



The Tower

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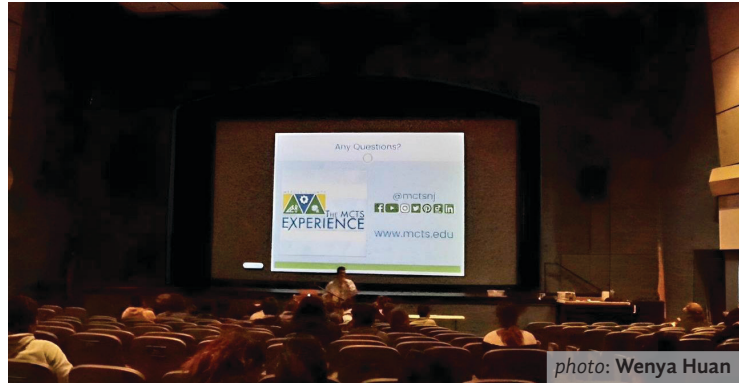


photo: Wenya Huan



photo courtesy: Andrea Dinan



photo courtesy: Andrea Dinan



photo courtesy: Andrea Dinan

Top left: Michael Orfe, the Director of Vocational Education at Mercer County Technical Schools, presents on the variety of programs that are available to PHS students during an assembly. Bottom left: Michael Cramer, the Automotive Technology Instructor at MCTS, explaining his class to a group of students during an informational field trip held on December 16. Bottom center: Janice LaFleur, from baking and dining services, and Michael Orfe chatting with students on the field trip during a break. Right: Chef Eric Silverman presents for students on the field trip about the Academy of Culinary arts.

Curriculum changes focus on mental health in health classes

Content warning: this article contains mentions of suicide

Meiya Xiong and Ivy Hu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

As part of the school's initiative to support students' mental health, Princeton High School has introduced new measures regarding mental health and wellness, including the Teen Mental Health First Aid and Effective School Solutions programs.

The Teen Mental Health First Aid program is provided to all 10th graders and is funded by the Cranbury Municipal Alliance. Sophomore PE classes have weekly classes from this training program, which covers how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health challenges in their peers. Students participating in the program are also issued a manual from the National Council for Behavioral Health and will receive a certification after completion of the program.

"The units of study have been very well vetted to provide students with an overview of mental health challenges, what to do to get help, what that looks like, and to really walk students through that process," said PHS Director of School Counseling Services Dana Karas.

The implementation of Effective School Solutions, or ESS, which is an organization that partners with local school districts to help them put in place mental health and behavioral support programs, was another measure that was introduced this year to support the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Currently there is a clinician from the ESS program, Nicholas Diaz, who meets with students for weekly counseling sessions and provides additional support through community collaboration with organizations such as HiTops, Corner House, and Trinity Counseling Service. Diaz is available for counseling sessions at school five days a week, which is an increase compared to last year, when there was only a clinician from Corner House who was at school two days a week.

"He also does a lot of collaboration with school counselors and with classroom teachers and tries to bring everybody around to provide a level of support for that student who may need it," said Karas. "He even has one night a week where he does evening counseling and works with the parents as well. . . Sometimes a whole family is struggling, so being able to provide that family piece [is] really important as well."

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Peter Eaton, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR
Kush Sharad and Wenya Huan,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

On Friday, December 2, Mercer County Technical Schools representatives held an assembly at PHS to increase student awareness about its shared time and career prep programs. These programs, available to upperclassmen at schools all across Mercer County, aim to help prepare students for their future careers by preparing them with useful knowledge and skills early on.

PHS has collaborated with the Mercer County Technical School for many years. Its shared-time program has offered students unique experiences through a variety of classes in the MCTS buildings. In this program, students gain useful hands-on skills, which they often cannot learn from their local high schools.

"When I went to school, there was the Home Economics class where you can learn how to cook . . . If students still have passion for these technical skill fields, they can't [learn them] in their local high schools. But by attending the shared-time program they can," said Thomas Filippone, a school counselor at PHS.

The shared time program is not the only option for interested PHS students, though. Another program that was covered in the assembly is the career-prep program, a collaboration between Mercer County

Technical Schools and Mercer County Community College. It has many similarities to the shared-time program but provides students with a different experience in many ways.

Both the shared-time program and the career-prep programs share a similar schedule. Career-prep students, and some of those doing shared-time, complete their high school courses in the morning and have scheduled courses in the afternoons from 12:00 to 2:30 p.m. However, students who

participate in the career-prep program don't go to the campus of the Mercer County Technical schools. Instead, they join college students at the Mercer County Community College in various classes, earning college credits for their time.

One benefit of this program is that it can prepare seniors early for the college-learning experience while they are still taking easier courses in a more supportive environment.

"A lot of the time when a student goes away for the first time it's a bit of a culture shock. They're not used to having all that responsibility, because their parents aren't going to poke them in the ribs and say, you got to come to class and things like that," said Director of Vocational Education at MCTS Michael Orfe. "At [MCTS,] they're really on their own making those decisions. And they learn a little bit more about the expectations."

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“CTE students think a little bit differently. They learn to look at the big picture.”

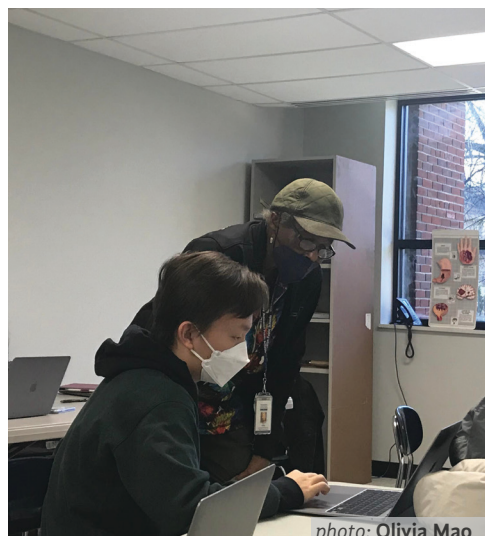


photo: Olivia Mao

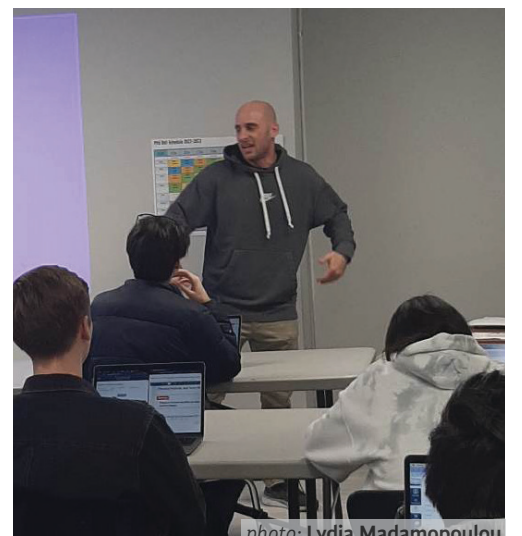


photo: Lydia Madamopolou

Left: PHS health teacher Joyce Jones helps Orion Wei '24 with an assignment. Right: PHS health teacher Lenny Goduto teaches a lesson on mental health. New curriculum changes have tried to increasingly emphasize mental health education.

Nipurna Shah brightens the college application process for seniors

Daniel Guo, STAFF WRITER
Brina Yang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Nipurna Shah, one of Princeton High School's college counselors, always knew that she wanted to pursue a career in education. The path that she took getting to Princeton High School does not reflect that though, as she initially earned a master's degree in economics and finance. She then worked extensively in both corporate and educational environments before finally earning her master's in counseling at Rutgers University.

Shah came to the United States at the age of two and has always had a family emphasis on the importance of education. In her first years out of college after undergraduate studies, Shah worked at JP Morgan Chase before taking some time off from work to raise her children. Following that, she worked for a software training company, all the while serving as a PTA president for her district. Her dream of becoming an educator only came true then, after she had already been out of college for many years.

Even before becoming a college counselor here at Princeton High School, Shah was already well familiarized with the school: As a part of her 150 hours of training in her master's program, she interned for the previous college counselor here in 2008.

"I serendipitously got an email from Rutgers University saying the law that required counselors to receive an undergraduate degree in teaching had been adjusted; now you could have any type of degree in order to apply for a master's program in counseling. So I got in, did my internship with [PHS] and that was 15 years ago," Shah said.

With such a variety of work experience, as Shah reflected upon her past jobs, she stated that these experiences have culminated in her current role as a college counselor, teaching her critical values such as teamwork, collaboration, and working with various personalities.

"I have had experience with occupations outside of what I do on a daily basis... I think of my varied experiences in corporate America and teaching have taught me teamwork and collaboration and working with all kinds of different stakeholders. I worked for 11 years as a counselor here and I was very interested in this job originally," Shah said.

Her decade-long contribution to the school hasn't decreased Shah's love for education, though, as she enjoys interacting with the students here at PHS, and misses some

of the long-term relations she had with the student body as a school counselor.

"I am a lot better in terms of knowledge that I gained [transitioning to being a college counselor, and the relationships that I've built with colleges. I have a group of college counselors from the public school and the private schools that meet to talk about trends and what's happening... I read voraciously because I'm used to keeping up with what's happening," Shah said.

Describing students as "motivated and driven and thoughtful and energetic," Shah's devotion and investment into the role hasn't gone unnoticed and unappreciated by students. Riya Menon '23 has met with Shah

previously to discuss her college prospects and felt both welcomed and organized after Shah guided her through the application process.

"Shah has the ability to make the school feel more welcoming. I felt all over the place when attempting to figure out the schools I wanted to apply to, but Shah aided me in formulating a logical list of schools I could apply to... We spoke about location and goals... she was invaluable in helping to make the college admissions process clearer and easier to navigate," Menon said.

Although Shah dedicates much of her time to the school, beyond working as a college counselor, Shah is also an avid cook. Shah enjoys trying new dishes, and she especially enjoys Indian cuisine due to its complexity.



PHS College Counselor Nipurna Shah replies to student emails about the college application process. photo: Emily Qian

"I come from a culture that very traditionally values a home-cooked meal. So on average, we will have three or four times a week. My boys are all grown up, but they come home sometimes to eat and for leftovers. If I wasn't doing college counseling, I would have fantasies about cooking."

Handling the logistics for countless meetings and presentations for various committees and panels, Shah at times feels overwhelmed. The time she spends interacting with students, her favorite part of the day, makes up for that.

"There's a lot of different responsibilities. Sometimes it does feel like a lot, but with students, I just feel energized. I'm learning from them, like using technology in a different way... I don't know another community with the curiosity and resources," Shah said. ■

HVAC investigations hope to improve PHS heating and cooling inconsistencies

Olivia Mao, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR
Hangyeol Cheong, STAFF WRITER
Katie Qin, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When PHS returned to in-person school, a handful of problems also came along. One of the main issues of the PHS building was its heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning, or HVAC, system's inability to consistently control school temperatures. As the issues worsened, PHS

finally settled on a plan to renovate the outdated system in hopes to solve the discomfort the faculty and students have been experiencing.

The HVAC system provides students and teachers with both warmth and cooling, depending on the season.

However, the last renovation was done nearly two decades ago, during the addition of the PAC. Since the lifespan of these systems are about 20 to 25 years, the old machines need repairs.

"They are about 17 years old, and they were slated to be replaced somewhere in the next five to ten years. There's been a new regime in the central office with an added sense of care and maintenance for all the equipment," said Matthew Bouldin, the Business Administrator for the Princeton Public Schools District.

Since the machines are reaching the end of their lifespan, an increasing amount of issues have started to arise, such as inconsistent temperature changes in classrooms.

"I noticed that there are many fluctuations in temperatures within different classrooms. For instance, some classrooms will be too cold and others will be too hot," said Jason Thomas '24.

These temperature changes don't just inconvenience students; in many cases they actually distract them from their work and negatively affect students' learning experiences.

"During the summer, I would remember how unbearably hot it was in many classrooms and it made it nearly impossible to stay focused and pay attention during class. I think having consistency is important, especially when we are studying. Not only in our learning habits and styles, but also our surroundings," Thomas said.

Bouldin also believes that unstable HVAC causes more struggle for students because it is difficult for them to adapt to overly hot or cold temperatures in indoor spaces.

"A long time ago, we didn't have a reliance on cooling, but now we're so used to it, and I think it has more of an effect on you as students because you're not used to those temperatures," Bouldin said.

Due to major setbacks from COVID-19 and other complications, PHS has experienced many delays. However, PHS has already started making improvements by repairing the two cooling towers. They also plan on getting the majority of the work done during the summer in order to get the units ready by September of 2023.

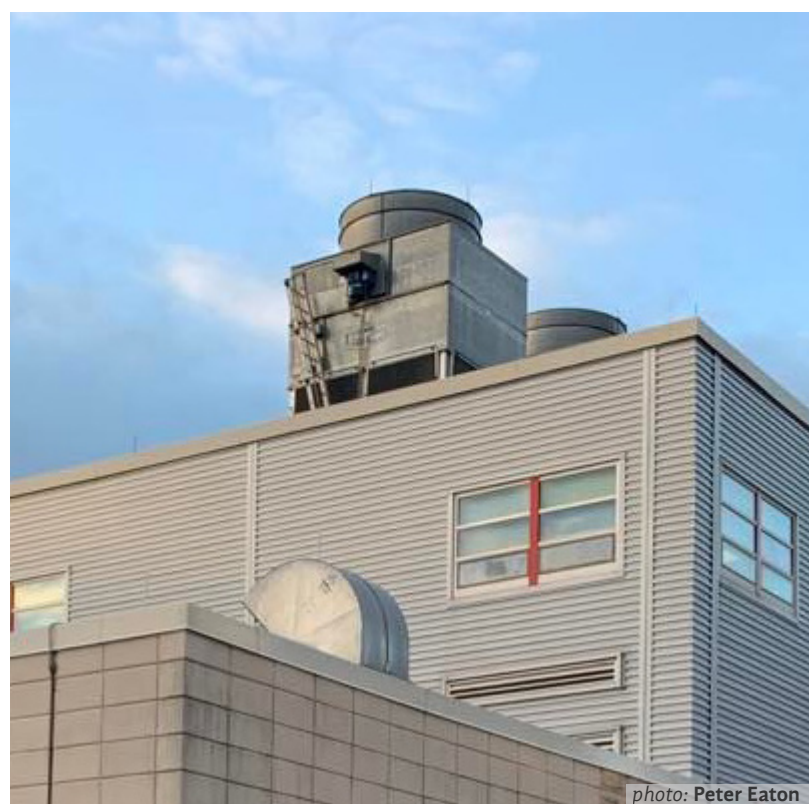
"The pandemic has created a lot of backlog. So, by the time I do that, hopefully things will be back to normal. [We] hope we'll be able to get the vast majority or bulk of the work done by September. When it's just a matter of planning, ordering the equipment way ahead of time, make sure it's here," Bouldin said.

As more issues start to emerge at PHS, Bouldin also believes that it is important for students to be heard in order to address these problems. Because students make up the majority of the school population, Bouldin wants to promote more transparency between students and faculty members.

"I think it's important that you keep your teachers informed, and hopefully, the teachers keep the administrators informed. When your teachers know an issue, they let people know, and they put a work order in an automated system [where] we get notified, identify the problem, and then try to fix it," Bouldin said.

Even with a solid plan and the right equipment, changing such a large system is difficult. Not just because of the machinery and cost, but also every individual's opinion. Some prefer it warmer, while others cooler, and it can be difficult to find a happy medium. Bouldin accepts the fact that it is impossible to satisfy every single student, but still strives for improvement.

"No one's ever 100 percent happy... Even when the system is functioning at 100 percent of its efficiency, it's always hard to please everybody. [But] we think it'll be better in the future," Bouldin said. ■



The district has recently started updating its HVAC units, such as this one located on the rooftop above the 260s hallway building in PHS. photo: Peter Eaton



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New health curriculum helps students tackle mental health

Content warning: this article contains mentions of suicide

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Both of these measures were introduced as part of the schools' multi-tiered system of support regarding mental health. The three tiers in place are Tier 1 — universal, Tier 2 — targeted, and Tier 3 — intensive, based upon the specific groups of students that the approaches apply to. The Teen Mental Health First Aid program is one of the measures in the universal tier since it is applied to all sophomores. The ESS program is part of the targeted tier to support a group of identified students, like those who meet with Diaz for weekly counseling sessions. The intensive tier is designed to help an even smaller number of students who deal with more significant mental health challenges, including students with suicidal ideations or suicide attempts.

"Students in Tier 3 [deal with challenges] that really require that they probably not be in the school setting, at least not full time. So that might mean that they are in a partial program [where] part of their school day is spent at a community organization such as GenPsych, which is located in town, or High Focus Center. . . They'll be able to get daily counseling, because it's much more intense at that level," Karas said.

This tiered approach was put into place due to the repercussions experienced by students after coming out of the pandemic. Teachers noticed that many students were struggling with in-person classes again after the extended periods of social isolation. Some found it hard to learn in a non-virtual classroom, as they suddenly had to interact in close contact with fellow students and teachers.

"Last year, the number of suicidal ideations, at least the ones that were being reported to us, was extremely high. We had large, large numbers of students [who] . . . had to be sent to the hospital for additional screenings [or] go into long-term hospital care in a facility to have their mental health issues being treated at that level. So it was just really [that] we were having so many parents and students just constantly saying, 'I need help. I need help and what can we do?'" Karas said.

“It's important to talk because we have to remove that stigma surrounding mental health.”

Noticing this sudden increase in mental health struggles, the PHS administration decided it was crucial that they expand their mental health education and counseling to help as many students as possible. The responses from parents to these changes varied significantly, with some expressing gratitude to the school for providing resources, and others communicating opinions that these actions are deeply offensive. Karas believes that those who are arguing against the expansion of mental health education in the high school misunderstand the intentions behind the expansions.

"It's important to talk because we have to remove that stigma [surrounding mental health]. Mental health should be looked at as a continuum... but I think most people only think of it at the extreme [of] 'somebody's going to kill themselves.' ... I think it's healthy to have these conversations because the more we know, the more that we can do to help support each other," said Karas.

Many students have found that the changes in the content of health classes have been engaging and important to their growth. Sophomores taking the course mentioned that this year's health classes focused more on helping others with mental health challenges, while typical health classes care more about one's own physical well-being.

"The teachers are really engaging— they are always handing out things, so people are more willing to participate. [They're] nice, and they seem to care about what they're doing," said Anastasia Morozov '25.

"Mental health [education] is important as we are still growing up so many students

don't really know how life is or how their mental health could get worse, so I think we should be prepared to know how to deal with these things," said Sungryung Lim '25, another student who has participated in the program through their health class.

After taking this course, the hope is that students will become more aware of the stigma surrounding mental health, as well as the significance of mental health in their lives. This will help them understand when they should seek help for themselves and others, and when to provide support to their peers, potentially guiding them to more professional help. ■



photo: Lydia Madamopoulos

Carlos Salazar, a physical education teacher at PHS, teaches a lesson on mental health to students.

Inaugural Career Festival aims to open doors for students

Matthew Chen, STAFF WRITER
Emilia Avalos, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On January 23, the Princeton PTO and PHS are set to host a Career Festival for the students of PHS. The fair hopes to open new doors for students and inspire them with various careers and life paths they never would have considered. The presentations span from local businesses, such as the Nassau Barbers, to PHS alumni and Princeton community members.

"We've been planning this career festival so that students will get to be exposed to several different careers, maybe sparking interest that they never thought they had," said PHS Principal Frank Chmiel. "Princeton High School parents, community members, local businesses, they'll all volunteer to share about the work that they do, and how students can get into that work."

The fair will not only bring new career opportunities for students, but also further understanding and interest in careers that students already have a passion for. Chmiel, along with the PTO, hopes that this event helps give students the knowledge they need to choose a career path in the future.

"Our idea is just to really open students' eyes to the possibilities," said Chmiel. "Actually hearing a person speaking about the career and... hopefully seeing some passion that the person has in it... present[ing] in a way that connects with high school students."

The aim of the fair is to demonstrate the many career possibilities that are available to students, and in doing so, hopefully help them make targeted decisions about what classes and electives they might want to take in the future.

"Students will be picking their schedules for the 2023 school year in January and February," said Chmiel. "And we thought there could be greater intentionality at the courses you pick if you've been exposed to a career that sparks your interest."

While the career fair is approaching fast, the initiative to create a fair like this started long ago. Sasha Weinstein, co-president of the Cranbury Middle School PTO, helps organize a career fair every year in Cranbury and wanted to help introduce it to PHS.

"I always saw the value ... of exposing children at a young age to a variety of careers," said Weinstein. "It was a misfortune that we didn't have it at the high school when it was probably more important than ever to expose kids to various careers."

While Weinstein might have prompted the original idea of having a career fair, she needed the help of others in order to make this dream a reality. Collaborating with Board of Education member Michelle Tuck-Ponder, the two

“No matter what you want to do ... we're going to put you in the best possible position to achieve your dreams.”



photo: Lydia Madamopoulos

Pictured above is the primary location of the Princeton Barber Shop, one of the employers that will be attending the career fair.

teamed up with Chmiel to make the event happen. Among the other people who helped with its organization were PHS counselor Thomas Filippone, Director of the Ideas Center Andrea Dinan, and finally, PHS School Library Media Specialist Jennifer Bigioni.

"We have some students who quietly go through our school, and they're like, 'Oh, yeah, I want to go to a four-year college, I want to go here,' ... because that's what all their peers are saying," said Chmiel. "No matter what you want to do, if you want to go Ivy League, you want to go straight into a career, or want to go into the military, we're going to put you in the best possible position to achieve your dreams. And you're all going to be PHS Tigers." ■

Mercer County Technical School makes visit to PHS to promote technical programs

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While students in MCTS's shared time program also learn many lessons early, they uniquely benefit from the fact that they leave high school already knowing a trade, something that not many other people can say they have done. This can benefit students whether they decide to go to college or start working right out of high school.

"Some people will use that job to supplement some of their income while they're going to school. Some people ... use this and then work in the evenings or when they don't have classes and make money on the side ... while they go to college in a related or maybe unrelated field," Filippone said.

Orfe and his colleagues at MCTS have been working hard to ensure that students are aware of the possibilities that are available to them. Along with the assembly, a day trip was held on December 16 during which interested PHS students were able to visit the MCTS campus and experience the programs first-hand. Orfe hopes that this kind of outreach will allow more students to change their perspective on what it means to attend technical school.

"In the last, say, 20 years, the biggest thing that has changed has been the face of career technical education ... Many years ago students had to choose between either going to college or going to tech school. And there was no middle of the road," said Orfe. "That's really not the case anymore. In fact, most of the people who come to our programs go to college ... and there are a lot of different pathways to them."

For interested students, or students who missed the informational assembly, more information about the programs is available at MCTS.edu, or on the MCTS podcast, "The MCTS Experience." Students are encouraged to apply for the shared-time program during their sophomore year, and any student can apply, given that they take a day to visit the MCTS campus. The career prep program is only open to seniors and applications have to be made in junior year. While anyone who has a GPA over 3.2 with a good attendance record is able to submit an application, spots are limited on a first-come, first-serve basis.

"I really, truly believe that career technical education can benefit everyone. And there are all kinds of data and statistics out there [showing] that CTE students ... do better economically in their lifetime," said Orfe. "CTE students think a little bit differently. They learn to look [at the] big picture." ■

OPINIONS

Hate a country's government, not its people

Iniya Karimanal, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



graphic: Sara Hu

In the news, we often hear stories about the atrocious human rights abuses throughout Iran, the oppressive, dehumanizing regime of North Korea, and the destructive imperialism of Russia. Unfortunately, through the distorted lens of that very media, we are often unable to truly comprehend the suffering of the inhabitants of these countries. In fact, it is often easier for us to alienate them than to empathize with them. As a result, we often blanket the people of a country with the same hatred that we feel for the regime that they live under, or assume that any Russian citizen, for example, is okay with their unjust invasion of Ukraine which has already led to almost a quarter of a million casualties.

As tensions between America and China increase, and as the war in Ukraine rages on, we have undoubtedly seen an uptick in xenophobia and hate speech in our country. Scrolling through TikTok or Instagram, one can easily find posts and comments denigrating Russian and Chinese culture. Among them are remarks claiming that the entire Russian population is weak and barbaric, as well as blatantly racist videos depicting celebrities digitally altered to have slanted eyes and traditional Chinese garments, including one which depicts actor Dwayne Johnson as “Dwayne the Wok Johnson”. In fact, Daegyong Kim explained for the University of California San

Diego that because of the U.S.'s persistent anti-Chinese rhetoric, “deep-rooted tropes frame contemporary mass racial sentiments towards Asian Americans, with racialized fear becoming more prominent during times of foreign policy crisis involving East Asia.” This underlying fear of the Chinese government, which is often exploited by American politicians (Donald Trump fanned the flames of xenophobia by referring to COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus” and “Kung Flu” at the height of the pandemic), has led to a disturbing rise in racialized violence. Ultimately, Michelle Gavin, writing for Foreign Policy in 2022, found that ethnically motivated violence has become “the most visible and immediate price of today’s showdown with China and Russia.” By failing to separate a country’s repressive government from its people, we’ve allowed for an America where incidents of hate crimes toward Asian Americans have increased by 339 percent since 2021.

Our susceptibility towards hate is often exploited by our own government to commit atrocities against the people of other countries. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, U.S. strikes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen from 2002 to 2020 as a part of the politically charged War on Terror killed between 10,000 and 17,000 people. Of these, between 800 and 1,750 are thought to have been civilians. The Iraq War and subsequent conflicts in the Middle East, set off by claims that the Iraqi regime was collaborating with the terrorist group Al Qaeda, claimed hundreds of thousands of civilian lives. The United States, despite claiming to be an ethical and reasonable country, alienated an entire region of the planet, inflicting meaningless harm against its population. This is not a new phenomenon. In the 1960s and 1970s, millions of Vietnamese civilians were killed by the same cycle of war and alienation. As long as our government is able to dehumanize the population of another country, it is able to kill. In fact, it can engage in total war — the opposing regime can be attacked with no regard for the well-being of the inhabitants.

“As long as our government is able to dehumanize the citizens of another country, it can kill.”

Thankfully, there is another way. PHS students should take note of the way the U.S. Men’s National Soccer Team reacted to winning a game with almost overwhelming political implications against Iran’s national team on November 29. Rather than gloating in the face of their opponents, whose reprehensible government has been executing people protesting the killing of a 22 year old woman by the “morality police” for not wearing her hijab correctly, the US players consoled the Iranian players, hugged them, helped them up from the soccer field they had collapsed on, and treated them like humans... because, of course, even though they were representing their country on the largest stage imaginable, the Iranian team members were not on their government’s side. In a move bolder and more beautiful than anything Christian Pulisic accomplished for the U.S. in a soccer game, Iran’s players had refused to sing their country’s anthem during their first appearance at the World Cup in order to show support for the protesters who were demonstrating all across Iran.

Unfortunately, many Americans have been taught to believe that we are instilled with some moral fortitude that is lacking in other countries. It is this form of American exceptionalism that makes us jump to associating a country’s people with the malevolent actions of their government. PHS students and teachers must make sure that they do not generalize when they talk about another country, in and out of the classroom. A social studies teacher, for example, could prevent students from demonizing Chinese citizens by specifying that it’s China’s government that poses a geopolitical threat to the U.S. because it helps spread authoritarianism. Likewise, students could help push back against the trend of vilifying all Russian citizens thanks to the war in Ukraine by considering all of the Russians who are dissatisfied with their government. In order to stop perpetuating needless hate and even needless violence, a shift in the rhetoric of students and teachers at PHS is needed. If our soccer team can do it on the most politically charged stage imaginable, so can we. ■

PHS doesn't need to digitize everything

Tamar Assayag, STAFF WRITER

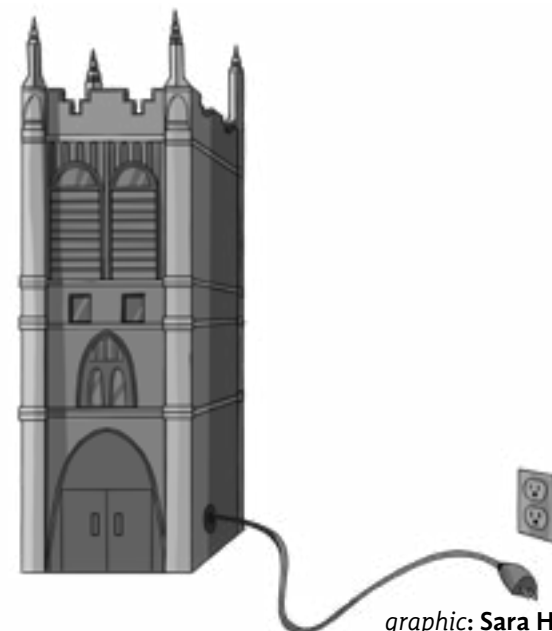
We live in a world that encourages the use of technology for almost any task where a digital device could be used. With the existence of huge, wealthy tech companies that run much of the modern economy, this trend isn't entirely surprising. But technology is not always necessary or beneficial. Complete digitization in and outside of the classroom should not be the norm simply because it's at our disposal, as many methods of study and communication are much more effective without the constant use of technology. Laptops and smartphones are certainly important, but that's not to say that they should dominate our school or social life. PHS students and faculty should stray away from a digitized lifestyle for several reasons, such as the benefits of handwritten notes, the endless distractions provided by the internet, and the tremendous difference between the purposeful connections that we build with people when we see them face-to-face compared to the lackluster relationships formed online.

Yes, what your history teacher told you about handwritten notes being better for recollection than digital notes is actually true, according to several studies over the years. It might be time-consuming to write all your notes for AP U.S. History on paper instead of typing it all into a document and finally getting to hit “print” with great satisfaction, but in the long run, students who physically write down their notes and annotations on paper are more likely to succeed at the subject at hand. In 2021, Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience held a study which found that people in the experiment that took handwritten notes on a subject had better recollection and understanding of the material than those that took notes on a tablet or a phone. When you pick up a pencil and notetake or study with physical paper, you are retaining the

information more thoroughly, and in effect increasing your chances of success. So handwritten assignments, which are becoming more and more of a rarity, should actually be encouraged by teachers, not disregarded.

I think I can safely assume that I am not the only one that's ever been distracted by the tempting Google search bar while trying to focus on typing up my responses to an assignment. Personally, I would much rather scroll through Instagram posts than finish up that final, intense question that took quite a long time to reach. The only reason that distraction would have been possible in the first place is because the assignment was online. The computer can be a useful tool for research or other such purposes, but technology should not be used for assignments where it really is not necessary, though this is what often ends up occurring. In 2019, the Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conducted a survey about the usage of technology in the classroom. They found that 49 percent of these undergraduate students used technology in the classroom for purposes other than those instructed, and they found it to be distracting. The most effective way to avoid such situations is to simply not use technology on assignments unless it is truly necessary.

It's no secret that meeting friends and family in-person is much different than conversing through text, phone calls, or even FaceTime. It might not be everybody's favorite method of communication, but there is something to be said about the invaluable connection you can have with people when you see them face-to-face. Whether it's through being able to identify their body language, eye contact, or other nonverbal social cues, seeing another person in the flesh is significantly more personal than communicating through a screen, which can sometimes feel like a barrier. When so much of the social world is online, it can be more difficult to make



graphic: Sara Hu

meaningful connections with others that reach farther than the occasional meme or “What’s up?” text, and that is especially true for friendships that exist solely through a screen. Being able to communicate face-to-face is essential to having strong bonds with people, as it allows us to pick up on a person’s feelings and character as well as feel like we can be vulnerable enough to truly connect.

Luckily, we are no longer at a place in the COVID-19 pandemic where classes are online, so the school is at a position where the pendulum could swing either way in terms of the excessive use of technology. It would definitely be most beneficial for us students if the use of technology is kept at a happy medium. ■

LILLIPIES  BAKERY

How to communicate with your parents

Jane Bennett, STAFF WRITER

The media often portrays teenagers as reckless, compulsive, and uncontrollable people who have fraught relationships with authoritative figures, especially their parents. Many PHS students perpetuate that stereotype — we have so much going on at school, at home, and in our own heads that we end up taking out our frustrations on our parents. This can spiral into cycles of resentment and conflict because we feel guilty for our aggressive behavior, but still angry when we receive judgment for it. When it comes to our social and emotional well-being, learning how to communicate with our parents is vital. When conflicts inevitably flare up, the best way to go about resolving them is to try to think about each contentious situation from their point of view, while still remaining assertive.

According to a survey by OnePoll in 2020, parents, by their own assessment, make around 221 mistakes every year. A mistake can be described as a misjudged comment or a poor decision, or unreasonable pressure on children. These parental mistakes come from a place of poor judgment and can cause lasting damage on children. We are the most vulnerable during our adolescence; there is a high chance that what we hear can make an impact on our development. Parents must remember to be careful with their words and actions, but we have to make sure to tell them when they do something that is hurtful. By being clear and straightforward about what we need our parents to improve upon, they will be more likely to take our criticisms constructively and attempt to do better in the future.

Most importantly, if you find that you are in an unsafe environment in terms of your relationship with your parents, these tips will not be able to help. Instead, reach out to a trusted adult or contact the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-4-A-CHILD).

Despite our parents' mistakes, it is important to let them know that you recognize the many kind and supportive things they do for you. Simply thanking them for giving you a ride or for making your dinner can go a long way if you mean it. By doing so you are not only recognizing the endless things that your parents do for you, but also outwardly expressing your appreciation for their hard work.

Often, it feels like our parents are trying to prepare us for our futures rather than paying attention to the present. When we place such an emphasis on the years that are to come rather than enjoying the life we are currently living, we almost ignore what happens around us. If we bring up this issue in conversations with our parents, they might have a greater awareness of how they can help to prepare you for the future, while not forgetting to be supportive of your needs in the present.



graphic: Mia Gatzke

The support from parents can often feel more like pressure, so it can be helpful to let parents know that we have everything under control and that we will ask them for help when we need it. Parents like to feel as though they are being supportive of their children. In order to make our relationship with our parents more collaborative, we should let them know what we need and what is going on in our world. Too often, we tell our parents that our days are “fine” when they ask. If we let them in a little bit more, it will build a greater sense of trust and vulnerability. You could build a stronger relationship with your parents by asking for their help on a specific task. I recently asked my mother if I could interview her for a sociology project. Not only was she honored to be considered, but she was excited to see me taking an interest in what she minored in in college, and our interview strengthened our bond. Approaching your parents for advice about your friends or your homework assignments will encourage them to share their own expertise on your terms and not in their usual lecture-based way.

It can be especially difficult to communicate with your parents if they don't agree with you on the topics that you find the most important such as politics, schoolwork, sexuality, or your priorities. Instead of ignoring their differing perspectives, we need to discuss these subjects civilly. By making sure that both sides are acknowledging and understanding the opposite side, we can prevent toxicity from seeping into our conversations. However, sometimes our discussions get out of control, devolving into shouting matches. In this case, it's best to let go of the argument altogether and recognize that “winning” isn't worth the damage that such an argument can do to your relationship.

Overall, we should try to understand that almost everything our parents do to pressure us comes from a place of love. Because of that simple fact, it is important to communicate our own boundaries to our parents, so that we can help them understand exactly what we need from their love. Sit down, make sure that there are no distractions, and just talk. ■

PHS Takes: What are we doing over winter break?

Compiled by Thomas Zhang and Alexander Margulis, OPINIONS CO-EDITORS

Wyatt Engelhart '26
photo: Thomas Zhang
Enjoying the food in New Orleans.

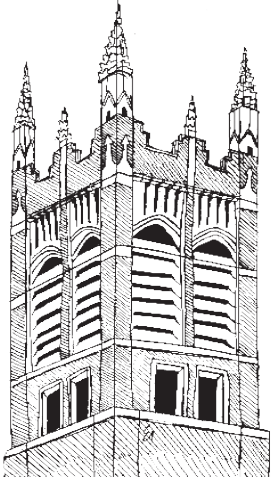
Erin Kim '24
photo: Alexander Margulis
I'm going to watch Avatar 2.

Kailani Harrison '24
photo: Alexander Margulis
I'm going to Brooklyn to eat at a restaurant with my family.

Scarlett Cai '24
photo: Thomas Zhang
Skiing in Switzerland!

Sylvan Waldman '25
photo: Alexander Margulis
I'm going ice skating!

Kaan Akturan '26
photo: Thomas Zhang
Partying until midnight on New Year's.



Editorial

Why the holidays are so expensive

It's the day before Christmas, and you still haven't bought gifts for your friends. In a panic, you drive to Target and run through the aisles flooded with fellow last-minute shoppers, grabbing greeting cards, ornaments, lights, and an assortment of other holiday trinkets. Half an hour later, you still haven't found a good gift, but something catches your eye. You walk over to the rack sheepishly, and, after a moment's hesitation, pick out three \$20 Amazon gift cards.

Over the past few decades, Americans have consistently spent more money on Christmas year after year. According to a 2022 study by Statista, Christmas sales increased by 8.2 percent in 2020 and a whopping 14.1 percent in 2021, a trend that is only expected to continue this year. Worryingly, recent data from the National Retail Federation reveals that Americans underestimate their Christmas gift spending by over \$100, suggesting a lack of awareness about holiday spending habits.

For many people who celebrate Christmas, holiday traditions and shopping have provided an escape from the pandemic and an opportunity to return to normalcy. After a year of rough economic downturn and current events, consumers seem determined to compensate for their lost happiness by spending big on decor, gifts, and lavish trips during Christmas. Unfortunately, this seemingly harmless indulgence is a symptom of a much greater issue that is fueled by our careless spending.

Profit-driven organizations, including corporations and advertisers, have greatly contributed to a modern Christmas culture defined by massive material spending. It seems like every part of Christmas has been commercialized; from

gift-giving to the tree itself, every step requires one to spend money.

Participating in (and therefore supporting) rampant consumerism is not only devastating for the environment, but also causes psychological problems, such as increased status anxiety, moodiness, and even depression. According to Investopedia in 2021, consumers experience stress associated with social status and a perceived need to keep up with celebrities by increasing their consumption, which only furthers the cycle. Unfortunately, as many of us are aware, a large portion of these purchased items are neglected: they're thrown in some dusty corner, donated, or trashed altogether. When considering the number of resources and underpaid, exploited human labor that goes into goods that are often landfill-bound, it's hard not to be horrified.

Even teenagers, who are mostly financially dependent, participate in holiday consumption. As such, it is crucial that PHS students dedicate more awareness to how they spend money during the holiday season. If no effort is made to shift the culture of consumerism that has permeated the holiday season, it can be reasonably expected that spending will only increase, creating negative consequences for the health of individuals and the planet.

This winter, PHS students can help keep their personal and family holiday consumption in check by setting holiday spending limits for their families, making DIY cards and decorations, or thrifting for gifts. No matter how small the change, being more mindful of spending habits is the first step in slowing down the trend of nationwide and even global overconsumption. ■

ChatGPT hasn't killed the high school essay — not yet.

Thomas Zhang and Alex Margulis,
OPINIONS CO-EDITORS

On December 6, the day before it was blocked on Princeton High School's Wi-Fi network, it seemed almost impossible to get through a class period without hearing something about ChatGPT, a new online chat bot that's powered by artificial intelligence. AI text generators are nothing new — two years ago, the company that developed ChatGPT released GPT3, another system which could simulate human-like text. Although there are a lot of small differences between the two models (compared to its predecessor, ChatGPT is designed to better limit harmful output and has new conversational capabilities, like answering follow-up questions), there is one big change that accompanies the new software. For now, ChatGPT is completely free, which means that once students get home, where the AI is not blocked, coherent, persuasive, and astoundingly grammatical essays are accessible to any PHS student with just a couple of clicks.

The growth of the software has been astounding — five days after its release, it had already reached a million active users, some of whom, no doubt, wanted to exploit it for academic purposes. Because ChatGPT is able to "write" essays on the spot, using the millions of texts from across the internet that it was trained on in order to concoct what is usually a perfectly reasonable response to any prompt you could think of, it's impossible for teachers to be entirely sure that an essay it created was plagiarized. That does not, however, mean that students are going to start turning in essays that were written by ChatGPT, because almost universally, the writing that the AI produces is filled with cleverly disguised lies, superficial analyses, and uninspiring clichés.

Take, for example, the essay we asked ChatGPT to generate about why Telemachus' journey in "The Odyssey" is important. It ends like this: "As Telemachus himself says, 'I am not the man I was.' (Book 15, Line

437)." There's only one problem with this closing statement — that quote doesn't actually exist. In fact, the entire essay is filled with nonexistent quotes and analyses that are C- work at best. Despite the AI grasping that "Telemachus learns from Nestor... to be a good ruler and leader," it doesn't actually elaborate on how that lesson was taught or what the results of it are in the rest of the story. For now, it seems, the only thing ChatGPT can help with, from an academic standpoint, is brainstorming. In that regard, it's certainly useful. It can come up with the idea that Telemachus learns how to be a good ruler, and point towards the people he learned it from, in just a couple of seconds. Still, if a student wants to turn in an essay that proves those points in engaging ways, they're going to have to write it themselves.

From that perspective, ChatGPT can look like a harmless academic aid. The truth, however, is that ChatGPT is a compulsive, convincing liar. It spews a uniquely dangerous type of lie: ones that you can't know are lies unless you knew the right answer to your question before you asked it to ChatGPT. So the smartest thing to do is to just do your own homework.

It was originally very tempting to use ChatGPT to write a paragraph for this article and surprise readers with the revelation that it had been written by a machine. However, upon further research, we discovered that almost every article written about ChatGPT on the internet uses this same gimmick. Ultimately, using ChatGPT to write about ChatGPT would have been trite and uninteresting, much like the content that ChatGPT itself produces. ■

The Tower

Princeton High School
151 Moore Street, Princeton, New Jersey

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The Tower serves as a medium of information for the community through reporting and/or analyzing the inner workings of Princeton High School, the school district, and cultural and athletic events that affect the student body; providing a source of general news for parents, teachers, and peers; voicing various opinions from an informed group of writers; and maintaining quality in accurate content and appealing aesthetics, as well as upholding professionalism and journalistic integrity.

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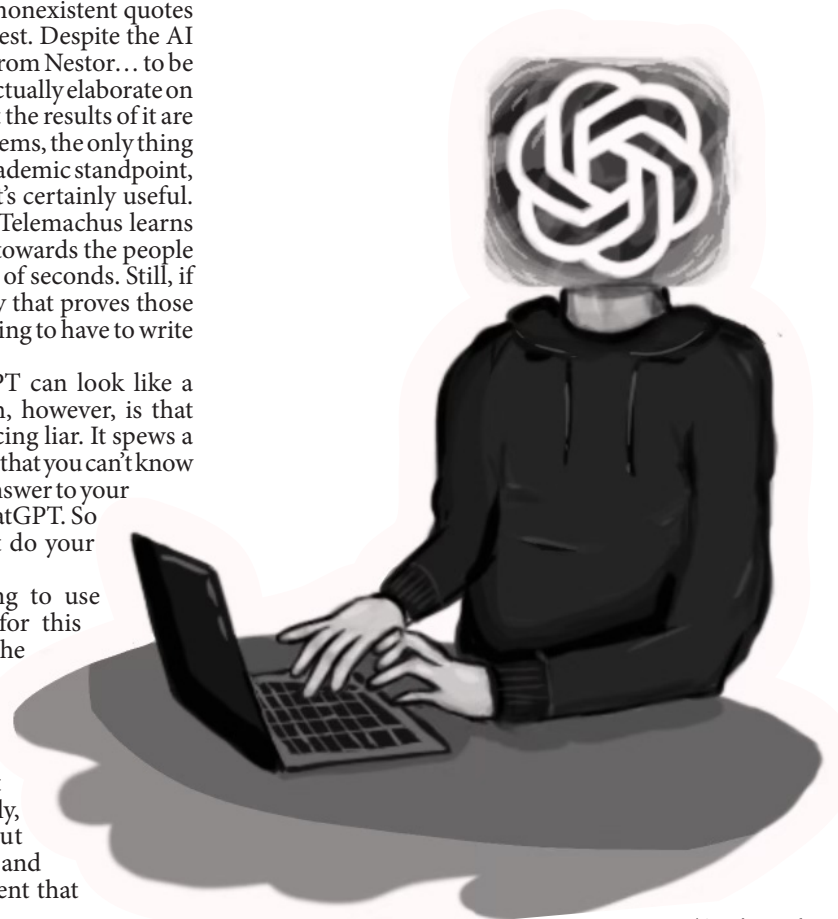
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The Tower editorial is written in part by Peter Eaton, who is the son of Board of Education member Beth Behrend.



graphic: Mia Gatzke



Vanguard

Winter holidays around the world

Christmas cake tradition

Kyra Mehta, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In my family, Christmas begins with the sweet scent of dried fruit and nuts. We use these ingredients in our most special tradition: making a Christmas cake using my grandmother's recipe.

Before we proceed to actually baking the cake, my grandmother gives each of my family members a specific task. Some years, my sister and I were in charge of separating the dried black currants, candied peel, and raisins into neat piles. Other years, we chopped walnuts together into little pieces.

Unlike your average cake, our special Christmas cake needs to be started up to fifteen days in advance due to all the ingredients that need to be prepared beforehand. We only mix and bake everything together right before Christmas day, which is one of my favorite parts of the process. Mixing, sifting and pouring the batter evenly into round baking tins is a therapeutic experience and helps us forget everything and just enjoy the simple experience.

Finally, on Christmas evening, it's time to enjoy the fruits of our labor. With a plate of cake in one hand and ice cream in another, we sit around the tree and talk about whatever is on our minds. When I was younger, I wasn't used to the complex flavors in the desert, and I used to give my share to my sister. However, I've learned to appreciate and enjoy the delicately fruity taste of the Christmas cake and what it means to my family this time of year.

Making the Christmas cake is my favorite holiday tradition because it's a time for my family and me to just spend time together and not worry about anything else. It's not the most extravagant event, but it's the simple things in life that bring everyone together. In our world today, everything is so fast-paced that there is almost never a minute to just rest and spend time with family and friends; that's why the holidays and this tradition are so special to us.

Why education about different holidays is important

Will Pittman, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As the first semester comes to a close and snow begins to fall, PHS students and faculty are excited to embark on a lively winter break filled with holiday treats, traditions, and relaxation. While spending time with family and friends should be your top priority, taking the time to learn about other holidays can enhance both your own celebrations and those of others.

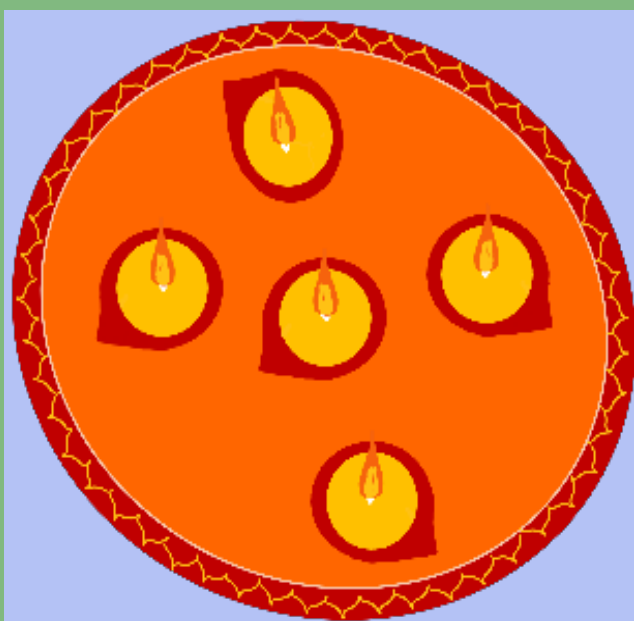
There are many different ways to learn about diverse holidays and traditions. One effective way is to conduct research online, which can provide accurate and reliable information. However, some of the most interesting and unique insights can come from talking to friends and family members who come from different cultural backgrounds. For example, you might ask someone from Austria, Hungary, or Germany about their Christmas traditions, and they could tell you about Krampus, the anti-Santa who punishes naughty children. Another example could be asking a Hindu who celebrates Diwali about their traditions, which may include art, fireworks, and other customs. By learning from the perspectives of others, you can gain a deeper understanding of different cultural traditions.

It's important to note that you aren't reliant on just others to learn about additional holidays. An effective way to learn is by celebrating other people's holidays with them. If you want to learn more about something like Hannukah, you can attend candle lighting events right here in Princeton, or you could go somewhere like New York City, where the holiday is widely celebrated, and experience the festivities on a larger scale. This immersive approach to learning can give you valuable insights into how to make your own celebrations more fun, and it can also be an enjoyable experience.

Holidays just open the door for us to better understand other cultures, which is becoming increasingly important as the world changes. It is essential for people to collaborate when addressing global issues, but the ignorance and misunderstanding of different cultures are hindering progress. For example, economically, a 2022 study from Ohio University found that cultural ignorance has historically resulted in failure for businesses. It cited an example of a Subway that opened in China where most locals were averse to touching their food and tended to prefer rice and pasta to bread. On the other hand, KFC was able to integrate into China's society by actually accounting for cultural differences. "KFC successfully integrated by substituting coleslaw for familiar Chinese dishes such as bamboo shoots and shredded carrots" (Ohio University, 2022). By understanding and respecting cultural differences, businesses can thrive in new markets. Cultural knowledge keeps the economy going.

Another reason to further educate people about different holidays is to promote inclusion. The winter season is often excluding to non-celebrators of Christmas, particularly in the western hemisphere. During December, there are constant reminders of Christmas in virtually every setting, from music to decorations. This can make non-celebrators feel unimportant. However, exclusivity can be counteracted through increased knowledge and awareness. Simply engaging in conversations with others about their differing holidays can make their day and show that you care about their traditions.

By learning more about different holidays, not only can you enrich yourself with other cultures' histories, but you can also spread happiness and tranquility to those around you. Instead of focusing on your traditional holiday, expand your mind to its fullest potential; go out and learn about different holidays.



graphic: Lydia Madamopoulou

What is your favorite holiday tradition?

COMPILED BY Jieruei Chang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

"Chinese New Year is a time for me to reconnect with my family and celebrate our culture and traditions. It's a time for new beginnings and making plans for the year ahead."

-Sizai (Andy) Yin '24



photo: Emily Quan

"Christmas is my favorite holiday because I enjoy giving and receiving presents. Opening presents gives me happiness and I like to return the gesture."

-Andre Mueller '26



photo: Andrew Zhao

"My favorite holiday tradition is meeting up with my best friends and playing football and badminton with them because I don't get to spend a lot of time with them during the school year."

-Raj Harish '23



photo: Andrew Zhao

Las Posadas

Las Posadas is a nine-day holiday leading up to Christmas Eve that is celebrated in parts of Mexico, Latin America, and other Hispanic communities. The name is a biblical translating to "The Inns," which refers to Mary and Joseph's journey leading up to Jesus' birth. Las Posadas is a festival hosted by the whole neighborhood, a recreation of the Nativity story. A community will gather each night of Las Posadas for festivities as they walk around the houses of their neighborhood, "searching" for lodging door to door. The outside processions entail caroling, dressing up as biblical figures, and building a strong sense of community. Each night ends with a celebration inside one of the houses, featuring a piñata and

Bodhi Day

Bodhi Day is a Buddhist holiday that is primarily celebrated in Japan. The date of the holiday depends on the branch of Buddhism. Many celebrate annually on December 8, while others celebrate on a different date in January each year. The official name of the day is the Enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama, which concretely describes the premise of the holiday. Bodhi Day marks the day that Siddhartha Gautama first arrived at enlightenment through the process of meditation, cementing a monumental day to the beginnings of Buddhism. On Bodhi Day, people will visit their temples for meditation in order to celebrate the special day. For the next thirty days after the holiday, families decorate their own mini Bodhi Trees: small fig trees that represent the original one that Buddha sat under. Overall, the holiday is observed with prayer and quietness.

Holidays around the world

Kristina Sarkisova, STAFF WRITER

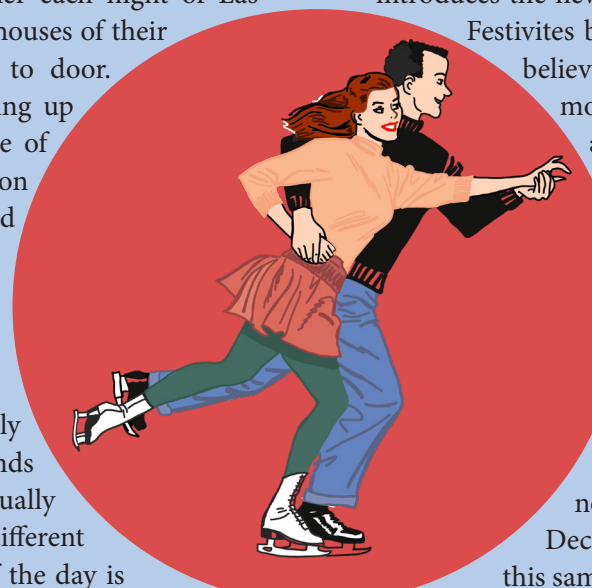
Soyal

Soyal is a Native American holiday, celebrated on the eve of and day of the winter solstice. Soyal is celebrated by the Zoni, Hopi, and Pueblo. These nations follow the Wheel of the Year, a calendar that marks the year's equinoxes and solstices, with allocated festivals for each. The celebration for the winter solstice is considered to be the most vital. Soyal consists of a ceremony that introduces the new cycle of the Wheel of the Year, calling back the sun god.

Festivities begin sixteen days prior to the holiday. These nations also believe in the Kachina spirits that play an essential role in the monumental holiday. People dress up in elaborate headdresses and participate in dances, representing the Kachina coming down to Earth. In addition, making prayer sticks and performing rituals characterize this special stretch of time in December.

Christmas

Christmas is the Christian holiday that honors the birth of Jesus, widely celebrated in America by both Christians and non-Christians. Most churches celebrate Christmas Day on December 25, but Orthodox branches of Christianity celebrate this same holiday on January 7. Christmas is celebrated worldwide, with a variety of traditions specific to cultures spanning the globe, some more relating to religion than others. Beginning as a religious holiday, Christmas also serves as a cultural holiday as well. Specifically, in America, Christmas has been extremely monetized, turning one day into a holiday season that fires off right after Thanksgiving. The season and the holiday itself are distinguished by iconic material objects like sparkling lights and sugar cookies, but also by nostalgia and comfort. It is a federal holiday and is during most school breaks, giving families a chance to reconnect. Although people have different purposes for celebrating, Christmas remains America's most celebrated holiday each year.



graphic: Angela Wu



graphic: Angela Wu

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Left: PHS Choir rehearses for Winter Concert, Right: Princeton University Chapel (concert venue)

photos: Lydia Madamopoulos

PHS choirs and orchestras prepare for annual Winter Concert

Marina Peres, STAFF WRITER and Syra Bhatt, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As the weather becomes cooler, there's nothing nicer than the warm comfort of music. PHS is sure to deliver with their 77th annual Winter Concert, which includes all PHS choirs and orchestras and is hosted at the awe-striking Princeton University Chapel. With its wide variety of songs, the concert focuses primarily on classical music, but also includes repertoire from other genres like gospel and contemporary, offering a little something for everyone.

"There is no one type of music that we play; it varies from classical to baroque or romantic, etc," said Princeton High School Orchestra member Meghna Myneni '25. The program setlist for the concert changes every year, showcasing the wide range of PHS musicians and also the skill it takes for the directors to create a unique production every year. Robert Loughran, director of the Orchestral Program, as well as Vincent Metallo and Sarah Pelletier, directors of the Choir Program, considered multiple details when choosing repertoire.

"It's all about knowing your ensemble... to ensure a well-thought-out concert," Loughran said.

Performing at the chapel takes some getting used to for new batches of performers, but it has been a cherished PHS tradition for the past 77 years.

"The chapel is more open than other performing spaces, which makes the music sound more resonant and tangible. We do adjust how we play, since we want our audience, even those at the back, to be touched by our music. The chapel is intimidating at first glance, but after the rest of the orchestra fills it, it doesn't seem as big as it did previously," said Meghna Myneni '25, a member of Princeton High School Orchestra.

Every year, the PHS Orchestra features senior soloists at the winter concert. Past soloists have included Natalie Loughran '16, Juilliard alumna and the winner of the 2021 Primrose International Viola competition, and Coco Mi '18, Juilliard alumna in violin. Last year, Roberto Haubold '22 performed the "Serenade Melancolique" by Tchaikovsky.

This year, senior soloists will include Heidi Gubser '23, a member of the Princeton High School Orchestra who will be performing "Cécile Chaminade Concertino" on flute. Not only is the solo a sentimental moment for her because it is her last winter concert, but this moment actually marks one of the biggest goals achieved in Gubser's journey as a flutist.

"I am so grateful to be playing a solo this year! Fun fact actually: When I was a freshman, another flutist played the same piece I'm playing this year, and I was amazed by her performance. While watching her play, I actually made a wish that that would be me in three years. And now I get to fulfill my wish!" Gubser said.

Despite the workload, choir students are looking forward to their annual performance and seeing their hard work pay off. During the weeks leading up to the performance, the choir students have to memorize full pieces in Portuguese, German, and Latin.

"When I get to perform in a concert, I feel excited and proud to perform the songs we've been working on. I love putting in effort as a group to learn our parts and perform on stage. It is also so much fun with friends there to sing and celebrate with afterwards," said Avery Madison '24, a member of PHS Choir.

"Overall, I'm pretty excited to perform the songs we have been spending the past few months perfecting. The first couple concerts are nerve-racking, but after that it's pretty fun," said Theo Balavoine '24, another member of PHS Choir and also PHS Chamber Choir.

The age-old traditions that resurface in this concert are what make it especially beloved within the Princeton community. For nearly six decades, PHS Choir students have held a candlelight procession inside the church. This year on the balcony at the back of the chapel, PHS Choir is performing the Portuguese piece "Alta" by Eurico Carrapatoso, Portugal's most prolific choral composer today. The rest of the program includes both well-known and more niche holiday music, featuring a German aria sung by the trebles from the Hansel and Gretel opera. To conclude the night, the choir sings Bach's "Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light" and Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," joined by all who know them.

"A huge tradition is that we invite the alums to come back and join us for [those] two pieces at the end," said Pelletier. "It's so much fun to have so many people singing together...the sound in that space is so glorious."

Though the concert poses a challenge for all performers, seniors in particular need to brace themselves before this one as it is their last time performing. More just another performance, this concert is an opportunity to reflect on all past choir memories.

"It's definitely bittersweet that this is the last year I'll be in PHS Choir, but I'm also excited that we are going on tour and that I get to hang out with my friends," said PHS Choir Vice President Andre Penn '23. ■

How the "Polar Express" takes you on a journey through the Arctic

Luca Balescu, STAFF WRITER

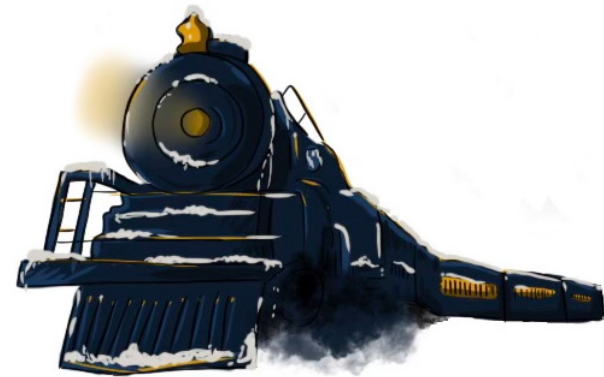
"The Polar Express" has been the subject of derision for a while, much of which I believe to be undeserved. Criticism has been flung at its use of motion-capture animation, which its detractors claim created a sense of the "uncanny valley." Personally, I've never found these complaints to carry much weight, and I believe the story of the film makes the characters not uncanny, but tangibly human (okay, the elves are a little creepy looking). With that out of the way, I wish to make it clear why I believe "The Polar Express" to be one of the greatest Christmas movies of all time, as well as my personal favorite.

"The Polar Express" follows a young boy who has begun to doubt the existence of Santa Claus. On Christmas Eve, after witnessing his father dressed as Santa and flipping through a collection of news articles ("MALL SANTASON STRIKE!"), the boy witnesses the arrival of the Polar Express, a magical train to the North Pole, outside on his street. Even speaking as someone who generally isn't the biggest fan of animated movies, the shot of the Polar Express shrouded in snow and dwarfing our protagonist is, to me, one of the most memorable images in any film I've seen, perfectly encapsulating the feeling of childlike wonder.

In fact, it's that feeling of childlike wonder that makes the movie so magical. We follow the titular vehicle through a sequence of beautifully rendered landscapes that capture viewers in a feeling of ethereal beauty that do not feel like a soulless CGI environment, but rather as a beautiful and captivating scenery. We see ice capped mountains, looming glaciers encircling a frozen lake, millions of caribou covering

the tundra, and even Grand Rapids, Michigan. Everything from the cozy city at the North Pole to the hills that line the tracks is shown from the perspective and scale of the characters, allowing us to experience their wonder at the world around them. Through a succession of characters, including the stern conductor, a mysterious ghostly hobo, and Santa Claus himself (all three of whom are voiced by Tom Hanks), our protagonist embarks on his traditional Hollywood "spirit of Christmas" journey.

At its core, "The Polar Express" is a story about retaining innocence and curiosity, and this is clearly stated in a beautiful final monologue. In a world where we are concerned with facts, problems, and good and bad, "The Polar Express" is a welcome reminder that sometimes it's worth it to forget it all and return to that sense of childlike amazement and innocence, and I can think of no better Christmas movie to instill that in an audience. ■



graphics: Mia Gatzke



Unwrapping your holiday playlist

Heidi Engelbert and Avery McDowell, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Whether you play a Christmas playlist as soon as November hits or only listen to winter music if it happens to play on the radio, finding ways to incorporate the holiday spirit into your daily life can be a fun way to get excited for upcoming celebrations. For many, this can mean gift shopping, putting up lights, and watching movies. Listening to holiday music can also be a good way to get cheerful this December, and if you're wondering how to best add to your holiday playlists, there's definitely something out there for everyone.

Some of the earliest Christmas songs were written by hymn writers in the 18th century to be sung in church on Christmas. This included songs like "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "Joy to the World," and "O Come All Ye Faithful." These songs all described the birth of Jesus, and many were adapted from poems or translated into English from other languages.

The late 19th century brought along more secular holiday songs, many of which are classics that we've known since we were young. Songs such as "Jingle Bells," "Deck the Halls," and "Up on the Housetop" were all written in the late 1800s and have continued on as classic holiday songs for centuries. Songs written around this time mostly describe fun holiday activities, as the holidays were becoming more centered around being in a cheerful atmosphere with friends and family rather than just being focused on religious customs.

Nowadays, we often turn to classics from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. This era includes frequently played songs such as "Jingle Bell Rock," "The Christmas Song," or "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas." Many of these original melodies



photos: Caroline Gu

have a vintage mood about them, which is part of the appeal to listeners. They usually depict very visual scenes of Christmas trees, toys for children, snow, and carolers that all evoke a touching winter spirit.

The most modern type of Christmas tunes can be considered pop music. Many may be most familiar with "All I Want for Christmas is You" by Mariah Carey or "Last Christmas" by Wham!. Like these two, most Christmas pop songs have to do with love, where the singer commonly wishes to have a special someone around for the holidays. For example, "Snowman" by Sia, which provided a melancholy yet warm mood, was centered around a cherished melting snowman.

If you can't seem to find options that fit what you look for in Christmas music, today there are many different versions of Christmas songs to choose from. Modern-day covers of classic Christmas songs sung by artists such as Michael Bublé, Pentatonix, or Mariah Carey can give those songs a more present-day holiday vibe. Even Christmas songs from the 1950s or 1960s can have multiple versions, sung by artists such as Bing Crosby, Andy Williams, or Darlene Love.

Many of our favorite songs revolve around cherished memories of the holiday season. For me, "Christmas Time Is Here" by the Vince Guaraldi Trio often brings back memories of simply sitting by the warmth of the fireplace with my dog and brother, listening to the crackling of the wood and music, while sipping hot chocolate.

Whether it's turning on the radio in the car or listening to holiday tunes at dinner, we hope that you feel the winter spirit by listening to any of your favorite holiday tunes or exploring unfamiliar ones. ■

Arinze Okeke-Agulu '23 sews together his future, one thread at a time

Syra Bhatt, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Arinze Okeke-Agulu '23 has been passionate about fashion, photography, and other forms of art since 2019. After sewing his first jacket in the summer of 2020 during lockdown, Arinze has been able to form close bonds with other artists and find meaning in his art. He has worked with Malayali-American designer Abel Paul George and the owner of the Instagram page "arkangel" to bounce ideas off of each other and gain valuable feedback from their experiences. He is inspired by American fashion designer Virgil Abloh and draws inspiration from his Nigerian background and culture for his work. In the future, he hopes to become a creative consultant and work with brands on their campaigns.

Can you describe your clothing line?

It's not really a clothing line, it's more like a means to an end to fund the stuff that I actually wanna do, so it's not really a long term thing

What kind of designs does your clothing line have?

All of the shirts I make are usually streetwear and have a cropped cut design. I sew everything myself and make patterns for it.

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

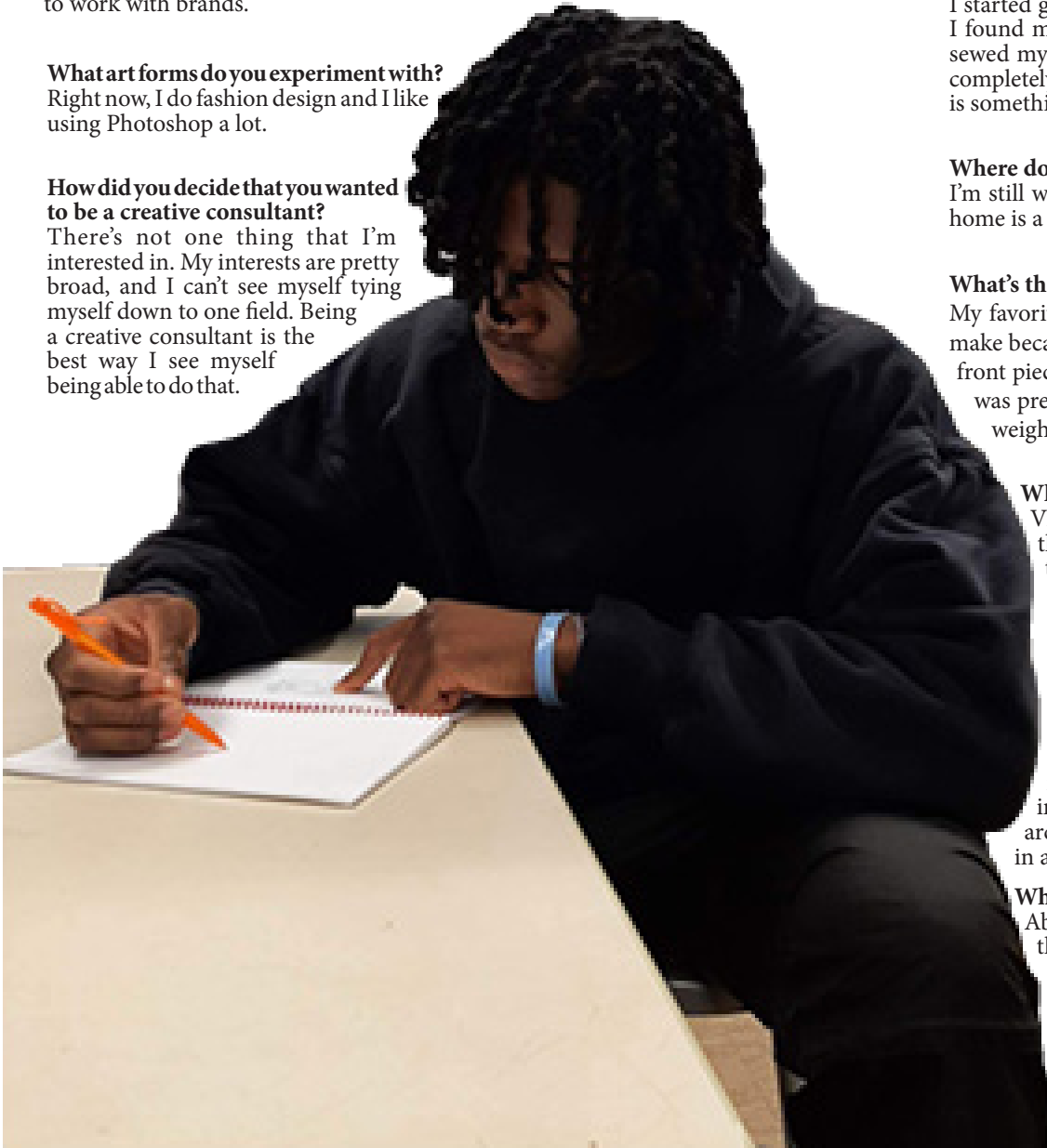
I see myself working with fashion houses on their campaigns. At that point I hope to have gone to a college and graduated and formed a foundation for myself, so I wanna use that to work with brands.

What art forms do you experiment with?

Right now, I do fashion design and I like using Photoshop a lot.

How did you decide that you wanted to be a creative consultant?

There's not one thing that I'm interested in. My interests are pretty broad, and I can't see myself tying myself down to one field. Being a creative consultant is the best way I see myself being able to do that.



How have you been able to connect your country's culture with your art?

I have stuff that I haven't shown yet that's inspired by regular houseware in my culture as well as some formal wear. I usually take those and incorporate them into modern fashion design, like having a cropped hem and a three-quarter sleeve.

What is the most important thing art has taught you?

To be patient. Art is not something you can just do and be amazing at, you need to work at it, and learning to be patient is important to me.

What made you first get into art?

I started getting interested in fashion in 2019. Then, in 2020, lockdown happened, so I found myself having the opportunity to explore those industries. That was when I sewed my first jacket, and I felt really proud of myself. Being able to sew something completely from scratch and having a physical product out in the world on a larger scale is something that I find really fun.

Where do you draw inspiration from?

I'm still working on the stuff that I'm inspired by back at home. I feel like starting at home is a good place to start and then branching out to other things.

What's the product you're proudest of?

My favorite one that I've made is a double layered hoodie. It was kind of tedious to make because you have to make a copy of everything—you have two back pieces, two front pieces and two sleeves pieces, and then you layer them on top of each other. It was pretty tedious, but I'm proud of being able to finish it. It's a pretty heavy piece weight wise, but it's my proudest piece.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

Virgil Abloh is my biggest inspiration because of his ability to properly reference things and use those references to inform his own work. He takes what's out there already, learns about it, and turns it into something new. There are so many ideas already out there, and drawing from what already exists and turning it into something new is something that I find really important, and I think Virgil does that really well.

What skills have you gained through your art?

Photoshop is an important one. Being able to sew and make your own stuff and having that skill of pattern-making is also really important, especially in the fashion field. I've also learned photography, which is something I'm interested in. Although photography is more of a hobby, I like photographing architecture and playing with light. Overall, I've learned how to present my work in a good manner.

Who have you been able to talk to?

Abel Paul George is a designer that I really look up to. He's more experienced than I am, and he's always open whenever I have a question about something. He first reached out to me three months ago after seeing my work, and we started talking. There's also this Instagram page called "arkangel." They're kind of a creative consultancy company, and they work with artists to create album covers and other things. I've known the owner for about two years now, and I love talking with him.

photo: Lydia Madamapoulou



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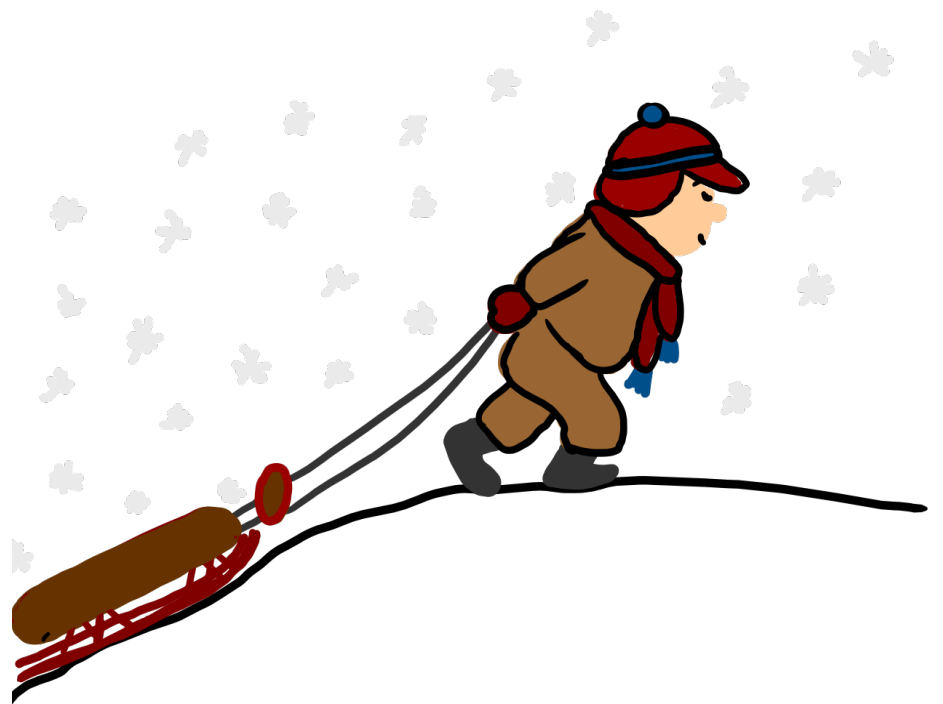
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Why sledding is a winter staple of mine

Sky Jo, STAFF WRITER

When the sun turns over her blanket, covering the sky with black and a hint of navy, leaving just a few spots for just enough stars to peek through, my friends and I start cleaning the garage to find sleds. Fully dressed from head to toe with mittens, socks, and a beanie, we meet on our favorite hill. Putting down our sleds on the snow-covered ground, zipping up our jackets, and tying our hair tight, we sleigh down the hill at the same time, sometimes on an Amazon box, sometimes on our back, sometimes squishing ourselves on the same sled. In the dark, the only thing we hear is the laughing and the squeaky noise from our shoes and the snow when we walk back up. No matter how fast or hard I try to slow my sled, there are times when I crash into a tree, breaking my sled or falling backward, hurting my head, but because we know by tomorrow most of this snow will be gone, we don't let it stop us. I think my friends and I enjoy sleighing as much as we do because you really can't do it an incorrect way — you drop your sleigh, roll forward, and enjoy the moment. By the time my friends yell "feel my face!" we start gathering our things and brushing off some of the snow. Going to check our phones, we can barely unlock our screens with our frozen fingers, so we walk to Small World to get hot chocolate. As we walk in, a trail of snow follows behind us, and finally, in the light, we laugh at how red our face is, a new scratch on our forehead, and a missing beanie or glove. The few-minutes wait for the hot chocolate is tragic, and that's when we start to feel every part of our body defrosting, our minds coming back alive. Once we feel a little dry, we leave the cafe and start heading home, looking forward to a warm shower and our cozy beds. ■



graphic: Lydia Madamapoulou

“The Nutcracker”: a graceful outcome after countless blisters and bruises

Elsa Barzilai, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



graphic: Lydia Madamapoulou

As a Jewish person, the holiday season is not my favorite time of year due to often feeling left out. Holiday albums, Christmas carols, sparkly lights, ugly sweaters, and Christmas spirit are all things that are excluded from my life. When I think about holiday traditions or fun anecdotes, I can't think of many. But one tradition that never fails to impress around the holidays is “The Nutcracker.” I can remember five-year-old me going to the theater to see “The Nutcracker,” an experience that many of you can probably relate to. But as a ballet dancer, my experience with “The Nutcracker” is a little different. Becoming a dancer has shown me the behind-the-scenes magic of this winter ballet, and truth of this magical winter ballet is a lot more brutal than many may think.

I have spent countless hours, days, and long weeks in the dance studio preparing for “The Nutcracker.” Rehearsals start in September, so the classic Christmas tunes are booming throughout the dance studio for over three months. I commit my Saturdays to hours of rehearsal and my Sundays to even more. I walk into the studio every weekend excited for the day ahead, but I am also left thinking about the relaxing weekend that I am missing out on. “The Nutcracker” has its good and bad parts. Preparing for “The Nutcracker” is full of ups and downs, like costume fittings and sewing pointe shoes, but also blisters, injuries, and ice buckets. For months, all that is on my mind is learning my dance, perfecting my dance, and performing my dance. Although it's exhausting, I never question if it was worth it in the end. Dance may bring me some amount of pain, but the joy that it provides is enough to overpower that pain.

When the time rolls around for me to start performing, it's a kind of excitement different from any other. I put on layers of makeup, gel down my hair, get into my costume, and prepare to step on stage and show the audience the product of my hardwork and dedication. Sometimes I feel elated by my performance, other times slightly disappointed, but it never matters because it is just another year of my favorite tradition. A tradition that will never get boring or tedious. A tradition that can be enjoyed by anyone, even those who don't celebrate Christmas. ■

What “It's a Wonderful Life” teaches us about appreciation

Sophie Zhang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Oftentimes, we focus so much on our regrets and failures that we fail to recognize the good in our lives. Although it may be a black-and-white film from the 1940s, “It's a Wonderful Life” contains messages that still hold true to this day.

On the eve of Christmas — a day full of warmth and supposed joy — George Bailey (James Stewart) has a grave thought of ending his life. However, the prayers of his friends and family reach the angels of heaven, including Clarence (Henry Travers), who is appointed to save George. As we dig through his memories, we view a story of his life, seeing how time by time he develops core relationships, loses the chance to fulfill his dreams, and grows to be a person who masters the art of sacrifice.

Missing out on going to college, being an architect, and exploring the world, George is bound to become bitter stuck in the small town of Bedford Falls. Instead of achieving his lofty dreams, he carries on and appears to be content with his father's business and Mary (Donna Reed), the love of his life. That is, until war breaks out and all that is well sets cold. Out of anguish, George lashes out, and his resentment of the past few decades gushes out, allowing us to see the shockingly real, raw version of him. Truly, George Bailey is a wonderful person for being so generous; he tries to maintain his brother's and friends' happiness in spite of his. But like others, he also isn't perfect and is full of faults. Perhaps this is the consequence of giving oneself too much, to the point one tips over.

At the one hour and forty minutes mark, the film begins to reach the climax and a rollercoaster of emotions is set in motion—this is my favorite part of the story. Clarence pays a visit to George, who shouts “I wish I'd never been born,” to which Clarence takes as a sign to make that wish come true. As they walk around town, George realizes everything has changed, and to the hilt, no one knows who he is. He staggers to reach his friends, mother, and the love of his life, explaining that he is someone important in their lives, but they simply don't understand. This sudden realization hits George, and he finally gets a full grasp onto the fact that he is leaving an impact on people, and that if he were to leave the world, no one would be the same. When he returns to his true life, he doesn't care about the predicament he has found himself in, but he laughs and weeps when he sees his friends and family — all of whom try to help him overcome the obstacle.



graphic: Caronline Gu

George gains a different view on his life that is much more positive, embodying the idea that although one may not have everything they want, what they've got at the moment is more valuable. It's the little moments when you're with people who care about you that you forget about the bitterness, and you realize everything is going to be okay. “It's a Wonderful Life” certainly isn't the average Christmas movie, but it had such an unexpected and delightful turn of events that it taught me to appreciate how wonderful life can be. After all, as Clarence tells George, “Each man's life touches so many other lives.” ■

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LEFT: Samuel Fosso, Tati—*Le Chef qui a vendu l'Afrique aux colons* (The Chief Who Sold Africa to the Colonists), 1997. The Walther Collection, New York / Neu-Ulm. © Samuel Fosso. Courtesy the artist; Jean Marc Patras, Paris; and The Walther Collection RIGHT: Dor Guez, *Lilies of the Field #1, Jerusalem, Mount Olives*, 2019–2020. Collection of the artist. © Dor Guez. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa; Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel; and Carlier Gebauer Gallery, Berlin, Germany

SPORTS



Epeeists Lisa Ndubisi '26 and Fangyi Yu '26 practice on the front fencing strip, while Foilists Hadrian Orban '24 and William compete on the back fencing strip. Maximilian Kassen '23 and Aviel Zur '26 keep score in the matches.

PHS fencing team stays on target this season

Wenya Huan, STAFF WRITER

“En garde. Prêt? Allez!” With the command, the fencers charge forward. Rubber soles squeak, blades meet, and sometimes, in a matter of seconds, a point has been scored.

Requiring lightning fast reflexes, quick footworks, and a strong mentality, fencing is a difficult sport to master. Fencing was originally a small school club with only ten participants, but became an official PHS winter sports team in 2012. Since then, it has grown tremendously in size. But in the previous two years, COVID-19 had an enormous impact on the team's meets and practices. Despite all this, the PHS fencing team came back strong to an in-person season last year.

“During my freshman year, we were super excited that one of our squads went to [New Jersey Fencing] States, but last year, a majority of them all went. We had a pleasant season even with the pandemic messing things up,” said girls fencing Captain Shira Kutin '23.

“My goals [...] are the same as they are every season: have the kids develop as fencers and grow as people.”

Last year, both the girls and boys team individually lost one match. In addition, girls saber and foil squads qualified for the New Jersey State tournament, and the entire boys team made it to the first round before losing 12-15 to West Windsor Plainsboro South.

“I want everyone to go to the states again this year,” said Kutin. “Last year we were just a place or two away. So far this season we've been working hard to make practices more productive and more organized.”

Not only has the team grown more competitively, but they have also become more unified over the course of last season. The boys captain Theodore Kopaliani '23 noted the great team environment he experienced.

“Our team was really bonded and it was a really comfortable experience to be with everyone. We chatted about the things we all liked, and we went to meets together. The team spirit was really nice and it definitely contributed to the results we had last year,” Kopaliani said.

This year, both Kutin and Kopaliani have been working together to rebuild the team's dynamic environment. Many fencers, who are totally new to the sport, have joined the

team. Head Fencing Coach Sam Blanchard is working towards having them all introduced and committed to the sport. His priority is helping the young players build a passion for fencing.

“My goal is not to collect championships, but to teach them the fun of the sport. We take people [who] have no experience at all. I want being on the fencing team to be a positive part of their day. Something they are looking forward to [...] I want them to learn the sport, enjoy it, and have fun fencing,” Blanchard said.

Blanchard's efforts are beginning to be realized. Rebecca Zhang '26, a new freshman fencer, expressed her eagerness to commit to the team.

“I'm really looking forward to making new friends and having fun in my first fencing season. I really want to be on the varsity team next year and I will do my best to work towards that goal by attending as many practices as possible and doing footworks at home,” Zhang said.

Having a team with passionate young players, along with experienced returning players, Coach Blanchard expressed his hopes for this season.

“My goals for this season are the same as they are every season: have the kids develop as fencers and grow as people,” Blanchard said.

PHS Boys Volleyball Club aims to create official team

Dester Selby-Salazar, STAFF WRITER

It's Tiger Time on a block day. While volleyball nets are being pulled up in the New Gym, dozens of Boys Volleyball Club members start to file in, ready to play. They begin warming up with simple sets and bumps, then transition into games. Cheers erupt as the teams win points.

Founded this year by Adam Stein '24, Matthew Chen '24, and Kaden Li '26, a group of friends with a common interest, the Boys Volleyball Club aims to gain support for an official boys volleyball team at PHS.

The club has two meetings each week. Their first meeting is every Thursday at lunch, and the members meet and analyze videos of professional volleyball games. During Tiger Time, they apply that knowledge to the court, and learn new skills before playing real games.

One challenge to creating an official team is maintaining consistent membership. Fortunately so far, the club has been a massive success, with dozens of members turning up each practice.

“To become a team, we need to consistently have 30 members to show Mr. Dzbenski that we have interest in the club and a team. And then I think that has to be applied to the school board to fund the team,” Stein said.

For students not used to playing volleyball, the club is a great opportunity to find out more about the sport. Henry Langmack '25 was introduced to volleyball during gymclass and was intrigued to sign up.

“It's my first time doing a club outside of school,” said Langmack. “I hope to meet new people and have fun.”



PHS Boys Volleyball Club members engage in a game at their Tiger Time free plays.

The supervisor of the club, PHS Math Teacher Ryan Gelenitis, has high hopes for the future. For him, the end goal is to create a varsity level volleyball team this spring that would be ready to compete in official competitions.

“We've been trying to get this started for a couple of years, but [the club] really started to take off this year,” said Gelenitis. “In years past, it's been a challenge of organizing and getting people aware that we were doing this. I think that really speaks to Adam's effort of spreading the word.”

At PHS, the girls volleyball team has had massive success, making it to their sectional finals this year. As such, a large portion of PHS students are aware and interested in the prospect of volleyball, which is great news for the Boys Volleyball Club.

“Growing up, I saw volleyball as more of a woman's sport,” said club member Andres Mejia '24. “Now, I see it as a sport for everyone and enjoy playing.”

The leaders welcome anyone who is willing to contribute to the friendly and supportive atmosphere, and most importantly, have a great time while doing it. Looking ahead, the future looks bright for the newly established club.

“As far as I know, there hasn't been a boys volleyball club that has had as much participation as this one,” said Stein. “Being able to play with so many different people, and seeing many new students is great.”

Athletes of the Month

Zach Della Rocca '23: track

Joshua Barzilai, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

With one foot against the block, one arm behind his back, and the other on the ground to support his body, Zach Della Rocca '23 awaits the gunshot to start the race. He exhales to calm his racing heart, but he knows the anxiety will go away as soon as he starts. Bang! The gun goes off, and he takes his first strides to propel him into the lead in the 400-meter sprint, his best event.

Della Rocca started his running career in the winter of his junior year. Prior to joining track, he had been playing soccer since he was five years old and even continued for a final season this fall. As a forward, his strength was his stamina during the game and his speed that caused him to beat the other players while sprinting to get the ball over a ninety-minute game.

"I was quick on the soccer field, so I was interested in seeing how fast I'd be while being timed competitively, and seeing if I would stand up against other track runners," Della Rocca said.

His first season was an unexpected one; he was introduced to big meets as an underdog. Within one season, he broke the PHS 200-meter and 400-meter records and qualified for New Balance Nationals, feats that other runners had been training for their entire careers.

"Breaking the school records for the 400m and 200m were my main goals I had going into the season, and then making nationals be the other one. Those are my two goals that make me so proud," Della Rocca said.

Having been acclimated to the team environment in soccer, Della Rocca had to adjust to a more independent sport. Competing against himself and other opponents, he had to find a new way to both rely on his teammates and be a team leader.

"He's very focused and determined. He is also very humble. He is always here for his teammates and gives really good advice on how to stay mentally focused and how to push yourself to the limit," says team captain Kate Prib '23.

Since he had only been running for two seasons, he was unaware of his talents and potential to run at a Division I program in college. His coach, Ben Samara, encouraged him to pursue the recruitment process. Seeing his potential, he helped him to reach out to the Princeton University coach.

"He was a really good soccer player, and a lot of times ability in other sports translates really well to track and field but track is a really grueling sport. So a lot of top athletes in our school from other teams don't always want to come out for track and test themselves. But you know, Zach did and it was clear right away that he had a lot of speed, a lot of endurance. I recommend trying track on your off-season because Zach did and now he's going to Princeton," said Samara.

After reaching out to other Ivy League institutions and top running programs, Zach reached out to the Princeton University coach this past summer.

"I reached out to Coach Abdullah, the assistant coach at Princeton and then he said, they would give me a chance and they asked for my transcripts," Della Rocca said.

He continued to contact the coach over the fall, and after careful consideration, chose Princeton.

"I got the impression that they take really good care of their athletes. They have free tutoring, paid study abroad, mental health resources like a sports psychologist and a normal psychologist," Della Rocca said.

Della Rocca, who struggled to stay mentally focused throughout his track career, has advice to future runners who hope to commit to collegiate track and field.

"Try to calm yourself down as much as you can, it's always a really anxiety producing environment. Just try to breathe and focus. But the thing with running is that it is short. It's not like a 90-minute game, so you don't really have much time to [lose]," Della Rocca said. ■



photo: Emily Qian

Ava Rose '23: wrestling

Jessica Chen, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Ava Rose '23 stares down the eyes of her opponent. The referee blows his whistle, and after only 25 seconds, Rose pins her opponent to the ground and wins the New Jersey Wrestling State Championship final.

Rose was introduced to wrestling by her oldest brother, Aiden Rose '21. At a young age, she would go to her brother's practices and do warm ups with the team. Rose wanted to do wrestling at that time, but felt prohibited because of the stigma against girls in wrestling. However, she joined the wrestling team in 7th grade and quickly excelled.

"From the beginning, I was kind of good, so if I was against other beginners, I would usually beat them. But honestly you can never really say you're really good because there's always people better than you. I think that it's more of looking at [how] I've improved."

With ambitious goals and immense mental strength, Rose has become one of New Jersey's top wrestling prospects. She finished first at the New Jersey state wrestling competition last year and is currently ranked 24th in the nation by USA Wrestling. She recently committed to Division I wrestling at Iowa State University.

"What Ava does very well is mental. She has a way that she prepares for competition: she thinks about what she wants to do, and knows what she wants to get done. And then she sets her goals, whether they're short term or long term, and then she makes sure she attacks those goals and she accomplishes them along the way," said Head Wrestling Coach Jess Monzo.

Her leadership and tenacity on the mats is what sets her up for success. Marty Brophy '23, who has been wrestling with Rose since middle school affirms her strength in the sport,

"She's an absolute beast, that lives and breathes the sport. If someone defines wrestling it's her," said Brophy.

However, one challenge of wrestling is cutting weight, which can potentially lead to negative health effects if not done in moderation. Wrestlers cut weight in order to go into a lower weight class for weigh-ins a few days before each match. When they meet the weight requirement, they can build up their muscle mass to hopefully be bigger than others in their weight class. In order to lose weight, Rose would wear up to five layers of clothing during exercise and restrict her diet.

"It just depends on what weight I would feel I would succeed the most at. But if I cut too much at once, it messes up my practice. If I'm smart about my weight, then maybe one practice is a little bit more rough, but it's usually more worth it [in the scope of the season]," Rose said.

Rose hopes to one day win the Olympic title for women's wrestling, and believes that through setting goals for her own personal improvement that an Olympic win is possible. She is always looking for ways to improve her skills and has recently committed to one of our nation's top wrestling programs at the University of Iowa.

"I set goals for myself to make me want to keep improving. Personally, I want to win the Olympics and stuff. So of course I have to keep working towards it and keep being inspired and what motivates me the most is my love for the sport. And I feel like I can get there," Rose said. ■

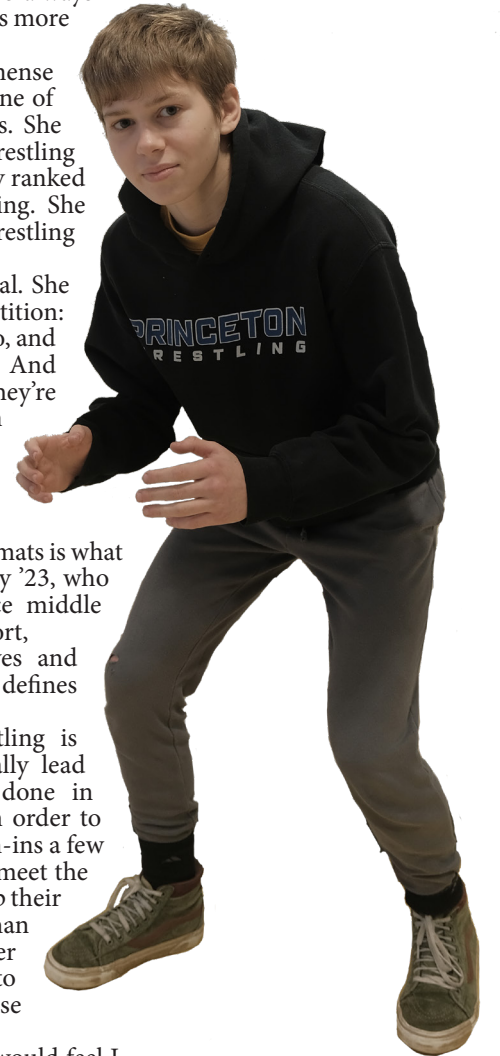


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photo: Lydia Madamopolou

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Qatar World Cup

Jessica Chen, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Celebrating the World Cup means championing human rights

For the past few weeks, as I walked through the hallways in between class and during break, I noticed that PHS really embodied the World Cup spirit. Throughout the school, passionate soccer fans wore their favorite team's jersey on game day and celebrated their impressive victories. Even as someone who rarely watches soccer, while tuning in to the World Cup, the zealous fans cheering in the stadium, the high stakes of each game, and the superb plays made it an exciting watching experience. However, for the Qatar World Cup, underneath this layer of excitement is a darker story of human rights abuses.

After Qatar won the 2022 World Cup bid in 2010, they began the long process of building new infrastructure, including eight stadiums and highway and airport expansions in 2014. Their estimated total spent on preparing this World Cup is close to \$220 billion. All this new infrastructure needed to be completed within seven years, so the Qatari government decided to turn to their migrant workers, which makes up 90 percent of the total Qatari population. Nearly 30,000 migrant workers were hired to build the stadiums alone.

Hiring migrant workers would not be a major issue in itself, but the Qatari government has been accused of reinforcing the systemic exploitation of these workers. According to the Guardian in 2021, since winning the World Cup bid, over 6,500 deaths have been reported solely due to unsafe working conditions and 37 deaths have been directly related to building the World Cup stadiums, though many suspect that these numbers are higher. These deaths may be attributed to the long hours and sweltering hot environment that were exacerbated by Qatar's infamous kafala system, which legally binds foreign workers to their employers. Although the kafala system has since been repealed, victims' families are still dealing with its adverse effects.

Migrant workers' lack of rights is just the beginning of a long list of abuses that the Qatari government supports. According to NPR in 2022, homosexuality is effectively criminalized and LGBTQ+ people are subject to conversion

therapy, harassment by officials, and possible imprisonment. Furthermore, sex outside of marriage is outlawed in Qatar, leading to the imprisonment of many rape victims. The World Cup would be pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the economy, indirectly fueling the continuation of these abuses.

Amidst international concern for these human rights violations, World Cup players have taken the protests to the fields. Ahead of the qualifiers, the German team lined up with black shirts, each with a letter that together spelled "HUMAN RIGHTS." The Dutch team wore shirts that read "Football supports change." Norwegian players wore T-shirts stating "Human rights on and off the pitch." In addition to the football players themselves, soccer fans have also protested in their own cities and boycotted the tournament. In response, Qatari officials have criticized the backlash, calling it a "double standard," since many Western countries were perfectly content with buying oil from Qatar before, but are now criticizing the government for their abuses.

As a result of these, many have decided to boycott this World Cup. However, with millions having already tuned in to watch such an iconic tournament, there would be little to no effect to simply boycott the event. We cannot simplify and stereotype their perspective, but we can't bypass the human rights that the Qatari government has clearly violated in pursuit of wealth for its own elites. Of course, we, as high school students, do not have the ability to directly influence international decisions, but we can always help empower the voices of the courageous migrant workers. We can donate to Amnesty International and support their campaign to compensate migrant workers in Qatar. We can use the #PayUpFIFA to raise awareness on social media. We can sign petitions that call on FIFA to address LGBTQ+ rights at the World Cup and the Ministry of Labour in Qatar to end forced labor. By bringing awareness to this issue in these simple ways, we can compensate those who toiled day and night to truly make this World Cup a success. ■



September 2013
Amnesty International uncovers human rights abuses with Qatar World Cup projects

December 14, 2022
Morocco becomes the first African nation to play in the World Cup semifinals

Qatar wins the World Cup bid
December 2010

World Cup Opening Ceremony
November 20, 2022

Argentina wins the World Cup
December 18, 2022



"My favorite thing about the World Cup was seeing how excited everyone was for the final."
- Mitalee Parischa '23

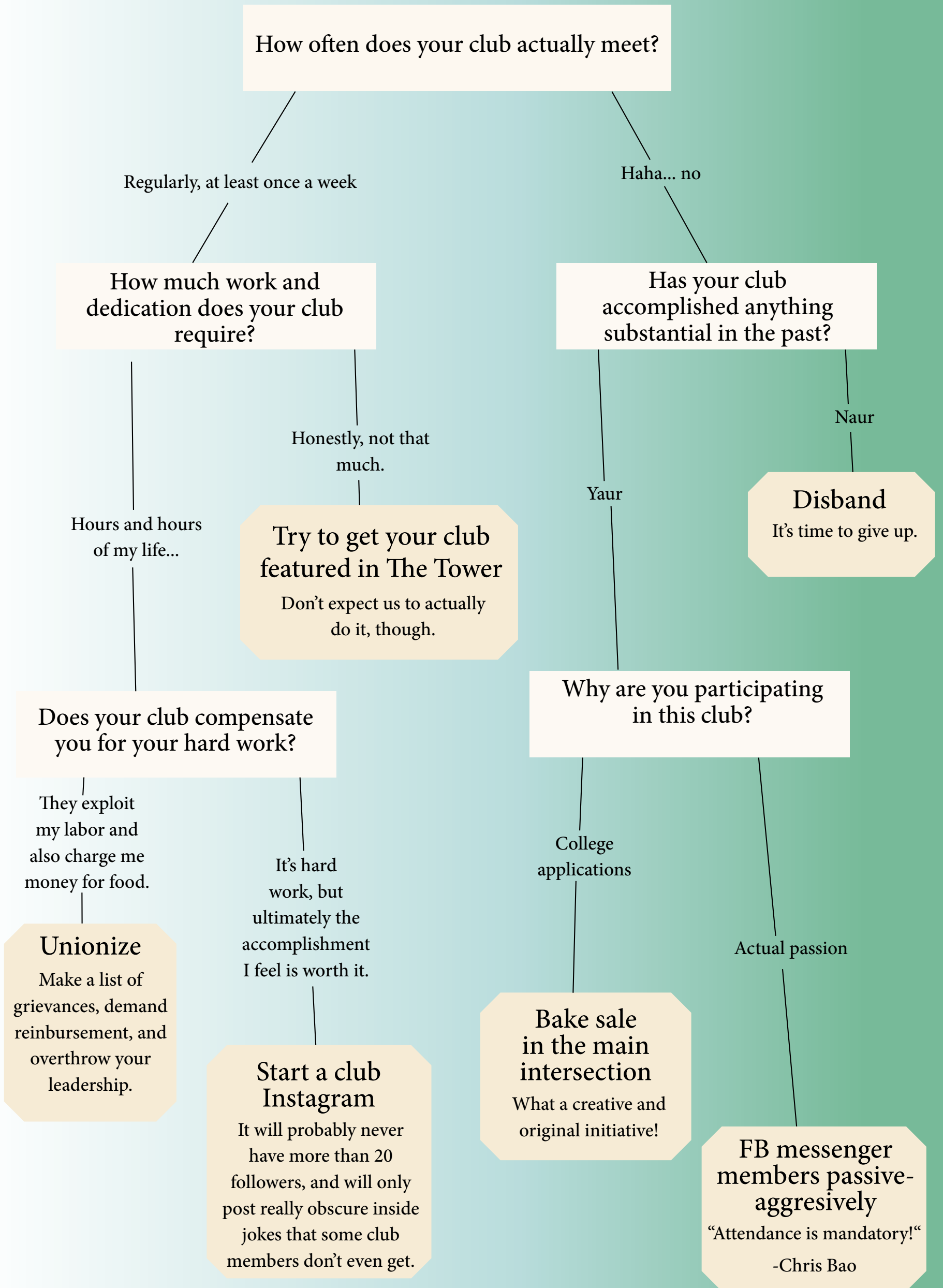
"My favorite moment was when Harry Kane missed the second penalty."
- Quentin Touzot '25

"When Messi scored his first goal against Mexico. That was when Messi's pressure was relieved and made them bounce back."
- Orion Wei '24

"When the Brazil team did their dance celebration."
- Grace Zeng '26



What is the logical next step for your club?



PHS GYM CLASSES TRAIN THE NEXT GENERATION OF SPEED WALKERS!!

Frank the Tank, SPEED WALKING MASTER
Jess the Tank, SPEED WALKING ACTIVIST
Shumoma the Tank, SPEED WALKING ENTHUSIAST
Rida the Tank, SPEED WALKING PROFESSIONAL

With PHS physical education instructors and students alike having years of experience “walking the track,” the athletic department will launch a new gym class curriculum to train the next generation of Olympic speed walkers, effective next month.

The new curriculum is called “Zooming-ology,” and consists of a three-part exercise program to achieve the desired Olympic speed walking skillset. The first part consists of walking the track. The second part consists of walking the track really fast. Lastly, gym teachers encourage all students to practice speed walking in classrooms and hallways.

“In my professional opinion, athletes these days need to find their inner peace. To achieve a state of complete nirvana, we encourage students to speed walk in their free time,” said Athletic Director Brian Dzbenksi, while speed walking at 40 miles per hour.

With the beginning of the curriculum on the horizon, the athletic department has been gearing up. They have placed speed walking limits as well as yield signs in the hallways to encourage their elite walkers to respect their ungifted classmates. However, there have been some traffic issues in the main intersection.

“No one is following the signs! It’s almost like the senior lot!” Mimi Gatzke ’23456 said.

Professional speed walking is classified by walking really fast (without the back toe leaving the ground until the heel of the front foot touches the ground and the supporting leg needs to be straightened until the body passes directly over it). The Olympic speed walking record is a 5:30 mile, but PHS Gym Teacher Patrick Noone, who’s had six years of walking the track, believes PHS students are capable of surpassing that time.

“It seems like a reach, but I believe PHS students are capable of anything,” remarked Jones while running a half-marathon. “Yesterday, I saw a student drop cheese



One Tank speed walks on the track, taking the gym teachers’ advice of practicing whenever possible.

on the gym floor during break and come back to class the next day to eat it. It really made me believe.”

PHS students have had years of experience “walking the track,” making them the perfect candidates for the rigorous new curriculum. For those who are unaware, “walking the track” is characterized by walking around the track for a full 42-minute period, and is the activity that defines the PHS gym class experience.

“I’ve been facilitating “walking the track” for the last 20 years,” said PHS Gym Teacher Carlos Salazar while benching 400 pounds. “From my years of experience as a physical education professional, it has really helped students, who are normally only and always on their phones, to get the blood flowing to their brains.”

Since the introduction of the new curriculum, some students are looking forward to beginning as soon as possible.

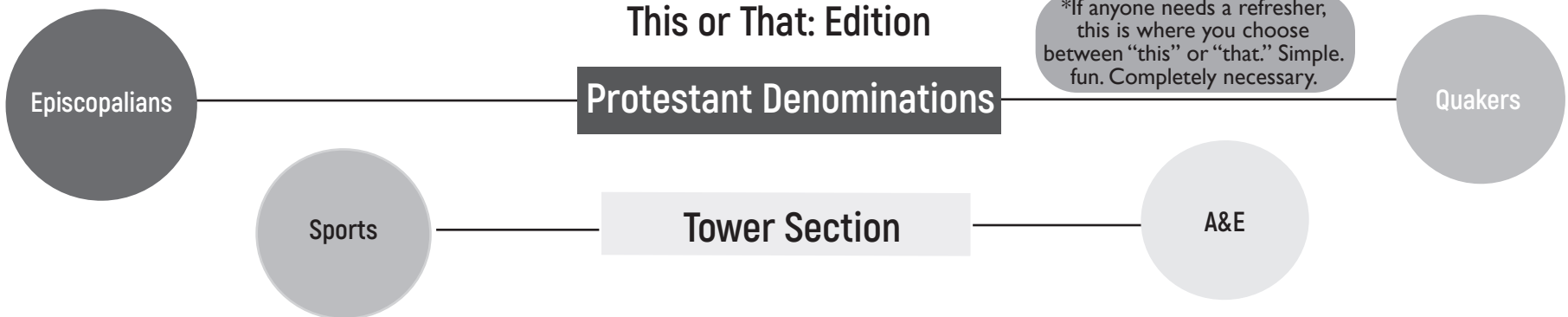
“I love walking. I want to make my family proud by bringing home the gold in 2024,” said Felix Aguayo ’24.

Others are skeptical. Though the new program does not specify what walking the track consists of, there is speculation that it could be more rigorous than the traditional walking.

“This bad.” Anika Hadap ’24 said (would not elaborate).

In response to the speculation about the curriculum and recent traffic violations, the athletic department did not give a definitive answer. They were too busy working out. In light of the new program, they had several collisions to work out with the local insurance companies. They just want everyone to know that a slow-walking ticket will earn you a trip to the catacombs.

“I’m a bit busy, but just so you know, we’re all about getting the blood moving, so you never know...” said Salazar, while deadlifting 500 pounds.



PHS CHOIRS AND BANDS DUKE IT OUT

Shum Shum and Co.

As of December 1st 2022, all PHS Choirs declared war on the PHS bands. Student Body President Ashley Chen ’23 had announced that she would need to cut funds for the music programs, and in the spirit of camaraderie and school spirit, encouraged the music programs to engage in Hunger Games style conflict to eliminate competition. The individual departments have decided to fight to the death.

Matty Baglio ’23 and Andre Penn ’23, representative general and lieutenant generals of the PHS Choirs, made an official declaration of war when PHS bands refused to drop out of the competition. Orchestra members, meanwhile, pledged their neutrality as they were far too engrossed in their daily qichi gong sessions to go to battle.

“As pacifists, we refused to take sides in this war and we instead believe that we should focus on mindfulness and synchronization of the body and soul,” said Vita Moss-Wang ’25, a PHS Orchestra member, as she was at goat yoga club in the new PHS dance studio.

“Baaaaa,” said the goat next to her.

The first of the long series of battles took place inside the auditorium. This battle, unlike the gruesome ones that followed, was planned by both choir and band. Each side observed proper battle etiquette. Their weapons of choice were rifles made from trombones on the band’s side, and microphones that had not received proper volume testing beforehand on the choir’s side..

“We shook hands and everything before proceeding to fight each other with trombones and drumsticks. We kind



Many fallen soldiers on the dirty school floor.

of wanted to recreate the battle- like Hamilton vs. Burr duel style,” said Audrey Kang ’24.

The next event was a surprise attack in the learning commons. Innocent and sweet members of Chorale I and II were minding their business on the couches, when all of a sudden a group of rowdy Nassau band II kids jumped out from behind the bookshelves. They proceeded to chase the innocent students all the way up into the Fagles room until Mr.Chmiel had to intervene. To support the moral cause for choir kids, PHS Choir director Vincent Metallo taught everyone a war chant to belt out in the hallways.

“Hashtag choir superiority, people!” Metallo sangid, clapping.

It wasn’t long before a plot twist was introduced into this already messy series of events. Otto Trueman ’23 was discovered to be a double agent, as he is a member of both choir and band. From the very beginning of the war, he declared his loyalty to choir, but it so happened that PHS Studio Band bribed him with Mr.Bongiovi’s Carvel ice cream,free pizza and he joined their side in secret.

“That was not a cool move but I don’t really care because Otto is my favorite,” said PHS Choir member Alex Margulis ’24.

“I don’t know why you’re interviewing me but I’m glad to be included,” said Rida Mian’23, PHS visual arts student. We’re not quite sure why we reached out to her for this article either.

Anyway.

Among the many casualties of the war were Isabella Kolleeny, a Jazz Ensemble clarinetist. Along with the rest of her section, she was willing to take on the entirety of the Testostertones, PHS’s ONLY all-male non-choir affiliated a capella group. While her group ended up beating the a capella dudes, Kolleeny had to confront her cruel fate.

“It’s ok, I’ll die for the cause,” Kolleeny said, as she took her last breath on the floor of the fitness center, where the battle had taken place.

To honor all who sacrificed themselves in battle, choir and band kids are each holding their own ceremonies to pay tribute to their comrades. For refreshments, they ransacked the cafeteria for waffle fries and cheesy bread bun things.

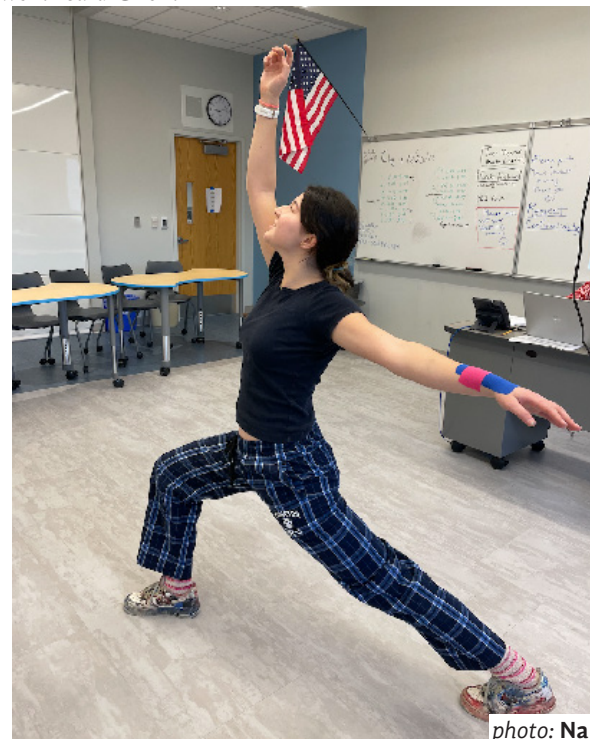
“Band kids are lit, and some of my best friends are band kids, but it’s not our fault if they are a public nuisance to the PHS student body,” said PHS Choir member Shumona Bhattacharjya ’24.

As a news source, we refuse to show any bias towards either side. However, our hearts go out to our brave singers on the front lines - we hope you guys win. Robes > weird sailor attireband uniforms.

“I honestly don’t know what is going to come out of this war and we’re probably just wasting more money, but oh well!” said Chen. ■



Fallen soldier on the floor.



Vita Moss-Wang ’25 completes a qi-gong sequence to prepare for the battle.