

# Community reels from accidental lockdown

*Students, faculty felt more prepared after initial alarm*  
by AUDREY PARK & KABIR JOSHI

Following the Nov. 27 accidental lockdown prompted by human error, the scheduled lockdown occurred Dec. 6 as planned.

For some students and adults on campus, the unexpected lockdown simulated a real-life situation, preparing students and faculty for the planned one and exposing possible concerns about future lockdown drill procedures.

When the accidental lockdown alarm sounded on Nov. 27, junior Juliana Walker was in the bathroom.

She had been aware that a scheduled lockdown drill was approaching. However, she still thought the accidental lockdown was a real situation.

Juliana said she felt more comfortable with the scheduled drill because of the accidental one.

"I felt really prepared for the drill," she said. "Our teacher was going over our strategies, and I was a lot more calm today for sure."

Juliana said students know to stay in the classroom in a planned lockdown drill, but in an actual crisis, they might be outside the classroom in places such as the hallway or bathroom.

Juliana said she was planning to run, but a teacher saw her and wel-

“People were much more prepared to do what they were supposed to do, which speaks back to the fact that there is a lot of value in doing these practices in the first place.”  
Christine Fojtik, history teacher

comed her into a classroom.

She said there should be more instruction on what to do in these situations.

History teacher Christine Fojtik said the accidental lockdown felt like a “practice for the practice.”

“People were much more prepared to do what they were supposed to do,” Ms. Fojtik said, “which speaks back to the fact that there is a lot of value in doing these practices in the first place.”

“If you’re in a classroom, your teacher or adviser would tell you what to do. ‘Hide in behind this closet, turn off your phones.’ But if you’re in the hallway, you don’t have that guidance and would be left not knowing what to do,” Juliana said. “There should be more instruction because you could be in so many different situations and not know what to do.”

Similarly, ninth grader Giovanni Nicolai said the “run, hide, fight” instruction could be clarified, although he understands the unpredictability of these situations.

He said, “The accidental lock-



Midway photo by Eli Raikhel

**LOCKDOWN LESSONS.** Students listen to instructions during the planned lockdown drill on Dec. 6. On Nov. 27, the Historic Campus experienced an accidental lockdown prompted by human error, sending many into panic.

down kind of showed me that no one knows what is going on, but the planned one went more smoothly, and I think expectations were clear.”

Juliana said it would also be helpful if the lockdown drill had occurred earlier in the school year

because a situation could arise at any point in the school year.

Foreign language Xiaoli Zhou’s foreign language advisory and AP Chinese class is in a classroom with a door that does not lock.

Although she was not in the room during the accidental lock-

down, she said it prepared her for the upcoming drill.

According to Ms. Zhou, the door is in the process of being replaced with a lock.

Ms. Zhou said, “I knew it was going to be replaced, so I just put two desks against the door.”

# Optional standardized testing offers flexibility

by AUDREY PARK  
Editor-in-Chief

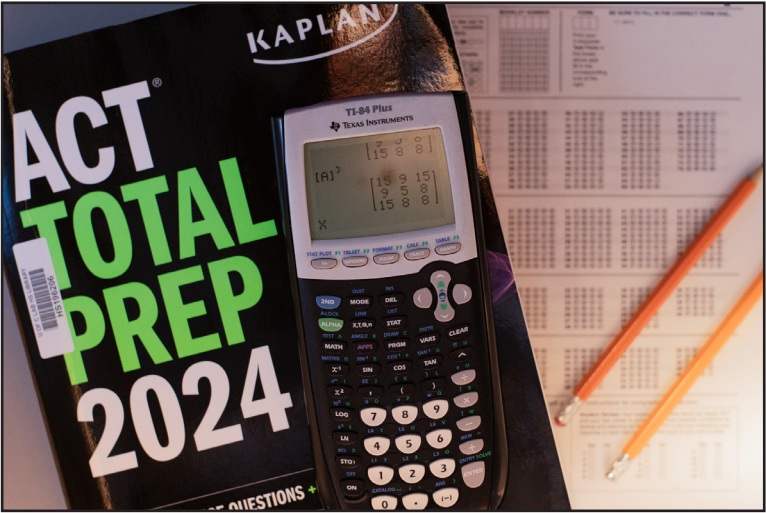
In 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on continuing in-person testing, colleges and universities expanded test-optional admission policies.

Most of these institutions extended the option up to the 2024 admissions cycle or longer, with many making the option permanent. A short list of colleges still require test scores.

High school students face an evolving landscape in the college admissions process as testing requirements and norms change, eliminating testing pressure for some.

College counselor Abigail Wagner said the pandemic gave colleges and universities an opportunity to see if they could evaluate applicants on other factors aside from their test score.

“Many colleges found that they could see if an applicant was ready for the environment based on just using grades and things like community service,” she said. “So maybe you’re not a great test taker, then it gives you the chance to still showcase your other assets.”



Midway photo by Ellis Calleri

**TESTING RELIEF.** Expanded optional standardized testing practices provide flexibility in the college application process for high school students.

For current seniors, Ms. Wagner said she will consider whether it is advantageous for a student to submit their test score, typically whether the score falls within the mid-50% range of what the college typically accepts.

As colleges have adopted test-optional policies, students’ participation in standardized tests has decreased.

She said, “If the student has a test score that is below what the college typically admits, it wouldn’t make sense for the student to submit the score because we don’t want to submit something that would drawback from the quality of that student’s application.”

Standardized testing is evolving in other ways, too. Starting in

March 2024, the SAT will be digital.

Despite this change, Ms. Wagner said her guidance remains the same for students who decide to test. She encourages students to take the PSAT and a practice ACT to determine which one is better suited for them.

She said, “Whichever of these tests allows them to demonstrate their knowledge, a student should choose that test to go forward in preparing to take whether that’s preparation on their own or through a tutor, they should plan to take it at least once maybe twice.”

Max Mathias, a senior who took the SAT, said he was satisfied with his score and plans to submit it to every college he applies to.

He said overall, test-optional admissions are good because students do not have to spend expensive resources to obtain a certain score.

“It still lets students who see it as a plus contribute to their application,” he said. “It can let students who are not strong test-takers emphasize other parts of their application.”

Max said he spent more time on

it because one of the more selective colleges he plans to apply to requires a test score.

“I felt I needed a really strong math score because the school has a big emphasis on math,” he said. “I thought that my score was good enough to demonstrate my aptitude, and it was well within the average of the school.”

Junior Nutan Ganigara, who will apply to colleges next year, also took the SAT. Nutan said she plans to retake it once because she worries colleges still value standardized testing.

Nutan said, “I fear a college will value a student with a score over another who chooses not to submit, so I want to get a good score.”

Ms. Wagner said she advises students not to compare applications to other students and to make the decision to submit a test score based on a student’s personal strengths and readiness.

“Consider what your best interests are,” she said. “Don’t spend a ton of money and emotional resources to test if it doesn’t feel like a strength of yours because there are plenty of other things you can grow and focus on aside from testing.”



# Café Lab adds sustainability practices

*New oil disposal system converts waste into fuel*

by VICTORIA WASHINGTON  
Opinion Editor

Among several sustainability measures, Café Lab has installed a new system to recycle cooking oil and promote sustainability. The system has been used to remove dirty oil from the kitchen and bring in clean oil, a process that has simplified waste disposal.

“It’s really simple, it’s like picking up a garden hose,” executive chef Jonathan Sherman said.

In the back of the cafeteria there are two silos: one for clean oil and one for dirty oil.

Instead of removing and dumping out 450 pounds of oil anywhere, Café Lab provides that oil to Tester Produce trucks for fuel, biodiesel.

Biodiesel is a renewable fuel that can be made from new and recycled oils, including waste oil from restaurants. Using pure biodiesel as an alternative for petroleum diesel can reduce carbon by more than 75%.

“It’s safer for us in the kitchen, because we’re not dealing with hot oil,” Mr. Sherman said. “The fryer

“  
We’ve worked in the past with the Green Team to educate them on doing an overall composting system for the entire community.  
”  
Alicia Culverson, food service director

oil averages 250-75 degrees, which is an instant third-degree burn, or you could slip and fall. It takes a whole liability out.”

In addition to the sustainable oil system, Café Lab reduces food waste by using fresh ingredients and cross utilizing items. Café Lab averages 300 pounds of vegetables per week.

Mr. Sherman encourages mixing up offerings to keep people interested, particularly at the Stir-Fry bar.

Jonah Chen gets stir fry almost every day. He considers it the best option that’s available in the cafeteria because of the fresh options.

“I usually get chicken, teriyaki and garlic,” Jonah said. “I hadn’t noticed the increase in options because I get the same thing, but it’s nice.”

Yellow and green bins are used to collect food waste for compost-



Midway photo by Ellis Calleri

**Café SUSTAINABILITY.** Café Lab has implemented multiple measures to promote sustainability, including a new system to recycle cooking oil, which turns the waste product into biodiesel.

ing, and while most of the work is done behind the service area, cafeteria staff hope to get more of the school involved.

“We’ve worked in the past with the Green Team to educate them on doing an overall composting system for the entire community,”

Alicia Culverson, food service director, said. “We’re hoping to revisit that again this year.”

Mr. Sherman takes pride that all of the bowls and plates are biodegradable.

Even though it comes at a minor cost, Mr. Sherman is confident

that the Lab community is making a difference and doing its part to move in the right direction.

“Every little piece we do helps,” Mr. Sherman said. “Instead of sitting here and not doing anything. Of course we want to do more and more, but it’s a stepping process.”

# At DEI conference, students learn how to foster inclusivity

by MILO PLATZ-WALKER  
Reporter

A group of U-High students are hoping to make an impact on diversity, equity and inclusion programs after they attended the NAIS People of Color Conference, which took place in St. Louis from Nov. 29 to Dec. 2.

Engaging in workshops, discussions and diverse activities such as games, poetry and performances, the students gained valuable insights into fostering DEI in educational environments.

The conference was a meaningful gathering that brought together educators and leaders of color from across the country. The National Association of Independent Schools hosted the event to showcase the organization’s commitment to creating a fair learning environment for all.

Junior Christian Martinez found the event deeply personal and inspiring. For him, the conference fostered a newfound comfort in his own identity.

Christian, who identifies as Latinx, said, “The conference was



Midway photo by Taariq Ahmed

**STUDENT LEADERSHIP.** Six U-High students attended the NAIS People of Color Conference from Nov. 29 to Dec. 2 in St. Louis.

very personal and inspiring. It was definitely a big self-confidence boost, and it made me comfortable with my identity.”

With a theme of “Gateways to Freedom: A Confluence of Truth,

Knowledge, Joy and Power,” the conference served as a platform for students and educators to gain new perspectives and insights into making an inclusive academic environment for all.

“  
I think a lot of people at Lab are tired of the DEI assemblies, but I think bringing back a lot of the activities we did in SDLC and the People of Color Conference is really going to help everyone be more involved in them.  
”  
Olivia Adams, junior

Throughout the conference, participants engaged in workshops and discussions about DEI, core identifiers and cancel culture. Activities included games, poetry, performances and guided discussions. Sessions delved into aspects of creating an inclusive academic environment and how to educate others about DEI.

“At first we started with simple icebreakers but eventually transitioned to talking about larger topics such as cancel culture and core

identifiers,” Christian said. “We got a lot done in our groups and I found it very productive.”

Similarly, junior Olivia Adams found that the conference helped her feel more comfortable and seen.

“Especially as someone who doesn’t always feel comfortable being one of the only Black people in our institution, it really made me feel seen and heard,” said Olivia. “I truly felt like I belonged.”

The attending students presented what they learned about DEI and identifiers to the Lab adults who also attended. The students aimed to recognize the importance of DEI to apply this knowledge to the Lab environment. In particular, Olivia feels this new knowledge can benefit the DEI assemblies at Lab.

Olivia said, “I think a lot of people at Lab are tired of the DEI assemblies, but I think bringing back a lot of the activities we did in SDLC and the People of Color Conference is really going to help everyone be more involved in them.”

## news in brief

### Clubs encourage playing of ping-pong, badminton

U-High enthusiasts of racquet sports have started new clubs for badminton and ping pong to engage in physical activity and have fun.

Skye Freeman, co-president of the Badminton Club, said that while badminton is the second most popular sport in the world, the United States seems to be exempt from this demographic.

U-High no longer has an official badminton team, so Skye hopes to gain and maintain a lot of interest through weekly Wednesday meetings in Upper Kovler Gymnasium at lunch.

Eventually the club plans to partner with the afterschool program. Because of its popularity, Skye said she would also like the club to become an official school sport again.

For a less active commitment, the Ping Pong Club meets Thursdays during lunch. President Eli Strahilevitz created this club because he enjoyed using the ping pong table in Francisco Saez’s science classroom and wanted



Midway photo by Peyton Palmer

**RACKET SPORTS.** Sophomore Charlie Lichtenbaum swings a racket in Badminton Club.

to share the experience with his peers.

Eli, a senior, encourages players of all skill levels to participate.

He said, the best way for a person to improve their skills is “to play people that are at your level and get competitive and try to beat them.”

— Naomi Benton

### Middle school assistant principal begins work

Abbey Cullen has been selected as assistant principal after former Assistant Principal Jessica Hanzlik left at the end of the 2022-23 school year. Ms. Cullen began her role on Nov. 6.

Ms. Cullen was formerly a student success coordinator at a middle school in Glenview, where she promoted practices such as restorative justice and community service, according to an email announcement sent to the community. She also spent six years at the Chicago High School for the Arts, where she served as assistant principal and organized student clubs and activities.

She enjoys watching students grow and become their unique selves during the difficult time of middle school.

Ms. Cullen said, “I want to bring my passion for helping teachers be-



Abbey Cullen

come the best teachers they can be and encouraging them to be creative in how they are teaching the students and working with the students.”

— Caroline Skelly

### Model UN wins best large delegation at St. Ignatius

The Model United Nations team won the outstanding large delegation award at a training conference at St. Ignatius College Prep on Oct. 4.

Junior Helen Kraemer, sophomores Daniel Chang, Maggie Yagan, Isabella Huang and ninth grader Gabi Novak won awards for best delegate, and 15 other students won outstanding or honorable delegate awards.

Secretary-general Sohail Sajdeh said he is very proud of the team’s recent achievements.

“We’ve won two out of two delegation awards, but on top of that, I think that everyone’s learned a lot and gained a lot of experience going into future conferences and bigger conferences,” Sohail, a senior, said.

— Edward Park

### Debate team performs well at recent conferences

At the recent four debate tournaments since the start of the school year, the U-High Debate team has displayed strong results, earning individual and group recognition.

At the Niles Township Invitational Sept. 9-10, seniors Sasha Duda and Siddharth Reddy made it to the quarterfinals and placed in the top eight teams.

At the Greenhill tournament and round-robin Sept. 13-18, seniors Cyrus Esmailzadeh and Mahi Shah made it to the semifinals of the tournament.

They placed in the top four teams. Mahi was awarded the Linda Odo Award for first place speaker.

At the Trevian Invitational Oct. 7-9, the team made it to the quarterfinals and placed in the top eight teams.

At the University of Michigan tournament Oct. 27-29, the team made it to the quarterfinals.

Mahi, a captain of the team, is content with the team’s results.

— Jaya Alenghat



# After alarm, attitude must change

“Run, hide, fight,” a low voice blared through intercoms across the Historic Campus. On Nov. 27, as hundreds of students joined their final class of the day, they heard this terrifying message. Students were sent into a frenzy, scrambling for information and instructions, completely unaware of what to do next. Teachers were sent into panic, trying to initiate the emergency protocol. The campus became lost in the chaos that ensued.

Thankfully, this lockdown was a false alarm. The Historic Campus was safe. A few minutes later, in a muffled voice, the phrase “disregard the previous message” echoed through the speakers. The alerts were a malfunction, the result of a simple human error.

On Dec. 6, the Lab community participated in another lockdown — a drill that had been planned since before the accidental alerts. This time, community members knew what it was like to be unprepared in these situations and took steps to follow protocols. Despite this, not enough people participated in the drill with the seriousness many experienced days earlier when they believed their lives were at stake.

Though these drills are unpleasant, knowing how to act in emergency situations is crucial for the

as the  
midway  
sees it.

This represents the opinion of the U-High Midway editorial board.

safety of the entire community. These drills are about life and death, so students should take them seriously.

Situations with intruders are possibly dangerous and inherently unpredictable. Each classroom or part of the school is unique. A lockdown is not like a fire drill. Everyone should be given more information about how to act in such frightening and uncertain circumstances because every scenario cannot be accounted for in a drill. These details — where to hide, what to take, how to react — are immensely significant to the safety of our entire community, yet they remain largely unknown.

Even though these drills interrupt a normal school day, they are the better alternative than chaos when we are unprepared. By teaching every person in the lower, middle and high schools what to do, we prevent people from



Midway illustration by Eliza Dearing

feeling panic. We can reduce people feeling like it is every person for themselves, which endangers the entire community.

It is also crucial that alarms be standard across the school. There should be no place where an intruder alarm couldn't be heard like in the gym or in certain classrooms, ensuring that everyone is informed of an issue and can take

the appropriate precautions.

The accidental drill illuminated an issue in our community that we cannot ignore. We don't know how to act to keep ourselves safe yet must learn the best way to do so. There must be a standard across the campus that students and adults are aware of. We cannot waste time joking around and laughing, even if the alarm turns

out to be a mistake.

Though it is horrible to imagine the possibility of these events, let alone how we as a community would have to react, these are today's devastating realities. We can't afford to ignore these drills and need to be aware of the actions we need to take in case a tragic instance occurs and that “run, hide, fight” alarm is real.

## It's OK to have uncertainty around your future job

by KATIE SASAMOTO-KURISU  
Editor-in-Chief

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

This is a question I was asked countless times when I was younger, by teachers, relatives and others, and I'm not alone. Now that I'm a senior, the question has turned into a conversation about what I want to study in college, and not long after, what job I want to pursue. I still don't know the answer.

At U-High, it often feels like everyone knows exactly what they want to do for their future career.



Katie Sasamoto-Kurusu

Involved academic teams like Science Olympiad and Model United Nations alongside professional opportunities like the Summer Link program enable students to develop robust academic interests in a direct way.

While this environment can be academically motivating, it can also be intellectually inhibitive and downright misleading. Despite the diversity offered in school co-curricular programming, many students still believe some majors and academic fields to be more desirable or valuable.

I myself at times have been vulnerable to these sentiments, but I extend a universal message to my peers: It is OK to not know what you want to study or which career you want to pursue. You should keep an open mind with regard to your future, because you nev-

er know where your interests may lead you.

In fact, about one-third of all undergraduate students in the United States change their academic major before receiving their bachelor's degree and about 10% change more than once, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. It is important to understand that personal interests — especially those academically or career oriented — are subject to change at the high school and undergraduate level.

Further, an estimated 20-50% of first-year students enter college undeclared. While some students may view this as a path that may hinder progress toward an intended career, most schools require general education requirements as part of their academic programming regardless. This structure

leads most students to take courses in numerous disciplines, often sparking curiosity in an unexpected academic interest outside of their original major.

About 10-25% of college students graduate with a double major. At some more selective institutions, this number is closer to 40%. Interdisciplinary study is and will continue to be a catalyst for academic innovation, especially in a rapidly changing world.

There is no “right” major or career path. Your interests — personally, socially and professionally — will most likely change. It is easy to feel drawn to specific academic disciplines because they may seem to be a fast-track to a successful career.

But the reality is major choice and related decisions are simply one factor in your academic jour-

by the numbers

20-50%  
high school students apply to college undeclared

1 in 10  
undergraduate students change their major at least once

— National Center for Education Statistics; BestColleges

ney and one catalyst for scholarly exploration. I encourage you to pick what truly interests you — you may be surprised — and pursue it. It just might change your life.

## ‘Girl Math’ trends perpetuates lack of financial literacy

by CHLOË ALEXANDER  
Arts Editor

Scrolling through TikTok's “For you page,” you are bound to come across at least one video about Girl Dinner, Girl Math or Girl's Roman Empire. From girls talking about buying a pair of \$5,000 earrings but the price is \$2,500 in her mind, or a girl claiming she saved money because she bought two lip glosses for the price of one, these “girl”-labeled trends develop quickly and have exponential pop-



Chloë Alexander

ularity.

Although these trends come across as funny and empowering for girls, they only further misogyny and promote negative connotations and stereotypes about women, including the misconceptions that all we do is shop or we don't know how to handle money.

Although this trend surfaced on social media in August, this idea has been around for decades. An early occurrence was the popularization of this idea of amortization, the concept of spreading an overall expense of something equally over its useful life, by media personalities like Oprah Winfrey.

Girl Math also stems from the idea of “investing in myself” by just spending money and justify-

“Girl Math as a trend perpetuates the idea that girls will just shop and spend thousands of dollars, only to say that it was a third of the price.”

ing it by saying it's for your own self-improvement. You're not going to receive dividends or any payback. There's no interest other than self-interest. These factors led to the promotion of Girl Math as a valuable, sustainable and usable economic goal for women, as if this is a way of budgeting.

Girl Math as a trend perpetuates the idea that girls will just shop and spend thousands of dollars, only to say it was actually a third of the price through fake, mental discounts. It ignores the real issue of the lack of financial literacy.

Girl trends mask as comedy, diminishing the intelligence of women that is already questioned. Girl Math only furthers the idea that women and girls are bad at math. Gendering this type of math only compares the intelligence and mathematical proficiency of women to men.

The reality is that a girl's math ability is not below a boy's, but the stereotype of girls being bad at math causes girls to lack confidence in their ability in math.

Instead of watching and liking these social media videos, reject these ideas and misconceptions by creating a different narrative around girl's finance and Girl Math by creating platforms to teach girls about financial literacy and how to spend money responsibly. By putting out content and supporting content that is substantial for girls, you get rid of math insecurity and gain the foundation for financial security.

Girl Math, among other trends, doesn't provide an insight into the mind of a girl but only lowers how a girl's intellect is perceived and miseducates girls and women. It doesn't matter who's making the joke when girls are still the butt of it.

u-high midway

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1362 East 59th Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60637  
Phone 773-702-0591  
Email midway@ucls.uchicago.edu

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### mission and editorial policy.

The Midway is an independent newspaper that strives for excellence across all of our platforms. We are a student-run newspaper for the entire University of Chicago Laboratory High School community. We aim to not only represent the multitude of thoughts and experiences at U-High but also inform community members through transparent, timely and complete reporting.

In a time when the press is criticized, the U-High Midway seeks to inform, educate and serve the community of University High School. The Midway is developed and managed by students, for students.

In every story we write, the Midway should give a voice to the experiences of people at U-High. We will report on the people, activities and thoughts that make our school unique, striving to include the voices we haven't heard yet.

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# Lack of snow causes alarm

*Students see their sports threatened by climate change*

by KATIE SASAMOTO-KURISU  
Editor-in-Chief

Last year, while in Park City, Utah, over spring break 2023, Sofia Picciola had the best day of skiing she'd ever had. The mountain conditions were amazing: an abundance of open terrain, stable weather and soft, powdery snow. Zipping between trees on run after run, she didn't want to stop.

But this experience was underscored by her understanding that days like these were becoming more and more rare, a phenomenon propelled by a looming threat to ecosystems and winter sports everywhere: climate change.

Despite the plentiful snow conditions and stable weather Sofia experienced on this trip, these conditions were by no means the norm throughout her time skiing. Just two years prior, the 2020-21 winter, was one of Utah's driest on record, resulting in little snowfall and significantly fewer open trails.

"Park City, Deer Valley had no snow. It was really really like, bare minimum," Sofia, a junior, said. "There was not a lot open, and I think that was kind of sad because they have some great terrain out there, but it was all closed because there was just too little."

This effect of less snow and lower average temperatures across the winter season has been felt across the world.

Some areas, European destinations in particular, are being hit particularly hard. Sofia's friend, Bea Badino, skis competitively on the Equipe Pragelato team at Sestriere resort in Italy and has experienced these drastic effects in re-

“It’s definitely making a lot of weather unpredictable and possibly dangerous for a lot of people because they aren’t prepared for it.”  
Alex Fogel, senior

cent years.

"As an alpine skier that has experienced the effects of climate change in her lifetime, the difference is undeniable," Bea wrote in a text message. "In the past years, it has become increasingly hard to find places with snow outside of the season."

To solve the problem, resorts have had to turn to alternative solutions for making snow, including automating the process by using snow machines and even building indoor skiing slopes. Bea doesn't think these actions, at least at their current stage, are feasible as long-term solutions.

"Indoor skiing stations are being built, but they are extremely expensive to maintain since the indoor temperature varies from -7 to -2, and aren't able to efficiently replicate natural snow yet," she wrote. "If the climate situation continues degrading at this pace, skiing will definitely be one of the first sports that will suffer the consequences as it already is now."

In addition to annually warmer temperatures and less average snow coverage, climate change has also made weather conditions on these trips more variable.

Senior Alex Fogel, who has been skiing since they were about 7 years old, has noticed changes in weather patterns across their various trips.

"I remember when I was younger, it was just kind of what you'd



Midway illustration by Eliza Dearing

imagine, a typical snowy day on the mountains. But there are times where it seems icier, and it's less safe for people to ski in certain areas," they said. "It's definitely making a lot of weather unpredictable and possibly dangerous for a lot of people because they aren't prepared for it."

Last winter, Mammoth Mountain in California received over 75 feet of snow, a record high com-

pared to 33 feet in a typical year. The record season kept the resort open until early August, compared to the typical late-spring closing. As a result of the unprecedented surplus, Sofia and her family were able to ski during mid-July.

"In Mammoth getting too much snow, it was really fun to ski during the summer, but I think that's not sustainable because it was really unpredictable," she said. "No one

saw that coming the year ahead."

The combination of decreasing snowfall averages and increasing variability in weather conditions for winter sports has made students and families more aware of the real effects, and subsequent consequences, of climate change.

"I'd like to go skiing and such in the time that I have," Alex said. "It makes me want to not take the time I have for granted."

# Sports documentaries immerse fans in new perspective

by KABIR JOSHI  
Assistant Editor

When the sports documentary "Olympia" by Leni Riefenstahl debuted in 1938, it captured the 1936 Olympic Games in depth and provided an angle never seen before. It is regarded as a pioneer to the industry, shaping the genre for many decades to come.

Today, as fans and athletes look for a closer connection to their idols and favorite players, sports documentaries offer inspiration and provide a new angle to the sport.

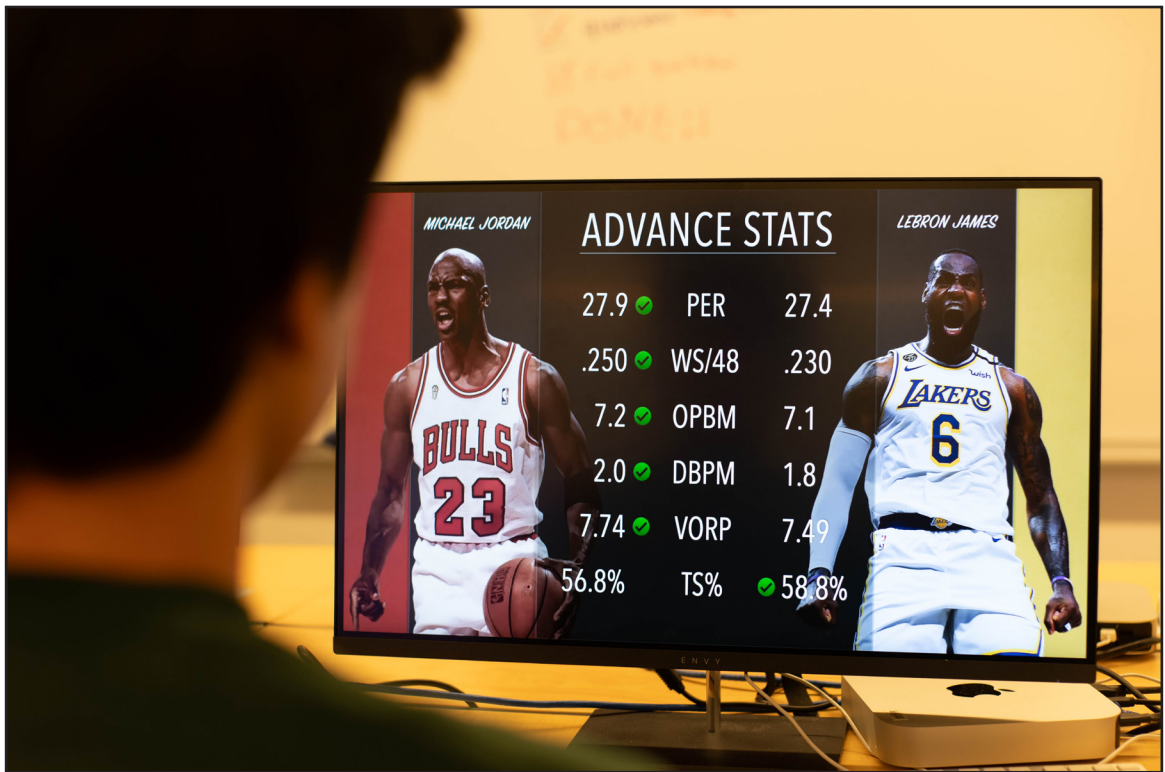
Documentaries present an opportunity for fans to understand the history behind players and unearth unknown facts as viewers immerse themselves and find entertainment, knowledge, life lessons, and things that go unnoticed during historic competitions.

Joshua Potter, a P.E. teacher and head soccer coach, has been a fan of documentaries that focus on soccer. He feels they give insight to the life of sports celebrities and allow fans to experience and relate to a side of sports that is unseen.

"To be in the locker room, to hear what that great player is like, or to hear what that great coach is like — it just gives you more of a sense of, 'Wow, that person is amazing,'" Mr. Potter said.

Sports documentaries can provide insights to coaches and players as they work to improve their game. Coaches benefit by learning from the teaching methods of the best, and players can gain motivation and understand the game on a deeper level.

"You see the professional athletes and how hard they are work-



Midway photo by Carter Chang

**PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES.** Today, as fans and athletes look for a closer connection to their idols and favorite players, sports documentaries offer inspiration and provide a new angle to the sport.

ing, and they always talk about the mental fatigue of the season. So it makes me aware of really what our athletes are going through as well," Mr. Potter said. "That's what I try and focus on: don't push them too hard, rely on the resources we have here, check in with them and really build relationships."

Recently, "Beckham," a four-part documentary series was released by Netflix showcasing the life of world-renowned soccer player David Beckham. It provides the perspective of a player

who transitioned to a coach and offers valuable insight and entertainment to fans. "Beckham" also helps fans experience historic moments, allowing them to experience the thrill of the game.

"Overall it was a great documentary," junior David Smith said. "I loved when he had career-changing moments, for example, his kick against Greece that secured qualification for the World Cup."

Furthermore, documentaries provide a different format of film compared to movies, focusing on

a particular team, season, game or even moment, which can be beneficial for new audiences, slowing down the action and allowing them to start understanding the sport.

"Some documentaries will tend to focus on dramatic moments of a season or a specific game, which for viewers who don't want the actual sport makes it seem more compelling or exciting," ninth grader Taara Sajdeh said.

Taara, a Formula 1 fan, feels documentaries such as Netflix's

“To be in the locker room, to hear what that great player is like, or to hear what that great coach is like — it just gives you more of a sense of, ‘Wow, that person is amazing.’”  
Joshua Potter, head soccer coach

"Drive to Survive" allow viewers to see behind the scenes, making the drivers feel more human instead of unrealistic.

"It can allow viewers to see what is going on behind the scenes," Taara said, "and into personal connections between players and teams, but it can also provide a second angle as when you are watching sports you are only really listening to the commentators, while when you are watching documentaries you are getting the perspective of the athletes themselves."

As the topic of sports documentaries among students continues to grow, the surge in popularity is a testament to the life lessons and opportunities for inspiration these documentaries provide to athletes and fans.

They expose another layer of details that many fans love to see, providing a deeper understanding to the sport. As these stories unfold, students are able to find themselves not only as spectators watching far from the bleachers but as participants to the history of their idols, taking inspiration and gaining valuable knowledge in their own journey to greatness.



# Days of Diplomacy

Tabletop board game offers players strategic, communal experience

by CLARE McROBERTS  
Features Editor

It had been six months. Six months of intricately plotted strategy. Attacks and counterattacks. Vanquishing alliances and ruthless betrayals.

At last, a victor emerges from the rubble. The war is done. Ultimately, there are winners and losers.

“But everyone cheered anyway, because we were just happy it was over,” Diplomacy Club president Sam Pastor said of the club’s tournament from last fall. “And then we started a new one.”

Diplomacy is a World War I simulation game where players, representing different countries, vie to control Europe. For U-High’s Diplomacy Club, the dramatic and community-building game can take months. That’s part of the fun of it.

“I think it’s nice just to have an extra something to talk about with your friends over a long period of time,” Sam said. “Also, the fact that the game goes on for so long means that we get to have more time to get invested in it, which we all think is fun.”

Nationally, board game sales in 2022 were up by about 28 percent compared to 2019, before the pandemic, according to market research company NPD Group.

Like Sam, a member of the Diplomacy Club, Max Gurinas, said he appreciates the unique length of the game. Players become more and more devoted.

“I like how invested you can get

“With that said, nothing online comes close to replicating the experience of hanging out in person. For that reason, I don’t think that people will ever stop playing in-person board games.”  
Sam Pastor, senior

in a drawn-out game,” Max said. He added later, “the game is always there for you to think about and distract yourself from other, less fun things.”

Krish Khanna, another Diplomacy Club member, said that for top players, chess can go on for a long time, too.

Still, he said, while some other games might have some of the complex qualities Diplomacy has, few match the multi-month span of the game.

Despite the increase in popularity of board games during the pandemic, some still think that online games have taken over the world of strategy gaming.

“I would actually say that it definitely has happened,” Sam said. “I’d say that clubs like Chess Club and Diplomacy Club would have more members if people didn’t have video games to play.”

And, without a doubt, there are reasons for this. Max said that the benefits of online strategy games are evident.



Midway photo by Elspeth LaCroix-Birdthistle

**TABLETOP QUEST.** A growing number of students are putting down their electronic devices in favor of immersive, long-term strategic tabletop board games as their preferred pastime.

“Online games tend to be longer, since they’re not as often limited to how much you can play in one sitting, and they also allow for asynchronous play,” Max said. “That allows for more time to strategize.”

Sam said that online gaming also has its faults.

“I think online games are more mentally taxing than board games,” he said. “You have to put your full effort into them at all times, stay

focused, and they do sort of hurt your eyes and stuff like that.”

Amid the pros and cons of strategic gaming online, Max said that the real-life connections are what ultimately matter.

“Online might be a ‘purer’ form of a game than in-person,” Max said. “With that said, nothing online comes close to replicating the experience of hanging out in person. For that reason, I don’t think

that people will ever stop playing in-person board games.”

Sam said that the longevity of traditional board games proves its value.

Sam said, “I think that the fact that so many people are still sticking with these more, quote-unquote, old fashioned games, shows that some games can really stand the test of time.”

Even if it takes six months.

## New York Times games bring opportunities to connect

by ZARA SIDDIQUE  
Sports & Leisure Editor

As sophomore Maggie Yagan does her homework, there are times she finds herself overwhelmed.

Whether it’s a long history reading or a complicated science question, the work or task can feel unapproachable. But sometimes all it takes to make them doable is a minute or two of the Mini Crossword or finding a few words on the day’s Spelling Bee.

Searching for a solution for the relentless stress high school students inevitably face, many students have sought refuge in their New York Times subscriptions, specifically the mindful and captivating games that come with news, opinion and sports headlines. From the charming jingle signifying the success of the Mini Crossword, to the queen bee buzzing across the screen after one finds all the words in the daily word hunt, these games can be seen and heard throughout the halls of U-High. Whether at lunch or in the minutes before a math test, students have turned to these puzzles as a momentary reprieve before plunging back into reality.

The New York Times games, including The Mini, Wordle, Connections and Spelling Bee, prove themselves to be a successful ally in a student’s daily battle against stress and feeling overwhelmed.

“It’s a nice break from all the assignments,” Maggie said. “Especially with the crossword or the Spelling Bee, you can do a little at a time, and then go back to homework.”



Midway photo by Leila Rezania

**BRAIN TEASERS.** Many students have sought refuge in their New York Times subscriptions, specifically the mindful and captivating games that come with news, opinion and sports headlines. These interactive puzzles not only offer entertainment but also serve as a refreshing break while staying informed about current events.

The games also help friends connect. While lunch can sometimes be a continuation of the stress of class, with students comparing assignments, and complaining about their next classes, some groups have started to use this time to decompress. Maggie and her friends play the New York Times games together.

“We send each other our scores every day, and it gets very competitive,” Maggie said. “A lot of the time we’ll be hanging out together as a group and someone will be like, ‘Hey, does anyone want to find words for me.’”

Senior Mary Bridget Molony said the biggest appeal of the games is how they can be spread throughout the day into short time periods.

“For me the games are just a really quick and easy way to have fun throughout the day,” she said. “I can do it in chunks, and it doesn’t take a long time.”

Mary Bridget explained that especially during her senior year, it has been great to have a simple way to disconnect from all the stress.

She said sometimes different activities, such as watching a movie

or TV show, can be too time consuming, or other activities can quickly stop being relaxing and instead turn into an obligation.

“I think a lot of things that we as students do for fun turn into something to be put on a résumé,” Mary Bridget said, “and this is just something light and simple.”



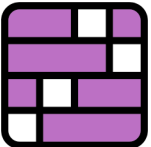
Scan this QR code to watch a review of these games.



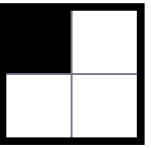
**Spelling Bee** is a day-long game consisting of players finding words from seven selected letters.



**Wordle** is a day-long game that gives the player six chances to guess a random five letter word.



**Connections** is day-long game requiring players to sort 16 words into four even categories.



**Mini Crossword** is a day-long game replicating the original New York Times crossword, but instead on a smaller 5x5 grid.

— compiled by Zara Siddique



# Freedom FLARE UP

Ray Bradbury's words were prescient. Efforts to ban books are on the rise in the United States with over 700 attempts in Illinois this year and 147 proposed bills aiming to restrict books. This year, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed a bill making Illinois the first state in the nation to outlaw book bans. Still, book ban efforts persist.

## Lab classroom, library practice freedom of expression, choice

by **TAARIQ AHMED**  
*Digital Editor*

There were 67 attempts to ban books in Illinois in 2022 alone, according to the Chicago-based American Library Association. Many targeted books include identities and themes from the LGBTQ+ community and communities of color.

But within the Laboratory Schools, students have access to commonly challenged books in the high school library and even in the classroom. In English classes, students do more than just read these books. They often partake in discussions about their complex themes, requesting students to think and reflect on deeper levels. English teacher Christine Himmelfarb teaches "Passing" by Nella Larsen, which contains a racial slur and depictions of sexual assault. Ms. Himmelfarb said she believes her discussions around the book build student engagement.

"The classroom is a great place to have these discussions because it's both not about us, and it is about us," Ms. Himmelfarb said. "In life, we hold our opinions and keep them to ourselves when we get the sense that no one is in agreement, but the classroom doesn't really let you hide in that way. It's like a safe place to not be safe."

Ms. Himmelfarb said as an English teacher, she chooses books that she believes contain educational value, and that discussing those as a class can benefit students outside of the classroom.

"I would never pick a book because it's controversial or because it exposes students to really difficult things," Ms. Himmelfarb said. "But I would argue that if you can't talk about these subjects in these fictional contexts,

“We are trying to find ourselves connecting to characters and seeing our own story reflected.”  
Rachel Nielson, English teacher

are you going to ever be able to talk to them in the real world, when it even counts more?”

Expressing similar ideas to Ms. Himmelfarb, English teacher Rachel Nielsen said, “Nobody is teaching a book because it’s banned. We pick things because we believe there’s something of literary merit and there’s something with the characters’ experiences that’s enriching.”

Ms. Nielsen teaches “The House on Mango Street” by Sandra Cisneros, categorized by the ALA as a “Frequently Challenged Book with Diverse Content.” No matter how difficult they might be to grasp, Ms. Nielsen said she believes these books are designed to provide readers with new perspectives.

“We try to find ourselves connecting to characters and seeing our own story reflected,” Ms. Nielsen said. “Avoiding that is insulting to students and the complexity of their lives.”

Senior Marlena Luiz read the graphic memoir “Fun Home” by Alison Bechdel, also commonly challenged and banned, for an English class. Marlena said her in-class discussions were positive spaces for understanding content.

“These books are written for a reason,” Marlena said, “and by allowing the space to read them, we can look at different perspectives than our own. The way we talked about the

more uncomfortable parts of ‘Fun Home’ made it less awkward because those parts are just as important to the book. By processing them, we got more out of the story.”

Marlena said she feels the ability for classes to explore and discuss these books is an example of the emphasis Lab places on inclusion and belonging.

“It shows that Lab is a space that allows for this diversity and encourages talking about the more ‘taboo’ subjects,” Marlena said. “It allows us to get more out of the community itself as well. Having been at Lab for a really long time, even in lower school, banned books were a topic we talked about. It reflects our values of trying to create an open environment.”

Laboratory Schools Director Tori Jueds said she agrees with the idea of an educational aspect to teaching books that require tougher moments of discourse for students.

“Whether the subject matter is controversial or well accepted, it’s about building and exercising all of the muscles that are needed by a true scholar,” Ms. Jueds said. “It’s about how to be flexible in one’s thinking, and how to be open to new ideas. In a way, it’s about personal and intellectual resilience, too.”

“There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches.”

— RAY BRADBURY  
“Fahrenheit 451,” 1953

With surge in book bans, some see a large threat

by **LIGHT DOHRN**  
*Assistant Editor*  
“Fahrenheit 451.” “Twilight.” For weeks now, several of the Laboratory Schools libraries have featured these commonly banned books, among many more, to raise awareness about book banning, a concerningly prevalent issue that originated more than 2,000 years ago.

From the public burning of books in the past to the quiet removal from library shelves today, the suppression of literature remains a potent symbol of power and control.

Whether a book is too racy, too political or too heretical, book banning is a practice that challenges not only free speech, but free expression as well — something that includes far more than just words, but also what a person wears, reads, performs and protests. Although the practice of book banning has waxed and waned in popularity throughout history, it has reached peaks both during McCarthyism and in the 1980s.

America is experiencing another surge, mostly centered around censorship of LGBTQ+ writers and writers of color. Just this year, there have been over 3,300 individual book bans in U.S. public school libraries — something librarians and advocates for free speech and expression are working every day to combat.

Susan Augustine, one of two librarians at U-High’s Pritzker Traubert Family Library, said that one of the main reasons that libraries at the Laboratory Schools feature banned book displays is to spread awareness among students about the issue and encourage students to read and learn

“It’s ridiculous to tell people what they can and can’t read. If you don’t want to read a book, that’s fine. But you can’t tell someone else not to read a book.”  
Susan Augustine, librarian  
Pritzker Traubert Family Library

whatever they may be interested in.

“We want to make sure, especially, that underrepresented voices in literature are being heard because those are the books that are getting banned the most right now,” Ms. Augustine said.

Eric Strohane, assistant director of member services for the Chicago-based American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, said that the First Amendment right of students to access information as a matter of voluntary inquiry is something that should be embraced across the political spectrum.

“Confronting the efforts of an organized group to remove library materials requires more than just good policies, well-informed board members and administrators, and a staunch commitment

## While some fight against bans, others oppose them

by **SAHANA UNNI**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

“Gender Queer: A Memoir” by Maia Kobabe, “All Boys Aren’t Blue” by George M. Johnson and “Out of the Darkness” by Ashley Hope Perez are among the most banned books in America. This is because of an organized movement by groups seeking to restrict access to books they find unacceptable for children.

As the number of banned books in the United States continues to rise each school year, a stark divide has emerged between authors and groups such as Moms for Liberty, Citizens Defending Freedom, and Parents’ Rights in Education.

One of these groups, MassResistance — a Massachusetts-based “pro-family activist” group that has been listed as “anti-LGBTQ” by the Southern Poverty Law Center, rejects describing their efforts as book banning.

“The term ‘book ban’ is a misnomer designed to shame and defame parents who wish to protect children from filth, smut, prurient material, and outright pornography,” Mass Resistance Field Director Arthur Schaper wrote in an email to the Midway.

Despite this, PEN America, a national organization dedicated to protecting free speech, defines book banning as action taken against a book by communities, administrations or governments that results in access to the book being restricted or diminished.

Mr. Schaper wrote that MassResistance is not

“The term ‘book ban’ is a misnomer designed to shame and defame parents who wish to protect children from filth, smut, prurient material and outright pornography.”  
Arthur Schaper,  
MassResistance field director

seeking “book bans” because adults would still be able to purchase the books.

“For the record, MassResistance does not support ‘book bans,’ but rather ‘pornography bans,’ which should never be disseminated among minors (anyone under 18 years old) EVER,” Mr. Schaper wrote.

Mr. Schaper specifically mentioned “Gender Queer” and Juno Dawson’s “This Book Is Gay” as unacceptable to distribute to anyone under age 18, claiming they contain explicit descriptions of sexual acts.

Ms. Dawson said in an Instagram video posted in March that “This Book Is Gay” is labeled as young adult nonfiction.

She acknowledged it is explicit at times because it aims to improve sexual education for LGBTQ teenagers.

“I wanted to give young LGBTQ people hope,” Ms. Dawson said in the video. “What we’re seeing now is a really organized attack on books, because the far right is out of ideas. What else can you attack but trans health care, drag queens, books?”

## Book banning roots: 6 key events in battle of right to read

Over time, book bans in the United States have increased in prevalence. They can be traced in the U.S. as early as 1637. Below are six key book ban-related events.

• **1873: Comstock Act**  
The Comstock Act criminalized obscene materials, leading to widespread book censorship. Its impact restricted the distribution of books discussing topics like sexuality and birth control, limiting access to information about sexuality and contraception.

• **1953: “Fahrenheit 451”**  
Ray Bradbury’s dystopian novel features a future where books are banned and burned by a totalitarian government. Its critique of censorship highlights the importance of intellectual freedom, making it a target for censorship itself.

• **1966: The People v. Fanny Hill**  
“Fanny Hill,” an 18th century novel, faced a trial that challenged societal norms. The book’s explicit content clashed with moral standards, highlighting the ongoing struggle between artistic expression and censorship.

• **1982-present: American Library Association’s Banned Books Week**  
Banned Books Week annually spotlights censored works, celebrating the right to read freely. It combats censorship by encouraging dialogue about controversial topics, promoting diversity and defending intellectual freedom in libraries.

• **2013: “Persepolis” removed from Chicago classrooms**  
Marjane Satrapi’s “Persepolis” was removed from the Chicago public school seventh-grade level because some CPS staff deemed it inappropriate for seventh graders. An email from the former CEO of CPS encouraged teachers to receive training before teaching the book.

• **2023: Illinois outlaws book bans**  
Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed a bill that prohibits libraries from banning books, becoming the first state in the nation to outlaw them.

— compiled by  
Milo Platz-Walker



Midway illustration by Noah Babai

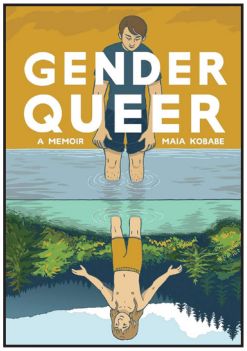
### controversial books

The following list features the most challenged books of 2022, according to the American Library Association. These books have been banned in various places across the United States for claims ranging from sexually explicit and LGBTQ+ content to profanity or themes of abuse. States such as Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, Virginia and South Carolina have banned hundreds of books during the 2022 school year.

— compiled by  
Milo Platz-Walker

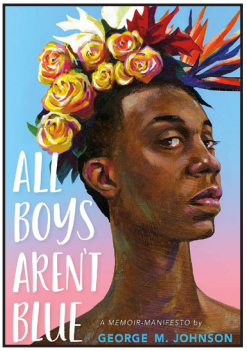
“Gender Queer”: a memoir by Maia Kobabe, 2019

After 151 challenges and being banned in 56 different school districts, “Gender Queer” by Maia Kobabe has faced backlash from many places across America with claims of LGBTQIA+ content in addition to sexually explicit material. The book centers around the challenges of coming out to friends and family.



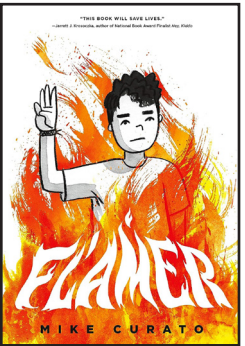
“All Boys Aren’t Blue”: a memoir by George M. Johnson, 2020

“All Boys Aren’t Blue” faced 86 challenges in 2022 for including both LGBTQ+ and sexually explicit content. Structured as a series of essays and letters, the book centers around the story of the author growing up in New Jersey as a black and queer man. These challenges took place in many places across America.



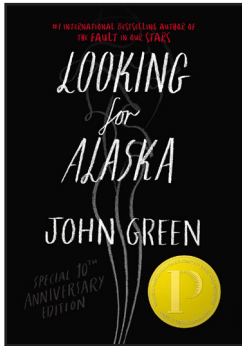
“Flamer”: a graphic novel by Mike Curato, 2020

“Flamer” by Mike Curato was challenged 62 times for its depiction of LGBTQ+ characters and sexually explicit content. The book follows the story of a young man struggling to accept his sexual identity during the 1990s. The book was banned 15 times in states throughout the South.



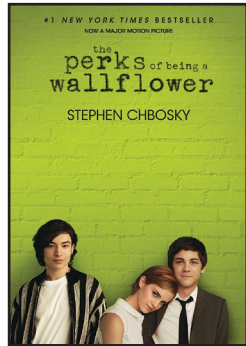
“Looking for Alaska”: a novel by John Green, 2005

John Green’s “Looking for Alaska” follows the story of a teenage boy discovering new struggles and experiences throughout his time in high school. The book received 55 challenges due to sexual and LGBTQ+ themes, as well as drug and alcohol content.



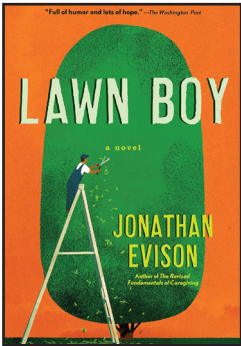
“The Perks of Being a Wallflower”: a novel by Stephen Chbosky, 1999

Challenged for its depiction of sexual abuse, LGBTQ+ content, drug use, profanity and claims of being sexually explicit, “The Perks of Being a Wallflower” explores the challenges of adolescence through the eyes of a teenage boy navigating high school and personal struggles. The book received 55 challenges.



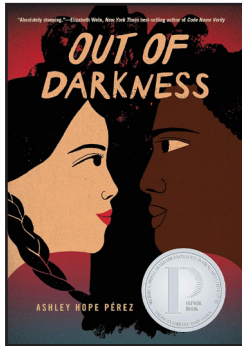
“Lawn Boy”: a semi-autobiographical novel by Jonathan Evison, 2018

Challenged 54 times for its LGBTQ+ and sexually explicit content, “Lawn Boy” explores the life of a young man exploring themes of identity, sexuality and the pursuit of the American Dream, leading to challenges in several areas. The book was challenged in multiple states across America.



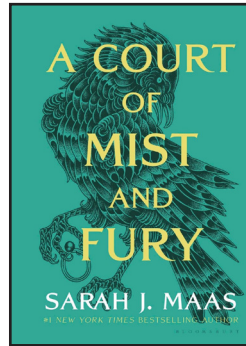
“Out of Darkness”: a novel by Ashley Hope Perez, 2015

Receiving 50 challenges for depictions of abuse and claims of being sexually inappropriate, “Out of Darkness” by Ashley Hope Perez, is a historical novel that covers an interracial love affair between two teenagers in the 1930s. The novel was banned in various places throughout the South.



“A Court of Mist and Fury”: a novel by Sarah J. Maas, 2016

Challenged 48 times for claims of being sexually explicit, “A Court of Mist and Fury” was banned 27 times throughout the United States. This fantasy fiction story follows an immortal woman on a journey to find love and peace.





# Connecting with the community

Owner of Harper Foods observes, students recognize

by SKYE FREEMAN

Audience Engagement Manager

At the little market on East 57th Street between South Harper and South Blackstone Avenues, U-High students flow in and out after school. They fill their hands with the abundant food options, everything from varying flavors of candy to fresh produce.

Alex Bharucha is there to see it all, all day, almost every day, from his spot behind the counter.

Mr. Bharucha is the owner of Harper Foods, the convenience store located at 1455 E. 57th St. He has seen, assisted and talked to hundreds of students from the Laboratory Schools and the university in his nearly five years of owning this store.

He says he loves the location, specifically the community.

“They look out for each other, so I like that,” he said. “Even strangers on the street, if they see somebody they don’t know, they might just go for help. I like that about the Hyde Park community.”

The community loves him, too, with most people knowing him just by his first name: Alex. He knows their pets by name, asks how relatives are doing, gives life advice and always greets customers with a smile.

Not only Lab students and neighborhood residents but students at nearby schools share connections with him. He says he’s seen many of the same students grow up in the last four years and has watched as certain snacks became their regular purchases.

Senior Ana Grieve, one of those students, who has been purchasing snacks from Harper Foods for seven years, has noticed his presence in U-High students’ conversations.

“I’ve talked to a lot of people who’ve said that they’ve started stocking things just because they mentioned that they were looking for it, or they kept things in stock that other people really aren’t buying just because they know a certain person will always come in for



Midway photo by Bryce Light

**IMPACTFUL INTERACTIONS.** Harper Foods owner Alex Bharucha stands at the cashier, waiting for customers to complete their purchases. Mr. Bharucha enjoys his customer interactions with members of the Hyde Park community, and students passing through his store recognize his hard work.

“They look out for each other, so I like that. Even strangers on the street, if they see somebody they don’t know, they might just go for help. I like that about the Hyde Park community.”

Alex Bharucha

that item,” she said.

While the community and atmosphere of the store are appealing to him, he admits a dislike for the number of hours he has to put in.

He works with grocery suppliers that send sales reps to help restock the store. But, most of the time, he ends up having to work

late restocking shelves or going out and purchasing items on his own time.

The store — open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week — is almost always run by Mr. Bharucha.

“It’s just a lot of hours. Consistently. If one restocking guy doesn’t show up, then you know, it’s just like, I have to do this after hours,” Mr. Bharucha said. “Sometimes until midnight.”

When he was about 10, Mr. Bharucha and his family moved from India to the United States. They first lived in Atlanta then moved all over the country, to whatever business called.

Working in his dad’s retail stores, Mr. Bharucha found a love for the business and the interactions between customers and the communities his family had operated in.

Mr. Bharucha majored in busi-

ness at the University of Tennessee, then he and his family moved to Chicago for business opportunities.

“I just kind of followed my dad’s footsteps. He had always been in the convenience store business, and I’ve been doing this since I was 14, helping in the store, helping right after school, whenever,” he said.

His parents, who also enjoy interacting with customers, occasionally drop in to help out.

While Mr. Bharucha enjoys his job and its emphasis on daily interaction, it has its downsides. Especially during the pandemic, the store was hit hard due to protests and robberies.

Despite the presence of shoplifters or intoxicated people wandering in, the store is his only source of income. All he can do is accept the complications. Despite

the negatives, he has hope for the future.

“In the future, I want to open up a similar kind of store or maybe buy the one already in operation,” he said. “I’m looking to open up a couple more grocery stores in the coming years.”

For now, he enjoys his lifestyle and the window he is given to our growing generation from behind the convenience store counter.

A customer walks in, his dog on a leash. Exchanging friendly hellos, Mr. Bharucha goes to ring up the dog food he’s holding. “How’s he been?” he asks, motioning toward the dog. The man smiles, appreciating the recognition, and mentions his dog’s veterinarian visits the past week.

As the man leaves, Mr. Bharucha wishes them both well, then waves goodbye with a simple “See you next time!”

## Chicago ends subminimum wage for tipped employees

by VICTORIA WASHINGTON

Opinion Editor

15%. 18%. 20%. How much to tip? From luxury meals to quick stops at Starbucks, gratitude provides a natural end to dining experiences. We ask ourselves how good the service was. Did the employee have a friendly attitude? Most of us quickly move on with our days after leaving some change in a jar, or tapping a button on a keypad.

A change in the law about how tipped workers in Chicago are paid is expected to improve the standard of living for such workers all over the city, though opponents say it may raise costs for restaurants.

U-High students who work at restaurants see firsthand how important compensation can be for tipped workers.

On Oct. 6, the Chicago City Council voted to phase out a practice that allowed establishments to pay service workers less than the minimum wage, under the assumption that those workers would receive tips that would boost their earnings. Such workers could be paid as little as \$9.48 an hour, far less than the \$15.80 minimum wage required for most other workers.

Prior to the change in October, if employees were unable to make



Midway photo by Olin Nafziger

**TIPPING DECISIONS.** While tipping might not seem important to many customers, employees heavily rely on tips along with their hourly wages.

up the remainder in tips, employers were mandated to cover the gap.

Beginning in July 2024, the wage for tipped employees will increase each year until 2028 when it will be the same as the regular minimum wage. This change impacts an estimated 100,000 workers across the city.

Senior Santana Romero, a host-

ess at a Chili’s restaurant on 95th Street, has noticed that her tipped colleagues receive ill treatment while waiting tables.

“The servers at my work deal with so much,” said Santana, who as a hostess receives a standard wage without tips. “Whether it’s someone just being really obnoxious or someone actually being really aggressive, the idea that that

interaction determines whether they’re going to make \$15 or \$6 that day from their minimum wage is crazy.”

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson said that the new ordinance will aim to address staffing issues in the restaurant industry and promote youth employment.

“This legislation is the culmination of years of advocacy,” Mr. Johnson said at an Oct. 6 press conference. “The ordinance embodies Chicago’s values of uplifting working people and addressing systemic inequities in the restaurant and hospitality industry.”

While advocacy organization One Fair Wage believes higher wages will retain the workforce, the Illinois Restaurant Association argues that the ordinance will harm restaurants as a result of higher costs.

The restaurant industry group asserts that under the current system, the median hourly wage for a tipped restaurant worker is \$28.48.

Senior Poppy Beiser has worked as a barista at Medici On 57th for two years.

She is guaranteed an hourly wage between \$16-17, excluding tips. Both electronic and cash tips are gathered at the end of each shift and distributed evenly among all employees.

by the numbers

**\$15.80**

Current hourly minimum wage for most Chicago workers

**\$9.48**

Hourly minimum wage that some tipped workers can be paid prior to new mandate

— Source: Chicago.gov

At Medici, most customers are friendly to baristas and choose to tip, Poppy said.

She observes that even though customers aren’t required to tip, many feel obligated to, especially when they pay with a card.

One takeaway Poppy has from working a minimum wage job is the importance of customers understanding the hard work of those who assist them in restaurants.

The hours are long. Patience is a necessity.

“I think some people forget that we’re humans too,” Poppy said. “They kind of just treat us like we’re there to serve them, and they forget this.”



# Hiding honky-tonk

Students enjoy country music — but not at school

by **AUDREY PARK**  
Editor-in-Chief

At first, junior Keira Harter was skeptical. Her sister was playing “That’s my Kind of Night” by country music artist Luke Bryan and making fun of the lyrics. But, after listening longer, she said something changed.

“I was like, ‘Oh, this is kind of catchy,’” Keira said.

Since then, Keira has occasionally listened to country music and, in particular, enjoys country-pop.

Despite their fandom, many U-High students who listen to country music say people often equate the genre with politics, the Southern United States and other stereotypes, when really, it is evolving, with some country music artists choosing to steer away from politics.

Country music developed its conservative and political reputation during Richard Nixon’s presidency. It has faced backlash for containing anti-Black Lives Matter, pro-gun and domestic violence rhetoric and themes, and employing racism as a marketing tool.

While such controversy certainly is reinforced and prevails among some country artists and songs — most recently with the populist anthem “Rich Men North of Richmond” by Oliver Anthony — some critics argue that a new wave of country music is emerging, one where country artists challenge racial barriers and style-related stereotypes or distance themselves from politics and religion.

The genre’s modern growth is also due to its experimentation with other genres, including pop, rock and hip-hop.

Country music streams have risen 20% in the first half of 2023 compared with the previous year, and according to Luminate, an entertainment industry analytics company, country music artist Morgan Wallen is responsible for 40% of the growth.

After using a racial slur in 2021, Mr. Wallen has steered “clear of politics.” Instead, country stars



Midway illustration by Chloë Alexander

like Mr. Wallen and Luke Combs include more relatable themes of sobriety and goal-chasing in their music.

Keira said she has observed such changes in the country music industry.

“I think it is kind of moving away from politics because some artists are starting to make music geared toward pop so it fits a wider audience,” Keira said, “but there is definitely a lot of stigma with it.”

Junior Juana diSabato listens to different genres depending on where she is. At school, she tends to play pop and rap and listens to Travis Scott or Drake. But at home in River Forest, a Chicago suburban village, country music is her genre of choice, with her favorite country artists being Mr. Wallen and Mr. Combs.

Juana said she rarely plays country music at school because her classmates judge the genre.

“We were listening to pop and rap, and I was like, ‘Hey, can I queue a song?’ And I played ‘Devil Don’t Know,’ and my friends were like, ‘Oh, no. Turn this off,’” Juana

said. “People tend to assume all country music is political.”

Juana said that this is a common misconception and not all country music centers on politics.

“I don’t think it’s right to associate all country music with that type of political view because if you really listen to more of the contemporary songs, it is not at all political and loving Trump and ‘God is with us,’” she said. “There are some country songs that are based on those views, but those aren’t the songs I’m listening to.”

Similarly, U-High ninth grader Bryce Poston, a fan of Mr. Wallen, said people are quick to associate country music with racist themes without giving it a chance.

“I can understand where the stereotypes come from, but it’s like any stereotype — it’s not always true,” he said. “I wouldn’t associate myself with that, and I still listen to country music.”

For sophomore Cruise Lickerman, listening to music sometimes means “separating the art from the artist.”

“A lot of times, the regions

where country music comes from are the same as the regions that are more right-leaning and in favor of certain views,” Cruise said. “But I do think it is possible just to enjoy the music without the political connotations.”

Juana said she encourages people to be open-minded, especially as the genre changes.

“I would tell the people hesitant to listen to country music that just like how they try to convince people to listen to pop and rap that are pretty well listened to in Chicago, have the same mindset for country music,” Juana said. “You might surprise yourself and like it.”

Sporadically listening to country music has led Keira to enjoy some new songs. However, social limitations and lack of relatability limit her from listening more frequently.

“I wouldn’t block country music out immediately just because it is good to try new things and see if you like it,” Keira said. “There is a lot of stigma around it, and I don’t think the style is for everyone.”

## Vibrant rock ‘n’ roll allows artist’s expression

by **MIA LIPSON**  
News Editor

In early 2022, Dolly Parton, known for her now-classic storytelling and country sound, received a nomination. After over six decades in the music industry, Ms. Parton is no stranger to receiving accolades for her work and influence. Initially, Ms. Parton declined the nomination, saying she did not see herself as an influential figure in that genre.

That was the moment her album “Rockstar” was born — challenging Ms. Parton to dive into the world of rock and roll.

In her 49th album, “Rockstar,” released Nov. 17, Ms. Parton goes beyond her roots, morphing her classic country and pop sound into vibrant-yet-assertive rock alongside a range of well-known featured artists. Her transition across genres exemplifies her versatility as an artist and her influence as a national idol.

Since the start of her career, Ms. Parton has established herself as a pillar of American pop culture, earning recognition for her storytelling, charm and sheer talent. The album is comprised of 9 original tracks and 21 cover songs, which provide a Dolly Parton and rock twist on classic songs. The range in featured artists is striking



dolyparton.com

**ROCKING REVAMP.** Country legend Dolly Parton released her album “Rockstar” Nov. 17. Aside from music endeavors, she has been vocal in recent politics.

ing — from Miley Cyrus to Paul McCartney — yet Dolly’s voice, a vibrant soprano laced with her smooth country accent, accompanied by hints of electric guitar tie everything together.

One of the most successful tracks, the original song “World on Fire,” takes Dolly’s music one step further into the world of politics, a topic Ms. Parton has famously

tried to stay away from. She sings, “Don’t get me started on politics./ Now how are we to live in a world like this?/ Greedy politicians, present and past,/ they wouldn’t know the truth if it bit ‘em in the a-”

Ms. Parton did not specify her political affiliation, but instead outlined authentic sentiments that speak to her enduring influence and adoration.

Still, over the years, Ms. Parton’s immense influence has branched beyond music in various ways, contrasting country music’s growing conservative reputation. In 1995, Ms. Parton founded the Imagination Library, which gifts a child a book every month.

Now, more than 2 million books are sent to children worldwide each month. She has expressed vocal support for people in the LGBTQ community.

In Southern states, the place where her typical country genre thrives, Ms. Parton has spoken up for issues including a North Carolina bill to ban transgender people from using the bathroom that does not correlate to their gender assigned at birth.

In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Parton, who lives outside of Nashville, donated \$1 million to Vanderbilt University Medical Center, which worked with Moderna to create one of the first COVID-19 vaccines to be approved in the United States at a time when many country music artists did not support mask mandates.

Dolly Parton is constantly evolving. Still, her charm and authenticity remains. Now she continues to express herself — with a vibrant splash of rock ‘n’ roll.

## 5 to try.

Here are five country music recommendations for anyone who isn’t yet a fan of country music. These songs are even enjoyable for the biggest country music skeptic.

### “Tequila” by Dan + Shay

This song displays a crossover between country and pop.

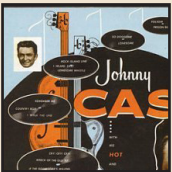
With a southern sound and emotional lyrics, Grammy award winners Dan + Shay provide an accessible and head-bop-worthy country song.



### “I Walk the Line” by Johnny Cash and The Tennessee Two

Released in 1973, “I Walk the Line” captures the essence of classic country music with a deep voice and gentle guitar.

The song’s stand-up-bass line carries throughout the song and adds an antique feeling.



### “I Remember Everything” by Zach Bryan feat. Kacey Musgraves

These singers give the song a light country sound but a nice chill song to listen to, as it falls in different genres like folk. Reminiscent of Noah Kahan, this song will be an instant favorite for anyone.



### “I Hope You Dance” by Lee Ann Womack

This slow country song encapsulates the country sound. Womack has a Dolly Parton twang with a melancholy joy that can be found within the song. Anyone could find themselves swaying softly to the melody.



### “Human” by Cody Johnson

Released in 2021, this country song is not for the faint of heart. This deep southern drawl pays homage to all the classic country songs that it’s inspired by. It is a song about life, cowboys, growing up and moving on.



### Midway playlist

Scan this QR to listen to these songs and more country recommendations on the U-High Midway’s Country Music to Contemplate playlist on Spotify.



— compiled by  
Chloë Alexander and  
Haley Maharry



# You and stress

## Stress is eating away at physical health, life spans

by CLARE McROBERTS  
Features Editor

It's in hallways. It's in the classroom. It's U-High's open secret: stress permeates student life.

But the consequences are far less recognized — and more serious. Day by day, stress is undermining our life spans.

Stress is an inevitable part of life. Still, experts say that understanding the long-term effects of chronic stress and finding methods to cope with stress are essential.

Josh Kellman, clinical associate of psychiatry and behavioral neuroscience at UChicago Medicine, said that there is a threshold for how much stress is too much. He uses a prehistoric analogy to refer to sources of stress: a saber-toothed tiger.

"I think that stress is not necessarily our enemy," Dr. Kellman said. "But there is such a thing as too much stress or too much anxiety for a situation. That's identified in psychiatric language as an anxiety disorder. It's like the saber-toothed tiger is there, but actually, there's no saber-toothed tiger."

In recent reports, national health experts have said that stress is what explains why Americans have shorter life expectancies than people in other countries with similar economic resources. Stress, these experts say, sets off a physiological reaction that sends hormones like cortisol into the bloodstream and may ultimately cause what experts describe as a "weathering" process that can age the body.

"There are problems if you have chronic cortisol levels that are high," Dr. Kellman said, "that does in fact lead to certain physiologic problems, cardiovascular issues, hypertension."

Granted, Dr. Kellman said, cortisol still plays a crucial role in our functioning as humans evolutionarily. For example, the hormone triggers your autonomic nervous system: the fight-or-flight response.

"When the tiger runs out of the cage, you don't even have to think about it: you run. Before that's go-



Midway photo by Grace LaBelle

**OVERSTRESSED.** Although stress has often gone unrecognized, it's prevalent in students' lives. While stress is unavoidable, it's essential for students to recognize the effects and causes of stress in order to manage it.

ing to happen, you have a massive cortisol release and cortisol activates the sympathetic part of the autonomic nervous system, which triggers this fight-or-flight reaction. You just run up the tree," Dr. Kellman said. "That's the adaptive function of cortisol."

Dr. Kellman said that trauma and long-term stressors have a huge role in subsequent cortisol releases.

"That is part of the risk of trauma and lasting, elevated cortisol levels — it's that it makes you kind of hyper vigilant," Dr. Kellman said. "It's adaptive if there's a saber-toothed -tiger there, but if there's not, you know, it's maladaptive."

At a moment when technology is so central to life, Jennifer Wil-

des, another associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral neuroscience at UChicago Medicine, believes that stress is even more prevalent now.

"We just move at a much faster pace than we did historically," Dr. Wildes said. "I think we're under a lot more pressure to multitask, which just increases level of stress. So there's less of an emphasis on, you know, sort of focusing on one task at a time or taking time for yourself."

Especially now, it is crucial to possess effective methods of stress release.

Aria Choi, a U-High counselor, said the real risk of stress is when it builds up over time. She said it's important for a person to recognize when they are experiencing

stress and then visualize reaching the other side of the situation as a management strategy.

"I think acknowledging that it is a stressful situation: 'Of course, I'm feeling stress,'" Ms. Choi said. "They're able to regulate themselves and respond to the stress response in a more quick and healthy and honestly productive way."

Ms. Choi said that learning how to deal with stress is not a one-and-done mechanism. It must be used and learned, again and again, to make a real difference.

She said, "You just have to put things into practice and make it a habit that will ultimately train your brain and your body to recognize, 'Oh, OK, I've had this sensation before. I responded to it this way.'"

### vox pop.

**What are you most stressed about right now?**

"I feel like a lot of it this year was based on **college applications** and just trying to hit that deadline and always **comparing myself** to other people and like classes in general."

— Katie Williams, senior

"I'm rather stressed about **college applications**. For the most part, I'm concerned that I haven't been doing enough outside of school and that I won't stand out as a strong candidate. To some degree, that's exacerbated by videos online discussing college statistics and acceptance rates."

— Keira Harter, junior

"Probably **managing extracurriculars and homework** currently. I could theoretically balance everything, but I still want a social life."

— Jiho Song, sophomore

"I think the thing that I'm most stressed about is **math**, because sometimes I don't get one of the concepts on the test, and that messes me up."

— Julian Rossi, sophomore

"I'm quite stressed about **adjusting to the new high school homework load**. It's hard for me to manage all my extracurriculars with the expectations of my teachers, and every day I'm having to stay up later than I would like to if I want to complete my schoolwork."

— Isaac Sutherland, ninth grader

"There's nothing in my immediate life, academically or socially or whatnot, that's stressing me out very much at all, so it would be the **situation in Gaza** that's causing me the most stress."

— Elias Laurence, ninth grader

— compiled by  
Haley Maharry

## Stress management apps support student mental health

by ZARA SIDDIQUE  
Sports & Leisure Editor

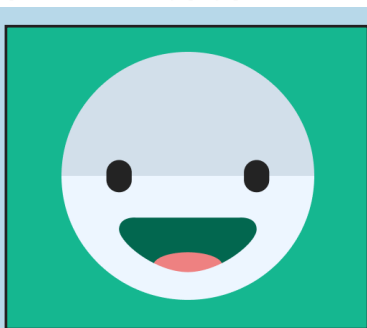
These four applications stand out as valuable tools for aiding students in managing their mental health. Similar to U-high provided app Insight Timer these apps cover stress reduction to meditation to tracking mood, they provide students with accessible ways to stay in touch with their own mental health.

**Headspace** is a mindfulness and meditation application dedicated to supporting and uplifting one's overall mental well-being. The app offers a user-friendly platform consisting of guided meditation videos, sleep inducing podcasts, also known as sleepcasts, and breathing exercises, making integrating mindfulness into everyday life achievable. The app targets a range of issues, from stress reduction to self awareness to improved sleeping. Headspace is a useful and beginner-friendly resource for students looking to alleviate anxiety, reduce stress or simply incorporate mindfulness in their day-to-day lives. While the full program has a \$12.99 monthly fee, some activities don't require a subscription.

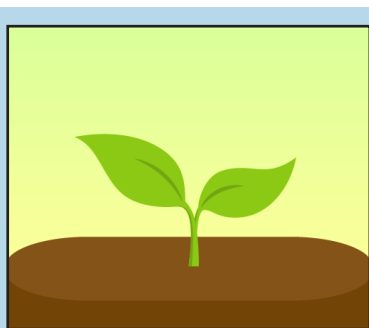
**Daylio Journal**, an online journaling application, advertises it-



Headspace is available on both Apple App Store and Google Play Store for a \$12.99 monthly and \$69.99 annual subscription for the app.



Daylio Journal is available on both Apple App Store and Google Play Store. They provide a \$4.99 monthly and \$35.99 annual subscription for Daylio premium.



Forest is available on both Apple App Store and Google Play Store. The app costs \$3.99 for a one-time download.



MoodKit is only available on the Apple App Store. It doesn't require any payment to install or subscribe.

— compiled by Edward Park

self as a "self-care bullet journal." Users record their daily activities, moods and emotions as a way to externalize their stresses and gather their thoughts. The goal of the app is to simplify one's reflection process, and it allows users to tailor the online journal to their specific needs. Over time, the journal begins to generate a user's statistics to reveal patterns in emotional health, allowing the user to focus on causes of stress and anxiety and regulate them effectively. This app is particularly useful for users

who want to gain a better understanding of their emotions, in addition to improving them, while tracking personal growth. Daylio Journal is free and also has a premium subscription option.

**Forest** is an app designed to motivate users to stay focused on their work through an appealing and fun premise. Similar to productivity app Flora, in this \$3.99 app, the user plants a tree at the beginning of every work session, setting off a timer for a designated period. If the user gets distract-

ed from their work, closing the application and moving to another, the tree withers. But a successful, focused, phone-use-free session leads to a blooming and vibrant forest, representing the user's accomplishment. This app is a great way for students to avoid distractions and maintain focus. It also encourages a user to hold themselves accountable.

**MoodKit** is a mood improvement app dedicated to making cognitive behavioral therapy simple and accessible, providing a set

of therapeutic tools users can employ to cope. It helps users implement basic strategies of professional psychology into their daily life and on their own. It allows users to identify unhealthy thinking and work toward changing it through a journaling function and track their daily moods and eventually observe long-term patterns. The \$4.99 app is primarily aimed to assist people who struggle with their mental health and experience depression and anxiety, but it can help anyone.



# Duo dedication: App serves as game rather than legitimate education

by CHLOË ALEXANDER  
Arts Editor

A notification pings a student's phone with a reminder to complete their daily lesson on the popular language learning app Duolingo. The student swipes it up, ignoring it. Another one comes an hour later, a steady reminder of your jeopardized streak.

Going onto TikTok as a break from the day, the student sees a dancing green bird interacting with Dua Lipa, compelling users to download the app.

Through its social media platforms, Duolingo entices downloads with promises of crossing international language barriers, but its gamification has U-High students questioning whether the app is helping them learn a language or if it's really just a game.

Duolingo has used an easy, free marketing strategy to gain popularity: TikTok. By creating a quirky presence on social media for the app's mascot, a green owl named Duo, Duolingo's brand was created.

"I think Duolingo's social media presence has endeared people to the platform, especially younger users," Ana Grieve, a senior, said. "I also think that by making sillier content they have been able to remain relevant which has probably added to their user base."

Even though there was a spike in downloads after the mascot became a familiar presence for many on TikTok, U-High students also have different reasons for using the app.

Junior Maya Pytel, who has a streak of 843 days — 27.7 months or 2.3 years — started using Duolingo in 2021 to connect with her grandparents more.

"I spoke Polish with them as a child but less as I was growing up, so I've kinda forgotten it a bit," Maya said, "The reason I use Duolingo is so I can communicate with my grandparents better and get to know them and their personalities a bit better, which is an opportunity that I am very lucky to have."

Jashan Gill, a junior, uses Duolingo for the same reason as Maya, to



Midway photo by Estelle Levinson

**DIALECT ENDEAVORS.** A student plays a game on Duolingo, a language learning app. However, its gamification has U-High students questioning whether the app is helping them learn a language or if it's really just a game.

communicate with his family. But for Jashan, the gamification elements cause him to put his learning Hindi on the back burner and just focus on keeping his 572-day streak.

"With Duolingo, I think the issue sometimes is gamification," Jashan said. "It certainly helps you with motivation and stuff, but then also what I've gotten to know is

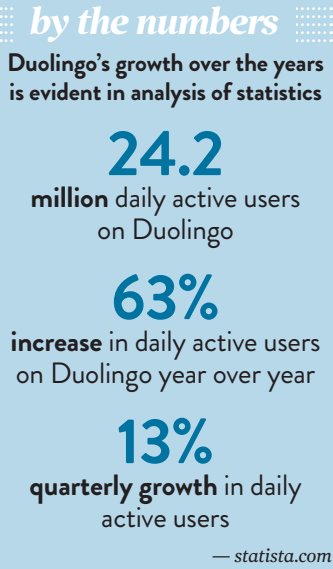
I'm just keeping up my streak and not learning so much. I'm not really learning anything. I'm just keeping it up."

Ana speaks English, Spanish and Mandarin but started using Duolingo in May to learn Portuguese. She's accumulated a streak of 119 days. Since she already had a foundation in Spanish, she thought learning Portuguese was a reach-

able goal.

"I kinda wanted to challenge myself to see if I could learn a language by myself," Ana said. "Portuguese is really similar to Spanish, and it seems like it would be very easy to pick up."

Ana enjoys the game-like aspects of Duolingo but finds that it isn't effective for learning and doesn't make up for the app's lack



of challenge. "I think the streak aspect does help a lot because it's so motivational," Ana said. "I think the fact that it's so, like, bright colors and fun shapes and stuff, like, that kinda game-like does help a lot with making me want to do it. But in some ways, because it's not as challenging as it should be because they want you to keep coming back, it can be hard to get a real education experience out of that."

Maya finds that learning from Duolingo provided her a good opportunity to understand the basics of Polish, but to effectively learn the language, practicing in actual conversation is a better tool.

"I think Duolingo has certain aspects that make it good. Like, learning vocabulary can be very useful," Maya said. "But I think that grammar structures I don't learn very effectively on Duolingo, and it's more through conversation and error that I learn those things."

Although Duolingo has been helpful in learning, Maya doesn't find a need to continue the program. The thing calling her back to the app isn't the new language she's learning but the streak she wants to keep growing.

"If I lost my streak," Maya said, "I would definitely not be doing Duolingo."

# Holiday activities form festive comradery

by LIGHT DOHRN  
Assistant Editor

It's December 2022. Hayla Shah peers around the corner of the hallway to make sure she's not being watched. She creeps down the corridor, her precious cargo tucked underneath an arm: a package of colorful hair clips wrapped in shiny holiday paper. Slipping the parcel into the locker of Sohana Schneider, Hayla grins to herself and takes off down the hallway to first period.

In the spirit of holiday generosity and festive camaraderie, during December, U-High students have had a tradition for years of getting together with their advisories, friends, families or extracurricular groups and playing holiday gift-giving games like Secret Santa and white elephant. As the holidays approach, students are beginning to plan for these events and looking back on the times they've done it in the past.

The premise of white elephant includes participants bringing wrapped items and taking turns either selecting a present from a pool in the middle or stealing one from someone else. One of the enjoyable aspects of the game is that the gift can be something either humorous or unwanted (or both), so when someone picks it up, they aim for something else. Secret Santa has a slightly different ba-

“Even though the season had ended, we still felt like a team who still did things together, and it was really fun to sort of still be friends with them.”  
Hayla Shah, sophomore

sis, involving group members randomly assigning a person to whom they will give a gift while keeping their identity as the giver a secret.

Hayla fondly remembers last year's holiday season, when the girls swimming team organized their locker-based game of Secret Santa— and she looks forward to doing it again this year.

"I think it was really just an opportunity to get to know people and their interests," Hayla said. "Cause you get to take a look at what everyone else wants and their interests, and when the seniors graduated, I kinda knew what to buy them as, like, a going away gift."

Hayla also appreciated the team-building element of the game as well as the more personal, relationship-strengthening one, especially as the swimming season

had already ended by the time her team played it.

"Even though the season had ended, we still felt like a team who still did things together," Hayla said, "and it was really fun to sort of still be friends with them, and we're all still very close."

Sometimes, when playing Secret Santa or white elephant with a larger group of friends or teammates, students will set price limits on gifts or create wishlists describing items they'd like to get. This can serve as inspiration/guidelines for the gift buyer, Hayla said, it can also be a way to get to know more about the person they're shopping for.

"Usually, we limit the price so nobody spends too much money," said junior Elizabeth Sharp, who has played Secret Santa in years past with her friends and her ballet group. "I may typically buy a person fuzzy socks, cheap jewelry or candy. Sometimes, we create a shared doc with people's preferences — like what candy they like or what small items they were hoping to receive."

Elizabeth said that a meaningful aspect of the game is the opportunity it presents to connect with friends during the holidays.

"During the holidays, you're not necessarily spending time with friends because you're at home with your family instead," Eliza-



Midway photo by Carter Chang

**GIFT GIVING.** During the holiday season, festive and community-building games like Secret Santa and white elephant are popular at U-High.

beth said. "It's nice to celebrate the holidays while you can with others who, while they may not be your family, are still significant people in your life."

As the school day ends, Sohana rushes to her locker to gather her belongings. Amid the text-

books, binders and loose sheets of paper, she notices a small, festive package nestled inside her locker. She unwraps it to discover the hair clips. Grinning, she slips them into her backpack and walks home, a wintery chill in the air and holiday spirit all around.





Midway photo by Ryan Burke-Stevenson

**SNIFFING OUT SCENTS.** More sophisticated colognes are replacing less exclusive deodorants as high-end fragrances become popularized for young men through social media.

## Trend generates student interest in high-end cologne

by SAHANA UNNI  
Editor-in-Chief

At a young age, Michael Sawaged developed an interest in various fragrances after having spent quality time with his older brother shopping for cologne. While Michael used to think he was one of the only guys wearing cologne at school, he's noticed this year that many of his friends have started to do the same.

As cologne reviews and accounts focused specifically on fragrances gain popularity across social media, guys are sniffing out their cans of Axe body spray and replacing them with bottles of high-end cologne.

"More people are interested than you would expect," Michael, now a senior, said. "Like, some of

these accounts have millions of followers, millions of likes."

Like many of his classmates, sophomore Dominic Vaughn was introduced to the world of fragrances after watching a YouTube video on the topic.

"I saw a lot of people talking about colognes, and I sort of got into them," Dominic said. "Then I asked for my first cologne for Christmas a couple years ago and just started shopping for colognes and stuff after that."

Besides initiating students' interest in fragrances, social media also helps students, like sophomore Mo Lyi-Ojo, find new colognes. Mo started wearing cologne after his uncle gave him a bottle last year.

Now, he relies on TikTok to introduce him to new scents. He even created an album on the app and filled it with colognes he hopes to buy.

Social media has also influenced sophomore Ty Quiles. While he

first sought out cologne in shops because he wanted his own signature scent and to smell good, he now watches many TikTok reviews of scents with different purposes.

"There will be videos like, 'Oh, this one cologne, you need this cologne to smell good, you need this cologne to talk to people,'" Ty said.

According to Michael, the newfound popularity of cologne has caused brands to begin advertising in different ways.

"A lot of brands are starting to make colognes and advertise colognes that are 'safe scents,' like office or school scents," Michael said. "It's not really associated by age but more with setting. So, school is a setting where there are going to be a lot of young people and students, so I think that's where the advertising comes in."

Other than social media, ninth grader Sale Sufi believes the increased popularity of cologne is also due to word of mouth.

"If one person gets one idea, it kind of starts to bonfire," Sale said. "Everyone starts thinking about that and it becomes more popular."

Ty said he thinks some teenagers have also developed an interest in colognes because of insecurities.

"I think it's just because more people are becoming more self-conscious about themselves and like their image," Ty said.

When looking into new colognes, Michael said it's important to consider personal preferences instead of just listening to social media reviews.

"Definitely don't blind buy anything just off what you hear online," Michael said. "Either sample it, because there are a lot of sampling options online that are cheaper, or just go into a store and see what you like, see what smells good on your skin and see how long it lasts on your skin."

And then start spraying.

### popular scents

#### Polo Black Eau de Toilette

- Fragrance notes: Iced mango, silver armoise and patchouli noir
- Price: \$99 (\$23.57/oz)

#### Dior Sauvage Eau de Parfum

- Fragrance notes: Reggio di Calabria bergamot and Papua New Guinean vanilla extract
- Price: \$145 (\$42.65/oz)

#### David Beckham Refined Woods Eau de Parfum

- Fragrance notes: Cardamom, cedrat, clary sage
- \$54.99 (\$16.66/oz)

#### Bleu de Chanel Parfum

- Fragrance notes: Cedar and New Caledonian sandalwood
- Price: \$185 (\$54.41/oz)

—compiled by Sahana Unni

## Student model balances school, artistic expression



Photo by Yick Chong Lam

**WORK THE RUNWAY.** Junior Lyra Luu walks the runway at the Asian Fashion Show. Lyra began her modeling journey two years ago.

by LIGHT DOHRN  
Assistant Editor

Adorned in a shiny red dress composed entirely of plastic grocery bags, Lyra Luu stepped out onto her first runway on May 20 amid camera flashes and applause. A matching wide-brimmed hat sat on her head, and glittering red makeup dripped from her eyes like tears.

"It was 'trashion revolution,' so all of the pieces were made out of single-use plastic," Lyra, a junior, said. "The outfit I wore was made out of plastic grocery bags from this specific store in Milwaukee."

For the past two years, Lyra has been balancing the artistry of modeling and the grace of ballet in her vibrant pursuits outside of school. Lyra's achievements extend beyond the classroom, as evident in her navigation of the intersections between artistry and physical expression.

In addition to modeling, Lyra has been pursuing ballet as a form of artistic expression as well. She started ballet at the end of her ninth grade year when she became old enough to sign herself up for lessons at the Hyde Park School of Dance. Now, she's both part of the company and on pointe.

"I've always been into fashion," Lyra said, "but I think when the idea of modeling got started, it was after 'America's Next Top Model' came out on Netflix for two

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Lyra Luu, junior  
”

seasons, and I watched it. I didn't like it a lot, but it was nice to have on in the background."

After being inspired by the television series, Lyra decided to attend a Chicago Fashion Week show. There, she met Florinda Fiore, or "Flo" — the creative director at the Fashion House of Fiore & Company, and now one of Lyra's mentors. Ms. Fiore took one look at Lyra and immediately recognized her passion and taste for fashion.

"She was working there, and I met her there. She thought I was a model," Lyra said, "and I was kind of like, 'Oh. I didn't really realize that was something I could do.'"

In terms of ballet, Lyra expresses her love of dancing combined with her distancing herself from the culture of it. The constant activity of a dancer can easily catch up to them, in many cases leading to issues like anxiety and depression. Ballet in particular has certain body standards that have

caused eating disorders and negative body image, especially among young female dancers.

"It's just the dancing itself, you know? The movement, the visual... it's certainly not the culture," Lyra said, her head tilted to the side. "I think we all know that ballet culture is less than ideal. Actually dancing and moving and letting the music flow through you — that I really enjoy."

Lyra also emphasizes the connection between dancing and fashion, occasionally leading to collaborative opportunities where her dance or fashion abilities have been integrated into various projects.

"They're both deeply artistic," Lyra said. "They both have this aesthetic element to them, so there have definitely been photographers and designers who have been interested in me because I can dance, and they've put me in things related to dance. I also wrote a history paper on the history of ballet last year, and I really really enjoyed it."

As cheers and camera shutters lingered in the air from her first runway show, Lyra gazed out, taking the first stride down the carpeted strip. It was the first step of a journey, and with each new step she takes, she continues to move towards a future of artistic expression and pushing the boundaries of conventionality.