

A photograph of a white stone wall on the left, with a concrete path leading from the bottom left towards the right. A large, dense bush of pink bougainvillea flowers is on the right, partially obscuring a set of concrete steps that lead up to a blue door in the background. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime.

INK MAGAZINE 2022-23

Be not afraid of growing
slowly. Be afraid of standing
still.

—Chinese proverb

**Friends' Central
School**

Letters from the Editors

Working on this magazine was such a joy! Daria and I have aspired to lead this club since 9th grade and are so proud to have been able to create INK this year. As a club of primarily juniors, we are coming close to the end of our high school careers and reflecting on the past three years of development, both socially and academically. So the idea of "growth" really resonated with us. Growth means an abundance of different things to different people, the perfect inspiration for writers and artists to explore their creative sides. I truly hope the readers of this year's INK Magazine get joy from the insight into FCS students' experiences and expressions of creativity. - Grace Schlegel

Trying to figure out the theme for this year was a bit of a struggle. However, when I heard "growth" I immediately knew that was perfect. Grace and I have been talking about working on this magazine for years and finally being able to do so was amazing. I am very passionate about writing, so it felt natural to work on INK. I am a very different person than I was when I started at FCS in 6th grade and even than when I started high school in 9th and the theme of growth feels like a perfect representation of high school, especially as we will soon enter the bittersweet senior year. --Daria Shepelavy

Photograph by Konrad Sieniatecki-Smith



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INK Staff: Zoë Alter '23, Grace Schlegel '24, Daria Shepelavy '24

Front Cover: photograph by Daria Shepelavy '24

Back Cover: art by Puntoni '24

Faculty Advisor: Laurie Novo

Time in Quebec --text and photos by Grace Schlegel '24

April 6th 9:00am

I'm sitting in a classroom completely zoned out, in my own world in a class full of twenty more. The only difference here is that some of *these* words are spelled out in French. Words have a different font than that of my own -and yet right now we are all thinking the same thing; this class is an hour and a half long and I've only been here for 30 minutes, no way am I making it to the end.

9:05am

Just presented something assigned yesterday, don't know why I was so nervous - not like anyone but the teacher was listening - not like I ever listened to anyone else. It's like my ears are turned in here; a floppy-eared dog with the floppy ears turned down. My thoughts follow a trail back to Philly, back to home, back to all my problems and all my joys, but if I'm being completely honest, which I rarely am, that trail is really just a leaking conscience littered with half fixed, exasperated anxieties that have no doubt followed me here. No escaping what awaits you without choice.

9:25am

Not sure what this teacher is talking about. Has nothing to do with her speaking French to me, has everything to do with her speaking boring. Feel like I'm gonna pass out in front of her - if things keep going this slowly, I'll get mine eight hours in before she's done.

9:40am Bored again, thinking about asking to use the bathroom so I can just roam around the halls of this college for a bit. Probably won't though.

10:05am

Thinking about the bus rides here. Canada is so safe a toddler could take public transportation. Here, my friends and I cross the street whenever we goddamn feel like it, the world of Canada. Guess Canada really isn't that different from home, same clothes, same problems, same joys -but God, I wish I could put my finger on it, wish I could describe it all with more direction, I wish I could make you understand, these places are not the same. --- I know it now. It's life's pace - all things here walk, they do not run - same world, different fonts.

10:26am

Breathe. During the first 48 hours in Quebec, the idea of comfort felt like a fairytale, a new environment, new people, and a new routine - only thing I could control was the lungs inside my chest. In - out. In - out, three more times, alright now do it again. I felt primitive, like my mind was on red alert, like my brain was switched to override; too many clothes in the wash, washing machine is gonna break. And so I breathe.

Alright now, do it again. Before this, despite my 17 years of age, I had never spent more than 3 consecutive nights away from my parents, I had not dabbled in the language of independence, never changed fonts all on my own.

The good

Montreal was a vacation like no other part of this trip has been. We ran through a snow blizzard into a golden church, I lit prayer candles for my mom and felt closer to the big man than I have in two years. In Quebec, I listened, learned the history of the people, learned that the French language is being co-opted by my native language and that here they call it *Anglosisme*, and learned that 30 degrees really isn't *that* cold. Well... maybe it still is.

In Quebec, we played pretend, every day after classes, we put on faces and became Merici College students who had forgotten their key cards needed in order to use the not-so-free gym. We became 30-second actors; now that was fun. Later we discovered the Chateau de Frontenac, but do not be fooled by how academic that might sound, no, our American blood runs deep through our veins, though it certainly does not run on Dunkin' - instead, the Starbucks in the Chateau was our fuel, our hang out spot, and though it may seem quite silly, I believe a piece of home that brought comfort. I can breathe in a Starbucks anywhere.



The bad

Anxiety haunted me for weeks leading up to this trip, will it be fun? Will it be freezing? Will I hate my host family more than life itself? The answer key is sometimes, yes, and no. In the airport we watched with our over-packed winter coats and sweaters as sororities from various local colleges wore their mini Kappa Kappa Gamma tees with big smiles, anticipating only parties and eternal tans. In Quebec, there certainly were times I would lie awake for an hour wondering what my friends at home were doing, wondering what I was missing in my classes, wondering about the spring break I could have had but did not.

The Ugly

Wish I hadn't cried so hard when I got my grade back on an assignment gone wrong. Didn't know it was possible to blame my whole future on a pre-rough draft failure because I read the instructions incorrectly. Feels like I let something so far away hop on a flight and join me in Canada, the land of the actual free, and yet here I was still dragged down by the academic constraints of a small PA private school, 9 hours away. Felt like a failure -- oh boy am I an ugly crier - couldn't catch my breath.

May 24th 2023

It's been about a month and a half since I arrived home, to a world in bloom from a world in snow. It felt good, so good to sleep in my own bed, to eat my own food, and to speak the language in my head. But now that time has passed, my French skills have drifted too; they did not really last.



Trusting the Unknown by Noah Perot '26

Born was a woman whose hope had grown frail
Her pulchritude great but her marriages stale
Soon Aphrodite began to descry
The beauty of Psyche (no doubt a lie!)

Inspired by jealousy, she moved to harrow
And ordered her Eros to let free his arrow
But this resolution was not guaranteed
For after one gaze he refused to proceed

Time passed her by as she waited for love;
Her parents sought aid from Apollo above
Persuaded by Delphi, they uttered her fate:
A beast foul and wicked her soul must await

With tears like the Styx she remained in despair
The wind of the west blew hope through her hair
Brought from the cliff to a room void of light,
Welcomed by kindness that lessened her spite

Assumptions defied and a heart reassured,
Still the man's face lay no less obscured
As he was sleeping she struck up a flame
Behold! this beauty was Eros in name!
A rogue drop of oil put cease to their zeal
He set forth in haste without time to appeal

Lost in her search for a mem'ry of love
At last she came unto the goddess thereof
Told by the deity one path remained:
Only through perils could love be sustained
With valor she rendered the trials complete
And thus the two lovers were able to meet.

In order to keep him, she did what she must
For love cannot live without trust.



drawing by Puntoni '24

**drawing by Zagwe
Yohannes-Johnson '23**





art by Ira Zuckman '26

Living by Sean Scott, '25

What is a lifetime other than
Days and days and days
Coming together into weeks
And months and years?

The time passes and the world
Sees a new version of everyone
With every new day.

That is part of the beauty of life.
We are not static beings
Incapable of making changes in our lives
That will help us and others.

We are able to learn from our mistakes,
Take lessons away from our failures,
And keep them in our memory,
Our ever-growing supply of wisdom.

But our lives are forever changing,
And impermanence is part of what makes
Each day and each moment a treasure.

We need to make the most of each day.
Of all the versions of ourselves the world
Could experience, let's make sure it's the best one.

Now is the time to be kind, to be friendly
Now is the time to be uplifting,
Dependable, helpful, caring
And every other good quality
That you can bring to mind.

That's what living is.

art by Puntoni '24



Poems by Ona Stocovaz '24

Oranges

There are so many poems about oranges
Detailing the sweet tang of flavor on your tongue
And the melodic quality of
Carefully peeling the tough skin
Citrus burying itself in your nails and staining your fingers
I like all the poems about oranges
They taste melancholy and smell like summer
I like how they are like me
And always share their fruit with people
Making sure everyone gets an equal piece
Of orange

Spring

It's been two hours
we still have six more to go
but it was lunchtime so we had to stop
at a plaza on the Pennsylvania turnpike
surrounded by campervans and colorful license plates
Popping the gate down with a loud thunk
The wind is cold and blows across the fields surrounding the highway
just behind the pavement and gas pumps is green
with small wildflowers stretching across the fields
they disappear into the mountains, lined with trees just blossoming
It smells like the end of winter and the beginning of something new and sweet



photograph by Vincent Yang '24

Do You Know About Salmon? by Peikun Shi '23

A large piece of garlic buttered salmon sits on his plate. Steam rises from the small slits in the animal's flesh and the fragrant smell of the ocean fills the air. He sits staring at it, wondering how he got here.

His hands lie gently in his lap, too afraid to lift and wrap around the cold silverware. His eyes trace around the room. This is his apartment. This is his kitchen. This is even his salmon. He had placed it in the fridge just two days ago and cooked it later that day, before “it” happened.

He had prepared the salmon the exact same way. Smothered in garlic and parsley with a side of wild rice. Finely chopped onions seasoned the rice. A bed of asparagus lay next to it all. A delicious meal for one. As he ate it just two days ago he wondered where the salmon had been before it ended up on his plate. Was it farmed in a small, inhumane pool? Or, was it freshly caught as advertised? If so, he wondered what its swimming pattern consisted of. Had it seen every ocean with its family? Or was it alone its entire life before ending up on the plate of some sad sack who never got anything done?

A sudden pang of anxiety overcomes him as he thinks of the moments before his own death. They were slow and drawn out – just long enough for him to remember the details before the world went dark. His life did not flash before his eyes, it merely vanished.

More anxiety builds up as he realizes that he is right here, right now. But, the feeling of his existence is strange. It's dreamlike. His hand, still placed in his lap, slowly flips over so it is gently cupping his thigh. He brings his fingers together and sharply grabs the spot where they meet. With a startle, he realizes that he is not dead. Not at all. He is very much alive.

Slowly, his breath moves in and out of his body. His chest rises and falls as he tries to expel his nervousness. His thoughts continue to race as he remembers the distinct seconds before and during his death. He is sure he crossed to the other side on that fateful April 17th. That's it.

His head darts to the left and peers at the fridge. He squints without his glasses at the calendar that has hung there for the past four months. The image of a small bird hovering over a national park seems to be taunting him. In large, bold letters he confirms that it's still April in whatever reality he has found himself in. Not only is it April, but it's April 16th. His neck flips to the other

side of his eat-in kitchen to take a look at the clock. It's dinnertime. The creases of his head appear as his brow furrows at his current reality. He is so sure of what had happened to him the other evening. How was he back here?

Glued to his seat from sheer panic, his stomach lets out a deep grumble. The scent of the delicious meal continues to fill his nose and he is more aware than ever that this exact smell had overcome him before.

He could no longer rationalize where he was, or why he was there. So, he decided to not let his salmon go to waste. Slowly he lifted his hands, still in the dream-like trance he has been in since coming to consciousness a few minutes ago. He grasped the silverware he had received as a gift from his grandmother before digging into his meal. Wondering if he was going to relive the days leading up to his own demise. Maybe this time he could avoid it.

As his plate cleared and stomach filled up, all of the thoughts he had been having paused. He savored each moment he could spend doing the mundane human task of eating. With the final bite, all of his worries resurfaced like the curious sockeye salmon that leap in and out of water.

Suddenly, the sound of a phone ringing caught his attention. An old 90s landline was trembling on the wall, shaking ever so slightly. He stood up from his meal and stepped over to it. No one had called this phone in years. His hands, warmed up from carving through the flesh of the salmon, were no longer dead weights at his sides. He lifted his right one up and wrapped his large fingers around the handle. He raised the pale yellow phone up to his ear and held it just a half a centimeter away. Just close enough that he could feel the plastic nearly touching him. But, he was unable to hear anything. So, he pressed his ear closer and the cold plastic felt alarmingly familiar. He could hear a faint noise on the other side. A tune that felt familiar but he could not place. Slowly, it got louder and louder until he realized where he knew the noise from. He slammed the phone down with a loud bang and ran to his bedroom, readying himself for an awful night of rest, knowing the next day could bring disaster.

When he woke up in the morning, he remembered all of his plans for that fateful day. All of the ones he had gone through with previously. This time, he could avoid them. This time, he could save himself.

He got up, got dressed and retired to his living room couch. For a little while, he watched the world pass by outside. He viewed the rustling leaves and passing clouds. He heard the sound of people engaging in conversation with each other. He wondered what each person's last day

would look like. Curious if they would have the chance to redo it all. If so, what would they do?

For him, it was going to be a day of nothing. This way, he could avoid the end of his life and carry on with everything else he needed to do. But part of him wondered if it mattered what he did. There was a chance he would die either way. That no matter what he did, his death was inevitable. If that was the case, was he wasting his last day? By doing nothing, he was not diving into the full potential of the human experience. He was not allowing himself the grace of doing all he could never do the previous days of his life. Everything he avoided could be done, everything he yearned for could be gotten, and everything that hurt him could be spited. Or, he could just sit and watch the world happen around him.

Knowing what he now knows, if tomorrow does come, he knows that he could live it like it was his last without the actual fear of the grim reaper hovering behind him. But, for today, he was going to live life avoiding all that there was to fear. In turn, he avoided all that there was to be grateful for. Quickly, the light of the morning faded into a beautiful golden glow. The kind of glow only an afternoon on planet earth can bring to the eyes of a human being. The sun setting indicated that it was almost time. His life could end at the exact moment it had before, or he could avoid it altogether. He lifted his arm to look at the face of his watch. He had only a few minutes until it was his time to go, potentially. The seconds dragged on, ticking quietly.

A rush of relief washed over him like a cold, spring fed river. A smile grew across his face as he finally stood up and walked toward the kitchen. A long day of doing nothing and his belly was still yearning for something to fill it. At the open fridge a small light shone onto his face. He reached his arm out, ready to grab the last piece of fish he had remaining. But, before he could, a pain came over his chest. He collapsed to the floor, clutching his heart. His eyes widened and his life once again vanished into thin air.

So, he died just like that. Again. As the protagonist of a novel, he was truly pitiful and even a little amusing. He still had many things left undone and many ideas unfulfilled, yet he died so suddenly. But perhaps, that was his fate. "Such is life", as they say. One day we are here, the next we are gone.

Along the way, his journey brought us many smiles and an equal amount of tears. His success brought us joy, as our own success brings joy. His failures evoked our sympathy; his courage elicited our admiration, his cowardice prompted self-reflection. He struggled in pain and grew in adversity; he writhed like a clown, moaned like an ill patient, thought like a saint, and greedily craved like a beast. He is noble yet unworthy; intelligent yet foolish; devoted yet fickle. He lives like a contradictory madman, simply to earn our laughter. At his core, he was human.

But, when we peel back those appearances and look closer, he is just a person, living in the world we have imagined for him. His purpose is only to provide temporary entertainment for us. One day, we will forget about him, just as we have forgotten about many other characters, both within the novel and without. Death is not his true ending. His true ending is no different from that of other protagonists and humans - to be forgotten by people.

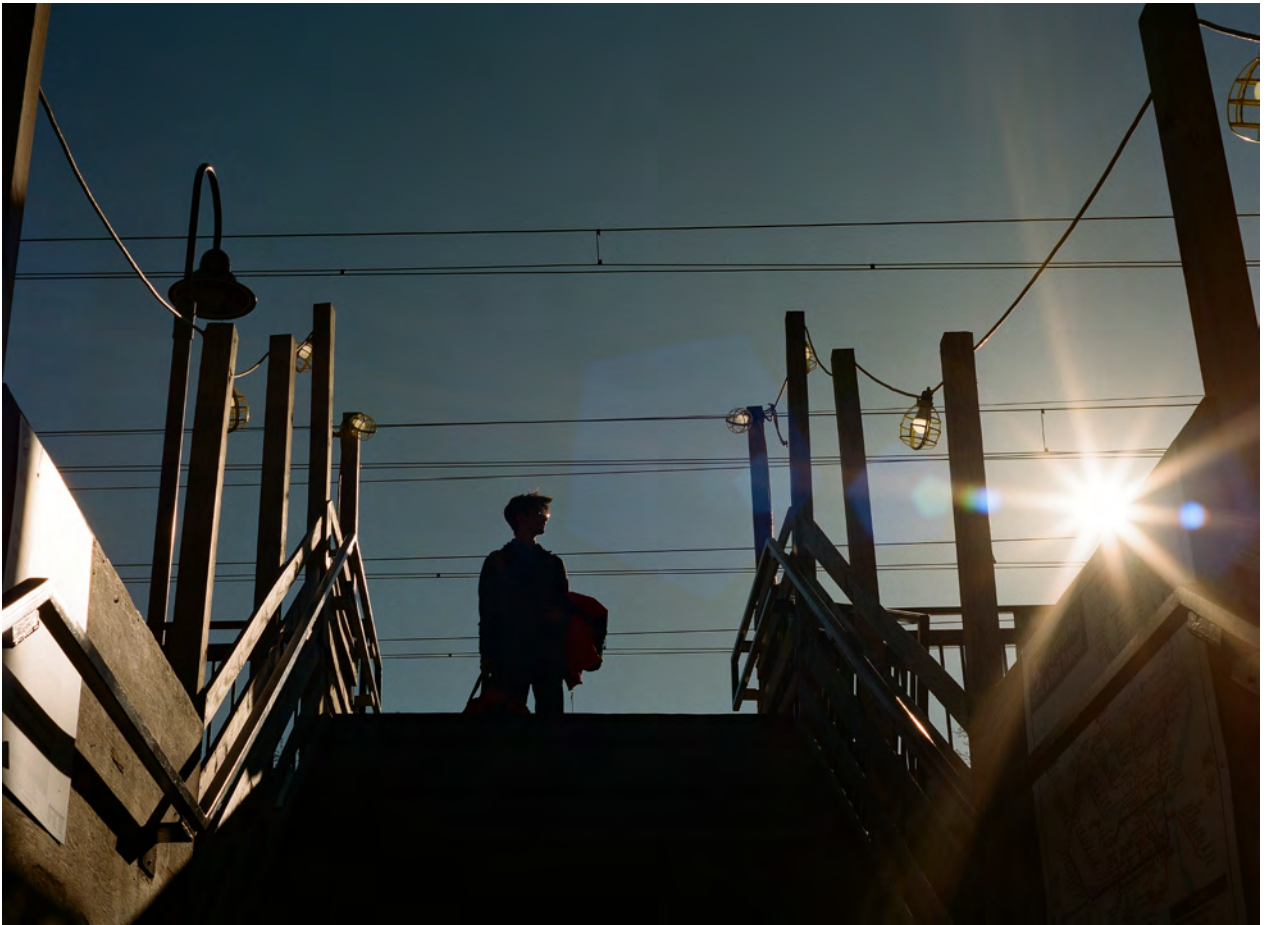
Do you know about salmon? When they are still eggs, humans and some large birds make them into a delicious meal to feed their bellies. Those that happen to survive drift and grow in the currents. When they mature, they swim upstream, traveling thousands of kilometers to return to the waters where they were born. They pass through waterfalls and dams, jump against the current, and strive forward. Escaping the claws of predators, they swim through endless currents. Despite their wounds, they bravely press on.

After overcoming many challenges, they finally reach the calm surface of a lake, the place where their mother lays eggs. Then, using all their remaining strength, they lay their own offspring and end their lives. It is a short and difficult life filled with hardship. Their bodies will nourish the trees. Their offspring will follow in their footsteps, returning upstream to fulfill their own purpose in life. Knowing that death is their ultimate end, they still follow this process. No matter what they do, they know they must die.

Just like countless novel protagonists, they come and go, performing a series of tumultuous and thrilling dramas in front of us, but in the end, they will still, like salmon, complete their brief lives in just a few years. For them, the time we see them is all they have. The death of a character is not an end, it is the end of the story that marks their end. So even though our protagonist still has many things left undone and many ideals unfulfilled, as long as we remember him and the feelings he has given us, he has not lived in vain. Even in the face of death, he will unflinchingly die.

photograph by Vincent Yang '24





photograph by Vincent Yang '24

Untitled by Ona Stocovaz '24

It's springtime and on the weekends I sit outside on my back step, ants crawling over my toes. Daffodils are blown in the warm wind, no longer yellow and bright. School is ending and the air conditioning whirrs in classrooms, louder than the teachers and distracting me from concentrating on the writing on my page. Rain drums outside and pools in the cups of tulips and tree blossoms. It smells like mulch and ivy, sweet and melancholy, the memories from winter melting with the cold. It's dawn and someone is sitting by a fire, the smokey smell drifting into our yard accompanied by the laughter of a family. Neil Young and Joni Mitchell fill the car as we go 80 on a 65, the windows down and the sunroof open. Wind drowning out our voices, and the Schuylkill River rushing beside us. We smile at each other, giddy and laughing, ready for summer, but not wanting spring to end.

art by Sofia Moran '23



cornered

wary eyes
every corner, a shadow
built of flimsy memory
the sharp, tangible fear
courses through fast beating veins
the feared, lurks
at the back of the mind
and in the corner of the room
the moment when darkness
melds with the night
and nowhere is safe,
not in the bed
or tucked away in dreams.

"Waking" by Lindsay McVail '23.

split

Something startles
in the depths of the night.
floorboard creaking
the shutting of a door.
eyes, open
a story cut off before its end.
the fog of a dream retreats
back into the shadows,
translucence rushes with a hurried fervor
as it races against memory.

time

heart, beats
woe builds itself
around memory, like a cocoon.
when the ice melts
in the coming of the sunrise,
all that is left is a shell.
beating, still.

photographs by Daria Shepelavy '24



Timeless Witness by Poyraz Ozer '25

I am standing in front of the heavy, yellow iron garden gate next to my father. It is a foggy November morning. We open the gate and nobody is there to welcome us. Such an unusual feeling as we visit Beykoz almost always during the summer time. Today, everything is gray: the sky, the sea, the trees, so intensely gray that I can smell it.

The summer mansion is in a quiet historical village in Istanbul, called Beykoz, next to the Bosphorus Strait located on the Asian continent facing the European continent. My great-grandfather bought the historical house more than 70 years ago and left it to his five children, including my grandma. The house was later divided into five separate houses, after many renovations. Each of them had their own house, sharing the garden and the dock. The house is near the Beykoz town square, an area of Beykoz that's filled to the brim with life and spirit. Now, the grandchildren and their families live there every summer and nobody dares to think about selling their house.

My grandma's colorful mosaics on the wall remind me of my summers here. I remember myself standing in front of the heavy, yellow iron garden gate, full of excitement. On the other side of the globe, I am expected. I am one step away from my grandparents, cousins, sea, cats, scent of the sea, nowhere else to be found. The gate opens, and I can see the blue sea at the end of the green tunnel. "Welcome home," whispers a soft voice into my ear. I am home away from home. A gentle, soft, comforting hug that soothes me like no other hug, a kiss on my cheek, my grandma's perfume, a table fully covered with my favorite foods. "Hi Poyraz," says one of my cousins, shy, waiting for my response. Another cousin makes fun of my appetite; my mouth is full with dolmas. They are waiting, observing. I know that in a couple of hours we will be fishing, joking, and swimming together.

My father's voice brings me out of my thoughts. We check the empty garden, then the empty house, and open the balcony door looking over the empty dock. I see the fishing gear left under the stairs at the entrance. Used millions of times, the fishing box is waiting to be opened again.

I remember our fishing days. They are always such fun days, especially if we go with cousins. I know we are ready to go when my grandma yells to my father to make sure we got our jackets in case the weather turns on us. Then everybody has an idea on the best spot to go fishing. While watching out for the big mighty ships, we cradle in our boats, waiting for the bluefish. Even when we return empty-handed, our hearts are always filled with the satisfaction of feeling the sea.

Unlike these good old days, it's so quiet here today that it bothers my ears. Even the seagulls avoid us. Everywhere can be quiet but not Beykoz. It is a strange silence. Everything is more fun with the whole family. This is why we also celebrate my birthdays during the summer although my actual birthday is in November. In Beykoz, my big family gets together over the summer time; this is when the beautiful spirit of Beykoz really flourishes. Birthdays at Beykoz consist of a long table set outside on the dock, filled with amazing Turkish food. At one end of the table, my father and his cousins are having a great time. They are usually conversing about what they did in Beykoz during their childhood and telling stories about their ancestors, lost ones. They had so many fun memories swimming, fishing and playing together, and sometimes making their elders angry with their mischievous behavior. When they were children, the sea was cleaner, the boats were all wooden and the area was quieter. On the other end of the table, my grandma and grandpa eat together with their siblings and their spouses. We, children, can't stay still for longer, we run and play until my grandma brings the cake. After the cake, I am sitting next to the gigantic pine tree facing the blue sea, hiding under the shadows, sipping my fresh cherry juice. The northeast wind, "Poyraz," carries the iodine scent from the Black Sea and tells me stories through the branches, very old stories about Beykoz, about my family members who sat here, right where I am sitting now. The roots of the tree go deep into the Earth, like a Sufi dervish; the tree connects the sky to the Earth and me to my ancestors.



**photograph by Konrad
Sieniatecki-Smith '23**

The heavy, yellow iron garden gate separates two different worlds. One side is peaceful but full with fun seaside and the other side is the crowded, noisy road between historical houses and small shops. But today, the gate separates a sorrowful seaside from the same crowded, noisy road. Life goes on. Once you pass the road and go up to the hills, it's yet another world.

Overseeing the whole Bosphorus, the hill is visited by many praying for their wishes at the shrine. My grandma likes hiking to the hill, she remembers her childhood. I remember her perfume when she hugs me on the hill, showing me different parts of the Bosphorus, telling me mysterious stories of the past. However, there won't be any hugging, kissing and "babaanne's" perfume this summer. What can I do, what should I do? Time is our enemy, tick tock, tick tock, can we stop it? No, says my inner voice, it always wins.

I will wait in front of the heavy, yellow gate this summer before I enter. It won't be the same as before. I know that, but there will be a family waiting for me at the end of the green tunnel with open arms. It is my second home, it will be my children's and their children's home and I will teach them how to be a part of this house so that they can say: "They lived."

I am sitting on the dock, gray clouds move from north to south, huge oil tankers, boats, seagulls crisscross the sea, the sky. Waves hit the bottom of the dock; blump, blump, blump. A deep familiar noise. Everything is moving in front of me and in front of the house. The house and I quietly sit at the shore and observe the changing view. "Do you see the rockfish, the colorful one?" asked my grandma a couple summers ago.

We were sitting on the same dock. "Is it istavrich?"

"No, it is not istavrich, it is pronounced istavrit anyway. You should be careful with your pronunciation," says my grandma.

"But I like to say istavrich." She smiles.

"I will teach you how to catch a seahorse by using a bucket tonight," she says.

I get excited. She forgets to teach me how to use a bucket to catch a seahorse.

However, maybe she will teach it to me next summer, or maybe the next one.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, oh, somebody please stop the time. Over my shoulder, I look at the huge house.

"Are you listening to my thoughts? Do you remember that day?" The house keeps quiet, erect and proud of itself.

My feet are touching the water. I can see the fish chasing each other, with a rock fish in the background. The fish remind me of my family. The fish are always swimming, they are always curious on what to do next. Even if the fish don't know what to do in life, and they are lost in the big sea, they still continue swimming. I'll continue swimming at Beykoz. Beykoz will always be a special place for me. It's my home away from home, so far away yet close to my heart. It is my big family, my past but also my future. It is a place full of adventures, mysterious yet very familiar. Above all, it is filled with my my grandma's spirit, that will live with us in her garden of hydrangeas, her balcony looking over the Bosphorus, her mosaics on the wall and her Beykoz stories in my mind.

ceramics by Ira Zuckman '26





Jinx from Arcane: League of Legends

Chiara Del Testa '25



Mico Carpiello '25

How to be Popular by Daria Shepelavy '24

Being popular is hard. Anyone who tells you differently has clearly never experienced it. As someone who has, I can tell you right now that it's no cakewalk. I know what you're thinking: "How can it possibly be hard to be well-liked?" Well, you ignorant little soul, I'll tell you. Just like most things, there are rules to being popular, and you have to follow them exactly or your chances of being Prom Queen are shot.

Despite what you may think, being yourself *does not* make you cool. That's a lie that's sold to you by the media in order to make losers feel better about themselves. In order to not only gain, but keep, your status as number one on the social pyramid you have to do everything and BE everything that I say.

Rule number 1: Be good looking

Look, I'm not gonna beat around the bush — there are some ugly people out there. This is a fact. And no offense to those people, but there's no way they would ever be popular. I mean look at every Queen Bee in movies. Regina George, Heather Chandler, Cher Horowitz. What do they all have in common? They're *hot*. Thus, being beautiful is a much needed requirement. You and I both know you're not perfect. But no one else should ever think that. So slap some makeup on your flaws, photoshop your Insta pics, wear expensive flashy clothes to distract from your flaws, pretend they don't exist and convince everyone around you that they don't. If you aren't good looking, then why should people even care about you?

Rule number 2: Be unattainable

It's not enough to be attractive, you have to be *wanted*. Being popular means cultivating an incredible amount of superiority and the irresistibility of Aphrodite herself. People only want what they can't have. You have to make yourself so incredibly unavailable that people would do absolutely anything just for a glimmer of hope that they have a chance. (As if.) Flirt with a guy and break his heart, make him fall in love with you but don't love him back. You also have to keep up the image of being better than everyone else. No one is worthy of your attention, but God do they want to be. Make sure people remember that you are superior and no one deserves you. Make sure they know that the only way they can have you is in their deepest fantasies.

Rule number 3: **Keep the people interested**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the definition of popularity is the “state or condition of being liked, admired or supported by many people”. I don’t know about “liked” here, but you must keep those around you admiring you. If they stop doing so, all your power goes away. If that means lowering your standards for a temporary time to be in a drama-filled relationship or a drunken hookup that “was meant to be a secret” or a petty catfight with a friend, then that’s what you have to do. Start — or better yet, be — a rumor, lie about meeting a celebrity, break up a relationship, it doesn’t matter. All that matters is making sure that you are always on people’s minds. That is the most important thing of all. If you are not filling other people’s social media feeds, why even bother being on top of the social food chain? If people aren’t thinking about you all the time, then what’s the point?

Rule number 4: **Keep people afraid**

Everyone wants to be popular. That’s, like, the whole point of high school. So, what’s stopping them from taking your crown? *Fear*. If people are scared to mess with you then you don’t have to worry about your position at the top being threatened. Make sure people know that if they try to ruin you, they will never be able to show their face at the school again. (See above: rumors, break-ups, drama that will make you look good...them, not so much.) Your reputation is important and that means you have to keep it. Rule through fear. If someone tries to expose you for doing something bad, then frame them for your wrongdoings. That’s the only way to make it to the top and stay there. I know it sounds like the kind of thing everyone tells you not to do, but trust me those people are losers, don’t listen to them.

Rule number 5: **Make popularity your main priority**

Forget academics and athletics and all that boring stuff. Being popular is the most important thing you will ever do. It is the only reason to be alive right now. None of these rules matter if you don’t care enough to make sure this is the biggest thing in your life. After all, who you were in high school defines you for the rest of your life, so why not be the best? You know what they say: Life’s winners are those who peak in high school. Sure, those coming of age movies try to tell you the opposite. Those are all lies created to convince lesser people that they aren’t pathetic, made by those who never even had a chance at being popular. If you don’t make it to the top of the high school food chain then you’re doomed to spend the rest of your life in a puddle of failure. So make sure that this is the most important thing in your life at all times.

Of course, there are side effects to being popular, just like everything. They really aren't that bad and you will totally be able to handle them. These side effects include things such as; an aversion to new students, a tendency to be disliked by everyone around you, bad grades from being so single-minded, a constant state of anxiety from always having to be perfect, and the ever-so-anticipated comeuppance. On the other hand, if you experience these side effects then it just goes to show how successful this guide is and how high up in the social pyramid you are. Congratulations!

So ladies. There it is, your simple and compact guide to popularity. Trust me when I tell you that it is the greatest thing you'll ever experience. Immense superiority is an incredible feeling and you should be lucky to obtain it. Goodbye baby prom queens and good luck.



picture by Ira Zuckman '26

I have never been in a plane before. When I first introduce this fact about myself to people, they look at me funny, curling their lips down and furrowing their brows, cocking their head to one side and staring at me. Just staring at me, like I am going to smile back at them and say 'I'm kidding, of course I've flown before, how silly.' Instead I look down at my feet and tuck my hands in my pockets to stop myself from picking at my fingers. I smile sheepishly and there is a moment of awkward nothingness where neither one of us knows what to say, until finally I have to break the silence.

"How many times have you flown?"

"Where does your family go each time?"

"Yeah my family just doesn't get around much, that's all." And then they'll be sucked back into their vacations and resorts and leave me and my family's traveling habits alone.

I love planes, I love the concept of flying, soaring through the air with nothing holding you back except what your own mind limits you to. I used to dream of being a pilot and going to school just to learn how to switch the buttons in a cockpit and learn how to deploy the wheels to land smoothly on a flat tarmac. My dad used to drive his old pickup 45 minutes to an independent landing strip. We used to park and just sit and watch the planes take off and come in, one after the other. They would always stay within eye range when they were in the sky, soaring over us in circles, over and over again, all just to come back and park on the grass next to me and my dad. The strip was long and narrow with a small hangar next to the even smaller parking lot, a single helipad sat not so far from where we would sit. The landing pavement itself was not more than 20 yards from where we watched, the only thing separating us was a dinky wired fence with a red and white sign that said "NO LOITERING".

One time, a passenger plane had found its way into our airport, its blue and white body shining in the summer sun. The gate that separated us from the strip had just been left open and it creaked in the wind. My dad ushered me out onto the burning asphalt and we dashed across it to examine the new plane up close. It was a small private jet, positioned perfectly for boarding, with the nose pointed at the orange sun, just now setting and painting the sky a brilliant mix of pink and purple. The door wasn't down and my dad had to lift me up so I could peer inside the cockpit and try and figure out which light meant what. My dad's back got tired easily and he had to set me down after a while, leaving me down to run around the plane, reaching to

touch the wings and feel the hot metal on my fingers. After a few minutes of ogling the mechanical beauty, the pilot found his way onto the blacktop and curtly herded us away and back to our rightful spot behind the fence. My dad popped down the back of his pickup and backed it up onto the grass, bumping over the curb when he did. We sat there eating dinner from an old red cooler that we had packed before we left. We sat there, my legs dangling off the back and the blue plane glistening in the little light that was left until the sun fully set, leaving me with drooping eyes leaning on my dad's shoulder.

When we got home and I shuffled into bed, I told myself that I would be a pilot. The next day I would go home and tell my mom all about the blue plane and how I could touch its wings and feel the heat radiating off of them. I would wave goodbye to my dad from a window as he pulled away from my house and I would promptly run upstairs to my room to try and figure out what the best school for flying was and how I could get my piloting license at 13. Eventually my mother would make her way up to my room to see me defeated, curled up on my bed, staring at the tiny whirring plane hanging from my ceiling. She would console me and say that even though we wouldn't be able to afford for me to fly, I could still touch the clouds. I could still reach the top of the trees and further, spread my wings and meet the sun in the bright blue sky, soaring over the ocean with my hair blowing in the wind and the salt spraying on my face.

My dad and I went one more time after that. The blue plane was gone, replaced by yet another light aircraft, ready to be swept up into the wind and taken away. We didn't go back after that, and I was ok with that. I kept some model planes hanging from my ceiling and balanced on my desk, sometimes wishing that they were more. I watch planes as they pass by in the sky, like tiny ants crawling above me, I compare their flashing green and red lights to the stars next to them, counting how many they pass as they go. I wonder what it would be like to be up there, and looking down at me, amongst all the little houses and little streets and cars that just look like little specks of dust from so high up.

I wish people would know this when they stare at me while I try not to make the difference between us too apparent. I wish I could say proudly that I have never been on a plane. And I wish that I was the one staring awkwardly at the girl with mismatched socks and a wrinkled t-shirt who was trying so desperately not to be different from the rest of us. But I'm not that person, I have to breathe deeply and smile back. At night I can look up at my ceiling and count the plastic stars and dream of being up there with them, and I will make it there someday. Just like my mom said, I can reach for the skies and make it there, stretching my wings and flying.

1; Rainfall dancing. by Puntoni '24

Pit, pat, patter,
The rain announces its entrance.
Ringing out like a group's chatter,
To whatever may be in its presence.

That 'what' includes a person.
Each drop adding to the tension,
That's brewing under his stoic face.
With what can these raindrops be laced?

They invoke in the poor bloke
An emotion many try to cloak.
It's the well known feeling of jealousy,
Which befalls the man as a regular tendency.

He yearns for what he can't have,
And all he wants, is to be able to dance.
As he watches the raindrops fall.
He is encased by it all.

Falling with the passion of a mating ritual.
Matching a rhythm which goes unheard.
The rain seems perpetual,
To the man who wishes to be part of the herd.

The beauty of it all,
It seems to call.
For people to observe.
Their grace forever preserved.

The man is filled with jealousy,
For he can't dance,
So he waits relentlessly,
For an unlikely chance.

2; *The grace of smoke.* by Puntoni '24

A dance can be observed.
Perhaps even a tune can be heard.
If you wander to the water.
When the sky has grown darker.

A mixture of nature and mankind,
Coming together to bind,
Something that can be compared to a dance,
Reckoning from you an uncertain glance.

It's the smoke on the surface,
Of that boundless lake,
The remains from the furnace,
Slithering like a snake.

It circles and moves with such grace,
Tranquil but yet with a steady pace,
Forming movement only nature could create,
The surface of the water creates a blank slate.

Then it reaches the end of the verse,
And you witness the smoke disperse.
No traces of the spectacle left,
As you blame time for its theft.



drawing by Puntoni 24

Whale Song by Zoë Alter '23

He's standing on that prow, large shirt disobeying his body, showing the sharpness of his shoulder blades, the way his chest concaves, his sloping figure, wind ballooning his pants around prepubescent legs. So this is his first hunt, only one he's done, one that'll let him know who he really is. See how his hands quiver, he could blame it on the wind but I doubt it. His hair's too long, it's plastered to his head like a hand, holding his scalp and skull in its palm. He shifts from side to side, wet floor threatening to make him fall, bare feet with no tread bearing the weight of the gale. Storm up, down, all around, he was in the middle, coming through the center like a bullet, waiting for the end.

Whale Song

I wrap rope round my waist, lest I fall overboard and get consumed by the writhing tide. My arm's a sharp tipped arrow, iron at the tip of a bow, harpoon clenched so tightly in white knuckled fists that it is me, and I am it, metal and flesh all in one. It's a summer rain, and I wonder if that's why the sea screeches thus, or maybe it howls because it knows the pain I am to inflict on its heart: a whale hunt, me with the harpoon, my brothers with the shouting and hollering, me with my eyes squinted, them with their feet running and slipping across wooden planks frothing with sea foam. Neptune is mad at us, or some god within the womb of the dark wet. The boat is shaking from within, and the sky trembles with fire and thunder.

The sea boils, rolling this way and that, opaque completely other than the translucence of the white, and the spot meters ahead of us, where a ridge rises and falls, splitting open the earth as if it were a bloody wound, cresting and spitting out salt ever so often. Men, shouting and pointing, screaming and calling each other by names that could be theirs, could be others, could be mine. A creaking of ropes, and a screech of a sail, the wood groans as our beast slowly draws closer and closer to the soul of the sea that flees in front of our watching eyes.

I look to the canvas and see that it looks as though there is almost a face pressed against it, a huge face, grimacing, features distorted and barely visible, jeering at

me. The wind chastises me, my harpoon, my unsteady feet, my nails ground to stubs by dull teeth. Then the wind changes and the face disappears, looking in the opposite direction. I turn my salted eyes back to the vision in front of me- we have finally drawn closer, and I can see the target, back black against dark gray. I'm tied to the mast like Odysseus, as he begged all of those around him to let him swim to his demise. Soon I will be able to release from the tips of my finger a blow that is more steady than the wives of all must endure, blows that elicit no screams, no crying, no reaction other than a shudder and submission.

I can hear the singing of the old blind lady who begs on the dirty street, hands dusty and a deeper ochre than the coins dropped in them. The way she grabs onto the cuffs of your clothes, fingers leaving mud-banks behind on the fabric, but all the while her singing never stopping. Her song is so strong that I barely notice that it is getting louder and louder, so loud that it covers the entire sea in a quivering hum of sound, a song coming right from the broad back, the strong tail. The sheer mass vibrates, making it seem even bigger, even more omnipotent. The whale, now, is singing. It has noticed our presence no doubt, as we are almost upon it, man touching man, a hand on my shoulder as encouragement seeps through one ear, and the song seeps through the other. It remains where it is, caressing the water in its aquatic flight- a plummet in my bosom when I realize it believes our attention is loving, our boat is a friend.

The song grows louder and louder, the fins on the tail rip through the surface with more vigor than a thousand men, and then there is more white in my eyes than just the foam, a splashing design of colors contrasting against the black, the flukes a constellation of mighty design. We are now alongside it, looking down as its body eclipses our boats. The music is inhuman, loud, more of a crooning than a harmonization, and the instructions into my ear grow louder in accordance. Rains pouring down on me from heaven, words and howling in my head, I'm slicker than the whale, drenched, and a hand pounds on my back and the yelling increases, the singing grows louder and louder, so loud that it's deafening, the hand hits harder, I have to do it now.

I let my hand release, white knuckles fading, a barb of gray lightning plunging down, down, until it meets its match of gray flesh. It splits gray skin, exposes pink,

the pink of a man's muscle underneath his skin, fat and veins and blood. The whale bucks, body flinching, and there's a moaning scream. My face catches a blast from a blowhole, the rope around my waist tightens till my ears ring, the rope taut, one half on me, one half on the whale, one half on the ship, no that's not right there are only two halves and I am in the middle. And the whale is screaming, and I am getting pulled, seamstress-like. I picture Moirai with her shears, hanging right over the rope, threatening to cut it, breaking a bond and creating a loss.

The rope pulls me to the edge of the ship. Another boom of thunder, mixing with the titanic waves that tilt the ship almost onto its side, I slip backwards, fall down, begin slipping towards the end. So it is diving now, I realize, it's diving, I did it wrong, it shouldn't be able to move, it's alive. I am being tugged at from my center towards the chasmatic abyss. Hands cover my body, men holding me, trying to pin me down, someone's on my waist, someone's hands around my shoulder. A glint of silver, a knife struggling to cut the thick, thick corded rope. I can hear the screeching, the sobs of betrayal, from over the ship's deck. It tilts more and more, and I can see the ocean now, and I can see the whale's churning tail and side as it flees from its disturbance into the deep.

The boat deck is at an almost vertical angle now, any more and it will flip over, like kicking a stone to see the underneath, and then dashing the ants down into the place of nothingness. A bigger knife is brought out, more of a machete. I turn to the man holding it, he stumbles not towards me, but towards the mast that I am tied to. There is a sinking inside of me, as I begin realization of exactly what that means, exactly what will happen, how it will happen, and how swiftly it will happen.

I don't even hear the blade fall, I just feel the tension of the rope subside- where it was once pulling in both ways, now it only pulls towards the blackened maw below me. And I am falling, falling swiftly, I am screaming, the boat is ricocheting back to its original position, a huge wave of water erupts as it slaps back down to safety, and I am plunged into the dark. My hands flail in silence, desperately pushing to stay afloat, tides and currents above and below, gaping for watery breath as rain and salt alike fill my nostrils, my lungs, my chest, my eyes. My hand hits something warm, firm, hard. It slides under me. A crack of lightning splits the sky open, and I see it, right in front of me, the lightning from above illuminating the underwater realm of living I have entered. The whale, eye open, staring into me.

My thrashing motions come to a still, oxygen settling down to almost nothing. In that eye, that iris, there's nothing. A timeless sense of time, a heatless blaze, a heart deep inside there beating and beating, a heart that I tried to stop. But nevertheless, the heart lives, three, four, five times the size of mine, of mine still beating but slower. I can feel every pulse in my body, all in this one bolt of lightning. It's like I'm still on board, their hands still touching me, pounding on me, voices still yelling. But instead it is silence, just me drowning, the whale watching, harpoon stuck out of its back, hot blood dripping down its side, red turning into small shapes like roses under the surface.

And just like that, the lightning is done, and the sea is dark again, I can see nothing, the whale is gone, diving deeper. I wonder if it'll ever resurface, ever dare offer its back to the men of the sea. Selfishly I hope it never will, I want it to stay down there, down below where its form melts into nothingness, everything too uncertain to have a form. I wonder if when I'm down there I'll have that same form, all melted and unshapen, all fluid in a current of time.

If I had gone home, shirt and pants slick to my body, showing every curve and shape, I'd open my door and see my shadow cast down on the ground, looking gargantuan and tall, thrill-inducing. Steps forward, feet making barely a sound on the ground, keep the door open and just keep watching downwards me glide silently across the room. The expanse of my shape is dark and wide, promising. The two-toned shoes, lying on the ground, worn and wrought, begging for me. The sun sets as I slip them on, erasing my giant in its own gloom.

I take a step and they slip right off.

