VIGNETTE

2026



VOLUME 65

Front Cover Art Inspiration

This years Front Cover of the Vignette Magazine is a sketch of a boy laying on grass, staring at the stars above. This sketch was done in 2026 by Charles Gosda ‘27.
The inspiration behind this vivid illustration is the editorial of this edition, which describes how art is salubrious for the human soul. The illustration depicts something that the artist also feels is salubrious for the soul; nature and the stars.

Completed by Christopher Stark ‘27

Back Cover Art Inspiration

This years Back Cover of the Vignette Magazine is of sky light peaking through the clouds over the ocean. This photograph was taken by Andre Ramirez ‘27.

Completed by Christopher Stark ‘27

Vignette Literary and Art Magazine

2026

Volume 65

Saint Joseph
A College Preparatory School
145 Plainfield Avenue
Metuchen, New Jersey 08840



Table contents

Title	Author/Artist	Page
Editorial	Christopher Stark ‘27	8
The Great Internal Conflict: Ambition vs. Talent	Franco Reinoso ‘28	9
The Flame of Passion	Giovanni Sparagna ‘28	10
The Night of 250	Christopher Stark ‘27	11
Early Plane Concepts	Kieran Geraghty ‘26	12
To Bear or Let It Bear Us	Christopher Stark ‘27	13
And	Giovanni Fighera ‘26	14
“Let not be forgotten”	Jason Paul Parel ‘26	15
The AI Divide	Saahir Vazirani ‘26	16
The Gates of Knowledge	Daniel Irungu ‘28	17
Outsourcing Thought	Vetrivelan Ganesh ‘28	18
The Unknown	David Adlao ‘26	19
A Falling Empire	Ethan Brucato ‘28	20
Washington Square Park	Christopher Stark ‘27	21
Echoes in the Hall	Braeden Micheals ‘27	22

Table contents

Title	Author/Artist	Page
El Rancho Restaurant	Steffen Hettiarachchi ‘27	23
Grim Removal	Santino Oliveti ‘26	24
The Great Life of Benjamin Brynn	Ryan MacDougall ‘28	25
Legend Cast in Gold	Daniel Irungu ‘28	26
The Golden Boy	David Romanyuk ‘27	27
Escape from Bordino	Sam Bonsignore ‘28	28
Der Weltkrieg	Dante Gean ‘29	29
Chiang Kai-shek	Dante Gean ‘29	30
Tales From a Tomorrow War	Kevin Watson ‘27	31
Don’t Look Back	Ethan Rivera ‘28	32
Sunsets In The Desert	Christopher Stark ‘27	33
The Redemption	Tyler Wojcik ‘29	34
Waiting	Wyatt Kovacs ‘26	35
A Surfer’s Song	Tyler Lechner ‘26	36
Bermuda Beach	Vijay Montoya ‘27	37

Table contents

Title	Author/Artist	Page
How to Combat Acid Rain	Zhenghan Cao ‘28	38
The Unreturned	Daniel Lasco ‘28	39
Rio Celeste	Christopher Stark ‘27	40
The Thing in the Woods	Skylar Ferreri ‘27	41
Time	Dean Wubbenhorst ‘28	42
My Calling	Kieran Zebrowski ‘28	43
Rock of Service	Steffen Hettiarachchi ‘27	44
The Beautiful Game	Daniel Irungu ‘28	45
Goli Ashwagandha: TikTok’s Favorite Supplement	Sebastian Nino ‘26	46
In My Head	Jedidiah Afoke ‘29	47
Stormy Sunset	Vijay Montoya ‘27	48
Unwritten	Ethan Caro ‘28	49
The Grey Man	Jainil Patel ‘28	50
Until Next Time	Marcello Craig ‘28	51
Snooping Around	Christopher Stark ‘27	52

Table contents

Title	Author/Artist	Page
Blank Paper	Caiden Mooney ‘27	53
A Poem about Pretentious Poetry	Kyle Moscone ‘28	54
The Premonition	Filip Rudzinski ‘27	55
Vignette Staff		56
Policy		57
Colophon		58
Dedication	Christopher Stark ‘27	59

Editorial

The daring to create art is a simple yet deep testament to the human spirit. One must test the taut strings of the soul and pluck one for the rest of the world to hear. Each of these strings carry a different emotion, memory, or passion.

Art is expressed through various means: sculptures, music, paintings, photography, videography, and writing. A machine may imitate the sound of a plucked string, but it has none to pluck itself. This is the unique ability humans have that computers do not. It is an ability we must all hold dear and express, because it is salubrious for our souls.

This year, members of the *Vignette* worked to compile an edition that represents that value—taut strings of the soul that are reflective of our human passion. With the guidance of Dr. Robert Longhi and Mrs. Amy Giglio, the fifteen members of our *Vignette* staff worked diligently to organize the school's sixty-fifth volume. After several rounds of reading and editing, our staff created a volume that offers a glimpse into the human soul.

Christopher Stark '27

Co-Editor-in-Chief

The Great Internal Conflict: Ambition vs. Talent

On March 15th of 2015, the twenty-two-time Grammy-winning hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar Duckworth released his concept album titled *To Pimp a Butterfly.* The album was nominated for 11 Grammy Awards, featuring top hits like "Alright," "i," and "King Kunta." It was exceptionally well received by the populace for its jazz production and social commentary. It immediately became beloved by music critics who list it among the greatest albums of all time, alongside other concept albums like *Dark Side of the Moon* and other classics like *Thriller* and *Led Zeppelin IV*. The album's well-received reception is due to its overarching metaphor, which comments on ambition in society through a long poem that unfolds as the album plays. Through this evolving metaphor in *To Pimp a Butterfly,* Kendrick Lamar explores the mental consequences of external pressures, describing the American dream as a force that compels people to cannibalize their own talent through indoctrinated ambition.

The album is an introspective follow-up to Kendrick Lamar's record label debut, *Good Kid, m.A.A.d. City,* reflecting upon his newfound wealth and success. He envisions the butterfly as the embodiment of a person's natural talent, potential, and passion. This is true innocence and delicate beauty, free from restraint. The butterfly represents the ideal life, and people should try to nourish this intrinsic beauty. Lamar also describes the caterpillar as the opposite of the butterfly. Not yet fully nurtured into embracing its inner self, the caterpillar has a harsh outlook on life. It is stuck and cannot break free to embrace its inner butterfly. Kendrick writes, "The caterpillar is a prisoner to the streets that conceived it." Real-life struggles harden the caterpillar, and it views its inner butterfly not as something worth protecting but as weak and naive. Therefore, to break free from its struggle, the caterpillar attempts to use the talent and passion of its inner butterfly. As the title of the album suggests, the caterpillar pimps the butterfly for its own gain. These actions drain the butterfly of its passion and beauty, sacrificing its talent in the endless pursuit of ambition.

Kendrick Lamar defines this internal conflict not as one born of necessity, but as one encouraged by the system itself. In the opening track, "Wesley's Theory," he reveals the American Dream to be falsely supporting the endless pursuit of ambition. In the song, Kendrick introduces the character of Uncle Sam almost as a reflection of the devil. Uncle Sam tempts those who are struggling with promises of "A house or a car? Forty acres and a mule, a piano, a guitar?" In exchange, Uncle Sam fuels the caterpillar's instincts to leech off the talent of the butterfly to satisfy its hunger for immediate material gain. He traps them in a chase for wealth and endless ambition, whispering, "Too much ain't enough, both we know…Get it all, you deserve it, Kendrick." Ultimately, Lamar unravels the lies of the American Dream, revealing it as not a path towards liberation from struggle, but a cycle of ambition and greed that systematically erodes your inner passion.

This internal conflict reaches a climax in the song "u." Kendrick paints the picture of himself screaming in anguish in his hotel room in a state of depression and self-hatred. The caterpillar has taken over, resulting only in despair. The butterfly is left completely burnt out, and the artist is left to regret their past actions. The back end of the album takes Kendrick on a mission of introspection and self-discovery, culminating in the album's lead single "i." The defiant refrain of "I love myself" directly contrasts the sentiments of "u." Kendrick has learned to nurture his inner butterfly, breaking free from the vicious cycle of ambition. *To Pimp a Butterfly* ends not as a story about finding success and glory, but as a mission to learn to love yourself and a call to listeners to recognize and nurture the inner butterfly within themselves.

Franco Reinoso '28

Sophomore Nonfiction

The Flame of Passion

What is passion? How do you quantify something like that?
Do you have to reach into the hearts of people
and judge the intensity of its burning flame?

The success of athletes, musicians, artists, writers,
hinges on this very thing
we call passion.

Passion plays a unique role in the hearts of humans.
Its boundless nature
gives us the impetus
to achieve something greater than ourselves.

Passion, unlike other aspects of the human spirit,
can drive people to do things
once thought impossible—
landing on the moon, achieving flight, splitting the atom.

No matter if it is a tiny spark
in the heart of a newborn child,
or a raging wildfire
inside the spirit of a madman,
passion resides in all of us.

Fire is at the center of civilization and survival
just as passion lies
at the very core of the human spirit.

The flame of passion is intrinsically tied
to the human experience.
It can never be extinguished
as long as we are still alive.

Passion cannot possibly be measured
because it is at the center
of what it means to be alive.

To desire an achievement bigger than yourself—
to strive for something greater—
to live for a higher purpose—
this is the very essence of having passion burning inside of you.

Giovanni Sparagna '28

Sophomore Nonfiction



The Night of 250

A photograph of fireworks on the night of America's 250th Anniversary in Bayhead, New Jersey.

Christopher Stark '27

Early Plane Concepts

Mankind has always had an interest in exploration and discovery. This is evident from the discovery of the New World to humanity placing its first steps on the moon. However, innovation is often required to get humans to these places. In the case of the discovery of the Americas, it was shipbuilding and navigation, with space exploration it was rocket propulsion and heat shielding. And, at least in the modern day, to create new innovative technologies and machinery, one must make a prototype and develop it to get a grandiose final product. Some of the most interesting prototypes in my mind come from early plane concepts.

Now, humanity, like its drive for discovery, has always been interested in the sky. From the tale of Icarus, to Leonardo Da Vinci's flying machine, mankind has always been fascinated by the flight of birds and the blue heavens above our heads. However, in the case of early aerial transportation, it mostly involved a lot more Icarus flying too close to the sun and falling back to the ground than him actually flying. In fact, many early attempts at flight incredulously resembled that of the Icarus story. Several European clergymen between the 1400s-1770s actually built feather wings (instead of wax) and tied them to their arms and flapped rapidly after jumping off a tall building. Unfortunately, this would, at best, result in a few broken limbs. The first construction besides a bird suit would be a "flying gondola", built by French clergyman Abbé Pierre Desforges in 1772, who essentially strapped makeshift wings to a gondola and pushed it off a roof with him in it. Unsurprisingly, the invention more so proved the theory of gravity instead of the theory of human flight, but surprisingly Desforges did survive. Despite this, more somewhat ventures followed a short one hundred years later.

In the 1800s, following the invention of the steam engine and actual research into gliding technology and the first creation of the propeller, somewhat real designs started to emerge. From the Aerial Steam Carriage in 1848, to the Albatross in 1868, to the Monoplane in 1874, all of these designs involved similar structures and traits to the actual successful Wright Brothers Airplane in 1903. Despite all these factors, these prototypes were never able to make it off the ground on their own, nor were they ever able to do more so than a control glide. In the case of the Aerial Steam Carriage, its funding was pulled, so it never even saw full construction. Albeit, most finished prototypes never stayed in one piece for too long.

A majority of these projects, due to the inherent danger of being many hundreds of feet in the air, often resulted in some sort of incident. As was the case for the eccentric "Flying Gondola", which was obliterated upon impact with the ground, so was that of the innovative yet flawed Albatross, which crashed to the ground upon the end of a 200 meter glide. Several different Monoplanes after 1874 met similar fates, crashing to the ground after lift off – and staying there, those projects dying soon after. Even after the first successful flight of the Wright Flyer, plane designs continued to be created, including incredibly ambitious designs. However, many unsuccessful designs met a similar fate, some literally tearing themselves apart. What I think makes these projects interesting is that, due to a lack of information regarding physics as opposed to what we have now, inventors really had to try and do what they could with what they had, with most looking towards birds as a way towards a future with flight. Although comparatively primitive as opposed to the science we know now, I believe that is why such scientific advancement and development back then is so interesting now, even in the context of what we have now.

Kieran Geraghty '26

Second Place, Senior Non-Fiction

To Bear Or Let It Bear Us

When a man bears the fruit of love and empathy, he must also bear the poison of hatred and pain. We are taught to love and to hate throughout our lives. Children often bear the innocence of hatred, and adults often bear the corruption of love. Life influences our emotions through the experiences that come out of it.

Morality first shapes the fruit and poison we must bear in human life. Many bear a basic moral compass from the very second they are conceived; Morality is further shaped by our experiences. The experiences start from the first time we step into a church and stare at the Crucifix of Christ. We are told that murder and theft are wrong, which are basic concepts to grasp, but we are also told that things like trespassing or lying are wrong. People question these beliefs, if I lie once it won't hurt. If I touch what I am told not to once, it won't hurt—*but it does*. These moments echo beyond their brevity, shaping our morality and poisoning the fruit we bear within. At the core of childish innocence, hatred erodes morality. Hatred poisons what we bear.

We also bear the corruption of love as we grow. Hatred eats us away. Hatred of colors and feelings. We biologically fear red for its association with blood, yet blood sustains us, proof we may hate what life holds. Hatred consumes our thoughts. We seek to run from the innocence of hatred, leading us to the corrupted love. At first, love consumes us and bears all hatred and pain away, but as we have love, we also have pain. With enough pain, love fades and makes us question if it ever really was love.

Some do not bear the innocence of hatred however. Some bear innocent empathy. We see those who bore the innocence of hatred and corruption of love and seek to help them, but only get pain in return. Pain seems to triumph over the empath and kill him. The innocent empath hides now, seeking the corruption of love to heal. The innocent empath has been granted the power to heal the world...but must kill himself in the process

No man however, is born as a corrupted hater. The corrupted hater is made from the innocent empath. The corrupted hater is the innocent empath when he hurts and never heals. The corrupted hater is many of us, but none of us, for the corrupted hater is not real. The healed corrupted hater is the hurt innocent empath.

When man bears the fruit of love and empathy, he must bear the poison of hatred and pain. Many men are scared of these fruits, but without them, we are only poison. These fruits help us grow even when they are consumed by the poison. Christ bore the highest role of the innocent empath and was consumed by the highest corrupted hater, yet remained the innocent empath. Morality erodes through the innocence of hatred and the corruption of love. Morality can erode only if we let it. If hatred is to poison love, then love must cleanse hatred. We must choose whether to bear our pain or let it bear us.

Christopher Stark '27
First Place, Junior Non-Fiction

And

You tell me I am an “or,”
Yet I fail to understand what you try to say.
“It’s a simple enough choice,” you add, “one or the other.”
My mind still does not comply, still doubts.
I am of Chinese beginnings,
Of resilience, diligence, loyalty.
I am just as much of Italian descent,
Of compassion, sensitivity, sociability.
But you only guess one over the other, reducing me to halves.
I adore the blinding stage lights,
The rush of performance, eyes glued to me.
I too enjoy exploring scientific discovery,
The fundamentals of life, the answers hidden underneath.
But you believe these interests are too polar opposite, that I must focus on one passion.
I value my academic endeavors,
Punctual for assignments, thorough in execution.
I also cherish my relationships,
Friends and family who’ve supported me, mentors who’ve shaped me.
But you say one must take priority or I will fall off my path,
My one straight path.
“Wrong!” I exclaim.
I refuse to choose between my identities.
I embrace each path, no matter how unique or seemingly contradictory.
I am both Chinese and Italian, a lover and a fighter,
Theatrical and scientific, a scholar and a friend.
Why constrict myself to one sense of being?
In fact, is the Earth not land and water,
Plant and animal, light and darkness
All at once?
We mustn’t live any differently.
So I tell you I am an “and,”
Always have been, always will be.

Giovanni Fighera ‘26

Second Place, Senior Poetry

“Let not be forgotten”

“Let not be forgotten, for thy sacrifice not be in vain. For your fathers and their fathers beforehand shall look down upon you, and shall bless thee for your actions. For the weaker man shall look upon you as a hero, as a being of great glory. Do not falter! Stay strong and advance. Wars like these are not won by cowardice. No, they are won with strength. Strong is the man who does not weep in danger, who runs against the horde. Strong is the man who dares defy God, to change what they can no longer accept! Be strong! Be the man that you are destined to be. Fight, fight!” Then follows a raise of a hand, one of passion and pride of his army. In which this officer held a sabre. Ordained with a large red jewel, its gold hilt shined against the mid-day sun, but not perfectly. It had, to no fault of the owner, several large patches in which the reflection ceased, exposing a foam body. It was gilded, and closer inspection of the sabre revealed its imitation. The blade itself was dull, made of not forged steel, but of a similar foam material as the hilt, on which were several creases, rips, and small tears, a result of haphazard swinging and general wear. The officer stepped down from his pedestal–a pink, child-sized chair pulled from a set of other miniature chairs and a table. His uniform was as childlike as his stage, pink pajamas of a similar hue of the chair and table. The young boy, perhaps six to seven years of age, waddled over to his army, sabre in hand. Positioning himself in front of one of his soldiers, a somewhat sizable stuffed animal of a panda bear, he brought down the sabre towards the creature’s left shoulder, then to its right in a knighting fashion. He continued this process to all of his soldiers: A cat, a brown dog, an alligator (who, possessing no shoulders, made the knighting process difficult on the boy). The knighting of each of his animal soldiers ended with a personal, “God be with you” by the young ‘officer’. But soon the door to the boy’s room swung open once more, revealing a nurse draped in light blue scrubs. He stands in the doorway for a moment, rubbing his palm against his forehead. To his right is another man, equipped with a sort of protective vest and belt. “Dangit old man, can’t ya ever sit still for once? This’s why we keep ya on your meds!” The second man’s voice is one of annoyance and a general lack of compassion. The latter most obviously shown the moment the nurse raises his hand upwards, signaling to the guard who removes a taser from his duty belt. Raising it up, he sent two prongs into the crazed patient. The boy, no longer seven but seventy, froze up almost instantly upon the contact of the prongs. Collapsing to the floor he yelped out, dropping his cane, which had until this time been raised and swung around the air. Yet as he falls, his message does not falter, still babbling about his “army” and “strength” as he is dragged by the shoulders out of the padded room.

Jason Paul Parel ‘26

First Place, Senior Fiction

The AI Divide

A recent KPMG study found 57% of employees hide AI usage or pass off AI work as their own, showcasing poor AI literacy and transparency (Agbai, 2025). In a real-world-scenario, if a hospital staffer uses AI for sensitive data entry, a bad actor could later prompt it to leak patient details. As such, we need laws mandating AI literacy and transparency. Like nutrition labels, AI development should disclose data sources, limits, and risks. Complementing this, AI literacy in schools and workplaces would convey how AI operates and fails. A comprehensive study found higher AI literacy strongly boosts job performance, revealing a statistically significant positive correlation ($\beta = 0.680$, $p < 0.001$) between employees' generative AI literacy and their work effectiveness (Liu et al., 2025). Developing AI skills improves technical ability and allows employees to focus on creativity and efficiency, supporting the need for strategic AI education. Some argue AI literacy investment may waste resources if most employees rarely use AI. However, studies indicate that as AI becomes integrated throughout diverse sectors, even employees in traditionally non-technical roles increasingly utilize AI-driven systems. For instance, a McKinsey survey found that 91% of employees use generative AI such as ChatGPT, with the majority believing it could improve their work (Relyea et al., 2024). Firms with AI literacy training saw productivity rise 28% and innovation by 23.6% across 342 companies in 12 industries. These organizations also saw AI-innovation spread, with more employee-led improvements and cross-functional projects beyond technical teams (Chen, 2025). To mandate AI literacy education and transparency, we can emulate California's recently enacted Senate Bill 53, known as the Transparency in Frontier Artificial Intelligence Act. This bill requires large AI developers to disclose safety frameworks of risks, limitations, and data sources. SB-53 also creates mechanisms for reporting critical AI-safety incidents and protects whistleblowers who expose risks, enforcing accountability with civil penalties (Justine Gluck, 2025). National transparency standards would provide lawmakers, businesses, and the public clear insight into AI operations, closing gaps that allow misuse. Pairing this with federally funded AI literacy in schools and workplaces would ensure broad understanding and empower citizens and professionals. Approaches like California's, which fosters ongoing multi-stakeholder input and adapts to technological advances, provide an adaptive framework that can scale nationwide. Funding could arise from reallocating government technology and education budgets, supplemented by grants targeted to states and school districts for AI literacy programs. Modest fees on large AI developers, similar to tech regulatory fees, could fund oversight and workforce AI education, ensuring beneficiaries support public safety. As AI reshapes our world, we can only assist a safe transition. Increasing AI literacy and transparency is crucial to ensure that this intelligence uplifts humanity rather than diminishes it.

Saahir Vazirani '26

First Place, Senior Nonfiction



The Gates of Knowledge

A photograph of Blair Hall at Princeton University on a warm spring day.

Daniel Irungu '28

Outsourcing Thought

In recent years, forgetting a fact is not solved by memory retrieval, or doing minimal research, but by asking an assistant on your phone or an AI tool. This reliance on artificial intelligence has fundamentally changed the way we use our brains, making these chatbots an extension of them. As we delegate more mental tasks to these powerful algorithms, a question of our own intellectual abilities emerges. Widespread use of AI is eroding essential human cognitive skills, posing a threat to our independent thinking capacity.

Allowing generative AI to create ideas for us limits human ingenuity, especially in creative works, leading to a cognitive issue called "idea erosion." For example, when a student is faced with a tough assignment or essay, they use AI to circumvent the hard work and time needed to find a unique solution or perspective. Instead they submit an AI generated work that is well-written, but soulless. By outsourcing the creative spark, the user misses the friction needed to create their own original angle. They do not develop the essential skill of being able to think outside the box and create something truly new.

Another major danger lies in using AI to avoid simple, recurring tasks that help keep your mind fresh. Once again, a student might use AI to do all their algebra homework, or write an email. These small, "menial" tasks can actually act as brain "warm-ups", and they can even help with memory retrieval and logic. By skipping the maintenance, you can not use these skills when you really need them; the math homework is practice for the upcoming test, and the email is building communication skills. By relying so much on AI, the mind will become rusty and soon struggle to do basic procedural tasks.

The final cognitive risk is a decline in decision making. When AI is able to give such quick replies, we become even lazier, becoming passive consumers instead of active thinkers. We begin trusting these machines too much, which even has a name: "automation bias." This dulls our skepticism, and our need to double check AI fades. This turns the user from a critical thinker into someone who will blindly believe everything the chatbot spits out. Without being able to spot errors, we will lose the ability to make independent decisions because we rely on AI for our facts.

The dangers of outsourcing our mental efforts are undeniable: we risk losing our unique creativity, compromising the ability to do simple tasks, and dulling our judgement. This "cognitive erosion" is not a flaw of the tool, though. It is our failure to keep turning towards AI chatbots because of our laziness. Even if in the short term, AI just lightens your workload and makes life a little bit easier, it will have devastating effects in the long term. As a student, using AI to pass assignments is also simply not fair to students who put in the hard work and are dedicated. The light on the other side will only become visible if we change our mindset, and make a conscious effort to leave AI as a copilot, and not allow it to take the wheel. By abstaining from the use of AI, we can ensure the survival of our cognitive ability through this dark age.

Vetrivelan Ganesh '28

Sophomore Nonfiction

The Unknown

Legend says that there's a creature that inhabits the barren desert beyond the outskirts of our small town, and every year, it preys upon unfortunate souls who dare cross the threshold that is a singular archway that used to be a sign pointing to the gun shop. With the sign still being somewhat legible, people often assume it to mean life or civilization beyond it, but no. There are horrors that exist beyond that sign incomprehensible to the human imagination. The only way to describe it... is if you lived it. It was just any normal day when it happened, except for the fact that it was one of the hottest days of the summer. We were planning a karaoke with family and friends but I wanted to try out the new frisbee I got for my birthday not too long ago. I grabbed a few of my buddies and some buckets to use as bases, and left for the rest of the night. One of my pals Ari was always cautious about the tale of the "S.W." (skinwalker): a greedy, murderous, shapeshifting creature whose hunger couldn't be relieved even with a thousand horses. He was furious when my other friend Zach dared all of us to play frisbee close to the sign. *Oh, how we should have listened.* When Ari threw the frisbee over my way, it slipped through my hands. I snapped my head back to try and follow it, but the darkness engulfed it before I could even take another step. It was like seeing it dropped into a pool of black ink. Usually in these cases, instinct overpowers reason, and in any other place, I would have just ran for the frisbee into the darkness without a single other thought. This place, though, had an ominous presence. A presence so strong it felt the atmosphere made it hard to breathe. I didn't run to the darkness, but Zach did. I watched Zach, about fifty feet away from the darkness. My eyes widened and my heart dropped. I couldn't scream. I couldn't move. I could only watch this helpless soul run towards his doom like a deer in headlights. He was eventually engulfed by the darkness as well. It's like waiting for a Jack-in-the-Box to pop out—you know it's about to happen, and it's a slow burn, but you are overcome with shock nonetheless. Ari and I first heard a shout. Then, the most blood-curdling scream, about that of ten thousand goats screaming combined, almost deafened Ari and me completely. There were footsteps: thump upon thump upon thump, getting louder and louder and faster and faster and the seconds fly by. The creature, about seven feet tall on its hind legs, coming at us with a combination of all-fours and bipedal sprints, with eyes all white, grinning its razor sharp teeth at us, plunged towards Ari. There is a huge discrepancy between hearing about death on the news versus being the actual witness who is interviewed. If I were to describe what I saw in an interview, I would describe raw chicken being torn apart and the drumsticks, the wings, the breasts, being eaten whole. It's sort of diminishing to see human life vanish in front of one's eyes so quickly and mercilessly, like Ari was just an inanimate object at that moment. I don't know how I survived it... adrenaline and the mind work in mysterious ways: in a sense, my body completely separated from what I was thinking during that whole event, because seeing Ari was the last thing I could remember.

Poor Ari. At least Zach was intentional in his actions. He was a brave guy, and he absolutely knew what he was getting himself into. However, Ari didn't deserve this. He was the rational to our stupidity and weakmindedness, and now I have to warn the children of our town to *never go beyond the sign*. If you do, you get lost in the darkness, and if you get lost in the darkness, you die. There is a reason why undiscoverable things stay that way. Once you look too far, the universe slaps you in the face and puts you in your place. There is a reason why no one really knows what is within the darkness. It was never meant to be discovered. Legend also says that the creature can mimic the voice and shape of its previous victim. That is probably why I can sometimes see Ari's faint picture in the darkness, smiling and waving at me... luring me to the unknown... *to death*.

David Adlao '26

Second Place, Senior Fiction

A Falling Empire

The New York Yankees were eliminated from the playoffs in the ALDS by the Toronto Blue Jays this year. Their elimination from the playoffs this year makes it 16 seasons since the Yankees have won a World Series. The Yankees are the winningest franchise in sports history, with 27 Championships, but is their legacy fading? The Yankees won their first championship in 1923, a few years after they acquired Babe Ruth from the Boston Red Sox in one of the most infamous trades in sports history. Babe Ruth and the Yankees over the 1920s won three championships, including the 1927 Yankees known as "Murderer's Row". The same dominance was shown even greater in the years following, with the iconic duo of Babe Ruth and Yankee Captain "The Iron Horse" Lou Gehrig in the 1930s winning 5 championships in that decade. In the 1940s and '50s, Yankee stars such as Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, and Yogi Berra led the team to an astounding 10 championships over 20 years. Such pure dominance in a sport has only been seen by one other team in sports history, that being the Boston Celtics in the 1950s as well. It is highly unlikely that we will ever see anything like what the Yankees were doing in the 1940s and 1950s again. In the years following, the Yankees slowed down when it came to winning championships; they only won 4 championships from 1960-1995 and went on a 14-season playoff drought from 1982 to 1994. However, 4 championships in a 36-season stretch is still more than about half the teams in the MLB have in the history of their franchise. Some iconic Yankees came from that stretch, such as Roger Maris, who broke Babe Ruth's record of 60 homers in a season with 61 in 1961. Thurman Munson, the first captain of the Yankees in over 30 years who won an MVP for the team in 1976, and Don Mattingly, nicknamed "Donnie Baseball," who won an MVP in 1985 and spent his whole career as a Yankee. Then the Yankees finally came back into dominance in the late 1990s. With the core 4 of Derek Jeter, Jorge Posada, Andy Pettitte, and Mariano Rivera, they won 4 Championships in 5 years, 3 peating in 1998-2000, and on top of that, they would have won a fourth in a row if it wasn't for a lucky single by Luis Gonzalez in Game 7 of the 2001 World Series. The Yankees proceeded to make the playoffs consistently for the next 8 years and were back on top in 2009, winning against the Phillies in 6 games. Led by the same core 4 plus, Hideki Matsui, who went on a tear in the 2009 World Series, eventually winning World Series MVP. After 2009, the Yankees just haven't had the same feel as teams of the past. They just simply aren't an intimidating team anymore. They've been owned by the Astros in 3 postseason series, not winning a single one against them. They have been outshone by other teams when it comes to signing big-name free agents, like the Dodgers. The only time the Yankees made the World Series was in 2024, and that's quite literally because they had the easiest path to the World Series in recent memory, but when the Yankees actually played in the World Series against the Dodgers, they were humiliated and blew a 5-0 lead to lose in Game 5 after multiple errors. The Yankees over the last decade have just been regulated to just another team instead of the best sports team ever. Will they ever return to glory?

Ethan Brucato '28
Sophomore Nonfiction



Washington Square Park

Christopher Stark '27

Echoes in the Hall

The light falls softly across the floor,
Shadows stretch and drift away.
A voice is carried through the hall,
Not loud but steady, here to stay

The walls remember who has passed
Their laughter, whispers, quiet song
I walked the path they carved in stone
And feel that I've belonged all along

Braeden Micheals '27
Junior Poetry, Second Place



El Rancho Restaurant

A photograph taken off Route 66, the first major highway to connect the United States

Steffen Hettiarachchi '27

Grim Removal

Out of darkness,
folds of charcoal approach.
Apparition; the grim reaper took.
Gentleness and poise calm.
Sobs sullen in sadness cease,
No longer to take,
Now under to care.
Straddled and quiet one is removed-
Out of the grips of control-
Handed over to prepare.
Out of the night, memory.
Thoughts of old, reflect;
Faith of future light,
The path of what will be.
Strapped in the back.
Landau on the side.

Santino Oliveti '26
Third Place, Senior Poetry

The Great Life of Benjamin Brynn

There once was a fisherman sailing across a sea of souls. His job was to pick out one soul and present their case before God. From there it was up to God if they were allowed to pass through the gates, into the afterlife. So the fisherman sailed and sailed. From time to time he would pick up souls hearing their story. However, they were unsuccessful when facing God. But then on one fateful day, the fisherman came across a particular soul. This was the soul of a boy named Benjamin Brynn. So the fisherman pulled up Benny's soul. He explained to him how he wanted to hear his story in hopes of getting him into the afterlife. The last thing he asked of Benny was to not lie about any of his life. This is where our story really starts.

Benjamin Brynn grew up in a normal home by the sea with his mother and father. His father worked an ordinary job and so did his mother. His mother aspired to be a musician. However, that did not work out. So she decided to look for something else but still played the piano as her hobby. Benny grew up like any other kid but had a very special talent. He was very talented at playing the piano! When he first heard his mothers melody he was able to copy it on his own little toy. She was amazed and knew he could be something special. So he grew up with his mothers dreams on his back. She taught him very well and pushed him so much. One day when taking a break outside, he saw his new neighbor move in. She felt so alone in this new environment and started talking with Benny. Those two became so close in the next few years. Benny continues to excel in playing the piano and his mother signs him up for an audition to get into a talented musical school. The night before the audition Benny gets a call from his neighbor and they sneak out to watch the stars. When he wakes up the next morning he can't focus and fails the audition. While sulking, he then gets sick. He was stuck inside for a whole year and decided to enjoy his time by drawing. This then resulted in him becoming a new and great artist in his future! He went on his own path and not his mothers to succeed. One day while observing his work in a gallery he reunited with his childhood friend and in the end they got married. A pretty good story right?

Just as Benny fished telling the fisherman, the man got mad. He knew Benny didn't tell the truth. So he made him go back to when he was sick. It turns out Benny did not become an artist. It was the story he wrote that he wished his life was like. While suffering from his illness, his friend confessed her love to him through a letter and his mom then visited him. His mom told him her story about the Benny she knew. How he grew up in an ordinary home with an ordinary father and mother and how when her plans didn't pan out, she forced them on her son. Then when he was just eleven years old, he got sick and wrote a story about the life he wished he could have had. That made him forget the great life he already had. How he filled his home with love even when sick and how he comforted his lonely neighbor. His story ended with his life being cut short. This was the true story and after the fisherman presented this to God, God let his soul through.

Ryan MacDougall '28

Sophomore Fiction



Legend Cast in Gold

A photograph of the William Tecumseh Sherman Monument in New York City.

Daniel Irungu ‘28

The Golden Boy

The year is 2072, and the world has been broken into chaos and division. Lawlessness and anarchy have run the Sunbelt of America since the beginning of nuclear fallout. With all major countries overrun or completely crumbled, the deserts of Western America are run by one major faction. The Samsonians have been ruling for 13 years, doing anything to benefit themselves and their people. The Samsonians are extremely wealthy, control major cities, and pillage all other groups and people. In the gray, lifeless ruins of what was once the bustling city of Las Vegas, Cassey Vega is overwatching a train delivery to the head of the Samsonian people, Captain Benjamin. Him and his crew are watching attentively, waiting to hear the train horn signaling them to jump into action. This is all for preparation for the grand heist they have been planning for the past month. Cassey is holding dynamite in one hand, planning to derail the train, Hupert, his main accomplice, is ready lasso and bag in hand. The train's horn echoes through the empty city, cueing the men into action. Cassey plants the dynamite and hides, getting into position, hiding behind a large rock. Each second feels like hours as they wait for the train to get closer. Finally, the train crosses the bridge, and Cassey lights the explosives. Kaboom! The train screeches and diverts off track, crashing into what once was a shopping plaza. The crew races in, Hupert breaks open the train doors, and immediately empties the gold stash. Cassey searches each train cart looking for one thing, his golden necklace, the last thing his father gave him before he went missing. While opening one of the train doors, he comes into contact with Captain Benjamin. Captain Benjamin stares with vengeance in his eyes, and Cassey notices his golden necklace on the neck of the Captain. He lunges at him, both wrestling each other on the ground. Benjamin, being bigger and stronger, begins beating Cassey as he lies there helplessly. When all hope was lost, Hupert emerged from the smoke and throws Benjamin off, tying him up and snatching the necklace back. He helps Cassey up and returns his prized possession. The crew runs away with so much gold and supplies that they don't know what to do with them, and better yet, Cassey has recaptured his family heirloom.

David Romanyuk '27

Junior Fiction

Escape from Borodino

September 8, 1812-Borodino, Russia

My brother and I have endured some tribulations, but the circumstances brought unto us this time have taken a grave turn on our lives. Families fled as French troops scattered our village after defeating one of our armies. Our home has ultimately become a looting destination and base for Napoleon's troops. One night before dawn, my brother, Nikolai, woke me up upon hearing chaos outside. We watched countless French troops being mauled, battling something we had never seen before. The creatures ripped into the soldiers with ease, with a bloodlust intent and twisted nature. Our father had left the house earlier for an untold reason, so we had to fend for ourselves. My brother proposed the idea that we should escape, which I was hesitant to agree with upon hearing, yet I nodded. The back door provided an unseen route to the woods where we could escape to a hopefully safe village. We grabbed a couple items and headed through the backdoor, but we were instantly met with a French troop. The soldier, Felix, told us to follow him quickly. With nobody else to rely on, we trusted our intuition and followed him. Felix led us to a church that had not been infested by creatures, unlike the streets of the village. Inside we saw a group of French soldiers, prepared to take on the monsters. Our father was among the men, who we ran to in desperation and fear. Our father hugged us and told us that we would get out of there safely. The outside temperature was unbearable, and the snowy grounds left us with little options for transportation. After several minutes of waiting, a horde of creatures broke through the church entrance. The soldiers fired their rifles one by one, and began using their sabres to take on the monsters. The creatures began to overwhelm the troops, killing a vast majority of them, as my brother and I stood there, helpless. Our father picked up a wooden stake and charged at the creatures alongside Felix and the other troops. Felix became overwhelmed, getting bit by the creatures in his limbs. He was thrown to the floor and screamed in agony, as the others continued fighting for their lives. The remaining soldiers shouted at our father to run and take us both to the boat down by the river. He followed this order and brought us out the backside of the church. From there we ran to the river, where a single row boat awaited us. My father gave us the paddles, as the creatures came running down the hill towards us. To hold off the creatures so we would have time to escape, our father began fighting them off one by one. He shouted at us to escape on our own, as the pressure became more overwhelming. As we paddled away in a rush, we saw our father for the last time, in his attempt to save our lives. He fell to the floor and I refused to look back from there. My brother and I continued paddling, with tears falling down our eyes. The screams that came out of him will forever haunt me, and they will serve as a reminder of his sacrifice for us.

Sam Bonsignore '28
2nd Place, Sophomore Fiction

Der Weltkrieg

It was 1914 and the tensions were palpable across Europe. The Germans were the emerging power in Europe and wanted to unify Europe under their image, and the malevolent Kaiser wanted to make sure that the evil Entente didn't destroy Europe forever. In June the cowardly Serbians assassinated Franz Ferdinand the Archduke of Austria and the heir to the Austrian throne. The assassin was obviously a man sent by the Serbians, but the Serbians denied this. This triggered the Weltkrieg where the evil French, and British attempted to destroy the German, and Austro-Hungarian States forever. The Germans, and Austro-Hungarians were fighting for their very survival and decided that they would have to go on the offensive first. The Germans asked the Belgians for passage through their country so they could pass the Maginot Line to get to the heartland of France. The Belgians of course were happy to allow the Germans through, but the cowardly British pressured the Belgians to resist so they had an excuse to join the war, but the kind Kaiser knowing the Belgians were being forced to cooperate with the Brits ordered the soldiers advancing to be a light as they could. Then the French and British staged some pictures of Belgium and framed it as "The Rape of Belgium" but the Germans were not deterred, and uncovered the British plot. Then the Germans were stalled right outside of Paris, and dug in for a brutal trench warfare. Then in late 1914 the Ottoman Empire entered the war due to the discovery to carve up the Ottoman Empire. It was a war of survival. In 1915 the Germans managed to push the Russians out of Poland. Then they made the decision to not engage in unrestricted submarine warfare. In 1915 the cowardly Italians betrayed Later a British plot was exposed to try to get the USA to join the war on their sad which sparked outraged and forced the British to lift the blockade on Germany. Then Bulgaria who had long been bullied by its neighbors joined Germany and defeated the evil Serbians and Montenegrins and they fled to Albania. Albania sent out a plea for help which gave the kind Kaiser a reason to liberate Albania. Then the Greeks, and Romanians were peer pressured into joining the war, before being invaded by Bulgarian, and Ottoman forces. Then in 1917 the Russians descended into civil war and Germany took the opportunity to occupy the east. The treaty of Brest-Litovsk ceded lands from Finland, the Baltic, White Ruthenia, Ukraine, and the Caucuses. The Germans finally turned their full attention to France, and captured Paris by early 1919. The Treaty of Frankfurt ceded border territories to Germany, made Belgium a German Puppet, the Entente recognized the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, and France and Britain would cede lands in Africa to Germany, and the Ottomans. Bulgaria gained land in Macedonia and Thrace achieving their "Greater Bulgaria". The Treaty of Zagreb made Italy cede Venice, and Lombardy. This victory would lead to instability to the losing nations, but for now Germany had formed its Kaiserreich.

Dante Gean '29

Freshmen Nonfiction



Chiang Kai-shek

A photograph of Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taiwan.

Dante Gean '29

Tales from a Tomorrow War

In the time of peace, all of the planets in the galaxy existed in one unified Republic. That ended 6 years ago when a coalition of radical planets came to the belief that they would have a better chance of prosperity if free from the bureaucracy of the Republic. And so they attempted to secede, taking a third of the planets from the once glorious Union with them, forming a Confederacy. The Republic quickly clamored for war as such treason was not to be tolerated. This led to a long and bloody intergalactic war. However, after six grueling years of combat the tide of battles seemed to be turning in favour of the Republic. Only one planet stood in the way of the Republic's future campaign on the Confederacy's Capital world, and that was the ocean planet of Poolimari. The planet was the host of the largest supply hub in the Confederacy. If the underwater hub was cut off from the Capital, the Confederacy would stand no chance of surviving the oncoming onslaught of the Republic. So the Republic formed a small task force of five men with the sole goal of eliminating the supply hub. It was this task force that Captain Dereck Philips was assigned to. Captain Philips was a veteran and had spent four years of service battling for the reunification of the Republic. This would be his last assignment until he could return home to his beloved Earth and his family. The mission, in concept, was simple: sneak through the ventilation shafts at the surface of the water until they reached the hub's core reactor where they would plant and, once at a safe distance, detonate explosives. The shuttle dumped the squadron in the great sea of Poolimari, where they swam until they reached the ventilation shaft that was responsible for providing oxygen to the underwater base. Along the way three of the original 5 members had been picked off by the aquatic beasts that inhabited the shallow waters of the planet. The only two that remained were Captain Phillips and his best friend since boot camp, Corporal Davis. They made their way through the air shaft until they reached the main core reactor. The two men got straight to work. When they had completed attaching the explosives, they made their way back to the air vent. But then the unmistakable sound of a laser rifle broke the silence. Captain Philips whipped around just in time to see his friend crumple to the ground. The Captain was now surrounded by a cohort of Confederate soldiers telling him to raise his arms. In the flash of a moment, Derek Philips thought of his home and his wife and his son. If he complied with the soldiers demands he would still have a chance of seeing them all again. But then the supply hub would continue fueling the Capital elongating the war another two, maybe even, three years. He thought back to his son. In a year and a half his son would become eligible for the draft and be forced to fight the same war Philips himself had spent so much time fighting. No, he would not allow that. Not just for his son and his family, but for all families both in the Republic and in the Confederacy who would be torn apart if the war continued on. So the Captain took a deep breath, held up his shaking arms with the detonator firmly clutched, and then through tear-filled eyes, detonated the explosives, destroying the supply hub and everything in it.

Kevin Watson '27
2nd Place, Junior Fiction

Don’t Look Back

I ran through the pitch black forest as I heard the sound of something trailing behind me and the words “ Don’t Look Back” echoed in my mind. It was a cold and desolate winter when I decided to pack my bags and go hike in the nearby woods. It was around dusk when I arrived at the trail and started on my journey to a campsite that I saw on map. The trail was seemingly endless, with every step feeling like I was getting nowhere to my destination. Finally I spotted a sign that was posted upon a tree that stated “Campsite” and had an arrow pointing to the right. The one thing that caught my eye was the red X markings that were pasted on every single tree around me. This was unusual due to the fact that there was never any markings on these trails before. I brushed it off to just a trail marker and began to set up my tent. During the setup of my tent, I noticed a very distant whistling sound coming from around 300 yards away. The sound intrigued me due to almost sounding so close as if it was right next to my ear but it was so far away. I ignored it and lit a fire so that I could cook up the food that I had brought. I finished my food and I realized that I had forgotten to bring some water with me. On the map that I saw, there was a river nearby and thankfully there was a filter straw in my bag. The hike to the river didn’t take long and as soon as I started to drink from the river, the whistling sound erupted from the trees. Frantically, the words “ Who’s there” came out my mouth and my heart couldn’t stop pounding with fear. After the words escaped my lips, the whistling sound suddenly halted and I hurried back to the campsite. On my way back, the X marking on the trees vanished into the thin air and my suspicion grew larger. The sinister idea of something being out in the wilderness terrified me but eventually I fell asleep in my tent. At around 2 AM, my body jolted awakened to the sound of whistling coming from the right of my tent. I stayed in my tent to not alert that I was in there to any possible thing outside. The whistling stopped and I decided my best course of action was to finally see if there was something stalking me. The flashlight in my bag had only one battery in it and it was almost dead due to me not changing it. My heart pounded out my chest as I unzipped the tent’s opening and shined the flashlight into the trees. My eyes scanned every possible spot where something could be hiding and I eventually found nothing. I got out of the tent and decided to start a fire to try and ward away anything that could be out lurking in the forest. The fire wood that was gathered prior only could sustain around a 10 minute fire, this would lead me to have to go gather more wood. The fire started to die out and I relied on my flashlight to illuminate my surroundings as I looked for firewood. There were 4 huge logs on the ground and I deemed those fit enough to stoke my fire throughout the night. As I stood up with the logs in my hand, the whistling sound ripped through the air and echoed in my ears. The logs fell to the floor and in unison the whistling stopped. I aimed my flashlight directly in front of me and the image of a man-like creature engraved into my mind. It was around 8ft tall with gangly limbs that almost touched the floor and its eyes were the blackest eyes that would pierce anyone's soul. Drool started to drip from its mouth that was wide open with its bloody teeth on display. In a split second, my flashlight died and as soon as it did, it came running after me.

Ethan Rivera ‘28
Sophomore Fiction



Sunsets In The Desert

Christopher Stark '27

The Redemption

Here, you could see for miles, staring into the endless horizon
The snow-capped mountains were glistening in the Sun
The stage was set, all focus on him, about to drop in for his final run
Down but not out, he needed a perfect time to win
This was his second chance, falling short once before
Heart pounding, but mind calm, using the adrenaline to his advantage
For he refused to lose again
Confident as he gets set, knowing what he needs
Starting down the slope, focused as ever
Weaving the flags, breathing steadily, but heart pounding
Can't look up at the clock, nerves too heavy
Approaching the final flag, Gold in mind
Stretching out past the finish line, giving his all
As he hears cheers come, the gold is his
Setting the new world record, his heart speeds up
Now his mind joins, it isn't on racing, it's on celebrating
He's got his redemption on the biggest stage of his life

Tyler Wojcik '29
First Place, Freshmen Poetry

Waiting

Waiting waiting, always waiting
Never saved from agitating
Problems always complicating
Does it ever end?

I sit and wait for them to leave me
Like a termite on a weak tree
Make my life a hyperbole
Can it just suspend?

Why must no one else wait so long
For the things they've wanted lifelong
Makes me overthink like ping pong
When does closure come?

At last I come to the conclusion
That He protects with preclusion
Formed in my mind from delusions
I finally rest!

Wyatt Kovacs '26

Senior Poetry

A Surfer's Song

The ocean whispers, pulling me near,
A rising swell that causes fear.
I chase the break, despite the tear,
My board rides waves that none could dare.

Salt on my skin, the wind burns on my face,
For one pure moment, I belong in place.
I race the crest, heart pounding with the tide,
Each roaring wave a wild, relentless ride.

Beneath the swell, sky or shore to see,
The wave's tight grip has a hold on me.
No breath to take, I fight to be free,
Yet mercy comes with the returning sea.

Tyler Lechner '26
Senior Poetry



Bermuda Beach

Vijay Montoya '27

How to Combat Acid Rain

Acidic rain encompasses any precipitation with acidic components. Acidic rain is typically caused by sulfur dioxide(SO2) and nitrogen oxides (NOX) being released into the atmosphere and combining with rain to form sulfuric acid and nitric acid. During this process, acidic rain forms. Acid rain is the result of environmental pollution; it is harmful to both animals and plants.
Acid rain negatively impacts the ecosystem: damaging forests and plants, polluting aquatic lives, degrading soil, corroding buildings, and affecting human health through airborne pollutants. Preventive measures against acid rain are critical to reducing its impact.

Sulfur dioxide (SO2) and nitrogen oxides (NOX) contribute to the formation of acid rain. The major sources of SO2 and NOX in the atmosphere are burning fossil fuels to generate electricity, vehicles and heavy equipment. Acid rain forms when sulfur dioxide (SO_2) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) go into the air from pollution. These gases mix with rain and air to make acids, which then fall to the ground as acid rain. Wet Deposition: The sulfuric and nitric acids formed in the atmosphere fall to the ground mixed with rain, snow, fog, or hail. Acid rain is colorless and odorless. Dry Deposition: Acidic gases and particles can settle on surfaces even without rain. They can land on water, plants, and buildings or form larger harmful particles that affect human health. Acid rain damages leaves, reducing photosynthesis, leeches essential nutrients like calcium and magnesium from the soil, and releases toxic aluminum. Aluminum released into the water can clog fish gills, making breathing difficult, and kill some small aquatic organisms. Acid rain also deprives the soil of important nutrients like calcium and magnesium that plants need for growth. Acid rain kills organisms at the bottom of the food chain, further affecting larger animals.

Acid rain affects the food and water we consume, indirectly impacting our health. Excessive consumption of plants and water contaminated by acid rain can negatively impact several health indicators. The primary impact of acid rain on the human body is inhalation of fine particles, which can lead to respiratory illnesses such as asthma and bronchitis, as well as cardiovascular disease. Acid rain is also corrosive, damaging buildings, monuments, and materials that impact the human environment and safety, and can cause structural failures.
Acid rain prevention and control focuses on reducing the pollutants that cause acid rain. This can be achieved by using cleaner energy, conserving energy, and addressing industrial emissions. For example: Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydropower.Scrubbers and catalytic converters can be used in factories to clean pollutants from industrial exhaust gases, especially sulfur dioxide from coal-fired power plants.The Clean Air Act, a national policy, also mandates the use of scrubbers and purifiers in factories.The International Maritime Organization (IMO) sets global rules for the shipping industry to limit sulfur emissions, such as the 0.5% and 0.1% fuel sulfur limits in Emission Control Areas (ECAs).
Acid rain is caused by sulfur dioxide (SO_2) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) released from burning fossil fuels. It harms plants, animals, soil, water, and even human health. People must take action to reduce pollution by using cleaner energy sources, conserving power, and following environmental laws to limit harmful emissions. With global cooperation, renewable energy use, and stricter pollution controls, we can prevent acid rain and protect the environment for future generations.

Zhenghan Cao '28

Sophomore Nonfiction

The Unreturned

Every evening, Yusuke fed the stray cat that waited by his doorstep. It was thin, and had a sleek black and gray fur pattern. It had dull yellow eyes that seemed pure but tired. The cat purred, rubbed against his legs and disappeared into the street every night after being fed.

The next morning, the cat was sitting on her doorstep again. The cat had a feather between its legs. Yusuke wondered if it had meaning. The cat looked at him with the same gaze then dashed away. The weeks passed and the cat's visits lessened. Sometimes the cat did not show up at all, sometimes it only stayed long enough to drop another object. Yusuke kept each gift, and kept them all in a box in the corner of his dimly lit room. Yusuke's room was minimalistic, but the new box added a nice touch. When Yusuke's neighbor asked if he had seen the cat lately, he could only shake his head. Every day, the box grew heavier, though the objects had no value other than something sentimental. The gifts kept him comfortable, and aware that the cat was doing okay. Even though he did not own the cat, it was starting to mean something to him.

One evening, Yusuke realized one time that he had not fed the cat in a while. He felt guilty because he had forgotten, so he glanced outside and saw nothing but the dark and deserted road below. He waited for a long time, gazing out of the window every day, sometimes even going outside hoping that the cat might return. One night he finally understood that the cat was never supposed to be kept by him. He realized that connection is often fleeting and grows divergent, and the meaning and strength of a connection is often created in the act of people noticing.

Daniel Lasco '28

Sophomore Fiction



Rio Celeste

Christopher Stark '27

The Thing in the Woods

The forest behind my house has always been too loud, but now it's quiet, too quiet. Leaves don't rustle the way they used to, and the birds seem to have abandoned the trees altogether. At first, I thought it was just the birds leaving and the season turning, but then one night, as I was getting a cup of water from the fridge, I caught a glimpse of a figure looking through my side window right at me. Immediately, the next morning, I had told my father about what had happened, and he brushed it off. It wasn't until my father had looked around the house and noticed the large footprints appearing at the windows that were too large to be human but not shaped like any animal. The tracks led deep into the woods and seemed almost never-ending, so my father and I decided to lay traps out by the windows, ensuring that if it came back, it would set them off. Last night, I stayed awake listening to the howls of the wind and animals outside. That's when I heard it, breaking branches and tree limbs. I crept close to my bedside window, where I saw it. Tall, skinny, and emotionless, coming from the woods with red eyes reflecting the moon from the night sky, meeting mine. Hoping it didn't notice me, I crawled back into my bed, cornering myself in my room with blankets pulled over top of me. It crept closer to the window, almost curious as to what I was doing. Then, it scratched the grass with its claw-like hands and smirked at my horror, before slowly backing away. I never saw it again...

Skylar Ferreri '27
Junior Fiction

Time

Every morning I wake up to the same vivid nightmare.
School to practice running from one place to the next.
Hours pass from 6 AM to 10 PM.
The time that people go to bed is the time I get home.
Ten at night and the workload begins.
Covered in homework all due the next day.

Six hours of sleep and it starts all again.
The same vivid nightmare. Tuesday begins.
My head weighs me down. My eyes slowly shut.
The sound of a teacher's voice makes me fall asleep again.
The clock ticks slow - one hour to go.
Where does it end? I'll never know.

The days are all the same. Exhaustion succumbs me.
Every lunch is spent studying. Every spare minute spent typing.
The screens burn my eyes as I stare at a blank doc ready to write.
Halfway through the week and I want it to be over.
A workout to run right after it all.

Thursday begins with the same ringtone.
A stop. A snooze. And there it goes again.
I sit in the shower as my eyes slowly close.
A quiet drive to school upset.
A school bell rings and I'm running to class. Every hallway is a blur.
I finally get home and go right to sleep. A quick little nap before I eat.

Friday is here.
What's supposed to be a good day is overshadowed by tests.
A test every class. Something I've been studying for all week.
Each class passes by and it's finally the last period.
The clocks are mocking me as I wait for the bell.
Class dismissed and to practice I go. The school week is over. I couldn't be happier.

Sunday night arrives with doom and despair, gearing up for what's to come.
The vivid nightmare all over again.

Dean Wubbenhorst '28
Sophomore Poetry

My Calling

Today, I've decided to share my experiences in skiing since 2011. At just one year old, I took up skiing, inspired by my dad and late uncle, two great skiers of their time. Now, I'd like you to keep in mind, this is not long after I had just learned to walk. My parents would strap my skis on for me and put me on top of this small mound in my grandparents' backyard, located in Herrick Ridge, PA. After practicing over and over for around a year, I was ready, ready for the big mountain, Elk Mountain. Now, I was around two years old, my dad bought this compact backpack for me to wear that had straps for him to hold onto me and raise me onto the lift since I was only around knee height. This year went fairly smoothly, but occasionally I would play the "noodle game," where I would flop down and complain about being tired.

The next ski season finally arrived, and I was very excited. I just started preschool, and things were going great for me. I started the season off with the harness but soon progressed out of it. At this time, I wasn't quite tall enough to jump onto the lift by myself so my dad kept the backpack, removing the large straps and leaving the handle. This time around, I started to enjoy the art of skiing, getting up early to go, but then taking three hours to get ready. I wasn't quite motivated yet.

For many years, nothing changed. Come 2020, I made up my mind. I want to be a skier. I gave it my all that year, learning tricks, pushing my speed, and even pushing my body to its limits. My mind had become a mountain in itself. Halfway through the season, I felt something. Something I've never felt before. My memories are jotted, but I completely broke my leg in half, placing me in a full leg cast for months. This created many struggles for me, but as a skier, there's nothing I can't do. As I healed, I began working out and lifting weights. The doctor said I was healing very well.

Now the 2021 season was around the corner. After experiencing such pain last season, I didn't think I had much to lose. I again pushed myself to the limits, over and over. I sweat every last drop of water in my body, flew above the trees on my jumps, and glided across the snow, cutting deep with my edges. The midpoint of the season rolled around again, this time leaving me with two broken thumbs and a concussion. I wouldn't let it stop me. I kept skiing with two casts on. My confidence was through the roof. This is when I realized that skiing was made for me.

Now at this point in my life, I couldn't be happier, practicing in the offseason, throwing down huge stunts, spinning, and sliding across rails with ease. I found my true calling, building a name for myself, no longer leaving me in my father's shadow. Every time I'm at the top of the mountain I take a look out over the world, looking to the heavens, thanking my guardian angel, Uncle Kevin. Kevin was the man who helped me through my darkest moments on the slopes. I can't count how many times he has saved me from above to this day.
Thank you, Uncle Kevin.

Kieran Zebrowski '28
Sophomore Nonfiction



Rock of Service

A photograph taken of a rock formation in Arizona

Steffen Hettiarachchi '27

The Beautiful Game

Ever since I was four years old, I enjoyed playing soccer with my brother any chance I got. It was our special time to bond as brothers and it meant the world to me. However, as I've grown up, I started playing in new settings and with new friends and teammates who had become a part of my life at one time or another. However, I still made sure to find time to play soccer with my older brother whenever I could find time. My favorite time was on Sunday mornings, before any neighbors were concerned about their windows being broken by one of us. My brother and I used to play soccer weekly together. Then, the bad news came; my brother was moving out of the house. He wasn't sure how long he'd be gone. However, he promised he'd come back from time to time. Reasonably, I was heartbroken. He had been there when I had kicked a soccer ball for the first time when I was four, he saw me practicing my bicycle kick when I was nine, he saw me playing soccer for my club team and my school team up until eighth grade. So, it's easy to say that soccer, the beautiful game, was my safe space with him. So finding out that he wasn't going to be there every week crushed me. However, I didn't let that stop me. I practiced by myself and I always did my best to be outside whenever he came home. Whenever he came home we'd immediately take a soccer ball and just pass if it was bright out at all. However, as time went on, he started visiting later. My older brother's visits soon began when it was completely dark outside. Nowadays, he's tried to be earlier more often. However, he has his own life now. Therefore, I've come to terms with the fact that every time I have and will play the beautiful game with my older brother is a gift.

Daniel Irungu '28

Second Place, Sophomore Nonfiction

Goli Ashwagandha: TikTok's Favorite Supplement

Goli Ashwagandha, a dietary supplement manufactured by Goli Nutrition, has been flung into the mainstream culture due to its popularity on the tiktok shop. People of all ages have been infatuated by the so-called benefits that tiktok affiliated creators have preached. But what really is Goli Ashwagandha, and is its benefits really worth the attention?

Goli Ashwagandha is a gummy supplement that primarily consists of KSM-66 Ashwagandha Root Extract, a herb extract that has been used in traditional Indian medicine for centuries. As one of the most studied medicinal herbs in the world, its properties help manage stress, with research showing that its benefits can even range from brain health to anti-aging. Users are recommended to take this gummy twice a day, without the need of water or any terrible aftertaste due to its fruity flavor. With benefits like these, and its ease to implement in one's own routine, Ashwagandha has had an easy journey to the top of the supplement world.

But how did Ashwagandha get to this place, knowing that it is an over the counter supplement that doctors aren't prescribing. Similarly to the story of other viral products, like the hoverboard, social media is responsible for its rise. Tiktok, a social media platform that is primarily focused on short-form videos, launched a new shop feature on September 12, 2023. They took advantage of their short format content by implementing an affiliate program for creators. In this program, creators with over 5000 followers choose products that they want to promote, and through making videos and lifestreaming the product, earn a commission of each product sold on their behalf.

To further promote the product, Tiktok creators often claim that Ashwagandha is cheaper on the tiktok shop compared to other retailers such as Target or Walmart. Additionally, affiliate creators often use fear mongering tactics to scare their audiences into buying this product. They claim that common issues, such as drowsiness and bloatedness, can simply be fixed by taking this supplement, and do not consider other factors that might be the true cause. A Saint Joseph High School student was interested in fixing these problems, and after buying and taking the supplement, had digestive issues resulting from taking the gummy. He found no benefit from taking Goli Ashwagandha.

Marketing tactics like these are common everywhere, but users on Tiktok might not expect or be old enough to properly respond to these advertisements. That is why users of all ages need to be aware of the things that they see online and what they choose to follow. To conclude, supplements like these can be helpful to some, but it is dependent upon the individual to make that choice, not an advertiser who is more interested in the monetary gain from exploiting the health insecurities of its users.

Sebastian Nino '26
Senior Nonfiction

In My Head

Sometimes it's loud in here,
even when the room is quiet.
Thoughts pace like athletes
before a game that never starts.

I tell myself to breathe,
to stretch the noise,
to warm up my mind the way
I warm up my legs before training

Some days I win,
I find that rhythm,
pass the doubt to the sidelines,
move forward with purpose

Other days,
I'm just chasing after
A ball that keeps rolling
further into the fog

But I guess that's part of it,
The work no one sees, the miles you run in silence,
until your thoughts learn
to play on your team.

Jedidiah Afoke '29

2nd Place, Freshmen Poetry



Stormy Sunset

Vijay Montoya '27

Unwritten

The page is blank, the ink is still
A glimmer of thought begins to spill
The story rests inside my mind
The shape unknown, it rests unlined

The past can rest, its words will fade
I can't be changed by what I made
Every day brings a better view
A chance to start, to write it new

I won't know how it will end
Which hearts will break which paths will bend
But with every word, each step I make
Becomes a path I choose to take

No rules that bind, no fixed design,
The story's message is solely mine
This life's not written, it's just begun
Unwritten lines beneath the sun

Ethan Caro '28

3rd Place, Sophomore Poetry

The Grey Man

He walks the line,
Not wrong, not right.
A faded soul
In too much light.

They shout, “Be more!”
He turns away.
Their colors burn,
He stays in grey.

Not hero, not fool,
Nor heart of stone.
Just tired of noise,
Content, alone.

The world too loud,
Its weight too grand.
He fades to peace,
Can’t meet demand.

Jainil Patel ‘28

1st Place, Sophomore Poetry

Until Next Time

"Do you believe in monsters?"A question my little sister Katie asked me the night before Halloween. I sat on the couch, pondering this unexpected question when my older sister Livia stormed into the living room.

"Dang it, Max, you're 15 freakin' years old and can't figure out how to use the stove."

"I just don't like how hot it is," I replied. "I'm scared I'll burn the house down."

Livia just shook her head. "You're so irresponsible and lazy" she said as she walked back to the kitchen. I turned back to Katie, who was now looking over the couch and out the window.

"I don't know, why do you ask, Katie?"

"Because I see this scary monster man a lot," she answered. My first thought was dismissing what seemed like a figment of her imagination. It was October, and she probably saw kids in costumes already.

"Look, look! I see him outside now!" she exclaimed. I made my way to the couch and looked out the window. She pointed to the neighbor's driveway, and there I saw a shadowy figure, dressed in all black. He made his way to the front door. Just before he opened it, he turned his head towards us. My heart skipped a beat, startled by this sudden movement. He made his way inside, and I quickly closed the blinds and walked to the kitchen.

"Livia, I just saw a man walk into the Conner's house. You think they could be getting robbed?"

Livia looked at me, her face half-concerned and half-tired.

"I don't know Max, their son was just killed, it could be someone paying their respects. Here, help me cook while I call our parents?" As she walked out, I hesitantly fiddled with the controls of the stove. Suddenly, I heard the loud crash of glass in the living room. Leaving the burning steak on the stove, I sprinted to see what happened and saw a body in the center of the room and Katie, covered in glass and cuts. Katie was screaming and Livia ran into the room, phone in her hand. She shrieked, stepping over the body. Katie was a mess. I stood frozen in fear, seeing Mr. Conner's body was thrown through our window. Amid the panic, a loud banging at the door silenced us, as if we knew this wasn't a friendly visitor. I snap awake and signal Katie and Livia to be silent. As they moved, the banging got faster and louder. It was no longer someone knocking, it was someone trying to break in. We shuffled to the basement and hid in a closet. We heard the door swing open upstairs, and heavy footsteps above us. To our horror, they made their way to the basement stairs, and slowly down the steps. I took action, grabbing a shovel from the closet and leaving Katie and Livia behind me. I lean against the wall next to the doorway, waiting for this unwanted intruder. The footsteps get closer, and I swing around the doorway and slam the shovel into his face. It did nothing. The man wore a dark, blank faced mask. I stared at him in terror. The corners of the lips were shadowed to make it look like the blank mask was smiling faintly. My neck was grabbed, and my sight began to fade. I thought it was over until he suddenly loosened his grip and threw me to the wall. I smelt burning wood. The ceiling then collapsed onto the masked assailant. He didn't even flinch. He turned to me with that wicked faint smile from his mask, now illuminated by the flickering flames above. When the ghastly shadows danced on his blank, emotionless mask, I had an answer to Katie's question. I did believe in monsters, and one was standing right in front of me. As our house above became engulfed in flames, the intruder left. Before he made his way up the basement stairs, he turned to me, almost as if he was saying, "until next time." He was long gone when firefighters rescued us. I never forgot his hooded appearance, his ghostly demeanor, his void eyes, and his faint wicked smile. Now, a year later, he hasn't been found. Until next time.

Marcello Craig '28

Sophomore Fiction



Snooping Around

A photograph of a White-faced Capuchin monkey peeking into a hotel room in Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica

Christopher Stark '27

Blank Paper

A sheet of Paper, clean and white
Waiting for words to bring it to life
Nothing has touched its empty face
It holds a quiet, open space

What can be written
Perhaps a plane or a kitten
It could be sad, or bright
It's a place for dreams to take a flight

It speaks to you, and seems to say
“Write your thoughts here, don't turn away”
A black page waits, both soft and wide
A silent template right by your side

Caiden Mooney ‘27
Junior Poetry

A Poem about Pretentious Poetry

Excessive flowery writing
strokes my heart not.
Yes, ‘tis only my ears it is biting.
It does pain me, quite a lot.
Yes, bring out that thesaurus!
Lay its words before you.
Rhyme without remorse.
Maybe do a haiku.
Or rhyme every line.
On your assignment you are sure to do fine!

Mind your jibbering and jabbering!
You're faffing and futzing!
When you can’t rhyme it's not just mindless blabbering!
Friend, plain speech isn’t just nothing.
Should Poe have written in Seussian verse?
Wordsworth in a rhyming curse, Ovid in sonnets?
All these great poets would have surely been worse.
Surely, we’d have lessened our fondness!
Only now I realize in this din,
I, myself, have committed this sin.

Kyle Moscone ‘28
2nd Place, Sophomore Poetry

The Premonition

I woke up suddenly, panting in my bed. I got up and looked at the clock. Nothing. I questioned myself for a brief moment before getting up. Walking slowly down the stairs, careful not to trip in my current state. I turned the light switch on, but nothing. There was no power, yet so many unanswered questions. What did I just experience? A dream? Maybe I am in a simulation? I looked out the window and opened it slightly. Pitch black outside, not a sight of my patio. I ran back upstairs, grabbing my phone from my nightstand. To my dismay, it didn't work. Then, suddenly, a strange noise came from below my room. I lived alone, I was a broke college student, and I had nothing going for me in my life.

All of a sudden, a bright flash of light blinded me. I couldn't see a thing for what lasted like an hour. I woke up once again, on my bed. I got up. I looked back at my clock. 3:47 am. I sighed with relief. It was just a dream. I drank some water and tried to fall asleep. But something caught my attention. I looked outside my window. There was a slight glimmer of light from the corner. Naturally, I thought it was my neighbor's window illuminating in the darkness. This time, I got back up and attempted to peek through the blinds when I heard a sound from downstairs. I walked slowly out of my room, trying my hardest not to be heard from above.

I peeked over the railing and saw my front door gaping open. Nothing could explain the fear I had in that moment. I went back to my room, deliberating on whether the dream I had was a premonition. Someone had broken into my house. I heard the doors opening one by one. I knew they were looking for me. I grabbed my phone and hid in my closet. I had no other choice. I called the police. I could feel my life slowly start to fade away when I heard the sounds of footsteps walking up the stairs. At that point, I fainted out of fear.

Then, I woke up and heard the sounds of faint sirens in the distance. For a moment, there I had hope. I heard the mysterious figure running out of the house. I got up and walked towards the door, which had been left open. I looked toward the back to see my window shattered, with glass scattered all across. The police came and took my report of the situation. I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep soundly, and thus I slept at my friend's dorm that night. Ever since the incident, I have never had anything close to what I experienced that night, and I hope nothing ever happens in the future.

Filip Rudzinski '27

Junior Fiction

Vignette Staff

Co-Editor-in-Chiefs:

Santino Oliveti '26

Christopher Stark ‘27

Staff Members:

Antonio Tuccio ‘26

Benjamin Yao ‘26

Ruthwik Panga ‘26

Steffen Hettiarachchi ‘27

Vijay Montoya ‘27

Viren Shinde ‘27

Brendan Mullins ‘28

Daniel Irungu ‘28

Dante Gean ‘29

Aaron Stephen ‘29

Nathan Albin ‘29

Himmat Virdee ‘30

Nathaniel Franklin ‘30

Moderators:

Dr. Robert Longhi '81

Mrs. Amy Giglio

Policy

All students enrolled at Saint Joseph, and all faculty members who work at the school, are encouraged to submit poetry, fiction, nonfiction, artwork, and photography to the literary and arts magazine. Submissions are judged equally on all grade levels. Writing submissions are collected in conjunction with the school's Robert Frost Writing Contest. Robert Frost Contest winners, in all grade levels, are published in the magazine. Other writing that is published in the Vignette, as well as all the artwork and photography, have been reviewed and approved by the literary staff.

Each student may submit a maximum of five works. Previously published pieces are not eligible. All writing entries must be typed and created without any AI. Each submission (writing, photography, and artwork) must include the following information: student ID number, grade level, title, and category (poetry, fiction, nonfiction, photography, artwork).

Submissions are judged by the *Vignette* literary and layout staff, which is comprised of students who participate in the club. The English Department also provides guidance and feedback with regards to critiquing written submissions, as well as judging the winners of the Robert Frost Writing Contest. Submissions are not returned. The editors and advisors reserve the right to edit manuscripts for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and clarity.

Colophon

The Vignette is published annually each spring by the literary and art staff of the Vignette at Saint Joseph. Copies are distributed free to all students and staff at Saint Joseph High School.

The body copy was set in Libre Baskerville 13 point for a majority of the pieces, with the font being altered on some to fit the piece on one page. Headlines were set in Libre Baskerville 20 point. Student's names are also set in the body copy size and italicized as well. Page numberings are set in Libre Baskerville 17 point font. The Vignette was completed in Google Slides for this edition, after a successful pilot edition for the 62nd Volume.

The front and back cover artworks are original creations and photographs by seniors Charles Gosda '27 and Andre Ramirez '27 respectively. These works were finished originally in sizes 8.5 x 11. Folios were designed by the Vignette staff. This magazine is 60 pages using a 8.5 x 11 inch format.

Thanks to the Saint Joseph English Department and the members of the Vignette Staff for your assistance with submissions and the compilation of this work as a whole. Unequivocally deserving of a thank you are our magazines' moderators Dr. Robert Longhi '81 and Mrs. Amy Giglio for their diligent guidance and work, as this could not be possible without them.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Vignette Awards

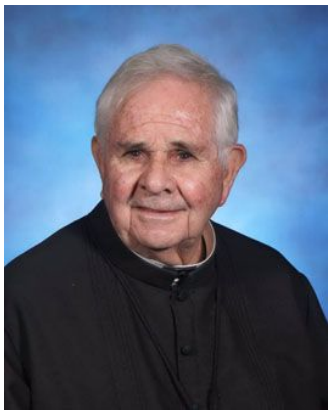
2024: ASPA - "First Place"
2023: ASPA – "First Place for Top Scoring High School and College Literary and Art Magazines and Advisors"
2022: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2021: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit" & "Outstanding Photograph"
2020: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit" & "Most Outstanding High School Literary-Art Magazine"
2019: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2018: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2017: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2016: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2015: ASPA – First Place with Special Merit"
2014: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit" & "Most Outstanding Private School"
2013: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit" & "Most Outstanding Private School"
2012: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2011: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2010: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2009: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2008: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2007: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
2006: ASPA – "First Place with Special Merit"
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Dedication

This year's *Vignette* Magazine is dedicated to The Brothers of The Sacred Heart, the group that founded our school. The Saint Joseph community honors all the brothers who have passed through these buildings, and shared in Andre Coindre's mission.

Saint Joseph High School had its first class in 1961, but many are unaware of the brothers prior to that who built up this land to make it what it is today. By 1902, there were eight brothers that built up that property which the school rests upon today: Brother Stanislaus, the first to be relocated to prepare the land; Brother Lewis Emile and Brother Florent, who joined him shortly after; Brother Fabian; Brother Damian; Brother Robert; Brother Faustas; and Brother Suarez. There were many others who walked the grounds which we walk upon today. These brothers had to endure poverty in order to establish this land as a Novitiate, and later a high school, as it is today.

Today, we look towards the 3 brothers on our campus to carry this legacy: Brother Richard Levin, who has been here longer than all of us; Brother Gary Humes, who welcomes our freshman into the school through his theology class; and Brother Barry Landry; who directs our school's mission and teaches our students economics. These three men carry out the legacy of the brothers who originally set foot on this property, and they continue to carry out the mission of the Brothers of The Sacred Heart and lead us.







Christopher Stark '27
Co-Editor-in-Chief

