

# paper\*

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VOLUME 12 ISSUE 5

## The Last 365 Days

For those of you who attended PVA last year, you may remember March 12th. The day started with seniors prowling the halls collecting donations for the Pie Eating Contest, dancers eagerly preparing for their Spring Concert, and students jabbering about their Spring Break plans. The March 12th school day ended with the chilling instructions to cancel all after school performances and clear out lockers; the next day of school was cancelled and a return date had not been set. When we woke up on March 13th, we could never imagine how much our lives and our world were about to change. With the harrowing March 13th anniversary recently passing, now is the time to reflect on the tumultuous 365 days behind us. Here are four of the history-making events that you should remember from the last year.

**The COVID-19 Pandemic.** No one (not even the government, apparently) plans ahead for a pandemic. It is the coronavirus pandemic that has disrupted our past year the most. Some of us haven't set foot on campus since that fateful March 12th, and others haven't hugged relatives in months. Most of us have probably forgotten what it feels like to stand in a large crowd at a concert or walk through a grocery store without a mask. While these inconveniences are upsetting, they pale in comparison to the other effects of the pandemic this past year. At the time of writing, 2.74 million people worldwide have died from COVID so far, and you should forever remember the US's irresponsible and dreadful response to the virus which was first identified in December 2019.

**The Killing of George Floyd.** The world watched in horror as Minneapolis Officer Derek Chauvin held his knee to the neck of Houston-native George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old Black man, for eight minutes and fifteen seconds, killing him. Floyd's death at the hands of officers came in the wake of hundreds of similar cases of police brutality and police killings of Black Americans across the country, including Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, and countless others. Video of Floyd's death sparked national outcry and protest in conjunction with the larger Black Lives Matter movement, as well as an overdue international conversation about systemic racism. But not everyone was welcoming to the movement. Protestors' clashes with police and the National Guard infuriated supporters of the movement. Statements by President Trump's "looting" and "shooting" threats raised tensions while simultaneously demonstrating the dire need to address racism in the US. Keep an eye on the ongoing charges against Officer Chauvin, which were brought to trial this March.

**The 2020 Election Fallout.** The 2020 election itself is one for the books, with the highest voter turnout since 1900 and a notable shift towards mail-in ballots. In a race called days after election day, Joe Biden earned the presidential win, heralding an end to President Donald Trump's one-term tumultuous administration. The election drama did not end there. Allegations of election fraud and the growing #STOPTHESTEAL movement

culminated in a historic attack on the US Capitol building by right-wing extremist groups. Trump's purported role in the terrorist attack led to his second impeachment and acquittal and his ban from Twitter following a national discussion on the responsibility of social media companies to curb extremism on their platforms.

**The 2021 Texas Power Crisis.** After three separate winter storms swept through Texas, millions of people were left without power and water for hours, days, or even weeks. While the freezing temperatures did damage, the real root of the crisis was the total lack of preparedness for the cold weather, despite us having over a decade's warning. In an effort to dodge federal regulations years ago, Texas completely separated from the national power grids and then conveniently didn't winterize...anything. As Texans grapple with the aftermath of the freeze, it is our responsibility to not only hold the heads of the power grid, ERCOT, accountable, but also our state government who allowed for three million Texans to pay the price for their political games.

The pandemic is not over. Racism is not over. The need for government accountability is not over. If anything, the past year has shown us all that we cannot be complacent, we cannot be apolitical, and we cannot continue with "business as usual." This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it is a start. 2020 and 2021 have been years of turmoil for not only the US, but for the entire world. As we graduate, as we reach voting age, as we move into the adult world, it will be our responsibility to see the state of the world and act accordingly. If the rest of our lives turn out to be anything like the last 365 days, we have a lot of work ahead of us.

by Pieper Grantham



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# A Not-So-Senior Year

by Joshua Garvin

“It’ll only last two weeks,” they said.

“It’ll only last 2-3 months,” they said.

Fast forward 365 days, and I’m still stuck at home. Something isn’t adding up. Either someone lied about what senior year was or this is just junior year 2.0. Are students even learning?

If our class, the class of 2021, is cursed, then please someone just say that.

Let’s take a trip down memory lane. Hey Hurricane Harvey, remember when you ruined the start of my high school experience? Don’t mention the great big move in the middle of what could’ve been our easiest year in high school. (I am grateful for the stairs; calves on point.)

Then you say to yourself, “After all of that, surely this year will have something better in store.” Nope, Ms. Rona is still living rent free everywhere you go waiting for her next victim. Ma’am, are you done?

There’s a light at the end of the tunnel. Well, I sure hope you’re right Demi because the class of 2021 hasn’t even seen a shimmer.

I get it; there’s only so much we can do in a pandemic (but gathering for a panoramic picture of 180+ seniors easily makes the list).

I guess we should’ve known when it started off funky, of course it had to end with a bang. And to top it all off, we don’t walk across the stage until June. Safe to say, I’m desensitized to the pain. I wouldn’t be surprised if there was a problem printing our diplomas.

Now, to my classmates: Don’t give up. The race is almost over. Soon we’ll be making a final decision on where we’re starting our lives next year. You are a victor and nothing less. You’ve done the work! Get a scoop of your favorite ice cream or a slice of cake; you deserve it. But until graduation, I guess we’ll sit at our computers waiting for that next notification that class has started and wait for that light to shine.



# The Dangerous Rise in Hate Crimes Against Asian-Americans

by Christine Rong\*

84-year old Vicha Ratanapakdee was killed in front of his home in San Francisco from a street attack. A 91-year old man, 60-year old man, and 55-year old woman were thrown to the ground in Oakland Chinatown. Asian Uber driver Subhakar Khadka was verbally assaulted by three women when he requested for them to wear their masks in the car, resulting in the passenger deliberately coughing on the driver, snatching his cell phone, and ripping off his mask. The media has finally shed light on an issue that has affected my family and me for years: Asian American hate crimes.

When I scroll through social media, I go between being pleasantly surprised and appalled by the response each case has incited within the public. One side shares resources and condolences for the victims while the other continues to undermine the severity of the violence, claiming that it does not exist or that there are greater issues at hand. As a Chinese-American, what surprised me most is how “new” this information is to people and the media. Although there has been a 1,900% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in NYC alone (as of September 2020), these hate crimes have existed far before this latest Lunar New Year. Growing up, my family has constantly taken precautions to protect my grandparents when we visit Houston’s Chinatown because we hear the stories of our family friends getting jumped, getting their cars broken into, and getting pushed to the side of the street. As much as I appreciate the media coverage of these attacks, what worries me the most is that standing in solidarity with the Asian community will end up just being “a trend.”

I could go on and on about the performative activism I see on social media and how pointless it is, but instead, I would like to offer a tangible call to action for you. Each ethnicity and race has struggles that are equally important. What one race experiences, the other may not, but each struggle and experience should be valued equally. I could provide some resources here with places to donate, but at this point, it is pointless if you as an individual do not go out of your way to understand the struggles of minorities and people of color. Recognize your place in society and use your privileges to uplift those in need. Be respectful the next time you enter an Asian owned restaurant, support your Asian-American and BIPOC peers, and acknowledge the moments when you see your internalized racism come out and fix it. At the end of the day, our differences are what make us one of the most diverse countries in the world, so be open-minded and proactive to learn about the communities and cultures around you.

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\*This article was written before the Atlanta shooting, but paper\* has decided to publish it as it was originally written

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# Everything You Need to Know About the Freeze

by Lila Mankad

If you were like me, you spent the week of February 15 huddled under the covers in your own home freezing your toes off. While I glared at the traitorous snow through the frosty windows, I couldn't help but wonder "Why? Why on Earth did Texas plunge into catastrophe after this freeze?" I'm guessing that I'm not the only one with that question, so I have done some research and compiled a quick guide that outlines what the heck is going on with Texas.\*

## Why did Texas lose power when there was a freeze?

Usually, the power grid gets stressed for Texas in the summer, because everyone is using energy for their air conditioners, but this stress can also happen during deep freezes when lots of energy is being used to heat houses. During our freeze, it was so cold that natural gas facilities failed big-time, as well as coal, nuclear, and wind to a lesser degree. If people are using more electricity than is being generated, the grid operators have to turn off electricity for some people. If there was an imbalance and the grid \*really\* fails, that would be catastrophic. To prevent the imbalance, "rolling blackouts" are used (where people only lose power for a few hours), except this time, the gap between the energy demand and energy generated was so huge, they couldn't even roll the blackouts (so people lost energy for days instead of hours).

## Who controls the electrical grid and makes these decisions?

For the rest of the US, there are two main power grids. If New York is running out of energy, Pennsylvania can share some because they are connected by a grid. These interstate grids have to follow national rules.

But Texas has its own grid. The governor appoints commissioners to the public utility commission, and they oversee ERCOT, which is a nonprofit that manages the Texas grid and decides when there's a blackout.

## How do we keep this from happening in the future?

Unlike some places, Texas has very few rules on who gets to sell energy, and how much extra reserve energy is available. The idea was to make energy cheaper, but it's debated whether it worked. The head of the Utility Commission was forced to resign. But now what? We could share the load with other states. Pay now to store extra energy for disasters. Make sure our vital equipment doesn't break when it's cold? All of these cost money, but if you sat in your house a few weeks ago, able to see your own breath, you probably have an idea whether it's worth it.



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# Let's Talk About It: Being Asian-American

by Nicholas Lam

Does anyone remember when the pandemic was only supposed to last two weeks? On my first day in the Bay Area during Spring Break, I had to remind my mom that she needed to be careful of the hate-crimes occurring amongst Asian American communities. Her response: "why us?"

I shouldn't have to be scared to go into Vietnamese town (or any Asian restaurant for that matter) and be scared that someone will attack us. I shouldn't be scared to be in my hotel room waiting for my parents to come home at night. I shouldn't be scared to simply walk down the street.

I am Vietnamese-American and the son of refugees. I, like my parents, did not choose to come to America. Nobody wants to come to a place that we struggle to make our home. And to top it off, Vietnam won't ever be home for us again.

Most of my peers and the American population don't know the history of what brought the Vietnamese here. American imperialism did. Yet nowadays, we're grouped with every other Asian American; we're just the "yellow people," right?

If the Atlanta shooting taught me anything, it's that discourse over racism against Asian-Americans does not enter the public sphere until tragedy strikes. Asian-Americans are taught to be respectful and silent. There is no outrage when we're mistreated. There is no outrage when we face racism everyday. America does not accept us into its black-and-white dichotomy.

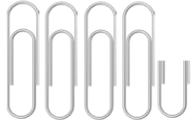
I get it, you want the Boba, the Pho, the ramen, the sushi, the Korean BBQ, but you don't want the problems that come with it. Look at 790 Night Market—we had incredibly high attendance because of the food stalls but there was no follow up to hearing Asian-American stories at school. Asian people and cultures are not just commodities to be enjoyed at your pleasure. We are hurting. We are in pain. And we deserve your empathy and attention.

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\*This situation has many nuances that can't be fully expressed in one short article. I urge you to do your own research, and if you're really interested, I (Lila) would be happy to hear what you think about it!

## Judas and the Black Messiah



By Will Newman

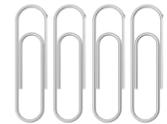
Bill O' Neal, a member of the Black Panther party, was featured on a television program filmed in 1990 titled *Eyes on the Prize 2*, where he talked about his time as an FBI informant in the Black Panther Party and his proximity to Fred Hampton. The program aired on January 15th, 1990, the same evening Bill O' Neal ended his own life. *Judas and the Black Messiah* is a nightmarish look into the events leading up to the death of celebrated Black Panther leader Fred Hampton and the complicated emotions that come with betraying those you support and love.

Shaka King, the director of *Judas and the Black Messiah*, has cited movies such as *The Departed* and films in the 70's crime cannon as major inspiration for how he approached this project. I was skeptical at first when I heard other critics compare King to Martin Scorsese, but the film sold me by its end. *Judas and the Black Messiah* has a couple slumps in its runtime but nothing that seriously damaged the pacing. Shaka King is a director to look out for in the future. Remember, this film is only the beginning of what is hopefully a long and fulfilling career for King.

What *Judas and the Black Messiah* pulls off with such skill is its characterization of historical figures with knockout performances by skilled actors. Daniel Kaluuya is electrifying as Fred Hampton, and Lakeith Stanfield portrays the inner conflict of Bill O' Neal to outright perfection.

*Judas and the Black Messiah* is a movie telling a story that needs to be pushed out of the dusty corner our history books have left this story in and into our thoughts. If you didn't know, Fred Hampton was killed by the Chicago Police department in cooperation with the FBI who had informants, such as Bill O' Neal, in the Black Panther Party in order to dismantle the organization and destroy the public's opinion of the party. The Black Panther Party's image was tarnished by disinformation campaigns created by the FBI, who depicted the organization as one trying to "sow hatred." *Judas and the Black Messiah* not only tells a great story but shows an honest portrayal of the Black Panther Party and how they healed their community. The film is interested in the truth and, to my knowledge, does an amazing job of illustrating it, giving us the most important film to be released in the past year. It's vital that you let people know about this film to help reveal a piece of history that's been tangled in disinformation for too long. Ya dig?

## Judas and the Black Messiah: The Inspired Album



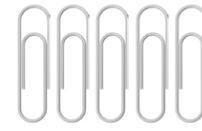
by Preston Lim

"Heads up, eyes open and fists clenched"

The inspired album of *Judas and the Black Messiah* (it's not a soundtrack — none of the songs are actually featured in the film) opens with a spoken word poem from Black Panther Party Chairman Fred Hampton's son: Chairman Fred Hampton, Jr. This poem sets the tone for the rest of the soundtrack: a masterfully produced, politically-galvanizing album featuring Nas, H.E.R., Jay-Z, a posthumous appearance of Nipsey Hussle, A\$AP Rocky, and more. This album is a mix of ambient, floaty songs coupled with soaring vocals, dense, thought-provoking verses with bass-heavy production (courtesy of Hit-Boy) and stank-face-inducing, head-bobbing flows over bouncy trap drums. Mingled throughout this project are references to this summer's events, like in Nas's "EPMD," Nardo Wick's "I Declare War," and Polo G's "Last Man Standing" ("Jealous of my melanin, what make you human more than me?"). Standouts on this album are Jay-Z and Nipsey Hussle's "What it Feels Like," G Herbo's "All Black," Polo G's "Last Man Standing," and SAFE and Kiana Ledé's "Contagious." *Judas and the Black Messiah: The Inspired Album* is jam-packed with talented artists and political themes, although its relevance to the film itself could be called into question. Even so, the album is more than worth a listen.



### paperviews\* Ratings Senioritis Edition



Attending all of your friends' senior shows/recitals



Totally not using a "calculator" on Econ work



Online learning for introverts



No seat privileges at Happenings

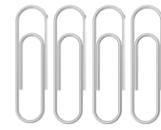


Virtual prom

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# To All The Boys: Always and Forever



By Shelby Edison and Rebecca Rock

First and foremost, *SPOILERS AHEAD!* Go watch the movie, then read our thoughts.

We're over Peter Kavinsky. Well, kinda. We want Lara Jean, our protagonist, to be happy, but Peter, the celebrated (and sometimes scorned) love interest of this film trilogy has lost our love.\*

In the *To All The Boys* finale, Lara Jean's senior year is filled with college admissions, growing into adulthood, and, of course, drama with her first true love. Our overall feelings about the film differed a bit (Rebecca preferred it over the second movie, and Shelby found it the worst of all three), but there's no denying that we're woefully invested in this movie franchise.

Let's start with what we liked about *To All the Boys: Always and Forever*. This film is objectively adorable. It's a sugar-coated depiction of high school that makes us yearn for prom and maskless-graduation: a much-needed escape. With a fun cast of supporting characters, clever product placement (we see you Laniege), and a pastel aesthetic that feels like a warm hug, this two-hour film certainly wasn't lacking in cuteness. Lara Jean's dad finds his happily ever after with a stunning outdoor wedding. And can we talk about that last monologue? Lara Jean's farewell that harkens back to the origins of the Lara Jean/Peter romance (via the love letters, the contract, the fake-turned-real relationship) made us swoon. Who can say no to a walk into the sunset?

Now onto the parts of the film that we found less than favorable. While we went along with this romanticized version of high school, we drew the line at romanticizing the college admissions process. As two seniors deep in the process of college applications, this film oversimplified the research and thought that goes into planning for the next four years of our lives. No one assumes that they're going to get into Stanford with its 4.3% acceptance rate. It's simply not realistic to plan around a school with odds so low. Our other qualm was the downward spiral of Peter Kavinsky. He breaks up with Lara Jean on prom night and accuses her of not being invested enough in their relationship because she wants to attend NYU instead of Berkeley (oh, what a relatable struggle \*rolls eyes\*). This relationship behavior is toxic.

But truly the highlight of the movie was realizing that Lara Jean is a fellow member of the class of 2021. It made us feel included in the movie world. While we love a good 80s teen flick, they'll never shout out our graduation year like *Always and Forever* does.

Go watch the movie. Love it or less-than love it, this cutesy romance hits the spot.



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# WandaVision



By Addie Fairbanks

*WandaVision*, strategically found exclusively on Disney+ and the latest addition to the Marvel saga, initially looked like it would be a complete mess. I walked in with low expectations, but I walked out with a newfound love for Tony Stark's Siri. Trying to weave new characters into an ongoing plot that reflects a superhero flick while paying homage to sitcoms and also solving past problems in a way that any non-Marvel geek could also understand seemed like a lot to ask for. But it was executed flawlessly. The show simulates the familiarity of classic sitcoms, such as *Full House* and *The Brady Bunch*, while keeping a suspenseful edge underneath, all while bringing back fan favorite characters and balancing humor and satire. It struck me how well the show handles tone shifts, seamlessly moving from an *I Love Lucy*-esque sitcom to psychological thriller. What surprised me most was Elizabeth Olsen's depiction of Wanda Maximoff. Previously, Wanda was just The Sad One in the Avengers crew, so it was nice to see how the show fleshes out her character and provides a backstory that calls back to previous films. It illustrates a woman in grief and questions when certain actions can no longer be justifiable. The portrayal of mental health is surprisingly nuanced and accurate, and you can see the shifting morals of each character. The cast, as always, is strong. Kathryn Hahn shines as nosy neighbor Agnes, a character who I would love an entire spin-off series for. Every song featured in the show is an absolute bop. The camerawork is incredibly creative. Each twist in the plot hit me like a slap in the face, and the show is full of little details and easter eggs, which is really fun if you like to nitpick your media like I do. *WandaVision* has something for everyone, be it fights, drama, nostalgia, or Jimmy Woo.

**OFFICIAL PAPER\* COUPON FOR THE CLASS OF 2021**

Show this coupon to an underclassman  
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*We've been through a lot this year. We deserve some love.*

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\*Shelby is still a hardcore John Ambrose fan (arguably the better love interest from the second film) and was over Peter Kavinsky by the time the opening credits rolled.

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# Bridgerton's Diversity Problem

by Anna Grace Hethcox

As a lover of all things historical, I was absolutely thrilled to see that Netflix was releasing a racially diverse and highly stylized period drama. There is a huge gap in period pieces for POC representation — that goes without saying. Many people online were also excited, expecting the series to be in the vein of Disney's *Rodger and Hammerstein's Cinderella*, which featured an African American and Filipino lead. So you could imagine the disappointment that was felt when *Bridgerton* was released.

The reality is that *Bridgerton's* diverse cast is missing something crucial: diversity. I hate that it even has to be said, but sprinkling in four or five black actors in the background of ball scenes does not even touch the true meaning of diversity. The entertainment industry as usual, fails to understand that adding black actors to a film or series doesn't make it diverse. There aren't two races, two ethnicities. *Bridgerton* features some other POC, including East and South Asian, but not to the point that it's "racially integrated." Showrunner Chris Van Dusen in interviews made it seem that the show's cast was selected using a technique called "colorblind casting." Some associate this term in a more controversial way, as if race never even crosses people's mind, when we live in a society where it means so much. I personally love the idea of including as many POC in a historical series as possible. Why not? The audience knows it isn't reality. The main issue I have with *Bridgerton* is its ignorance. Dusen claimed that the show would really flesh out ideas regarding several topics, including race... and then it didn't. Instead of including POC because they were truly great performers and right for the part, about midway through the series, racism is completely explained away. Lady Danbury claims that the reason this fictional society is integrated because a white king fell in love with a black woman which easily eliminated at least 200 years of racism. This weak explanation is harmful, and it perpetuates the idea that for a person of color to be included in a piece of mainstream media, that their existence is immediately political. *Bridgerton* is based on a nine book series of bodice ripper novels. So here's my question to Chris Van Dusen: why can't people of color enjoy frivolous, romantic content with representation, without explaining race? Where is the harm in letting people see themselves in fun, stylized period dramas?

I remember watching the first few episodes of *Bridgerton* feeling let down. This isn't a racially integrated show. It was advertised that way to appeal to audiences. I only hope that people's concerns are heard from Netflix and the creators of *Bridgerton*. I hope there's understanding that the display that was shown in season one is not diversity, rather a marketing ploy, and that proper POC representation should be given for the sake of betterment, not monetary gain.



## How to Talk to People who Believe in Conspiracies

by Lucia Maynard

Political conflict and disagreement is inevitable, especially among the tools technology provides to a widened variety of people. What happens when the argument stops being founded on facts? It can be hard to approach a conversation with someone who believes conspiracy theories. Times like this have us asking questions — questions like how do I talk to someone who doesn't believe in science? How do I have a relationship with family members who have gone full tin foil hat on you?

Start the conversation from a place of care and understanding for that person. It is important that they know your intention is to listen and not to shame them. It is important that they do not feel as though you are trying to change their mind. Remember, it is more important to be kind than to be right.

Listen to them fully, then begin to focus on their biggest concern. Ask yourself what holding this belief means to them and lean into your shared humanity. Center the narrative around how this issue affects both of you, and explain why you care about it or how many people it affects. Let them know that their opinion matters not only to you, but to the people around them.

Do not go into a confrontational conversation with someone about conspiracy theories without being prepared with consistent and well-researched evidence from a variety of sources. Present one clear and concise narrative throughout your argument and make sure that your arguments are factually based. Remain calm, even if they get defensive, asking for space to voice your

opinion and presenting factual evidence to support that opinion is absolutely reasonable. Remind them that they will have an opportunity to voice their own opinion.

Often times, conspiracy theory sites hone in on people who are alone and may not have social supports in place. When you listen to a person who has been drawn in, give them space without interruption to voice their opinion no matter how infuriating or contrary to your own values it might be. It is important to be an alternative to the dark and cynical version of reality presented by these sites.

Being exposed to sites that support conspiracy theories can cause a person to feel anxiety, depression, loneliness, and/or a lack of trust. Your friend or family member's mental health has been affected. Show compassion, care for them, and connect them to resources where they can gain external supports.

As a friend or family member, you can still promote science, facts and reality. Do not turn the volume down on that, but do turn up the volume on connection, compassion and recognizing their humanity.

Continue to follow up with them, and remember that healing happens through connection — not alone. If the person remains or digs deeper into isolation, into the rabbit hole, it isn't your fault. It isn't your responsibility to change someone's mind. If you feel that your safety or their safety or overall health could be in danger, remove yourself from the situation and seek help in the best way you can.

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# What's Up With College Admissions?

by Christine Rong

2020-2021 has been unprecedented to say the least but the thing that has been the most unpredictable is college admissions. Lets bring it back to the beginning of 2020. I remember sitting in my room, flipping aggressively through my prep book and studying for the March SAT. I'll be the first to say that standardized tests are not my friend but the SAT was too important. Soon enough our "two-week" spring break began and I was ecstatic to get more studying in after hearing that our March SAT was getting rescheduled. Months passed and I began to get frustrated and exhausted because my test continued to get pushed back despite schools becoming test-optional. I found myself lacking motivation and "unprecedented" was no longer what I wanted to experience.

Everyday, new information seemed to arise: Common App tweeted that "applicants set a new world record for applications submitted in a minute at 11:59 pm EST" on January 1, 2021. The new record of 1,035 tops last year's of 908," colleges emailed "the College will be notifying its Regular Decision and deferred applicants of their decisions on Tuesday, April 6, at 7 p.m" and overall, every university in the country, was receiving more applications than ever before.

As a senior who just applied to 10+ colleges, I shook at the thought of my ~uncertain future~ and my ~uncertain financial aid package~. This college admissions season created a wave of anxiety that I never thought existed (and continues to lure over me to this day) but to all you worried seniors out there, I am here to tell you that you are not alone.

Here are some words of affirmation I can offer for those hanging by a thread: YOU GOT THIS! There is no one else in the world that is unique like you and always remember that any school is lucky to have YOU. At the end of the day, somehow, the process works in mysterious ways and we will all end up where we belong. Once again, the process is stressful so try to relax whether you have already committed to a school or not. For the juniors who are reading this, start brainstorming for your personal statement. These unprecedented times say it's never too early to get started.

## Every College Email: A Collage Poem

by Vera Caldwell\*

Dear Vera,

Did you miss us? Okay, now that that's off our chest, we're not like other schools, Vera. You stand out to me, Vera.

You're clearly a student with distinct promise. We think you're a swell student. Vera: am I reaching you? Vera, I look forward to your request. Please don't delay, Vera.

Make your list and check it twice. This is the last time I'm able to contact you about this resource. Creative and curious, huh? Good mix. There's no reason to go on feeling unchallenged and uninspired at school.

Don't miss out. You control your future, Vera. Your college choice will make a big impact on how prepared you are. Prepare yourself for jobs that don't exist yet.

There's still time. Every moment matters, so why wait?

Vera, is this goodbye? :( Vera: am I reaching you?

Am I reaching the right Vera? I need to hear from you today. Happy birthday!

Sincerely,

University



## The Weirdest Topics PVA Seniors Wrote About in Their College Essays

A Ceramic Chicken

Existential Strife

Ideaphoria

Hannah Montana

Bald Men

Corn

Skinny Pop

A Rubber Chicken

Potato

Pickled Okra

Disney Channel

Dungeons & Dragons

Megamind

Chick Fil A Chicken Noodle Soup

Dumbo

Bed Sheets

Neon Flare-Leg Yoga Pants

Relish

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\*lines taken from emails sent by Tulane University, Columbia College Chicago, University of the Incarnate Word, Iowa State University, Swarthmore College [one of two listed here that I am actually considering], West Point, University of Kentucky, Emory University [one of two on listed here that I am actually considering], Reed College, Bard College at Simon's Rock, Rhodes College, Baylor University, Case Western, Connecticut College, Whitman College, Western Michigan University, University of Dallas, Abilene Christian University

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# If You're Going Back to In-Person, This is For You

By Kate-Yeonjae Jeong

When the choice was given at the beginning of the school year to stay at home or attend school physically with safety precautions placed, many students found themselves in a dilemma. Going back or staying both had their fair share of pros and cons, and the response was indefinitely split. Now that time has flown, many are opting to go back, with the number seemingly growing each cycle.

If you're reading this, perhaps you've made the decision to return to the wondrous, fun-never-stops school of the arts. However, due to COVID, many students that had returned earlier noted differences that they hadn't expected. If you're planning to make the change of scenery for school, these tips and advice will have you well-set to begin your studies in a mid-pandemic era at PVA.

First and foremost: don't expect to have a set place to place your bags. "You don't get a locker, and you'll be carrying your backpack," says Morgan Hildum, 2024. Simon Martin, 2024, agrees, "Bring only what's necessary because your bags are going to get heavy." For all of us virtual folks, it's been a while since we've set foot in the building. You may be lost as to where classrooms are, so consider mapping out your route. "Bring a chart of your schedule," Kerrigan Gaither, 2023, suggests. Speaking of the building, the five flights of stairs have been a much-spoken topic amongst students. "Be prepared to walk the stairs with a mask on," Kerrigan adds.

A notable majority of the in-person students have shown excitement about seeing their classmates and

friends again; people interaction has most definitely been missed. "Find a group or even one person you're comfortable around. It'll make it easier to get through your day," recommends Hazel Britton, 2024.

You may also find yourself with less time. With added commute time and other activities, your daily time frame could change. "I get way less sleep than before when virtual, but seeing my friends every day makes me happier," notes Jupiter Zimmerman-Yang, 2024. Lastly, having fun is fun, but always with regards to promoting proper school behavior, and of course, keeping in mind social distancing precautions. "No being silly!" emphasizes Zech Bochetto, 2024.

With hopes of all of the PVA community returning as a whole someday, for now, students and faculty are maintaining safe measures for in-person learning. For those returning to campus from virtual school, we're sending you good energy- you got this!

Tips You Need to Hear Before You're on Campus: You'll make more friends with people at school, so don't worry if your besties are still virtual. — Shelby Edison, 2021

Always bring a mask and keep spares in your car in case you forget. — Meg Routh, 2024

Bring lots of bottled water. — Kerrigan Gaither, 2023

Hide your personal belongings and come prepared to fight for survival. — Frida Ruiz, 2024

After school, hanging out downtown, such as Phoenicia, is so fun! — Jupiter Zimmerman-Yang, 2024

# The App for Busy People Who Are Bored

by Jordan Sheldon

In just my first week as a *Clubhouse* user, I've befriended and collaborated with thriving standup comedians, producers, and actors. *Clubhouse*, an emerging audio only platform, is a new type of social media that brings all levels of talent, career status, and creativity together into one large network. By speaking and listening in on live podcast rooms with career professionals, you can find and follow other people that you want to collaborate with, communicate with, or even get roasted by in the Laugh Factory's popular "Late Night Roast" room.

In addition to its primary functions, *Clubhouse* has helped me become a more productive, patient, and understanding individual. It diverts my attention from

mindlessly scrolling through Instagram and Tik Tok to sitting down and having real, thorough, intelligent conversations where I am forced to listen and respond to others. I've even found other people who, like me, struggle with ADHD and being productive in a room called "All Day Dreaming," where we discuss how ADHD affects us as creators and tips to increase productivity in an otherwise chaotic world.

*Clubhouse* has opened windows for me that just one week ago, I didn't even know existed. Whether you want to learn how to tackle the screenwriting process, vent about your "unpopular opinion," or just laugh really hard, there's a room in *Clubhouse* waiting for you with its doors wide open.

*HEY HEY PVA*

Synergy 2021 is on sale now!  
Don't wait to buy your yearbook!

***Purchase on Balfour.com or in the library.***

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# 2021 Oscars Predictions

By Luca Jarosz

Let's face the facts: 2020 ripped away many things from film buffs across the nation. We've been restricted to at-home premiers, a number of releases have been delayed, and movie theatres across the nation have been closed indefinitely. Regardless, the film industry's Super Bowl is upon us and with a new goal of true diversity, and the Academy has delivered their most diverse list of nominees yet — let's get into what you need to know in addition to my humble opinions that have no effect on the event whatsoever.

## Best Picture:

Will Win: *The Trial of the Chicago 7*

Should Win: *Minari* or *Nomadland*

Snubbed: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *One Night in Miami*

Even though *Nomadland* is a clear front runner in the race for best picture, something within me and my sister's gut is telling us that *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is going to steal it.

## Best Director:

Will Win: Chloe Zhao for *Nomadland*

Should Win: Chloe Zhao for *Nomadland*

Snubbed: Regina King for *One Night in Miami* and Aaron Sorkin for *The Trial of the Chicago 7*

Get ready, because Chloe Zhao is about to make history as only the second woman and the first Asian woman to win best director. Very excited for her nearly definite win and thrilled that Aaron Sorkin was snubbed.

## Best Actor:

Will Win: Chadwick Boseman for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

Should Win: Chadwick Boseman for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* or Riz Ahmed for *Sound of Metal*

Snubbed: Delroy Lindo for *Da 5 Bloods*

Chadwick Boseman gave the performance of a lifetime, and there is a 99% chance that he will take home the Oscar. Rest in Power.

## Best Actress:

Will Win: Carey Mulligan for *Promising Young Woman*

Should Win: Carey Mulligan for *Promising Young Woman* or Viola Davis for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

Snubbed: Yeri Han for *Minari* and Sidney Flanigan for *Never Rarely Sometimes Always*

The race for Best Actress is heating up and no one quite knows what's about to happen on Oscars night. Carey Mulligan could be headed for the win, but she has been snubbed of a BAFTA nomination. Andra Day could sneak the win, but no one is totally sure. What ARE we sure of? Any one of these women deserve it.

## Best Supporting Actor:

Will Win: Daniel Kaluuya for *Judas and the Black Messiah* (with slim chance for Sacha Baron Cohen for *The Trial of the Chicago 7*)

Should Win: Daniel Kaluuya or Lakeith Stanfield for *Judas and the Black Messiah*

Snubbed: Alan Kim for *Minari*

I was absolutely blown away by Daniel Kaluuya and have high hopes for him to take home his first Oscar, but I am the biggest Lakeith Stanfield fan. I've loved his work from *Atlanta* to *Judas and the Black Messiah* and I'm absolutely thrilled that he snuck his way into this category. However, I'm terrified that their vote will be split and Sacha Baron Coehn will take home the award. (I love Sacha... but it's not his time.)

## Best Supporting Actress:

Will Win: Maria Bakalova for *Borat: Subsequent Movie Film...* or Yuh-Jung Youn for *Minari*

Should Win: Maria Bakalova for *Borat: Subsequent Movie Film...* or Yuh-Jung Youn for *Minari*

Snubbed: Jodie Foster for *The Mauritanian*

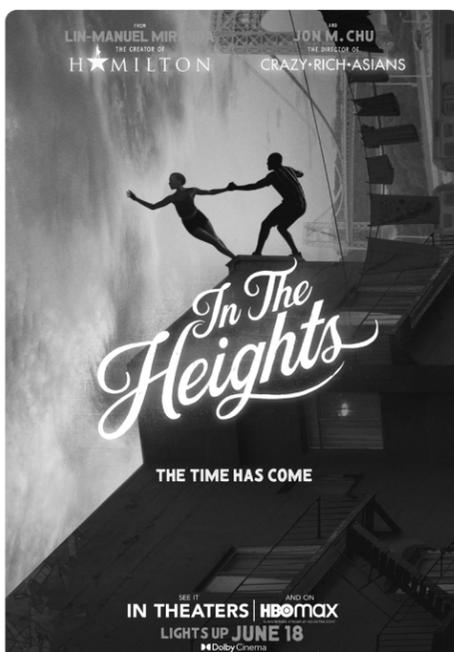
To be frank, this is such an excellent race for Best Supporting Actress that anyone can take it home. The least likely, sadly, is Glenn Close who will still not get her Oscar after 7. Freaking. Nominations. I am a Bakalova stan; I can't lie, but I'd be thrilled if Yuh-Jung Youn ended up winning.

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## Movies We're Looking Forward to in Summer 2021

### LMM's *In the Heights*



### Marvel's *Black Widow*



### Pixar's *Luca*



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# Zan's Mixtapes

by Zander Tate

Second semester senior year is driving me crazy as every last bit of my passion and drive disintegrates, so here is a random collection of songs to match the erraticness and confusion that comes with losing your adolescence to a pandemic.

**“The year 2003 Minus 25” by Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson** — Nothing better than some good ol’ Willie! Something about old country music and its tales of wasted time and lost lovers really puts you in a melancholic mood.

**“Strong Friend” by Teezo Touchdown** — Hailing from Houston and cosigned by A\$AP Rocky, Teezo makes music unlike anything else out right now. By combining indie instrumentation with talk-singy delivery, Teezo is pushing indie and experimental music forward.

**“Rhymes Like Dimes” by MF DOOM** — Please don’t clown me for this, but I had to pay homage to the legend DOOM. There is beauty in the absurdity of over the top rhymes over a funky beat that makes you want to zone out.

**“Cellophane” by FKA twigs** — This modern classic can put you in your feels fast. FKA twigs creates a gorgeous soundscape that reflects the sadness of solitude which is ever relevant during a pandemic.

**“21st Century Vampire” by LILHUDDY** — If “Cellophane” was too sad, here’s a fun and shallow pop-punk song to cheer you up. While LILHUDDY may be better known for his TikToks, with the help of MGK’s songwriters he’s made some solid tracks that put him on the route to stardom.

**“Mean Girls” by Bladee** — Euro cloud rap best encapsulates the brain fog and passivity of senior

year during a pandemic. Something about meaningless lyrics on ambient beats just seems appropriate right now.

**“2021” by Vampire Weekend** — Released in 2019, Vampire Weekend somehow predicted the somber tone that has filled this year. Short and sweet, this song hits close to home right now.

**“Waking Up In Vegas” by Katy Perry** — This throwback is perfect for screaming at the top of your lungs in your room as you try to forget your problems and stressors.

**“3AM” by HAIM feat. Thundercat** — HAIM just released their wonderful album *Women in Music Pt III*, and this track reflects the moody indie vibes that instill you with groove.



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# Popular Artists with Unpopular Songs

by Julian Cotom

A lot of artists seem to have so much airplay and well-known songs that it’s as if their popular songs are their best ones. I’ve compiled different artists with unpopular songs that are on par or better than their popular songs. In no particular order, prepare to get hooked on some underappreciated songs from these already well-known artists.

**Queen:** Everyone is born knowing the lyrics to Bohemian Rhapsody, and Don’t Stop Me Now is a cult classic shower song. Being one of the most virtuoso rock bands to have ever existed with all four members having written a chart-topping song each, it’s a shock that their already obsessed fan base doesn’t bring attention to numerous songs in their catalogue that could fill this list. Here are just a couple:

“The Prophet’s Song,” “If You Can’t Beat Them,” “Keep Passing the Open Windows,” “Drowse”

**Kanye West:** One of the most successful artists in the Hip Hop community, and one of the most divisive personalities in the music industry. With anthems such as Power, pop tunes like Heartless, and “profane Gospel” hits like Ultralight Beam, West has been able to provide millions with the day-to-day motivation and hype that we all need to get through the week. Even his non-Hip Hop albums are able to get people amped. Here are some songs that do the job:

“Say You Will,” “Two Words,” “I Thought About Killing You,” “Gone”

**Taylor Swift:** Love her or hate her, you can’t deny how successful she has become and will continue to be. I’m willing to bet there is not a single alternate universe in the multiverse where Taylor Swift isn’t successful in some way. From her early Country days with Teardrops on My Guitar all the way to her new direction in Folk Rock with willow, there must be something for anyone to enjoy in her discography. Here are some that take this list:

“You’re Not Sorry,” “Sad Beautiful,” “Tragic,” “hoax,” “This Love”

**Earth, Wind & Fire:** Regarding the representation in the Soul/R&B scene and the appreciation for instrumentation and craft for this group, criminal would be an understatement. It boggles my mind how a group this influential is just appreciated through the same three songs shuffled on a dance playlist. Yes, September, Boogie Wonderland, and Let’s Groove are good tunes, but what if I told you there was better? Jazz Fusion, Synth Funk, Gospel Soul; the Elements have so much under their belt that it’s blasphemous it’s not well-known. Do me a favor, and put yourself on these tracks:

“Jupiter,” “Spirit of a New World,” “Everything Is Everything,” “Burnin’ Bush”

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# Ruth + Denney: PVA's Worst, Best, and Only Advice Column\*

**All my friends can drive but my parents won't allow me to learn how. Any ideas on how I can convince them?**

— Cowboy without a Horse

Dear Cowboy,  
Have you tried sitting down and having a genuine, heart to heart conversation with your parents? This might be your best starting bet. Why do you want to drive? Is it because all your peers are doing it? To look cool? Because you hate riding the school bus? Because you'd like to jam your Spotify playlist in the morning without your parents giving you the side eye? Knowing your intentions will probably help them see that you've seriously thought this out... but DON'T say "because I want to." This is the worst explanation! If speaking to them isn't an option, try writing a letter. List out your reasons in a sort of persuasive essay. Have you respectfully listened to their reasons for not letting you drive? And if it's "you're too young" or "because I said so," tell them this: authoritative parenting is the best way to create a healthy child-parent relationship. It involves authority (duh, it's in the word itself), while also being flexible and encouraging discussion on disagreements. Work together to find a compromise that addresses their worries while also granting you a little freedom. Research solutions to the issues your parents raise without immediately shutting their fears down: odds are, they just want to keep you safe, like most parents. Make yourself heard, but don't yell at them or anything, okay?  
Yours,  
Ruth

Howdy Partner,  
I hear your pain, buckaroo, it's painful to be left at the chuck wagon when your pals are riding off into the sunset on their broncos. Luckily for you, I have two proposed solutions to your situation.  
1. Wear them down. How many times can a parent hear "can I get a ride?" before they need to visit the saloon? I suggest you find out. Need a ride to Dodge City to meet your high-noon showdown deadline? Ask for a ride. Want to pick up a sasparilla from the corner store a block away? Ask for a ride. Forgot your lasso in the living room and that's just too gosh-darn far from your bed? Ask for a ride. Like a river through a canyon, play the long game and erode their sanity bit by bit.  
2. Sweeten the deal. Maybe you're more of a candy shop than a war of attrition. I get that. Instead of begging to be taken for a drive, you suggest "Hey parental unit, wouldn't it be nice if I could drive you around town? I'd love to be able to pick you up from date night like a dashing chauffeur, and I'm much cheaper than the standard stretch-wagon driver. Gee mom, wouldn't it just take so much stress off from you if I could go pick up all the groceries for you this week? All I need is a driver's license."  
But if none of that works, I'll still be kind and let you keep that Oliva Rodrigo song on your playlist. It'll already be sad enough that you can't drive alone past his street...you'll have your parents driving for you. Until next time Cowboy,  
Deputy Denney

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**My relationship has been kind of weird lately. My girlfriend has been going through a very bad time mentally and I really want to be there for her but she is shutting me out. I understand that everyone has different ways of coping, but I'm worried that I am part of the problem and hurt that she isn't opening**

**up to me. She has been very distant, and I feel very disconnected in the relationship. I really hate that I feel this way because I don't want to victimize myself while she is struggling with depression and anxiety; therefore, adding to the stress? How can I support her if she's not ready to let me in and what if I am the problem?**

—The Shoulder to Cry On

Dear Shoulder,  
First of all, I'd like to commend you on being such a thoughtful, dedicated partner. Your girlfriend is lucky to have someone as empathetic and sensitive as you on her side. You mention you're worried that you're the problem, but don't mention anything that has led you to believe this. I'd advise you to only concern yourself with what you concretely know: your girlfriend is struggling through a rough mental health patch, and you are simultaneously worried for her (as any loved one would be!) and hurt that she's not letting you support her. You also feel a little guilty for feeling this resentment towards her. I think you can also let go of that guilt: you're not acting on that resentment, and you are very much allowed to have complicated feelings about a complicated situation.

Now to address your actual question. You can't make your girlfriend open up to you, nor should you try. Her comfort level is her comfort level, and trying to push past that, as you've already guessed, would likely be unhelpful. As partners, your job isn't to manage the other person's mental health; it's to be a respectful and caring figure in the other person's life. So, be that. Send her a text every once in a while that says "I hope you have a lovely day" or "I'm rooting for you" or even just a meme you thought she'd enjoy. Don't spam her, and don't invest too much energy in getting a response. The point isn't to pressure her into connecting if she's not ready, but to remind her she's got someone in her corner. In the meantime, find someone of your own to open up to about all these complicated feelings — your parents, if they'd be sympathetic, or a friend or two that you can trust. It sounds like both of you have a lot on your plates right now, and I wish you both the absolute best in getting through this difficult time.

Yours,  
Ruth

Dearest shoulder shoulder shoulder shoulder,  
For once, I agree with Ruthie; you should respect your girlfriend's boundaries but still let her know you're there for her. While I agree with Ruthie's concept, I don't agree with her application; I simply don't think a single text is enough. While it is a start, there's a fast and easy way to constantly let her know you're thinking of her, and the best part is that it requires no long-term effort from you. The miracle solution: spam (I can feel Ruthie shudder; I have directly contradicted her!). No, not the delectable rectangular pork on aisle nine, the kind of spam you get in your email, your texts, your calls, and even via physical mail. (I mean, who the heck sends snail mail anymore? Even my grandma has stopped sending birthday cards.) Your girlfriend will be inundated at all hours of the day with thoughtful messages for the rest of her natural life, and all you need to do is put her contact info in a few sketchy websites. Somewhere out there, there is a wealthy Nigerian prince aching to speak with your girl. He has money to send her! What a great pick-me-up! Sure, she might have her identity stolen, but it's all worth it as long as she knows you care.  
Congrats, you have been randomly selected as the winner of a free cruise!  
Denney

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# Horoscopes

By Maja Neal

April is a wonderful beautiful month, which has exactly nothing to do with the fact that I was born on the 26th. Temperatures are rising, the end of school is so close I can smell it, and your horoscopes are fresh off the press!

**Aries** — Work-wise, do you find yourself remaining too attached to past projects? This is a good time to scrap that piece of art or poem that you've been trying and trying to get right, and devote your huge brain to a new endeavor. Advice: make box macaroni. You deserve it.

**Taurus** — Remember that arrogance and stubbornness to a toxic degree doesn't look good on anyone! Though you may feel quick to conflict, don't convince yourself that acting while angry is a good idea. Advice: listen to my 2-hour Vocaloid hype playlist.

**Gemini** — If you're the type of person who enjoys and/or is good at communication, think of channeling that into your work. How can you solve things by talking it out? Maybe get some extra credit or a due date extension? Advice: learn what in God's name an NFT is.

**Cancer** — Hopefully, you know your own worth, and that makes you pretty hard to fool. Hang on to that instinct in relationships. Make sure people know to get straight to the point, or you won't deal with them anymore. Advice: pitch a new reboot to John Netflix. He'll probably take it.

**Leo** — It's a lucky month for you! But even I don't believe in things coming purely from luck. Though it's stressful, planning for your future is always a very good idea. Seniors, this means you! Advice: do NOT buy the fancy markers. (Get the knockoffs.)

**Virgo** — Find a good balance between your own wants and other people's. This also applies to provocation and anger — does someone deserve to be getting a rise out of you? Do

they deserve that attention? Advice: stop drinking so much Arizona Tea.

**Libra** — Boringly practical lesson for this month: teach yourself. If you're having trouble, you might be just a YouTube video or online tutorial away from catching up. After all, Hank Green is the reason I passed chemistry. Advice: check your phone battery health.

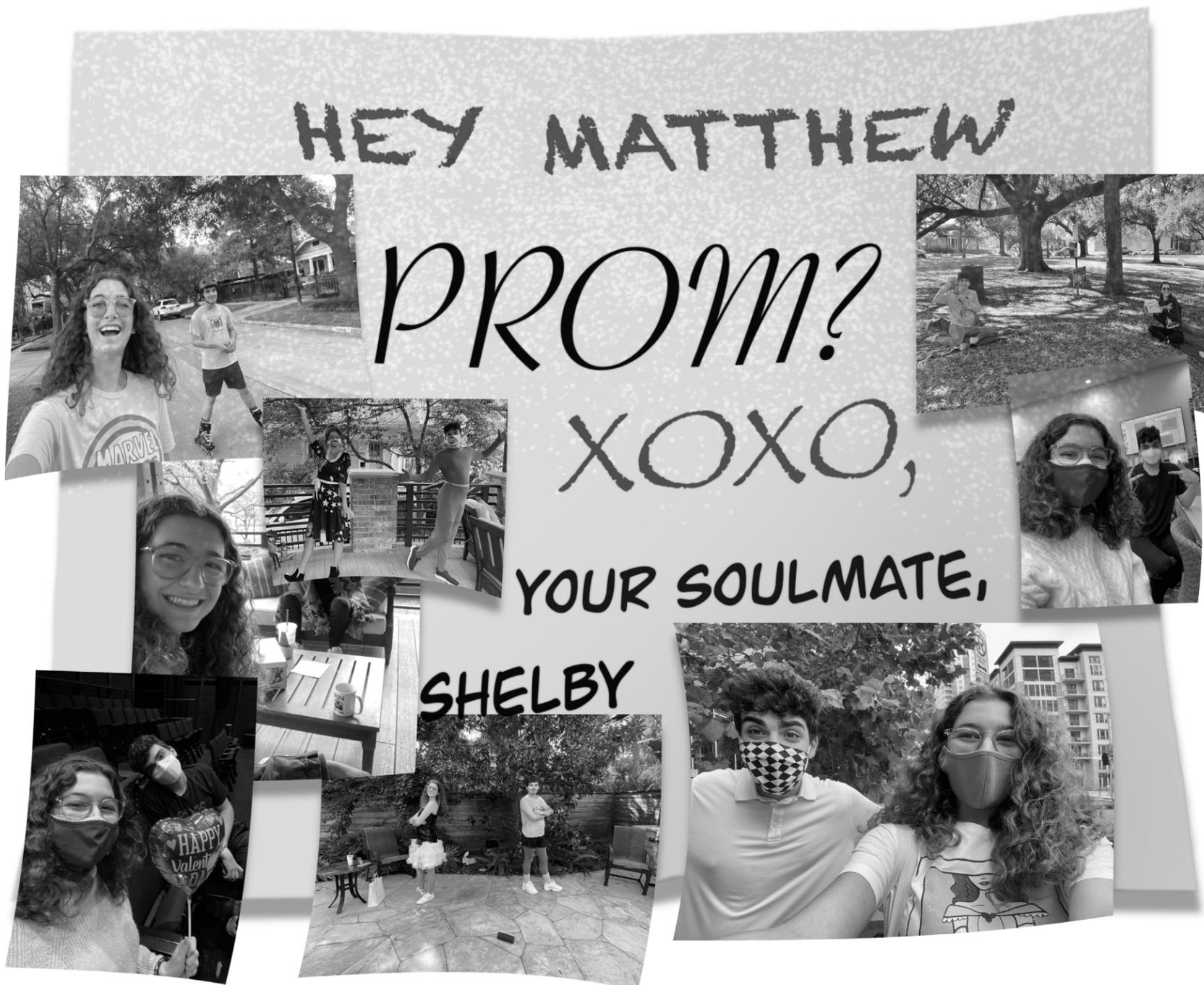
**Scorpio** — This is a turbulent month. Don't overextend yourself, though you may feel pulled in many directions at once, especially by friends needing your help. Alone time can be incredibly healing, especially for healer types. Advice: eat one of those fun manmade citrus fruits.

**Sagittarius** — If you find yourself struck by creativity — TAKE ADVANTAGE! Record things as you think them, rather than waiting and forgetting or convincing yourself the idea isn't good. Advice: Stop getting show spoilers from Instagram.

**Capricorn** — If you find yourself feeling lonely, don't go back to relationships that you left for a reason. Bad friends are bad friends, and you deserve much better. Advice: replace your toothbrush already.

**Aquarius** — Remember to promote yourself. If you think you deserve a bigger role in the project, or if you want to be the first one to make a move in a relationship, remember other times when you've been proactive with good outcomes. Advice: take up small-batch jewelry making.

**Pisces** — Instead of spreading yourself thin on many different relationships, think about interacting with your closest friends only (within health safety reasons). A small group of friends can often energize you anew. Advice: get cooked into a soup.



# Overheard@PVA

I'm not a soup fiend.  
— Celeste Schmidt

I wrote a thank-you-note to Sal Khan.  
— Rebecca Rock

I could biodegrade you easily in seconds.  
— Saylor Swick

Do you eat your oranges with or without the crust?  
— Seven Modad

How could life be anything but meaningless in a world where the human centipede films exist.  
— Eli Johns-Krull

I got a really weird ice cream thing from Phonecia. It tastes like chlorine from an indoor swimming pool.  
— Sarah Painter

Jimmy Neutron was the first I began confronting my racial identity in America.  
— Rylan Carroll

I took a quiz to figure out which eldritch abomination I am, and I got Justin Bieber. — Bhodi Langford

I think I'm just a little bit stupid.  
— Callum Curtis

I don't know if your stereotypical bullies are a thing. The only spitballing I see at PVA is at a poetry slam. — Rohit

I am this close to reincarnating as a praying mantis.  
— Sylvia Zhao

Learn how to forage and live in the woods because society is ending. — KM

I think its funny when people eat their twin in the womb.  
— Luca Jarosz

I found my trumpet in a shipwreck. How cool would that be?  
— Lily Peters

My brain is holding itself together with a piece of tape.  
— Riya Shah

Physics is very important if ever you meet a genie. — Mr. Landry

I never thought I'd watch a livestream of my student getting a Covid test.  
— Mrs. Landry

I spilled dog mouthwash all over the floor and I just wanted sriracha from the fridge.  
— Maika Nebgen

Time is a social construct invented by clock companies in the 1950s to sell more clocks.  
— Elijah Islam

Wait, you can be gay, skinny, and have body hair?  
— Emily Chapin

Let me smell your dandruff!  
— Victoria Ramazzini

Are hitmen counted in GDP?  
— Anna Tobin

I'll transform right back into my cat form.  
— Zoe Yang

Dr. Smith is the primary character in this story. We have one main character!  
— Dr. Smith

How do left-handed people use scissors?  
— Joshua Garvin

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