

# iWRITER

ISSUE 5 | JULY 2021

BY KIDS FOR KIDS MAGAZINE



Gearing up for  
the School Year!

## EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Eshaan Mani

Kate-Yeonjae Jeong

## ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Sanjna Pandit

## COPY EDITORS

Nia Shetty

Madison Burba

Sanjna Pandit

## DESIGN EDITOR

Eshaan Mani

## WRITERS

Alex Zhang

Eshaan Mani

Sanjna Pandit

Madison Burba

Shaivi Moparthi

David Liu

Lexi Bumah

Aarushi Saxena

Sophie Yu

Nia Shetty

Austin Lopez

## COVER ARTISTS

"Basket of Unknowns" by Eshing Ji

(front cover)

"Launching into the Fall!" by Ryan Hay

(back cover)

YouTube: Ryaaan

Instagram: @ryaaanyt

# A Note from the Editor

Dear Readers,

As students in 2021, we've seen so many changes, felt so many emotions, had so many losses and some victories as well. We've dealt with modified learning modes, trying our best to glean as much information from our virtual and six-foot-distanced in-person classes, both of which were often shorter than our former schedules dictated. In addition to checking the weather on our way out the door each morning, we now read national and local news headlines blazoned with case counts, death rates, and vaccine availability, which sets the mood of our day.

Thankfully, life seems to be moving toward a more normal direction for us in the United States, as we transition from the last month of our summer break back to school. While much is still uncertain, schools in Houston have made plans for a full, in-person reopening and are adjusting health and safety requirements as per the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For students, the shift back to school has always been undeniably difficult; it's hard to switch from sleeping in, relaxing, and having non-academic fun to eight-hour school days and several hours of homework. However, it's especially difficult this year. Students who have attended school completely virtually for the past year are struggling to get in the mindset for in-person school. Even those of us who have gone to school in-person for a while are not sure exactly what this next school year will be like.

But hey, we got through 2020, we got through half of 2021, and we're going to get through this next year of school together. We should maintain hope, determination, and optimism: Three traits that truly have shown their importance in trying times. And to help us launch into the new school year is the July issue of *iWRITER*. Within the pages of this magazine are unique poems sharing special values to keep close to your heart as we enter the fall, wise op-eds and articles by rising high school sophomores and seniors about ways to manage your time and make the most of your schedule, and some recreational fun that we certainly need when making this transition: sports insight, reading recommendations, and more! Turn the page, and I promise you won't be disappointed.

On behalf of the *iWRITER* team, I wish you the best for the upcoming school year, and I hope that you enjoy the fifth issue of *iWRITER* magazine. Stay inspired and thank you for reading.

*Eshaan Mani*

*I WRITE for the rush of adrenaline I feel when my pen touches the paper. It is that exhilarating experience and the opportunity to not only get my voice out to the public, but also be able to be the voice of inspiring people and organizations that inspires me to write.*



#### 4 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Madison Burba shares the perspectives of students as they enter an uncertain year with optimism.

#### 6 FALLING FAST

Alex Zhang looks back on his past years of high school as he enters his senior year and uses the lessons he's learned to chart out the year ahead.

#### 7 CARDINALS AND CHORISTERS: A MUSIC TEACHER MAKING MAGIC

Sanjna Pandit spotlights Mr. Phillip Sammons, a choir teacher making a difference in the lives of his students.



#### 9 STAYING SANE WITH SPORTS AND SCHOOL

Aarushi Saxena provides her top tips on how to balance academics and athletics as we enter a new school year.

#### 10 THE SCIENCE OF SCHEDULING

Austin Lopez shares his tips on organizing your schedule for optimal productivity.

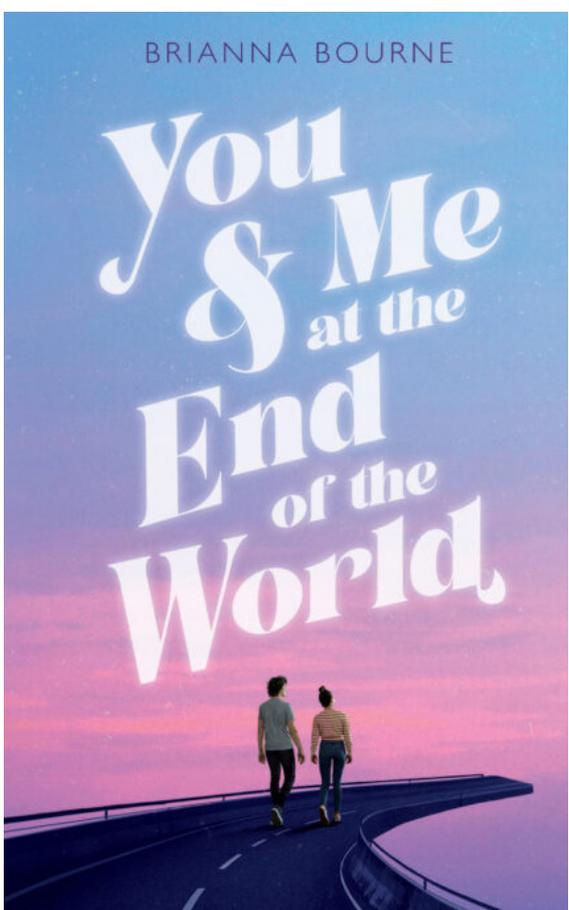


#### 11 CHESS IS FOR EVERYONE

New writer David Liu expresses his love for chess, sharing with readers exactly why they should try their hand at the strategic game.

#### 12 A PLACE FOR POETRY

Featured poems from the iWRITER Staff with a thematic focus on academic resilience and student potential.



#### 14 BOOK TALK

Eshaan Mani writes about debut author Brianna Bourne and reviews her novel *You & Me at the End of the World*.

#### 15 FIVE MUST-READ BOOKS THIS SUMMER!

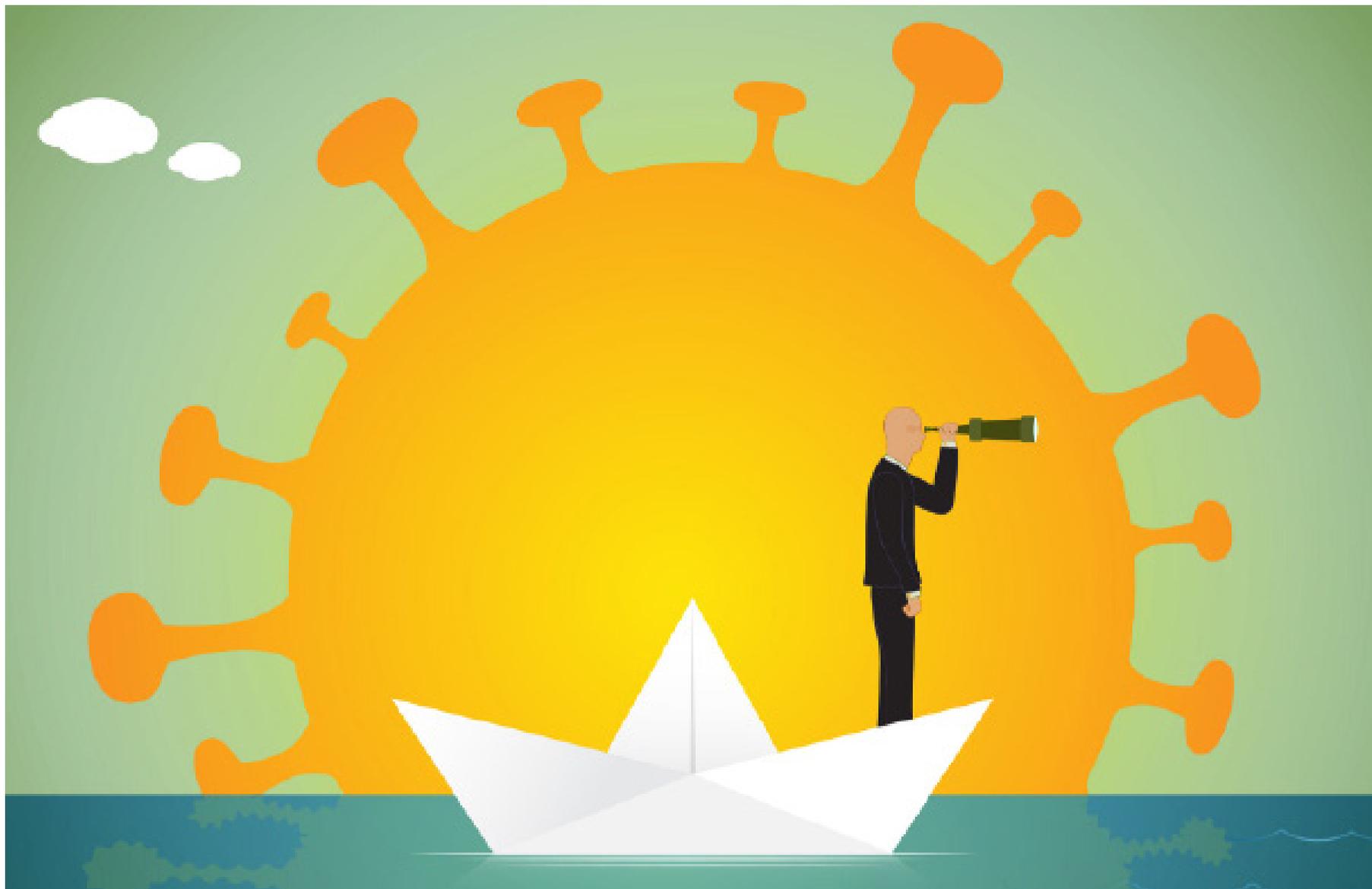
Kate Jeong shares her top five reads for this summer.

#### 16 A CHANCE TO MAKE HISTORY

This piece contains a very exciting announcement! You (yes, you) can make history by submitting to this year's iWRITE Publishing Contest as we attempt to break the world record for the largest book.

# Looking to the Future

*Teens consider the prospect of a COVID-less year.*



*Image credit: TraceGains*

**A**fter a crazy year filled with social distancing, Zoom classes, and masks, students are making their way back into the classroom and figuring out their next footsteps in a post-COVID world. With the release of the vaccine, schools everywhere are returning back to normal, bringing back in-person classes, games, and school dances that we all missed this past 2020-2021 school year. While we are all thrilled for life to return to normal, COVID's reverberations will most likely weave themselves into our lives. From maskless interactions, virtual meetings, and even what our definitions of personal space now mean, we could find ourselves in a school year infused with old and new.

## **New Faces**

Surely everyone's experienced a moment where they're looking at someone who they've seen on Zoom but can't place their face now that they're wearing a mask. After spending the year on Zoom or with masks, students going back to school will

see their classmates in a new light. This is especially true for this year's sophomores and seventh graders, who spent their first year of middle school and high school with new classmates, respectively.

However, after spending so much time learning to recognize classmates in their masks, students will face the reversed challenge of recognizing classmates without their masks. For so long, the mask was part of our daily routine that we learned to adapt to and overcome the issue of recognizing people. But Catherine Gordon, a sophomore at The Kinkaid School, is ready for any challenges that may come in the fall. Gordon says, "I was a freshman this year, so our class grew dramatically. There are nearly 60 new faces I haven't really seen yet. I feel it'll be pretty weird to see "new" people that, while I know their face with a mask on, I really have no idea what they look like." Whatever the case, Gordon says she is thrilled to be returning in person and can't wait to "see all my classmates".

## Virtual vs Not Virtual

Another big debate going into the new school year is virtual vs. not virtual. Having spent the past year on Zoom, many students are well adapted to online classes and are ready to be in person. However, many also have voiced their preference for some aspects of virtual learning, such as online exams, virtual extracurricular activities, and Zoom club meetings. Virtual assessments in particular have students torn. Catherine Gordon says, "Personally, I disliked online assessments in some classes, but liked them in others. Typing long, timed English or History essays was convenient, but Biology tests online were difficult and [required] lots of reading."

The iWRITE Youth Club has also experienced some internal debate on whether or not to continue with Zoom meetings. Before COVID, all Youth Club meetings were held in person, but due to safety concerns, iWRITE switched to a virtual platform. With Zoom, iWRITE meetings grew, including members from across Texas and even extending to other states such as Ohio. Youth Club member, sophomore Sanjna Pandit, was a part of this group, having joined the iWRITE community in the spring of 2020. "My time as a Youth Club member was born along with the pandemic. All of the Youth Club meetings I have attended have been through Zoom. Therefore, I can't imagine attending meetings in person. Because of the overall convenience and practicality, I would love for iWRITE meetings to stay virtual, whereas for other events like ceremonies and of course school, I am perfectly willing to say goodbye to Zoom."

Clubs everywhere are asking similar questions as they weigh the benefits of membership and participation for deciding virtual or in-person club meetings. While it is exciting to have meetings with members across the US, there is much to be said for in-person meetings, where they run more smoothly and without worry or accommodations to be made for technological problems. Most high school students agree, however, that Zoom is here to stay in some capacity. Gordon says that she feels Zoom will stick since it's so useful for days when you can't make it to school if, for example, you feel under the weather but well enough to log in online. Basically, Gordon is "looking forward to more normalcy in the classroom. I missed feeling connected with my classmates - Zoom stripped us of those day-to-day relationships that made school enjoyable."

## Looking Forward

Everyone knows the feelings of disappointment that arose as event after event was canceled due to COVID-19 in Houston. From sports games to school dances to even school in general, everyone's missed out on something. Catherine Gordon, an avid lacrosse and basketball player, and track-and-field runner says she missed out on SPC, or the Southwest Preparatory Conference, a tournament where teams across the Southwest get to compete and show off their hard-earned skills and dedication. Gordon says, "For basketball and lacrosse, the SPC tournament was cancelled, and the season just wasn't the same. It was often frustrating and a bit sad that all our hard work did not amount to a competition." Despite these feelings of disappointment, Gordon maintained a positive attitude. "As a three-sport varsity athlete, I am thrilled about the lack of masks in these upcoming seasons. Basketball season was quite difficult with a mask on - lacrosse was even harder. I can't wait to get back to normal!"

A significant part of a high schooler's life is going to various social events. Whether football games or performing arts showcases, everyone's involved in something. One big event high schoolers across America look forward to is homecoming. Whether you're just interested in the football game or you enjoy going dancing with friends, homecoming is arguably one of the most looked forward to events in high school. With homecomings across the country put on hold or following social distancing and COVID protocols, it just wasn't the same. Now that we're ready to press play on regular life and get back into the swing of things, Houston high schools are excitedly looking forward to their homecoming dances and making memories.

Sanjna Pandit could not agree more. "I'm so grateful for the hard work Kinkaid has put into getting the students, faculty, and staff in the school spirit despite COVID-19's setbacks. When Catherine, myself, and many others stepped foot onto the school's grounds in the beginning of 2021, we had no idea how things would be. But it turned out to be a great year, and knowing that we have the ability to relax COVID protocols in the fall makes me all the more excited for my sophomore year. Changes are coming, and memories will indeed be made."

Whatever we are looking forward to this coming school year, all of us in the Greater Houston Area can agree that it's exciting to return back to normal. The excitement in Gordon's voice is palpable as she says, "I am looking forward to a sense of normalcy and can't wait to get back to having a real high school experience. I plan to make the most of the next three years!"

## **BY** *Madison Burba*

*I WRITE because when I put pen to paper, I can create entire worlds. One where anything is possible. I love to inspire people to feel the same when they write too.*

# Falling Fast



*Image credit: Buzz Magazines*

As much as the summer holiday is supposed to be used for doing literally anything except this, I found myself thinking about school the other day. Although my notoriously horrible memory prevented me from actually remembering specifics about how I chose to spend my time in high school (or any school, for that matter), I can summarize my experience in two choice words: chaos and panic.

I suppose I was spoiled in terms of how much free time I had. It was like I was pooling an hourglass's worth of sand in my hands: it just kept slipping through my fingers. How many hours did I spend scrolling the 'gram? How many hours did I spend talking with people I didn't like? How many hours did I spend surviving high school instead of living it? I still have a year left. And yet, looking back on the three that have already passed me by, the amount of sand still cupped in my palms seems to shrink. I'm sure that it will pass in the blink of an eye, the fierce teeth of time ripping through my final year of youth as I am forced into the dense, dark fog that shrouds my future of being "grown-up."

But I want to take a moment, here in the lull that the summer provides, to reflect upon my high school experience as a whole: to examine what I enjoyed, what I would've changed, and, most importantly, my advice to you, beloved reader of this magazine (and/or editor reading this article). If there is one thing I have enjoyed about high school, it is learning. But that's probably because I'm a nerd, far better equipped to get a number from a calculus question than a cute girl. For me, becoming more knowledgeable has become its own reward, and developing a joy for it will make school far easier and homework at least bearable. I understand that fostering this interest isn't as simple as flipping a switch in your head, nor am I expecting you to suddenly love your classes. I am only urging a simple change in thinking and in the way you frame school. Looking at schoolwork as a vehicle for learning rather than getting a good grade made a world of difference for me in terms of how much I actually took away from it. The other main reason I got through high

school was the support of a network of awesome friends. They're too numerous to list here, but I couldn't have made it without each and every one of them. A long time ago, when I was more vulnerable and less outgoing, I would've prided myself on being able to handle everything that life threw at me. Coming to terms with my own deficiencies and learning when to rely on others has allowed me to both meet new people and become a better person overall.

I can't complain about the experience that I have been given. Honestly speaking, I have had many regrets during my time here, but looking back, they seem almost insignificant. That's not to say they don't exist, but the passage of time erases all wounds (as well as everything else). I would only ask for more opportunities to have regrets in the first place. After this year, I will move on into the next stage of my life. Friends will fall away, crushes forgotten, old flames discarded in favor of a fresh start. And high school will become another memory that will eventually fade away, too. My one piece of advice in this article, contrary to what you might be expecting, is not to live every day as if it was your last. I've always found that line kind of puzzling; if I thought today was my last day of existence, I would behave in a neither sustainable nor particularly ethical way. Instead, I simply ask that you be more conscious of the time that you have left, and to treat it as a precious resource. An hourglass of disappearing diamonds would undoubtedly leave more of an impact than sand moving from one side to the other. Your life will probably be long, healthy, and happy. But it doesn't mean that you will have all the time you want. And a person's perception of the time they have left and the time they actually have left is quite staggering. My request to you is that if you are to ever spend time on something, make sure it is worthwhile. Not everything you do has to be impactful, you just have to personally enjoy it. It can be anything from writing your magnum opus to just spending an afternoon with your friends. Wring the magic out of every moment and never forget the things that you love. As the fall approaches, bringing with it a few final semesters, I will do everything in my power to make this year last for as long as it can.

**BY** *Alex Zhang*

*I WRITE because it's a way to bring my wildest dreams to life and share them with others. I really love iWRITE because of the family that I've found within the organization.*

# Cardinals and Choristers: A Music Teacher Making Magic

To say that it's been a weird year for students would be an understatement. Around the world, whether in kindergarten or college, virtual classrooms dominated the screen (literally!), and students adjusted to a new learning environment. Some returned to in-person mode, while others eagerly await walking their school's hallways in the fall. In the midst of all the craziness, the conductors of this educational train have been remarkably stable, doing everything and more to make math, writing, and history classes enjoyable for their pupils. These conductors are none other than teachers. In this article, I have the great pleasure of highlighting the work of one in particular: Mr. Phillip Sammons, a UH Moores School of Music graduate, master clarinetist, and music teacher.



Image credit: Buzz Magazines

It all started in 2017 after Hurricane Harvey devastated the Houston area. Sammons realized it was time to start a choir at Paul W. Horn Elementary School, where he works. And so began the Cardinal Choir, named after the school's passerine mascot; the choir consists of fourth and fifth-grade students, including my nine-year-old sister. As someone who remained virtual for the entire year, going to rehearsals, recording a performance for the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA), and expressing her voice in song felt all the more special for her. This experience was all possible because of Sammons.

He shared, "I felt strongly that after a major trauma like Harvey, students needed a place to share, sing, and feel excited about life. I still remember the first concert that December! We sang a piece called Yonder Come Day, and the final line resonates with me still. "Sun is a-risin', in my soul." The students tossed gold glitter from their pockets, and the audience cheered in a standing ovation. Those are now cherished memories of a concert that put a smile on the hardened faces of so many." That magic also rings true during a global pandemic. For my sister, music filled the void that resulted from online academic and core enrichment classes; knowing how much of an impact the choir had on

her assures me that her peers and their families also benefited from this incredible program. Sammons gave his thoughts on this subject: "What I soon realized was that choir gave myself and my students a purpose beyond the classroom. I saw that with intentional teaching, I could prepare my students to sing beautifully in choir from the fun games they play in Kindergarten! My teaching began to align with this mindset, and I am so thankful. Choir enriches a young person's life with meaning, fellowship, and a passionate spirit in all disciplines."

That doesn't mean there weren't difficulties. Sammons wanted the Cardinal Choir to sing at the statewide level, and this past year, that came true! Due to COVID'S restraints, however, the choir was confined to a digital concert for online views. Of course, Sammons did not expect his dream to go this way, but he didn't let the negativity stop him and his students.

"I really believe in the power of perspective. Instead of complaining about the circumstances, I reshaped my thoughts," he said. "The ability to record a concert could also mean the opportunity to showcase my students' creativity and love for music in a new light. Looking at the music I chose for the concert, I discovered an inherent theme – birds. Birds represent freedom – an escape from life that tethers us to a harsh reality. I explained this to the choir, and they understood that our concert would be giving educators – who may be suffering under the demands of COVID – a feeling of hope for the future of their music programs. Every rehearsal began with a sense of gratitude, and this kept me grounded despite the many roadblocks that appeared!" Though the journey of finding an audio engineer, videographer, and outdoor place to film while dealing with Houston weather was no easy task, Sammons and the Cardinal Choir "made history at Horn Elementary." In Sammons' words, they proved "beautiful music can be made under any circumstance" and "singing is vital to a happy, healthy life!"

Sadly, Sammons will now be with the Cardinal Choir in spirit, for he is taking the next step in his music teaching career at St. John's School in the fall. He is hopeful for a school environment that looks more like pre-COVID life, but the memories, accomplishments, and lessons learned this year will stay with him as he tackles the new school year. I think it wise to take on perspective like Sammons and use that to better ourselves and the world around and ahead of us. As we continue to enjoy our summer vacation and think about the approaching school year, let us applaud all of the adults in our lives who have done something to positively impact us, like Mr. Sammons has and will no doubt continue to do.

## BY Sanjna Pandit

*I WRITE because writing cultivates my ability to be eloquent and express my feelings and ideas. I learn more and more about myself with every new thought that I put on paper. My mind forces me to enter a whole new realm of imagination and discoveries that I never knew I could reach.*

# A Case of the First Day Jitters



“But, I don’t even know anybody there!” Nicole whined to her mother.

“What about Hannah and Rose? You three were *best* friends last year!” Nicole’s mother questioned, emphasizing ‘best’.

“Mom! We aren’t going to the same school anymore, remember?” Nicole retorted.

That dreadful day in August had finally rolled around. Socially, last school year was fairly easy for Nicole. She kept her circle small and predominantly talked to her closest friends Hannah and Rose. They did everything together: shopping, homework, soccer. They practically spent every waking minute with one another. Nicole figured they would have each other throughout high school, so she never had to make other friends. Therefore, she was pretty nervous to start school without them. For their freshman year of high school, Nicole would no longer be able to hang out with Hannah and Rose during school since Hannah’s mom was moving the family to a different city to help take care of Hannah’s grandfather, and Rose had to switch schools because her sister was going off to college and her family wanted to stay close by.

Finally, the fateful day came: the first day of high school. Nicole’s hands were sweating, her knees were weak, she had butterflies in her stomach, and a humongous lump in her throat. She got out of the car, said goodbye to her mom, tightened her bookbag straps, and walked into the new building. She stumbled into her first period right before the bell rang. She quickly glanced at the students in search of a seat when someone caught her eye. A girl was sitting alone in the back corner of the class looking back at her with a

soft smile and kind eyes. Nicole immediately knew that they would be great friends. Nicole sat down in the chair next to her and they started getting to know each other, Nicole found out her name was Charlotte or “Char” for short. Char and Nicole began talking about their favorite bands, sports, and hobbies. They realized they both loved shopping at their local mall, and they arranged a time on the weekend to go to the mall together.

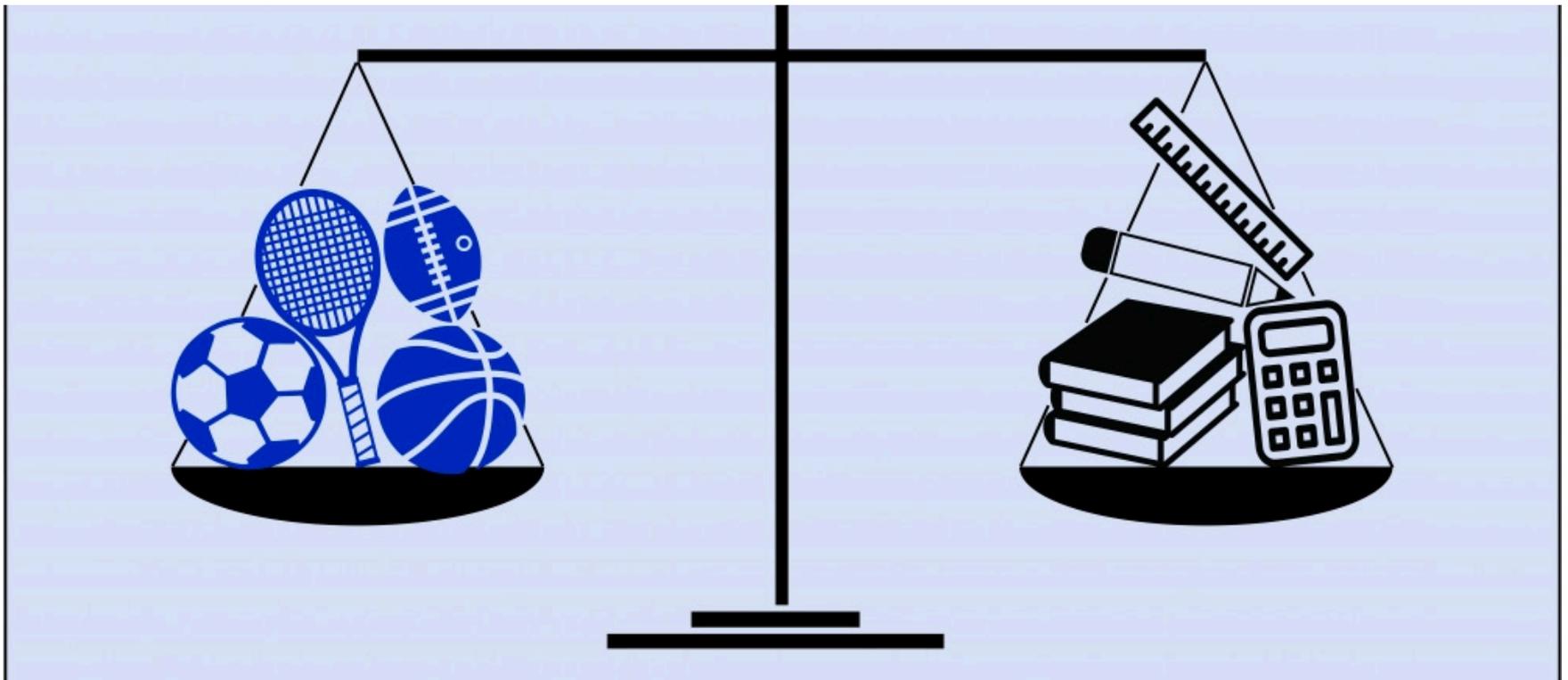
That weekend they met up along with one of Char’s friends Jax. He stayed in the food court the majority of the time they were at the mall while Nicole and Charlotte were shopping. Nicole still managed to get acquainted with Jax and she realized they had three classes together! All the classes she didn’t have with Char she had with Jax! So when they went back to school on Monday, they all hung out together during lunch. During the classes that Nicole had with Jax, she hung out with him, and for the classes she had with Char, she hung out with her. Throughout the year they got closer, went shopping, and studied together. By the end of the year, they were best friends. Everyone in school knew that if you saw one of them, you were bound to see the other two. They were everyone’s favorite trio!

Now when Nicole looks back at her case of the ‘first day jitters,’ she laughs knowing that she now has the best friends anyone could ask for.

**BY Lexi Bumah**

*I WRITE because writing for me is a mental massage and an authentic way to express myself. In-person I’m shy. When I have the opportunity to write, I find it exhilarating. I love having the ability to convey my feelings, without feeling uncomfortable.*

# Staying Sane with Sports and School



Fall is a very exciting time of year! It is the time when school starts back up and sports start again. However, transitioning from summer to sports and school can be very difficult, which is why you should start training and devise strategies to balance school and sports.

## Training Yourself

As you slowly start getting back into sports you need to be ready. If you do not train or exercise before the season, you could injure yourself once you are back to playing sports. Since your body isn't used to running for a while or stretching, you could pull something. This is why you should train yourself. Now, the first step to training yourself is to make sure you are in shape.

To get into shape, you should do at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. That could be running, biking, swimming or any physical activity, but the important part is to exercise for at least 30 minutes. Set yourself a goal and continue

this every day to make sure you are fit. Practicing the sport you play is also important. For example, you can practice shooting hoops and dribbling if you play basketball; if you play soccer, practice scoring goals and dribbling the ball; if you play tennis, practice your swing.

Yoga can also help you quite a bit. By doing yoga, you can stretch your muscles and calm your mind. Yoga also helps with flexibility, endurance, oxygenating your body, and much more.

## Balancing School and Sports

As sport seasons slowly start, all the schoolwork and homework start to pile up. Student athletes can get very stressed out, because they might not have enough time to complete their schoolwork.

This is why you should make a plan of how to balance your time. One of the best ways to help you do this is make a schedule. Every month, take about 15-20 minutes to make a monthly schedule. Add all your games, practices, hangouts, out-of-school activities, and everything else you have going on. After adding all that, in the free time you have left, add time for

homework. Depending on how much work you have to do, make sure to have at least 1-2 hours for schoolwork. Make sure you have all your due dates (or as many as have been provided) in the calendar, so you do not fall behind.

Next, you might not be motivated to do schoolwork after a practice or game, maybe even before, so treat yourself after you have finished work to help you keep going. You also want to work during some of your breaks in school, in study hall, or in your free time. That way, you will have less to do when you come back home.

Lastly, if you have too much work piling up on you, do not be afraid to talk to your coach about letting you skip practice or even part of it. Prioritizing is key.

In conclusion, two key parts to being a successful student-athlete are staying in shape through regular training and finding a balance between academics and athletics. I hope the tips in this article come in handy for you as you enter the new school year! Good luck!

**BY** *Aarushi Saxena*

*I WRITE because it inspires me to share my ideas.*

# The Science of Scheduling

**T**he science of scheduling your day is more an art than a science, in its immensely frustrating and elusive standard of quality. However, the necessity of following a schedule remains, and it would be in all our best interest to follow good ones. The question of what an ideal schedule looks like for you could well be vastly different from another's, though there are definitely bad ones, including the lack thereof. This article can't go through planning individual schedules, but it can go through a handful of general rules to consider when formulating a schedule, a stab in the dark, if you would.

Firstly, I would highly suggest getting in the mindset of 24-hour time, also known as military time. Set your phone, your watch, your clocks, your computer, and any other time telling device to this time scheme. This gets you in the mind frame of exactly how much time you have in your day. It clearly indicates to you the truly vast amount of time you have in your day despite all the various tasks taking it up. It does this in a way that standard time can't, and though not necessary, is an important step towards outlining your schedule.

Secondly, allocate your time between your necessary tasks, your unnecessary ones, and your time sleeping down to the hour. On the subject of sleep, I would recommend setting aside six to eight hours for optimal productivity. As for your daily tasks, these can vary to a dramatic degree, but it is almost always the case that you can cut back in certain areas in favor of others. When outlining where you spend

your time, remember to keep in mind your priorities, whatever they may be. Ideally, you'd want to spend at least a plurality of your time towards tasks directly related to your priorities and their achievement.

Finally, adhere to the schedule you set, however demanding it might feel when you're actually going through it every day. Stick to your schedule however daunting or tiresome it may be. In the end, it will be more than worth it. Now, this isn't to say that you should never deviate from the schedule you set because that wouldn't be life. Life is chaotic, life is always taking us by surprise, and that's okay. Find the balance and allow yourself legitimate times for deviation while disallowing illegitimate times for deviation using your best judgement.

In summary, it is in all our best interests to formulate and follow daily schedules, so you should take precaution to lay out efficient ones. You should utilize the 24-hour time scheme as to fully comprehend your day. You should outline your daily tasks down to the hour and allocate your time wisely. And once you've created for yourself a schedule, you should make an effort to follow that schedule, though allowing for extraordinary circumstances. And finally, keep working on your schedule and finding new ways to optimize it, for with an effective plan the world is at your fingertips.

**BY** *Austin Lopez*

*I WRITE because I have words to say and a passion with which to say them. I love the old Star Wars, Percy Jackson, and AJR. I'm also a firm believer that everything isn't as it seems.*



# Chess Is For Everyone



**2**8. Rd4, Rae8 29. Qf6+, Kg8 30. h4, h5, 31. Kh2. What is this? Few people in America, much less the world, would have any idea that this scrambled mixture of numbers and letters corresponds to one of the most legendary games in chess history. Last year, I, like many others, couldn't tell a king from a queen or a rook from a bishop.

Then COVID-19 shook up the world, separating communities and forcing us to lockdown in our homes. Despite the pandemic being a generally miserable (and ongoing) experience, the one thing that I can thank the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown for is how it introduced me to the world of chess. Chess has been a routine pastime for me since then. So, why do I like chess?

First off, chess is exhilarating. Defeating an opponent while gracefully maneuvering around their pieces gives a great sense of satisfaction. The feeling of sacrificing a piece or being multiple points down material but still giving checkmate is a feeling beyond words. And even losing is fun. The anger, frustration, and helplessness of losing it all never ceases to draw me back to chess. The burning competitiveness in me always wants me to improve and get better. Like the joy of winning, the bitterness of losing is also an indescribable feeling.

Secondly, chess helps improve players' memory. During an interview, Magnus Carlsen (the current chess champion) could recall and play the move order of a chess game from nearly 50 years ago just from the position of the pieces. Out of nearly 10,000,000,000...00 (overall twenty-four zeros) different chess combinations, someone could pinpoint the exact chess game. That's an incredible memory! Of course not everyone can be Magnus Carlsen.

But according to Healthline, even an amateur chess player has a better memory than someone who didn't play chess at all. After my introduction to chess, I have found that I can recall many historical facts in daily conversations with strangers, and studying has become so much easier. Daunting as it may be, chess can be a great way to transition to and relax in the upcoming school year by giving you an educational and entertaining game to play. We all know that dreaded feeling of having to do homework or actually focus for the first time in the school year while our brain is numb and eyes are unfocused. Chess is a great remedy for this.

Chess, by nature, is a very methodical and mind-intensive game. Finding the best move, however, in a combination of thousands may only require the simplest logical thinking and a fair amount of focus, helping rebuild those skills necessary in successful school life. During my 8th grade year after the pandemic, I could do much more hours of high-quality work without getting distracted and switching to entertainment. I hope you can pick up chess as your hobby as well. Hesitating? I admit, reading an article from a magazine isn't as convincing as actually doing it. So here's my call to action. Whether you swim, play football, dance, game, or write, please bring out a chessboard, go to chess.com, or just watch a chess YouTube video (I recommend Gotham Chess). Give it a chance. By the time school rolls around, you will have gotten used to concentrating on a task, gained a new friend from a common hobby, or at the very least, learned how to play chess.

**BY** *David Liu*

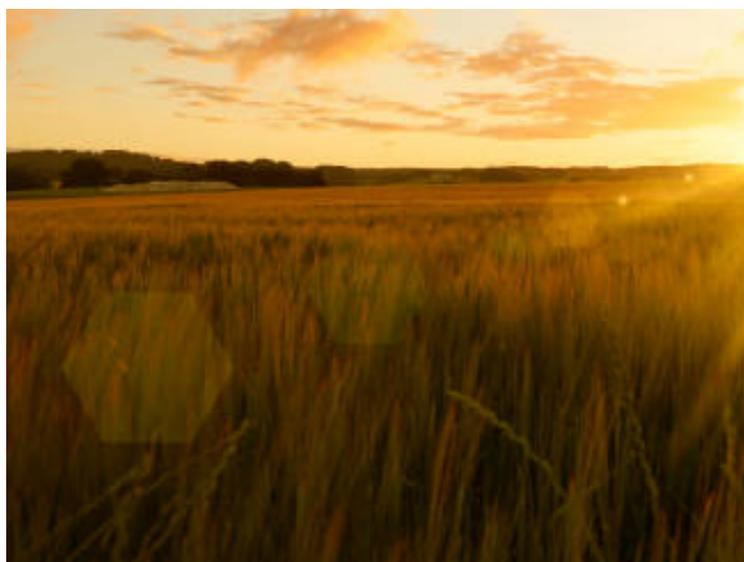
*I WRITE to help others escape to worlds full of color with characters of energy and nuance. To create a place where someone can find refuge, if only just for a few seconds, is something I love to do.*

# A PLACE FOR poetry

## ARISING SUN RISING: A KETEK POEM

Arising sun breeds warmth  
 Dawn's rosy fingers linger  
 Glimpses light's glimpse  
 Lingers fingering rosy dawn  
 Warmth breeds sun arising

*Editor's note: This poem, a ketek, reads the same both ways (with some change in verb form) and forms five complete thoughts. Read it backwards!*



**BY** *Austin Lopez*

*I WRITE because I have words to say and a passion with which to say them. I love the old Star Wars, Percy Jackson, and AJR. I'm also a firm believer that everything isn't as it seems.*

## COVID - THE RAGING STORM

Will the storm and clouds ever pass?  
 Is the new season a symbol of the light that's to come?

Me, one of the few not touched by the needle,  
 Eagerly waiting for the vaccine to hit me.  
 Science has changed and demolished the storm,  
 New inventions never failing to impress all.

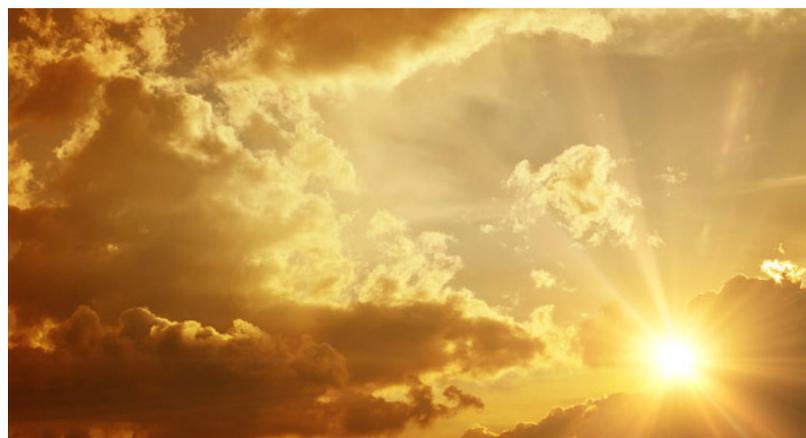
The storm tyrannizes my mind.  
 It brought so many apart  
 But the new season symbolizes the world to come.  
 Never forgetting the storm,  
 how it changed everyone's life,  
 But now the new season is coming,  
 and opportunity will strike.

The new season will never be like life before the storm,  
 But it will be a brand-new thing for the world.

The world will take all the chances,  
 That's what the new season shows us best.  
 The new season shows us how we've grown in different ways.  
 The new season is a symbol of the life that stays.

**BY** *Nia Shetty*

*I WRITE because of the joy I feel, when I put a new idea down on paper. To be able to bring feelings and emotions to the reader, through ideas that I get to express.*



---

## THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

---

What a unique and unprecedented year it has been.  
We have struggled to find ways to weather the stress and anxiety  
caused by COVID-19.

With a deadly pandemic taking a toll on people's lives,  
We have all experienced challenges in the current crisis.  
Yet, we have been hopeful, looking forward to better times.

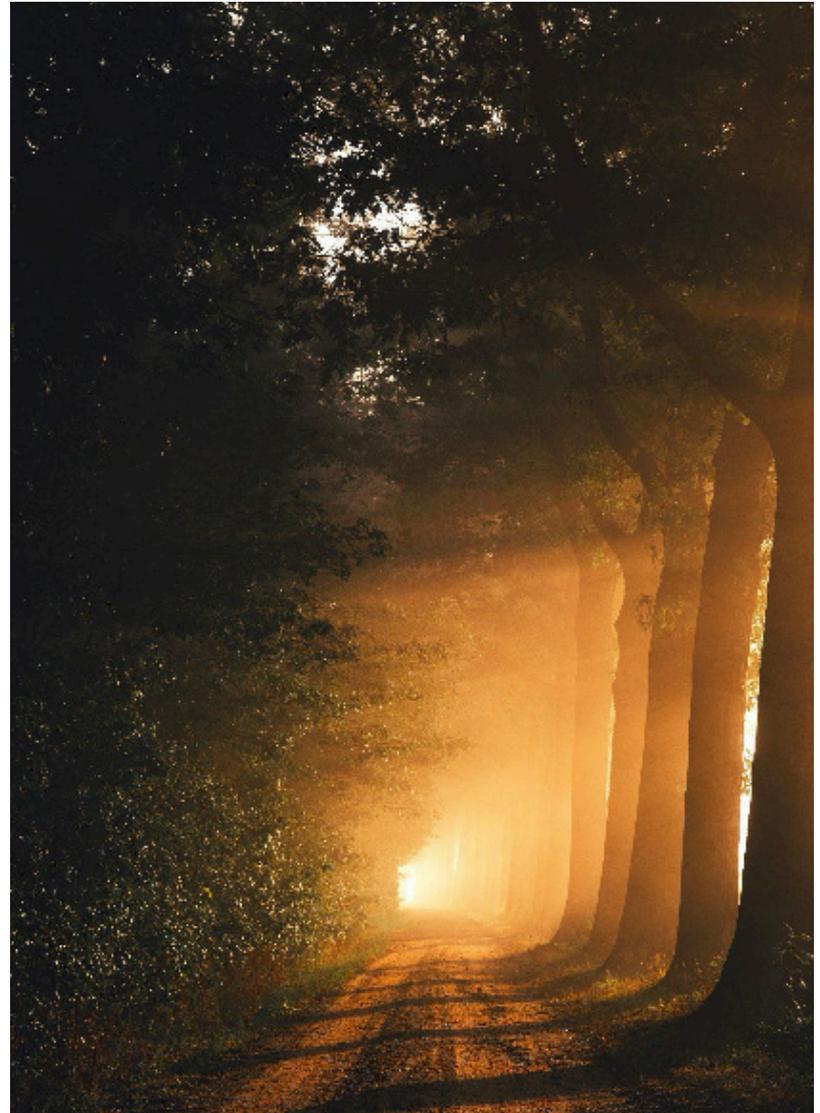
As we find our way through challenges,  
This year was filled with contemplation and change.  
Some days were fine, and others felt strange.

Just like every cloud has a silver lining,  
This year has been filled with opportunities.  
It has taught us to be focused, resilient, and explore our creativity.  
Despite the hurdles we faced,  
We have learned to stay positive and come together as a community.

As vaccines give us hope and a sense of direction,  
It's time for families and friends to reunite after a year of isolation.

While looking forward to a fresh start this fall,  
We shall try to do our best to move forward.  
As we get ready to unmask and breathe easy,  
We shall remember one thing,

No matter what struggles we face in life,  
We will embrace optimism, perseverance, and hope.  
For we shall never cease to see the light at the end of the tunnel.



**BY** *Shaivi Moparthy*

*I WRITE because writing is a way for me to express myself and it helps me connect to my artistic side. I enjoy writing because it allows me to reflect on experiences that I have encountered. Writing is something that I truly enjoy, and it has always been one of my greatest passions.*

---

## SOMEWHAT NORMAL

---

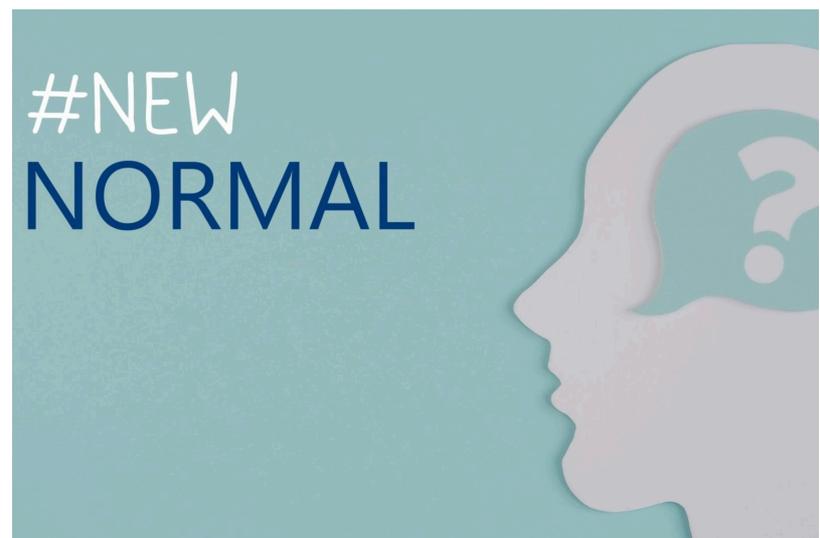
Buzzing static sounds  
Crackle over the Zoom audio  
Cameras shut off  
As teachers drone on--  
Their monotonous lessons  
Lulling students back  
To their restless sleep.  
Aisles of the grocery stores  
Empty quick.  
Masks and hand sanitizer bottles  
Become the most prominent items  
On parents' shopping lists

Airlines opened up,  
People traveled,  
And talked.  
Masks were no longer required.

Schools let students in,  
6 feet was soon down to 3 feet,  
Vaccines were then accessible  
To adults, then children.  
Group hangouts were arranged,

Parties were planned,  
Social gatherings spun into view,  
Society clicked back into  
Its original home,  
And all felt  
Somewhat normal again.

All of us  
Locked up in our houses,  
Waiting, waiting.



**BY** *Sophie Yu*

*I WRITE to let my thoughts, feelings, and ideas spread across the paper. To form and create a story that can be told in any perspective, described with any words. Writing can create a whole new world.*

# BOOK TALK

## You & Me <sup>at the</sup> End <sup>of the</sup> World

*Image Credit: Scholastic Press*

**A** book with something for everyone, author Brianna Bourne's debut novel *You and Me At the End of the World* is an enthralling young adult romance/fantasy/sci-fi piece that will have you hooked. For our Houston readers, there are some fun Easter eggs interwoven within the story. The New York Times liked the book so much that it was included on a list of the 10 Young Adult Books to Watch Out for This Summer.

The unique novel back by Scholastic follows two Houston teens from totally different backgrounds and social circles at school: the overachieving, perfectionist ballerina, Hannah Ashton and the reckless, fun, 80s glam metal-obsessed guitarist, Leo Sterling. Hannah and Leo end up together in their empty home city... and they have no clue why it's so empty. The two kids in post-apocalyptic, isolated Houston explore their new world without parents, friends, or school, and search for the answers that will keep them together. They get a chance to start over and be themselves instead of playing parts others cut out for them, growing closer throughout their time together. They visit abandoned carnivals and cavernous museums, battling strong rainstorms, and discover some interesting powers leading to a jaw-dropping revelation.

A tumultuous romance, a moving emotional plot, an immersive setting, layered characters with emotional insecurities, faults, but also many strong points, and so much more are included in this 358-page book. I blazed through the entire advance reading copy in a day, and I loved the book; it was an easy, engaging read. It's also especially gratifying to have characters with faults that a wider range of young adult readers can relate to. Hannah has danced for the past 12 years of her life and feels forced into her future, and Leo really doesn't have much direction whatsoever, with the reputation of being a party boy who loves music. Leo has neglectful parents who don't seem to pay much attention to him. But what unites the two characters, and what I feel is key even in life, is that both Hannah and Leo's friends – Astrid and Asher respectively – play an important part in their lives as support structures and

companions. It's a bit formulaic, but it works well because of Brianna Bourne's illustrative writing style. She shared more about her character development process.

"I started with the shell of Hannah and Leo: she's a ballerina and he's a bad boy. But to reveal their traits, I had to work hard, and I leaned heavily on this amazing book called *Story Genius* by Lisa Cron," Bourne told me. "There's a small part of me in each of my characters. Hannah's a bit of an overthinker, which I am, and Leo has this amazing ability to stick his head in the sand and pretend things aren't happening, which I sometimes do. But beyond that, they became their own people as I continued drafting."

Touching on the setting of the book, post-apocalyptic Houston never felt so relatable; after the past year, a girl walking down an empty highway is an image we can actually conjure up. And even if we didn't have that reference point (as Bourne didn't, having written this book before the pandemic), the vivid details in this novel certainly help. Bourne said that one of her main goals was to create an immersive setting, and she drew on her childhood in Houston, plus some interesting visualization techniques.

"An important part of writing that doesn't get enough importance is to imagine the scene through your characters' eyes," she said. "Pretend that it's you in their shoes. So I start with inserting myself in the story and from there, it's a sidestep to tailor the scene for the given character. I also tied sensory details back into how the narrator feels about the scene."

When asked what the hardest part of her writing journey was, Bourne said that the initial chapters of the book and the scenes where not much was happening were the toughest for her to craft.

"Conveying so much in such a small space, especially in the first few chapters, is challenging," she said. "After your characters break into their second act, going after their goal, things get a bit saggy there."

To conclude, I'd give *You and Me at the End of the World* 4.5 out of 5 stars, only deducting .5 stars because it was slightly formulaic and seemed to have a pretty fortuitous ending, which you'll find out about if you read the book...

but hey, it's fantasy, and it's still an amazing novel! I encourage readers 13 and up to read *You and Me at the End of the World*. *You and Me at the End of the World* releases on July 20, 2021, in the USA. Check out my full interview with author Brianna Bourne on the iWRITE Youth Club YouTube page.

**BY** *Eshaan Mani*

*I WRITE for the rush of adrenaline I feel when my pen touches the paper. It is that exhilarating experience and the opportunity to not only get my voice out to the public but also be able to be the voice of inspiring people and organizations that inspires me to write.*

## 5 Must-Read Books this Summer!

**N**ow that summer's in full swing, it's time to pick up a book and get into reading. Nothing is better than warm sunshine paired with some good words, and below are five books you just have to read this summer!

### **TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE** by Mitch Albom

**I**f you're looking for life-changing words, look no further. *Tuesdays with Morrie* follows the real life story of an intrigued student and a wise teacher. Mitch Albom reconnects with his former professor of sociology, Morrie Schwartz, who had been diagnosed with ALS. The two meet on Tuesdays to discuss topics of what will become Morrie's last lesson, but one that is powerfully moving. Morrie shares beautiful, inspiring words about how the acceptance of one's death can emphasize the meanings of life and how one should live it. Written in an accessible way, this book is one of the greatest soul foods you could possibly consume.

### **AND THEN THERE WERE NONE** by Agatha Christie

**N**obody does a good summer crime book like Agatha Christie, and *And Then There Were None* is one of her most spectacular pieces. Eight strangers receive a letter of invitation to a distant island from the mysterious Mr. Owen. After the eight guests dine together, they find a recording, accusing each of them of committing a murder. The guests realize no one actually knows who Mr. Owen is, and that they have all specifically been gathered as part of a plan. The situation grows darker as each of the guests die one by one, following the eerie lyrics of a nursery rhyme that is hung on the walls of each guestroom. The intricate, shocking revelations and developments will be sure to stun you.

### **THE GIVER** by Lois Lowry

**T**his classic book is set in a futuristic society where things are vastly different from the past. All negative ideas are seemingly eliminated, with no fear, pain, or hate. All members of the society follow strict rules that allow them to live a life of peaceful harmony and convenience. Jonas is a young boy who is soon to reach his Ceremony of Twelve, where members of the society are assigned a career. At the ceremony, Jonas is honored as The Receiver; he is to

closely work with The Giver on overseeing the community's memories. With this, Jonas comes to the revelation that his community is not what it seems; he begins to feel overcome with emotions and realizes that color is absent from his world. With *The Giver*, Jonas devises a plan that could overturn the society and change it forever.

### **THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER** by Steven Chbosky

**C**harlie is a wallflower. He's present, but merely observing what goes around. Charlie grapples with two deaths that have happened in his life. Charlie enters high school and becomes close friends with a group of seniors who take him in and introduce him to life as an adolescent. With the help of his friends and through his experiences, Charlie comes to great realizations, allowing him to truly live out his life. This novel is beautifully written and is truly one of the best coming-to-age books. Also adapted as a film, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a must-read and must-see.

### **THE BOOK THIEF** by Markus Zusak

**W**ith gorgeous imagery, *The Book Thief* is at the top of the list of books that have made me cry the hardest. Set in the time of World War II, a young girl named Liesel is aboard a train to Germany with her mother and brother. After her brother's sudden death, she steals her first book from the gravediggers at his burial. Liesel is left to live with her foster parents, the Hubermanns, whom she gradually comes to love. She befriends the neighborhood boy, Rudy, and learns to read. The time of war approaches her little town, and between book-burnings and chores, Liesel steals and acquires a steady collection of books. This book follows Liesel's story, her life in her small town, the sightings of war, and hiding a Jew in the basement. This beautifully written book will move you.

**BY** *Kate Jeong*

*I WRITE because I have a passion for being able to share my reflections and thoughts with others. I write so I can share the spark that writing's joys give with many other interested students.*

# A Chance to Make History



**W**e have a very exciting announcement! You (yes, you) can make history by submitting to this year's iWRITE Publishing Contest! How, you ask?

The iWRITE Organization and The Bryan Museum are partnering with New York Times bestselling author and illustrator team, Brad Meltzer and Christopher Eliopoulos, to break the Guinness World Record for the Largest Published Book in the World called I Am Texas!

To break the record, they'll be creating a massive book (over 7 feet tall!) that will be displayed at The Bryan Museum, alongside its Texas and American West collection of historical artifacts, books, and artwork. One-thousand students will have the chance to be published and become part of Brad Meltzer's *Ordinary People Change the World* series.

Students are invited to share "their Texas story" from grades 3-12. These stories (fiction or nonfiction), poetry, and illustrations are due no later than March 2, 2022, Texas State Independence Day. Students will be invited to the official Guinness World Record judging and book signing event in Houston, TX.

Brad Meltzer and Illustrator Christopher Eliopoulos will be announcing the Editor's Choice Award Winners and Featured Illustrator. For more information, please visit [iamtx.org](http://iamtx.org) or email [contest@iwrite.org](mailto:contest@iwrite.org).

### About the Publishing House

Penguin Random House, the world's largest trade book publisher, is dedicated to its mission of nourishing a universal passion for reading by connecting authors and their writing with readers everywhere.

The company, which employs more than 10,000 people globally, was formed on July 1, 2013, by Bertelsmann and Pearson. As of April 1, 2020, Bertelsmann is full owner of the company. With more than 300 imprints and brands on six continents, Penguin Random House comprises adult and children's fiction and nonfiction print and digital English- German- and Spanish-language trade book publishing businesses in more than 20 countries worldwide. With over 15,000 new titles, and more than 600 million print, audio and eBooks sold annually, Penguin Random House's publishing lists include more than 80 Nobel Prize laureates and hundreds of the world's most widely read authors.

## HOW IT WORKS

**1. Tell your Texas Story.** This year's theme is all about Texas. Maybe you and your family have lived in Texas for generations, or maybe you just moved to Texas. Or, maybe you've done your research and know that Texas is full of adventures and history. If you're telling a story about Texas in words or artwork, you can enter.

**2. Enter the contest.** Students in grades 3-12 can enter stories (fiction or nonfiction), poetry, and illustrations. Let your imagination run wild! The deadline is March 2, 2022 (That's Texas Independence Day!).

**3. Celebrate Texas!** One thousand students will be selected for publication. Students will be invited to our annual book-signing celebration and the official Guinness World Record judging event in Houston, TX. New York Times bestselling author Brad Meltzer and illustrator Christopher Eliopoulos will be announcing this year's Editor's Choice award winners and Featured Illustrator!

*All entries must be received using the contest portal link. You will be prompted to create an account to upload your work and fill out the entry form.*

## FICTION & NONFICTION

*Telling Your Texas Story Through Prose*

Stories about Texas are as wide as the Texas sky and as diverse as the Texas landscape. Use your personal experiences, family stories, research and, of course, your imagination to write a story that embodies what Texas means to you. Put your fictional characters smack dab in the middle of a real historical event or tell the true story of your family's connection to this great state. Whether through fiction or nonfiction, everyone has a tale to tell, so let your creative star shine by proclaiming, "I AM TEXAS!"

## POETRY

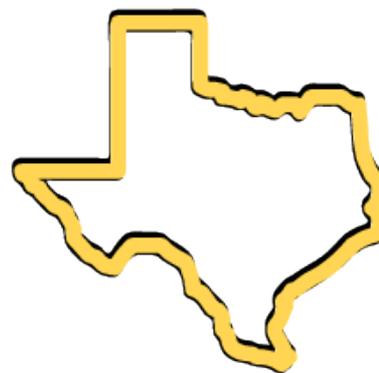
*Telling Your Texas Story Through Poetry*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once defined poetry as the best words in the best order. Celebrate how you embody "I AM TEXAS" through the best words. Like the great diversity of the people of Texas, there are numerous Texas themes for poetry including historical perspective, cultural celebrations, family memories, thoughtful introspection, and varied viewpoints. All varieties of poetry are enthusiastically encouraged.

## ARTWORK

*Telling Your Texas Story Through Art*

From the sandy shores of the Texas coast to the deep greens of the piney woods and from the rosy pinks of Palo Duro Canyon to the bright lights of the big cities, Texas is full of bold and vibrant colors. Whether it's the view out your window, a glimpse into your heart, or a vision of the past or the future, create a picture that expresses what "I AM TEXAS" means to you.



*Information and assets retrieved from The Bryan Museum and iWRITE by Eshaan Mani.*



**Together, we  
can give every  
kid a chance to  
be a hero in  
their own story.**

**Let's Make  
History!**



Left column (top down): Austin Lopez, Aarushi Saxena, Lexi Bumah, Alex Zhang, Sophie Yu, Sanjna Pandit  
Right column (top down): Kate-Yeonjae Jeong, Eshaan Mani, Nia Shetty, Shaivi Moparthy, Madison Burba, David Liu