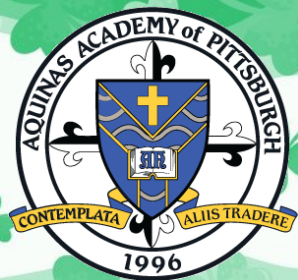


# The Dumb Ox

## March 2026



### Prefect Board Review

By: Katrina Kedzierski

As prefect campaigns for the next year begin, many look back to the prefect board this year for inspiration and ways to improve. The prefect board is a group of student leaders who help the school by organizing events and receiving student ideas to make the school a better place. The prefects this year have implemented many new events, such as weekly assemblies and the survivor game. Individually, they have effected new ideas like class t-shirts, a prayer wall, food drives, game nights, and more.

The majority view seems to be very positive towards the prefects, with freshman Ava Best giving a positive review of the events, noting, "I really liked the karaoke and cookie decorating party, it was a great chance to meet new people and make new friends." She also commented that the prefects are, "very friendly and easy to talk to all the time." Tabitha Ridings affirmed, "They're very relatable." Both agreed that weekly assemblies offered a fun and helpful opportunity to hear from the prefects and remain up to date on school events.

Students are not the only ones happy about the prefects. For example, Mr. Salinas has gotten to work closely with the prefects in his new position as high school director. He shares that, "Not only were they incredibly motivated and accomplished a lot, but everything they did, they did with joy." Looking ahead, he added, "As for next year's prefect board, whoever is on it, I'm sure they will be brilliant as well!"

This excitement and optimism is shared by the student body as posters for head prefect begin to go up around the school. Head prefect candidates are beginning to give out bribes and campaigns are going strong. The eighth graders are eager to vote for the first time, and with five students running for head prefect, they have an abundance of choices. Good luck to everyone running and thank you to all the wonderful prefects of this school year!

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## Diamonds and Nets

By: Aurora Predis

As the green grass pokes its head up through the earth this spring, it is not given long to enjoy the sunlight before cleats tear it up, because some very determined boys are here to take a win home. The baseball team is returning for their third year ever and second year in the WPIAL. With an ever-increasing team size of 23, this team of dedicated and skilled boys is ready to hit the home run of a season. They have a very positive outlook for the season, hoping to make it to the playoffs and bring home the first ever baseball WPIAL title in Aquinas history. The team captains are ready to lead the boys to a successful season. Senior Jonah Burchill was very excited about the season and said that “We have a lot of players returning, and we have gained a lot of experience in the last two years. We are in a very good position to build on that experience and have a successful season.”



In a similar fashion, the Aquinas gym never catches a break, as basketball leaves until next year, and volleyball takes its place on the court, replacing hoops with nets. The boys' volleyball team is back for its sixth season with lots of capable players, led by their team captain senior Henry Buchanan. This is their second WPIAL year, and junior Asher Buchanan is in a positive mindset for the season, noting “The team is very young, and many of the players are new, so there is a great amount of opportunity for improvement.” The boys' teams are looking forward to a thrilling and new season of sports in the spring air, ready to go to the end of the school year in triumph.

## On the Way to Wonderland

By: Aarona Casas

After a great success in last year's *The Wizard of Oz*, Middle School Crusaders are returning to the stage for their annual spring production. This year they embark on a journey through Lewis Carroll's “Wonderland.” The play auditions took place on February 24th and 25th, and all 80 students who participated will be appearing in the production. Freshman Juliana Gruber, who helped Director Mr. Flynn in the audition process, remarked, “We had incredible talent, and most students immersed themselves perfectly in their roles.” Rehearsals officially began after winter break, and in merely six days, the actors have been able to block the play with the help of high school volunteers: sophomore Lily O'Neill, freshman Juliana Gruber, junior Elise Metzler, and junior Aarona Casas. The play's director, Mr. Flynn is proud to announce that “we have a lot of great actors in the Middle School. Everyone across the board has had great performances.” The play will be presented to the Aquinas Community on March 27th and 28th at 7:00 pm in the Rhodora.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in the Wonderland* was written in 1865 and is symbolic of a chess game. In the story, Alice (Addie Phelps) enters the wonderland by hopping into a rabbit-hole, and soon she realizes her mistake. She meets all sorts of mad persons, including: talking animals (Alexandra Robinson, Max Predis, Pere Casas, Savanna Ridings, Beca de Souza, Abby Mitros, Grace Tuffiash, Garvin Whetzel, Ethan Mullican), an angry duchess (Maria Freyvogel), a mad hatter (Luke Patterson), a cheshire cat (Ally Park), and the wonderland's vicious Queen of Hearts (Gabrielle Boright). Her journey through the strange land in order to return home is meant to symbolize a pawn moving from one end of the chess board to the other in order to become a queen. In this play, Lewis Carroll emphasizes on the themes of curiosity and bad temper through Alice's encounters with the twisted characters. The Aquinas theatre program encourages everyone to come together and enjoy an amazing show soon!





Every year in over forty counties statewide, high school students sift through reams of tedious court exhibits, stipulations, and affidavits in order to build a case presentable to the Pennsylvania Bar Association Mock Trial Competition. Aquinas has presented a team to the county competition every year since the initiation of the school's program five years ago in 2020. In that time, it has reigned as Allegheny County Champion three times and progressed as far as to be fifth in the state. Although defeated in the county semifinals by Taylor Allderice this year, the Mock Trial team has made significant strides toward a better 2027. With the absence of nine seniors who graduated last year, the team had to optimize for success with a diverse team split between upper and lower classmen, none of which had participated in a county trial.

November marks the beginning of preparation each year. It is then that the court case for each year is released to the public so that students can start reading through and preparing for a practice tournament in January. Hosted by the University of Pittsburgh, the weekend gives witnesses and attorneys who are newer to the experience, particularly freshmen, the chance to participate in a trial and receive feedback on their performances. Notably, junior John Dolan received this year one of the prestigious few 'Outstanding Attorney' awards presented at its conclusion. Afterwards, the team captains select the makeup of two teams, plaintiff and defense, that will be entered into the county competition a few weeks following. An individual mock trial consists of opening statements followed by each side's presentation of evidence, concluding with a closing argument. Typically lasting over an hour, each team's three witnesses are guided through direct examinations by their three attorneys, through which the teams can present facts to bolster their case. Then, each team's attorneys are pitted against the other side's witnesses in contentious cross examinations.

The team was forced to pivot this year with the departure of its beloved coach, Mr. Waxenfelter, who left to establish a team with Moon Area School District. In his replacement, new coach Mr. Kuntz, a protégé of Mr. Wax, has stepped in, proving to be invaluable. While the team did not progress as far as in the past, individual successes were frequent throughout the season. Team captain Katrina Kedzierski commented that "Our team is strong, and I'm very proud of the way we've performed this year. It's difficult having a team who is entirely new to county trials. We needed experience, which we've been able to gain, so I'm confident for our team next year." We hope that with this enthusiasm the team will continue to progress!



On March 17th every year, many people around the world gather with their loved ones and friends dressed in green and gold to celebrate the feast of Saint Patrick.

Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and is credited with bringing Christianity to the people of the country. According to legend, Saint Patrick used the shamrock (a very prevalent symbol on his feast day) to teach the Irish about the Holy Trinity. He used each of the three leaves as a simple way to represent the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is also said that he drove all the snakes living in Ireland into the sea, accounting for the lack of native snakes present in Ireland to this day. Other symbols associated with Saint Patrick's Day include pots of gold and leprechauns, representing good luck and prosperity. The history of Saint Patrick's Day is very special for many families including Mrs. Flynn's family, who shared that it's important because "it's just a good time to get together and remember the relatives far and near."

In addition to shamrocks and gold coins, traditional Irish dishes consumed on Saint Patrick's Day include corned beef and cabbage, soda bread, colcannon, and shepherd's pie. Aurora Predis, a junior, expressed her love of her family's traditions, stating that "my mom makes Irish soda bread every year and we have family over for corned beef and cabbage as well as a party." Parades are often held, with Pittsburgh being known for having one of the largest in the nation. Irish dancing is also very popular as a way of celebrating Irish culture, complete with green outfits with colorful braided designs. Religious traditions include pilgrimages in Ireland to places visited by Saint Patrick, with masses and prayers said along the journey. When asked what her favorite memory of Saint Patrick's Day was, faculty member Ms. Ali McGrath stated warmly that "I had gone to the Pittsburgh St. Patrick's Day Parade with my aunt in 2012 and I engaged in conversation with a guest she had brought with her. Turns out that he was an ambassador from Ireland meeting with the Vice President who was in town for the parade. It's a loose connection, but I like to think I contributed in some small way to U.S.-Ireland foreign relations."

Saint Patrick is an excellent role model and his feast day serves as a reminder of how wonderful he was in carrying out God's will to the people of Ireland. It is also a great day to celebrate with family, friends, food, and fun, creating memories to last throughout the years.



## Survival of the Fittest

By: Lucy Flynn

All the students that participated in this amazing high school game tried their hardest, but did not have what it takes to be a finalist in *Survivor*. Jack Hoerster believes the final round of *Survivor* will be a game changer. “I think it's going to be a blast. When the board is making games, we're always thinking of how to make things fun, not only for Survivors, but for the people in the audience, whether that be them assisting the survivors or serving as the hype crew.”

The pink team who made it to the final round of *Survivor* consisted of Lex Risdon, Judah Hartle, Tabby Ridings, and Maggie McBride. Lex Risdon, one of the finalists, has no idea how she is still in the competition. “I have a low chance of winning considering my luck in the game so far,” she said before the previous round. Lex is especially optimistic after making it to the semi-finals by winning an intense game of rock-paper-scissors.

Judah Hartle, another finalist in *Survivor*, says he is very excited about his chances of winning, and believes he will do well. “I feel good about making it to the final round of *Survivor* and I have a 25% chance of winning!” With those odds, I would feel confident as well.



Tabby Ridings says, “I'm definitely enthusiastic about still being in *Survivor*, and I do think it's possible for me to win, but it's also a tough competition, so we'll see!”

Maggie McBride, the last finalist in *Survivor*, mentioned that “I'm so excited for the next competition and can't wait to see how it all plays out.”

We are all very excited as well to see how *Survivor* pans out so stay tuned and one of these contestants will walk away with \$75 dollars!

## Madness in March

By: Alexa Risdon

March Madness is always competitive, but Aquinas students in particular go crazy over their brackets.

March Madness is a college basketball tournament that has taken place every year since 1939. Involving 68 teams in total, they are seeded and divided into four regions. The teams are then ranked best (first seed) to last (sixteenth seed). The first team plays the last, and it's ordered like that until it meets in the middle. Every game is a win or go home, and advances through the following rounds: First, Second, Sweet 16, Elite Eight, Final Four, and finally the National Championship. Millions of people around the United States create brackets and bet on the winners of the championship.

Sam Duer, basketball player and a senior at Aquinas, has set up a league of his own with his friends; Anthony Rossi, Luke Crawford, Daniel Hartle, Louis Bentivegna, Henry Hynds, Zander Beaven, and Henry Buchanan. His buy-in was ten dollars per person, and “whoever's bracket is most accurate wins the money and second place receives their money back.” Sam is confident that Houston is going to win, “because of their ability to frustrate teams on defense.” He doesn't believe there is a favorite in the group he is competing with because nobody follows basketball as much. Jonah has faith in Duke winning the championship solely because he has “heard good things.” He believes Anthony Rossi has the best chance of winning because he follows basketball the most out of everyone. Daniel Hartle mentioned he “doesn't have much faith in his bracket,” but hopes “Gonzaga can pull through.”

Participating with millions worldwide, Aquinas students participate in the March Madness bracket challenges in their own ways.





# What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger

By: Caitlyn Abbett

On February 18th, the season of Lent began and the Aquinas community started their spiritual journey together with Ash Wednesday mass. Celebrating Lent as a Catholic includes offering up sacrifice through fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. Aquinas students and faculty shared some creative things they gave up for the 40 Days and things they added to strengthen their relationship with God.

A group of junior girls participated in the Fiat 40, a spiritual program that includes praying with scripture, veiling at mass, fasting between meals, and cutting off scrolling on social media. Junior Katrina says, "I don't usually veil at mass, so the experience is new but beautiful. It's hard to put the phone down sometimes, but it gives me so many more opportunities to spend with Christ!"

Freshman Sarah Mlecko committed to a 40 day fast consisting of water, fruit juice, chicken, vegetables, and some dairy. She cut off all desserts, snacks, and soda. "It's really helping me in my Lenten journey because it makes me feel closer to Jesus, sharing in a small way how He fasted for 40 days in the desert."

8th grader Garvin Whetzel abstained from fighting with his sisters as a way to work on compassion. "It's pretty difficult but there's less yelling in my house now and I'm not angry as much which gives me more time to have a good time with my family."

Senior Abi Irvin gave up napping for Lent, which she admits is a fighting battle, but she is pushing through the struggle. Her purpose for doing this is so she has more time to spend with her loved ones. "You miss a lot when you oversleep, and I wanted to feel closer to the people I love this Lent before I go to college."

The 40 days of Lent are a great opportunity to offer something up to God, whether you are adding sometime to your daily routine or fasting from sometime you love. This period of repentance, prayer, and reflection is a perfect time to think of others while growing in your own personal journey with Christ.



How do you celebrate Lent? Everyone approaches this 40-day season differently. Some people give up chocolate and others use it as a time for self-reflection. Mr. Kuniega, a Latin and Theology teacher, is counting down the degrees on his oven until it is preheated.

Mr. Kuniega is quite the cook. He has taken charge of all the food preparations for his family's parties including Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter over the past 4 years. His Easter menu "includes both modern and traditional side dishes, entrees, and desserts." For example, he prepares "a large platter of authentic Polish kielbasa sausage" Along with the sausages, he serves "spring vegetables, cheeses, and homemade dips and toppings." The main courses are lamb and braised ham. Desserts may vary but "homemade pascha bread" is always served each Easter. He makes these "Eastern European loaves with sweetened milk, lots of sugar and eggs, and a large amount of butter." He also shared the fact that the pascha bread is shaped into "braided crosses and other religious symbols baked onto the top." The last delicious food he cooks is "Easter cheese, but it is not cheese." The recipe calls for "eggs, milk, and sugar." He cooks it on the stove until curds are formed. It cools "in a cheese cloth" overnight and it can be eaten alone or with the pascha bread.

Mr. Kuniega's Easter menu sounds delicious. Lent is a time for Catholics to develop new traditions. What are you doing this Lenten season?

## Hooked on Fish Fries

By: Abigail Irvin

Lent is the season for fish fries. Each parish offers their own, unique food, experience, and atmosphere. I had the opportunity to visit and compare two local fish fries in Cranberry, St. Ferdinand's and St. Killian's.

The first fish fry I went to was St. Ferdinand's. When I arrived, there was a line out the door and a wait time of about thirty minutes. The meal cost \$18. I ordered baked fish, mac and cheese, and applesauce. The food had a very homemade taste and the fish was well seasoned. The volunteers were friendly and welcoming, which made the experience even better. It was also nice to see parish priests serving the food. There was a dessert table with cakes and cookies, and I finished my meal with a slice of chocolate cake and M&M cookies. Junior Katrina Kedzierski volunteers at St. Ferdinand's Fish Fry and commented, "I love helping out at the fish fries! I've gotten to know a lot of amazing people through it and it's such a gift to be able to serve the community. I also love getting free food at the end of the night!"

The next fish fry I attended was St. Killian's. We ordered our food within ten minutes of arriving and were seated right away. The meal was \$17. It took about a half hour for our food to be brought out. While the servers were not as friendly as the ones at St. Ferdinand's, the food was delicious. I ordered fried fish with mac and cheese and applesauce. The fish was crispy and flavorful and the mac and cheese was rich and cheesy. However, they were a bit stingy on the apple sauce and other sides. My dad ordered French fries and they only gave him about eight. The dessert table was what stood out the most. It was the largest dessert table I have seen at a fish fry and was filled with cookies, cake, brownies, donuts, and more. I took a cheese cake, which was one of the best desserts I've ever had.

Overall, both St. Ferdinand's and St. Killian's offered enjoyable fish fry experiences, each with their own strengths. St. Ferdinand's stood out with their welcoming atmosphere and homemade feel, while St. Killian's impressed me with their food and dessert selection. Overall, I highly recommend visiting both of these parish fish fries.



### Students Review the Year

Aquinas Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors are nearing the end of their academic year and are gearing up for next year in the process. A few students generously shared some of their experiences this year and some advice for next year's students.

For the freshmen, this year began a massive shift in their school career. New classes, new friends, and new activities could be daunting at first, but many freshmen enjoyed their year. Giancarlo Josephs ( a first year Aquinas student) said his favorite part of freshman year was talking to his friends during long runs in Cross Country. Giancarlo's advice to incoming freshmen is "to get involved in a sport or club early because it is a great way to meet friends."

Sophomores experienced a great year, excited to no longer be freshmen. The work and tests were a step up from freshman year. Michael Richtammer cited tests as the hardest part of sophomore year. As for positives, Michael, like Giancarlo, shared "Sports were definitely my favorite thing about sophomore year. The increase in playing time as well as no longer being the newest make sports even more fun than freshman year." Michael's advice to next year's sophomores is to "Study hard for all your tests and ask your teachers to help you, otherwise you might honestly be cooked."

Juniors experienced what is possibly the hardest year of school. Although it was long and tedious, the junior class enjoyed the ride. Tess Austin shared, "My favorite thing about junior year was being able to go more in depth in my classes. I loved being able to take what we've learned in past years and apply it to a deeper way of learning in my new classes." Grace Chrobak credited her teachers' support through the year as extremely helpful, "My favorite thing about junior year was the teachers. Their support with my classes and the adjustment to junior year really helped me." Grace also cited the SAT as one of the hardest parts of junior year. "My least favorite thing about junior year was definitely the increased workload and preparing for the SAT," she expressed. As for advice for next year's juniors, Tess shared that "It's important to ask for help from teachers when you need it since the workload is much harder as a junior." Grace agreed and stressed that "It's never too early to start preparing for the SAT, so start preparing as soon as possible." Although the juniors had a great year, they are looking forward to being at the top as next year's seniors. "I'm looking forward to taking anatomy next year and to all the senior privileges," exclaimed Tess.

No matter what grade you are going into this year, remember that everything will be okay in the end, and don't be afraid to talk to upperclassmen if you have more questions about next school year!





# March Showers Bring Standardized Tests

By: Jules Shemer

'Tis the season of standardized testing! Juniors at Aquinas Academy have been diligently preparing for this year's SATs and ACTs.

When the time rolls around for students to sit down and click the start button on the computer, a question might come to their minds, "What is the point of this?" The answer is that these tests are to help colleges and universities assess your readiness for their school. Before Covid-19, almost all colleges made it mandatory to send in test scores, but now, most schools allow students to apply test-optional. However, colleges are starting to go back to mandatory test scores. Mrs. Martyak explains, "It is still the best way for a college to see whether a student can or cannot handle their curriculum." As schools reinstate the mandatory test scores, this will allow them to broaden their accepting test range.

So, what are the differences between the SAT and ACT? Both tests have sections on math and reading. Adding an English section and optional science and essay section, the ACT provides students a broader area of testing than the SAT. 152 questions are given on the SAT with two hours and 14 minutes to complete the test. For the ACT, 215 questions are given, with two hours and 55 minutes (three hours and 40 minutes including the optional essay).

Upperclassmen were asked to give advice for lowerclassmen on standardized tests. Senior Savannah Deschamps advised, "The best thing to do is to take practice tests and to start early. There is no better way to prepare!" Senior Zander Beaven added, "Use the practice tests in the [College Board's] BlueBook. You'll see the types of questions that are asked and get better at hard problems as well."

Students are encouraged to take both tests, or to pick the one that works best for them. It is fortunately not the end of the world if a student does not get the score they want because he or she can either take the test again or go test-optional for college.



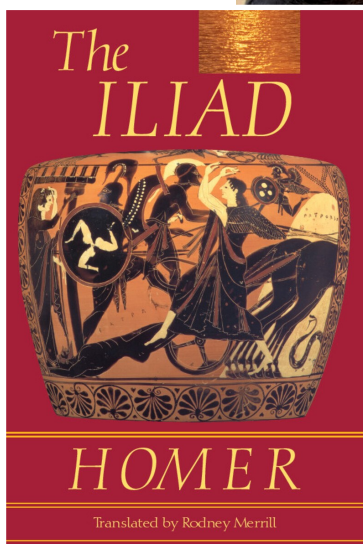
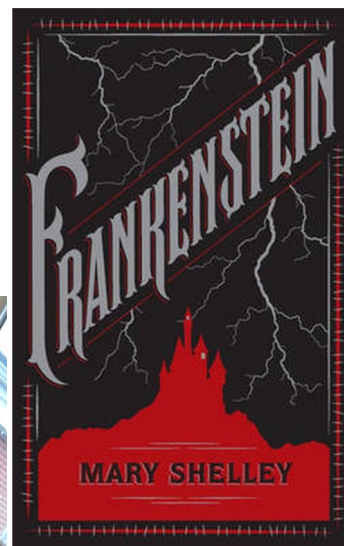
# Novel Ideas

By: Elise Metzler

Throughout a student's time at Aquinas, he or she will have to read quite a few books for their required literature classes. Usually accompanied by reading check quizzes, analytical essays, and small projects, students often must read the books deeply to earn the A. However, teachers hope that the reading becomes more than a grade, with Mrs. Maglio stating, "It's the one time in your life that you will be introduced to the classics that transcend time and setting. It's the bedrock for understanding western culture."

For the most part, many books are enjoyed by students. That should be a given when dealing with some of the most influential books of the West. However, students sometimes have trouble with certain texts. Tess Austin says, "For the most part, it's pretty fun." Tess goes on to explain that some of the books required for freshman year are very challenging to get through. A good example of this would be the first book students read freshman year, *The Iliad*. Although massively important to every era and work after it, many modern readers struggle with heavy description and long battle scenes that contain very little dialogue.

In this writer's personal opinion, the best books are the ones that spark lively discussion within a class. Some of the best memories within a class can be the questions and debates sparked by a piece of literature. *Frankenstein*, the required summer reading for incoming juniors, is a very good example of this. With complicated characters and deep questions at the novel's very core, the class discussions and literary papers possible to derive from this work are truly endless.



# Snips n' Quips

"I have a prosciutto, mozzarella, and balsamic sandwich." -Lucy F.

"Did you make such a sandwich?" -Mr. Malchano

"I'm a woman, of course I did."

"I know I'm opinionated, but most of my opinions are right." -Savannah D.

"They named an animal after me." -Grace C.

"What animal?" -Brigid M.

"The goat."

"Do they do the open heart surgery just for the field trip or do they do it because the person is actually sick?" -Mary Emma K.

"I'm bringing a guy from Boston to the dance." -Kate

"The one thing I don't like about my wife is that she was born in Ohio." -Mr. Malchano

"What does your wife think about that?" -Matt M.

"Like the country?" -Grace C.

"Oh, she KNOWS"

"No the state."

"All good things almost burn your house down." -Francesca H.

"I think I covered a turnip in salt, it might be slightly palatable." -Zander B.

"I hope you're starving with nothing to eat but turnips." -Jonah B.

## **Writer's Favorite:**

### **Children's Book**

Abigail: *The Dear America Sisters*

Alexa: *Curious George*

Aarona: *The Giving Tree*

Aurora: *Lily and the Purple Plastic Purse*

Brigid: *Farmer Boy*

Caitlyn: *Berenstain Bears*

Grace: *Three Billy Goats Gruff*

Elise: *Matilda*

Laila: *The Lightning Thief*

Lara: *The BFG*

Lucy: *Frog and Toad Stories*

Felicity: *The Phantom Tollbooth*

Jack: *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*

Katrina: *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Jules: *Amelia Bedelia*

## **"Spring"**

**By Ava Best**

Cooling breezes Pass  
Buds on the trees burst  
open

Birdsong call flowers

Velvet buds open

Delicate blossoms

Fragrant breezes blow





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