

A close-up photograph of a pink flower, likely a lily, with several stamens. The stamens have long, thin filaments and bright orange, textured anthers. The petals are a soft pink color. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

the Reckoner

of Marc Garneau C.I.

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Cover Art: Maryam Mobashir

SHORT STORY CONTEST WINNER

- 4 An Opera of Death

GREEN CANVAS PROJECT

- 8 We Still Have Time

NEWS

- 10 Ms. Sawh's Persistent Path to Vice Principal
11 Catching Up With the Health and Wellness Club
12 The TNO Food Collaborative: Fighting Food Insecurity

LIFE

- 13 Experiment
14 matches
15 Sadness in the Sky
16 crash
17 fireworks
18 *2021 GRAMMYS*
18 *blood rose of anxiety*
19 *Birds*
20 *Rebel, Rebel*
21 *SPIKE*
22 *Conch*

EDITORIAL

- 22 What They Aren't Telling You About: COVID-19 Vaccines
24 Snooze or Lose?
26 Colourism: Shades of Acceptance
28 Are Fangirls Really Fanatics?
30 Why the Pandemic Showed We Can Do More to Stop Climate Change

JEFFERSON CHEN

Ok... that's one credit for French, another for Phys. Ed., two in science, another in English, two more in math, another one for...

We've all been through course selection at some point. Whether you are a freshman student just entering Garneau or a high school senior about to attend college, we are all bound by the pain of assembling every single credit we need to graduate. You've probably also noticed how the course selections force students to pick courses with very little freedom. How the hell am I going to use this French credit if I'm not moving to France or Quebec? These are only few of the many problems that plague the Ontario high school course requirements that are now largely out of date. The current measures by the government have failed to adapt to the changing times, and some serious edits must be made if the ministry still wants to provide students with a proper education.

One of the courses despised the most by students is the mandatory French credit—and how useless it is for a large number of students. There are very few French speakers in North America outside of Quebec. In fact, out of the almost six million inhabitants of Toronto, about ninety-thousand people speak French as their first language—a little over 1% [1]. In fact, the most common first languages in Toronto after English are Chinese (all dialects), Punjabi, Italian, and then Tagalog (Filipino)—French isn't even in the top 10. You're over five times as likely to bump into a native Chinese speaker on the street than a French speaker, and two times as likely to run into a Punjabi or Italian speaker [2].

I don't believe in removing French entirely, for it's still useful for some—but French is perfectly fine as an elective rather than a mandatory course. Instead, students should

Why the Course Requirements Need to Change

be given more freedom in what second language they would like to learn instead. For many, French just isn't useful anymore—I haven't spoken a single word of it outside of class, have you?

Another weird requirement is the forced art credit in Grade 9. Since it is science and mathematics that govern our world, it's understandable to have arts students study at least a little bit of science. But for the STEM kids out here, why bother learning how to play the tuba when you could be learning something more related to your profession, or more universal? Again, the arts should become electives—sure, some students may wish to experience a course or two in the arts for their own enjoyment, but there's no point in forcing everyone into something many don't want to do.

Then, there are courses currently not mandatory that frankly should become enforced. One obvious example is computer science. I'm willing to bet money on the fact every single student in Ontario has used some type of computer at some point in their lives: in school, at home, or somewhere else. Computers have become so common that many of us take them for granted, and yet we still don't give everyone the course that teaches us how the computer works and how to fix its problems. Not everybody will become programmers, artificial intelligence developers, or software engineers, but having a basic understanding on the machine that allows you to write English essays and play League of Legends will prove to be universally helpful.

The times are changing, and useful knowledge changes with time. Every time we study information that is no longer useful to use, we are wasting time. The ministry has failed to catch up with time, and therefore failed every single child out of the two million students enrolled in the public education system in Ontario [3]. Course selections need to change, and those higher up need to make the measures to change it.

[1] <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-cma-eng.cfm?LANG=Eng&GK=CMA&GC=535&TOPIC=5>

[2] <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-cma-eng.cfm?LANG=Eng&GK=CMA&GC=535&TOPIC=5>

[3] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/449110/enrollment-in-public-elementary-and-secondary-schools-in-canada-by-province/>

Dil To Pagal Hai (The Heart is Crazy)– The Ultimate Bollywood Soundtrack

by NUHA KHAN

I believe in *Dil To Pagal Hai* soundtrack supremacy. A tale of love, friendship, and a passion for music, the soundtrack of this 90s Bollywood hit encapsulates exactly that. Bollywood's ever-green romantic Yash Chopra created some of the best love stories with flawless soundtracks for multiple generations of fans. For those who love Bollywood music, to those looking for the perfect soundtrack to start with, the contemporary and traditional fusion in this soundtrack is the best place to start, and in my opinion the perfect representation of Bollywood for those unfamiliar with it. The energy, instrumentals, indulgence in romanticism, and soulful vocals found here are what makes Bollywood what it is. The movie was originally launched as *Mohabbat Kar Le*, which was later renamed as *Dil to Pagal Hai*, and became immortalized in Bollywood history. Following its release, professional dance groups were popularized, Shahrukh Khan's status as the King of Bollywood was cemented, and the movie's album took its place at second on the list of Top 10 Bollywood song album sales of all time, with 12.5 million sales worldwide [1].

The soundtrack, like most Yash Chopra films, is unforgettable, unique, and youthful, full of passion, excitement, and heartbreak in the voices of Udit Narayan and Lata Mangeshkar on seven sensational duets. The composer Uttam Singh was a tabla and western violin specialist who worked with legends like Madan Mohan, Naushad, S.D. Burman and R.D. Burman. He spent two years composing ten songs for the film that went on to become the top released film album for 1997 [2]. The dynamic songs composed by Uttam Singh had an excellent use of violins, western and Indian instruments are the soul of the film and many prominent Bollywood discographies.

Allow me to briefly delve into the top tracks of *Dil To Pagal Hai*.

The soundtrack starts with the masterful title song "Dil To Pagal Hai," sung by Udit Narayan and Lata Mangeshkar and heard in teasers and trailers alongside shots of SRK and Madhuri. So India gasped, and the romantic suspense in the film skyrocketed when Akshay Kumar, who was purposefully left out of the movie credits, appeared out of nowhere to sing the song with Madhuri on screen halfway through the film.

The A side's second song is credited to Yash Chopra's son Uday Chopra. "Are Re Are" by the Udit-Lata super combo is a super ultra catchy duet. This song's creation was almost like something out of a book. As Uttam Singh was practicing the melody, a young Uday Chopra arrived at the studio. When Uday Chopra heard the song, he began to hum it, and soon everyone else joined in. Anand Bakshi, the lyricist for Yashji, came into the studio at that precise moment, heard the song, turned around, and went to the bathroom. Uttam Singh thought that was the end of the tune for him, but to his surprise Bakshi emerged from the restroom and sang, "Are Re Are Yeh Kya Hua, Koi Na Yeh Jaana," and everyone cheered. Jumped with joy. With the combination of the catchy chorus and the meaningful verses, a classic love song was born. This is followed by "Bholi Si Surat," the song whose guitar strings can be recognized in a heart-beat by almost every Bollywood fanatic. A song of innocence, playfulness, and fantasy, each stanza of this song is otherworldly. The traditional beats and amazing lyrics of "Dholna" makes it stand out from the other songs on this album.

Side A wraps with the intense music of Madhuri and Karishma's dance showdown, with a multitude of contemporary western, African, and traditional Indian elements. I especially enjoy the ending, when Karishma takes over the dance to the strumming beats of the opening dance number from the film "Le Gayi," tying the tracks together.

Side B starts slowly with a brief Alaap (form of melodic improvisation opening the song) by Udit and Lata's golden voices before picking up pace as they sing "Pyar Kar," Uttam Singh's first song recorded for the film. The song is the perfect song of longing, dreams, and soulmates who have yet to meet, staring at the same moon.

"Chak Dum Dum" was a snippet sung and danced to by a choir of kids, before Udit and Lata added their talents, making the most popular monsoon song in Indian history, "Koi Ladki Hai" which also features a great violin solo by Uttam Singh.

Then, for the only time on the soundtrack, Hariharan replaced Udit Narayan for a duet with Lata Mangeshkar on the movie's special opening credits track "Ek Dujhe Ke Vaaste," which shows the movie's crew members with their spouses during the opening credits. With its soft, intimate lyrics, this is what the sound waves of love feel like.

Lastly, there's "Le Gayi," the only song with Asha Bhonsle's vocals, which takes the movie's momentum to a whole new dimension with its confidence, glamour, dance sequence and energy, the definition of Bollywood for any first-timer.

The album concluded with an instrumental piece featuring Shahrukh Khan's iconic whistling tune from "Are re Are," which was accompanied by a delicate combination of matka (Indian folk music instrument), flute, strings, and Uttam Singh's violin solo.

In my opinion it checks all the boxes of the key descriptors of Bollywood music. The album gave us everything from delicate to upbeat, traditional to modern, love to rivalry, intimate to expressive, and intense to emotional, all in one movie. Even if you don't watch the movie (I recommend that you do), you should listen to the Dil To Pagal Hai soundtrack—the perfect representation of Bollywood music.

[1] <https://www.bollymoviereviewz.com/2013/07/top-10-bollywood-songs-album-of-all.html>

[2] <https://web.archive.org/web/20080215081552/http://www.boxofficeindia.com/showProd.php?itemCat=284&catName=MTk5MCoxOTk5&PHPSESSID=108b9056cd4ca14236f9c6119d34dce>





SIGNS OF SPRING

Blooms of colour spring from the ground and the chatter of wild critters fills the air—the world is full of life—signifying the beginning of spring. The Reckoner's Photography Board set out to capture signs of spring in this photo series.

Photos by Jessica Xiong, Amy Jia, Bill Yan, Justin Wei,
Evelyn Jiang, Stephanie Chan











NEWS BOARD

A board to keep the student body informed about their school and local community.

Painting A Better Tomorrow With Art Council

by ANNE LIU

Photograph: JESSICA XIONG

Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute's Art Council, led by President Hateem Fatima, is a group of MGCI students who gather weekly to enjoy the process of creating art, as well as raise awareness for change needed in the community. Regardless of their skill level, these art lovers meet to appreciate art with one another for fun. The club aims to provide a friendly and open

environment where people can enjoy themselves, learn, and forge meaningful connections.

The council meets virtually every Monday at 3:30 pm through Google Meet meetings. Composed of staff advisors Ms. Masemann and Ms. Satary, and a cohort of around twenty members, Art Council presents a welcoming environment where students can come together, make lasting friendships,

and de-stress by creating art.

"To me, Art Council has always been a place students can gather away from our hectic school lives and just enjoy ourselves," said Hateem. "It isn't a stressful club, and no one is expected to be the world's best artist. You can just come, talk with Garneau students, and keep your mind busy with art. When school drains the energy out of you, Art Council is like a safe haven where you can actually relax, and I think that's the charm of the entire club."

Having adapted effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic, the club has pivoted from contact activities such as painting large-scale murals and handing out cards to the community, to smaller-scale projects. "We continued with the Art Council's tradition of creating holiday cards for staff at Garneau," Hateem Fatima said. "Every card was in fact made and coloured by the Art Council, and we made a lot of fun memories while working on them!" During the winter break, they also held a daily drawing challenge, where Art Council members were free to let out their creativity and draw according to a prompt. The first prompt was "something I love," so the council members created art based on their pets, friends, and



more. It was a small and enjoyable ongoing activity, where members expressed themselves through their artwork. Another activity they initiated was a small project where members created personalized wooden boxes. In the first week of March, students received their boxes, paints, and paintbrushes to start. They have been customizing them as a group.

“While working on our wooden boxes, we had a fun and easy-going time making them. It was an activity that wasn’t meant to be rushed or stressed about,” said executive member Qodsia Hamid. “Although it was all online, we still had the opportunity to talk, laugh, and share stories while making these boxes. It was an awesome experience, and an activity I would definitely recommend.”

In addition, the council has introduced and explored various initiatives. These include sending out virtual cards to the community, as well as the Cards for Caring project they recently commenced.

The Cards for Caring project, guided by club member Zahra Ahmed, focuses on helping seniors under the care of SPRINT Senior Care, a residence home in Thorncliffe Park. The goal is to help support seniors, especially amidst the pandemic. The initiative began with a Google Form that was sent out to the activationists in the home inquiring about their clients. The activationists are the frontline workers who interact with seniors on a daily basis: they create interactive activities to keep seniors engaged and active, work on socialization exercises, and offer music thera-



py. Currently, Art Council is in the process of reaching out to enthusiastic student members who are interested in customizing cards. Once responses from the activationists are received, students will be provided personalized information about selected clients that would be helpful to include on a card, to deepen the connection between students and seniors.

“Being able to lead the Cards For Caring initiative is so heartwarming. SPRINT Senior Care has always been a close connection,” said Zahra Ahmed, the leader of the project. “All the seniors have so many stories to share about their careers and life experience. This initiative is a nice way for students to engage a bit more with our community.”

The challenging times brought forth by the pandemic saw only more innovation from Art Council; the potential issues with this project had long been foreseen and resolved. Given the current situation, Art Council was uncertain of when

schools would reopen. Therefore, to ensure seniors would receive the cards, the club proposed that once finished, they would deliver images of the cards created by students to the activationists through email. Subsequently, if schools reopen, the physical cards can be delivered to the seniors so that they have something tangible to cherish. Moreover, to ensure the safety of the seniors, upon receipt, the cards would be quarantined for two weeks to eliminate the potential of the virus spreading in their homes. The Council is hopeful about the impact of this initiative, and what it could become once the virus dies down. “I hope this initiative can be done on a larger scale once schools reopen,” said Zahra Ahmed.

Overall, Art Council’s persistent efforts have proven to become quite successful, allowing them to come together, enjoy art, and create change for the betterment of the community. Together, they’re painting a better tomorrow for our world. ■

Iftar With ISNA

by UROOBA SHAIKH

For Muslims, Ramadan is a month of fasting from sunrise to sunset, sharing, and community. However, for the second year in a row, things are a bit different. With even stricter lockdown measures in place, people are once again forced to celebrate this blessed month from home. However, this hasn't stopped the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) from providing for communities in any way they can, with iftar drive-through food banks at both their Toronto and Mississauga locations.

ISNA is an organization that provided for approximately four hundred families every month through its food bank, so there was concern at the start of the pandemic as to how this important service would operate. It was in March of 2020 that ISNA devised a drive-through model so that those in need could continue to have access to provisions. Since the start of the pandemic, the number of families served each month has risen to between five and seven hundred.

"A lot of our clients are from immigrant, refugee communities, marginalized, racialized. There are a lot of barriers for them to actually access other social services and perhaps other food banks in the GTA. We felt compelled that we have to stay open," said Faisal Shaheen, food bank co-chair.

In pre-pandemic times, ISNA had also regularly held community iftars during Ramadan. Many would go to the mosque to share the breaking fast meal, called iftar, with members of the community. Financial contributions also

helped those who are underprivileged to have a proper meal while maintaining the spirit of togetherness that Ramadan brings. ISNA decided to use the drive-through model to continue this service while adhering to COVID-19 restrictions. During Ramadan 2020, between 1 000 and 1 200 iftar meals were distributed. Sponsored by organizations such as Islamic Relief and Zabiha Halal, it is being continued for the second year of Ramadan in lockdown with iftar pickups being held every Friday and Saturday of the month, just before sunset.

Also in line with COVID-19 precautionary measures, ISNA is only working with restaurants such as Aunty's Kitchen and Popeyes for meal distribution and no donations from the public are being accepted.

Volunteers, many of whom are high school students, are on duty every week, guiding cars from the two entry lanes through the mosque parking lot to the drive through. Upon entering the area, drivers are able to listen to the mosque's very own radio station, which features religious songs and sermons as well as Ramadan greetings for all those visiting.

Zahra Ahmed, who visited

the drive-through at the Mississauga location, said, "There were so many cars, backed up all the way to the highway exit where the mosque is located. It took almost an hour to get around the parking lot and pick up our food. Overall there was a really fun vibe, with people in their cars honking to show support and waving to each other."

This year saw a much larger turnout than last year, with nearly 1 800 meals being distributed in the first two days. Whereas previously one meal package had been distributed for each person, this year there was a limit of two meal packages per car to accommodate the number of families that showed up.

Members of Provincial Parliament from the area were also present, such as Rudy Cuzzetto, the MPP for Mississauga-Lakeshore, showing his support at the Mississauga mosque location.

With support from many members of the community, ISNA's drive-through iftar serves the sense of celebration and togetherness that many had missed from Ramadan during the pandemic, and helps those less fortunate to share in it. ■



Photo: Zahra Ahmed

Large COVID-19 Vaccine Roll Out In Thorncliffe and Flemingdon

by ZARAH AHMED

Thorncliffe and Flemingdon Park, both high-density neighbourhoods with a large volume of essential workers, are among the communities hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Important steps were taken this past month to make rapid progress in vaccinating two of Ontario's one hundred and eleven hot spots, in hopes to reduce the spread of the virus in priority neighbourhoods in East Toronto.

On 24 March 2021, the City of Toronto and East Toronto Health Partners (ETHP) opened a COVID-19 immunization site in Thorncliffe Park. It was Toronto's tenth mass immunization location in the city, with others located in Scarborough Town Centre, Metro Toronto Convention Centre's North Building, and Toronto Congress Centre.

Thanks to The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO), Flemingdon Health Centre (FHC) and Michael Garron Hospital (MGH), the mass immunization site is located in the Community Hub, a health and wellness centre at the East York Town Centre. The centre was strategically placed in the center of the community in hopes of reducing transportation barriers and increasing accessibility for residents.

Around 1 200 doses of the vaccine were expected to be distributed on the first day of administration. According to the City of Toronto, once vaccination supplies had increased, the goal was to vaccinate 10 000 people at the location daily. Seniors aged seventy-five and older as well as select east-end residents from priority populations were able to make an appointment online to be inoculated at the Community Hub.



Photo: Zahra Ahmed

However, on 7 April 2021, the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub announced its closure of the clinic due to a lack of vaccine supply, and it hopes to reopen once supply issues are overcome. Michael Garron Hospital tweeted: "Thank you for your patience. We look forward to administering vaccines to community members as soon as supply is available" [1].

Fortunately, on 24 April 2021, residents with postal codes of M4H and M4C over the age of eighteen were able to get inoculated at the Community Hub. The location opened at 9:00 am and lasted until supplies ran out.

Meanwhile, the ETHP's mobile vaccination team has been administering vaccinations in community shelters, seniors' congregated settings, and pop-up clinics. Their mobile vaccination teams aim to reduce barriers for residents who may face challenges accessing a public COVID-19 immunization clinic.

The ETHP is a group of over fifty community, hospital, home care,

and social services organizations that work together to create an integrated system of care. Collectively, the team is responsible for providing support to 300 000 individuals living in the city's east end as well as an additional 75 000 clients who choose to receive health care in the area.

The pop-up clinics are generally geared towards people who are hesitant to go to an indoor space or do not have the opportunity to pre-book appointments. They aim to make vaccinations easy and convenient for residents of priority neighbourhoods. The pop-up vaccine clinics are led by MGH, TNO, FHC, Health Access Thorncliffe Park (HATP) and East Toronto Family Practice Network (East-FPN), all of which are members of ETHP. The initiative is part of a strategy to quickly vaccinate a high number of people in at-risk neighbourhoods.

Five pop-up COVID-19 vaccine clinics took place in Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park from 7-11 April, including locations like the Flemingdon Park Shopping Centre,

Masjid Darussalam, and courtyards of select high-rise apartment buildings. Clinic dates and times were being promoted locally by community organizations in these neighbourhoods through email, Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp.

On 7 April 2021, residents aged forty and older were eligible to receive their first dose at the Flemingdon Park vaccination clinic. The clinic opened at 9:30 am and, by the end of the day, a whopping seven hundred residents were vaccinated. Nazerah Shaikh, co-chair of the MGCI Parent Council described her experience waiting to get vaccinated at this clinic: “I was so happy to see locals lining up, as that was not the case at the vaccine clinic at East York Town Centre when my husband went as a waitlisted walk-in. Through the power of social media, we were able to share the locations and timings for the pop up clinics so graciously hosted and administered by Michael Garron Hospital in collaboration with local health agencies, nonprofits and businesses. On my way out, I knocked on my neighbour’s door and told her where I was headed. Noting my urgency, she immediately joined the very short and super-fast line at the pop-up clinic.” Nazerah mentioned that even though the community is nowhere in the clear of the pandemic, she feels a tiny tinge of relief as the COVID-19 vaccine continues to roll out, especially in harder hit areas like Flemingdon Park and Thorncliffe Park.

“The only way out of this pandemic is through it and each of us can, and should, take responsibility for ourselves to the best of our abilities. Social distancing, masking, hand washing, and now, getting jabbed are the way to go!” she said. While waiting in line, she noticed some

reservations from others who were concerned about which manufacturer’s vaccine was being given out, to which her response was, “a bird in the hand is better than three in a tree, or a needle in the arm is better than a wasted dose, so go and get yours, stat.”

Again on 18 April 2021, residents of Flemingdon Park and Thorncliffe Park aged eighteen and older were eligible for the vaccine at the Flemingdon location. Registration was not required, and it was suggested to bring a health card. Proof of address was required.

In the neighbouring community, Thorncliffe park, pop-up vaccine clinics were open in the parking lot of Masjid Darusalam on 9 April 2021 from 12:30 to 5:00 pm and in front of Iqbal Halal Foods on 10 April 2021 from 9:30 am to 5:00 pm.

Hundreds of people arrived hours before the clinic opened, and lines went around the block. Water bottles were handed out to residents, while staff directed people and answered questions. Organizers said the clinic would be open on Sunday as well, while doses lasted. Over the span of two days, organizers had expected a vaccine roll out of 1 800.

On 16 April 2021, COVID-19 vaccinations were available from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, or until vaccines ran out, at the Thorncliffe Park Public School in the gymnasium. Lines snaked through the front yard and into the parking lot. Mohammed Saad, a worker helping manage the lines, mentioned that he decided to work because it’s good community service. When asked about his experience, he noted, “It’s a mix of everything. There’s a lot of confusion with testing practises and common vaccination questions.”

Sharon Spencer, a TDSB teacher at Fraser Mustard Early Learning

Academy, was eagerly waiting in the line. She said, “So far, not so bad. I was contemplating if I should come to this location, whether the line was going to be long or not. The line seems to be moving okay, everyone’s keeping their social distance, I’m feeling okay. I think I should be able to get one, I’m hoping.”

Nasrin Jahan, a teacher at Khair-ul Ummah Islamic School, was very hopeful as she was near the front of the lines. “I’m very near the line, there’s seven to eight people in front of me. After that, maybe I will get it. It’s nice, the TNO volunteers are helping us. There is no problem. So Insha’Allah when I get the vaccine it will work and maybe after three to four months we’ll get the second dose.”

TNO has been playing an important role in encouraging community members to get vaccinated. Over the past four months, community ambassadors have been knocking on doors; posting flyers about COVID-19 support at bus stops, apartment lobbies and stores; calling up residents to make sure they know how and where to get their vaccine; and receiving training from public health to answer any questions residents have about inoculation.

Hafiz Khan, a member of the MGCI Parent Council, encourages local residents to get vaccinated when available. “The vaccine, it’s safe and reliable. With the vaccine we see a light at the end of a tunnel; it gives us some hope that help is on the way. By doing this, we can keep ourselves, our family and our community safe and this will help out to bring life back to normal.” ■

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[1] <https://twitter.com/MGHToronto/status/1382337586857963527>

The Overlea Bridge Campaign

by JACQUELINE HUO

The Charles H. Hiscott Bridge, commonly known as the Overlea Bridge, is used by many students on their way to and from MGCI and Valley Park Middle School. On 15 November 2020, the CBC published an article titled “Thornccliffe Park parents want Overlea Bridge ‘reimagined’ so kids can physically distance” outlining concerns about the lack of pedestrian space on the bridge [1]. This article caught the attention of Vice Principal Ms. Sawh, who shared it with Mr. Langford, who was teaching a Grade 12 technological design course at the time. Mr. Langford introduced the article to his class and they decided to create potential designs to improve the bridge. Thus, the Overlea Bridge Project was born.

“What I didn’t expect,” said Mr. Langford, “was that the students themselves were so familiar with the bridge and all of its many shortcomings. They delivered to me a whole laundry list of all the things that needed to be changed about the bridge. And then they went about designing their new bridge with all the new features included. And it was wonderful. It was really wonderful. It’s probably the most engaged that I’ve ever had a class in my career.”

The biggest issues on this “laundry list” are the lack of pedestrian space and the low railings on the bridge. The overcrowding on a bridge was a concern even before the pandemic. “Parents, for many years now, have been complaining to the city about the inadequacy of the bridge for handling pedestrian traffic that it has to handle at school dismissal times,” said Mr. Langford. If someone is using a stroller or a wheelchair, it is difficult for others to walk past them. The walkways are only one and a half metres wide, making it impossible to maintain physical distancing during busy times of day. Both Thornccliffe Park and

Flemingdon Park have been identified as COVID-19 hotspots, and each have over eight hundred active cases per 100 000 people at the time of writing [2].

Many students feel unsafe or uneasy when crossing the bridge because of the low railings. Zanib Zakia, one of the students working on the project, described her first experience crossing the bridge as “freaky”. “I remember in middle school I was just rushing to get off the bridge,” she said. Mr. Langford noted that parents have previously lobbied for higher railings to prevent both accidental falls from the bridge, as well as suicides. The student designs incorporate suicide barriers, which have been shown to reduce suicides by 93% [3].

Mr. Langford mentioned that there many Thornccliffe Park parents pay for private school buses to take their children to school, “[Those school buses] are not paid for by the TDSB, the parents of those children are paying out of pocket for those school buses, strictly because they see the bridge as not being safe to send their children across. When I heard that, I was absolutely gobsmacked. That speaks volumes about how unsafe they feel the bridge is.”

Other issues are poor lighting and poor drainage on the bridge. On rainy or snowy days, pedestrians are often splashed by cars despite a concrete barrier between the road and the sidewalk.

The class was tasked with redesigning the deck of the bridge to address these issues, which included widening the deck to create more space for pedestrians and cyclists. Because the road isn’t wide enough for a bike lane, cyclists often have to walk across the bridge to avoid riding in the same lane as cars. After sketching out their designs, the students created three-dimensional models using Google Sketchup.

The next steps were to try and

convince City Council to make changes to the bridge. Speaking about the political aspects of the project, Mr. Langford said, “When I assigned it in November, I told them it was for real. I told them this is not just playing school, make-believe thing. This is an actual design for an actual bridge, and you are actually going to present it to the City Councillors. At the end of January, I switched the naming of it from being a project to being a campaign. Because it’s no longer a class project, it’s now a campaign to try and nudge the city into some kind of action, preferably in the short term.”

In early February, Mr. Langford and his students had a meeting with several of the politicians that represent the areas near MGCI to present their designs and talk about the issues regarding the bridge. Present were City Councillors Jaye Robinson and Denzil Minnan-Wong, who represent Don Valley West and Don Valley East respectively, as well as Member of Provincial Parliament Kathleen Wynne and Member of Parliament Rob Oliphant. At the time, they were impressed with the presentation, but did not promise any action. Rob Oliphant met with the students a second time to give them more information on how to go about speaking with Toronto City Council in the future.

Although the tech design course ended in February, Zanib and her classmate Tehreem Arif have continued working on the campaign. When asked why she wanted to be involved, Zanib said, “I feel a deep connection to the bridge. I’ve been using it all my life so that’s why I felt like there was a need to address the issues on the bridge. I feel like not a lot of people have addressed it so far and being a member of this community it would be a great way for me to give back to my community.”

On 23 March 2021, a group of staff, students, and parents attended a meeting of Toronto's Infrastructure and Environment Committee (IEC). This group included Zanib, as well as Grade 11 student Hafeez Alavi, who had been creating and distributing pamphlets with suggested changes to the bridge even before the current project came into being. It also included Ms. Cordova, who works for the TDSB and has been an integral member of the campaign.

The Overlea Bridge was not specifically on the meeting agenda, but the group made a deputation regarding ActiveTO, a project started to create more bike lanes and cycling paths throughout the city in response to the pandemic. Overlea Blvd was one of ten corridors identified as a potential location for added bike lanes. The other nine other locations have had bike lanes constructed, but the Overlea Blvd location is still under consideration. The members representing the Overlea Bridge Campaign asked the IEC to move the project from consideration to public consultation.

Although no action was taken at the time, the general manager of Toronto Transportation Services (TTS), Barbara Gray, attended the meeting and was interested in the project and said that they were willing to work with the Overlea Bridge Campaign committee. Mr. Langford and Ms. Cordova met with the TTS on 13 April 2021 and discussed possible changes to the bridge.

There are currently plans in place to rebuild the bridge in 2026. However, the committee hopes that temporary changes can be implemented in the meantime, such as creating higher barriers.

"They're holding public consultations for the design of the rebuild starting in June, so we want to have a strong presence there. It's good that we've raised awareness in the community so that people will sort of have [it] on their radar" said Mr. Langford.

Many staff members have also gotten involved with the campaign

including Ms. Woodley, Ms. Ammar, Ms. Carey, and Mr. Seenath. Ms. Roberge created a survey which asks about people's experiences and usage of the bridge. They received over three hundred responses and were able to present the results at their February meeting with the neighbourhood's politicians. The survey can be found and completed here:

<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/efdb0dac4ce74e13aab09dfd5223985f>.

Ms. Yoganathan organized a story-writing contest called "Overlea Bridge—Our Stories" which was open to students from grades 1-12. Students were asked to write about how the bridge is a part of their life, how improved safety would impact the community, or an unforgettable moment on the bridge.

With the help of Ms. Sarojkumaran, Zanib and Tehreem are raising awareness for the campaign through an Instagram account. They plan to feature the stories from the writing contest through this platform.

The committee also held a logo contest and is currently working on creating t-shirts and buttons for its members. As well, the logo will be featured on a banner which will be displayed outside of MGCI, to raise more awareness about the bridge. Mr. Langford hopes to hold

an event to celebrate the winners of the story-writing contest and unveil the banner. However, due to the ongoing lockdown, it is undecided whether this can take place in person.

The committee is continuing to work with the TTS about what can be done to improve the bridge. They are also looking for more opportunities to speak with Toronto City Council or the IEC to push for improvements to the bridge in the near future.

If you would like to contribute to the campaign, Mr. Langford is looking for students to help design a website and can be contacted by email at tim.langford@tdsb.on.ca. He also encourages students to call their city councillor if they want to see changes to the Overlea Bridge. If you want to stay engaged with the campaign, you can follow them on Instagram (@overleabridge) or on Twitter (@BridgeOverlea).

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Illustration: Sarah Li

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Hamster

by SARAH LI

The little hamster ran and ran, the wheels turning and churning and creaking like frogs. The little hamster ran, and it thought about the things that it does. The little hamster ran, and thought about the things that lie. Thought about if it was lying.

But then a hand came and plucked the little hamster out of its wheel. "Wait!" The little hamster cried. "I have long yet to go!" as it squirmed in the hold.

The hand did not let the little hamster go. The hand said it was tired, that the little hamster was making it sad. So the little hamster could not run in its wheel.

The little hamster chewed on some seeds, a slight saltiness teasing at a story. It ate in silence to relieve its hunger, beige sunflower seeds popping as they cracked. The little hamster ate, and felt and thought about the things it would do.

But then a hand came and swept away its seeds. "Wait!" The little hamster cried. "I am not done with my food!" and chased after the pile.

The hand did not bring back the seeds. The hand said it wanted tastier things, like chocolate and french fries. So the little hamster ate that, in-

stead.

The little hamster studied its work. It tore cardboard to make bedding, brought little pellets to hoard in a pile. The little hamster prodded and tussled, testing different roads leading to the same little town. The little hamster was building a scheme.

But then a hand came and threw at the little hamster a ball. "Wait!" The little hamster cried. "I must complete my work!" and nudged the ball away.

The hand did not let the little hamster work. The hand said it was burnt out, that it could work no longer. So the little hamster played ball instead, and wished it were building.

The little hamster sat in silence, contemplating the ways of men. It measured and thought and compared its deeds, weighing them upon a scale that shone of tarnished gold. It sought the truth of matters, the elusive right and



Illustration: Lucy Qi

wrong of being.

But then a hand came and toppled its scale, bringing havoc in the path of its wrath. "Wait!" The little hamster cried. "I was not wronged!" and clung to the scale.

The hand did not listen to the little hamster's words. The hand said it was angry and vengeful, that the little hamster must fight. So the little hamster sighed and screamed in rage.

One day, the hand came to the little hamster and asked, "Why do you listen?" All clammy and cold. "Why do you obey me when you have no duty?"

The little hamster looked up and explained with no mirth, "for there is no difference between a hamster and a hand. I am a hamster because I am a hamster, and you are a hand because you are a hand. If you were a hamster and I were a hand, nought would change but semantics and words."

The hand curled back in surprise, for the little hamster was right. The hamster had no feet, no mouth nor a head. The hand had no fingers, no knuckles nor nails. The hamster and hand were only ideas adrift, clinging to each other in sweet dichotomous contrast.

"But if we are one and the same, then who was the prisoner and who was the cage?"

"Look outside," the little hamster commanded. For outside was a pulsing being that breathed and moved on the world's accord. "We were born as it was born, and we will die as it will die. We flit to its whimsy and it dances to ours." The little hamster returned to its wheel, and began again its journey to nowhere. "In the end, neither of us will ever be free."

window

by EMILY LAI

I look left. I look right.
Nothing makes sense, it seems so empty.
It seems like the time I crawled out of the womb.
Dark. Damp. Strangely comforting.

I take a breath, and it quickly fades.
I try again to no avail.
How can I be alive with no air?
I wonder, and ponder some more.

That's right, try pinching your arm, they said.
You'll see if you're awake, they said.
I raise my fingers.
Thumb. Index.
And push them together.

Nothing.

I look up at the sky, the vast darkness of it all.
And count the stars.

It is an easy task.
There are none.

Finally I hear a noise, it sounds like a screech.
A seagull? Crow?
My mind eludes me again.
Yet I feel safe.

Then comes the smell, and it all comes back.
A barbecue, with juicy ribs
steaks
and chicken wings.

How could I forget those chicken wings?
That crispy skin
tender flesh
and the grinding tooth against bone.

The dream continues and I begin to fly.
Through a world of chicken wings
I reach out for one
and just miss.

For I am not flying anymore.
I hit something. The ground, or the ceiling?
The sky, or the earth?

My mind eludes me again.

Then without pause I am in the air again.
Flying through the endless sky like an angel, my skirt fluttering in the wind.

Into the depths of Hell I fly,
Lava licking at my gaudy tassels.
Made with care, only to be dashed into the everlasting depths.

Deeper into the inferno I go,
the fire screams at my skin
and devours me whole.

But it doesn't hurt.
It smells.
Not of brimstone, but of

chloroform.

Suddenly, everything is clear.
I turn left, and am overjoyed.

Through the wrought iron window stands
the endless sky, and the freedom it brings.
For the day I have become an adult
has arrived.



Photo: Jessica Xiong



friends share lovers

by INDIA DAS-BROWN

Friends share lovers and
lovers share friends:
Hh, mm, h, hh hh mm.

There are all these funny blue green hearts—(here, there, and every-
where)—across
oh so many of these oh so pale funny grey faded surfaces, you say
I drew them but I don't remember, can't remember, I forget, all I
know:

This gum tastes like ass, I've smushed your birthday
cake, smeared red and blue, green, white, and also purple
all around, inside this funny little Ziplock bag. I would never hurt
you but I think

I have, I know

I will. "Time in any sense," oh

watch me! I am oh so clever, watch me smart! watch me long:
you pat my head, it's up to me, I'm QUEEN of the world.

Illustration: Helen Sun





flowers

by ANNIE XIONG

flowers are always so beautiful
a tempest of hues and scents
elicit visions of sprawling countryside hills and riverbanks
an ideal postcard destination for retirement
an enticing offer of peace after a lifetime of war

flowers are always so beautiful
when given to a lover on her doorstep
rubicund carnations wrapped in shoddy plastic paper
but to her they must have been mythical jewels
that could make venal kings gnash their rotten teeth in envy

flowers are always so beautiful
carried by a maiden cloaked in alabaster
as she marches down the mossy cobblestone aisle in her sensible flats
in the villa garden her old money family owns
in-laws exchanging glares across the banquet table

flowers are always so beautiful
calla lilies, goosefoots, and asphodels cover our honeymoon estate
but I yearn to follow the gold rush
i greed for the sea, soil and sun
so I embark on an odyssey for fortune and prestige

but epic poems are always greek tragedies

i feasted on ambrosia and nectar with the mighty gods
and demigod kings bowed their heads as I passed
i drained the seas and I gathered the soil
but as I longed for the sun in its brilliant glory
zeus struck me down with a calamitous thunderbolt

and i fell

repeating the mistake of Icarus
i reached for fool's gold
my wings melted from rays of insouciance and solitude
my prophetic fall immortalized in paper and pen
and my euphoric high erodes into a hard truth

flowers are always so beautiful
as crimson roses laid on your grave
alabaster veils corroding into abyssal shrouds
mythical jewels robbed and pawned off
to repay debts of shame and lost time

as your marble tombstone weathered and cracked like the ruins of the
Nekromanteion
i was left with nothing

A Ghost Story

by MAGGIE PANG

The first thing that occurred to me was that I had not vanished into oblivion.

The second was that I no longer felt the excruciating pain that had tortured me for the past eternity. Providence had thrown me one last insult in my last moments of life, giving me a long and painful death.

For a second, I looked down in shock at my bloody, disfigured body surrounded by broken glass and fragments of my car.

The crash occurred on the side of an empty and unfrequented road in the middle of the night, a notable distance from any civilization, and I had to appreciate the fact that although I was clearly not going to survive, the lady whose blue Honda Civic I had crashed into had called 911. But then again, of course she had. What else could she have done?

Now was the time for me to look down at my translucent figure in wonder, like in the movies, to realize that I was a ghost, I supposed. Except... I found, to my great disappointment, that I did not have any ghostly limbs, and that indeed, I did not have any physical traits at all—my heartbeat could no longer be felt, my brain was nonexistent, and although I could see, I had no eyes. I was quite pleased, however, to find that I could hear and smell just fine.

I was just a floating consciousness, closer to an idea than a human being, destined to be forever alone, my thoughts to be my only company for eternity, for I existed now as a person only to myself.

The fact of my death began to settle in. I died in a car crash, a nameless, struggling twenty-year-old who managed to put together enough money to buy a used 2006 Toyota Camry, which was in very

good condition when I bought it and now lay in pieces. Since starting college, I failed to find a niche for myself, finding most conversations with my fellow students to be stunted and awkward. I studied finance knowing that I hated it, in hopes that it would be a lucrative career and that it would provide me with the means to pursue something more exciting and, in my eyes, likely to be of significant impact. Then I died.

News should be getting out of my death now. Police and emergency responders have arrived at the scene—fifteen minutes too late. Perhaps it is better off that way, seeing as I would have died a deeply unhappy person either way.

I wandered around the people I knew for a few days, looking for any sign that I mattered to them. There was quite a bit of talk about me, but it was mostly strangers commenting about how I was probably some irresponsible child texting while driving. The world went on quite

easily without me.

The day of the funeral. I was buried. A few people attended. It was a somber affair, but very much tearless. Words about how much I meant to them. I was such a great person. Everyone was so lucky to know me. Sentiments just as fake as my relationships with any of the attendees.

I stayed through the whole ordeal, waiting and hoping desperately for a single hint that I was of consequence to someone, that I had made some mark on the world around me. But the funeral ended a mere courtesy, for someone they hardly knew.

It hurt very much to think that I, from that point onward, would be no more than a name engraved on a dirty and uncared-for tombstone in the corner of a despondent looking cemetery.

There could be no feeling more agonizing than to know that you died as if you had never lived at all. ■



Illustration: Zoe Cheng

Their Stories

by AMY JIA

What if trees could tell their stories?

Would we find a grand tree in the forest, and sit by its roots to talk? If we asked, would it remember its time as a young sapling, straining to be as tall as the canopy of leaves up above? It could tell us the excitement of thickening, lengthening, as a new layer of rough bark and new branches formed.

Its voice would grow hushed as it tells us about the harder years, like how it felt to see forest fires roll through the normal calm of the forest. When reminiscing the years of drought, or the times when winter was drawn out a little too long, the tree would murmur the stories of difficulty, but its tone would brighten when it describes how it got past those years. It knew that summer was on its way when little buds sprung up along its branches and slowly unfurled into a fresh set of new leaves.

Maybe it could even teach us how to listen to the whispers of the breeze as it carried secrets, rustling the leaves gently each time it had new gossip.

The tree could then tell us its fears. It must have heard news of forests being cleared away, even for the stumps to be sliced level with the ground. Then the flat areas would have stone houses, buildings, factories built over. The leftover logs would be taken away and made unrecognizable, the life sucked out of them in a factory to be made into paper, or sealed forever under a thick layer of wax and varnish to be used as decorative furniture.

If the tree could share its wisdom, teach its lessons, and tell its fears and worries, would we, as humans,

stop clearing away forests like they are inconveniences that stand in the way of urbanization? Would we stop treating paper like there are infinite reserves at our disposal?

What if raindrops could tell their stories?

If we caught a raindrop on the tips of our fingers during one rainy day, maybe it could explain its adventures, broken into silver vapour and being tossed by frigid winds in the sky. It could explain its time spent in a lake, glinting as it caught rays of the sun, rippling gently in the soft breeze on the earth's surface. In another storm, it fell straight into a puddle made by a small hollow in the sidewalk. A child dressed in the colourful plastic of rainproof boots and a jacket leapt, giggling, sending the little raindrop up, then back down on the ground.

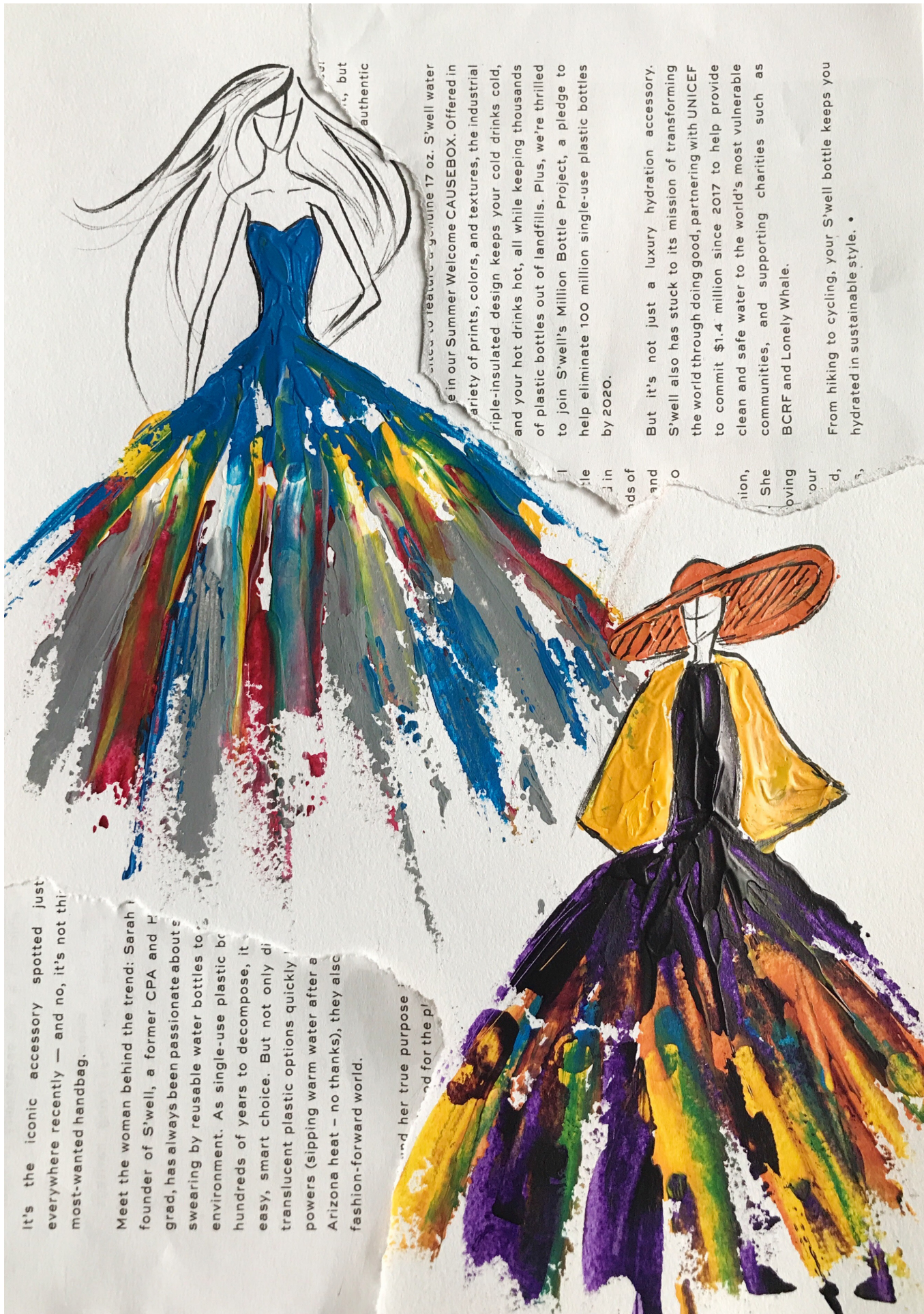
We could ask for its thoughts about how much the world has changed. From the beginnings of its life, forming on the earth's surface, nourishing tiny cells of life, to the world of biodiversity before humans. Maybe as a cloud, it raced across the sky, lamenting the green forests slowly being replaced by brown stumps, then gray industrial sites. In the lake, it watched the animals become sparse, fish turn lethargic from pollution, and beaches shrink into near nothingness.

The raindrops would be unimaginably wise. They could answer the questions of history, give advice to the most sage of intellects, and tell the stories of the eons.

If raindrops could tell their stories, then, would this stop humans from taking gallons and gallons of clean water for granted? Instead, would we now cherish each drop? ■



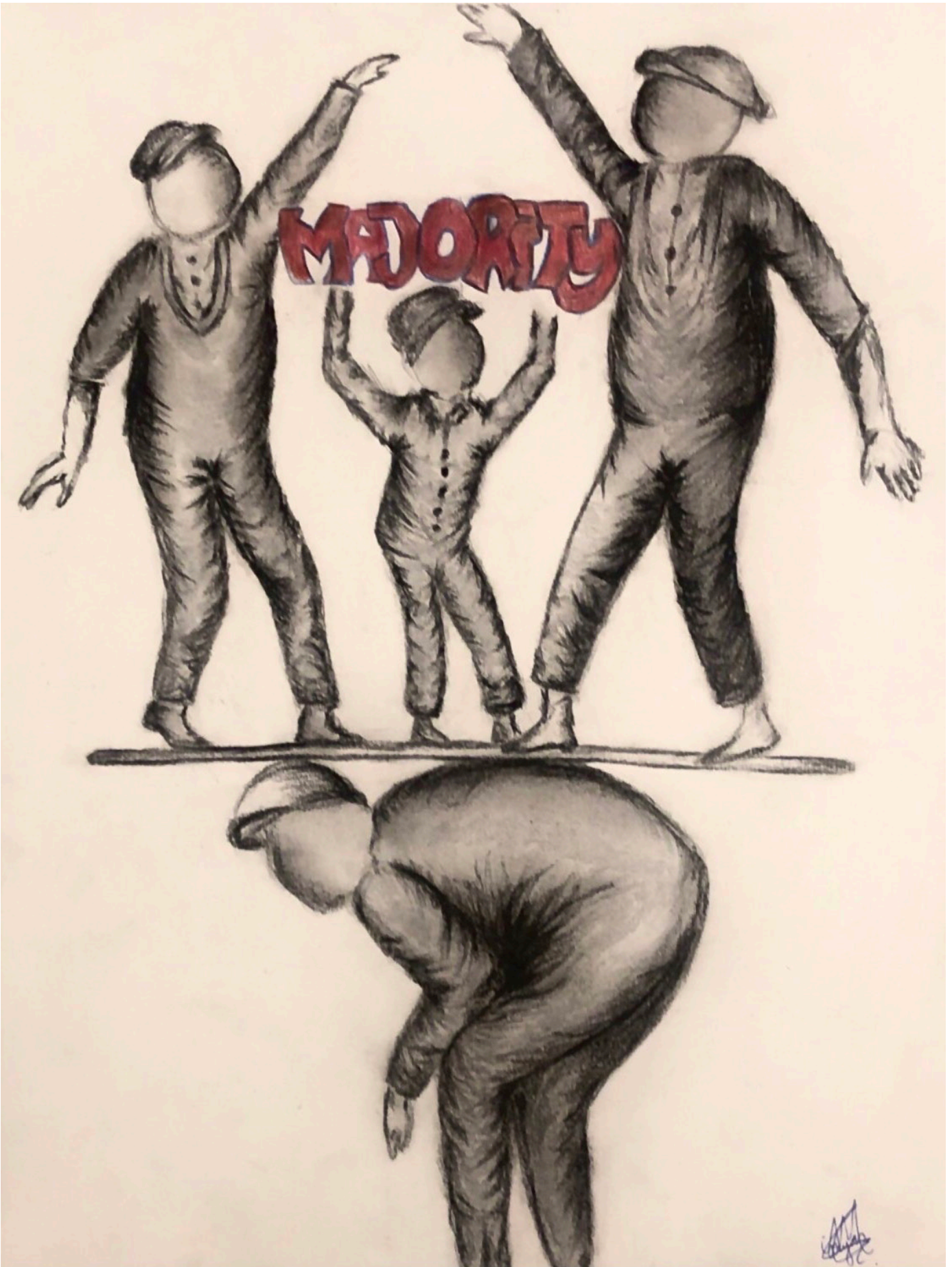
Illustration: Julia Shen





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JJK Trio
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EDITORIAL BOARD

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Let's Talk About Sex Education

by JACQUELINE HUO

What is the most important subject in high school? Many would argue for English. After all, literacy skills are crucial for any future academic or career aspirations. Others might suggest math, which develops problem-solving skills and has applications in finance. Whatever your answer, chances are that sex education didn't come to mind. While sex education may not be a necessary prerequisite for university or prepare students to enter the workforce, it is an essential part of our high school education.

Let's start with the basics: sex education aims to teach students how to have safe sex. According to Statistics Canada, 30% of people aged fifteen to seventeen and 68% of people aged eighteen to nineteen reported having had sex [1]. An abstinence-only teaching approach—one that simply tells students to wait until later to have sex—is ineffective in lowering rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or teen pregnancy [2]. This is because those who do choose to engage in sexual activity are often uninformed about the risks of unprotected sex, and are less likely to use condoms or other contraceptives [2].

At MGCI, while teachers do encourage abstinence, they also ensure that students understand the risks associated with sex. They discuss STIs and different methods of contraception, such as birth control pills and intrauterine devices. Programs like this that discuss pregnancy and STI prevention result in increased use of condoms and contraceptives among sexually active students [3].

Some would argue that sexual health is a private matter, and should only be taught at home, not in the classroom. Parents should be discussing sex with their children, but these conversations are often centred around their personal beliefs regarding sex—particularly in cultures and religions that view premarital sex as immoral—rather than the physical risks of sex or methods of contraception [4]. According to a survey conducted by Planned Parenthood, most parents are comfortable discussing relationships and their personal values regarding when sex should take place. However, only 60% of parents reported that they talked to their children about the use of condoms and other forms of birth control [5]. Some

parents may lack the required knowledge or be uncomfortable discussing certain topics, and it is imperative that all students are aware of the risks surrounding sex.

In addition to the risks associated with sex, students also learn about healthy relationships. Mr. Hillman, the curriculum leader for physical education at MGCI, said teachers emphasize the importance of communication and consent in all relationships. It is important for students to understand that they must give and receive consent before engaging in any sexual activity. Through learning about consent, students also learn how to say no to sex or other intimate activities, a topic that only 74% of parents discuss with their children [5].

Finally, sex education teaches students about sexual orientation and gender identity. According to the Ontario curriculum for health and phys-



Illustration: Akshaya Varakunan

ical education, sexual orientation is first introduced in Grade 5, and gender identity in Grade 8 [6]. Despite this, Mr. Hillman noted that some students come into high school unfamiliar with these topics. He explained that he teaches about gender and sexuality as a spectrum and tries to include real-life stories from people who aren't cisgender or heterosexual. These discussions help create an inclusive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students. Sex education can help students discover or better understand their own identity or the identities of their peers. This also helps LGBTQ students feel that their identities and experiences are acknowledged and accepted.

Although LGBTQ relationships are not explicitly discussed, sex is not defined as something that only occurs with a man and a woman. Sexual activities outside of vaginal sex, such as oral and anal sex, are included in the curriculum. The goal of this is not to encourage students to engage in such behaviours but to inform them how to do so safely.

I'm not going to tell you that sex education is more important than math and English. But learning about and understanding sexual health will be more useful in your future than memorizing trigonometric ratios. If you're still taking gym, pay attention during the sex education unit. Listen to your teacher, participate in discussions, and ask questions. You might learn something important. ■

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It's Time for the Age of Old Politicians to End

by ANNE LIU and EMILY MA

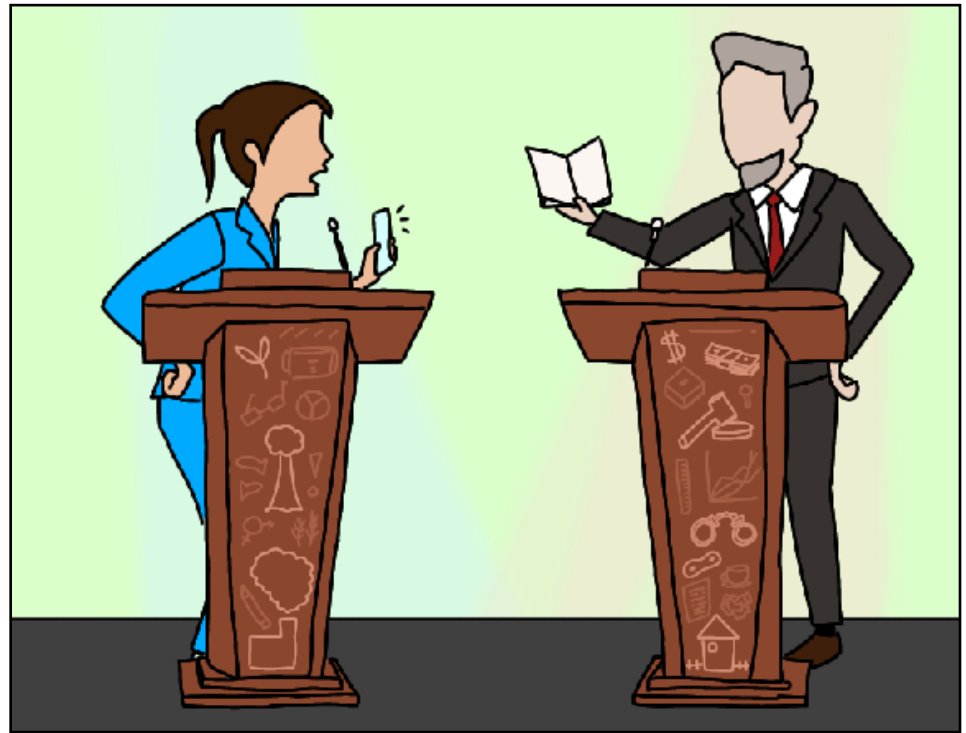


Illustration: Emily Lai

In our current chaotic world, we need changes to the fundamental political system instilled in our society. When senior candidates are elected into powerful political positions, they lack the incentives to push for radical reform under the current complex. Politicians control our lives and our society; they determine how we deal with crises and help less privileged individuals. We should hold our politicians to the highest standard for both ourselves and for society as a whole. If old politicians are not able to bring about the necessary changes to help society progress, they shouldn't be in office.

Elderly politicians are typically those who are the most privileged in our society as, in the era they grew up in, they were disproportionately advantaged due to their gender, sexuality, race, etc. When people grow up in such a manner in which they believe their privilege

is deserved, due to the beliefs they hold from their past unevolved society, they're likely to try to maintain their positions of power merely because they believe they're the most superior candidates. For example, urban schools provide lower quality education to Black and Latino students, and the media focuses exclusively on Black citizens with regard to crime and ridicule. These problems were far less contested in the past [1]. This problem primarily exists due to politicians who have grown up in an era where they were privileged on the basis of their race, gender, or other uncontrollable factors, where awareness about detrimental deep-rooted values weren't addressed. When people like these are attracted to political positions to maintain their power because they believe they rightfully deserve it, they don't have the actual incentives to prompt change that one without these privileged beliefs

would have implemented. Their primary motivation while in power is to maintain their position, to retain the superiority they've long had and have grown accustomed to. On the other hand, those that did not grow up in this era are more than likely to enter into these positions for the sake of initiating legitimate change to address what they see wrong with society, because awareness was brought to issues relating to privilege, and hence this wouldn't interfere with their political motivations.

When politicians lack the incentive to introduce long-term radical reform, no change is brought to the table. Old politicians in power hold a great deal of influence in terms of what a country gets in comparison to what it needs. Because they often do not live to witness the grand consequences of their policies play out, politicians have less of an incentive to make meaningful change that would positively affect society in a way that is not just performative action or creating attractive policies to the public. Take climate change policies for example: Trump pulled the U.S. out of the Paris Climate Accord in 2017 and decided to instead negotiate for "terms that are better for American businesses and taxpayers" [2]. Considering how powerful of a country the U.S. is, this was a significant setback in the fight against climate change not only in the United States, but all around the world. Additionally, because these politicians won't live long enough to face the repercussions of not implementing a policy that would help the Earth, they don't feel a pull to these laws and hence cannot be held accountable when things go wrong. The problem with the lack of incentive to bring about these changes is that the catastrophic, deeply rooted issues in our society aren't solved, and are often pushed to a significantly worse degree.

On the contrary, younger poli-

ticians are more in tune with the concerns of the next generation, better able to plan ahead and institute radical change. They've experienced current prevalent issues (like anti-discrimination protests and rallies) with growth mindsets, to hope for change and equality for people. Politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—who supported the "Green New Deal" and had experience working as a waitress and a bartender before running for Congress—are able to connect with the public and their needs, and to advocate for change [3]. On the other hand, elderly politicians did not grow up in the corresponding period as the current generation. As our society evolves, the people in power must evolve as well. Otherwise, our world is detrimentally held back and we lose focus on what's critically important to today's people.

The economy has also significantly transformed since the time elderly politicians grew up in. With rising costs of education and students taking on greater amounts of debt, senior politicians are unable to fully comprehend the struggles of today's young adults. They grew up in an era where people were typically able to quickly get a job and a house, whereas in the current reality, this isn't feasible for a large majority of people. The facts show that people are having a harder time surviving now compared to when older politicians grew up, which was the mid-1900s. For example, in 1981, the typical homebuyer was between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four, but now it's considerably higher at forty-four years old due to rapidly rising home prices [4]. Another factor in not being able to immediately invest in a house is the increasing cost of education: the Canadian Federation of Students estimates that average student debt is almost \$28 000. According to the Canada Student Loan Program, most

students take ten years to pay off their loans, which would cripple many borrowers' chances of securing a house or being able to focus on getting a job [5]. In fact, student loan debt only continues to grow [6]. What these numbers show is that it's a lot more expensive and hard to live today than the time when older politicians were navigating adulthood. This means they won't necessarily be enacting policies with the current situation in mind, and will instead be influenced by their own vastly contrasting experiences. Since they aren't likely to adequately recognize and grasp the problems young adults currently face, they shouldn't be making choices that change the lives of the current generation either.

What we've seen from old political leaders and their futile policies isn't enough. In a society where reform is absolutely necessary, old politicians who lack the motivation and knowledge to make change cannot continue on in their ways. In a society that has evolved greatly from the dark ages, we cannot afford to remain stagnant. We need to end this period of inefficiency. For far too long, our policies have been inadequate to serve our generation. The new era must begin now. ■

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The Explosion of Gender Reveal Parties

by MAGGIE PANG

An interesting phenomenon has been taking over the western world.

Popularized by Jenna Myers Karvundis, gender reveal parties are when expecting parents, looking for any excuse to throw parties centered around themselves, gather all their friends around to celebrate what reproductive body parts their doctor told them the baby has. While this may seem like an innocent endeavor, gender reveal parties are becoming increasingly notorious for the damage they can cause.

They typically proceed as follows.

A baby's sex can be identified around sixteen to twenty weeks into pregnancy through ultrasound. Notice that alcohol has probably been absent for three or so months by now, as well as the daily five cups of coffee, so pregnancy's starting to seem more boring. But what's great about a baby is that it is an opportunity to bring all your estranged friends and family together because what could be more exciting and uniting than birthing life!

So you invite everyone over. Everything is decorated to match society's gender stereotypes, everyone gives you free baby supplies, everyone gets free food, it all goes well, and you maybe set a multi-million dollar wildfire or two.

Gender reveal parties have long been a subject of controversy. Society is becoming more and more progressive in terms of understanding that "boy" does not necessarily mean that the baby will grow up to play with trains and cars and "girl" does not necessarily mean dolls and jewelry, but gender reveal parties tend to further perpetuate gender stereotypes with blue and pink themes and the like. However, gender reveal parties don't necessarily

mean parents will enforce gender stereotypes—they can just be a way to make life more fun. A cake dyed either blue or pink is cut, and that's that. So often, these parties can be quite harmless.

Except when social media is involved.

One needs only to look to family channels such as the Ace Family to see that there are many potential views and likes to be gained from posting an extravagant gender reveal party on plat-



Illustration: Lauren Liu

forms like Youtube or Tiktok. On social media, there are thousands of extra virtual guests, all expecting drama and excitement, which means doing something dangerous, apparently.

In September of 2020, a smoke-generating pyrokinetic device used at a gender reveal party ignited a huge fire that subsequently destroyed more than 22 000 acres of land and caused several evacuation orders [1]. This was after a similar device caused more than 8 million dollars in damage in Arizona in 2017 [2]. More recently, a father-to-be was killed after the explosive device he was assembling for a gender reveal party detonated [3].

You might be wondering: “Aren’t there plenty of other parties where explosive devices might be used?” and you’d be absolutely incorrect. Have you ever heard of someone setting off an explosive to reveal their age? No, I think not.

It’s important to have fun in life, but nothing, not even a few thousand likes or views, are worth possibly lethal explosive devices or multi-million dollar wildfires. Many, including the person who started it all, are calling for all this to end. Just stick to cutting a cake, please. ■

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Should Able-bodied Actors Play Characters with Disabilities?

by PAROMITA ROY

"If I told you I’m trying to save the world, would you believe me?”

On 10 January 2019, showrunner Eric Heisserer shook fans of the Grishaverse by announcing a Netflix show coming up the next fall. Now, a year later, with only a few days left until the show is released for the North American audience, admirers of this hybrid between the original *Shadow and Bone* series and *Six of Crows* are excited more than ever for their favourite franchise to be fully serialized, but that’s not to say there weren’t major bumps along the road.

A few weeks ago, Freddy Carter—an actor on the *Shadow and Bone* cast—described how he practiced limping in his flat in preparation for his role, the character Kaz Brekker, a Barrel boss with a limp due to injury.

Much to the show’s production team’s (and my) surprise, this simple, offhanded statement was faced with much backlash, mostly congregating in the echo chambers of Twitter, where people interpreted his training for his role as ableism (discrimination in favour of able-bodied people). This dissent followed up with requests for cancelling the actor, the author, and even the show itself.

It can be easy, natural even, to get whipped up in this myriad of thoughts, going with the flow and not bothering to think or express one’s own opinions.

Especially when it has the advantage of being the popular opinion online, this false sense of majority leaves way for broad generalizations and guilt trips to occur, such as the infamous, “If you support S&B, you are overlooking a societal issue.” If you happen to not share the same belief as the ‘status-quo’, it can seem like your opinions are the minority or a complete anomaly—that everyone around you is morally superior, or virtuous, giving rise to thoughts such as “Am I the problem?” or “Am I a bad person?”

Of course, these thoughts do not take into consideration the fact that the internet is a vast place, meaning that if you end up in a corner that is strongly biased for a topic, there is most certainly another with the polar opposite opinion. Majorities created online are almost always metastasized, partially due to our own perceptions—or lack thereof, seeing that our world is much wider than the Reddit forum we’re scrolling through—but also because technology reduces everything to simple inkblots on a blue-lite screen, and that enormity can seem terribly daunting.

One valid piece of criticism that cannot be denied from the ordeal is the fact that disabled characters aren’t common on TV. Hence, giving actors with actual disabilities the rare opportunity to act with characters that share their struggles, is one that should’ve been seized. Representation is so important, and this could’ve been a perfect opportunity to give opportunities to disabled actors and also ring true to Brekker’s condition.

But what about the ableism claims that Freddy Carter had to face? It raises an important question: What is the line between holding your favour-

ite actors accountable and using them as a scapegoat for your own urge to virtue signal?

There are two other ways that this could've played out. The first being if Carter decided to not practice for his role after all. Now, actors are cherished and praised for their accurate portrayal of their TV personas, even when abled people represent abled characters—because even then, there are certain mannerisms that a character has that must be perfected in order to be authentic. Enter an abled person playing someone with a disability as an integral part of their character—there are even more factors to consider while on set. People who possess limps have certain subtleties that go unnoticed for the average person, but these subtleties add to the realism of a character when portrayed accurately. Things like your hips going off balance and causing you to favour a shoulder, or shaking your shoulders in a certain way, are little things that are a part of a disabled person's daily life. They often go unnoticed unless someone takes the time out of their day to see how it feels to be limping and to be using a cane as walking support.

What would happen if Carter didn't practice? Well, most likely, the change in the walking patterns one adapts using mobility aids would be even less precise. It would then truly seem like the disability to Kaz's character was simply an accessory, and the poor performance would probably get him cancelled regardless, as now he's portrayed a beloved character's disability as a stereotype.

The other route this could've taken was if Carter practiced, but hadn't told any of the fans that information. This in and of itself is an irksome detail, as there

would never have been this much of an uproar if he hadn't said that comment. The fans would reap an earnest performance without hearing what goes into it, thus not giving them material to "call out."

Of course, in Brekker's daily life he combats his limp, and has a hard time walking up hills, grappling with his PTSD. But as deeply ingrained as they are to himself and his history, they influence, but are not definitive of his character. Bardugo and the team had to cast someone based off of resemblance regardless of disability. His dark vibe, quick wit, and thin patience: all of these resemblances are necessary regardless of disability status in order to avoid portraying a character with their disability as the defining feature of their personality. What they're doing at the end of the day is trying to integrate visibly disabled characters in the media in efforts to normalize them, and give disabled viewers around the world the representation they deserve. This cannot be done without practice, exposure, and authenticity.

Leigh Bardugo as a disabled person herself had a completely new viewpoint on the matter that most others would not be able to think of. In an interview with the *Daily Express*, she went on to explain the intrusivity of asking someone to put their disability and trauma on display for the sake of a role, or in her experience, writing. This opens up the fact that a lot of fans who are cancelling the show over the matter are able-bodied people. In efforts of "standing up" for the disabled community, they may be once again silencing the actual marginalized group at the heart of the discussion.

Taking this into consideration,

cancelling people and projecting hostile behavior on social media does little to nothing about actual problems relating to disabled people. Sharing information slides, calling anyone who supports a franchise ableist, and anything else of that sort is like metal straws in the sense that they both contribute equally little in the grand scheme of things.

This call out culture in general acts as a guise for cruel behavior. Comments such as "he's ugly" or sending death threats are most commonly propagated under the defense that the subject of this dissent is a bad person, and therefore it is justified to harass them. This has become so widespread through "cancel culture" that it seems people may be banished and ostracized over the most innocuous missteps, limiting growth that we as online platforms could be having if we addressed issues properly, instead. If we teach individuals that they can be cancelled by whatever they say or do, the question stands: are we truly enabling an environment whose main purpose is to educate its members? Or are we manifesting a place where people reign with performatism, shutting people out instead of having greater conversations where change can actually be made? ■

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