



Falcon Flyer

Summer 2026

Published by the students of Stetson Middle School



Hoops for Heart



The basketball competition that saves lives!

By Griffin Sweatman



Here at Stetson Middle School, an annual event by the name of

"Hoops for Heart"

is led by the Health and P.E. teachers. Each year, students register a team prior to the competition with four coed players and an original team name, along with optional coaches and mascots, to help raise money for the American Heart Association!

However, for those lacking a full understanding of the tournament -whether

you're unsure of the full legacy of the contest, how the tournament started, or how much money has been raised in total- this article is for you!

The Beginning of H4H

Hoops for Heart began at Stetson Middle School during the 2006-07 school year as a fundraiser supporting the American Heart Association. It was founded by former principal *Dr. Charles Cognato*, who was inspired by the Jump Rope for Heart fundraisers. The event combines friendly competition with community service, allowing students to play basketball while helping raise money for an important cause: helping to fight cardiovascular disease and stroke.

The tournament is a co-ed 4 vs. 4 basketball competition for students in grades 6 through 8. Teams consist of two boys and two girls, and may also include coaches, mascots, managers, or cheerleaders up to six total players. Throughout the years, Hoops for Heart has become much more than just a basketball tournament by encouraging teamwork and sportsmanship among students while helping fund many necessities like education for the American Heart Association!

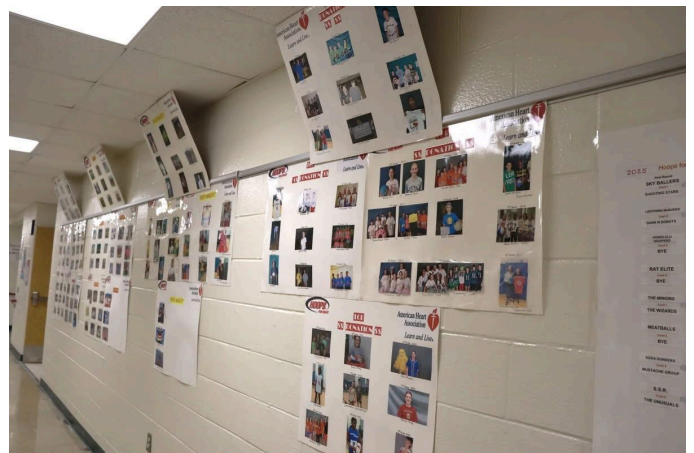
According to tournament information provided by the Physical Education Department, the goal of Hoops for Heart is to “promote good heart health while teaching students the importance of volunteering and giving back to their community. All proceeds raised are donated to the American Heart Association and help support heart disease and stroke research, educational programs, and health initiatives.”

The History of Annual Money Raised

Starting in 2007, the event grew rapidly in the following years with regard to money raised for the competition. In the 2006-07 school year, the school raised \$1,700.00. This number jumped to \$3,817.00 in the following year, and surpassed \$4,567.00 by 2011.

Here is the full list of each year's total raised amounts!

- 2006-07: \$1,700.00 raised
- 2007-08: \$3,817.00 raised
- 2008-09: \$4,526.00 raised
- 2009-10: \$4,133.00 raised
- 2010-11: \$4,567.00 raised
- 2011-12: \$6,283.25 raised
- 2012-13: \$5,158.00 raised



- 2013-14: \$5,491.00 raised
- 2014-15: \$5,748.00 raised
- 2015-16: \$6,300.00 raised
- 2016-17: \$6,000.00 raised
- 2017-18: \$6,538.00 raised
- 2018-19: \$6,781.00 raised
- 2019-20: N/A - Covid
- 2020-21: N/A - Covid
- 2021-22: \$6,336.77 raised
- 2022-23: \$5,916.78 raised
- 2023-24: \$5,940.21 raised
- 2024-25: \$5,066.18 raised
- 2025-26: \$5,434.68 raised



💖 **Total Raised: \$95,734.68+ !!!!**

Hoops For Heart: This Year

The 2025-26 Hoops for Heart tournament was another successful year for Stetson Middle School. Students participated in the annual basketball tournament while raising money for the American Heart Association once again. The event featured exciting games, creative team costumes, enthusiastic mascots, and strong school spirit throughout all three grade levels.





This year, Stetson raised \$5,434.68 for the American Heart Association. Students also competed for awards such as tournament champions, Best Dressed Team, Best Mascot, and Top Donor.

In sixth grade, the **Hoop Dawgs** captured first place. In seventh grade, **Men in Black** won the championship. In eighth grade, **Net Ninjas** earned the title of tournament champions. Other notable award winners included **Scooby-Dunk**, which won Best Dressed Team in eighth grade.

Here is the FULL LIST of awards this school year:

6TH GRADE:

Tournament Champions: Hoop Dawgs

Best Dressed Team: Swish Cheese

Best Mascots: Jane Thomas (Preppy Hippos) and Henry Scozzafava (Disco Ballers)

Top Donor: Delaney Walker

7TH GRADE:

Tournament Champions: Men in Black

Best Dressed Team: Low Cortisol Crew

Best Mascots: Sean Galloway and Brady Loro (Marlon Moggers)

Top Donors: James Burke and Cecilia Pak

8TH GRADE:

Tournament Champions: Net Ninjas

Best Dressed Team: Scooby-Dunk (my team!)

Best Mascot: Ryan McCallum (The Patriots)

Top Donor: Michael Valbrum

FINAL MESSAGE:

Whether you are competing in games, dressing up with teammates, serving as mascots, or raising donations, we can make the Hoops for Heart tournament another memorable event at Stetson Middle School by raising money for the American Heart Association and enjoying a day of fun on the basketball court!



Music in the Parks

Santosh Kandasamy, Harrison Ko, and Griffin Sweatman

The Hershey *Music in the Parks* competition is the annual competition for Orchestra, Chorus, and Band. It took place on May 17, 2026 at Cedar Cliff High School. This competition allows



music ensembles to showcase their talent, and get graded by professional judges. After the competition, competitors get to relax and have fun at Hershey Park! Students get to spend the remainder of the day riding roller

coasters and eating candy. But what is the full experience of the trip? Join us on this virtual tour of a Music in the Parks experience!

Harrison POV:

I had a good time at the park. When I arrived at the park, I was feeling excited to ride some of the rides. I was already feeling the adrenaline due to our success in the competition and took that excitement into the park.

Santosh POV:

The day started early before school, with a long drive to Cedar Cliff High School in the coach buses. The competition went well! I played a solo with my stand partner! The Stetson Orchestra received the highest score out of any orchestra that day, and we finished the rest of the day with lots of roller coasters, candy, and fun.

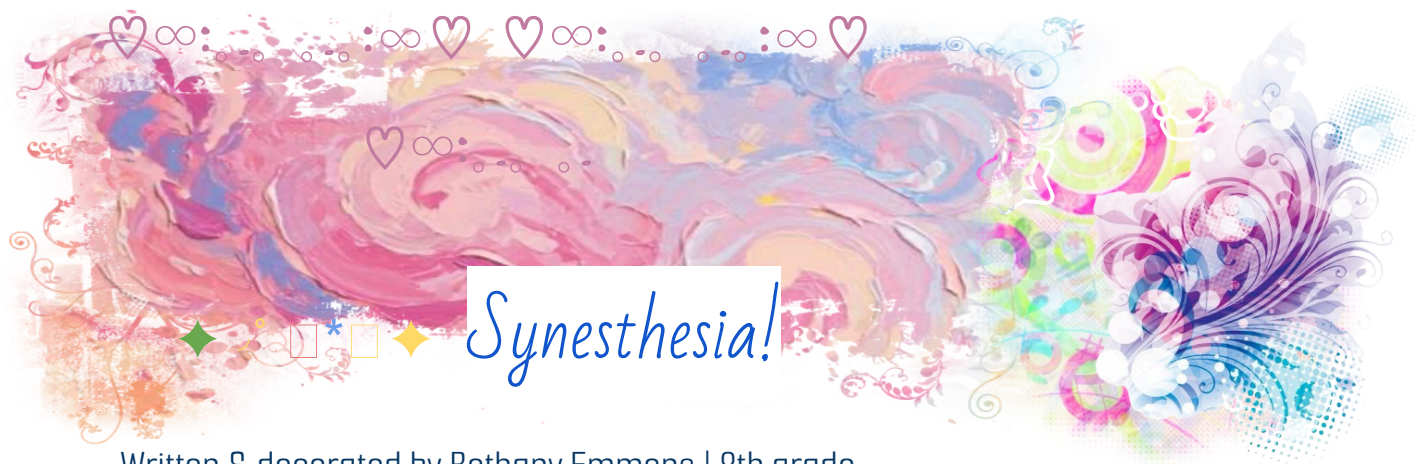
Griffin POV:

Just as Santosh previously stated, the day began before school – around 6:30 in the morning with a two-hour drive to Cedar Cliff HS. However, instead of participating in Music in the Parks like we did last year, the Chorus members participated in the Trills & Thrills competition instead. The group I participated in, Honors Chorale, received a final score of 88/100, while 8th grade got a 76/100. We finished our trip with a nice day at Hersheypark – although high-thrill rated rides scare me, it was nice to have won prizes and spent time with my friends!



We ended up getting 96% (Superior) in orchestra, 82% (Excellent) in band, 88% (Excellent) in chorale, and 76% (Proficient) in 8th grade Chorus. I hope that if you are in classroom music, you can join one of those classes next year or if you are going to high school, you can add it to your schedule!

Have a great summer, keep making music, and consider joining Falcon Flyer next year! Many upperclassmen are moving on to high school, so we will need more writers to join the group!



Written & decorated by Bethany Emmons | 8th grade



One day in 7th grade, when I was in gym class, we were playing basketball. I forgot which game I was part of, and accidentally focused on the game going on beside me. BAM! Suddenly, I got hit on the head by the basketball from the game I was actually in. I later got sent home because the nurse thought I had a concussion. The next day, I woke up seeing colors anytime I heard a sound, sounds such as my own breathing, talking, and the fan in my room. My mom, a medical professional, figured out that I had synesthesia.



Synesthesia is defined as, "a neurological phenomenon where stimulating one sensory pathway (e.g., hearing sound) involuntarily triggers experiences in

another, unrelated pathway (e.g., seeing color)." About 4% of the population –1 in 23 people– has some version of synesthesia. 2% of those people won't know they have it their entire lives, because they think it is normal. That means about 23 students in Stetson Middle School statistically could have some version of synesthesia, and about 11 of them will never know it. There are many different types, and we have only studied 60 of the 150 different types that we know of. The major and more common ones that we know the most about are:

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- ➔ "Sound-to-Color: Hearing music or specific sounds induces the visualization of colors (photisms)".
 - ➔ "Grapheme-Color: Seeing letters or numbers, such as "4" or "g," as consistently having specific, individual colors."
 - ➔ "Lexical-Gustatory: Specific words or sounds trigger distinct tastes or smells."
 - ➔ "Mirror-Touch: A rare form where an individual feels a physical touch on their own body when observing someone else being touched."
 - ➔ "Number Form: Numerical sequences are perceived as shapes, colors, or locations in space."
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I have Sound-to-Color, Grapheme-Color, and Lexical-Gustatory Synesthesia. Imagine: every time you hear a sound, you see colors and shapes in your field of vision: each time you hear a word, you can taste and smell it: every letter, number, and symbol has a taste, smell, and color: Every single person you talk to has a color they have around them, like an aura, or a smell, or taste, and you can see their voice. It gets overwhelming quickly, yet it can be a superpower. Imagine as you read, tasting each word!



There are key symptoms to synesthesia. One is that these associations, visuals, smells, or tastes are immediate and involuntary. A second one is that all your experiences are consistent. Often, synesthesia is inherited, yet it can also come from an injury to one's head. Most times, one person will find out they have synesthesia and realize just about their entire family has it too. A last symptom is that it feels real in your surroundings, not like a fever dream.



I asked close friends questions they had about synesthesia after reading this article and they gave some funny and good questions that I hadn't thought of! Here are some that I feel readers may still be wondering about:

Q: Do you taste every word in conversations, and sentences?

A: No, I either taste the last word or the word that stuck with me most, yet it is most commonly very random which word I taste from a sentence.

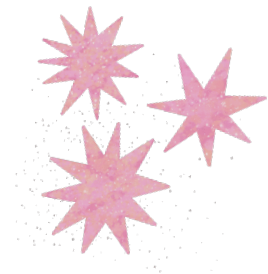
Q: Can your synesthesia be biased toward people you don't like?

A: Yes! It happens a lot! Some people who aren't exactly my friends will taste bad. However, sometimes it is just randomly mean to people. Like, I'm sure that person was really nice, but they smell like mulch, and taste like broccoli.

Q: Does it ever get overwhelming, or distracting?

A: ALL. THE. TIME! The cafeteria can be very overwhelming! When I first got it, I got overwhelmed all the time, yet as the days go on, it just becomes a part of life. I do get distracted often though. If we are reading a book in class aloud, then I struggle to follow along in the book when a whole light show is happening in my world.

Q: What is your least favorite tasting word?



A: Mine is doorknob, because it tastes like watered down apple juice in a gross way, and also like the taste in your mouth before you brush your teeth in the morning– Yuck!



Synesthesia is a neurological phenomenon, meaning we still aren't sure what truly causes it and how it could be fixed. Personally, I never want to go back to when I didn't have synesthesia. It

has changed my life for the better and really improved my memory! Although there is no cure, those with synesthesia often try deep breathing and meditation to help them when they get overwhelmed. It is a superpower that some people dream of having, and it can also be a curse occasionally!

Sources:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24995-synesthesia>

<https://www.britannica.com/science/synesthesia>

Oh My Manatee!

An informational column about the beautiful nature of sea cows

By: Ryan Kurimay

Imagine this..... You are swimming in a river in Florida. You are having an amazing time, experiencing the truly beautiful nature. Then, something grabs your leg, almost like a hug. You jump and scream, for you think it's an alligator. You take one look down, and you realize it's not a gator... it's a gray blob. It starts swimming up to the surface, and it's a manatee/sea cow! Manatees are known for their warm hugs (where it is illegal to touch them back) when swimming. These graceful, curious animals love to explore humans when in their natural habitat. Read this column to learn more about the wonderful manatee!



Overview:

Manatees, a.k.a. sea cows, are large aquatic animals that have no natural predators where they live. Florida Manatees are native to Florida, and have

many unique characteristics that make them up. Manatees are herbivores, grazing on sea grasses (get the name now?). They can weigh up to 3,500 pounds and grow to over 10 feet long! Keep reading to discover more.

Habitat:

The Florida Manatee is a sub-species of the West Indian Manatee. They are native to Florida, but range from the Southern USA to Northern South America, and everywhere in between. They live in coastal water, rivers, and springs.

Appearance:

Manatees...kind of are just a gray blob. A CUTE gray blob. Manatees are typically 9-10ft long, and weigh around 1000 pounds. They have two flippers in the front they use for steering movements, and to hold vegetation while eating. They have one round flipper in the back, and leathery skin that flakes off. This adaptation helps prevent too much algae and barnacles from building up on their skin.

Behavior:

Manatees are non-aggressive, non-territorial creatures, who spend most of



their time eating and resting. When not doing that, they investigate objects, travel, and socialize. They are loosely organized, temporarily staying in groups. Manatees have no natural predators, for

they sometimes can be curious of alligators! The game, “Follow the Leader” has been known to happen between these animals!

Diet:

Manatees are herbivores who spend up to 8 hours grazing on sea grasses and other aquatic vegetation. It can consume 4-9% of its weight in aquatic vegetation daily. When not in saltwater, manatees actually need to find a source of freshwater, whether that is runoff, a leak, etc., to survive.

Cold Stress and Migration:

Manatees need to constantly be in warm water. If the water temperature drops below 68 degrees Fahrenheit, manatees can develop cold stress syndrome, which causes lesions on skin, a weakened immune system, disrupted circulation, and even organ failure. To



prevent this, the creatures migrate to warmer natural springs that stay above 72 degrees Fahrenheit. To protect these animals, boaters are cautioned to drive slowly, give them space, and report them to the manatee hotline, where they will be found and saved.

Fun Facts:

1. Manatees have the smallest brain in relation to their size of all mammals!
2. Humans are the biggest threat to manatees
3. They live 30-40 years
4. They may look fat, but most of the manatee mass is made up of their stomach and intestines
5. Elephants are actually the closest living relative to the manatee!

Thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed learning about the awe-inspiring manatee!

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The World Cup Returns



Written by Griffin Sweatman

This summer, from June 11 to July 19, Mexico, Canada, and the USA will host the world's biggest soccer tournament across 16 states and stadiums – and teams from across the globe will compete for the legendary prize.

The FIFA World Cup is a competition held every four years to determine which footballing nation is the best in the world. The difference? 16 additional squads have been included to create the first World Cup with 48 teams.

Which players will thrive and win the golden boot?

Which teams will find success and secure the victory?

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Tournament Details

The tournament's first match will be played between Mexico and South Africa in the world-famous Estadio Azteca. Other matches will also be played across major cities in the United States and Canada, which gives many Americans like us the chance to watch the World Cup in live action.

The World Cup Final will take place on July 19, 2026, at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

The hype in this year's tournament? The addition of teams! With 48 teams this time, the tournament will provide more countries with the chance to compete on soccer's biggest stage. Along with the new teams come new possibilities for underdog stories from smaller nations like Curacao and Cape Verde.

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Compare and contrast - Epic the Musical v. Ride the Cyclone

By Lily Hoang-Kluth and Kyleigh Zimmerman | 8th grade

Epic the Musical:

Epic the Musical is a show/musical based on Greek mythology. It follows a guy by the name of Odysseus, who is trying to go home after the Trojan War. The whole premise of the musical is Odysseus is missing his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus. After multiple encounters with mythical creatures and after many hardships, he finds his way back home. The musical has nine different sagas: The Troy, Cyclops, Ocean, Circe, Underworld, Thunder, Wisdom, Vengeance, and Ithaca Sagas. Epic the Musical is a high energy cinematic adaptation of Homer's the Odyssey. Fans would describe this musical as deep, because it has happy and upbeat musical aspects but also gets into the nitty-gritty of it all. One minute you will be vibing to song and the next there will be tears running down your face. It does not currently have a Broadway version and is only available as a fan animatic, but the creator, Jorge Rivera-Herrans, is hoping to have the musical on Broadway one day.

Ride the Cyclone:

Ride the Cyclone is a musical about a six-member choir who went on a field trip to an amusement park and ended up dying on the broken rollercoaster. Trapped in the carnival-themed afterlife, they have to sing about why they think they should be the one who deserves a second chance at life. People like to describe the musical as a “rollercoaster ride” itself because

of the placement of the songs. The musical will have very sad songs next to very energetic songs, due to the kids in the musical singing about their life. In the middle of it, they meet a girl named Jane Doe (or Penny Lamb). Jane Doe was a girl who died in a previous accident in a similar way, and she actually was a part of the same choir as the rest of the kids. | Jane Doe is the name given to bodies that people are unable to identify - we don't know who Penny is throughout the entire musical until the end because during her accident on the Cyclone (the rollercoaster they rode) she lost her head.

Compare

These two musicals, General notes

- Mischa and Eurylochus ; both portrayed as “tough guys” throughout their stories until they sing a song about their true feelings. For Mischa he goes from singing a song about how awesome he is (the song is quite literally called “This Song is Awesome”) to singing a somber ballad about the girl he was supposed to marry before dying in his tragic accident. This reveals how he isn't just some angry Ukrainian guy, but instead has his reasons and is a sad and lonely orphan who just wanted to see his fiancée. Eurylochus is an aggressive man who always goes for the more rash decisions in order to protect the men. However in certain songs throughout the musical, it's revealed that he acts this way from a survivor's instinct. His tough exterior cracks, and his aggression is driven by survivors' guilt and terror, only wanting to get back to his family.
- Ricky and Politics ; both portrayed as optimistic characters with powerful imaginations. Ricky is born with a rare generative illness which makes him mute and reliant on a wheel chair or crutches (based on the rendition of the musical) starting at the age of 6. He and his family work powerfully through it, and he copes with it by imagining himself in intricate fantasy worlds. When he dies, the song he sings is about a space man and cats; a prime example of his imagination. Politics is described as a guy who keeps his spirits high especially when faced with many challenges before he eventually succumbs to his death to

polyphemus. He advocates for friendship and attempts to help Odysseus realize that he doesn't need to rely on violence to survive.

Cry stals: *Scientific and Spiritual*



By: Avery Krier

From witchcraft to Mohs Scale of Hardness, crystals have two types of viewpoints: scientific and spiritual. The spiritual aspect of crystals refers to how crystals were historically sought after for healing purposes and now used to bring faith and other emotional stability. There are also strictly scientific viewpoints concerning geology with concerns of rarity and how they are formed and in what location.

Spiritual Use

Crystals are no doubt beautiful, their majestic colors and how lovely they are, they are unexplainably wonderful. For centuries these stones have been associated with witchcraft and magic, but why?

Crystals are associated with magic because they fall to ancient empires with key roles to change how the world views crystals today.

Starting with ancient Mesopotamia, they used crystals for a spiritual medicine. They used malachite for healing purposes like physical wounds and digestive issues, making it seem that they were magical for healing the Mesopotamians. After that empire fell, the Ancient Greeks believed that clear quartz was solid water and rubbing a crystal called Malachite on their skin is for protection before going off to war. In Vedic tribes, the crystals align with astronomical patterns. (For myself that really sells the magical aura surrounding crystals). For example, the crystal ruby and the sun align, and the crystal rose quartz with Venus align.

These all are ways that crystals have the magical element but what do these crystals mean? Each crystal has a feeling or hope that someone wants, for example, Rose quartz means love because of its pinkish color, moonstone means new beginnings, and emerald represents truth. It is believed across cultures and centuries that crystals possess these qualities.

Scientific Creation

Crystals are formed in two ways, cooling magma and evaporating solutions. Both ways have different ways to solidify and make the beauties you may wear or admire. One way crystals are formed is cooling magma, this creates an igneous rock. This process of crystallizing starts in a magma chamber where the minerals either sink to the bottom or rise to the top, this removes unnecessary materials like iron so the crystalizing process begins. Examples of igneous crystals are rose and smokey quartz, aventurine, and amethyst. You can tell these are made by cooling magma by the texture of the stone before it is smoothed and the marks on it from quick cooling formation.

The other way crystals are formed is evaporating solutions. This takes place over four steps all contributing in one way or another. The four steps consist of the solution being made, then evaporation, then supersaturation, then finally growth. All of these steps are necessary to create crystals. The first step is the solution being made with rocks and various salts dissolving with the necessary ingredients to start the crystals formations. The second step is evaporation when the solution evaporates but the minerals are left behind and makes it thicker. This helps the crystals solidify. The third step is supersaturation which ultimately makes the solution become unstable and the excess liquid falls out completely. Now at this time right after the crystals begin to form. These crystals are formed by the minerals finding one crystal and attaching itself to it. When enough minerals are bonded, it starts to solidify and bond together, making a crystal. Some examples of crystals formed by evaporation are the desert rose and Halite (rock salt).

Whether you are more knowledgeable about magical meanings of crystals or scientific, rock out and I hope you learned something new about the amazing world of crystals.

Sources:

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<https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2018/08/understanding-peoples-obsession-crystals>

Different Types of Government by Jake Romberger

There are many forms of government. You probably have learned about some forms of government in Geography class. In this article, I will teach you about 7 forms of government. These are Democracy, Republic, Oligarchy, Communism, Theocracy, Anarchy, and Monarchy.

1. Democracy

Democracy is a form of government in which the citizens vote on which leader they will have next. Power is exercised via the people of the nation. It was created in Athens, Greece in the 5th century BCE.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy>

2. Republic

A republic is a form of government in which political power lies in the hands of the public, typically through their representatives. In a Republic, people elect representatives to vote for them. A modern example of a republic would be Botswana, which has been a republic since 1966. It originated in the Roman Republic.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/republic-government>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Botswana>

3. Oligarchy

Oligarchy is a form of government in which power lies in the hands of a small group of people. These people are typically called oligarchs, and these people are extremely wealthy, have all the power in the nation, and sometimes can become selfish. The citizens in nations under this type of government tend to have very little rights. An example of a modern oligarchy is Myanmar, which has been an oligarchy since 1988 or so. Oligarchy originated in Greece with Sparta, an ancient oligarchy.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/oligarchy>

4. Communism

Communism is a form of government where the goal is absolute equality through government control over the people. Communism is meant to be a classless society with no private property and the citizens have a lack of autonomy and rights. A modern example of a communist nation is China, which has been

communist since 1949. It was invented by a German man named Karl Marx in the 1800s. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism>
<https://www.britannica.com/place/China>

5. Theocracy

Theocracy is a form of government where a religious leader rules a country and a country is recognized as one whole religion. Decisions are often based on

religious beliefs, and the entire nation is based on a religion. Sometimes these nations are united and stable, but can have a lack of free speech or lack of human rights. A modern example of a theocracy would be Vatican City, which has been a theocracy and also an elective absolute monarchy since 1929.

Theocracy was created around 5,000 years ago, dating back to Ancient Egypt.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/theocracy>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Vatican-City>

6. Anarchy

Anarchy is a type of government where there is no government, enforcement of laws, rules, or anything. Everybody has extreme autonomy. There are no modern examples of Anarchy today. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anarchism>

7. Monarchy

Monarchy is a form of government in which a king or a queen rules over a nation.

There are two main types of monarchy. Absolute monarchy and constitutional monarchy. Absolute Monarchy is a type of government in which the king/queen has absolute power and unlimited power over a nation and decisions are made quickly by one person and one person only. The citizens have very little to no rights and a lack of free speech. A modern example of an absolute monarchy would be Saudi Arabia, which has been an absolute monarchy since 1932.

Absolute monarchy has been around for thousands of years. Constitutional monarchy is a type of government in which a nation is ruled by a king or queen who shares power with a constitution. Decisions are made by many different people in the government. Citizens have many different rights in this type of monarchy. A modern example of a constitutional monarchy would be Tonga, which has been a constitutional monarchy since November 4, 1875.

Constitutional monarchy has been around for hundreds of years.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/monarchy>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Saudi-Arabia>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Tonga>

THE TWO - DAY BUS RIDE

A fictional short story written by Erin Alloway, 8th grade.

Their biggest mistake was passing by the football stadium. It was a mistake that would cost them weeks of their lives.

The six yellow buses in a line that contained the entirety of Tigerbrook Middle School, plus a few parent chaperones, had not intended to be caught in some of the worst traffic in the Philadelphia area. But they had, and as the sun set, Winnie finally

accepted that maybe her end-of-the-year field trip to a camp in upstate New York would not take three hours, as previously expected. How much longer they had to go was anyone's guess, but based on how the bus driver, Luke, was screaming into his school-issued walkie talkie, it wouldn't be short.

"We WHAT?! No-no... but- wait, you're breaking up... WHAT?!" he went, and so on, and so on, like he had been for the past thirty minutes. Winnie found it amazing how Luke (Mr. Funnel, as the other kids knew him) never seemed to run out of panicked energy. He was a new driver this year, a fresh - out - of - high - school college dropout looking for stable, nearby jobs. Word around the school was that he had a car, but was always driven to work by his mom. As his frantic sweating and whimpering the whole way up thus far had proven, he really didn't like driving. Now, his hands were clutched around the steering wheel, tears streaming down his puffy red face, even though the bus hadn't been moving in a while. It was as though he expected it to take off at any moment and fly away like a roller coaster.

Winnie huffed and slumped back down in her seat, her breath clouding on the grimy glass of Bus 43. She really wished she had squished in with a member of her established friend group instead of finding whatever was empty nearby and ending up with... **JAYDEN**. He sat with his legs up on the top of the seat in front of them, a lacrosse backpack taking up far too much space between them. "Mr. Funnel! Mr.- Mr. Funnel! Uh, uh, are we there yet?"

"I'M TRYING!!!!!" Mr. Funnel sobbed. His eyebrows were clenched, and his pupils rocked in their sockets. He appeared to be hyperventilating.

"This dude STINKS." **JAYDEN** yelled among the students. Then, interest in the current happenings waning as quickly as it came, he attempted to start a round of "everywhere we go, (insert student here) picks his nose", which did not pick up. Winnie turned in her seat to her friend, Sam, who was picking at the worn hem of her school - issued field trip tee shirt. "Do you think we're ever going to get to New York?" Winnie asked.

Sam replied nervously, “We have to, don’t we? We need to see the new *Whispering Scrolls* episode live! You know, with WiFi!” She wiggled her phone in the empty air for emphasis. *Whispering Scrolls* was the two’s favorite fantasy drama, and the new episode would be posted as a live video on their website in addition to being released to streaming. It was imperative that it be watched as soon as possible, because it was the episode where Melissalin Fortweatherington decided whether she would marry the Duke of Waterloo, Opalite Osmosisjubbernutterwatterwistershiringworth the Third, or the brooding faerie prince, Doorknob.

Winnie nodded in silent agreement. “Do you remember the big fight scene from the last episode? I can’t believe they left off on a cliffhanger like that!” Sam shuddered.

“I’m sort of glad it ended abruptly. All that blood grossed me out so much. Blood is creepy.”

Sam’s friendship meant so much to her; they had even decided that, after high school, they’d attend the same college. Winnie didn’t quite know what she wanted to do with her life yet, but she hoped that some of Sam’s confidence and sense of direction would rub off on her. High school was coming up soon, after all, and she was running out of time to decide.

But then, maybe it was a good thing that she’d be stuck on this bus for all eternity. *Oh*, she thought to herself, *I’m being too dramatic. It’s just a thirty - minute delay. We’ll be at the lodges in no time, I’m sure.*

From the side, **JAYDEN** and his friends prank - called the McDonald’s back at their hometown. Once the worker on the other line greeted them, they all started barking.

But I’m probably not going to make it.

“We’re sleeping in here? No way!”

“Sorry,” Mr. Funnel replied to Sam’s uptight aversion, “I don’t make the rules. Until we find a hotel that takes four - hundred kids and twenty - nine adults, you may want to grab your pillows from your bags and get comfortable. Think of it as a... sleepover, maybe?”

Sam crossed her arms and squished into her seat. “I’m not having a sleepover on a moving bus behind **JAYDEN**.” **JAYDEN** and his friends huddled together and let out a series of “ooOOOOOO”s.

Winnie didn't mind, as long as it got her to the lodges sooner. She pulled up her phone - still WiFi, thank goodness, and decided to look at different jobs and what they paid for. *I could be a lawyer, she thought, or maybe a mechanic? What goes best with my skillset? Could I be a nurse? Do I have the heart for that? What if there's some sort of special middle - school requirement for that job that I missed the boat on? Where's my nearest Technical College-*

Sam pulled Winnie out of her rambling train of thought with a quick pillow to the face. Winnie laughed and returned the gesture before Mr. Funnel chastised them. "PLEASE be calm and keep it down!" he said with more fear than sternness. "I have to drive the bus the whole night until we can find a free place to park, and in Philly..."

"Say no more!" replied Sam. She was a good friend, able to cheer Winnie up whenever she needed it. How did she do that, knowing exactly what she needed, when she needed it? She was probably going to be an astronaut one day. Or the president.

Soon the kids nodded off, with as much difficulty as one would expect from combining so many people of the teenage demographic. It was a rocky ride, but not too rocky; they were still, after all, making their way out of the clogged streets of East Philadelphia. A chaperone, which Winnie thought was called Ms. Wilson, kept watch over a sleepy Mr. Funnel.

"Here's some coffee from my thermos, Luke. You got this next mile?"

"Luke?"

"Uh..."

She then frantically pulled on his lanyard, which made no effort to wake a now visibly drooling Mr. Funnel. The class knew well about Mr. Funnel's caffeine addiction, which usually led to hard and strong crashes around the end of the day. Riding his bus was a little nerve-racking when his eyes grew droopy, but he thankfully always had a cup of coffee to keep himself on the road. Having expected to get to the lodges by the late afternoon, though, he hadn't brought one. So now, he was asleep at the wheel.

At the moment, the traffic was poor enough that the bus was still, but it was nevertheless a dangerous moment. Ms. Wilson grabbed Mr. Funnel's walkie. "Hello? Other buses? We have an emergency on - no, no, dead battery pack!" She pulled, to no avail, at his arm to remove his heavyset body from the driver's seat. "Hurry," she said, "I need to take the wheel!"

"Not it!" said the entire bus in synchrony before Winnie had the time to process what was being asked of her. With effort, Winnie unbuckled Mr. Funnel's seatbelt and Ms. Wilson yanked at his leg. The guy barely stirred; he was out like a light. It took a

good part of thirty minutes to remove him, during which the cars in front of the bus moved. To alleviate this, since Winnie was small and could squeeze in closer to the pedals and wheel... that was the day she learned to drive.

She looked to Sam with pleading eyes for help. Sam shrugged in response. *Maybe I'll be a bus driver when I grow up.*

The next day, once Philly was well behind him, an embarrassed Mr. Funnel was extra concentrated on making it to the lodges on time. He had already called in advance to let them know that Tigerbrook Middle would be about a day late. As per the students' request, he finally decided to make the first pit-stop of the trip (a welcome center between Pennsylvania and New York) so that they could relieve themselves. The line of

middle schoolers ran far out of the bathroom stalls. Some kids were desperate enough to take a chance in the woods. Most of them were able to buy snacks and breakfast with their own money, though this took some pleading on part of the adults. Most facilities would naturally be unwelcoming to a group so large.

Winnie bit into a thick donut and continued to plan for the coming years. Troubled by a lack of clarity, she consulted one of Sam's fortune-tellers for what she would be when she grew up. Her result read, "Out of Service; Ask Again Later or Contact a School Admin." Winnie nearly dropped her donut in surprise. "Doh" she said to no one in particular.

The next leg of the trip would take only two hours. Once back on the bus, Winnie and Sam let out some deep breaths that they had been holding onto for a while. Sam handed Winnie a can of soda pop (she really *did* think of everything) and gave her a reassuring smile. They would surely make it in time for the *Whispering Scrolls* finale, and everything would work out. *This time*, Winnie thought with conviction, *we'll make it to New York for sure.*

"AAAAAAAAAAAMFHREIUOWH<FEWQUH<()&#Q<HUOGFY#Y@#*!!!!!" Mr. Funnel (and Winnie, and everyone else) had forgotten about the highway! It was a nightmare keeping all the buses straight, fast, and safe, in a row. Everyone needed to go fast, but not *too* fast, and the heavens forbid a kid throws up or spills a drink or something...

Winnie spilled her soda all over her lap at a speedbump.

JAYDEN screeched like a little girl. Mr. Funnel didn't turn around, of course, but his shoulders became even more hunched. "What happened back there?! I swear, if you kids are playing hacky sack on the bus again... WHOA!" He swerved suddenly as a car tried to merge in his place. He hit the bus horn, rarely heard by students. The soda fountained out onto the ground, as did Winnie. **SLAM** she went on the ground.

"Winnie!" Sam cried, coming to her aid. "Are you hurt? Don't worry, I have Band-Aids in my bag, and-" Winnie looked up at Sam in queasiness, and she saw Sam's eyes shoot down at her knee. It was bleeding. Sam's crippling hemophobia took hold, and she staggered back into her seat, as though her friend wasn't there. With a trembling hand, she pulled a pack of Band-Aids from her backpack and tossed it on the ground without once looking at Winnie. "Nope," she said under her breath, "nope, no, no way. Forget this." *Nice going, Sam.* Winnie thought, pulling herself from the puddle of soda with pain. Her leg didn't seem to be seriously injured, but she must have torn something.

The bus continued to swerve. Some children shrieked, others chided Mr. Funnel. He was breathing rapidly and... shoot, when was the last time he had coffee? Winnie checked her mental "time-till-Mr -Funnel-crashes" timer and saw that it was low. He desperately needed caffeine. *Wait*, she thought, *doesn't my soda have caffeine in it?*

Nearly slipping on the ground, she caught her soda can and the little drink that remained in it and pulled herself up. At this time, now more than ever, she needed to prepare for the unexpected, to brace herself for utter chaos. Taking a deep breath, she sprinted down the aisle, jumping over outstretched legs, slipping and buckling, clutching her weakened knee and her soda like life depended on it. Pitching herself forward with the last of her strength, she slammed the near-empty can onto Mr. Funnel's dashboard. "Drink this!" she cried. "NOW!"

Mr. Funnel considered the drink with groggy eyes. He downed it just in the nick of time, and immediately started to look better. "Thanks for that." he said. "Without a drink, I couldn't have made it another-THERE'S THE EXIT!"

"TURN, TURN!" Winnie commanded. With that, they left the highway. The children cheered in celebration.

Sam threw up.

When Winnie managed to hobble back to her seat and apply a Band Aid, Sam finally started treating her like a human again. She apologized for her callousness when Winnie fell.

“I’m sorry about freezing up. I never know what to do when there’s an emergency. I wish I could have helped you drive the bus, or get the soda to Mr. Funnel. Sometimes I feel like I don’t know where I’m supposed to be or how I’m supposed to help you at all.” Winnie was surprised. “I feel the same about school. I really didn’t expect that from you, though. You always seem so put-together.”

“I’m just making it up as I go. I think we all are. Shouldn’t *Whispering Scrolls* be on now?”

“Oh, yeah!” Winnie whipped out her phone and pulled up the episode countdown. 10, 9, 8...

“This is it!!!” Sam squealed. Her eyes grew as wide as lily pads 3... 2... 1... *No WiFi signal received*. Winnie and Sam groaned in sync. “IT’S OVER!!!” Sam exclaimed. “WE’LL NEVER SEE IT!”

“Of course we will.” Winnie reassured Sam. “We just won’t see it now. Besides, she obviously picks Doorknob anyway.”

“Yeah... wait, what?!”

“Of course,” said **JAYDEN**. “Have you seen the way she looks at him?”

“WHAT?!”

Flying Duck: The Finale

Part 2 of 2

Fictional story by Santosh Kandasamy (with inspiration from Harrison Ko)

The time has come. Flying Duck is set to be poisoned tonight, and nothing can go wrong. Dr. Koo has the trap ready to go. First, he will lure in Flying Duck with a resin mushroom, Flying Duck’s favorite treat. Next, Dr. Koo will drop a cage over Flying Duck when invisible lasers detect him. Lastly, the poison will be dumped into the cage, burning Flying Duck to ashes. The plan was perfect, nothing could go wrong. It just had to be executed perfectly.

Flying Duck was walking out of his graduation ceremony, which went amazingly! He graduated at the top of his class while all his friends were cheering him on. But suddenly, in the distance, he saw his favorite food - resin mushrooms! Flying Duck flew all the way

there, but as soon as Flying Duck triggered the lasers, the cage dropped! Flying Duck panicked, and tried to escape, but he remembered the plan.

Dr. Koo: "Haha! You have finally fallen into my trap! Do you have any last words, Flying Duck? **while dropping poison into cage**

Flying Duck: **Takes costume off**

Dr. Koo: "Snow Duck?, "

Snow Duck: "Let this be for a good cause, don't let this go to waste." **Pulls Dr. Koo into cage**

The poison spills onto both. Flying Duck tries to get them both out, and pulls them to safety. Luckily, Snow Duck, unknowingly to him, had a poison resistance this whole time! Dr. Koo, however, didn't.

Santosh took both to the veterinarian to check up on them. Snow Duck had no injuries.

Snow Duck later received an award for his bravery, and Flying Duck left the scene unscathed. They all celebrated and had fun. Flying Duck then flew back to where his parents were poisoned.

Flying Duck: "Dr. Koo is gone. Peace has been restored."

Epilogue:

Wakes up

Santosh: It was... a dream?

Picks up plastic duck

Santosh: So it... didn't really happen?

Santosh's dad: **walks into room**

Santosh's dad: It's time for school, get up.

Santosh walking out of room, but looks back

Flying duck: **winks**

About the Future of Flying Duck:

As I move on to high school, the Flying Duck saga will come to a close in Falcon Flyer. Thank you to everyone who has read these short stories over the past couple of years.

I am planning to start something similar in high school in Newspaper club for current 8th graders. Please mail any suggestions to Santosh Kandasamy (30kandasamys@student.wcasd.net).



Five Falcon Summer Facts!



By Madelyn Crawford, Eighth Grade

- ★ The Eiffel Tower grows taller in the summer!
Because the well-known French Tower is made of iron it expands when the material is hot. Nothing to worry about, the tower eventually cools down and then slowly returns to normal size. During the expansion it can be about 10 cm taller! <https://engineering.purdue.edu/MSE/about-us/gotmaterials/Buildings/patel.html>
- ★ Nearly 20 billion hot dogs are consumed in America every year! 7 billion are consumed from Memorial to Labor Day!
<https://www.hot-dog.org/media/consumption-stats>
- ★ Early Women's swimsuits were very modest with hats/hoods, high necks, long sleeves, and pants!
<https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/a-history-of-womens-swimwear/>



- ★ A rare flower called the Corpse Flower blooms every couple of years, can grow up to 15 feet tall, and releases a horrid smell to attract flies!

<https://www.usbg.gov/gardens-plants/corpse-flowers>

- ★ In Denmark 2021, the world record of the tallest sandcastle was created standing at a whopping 69 feet!

<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/tallest-sandcastle>



**Thanks for reading the “Summer 2026 Falcon Flyer!”
Tune in next school year for the “Fall 2026 Falcon Flyer”
Have a safe, and Fun Summer Stetson!**

