

Oneirata 2021



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2021

The Literary Magazine of Hastings High School

Editor in Chief

Caroline Anderson

Faculty Advisor

Ms. Walters

Editor's Note

The literary magazine was put together in a COVID-esque manner: an isolated individual working from home in pajamas. Many pieces reflected the same themes of loneliness, yet the literary magazine has never had such a unified collection of pieces. The separation itself was unifying, since we all had the universal experience of having friendships reduced to reaching out through screens and occasional walks and of having our schedules thrown off balance. As destructive as the experience is, the magazine seems to have notes of hope with the COVID-19 Epiphany Papers. Together they tell a story of strength, stronger appreciation for other people and a stronger sense of self. Writing has been a way to get to know myself, even when the subject has nothing to do with me. There's always some underlying reason why I choose to write what I do, and the mood of the piece gives insight into how I feel at that moment. Each character carries a small reflection of me, maybe the tone of their voice or an experience we share. It is a way to put myself out in the world behind a mask, something we're all very familiar with by now. But I think the best part of this edition of the magazine is the irony that most of the pieces are those that show the person behind the mask and take a moment of deep self-reflection, which made being the editor incredibly gratifying. I hope you enjoy the finished product almost as much as I enjoyed making it. ~ Caroline Anderson

A Note from Ms. Walters

As we enter summer, that traditional time-honored emblem of freedom, we enter it differently than we did last summer. We appreciate a hot cafeteria, an uncomfortable desk, a packed schedule, a noisy hallway as integral parts of what makes school fulfilling. After a year of more enforced solitude and quiet than we'd ever imagined, we seem to know ourselves and what we need a little more. The contributions in this year's magazine show how fear, weakness and worry aren't eternal; in fact, they just might be the flipside to hard-won fortitude. Some of these pieces come from English or Creative Writing class assignments; others students crafted on their own. I'm so grateful to Caroline for the time she spent thoughtfully pairing art submissions with the literary ones and for showing initiative, passion and an overall sunny attitude while working on this magazine. Thank you Ms. Gilbert and Mr. Merchant for the art contributions from your students and Nidia Ferrara for printing hard copies of the magazine. I wish you all a wonderful summer.

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Roots

I don't exactly know why
I turned down that promotion today.
Outside the window, the willow tree's gnarled arm
reaches for the last dregs of light in a watery sky.
A petal of pale gray skin spans the pad of my index finger,
new and tentative where I nicked myself
cutting carrots for dinner last week.

Somewhere in my stomach, restlessness stirs.
I'll let it brew.
I buy a new quilt every time I move cities
and there's a hole in mine,
only the size of a dime, an oddly even tunnel
through sage green yarn.

I know I should be climbing up some ladder but it would kill me
to dig my roots down even further into this soil.
I don't want to reach for anything, only
the consistency of my dinners for one,
that thin orange film of oil on top of the dishes soaking in the sink,
the shrill cry of the kettle in the afternoon and the same playlist
every night. Lemon peels and eggshells in the compost.
The coolness of a fresh silk pillowcase
each Thursday.

For now, I'll let it brew;
a Saturday later, I go to Bed, Bath & Beyond and roam the aisles,
not to buy anything but to run my eyes over the possibilities;
paisley, navy blue, alabaster.
Sink into sleep at ten and dream of the crisp edges
of a letter of resignation, the familiar heft
of those cardboard boxes waiting tensely in the living room closet,

wake up with my twitching fingers tangled in yarn,
stretching the hole in the quilt.

Julia Gardner

Phone Poem

My phone is like my airpods,
Connecting me to a new world while disconnecting me from an old one.
Our phones are like maps,
Guiding us if used correctly, but a couple wrong steps and we are more lost than before.
My phone is like food,
Providing a multitude of benefits only if used in moderation.
Our phones are like clothes,
Leaving the house without them would be a nightmare.
My phone is like a glass bottled soda,
Offering pleasure when opened, but closing it is a whole different challenge.
Our phones are like us,
Running out of battery at the end of the day.

Austin Birkedal



Roisin O'Flaherty- AP Art

I Was Ready to Bust Out of the Closet with Rainbows and Glitter

Daniel walked into the living room with two steaming glasses of tea. He placed one on the mid-century coffee table and sipped from the other one in his hand. He ran back to the kitchen and grabbed the banana smoothie he made for Melissa, then he came back and sat down next to his husband Owen and their daughter in their comfortable, small home.

"Here we go," Daniel said with a cheerful hum underneath his breath. Daniel glanced over at Owen, looked around their home and breathed in the warm, fresh air. He stood up for a moment to go to the window. He opened the shades allowing the strong rays of light to seep through. He stood there for a moment and absorbed the sunlight through their ceiling high windows. He took a moment to appreciate his life; something he hadn't done in a long time. He turned around and while walking back to the couch, he caught sight of a picture of Owen and him while he was in the Marines. Now, he was so thankful to have that part of his life behind him.

The night before Daniel was deployed to Iraq he visited his mother. Reentering his childhood home at the age of twenty, he never believed he would visit for the reason he was there that night. He walked up the thin staircase and into his mother's room. The aged, creaky door squeaked as he stepped through the entry. His eyes were already watering and his nose and cheeks were all rosy.

"Danny," his mom said, in shock. "Come here, what's wrong?" she asked, but he didn't respond. He steadily walked towards her, trying his best to avoid eye contact. Then, he laid down on the floral comforter, put his head in her lap and cried. The tears fell down his cheeks like a waterfall, pouring down strong and fast. Daniel's heart continued to break because he wasn't prepared to tell his mother why he was crying. He couldn't tell her that he was in love.

Back in their suburban house, Owen headed up the stairs to their bedroom to grab three blankets before they started watching their usual Sunday morning television program.

"Daniel, where are the blankets?" he yelled down the hall.

"They should be in the bottom drawer of my dresser."

Owen opened the drawer and yelled back, "Got it." As he lifted the blankets out of their neat fold at the bottom of the dresser, he noticed at least ten pieces of paper hidden below. He got on his knees, pulled them out and began to unfold them. Owen began skimming through a few of the letters, and as he made his way to the bottom he saw the signature - from Lisa.

When Daniel was deployed for the first time, Owen decided to write him letters once a week and sign them as Lisa; in case they were ever found. This was the only way they could keep their relationship a secret. Owen would find a piece of paper and pencil, sit in his office chair at his desk and write. He would share about what he was doing back home and ask about how Daniel was, too. Then moving from his desk to lying in his cold bed alone, Owen would wait for days, and sometimes months, to find a letter in his mailbox. What he preferred even more than a letter, was a phone call. The landline just sat there, lonely, miserable waiting for someone to call. But, Daniel was only able to call him once in a blue moon, so he never got his hopes up. Owen would often think about how Daniel could be severely hurt or falling out of love with him as he was writing the letters week after week. It felt so unsettling. He wondered why they were waiting so long to come out and tell their friends and family how they truly felt about one another.

"Just two imperfect people refusing to give up on each other," Daniel said as he peered over Owen's shoulder at the letter in his hand. Owen spun around, taken off guard, but then exhaled and smiled.

"You saved these?" Owen asked.

"Why wouldn't I?" Daniel responded without any hesitation.

"I just thought-" Owen started, but was then suddenly interrupted.

"These were the reasons our relationship lasted while I was away," Daniel sat on the floor next to Owen and looked straight into his wide, hazel eyes. "You never gave up," he said. "We never gave up."

Owen smiled and Daniel continued, "Like I always say, by the time I left the Marines I was ready to bust out of the closet with rainbows and glitter."

"You and I both," Owen said as he carefully folded the letter back into a little rectangle and laid them into the drawer. Daniel stood up and helped Owen gather the blankets.

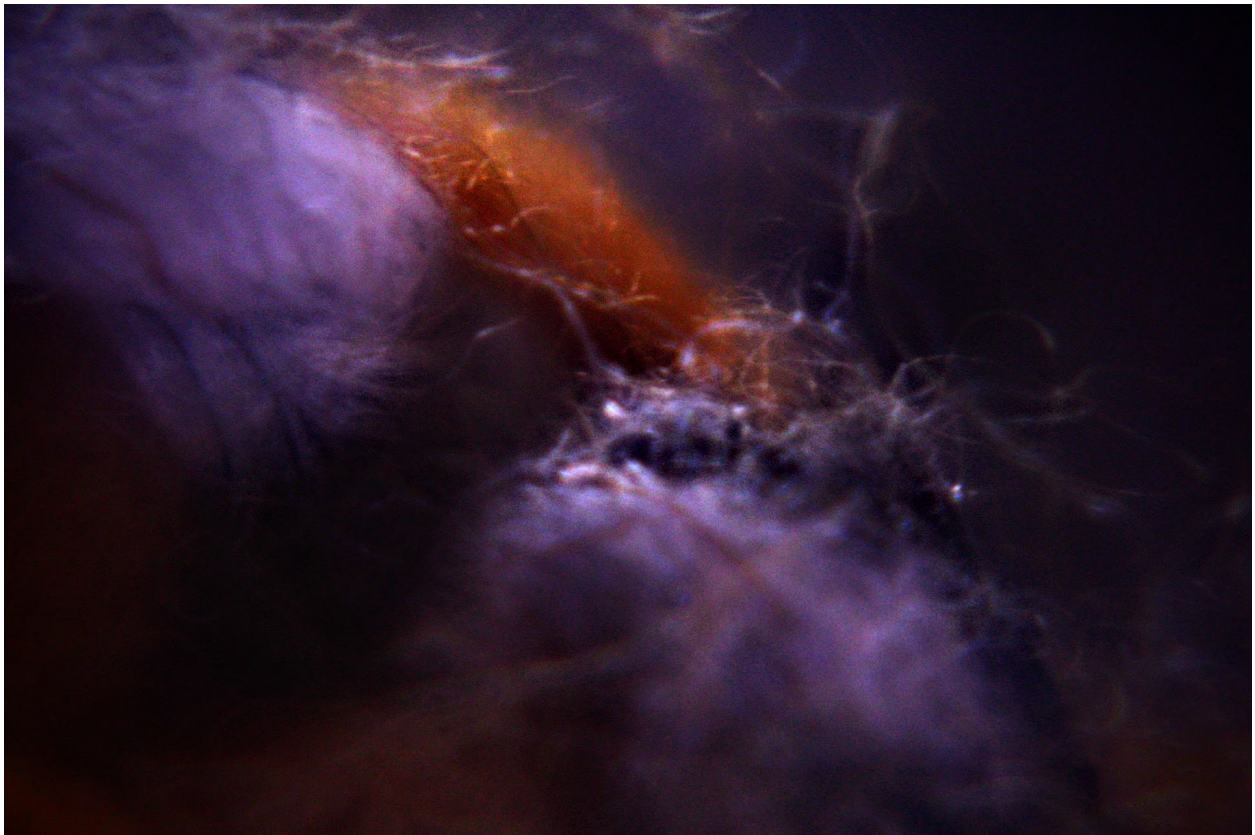
Then a little head with shimmering, long brown hair peeked into the room, "Are you guys coming?" A sweet high-pitched voice asked from the doorway.

"We're coming, Melissa," Daniel responded as he walked to the hallway and picked her up. The three of them walked back downstairs and got cozy on the couch. They both held one of Melissa's hands as she struggled to get her body up on the sofa. Once up, she carefully situated herself between her dads and laid the blanket over her lap. As the program started, the two looked at each other and grinned.

"I love you," Owen mouthed to Daniel.

"I love you, too," he responded.

Erin Lobovsky (inspired by a Storycorps piece on NPR)



Marin Diz- AP Photo

Phone Poem

Our phone is like an appendage,

Attached to our bodies at all times, never leaving without it

Our phone is like a mailman,

Delivering messages and connecting us to the world

Our phone is like a screw,

Holding us together and helping us function

Our phone is like oxygen,

Something we consider a necessity for survival, unable to go minutes without it

Our phone is like a casino,

Trapped in it for long periods of time, wasting our day away

Stella Stephens



Jasper Lincoln- AP Art

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

The COVID-19 pandemic was life-changing for almost everyone across the world in 2020. No one knew how to deal with their feelings and emotions about the new regulations for keeping everyone safe. In the beginning, I remember everyone, including myself, thinking this was just going to be just 2 weeks off from school/work. Naturally, everyone was psyched for a break. However, as the weeks went on and we still weren't going back to school, people started to get increasingly nervous. I remember being uncertain about what was going to happen. Would summer be normal? Would we go back to school before my freshman year of high school ended? Everything was up in the air. I think the scariest part of it all for me at the beginning was how my parents, the people in my life who are always calm and know that things are going to turn out ok, didn't know what was happening or what was going to happen. This made me feel like the base in my life wasn't steady and that was really scary. Another thing that was really different was that for the longest time, I didn't know how to feel. Was I supposed to be scared? Sad? Happy for a break from school? It was really confusing for me to try and figure out what I felt like inside about this huge situation.

On a more positive note, this COVID-19 pandemic really allowed me to appreciate the things I once took for granted and now can't have. "Too often we don't realize what we have until it's gone." One thing I greatly took advantage of before the pandemic was being able to hang out with large groups of friends in their homes. I found myself missing seeing my friend's houses and families which I never once crossed my mind before quarantine. I also realized how powerful hugs are. When I would go and see my friends safely with masks on, my first instinct was to go hug them like usual, but of course, I had to stop myself and that was really upsetting. However, it allowed me to cherish physical contact and look forward to a time when that's safe. Another major thing that allowed me to really appreciate life was in the very beginning, it wasn't safe to go out of state at all. All my mother's family lives in Massachusetts and at least once every summer, my family will make the drive up to Cape Cod to visit them. So up until almost July, my family wasn't sure when the next time we would see our relatives was going to be. Even worse, my dad's entire family lives in Germany and we had a trip booked in April to go visit them, but of course that was canceled. We still haven't seen them in more than a year, which really makes me want to fully appreciate every second I get with my extended family. If it weren't for the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020, I probably wouldn't have realized how much I really love and cherish seeing and hugging my friends and family.

Isabelle Fries

Nuisance's Lament

I hate when the telephone in my dorm rings. The sound reminds me of my aunt's summer cottage off the coast of Virginia. My mother never wanted to send me to camp, too many grass stains and socialization with other frivolous children, she would say. My mother and father already thought I was too imaginative so my aunt's limitless abyss she called a summer home was a perfect spot to settle my unruly mind.

My aunt has always been a little scared of my mother. My aunt used to tell me that she was always embittered, even in the perfect point of adolescence where everything feels warm and bullish. When I was seven years old, my mother decided I was a nuisance. You would think most seven year olds would be some sort of a nuisance but my mother didn't think that way. Right before our holiday break my mother had received a letter from my teacher, Ms. Winnie. In the letter she explained that I was a great student with a wide imagination but I couldn't focus well during reading. She explained that I would take out the crayons my father had bought me for my sixth birthday and draw out the stories she would tell. Though Ms. Winnie praised me for my creativity, all my mother saw was a whirlpool of distraction administered by a senseless daydreamer. She always feared I would become a Walter Mitty in a sea full of diplomats and professors that had always surrounded me; and of course that wasn't acceptable. Nevermind, some parents could only *wish* their child had a mind that went beyond time tables and line leaders. But, I was taken out of that school and put into a private school on the border between Connecticut and Rhode Island. I was devastated because I loved Ms. Winnie more than I had any other woman, and I think my mother knew that.

That summer I was sent down on a train to the place in Virginia where no one intentionally goes; the last stop. But once I arrived I saw a quiet beach-side house with casement windows and a mansard roof. Its shingles were rusted and full of grime but the house stood enduring the mighty winds and waves every summer. Her house was only steps from the beach but the water was too cold for anyone to enjoy. I would simply watch my aunt from the small, screened window of my bedroom as she waded in the foamed navy water, not scared of the cold or the crabs by her feet. It was me and only me watching her blush bathing suit bob up and down during low tide.

My aunt was a particular lady who didn't like many things. She hated crosswords at the end of gossip magazines and mechanical pencils that broke too easily. She only truly loved her set of Princess Diana plates and Waterford wine glasses that sat on her mantelpiece. That was all she needed, everything else was left to be buried under the dust and sand from the windows she kept open year-round. She also wasn't very keen on people. She didn't like guests at her house and only tolerated me at my mother's request. When she did have someone over, usually the local reverend or a bridge friend, she asked them not to bring gifts. Without hesitation, for the few who didn't listen, she threw them away. She saw the act of eternal pity through a measly box of chocolates or a serving tray. She believed that everyone thought she was lonely. They weren't wrong. She must have had a reason to let me stay summers if she wasn't extremely lonely; I wasn't very good company.

I only saw her keep one gift during the summer before I turned fifteen. A woman named Catherine bought her an antique landline from a small boutique up in New Hampshire. Catherine claimed it sounded like the morning doves that nested outside of her parent's home, but I thought it was closer to an elderly owl; it croaked like a poor bird waiting for death on its maple perch. Now, I didn't know Catherine, only that she had known my mother and aunt as a child; something about their father's working together in a printing shop. She seemed quiet and reserved when I first met her. She would twirl the ends of her tasseled cardigan while my aunt talked about the latest recipes she'd seen in *Good Housekeeping*. I didn't talk to her much but I knew my aunt adored her, more than any other guest I'd met. And my aunt loved the umber-

colored phone more than she had loved anything I'd seen and placed it next to her favorite loveseat. A cherry-colored chair nobody sat on right outside her guest room, my bedroom.

The ringing never seemed to stop. My aunt received more calls than an older woman should. The phone would go off every morning at eight o'clock from her ex-husband Harold arranging their use of their apartment in Gloucester. They had no children but their seaside two-bedroom caused more quarrel than any sane child could handle. Later, at four on the dot, my mother would call to check up on me. She didn't ask much; was I walking once a day, did I finish my summer work? To both of those I replied yes, the answer she wanted to hear, and we wouldn't talk about it anymore after that. It was a response that gave my mother her weekly sense of relief. My mother continued with the riveting discussion of my father's new office overlooking the Williamsburg Bridge. It had floor to ceiling windows and a secretary who wasn't as pretty as at his last office, to my mother's pleasure. The conversation lasted ten minutes, maybe fifteen, until she made up some excuse about her tea kettle whistling or having to shoo away an Evangelical at the door. We didn't have much to say to each other so I didn't mind her sorry excuse for a goodbye.

I wished my aunt asked Catherine to stay that night. I had to set up the phone that day, to my aunt's request, which lasted until the later hours of the night. Though I didn't mind staying past midnight, I did most nights anyways, I wished my aunt could have been interested in anything else besides yelling at me about scuffing her walls. Her voice was always scratchy at night like a broken Bob Dylan record. It started soft in the morning while she drank her earl grey and read the style section but as the day went on, and the phone kept ringing, her voice turned ashen, like the tea leaves sitting at the bottom of her cup.

I only had to bear the ringing and the yelling for another week and half. My new formidable private school started earlier than my classes with Miss Winnie had. Back in her classroom she would spend the first few minutes greeting and stirring honey into her tea. She managed to wake up all the tired eyes that lingered after Labor Day. I'm sure at this school there are no striped cardigans and morning hymns. But I didn't mind leaving most of August behind if it meant I could get away from the ringing and the reverends at dinner. I liked to think my aunt didn't mind either that she was happy to send me back in one piece, but my mother used to tell me it tore her apart. I didn't like thinking of her that way. She was supposed to be like a lioness statue standing still at the front of her porch. She was supposed to be strong and frigid with the surveillance I never got from my mother, who could care less about what secrets and promises I trusted her with.

I hugged my aunt for the first time that summer. I told her I would call her at my new school and I intended to. I actually called her three times that next week. We didn't say much to each other, but I wanted to hear her raspy voice and the crashing waves in the background. She's still withering away in that loveseat of hers, my mother says. I don't think she is. If anything, I'm the one fading in this dorm.

My aunt was never a very passionate person, at least I could only assume she wasn't. She studied classics in school but couldn't remember a word of Latin and had a vocabulary equivalent to an old sailor. Although she didn't seem to love anything for more than a few weeks, she was content. Yes, she would yell and was bitter more days than none but she was never truly unhappy, unlike me. Unlike my mother who most definitely regrets that her son loved his school teacher more than her. And that I'm sitting in a dorm at a school she sent me to. That I'm listening to my landline ring and thinking about my aunt's old, irritating phone instead of wondering if it's my mother calling to check up on me. And I will always hate the sound of my phone but not because it reminds me of my aunt and her biting voice, but because it reminds of that June day when my mother dropped me off and left without a shadow. My aunt was more

willing to love me, tolerate me, than she had ever tried. A woman named Catherine who I never really knew tried to know me. She didn't. And now I'm sitting in this school for washed up, uninspired children, with the hopes that maybe I'll come out a lawyer. That maybe I can wash away this repeated owl-ringing in my ear and all the waves crashing onto pebbles. I have to pretend I forget it all or else she'll never let me return to that seaside house in the middle of nowhere.

Sofia Hayes



Kim Rosner- AP Art

Hell Essay

I wake up to my alarm clock playing the intro to my favorite song "Martin & Gina" by Polo G. But after I begin to get the vibe to the song it changes to the chorus of one of my mom's favorite songs, "Gaslighter" which makes my ears cringe listening to the repetitive "Gaslighter denier doing anything to get your ass farther". The squeaky, repetitive song haunts me all day, making me remember the times when my mom would come in and blast that song when I had to wake up and get ready for school. Then I look out the window to a gorgeous sunny 60-degree day with the hopes of getting outside and playing soccer with my friends. When, in reality, in about ten minutes it will thunderstorm destroying any ambitions I had to go outside and play. On the other hand, my lock screen on my phone says today is Sunday, December 25th. So I rush downstairs to eat breakfast, which is my favorite meal of the day, to have avocado toast on crunchy bread with a seasoned egg to the perfect amount of saltiness. But as soon as I am about to take a colossal bite out of my toast my dog starts howling at the people walking by while knocking my plate shattering right out of my hands, and then devouring the food that fell on the floor. Bet this couldn't get any worse, right? Well turns out the kids who were walking down the street, are actually walking to school. So, I have to throw on a pair of baggy sweatpants and a sweatshirt and rush out the door on a Monday morning with an empty stomach and my mom screaming at me not to forget my soccer stuff, which, of course, I forget.

As soon as I walk into school, there's a huge banner at the top of the entrance that says Hastings High School Olympics - my favorite school day of the year. So I rush down to the gym to find my friends, only to find all the tables and chairs set up instead for testing because of course, it is midterms week. Instead of playing games with my friends and having a great time I am sitting in an uncomfortably hot gymnasium taking midterms that I probably could have taken blindfolded and got a better score. After completely flunking all of the midterms, my friends come up to me and start hazing me about our playoff soccer game against Dobbs.

The only relief from a miserable day of school is that I know today is a huge playoff soccer game against our arch-rival, Dobbs Ferry. Before warming up my heart drops because I realize I forgot my cleats. With regret tormenting me, I remember my mom yelling at me not to forget my stuff, and how disappointed she will be when she finds out. I am suddenly overwhelmed with the knowledge that I will be watching the game from the sidelines, knowing it is completely my fault that I'm not playing. This is quite possibly the worst feeling in the world. From the bench, watching my team lose on a last-second goal, fills my body with despair. The song Gaslighter comes back in my head as I start thinking about how I could have stopped this all from happening and not let down the people I love around me if only I had listened to my mom's annoying reminder.

Hell for me is not just torture and my imagination of things that annoy me, it's the taste of joy immediately snatched away to be replaced with misery and agony. Much like Sisyphus pushing his boulder up the hill, my version of hell is pushing my rock closer and closer to the top but never getting there. In some ways, it's harder to face that there is a better world out there that is just beyond our reach than it is to be oblivious to the sweet side of life. My hell isn't just a series of misadventures and screw-ups, it is the pain of living with what-ifs and almosts that haunt me as much as that stupid song. Gaslighter for real.

Ezekiel Manly

My Phone

My phone is like candy,
Fun and tasty, but never good for you if you have too much.

My phone is like my grandparents,
Telling endless stories and seemingly all-knowing.

My phone is like an action movie,
Exciting, ridiculous, and with some CGI as well.

My phone is like a lantern,
Helpful and necessary, but attracting pests that make it more of a distraction.

My phone is like a tennis match,
Entertaining to watch and full of surprises and disappointments, victories and losses.

What is your phone like?

Benjamin McNulty



Miles Hamburger- AP Art

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

Since the United States has become the epicenter of the devastating coronavirus pandemic, citizens' lifestyles around the nation have been altered more than they could have ever imagined. Millions cannot support their families, and hundreds of thousands have lost loved ones to the mysterious disease. Citizens have been forced to develop new routines for themselves during this unusual period. Several have had epiphanies that have drastically changed their outlooks on both life and the pandemic. I have developed an appreciation for the world's natural beauties and have realized just how beautiful nature is.

Following the isolation period's official announcement, I struggled to discover new hobbies that I would enjoy doing for the next few months. I attempted to learn an instrument, cook delectable meals, and play soccer by myself at the Burke Estate. After weeks of pursuing new hobbies, I observed a significant decrease in my motivation and cognizance. I lacked the ambition to try new activities and decided to go on a walk to clear my mind. As I wandered through the Hastings Woods, I was overwhelmed by a feeling buried in my mind for months: freedom. As I continued to walk, I glanced at the trees that towered over me and listened to the birds singing their captivating anthems. I had finally discovered my "paradise."

Taking scenic walks had become one of my few daily activities, and it never seemed to bore me. Accompanied solely by my camera, I would take walks for hours on end, searching for new routes and areas to relax. I strived to capture photos of exotic animals and breathtaking scenes created by the strength of nature itself. These walks had become a form of liberation for my body, giving my thoughts the ability to wander in whatever direction they desired. I observed a significant improvement in my cardiovascular health and a newfound passion for preserving the various organisms surrounding me. Walking helped me remain both physically and mentally active during the early months of isolation.

My love for all aspects of nature had opened up a section of the world that I had always seemed to overlook: color. The vibrant shades of green, orange, and yellow were splattered across the woods like an abstract piece of art; It was truly a hidden masterpiece. I would find myself gazing at the trees that towered over me for long periods, admiring the thousands of colors that it was composed of. My passion for photography, combined with my love for colors, had ultimately resulted in an empty wallet and an SD card filled to the brim.

Although my love for nature had begun during the early months of isolation, I plan on continuing to pursue it throughout the school year. John Muir, a Scottish-American mountaineer, once said, "In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks." This statement directly correlates to my first memorable encounter with nature, as it left me feeling cleansed and "reborn." Nature was my escape from the harsh reality that we were living in.

Owen Taylor

Phone Poem

Our phones are like masks,
Covering up our true emotions beneath a screen of unreal.

Our phones are like high school students,
Shutting down when they work for too long.

Our phones are like corn mazes,
Trapping us in interest, fun, confusion.

Our phones are like birds,
Seeing more than we see, knowing more than we do.

Our phones are like our hometowns,
Where we wander past familiar spots for hours.

Julie Aleiner



Caroline Rosner- AP Art

She Wore the Ocean

She wore the ocean as a dress
The froth formed the frills
as the waves unfurled themselves upon her shoulders
A seaweed belt and sandy shoes.
She was covered
tripping over the billowing layers of fabric until they swallowed her
in teeth of salt
between shapeshifting blue lips

The body washed up in a coat of sand and
eyes little melted disco balls
Her veins traveled like coral on the coast of her arms
Leftover from her deep sea massage, a tentacle formed a collar
Tagging her for return.
Her lips pried open like a clam for the chance of a pearl
Shriveled as dried fruits on countertops
They could not identify the bloated skin dressed in foam
And jellyfish sting polka dots

His bride had vanished in the night
Taken a path through the Milky Way
Homesick for the sun and her slow honey coughs
Syrupy with bits of stars flying out of her lips
Frail in her rocking chair
He remembered all the times he said he loved her and everything about her

"Even the blue things? The sad things?"
Her Chapstick brand in the blue packaging
Only using blue highlighters because yellow seemed to scream
"Spotlight this" and all of the text was important to her
Her eyes the dusty remains of graphite
sapped of the blue of her childhood
It was all blue
The walls, the bed, the view from the window
Her favorite bowl, her school colors
Her earrings, shoes and jacket
The texture of her skin and
rhythm of her voice
Even when she was screaming or singing off tune
Smell of her body wash was blue too and
Taste of her salty cheeks after crying when he would kiss the remnants of tears,
the little puddles in the craters of her face,
Away
So they could not escape into oceans

Caroline Anderson

SLEEP

Geryon was now only physically alone.

His eyes were itching through his cornea like a hot home of ants. Thinking of the time
She had taken him to the orchard
crisp on his mind.
He cried bright tears out of these same human eyes.
He was younger then, but recognized bright red apples
for fractions of his whole.
Geryon was able to count crate full of glistening seeds.
He kept climbing, his mind was empty like a sky with no stars or
a picture with color.
The water drowned his hearing now as he crawled into bed. He was tired
of people, agony kept him awake but he was no longer thinking.
He had made up his mind.
His dreams were concave, the central meaning of which
had been diluted like store bought apple juice, he dreamt, too much water
And not enough apple.
Seeking to fill what Geryon so desperately desired, his eyes moved rapidly under his eyelids for
minutes but what felt like a lifetime with an electrolynx.
He was coughing, his lungs butted black by trays full of ash.
They felt as if they could erupt in blood and soot.
He could not stop, his vision was lackluster and his heart ablaze.
Now not only was it broken but smoking like car twisted with glass.
He awoke, the only thing burnt was the mirror.

The feet of a monster are too big for a boy's bed
and his were cold. Geryon laid with his eyes now relieved,
the only part that ached was everything else, core through skin.
Beneath the windows Geryon still heard black clouds scribbling hard
on the white concrete street, marking every inch.
The caress of water on cinder made him feel even more alone.
Memories of sunshine now long gone hidden like the underside
of rotting lily pads.
Geryon thought the horizon always had something to look forward to,
another day in the broken pattern of mindless weather.
It did not.
Separation proved to be the limit to his theory.

Shrieks from the millions of hydrated non-humans as they came
exploding when they walked from heaven to death filled only two ears
on all of earth.
His eyelids were sore like sunburn from water
that put a target on the dumb, red boy's back.
He flipped his pillow to the cool side.
It didn't help.
At the very end of Geryon's street breathes a streetlamp whose sole purpose
is for attention. It bleeds past Geryon's eyelashes and maneuvers
every which way ensuring Geryon gets the least amount of sleep possible
this particular night.
Instead of putting up curtains Geryon chooses to fight this battle for attention and

he finds himself losing.

Andre Anuszkiewicz



Caleb Painter- AP Art

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

As our seemingly brief two week “coronacation” slowly has turned into six months and counting, myself and the people I keep close to my heart have had plenty of time to reflect and evolve both individually and as a community. My friends and I tracked the timeline by means of significant milestones: my total loss of all eyebrow hair, the beginning of the newest wave of Black Lives Matter protests, and most recently, the passing of our beloved RBG. Somewhere along the way, my mental health plummeted into a seemingly endless abyss. Deep in a covid induced depression coma, throughout many therapy sessions, I had a realization that completely polarized my initial perception of how I’ve been living my life.

Until sometime in mid-May, I suppose I was what most would call a solipsist, someone who lives along the lines of a philosophy in which oneself is the only “real” person. It troubles me to put a label on my beliefs like that, but for the sake of the argument I was definitely a solipsist. My realization, though, was that regardless of my indulgence in solopcism, I needed to make the most out of this life. This was not a concept that was easy to grasp, nor did it provide me with an immediate change in my physical life. I had this knowledge long before I let myself be affected by it. How I obtained the knowledge in the first place is a mystery. Why it chose to hit me like a truck is another. All I know is that one night, I was taking a shower at around midnight, as I always do before going to sleep. I closed my eyes and let myself be encased by the hot water. The warmth that had always soothed me would once again quiet my mind and let me think clearly. With a calm headspace for the first time in months, I decided I would infuse myself with life and truly live it, regardless of whether it meant anything in the long run or the afterlife or whatever. The next morning, I woke up, cleaned my room, and was possibly the most productive I’ve ever been in my life.

This was clearly a personal victory. As much as I would have liked to make an earth-shattering discovery that would forever change humankind, this was the product of too much time in quarantine. Looking back on the events of my discovery now, and especially organizing

it in writing, I would say it was an experience that taught me a lot. Not about just myself, but about mental health in general. First, it taught me that nobody's mental health progress is linear. If I graphed it, it would be all over the place. Second, I learned to ride the wave. As long as I can lean on my resources throughout the not-so-linear mental health path, I will always be able to make it through. Word. On momma.

lone Shih



Kate Jones- AP Art

Before the Sun Sets

The sadness sat deep in the pit of my stomach and never went away. It didn't burn like a fire, but it was always there, weighing me down, covering my thoughts in a gray cloud. Standing right in front of my sister in the place we had lived together for forever, I noticed she didn't look the same. Mia's hair had reached her elbows and her once innocent eyes were traced in black eyeliner. She didn't smile in that way she used to where she placed her top teeth directly over her bottom ones. She no longer flinched her shoulders whenever someone said her name.

I wished I could go back to ten years ago when Mia smiled in that awkward way, when my mind was clear and my eyes glimmered at the thought of playing sock puppets with her. Even though she had changed, I hadn't. I still preferred reading graphic novels to going to parties. She had lived a new life, and I didn't even recognize her anymore. So much had come between us. I grew envious of the elegant way she walked, and the way she could make an entire room of people turn toward her while I hid in the corner. But tonight was the last night before she left for college.

I rarely spoke to her these days, before I knew it, the words escaped my mouth.

"Do you want to watch the sunset?" I asked, "It's our last one together for a while."

She stared at me and shrugged, "sure . . . but it's almost over."

"No, it's not dark yet," I responded, trying to match the look in her eyes.

She sighed, "okay."

Together we walked out the sliding glass door and onto the grass. We passed the wooden table where we'd eaten dinner a thousand times and climbed up onto the big rocks we weren't allowed to climb on years ago. The air smelled like peaches and sunscreen. I moved my fingers against the rock and felt little pieces of it crumble onto my palms. In front of us, the golden sun melted on the trees and turned the purple-blue sky to a warm pink. The color of a heart. The heart I knew she had deep inside her soul.

When the sun went all the way down, and the sky became a dark curtain, it felt like time stopped. She rested her head on my shoulder and we sat, eyes still open, listening to the crickets chirp, and breathing in the sweet summery air.

Hannah Beinstein



Graham Routhier- AP Art

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

E·piph·a·ny (*noun*) - an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure. Moments like these don't happen very often. But when they do, they can turn your life around; making you feel like a brand new you. Epiphanies can make you view everything from a totally different perspective than before. During the past months of this pandemic, I've happened to come across an epiphany; one that completely changed my mindset forever. It was that you shouldn't live in the past, shouldn't think about the future, but you should live right here, right now, in the present.

When first going into quarantine, I was in total shock that I would no longer be allowed to live my life normally. Staying inside my house with nothing to do really got to me; and let me tell you those first few months of shelter in place were horrifying. My father was coming home crying every day because of patients dying one after another, my motivation to do well in school went totally missing, and my mental health was for sure not at its best. But one day after those few hard months, one very random day it just hit me. You have to make the most of what you've got right now, in the present. The past definitely does not define you, so why continue to live in it? Why make yourself so anxious thinking about the future when you haven't yet come to the realization that you have control of the present? A very famous saint, Mother Teresa once said, "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin". The present is very important and you should never take it for granted.

As I finally realized that I should no longer be living in the past, I completely changed overall as a person. To be honest, before quarantine, I was a complete mess. I often pushed everything to the last minute, I was barely active and really didn't do much to benefit myself. When COVID came into the picture, it only made things worse. I could hardly concentrate and get my schoolwork done since I had so many things on my mind all at once. I was overthinking everything, especially my past. After I randomly came across my big realization, I decided to take this time and use it in a more useful way. I started to become more active, exercising every day, and started preparing and enjoying healthy meals-even creating some fun recipes along the way. I tried to improve my mindset, worked on my physical and mental health, and overall began to look at the world in a more optimistic way. I definitely started to see a change in myself when I worked on these things, and others saw a change in me as well. I believe that this pandemic overall has taught me a lot; to be more appreciative, to try and make time as useful as possible, but mostly, to live in the present and not worry about anything else at the moment.

Sarah Korosi

Phone Poem

Our phones are like our friends,

Always there for us when we need them.

Our phones are like a knowledgeable person,

Knowing all the facts and applying them.

Our phones are like our minds,

Full of thoughts and opinions, shared.

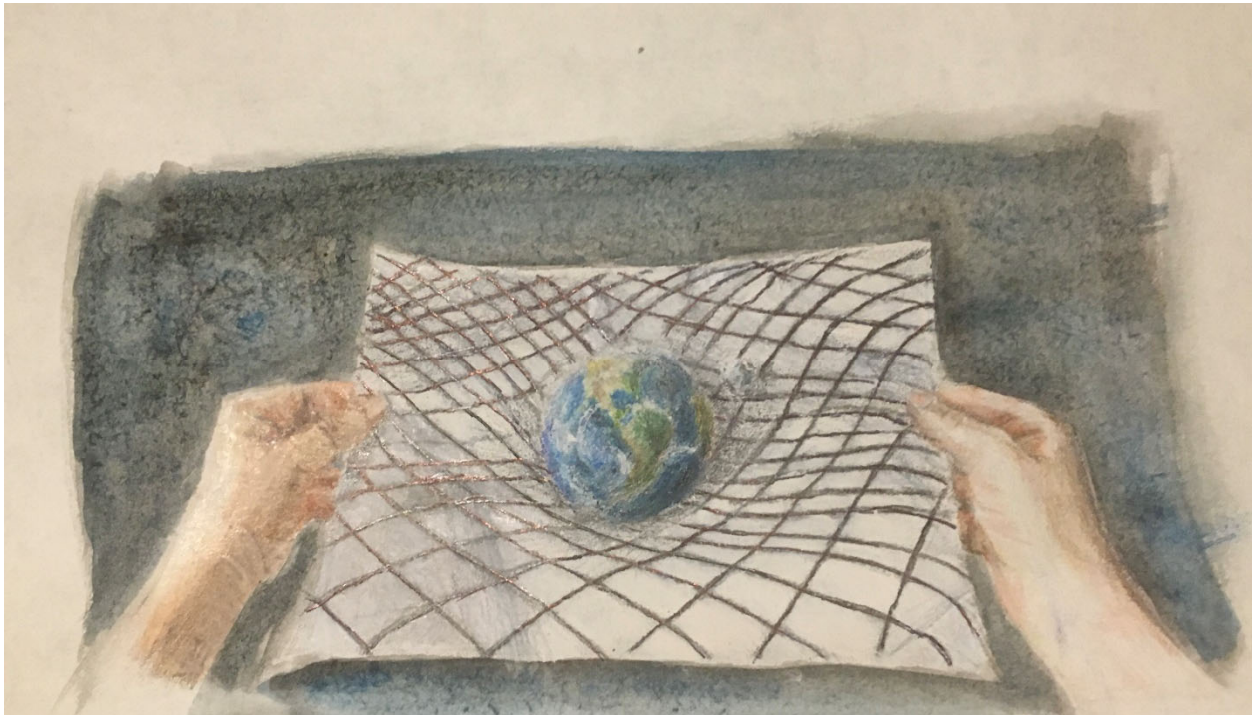
Our phones are like our voices,

Spreading information and being an outlet for the freedom of speech.

Our phones are like our world,

Providing the platform to spread cultures and beliefs worldwide.

Joanna Abirizk



Emma Rabinowitz- AP Art

This Could Be Heaven or This Could Be Hell

As I reclined in my disheveled hospital bed, I began to reminisce about the preceding years of my life, aspiring to receive an opportunity to relive those memories. My recollection of the past had gradually faded throughout my life; however, I managed to recover details that ultimately altered my outlook on death itself. Surrounded by my closest friends and family, I realized that they, too, will venture to the afterlife, and I will be awaiting their arrival. As I prepared to take my final breaths, I gazed out the fractured hospital window and admired this extraordinary planet for one last time.

Upon my awakening, I was greeted by the unmistakable sensation of a Labrador Retriever avidly licking my sunburnt face. It soon became evident that I was lying in the center of a mesmerizing piece of farmland, surrounded by Braunvieh cattle and Einsiedler horses. Astonished by the intricacies of this small piece of land, I had decided to continue my exploration of this uncharted location. As I approached the field's border, I managed to distinguish a fascinating lodge constructed with vibrant shades of cedarwood. With an outdoor hot-tub and a handcrafted sauna, the chalet's amenities provided me with an opportunity to enter a state of unadulterated relaxation. However, the enthralling view from the peak of the Grand Teton Mountains was what had truly struck my attention. I arrived at the mountain's summit shortly before sunset in an attempt to observe nightfall with my canine companion. As I gazed at the vivid twilight, I ultimately came to a realization: this is the afterlife.

As I returned from my brief expedition, I inhaled the brisk Jackson Hole air, an action that has consistently left my mind, body, and soul feeling rejuvenated. The breeze emitted an aroma of freshly baked Toll House cookies, a distinctive scent that I had frequently anticipated when traveling to my grandma's house in Long Island. Upon returning to the lodge, I realized that the confections had been prepared in a Miele toaster oven at 350 Fahrenheit, my grandmother's preferred machinery and temperature. After consuming an obscure amount of chocolate chip cookies, I decided to explore my remarkable home further. As I ventured into the

basement, I managed to distinguish the faint echo of "Brain Damage" by Pink Floyd being performed below me. I was quite apprehensive when approaching this mysterious room's entrance; however, without hesitation, I entered. In this darkened room, I was surrounded by immersive speakers playing "The Dark Side of the Moon," while a 75-inch Samsung television emerged from the wall before my eyes. I reclined onto a relaxing bean bag that conformed to the shape of my body and retired to my bedroom after watching my favorite movie, Stepbrothers.

I was awakened by the distinct sound of the North Pacific Ocean's cascading waters advancing and retreating from the arenaceous surface. After thoroughly sterilizing my bedroom in an attempt to satisfy my germophobic tendencies, I strolled downstairs and switched my television on. While consuming my yogurt parfait with an excessive amount of drizzled honey, I browsed through the station's directory. I was ecstatic when I observed the absence of news channels and political programs. After digesting my primary meal of the day, I traveled to the coast with my canine and allowed him to submerge himself in the frigid, translucent waters. I craved an experience that provided me with an intense adrenaline rush, so I decided to venture to my hangar and fly the Cessna 172 Skyhawk. While soaring through the air, I experienced the immense pressure of the gravitational force, recognizing a sense of freedom that I seemed to have forgotten. For the first time in my life, there was an absence of evil.

I was unexpectedly jolted awake by the distinct sound of my mother's attempt at summoning me into the kitchen. Breakfast had been prepared, she hollered, and the entire family was anxiously awaiting my arrival. As I settled into my revolving stool, I entered a state of utter confusion when observing my surroundings. Yesterday, I was trekking through a mountain with Pink Floyd performing in the background. Today, it seemed that I had returned to reality.

I soon realized that my journey through nirvana was a captivating illusion, a figment of my imagination.

Owen Taylor



Kim Rosner- AP Art

Ode to a Skinned Knee

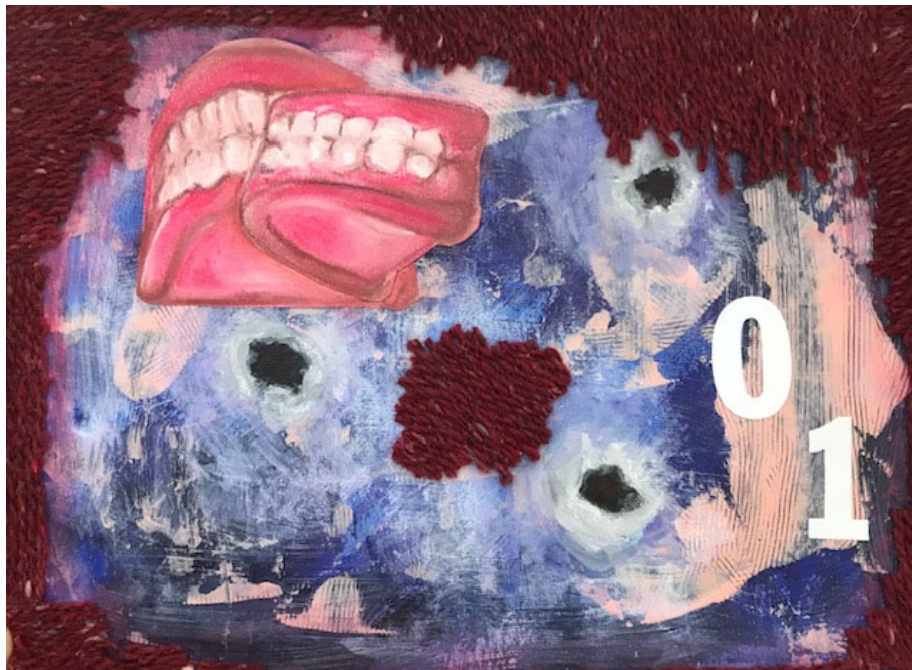
Smooth, soft plain
swallowed abruptly at a ragged, rippling edge:
a crater, sizzling and overflowing,
its rises and dips a glistening pink.

A velvety red rivulet blossoms from the molten center,
meandering through shimmering nooks and crannies, dripping down and away
through peach fuzz, the light blonde strands translucent, barely visible
against dirt-smeared skin.

Meadows of gleaming rose intercut
with highways paved in a light yellow ooze:
a sunset palette of watercolors bubbling up
from their torn and textured canvas.

The site of impact hums with the warmth
of the asphalt's slick oil, that hot grime,
the summer's rage awakening from its feverish slumber within the concrete
and unhinging its jaws to take a bite,
the delicate skin of the knee rupturing like a plum under its canines;
tender flesh, vulnerable, malleable
to the road's abrasive scrape.

Julia Gardner



Roisin O'Flaherty

Phone Poem

My phone is like a drug,
Addicting and always wanting to use
My phone is like an entertainment system
Allowing me to watch and play anything I want
My phone is like a person
Connecting me to new people or friends who live far away
My phone is like a plane
Transporting me to new places all over the world
My phone is like an engine
Keeping me going throughout the day

Connor Noyes



Kate Jones- AP Art

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

If we're being honest, I didn't start writing this paper until two days ago. I was having trouble thinking of any type of "epiphany" I had had during the pandemic. I spent all last week wracking my brain, trying to come up with something. I had few ideas and those I did have were useless. But then it hit me (an epiphany if you will), that this realization could be something I had never considered, but that had transformed my life nonetheless.

You probably don't know this, but I'm a person who works well on a schedule, a person who tends to fall apart without one. Over the course of my life, school was my routine. I would wake up, go to school, come home, do work, maybe spend time with friends, and then go to bed. It was organized and helped to keep me on task and productive. Each summer, I would regress and become more lazy and less social. No work would get done. I had no need to do anything, and no pressure was there to push me. You see, there was this idea ingrained in my head. I was someone who needed to have a busy life, to have every minute packed to the brim, because otherwise I would lose track of what was important.

But this spring, the whole concept of my life came crashing down. I still had schoolwork, but the structure was gone. The pressure was there, but nothing came even close to organization. I won't even try to deny it; I was completely lost at first. Assignment after assignment went missing as I forgot to hand them in. If you had bet me a hundred dollars on what day of the week it was, I would have been a hundred dollars poorer. Days drifted in a haze and I floated through them meaninglessly.

Finally, I awoke one day and decided I was tired of living that way. I could no longer pretend it was summer and ignore the majority of my work. So I went back to what always worked for me: a schedule. The only exception was that this time, the schedule was my own. I told myself what times were work hours and which hours were free time. I told myself when to wake up, when to eat, and when to sleep. But most importantly, I told myself that this schedule was set in stone, unmovable. I could not afford to procrastinate; I had to stick to my schedule because who knows what would happen if I didn't. Somehow I managed to keep this energy throughout school and even into the summer. My dedication may have wavered, but it never broke.

So there it is, my epiphany. It turns out that it never had to do with the outside world, but rather what was inside me. I had found something inside me that I never knew was there. I had an ability to do things without external pressure. I had discovered a way to create an internal driving force to make me get things done.

Liam Painter

Phone Poem

Our phones are like our food,
Fueling our bodies, without it we wouldn't survive.

Our phones are like pets,
Attracting our immediate attention, it's so hard to look away!

Our phones are like chatty gossip,
Distracting us endlessly while hours pass by.

Our phones are like our closets,
Specifically organized to our own liking.

Our phones are like our minds,
Storing our lives and memories and giving us access to them whenever we please.

Christine Cifelli



Emma Rabinowitz- AP Art

Childhood Memories

Inspired by Mr. Blum's jokes

Riley: *(strides on stage)*

April: So

Riley: So?

April: You slept with her again?

Riley: I can't stop.

April: But she's ugly, raggedy and old.

Riley: I think she's beautiful! She's soft, non-judgmental and always there for me unlike you.

April: I LOVE you and, and you love her... Pack your bags.

Riley: WHAT?

April: PACK THEM.

Riley: Listen, you know I love her, but I can love both of you. She's been with me ever since I was a baby. I know she's just a little old rag, but she means so much to me. I can't sleep without her.

April: Honey I understand I'm just worried about you. You're a grown man. You know I would never leave you for sleeping with your baby rag. I just think it's kind of weird.

Riley: *(starts to get up and leave)* Yeah, I think so too but I can't stop. You promise not to tell.

April: I promise on our marriage *(looks to see nobody's watching and then pulls out a Teddy Bear and gives it a hug)*

Emma Nathenson

No Back Door

The campus was empty that night. Even the streetlights looked a bit lonely with no shadows to cast on people. The alleys were untouched by muddy rain boots, only receiving the light steps of my ballerina flats. I'm still not sure why I arrived six days before orientation only to stay at a motel for two of those nights across campus, but I did. The dorms weren't open, and my parents had a tight schedule in between my brother's communion rehearsal and my mother's dress fitting for her hairstylist's wedding, so I mostly sat in the motel alone with two suitcases of folded up clothes and the sounds of wind hitting the unsturdy windowpanes.

It wasn't like me to want to be alone, yet I didn't talk my parents out of the early departure. I hated my own company. Other people were able to still sit down with themselves for hours on end, but I couldn't. I wish I were one of those people who listened to different types of music depending on their moods. Shrill violins for fog-covered days that don't seem to end and upbeat synthesizers for Sunday mornings with French toast and Mrs. Butterworth's at the table. I wish I thought up stories of what could have been in my head. I wanted to romanticize a guy I had seen walking across the street in oversized flannels and untouched white sneakers. He could have been the perfect little story in my head, the melodic tune filling my brain, but he wasn't. I only listen to the top hits on shuffle, no repeats and no skips, and I prefer to see stories and destinies created by other people in my textbooks and novels.

The campus was desolate, but the city wasn't. At night, I heard people yelling outside my window with bursts of tuned laughter. Although I didn't get up to see their faces outside the blurred glass, I could tell they were secure with themselves and happy to just be roaming the streets. They were glad the campus was so empty because it meant their little friend group could be on top of the world for just a few more hours. I really wanted to see their faces, even though I may never see them again, just to see what pure intoxicated happiness looked like. But uptown, it was mostly quiet the rest of the day. Maybe if I had gone a little more downtown, I would have seen a lot more faces than just my own reflection in the parked cars I passed walking to the library.

My mother used to tell me I was a bad conversationalist. She still does, not as often, but she does. The first time she said it was at my aunt's wake when I was eight. I don't why she invited a child with almost no experience with small talk or death, for that matter, but I was shoved in a striped, black dress and suddenly surrounded by three dozen strangers. I was forced to talk to my great aunt named Lucy, who wore green tights and brought ginger snaps with little sad faces on them. I had never met her, probably for good reason, but I *had* met a cat with the same name when my father took my brother and I to an animal shelter. We didn't end up getting a dog like he said we would, but there was one mangy cat who kept purring at me as we left. At that moment between awkward and silent, I told my great aunt that she reminded me of a brown cat that had a bald spot on its back. She probably thought I was just being a fresh little kid, so she brushed it off. But my mother didn't appreciate the comment and I had to sit on a tiny chair next to the casket the rest of the evening.

I wish I was being "fresh" that night. If I was, maybe I could have been a whole lot more interesting now. My family didn't think I would move for college. Partially because I couldn't last a full night at a sleepover until I was fifteen, but also because I wouldn't have the security to "go back home" when people started talking about politics or movies, I had no intention of seeing. When you're a plane ride away there is no back door you can exit, no "Irish goodbye" you can give. My bedroom used to be a place of withdrawal but now it's filled with people who want to know me, for real.

Sofia Hayes



Cayla Ossen- AP Photo

Candlelight

These candles are a hopeful reassurance:
spades of light, glowing softly, fading into some
planetary realm. The pale flame expands into the
everlasting dark of the cathedral, a silent chorus

heard amongst the empty pews. How easy it is
to mistake something simple as light for the divine;
smoke rising in halo-shaped orbs, faceless grey saints
emerging from this celestial garden of light. A single

angel-winged cloud drifts beneath the high arch
of the church, between the flowered fingers of columns
and stained glass. We pray, and we hope to be heard
in our silence. We pray, and we hope to harvest devotion.

The wax pools deeper into the palm of the candles.
We are beholden to ignorance behind these kindled wicks.

Emilia Anderson



Marin Diz- AP Photo

Sports in a Global Pandemic

Our physical health has a major influence on who we are and impacts every single part of our lives. It affects how we think, how we feel, and how we perform in school and in our jobs. A study from sciencedaily.com shows that U.S. adults who exercise regularly have 1 1/2 fewer days of poor mental health each month, compared to people who don't exercise. In addition, the CDC says that "students who are physically active tend to have better grades, school attendance, cognitive performance (e.g., memory), and classroom behaviors (e.g., on-task behavior)." But unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has taken a drastic toll on every aspect of physical health from professional and youth sports to exercise and physical fitness.

For me personally, before the shutdown from Covid-19 began, my life was jam packed with activity centered around sports. I would leave a long day at school and go straight to a 3:15 school lacrosse practice, then drive immediately to my club soccer practice 30 minutes away. Once I got home, I would eat dinner with my family and try to finish every last bit of homework I had before falling into bed. Once Covid-19 hit, my life immediately switched gears. All of the sudden my sports world ended abruptly. Both my teams canceled all games and practices. I had much more free time. I had an epiphany that if I didn't stay active and find my own motivation, I would go stir crazy. I worked out in my basement, took runs outside, and played soccer drills by myself in my backyard.

Throughout the pandemic, I realized that I was fortunate enough to have access to a backyard, a basketball hoop, and gym equipment in my basement. This virus has further created a separation between people who are well off and people who are not as privileged. People who have resources have access to a personal trainer, gym equipment, and private clubs so they can remain in good shape which will then impact other outcomes like education and mental health. Relating this to a documentary I watched over the pandemic called *Last Chance U*, many of the kids on the show did not have access to anything else besides football and relied on football as their way "out". Many of these kids would not be putting in time and effort in school if it weren't for football. Over the pandemic, I also came to the epiphany that I would want to pursue a career that focuses on helping kids expand their access to different kinds of physical activity.

Ezekiel Manly

Phone poem

Our phones are like our cars
 Demanding more and more money each month to energize
Our phones are like leeches
 Causing us to lose time every day doing things that are unproductive
Our phones are like planes
 Connecting us to territories filled with all kinds of people like never before
Our phones are like newscasters
 Delivering all different types of information to us instantly
Our phones are like calendars
 Allowing us to stay on track and plan out our days

Patrick Walsh



Marin Diz- AP Photo

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

At the beginning, I honestly took it as a joke. No one really expects there to be some type of worldwide plague at first until it starts spreading, then people get worried. When we first started talking about it in my tenth grade History class, I chuckled. Everyone was ready to pack up their bags and equipment and get ready for the apocalypse.

I'll be honest, I'm a semi-selfish person like most people are in the United States; if it's not happening to me or around me yet, why worry? Things were shutting down but all seemed like a little game of propaganda. It wasn't until the first few strikes of the virus marked my current life that I started to understand.

My dad works at a hospital as a security guard, a place mixed with not only physically ill patients but also mentally ill ones. He works for hours, sometimes getting bit or scratched by patients who refuse to cooperate. It was hard to socially distance when you're in that environment. Not only was this a risk, but my father also has severe asthma, dating back from when he first came to the States as a kid. If he got sick, I really don't even want to think what could've happened. Although my dad came out okay thankfully every time, his friends weren't. My dad, in total, has lost up to eight of his friends and coworkers to the virus. It always hit a nerve when I was on the phone with him, because you can tell when somebody just wants to cry but they hold it back enough to keep the tears back and the choking quiet. My dad, like I often do, cries alone. It's a relative thing we share to let nobody see the weak parts of you, but he's much better at it than me since he's been doing it for nearly 40 years. But as I was saying, it was incredibly painful. Some of his friends that died I knew since I was a kid and he used to bring me to work sometimes at the booth or in the hospital. Although I didn't know them like my dad did, I felt the second hand pain not only from the aching I knew he felt in his chest but also because those guys were a part of my childhood. I couldn't imagine losing another one of my friends to death, nor could I imagine losing eight of them. That wasn't the last of the COVID's plague on my life, though.

As if my father wasn't vital enough in my life and well being, next the plague reached my mother, a registered nurse for twenty years and a mother to three, not only me but my two younger sisters who are eight and ten years younger than me. Our living area is not too ideal for a family of five. We are in a one-bedroom apartment, I sleep in the basement, my sisters have the only bedroom and my mom sadly needs to sleep in the living room with my stepdad. When she tested positive, it was a given that we'd all have it too, but of us all she had it the worst. My mother got pneumonia in both of her lungs, had completely lost her appetite, and was literally slowly dying. She was rushed to the hospital early in the morning one day in May, and she was left to rot in that place. I guess it was because the hospitals were all on high alert and were rushing back and forth, but my mom could barely breathe. She was placed next to a woman who couldn't speak English who was also suffering, the both of them pleading for some help or food or anything but people rarely came for them. Long story short, she returned home better thankfully but had to rebuild her strength, which took awhile. By then, I was completely aware of the seriousness of this virus. It goes to show that although you aren't suffering from it, people around you are, and sometimes that's all it takes to understand the reality of things.

Paige Sanchez

Phone Poem

My phone is like a drug,
Making me dependent, taking over my everyday life

My phone is like my heart,
When it loses power, my world stops until it's brought back

My phone is like a companion,
When I am alone it brings me joy and something to spend my time with

My phone is like a plane,
When I am far from the people I love, I know we can be together immediately

My phone is like the compass of my life,
While it can also give me literal directions, it can give me the directions to the
way of life I want and the friends I want to be with

Joaquin Teper



Jasper Lincoln- AP Art

Spotlight

Stars pounded the sky into a bruised black and blue,
she entered the dance where the spotlight
was composed of thousands of these stars
Dipping down to settle on her shoulders
She removed her jacket like curtains
peeling back to reveal the stage of her body
She let the light run down the highways of her arms
And soak into her skin
It was all an act
Waiting on a cue, lines telling her where to go

He was sitting on the perimeter watching.
Poured from the big dipper,
A wash of silvery liquid
flooded the details of him except the wide fish-out-of-water eyes
Hardening like concrete to form a tomb around his body.
Caught in the splatter of flashing lights and pop music about love
The mass of bodies jumping around under the lights,
drinking in the heat and low drift of secrets,
not feeling the rift between themselves and
the rest of the world.

Caroline Anderson



Josie Simon- AP Photo

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

I had a covid birthday. It was my favorite by far.

Imagine waking up, groggy headed, to an utterly miserable rainy day, just to realize it's your birthday. You glance out your window and are suddenly yanked down to earth from your (not so pleasant may I add) fantasy of parties, cakes, and normal capitalist-society-birthday-norms.

You see all the masked faces out your window, concealing not only emotions but all signs of humanity: stripping the face down to a pair of eyes and a forehead; almost robotic figures marching around, devoid of social contact.

You're not expecting to like this day: you know you don't like birthdays, you don't pretend to either. They're stressful: a day focused entirely on you is like acting in a 12-hour play--then again, you're always acting in a 12-hour play--you're just the star in this one.

Imagine walking in the rain. Imagine walking in the rain without an umbrella. Imagine walking in the rain without an umbrella or shoes. This was my ideal birthday. Strange? Yes...

Wormy walks hold sentimental value for you: you used to go for walks with your mom after it rained and search for worms. Barefoot walking holds sentimental value for you: You used to go to a camp where that was the norm, not the exception.

You walked on the aqueduct--an utterly mundane trail--which tiptoes through towns and backyards, giving you small glimpses into the monotonous nature of New York suburbanites.

You don't focus on the people, however. This is why you like walking in the rain: the inherent lack of them. You focus on the sensations you often take for granted: the luke-warm slush with the occasional sharp rock under your feet, the dripping of water down your face, the smell of freshly hydrated earth, and the sound of your undisturbed imagination.

This: a sentimental moment, intimate family time, and the primal "rush" of breaking societal norms, this was my ideal birthday.

Why? You may ask. You could say I'm a strange kid. You could say I'm a weird kid. You could say I'm a strange and a weird kid. Or you could say I'm a product of the environment in which I was raised.

All of these are possible explanations for the quirky hijinks I voluntarily get myself into; the vindication I personally would choose is that I am an assimilated tourist of all things natural and man-made.

Adin Dowling



Cayla Ossen- AP Photo

Untitled

A script written using underlying tension and music

Terri uncomfortably moves her chair around as if she cannot find the right position. Terri continues to move the chair as Charlie walks in.

Charlie: You're ignoring me.

Terri: You're ignoring my question.

Charlie: What question?

Terri stops moving her chair and abruptly turns toward Charlie.

Terri: There is something wrong with this chair.

Charlie: What question?

The two stare at each other for three seconds, then an annoyed Terri turns around in the chair and pulls out her phone.

Charlie: Look, I am trying to explain myself.

Terri turns her phone sideways as the 'Geometry Dash' theme song starts playing.

Charlie: You're unbelievable. Turn off the game.

Terri: No.

Pause

Charlie: Terri. Terri!

Charlie walks up to Terri, rips the phone out of her hands and walks to downstage center.

Terri: Hey! Stop. Stop!

Terri walks up to Charlie and starts reaching for the phone. The two are very close together, each trying to grab at the phone while talking over one another.

Terri: Give me the phone. Charlie!

Charlie: You are not getting it back! No, no, stop.

Terri: Stop, stop. Stop!

As Terri gets hold of the phone, she hits the power button. When the music stops, the twos' faces are inches apart. They stand, staring into each other's eyes for six seconds.

Terri: Where were you last night?

Short pause

Charlie: You already know.

Elianna Carvalho

What Happened at Novacoast

Sometimes I ask myself: Am I someone destined for uncovering the truth or am I merely a faceless fool filled with golden dreams of grandeur.

The dusk sky was almost picturesque. The blue mixed with a pinkish hue and imperfect smudges of white clouds. Trees and their shadows painted the floor, accompanied by the wind's subtle orchestra of leaves. The insects' buzz tries silently not to disturb the masterpiece in the rough. All the tension in my body begins to decrease. This feeling of emptiness prevails through the scene as if all time has stood still. The madness surrounding the land stops for this moment to bring a new age of calm. I feel myself getting lost in the gallery show--simplicity within chaos. However, the circumstances at hand kept me from escaping into it.

Welcome to Novacoast, the happiest place in the universe for earthlings and aliens alike. At least it used to. The park has recently been abandoned as a result of financial troubles and suspected rumors of the owner's apparent affiliation with a local town cult--The Elderarachs; Some consider them to be nothing more than a fanatical group for the insane, while others believe differently. A place like this, formerly populated by bright colors and happy smiles turned into a place for malevolence and insanity, comes with a feeling of unease. Flickering in the distance, the lamps stood idle, witnessing many beginnings and ends. Streets are lined with loose trash piling up from continuous neglect. I remember this laughable dream of someday bringing my own kid, Taran, here, so I could share the same experiences I had with him. He used to be bright eyed like everyone around his age at the time. Soon things change. I try to distance myself from that child-like sense of wonder and innocence and stick to logic. While fools chase and relive the moment that is gone forever, trying to shorten an eternally widening gap, the wise are detached--with it comes great judgement and the ability to do what is necessary.

As I inch closer and closer into the park, I feel a sudden call in my mind. A sixth sense guiding me across the spider's web. A mental map connecting me through disrepair and my goal. I sprint as fast as an athlete, mustering up all of my stamina for this short burst. I stood in front of it. The owner's old room. The structure was imposing and it exerts a maddening air. A place my heart nor mind could not picture; it was suffocating. A primordial fear that kept telling me not to venture too far or I might get burned. Blood circulating around my body began to freeze and my mind began to drift off into the night.

When I awoke, they all gathered around me. *Did I black out because of them? Lured here?* They were unsightly and grotesque. Gazing at the crowd, I could see their inhuman qualities. Some of them possess eight of a certain body part--eight hands protruding from two arms, eight legs growing everywhere, or eight heads secreting juices from his neck. They are all ghost-like with blank expressions. Their sight concentrates on me; eyes piercing into my mind like a searing bite. The tallest one out of all them had the most disturbing presence. He boasts eight red gems embedded into his face as evident by dried blood dripping down; they each glow bright in this dark lit room. His face is the only one out of the group to breathe, but he could only do so with his mouth--it opens wide, but strangely never makes a sound. His arms are replaced by legs growing out of where they should be. Additionally, his chest has a tag on it that read, "Owner." An ornate design of what appeared to be a spider crawls right underneath it, but this unearthly marking kept moving. Its legs twitch ever so slightly nauseatingly. Each segment kept curling into impossible shapes and the spiders' ever-changing collection of eyes. I could not stand it anymore. Without hesitation, I grab one of them and wrestle him to the ground. No reaction. No resistance. The other heads turn and simply watch. *Was I doing the logical thing? They are unsightly abominations. I am just helping the both of us by stopping this pain. Why was I here again?* I came looking for someone, but I seem to have lost my way. I looked up from

the lifeless body I wrestled down and saw Taran, my own son, on an indescribable circle surrounded by blood, candles, and an old book on a pedestal. *Was it the mad group's plan? An unholy ritual.* He appears soulless like the rest of the maniacs in this room. My feelings. Indescribable. This maddening sensation creates a flame around my body. My eyes, heart, and mind were all inflamed with emotions. The room darkening until I could only see the lifeless body of my son and me. That sixth sense returned. The feeling that guided me here; my beginning and end. The individuals in the room came back to life and spoke, "Eh sawt turedra." I could understand their tongue. "He has returned," they repeated. Eight inhuman legs descend from the black sky and envelop my son and I. The entity's uncountable eyes facing numerous directions congregate into my line of sight. My body is overrun with a crawling sensation of insects. I could sense the blood of stars pouring into the mouths of eldritch abominations, the aliens' consumption, and the cosmic dream of the future. "Y'ma Ara'phol Re'cat eht be'w nda ui'gad uoy" A voice echoed, "May Ara'phol create the web and guide you" *After all that, I regress back to a faceless fool leaving behind my difference.*

Eric Louis Bagtas

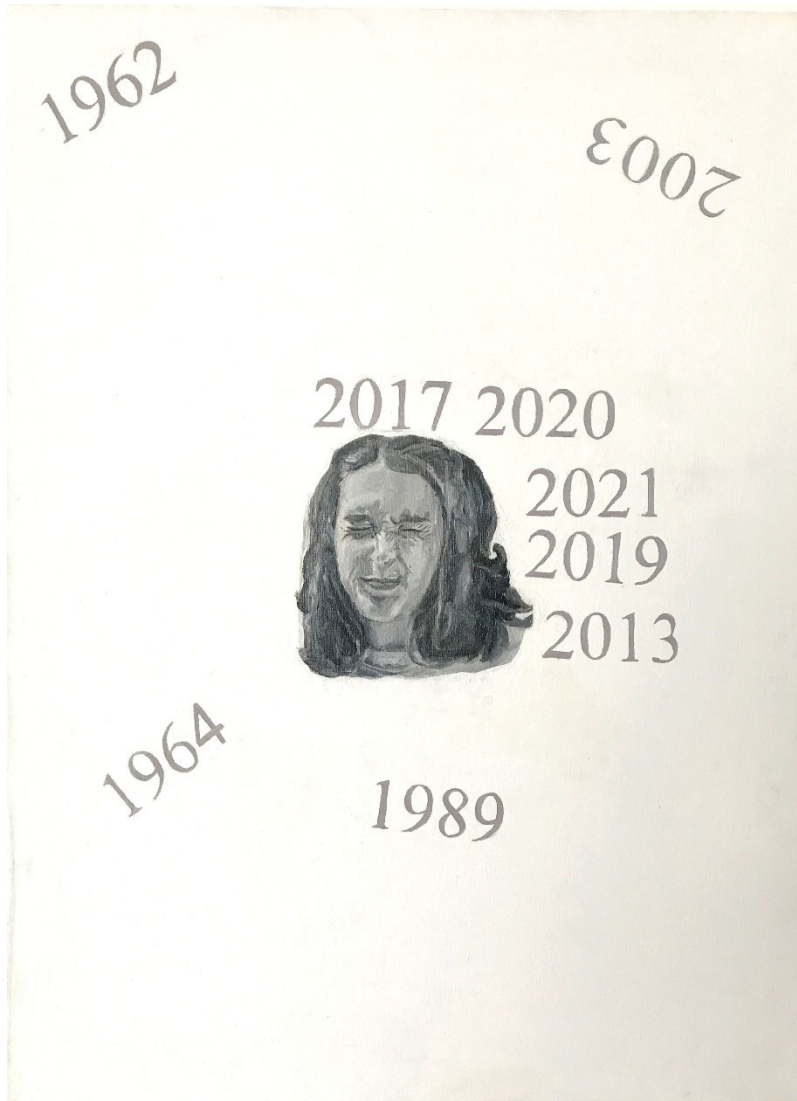


Katharine Kunze- AP Art

Phone Poem

Our phones are like time travelers,
Showing us social media from the past.
Our phones are like maps,
Allowing strangers to see who we are.
Our phones are like people,
Needing money and care.
Our phones are like clothes,
Requiring us to get new ones every couple of years.
Our phones are like drugs,
Addicting once you get hooked.

Lauren Margalit



Graham Routhier- AP Art

Longing

On stage, she became an inspiration in full force.
You want to be like her
Walking across the stage like a battlefield,
She meets your eye
Another faithful subject
You cower in her gaze

You will never, ever be
Capable of even feigning that cape of confidence
That Madonna wears with pride,
No doubt even with her off-stage persona.

She takes off her cape
For a second, the audience is tense.
Without the cape of confidence, how will she be Madonna?
But underneath, she shows that she doesn't need the cape
She is made of pure and unapologetic confidence
Like the sea is made of water.

She struts across her terrain
The reflection of the diamonds on her leather jacket strikes you right in the eye.
You flinch.
You look back and see God.
This time, you are not blinded by her.
Not even a little bit.

It feels good.
You bathe in the light that seems to radiate from her skin
Trying to soak up all you can before the sun sets.

lone Shih



Josie Simon- AP Photo

BACKSTORY FOR POEM

I'm sitting in a 50-year-old leather reclining chair. A beer in hand with the TV blabbing about football in front of me. I stare mindlessly at it, noticing the game commentary float through one ear and out the other. However, my thoughts feel turbulent inside my head. Almost as if they're flying around my brain, crashing into the walls of my skull. A horrible headache begins to form when I remember: I was fired from work today. Anxious thoughts surge through my mind so I take a sip of my beer and turn the TV off. A calming silence floods my ears.

Standing up, I make my way to the kitchen where I throw a frozen pepperoni and mushroom pizza into the microwave. I lean against the counter, my brain completely empty. Once the timer beeps, I take the floppy slice out of the microwave and drop it on a plate. I shove it into my mouth and finish my beer. Then I trudge up the stairs to my bedroom where my wife is already asleep on the bed. I slide under the covers and shut my eyes. I think about waking her and telling her the news. But I think against it, figuring she should have one more night's sleep before the burden rests on her shoulders as well. Somehow, I manage to fall asleep.

The next thing I know, I'm wide awake. The room is completely silent except for the soft breathing of my wife next to me. Inside my brain however, one thought keeps screaming, "How will you ever manage to support your family and yourself if you just lost your job?!". The room around me is completely quiet and yet it feels as though the noise in my head could wake an entire neighborhood. (288)

The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Barry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Isabelle Fries



Atomu Hicks- AP Photo

Phone Poem

My phone is like a Halloween mask,
Hiding my awkward self in public.

My phone is like delicious candy laxatives,
Creating guilt free pleasure in the beginning but ending in deep regret.

My phone is like a yo-yo,
Coming back to me even after putting it down.

My phone is like my PSAT score in freshman year,
Creating great, addicting, pain that I cannot stop looking at.

My phone is like a Pokémon,
Evolving and becoming more intricate as time goes by.

My phone is like my 15-pound dumbbells,
Leaving them behind for news ones as time passes.

My phone is like peanut brittle,
Being consumed with no moderation and ending in guilt.

My phone is like a piece of art,
Containing hidden and sophisticated parts the more I look into it.

Our phones are like children,
Creating pleasure and enjoyment even though they are never necessary to have in life.

My phone is like a lamp,
Bringing light upon my lacking social skills through, easily obtainable, new trends and information.

Ford Zamore



Marin Diz- AP Photo

To The Sitcom Industry in Crisis (inspired by Frank O'Hara)

Not you, shifted sine curves and periodic table
with your strident explanations of the physical world
nor you, Broadway Training Center in which Cultlike Loyalty
is wedding Pay To Play perpetually, nor you,
caroling Madrigals, sweeping the crowd in the Metlife Building (though I
had to live through that), but you, Situational Comedy Industry,
it's you I love!

In times of crisis, we must all decide again and again whom we
love,
And give credit where it's due: not to Peter Scotch, who
taught me
how to write and not write rather than perform (and has lately
agreed
to an interview), not to Temple Beth Shalom,
which is at best a concert of Shtetl songs and
irony,
not to the Hastings High School, which hates everybody, but to you,
glorious small screen, tragic Netflix, amorous Hulu,
stretching HBO2GO and startling built-in speakers, with all
your heavenly dimensions and reverberations and iconoclasms! To
Andy Samberg as the 'noine-noine' boy sneakered and enbadged,
Laura Prepon of the former red hair and lips and long, long
Sentence,
Amy Poehler as she parks in the lot of City Hall
and smiles, Olivia Rodrigo with her driver's license like a poptart
in her high school backpack, birthday-cake-pop-voiced Joshua Bassett of
the feet,
Neil Patrick Harris, the seducer of best-friends' smuldering
exes,
the Lilys, each and every one of you (I cannot bring myself to
prefer
Aubrey Anderson-Emmons over Ella Hiller, I cannot!), Ellie Kemper in a
pink cardigan
her bunker radiance and ingenuous remarks, Justin Baldoni of
the hotel,
its snooty hospitality, and hotellike too, too, the fast-talking Lauren
Graham,
Jane Krakowski drinking liquor on Tracy Morgan's
stolen yacht,
and alerting the paparazzi in the dirty Hudson, Zooey Deschanel rescuing Max
Greenfield
from Greatneck and Rainn Wilson rescuing Angela Kinsey from Ed
Helms,
Kristen Bell spewing sarcasm on the heavenly books while William Jackson
Harper sermonizes,
Mindy Kaling in her little spike heels reeling through Labor and
Delivery,
Larry David joking and Jerry Seinfeld joked and Ali Wong

eating breakfast for second breakfast and breaking spirits, Julie Andrews narrating,
and Patton Oswalt narrating and editorializing, and Daniel Stern narrating and editorializing and ageing, Yearley Smith being calm and wise, Danny Castellenta in his stunning girth, Yara Shahidi blossoming-ish, yes, to you and to all you others, the great, the near-great, the featured, the extras who pass quickly and return in dreams playing in your one-second SVU debut, my love!
Long may you illumine space with your marvelous cameos, PSAs and commercials, and may the money of the world glitteringly cover you as you rest after a long day on Ellen with your faces on thumbnails for our tabloids, the way rumors often come in droves but the heavens operate on a snap system. It is a divine precedent you perpetuate! Roll on, single camera and boom, as the great earth rolls on!

Noa Hart



Roisin O'Flaherty- AP Art

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

When COVID first started it was a big change because I barely saw anyone, and I started to feel alone having no one to talk to in real life other than my family. This virus changed my life because I had to learn in a different way. I had to understand how to use the knowledge the teacher gave and try to get the work done without a teacher next to me. I learned differently by not having 80 minutes of classes in person, instead, only talking to the teacher for 20 minutes on the computer. At first, it was a bit scary because teachers were giving assignments left and right and I felt so overwhelmed with the workload. I thought that I wasn't going to finish all the work on time. I also didn't know how to time manage everything. As time passed, I became a more independent learner and I realized that I could manage the workload and get all my assignments done. Sometimes, projects were difficult, but I got through it. I would go on calls to ask the teacher some questions about the assignment, or I would ask my friends. After several weeks, I didn't feel as overwhelmed as I did when online school started.

It is important to become more independent because it helps your skills as a student, and it prepares you for any assignment that a teacher gives you. I realized I was a little bit more independent when I was forced to work on assignments by myself because of COVID. This process changed me and taught me how to work alone on assignments and not ask teachers for support as much as I did before quarantine. I felt a bit smarter in a way because I was able to do homework and classwork by myself. I would read the assignment over and over until I understood it. I would maybe ask my parents for some help or search it up on the Internet. I also felt more confident in myself. This school year, I am going to try to work as much as possible independently, but it could be really challenging. The reason it could be challenging is that we are learning completely new things and it's hard for some students to understand what the teacher means. For example, if the teacher is not clear about a question, students have to email them. If everyone is having this problem, it might take a while for a teacher to respond. If we were in school, we could easily ask the teacher and he would answer right away. This is sort of the difference between online learning and regular school. Even though I'm nervous about coming back to school, I think that deep down I can probably achieve working on my own.

Logan Richiez



Jasmine Kayat- AP Photo

The Job

The fiery sun burned my cheeks
On the hot and sticky July day.
“Help wanted,” the sign read,
“Rowing experience needed.”

I was greeted by people in long white cloth
That hung from their stiff shoulders.
Their dark eyes watched me,
frightened me,
Made me want to crawl into a deep hole
but I followed them because I needed the job.

The tallest one led me to a canoe,
He went in before me
Icy water soaked through my shoes as I stepped in.
I held onto to an oar
With my shaking hands
And listened to the soft splashing of the water
As it rippled from the paddles.
Rowing reminded me of summer camp
When I could afford to go there.

Dark clouds turned the sky grey,
And the water nearly black.
I kept moving forward
Until an island of cliffs and ominous trees
Towered over me.
I stared at the man’s white clothing which hung all the way to his feet
And realized he was standing in front of a coffin.
I swallowed and felt a knot of fear
in my stomach
“Welcome,” he said.

Hannah Beinstein



Cayla Ossen- AP Photo

Heaven and Hell Paper

I opened my eyes and observed the room, dreading the fact that things hadn't changed since yesterday. It was practically empty; entirely filled with loneliness. I didn't even want to think about the mushrooms that rubbed against my body as I moved around in my bed. I took a second glance around the room to see how all the floors and furniture were covered in fleshy, stomach-churning disc shapes. I felt nothing but disgust and fear knowing that I will forever only be walking on fungi no matter where I go. Ugh, not another day living in this horror movie; I'd do anything to escape this.

Knowing that there was nothing better to do, I flipped over my blanket and stepped onto the squishy floor, leading myself to the bathroom. I

picked up my toothbrush and plopped a dollop of toothpaste onto the top. Since I can't use water, I immediately began to sweep the little hairs of the toothbrush, mixed with dry paste, onto my green, rotten teeth. Afterwards, I decided to change from my ragged pajamas into my one set of clothing that hadn't been washed in years. I descended the stairs as my stomach screamed in hunger. I opened the door to the refrigerator to find the only thing sitting on the shelf: gooey eggs. Without choice, I cracked one of the white shells open and dropped the inside yolk onto a heated pan. As I listened to the sizzling sound of the egg frying, a nauseating smell started to fill the whole room; such a sickening scent that I could not escape. Once it was ready, I put the cooked egg on an unwashed plate and



sat down on a chair that was not surprisingly covered in mushrooms. The texture and overall taste of the egg were so off-putting it made me want to upchuck.

This place is so lonely; I despise the sound of silence. As I sit still, the only thing I can hear is the fuzzy sound, of air vibrating, rotating around my ears over and over again. This place is giving me no option but to be bored out of my mind. Nothing but my body sitting still on a pile of fungi, and my mind non-stop traveling around negative thoughts. The way I talk to myself is cruel; almost as if I am beating myself up. With nothing to look forward to nowadays, it's hard to stay in the present. I decided to write a letter to try and seek help. As I began to touch the tip of

my orange pencil to the paper, a scratchy sound started to emerge. My whole body tensed up from the noise and I then realized there was no lead in the pencil. I was screwed, there was nothing I could do except to continue to live this way forever and ever. My heart started to pound out of my chest as my stress levels began to rise. I felt stuck, almost as if the walls were closing on me. I felt a single drop stream from the corner of my eye as I slowly started to walk backward. I was losing complete control over myself, I knew I was about to go insane. Right then, I figured the best choice for me was to just lie down and go to bed.

Still feeling anxious, I pulled the thin covers over my trembling body. As I inhaled through my nose and exhaled through my mouth, I tried to close my eyes and keep them shut.

A few hours passed and I awoke to the sound of my alarm; it was time for school. The purple walls were reflecting the morning sun streaming through the window, and the sound of birds chirping filled my ears. I breathed a huge sigh of relief as it all of a sudden hit me: it was all a nightmare.

Sarah Korosi with art by Caleb Painter- AP Art



Xenia Hernandez- AP Art

COVID-19 Epiphany Paper

What used to be an everyday affair, going out to eat with my friends, visiting my grandparents, and even going to school was disrupted in an instant when the COVID-19 virus came to New York, and soon after, to Hastings. Everyone has a routine, everyday activities that they are familiar with that make them feel stable and comfortable. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted my routine, making me feel anxious and unstable. Over the past six months, I have come to realize everything that I took for granted before the virus, things that were completely normal six months ago but feel so strange and unsafe now.

Before the pandemic, I would frequently visit my grandparents, who live a short 20 minute drive away. Seeing their smiles in person and being able to hug them are some of the things I miss the most. With advancements in technology, I can FaceTime them frequently, seeing their faces and hearing their voices, but that simply can't be compared to real human interaction. Not being able to hear my grandma's singing in person or eat my grandpa's food right next to him made me feel out of touch with my grandparents, and even out of touch with my own emotions. Real human interaction is irreplaceable, and I now understand how lack of it can have such a negative impact on someone's well-being. According to a survey by the University of Phoenix, more than four in ten Americans said they are "lonelier now than ever before as a result of the coronavirus outbreak" (Pesce). Always having to be on a screen to talk to people outside my immediate family, whether it be FaceTiming a friend, calling my grandparents, or being on a video call for school, makes me miss real human interaction and realize how much I took my time spent with people for granted.

Going to public areas without fearing for my health and well-being is a distant memory, something I completely took for granted. I used to go to the supermarket with my friends just to

make a quick stop and buy a snack, or walk through malls going from store to store, but with everyone at risk of the virus, impromptu things such as those are very limited. The COVID 19 virus makes it much harder for me to go out in public because of the constant fear of germs and having to stay away from other people. Although COVID has had many negative impacts on my life, it has given me a better appreciation for the simple things, many of which I took for granted.

Isabella Santana



Kim Rosner- AP Art

Untitled

It was the night of July 26, 1998. Three twelve year-old girls were walking in the streets of Seattle, Washington. All of a sudden, Samantha, Morgan, and Jordan saw the city turn black; it felt like the whole world shut down. It had been one of the hottest days on record, with a high of 104. Sweat dripped down their bodies like they were in a sauna. They held each other's hands tightly and neighbors panicked; most of the kids in the streets ran home. Store generators refused to turn on. Mothers were screaming the names of their children, and everyone was running into each other. The three girls waited on the side of the building so the little kids could run home; however, the three of them were at least half a mile or more away from home. Morgan started to freak out. "Will this journey of terror ever end?" she said. She had just moved here and was very uncertain of where she was. A couple minutes later, they continued to walk. When Jordan started hearing racoons, they started to run, with no clue how far they were to Samantha's house.

After running fifteen blocks, they heard a Honda Civic with terrified-sounding women. The headlights of the car shone in the girls' faces. Jennifer, Samantha's mother, screamed all of the girls' names and they ran into the car at the speed of light. You could hear the anxiety of the kids: their hearts throbbed, their hands shook, sweat poured down their faces. You could hear the fighting from apartments and houses. "It felt like I was in a nightmare," Morgan said. They all ended the night by having a sleepover in the dark discussing the reactions of each other.

Julia Mooney



Marin Diz- AP Photo



Caroline Rosner- AP Art

Untitled

The Fourth of July barbecue is just a thinly veiled excuse for my mother to try and make me some friends. Every year, she invites lots of people my age, and every year they go out and do whatever normal teenagers do, and I stay inside, drinking iced coffee and watching Criminal Minds. Honestly, it's a win-win situation for everyone involved - well, everyone except my mother. As people begin flowing in, I casually amble over to the back door, and give the handle a tug. It doesn't open. I pull harder - nothing. It's locked.

"Um, Mom, I think you accidentally locked the door!" I call. She comes over, clutching a pitcher of brightly-colored Kool-Aid.

"Yes, honey. That was on purpose. I was thinking, instead of staying inside this time, maybe you could hang out with the other kids?" I blink rapidly.

"But... I might get heatstroke!"

"You're not going to get heatstroke."

"You don't know that!" But she brushes me off, going to talk to some friends of a friend. I storm off and sit in the shade of the massive oak, hugging my knees to my chest. This is a disaster. For a couple minutes, I think maybe it won't be so bad. I'm sipping an iced tea, which is the next best thing if coffee is out of the question, and I'm observing people from the distance I prefer - far away. But of course, someone has to come over.

"Hey! We're going to walk into town and get ice cream, if you want to come!" I stare at her.

She's bouncing on the balls of her feet, and generally seems far too enthusiastic for my taste.

"No-" I start, but then I see my mom staring at me. If I don't go with this girl of my own free will, she'll make me, plus then I'll get saddled with some unpleasant task later, like serving desserts to chatty Melvin and his actually chatty wife Norma. Besides, I figure I can lose them somewhere in town and just go do my own thing.

"What's your name?" she asks.

"Benedict," I reply flatly.

"What kind of ice cream do you like?" Silence. "Well?"

"Vanilla." This is not, strictly speaking, true. I do not like vanilla ice cream. Heck, I don't even like ice cream at all. But if you say that to people, you really have to get into it with them. Really?, they say. Really, really? Well, you've never had my Grandma Joan's baked Alaska, blah, blah, blah, blah. Vanilla, on the other hand, is utterly unremarkable, and that's the way I prefer to present myself. Luckily, we arrive at the group, and I'm hoping I can lose her, but the girl persists.

"Oh my god, that's my favorite too!" She sticks out a hand. "Lulu, by the way." I nod stiffly and awkwardly fumble the handshake. I'm left-handed, ok? Still haven't gotten the hang of this whole 'default to the right thing'. As everyone intermingles, I produce my headphones from my bag. I mean, they're basically the universal signal for "do not disturb". We begin to walk at a downright crawl. I mean, it's 92 degrees, I get it, but could these people possibly go any slower? As we move along the sidewalk, the crowd gradually begins to creep around me. Tensely, I step to the side... and right into a huge puddle of murky water that pooled by the gutter after the last rainstorm.

"Ugh!" I shake the water off my sneakers. This is the last thing I need. "I'm fi-" I begin reflexively. Then I look up. "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." I wince, internally chastising myself for the horrible reference. Then I remember there's no one around to hear it. I'm still standing in a puddle. But gone is the stifling July humidity, replaced by a biting chill. I'm sandwiched on either side by buildings that reach up as far as the eye can see. And the whole place is... dark, for lack of a better word. It's like someone turned the brightness down on everything. I walk forwards, through the alleyway, further and further until I finally come to a street. I flag down a passerby, outfitted in a bowler hat and trench coat.

"Excuse me? Where are we?" He stares at me.

"Well, you certainly aren't from around here," he says, his voice a deep growl. Internally I scoff, but I put on a polite front.

"No, I'm not." He tips his monocle and begins to walk away.

"Wait! You never answered my question." He frowns at me.

"The consulate would hardly approve. They expect you to figure things out on your own, you know. You wouldn't be here if you couldn't." Well, that was helpful. I sit down on the curb, dangling my feet over the gutter. If it got me here, maybe it can get me home. I'm watching cars whiz by at ridiculous speeds when I feel a hard tap on my shoulder.

"Hey-" The woman puts a finger to her lips.

"Quiet. The consulate will see you now."

Anna Thomas



Jasmine Kayat- AP Photo

