

# This Life



THE WALRUS, VOL. 58

2023-2024

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2023-2024

Saint Mary's Hall  
9401 Starcrest Drive  
San Antonio, Texas 78217

*Sofia Johnson (10) | Illumination | Digital Photography*  
*Cover Art: Sedelia Wilson-Larkin (11) | Flicker of Light | Digital Photography*

# A Note From the Editors

Exploring the relationship between free will and fate, 17th Century playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca wrote his most famous play *Life Is a Dream* to tackle the human experience, the mystery of life. Focusing on capturing complicated states of mind, he reimagined life as a whole, the deepest human feelings, and dilemmas, pushing us to question our reality and the role of fate.

Whether life offers frenzies, illusions, shadows, delirium, or dreams, there are endless possibilities in what we, as humans, can accomplish. So we leave you with the question: "What is life?"

## life noun

LIFE | LĪF

- 1  
: the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change preceding death. "the origins of life"
- 2  
: the period between the birth and death of a living thing, especially a human being. "she has lived all her life in the country"
- 3  
: vitality, vigor, or energy. "she was beautiful and full of life"
- 4  
: (in art) the depiction of a subject from a real model, rather than from an artist's imagination. "the pose and clothing were sketched from life"
- 5  
: expressed as a feeling:

*¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí.  
¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusión,  
una sombra, una ficción,  
y el mayor bien es pequeño.  
¡Que toda la vida es sueño,  
y los sueños, sueños son!*

"What is this life? A frenzy, an illusion, a shadow, a delirium, a fiction. The greatest good's but little, and this life is but a dream, and dreams are only dreams." -- Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *La vida es sueño*



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## Editorial Policy:

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Lindsey Do (10) / Reflections | Charcoal & Pastel

# Delirium & Frenzy

## **delirium** *noun*

DE·LIR·I·UM | DI-'LIR-Ē-EM

1

: an *acute* (see *ACUTE* sense 1a(2)) mental disturbance characterized by confused thinking and disrupted attention usually accompanied by disordered speech and hallucinations

2

: expressed as a feeling:

With a blink of an eye, gone.  
Clawing at the past, a new dawn.

Once surrounded by camaraderie, All reduced because of mere causerie!

A whole year's worth of mingles

- *Madison Winston (11)*

## **frenzy** *noun*

FREN·ZY | FREN-ZĒ

PLURAL FRENZIES

1

: a temporary madness  
in a rage amounting to a frenzy

2

: expressed as a feeling:

There is a Beast beneath my skin  
scratching, snarling, hissing  
rumbling, rolling, writhing  
clamoring, clashing, claws  
scraping the underside of my skin somehow,  
I am able to keep it contained, confined, caged  
still, there is a Beast beneath my skin.

- *Sophie Junaidi (12)*

Ines Wallisch 10) | Chaos | Digital Photography



Sasha Glast (12) | Through the Ages | Mixed Media

# Entendiendo Entre Existencias

Paulina Esquinca-Moreno (12) | Poem

## I. Mom

My mother hands me the tongue of her mother  
 And her mother and her mother before that.  
 Thrown off the ivory cliffs of emerald isles  
 Across the great Atlantic  
 Fleeing the fate of their faith  
 Though their red hair has been trampled into dark dirt  
 The sharp inflections of their tongues stay  
 Traveling from the city cast in iron  
 To the coast coated in gold  
 Taking a stop at the river city  
 Down to the valley of stones beyond the border.

## II. Papá

My father slides a simple box  
 My way, silent, still,  
 Just as Abuelo was and always will be.  
 Native to the *Náhuatl* city of chia sage,  
 Chiapas, the town torn to tongues

*Tzotzil,*  
*Tzeltal,*  
*Español,*

They twist and tear at each other  
 Over ruins ravaged by religious rampage

In his own simple stone box  
 Sacred, scratched, solitary,  
 Abandoned in the stone valley  
 Spirit reaching, calling out  
 For any ear, any ear  
 But my father and my preauricular pits  
 Parted from the valley city long ago  
 And Abuelo's angel tongue shoots  
 Hitting the Wall of brown gapped teeth  
 Protruding from the yellow earth  
 And a buoyant boa drowns  
 All tongues that tread into the treacherous  
 Tides of the Big River.

North of the notched lines in the land  
 A feast of *fidello*, *posole*, *frijoles*, and *ponche*  
 Lay across the granite table before me  
 Mom at the head, sister at her right,  
 Me at her left, Papá on the end  
 His foreign feel finds no place in this free land  
 The sea of seats that sits between us  
 Soaks the silence in stinging solitude  
 As his tongue remains silent, still.  
 For any tune from him that tips over his teeth dies,  
 Crashing into the barring brown arms of benches.

## III. Casa

*Atrapada, no puedo mover*  
*Entre dientes de dos demonios*  
*Que gritan y gruñen*

**ESCUCHA**

*No escuchan.*  
*No entiendes?*  
*No comprendes?*  
*Ya no puedes*

*Sin sabor, ni dolor,*  
*Sin gripa, ni color,*  
*Me llaman,*  
*me queman,*  
*me odian,*

*Sus lonjas llenos de lenguas sangrosas*  
*De lugares lejos*  
*De niños como yo*  
*Yo se que cuando paro de cantar*  
*Mi lengua, le cortaran,*  
*Comiendo se lo como comi el lodo*  
*De la leche de los extranjeros.*

*No hay lugar aquí,*  
*Para mí,*  
*No pertenezco*  
*Entre las palabras de mis padres*  
*Las piedras que se pierden entre paseadas*  
*En partes de países*  
*Rancada de mis raíces*  
*No partara para mí*  
*No puedo parar de pensar*  
*Como sera*  
*Si estuviera ahí.*  
*Sería diferente, si,*  
*Y el cambio, siempre sera para mí*  
*Es bien difícil*  
*Estar imobil*  
*Y la libertad*  
*De ir, partar,*  
*De empacar mi vida*  
*Y escapar al eterno español.*



Listen to  
 Paulina  
 perform her  
 piece!

## A Poem On Aging

Sophia Nelson (11) | Poem

Lines crack on her face with the parting of her lips  
And she smiles down at me.  
Like an entire lifetime lies in those traceable strains.  
Every furrow a different frustration -  
And it is then that I fear my aging body.

Every minute a reminder of time lost lingering,  
I decide to fill my life with busy unimportance.

I ask myself why people have become items on a checklist I  
need to complete.

And why I feel so unsettled by just settling down  
From the weight of overbearing responsibility.

How do you weigh success?

I fear that with all I have been given, my life  
Will fall short of my own expectations.

My story goes unfinished as blank pages fold themselves over  
With the whirlwind of change.  
Changing direction with every step I take

I am an unpredictable force to be reckoned with.  
I pray the clock stop ticking and restore me of that youthful  
innocence.  
Questions traded for ignorant acceptance  
No longer tracking time, but living.

## ... you

Elissa Mason-Bizzell (12) | Poem

Truly, you repulse me!  
When I first saw you walk upon the street,  
my body shuddered in utter condemnation  
(’twas nothing else).  
When you sauntered through the garden,  
(oh so daintily)  
’twas as though hundreds, no,  
thousands of burning metal rods  
doused themselves upon my skin.  
(Oh how the sight of you  
burns my very soul.)  
Many a day I spend thoroughly wishing  
to never come near you again  
(the next time I do,  
may I instantly run to the nearest bridge  
and be flung off it).  
My heart thrashes with your touch  
(with loathing of course).  
Truly, you appall me!  
I’d rather pluck out my eyes,  
with knives, than gaze upon you  
(your misshapen jaw,  
your crooked nose,  
your hypnotizing eyes  
have burrowed deep into my memory).  
You are positively nauseating  
(your personality,  
simply stomach-churning).  
I can only compare thee  
to the sickening smell of  
a horse pen, or an overcooked pig,  
or of a flowering fly-attracting mushroom.  
(I’d simply rather be placed  
in the coldest, deepest,  
layer of hell, but alas,  
I’d come to find you there.)

Ugh- I could never!  
(You are simply, too repelling-  
and there is nothing else to it.)





Michael Turner (11) | Captive Heart | Pen & Ink

# Curb Your Extremism

Avani Gunaganti (12) | Original Oratory

I joined a cult this past summer, and honestly it wasn't that bad. I was feeling aimless, hopeless, and uninspired-less.



Listen to Avani perform her piece!

I joined a cult this past summer, and honestly it wasn't that bad. I was feeling aimless, hopeless, and uninspired...less. So, I scoured the internet for answers, for a sense of community. I ended up finding one just a few miles from my house.

On my first visit, I was greeted at the door by a wall of warmth and smiles and a tall man who looked very Jesus-coded. He walked me through the compound. I asked members about their experiences, and they all said it was the best - and easiest - decision they'd ever made. I was hooked. He told me about the fee, offered me a contract, and I signed my name on the dotted line. And that's the story of how I got my first gym membership! I started attending monthly... then weekly...then daily. I ate buckets of protein powder and drank gallons of radioactive energy drinks. At first, I felt the gains, but, within months, the effects started weighing me down. I began to plan my day around working out, neglecting my obligations as well as those around me.

Sadly, I'm not the only one who has dived head first into the deep end of the pool without even checking to see if there's water. We've become a country that lives for and loves to go to extremes. The specific extremes we may go to vary from person to person, but our tendency to take things to the extremes contributes to the 10,000 active cults in the United States right now, the 30% of Americans who identify as workaholics, and the 20 million Americans who have participated in extreme dieting, often called "fad diets. It's time we work through our relationship with extremes to live a more balanced life. So, let's first, uncover why we go to such extremes, then discover how this can hurt us, before finally offering some simple solutions because as American journalist Ari Melber once proudly proclaimed, it's never a good sign when extremism becomes the norm. We often equate extremism with...you guessed it...terrorism. And yes, while these two have met several times, they're not married to one another. Anyone, you or I, can go to the extremes on a daily basis. We tend to go to extremes because it's easy and we want quick success.

Initially, we tend to think in extremes, like I'm a brilliant success, or I'm an utter failure. My boyfriend's an angel, or He's not Timothy Chalamet and he never will be! Very black and white with very little gray space in between. The American Psychological Association (APA) calls this particular thought pattern dichotomous or polarized thinking. And the APA even considers this a cognitive distortion because it prevents us from seeing the world as it often is: nuanced. *Psychology Today* on September 5, 2023 articulates that this thinking is all around us, as we try to simplify and organize

information to guide our everyday decision-making. Whether it's labeling a food as 'healthy' or 'unhealthy,' a job as 'fulfilling' or 'miserable,' or even a person as 'good' or 'bad,' it's easier to call something one or the other rather than see the multiple other variables or variations in between.

Additionally, we often resort to extreme behaviors to chase a quick win or achieve a particular outcome. For example, research from Deloitte found that 70% of Americans will lose sleep to binge-watch a TV series in one night, rather than spread the love over several days. *The Washington Post* on April 26, 2023 explains this is due to the theory of hyperbolic discounting, or human tendency to disproportionately discount future payoffs. Let me explain with some fake math. Say it's June 2024 and *Bridgerton* Season 4 gets finally released at 10 PM. I know each episode's 10 out of 10 enjoyment for me, but my brain whispers, "Wait till tomorrow, and it'll become a 7!" So, there goes my sleep! We're suckers for instant thrills, from crash diets and 5 AM workout alarms to midnight Black Friday dashes. After all, how often we hear or justify something with "eh, go big or go home."

People outside the Speech & Debate community likely think we're a bit culty. By its very definition, a cult must comprise of three things: 1. a charismatic and self-appointed leader (Josh Gad, Oratory Overlord), 2. control of its members (like me coming to tournaments in my free time), and 3. unwavering devotion to a set of practices which are considered outside the norms of society (#talkingtowalls). Anyway (long pause), Effects!

First, thinking in extremes can put us in some dangerous situations. Think of your favorite sports team like the Spurs or the Mighty Ducks. What if I told you that getting your head too into the game was bad for your health? Well, *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that watching a game for a team that you love actually more than doubles our risk of a heart attack. This doesn't mean we can't ever show our excitement as fans. It just needs to have its limits. Moreover, an August 2022 report from *Future Market Insights* sheds light on one of the fastest growing and most extreme forms of travel, frontier tourism, which is when people engage in risky travel activities in remote locations like deep-sea diving/submarining, climbing Mount Everest, visiting ongoing warzones, and space travel. All of these ideas have the potential to be awesome vacations, but as the tragic Titan submarine incident this past June reminded us, pushing boundaries incessantly carries its own dangers.

Second, extreme-thinking leads us to seek out other like-minded individuals, which can end up harming ourselves and others. *Wired* on January 20, 2023 details, echo cham-



bers, or people who operate in media bubbles, are one of the biggest concerns when it comes to the harms of social media, and political polarization within the US. In fact, recent research from University of Chicago has found that consistent contact with extremist messaging on social media platforms, can make individuals more likely to justify immoral actions like hate crimes, violence against politicians, and insurrectionist movements. Of which we have seen plenty in the last few years like the attack on Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband, the racist killing spree in Buffalo, and the attempted murder of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, all acts of violence committed in the name of "morality." Extreme ideologies, even from the Internet, can spill over into real life.

My own "all or nothing" approach to the gym almost didn't turn out great for me. I was so eager to push myself in the gym and constantly increase the amount of weight I was lifting that I didn't listen to my body. I was always sore and lifting with incorrect form. My mom had to intervene, and told me the story about how she has a bad shoulder today from a gym accident two decades ago. An accident she will openly say was caused by her own unwillingness to approach fitness holistically, rather than extremely. Let's start the process of de-escalating with some simple solutions.

Initially, when it comes to our own thoughts, we need to embrace what Chicago-based therapy practice, Mind Chicago, refers to as "Middle Path" thinking. The crux of the idea is that we must accept that "we can hold two or more opposing thoughts, emotions, or experiences" at the same time. The

first step in doing so starts with altering our own vocabularies. Dr. Jennifer Litner reminds *Healthline* on January 14, 2020 that certain words can help alert us that our thoughts are becoming too extreme like always, never, impossible, disaster, furious, ruined or perfect. Of course, these words aren't bad, but we must be cognizant of how often absolutist language appears in our thoughts, and throughout our everyday lives.

Additionally, there are simple things we can do to help curtail extremist thinking in others. It all centers around building common ground. *Scientific American* on April 5, 2023 contends that when someone falls down a questionable rabbit hole of thinking, they won't respond well to hearing blatant "you are wrong" statements. These extremist reactions typically only further engrain that person's thinking. Instead, we need to try to understand their point of view, paying special attention to their media literacy, education, and analysis. Let's work to encourage our friends and family into an analytical mindset by teaching them how to evaluate the information they're receiving.

Today, we discovered how extremism surrounds our thoughts and actions, then examined the harmful effects it has on us and our world, before finally, exploring some of the solutions to kick our extremism to the curb. Of course, we are allowed to have beliefs. No one is stopping you from cheering on your favorite sports team, going to the gym everyday, or going underwater basket weaving! But everything has its limits, including us. Let's learn to keep our beliefs in check, and in turn, curb our extremism.



Kate Edwards (11) & Sai Ono (11) | Darkness | Digital Photography

## A10 Warthog

Edward Briggs (10) | Rap

A10 Warthog  
The familiar sound  
Listen to that GAU 8 as it's tearing up the ground  
The massive truck convoy, is almost taken down  
As the legendary plane circles back around

The A10 Warthog a formidable machine  
With it's G-A-U 8  
It's a C-A-S Machine  
A-A fire, won't do you any good  
Cuz it can face that stuff like a flying tank should  
The G-A-U 8 is gun that is feral  
Shooting 30 millimeter out of all seven barrels  
This gun on the plane is like the terminator  
And designed by a group that makes refrigerators

A10 Warthog  
The familiar sound  
Listen to that GAU 8 as it's tearing up the ground  
The massive truck convoy, is almost taken down  
As the legendary plane circles back around

The A10 plane was not really the norm  
Having first being deployed during desert storm  
But it was a great force during the operation's span  
And it saw great use against the Taliban  
United States Congress says that it should be retired  
And my response to that is they should all be fired  
This legendary plane is what kept soldiers alive  
And right now these guys replace it with the F35  
Flying with a half a tail and only one wing  
The F35 Lightning could not do a such thing  
And It's not okay to cut this plane's life short  
Cause it will forever reign in close air support

A10 Warthog  
The familiar sound  
Listen to that GAU 8 as it's tearing up the ground  
The massive truck convoy, is almost taken down  
As the legendary plane circles back around

A10 Warthog  
The familiar sound  
Listen to that GAU 8 as it's tearing up the ground  
The massive truck convoy, is almost taken down  
As the legendary plane circles back around



Listen to Edward perform his piece!



## Orphiocordyceps Unilateralis & The Ant

Elissa Mason-Bizzel (12) | Poem

I am an ant,  
magnificent and mighty,  
one in many, I serve my kind.  
My strength, more immeasurable than  
Bear's.  
My purpose, more infallible than Deer's.  
My skill, more adept than Tiger's.  
I hold leaves high like geodes,  
my actions filled with satisfaction.  
For once again, I expand our domain.  
Our kingdom, majestic.  
Personally, I will make it such.  
All of us shall reach salvation.  
Like a canopy of rubber trees,  
our reach will cover all.  
With such great purpose,  
Never shall I falter!

I... am an ant.  
I possess not grand Crane's wisdom,  
or sly Panther's cleverness.  
I did not predict it.  
I could not have foreseen it.  
It's spores, airborne as ash,  
grafted onto my skeleton,  
sunk into my intestines.  
That day, I returned,  
My harvest, bountiful.  
My head, held higher than Swan's.  
I presented myself to our Majesty,  
Her antennae blessed me.  
At first, thankful.  
At second, revolted.  
My sovereign shrieked,  
filth, filth, it's brought it here!  
Servants come near,  
save me from this sinner's sin!  
My sisters, innumerable,  
my kin, innumerable,  
burst from castle's great caverns,  
marching with Clydesdale's sound,  
mantels primed by Shark's strength,  
to fling me out of Mother's den.

I was an ant.  
Yet now, I sway on lofty trees,  
as Death's circle encloses me.  
My eyes, covered by amber.  
My intestines, spore stuffed.  
My mandibles, snapped shut.  
My mind shrunk.  
My antennas raised towards cosmos,  
towards my brethren.  
I waste away as Elk did,  
drunk as Cow,  
withered as Finch,  
Alone, I reach for salvation.  
No longer can I raise my head.  
No longer can I feel.  
No longer do I have a purpose.  
No longer an ant.



## Society's Puppets

*Sam Miller (10) | Rap*

They say chase your dreams and reach for the sky,  
But in this rat race, is where dreams die.  
Caught in an endless cycle of profit and gain,  
Freedom's illusion becomes Society's chain.

Chase your dreams, they whisper in your ear  
But are we truly free, or just living in fear  
Society's puppets, dancing on strings,  
The system laughs and power sings.

We're told the tale of untold success  
But at what cost, having dreams suppressed  
We're sellin' our souls for a paycheck's grace  
Where dreams are pawns in this heartless race.

Wake up, break free from this endless game,  
Where conformity thrives and souls are tamed.  
Refuse to be a cog in a system's design,  
For true liberation lies within the mind!

The sky's the limit! they scream desperately in your ear,  
But we are not free, just living in fear  
No longer puppets strangling on strings  
The system cries and power clings  
So, we shake it and rise, with passion untamed,  
Charting our course, unafraid unashamed.  
Discovering our path, we unmask our fight,  
Not bound by systems, but guardians of the light.

Wake up, break free from this endless game,  
Where conformity thrives and souls are tamed.  
Refuse to be a cog in a systems design,  
For true liberation lies within the mind!

Wake up, break free from this endless game,  
Where conformity thrives and souls are tamed.  
Refuse to be a cog in a systems design,  
For true liberation lies within the mind!

# shadow *noun*

SHAD·OW | 'SHA-(,)DŌ

1

: the dark figure cast upon a surface by a body intercepting the rays from a source of *light*

2

: expressed as a feeling:

There must have been magic in the minds of  
The ancient ones who took berries to caves  
And crafted murals from just that.  
How fantastic it is that they wanted to paint!  
That they delighted in  
Beautiful Earth's loving creations  
Such that they had to create,  
Had to pay tribute!

Where is that now?  
Is the magic gone?  
Did we kill it?

No...  
It lives in the minds of our children  
And in some small part...  
us.

-Emma Carter (12)

# illusion *noun*

IL·LU·SION I-'LŪ-ZHEN

PLURAL ILLUSIONS

1

: something that deceives or misleads *intellectually*

2

: expressed as a feeling:

Our sense  
of a silhouette  
skewed to fit  
the wall  
of our cage  
when all we can know  
a scrap of what's real  
our souls  
sciologic  
our knowledge  
chains

- Isa Nava (12)

Shadow & Illusion

# The Fascination with Whiteness



Listen to  
Nandini  
perform her  
piece!

Nandini Cheruku (12) | Critical Essay

**½ cup chickpea flour.  
1 teaspoon turmeric.  
1 ½ teaspoon yogurt.**

**Mix until well combined. Gen-  
erously apply to face and wait  
until stiff to touch to wash off.**

When a little girl of ethnic origin starts caring about her appearance, this recipe is a staple, one that stays with her. Its purpose? To get rid of the tan and brighten her face. She will drown herself in the belief that because it is all-natural, it is safe for her to use, for she has been told, “It is not doing any damage.”

That is what she’ll force herself to believe.

Since I was little, I have seen Indian face washes and creams cater to glowing and fair skin. Fair-skin actresses topped my list of role models. My social media algorithms try to sell me products that bleach my skin. T.V. ads only hired fairer-skinned models. No beauty product catered toward skin health but instead tried to convince me I needed a fairer complexion.

On top of that, I was praised for having fair skin as an Indian because it made me desirable. Relatives saw me for the first time in years, and all they could say was, “You are so lucky to have fair skin.”

For centuries, many people have learned that having fair skin is right. Not only good but right. It became the standard that everyone should supposedly live up to. However, this belief and these practices do carry consequences. Even if it does not cause damage on the surface of our skin, deep down, maybe even microscopically for some, it feeds our ideas of

not being good enough, cause severe self-esteem issues, plants the seed for self-hate, and does so much more damage than just some “harmless bleaching.” Many tend to confuse these practices with racism, discrimination based on skin color. However, there is another term that is more appropriately applied: Colorism.

Colorism is a term that has made its way into the spotlight as the discussion on race relations continues. Colorism is the “prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a darker complexion, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.” While racism is one race against another, colorism resides within communities of color. Some people in a community tend to be “passing” or have a fairer complexion, meaning they can pass as a different ethnicity. This leads to resentment and internal strife as those “passing” get better benefits, like better economic, education, and marriage opportunities, than someone with a darker complexion. Regardless, it is a harmful belief that has led to severe self-esteem, mental health, and physical issues as many turn to harmful chemicals to bleach their skin to fit into the Western beauty standard. This standard is not a problem that only Indians have. My personal experiences are only one of many. Media, being most profound in the 20th and 21st centuries, is currently the primary culprit, but before media, there were other

driving factors of colorism. Colonialism and, inherently, racism were considerable causes in the past for the exuberant amount of colorist beliefs, and modern inventions have only worsened them. It is a problem seen around the world in numerous communities of color.

However, colonialism happened 500 years ago. Historians have had centuries to dive into the effects of colonialism on communities of color. For many, colonialism did not even cause colorism; it simply reinforced it. It was what qualified as media during each time that spread these colorist beliefs. Mobeen Hussain, a postdoctoral research fellow writing for Trinity College Dublin, reflects on a BBC documentary titled *Beauty and the Bleach*. She touches on the transitioning from colonial reinforcement of beauty standards to when modern-day media came into play. Hussain’s article mentions that this transition from colonialism to media occurred slowly. It first became highly apparent in the 20th century, when many European and U.S. companies “commodified skin lightening... [and] market[ed] for soaps and creams, as well as skin-lighteners.” All of this occurred through advertisements. As seen here, while it may have been the colonizers that reinforced it, the implementation of these beliefs transferred to forms of media instead of policies. Unlike in the 20th century, when access to media was not universal, media is now one of the

numerous ways people connect worldwide. Whether through social media posts, watching movies, or seeing beauty ads on billboards, media surrounds everyone everywhere. It does a lot to convince its audience to buy a product, believe a particular set of beliefs, or even offer a helping hand. Seeing the transition from colonialism to media and the rise in beauty products and new methods of communication that surround us, a question presents itself. To what extent does media influence colorist beliefs in communities of color?

To answer this, a 2022 study entitled, “‘A Whiter Shade of Pale’: Whiteness, Female Beauty Standards, and Ethical Engagement Across Three Cultures,” asked women in Ghana, India, and Egypt about the influence of media and how it influenced their perceptions of skin color. Sarah Mady, Dibyangana Biswas, Charlene A. Dadzie, Ronald Paul Hill, and Rehana Paul from American University addressed the effects of cultural beliefs, colonialism, superstitions, and the physical and mental effects it has on them. As most of the professors had some background in marketing, it was clear that their studies would eventually take them toward the market of whitening products, addressing how “cross-market engagement for marketing research and practice by focusing on women’s perceptions of whitening products “are often remnant of colonialist cultural standards, exacerbated by market-



Elissa Mason-Bizzell (12) | Triptych | Digital Photography

ing narratives.” The study hits the mark as it draws attention to the effects of media in this conversation. These professors and students conducted comprehensive interviews with women from all three countries, ultimately concluding that “it is relatively settled that [the usage of whiter models] in marketing promotions does impact women’s perception of their beauty.” Their research allowed them to get personal insights from women who must live with products like these shoved into their faces daily. The authors write that “social media has made [these beliefs worse] because of its interactive, individualized, and power-sharing nature for customer engagement.” They also note that “the influence of the media and the influx of European and U.S. cosmetics products and models continued to heighten women’s awareness of lighter complexions.”

Their conclusion? Media plays a massive role in influencing colorist beliefs. This is because these companies feel the need to enforce a Western beauty standard and exploit the insecurities that young women in communities of color have, ultimately manipulating them into buying products that enforce a terrible standard, destroy their skin, and harm their mental health. This argument is not a new one. A *Fox News* article by Janine Puhak, an editor for *Fox News Lifestyle*, written in 2017, notes that many American and European companies are at fault for releasing products meant to enforce the white beauty standard on communities of color through forms of media. For example, Nivea had their Natural Fairness moisturizer marketed explicitly toward women in African countries. They also had a deodorant ad in West Asia that carried the title “White Is Purity.” These examples and the research study’s data prove that media significantly influences colorist beliefs to the point where foreign companies enforce them.

But regardless, marketing and media aren’t the only driving causes of colorism. Some believe that it is not the media that makes colorism worse but rather colonialism and the beliefs it imparted. In “Is Beauty in the Eyes of the Colonizer?” Lea Donella answers questions about colonized beauty standards for NPR listeners. Her argument is based on history, acknowledging that during times of colonialism, racial theorists believed that white people needed to be superior in all areas, including beauty. This thought process was wholeheartedly defended by these theorists, to the point that they “defined the category of ‘white’ or ‘Caucasian,’ as being the most beautiful of the races.” In support of Donella’s argument, Jessica DeFino, a freelance writer on skincare and self-care, wrote an article published in *Teen Vogue*, an online publication about celebrity news, fashion, popular skincare, and makeup, targeted towards teenagers, about how colonialism and capitalism were the primary culprits of colorist ideals. DeFino finds that “Western beauty standards are the products of a capitalist, colonialist, patriarchal, white supremacist society, contrived to keep us consuming and consumed.” She

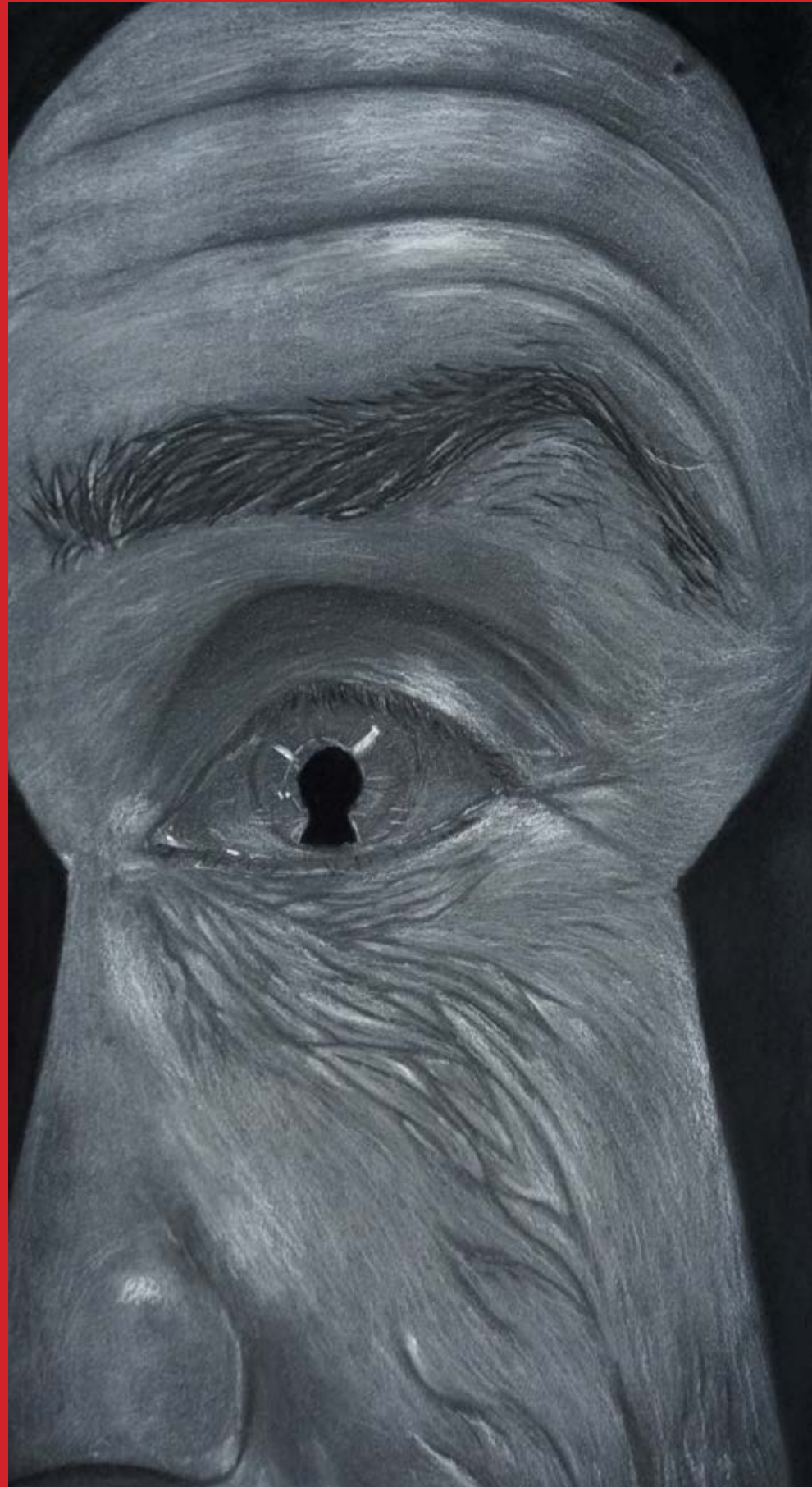
believes that “colonialism gave capitalism a brilliant business model to follow,” paving the way for companies to profit off people’s insecurities. DeFino argues that beauty companies portray standards from the colonial era. Companies took advantage of their actions and, in a way, are still showcasing colonial beliefs.

However, the advancements in the world prove that colonialism is not the culprit. Many injustices are being amended as this world progresses, yet for some reason, colorist beliefs appear more prominent than ever. The reason? Media. Even though colorism can be traced back to colonialism and even further, its current prolongation is a direct effect of modern-day media. From disparaging skin-whitening ads to beauty companies and movies using light-skinned models and actors only, the media has been reinforcing a hierarchy of beauty, originating in colonialism, that is detrimental to communities of color. Everyone under the sun has access to media. Television, movies, and social media are now daily parts of people’s lives, shaping their thoughts whether they know it or not. So many influencers use these platforms to get people on their side or to share new beauty products they found, yet their potentially good intentions are causing drastic impacts for some. Young girls follow beauty influencers who look nothing like them and buy beauty products that can lighten their skin because they want to look like the ones they idolize. This is because they believe that this is the standard of beauty.

I remember how products promising “fairness,” “glow,” and “lighter skin” filled the beauty aisles of the Indian grocery stores and beauty salons. Every one of my aunts’ houses is lined with “all natural skin bleachers,” completely ignoring the beliefs they are giving into. I have watched movies where the main leads are only attainable or seen as suitable matches to their parents because they are fair-skinned. I have grown up seeing fairer-skinned Indians in American and European beauty ads, advertising fairness creams. It’s been drilled into me as well as thousands of other Indian girls across the world that we must be whiter to be better. These ideals we’ve been fed from such a young age can take a severe toll on our well-being, whether physical or mental.

The lack of representation from these communities teaches them to limit their imagination and snuff out some of their dreams because they can no longer see someone like themselves being successful. The past’s ways obstruct the future, leaving no room for anyone’s imagination or dreams. Seeing oneself reflected in the world is the biggest gift anyone can get, but it can also be a significant setback when it is not there. Those skin-lightening recipes leave young kids believing they must change their appearance to fit society’s standards when society should not set them in the first place. So, the next time an at-home face mask is needed, do not reach for the skin-lightening ingredients; reach for the ingredients that make you feel the best you.





Nichole Chartrand (12) | Looking through Life | Charcoal

## Lost Morals

Nicholas Morgan (10) | Rap

Listen here close I'm gonna tell you a story,  
Back when we were whining kids and everything was hunky-dory.  
It's back to a time when we were in Montessori,  
And they gave us lots of books to expand our inventory.

But we don't remember those morals anymore,  
No, we never even learned who those stories were for.  
So let me take you back to learn what those stories meant,  
Just listen here close and it'll be time well spent.

The "Cat in the Hat" walked up to the flat,  
Then from the doormat, he walked inside the habitat.  
He started playing around the house and chatting with that fat sprat,  
Then he broke vases and bookcases like a baseball bat.

It wasn't his intention to make a mess,  
But that fish was right the whole time I must confess.  
The cat should've listened to authority,  
A plea from seniority so he won't go on a spree.

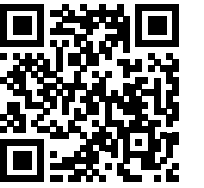
The "Very Hungry Caterpillar" filled his platter like a killer,  
Shattered fruit just like a driller and ate that splatter just to fill 'em.  
Eaten fruits around around, growing growing like a town,  
Then suddenly he's slowing down, around him grows a new nightgown.

I never imagined that he would grow,  
Into a colorful masterpiece by the likes of Van Gogh,  
But the lesson here is to take things more slow,  
And accept change, and get a new flow.

"Goodnight Moon" you came so soon,  
But now I got to swoon a tune to the room.  
Say goodnight to the broom and the fireplace plume,  
Say goodnight to the clock that strikes at noon.

Cause sometimes you gotta appreciate the little things,  
To relax and calm down, not have the worries of kings.  
Start to look around and hear the sound of joy that life brings,  
Then soon the time will come for you to spread your wings.

So those are some morals to stories you once heard,  
And now you'll understand that lessons can get blurred.  
So next time you think a story is simple have some doubt,  
Cause there's always a deeper meaning, alright, I'm out.



Listen to  
Nicholas  
perform  
his piece!



Abby Gillham (11) | Tú, sólo tú | Micron Pen

# Coexisting Insane

Isa Nava (12) | Poem

## I. The Sunflower

My life is a dance  
I cheerfully perform  
Golden petals sway with movement  
Flourished colors I adorn

Tracing circles in the sky  
As I shadow the sun  
My existence a reflection  
Of its superlative one

Each stroke of my life  
By the hand of another  
Brings shape to crude form  
And purpose to color

My life for the world  
My merit in delight  
I dance through my vase  
Tracing day into night

## II. The Man

Deranged  
    Insane  
            Out of my Mind

My art comes from chaos  
    Coarse  
            Unrefined

These flowers are mine  
They know what it means  
To be cruelly construed  
    Took amiss  
            Misconceived  
I'll tease out the yellows  
The lush lemons  
And gentle golds  
All the groundbreaking colors  
    Left to rot  
            Left to mold

Petals droop and they drape  
Adorned by my name  
The yellows bleed outward  
    Escape  
            Invade

Amber creeps through my eyes  
Saffron tints  
    No rather taints  
            The world

Till it floods from my paintbrush  
Like it flows in my blood

On the walls  
    On the ground  
            Smearred across all my limbs

Yellow Painting  
    Yellow House  
        Yellow Man  
            Who paints his skin.



# The Sacrifice

Cici Yang (12) | Short Story

“What do you mean? We deserve it,” Elijah impulsively snatched the Ruby Tear.

Waiting for the judges to open the gates, Elijah confidently ran his fingers through his hair. “May the best man win.” “Right,” Wilson hesitated. A horn blared in the background, signaling the start of their final event: the retrieval of the Ruby Tear. This competition was both lethal and rewarding. With 30 competitors already eliminated, the finalists were challenged to find the Ruby Tear hidden in the labyrinth in order to receive the title of Honored One and a life of luxury. Everything was at stake. The walls reaching for the skies, the empty maze was soon filled with pants, and their hunger for victory grew with each passing minute. Elijah looked around frantically for the Ruby Tear as Wilson examined the scene. “Jesus! Where is this stupid stone?” “Elijah, chill! We have all the time we need to find this Ruby Tear,” Wilson reassured him as the wind shifted the sand below him. “I don’t care! I need it now!” Elijah’s outburst caught Wilson off guard, making him jump. “Relax, you have me. We’ll find it eventually.” Elijah stared blankly at him before sighing in defeat. They continued to walk, their hands brushing against each other. For a moment, the air was still, and what mattered was their presence. As time stopped, Wilson smiled to himself, remembering Elijah’s first impressions as he thought of him as a bear with the personality of a dog. The atmosphere was serene, but it didn’t last long. They rounded a corner and entered a chamber where the Ruby Tear was displayed on a pedestal. They stopped and exchanged shocked looks before sprinting toward the red jewel. Wilson intervened just as Elijah reached out to grab it. “Wait, doesn’t this feel too easy?” “What do you mean? We deserve it,” Elijah impulsively snatched the Ruby Tear. Wilson stood frozen in his spot as Elijah proudly walked towards the exit when a loud rumble jostled the dust around. “This place is going to fall apart! Let’s go!” Wilson grabbed Elijah’s wrist as they ran for their lives again. “Hurry!” Bricks started falling; their grunts were overpowered by

the gritting sound of walls collapsing on themselves. Elijah, holding the Ruby Tear, curiously glanced over his shoulder to scan the scene but didn’t see the massive pile of rubble tumbling down on him. He screeched out in pain. “Wilson!” Wilson looked back to see him struggle under the rubble and shuddered. He knew that if he didn’t get out, he would die without that title, and his daughter would be left alone with no one to lean on, but if he didn’t help Elijah, he would never forgive himself. He cursed under his breath, knowing the risks of his next decision. “You drive me insane,” Wilson ran to push the blocks off Elijah. The once beige room would never return to the way it was. For what felt like hours, Wilson couldn’t push the bricks off of him, and Elijah coughed up blood from the pressure. “Just leave me and take the stone,” Elijah said weakly. “No, I won’t. Just hang on,” Wilson began to shake from the fear of leaving him but continued to remove the heavy blocks. “Please. Take it and go.” He wheezed. “You need it more than I do.” With falling rocks nearly missing Wilson, he put his hand down and lowered his head in shame. He thought about his daughter suffering in the cold alone and realized how much this Ruby Tear can change their lives for the better. As his heart pounded against his chest, Wilson hesitated before grabbing the Ruby Tear out of Elijah’s hand, sobbing on his knees. “I’m so sorry, Elijah.” Warm tears fell on the jewel as his voice weakened, “I have to do this for my daughter.” Elijah chuckled and rested his head on the floor, taking his last breaths. As the room collapsed, Wilson took all his might to run out with the Ruby Tear in his pocket. He leaped out of the exit with barely a scratch and looked back at the resting body as a bulk of rubble blocked the view. The horn went off, ending the final round and declaring Wilson the Honored One, but he didn’t care. As the adrenaline subsided, he collapsed on the floor with his face in his hands, still crying. “I’m so, so, so sorry,” he said under his breath. “I’m sorry.”



Cypress Rabke (11) / Green Heron / Mixed Media



# The S-Bomb

Rachel Weissmann (12) | Original Oratory

**“We are dropping  
the s-bomb left,  
right, and center.  
It’s time we stop.”**



Listen Rachel  
perform their  
piece!

The Cheesecake Factory slaps, and my family agrees. So, the other day at the mall, my mom, sister, and I decided to pop in for lunch. I’ve always been a fangirl of their ginger-glazed salmon, and after hours of shopping, your girl was famished. I ordered my salmon and waited. Finally, there it was, being carried out of the kitchen; however, when it arrived, I noticed it still had gills and fins, meaning it was practically raw. My sister glared at me and said, “Rachel, send it back. Now!” So, I did what any normal person would do: I flagged down the waiter...and apologized. I said, “I’m so sorry for bothering you, but my salmon is a little too under the sea for me.” He gave me a weird look so I responded with, “Again, I’m sorry. It’s fine and I’m fine. I didn’t even know I wanted sushi until just now.” My sister rolled her eyes as I ate every single bit of that uncooked fish. It wasn’t until much later that I realized I had apologized for something that wasn’t even my fault. And sadly, millions of women are just like me. Journalist Joanna Freedman tells *Tyla*, a female-focused news outlet, that women excuse themselves a staggering amount of 295,650 times during their lifetime. Additionally, self-described apology-hater and confidence-builder Professor Maja Jovanovic articulates in her 2019 TedTalk that yes, apologies do matter, but with every unnecessary apology women give, we chip away at our own self-confidence. Women are losing self-confidence in our personal lives and missing out on recognition in the professional world. Now, before all my male audience members check out, remember this problem affects us all. All of you have moms, and many of you have sisters, and some of you even have daughters. So today, we will first discuss why we do it, how it hurts us, and what we can do to break free from the “I’m sorry” spiral.

If you thought you were alone in saying “sorry,” think again. Taylor Swift does it too. In her 2020 documentary *Miss Americana*, she makes a comment and then immediately apologizes, but catches herself, laughs, and then explains how girls are all, “Sorry,

was I loud?’ In my own house. That I bought. With the songs that I wrote. About my own life.” If that’s not giving girlboss, I don’t know what is. However, let’s clarify some not-so-girlboss causes.

First, we over-apologize because it’s both a reactionary response and a learned behavior. In his book, *The Triple Bind*, clinical psychologist Dr. Stephen Hinshaw explains, as girls grow up, the messages we receive about what good behavior looks like gets more complicated and confusing. For instance, the Child Mind Institute on February 4, 2023 articulates, young girls are taught to be confident, but not conceited; smart, but no one likes a know-it-all; assertive, but not bossy. Boys, however, are treated oppositely, often praised when they show confident behaviors like winning a game, climbing a tree, or making stupid lightsaber noises with their mouths. Dr. Hinshaw furthers our individuation, or the process of becoming unique individuals, is greatly hindered when we’re taught that building character comes with conditions.

Second, we use the word sorry as a self-defense mechanism. Trust me, I know it can be scary to state unpopular opinions, or even just opinions. So, as women, we put apologies in front of our statements to avoid or defuse potential conflicts. Devin Yingling writes for *The Hawk*, the student newspaper at Saint Joseph’s University, that while taking a class titled Black Women Writers, they began discussing Roxanne Gay’s book *Bad Feminist*. Devin related heavily to the material and, given this course is participation-based, felt compelled to share her ideas, but after raising her hand three times, she began prefacing her comments with, “I’m sorry I keep talking so much!” Like many of us, she did so out of fear that she was bothering her classmates or her professor. This use of apology is common, contingent on how we think others feel about us.

Ladies, I want you all to close your eyes and picture yourself walking down the street. Imagine a man coming towards you. Do you...A) do an awkward shuffle to see who should move? B) step aside? C) barrel forwards? Or D) call the police. In this scenario, men often expect me to move, and when I do, I apologize for getting in their way. Let’s explore the effects.

First, over-apologizing diminishes our accomplishments and fuels low self-esteem. In her aforementioned TedTalk, Professor Maja Jovanovic vividly remembers a conference she attended a few years back, where during a panel discussion, four women – all world-renowned experts in their chosen field – were tasked with just introducing themselves. One by one, each woman discounted her accomplishments, minimized her experience, and apologized by saying, “I’m sorry, but I don’t know what I can possibly add to this discussion,” or “I’m sorry. They must have sent the invite to the wrong person.” This attitude may seem courteous or cordial. But, it can also be seen as a sign of weakness, or worse, an absence of accountability. Because, truthfully, if we don’t speak up about our worth, how will anyone know that we’re worthy?

Second, apologies have become so common that we end

up saying sorry for things beyond our control. This makes us feel guilty for stuff we shouldn’t be sorry about and unfairly puts blame on us for things we couldn’t help. Many women, like Rainesford Stauffer, know this too well. In her article for *Catapult Magazine* on November 18, 2021, she looks back at her twenties and describes it with one word: *horrified*. She remembers a time when a guy she thought was a friend did something inexcusably violent to her in a locked car. Her immediate response was to apologize, saying, “I’m sorry for screaming.” Even though we’ve had the #MeToo movement for three years now, it’s still hard for many of us to find the courage and confidence not to apologize for someone else’s actions against us.

I apologize countless times a day to friends, teachers, and my speech coach. But, most of the time, I’m not sorry. I only say it to ensure I’m not offending anyone by inserting my thoughts just in case they aren’t wanted. If writing this speech has taught me anything, it’s that I’m done letting my language inhibit my ability to be seen and heard. So, let’s enact some simple solutions.

First, on a societal level, if we want to change this behavior in our girls, we have to start young. Parents, especially moms in the room – this is where you come in! Watch your language and become aware of your own linguistic habits. It’s basically monkey see monkey do. If I see Mommy apologizing when she didn’t mean it, then hey, so can I. Set an example for your little girl by modeling the right behavior. Teachers, you can also help us out by partnering with your female students to find alternative statements to “I’m sorry” like “Excuse me” when she raises her hand, or “Thank you” when she receives feedback or criticism. There’s a huge difference between being heartfelt and being habitual. Let’s teach and tell girls to be mindful of the why behind our apologies. Only then can we train the next generation to communicate with confidence.

Second, on a personal level, we are dropping the s-bomb left, right, and center. It’s time we stop. Luckily, there’s an app for that. Just Not Sorry is a Gmail plug-in that works like a spell checker underlining phrases in emails that undermine our message such as “sorry” or “I think.” Boxes pop up when you hover over the highlighted words to explain why that language could weaken your email, or hold you back. According to Tami Reiss, co-creator of the app, women in leadership positions are highly susceptible to softening their speech. So, I downloaded it. You should too. Lastly, if we really want to be shocked into stopping, start an “I’m Sorry Jar.” We’ve all heard of the swear jar before. Same concept, except every time you say sorry, add some money to the jar. I’m up to \$5.25...today. Ladies, let’s break this habit and put our money where our mouth is.

Right now, apologies are taking up more space than we are, and that’s not okay and it never will be. Chef and TV personality Julia Child said it best: “Never apologize.”

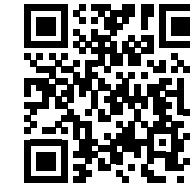
Am I right, ladies? Yeah, I am right.

And, you know what? I’m not sorry about it.

Stillness

A SHORT FILM CREATED BY AND PERFORMED by Emma Carter (12)

Watch Emma perform their piece!



Amelia French (12) | Hands | Digital Photography



## Sonnet

*Eleanor Pulis (10) | Sonnet*

The flowers whisper in the springtime breeze;  
Blue and golden buds shimmer in the dew.  
Long have we dreamt of moments such as these,  
The joy that fills us, infinite and true.  
Your honey skin that's glowing like the sun,  
In my fingers, your dark curls gently wrap,  
Us lying here, I know that we have won,  
Hand in hand, we're laid out like a map.  
The world rests in a soft romantic light,  
A perfect symphony, a shared chorus.  
We watch as the sky fades into the night,  
The colors dance in ecstasy for us.  
Among the stars, our love can take its cue  
A timeless art forever, me and you.

## Sisterdale

*Meriweather Rabke (9) | Poem*

Small feet bounding across the pebbles  
River, murky yet a beautiful hazel  
Flowing and providing  
The sparkling sunfish safe in my hands  
The wildflowers painting the land  
Voices echo, creating a choir among the tall grasses  
The grasses reflecting the dancing wind  
Books stacked on the nightstand  
No pages not having a scarred dog ear  
Mud coating me, not dirty, natural  
The smell of smoke coating the air  
Worn-down rainbow quilts  
Not soft but somehow safe  
I learned to love here  
I found beauty here  
I grew up here  
Now my love, no matter how big  
Cannot save it  
From the storm yet to come  
The storm I never saw coming  
The storm without water

## The Last Fruit in the Bowl

Isa Nava (12) | Poem

So lonesome, it sits, plucked apart from its kin as  
The world rips away at its delicate skin  
And the fruit deemed unworthy, grotesque, or malign  
Detests none but the hand which averred, "Sacrifice!"

The fruit set to seethe 'twas a poet, 'twas but I,  
And these words freed from Sheol cascaded through my eyes  
As the soul of my sorrow howled its treacherous cry  
Of despair, of despondence, of the torture survived.

Then from I, the deserted, the one left behind  
Pen down each of you awful, perturbing, vile  
Creatures, who hiss serpentine lies  
And weave wicked webs of sinful design.

When claws wrenched a hole in my cavernous hide and,  
Herculean Hell claimed forfeit my life  
By mother, by friend, by companion, by trust  
When the blood from your blows was but bleeding enough.

Left here to wither, dear, left here to rot, left to sink in my sorrow,  
Inundate in my blood, I am  
Both dead and butchered by the hands I once loved  
And the string at my neck dies the price of my trust.

Oh of the wicked, the fantasts are worst, and still,  
I concede that my heart beats to dream,  
To want, to covet, to hope, and to need  
As you rip from my limbs every bliss that I breathe.



# Dreams



## dream

*noun*

'DRĒM

OFTEN ATTRIBUTIVE

1  
: a series of thoughts, images, or emotions occurring during sleep  
: an experience of waking life having the characteristics of a dream

2  
: expressed as a feeling;

Silver orb  
cloaked in night.  
Mystic glow,  
a quiet thrill.  
Casted shadows,  
soft and light.  
Moon's allure,  
serene and still.

- *Elissa Mason-Bizzell (12)*

3  
: expressed as a feeling;

The dog howled at the moon  
he'd wait every afternoon  
chasing after it like a loon  
at night, and would croon  
when it left too soon  
if it could hear his  
soulfull tone  
it would remain immune

For the moon dosen't swoon  
For love,

it has no room.

- *Paulina Esquinca-Moreno (12)*



Sofia Johnson (10) | Firecracker | Digital Photography

## The Glass Studio

Emma Carter (12) | Poem

### I.

That magnificent diamond palace  
Wherein wondrous movement was crafted  
Flutters about the lavender wisps of my mind like  
Mottled warblers of ancient verdant pines.

The first day I was grey,  
A tangle of angst.  
Stuck to mother,  
Nestling discovering flight,  
Safety an option swiftly fading.

Setting foot over blackened studio floors,  
I was not myself.  
Shrouded were my rapid eyes-  
Bared, aware of my pale aspect,

Barred from the thrill of adventure.

Then came time,  
To fly, to dance.  
Mustering evaporated courage  
I soared through glittering cyclorama,  
Swept into swirling gusts,  
No chance to test the waters.

Senses drowned in euphoric glee-  
Never had I seen a scene so fantastic as the many  
Souls conjoined- a blissful chorus of oneness  
Singing, spinning through the mirrored room with purpose-  
Purpose!

Whirling violently within the cyclone,  
I saw them, galactic angels  
In the midst of thunderous din,  
Shining brighter than Helios' own chariot-  
Gorgeous feathered muses all!  
Miraculously, they glided across the floor,  
Coming to meet me!  
Awed, I stood as they  
Offered their crystalline hands,  
A promise to lead me into deep violet love.

### II.

I found my breath for the first time  
Almost a week after my arrival.  
Those stunning beings placed me in their ranks  
And oh, how I adored them.  
Garlands we wove, hands intertwined.  
Long nights spent in groves of roses.

Free spirited as a nymph,  
In all my blue days I had not felt such belonging.  
When I danced the world rejoiced,  
And I wept with jubilation.  
A dream of majestic night,  
Life was bursting with midnight pearls.

I devoured all that was offered me,  
Full and satiated.  
I grew thoughtful and strong,  
My wings carrying me to sparkling heights,  
Where I played for long golden hours with fellow fliers.

Yet, this renewal cost a severe price,  
One I had not prepared for.  
My mind became humid as  
Whispers of mediocrity plagued my thoughts,  
Hindering my path,  
Clouding my valor.

My newfound bliss swamped in doubt,  
A toxic cloud seeped through my brain.  
Neck breaking under heavy serpentine mist,  
My wings faltered.  
Plunged deep into wine waves,  
I drowned in the wonder  
Which had greeted me so warmly.

No nest to return to,

My burned pinions grounded me.  
Forced to watch my kin frolic in Heaven  
While I stood doggedly still.  
I wanted just to die.

### III.

Memories of the last day swim in my brain  
Reminding me of melancholic hours.  
Packing away the excitement,  
The infatuation,  
The tears.  
Numb, I ate.  
Numb, I moved.  
Raw, I wailed into soft blankets  
The only thing I would let feel my anguish.

Warring with myself,  
I fought to celebrate.  
Ripping oily thoughts from my crowded head,  
I threw myself into the final thrilling throes of dance,  
Surrounded by those who had loved me so faithfully.  
The moon cast her delicate rays unto the stage,  
Capturing my face, partnering me in her playful gaze.  
The music echoed as I took my bow,  
Knees groaning as I rose.

Time to fly.  
Feathers grasping, we begged not to part.  
Talons clawing, we clung together and I whispered,  
Trembling throat drenched in somber droplets,

“Though we are split for the rest of our days,  
I will hold your flames to my breast  
As long as Vesta tends the hearth.  
The lavender we braided will hang on my walls  
Til time's crushing fist deems they crumble.  
I will long for you,  
Your tender gaze,  
Your silken lips,  
Your loving embrace,  
For all eternity.”

Kissing goodbye,  
I broke from the cluster of stars.  
Turning, looking one last time at that  
Glamorous mansion which birthed me from fire,  
I blinked away tears  
And took flight.



# So You Call Yourself a Feminist

Sophia Nelson (11) | Critical Essay

**“Instead of shaming each other, we should urge women to feel confident in the fact that they are making choices truly for themselves.”**

It was a Friday night, and the last thing I wanted to do was fight about women’s rights.

My eyes darted as I sat there quietly, taking in the scene around me. The boys. Piecing their jarring comments together, I leaned over, trying to catch a glimpse of the bright screen they were crowded around. They piled on top of each other, tossing the phone around as they swiped and zoomed on different girl’s bodies and faces. They mocked, criticized, and objectified—howling and sneering as if they carried the God-given entitlement to do so. I wondered if that was the way they talked about me.

I trembled violently with anger as I watched. I tried to speak, but no sound came out. I tried to stand, but my legs felt stuck, overwhelmed with the pressure of being the only girl who would even think to stand up to them. I shut my mouth and turned away.

I left sick with disappointment—the guilt of my short-

comings overwhelming me as I replayed the event. I had been a bystander, passively observing as I failed to stand up for what I believed in, fearing that I would be labeled a feminist—the word a disturbing branding within my community. It was then I began to wonder why so many women, including myself, adamantly avoided calling themselves feminists.

“Feminist” derives its meaning from feminism, a social and political movement designed to gain equality for women within the patriarchal system of our modern world. However, as with most politically charged words, society’s newly redefined feminist is framed by stereotypical misconceptions of a radical angry woman. She doesn’t wear makeup or deodorant, doesn’t have the door opened for her, and would definitely never marry. I knew that protecting myself from bearing this definition of a feminist was better than calling myself a feminist at all. However, we should define feminists for what they really are—advocates for the equality of all peo-

ple, and look past what a feminist truly is not. Firstly, a feminist is not “anti-man.” When asked if she considers herself a feminist, celebrity Lady Gaga has stated that she loves men, and, therefore, cannot claim herself a feminist. But feminism isn’t about that, and such consistent misinterpretation of this is what holds so many men and women back from wanting to call themselves feminists.

Feminists do not hate men. Feminists do not want to take men down. In fact, when certain feminists create this spirit of division and hate between men and women, they directly harm the equality they claim to promote. Redefining a feminist as anti-patriarchy rather than anti-man nods to the true motive of feminists themselves. While it is true that men have historically made up the patriarchy, and many continue to uphold such destructive values, real feminists recognize that the patriarchy itself is a social construct propagated by both men and women. The institutions themselves are the true evil.

Feminists are not only women—anyone who simply believes in equality can be a feminist. Due to identity politics and people who have embodied the term incorrectly, feminist and feminism have been defined as strictly womanly. Feeling like they do not make the cut, such exclusivity turns many non-women away from the movement. This gender specification also fails to acknowledge the intersectional applications of feminism that have been used to address the oppression of all marginalized groups—categories in which many non-women can and often do fall. Exclusive feminists additionally create a lack of accountability amongst those who look to write off the feminist cause as a “woman’s issue” that cannot possibly apply to them; after all, they are not women. While many feminists are women, and feminism was founded on the basis of women’s rights, it can be expanded like any other political movement; how could there be a gender requirement for believing that all people are equal? Expanding who can be a feminist is a crucial step in creating more support for women and other oppressed voices. It should benefit everyone, as feminists look to dismantle all systems of oppression. Additionally, feminism gains strength when those already in positions of power, such as men, utilize their inherent influence to push for social change. Creating a space of inclusivity additionally helps others view feminists as accepting of all people, a tenet at the core of the fight for women’s rights.

Feminists are not shaming of other women. As the stereotypes of a feminist have developed strongly, many women view those who yearn for the “traditional lifestyle” of raising children at home as enemies to the progress feminism has created. But what’s wrong with wanting to raise a family? Such a mindset has been applied to anything traditionally feminine, such as wanting to wear makeup, enjoying the idea of getting married, or accepting chivalrous treatment. “Girly girls” are often heavily criticized and deemed unworthy of participating in the feminist movement by feminists themselves, and such trends scare many women away. When feminists mock women for enjoying things deemed traditionally feminine, they propagate the assumption that “girl stuff”—fashion, rom-coms, makeup—is considered less valuable to society than more masculine things. But I do not need to be

the breadwinner to be a good woman, and the girly ways in which I express myself are a beautiful privilege of femininity. Instead of shaming each other, we should urge women to feel confident in the fact that they are making choices truly for themselves. There is such freedom in knowing that women can now choose to be stay-at-home mothers without feeling that it’s their singular purpose, and true feminists will fight for a world in which such choices are seen for what they really are—just choices.

Finally, a feminist is not arguing for men and women to be the same. “Sameness” is not equality, and understanding the difference is important when considering a feminist’s purpose. Women and men are not going to have the same life experiences, interests, or tastes. What should be the same, however, is how society treats women in access to opportunities, pay, and overall respect. One can acknowledge the natural distinctions between a man and woman, such as their physical appearance and biological functions, and also believe that women should stand on an equal playing field. And there’s no downside to it—equality stimulates economic growth, social stability, and fulfills one’s human rights. I’d like to see the argument that men and women can’t possibly be equal because they are not the same completely disappear, frankly because it is a misguided one. All people are not the same. Women and men are not the same, and our world is shaped upon these unique distinctions of personal individuality. But we owe it to each other to give this world a chance at peace, and that starts in building a more cohesive society.

I now proudly claim to be a feminist, wearing the title like an honorable medal. I am proud to be part of a group that has been instrumental in advancing women’s rights, addressing gender violence, and creating equitable spaces for all oppressed peoples. I am proud to be part of a group brave enough to defy longstanding social norms, unfearing of backlash and hate. The correct definition of a feminist, one uninfluenced by repressive stereotypes, incorrect conclusions, and other misunderstandings, has created a gateway for me to develop my own interests and figure out what really matters to me. When I define myself as a feminist, I am reminded of my strength and worth, regardless of my “inferior” gender, and am empowered to be the best version of myself. The values that the feminist definition has outlined for me—ones of equality, individuality, and love for all people—have become the basis upon which I live my life, a complete contrast to my initial reaction to feminism. Just like I nearly did, we are so quick to passively accept and not actually examine what it truly means to BE something—whether it be feminist, liberal, conservative, or religious. We end up missing out on the value a term can imprint on our character. As our society tosses incomplete and incorrect definitions at us, I encourage all to question: question to challenge barriers, challenge systems, and ultimately challenge yourself. It may be uncomfortable, but a gained understanding of true definition would transform a world so charged by irrational hatred into one where every individual could know exactly who they are—and that’s the kind of world we should aspire to see.





## Companion

*Nichole Chartrand (12) | Poem*

I raised you myself  
From seedling to sprout you have always been by my side  
You were loyal and steadfast  
You gave me hope in our little world.  
As the years passed, I remember the little sprout that you used to be  
But now you're an old oak tree  
As you wither, you spread your last seeds  
I found one, but it seemed off  
It wasn't from you but was the same shape  
Same kind of seed?  
Did you send me this gift?  
Was it meant to be?  
You knew I needed you.  
But now that you're gone-  
Have you eased my pain with something new?  
Something odd but exciting?  
Painful but kind?

## Song for a Wandering Beast

*Sophie Junaidi (12) | Poem*

You were loved before, I can see it  
In your pelt which carried the shine of lost stars  
In your soft and unarmed paws  
In the way you wanted to trust  
And how you nibble daintily at the bowl of food I leave out  
After I go back inside  
And you slide closer to the door

Months pass,  
Months of me inching closer,  
of you remembering how to trust  
I sat outside, watching, talking,  
A few feet away  
Though you flinched at my voice at first  
You started to approach me

When you stayed after eating to sit beside me  
I thought that my heartbeat,  
Louder than waves in the wind,  
Might scare you away  
When you hummed along to the melody sung under my  
breath,  
This soft harmony  
Made all of earth burst into bloom  
When you gently pressed your nose against my outstretched  
palm  
Our hearts pulsed in time,  
A perfect, steady beat between us  
When finally you let me run my hands along your flank,  
Let me scratch behind your ear  
I wanted to weep, or sing

If I had known how much I would miss you,  
Your rumbling laugh, your sharp-toothed grin  
The shy brush of our hands against each other  
If I had known how much I would miss you  
Known that this would be our last day  
The end of our few months together  
If I had known how much I would miss you  
I would have stayed by your side longer  
Held you close, pressed my lips between your ears  
I would have sat beside you for hours,  
If I had known how much I would miss you

Instead  
You vanished.  
Suddenly  
This life we shared  
Gone, reduced to nothing.

Our song abruptly ended  
As the chords returned to being  
As Major as you were to me.



Sasha Glast (12) / Sundream / Mixed Media

## A Starry Night at the Café

Madison Winston (11) | Poem  
Inspired by Café Terrace at Night by Van Gogh

### *The Young Fellow*

The tall buildings sneer as I stroll in the city  
Their bitterness fills my body  
The buildings' cool breeze stings  
My late-night walk halts as I hear the siren sing

All sensation of being frozen melts  
The café whisks me away from everything else  
Warm croissants, warm macarons, warm chocolat  
Her sweet pastry breath lures me into the restaurant

Her hypnosis falters, I must return to the now  
My miserable life of never-ending work awaits me  
Fingers barely touching the door  
Yellow paint splatters color the floor  
*C'est la vie*

I turn, and a fellow with fiery hair slings paint  
His starry cerulean eyes make me feel faint  
Locking eyes with the fellow, he opens his mouth  
Uttering incoherent advice I knew nothing about

I peer onto his canvas full of stars  
An odd fellow this was, quite bizzare

He returns to his painting, and I return to my life

### *The Artist*

Paint, paint, paint  
Yellow, blue, and purple, colors  
so opposite that can beautifully blend

Her brilliance consumes my mind  
Ugh, how the black buildings block her light  
The open patio grants me the ability to view the  
sultry  
yellow  
tones

I snap back  
Rubbing the amber out of my eyes  
A perplexed young fellow peers at me and my canvas

Knowing I was just entranced, I warn him  
"Be careful, young one.  
Cafés are where one can destory themselves,  
commit a crime, or go mad."

My vision blurs to an amber galaxy once more  
Must paint her.  
I love her.



JC Peña (11) | *The Lonely Man* | Oil Painting

## What You Don't Know: A Driver's Story

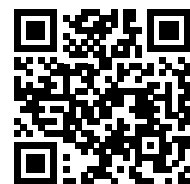
A SHORT AWARD-WINNING FILM  
BY SMH STUDIO PRACTICE IN  
DIGITAL CINEMA

WRITTEN by Christopher Chan  
PRODUCED by Sofija Dudia & Joshua Rice  
DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY:  
Matthew Medellin & Kate Whittington  
FIRST AD: Ana Testes  
SOUND: Analia Rivera  
EDITOR: Ines Wallish  
STARRING: Will Underwood, Frank Di-  
Napoli, Tammy Wang, Tomynahan,  
Levi Blaise Coleman, Lucas Foster,  
Matthew Medellin



This Short Film was made at the All American High School Film Festival during their 56 hour film competition in New York City in October 2023. The Studio Practice in Digital Cinema from Saint Mary's Hall were the Winners in the Best Film Invitational - Complete Experience Catagory.

Watch *What You Don't Know: A Driver's Story!*



## Behind the Wheel

Paulina Esquinca-Moreno (12) | Poem

Sultry, sweet, your song sweeps  
Caressing the cracks and curves of concrete  
Rumbling into the rough road  
Racing across my face, a reddened glow  
Coating my cracked knuckles

Your face, faint and freckled  
Flashes unafraid as my eyes  
Tear their stare from the streets  
To your green gaze greets  
As prying eyes pass  
Glaring through the gray glass  
I twist us into a turn  
Dining drive-thru as darkness seeps  
Into the red sky with a sizzling burn

And through opened windows, the cold wind sweeps  
Your scarlet summer hair  
Off your neck, revealing the cluster  
Of constellations that lay there  
Still, picking up some luster

From the flashing lights ahead  
Sending shots of supernovas across  
The lot, where your tunes tumble and tread  
Escaping the exhales of exhaust  
Edging closer to the curves of curbs  
Accelerating at axled asteroids  
Shooting sparks as they spin and shoot  
Across atmospheres,

Looking out onto the freeway  
My flight out to freedom  
Awaits in the glaring starburst lights  
Scattered by mirrors and rings  
Wrapped around the wheel  
Waiting  
For the lights

To switch  
From red  
to green  
to go  
gain speed



Henry Scott (10) | Buddy | Mixed Media

# Tapestry

Sophie Junaidi (12) | Poem

There is a word in Urdu that baffled me as a child.  
*Abhi*, which can mean either 'here' or 'now'  
 depending on the context. Sometimes  
 it can mean both; in this place, but also in this moment.  
 At this point in space and time.

There was a cluster of trees when I first meandered through the playground.  
 Tucked in the back,  
 a shaded, hidden grove  
 I could avoid everything.  
 I did not know my classmates yet  
 This corner would be a spot to hide away with a few friends,  
 leaning against the trees,  
 chatting about nothing.  
 The potential shone,  
 possibilities weaving together like the branches  
 A soft textile of hope  
 For the future  
 For this school.

We found a bird one day, heard it crying and followed the strands of its voice. Its wing was broken, we noticed its feathers; a tangled mess, the back of a child's first embroidery. Carving a hollow between the tangled roots, we gently scooped him up and tucked him away safely.

We planned to take care of him, although it meant going behind our teachers' backs. They warned us about diseases, and how his parents would shun him after our care. We fought back, there were predators on campus- dogs, cats, foxes- this chick would not survive without our help and protection. Despite the wishes of everyone in authority, we kept taking care of the bird.

We caught lacewings and small moths on the field beneath the trees. Every friday we would pile these dead insects in the haven we created so that the bird would be well fed over the weekend.

We kept the ground as tidy as possible, brushing away loose sticks and leaves, which made the blood spilt on the earth apparent. When we traced this crimson dye to the cavern's opening, found the bird, bleeding, breathing labored, stabbed through the chest- several people had to step away, they were going to puke. It would not survive, it was suffering; the task of snapping its neck was given to the first reluctant volunteer.

The day before, we discussed how we would care for the bird over the summer, and how we would teach it how to fly after. Embroidered plans which had to be discarded, wasted because of one misplaced stitch.

This place, love, time, home,  
 these three trees, tremulously  
 reaching, weaving up.  
 Nothing mattered more.  
 Braiding cat grass- an attempt  
 at rugs, grinding leaves  
 and foraged berries  
 to make pastel dyes, working  
 Together as we  
 Built this home, this place  
 Abhi, this one point in space and time

In sixth grade,  
 when we were too old to have recess,  
 at least, that's what administration said,  
 two friends and I wandered into the playground  
 our old home, where we grew up around each other  
 intertwined, inseparable.  
 We returned home to a harsh concrete pad backed against our trees  
 for a giant chessboard, a sharp contrast  
 To the textile dreams and soft grasses which we were raised in.  
 The next year they put up a fence between the trees,  
 Separating the stalks which we had scrambled over, sat upon,  
 we were forced to admit  
 that this place, this point, which we had loved  
 gone.

# Made in Heaven

Cici Yang (12) | Poem

Inspired by the painting *The Swing* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard

## I: The Man in the Bushes

Oh Lord,  
How divine she is!  
Her dress jumps in the light,  
With that teasing look in her eyes.  
Oh, God knows how much I crave her!

But, he must not know about us.  
And our love is forbidden,  
But that's why she looks so delicious,  
I want to drink her like a sweet glass of wine,  
But he stops us from devouring each other.

I can tell she wants a taste of me,  
How in love we are!  
Her legs crave for a lick.  
Her tantalizing gaze consumes me.  
Oh, Heaven knows we are made for each other!

Looking at her on the swing,  
Oh Lord, she is most divine!  
Her shoes fell off!  
How playful she is!  
I will forever cherish this moment!

## II: The Woman

Cupid shot the first arrow  
On my wealthy, powerful husband.  
He used to be so lovely.  
What a pity!

Cupid shot his second arrow.  
On him.  
Thank the Lord!  
I thought I became immune to them.  
Cupid must have used his strongest arrow,  
For us to be together.

Silly Cupid!  
Did you miss the first time?  
Were you rusty?  
You made me waste half of my life  
With this pitiful boy.  
I could have spent my life with this man.  
Oh, how he makes me feel fuzzy inside!  
What a shame I'm stuck with your first practice target.

I like to throw my shoe to him when I'm on the swing,  
As a token of my appreciation.

## III: The Man in the Shadow

She is so lucky to have me.  
She is my jewel, my doll, my dove.  
My jewel, my doll, my dove.

She's lucky to have someone to  
Hold her  
Admire her  
Protect her  
Love her

Like I do.  
God put us together for a reason.  
I give her everything while  
She stays pretty  
For me.

I love her the most when  
She's on the swing.  
The dress I picked out for her fits perfectly,  
Her composure is so ladylike.

Just like the way I taught her.  
Goodness, her shoe fell off again.  
Should I fetch it for her?

## IV: The Shoe

Alas, another day in the air,  
How many times will I be flung without a care  
Until their affair crumbles?

I want to talk to Cupid!  
What on Earth was he thinking about?  
Pairing these two together  
Must've been an accident.  
His mistake caused my suffering!

I can't take it anymore.  
Her feet stink.  
I have vertigo and a fear of heights.  
It's too much.  
Just leave me in the bushes,  
I can't bear another day with them.  
I truly hope their relationship ends  
With all of my heart and sole!

# THIS EDITION OF THE WALRUS IS DEDICATED TO KYLE PETERSEN,

who presents the contents of his curriculum with rigor and creativity,  
while creating a safe space for all of his students and their ideas.

## Colophon:

Volume 58 of *The Walrus* was created by the staff and teacher advisor at Saint Mary's Hall, 9401 Starcrest Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78217. Three hundred copies were printed and distributed at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

In this magazine Ainsdale for the title and Le Havre Layers and Baskerville Old Face were also on the front cover; Baskerville Old Face font was used throughout for copy, writing credits, and art credits; Ainsdale was used for headlines; Verdana Bold was used for the quotes pulled from stories and narratives, and Le Havre Layers for page numbers. All definitions on theme pages and division pages appear in Courier New Bold. Thompson Print Solutions printed the magazine at 5818 Rocky Point Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78249. Preston Thompson was the representative who worked with the staff and editors to bring the magazine to completion. Programs used included Microsoft Word, Photoshop, InDesign, and several HP computers.

## Staff:

### Editorial Team

Emma Carter  
Paulina Esquinca-Moreno  
Sophia Junadi  
Isa Nava  
Madison Winston

### Faculty Advisor

Amy Williams-Eddy

### Senior Design Editor

Elissa Mason-Bizzell

**Special Thanks To:** Len Miller, Liz Stockdale, Jeff Hebert, Bethany Bohall, Logan Blanco, Kyle Petersen, Nate Cassie, Will Underwood, Breanne Hicks, Christina Baker, Ronessa McDonald, Emily Robbins, Randy Lee, Glenn Guerra, Mike Harriman, Shangruti Desai, and Deb DeVeau

**Submission Policy:** *The Walrus* welcomes submissions from any member of the Upper School student body from August through February 14. Teachers are also encouraged to submit work for their students. All work is judged anonymously so we ask that all submissions arrive without a name on the piece and with the required submission form. Submission forms may be obtained from Mrs. Amy Williams-Eddy via email or your English teacher's resources page. Digital submissions are preferred and are to be sent to [aweddy@smhall.org](mailto:aweddy@smhall.org) along with a submission form. All writing submissions should be submitted as MS Word files or PDF files. All digital photographs and artwork should be submitted as JPEG files or PDF files and must be 300 dpi or larger for printing purposes.

