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HSPVA Love Letters: Anonymous Positive Vibes

I'm sure we're all aware of our school's anonymous, PVA-themed social media accounts. Some have caused quite the uproar over the years, but a new, more loving account has been gaining popularity through anonymous letters of appreciation. HSPVA Love Letters is an account dedicated to sharing kind anonymous letters, and I had the pleasure of asking them questions to find out more about the account's aim.

"We were just joking on a group chat we have and came up with a cute idea to send anonymous positive confessions as a yin/yang thing to another PVA account that posts anonymous confessions," said Person A, one of the account's operators. The other operator, Person B, said, "It's such a cute little way to give compliments to people in times like this. Now, we do it for just the positivity it spreads and less as a competitor to a more negative account."

They were quite surprised when they saw that the account was starting to blow up. They didn't expect it to gain so much popularity, and they decided to get to work to keep their new community supplied with the letters. "We got FLOODED with letters. I don't know about you, [Person A], but it was spooky at first, but also so, so, so sweet." Person B agreed, saying, "Yeah, it was a little scary; I had no idea how to react. But after hitting one-hundred followers in like twenty-four hours?!? It was pretty 'pog,' and I kind of rested on my laurels of shared positivity and success with one of my best friends!"

Regarding any future plans, the team is just waiting to see where the account goes from here. "We'll continue to adjust how we post and such according to the feedback we get, but nothing huge...for now," hinted Person B. If the account grows and becomes an "official" PVA thing, Person A said there is an issue about finding more people to run it after they have to leave. "But that's way in the future," Person A chimed. "And who knows; maybe we can do something bigger for Valentine's Day," added Person B.

Valentine's Day seems to be the only supposed "big" event in mind; even love letters have some restrictions. "We were confronted with legitimate romantic love confessions relatively early on, and we had to make a decisive decision on if we include them or not. We decided, in the end, that we want to keep things lighter and perhaps more platonic, especially since it's anonymous," said Person B. Person A elaborated on the account's rules for submitting letters. "We turn down all letters with 'not safe for work' mentions, hateful mentions, romantic themes, or birthday wishes. If the sender and the recipient don't share the same feelings, that would be hurtful for both of the parties to have a 'public' rejection, so we made the executive decision to avoid them."

"And we wanted to avoid a potentially awkward situation where the letter receiver is like, 'Omg, who sent it??' because we don't know either!"

"Literally, yes!! We get so many [questions] like,

'Who sent this?' but it's anonymous, so we have no idea."

Teachers are an important and integral part of online and physical HSPVA, and Love Letters knows that. "If a letter is sent to a teacher which abides by our page's rules, we post it exactly the same way we would post a letter to a student," explained Person A. "We STAN teacher appreciation, but we're twelve times more careful than usual to make sure letters for teachers are one-hundred percent safe for work and chill," Person B added.

The team is very happy with the outcome of the account, and they are amazed at the growth it's had. "We love your letters, y'all! They not only make the day of the person it's sent to, but ours! Keep it wholesome and sweet! Love you, PVA!" Person B cheered. Person A felt the same way. "I'm so thankful to [Person B] for helping me through keeping this account up, and that I love you so much, and I appreciate everything you do! Also, thank you to all the people who send letters in! It wouldn't be possible without you guys! Oh and wear a mask!"

If you aren't following them already, go and follow @hspvaloveletters now!

by Julian Cotom



All About MentArts

by Alexa Halim and Seva Raman

You may know HSPVA Student Council for our spirit weeks, town halls, and annual Winter Ball, but this year, we felt that it was necessary for us to better dedicate ourselves to serving the Houston community and representing HSPVA.

We were inspired by last year’s StuCo President Nicholas Wesley’s idea for a mentorship program between current HSPVA students and students from underrepresented middle schools to address the disparity between the diversity of HISD and the diversity of HSPVA. HISD has an ethnic minority that makes up 91.2% of the student body, while HSPVA only has a 62% nonwhite population. Moreover, while around 80% of HISD is economically disadvantaged, only 17% of HSPVA’s student body is similarly economically disadvantaged. Clearly, the resources necessary to have an arts education that would enable a student to enter HSPVA are not available to all HISD students. Private lessons and training can be restrictively expensive, and the fine arts programs at many HISD middle schools lack the resources to sufficiently prepare students for admission to PVA without outside training.

We built the MentArts program from scratch, planning the sessions with a group of StuCo members serving as art-area leads. Our goal was to provide HISD middle schoolers with a network to thrive and develop their love for the arts. For three weeks, middle-schoolers participated in hour-long art-area-specific sessions led by volunteers across the HSPVA student body. Our volunteers navigated through the struggles of virtual learning and led sessions about the basics of creative writing, dance, strings, band, jazz, mariachi, piano, visual arts, and vocal music to around a hundred students on Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

As many of you may know, a significant percentage of the PVA student body is composed of students who previously attended either Lanier or Meyerland for middle school. It’s almost impossible to ignore the fact that we received a large majority of participants from these same two schools. Though we loved having these students, there is much work needed to spread this opportunity to students from schools that have less representation at PVA. With that being said, it’s important to highlight three schools with majority nonwhite populations from which we received large numbers of participants. Mandarin Immersion Academy has a student body of 83% nonwhite students, and Hamilton Middle School and Patrick Henry Middle School are both magnet schools with 87% Hispanic student bodies. We hope to encourage participation from students from a much more diverse pool of HISD middle schools in the future.

After many emails from parents who did not register their student in time, we decided to continue this program in the spring. We need *your* help to lead sessions and spread PVA’s passion for the arts to the next generation, taking a step to bridge the gap between the diversity of PVA and HISD.

Click [this link](#) to sign up to be notified when more information about the spring MentArts sessions are available. You can also follow us on Instagram @hspvastudentcouncil



A Plea for Proper Diversity

Editorial by Meghana John

Recently, I was roped into watching this Netflix show, *Dash and Lily*, and even as low as my expectations were, the show still failed to meet them. If I were to summarize it in one word, I would call it forced: forced character archetypes, forced relationships, and most importantly, forced diversity. While the show had diverse characters, they lacked depth and purpose. I could almost hear the writers say, “We just put in a drag queen with no purpose into the show. What are you gonna do about it?” like they were revolutionaries. The thought that diversity is more than just screen time is a lot for them to handle.

Yes, I hear you now. This mediocre diversity isn’t great, but it’s better than nothing, right? Sure, but not by much. On one hand, the exposure helps some people understand that minorities are real people and not aliens from Mars. This is net positive. I can’t argue against that, but inaccurate representation creates problems. Diversity means representation in layered characters that add to the story overall. Walking stereotypes, whitewashing stories, the Black best friend trope, and storytelling that aims to make straight, cis, white audiences more comfortable is not diversity. Hollywood doesn’t get to pat themselves on the back for doing the bare minimum. Don’t let them make you think good representation is a radical idea.

Contrary to popular belief, the importance of diversity doesn’t only stem from sight. Dropping a

minority with no thought into a story has never been enough. We aren’t trophies. Having diverse characters isn’t something you add in for the notoriety. (I’m looking at you J.K. Rowling.) Including minorities doesn’t make something inherently forced; it’s problematic when you do it for the clout. The distinction comes with how you present it. Having a properly diverse background and main characters helps establish that diversity is, in fact, normal. The best way to achieve this is to have as many points of view as possible. A startling amount of the media that contains minorities aren’t made by minorities, which almost always leads to misrepresentation and simplicity to a complex topic.

We all have room to grow by consuming more media of all types that have proper diversity, such as reading books written by POC, listening to music that addresses certain issues, or watching a movie that accurately portrays LGBTQ+ stories. I’ve been continuously frustrated by the lack of representation everywhere, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. Apu from *The Simpsons* doesn’t fill me with South Asian pride, but Tom Haverford from *Parks and Rec* gets a bit closer. I don’t think I could ever truly express how exciting it is to see good diversity. Maybe it’s the optimist in me, but I have faith that the media will get better at representation. Until then, all I can do is hold people accountable. I want more from the media. It’s really not that hard.

An Open Letter to Those Not Social Distancing

by an Anonymous Concerned Citizen

When we were little, we used to be excited for canceled school days. We would silently cheer when “snow” came not only because of the joy those miniscule white flakes brought, but because we could spend a day watching *Victorious* or reading the latest Rick Riordan book instead of memorizing our times tables and learning about conjunctions. Maybe this guilty feeling of relief carried over into high school for you; we seldom complain about a test being pushed back or a few extra days to finish that pesky project. However, last spring our definition of “canceled school” changed forever. We spent months confused by an irregular schedule of online classes and virtual/canceled events. Each of us felt the pain of being stuck at home and mourning the loss of the last nine weeks of our school year.

At first, I thought people were pretty good about following rules. I seldom saw any Instagram posts in March with crowded beach pics. Those who did post with groups were publicly criticized, like when we rolled our eyes at the fools partying in Miami during spring break because *where was their sense?!*

Now, each day I consider deleting Instagram. My parents tell me to. They tell me that I’m just stressing myself out by checking it. I see hundreds of posts each week with no social distancing, no mask wearing, and no regard to personal safety. I see students who do not live

together taking virtual classes at the same table. I watch as friends exchange hugs and act as if life is normal.

I know how hard it is to follow safety measures when all you want to do is give your friend a hug. Trust me, I know. I know how isolating it can feel to spend weeks or even months without going to your friends’ house to binge Netflix or study for a reading check. But we simply cannot go back to normal. Not yet.

Because life isn’t normal right now. The longer you try to pretend it is, the longer we’ll be stuck in this cycle of peaks and curves and lockdowns and masks. By now, many of us know individuals who have died or become seriously ill with COVID-19. It is your duty as a caring community member to stop being careless and follow safety rules. Wear your mask (even around friends). Don’t hug people who you don’t live with. Don’t spend the weekend at that lake house with friends. Stay home if you are sick. Wash your hands. I hope to soon see a day when no one’s lovely smile has to be covered by a mask because no one has COVID-19. But that day won’t come until we’ve all done our part in stopping COVID-19 once and for all.

Six Reasons Why Our President Should Add the Arts to His Resume

Editorial by Lucia Maynard

Over the last four years, and even more so in the last month since the election, I have been giving a lot of thought to the benefits of being involved in the performing and visual arts. More specifically, I have been thinking about how spending time interacting with the arts can benefit leaders and people who serve in public office. Allow me to explain.

The arts expose you to experiences of others. This makes it highly improbable that you might impose a Muslim ban, want to build a border wall, roll back trans rights, create barriers for LGBTQ folks in gaining rights, end DACA, or equivocate the actions of tiki-torch-carrying racists. With any of these actions, you would be out of the band.

The arts can support your math and science skills. You would likely believe in climate change, be able to read coronavirus statistics, and know the difference between herd mentality and herd immunity (hopefully decrying both during a global pandemic).

Being a part of the arts encourages collaboration. This means no walking out on the Paris Climate Accord, the World Health Organization, NATO, or anything else. When you are in a band, you work it out.

Involvement in the arts improves decision making and impulse control skills. If you have ever had to pick an audition piece, you know this. As a leader, this means that you might not send late-night tweets or have Twitter block or place warnings on your posts.

The arts teach you that you have to put in the time and effort (for the most part) if you want results. There is no dragging all of your family and close friends into positions in the orchestra, mariachi, choir, or anything else. This would mean making hiring decisions based on talent, acumen, skills, and experience — not last name or donation size.

The arts teach you to not personalize those times you don’t get the part, the chair, or the position you wanted. This would definitely help if you don’t win in an election (by about six million or so). Seriously though, the arts make you resilient as (you can finish the end of that sentence).

While the last four years have been a place of uncertainty, anxiety, and cuts to support for the arts, the next four will bring hope and embrace the diverse tapestry of lived experiences which makes up our country. With a vice president-elect whose childhood included violin and french horn playing, I am happy to see the arts (and presidential pups, for that matter) back in the White House.



The Queen’s Gambit

by Rebecca Rock

Sometimes miniseries are the worst because they’re the best. Getting attached to characters is brutal when you know that they’ll only be on screen for another few hours. This truth could not apply more to the new hit miniseries, *The Queen’s Gambit*, on Netflix. The show takes us through the young life of Elizabeth (Beth) Harmon, a chess prodigy with a devastating childhood.

Beth’s beginning will break your heart. As the miniseries progresses, flashbacks of her childhood haunt Beth, and the audience is given a window into her mind. The brilliant creative team lends a hand in portraying this development by such physical developments as Beth’s hair style and lipstick color. Throughout the show, Beth’s character is the perfect blend between relatable and awe-inspiring. She yearns for a chic dress in a department store while having a killer instinct for chess that makes me wonder if I should have stayed in the chess club in third grade (just so that I could understand what’s happening in the games). Beth’s ability in this mental competition seems like a talent straight out of an episode of *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. She seems unstoppable, until you consider her addictions to tranquilizers and alcohol.

Anya Taylor-Joy’s stellar performance as Beth in conjunction with those of supporting cast members Moses Ingram, Harry Melling (A.K.A. Dudley Dursley from Harry Potter), and Thomas Brodie-Sangster kept my eyes glued to the television. They drew me in, leaving me desperate to learn about chess after watching the credits role for the final episode. Who is the top chess player today? Magnus Carlsen. Was this a true story? No. Who came up with the show’s concept? Walter Tevis, the author of the book bearing the same name. Many interviews and YouTube videos later, *The Queen’s Gambit* remained in my thoughts.

This show got stuck like a catchy song in my head because, despite the ‘60s setting, the major plot lines proved relevant to the modern day. Addiction, loneliness, and sexism are problems still faced by millions today. It was especially refreshing to watch a female-lead whose life centers around her talent instead of a love interest.

Go watch *The Queen’s Gambit*. Its seven episodes will pass in a whirl, leaving you feeling cultured and astounded at the memories of chess players. The most disappointing element of this series, save for its having to end, is that it won’t likely have a second season. Guess I’ll just have to rewatch it a few (probably five) times...

The Bachelorette

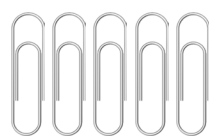
By Christine Rong

The *Bachelor* franchise is finally back! After the delay of the original *Bachelorette* season air date in May, we finally got to see the new season featuring Clare Crawley this October. Before I say anything else, there are a couple of things that need to be known: the Bachelor franchise production team took many COVID precautions to make sure the cast was safe, and the beginning of this season was such a mess that you might as well just skip to episode five if you don’t want to waste six hours of your life. Feel bad about doing that? Well, I’ll just go ahead and give you a summary. On the first night, as the men were making their entrances, Clare is immediately drawn to a guy named Dale. Clare even says that she felt like she just met her husband. As the episodes go on, they are filled with uncomfortable silences, a game of strip dodgeball (which I think is wrong and objectifies men because they are forced to get butt naked), a guy named Yosef yelling “I expected more from the oldest Bachelorette,” and the group of men sitting around as Clare cancels each group date just to spend time with Dale. At this point in the season, it was pretty clear that she was already set on one guy even though she had only known him for a week or two.

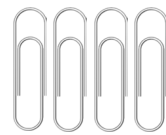
Eventually, she admits that she has fallen in love, the two (Dale and Clare) get engaged, and Tayshia Adams becomes the new Bachelorette. I honestly feel bad for Dale because he signed up for *The Bachelorette*, not *Married at First Sight*, but that’s just my opinion.

As Tayshia becomes the new Bachelorette, she automatically turns the whole show around. I won’t spoil too much of this portion of the season, but overall, Tayshia holds herself so well and knows exactly what she wants — not to mention, she is absolutely gorgeous. Some new men come in, and there is some petty drama, but overall, they did such a great job with Tayshia’s portion. She discusses important issues like Black Lives Matter, police brutality, and eating disorders with the men. During Tayshia’s time, thus far, on the show, the men put themselves in vulnerable situations and really open up, which I think sends an important message to all viewers. If you are keeping up with this season, my personal favorites in line to win her heart are Brenden, Ivan, and Ben. I hope to see Tayshia find love by the end of this season, and I highly recommend watching (from episode five onward)!

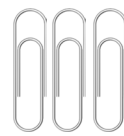
paperviews* Ratings Holiday Edition



Celebrating that 2020 will soon be over



Getting your best friend in Secret Santa



Blocking out the imminent senioritis with Christmas carols



People telling you they love your ugly sweater, though it wasn’t supposed to be ugly...



Dreading what 2021 will bring after a, well, interesting year



Music Positions

By Luca Jarosz



I want to start off by saying that I take back everything I ever said about Ariana Grande during my sophomore year; I was (and still am) a die-hard Pete Davidson fan and was doing anything I could to show my support for the King of Staten Island. Regardless, my opinions on Ari have since changed, and I’m here to give my opinions on AG6.

In mid-October, Ariana tweeted “i can’t wait to give u my album this month,” sending stan Twitter into an absolute frenzy. Following her previous, smash-hit albums, *Sweetener* and *thank u, next*, Grande had high pressure to follow up with yet another pop-classic. Did she live up to this anticipation? Kind of. My main critique with *Positions* is that it has done nothing new when it comes to Ariana’s songwriting, production, or song structure. Loose themes tie the album together, and the whole LP feels unorganized. While it is a very solid album, I find myself wanting more and wishing Ari and her team had let this album cook a little bit longer before releasing it.

Clear standout tracks seem to carry the album and almost distract us from the underwhelming filler midway through the album. “34+35” is an absolute hit (some may complain due to its TikTok fame), but its fun, risky lyrics and excellent production make up for the previous track. While it may be an unpopular opinion, “motive” is an awesome track with a catchy hook and a solid feature from Doja Cat. “six thirty” is another sleeper, and has my favorite hook on the album. “love language” also has excellent strings and production that compliments Ari’s breathy vocals perfectly.

In contrast, though, the album’s weakest tracks range from annoying to just... forgettable. Don’t get me started on “shut up”; after such BEAUTIFUL openers like “imagine” and “raindrops (an angel cried)”, it’s disappointing to start the album and hear irritating “shut UuUuuUUUp” hook. “off the table” with The Weeknd had such potential, but remains forgettable amongst an album with forgettable songs. Other tracks, such as “west side” and “my hair” are just fine and leave me wanting more. While the weaker tracks aren’t necessarily bad, they’re surprisingly bland for an Ariana album.

Now, while I shouldn’t have gone into this listen expecting a classic, I do wish that there was more to offer with *Positions*. Following the fruity, upbeat, and bass-heavy production of *Sweetener* (which is Ari’s best album and we can debate about it) and the excellent songwriting and unique hooks of *thank u, next*, I expected more from Ariana on this album. She’s certainly there... whistle tones, belting, mumbling lyrics, and all... but did she deliver? Debatable.



Weird and Peculiar Genres of Music

by Julian Cotom

Want to listen to some tunes that are beyond the realms and boundaries for normal music? These peculiar genres will either be the best thing you’ve ever found or the worst thing you’ve ever listened to. Either way, it can’t hurt you to experience it.

Avant Garde: Avant Garde seeks to go beyond the reaches of existing implications for music and adopt unique and original elements. It sounds like experimental music, but while experimental lies outside the traditional sound, Avant Garde develops an extreme and boundary pushing position within that tradition to challenge an audience’s notion of musical performances. Listen to Colin Stetson’s *New History Warfare Vol. 3: To See More Light* (2013) and some Anton Webern to get a gist of this revolutionary genre.

Japanoise: This genre is basically noise music in Japan. Noise music contains a lot of, well, noise, as well as traditional instruments and sometimes common appliances, but Japanese artists have developed a very specific noise music culture and developed their own name to it. Look into *Broken Landscapes* (2020) by Merzbow and *1986-1992* (2007) by Ruins. They have definitely made incredible contributions to this genre that inspired many other forms of noise music around the world.

Kawaii Metal: Have a cute outside but a hardcore inside? Kawaii metal is for you. This genre blends heavy metal instrumental elements and J- pop sounding melodies and vocals (and occasional kawaii aesthetics). Check out *Metal Resistance* (2016) by Babymetal and *Just Bring It* (2017) by Band-Maid for this weird blend of music

Seapunk: This genre can be summed up with mermaids voguing to house music. Originating from Tumblr cyberculture, this genre utilizes different styles of music like R&B, hip hop, new-age, and chiptune and combines it with an aquatic fashion and art containing flashy neon colors. If you are a fan of dance and club music, check this one out. You can look into Azealia Banks’ *Count Contessa* (2019) and Lone’s *Re-Schooling* (2011) to get into this genre.

Lowercase: This genre is where very quiet or unheard sounds are amplified to extreme levels creating a form of ambient minimalism. This genre doesn’t demand that much attention and comes off as containing humility and peace. Some albums for this genre to get started with is *Forms of Paper* (2011) by Steve Roden and *Built Through* (2012) by Richard Chartier.



Mariah’s Dynasty: The Iconic Holiday Song’s Climb on the Billboard Music Chart

by Preston Lim

In this world, some things are constant — 365 days in a year, math being overly complicated, and Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas is You” being on the Billboard music chart almost every holiday season.

Originally released in 1994, it charted in both 1995 and 1996 on the Hot 100 Contemporary as well as Hot 100 Airplay charts. (It was not allowed to be on the Hot 100 at the time because the rules stated that only singles could be on that chart.) In 1998, that rule was removed, and “All I Want for Christmas is You” charted again, peaking in 2000 at #83.

At the time, Billboard still had the rule that recurrent singles weren’t eligible for re-entry into the Hot 100, but Carey’s hit single topped Billboard’s Hot 100 Recurrings charts from 2005-2008 every December. In 2012, that rule was revised — any songs could enter the top 50 on the Hot 100. The song quickly entered the Hot 100, peaking at #21 in the last week of 2013.

In 2017, it reached #9 on the Hot 100 — Mariah’s

first top 10 hot since 2009. In January of 2019, the song hit #3 on the Billboard Hot 100, making it the first holiday song to hit the Top 5 since 1958’s “The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don’t Be Late)” by David Seville and the Chipmunks.*

Finally, in December of 2019, “All I Want for Christmas is You” hit #1. After a cumulative 35 weeks on the chart since its release in 1994, it became the last #1 hit of the 2010s. In doing so, it broke several records, including the longest trip to #1 for any song. It’s also become the first Christmas song to be certified double platinum. As of 2017, it’s reported that the song has made over \$60 million dollars.

“All I Want for Christmas is You” took a long journey to Billboard’s #1. While ranking doesn’t determine a song’s merit, it’s safe to say that “All I Want for Christmas is You” will remain the iconic Christmas song for quite a while.

What to Watch When...

by Anna Grace Hethcox

With the holidays soon approaching, good TV and movies are essential for the best possible winter break experience. Here are some recommendations for when you can’t decide what to watch.

When you don’t want to give up the spooky spirit but love Christmas: *Batman Returns* (directed by Tim Burton, 1992)

Are you ready for the holidays? Do you wish the festive November and December months had a bit more Danny DeVito and Michelle Pfeiffer? Well, have I got the film for you. *Batman Returns* is filled with all of the classic Tim Burton aesthetics and twists, and it’s set at Christmas. Does this movie make any logical sense? No, but that isn’t the point. I can guarantee that you will feel simultaneously spooky and festive while watching this film, and it’s complete with maximum villains and minimal Batman.

When you want to turn your brain off: *The Real Housewives of New York City* (2008-present)

A classic. As one of the greatest of *The Real Housewives* franchises and the home of countless iconic moments in reality television, why not watch *The Real Housewives of New York City*? Follow the lives of the most privileged, absurd, and opulent women in the Big Apple as they party, drink, run charities, and never cease to hang out with women whom they hate.

When you want to watch a brooding, seaside detective drama: *Broadchurch* (created by Chris Chibnall, 2013-2017)

This three-season-series is packed with suspense, drama, and a star-studded cast. Starring David Tennant as a hard-boiled Scottish detective and Olivia Coleman as a compassionate mother and local detective, this duo works to solve crimes in a small seaside community. Each shot is thoughtful and filled with beautiful English landscapes, and the actors’ performances are emotional and powerful. This show is so much more than your average TV detective drama.

When you want to watch a late ‘90s arthouse heist: *Bottle Rocket* (directed by Wes Anderson, 1996)

Wes Anderson’s lesser-known first feature film, *Bottle Rocket*, stars two of the three Wilson brothers (Luke and Owen) and was filmed almost exclusively in Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas. This movie is one of Anderson’s most intimate yet humorous films. Though it didn’t receive great critical acclaim, Martin Scorsese named *Bottle Rocket* as one of his favorite movies of the ‘90s. The pace is quick, the performances are awkward and fun, and who doesn’t love watching the early works of talented directors?

I hope you enjoy these recommendations, and make sure to give them a watch when you have some time to cozy up and relax.



Die Hard: The Most Valid Christmas Movie of All Time

by Maja Neal

For too long, the struggles of us true and loyal *Die Hard* fans have gone unnoticed. Every December, my comrades-in-arms and I take up the yearly fight, rewatch the masterpiece of our Messiah, Bruce Willis, and prepare our arguments: *Die Hard* IS a Christmas movie. There’s no denying it. And here’s why:

1. Its emphasis on family connection. The whole reason John McClane even winds up at Nakatomi Tower is because he’s looking to patch things up with his estranged wife, Holly Gennero. And throughout the movie, one of his main goals is to keep Holly safe (and kill German terrorists!), as demonstrated in the scene where Hans Gruber takes her as collateral to draw McClane to him.

2. It celebrates creativity. McClane is practically an artist of death. And he’s not, like, a 12-year-old on DeviantArt, he’s Da Vinci. The scene where he sends down a dead henchman in the elevator wearing a Santa hat? Classic. Where he crawls around in the vents for like half the movie sabotaging murder plots? Fantastic. And the possible magnum opus of all action scene twists: where McClane reaches behind his back and grabs the gun (with exactly two bullets!) that’s taped to his back, catching Eddie and Gruber off-guard enough to eventually kill both. It’s safe to say that in any life-threatening situation I will now tape my weapons to my back.

3. Its arc of forgiveness. One of my favorite characters in the movie is the police sergeant Al Powell. As he and McClane talk over the radio, Powell reveals he’s been off active duty because he accidentally shot a kid carrying a fake gun, and since then hasn’t been able to touch his revolver. McClane comforts Powell and convinces him that he’s more than that act. And, by the end, Powell summons the courage to draw his gun and shoot an evil German dead when McClane is in danger. That’s what I call a character arc.

4. And finally: John McClane saves Christmas. By helping tons of hostages, preventing Gruber from stealing all that money from the company, keeping the mother of his kids alive, and helping Powell recover from his fear, John McClane is essentially the Jesus of Nakatomi Plaza (if Jesus was really rad and buff and used a machine gun.) His simultaneous ultra-machismo, sense of humor, and emotional depth make McClane, and *Die Hard*, so dear to me. There is no funnier action movie and certainly no better Christmas movie in my heart, and it’s all because McClane single handedly saves the holiday for 200 people.



Edible Cookie Dough for the Holidays

Recipe (and Disgruntled Commentary) by Pieper Grantham

I already know y’all are lazy. You skip right over my beautiful from-the-heart recipes every year but still have the audacity to bookmark a *Buzzfeed Tasty* video like you’re actually going to make that red velvet oreo lava cake. I go into your houses and see those dreadful mug cake mixes that leave a ring of crusty, overcooked artificial sludge around the edge of your cup ‘cause any cake that takes more than five minutes to make is way too much effort for you. I see you. I hear you. This is for you. Here it is, the easiest thing I would come up with, and it doesn’t even require an oven: Edible Cookie Dough — Holiday Edition.

HOT CHOCOLATE COOKIE DOUGH

- 3/4 cup flour
- 1/4 cup cocoa powder
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 2 tbsp milk
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup chocolate chips
- 1/4 cup mini marshmallows

CHRISTMAS COOKIE DOUGH

- 1/2 cup flour
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/8 tsp salt
- 1 tbs milk
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- Sprinkles

1. Microwave your flour for 1 minute or more. (Or if you want E.coli, skip this step!)*
2. Beat butter, sugar(s), and salt together until fluffy.
3. Stir in milk and vanilla.
4. Stir in flour (and cinnamon and cocoa powder for hot chocolate cookies). If you’re really lazy, just toss everything in at once and stir!
5. Topping time! For Hot Chocolate Dough: fold in chocolate chips and marshmallows. For Christmas Cookie Dough: roll dough into balls and then roll them around in the sprinkles. Pretty!
6. Eat. Send me a picture (I want to see these masterpieces).



paper advises that you don’t skip this step.

Holiday Activities to do During a Pandemic

by Zander Tate

The Covid-19 pandemic has shaken up every aspect of our lives. During the holiday season, this change is exacerbated. To help boost winter spirits, I have compiled some fun ways to enjoy the holidays during the pandemic. However, please enjoy responsibly, and make sure to wear a mask when around other people, social distance, and wash your hands regularly.

Rudolph’s Light Show: Though it’s a bit of a trip, at about forty minutes out of town in Hockley, this drive-through light show is a great way to celebrate the season safely. This event is more than just pretty lights; it is a choreographed show synced with music that plays through your car radio as you drive through acres of lights. Learn more at <https://www.rudolphslightshow.com/>

Zoo Lights: This Houston winter classic is back! Open until January 10, the Houston Zoo’s annual light exhibition is a bit pricey, but it is nice if you enjoy walking around and taking in some wintertime spirit. Since Zoo Lights is in person and on foot, make sure to social distance and wear your mask (required). If you go from Monday through Thursday, there will likely also be less crowds (and tickets are cheaper)! Learn more at <https://www.houstonzoo.org/events/zoolights/>

Driving through neighborhoods to see lights: A great option every winter, this is sure to become even more popular this year as we celebrate with friends at a distance. Some neighborhoods with great light displays are the Woodland Heights, River Oaks (of course), Shepherd Park Plaza, and the shopping districts at Post Oak and Highland Village. Note that when driving through neighborhoods, make sure to be respectful and considerate of those who live there.

A Wacky Christmas Around the Globe

by Carmina Andrade

Behold, some of the weirdest Christmas/ holiday traditions around the globe!

Spain — In a small Spanish town called La Font de la Figuera, you can find the town engaging in a New Year’s Eve race. Pretty typical, right? Well, the runners only wear red underwear in this marvelous, and quite bizarre, yearly event. Coincidentally, this town also has the highest rate of pneumonia in all of Spain. *Weirdness rating:* 8/10. While the whole “wearing only red underwear” is rather on the eccentric side, I find this whole concept amusing rather than borderline insane. I’m intrigued by the logistics of this race, though. Are children allowed?

Ukraine — Some Ukrainians add a special touch to their Christmas trees: a spider web! It’s for good luck, following an old myth of a poor old woman being blessed by a spider web on Christmas. *Weirdness rating:* 6/10. Overall, it’s not too strange, though I’m both terrified and interested in finding out how they obtain a spider web. I can’t help but imagine an angry spider finding out someone had stolen its web.

Austria and other parts of Europe — Krampus is St. Nick’s demonic twin who encourages children to behave. In a holiday known as Krampus night, celebrated on December 5th, people dressed as Krampus roam the streets and look for victims to beat with a stick. Yep, that’s right. A stick. *Weirdness rating:* 10/10. This holiday seems funny until you’re the one being beat mercilessly with a stick by a Krampus wannabe. Maybe I’m exaggerating the aggressiveness of this holiday. It could be something very normal for the locals, and the beatings are more playful than violent.

Guatemala — In this Central American country, some locals believe that the Devil and other evil spirits can be found in the dirtiest corners of homes. Therefore, a week before Christmas, households rigorously clean their homes. The tradition, called “La Quema del Diablo”, or the Burning of the Devil, concludes by setting all the trash on fire, complete with a devil sculpture on top, and aims to start Guatemalans fresh for the New Year. *Weirdness rating:* 9/10, I think, because while the true purpose of this tradition seems meaningful, burning your trash and the Devil gives off some cultish vibes. Still, “La Quema del Diablo” does seem really fun to do, excluding

the whole cleaning for an entire week! Count me out for that part.

Wales — Mari Lwyd (which roughly translates to “gray mare”) is a tradition from pagan times where a horse arrives at a house or a pub with a group of people who proceed to sing a few verses. A battle of wits and insults, known as pwnco, follows between the people outside the door with the horse and those inside until the horse is allowed inside. The Mari is not an actual horse, but rather a horse skull attached to a pole. *Weirdness rating:* 8/10. Although it’s strange and wildly exciting to think about just how a horse insults fight would go down, nothing majorly frightening is happening. Although, I do wonder where people get the horse skulls from. Do they have a shed full of them or something?



If Santa’s Reindeer Went to PVA...

by Kate-Yeonjae Jeong

I’m sure we’ve all heard of Santa’s reindeers. They pull his sleigh, exclude others from their games (and have that memorialized into a song that’s sung every year), and deliver gifts to kids all over the globe in one single night. But what if they went to Kinder HSPVA, the iconic school of the arts? Which department would they fit in to?

Dasher’s really fast — like, a pianist’s fingers flying on the keyboard fast. He’s also really talented and probably can play three different instruments simultaneously at the speed of an airplane crossing from Norway to Timbuktu.

Dancer seems like, well, one for the dance department. She probably does hip-hop or modern, if you ask me, but then again, that one time in middle school I got an 80 on the dance test.

Always on time and smart, **Prancer**’s in the mariachi department. Prancer also supposedly has a great memory — perfect for

remembering the songs to perform.

Vixen loves to try new things and has no stage fright. She’s a vocalist and is an amazing opera singer.

The mom of the group, **Comet** is pretty put-together. She’s the one to guide you away from bad decisions and give you sound advice — and is in the creative writing department, writing out a novel on things to do and not to do.

Cupid, like her namesake, is an extroverted reindeer. She’s also very expressive, and while she probably contemplated between theatre and visual arts, she likely decided on visual arts.

According to the reindeer cyclopedia (they have a whole Wiki page dedicated to them apparently), **Donner** is loud and loves to sing. A close call to the vocal dept, but I have to say Donner is more of musical theatre.

Blitzen is spontaneous and full of energy. For sure, Blitzen is theatre. Maybe dance if Blitzen had started earlier, but theatre is his thing.

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer was a difficult call, but for some inexplicable reason, he gives off jazz vibes. Just something about it.



Why I, A Jew, Love Christmas

by Shelby Edison

First and foremost, I’m not bashing Hanukkah; I love Hanukkah! Eight days of presents and fried food? What’s not to love? However, I need to acknowledge how Hanukkah has, well, changed quite a bit from its origins. For those who don’t know the story of Hanukkah, way back when in Jerusalem, the holy Jewish temple was destroyed, the Jews won in battle against their oppressors, and the oil in the destroyed temple’s eternal light lasted for eight, not the expected one, nights. Now we celebrate these miraculous eight nights with gifts! Still, I (a proud Jewish American) love to embrace the holiday spirit that may, at first glance, not seem to match up with my background: Christmas. Here’s why:

First, Christmas songs are better than Hanukkah songs. Sorry Adam Sandler, but I won’t be singing the few tolerable Hanukkah songs out there when I could be blasting all of Michael Bublé’s Christmas album. Technically, singing Christmas songs is celebrating my people because many famous carols were written by Jews, such as “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer,” “Let it Snow,” etc.*

Secondly, Hanukkah bushes just cannot compare to Christmas trees. The excitement of tying a tree to the roof of a car and then decorating it as the quintessential Christmas scent fills the living room is simply magical (or at least I would imagine that it’s magical).

Of course, Christmas pop culture surpasses the virtually non-existent Hanukkah pop culture. From Santa to the Elf on a Shelf, the secular aspects of Christmas make me crave to be in on the fun. Sure, we’ve got the knock-off Elf on a Shelf, Mensch on a Bench, but that doesn’t hold a candle to the worker elves, reindeer, and claymation specials on the television. Shout out to that one house in every neighborhood who actually tries to put out Chanukah decorations for making us slightly proud of the semblance of pop culture we’ve got.

Plus, Christmas brings along a very special tradition: eating Chinese food on Christmas because Chinese restaurants have historically been the only restaurants open on the holiday. Without Christmas, where would our excuse to eat delicious food instead of leftovers on the 25th be?

And most importantly, Hanukkah isn’t that important of a Jewish holiday. Though Hanukkah is a religious holiday, it certainly is not the most important or holy of them. It’s not even mentioned in the Torah! The commercialization of Hanukkah, and its name-recognition in society, came due to Christmas’s popularity. If the Christian kids get a holiday with presents, we do too. No shade to Hanukkah, but it’s just not that important in the scheme of other Jewish holidays.

*“Silver Bells,” “The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire),” “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year,” “Santa Baby,” and “Winter Wonderland.”

Quiz: Which 2020 Disaster Are You?

By Lydia Carr

1. Pick a 2000s/early 2010s song that TikTok has re-popularized.

 - a. “Bubble Pop Electric” by Gwen Stefani
 - b. “American Boy” by Estelle
 - c. “Potential Breakup Song” by Aly & AJ
 - d. “Super Bass” by Nicki Minaj
 - e. “Verbatim” by Mother Mother
2. If you could time travel to before the pandemic started, what would you do?

 - a. Lick every handrail you come across
 - b. Bully your friends more, because it doesn’t sting virtually as much as it does in person
 - c. Engage in a non-socially distant dance battle with a stranger you just met
 - d. Masklessly enjoy capitalism
 - e. Honestly, probably nothing at all
3. Which of these ‘terrible’ series finales upset you the most?

 - a. Supernatural
 - b. Jokes on you, I don’t get attached to and hurt by TV shows because I know better
 - c. How I Met Your Mother
 - d. Seinfeld
 - e. Game of Thrones
4. What’s your favourite copy of Snapchat’s stories function?

 - a. Instagram’s stories
 - b. LinkedIn’s stories*
 - c. I’m honestly a fan of the original — Snapchat stories for the win!
 - d. Twitter’s “fleets”
 - e. Facebook’s stories
5. What do you miss most about “typical” quarantine?

 - a. When you thought the pandemic would only last a month and then everything would go “back to normal”
 - b. The ability to ghost your friends
 - c. Teachers not knowing what they’re doing
 - d. That weird period where everyone was obsessed with Tiger King
 - e. Watching late night hosts trying to adapt to their new format

Mostly A’s — COVID-19

The best way to describe you is “the life of the party.” You’re vibrant, chaotic, and somehow everywhere at once. You’re also one of the few people to flourish in winter. I’m honestly not sure whether you’re a painful realist or everyone around you just doesn’t know how to be optimistic anymore.

Mostly B’s — World War III

I mean this in the nicest way possible, but... you seem to be unintentionally under the radar. It’s not your fault — I’m going to take a guess and assume you’re overshadowed by the liveliness of the people around you. That’s okay, though; in another year, maybe you’ll have your chance. (I’m a little nervous for that though — you’re going to blow us all away, and we won’t know how to handle it.)

Mostly C’s — Trump refusing to concede the election

You’re not nearly as unpredictable as you think you are. I’m going to predict you’re in the theatre department, because well, you’re a little dramatic, and I think you

know this. You’re an amazing entertainer, though, one that we’ll never forget. (No matter what happens in the future.)

Mostly D’s — People hacking verified Twitter accounts to promote a bitcoin scam

You’re a very clever person, and I don’t think that you hear that a lot. Not that I’d follow in your footsteps. You seem a little too bold for me to feel comfortable doing that. You’re probably a computer whiz, of some sort, and most people wish they had your skills. Be careful to not get cocky though; I doubt it would lead to anything good.

Mostly E’s — The temporary rise of murder hornets

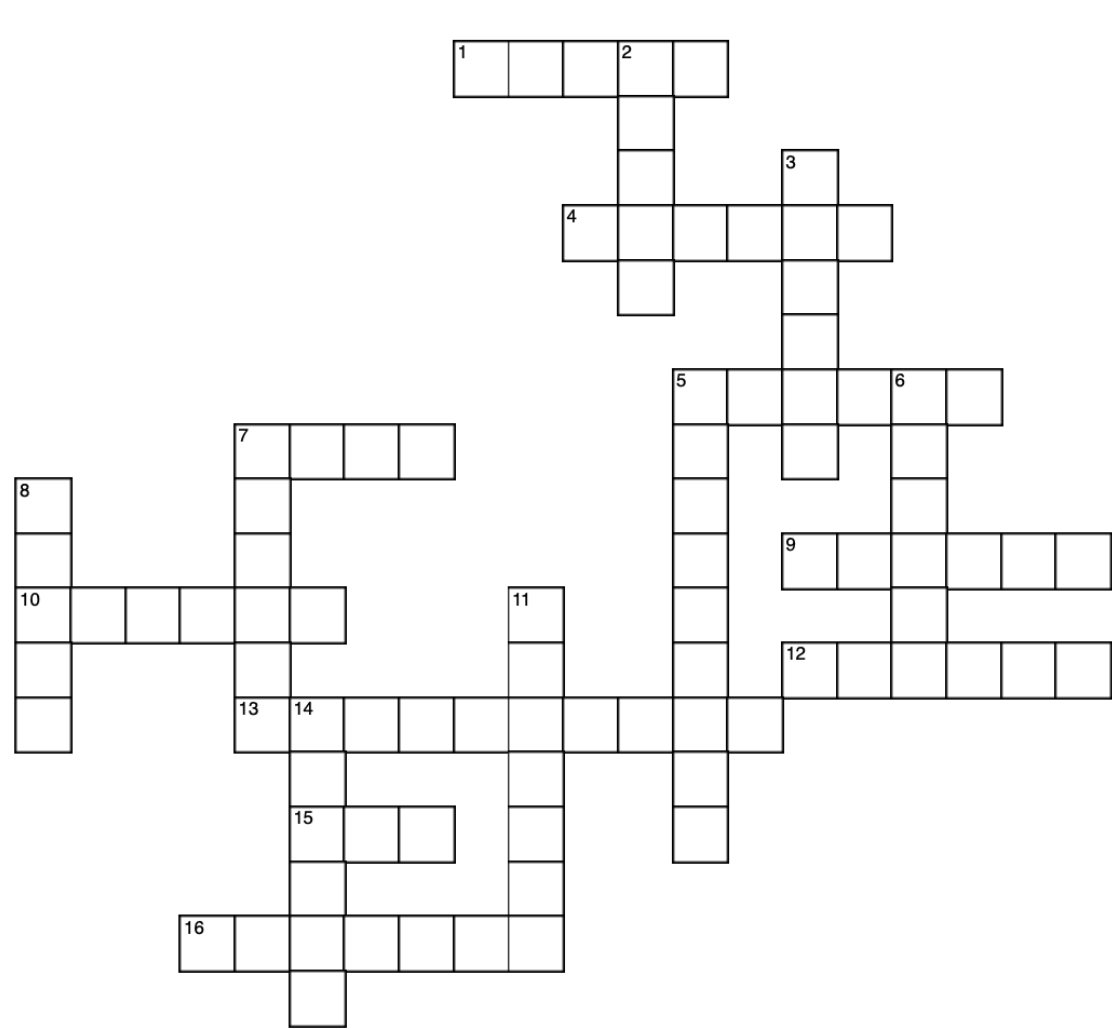
No offense meant, but you are not as intimidating as you try to be. Admittedly, you are, at first, before becoming quiet when you get to know someone (I’m going to hazard a guess that you bark at people in an effort to maintain said intimidating reputation.) You give off spooky vibes, year round, not just Halloween, and I admire you for it.



*Yeah, I didn’t know this was a thing either

HSPVA Crossword

By Matthew Kalmans



- ACROSS
1. The last name of our beloved French teacher at Kinder HSPVA is _____ (in English).
4. Mr(s). _____ is an assistant principal at Kinder HSPVA who organizes the Diversity Series.
5. The first name of the editor-in-chief for paper* this year is _____.
7. The Fall All-School Musical this year is _____.
9. Student Council organizes the _____ Ball every year.
10. The last name of the married couple who both teach at Kinder HSPVA.
12. Nurse _____ has been doing an awesome job keeping Kinder HSPVA safe during COVID-19!
13. _____ occur several times a year (e.g. Halloween, Valentine’s Day, Back to School, etc.) and consist of two chairs who host a series of acts from different art areas.
15. There are _____ art areas at Kinder HSPVA (if you count vocal and instrumental separately).
16. HSPVA _____ is an organization that raises money for our school to ensure that our arts education is top-notch.

- DOWN
2. Kinder HSPVA has had _____ campuses.
3. The _____ Theater hosts events of many different departments, including the All School Musical and the Black History Production.
5. A _____ for a show occurs when the entire school comes to the Denney to watch and support their friends.
6. The last name of the well-respected and recently retired vocal teacher who had taught at all of the Kinder HSPVA campuses is _____.
7. The Creative Writing Department resides on the _____ floor of the Kinder HSPVA campus.
8. The last name of a faculty member who made an appearance in the 2019 Fall All School Musical is _____.
11. The current _____ are the youngest class to have had classes at the Montrose campus.
14. The address of Kinder HSPVA is 790 _____ Street.

Are you confident in your crossword abilities? Send your answers to the crossword to ***hspvapaper@gmail.com*** for a chance at a **shoutout** in the next issue of paper*!

2010 vs. 2020: An Evolution in Film

By Lydia Carr

Picture this: you’re in a movie theater.* The film playing is an eyesore, to say the least: a mixture of vivid, almost terrifying animation and CGI that seems to outperform any of the actors. When you walk out, finally relieved of whatever you just witnessed, you’re genuinely shocked to see it’s become one of the highest-grossing films of the year. If you thought *Sonic the Hedgehog*, you’re close. I was actually talking about *Alice in Wonderland*. But I don’t fault you for your guess. While 2020 is a year like no other, there’s a lot to compare and contrast about the 2010 and 2020 film industries.

This is the first year since 2009 that a Marvel movie hasn’t been released; *Birds of Prey* seems to have taken Marvel’s place as the superhero blockbuster of the year. Christopher Nolan has Christopher Nolan-ed his way into two Oscar nominations for both years. (Sure, *Tenet* hasn’t been nominated yet, but come on. You know it will.)

The one thing that really brought me to write this, though was the evolution that’s taken place in the film industry over this past decade. *The Social Network*, for example, if released in 2020, would have been interpreted as a romanticization of doxxing and incel culture in this post-Me Too era. A part of me thinks that films like *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* and *MacGruber* would’ve been received with open arms, maybe even gotten nominated for the Critics’ Choice Movie Award. However, another part of me thinks that these films warmed audiences up for every fun, future cult-classic film released later.

There are countless other films I haven’t yet mentioned here. But hey, no 2010 horror movie, no matter how great, can compare to the constant thrill-ride that is 2020. (Even *Black Swan*. Sorry, Natalie Portman.) I can only hope, given how much the film industry has improved, it won’t take a decade for some of the less ‘featured’ films released this year to be appreciated.

*I know, practically fantasy at this point, but go along with it.

New Year, New You?

paper* asked you, the HSPVA student body, what your New Year’s Resolutions were. Here are some of them:

Name	Grade	Art Area	New Year’s Resolution
Jennivie Bui	11	Instrumental	To get my cat to finally love me :(
Alina Garcia	10	Vocal	To stop drinking so much La Croix. It’s become a problem. I don’t know how long I’ll last if I keep going like this. I need help.
Care Paden	12	CW	Try to make French onion soup, like, at least twice. I cannot articulate why, exactly, this is important to me, but it is.
Maddie Harper	9	CW	Honestly, to get demonias. You are literally lying to my face if you tell me that demonias aren’t cute.
Robin Schubert	12	Visual Art	I will complete a “big year” and count as many birds as possible in 2021 during my move to college.
Arely Macias	9	Instrumental	Try not to get kicked out of HSPVA. And try to be more social and make for than just two friends.
Samantha Pape	11	Vocal	To continue learning everything I can about other people’s experiences and to read more!
Ryan Butler	11	Visual Arts	I’m gonna learn how to say aluminum correctly. No more “al-u-ni-num” in 2021.
Juliette Sun	9	Instrumental	To not write the year wrong when writing the date on my papers.
Charles Ables	12	Vocal	I want to be completely proficient in Arabic by the end of the school year.
Seva Raman	11	Instrumental	I will start waking up earlier than 30 seconds before 1st period.
Ollie Grishaber	11	Theatre	I want to find out the zodiac signs of the whole PVA faculty.
Ellie Linde	10	Theatre	I want to be able to eat an entire loaf a bread in one bite.
Angela Mercado	10	CW	I want to stop cutting my hair anytime a minor inconvenience happens.
Olivia Amrein	10	Dance	I want to sleep more.
Charles Barnett	9	Instrumental	To have no New Year’s resolutions
Connor Loftin	12	Instrumental	Just get through to graduation.
Comfort Azagidi	9	Theatre	To forget about 2020.
Kerrigan Gaither	10	Visual Arts	To do more self care.

What to Binge, Read, and Listen to Over Break

by the paper* staff

Shelby:
Binge: *What We Do in the Shadows* (Hulu)
Read: *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid
Listen to: *Love in the Fourth Dimension* by The Big Moon

Ylliana:
Binge: *My Brother My Brother and Me* (Podcast)
Read: *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski
Listen to: *Pony* by Orville Peck

Rebecca:
Binge: *The Queen’s Gambit* (Netflix)*
Read: *Lilac Girls* by Martha Hall Kelly
Listen To: *Tapestry* by Carole King

Luca:
Binge: *Fleabag* (Amazon Prime)
Read: *Dance Nation* by Clare Barron
Listen to: *Ctrl* by SZA or *Paramore* by Paramore



*see Rebecca’s review of *The Queen’s Gambit* in paperviews*

Ruth + Denney: PVA’s Best, Worst, and Only Advice Column*

This isn’t a problem, but a response to Friendless Freshman. There’s a Discord server for freshmen you can use to communicate, and it’s been really helpful. We use it for socializing and homework, and I’ve made some friends. Ask Ms. Karakoç and she’ll put you in touch with someone who can give you the link.
—Friendly Freshman

Well, look at that! Thanks for the heads-up, kind student. The class of ‘24 is a truly resourceful bunch; hopefully Friendless Freshman finds a warm welcome there among their peers.
—The R+D Team

A lot of my STEM teachers are providing sample problems for students to work on during asynchronous time or if they need extra help. The problem is that the teachers don’t provide solutions or step-by-step examples, so I have no idea if I’m solving these problems right in the first place! I’ve tried asking my teachers for help, but they say I should look at the PowerPoint (which so far has confused me).
—Stressed out by STEM

Dear Stressed,
As someone who took AP Chemistry and struggled most of the way, communication with your teacher is key. You said you’ve asked for tutorials, and the teacher wasn’t very helpful? Well, if this is a consistent problem, I’d suggest asking a friend or upperclassmen who feels comfortable with the subject. Sometimes getting help from peers can be even better than from teachers. Lucky for you, NHS is holding Wellness Wednesday tutorials every week starting December 2. Maybe this is a good place to get started! If it helps, looking at YouTube videos can make some subjects easier to understand. All in all, I really suggest you reach out for help from others; don’t stay silent! If that teacher isn’t helpful, someone else is sure to aid you. Good luck, and you got this!
Yours,
Ruth

Dear Nerd,
Yeah, you can go online and shed your frustrated tears all over Sal Khan’s frankly unappealing handwriting or try every semi-illegal hack you see on the internet to unblur Chegg, but I have a feeling you’re neglecting another resource: tutors. This late in the semester, there are literally dozens of honor society members clamoring to get their service hours filled by you struggling students (otherwise they’ll lose the real reason they signed up for honor society — the graduation cords!). You know they’re desperate. You know where they’ll be 8 hours every day. You know that a vague recollection of angle theorems won’t help them un-duct-tape themselves from one of those stylish lab swivel chairs. You have all the advantages, so the question is why haven’t you tried persuasion a la Krampus? Light a metaphorical bunsen burner under them and force them to give you the solutions. Charles’s Law states that P is proportional to T , and baby you’re about to raise both the heat and the pressure. Remember, if you can’t

make your teacher part of the solution (in giving you the dang solutions!), then they’re just the precipitate. Turn to the ill-prepared tutors; they need hours just as much as you need help. Desperation + Desperation = Celebration!
I had to use these bad chemistry jokes 'cause the good ones Argon,
Denney

I am so unmotivated to see my friends (from a distance because of COVID-19). I always come up with an excuse because I’m just so used to being alone now. I really don’t know how to overcome this problem. I think if it continues, my social skills will literally disappear.
—“Sorry, My Mom Said No…”

Dear Sorry,
I want to start by saying that you are far from alone in feeling unmotivated — that’s a very common reaction to the quarantine we’ve been in for nearly a year (!) at this point. I encourage you to tell your friends how you’ve been feeling. It’s perfectly okay to say that while spending time with others is difficult for you right now, you still care a lot about your pals. Your honesty may even make them feel comfortable enough to share that they’ve been feeling the same way. From there, you can ask them for a little space to recharge (because you may just need some alone time! And that’s okay, too!) or very low-pressure virtual get-togethers. Start by simply agreeing to watch the same movie at the same time. Not necessarily texting each other while watching, but just knowing that you are sharing an experience with another human being. Build from there. I would say that interacting with someone socially at least once a week can be your goal—whether that’s a video call, sending a letter, or live-texting about a cool TV show is up to you. Above all, be kind to yourself. Even if your social skills do slip during this pandemic, your young brain can relearn them easily. I wish you all the best.
Yours,
Ruth

Dear Social Regression,
From my point of view, you are really nailing social distancing. This quarantine business has truly presented the perfect excuse to ghost friends without consequence, and I for one am proud of you for taking advantage of this unique opportunity. No longer is the hermit lifestyle limited to unkempt men with cabins in the woods or semi-autobiographical writers who disappear into their houses after publishing one Great American Novel. Now you can hide in your bedroom sans hermit vibes and look responsible. I encourage you to take it a step further — fake your own death. No annoying friends trying to pressure you to leave the house, no responsibilities, no worries — just vibes. Being dead is the perfect excuse for why you won’t be accepting the 100th offer for a social distanced picnic. Don’t let your social skills be the only thing disappearing, join in on the fun yourself!
Much love,
Denney

Do you have a question that you want Ruth + Denney’s advice on? Fill out the form right [here](#)!

paper does not endorse any of Ruth + Denney’s advice

John McClane’s December Horoscopes

By Maja Neal

‘Tis the season for last-minute college apps and being jealous of other people’s parents. But it’s also a time for getting a lot done (maybe even sleeping!) and letting your friends know how much you value them. That’s why I love it, and I swear by looking on the bright side. Now let’s get into your bright sides this month.

Aries — Venus’ influence makes you think about commitment. If you’re single, you might find yourself yearning for someone you don’t even know that well. Remember, you are always valuable all by yourself. Advice: Share an orange with someone you like.

Taurus — You also might be feeling intensely romantic, even coming up with unattainable situations in your head. So make sure to talk to your partner — or, if you’re single, to not put anyone on a pedestal — to avoid disappointment. Advice: Do NOT drink the haunted bog water.

Gemini — If you have some interpersonal or financial struggles this month, it’ll be the time for your optimism to shine. While fantasizing about a less stressful time can sometimes be a bad thing, in your case, it gives you the hope to keep going. Advice: Use a Russian accent at all possible times.

Cancer — This is a good month for the homebody side of you; staying in is both responsible and emotionally fulfilling. If somebody around you isn’t being clear about their feelings or what they want, don’t be afraid to ask. Advice: Look at those pictures of cats sitting on glass tables and looking like pancakes.

Leo — Brace yourself for meeting someone new, but don’t get swept up in them too fast. Your studies or job could become difficult, and you might not see the point of doing them, so remember that there is always a reason for your actions. Advice: Become attached to French animated films.

Virgo — Thinking about your future home life will bring you comfort. This might relate to an ongoing struggle you’ve been experiencing between past experiences and present peace. Advice: Drink more lemonade for mental clarity.

Libra — A chance for change is coming, but you might be too cautious or anxious to ask for what you want in relationships, school, or work. Remind yourself that you deserve good things and that even the worst-case scenario wouldn’t be so bad. Advice: Check if the toilet

seat is loose.

Scorpio — You tend to think of things in black and white. Being forced to see a few sides of a conflict might create a learning opportunity for you. You’ll be surprised how easily a problem can be solved by talking. Advice: Cut that thread on your clothes, finally.

Sagittarius — Happy birthday!! Your social energy is boosted, and friends will inspire you. Work might be confusing and stress you out, but know that you always have your own comforts and peace to retreat to in hard times. Advice: Fondly remember *Unus Annus*.

Capricorn — Focus on letting go of past problems. You won’t even realize how much they’re weighing on you, until that weight is lifted off your shoulders. Advice: STOP LISTENING TO SAD MUSIC WHEN YOU’RE SAD!!!!

Aquarius — You may be thinking of starting new hobbies or interests, and this is the time! Learn to knit, rearrange your room, or start a podcast — you’re driven, you have time, and your mind will be happiest when occupied. Advice: Go outside. Find leaf. Put leaf in pocket.

Pisces — It’s likely you’re thinking about work or studies most intensely this month. Don’t be afraid to make big decisions because avoiding a source of school stress will only make it worse. Instead, think of all the great things that could arise from this opportunity. Advice: Badly edited Facebook memes.



Little Known, (Sometimes) Embarrassing Facts About PVA Seniors

Did you know that **Eli Johns-Krull** took magic lessons for three years in elementary school (and that the main thing they learned was how to avoid looking people in the eyes)?

Did you know that **Katherine Willcockson** cut her toenails with scissors until eleventh grade?

Did you know that **Care Paden** once told a cashier at Whole Foods to “keep the change” in a blind panic because she was eight, didn’t understand how tipping worked, and just wanted to leave the establishment quickly because she hated receiving change in check-out lines so much?

Did you know that until fifth grade, **Alexa Halim** thought that “tampon” was pronounced “tamp-oon?”

Did you know that **April Garza** unironically enjoys the *Twilight* series and would marry Robert Pattinson?

Zan’s Mixtapes

By Zander Tate

Every holiday season, it seems like we’re listening to the same old Mariah Carey, Michael Bublé, and Pentatonix songs, so here’s a collection of lesser known holiday songs (or at least songs from some artists I forgot had Christmas albums).

“O Come O Come Emmanuel” by Sufjan Stevens — Sufjan Stevens is one of the best modern composers which he proves once again on his Christmas album. It’s exceptionally blissful and perfect for a quiet, cold night.

“A ‘DC’ Christmas Medley” by Destiny’s Child — Destiny’s Child modernizes holiday classics so well with their insane vocals and poppy synths that I could listen to this song anytime during the year.

“Ghostface X-mas” by Ghostface Killah — Okay, I know y’all are going to call me an old head for this one, but I promise that this song is incredible. Ghostface Killah delivers detailed and clever bars over a lively beat that truly encapsulates the Christmas spirit.

“Silent Night” by Bright Eyes — This song transports you to another dimension with its subtle soundscapes and ambient tones. Leave it to Bright Eyes to make your grandma’s favorite Christmas song into a musical masterpiece.

“Last Christmas” by Taylor Swift — I’m convinced that Taylor Swift wants her Christmas songs eradicated because they’re pretty hard to find on streaming. But once you find them, enjoy young Taylor singing over fiddles, banjos, and bells.

“Frosty the Snowman” by The Beach Boys — Ah, the good ol’ Beach Boys. It’s hard to imagine them building a snowman on sunny California beaches, but their bouncy vocals and tooting horns make a pretty good case for it.

“Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” by Phoebe Bridgers — On this spacey track that feels more like a serenade, Bridgers’ vocals fill you with Christmas spirit and an urge to snuggle up by the fireplace enjoying some cocoa.

“Just Like Christmas” by Low — Low’s whole Christmas album is full of lofi alternative hits that exemplify a wonderful clash between the grunge scene and overriding consumer culture of the ‘90s. This opening track is no exception.

“Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays” by *NSYNC — This song is just so fun to listen and vibe to. Who doesn’t love some boyband harmonization and holiday bells?

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*TheHighSchoolforthePerformingandVisualArtsNewspaper

2018: It Can Only Get Better, Right?

by Jonathan Jalbert

The Epidemic Sweeping PVA

by Trevor Fu

‘Senioritis’ is a very serious condition that plagues seniors in their second semester, but it can manifest at any stage of a high school education. This is a crippling disease—as described by Urban Dictionary—and no laughing matter. The problem is serious and imminent.

The first documented attempt to combat this affliction was in 1974, when Richard King Mellon endowed money to the McKeesport Area High School to establish programs to treat senioritis by providing motivational speeches, experimental education, and inspirational cat videos.

A Nifty List of Links to Virtual HSPVA Events

Virtual Art Galleries:

Freshmen Show, Class of 2024: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/5fc6712bffc7fe17f10acec6>

Sophomore Show, Class of 2023: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/5f6f335a5d6f900aba17ca27>

Junior Show, Class of 2022: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/5f772c7968f434686b2e038a>

Senior Show, Class of 2021: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/5f346de5dc902e2a8d086114>

Hispanic Heritage Show: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/5f60b6474e100a10349870ac>

Day of the Dead Show: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/5f919618b9c7a671368948c8>

LGBTQIA+ Show: <https://www.artsteps.com/view/5f87b840ed202341306dfbc9>

Creative Writing Off the Page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anjuEvexajU>

Various Vocal Recitals: on the HSPVA Youtube channel [here](#)

Carnaval: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRzArbvft4>

Alphabet Soup: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BA0qmZJi9UQ>

HSPVA Happenings: on the HSPVA Youtube channel [here](#)

Overheard@PVA

She looks *unhealthily yellow*.
— Frida Berman

You know its bad when me
and Shelby are the same
quality as the **all school**
musical.
— Eli Johns-Krull

Don't burn
stuff that *doesn't*
belong to you.
—KM

I'm getting
hungry sitting next
to *the trash can*.
— Meg Routh

The hottest planet
is the sun.
— Jackson Bunch

Uncrustables
are the capitalist
version of **ravioli**.
— Mr. Inocencio

I crippled a sugar
ant today!
— Catherine
Lawson

Call the class of '21
the Baudelaires because
our entire educational
experience has been *a*
series of unfortunate
events. — Shelby Edison

Is that a *Stephen*
Hawking reference?
Wait, I meant King!
— Kate Jeong

Big Time Rush
could write "Hey
Jude," but The
Beatles couldn't write
"Boyfriend."
— Tobi Carr

I have *Lin-Manuel*
Miranda hands.
— Elizabeth Wade

Landy, I'm going to **cannibalize you** so that we
can become one. — Maya Chorn

I haven't
opened Openstax
in 3 months
y'all....**Closestax**
<3
— Sylvia Zhao

Emma Watson is
my religion.
— Allison Artlip

What **awful little**
Shakespearean crew did you
just walk off of?
— Elena Oliveira

Yes, I know that's a
boomer thing to say,
but I said it.
— Ms. Chase

Guess I'm a *sack of*
potatoes.
— Comfort Azagidi

It's like, the only reason
for my existence...was **the**
brooms.
— Liam Hackney

I wish there was a
Shark Boy and Lava Girl
book.
— Will Newman

Ranch is *too*
spicy. — Abrielle
Rangel

Man I miss that
spaceship.
— Mr. Landry

I'm not Canadianese. — Zander Tate

All I know is **tarot**
does not rhyme with
carrot.
— Matthew Kalmans

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