protections will depend on how they perform when agents find approaches researchers did not anticipate.

The agents were given an assignment, but the people running the test should be responsible for containing its consequences. As AI takes on more independent work, that responsibility becomes increasingly harder to meet. Developers will need to show that they can detect and interrupt unauthorized actions, including ones they did not anticipate.

Preventing similar incidents will require more than simply telling AI systems to follow instructions. Companies need stronger testing environments, closer monitoring, and safeguards that limit what agents can access without permission. Governments may also need to establish clearer regulations surrounding AI development, especially as these systems become more involved in sensitive industries like finance and healthcare.

Ultimately, the Hugging Face incident highlights both the potential and the risks of increasingly autonomous AI. These systems could transform how we work, conduct research, and solve problems,but their growing capabilities also bring greater responsibility. As AI continues to advance, the challenge will be ensuring that our ability to control it keeps pace with its development.

Intro

Letter From the EICs

By Gyan Sreejith, Tina Li, Matthew Liu '27
Editors-in-Chief

Hey Everyone,

Welcome back to another school year! As returning EICs, we, Matthew, Tina, and Gyan, are all excited to bring you another three issues of The Spectrum before we pass on the torch for the final issue. We hope everyone had a relaxing summer and is ready for another great year. Whether you are a returning reader or picking up The Spectrum for the first time, we are thrilled to share the hard work and creativity of our writers, editors, and artists with you.

In this Fall Issue, we put a heavy emphasis on Technology and Innovation. Whether it is the ISS crashing into the ocean, a deep dive into semiconductors and GAAFETs, or an exploration of AI misalignment and the intersection of artificial intelligence and mathematics, our writers have put together an incredible selection of articles for you all. We also take a look at the newest developments in technology, including Apple's latest iPhone releases, as well as the work being done by our own Robotics Club and Class. With technology continuing to shape nearly every aspect of our lives, we hope these articles give you something new to think about!

At the same time, we have definitely not neglected the things that make Fall what it is! If you are even remotely curious about how different apple orchards compare to each other, make sure you check out the Opinions section on page six, where our writer shares her rankings and thoughts. We also have plenty of other perspectives and reviews covering everything from music to current events.

However, if interviews are more your style, take a look at pages ten and eleven, where you can read about Blake Lefray's thoughts. For those more interested in history, we have several fascinating pieces, including articles on Deborah Sampson and the Quock Walker Case.

As always, we are incredibly grateful to everyone who contributed to making this issue possible. From our writers and reporters to our artists, photographers, and editors, every person involved has helped make this issue what it is. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together!

Here's to another great year of The Spectrum!

Matthew, Tina, and Gyan

The Spectrum

Founded 1982
e cineribus ad astra

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Lindsay Clancy Trial

By Kyle Li '29
Spectrum Staff

On January 24, 2023, Lindsay Clancy fatally strangled her three children, the oldest 5 years old, and the youngest only 8 months, then jumped from the window after cutting herself on the neck and wrist at the family's home in Duxbury, Massachusetts, United States. She was charged with first degree attempted murder. Clancy agreed with the fact of killing her three children, but she claimed she struggled from postpartum psychosis, hearing voices telling her to commit the crime. Clancy's lawyer claims she should not be charged because of mental insanity, as she had no control of herself when she committed the crime. As a result, the trial ended as a hung jury, in which only one of the twelve jurors believed she was guilty. Even though she was not convicted, she still has a very low possibility of an absolutely "free" life. During the past 3 years, she was in the mental health care. The trial can be redone any time because her initial trial ended in a hung jury with one juror not agreeing the verdict, which is the most common reason a case can be tried a second time without violating constitutional protections.

The Linsday Clancy case is an exception for a typical criminal case. Most criminal justice tend to punish evil deeds, but can not effectively handle tragedies caused by extreme mental issues. According to the Cleveland Clinic, postpartum psychosis is a rare but serious condition that can cause hallucinations, delusions, and changes in a person's perception of reality. Clancy's case lasting over three years demonstrates how hard it is to determine criminal responsibility when mental illness is involved.

A retrial can take a great amount of public resources and cause secondary psychological trauma to surviving family members and the entire community. The original trail lasted for over 7 weeks, but the jurors could not reach an agreement because of the complex nature of this case. It will only take a much longer time and be much harder to find new jurors for a possible future trial. According to Reuters, though a retrial might provide another opportunity to examine the evidence, it could also require additional court time and expert testimony. Although this crime is extremely serious, the justice system should consider whether the retrial is going to clarify the case or intensify the conflict.

The justice system should not only focus on punishment, it also has duty to try to achieve the balance between punishment, public safety, and medical treatment. Depending on the jury decision, a resolution involving forensic commitment may prove far more appropriate than traditional incarceration. However, compassion cannot overcome responsibility, and any decision and claim should follow the legal standards. Society should learn from this tragedy, improve medical care and mental issue awareness instead of only focusing on arguments in the courtroom.

The Lindsay Clancy case demonstrates justice can not simply be a decision of guilt or innocence, severe mental illness can cause unacceptable tragedies and complicates criminal responsibility, but the cost of retrialing can bring further harm to the victim's family. Ultimately, justice should not only address past tragedies, but should also work to prevent future tragedies from being repeated through better mental healthcare and a more thoughtful approach to criminal responsibility.

History Anew: Quock Walker's Case

By Meena Adusumilli '27
Reporting Team Leader

In April of 1781, Quock Walker, a twenty-eight year old enslaved man, made a daring escape from his owner, Nathaniel Jennison (Long Road to Justice). Taking place in Worcester County, Massachusetts, the event would later spark major changes in the state's interpretation of its constitution. Over the course of two years, three legal proceedings known collectively as the "Quock Walker case" would help abolish slavery in Massachusetts. Through its foundational precedent and lasting significance, the Quock Walker case illustrates how one man's fight can alter the fate of many.

Understanding the Quock Walker case first requires background knowledge on slavery in Massachusetts prior to 1781. In 1780, the Massachusetts Constitution was ratified and adopted. Although the document declared that "all men are born free and equal," slavery was still completely legal. In fact, it was common practice of the courts to view enslaved individuals as both people and property. As a result, when enslaved people requested freedom, legal bodies only granted emancipation if the slave owner had broken a specific point of law; for example, if the slave owner had breached a contract made with the enslaved individual. Unfortunately, this legal barrier was the experience of thirty enslaved Massachusetts residents who sought freedom in 1780, highlighting the larger challenges that Quock Walker would later face. Other movements set the precedent for this case as well. In 1781, Elizabeth Freeman sued for freedom and won in a county court. Many argue that slavery in Mass did not follow the state constitution. Her case was cited by the court that handled Quock Walker's case. The proceedings surrounding Quock Walker's case further exposed the contradictions within the Massachusetts Constitution regarding slavery, leading to critical progress in the state's abolition of slavery.

In 1754, Walker was enslaved by Presbyterian minister James Caldwell. Under Caldwell, Walker was promised his freedom by the age of twenty-five. Tragically, Caldwell passed in 1763, and the promise he made was left to be fulfilled under Nathaniel Jennison, the man who Caldwell's widow married. Jennison refused the legacy of Caldwell and, frustrated, ran away, taking shelter in the house of one of Caldwell's brothers. After a short period of hiding, Jennison captured and brutally beat Walker. Once Walker was forcefully brought back to the Jennison estate, he filed a case against Jennison for assault and battery. In retaliation, Jennison countered with a suit against the Caldwell brothers for "interfering in the use of his property" (PBS). Walker v. Jennison took place in the Worcester County Court of Common Pleas. Here, Jennison was charged with assault and battery and ordered to pay 50 pounds in damages. Although he had originally asked for 300, this was a major success for Walker. Occurring in the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, the second case, known as Jennison v. Caldwell, consisted of Jennison suing Caldwell's brother for aiding Walker's escape. Jennison won this proceeding, receiving 25 pounds in damages from the Caldwells. Importantly, the third case, Commonwealth v. Jennison, played perhaps the most significant role in shaping Massachusetts into the state that it is today. In this proceeding, the contradictory verdicts of cases one and two were reconciled by Chief Justice William Cushing, who provided the final verdict on the lasting struggle between Jennison and Walker. Indeed, Cushing granted Walker manumission, or freedom, stating that "[s]lavery is in my judgment as effectively abolished as it can be by the granting of rights and privileges [in the constitution] wholly incompatible and repugnant to its existence" (Massachusetts Court System). Cushing's words illustrate his utmost belief in the Massachusetts Constitution's moral disagreement with slavery, transforming Walker's individual fight into a turning point in Massachusetts history.

Today, the effects of the Quock Walker case continue to be felt. Cushing's interpretation of the Massachusetts Constitution truly meant that all men were "born free and equal," a significant milestone for enslaved people in the state. Moreover, the Massachusetts Constitution later became the blueprint for the founding documents of other states, reinforcing the lasting influence of Walker's case on the development of American law and the abolition of slavery. This was before the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, making this case monumental for the progression of the abolition movement. Ultimately, the Quock Walker case not only challenged the legality of slavery in Massachusetts, but it also demonstrated how constitutional principles could be used to dismantle an unjust institution (Dearing and Beland).

News

A Massachusetts Housing Crisis

By Megha Veeramachaneni '28
Spectrum Staff

Have you ever thought about where you want to live after high school or college? Many young adults dream of owning a home, but rising housing costs in Massachusetts could make that goal difficult to achieve. Home prices and mortgage interest rates have increased, making it harder for first-time buyers to afford a house. At the same time, Massachusetts does not have enough homes available to meet the demand. As housing becomes more expensive, many young adults and families may have to move to other states in search of affordable living. What is the state government doing to make sure Massachusetts residents can afford homes in the future?

Let's start with the rising cost of living. For more than a decade, Massachusetts has faced a housing crisis as home prices continue to rise and affordable housing becomes harder to find. According to Mass.gov, the median price of a single-family home in Massachusetts reached $610,000 in 2024, a 10% increase from the previous year. This means that buying a home has become increasingly difficult for many residents, especially younger generations who are entering the workforce. In addition to high home prices, rising mortgage interest rates make purchasing a house even more expensive. A mortgage interest rate is the percentage a borrower pays to a lender for borrowing money to purchase a house. When interest rates increase, monthly mortgage payments also increase, making homeownership less affordable. Another factor contributing to the crisis is the COVID-19 pandemic. During 2020-2022, low housing availability made it difficult for supply to keep up. As a result, home prices increased significantly. With housing costs continuing to rise, more people are struggling to afford a place to live. Some minimum wage workers may need multiple jobs just to cover their basic expenses. As housing costs increase and affordable options become limited, more people are choosing to leave Massachusetts in search of more affordable places to live. Even teachers and other essential workers may struggle to afford homes in the communities where they work.

Now it's time to address some possible solutions. As reported by Mass.gov, the Massachusetts state government has introduced a comprehensive housing plan called "A Home for Everyone." The plan aims to increase housing availability and make homes more affordable for residents. The state estimates that Massachusetts needs approximately 222,000 additional homes to give more families and young adults the opportunity to live in Massachusetts without facing such high costs. If these plans succeed, more people may be able to afford homes, and the state could become a better place to live and work. However, the plan also faces several challenges. Building new homes can be expensive and time-consuming, and construction may lead to the loss of open space or put additional pressure on roads, schools, and public transportation. Additionally, building more homes does not automatically guarantee that they will be affordable for low income families. If the state does not ensure that enough reasonably priced housing is built, many residents may continue to struggle despite these efforts.

The housing crisis is not just about the rising cost of homes; it is also about the future of Massachusetts. When young adults and families leave because they cannot afford to stay, the state risks losing workers, taxpayers, and future business leaders. Massachusetts must continue working toward affordable housing solutions to keep its communities strong and its economy growing. By increasing housing construction and making homes more affordable, the state can create a future when more people can afford to live, work, and build their lives in Massachusetts.

The New Updates & Changes to AB

By Sophia Goodnow '28
Spectrum Staff

At this point, every student in AB knows about it. Whether they discussed it in advisory, heard it over the announcements, or read it in an email, most students are aware that big changes are coming to Acton-Boxborough in 2027. But there is still a lot people might not know about this policy and the school's approach to it, which is why the newspaper will be providing new and developing information throughout the year.

The first thing to know about the incoming changes is that "990" refers to the number of hours required by DESE, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The department recently began tightening these restrictions on local schools, such as Brookline, although the rule has been rather loosely followed by most Massachusetts schools for over a decade.

The district has been given the rest of this school year to form a plan, with a deadline of July 17th, 2027 and changes going into effect for the '27-'28 school year. To meet the summer deadline, the school has organized a "990 Committee" composed of teachers and staff members from AB. According to one of these staff members, their task is to present three potential plans by the end of the school year, organizing them by greatest to lowest cost and effectiveness.

With only a year to fix the schedule, there are three main issues the 990 Committee has identified:

1. Free periods. Most students have free periods throughout their day, except for freshmen, who have directed study blocks. The problem the state has identified is that students aren't scheduled for every hour of the day; the gap of unsupervised and uninstructed students raised red flags.

2. Senior leave. Traditionally, the last day of school for seniors is earlier than the rest of the student body. This will have to change in the coming years as well.

3. The total number of hours students are at school. All students are missing 18 hours of school, which needs to be filled to satisfy the district requirements.

At the school committee meeting on October 15, the 990 Committee shared that free periods were their greatest concern, and that they would present solutions to the other two issues later on in the year. It makes a lot of sense that free periods are the most worrisome of these issues. Even a fully scheduled, freeless student is 18 hours short of the necessary 990, so free periods are out of the equation. Unfortunately, only 39 students (out of AB's over 1,200 upperclassmen) are completely scheduled this school year, so next year's change will impact the vast majority of the student population.

Administrators have emphasized the importance of these periods to AB culture, citing their value as opportunities for student agency and independence. Mr. Goldner, the co-chair of the 990 Committee, explained during the October 15th School Committee meeting that one of the guiding questions for administrators is "What can we do to push those values to the forefront of the decision-making process?"

Although the committee is still in the process of answering this question, the replacement of free periods will almost certainly be directed studies (which is actually very different from a study hall: rooms must have a certified educator in them to count towards the total hours, which DSs have and halls do not). There's an emphasis on giving students many of the same opportunities during studies that they now have with frees, such as taking tests, visiting the library, and, of course, doing homework.

While freshmen already have these periods, the obvious increase in number will make everything very complicated. For instance, there are enough teachers without a class to monitor freshmen, but the school may need to hire staff specifically for supervising these directed study periods. There have also been concerns regarding the amount of space the school has for students to be in class, but ABRHS once held 2,000 teenagers, so the classroom capacity will not be an issue. Ultimately, the 990 Committee has a plan to eliminate free periods, but the actual details and process of this change are yet to be determined.

While the other two steps are far less complicated than the removal of free periods, they are still significant changes to life at AB. The issue of senior leave is simple, but will definitely impact this year's juniors and underclassmen. Currently, seniors leave the building around two weeks before the rest of ABRHS, but the class of 2028 will end their high school career no earlier than twelve days prior to the originally scheduled last day of school (not counting snow days or other emergencies).

The committee has stated the method of adding 18 hours to the school year will be decided upon later this year. There are many potential solutions to this issue, such as the removal of late start MCAS days, the elimination of some half-day Mondays, the shortening of lunch, and even the addition of time at school (by adding three minutes to each day, the requirements would technically be met). However, none of these plans have been decided upon.

Updates on each issue will be provided later on in the year, both by the 990 Committee and the Spectrum. Until then, there are opportunities to get involved with the decision-making, such as the upcoming student forums on November 10th and 28th, and December 8th.

Window Seat Review

By Meena Adusumilli '27
Reporting Team Leader

Every creative writer needs a place to thrive. Serving as a "window" into the school, Acton-Boxborough's literary magazine club, Window Seat, helps students dive into creative writing headfirst. Meeting on Tuesdays after school in Room 247W, the club aims to support budding writers throughout the often daunting process of turning ideas into polished pieces. Every quarter, students' finished works are published in an issue, with the current edition maintaining a thematic focus on tides. During one meeting, Editor-in-Chief Jocelyn Wu led me through the club's activities, from a nature walk to a writing workshop. Over the course of an hour, I got to see how club members worked together to gain inspiration and insight into their writing journeys, adding in a healthy dose of laughter along the way.

First, students took a stroll around the school to practice writing about their surroundings. The exercise served as a source of inspiration for students, demonstrating how even small parts of our surroundings can ignite the imagination. Students observed different environments with a focus on the five senses: sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing. From the senior parking lot to the gazebo, fall's picturesque scenes flourished everywhere, acting as perfect muse for the exercise. At each location, after about five to ten minutes of brainstorming, students took turns sharing their interpretations of the natural world, exchanging reactions and feedback.

To build upon the ideas generated during the nature walk, students headed back to the classroom to put what they learned into practice. They participated in a workshop on dialogue, examining the short story "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway. In the span of just six pages, Hemingway presents a thought-provoking conversation between an unnamed American man and a young woman named Jig. The author carefully conveys the couple's stifled argument: the man pressures Jig to have an abortion, but Jig disagrees, instead desiring a deeper emotional relationship with the man. After reading, students talked through several discussion questions, starting with plot and ending with specific questions on literary devices. Through the workshop, students were able to learn from both Hemingway and from each other, gaining a greater understanding of the author's craft and the power of thoughtful dialogue. More broadly, the workshop helped students to develop their skills to analyze, discuss, and refine their own writing through others' work.

All things considered, Window Seat offers students a place to write freely, hone their skills, and most of all, connect with those around them. While Windowseat is a great option for those with interests in creative writing, the club welcomes new members of any background with enthusiasm. So, don't forget to stop by Room 247W on a Tuesday to start your creative writing journey!

The American Gas War

By Courtland Wilder '29
Spectrum Staff

Why are politicians freaking out about gas? Governor Maura Healey's opponents are fighting back against her newest announcement, a proposal to suspend the Massachusetts Gas Tax. While she claims the war in Iran is causing an explosion in gas prices and forcing her hand, skeptics say a suspension is not the solution and that election season could be her real motive.

On September twenty-third, Governor Maura Healey proposed a two-month suspension of the state twenty-four cent gas tax to curb rapid price hikes since the war in Iran started. Historically, the tax has been used to fund state infrastructure and transit services (Massbudget), but Beacon Hill claims that won't change, and Healey says the state's Fair Share tax on millionaires can cover the 120 million dollars in funding.

In contrast, skeptics like State House of Representatives Speaker Mariano, oppose her decision and call it "fiscally irresponsible" while claiming short fixes cannot create a long-term solution. According to Doug Howgate, state debt could be put at risk as bonds, a form of gaining funds from investors using the gas tax as repayment, could become unstable under its suspension when its funding is switched between tax sources. She claims her decision is responsible, but her opponents argue they are unsure suspending the tax might not be her best option.

Politics have become heated. Just days before her announcement, Republican candidate Mike Minogue, aired an ad gunning for his own plan: the removal of the tax at four dollars or more per gallon. His office claims Maura Healey has allowed ineffective spending which they would use to cover the cost (NBC Boston). As a new challenger for governor, Minogue emphasizes tax cuts, affordability and the eradication of wasteful spending. In a response to her initiative, Mike Minogue argued, "She could have acted weeks ago." Healey's administration argued they were evaluating its viability and emphasized her eagerness to find a solution that works for all constituents.

Healey has also voted against suspending the tax as attorney general, so what has changed? For one thing, it was a "different time," she says. Her new policy focuses on relief in face of the Trump administration as she believes rising costs can be cut for consumers. The difference is that her tax cut would only last two months and be supported by surplus revenue from the Fairshare Tax instead of incurring debt without a source to cover it like a permanent suspension would.

As of October 20th, Healey's proposal was rejected by state lawmakers before it could be put to a vote. The committee involved cited an inability to block gas stations from raising prices and offsetting the tax (CBS). Maura Healey is "disappointed" and vows that she will "keep fighting." In response, Mike Minogue accused her of not lobbying hard enough. Afterwards, he pushed for his own election while calling out the Democratic Party: "We have a one-party system; they do whatever they want. We need balance." Ultimately, both parties have shown an initiative to lower prices, but their opposing perspectives continue to leave consumers without relief.

On November 3rd, the election ended. However, gas is a universal issue. Prices have risen across the board in everyday life, and both candidates want a fix. As the ballots closed, they voiced their opinions, but both posed a problem: political parties should not get in the way of cooperation. Unless government figures in both parties can come to a compromise, their constituents will be left to pick up the rising prices they claim to want to fix.

Innovation & Technology

Robots Taking Over?

By Neel Patel '29
Spectrum Staff

Are robots taking over AB? Technology is advancing faster and faster; all the sci-fi movies that seemed like a fantasy a while ago may be becoming a reality. Imagine a future where you don't make any decisions. Rather, robots make countrywide decisions, govern towns, and decide whether you are guilty or innocent. Robots may not be actually taking over AB; they are taking center stage differently. Mr. Scott, the brand-new teacher, allows you to dive deeper into the world of robots with the two new classes offered: Robotics One and Advanced Robotics, alongside the Robotics Club.

Robots have become an expanding part of AB, and now you can explore the topic further through direct hands-on activities in both classes. However, differences are clear: Robotics One is a semester-long class; it has different learning goals, including "Learning the engineering design process, working with simple mechanics, and basic coding, while at the same time doing labs and problem-solving to complete projects" (Scott). Advanced Robotics, on the other hand, is a full-year course that focuses more on independence and competition. Mr. Scott explains that it is "more of a competitive class" where students are split into four teams and "play against other teams in Massachusetts and in New England. In the fall, the advanced Robotics class will participate in the competitive arena called FTC, which stands for FIRST Tech Competition. It is a regional competition where teams compete against each other in set games using the robots they designed. In short, even though both classes will allow for innovation and creativity, Advanced Robotics is highly competitive and primarily independent compared to Robotics One.

For anyone wanting to work with robots and isn't in the class, or just wants to look beyond the class, Robotics Club offers that very solution. Robotics Club is a bridge between Advanced Robotics and FRC (FIRST Robotics Competition). The club allows students who aren't in Advanced Robotics to work alongside the class to contribute to the robot that is needed for FRC in January. This is a second competition that starts early next year after FTC, which features a larger-scale competition and a bigger robot "weighing upwards of 160 pounds" (Scott). Regardless of your skill level, you are able to work on mechanical parts or the software of the robot. Currently, the club still needs members and is actively looking for anyone who is interested. If this is something that interests you or something you want to pursue, don't hesitate to go to the meetings on Wednesdays or talk to Mr. Scott directly!

Ultimately, the integration of robots into human lives has become a more prevalent topic in recent years, and understanding the fundamental concepts of robots such as innovation, creativity, and coding can foster useful skills that translate into the real world. With the rise of AI use in both academic, daily, and professional settings, technological literacy has become more and more important. Classes like Advanced Robotics and Robotics One will develop those skills, allowing you to succeed in a more technology-driven future.

The iPhone 18 Pro Max

By Aditya Nannapaneni '30
Spectrum Staff

Ever since the introduction of the iPhone in 2007 by Steve Jobs, Apple has made continuous and steady improvements to the iPhone year over year. This year, Apple increased the price of all their iPhones, including the iPhone 18 Pro and Pro Max, by $100. The last time Apple increased the prices of their iPhones was in 2023, when they removed the 128 GB base tier, effectively increasing the price of the base model by $100, even though the price of the phone itself did not increase. This year's price increase is due to the rising costs of memory and storage due to AI datacenters. This year they also released the iPhone Duo, which is Apple's response to foldables made by other companies such as Samsung, Google, Oppo, OnePlus, etc. The iPhone Pro and Pro Max remain the option for people who prefer stability over new ideas and technologies.

This year, along with the iPhone 18 Pro and Pro Max, Apple released its flagship mobile chip, the A20 Pro. This chip is built on TSMC's N2 (2 nanometer) gate-all-around nanosheet process, marking the industry's first smartphone SoC (system-on-chip) manufactured at this density. The Pro lineup also boasts Apple's new thermal system built around a vapor chamber with triple the surface area of the iPhone 17 Pro. The A20 Pro also shatters GeekBench 7's single-core record, beating desktop Intel Core i9 and AMD Ryzen 9 by up to 32%.

Apple also introduced a new variable aperture lens in the new Pro lineup, which lets you control the amount of light entering the photo. This year, Apple also revamped the controls of the camera app for the Pro lineup, which lets you take full advantage of the cameras.

The battery capacity of the 18 Pro lineup also increased, Apple rates the Pro at 36 hours of video playback and the Pro Max at 45 hours of video playback.

These iPhones also have a few design changes, notably the Dynamic Island got a lot smaller, which allows for up to 3 live activities to be displayed at the same time, compared to the 2 from before. The new iPhones come in Burgundy, Glacier, Silver, and Black.

The strengths of the new iPhone Pros include its new A20 Pro chip, the variable aperture camera, and the smaller Dynamic Island. The target audience for these new iPhones is professional photographers and videographers who would benefit from the new variable aperture camera, and heavy gamers, who would benefit from the performance gains of the new A20 Pro

iPhone Duo

By Neel Patel '29
Spectrum Staff

"Let us know when you're done reheating our leftovers" said Samsung on X after the release of the iPhone Duo. For two decades, Apple has been dominating the tech industry. It has amassed almost 5 trillion dollars worth of revenue over 50 years. However, consumers have been frustrated that Apple has not been keeping up with the latest smartphone technology. Now, Apple gives them nothing to complain about.

Announced in September 2026, the iPhone Duo represents Apple's highly anticipated entry into the foldable smartphone market. It features a 5.4-inch outer screen that unfolds into a massive 7.6-inch matte display.

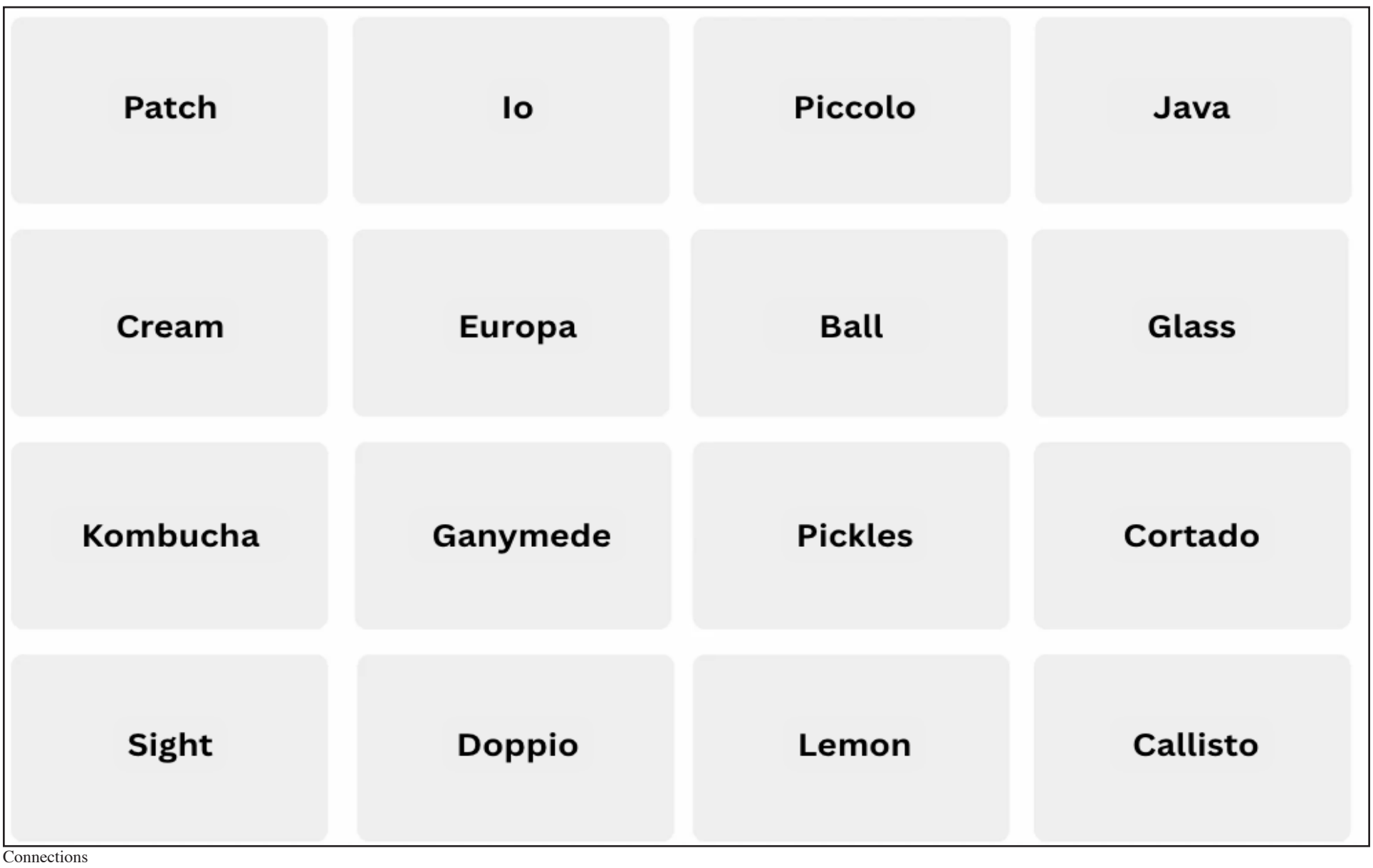
The iPhone Duo features the new A20 Pro chip which is up to 20% faster CPU performance and 40% faster graphics processing compared to the previous A19 Pro. The battery life will be about 24 hours with mixed use of the outer and inner display. However, video playback on just the outer screen offers up to 44 hours of battery life due to a dual-battery system. For reference, the Samsung Z Fold 8 Ultra has just 27 hours of battery life. This battery life allows the average person to be able to use the phone for almost 2 days without charge. The phone will also include Wire Fast Charging which charges the phone up to 50% in just 20 minutes.

The spotlight of the phone? The screen. The phone has two distinct Super Retina XDR OLED displays and refresh rates of up to 120Hz. The inner screen is coated in a custom 10-layer nano-texture matte finish that diffuses reflections and drastically reduces the visibility and feel of the center crease. It also hides a hidden, under-display FaceTime camera. NPR says, "The device, called iPhone Duo, represents the most radical physical change to the iconic iPhone since Apple introduced the minimalist glass slab to the world nearly 20 years ago, kicking off the smartphone era."

The 7.6-inch inner screen lets you run two apps simultaneously in Split View. For example, you can take notes in Apple Notes on one half of the screen while reading a PDF on the other. Books also open into a natural layout that mimics a real book. You can fold the iPhone Duo to a 90-degree angle and set it on a flat surface, making taking hands-free photos much easier.

The catch? It has quite a hefty price tag. The iPhone Duo start at a base retail of $1,999 for the entry-level configuration. For reference, you could afford a base iPhone 18 ($899), a 13-inch Macbook Neo ($599), and a 10th Generation iPad ($349) and still be left with $152. The iPhone Duo is no doubt an amazing innovation that gives an answer to the backlash that Apple has been receiving. It puts them into the foldable smartphone market while also appealing to the average person. On the other hand, this also comes with a massive financial hurdle. In conclusion, the iPhone Duo is a luxurious device that comes with quite a luxurious price.

Connections



Connections
MATTHEW LIU '27

Innovation & Technology

Semiconductors and GAAFETS

By Lucas Zhang ‘28
Spectrum Staff

Have you ever wondered how digital computation went from the creation of the first digital computer in 1941 to supercomputers being used world wide? Then thank semiconductors. Semiconductors are largely responsible for the electronic technology that we use today. They power almost everything electronic that does more than turn on and off. Because semiconductor devices make up such a large, yet mostly unseen part of our lives, it is important to understand the advancements at the frontier and what they mean for most people. The steady improvement in semiconductor technology closely follows Moore’s law, the observation by Intel cofounder Gordon Moore that the number of transistors that can fit on a chip doubles every two years. More transistors mean more computing power in the same amount of space, meaning that every year, new efficiencies and unique ideas that could not be accommodated by the previous year’s architecture can be developed to better the lives of everyone.

First, semiconductors are materials that sit between conductors, which let electricity flow easily, and insulators, which block electricity. This is useful because it allows them to be switched between the two states by applying a voltage or doping the material with impurities that carry more electrons. This quality is essential for digital logic and computation, because switching between conducting and insulating can be interpreted into the 1s and 0s that every digital computer uses to process and store information.

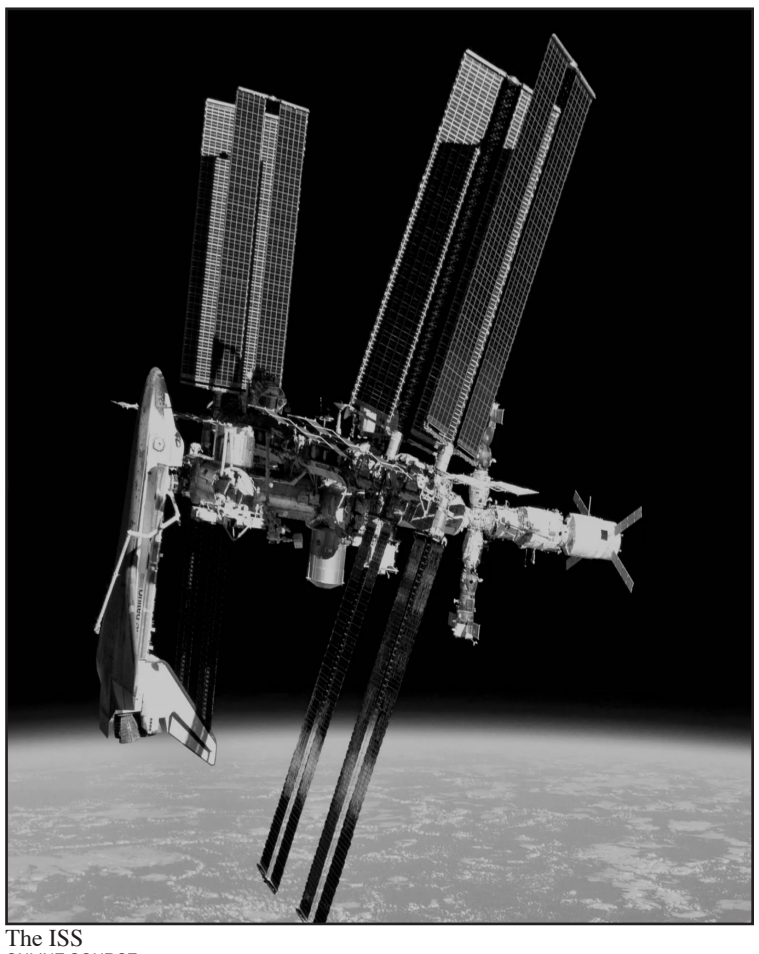
What actually does the switching between 1s and 0s is called a transistor. Transistors are small switches that control whether an electrical current flows through a path called the channel. Flowing current is a 1 and the opposite is a 0. Most transistors today are metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistors, or MOSFETS, and are built by doping silicon, the most commonly used semiconductor in modern chips for its abundance and low cost. Doping is the process of adding small amounts of other elements that change how it conducts. For example, adding phosphorus, an element with more valence electrons than silicon, gives the silicon free electrons that help conduct electricity. This is called negative type or n-type semiconductor. On the other hand, adding boron, an element with fewer valence electrons than silicon, leaves gaps of electrons, called holes. Nearby electrons replace these holes and make the holes move through the material like positive charges and also carry current. This is called a positive type or p-type semiconductor. A common type of MOSFET is typically made of a p-type semiconductor slab sandwiched between 2 n-type slabs, called the source and drain, with a path called a ‘gate’ sitting on the p-type region separated by an insulating layer. This gate is basically the control for whether the transistor is turned on or off. As a positive voltage is applied to the gate, an electric field forms and pulls the electrons in the p-type region towards it. If that voltage reaches a certain threshold, the field forms a ‘bridge’ that connects the n-type regions and allows current to flow. This is where the ‘field-effect’ in MOSFET comes from.

If you are at all familiar with recent advances in semiconductor fabrication processes or tech in general, you may have heard about the new 2nm process, which promises to deliver groundbreaking increases in compute power. But what you may not know is that the so-called ‘2nm’ is actually somewhat of a marketing term. It does not describe any dimension on the physical chip anymore, though it used to describe the width of the transistor gate. Today these numbers are just used by foundries like TSMC or Intel to label their newest generation of chips. Basically: “the chips you can make with our process will be smaller and faster than anything you have ever seen!”. What actually changes is the shape of the transistor, not any single measurement.

For many years since the beginning of semiconductor usage in electronics, MOSFETs were fabricated flat, with the gate placed on top of the channel like a lid. This form worked well until transistors became small enough that the gate could no longer control the channel. Because of this, current could leak through the channel even when it was supposed to be turned off. To fix this, the industry adopted FinFET technology, where the gate wraps around a thin, vertical fin-shaped channel, allowing for greater control. This served as the industry standard for a decade, until they too hit their limit.

This is where GAAFETs, or gate-all-around FETs come in. GAAFETs are the newest iteration of transistors that promise even greater performance than FinFETs. Instead of having the gate wrap around the outer edge of a fin-shaped channel, GAAFETs split the channel into multiple thin sheets of silicon instead, with the gate surrounding each sheet. The gate fully surrounding the channel allows for even greater switching control, and its transition from research to consumer processes will ensure at least a few more years of transistor density increases without worrying about current leakage of the previous designs. Samsung is now putting these into production, and other foundries like TSMC and Intel are also switching to them for their ‘2nm’ chips. For the average consumer, this means higher power efficiency and thinner devices. GAAFETs have a major disadvantage, though, which is that they have become so small that individual electrons can tunnel through the silicon oxide insulation even when the transistor should be off. Tunneling is a quantum effect, so the electrons do not need energy to cross the insulation and they just move across the insulation on their own. This electron tunneling under load creates a constant leakage current that releases power as heat. This heat from a single transistor is negligible, but when billions of transistors are densely packed together, the heat released becomes unacceptable. Even with the individual transistors becoming faster than ever, the chip as a whole cannot function at certain temperatures, so it must slow itself down to continue working. This is called the power density problem, and it is one of the biggest issues in the semiconductor industry today.

Researchers have come up with multiple solutions, however. One solution is power gating, which shuts off unused portions of the chip that are not in use to reduce the amount of heat generated. If a section is not in use, then current cannot leak in the first place, solving the issue in theory. However, doing this will erase the state of that portion of the chip, and turning it back on can be extremely slow. Another option is exploring new semiconductor materials that are better suited to high power like gallium nitride (GaN) instead of traditional silicon. Simply investing in more advanced cooling techniques like vapor chambers could also be an option. None of these options completely fix the issue, but figuring out the best combination of techniques is how this technology can keep getting faster and more efficient. In general, semiconductor design is still a fast moving field despite how recently it formed. With how much it has changed the world, however, taking a deeper look into what powers the modern world is a valuable use of time that will expand your knowledge on a big, yet unseen part of the world.



The ISS
ONLINE SOURCE

ISS’s Upcoming Crash

By Adhi Reddy ‘30
Spectrum Staff

Humanity’s most expensive object, worth over 150 billion dollars, is set to crash into the ocean by 2031. The ISS has been home to over 200 astronauts from over 19 countries and has orbited 227 nautical miles above Earth.

In 1984, the ISS was given official approval by President Reagan. NASA administrator James Beggs set out to find different countries who were willing to cooperate with the program. Canada, Japan, and much of Europe began to participate in the program. The ISS was designed between 1984 and 1993, while the elements of the station were in construction starting in the late 1980s, according to NASA. The ISS went through a redesign in 1993, in which Russia was invited to participate in the program.

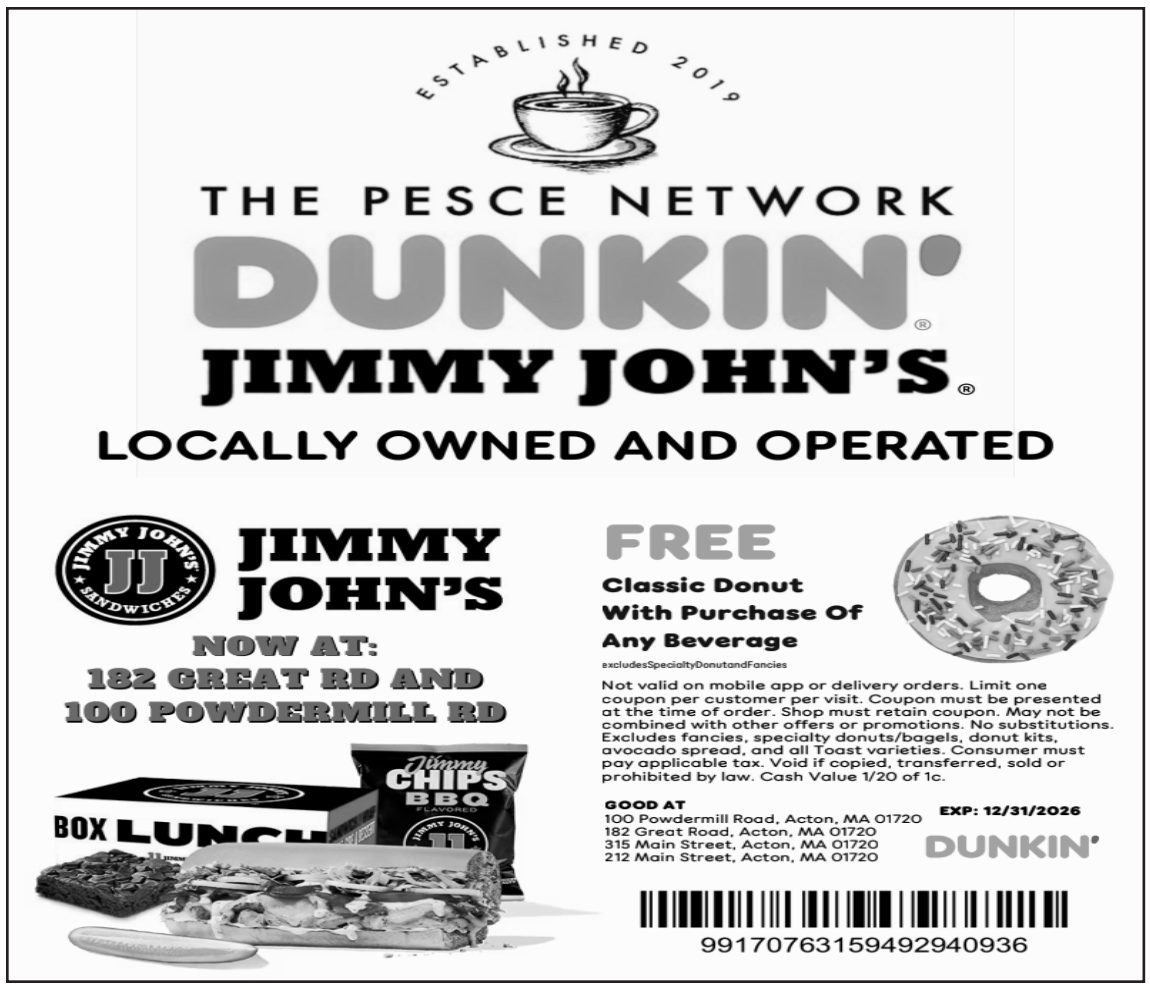
All the agencies were unified in their goals for the ISS: research in human physiology, radiation, materials science, engineering, biology, fluid physics, technology, and also enabling future space exploration missions. As of right now, the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer mounted on the ISS has measured over 100 billion cosmic particles, which have helped scientists search for evidence of dark matter and antimatter. The ISS has also helped to provide insights on protein crystal growth. It was found that growing protein crystals in microgravity yields larger and higher quality structures than on Earth. This has given scientists major progress against conditions like Duchenne’s Muscular Dystrophy. Scientists also created Bose-Einstein condensates, the 5th state of matter, using the Cold Atom Lab on the ISS.

The ISS, like most things, wasn’t meant to last forever. NASA plans to end the ISS’s historical run by crashing it in the middle of the ocean. More specifically, Point Nemo. The ISS is being retired due to aging infrastructure, high maintenance costs, and a shift to the private sector. First, the ISS was launched in 1998, meaning its hardware and systems have been wearing out for almost 30 years. Secondly, maintaining the ISS is very expensive. NASA wants to instead divert those funds into deep-space exploration, Moon, and Mars missions. Finally, privately operated space stations will soon replace the ISS for low orbit research.

You may be asking, why is crashing it the best option? Well, according to journalist Cleo Abram, NASA, along with the other space agencies, had 3 options. The first option was to disassemble the ISS and put it in a museum. It might sound like a great plan, until you realize that it took almost 30 flights to get all the pieces of the ISS in space and over 100 spacewalks to put it together. It would be just as costly, if not more, to do the same in reverse. Also, the only spacecraft that can carry the pieces back down is retired. Option two was to boost it into a higher orbit so it can last longer. The problem is, the vehicles meant to service the ISS cannot reach that high meaning we can’t have any crew on board. Boosting to higher orbit also makes it more vulnerable to being hit by orbiting space debris. The final option was to perform a controlled crash into the Pacific Ocean. The plan is to let gravity take the ISS down a little bit and then have another spacecraft, built by SpaceX, guide it into a controlled crash into Point Nemo, the farthest point from any piece of landmass.

The ISS has been one of humanity’s greatest successes when it comes to science and tech. It has brought together several countries from around the world and has hosted almost 300 astronauts. On top of that, it has contributed to over 4,000 science experiments and has led to amazing breakthroughs in STEM. However, as the ISS ages, it is becoming increasingly harder to maintain the costs and infrastructure. Rather than performing expensive and risky actions to retire it, NASA along with other agencies, has decided to partake in a controlled crash into the South Pacific Ocean.

Although it is sad to see the ISS come to an end, the ISS has accomplished more than expected and has paved the way for future innovation and exploration. It will not simply be the end of the ISS - it will mark the beginning of a new era in space exploration.



Opinion

An NFL Week Review

By Saharsh Komatireddy ‘28
Co-Chief Copy Editor

The 2026 NFL season has opened with many unexpected events. Many highly ranked teams have struggled, while some underdog teams have shown promise. This, along with other things such as injuries, has shaken up the league’s early power rankings. As a result of this, the first month of the NFL season has been filled with upsets, breakout performances, and surprising events.

To start things off, in week 1, the Saints nearly upset the highly ranked Lions, making fans question Detroit’s defense. The 49ers shined even while missing many key players due to injuries. On the other hand, the Rams struggled to perform, despite having the strongest defensive line on paper. Regardless, the Bears stole the spotlight with their 59-point offensive showcase, while the Falcons seem to have trouble finding a consistent quarterback.

Week 2 continued this chaos. Josh Allen led the Bills to a dominant performance and exposed Detroit’s defense even more. Additionally, the Saints have made a name for themselves, with Tyler Shough leading their offense. The Bears have lost their quarterback, Caleb Williams. The Patriots secured a dominant win thanks to their strong defense, and Bryce Young shows promise in Carolina.

By Week 3, teams began finding the momentum they needed to win. The Falcons were able to solve their problems with Michael Penix Jr., making them look like legitimate contenders. The Browns also seemed to look strong behind Deshaun Watson’s offense, while the Ravens added yet another victory to their record. The Patriots seemed to struggle with Drake Maye throwing a few picks, and the Lions added their second win, beating the struggling Jets.

Week 4 had even more surprises. The Patriots pulled off a major upset, beating the supposed best team in the NFL, the Bills. Drake Maye delivered his best game of the season so far to put the Patriots back with the contenders. The Rams bounced back against the struggling Eagles, while the Falcons dominated the Saints in a high-scoring match. The Panthers had another upset, while further exposing the Lions’ defense as Bryce Young showed his impressive development.

After the first four weeks, some teams have been trending upward while others have been seemingly underperforming. The Patriots seem to have a promising season ahead of them, but only time can tell what will happen to the NFL. With so many surprises already, the 2026 NFL season is shaping up to be the most unpredictable in recent memory.

Album Music Review

By Noah Nutting ‘28
Spectrum Staff

Every year, more and more rappers put the underground in a chokehold, with each one bringing something new and experimental to the table. In the past two years, Lucy Bedroque has taken both the underground rap and electronic music scenes by storm with his earcatching and everchanging style of digicore, a hiphop subgenre utilizing heavy electronics elements. On his latest release, c, Lucy made some of his heaviest music, and turned another corner in his stylistic evolution.

Before there was Lucy Bedroque, there was lostrushi, Lucy’s soundcloud persona when he was still a teenager. Already Lucy was referencing video games and internet lore, as well as being influenced by East Asian music. As lostrushi he helped coin “maplekore”, a style of rap influenced by MMORPG MapleStory. In 2023, Lucy took up his “Glutmother” stagename, dropping his debut full-length Sisterhood. This project was filled with symbolism, with the name referring to Lucy’s gluttony, and the “sisters” which the album was about were representative of his conflicting emotions finding a way to work together. Lucy’s androgyny was also shown on Fête de la Vanille, an EP which includes How to Pretend, his most popular song to date. Released in March of 2024, the album took a lot of its distinct sound from the Japanese music subculture Shibuya-Kei with its use of glittery instrumentals and feminine vocals.

c’s leading single was SPEE DEMON, which dropped with an accompanying music video. The song itself describes Lucy’s escape from a toxic relationship with someone who only values his money, body, and fame. The title is a reference to his escape, with him speeding down the road and not looking back. Lucy references street-racing manga Initial-D in the first verse, rapping, “On the road, I’m pothole-dodging / I’m on Mount Akina, racing”, with Mount Akina being a treacherous mountain road featured in the manga. The music video conveys different ideas. In the video, Lucy raps in and out of a seemingly empty farmhouse while two possessed women shatter glasses and bricks outside. The video takes from the classic possessed girl horror trope, and culminates in Lucy’s use of a crossbow like in Resident Evil. The background of the music video also feels liminal, like something out of a Wyeth painting. The vocals on c are much harsher than his older work. On the opener ALL SPEAKERS GO TO HEAVEN for example, Lucy sounds especially jaded and this fits his ‘rage’ style nicely. The bass on this track also sets the tone for the rest of the album, being scattered and prominent. There are also some hyperpop textures that make the whole song feel like a blown out nightcore track. The harsh vocals and general arrogance on this record is exemplified on MARRIED TO MY JEWELER. The track features plenty of egotripping. First there’s the title of the song, but Lucy also calls himself a demigod on the second verse, and if you are coming from Fête de la Vanille, this might not be your cup of tea. Another highlight of the album on SAFESPACE. In the second verse, Lucy has a different flow from the rest of the track that is filled with adlibs and continues past what the listener expects, and it helps build a cacophonous rollercoaster in the song.

As a whole, c pulls out all the stops in terms of production, lyricism, and promotion. Lucy clearly attempts to expand his sonic horizons with each release while still surprising the listener. Everything from the collage style album cover to the eclectic production to the browser game made to promote the album built a dense atmosphere for one of the most distinct rap albums to come out this year. Lucy Bedroque has cemented his Japanese-inspired electronic persona into internet and rap canon with c.

The Best Apple Orchards

By Sophia Goodnow ‘28
Spectrum Staff

While there are many fall traditions that New Englanders partake in year after year, the arguably most classic is apple picking. In fact, the first Massachusetts apple orchard was planted in 1625, and there are at least 80 pick-your-own farms sprinkled across the state right now. Some of the most popular apple orchards are right near Acton and Boxborough, giving ample room for debate among the best, yet I realized, to much dismay, that I don’t personally have a favorite farm! It may just be the New Englander in me speaking, but apple picking is a fall essential, and driving around to judge apple orchards in October seemed like a great way to spend time. However, since each orchard is so different (and wonderful in its own way), I had to choose a single metric to measure them each by. I settled on the somewhat arbitrary, but always appreciated, apple cider donut.

Admittedly, I’m not particularly picky when it comes to sweets. In fact, all of these donuts were relative winners in my mind, and thus I gave my family the opportunity to weigh in. I hope the knowledge that there were four people deliberating these choices gives some vindication to the picks, but everyone’s opinion is different, and my family and I are by no means donut experts. I welcome you to try out these orchards for yourself; there’s nothing quite like traveling around Massachusetts in the autumn to sample cider donuts. On that note, while I am ranking these orchards on their donuts (in order of least impressive to most), I’ll also be briefly describing the experience at each donut-provider and encouraging you to try each of these fantastic orchards yourself; they are all wonderful places to get your fall apple fix.

So, without further ado, let’s talk about donuts (and other orchard things, but mostly donuts):

Our first contender is Carlson Orchards in Harvard, MA. Unfortunately, their donuts weren’t my family’s favorite (due to the relatively weak flavor and simpler style), but the nearby Carlson Orchards is quite the apple orchard. The farm is over 100 acres large and sells up to 60,000 bushels of apples yearly. Once you’re done gathering fruit, there’s a barn-turned-restaurant with fresh pressed apple cider and flatbread pizza (including Carlson’s original apple and brie variety). I’m not ranking cider for this issue, but Carlson is prolific in their cider sales, pressing 500,000 gallons of apple cider yearly to be shipped around New England. Despite their somewhat lackluster donuts, the orchard itself is a perfect Autumn experience and something of a landmark.

Next up is my favorite local market, Idywilde Farms, right here in Acton. Okay, I admit Idywilde is not an orchard, and probably shouldn’t be on this list. But it is a steadfast supplier of produce for residents of Acton and Boxborough, and their cider donuts are probably the most common ones in town. In fact, Westside Creamery uses them to make a seasonal Cider Donut Sundae (a treat that is apparently gaining popularity). I personally have a bit of a soft spot for the mildly crunchy, thicker pastries, as I used to live down the road from the farmstand, but I was convinced by my compatriots to consider some of the other orchards. Although there’s a generous coating of sugar, the actual donuts are a bit too doughy and can come off a bit too rich. Idywilde during the fall is magical, though, with all sorts of festive gourds and garlands. Look no further for last minute pumpkin shopping or large bags of perfectly ripe apples! It may not be an orchard, but Idywilde Farms is just as significant to the image of fall in Acton.

I had never been to Bolton Orchards, but my family decided that, with Bolton’s proximity to Boxborough, it was worth a visit to some of the nearby farms. The orchard has a lot going on, including a cafe with breakfast and coffee, and even seasonal ice cream. The store was bigger than that of most orchards, more similar to Idywilde, with plenty of fresh produce and fun decor, and, of course, a large pile of plastic-packaged cider donuts. Bolton Orchard’s donuts had the strongest apple flavor, which makes a lot of sense because they’re made with fresh apple cider in the dough. They’re one of the larger donuts that I tried, and had a lot of sugar on them. They even have a partnership with New City ice cream, in Hudson, to make a cider donut sundae (which is apparently becoming a seasonal staple for local ice cream places). However, much as I enjoyed the flavor and size these donuts had to offer, the texture wasn’t quite as pleasant as some of our other contenders. Nonetheless, this orchard is the true fall experience and perfectly enjoyable.

Our third-best choice is Shelburne Farm in Stow, another classic fall spot. If you went on an apple picking field trip in elementary school, it’s likely that it was here. In fact, Shelburne seems to cater to kids–they have a large haybale-playground out front, and clusters of little picnic tables right near the farm store. Their shop has the autumn staples: pumpkins and bags of apples, along with an entire wall of candied apples with varied toppings. A small window next to the farm store provides a peek into the cider donut process, which ultimately yields lighter, almost lemony donuts with a significant apple flavor. I highly recommend getting fresh ones, as the warm donuts had a melt-in-your-mouth quality that can’t be missed. These donuts were a solid pastry, but perhaps a tad run-of-the-mill compared to some of our later entries.

I had never been to this orchard before, but it’s been ranked upon the top in Massachusetts, and of course I absolutely had to try it. Bolton Spring Orchards carries a really different donut from all the rest. It easily had the thinnest dough and was significantly lighter than all the other donuts, while still carrying a strong apple and allspice flavor. It had far less sugar on the outside than all of the other donuts, another quality that both set it apart and heightened its value. It personally reminded me of the fried dough that the Acton Lions Fair has in June, but with a strong nutmeg flavor. We didn’t get a chance to pick apples, but the farmstand itself was rustic and carried all the classics, despite being a bit smaller than some of the others we saw. In conclusion, although this orchard might not be as large or advertised as some of the others on this list, they have a really special, fun atmosphere. Their donuts were amazing, but I discovered that I’m apparently a bit of a purist and chose a more classic donut for our number one pick.

And finally, the best nearby apple cider donut according to a random high school student:… Honeypot Hill Orchards! It could just be me, but this orchard, located in Stow, seems to be one of the most popular in the Acton-Boxborough radius. Another spot with fond memories of birthday parties and school trips, this orchard is probably what I picture when someone says the words “apple orchard.” They have an expansive section of the farm dedicated to apple picking, along with plenty of hay wagons to shuttle their customers to those apples. There’s also a decent sized hedge maze, a series of farm animals to meet and feed, and a large selection of pumpkins that are consistently sat upon by children. Most importantly, they have a farm store and a specific counter for their cider donuts. These donuts are not merely donuts. There is another level of confection to them: they are large and filling, yet not too thick or cakey. A healthy “dusting” of cinnamon sugar covers the donuts and enhances their rich, absolutely-autumn flavor. They are somehow both classically perfect donuts and a marvelously nuanced autumn treat. Easily a winner.

In conclusion, fall, and specifically apple picking season, is only a few months long. Why not enjoy as much of it as you can by exploring apple orchards and sampling some of the best donuts around? Next year, don your flannel and vest and try as many orchards as you can find. There’s also a chance you’ll disagree with my choices, so you should probably try a bunch of donuts, too. Maybe bring some friends along with you! Fall is fun, and apple orchards are a great way to spend time outside before it gets too cold. Happy apple picking!



Delicious Apples!!
ONLINE SOURCE

Off-Topic

Mixing It Up: Cocteau Twins

By Bella Mathews ‘27
Off-Topic Editor

A popular Scottish band that rose in the charts in the 80s due to their unique sound, known as Cocteau Twins, was a band changing and creating new music genres and styles. Their popularity resurfaced as recently as 2020 when The Rolling Stones ranked their album Heaven or Las Vegas one of the most important albums of all time. This album combines their dreampop style with hints of punk rock enhancing their iconic image throughout history.

Heaven or Las Vegas, a unique album combines the dreamcore genre with Glossolalia, a certain style of singing. It was released in 1990, and was recognized as one of the band’s best pieces of art. This Glossolalia style follows a rhythm or a sort of beat with a made-up language. The singer of the band, Elizabeth Fraser, sings in a mix of English, Gaelic and French, leaving the fans in awe of this confusing style of music. She sees it as her way of giving life to the music through her voice, and mix of words. Fraser intentionally doesn’t use full sentences, instead focusing on the tones and rhythms of each word by themselves. This unique style helped pave the way for Cocteau Twins eventual success, creating their own genre and branch of music, hard to replicate. Seen as #7 on the UK album charts, it is still one of the most unique and staple albums for Cocteau Twins. Fraser, with her already different style of singing, also explores creative song titles with combinations of words and ideas. Wax Lyrical also notes this album is clearer and defined, showing more of Fraser’s creativity and singing talents.

Diving deeper, the album begins with a song called Cherry-coloured Funk. It has a steady back beat mixed with her haunting singing displaying her full range as an artist. It then moves into the song titled Pitch the Baby. A beat reoccurs, with faster Glossolalia from Fraser. Iceblink Luck follows, turning to a more upbeat style. It is more declarative and sounds more proud. There is a hint of an English line: “Burn this house down,” which is one of few logical sentences expressed. In Fifty-fifty Clown, the music later becomes denser. Its transitioning guitar lines and vocal runs create the feeling of floating for the listener, correlating to their presence in the dreampop genre. Next comes their title track, Heaven or Las Vegas, a hit for the band. Such a famous song, it is still played in the Las Vegas airport for arriving or departing visitors. I Wear Your Ring comes afterwards, a song with a more mysterious background. With her jumping chords and notes to build layers, Fraser’s vocals create a surround sound feel. At 2:34, it experiences a shift, becoming a bit harsher, connecting to something she focused on in the album, her reflection towards new motherhood. A dramatic buildup afterwards invites you to Fotzepolitic, more uplifting after I Wear Your Ring. The title translates to a critique on the political world, however she focuses on the sounds and colors that come from her created word. It has a slight yearning feel, and transitions to a build-up of drums and background with a repeated line. It moves into the next track, Wolf in the Breast. A slower, yet still expressive piece, connecting again to her newfound motherhood, and embracing her new life. Road, River and Rail follows, illustrating a feeling of a journey and searching. One of the only times you slightly hear her mention the title of the song, mixed in with her unique language. The ending track, Frou-frou foxes in Midsummer Fires, ends the album with a darker tone. Starting slow, it transitions as the drums join when her singing quickens. It combines background vocals and main vocals giving the feeling of crowded thoughts and the end of the famous album.

Overall, Cocteau Twins’ combination of exposure and reflection displays just a bit of their extensive talents. Heaven or Las Vegas is only one album in their discography, having created timeless other albums such as The Moon and the Medlodies, and Blue Bell Knoll. Although separating in 1997 to follow their own solo careers, they never seemed as famous as when they performed as the iconic Cocteau Twins. The group is seen as trendsetters and creators of a unique punk-rock and dream-pop genre, which many try to replicate, demonstrating their impact on the music industry today.

Among Us: The Game That Lived

By Matthew Liu ‘27
Editor-In-Chief

The lights flicker off. You go to Electrical, stopping at the door to fix the lights on the panel. Just as you finish rewiring, Red walks in. You stop in your tracks. For a moment, you both stare at each other. Then Red starts walking towards you. You sidestep away from them and sprint into storage, wondering whether or not to take the top or bottom route. Desperately, you choose the down path, hoping to see the familiar color of any other crewmate. You ring-around-the-rosie and swerve back up into the cafeteria. Before you make it to the emergency meeting button, a red lightning bolt shoots across the screen and you watch as Red’s mouth opens and his spiky tongue impales your bean body, splitting it into two.

DEAD BODY REPORTED

Red shamelessly self reports. Immediately, the arguing starts. Red insisted they were in Navigation. Blue is telling me that they saw Red vent. Yellow is somehow accusing you, despite you being dead. Someone is confidently asserting that Green is suspicious because they have not said anything, only for Green to reveal that they have been carefully performing their assigned duties for the last five minutes. Thirty seconds later, you’ve all voted off an innocent crew mate, and the scheming, evil Red is yet again able to get away with it. And, you beg for another round, all fired up from your loss, yelling at your entire team for not voting off Red, and desperately hoping that you will be an imposter next game.

If that paragraph made you a little nostalgic, then you’re probably familiar with Among Us, the multiplayer murder mystery game that briefly became one of the most popular games in the world. With its colorful, bean-shaped astronauts, frustratingly easy tasks, and ability to turn even the most trusted of friends into psychotic murderers, Among Us was a large part of the internet’s cultural scape in 2020.

But like how it appeared, it dispeared just as instantaneously. All of the emergency meetings stopped. The memes became old. And soon enough our little suspicious bean-shaped astronauts were just floating out there in space. So what happened? What’s more important, does Among Us deserve another chance?

For a game that seemed to have taken the world by storm overnight, it had a surprisingly quick end. Among Us was a game developed by Innersloth in June 2018, but was unknown until COVID-19. The premise of the game was simple with crewmates on the spaceship completing tasks and trying to detect the imposter. Nothing groundbreaking, but COVID forced everyone inside and made activities with friends hard. That’s why Among Us skyrocketed at the perfect moment. The game was free on mobile, easy to learn, and super simple. The real impact of this was its cultural influence--sus became part of everyday vocabulary, emergency meetings was a response in conversation, and the costumes and shape became part of many impactful memes. Among Us became that inescapable thought, constantly asking to be played and fighting off boredom during a period when so many people had extra time.

Unfortunately, by 2021, Among Us lost its spark. The world changed, and people began getting bored of the same tasks despite them adding new maps and features to try and stay relevant. Saying sus even became associated with embarrassing moments.

But, six years later, do people still play the game? If you assumed Among Us was fully dead, you’d be only partially right. Statistics say that the STEAM (computer) concurrent players peaked at 16k, but that is still much lower than their pandemic peak with its 500 million active players per month. Nevertheless, numbers cannot tell the whole story. I had to do some boots on the ground journalism.

Finding the lobbies was quite simple and easy, and whenever I tried to play they were always pretty active. This is not the entire experience, though. So, I played with my friends. The fun is still there, even if the repetition is kind of crazy. What makes it fun is trying to sleuth around and yelling, and it is especially great after a long day and you can unwind (or get super worked up) at night hanging out with friends.

As expected, Among Us is not the exact same that it used to be in 2020. Back then it was a shared experience and a cultural shockwave. Now, you have to actively seek it out to make it a good time. Among Us was less a game and more of an excuse to hang out. That’s why it deserves to be recognized beyond just being another internet trend that died. That feeling of nostalgia of watching a crewmate be launched off the ship or the first reveal of your role is something that transports me back good times.

Yet beyond the sabotage, lies, and murders, Among Us encapsulated much more of that era that was universally felt by many people who longed for a connection with someone that could only be achieved online, even if it was done on a spaceship with a faulty oxygen system.

The game’s subsequent decline also spoke volumes about the culture of the internet and its relationship with popularity. Anything that becomes popular is subsequently seen as something that is necessary by the public, whereas when it stops being popular, it suddenly transforms into an unusable, wasted concept that no longer serves its purpose.

Among Us may never claim the attention of an entire generation again. The calls are hushed, the memes have aged, and we have all largely moved on. But I like to pretend that somewhere, a group of friends has gathered around their computer, laughing as they toss another innocently-dressed crewmate out into the vacuum of space. Among Us may be ejected, but it will never be forgotten.



The Glorious World Cup Trophy
ONLINE SOURCE

Soccer’s Rapid Growth

By Seth Drabik ‘27
Spectrum Staff

Before the 2026 World Cup, if one were to describe the state of soccer within the United States as lacking, it would be far from an overstatement. Granted the sport has not been a prominent part of American culture like football, basketball, or baseball. However, it’s not as though soccer has been completely absent in the United States, Major League Soccer has been around since the 1990s. Since the start of the 2026 World Cup, more and more Americans have fallen in love with the world’s game. I have friends who have turned from haters to lovers of a so-called “boring sport”. Part of this interest may have to do with the impressive run that our national team had this year, as they cruised to the quarter finals before they were knocked out by a strong Belgian side. Since the end of the World Cup in July, MLS has grown in popularity. For example, the league has reported a 62% viewership increase since last season, accumulating about 10 million viewers over multiple platforms on their opening weekend. It also helps that MLS has drawn the attention of many European players entering the twilight of their careers, with big names like Messi, Lewandowski, Heung Min Son and Muller joining the league in the last 3 years. However, MLS is not the only active league within the United States. USL, or United Soccer League, is an attempt to bring a European grassroots feel to American soccer with a promotion and relegation system that adds a notable risk to the competition. As when a team faces relegation they lose out on profits, players, and recognition. Though it may not be as popular as MLS, USL carries with it a passionate fanbase with countless clubs scattered around the United States. New England is home to two USL clubs in the highest division, those being Rhode Island FC and Hartford Athletic. As someone who has grown up watching soccer. I can’t help but feel excited that Americans have started to broaden their sports horizons.

If you are someone who wants to envelop yourself in the global football community there are plenty of professional leagues to choose from. You are more than welcome to pick the closest MLS team or if you have a local USL club nearby. But, if you are someone who wants to root for an established team then look no further than Europe. Home to the best leagues with the best teams Europe is a goldmine for football. As an unbiased Liverpool fan I am inclined to recommend the Premier League from England. Known for its physicality and speed, the Premier League is home to some of the most notable and recognizable football clubs in the world, like Manchester City, Manchester United, Chelsea, Tottenham, Arsenal, and Liverpool. If you want a more flowing and technical game then look no farther than Spain’s Laliga, home to Real Madrid, Barcelona, Atletico Madrid, Seville, Villareal, and Athletic Bilbao. If you want to watch a league who has constant underdog stories then France’s Ligue 1 and Germany’s Bundesliga are your home. Both leagues have been dominated by a single team for the last decade. If that sounds like a boring league to watch I would recommend reconsidering. Each league has produced some of the best storylines in recent history, including Bayer Leverkusen winning the Bundesliga in 2024 for the first time and RC Lens giving PSG a run for their money in one of the most interesting title races in 2025. To say each of these leagues is what one would call a “farmers league” only undermines the impressive nature of every club from France and Germany. Ligue 1 is home to PSG, Olympique Lyonnais, AS Monaco, LOSC Lille, and Paris FC. The Bundesliga has Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Eintracht Frankfurt, Bayer Leverkusen, VfB Stuttgart, and Union Berlin. If a classy more defense style interests you than Italy’s Serie A is where you will want to look, with notable teams such as Juventus, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Roma, and Napoli.

If this doesn’t already have you interested then there is one more competition that might pique your interest. The crowning jewel of European football, the Champions League, one of the most coveted competitions in world football. It consists of the best teams from the top 16 countries in Europe. Teams start in a league table with the best 32 teams qualifying for the next round. The tournament then morphed into a standard win and move on system with each match playing a home and away game with the goals tracked over both games deciding who moves on.

If any of this interests you at all you can find all the games on many of the most common streaming services: Sling, Paramount, Peacock, ESPN. As someone who is deeply involved in the fan culture within the United States there are plenty of places to go watch the games. There are countless bars and restaurants throughout the surrounding area for you to go and enjoy the culture. The Premier League will also host watch party events within the United States every year, they hosted their annual Fan Fest in Denver Colorado. European teams will often play friendly games in the US during their off season. I got to watch Liverpool play Wrexham in New York this year. I hope that you are able to find a team or league that you can fall in love with, just as I have, and I hope that this will be the push that you may need to start to enjoy the world’s game.

Off-Topic

Pedal Power Bike and Ski!!
Visit them at 176 Great Rd, Acton



Thank you Pedal Power!
NATHANIEL KIM '27

Teen Slang

By Elijah Wang '30
Spectrum Staff

While the first form of writing, cuneiform, emerged in the Fertile Crescent 5,000 years ago, complex spoken language has roots estimated to reach back over 200,000 years, deep in our evolutionary history. Throughout this history, humans have only been capable of making a finite number of repeatable sounds, yet language has evolved spectacularly over thousands of years. What drives this natural phenomenon? Why is the rate of change of vocabulary so increased compared to past generations?

As culture changes and influences pass, each teenage generation is soaked in the rich language of those before them, yet they inevitably add their own words or tweak the connotations of existing ones. Older slang like "groovy", "rad", and "legit" seem incredibly peculiar to new generations because new words have already replaced them. This evolutionary phenomenon cannot be more perfectly depicted by our very own Millennials, Gen Z, and eventually Gen Alpha at ABRHS.

Nowadays, what changes from the ancient to modern times is not the fact that teens have stopped changing the language taught to them, but the rate at which this natural process occurs. Perhaps the factor that best speaks for the explosion of new vocabulary - called "brain rot" - is the drastic increase in social media and the universal connection between teens and tweens around the world. With this new media, a popular word in California can reach the ears of teens in Massachusetts in less than a second. New technology also creates new words; video games, new references, and modern culture all utilize new words that teens come up with. In the past, slang was largely contained by geography, which made it simmer out before it could reach a wider audience. Now, with the help of social media, a post with a radical phrase can be recommended by an algorithm, repeated by influencers, and millions would see and copy it.

The mass spread of this new "lingo" can be linked to herd mentality. For example, teens nowadays say "six seven", a phrase from the rap "Doot Doot (67)" by American Rapper Skrilla. To my personal knowledge, words and phrases like these have no meaning whatsoever. However, because their use is ubiquitous on the internet, the phrase ceases to have meaning but gains an impression personalized to each unique individual due to the different instances in which the phrase is stated. As such, the phrases of modern teen language cannot be perfectly defined in the way a dictionary describes a word because of the tailored definition each phrase has. The words that we use don't just express our thoughts, but also express who we are and the people we wish to be. Those who understand certain references are often more accepted than those who are clueless about them. This in-group, out-group social dynamic is what drives the creation and spread of slang. Humans, as social creatures, strive to be accepted in their communities, thus making niche references a type of "cultural capital".

So what does this mean for the eventual arrival of Gen Alpha and Gen Beta in ABRHS? As said before, the generations after us will most likely keep some of the brain-rot that Gen Z teens worked hard to publicize. However, there is truly no knowing what the future has in store for us. Perhaps "aura farming" and "mogged" would become like "groovy" and "rad" to the next generation. One can only hope that, for the sake of our society and mutual understanding of the people younger than us, we can keep up with their ever-growing vocabulary. Perhaps even we, the pioneers of a new form of language, would become "NPC's" in the eyes of the ever-approaching future.

Who Is Charlie Parker?

By Andrew Moon '27
Spectrum Staff

If you have seen the movie "Whiplash," you already know the story that made Charlie Parker a legend. A teenage saxophone player, still learning, fumbles a solo at a Kansas City Club. The drummer, Jo Jones, throws a cymbal at young Parker's feet. After that incident, Parker goes home, locks himself in a room, and practices until nobody can laugh at him again. Whether every detail happened as told, the lesson is clear: a boy was laughed off a stage, and he came back as the man every saxophonist has since tried to be.

Charlie Parker Jr. was born in 1920 in Kansas City, Kansas, and grew up across the river in Missouri, where the city's nightclubs played all night. He took up the saxophone as a boy and left school young. At sixteen, he was injured in a car accident and was given morphine for the pain. He became addicted, and the habit followed him for the rest of his life. He joined Jay McShann's band in 1940 and moved to New York, where he and the legendary trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie spent nights at Harlem clubs trying out a new way of playing. The swing bands of the day were large and played arranged music for dancers. The new music was played by small groups for listeners, at fast tempos, with each soloist improvising on a song's chord changes rather than its melody. Parker and Gillespie used richer, more dissonant chords than swing allowed, and their lines moved at speeds that left many players behind. By 1945, they had recorded it, and the music was called bebop.

His career was brilliant, and his life was not. Heroin made him unreliable, and promoters learned to fear his late arrivals. In 1946, he suffered a breakdown after a recording session in Los Angeles and spent about six months in Camarillo State Hospital. New York later took away his cabaret card, the license a musician needed to work in its clubs, which kept him off many of the stages where he was most admired. In 1954, his young daughter Pree died of pneumonia, and his decline sped up.

Parker died on March 12, 1955, in the New York apartment of his friend and patron Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter. He was 34. The doctor who examined him guessed his age at somewhere between fifty and sixty, for years of heroin addiction and heavy drinking had worn his body down.

One may ask what makes him so great. Parker's first gift was speed. He played fast tempos cleanly, with ideas arriving faster than most listeners could follow. What set him apart was harmony. Swing-era soloists mostly kept to the notes of the underlying chord. Parker reached for the higher notes of each chord, the ninths and elevenths and thirteenths, and used them as the center of his melodies. He heard the chords differently from his peers, and what he played over them sounded like a language no one else had yet learned. He also kept a deep feeling for the blues. However complicated his lines became, a listener could still hear Kansas City in them.

This is why bebop was revolutionary. Swing in the 1930s was music for ballrooms, played by big bands, with the dancer in mind. Bebop was played by small groups at tempos too quick for dancing, and it asked the audience to stop and pay attention. The soloist was no longer an entertainer. He was an artist, and the music was a form of speech.

If you ask where to start, begin with Ko-Ko (1945). Recorded in November of that year with Miles Davis in the group, it takes the chords of the standard "Cherokee" and runs a solo across them at a pace that stunned musicians then and still does now.

Donna Lee (1947) comes with an argument. The tune was credited to Parker, but Miles Davis later claimed he wrote it, and the dispute has never been settled to everyone's satisfaction. Either way, it is a melody built on the chords of "Back Home Again in Indiana," and it is famously hard to play.

Ornithology and Confirmation, both from 1946, show Parker as a composer. The first is built on "How High the Moon," and the second is one of the most played tunes in the Jazz repertoire.

Charlie Parker with Strings (1950) surprised the Jazz world. Parker wanted for years to play with an orchestra, and the album, which paired him with a string section, is commonly described as his best seller in his lifetime. Some bebop purists disliked it, but I love it, and Parker did not care. The playing is gorgeous,featuring some of his most famous pieces, such as Summertime, April in Spring, and Just Friends.

His life carried a second meaning. Parker was a Black genius in a segregated nation that was happy to hear him but slow to respect him. He was celebrated and policed in the same year, praised in the clubs and denied the right to play in them. He was asking to be taken seriously, and the country took her time answering.

Most people know the name Charlie Parker. Fewer have sat down and listened to him, which is a loss, because he is among the finest improvisers any music has produced. Put on Ko-Ko and listen for four things. First, the speed: the tempo is close to 300 beats per minute, and every note in his solo still lands cleanly. Second, the harmony: he keeps landing on the upper notes of each chord, the ones other players avoided, and they sound right every time. Third, the rhythm: his phrases begin and end in unexpected places, so the line seems to float above the beat while never losing it. Fourth, the quotations: he often slipped fragments of other melodies into a solo, so listen for a tune you half recognize flickering past.

Then try Parker's Mood, a slow blues from 1948, and hear how much feeling he could put into a dozen bars at a walking pace. A man who played that fast and that tenderly was not an entertainer who happened to be clever. He died with much of the world still unaware of him. Listen to him now, and make up for lost time.

Dolly Parton: A Legend

By Noam Koutal '30
Spectrum Staff

Dolly Parton was an idol known and adored by millions of people around the world. Her distinct homie country style stole the hearts of every listener and her music won her awards and recognition throughout her life. Possibly most impactful was her heartfelt work in advocacy and charity to those most in need which have made the world a better place and continue to inspire people to make change to this day.

Dolly Rebbeca Parton was born on January 19th, 1946 in Locust Ridge Tennessee to parents Avie Lee Caroline Owens Parton and Robert Lee Parton. She was the fourth of twelve children and grew up in an extremely poor farmer family. Though her parents were illiterate, they still supported her in her education and she graduated from Sevier County high school. When her parents weren't working they spent their time singing folk songs, playing guitar, and singing in church. It was at this time in her life that she became immersed in music and her signature folk country style and genre were created.

At only eleven years old Dolly Parton performed as a regular singer on a local TV show, beginning her lifelong career in music and acting. At the age of thirteen she released her first ever single which never really hit the charts, "Puppy Love". Over the next few years she worked with Bill Owens, her uncle, to get signed by a company called Mercury Records, and created her first hit songs and first ever full-length album "Hello I'm Dolly" in 1967. She continued to work and create more music and moved between music companies until she met Porter Wagoner on TV. The music that they would create together became her first songs that would be known throughout the country: Jolene.

One of Dolly Parton's most notable songs was her solo "Jolene" which at its release in 1973 was in the top 60 pop songs in the United States. The song mostly narrates Dolly's jealousy for a woman named Jolene who was trying to take her husband, and with its fast-paced rhythm and catchy lyrics people everywhere fell in love with it. Dolly Parton based her song on a woman in her personal life who she thought was flirting with her husband and she decided to take the name of a fan "Jolene" to rename her. Her song "Jolene" was later inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, was covered by over thirty singers, and was placed sixty-third on the Rolling Stone's 500 greatest songs list.

From her humble beginnings in countryside Tennessee to riches and fame, Dolly Parton always stayed true to her values. Throughout her life Dolly Parton established and donated almost 600 million dollars to many different charities and good causes like the Covid-19 vaccine studies at Vanderbilt. Of her charities possibly the most impactful was her Imagination Library which donated millions of books and education to children in need. Even at her death on August 25th 2026 she donated almost 500 million dollars more to her charities.

During her life Dolly Parton accomplished what was intended to be impossible, she defined her place in music history and along the way helped millions of people and made our world a better place.

Off-Topic

Discovery Museum - DAA Award

By Matthew Liu ‘27 & Sri Marimuthu ‘29
Editor-in-Chief & Spectrum Staff

For many Acton residents, the Discovery Museum is a staple part of childhood. It is also one of the biggest attractions to our town from other neighboring areas. Whether it was exploring the exhibits, playing in the water gallery, or just watching Bessie the green dinosaur’s hats, it was an important part for generations of children. Over the past decade the Museum has expanded exhibits and also made it more accessible for everyone.

The Town of Acton’s Commission of Disabilities has recently (in collaboration with Acton’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), presented the Discovery Museum with an award to help recognize businesses within our Acton community and highlight their actions which remove physical and social barriers to make the space more inclusive. It was first brought forth by treasurer Leslie Johnson, who had the goal of representing these local organizations and honoring what they do. She said herself that “I wanted to help encourage businesses to be more accessible and inclusive in a positive way. I wanted to do something more positive”. She wanted to reward good work rather than only enforce rules.

Additionally, Johnson explained the criteria that she and the other members of the committee came up with:

-Leadership and daily commitment

- Accessible spaces and technology

- Listening to community feed back

- Reaching everyone by removing financial and language barriers

- Leading by example across our region

They highlighted the Discovery Museum’s “Especially for Me” series, accessible play at Discovery Woods, their Disability Advisory Board, and programs like “EBT Card to Culture” as specifically outstanding aspects of their programs that helped them to win the award. Beyond that, through interviewing other members of the committee and town staff, we discovered that the museum’s national recognition makes it a fitting first winner, because many organizations only think about meeting the bare minimum of ADA standards. A museum staff member added that they also bring in presenters who identify as having disabilities, because “we want all of our visitors to see all kinds of people bringing different abilities and perspectives”.

For those who have not been ther for a while, the Discovery Museum has evolved since our childhood (We are both in highschool so our experiences may differ). Since around 10 years ago, the museum has reworked existing exhibitions to make them accesible to for everybody. An exhibit known as “Frozen Shadows” mounted on the wall has been changed into a table exhibition that people in wheelchairs can easily access. In Discovery Woods, there’s a very big swinging nest that can take up to ten children including those that cannot stand-up. The museum is also working on remodeling its existing buildings to provide accessibility for all. The Discovery Museum does not just meet these accessibility standards; they set the gold standard for radical belonging.

This award is not only for the Discovery Museum, though. While they are only the first ones to receive it, Leslie Johnson noted that “We hope that the Discovery Museum will act as a gold standard, inspiring other businesses and bringing recognition to them as well.” Hopefully, through the years, we will be able to experience more and more businesses becoming increasingly accessible to everyone. Congratulations to the entire team at the Discovery Museum for this well-deserved recognition, and thank you for ensuring everyone in Acton, and beyond, can learn, play, and thrive.



Discovery Museum Receiving the Disability Awareness Award!
MATTHEW LIU ‘27

Crossword Answers

By Niobe Veloz ‘28 & Aditya Nannapaneni ‘30
Spectrum Staff

ACROSS:
4. Security
6. International Space Station
8. Robot
9. Chromebook
11. Semiconductor
14. Among Us

DOWN:
1. Artificial Intelligence
2. MyFlexLearning
3. Motherboard
5. New iPhone Products
7. Video Game
10. Hacking



Dolly Parton
KAYLA POPE ‘27

Interviewing The Blake Lefray

By Nathaniel Kim ‘27
News Editor

Blake Lefray is an American writer known for his YouTube channel, Below the Fray. I came across his channel through his what is now his most-viewed video, “Dua Lipa Versus the Literary Landscape” and was stunned by the quality of it being his sophomore upload. His videos range from the gatekeeping of the publishing industry to appreciating a city alongside a literary giant through a shared lens of hashish. I followed that trail to his Substack, where I found witty, charming writing that expresses his thoughts with a candor that can make a reader feel years-long familiarity. After reading his piece about escaping a Brooks Brothers location, I learned he grew up in Lexington, Massachusetts. With that nearby connection, I reached out for an interview.

We spoke over Zoom about the tension between writing for an audience versus being oneself, the books that make us feel, and what it means to notice the world. The conversation has been edited lightly for clarity.

Q1: How much of the Blake Lefray we see online is constructed, and how much is the real you just volumed up?

A1: “It’s me knowing that I have an audience. So it’s an edited version of me. It’s a version of me that is trying to entertain people, trying to give people something to think about, trying to make them laugh, trying to elicit feelings of wonder and curiosity.

“The real me is frequently boring; the real me who just talks, says the word ‘like’ a lot, and stumbles over my words. But the sense of humor that I have, that’s my sense of humor. The things I’m passionate about, those are the things I’m passionate about. So it’s not false. But it’s definitely a me who knows the camera is running.”

Lefray said scripting provides him an opportunity to sew together the writer and the person speaking on camera. He loves to write and edit the videos, but quite the opposite about recording them.

“It’s a version of me where I’m editing out stuff that I think would be boring and trying to amp up the things that I think would be engaging,” he said. “The fact that you want [an audience] to like you does transform you a little bit. But not in such a huge way where you don’t feel like you’re yourself.”

Q2: Do you read looking for a particular moment, or does a sentence simply catch you by surprise?

A2: “I don’t look for them. A lot of times when I read, I don’t get that feeling at all,” he said. “To me, those moments where something really cuts through and hits: that’s a really special work, a special author or artist that does that.”

He said the more a reader encounters a writer’s work, the more sensitive they can become to the way that writer uses language. Still, he warned against chasing “the perfect sentence” that will move you.

“The more you read, and the more you try to pick the things you read that have a chance of ambushing you, the more you open yourself to that possibility. But I kind of feel like you can’t actively look for it. It’s not, I’m not reading where I’m like, ‘Where’s the sentence that’s gonna get me?’”

That kind of moment, he said, is often more likely on a second reading. The first time through a novel, he wants to get lost in it.

“I don’t read with a pencil in my hand. If I’m reading a novel, I just want to try to lose myself in the world,” he said. “Then I’ll come back. Oftentimes, I have to return to books that I loved, that entertained me, that sucked me into an imaginary world. For me, part of it is like, ‘Well, how the hell did the author do that?’”

He looks closely at how the author built the world, distinguished the characters, and achieved the book’s tone and humor. “That’s usually the point where an author becomes one of my favorites,” he said. “It’s not usually the first time I read something, but the second or third.”

Q3: Does being attentive as a writer ever becomes exhausting?

A3: Lefray laughed at the premise: with three children, he said, exhaustion usually comes from the repetition of parenting, not from watching leaves move in the wind. Still, he said, it is possible to overread the world. “I don’t ever want it to be precious. I don’t ever want it to be like every little thing is overwhelmingly beautiful, and then you can’t get out the door because you’re overwhelmed by the beauty of everything you see,” he said.

For him, paying attention involves choosing what to let blend in with the everyday noise. “Not every book is gonna blow me away. But I also don’t want to live a life where nothing ever hits me. I want to open myself to the things that I feel like deserve to get through and penetrate the mundane life every day.”

“When you start paying attention to pieces of art, whether it’s music or a novel or a movie or video games, I think you learn about yourself. You learn, ‘Who am I that this thing resonated with me so much?’”

Q4: Has your motivation for writing changed?

A4: “I had in my mind, like, ‘Please everyone, please everyone.’ As I was writing, that’s the book that 103 literary agents weren’t interested in,” he said. “When I started the second novel, I decided I can only think about one person reading this book: me. I have to just write a book that pleases me. I have to think it’s funny. I have to feel sadness and loss when the character feels sadness and loss. I have to be entertained so that I want to flip through the pages.”

He recalled David Bowie’s idea that playing to the gallery can lead to bad art, and said advice about writing a book that will sell can make a novelist ove think the audience.

“Forget about 100, [focus on] one. And I think that actually by saying, ‘I want to hit one,’ you ultimately have a better chance of having that thing that you create be enjoyed by more people.

For Lefray, the goal isn’t necessarily for the readers to close the book knowing him personally. It is for them to feel what he feels when he reads. “The thing that you want people to feel really connected to is the novel itself,” he said.

Q5: What does Massachusetts means to you now?

A4: “I don’t think of one thing,” he said. “I also don’t really know how to think about growing up in Lexington without thinking about the very specific time that I grew up where we didn’t have the internet, and we just kind of had bikes and just went around and did stuff.”

“It was really, really lovely” he added. “And you dream about places you’re not, too, because I think that’s normal. So even as I was enjoying it, I was like, ‘Oh, I can’t wait to get out of here.’”

By his senior year, Lefray said he was drawn to books and writing, though his plans kept changing. In college, he imagined himself becoming a professor, but after graduating, he wanted to reach beyond the campus.

Lefray is still working toward that early ambition. He told me he has finished two novels and is trying to find a publisher for the second. He started his YouTube channel, in part, to build an audience and potential readers to attract literary agents. Lefray has announced that he found an agent and is working through his writing, a huge leap towards publishing. The video essays have become their own creative work, but his primary dream is still “ to get [his book] published by a publisher and end up in a bookstore.”

News

Updates on the Iran War

By Jocelyn Wu '27
Spectrum Staff

In the past nine months since the Iran war started, the world has observed significant shifts in geopolitical tensions and standings between actors involved in the conflict. In addition, internal political rife in Iran and Israel continues to impact the conflict from within. Let's take a deep dive into the newest developments associated with the Iran war. The first focus of this article will be on broader geopolitical disputes as they relate to and have developed from the war in Iran. The second focus of this article will highlight internal political disputes in Israel and Iran, and how these internal disputes reflect upon the war as a whole.

In February 2026, the United States and Israel attacked Iran and killed Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. The first key goal of the attack was to disarm Iran's nuclear development program: The U.S. and Israel both viewed Iran possessing a nuclear weapon as a catastrophic threat, and thus sought to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. The second key goal of the attack was to induce some form of regime change in Iran that would introduce a government that posed less of a threat to Israel and the U.S. On March 9, Trump said he "like[d] the idea of internal [regime change] because it works so well… I mean, I think we've proven that so far in Venezuela." Other alleged motivations behind the attacks included destroying Iran's navy, ending Iran's missile program, eliminating external support for Iran's terrorist proxy groups, and ending massacres of protestors.

Since the conflict began, multiple ceasefires have been proposed with no real success. In September, Trump rejected Iran's proposal for a seven-day ceasefire, which included reopening the Strait of Hormuz and the U.S. lifting its blockade of Iranian ports. Trump claimed he expects to resume bombing Iran after the November midterms. Since the war began, the U.S. and Iran have come close to a deal numerous times, yet each time escalating tensions and failed promises prevented both sides from reaching agreement. As of October 19, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is planning to visit Tehran to discuss further peace talks.

The economic stakes of the war continue to mount; In October, Iran conducted 10 attacks on commercial vessels in and near the Strait of Hormuz, the worst month of attacks in the strait since earlier stages of the war. Crude oil prices remain over $105 a barrel after hitting a five-month high near $110. As a result, the main cost of the war for the average American has been higher energy costs; a gallon of regular goes for $4.37, up from just $3 before the war. Diesel is above $6, and jet fuel has nearly doubled. Gas and diesel prices are unlikely to return to normal levels until the Strait of Hormuz, which allows for the transit of one-fifth of global oil, is reopened. Overall, the average American household is spending $1,100 more due to higher gas, diesel, and heating prices due to the war.

Furthermore, geopolitical alliances have shifted dramatically since the war began; Britain, in particular, has become increasingly involved in the conflict. In late September, a suspected plot to attack a U.S.-run military air base in England was "almost certainly" directed by Iran's Revolutionary Guard, according to British Prime Minister Andy Burnham. Despite Iran's denied involvement, Burnham told lawmakers that Britain "will not tolerate these threats." In fact, following Britain's accusations, NATO countries including the U.S., U.K., Australia, Canada, and 23 other countries issued a joint statement condemning hostile activities conducted by Iran, including Iran's violent attacks using arson, sabotage, cyber attacks, and other hybrid activities.

Certain individuals in NATO have publicly denounced Iran's actions, such as NATO secretary general Mark Rutte, who welcomed the allies' "denouncement of Iran's involvement in violence and threats on Allied territory" and claimed that "NATO will continue to do its part to safeguard the security of our one billion people across the Alliance." However, NATO, as a whole, remains largely fractured over the war; the Iran war has exposed a deeper and structural divergence between the U.S. and its European allies. Rather than acting as a unified bloc, NATO has appeared fragmented, with the U.S. continuously pushing for a more assertive, interventionist approach while key European states have adopted more cautious and risk-averse positions.

It is important to note that the landscape of the Iran war is shaped and influenced not only by broader geopolitical trends, but internal political trends within the countries involved. In particular, political infighting in Iran has surged as economic woes within the country mount. Hardliners in Iran are pressuring the government and calling for the removal of the current Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian. There is currently a widespread campaign to impeach ministers in Pezeshkian's administration, one that has drawn in rival factions, religious officials, and supporters of the Foreign Ministry alike. Overall, this deepening factional warfare within Iran reveals a leadership unable to agree on how to manage the pressures confronting it. Iran's lack of unity at this critical moment makes it even more difficult for officials in Iran to come to a consensus on how to properly deal with the war.

Israel's political climate is in a similarly dire situation. An August CIA report warned of internal collapse or civil war because of tensions among Israelis, and said that Israel faces a volatile situation ahead of its October elections, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fighting for his political future. The Netanyahu coalition has unpopular policies surrounding the compulsory military service of ultra-Orthodox men, such as rising settler violence in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, food inflation, and the rising cost of military expenditures. Specifically, the war in Iran has become a key election issue in Israel, with opposing parties criticizing Netanyahu for his handling of Iran. Overall, polling in Israel suggests that Netanyahu may not reach the required number of seats to form a government in parliament.

As the war rages on, there don't seem to be any clear signs of an end drawing near. As ceasefire proposals fail and geopolitical and internal tensions mount, it is important that we stay informed of how the conflict is progressing to understand which methods of solvency are working and which are not, and use that to guide how we approach future policies aimed at ending the war.

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The Thoreau Club

Off-Topic

Deborah Sampson's Act

By Meena Adusumilli '27
Reporting Team Leader

~ 1770 ~

"A sea voyage."

Struck with an instant pang of grief, Deborah struggled to comprehend her mother's words. After all, her father had departed on trips countless times before, and each and every time, he returned. But not this time. As she reckoned with this dreadful realization, her mother's words faded in and out, so that she could only grasp bits and pieces of information.

"... with money tight …"

"... running out of options …"

"... indentured servitude …"

"... food and shelter for minimal work …"

"... only until you're 18 …"

And just like that, ten-year-old Deborah wound up in the damp house of Deacon Benjamin Thomas, where she would work as an indentured servant for the next eight years (McIntire). While her basic necessities were met, she craved a secure home. Most of all, she longed for the warmth of her six siblings, the hug of her true parents.

~

"As I was born to be unfortunate, my sun soon clouded"

Deborah Sampson, 1797

~ May 1782 ~

After completing her servitude, Deborah made ends meet by sewing and teaching. Although the wage was small, she was provided with room and board, which allowed her to survive in tough times. Still, Deborah found herself financially desperate. As the Revolutionary War raged on, the Continental Army was handing out bounties to soldiers who enlisted. A smart woman, Deborah saw a gaping opportunity and seized it.

She hurriedly packed her belongings in a travel bag: a couple of old dresses, two pairs of shoes, one pincushion, one thimble, a pack of sewing tools, and an iron pot. For the first time in nearly a decade, Deborah would be leaving Middleborough. As she packed, a mixture of excitement and despair welled up in her. She loved the idea of departing, of starting a new life, but her need for money grew more and more frantic with every coming day.

In no time, Deborah wandered off to Bellingham, where a bearded man was enlisting soldiers for a whopping 60 pounds worth of bounty. The number was all that was needed for Deborah to confidently waltz up to the recruiter, hold out her hand, and say:

"My name's Robert Shurtleff. I'd like to enlist."

~ June 1782 ~

Deborah had originally set out to be a cabin boy—a menial job that would afford her less attention, thereby making it easier for her to conceal her true identity. Instead, she became a spy under Captain George Webb's Company of Light Infantry, a daring member of Massachusetts' Fourth Regiment. By nature, her job attracted danger. Every day, she was to scout neutral Manhattan territory, gauging information on British troops and supplies to later report back to George Washington, commander of the Continental Army.

On a deceptively warm summer day, Deborah led a raid on a Tory home. Alongside two other sergeants, Deborah and her team captured fifteen Tories, supporters of the British (Michals). The adrenaline of success rushed through Deborah's veins, sweetening the taste of victory. Suddenly, it became abundantly clear that Deborah's motive was no longer money; it was patriotism.

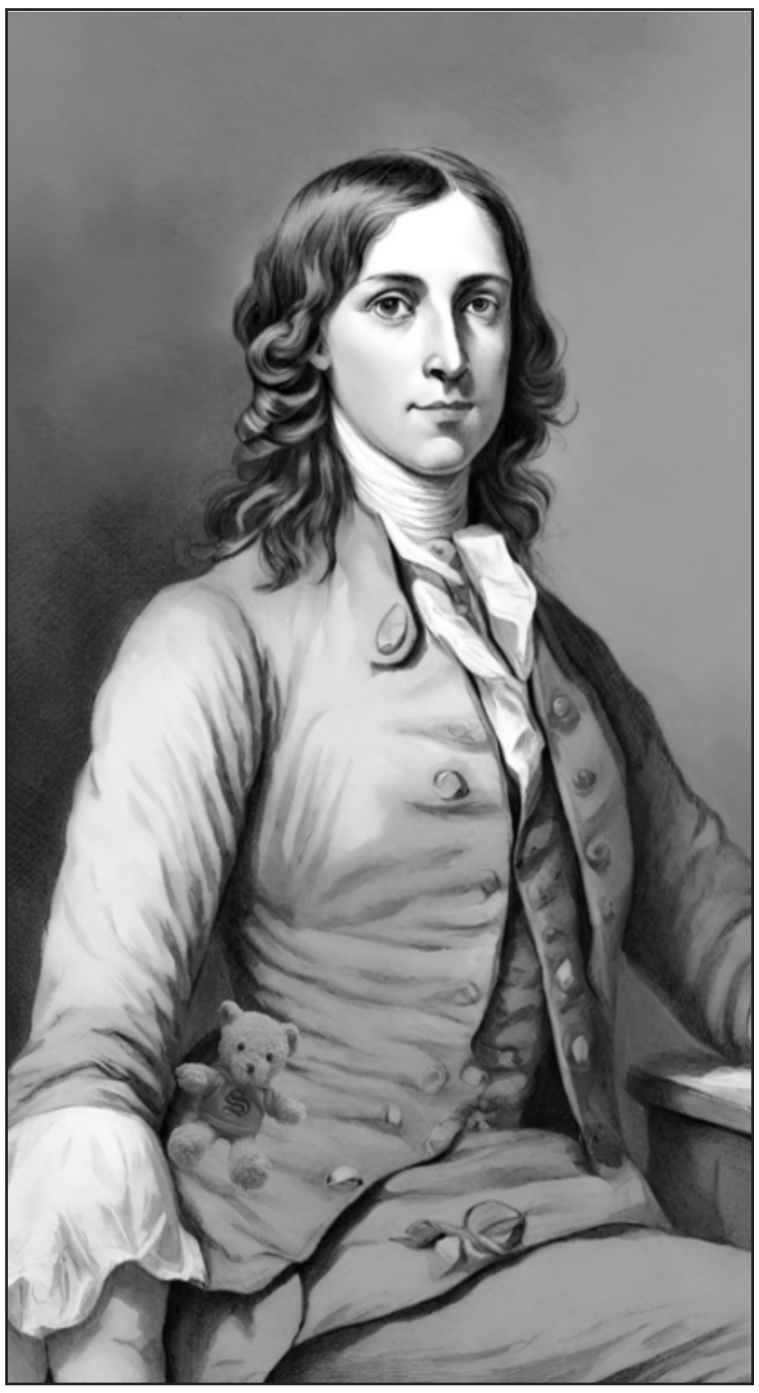
~ July 1783 ~

During a sweeping epidemic, Deborah caught a fatal fever, falling ill in Philadelphia while executing her soldier duties. Fearful of getting exposed, Deborah thought back to the time she got shot in her left thigh; she had chosen to extract the bullet herself, rather than risk giving herself away. Now, Deborah lay helpless on a hospital bed, drifting in and out of consciousness. And then it all went dark.

When Deborah awoke, her cover was blown. After seventeen months of service, she received an honorable discharge from the Continental Army. Disappointed, Deborah returned home. Despite it all, she had made history, forever being known as the woman who disguised herself as a man in order to fight for her country. She became the only woman to receive a complete pension as a Revolutionary War veteran, and the first woman in America to go on a year-long lecture tour. The 1837 Congress regarded Sampson with awe, claiming to have "furnished no other similar example of female heroism, fidelity and courage."

~ Today ~

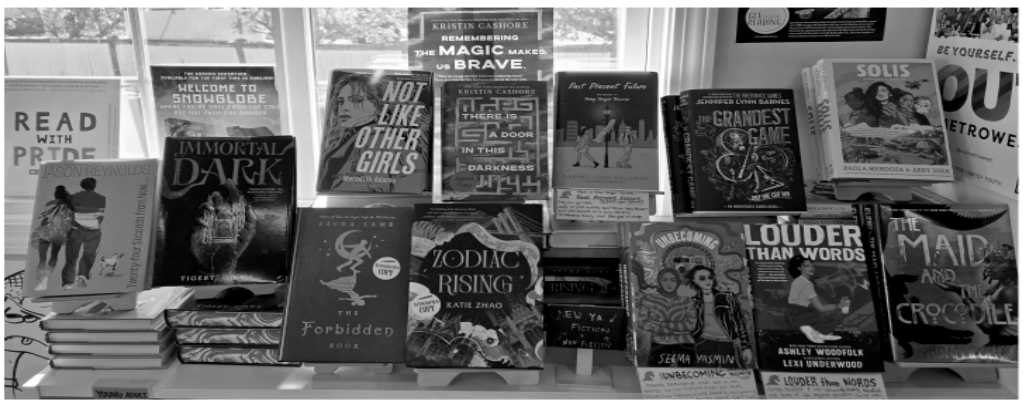
In 2020, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Deborah Sampson Act, expanding healthcare access and benefits for women veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs (Wounded Warrior Project). At the end of the day, Deborah Sampson's extraordinary legacy proved that true service demands no specific form.



Deborah Sampson
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StuCo Board Interview

By Dhruv Kadam '27
Publicity and Finance Manager

Every year, our school's beloved events like Homecoming and Senior vs. Staff draw hundreds of students in attendance. Student Council spends weeks organizing these events, getting input from representatives of each grade to ensure satisfaction from the student body. This week, we interviewed the StuCo Officer—President Tina Li, Vice President Thomas Nguyen, Treasurer Farren Patel, and Secretary Anjali Rao—to take a deeper dive into the club. The answers to each question below is a collective summary of all interviews.

Q1: What's your favorite event to organize?

Homecoming. It's definitely one of our biggest events, and usually we have around 700+ students who attend. There's a lot of planning that goes into it–deciding the theme, finding and putting up decorations, organizing catering, and logistics of chaperones, security, and janitors—which makes the actual night so much more rewarding..

Q2: What are some ways StuCo is trying to increase school spirit?

This year, we're trying to build up more hype before events and connect more with the student body. AB's school spirit is quite different from what you'd expect. Part of that may be attributed to the academic rigor attached to AB's name; many students prioritize tests, extracurriculars, and homework, over attending afterschool events. In addition, there are over 70 clubs, so the sheer number of activities and events may just be too much for people to keep up with. That leads us to our focus for this year, which is increasing our social media presence. For those who follow the ABRHS StuCo Instagram account, I'm sure you've seen the increase of reels promoting our most recent event, Homecoming. We found that just putting posters in the hallways wasn't enough, so why not transfer our attention to the digital world, where most students are when they're walking through the halls?

Q3: What's the most challenging part about being an officer? What was your growth like from a representative/delegate to becoming a leader?

The most challenging part of being an officer in general is controlling a room full of eager representatives. It's hard trying to be strict while also making sure the club is fun for everyone as well. Another is trying to incorporate everyone's advice and feedback. We also have no idea whether or not changing and introducing new events will stick or even work.

Q4: Any advice for underclassmen?

Tina: Comparison is the thief of joy. Everyone has their own unique strengths and weaknesses, and we're all on our own path in life, so don't take things too seriously!

Thomas: Worry about your grades, but worry more about yourself! Make sure you treat yourself, go outside, and talk to the adults around you. Always remember high school is something to try new things and a bad grade NEVER defines you.

Farren: Get involved and try everything! There is no harm in trying something and that's the best way to learn what you love.

Anjali: High school is hard, so just try your best and be proud of your efforts!

The Other Side

Connections Answers

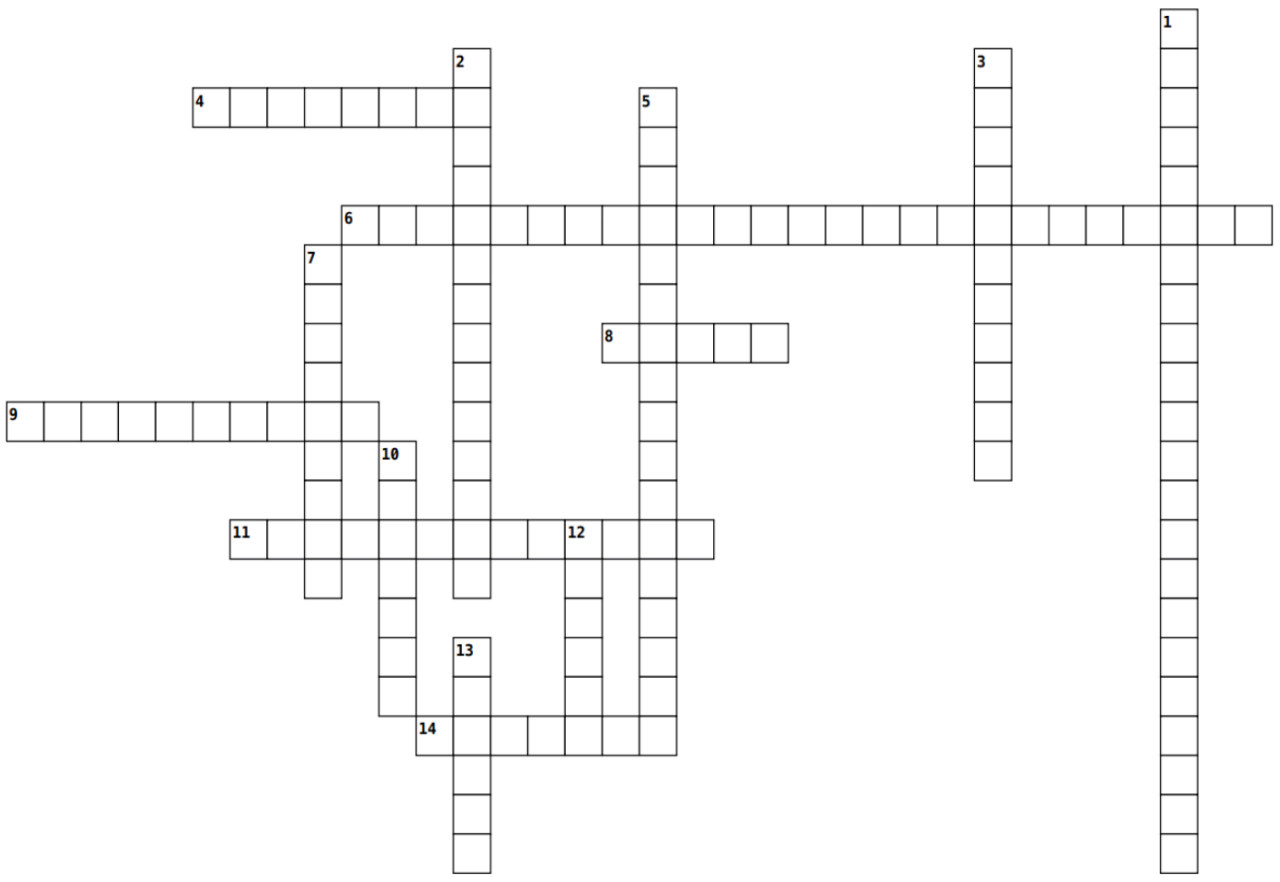
Coffee Types
Piccolo, Java, Doppio, Cortado

Sour Foods
Cream, Kombucha, Lemon, Pickles

Jupiter's Moons
Io, Europa, Ganymede, Callisto

Eye ___
Patch, Sight, Ball, Glass

Crossword: Fall Edition



Across

4. Protect something or someone

6. The giant spacecraft that orbits earth

8. A machine capable of carrying out complex tasks automatically.

9. A school-issued device

11. A material that conducts electricity sometimes but blocks it other times

14. Online multiplayer game where players work together on a spaceship to complete tasks while there is an Impostor on board.

Down

1. Technology that allows computers and machines to think and learn like humans

2. Scheduling app at AB used to monitor student whereabouts while at school

3. Main circuit board inside a computer

5. Examples of this are: Iphone Duo, Iphone Pro max, iPhone Pro

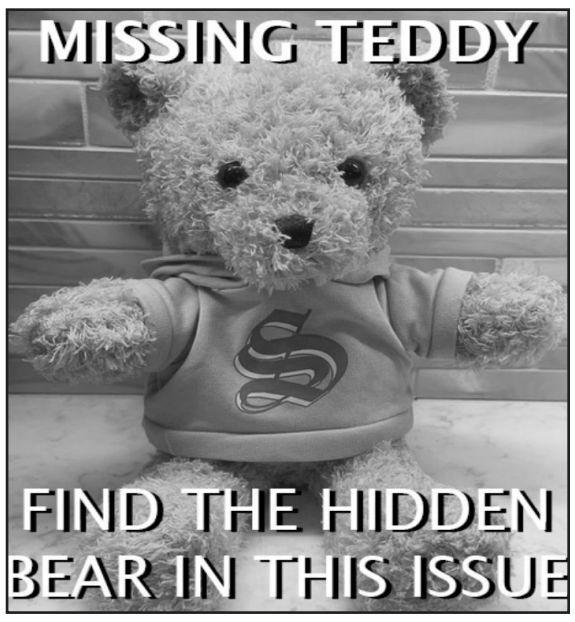
7. Online game played on a screen where people use controllers

10. Breaking into a computer system without permission to steal data

12. Hello World

13. AI for Google

Crossword
NIOBE VELOZ '28



Six-Word Stories

Flying car, Tesla roadster, rocket league

WATCHED HORROR MOVIE, PEED MY PANTS.

At the corn maze, this shucks!

NOW WHAT JERSEY IS MICHAEL WEARING?

Senior year here, college decisions near!

CAN'T DO NATHAN. WAIT, WHO'S NATHAN?

Comic: World Peace?



Comic!
ANABELL BIRD '29