

THE PAW

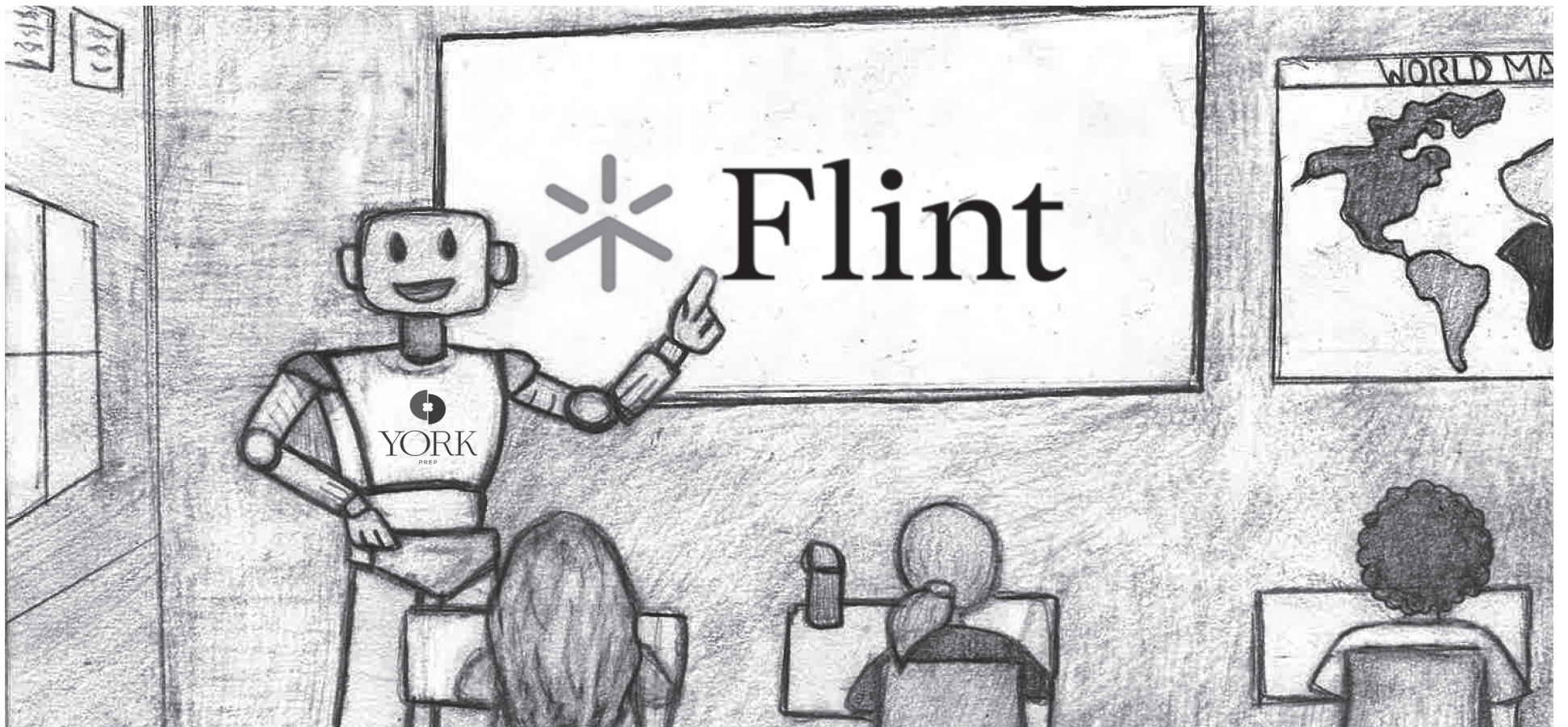


SPRING 2026

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: LETTERS, COLLEGE IN THE SOUTH, MR. HARTMAN, COLLEGE GUIDANCE, CURLY HAIR ROUTINE, ICE, GRADE COMPETITION, RACISM ON THE LEFT, NONCHALANCE, 2020S MUSIC, MOVIE REVIEWS, SEX & THE CITY, CHICAGO, COLLEGE FOOTBALL, WEIGHT ROOM ACCESS, FUN & GAMES, PERFORMATIVITY

Thinking Outside the Bot

Flint integrates AI into learning and instruction; opinions are mixed



Flint, Cognita's in-house artificial intelligence chatbot, was developed to help teachers plan and individuate assignments and lessons; faculty are already testing its applicability in York Prep classrooms.

By Smith Deley

Healthy use of artificial intelligence in education remains largely undefined. Nevertheless, over the past few years, educators have sought to strike the right balance. At one end of the spectrum are schools like the Austin, Texas-based Alpha School network, where tech executives launched an education program that uses AI. Students learn primarily from computers in two-hour periods of hyperpersonalized AI sessions where teachers observe from the background. At the other end are schools taking a more traditional approach, trying to moderate how students engage with AI. But moderation is a challenge for teachers and parents alike.

As AI is rapidly implemented into nearly every aspect of society, companies are racing to incorporate AI into their business models in order to stay ahead of the market. Cognita, the private, for-profit education company that owns York Prep and over 100 other schools around the world, has taken steps to embrace the use of AI in education.

In 2025, Cognita partnered with Flint AI, a chatbot tailored to help teachers—and potentially, students—with assignments. Cognita is working to incorporate Flint into its schools' curriculum, and selected York as one of the first schools to do so.

Emily Borden, director of curriculum and instruction for STEAM, has been leading this project. Flint is trained to avoid giving direct answers to users; instead, it helps them structure their work. From an educator's perspective, the rollout of AI provides an efficient way to design and organize tasks and projects for students. Though plans to grant students access to Flint have yet to be announced, authorized applications may include generating ideas for an essay without writing the whole thing.

"It's basically an attempt to help students learn and not just get the shortcut to avoid learning," Ms. Borden said.

On the surface, AI learning can remove a lot of roadblocks, increasing accessibility to education and individualized paths for different learning styles. But what do students

lose when their teacher isn't human?

Alpha School's AI-based curriculum is getting attention from experts. Randi Weingartner, president of the American Federation of Teachers, told *The New York Times*, "Students and our country need to be in relationship with other human beings. When you have a school that is strictly AI, it is violating that core precept of the human endeavor and of education."

In an interview with ABC News, Thomas Toch, director of FutureEd, an education policy center at Georgetown University, thought back to the Covid-19 pandemic, when students were forced to learn strictly online for long periods of time.

"The loss of that connection during the pandemic, when kids were learning virtually, created widespread mental-health challenges," Toch said. "The notion that, you know, a machine will be the only entity that interacts with kids is problematic in that regard."

As AI continues to advance, will Flint take York down the path of AI-controlled learning environments, or will we draw the line before large language models start

taking teachers' jobs?

York isn't planning on getting rid of teachers anytime soon, and some are finding that AI actually enhances their work. History and Jump Start teacher Lane Choplin has already discovered many helpful applications for Flint in his classroom.

"Having a model that just already knows your work environment really well saves a lot of time," Mr. Choplin said. "It knows things about my job, so it can much more easily help write reports, have them actually be useful, and set up lessons."

Flint has already received positive reviews from teachers: used responsibly, it appears to help students learn, and there have been no major shifts in the dynamics between faculty and students thus far.

But students are not necessarily on the same page.

"Part of me just doesn't think it's fair that we get in trouble for using it, and they are obviously allowed to use it for their job," junior Ava Johnson said. "But we're the ones going into a world where we're going to have AI regardless. So it would be better for us to learn how to use it to our advantage." ❏

Affirming Israel's Right to Self-Defense

A guest editorial in response to "After October 7th, Calls for Peace"

By the Jewish Heritage Club

The following letter refers to Saige Moodie's story on page 3 of the Winter 2026 issue.

We are writing as members of the Jewish Heritage Club to share our response to the recent student article about the Israel– Hamas war.

While we appreciate the effort to engage students in conversation and to acknowledge Palestinian suffering, we have concerns about how the article was presented and the ef-

fect it has had on some Jewish students in our community.

October 7, 2023, was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. For many of us, this is not just a historical or political fact, but a personal trauma that affects our sense of safety, identity, and belonging, especially with antisemitism on the rise. The article mentions this, but it does not fully reflect the ongoing impact on Jewish students.

We believe a more balanced article would recognize several truths at the same time: that Hamas, a designated terrorist

group, started the war with mass murder and hostage-taking; that Israel has the right to defend its citizens; and that Palestinian civilians are suffering in a war they did not choose. Recognition of Jewish and Palestinian suffering should acknowledge the role of Hamas in both.

The article also does not fully consider how certain language could affect Jewish students. For many Jews, Zionism is not only a political ideology, but also deeply tied to identity, history, and survival. Without this context, Jewish fear and discomfort can be

dismissed or misunderstood

Our concern is not about stopping discussion or limiting empathy. It is about making sure conversations, especially in school publications, are accurate, contextual, and aware of how global conflicts affect students locally.

We respectfully ask that future coverage of sensitive topics include more context and consider how it impacts students. We would be happy to talk further and work together to encourage thoughtful, inclusive discussion that respects everyone's safety and sense of belonging. ☒

Letters to the Editor

Who Turns on the Lights?

The work of York Prep's custodial staff is a great thing because it helps the entire school function easily. By cleaning classrooms, bathrooms, and hallways, the custodial staff creates a safe and comfortable environment for students and teachers. When the school is clean and organized, it becomes easier for everyone to focus on learning and teaching. Their dedication also shows teamwork and responsibility, which are very important traits for people and a community to have. Additionally, I feel that this topic stands out mainly because there are many people who do not understand how hard the staff works. Many people walk through the school every day without realizing how much effort goes into keeping the school clean and organized. The staff wakes up early and stays at school late to make sure that each day York Prep students and teachers feel comfortable when walking into the building. Aitan Greene-Houvras's article helps bring attention to the long hours and dedication the staff put in to make York Prep a better place.

—Collin Muhammad, 10th grade

Bermuda Bin

I was able to grasp a new understanding of the lost and found after reading this article by Gabriel Cheng: as a deep hole where everything that falls inside is forgotten. Cheng makes an alluring connection between York Prep's lost and found bin and our everyday lives. For instance, he mentions that the clothes inside the bin are

somewhat reminiscent of fossils under the earth's crust. I have had my fair share of experiences with the bin, the most notable being the time I was told to find gym clothes from the lost and found after I had forgotten them for the first time. When I got to the bin, I decided to stop searching for gym clothes after looking for five seconds because the mounds of clothes on top of the bin were headache inducing. At the end of the day, the so-called *lost and found* does not deserve its name. It should be called the *lost and lost*.

—Ilan Segal, 10th grade

Screen Time

After reading Haile Fong Choy's article, I started thinking about how much technology affects students' lives today. Technology can be very helpful because it allows students to research information quickly, complete assignments more easily, and stay connected with friends and family. However, an excess of screen time can also have negative effects on kids. For example, spending many hours on phones or computers can lead to weaker communication skills and difficulty focusing in school. Prolonged time on screens can also affect sleep when teenagers stay up late using social media and talking to friends. I believe that the real issue is not technology itself, but how students choose to use it. Young people should learn to set limits and balance screen time with activities like sports, hobbies, and time outdoors with their friends so that they can stay healthy and focused.

—Francesca De Matos, 10th grade

Haile Fong Choy explains how technology has become a part of Gen Alpha's lives early on, leading to long-term dependence on screens. Exposure to devices as early as age two can ultimately shape how children interact with technology, making it difficult to separate from screens later on. As someone born in 2010, on the cusp of Gen Alpha, I believe that the Covid-19 pandemic drastically increased technology use among younger generations, and for me, especially. During quarantine, screens became necessary for online school, entertainment, and staying connected with others. For many children, devices acted as a digital lifeline when physical interaction was nearly impossible. Now that quarantine is over, technology should be used in moderation, so that kids can balance online life with real experiences. Overall, we should stay in the moment and have an effective balance of screen time, especially for younger children.

—Lucy Sanquini, 10th grade

Free the Knees

George Pertuz writes an intriguing article about a recommended tweak in the dress code, advocating for the use of shorts. Although the argument for shorts may seem reasonable, I believe that in order to keep a professional learning environment and uphold traditions, shorts should not be a part of the dress code. Lightweight pants help provide a reasonable compromise of comfort and professionalism while still maintaining the school standards for the dress code. I would

make a small adjustment while still following the dress code on those hot days by wearing neutral-colored, thin pants, since administrators generally allow them as long as they follow the color guidelines. The administrators already have to deal with a multitude of dress code violations, and including shorts would amount to another obstacle that would have to be monitored and enforced. This would no doubt create more difficulty for the faculty and staff, blurring the line as to whether we even have a dress code or not.

—Jack Grabos, 10th grade

Addiction, Recovery, Abduction, Revolution

With regards to Cooper Stelwagon's review of *The Smashing Machine*, the film's main problems are its story and pace. The plot moves too quickly, jumping from one important scene to the next without giving the audience enough time to understand the characters or their motivations. As a result, many moments seem hurried and too emotional rather than significant. The film also attempts to address multiple issues at once, but explains them to the audience too bluntly, rather than allowing them to evolve organically. This makes the message seem forced and eliminates any feeling of subtlety or mystery. The tone occasionally gets unintentionally humorous, which takes away from the mood the movie is attempting to portray.

—James Meskouris, 10th grade ☒

Goin' South

Panthers flock to college below Mason-Dixon line



According to the Wall Street Journal, over the past two decades, there has been an 84% increase in Northerners attending public colleges and universities in the South.

By Cessie Haber

For decades, students from the Northeast have flocked to the Ivy League, local state universities, and liberal arts schools throughout the region. But in recent years, more of these students have shifted towards the South for their undergraduate educations. Over the past two decades, there has been an 84% increase in students from north of the Mason-Dixon line attending public schools in the South.

Many of these students are attracted to the football culture that is offered by these institutions. According to Dylan Taylor, a senior and former cheerleader who will be attending Spelman College in Atlanta, this is a lack felt by York Prep students yearning for a traditional college experience.

“There’s no Friday night or Saturday night lights,” Taylor said. “When there’s just the same gym you have PE in, it’s like, why bother?” The potential for the kind of college experiences seen on TV can influence the decisions of students who want a livelier atmosphere.

This appeal was heightened during the pandemic, when the increasing trend of students going South became difficult to ignore. As a result of Covid-19, many Northern

colleges and universities transitioned to Zoom and other platforms like Google Meet to hold classes, while many schools in the South reopened quickly.

York Prep’s director of college guidance, Janet Rooney, is well aware of this trend.

“It started with kids wanting smaller liberal arts Northeastern schools: Franklin & Marshall, Hobart & William Smith, and American University,” she said. “About eight years ago, kids started coming in asking for larger schools that have football and business. Those three things, and more.”

The idealized version of college centers on tradition: football games and tailgates, rowdy student sections, and Greek life. Students who have attended smaller high schools are often attracted to these huge Southern schools because of their school spirit. On social media, trends like “Rushtok,” a TikTok movement about rushing sororities, sorority vlogs, and viral dances have also contributed to the exploding popularity of schools in the SEC, which have become synonymous with enthusiasm and community.

With massive student attendance at football games and strong athletics programs at schools like the Univer-

sity of Tennessee and the University of South Carolina, school spirit has climbed towards the top of priorities for prospective students.

But the draw isn’t just about the lifestyle: it’s also the cost. For instance, out-of-state tuition at Pennsylvania State University is roughly \$25,000, while at Florida State University, which is ranked slightly higher, it is only \$20,063. According to reporting by outlets such as Bloomberg, these lower-tuition public colleges in the South offer a stronger return on investment, meaning graduates see comparable or better post-college earnings relative to the amount they paid for their degree. For some students, Southern schools may provide a financially efficient pathway to high incomes after graduation.

Social media has also brought new attention to the culture of schools in the South. Rushtok and tailgate reels show a glamorized student life for high schoolers all over the country to see: viral videos of sororities choreographing dance routines and students showcasing their outfits for the week-long period of “Bama Rush.” Additionally, social media platforms highlight the energy of football games, which further incentivizes students to apply to

schools they might not have considered otherwise.

Students at smaller high schools in large urban environments like New York rarely get the romanticized adolescence depicted in *Bella and the Bulldogs* or *High School Musical*.

“I feel like I did miss out on some of the high school experience,” senior Sofia Susskind, who has committed to Elon University in North Carolina, said. “Things like painting your parking spot, going to football games.” This absence of stereotypical campus culture shapes the desire for a different environment. Large Southern universities offer a vision of college more in line with media representations teenagers are exposed to, and which some feel that they didn’t get to have in high school.

Others avoid the South at all costs. For some students, the politics of Southern states—from legal restrictions on bodily autonomy to book bans—is a deal-breaker.

Senior Sarah Abrams identified the South as a region where she specifically does not want to go.

“You can’t go to school in a state where you can’t get an abortion, because that’s also an indicator of a lot more conservative values that don’t line up with my mine.”

The Nature of Nature

Visual art teacher discusses new showcase



Bull and Cow. Oil on aluminum panel. 16x16 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

By Coby Blatt

Art teacher Karl Hartman recently had a solo exhibition of his paintings at DFN Projects in midtown, *The Nature of Nature*, which ran from January 21 to February 27. The show consisted of beautiful oil landscapes he created over many years, influenced by his formative years in the heartland as well as the nature surrounding his home in New Jersey. He has exhibited work around New York City and as far as Tokyo—however, he will downplay this achievement and say it was “just a doodle.” *The Paw* was privileged to interview him and learn about his creative process as a painter, what inspires him, and hear some advice on how to start painting.

How long have you been painting, and why did you start?

“I’ve been painting since high school, but I didn’t start painting with oils until I moved to New York in 1986. I enrolled in the School of Visual Arts, and that’s where I learned how to paint with oil. I had been working with watercolor previous to that.”

What made you want to pursue

sue painting as a career?

“I felt that it was the strongest skill I had. It was something pretty unique to me compared to my peers. I was not a strong academic student throughout my time in middle and high school because I had similar learning disabilities to the kids here at York Prep, and painting was a skill I had that I could perform well in, so it gave me the most satisfaction.”

How did you settle on the themes depicted in *The Nature of Nature*?

“I didn’t start out with any one product or specific idea for a show in mind. When I paint, I kind of move in a direction and if it feels right to me, then I’ll continue to create work like that. I started working on landscape, and there were many factors that weighed on that. One was that it was a very dark moment in the art world when I was in school in New York, and my peers in my classes at the School of Visual Arts were creating very dark work and I felt as though they were doing it because it was expected of them, and that scene started to depress me, so I turned to landscapes. Then, those landscapes started to sell and generate some interest and I kept doing them.”

Eventually, I had enough pieces to create a show. It wasn’t like I had an idea for a specific show for specific landscapes.

What is your biggest challenge as a painter?

“The most difficult hurdle when it comes to painting is coming up with a good concept—to come up with a good composition for the painting, and how to give the painting real conviction. All three of those, coupled with the skill to put it all together, is probably the most difficult thing. The joy of painting comes from being able to do all three of those things to create something unique.”

You have moved around a lot. You were born in Montana and then grew up in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Then, you moved around the country before settling in New Jersey and working here in Manhattan. How do you think your change in environment has influenced the paintings you have made over the years?

“It has influenced me greatly. Some of the paintings in *The Nature of Nature* were from local trails around my house in Bergen County, New Jersey. I started

doing drawings of my neighbors and their houses as well. During the pandemic I would go out into my yard and just paint little sticks and mushrooms and birds. I really think that anything can make an interesting piece. You don’t need a view of some great national park or the Grand Canyon to make something beautiful.”

What would you say to students who want to pursue painting like you have?

“Aside from ‘God be with you,’ I would say that you have to enjoy the challenge of creating a painting. It’s like getting a good grade on a test: it gives you a little charge when you get something right, when you figure out how to draw something the right way. You also have to be patient and invest time into it. The more you paint, the more you will like it, but you always have to be ready to spend some time thinking about a piece, sketching it, and then executing your idea.”

What is next for Mr. Hartman?

“I don’t even know the answer to that one. I think I’m going to continue to paint and keep showing my work at other shows.”

Behind the Scenes of College Admissions

How Ms. Rooney helps students find the right match

By Gabrielle Bolt

For most students, the college process feels like a high-stakes race. Whether it be striving for perfect grades, endless activities, or the pressure to land at the most prestigious school possible, juniors and seniors frequently feel overwhelmed. But inside York Prep's college guidance office, director Janet Rooney sees the process a little differently. After years of guiding students through applications and acceptances, she says the biggest challenge isn't getting into college—it's helping students find a place where they'll actually succeed.

Ms. Rooney didn't originally set out to become a college counselor. She attended a state school in Maine, choosing a different path after watching her siblings take a more conventional one.

"I was fairly immature for my age, and I was only interested in playing soccer," she said. "So that's where I went, and I loved every minute of it!"

Ms. Rooney began college as a social work major before quickly realizing it wasn't the right fit.

"The more I got into it, the more I was like, I'm not cut out for this. This takes a saint," she said. "So I switched to sociology."

Years later, she found herself in New York City interviewing for jobs at several schools before landing at York, a place that immediately felt different.

"I felt at home the minute I walked in the lobby," she said. "I did not feel intimidated. Everybody was just nice and super friendly."

That same sense of comfort she felt on her first day at York is what she tries to replicate in the college guidance office, even as the admissions process becomes more competitive and stressful each year. Her work follows an annual cycle. In the fall, she meets with the families of the junior class to discuss expectations, financial aid, and support needs. After winter break, she meets individually with juniors to begin preparing their college lists.

In the spring, much of her time is spent behind the scenes: reviewing transcripts, checking course selections, and organizing paperwork.

"There's so much paperwork," she said. "It's the best time of year to get organized."

Still, she says that the most rewarding part of the job is the students themselves.

"Somebody will walk in the office with a big smile on their face



Janet Rooney, director of college guidance, in her office on the fourth floor.

just to say 'hi,'" she said. "And kids who make me laugh . . . I love that."

But the job also comes with difficult conversations, especially when students' dreams don't quite align with reality just yet.

"I prefer to rip the Band-Aid off early," she said. "The longer you're gentle about it, the more they think it might still happen."

The difficult conversations that Ms. Rooney has with students often revolve around prestige. Today's students are more focused than ever on big-name schools and acceptance rates, a shift Ms. Rooney has watched happen in real time.

"When I first got here, it was all about small liberal arts colleges," she said. "Now everyone wants big football schools. There has been a complete flip."

She's also seen acceptance rates plummet at schools that were once considered easy options.

"Schools that used to be safety schools aren't anymore," she said. "Acceptance rates have dropped everywhere. It's crazy."

In her view, the focus on prestige often overshadows a more important question. Is this school actually

the right fit?

"For me, it's all about the match," she said. "I want the kids to go on and be happy—not crushed by some curriculum they're not prepared for."

"Kids somehow wind up in the right place. It's all about the match."

That mismatch can become especially clear when students choose colleges based on reputation rather than environment. Many students are drawn to large universities with school spirit and big sports programs, but those schools don't always offer the same level of academic scaffolding.

"A lot of the larger schools don't have the same supports," she said.

"There's too many kids in a class. Sometimes you have a TA instead of a professor."

She's also seen how trends shape student decisions, sometimes in ways that have little to do with academics.

"It's more about the experience the college is going to offer them," she said. "Not necessarily education."

One trend she's especially scared of is Greek life culture.

"For all the good they do, there's also the hazing and the . . . culture," she said. "It's a whole environment."

Still, she says, the biggest misconception about college admissions is that it is always overwhelming.

"It doesn't have to be so full of anxiety," she said. "If you follow the steps, it works."

That process starts earlier than many students realize. By ninth and tenth grade, transcripts are already beginning to take shape, which is one of the reasons why she encourages underclassmen to focus on strong grades and meaningful interests.

"Get good grades, get involved, and find your passion," she said.

She also encourages students to think honestly about finances—something many families avoid discussing until late in the process.

"A lot of kids don't know if they need financial aid," she said. "You have to find that out early."

Despite York's reputation as a college preparatory school, she emphasizes that college isn't the only path.

"I love gap years. I love trade schools," she said. "There are a lot of different ways to be successful."

Even after years on the job, she still gets excited when decisions come in.

"I'll check and see who got in," she said. "It's exciting every time."

But the most meaningful moment comes at the end of senior year.

"Graduation floors me every year," she said. "It's very emotional."

By then, the stress of the application process has usually faded, replaced by something simpler: relief and excitement about what comes next.

"Kids somehow wind up in the right place," she said.

And if there's one thing she wants students to understand, it's that the college process works best when they focus less on status and more on themselves.

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FEATURE

Curly Hair Routine

Frizz-free, perfect curls in only nine steps



No curly hair routine is complete without styling spray, mousse, leave-in conditioner, defining cream, sculpting gel, or a good brush.

By Gabriella Haus

Do you have curly hair? If so, this article is for you! Have you ever wondered if your curls are never at their full potential, or why your hair is always frizzy? I too used to have frizzy, uncontrolled curls—until I tried these steps.

1. Shower

Washing your hair before a routine prepares your curls to soak up products that can define them.

2. Keep your hair wet

This means NO FULL DRYING. You can dry your hair slightly by scrunching it in a towel, but no more than that. Before applying products, you should be able to hear a wet, spongy sound coming from your hair when you scrunch it with your hands. If not, simply take a spray bottle and apply more water to the dryer spots.

3. Brush

Many people love to use defining brushes, which I also recommend. Sadly, I do not own a defining brush, so I just use a plain wet brush to get rid of my knotty curls. It is okay for your hair to look straight during this process; that is normal. If it is still curly while brushing your hair out, that is normal too. There are many videos on social media demonstrating how to use a defining brush on curly hair.

4. Leave-in conditioner

Using leave-in conditioner before any other product provides long-lasting hydration and frizz control. I use OUAI, which you can find at Sephora. Another brand that I recommend is the Curlsmith Weightless Air Dry Cream, which you can find at Ulta Beauty or Target.

There are many videos on social media demonstrating an effective curly hair routine.

5. Curl defining cream

This product ensures defined, shiny, and controlled curls. The one that I use is Not My Mother's Curl Talk, but it is not my favorite product because I feel that it doesn't keep my frizz in control. After doing some research, it looks like Rizos Curls makes the best option for minimizing frizz and holding hydration.

6. Curl gel

Some of you may have heard the term "curl cast" before. A curl cast

is formed from curl gel once it has dried. For extra volume, flip your hair over in front of you, and scrunch lightly with a towel. Next, flip your hair back up, split it into two parts, and gently apply the curl gel to your hands; comb through the first part, then the next. This will keep your curls the exact way that you want them to be, and in the morning when you wake up, your hair will feel crunchy. This is called a curl cast, and is key to frizz-free hair. (In Step 9 of the routine, I explain how to get rid of the cast in order to finish up the curly, frizz-free look.)

7. Curl mousse

This is a crucial step in forming true curls. The product I use is Not My Mother's Curl Talk Activating Mousse. It works fabulously, and always leaves that perfectly defined and volumized look that I long for. Although this product works for my hair, there is a chance that it won't produce the same results for yours, so experiment with different products as you wish. After forming the curl cast, keep your hair flipped over—if you flipped it upward, that's okay, but it's best to keep it flipped over forward. Next, get your curl mousse and shake the bottle up as much as you can. This will make the product foamy, which is what you want, because then the product will be able to fuse to your hair more easily. Next, spray any amount of the product you want onto your hands. I use a lot, but any amount will work—just experiment with it for a bit. Now that the product is in your hands and fingertips, massage and scrunch your roots with the mousse. Most of the product should be used up just on your roots, so spray more onto your hands. Now, with more product on your hands, scrunch through every other part of your hair. I normally do one half before the other, and then scrunch the rest.

8. Bonnet

I regularly let my hair dry for a bit, and then place it into a bonnet. If you don't know how to get your hair into a bonnet, I suggest looking it up on YouTube, which has the best tutorials, in my opinion.

9. Hair oil

I apply hair oil in the morning when I wake up in my bonnet. Usually, I take the bonnet off, get my coconut miracle oil, and scrunch it through my curls. This gets rid of the gel cast and prevents frizz!

If your hair is still frizzy, it might mean that you are applying products too roughly, or that you aren't using the right amount of product in your hair. I hope you enjoy your defined, shiny, and frizz-free curls! 🌿

PHOTO BY GABRIELLA HAUS

The Winter of Our Discontent

ICE leaves democracy out in the cold

By Halle Maanavi

Unchecked power is antithetical to democracy. American ideals are built on the United States Constitution, which mandates that in our government specific processes be followed, and in no context should they be gone against. When a presidential administration disregards constitutional law, it puts our entire country in danger, rather than protecting it, as every president was sworn in to do. The federal government was designed to be reliable and trustworthy so that citizens would have faith in justice. When expectations aren't met, chaos follows. Balancing powers among the three branches is vital for democracy to prosper because it ensures that no one can overpower another.

Today, America is in crisis because the executive branch has assumed the power of Congress and the courts: President Trump demands that his agenda be executed no matter what. With the Republican Party in control of the White House, the legislature, and—ideologically, at least—the judiciary, it becomes especially difficult to ensure equal representation nationwide. And when the actions of these branches are not transparent, which is the right of the public, the government weakens our democracy.

Across the country, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has been tasked with the job of upholding immigration law, but instead, it is eroding faith in the legal system and government as a whole. In the past year, President Trump has made it his goal to conduct rapid deportations all over the U.S. ICE completely disregards the law by entering homes without warrants, racially profiling, and exhibiting aggressive behavior and undue, sometimes lethal force. This violence poses threats to Americans' civil liberties that have triggered deep constitutional concerns.

There is a core constitutional principle established in the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments called due process that underlies American democracy. Due process guarantees that every person on U.S. soil, citizen or not, has the right to a fair trial to prove their innocence or guilt before any later actions—in this case, deportation. Recent enforcement actions suggest otherwise, with the administration's blatant disregard for warrants or fair trial. People detained have limited access to at-



ICE poses threats to civil liberties that have triggered constitutional concerns.

torneys, or are deported before they can access the court system at all.

In some cases, individuals have been deported to confinement centers in countries like El Salvador regardless of their nationality. If they must be deported, detainees should be sent back to their home countries, not wherever the Trump Administration pleases, even if the Supreme Court has ruled otherwise. The Terrorist Confinement Center in Tecoluca is a 40,000-capacity maximum security prison to accommodate a large-scale gang crackdown in 2022. While it is unknown how many more immigrants ICE has deported to the facility since the Salvadoran government accepted over 200 detainees in March 2025, with or without a criminal record, such maltreatment far exceeds reasonable punishment for being in the U.S. without authorization, which is a civil violation, and not a criminal offense.

As the new year began, Minneapolis, Minnesota, became a hotspot for ICE's new agenda. Community

members reported aggressive encounters with federal immigration officers on a daily basis resembling military raids rather than standard policing. Although the agency's ostensible purpose is to detain illegal immigrants, fear has spread across the state that they are just going after anyone who protests them. Despite this, the killings of Renée Good and Alex Pretti by federal agents increased the number of protests against ICE in Minnesota and throughout the country.

Although investigations into the officers who shot these citizens are ongoing, the message still stands: if immigration enforcement escalates to lethal force and continues to cause harm in neighborhoods, cities, and now even airports, public trust will inevitably collapse. The last thing Americans want is to view federal agents as agitators harmful to our society rather than protectors of the law, but it is the unjustifiable actions and unchecked powers of our government that fuel tension and division across our nation. ❏



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Whadja Get?

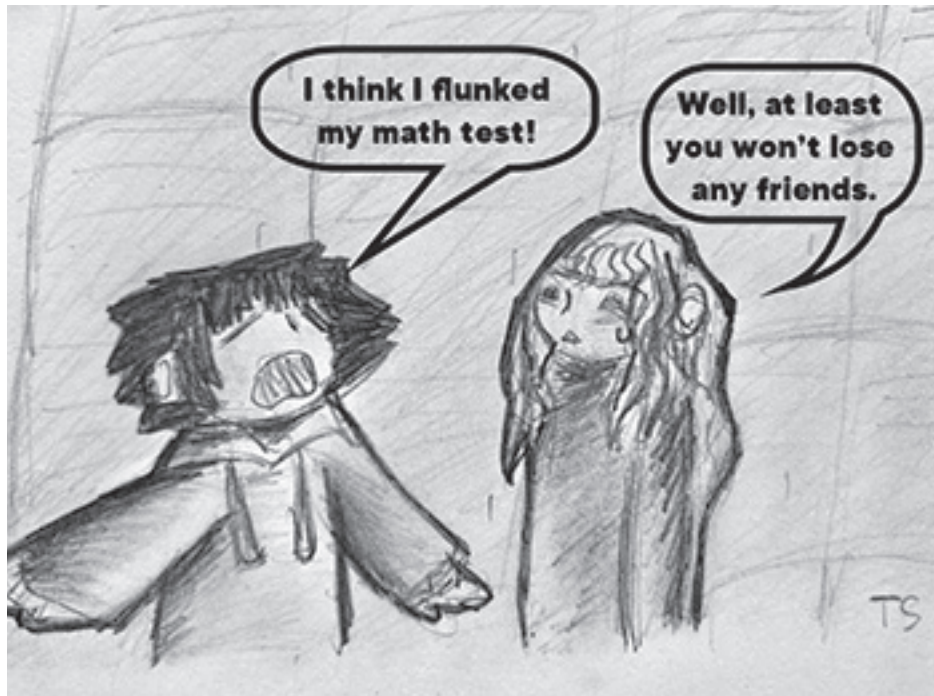
When your classmates' wins feel like your loss

By Devon Oser

For today's students, grades no longer represent performance, but worth. We identify our grades as a measure of our intelligence and importance because of the competitive nature of teenagers. The second a test gets handed back, every student in class turns to their friend and asks, "whadja get?" Whether they mean "I hope you did well!" or "I hope I got a higher grade!" is the real question.

I believe that most students truly do want to be happy for their peers, but how can we be when school naturally encourages competition? The environment is intended to build connections and cheer others on, but grades, tracks, and rankings inherently breed jealousy and hostility. Maybe competition isn't always bad; sometimes it's a motivator. Our future goals tend to be why we feel the need to compete—or even better, win.

According to York Prep's director of college guidance, Janet Rooney, "there is a direct correlation between motivation and the future." Maybe competition pushes students to study or participate more to do better in the long run, but when ev-



High school can make you feel like you're in a constant race for first place.

ery student has the same few goals, is friendly competition possible? Can we really see past what is right in front of us?

If every student wants to be in the same Advanced Placement as their friends, or even get into the same college, it becomes harder to appreciate someone's success while you struggle. This idea is not grounded in reality, as there is no limit for how many students can achieve success.

"The first year I worked here, I think 13 students applied to Syracuse, 12 got in, and 11 went," Ms. Rooney said. "Nobody cancelled each other. If you're a good candidate, you're a good candidate."

Many students can succeed at the same time, but most of us don't accept that and still believe that everything is win-or-lose, all-or-nothing. Still, it can take a lot to not look at the kid with better grades as taking

up one more seat from you in the class you are trying to join, even if they are not. Thinking of fellow students as competitors is "based on a lie," Ms. Rooney said. "You aren't really competing with each other; it's the rest of the world."

Falling behind is natural in any setting, but being a student can make you feel like you're in a constant race for first place. We see our classmates as opponents or hurdles when they should be teammates.

"I don't think it's healthy at all to compare yourself to others," Ms. Rooney said. "I think a great thing in life and what shows true maturity is to really think about, 'What is the best fit for my needs?'"

It is not healthy to work against each other rather than with each other. We feel the need to run faster and catch up to others rather than cheering them on.

"Everyone is thinking about the small picture," Ms. Rooney said. "You think you're in competition with each other; I would encourage kids to think critically and outside of these four walls."

But maybe it's not that students think that they need to compete. Maybe they want to, for the sake of winning. 🗳️

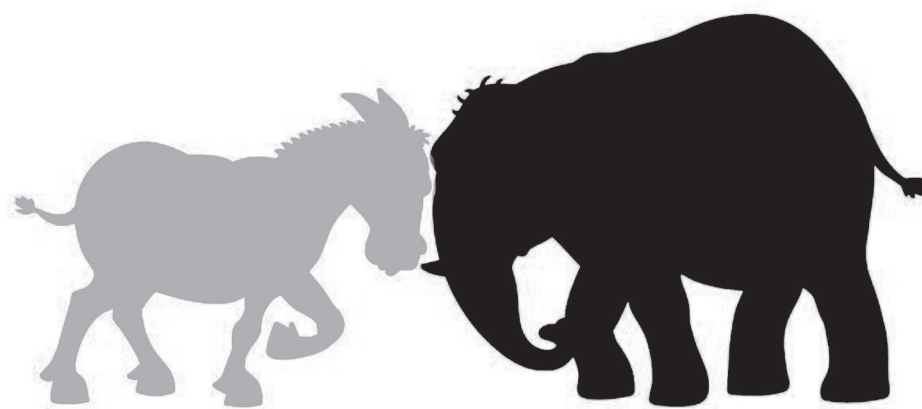
Higher Ground

Republicans aren't the only party with a race problem

By Smith Deley

The other day, during my post-school scroll, I stumbled across a clip from a podcast on Instagram Reels featuring a left-leaning white man and a right-leaning Black man. The conversation went the way many political conversations have since the 2016 presidential election: highly polarized and ultimately unproductive. But when I opened the comments on that reel, I saw many that racially targeted the Black man, personally attacking him for his beliefs. This confused me, as it was my understanding that racial equality is a pillar of the Democratic Party platform. But what those comments showed me is that when a Black man holds beliefs that contradict liberal orthodoxy, supposed progressives—or at least those hiding behind blank Instagram accounts—can turn hostile quickly.

Generally speaking, Democrats take pride in moral righteousness.



"If you have a problem figuring out if you're for me or for Trump, you ain't Black," President Joe Biden said on The Breakfast Club in 2020.

At the 2016 Democratic National Convention, former First Lady Michelle Obama famously said, "When they go low, we go high," implicitly casting hateful rhetoric as a Republican problem. But the Democrats' patronizing posture is undermined when they treat Republicans as lesser people. This tendency surfaced only a month later when, at a campaign fundraiser, Democratic presidential

nominee Hillary Clinton referred to half of then-Republican nominee Donald Trump's supporters as a "basket of deplorables." Even if this remark contradicted the Democratic Party's holier-than-thou brand, it was a line taken up again by President Joe Biden in a 2020 radio interview, when he told *The Breakfast Club's* co-host Charlamagne tha God, who is Black, "If you have a problem figuring out

if you're for me or for Trump, you ain't Black."

Although Republicans may be no better in this respect, gaffes such as these make it difficult for Democrats to defend themselves against accusations of elitism. When Democrats assume that the Black vote is a guarantee, they disrespect African Americans by treating them as a monolith and fail to consider why Black voters may not be inclined to "vote blue no matter who."

Democratic leadership has failed African Americans time and time again. It is natural for these people to turn to other parties and candidates when they feel deprioritized. Republicans may not be eager to champion the issues most pressing to Black voters, but a demographic shift in party affiliations, however slight, reveals some holes in Democratic policy that the Party needs to fix. It is time for Democrats to earn their votes instead of taking them for granted. 🗳️

The Rise of Nonchalance

For Gen Z, caring has become the ultimate cringe



To avoid scrutiny, today's teens are choosing the easy way out: pretending not to care.

By Haile Fong Choy & Roman Pollack

In a world where showing emotion is seen as “trying too hard,” nonchalance has somehow become the ultimate flex. *Nonchalance* is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as lack of enthusiasm, casual difference, or unconcern, but exactly what that means has changed over the years. For some teenagers, being nonchalant can amount to performing or being performative, that is, acting as a false version of oneself. This nonchalant mindset is on the rise among Generation Z, mainly due to the culture of indifference social media has promoted among teens.

Teenagers who adopt false personas pay a real price—in their schoolwork, relationships, and their sense of self. But social media has made being outgoing “embarrassing,” leading many teens to resort to a nonchalant affect in fear of being judged. The constant surveillance enforced by social media has left essentially no room to be bold or different from what’s trending without being othered. This robotic

state of mind, recently popularized as the “Gen Z stare,” appears at first glance as a bulletproof strategy for eluding rejection: how can what you do be weaponized against you when you’re simply not doing anything that can be looked at?

“It’s like having no personality,” sophomore Jane Fischer-Harbage said. “You’re not acting like yourself.” Fischer-Harbage is not alone in harboring reservations about this culture of nonchalance; other teens report being too afraid to speak up due to fears of being excluded from the “trend.” By shifting social constructs, nonchalance is both a symptom and a cause of divides in our community at a time when human connection is already in danger.

Part of the reason nonchalance has become such a defining trait for this generation is that Gen Z grew up alongside the internet. On social media, everything is at risk. When you post something, you risk being screenshotted, receiving rude comments, and facing public scrutiny. So instead, many teens choose the safe route of pretending not to care. It feels more secure to act detached

than to confess to anxiety about a test score, hurt feelings, or genuine passion about anything at all. Nonchalance is a shield for teenagers who simply fear judgment. When everyone feigns apathy, sus-

Nonchalance is a shield for teenagers who simply fear judgment. When everyone feigns apathy, sustaining real connections becomes nearly impossible.

taining real connections becomes nearly impossible. Even significant achievements are downplayed be-

cause reacting “too much” is seen as cringe. Who wants to live in a society that discourages positivity from being expressed?

If the art of building connections has been lost, we must return to how these connections were formed in the first place. The most direct solution to this is, simply, to talk. You don’t have to share everything—just enough to make contact. This small act of openness can form bonds, tearing back the veil of disinterest. Gen Z loves to follow what is trendy, and redefining what is considered “cool” is a relatable way to help get Gen Z back on the path of excitement, relationships, and most importantly, learning how to care about things again. Ironically, those who seek out nonchalance in order to seem like they care less are the ones who care too much and try too hard. To fix this, our community—and not just our generation—must normalize what makes us human, which is social ties with other people. Rebuilding the way we interact with one another will create a more empathic world and solidify our generation for the greater good. ☒

A Beginner's Guide to Albums of the 2020s

Underappreciated gems from a grueling decade

By Lucas Masi & Weller Ranson



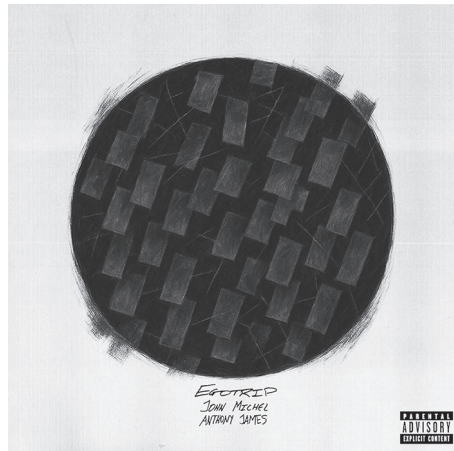
Pastel, *Souls In Motion* (2025)

Add one part Oasis, one part shoegaze, and an extra dash of Brit pop, and you get Pastel. Hailing from Manchester, the five-piece released a handful of singles from 2023 to 2024, but their big break came in '25 with *Souls in Motion*. The group is fronted by cousins Jack Yates on vocals and James Yates on guitar. The album has a big swaggering sound; the duelling guitar work of James Yates and Joey Anderson drives the melodies of Jack Yates's bold voice. *Souls in Motion* has a mix of loud, upbeat rock and dreamier tracks, all drawing from influences such as the Stone Roses, the Verve and Ride. Songs such as "Hero's Blood" and "Dancing On A Pin" feature brisk guitar melodies and a modern rock feel, while tracks like "Escape" and "Isiah" have an airier vibe. Whether listening live or on headphones, *Souls in Motion* is energetic and alive.



Magdalena Bay, *Imaginal Disk* (2024)

Among modern pop artists who have seen sudden success, perhaps none shine brighter than Mica Tenenbaum and Matthew Lewinthe, the duo behind Magdalena Bay. After its release, *Imaginal Disk* saw Magdalena Bay soar into the mainstream with its synth-heavy soundscape. In a decade criticized for artistic stagnation, the duo pushes the envelope of what a pop record can sound like. Influenced by the likes of Grimes, Charli xcx, Fiona Apple, and even the '70s prog-rock band Genesis, *Imaginal Disk* sets itself against a backdrop of '90s screensavers. This fusion of styles gives their music an almost neo-psychedelic feel with a progressive sound while still retaining the quality and catchiness of the big names in pop music. An amalgamation of bright, flashy synth chords and uplifting vocals, *Imaginal Disk* is as groovy as it is exhilarating.



John Michel, *Egotrip* (2025)

Underground Philadelphia MC John Michel joins forces with long-time collaborator Anthony James to deliver one of the strongest debut rap records of the decade. As the title suggests, *Egotrip* sees Michel battle his own narcissistic tendencies by confronting them head-on in a jazzy, introspective hip hop journey. Producer Anthony James takes Michel's self-conscious lyrics and turns them into a jazz-rap spectacle with Michel rhyming over sped up samples and exhilarating beats reminiscent of College Dropout-era Kanye West. *Egotrip* is a feast for the ears with Michel's lyrical genius & James's overblown production, suggesting that the talent on display is just the beginning of the duo's promising career. For those who love to read deeply into rap lyrics and people who admire grand production, *Egotrip* is a must-listen.



Hum, *Inlet* (2020)

The layered feel of Hum's most recent album, *Inlet*, is best described as heavy shoegaze. Shoegaze is a tradition in alternative rock that builds dense walls of guitar and vocals. Formed in 1989, Illinois band Hum married alt rock with post-hardcore in three albums before disbanding in 2000, but they came back with a bang in their most recent release, from 2020. The first track of the album, "Waves," sets the tone with thick, atmospheric guitars and reflective lyrics. Many tracks are slow to mid-tempo, the wails of guitar and emotional lyrics grabbing the listener's attention. Some tracks, such as "Step Into You," are faster paced, substantial, and harken back to Hum's earlier work in the '90s. Hum's unique sound has evolved over the past three decades, but still lives on in *Inlet*.



Ninajirachi, *I Love My Computer* (2025)

The suburb of Kincumber, Australia, may not be known for club or electronic music, but Ninajirachi is here to change that. Her fifth album, *I Love My Computer*, is hyper-detailed in every glittery synth and hi-hat. Ninajirachi, whose real name Nina Wilson, is part of the first generation that grew up solely in the digital age. Her album reflects this, but instead of dwelling on isolation related to the digital boom, the album is a high-energy EDM love letter to digital culture. Lyrics in tracks such as "iPod Touch" are nostalgic for her high school days, when iPods were still in use. Other standout tracks include "London Song" and "F*** My Computer," both of which have pouding bass and big beat drops. Woven into this are intricate textures and precise production. Although her most recent album can fit into a club setting, its perspective is more advanced than much other EDM music.



Racing Mount Pleasant, *Self-Titled* (2025)

Racing Mount Pleasant's second LP, *Racing Mount Pleasant*, is a gorgeously sentimental ride into a cacophony of brass instruments and hard-hitting lyrics. Taking notes from the English six-piece Black Country, New Road, this Michigan-based septet creates a melancholic, almost theatrical, atmosphere of longing, regret, and ultimately acceptance. *Racing Mount Pleasant* aims to convey all these somber, complex emotions with a granular progression of various instruments working in tandem with each other: guitars, bass, vocals, and drums, but also trumpet, saxophones, and strings. The mixture of chamber pop, folk, and art rock blends well into a narrative of loss and growth. But much like a tunnel, the uplifting light at the end of each song sheds grief's cold exterior for an optimistic message. The drive down to Mount Pleasant is a cold one, with a bittersweet bed at the end.



Vylet Pony, *Love & Ponystep* (2025)

Perhaps the most esoteric pick, *Love & Ponystep* is a love letter to early-2010s internet and gaming culture, including everything that might be considered cringe. Borrowing from the likes of hyperpop, brostep, and other sensory-overloaded genres of contemporary EDM, this album creates a chaotic, maximalist rager on a grand scale. Part breakup story, part post-ironic dance rave, *Love & Ponystep* is filled to the brim with melodic dubstep growls, meme sound effects, and surprisingly somber moments towards its middle. What sounds like a nostalgic joke of a dance record is actually a story of self-confidence and learning not to care about what others think. From its use of video game sound effects to its emotionally jaw-breaking beat drops, *Love & Ponystep* boasts production perfection. You'll laugh, you'll cry, but most importantly, you should party with no shame.



Earl Sweatshirt, *SICK!* (2022)

In his late teens, the Chicago native Earl Sweatshirt (Thebe Kgositsile) was already a phenom in the rap group Odd Future. But as quickly as he rose to prominence, he disappeared. He came back a couple years later with a darker and more serious sound, after going to a boarding school in Samoa. Compared to his early, darker sound, *SICK!* is much more relaxed, but Sweatshirt's aggressive roots still show through the hazy instrumentals and jazz samples. Tracks like "Old Friend" and "Lobby" have an off-kilter and edgy feel. "Fire in the Hole" and "Tabula Rasa," on the other hand, showcase Sweatshirt's introspective lyrics. Since *SICK!* came out in the wake of the pandemic, it makes sense that the album has themes of isolation and frustration. Though not his most commercially successful album, *SICK!* shows a lyrical shift towards maturity. 🎧

Superheroes, Murder, Racecars & Na'vi

2026 Oscar snubs in review

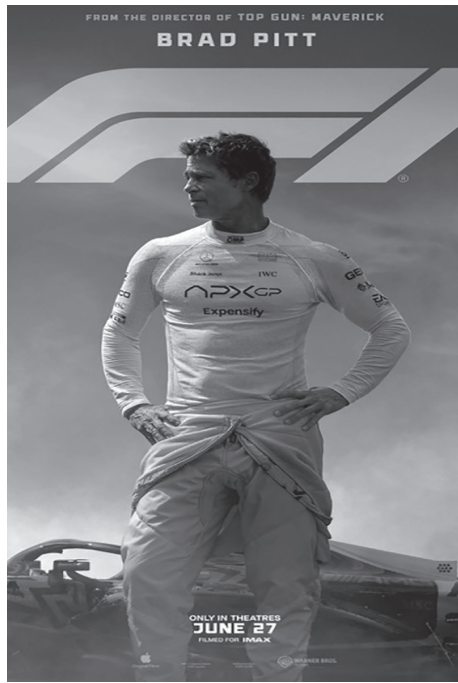
By George Pertuz



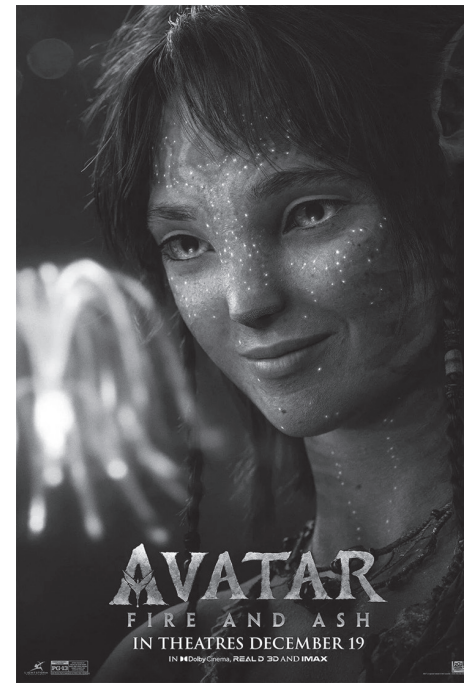
Superman, dir. James Gunn
When I went to see this movie in the theater, I had little to no hope for the next installment of the “Snyderverse” (I realize now that Zack Snyder did not direct this one). Having watched Justice League, the Man of Steel movies, and the godawful Flash, the trend was not looking good. As the first scenes played out, I was blown away. The entire film shows an immense amount of love—not only for the characters, but also for living life. David Corenswet’s Superman is true to the original superhero of the comics—not the depressed one who beefs with Batman. The colors on the screen filled me with an unimaginable joy, and the message throughout the entire movie is love. Maybe the new punk rock is being kind.



Wake Up Dead Man, dir. Rian Johnson
Daniel Craig feels fully in his element here, as in the previous Knives Out movies. A gay detective with a thick Southern accent is not the first thing that comes to mind when you think “murder mystery,” but this one is surely one of the best. The film’s comedic material and timing are incredible, unlike an Agatha Christie novel, where everything is tense up until the last moment. The film has little moments of respite where we get to take a breath and laugh at its absurdity. The last positive of this movie is that it takes place in our era, with all the bells and whistles of modern surveillance, yet it doesn’t lose its suspense. The fact that all of the characters exist in the present allows us to personally connect with them alongside the nuances of living in the digital age—rare for a mystery movie.



F1, dir. Joseph Kosinski
I reluctantly streamed this one after it came to Apple TV, and to little surprise, it wasn’t that good. As much as I love Brad Pitt, there is no amount of Brad Pittness that can make me like this movie. It follows a retired racer who suffered some sort of accident that he doesn’t want to talk about as he coaches an egotistical youngster who is fast but doesn’t know how to use his speed properly. Does this sound familiar? It should, because I’m describing the plot of Cars, a Pixar movie that came out 20 years ago. The point is that this story has been done over and over again with nothing of worth being added to the formula. But the real problem is that it was done without love: it’s rushed, designed with the idea of making money rather than with the goal of audience enjoyment. This is a counter-intuitive way of making movies: if you privilege the viewer’s experience, the money will follow.



Avatar: Fire and Ash, dir. James Cameron
As much as I wanted to love this film, I really couldn’t. Compared to the other Avatars, this one falls short, but only on the story side. James Cameron took the phrase “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” to heart and rolled with it. The redeeming quality of this film, as in all the others, is the beautiful visuals. However, by this point the story was already so replayed that I left and went to the bathroom for like 20 minutes (even getting an AMC pizza) during the middle of the film, and I still completely understood what happened while I was gone. The beef I have with this movie is the plot twist near the end—it did away with any sort of suspense, showing a true sense of plot armor. Writers should never actively show the seams of narrative construction, because then the characters’ struggles don’t mean anything. Fire and Ash is a stale piece of bread dressed in the best jelly in the world. But no matter how good the jelly is, the bread is still stale. ☹️

Which Lady Are You Today?

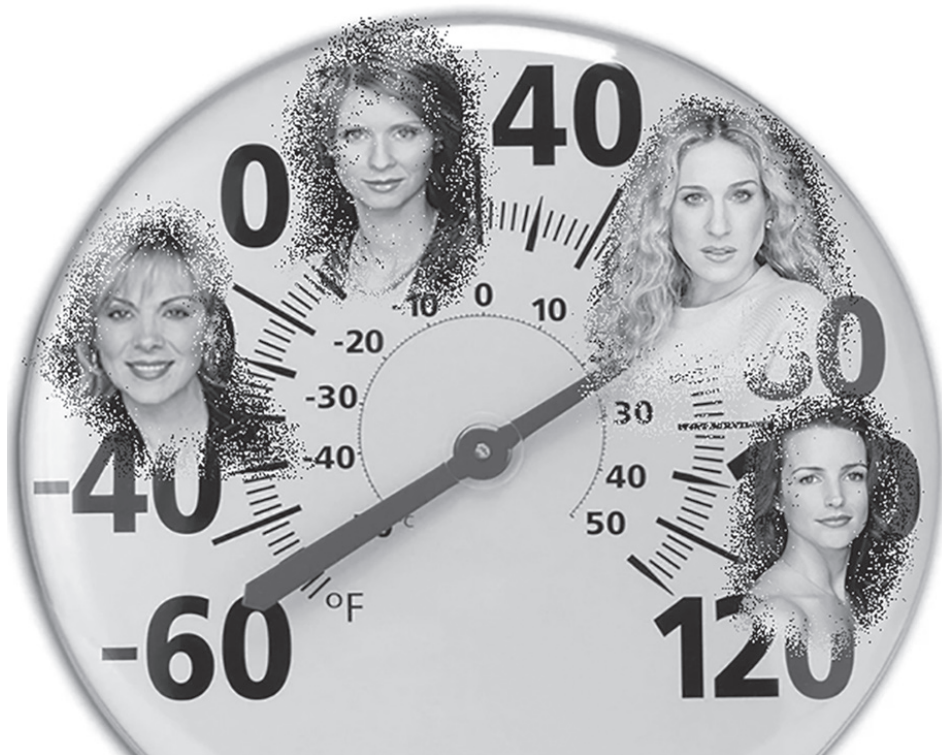
A Sex and the City temperature check

By Gita Friedman & Audrey Varley

New York City isn’t just a scene—it’s a playground, and sometimes a battlefield for the women of Sex and the City. Each character’s narrative arc, outfit, and cocktail is curated to represent who they are—and in turn, who we are. Are you the bold, unapologetic Samantha? The romantic, polished Charlotte? The down-to-earth Miranda? Or the endlessly overthinking Carrie? Our character analysis will help you see through the lens of these iconic ladies, showing which personality might be navigating your life right now.

Samantha

Samantha Jones is bold, outspoken, and unapologetically confident in a way that almost feels radical. This icon says what comes to mind, even if it makes others uncomfortable. Samantha is powerful on her own and does not seek validation from anyone else to confirm her “larger than life”



“Get it while it’s hot!”

mentality. The most loyal friend, she always shows up, and prioritizes what’s important. Samantha challenges the idea that women must define themselves through marriage, male validation, and social approval; instead, she privileges her own pleasure and career success. Are you fearless, independent, and loyal? You might just be a Samantha.

Charlotte

A Park Avenue princess, Charlotte York’s hair is always shiny, and she always has the perfect Ralph Lauren sweater for every occasion. She is the believer of the group—the one who idealizes every moment and has relentless faith in love. Charlotte believes that everything will work out. She values tradition, romance, and elegance, often holding onto fairy-tale expectations. At times, her peers may critique her for her delusions, but in reality, these are just a disguise for her strong, beautiful sense of self. She is a

Continued on page 14

All That Jazz

In Chicago, the drama club stages a killer production



Clockwise from left: Jayden Sample, 12th grade; Chelsea Branch, 9th grade; Melanie Perez, 12th grade; Bella Fong Choy, 12th grade; Gabrielle Bolt, 12th grade; Zoe Sweeney, 11th grade; MaKenna Pappas, 10th grade; Ava Johnson, 11th grade; Sasha Droulias, 10th grade; Audrey Varley, 11th grade; Zoe Casriel, 7th grade.

By Faaris Ahmed

For its spring production, the Drama Club performed Bob Fosse's classic musical, *Chicago*. Over the past few months, cast members worked hard to put on the show. This year, opening night was moved up to March to allow those involved to enjoy spring break without worrying about rehearsals upon returning to school. Preparation for a role can be challenging and requires dedication and commitment. Along with academics and additional extracurricular activities, cast members have long days, rehearsing during free periods and after school for hours at a time while also completing assignments and participating in other extracurricular activities.

Junior Audrey Varley played Roxie Hart, one of *Chicago*'s two lead roles. Roxie desires fame after she is accused of murdering her lover, Fred Casely (sophomore Gordon Petrik). Varley has

been performing on and off for five years, most recently appearing in last fall's *Almost Maine*. Asked about her experience getting into character, Varley replied, "I think that memorizing lines can be a little difficult at times, but other than that, everything else is really fun to do." Some of Roxie's character traits were easy for Varley to relate to: she's ambitious, and has a "big ego," which Varley admits to being guilty of at times. However, Varley wholeheartedly disapproves of her character's actions—murder, in particular.

Co-starring alongside Varley was junior Ava Johnson, who played Velma Kelly, a rival murderess whom Roxie meets in prison. Like Roxie, Velma has lofty aspirations for trading in on her life in crime. Johnson has been acting for over a decade, appearing in last spring's *Mean Girls* and more than a dozen productions outside of school. As a result, the role came easy for her, especially since *Chicago* is one of her

favorite musicals. Although Johnson initially auditioned to play Roxie, she was attracted to Velma's confidence, "which is nice to portray on stage," she said, "especially when I'm not feeling confident." But she found the long days of singing, dancing, and late nights filled with homework exhausting.

Dancing was the most challenging aspect for Johnson. "It's the most dancing I've ever had to do in a show," she said. Working tirelessly through rehearsals, Johnson took time to memorize dance teacher Lance Martin's choreography, and in her efforts to perfect every little step, she noticed herself becoming more confident in her abilities.

Sophomore MaKenna Pappas portrayed Matron "Mama" Morton, a significant supporting role beloved by audiences. De facto leader of "Murderess Row," Mama is demanding and corrupt, accepting bribes from inmates. Like Varley and Johnson, Pappas brought a wealth of experience to

her role, having been involved in theatre in some capacity for eleven years, which made it easy for her to prepare. While she doesn't identify much with Mama on a personal level, "when you finally put on the costume—they call it 'character shoes' for a reason—you truly do feel like the person," she said. It was not necessarily difficult for her to manage the workload, but prioritizing what work to complete and reaching out to teachers for support and extensions posed a challenge.

Anxiety was another obstacle. "I feel like once you keep getting into the show, it's not as anxiety-inducing," Pappas said. "But the first show is also the scariest because you haven't performed in front of an audience." To ease the pre-show jitters, she ran her lines again and again, talking with her friends in the wings to help calm her nerves.

Tech week proved uniquely strenuous for the cast, especially in terms of managing academic work, since students were not in classes for the majority of the week. For Varley, this was an unexpected benefit: "It actually helps me be on top of everything because it engages me more with school," she said. But she was still anxious before the first performance, and as a coping strategy, she took deep breaths to ground herself, which helped her prevail through one of the biggest roles she's ever played. Johnson suffered from stage fright as well, but overcame it by doing similar breathing exercises. Overall, she was grateful to be in a supportive environment where castmates and friends had each other's backs. She continues to realize her true passion for singing, but ever since learning the choreography for the production, her enthusiasm for dancing has increased as well.

In the end, the production was spectacular, and all of the cast and crew did an amazing job, working together to ensure a flawless execution. The set was beautiful, with a lit-up "Chicago" sign and a live ensemble led by music teacher Coty Cockrell and musical director Thomas Hodges playing from the stage. But the phenomenal vocal performances of Varley, Johnson, and Pappas very clearly stood out. The duets between Roxie and Velma were not only excellent, but contributed to the emotional depth of the story. Pappas's performance was particularly strong, having transformed her into a character that is much older and more mature. As the leads, Varley and Johnson left the audience both excited and invested in how the play would progress up until the finale. The creative team led by co-directors John Viscardi and Fiona Hutchison has done it again with another fabulous and memorable production. 🎭

More than Just a Game

How college sports are shaping where students apply

By Reid Chilkowitz & Riga Toner

From packed stadiums to viral moments like Deion Sanders transforming the University of Colorado Boulder's football program overnight, college sports have never been more visible, and for many high school seniors, they are becoming a real factor in where students choose to apply.

Athletics was an important factor in the decisions of York Prep seniors Jeremy Ciment and Michael Heffernan. "I would go to a statistically worse school if they had sports compared to a better school that did not," Ciment, who committed to Colorado, said. Citing the Indiana University Hoosiers' 2025-26 national championship run as the kind of moment that puts a school on a student's radar, "There's definitely a jump in applicants after they've won," he said. For Ciment, it's not just the game: it's the community beyond graduation. Schools with big sports programs



Senior Jeremy Ciment plans to be a regular at Colorado Buffaloes games this fall.

often have tightly knit alumni bases that look out for each other for years to come.

Heffernan, who committed to the College of the Holy Cross, took a slightly different approach. While he is an avid University of Tennessee fan, he acknowledged the pull of big-time college athletics. "I saw clips

of UNC kids just running around campus after the Duke game. It just looks like so much fun," he said. "I do feel like I'll miss out on that a little." Ultimately, though, his commitment to a liberal arts education won out over the allure of a top-tier sports program.

The data supports the feelings that students such as Ciment and Heffernan are experiencing. The phenomenon even has a name: the Flutie Effect. Perhaps the most potent example in recent years is Colorado. While their first season under coach Deion Sanders in 2023 ended with a disappointing 4-8 record, it also coincided with a 20 percent increase in applicants to the university. This translated to a record 68,000 applicants for the class of 2024. Ciment named Sanders specifically as an incentive behind his decision to commit to the university.

There is also interest in whether sports achievement can influence academic reputation beyond the

application pool. While no schools have really shot up in the rankings due to athletics alone, some schools with well-known athletics programs have seen an increase in academic performance. Rutgers University, for example, jumped about 25 spots in the U.S. News & World Report ranking in the years after joining the Big Ten in 2014, which gave them a much larger audience and application pool.

The contrast to small liberal arts colleges is striking. FBS Power Four schools saw a 46 percent increase in undergraduate enrollment between 2002 and 2023, with the majority of this increase driven by out-of-state students and the associated increase in tuition. In contrast, overall undergraduate enrollment in the United States declined by eight percent between 2019 and 2022. Some schools have leaned into athletics for a competitive edge: Calvin College began a football program in 2023 and saw its enrollment increase by 15 percent. *Continued on page 14*

Submaximal Access

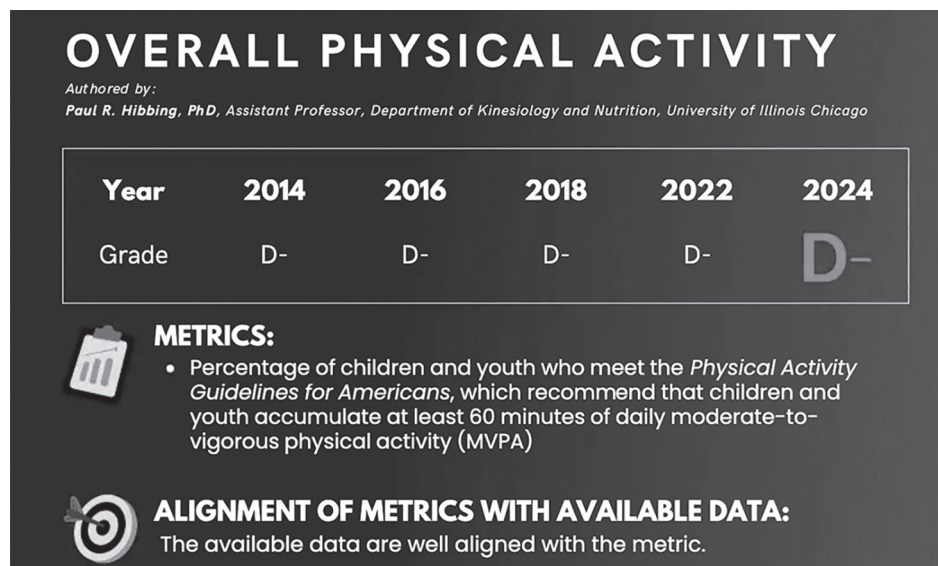
Weight room restrictions inhibit students' physical and mental health

By Sam Subracko

At a time when teens across the country are struggling to stay active, York Prep student athletes are campaigning for something simple: more time in the school's weight room. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fewer than one in four high school students in the United States get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity every day, and only about one in five adolescents meet federal guidelines for both aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercise. Student athletes argue that expanding access to the weight room during physical education classes and after-school hours would not only boost their performance but also reinforce their physical and mental health.

Currently, York's weight room is typically open only during scheduled PE periods, and even then, students say they are rarely allowed to use the equipment. "I can barely use the weight room in PE, because they do not let us," junior David Gold said. Outside of class, students can work out only if a teacher is available to supervise—a requirement that often leaves athletes wandering the hallways instead of following a consistent training plan.

For many students, the situation



feels out of step with what experts recommend. The CDC reports that just 26 percent of high school students are active for at least an hour a day, seven days of the week, even though regular activity is linked to stronger muscles and bones, healthier body weight, and a lower risk of anxiety and depression. The same data shows that physically active students tend to earn better grades, attend school more regularly, and stay more focused in class—benefits that York students say they are missing when they cannot train consistently.

Student athletes also point out that the U.S. earned a D- on the 2024 U.S. Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, which found that only 20-28 per-

cent of children and teens achieve the recommended daily hour of movement. The World Health Organization estimates that 80 percent of adolescents globally do not meet recommended activity levels, highlighting a widespread crisis of inactivity that schools are uniquely positioned to address. Allowing students to lift before or after school, they argue, would move York in the opposite direction of these troubling trends.

Comparisons to peer institutions deepen students' frustration. At Packer Collegiate in Brooklyn Heights, students have open access to gym facilities at designated times without needing an adult standing nearby. "We can use the gym at certain hours without an adult," Packer

junior Miles Soler said, describing a system that gives teenagers more responsibility while also making it easier to follow structured workout plans. Students surveyed at York believe that a similar model—set hours, clear rules, and appropriate supervision—could work in our school as well.

Research suggests that after-school training time may be especially valuable. A recent analysis of physical activity programs for adolescents published in BMC Public Health found that moderate exercise sessions lasting 15 to 60 minutes three or more times per week over several weeks significantly improved mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, stress, and even social difficulties. Other studies show that for many teens, regular exercise can be as effective as medication in treating mild to moderate depression, often without the side effects that drugs can bring. For students balancing academic pressure, college applications, and extracurriculars, that kind of natural stress relief feels essential, not optional.

"I like to use the weight room to relieve stress and it really helps me out," senior Bennett Harrison, returning captain of the varsity baseball team, said. "If the weigh troom was available after school, then it *Continued on page 14*



Field to Classroom

How Coach D builds stronger athletes and leaders

By Weller Ranson

It's Karen DeJesus's third year playing women's professional football, and her team, the New York Wolves, is up by twenty with two minutes left on the clock. With a certain win on the horizon, the coach wants to put in all the rookies. But they are all too nervous, so DeJesus takes the initiative and goes into the game. She knows the play, and she runs straight at the running back. She has tunnel vision; she doesn't see the fullback coming right at her. It's a hard hit, and DeJesus's left knee and shoulder cave in as she hears a loud pop. Later, she describes it as one of the worst pains she has ever experienced. With a torn meniscus and a blown knee, this is the end of DeJesus's football career.

Now in her second year in the athletics department at York Prep, Coach D has become integral to several sports teams and clubs. She coaches cross-country, middle school basketball, and junior varsity girls basketball, which she admits to be her favorite. Sophomore Franny Miculis has this to say about her coach: "She has really helped me push myself on and off the court and has a great, positive attitude." Since York hadn't had a JV girls basketball team for a while, many players were playing for the first time, leading to a season of losses. When asked about the future of the team, Coach D said, "We're hoping to build the program, and next year get better with more freshmen."

In addition to coaching numerous sports, Coach D teaches physical education. For her, the hardest thing about her dual role is "getting everyone on the same page, not only athletically but on perspective and mindset. There's a lot of work that ties into it; then again, PE teachers were taught to look at the bigger picture." For Coach D, coaching is not just about teaching kids how to play a sport, but also showing them how to work together and communicate effectively.

Coach D's impact off the court extends to the Female Empowerment Club, which she helps advise. This is where she talks with girls about what it means to be a woman in society and how to view life from others' perspectives. "It would have helped me a lot to have this kind of club in high school," Coach D said, grateful for the opportunity to share skills she wishes she had learned sooner with younger women.

Women in sports is an additional focus of Coach D's club. Playing women's college sports and pro football taught her the difficulties that female athletes face. While male athletes got their gear and travel paid for, Coach D remembers when she had to pay for both. In addition to those costs, "We had to really fight to be seen, fight to be televised," Coach D said. On top of all of this, "It's tougher for [women] because we can't make a career out of it."

Though Coach D has only been at York for two years, she has already left a mark on the community and

made her presence felt around the school. While coaching and teaching PE may sometimes look easy, that's exactly what pro athletes do, and Coach D is no exception.

"You're not only coaching a sport, you're teaching them life skills like effective communication, how to collaborate with one another, and how to work as a team," she said. "So you're not only building better athletes, you're building better people." ❧

Which Lady Are You? *cont'd from p. 11*

symbol of pure femininity, her poise flowing elegantly. If you believe in soulmates, romanticize everything, and care about doing the right thing, Charlotte would approve.

Miranda

As a lawyer, Miranda approaches life the way she approaches the law: rationally, realistically, and with lots of preparation. For Miranda, logic always wins the case. She is the type to cancel a date to order Chinese food, wear her hair in a messy bun, and put on the comfiest pajamas. Staying realistic in every relationship clashes with Charlotte's ritual of romanticizing everything. Miranda does not care about the little things or mixed signals—she simply moves on. Prioritizing herself, Miranda will not hesitate to break up with someone over nothing and eat chocolate on her couch while watching Jules and Mimi.

Carrie

And so I wondered . . . am I Carrie? Carrie Bradshaw is the voice inside your head that overanalyzes texts, replays conversations, and searches for meaning in every little mistake. As a writer, Carrie turns her own confusion into curiosity. She represents people who feel deeply and overthink constantly while figuring themselves out. Carrie is also a major fashion icon, known for her Manolo Blahniks and outfits for every occasion; she has a relentless hunger for shoes, shoes, and more shoes. But beneath all the razzle-dazzle is someone who struggles just like the rest of us, balancing situationships, friendship, and self-discovery in the city that never sleeps. If there's a Carrie, then there's a Mr. Big in an Armani suit nearby: the man who complicates her life, challenges her heart, and inspires her creative expression. Through their on-and-off romance, Carrie learns that love is messy and thrilling. If you like your money where you can see it—hanging in your closet—think too much, dream, and wax poetic about magical moments in Manhattan, you may just be a Carrie. ❧

More Than Just a Game *cont'd from p. 13*

cent in 2014, which gave them a much larger audience and application pool.

But the connection between sports and applications is not always clear-cut. In fact, a 2021 study found that schools with winning football and basketball teams didn't significantly affect students' deci-

sions to attend those schools. Instead, the importance of athletics was far more closely related to the strength of the campus community and students' satisfaction with their school selection.

For students like Heffernan, it's a trade-off. But for those like Ciment, the full stadium on a Saturday afternoon is at the heart of the college experience. Either way, it's clear that in today's college landscape, sports are no longer just a weekend distraction for students choosing where to apply. ❧

Submaximal Access *cont'd from p. 13*

would be a great place to go when you don't have anything to do." For athletes hoping to play at the next level, that extra time could mean the difference between falling behind and becoming "more physically advanced, elite athletes," in Harrison's words, with a real shot at college recruitment.

Harrison's perspective echoes what health professionals are saying. Sports medicine doctor Matt Bayes argues that "having a weight room available for students is 50 percent towards our goal of overall physical fitness." With only a fraction of teens nationwide meeting basic activity guidelines, on-campus facilities may be one of the most realistic ways to close that gap. With regard to weightlifting's impact on mental health, Dr. Bayes said, "Physical fitness is as effective as a prescription medication to treat depression," a claim supported by growing research on the power of exercise to improve mood and resilience.

York could fix these issues with low-cost changes like parental waivers and student-led clubs, which have been proven to expand access safely. Signed waivers detailing risks and requiring basic training would limit the school's liability, dismissing most negligence claims while opening set after-school hours, like those found in New York City's YMCA program. Student-led clubs, starting with coach oversight and leading to peer management, mirror successful models like the weights club at the French-American School of New York, and would allow York to foster independence in the weight room.

For students at York, the debate over weight room access is about more than convenience—it is about whether the school will match its policies to the science. As national and global data continues to show alarming levels of inactivity among adolescents, lifting the red tape could help build a culture of strength, responsibility, and wellness that would benefit the entire community. ❧

Trivia

Class of 2026

Crossword

How much do you know about NYC parks?

By Griffin Rome

Answers on page 16

1. Which senior is secretly a pro at Fortnite?

- a. Tony Miele
- b. Julia Gill
- c. Wyatt Simmons
- d. Louise Kulson

2. Which senior claims that they're "hilarious"?

- a. Charlotte Koops
- b. Andrew Wallace
- c. Sarah Abrams
- d. Gabe Soriano

3. Which senior is lowkey an Olivia Rodrigo stan?

- a. Smith Deley
- b. Jack Zaretsky
- c. Sofia Susskind
- d. Robert Weiswasser

4. Which senior publishes a magazine about small businesses outside of school?

- a. Dylan Taylor
- b. Aitan Greene-Houvras
- c. Cleo Neubert
- d. Jaden Roer

5. Which senior has been jetskiing since age 12?

- a. Aspen Wilson
- b. Arielle Charles
- c. Weller Ranson
- d. Cessie Haber

6. Which senior is interning with the Brooklyn Nets this summer?

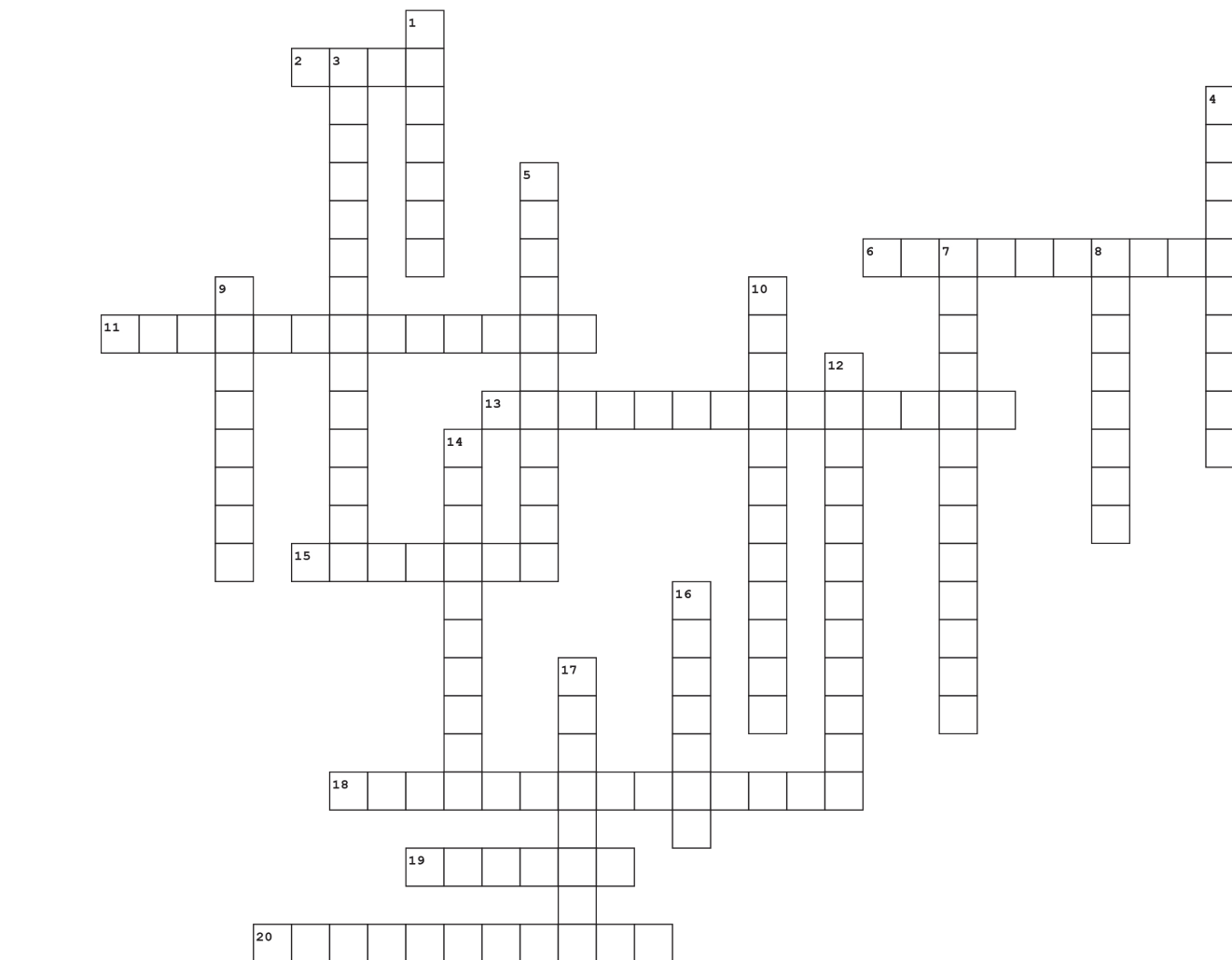
- a. Gus Hubner
- b. Rhys Auerbach
- c. Arjun Menon
- d. Jayden Sample

7. Which senior wants to work in urgent care after college?

- a. Cooper Stelwagon
- b. Kieran Smith
- c. Lya Clark
- d. Jack Zaretsky

8. Which senior has a twin brother?

- a. Phil Safdiah
- b. Cooper Cohen
- c. Ezra Greene-Houvras
- d. Reid Gall



Across

- 2. Named after the Arabic word for family
- 6. A fort during the American Revolution and War of 1812
- 11. Once owned by notorious gangster Arnold Rothstein
- 13. Home to a Wendy's
- 15. Home to the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir
- 18. Home to Manhattan's only lighthouse
- 19. Once the site of a glue factory
- 20. Named after a groundbreaking 19th century lesbian photographer

Down

- 1. Purchased from Indigenous-American chiefs in 1685
- 3. Named after one of the shortest men to ever serve in the U.S. Army
- 4. Park which is named after the Dutch word for cleft
- 5. Named after a Ukrainian Jewish immigrant
- 7. After Central Park, closest to York Prep
- 8. Houses a memorial to Vietnam veterans from Queens
- 9. Overlooks a stretch of road known in the 1910s as "Death Avenue"
- 10. Has a plaza named after one of the Tuskegee airmen
- 12. Oldest in NYC
- 14. Formerly owned by President Trump, prospective site of a casino
- 16. Named after the Chippewa word for cold
- 17. Park in Brooklyn with over 16,000 trees

9. Which senior is working at a bagel shop this summer?

- a. Lianna Zimmet
- b. Jeremy Ciment
- c. Phil Safdiah
- d. Brody Philips

11. Which senior is from Brazil?

- a. Melanie Perez
- b. Vitoria Loureiro
- c. Kenny Reyes
- d. Michael Heffernan

10. Which senior is regionally qualified in rock climbing?

- a. Quinn Johnson
- b. Quintin Kane
- c. Bennett Harrison
- d. Harry Johnson-Weinberg

12. Which senior commutes to school from outside of NYC?

- a. Liam Haus
- b. Aiden Miller
- c. Talia Hodes
- d. Elijah Blaustein

The Male LARPing Epidemic

Performativity objectifies alternative expression



By Saige Moodie

I'm sure by now that everyone and their mother has seen the trend of so-called "performative" males. Online, performative males serve as an archetype of the pseudo-intellectual, "sensitive" man, often wearing selvedge denim, loafers or army trainers, carrying a matcha and a Margaret Atwood book. But the performative male is, in reality, a wolf in sheep's clothing, invading alternative spaces to appear sexually nonthreatening. Despite his soft boy appearance, all of the performative male's actions are in pursuit of attracting female attention.

Live action role playing, or LARPing, is a term that did not actually start out as an insult. It originates from Renaissance faires, describing people dressed up in fantasy armor staging play fights. While corny, it's really not hurting anyone, but its broader effect on our culture has been insidious. LARPing has evolved into people infiltrating spaces where they imitate or pretend to be members of a community to which they don't belong. Think of LARPers as posers at a skate park—people who walk like ducks, talk like ducks, look like ducks, but are not, in fact, ducks.

While performative males generally tend to prefer only a few identifiable signifiers, LARPers exist everywhere. To be fair, everyone LARPs

every once in a while: it's the root of a much greater social problem. Everyone's talking about a movie you haven't seen? You want to feel included? Just pretend you saw it. In layman's terms, LARPing is a relatively low-stakes form of lying. Everyone does it, but normal people only do it a little bit. In order to be a LARPer, you need to have a bit of a track record, switching in and out of things like fashion or music based on what is trending or whatever is niche. The internet has made LARPing easier than ever; it's often as simple as finding a hashtag or doing a Google search. On top of this, brands often corporatize these LARPing microtrends in efforts to capitalize on them, which creates a profitable incentive to keep LARPing on the rise.

Though there are differences between LARPers and performative males, they are both incredibly harmful to the communities that they infest. There is a lot of overlap, but neither of these phenomena is new. In the 1950s came the rise of the hipster, white dudes in cities like New York and San Francisco who adopted the style, language, and tastes of Black jazz musicians. Elvis notoriously copied Black artists, and he's seen as one of the musical greats of the 20th century. In the 1990s and 2000s, musicians like Eminem invited white people to dress, act, and speak like African Americans

once again. This is an even more common practice among white youth today—I can't tell you how many times I've seen kids from Tribeca talking like they're from the hood, often using African American Vernacular English incorrectly. In fact, white people ruining any new slang that Black people invent has become a trend of its own. If you look up #thosepeople on TikTok you'll see a plethora of Black people complaining about this problem. White people stealing Black aesthetics has a long history of success, but when hipster resurfaced in the 2010s, it applied to metrosexual millennials with skinny jeans, beards, and scarves. Today, our generation has the performative male. Rather than mimicking African Americans, these hipsters turned their sights on queer culture, and by extension, femininity. In the process, the performative male has evolved to cater to the microscopic attention span of Generation Z, which makes it harder to spot them than previous iterations.

Performativity reflects a need for recognition that is, honestly, pathetic. If you're so desperate for approval, go on *Real Housewives*, and don't waste your time LARPing. Furthermore, LARPers are cowards, only invading spaces that don't push back, and when they do, they quickly get the hell out of there. I'm a mixed martial arts fighter, and when I'm at the gym, I don't see anyone LARPing through a sparring session. They'd get knocked out cold before they could even blink. I'm not advocating for a witchhunt, and certainly not endorsing violence against these frauds. However, I do think it's fair to call these people out when you're confident that they are LARPing—it's usually all it takes to shut them down.

The social media fetishization of difference has led traditionally alternative spaces to be appropriated by the LARPing of performative males. Many of the fashion, music, and art scenes that performative males tend to gravitate towards serve as queer-friendly environments and safe spaces for people in those communities. Gentrifying these spaces without acknowledging their origins and intended purposes, even unwittingly, amounts to behavior not unlike what many women of color, for instance, experience navigating the world. It's the objectification of alternative human expression.

So don't listen to Clairo because you think that it will get you girls. If you like the music, that's another story, but either way, be proud of who you are. 🏳️‍🌈

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The Paw reserves the right to edit letters containing libelous or obscene material and to omit certain sections for space limitations as long as the original meaning remains unchanged.

No AI was used in the making of this newspaper.

Trivia Answer Key
1c, 2b, 3d, 4c, 5a, 6b, 7d, 8c, 9a, 10a, 11b, 12c

Crossword Answer Key

Across	Down
2. Umma	1. Nameoke
6. FortGreene	3. MichelTriangle
11. JuniperValley	4. CloveLakes
13. KeltchMemorial	5. AbeLebewohl
15. Central	7. RichardTucker
18. FortWashington	8. Elmhurst
19. Cooper	9. Highline
20. AliceAusten	10. AqueductWalk
	12. BowlingGreen
	14. FerryPoint
	16. Kissena
	17. ProspectPark