

THE MEDALLION

Mission Moment >

WHAT WE LEARNED AT THE TEACH-IN

By Ceighlyn Crowley '25

In October 2023, five juniors, two seniors, and three faculty members from NDA traveled to Washington D.C. to attend the Ignatian Family Teach-in conference. From October 28-30, they dedicated their time to learning about social justice issues and movements. Alongside other high school and college students from around the world, they listened to personal stories from their peers and advocated for change.

NDA participants immersed themselves in new social movements, concerning climate change, immigration, and even fast fashion. Through their shared interest in social justice, NDA students connected with students from around the world, and formed a particularly strong bond with the students of NDA Los Angeles, California. The girls enjoyed comparing academies, while faculty members from both schools were able to learn from each other.

On the last day of the conference, NDA participated in a peaceful protest in front of the Capital, singing, cheering, and rallying together in support of social justice. After the rally, the girls had the opportunity to attend a meeting with members of Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey's staff to voice their concerns about climate change, deforestation, and immigration.

After an inspiring weekend, the girls and faculty returned to Massachusetts with new vision, enlightened as to how to spread awareness and put an end to injustice.



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INTERESTED IN JOINING THE MEDALLION STAFF?

The Medallion is looking for student writers, copy editors, and graphic artists. If you are interested in joining please reach out to senior editors Madeline Hannan '24 and Grace Pistorino '24. Students may also contact Ms. Shea and Ms. Zani with their interest. The Medallion meets in room 136 during K2 Cycle B blocks.

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Women in STEM >

COUGEARS GOING TO STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

By Maisie Robinson '25

After an incredible performance at the "Battle of Lexington" qualifying match, NDA's CouGEARS are headed to Andover high school on March 9th for the Massachusetts state championship! FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology) Robotics is an organization that has been around for almost 30 years. In this competition, teams of up to fifteen students are given a specific set of challenges and three months to build a complete robot. A team consists of multiple specialty groups, including hardware (building), software (coding), marketing, and more. Once the qualifiers begin, each team attends two to display their months of work and get the chance to be sent to states.

Massachusetts is an especially competitive location for this competition, as year after year several groups from Massachusetts are among the top teams at the World Championships in Houston, TX. In fact, last year's World Championship winner was Wolfpack Machina, a team from Beverly, MA. The competitive nature that stems from this overwhelming display of skill makes the Massachusetts qualifying rounds some of the most difficult in the country.

With all this in mind, the CouGEARS victory becomes even more impressive. A team that generally has fewer members, less funding, and less experience consistently performed with expert skill and gracious professionalism. With the second-best autonomous score and the second-best end game score, the CouGEARS were the first choice for the first-place team when it came to choosing alliances for the playoffs. This match-up turned out to be an incredible choice as the CouGears' alliance went undefeated and came out on top during the last match with a score of 125 to 61. This victory led to the team taking home a trophy for being in the winning alliance.

However, only the winning alliance's leading team advances to the state rounds from the game scores, so the CouGEARS would not be going to states. That was, of course, until it was announced that the team had won the Inspire Award. This award outranks even the number one team of the day, as it is awarded to the group that excels in every category, not just pure skill. This award requires gracious professionalism, outreach efforts, community building, impressive skills, proof of growth, and many other factors. Additionally, this award comes with the honor of qualifying for the state championships. And so, the Notre Dame Academy CouGEARS are now displaying two trophies and are preparing for the final challenges ahead. Andover High School better be ready, because the CouGEARS are on their way!



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Getting to Know NDA >

INSPIRATION FROM WITHIN

By Madeline Hannan '24

Mrs. O'Reilly has been at NDA for six months now working as the Campus Minister and Mission Coordinator. Although many students have gotten to know her over these past few months through volunteering in the Saint Julie Center, taking trips to Carolina Hill and Cardinal Cushing, and assisting with liturgies, I personally feel that the whole community should know a little bit more about this inspiring young woman who handles her new job with grace, poise, and optimism.

Mrs. O'Reilly grew up locally in Hull as the fourth of five children in her family. She did not attend Notre Dame Academy despite her personal connections to the institution and instead attended Hull High School. After high school, she attended Providence College and became heavily involved with campus ministry there. Participating in the campus ministry program at PC allowed her to put into practice the lessons that she was learning about in the classroom as a Global Studies major. This major focused on world issues and how to address them given the complexity of our world. Mrs. O'Reilly said that she chose this major because it helped her understand that although her "position in the world might be different from others, we can

connect and thrive together without imposing our beliefs or schools of thought on those we seek to help."

With campus ministry came strong friendships and relationships. She met her husband while at Providence College and, in July of 2022, they got married there. Once she graduated, she had dreams and hopes of becoming a veterinarian technician and did just that. After working in this field for a good number of years, she felt that something was missing in her life and that she was called to a different profession, one that combined her love of service, mission, and faith, and helped her fulfill what she believes is her deeper calling. This led her to apply for the campus ministry job at Notre Dame Academy.

Mrs. O'Reilly grew up hearing about Notre Dame because one of her aunts went to NDA (there is a seat dedicated to her in the auditorium!) and two other aunts are Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who work in African outreach and are good friends with Sister Isabelle who the NDA community heard from on Founder's Day! In addition to being the campus minister, Mrs. O'Reilly has

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taken on the job of teaching eighth grade religion. One of her favorite experiences at NDA so far was a service trip to Carolina Hill where she saw how excited and engaged all the students were with the young children. She loves seeing how passionate NDA girls are about helping others and taking time out of their busy schedules to serve and improve their communities.

Mrs. O'Reilly has a bubbly personality and glowing essence, hard to capture in words. Some fun facts about her include that she has a golden retriever named Dom and one of her favorite summer activities is hiking with her dog and her husband. They hope to tackle Mount Washington together this coming summer! Mrs. O'Reilly's favorite place is Switzerland, and she is going to go back there soon as she will be attending the Taylor Swift Era's Tour there. Another fun fact is that Mrs. O'Reilly and another new teacher, Ms. Torpey, were roommates in London when they did a semester abroad at Providence College.

Mrs. O'Reilly's advice to Notre Dame students and staff is to live in each moment and not take anything for granted. Everyone should savor every moment, not just the big ones. Her advice is inspired by Saint Theresa's Little Way. She encourages everyone to stop by the Saint Julie Center to learn more about service trips and to get to know her. Her door is always open!



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Environmental Stewardship >

A WARMING PLANET

By Julia Walsh '27

When I was in elementary school, it used to snow all the time in the winter. And not just little dustings – real snow-day snow. In the summertime, temperatures were always just about eighty degrees and never ninety or one hundred like they can be now. Even though the effects of climate change were certainly present in my elementary school days, the weather wasn't as extreme. Although climate change does mean a drastic spike in temperature, it also means drastic changes to our climate overall.

What causes these changes to climate isn't just the world naturally heating up, but rather it is the result of human actions. Plastic bottles take huge amounts of carbon dioxide to make, and this significantly warms up our planet. The gas pumped into cars creates this carbon dioxide as well. Every year, each car produces about 4.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide. It takes about 211 trees just to absorb the amount of carbon dioxide that one car produces. Around the world, global warming has other effects. Sea levels have begun to rise because of melting ice caps. The warming air causes earth's oceans to heat up, leading to toxic environments for marine life. Although these issues are distressing, solutions do exist.

The biggest change people can make is to minimize the use of plastic as much as possible. It may be unrealistic to just completely stop driving or eating from containers that contribute to pollution, but, even a small change in habit can help reduce the harmful effects of climate change. Something as simple as bringing a metal water bottle to school ultimately means less plastic to pollute the air. Preventing global warming requires everyone doing what they can to make the planet a better place.

Critical Thinking Book Reviews >

A LONG WAY GONE: HOW WAR CHANGES YOUTH

By Avery Baxter '27

War can have a catastrophic impact on children, especially the ones who are trained to fight and kill for their country before they're old enough to drive a car. Ishmael Beah, an author, human rights activist, and recipient of the UNICEF USA Spirit of Compassion Award, discusses his own personal experience with being involved in war at a young age in his memoir *A Long Way Gone*, a gripping journey from a carefree boy to a tormented child soldier in the depths of the Sierra Leone Civil War.

Ishmael's "friend group" while he is a part of the army consists of 5 other adolescent soldiers named Kanei, Musa, Saidu, Moriba, and Alhaji. They provide each other support and comfort in a time of fear and violence. Just being around these young men helps Ishmael to relax, as even the sound of "Saidu's heavy breathing made our silence less unbearable" (70). War can destroy or alter almost everything, but the key human behavior of friendship seems to stay intact. After being removed from the front lines by UNICEF with his group of companions, Ishmael makes even more friends, one of them being Esther, a kind, heartfelt nurse who encourages him to talk about what he's been through and also rekindles his love of music. This first relationship after the war is extremely important for Ishmael, who, although resentful about it, needs to rebuild his trust and social skills after his only friendships were built on shared hatred and brutality. Clearly, the friendships throughout the memoir contribute to one of the biggest themes of *A Long Way Gone*, which is companionship.

Hope is another major theme; even the smallest sliver of hope can be a motivator for doing the hardest of things. Ishmael's main hope is that he will one day be reunited with his biological family, who he was separated from at the start of the war. Although he does not get to see his family, the hope that he someday will keeps him going, carrying him through the wet rainforests of Sierra Leone when his feet cannot.

Ishmael's first-hand narration of the memoir, complex explanations of his own feelings, and constant use of symbolism add to the quality of the book and really make the reader think, tugging at your heartstrings while educating you about the misfortunes these young boys were forced to deal with. The reader can trust that Ishmael's stories are reliable, as he was present for all of the events he wrote about.

A Long Way Gone is written in rather short chapters, but could also easily be divided into two sections: before the war and after it. The part of the book that takes place during the war is graphic and at times hard to read, with descriptions of death and mutilation, while Ishmael's stories from after the war are more focused on finding normalcy and getting life back to how it was before. All in all, Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* is a harrowing yet essential tale that sheds light on the injustices of child soldiers in war-torn regions. Through Ishmael's captivating first hand accounts and awe-inspiring storytelling, the memoir compels readers to confront the harsh realities of armed conflict occurring far across the world from them while also emphasizing the importance of having compassion and sympathy for those affected. The story also serves as a reminder of just how strong humans' potential for redemption and recovery after a disaster is, giving us hope for our own human race.



THE GIRL IN THE BLUE COAT

By Emma Trout '27

The Girl in the Blue Coat is a bestselling historical fiction novel written by Monica Hesse. This novel follows the story of Hanneke Bakker and her search for a missing Jewish girl in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam during WWII. This novel is an exhilarating journey through one girl's personal experience.

The plot follows Hanneke Baker, a young woman working as a courier in the Dutch resistance. After a Jewish girl named Mirjam wearing a bright blue coat goes missing, Hanneke is tasked with finding her by her client Mrs. Janssen. The rising action occurs when, with assistance from the resistance movement, Hanneke plans an ambush on a Nazi transport to attempt to recover Mirjam. The climax of the plot occurs suddenly when Mirjam runs in the opposite direction and then pauses in the middle of a bridge where she is fatally shot in the neck. At Mirjam's funeral, Hanneke realizes that the description of the deceased girl does not match the description given by Mrs. Janssen. She then discovers that at an earlier Nazi raid, Mirjam had swapped places with her best friend Amalia. Hanneke then travels to the refuge camp where the real Mirjam is staying. When Hanneke explains what she is doing there, Mirjam in turn explains how she swapped places with Amalia.

The novel is written from the first-person perspective of the protagonist, Hanneke. This point of view allows the reader the intimacy of her thoughts and feelings, creating an emotional connection. Hanneke's motivation starts with financial stability. She sells goods on the black market to provide for her family and is focused on generating income. When she is tasked with finding Mirjam, her motivation switches to a sense of moral responsibility. She

contemplates whether she should help search for her, and in chapter four you can see the moment where her motivations start to change. She cannot stop thinking about Mirjam, so she goes to Mrs. Janssen and says, "For now we'll just talk about Mirjam and I'll consider it. But I'm not a detective, and I'm not promising anything" (Hesse 40). As someone who is somewhat self-centered and apathetic, the fact that she returns to help is a big step for Hanneke morally. She feels empathetic towards the missing girl and decides that she will risk her life to find her. Hesse skillfully uses figurative language in her work. Towards the end of the novel Hanneke says, "Maybe we can't barter our feelings away, trading good deeds for bad ones and expecting to become whole" (Hesse 300). In this metaphor, emotions are compared to commodities. The idea is that feelings cannot be exchanged like goods in a transaction. There is no simple exchange or formula for achieving emotional completeness or healing.

The novel's structure is meticulously crafted. Hesse uses flashback often to provide both historical context and background on the protagonist. While this book is fiction, the historical context is certainly nonfiction. The story provides a strong base for understanding WWII. Overall, Hesse's *The Girl in the Blue Coat* is an enjoyable book, hard to put down. The character of Hanneke is relatable and her bravery is inspiring.

