

# The York Street Times

ISSUE EIGHT - DECEMBER 2024



ART - LIBBY RILEY

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# EDITORS' INTRO—

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Welcome to the 2024 Autumn edition of the York Street Times!

This issue is incredibly special as it is the first for many of our writers - our new year 12s! It's such a privilege to work in such a lovely team, creating the York Street Times and making it our own - whilst marking the start of another fantastic year for our school newspaper.

This issue is our Autumn term edition, and it definitely captures the festive spirit while offering a wide range of thought-provoking articles. Whether you're interested in the iconic Beyoncé, the magic of *Wicked*, or the beauty of art, there's something in these pages for everyone. Our fantastic writers have worked diligently and passionately on these articles, despite it being the run-up to Christmas!

Before you dive into the fantastic articles ahead, we want to say a massive thank you to Mrs Carney-Grenfell - who this edition simply couldn't exist without. Thank you for everything you do to make the York Street Times possible.

We hope reading this newspaper brings you as much joy as we had creating it! We hope these articles inspire, entertain, and inform you on topics that we are passion about. Thank you for supporting the York Street Times - here's to an amazing year ahead!

By Lara Goudge, Ava Wetherall, Holly McCormick, Joss Eastwood, and Annabelle Martin.



# THE COMMODIFICATION OF ART

by Grace Liang



*Ai Weiwei*

The public perception of art has changed drastically over time, with the rise and fall of art movements, the increasing use of generative AI, changing attitudes towards different types of art, and the changing usage of artwork.

Contemporary art is a key example in showcasing starkly different opinions towards various types of art. As exemplified in museums such as London's Tate Modern, contemporary art (and its subcategories - abstract, minimalist, pop, and surrealist) conveys innovative ideas in unique and unconventional styles. It is expected of any genre of art to receive criticism, yet contemporary particularly appears to receive a disproportionate amount of backlash, especially on the internet. Some recurring comments include "it doesn't make sense", "it's low-effort and meaningless", and "what happened to

beautiful art from centuries ago?". *"It's not real art"*. These may provoke the questions – what actually is art? Why is the value of the present and future defined by the past? How should quality be judged alongside effort? How can you know how much effort was put into a piece? How do you know it has no meaning? Does it have to make sense? Does it have to make sense to *you*?

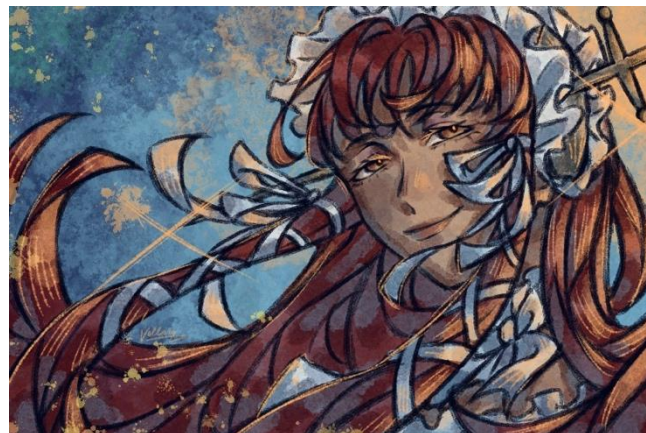
Art can be defined as a form of human expression - imagination consciously translated into visual representation via art mediums. Contemporary art is no different. It has been praised for its fresh, unique ways of observation and creation, evoking emotions and introspection, as well as actively challenging traditional norms of art. And what are those traditional norms of the past that we appear to cling onto when judging art in the present day? Realism, traditional mediums,

conventionally pretty figures, easily understandable, rich in detail, something tangible and beautiful. Should anything stepping outside of these standards really be met with immediate distaste?

I believe it stems from the commodification of creativity, where art is viewed as a necessity, rather than a luxury. Perhaps we forget that artists of the past had far more time and money to dedicate themselves to beautiful, detailed, and commonly realistic paintings. Additionally, commissioned artists (most likely of high status, although this is not a general rule) would have received much more money, exemplifying that art back then was indeed a luxury. This value of art has not changed – just because less time and money are available to spare for artists does not mean the artistic value has downgraded or should be reduced to a necessity. The presence of art in the modern world is ubiquitous - in animation, graphic design, games, advertising, architecture, interior design - yet its undeniable value is often brushed aside due to its seemingly less obvious and less important nature. Excessively strict deadlines, underpayment, labelled as ‘content’ not art, ‘content creators’ not artists. What other ways can you undermine the value of art? To put it simply, it is entitlement that kills off artists today.

This attitude not only affects current experienced artists, but also beginner artists. Unwanted and overly negative criticism can be extremely devastating for those who have just started learning. Instead of constructive advice and recommendations for sources of learning and observation, people are met with unfairly harsh reactions and dissuasion to quit, especially online. It seems to be a common trend to be nasty online, doesn't it? From personal experience, I have seen people online who utilise the tools of shallow popularity and private accounts to secretly complain and condescendingly criticise commission prices and the quality of (particularly beginner) artists' work. The art community is no exception to scammers either. All the while, they publicly act courteous and satisfied with the severely underpriced artwork they cling onto. And subconsciously, some artists

do develop that mindset of wanting to appeal to the public, wanting to go viral, and wanting to measure quality by the number of likes and comments and reposts. It is undoubtedly a toxic way of thinking that is both harmful to themselves and other artists.



### *Vellistq*

Similarly, because we cling onto art of the past, which is commonly associated with paint mediums, we may undervalue other mediums. One example would be digital art, which is met with similar criticisms as contemporary, in the sense that it is “not real art”. Art is expression. There is no set definition for what medium that imagination should be expressed. Each medium has its own advantages and disadvantages, easier aspects and difficulties – why pit them against each other?

Generative AI is taking the internet by storm in multiple aspects, including the increasingly popular Character AI, social media policies (namely Twitter), and replacement of employed artists and designers in media in favour of AI. It's quick, ‘free’, mouldable to your tastes. But it is lazy, soulless, causes unemployment, causes privacy concerns, requires costly implementation, consumes excessive amounts of energy (and therefore environmentally damaging) – it contains plenty of flaws. However, with new policies permitting AI machines to freely take public data for ‘learning’ and less artist freedom, AI is developing at dangerously fast rate. Human and AI art may become virtually indistinguishable in the near future. And it's because of those policies that many creatives - including artists and writers whose works are at risk of being stolen - have moved to alternative social media platforms without such damaging policies, such

as Cara and Bluesky. Whilst the recent migration to Bluesky appears to be effective and positive, Cara is less discussed. This is most likely due to Cara's unvaried, artist-focused audience that reduces the possibility of clients for commissions - which many artists rely on for secondary income, if not their primary source. An even more serious issue concerning AI is the increasing use of it in creative media, such as animation, games, and illustration, particularly if the developers are conscious of this immorality and attempt to hide it. This inevitably leads to unemployment in the creative industry, and it simply goes further downhill from there.



*Yayoi Kusama*

Furthermore, the commodification of art online is evident in many different ways. Art trends on social media, that artists seem to rely on due to usually consistently poor reach, overshadow typical art posts, often with some low-effort doodle in an attempt to go viral. Recently, with the rise of AI, redrawing AI generated images has become a trend with the aim of rebelling against AI and reclaiming its art. Doesn't this defeat the point?

It arguably has contradictory consequences and only promotes AI art even further. Stealing from

something that has stolen from others - is that really revolutionary?

Unauthorised usage and stealing of artwork is also prevalent online, such as profile pictures and video edits with uncredited sources, as well as tracing and referencing artwork without the artist's permission under the excuse of studying and improvement (which would be a perfectly fine reason, if only the simple task of asking for permission were not ignored).

To conclude, the commodification of art and creativity has become frequent in our world, and its various consequent issues on both individual artists and the wider industry are not to be disregarded.



# IS SOCIAL MEDIA MAKING US ANTISOCIAL?

*by Lara Goudge*



Social media is a notoriously dangerous place, with the ability to reach and influence thousands of people from the comfort of our own homes. But who's to say this is making us anti-social? Surely, communicating with large amounts of people on a daily basis makes us a highly social, global community. However, while we're more connected than ever, some studies suggest that social media could increase feelings of isolation and loneliness. It's a bit of a paradox, really. For most of us, we're constantly interacting online, but those interactions can sometimes feel shallow and unnatural, leaving us longing for real, face-to-face connection. One of the main issues is that social media presents relationships in a way which massively contrasts raw, human relationships. Receiving likes and comments may feel like we're socialising but, in reality, these

online interactions lack the depth and emotion of in-person conversations. A text or a tweet can't replace the feeling of a real hug or the comfort of seeing friends in person.

On social media, it's easy to compare ourselves to others. It's no surprise when it seems like everyone's life is picture-perfect. But that's simply because social media is a selective platform where people only share the parts of their lives that they want us to see - from their dream vacations to carefully curated photos and flawless selfies. However, behind the filters, many people are struggling with their own insecurities. This constant comparison can fuel feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem, which can drastically affect our mental health. Some studies have even shown a strong link between heavy social media use and symptoms of

anxiety, depression and loneliness, particularly among teenagers and young adults.

Another serious issue with social media is the normalisation of bullying. Due to the anonymity that exists on social media, people are more likely to engage in hurtful behaviour that they might never attempt in person (for example, leaving cruel and offensive comments). What's worse is that it's often brushed off as "online drama", creating a culture where bullying is tolerated and even normalized. This can make it harder for victims to speak up in fear that they will not be taken seriously. The constant exposure to this negativity can reinforce feelings of isolation and make social media a dangerous place.

So, is social media making us antisocial? It can certainly contribute to feelings of isolation, but that's not the whole story. Like most things, there are positives and negatives to social media. It can be used to build meaningful relationships, share ideas, and even offer support. For example, online communities can be incredibly empowering and helpful for those who may feel lonely in real life. Social media can be an incredible platform, allowing people to connect with others who share interests, passions, experiences and hobbies. It can also be a space for activism, raising awareness about important issues, and providing a platform for voices that might otherwise be silenced. It's aided movements like #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and climate change awareness to reach a global audience. In many ways, social media has brought people together who might never have connected otherwise, and this has had many positive outcomes.

At the end of the day, social media itself isn't inherently good or bad – it's how we use it that matters. If we can find a healthy balance between online interactions and offline connections and use social media in a healthy way, it can be a powerful tool for positive change. However, we

should consider the effect that it can have on our mental health if we are not careful, ensuring we don't fall into the trap of unrealistic comparisons, shallow connections, or the normalisation of harmful behaviours like bullying.



# BRAIN ROT: IS THIS OUR FUTURE?

by Ava Wetherall



‘Brain rot’ has been named Oxford’s word of the year and, honestly, I’m not surprised. If you use social media, especially TikTok, you have probably seen examples of brain rot at some point. If you have young siblings or children, you may have heard of those phrases like ‘skibidi toilet’, ‘what the sigma’, and ‘mewing streak’. Maybe you have that feeling when knee surgery is tomorrow, or you’re just holding space for the lyrics of ‘Defying Gravity’. Or maybe you have no idea what I’m talking about. That’s fine. Maybe you’ll learn something new!

‘Brain rot’ is now defined as the *supposed* deterioration of a person’s mental or intellectual state as a result of an excessive consumption of low quality online content. This content can be in the form of memes, slang, and short video clips that grab the attention of viewers, and are often aimed towards Generation Alpha (born after 2010). It is made to be addictive, over-stimulating, and... well... pointless. The most well-known example of brain rot is the animated

series ‘Skibidi Toilet’, made by Alexey Gerasimov. The most popular video somehow has 173 million views on YouTube and has 25 seasons. Surely, there must be something about Skibidi Toilet that makes it so interesting. Why else would it have so many views?

A Skibidi Toilet is a spinning head that pops out of a toilet, dances, and sings. It’s quite terrifying, actually. If it isn’t classed as a horror, it should be. The soundtrack is a mashup of ‘Give It To Me’ by Timbaland and ‘Dom Dom Yes Yes’ by Bulgarian artist Biser King. My brother used to play it at full volume almost every day, and I think it’s now conditioned to set off my fight or flight response. Don’t get me wrong, I can see how the series appeals to children, but I’m still shocked at how it became so popular, and I think a lot of people feel the same. ‘Skibidi Toilet’ very quickly became a brain rot slang term - it was everywhere, used in any context, and everyone was confused.



When you think of brain rot, you probably associate it with the slang. Apart from ‘Skibidi Toilet’, words such as ‘sigma’, ‘alpha’, and ‘gyatt’ have also been gaining popularity. Gen Alpha seem to have a whole new level of vocabulary that other generations are really missing out on.

### **Definitions:**

**Skibidi:** A nonsense slang term. Depending on the context, it can mean good, weird, or bad. It can also be used as a reaction, e.g. ‘what the skibidi?’

**Sigma:** A popular, successful, highly independent, and self reliant person, typically a male. It can also be used as a reaction, e.g. ‘what the sigma?’

**Alpha:** The most powerful, dominant, or assertive person in a particular group, typically a male.

**Rizz:** Short for charisma, the ability to attract a person romantically. It has developed into the phrases ‘W rizz’ or ‘L rizz’, describing someone’s ‘winning’ or ‘losing’ ability in romantic relationships. A ‘rizzler’ refers to a person who is charming, seductive, and confident.

**Gyatt:** A large butt, or it can be used in exclamation to express attraction, e.g. ‘gyatt damn!’

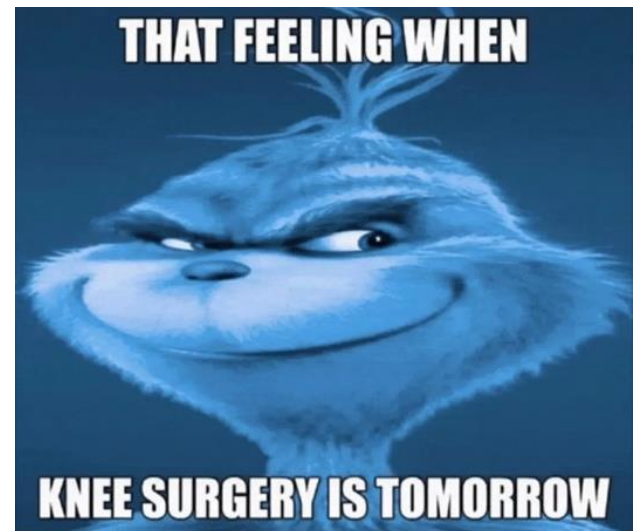
**Aura:** The energy of a person, or a way to measure how respected someone is. You can gain ‘aura points’ by doing something well and lose them by doing something embarrassing.

**Mewing:** The process of making your jawline more defined by putting your tongue to the roof of your mouth.

For context, I asked my brother to use brain rot slang in some sentences. It sounds completely normal coming from him.

*‘Yesterday, I saw my friend rizzing up this girl. I was like, what the sigma?’*

*‘Bro, I literally tripped over my laces during my football match. Minus 1000 aura.’*



Brain rot has also been used to describe trends on TikTok, where the joke isn’t necessarily about the joke itself, but being in on it. Even if you don’t understand what the trend is or where it came from, being part of an online inside joke is entertaining and satisfying. Some examples of this include ‘that feeling when knee surgery is tomorrow’, ‘holding space for the lyrics of Defying Gravity’ and ‘I like my sootcase’.

Even though brain rot has become so popular, the term itself does have a lot of negative connotations. Like ‘doomscrolling’ and being ‘chronically online’, ‘brain rot’ is yet another term that describes the damaging effects of social media on young people. So, is it actually that bad? Does this content have the potential to affect an entire generation? Well, there is no real evidence to support the theory of brain rot, but obviously, consuming anything in excess has to be damaging. Many fear that this media will have lasting impacts on productivity and concentration, particularly in children.

The first recorded use of 'brain rot' is from the 1854 book 'Walden' by Henry David Thoreau. He describes a general decrease in mental and intellectual standards, from society's tendency to devalue complex moral ideas.

*"While England endeavours to cure the potato rot, will not any endeavour to cure the brain-rot – which prevails so much more widely and fatally?"*

Although the meaning of brain rot has somewhat shifted over time to describe social media content and its effects, the overall theme still remains.

*"Looking back at the Oxford Word of the Year over the past two decades, you can see society's growing preoccupation with how our virtual lives are evolving, the way internet culture is permeating so much of who we are and what we talk about. Last year's winning word, 'rizz', was an interesting example of how language is increasingly formed, shaped, and shared within online communities. 'Brain rot' speaks to one of the perceived dangers of virtual life, and how we are using our free time. It feels like a rightful next chapter in the cultural conversation about humanity and technology. It's not surprising that so many voters embraced the term, endorsing it as our choice this year."*

*- Casper Grothwell, President of Oxford Languages*

The question is, then, is brain rot simply a trend, or is it more about the fears we have, as a society, around change? Whether or not brain rot becomes a lasting concern, it's clear that our relationship with technology and media will continue to shape our lives, the ways in which we communicate, and what we view as essential for humanity.



# THE MENENDEZ BROTHERS: A STORY OF TRAGEDY

by Meriella Gempesaw



*You be the judge. Was justice served?*

## The complexity of the murders

Beverly Hills in the 1980's: the iconic zip code of 90210, 'royalty' compared to others, a place where only the wealthiest Californian's could take pleasure in, the very setting of every 'American dream'. Well, what happens when two residents of this prestigious neighbourhood are brutally murdered in their own two-story mansion? Set aside your sympathies and understand that the real victims of the crime were none other than it's perpetrators. 'I will tell you what *Erik* and *Lyle* are guilty of - the *only* thing they are guilty of is *loving* the mother and father who tortured *them*' - *Leslie Abrahamson, the defence attorney. This article will take a defence perspective approach, exploring the*

*adversities and the fairness of the trial, helping you make your own perspective. Was justice served?*

## What happened on August 20<sup>th</sup> 1989?

On August 20<sup>th</sup> 1989, Jose Menendez was shot in the back of his head with a 12-gauge shotgun at close range, and Kitty Menendez was shot multiple times in the face with the same 12-gauge shotgun, by the hands of their own sons, Lyle and Erik Menendez. During their funeral, the same Lyle Menendez crafted a speech celebrating his parents lives in an eloquent fashion. It was so adored and described as 'beautifully eulogised'. Initially, the brothers were not perceived as suspects. However, due to their ludicrous shopping adventures - a Porsche Carrera, a Jeep



Wrangler and 3 Rolexes - the police caught on. How impatient were they to receive their 14-million-dollar inheritance?

### **Boys can be sexually assaulted too**

‘The myths back then about who a sex offender was didn’t fit the Menendez family. Looking at these well-dressed white guys just doesn’t match the public’s perception of what a victim should look like, and there is a natural tendency to discount it’ – Dr Conte. Unpacking the trial, Leslie Abramson alongside Jill Lansing revealed the disturbing hidden truths behind the murders, a history of sexual abuse. Jose Menendez sexually abused his sons from the age of 6 until his death, which psychologically scarred both brothers into a dysfunctional normality where the concept of murder didn’t sound so terrible. ‘Unlike the alleged crime that the prosecution here presents, those crimes occurred in total secrecy, no police were called. He killed his parents because he could no longer endure their abuse and had to stop it’. The defence explored the why the murders happened, arguing its relevance to the case. It was a question of degree, not innocence. In 1990’s America, this trial was publicised on ‘Court Tv’ and became a reality tv show, due to the multiple TV adaptations making their abuse comedic relief. The severity of the abuse was disregarded as a culture of silence was prevalent when the topic of ‘male sexual abuse’ arose. In this case, the only motive for murder deemed ‘logical’ was money.

### **The trial and its verdict**

Dissatisfaction - a common emotion shared by Court TV viewers when the first trial came to its conclusion, a hung jury. Undecided in their verdict, the jury was drawn 6 v 6 to a battle of the sexes. The women were granting the boys sympathy, while the men were convinced the Menendez’s vulnerable truths were nothing but lies. A second trial was upcoming, this time only Erik testifying. Amidst the Menendez chaos, a

climate of uproar sparked amongst Californian civilians, unhappy with the verdicts of recent criminal cases. The murderer’s of Rodney King? Acquitted. OJ Simpson? Innocent. People were losing faith in the Californian justice system, leaving Judge Weisberg determined to get a conviction. To secure the conviction, Weisberg limited the amounts of witnesses and experts to weaken the ‘abuse-excuse’. ‘The second jury convicted the brothers because they saw a different trial that was engineered to guarantee murder verdicts.’ – Hazel Thornton. The second trial concluded to a 12 v 0 jury, meaning the brothers were sentenced to life imprisonment without possibility of parole. The 21 and 18 year old Menendez brothers weren’t granted freedom - they were still haunted by their parents, even after their deaths.

### **Where are they now?**



After 34 years of incarceration, the brothers share their story, urging the importance of speaking up against abuse. Lyle, 56 years old, devotes his life in prison to promote safe spaces for sex abuse survivors, allowing them to seek comfort in their shared traumatic experiences. The Menendez case also preceded the ‘Me-Too’ movement, a social movement that aims to raise awareness about sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and rape culture. ‘If they were tried today, I think the most they would get is manslaughter’ – Hazel Thornton. There is a clear disparity between the culture of silence in the 1980’s and the age of speaking up in 2024. In modern society, male voices are more accepted and heard when it comes to who are victims. The

Menendez case is evidence that no one in society is exempt from abuse, regardless of their wealth or gender identity, highlighting how, as a society, we should maintain an environment where sex abuse survivors feel safe sharing their stories.

If you or anyone you know is struggling, please visit the websites below and know your story matters.

<https://safeline.org.uk/>

<https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/>

<https://www.survivorsuk.org>

**BEAUTY AND THE BEARS!***by Lara Goudge****How the Rugby player and TikTok sensation Ilona Maher has risen to fame!***

The Olympics is always a well-loved international event, watched by millions each year. It celebrates incredible athletes worldwide. However, this year, it wasn't just the sporting events that captured our attention. The Olympic Village became an internet sensation, with thousands of people watching our well-loved athletes eat chocolate muffins and show off their cardboard beds. The American Rugby star and Olympic bronze medalist (Ilona Maher) like many competing athletes, joined in on this trend making videos to share her experience in the Olympics.

However, her videos were not all as trivial as chocolate muffin gate and the Olympic Village's

dating scene as she also shared motivational messages about feminism. She uses her social media platform, which makes her the most followed rugby player worldwide, to advocate for body positivity and equal gender representation. She also encourages women to get involved in sports (stating "Come for the Tik Tok girl but stay for rugby which will be on par with the best.") and reminds us that our femininity is not defined by our appearances (as society will tell us). Additionally, Ilona Maher highlights the importance of diverse body types in athletics and celebrates the physical strength and abilities of women. As a result of her challenging traditional gender stereotypes (that are reinforced by the

media), she has become an inspiration to women all over the world.

Maher has also recently participated in the show 'Dancing with the Stars', where she showed that strong female athletes are just as capable as any other women at being feminine. Her dances, including a performance to the song 'Femininomenon' celebrated women's empowerment and encouraged audiences to embrace all body types and redefine beauty and power. She showed courage and determination, finishing in second place, and even said she wanted to tell her children and grandchildren that she went out there in front of millions of people and ballroom danced.

But what is she doing now? She is set to join the Bristol Bears in 2025 and Head Coach, Dave Ward has said: "This is a huge coup to be able to bring Ilona Maher to Bristol Bears on a short-term deal. She is one of the biggest names in women's sport, let alone rugby, and we believe she will add real value to our programme on and off the field.". Undoubtedly, she will shake the rugby world in England, however, she believes

she also has a lot to learn from her new team the Bristol Bears - "I just know I am going to learn so much from them". Featuring in a Rugby World Cup is the pinnacle of any player's career, and she aims to reach this after her time with the Bristol Bears.

In conclusion, Ilona Maher's rise to fame is a perfect mix of incredible athletic talent, social media influence, and challenging gender stereotypes and societal expectations. She's not only an outstanding rugby player, but she also uses her platform to promote body positivity, gender equality, and the importance of embracing all body types. Whether she's sharing her Olympic experiences on TikTok or dancing on *Dancing with the Stars*, Maher has become a role model for women everywhere, inspiring them to redefine strength, beauty, and femininity. As she heads to the Bristol Bears in 2025, it's clear her journey is far from over. With her talent and determination, Maher will undoubtedly continue to shake up the world of rugby and inspire generations to come.



# THE HOLOCAUST EDUCATIONAL TRUST PROJECT

*by Holly McBeth*



A school peer and I took part in an important project which aims to spread awareness about the infamous tragedy that we know as the Holocaust. So, what is the Holocaust?

The Holocaust was the mass genocide of approximately 6 million Jews and other minorities under the oppression of Nazis from 1939 to 1945. The Nazis were members of the far-right National Socialist German Workers' Party, led by Adolf Hitler. Hitler's aim was to exterminate any groups who were a supposed "threat" to the perfect image he had of the country which he dictated – Germany – even though he was born in Austria.

It is important for us as a population to understand and appreciate this event rather than leave it all in the past – that is why I decided to take part in this project. Since my peer and I began the project in the beginning of October, we have both become more aware and appreciative of the ins and outs of

the Holocaust and have a goal to spread awareness to you as readers.

## Visit to Poland

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, we were offered the opportunity to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau in the centre of Poland. These were the main concentration camps used to exterminate minorities during the war. Although upsetting and disturbing, it gave us the chance to learn more and educate ourselves on the horrors witnessed, and to even see the hope that many of the victims held on to. We were given the opportunity to visit the Auschwitz Museum, Oświęcim and Birkenau.

Firstly, we travelled through Oświęcim, the village that was occupied by mainly Jews in the 1920s. The way Jews lived was no different to how non-Jewish Polish, German, English, etc...people lived, except their customs (such as attending synagogue or having different ways of working). To see this

village and learn that there was close to no difference in this Polish-Jewish village compared to a Polish-non-Jewish village (for example) opened the opportunity for us to think “What is it about the Jews that bothered people?”.

We made our way to the Auschwitz camp. We walked through a long corridor where a loudspeaker announced the names of every Jew that had died there. It didn't feel moral or respectful to be visiting a death camp. Once we got there, I would like to believe that everybody was somewhat shocked to see the infamous but iconic “Arbeit Macht Frei” sign, roughly translating to - “Work to be Free”. What this signalled to the Jews was that that they would eventually be free if they worked hard enough - which we are aware was not the case.



The camp looked more pleasant than we had all expected, but this is where we found out that it used to be Polish military barracks.

We made our way through the blocks, to be welcomed with a new sort of history in each one. One of the blocks contained pictures of the children who were victims of the Holocaust. One of the children, who unfortunately didn't make it out alive, was a little girl around the age of 8 or 9. She is known for her resilience - before her photo was taken, she was beaten by the Nazi's for not understanding German. However, when the photo was ready to be taken, she wiped the blood from her face and let them take her photo. Her strength is still remembered today.

Another one of the blocks contained items such as uniform, hair, and items belonging to Jews that we can interpret as a symbol of hope. The Jews brought pots, pans, clothes, and personal belongings, because they thought they were going to live in a new home. These personal belongings were sold or thrown, depending on their worth, for example jewellery. There were also tens of thousands of shoes, 20,000 of them being children's shoes.

We then made our way to Birkenau, the death camp. It was a shock to see the infamous gates right there before us, knowing we were stood in the same place as the Jews were stood less than 100 years prior. We made our way through the camp and saw things such as triple decker “beds” (wooden frames with wooden slabs) where they would've slept. Around 5-6 people were expected to fit on each bunk of every bed. We also saw the toilets that they were only allowed to use twice a day, in the morning before work and in the evening after work, for only a few seconds. The camp separated the women's barracks and the men's barracks. The women's barracks were made of brick, whereas the men's were made of wood since they supposedly built them themselves as part of their forced labour.



As we continued along, we came across one of the trains that would've transported a few hundred Jews - cramped into the stall. The train remained close to the place where a doctor would analyse you and point either left or right – to the barracks or to the gas chambers.





We then made our way to a gas chamber, which was destroyed during the time that the Nazis tried to remove all evidence of the hostile activity they took part in. The rooms could be easily distinguished, no matter the damage. There was the room where they would've stripped naked and removed all their belongings, the room where they were executed and the room where the Nazis would burn the bodies. We stood at the entrance of the chamber, where a lot of Jews would've taken their last breath of fresh air, and remembered them.

Before our departure, we held a ceremony to commemorate those who were ostracised, targeted, and victimised by the Nazis in the Second World War. Poems were read, candles were lit, and we listened to a Jewish religious story.

The journey will forever hold a place in my heart and the way I look at the world has been altered. I believe that everyone should be aware of and appreciate the emotional trauma the Holocaust caused for those affected by it.

### **So, why should we commemorate this tragic event?**

The Holocaust had a drastic effect on the world and changed the lives of many people such as survivors, relatives to victims and the entire Jewish community. To avoid this event from happening again, we should learn about the history of the Holocaust, the experiences and remember the consequences of the event.

Mala was a victim of the Holocaust when she was a little girl, and she still speaks out today about the experience and the horrors she witnessed whilst under Nazi oppression. Mala was a hero for her little cousin during the Holocaust since she stuck by and protected her throughout the disaster. They were only very young when the Nazi's begun to exterminate Jews, and Mala sadly lost a lot of her

immediate family in this time. However, she stayed strong and managed to keep both herself and her little cousin alive. Luckily, both are well today.

Another case is the case of young Heinz Oster - also known as Henry Oster. He was only 5 when the Holocaust begun, and he experienced the deaths of his mother and father in this period. He was sent to Birkenau in the later years of the events and kept as a "Stable Boy" to look after the Nazis' horses. Since Oster could speak German, he managed to make it through a lot of trouble that another non-German speaking Jew wouldn't have made it through. He went on to live a good life in America and spoke every year in Cologne about the Holocaust up until his death in 2019. His bravery is still remembered today.

### **How can you spread awareness?**

There are many ways to commemorate and spread awareness of the event. You can do so little as watch a video to understand more about the event, to doing so much as participating in a project which directly aims to spread awareness of the Holocaust around the world. For me, I found that reading a book – Stable Boy of Auschwitz - and doing my own research was a great way to become more educated and therefore be able to share that knowledge with others.

We should try to spread awareness of the Holocaust since its part in history is prominent and has had an adverse effect on the way we are as a society today.



## A MUSICAL FANTASY OR A LIVING NIGHTMARE? HERE'S THE WICKED TRUTH!

*by Holly McCormick*

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*What really happened on the set of one of Hollywood's most beloved pictures 'The Wizard of Oz'?*

'The Wizard of Oz', needs no introduction. The musical, adapted from the 1900 children's novel 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' remains a timeless, enchanting story, loved by many musical lovers worldwide. This classic not only brought colour, joy and adventure to the silver screen, but helped audiences escape the bleak reality of life in 1939. The story follows a young girl named Dorothy Gale (played by Judy Garland) who is swept away from her home in Kansas to the whimsical land of Oz by a tornado.

However, beyond this wonderful, magical world of witches and wizards, talking lions and

munchkins there lies a wicked truth, one which Hollywood has tried to forget. Here's a look at some of the shocking events which took place on the set of 'The Wizard of Oz'.

It seems in the glitz and glamour of the golden age of Hollywood health and safety wasn't much of a concern. This becomes apparent as on set, multiple actors faced injuries due to makeup, props and stunts.

Actor Buddy Ebsen who was originally intended to play the Tin Man, suffered a severe allergic reaction due to the aluminium powder used in the silver makeup causing him to give up his role,



which was then filled by Jack Haley, who was provided with a safer makeup formula. In Ebsen's autobiography he described his turmoil and even went as far as to say, "I was sure I was dying". As a result of his grave illness Buddy Ebsen spent two weeks in hospital and a following month recuperating.

Additionally, both Margaret Hamilton (who played the Wicked Witch of the West) and her stunt double, Betty Danko were badly burnt after filming scenes involving fire went horribly wrong. Due to a malfunctioning trap door, preventing Hamilton's character to escape from the pyrotechnic display of fire and smoke as she leaves Munchkinland, Hamilton gained third-degree burns on her face and hands. Margaret Hamilton's character is famously known for her tall black hat and her green skin. This green paint could only be removed with alcohol which exacerbated her injury. After taking six weeks off to recover, she returned to set but refused to do anymore scenes involving fire. Danko was also hospitalized after the witch's broom exploded. The broom was full of combustible materials which went on to burn Danko's legs, causing her to spend eleven days in hospital. She was then replaced by another stunt double, Alice Goodwin to finish the take.

As well as brooms erupting into flames and toxic makeup there was more danger on the Oz set. For instance, the snow was reportedly made from the carcinogenic mineral asbestos adding a more sinister tone to the movie. Another sinister aspect of the movie was the costume worn by Bert Lahr (who played the cowardly lion) was actually made out of real lion pelts.

Despite the danger of the set the real nightmare behind 'The Wizard of Oz' was the mistreatment and abuse of Judy Garland who at the time of filming was only seventeen. On set Garland was abused by studio executives, put on a restrictive diet, forced to wear a corset and put on medications to keep her working and to make her appear younger and thinner. While this was going on her mental health suffered a huge toll,

but she had to mask it as a figure in the public eye.

In conclusion, the making of '*The Wizard of Oz*' was not without its darker side. Behind the film's whimsical charm and enduring success lies a history of hardship, exploitation, and poor treatment of its cast and crew. The actors endured physically and emotionally taxing conditions, such as Judy Garland's battles with exhaustion, weight control, and mistreatment by studio executives, and the injuries sustained by the actors playing the Tin Man and the Wicked Witch of the West. The use of toxic and dangerous materials in the makeup and props, combined with long hours and harsh working conditions, contributed to a gruelling production. These unsettling realities cast a shadow over the film's legacy, reminding us that even the most iconic cinematic achievements can come at a significant personal cost.

## WICKED: THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL FILM OF 2024?

*by Ava Mahoney*



Wicked is arguably one of the most anticipated films of 2024, and for theatre kids, definitely the most! This Broadway-to-film adaptation stars Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba and Ariana Grande as Galinda and has caused uproar amongst fans on TikTok.

This controversial whirlwind of a film was found in turmoil a full year before the film even came out, the reason being Ariana Grande's new relationship with co-star Ethan Slater. The SpongeBob star, Ethan Slater, plays the munchkin Boq who throughout the film is in love with Galinda – ironic, right? It appears that during filming, Slater really took the term “method acting” to heart and fell in love with Grande. This caused upmost turmoil amongst fans as Ariana was married (although seen without her ring at Wembley) and Ethan had a wife who had just given birth. This caused questions of infidelity to arise, and many fans

were shocked at the immorality of their actions. Now that the film is out, this controversy still follows, really, it's all you can think about when you see them in the same scene!



Another topic of discussion regarding the Wicked film is Grande's and Erivo's crying in interviews. The Wicked press tour is wildly comical, with both women constantly crying over seemingly nothing. The main interview that has become a

global phenomenon is centered around the lyrics of Defying Gravity. The interviewer's exact words are "I've seen this week people are taking the lyrics of defying gravity and really holding space with that", to which Erivo started to get emotional and describes it as being "really powerful". This started a trend across TikTok of people making fun of the interview and making satirical skits and edits surrounding it.

Another controversy to recently arise is the question of who should have played Galinda. The actors we know that auditioned for the role are Taylor Lautner, Dove Cameron, Amanda Seyfried, and Renée Rapp. Obviously, Ariana was picked, and many people questioned this decision, even Lautner herself. Taylor Lautner, most notably known for playing Regina George in Mean Girls on Broadway, shared a picture to her Instagram story of the cast of Wicked with the caption "yyyyy did I even audition or think I had a chance?" Furthermore, a video of Amanda Seyfried recently surfaced of her singing 'Popular', and this caused fans to question who was cast as Galinda. Many have slated the casting choice of Ariana Grande and stated that Dove Cameron would have been a better fit. The main reason seems to be because Cameron has often played as the daughter of Kristen Chenoweth in things like Descendants and Hairspray. Many fans then think that because she has played alongside OG Galinda multiple times, she was more deserving of the role. Many see Ariana being cast as a tactical move and using her for her fame. Who do you think should have played Galinda?

Also, we can't forget about the controversy over the Wicked poster. One of the posters for the film took inspiration from the Broadway posters, however it wasn't a direct copy. A fan decided to make a piece of fan art, as they usually do, and tweak the poster to look like the original. Cynthia Erivo did not like this, however, and took to Instagram to show her distaste for the edit. Erivo described the edit as the "most offensive thing I have seen" and then says it is equal to things that are far more offensive and that it degrades her. This became a catalyst for lots of fans to mock

and marvel at the foolishness of her overreaction over something so innocent.



There is more and more drama we could unpack regarding the Wicked film, however, let's not be pessimistic. If you haven't watched Wicked, I would advise you to and maybe when you're there, you can hold space with the lyrics of 'Defying Gravity'.



## SHE KNOWLES, OR DOES SHE?

*by Anonymous*



### *A Brief Insight Behind the Beyoncé Conspiracy Theories*

Beyoncé Carter Knowles, born on the fourth of September 1981, or was she? So many questions asked, so many unanswered, everyone wondering the same thing. Beyoncé has been coined by the Internet as the one responsible for the deaths of many celebrities. The Internet has taken various events and used Beyoncé to make sense of them.

The conspiracy begins with the death of Michael Jackson during Beyoncé's 2009 'I am' World Tour. When Beyoncé announces the 'Miss Carter Show' World Tour in 2012, Donna Summers dies, and embarking on that same World Tour, Whitney Houston also dies.

But you might be thinking that Beyoncé was

only eating Onika burgers with Donatella Versace thinking "what I do?". However, people online have decided otherwise and have taken these theories into their own hands to connect the imaginary dots. Why is this correlation occurring around Beyoncé's World Tours? A question asked by many people.

These conspiracies took off when people began to think about the award ceremonies. They relayed all the footage and noticed a pattern when a celebrity won an award. Most celebrities "held space" for Beyoncé, and those who didn't were allegedly "saved" by someone else. For example, Kanye West saying Beyoncé had the best album and music video of the year in order to "protect"



Taylor Swift as she wasn't planning on thanking Beyoncé. Conspiracy theorists link the death of Amy Winehouse to her not thanking Beyoncé at the Grammys.



These conspiracies were supported by “She Knows”, a song by J. Cole, released in 2013, about someone who “knows”. He then goes on to list some high-profile celebrities, Aaliyah, Left-Eye, and Michael Jackson. The Internet went crazy as they connected more imaginary dots and

started to believe that Beyoncé had really caused these deaths to rise to stardom, and J. Cole was warning us about her doings, as Beyoncé was the one who “knows”.

Connecting all the events and happenings to celebrities that seemingly started to surround Beyoncé, the Internet became more suspicious with people crying about not remembering a single song from Beyoncé. This probably left the Pop Queen and some fans sad, but “queen never cry”. Some theorised that Beyoncé had a sudden rise to fame because she has the ability to give her “competition” the feeling that they’re about to die soon. This idea became even more unserious, with many internet trends connecting her to numerous incidents—the majority being happy incidents—and people joking that those who experienced them were spared because they “thanked Beyoncé,” while others claimed misfortune struck those who didn’t thank her.

Overall, according to the Internet, Beyoncé will be behind you and say that’s her line if you don’t thank her and “hold space” for her lyrics.

And remember...  
She Knowles.

# THE HISTORY OF VAMPIRES

by Libby Riley



Halloween's come and gone, and with it the weird satisfaction that comes with watching and reading books and films about supernaturals at the "right" time of year. Out of all the monsters and myths we dress up as, though, my personal favourite would have to be the vampire; and it turns out their history stretches over a huge number of eras and way further back than Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Probably the earliest known vampire variant (that was way too much fun to type) is the Edimmu of Mesopotamia - a vengeful spirit which arose as the result of an improper burial and would cause criminal behaviour and disease. Akkadian and Babylonian mythology also described them as having the ability to possess people, particularly children, and probably the trait most alike to a vampire they have is the ability to drink blood and manipulate (and extract) life force. The method of preventing these spirits was to hold funeral feasts and banquets to appease the Edimmus, or not eating oxen meat as it was believed to attract their fury.

Female vampires seducing and drinking the blood of men can be found in both pottery shards from ancient Persia and also within Greco-Roman mythology of the goddess Hecate, a bronze-footed creature who transformed into a young woman to seduce men and drink their blood as they slept. Also, several stories involving the Lamia and gellodues/Gello of Roman mythology and Lilitu of Ancient Babylonia and Assyria both involved vampires consuming the blood of babies and children.

Fast forward to Ancient Greece and the vampire belief of their era was that redheads turned into vampires after their death, and the way the Greeks prevented this was to cremate the bodies of redheads so that they couldn't be reanimated after death (although, as a ginger, I'm sad to report the ginger jokes this triggered are still alive and well). This also appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, in which they're too insubstantial to be heard by the living and must drink blood to be able to do so. In more modern times, the plague that devastated the Middle Ages was

commonly connected to vampirism - the bleeding mouth lesions the disease left behind were supposed to be a sign of vampirism. It was also widely believed in the Middle Ages that people with any uncommon mental or physical illness were vampires. One example of this is porphyria, a skin condition which caused serious blisters when exposed to sunlight (which could have been the origin of the cliché in vampires), and the symptoms were temporarily eased by drinking blood. Suspected vampires' bodies were often dug up after burial, with some having stakes thrust through the hearts to ensure their deaths, while cremation of suspected vampires continued until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Alongside ancient beliefs, there's been several documentations of real people who fit the vampire persona. The 1880s case of Mercy Brown being one of the most famous; she was blamed by her townsfolk as the cause of a mass tuberculosis death amongst her family (including Mercy herself). Her body was then dug up and searched for signs of vampirism along with the rest of her family - when her body hadn't severely decayed, the townspeople accused her of being a vampire and her icy grave causing her family's sickness; cutting out her heart, burning it, and then feeding the ashes to her sick brother, who for some weird reason died soon after. There's also the ruler of Walachia, Romania between 1448 and 1477 (Vlad the Impaler) described as a brutally cruel ruler whose preferred method of killing his enemies involved impaling them on a wooden stake. He was also reported to have enjoyed drinking the blood of his enemies and dining amongst his dying victims. The similarities between him and Bram Stoker's

Dracula leads to some considering Vlad as Stoker's inspiration (especially as both characters are from Transylvania), although there's some dispute around the topic.

Even today, there's small communities of vampires that still exist, who mostly keep to themselves and drink the blood of others (willing donors!) in private in an attempt to stay healthy. Some others don't drink blood but instead claim to feed off the energy of others, with many reporting they feel depressed if they don't do it regularly.

So to sum up my timeline/rant, vampires have actually been around for way longer than Bram Stoker's Dracula and make some form of appearance in an astonishingly high number of ancient civilisations, with their main traits of sensitivity to sunlight, seductiveness, drinking blood and heightened physical abilities continuing to make their mark on literature for decades.



## SHINING A LIGHT ON SEASONAL DEPRESSION

*by Isabel Shervey*



The never-ending darkness. The constant bitter cold. Lost motivation. A need for warmth again. An infinite, unbroken cycle of contempt transforming into depression. Or to put a label on it... Seasonal Depression.

Now, you may be wondering, “Seasonal Depression? Isn’t that just a myth? I mean, if you’re depressed, you’re depressed right?” Wrong! You see, this concept is way more complex than simply a ‘to be or not to be’ depressed.

Seasonal depression (or in more scientific terms), Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD (ironic, no?) is a form of depression that ebbs and flows with the seasons and affects generally everyone in some shape or form, whether it be slight fatigue on one end of the spectrum, or severe depression on the other. And if you need proof, then you’ll

be thrilled to know that a recent study by the Yale School of Medicine revealed in a survey that 90% had suffered from changes in mood, energy, sleep, appetite, and/or weight in the winter months. It affects our mood, often leading to symptoms of:

- ❖ Having a persistent low mood
- ❖ Increased irritability
- ❖ Feelings of despair
- ❖ Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- ❖ Feeling lethargic (lacking energy)
- ❖ Difficulty concentrating
- ❖ A loss of pleasure or interest in normal everyday activities
- ❖ Craving carbohydrates and gaining weight
- ❖ Oversleeping and struggling to get up in the morning

But why does this happen, you may ask? Well, it's not as simple as  $2+2=4$ . To be frank, the exact cause isn't fully understood (helpful right?). However, many studies have revealed that most cases of SAD are often linked to reduced exposure to sunlight during the shorter autumn and winter days. Thus, this has led to the main theory that due to the lack of sunlight, this may stop a part of the brain called the hypothalamus from working properly, which could affect a multitude of things, such as:

- ❖ The production of melatonin (the hormone that makes you sleepy) - sufferers may produce higher levels than normal, causing that constant feeling of fatigue
- ❖ The production of serotonin (the hormone that affects your mood, appetite and sleep) - often the lack of sun exposure in winter months can lower the levels of serotonin, thus causing symptoms like low mood
- ❖ The body's internal clock (the body uses sunlight for various important functions) - this would disrupt your wake-up time, due to lower light levels

So, if it affects everyone, then why hasn't it affected me? Well, (luckily for you) that's a much simpler question to answer as, just like any other physical or mental illness, it's clear to say that certain demographics or people are just more likely to be affected than others. For example, genetics play a massive role in who's affected and how severe symptoms are, with many cases stemming from families with a known history of either SAD or mental illness in general.

Okay... but what if my family doesn't have a history of mental illness? Well, there's no need to worry, because more than one demographic has been found to be vulnerable to SAD, such as: young adults (20+), with the risk increasing with age, women, those with already existing mental

health issues, and those who live further north due to shorter daylight hours in the winter.

However, just because you aren't part of any of these demographics, it doesn't prevent you from suffering from SAD (cough, cough, talking to the men reading this). So, don't ignore your symptoms. I mean it! Don't limit your happiness just because a silly article says "Oh, these people are the most vulnerable and likely to get it". Yes, it's facts - but facts aren't always inclusive.

Okay, okay. I understand. Well, what do I do then? How do I treat it? Well, I am glad you asked because you may actually be rather shocked by all the very simple habits you can slot into your daily life to combat your draining symptoms and bring you back to the land of the living, such as:

- ❖ Getting as much natural sunlight as possible (even a brief walk can be beneficial)
- ❖ Make your work and your home environments as light and airy as possible. (A bit trickier when you're at school)
- ❖ Sit near windows when indoors (vitamin D is so important for normal bodily functions and it's even more important during these dull, soul sucking winter months)
- ❖ Take plenty of regular exercise (particularly outdoors and in daylight) - trust me, endorphins do wonders for your mood and sleep
- ❖ Eat a healthy, balanced diet
- ❖ If possible, avoid stressful situations (which is easier said than done, especially with A-Levels and all). Take steps to manage stress (meditation, hobbies, exercise, scheduling breaks, rest, etc.)
- ❖ Talk to your family and friends about it so that they can understand how you're feeling to support you more effectively

- ❖ Go to student support (trust me, they're the most supportive and understanding people you'll ever meet and almost everything is confidential)

So, there you have it. Seasonal Depression. We all may suffer from it in one way or another, but hopefully you've realised that it's a lot more treatable than you think. It's really up to you, if you have the courage to ask for help, but if you don't, you might regret it. Just remember you are not alone, even if sometimes it feels that way.

If you need support, please reach out to someone you know or visit these helplines below.

<https://www.mind.org.uk>

<https://www.samaritans.org>

<https://giveusashout.org>



## WHAT TO DO WITH PUMPKIN INNARDS

*by Annabelle Martin*

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Around Halloween, I am sure many of you went pumpkin picking and carved the ones you hand-picked. Or maybe you decided to have a night in to carve some pumpkins with friends? Either way, you would have been left with some pumpkin innards. What do you do with them?

Well, you could throw them away, but I suggest you make a snack if you're feeling a little peckish. A personal favourite I have seen online is pumpkin seed snacks. These are similar to a crisp but end up being healthier (and easier to make). The hardest part is separating the inner strings from the seeds. But, once you have done this, all you need to do is wash and dry them, coat with some oil and your seasoning of preference (cinnamon perhaps), and then put them oven (at 180C fan) for 10 minutes.

But what do you do with the inner strings? You could make a pumpkin soup. It's simple and tastes great (I didn't think it would, but don't knock it till you try it). All you need to do is blend the inner pumpkin, add some cream and seasoning, while you heat it on the hob at medium heat - and voila!

You could also make a face mask if you have anything left over. It sounds disgusting, I know, but the guts are actually packed with vitamins, zinc, and antioxidants that can help your skin. You may want to blend it a little and test it on your hand before you try it though!

So, next year, if you're struggling on what to do with your pumpkin innards, maybe treat yourself with a face mask or try a new snack. You never know, it could be better than you think!

# WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN SIXTH FORM?

*by Annabelle Martin*

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## Freshers Fair:

On October 1st, Freshers Fair took place for the new year 12s. 28 societies, for example, MedSoc, Spanish Club, and LawSoc, gathered to welcome their new members. Editors of Press Club were also on a stand, handing out previous editions and explaining the process to the year 12s, some of whom you'll see writing in this edition. The senior leadership team helped organise this event (a big thank you to Yahya, Hana, Rebecca, and Tom for all they did). I spoke to them all and they were very pleased with the outcome. Don't forget, if there is a club you would like to create and run yourself, please contact Ms Clark!



### EPQ:

Year 12s are currently working on their EPQ project. At this point, they will be doing the production log. As someone who has been through the process, make sure you stay on top of deadlines, so they don't catch up to you. I decided to ask around to get some extra advice from people who have previously done EPQ too. Amber Wood recommends that you "include everything you do and reflect on your feelings", others agreed with her to write loads and it "doesn't matter if you think you are waffling." Cloris Woo recognised that the production log is "the most important part" as it is the part of the project that you have the most control over. You can write as much (or as little) as you want. The most important piece of advice I heard was to not do references at the end of the project because they will build up and it will become more difficult to complete. You must find the links and make sure there is no paraphrasing that hasn't been linked. I recommend using the website "MyBib", adding the sources as you go so you don't have this issue.

### Open Evening:

On October 30<sup>th</sup>, the Open Evening for prospective students took place. Rebecca, Tom, Lily, and Harith did the presentation for parents and students, alongside the senior members of staff. They did superb and were highly informative - well done! All of the senior leadership team thank everyone who helped and was involved in the Open Evening.

The English department was constantly packed with students looking to study English. The teachers and students who helped explained the subject and laid out the books that are covered in each course of A-Level English. They even specially printed the most recent edition of the newspaper!

Psychology went full out with their fluorescent pink sign. They covered the classroom with psychology related challenges, ranging from Attachment to Biopsychology, which got everyone involved. The teachers were really interactive and thoroughly explained the subject.

In Biology, plants surrounded the classroom and microscopes were out to give students an insight into the course. There were models of protein synthesis and opportunities for students to create their own. As well as this, the prospective students also had the opportunity to speak to any of the teachers to ask about 'MedDenVet'.

In summary, all the departments put a huge amount of effort into making this night the best possible.



