

THE COMET NEWS

Winter 2021

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THE COVID 19 RESPONSE

Written by: Maeryam Nasari

The United States has been focused on developing an effective vaccine for COVID-19 since the beginning of the spread of the virus. In recent months, Moderna, a biotech company and Pfizer, a pharmaceutical company have produced a vaccine determined to be effective after several trials on more than 30,000 people.

Both Moderna's and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine have shown similar efficacy levels of nearly 95%. The biggest difference noted between the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccine is the temperature storage requirements. While this may not be an issue for hospitals and large healthcare organizations, it may be an ongoing concern with regards to distribution to doctors' offices, pharmacies, and/or public health clinics.

In the test trials, 15,000 study participants were given a placebo, which is a shot of saline that has no effect. Over several months, 185 of them developed Covid-19, with 30 developing severe forms of the disease. One of them died. Another 15,000 participants were given the vaccine, and only 11 of them devel-

oped Covid-19. None of the 11 became severely ill. The vaccine was effective across age groups, genders, racial and ethnic groups, and participants with underlying medical conditions associated with high risk of severe Covid-19.

According to the CDC, approximately 6.7 million people have received their first doses of vaccine against coronavirus in the US and more than 22 million doses of vaccine have been distributed.

Despite two new COVID-19 variants, healthcare professionals are hopeful and optimistic about the future. Nurses and other healthcare professionals are lining up for the vaccine throughout the United States. Even though there is ongoing excitement for the light at the end of the tunnel, many frontline workers in healthcare have yet to receive the vaccine.



Pictured: Vaccination lines Georgia.

States have said they don't have enough staff or money to administer coronavirus vaccines at the needed rate. As the US looks for ways to speed up the administration of Covid-19 vaccines, some states and providers are asking healthcare workers traditionally not involved in the vaccination effort such as dentists, retirees and students, to aid in the process. Andrew Cuomo, New York Governor said as of January 8, 2021 that New York hospitals will continue to prioritize vaccinating health care workers (Group 1A) and beginning on January 11, 2021, the vaccine was allowed to be distributed to the elderly and city workers who are part of group 1B, in addition to essential workers such as teachers.

THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF QUARANTINE

Written by: Emily Cuellar

It's fair to say that 2020 was quite an eventful year. Looking back at this year, we can reflect and say that it wasn't exactly the best or ideal year. It's a crazy concept to grasp how the entire country modified normal customs to fit the Covid circumstances. However on a more optimistic note, we can realize quarantine gave us an opportunity. Quarantine gave us an opportunity for months to put the whole world on pause and stop everything.

One specific good outcome was all the extra time we have. During these past months, all of the restaurants, schools, malls, activities, etc. have closed down.

This gave us an immense amount of time to try new things that we may have put on the backburner. Here's a question for you: How many times have you cooked your own meal? How many books do you have on your shelf that you never read? Have you tried learning that instrument that you were always curious about? Quarantine gave us time for new ideas or skills that we always were curious about. This can simply be redecorating your bedroom to fit your aesthetic or updating your music playlist. These ideas really do make a great impact on our lives.

Another positive aspect of quarantine is the effect it has on the environment. Due to the Coronavirus, the planet has been given a chance to rejuvenate. For instance, since there are less tourists in Italy, the long polluted canals of Italy have finally been cleared. In China, there has been an eighty five percent increase in good air quality within 337 cities during this quarantine. There has been a significant decrease with air pollution as well. For a few months now, Mother Nature has finally gotten a breather.

The third aspect is the connectedness within the community and our families. Coronavirus has rejuvenated the sense of community. Lately, we have spoken more often about our loved ones. We are concerned about the health and emotional well being of our families, friends, etc. Even if we aren't together face to face, we found ourselves relying on each other more often during 2020. It's fair to say that quarantine has challenged us social people who desire contact and interaction with other human beings. However, as a community we have managed to overcome these obstacles and found new ways to interact with each other. We utilize social media platforms to communicate with our friends and families. Social media has a

great impact on our connectedness. For example, a video has surfaced on the internet showing Italy, one of the countries affected negatively by the Coronavirus. The video showed people on their balconies (socially distanced) creating music by singing and using their instruments. There are many organizations online who post daily affirmations to help and reach out to other people. It's fascinating how as a whole society we manage to look out for one another.

The fourth positive aspect of quarantine is the time to reflect and reconsider. During this quarantine, we can agree that all our lives have drastically changed. It made us realize and reconsider what we do and why we do it. We may have taken a few things for granted such as going to the gym or simply eating at a restaurant. We have adjusted our homes into our personal gyms, offices, etc. This offered us an opportunity to possibly change up our habits or normal accustomed routines. The virus has forced us to make changes to our daily lives and some of us might want to keep these new habits.

Quarantine has clearly offered us a new perspective on life and everything we have taken for granted. Hopefully once this virus is over, we will appreciate the things we have taken for granted and utilize possibly some life lessons we have learned over the course of this year. Until then, it's important to be positive during these moments of vulnerability. It's quite ironic how the most negative word in quarantine is positive. However, this crisis will eventually end and we will meet again, hopefully as better human beings.

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TO STAY HOME OR TO NOT STAY HOME...

Written by: Roman Charan

After six months of being home, most can agree that the transition from summer to school was more difficult than usual. I remember it being the end of the summer, the thought of going back to school was nerve racking; there was so much uncertainty. How could I be certain I would be safe? How could I be certain that I will be able to actually learn? The school attempted to calm those uncertainties by proposing two styles of schooling: Hybrid and Remote.

Hybrid students would come into school two days a week (Monday-Tuesday or Thursday-Friday, everyone remote on Wednesday), depending on the letter of the students last name. Hybrid students go through their typical school days while wearing a mask. However, due to covid-19 regulations students are no longer able to congregate in the halls and must clean their desks after use. The attempt with hybrid seems to be trying to maintain as much normalcy as possible in a not normal situation.

While Hybrid Students are getting ready for school, most remote students are usually still sleeping. Being remote allows students to do school in the comfort of their homes. Students can eat when they want, wear what they want, and be where they want. Being remote is very relaxing but does have its shortcomings. Some remote students have reported that it is harder to get the teachers' attention and stay engaged in class. However, hybrid students have had a similar experience even when in school. Granted this is a new situa-

tion no one was prepared for, but teachers have been finding it difficult to balance giving attention to both the hybrid and remote students. Unintentionally teachers seem to focus on one group of students making things harder for their counterparts. There is no right answer when it comes to picking your style of schooling, it is all about preference and comfortability. Students should speak to their parents about what works best for them to

able to have the opportunity to go into the classroom. I, for one, have solace in knowing that I am in school two days a week and have more time with my teacher, to ask any questions I may have or understand certain concepts better. Additionally, I believe that teachers should know their students well, and that the most important piece of developing a good classroom environment is strengthening the relationship between student and teacher. There is only so much teachers can learn about students through a camera, so seeing students in school, even for a short while, allows for the betterment of these relationships."



ensure a productive rest of the school year.

Julia DeTurris is an 11 grade student who believes hybrid is better "because it puts me in a school atmosphere And it's hard to learn at home w external distractions"

Joseph Gluadino is also a Junior who is a hybrid learner. His thoughts are as follows: "The hybrid learning platform allows for students to experience both learning from home and in the traditional classroom setting. Students are able to better pace themselves with class work throughout the day at the comfort of their homes which is an excellent aspect of remote days. Although, this is great, students should still be

Last but not least, Rohan Manjrekar is a student who first struggled with making a decision between remote and hybrid learning. After discussing with his parents, they decided hybrid would be the best option for him. To his surprise he prefers "hybrid learning for a few reasons: one of the main ones being time. When I'm at home I am able to do everything on my own time and still meet the deadlines off my assignments which helps with stress and mental health. I am also able to do everything in my home environment which I am used to working in which makes me more relaxed while doing my work which causes me to do all of my work better. I also personally don't have a lunch period so I am able to eat at home while being in class. In regards to Covid I am also able to work safely without any Covid concerns while working hybrid."

LIGHTS UP! TAKE YOUR PLACE! START ROLLING?

Written by: Alina Nodrat

The last couple of months have served as a challenge to many. With a sense of uncertainty lingering about, we have all clung on to what we know in hopes for a return to normalcy. Many clubs throughout Hicksville High School have created an atmosphere that provides students with a place to relax and do what they love. The theatre department is no exception.

The pandemic has caused us to feel various emotions whether it be happiness, loneliness, or boredom. Additionally, society as a whole faced stellar changes. Throughout this time we saw the Black Lives Matter protests gain more traction, an unforgettable election, job loss, and more causing us to adjust to tough times. All these reasons led a brilliant idea to sprout in the theatre department.

"The Quarantine Monologues" gives students a chance to express themselves and talk about their experiences during this time in their own artistic way. Students were able to turn in their own, unique, monologues for selection. Students were also able to audition and apply to be an assistant director. Just as always, Hicksville's theatre department has been able to overcome issues and involve people that are passionate about different areas of theatre.

A monologue can be described as a speech given by a single person. Writing a monologue is up to the author's interpretation. It can be a speech, a character having a conver-

sation with someone without lines, and much more! Monologues aim to provide the audience a story and a sense of connection with the characters.

In an interview with Thespian Honor Society President Rohina Nodrat, she shared her thoughts on "The Quarantine Monologues" and what's to come!

Q: How do you think "The Quarantine Monologues" changed the theatre department and Thespians?

A: It is truly something we have never done before, but I'm confident that it will be a spectacular event. One major difference is that we sadly will not be performing on stage due to COVID-19 restrictions. Because of this, we had to move everything online, from auditions to the show itself. We know this will be tough, but I know we are all up for the challenge.

Q: What do you imagine pieces to be like?

A: Just like in our One Act Play festival, our writers are fantastic. Each of them have a talent that is astonishing, especially as high school students. I can't wait to hear about the selected pieces after they are released. I've heard people discuss their monologue ideas and they greatly ranged in the best way possible. People wrote about the pandemic, isolation, social justice, mental health, and more. It is important to note that each piece has its own

feeling, passion, and raw emotion to it. I can't wait to see the phenomenal job our actors/actresses, director, and crew will do with it.

Q: Any news on when opening night will be?

A: Yes! Opening night will be towards the end of February. There will be updates to come!

The virtual performance of "The Quarantine Monologues" aims to provide us all a feeling of relief and relation. More insights and information will be given out closer to opening night.

CLUB AND ACTIVITY SPOTLIGHT FOR HHS!

Written by: Gia Rangi



This year has brought on many changes to the high school, but the clubs are still active despite being online. Here are a few!

Ecology Club

If you care about the environment and would like to help out, join the ecology club! In this club you can sell things like stainless steel water bottles and metal straws. You can also participate in a recycling program. The advisor for this club is Mr. Lichtenthal, contact him at alichtenthal@hicksvillepublicschools.org if you are interested in joining.

Mock Trial

If you take an interest in law or court cases, this club will allow you to experience that personally. This club will perform a court trial with a made up case. You will have the opportunity to play roles such as the witness or lawyer. If this were to be a normal year, the mock trial would go to a courtroom and play out the case in front of a judge. This club can expand your knowledge on things like court cases or general law, if you didn't already know about them. The advisor for this club is Ms. Vangi Delise and you can contact her at gdelise@hicksvillepublicschools.org.

Student Government

This club gives students a direct platform to benefit the school environment. For example, the student government was involved in decorating the school lobby for the holidays this year, which helped to raise people's spirits. The student government can also make changes by speaking out about things in the school that could be done differently and it creates an opportunity for you to have a voice. The advisor for this club is Ms. Temps, and you can contact her at ctemps@hicksvillepublicschools.org.

FBLA

FBLA is a club for people who are interested in business. The club teaches students important business skills and also consists of guest speakers. You can contact the advisor, Ms. Anastasopoulos, at danastasopoulos@hicksvillepublicschools.org.

Comet News

If you are reading these articles, and wish that you could write one, then this is the club to join. This club will provide you with opportunities to write about anything you please, as long as it is deemed newsworthy. You can spread information, ideas, or write about simple topics that interest you. The advisors for this club are Mr. Cohn and Ms. Civello. You may contact them at acohn@hicksvillepublicschools.org or dcivello@hicksvillepublicschools.org.

Yearbook

In this club, you can be involved with different aspects of creating the yearbook and seeing the process. If you are interested, you can contact the advisor, Ms. LaCava, at jlacava@hicksvillepublicschools.org.

These are only some of the clubs located at our school. The high school also has many other clubs and honor societies that you can be a part of. The advisors and emails are listed below.

If interested in music...

Jazz Ensemble: Mr. Shmuel at jshmuel@hicksvillepublicschools.org

String Ensemble: Ms. Weiss at jweiss@hicksvillepublicschools.org

Modern Music Masters: Ms. Weiss at jweiss@hicksvillepublicschools.org

Chamber Singers: Ms. Shmuel at mshmuel@hicksvillepublicschools.org

If you are interested in joining an honor society or science Olympiads feel free to reach out to the

Math Honor Society:
eryan@hicksvillepublicschools.org

Science Honor Society:
ppowell@hicksvillepublicschools.org

Science Olympiad:
zmilack@hicksvillepublicschools.org

Social Studies Honor Society:
Hstavrinas
@hicksvillepublicschools.org
mldau@hicksvillepublicschools.org

National Honor Society:
kfelber@hicksvillepublicschools.org

National Art Honor Society:
cmaeyunas@hicksvillepublicschools.org

Thespians Honor Society:
ccassidy@hicksvillepublicschools.org

In order to find more clubs, you may visit the Hicksville High School website or check your email from Mr. Harris that was sent out containing the clubs/activities with the advisor at the beginning of the year.

GENDER INEQUALITY

Feature written by: Sarah Quadi

Gender equality is a basic human right, but our society is facing a major disparity in women's and men's access to opportunity and decision-making authority. Women internationally have fewer economic participation opportunities than men, less access to higher education or any education at all, higher threats to health & welfare, and less representation in government. It is crucial not only for achieving gender equality, but also for reaching a wide range of important development goals to ensure women's rights and to give them the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Things have gotten even worse now with the current pandemic. The pandemic prompted schools to shut down and providers of child care to leave their jobs in fear of catching the virus. This causes stress on working mothers to pile up. Employed women across the world make brutally tough decisions on whether to stay home if they have not already been fired from their jobs. And in countries such as the United States, where the pandemic is exacerbating the disparities that women have already encountered as a consequence of the lack of guaranteed paid maternity leave and adequate childcare, the impact could be especially serious.

Women have far less accessibility to education across the world than men do. 25% of young women aged 15-24 will not complete primary school, according to humanrightscareers.com. That is about fifty eight percent of individuals who do not complete basic education. It has also been stated on humanrightscareers.com

that of all the undereducated individuals in the country, 2/3 are women. This has a big impact on their future and the kinds of opportunities they can get because women are being denied education of the same level as men or any education at all. Not many countries offer the same job opportunities to women. While men have the opportunity to get a nice, well-paying job, women face jobs where they are overworked and underpaid.

The separation of jobs is another factor behind gender discrimination inside jobs. There's an ingrained assumption in most communities that men are inherently better qualified to handle such work. Usually, those are the professions that pay the most. This prejudice results in lower women's earnings. Women often carry on the responsibility for unpaid labor, because they have additional work that has never been financially appreciated even though they engage in the paying workforce.

According to the research from World Bank, it is said that over one billion women do not have legal safeguards against domestic sexual abuse or other domestic abuse cases. Both have a considerable effect on the capacity of women to flourish and live in freedom. There is also a lack of appropriate defense in many countries from abuse in public. This makes places outside of their home more dangerous and makes women often have to make choices that sacrifice and restrict their objectives without defense. Most women across the

globe do not have control over their own bodies. It is very difficult to come into contact with birth control in most areas. Globally, men are the ones who determine what women's rights to their bodies are. It's not okay. Without being constrained, monitored or doing it illegally or in a dangerous way, women should have the option to do whatever they want with their bodies.

The World Health Organization states that about 200 million women who don't want to get pregnant don't use contraception. A lack of choices, limited applicability, and cultural/religious disapproval are different reasons for this. Mothers who have been raped or have not had access to birth control also become financially dependent, losing their rights, on another person or the state. Overall, women are given poorer quality medical care than men. According to HumanRightsCareers.com, "Of all national parliaments at the beginning of 2019, only 24.3 percent of seats were filled by women. As of June of 2019, 11 Heads of State were women." This suggests that some problems that female lawmakers seek to raise are frequently ignored, such as parental leave and childcare and legislation on gender fairness.

This is similar to other causes for gender bias, such as a lack of schooling and economic opportunities, resulting in more women living in poverty. It is less likely that they can afford decent healthcare. Many women still face sexism from their physicians, expanding the gender disparity in the level of health care.

VEGANISM

Written by: Mallika Rangi

What is veganism?

Veganism has been increasing in popularity over the years. More and more people are beginning to replace meat and dairy with plant-based alternatives, whether it be due to celebrity influence, concern for the environment, or other factors. This year had a record breaking 500,000 people sign up for Veganuary, which is an annual commitment to eating only plant-based foods for the month of January. Even with this growing movement, many people are still unsure of what it means to be vegan, why people become vegan in the first place, and the benefits of veganism.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, veganism is “the practice of not eating or using any animal products, such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese, or leather.” Often confused with vegetarians, vegans do not consume any animal products at all, including dairy and honey. Along with abstaining from animal products in their diet, some vegans also tend to avoid animal products in other items, like clothing or makeup.

Ethical Concerns

One of the number one reasons people decide to become vegan is to fight animal cruelty. Factory farms are considered to be the main cause of animal suffering as they consist of many inhumane practices. For example, the animals in factory farms are often kept in harsh conditions, in a filthy environment with no sanitation. Most of the animals spend their entire lives in factory farms before they are slaughtered, never being able to see the outside world. Furthermore, many of them are force fed so that they can grow to a larger, more preferred size. While opponents to veganism argue that most animals are stunned before being slaughtered so that they can't feel pain, many vegan activists state that there is no humane way to take the life of an animal.

They base their argument on the idea that raising and killing animals for personal gratification is unethical and cruel.

While it may be understandable why vegans refuse to eat meat, it is not as clear why they avoid dairy as well. The reason vegans don't consume dairy products like milk or cheese is similar to the reasons many of them don't consume meat. Vegans claim that though the animals may not die in the process of getting milked, they are still treated poorly, and commonly given steroids and forcibly impregnated so that they can produce milk in the first place. Cows are deprived from their young as soon as they give birth so that the milk can be used for profit instead of the purpose it was intended for: the nourishment of the baby cow. This process repeats every year for a single cow, as they are repeatedly forcibly impregnated to produce a steady supply of milk. It is for these reasons that vegans view the consumption of both meat and dairy as unethical practices that only fund the exploitation and abuse of animals.

Environment

Factory farming is one of the biggest contributors to water and air pollution, as well as deforestation. There is a large amount of greenhouse gas emissions released from factory farms. There may be around 2.4 million tons of carbon dioxide released worldwide every year when forests and land are cleared for feed crops or for grazing to support the factory farms. Livestock also release methane gas during their digestion process, and because they are unnaturally bred to produce more supply, and in turn more profit for the farmers, there is a significant amount of methane released into the atmosphere from factory farms. Factory farms actually account for 37% of methane emissions, which is far worse than the contribution of carbon dioxide emissions to global warming. Not only does factory farming

have a significant impact on climate change and pollution, it also poses harmful effects to the food chain, since animals are often given antibiotics in order to promote growth or reduce illness. These antibiotics can enter the food chain and result in negative consequences, like disease, for the human population that consumes animal products. According to researchers at the University of Oxford, going vegan can reduce one's carbon footprint by up to 73 percent. Because it takes around 2,000 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef, each vegan will be saving around 150,000 gallons of water per year.

Health

According to many doctors and nutritionists, vegan diets can certainly be healthy and sustainable if done properly. Many studies have found that vegan diets contain more of certain nutrients. They tend to consist of greater fiber, antioxidants, and other vitamins and minerals than other diets. Additionally, vegan diets have been linked to lower blood sugar levels, weight loss, and a lower risk of heart disease. Although there are a few risks to going vegan, such as a Vitamin-B12 deficiency, if a person is informed and plans out their vegan diet carefully, they will likely be successful and improve their health along the way.

Better World

One does not need to be vegan to yield these consequences. If one simply lowers their consumption of meat and dairy and is more mindful of what they are consuming, as well as where those products are coming from, they will still be impacting the world in a positive way. Considering the idea of veganism or even less consumption of animal products is certainly a right step in the direction to a healthier and humane world.

IS OUR FREEDOM OF SPEECH BEING ATTACKED?

Written by: Cory Wright

As Americans struggle to cope with the events at the Capitol, social media platforms have begun to crack down on “misinformation.” In this article I will explore some of the events of the past week and what they could mean for the future of our country.

On the 8th of January, President Trump’s Twitter account was permanently suspended following what Twitter saw as provocative comments on the Capitol riots that took place on January 6th. On January 7th, Mark Zuckerberg announced that Trump’s Facebook account would be banned, at least until President-Elect Joe Biden took power. Instagram followed suit. YouTube announced that as a result of the riot they will now give a strike to “*any* channels posting new videos with false claims in violation of our policies. On top of that, YouTube has announced that they have removed thousands of videos that suggested the existence of widespread voter fraud. Snapchat and Twitch have removed Trump’s official accounts. The online public forum Reddit has banned large swaths of their pro-Trump pages.

But it doesn’t end there. As a result of distrust of the “mainstream media,” a migration of right-wing social media users to other platforms has been occurring under the radar. Parler is one of these alternative platforms that recently gained huge amounts of popularity. It’s a social media company started in 2018 that

is seen by many on the right as a free speech supporting unbiased solution to the predations of Twitter and Facebook. As of early January, Parler had 15 million total active users. Or at least it did, until it went offline on January 10th after Amazon Web Services quit hosting the app. Simplified, this means that Parler no longer has access to the servers it needs to function on the internet. Like Trump, Parler’s users lost a mode of communication and, in a way, their voice.



The most critical question that many are left wondering is what this suggests for the future of freedom of speech, not only in the United States but in the world at large. The steps taken by social media giants to silence people in the name of safety clearly signify a new interpretation of the meaning of freedom of speech. In the past, freedom of speech in the United States meant allowing people to speak freely with little fear of consequences. The quote “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it” may come to mind. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the United Nations claims that “everyone has

the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. In Europe, many leaders expressed concern for how President Trump’s words are being handled by American tech giants. As Bloomberg News reported on January 11th, “Junior Minister for European Union Affairs Clement Beaune said he was ‘shocked’ to see a private company make such an important decision.

‘This should be decided by citizens, not by a CEO’”. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador expressed similar concerns over the account’s permanent suspension.

One of the most telling condemnations of Twitter’s actions are the words of Alexei Navalny, a Russian opposition leader. Navalny, who has campaigned against the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, knows a fair bit about living in a place where speaking freely is dangerous. Navalny survived an assassination attempt by poisoning back in August of 2020, most likely an attack meant to permanently silence his critics of President Putin. Here's some of what he had to say about Twitter’s actions: “If you replace “Trump” with “Navalny” in today's discussion, you will get an 80% accurate Kremlin's answer as to why my name can't be mentioned on Russian TV and I shouldn't be allowed to participate in any elections... Don't tell me he was banned for violating Twitter rules. I get death threats here

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THE STREAMING WARS

Feature written by: Albert Feinstein

For many of us all across the globe, entertainment is one of the key features of fulfillment, whether it be a TV show, movie, etc. Especially now, due to our whole pandemic situation, we are mostly stuck at home, twiddling our thumbs. One of the few ways to pass the time is to watch something on TV. As a result of our compromised situation, streaming services grew like wild-fires. Sure, streaming TV has been around for a while, but new services look very promising to dominate the market. Here are our contenders.

The Contenders

Disney+

At this point, everyone in the country has heard of Disney+, one way or another. Otherwise, you live under a rock. To everyone, this is the streaming service that will come up on top. Others say this is false. A Disney+ subscription costs \$6.99 a month, which is slightly less of what Netflix charges. The reason everybody believes that Disney+ will succeed is because Verizon has been offering a free subscription for a year for new users of Verizon's services. Sure, Disney+ has Disney companies, Marvel, Pixar, Nat. Geo., and 20th Century Studios under its wing.

It may seem tough to see it, but Disney+ has some flaws. Disney+ limits and will continue to limit its content to family friendly titles. This can be compared to Netflix, which has over 50,000 different titles, compared to Disney's 10,000 or so. Netflix offers titles for all audiences, whereas Disney+ is focusing on mostly families.

HBO Max

Here is the service that is doing a lot right. HBO Max is right up there with the famed Netflix. The reason for this can be seen on bloomberg.com, where Lucas Shaw reviews: "No other service is spending as much on original programming, or offering as broad a selection of TV shows, movies, documentaries and specials. This is the one service going right at Netflix..." Sure, HBO Max may not be as big as Disney+, but it is still in the



game. Some say it is doing better than Disney. As a bonus, instead of paying the slightly pricey subscription of \$15, if you have a subscription to HBO through Prime Video Channels, you get the HBO Max subscription free of charge. The negative of this service is: it is not very accessible. It is not available on Roku or Amazon.

Amazon Prime Video

This service is the service that is overlooked quite a bit because many viewers do not know that with a Prime subscription, you get this as a perk. For a subscription of \$119, yearly, you get to shop and get free-2 day delivery, along with a video streaming service. According to tomsguide.com, "Like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video is a veritable buffet of movies, television

and original programming..." The selection and variety of content is astounding, including a very extensive Kids section. One key (and overlooked feature) is the connection to channels, such as HBO, Showtime, Cinemax, IMDB TV, etc. The downside of this service is, for one thing, the price. Firstly, if you don't shop online on Amazon and don't have a Prime subscription, there is really no point for spending \$119 per year for just watching TV. Secondly, Amazon Prime Video feels incomplete when there are no outside channels linked up to it.

Hulu

Hulu is yet another service that is contending against Netflix for superiority in the streaming wars. Sure, it is very small compared to Netflix and Disney+, but it still remains in the race. Like the big boys, Hulu also has a wide selection of TV shows, most of which cannot be found anywhere else. Hulu has multiple plans, the most basic, has ads, and is \$6 per month. The next tier is Hulu with no ads, which is \$12. Hulu with Live TV is a whopping \$65 per month! This has ads, but does include live TV. Hulu with Live TV and no ads is \$71, per month! This is the downside of Hulu, it is very expensive to have with no interruptions. Live TV through Hulu is a whole different story. Live TV is very expensive, so it is more favorable to have a cable subscription, which is probably less costly.

Netflix

Yes, the best is truly for last. This streaming service has the most subscribers and is the highest rated by

READING TO ESCAPE

Written by: Roxy Dias

Some say that readers are given hundreds of lives through the stories they find themselves in. Many readers will vouch for this, as they go on several adventures through pages that wouldn't be possible otherwise. More than just being engrossed in fictional stories, readers are actually more likely to live longer and strengthen their mind.

Unfortunately, in the last decade, reading has become less prominent among teenagers, with less than twenty percent of teenagers saying they read for fun according to research done by the American Psychological Association.

Although many teenagers enjoyed reading books in earlier years, such as *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games*, they often stop in adolescence, as they get caught up with other things, such as an immense amount of schoolwork or a more active social life.

Others have not enjoyed reading, but mainly base their views of novels off the few they read in school. This is an awful way to represent literature, as there is a colorful variety of genres and stories waiting to be read, only to be dismissed or overlooked due to popular novels introduced in school. Lots of avid read-

ers haven't enjoyed all the texts they read in school either, but that doesn't mean they couldn't find something they are passionate about in the millions of stories written and published.



Illustration by Robert Neubecker

It is important to experiment with different genres and types of books in order to find something that you love, as naturally, the mind is enticed by storytelling. Before you decide that reading isn't for you, it might be helpful to try using audio-books, or try out genres not emphasized in school such as young adult fantasy, mystery, thriller, romance, science fiction, dystopias, or any other type of work. Even if you think you hate reading or it seems like a waste of time, finding the right kind of novels may surprise you.

Health Benefits

After all, reading has shown to provide people with numerous health benefits,

such as improving cognitive function. MRI scans have shown that reading requires a complex network of neural circuits and signals, which strengthen as you keep reading. Other brain scans have shown that when reading, and for days after someone has read a text, brain connectivity has increased.

Reading literary fiction has also shown to improve the ability to empathize with others, improving what researchers call the "theory of mind," skills which help with maintaining social relationships.

More than that, reading can help with long term memory and prevents cognitive decline with older age. It also can help sleep performance, and has shown to lower blood pressure and heart rate.

Furthermore, reading is often a healthy form of escapism when reality gets tough. It reduces stress, as well as alleviates the symptoms of depression. People with depression often feel alone or misunderstood. Reading gives people the opportunity to disconnect with a stressful world and connect with a fictional world they feel they can more meaningfully relate to.

IS OUR FREEDOM OF SPEECH BEING ATTACKED? CONTINUED

every day for many years, and Twitter doesn't ban anyone (not that I ask for it). Among the people who have Twitter accounts are cold-blooded murderers (Putin or Maduro) and liars and thieves (Medvedev). For many years, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have been used as a

base for Putin's "troll factory" and similar groups from other authoritarian countries".

The exact effects of social media platforms taking more control over who may say what remains unsure. Perhaps

2021 may not be the shining star we all hoped for. One thing is clear: the days of America being regarded as the perfect example of freedom and paragon of virtue by the world are over.

CASTE BASED DISCRIMINATION

Written by: Sneha Gouli

Caste systems have been used as a category of social hierarchy through all decades and time. The word “caste” originated from the Portuguese and applied to India in the 15th century and was implemented in India with the arrival of the Aryans. The caste system is the classification of hereditary or hierarchy. However due to nature, the caste system has been broken to many different meanings depending on the culture it falls into. Many people understand the caste system is an organized system to be placed into based on your wealth, occupation and ethnicity. Although there are many countries that don't implement this social hierarchy any more, some still use it in their day to day lives.

The basic class structure today has 4 major groups called Varnas and 36 castes. The fifth outcast group consist of the Dalits, “the untouchables,” or “water-unacceptable”--one should never touch them because they are from the lowest caste. However, with different groups and languages, the system gets complicated. Today, caste does not influence someone's standing since people of any caste can attend any schools and apply for any job, but the underlying problem is the influence it has left on people since discrimination and opinions arise from a person's caste. When the harmful practice of the caste system is followed for years, specific groups of people become negatively impacted.

In many South Asian countries, last names often indicate their caste and based on this information, people (often elders) will judge and shift their views towards that person. Many South Asian countries have changed laws to criminalize caste based discriminations, but the issue is still prominent. Although caste is not correlated with socioeconomic status, lower class people usually experience more poverty, have less access to education and health care. Some communities reject low castes in hospitals and schools since contact with them would make a person in a higher class “impure.” This ideology denies people in lower classes the same opportunities and can often lead to violence towards these specific groups.

Nepal's caste-based killings have brought awareness to this issue and showing the government how they continuously failed to confront discrimination against lower castes. In Rukum West District, five men were killed after a Dalit man, Nabaraj Bishwokarma arrived to marry his girlfriend from a different caste. Reports show that villagers chased and beat them, then threw them in the Bheri river. In another case in India, Sandeep, a Dalit man was attacked for marrying an upper class woman. Both suffered intense injuries. Even though these countries have laws against caste based discrimination, police often refuse to register cases where the victims are from a lower caste. In Pasi's case, who had allegedly been raped and murdered, the police did not register the case at first, stating she had committed suicide. This common trend can be seen in most South Asian

countries. Cases have always proven that the motive behind these killings are rooted in inter-caste marriage and the cases are often closed by stating that the cause of death is suicide. When it comes to Dalits, the women are deserted and men are murdered. Furthermore, reports also show that these groups have been even more vulnerable due to the Covid-19 pandemic and since the lockdown in March, there has been an increase in rape, assaults and denial of funeral rites.

Because the government and law enforcement fail to protect the vulnerable citizens these horrific crimes will continue. The issue lies within the failure to protect as well as the mindsets of people that have been embedded into history and culture. Violent crimes and discrimination cannot be stopped long term until these countries is able to overcome this mindset and outdate the caste based discrimination. Although this solution would ensure long term change, it becomes difficult in terms of changing people's opinions since there is no set measure on how to change it; however a temporary solution would be to increase punishment for caste based killings which ensures that people will be less tempted to commit crimes against vulnerable groups which could possibly lead to more people coming to terms with outdated the caste system altogether.



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THE STREAMING WARS CONTINUED

Netflix (continued)

many reviewers and experts alike. As you could see from this article, all of the previous mentioned subscriptions have been compared to Netflix, because this is the OG (original gangster, for those of you who live under a rock) subscription service. This service is considered a great-grandfather to these newer services, for Netflix has been around for a while. No other streaming service has ever been able to make Netflix worry. People may think, "Can't you just copy Netflix to rise to the top?" The answer is no. In the entertainment industry, specifically regarding streaming services, individuality is key to success. According to bloomberg.com, this is exactly what this says. "Copying Netflix is not a tried and true strategy. Creating a differentiated product is." This shows both variety and appeal and risk. Otherwise, the service is seen as a knock-off. Netflix is doing it right, which is why there are no negatives associated with it.

Who Will Come Out on Top?

No one really knows who will win this war, for anything could happen. It is definitely set in stone that Netflix will remain dominant for a long time with the others behind it. Anyhow, we will still end up with our favorite movies and TV shows no matter what we are subscribed to; big or small.

A Fight to the Death

In the end, most of these services will either collapse under pressure from larger streaming services or be bought by one of these services. Better yet, some can merge to form an alliance against a larger competitor. All is possible when striving for the top slot on everybody's wishlist. People want what is best for them, so they choose what is best for them. Netflix will probably remain on top for a long time. The others will try to come out on top. That's life.

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