

Vanguard  
presents

# Luck & Fate

## The Road Not Taken: fate and free will at PHS

Maxime DeVico, BUSINESS CO-MANAGER  
Aarna Vachhrajani, MULTIMEDIA CO-EDITOR

In a single lifetime, a person will make billions of decisions, twelve million in a year, one million in a month, two hundred forty-five thousand in a week, and thirty-five thousand in a day. Each decision, whether it is what food to eat for lunch or what to study in college, shapes the path on which you walk, however small that change may be. But with those billions of decisions in a lifetime come just as many “what-ifs.” Every decision is like a crossroads — one path is what you choose, and another is the road not taken. Sometimes, it is fate that pulls you toward one side of the fork in the road, while other decisions are the result of free will.

At PHS, students make decisions that may alter the course of their lives. Many discover new passions after bittersweet partings with old ones. Others leave the decision to luck.

For some, simply coming to PHS and finding a home here was much more luck than free will.

“I lucked out in that I had somewhere to go, [and that] I had family that lived in a place where I could go to a good school district,” said Olivia Johnson '27 after moving from Minnesota to Princeton, New Jersey.

For others, where they will end up is more fate than it is luck. This is the case for many of the seniors this year heading off to college, such as Clara Burton '26.

“[Picking] a college is going to be a very big, significant choice I have to make,” said Burton. “I think fate will play a big role because I think that it’s going to be a very good experience no matter what.”

Students at PHS find free will plays a much larger role when it comes to athletics, however. For Mia Abrams-Sartor '28, this decision was purely free will, although she believes her experience would be vastly different had she made a different choice.

“A significant decision I had to make was deciding which [softball] team to join when I was moving to a new state,” said Abrams-Sartor. “I may not have met ... some of my closest friends [nor] enjoyed the sport so much.”

Similarly, Yasna Shariarian '27 also made a conscious decision to quit a sport that she disliked.

“I was a swimmer through eighth grade [but] I picked up golf as my sport, and I decided to quit swim[ming],” said Shariarian. “[Had I not played golf] I probably wouldn’t have found another sport that I liked, and I wouldn’t have been able to meet the people that I now know.”

Fate and free will also dictate many of the decisions teachers at PHS make, especially when it comes to their decision to even teach in the first place.

“I was thinking I was going to go into advertising ... I did advertising for my high school newspaper. But the more I thought about the logistics of the job, of whatever advertising work I’d be doing, I was thinking ‘Gosh, I’m going to be sitting at a desk all day long, and that is not for me.’ And I loved my English classes ... I had great high school and college professors that guided me,” said Courtney Crane, an English and journalism teacher at PHS.

For Crane, both fate and free will led her down this road.

“When I moved to New Jersey, I didn’t have a job, and the only job offer I had was being an editor at a dental magazine. And then a day later, I got offered the job here at Princeton High School. And so I think there were a lot of things going for me to get me this job here. That might have been luck, but also, just the kind of decisions I made along the way,” said Crane.

Across PHS, it is clear that one decision can change one’s life. Moreover, that same decision can be viewed in opposite ways. For some, loving a sport is fate; for others, it is luck. It is impossible to know what would have happened if you hadn’t made that decision, but that decision certainly brought you to where you are today.

## Superstitions at PHS

Asma Frough and Lilja Jarlsson Darley,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Superstitions have a way of weaving themselves into our daily lives; they often go unnoticed but are deeply embedded in our routines. Over the years, many people develop their own unique personal superstitions that make sense to the individual, regardless of how illogical they may appear. From knocking on wood for good luck to tossing salt over the shoulder for good fortune, these unique beliefs add comfort and excitement to a world full of uncertainties. Rooted in tradition and shaped by personal experience, these superstitions often offer a peek into individual fears, hopes, and cultural backgrounds. Here is a glimpse into the personal superstitions of students and faculty members at PHS:

“My grandma wears jewelry with [the] Evil Eye all the time. It’s from my Middle Eastern background, [it’s used] so that people couldn’t jinx [success, and it prevents jealousy]. ... [I] know I’m going to have a good day when I’m wearing [the] jewelry I always wear, and if I’m not then it wouldn’t be the right vibe. ... I don’t depend on them that much [but I] definitely feel more confident [with] them.” - Angela Leonie ’28

“When my sister played travel hockey, I would go to all of her tournaments and I [would] get really into watching the games. I love watching hockey and it [got] to the point where I’d move, and sit a certain way, and then they’d score a goal, and then I’d [think] ‘I cannot move for the rest of the game’ ...because I thought the way I was sitting would determine [the game],” - Maisie Speir ’27.

“[I’ve] got a lucky coin. When I lost my airpods my friend gave me a coin, after [that], I found my airpods. Ever since then I’ve just carried it around, and I feel like it helps, [like] I hold it during tests and it helps me study.” - Joseph Murray ’27

“I feel like there are a lot of little superstitions that I follow without even realizing it. Like I cross my fingers when I’m wishing for something or want something specifically and I knock on wood since other people in my family do it. [These] might work but it also might be a coincidence, [yet] I feel anxious or off whenever I forget to cross my fingers.” - Catherine Decker ’28

“For football, I tie my shoes the same way every time before [my] games as a ritual. ... I feel a little bit anxious if I don’t do it ... [it really] gets me into the right head space, [kind of] grounds me,” - Noah Meier ’27.

## Fate vs. free will

Atharva Desai, Jaisel Iyer, and Luke Taylor, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Every day, people face moments where they question whether their actions come from their own free will or from forces beyond their control. Humans constantly try to understand why events happen the way they do. Some believe their lives follow a path that is already determined by fate, while others feel that individuals control their own life through the decisions they make.

However, between these two ideas is a philosophical concept called determinism. The idea states that all events are determined by prior causes and natural law. The debate between fate, determinism, and free will reveals a big question. Which one do people believe more and how much of a role does it contribute to our lives?

Many people perceive events in their lives through the idea of fate. The idea of fate says that certain outcomes are meant to happen regardless of the choice people make. In the perspective of a person who believes in fate, whenever something positive occurs, individuals describe it as something that was meant to happen. On the other hand, when something negative occurs in the person's life, they say that it was “not in the cards.” A belief like this can help people as it diminishes this idea of personal responsibility. An example of this could be a student who performs poorly on a test. They could claim that the test “just was not made to go well” for them instead of acknowledging that they had not studied properly in the first place. Similarly, someone who wakes up feeling exhausted after an all-nighter may blame fate when an unproductive day seemingly follows. In reality, the person is tired because they

sacrificed their own sleep to stay up late. When individuals credit these results to fate, they avoid recognizing that their actions resulted in this outcome. Even though the idea of fate can make hard situations easy to accept, it can also encourage people to ignore the idea of action shaping their lives.

## Superstitions around the world

Layla Krystofik and Laura Pepek,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

### France:

Although most cultures regard stepping in any sort of feces as bad luck, the French don’t always think so. According to the French superstition, if you step in dog poop with your right foot, you will live a cursed life of anguish, but if you walk through it with your left, it will bring you good luck!

### South Korea:

Writing with red ink is very unlucky in South Korea. The color red is a symbol of death and has historically been used to write the name of the deceased on funeral banners or gravestones. Today, if a person’s name is written in red ink, it signifies that the writer wishes evil and imminent death upon the written person.

### Japan:

The number four is widely known as an unlucky number in Japanese culture. It is pronounced “shi” in Japanese, mirroring the pronunciation for the word death. Therefore, the number is cautiously circumvented to steer clear of death and misfortune. For example, apartment buildings may completely skip over the fourth floor, and countless Japanese people avoid giving gifts in groups of four to avoid unintentionally implying a wish for harm or bad luck toward the recipient.

### Turkey:

Although many admire the fig tree for its beauty and delicious fruit, Turkish people view them very differently. In Turkey, having a fig tree in front of your house is bad luck — but removing it brings bad luck as well! Supposedly, Jesus himself declared it fruitless during a season the tree was not intended to bloom, and demons reside there because of its dark color. Either way, it’s best not to plant these trees too close to your house, or else you might be inviting trouble.

### India:

Within Hindu or Jain communities, cutting nails or hair is traditionally never done at night. Younger generations simply call it a superstition, while elder traditionalists say it is rooted in history, culture, and astrology. Mythologically, the deity of wealth and fortune, Lakshmi, finds trimming nails at night disgraceful and thus avoids homes where this takes place after dark, bringing financial misfortune to the family. Astrologically, the shadow planets of Rahu and Ketu are most active during the night, and cutting hair or nails at this time is thought to invite their negative influence into the home.

## A thread cut short

Olivia Fan, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The three Fates of Greek mythology, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, watch over every mortal’s life. Clotho spins the thread, Lachesis measures it, and Atropos cuts it.

Clotho spun my thread into existence, a one in 400 quadrillion chance. Out of every possible genetic combination, I was born.

Lachesis, the measurer, determines the course a life will take. By luck, I ended up attending North Brunswick Township Middle School; by luck, I landed in a fifth-grade art class where I sat next to Armoni Len Bennett, newly arrived from Illinois to New Jersey. But it felt like fate that he would become my best friend. Armoni had a way of brightening any room he walked into — he could make anyone laugh, even on days they didn’t want to.

Of course, fate doesn’t promise smoothness. Armoni and I had our differences, and I blocked him more times than I care to admit. Yet somehow, he always found a way back into my life, whether through a new account, a new platform, or even a desperate message on Roblox asking me to unblock him. During one of the rare weeks I’d distanced myself, I bumped into his dad at Target. He told me how much Armoni truly missed me. I didn’t say much, but the words stayed with me. They made me question whether I was taking him for granted. Was a disagreement worth losing someone who kept choosing to return? I decided to give him another chance.

But as Lachesis is known as the ultimate allocator of destiny, she decided that Armoni’s thread would be pulled far from mine. First to Morocco, where he lived with his family and his raccoon named Ice Spice. Then, back to Illinois instead of New Jersey, despite the promises he made. Months passed, and our conversations grew shorter, thinner, and more distant.

The last message I received from him was a simple “Happy birthday.”

He was planning to visit New Jersey on April 2, his birthday. He was 38 days from finally coming back to New Jersey when he was shot and murdered.

And that is where Atropos, the eldest Fate, stepped in. She is the one who cuts the thread, ending the story, reminding us that death is inescapable. On February 23, 2025, in Bloomington, Illinois, she decided Armoni’s thread had reached its end.

By some cruel twist of luck, Armoni never made it back to New Jersey. By some cruel twist of luck, I am still here, and the greatest person I have ever known is not.

At his funeral, I saw his step-mom for the first time in years. She hugged me like she was trying to hold together every thread the Fates had ever tangled.

Through tears, she told me how he truly loved me, how often he talked about our friendship, and how badly he wanted to return to New Jersey.

Luck allowed me to win the lottery of friendship, of being able to call Armoni a friend. I took that luck for granted through our arguments and the distance I let build between us, always assuming there would be more time to fix things, more chances to grow close again. But Fate had other plans, knotting our stories in ways I never fully appreciated until his thread snapped.

graphics: Emily Kim