

THE NUEVA CURRENT



Photo by Isabelle Nunes/SM Daily

NEWS

A new building proposition has sparked debate among citizens on San Mateo's housing affordability. [\[P 4 \]](#)



Photo by Disney

ARTS & CULTURE

Unfortunately, *Wish* is far from the pinnacle of the Disney pantheon of movies. It's a miss in terms of being the movie to mark a century of Disney. [\[P 5 \]](#)



Photo by Ed Robertson

FEATURES

The English team regularly reconsiders which books to select for their classes. Teachers share their rationale for changes to the curriculum. [\[P 12 \]](#)



Photo by Mishaal Zahed/Unsplash

OPINION

Students have been careless with the widely-used toaster oven. A call to be more conscientious while preparing a bite. [\[P 16 \]](#)



Photo by Matt Dodd/Unsplash

SPORTS

The Oakland A's are leaving the Bay. Community members and longtime fans reflect on their relationship with Oakland's hometown team. [\[P 18 \]](#)

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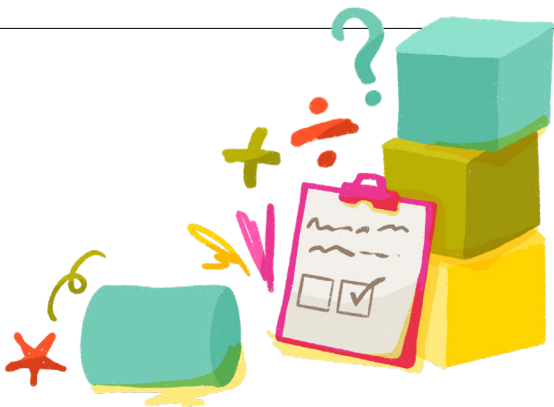
Has the Golden City lost its luster?

The poop map. The smash and grab capital. The doom loop. The reputation of San Francisco has plummeted since the pandemic — hear from residents about their lived experiences in the City by the Bay

Story by Natalie L.
with reporting by Gabe H. & Jordan F.



Photo by Joshua Sortino via Unsplash



Art by Jodie C.

Spill your brains: Unpacking the IQ test at Nueva

For decades, the assessment has been required for Lower and Middle School admissions. Here's a glimpse into how and why it's used

By Owen Y-L.

I. PUTTING GIFTEDNESS INTO NUMBERS

In the 1960s, Karen Stone McCown gathered a group of 17 Nobel Prize laureates with a singular goal: To learn how to create a school that would have fulfilled them in their childhoods. Over half a century later, the product of her work, Nueva, continues that mission of serving gifted learners.

But how does the school quantify and identify giftedness? The first step: the IQ test.

For decades, the Nueva admissions team has used the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) for evaluating applicants under 6 years old and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) for those 6 years and older. Typically, the IQ score is submitted alongside the first part of the application, which includes basic applicant information, before moving on to the rest of the process.

The "Frequently Asked Questions" page on Nueva's website states, "Our experience has shown that students with a Full Scale Wechsler IQ Score around 130 (98th percentile) and above are more likely to be successful in Nueva's program." If an applicant's score falls below the target range of around 130, the admissions team may recommend the student not to move forward with the process.

For Director of Admissions Melanie Leon, the main purpose of the target score range is to ensure that admitted students will truly thrive in and enjoy a Nueva education.

"We are a school for gifted learners—it's fast-paced and highly verbal. We have found that if students are scoring below our target range, this might be a place where they may not thrive," Leon said.

Specifically, IQ assessments can shed light on aspects like verbal and reasoning abilities, visual spatial thinking, as well as working memory and processing speed, said Dunja Solari, Associate Director of Admissions for the Middle School. "Some of those scores actually tell you quite a bit about who that student might be as a learner."

While the use of a "singular score or a snapshot in time" might appear to be somewhat contradictory, especially for a school that shies away from exams and numerical grades in favor of more project-based, collaborative learning, Head of School Lee Fertig said the test can be "legitimately valuable if we embed it into a much larger framework of assessment."

"[The IQ assessment] doesn't necessarily align with the iterative, nuanced philosophy of education that Nueva espouses," Fertig said. "But, there are certain types of things that Nueva students benefit from when they're immersed in the Nueva experience, and the IQ test, if used properly, has the potential to shed some light on those things."

Particularly, in comparison with more

achievement-based aptitude tests, Nate B. '26, who joined Nueva in preK, believes the IQ test is "a lot better of a predictor of who you actually are as opposed to your environment."

Other standardized tests can be "even more systemically unequal because it's a lot easier for wealthy parents or very present parents to put their kids in tutoring from an incredibly young age," Nate said.

Because of this, Director of Enrollment and Strategic Engagement Taryn Grogan feels that using the IQ test "evens the playing field a little bit more."

However, while it provides some useful data, an IQ score is only "one piece of the puzzle," she said.

"The IQ test doesn't tell us about resiliency, character, how they problem-solve with people in groups," Grogan said. "Those are the things that we look for and can glean from other data points in the admissions process."

Besides the IQ test, the rigorous application process includes on-campus activity sessions (called "My Nueva Day"), conversations with parents, written responses from parents and/or students, and My Page, which allows Middle School applicants to creatively express themselves in a medium of their choice. Teacher recommendations, report cards, and transcripts are also considered.

[\[CONTINUED ON P 7 \]](#)

Sophomore starts music nonprofit to foster intergenerational connections

Through Link-age Youth Music, Edden L. '26 connects youth musicians with senior homes to spread the “universal language” of music

By Ellie L.

Edden L. '26 has played violin for eight years—many of which were spent playing for an orchestra. But over time, he grew tired of learning the same, overly technical pieces for months at a time with the orchestra.

“I wasn’t expressing what I wanted to with my music,” he said.

So last spring, he quit the orchestra and created his own program, Link-age Youth Music, to organize free student music performances at senior homes, hoping to share the wisdom, joy, and energy of music and create powerful intergenerational connections.

Though Link-age Youth Music is based in SF, Edden has recruited a group of almost a dozen different youth musicians from across the Bay Area.

Each musician can decide how much they’re involved: some may just perform, while others have joined the leadership team that Edden heads. As of December, they have had six concerts with performers playing instruments from piano to ukulele.



Photo by Yingjun Gong

SMILING SOLOIST

Edden L. '26 smiles wide with his violin after performing at Link-age Youth's Thanksgiving concert.

A typical concert starts with Edden introducing the student musicians, followed by a series of performances that are preceded by an introduction to the piece and the composer.

According to Edden, their best concert so far was not big, with only six performances, but still “special” nonetheless.

“A lot of the seniors stayed back and talked with us. I really felt like [the

performers and seniors] connected,” Edden said.

While not every senior they’ve played for speaks English or can understand their introductions, Edden states that linguistic barriers is part of what Link-age Youth Music hopes to address.

“I believe music is the universal language,” he said with a smile.

Affinity groups share a flavorful journey of cultures

A multicultural potluck let students experience multiple cultures through food

By Jordan F.

From sweet fresh baked cornbread to savory green onion pancakes, a multicultural gathering of foods unfolded on the Rosenberg Lawn.

On Tuesday, Nov. 28, Zara M. '25, Upper School Equity and Inclusion Representative, organized a potluck event for affinity groups to introduce foods from their culture to the student body. Unlike last year, this event was intended to bring cultures together rather than raising money.

Six different affinity groups brought

food such as Persian pastries, East-Asian shrimp chips, and South-Asian Biscuits.

The Korean Affinity Group brought spicy rice cakes, or tteokbokki, a popular Korean street food eaten since the 1800s, paired with imitation fish cake and topped with thinly sliced chives.

“For my family, whenever we visit Korea we always get street food—usually tteokbokki— so making [tteokbokki] reminds me of visiting family,” said Penelope C. '26, a member of the Korean Affinity Group.

Three tables to their right, the Black Student Union passed out samplings of

macaroni and cheese.

“My uncle taught me how to make [macaroni and cheese] and we make it every Thanksgiving,” said Black Student Union student lead Zara M. '25. “It’s just soul food that I wanted to share with the community.”

At the very last table on the right, Brayden D. '27, a member of the Taiwanese affinity group, shared dumplings.

“This dish reminds me of my family and culture because I grew up eating this,” Brayden said. “It brings my family closer together.”

Many students came to enjoy the variety of cultural foods.

“Usually you are confined to your culture at home, but trying new foods can help you experience other cultures,” said Anjali M. '27, who sampled several dishes offered.

After the remnants of the potluck were eaten by students, Zara shared her inspiration behind the potluck.

“I wanted to create a space for people to bring and share food that was culturally significant to them,” Zara said. “I would say it was a success.”



Photo by Jordan F.

FOOD FILLED FUN

Zara M. '25 and Anya D. '25 serve freshly baked homemade mac and cheese at the Black Student Union's table.

Leading into Winter Break with Wellness Week

By Jordan F.

As the end of the Fall semester approaches, major assignments and tests leave many students feeling stressed. So this year, the Mental Health Advocacy Club, organized Wellness Week for the week of Dec. 11 in conjunction with the Nueva Parent Association.

On Monday, students were greeted with breakfast stations set up around school, piled with bagels, cream cheeses, and yogurt.

Tuesday delivered delicious French toast, sausage, and eggs for lunch. Posters were hung around school, with prompts for students to reflect on the positives within their lives.

During lunchtime on Wednesday, there were activities on the lawn, such as yoga led by admissions head Emily Fedor, and paper snowflake making. A therapy dog was also available for students to cuddle, play, and relax with.

On Thursday, ninth and tenth grade advisors conducted dedicated advisory time to one-on-one check ins with students and fun games.

Lastly, on Friday, students sipped hot chocolate and cider from a Rosenberg lawn bar before school.

Each of these activities and dishes were intended to help students relax or gain back energy to focus during this last week.

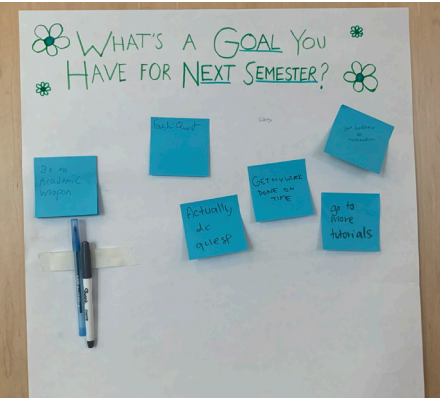


Photo by Ellie L.

POSITIVE POSTER

Student responses dot one of the posters put up by Mental Health Advocacy Club.

NEWS BY THE NUMBERS



Photo by Andrew Alexander

20

US TRIPS

There are three trips each in ninth and tenth grade, and seven trips each in eleventh and twelfth grades.



Photo by cammandawe / Unsplash

10

NEW TRIPS

Of the 20 Upper School trips that will take place in may, half of them are new for 2024: San Juan Islands, the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, Southern California, O'ahu and Kauai trips in Hawaii, Boston-New York library trip, the Florida Keys and Georgia, Ireland, and Venice.



Photo by Ellie L.

120-130

GIFTS WRAPPED

The Community Service Learning club wrapped an assortment of donated games, puzzles, stuffed animals, journals, and other interactive tests during the Wednesday of Wonder morning. They partnered with Life Moves to send gifts to low-income families in the Bay Area.



Photo by Wan San Yip / Unsplash

60+

PLAYERS

Over 60 students participated in the dodgeball game that took place in the Spirit Week assembly on Wednesday, Dec. 13. The juniors won.

Teams fundraise for local nonprofit

Sports fundraiser sparks
competition in support
of The Hope Center

By Neel G.

Sweet scents of home baked goods wafted through the air on Dec. 1, attracting a swarm of hungry students to the tables in the East Courtyard. In light of healthy competition and high spirits, the Upper School soccer and basketball teams led a bake sale and raised \$275 to donate to a local non-profit, which was selected by the team who raised the most money.

Alizey H. '27, a JV soccer player who baked blueberry muffins, was intent on leading the girls soccer team to victory. "Each team was really passionate about winning the competition, but we still had fun running the booth together," she said.

Alizey's muffins, along with home-baked matcha cookies, blondies, brownies, and cupcakes helped the girls soccer team raise \$156 and win the fundraiser. For the recipient of their donation, the girls soccer team chose the Hope Center, a San Francisco based organization that supports transitional housing for women in abusive relationships.

"We decided to donate to the shelter because we want to uplift and help women in any way we can," said girls soccer team captain Kaila E. '24, who proposed the non-profit. "Places like this are extremely important."

"The fundraiser was a great way to start the winter season," Alizey said. "It really brought the sports teams together, while bonding with the Nueva community for a greater cause."



Photo by Freepik

Class shirt sparks discussion about gender dynamics in STEM classes

All boys MVC class becomes the center of a discussion

By Aaron H.

An all-male multivariable calculus class sparked conversation about gender dynamics in STEM classes in the week before fall break by creating t-shirts that read "trigonometry [sic] is for boys, linear algebra is for men."

At the beginning of the semester, the 12-person class quickly noticed that the roster was filled with only male identifying students, and titled the class "Men-VC"—a play on the acronym for multivariable calculus, "MVC."

"Maybe by the end of the semester you'll be men, but right now you're Boys-VC," retorted the teacher, Andrew Alexander.

And that was the start of the inside joke. From then on, for both Alexander and the students, the class became a "coming of age story."

Later in the semester, Alexander noticed that the class was overusing trigonometry rather than the "much simpler, much more beautiful," linear algebra to solve problems. He wrote on the board "trigonometry is for boys, linear algebra is for men."

The class loved it. It became their unofficial motto.

"The intent of the joke was that we were all boys and using linear algebra is one step to becoming men that will kind of codify our journey. Had it been a class of multiple genders, it would have been 'trigonometry is for children, linear algebra is for adults.'"

In late September, Jaxon J. '24 designed a shirt that carried the motto. They went to great lengths to produce it: because the term "MVC" was trademarked by Moreno Valley College, screen-printing company CustomInk would not allow Jaxon to



Photo from Jaxon J.

T-SHIRT DESIGN

The class's shirt is designed to include inside jokes and references from throughout the semester.

print the shirts. Jaxon, determined, called the district supervisor of the college, eventually receiving permission to make the shirts.

When the students gifted Alexander with a shirt, he couldn't believe it.

"It is probably the sweetest thing any student or any group of students has ever done in my decade as a teacher," Alexander said.

The shirt's design was centered around the class's motto, and referenced other inside jokes and rabbit hole stories from class.

"The intent of the joke was that we were all boys and using linear algebra is one step to becoming men that will kind of codify our journey," Jaxon said. "Had it been a class of multiple genders, it would have been 'trigonometry is for children, linear algebra is for adults.'"

However, when the shirts were made public by a Grade 12 "Dean's Weekly" email—sent out to senior parents and students—readers lacked this context, sparking discussion regarding gender dynamics in STEM classes.

Lara M. '25, co-lead of the Feminism Club, described the messaging of the shirt as "harmful."

"We don't want to shoot down any camaraderie or friendship that they've developed," Lara said. "At the same time, why is the school representing [the Multivariable Calculus] class to be male exclusive?"

Led by Lara on Friday, Nov. 17, the Feminism Club discussed the shirts—for which many believed were symptomatic of a larger issue in STEM classes. Madeline L. '24, who took MVC last year and is a teaching assistant for it this year, was one of the students in attendance at the meeting.

"We've latched onto this shirt because of some of the underlying girls in STEM issues," Madeline said.

Madeline believes that while no one at Nueva is denied access to higher level STEM classes, the issue lies in the disproportionate amount of girls that are enrolling in these classes.

"Girls sometimes make the decision to not take higher level classes because of mansplaining or being in classes where there are mostly all males and not having a very good experience," Madeline said. "The STEM class culture influenced them into thinking that they are not as deserving, don't belong, or wouldn't be able to excel."

In the Dean's Weekly following fall break, a note written by Jackee Bruno, Dean of Students, was attached addressing the situation.

"Nueva admin will be reviewing our scheduling process to see what we can do moving forward about homogenous groupings, looking for opportunities to adjust where possible," Bruno wrote. "We will also continue engaging in conversations about the systemic issues leading to unbalanced gender numbers in STEM at both an institutional and global level."

Intersession 2024: More AI, more alumni, and an improved scheduling app

The beloved January program will bring an abundance of new and returning workshops

By Niam K.

Every year in January, over the course of four days, the Upper School offers students a wide variety of workshop courses ranging from professional panels in life sciences and medicine to cooking and survival skills. Intersession exposes students to diverse fields through hands-on lessons and lectures. The facilitators are both Nueva parents as well as professionals and experts, who offer over a

hundred sessions that cover a broad spectrum of topics around the arts, humanities, STEM, environmental citizenship, design thinking, and social-emotional learning.

In addition, this school year's Intersession adopted a new platform for picking courses: Sched. The platform offers a convenient way for students to pick their courses with a range of unique features such as sorting by the length of a session, the time and day it occurs, and the discipline it falls under.

Contrary to previous years where choosing intersession courses was a slew of Google Forms

and spreadsheets, this year's platform gives greater autonomy to the students. Director of Enrichment and Summer Programs Katie Saylor was quick to praise Sched.

"[Sched] just puts it into the hands of the students directly so it removes any middle person that could make errors," said Saylor, who shared that she was able to pilot Sched when she helped create the schedule for the Innovative Learning Conference earlier in the fall.

Additionally, Sched allows students to make changes on their own without having to come find Saylor or Master Scheduler Kevin Dineen.

"Last year we set up a table at lunch for a week and the lines were crazy, wrapped around the corner," Saylor said. "It was just a mess."

Another new change this year: Upper School students are invited to spend an afternoon at the Hillsborough campus leading an Intersession workshop for Lower School students. Brooks W. '26 was one of the students who helped lead the planning for this session over the summer.

"I hope that both the upper schoolers and lower schoolers can have a great time, and that the younger students will ask tons of questions that they have, not just about life at Nueva but about anything in general," Brooks said.

This course spearheads a new ambition to help connect the two campuses and allow students to utilize both facilities. Brooks echoed this idea when describing the goals of this new intersession course.

"I also wanted to hopefully build some momentum around the focus on developing a

mentoring program at Nueva," Brooks explained. "I think it's a really unique opportunity for Nueva, having both campuses, that we should take advantage of, and hopefully to the benefit of older and younger students."

Students are also able to utilize the new features of our campus following the recent construction. This year there are a wealth of options in the newly built gym, ranging from learning the basics to participating in weight lifting and other athletic activities.

In response to the rise of artificial intelligence, the number of AI courses has grown tremendously since last year.

"Last year around when Intersession planning began, ChatGPT had only just come out, or was on the verge of release, so our sessions weren't really exploring it," Saylor said. "This year we have so many sessions that are actually digging in and using it... just really more practical implications of AI."

This year, Intersession will also feature more alumni-led sessions than ever before, like Artisanal Pizza Making, which is led by three members of the class of 2023.

"I see it as a real win, just the increase in alums from last year to this year," said Saylor, who estimated that three times as many are coming back to lead sessions. "I think that it's a really fun way to keep them in the community."



Photo from Katie Saylor

FORWARD THINKING

Intersession on transformative justice is held in the Writing and Research Center.

New building proposition prompts discourse on San Mateo housing affordability

A measure removing the five-story cap on buildings could increase housing development in the coming years

By Josie B.

On a cloudless morning in November, San Mateo resident Evan Powell took a picture with his dog while walking down B-street in downtown San Mateo. He posted the picture on Nextdoor, a social networking app for neighbors, however, with a caption that was less sunny.

“Can’t wait for this to be transformed into a canyon with 12-story buildings on either side,” Powell wrote sarcastically, calling for residents to attend a city council meeting on November 6. “If you, too, are concerned about the city council pushing through a plan calling for 50%+ growth in population when our population and that of California has been flat recently, please attend the city council meeting...”

Powell’s post was far from the only one on the topic of a taller building frenzy in reference to a proposal that was recently discussed in city counseling to amend Measure Y to allow new buildings to be taller and have higher residential densities than currently allowed.

Many San Mateo residents have taken to online platforms recently to share their thoughts about the proposed amendment to Measure Y, a law that narrowly passed in 2020 with 50.05% voter support, that currently ensures a five-story cap on residential and commercial buildings coming to ballots in 2023. The proposal is the result of a new general plan that outlines ways to promote affordable housing and housing development in San Mateo, including an increase in building density and height limits. The plan has identified 10 areas

around the city where growth and change could be concentrated if Measure Y was amended.

San Mateo has consistently fallen short of meeting low-income housing targets set by the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), a state mandate that determines the number of new homes an area must plan for in order to accommodate residents; last year, the county met only 29% of its low-income RHNA targets.

However, not everyone is as convinced as Powell that the amendment will be detrimental. In fact, many San Mateo residents have brought up the lack of affordable housing currently in San Mateo as a reason why Measure Y should never have been passed.

Raayan Mohtashemim, a San Mateo native, wrote an editorial piece on why Measure Y should have been shut down in 2020 for

the San Mateo Chronicle: “As a child of San Mateo, I’m tired of seeing us choose the status quo over a more affordable, livable community.”

In a city council meeting, Mayor Amourence Lee said she felt the new measure was insufficient and advocated for the exception to apply to the downtown San Mateo Caltrain station. She also cited the recently completed Kiku Crossing as an example of the city’s affordable housing efforts, noting the development used state density bonus laws to add approximately 60 more below-market-rate units that would have otherwise been prohibited due to local density requirements.

The dispute ultimately highlights a split among residents about how aggressive the city should be in meeting affordable housing needs.

WORD ON THE STREET

Students weigh in on affordable housing in San Mateo

“A lot of people in San Mateo like the idea of affordable housing on the surface but they reject it when it is proposed in their neighborhood, it’s like the idea of the “Not in my backyard.”

–Syon P. ’24



“The only reason why affordable housing doesn’t happen is because the people who would have to agree all own property and don’t want prices to go down their area.”

–Ryan F. ’26



“I think the Bay Area needs more affordable housing so everyone has the opportunity to live here. Restrictive zoning policies such as high restrictions contribute to California’s affordable housing crisis.”

–Adam A. ’24



Despite disagreement at COP28, historic climate progress was made

In a surprising turn of events, an international fossil fuel phaseout is official

By Kayla L.

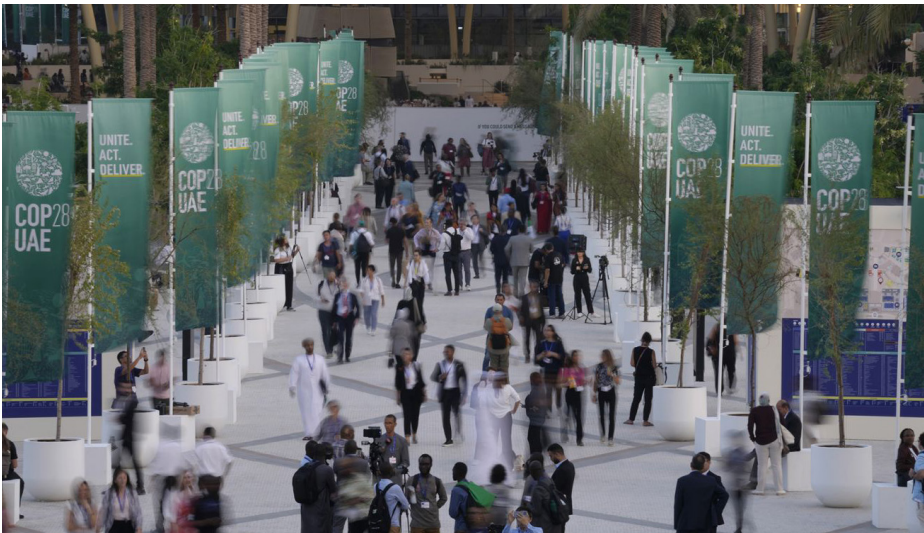
As the conference headed into overtime, it seemed like the world leaders’ grueling climate negotiations would yield an unproductive result.

Yet, the final agreement of the 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) has pleasantly surprised many. Taking place from Dec. 1 to Dec. 13 in the United Arab Emirates, the annual conference is the largest global climate summit in the world with delegates from 197 nations.

In the summit’s final 11,000 word memo released on Dec. 13, a small but significant call for the “transitioning away from fossil fuels.” With no previous international agreements at this scope unanimously calling to end fossil fuels—the largest contributor to climate change—this was an ending that surprised many.

With global temperatures reaching 1.46°C above pre-industrial levels in 2023, the tone at COP28 this year was no longer about whether to take action but how and when.

Still, COP28 received backlash for hosting a record number of 2,400 fossil fuel lobbyists in Dubai. In contrast, Sudan, one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable countries,



Photos by Peter DeJong / AP

sent only 46 delegates.

The fossil fuel industry’s tight grip on COP28 was demonstrated by the U.A.E.’s top fossil fuel official Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber presided over the event. On X, Al-Jaber’s “preposterous disguise... of the most brazen conflict of interest in the history of climate negotiations” was criticized by former Vice President Al Gore.

Other politicians have already started to call out the final agreement’s lack of specific wording. While COP28 reached a long-awaited consensus about phasing out fossil fuels, it is still clear that individual countries will need to be self-motivated in addressing

COP OUT

Attendees of the conference flocked to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from Nov. 30 to Dec. 13

the climate crisis.

The United States, one of the richest and most polluting countries in the world, was represented at COP28 by climate envoy John Kerry, 18 key delegates, and Vice President Kamala Harris. VP Harris announced the country’s pledge of \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund and called upon other world leaders to step up.

Recent COPs at a glance:



COP 16

Established a temperature target at below two degrees celsius and established 100 billion dollar climate fund



PARIS2015

COP 21

Paris agreement reduced global temperature target to well below 2°C and pursued efforts to limit it to 1.5°C.



COP 26

Passed a provision to phase-down coal power and a phase-out of fossil fuels.



Photo by Disney

A wish on a star could not have saved this mess

Disney’s newest animated film, *Wish*, is forgettable and lukewarm

By Ellie L.

On Oct. 16, 1923, Disney was founded, promising wonder and joy for all. One hundred years later, its centennial film does not live up to that promise.

On the surface, *Wish* looks like a classic Disney film. Teenager Asha (voiced by Ariana DeBose) is a clumsily earnest, brave heroine with hair to envy and a powerhouse voice. She has a spunky goat sidekick Valentino, and, of course, has experienced some family tragedy. It falls into Disney staples and yet, tries to lead Disney into a new century of wonder at the same time.

However, *Wish* fails to balance these contrasting aims and instead becomes something lukewarm that kids can enjoy but not remember, given the conspicuous lack of good old Disney magic.

The film introduces the picturesque kingdom of Rosas and its charismatic king Magnifico (voiced by Chris Pine). Spoiler alert: Magnifico is a tyrant who locks up people’s wishes, and selectively grants them, in a vague metaphor for dreams, capitalism, and corporations. Magnifico’s sinister nature is revealed to Asha in a song. So what does she do? Reverting to the classic Disney trope, she sings a dramatic ballad. Her performance of “This Wish” brings down a star named Star, threatening Magnifico’s own powers. When the movie reaches its climax, Asha sings a song that unites everyone to victory against Magnifico.

It’s a lackluster ending that is just one example of how the story, while initially interesting, is quickly swallowed by the choppy pacing and lack of actual depth. The premise is too complex for the short 95-minute runtime, and as a result, nothing comes of it since the movie only grabs at familiar cliches.

The soundtrack is much the same, lacking any memorable or developed nature. Villain Chris Pine’s “This Is The Thanks I Get” has a catchy chorus and a few

WISH UPON A STAR

Asha, voiced by Ariana Debose, reassures the anthropomorphic Star.

crafty lines, but is not spectacular. Ensemble number “Knowing What I Know Now” takes a stab at originality with a fierce drumline, but is foiled by the laughable lyrics. None of the songs are standout. Every song plays it safe, sticking to the tried and true Disney sounds of sweeping instrumentals and an occasionally jazzy beat. Given the whopping 12 songs in the entire movie, it is just disappointing.

Sure, *Frozen* and *Moana* both had the same elements in a lot of their songs too, but at least there were other catchy songs like “You’re Welcome,” or a unique character, or original premise like sisterly love. *Wish* has none of that freshness, for all of their attempts fall flat.

Even the animation, a tenet of Disney movies, is neither fresh nor a nostalgic tribute. It should be gorgeous. It is a hybrid of two styles: lined, 2D animation that feels whimsical, and 3D fluid animation that creates the modern definition and lights of recent Disney films. On paper, it seems like the perfect balance between an ode to Disney’s past, while using enough updated technology to keep it grounded. But the results are often jarring. Facial movement looks strange, and the large, Disney eyes look out of place on the 2D faces. This failure is only accentuated by the animation of the voiceless Star, a character perfect to be a plushie that bears an unfortunate resemblance to Carl’s Jr.’s logo.

Kids can enjoy the movie, just as they’ll hug that easily merchandisable star, but they won’t remember it in the pantheon of Disney classics. Disney enters a new century with *Wish*, but the film is only another entry in the list of the recent forgettable movies. Let us all wish that Disney can reclaim their magic before the end of this century.

Nicki Minaj spotlights her lyrical maturity in *Pink Friday 2*

Her latest album sings with vulnerability and introspection

By Gabe H.

When Nicki Minaj released her initial *Pink Friday* album in 2010, she was still an up-and-coming artist, a far cry from the superstar rapper of which she is now rightfully regarded as. However, the album’s commercial success catapulted her up the rankings of pop-music stardom, and she cultivated a lucrative brand, releasing *Pink Friday: Roman’s Reload*, two years later. With chart-topping tracks like “Super Bass” and “Starships,” the broader *Pink Friday* brand became a staple of the pop music canon.

Over a decade later, Minaj comes full circle in her long-awaited *Pink Friday 2*, which finally dropped on Dec. 8. In an album that seamlessly traverses pop and rap, Minaj juxtaposes lighthearted club tracks with biting honesty, aptly infusing pop hits with hard-hitting rap records. Tracks like “Pink Friday Girls,” where she samples Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun,” and the fiery “Barbie Dangerous,” reinforce her status as a hitmaker on her first album since 2018.

With remarkably swift lyrical pacing, “Barbie Dangerous” allows Minaj to justify her claims to superiority in contemporary rap music. Sampling “Notorious Thugs” by the Notorious B.I.G. feat. Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, the track radiates dominance: “Chanel bags, they still swingin’ / Old hits, they still swingin’” she raps, noting her long musical career and ongoing A-List presence. The track reads as a surefire sequel to her 2018 “Barbie Dreams,” where she exacted searing indictments on other rappers in the field, perpetually throwing rhythmic punches.

She opts for a more temperate vibe in other tracks, suggesting heightened maturity and greater command over her music compared to the omnipresent freneticism and overdone electronic overtones on Minaj’s initial *Pink Friday*.

Minaj’s artistic control is exemplified clearly in “Last Time I Saw You.” In this unembellished track, Minaj wrestles with the feeling of guilt, lamenting her choice to push away a loved one who has presumably passed away. Her pain is palpable throughout the track, but reaches a breaking point in her muffled chorus: “I wish I’d hugged you tighter the last time that I saw you.” In her verses, she



Photo by Nicki Minaj

NEON DREAMS

The cover of *Pink Friday 2* is reminiscent of her signature pink themes with a futuristic twist.

effortlessly evokes nostalgia. Before hinting at the disintegration of this relationship, she reflects on its highs: “Them nights we wish never ended/Those rules that we wish we bended.” However, these highs evidently dissolved into dysfunction, resulting in a heartbreak that “never mended.” Her looming regret is rooted in the notion that these tensions will remain forever unresolved.

“Just the Memories” perfectly bookends the album. In this track, Minaj contemplates the emotional trajectory of her childhood, excavating a history of untapped trauma. She recounts her first crush in fifth grade being “stabbed in the neck with a switchblade.” She goes on to rap about being arrested and “assaulted with a deadly weapon.” The juxtaposition of her intentional syllabic phrasing and exacting rhyme scheme paints a confessional portrait. In her haunting chorus, she articulates the looming influence of the past. “Memories don’t leave like people do, they’ll always ‘member you.” In confronting her tumultuous childhood and history of trauma, Minaj seeks to mend fragments of the heartbreak outlined in “Last Time I Saw You.”

Throughout *Pink Friday 2*, Minaj establishes herself not just as a hitmaker but as an artist who processes authentic heartbreak and trauma through her music, and it’s a joy to witness her lyrical evolution.

Best holiday movies Looking for a holiday movie to watch? Look no further, we’ve got you covered.

By Ellie L.



HANNUKAH ON RYE (2022)

Like a holiday themed *You’ve Got Mail*, *Hanukkah on Rye Bread* enjoys a fun enemies to lovers dynamic, complemented by intense chemistry, and well meaning family. It’s a gleeful, occasionally dramatic flick that’s easy to watch. It’s cheesy, and cliché, but not overly so. All in all, it’s a nice escape into festive cheer.



LAST CHRISTMAS (2019)

Touching and heartfelt, *Last Christmas* is like roast-ed yams. On the outside, it looks like a dull, cliché Christmas romance, just another holiday flop. But when you dig in, vividly allures you in the form of the wreck of a woman Emilia Clarke portrays. By the time you polish it off, the movie settles into you with just enough nostalgia and warmth to tug at your heartstrings.



THE GRINCH (2018)

The Grinch is a classic character that several movies have tried to get right. *The Grinch*, in a slew of colorful, rounded animation and ridiculous, Seuss-esque machines, manages to capture his essence. The movie, overall, is a nostalgic blast that is as family friendly and heartwarming as it gets. It is a perfect little introduction into the holiday season that can be watched by all audiences, young and old.



LOVE ACTUALLY (2003)

A staple of the holiday genre, *Love Actually* never loses its freshly realistic luster, no matter how many times I watch it. The movie is composed of multiple couples and swoon worthy romances with a wide variety of set-ups and dynamics. That doesn’t mean every story ends happily. After all, these are real people. You’ll cry, you’ll laugh, because that’s life, actually.

Pop Culture Report Card

Our staff's celebrations and condemnations of the latest in pop culture

By Gabe H.

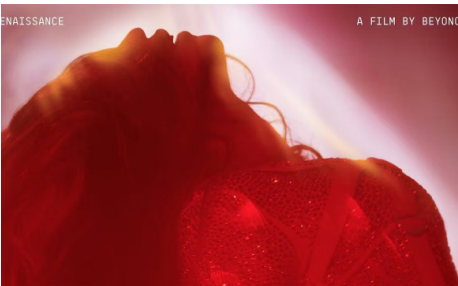


Photo by Parkwood Entertainment

Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé: A+

The meditative and introspective documentary immortalizes and sheds light on the superstar's most recent groundbreaking world tour. Shattering the record for the highest-grossing film to open on post-Thanksgiving Friday, Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé is further proof that Bey's crown never tarnishes.

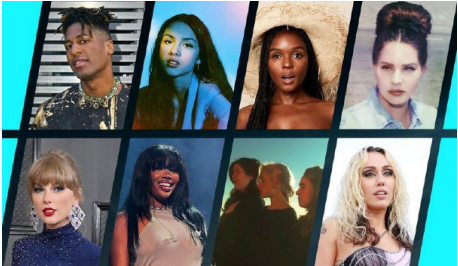


Photo by The Recording Academy

Grammy Nominations for Song of the Year: B-

The nominations for Song of the Year presented a wide-ranging if predictable encapsulation of this year's most memorable tracks. Soaring R&B ballads like SZA's "Kill Bill" and pop anthems like Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero" generated the most buzz in the category, fending off competition from lighthearted tracks like "Dance the Night" from the Barbie movie, Miley Cyrus' wildly overplayed "Flowers," and Olivia Rodrigo's hard-hitting "Vampire." In a season of music that has been refreshing and generative, as evidenced in lesser-known albums like Janelle Monáe's The Age of Pleasure as well as more mainstream albums like Rodrigo's Guts, the Song of the Year category was once again over-saturated with pop-hits from albums rife with stronger material.



Photo by @tomholland13/Instagram

"Rizz" is the word of the year: D

Oxford Dictionary, with the utmost respect, I implore you to remove "rizz" from your vocabulary. A gen-Z slang term that refers to a person's romantic charisma, "rizz" was widely popularized in 2023 after Tom Holland employed the word when referring to his relationship with Zendaya. Like many slang terms coined by our generation, it has been playfully adopted by older generations, much to our chagrin. For Oxford Dictionary to crown it word of the year, encouraging usage in more non-gen Z individuals, is a real kicker.



Photo by Netflix

Squid Game: The Challenge: F

One thought never crossed my mind while bingeing Netflix's Squid Game in 2021: adapting the series into a vapid reality show. Featuring real debtors down on their luck, the game boasts a \$4.56 million prize and pared-down stakes. However, by satirizing the dehumanization of debtors and other poverty-stricken individuals for mass consumption, Squid Game: The Challenge laughably misreads the original series' polarizing anti-capitalist message.

By Kayla L.

In an Instagram reel posted in late August, content creator "Ya Boi Shuggie" rips actress Rachel Zegler to shreds.

"Pretty much everybody hates her," he says, while delivering a vicious rant of her as "an absolute PR nightmare" and a "young [actress]... who knows next to nothing at all."

This video is among hundreds that target Zegler, a 22-year-old American actress who has played leading roles in West Side Story (2021), the Shazam! sequel, and Hunger Games prequel. Over the past few months, the typically divided Internet has somehow united to bully Zegler for being "annoying" and "undeserving." They've pulled interview clips of her out of context, pitted her against fellow

excitement for the public to see the movie. TikTokers have a serious case of selective hearing on social media.

I've now watched hours of trolling TikTok videos, analyzed Zegler's interviews, plunged into Reddit subthreads about her, and I cringe at how horribly the internet has treated her for small missteps. I know the internet is not the whole world; instead, it's a reflective mirror. The internet's recent behavior is breaking my faith in it.

At the core of the "Rachel Zegler hate train," I see a successful young woman whose playful, assertive personality became an easy target for hateful people on the internet. Some of Zegler's comments lacked nuance, sure. She isn't perfect. My question is, why should she be? The demonization of young, rising, and imperfect women—which all people are—like Zegler is a pattern we need to break today.

There's an elephant in the room: casting a Latina as Snow "White" is what I think is fueling the majority of the inordinate hate online. Social media users have ranged from calling her "Sand Brown," to urging Disney to cast someone "more vibrant," to cryptically commenting on a promotional photo, "her skin was white as snow."

The racist backlash against Zegler's casting is hateful and widespread. We saw the same situation for breakout actress Halle Bailey with The Little Mermaid, who was criticized for being a Black actress playing the traditionally white Disney princess. I wish that the hateful people online realized these young actresses of color are not stealing the old, classic animations away from anyone. Instead, they are building onto them with new stories, that fans have the full autonomy of choosing whether or not to watch.

Stepping back, I've realized that this is not an isolated situation. Instead, it is a pattern where social media users gang up against young women—of color, especially—on the rise. They look for a small misstep and latch onto it to drag her down.

In 2013, #HathaHate, a hate movement against actress Anne Hathaway, went viral on X after she won an Oscar for her Les Misérables movie remake. They called her annoying and princessy. After marrying Justin Bieber in 2018, model Hailey Bieber endured

years of internet slander for "stealing" him from Selena Gomez. They called her fake and conniving. In 2019, as Captain Marvel rocketed towards a \$1 billion box office gross, bloggers and YouTubers launched a hate campaign against leading actress Brie Larson. They called her too outspoken, specifically about diversity issues. That same year, upon joining the British royal family, Duchess Meghan Markle endured thousands of racist X posts that reached over

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17 million users. They called her improper and a bully. Ironic, right?

To put it bluntly, I am deeply concerned that the internet bashes young women quickly because we're unwilling to see their success. This is rooted in historical gender discrimination, where women have long been seen as incompetent and unfit to be anything other than what's tradition.

Women are still at a sizable disadvantage when it comes to building their success.

This, too, is a social media problem. To bully Zegler, creators and users have taken quotes out of context, made simple of the complex, and weaponized a powerful tool for all the wrong reasons. I believe that social media users have the right to hold celebrities accountable, but we have too often done it incorrectly. Any nuance, empathy, or kindness falls into the cracks of our #foryou pages.

Despite the bullying on social media, Zegler is unbothered, posting glamor shots from the red carpet and cheerful behind-the-scenes peeks into her films. If the internet remains unwilling to consider her full story, let's take a page from Zegler's book and mind our business.



Photo by Matt Winkelmeyer / Getty Images

It's time to deboard the Rachel Zegler hate train

The latest celebrity cyberbullying campaign reveals an awful sexist pattern



Photo by Amanda Edwards / Getty Images



Photo by Freepik (statue), Illustration by Jodie C.

FEATURES

Spill your BRAINS

Unpacking the IQ test at Nueva

For decades, the assessment has been required for Lower and Middle School admissions. Here's a glimpse into how and why it's used

By Owen Y-L.

[CONTINUED FROM P 1]

Notably, the IQ assessment is not used as part of the Upper School admissions process. The high school used to require applicants to take either the SSAT or ISEE standardized tests but removed the requirement during the COVID-19 pandemic. "One could ask, logically: then why do you need it at all?" Fertig said. "If you can get away without it in the Upper School, why not do the same for preK through eighth grade?"

It all comes down to the available information with which to evaluate applicants in the admissions process. "We don't have the same longitudinal data on our Lower and Middle School students as we do with our high school students," Grogan explained, emphasizing that much of a younger child's academic and extracurricular life can be dictated by their parents. "A student's ownership of their learning feels very different as a 12- or 13-year-old than as a 4- or 5-year-old."

At the high school level, that is less of a concern, since students have already built up an academic profile and started to pursue their own interests. "We just have more data as you get older, so we're not as reliant upon the IQ," Grogan said.

AN IMPERFECT MEASURE

While it aims to uncover the "innate" intellectual profile of a student, the IQ test isn't entirely objective, Leon said. "There is some potential bias and some lived experiences built into the test."

For example, she said, if a child has only ever lived in the city, but the IQ test asked a question that pertained to life in the countryside, they might appear to score lower on that question. She also acknowledged the possibility of studying for the test, which can skew the results.

Kate K. '24, who joined in fifth grade, worries that external factors, such as if a student was having a "bad day" or feeling nervous, could have a negative bearing on test results and, consequently, an applicant's admission status.

"It is ultimately kind of a measure of test-taking ability. You have to concentrate for a long period of time on the IQ test, which is way longer than a typical Nueva class block," Kate said. "Taking an IQ test is a very different thing from being a good student."

In particular, for neurodivergent students who may present their intellectual abilities in different ways, the test may also not be a perfect representation.

Kate, who leads the Neurodivergent Affinity Group, explained that "having perfectionistic tendencies" can be one common manifestation in neurodivergent children. She recalls taking a test in ninth grade with similar elements to the IQ test. When faced with the task of copying a picture from

memory, she remembers scrutinizing and redrawing each minute detail until the test administrator had to intervene. This adds another layer to the external circumstances that need to be accounted for, Kate said.

On a broader historical scale, the IQ test carries a dark past. The first major intelligence scale was created by Alfred Binet in 1905 with the purpose of identifying children with developmental disabilities. However, in the early 1900s, the American eugenics movement weaponized the test to further their claims that certain racial groups or people with cognitive disabilities were inferior and endangered the genetic purity of the human race. This led to the widespread segregation, institutionalization, and involuntary sterilization of people with traits considered undesirable, often based on IQ scores. In North Carolina alone, over 7,500 people—about 40% of whom were Black or Native American, and 85% women—were forcibly sterilized between 1929 and 1974; dozens of states nationwide passed similar sterilization laws.

The discriminatory legacy associated with intelligence testing still persists. According to the U.S. Department of Education, African American, Hispanic American, and Native American children are underrepresented in gifted programs and overrepresented in special education programs, in part due to the biases present in tests.

understand why families may feel nervous or suspicious about why we would use an IQ test," Terra said. "We need to build relationships with folks who, for good reason, may have mistrust over the test."

Grogan, for example, tries to stress to parents that an IQ score "is by no means a stamp of success for the trajectory of your child's life. This is a threshold for the Nueva admissions process—that's it."

Beyond the issues within the test, Leon also recognizes the financial burden of taking the assessment—appointments can cost anywhere from \$300 to over \$1,000. To address this, beginning in November, the admissions office began partnering with psychologists to provide families who have applied for financial assistance with vouchers they can use to subsidize the expense of off-campus testing.

"It's still not necessarily affordable, but it is a lower rate," Leon said. "That's something that we've formalized, so we're excited to kick that off."

For Leon, the conversation is "less about the IQ assessment itself" and more about creating a holistic, nuanced process as a whole.

"Nueva's admissions process requires much more interaction with the families and with the applicants, because of that gifted piece," she explained. "How do we balance being open and accessible for families to go through the process, while also being able to



"The IQ test doesn't tell us about resiliency, character, how they problem-solve with people in groups. Those are the things that we look for and can glean from other data points in the admissions process."

This history can make the test "very scary" for some families today, Grogan acknowledged. "It's not a system built on trust."

Leon agreed; because it is required for Lower and Middle School applicants, "the IQ assessment can be seen as a barrier."

"Historically, people of color have been really left out of the conversation of giftedness, so we see a hesitation, especially for Black and brown families, in even moving forward in the process," Leon said. "If folks already feel like the IQ assessment is a barrier they're not willing to jump over, then they are basically removing Nueva from their list of schools to consider."

FINDING BALANCE

Lower School Division Head Megan Terra emphasized the need for honesty, self-awareness, and empathy when engaging with prospective families who may feel hesitation.

"We first have to help families understand who we are as a school, how this tool helps us, and why we

manage the number of applicants that are coming through?"

To answer that question, the school is forming a task force to reevaluate the admission process as a whole and identify areas to revamp.

"We constantly have to assess and innovate what we're doing, and never feel like what we're doing is the best because things are changing," Leon said.

Fertig acknowledged that the IQ test could be "in need of an upgrade." He considered a future in which multiple private schools come together to collectively replace the IQ assessment with a "potentially less biased instrument."

"Right now we're making sure that we don't let that bias come to the surface as much as possible, but wouldn't it be nice if we didn't even have to worry about that?" Fertig proposed. "Here at the Upper School I think most students are thriving and they're not taking the IQ test. What can we learn from that and bring down to a lower level on the chronological age spectrum?"

Put it to the test

Challenge yourself with these brain teasers (with increasing levels of difficulty)!

Note: Questions are for entertainment only and should not be considered an accurate representation of intellectual ability or an official IQ assessment.

1 Fill in the empty box with the appropriate shape.

		?

Source: Mensa

A

B

C

D

2 An apple and a banana cost \$1.10 in total. The apple costs \$1.00 more than the banana. How much does the banana cost?

3 Fill in the empty box with the appropriate number.

5	3	1	5
6	4	2	4
2	9	1	8
7	8	5	

Answers:
#1: B.
#2: The apple is \$1.05; the banana is \$0.05.
#3: 6. The first column's number multiplied by the second column results in the last two columns (7 x 8 = 56).

Raising their voices with Pride

Inspired by Upper School Pride assembly, math teacher joins San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus

By Ellie K.

It’s Monday evening, and chorus members’ voices join together; they combine and crescendo, complementing each other and emerging as one melody that floats down Valencia Street in San Francisco. The San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus (SFGMC) is rehearsing for their December concert, a “Holiday Spectacular,” which took place the weekend of Dec. 8. Whether they are practicing their traditional holiday songs (“The Little Drummer Boy / Peace on Earth,” “The Chanukah Song (We Are Lights),” “Pacem,” (“Peace” in Latin), and “Silent Night” to name a few) or their festive “Britney Medley”—yes, Britney Spears—one thing is certain: as voices rise up, tears stream down.

Six months ago, Upper School math teacher Ihmar Aldana was in the audience at the Pride assembly organized by the Queer Student Union (QSU) on June 7. To celebrate Pride Month, the SFGMC came to Nueva through their Reaching Youth Through Music (RHYTHM) program led by Mitch Galli. Between songs, the chorus members shared personal stories and experiences with being queer.

Moved by the performance and having a passion and talent for singing—recently rekindled at karaoke parties but originally developed in his youth church choir—Aldana decided to audition for the chorus.

After a short interview, Aldana sang “All of Me” by John Legend in front of the chorus director, assistant director, and section leaders. He attributes his lack of stage fright to his experience as a teacher. When in front of large groups, excitement takes the place of nerves.

Eventually, Aldana received the news that he had been accepted into the chorus.

“It was a very turbulent part of my life,” he said. “Once I found out that I got into the chorus, I felt like it was the universe giving me a sign: ‘Even though you have to let go of things from your past, there’s something beautiful that came into you now.’”

To its members, the SFGMC is exactly that. Founded in 1978 as the world’s first openly gay chorus, the chorus aims to “lead by creating extraordinary music and experiences that

build community, inspire activism, and foster compassion at home and around the world.” Despite being the “Gay Men’s Chorus,” the chorus is now open to all individuals who sing in tenor, baritone, or bass ranges regardless of sexuality or gender orientation.

The choir’s first performance was on the steps of San Francisco City Hall following the assassination of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California. Since then, the chorus has inspired an international LGBTQ+ choral movement.

Today, the chorus embodies pride, authenticity, and love. Aldana felt encouraged to join because of the things “they stand for and the things they want to provide to society and the community.”

“It has already inspired many gay choruses around the world to stand tall and be proud of who they are and stand for love and humanity,” he shared.

For him, the chorus has become a new family. “Every time I’m with the chorus, [I have]

this feeling of safety and acceptance,” he said, describing it as a “sanctuary.”

Beyond its impact on its members, the chorus has also served as a sanctuary for its audience. At a recent performance for a public school, one student shared that the chorus saved his life.

“That is what we stand for—being able to save who we can,” Aldana said, reflecting on the event. In a way, the chorus has saved him.

Through a small and big sibling program, newer members are paired with older members, who serve as mentors and assist new members in feeling acquainted with the chorus. Before his first rehearsal, Aldana’s big sibling invited him to meet for ramen.

Being surrounded by older generations of gay men has been especially meaningful for Aldana. Recognizing a shift in society to becoming more accepting of youth expressing their authentic identities, he feels greater respect and appreciation for the resilience of these men.

“Gay men from older generations really struggled: they walked so we could run,” he said.

“They paved the way for many things for us.”

Listening to their stories of successes and struggles, Aldana feels validated and encouraged to “pay it forward” to the younger generations, inspiring a chain of love and acceptance.

“How I can contribute is to make time to join this outreach, so that we can spread awareness, support, and love to children from the new generation because you will one day do the work that we’re doing now,” he said.

Aldana’s experiences in the SFGMC offer comfort to him and his younger self trying to “figure out who [he] truly was.”

“It’s normal to feel lost at times,” he’s learned. “There are people who will love you and are waiting to meet you to show you that you’re amazing just the way you are.”

When he thinks of his newfound family, tears well up in his eyes. Tearing up in rehearsal one night, Aldana nervously asked, “How can I sing if I’m crying?” To which chorus members responded, “We understand how the feels are. If at the concert you have to cry, just cry. There are 200 more people singing, so I’m sure everyone can sing for you.”

“Every rehearsal I cry because of the feeling when everyone around you is someone who truly is there for you and loves you unconditionally,” Aldana said. “The feels are amplified when you just hear them singing so beautifully.”

They sing for each other, the LGBTQ+ community, and a broader movement for love (they end every rehearsal by telling another person they love them).

Aldana said, “Overall, the most powerful part is being more proud of who I am now that I see this new family and the way that they impact society through our profession and the music that brings us together.”

BEAMING WITH PRIDE

Aldana takes a selfie before he performs with the SFGMC at the Warriors’ halftime show on LGBTQ+ Night.



Photo by Ihmar Aldana

A new note for Nueva Notes

A cappella group releases first single on streaming platforms

By Isabella X.

On Tuesday after school in the Café, students lounge on chairs, assume traditional choir-like standing stances (chin up, shoulders back—to maximize resonance space), or sit cross-legged on the floor. However disparate their physical positions may be, this eclectic group has something in common: a love of a cappella.

In one corner, co-lead Kayte C. ’25 and Ryley M. ’25 practice the alto (the second highest vocal register) harmony, replaying a recorded demo and adjusting their voices as needed. In choral speak, this is a “sectional.”

“The alto part has a lot of [accidentals (sharp or flat notes)], so we wanted to take the time to get really precise on our part,” Kayte said.

Meanwhile, the rest of the group hums along to a demo of the piece, glancing at their laptops for lyrics when needed.

When Kayte and Ryley are satisfied with their part and start heading back to the main gathering area, co-lead Owen Y-L. ’24 looks around to check that everyone is settled, before calling out: “One, two, three, ready...go!”

Interspersed between snaps, claps, and harmonic hums, the first melodic verses reveal the song to be Frank Sinatra’s “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” a new piece the group is practicing for the holiday season. The moment Nueva Notes comes together, they’re no longer a collection of scattered parts, but a single entity, tuning and matching their voices to one another live.

“If someone’s singing an ‘ah’ vowel, you have to match that vowel. Or if someone’s singing and they’re a little flat, then you have to tune yourself to match that,” Owen said. “We have to make calculations in ‘real time.’”

Because of this, Owen explains that experience in solo singing doesn’t necessarily

translate to a cappella. “There’s a huge mental and physical shift. I’m lucky that I’ve done choir for 10 years and I’ve built up that skill, but for people who’ve maybe only been singing in the shower for most of their lives, it’s harder to adjust.”

For Alexis T. ’24, Nueva Notes was her first a cappella experience. Joining from a musical theater background, she found it difficult learning to be “part of the choir with smoother, more blended vocals.”

“The most challenging aspect to this day is capturing that style of singing that I’m not quite used to,” Alexis said.

The week after Thanksgiving, the group released their first studio single, an a cappella cover of Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over.”

The single was recorded in May 2023, featuring now-graduated members Anoushka Krishnan ’23, Isabelle Shi ’23, Lucie Lin ’23, and Misha Aganin ’23.

The group settled on singing “when the party’s over,” a more difficult composition that they’d only sung once before, at the 2023 Spring Coffeehouse.

“I really wanted to showcase what the group was capable of. The magic of recording is that you’re able to create the best case scenario of a song, because sometimes in live performances, you make a small mistake that you end up feeling really bad about,” said Owen, who also serves as the group’s Music Director, composing and making the a cappella arrangements. “I wanted to give [us] the chance to put [our] best foot forward.”

The arrangement process wasn’t easy. “when the party’s over” was Owen’s first foray into arranging an a cappella piece, and the composition took two months.

Much of the process is trial and error. Owen begins with MuseScore, a software allowing users to input notes across different parts and play the combined parts back to roughly hear how they sound when sung together. Then,



Photos by Alexis T. (left), Rachel Freeman (right)

in Logic Pro, a music recording software, he’ll set up soprano, alto, tenor, and bass tracks, before singing out the different parts. Once he’s satisfied with the sound, he’ll transcribe it into the music score.

When the club members came in to learn the piece, however, Owen quickly realized that his vision was too ambitious. “It was way too hard for the group,” he said. “It was six parts, and we only have three to four weeks to prepare for each performance.”

Instead, the group elected to repurpose the arrangement for their first digital release.

Owen scheduled 30-minute on-campus recording sessions with each member of the group, and, using microphones he brought from home, recorded each part—or rather, each sentence.

“We’ll go line-by-line, sometimes rerecording four or five times to make sure it’s good. Sometimes, if I’m really crazy, I’ll [have them sing] each syllable separately,” Owen admits.

These individual recording sessions were especially difficult, Kayte recalled. “When you can’t hear other people, it’s harder to blend, which is a really important part of a cappella.”

The recording and mixing process ultimately took upwards of 70 hours. Owen spent the

A TEAM OF MANY TALENTS

Member Alexis T. ’24 took on another role, illustrating the song’s cover art (left). The group performs at the fall Coffeehouse event (right).

entire summer piecing it together on Melodyne, another music recording software. The final product was released for streaming on Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube.

“It’s one thing for us to hold concerts in the hallways at lunch; it’s a whole other thing for us to now have this finished polished keepsake,” Alexis said.

Owen notes that the group won’t stop at this single. Hoping to continue the group’s “upward momentum,” they’re planning another digital release in the spring.

“I want to do ‘invisible string’ by Taylor Swift,” Owen revealed. “We haven’t finalized it yet, but I’ve arranged it and I think it would be a nice contrast from the somber nature of [‘when the party’s over’].”

Wacky, elegant, and everything in between

Three artists share their stories at the inaugural MoMA Holiday Maker’s Market

By Ellie L.

There was something brimming in the halls of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. But it was not the characteristic, artistic frenzy. No, it was the holiday shopper’s energy, easily recognizable to a survivor of a Macy’s on Black Friday. As shoppers made their way to booths tucked into the corners of the ivory walls, conversations filled the air. These booths were mere tables, covered in a vast array of products: sculpted soaps that sat upon beds of white cotton, patterned ceramics covered in sepia flowers or swirled checkerboard, raw pearls on delicate chains of gold, glossy hand turned wooden stools, and even pastel rainbow-shaped toys for teething toddlers. Artists bustled behind these tables, answering questions of sourcing and who designed what. Here are three of their stories.



Photo by abacusrow.com

Christine Trac

Christine Trac is the perfect picture of an entrepreneur, with her sleek bob and clear, ringing voice that carries over the clamorous chatter. And of course, a necklace of her own design—multicolored, petal-shaped beads dangle from pink silk thread—hangs around her neck. This necklace, and every other piece of jewelry is designed by Trac herself. Trac starts by identifying materials: sterling silver, moss green thread, kaleidoscopic glass beads, or just “things that I think can be cohesive or can make patterns between them.” Then she lets herself play around. “I work best in limitations,” Trac said. Trac’s jewelry brand Abacus Row, however, is certainly not limited. Every new collection is different: vibrant and wacky, golden and elegant, and everything in between. Trac founded Abacus Row in 2012. However, she did not know she wanted to be an artist from early on, even though she’d always had a “visual mind.” “I wandered into this when I wanted to delve into something more creative and build something for myself,” Trac said.



Photo by drawingroomsf.com/products/barber

Darolyn Barber

On a heavy sculpture, cracks spiderwebbed the entirety of the vibrant color—these splotches of turquoise glaze were pooled in those cracks and corners of roses. The roses curled enticingly outwards, ringing a diamond with a startling, arched eye. Next to the sculpture sat a piece that broke out of every medium and mold. Spirals of thread and wooden beads curl around strips of tie-dye and unfinished, above leaves pressed into paper and a branch, rolled in brilliant thread. Darolyn Barber’s works are novel and fantastical, stretching across multiple mediums. Every work is peculiar and wacky and beautiful—Barber’s raw creativity splashed across pages and clay and thread. Barber finds inspiration for these pieces all around her. For example, Barber constructed an eclectic sculptural piece by thinking of Sirius, “a real star [that’s] our connection to the wider world,” as she described it. Barber works at the MOMA, and as a ceramics artist and teacher in SF. She got into art at an early age. Her passion only heightened when she went to a high school with a strong arts program. From that very first ceramics class, Barber was hooked. In her studio, she has created pottery for 12 years. Barber started with “slab work,” her own term for slab pottery, a basic pottery technique. She likes starting with something basic like slab work, so she can create anything. She prefers no limits, and that full creative freedom.



Photo by acyakilicoglu.com

Ayca Kilicoglu

On a glossy Equator Coffee bag, vivid colors swirled in intertwining patterns, surrounded by leaping tigers and soaring birds. Funky people and scarlet hearts seamlessly filled a canvas apron. Ayca Kilicoglu patted at a similarly flamboyant scarf, her dark eyes sweeping the shoppers arriving. Kilicoglu’s patterns are seamless, but her artistic process to make such patterns is certainly not so effortless. Her process is “long, long... [and not] simple.” Kilicoglu’s journey to being an artist was similarly not so simple. She grew up in Turkey. She knew she wanted to study art, but when admission to Turkey art schools proved seemingly impossible, she pursued public administration and worked in economics. Over time, her passion for art gradually resurfaced and she attended UC Berkeley’s graduate art program. From there, she founded Mür by Ayça, her own art brand in 2019. A few years ago, her scarves and mugs made their way to the MOMA design store, and she has worked with the MOMA team since. Kilicoglu enjoys these collaborations, and being in the collective space of artists and artisans. “Designers and artists I adore are here,” Kilicoglu said. “Being in the MOMA community... it feels really special.”



Photo by Filoli

No place like home for the holidays

The ultimate guide to spending winter break in the Bay

By Roan W.

The holidays are right around the corner, and for many people, a winter spent in the Bay is the immediate future. Of course, the San Francisco area doesn’t scream holiday season. There’s no snow, very few fireplaces, and sleigh rides to grandmother’s house are replaced by soul-crushing traffic. But the Bay Area is huge, and there’s Christmas magic all around if you know where to look. Here are four local winter activities to get you in the holiday spirit. For those who frequent Golden Gate Park, you probably already know about this amazing installation. **Charles Gadaken’s Entwined** has returned to the Peacock Meadow to once again bedazzle the expansive lawn with ethereal, glowing flora. The centerpiece is the brand new Elder Mother; a 30 foot tall tree with a 25 foot wide canopy of blocky lights reminiscent of a towering weeping willow. The installation features over 150 lighting patterns and more than 2,000 LED light-fueled cubes, and is among several public art installations along JFK Promenade in what’s called the Golden Mile. If you’re looking for bedazzling holiday magic, there’s no better place than Entwined. Plus, every installation

is entirely free to view, making this an excellent way to spend an evening without spending a penny. If the north city is too far of a commute, another light show continues to astound closer to the South Bay. The **Filoli Gardens** estate has astounded since it opened to the public in 1977 with beautifully curated landscaping and sprawling grounds, but has also become a holiday classic with brilliant lighting that spans the entire property. Featuring 25 miles of Christmas light strands and a 210-foot-long tunnel of sparkling lights, you could spend the entire evening exploring the meticulous decoration of every square inch. And if the 16-acre gardens are starting to tire you out, you can find a seat in the walled garden, get yourself a hot beverage, and find a seat with your family and listen to the Christmas music. Or if you find yourself getting too cold, head inside the beautifully decorated mansion and immerse yourself in a 1960s holiday season, with everything from classic Christmas shows to massive gingerbread houses. With countless areas to explore, you’re sure to have the most wonderful time of the year. In the spirit of the past, any lover of classic literature must attend the **Dickens Fair** in

San Francisco. Every November, the Cow Palace arena opens its doors to hundreds, if not thousands of patrons decked in old-timey outfits and sporting their English accents. If it weren’t for the few folks dressed in their normal clothes, you’d think you’d have stepped back in time to Victorian England. Among the hundreds of costumed patrons, you might catch a glimpse of some famous faces, such as the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future, Ebenezer Scrooge, and of course, Saint Nicholas himself. The Dickens Fair has something for everyone who visits. You can head to the port to pick up fresh fish and chips or get yourself a steaming hot meat pie; launch ragdoll chimney sweeps via hammer at the Royal Sweep Delivery Service; or stop by the music hall to watch a variety of performances, be it dramatic or melodic. Furthermore, the Fair acts as a hub for small, artistic businesses. From hand-dipped candles two feet tall to jewelry made from imperfect stones, you can find something to tickle any fancy if you just know where to look. Finally, for those of you in the South Bay, how about a nice **Christmas in the Park**? At the center of Downtown San Jose, Plaza de Cesar Chavez has transformed itself into

JOY TO THE BAY

Filoli Gardens lights up the night with their annual 16 acres of Christmas decorations.

a winter wonderland for the past 44 years! Featuring over 40 musical and animated exhibits and a 50 foot tall christmas tree. But don’t you worry, there’s so much more. Dozens of nonprofits and schools have come together to decorate a walking path with unique trees. And the best part: it’s completely free! And if going to support nonprofits wasn’t enough, Christmas in the Park has ice skating and rides on site! Featuring a ferris wheel, a spinning swing, and more, it’s definitely not something to miss. However, these aren’t free, so make sure to bring your wallet if you’re looking for a thrill or a nice time on the ice! A snow-free holiday season doesn’t have to be any less holly jolly, and there’s plenty of wintry activities all around the Bay if you know where to look. Here’s to a happy holiday season, and hopefully one full of fun activities!

Photos by Hardik Pandya and Chris Brignola via Unsplash

Has the Golden City

In first-hand accounts of crime, homelessness, and lifestyle, San Francisco residents compare the media's portrayal of the city with their lived experiences

By Natalie L.
with reporting from Gabe H. & Jordan F.

Before Blue N. '27's first trip to San Francisco, their mother cautioned them on what they might see in the Financial District—drug usage, homelessness, and abandoned needles littering the sidewalk.

Blue, who moved from North Carolina to Burlingame as a fifth grader, recalled their mother's advice: "If you see a needle, don't touch it. If we are walking past an area with many homeless people, keep your phone in your front pocket."

"While my mom and I don't think being homeless or using drugs makes people necessarily dangerous, because I am female-presenting, I feel like I constantly have to worry about my safety," Blue said.

In August, a survey by the *San Francisco Chronicle* found that nearly half of Americans perceive San Francisco as "an unsafe city"—an 18% increase compared to the same survey conducted in 2006.

Since the pandemic, it seems that news headlines depicting a decline in nearly every facet of San Francisco have dominated mainstream coverage of the city. From *Fox News* ("San Francisco's rampant drugs, homelessness shock new resident: 'This is a disgrace'") to *The New York Times* ("How Did San Francisco Become the City in a 'Doom Loop'?"). Even the city's local paper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, has piled on the negative press with pointed headlines ("Czech news crew in S.F. covering APEC robbed at gunpoint while filming"). Some articles spotlight specific incidents to depict broad trends of crime in the city, like this article from Moneywise: "Rampant crime has become a regular part of life: CNN reporter witnesses 3 thefts in 30 minutes at a San Francisco Walgreens."

In recent years, public figures and political pundits with massive platforms have reinforced the city's reputation as unsafe, with grim statements about the downturn of the city following the COVID-19 pandemic. Their messaging garners millions of views.

In May, Twitter CEO Elon Musk called San Francisco "post-apocalyptic" due to shutdowns in the downtown area in a tweet. Earlier in the year, in response to the homicide of tech executive Bob Lee, Musk was one of many prominent figures who piled on to publicly condemn the city's violence crime rates as "horrific." When police charged a fellow tech worker later for the death and determined that the crime was not a "random" street incident, neither Musk nor most media companies that had broadcasted similar rhetoric walked back on their condemnations of the city.

San Francisco has become a partisan flashpoint for conservative politicians, who point to the city as an example of failed liberal policies.

During a televised Dec. 1 debate between Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and California Governor Gavin Newsom, DeSantis unveiled a map tracking reported human feces across the city from 2011 to 2019. The densely marked map, dubbed "Poop Map," went viral, sparking online mockery and fueling public concerns about the city's cleanliness and public safety.

The angle journalists adopt has had a substantial effect on shaping Americans' perceptions of the City by the Bay.

"People see members of our community that are really suffering from being unhoused, mentally ill, and with drug use issues. When folks say they feel unsafe, a lot of times, they just feel uncomfortable seeing other human beings living like that."

SF RESIDENT JOY A., PARENT OF OLIVER A. '26

Even among Upper School students who live in mid-peninsula counties less than an hour's drive away, several share that they and their parents depend primarily on media outlets to stay informed of the city.

In a survey of the Upper School student body completed by 121 students, 35% of non-residents say that news and media coverage primarily inform their understanding of the city.

Kevin C. '26, who lives in Millbrae, said that his parents often consume media coverage on San Francisco and thus feel that certain areas, such as Haight Ashbury, are best avoided.

"I've been told by my parents to watch out where I'm going in the city, what time I'm there, and if I have a group of friends to go with," Kevin said.

Alaric L. '25, who lives in Hillsborough, spent the last summer working as an in-person intern in the Financial District, where he tracked the policies made by the city's Board of Supervisors. Commuting to the city daily increased his appreciation for the area, a sentiment that diverged from the often contrasting portrayal of the city in the media.

"The media definitely tears San Francisco apart," said Alaric, highlighting that most Board of Supervisors do not consider crime as the most pressing issue in the city, but rather drug usage. "From my internship, I realized that it's not just people

living across the country that misunderstand the city, but also people who live 20 or 30 minutes away."

This feedback loop between citizens and media outlets reporting the city's decline has painted a dismal image of San Francisco: an urban apocalypse of vacant skyscrapers and shopping districts overrun with crime and homelessness.

A June 2023 survey by the *San Francisco Chronicle* found that of 1,653 San Francisco residents, 24 percent have been verbally or physically attacked by another person in the past five years, and 45 percent have experienced

theft.

While at face value, this data portrays the city as crime-ridden, recent studies argue that on a national scale, violent crimes in San Francisco are consistently low relative to other large cities. Homicidal rates, in particular, were reported earlier this year by *ABC News* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* to be 636 reported offenses per 100,000 residents in 2022—less than most U.S cities such as Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and neighboring Oakland.

Theft, on the other hand, has consistently made up the highest percentage of crime in the city—with the city dubbed the "smash and grab" capital by media outlets. For the past three years, retail theft in San Francisco ranked the second highest in the nation according to the National Retail Federation.

Anya V. '26, who lives near the Presidio, was verbally threatened and robbed for the \$10 she had in her wallet while on Geary Boulevard in the Richmond District, a pricier residential area.

"I think my experience is pretty typical of living in a big city, but here, you do always have to be aware of your surroundings," Anya said.

Yet rates of petty theft in San Francisco have been gradually improving. From 2022 to 2023, there was a 19% decrease in burglary and petty theft such as shoplifting, according to the San Francisco Police Department.

Asking residents if they felt at ease living or raising families in San Francisco, many took a thoughtful pause before offering a response: their biggest concern is not that they might be

a victim of violence or theft, but rather the decline in commercial vitality of the city resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the 25 largest metropolitan cities in the country, the Bay Area Council Business Group found that San Francisco had the second worst pandemic recovery after Detroit, MI, calculated based on factors including job growth, population growth, construction of new housing, and office occupancy.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and surge of negative media coverage, the city gleamed as one of the top travel destinations in the world with a record high of 26.2 million visitors in 2019 according to San Francisco Travel.

In 2022, San Francisco had 21.2 million visitors, with The New York Times reporting that a complete recovery to pre-pandemic tourism levels is potentially years away. San Francisco Travel attributes the decline primarily to a reduction in business convention travel that had once made up 60% of hotel bookings. Unlike cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago that have rebounded hotel revenue levels, San Francisco's hotels currently generate 30 percent less revenue than in 2019, according to Reuters.

This problem has only been exacerbated by a sharp decline in commercial stores.

Since 2019, 47% of businesses in the downtown area have shut down, leading to a notable decrease in storefront occupancy in the Union Square area. In May, Nordstrom shut down both of its multi-million downtown store locations, citing the area's deteriorating situation in an official statement. A month later, Westfield Mall announced a withdrawal from the area a month later with concerns of the consistently low foot traffic.

Anya has noticed a post-pandemic diminishing of "energy" in areas formerly busy with foot traffic

"Before COVID hit, I used to always go out with my friends to different areas of the city, but now I find that there are fewer stores open and activities to do," said Anya, who used to frequent areas of Haight Street and Union Square. "It's not a fun city anymore."

Upper School English teacher Allen Frost agrees; he "never" visits downtown areas anymore, citing the closure of several movie theaters in the Westfield Mall and Embarcadero District.

According to history teacher Chelsea Denlow, the once-bustling Financial District has devolved into a "ghost-town" with a record high city-wide office vacancy rate of 35%. Denlow, who

City lost its luster?

also teaches the Upper School Urban Studies elective, says that this can make homelessness appear more widespread.

“Part of the reason downtown feels so apocalyptic is because without the normal businesses that used to be there pre-pandemic, it feels like there is a higher concentration of homeless people,” said Denlow. “That’s not very appealing to tourists or businesses. We need to bring people back for the city to feel vibrant again.”

While downtown is no longer brimming with people, drug-usage remains prominent. *San Francisco Chronicle* reported a record high 692 drug overdoses in the city this year.

Frost recalls feeling shocked by the rampant scenes of homelessness and drug-use during one visit to the Tenderloin—a notoriously dangerous neighborhood—last year.

“It felt like something out of a post-apocalyptic movie. The government has failed them,” Frost said.

Joy A., parent to Oliver A. ’26, agrees that widespread homelessness and drug use are a symptom, rather than a cause, of societal failures.

“People see members of our community that are really suffering from being unhoused, mentally ill, and with drug use issues,” said Joy, referring to common scenes in the Mission District. “When folks say they feel unsafe, a lot of times, they just feel uncomfortable seeing other human beings living like that.”

Despite these failures, residents argue that news outlets paint an overly pessimistic view, overlooking other quintessential elements of the city. In a city where residential homes, skyscraper office buildings, and eclectic bars frequently meet, and average income fluctuates dramatically between neighborhoods minutes-drive away from each other, there isn’t a single narrative that characterizes the 47-square-mile city.

“People who only read the news do not understand the full picture of what the city is,” said resident Hilde K. K. ’27, emphasizing that news outlets tend to extrapolate city-wide trends from specific incidents of something going wrong. “It annoys me that people assume they would feel uncomfortable in parts of the city without a real reason.”

Residents argue that a city is more than its worst districts, and highlight picturesque neighborhoods and compassionate neighbors that outweigh the problematic areas of downtown.

For Oliver’s family, each harvest from their backyard garden in Potrero Hill prompts a produce drop-off to the neighbors living across the street. In return, their neighbors bring over homemade cakes.

“It’s the kind of community you want to be a part of—good people that look out for each other,” said Jon A., parent of Oliver A. ’26. “We live in one of the greatest cities in the world.”

Yingjun Gong*, parent of Edden L. ’26, immigrated to San Francisco from Shanghai in 2010 with her son. She quickly immersed herself in English classes at the City College of San Francisco, gaining not only language proficiency but a strong sense of cultural belonging. “My first friends were classmates. We were immigrants with the same native language, so our backgrounds made it easy for us to become friends,” said Yingjun, characterizing San Francisco as a melting pot of cultures. “San Francisco is very friendly to new immigrants.”

For students who have found such communities within the city, it’s disheartening to hear ill-informed non-residents’ perspectives.

“When people learn that I live in San Francisco, they ask me: ‘How many homeless people do you see?’ and ‘Have you ever been attacked?’ said Kaila E. ’24. “Because of the way that the media portrays San Francisco, it’s given people this idea that San Francisco is dirty and unsafe.”

During her freshman year, Natalie C. ’25 suggested getting lunch from Japantown to a visiting friend. Her friend, reluctant to walk the 20-minute route from Natalie’s house, declined.

“Walking around the city is something I don’t give a second thought to,” said Natalie, who lives in Pacific Heights, a high end residential area. “I didn’t understand why her parents were afraid to let us go

by ourselves, even though [Pacific Heights and Japantown] are probably some of the safest areas of the city.”

Resident Rowan B. ’26 has lost faith in the media’s representation of the city, viewing it as negatively prejudiced and ungrounded.

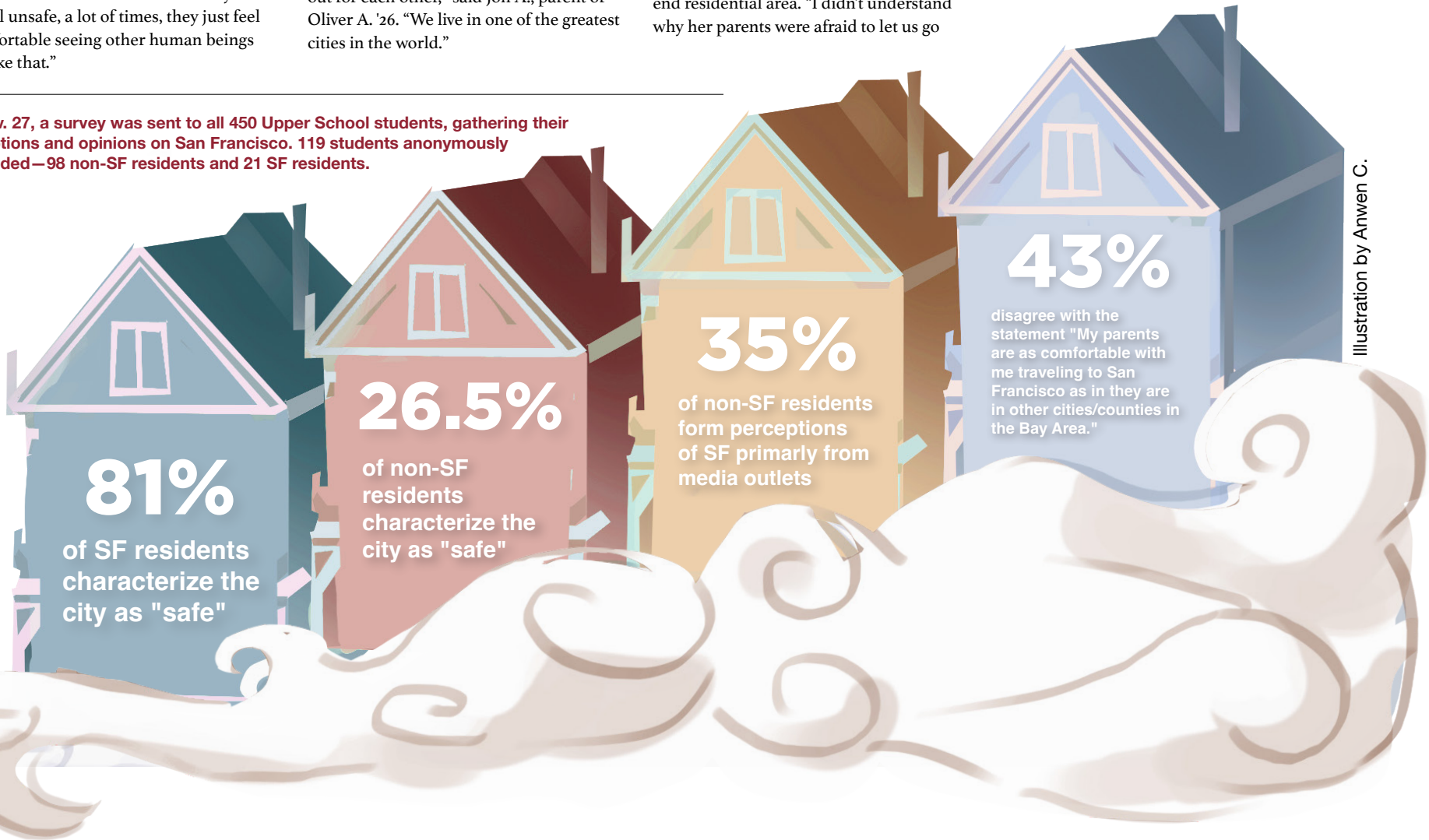
“I’ve intentionally chosen to not read [media] talking about the ‘doom loop’ of San Francisco,” said Rowan, referring to the influx of news articles that paint San Francisco as victim of an unsalvageable economic and cultural downfall. “It makes me angry that the city I live in is being portrayed this way. It feels to me like journalists are just grabbing for a good story.”

Dan B., parent to Nate B. ’26, feels that while media outlets and Silicon Valley technology leaders “lack humility” when criticizing the city, they may draw attention to concerns that residents may overlook.

“I think the truth of the city lies somewhere between what the residents want to believe and what the newspapers want to say,” Dan said.

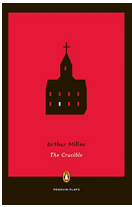
***Note: All quotes by Yingjun Gong were spoken in Mandarin, and translated into English by Edden L. ’26.**

On Nov. 27, a survey was sent to all 450 Upper School students, gathering their perceptions and opinions on San Francisco. 119 students anonymously responded—98 non-SF residents and 21 SF residents.



A timeline of recent English curricular changes

Pre-2020

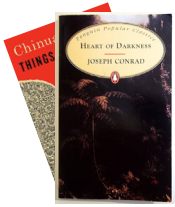


The Crucible by Arthur Miller as been a long-standing 11th grade read, especially with its “Pitch-a-Play” project, which invites students to adapt a historical event of their choice into a play.



Frankenstein by Mary Shelley has been a popular and lasting 9th grade read.

2021



The 10th grade curriculum is modernized, removing texts like *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*.

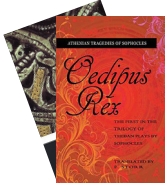


Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and August Wilson's *Fences* return to the 11th grade curriculum.

2022

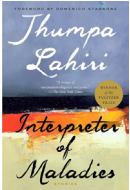


Circe by Madeline Miller replaces *Great Expectations* as the 9th grade summer reading.

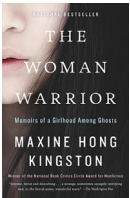


9th grade replaces *Beowulf* with *Oedipus Rex*, in order to include some drama into the course.

2023



11th grade is adding an Asian American authors unit, with full texts from authors Jhumpa Lahiri and Maxine Hong Kingston.



As times change, so does the English curriculum

A look into the ever-changing English syllabus and the decisions that influenced it

By Milo K.

The English curriculum can feel like a revolving door, with texts cycling in and out of courses every year. However, there is a method to this madness. While each grade has differing methods for what books are taught in the next year, there are some common threads.

For Upper School English teacher Jonathan Quick, his process revolves around the primary theme of ninth and tenth grade: an introduction to the western literary canon, and the pushing back against it.

“The point of ninth grade is an introduction to the Western literary canon, and tenth grade is a reaction against the canon; what does Anglophone literature look like outside of England and America?” Quick said.

Compared to the historic texts of ninth grade like *The Odyssey* or *Frankenstein*, the tenth grade curriculum is constantly modernizing and reacting to the current world. Texts like *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) and *The Best We Could Do* (2017) have both been added in the last two years. Both of these texts have embodied the theme of western imperialism, touching on the effects colonialism has had on both Vietnam and Africa. English teacher Pearl Bauer points to the protests following George Floyd’s murder as a critical point in her shift in philosophy.

“Now, people are open and thinking about these kinds of issues, like the way in which America was founded on enslavement, and the legacies of that,” Bauer said. “So, I think for us teachers, it’s important for us to be thinking about this as part of the conversation when we’re pushing against Western canon.”

One of the primary texts under criticism was *Heart of Darkness*, an 1899 text that examines the horrors of Western colonialism, commonly criticized due to the explicit racism in it. For the English department, they struggled to find the balance with this book: How can we balance confronting the brutal past with taking care of student’s mental health? Students’ perspectives on this question vary, with some arguing for the historical relevance of the novella.

“While *Heart of Darkness* is horribly racist, so is the history of colonialism. By avoiding these types of books, we are diluting the context under which this colonialist history occurred,” Colin C. ’24 said.

Others argued the text is too weighted for the time allowed by the curriculum:

“We don’t have the time to read the whole book and talk about how horrible it is. I think it is irresponsible to talk about it just for its literary merit.... The explanation we got in class is that [*Heart of Darkness*] is helpful context, and I don’t think we need to read a incredibly racist book to understand the historical context,” Sasha F. ’24 said.

For Bauer, a critical factor when removing it was the financial implications of teaching it.

“The fact that we [were] reading this every year means we continue to pay for,” She said, “And so we [were] still supporting it financially.”

“The point of ninth grade is an introduction to the Western literary canon, and tenth grade is a reaction against the canon; what does Anglophone literature look like outside of England and America?”

However, some books are replaced simply because there is not enough time in the semester. While Upper School English teacher Sarah Muszynski found immense value in teaching Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, it was replaced with a unit centered on Asian American authors, because of a blindspot in the curriculum.

“We realized we had a blind spot in our curriculum, especially given our student body, in that we really didn’t have any literature portraying Asian American experiences. A large contingent of our student body is Asian American, so we’re bringing something in to represent that,” Muszynski said.

The eleventh grade curriculum is unique, because not every teacher teaches it identically. Although the first semester is the same across all three teachers, in the second semester the class is slightly variable, with teachers emphasizing different areas of the curriculum. Contrasting 10th and 11th grade deep investigation of one aspect of the literary canon, Muszynski describes eleventh grade as more of a “survey course.”

“We’re not [saying we] need to establish this theme about American literature first, even though we still try to do that with each unit. The American journey isn’t a linear one. It has ebbs and flows and then

regressions and progressions. So I think that if we tried to separate it extremely neatly it might send the wrong message about the real American experience,” she said.

For the teachers, a new book comes with new challenges, but also new excitements. For Quick, teaching a new text is more unpredictable than a classic.

“I think with something that I’m familiar with, I can anticipate the rhythms or the patterns that happened in the class... all my classes have had uproar about [certain] moments,” he said, “Whereas with a new text, I have my own teaching goals, but I’m also making notes on what happens.”

For Bauer, the sweet spot that balances unpredictability and routine is when she is teaching a book for the second time

“The first time I’m still learning with the students. Then the second time, it’s still fresh for me, but I’m still changing bits of how I teach it. By the third time, it’s become more rote in a way. Once you start teaching it four or five times, I think, maybe we should switch it up,” She said.

While Muszynski shares Bauer’s excitement teaching a book for the second time, she also emphasizes the care that goes into selecting books.

“I’m wary of novelty for novelty’s sake. I think that refining your craft often involves repetition. With that said, the literary canon is constantly expanding. I also think that sometimes exploring something new is a really great way to ignite excitement for both you and students. What you don’t want is falling into a rut, where you’re just sort of becoming almost a hollow imitation of yourself.”

Although all three grades vary in their process of deciding a curriculum, one thing remained constant across all three teachers: they are working to amplify student autonomy in their own curriculum. Quick and the ninth grade team are working on a choose-your-own-adaptation assignment from a list of books, Bauer amplified the importance of her student surveys and informal conversations about the curriculum, and the newly added Asian American unit in eleventh grade is focused on providing students opportunities to pick books they read. Although the teacher voice is important, all of them are intently listening to the student voice as well.

“I’m all about co-creation. So... I want to encourage students to continue to have a conversation, if they’re finding discomfort, or excitement about a book, because teachers want to hear it. I am constantly changing curriculum with student feedback. Personally, I would love to continue that open dialogue,” Bauer said.

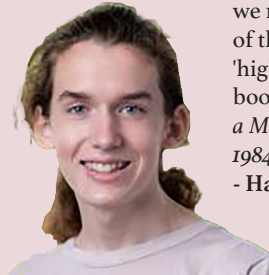
What do students think about the English curriculum?



“I think the teachers choose books deliberately, so I respect their choices.”
- Cara M. ’25



“I’ve liked the books so far, but I wish they still taught *Dante’s Inferno*.”
- Daniel K. ’27



“Part of me wishes we read more of the standard ‘high school books’ like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *1984*”
- Hazel B. ’25



“Of all the classes, I felt the ninth grade curriculum was least relevant to literature I read today”
- Sofia T. ’24

Taking a journey through the kitchen

Get to know three of our café staff and their stories through the lens of food

By Gabe A.

Taste is a special sense: it never ceases to unearth and refresh our most vivid memories associated with family and culture. By understanding someone’s relationship with food, we can uncover so much more than their palette and preferences. Meet three of our most vital community members, working in the café to prepare our delicious meals, and their varied journeys.



Photos by Roy Scopazzi (restaurant, Gabe Ancasias (Zamora))

Gloria Zamora

Sparse kernels floated about the oversaturated pot. Lost in her mishapful first attempt at boiling rice, she called for her mother. What young Gloria Zamora didn’t know was that in addition to her mother, the kitchen would also become a guiding force for her, from Guadalajara to California, and back.

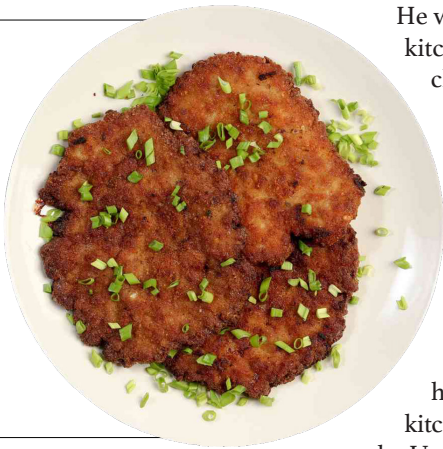
At first, she didn’t learn by choice. “Ven, ayúdame a cocinar.” Come, help me cook. Zamora would obediently join her mother cooking. Despite the cultural pressure to uphold the long-standing expectation of a woman’s role in the kitchen, she would still make the place uniquely her own.

Walking through the puesto-lined Guadalaran streets, Zamora followed her nose, bringing the scents and spices of the stalls back home to her mother, asking her to teach her to cook the foods she loved.

It wasn’t the picture-perfect plating or high-end service that drew crowds to the puestos; it was the wavering air rising from grills and griddles that carried the food stalls’ fragrances—the only means of marketing that could puncture the dense foot traffic.

Life in Guadalajara was not all sweet and savory. As Zamora came of age, she faced a harsh reality. She planned to start a family with her husband and work was scarce—with many businesses rejecting Zamora and her husband because of their older ages.

“Zamora orders her favorites: the *bagre ceviche*, *quesadilla*, and *milanesa*—an Argentine dish served as far north as Mexico, of pounded-thin fried beef, chicken, or veal, reminiscent of a schnitzel.”



In search of better opportunities, the couple immigrated to the United States in 1993. Before arriving at Nueva’s cafeteria, Zamora supported her family of four working at Taqueria Las Cazuelas in East Palo Alto—serving the saucy platefuls of burritos and red mesh baskets of their cilantro-and-onion-piled taqueria-style tacos. After the pandemic led to the restaurant’s closure, Zamora found a new chapter in her culinary career at Nueva’s café. For Zamora, cooking for 450 students is a different experience than cooking for her family, free of critique from her two kids: “Me gusta cocinar más cuando trabajo porque mis hijos dicen ‘oh no, esto no me gusta’.” said Zamora. I like to cook more at work than when I’m at home because my kids say ‘oh no, I don’t like this.’

El Magüey is where she and her family eat to relieve Zamora of cooking duties. Tucked into a mini strip mall that wraps around the outside of downtown San Carlos, the taqueria is where the four of them reunite: Zamora, her husband, her daughter visiting home from San Diego State University, and her son after his shift at Ace Hardware.

Zamora orders her favorites: the *bagre ceviche*, *quesadilla*, and *milanesa*—an Argentine dish served as far north as Mexico, of pounded-thin fried beef, chicken, or veal, reminiscent of a schnitzel. When Zamora eats at El Magüey she is brought back to the puestos: sifting through the hefty scents of stewing birria and tortas she follows her nose, guided back to the place she started.



Photos by Milagros (restaurant, Gabe Ancasias (Lopez))

Jorge Lopez

“Tres años,” he says, tipping his head back and forth, as if he is unsure of his answer. Jorge Lopez has not seen his family since he immigrated to the United States in August 2022. It is his goal to save up enough money to visit them in three years.

As he hesitantly lifted three fingers up in the air, he seemed to hopefully manifest his return.

Lopez was born the rural outskirts of Guatemala. The country’s scarce sources of underpaid work would likely grant him an arduous life in los campos—picking through dense fields of palm and corn, drowned in tropical humidity.

In a decisive goodbye to his homeland, Lopez traveled north by car in pursuit of the American Dream.

He was not introduced to work in the kitchen until arriving in the United States; in Guatemala restaurants only existed in cities, a novel setting to the rural population. Lopez was able to secure a job at Milagros Latin Kitchen in Redwood City, through a referral from his cousin, who was already living in the States.

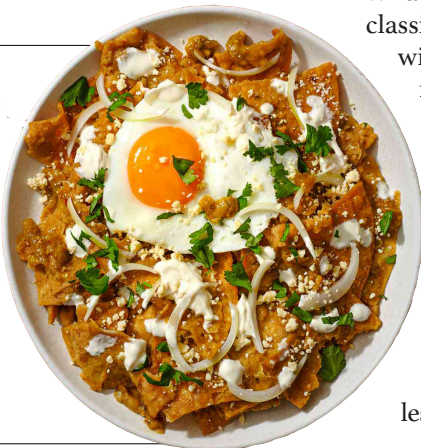
He was able to find footing in the kitchen through trial-and-error. As he clumsily wrapped his fingers around a knife for the first time, with intention to slice an onion, his cousin concisely guided him with “es bueno” and “no es bueno,” until he eventually got it right.

The two remain close: living together and working together. When Lopez’s cousin got a new, better-paying job at the Nueva café, he was placed at the Lower School kitchen, while Lopez was employed at the Upper School. Now, they are reunited in the evenings at their home in Redwood City.

When the pair return to Milagros, as customers rather than cooks, they walk through the palm trees that line the restaurant, cornering Main St. and Middlefield. Seated across from one another in the familiar metal chairs, they reminisce over their favorite dish: *chilaquiles*—a texturally adventurous mix of soft scrambled eggs, tortilla chips, salsa, and beans.

In both these plates that he eats alongside his cousin at Milagros, and the plates that he prepares here at Nueva, Lopez is one step closer to his family in Guatemala.

“They reminisce over their favorite dish: *chilaquiles*—a texturally adventurous mix of soft scrambled eggs, tortilla chips, salsa, and beans.”



Photos by Anna & Jorge / Flickr (restaurant, Gabe A. (Samora Mateos))

Olivia Samora Mateos

Coming from Tonalá, a town wedged into the outskirts of Guadalajara and known for its handcrafts and pottery, Olivia Samora Mateos had never been a cook. In 2017, she left behind her parents in search of work in the United States.

While she doesn’t remember the name, the first restaurant she worked at in the U.S. served as

“*Pozole* is the type of dish one craves after spending too long away from home. It embraces with a thick, maroon broth of pork and hominy, ushering you into its comforting abode.”



an opportunity on many fronts. She was able to maintain a steady stream of income for her family while gaining a valuable repertoire in the kitchen.

When asked about any struggles from this experience, Samora Mateos shrugged:

“Me gustó mucho. No fue exigente. No fue estresante.” I enjoyed it. It wasn’t demanding. It wasn’t stressful.

Despite the laidback work environment, the steady stream of income may not have been enough. With the goal of eventually visiting her brothers still in Tonalá, she needed to find a way to gradually overcome the expensive rent and save up for plane tickets. She was able to find this means at the Nueva café, among the close friends she has made of her coworkers.

She lives here in San Mateo with her husband. The two reconnect with their daughters (ages 24 and 26), at Fernando’s, a homey Mexican restaurant lodged into a neighborhood off of El Camino only three blocks from the Hillsdale Mall. Recognizable for its bright red awning and mustard walls, Samora Mateos’s go-to dishes are the enchiladas, drowned in beans, rice, and a smoky red sauce, as well as the cocktail de camaron (shrimp cocktail).

What she described as a must-try dish is a classic Mexican dish of fried chile, stuffed with meat, beans, cheese, and more: *chile relleno*. On the other hand, *pozole* is the type of dish one craves after spending too long away from home. It embraces with a thick, maroon broth of pork and hominy, ushering you into its comforting abode.

Even though Samora Mateos doesn’t know when she’ll be able to visit her brothers, she stays afloat despite the daunting rent—finding joy in these are the lesser known delights of Mexican cuisine.

Photos: Wholesome Yum (pozole), Serious Eats (chilaquiles), The Spruce Eats (milanesa)

We need to spend more time being **bored**

Boredom is the only way to combat TikTok-induced short attention spans

By Josie B.

What do a true-crime podcast, a pirated Netflix TV show, and a YouTube docu-series have in common? After a quick scroll through through TikTok, I found all three sharing the same screen as a random person playing Subway Surfers.

Split-screen videos have flourished on the app and other parts of the internet over the past year, allowing viewers to watch two, sometimes even three or more, videos simultaneously. Many of the videos are mind-numbing, such as someone cutting a bar of soap, and are ultimately designed to keep viewers watching for as long as possible without providing unique content. It might seem that these videos are alarming evidence of our increasingly low attention spans.

However, I am not convinced that split-screen videos are an indication that our ability to pay attention has taken an inexorable turn for the worse. We are not losing the ability to focus, rather, we are simply consuming online content in the way that it was designed: constantly.

Barbara Shinn-Cunningham, director of the Neuroscience Institute at Carnegie

Mellon University, agrees: “I’m not sure that [the internet] is changing how our brains operate,” Shinn-Cunningham said in an interview with *Time Magazine*, “but [rather] leveraging how our brains operate to keep us engaged with our electronics.”

Paying attention to long-form content isn’t a thing of the past; we are still able to do it– we just don’t because we often turn to short-form content to prevent boredom. Often, I feel as if there is a constant aim to be “productive,” and thus, boredom can seem like a bad thing. However, studies show it isn’t. According to a *New York Times* interview with professor of psychology Erin Westgate, experiencing boredom can help with creativity, problem-solving, and academic learning skills.

For those worried about their shortening attention spans, the answer is not simply watching long-form content; It’s experiencing boredom and dealing with it in a healthy ways. We need to spend more time experiencing boredom and learning how to deal with it in healthy ways rather than stopping it in any way possible.



Illustration by Freepik

EDITORIAL

SF’s portrayal in media is half-baked and unethical

By The Nueva Current Editorial Board

San Francisco has become a strawman for conservative media, and conservatives in general, when criticizing liberal cities over the past few years.

San Francisco isn’t perfect. Homelessness, housing prices, drug use, and theft are all real problems, but *Fox News* and conservatives are only telling one side of the story of a narrow slice of the city.

As the centerfold article points out, in 2022, burglary and petty theft decreased by 19%. From 2019 to 2022, homelessness decreased by 15% because of San Francisco resource investments, according to an Applied Survey Research study. Furthermore, Graffiti has decreased by a magnitude of seven over the past decade according to DataSF.

It is poor reporting to present San Francisco as a doom loop city with only failure in its future—it is unethical to write stories on rampant homelessness but never cover how it’s improving. We doubt the targeting of San Francisco will stop soon, so we encourage readers to look closely at the headlines they’re fed. Don’t take unverified rhetoric, even if it’s on national television. Read for the full picture, the unedited truth.



Photo from @georgesantosny via Instagram

George Santos was the villain we needed

The disgraced former congressman from New York shows how internet controversy can bolster political momentum, particularly for Gen Z

By Gabe H.

George Santos gave us many things. Or should I say, his lies gave us many things. They gave us physician. They served banker. And according to Santos, he was the most celebrated Volleyball star in the history of Baruch College. His lies gave Bowen Yang a hysterical residency on *Saturday Night Live*, with seemingly unlimited airtime to satirize his fraudulence. They will soon give us an *Max* biopic by Frank Rich. To put it simply, they had us in a chokehold from January to December.

Most tantamount, however, was his role in shaping the cultural zeitgeist of 2023.

To understand how dominant the saga of George Santos has been in both the political and socio-cultural spheres over the past twelve months, let us venture back to December 2022, when a *New York Times* bombshell report revealed Santos’ scandalous lies to the public. That article laid out that he had lied about nearly the entirety of his resume, including being secularly Jewish, despite previously broadcasting his Catholicism. Later, public records revealed that he fabricated a story about his mother dying in the 9/11 attacks as a ploy to gain political sympathy. Now, the public knows he used campaign donations to fund his OnlyFans needs. After months of deliberations, a House committee on Dec.1 voted 311 to 114

to expel Santos from the House of Representatives, making him the sixth House member to be discharged from the post.

The internet’s infatuation with this modern political soap opera feels almost hyper-curated to Gen Z, which has already proven its political prowess, even in its relative political infancy. According to Census data, Gen Z voted in droves in the 2022 midterm elections, besting rates for both Gen Xers and millennials in the 18-24 voting bloc. Our generation has also been at the forefront of climate and gun safety movements, showing more impetus for change than some of the United States’ leading politicians.

Our primary medium for change has been social media. As an Instagram ambassador for a New York City mayoral campaign in ninth grade, I witnessed firsthand how immense of an impact social media organizing can have on political movements. In an increasingly digitized world, the accessibility of political information can be a powerful organizing tool.

Politicians have used this momentum on social media as a tool to create powerful change. Representative Jeff Jackson of North Carolina, affectionately dubbed the “TikTok congressman,” has inspired political literacy in Gen Z, making bite-sized videos to elucidate complex issues in Congress, including the ongoing congressional gridlock

between the two parties. Senator John Fetterman of Pennsylvania has been lauded on social media for his memes parodying perceived incompetence amongst his colleagues.

Social media can have the same impact in bringing corrupt politicians to justice. Santos is a prime example of why these platforms can be such an integral tool in allowing these controversies to reach a broader audience.

Through satirical content about Santos on Instagram, TikTok edits mocking his concocted narratives, and rapid-fire tweets condemning his status as a United States representative, contemporary technology converged to paint a slapstick portrait of the disgraced former congressman.

Sustained campaigns about Santos allowed social media to shed light on his controversies, drawing attention to political news and the congressional bodies in general. Understanding how Santos was able to amass power in the first place was a crash course in media literacy. Analysis of how he courted votes from the public provided a lesson in campaigning and the dos and don’ts of running for office. Not to mention the fact that with an unceasing gridlock between congressional Democrats and Republicans, Santos’ culpability was one of the only nonpartisan sources of agreement.

Furthermore, the expulsion of

Santos from Congress was precipitated by public outrage over his leadership position, particularly from social media circles, which are dominated by Gen-Z users. Becoming a household name throughout every political echelon in the country, Santos galvanized our media culture and placed pressure on the Senate to vote him out of office. He was the worst kind of PR nightmare, battering any residue of faith the country had in its largest elected body, particularly at a period of governmental intransigence that almost warranted a shutdown on Nov. 17.

The Santos saga therefore imparted a powerful message. It forced us to question the civic institutions that are allegedly in place to champion us. It also challenged us to reckon with our own roles in electing leaders who fail to take responsibility for their wrongdoings and wield their power through sleaziness and opportunism. Moreover, we learned the necessity of being proactive about vetting candidates elected to represent us. All of these takeaways would not have been reachable without social media’s keen ability to spotlight his every scandalous move.

For all of these reasons, the George Santos narrative can serve as a call to action. Though Santos should never have held office in the first place, his legacy can be a boon for our future political action.

And to our favorite war hero George Santos, fight on.

STUDENT STANDOFF

Do the Upper School graduation requirements need to change?

Currently, students need two semesters total of an art class and either two seasons of P.E. or one season of a school sport per year



The P.E. requirement, simply put, doesn't work

A graduation requirement that can't be fulfilled on school grounds during school hours blurs the line between curriculum and extracurricular

By Jackson H.

Being at a private school gives us the luxury of determining our own requirements to graduate. Now, while other schools may then adopt various strict requirements, Nueva has generally allowed for less “must” and more “may:”

there's a steady rise in elective slots and free periods with each grade. For something to be a requirement means that it is a must-have, an inextricable part of the curriculum—I don't think anyone would argue that Math, Science, or English are an unnecessary course. So, what definitions or ground rules exist for what can be included? For one, I'd propose that they ought to be completed at school during school hours.

But that's not the case for the physical education requirement.

In order to graduate, one needs to get a P.E. credit for every year. That credit can be earned in three ways: through a single season of a Nueva sport, two seasons of an “outside activity”, or two seasons of a limited set of afterschool offerings. All of these options require a considerable investment of non-school time: the minimum for an outside activity credit is two hours a week.

The effect is that we have blurred the line between extracurriculars and the curriculum. School sports, club sports, at-home exercise, and afterschool programs are without a doubt extracurricular activities. The P.E. requirements have ended up as school-mandated extracurricular, a self-contradiction.

The clearest reasoning I can find for the requirement as it currently exists is that it brings more people to Nueva teams. That's probably true, but

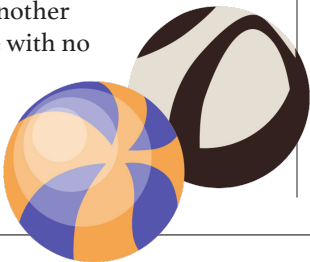
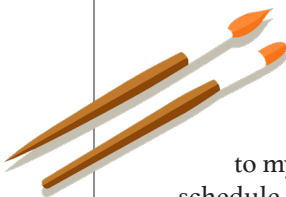
I'd argue that it's limiting athletics as a whole. An op-ed in the first issue of the Current this year called for student athletes to bring a “culture of commitment” to their teams. Poor attendance at games or low effort are absolutely things to be fixed—filling team rosters with students just doing the bare minimum to graduate is not a part of that solution.

There are students for whom the time costs completely prevent them from taking on the responsibility of a team sport: students who work jobs, have long commutes, or have other time-intensive commitments.

Unfortunately, these same constraints that eliminate sports make outside activities exceedingly difficult as well. As a result, for an unknown number of students and their families, they have to sort the mess out on their own time and dollar.

An increase in the number of afterschool offerings would ease that burden, but it doesn't change the core incoherence of the requirement: that it can't be fulfilled within school time. To fix that, we'd need to create a semester-long P.E. elective that gives a year's worth of credit. With that, at least, it would become plausible for the students struggling to piece together a survivable schedule.

But I don't know many Nueva students who would swap out an elective slot that could be spent on Organic Chemistry or Post-colonial Latin America for Gym. As such, it's hard to tell whether this necessary fix will actually change the way people go about meeting the requirements. But it would be another option for people with no better ones, and that's what we need.



Arts extracurriculars should count for arts credits

Distribution requirements favor athletes and simply add more stress to artists' schedules

By Grace Finke '23 (Guest Writer)

When I was a freshman at Nueva, I found myself joining the volleyball team. Not necessarily because I liked volleyball, let alone knew how to play

it, but simply because it was the first sport that was offered, and I needed PE credit.

This ended up adding up to five weekly hours to my already jam-packed schedule, and made me extremely jealous of my friends whose main extracurriculars were sports.

In high school, I spent approximately eight hours per week in private music lessons, choir rehearsals, individual practice, and performances, all out of school. Though I enjoyed the art class I took my sophomore year, I found it frustrating that in order to graduate, I needed to add more arts to my schedule. Even though I was spending as much time on music as some of my friends did on athletics, I still had to use my schedule space to take a class that felt redundant.

I'm well aware that Nueva's art requirement is closely aligned with the UC system's general education requirements, thereby making it easier for students to apply to the UC colleges. However, not every Nueva student has the same plan for college, and students should be able to decide for themselves what to prioritize through their high school career. For me, I wanted to be able to take every possible academic opportunity early on in high school without being held back by extra requirements.

In addition, I felt that taking an arts course simply made art feel

scholastic to me in a time that I should have been exploring. By the time I reached high school, I was comfortable with where I was as an artist and musician, and felt that simply expanding my current passion was enough to let myself grow. By being required to practice a different discipline (as Nueva doesn't offer courses in classical music), I felt that I was starting over. Athletes didn't need to start their self-discovery over, so why do artists?

If given the choice to use my arts extracurriculars for credit, I would've had the opportunity to explore more without the pressure of meeting graduation requirements. However, I felt that I was restricted, especially since classes even near my main discipline weren't offered. I hope that artists themselves can have the opportunity to expand their own passions on their own terms, whether they choose to do that inside or outside of the classroom.



CORRECTIONS: The Nueva Current welcomes comments and suggestions. We seek to publish corrections and clarifications in the subsequent issue. Please email any corrections to thenueva-current@nuevaschool.org.

Corrections: Issue 2, published Nov. 15, 2023: On page 7, Nueva parent Damian Marhefka's name was misspelled. On page 15, the Middle School Community Service Learning (CSL) program is no longer parent-driven and has been maintained by Middle School CSL Coordinator Grace Metos since 2022. On page 16, Sava I. '24's name was misspelled. On page 18, Sasha G. '24's name was misspelled.

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THE NUEVA CURRENT

strives to provide informative and impactful articles for our community. Our issues cover stories related to our school, the Bay Area, California, and other relevant spheres. We are dedicated to helping readers understand the ways in which we can all make a difference in the world around us.

The opinions expressed in *The Nueva Current* belong solely to the writers and are not a reflection or representation of the opinions of the school or administrators.

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Put some respect on our toaster ovens

The two cafe toaster ovens have been disrespected for far too long

By Aaron H.

On Tuesdays and Fridays, I leisurely walk to the cafe during my senior block to get a nice, chilled glass of milk, ready to enjoy it with my morning toast. But, by the time I get to the toaster ovens—Block 6—streaks of scorched sunbutter line the inside and the butter bowl is swirled with jam, creating something akin to poor modern art. The toaster ovens are a privilege—remember how excited we all were last year when administration and StuCo had brought them back? They are also a shared kitchen appliance. So, for those who have never shared, never had to clean skid marks of peanut butter and morning condiments off knives and forks that your siblings have left out, please, please be respectful. Here are some of my do’s and don’ts, but mostly don’ts, for the toaster oven: If you want to mix butter with strawberry jam on toast, DO use the separate knives five feet away from you to spread... DO NOT use the communal jam knife—it’s gross when chunks of spread butter get in the jam bowl.



MAKING A MESS
Used cream cheese packets, soiled utensils, and jam stains litter the toaster and surrounding counter space. This is unfortunately a common sight.
Photo from Ellie L.

Past what I hope is a shared discomfort with mixing butter with strawberry jam on toast, there is a more valid reason to not do so. For those with allergies to certain fruits or lactose, the mixing of the two separate condiments can result in anything from some extra restroom time to an epipen in the thigh. So, let’s keep our community safe. Also, DO NOT put your toast back in the toaster once you’ve spread butter, jam, and/or sunbutter on it. If you didn’t know, the toaster oven FLIPS YOUR TOAST as it slides out of the machine. So whatever you spread on the top is

going to be spread on the bottom of the toaster. Lastly, please DON’T manhandle the bread when taking it out of the bread drawer. You don’t need to touch all of the slices like you’re flitting through a file cabinet. Just grab the first slice in the stack—no need to go digging in the back. They’re all the same until you spread your unwashed hands on all of them. Hopefully when we return from winter break we’ll come back to a skid mark-less toaster oven. I know it’s on my holiday wish list.

Confessions of a high school LinkedIn user

The pervasive use of the business networking app at the upper school perpetuates unspoken peer-to-peer comparison and pre-professional culture



Lara M · 1st
Student at The Nueva School
San Francisco Bay Area
187 connections
Message More

By Lara M. '25 (Guest Writer)

“A Student at The Nueva School is on LinkedIn. Would you like to connect?” I’ve received notifications like this time and time again since creating a LinkedIn profile my sophomore year. It started out as an innocent attempt to have my internship applications taken more seriously, yet perhaps subconsciously I considered it an opportunity to be considered a peer—rather than a mentee—by the upperclassmen that I admired both intellectually and academically. From the start, others’ perceptions of the way I presented myself was ingrained in my use of the platform. It was not long after I joined that I began to sense the toxicity that the platform cultivated—an inherent feeling of competition that slowly brews among its users, especially among Nueva students. Since I was clearly able to see my peers’ volunteer and extracurricular activities laid out in painstaking, bullet-pointed detail, I started to feel anxious about my own achievements. How was I meant to compare to a self-advertised

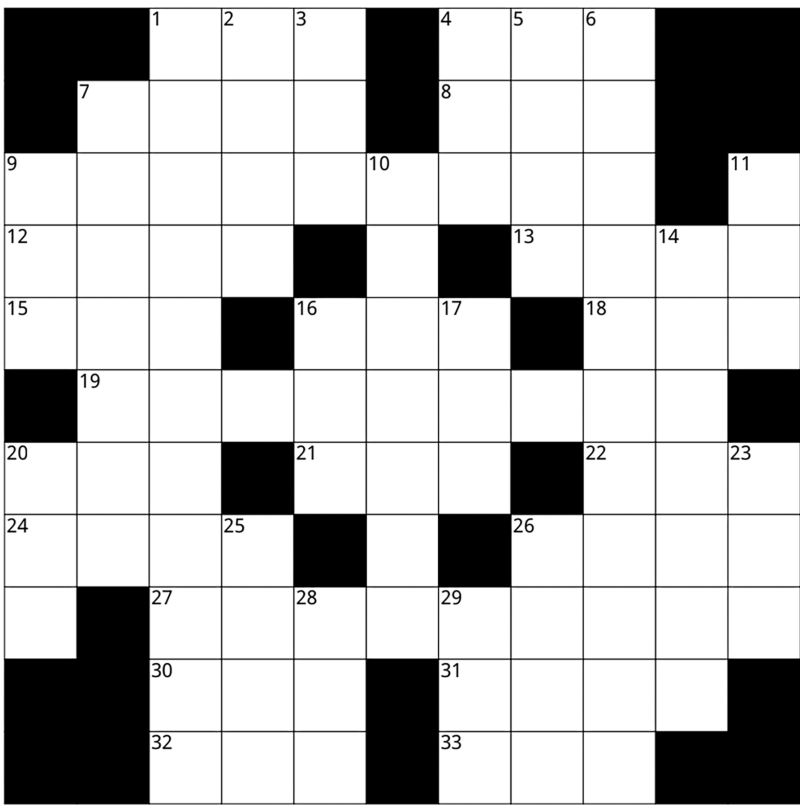
16-year-old entrepreneur? Or worse, nonprofit Chief Executive Officer? Unfortunately, I’m not the only Nueva student who was inspired to download the business-networking platform prematurely. Many students are first inspired to create LinkedIn accounts when applying to internships through the school-facilitated program. While it’s optional—in fact, students are informed that most employer partners don’t even look at profiles when hiring for positions in the internship program—students still get obsessed with crafting the perfect profile. We’re blessed to have the resources to have a program like this in the first place, yet as students learn these professional skills, they have started to apply them in harmful ways. Nueva LinkedIn has become a vessel to not-so-subtly flex your academic and extracurricular achievements. The result is an annoying mess of inflated LinkedIn profiles filled with “community innovator” rhetoric. Remember when Director of Enrichment & Summer Programs Katie Saylor told us in resume-creation workshops not to call ourselves “CEOs” of anything (and remember that we are highschoolers)? That applies to your LinkedIn, as well. We might be “gifted” kids walking around calling our PhD-educated teachers by their first names, but that does not make us adults with fully-fledged careers. Have some shame! This flex culture is representative of a larger issue I believe we as a school don’t like to admit: our pervasive yet unacknowledged pre-professional culture. Whether it’s a result of

competitive college admissions, living up to parents’ expectations, or just living in proximity to Silicon Valley—I’m not sure. But the widespread use of LinkedIn proves one thing: a benign tool meant to equip students with basic professional skills has transformed into a perpetrator of an unspoken social pressure to quantify any and all accomplishments at a school that is designed to discourage just that. The competitive comparisons intrinsic to LinkedIn are simply incongruent with Nueva’s philosophy, yet many of us feel the need to wield the Skills and Awards sections to get ahead. To those who argue that using LinkedIn in high school is a productive use of your time: yes, there is a small chance it opens you to new opportunities or provides some ideas, but it also might just be freaking you out and sending you into midnight spirals of feeling less than. I’ve succumbed to this pressure as well, simply by having a LinkedIn profile in the first place. I’ll admit—it’s validating to get those notifications and have my mom’s colleagues send me connection invites. But it’s also important to acknowledge that we’re all on our own paths, and a perfectly-manicured high school LinkedIn will not affect your career trajectory. My own way of resisting the harmful culture has come through hibernating my account (and so none of you can search me up after reading this). Please spend your time in a way that fulfills you—and that often will not be quantified on your LinkedIn.

P.S. Should I add this article to the “Projects” section of my LinkedIn profile?

Crossword

By Marcus H.



ACROSS

- 1. Curling surface
- 4. Santa's little helper
- 7. Growl
- 8. Spoil
- 9. Thorough, like some courses
- 12. Midday
- 13. Flying start?
- 15. Play a part
- 16. Atlas page
- 18. Shade of green
- 19. When the break-in occurred
- 20. Greek X
- 21. "What's up, ___?"
- 22. Steal from
- 24. Dandy
- 26. Tex. neighbor
- 27. Second most common blood type
- 30. Mil. roadside hazard
- 31. Trig function
- 32. Wine choice
- 33. Flavor enhancer

DOWN

- 1. Where a spy might seemingly vanish
- 2. Normandy city
- 3. Directional suffix
- 4. U.K. record label
- 5. Volcanic flow
- 6. Monopoly board corner
- 7. Italian dumplings
- 9. One ___ million
- 10. Calendar quartet
- 11. Feathery wrap
- 14. Settle
- 16. Central
- 17. Mid-term meeting, abbr.
- 20. Money exec
- 23. Sweetheart, in slang
- 25. Fencing sword
- 26. Singer Redding
- 28. Peculiar
- 29. School of thought

Connections

By Marcus H.

For each puzzle, find groups of four words that share a common link! Watch out for words that could belong in multiple categories.

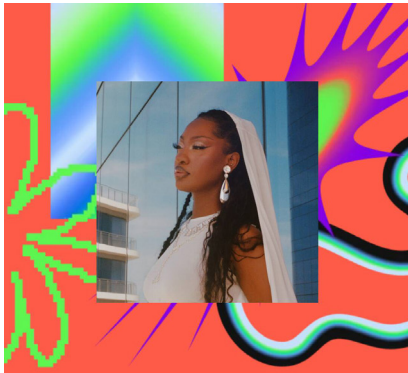
Ex: “Pixar movies” (Brave, Cars, Coco, Up) or “___ button” (Belly, Hot, Panic, Snooze)

FACE	OLAY	STATE	DUSK
NOON	TELL	DOVE	UTTER
DIAL	MIDNIGHT	DAY	DAWN
BACK	TALK	EYE	PALMOLIVE

Answers: 1. FACE, BACK, DAY, EYE: ___ to ___ / 2. DAWN, DUSK, NOON, MIDNIGHT: times of day 3. DOVE, OLAY, DIAL, PALMOLIVE: soap brands / 4. TALK, UTTER, STATE, TELL: synonyms for speak

Guess the Spotify Wrapped: faculty edition!

On Nov. 29, Spotify presented listeners with a review of their year including stats on how many minutes they spent listening to music and rankings of top artists and songs. Can you guess the faculty members based on their music taste? (Hint: Answers are below—don't peek!)



Top Artists

- 1 Tems
- 2 Prince
- 3 Beyoncé
- 4 Curren\$y
- 5 Drake

Top Songs

- 1 Kiss
- 2 Replay
- 3 When I Come ...
- 4 Eyes Closed
- 5 Last Last

Minutes Listened

88,437

Top Genre

Rap

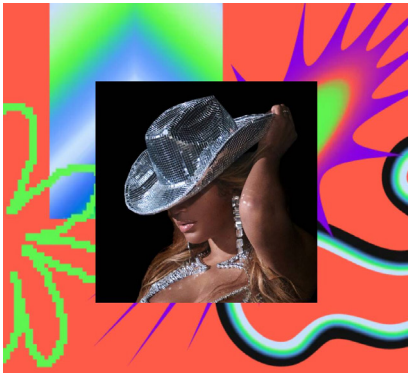
Spotify SPOTIFY.COM/WRAPPED

Top Artist: Tems

“Tems is a Nigerian artist and I just really enjoy her pen. Her voice is so unique and she’s an amazing writer too. When she sings, her writing is very much like poetry. Honestly, I can relate to a lot of her content too.”

Top Song: “Kiss”

“‘Replay’ is a Tems song that I play non-stop. It’s a very specific story about her come up in the industry. As for Kiss, I’m also a lyricist and rapper myself and I’m working on a freestyle verse for the song, so that’s why it’s at the top.”



Top Artists

- 1 Beyoncé
- 2 Frank Ocean
- 3 Fleetwood Mac
- 4 Taylor Swift
- 5 Cardi B

Top Songs

- 1 CUFF IT
- 2 Big Energy
- 3 I Will Survive
- 4 BREAK MY SO...
- 5 Fly

Minutes Listened

21,234

Top Genre


Pop

Spotify SPOTIFY.COM/WRAPPED

Top Artist: Beyoncé

“I would say 60-80% of these are my wife’s listening, since we share the account. Fleetwood Mac is definitely mine though.

My dad would play Fleetwood Mac music when I was younger, so I grew up listening to them all the time. I’ve kind of adopted listening to them and I’ve just liked their music and some of their albums ever since.”



Top Artists

- 1 Tobe Nwigwe
- 2 Tori Kelly
- 3 Bruno Mars
- 4 Piff Marti
- 5 Anderson .Paak

Top Songs

- 1 Lovely Day
- 2 BRAVO
- 3 Rain
- 4 Hamba Wena
- 5 We a Run E Gr...

Minutes Listened

8,559

Top Genre

Hip Hop

Spotify SPOTIFY.COM/WRAPPED

Top Artist: Tobe Nwigwe

“Tobe Nwigwe is from Houston and it comes up in his rap and his lyrics. It takes me home in a way because he raps about a lot of life experiences that I’ve had... besides being a millionaire rapper.”

Top Song: “Lovely Day”

“‘Lovely Day’ is a good one, and the song itself is about that title. I tell myself every day to have a good one and think about how if there was a problem, how I can make the next day an even lovelier day. The song’s a good reminder of that.”

The heroes and antagonists of 2023

This year was a cultural, political, and economic whirlwind. Here are some of its defining characters.

By Gabe H.

HERO: TAYLOR SWIFT



Photo by Inez and Vinoodh/TIME

TIME’s Person of the Year, Taylor Swift has cemented herself as not only a brilliant performer but also a historical figure. Her groundbreaking Eras Tour was the highest-grossing stadium tour by a female artist in history, and the filmed version of her Los Angeles leg helped to revitalize a declining cinema industry. With ten studio albums under her belt and one of the most loyal followings in modern music history, Swift simply never goes out of style.

HERO: WGA WRITERS GUILD



Photo by David McNew/Getty Images

After fruitless negotiations to raise unlivable wages for film and television writers, the Writers Guild of America finally went on strike on May 2, provoking nationwide discussions over workers’ rights and capturing both the attention and chagrin of the media, politicians, and concerned citizens alike. On Sept. 27, media executives finally reached an agreement with the Writers Guild, ending the strike.

ANTAGONIST: ELON MUSK



Photo by Getty Images

After aggressively staking claim to Twitter, the most ubiquitous platform for users to share unoriginal political takes, Musk made the already hellish platform more uninhabitable, first by slashing Twitter’s employee count and rolling back its content moderation to allow for more misinformation to circulate. As the single richest person on the planet, Musk continued to cash in throughout the year, despite being among the most abhorred public figures.

ANTAGONIST: STARBUCKS



Photo by Victor J. Blue/Getty Images

Everyone’s favorite coffee chain has been widely disputed throughout the year. In June, the union Starbucks Workers United facilitated a 3,000+ strong movement called Strike with Pride, condemning its ongoing union-busting, which had detrimental ramifications for its LGBTQ+ employees in particular. However strong resistance to Starbuck’s corporate leadership, the company continued to butt heads with its union. Not a good look for a company that’s already come under scrutiny for devaluing marginalized groups.

Answer: Dani Moiseley
(US administrative assistant)

Answer: Kevin Dineen (and his wife)
(US Master Scheduling and Academic Data Coordinator)

Answer: Jackie Bruno
(US Dean of Students)



Photo by Jon Bernstein. Inset: Nancy Phan Fields

The A’s are saying goodbye to the Bay

Fans share memories of the Vegas-bound team's past and speculate on a future without it in Oakland

By Gabriel B.

The clock is ticking on the Oakland Athletics' time playing at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, the team's home stadium since it moved to California from Kansas City in 1968.

On Nov. 16, Major League Baseball (MLB) team owners unanimously voted to approve a relocation to Las Vegas, setting up only the second relocation in baseball in the last half-century.

The A's lease at the Coliseum—the fifth oldest major league ballpark—ends after 2024. With completion of a new stadium in Las Vegas planned for 2028, a renewal appears unlikely.

To fully finalize the move, the A's and the city of Las Vegas must collect \$1.5B to fund the construction of the stadium. The Nevada legislature has passed a \$380M public funding bill, leaving the A's to find the remainder through private financing.

Owner John Fisher—a figure the fanbase detests for his lack of investment in the team—told NBC Bay Area there are no plans officially in place yet for the team's home in 2025–2027.

Though attendance has dropped in recent years, and the facility's current worn-down condition is less than ideal (stadium lighting outages and feral cats are among reported issues), the Coliseum has been a setting for some spectacular memories and experiences for A's fans.

Tom Dorrance has been attending games there since the 1980s. In those years, he and his friends would move down the rows from their original spots, trying to score seats as close to the field as they could. Against all the sports venues he's been to since, he still loves the “carnival kind of feeling” at the Coliseum the most.

“I don't think I've ever experienced the same kind of fun atmosphere as the Oakland A's bleachers,” he said.

The A's teams of the early 2000s were Dorrance's favorite to watch. In 2003, he went to see the A's opening playoff game against the Boston Red Sox. The teams played to a 4–4 tie, sending the game to extra innings. Ramón Hernández' walk-off bunt in the bottom of the twelfth inning, capped off what stands to Dorrance as the best game he ever saw.

“That was a time when the stadium was packed, and the Coliseum can hold a lot of people, so it gets really loud and really exciting,” he said. Indeed, 50,606 turned out that night.

For administrative assistant Dani

Moseley, attending special event games, like bring-your-dog day or queer-friendly night, has been one of her favorite experiences as an A's fan.

“I love those community oriented things and I feel like Oakland is really unique in being able to offer that to folks,” they said.

Livie P.F. '25 was a regular at A's games for a number of years, going to around 20 a season with her family. When not at games, she tracked the scores and stats daily.

Fandom was her access point to the sport. She said her thought was: “I'm gonna follow this team. I'm gonna become passionate about it even if I can't be a baseball player.” Livie said it has also been a way to connect with her dad.

One of her top memories was when she celebrated her 10th birthday at an A's game with her friends, and, topping it off, she got a birthday shout-out on the scoreboard. On that day and in general, she felt the buzz around the ballpark.

“At the A's stadium, everyone was always so invested in the game. The energy was insane,” Livie said.

Dorrance and Livie both mentioned that

has often managed to construct successful teams with what little the ownership has given them to work with. However, the A's have not ranked in the top 20 in payroll since 2007, signaling a lack of care to the fanbase and driving that rapid player turnover.

The A's are on the heels of consecutive seasons with 100-plus losses (out of 162 games), and have not ranked in the top 20 in attendance since 2005 (out of 30 MLB teams). Ironically, that was the year when the current owner John Fisher first bought a share of the team.

“If you have an owner like the A's owner, then it just becomes about money and it doesn't feel like you can enjoy the game. It's not about the community anymore, which is what the game is about,” Livie said.

“There doesn't seem to be very much buy-in in investing in professional athletics in Oakland,” said Moseley, alluding to the Warriors' and Raiders' departures as well.

Dorrance and Livie said they had been hearing the threats of relocation for a while, but there was no real follow-through up

TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALLGAME

Livie gets ready to watch a game with a friend and her brother Prez '31 in 2018 (inset).

growing up experience, seeing it disappear sucks,” he said.

Livie feels like she will lose a baseball team to root for, and Dorrance does not wish the franchise well in Las Vegas out of spite for the owners and the league. Moseley is still a Raiders fan, and they may also continue following some of the A's players since “there is a bit of loyalty involved,” though not feel that attached to the team.

Oakland as a whole will soon be bereft of the football, baseball, and basketball teams that used to share the same lot.

“Fans lose any sense of team, or any sense of putting pride in something that can represent the city,” Livie said.

“The city loses revenue, the city loses another community, the city loses morale,” Moseley said.

She also pointed out that once people have to travel significant distances to catch a game in-person, low-income residents who used to catch a quick BART ride to the Coliseum will be at a particular disadvantage.

The impacts of A's relocation will stretch beyond the East Bay, too. The move will



“I am losing an opportunity to escape, so to speak, for the mundane,” said Moseley, who lives 10 minutes away from the ballpark. “I'll be losing that ability to stay pretty close to home and still feel like a part of something.”

the group of fans who, without fail, play the drums at every home game are a signature part of that environment. These diehards occupy Section 149 in the right field bleachers, and their drumming, chanting, and general noise-making has been a constant in Oakland even as followers have watched the club decline.

Dorrance, Moseley, and Livie were all frank about the predictability of the relocation. They saw it coming from the lack of investment from ownership, the results on the field, and their own following of the team.

It has been hard for them to engage as fans when each season they have watched the best players and fan-favorites leave for teams that offer them better contracts.

A shrewd baseball operations team—once led by Billy Beane of *Moneyball* fame—

to this point.

“It always felt inevitable, but it never felt immediate,” Dorrance said.

From Dorrance, Livie, and Moseley's perspectives, the sense emerges that the franchise's departure is the last in a long line of slights to its followers, and reflects poorly on the interests of the league and upper-level executives in the sport.

Now that the relocation is impending, fans and the city are faced with some unfortunate losses.

“I am losing an opportunity to escape, so to speak, from the mundane,” said Moseley, who lives just 10 minutes away from the ballpark. “I'll be losing that ability to stay pretty close to home and still feel like part of something.”

There are plenty of other sources for meaning and community, but the move still stings for Dorrance.

“[As] something that was part of my own

compromise the “Bay Bridge Series” against the San Francisco Giants that has become a main attraction on the Bay Area sports calendar. In 1989, the two clubs met in the World Series. Just half an hour before Game 3, the Loma Prieta earthquake infamously struck, a moment etched in Dorrance's memory and the minds of many long-time Bay Area residents. As the story goes, with so many people preparing to watch from home, the game saved people's lives.

Stories like that will not fade from the collective memory as quickly as the team may leave for Las Vegas. Although it will be disappointing for the A's time in Oakland to end, the good memories are bound to form the core of the Athletics' legacy among fans.

“I think that there's a resiliency to the fans that I would have faith with,” said Dorrance.

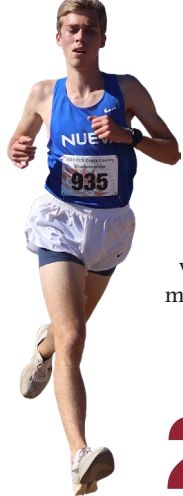
FALL SPORTS
BY THE
NUMBERS



90% win percentage of the girls tennis team, more than any other team they played



#2 standing in the private school league for the girls volleyball team



11:32 was Ryan F's time in 2.2 miles, breaking the school record

27 athletes in the fall sports received All-League recognition

The New College Football Dynasty: Money
How the influence of revenue is changing the college football landscape

By Milo K.

After the 13-0 ACC champion Florida State University Seminoles (abbreviated as FSU) were left out of the college football playoffs, the Playoff Committee cited Heisman Candidate Jordan Travis' week 11 injury as cause for exclusion. However, some people are speculating that it was instead done to allow a bigger market, the college football powerhouse Alabama, in instead. The Southeastern Conference (SEC)—Alabama's conference—is rivaled only by the Big 10 in perceived strength and, perhaps more importantly, revenue. While the Big 10 and SEC make over \$800 million in revenue, no other conference made more than \$617 million. This has created a so-called "SEC bias", where SEC teams are favored in

playoff selections and in season rankings. This success breeds more success, as unlike in most professional sports, college football has no draft—players usually play for the best team they can. Now more than ever, college football success has been determined by the school's monetary investment. Two major changes for player empowerment have only compounded this issue. The most notable is the legalization of players now being able to profit from their Name, Image, and Likeness (commonly called NIL). On paper, allowing players this opportunity is a positive thing, but it came with a homogenizing effect in the field. Due to NIL collectives (a company with the express purpose of giving athletes NIL payments), the wealthier schools have consistently gotten better. Adding on changes to allow for players to transfer

between schools at will, and the field of college football is no longer littered with the upsets it was known for. This year, seven schools had one loss or fewer, and none of those losses were to a team ranked lower than 12th. With money determining success on the field, it has seen off the field repercussions as well. A wave of realignments—where schools are abandoning their current conferences for TV deals—has caused irreparable damage to the traditions college football has held. Most notably, the PAC 12 and its 108 years of history have all but disbanded, with 10 of the 12 teams leaving for other conferences due to struggles in finding a TV deal. Because of this, teams with deep history and passionate rivalries are no longer going to face each other. Matchups with over 90 years of tradition like Stanford versus USC, Oregon versus Oregon State and Cal versus UCLA, are now in an uncertain state, with conference realignment causing them to no longer play. The message is clear: the future of college football is no longer shaped by fans and tradition, but rather revenue streams.



Photo by Mike Erdelyi

SNUBBED

FSU is the first team to be an undefeated Power Five champion while still missing the College Football Playoffs.

Upsets, Cinderella Stories, and More; Previewing the 2023-24 NFL Playoffs

A Deep Dive into the NFL Playoff Standings

By Niam K.

As we approach the end of the NFL Regular Season, it's time to look ahead to the NFL Playoffs. Let's see who would make the playoffs if the season ended right now and what the teams on the outside need to do to secure their spots in the postseason. As of Dec 12, this is how the National Football Conference (NFC) standings would look in order of seed: (1) San Francisco 49ers, (2) Dallas Cowboys, (3) Detroit Lions, (4) Tampa Bay Buccaneers, (5) Philadelphia Eagles, (6) Minnesota Vikings, (7) Green Bay Packers. The teams "in the hunt", meaning not currently in the playoff standings but still have a good chance, are as follows: Los Angeles Rams, Seattle Seahawks, Atlanta Falcons, New Orleans Saints, and the New Orleans Saints. The Detroit Lions have headlined a season of unconventionality in the NFC North with perennial division winners, the Green Bay Packers, currently having a losing record. At the same time, the Lions lead the division and look poised to make a deep run in the playoffs. When starting quarterback Kirk Cousins tore his Achilles, an already underwhelming season looked lost for the Minnesota Vikings. Since then, they have had a nice recent stretch with Josh Dobbs under center and have stayed in playoff contention. At the bottom of the division is the Chicago Bears. The Bears seem to be more focused on next season; if the season ended today they

ON THE ROAD TO VICTORY

Follow the NFL Playoffs with this bracket created by Alvin Y.

would have possession of the two top-five picks in next year's draft, including the first overall pick which they acquired in a trade with the Carolina Panthers. The NFC South may prove to have a big impact on this year's playoffs. Often considered the worst division in football, they still occupy a guaranteed playoff spot for one of their four teams. The worst team in the division, the 1-11 Carolina Panthers, was the first team eliminated from the playoffs and recently fired their head coach Frank Reich less than a year after they hired him. Reich made unwanted history by becoming the first head coach to get fired two seasons in a row; he was fired as Indianapolis Colts head coach last season. The NFC is sure to produce some major storylines as we near the end of the regular season. The race for the number 1 seed, which grants a bye in the first round of the playoffs, is heating up after the 49ers beat the Eagles 42-19 in Philadelphia. The 49ers are currently



in first place following the Eagles' loss to the Cowboys on Sunday Night Football on Dec 10. Don't count out the Lions, Eagles, or the Cowboys as they are all one game behind the 49ers, though the Eagles are in fifth place as they are behind the Cowboys in the NFC East division. On the American Football Conference (AFC) side of the bracket the seeding looks like this: (1) Baltimore Ravens, (2) Miami Dolphins, (3) Kansas City Chiefs, (4) Jacksonville Jaguars, (5) Cleveland Browns, (6) Pittsburgh Steelers, (7) Indianapolis Colts. The teams within striking distance are the Houston Texans, Denver Broncos, Cincinnati Bengals, Buffalo Bills, Los Angeles Chargers, Las Vegas Raiders, and the New York Jets. The AFC North has also been quite surprising. The Baltimore Ravens, fresh off of giving quarterback Lamar Jackson the biggest contract in NFL history, are currently second in the AFC while the rest of their division isn't too far behind. The Pittsburgh Steelers

and Cleveland Browns are both occupying wildcard spots, to the surprise of many as they have been underwhelming in recent years and have each lost their starting quarterbacks due to lengthy injuries. Preseason Divisional favorites the Cincinnati Bengals have had an underwhelming season as starting quarterback Joe Burrow is out for the season with a wrist injury. The AFC also holds the potential for some major storylines in the coming weeks. Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers is looking to return on Dec. 24 against the Washington Commanders from a torn Achilles injury—if he were to return it would be the fastest return from an Achilles tear of any professional athlete. With four weeks left in the regular season, these standings are far from set in stone as many things can happen in the future.

Photo by Alvin Y.

Girls soccer team kicks off to a strong start

By Neel G.

As a D5 league team competing against a D3 team’s home field, no one expected the girls varsity soccer team to win. On the van ride there,



Photo by Neel G.

HIT AND SCORE

Kaila E. ’24 fiercely competes in the first game of the season.

tensions were high and hopes were low, but as they played through 90 heated minutes, they left their competitor confounded. With intense concentration and unmatched passion, the Nueva girls soccer team won 1-0 in their first game of an ambitious season.

With five practices a week and 10 scheduled games just before winter break, they are committed to becoming the best players they can be, while still maintaining a healthy environment. “It’s all about building and getting better,” says goalkeeping and JV coach Kevin Dineen. “No one is going to be perfect right away.”

But beyond their personal progress, practices are also a time when the team forms strong bonds between grades. Athletics representative, team captain, and “team mom,” dubbed by her teammates, Zoe B. ’24 looks forward to developing connections between upper and underclassmen for the season.

“My goal is to be someone they can come to on and off the field. Whether they text me to ask for a ride or to tell me they just failed a Biology test, I want to curate a unique relationship with each and every one of them,” she says. “That’s what I

had, and it was pretty incredible.”

And, that bond shows on the field, with their strong communication and growing resilience.

In the first year after its launch, the JV team has made exciting advancements, especially for less experienced players. They practice in a more solidified league, play more scheduled games, and overall gain a stronger team dynamic. The varsity team has been racking up wins, as players from all grades have been excelling. From Siri P. ’27’s first goal of the season to Alyse G.-M. ’24’s powerhouse kicks, the team fosters potential for freshmen and seniors alike.

The team’s supportive spirit and engaged attitude toward the sport are promising signs for the rest of the winter season.

“Our goal for varsity this year is to get all the way to the CCS finals. We did lose three or four incredibly strong players last year, who were a lot of our record holders and goal scorers, so it’s really going to be seeing how we can come together and fill those spots,” says Zoe. “But, it’s going really well so far. They all have great attitudes, and they’re all strong.”

Girls Basketball’s Win in Season Opener Overturned after Self-Reported Scheduling Violation

By Gabriel B.

Varsity girls basketball had earned a victory in their opening night matchup at Drew School by a final score of 32–25. Two and half weeks later, the result was wiped and the Dragons were credited with a win by forfeit, the Mavericks with a loss.

The team was in a film session when they learned the outcome had been reversed.

“We were really proud of the way that we had worked together as a team and gotten a win early on [in the season],” said forward Lara M. ’25. “We worked hard for it, and just knowing that that win didn’t count anymore, we were really frustrated.”

The Central Coast Section (CCS) is divided into north, central, and south. As it turned out, the start date for competition varies by subsection. In the north, where Drew plays, games were allowed to begin on Nov. 1. Nueva is in the central region, however, where games were not allowed before Nov. 16. Therein lay the problem: the contest between the schools took place on Nov. 14, before the Mavericks were permitted to play.

Drew’s request to schedule the game had been accepted without question. As basketball coach Gavin Bradley said, “I hadn’t really been involved in scheduling until later this year, and it just never occurred to me that if a school is asking for a game [there could be a problem]. I would assume it would be following the rules.”

Bradley and Assistant Director of Athletics Robert Lopez were looking at what date the regular season had to end ahead of the playoffs when they realized there was an issue on the front end of the timeline. They notified Director of Athletics Brett McCabe, who called the CCS commissioner and recorded the mistake.

Since the timing was legal for Drew and not for Nueva, CCS handed the Mavericks a loss rather than merely voiding the result. The CCS commissioner also lowered the maximum number of games for the girls basketball team next season from 26 to 24, and put them on probation for two years. The discipline roughly aligns with the “Level One Penalty Guidelines” of the CCS Infractions Policy.

“I think everyone was sort of surprised that there was a penalty because it was just an innocent mistake,” Bradley said.

He is not too concerned about the scheduling restriction, as the team only has 21 contests on the calendar this year, but is unsure of what probation means. In total, he found the punishments unexpectedly harsh.

“It’s not like I’m trying to break rules or even test the limits. We’re trying to be a basketball team,” Bradley said. “And so that’s my frustration, is that it was public. It was self-reported.”

All else aside, Bradley viewed the on-court action against Drew as a good live game experience and an opportunity to improve. He is optimistic about this year going forward.

“It’s a good, balanced group,” he said. “They work well together, they’re getting more competitive, working hard, and I think we’re having a lot of fun.”

Both Lara and Bradley noted that this year’s upperclassmen are focused on growing into their leadership roles, as a lot of players have graduated out of the program recently.

“It’s important for us to be good role models and leaders to the younger members of the team,” Lara said. She and Bradley both expressed their excitement about the freshmen talent on the team, as well as the strong team dynamic they see forming.

The team did get their first official win on Dec. 1, 38–23 at home against El Primero, two weeks after the errant game at Drew. Their record—accounting for the forfeit—stood at 1–4 as of Dec. 8.

It is certainly an oddity to outscore the opponent over a full 32 minutes of play and end up with a loss. If they have not already, though, the team will look to move past that and start strong in league play, beginning with a Jan. 4 home game versus Pacific Bay Christian.

Boys Basketball Looks to Rebound After Down Season Last Year

The team’s preseason performances so far are indicative of future success

By Ethan H.

“Gentlemen, expect to win and play your best out there. Let the scoreboard decide how you play,” said Mike Green, the boys’ varsity basketball coach of seven years. The team huddled up, concluding the meeting with an “Execute” cheer before heading upstairs for their entrance into the gym.

Riding a three-game win streak, Nueva’s matchup for the night was King’s Academy from Sunnyvale.

Although the Mavericks ended up losing the game, they have found early success in their out-of-league preseason games with a 4–2 record, a major step up from the team’s preseason record last year of 1–7.

Coach Green thinks that the team’s success so far this season is a result of last year’s struggles.

“Last year was a transition year

BOUNCING BACK

Diego A. ’25 poses during the team’s Media Day.



and we had a lot of young players that had to learn how to play at a varsity level. This year’s returning players, especially a majority of the junior class, all knew how much work they would have to put in during the summer and it’s showing.”

One player in the team’s junior core is third-year player and second-year captain Diego A. ’25. A member of the varsity team since his freshman year, Diego has experienced the ups and downs of Nueva basketball.

“The jump from freshman to sophomore year was tough,” said Diego. “Freshman year was the best that we’ve been while I’ve been at the school. But over that summer we lost a lot of our seniors, around half the team, so it was definitely a big change.”

Like his coach, Diego also believes last year’s results were a motivator and factor in the team’s success so far this year.

“Being the first-ever Nueva basketball team to not make CCS encouraged us to get better so we wouldn’t have to see a season like that again,” he said.

Besides last season’s outcome, part of the team’s success can be attributed to changes in culture, in both basketball and Nueva athletics as a whole. This year, Coach Green made several

changes to Nueva’s boys basketball program to make it more competitive, including team meals before every game and cuts to the JV team.

“My goal is to teach the gentlemen to be more accountable and responsible when committing to play a sport. Competition and team sports are important because they prepare you for the future. I’m trying to prepare them because, after you graduate and are out in the work world, everything is a competition, and I think that’s where athletes have a small advantage,” said Green.

This year, Nueva has also put a larger emphasis on athletics, especially with the addition of media days and an active social media page. The result is a significant boost in fan attendance.

Described by some members of the team as “amazing” and “game-changing,” this increase in attendance also inspires the team to show out for their fans.

“There would be games last year where we would run into a completely empty gym,” said co-captain Max R. ’25. “But this year, having people there to cheer for us is a huge confidence boost.”

With all of this in mind, both Coach Green and his players are hopeful that they can return the program to its former success. Nueva’s next matchup is tonight against Oceana High School. JV plays at 4:00, the girls at 5:30, and the boys will wrap it up at 7:00.

Dedication and depth: Why boys soccer can reach CCS

The soccer team looks ahead to Central Coast Section and rivalry matches after an increase in players

By Alvin Y.

After a strong 1-0 win against Pinewood to start the season on Nov. 30, the boy’s soccer team believes they have a chance to make CCS this year with a large increase of new players.

“I think the goal was always to make CCS, and I believe that we have a really good shot at it,” said left back Connor H. ’26. “This year, we’ve gotten a lot more people, so I’m excited about the amount of commitment we have to the team.”

With four incoming freshmen, the position distribution in the team proves helpful, as the team now has more midfielders, attackers, and two new goalkeepers who provide extra depth and skill. Although the increase in backup players is crucial to the team reaching CCS, co-captain and starting goalkeeper Sam Z. ’24 believes the dedication and consistency the team puts in will prove essential to their success in the season.

“In past years, we have always gotten very

close, placing 2nd or 3rd in our division, but this year—if everyone stays healthy—I think we have a real shot at making the playoffs,” said co-captain Sam. “The key here is staying dedicated by ensuring we have a good number of players showing up to practice and games.”

However, some members had to adapt and change their playing styles as their positions changed due to the number of players on the team.

“I was put into a different position and was given a new role on the team,” said Rohan K. ’26, who switched to center back. “I have to learn to play differently which is hard since I normally play right back.”

As the players begin to adjust to their roles on the team, many of the older members look forward to two rivalry matches against Design Tech.

“We have a few games where we are facing D-tech—kind of like a second-best-case rivalry match-up instead of Crystal,” Sam said. “D-tech has beaten us a few times in the past, but this season I think we can pull off a clean sweep: 2-0.”



Photo by Damian Diaz

TEAMWORK IN MOTION

Gabe A. ’24 looking to pass while Ethan C. ’25 directs him to an open player.