



Ms. Wurzer's performance classes help Hawks gain increased confidence

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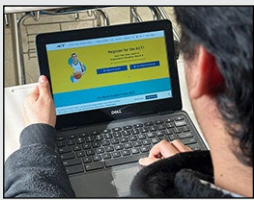
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Over the course of four months, students over four grade levels will be engaged in required ACT, ACCESS and MCA testing

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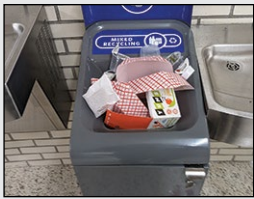


ABC Lab settles into new classroom

Following many years in the C2 circle behind the Media Center, the ABC Lab is now in room 246, which is located in the B2 circle

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Hawks should try to recycle more

When a student's recyclable items are not put in the proper bin, there are repercussions for the school and the broader environment

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Variety



Musicians shine at Tri-Metro event

The annual festival, which took place February 12, brought together band, choir, orchestra students from across the Tri-Metro Conference

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Dancers reflect on winter season

The squad will be looking for brand new members for next year as several people on its current roster will be graduating this June

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INNER HERO SPEAKERS MAKE DEBUT AT COOPER



Photo by NOAH PLAHN

Bernie Burnham (right) is the current president of Minnesota's AFL-CIO, a powerful union organization.

By NOAH PLAHN
Quill staff writer

Cooper has partnered with the Inner Hero program to sponsor a series of six inspirational speakers over the last few months of the 2023-2024 school year.

The Minneapolis-based Inner Hero program was established in 2004 but is new to Cooper this year.

"We wanted Inner Hero at Cooper because the administration team felt like it was an incredible opportunity for students and staff. Beyond the notoriety associated with these folks, I hope that our students feel inspired when they hear these people speak," Cooper Administrative Intern Mr. Mahan said.

The first speaker to appear at Cooper was Bernie Burnham, whose speech took place on February 28 from 9-10 a.m. Burnham is president of the Minnesota AFL-CIO, which is a national trade union that is also the largest federation of unions in the country. Burnham is the first person of color to lead that group.

"I love getting back to kids. For me, it is really how I frame my work. I think we need to make sure our children have what they need. Public schools are important to me as a teacher. If our kids are doing well and our parents are doing well, our communities will thrive," Burnham said.

Prior to her work with

The program gives accomplished individuals from different fields a chance to interact with students

the AFL-CIO, Burnham had a background in education.

"My favorite year of teaching was when I had sixth graders. You could talk with them and just have conversations. It was the best stuff I could do," Burnham said.

Burnham said her speech at Cooper was important because she wanted to show students their options in life.

"There's not just one path. There are many paths to life and it's not just college, it's not just trade. You have to figure out where you fit in and then find that interest," Burnham said. "I think another part with students is just letting them know there are people out there looking out for them too."

In addition to discussing what awaits students in the future, Burnham said she enjoyed the process of explaining her job.

"This isn't just about a role and sitting at a table as the president with a gavel. It's more about really doing the work and trying to improve the lives of people. I hope that they hear that and I hope that sparks their curiosity into what possibilities there are moving forward," Burnham said.

Burnham's speech clearly rubbed off on students. One

INNER HERO continues on page 3

Commencement plans take shape for Class of 2024

This year's ceremony will once again take place at the Minneapolis Convention Center, which was also the case in 2023

By CHIMUAL VANG
Quill staff writer

The graduation ceremony is coming soon. With just over 10 weeks left as of today until the seniors graduate, the Class of 2024 is preparing for commencement.

The graduation ceremony will be held on June 3 at 6:30 p.m. at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Parents and families are encouraged to attend the ceremony, and every senior will be allowed seven tickets to share with those people who will be attending. For anyone who is attending the event, they will need to present a digital ticket at entry.

"Anyone under 18 will need to have a ticket and be present with an adult chaperone or guardian. Although ticket sales for graduation have not opened yet, I highly recommend seniors prepare who they will have attending their graduation," Ms. Olson, Cooper head secretary, said.

All attendees are expected to follow the rules of the Minneapolis Convention Center's code of conduct when viewing the graduation ceremony. Students and families must follow school behavior expectations, which includes not consuming alcohol, not using substances, not brining toys like beach balls and not blowing bubbles.

"Before graduation, seniors should prepare for the ceremony by having an in-depth conversation with their guardians and families about these expectations. It's also important that everyone is on the same page when it comes to who you are inviting to graduation and how they are getting to the event. Tickets are limited, and the last thing we want to do is to turn someone away at the door," Administrative Intern Mr. Mahan said.

It is equally important that seniors pay attention to the significant end-of-year classroom deadlines. This includes avoiding senior slide and turning in work on time.



Photo by DERRICK WILLIAMS

Commencement will occur in Minneapolis on June 3 starting at 6:30 p.m.

"I hate telling folks they cannot walk up to the podium because they came past the entry time or because they aren't passing a class, but unfortunately, it's a conversation we have to have every year," Mahan said.

Another important part of the ceremony is getting a cap and gown for the event.

"Students who are participating in the graduation ceremony are required to purchase a cap and gown. The cap and gown can be ordered at robbinsdalegrad.com," Olson said.

COMMENCEMENT continues on page 3

Robbinsdale teachers vote to accept new contract offer

The two-year agreement includes some of the largest increases in salary, benefits in the recent history of the district

By NOAH PLAHN
Quill staff writer

The Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers (RFT) voted to accept a new teacher contract for the 2023-2025 school years. During the February 27 vote, 634 out of 707 approved of the new contract, which represents 90 percent of teachers who voted.

According to RFT officials, the changes in the new contract agreement make it the largest compensation package in Robbinsdale Area School District history. The package includes a 4 percent salary schedule improvement and a \$125 monthly increase in health benefits during the 2023-2024 school year. In addition, teachers who have been in the district for 25 years or more will get an additional 3 percent salary increase in year one.

Following year one, the 2024-2025 school year will see even larger benefits with a 5 percent salary schedule increase, an additional \$75 per month toward health insurance and an additional match of \$350 a year by the district for teachers' 403b/457 retirement plans.

Playing a part in this contract negotiation process was Cooper's union representative and science teacher Mr. Stanton.

Stanton has been the building representative for seven years and has been on the building union committee for 11 years.

"I like to know how things work. When I was young, I heard both good and bad things about unions. I wanted to find out what was going on. The more I learned, the more I realized that I like being involved. I like helping members. I like making things better. I like talking to other members about what is going well and how things should be done," Stanton said.

According to Stanton, the process of proposing changes to the contract during negotiations is one that takes time.

"This is a long process to make a change or propose an item. The first step is for a member to talk with the building rep and fill out the correct form. The form asks for information about what needs to be changed, why and what should be changed. Then, the item is compiled with all the other items from that building and all the other buildings," Stanton said.

Once all of the proposed changes have been pulled together, union members are asked to be part of the backup committee. This committee's task is to review the proposed items to make sure they have the union

CONTRACT continues on page 8

Students attend trade show for construction jobs

The field trip was connected to the new RPathways program, which focuses on careers

By CHIMUAL VANG
Quill staff writer

Thirty-five Cooper students had a chance to attend a construction exposition on February 14 from 8:30-11 a.m. to learn more about that career option.

The chance to attend the expo came through the new district program called RPathways. The construction expo was established as a foundation to help students explore and experience career options related to construction during high school.

The construction expo focused on career opportunities in the technological fields of masonry, carpentry, excavating and electrical, among other related fields.

“The main goal of the construction expo is to allow students to get hands-on education,” Mr. Herman, who oversees the RPathways program, said.

Students who took part in the event said it provided a chance to get specific information about the different trade fields. The expo also gave students a chance to communicate with tradespeople in various fields of work as well as be able to learn how machinery functions and the history of that technology.

“The most interesting thing was just the amount of variations there were of trades, unions and corporations. I personally recommend anyone who wishes to visit the construction expo to go to the field of work you are most interested in [and] what career path you wish to enter in,” Bernard Barthel (12) said.

The expo helped raise awareness of the many career pathways interested students can choose from. At the expo were representatives from a variety of trade schools that focus on different fields of work related to construction. They were able to let students know about the requirements and tests you need to take in order to work in such a field of work, the wages and what a day at that job looks like.

“It’s not just hearing and reading stuff, but actually experiencing it. I recommend exploring everything and not just focusing on one thing or presentation,” Kenny Figueroa Cruz (12) said.

At the construction expo, there were machines that allowed attendees to experience first hand what it is like to operate them. The excavator exhibition, for example, allowed students to understand the process of how to use the excavator efficiently. In addition, students could see how to properly operate the vehicle and use it to help out other vehicles.

There was also cement trucks that allowed students to understand how cement is made and how the mixing process works. Additionally, they showed students how to lay out cement properly.

“The cement machine was perhaps the one with the most hands-on activity. You learned just how difficult it is to make it with all the chemicals and formulas you need to understand,” Ana Canada Cerrito (12) said.

Along with this was a painting course exhibit where it was shown how blueprints are made. This exhibit allowed students to go hands-on by making a blueprint themselves.

“I personally liked the painting course because it allowed me to express my ideas,” Figueroa Cruz said.

Ultimately, it was Herman’s hope that participating students had a chance to consider their future career prospects at the expo.

“If anything, I wish students can learn more about themselves during their visit at the construction expo,” Herman said.

Media Center starts semester two with new rules

While they do not represent a large shift in the facility’s policies, the rule tweaks are designed to maintain a better learning environment



Photo by CHIMUAL VANG

The Media Center tries to strike a balance between areas to silently study and those to collaborate on work.

By HEATHER HOLZERSMITH
Quill staff writer

The Cooper Media Center is a great place to study, relax and check out books. At the start of the second semester, the Media Center staff put out a new set of expectations for Cooper students to follow in order to use the facility.

The updated policies were featured in a message Media Specialist Mr. King sent out on January 25. In the message, King went over the various steps students should take in order to appropriately utilize the Media Center space.

First, if students are going to enter the Media Center, they must have previously made a reservation that morning using SignUp-Genius. Then, when they arrive, they must sign in using the QR codes at their tables.

“We ask students to make reservations for two reasons. One, we can limit the number of students to a manageable number. Two, if we have to be closed for some reason, like an event or testing, students would know in advance and not waste time trying to go to the center,” King said.

The Media Center staff finds that overcrowding of students can lead to a disruptive environment. The importance of students signing in also counts for their attendance. When students sign in, the staff can accurately hone in on just how many students they have to accommodate for. The staff looks at the attendance every hour to make sure students are signed in. They also check to see if students are in the right place and not just claiming they have a

they contact us in advance and let us know what the group is working on,” he said.

Students have been complying with signing in this semester. King said he has not seen any misbehaving students causing a ruckus or giving countless knocks at the door. King said he is a firm advocate for allowing students to use the Media Center if it is in an appropriate fashion.

“The Media Center should be a place where students can

“The Media Center should be a place where students can relax, study, read and have good conversations,” Media Center Specialist Mr. King said.

study hall.

King said that the second semester has been more quiet and peaceful because of the limitation of Media Center passes issued by teachers.

“What’s different this semester is that we’ve asked classroom teachers to limit how many students they send to the Media Center each hour. They can only send two students per period, unless

relax, study, read and have good conversations. We have a number of expectations that we’ve established over the years so that everyone can do that,” he said.

Keeping the Media Center a peaceful work zone helps everyone. King said that some of the expectations are exactly the same as those that apply to all classrooms at Cooper: be on time, remain the entire hour and meet the

Spring filled with standardized testing for Hawks

Over the course of four months, students over four grade levels will be engaged in required ACT, ACCESS and MCA testing

By HEATHER HOLZERSMITH
Quill staff writer

Spring time is always an exciting season for students, with summer on the approach, spring sports coming into session and the well-established stress of standardized testing. Standardized tests such as the ACT, ACCESS and MCAs always happen right around spring. What follows is an overview of each of these three kinds of testing.

ACT Test

The ACT was administered on March 13. Only 11th grade students attended school that day along with some seniors who did not get to take it last year.

The ACT, or American College Test, measures the reading, mathematics and science skills of students prior to college. The ACT is a national test that helps colleges determine how well-prepared students are.

One staff member with experience working with students on the ACT process is Ms. Hough, a student counselor at Cooper. Hough, who has a lot of insight on the ACT, said that students should take the ACT because some colleges require students to submit scores when applying. Colleges use the scores for student admissions, advising and class placement. Scores can also be part of scholarship selection.

According to Hough, there were several ways students could

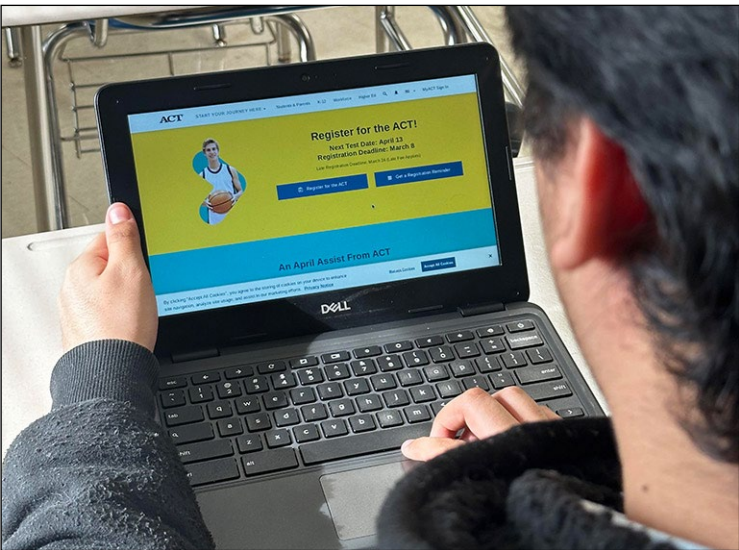


Photo by NOAH PLAHN

The 2024 ACT exam was administered to juniors on March 13.

go about practicing for the ACT prior to the test.

“There [were] some practice lessons in advisory, and various subject areas [were] doing practice as well. For example, they did preparation activities in math and English. The Cooper website has ACT practice resources listed. The College and Career Center also has resources,” she said.

Once students complete the exam, they can eventually access their scores online through the ACT website.

“Students are supposed to create accounts so they can access their scores online. They also get a copy sent to them and we will get copies at Cooper also,” Hough said.

When the test results are in, they are final and students must

pay to retake the test.

Hough said she often gets asked by students why they should take the ACT seriously. She said the test helps give students a head start on life after high school.

“Students should have as many options after high school as possible. Doing well on the ACT opens up more opportunity for that,” she said.

The ACT can open up a lot of opportunities, but it can also make some students feel overwhelmed by the stress of having to do well on the ACT to get those opportunities. Students have differing opinions about taking the ACT.

“The ACT makes me feel stressed out, but all the stress goes away after you’re done,” Jasmine Makori (11) said.

According to Makori, the

staff’s expectations.

According to King, one activity that the Media Center staff had to put a ban on is playing card games with large groups of people.

“We don’t allow card playing, because a few years ago, we had a large group of seniors who were constantly playing Uno, and their games became more and more disruptive despite our asking them repeatedly to maintain a lower level of volume,” he stated.

Additionally, the Media Center staff has had to inform students that they cannot use the Media Center to sing and dance.

“We ask students not to sing in the Media Center because, as you might guess, we’ve had groups of students sing loudly here and disrupt other groups. We limit students to four per table because we learned that bigger groups simply lead to louder noise,” King said.

While it may come as no surprise that large groups lead to more chaotic behavior, some students fail to recognize that and that is why King and the Cooper Media Center staff have to remain firm with their exceptions.

Thanks to the revised Media Center policies, students who use the room are grateful to have a quiet place to study.

“I get to use the Media Center to study and the environment is peaceful and calm,” Marco Mis Ochoa (10) said. “The seats are always open so you aren’t forced to sit next to anyone and it’s nice.”

The ability for students to spread out is what seems to be the most effective way to maintain the Media Center’s quiet study environment. Lucas Johnson (12) said that he likes how it is a much more comfortable space and a lot quieter than a traditional classroom.

“I think that the comfortable choice of seating is great. The open space and natural light helps me focus,” he said.

The main goal of the Media Center is to keep a peaceful atmosphere for studying. King and the Media Center staff ask that students remain respectful toward these expectations to promote the tranquility of the space.

test makes her feel pressured to do well, which makes her performance poor.

“I’m excited to take it, and not at all intimidated by it. However I think retakes should be free,” she said.

Students recognize the importance of standardized testing. However, for Makori, she said she is not intimidated by the test and knows it does not define her as a student.

ACCESS Test

The ACCESS Test measures the proficiency and growth in the English language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening for students who are English language learners.

Ms. Foster and Mr. Nass are two of the many EL staff members at Cooper who help administer these tests to students. According to Foster, the test is administered in four parts: writing, reading, listening and speaking. Each section of the test is administered to students on a different day over the course of two weeks in January and February. Only students who are currently learning English are taking the tests.

Unlike the ACT, Nass said the students do not prepare for the ACCESS test in a specific way.

“Most students don’t receive formal preparation for the test in their classrooms. Our students

TESTING
continues on page 3

ABC Lab adjusts to new location

Following many years in the C2 circle behind the Media Center, the ABC Lab is now in room 246, which is located in the B2 circle

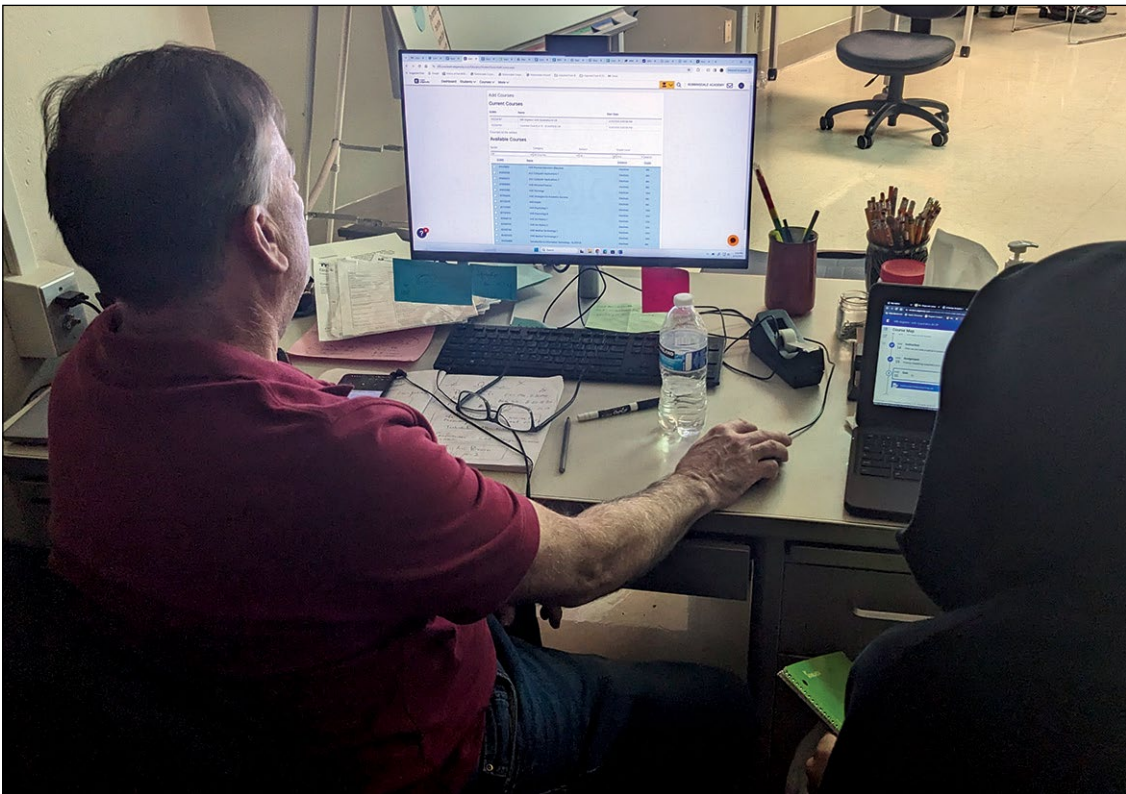


Photo by CHIMUAL VANG

Mr. Ludbrook (left) works with a student in the ABC Lab, which helps students recover missed credits.

By **DRIANA SANMARTIN**
Quill staff writer

The ABC Lab supports Cooper students in need of credit recovery by giving them a chance to make up for classes they did not previously pass. This year, the program relocated from the Media Center circle to room 246, which teachers and students alike have said has notably enhanced the environment. Students now have ample space to work quietly and effectively.

The process of enrolling in the ABC Lab is straightforward,

according to ABC Lab teacher Mr. Ludbrook.

“Students are typically enrolled by their counselor. Primarily working with seniors, I assist those who are missing credits and have a study hall by switching them to the ABC Lab,” he said.

Ludbrook emphasized that the main benefit of the ABC Lab is the learning opportunity it provides for students.

“In the ABC Lab, students focus on earning their online credits,” he said. “Moreover, if they’re struggling in a required class, they can also receive sup-

port and work on their class assignments.”

While he said it was a challenge to get the lab set up at the start of the current school year after the move, Ludbrook expressed satisfaction with the new space.

“So far, everything has been running smoothly and the overall feedback has been positive,” he said.

According to Ludbrook, one aspect he enjoys most about teaching in the ABC Lab is the personalized approach.

“We have the time to develop relationships and work

with students on an individual basis,” he said. “This allows us to better support their academic journey.”

Additionally, Ludbrook added that advocating for graduation as a motivation to get work done is more straightforward than promoting “a subject a student may not enjoy.”

The students experiencing ABC Lab in its new location have been enjoying the changes this year. One student, Precious Garwoloquoi (12), said her current focus in the lab is on earning credits for her chemistry and world history classes. Reflecting on her experience, Garwoloquoi emphasized the invaluable support provided by the ABC Lab teachers and described the new room as an environment that is conducive to studying, working efficiently and enjoying flexibility.

“I appreciate the spaciousness of the ABC Lab,” Garwoloquoi said. “It allows individuals to spread out and engage in their work comfortably. The flexibility offered here motivates me to be productive both in this space and at home.”

Despite acknowledging the benefits of the ABC Lab, Garwoloquoi also offered advice to her peers.

“While the ABC Lab is a fantastic resource for credit recovery, I believe it’s important to strive in your classes to avoid the need for credit recovery altogether,” she said. “However, for those who may require it, the ABC Lab stands as an excellent option to regain necessary credits.”

SPRING FILLED WITH STANDARDIZED TESTING FOR HAWKS continued from page 2

with lower levels of English proficiency receive more instruction about the test, including practicing in class,” Nass said.

When students complete the test, their scores are utilized by the school for class placement and statistical data for the state.

“ACCESS scores are really useful for teachers, our school and the state. The state uses data from this test to allocate education funding and provide districts and communities with appropriate resources. Counselors use results from the ACCESS test to place students in the right classes. As a teacher, I look at student’s ACCESS scores every time I’m assigning classwork to make sure the level of language difficulty matches where each student is on their language acquisition journey,” Foster said.

According to Nass, the test should be taken seriously because it helps English learners actually adapt to the education system more comfortably.

“Students should take the test seriously because the results are used to make decisions about their education. They should also take it seriously because it is the only formal measure of their English proficiency we have that is not connected to a particular class or subject,” Nass said.

Uriel Conedo (12) is a student who has actively participated in ACCESS testing. He said the test is important for students to take.

“The test says my English level, which helps me know where I’m at with my learning,” he said.

Likewise, David Ikechukwu

(12) said that the test makes him feel good about himself when he does well.

ACCESS testing guides students through their education by evaluating their English skills. Although EL teachers recognize that it is a little frustrating for students to be pulled out of class, ACCESS testing is worth their while because it grants them the chance to take classes at their correct English level.

MCA Tests

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) exams

“[MCA] scores highlight areas where students are excelling and where students need reinforcement. This allows for staff to work together and determine how to modify instruction and curriculum to best meet the needs of students,” Ms. Enselein said.

are annual tests in math, science and reading that are issued to gather a statewide standard among students. Ms. Enselein, who is the reading teacher at Cooper, said that the MCAs help districts measure student progress. Additionally, she said that the MCAs can help prepare students for college entrance exams.

The scores for the MCAs are used to help districts measure student progress on Minnesota’s academic standards and meet the requirements of the education system.

There are three parts to the

MCAs in high school: the math portion will be held on April 8-12, reading will be held on April 15-19 and science will be held on April 22-26. Whether a student takes a certain category of the test depends on their grade level and the classes they are enrolled in. The math MCA will be taken by 11th grade students, the reading MCA will be taken by 10th grade students and the science MCA will be taken only by the students currently enrolled in Biology.

Students will take the assessment in the period during which they have the related class. Test-

educational standard.

“MCAs guide our instruction at Cooper. The information is used to support students. Scores highlight areas where students are excelling and where students need reinforcement. This allows for staff to work together and determine how to modify instruction and curriculum to best meet the needs of students,” Enselein said.

The collected data acts as a building block for making an enriched educational experience for students, whether it is at the building or the district level. That means the school might need to offer additional classes such as more math options and more science electives if students are not scoring well.

Cooper students seem to be aware of the impact of their test scores on the MCAs.

“Teachers can understand what students know and they can help students better understand classwork,” AJ Wiley-Hunt (10), who is taking the reading test, said.

Agreeing with Wiley-Hunt is Tyler Moulds (9), who is taking the science MCA.

“It’s important for the people looking at the tests to see how well students are doing,” Moulds said.

On the other hand, while Chase Chang (10) said that the tests are used to see improvement in students, the test also makes him feel “bored and stressed.”

Similarly, Moulds said that the test stresses him out, but he later feels relieved because the scores are used as analytical data and do not directly affect his grades.

INNER HERO SPEAKERS MAKE DEBUT AT COOPER continued from page 1

student who attended the speech was Leo Perez (12).

“The Inner Hero event was insightful. It really helped us students know about some helpful people who genuinely do some good in the world,” he said.

Student attendees were excused from class for Burnham’s speech, which will be the case for the other speakers as well. A meet and greet takes place with free snacks for students before hearing from each speaker.

Mahan said students can gain a unique experience from attending

these guest appearances.

“There are two major incentives that every student will immediately recognize: first, free snacks and, second, you get to miss class. That said, I’m also hoping that our students will be motivated to attend because of the inherent awesomeness associated with some of our speakers. How often is it that you get to speak with the state’s Attorney General? How often do you get to speak with a former chief of police? These aren’t opportunities that come about every day. I hope that I can convince students

to show up because they want their voices to be seen and heard around powerful people who can help shape our shared future,” Mahan said.

Although students are incentivized to go, they also need to abide by the rules to ensure they qualify to take part.

“Restrictions for the event are simple. All students need to be passing their classes and in good standing, they need to complete an application for the event, and they need their parents to sign off on the permission form,” Mahan said.

Mahan said he hopes the students and the speakers benefit from the events.

“I expect that our amazing students will be in awe of any invited Inner Hero speakers. Whenever outsiders see and interact with our young scholars, you can’t help but feel that they’re doing something special. But they can only do that if we have a strong turnout. As such, I encourage all Cooper students to fill out the application form. If you have any questions, please see me in the main office,” Mahan said.

Students share plans for their spring break

From trips to work to relaxing at home, Hawks are figuring out how to spend their break

By **EMILY CARRILLO ACEVEDO**
Quill staff writer

Spring break is when people take time to work, rest or have fun with no need to wake up for school. Many students have plans to take advantage of the much-needed break. Below are the plans of a few students who were willing to share their vision for spring break.

Amy Vue (12): “Take a break from school and sleep.”

Madisyn Pepper (12): “Play softball and sleep in when I can.”

Kindric Yang (12): “Take some time to relax, apply for a job and learn to drive.”

Mei Ling Vasquez (12): “I’m not too sure, but I believe there are going to be things for robotics.”

Carissa Chilson (12): “I don’t know as I’m not sure I have any plans scheduled yet.”

Ryanne Dutton (10): “I’ll be going on a road trip to visit colleges. I’m visiting University of North Dakota and Oklahoma University.”

Isabelle Atkins (10): “I will be going to Wisconsin with my cousins.”

Grace Bell-Cepeda (12): “I don’t have any serious plans yet except for reading books, some college visits and relaxing.”

Jessica Carrillo Acevedo (9): “I plan to spend time outside in the nice weather and drink something cold and sweet, clean my room for spring cleaning, make more art and finish some movies and shows I’ve been watching on and off.”

Jelani Jackson (12): “Stay at home, sleep and play video games.”

Gian Ventura (12): “I’m not sure, but I’m going to find a job.”

Kailey Jackson (12): “I might go college visiting or go to Nebraska for a specific Squishmallow.”

Isabelle Ross (11): “Me and my family are driving down to North Carolina to see my grandparents. I’m going to take my senior photos there, too, and then go prom dress shopping.”

Connor Watkins (12): “I will do some writing and drawing for some of my stories.”

Charlie Rush-Resse (12): “I plan to write my one act for the IB theater spring festival and finish writing some songs for my EP that I hope to have come out this summer.”

COMMENCEMENT continued from page 1

Online ordering for the cap and gown closed on March 1. Each cap and gown set costs \$39. This price includes a gown, cap, tassel and stole. If seniors who missed the deadline are unsure of how to order their graduation uniform, they should consult with their grade-level counselor, Ms. Walters.

“I highly encourage students to place an order as soon as possible, as caps and gowns are a requirement for graduation,” Mahan said.

Before the ceremony date, all new or changed information will be communicated to seniors via emails, through Schoology and in grade-level meetings.

Post-high school decision making can be difficult

Taking time off, getting a job or starting an apprenticeship are some post-school options

By AMARILYS BALMACEDA
Quill staff writer

Today's generation is told time and time again that, after high school, we need to get into college and get our degrees to be successful. This can be difficult for some people who have not picked what they want to do in their life and are not sure what to go to school for. Attending college for a major you are not going to like and eventually quitting can be the biggest waste of time and money you will make in life. There are other options in the world besides college right after high school. Whether you are not sure what you want to do in school, you want to take a year off or you do not want to go to college at all, the post-high school decision is not the same for everyone.

The first option is to take a year or two off of school before going to college. It can be nice to relax after working your whole life in school and just have fun working on your own. Another reason taking time off is not a bad idea is because a lot of people do not know exactly what they want to do. You should not pay for school if you are going for something you will hate in a few years

You should not pay for school if you are going for something you will hate in a few years and just quit. Instead, you should take some time to find out what you really like.

and just quit. Instead, you should take some time to find out what you really like and what you will not mind doing for the rest of your life before committing to school.

Of course, there are post-high school options that can result in a successful life that do not involve college at all. There are jobs where you can become an apprentice and work your way up through on-the-job training and schooling with the company. Many companies offer great pay, benefits and job security. Also, there are not any student loans to follow you for years after you finish school. For people who do not enjoy school, or do not feel like working a desk job, these careers are perfect alternatives.

Everyone is different and everyone needs to do what makes them happy. If you enjoy school, and enjoy the chance of finding your future career that way, you should absolutely go to college after high school and get it done as quickly as you can. If you want to go to school but have not picked a major, however, perhaps you should take some time off to find what you really enjoy. Finally, if school just is not for you, looking into a career where you can get an apprenticeship may be the best option. Whatever you do, just do what is going to make you happy for the rest of your life.

Students use of bins for recycling is poor

When recyclable items are not put in the proper spot, there are repercussions for the school and the broader environment



Photo by CHIMUAL VANG

It is not unusual by the end of each school day to see the hallway's recycling bins overflowing with trash that is not meant for recycling.

By CHIMUAL VANG
Quill staff writer

Students not using recycling and trash bins properly is becoming a major issue at Cooper. Since the start of second semester, there has been an influx of people practicing inadequate recycling. In addition, people have been leaving trash around the school at an increasing rate. The reason I feel so strongly that this disruption within our school ecosystem is becoming a problem is that, the more times anyone enters the bathrooms and hallways, the more and more trash they will see on the floor from unknown sources. Not only is this ruining the school environment, it is inevitably motivating students to add more trash to the already bad littering problem by throwing things on the floor.

One change that is contributing to the trash problem is the absence of outdoor tables at lunch. Two years ago, it was possible to

get a table to eat outdoors during lunch. However, since the eating area was not properly maintained by students, it had to be closed down to prevent further damage to the environment. The fact that this problem has not been solved yet is rather concerning. I believe if we practice recycling and just

While it is true that some recyclables will take longer to decompose than others, it is better to attempt to do something positive for our environment than not.

being responsible with where our garbage goes, the closing of this area could have been prevented.

The decline of recycling is becoming a major issue outside of school as well. The fact we are not recycling used materials means that those items are ending up somewhere else, usually in landfills. This is never a good

thing for any ecosystem. Since every resource is finite, if recycling is neglected, eventually so will be our environment.

Another reason I believe students should be more responsible with recycling is its potential impact on the future. If everyone were to take care of

create a safer environment, it reduces the amount of garbage produced. Given the presence of mice in the school, if we exercise recycling regularly by throwing used soda cans or food trays into recycling bins, I believe this can also diminish the number of mice that linger in the building.

While it is true that some recyclables will take longer to decompose than others, it is better to attempt to do something positive for our environment than not. I genuinely think we could improve a lot more than we expect in this situation. Recycling is not only helping our environment, it is also helping our future. Learning to do something new like recycling or putting trash in the proper place takes time. There is nothing wrong with that. However, we should not take things for granted because our actions surrounding recycling and trash disposal now will influence our future more than we might expect.

Relationships can help, hinder student academic success

Being attached to a significant other can make some people more inclined to focus on school, while others get distracted

A student's romantic and friendship relationships can affect how they are doing in school. For some students, if a certain relationship is going well, they may be more inclined to do well in school, while a bad relationship may lead to the student having problems in class. For other students, the opposite may happen as a good relationship may distract them from school while a bad one may prompt them to focus more on their education. Overall, the academic impact of being in a relationship can be both good and bad.

Perhaps the top concern is that some people cannot maintain a relationship while properly focusing on their academics at the same time. For these students, focusing on their partner becomes more important than paying attention to anything else, including school.

Instead of doing what is needed to stay on top of their classes, these people spend all their time making sure they treat their partner like they are perfect. While their motivation is understandable, students who focus on a relationship at the expense of an education may be making a mistake.

On the other side, some students can be affected by a relationship in a positive way that motivates them to do better in school. Some partners thrive off each other's academic success, which is how healthy relationships are supposed to be. At the same time, a partner might see their partner struggle in school and help them improve their grades. Similarly, if one of the partners is generally good at school, that might be a

motivator for their partner to also take school more seriously. It is a sign of a positive relationship when neither partner is ignoring school to the point that they are struggling in their academics.

In contrast to this are situations where the relationship is not good for both of the partners and has a negative impact on their

school performance. Being in a relationship where both people argue with each other all the time can take a toll on both people. In this type of relationship, one or both people can end up suffering when it comes to their mental health. Not being on the same page makes both people focus more on fixing the relationship rather than focusing on their academic goals.

From the Editors

Letters to the Editor

The Quill welcomes Letters to the Editor. If you would like to send The Quill your thoughts about a story that ran in the paper, or your thoughts about an issue affecting our school or community, please word process and email your letter to eric_zuccola@rdale.org as a text-only file. The Quill reserves the right to edit all Letters to the Editor for space.

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Animated *Spider-Man* is an instant classic

Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse, which came out in 2023, received an Academy Award nomination for Best Animated Feature

By OWEN TOURTELOTTE
Quill staff writer

Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse is the Academy Award-nominated, much-awaited sequel to the ground-breaking animated movie *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. The new film in the series takes viewers on a fascinating voyage throughout the enormous and varied multiverse in which Miles Morales now finds himself. Two notable components greatly add to the film's success as it navigates its complex narrative: the engrossing soundtrack and the creative character design.

The film begins 16 months after the events of the first movie. As it opens, Miles Morales (Shameik Moore), who lives in Brooklyn on Earth-1610, encounters the Spot (Jason Schwartzman), a scientist whose body was infused with portals during the Alchemax explosion at the end of the first movie. Due to his condition, the Spot can travel through space at will by opening portals wherever he wants. The Spot blames Miles for causing his condition and reveals that, while testing the Collider, he had transported a spider from another dimension, Earth-42, which then bit Miles and turned him into Spider-Man.

Meanwhile, on Earth-65, police captain George Stacy (Shea Whigham) is unaware that his daughter, Gwen Stacy (Hailee Steinfeld), is Spider-Woman, who the police mistakenly believe is a murderer. One night, Gwen encounters a variant of the Vulture (Jorma Taccone), who comes from an Italian Renaissance-esque alternate universe. Arriving soon after him are two other Spider-Person variants, Miguel O'Hara (Oscar Isaac) and Jess Drew (Issa Rae), who help Gwen neutralize the Vulture. Miguel then reluctantly grants Gwen membership into the Spider-Society, which is an elite strike force dedicated to the security of the universe. This new role eventually brings her back in contact with Miles Morales, whose continued battles with the Spot lead to a series of events that put the entire multiverse in jeopardy.

The vibrant and stirring soundtrack of *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* is one of its most distinctive elements. Hip-hop producer Metro Boomin worked with composer Daniel Pemberton to create a soundtrack that improves the film's emotional resonance while also supporting the story. The score deftly combines a variety of musical



Photo by SONY PICTURES

The conflict between Spider-Man and the Spot is central to the plot of the sequel to *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*.

styles, reflecting the varied worlds the characters visit. Hip-hop, electronic and orchestral components are expertly blended in the music to create a distinctive soundscape that reflects the multiverse's liveliness. Hip-hop is incorporated to both honor the film's precursor and represent the protagonists' many ethnic backgrounds. The emotional complexity of the characters and the difficulties they encounter are deftly captured by Pemberton's music. The music elevates the entire viewing experience by acting as a crucial storytelling tool, whether it be during the heart-pounding action scenes or the moving character moments.

In my opinion, the greatest musical moment and the best scene in the entire film is the sequence immediately after Miles gets sent to Dimension 42. As he swings through the city, the music pounds with the main heroic theme that was set up at the end of the pre-title sequence and built upon again and again each time it appears, peaking as Miles rushes to save his father. Specifically, the music in question starts around 5:56 in the song "Falling Apart" on the film's soundtrack if you would like to listen. This sequence is a clear homage to the "What's Up Danger?" scene in the previous film, arguably one of the best scenes in all of cinema, and this one reaches similar heights.

The use of different artistic styles of every Spider-Person is one of the most captivating parts of the character design. From Spider-Man

2009's sleek and futuristic appearance to Spider-Gwen's hand-drawn, comic book-inspired appearance, the movie highlights each character's uniqueness and emphasizes that anyone can don the mask. *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* incorporates cultural influences into character creation, going beyond just cosmetic variety. From Miles Morales's Afro-Latino representation to Peni Parker's futuristic, Japanese-inspired design, the movie welcomes diversity and captures the allure of the Spider-Man mythology on a worldwide scale.

This goes even further in the alternate dimensions the characters visit. A large chunk of the second act takes in Earth-50101, Mumbattan, a world where New York city is part of India (we are not meant to think that hard about it). The Indian-inspired design of everything is just immaculate.

One detail in costume design I thought I was a genius for noticing comes near the end of the film in Dimension 42. This is the only universe in which there is no Spider-Man to protect the city, and Miles 42 is revealed as this universe's Prowler, rather than his Uncle Aaron as expected based on the first film. This is teased even before Aaron shows up by the fact that, in their conversation together, Miles and his mother are both dressed in purple and green, the Prowler's suit colors. I thought that was a fantastic detail.

Spider-Man: Across the Spi-

der-Verse delves into profound themes of societal expectations and the intertwining threads of fate that shape the lives of its characters. At its core, the film grapples with the burden of expectations placed on individuals, especially the titular Spider-People, by their respective societies. Miles Morales, in particular, faces the challenge of living up to the legacy of Spider-Man while navigating the complexities of multiversal responsibilities. The narrative weaves a delicate web around the characters, exploring the choices they make and the paths they must tread, echoing the timeless question of whether destiny is predetermined or subject to personal agency. The film masterfully navigates these themes, underscoring the importance of individual choices and the resilience required to break free from societal expectations, ultimately empowering its characters to forge their destinies across the vast canvas of the multiverse.

To sum up, *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* is a monument to the inventiveness that can be found in animated movies. The film is elevated into the realm of artistic miracles by the harmonious combination of the inventive character design and the moving musical score. As they go on, the *Spider-Verse* films break conventions and entertain audiences in addition to raising the bar for animated superhero storytelling. This movie deserves five out of five stars.

Dystopian flick *V is for Vendetta* still resonates

The film's conflict between the forces of fascism, freedom has many parallels in the real world

By ANDREW MOEWES-BYSTROM
Quill staff writer

V for Vendetta was directed by James McTeigue and released on March 17, 2005. I decided to review this film after my father suggested that we watch it. I had heard of it before and it sounded interesting. *V for Vendetta* uses costume design and special effects to portray how strong ideas can create grand change throughout the world.

The movie is set in England during the near future after a world war has led to global anarchy. To address this new reality, England has become an authoritarian fascist police state in order to return to stability. The country is now ruled by Adam Sutler (John Hurt), who has assumed the role of Chancellor. His policies regulate everything and immediately quash any dissent by death. Rising up against this totalitarian state is a man who identifies himself as V. V wears a mask modeled after Guy Fawkes, a revolutionary who attempted to blow up British Parliament and kill King James I in 1605.

As the film opens, V (Hugo Weaving) blows up Old Bailey as a sign of protest against the government. On that same evening, he also saves the life of Evey Hammond (Natalie Portman), an employee of the state-run television channel, with whom V develops a connection. The next day, V overtakes the state-run television station and implores viewers to join him in one year's time for an uprising during which they will blow up Parliament. The film then follows the journeys of V and Evey Hammond over the next year as the authorities try to track V down to maintain order and avoid the possibility of a revolution.

One filmmaking element that is important to the movie is costume design. In one scene, V is in his home with Evey. He is fencing with a suit of armor while watching *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Evey walks in on him doing this and questions him. They then sit and watch the movie together. The all-black outfit with the iconic white mask is intentionally used to avoid revealing much about the character of V. V is not depicted as an actual person throughout the film; rather, V is more of an idea. He is meant to represent the anti-dictatorial ideas of the citizens. The costume design used for V effectively communicates that message to the viewers.

Also having an impact in the film is its use of special effects. At the end of the movie, Evey pushes a lever and sends a train full of explosives down a subway track to blow up the Parliament building. The camera is shifted to show what is happening above ground, where crowds of people dressed as V have gathered outside Parliament. The building then explodes into fireworks and the crowd begins to take off their masks. The crowd includes many of the characters that have shown up throughout the movie, along with characters that died along the way. The special effects show the dramatic grandness of the revolutionary idea that V personified.

The importance of ideas is a central theme in the movie. Toward the end of the film, V is mortally wounded. He finds his way back to Evey and dies in her arms. Evey puts his body onto the train that is sent under Parliament to destroy it. Police investigator Eric Finch (Stephen Rea) finds and confronts Evey, but ultimately lets her pull the lever to send the explosives to Parliament as he has become disillusioned with the government. V dies, but the idea that he represents lives on. You can kill a man, but you cannot kill an idea.

V for Vendetta is an excellent dystopian film. It shows through costume design and special effects how an idea can topple grand powers. I enjoyed the style of the director. I really like how we never see the face of V and how we get very little information about him. *V for Vendetta* earns five out of five stars.

Sports fans will enjoy football biopic *Greater*

The film focuses on the story of a college walk-on player who eventually becomes a key part of the Arkansas Razorbacks

By JUNE CHANG
Quill staff writer

The movie I have selected to review is *Greater*, which is directed by David L. Hunt and was released on August 26, 2016. I decided to choose this film because it is a sports movie that inspires you to motivate yourself and push through all the hard times to get what you want in life. It is an interesting film that brings emotion and vulnerability to the sports movie genre. Sports movies are always good to watch because they are relatable and we can easily connect with the characters. In this film, David L. Hunt uses lighting and synchronized sound to show audiences the amazing story of a well-respected football player who teaches us that you can achieve anything you want when you work for it.

Greater uses a framing device to tell the true story of Brandon Burlsworth (Chris Severio). While the movie starts and ends in 1999, the bulk of the plot is conveyed to the viewer as a flashback that takes us through Burlsworth's life as a football player. As a young man, Brandon has a dream to play for the University of Arkansas. Despite being a gifted player in high school, Brandon does not get a scholarship to become an Arkansas Razorback as an offensive guard, so he decides to try to make



Photo by GREATER PRODUCTIONS

The movie explores the importance of facing challenges in life.

the team as a walk-on. Offensive line coach Mike Bender (Fredric Lehne) does not believe Brandon will make the team due to his size, but with hard work, Brandon sheds fat and puts on muscle, eventually proving himself on the field. The film then follows his journey with the Razorbacks and the potential of one day making it to the NFL.

Lighting plays a huge role in the middle of the movie in a scene during which Brandon's teammates are trying to get him in their car after a night out at a restaurant. During their outing, Brandon's teammates tricked him into drinking alcohol, which he did not intend to do. After this happens, Brandon decides to take a run to

wear off the effects of the alcohol, at which point his teammates decide to go after him to apologize. The director effectively uses lighting in this sequence to catch the characters' emotions without having to use dialogue. By fully seeing each character's expressions, we understand that Brandon and his teammates are finally bonding for the first time, which is an important turning point in the movie.

The second filmmaking technique that is used well in the film is synchronous sound, which can be heard in every game of football the movie depicts. One sequence in which this use of sound is especially noticeable is when the Arkansas Razorbacks fight hard to

defeat the Alabama Hogs. Thanks to synchronous sound, the audience hears the hard hits and the yelling that are typical parts of a football game. This helps make the sequence more realistic and brings the overall film to life.

The primary message in *Greater* is that it is important to work through the challenges one faces in life. In the movie, Brandon is told he will not be able to play Division One college football because he is not good enough, but that does not stop him from putting in the work every day and eventually proving himself to the coaches. Once he earns their respect, Brandon is given a full-ride scholarship to play for the Arkansas Razorbacks, which makes him one of the greatest walk-ons in college history. This shows audiences the importance of confronting and overcoming the challenges that life might present to you.

In *Greater*, David L. Hunt uses lighting and synchronized sound to show audiences that a person can achieve anything when they work for it hard enough. This is an awesome movie to watch thanks to its intense game scenes and the journey of sweat and tears that Brandon Burlsworth takes to reach his goals. I think the director does a fantastic job of showcasing this real-life story and demonstrating its importance to audiences. *Greater* earns five out of five stars.

Premier Performers

The story of the musicians and artists who bring their talents to Cooper

Jose Leon Estrada

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

Jose Leon Estrada (12) is a Hawk who takes part in arts-related activities at school.

"I am involved in choir and drawing class," Leon Estrada said.

Leon Estrada has been involved in choir since his freshman year at Cooper.

"I started choir because I thought I'd make friends," Leon Estrada said.

As for the drawing class, Leon Estrada said he wanted to work on his artistic skills.

"I enjoy being in drawing class the most," Leon Estrada said.

While Leon Estrada said he

has enjoyed many things about his time in choir, it is working with his peers that he likes the best.

"My favorite part of choir is making friends," Leon Estrada said.

Although Leon Estrada has made a name for himself in the arts, he is skilled in athletics as well. Leon Estrada plays with the Robbinsdale Robins and was part of that team's state championship win in adapted soccer in fall 2023. In fact, Leon Estrada scored three goals in the championship match.

Outside of school and sports, Leon Estrada enjoys riding his bike.

Next fall, Leon Estrada plans on attending a community college.



Photo by C. VANG

River Nystrom

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

River Nystrom (12) is involved in choir, clay and painting. Nystrom has been doing choir for three years.

"I started choir because I really love singing," he said.

Meanwhile, Nystrom has been in clay for one year.

"I joined because my friends thought I would really like it and encouraged me to try it," he said.

Painting is a more recent class for Nystrom, who just joined it this year. He said he "loves to paint."

What Nystrom enjoys most about choir is the chance to sing, while he enjoys the chance to create new things he did not know how to make in clay. Finally, in painting, Nystrom said he enjoys learning from Ms. Mielke and "being in class with [his] friends."



Photo by C. VANG

Each of Nystrom's art activities has produced favorite memories. For choir, he said he has enjoyed singing a range of songs even if they are pretty difficult. Meanwhile, in clay, Nystrom's favorite memory is "making creations [he] can use even if [he gets] extremely frustrated when it breaks."

When it comes to painting class, Nystrom's favorite memory is laughing with his friends.

While Nystrom said his favorite classes in school are choir, clay and painting, he also said his English class is another favorite.

"All the teachers I had were really encouraging and I really loved being in their classes," he said.

Next fall, Nystrom plans to go to college for painting, animation or clay.

"I would really love to go to college for art," he said.

Thomas Yang

By BETHZY ARIAS-PLIEGO
Quill staff writer

Thomas Yang (12) started taking part in choir even before his arrival at Cooper.

"I have been doing choir for five years," Yang said. "This year will be my sixth."

There have been a number of things that Yang has enjoyed about the time he has spent in choir.

"I have enjoyed going on the trips and being able to sing with different people," Yang said.

According to Yang, the performance part of being in choir has led to his most enjoyable moments.

"My favorite memories are

the concerts," Yang said.

Beyond his work in choir, Yang said his favorite subject at school is math.

"Math is enjoyable when you understand what is going on," he said.

Outside of school, Yang has a pair of favorite hobbies.

"I play volleyball and like working on my car," Yang said.

Yang hopes to go to college after graduating.

"I plan on going to college and studying engineering," Yang said.

As for singing in the future, Yang said he is considering it.

"If I have the possibility to continue, then I might give it a chance," Yang said.



Photo by C. VANG

Julius Muriuki

By BETHZY ARIAS-PLIEGO
Quill staff writer

Julius Muriuki (12) is a Hawk performer who has been involved in many different aspects of the school's theater program during his time at Cooper.

Although he did not first get involved in theater until his junior year, Muriuki has been a part of every school show since that time.

"Each of them has been great. They were all different and I enjoyed them all," Muriuki said.

Muriuki's involvement in theater was kickstarted by his decision to take Ms. Wurzer's Acting class.

"She is a great teacher," he said.

As for his favorite aspects of being involved in theater, Muriuki cited

performing in front of an audience as a highlight.

"Being on the stage in front of people and entertaining them is fantastic," Muriuki said.

One skill Muriuki said he has been able to develop through his involvement in theater is listening.

"In order to be an actor, I have to be a good listener. This helps me be able to understand and execute," Muriuki said.

When it comes to school, Muriuki said he enjoys all of his classes equally because he has "good teachers who are always willing to help."

Outside of school, Muriuki enjoys watching movies and shows and hanging out with friends.

In the future, Muriuki said he hopes to pursue a career in business.



Photo by C. VANG

Hawks musicians shine at Tri-Metro

The February 12 festival brought together band, choir, orchestra students from across the conference



Photo by ANASTASIA VERDOLJAK

Participating students had the opportunity to work with guest conductors on specially chosen music.

By EMILY CARRILLO ACEVEDO
Quill staff writer

The Tri-Metro Music Conference, which took place on February 5, is an annual event where high-achieving music students are honored. Ten schools participate in this event and Cooper is one of those schools. Three music classes participated in this event: choir, band and orchestra. This year, Kennedy High School in Bloomington hosted the conference.

Mr. Hahn, the band teacher for Cooper, said that participating students are nominated by their teachers. According to Hahn, he nominated students based on two conditions.

"They were the top of their sections and I based it on seniority," he said.

The music played during the conference is chosen by the clinicians who work with the students at the event.

"I gave my students their pieces a week before the event. They were placed in their sections from auditions and I knew my students would learn them quickly," Hahn said.

The clinician working with band students was Heidi Miller from Gustavus Adolphus College. Hahn had his students looked through the pieces chosen by Miller the week before the event and they ran through their parts with him as needed.

"I think the music selection and venue were better than last year. I also know our clinician as well,"

Hahn said.

Also participating in the event were Cooper choir students. Mr. Vidal and Ms. Rowan, the choir teachers, nominated students based on their availability and their positions in the school's Honors Choir.

"I avoided students who were a part of the musical. I nominated students who I knew would be successful," Vidal said.

Two pieces of music were given to the chosen choir students in January, "but we got the other two the week before the event," Vidal said.

Two pieces of music were given to the chosen choir students in January, "but we got the other two the week before the event," choir teacher Mr. Vidal said. He added that it was not difficult for the singers to learn the pieces due to the fact that students heard the music starting in January.

He added that it was not difficult for the singers to learn the pieces due to the fact that students heard the music starting in January.

The clinician for the choir students was Adam Reinwald from St. Olaf College. Along with Reinwald, Nikki Goulet-Jordan, the Tri-Metro Conference vocal music coordinator, chose the pieces that were sung by the choirs. Vidal said his singers had a chance to work on the pieces before the actual event.

"We had two Cooper rehearsals before the all-day rehearsals at Ken-

nedy," he said.

According to Vidal, the facilities for the event were better this year than last. However, he added that classes were in session at Kennedy, which was not the case last year.

The third music program taking part in the conference was orchestra. Ms. Verdoljak, the new orchestra teacher this year, took part in the Tri-Metro festival for the first time. She nominated students from Cooper's advanced orchestra, the Symphony Orchestra, based on seniority and on how many students were able to go.

"I had them all look at the pieces back in January and we have worked on them during Symphony Orchestra class time," she said.

The orchestra clinician was Dr. Justin Knoepfel, who also chose the music for the students performing. Verdoljak had her students look through this music for around three weeks from January

until the all-day rehearsals in early February.

"I wasn't here last year, but I thought it went very well. I enjoyed the time I was able to be in the orchestra rehearsal and see how the clinician worked with students, and I was honored to be able to share insights into the music with the first violin students," she said.

Verdoljak added that she enjoyed watching the collaboration between the musicians during the event.

"I was inspired seeing the students work together," she said.

Wurzer develops fleet of performance electives

Ranging from speech to theater to dance, Wurzer's classes push students to express themselves

By AKEYA EASLEY
Quill staff writer

Room 257 has become a sanctuary for creativity, where dance, theater, acting and speech students come together to explore and express themselves. These students are led to grow as performers through the guidance of teacher Ms. Wurzer.

Wurzer teaches a collection of performance-based electives at Cooper. Currently, those classes are Dance, International Baccalaureate (IB) Dance, Introduction to Theater, IB Theater, Acting and Speech.

Wurzer's Dance and IB Dance classes have some overlap in content but are still different from each other. The main difference between the two is the design of the curriculum. The IB program provides the structure for IB Dance, whereas Dance has more freedom for Wurzer to cater to student needs.

"I suppose you could say there is a prerequisite to IB dance and that is: you're a dancer," Wurzer said.

The Dance class is open to anyone of any experience level, whether they are used to getting on stage or they have never danced a day in their lives. During the class, students



Photo by CHIMUAL VANG

Ms. Wurzer is located in room 257, which is near the music classrooms.

go through the structure of different dances, the creativity involved and the multitude of genres in dance. These topics are followed up with a final performance where students perform a narrative dance.

Meanwhile, IB Dance class has three main components. The first is Composition and Analysis, during which students choreograph themselves and other people in the room. Next up is an Internal Assessment, which asks dancers to work on tech-

nique. Finally, there is World, during which a student learns someone else's dance repertoire in the world and perfects it.

Both classes are performance-based, meaning that everything counts as a summative. For anyone wanting to take a dance class next school year, Wurzer invites them with open arms.

WURZER continues on page 8

Tarantino's *Hollywood* is way overrated

While it does have some flashes of Quentin Tarantino's obvious brilliance, *Hollywood* is his least cohesive film

By MILO ATHIAS FINN
Quill staff writer

Once Upon a Time in Hollywood, directed by Quentin Tarantino, was theatrically released to audiences July 26, 2019. Despite the date of the film's premiere and worldwide release, it was shown in a series of film festivals in the months leading up to its official release. Tarantino's filmography is highly touted and he has established himself as one of the best directors of his generation. Personally, I believe he is one of the most innovative directors of all time. With that being said, *Once Upon a Time* is not a good movie.

Once Upon a Time in Hollywood won numerous awards, with some of the most notable being: Academy Award for Best Production Design, which I agree with; Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor, which I agree with as it was a relatively weak year and Brad Pitt is excellent in the film; and two Golden Globe Awards for Best Motion Picture and Best Screenplay. To top it all off, the film won the Critics' Choice Awards for Best Motion Picture and Original Screenplay, and scored an 85 percent on Rotten Tomatoes. So, it is safe to say the film was extremely well received.

For the most part, I agree with the hype. I think the production design is beautiful and the acting performances are incredibly compelling. Brad Pitt plays his role very well, but it is Leonardo DiCaprio who steals the show, as he plays his role perfectly. However, it is the actual plot that I cannot get behind. It is at this point that I issue a spoiler warning to any readers who have not yet viewed the film, as I will be discussing the film in its entirety.

The film takes place in 1969 over the course of a few months in Hollywood, California. The protagonist of the movie is Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio), a once-successful actor who starred in an uber-successful Western television show called *Bounty Law*. However, because of Dalton's tendency to be typecast as a villain, he is not taken seriously as anything else, and with shifting audience tastes and Dalton's lack of malleability as an actor, his career begins to regress and it is harder for him to find meaningful roles.

As the film begins, Dalton spends his time hanging out with his long-time stuntman Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt), a man notorious in the film industry because many people believe he murdered his wife in cold blood. It is later revealed in the film that Rick is next door neighbors with Roman Polanski (Rafal Zawierucha) and Sharon Tate (Margot Robbie), which becomes important as the film goes forward.



Photo by SONY PICTURES

The star power of Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio (left to right) is one highlight of the uneven movie.

In real life, Sharon Tate was tragically killed by Charles "Tex" Watson and other disciples of the Manson family cult, which is not what happens in this film. Tarantino said *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* is dedicated to the Tate family and the film was a way to reimagine a scenario in which Sharon Tate survived that fateful night. At first glance, this plot structure is incredibly moving and thought-provoking. However, the film does not focus on Sharon Tate at all, which is incredibly bizarre. I understand that if you are familiar with the history of Tate and the story of her death, you may have an idea of where the film is heading, but at the time I first watched the movie, like many others, I had no idea about the history of Tate and what really transpired.

Nevertheless, one's lack of knowledge concerning a historical event should not be an issue, especially with a filmmaker of Tarantino's caliber. In fact, this is not the first time Tarantino has changed historical events for the purposes of his plots. In the film *Inglourious Basterds*, for example, the story revolves around a group of Jewish soldiers who team up to wreak havoc on the Nazis during World War II. Tarantino keeps the storyline in relative alignment with the historical timeline until the third act of the film, when the Jewish soldiers earn a triumphant victory over the

German soldiers and end up killing Adolf Hitler. Obviously, this incident did not actually occur in real life, but Tarantino has a tendency to alter painful historical events and give more peaceful and digestible solutions to them. This decision allows audiences, family members and victims of the tragedies he addresses the ability to imagine a happy ending. For *Inglourious Basterds*,

Quentin Tarantino said *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* is dedicated to the Tate family and the film was a way to reimagine a scenario in which Sharon Tate survived that fateful night. At first glance, this plot structure is incredibly moving and thought-provoking. However, the film does not focus on Sharon Tate at all, which is incredibly bizarre.

Tarantino's approach works. However, it works because Tarantino gives historical context for the situation, as the Nazis are introduced as the villains at the beginning of the film. The stakes of the mission are also established at the midpoint of the film, and the consequences of failure are easily recognizable to the audience. The same cannot be said for *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, as there is no context given to the characters besides their names. Due to the Holocaust being immensely more known about than the murder of Sharon Tate, more background information is required to understand what the film is about,

which is something viewers do not get in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*.

Up until the midpoint of the film, the storyline centers around the endeavors of Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth. In fact, this remains the case for what feels like the latter half of the movie as well. When Dalton is hired to play the antagonist in an upcoming Western, Booth tags along in hopes of securing a job as Dalton's stunt double. While he is on set, he picks a brawl with Bruce Lee, and flings him against a car, asserting his dominance and essentially tarnishing Lee's legacy.

Meanwhile, Sharon Tate's character plays no part in these plot developments because she has no interactions with those characters. The only thing we are able to learn about her is that she is an actress who is not yet famous, which hurts her self-esteem. However, she is recognizable enough to attend the premiere of her first big movie for free. We also learn that a lot of men like her and she is involved in a love triangle with her husband and director Roman Polanski. That is it. It would be nice to take a deeper dive into Tate's motivations, so the audience could better relate to the character. Unfortunately, Tarantino spends so much money on unnecessary foot shots involving ev-

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The Red Palace merges history with mystery

A nurse discovers a murder in the palace, prompting her to investigate the shocking crime



Photo by FEIWEL & FRIENDS

June Hur's ability to create well-rounded characters helps add depth to the central plot.

By DRIANA SANMARTIN
Quill staff writer

The Red Palace by June Hur is an incredibly well-written book. I was drawn to this book for its unique setting in historical Korea; its intriguing premise, which is centered around a young palace nurse turned investigator; and the promise of a meticulously crafted mystery. Hur's ability to weave a compelling narrative with rich character development and historical detail makes this book a must-read. With its intricate plot and well-rounded characters, *The Red Palace* is undeniably a captivating and well-crafted story.

Set in historical Korea, *The Red Palace* follows the journey of Baek-Hyeon, a palace nurse who becomes entangled in a murder investigation after discovering a crime scene at her school. Determined to uncover the truth and clear her mentor's name, Baek-Hyeon embarks on a dangerous journey, aided by the police inspector Seo Eojin. As they navigate the difficult surveillance and rules of the palace, and find those people they can trust and depend on, they work throughout the book to find the murderer.

One standout aspect of *The Red Palace* is its characterization. June Hur expertly crafts complex and multi-dimensional characters, particularly the protagonist Baek-Hyeon. Baek-Hyeon's resilience, intelligence and determination leap off the page, drawing readers into her world and making them root for her every step of the way. Supporting characters are equally well-developed, with motivations and secrets that add depth to the narrative.

The book's setting and mood are also remarkable. The author skillfully transports readers to Joseon-era Korea's dangerous and vibrant world, immersing them in its sights, sounds and smells. The palpable tension and intrigue keep readers on the edge of their seats, while the rich historical detail adds depth to the story.

The Red Palace is an excellent showcase of June Hur's storytelling abilities, evidenced by its plot structure. The story progresses quickly, with perfectly timed reveals and unexpected turns that keep the reader engaged until the end. Hur has managed to strike a balance between tense, suspenseful moments and quieter, character-focused scenes, resulting in an emotionally impactful and thrilling narrative.

In conclusion, *The Red Palace* by June Hur is a masterfully crafted historical mystery that will keep readers entertained from beginning to end. With its compelling characters, atmospheric setting and intricately woven plot, this book is a must-read for fans of historical fiction and mystery alike. I highly recommend this incredible book for those who admire a mystery worth reading. This novel earns five out of five stars.

Elden Ring is yet another FromSoftware triumph

The open-world video game provides players with countless options for approaching its complicated but rewarding story

By LEO PEREZ
Quill staff writer

My latest video game review is of *Elden Ring*. For those of you who have read my past reviews, you will notice that *Elden Ring* is yet another release by FromSoftware, the company behind several of the games that I have previously written about in the newspaper. This is testimony to how good their games are.

Released in 2022, *Elden Ring* changes previous game mechanics and adds a new innovation: an open world. This game offers adventure and action, complex storytelling with multiple characters and bosses, and a good amount of armor and weapons.

While all of this is new and exciting, *Elden Ring*, like other FromSoftware titles, is not for the faint of heart. You will lose and you will feel the consequences of losing. There will be other players who will help you, but do not listen to what they say. Instead, play this game your own way and find a balance between fun and efficiency.

The first thing of note about *Elden Ring* is the excellent story. This title features a complicated story that can be approached in many different ways. No matter which approach you take, it



Photo by FROMSOFTWARE

Elden Ring features a collection of challenging enemies and difficult bosses.

all starts with the same event: you wake up to find your maiden is dead.

In the game, your maiden is like your handler or your caretaker. Their job is to help you get stronger and become Elden Lord, but the fact that your maiden appears to be dead presents challenges to you right from the beginning. Your mission in the game is to collect the scattered pieces of a broken rune that, when reassembled, will give you power and allow you to emerge as the next Lord of the Land. This ending is just one of many that

you can get based on what transpires over the course of playing the game.

The gameplay in *Elden Ring* is really solid because it largely follows the FromSoftware recipe. First, *Elden Ring* features challenging enemies and difficult bosses that may inspire you to rage-quit the game. This title also features a number of weapons and armor sets that can shape their build and drastically change how a player can play.

Like other FromSoftware titles, dying can be devastating as you can

lose all your currency, called runes. Runes can be picked up again if you can find where you died the last time. However, dying before you can retrieve your runes means losing them forever.

While everybody can play the game differently, there are some ways to beat the game that are more effective than others. For example, the Rivers of Blood katana-classed weapon can deal phenomenal damage when paired with certain stats. Moreover, using this weapon can ultimately make defeating any difficult boss rather easy.

Another way to play the game is through player-versus-player mode. This is a thriving playerbase that lets one player use their build against another player's build. Some people choose to use wacky weapons or mechanics; for instance, they might choose to only deal damage by rolling into someone else.

Meanwhile, other players may insist on using cheap tactics such as those provided by overpowered magic items. More specifically, a mechanic called "stacking" allows a player to use multiple powerful buffs that can

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members’ best interests in mind and are written well.

“In this contract, there were 100 items that needed to be discussed. We had four or five, three-hour meetings to discuss the items and see if we wanted to move them into the contract. The ones that passed were made into the package the negotiation team brought to the table and shared with district leadership. The district has its own process, and they bring items that it would like to talk about as well,” Stanton said.

Once the district and union are ready to discuss the new, two-year contract, a typical negotiation session follows a specific format.

“The lead negotiator for each team will coordinate days and times that work for the team and propose them to the other side. When the date matches, we set a meeting time. We start by reading all the items that each side has proposed. There is a time to ask clarifying questions to ensure each side understands what is being discussed. Some items both sides agree on quickly as the ideas are positive for both sides. Sometimes, one side is not interested in an item at all. Sometimes, lengthy discussions with researchers and specialists with knowledge are consulted for more information on a topic as needed,” Stanton said.

One key during negotiations is the willingness of both sides to compromise.

“In the end, this involves a lot of give and take. Not everyone gets exactly what they want, but both sides are working to make improvements,” Stanton said.

Looking back at the contract negotiations in which he has taken part, Stanton said there are always negative and positive aspects to the process.

“[A negative aspect is] not getting everything you want. Of course, in a perfect world, everything asked for would be achieved. When we successfully get new items into the contract, that feels like success. We work together with the district team to find mutually beneficial solutions to the challenges that are shared during the negotiation process,” Stanton said.

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“If you like to move and you like music and you like to be active, it’s a no-brainer,” Wurzer said.

For students who would like to learn more about theater, the Introduction to Theater class is the perfect fit.

“It’s like a dip-your-toe-in-the-water, figure-out-what-theater-is-all-about class,” Wurzer said.

IB Theater, however, is dictated by IB requirements and comes from a director’s point of view. Alleyne Syverson (11) said she has enjoyed taking this course.

“It’s an interesting, different point of view,” Syverson said.

Just like the dance class, students taking the IB Theater course focus on cultural and world components.

Along with Theater and IB Theater, students can take a standalone Acting class that is more focused on performing.

“It’s really just the nuts and bolts of acting and the different genres,” Wurzer said.

Students in this class learn different ways to act, such as acting in front of a camera versus acting on stage. As for grading, this class is also performance-based, meaning there are few-to-no formatives. Noah Heap (10) encourages other students to take the class.

“It helps you expand your character,” he said.

Slightly different from the other performance courses Wurzer teaches is Speech. Wurzer said this class is not what most students may think it is.

“There’s a misnomer behind the class. They think I’m teaching them how to talk,” Wurzer said.

Instead, Speech is a public-speaking class, rather than a language class. It is where students learn how to deal with communication and interviewing skills, and improve where they are as communicators. One student who is enjoying the class this year is Raiden Southwell (9).

“I wanted to take speech so it’d help me with my job opportunities,” he said.

Students who may be interested in taking any of these performance courses next school year are encouraged to see their grade-level counselor.

Sandler's performance helps elevate *Click*

The high-concept comedy comes from one of the commercial peaks of Adam Sandler's career in the early 2000s



Photo by COLUMBIA PICTURES

The wonderfully odd Christopher Walken is a great counterpart to Adam Sandler in the 2006 movie.

By MILO ATHIAS FINN
Quill staff writer

The Adam Sandler movie *Click* was directed by Frank Coraci, written by Mark O’Keefe and Steve Koren, and released to audiences June 23, 2006. The film was produced by Happy Madison, a film company founded by Adam Sandler in 1999. After its release, *Click* grossed \$240 million at the box office, nearly tripling its budget of \$82.5 million. While it is paramount for films to make a significant profit just to break even, *Click* was certainly a success economically. As for its success artistically, *Click* is definitely one of Sandler’s stronger films.

For those who have not yet viewed this movie and plan on doing so, please be warned that there are spoilers about the plot throughout this analysis. The plot follows the journey of Michael Newman (Sandler), a workaholic too engrossed in his goal of becoming promoted to make time for his family. His wife, Donna (Kate Beckinsale), urges him to moderate his work affairs and become more involved in his children’s lives. Donna is critical of Michael’s behavior, encouraging him to set time aside in his schedule to watch his son’s swim meet and finish up a treehouse in the front yard, as Michael had promised his daughter he would do. To top it off, all of the remotes in Michael’s house seem to have the opposite function

than the one he is looking for. He wonders why there cannot be a remote that controls everything.

When Michael’s boss, John Ammer (Dave Hasselhoff), gives him a massive project with limited time to accomplish it, Michael reaches his breaking point. He begins driving aimlessly around the city to catch a moment of clarity and hopefully find a multifaceted remote. Eventually, he stumbles across a Bed Bath and Beyond. Michael searches the store for a remote but to avail; they just do not have what he is looking for.

Suddenly, Michael catches a glimpse of something in the corner of his eye: the Beyond Room. Inside, Michael meets Morty (Christopher Walken), a savvy technician who ensures Michael that he has exactly what he is looking for. Morty then gives Michael a state-of-the-art remote that is capable of controlling everything in Michael’s life and at no cost. But, of course, there is a catch that is revealed to Michael over the course of the film.

Despite Sandler only partaking in a producer’s role, his influence on the film is extremely apparent and even jarring at times. *Click* is described as a comedy and it definitely presents itself that way during the first half of the film. Most of the humor comes from Michael’s remote and its versatile power. Michael can lower the volume of his barking dog, display sports games to cover Donna’s annoying friend’s face and change the volume of people’s

voices for his personal enjoyment.

In classic Adam Sandler fashion, the film features frequent, vulgar jokes that may become nauseating to the female audience. Michael uses the remote to zoom in on a nearby jogger’s breasts and plays it in slow motion. There are also a handful of misogynistic jokes toward Donna’s annoying friend and Michael’s female coworkers. (These mainly come from the character played by David Hasselhoff.)

Another feature that the remote provides is the ability to fast-forward your life, which allows Michael to skip any possible inconvenience that he may encounter. He can skip through periods of illness, redundant conversations with family members (mostly his parents) and fights with his wife. The best part is, when Michael skips phases of his life, his body is on auto pilot and will act according to Michael’s tendencies. How bad could it be?

During the second half of the film, the plot switches gears in the most egregious way possible. It is almost as if it is two separate films combined into one. All of the interactions that Michael skipped through early in the movie begin to come back to bite him. After Ammer declines to promote Michael, and instead gives him more assignments, Michael decides to fast forward to the moment he gets promoted. This way he does not have to face his family and feel guilty for his shortcomings.

However, when Michael returns,

Howl's Moving Castle is Miyazaki at his best

With Miyazaki's newest film, *The Boy and the Heron*, recently winning an Academy Award, it is a good time to revisit his 2005 classic

By BETHZY ARIAS-PLIEGO
Quill staff writer

Howl’s Moving Castle is a movie from a company called Studio Ghibli and the director’s name is Hayao Miyazaki. This movie came out in the U.S. on June 17, 2005. I chose to review this movie because it is such a beautiful story. Additionally, the movie features amazing songs, especially “Merry-Go-Round of Life,” which became popular after the film’s release. I think people should watch the movie because, in addition to the amazing animation, there are some interesting themes related to the issues of love and war. The movie also shows us the importance of pursuing our dreams, the selflessness of people and doing the right thing and not the wrong when situations are at their toughest. It is because of the way in which Miyazaki deals with these many issues and messages that I think all viewers would find *Howl’s Moving Castle* to be a great movie.

The main characters of *Howl’s Moving Castle* are Sophie, the Witch of the Waste, Howl, Calcifer, Markl, Kakashi no Kabu, Madame Suliman and Lettie. Our protagonist is Sophie, who works at a hat store. One evening after the shop closes, the Witch of the Waste comes to the store and puts a curse on Sophie that turns her into an old lady. The Witch of the Waste does this because she believes Sophie is connected to Howl, a handsome young wizard that the Witch likes. Sophie’s missions are to break her curse, help those around her break their curses and, along with Howl, bring an

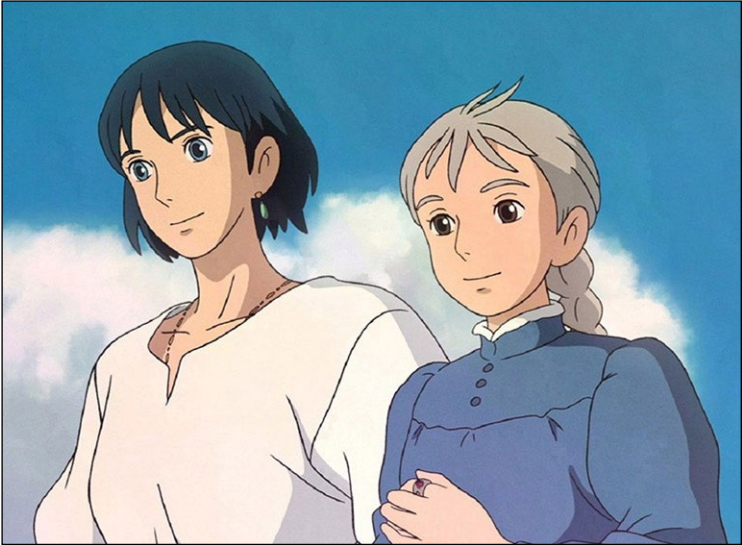


Photo by STUDIO GHIBLI

Castle focuses on the journey Howl and Sophie take toward love and maturity.

end to the war going on around them. Helping her accomplish these goals is the moving castle, which has a secret door that helps them go to different places.

One of the best scenes in the movie is when Howl gives Sophie a ring and tells her to summon his heart with hers. During this scene, you can see that he cares for Sophie and that, if she needs him, he will come to her no matter what. Howl gives Sophie this ring after he has a meeting with Madame Suliman that almost results in Suliman taking away his powers. Howl and Sophie manage to escape, and the ring allows Sophie to return safely to the moving castle while he leads Suliman’s henchmen in the wrong direction. This ring is the first sign of the love that Howl is feeling for Sophie, even if her outward appearance is still that of an old lady due

to the curse. The viewer now knows that Howl is going to show up to help her no matter what she needs.

Another one of my favorite scenes occurs later in the film when Howl takes Sophie to a secret garden. Earlier in the movie, Howl is depicted as a somewhat heartless person who is not concerned with other people. However, as the movie goes on, Howl slowly starts to protect the people that he has in his castle, including Sophie. As a way to surprise Sophie on her birthday, Howl takes her to see the secret garden he used to go to when he was a child. Uplifted by this gesture, Sophie rejuvenates to her younger self for a moment, but then her thoughts become negative and she returns to looking like an old woman again. Although Howl tells her she can use the secret garden to open a flower shop, Sophie seems

his world has changed. It takes Ammer many years to promote Michael, meaning he has been on autopilot the whole time. Next, he finds that his relationship with his children is non-existent. What is more, Donna is now remarried to her son’s swim coach, Bill (Sean Astin, who plays his role surprisingly well despite his limited screen time). Finally, Michael discovers that his dad has passed away. What Michael realizes is that every time he skipped an exchange or an event he deemed uneventful, the remote began to catch on and began skipping these events automatically.

Although the shift in the second half of the movie is jarring, it is also the highlight of this film because it truly ties everything together. It is in the second half that we figure out that *Click* is a story about family and time, or the lack of it. In the first half of the movie, Michael is too caught up in getting promoted and earning a bunch of money so his kids do not have to go through the same struggles he went through in his childhood. However, he begins to learn that he is robbing them of a meaningful connection by not being around. Additionally, he is robbing Donna of the affection that a spouse deserves. Ultimately, Michael comes to realize that the awkward, uncomfortable and boring moments he spends with his family are important because it is still time spent with his family. It is that time that creates the memories that connect family members on a deeper level.

My favorite scene of this movie is when Michael eventually confronts Morty and asks him why he has cursed him with the remote, the device that has ruined his life. Morty explains that the device shows no prejudice and merely obeys Michael’s commands. Michael had asked for a universal remote to fix all of his problems and he was given it on a silver platter. The only problem is that, while life is full of adversity and hardships, there is only so much time to be alive. As a result, if you skip all of your inconveniences, you will not have much time to live.

Click is one of the only films to ever make me cry, which is ironic given that it is an Adam Sandler comedy. The film has a ton of negative reviews, most of which I agree with. However, most of those reviews are critical of the film’s crude jokes and immature humor, not its underlying message. If *Click* is considered a “bad” movie, it is the best bad movie I have ever watched. I give *Click* four out of five stars.

concerned that Howl’s gift implies that he is going away. The continued uncertainty in their relationship as demonstrated in this scene sets up the viewers for the events that transpire at the end of the film.

In addition to these great scenes, the movie also benefits from an excellent soundtrack. One of my favorite pieces in the movie is “Merry-Go-Round of Life” by Joe Hisaishi. It is a beautiful piece of music that is well performed by an amazing orchestra. The popularity of the movie and the song eventually led to it being rerecorded with different instruments beyond those in a traditional orchestra. The song feels to me like a metaphor for the journey people make from childhood to youth to adulthood. If you listen to the song, you will hear the appealing harmonious closures and crescendos. This song adds to the scenes in which it is played and is worth listening to outside of the film as well.

Overall, I believe any viewer would really enjoy watching *Howl’s Moving Castle*. It is an amazing movie thanks to its beautiful animation and its interesting plot. The way in which the movie follows the development of the true love between Howl and Sophie is flawless and it fits well with the elements of the fantasy genre featured in the film. Moreover, the movie also has a ton of different messages that can appeal to viewers of all ages. I rate this movie five out of five stars because of its many exceptional components. I strongly urge everyone to watch this and Hayao Miyazaki’s other Studio Ghibli movies.

Nordic season derailed by weather

While the team still practiced and competed, it was not the type of season skiers hoped for



Photo by LORRAINE MEREDITH

The Nordic team benefited from local ski facilities that were able to generate and maintain artificial snow.

By MILO ATHIAS FINN
Quill staff writer

Outdoor sports are heavily reliant on the weather, as extreme or unpredictable conditions can derail a season. This is especially true with Nordic skiing, a sport that takes place exclusively in the snow.

Normally, relying on snow is not a problem in Minnesota. According to the Minnesota DNR, the average snowfall each winter ranges from 36 inches in the southwest of the state to more than 70 inches along Lake Superior. Moreover, the winter of 2022-2023 was the third snowiest on record with the Twin Cities hitting 89.7 inches according to Fox 9 news.

That is in stark contrast to this winter, during which the Twin Cities area has received only 14.2 inches of snow as of early March according to CBS News. Of equal note is that the snow that has fallen does not stick around very long due to the abnormally warm temperatures. The Minnesota DNR reports that winter heatwaves have produced record high temperatures and record high minimum temperatures this year, with the Twin Cities breaking its record for number of 50 F days for the season by early March.

The Cooper Hawks Nordic skiing team went through great lengths to stop the lack of snow from being a detriment to their season. One member of the staff in particular who has been game planning the squad's season a little bit differently due to the weather is Assistant Coach Ms. Meredith.

"The lack of snow this year has been a setback for both our new and experienced skiers since time on snow has been a challenge. However, we are very fortunate that Elm Creek and Theodore Wirth parks have been making snow and make it possible to get some time on snow even if the laps are smaller," Meredith said.

Meredith said the Nordic ski team has employed several strategies in order to maximize their practice time and continue to improve.

"To combat the lack of snow, we have done more dry land practices and spent more time in the weight room. These activities strengthen our core and help our endurance, both necessary qualities to be competitive," Meredith said.

Kendall Carscadden (10), a member of the Nordic ski program, said the lack of snow had a negative effect on the team.

"We had to start later. Last year, we could start early because we had so much snow by November, but now, this year, we had to wait. A lot of the trails were still in the process of being made be-

cause, mostly, it's just fake snow. We had to wait for the trails to be opened and only so much of the trails would be open when we had races. So, instead of using the full trail, we would have to do loops," Carscadden said.

Despite there only being 14.2 total inches of natural snow as opposed to last year's 50 at the beginning of March, local ski sites were still able to maintain artificial snow so Nordic skiers could continue to hone their craft. However, Carscadden said the benefits of the artificially generated snow were sometimes at odds with the air temperatures.

"It's been hard. There's been days when the conditions are good and the snow is nice, then there's days when it's 50 degrees and we have to ski and it's basically slush. So, it's definitely been tough. It feels like our season has been shorter because races have been delayed due to the lack of snow," Carscadden said.

As of early February, the Nordic ski team was able to compete in five meets despite the weather challenges.

"This is only my second year, but we definitely did a lot more races, and had a lot more chances to compete in the past,"

"Racing in the warm weather was very difficult as well. Personally, I couldn't go as fast when racing because a lot of the time the snow was mixed with real and fake, and the warm weather made the snow very slushy at times, which slowed me down a lot," Alaina Anderson said.

Carscadden said. "It's definitely kind of abnormal because we would have a race every week and now we had to cut our time short because our races keep getting postponed."

Stella Fesenmaier (11), a captain of the Nordic ski team, also weighed in on the unfortunate circumstances for her sport. Fesenmaier was motivated to join Nordic skiing to stay conditioned for the other activities that she participates in, but found this season to be disappointing.

"I can say it was hard to find motivation to practice when ski areas have been slushy and hard to work with and it has impacted the whole team. It was hard to get better and achieve new things in these conditions. Meets have especially been difficult because, as time goes on and more racers go out, the deck gets looser and warms up, especially later in the day. The section meet this year had to be moved back two hours just so the snow would be a little better," Fesenmaier said.

Another Nordic ski participant disappointed in the incompatible climate is Alaina Anderson (11). It is currently Anderson's second year in the Nordic skiing program, which she first joined because the sport seemed fun. This year, Anderson

said the scarcity of snow led to many setbacks.

"The warm weather really made it difficult for practice as the places for skiing were very limited. We were only able to go to Elm Creek and Wirth to practice on skis, since many places didn't have snow. Racing in the warm weather was very difficult as well. Personally, I couldn't go as fast when racing because a lot of the time the snow was mixed with real and fake, and the warm weather made the snow very slushy at times, which slowed me down a lot," Anderson said.

The issues at meets were accompanied by similar challenges during daily practices. Citing the problem of having Nordic practice without a normal amount of snow to ski on was Anab Sharif-Abdullahi (11), who just joined the team for the first time this season.

"All we did was run around the neighborhood," she said. "We could've used that time to learn how to ski if there had been snow."

Despite the negative experiences caused by the weather conditions, the warmer weather has also yielded some unique and positive moments for Nordic ski participants.

"[There were] some benefits of the warm weather, like not shivering when we were outside," Anderson said.

Luke Skoglund (10) also had a positive thing to say regarding the warm weather.

"We didn't have to wear as many layers when we were skiing," Skoglund said.

Even though Minnesota's warmer temperatures and lack of snow may have had negative implications for the Nordic ski program this year, Cooper athletes remain hopeful for the upcoming seasons.

"I hope next year is more normal so we can have more motivation, fun and development," Fesenmaier said.

Meanwhile, Anderson said she hopes that next season provides a chance to ski at more locations.

"Having a normal winter next year would be great. It would make meets and practices run more smoothly, and we would be able to go to more places for practice like French and have more places to race at," Anderson said.

Another benefit to a return to normal winter weather next year will be the help it would give to new skiers. Nordic skiing veteran Robert Nichols (10), who is currently participating in his second year in the program, said a colder and snowier winter in 2024-2025 season would benefit beginners.

"A [normal winter] would let us have more time on the snow and give beginners better opportunities to learn how to ski," Nichols said.

Cooper Competitors

The story of the athletes who strive for success in Cooper sports

Israel Ogunleye

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

Israel Ogunleye (12) is a three-sport athlete at Cooper. He is currently wrapping up his final winter season on the Hawks basketball team, after which he will transition into track this spring. In the fall, Ogunleye played his final season of Hawks football.

"I started playing basketball at 14," he said. "It was love at first sight with this sport."

Ogunleye cited the competitive aspect of playing basketball that keeps him interested in the sport.

"The game itself brings a lot of joy and dunking," he said. "I love playing in front of a crowd."

Looking back at the fall, Ogunleye said he enjoyed his final season in football.

"The season went well despite our loss to Armstrong," Ogunleye said.

Now, Ogunleye is anticipating the beginning of track and his chance to run in meets.

"I want to get first place in everything I do," he said.

When it comes to school, Ogunleye said his current favorite classes are English 12, Foods and Yearbook.

"All my classes have good teachers," he said.

Next fall, Ogunleye will be attending college in Wisconsin as a business major. Additionally, he will be playing football at his school.



Photo by N. PLAHN

Attoria McDonald

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

Attoria McDonald (12) participates in track during the spring and volleyball during the fall.

"I've been doing track since sophomore year of high school," she said. "I started because I love to be outdoors and go on runs."

McDonald takes part in several track events. She has had her biggest success competing in the 100-meter hurdles.

"My favorite memory was winning conference champion in the 100-meter hurdles," she said. "I had an amazing support system that included friends who came, parents, teammates and coaches."

McDonald's background in the sport has led to her taking on a leadership role as a team captain.

"I enjoy being a captain because I get to know a lot of people," she said. "The friends that I've made through track are now like family to me."

Last fall, McDonald took part in her final season in volleyball. She said the highlight from the season was senior night.

After graduating from high school, McDonald will be heading off to college. She is currently deciding between the University of Minnesota, Rochester and Howard University. Her planned major is psychology and she hopes to one day work professionally as a psychologist.

Although she has been approached by several schools for her talents in track, McDonald said she is choosing not to compete at college to keep her focus on her studies.



Photo by N. PLAHN

Marie Odegaard

By BETHZY ARIAS-PLIEGO
Quill staff writer

Marie Odegaard (12) is a foreign exchange student who has just wrapped up Nordic skiing as her winter sport. During the fall, she played volleyball, and during the spring, she will play softball.

"This was my first year doing Nordic as a competitive sport," she said. "In Norway, a lot of people do Nordic skiing and we have some good Nordic athletes. I chose Nordic as my winter sport because I wanted to become better at skiing and do something outdoors."

One of Odegaard's favorite memories about Nordic was a ski trip the team took to Wisconsin.

"We skied for three days, ate a lot of good food thanks to some parents on the team, got to ski on real snow and we

became closer as a team," she said.

As she looks back on the fall, Odegaard said she enjoyed playing volleyball.

"I love those girls," she said. "I miss it."

Now that spring is arriving, Odegaard will play softball. It will be her first time playing and she said she is both nervous and excited about the season.

Outside of school, Odegaard likes to read, bake, hang out with friends and watch shows. She also enjoys hiking in the mountains and playing handball.

Next fall, Odegaard will be back in Norway finishing his last year of high school. She will then take a gap year to travel the world with her best friend.

"After that, I plan on going to the university. My current plan is to become an English teacher," she said.



Photo by N. PLAHN

Anastasia Xiong

By BETHZY ARIAS-PLIEGO
Quill staff writer

Anastasia Xiong (12) is a captain of the winter dance team, the fall cheerleading squad and the spring golf team.

"This is my second year on the dance team and I started my junior year after being recruited by a dance team member," she said.

Something Xiong enjoys about her winter sport is that it requires artistry and athleticism.

"Expressing my creative and artistic mind is what I enjoy most," she said.

One of Xiong's favorite memories about her winter sport is creating dance choreography with her coaches and teammates.

"We all pushed our limits and challenged each other to more advanced choreography," Xiong said.

Xiong's hard work led to her becoming a team captain.

"I thrive to be a reliable and knowledgeable captain, which has pushed me to go beyond my limits with my mindset and dancing," Xiong said.

The next sport Xiong is going to do is golf.

"My hopes for Cooper's golf team is for more players," Xiong said.

When it comes to school, one of Xiong's favorite subjects is English.

"English is not just academically challenging, but also requires creative thinking," she said.

Outside of school, Xiong's main hobby is figure skating.

Xiong's plan after high school is to pursue a career in medicine as a nurse or a doctor. Xiong said she might continue with athletics after high school depending on her free time.

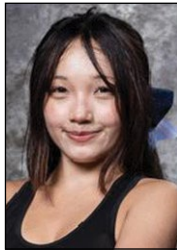


Photo by N. PLAHN

Climbing club seeks Hawks who enjoy a challenge

Members of the group meet once every other week at Minneapolis Bouldering Project

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

The Cooper climbing club is now in its second year at the school. According to the students who take part, they are always open to welcoming new members to the group.

Serving as advisor to the group is math teacher Mr. James.

“This is my first year with the climbing club,” James said. “After [former school nurse Ms.] Kraft started it last year, the students needed someone to fill in to run the club this year, so a few of them asked me.”

The team meets once every other week at Minneapolis Bouldering Project, which is an indoor climbing facility located near downtown.

“Students will typically show up around 10 a.m. and get checked in. Once they do, they change into athletic clothes and put on their climbing shoes that they’ll usually rent for free. After that, I let them go climb whatever routes they want to in the gym. I’ll usually bounce between groups and check in to see how it’s going. Students usually climb for about two hours and then we all head out around noon,” James said.

It is the freedom the climbers have at the gym that is one highlights to getting involved with the club, according to member Ellias Bjorback (11).

“We have free reign of the facility. We look around the gym for any interesting climbs and people usually stay in groups to work on said climbs together,” Bjorback said.

The teamwork aspect of climbing is something Bjorback likes about being involved with the sport.

“I enjoy working with the team because I love climbing and the people are always really nice and encouraging. Working on climbs together is a lot of fun because it’s like a puzzle we’re all trying to solve,” Bjorback said.

Another club participant, Joshua Peterson (12), also pointed out the puzzle-like challenge of climbing as one of the sport’s main draws.

“I enjoy climbing with the other students because it’s just fun to find different routes to climb and figure out,” Peterson said.

Unlike other Cooper sports activities, the team does not take part in official meets or games. However, James said that could be something the squad members consider in the future. More important to James is the chance this sport gives participants to get in excellent physical shape.

“I think climbing is a great life-long sport,” James said. “It radically improves your grip and upper body strength. It’s also a very intense workout in a short amount of time. Plus, it’s a ton of fun and doesn’t even feel like working out.”

Peterson pointed out that the ability to stay fit through climbing will benefit him in the long run.

“Climbing club serves as a good means for working out, which will definitely help me given my plans to join the military after graduating,” he said.

While the current members of the club have been improving their skills as climbers over the course of the school year, they encourage beginners to get involved with the group. For example, Bjorback started with the team last year with no major prior experience.

“We are always looking for new people and no experience is required. It’s a lot of fun and we’d love to have anyone who is interested,” Bjorback said.

According to James, the club will welcome new members at any point in the year, so it is not too late to get involved before the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

“We’re still inviting new members and new climbers every week. There’s no commitment and no previous climbing experience is needed,” James said.

An additional note James made to potential climbers is the affordability of getting involved in climbing through a school-based club.

“The club offers a low-cost way to get involved in an often expensive sport,” James said.

Interested students are encouraged to contact James at brady_james@rdale.org.

Dance Team merges athletics with artistry

The squad is looking for new members as several people on its current roster will be graduating this June



Photo by AKEYA EASLEY

One of the team’s most notable recent performances was at the pepfest held during Snow Week on February 23.

By AKEYA EASLEY
Quill staff writer

Bound together by ambition and determination, the Hawks winter dance squad spent the 2023-2024 season showing Cooper what teamwork is meant to look like.

The team is led by Ms. Braden, who has been the head coach for four seasons. She was inspired to get involved due to her dancing past.

“I grew up dancing and I love coaching and teaching others about what I am passionate about,” Braden said.

A similar thing prompted team captain Brenda Nyabicha (12) to join as well.

“I have always loved dancing since I was a little kid and was on a dance team when I was little,” she said.

Also helping to lead the team was co-captain Anastasia Xiong (12), who has been on the dance squad for two years. Xiong said her participation on the team came through a friendship.

“My friend and now captain, Brenda, encouraged me to join,” she said.

While performing, the team makes it look almost effortless. However, team members said there is a lot that goes into looking as great as they do on stage. Practice occurs three days a week for two hours. Each session involves a lot of work, such as running laps around the cafeteria, doing conditioning moves they need to perfect and going over their dances while their coaches correct them.

“A typical practice for dance team includes drilling our dances multiple times,” Xiong said.

According to Najia Cook (11), the team does more than just work on the physical aspects of dance. They also work on the mental piece by talking about their past performances as well.

When it comes to a performance, the dancers do their makeup and hair, stretch and change their outfits in preparation for the performance.

“We typically perform in four

conference meets and one or two invitationals,” Cook said. “We compete in jazz and kick both twice throughout the four competitions.”

During the competitions, the dancers get divided into junior varsity and varsity groups. Junior varsity dances first and varsity goes last. The scores are organized and the top three teams get recognized.

“After, we announce who won Pancake [a stuffed animal used as motivation] for fun,” Cook said.

Xiong said that one important aspect of being in dance during the competitions is on the sisterhood of the team.

“It’s so fun to get ready together,” she said.

Unfortunately for the seniors, the next events for the dance squad will occur next year as the current season has reached its end. However, one event from this year that all the dancers will remember is the Jack of Hearts Dance, which the team sponsors as a fundraiser.

“It is a lot of work and our danc-

ers did a great job putting it together,” Braden said.

Each member of the dance team cited different aspects of taking part in the activity that they enjoy the most.

“I enjoy working with the dance team because I get to create a bond with each of the dancers and see all the different techniques when it comes to dancing. We get to grow and improve with each other,” Nyabicha said.

Another element many of the members enjoy is the family atmosphere of the team. They all connect and go off of each other’s energy, which creates a chemistry that is shown once they perform.

“They make me look forward to every practice and competition,” Carissa Chilson (12) said.

Echoing Chilson’s thoughts was Xiong, who said the team is always supportive.

“The members of the dance team are so kind and respectful. Everyone is welcomed in the dance team,” Xiong said.

The benefits of being on such a team can vary from person to person. According to Chilson, she benefited by improving on her past dancing skills.

“[It gave me] a chance to push myself individually and help my teammates grow,” she said.

At the same time, students do not necessarily need to have a background in dance to get involved with the team.

“No matter what your style of dance is, the dance team is the right place for you,” Xiong said.

Also encouraging people to join next year’s team is Kayden Ableiter (11).

“It’s an amazing opportunity to make friends and create strong bonds,” Ableiter said. “Join dance team next year. We welcome anyone with open arms.”

Students interested in taking part in the team are encouraged to contact any of its current members, Braden, or the Activities Office.

“We are a tight-knit group across grades and the team is very supportive of one another,” Braden said.

TARANTINO'S HOLLYWOOD IS WAY OVERRATED continued from page 7

ery female member of the cast (classic Tarantino) that there is no room for character development.

With Tate’s story again pushed to the side, the film returns to Dalton and Booth. After Booth is fired from his job for assaulting Bruce Lee, he decides to drive his car around the city to pass time, at which point he picks up an underaged hitchhiker and agrees to give her a ride home. When they arrive at her home, he realizes that she is living at a commune in an abandoned movie set owned by his friend George Spahn.

Booth is skeptical that Spahn would allow a commune to live there, so he decides to have a conversation with Spahn to make sure he is still lucid and not being taken advantage of. This angers the members of the commune, who decide to slash Booth’s tires. Naturally, when Booth finds out, a fight ensues, and Booth is forced to retreat before more harm is done. Members of the commune then decide to go on a manhunt to kill Booth in order to avenge their friend who is badly injured in the fight with Booth. This commune is later revealed to be the Manson family cult, despite Charles Manson never explicitly being mentioned in the film.

Eventually, Charles “Tex” Watson (Austin Butler) and several other members of the Spahn commune stumble upon Dalton’s house, where Booth is currently staying. Dalton urges them to leave the property, and

the group decides to comply and reconsider their mission back in their car. While in the car, Watson is persuaded by Sadie (Mikey Madison) to go back and murder Dalton. She argues that Dalton is an actor who is in many action movies; therefore, he deserves to die because his movies teach audiences how to kill. (This is a rather weak motivation for murder, but I digress.) The group then discusses their disdain for actors in Hollywood, something I never really understood, as the community lives in an abandoned movie set owned by a retired film director.

Now that they are properly motivated, Tex and his crew return to Dalton’s home, at which point a massive battle erupts between Watson’s posse and the duo of Dalton and Boothe, resulting in a signature Tarantino gore fest. After the group of Manson acolytes is killed, Dalton and Boothe venture outside, where they see Roman Polanski. Polanski and Tate are concerned about the loud noises they heard, and after Dalton explains the situation, Tate invites the two men to dinner. This is the first and only time that Dalton and Booth even interact with Tate, and despite the heartwarming nature of Tate’s survival, this ending falls flat. That is because there is no indication to viewers unfamiliar with the real-life events that Tate just escaped being murdered and has been given a happy ending.

The abundance of subplots that remain unresolved at the end of the

film completely kills the resolution of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. What is the point of Tate’s character besides her real-life relevance outside of the film? Why did the first two acts of the film focus on Rick Dalton and the fall and resurgence of his career when it has no relevance to the climax of the film? The difference between the first two acts and the final act is so egregious it feels as if it is two separate films. The first two acts are painfully slow and make no attempt to establish any stakes. This forces the third act to play catch up, and this is incredibly evident in the finale, during which the final battle and conclusion all occur in the span of about 20 minutes.

The film’s laziness is especially apparent in its arbitrary use of voiceover. There is a point in between the second and third act where Kurt Russell (who also plays stunt coordinator Randy Miller in the film) narrates for seven minutes, catching the audience up so the film’s conclusion does not fly completely over their heads. “Show don’t tell” is usually one of Tarantino’s specialties and he tends to have a knack for creating powerful scenes with little dialogue. Unfortunately, this usual attention to detail is not evident in this film, which the need for narration clearly demonstrates.

Ultimately, it almost seems that Tarantino really wanted to center the film around Dalton and Booth, and threw in the Tate storyline as a sec-

ondary plot device. I firmly believe if Tarantino had stayed on task and focused on developing one particular storyline in a very strong manner, this film would work better. Instead, he goes for the home run and focuses on three conflicting subplots that he fails to fully connect at the very end, which results in a subpar film. It is one thing for the third act to behave differently than previous acts. However, if the tempo switch is so extreme that the final act no longer seems connected to the rest of the film, that is unacceptable. Tarantino should have prioritized establishing meaningful threads for all three storylines at the beginning of the film, but instead the third act is forced to rapidly, and unsuccessfully, tie everything together.

This movie disappointed me as I am a massive Tarantino fan. I have heard critics raving about this film and I wanted to believe it, but this film is no *Django Unchained*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown* or *Kill Bill*. The acting by the star-studded cast is the film’s only saving grace, and the performances do truly go a long way. Nonetheless, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* is a letdown despite the positive reviews. If you happen to have watched this film and enjoyed it, I respect your opinion. If you have not and are still skeptical, I encourage you to watch this film and develop your own opinion about it. I rate *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* 2.5 out of five stars.

ELDEN RING IS YET ANOTHER FROMSOFTWARE TRIUMPH continued from page 7

nearly instantly kill or do serious damage to someone else.

Another highlight of *Elden Ring* is its use of scenery. The lands depicted in the game feature some breathtaking sights. There are beautifully rendered lakes and castles that are rich with detail. What is more, everything around the player has a story, even enemy placement. While some of these details are not all that important for other game developers, there is a reason behind everything in *Elden Ring*, some piece of lore that explains

why something is placed where it is placed.

Within the game are some locations that are not meant for new players. One example is called Caelid, a poison swamp. It is a hostile place that features beasts and dragons for its main enemies. There is also a magical school that is definitely not inspired by the Harry Potter series. Instead, Raya Lucaria Academy features magic-using enemies and one of the more annoying bosses, Rennala, Queen Of The Full Moon.

The academy is wonderful to look at and it includes detailed backgrounds with carefully illustrated libraries and paintings. There are even secret passages that lead to good loot or a secret boss.

Ultimately, *Elden Ring* is truly worthy of your time and patience. If you think you can get beyond the sometimes unfair mechanics of this title and achieve Elden Lord status, then you have to give this game a try. You know a game is something special when it earns Game of the Year

honors, and that is definitely the case with *Elden Ring*.

FromSoftware takes the best from their previous games and makes it better with this release. *Elden Ring* deserves your attention thanks to the ways in which it allows you and your character to have full freedom. Thank you, FromSoftware, for another excellent title. *Elden Ring* earns five out of five stars. As you play the game, remember the words of Godfrey, the first Elden Lord: “Brave tarnished, thy strength befits a crown.”