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# Purple Press

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## OWL History Day in the books

*School showcase done, regionals around corner*

**Helena Squires Mosher**  
Staff Writer

The time is nigh OWL students. The time for proof reading drafts, annotating bibliographies, and making sure you know 110% of the facts about something, because the History Day season is upon us.

On February 13th, about

150 Open World Learning students showcased exhibit boards, papers, websites, performances, and documentaries about notable events or people in history, relating to this year's History Day theme: Triumph and Tragedy. Judges examined their projects, and asked questions about their

topic, to inform their decision on who to choose to move on to the regional competition in March. From there, projects may even move on to the state competition at the University of Minnesota, and the best of the best then go to Nationals, in Washington DC.

History Day is a big thing

here at Open World Learning. Multiple students continue to do History Day past 7th grade, when it's no longer required for a grade. "Believe it or not, I actually enjoy working on it! I think it's fun to dive in and become an expert on a specific topic," says Zoe Champion, a 10th grader currently making

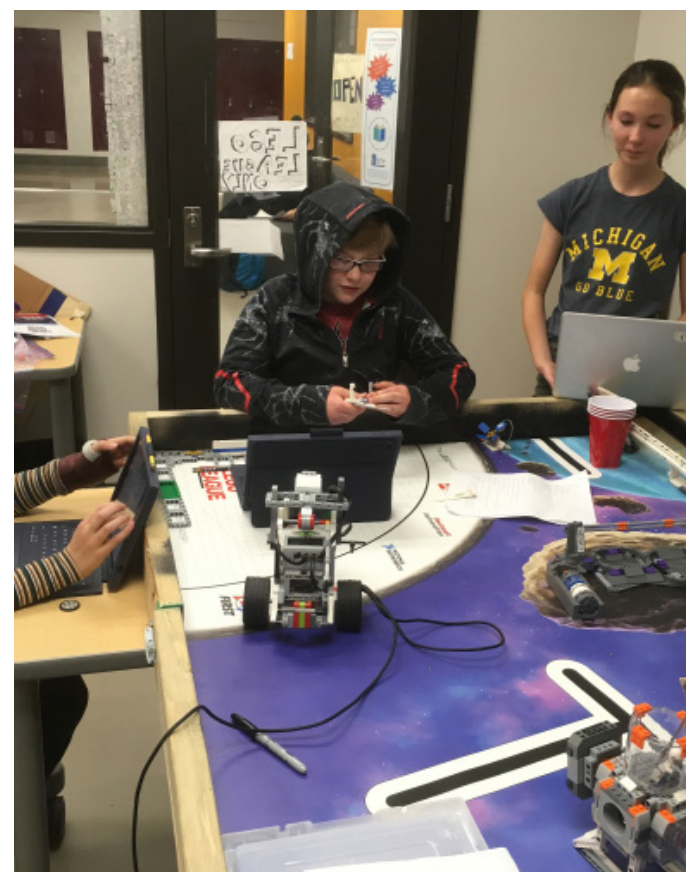
a group documentary on the Manhattan Project with fellow 10th grader Elsa Carlson. "It's also so rewarding to see your final product after all of the work you have put into it." Zoe and Elsa have placed at Nationals twice in the past two years, and are feeling nervous but still confident going into this season of History Day.

Students spend a lot of their

time out of school working on their projects. They go to libraries, conduct interviews, and revise over and over again based on comment from mentors and judges until they have a finished project for competitions. "It's too much work," said 10th grader Jonas Kammerer-Mueller when asked why he doesn't do History Day.

**History Day, 2**

## OWL teams battle at Lego tourney



OWL staff photos

The Brick Birds at the recent regional competition (left), and The After School Squad testing their robots before the competition (right). The competition judges teams' skills with robotics, research, and presentation to a panel of judges.

### OWL team wins "Innovative Design" award

**Grace Bellamy**  
Staff Writer

Three Lego League teams from OWL/Humboldt competed in the regional competition on Saturday, January 19 at Capital Hill.

No teams are moving on to the state competition, but two teams, The After School Squad from OWL and T.W.O.A.N.

from Humboldt both received the "Innovative Design" award. It recognizes the teams' ability to use engineering practices to more efficiently get points. OWL's oldest team, the Brick Birds, did not receive any awards. 8th grader Ian St. Louis from The Afterschool Squad said that his team did well - they consistently scored

points during the robot game portion. Ian liked seeing the robot that his team worked on "do its thing," but another competition highlight was "I really like explaining how the stuff worked and our process with the robot."

This year's challenge, Into Orbit, consisted of three parts: a competition using a robot to

complete tasks and earn points (robot games), a research project on how space affects humans, and a presentation to a panel of judges. There are at least three rounds of the robot games, and teams are judged based only on the highest score out of them. The judges grade teams on the robot games and robot design, teams' research, and core values and team spirit.

Awards are given out for

the robot, the project, the core values, and the Champion's Award. To receive the Champion's Award, teams must perform well in all aspects of judging and be in the top 40% of robot game scores. To move onto the next round, teams must be in the top 75% of the robot game scores. There are also judges' awards, based on "teams whose unique efforts,

**Lego League, 2**

## Under pressure: stress in sports

**Emily Yang**  
Staff Writer

Blood runs through my heart with pounding adrenaline coursing in my veins. The last arrow set on the bow with steady fingers set on the string, ready to fire. Take deep breaths in slowly, get ready to focus. One thing wrong can break a perfect round, but with the right way to stay focused, anything is possible.

During tournaments and even at a typical practice, pressure is a constant weight always on my shoulders. Pressure can either be my best friend or my worst enemy, but instead of letting it get to me, I zone everything out and focus on the goal. Be consistent every time I release, clearing my mind with every deep breath.

Many new students who have never been to or participated in a tournament have expressed nervousness. From learning how to shoot, scoring, and preparing for the first tournament, it can be a lot to comprehend. Sixth graders, Grace Moua and Charlie Acosta won't let those things get in their way of their upcoming success.

Charlie has been shooting with a bow since he was in fourth grade. Now as a sixth grader, he plans on taking archery to the next level. Charlie shot a 249 out of 300 and Grace shot a 251 out 300 at the first tournament.

Like many athletic sports, in team and in individual, archery is no different when it comes to getting your head in the game. There is a goal that is right in front of you, but sometimes what's in front of the goal is many difficult obstacles to mentally overcome. Clearing your mind and staying focus is the key factor in doing

**Pressure, 3**



Angelo Carvale  
**Math teacher and boys and girls volleyball coach Damon Liberatore.**

## Coming soon to a court near you

*Boys volleyball starting at OWL, Humboldt, but not with MSHSL*

**Paloma Leone-Getten**  
Staff Writer

Boys volleyball is coming to OWL and Humboldt. Yes, you read that right. Boys volleyball is coming. It's like girls volleyball, but with boys.

Recently, there has been a bigger push to get boys volley-

ball clubs started in Minnesota, and then to make it a varsity sport. The idea to start a boys volleyball team at Humboldt and OWL began with some boys at Humboldt. They were interested in the idea and talked to a teacher there, Hannah Osborne. "The athletic direc-

tor contacted me just to see if I had any information or knowledge and I got on board with that. I have volunteered to coach for this year and I would love to see it become a varsity sport," said math teacher Damon Liberatore.

For now, boys volleyball

is not considered an MSHSL sport, so it is similar to the Ultimate Frisbee team. But, there is a push to make it a varsity sport as soon as next year. "If it was a varsity sport, it would be funded just like any varsity sport at Humboldt or OWL. If

**Volleyball, 2**

Adult to Blame  
Leo Bickelhaupt

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Paloma Leone-Getten  
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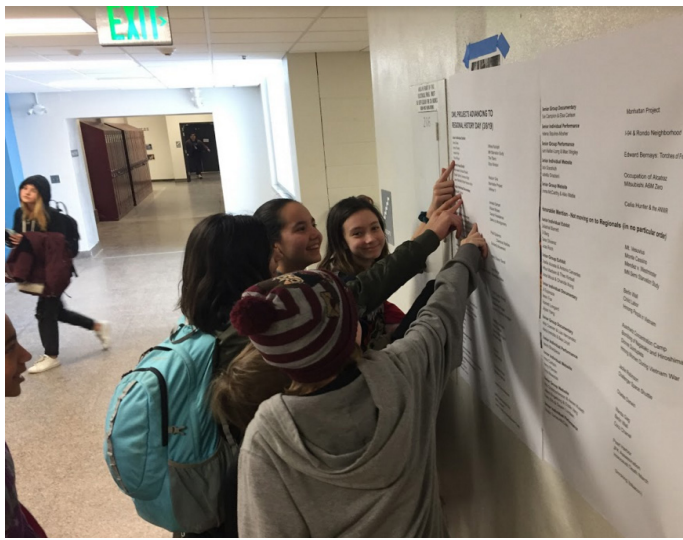
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## History Day, 1

He's right, it is a lot of work, but the kids who continue to put themselves through it are extremely passionate about the work they do. OWL is one of the most competitive schools in Minnesota, one of the most competitive states in the competition. Judges' decisions get quite dicey as you move up in the competition, especially for

divisions that have a lot of entries, like websites and exhibits, or divisions with a lot of high quality entries, like documentaries.

But don't fear, as long as you're having a good time, the prizes and judging won't be the end of the world, and if History Day isn't your forte, once you're out of 7th grade, you can avoid the chaos.



Katie Craven

Middle schoolers looking at the results from the school competition.

## Lego league, 1

performance or dynamics merit recognition," according to FIRST Lego League. This is an open section, allowing judges to give awards to teams who did well, but did not otherwise place.

The core values include

teamwork, innovation, impact, inclusion, and fun. Ian said that he developed such skills while on the team. They eventually started to work together. Ian said the team was "working with everybody no matter what."

## Volleyball, 1

it's a club sport it gets paid off of donations," said Damon.

Damon has high expectations for how well the team will do, especially because a lot of the athletes on the team have never played volleyball before. "I do really well with athletes that are starting from scratch. I feel like I get them from point A to point B really fast. When you get people who are fresh, you can get the raw talent, and sometimes it takes them longer, and sometimes, depending on the athlete, especially if they've been in another sport, it goes pretty quick," said Damon. "I think because it's a club sport, we're going to be a little bit outnumbered at the beginning but with practices

and competition and exposure, we'll definitely move up the ranks."

Currently, about 40-50 boys are interested in being on the volleyball team, and about half of them are OWL students. Practices will start in March, but there may be some open gym time in late February or early March. The season wraps up by the middle of May. Because of the lack of funding for club sports, the boys volleyball team is asking for donations or helpers throughout the season. "If there's families who are willing to support or who want to volunteer their time or anything like that, they can certainly contact me or Hannah Osborne," said Damon.



Kate Moe

10th grader Haakon Neske slides down a hill at a West Side Sledding Club meet. Want to join? Go to @westsidesleddingclub on Instagram, or talk to Sawyer Neske.

# A search for nicer rooms

## A tour of select teacher rooms reveals hidden treasures

Samantha Peden  
Staff Writer

As I sat in my first hour, in the cold, bland tundra we call Leo's room, amidst the aggressive clanging from the radiator, and the floating heads on the wall. I knew there had to be something more. I knew if I ventured out, I would find what makes a classroom pleasant.

I immediately found hope when I went into Bridget's room. Despite the temperature being colder than Leo's room, as its halfway underground. However, the decor makes up for the location. This is the closest you'll get to the rainforest cafe in a school. Bridget's room is a lime green, with giant leaves canopying the big row of bookshelves, and an array of couches, pillows and blankets, and cultural items covering the walls, this room is designed to welcome and comfort the students, when students aren't punting others in the face with a pillow. The dim lighting from the lamps helps with the rooms calming, cozy effect.

My next stop was Katie's room. When you enter, you're greeted by a lifesize cardboard cutout of Han Solo, which was given to her by one of her classes. In different areas of

the room you'll find various Star Wars, Marvel, and History memorabilia. Katie also has a lifesize Chewbacca, Rey and a mini, giant stormtrooper. However, the cutouts may or may not make your heart skip a beat when you walk into the room and you see a 6ft, giant, brown furry figure looming in the corner. With all of the pop culture decor it really makes the room feel fun and 'hip' with the kids. The wall of windows also gives a nice natural light, making the room feel bigger, the architecture of the room is also different. It has a half raised ceiling, which also gives the room an interesting and unique build.

Megan's room is very clean cut, but has personality. This room is very discussion centered, with the tables formed around the center so students can interact and express ideas together. Color is also a component as the tables are organized by colored supply bins and lanterns that hang above, giving the room a nice modern touch. This room has a great view of downtown Saint Paul, raising its property value. There are also live fish in this room which are always fun to watch, unless you're supposed to be working...then watch Megan. A newer, great addi-



Emily Yang

Megan's room is very clean cut, but has personality.



Emily Yang

Katie's room decor is topical, fun, and has a lot of personality.

tion is the gardens in bowls. Her students are contributing to them, and they're displayed by the windows. There's also a giant furry jellyfish on top of a cabinet, which confuses newcomers but it's a great conversation piece. Another thing I'd like to comment on is her shelf of unicorn figurines, which I believe adds personal flare and whimsy.

Kevin's room was much different. The room seems to have taken lighting inspiration from Hollister. If you have a flashlight, you'll be able to see the simple, but tasteful decor. There's a nice seating area with chairs and a rug in the corner, where there's a nice view of Kevin listening to his music with his AirPods. There's a clean cut, geometric mirror set, and framed art of the "alot's" on the wall. In the back of the room, you'll find another framed photo, this one being kitten heads formed into a pyramid, which is just as strange as it sounds; but somehow, it works. The lamps, although dark, provide a nice warm glow to the room. Which complements the yellow walls. This room may be smaller than others, but it certainly doesn't impact the quality.

I then went to Nora's room, I have three words. Pink and Orange. This room automatically has a welcoming and open presence, due to high

ceilings and bright colors. Everything in this room is organized by colors. You want an assignment? Check the green cubby. You want a senior sem organizer that was due over a month ago? Check the blue cubby. Organization is key in this room, the learning targets for each class are up on the wall with bright colored paper, separated by class. Another thing interesting about this room is the large fake tree, which really makes the room feel more natural and calm. Something that is also pretty important in this room, is the three giant pink stuffed animals. As students are doing work, someone will have a pink sloth slung around their neck, someone's cuddling the teddy bear, and someone's chucking the pink elephant at another student. Nora believes having something to physically touch, helps with comforting and calming students when they're stressed or may be struggling with other things. The organization, bright colors, and comforting pieces really make this room a great place for learning.

When I returned back to the black hole of nothing (Leo's room), I at least had comfort knowing that in the rest of OWL, there was hope for the students in other, more inviting spaces.

# Teacher feature: Andy Kunkel

## New special education teacher thrives in his role at OWL

Ella Pratt  
Staff Writer

You may have seen the tall dude rocking the blond bun and beard in the halls before and wondered, who is he and where did he come from? Well I'm here to tell you about the mysterious special education teacher, Andrew (Andy) Kunkel.

When asking Andy how he got into teaching he says he "got lucky" with his job as a personal care assistant, giving needed assistance to people who are sick, injured, mentally or physically disabled, or the elderly and fragile. When Andy started as a teacher's assistant he continued working with autism programs full time, until he solidified his passion for teaching. Andy started teaching at Arlington working as a

teacher's assistant for 3 years, afterwards he moved to Johnson High School still working as a teacher's assistant for 3 more years. He then moved on to Parkway Montessori middle school where he started an autism program and influenced the school greatly all before applying to be a special education teacher at OWL.

Having mixed grades in math classes forced Andy to adjust his teaching style, "It's really cool, I've never seen mixed (grades) in math classes before". Andy helps out in Clara Olson and Patricia Hosfield's math classes, and says co teaching is "all about compromising and communication." helping with teaching the class and bringing students to test in his quieter room, that is when it's not too cold because of the

lack of heaters.

Andy says one of his favorite parts of teaching is "seeing kids get their Ah-Ha moment". As much as Andy enjoys teaching there are many challenges such as OWL being a "cell phone school" he says "it's hard to determine whether a kid is actually doing work or playing video games". Despite having cell phones allowed in our school Andy loves the opportunity to go on field trips and create a closer bond with students.

Andy grew up in "an outer ring suburb" in the small town of Buffalo, Minnesota, before moving to Saint Cloud for college.

Despite not being able to bike to work anymore because of the longer days, Andy still makes his way around by stay-



ing busy with friends. When Andy is done with teaching during the day, he likes to stay busy by going to concerts at night or sitting on his hanging couch that looks over his friends playing ping pong in his garage. He is also an obsessive fan of the Minnesota Wild.

# Senior Spotlight

Emilie McCormick



**How many years have you been at OWL?**

This is my first year.

**What are your plans for next year?**

I have confirmed my enrollment at the U of MN Twin Cities and I'm going in under a sociology of law, criminology, and deviance major.

**What was your favorite class in high school?**

I enjoy crew.

**What extracurriculars are you involved in?**

I'm in the school's Outward Bound.

**What was your favorite fieldwork trip you've been on? And why?**

I liked fall retreats because of the sauna in Ely.

**What's your favorite book, movie, or TV show?**

My favorite movie is Coraline.

**If you had a walk up song what would it be?**

Oh my god, Nine in the Afternoon by Panic! at the Disco.

# That One Little Kid

Ratha Johnson

**How tall are you?**

I think like, six feet.

**Who's your favorite senior?**

Undecided.

**Where do you think you're going to college?**

I don't know about that one yet . . .

**What's the weirdest thing about OWL?**

All the different celebrations we do.

**What's your favorite school lunch?**

So far it's chicken drumstick and pizza, so far.

**What elementary school did you come from?**

Phalen Lake elementary

**What's your favorite class?**

So far, it's gym



## Pressure, 1

well in anything you put your mind to.

"Before my free throws, I take two dribbles, take a deep breath, pause, and shoot. I do this before every free throw, it helps me get in the right state of mind," said 11th grader Tom Hobday.

Tom has been playing basketball since the age of 7. During his freshman year, his free throw shots were almost automatic, but when he had made varsity that is when he felt the most pressure.

"My free throw percentage plummeted. This year, with a year of experience under my

belt, I feel much more confident in my free throws. There's still a little bit of pressure that comes when everyone is expecting you to make the shot, but I make about 70% of them," said Tom.

Whenever Tom misses a shot, whether it be too far to the right, he thinks to himself to shoot more to the left. I found it interesting that even though basketball and archery are very different, we think very similar when it comes to adjusting your shot.

Before he takes a shot he takes two dribbles, take a deep breath, pause, and shoot.

"I do this before every free

**"Before my free throws, I take two dribbles, take a deep breath, pause, and shoot. I do this before every free throw, it helps me get in the right state of mind"**

throw, it helps me get in the right state of mind," said Tom.

11th grader Micah Gundale has been in soccer competitively since the age of 9, and has taken up many opportunities that kids would only dream of. When it comes to his Penalty Kicks, feeling some kind of pressure is normal. He has represented his country through a developing Olympic team comprised of the best players in the state.

"The key thing to doing well in soccer or in sports in general is being able to always find the love and passion that you developed in the early stages of your career," said Micah.

Before Micah starts his pk's he always tends to replace the ball. It is a way for the kicker to have confidence in their shot. This part of the game can be the hardest as the flow of the game has stopped.

"I do believe it is harder because when you are in the flow your constantly moving and leaving yourself up to instinct," said Micah.

When you're taking a free kick that flow has been stopped and you have maybe

too much time to think about your next action.

11th grader Abby Davis has been in volleyball for 11 years. Being a part of a team where everyone has the same passion as you do, Abby believes that it is an important do her best. Being a middle hitter means that it is important to have a strong hit.

The biggest pressure in the game is when it comes to serving. The flow of the game has stopped and a point can be determined based on how well the serve is. Abby has a ritual of bouncing the ball 5 times before serving the ball. During this time, the whole gym is silent as everyone is watching.

"I always take a deep breath and take a mental picture of where I want the ball to go," said Abby.

Being in the right state of mind and having the love and passion is the best way to succeed. They all believe that being a good teammate comes first over their individual performance. Everything else will come naturally after that.

# I'm going to be Dr. Hall!:

## An interview with Megan

*Megan discusses her path to getting her doctorate, the importance of self-motivation, and how the natural world gives her hope for the future.*

**Nik Logue**

Staff Writer

**You've been teaching at OWL since it was at West Seventh.**

**What do you think is the greatest thing you've learned about teaching in such a non-traditional environment?**

Ooh, that's a good question. Well our school motto is nurturing self-directed learners since 1971. And I think, probably, the most valuable thing I've learned as an OWL teacher is how to help a young person become self-directed, which is a really gradual process. I think it is really important that teachers model organization, responsibility and clear communication, and then slowly, over the years, release that responsibility to students so that by the time they are juniors and seniors, students have that sense of owning their education and really being in charge of what they're doing. It's been really fortunate that I've been able to work when there were a lot of veteran teachers on staff that had a ton of experience with helping students in becoming self-directed learners without expecting that to just be something that people could naturally do. Because I don't think anyone can automatically take charge and know exactly what to do, but learning how to help students become self-directed.

**Do you believe your education made you strive to go to those lengths of getting your doctorate?**

Oh yeah...so my education, starting from when I was little, was kind of about self-direction too. I went to a Montessori elementary school, then went to a traditional middle school and high school—which I pretty much hated—but I was kind of self-directed even as a

little kid probably because of the Montessori start. So I knew how to navigate the system and get the education I wanted. All the time since I was growing up, since I was five years old, my mom had a PhD. And so I always admired that about her and thought it would be cool to get a terminal degree myself. But you don't really need a PhD to be a really strong teacher. And PhDs are kinda expensive, so the thing that really clicked over the difference and helped me go to get my PhD was getting a scholarship. Walden University gives a full scholarship for any degree that a Teacher of the Year chooses. So because I received the Minnesota Teacher of the Year award, I had the opportunity to get a free PhD. So I was like "Yay! Just like mom! I'm going to be Dr. Hall!"

**[laughs] Are you going to make your students call you Dr. Hall?**

I don't really feel like that would be a good fit with the philosophy of the school, [chuckles] so I think I'll just make my colleagues call me that if they're being rude.

**Circling back to self-direction, do you have faith that the people you teach will strive to go the lengths you've gone?**

Well...I think the real goal of education is to help people become who they are meant to be, and to really become self-actualized as the full person they want to be. So if I have a student whose true destiny is to own their education and go get a PhD, then I hope that going to OWL helps them become that person. But there are lots of different paths to happiness and success in life, so if being true to themselves,

Megan, 4



Megan helping senior Athena Bolton-Steiner in her AP Environmental Science class.



OWL Staff photo

11th grader Tom Hobday shoots a free throw.



# Reviews 'n' stuff



## Kids, magic, and robots, oh my!

*Eight-book long Amulet graphic novel series seems to mix elements of sci fi and fantasy*

Cy Christensen  
Staff Writer

The Amulet book series is about two lil' people who travel to another world and use magic to slap some ghosts and elves and become bigger people (emotionally, not physically. They're still children). There's also robot houses. It's an amalgamation of some elements from fantasy like magic and curses, and sci-fi, 'cause eventually they're in space.

All the problems might turn you away from the series, but with all the noticeable problems, these books are still a fun read. Kazu Kibuishi is a wonderful artist and I love the world he built. The charac-

ters are interesting even when they're not forgotten about, and the plot, although trying to be every fiction genre there is, works well most of the time.

The Amulet books have all the great aspects of a book series that's being milked for cash. There's the large world, the one book that you don't really know why it's there, like an entire book that's just filler, the wide cast of characters, the characters that the writer forgot about in the sixth book and then mentioned his name once in the eighth book, etcetera. Amulet isn't all bad though. Eventually they go to space for some reason!

The main characters are

Emily and Navin. Emily saw her dad die, and she's pretty hung up about it, and Navin is, um, confused? Hungry? You don't really know much about his character, besides the fact that he plays video games.

Did I mention he plays video games? Because that's his storyline. He plays video games, which translates to air-boat thingies and house mechs and war machines. It makes sense. Anyone who plays video games can use mile-high war robots. Obviously.

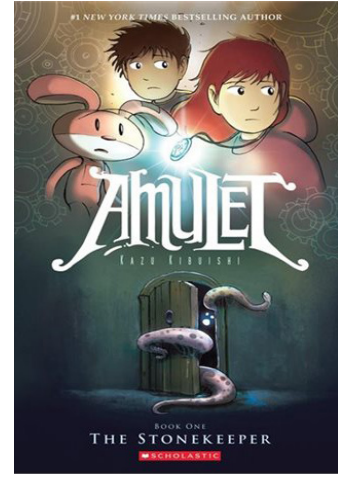
The sixth book maybe introduces the actual villains of the story. Other than that, it's just more side characters and a beautiful setting that's only

used for half a single book. Another problem is sometimes you'll see things that seem like it's supposed to be a subtle hint with something around the plot to solve a mystery or whatever, and it doesn't go anywhere? And sometimes things are just resolved so quickly you don't even see the fights or anything. It's just 'Oh, yeah, now everyone else is dead because otherwise the plot can't happen or something.'

Here's a fun drinking game you can't do because we're all in middle/high school don't drink it's bad: drink a shot every time the main characters are left alone by some unfor-

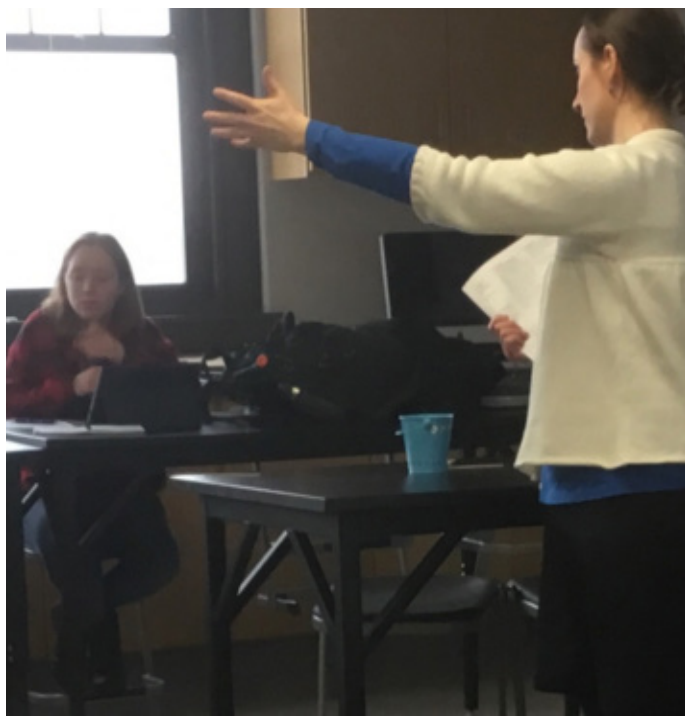
tunate circumstance. I once saw a guy in the fourth book get killed (two guys actually) and the only detriment to the characters was four panels of aaaaa someone died and they had to run. Emily doesn't have any qualms with people dying in front of her eyes, it's both normal and fine. Everyone dies, so it doesn't matter if it's by old age or being eaten alive by swarms of extradimensional cave monsters.

I did enjoy reading them, and from a more positive perspective I'd say the issues don't affect the read a ton, and you'll probably find similar problems in other books. I'd suggest reading the series if you enjoy



any fiction that isn't realistic/historical. I give these books a 3.5/5.

Megan, 3



Angelo Carvale

**Megan teaching her AP Environmental Science class.**

for my students, means maybe getting a different type of certification and still being able to support themselves, be comfortable, and have time with their families, I think that's fine too.

**Do you have any plans for when you get your doctorate?**

Well, I think I'm going to rest for about six months [laughs] 'cause it's a lot of work and I'm tired. And I'm really looking forward to being able to focus on being present in the moment with my students and with my children at home. I feel like, these last five years I've been in school, I've always had something weighing on my mind, and it will just be very peaceful to end that chapter and close that book and just set it on the shelf for a while. I think it would be really fun for me, while I'm still teaching at OWL, to have some workshops or summer class or a weekend class where I'm helping other teachers. I really like organizing and planning, so I've always thought I'd enjoy teaching what they call METHODS, which is a—[turns to her student-teacher] Heather's nodding, she just took it—it's about creating your syllabus, creating your course plan, and then bringing it down to the unit and lesson level and real-

ly being organized and planful in your teaching. And I love organizing and planning, so I think that would be a fun thing to teach, but only if it were an evening class, or a weekend class, or an online class, because I want to stay at OWL for a long time. But mostly, I think the way my life is going to change by having a doctorate is that I'm going to be a more effective teacher.

**What is something you hope every graduating class will learn from OWL when going out into the world?**

Well I think the most important thing that every graduate takes away with them is knowing the function of the Golgi apparatus. But in addition to that basic science knowledge, I hope that people who leave OWL know that they're valuable and important to the world. And that they feel empowered to make the changes they want to see, because nobody is satisfied with the world, we all have to go out and make our mark. I hope all of our OWL graduates see that they are enough, that they are good and strong and powerful people, and that they have the tools to learn what they need to learn, to do what they've got to do, to make the world the way they want it to be.

**A common theme in science class is how the world is in dire need of many things, whether environmental or agricultural. Do you believe the future generation will deliver that?**

I think...yeah, I don't think it's a single delivery, I don't think the next generation will deposit a package of perfection upon the world and all the problems will be solved. But I think young people—everybody, but especially young people—are aware of the environmental challenges that we face, and they feel some urge about making a change. And I see that when young people are conscious of their carbon footprints. There are more young vegans than there are old vegans, and there are more young people that use public transit than there are old people that use public transit. So yeah, I think every generation becomes more attuned to the needs of our planets and more committed to it; but I think it's a more gradual change. I don't think there is going to be a line in time where every person does everything that's needed to do to halt and reverse climate change. I think we're more gradually waking up to the situation and gradually changing our lifestyles.

**And do you have faith in the future?**

Yeah! Yeah, I mean, I have concerns; there are things that are happening in the world that make me want to just close my eyes or sit down and cry. There are really bad things happening in the world, but I also believe, fundamentally, that human beings are good, and that human beings want the world to be peaceful and kind and clean, and that we don't want to be hurtful. I really do believe that...so yeah, I am hopeful. I don't think you can spend time with nature and not feel hopeful; trees, I think, are very consoling. So whenever I get to work in the greenhouse or work in my garden at home or go out into the forest with my students, that renews my sense of hope for the future.

## Boss battles: the good, the bad, and the demented

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Staff Writers

Boss battles are an integral part of the video game experience. When done right, they can be an amazing way to cap off a segment of the story. However, they can be difficult for the makers of the game to pull off. There is always the very real risk that one or more of the bosses will fall flat. What sets a good boss fight apart from a bad one?

Even though visuals have little bearing on the quality of a game, they still can make it memorable.. One of the most memorable aspects of Gruntilda in *Banjo-Kazooie* is her design, partly because of how the game's exaggerated, cartoony art style allows it to take the clichéd witch look we're all familiar with, and turn it up to eleven. On the opposite end of the spectrum of graphical realism, the *Dark Souls* franchise is almost synonymous with messed-up appearances, exemplified no better than in the third entry's Dancer of the Boreal Valley. With her (probably "her") lanky build, slimy look, and graceful movements, it's almost impossible *not* to be just short of hypnotized from her with your eyes.

It's possible no franchise has mastered the art of the wonderfully demented enemy better than the *Resident Evil* series, especially with its long repertoire of mutated humans. Just looking at William Birkin's final form from *Resident Evil 2*, or Salazar's transformation in *Resident Evil 4*, one would never guess that they started out as mere humans.

Before we move on from the aesthetics, let's take a look at the other half of the more superficial elements: the audio. Now, this bit is going to be broken into two parts, one of which will be focused on the music, and the other of which will be focused on the fights' sound design.

The soundtrack is often an essential element in setting a scene. Would any of the numerous dragons in *Skyrim* be as memorable without their heavy percussion and massive choirs?

Other soundtracks are more experimental. Upon an initial listen, *Dark Souls III's* Abyss Watchers theme may not sound like a boss fight, with its mellow tones and somber mood. However, it still perfectly matches the encounter. How does the music work so well despite lacking the bombasticity associated with boss themes? Well, it might help to compare that very piece against one that better aligns with expectations: the Koloktos/Moldarach theme from *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword*. One of the most important things to take into consideration here is the circumstances of the fight.

Both Moldarach and Koloktos—*Skyward Sword's* third and fifth bosses—just appear without a whole lot of context. In any case, the loud and energetic music fits the encounters.

Of course sometimes the designers are just being playful. Exhibit A: *Cuphead*. With its focus on ridiculous, over-the-top villains and its old 1930's cartoony art style, it also carries a hefty amount of period-appropriate big band jazz. The methods of scoring a boss battle are fluid and open for the composer to experiment with to create something that stands out.

Sound design is also integral in boss fights. A lot of the weight can come from the sounds of a boss, less so in speech (which can also be used to the fight's aesthetic advantage), but more in terms of their interaction with the environment. This may be an easy example when talking about weight, but here goes: *Shadow of The Colossus*. In the encounter with Barba, the

second Colossus, you climb up the body of the giant and up to their head, before you can give the finishing blows with your sword. However, since this is only your second encounter with a Colossi, it's treated less as a boss and more an example. Before he notices you, and you're running up to his foot ten times bigger than you, there's no music. All you hear are his booming footsteps, shaking the ground. Soon enough he sees you, and that's when the music comes in. And you get a feeling of what you're up against.

Another great example of sound is Odolwa from *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, but for different reasons. It's the classic retro boss setup: You find a new room, walk in, the door shuts behind you and out comes a boss. Odolwa falls from the ceiling and swings his sword, however what stands out to me was his voice. He has an intimidating chant in a language the player doesn't recognize, creating a mysterious aura around him.

In most games, bosses will have a set of (usually subtle) animations conveying to the player what they are about to do. Odolwa doesn't really have these, but instead his series of chants perform that role. Visual design, of course, can bring a lot to a character in terms of intimidation. But I think in lots of cases, sounds produced by said character can do leagues more to make the player know it will be a long, well structured battle.

We have just scratched the surface into everything that goes into these essential encounters. Because believe me, we have a lot more to say. Stay tuned for next issue, in which we will cover the gameplay aspects of these fights, and more.