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## Community Service Club in the Courtyard

By: Niek Erkkila

It's the end of the 2nd quarter, and while some kids might be at home playing video games or at the school playing sports, the kids involved in the Community Service Club are working hard to make White Plains a better place to live in. The first project the Community Service Club is tackling is planting daffodils in the newly renovated courtyard, led by the 7th grade science teacher, Mr. Lupia.



### Why is planting flowers your first project in the community service?

Honestly the weather is nice, and I want to get the whole group out before the weather gets awful. The daffodils have to be planted during the fall. I also wanted to make the courtyard beautified this year because the courtyard just got redone.

### What are some of the other projects planned?

We are planning to write letters to the elderly that don't really have anyone left. We are also doing a food drive.

### Why did you start community service?

When I was in my old school, I did something similar, and I always felt so rewarded and wanted to share it with some of the Highlanders.

### What do you hope to accomplish through community service?

I want to make White Plains a better place and to give kids the opportunity to help their community.

### Did you ever have any other ideas for community service?

Something that I wanted to do, but never the time to do, is a school supply drive where kids that might not be able to afford supplies would be able to get new supplies without using decrepit school owned supplies.

### When did you start Community Service Club?

I started the first year I taught at this school, but it was during the pandemic, so things are a lot different now.

### What do you think was your most meaningful Community Service project?

When we wrote letters to the elderly that lived alone. This felt especially important during the pandemic when social contact was at a full time low.



Did you know that Highlands has it's very own Food Pantry? Right now, the Community Service club is running a food drive to collect nonperishable items to donate to our food pantry. Please see Mr. Lupia or any member of the Community Service Club for more information!

## Let's Use our Brand New Courtyard!

By: Mary Magneson, Viviana Gerontzos, Ellie Conley, & Elizabeth Salera

Students should be able to have access to the courtyard. It's a big space filled with big opportunities. The courtyard was recently redone, but nobody uses it, even though it's different now. The school has put a lot of effort into something that is barely used. It's a very spacious area students can use to work with their peers or enjoy lunch by themselves or with a study group.

Once it gets warmer, especially in the spring, students should be allowed to go outside in that

area. It would be a good idea for classes to go there on nice days and have lessons outside just like they do in front of the school or in the library when it's cold. Students enjoy a change of scenery sometimes because staying in the same classroom all the time could get boring. It also would get us fresh air. The courtyard was also redone the previous year. Also, the community service club is planting flowers and



making the place comfortable. There could be other add-ons to make it better, like benches, or a tree.

We interviewed Ms. Merrill (librarian), Mr. Mulcahy (8th grade Social Studies teacher), Ms. Davila (8th grade chorus and select choir teacher),





Ms. Irlen (7th grade chorus teacher and musical director), and Mr. Brown (administrator) and here is what they said.

Ms. Merrill mentioned how she would love to use the courtyard. It could be used for many things, such as study groups, library sessions, and a good space to get fresh air for everyone. She mentioned how with the possible (not guaranteed) installation of air conditioning, windows can be closed so teachers won't have issues with noise levels.

Mr. Mulcahy expressed how, with or without air conditioning, he wouldn't mind the noise level. He thinks it's a good idea for a new learning space for students to enjoy. He mentioned while any subject can be possible, it's easiest for ELA and Critical Literacy classes to be held out there. The idea was brought up that for his personal class, Socratic Seminars could be held outside.

Mr. Brown mentioned how he would like to start using the courtyard, especially because of its recent change. We talked to him about the Community Service Club and what they're planning on doing in the future. They want to start planting in the planting boxes when it gets warmer. He mentioned how all the building and hardscaping is done and it's practically ready for use.

Ms. Davila and Ms. Irlen both talked about how it would be nice for music classes, musical rehearsals, and talent show rehearsals to be held out there. They also came up with a really good idea for kids during lunch. Kids could go out there and study or read outside or there could be something like an open mic for kids who want to share their talent, or just want to have some fun.



## 2023 Modified Fall Sports Wrap Up

By: Kellen Doherty

Yet again, another fall has left us, leaving behind a once again memorable fall sports season. From football to cross country, to swimming, to field hockey, every team showed tremendous spirit, teamwork, a winning mindset, and of course, excellent players. So, after an exciting season I will take us back and look at every team's best moment in the Courier's Fall Sports Recap!

### Football

The Modified Football Team finished the season with a 4-1 record, holding opponents scoreless through the first four games of the season. The Tigers cruised to victories over opposing schools New Rochelle, Rye, Fox Lane and Carmel. The team lost in a battle to Mamaroneck in the final game, with a final score of 30-12.

"As coaches, we were a bit surprised to see the team doing so well, since we had zero returning starters from the year before," said football Coach Armogida. "The boys worked hard and were disciplined, and we were able to have a great season! In the first four games our starters were out of the game by the start of the second quarter because of their dominating play."

### Field Hockey

The Modified Field Hockey team finished the Fall with a 1-4-3 record and showed a lot of school spirit and grit throughout the season. In their home games, the Tigers were sure to attract a big crowd to watch them take on opposing teams, such as Rye, Horace Greeley, Pelham, Mamaroneck and Scarsdale.

"There were twenty-five field hockey players on the team this year! The girls worked together, were supportive, and kept a positive attitude. The team stayed focused on playing and never gave up!" field hockey Coach McAllen said about the team. "There were a lot of new players this year. As the season progressed, they learned how to play together, communicate and really grew as a team!"

Tierney Baumann led the team with four goals

during the season, and next was Margo Gordon with one. Rebecca Marcotullio and Halle Archer had multiple saves as goalies this season.

### Women's Swimming and Diving

The Women's Swim Team was very strong this year. The team did a great job representing Highlands this season and worked very hard to become some of the best and most respected in their section. They finished 11-1 and lost their only meet on a penalty.

"All of the girls were very kind and each one of them had a personality I'll never forget," Swimmer Blake Morris said, when asked about the team. "The experience of being on the swim team was one I'll never forget. Our coaches made practice fun, but kept us working hard. The season was very good. The other girls and I improved our swimming technique and speed. It was an experience I'd want to continue."

### Cross Country

This year's Modified Cross Country team was one of the best in the section and was led by strong performances from both the men's and women's team. The team showed excellent resilience, camaraderie and much improvement from an already very strong team.

In an end of season message to the team, Cross Country Coach Owens said "This was the largest group we have ever had, and they were so much fun. It takes a special person to push themselves as hard as they did."

"The community was great since everyone was really supportive of each other especially at the meets," Runner Eleanor Ingram said about her experience on the team. "The experience was fun because no matter how fast to slow you were you still enjoyed it."

### Men's Soccer

There were two soccer teams this season, the Orange team and the Black team. Each had

their own unique community, and both had some tremendous moments and outstanding athletes. The team battled opposing schools Harrison, Pelham, New Rochelle, Rye, Port Chester and Mamaroneck.

"The season was pretty good, we knew how each other played and how to adjust," 7th grader Hudson Salley remarked about his experience on the soccer team. "Overall, I think all my teammates including myself got better, and the coaches really cemented that in all of our brains. Overall, we had a really good season!"

### Women's Soccer

The Modified Soccer Team finished the season 6-3. The three losses were excellent games, and one of the losses came in the final 30 seconds of the game. This year, the soccer team played Rye, Ursuline, Mamaroneck, Harrison, Pelham, New Rochelle and Port Chester.

"The team came together offensively and defensively as the season progressed," said Coach Francisco. "Regardless of the situation they were in the games and the team played each game hard until the end. I would like to congratulate and commend each member of the team on their efforts and teamwork. I wish them the best in the future."

### Volleyball

The Volleyball team had a great season and attracted a lot of crowds for each match. There were two teams for Volleyball, the Black team and Orange team.

"The season went well! We had a lot of players that were brand new to volleyball. They showed so much improvement throughout the season," Coach Tschinkel said. "Some of my favorite moments were watching girls develop a strong family bond with one another. They really started to support each other on and off the court!"

Congratulations to all athletes participating in a sport this Fall! Let's Go Tigers!

## The Atlanta Braves Are Rebuilding an Already Good Team

By: Kellen Doherty

Picture this- you're the General Manager of a pro baseball team. They just finished 104-58, 14 games above the second-place team. You had the National League MVP, another guy who finished in the top 5 MVP voting, and arguably the best bullpen in baseball. Seven players finished with 20+ homers, and two came within 3 homers.

Your stadium is sold out almost every day, and you have a dedicated fan base. Players have a brotherly bond and love the team. This is the team GMs dream of. You must have plenty of rings and be completely satisfied with everything about the team, right?

Well, Atlanta Braves GM Alex Anthopoulos feels differently. The team's last World Series was in 2021, but the past two seasons have been much better, excluding the playoffs. After an embarrassing 4 games and out against the Phillies, the Braves have started a rebuild- of an already good team.

### The Problem(s)

Looking at the state of the Braves roster at the end of last season, you can begin to see what caused the eventual demise of this star-studded team. In a simple answer: pitching. I've always said that the key to winning the playoffs is pitching. Not only did the Braves starting staff not pull it together against the Phils, but they also couldn't pitch above average all season.

Let me emphasize a little more. Upon looking at the Braves stat sheet, I saw three pitchers with 30+ starts. Spencer Strider, Charlie Morton, and Bryce Elder. I saw a great season from Spencer Strider, if you take away the absurdly high 3.86 ERA, 80 ER and 22 HR. Strider was in the 99th percentile in K%, 98th Percentile in Wiff%, and 95th percentile in Chase Rate.

Then, I saw an aging Charlie Morton lead the team in ERA, and an inconsistent Bryce Elder who had a massive 5.11 ERA post all-star break. If you've noticed, I haven't mentioned Ace Pitcher Max Fried, who missed a large portion of the season due to injury, or 22 Game Winner Kyle Wright, who also had an early finish due to injury, and Michael Soroka, who once was a promising young pitcher, came back from an Achilles injury, only to pitch horribly and get



demoted to AAA. Several young rookies were forced onto the scene early and couldn't find their groove. Inconsistency and injuries led to the pitching demise.

### Atlanta's Solution

I mean, based off the title people should know what they did. A series of small, unexpected trades that seem meaningless on the top, but are part of a seemingly bigger plan. To start it all off, the Braves gave up a load of players for one measly reliever, Aaron Bummer. The deal included Michael Soroka, Nicky Lopez, and two prospects for a reliever who had a rough season with a rough team.

However, looking at the numbers, Bummer has the potential to be good, due to his high Spin Rate. On his four seam, it's basic, but his spin rate is above average on a devastating sweeper and slider. Bummer's best season was in 2022. This was a risky high risk- high reward trade, that I like, and the Braves hope will work out.

Marco Gonzales, Evan White, and Jarrod Kelenic were traded from the Mariners for Jackson Kowar and Cole Phillips. I honestly liked this deal for the Braves. Especially with Gonzales. He has a high upside that is diminished in an overpowered Mariners rotation. His best season was the shortened 2020 year, when he posted a 3.10 ERA, and a 7-2 record. Even though the numbers aren't great, he is a work horse, and can get every start the team would need. Kelenic will provide excellent out field depth, but since I'm focusing on pitching, I'm not going to mention him yet.

Remember Marco Gonzales? well, he got traded to the Pirates for cash and a player to be named later. The next move was to the Angeles, where Evan White and LHP Tyler Thompson got dealt for Max Stassi and David Fletcher. Both will provide good depth and will likely spend time in AAA. Matt Carpenter was acquired and promptly released, after a trade with the Padres.

Despite a strong season from Ace Spencer Strider, the Braves' pitching staff was inconsistent, and unreliable, which I blame for their fall to the Phillies.

The icing on the cake, the trade I want to talk about was the Chris Sale Trade. Chris Sale to the Braves, Vaughn Grissom to the Sox. For those who don't know, Sale was a Cy Young contender every season. He was a key part of the 2018 Red Sox World Series team. A quirky pitcher with a "wonky" wind up, he could fool batters before he even through the ball. Injuries have held him back, and he hasn't thrown a full season since 2019.

Here's my analysis: way above average break on a four- seam, sinker and changeup. High spin rates could make the trade alone worth every cent. In 2023, he was in the 92nd percentile for chase rate, and 88th percentile for K%. A 1.13 WHIP was a major bounce back, and I fully believe that Chris Sale may be on track for a bounce back year. Can he stay healthy? I don't know. I wouldn't bet against another awesome season from this Braves team, and a bounce back season from Chris Sale.



### Alicia Key's New Broadway Show: Hell's Kitchen

By: Viviana Gerontzos

Hell's Kitchen is a new show coming to Broadway on March 28, 2024! It just finished it's off-Broadway run this month. Hell's Kitchen was written by Alicia Keys and is loosely based on her life and personal experiences in New York City. It is a jukebox musical of Alicia Key's music with a few new additional songs. Some of the songs in the musical include "Fallin'," "Girl on Fire," "No One," and "Empire State of Mind." Maleah Joi Moon and Shoshanna Bean starred in the off-Broadway run.

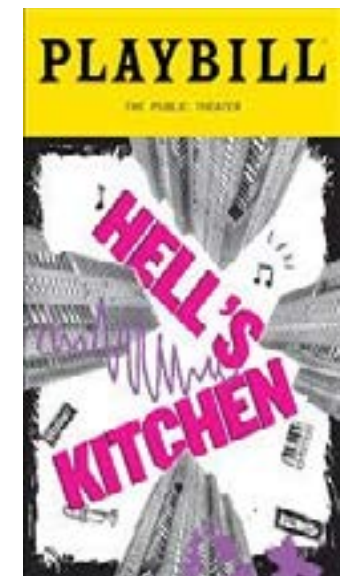
Hell's Kitchen is a coming-of-age musical about 17-year-old, Ali. She ends up discovering her love life along with a passion



for music. Ali lives in a building full of artists with her mom. Her parents aren't together. Her mom appears in the musical a lot, while the dad only pops in sometimes.

At one point, Ali is mad at her mom because she disapproves of Ali's relationship (technically, a situationship). Instead of going to her apartment, Ali goes to the Ellington Room and meets Ms. Liza Jane who practices piano there on a strict schedule. Ms. Liza Jane says Ali can watch, listen, and learn, but she can't speak. Ms. Liza Jane takes her time very seriously. Ali starts to watch but after a while, she starts to learn and develop her passion for music. In her free time, she goes to the Ellington Room and plays piano. Ali eventually forgives her mom and realizes all her mom was trying to do was help her. Ali's mom apologizes for being overprotective. They come to understand each other and strengthen their bond.

I would recommend this musical. It is something a lot of teens could probably relate to with iconic and recognizable music. I watched the musical in late December, and I thought it was phenomenal. I liked the story, the music, the choreography, the set, and the overall vibe.



## Mean Girls 2024- Good or Bad?

By: Viviana Gerontzos



The iconic 2004 movie, Mean Girls, was adapted into a Broadway show in 2018, which is now a musical movie in 2024. Angourie Rice, Renee Rapp, and Auli'i Cravalho star in this movie. Mean Girls is about a teenager (Cady Heron) who was homeschooled in Africa but moves to America to go to high school. She first meets Janis and Damian, but then she meets "The Plastics," a group of popular girls and is invited to sit with them. The group consists of Regina George (the Queen Bee), Gretchen Weiners (the second-in-command), and Karen Smith (the ditzy one). Janis convinces Cady to "spy" on The Plastics and then to come back and tell her everything. While Cady stays friends with Janis, she also becomes actual friends with The Plastics. People are divided over the new 2024 musical version of the movie. Some people love it, some people hate it.

The people that love it argue that it was a good movie, and they don't understand the hate. They claim it was well-cast and the music was good. While some songs were cut (and new ones were added), it was put together nicely. It was modernized perfectly.

The people that hate it argue that it was unnecessary. They claim the musical numbers were excessive. They didn't like the actors and said they were bad. Many of their criticisms compare it to the original 2004 movie. This newer version is a musical based off the Broadway show, not the original 2004 movie. It's not going to be the same as the original, especially because it's 20 years later and some things from 2004 would be outdated. The Broadway show wasn't exactly like the movie either.

My opinion: Even though this movie wasn't like the original movie, it was pretty decent. I've seen the 2024 movie, a high school adaptation of



the Broadway show, the 2004 movie, and I've listened to the Broadway soundtrack a lot. I loved them all. While it was different, that doesn't make it bad. I personally thought it was well cast. The acting was okay. It could've been better, but it also could've been worse. I will admit, I was a bit critical of the movie at first with everything I heard about it. I was disappointed with some songs being cut, but I like the songs they kept. I would've preferred for them to keep all the songs from the Broadway show. For me, it was worth the wait, and I was very excited for the movie to come out. Renee Rapp is one of my favorite singers and I was super excited to see her. I think her performance was amazing. This movie is worth at least giving a chance. Overall, I would give it 4.5/5 stars.



## Open AI: ChatGPT's Newest Feature

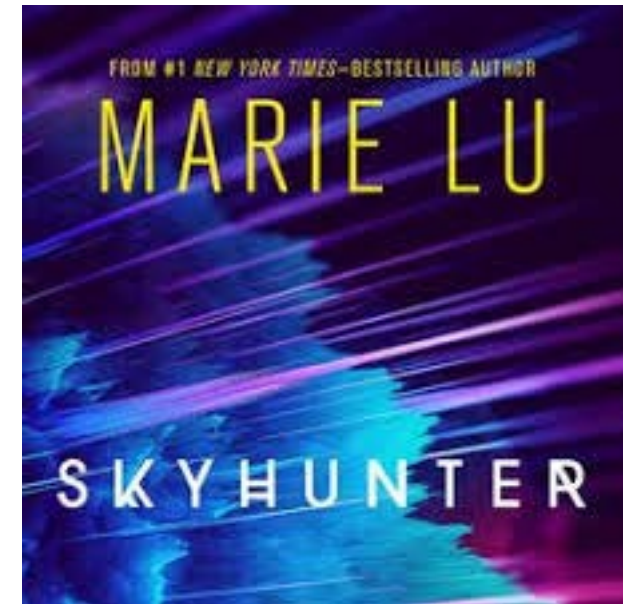
By: Wyatt Gonzalez

OpenAI just released a new feature for their popular Large Language Model, ChatGPT. This new feature is very important for the development of the AI. The new feature, tailor-made GPTs that you can personalize for specific tasks or jobs. OpenAI calls the new feature "Customizable GPTs," which is, you know, pretty generic.

In order to understand the importance of this feature, you must understand what ChatGPT really is. ChatGPT is a blockbuster large language model that took the world by storm in fall 2022. ChatGPT allows you to input information into somewhat of a search bar and it will quickly look through its training data, which is trained on everything on the internet, from cat photos to the most complicated python programs. It will then generate a response to your query using the cumulation of what it "thinks" of all this data. Even though this can quickly answer most of your questions, it will sometimes generate completely false information, because the input uses some language that the GPT hasn't been trained on. AI scientists call these mistakes, "Hallucinations."

Overall ChatGPT can be a really good tool if you know how to use it correctly. The new feature can basically take this tool to the next level by making entirely different GPTs for each of you specified type of tasks. Here are some examples from OpenAI's website (Click on Picture to open the website). As you can see, OpenAI has advertised many useful options for this new feature such as Creative Writing Coach, which can quickly and efficiently give you feedback on your writing projects, and also Tech Advisor, which can help you in times of need when your tech-savviness has run out while fixing your printer. As you can probably tell, creative people will come up with insanely productive uses for this. If you want to try this, you will need ChatGPT Plus, which is kind expensive at \$20 a

month. The subscription does include access to GPT-4, which is there latest AI model and the ability for ChatGPT to generate images and responds with voice to your queries. Thank you for reading and have a great day!



## Book Review: Skyhunter

By: Eleanor Ingram

Have you been looking for a good book to read recently? Probably not. But if you were, then look no farther. A good book to read is Skyhunter by Marie Lu. This book is about a striker (soldier) named Talin. Talin is fighting to keep her nation, Mara, from being taken over by The Federation, a nation that has taken over all the other nations.

The plot of the story gets further developed when Talin witnesses Red, a prisoner of war, get violently punished for his actions and doesn't respond at all. Talin then decides to go protest against this happening and has to take Red under her care as a punishment. She and Red form a very strong bond, and eventually develop the ability to read each other's mind, because of Red's modifications that The Federation had made to him. A few of Reds 'modifications' are that he has the ability to fly (as a result of The Federations scientists planting pieces of steel in his back) and that he is much stronger than any human could ever be.

This book is incredible with many plot twists that keep you on your toes the whole time. If you decide to read this story, I hope you enjoy it as much as I did!

## EDITORIAL THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL: Fundamental Adjustments Don't Benefit Everyone

Each student at Highlands is an individual worthy of their own formula to learn. Although the learning algorithm may be unable to create a specific curriculum for each student, no-one should be untreated and simply adjusted to an easier level. To which, they cannot benefit or grow. Although it's essential to have a basic understanding of what we are expected to learn, why must others be simply adjusted to a minimum capacity? The mathematics at Highlands are inclusive to the appropriate level of each student, but why isn't the reading level of book choice the same?

A provided idea given by the writer and editor of this article can be divided into the contents of this paragraph. The school could perhaps divide the books each grade reads, into two levels. The idea to indulge someone into reading, is to adjust to a measurable goal and allow them to submerge themselves in a book they themselves like.

However, by allowing multiple categories to be created, countless students might be able to inquire about a newfound interest in reading. Not to mention the humbling pain the more advanced readers must endure while reading a lower-level literature piece.

The estimated amount of possibly more indulged readers, and more active learners is unmeasured since the change hasn't occurred, but if it were to happen, many new benefits would appear.

By reading a book you actually enjoy, you might find yourself in a dazzling new mindset, similar to that of your favorite character in the book. But you might also concisely find yourself acting as similar to your favorite character as possible. Additionally, reading can help develop a wider literature language in both speaking and writing. As obvious as that is, the changes developed in solely one month of constant reading can depend on each individual, but typically allow a person to learn 1,000 words. Of course, it would typically take one hour of reading, and depend

on the book and level, but the estimate would be an average indicator of numerous words learned. Although this paragraph was a brevity of the few benefits provided by more specified reading, the countless already acknowledged benefits are already easily implied.

Reading. The word itself is objective. And it means to scan the contents of a page and allow the thoughts of a book to influence how you think and act on something. This is a clear definition of reading. But by speculation, how many students at Highlands thoughtfully read as described above? How many kids? The purpose of higher learning is to improve and adjust yourself to a new goal. So thoughtfully we expand our thinking, how can we include everyone into a better reading experience? The question implies itself into a different setting each time it is asked.

How can I become a better reader and get a better experience? How can my students develop better reading experience? How do we answer the question? Our actions impact ourselves and others. Our minds consist of our thoughts and our thoughts crystallize into our actions, towards the situation. So, a final question to ponder while in line at the florist, or ordering a latte is, how can I improve my reading experience into a higher level that benefits me as an individual and engine of the community?



## EDITORIAL: JAZZ BAND VS. SELECT CHOIR ALL ABOUT THE TOUR

### JAZZ BAND

The 'Jazz Band' club is a small group of musicians in practice and dedication for public performances. Consisting of many instruments, the club is inclusive of countless musical pieces. Each value in Jazz Band coexists with their undivided attention towards detail and perfection in each of their performances. It's 'small mindedness' to not address the true participation the Jazz Band has in our community. From public performances to school ceremony appearances, that have long lasting effects on the school. An example of these effects can start with allowing students to practice their instruments and express themselves without limiting music levels. Bottom line: the Jazz Band provides an extracurricular for its talented musicians, therefore additionally benefiting their academic future.

### SELECT CHOIR

Select Choir is a group of talented singers all in tune with one another. Needless to say, the songs audited in the selection in their performances are truly matched with their name. Each melody is a primordial awakening of thunder and wind. Given the range of each singer's voice: soprano, alto, baritone, tenor. In effect to their melodic unity, there have been many combinations of notes that can be reminiscent to what they try to represent. In simpler terms, the songs they choose, have a true meaning that justifies why they chose that song. However poetic and perfectly pitched the Select Choir is, it's true to confirm their equal sense of justification and inclusivity can match their perfect vocal tones.

The same source to compliment both parties, will be the same one to sully their reputations in this case. The ongoing silence between both parties isn't of ignorance or boredom, it is of war. The Select Choir and Jazz Band collaborated during their tours around White Plains, but it wasn't without a minimalistic conflict. Although their collaborations were in order, their minds were not. The bloody scenes of war were all left swept and clean, but we can attest to finding evidence of the war in their memory. A brief summary of the 'act,' is truly just a petty analogue of the Select Chorus going before

Jazz Band (and in addition, to asking the instrumental performers to move each placed and independent instrument. From Drum-sets to guitar amplifiers and wired components.)

Although biased, the evidential credits 'solemnly' swore to verbalize the truth and only such. We can find evidence towards such with, Ariel .G. "The tour was very open to new opportunities and memories. Although it was partially difficult since we had to constantly move our components, it was overall very likable." Just as she has previously said, the party of Jazz Band can certainly attest to the conflict being on Select Chorus's part.

As equal as this article is, we shall have our Select Choir representative speak on behalf of the 'opposing side,' depending on which side you are an ally to. With a small introduction, the article opens itself to Maxsence .B. "It was... a fine idea." With nothing left to say, at least a partial opinion of Select Chorus is embedded in the article, its contents are now unbalanced. The right of opinion is given to all, but it truly binds people to neutrality, rather than each side. As it truly should.

Given the circumstances of the situation, it's true to say that this situation is a mutual act of friendship.

Therefore, the disagreements between Jazz Band and Select Choir are truly not an act of spite against one another, but an act of friendship. Or at least a messy one indeed. Now, although both parties have had their representatives speak on their behalf, it's careless to not include a 'neutral' opinion on this matter, as boring or broad as it is, or may be.

As stated above, Hannah .C delegates her opinion to the matter of this unorganized war to his extent in capacitance, as the friend and classmate of countless select choir and jazz band members. "I think that they're not against each other, but rather that they're neutrally playing in harmony with one another." Would people agree on her opinion? As careless and scandalous as this parchment is, we will not contradict more entertainment in disagreement. Although a very small number of delegates of the community have been quizzed and averaged for their opinion, at least the three main contradicting sides have been represented in the article.

The 'readers' now will be the dictator... as their opinion will now voice an aid to article. Although this 'scandal-sheet' will not be further continued, any further opinions about Jazz Band and Select Choir are freely available to discuss, WITHOUT any judgement, partial to the fact that all sides have been represented and aided.

# The Courier's Holiday Reflections

## Holiday Movies: What do you prefer?

By Ariel Garcia

The holidays are right behind us, and what better time to reflect on the season. We have a few new topics to discuss, with the top being the best Christmas Movies.

"Home Alone" has been a classic holiday entertainment for years, but now that new movies are coming out, such as "The Bad Guys: A Very Bad Holiday," those opinions might change. There have been a few people asked to choose between these two movies. Although both screenings are equally dramatic, entertaining and enjoyable, some people have diverse opinions on which movie is better.

One piece of information to consider before choosing between the two is the plot. "The Bad Guys: A Very Bad Holiday," has a very entertaining plot: (please be warned, this is a brief summary of the movie that contains spoilers)!



The movie starts with The Bad Guys planning to rob a bank, meanwhile everyone is celebrating Christmas at home. At a parade, their car tangles with a Santa balloon and pops, bestowing a sad and disappointed feeling upon the town, resulting in the cancellation of Christmas.

With a sudden change of plans, the Bad Guys decide to cheer up the city, for the sake of their beloved bank heist, of course. After they eventually create a balloon replica, they soon throw it out, due to its hideous face.

In the last 12 hours before Christmas,

they plan to break in into a radio station to play Christmas Carols (with the replacement of heavy metal music, due to the cancellation of Christmas), as Mr. Wolf and Snake both deliver stolen presents to people's homes to rekindle everyone's Christmas spirit. The plan is successful, but Mr. Wolf is still left with a doubting sentiment, with the absence of snow, to mark a "White Christmas."

To properly make the best of the holiday, Webbs modifies a shaved ice machine to create snow in the city. But then Wolf overpowers the machine and creates a violent icestorm, terrorizing the citizens. Mr. Wolf apologizes to the gang for his impulsive actions, which results with him using a Santa exoskeleton to shut down the raging ice machine. The movie finalizes with the exoskeleton becoming the city's mascot, and the Bad Guys receiving presents, then later planning a Santa heist to prove they deserve to be on the naughty list.

The movie's plot is unique and provides the viewer with additional imagination, but not every teacher thought it deserved praise. In contrast to that, a (student) member at Highlands, Emily Arellano Torres, said, "I think that it's funny, how they planned to rob Santa. That sounds like a stupid idea."

Although the members of Highlands answered differently due to their opinions on the movie's graphics, plot, and theme, it's still considered to be an amazing Christmas screening!

The next movie summary will be based on the Christmas Holiday classic, "Home Alone," (the original screening). This movie is a very iconic and entertaining visual multiple people have loved for the past few years. (Please be advised, the following contains spoilers!!)

When the McCallister family is preparing for their Paris trip for Christmas, everyone decides to meet at Kate and Peter's house. The large family reunites with cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents. While the large family is eating dinner at the McCallister residence, Buzz, Kevin's older brother humiliates him.

Misunderstood, Kevin tries to loudly clarify his situation to his mother, resulting in Kevin being sent to sleep in the attic. Sulking, Kevin wishes to

be alone and goes to bed. A large winter storm hits, disrupting the power and stranding the McCallister's in a difficult situation, where they sleep in.

In a frenzy, the family feverishly packs and accidentally leaves Kevin, the angry, and sulking child alone. As the movie implies, Kevin in fact did stay "Home Alone." When Kevin finally wakes up, to his surprise his wish seems to have been fulfilled, finding the house empty and the cars still parked, causing him to then perform his crazy desires, however dangerous they are.

Later in the movie, Kevin becomes scared of his next-door neighbor, "Old-Man Marley," rumored to be a serial killer. When some time finally passes, a thief duo, "The Wet Bandits," target the McCallister home.

Determined to protect his home, Kevin sets up multiple sets, forcing the thieves to think the house isn't empty, and postpone their plans.

Upon arrival in Paris, Kate remembers she left Kevin, only to find that the next flight to Chicago is available in three days. Devastated and worried, Kate encounters a polka band and is offered a seat on a road trip back to Chicago, but only one seat is available. Kate leaves her family to go with the band back home to see her son, meanwhile the thieves realize they've been fooled all along by a child.

With the realization, both Harry and Marv (The bandits) decide to break into the McCallister estate, underestimating Kevin and his planned traps. When the night finally comes for the heist to commence, the thieves are met unexpectedly with slippery ice, burning doorknobs, miniature car figures on the floor, a tarantula, a risky zip line to a treehouse, and a smack to the head, alongside an arrest when "Old Man Marley" saves Kevin from (possibly) getting his fingers bitten off.

As the night is finally done and the thieves are captured, and in police custody, Kevin cannot



help but feel alone. Feeling sad, Kevin is met with a surprise visit from his mother, alongside the rest of the family, all in time for a snowy, white Christmas.

The movie is enjoyed by countless staff members at Highlands, including Mrs. Lopez. Most people

have said that the movie is better, for its original plot, relatable sibling problems and comedic scenes.

Between the two amazing movies, "Home Alone" definitely won the movie preference. But a short analysis of why can easily change your mind!

The movie is biased due to its wide known fame and "classic 1900s" background. Alongside that, you may not know, but scientifically blondes are more likely to be favored, according to the large fame, and wealth made by today's blonde Hollywood celebrities, compared to black, brown, red, (etc.) hair-colored celebrities.

This might be due to the rare occurrence that someone has "naturally" blonde hair, or maybe due to the iconic nostalgia that resemble (late) Marilyn Monroe, and her luscious, and ever so envious blonde hair.

Additionally, many people consider the movie a very "classic" screening due to its release date in the 1900's. With the recent rise of vintage and retro aesthetics, many people enjoy the movie due to its background info, including the use of many vintage references. Including Kate's bob which, (mildly) resembles Marilyn Monroes classic and iconic hair style. The use of black and white references also adds to the 'retro vibe' of the movie.

In addition to that, the movie is heavily inspired by the French movie; "Home Alone." Both movies have many similarities, but it's safe to confirm that both are different. To conclude, both classics are enjoyable, but it all comes down to personal preference. Regardless of your opinion on either movie, if you're a Christmas Fan and are counting down the days until the season strikes again, take the "Would You Rather" quiz on the next page!

## Would you rather...

- a. Have a Christmas without Snow
- b. Have a Christmas without Presents
- c. Call Santa (Any time you want to!)
- d. Meet Santas Reindeer (At any time!)
- e. Not talk at all at Christmas Dinner
- f. Not eat any dessert on Christmas Day or Eve
- g. Wear all black (funeral attire) for Christmas!
- h. Wear all orange for Christmas!
- i. Spend Christmas with your favorite idols/ celebrities!
- j. Spend Christmas with any animal you choose!
- k. Not use your phone for Christmas week at all!
- l. Not have a snowball fight at all on Christmas week

If you have mostly 'A.' Answers you're a basic person, but on the contrary if you have mostly 'B's' then you're a very creative person who has a way of doing things themselves!



## Real or Artificial Trees: That is the Question!

By: Teresa Damato

Artificial Christmas trees are becoming increasingly more popular around the holidays and many people are opting for those instead of real trees, mainly because of their 'environmental benefits.' However, the answer to which is a more sustainable option is more complicated than that, and there are some surprisingly strong arguments promoting the sale of real trees.

Now I'm sure you've heard of deforestation and movements to stop it because it is destroying the environment. While this is true, in part, there is also another side to the story. Science shows that carefully managing forests is actually quite beneficial to certain ecosystems. Consider this: roughly 98% of Christmas trees are cut from a farm, leaving about 2% to be cut from natural forests. This means that the vast majority of Christmas trees are actually an addition to existing forests, providing more places for forest-dwelling animals to live, cleaning the air and filtering the soil around them while they grow.

Studies have shown that these tree farms, on average, absorb nearly a ton of carbon dioxide per acre. The hills that these trees grow best on are unfit for farming other crops and are able to absorb between 4 and 6 inches of rainfall that pavement and sidewalks cannot. In addition, for every Christmas tree cut down, farmers plant between one and three more trees to compensate. Because the average Christmas tree takes between eight and twelve years to reach its size, only about 30 million out of the 350-500 million trees grown on farms in the US are harvested for sale each year. That means that well over 10 times the amount of Christmas trees harvested each year are left standing. By buying a real tree every year, you are supporting tree farmers and, by extension, forests too.

However, there are also downsides to buying a real tree every December. For one thing, there is a fairly significant carbon footprint. While little to no carbon emissions are required to produce them, they have to be shipped all across the country. And if these trees are improperly disposed of, the carbon dioxide that they absorbed while growing could get released right back into the air. Additionally, to make space for these large tree farms needed to meet the demand every Christmas, natural forests must be cleared, uprooting the homes of the animals living there until

the Christmas tree forests have grown. Then you have to take into account that some farmers fence off their trees, permanently leaving wildlife homeless.



More and more people are starting to question whether buying a real tree each Christmas is the most environmentally friendly choice. Many have stopped purchasing real trees, switching instead to an artificial tree. In fact, according to the New York Times, approximately 80% of the Americans who put up a tree each Christmas display an artificial tree rather than a real one. At first glance, it does seem like the better option. They don't use up natural resources and don't contribute in any way to deforestation, along with the added benefits that there are no pine needles to clean up afterward. And even though you have to pay slightly more up front than a real tree, it pays itself off throughout the years.

Perhaps the strongest argument supporting artificial trees is that they are reusable. Since they are made from plastics and PVC, they last forever, in a sense. Each year you reuse your tree, you reduce its impact on the environment. However, for most artificial trees, they need to be reused for at the very least twelve years to have less of an impact than a real tree. Then once you throw out your artificial tree, it won't ever compost. Unlike a real tree, artificial trees are not biodegradable, and most aren't recyclable, so they end up sitting in landfills forever. Real trees, on the other hand, decompose

easily and can be recycled in many ways. Most cities have set up donation spots for Christmas trees so that when the holiday season is over, they can be composted or made into mulch.

Some towns drop the trees into rivers and streams to provide additional underwater habitats for wildlife. If given to a farm or nature center, your old Christmas tree may even be fed to goats, who love to eat these trees as a snack (look up a video: I guarantee you won't regret it).

The other major downside of artificial trees is their carbon footprint. The carbon emission required to produce and ship millions of these trees every year, especially from China to places all across the world, dwarf that of real trees. Even if they end up in landfills, the carbon emissions of real trees are more than 10 times less than that of artificial trees.

Now it's up to you. If you were thinking about buying an artificial tree for Christmas this year, think again. If you were planning on buying a real tree, get one that's grown locally so that the emissions from shipping are reduced. The more people who buy real Christmas trees, the more forest space we will have, and the less land lost to developers. You can help the earth. And it starts here.

### Sources:

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