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Highlands' School Musical- Matilda, Jr.!

By: Viviana Gerontzos

March came and went in a flash and musical season in White Plains schools has come to an end, and we started off strong with the high school's Fiddler on the Roof. Eastview on Broadway also had their performance. This article is about Highlands' school musical, Matilda Jr! It was an hour long with one intermission. There were two performances, one on March 15th at 7:00pm and one on March 16th at 3:00pm.

Matilda, Jr. is based off the book Matilda by Roald Dahl. Matilda has also been adapted to a movie and a movie musical as well as a Broadway show. Matilda Jr follows the story of five-year-old Matilda who has toxic parents and she's going to Crunchem Hall (which is a school). She also has telekinetic abilities. Matilda loves to read and she's incredibly smart for her age. She gets to school and realizes it's not as fun as it seems. Her principal is crazy, but her classmates are normal, and she really likes her teacher. Throughout the musical, Matilda tells a story about an acrobat and an escapologist in shifts to her librarian, Ms. Phelps. It's not a normal story, it takes a few interesting turns. Please note that this part is only in the musical (Broadway,

junior broadway, & movie musical), but not the book or the 1996 movie. Matilda makes friends and learns a lot throughout her experiences. In the end, something unexpected happens between Matilda and

the people who are in her everyday life. This musical was full of extremely talented performers & energetic dance numbers all put together by Ms. Irlen and Ms. V, along with many others in our school. Thank you!

A couple of weeks before the show, the cast was interviewed.

1. What has been your favorite part of working on the musical so far?

- Zoe Cruz (Michelle Wormwood): "Definitely the choreography and having fun with my new friends!"
- Nickie Hunt (Ensemble): "I love doing choreography and hanging out at dinner time when practices are until eight."
- Olivia Saja (Ensemble): "I enjoy meeting with fellow theater kids and making new friends and relations."
- Salvatore Bonaiuto (Sergei): "Meeting and hanging out with other theater kids."
- Ellie Conley (Ensemble): "Making friends with theater kids and strengthening previous bonds."
- Vivienne Mittenzwei (Agatha Trunchbull): "Widening my range of roles that I've played and being able to just have fun while acting and singing/dancing."

2. What do you want to tell people who are coming to the show?

- Zoe Cruz: "There's a lot of energy and some chaos but I think it's overall gonna be an amazing show!"
- Nickie Hunt: "It's going to be worth seeing with all the effort and awesome cast we have."
- Olivia Saja: "They should come see the show to support the performers and behind-the-scenes people who made the show happen, as well as showing support for the hard work and effort that went into the show."
- Salvatore Bonaiuto: "How much effort has gone into the show from us, stage crew, Ms. Irlen and Ms. V, parents, etc."
- Vivienne Mittenzwei: "We spent a lot of time working on this and we want it to be the best experience for you that it can be."

3. What is your favorite scene/song to perform?

- Zoe Cruz: "I love to perform and of the Wormwood's House scenes because I get to be a comedic break."
- Nickie Hunt: "My favorite song to perform is Bruce because the acting and being overdramatic is so fun and I love the dance."
- Olivia Saja: "I like performing School Song because I get to be a menacing mean kid and dance on a box."
- Salvatore Bonaiuto: "Revolting children or school song because they're so high energy and it's fun to run around the stage."
- Ellie Conley: "I really like Miracle because it's a nice and upbeat song."
- Vivienne Mittenzwei: "My favorite song to perform is The Hammer because of the hilarious choreography and attitude that I can omit, and my

favorite scene has to be the scene when I give the class a spelling bee."

- Sophia Miller (Ensemble): "My favorite song is probably Smell of Rebellion because it's just so fun! I love the energy and the acting in it!"

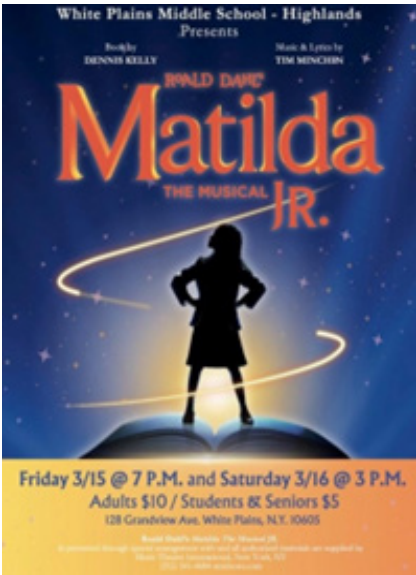
4. What has been the musical's highlight? As a group, what have we done really well?

- Zoe Cruz: "I think the musical's highlight has been our school song scene, and you'll see why when you come to the show!"
- Nickie Hunt: "I think we learn all the songs really quickly and well and the dances always come out really good."
- Olivia Saja: "I think that we've done a lot of work on Miracle, it being the first song we learned and choreographed, and the mix of families and dances are fun to participate in."
- Salvatore Bonaiuto: "When we're on point and everyone gets really excited when we do a song well."
- Ellie Conley: "We've really committed to it and are growing a community with each other, while also working hard on the musical itself."
- Vivienne Mittenzwei: "I think we have brought different energies through our roles really well."

5. What's something the school should know about the show?

- Zoe Cruz: "You should know that we put a lot of hard work into it, and we hope it shows!"
- Nickie Hunt: "They should know the show is not just for fun, it is very serious for us to make it the best as possible with all the late nights we stay at school and the effort that is put into it."

- Olivia Saja: “We showed up and put in the work into creating this awesome show you will see!”
- Ellie Conley: “Everything you see has been choreographed by an actual Broadway choreographer, and we have put in lots of effort to keep up with the complicated choreography and harmonizing to our highest potential.”
- Vivienne Mittenzwei: “Honestly just that we worked really hard on it and spent almost every day after school rehearsing and also that it’s a great show and fun to perform.”



6. What’s something you’re scared about for the show?

- Zoe Cruz: “I’m definitely scared I’m gonna forget the choreo, but I have faith that my friends can help me when I’m in distress.”
- Nickie Hunt: “I’m scared that they are going to mess up the lyrics for When I Grow Up and I’m scared about messing up BOWS.”
- Olivia Saja: “I’m scared of forgetting the lyrics in When I Grow Up as a group because it was a little chaotic last time.”
- Ellie Conley: “When I Grow Up & Bows are going to be very difficult because of the mixed-up lyrics.”

7. Anything else?

- Zoe Cruz: “Hopefully you can come and experience the life of Matilda Wormwood in our production of MATILDA JUNIOR!!!”
- Nickie Hunt: “If you come to the show, I hope you enjoy it!”
- Olivia Saja: “Come to the show and see amazing actors and performers put on a show that will be

fun for all!
- Ellie Conley: “Coming to the show, you should be extremely respectful to the staff, actors, and stage crew that have helped this come together. Disrespect will not be tolerated and you will not get away with it. If you want to see it, come see it, but don’t do it to spite anyone and don’t do it to make fun of these kids who have worked so hard on this. Enjoy the show!”
- Vivienne Mittenzwei: “I’m so excited for everyone to see what we have been doing all of these months and be able to experience all of the fun numbers and scenes that we can share with you.”

We had a great turn out for Matilda, Jr.! Thank you to everyone for your support throughout that hardworking period!

**Winter Sports Recap
By: Kellen Doherty**

This was a great winter season for all winter sports at Highlands! The winter flew by, but the sports teams had a rigorous winter full of training, studying, and playing. This season, Highlands had four sports (basketball, wrestling, boys Swimming, and ice hockey), and seven teams played with White Plains uniforms. So, come with me as I’ll tell you a little bit about each team in The Courier’s Winter Sports Recap.

Ice Hockey

Modified Ice Hockey finished 1-8 over their nine games. When asked about the season, Hockey Coach Hauser said “Although our record doesn’t reflect it, we had a great season. A few of our players were trying ice hockey for the first time! We worked hard, learned the game and had some fun! Our shining moment this season was when we beat cross-town rival Rye Town Harrison at Ebersole rink.” Ian Molloy led the team in goals, Molly Muzzio and Chris Hansen were the star defenders of the team. This was an all-around great season for the Hockey team, and they had a great experience and time on the team!

Wrestling

Wresting participated in 10 different

matches this season! Wrestling Coach Taino said this was the “hardest working group in his 10 years of coaching in White Plains,” and that it was a “very memorable season.” Wrestling had a dominant performance against Horace Mann and wrestled very well against rival school Mamaroneck. The team had four captains, Luke Bellantoni, Logan Rosado, Niek Erkkila and Josh Jamio.

Men’s Basketball

This year, there were two men’s basketball teams. The Orange team finished 4-8. For the Orange Team, Coach Razzak says, “the boys fought hard every single day, played against tough competition and continued to improve every single game!” The Orange Team played against New Rochelle, Mamaroneck, Harrison, Ossining, Eastchester and Port Chester. Two of the leaders of the orange team were Silas Biffert and Aidan Toledo.

The Black Team had a 4-10 record. Basketball Coach Salley said, “Although we did not perform the way we wanted to, we improved overall. The majority of our players were first timers and want to continue. That's a win no matter what our record was!” The highlight of the season? “Seeing players compete or score and reach a milestone and seeing the confidence rise.” Both teams battled it out all year and learned a lot of lessons throughout the season.

Women’s Basketball-

This winter season, fifty girls tried out for the women’s basketball team, double the usual amount. To make sure that more girls got a chance to play, Principal Mr. Eaton and Athletic Director Mr. Cameron were able to add a second basketball team, which held 15 extra girls. The A team finished 5-5, and the B team finished 4-3. Coach Sherman’s words on the season were: “The season was a great success due to the adding of the team, but also how hard the girls worked, improved their skills and had fun playing basketball. The additional coaches were Coach Owen and Coach Tomici from the HS, and they are amazing to work with. Our girls really benefitted from their expertise.” An A Team highlight was beating Albert Leonard and giving them their first loss in over 2 seasons. The A Team also finished with 3 wins in a row.

Congrats to anybody who participated in a sport this winter! You guys had an amazing learning experience, and watching games was great! Congrats on another amazing winter sports season!

**Highlands 2024 Talent Show
By: Viviana Gerontzos**

Right before spring break, Highlands hosted a talent show for students and staff. Highlands got lucky this year with many acts ranging from dances, songs, musical acts, teacher roasts, and competitive games. This year we also had the theme of Barbie. While it was brief, there were still pink feather boas, Barbie jokes, and the song “I’m Just Ken” as a finale.

Coming from someone in the talent show, we put in a lot of effort with not much time. We were able to complete it very successfully, but it wasn’t super easy, especially considering we lost a day because of the snow day. Not including the interest meeting, we had three meetings in January, six meetings in February, and seven meetings in March, which made only 16 meetings. We then had our show March 22nd, 2024! We hope you enjoyed our show!

We wanted to give a special shout out to Ms. Melendez and Mrs. Davila for their support in directing and producing this talent show. Without them, it wouldn’t have been possible! Thank you to all of the brave performers, as well!

**WOMENS HISTORY MONTH AT
HIGHLANDS**

HER MIND...

In the middle of March, at Highlands Middle School, we were able to see multiple women conveyed through the ‘dress-up’ of our beloved staff. The attempts to stand for all the vital women in the past was surely not in vain. Our representatives included Dr. DeLanoy, Mrs. Merrill and countless others. Through many curiosities portrayed as students, we have also learned. We can easily observe how the details of Vera Wang in her bridal gowns have precariously forged trends in fashion. We can even see how atavistic certain pieces of fashion are, to her beautiful designs. We can also feel aspired by Malala’s bravery in her rebellion to allow women to be educated. To beseech each woman as the sum of their actions, rather than their sex. To be seen as more than a product of a short marriage for a simple whim of ‘heirs’ or responsibility. We can indeed, feel the aboriginality of these women’s minds. The

exploration of her mind, in the philosophy to learn what makes a woman so ravishing. Not solely acceptable.

RALLIED CONTESTANTS

We saw a plethora of students in the hall, each a contestant and constant for all things sports, or perhaps learning. A few of which were unaccounted for when the winners were uprooted and compensated. We can easily see those people, and how they felt with their efforts being discredited. We can also see how their eagerness to learn forged a new spectacle in losing. Fairness and equality, to be a good angler and feel their efforts as part of who they are.

A ‘FINNE,’ OR PERHAPS A PAUSE

Even through the end of April, the lingering spirit of national Women’s-Month, still is heavily sedated upon many students and people alike. We can observe the books and biographies of vital historical women like, Malala Mulan and Teresa of Avila. Each woman has forged and melded our history into a better or perhaps more glorious places than recent past. And in the time of those lingering spirits, some curiosities are lead anew. Refreshed to learn more.

Women’s History Month Highlight: Coach Simmons!
By: Viviana Gerontzos

Coach Simmons is an amazing teacher in our own school. Outside of school, she’s done some pretty amazing things too! She advocates a lot for human rights, has ran from Albany, NY to Beacon, NY, has biked from Niagara Falls, NY to Beacon, NY, and biked and ran from Death Valley, CA to Beacon, NY!

In school, Coach Simmons is an 8th grade math teacher on Team 8A, who also teaches algebra to 8th grade students. Her classroom is a very positive and inviting community to be in. While her classroom itself has very bright colors, she brings lots of energy into learning math, even if it is incredibly difficult a lot of the time.

In the beginning of the year, while all teachers did this in some way, Coach Simmons took us to the library to write down what we need from class. what we’ll bring to class, and to build a community among

the class. Her other main purpose was to establish relationships and learn about her students. For what we wrote down, it wasn’t about something we can physically bring to class, it was about what we as people alone can bring. An example could be, “I need humor in class. I bring energy to class.”

Still to this day, we have a really good community in our class and the “Ubuntu” community we established at the beginning of the year is still in effect. She also has her own personal motto that’s in her class, but also on the end of every one of her assignment reminders, “Smile, Shine, SOAR!”

All over her classroom, it is very colorful, but it also has inspirational quotes. Unfortunately, she recently got injured, but she is still spreading positivity and teaching to the best of her ability.

On March 7th, 2024, Coach Simmons was interviewed. Here’s what she said.

Q- What would you say is your biggest achievement?

A- “My biggest achievement is embracing the journey of growth and self-improvement. It's not about reaching a specific milestone or earning accolades, but rather about continuously evolving into the best version of myself.”

Q- What keeps you motivated every day?

A- “My faith and my children are my master teachers and my driving forces. Despite knowing they may not always follow my words, I'm aware they're observing my actions. Hence, I endeavor to lead by example, fostering an environment of love and empathy. In a world overshadowed by fear, spreading love becomes my daily mission.”

Q- Who has inspired you?

A- “I find inspiration in humanity itself. We are all interconnected, each teaching and learning from one another. My faith also serves as a wellspring of inspiration, guiding me to recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every individual.”

Q- What is your favorite thing about yourself?

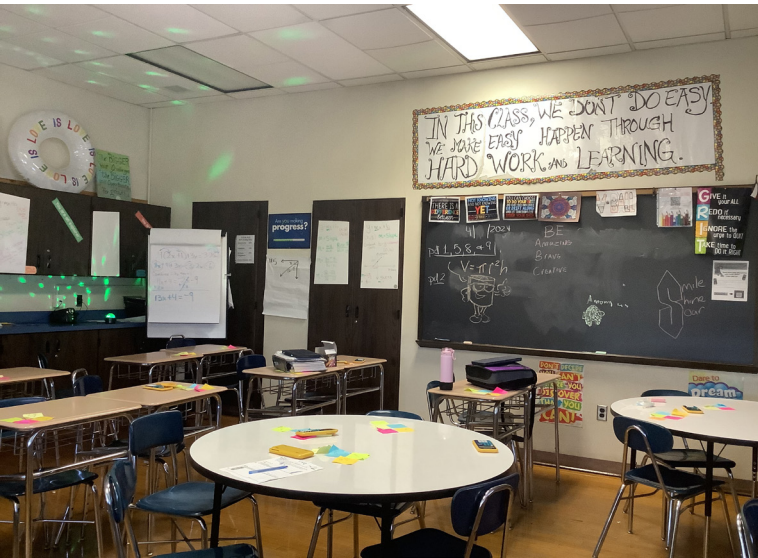
A- “What I cherish most is simply being me. Every facet of who I am serves a purpose, and I've learned to embrace and love every part of myself unconditionally.”

Q- What is your favorite quote?

A- ““Go where you are celebrated, not where you are tolerated.’ These words resonate deeply with me, reminding me of the importance of surrounding oneself with people and environments that uplift and appreciate one's true essence.”

Q- What advice would you give to any teen who asked you for advice?

A- “To any teen seeking advice, I would encourage them to stay present, breathe, and explore their passions. Encourage them to find your passion and pursue it relentlessly. Whether it's running, cycling, or any other activity/ goal/ dream/ desire/calling that sets your soul on fire, embrace it wholeheartedly and never let anyone dim your shine. Remember, the journey is just as important as the destination, so enjoy every moment, learn from every setback, and never lose sight of your hopes & dreams. Keep moving forward, one step or pedal stroke at a time, inch by inch and you'll achieve greatness beyond your wildest imagination. Discovering oneself involves recognizing likes and dislikes, giving more than taking, and standing up not just for oneself but for others too. Treat yourself as you would your best friend, with kindness and compassion. Smile, shine, and SOAR. Embrace your uniqueness with excitement, bravery and curiosity. Be unapologetically and authentically you.”



Rising Star: Renee Rapp
By: Viviana Gerontzos



Reneè Rapp is an American singer, songwriter, and actress. She’s from Huntersville, North Carolina. Her fame started when she was in Mean Girls, the Broadway musical, from 2019-2020. The show closed early March 2020 due to the pandemic. She is also in an HBO show. Her most recent performances were in the Mean Girls Musical Movie (2024) and an SNL performance as a musical guest on January 20th, 2024.

Reneè Rapp came out with her first single, Tattoos, in June of 2022. She released her first EP, Everything to Everyone, in November of 2022. She released her first album, Snow Angel, in August of 2023 and then the deluxe version in November of 2023.

She’s been nominated for a few awards previously. Her most recent nomination is for the 2024 iHeart Radio Music Awards in the category of Debut Album for her most recent album Snow Angel.

She has been on tour twice (2022, 2023-2024). She recently finished her Snow Hard Feelings Tour on March 7th. She will also be performing at Coachella (CA), Hangout Fest (AL), Boston Calling (MA), The Governor’s Ball (NY), Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival (TN), Osheaga Festival (Quebec), Leeds Festival (UK), and Reading Festival (UK) this year. You also might recognize her from New Years Rockin’ Eve, which was streamed from California, where she performed her song Talk Too Much as a solo and Tummy Hurts with Coco Jones.

The Stanley Takeover

By: Teresa Damato



It is no secret that the Stanley Tumbler is taking the world by storm. In fact, the company recorded a 275% increase in sales from last year, increasing their annual sales from \$75 million in 2019 to \$750 million in 2023, selling over 10 million cups. What caused the cup to skyrocket in sales so suddenly? Is the Stanley really worth the expense?

William Stanley, founder of the now one-hundred and one year-old company, came up with the idea of a double wall vacuum water bottle as a way to keep his coffee hot all day at work in 1913. From this bottle, a company was born, selling their signature steel bottles and thermoses, targeted at outdoorsy sorts of people, mainly men. The thermoses were even used by many pilots in World War II. However, the company pivoted in 2016, when they introduced the all-famous Quencher targeted directly at women and teens.

The cup didn't become the must-have immediately though, and for a while it wasn't even the company's main focus. Three women, the founders of a blog called The Buy Guide, fell in love with it from early on. When the Quencher, not having racked up nearly as many sales as expected, threatened to be discontinued in 2019, Ashlee LeSueur, co-founder of the online blog, was contacted by Stanley after her blog was brought up by an employee to the new president of the company, with a proposal that had the potential to save the cup: make a wholesale order of no less than 5,000 Stanley Quenchers to sell to her Buy Guide audience. "I felt like I was signing a mortgage. It was a big risk for it. It took every penny that we had," LeSueur told CNBC after agreeing to the plan.

Unsure how fast they were going to sell out, if at all, this purchase meant the life or death of the Quencher – and possibly the blog as well. The cups, however, sold out within days, and from there, popularity only increased, and the company transformed into the booming business it is today.

Now, the most popular cup sold by Stanley is the 40 oz Quencher, though 4 other sizes are also available ranging from 14 oz to 64 oz, sold in numerous colors, ranging between \$35 and \$50. Limited edition colors, patterns, and finishes are also available, but in high demand. On the day the "winter pink" tumbler was released at Target, hundreds of people were camped out in the parking lots, waiting in hour-long lines, and hopping over counters in hopes to snag one of the cups amidst a throng of other shoppers. Other limited edition colors have been known to sell out in minutes. Many cups have also been resold on eBay for hundreds of dollars. Videos of kids across the country shedding happy tears over receiving one of the cups have flooded the internet and many social media platforms, and the Stanley hashtag has received over 900 million views on TikTok.

There are countless features of the Quencher that Stanley takes pride in. The cup, made of 90% recycled double-walled stainless steel and vacuum insulated, can keep a drink hot for up to 7 hours and cold for up to 11. This was proven, in quite a spectacular fashion, in a video on social media that showed a Stanley surviving a car fire with the ice inside of it still unmelted. The small bottom lets it fit in most car cup holders, and the large handle makes it easy and convenient to transport. Dishwasher safe, the Stanley is said to last a lifetime. A rotating top allows for three different settings: one for the reusable plastic straw, held in place by a seal to prevent any leaking; one with an opening to drink directly from the cup; and the third to close it completely. Countless varieties of straw toppers are sold to clip onto the top of the straw when you're not drinking, and you can even buy Stanley holders with phone pockets to slip your cup into for easy transport.

Perhaps the most appealing thing about Stanleys is that they are reusable. Meant to replace single-use plastic bottles, Stanleys are a fairly sustainable thing, right? Well, that may be true for most people, who only have one or two Stanleys.

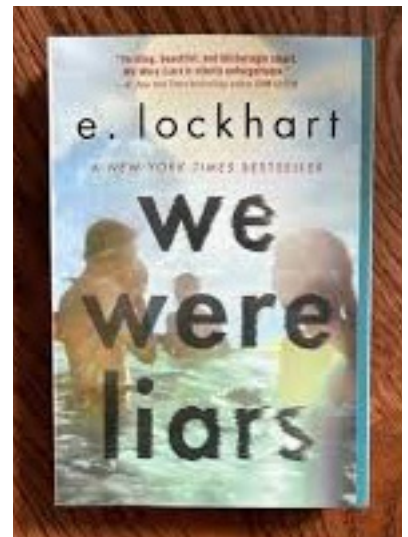
But many have collections of dozens of the tumblers, simply for show. Chelsea Espejo, a Stanley collector, even stated to CNBC, "they're actually part of my personality. If I don't have [my Stanley], if I don't choose the right color, my day kind of doesn't go how I planned it." The truth is, recycled stainless steel is in extremely high demand, and making it from natural materials is not only very expensive, but also an energy-intensive process that burns fossil fuels and releases harmful gasses into the atmosphere. While Stanley tumblers are made from 90% recycled steel, only 23% of Stanley products are made with recycled steel. Collecting Stanleys is by no means environmentally friendly: in fact, producing just one cup can have significant environmental impacts, and when the Stanley craze has subsided, where will the collections end up? Most likely in landfills.



Now for the question that has been bugging Stanley owners for quite some time: do Stanleys contain lead? The simple answer is yes. The material used as sealant on the cup does contain a small amount of lead. To test this, New York University professor Jack Caravanos tested three different models of the Stanley cup. He found no lead anywhere on the outside of the cup, but suspects the bottom cap is sealed to the cup using lead. Ordinary people have taken home lead tests and come back with positive results, but experts say these tests are not always reliable. So, while the cup is technically safe to drink from, many are unhappy with the decision to use lead in the cup and are uncertain about whether or not they want to risk ingesting it. Lead poisoning can have serious side effects from even the smallest amounts ingested, including headaches, cramps, and in more serious cases, problems with the brain and kidneys, as well as developmental problems and learning disabilities in children. Dr. Caravanos told the New York Times, "I am really disheartened and sort of angry that a company like this uses a known toxic ingredient that is banned in many applications for a cup. I mean, surely there could have been an alternative." Many have also pointed out that other companies do not use any lead in their water bottles, which have the same function as the Stanley.

All around, Stanleys have multiple benefits

that justify, in many's eyes, the cost and occasional havoc to acquire one of the cups. The company, now a dominant water bottle company, continues to release new colors, finishes and models that are expected to sell out just as quickly as the Quencher tumbler. However, many are scornful of the cup, saying that other water bottles work better, are more convenient, and are more comfortable drinking from something with non-toxic materials. Currently, it appears that interest in the Stanley is unwavering, but a new bottle is on the horizon, waiting for its turn: the Owala. These new water bottles are appearing on college campuses more and more, and seem to have a bright future, set to follow in the footsteps of the Stanley Quencher.



Book Review: We Were Liars

By: Eleanor Ingram

If you haven't read We Were Liars by E. Lockhart yet, then you really should. It is one of the best books written because of the complete unpredictability. This book is about a family who goes to the same summer house every year on their private island. They are the Sinclares, and deal with the suffering and trauma in their family by erasing it from their past. This book has many plot twists that make you doubt the foundations of this, and your very own family. Additionally, Lockhart has written a prequel for this book which is even better than the 1st in many ways. It's about the generation before Cadence's, and all the trouble and issues they had. Once you get into, We Were Liars you just can't put it down or you might miss something important. Finally, this book has a shocking ending that leaves you wondering what was real, fake, imagined, and untrue.

Editoroial: WHY WE NEED A FUNDAMENTAL CONTINUATION OF ADVANCED ELA

I. AN EXERCISE:

This thought has been thought by others for years. It is a proposal with no originality, and it originates with the minds of the multitude of students, housed at Highlands, and continuously all around the world. The kindest aspiration is to improve the world. All of us, students and faculty, have a sort of likeness in having a dream. We each aspire an outcome, some intertwined collaborations of thoughts are what create those aspirations, and a dash of perspective.

Our perspective forms our perception, whether it's good or not; even if the world is in shades of gray, rather than just black and white. But the likeness of symbolism behind this philosophy, is the equation to what occurs in a person's brain to make them love something. For something to occur and them to say, "this is going to be a great day!" Later, with great disappointment, their happiness impairs another gaze into their lucid perception. There is no equation, whatever happens in our brains is due to a chemical imbalance that spired through our environment, and therefore, was perceived by our physicals. The idea of this, is to properly show you how a love is constructed. For the exercise to work, you must lucidly submerge yourself in the contents of each word in this sentence. Doth, thou understand?

How did you feel while reading this article? Did some of the sentences utterly perplex you? How did you perceive my hyperboles? Each question is its own statement. If you couldn't understand this piece well enough, you have felt the same confusion I have felt during my English classes. And those feelings of confusion, and perplexing churning in my mind, all came from the singular thoughts as to why countless categories are made for mathematical aspects, yet callously ignored for English.

II. A POINT

English is the fundamental of our understanding and can form new ideas to be expressed. The philosophy to love something is how we personally perceive things. Could allowing a glimpse to an advanced critical literacy class and

writing class, allow students to better understand themselves? Better yet, the rest of humane and verbal complexion? As minuscule as we perceive English literature to be, it is the foundation of our language. Religiously, some few hundreds aspire for great works and pieces to read and create.

On the contrary, there are a formal majority at Highlands who would joyously much rather open a social platform and converse on hours to strangers on varied ends. The point of this "rant" is to give awareness to those who don't have it. Awareness to the idea for an advanced separation for those who deserve such things.

III. A PAUSING THOUGHT OF SOLACE:

'You can teach a viper to eat from your hands, but you can't take away how much it loves to bite.' A quote. You can't change everything in something, vile, by nature. That is the message in this. 'Not everything is malleable...' another quote, this one my own. Both have the same message, one more vague than the other. Different levels of perception can dictate your own understanding of each quote, although the citing of the main idea in both quotes, is fundamental. Simply put, perception levels our consciousness to advance in literature or even at all. English literature is what expresses my thoughts, and my actions, my tools should be refreshed and further supplied for my bloody thirst to learn in English literature. In sum, I leave this statement as protest to a continuation of advanced ELA.

War in Ukraine: Update By: Wyatt Gonzalez



As many of you know, there is a war going on in Ukraine, a country in eastern Europe. The war was sparked by Russia, who feels that they have rightful ownership over the country. The war has been going on for a long while, since the 2010s, but it really picked up steam after Russia invaded eastern Ukraine on February 24, 2022, with over 300,000 troops (about half the population of Wyoming) at the head. Immediately, global conflict between the east and the west sprouted up, with Belarus and China taking Russia's side and the USA and NATO supporting Ukraine in their defense. Since then, trillions have been spent on war and aid efforts. We all probably remember talking about it in school and writing cards to soldiers on the war front, but after that first year, the public of the US forgot about the whole thing, with it being demoted to small subsections in the media. In this article, I will tell you about what is happening nowadays between Ukraine and Russia.

Now that the war is entering its third year, it is getting harder and harder to get aid through Congress to Ukraine. The White House was able to push Congress to pass a new aid \$95 (about \$290 per person in the US) package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, but it was a hard-fought win, with House Speaker Mike Johnson having to convince a multitude of Congresspeople to vote for the bill. The final vote count was 78 for the bill and 18 against it. CNN reporter Mark Stilles say's "The US Senate on Tuesday passed a \$95 billion foreign aid package aimed at bolstering support for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, ending months of legislative wrangling among lawmakers overextending help to the American allies."

As you can see, turmoil in the government might affect our allies if not dealt with correctly. On another note, after months of fighting, on Saturday, February 17th, Ukrainian troops retreated from the city-stronghold of Avdiivka in the Donetsk Region. This is a major win for the Russians because now they can use Avdiivka as a point for attacking important hubs of the Ukrainian military such as Pokrovsk, which is to the northwest and is a logistical center for Ukraine.

The fall of Avdiivka comes at a great cost to Russia though, with over 30,000 casualties and close to 400 tanks lost. Yet, the cost didn't matter to Russian President Vladimir Putin who used this victory to promote his successful reelection in mid-March. Also, in a huge show of support for Ukraine, European heads of state met in Paris on Monday, February 29th, to unite against Russia. The meeting was hosted by French President Emanuel Macron, who feels that showing support for Ukraine will help them in the coming months with their fight against Russia. An anonymous source inside the French government said that the meeting would conclude without any promises of military aid, and they were correct, with no European country offering assistance.

Overall, Ukraine has taken some pretty bad losses recently, but can turn it around soon with the right support from the US and Europe. Thanks for reading and have a wonderful day!



Tech Focus: OpenAI Video Generation

By: Wyatt Gonzalez



Recently, OpenAI has been releasing a slew of new features to show the public about what AI can really do to help you amid fears about misuse on the internet. One of these new features, not surprisingly, was a video generation model.

Now, AI video generation has been around for a while starting with RunwayAI, a small startup created in 2018 by Cristóbal Valenzuela, Anastasis Germanidis and Alejandro Matamala. Runways’ AI made videos instantly, based off of user input. OpenAI’s model does sort of the same thing, with the user specifying the type of camera, the location and setting, and the position and movement of the camera. OpenAI has named this new model ‘Sora,’ for the Japanese word for sky.

AI has been a controversial topic ever since Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI and his team released ChatGPT. While there are many good uses for GPT models, people online have been using them to generate false and offensive content, which can harm people online. NBC news reporter Angela Yang said, “AI enthusiasts were quick to brainstorm ideas around the potential of this latest technology, even as others raised immediate concern over how its accessibility might erode human jobs and further the spread of digital disinformation.” Photos are one thing, because they can only display one thing.

Videos, however, can be used to deepfake important people and show people saying things they didn’t say. Giving this type of power to the public could produce great results, such as educational videos or portraying a time when there was no video, but there are always some people who chose wrong and decide to use it to harm others. Any person with a grudge could easily make a video showing an election candidate saying controversial things that could affect how voters think of them.

Luckily, Sam Altman told the press that OpenAI wouldn’t include Sora in any of their products for a while, so it might be some time before we see use of this product, good or bad, in public.

PHILOSOPHICAL PONDERINGS...

I. TIME IS CONCEPTUAL

A sight of an electric blue shot the eyes of a man. In his absence, his mind was putrid, as his neighbors had said. The sparring noise in his home wheeled across the night. The man undisputed, and undisturbed. In unison, he would stroke his canvas with each pattering sound. His eyes bawling his canvas to pry a new idea out of him yet.

A neighbor heard the strokes of his paint, the wetting mixture enriching the white bland canvas. Has a love ever felt such remorse? In the midst of the silence, the neighbor elongated his shadow, beseeching a standing figure, postured in dignified grace. He paced the hall across the man. A slight openness crawled to his sight. A cunning, now sharpened look was all but a glimpse seen in the neighbor. And for a second, his smile was in his eyes. The door made a sound, the slight killing of silence a merciless defeat. The patter roused the man. His grays, in a full beauty as the shine of their luster was fully submerged in the sun. The gleaming sun now bequeathed its warmth upon the man, at his easel in calmness.

The man stared, in plain silence. His breaths coated the room in an eerie sweetness. His eyes almost asked, ‘What do you want to know?’ In a rather honeyed tone, for his brown eyes were all but an onyx crystal bathed in honey, in the sun. The neighbor, clothed in mystery silently gazed at the easel. The eyes of a lady and a single grape vine were portrayed in the canvas. Immortalized in colors of vibrant blues, cool toned shartruces, and royal purples. The man vaguely gazed across the canvas to the man, a questioning look of concern came over him. For the land in which they were in, was forth going through a drought. A loss at words and a paused breath beseeched the neighbor now in a serious gaze. But the man, slowly breathed. His eyes directed the surprise of the flatness to such an idea.

The pattering paused in an unlikely manner. A surprise to both perhaps. A small bird flew across the room and stroked the man’s plant. In a corner of the man abode. The birds humming came above the air, and a stirring stench of holiness lingered in the air. Both the neighbors and the man’s breaths were both caressed by the air and swallowed. The man, rose with a cane, flatly gazing at his neighbor. In

delight he smiled. A chuckle arose the waking silence, in unison. Both men laughed.

“My boy- you have yet died and arose. I have been here ever since the days of Moses! How must you not understand yet the simplest forms of expression in art? Joy!” He chided. In a kind remark. The newborn neighbor, esoteric in thought, emerged to say, “Why do you often laugh? Your family has long died, and the drought we are in has limited the brisk air. You are mad, or depressed? Have you foreseen this outcome, is that the reason you have to laugh at us, fools? Amusement, are we? “

“Dearest, no. My family is me. My family is my canvas, there is love around me still yet. And even if my family dies, or I die, my love is here!” The neighbor blankly stared in confusion. “I mean to say, time is a concept for fools, everything is of perception and thought. My thoughts are me. This body is all but like a tide, pulling and pushing until it goes. My thoughts stay here, I stay here as nothing but a scramble of words and emotion. For time is conceptual.”

CHIPPING AWAY

Roman Numerals are all the rage in the topic of book prologues, but should the curation of a book be numbered at all? Should the budding flower impatiently wish to curate their adulthood early? Should we as children, sacrifice our livelihoods for the sake of a new ‘freedom?’ The exact same impatience we ourselves exude, is the same one we consider adversariesesque.

A pondering thought to consider is the flatness of our lies, our beliefs and reasoning. To state we adore instrumentation when we also take solitude in peace of silence. Hypocritical acts are what we ourselves are composed of, so what causes this? What causes our unprescribed impatience is the penance of entertaining doubt.

Imagine in the safety of comfort, perhaps laying atop your bed, how the blood flowing in your arteries and veins moves. Ever so gently and unpressurized, almost vivid in fact. You can imagine the redness of your blood can you not?

Imagine the blood flowing in different colors, a chartreuse perhaps, or some deep velvety blue. The same way the blood flows in your veins, so does the nutrients, only within the blood do they intersect ever so partly. Iron, rages inside your blood.

It is simply believed by science and physiology that such wonders occur in the typical living human body. Now imagine your blood simply flowing into your brain and every part of your body. Feel the raging warmth from each cell in your blood, their presence just cell keeping you from death.

Now what would happen if the amygdala was triggered in a state of lucidity? To those who don’t know, you must assume that some pathing must happen for me to write it in this exercise. But that is to show you how ignorance is bliss. You are allowed for the bliss moment of unknowing to imagine any outcome. Although you feel a colossal fear in you, you yet, wish to know. You are impatient still even for the things you want to be kept a distance from you. This itself is a discovery. How can you hate and want something at the same time?

If this is just a mixture of words to you, then no understanding is meant to trigger you, nor appeal to you at all. But if you can understand, what is this feeling? This discovery? There is no word.

A small note to acknowledge, is how perception molds our vision, desires and thoughts. I perceive this as an acknowledgment to my own self. Or I perceive this as an acknowledgment to philosophies essentials. Can you now see what the definition of this is? How perception, impatience, fear, love and hatred are all intertwined? Despite their bland differences. You may now finish this sentence with a clarity of mind, knowing how differences can all be similarities intertwined by perception. Our perception.