

# THE COMET NEWS

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## THE START OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Written by: Maeryam Nasari

President Joe Biden's first few weeks in the White House featured the passing of several executive orders and immediate actions, ranging from a new \$20 bill to the current global climate crisis.

With the new administration, it appears that once again the anticipated change for the cover of the \$20 bill might occur. On January 25th, 2021 it was announced that the Department of Treasury is taking steps towards placing Harriet Tubman on the cover of the \$20 bill. Tubman was an abolitionist in the 1800s and led enslaved people in the South to freedom in the North through the Underground Railroad. Her bravery and fearless leadership was evident in her journeys to and from the South. Many are advocating for Tubman to replace Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill. With Biden's arrival, the Department of Treasury has taken significant steps towards making this a reality. Jen Psaki, President Joe Biden's press secretary, stated that "It is important that our .... money reflect the history and diversity of our country and Harriet Tubman's image gracing the new \$20 note would certainly reflect that."

On another hand, Biden took the first step towards easing racial tensions by signing a proclamation that reversed policies from the Trump administration. This included the ban which restricted entry into the United States for refugees and residents from seven predominantly Muslim countries. This ban had several dangerous impacts such as further institutionalizing xenophobia and Islamophobia



*Pictured: President Biden at his desk in the Oval Office. (usatoday.com)*

in the United States. Biden's order removes this ban, allowing for the process to earn a visa to continue, and requires the Secretary of State to propose a way to reconsider visa applications that had been denied previously.

Biden has also revoked the Mexico City Policy, otherwise known as the global

gag rule. Under the Trump administration, this policy blocked U.S. federal funding for non-governmental organizations that provided abortion counseling or expanded abortion services. In addition, Biden has made it a priority for the Department of Health and Human Services to review the Title X family planning program which had funding pulled from women's health clinics across the nation under the Trump administration.

Furthermore, Biden repealed the ban on transgender people serving in the military and passed an order that will extend federal nondiscrimination protection to the members of the LGBTQ+ community. He fulfilled one of his top campaign promises by rejoining the Paris Agreement on climate change which works to lower emissions that increase global warming. President Trump had

previously withdrawn from the Paris Agreement back in 2017.

Biden's first two weeks in office consisted of putting forth a major effort to reverse many of the restrictive policies put in place by former President Donald Trump. We hope to see many more prosperous changes in President Biden's term.

# CORONAVIRUS AND STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Written by: Gia Rangi

The coronavirus pandemic has taken an immense toll on students and teens around the world. Many people may be feeling overwhelming emotions of stress, and dismay during these challenging times. Whether it be from the distress of limited social interaction, or the stress from school, there are many healthy ways for you to cope.

Most students this year are remote, with limited interaction amongst their peers. Isolating yourself has never been, nor will ever be healthy for your overall welfare, especially

under these circumstances. You can find comfort with your family members, and start to spend more time with them. You can also always remain in touch with your previous peers, and can continue to interact with them through technology, such as social media, texting, calls, or FaceTime calls. Although it is not the same as being together in-person, it can make up for the lack of communication during this time.

There are many ways to find sources of comfort alone. For example, you can take this time to tend to your own needs in ways such as taking a relaxing bath, having a cup of herbal tea to reduce your stress, or cooking healthy comfort foods. This will also help you to take up a new hobby. For example, art is something that might help you relieve frustration or stress. Art can come in many forms such as drawing, painting, or writing. Other hobbies could include reading, listening to music, or watching television. Whatever you may have not had time to do, you can do now!

In trying to make these days seem less unorthodox, it may do well to keep to a persistent schedule. You can start each day with a plan of what you will do throughout the day. Keeping a diary of your progress and feelings may also help while you are trying to keep a consistent schedule. Keeping track can help you feel as if you are being proactive about the situation. Creating a list of things you will do once the pandemic is over, may also help to motivate you while getting through this difficult time.

It will also do well to distract yourself. You can create little projects for yourself to keep yourself active. For example, organizing or decorating your room. You can also start a photo album or scrapbook of your time in quarantine to look back at. You can also buy a plant! Buying a plant will help you with inactiveness, and give you something to have responsibility over and will, of course, make a good means of decoration. Or if you have a pet, spend more time with them!

Online schooling has also definitely been a challenge for many. While this lasts, we must find ways to adapt. If you have a noisy environment, try slight noise cancelling headphones to limit the nearby sound so you can increase your focus onto the Google Meet, or you can research ways to soundproof your room, or wherever it may be that you are schooling. If you do not have a proper learning environment, a kitchen table is always suitable. You can also always try to be innovative and create a learning environment for yourself using materials you may have in your home.

It is also important to practice self-compassion. Instead of pushing away your feelings of negativity, it is important to accept and acknowledge that you are feeling this way and remember that these feelings will fade and change.

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# PROCRASTINATION: VICE OR VIRTUE?

Written by: Mallika Rangi

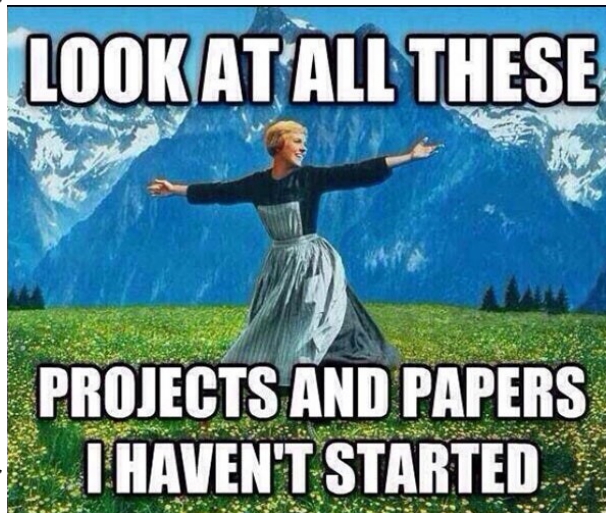
## What is Procrastination and Why is it a Problem?

Procrastination, which is when people save doing important tasks for the last minute, is undeniably a significant issue. It is oftentimes defined as putting off a task that would be beneficial to do, for no valid reason. For example, when a student decides to bake cookies for no special reason, instead of writing their English essay that is due the next day, that student is procrastinating. The American Psychological Association has stated that when it comes to their schoolwork, around 80 to 95 percent of college students procrastinate. Other research has suggested that 20% of the American population consists of chronic procrastinators. This is larger than the percent of people in the United States who are clinically diagnosed with depression or anxiety disorders. While it may seem like an ordinary part of people's lives, procrastination actually poses negative consequences. According to a meta-analysis done in 2015, those who procrastinate are likely to have lower grades in school. Procrastinating has also been associated with increased levels of stress, depression, fatigue, and anxiety. It is clear that procrastination is a serious problem as it affects so many people and interferes with the productivity of their lives.

## Why do People Procrastinate?

People can procrastinate for a number of reasons. "Regular" procrastinators may procrastinate because they have trouble with time management. However, for chronic procrastinators, procrastination is more of a lifestyle. Devon Price, a social psychology professor at Loyola University, has argued that procrastination occurs for two main reasons. According to Price, these reasons are fear

of failing, and confusion about a task. People may delay doing tasks that seem intimidating or too difficult. Procrastination can even be considered to be a coping mechanism for stressful situations, like studying for a difficult test. Interestingly, some people procrastinate for the thrill of it, or the adrenaline rush that they receive when completing an assignment minutes before it is due. Whatever the reason for procrastination, there is no doubt that people, especially students, need to be better equipped to make healthy and beneficial decisions.



## Overcoming Procrastination

Procrastination can seem impossible to overcome for some people, as it has been deeply integrated into their daily routines. However, there are definitely ways people can decrease how often they procrastinate. Technology is a factor that can increase procrastination, but, if used wisely, it can also help suppress procrastination. By setting time limits on certain social media apps, as well as alarms that restrict the amount of time spent using technology, people will be more likely to stay on track and avoid going on their phones when studying or

doing homework. Students can also write their plans in an agenda, preferably one that looks appealing to them, so they will be more inclined to complete their tasks. Spreading out tasks would also help reduce procrastination. If students are aware they have a project due in a week, they can start working on it beforehand, even if it is for as little as ten minutes a day. Doing little chunks of an assignment each day would certainly go a long way, and would definitely be better than starting the assignment the day it is due. Another way one can overcome procrastination is by rewarding themselves after

completing a task. For example, if a student promises themselves they will read 10 pages of their history textbook and then watch 15 minutes of their favorite show, not only will they feel more motivated to complete the reading, but also excited to do it again in the future. Eliminating distractions is also a great way one can get their work done efficiently. If someone knows that working with the TV on, will likely cause them to watch it and get sidetracked, turning it off, or sitting in a different room perhaps, would be a good idea.

Overall, while procrastinating may seem unavoidable, there are definitely ways to reduce it and overcome it. Students need to be self aware and realize when and why they may be procrastinating. By understanding their reasons for procrastinating, as well as the moments in which they are doing it, students will be able to make better decisions about how they spend their time. Planning, organizing, setting rewards, and eliminating distractions are all steps students can take to change their habits for the better.

# WHAT DO WE WANT? EQUAL PAY!

Written by: Harjot Kumari

Here's a problem we all know about, but choose not to acknowledge and those of us who do can't do nearly as much as they want to help fix it. Gender Inequality in sports. We live in 2021 and you would think our society would be at a point where we would no longer gender stereotype professional athletes, but here we are decades after we established it was a problem; still dealing with it, nowhere near seeing actual change.

If I asked you to name a sport, the first ones that might come to mind are basketball, soccer and baseball. One that probably wasn't at the top of your list; Tennis. Traditionally thought of as a non-stereotyped sport, but the numbers say differently. The highest paid-female Tennis players in the world are Naomi Osaka making \$37.4 million annually and Serena Williams just trailing with \$36 million annually. Alone, both Osaka and Williams take home a hefty paycheck at the end of the year, but compare that to the highest paid male Tennis player and you might think differently. Roger Federer, a Swiss tennis player, takes home a grand total of \$106.3 million! Naomi Osaka is ranked as the 3rd best Tennis player while Roger is ranked at 5th yet he gets paid a considerable more amount of money than Osaka. About 36% more, to be precise.

Let's go back to basketball, one of the most popular sports in America. The NBA and WNBA are nowhere near being safe from being gender stereotyped. One of the current best basketball players LeBron James signed a 4 year / \$153,312,846 contract with the Los Angeles Lakers. He is guaran-

teed \$153,312,846 and will also get an annual average salary of \$38,328,212. The most underperforming player of the Lakers in the 2019-20 season, Kyle Kuzma, signed a contract of \$8,650,178 and an annual average salary of \$2,162,545, and recently extended the contract (by 2023-24 he will be making close to \$49 million compared to his current 13.3 million) even after his severely disappointing last season. Now for comparison sake let's go to the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks. The best Los Angeles sparks player, Candice Parker, makes a measly \$113,500. What's even sadder is that she is considered to be the highest paid WNBA player. The best WNBA player in the LA Sparks makes a little less than 84% of what the most underperforming NBA Laker makes.

Now that we've established that this is in fact a problem, we need to find a way to fix this. Many different groups of women have tried to get their say but they can't help bring about a change this big all on their own. In March 2015, 28 members of the U.S women's national soccer team sued the U.S soccer Federation over gender discrimination. The U.S men's national soccer team has proven itself to be significantly less successful than the women's and are still paid more. The women's team also played significantly more games than the men's team had. An estimate was made that if both the women's and men's teams played 20 games and won them all, the women would receive \$99,00 each while the men would receive \$263,320 each. This lawsuit was first filed in 2015, yet only 2 years ago was it actually dealt with. In 2019, U.S. District

Judge R. Gary Klausner in Los Angeles scheduled a trial for Sept. 15 on the players' claim of discriminatory work conditions. In 2020 the original claim of unequal pay was dismissed.

It wouldn't be fair to say this can all be put onto the sports administration. Male athletes are much more avidly watched both live and on T.V compared women. If people can watch the NBA playoffs, what makes them unable to watch the WNBA playoffs? The first thing people need to do is realize that no gender is better or worse than the other, enough people need to change their mindset and realize that before equal pay for athletes is even brought into the equation.

Some might say that women only get paid less because players are given their salaries based on their skill level, but time and time again women have proven themselves to be of equal or even higher level than men in many different sports. Women are no less than men when it comes to anything, this doesn't just go for men and women but also for all LGBTQ+ athletes. LGBTQ athletes get significantly less media attention and coverage yet they are no less of an athlete, no-one is better than the other just because of their sexual orientation.

We live in a world where people preach for racial equality and cultural equality then why can't gender equality be something we also fight for!

# WHEN HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

Written by: Zahel Nasari

History tends to repeat itself. As memory fades, events from the past can become events of the present. Unfortunately, humanity has been unable to learn. The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored murder of eleven million people across Europe between 1933-1945. As a student, I read passages and novels regarding this mass genocide in school. We criticize the government and this injustice but turn a blind eye to the recurring events in the present day.

The Chinese authorities have detained 1 million or more ethnic Uyghurs at prison-like camps in the Xinjiang region. The Uyghurs have been forced to renounce Muslim customs, memorize propaganda songs and study Chinese. More troubling testimonies of beatings, sterilizations of women, and forced labor have reached the West. Based on the stories of survivors, a report was produced regarding the systematic rape and torture of females in the camps. Tursunay Ziawudun, who fled the country after her release and now lives outside Washington, told the British network that women were removed from cells “every night” and raped by Chinese men wearing masks. Moreover, Ms. Ziawudun stated that she and other women had been tortured with electric shocks.

Chinese President Xi Jinping is accountable for these crimes against humanity. The close association of Xi Jinping in the targeting of Uyghurs would support a “plausible” case of genocide against them. Although the situation is complicated, ethnic tensions caused by economic and cultural factors are the main cause of the recent

violence. The Han Chinese are given the best jobs, and the majority do well economically, which has fueled resentment among Uyghurs. Activists state that Uyghur commercial and cultural activities have been increasingly reduced by the Chinese state. Furthermore, there are complaints of harsh restrictions on Islam, with fewer mosques and strict authority over religious institutions.

China has done its best to hide these barbaric and inhuman practices. Reporters and other international observers are not allowed near the camps, and most inmates are prevented from leaving the country following their release. International response to this effort to completely wipe out an ethnic minority has been gradually rising but still falls considerably low of what it should be. The Trump administration had declared that the regime of Xi Jinping was committing

genocide, and it banned some imports from Xinjiang. Antony Blinken, the Biden administration’s new Secretary of State, said that he agrees with the genocide designation.

Additional states ought to be joining the United States in demanding investigations by the United Nations of the alleged rapes, torture, and other abuses.



Pictured above: Protests against the ethnic cleansing of the Uyghurs. (conversation.com)

# AMANDA GORMAN'S WORDS TO REMEMBER

Feature written by: Danna Taboada

The Inauguration of America's 46th president, Joe Biden, was a day to remember. A day filled with exciting, unforgettable moments like the swearing in of the United States' first female, first black and first south Asian Vice President, Kamala Harris, along with Lady Gaga's incredible performance of the national anthem and former First Lady, Michelle Obama's iconic look. However, there was another fellow American who stood out from all the history-making moments that day.

With her vibrant yellow long coat and her fiery red, wide padded satin headband, 22-year-old poet and activist Amanda Gorman astonished the country as she recited her nearly six minute long poem, "The Hill We Climb." She, too, made history that day as the youngest poet ever to recite a poem at a presidential inauguration.

Oprah Winfrey claims she has "never been prouder to see another young woman rise," former President Barack Obama said she delivered a poem "that more than met the moment," and many other celebrities took the time to praise the young poet for the world-changing words she spoke.

"But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated," Gorman declared to those before her and to the millions watching around the country in their homes. "In this truth, in this faith we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us." At a length of 723 words, "The Hill

We Climb" is known as a call for unity among America, how we all still have the ability to come together as one to heal and to continue where we left off. Gorman reflects on the hardships we all had to face. From covid-19 to protests for equality, we have gone through what has been one of the toughest times in American history.

Her words of courage were able to give hope to Americans that there is still light at the end of the tunnel. That although yes, we may have taken a blow, we still manage to get back up on our feet and try. "That even as we hurt, we hoped. That even as we tired, we tried. That we'll forever be tied together, victorious." She reminds her fellow Americans that the future is in our hands and that we will be the ones leaving it behind for the generations to come. And most importantly, in her majestic manner and brave aura, Amanda Gorman lets us know that there is light and that day will arrive.

That day Gorman demonstrated her mastery of a gift, amazing each and every single person watching. The way she recited it along with her encouraging hand movements as they expressed what she was truly feeling deep down inside of her captivated everyone's attention. So much power told in such a graceful yet moving manner.

Before making her groundbreaking moment, Gorman had already a few accomplishments of her own. In the year 2014, she was chosen as the youth poet laureate of Los Angeles,

where she was born. Two years later, she founded the nonprofit organization One Pen One Page, a youth writing and leadership program. Gorman became the first author ever to be featured on XQ Institute's Book of the month in 2017. That same year, she opened the literary season for the Library of Congress as she recited her poem, "In This Place : An American Lyric," becoming the first youth poet to do so. Later in April, during her Harvard years, Amanda became the first person ever to gain the title of National Youth Poet Laureate, after being one of the five finalists across the nation for it.

The weeks following the inauguration have also been quite exciting for the 22-year-old. *The Hill We Climb and Change Sings : A Children's Anthem*, two of her upcoming books sky rocketed to the top of Amazon's bestseller list, taking the two top spots. *The Hill We Climb*, set for release on March 16th, 2021, received a forward by Oprah Winfrey, one of her inspirations. And just recently, Gorman made history once again as she composed another original piece of her own and recited it at the Super Bowl LV's pregame ceremony, where she honored essential workers James Martin, Suzie Doner, and Trimaine Davis.

This is just the beginning for not just Amanda Gorman, but for the new generation, also referred to as "Gen-Z" to rise. It's young people like her that can and will make a difference in the world. Anyone can. As Gorman so eloquently put it, "For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."

# CONDEMNING VIOLENCE

Written by: Cory Wright



Pictured: Rioters storm the Capital. (nbcnews.com)

On January 6th, the world of US politics was flipped on its head once more. The coverage of the riot was at the forefront of media coverage, and rightfully so. Unfortunately, it wasn't the only thing being covered. Various political leaders instantly made their feelings clear, which would have been perfectly fine, had they not accidentally shown their true colors.

To understand the scope of the hypocrisy, one must first understand the context. Over the summer, various riots broke out in condemnation of the murder of George Floyd and systemic racism as a whole. The 1619 riots, named after Nikole Hannah-Jones's controversial long-form journalism project, became a topic of political discourse that has now come back to haunt many of the riots' defenders. From May 26-June 8, it is estimated that the damages totaled around \$1-2 billion in insurance money. More importantly, the chaos caused by the riots resulted in unnecessary loss of life. On June 8th a total of 19 people had already been killed.

Many would go unnamed and forgotten, people like John Tiggs from Illinois who was murdered during looting in southern Chicago. May 31st was the deadliest day in recorded Chicago history with 18 murders within 24 hours, most likely a result of the perceived impunity that the lack of police availability permitted. Rev. Michael Pfleger, leader of the St. Sabina church in Chicago's 12th most dangerous neighborhood, explained that Chicago was "open season" because "there's no police anywhere".

Considering violence like that, it's easy to see why some people were outraged at CNN host Chris Cuomo defending the violence by asking people to "show [him] where it says protesters are supposed to be polite and peaceful". On the 6th however, Cuomo condemned the Capitol Hill riots for being "not peaceful" because Trump is "not about peace" in response to one of Trump's final tweets.

Chris Cuomo wasn't alone.

Political pundits in the United States immediately began to express their thoughts on the impeachment and too many did so while contradicting themselves. Their stance on violence seemed to change when it hit so close to home. They all condemn violence now, as they should, but didn't before. In 2018, President Joe Biden revealed that he wasn't interested in debating Trump. In fact, Biden claimed that he would "take him behind the gym" if they were in high school. That same year House Rep. of California Maxine Waters gave a speech which included the orders to "create a crowd" and "push back" on the members of Trump's cabinet if they are spotted in public. Even actors got in on it. Madonna and Johnny Depp suggested they felt like blowing up the White House and assassinating the president respectively. Kathy Griffin did a photoshoot with a replica of Trump's head, a head detached at the neck from his body and covered in blood. Michigan Rep. Cynthia Johnson told "trumpers" to be careful and tread lightly. In the same video she subsequently told her followers who were in the military that they "know how to do it, make them pay." Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez infamously claimed that "the whole point of protesting is to make [people] uncomfortable" back in December. AOC's feelings on "protesting" seemed to change after she experienced it first hand. "I thought I was going to die" she explained on an Instagram Live video.

These people condemn violence now, but what about tomorrow? I do hope that AOC, along with all of the people who have incited or excused violence before and now claim to hate it, can learn from their mistakes. One can only hope.

# ZOMBIE INSECTS INVADE NEW YORK

Written by: Kaitlyn Verdugo Ortiz

You may start hearing a familiar buzz in the air as the warmer weather hits.

Bugs are undeniably crucial to our environment by providing biodiversity and the balancing of the food chain. After seventeen years of underground isolation, the cicada bugs are ready to rise from underground homes and into our lives. Starting from a rice sized egg in grooves their mother's dig in trees and feeding from tree liquid, young cicadas start digging a whole underground where they stay for up to 17 years, depending on the species. After the 2 to 17 years, cicadas come to the surface as nymphs and shed their nymph exoskeleton so that their wings can inflate with fluid. This liquid, haemolymph, and their adult skin is strengthened as a result. At this adult stage as imagoes, the cicadas are focused on finding a mate and breeding. But, exactly why are these bugs being feared?

Although some trees are affected by cicadas and their groove making, they are, for the most part, harmless creatures. In fact these bugs are demonstrative of various talents. Cicadas are insects who are partially blessed with the ability to sing. Males are those who can flex their tymbals, drum-like organs in their abdomens, allowing them to sing. Some cicadas, both females and males, can make noise by flicking their wings. However, these sounds can reach up to 100 decibels, and when in a great population, can cause disturbances in areas of residence. Considering that the deafening level of decibels is 120, this can be a worrying cause.

The COVID-19 pandemic has somehow overlapped with this momentous occasion, which might be in best interest for people prone to mass infestation. States in the US that are going to be immediately affected by these insects are Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana,

Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C. They are predicted to come out of hiding by May to late June when soil hits 64 degrees Fahrenheit, right at the verge of their life cycle.

Something that can be alarming, is the recent correlation found between cicadas and fungi. *Massospora* fungus infected cicadas are instantaneously hijacked. It takes over the lower portion of the cicada, while keeping it alive, and spreads spores that infect younger cicadas. However, this is not affecting their population whatsoever, instead it is producing a new generation of "zombie" cicadas.

Do not be alarmed! Although this bug may be an infested parasite, a cicada's main priority is still to find a mate after their 17 year reappearance. Due to their small size, cicadas can be threatened when alone, and therefore will only come out in sufficient numbers. According to Michael J. Raupp, professor of Entomology at the University of Maryland and a fellow of the Entomological Society of America, these bugs reach up to 1.5 million per acre. In terms of our New York area, this could mean trillions of cicadas would be present just between us and Georgia.

Regardless of quantity, it is important to stress the importance of wildlife that is not harmful to human kind. It may seem petrifying to acknowledge that these beings are necessary, but they hold a beautiful representation of the life cycle. As human beings, we should honor their wish of 17 year isolation.



Pictured: A zombie cicada! (usatoday.com)



## OVER-HYPED NOVELS AND PLAYS

Written by: Marian Rai

### *Romeo and Juliet* By William Shakespeare

Ah, the play that launched a thousand tragedies. Let's start right off the bat with this universally acclaimed novel; one of the best romantic stories ever written. Two star-crossed lovers who sacrificed themselves in the name of love. How heart-warming! One rarely comes across this level of affection nowadays; everything in this play is right on point. Except for the fact that they had known each other for a day, and that Romeo was just 16 and Juliet only 13, and that Romeo had been heartbroken over a girl just minutes before meeting Juliet (and comparing her to the Sun while standing in the middle of her garden at night. \*shudders\*)

### *The Fault in Our Stars* By John Green

Now before all the TFiOS fans start

coming after me, I'll get one thing straight. I actually liked this novel. It was the over-hype for me that killed all my joy. This novel was beautifully written, no doubt, but there are other novels, addressing the same problems that are adequately well-written yet significantly less popular. And half of the people who say they like the book, haven't even read it; they watched the movies. So let's cut some slack for this novel, okay? Okay.

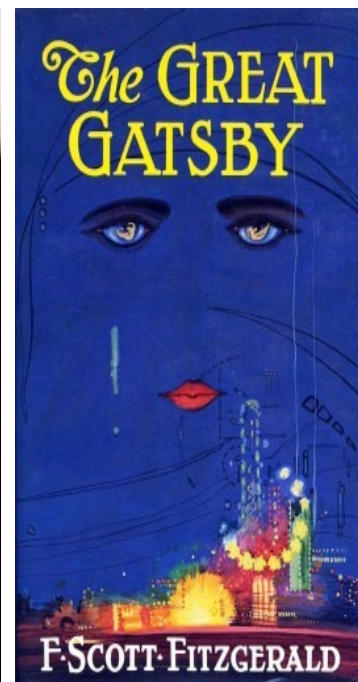
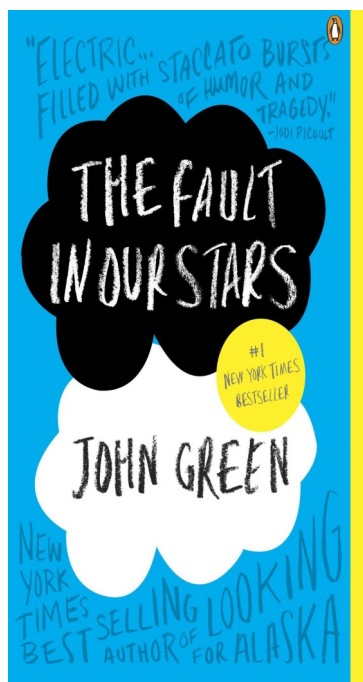
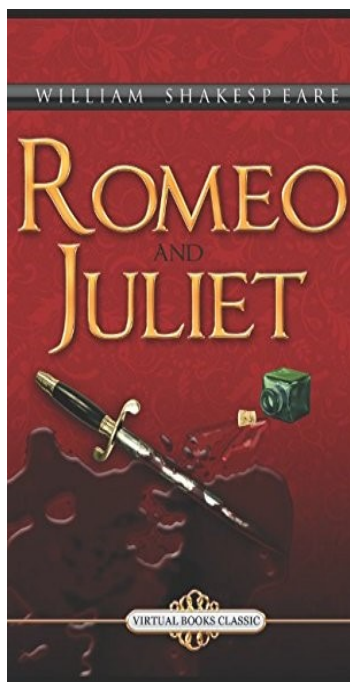
### *The Twilight Series* By Stephanie Meyer

Again, I liked this novel [I'm team Bella ;)], but it was the part where Edward started glowing, and I'm talking radiating-glitters-from his body glowing, in the sun that I died a little inside. Let's admit it, we all did. Jokes aside, I felt that the characters did not really know what they were doing half of the time and the entire second novel was based on how Bella got a paper-

cut and the Cullens went into a frenzy. How's that for an overhype?

### *The Great Gatsby* By F. Scott Fitzgerald

I might actually be too scared to attend Mrs. Lypen's classes after this, but here we go (\*inaudible sobs\*). The prose of *Great Gatsby* is impeccable and the setting is just as beautifully crafted. But other than that, the characters just come off as a bunch of morally complacent people, all morbidly doing the job of representing one thing or the other. Sure it is a great novel, but not really a be all, end all epitome of Great American Novel.



# OLIVIA RODRIGO—RIDING TO THE TOP

Written by: Roxy Dias

The world has been obsessed with Olivia Rodrigo's first single, "Driver's License" as it remains on the top spot of Billboard 100 for the fourth week in a row since its initial release in January. The singer, at only 17 years old, has surpassed numerous records with this global hit, including the record for the most streams in a single day on Spotify, with 13 million streams. This is extremely impressive, especially considering this was Rodrigo's debut song, and she did not have a strong fan base like other household names.

Rodrigo has been a Disney Channel star for years, and is currently starring on the show "High School Musical: The Series." She has previously written one song for the show called "All I Want," which ended up being the most streamed song of the show with over 200 million streams. She's been performing on stage since she was a child, and has started her songwriting journey around less than two years ago.

The hit "Driver's License" is about a teenage heartbreak. Part of the song's popularity is attributed to drama from the show, and a love triangle including two other Disney Channel stars, Joshua Bassett and Sabrina Carpenter. This sparked viral conversation on TikTok, including hilarious renditions of the song from different perspectives, new trends, and other interesting insights regarding the song and drama.

Olivia Rodrigo is a huge Taylor Swift fan, and says that everything she writes draws inspiration from Taylor Swift's imagery and songwriting style. She often refers to Taylor Swift as her musical mother. In fact, she was swept away when Taylor Swift herself commented on Rodrigo's Instagram post of being elated to be on the charts with Taylor. Her other major musical inspiration is Lorde, famously known for her hit "Royals" at age 16. Rodrigo appreciates raw, honest songwriting of these artists and has been compared strongly to both of them. She has also drawn the attention of numerous other artists and huge celebrities that she's been a fan of, including Halsey, Niall Horan, Courteney Cox, and Jimmy Fallon. Some believe that she can become "The Next Taylor Swift." Rodrigo hopes to continue to create music that people

can be vulnerable with.

Many new fans expect big things for Rodrigo. Although there is not a specific release date for her debut album yet, she is planning to release one soon. She has uploaded small clips of her singing different songs she's written, which people have enjoyed. When referring to the sound, she has stated, "My dream is to have it be an intersection between mainstream pop, folk music, and alternative rock." After her record breaking success, the world is waiting to see what she has next, and whether she will live up to the high expectations people have for the future of her career.



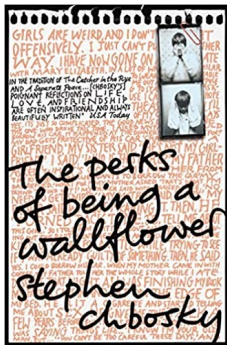
# 5 BOOKS YOU NEED TO READ

Written by: Kaitlyn Corbett

In every book there is a message, a theme, a lesson you learn. I'm still a teenager that's learning and making my way through life, and I like to read books that show a meaning to a life, a book that I could gain knowledge from. There are five books you need to read before you leave your teenage years, and those are:

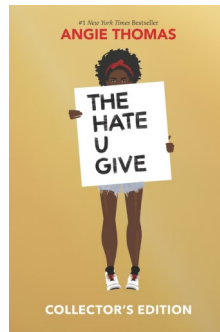
## The Perks of Being a Wallflower

by Stephen Chbosky



The main character Charlie is a fifteen year old narrator. He has just entered his freshman year of high school. Charlie is the eponymous "wallflower."

He is quiet and withdrawn, but he is also observant and thoughtful, always paying close attention to everything going on around him, in every little detail. Charlie was grappling with two traumatic deaths: his best friend from suicide and his Aunt Helen. Charlie suffers from post traumatic stress disorder from those two deaths. Charlie soon learns acceptance and develops a friend group while in high school. which pulled him out of his shell. However, his inner sadness shatters him in the end and he has to learn how to get out on his own, how to reflect.



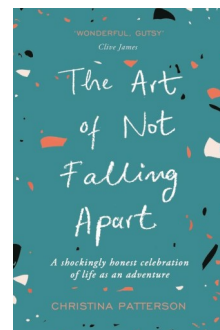
## The Hate U Give

By Angie Thomas

Starr is a teenage girl who grapples with racism, police brutality, and activism after witnessing her black friend get murdered by the police. Star starts having nightmares over the death of her other childhood friend Natasha who died in a crossfire of a gang shooting. This sets off an idea for Starr to start a protest. She does so with her community. It turns into chaos and a huge ordeal because Starr along with her black community want to stand up for their rights and for the people they have lost because of the police force.

## The Art of Not Falling Apart

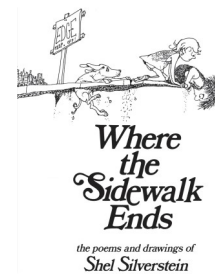
By Christina Patterson



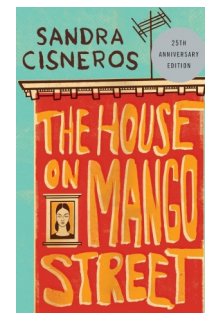
Most of us want love, a nice home, good work, and happy children. Some of us grew up with parents who made these things look relatively easy and assumed we would get them, too. In some cases, we don't. So what does that lead us to do? For Christina Patterson, it was her job as a journalist that kept her going through the ups and downs of life. And then she lost that, too. Dreaming of revenge and irritated by self-help books, she decided to do the kind of interviews she had never done before. The book should be required of anyone giving up, because in this book, you learn about extraordinary life stories of hardship and pain in human nature.

## Where the Sidewalk Ends

By Shel Silverstein



Where the Sidewalk Ends is a three-stanza poem that depicts the adult world as something harsh and demanding, in contrast to a more childlike mentality that can provide a break from the responsibilities and pressures of being an adult. In the poem, the author Shel Silverstein is essentially suggesting that there is a magical place that children know of "where the sidewalk ends." That place represents childhood, its innocence, and its fundamentally different way of looking at the world, as opposed to the way that adults view it. Silverstein wrote the poem for children but many of the ideas expressed in the poem are actually meant for adults. For instance, he made allusions about the fact that adults live in a dark world full of depression while children live in a joyful and lively world. He maintains that adults need to take a step back and use the mindset of children in order to locate joy and happiness just as the kids have.



## The House on Mango Street

By Sandra Cisneros

On Mango Street is a feminist novel written through the eyes of a pre-teen, Esperanza. Throughout the novel there are vignettes of each woman's story on Mango Street. Each story is filled with a woman's lack of power, freedom, and mistreatment.



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