The Talon

Gripping News

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OCS Students Voice Concerns for the Department Of Education

By Lucia McDonagh and Sophia Somerstein, Juniors

In this article, Lucia McDonagh and Sophia Somerstein share their concerns about cuts to funding from The Federal Education Department. Recent headline news reports dismantling or gutting of The Department of Education. Here, they have compiled student concerns re: FAFSA and explanations of education legislation that is threatened under the current presidential administration.

Created in 1979 by President Jimmy Carter, The United States Department of Education (DE), as it currently is recognized, has made equal access to education a nationwide mission. The DE distributes financial aid, enforces civil rights laws in schools, supplies resources and supports to all students, and focuses on assisting students with disabilities (Title IX).

The current federal administration has underscored its plans to dismantle the Department of Education, which is concerning to some because it is through the Department of Education that students from all over the country obtain a proper education, no matter what their background. The United States Department of Education has played a pivotal role in uplifting the public schools nationally, making sure that each child is cared for and gets the best education that they can.

Additionally, The DE is the largest provider of financial aid for higher education. Without financial aid, millions of students would not be able to afford a college education. This would greatly change the outcome of their lives. Onteora students have shown concern about the following:

Financial Aid For Individual Students:

Federal Student Aid, or FSA, is the largest provider of financial aid for students in the United States. FSA provides billions of dollars to eligible students in the form of grants and loans.

Senior Sara Metawee, currently enrolled at Hamilton College for fall of 2025 said, "I'm worried about how I'm going to afford college. I am relying on grants and federal aid that comes from the DE."

Financial aid is a crucial establishment in our country, ensuring that education is accessible to students regardless of their financial background. Without federal support, many low-income, middle-income, or first generation students may not be able to afford higher education, limiting their opportunities to progress in modern society. FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is a form that every student must fill out in order to apply for federal financial aid. Without doing so, an individual can not qualify for financial aid from the government.

> ***"Loss of federal aid would be like pulling the financial rug out from under us."*** *-Senior Sara Metawee, in response to the question: As an enrolled college student, what are your concerns about the instability of the DE?*

This process documents information about the student's and their family's financial situation in order to determine their eligibility for various financial aid programs. Senior Sarah Caloro, who's enrolled at Vassar College for fall of 2025, reflects on the fact that, "Academically I earned the grades to be accepted to my dream school, but with out federal aid I wouldn't be able to attend, which would be crushing."

OCS students are concerned that a process that is already cumbersome and time consuming will be even worse with fewer employees and reduced efficiency. Senior Anna Johnson, currently enrolled at Vassar for fall of 2025 asks the question, "What is the new system going to be?"

In addtion to concerns about financial aid, Onteora students are aware that the DE oversees many components of public education, and have expressed concerns about the following laws.

Title I:

Title I is the largest federal funding program and aims to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students in K-12 schools. This specifically targets schools with a high number of low-income students by providing them with the necessary resources to hire additional staff, implement after-school programs or additional instruction time, and purchase educational materials.

Title II:

Title II funding focuses on improving the quality of teaching and learning. This funding provides financial aid to state educational agencies and school districts in order to provide teachers and other school leaders with the proper training, improve the effectiveness of teachers, and attract high-quality teachers (particularly in low-income schools, which arguably need them the most).

Title III:

This funding aims at helping to improve ELL (English Language Learners) programs and the learners within to succeed in school by providing funds to improve language proficiency. This funding is used to provide bilingual programs and language acquisition support while implementing academic programs that integrate language learning.

Title IX:

Title IX, passed in 1972, prevents sex-based discrimination in schools and educational facilities that receive funding from the federal government. It also protects students from sexual harassment. When it was passed, Title IX was seen as a massive step forward for women's education.

Civil Rights:

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) works to keep access to education equal. Within the DE, the ORC has already experinced cuts. The OCR is imperative in stopping discrimination, and making school a safe and equal place for all students. The OCR hassuffered a nearly 50% reduction in staff. OCS students wonder how this massive cut will impact the enforcement of civil rights laws in schools.

Finally History: The Five - Year Covid Anniversary

By Talula Kirschner and Lucia McDonagh, Juniors

As the five year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown passes and the smoke has cleared, we can see the detrimental effects that it has had on students. As kids of this generation, we had to grow up in the midst of Covid, and now that it's finally behind us, it is clear just how much we have missed.

As part of the class of '26, we missed out on the social and scholastic developmental years of middle school. Now, as rising seniors, we are old enough to see how what we missed has impacted our lives. Specifically in school, one recurring problem is how we started high school without the knowledge and background of how to take proficient notes, study, and manage homework. While it seems trivial, time management in relation to the compilation of homework and studying is vital to success in high school—and life.

Homework is hardly existent in elementary school, and when Covid took over our middle school experience, we were cut a lot of slack. The education system used the pandemic as an excuse to not assign homework, lighten up on grading policies, and lower the passing requirements.

In the years after Covid, whatever we did—or should we say didn't learn—during online school was dismissed. While, in the moment, the relaxed rules and regulations were appreciated by students, and we even used it as an excuse ourselves, we now see how much that has impacted us—and not for the better.

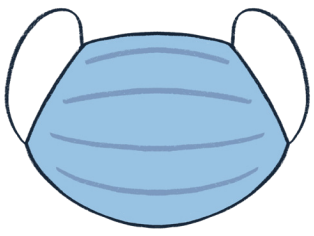
As the rush of junior year hit us, it hit hard, and even high honor students struggled to deal with the workload; everyone felt totally unprepared for what was coming. Are students really ready for college and the "real world"?

Another subject that kids missed out on during Covid was sports. During quarantine, kids who were in elementary school didn't get to experience rec-league team sports where they would learn the fundamentals. Middle schoolers didn't get the proper modified experience, and high schoolers who had been playing their entire lives lost out on playing JV and Varsity for the school. College players who went to school for their sport suffered as well, though the NCAA gave the option for a 5th year of playing for those who missed the Covid year. So, unless you had the money and resources to be on a club team or program that invested resources into online practices, no sports teams could play at all.

Many of the kids who missed those formative years lost interest in the sport. Quickly, individual sports such as tennis and skiing became more popular. It is unfortunate that so many kids were impacted by something that was well out of their control and lost the art of team bonding and sportsmanship.

In retrospect, there wasn't much that could have been done to prevent these things. The world was in a state of panic, and people did what they thought was best at the moment, not thinking so much about how it would impact our futures.

Now that it's been half a decade, we can see how we were affected in all sorts of ways. Perhaps in ten or twenty years more effects will be apparent, but until then, we must learn, as a society, to adapt to these unfamiliarities and go on with our lives.



Our Humanity vs Robots in Our Daily Lives

By Riley Peer, Sophomore

The other day while shopping, I turned the corner and saw a robot scanning grocery items. It was basically just a camera on wheels with a tablet screen that read, "Need Customer Service?"

"Absolutely not," I thought "I sure don't; not from a robot at least." I walked away without responding, but then I wondered... Should I have thanked the robot for its offering of customer service?

When I returned home I thought about this robot, Googled it, and it seems Artificial Intelligence is learning algorithms that can analyze inventory to determine when a product is running low or needs to be restocked. These robots are made by Albertson and Robotics: A New Era Of Grocery Shopping.

Artificial Intelligence is powerful technology, and it is continually growing more accurate; one of my biggest fears is AI taking over the world. Will robots be programmed to act like humans? Live like humans? Express emotions like humans?

This notion may seem fairly stupid. I mean, robots having emotions, really? But, no, not just that; do you think AI is going to decrease self-reliance in future generations?

On the other hand, AI can be an advanced technology that not only saves time, but minimizes human error.

Sure, humans have lots of skills that AI might not be capable of, but AI is programmed specifically to get answers faster and more efficiently than humans. For the future, we may have to consider a lack of employment opportunities as AI fulfills job demands. Also, if AI is programmed to do and know more than humans, then could AI even take future jobs that haven't even been developed yet? Considering their superpower-esque capabilities, I think the answer is yes.

AI doesn't need to go to school and get a degree in order to secure a job. This means that it will never truly have to work hard; AI never has to stay up past twelve at night writing a last-minute essay. Honestly, being an AI robot seems promising.

The abundance of AI in our lives and in the workplace is inevitable. However, we must not let it stop us from demonstrating humanity. It shouldn't make *us* into robots, exhibiting poor behavior such as acting impolite and not demon strating social skills. If grocery store workers are all swapped with AI robots, would you still be polite? Would you still say "Thank you"? We can, and must, learn to live with the advanced technologies of this world. They can even take our jobs, but we can't let them take our goodwill.

The Unnecessary Stress of College

By Evan Pizer, Sophomore

I'm waiting for the stressed-out students to hear a voice that says "Not everyone is meant to go to a top college, and that is not the end of the world whatsoever. The college you go to doesn't matter as much as you think it does. You do not have to go to a top university to be successful. It's more important to be content where you are than to be able to say you went to a competitive college."

We all see the workhorse student who takes five AP classes, participates in several extracurriculars, is a three-season athlete — all while maintaining a near-perfect GPA. I want every grade–conscious student reading this to take the time to answer the question: Why do I work as hard as I do?

The pressure to be ranked top in your class and get into a highly competitive college is not self-induced like many students claim it is. Pressure from parents, social media, and other cultural influences is real. Implicitly, everyone is impacted by external pressure.

Many students fall into the academic "grind culture." This is dangerous and has many negative effects, mainly anxiety. Because of the use of modern media, the grind culture is constantly normalized and romanticized. Posts and TikToks talking about which AP classes to take, and what top universities want, and ideas for a "Passion Project" every summer, and an internship and volunteer hours at a non-profit are directed to academic juniors and seniors. It's a lot. All this creates unrealistic expectations and dissonance. Students start feeling that they are falling behind–when in reality they are not. Inevitably, this leads to anxiety.

It's important to take a step back and ask yourself, "what is your motive behind all the work and stress, and is that motive actually important to you and for you?"

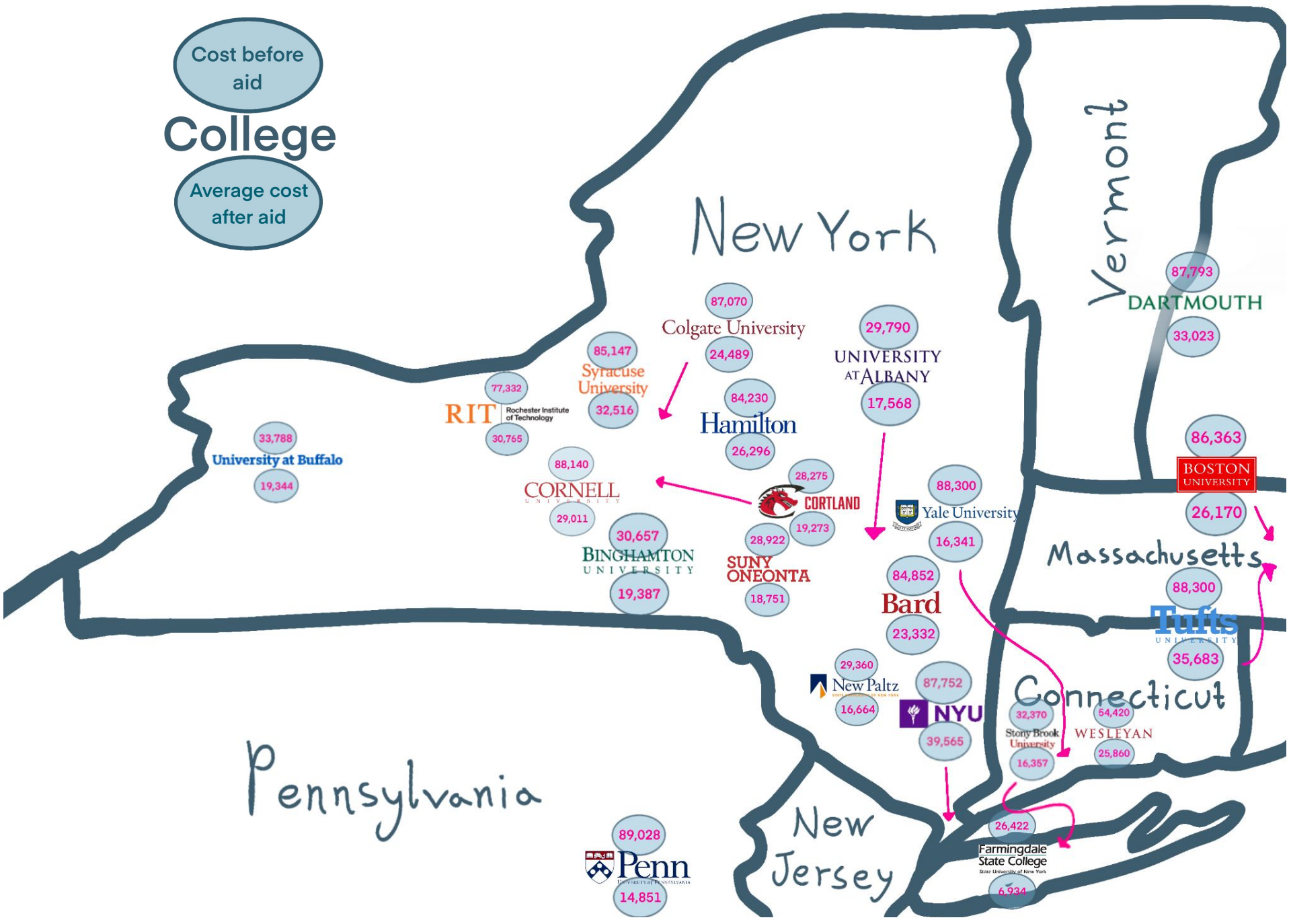
The driving force for many students' efforts is acceptance into a good college. But what is the reason they want to get into a good college? It may be scary to imagine people finding out you got into a college that doesn't meet someone else's expectations for you, but the alternative is doomful.

Students' exhaust themselves by working hard all day, every day throughout high school, studying for hours into the night and stressing about everything. They say "I will be happier when summer starts", then "I can't wait until senior year when I won't have to do any work," but that never works out. Then it's "I can't wait for college where I will have free time and everything will be better". But nothing is going to change. If the work to get into a college was miserably difficult, it's going to be just as miserably difficult once you're there.

College Tuition Info-Graph, Pre- and Post Financial Aid

By Rama Gabriel, Freshman

For this info-graph Rama gathered actual college costs before and after student financial aid. The number above the college name represents the cost before aid; the number below is the average student cost after financial aid. The data illustrated demonstrates the rates of college tuition, as well as their average cost after financial aid. For the most part, colleges and universities with lower acceptance rates are a whole lot pricier than those with higher acceptance rates.



Onteora Trivia Bowl!

By Archie Popp, Sophomore

On March 5th, a beloved pre-pandemic event was revived by the Booster Club: The Onteora Trivia Bowl, hosted by former Jeopardy! contestant, Rick Nutson. The event was a huge success. Seven teams participated, each made up of students from various grade levels and, at most, two teachers, for a total of seven members on each team. The competition featured five themed trivia rounds with a unique twist on each to maximize points.

Scoring was simple and straightforward: correct answers awarded a set number of points depending on the round, and the team with the highest total points emerged victorious. Thanks to such a strong turnout and enthusiastic participation, the Booster Club looks forward to holding the Onteora Trivia Bowl as an annual tradition, hoping for even greater success in the years to come.

The first round followed a standard trivia format, but teams could earn extra points if they were able to answer questions without assistance from the teachers. The second round was a location-based challenge; teams had to identify zoomed-in images of places within the Onteora School District. The third round tested historical knowledge by presenting two events and requiring the teams to figure out which happened first. The fourth round involved our very own staff; students had to match six teachers that were present to fun-facts about each of them, except one of the facts was false, adding an element of deception to the game. The event concluded with a final round of Marvel trivia, which ended up as the crowd favorite, generating lots of excitement.

Courtesy of Cynthia Bracken

The winning team!

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Welcoming Two New Clubs at Onteora

By Lucia McDonagh, Junior

Recently in the Onteora high school we have been introducued to two brand new clubs: Human Rights Club, and Math Club. After interviewing the creators we got some incite into the clubs vision. The questions asked were: What inspired you to start up this club? What is the purpose/goals of this club? How do you think this club will benefit high school students at onteora? Here's what they said:

Human Rights Club:

Ms. Liz, one of Onteora's social workers, revived the Human Rights Club because she wished that there was something like this when she was a kid at this school. When she brought the idea to administration, she learned that something similar to her proposal actually did at one point exist, but needed a jump start to get it going again.

Ms. Liz is very passionate about human rights and social justice, so when she saw an opportunity, she jumped on it. She has also heard from students at Onteora that there is not always space during the day to be able to talk about social justice/ human rights issues, and she wanted this club to be a safe space to do that.

The club is meant to educate the community about issues, and fight for change in that community. This club will benefit high school students because it allows students to talk about issues close to them in a safe environment, bring issues to the table anonymously that they can then be discussed, and ultimately make the school community greater as a whole.

Math Club:

Bryan Steiner, a parent at Onteora, loves teaching math, being surrounded by math, and specifically enjoys investigative math with students. When he saw that there was no math club at Onteora, he brought the idea to the table.

When asked what the goals of math club are, he responded, "to have fun and expand our mathematical thinking skills". He puts an emphasis on problem solving, critical thinking, and mathematical thought, which are skills that can be useful in real life situations.

At math club, students can expect to investigate fun problems and have a good time! Math club will benefit high school students at Onteora by preparing them for high math classes in the future (college), teaching them about algorithm writing, coding, computers, ect.

Book Review: *The Naturals*

By Gabrielle Alterio, Sophomore

When I initially picked up *The Naturals,* I was not expecting to make a Barnes & Noble run to buy the next three books— just five minutes after finishing it, but that is what I did. The novel follows the story of five young teenagers with skills and aptitudes that make them a match for the FBI program, *The Naturals*.

The main protagonist of the story is Cassie, an FBI profiler, who meets Dean, Michael, Lia, and Sloane. The five "naturals" are tasked with solving FBI cold cases, until one current case suggests a killer is back in the game. It becomes clear that the killer is holding something against Cassie, whose own mother was murdered five years prior, and "The Naturals" must do everything they can to catch the killer before the killer catches the next victim.

The Naturals is an absolutely riveting mystery. The plotline is chock-full of twists and turns, as well as interesting character dynamics. The five naturals are teens and that adds a sense of relatability to them. Jennifer Lynn Barnes is a master at creating complex characters who you sometimes root for, and other times pray for their downfall. Barnes' style of writing is perfect for a variety of readers.

Additionally certain pages in the book are cryptic words from the killer's perspective which adds to the thrilling nature of the story. I would highly recommend *The Naturals s*eries and The Inheritance Games both by Jennifer Lynn Barnes. Trust me you won't be able to put them down.

Show Review: *XO Kitty*

By Harsimran Kaur, Junior

If you are a fan of the *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* movie series, you desperately need to check out its spinoff series, *XO Kitty*, whose second season came out recently in January and has been renewed for a third.

Courtesy of Creative Commons

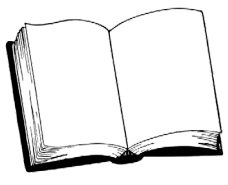
The *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* trilogy had us follow Lara Jean, a high school student dealing with the highs and lows of teenage love and dating. She has her love letters to every guy she's ever had a crush on sent out to them, creating opportunities for new relationships to flourish. *XO Kitty* follows Lara Jean's love–obsessed younger sister, Kitty, who's been a self acclaimed matchmaker since she played a part in getting her sister and her boyfriend together.

XO Kitty is set in Seoul, South Korea, as Kitty goes on her journey as an international student at the Korean Independent school of Seoul, more commonly called K.I.S.S. Her endeavor to Seoul started with her desire to connect more with her culture and heritage. Additionally, her mother who passed away when she was young attended this school, so it's a way for her to get to know her better. Plus, her long distance boyfriend Dae goes to the same school. Kitty expects everything to go well, but it doesn't. She goes through the ups and downs Seoul has to offer, along with discovering previously unknown things about her mother and family history.

In complete honesty, this show is filled with corny and cliche moments, but it's in the right kind of way. The show includes a mix of both English and Korean which I appreciated dearly, since it gave more depth and realism to the show. It contains faint traces of KDrama vibes with how the production is done, which overall added to the enjoyability of the series. I ended up finishing the second season of this show in one sitting. It was *that*, addicting.

To All The Boys I've Loved Before was one of my favorite movies several years ago when it was first released, so this show was really nostalgic to watch because it tied in some of the old characters from the movies and had me reminiscing at times. If you're in need of a good show just for the fun vibes please let Katherine (Kitty) Covey's enticing, energetic personality warp you in.

Clawsnaps



Q: If you could only choose one out of books, movies, or TV shows, which would it be and why?

Compiled by Talon Staff

Sophia Somerstein, Junior- "Books because you can use your own imagination."

Yogi Johansen, Senior- "I like shows because there's just so much more to watch."

Mr. Armstrong, Staff- "Books because you use your own thoughts so it's all up to interpretation."

Lucy Jennings, Senior- "TV shows because there's more content to get into."

Jillian Tyler, Senior- "Movies. They're just better."

Movie Review: A Deep Dive into *Flow*

By Jade Belfiore, Sophomore

After I heard that people were watching the movie *Flow* with their pets, I decided to watch it with one of my cats. Her ears perked up to hear the sounds of the animal protagonists. She was briefly interested but eventually went back to her nap. However, *Flow* held my interest from beginning to end. I'd had doubts about a movie without dialogue, but the actions, expressions, and music that took its place were just as effective in expressing emotion and drama, if not more.

Flow was created by writer-director Gints Zilbalodis, who became the first filmmaker from Latvia to win an Oscar this year. The surprise winner of the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film, Flow beat out expensive, highly produced Hollywood movies like *The Wild Robot* and *Inside Out 2*. Since Zilbalodis used free, open-source software to create the animations, and animal sounds instead of actors' voices, *Flow* had a budget of under $4 million (for comparison, *Inside Out 2* cost $200 million to make). The result was a more creative and unique film than anything that Hollywood could produce.

The star of *Flow* is a solitary black cat that we first meet wandering through a jungle in a post-apocalyptic world, empty of people. When a flood rushes through the forest, all animals run for safety as dry ground quickly vanishes. After nearly drowning, the cat takes refuge in a boat with a gentle capybara, the first companion that the cat learns to trust. They're joined by a resourceful and curious lemur who is obsessed with gathering shiny objects, a tall and protective secretary bird, as well as a playful and entertaining labrador retriever.

Navigating waters full of fish and an occasional majestic whale, the animals pass signs of a dead civilization, with eerie but beautiful scenes of flooded cities and deserted houses. The message of climate change is unmistakable, with the audience left to wonder where the humans have gone. There is an undercurrent of danger as the animation lingers on lush landscapes and the beauty of nature.

As the animals try to survive, their personalities and attitudes change. Interconnectedness becomes a theme as the cat starts trusting and relying on others more, and the dog evolves to help his companions. Despite their differences, the animals team up together. It's clear that without cooperation, they wouldn't make it.

Too bad my cat didn't watch the whole movie with me, as I think she would have liked it. Maybe you'll have better luck with your own pet. *Flow* is available to stream on Max and Apple TV+!

Word Search: Spring Sports

By Talula Kirschner, Junior

A	D	X	B	T	P	L	P	S	O	C	L	Z	J	H	O	C	K	E	Y	A	W	O
O	D	Y	N	S	O	J	Q	L	T	R	A	C	K	A	N	D	F	I	E	L	D	R
I	M	F	I	A	V	L	U	X	F	B	R	N	E	N	K	E	I	K	R	T	V	M
M	B	Z	Z	V	P	U	N	Z	T	V	P	V	A	C	T	T	R	V	L	Z	W	G
B	R	A	L	T	Y	O	G	Q	H	A	N	Y	A	L	A	N	D	B	Z	J	O	N
W	L	H	S	Z	E	L	N	M	Y	D	K	V	J	L	A	E	I	R	X	D	N	I
D	S	O	B	E	N	N	M	X	W	X	U	B	M	S	T	C	P	P	G	Y	B	W
G	G	T	E	I	B	J	N	Y	R	H	Z	V	Y	G	V	B	R	Q	K	I	F	O
C	E	O	P	J	V	A	M	I	D	S	O	F	T	B	A	L	L	O	H	G	Z	R
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X	G	Q	G	O	L	F	Q	D	V	Z	K	U	P	W	B	Z	R	C	I	H	U	N
W	V	P	W	A	P	Z	M	B	A	S	K	E	T	B	A	L	L	W	S	Y	A	I
X	A	Q	E	W	V	X	Y	X	I	V	Z	V	T	L	T	G	F	S	Y	A	A	T
A	N	E	Z	Y	R	S	S	B	P	I	R	E	C	C	O	S	Y	U	Q	A	Y	R

Word Bank

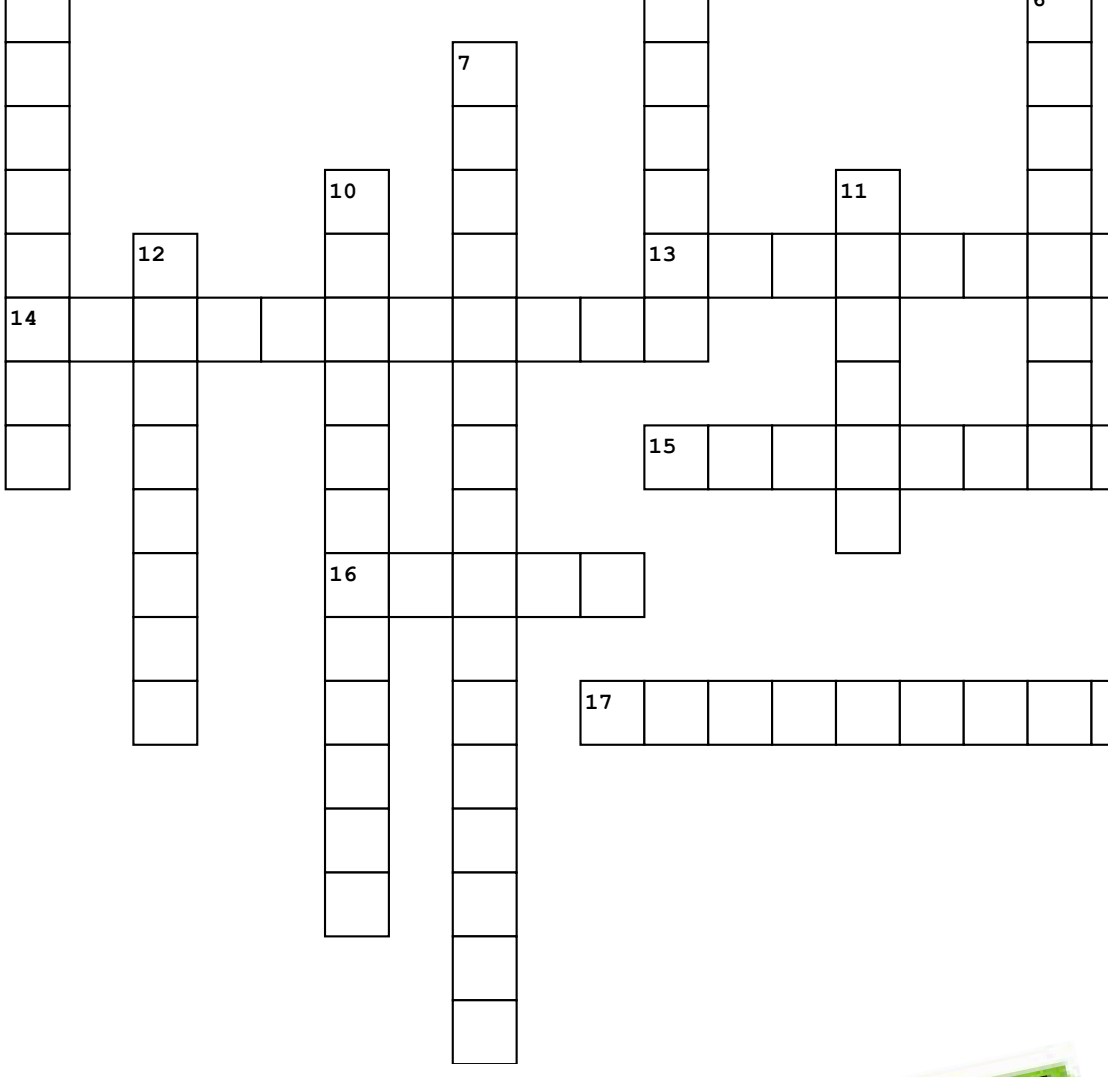
Track and field
Lacrosse
Tennis
Baseball
Softball
Golf

Pickleball
Hockey
Basketball
Rowing
Soccer

Crossword: 100 Years of Broadway

Featuring the plays from Onteora's Spring Musical

By Talula Kirschner, Junior



Down

2. Broadway hit about a pushy mom and a reluctant star

3. Musical about love and rain in a drought- stricken town

4. Cole Porter musical about a feuding ex-couple, on stage and off

6. Musical where the wind comes sweeping down the plain

7. Musical centered around a Jewish family and changing traditions

9. Musical filled with love, comedy, and catchy tunes, on a cruise ship

10. Rodgers and Hammerstein musical set during WWII in the Pacific

11. Musical based on Dickens' story of a young pick-pocket

12. Musical set on a riverboat, featuring a romance amid racial tensions

Across

1. Irving Berlin about a legendary female sharpshooter

5. 1930 Gershwin musical featuring a Wild West romance

8. Musical where gamblers and missionaries find love

13. Stage adaptation of Rick Riordan's mythological adventure

14. Broadway musical where dancers reveal their hopes and struggles.

15. Musical adventure where a flying boy battles pirates and leads a magical journey

16. Boadway musical of the girl who dreams of a better tomorrow

17. Musical where a cursed prince falls in love with a bookish village girl

American Gore

By Val Albright, Junior

No sane person would find humor in another hurting themselves or getting hurt. This is not a controversial statement. But if many– if not all of us– could agree with this, why do we laugh when we see a child fall or a friend trip? Why do so many of us find others getting hurt hilarious? None of us are born like this– there is no genetic pair that makes us so sick and sadistic– so there must be something else: our culture; the unique American environment in which we are raised and thrown into.

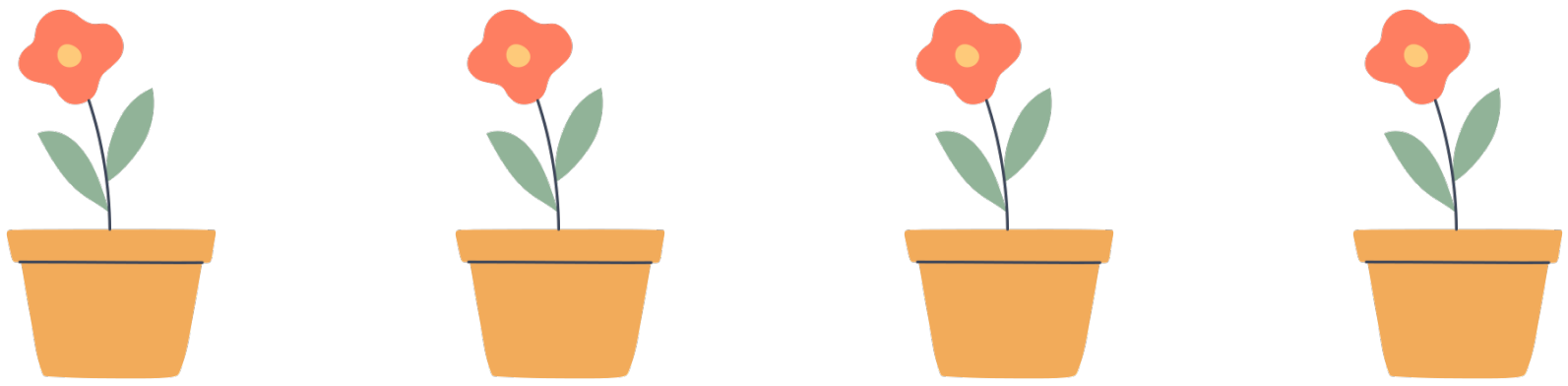
It is obvious that part of the Western tolerance of violence and horror comes from the fact that we are so far removed from it on the daily, a privilege many of us take for granted. Even in the example of a peaceful family death, it is very rare for someone in a Western, specifically American, society to see this happen outside of the sterile, clinical setting. If more of us experienced death or other violent, traumatic events firsthand, the chances of us loving our blood, guts, and horror would be much lower. Though, that only explains the cultural tolerance. Why is it that we, as Americans, just cannot get enough of it? It lies strongly in the fact that our country is built on such violence and gore.

After generations and generations of spurts of it– enough to keep us aware, but still desensitized– we have grown so accustomed and attached to it that it has latched on, and become part of our culture. With a birth from revolution and a war every fifty years or so, (the latest of which have been televised), it is no wonder that we have attached ourselves to these themes in such a way that, instead of fearing them, we grew fond of them. The only way that we, as a nation with such an importance on pop culture, can survive is by throwing our worst fears into entertainment.

Is there anything wrong with this? Have we made ourselves so normalized to violence that we no longer care about our loved ones being harmed? No. Obviously, no. The majority of people can discern between fiction and reality, and if you ask any avid horror fan, they still feel empathy for their family and friends.

Though the argument could be made that horror movies zone their violence on women and BIPOC can alienate the moral compass, the same logic from before can be applied: the average person can discern between fiction and reality.

As with all forms of culture, the American way applies to horror and violence; make it big, make it bold, make it grotesque in nature. This country was built upon spilt blood, and like all things of that nature (see: movies regarding freedom via military), that birth has followed how we as individuals make and eat up our culture.



Playlists

By Val Albright and Shelby Buryk, Juniors