

# The Tower

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Princeton High School  
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## Hispanic heritage assembly showcases diversity and culture

Angela Chen, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR  
Daniel Gu and Rohan Srivastava, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photos: Charley Hu

Camila Del Castillo, Mona Mobin-Uddin '26, and Cecilia Reynolds '25 adjust their garments in preparation for the assembly.

On March 27, PHS students gathered in the new gym for a celebration of Hispanic culture and history. Following the administration's postponement of the assembly, which was originally scheduled for October, students from clubs such as Latinos Unidos and Generation 1 came together in January to begin the planning process. This year's assembly included numerous performances, including those that showcased the many perspectives of Hispanic people throughout the Princeton community.

In order to address PHS administration's concerns about the event's educational value, new performances focused on teaching various aspects of Hispanic culture, such as mariachi music and quinceañera dances, a tradition that celebrates a girl's 15th birthday common in many Latin American countries.

"A new event that we tried out that we hadn't done previous years for the assembly is a quinceañera: we [had] a bunch of quinceañeras with big dresses, and we [had] teachers to do a waltz with them," said Aimy Solares '26, one of the board members of Latinos Unidos.

Latinos Unidos led the preparation for assembly. As a completely student-led club, the planning board coordinated with several outside community groups, as well as club members from the organization Gen 1, to ensure all events and rehearsals happened smoothly.

"[The preparation is] chaotic ... we have to talk to everyone who's part of it to make sure they're up to date with everything, especially with our other events making sure everyone's doing their part," said Osbaldo Morales '25, co-president of Latinos Unidos.

This year's Hispanic Heritage celebration was the first to include several other PHS clubs in its performances. This added an extra challenge for the organizers, as they had to schedule rehearsal times that would work for all the students involved.

"For our assembly, usually we kind of just plan it out among ourselves, but this year we tried to get other clubs like PULSE involved and the PHS Step Team," said Solares. "We [also tried] to get other people outside of Latinos [Unidos] to come in and volunteer and help with the assembly."

Though the assembly was intended to celebrate Hispanic culture, students of all cultural backgrounds are encouraged to participate in future events.

"Can you dance? Can you sing? Can you move furniture around? I could. You can. Everyone's invited. Whoever wants to participate — even the administration — is invited. The community outside of the PHS community is also invited," said Idiana Mejia-Rodriguez, a Spanish teacher at PHS and the advisor of Latinos Unidos.

The organizers hope that the assembly not only successfully educated others on Hispanic culture and heritage, but also brought representation to Princeton's large, but often-underrepresented Hispanic community. The assembly was intended to serve as a public platform for their voices and ideas to showcase their diverse culture and form a sense of community.

"I think we just want them to feel seen and know that there's other kids just like them and just to [provide] representation. Hopefully [even] if they don't feel like they belong somewhere [else] in the school, they know that they belong in our club," said Solares.



Mona Mobin-Uddin '26, Ava Friedman '25, Sophia Penn '25, and Cecilia Reynolds '25 pose in traditional Hispanic attire for the assembly's fashion show.

## PHS students reflect on Asian Fest

Joy Chen, MULTIMEDIA CO-EDITOR  
Andrew Kuo, STAFF WRITER

The PHS community celebrated the 18th annual Asian Fest on March 21, with performances to showcase the diversity of Asian culture. Featured events included Chinese yo-yo, a rendition of the story of Diwali, and cultural dances. PHS Mandarin teacher Shwu-Fen Lin and students from several of PHS's language programs and cultural clubs organized the event.

Asian Fest, the result of months of collaboration and preparation, held unique significance for each of the student performers.

Jessica Zhang '26 performed in both C-pop (Chinese pop) and K-pop (Korean pop) dance routines. For Zhang, Asian Fest was an opportunity to discover how different cultures express themselves through the arts.

"I think music is one of the major art styles that can best express a certain culture because instruments, music, [and] lyrics contain deep meanings [about each] country's history, [and] how they evolved into the people they are," said Zhang.

Lisa Jin '25, a performer for the Japanese Club, emphasized that Asian Fest was a way to challenge stereotypes about the Asian identity. In covering performances from anime and K-pop, PHS students showcased the cultural impact of all Asian traditions, encouraging a wider understanding and appreciation for their culture.

"We wanted to highlight how vibrant and creative the community is," said Jin. "I know some people feel a bias [against] people who watch anime [and] the anime culture [in general]. After seeing our performance and dancing, I want to show [people] that we can actually do something that can be shown in public."

While these performances were a celebration of Asian culture for the entire PHS community, they also provided an opportunity for Asian student performers to connect to their own roots.

"I'm Korean, and so my Korean culture has always been very important to me, especially in America," said Kyuyoung Chung '26, a performer for the Asian American Club and Korean Cover Group Club. "In Princeton, the Korean community isn't very large, so it's nice [to] have this club to be able to share that piece of that culture."

In addition to the performances, student-led clubs set up cultural stations across the gym, offering food, lessons, and traditional activities. Those who attended could practice calligraphy, create origami, experiment with musical instruments, and participate in traditional games to connect further with Asian cultures.

"I think one of the most important things about Asian Fest is exploring, especially since we have so many different stations, food stalls, [and] game stations," said Zey Oral '25, a performer for the Korean Club. "You can explore [the] different aspects of other people's culture."

To prepare, students spent hours at rehearsal, developing activities, and designing posters. The theme for Asian Fest is chosen in November, followed by a poster competition open to all artists at PHS. Mandarin teacher Shwu-Fen Lin expressed thanks for all those involved in the event.

"I really appreciate the students who dedicated their time to this program. Throughout the 18 years [of Asian Fest], I'm just very surprised. Our students have so many talents. They did really wonderful," said Lin.



photos: Emily Kim

Top: William Chen '26, William Liao '26, Carson Lew-Williams '27, and Sebastian Su '27 perform a traditional Chinese lion dance. Bottom left: Debdeep Sen '26, Sofia Son '25, Radheka Purohit '27, Alice Liu '25, Jacqueline Zang '25, Leo Jusuf '25, and Sanjana Manghnani '25 act out the story of Diwali. Bottom right: Jessica Lee '26 performs a traditional Chinese dance.

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# Muslim Student Union hosts Interfaith Iftar

Harry Dweck, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR  
Emil Kapur, STAFF WRITER



Interfaith Iftar attendees Khaja Khateeb, Imam Levon Brown, Malachi Wood, Zainab Qureshi, Asma Qureshi '25, Eman El-Badawi, and Naba Sharif gather for a crescent lighting, a symbol of unity.



Asma Qureshi '25 delivers the land acknowledgment to start the Iftar and introduces the speakers and community guests.

The Interfaith Iftar at PHS, led by the Muslim Student Union (MSU) on March 17, brought together students, staff, and the local community to celebrate Ramadan and build connections among people of all faiths. The Iftar included both Muslim and non-Muslim students, community members, and several speakers.

“The Interfaith Iftar is an event for everyone to come and learn about the month of Ramadan and how Muslims break fast. Additionally, it’s for all of us to come together to embrace [our] similarities and differences so that we can all connect and become closer together,” said Asma Qureshi ’25, a leader of the Interfaith Iftar and the PHS MSU. “I want this to be a glimmer of hope and light in our very own Princeton. And I hope that after tonight, our hearts stay kind and pure to ourselves and to one another.”

The event began with a land acknowledgement, followed by several presenters from the local community. These speakers included Muslim imams and members of the Jewish and Christian communities, who all emphasized the

common beliefs of peace throughout different religions and cultures.

“This particular time in 2025 is a beautiful convergence of blessed days, as the month of Ramadan coincides with Lent, Passover, and the holiday of Easter and Good Friday,” said Levon Brown, an imam and one of the speakers at the Iftar. “It is a time of reflection and unity amongst our multicultural and diverse family, and we are in a country of diversity and multiculturalism. This is the land of freedom of religion and freedom of thought, and this is what we celebrate tonight at this blessed 4th annual Iftar event.”

The Iftar also had the first-ever crescent lighting at PHS. An Eid Committee brought a metal crescent to PHS, which had previously been lit in over 50 other communities throughout New Jersey, as a symbol of unity.

The event comes at a time of considerable tension in the Muslim community, especially after college campus protests over Palestine and divestment from Israel. On March 18, the Trump administration ordered the Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE) to seize Mahmoud Khalil for his role in Columbia’s Palestine protests last year. Though he is not accused of any charges, he faces potential deportation.

“[It’s easy] to come to a celebration and be with people who are of like minds, [but] for me, allyship means standing up for people when it’s not easy,” said Linda Oppenheim, a member of Not in Our Town Princeton.

“To some degree these days, it’s within my own community. This past Saturday, in my synagogue, when they asked people to stand to give names of people who are suffering physically or spiritually, I [said] the names of Khalil Mahmood and [his wife] Noor Abdullah.”

Malachi Wood, a French teacher at PHS and the advisor for the Muslim Union, noted the two goals of the Interfaith Iftar.

“I hope that non-Muslim students will have a better insight into Islam and the Muslim community, and see that it’s a warm, welcoming community. I hope that Muslim students will [be able to] feel valued as members of the community and see that there’s a place for them here — that they’re included,” said Wood.

Though students of all backgrounds were encouraged to attend, the Iftar included religious ceremonies that celebrate the end of the daily Muslim fast during the holy month of Ramadan — one of the five pillars of Islam, designed to strengthen Muslims’ relationship with God.

“Once everyone [broke] their fast, we [had] an imam come to lead the prayer, and whoever needed to pray pray[ed]. Otherwise, people [got] their dinner or observed if they want to. In the past years, we’ve usually had a final remark, called a Dua, which is basically a prayer for ... hope [and] peace in the world,” said Qureshi.

PHS began the tradition of the Iftar in 2017, though did not host it for several years. Qureshi and Wood began reviving the Iftar two years ago — this year, around 40 PHS students, administrators, faculty, and Princeton community members attended the event.

“I came [in part] to support the students, and also to learn more about Ramadan and Iftar,” said Valerie Henry, an administrative assistant at PHS. “I was happy to see my very first crescent lighting.”

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# PHS Profile: Sova Fisher

Asma Frough and Sanya Bhatt,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

PHS French teacher Sova Fisher’s journey to PHS spans multiple continents, cultures, and careers. Fisher spent her childhood in England, France, Taiwan, along with several short periods in Cambodia. After Cambodia’s collapse to the Khmer Rouge, Fisher’s family, who were stranded in Taiwan, decided to move to the United States.

Fisher’s relationship with language and culture has been important throughout her journey. She spent much of her education in French international schools, though she also spoke English and a bit of Mandarin.

“I went to French schools until 8th grade, then to an American high school, and then to [Dartmouth]. [Though] my parents ... wanted to keep the [Cambodian] culture and the tradition alive in the house, we weren’t living in Cambodia most of the time, so it was very difficult,” said Fisher.

At Dartmouth, Fisher enrolled as a pre-med student but later switched to a double major in biology and French. After a brief stint in sports publishing, she decided to pursue a PhD in French at her husband’s recommendation. Fisher was accepted into a PhD program at Princeton University, where she worked as a preceptor for undergraduate French classes in addition to her research.

“I was a little intellectually demanding, [which] was sort of a challenge, and I learned [after] one of the comments from an undergrad to try [and] sort ease into the discussion, rather than [start] with a big question,” said Fisher.

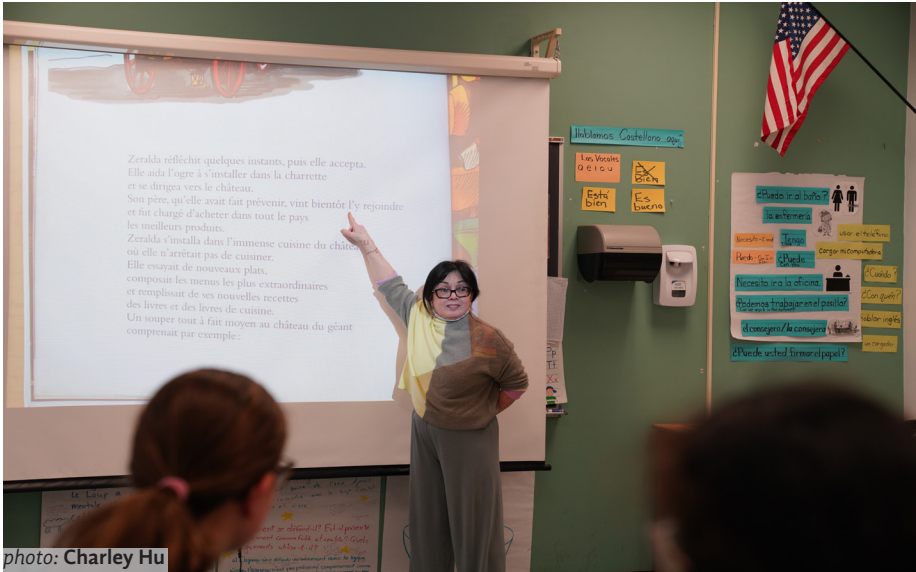
However, after a while, Fisher realized that she wasn’t very excited about the job prospects in academia if she were to complete her PhD.

“I wrote one chapter of my dissertation, and I thought, ‘you know what, I want to stay here. I don’t really want to, you know, go teach in Arkansas or Alabama.’ At a university level, you have to go where the job is, because there are not that many posts,” said Fisher.

Fisher decided to apply as a French teacher to the local Princeton Charter School, where one of her daughters attended.

“I got hired at the Charter School ... and from the Charter School, I came to [PHS],” said Fisher. “This is what I think is my calling: with all this other stuff that I’ve done in my life, it just never really sort of felt like I made a difference or that I have the passion for it, whereas with teaching French ... I love it. I love the culture, the language. I love teaching it, and I love the students.”

In the classroom, Fisher strives to create an environment where students feel engaged with each other and with the language.



Sova Fischer analyzes the text of “Le Géant de Zéralda,” a French children’s story, with her 8th period French IV A class.

“Whenever we do presentations, she gives us different partners and switches it up every time, so I know everyone in that class, and I have a really close bond with them all,” said Penelope Cardona-Fox ’26, a student in Fisher’s AP French class.

Fisher’s passion for language and teaching has been noticed by students and colleagues alike.

“In her classroom, students are expected to participate actively. There is a lot of group work, and the expectation is that everyone stays in the language throughout the class,” said Priscilla Russel, PHS’s world language supervisor. “[Fisher] is a very passionate teacher, and her enthusiasm is contagious. She loves teaching French, and this comes through in her classes.”

# Tower Investigates: Peer Group

Daniel da Costa and Elena Pavicevic,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Advisor Christian Gonzalez leads his class of Peer Group leaders in a group discussion about immigration.

As the final bell rings on a Tiger Day, Siddarth Chellapan ’28, along with the rest of PHS’s freshmen, heads to Peer Group to meet up with classmates and Peer Group leaders to discuss various social and school-related issues.

“It’s been beneficial for mental health because we get to learn more and get advice from upperclassmen,” said Chellapan. “It’s helped me understand how selecting courses work and understanding how the layout of the whole school system works.”

In the coming weeks, around 100 current PHS juniors will find out if they are one of the 63 applicants chosen to be Peer Group leaders next year. As part of the application, students have to answer written questions, attend interviews, and have teacher recommendations.

“It’s going to be my senior year next year, and I feel like I’ve done a lot of what the opportunities there are to offer here,” said Naomi Lygas ’26, a junior applying to be a Peer Group leader. “I just want to be able

to provide my advice for the freshmen that obviously don’t have as much experience.”

If they are selected, the rising seniors will attend a short leadership retreat and enroll in a daily, year-long class on how to be a Peer Group leader.

“We’re looking for things like self-awareness, problem-solving ability, compassion and empathy, moral responsibility, [and] good active listening skills,” said Christian Gonzalez, a Peer Group advisor. “At the same time, in the written application, we’re looking for authenticity, commitment, again, self-awareness, and then leadership potential.”

The activities, called “outreaches,” vary depending on the week, but are usually centered around building community and adapting to the challenges of high school.

“It changes a lot from group to group, but with our freshmen, you usually have better outreaches with more serious topics, which seems like that wouldn’t actually happen, but it’s like they’re more engaged with the material. And it makes it worth being there,” said Ava Tabart ’25, a Peer Group leader.

The goal for all activities is to develop a sense of community among freshmen.

“I think the most important thing is that the freshmen feel like they are connected, like they have a space here at PHS, which, although a very welcoming place, is still a high school ... and it can be hard to find a connection,” said Gonzalez.

Not only does Peer Group help freshmen adjust to a new school environment, it’s also a way for seniors to develop their leadership skills.

“I think a big part of it is actually to learn to be a leader of other people,” said Hayah Mian ’25, a current Peer Group leader. “You’re accommodating how [freshmen] work and how you work, and they’re kids, so it takes a couple of months to understand how they work and what works best.”

However, some freshmen remain critical of several aspects of the program.

“There’s a bunch of clubs that overlap with peer group, so I’m sad that I can’t go to those,” said John Patrick Aguilar ’28. “It could [also] be a little more energetic because most of the topics we approach with a sort of laziness. But I think that relies on [us] too, to bring more energy to the group.”

Mian and other peer group leaders are actively looking for ways that they can improve this program and make sure that PHS freshmen have the best possible experience.

“I think the way we talk about more serious topics [can be improved]. We talk about gender, sexuality, race and things, [which] I feel we are not completely prepared to dive deep into,” said Mian.

“[Having] more preparation and more freedom with what you do with your students, as not all students are the same and learn differently, [would improve the program].”

Peer Group [helps] freshmen adjust to a new environment [and allows] seniors to develop their leadership skills.



Peer Group leaders Tessa Thai ’25 and Ozan Koyluoglu ’25 lead Tara Venkatesh ’28, Chloe Wu ’28, Rohan Balasubramanian ’28, Pranav Shrivastava ’28, and Bram Reynolds ’28 in a reading of an I Am Lovable and Capable story.



**MONTHLY PROJECTS**



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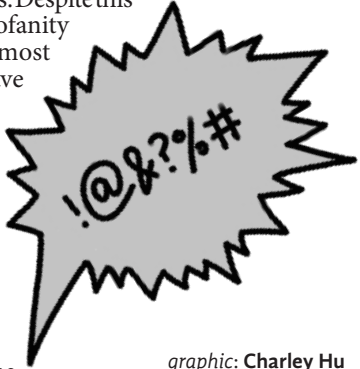
# OPINIONS

## The evolution of profanity

Asya Morozov and Joshua Huang,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

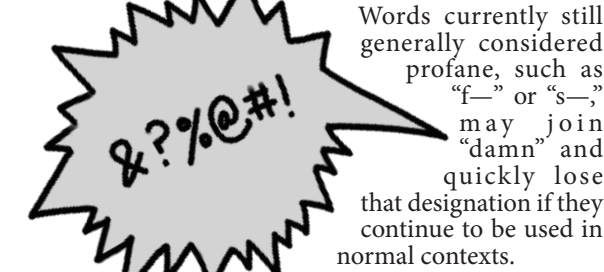
Conversations at PHS are often embedded with strings of expletives, which occasionally result in teachers warning students about their language. This seemingly normal occurrence demonstrates that although profanity has become desensitized for younger generations, it still carries weight for the older population and in professional environments. According to a paper from the International Journal of Literature, Language, and Linguistics (IJLLL), a survey comparing Generations X, Y, and Z reported that only 4 percent of Generation Z respondents reported no use of profanity, contrasting with a larger 43 percent of Generation X participants. Despite this disconnect between profanity and past generations, most popular curse words have deep historic roots and come directly from the Middle Ages.

According to the Saturday Evening Post, profanity in medieval times mostly revolved around religion and eventually became associated with immodesty. These examples allude to a greater trend in profanity — historically, profanity matches the needs and desires of its users and the society it exists in. For example, general profanity revolved around racial slurs in societies where racial discrimination was a norm. Today, what we define as profanity is once again changing, and it will likely cause a rift between Generation Z and older generations such as Generation X. For example, the word “damn” was considered a serious profanity in the 16th century. However, in the modern era, its profane nature has more or less dissipated. For instance,



graphic: Charley Hu

The New York Times and other major print publications have loose regulations surrounding the printing of “damn” in article titles, but will only include the word “f—” in “highly contentious quotations and interview transcripts”. The IJLLL paper found that Generation Z is more likely to use profanity light-heartedly or in casual conversation. Words currently still generally considered profane, such as “f—” or “s—,” may join “damn” and quickly lose that designation if they continue to be used in normal contexts.



In contrast to “damn,” certain words have had their profane statuses elevated. The r-slur, which began as a professional medical term for neurodivergent people, quickly became common profane vocabulary. After various social movements pointed out the r-slur’s derogatory nature towards neurodivergency, it began to be considered as a slur. Its slur status was then solidified in 2010 when President Barack Obama signed “Rosa’s Law,” which changed “mental retardation” to “intellectual disability.” It’s likely that the next wave of profanity will not be any new, strange words, but rather a revival of what is currently considered unacceptable. For example, most PHS students have likely heard at least one slur in the hallways. Offensive slurs such as the f-slur and the r-slur that have been phased out of popular vocabulary seem to be making a worrying comeback. Interestingly, this coincides with the

“Traditional curse words are losing their meaning for younger people.”

rise of conservatism among U.S. youth alongside racism, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, etc. These ideas and associated slang spread quickly in the fast-paced digital age, contributing to the loss of meaning for otherwise offensive words.

It is important to recall, though, that these changes in profanity are generally concentrated in younger generations. Older generations are less likely to change their perception of words they have always known as profane. This results in a generational language gap — when younger generations casually use words older generations may still perceive as highly hurtful, it can cause conflict. In the workplace, which many PHS students are only years away from entering, this dissonance could have particularly negative effects. Although curse words being used more casually isn’t inherently negative, it is important for younger people to remember that language does not change at the same rate for everyone.

As we, the younger half of Gen Z, begin to enter the professional sphere and transition into a world where we are not always mostly surrounded by our peers, we should start to be more mindful of our words — we will need to communicate effectively with other people, and profane language, although more casual for young people, is intrinsically divisive.

Traditional curse words are losing their meaning for younger people as they use them as casual terms, not as expressions of significant emotion. These developments should be taken seriously, as they will not only create far-reaching professional and interpersonal consequences, but could also accelerate the use of bigoted slurs in common conversation. Although these linguistic developments seem out of our hands, by consciously making an effort to remove profanity from our vocabularies, we can still make a difference.

## Tutors are not shortcuts to success

Aryan Singla, ONLINE CO-EDITOR

Having a tutor does not guarantee success. That is the mistake too many students make. The assumption goes like this: if you are struggling in a class, hiring a tutor will fix everything. A tutor will reteach the material, clarify confusion, and help you complete assignments. If you sit through lessons, understanding will come eventually. But that is not how learning works.

Students who rely on tutors as a safety net — thinking they can check out during class because they will “just relearn it later” — are setting themselves up for failure. A tutor is not a replacement for active engagement. They are not an alternative to thinking for yourself.

PHS students know this pattern too well. You can walk into the IDEAS Center on any given afternoon and see tutoring sessions happening at nearly every table. Some students are asking questions, engaging in discussion, and working through problems themselves. Others sit back, listen passively, and nod as if absorption was automatic. Then, they go home, take the test a few days later, and are surprised when their grade does not reflect all those hours with their tutor.

The reality is that success depends on active learning. That means asking questions in the moment, staying engaged with the material, and making an effort before seeking outside help. It means attempting the homework before assuming you need a tutor to walk you through it.

Tutors are not a shortcut. They should be a supplement: a way to refine understanding, clarify difficult concepts, and receive guidance on problem areas. The students who see real results from tutoring are the ones who already engage in class, who struggle first before seeking help, and who come to their tutor with specific questions instead of waiting to be spoon-fed the material. PHS offers plenty



photo: Charley Hu

Stellan Song ’28 and Vinay Lele ’28 study together in the IDEAS Center.

of resources for students: teachers who hold office hours, peer tutoring programs, and the IDEAS Center. However, none of it matters if students refuse to take the initiative themselves. The bottom line? If you are zoning out in class,

thinking your tutor will handle it later, you are wasting time — yours, your tutor’s, and your teacher’s. The real work happens in the classroom. Tutors can help, but only if you are willing to help yourself first.

## CHEERS

### STUFF WE LIKE

JENNIE’S new album

Spring WEATHER

GROUNDHOG DAY

MATCHA lattes

Tiger Deli CHICKEN NUGGETS

### STUFF WE DON’T

DoorDash THIEVES

Dry erase MARKERS

## JEERS

Spring POLLEN

OSCAR SNUBS

HEAVY perfume



# On the new physics enrollment policy

Aritra Ray, MANAGING EDITOR,  
Atharva Desai, Andrew Kuo, and Devina Sinha,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Princeton High School has introduced significant and jarring changes to its 2025–2026 science curriculum. Placement tests for AP Physics C have been eliminated, Accelerated Physics has replaced AP Physics 1 as a mandatory prerequisite, and students can no longer double up on a lab and non-lab science course. While these changes might seem minor, students wishing to explore their interest in science now face considerable uncertainty.

PHS physics teacher Oren Levi explained that the placement test was originally implemented due to the removal of AP Physics 1. “We wanted to give an opportunity to the students who would have been excluded from taking those classes because of the new requirements,” said Levi. “Now [that] the remaining students who would want to take the class have now had the opportunity to take a physics class ... the test was removed.” Additionally, he added that “the school is trying to ... slow down some of the kids that are overextending themselves.”

Since Accelerated Physics has replaced AP Physics 1 as a mandatory prerequisite, students who have finished AP Calculus BC will be forced to start the physics curriculum by taking algebra-based Accelerated Physics.

This isn't the first time sudden policy changes have derailed course study plans. Last year, eligibility changes preventing sophomores from taking AP Macro/Micro surprised students desiring to take those courses. Policy changes often come

from valid concern for students's well being, but their implementation leaves them flailing. In the current policy-making atmosphere, rising juniors and seniors are given no opportunity for effective high school planning — they have few options to meet new prerequisites put in place near the end of their high school journey.

As a result of this change, the academic goals of students interested in physics have been hindered, requiring them to take Physics 1 Accelerated before AP Physics. For example, if a student desires to take all the AP physics courses before junior year, having to take a prerequisite class in freshman year can delay these plans.

Many students didn't know about these changes until they had meetings with their counselors to finalize class schedules. Instead of creating roadblocks with no transparency, the district ought to implement policies with two-year delay periods.

A delay period for any new policy shelters current students from the potential changes it brings, while giving standardized effects to future students. As an example, a policy change made in the 2024–2025 school year should only go into effect in the 2026–2027 school year. This allows students to effectively plan and recalibrate their high school journey.

Until the district fundamentally changes the methodology of implementing new policies, placement tests can act as a stopgap to minimize the disruption on students' academic journeys.

“As a result of this change, the academic goals of students interested in physics have been hindered.”



graphic: Madison Charles

## PHS STUDENT TESTIMONIALS AND EXPERIENCES

“Start [the change] with the freshmen, or give a timeline that allows people to plan out their schedules a lot more. [The school] can't just make these sudden changes and expect people to just like not try [to] figure out how they can actually take this class. [The school] can't just be like, 'Oh, hey, we made this switch, why are you upset about it?'”

- Elif Cam '26

“I like to keep my options open ... limiting access to additional science courses will make it harder to build strong foundations in some subjects and prevent students from meeting prerequisites of classes they want to take.”

- Erini Hana '27

“The whole reason I took chem this year ... was that I can test into Physics C next year, because from what I've heard ... Physics 1 Accelerated doesn't prepare you properly. So I think I would just study it by myself, but obviously that [won't] work right now. So I'm still kind of stuck deciding between ... AP Chem or Physics 1 next year. [Unfortunately] Physics 1 probably would not be able [to help] towards my objective field.”

- Felix Yu '27

“It makes no sense. I'm someone who likes to self-study physics and the school doesn't allow you to take a test to prove that you have the ability to be in Physics C. You'll be confined to a more rigid curriculum.”

- Melvin Qiu '27, current AP Physics C student

## PHS SPEAKS OUT

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PHS EVENT?

Joy Chen and Aarna Vachhrajani, MULTIMEDIA CO-EDITORS



“PROBABLY THE HOMECOMING GAME BECAUSE THE WHOLE SCHOOL GETS INVOLVED AND IT'S [A] REALLY ENERGETIC EVENT.”

- AMYRA SHUKLA '27



“PROBABLY THE CLUB FAIR, BECAUSE THERE'S A LOT OF FOOD AND I CAN EAT AND STUFF.”

- AIDEN DOUCE '27



“MY FAVORITE PRINCETON HIGH SCHOOL EVENT IS THE BLACK HISTORY MONTH ASSEMBLY ... BECAUSE I THOUGHT IT WAS VERY INTERESTING TO LEARN ABOUT DIFFERENT CULTURES.”

- LIAM MCCLOSKEY '28



“PROBABLY PROM, BECAUSE YOU GET TO GO WITH A DATE AND THEY GET TO ASK YOU WITH A POSTER AND STUFF. THEN ... YOU CAN SEE ALL YOUR FRIENDS AND [THEIR] DRESSES.”

- CAROLINE GENESTIN '26





# The echo chamber of elite pre-college programs

Editorial

This summer, many PHS students will go to Harvard (or Yale or UPenn). But they won't be attending Harvard College — instead, they'll spend around \$5,000 to join Harvard's pre-college summer school, a two-week program that offers non-credit college level courses for around 2,800 high school students.

Pre-college programs are offered by most elite universities, including all Ivy League schools, with the exception of Princeton University. The programs are marketed as opportunities to explore academic passion and experience life on a college campus, though many students are also swayed by the belief that attendance will help them in the college admission process.

Although attending a pre-college program from a prestigious school sounds alluring, it's not worth it. In addition to being a waste of both time and money, these programs present serious ethical problems.

PHS students as is are already in an elite academic environment, just a couple blocks away from one of the most prestigious universities in the world. The last thing we need is even more time in this bubble of exclusive academia.

First, consider who else is attending: likely wealthy students with the means to spend thousands on programs that generally offer little financial aid, with interests that fall within the limited range of courses offered. Being surrounded with such similar students, in such a similar academic environment, presents little new challenges or experiences.

This isolationism, or "Ivory Tower" seclusion, has been brought to attention in every recent major election, particularly since the rise of Donald Trump and his crusade

against elite institutions for "indoctrinating students" and being "out of touch." Though not necessarily correct, Trump's claims do reflect a widening gap between college-educated and non-college-educated voters: in 2024, Trump secured non-college educated voters by 28 percentage points, but fell short of support from college educated voters by 8 percentage points.

It's critical that as high school students we don't continue to revel in this polarization, but instead work to engage with a bigger world — the real world. It's admittedly difficult to do this in the school year, but the summers present a strong opportunity.

Further, many of the courses at pre-college programs are simply not effective ways to learn material. This year, Harvard is offering a two-week course called "Happiness and the Meaning of Life." The topic, while interesting, is simply not something that can meaningfully be covered in such a short time frame. And, though most pre-college programs advertise a rigorous environment similar to what can be expected from an undergraduate course, most programs are taught by graduate students, not professors.

Finally, as an added benefit: not going to pre-college programs, but instead spending the summer engaged in the real world community, will make for a more interesting individual.

Princeton (and the broader Mercer County) offers so many opportunities for true personal growth. From volunteering at a local organization to working a summer job, there are so many experiences that present a chance to learn in a new way, to face a real challenge, or to encounter a new perspective.

## The Tower

Princeton High School

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### Mission Statement

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.

### Editorial Board

The Editorial Board of the Tower consists of a select group of 23 Tower 2025 staff members. The views of board members are accurately reflected in the editorial, which is co-written each month by the Board with primary authorship changing monthly.

### Letter and Submission Policy

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The newspaper accepts advice from the administration and the advisors in regard to the newspaper's content; however, the final decision to print the content lies with the Editor-in-Chief. The Tower's articles do not necessarily represent the views of the administration, faculty, or staff.

# NIH funding cuts hurt innovation

Rohan Srivastava and Fangwu Yu,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Within two months of taking office, President Donald Trump has already cut funding for many departments within the federal government through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), headed by Elon Musk. The cuts to the National Institute of Health (NIH) hit especially hard, removing funding from many research institutions.

The NIH is the federal agency responsible for conducting and supporting medical research. Their mission statement is to "seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability."

According to the New York Times, in 2024, \$32 billion was spent on grants, with \$23 billion going to direct costs and \$9 billion going to overhead costs. These overhead costs are what the Trump administration attempts to target, but what they're missing is that overhead costs are incredibly important to research. Without them, the United States will fall behind in the scope of worldwide research progress.

The NIH has served an essential role in the development of medications in the U.S. A data assessment from the JAMA Health Forum found that the NIH funded the creation of 99% of drugs approved between 2010 and 2019, ranging from cancer treatments to advancements in gene editing. With funding being frozen for some institutions, these developments are bound to grind to a halt. This means

that the United States simply will not be able to research as quickly as other countries. This inevitably leads to less innovation, as the funds for the backend operations required aren't being provided.

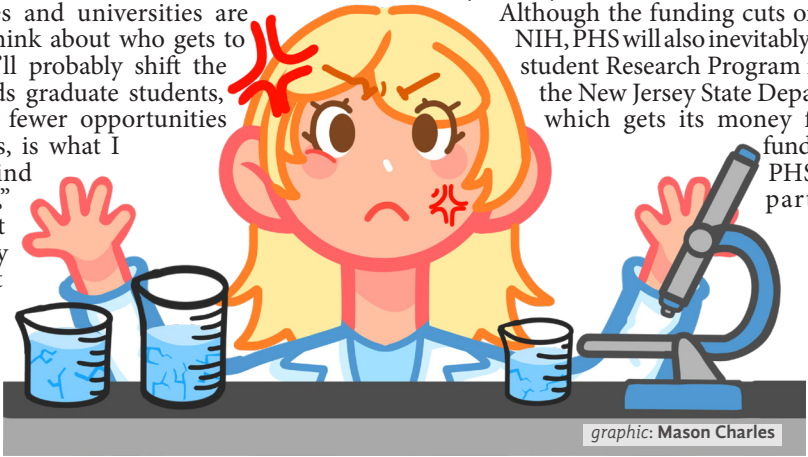
Biology teacher and PHS Research Program head Jennifer Smolyn relied on government funding for the multiple research programs and labs that she participated in during her college years.

"I think colleges and universities are going to have to think about who gets to do research. They'll probably shift the focus more towards graduate students, and there will be fewer opportunities for undergraduates, is what I would guess is kind of the easiest fix," said Smolyn. "But they will definitely need to think about where the funding is going, how they're allocating resources, and to whom."

Smolyn says that she is trying to be

optimistic about the situation, but reading the news about these funding cuts is alarming and discouraging. However, she is still positive about the fact that the U.S. will remain a world leader in scientific research and progress despite these cuts. "I don't know that I would say we'll lose our position entirely, but I do think it will be more of a challenge to ... hold the standard of academic research that we do," says Smolyn.

Although the funding cuts only directly affect the NIH, PHS will also inevitably feel its tremors. As the student Research Program relies on money from the New Jersey State Department of Education, which gets its money from taxpayers, this funding cut will likely affect PHS's ability to support particularly resource-heavy student projects. Research is an integral part of PHS's academic culture, and PHS students should be aware of these far reaching policies when casting their votes in the future.



## TOWER MULTIMEDIA SHORTS



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# BIRD WATCHING

with VANGUARD



## Birds of Princeton: interviewing local birdwatchers

Asma Frough and Angelica Hu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

As spring begins to emerge from the frost of winter, birds make the long migratory flight back to colder regions, preparing themselves for the breeding season. It’s possible to observe this influx through birding, a common hobby that involves the identification of different species of birds, observing their behaviors, and appreciating their beauty and diversity. Many people have turned this activity into a hobby and different organizations host birdwatching events.

“I really represent myself as a birder, but I am a life member of the New Jersey Audubon Society ... I also do a lot of volunteering with the Watershed Institute,” said Mary-Joan Gaynor, a long-time Princeton resident and avid birdwatcher.

While some people participate in various activities of birdwatching within an organization, others do it for fun.

“I describe myself as a hobbyist. I am aware of the Princeton Birding Society, which I haven't been able to join yet for a bird-watching excursion. I’ve hosted some of my classmates for bird watching at Institute Woods, and I recently auctioned a community service auction bird watching trip at Institute Woods later this year,” said Matteo Treviño, a student at Princeton University.



Past birding events such as the Great Backyard Bird Count, had participants monitor bird feeders and record their observations, a way for people to still interact with nature while staying indoors. Upcoming birding events such as the World Series of Birding, are hosted by the New Jersey Audubon, encouraging participants to collaborate on recording as many bird species as possible, through visual and/or auditory cues.

“It's sort of a competition ... You get involved with a team and you go out for a period of 24 hours and record as many bird species as you can recognize visually or auditorily,” said Gaynor.

In terms of equipment, birdwatching is generally an outdoor activity that involves keen sight and patience. People mainly use binoculars and writing utensils, mainly for viewing the birds and providing a description. Newer equipment such as digiscopes, which are cameras attached to scopes, enable both bird watching and photography. Other advancements in technology allow birdwatchers to identify species of birds based on a few observations, such as Cornell Labs’ app Merlin Bird ID.

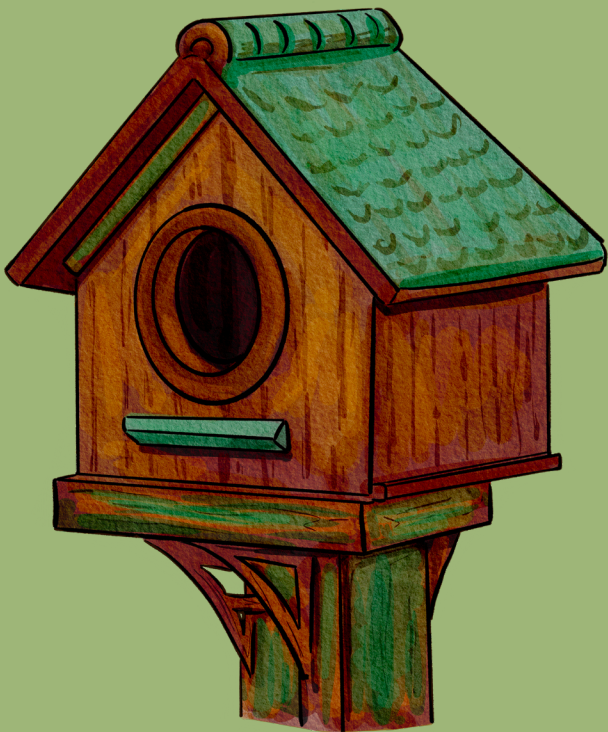
“You put in the size [and] shape of the bird and it will figure out [its species] ... They [also] have a sound ID feature on the app, [which will listen] to the bird song or call and it will show you what the bird is,” said Gaynor.

However, there are concerns about the state of the environment. The recent avian flu has impacted birds such as chickens and hawks and is fatal for all affected species. Alterations to the habitats of local organisms affect the populations of birds, as well as many other animals. The ingestion of the pesticide DDT once posed a dire concern to the bald eagle population, which declined and became critically endangered.

“[Before], you would really have to try hard to see one in New Jersey ... Now there are bald eagle pairs. There are hundreds of them in the state. And that was because [of] the banning of DDT,” said Gaynor.

Nature cleanups are a collective effort, allowing for both the maintenance of the habitat and for forming new connections with members of the community. Establishments such as the Watershed Institute and Friends of Princeton host many cleanups at natural preserves, such as the Mountain Lakes Preserve. For conservation efforts in everyday life, civilians can reduce the consumption of electricity and engage in reducing plastic pollution by recycling and opting for reusable options.

The conservation of wildlife is crucial for the survival of birds, serving as the staples of nature. One of nature’s most recognizable sounds is the singing of birds, vital for the beauty of the environment and for maintaining ecosystem balance. The preservation of nature’s well-being is not only vital for human life but also for the countless other organisms that interact with birds.



graphics: Charley Hu



# How To Train Your Chicken: Interviews with PHS Chicken Owners

Jaisel Iyer and Nomsa Nganang, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Have you ever wondered what it’s like to raise your own chickens? Although it is fairly uncommon, it’s still a fascinating and fulfilling hobby, one which some students and teachers have plenty of experience with — such as PHS French teacher Janelle Wilkinson and student Nicholas Kopaliani ’26. From collecting fresh eggs to facing challenges with pesky predators, owning chickens has just as many rewards as it does responsibilities.

## Janelle Wilkinson

**Q: What inspired you to start raising chickens?**

A: When we lived in Princeton we had between three and five chickens on a small quarter-acre lot. Now we have a farm, and there are two types of chickens: meat chickens and laying chickens. It was important [for us] to know where our food was coming from and it grew from the garden to chickens. We also had turkeys in Princeton.

**Q: What kind of daily routine goes into taking care of your chickens?**

A: You take the eggs out of the nesting box every day in the afternoon. [The chickens] lay in the morning, are very vocal about it, and wander around the grass and the farm. The rooster is the last one into the coop at night and makes sure that all the girls are back safe and then you lock the door once the sun goes down and it keeps them safe for the night.

**Q: What advice would you give someone looking to start raising chickens?**

A: The first thing I would say is they need to check the Princeton ordinances. For a while, chickens were not allowed in Princeton since they were considered farm animals. Princeton has evolved and realized that chickens are not necessarily farm animals and you can consider them pets and that is the loophole there. Just be sure to check the ordinance because they may allow chickens as chickens, not as pets. [Besides that] they would need a waterer, a feeder, a small coop, and chickens.



photo: Nomsa Nganang  
Madame Wilkinson shows off her chicken eggs.

## Nicholas Kopaliani

**Q: How many chickens do you have and what kind of breeds are they?**

A: We currently have 11 chickens, and they’re pretty much all different breeds. There’s usually two of the same breed, and there’s just a whole bunch of them. They die sometimes — they are chickens, so they are going to get hunted. Princeton has way too many foxes, so we’ve been buying new ones occasionally, which is why we currently have an odd number of chickens. There’s this one breed — the entire chicken is just black including the feathers which is really cool. They tend to have this blue shine in the sun which looks really nice.

**Q: What were some of the biggest challenges raising your own chickens?**

A: Keeping them safe has probably been the biggest challenge because foxes, raccoons, hawks. They all really want chicken. There are a lot of those in Princeton, so we put a lot of fences up. We also recently got a dog, because these animals kept trying to hunt them which was really annoying.

**Q: What are some of the biggest benefits of raising your own chickens? What are your favorite parts?**

A: We get a lot of eggs, but Princeton doesn’t let you sell eggs. So instead, we use them to make pasta or just give them away a lot. The chickens have been really productive because it’s been getting warmer. Typically we get around eight, but it tends to build up, so we make pasta a lot. It’s like four eggs a batch, and we just let it sit. In the end, you get great pasta, so I think that’s my favorite.



# Cultural Importance of Birds in Native American Tribes

Anaya Sinha and Vanessa He, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Birds hold deep cultural and spiritual significance to many Native Americans, symbolizing freedom, wisdom, and strength. Tribes across North America view birds not just as little fledglings, but as guides and messengers that shape their beliefs and customs. Among these tribes are the Lenni Lenape, who originally lived in what is now New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and Delaware. Hunting was an essential part of their lifestyle, including the hunting of birds such as pigeons, eagles, hawks, turkeys, and herons.

However, birds weren’t just a food source to these people; birds were seen as sacred beings that connected the earth to heaven. The eagle was praised for its strength, whereas the owl was seen as a keeper of wisdom, and the blue jay was a symbol of communication, guidance, and change. Eagle feathers were often used in religious ceremonies and were believed to carry prayers to the Great Spirit — receiving or wearing a feather was an honor. Stories were also told about many birds; a popular Lenape legend was about the Rainbow or Many-Colored Crow. These crows represented selflessness and service, further emphasizing the significance of birds in their culture.

Many other tribes across the continent share a connection to birds. For example, the Hopi in the Southwest believe that birds are mediators between humans and spirits. The Lakota and Cheyenne view the thunderbird as a very powerful and supernatural being that brings beautiful rain and controlled harsh storms. The Cherokee believe that the red-tailed hawk brought messages from ancestors, offering wisdom and protection.

Birds’ ability to fly gives them a point beyond human reach, symbolizing insight, vision, and the power to look beyond earthly concerns. This is why many tribes see birds as guiding spirits or totems that help individuals connect with higher truths, and why people look up to them.

Their presence in stories and ceremonies reflects their importance as a guide, spiritual messengers, and protectors. Birds remind people of their connections to nature and the importance of living in harmony alongside the world around them.

# The Accidental Birdwatcher

Aritra Ray, MANAGING EDITOR

When my sixth-grade Science Olympiad coach first assigned me this topic, I accepted it with a grumble. I could barely pronounce it – “Orni,” I called it.

Little did I know ornithology would soon be an all-encompassing passion that made navigating my daily surroundings feel like a treasure hunt.

The hours spent flipping through the Peterson Bird Guide led to me staring out my window, hoping for a glimpse at this new world that had been opened for me. Routine walks became eye-opening moments. Only through birding did I come to appreciate the true biodiversity that surrounded me. I soon set up bird feeders in my backyard, and I was amazed by the variety of birds that lived in the area’s trees. From cardinals and blue jays to an endless array of sparrows, every new sighting amazed me like it was my first.

Every excursion soon turned into a birding expedition. The biggest joy I derive from birding is the puzzle of “ID”: identifying them within a fleeting second. It’s analogous to putting together a puzzle: putting together small clues to find the bigger picture. Whether its a single streak on a wing or their unique call, birding drives me to challenge myself to look at a challenge from aspects I’d never consider.

Of all the experiences that I’ve acquired from birdwatching, observance is perhaps one that I’ve come to appreciate the most. Birdwatching has taught me to see beyond the surface level. It is an exercise for all the senses; bird calls are the background music of every neighborhood, and their variety leaves me in awe.

Birdwatching is also a humbling experience, and it speaks to how much more there is to learn. More often than not, birds present a living mystery. They aren’t what they initially seem to be. But effective birding is about creating a mindset to think beyond the obvious, and consider every possibility. My birding experience has taught me that no possibility is too outlandish. What might look like a finch could actually be a female cardinal, but how can you tell? Well sometimes, you just can’t. And that’s the beauty of nature. There are no absolutes, only ambiguity and possibility.

For some, exotic birds are the draw – macaws, flamingos, and the like. But my true passion is about backyard birds. Backyard birding shows us that the greenery we take for granted is in reality a privilege, and we ought to enjoy what is in our backyard instead of reaching for increasingly exotic species brought to market by unethical bird breeders. Backyard bird feeders offer me a glimpse of birds in their natural habitats – one nectar feeder was even frequented by a ruby-throated hummingbird last spring!

At the time when the world seems to spin faster than ever, birdwatching connects me with nature and pulls me away from the world of screens and deadlines. Because there is no deadline with a birdwatch. Nature sets the clock, and nature’s humbling power reigns supreme.

graphics: Charley Hu

# Birds as Symbols in Literature

Aarna Dharmavarapu, STAFF WRITER  
Bruno Giacoppo, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Birds can be found in every genre of literature, whether that is horror, drama, or fantasy. However, these feathery friends of ours aren’t just here for the sake of having animals in a book. Birds and animals that take flight usually represent something important:

**“I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou**

“I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” is an autobiography published in 1969 by the poet Maya Angelou. The title of the book was inspired by Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s poem “Sympathy,” which used the symbol of a caged bird to reflect the struggles of marginalized social groups. Angelou’s story recounts her childhood experiences with racism and trauma in the South, an area plagued by segregation. By juxtaposing a caged and a free bird, Angelou emphasizes the difference in the way that traditionally oppressed social groups like Black Americans live in comparison to privileged populations.

The caged bird acts as a symbol of oppression and the racism and discrimination that Black Americans face. However, despite being confined, it continues to sing, representing the resilience of the Black American community and their fight for justice. Today, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” continues to illustrate the struggles of marginalized groups. Angelou’s work has catalyzed various social justice movements, inspiring these communities to share their own experiences and advocate for equality.

**“To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee**

Published in 1960, Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird” illustrates what life was like in the South during the Great Depression. The novel is written through the perspective of Scout Finch, as her father Atticus defends a Black man, named Tom Robinson, who was falsely accused of assaulting a white woman. Through her perspective, readers learn the harsh reality of racism and justice, as Robinson battles a heavily biased legal system that is against him from the start, simply due to the color of his skin.

The mockingbird is used as a symbol of innocence, righteousness, and those who are unfairly treated by society. Atticus teaches his children that killing a mockingbird is morally wrong, as they do no harm, only bringing music and beauty to the world. Atticus’s warning against killing mockingbirds reflects his defense of “mockingbirds” like Tom Robinson, who, like many vulnerable groups, suffers injustice solely for existing. The novel’s message about morality, having empathy for others, and fighting against injustices in society remains relevant and important to the present day, where many marginalized groups are constantly put at a disadvantage.



# Amazingly Unique Birds

Maxime DeVico, STAFF WRITER

## Quetzal

The quetzal bird lives in humid regions of Central and South America. The Aztecs and Mayans used to view them as being “gods of air.” Male quetzals have red, green, and blue coloring to attract the females. The females have a duller shade to them as they don’t need to have vibrant colors in order to attract a mate.



## Hummingbird

Hummingbirds can fly at speeds of up to 61 miles per hour and are one of the only birds that can fly backwards. They are also some of the smallest birds but have some of the most colorful colors. Due to their unique wing movements, they make a unique whirring sound whenever they fly overhead.

## Flamingo

These iconic pink birds earn their color from their diet. Since they regularly eat shrimp, a dye in the shrimp causes the birds’ feathers to turn a pinkish-red color. Unlike many birds, flamingos build their nests using mud. The flamingo’s signature one-leg-up pose can be held while they are sleeping, as they don’t need to lie down.



## Kiwi

Kiwis are flightless birds that are indigenous to New Zealand. They are quickly becoming endangered — only 68,000 of them are left in the world, and roughly 20 of them die each week. With their sturdy legs being a third of their body weight, the kiwi can run as quickly as a human.





# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## Cast, crew, and orchestra shine in “Groundhog Day” musical

**Asma Frough, STAFF WRITER**  
**Dhruv Khanna, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

PHS’s Spectacle Theatre brought a classic comedy to life this year with “Groundhog Day: The Musical” from March 13–15 in the Performing Arts Center. Based on the 1993 film of the same name, the musical follows Phil Connors, a weatherman who finds himself reliving Groundhog Day over and over again in the small town of Punxsutawney. Directed by drama teacher Julianna Krawiecki, the show highlighted the talents of the students involved through acting, music, dancing, and stage management.

“Last year, after we did “Beauty and the Beast,” I sat down and thought about what is a great contrast to this musical ... how do we make sure we give them a very different experience but do something that’s new and challenging and exciting, and “Groundhog Day” [is] very different from anything we’ve done,” said Krawiecki.

Bringing “Groundhog Day” to the stage required months of dedication from the cast, orchestra, and crew. With its fast-paced musical numbers, and intricate technical elements, the show posed unique challenges for everyone involved. From vocal rehearsals with PHS Choir Director Vincent Metallo to going through scenes under the direction of Krawiecki, students in the cast and PHS Orchestra gave their all to perfect their performances while the tech crew spent hours building the set.

“Basically, as soon as the fall play was over ... we started building the [set for the] musical because we knew that it was going to be a huge undertaking. We’ve never done a turntable before, so there was a lot that we wanted to get figured out early. So we’ve been working on this [for] eight to 10, 12, [or] 14 weeks at this point,” said Jeffrey Van Velsor, Set Designer and Technical Director for the show.

Being a member of the musical required dedication and time management skills, as students spent a lot of time after school rehearsing.

“The most challenging part [for me was] the amount of time it [took]. Rehearsals [started] at 5:30 p.m. but they often [went] past 8 p.m., and while it [was] a lot of fun, it [could] be really time-consuming,” said cast member Ivy Cordle ’27.

Music was a key element of the musical, with the orchestra playing a central role. The PHS Orchestra rehearsed

alongside the cast members, ensuring a seamless integration of live music and performance that brought energy and excitement to the show.

“Groundhog Day is a contemporary show. The genre of the music is very upbeat pop [and] rock pop, so it’s [a] very unique style, and that contemporary musical, more modern musical, [brought] new challenges,” said Metallo.

PHS Orchestra, which provided a live soundtrack for the show, faced the challenge of coordinating with the action on stage as they were playing.

Maxime DeVico ’27, Julia Scibienski ’27, Noa Zacks ’25, Sebastian Bongiovi ’25, Milania Kapoor ’27, Elena Barreto ’27, Judy Pwee ’27, Sanya Bhatt ’28, Sophie Mueller ’28, Daniel Spitkovsky ’27, Tara Venkatesh ’28, Sylven Waldman ’25, Ash Nieman ’26, and Anna Kaufman ’26 perform the number “Day One — Punxsutawney Phil” in “Groundhog Day.”



photo: Katherine Chen

## Studio Band and Studio Vocals compete in the National Jazz Festival

**Yunsheng Xu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**



photo: Katherine Chen

Jazz Ensemble members Emil Kapur ’27, Stella Wolsk ’26, Sean Wilton ’25, Shawn Elwood ’26, Adam Greenberg ’26, Donovan Vaccaro ’25, Isaac Son ’27, Mia Abrams-Sartor ’28, Avyaya Srivastava ’28, Blake Kearney ’28, Lucas Martinetti ’28, Nicholas Kopaliani ’26, Ian Lee ’28, Florencia Curchitser ’25, and Michael Chorba ’27 practice “The Gathering Sky” by Pat Metheny Group.

A day of spreading music and bonding with your band and vocals members: that’s exactly what the National Jazz Festival (NJF) is about. Every year, the PHS Studio Band and PHS Studio Vocals compete with high school musicians from across the country in the NJF in Philadelphia. This year

on March 22, Studio Band and Studio Vocals musicians took part in a full day of jazz performance at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia.

This year, Studio Band played three songs: “It Don’t Mean a Thing” by Ella Fitzgerald, a fast swing song; “Decoupage”

by Stan Kenton and His Orchestra, a slow ballad; and “Heat of the Day” by Pat Metheny Group, a song with many time signature changes. By choosing a combination of diverse genres, Studio Band showed off their range as musicians. The bands and Studio Vocals began preparations for NJF as far back as January. After deciding on three songs to play, they moved on to finalizing and rearranging solos throughout the song, ensuring that they were able to fit within 20 minutes, the time allotted to them by the competition.

Joseph Bongiovi, the Studio Band director, led the band in weekly rehearsals on Wednesdays from 6:30 to 9:30. In addition to rehearsals each week, Studio Band practiced by recording hour-long sectionals, where they practice together to build for coherence and collaboration as a group. Though the preparation was demanding, it helped the students grow as musicians.

“The competition kind of forces you to put your best self forward [and] shows you what [you’re] capable [of] and what you can actually do if put under pressure,” said Naomi Carroll ’26, a singer in Studio Vocals.

Aside from providing a platform for competition and music, NJF also promoted bonds between musicians from across different schools and between band members. Competitions like NJF radiate a sense of camaraderie, creating an atmosphere where band members can enjoy playing music and pursuing their passions together, regardless of their preceding relationships.

“There have been times when I’ve seen people [from other schools] just get into a group and start jamming out in the instrument storage room. Even though they are from completely different places, [and] none of them know each other, they’re just there to have fun,” said Thomas Basso ’27, a clarinet player in Studio Band.

“To me, band is like a big family. I feel like [it’s] a lot more like a tight knit community, so you see recurring faces at festivals, and you know certain judges who you’ve seen over and over again, and certain teachers in certain high schools. There is a sense of [family and] a big community,” said Carroll.

# PREX

## PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE



# Peter Niforatos '25 performs from the heart

Chloe Lam, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

From reading Shakespeare and watching plays to playing the lead role in high school productions, Peter Niforatos '25 has developed a passion for acting through years of dedication and hard work. His love began acting in middle school when he and his sister frequently put on productions at home. This led Niforatos to pursue theater throughout high school, most recently playing Phil Connors, the lead role in "Groundhog Day." With every musical production, he continues to gain valuable experiences and develop a better understanding of acting, which he intends to pursue at New York University.

**What was your favorite moment and role in high school acting?**

The most fun I've had is between two [different plays]. I really enjoyed playing Lenny in "Rumors" because he's a very high energetic character and ... I ended with this massive monologue, and he was such an intense character to play. [In contrast], I think the exact opposite when I played Nick Carraway back in "The Great Gatsby." I remember that was such a meticulous character and one that I really had to focus on every single detail. [Lenny] was the exact opposite experience and it was fun to play and really [interesting] to figure out how I was going to do that.

**What's the biggest challenge you've faced as an actor?**

The most challenging one is "Groundhog Day" because I've always been more of an actor than a singer and dancer ... "Groundhog Day" in particular is a show about a change in a person. A lot of the characters change from the beginning [to the end], and that's one of the most important things. I think to have somebody completely go from a depressed and pessimistic character and change to somebody who is more positive and an optimistic person is really hard to nail, especially because in a lot of shows you change with other characters. But in "Groundhog Day," because everybody is repeating the exact same day, except for Phil, it's really important to find that change within yourself, instead of from outside forces.

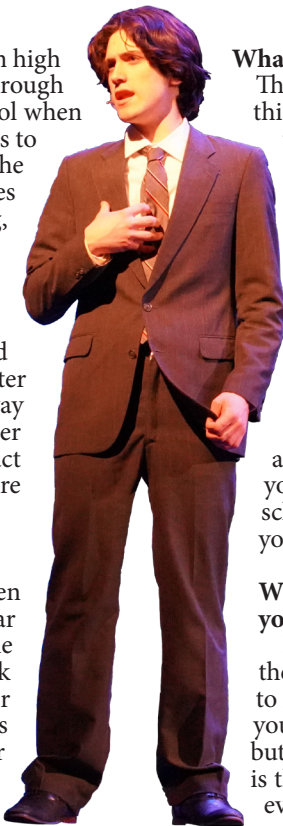


photo: Charley Hu

**What lessons have you learn about acting?**

The biggest thing I've learned is to think of less specific elements. I used to always think about how every single word could mean a specific thing ... and while that can be useful, I think what I really learned to do is to [bring the right amount] of energy into a scene based on how I feel. So every single time I do things now, it's always different. I think letting yourself be that vulnerable and convince yourself that you're the character in that moment, that I think is really what acting is.

**What advice would you give to someone who wants or plans to become a lead role in a play, or someone who wants to go into acting in the future?**

The number one thing is dedication. You have to be ready to embrace it all. It's a big commitment and it's similar to people who do sports and want to be captain. I would say you have to be prepared to put a lot of your time and effort into it. You have to be able to memorize your lines, your blocking, and you really have to be able to commit yourself to not just practice when you're in school, but make sure you understand things when you're out of school ... but maybe if you love it, then I think it's just gonna come naturally if you keep doing it.

**What do you do if you ever feel nervous before a performance and how do you overcome that feeling?**

I always feel nervous before a performance, but it has calmed over the years ... the problem with those feelings are probably exacerbated, but I think you just have to learn to embrace them. I think trying to make them go away really will mess you up. I remember I used to try to push them out and not feel nervous anymore, but then they would just show up anyway. The biggest thing with nervous energy is the fact that there's energy there. You need to use that energy and apply it to everything, and then it quickly turns into excitement. But, once you start doing everything and start feeling it and then all of sudden things start happening.

# Jenna Stucky '25 finds community through singing

Samantha Henderson, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



photo: Katherine Chen

Jenna Stucky '25 grew up in a household full of musicians, so music has always been an important part of her life. She discovered her love for singing and performing at a very young age, and soon began singing in choral groups and even combining her singing skills with acting by performing in musicals. Now a senior at PHS, Stucky has immersed herself in the musical community by singing in PHS Choir and co-leading the a cappella group The Cat's Meow.

**When did you first start singing and why?**

[I started] when I was pretty young because my family is very musical, so I'd often sing with my siblings and with my parents.

**How do you handle performance jitters?**

I think it's something that gets easier over time. The more practice you get in front of an audience, the easier that it gets. Sometimes you just have to embrace the nerves and do something even if you're a little nervous.

**What's it like being in an acapella group?**

I have a lot of fun. My group, we're really close with each other, so oftentimes in our rehearsals we'll be talking more than we're singing. But, it's a really talented group of people and I love singing with them and we have a lot of fun together. I love doing performances, too, sometimes in the winter we'll get gigs, so that's a fun experience, and also performing at the choir concerts. Also, in Italy we actually got to perform as well.

**How was your tour experience in Italy with PHS Choir?**

It was so much fun and I wish that I could go back. The spaces that we performed in were gorgeous and stunning, and the food was amazing, and it was just such a fun experience.

**What kind of music do you listen to? Do you have a favorite band or an artist?**

I listen to a wide range of music, but recently I've been listening to a lot of SZA and some Role Model.

**What are some of your other hobbies?**

I'm very musical, so I like to learn instruments. Recently I've been practicing a lot of guitar.

**If you were stranded on a desert island and could only take one thing with you, what would it be?**

I would take my kazoo, because I think that would be really entertaining for me and would help pass the time.

**What are you going to miss most about PHS?**

I'm going to miss the communities here, especially the singing communities. We're really close and I've got to do a lot with other artists and musicians at PHS.

**Are you planning on pursuing music in the future?**

Not as a profession, but it's definitely something that I want to keep doing when I'm older.

**What's the best advice you've ever been given?**

Don't be afraid to try new things even if it might be a little nerve-racking.

**What advice would you give to new singers and musicians?**

Don't be afraid to put yourself out there and step out of your comfort zone every now and then. Do things that push you and help you grow.

# "Hidden Figures" in women's history

Jane Hu, STAFF WRITER

"Hidden Figures" (2016) tells the story of three Black women: Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who work at NASA, battling social barriers and scrutiny. In the midst of the Space Race, the three women act as the brains behind the launch of astronaut John Glenn, elevating national moral and changing the future of America. This movie, based on real-life events, represents one of the many times in American history where women have had to confront the challenges that come with being seen as inferior and weaker than men, and therefore less capable.

This film shows the personal lives of each woman, overcoming challenges both at work and at home. Johnson is a single mother of three children who often is unable to play an impactful role in her children's lives due to overtime. Jackson, while discriminated against in her job, also has tensions with her husband due to their differing opinions on how their children should be raised, often leading to arguments. Additionally, she fought for desegregation in education in order to get her degree. Vaughan faces significant trouble in the workforce when her hard work gets overlooked due to her race and gender.

"Hidden Figures" is a wonderful movie demonstrating the hardship that women have had to face in the workforce. In the mid-1900s, while women were bound to the societal expectations of being mothers, they were also challenged at their jobs, receiving less pay than men and being treated unequally. For example, when Johnson worked at her new permanent job in the Spacecraft Controls Branch, there was no women's bathroom for people of color. If she had to take a bathroom break, she would be forced to walk at least a mile to use the closest available bathroom.

One day, Johnson takes longer to use the bathroom due to heavy rain. Being ignorant of her situation, her supervisor

criticizes her for being lazy, threatening to fire her. Johnson snaps back in a moment of frustration: "And I work like a dog day and night, living on coffee from a pot none of you want to touch! So, excuse me if I have to go to the restroom a few times a day." Her words incredibly powerful, showing that women have the power to push back against societal standards placed by their oppressors.

Additionally, during NASA's supervisor applications for workers of colors, Vaughan, despite being qualified for the job, is ignored due to her skin color. Rather than shying away from the multiple rejections by her own boss, Vaughan continues to prove herself through her work. She works hard and manages to solve a math problem that her white peers had trouble solving. Due to her hard work, she showed her capabilities, earning her the role as the first black supervisor at NASA.

Combining the three women's eventful and hectic experiences with the skills of the actresses portraying those characters, "Hidden Figures" successfully tells a well-thought-out story. These women prove society wrong. They show the world that they too, are capable of doing those that men are expected to do. The title truly speaks for itself, for despite the impactful roles these women have played, they are hidden figures of our history.

This movie gives light to the women who have helped us advance in society while addressing the struggles that Black Americans faced in the early 1960s. Every scene in this movie played an important role in building the plot — characterizing the powerful women and portraying their willpower. Ultimately, "Hidden Figures" is an inspiring movie that highlights women's past contributions, giving them the recognition they deserve, while leaving the audience with a sense of fulfillment and pride.



image courtesy: 20th Century Studios



# Irish apple cake recipe

Maeve Walsh, STAFF WRITER



Growing up as a proud Irish-American, the month of March has always been a time for me to celebrate my identity, my family history, and all things Irish. Whether it's listening to The Cranberries, reading Oscar Wilde, or simply hearing my Irish grandmother's charming accented voice, I lean into my roots more than ever. After visiting Ireland for the first time last spring, I learned about the culinary aspects of my culture beyond anything my relatives ever made me.

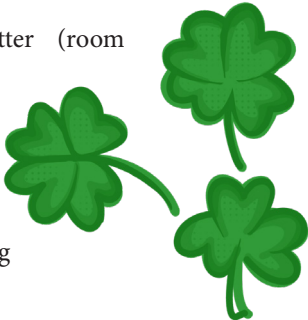
Granted, the cuisine isn't the most technical or visually appealing, but the flavors are extremely comforting and layered. One dish that has those complex flavors but is simple to make is Irish apple cake. The cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg provide a richness that is perfectly balanced with the slightly tangy apples, pleasing any crowd, especially Irish. Sláinte!

### Ingredients

Streusel topping:  
4 tablespoons salted butter (cold)  
½ cup flour  
⅓ cup granulated sugar  
Pinch of salt  
1 teaspoon cinnamon



Apple cake:  
1 stick unsalted butter (room temperature)  
½ cup granulated sugar  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
2 large eggs  
1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
½ teaspoon ginger  
¼ teaspoon nutmeg  
⅓ teaspoon salt  
¼ cup heavy cream  
2 Granny Smith apples (peeled and thinly sliced)  
Confectioners' sugar for serving



### Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease a 9-inch baking dish and line the bottom with parchment paper.
- In a medium bowl, combine the flour, granulated sugar, salt, and cinnamon. Add the cold butter and combine until the dry ingredients have the texture of coarse breadcrumbs and there are no chunks of butter left. Set aside in the fridge.
- In a large bowl, cream the butter and granulated sugar until light and fluffy. Add the vanilla and eggs one at a time until fully combined.
- In a separate bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and salt. Slowly add the dry ingredients to the wet and

fold with a rubber spatula until just combined. Then, add the heavy cream and combine.

5. Add the batter to the greased pan, evenly layer the apples on top, and cover with streusel topping.

6. Bake for 60 to 70 minutes or until the top is golden brown and crisp. Remove from the oven and let the cake cool slightly in the pan before removing and placing onto a rack. Let it cool completely and then dust with confectioners' sugar. Enjoy!

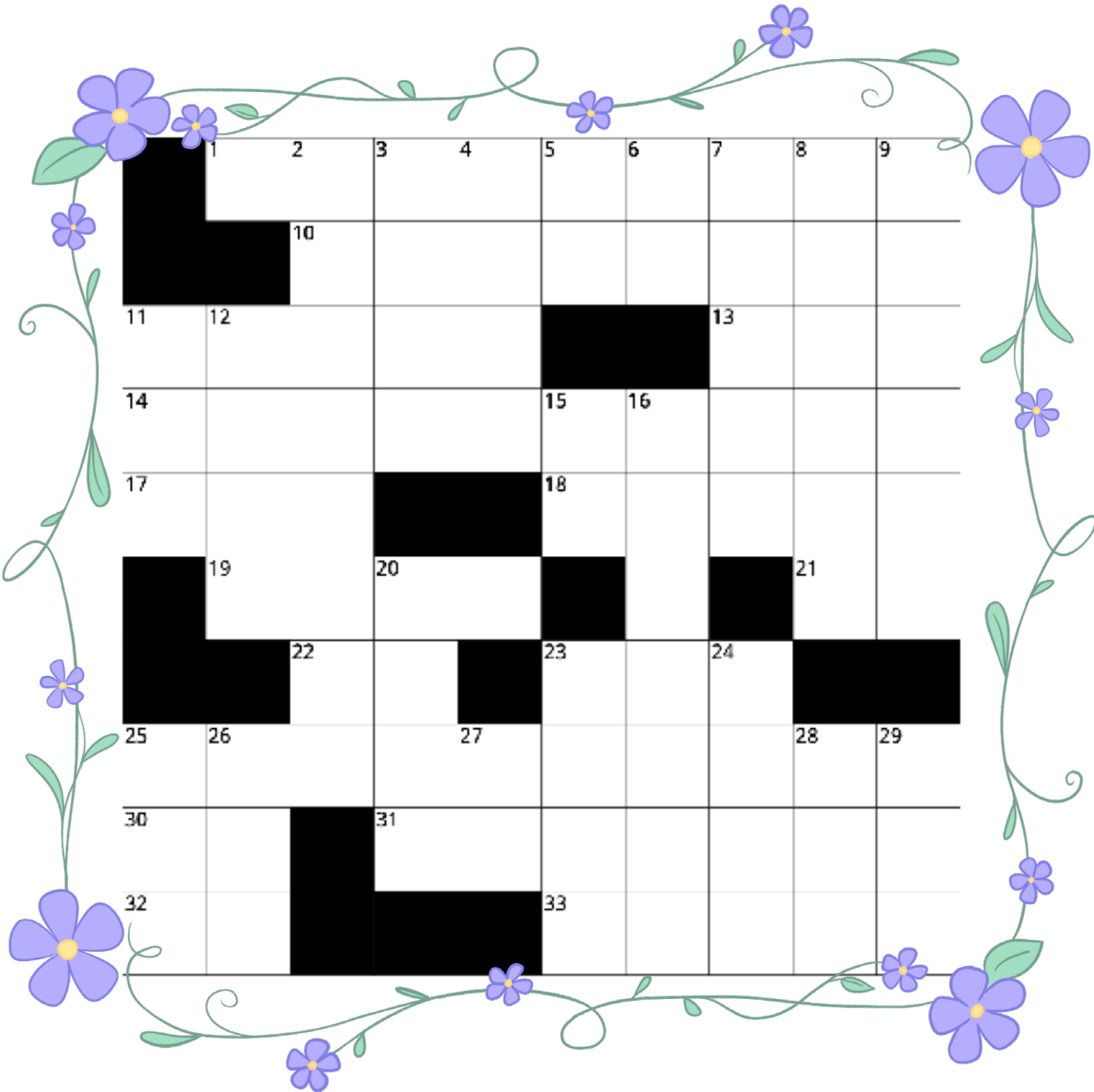
Adapted from Food Network      graphics: Madison Charles



photo: Maeve Walsh

# Spring into spring with this crossword

Tessa Silver, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR



### Across:

- The month that spring starts in in the Southern Hemisphere
- Kitchen appliance that cooks food using a fan
- Carried
- First three letters of actor Reynolds's first name
- State flower of Montana
- \_\_\_ Wednesday, Christian holiday that marks the start of Lent
- Category
- Type of cheese named after a town in North Holland

- \_\_\_ Sheeran, singer with the song "Spring"
- Acronym that stands for "before midday" in Latin
- \_\_\_-Ed, educational animation video channel
- "April showers bring \_\_\_\_\_," common saying
- First two letters of a government tax department
- Swedish chocolate brand
- Acronym for the sytem used to cool homes
- Elizabeth \_\_\_, actress known for her role as the Scarlet Witch

### Down:

- International holiday held on April 22 to celebrate the environment
- Typical container size for ice cream
- Plant that Arbor Day is dedicated to
- Spelled-out version of the sixth letter in the alphabet
- Formal title for men
- Lord \_\_\_, British poet who played a key role in the Romantic movement
- Donkey in the Winnie-the-Pooh series
- What movies with inappropriate scenes might be
- Undergraduate degree for people going into management
- River in Belgium and France
- Acronym for some offensive linemen in football
- What spring is known as a time of
- The two radio frequencies
- "Bull" in Spanish
- Eugene \_\_\_, influential American socialist who ran for president from jail in 1912
- \_\_\_ Goth, actress known for her roles in horror movies such as "Pearl"
- Shape of a rainbow
- Common abbreviation of a California city known for its central role in the movie industry
- Type of fish egg used in caviar and sushi
- What spring brings more of, weather-wise

graphics: Katherine Chen



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Additional support for this exhibition is provided by the Curtis W. McGraw Foundation; the Edna W. Andrade Fund of the Philadelphia Foundation; and Princeton University's Humanities Council, Program in Latin American Studies, Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies (with the support of the Stanley J. Seeger Hellenic Fund), Department of African American Studies, Graduate School—Access, Diversity and Inclusion, Effron Center for the Study of America, and Program in Latino Studies.



# ATTENTION SPANS

## WHAT TRADITIONAL SPORTS MEDIA IS LOSING

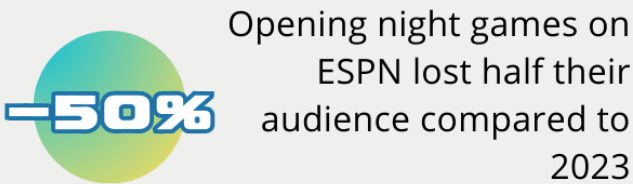
Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

When we watch sports, we no longer get cozy on the couch, reach for the remote, turn on the TV, wait with giddy anticipation, and cheer along with each point won. We scroll on TikTok, Instagram reels, YouTube Shorts, and Snapchat Spotlight to get a quick bite of information on our favorite players and teams. This team won the finals, and here are some highlights. Two players were traded, and this is why it's so controversial. An athlete was suspended for a year, so let's break down how this happened. It's in the name: short-form media is short, sweet, and straight to the point.



MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL HAS BEEN LOSING VIEWERSHIP FOR THE PAST NINE SEASONS SINCE THE 2011-2012 SEASON

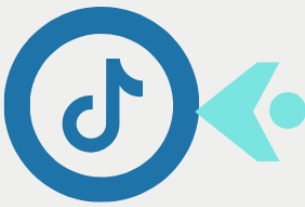
Viewership on popular sports channels like ABC, ESPN, and TNT is down 19% compared to last year



### IS IT JUST IN SPORTS?

According to a Microsoft study in 2015, average attention spans had dropped by four seconds since 2000. We can concentrate on a subject for just eight seconds now.

graphics: Katie Qin



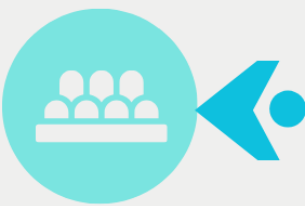
### IT'S THE DANG PHONE

74% of Gen-Zs often watch sports content on social media compared to 65% of millennials



### ON THE GO

80% of Gen-Zs watch sports content while on the road

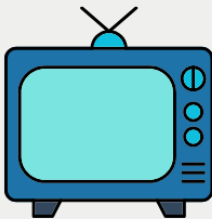
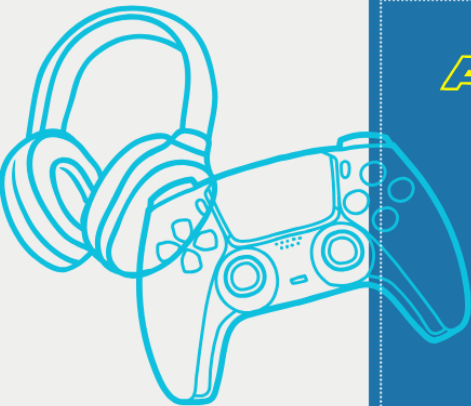


### EMPTY STADIUMS

58% of Gen-Zs enjoy live sporting events

### A CHALLENGER ARISES?

ESPORTS IS EXPECTED TO GAIN OLYMPIC STATUS IN 2028

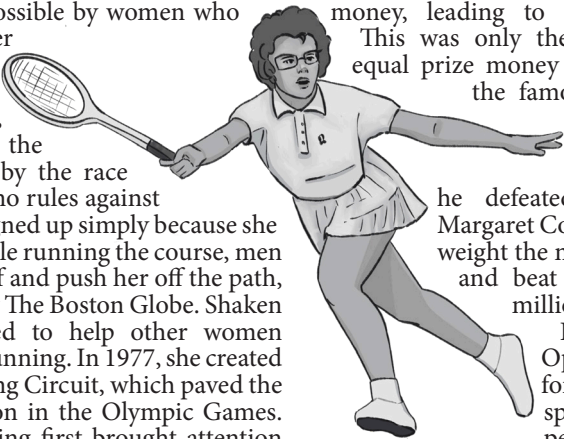


The sports world, which is traditionally televised or watched in person, is struggling to escape the conversion into a swipeable blast of serotonin that's less than sixty seconds.

## Women's impact on sports

Claire Yang and Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITORS

Throughout history, women have played a significant role in challenging societal norms in the sports world. Efforts to bring attention to women's sports and close the gender pay gap were made possible by women who persevered to create a better future for female athletes. As the first woman to run the Boston Marathon, Kathrine Switzer completed the entire course despite efforts by the race director to remove her. With no rules against women competing, Switzer signed up simply because she was a running enthusiast. While running the course, men tried to rip her running bib off and push her off the path, captured in an iconic photo by The Boston Globe. Shaken but determined, she resolved to help other women deprived of opportunities in running. In 1977, she created the Avon International Running Circuit, which paved the way for the women's marathon in the Olympic Games. Tennis player Billie Jean King first brought attention to the gender pay gap after she noticed that her prize earnings in the Pacific Southwest Tennis Tournament were only 15 percent of what her male counterparts



earned. Despite the womens' finals selling more than double the tickets as the mens, the tournament director refused to award the same amount of prize money, leading to King to organize a walk-out. This was only the beginning of King's fight for equal prize money in tennis, which culminated in the famous tennis match, Battle of the Sexes. Bobby Riggs, declaring that women's tennis inferior to men's, challenged King after he defeated top-ranked women's player Margaret Court. Knowing the symbolism and weight the match would carry, King accepted and beat Riggs in straight sets with 90 million people watching worldwide. Her win inspired the U.S. Open to offer equal prize money for the first time for any major sporting event. Thanks to King's persistent advocacy, tennis is one of the only sports today that offer the same amount of money to both male and female competitors across all four grand slams.

graphic: Charley Hu

Despite these advancements in tennis and Title IX, the landmark legislation preventing sex-based discrimination in sports in an educational setting, the gender pay gap still remains at large for other sports. Yet in 2024, none of the top ten most-paid female athletes were included in Sportico's list of top 100 highest-paid athletes. However, in team sports, the gap is especially noticeable because of the difference between individual salary compared to the revenue generated as a team. Caitlin Clark, a rising basketball star, signed with Indiana Fever. However, her salary of \$338,056 was only a fraction of Victor Wembanyama's contract of \$55 million. Despite generating more revenue than the men's team, the U.S. women's soccer team's maximum salary was \$99,000 versus the men's maximum salary of \$263,320. In comparison, the men's team has never made it to a World Cup finals while the women's team consistently ranks among the best in the world. While the advancements made by iconic women athletes have considerably shaped the sports world for the better, there is more work that needs to be done. Women representation in sports in itself showcases the broader need for change in women's rights.



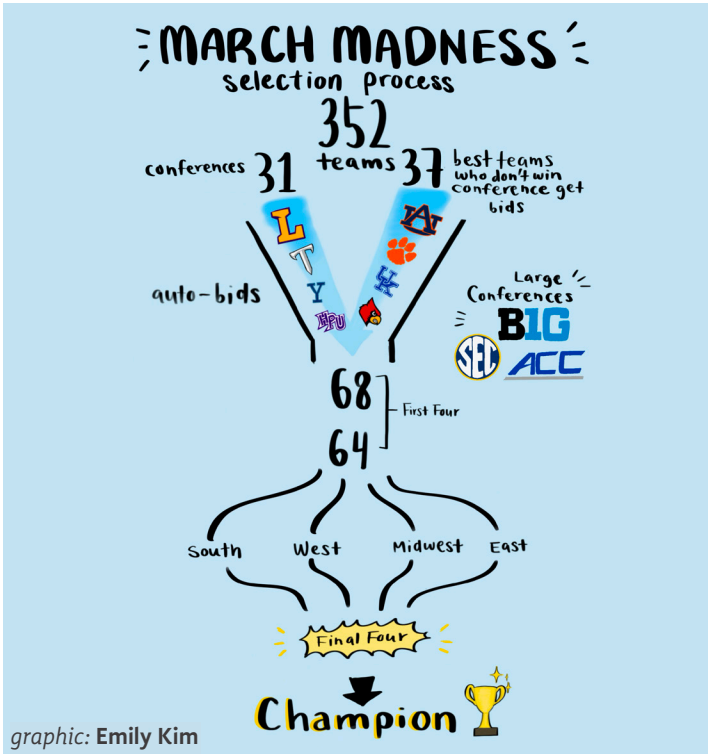
# March Madness: the science behind the brackets

Kaelan Patel, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Jackson Zwick, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The month of March is known for many things in the sports world, but by far the most popular is the NCAA Division 1 men’s basketball tournament, or March Madness, a thrilling 68-team tournament full of underdog stories and intense games of college basketball. According to the NCAA, the chance of filling out a perfect bracket is one in approximately 9.2 quintillion. Yet, despite these odds, millions of people fill out their brackets every year for fun, prizes, or glory, including PHS’s very own students. “I love March Madness because of all the uncertainty. It’s [very] fun,” said Octavio Shank ’27. Teams are seeded 1–16 in each of the regions. The bracket will play out until the

championship is left with 4 region champions and then a grand champion. Every year, millions watch as small school winners from underfunded conferences come out of nowhere and win against much more seasoned teams, shocking the world and ruining bracket predictions. These unexpected wins are what put the madness in March Madness. As an example, the Princeton Tigers won the Ivy League tournament in 2022 and were placed into the bracket as a #15 seed. The Tigers stunned everyone by defeating #2 Arizona then #7 Missouri, advancing to the round of 16 and breaking millions of brackets along the way. “I remember my brother telling my mom, ‘Hey Mom, we might

actually win this.’ We’re up by ten points with only two minutes to go ... the emotions at the end and the feeling of ‘oh my goodness we just won this insane, crazy game’ was so much fun,” said John Staples ’27, a fan that attended the Princeton vs Missouri game in Sacramento back in 2022. March Madness is a thrilling, unpredictable college basketball tournament that, due to its unique structure and format, consistently produces games where smaller, lower-seeded teams defeat larger, higher-seeded powerhouses. Each year, these underdogs create history and ruin millions of brackets that attempt to predict it. “The tournament is amazing. I think it’s a very fun tradition to do,” said Staples.



# PHS holds its first badminton tournament

Claire Yang and Kaelan Patel, SPORTS CO-EDITORS

For the first time in PHS history, a student-run badminton tournament took place in the Old Gym, where 12 singles players and eight pairs of doubles, all tried to claim the championship title. PHS Badminton Club leaders William Liu ’26, Kaitlyn Bian ’26, and Joseph Hu ’26 took many months to plan. “There were a lot of steps. First, we had to get approved, and then we had to get all the logistics, like the nets, the tournament order as well as [decide] who is going to judge. So there’s a lot of components, and I’m glad that we were able to get it together in the end,” said Bian. After playing badminton in China, Liu wanted to build a community that shared his passion for the sport with his fellow students. At the club fair, the club got over 200 signups — an eighth of the entire student body. “I’m trying to find [people] who share the same interest with me in badminton and also trying to encourage others to play this sport,” said Liu. The co-ed tournament was held in an elimination style format, playing the best out of two sets, with each set only going up to 11 points, unlike the professional standard of 21 points. Players had the choice to sign up for either doubles or singles, and were required to bring their equipment.

In the finale of the tournament, Akshaj Sama ’26 and Anirudh Kashyap ’25 won the doubles tournament and Yunsheng Xu ’27 took home the singles prize. Sama initially decided to sign up for the tournament for fun and compete with fellow students. “I’m really happy about my win,” said Sama. “I definitely couldn’t have won without my teammate Anirudh ... This experience was really fun!”



Meghna Myneni ’25 warms up before the tournament.

Club advisor and gym teacher Carlos Salazar remembers badminton being a tradition among the P.E. teachers and wanted to help the students at PHS get involved with the sport outside of their gym class. In his 34 years of teaching, this is the first time he’s witnessed such an event. “As an advisor, my main goal is to make sure that it is a ... student-oriented program,” said Salazar. “I make suggestions, support them as much as I can ... basically it’s been [the leaders’] ideas [and] their support.” Although PHS does not have an official badminton team, the tournament served as a way to connect badminton players throughout the school, regardless of their skill level or previous experience. “I played badminton outside of school, and I think it’s a very fun sport. It’s good exercise as well,” said Bian. “I think [the tournament] positively influenced sports culture [by] getting people who normally don’t participate in sports to participate in some type of activity.” After seeing the success of their very first tournament, Liu is optimistic about the future of badminton at PHS and even beyond. “Maybe next time we can have an inter-school tournament. For next year, we’re gonna have the same school [event], hopefully,” said Liu.

# BLOOM LOCAL.



**Experience Princeton** is collaborating with the **Municipality of Princeton** and cultural and civic organizations to highlight the work done by businesses as they turn Princeton into a “bloom town” this spring! **Scan the QR code** to find out more about the special events, art installations, new plantings and volunteer opportunities that will make Princeton cleaner, more beautiful and fun all season long!



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# Athletes of the Month

Brendon Beatty '25: lacrosse

Luna Xu and Devina Sinha, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photo: Jasur Agzamov

Beatty, who has been a lacrosse player since freshman year, looks to continue his legacy at PHS with his senior season.

Pushing past the wall of defenders, Brendan Beatty '25 shoots and scores the winning goal by flicking his stick forward, allowing the ball to glide into the back of the net as the goalie fails to stop the ball from entry. With only 30 seconds left on the clock, Beatty demonstrates perseverance and grit, key skills needed to secure the win for the team.

Beatty's lacrosse journey started in third grade after he moved from England to the United States. Following his older brother's example and influence, Beatty picked up the sport as well. Throughout his lacrosse career, Beatty was able to find inspiration from one of the coaches of his club team, CJ Kirst, a senior at Cornell and one of the top players in college lacrosse. Beatty learned that success in lacrosse isn't only about skill, but patience and dedication as well.



photo: Jasur Agzamov

Now a Vermont commit, Beatty continues to showcase his lacrosse skills.

"He also brought the other things you want to see in athletes, which is effort, tenacity, intensity, and commitment to getting better at the sport during the off-season, and he really personifies that," said Casto.

However, at a higher level, it can be difficult to deal with pressures to achieve perfection. "There are times when he doesn't feel like he's done enough for the team and he struggles with holding on to that for too long and that might affect the way he plays," said Casto.

However, as Beatty progressed throughout the years, he has come to understand that errors and mistakes are just part of the process of improvement.

"As a player he's become better at everything, at playing defense, at figuring out situations so his mental game is much better. He's a better shooter," said Casto.

Apart from becoming a better player on the field, he has also grown as a person and a leader off the field, becoming more disciplined and confident in the process of how a game will play out.

"He's a great leader. He's always stepping up to do the right job," said teammate Peter Pessutti'27. "He's always helping out younger kids. He's always teaching us to do respectful things"

Looking back on his high school career, Brendon's advice to his freshman self is simple yet telling.

"Don't take anything for granted. Always go out to get more reps and work when people aren't watching or listening because that's the biggest thing," said Beatty.

Beatty's final season of his high school career is soon to start, and everyone is looking forward to how much he has grown both on and off the field in the last four years.

"He's becoming more vocal and people listen to him. We're excited to see how he leads us in his senior season," said Casto.

Beyond his high school career, Beatty has committed to playing for the University of Vermont at the Division I collegiate level. Many schools reached out to him, but Vermont stood out to him the most.

"Vermont was one of my top schools. When I visited, I saw the campus and met the team. It checked all the boxes, and I knew I wanted to go there," said Beatty.



photo: Jasur Agzamov

Beatty attempting a shot at the recent Clearview Regional Scrimmage.

Ellie Kovalick '25: rowing

Joshua Huang and Tyler Fiorentino, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photo: Charley Hu

Kovalick, who has committed to the University of Wisconsin, continues her senior rowing season while looking forward to competing at the collegiate level.

With each precise stroke, Ellie Kovalick '25 brings her team closer to the finish line. Guided by the rhythmic splash of the oars against the water, the boat inches past the others. In a succinct, combined effort, Kovalick and her teammates secure 15th place out of a total of 90 competitors in the 2024 USRowing National Championships.

Despite doing track in middle school, Kovalick began focusing on rowing as her main sport starting freshman year. She specializes in rowing eights, the largest, fastest, and most competitive type of racing boat.

"I started rowing the summer before my freshman year, and I kind of just knew that I loved it," said Kovalick. "And the thing about rowing is [that] it's year-round, so it's hard to do multiple sports at once. So once I discovered that I loved [rowing], I committed to it, and I never really looked back. I've never considered doing another sport since I started."

This commitment has propelled her to find success at the highest level. Kovalick has gone to Nationals during her sophomore and junior year. In addition, her team, Mercer Juniors, was the 13th fastest in the nation last year with this year's national championships yet to take place. However, the achievements seen today outshine the hardships that they had to surmount. Throughout her high school career, Kovalick has seen three changes in coaching, something that can become very chaotic, as teaching styles may vary.

"Our team has gone through a lot so there have been rebuilding years in there, for sure, and a lot of the athletes have to step up and take a more active role in how we want the team culture and how we want the dynamic of our team to be," said Kovalick. "But overall, I think we're a resilient group, and we managed all right, even through coaching changes."

Despite this setback, Kovalick and her team are still very competitive. Rowers have to work nonstop for races that can be up to three miles long, such as the Head of the Charles in Boston that Kovalick's team will participate in this fall.



photo courtesy: Ellie Kovalick

Kovalick rows her oar as she helps her team find success.

kind of, just grit your teeth, get the job done, don't fold under pressure kind of ethos," said Altier.

Here at PHS, Kovalick has taken the initiative to expand the sport of rowing to a wider audience, by reviving the PHS Crew Club from its few year hiatus.

"I've definitely been trying to get more PHS kids involved in the sport, because it's not too far from [Princeton], and it's just such an awesome opportunity ... I have nothing but good things to say about Mercer [Rowing]," said Kovalick.

Kovalick recently committed to continue rowing at the Division I school of Wisconsin, joining many teammates in collegiate Rowing Commitments. As she embarks on the next chapter of her rowing career at the collegiate level, Kovalick reflects on her choice to pursue the sport.

"There's people that show up their first year and immediately quit [rowing], and then there's people that stick with it. And I think I [have] just found a passion, and it's not something I ever want to give up," said Kovalick.



photo courtesy: Ellie Kovalick

Kovalick competes at the Mercer Fall Classic hosted at Mercer Lake.

Kovalick's impact isn't limited to her contributions on the water, though. Vita Moss-Wang '25, Kovalick's teammate and long-time friend, explained what helps Kovalick set herself apart from the rest.

"What's really unique about Ellie is ... [her] consistency, every day at practice, every day on the water, and you can see that when she rows, she's very decisive with her stroke," said Moss-Wang.

Sam Altier, Kovalick's coach on the girls' rowing team, confirmed her dedication.

"I think that's been a consistent theme for [Kovalick], from 2023 to now: her ability to be in these hard situations, these hard races, and [being] a kind of a leader, demonstrating and acting on this kind of, just grit your teeth, get the job done, don't fold under pressure kind of ethos," said Altier.



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