

OCTOBER 2012
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L.A. youth

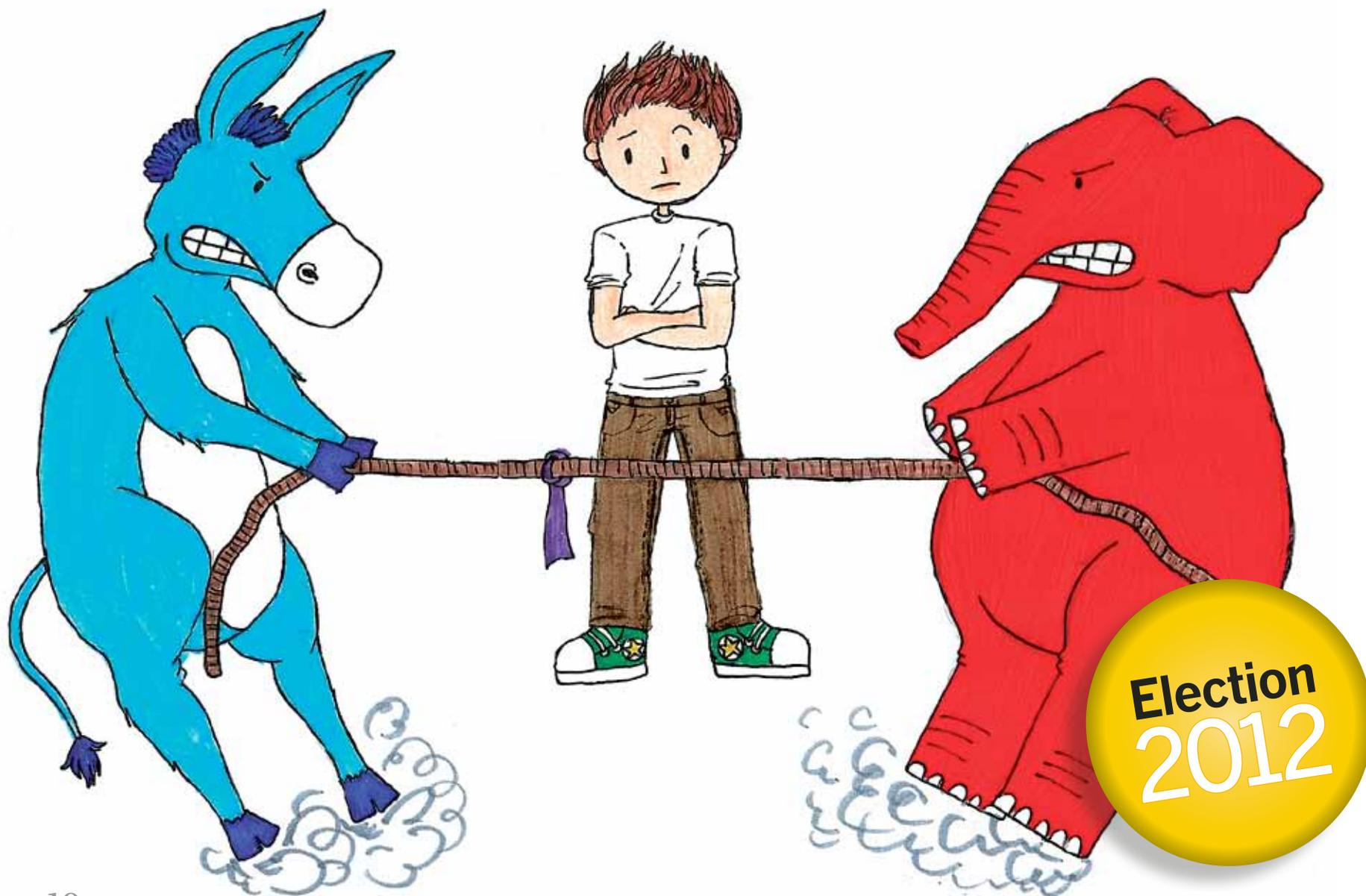
the newspaper by and about teens

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HOW DO YOU DECIDE?

L.A. youth

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WE APOLOGIZE FOR NOT THANKING THE **GOOD WORKS FOUNDATION** IN OUR SEPTEMBER ISSUE AMONG THE LIST OF DONORS THAT CONTRIBUTED OVER \$1,000.

FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

About L.A. Youth

There aren't many cities where teenagers have their own newspaper, but in Los Angeles they do. It's called L.A. Youth, and since 1988, it has given teens more than a voice. With it, they have had a megaphone.

Celebrating our 25th anniversary in January 2013, L.A. Youth's rigorous writing program provides high-quality stories that offer important information to teens. Teachers use the paper to engage students and help them improve their skills.

Teens gather after school and on Saturdays in our mid-city newsroom for editorial meetings. There they work with adult editors one-on-one to rewrite their stories, fact check, and exchange ideas with other staff members from diverse racial, ethnic and economic groups.

There are no requirements to join our staff. Teens bring friends, teachers refer students, parents call us looking for a summer workshop or a place for their son/daughter to improve their writing skills. On Newcomer's Day every other month, prospective writers, illustrators and photographers meet the adult staff.

Benefits to Youth

L.A. Youth is helping to change outcomes for disadvantaged youth by providing the skills and experience needed to help young people become productive members of the community. The supportive learning environment is designed to build self-esteem and the critical thinking skills that are necessary to become successful in today's highly competitive workforce and globalized economy.

L.A. Youth helps to close the achievement gap through its direct service to participating students, its contributions to teachers' curricular tools and its strong role as a youth advocate.

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L.A. Youth is a non-profit charitable organization funded by donations from foundations, corporations and individuals.

The youth in our community represent our future. The investment today will have a lasting impact on a young life, opening the doors to opportunity, education and hope.

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Cover illustration by Courtney Loi, 15,
Sierra Vista HS (Baldwin Park)



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Our staff writers recommend Kimbra, Tyrese and Dev.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Drawing has always been my passion. With just a pencil and scrap paper I can convey my emotions and tell people about myself. Drawing for L.A. Youth has been a challenge because I have to revise my drawings. However, it is more worthwhile to me because my drawings help capture the mood and emotion of the story (p. 16).

—**Vicky Chen, 17, Walnut HS**



BEHIND THE SCENES

When controversy erupted last month over an anti-Islam video produced by a California man, it caused some people to once again believe the stereotype that Islam is violent. So we were glad that one of our writers already was working on a story about being Muslim. With increased attention on her religion, it was an opportunity to let people know what Islam is really about. Hanifati says that Islam has taught her respect and kindness. (p. 24).



STAY IN TOUCH WITH US

Did you like a story in this issue? Hate it? Could you relate? Tell us what you think. Leave a comment on layout.com or on our Facebook page. You can also email us at editor@layout.com or send a letter to L.A. Youth • 5967 W. 3rd St. Suite 301 • Los Angeles CA 90036. We might choose your comment to be published in the newspaper.

SEPTEMBER 2012 ISSUE

A LATINO BOY FELT UNWELCOME IN AMERICA

THE ARTICLE “DO I belong here?” put a picture in my head of how bad racism still is today. I thought it was an inspiring story because Miguel was able to overcome the stereotypes. He didn’t care what others thought of a Latino’s future and started to gain confidence in himself. I’m happy he doesn’t care about stereotypes anymore and is happy to be himself.

Andrew Costley
Manhattan Beach MS

THE ARTICLE “DO I belong here?” really spoke to me. I know how it feels to be discriminated against and it sucks a lot. Just because I’m Asian, people think I should be extraordinarily smart, but other times because I’m Filipino, they call me the “beaner” of Asia. At first I dealt

with it by firing back with more cruel words. Then I figured out that that wasn’t the best thing to do because you can’t stop war by starting war. I learned to just deal with it and not care. I figured out it was a lot easier to watch them get frustrated because they couldn’t get me angry.

Angel Ancheta
Wilson MS (Glendale)

SHARING A BEDROOM WITH HER MESSY SISTER ANNOYED ONE GIRL

I COULD REALLY connect with “Sharing a room is messed up.” Like Zzzahkia and Zzzah-Zzaz, I share a room with my sister. Unlike Zzzahkia, I am the messy sibling, and I tend to hide all of my junk in a pile under my bed. I try to keep my clothes neatly organized in my drawers, but that only lasts for about five days. I try to clean all of my stuff, but I always get

lazy and leave everything the way it is. When I read this article, I felt sorry for my sister and I decided to try to be organized so my sister could have the clean room she longs for.

Esther Kim
Wilson MS

I COULD REALLY connect to “Sharing a room is messed up.” My brother is two years younger than me and we share a room. He is also really messy and I clean up after him. I think that if you are organized, then you will be successful. My brother doesn’t care. It is always his items and clothes all over the room and under his bed. I hope that someday he will learn from me and keep our room clean and organized.

Robert Stepanyan
Wilson MS

A GIRL WAS TERRIBLE AT FLIRTING

I REALLY LIKED Jazmine’s story “How (not) to get the guy.” It shows how girls think. They always use body language or other hints that guys don’t get. Guys just say things out loud. That is why men are considered more hostile, since they aren’t subtle about communicating. If a girl wants another girl to stop a hostile behavior, she gives a stern look. On the other hand, a guy would yell out threats. Just a note to girls: talk. Body language and giggling doesn’t work.

Henry Dilanyan
Wilson MS

I ONCE TRIED hard to get the guy. I agree with Jazmine that it doesn’t always have to be the guy making the first move. Yeah it may be awkward, but you never know what they’ll say. And sometimes if a girl asks a guy out it can mean that they have confidence in themselves. From reading this article, I learned that the guys don’t ALWAYS have to make the first move. Girls have the choice to make the first move too.

Nathalie Gonzalez
Wilson MS

GIVING UP MEAT AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS WASN’T TOO HARD

I REALLY LIKED the article “No meat, no problem.” Your article

made me understand that trying something you’re not ready for does not always turn out bad. There could be a good side to it. I am not planning to become a vegan like the writer but maybe a vegetarian. If I had not read your article, I would have never considered changing anything. Thank you for inspiring me and many other students around L.A.!

Tigran Danielyan
Wilson MS

YOU CAN FIND STYLISH BARGAINS AT THRIFT STORES

I LOVED THE article “Cheap and chic.” By shopping at thrift stores, you can save a ton of money. Before reading this article, I thought that shopping at thrift stores was embarrassing and that the clothes are old and ripped. After reading this article, I realized that I was being foolish and that thrift store shopping is a great way to afford nice clothes that are overpriced at other stores.

Camilia Rowshan
Manhattan Beach MS

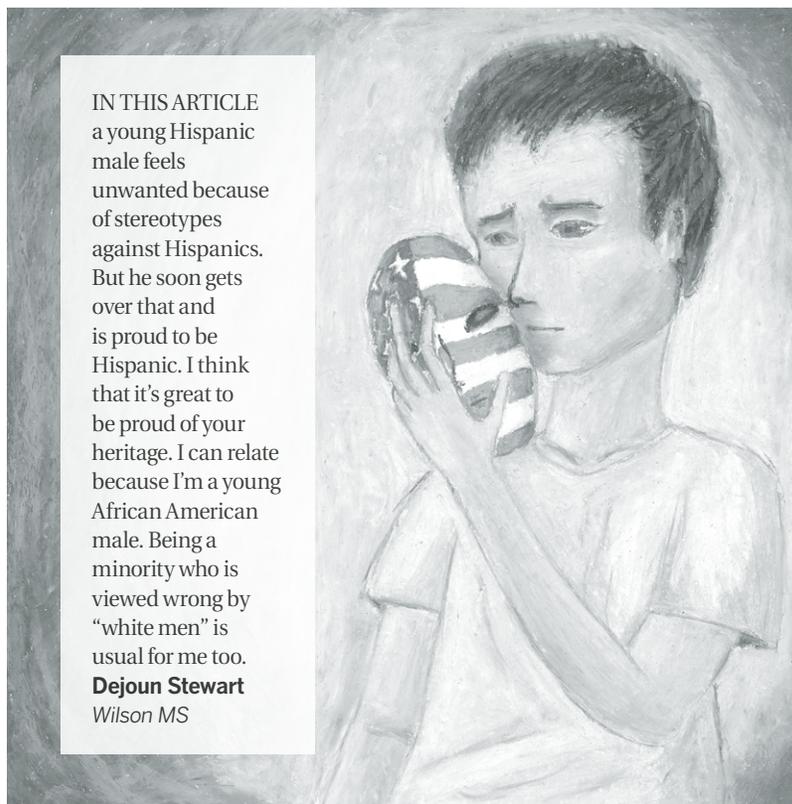
I REALLY CONNECTED with the article “Cheap and chic.” Growing up with rich friends hasn’t been easy. I’m used to seeing people wearing clothes from famous stores but there are also people who cannot afford them. But now I own fabulous clothes and jewelry and I get my clothes for 10 times less than wealthier people do. Sometimes we do end up wearing the same things but with different prices.

Anyana Avedian
Manhattan Beach MS

DON’T USE TEST SCORES TO GRADE TEACHERS

I FOUND THE article “Grading teachers” very smart. I think that students should be a part of a teacher’s evaluation because the work of the students reflects the work of the teachers. If some students fall asleep during class, it may be because the students are tired but other times they fall asleep because the things they are learning are not interesting, and I think this article definitely describes that.

Parnia Mazhar
Manhattan Beach MS



IN THIS ARTICLE a young Hispanic male feels unwanted because of stereotypes against Hispanics. But he soon gets over that and is proud to be Hispanic. I think that it’s great to be proud of your heritage. I can relate because I’m a young African American male. Being a minority who is viewed wrong by “white men” is usual for me too.

Dejoun Stewart
Wilson MS

Illustration by Cindy Kim, 17, Whitney HS (Cerritos)

We deserve safe parks

These teens say they wish security was better so they could use them more

LAST MONTH A 19-year-old college student was shot to death while sitting on a bench at a park in South Los Angeles. Police said he was an innocent bystander who was shot by a gang member who they think mistook him for a rival gang member. The city had plans to add security cameras to the park, but they hadn't been installed yet. When we talked to our staff writers, several said that they didn't always feel safe using the parks in their neighborhoods.

There is a beautiful park a five-minute walk from my school in East L.A. Hollenbeck Park has a lake with a trail that goes around it. Lots of people, including me, run through the park but one thing is sure: you better run during the day. After 7 p.m. it gets dangerous.

A month ago, I was running on the trail around 9:30 p.m. when seven to nine gangbangers yelled at me, "Hey, why you running? Who's chasing you?"

When I wouldn't answer they yelled, "Hey kid, get the f*** out of here. Don't let me catch you here again." I finished my lap and went home shook up. I had no idea if they were carrying weapons.

Thankfully there's Belvedere Park, which is about 10 minutes from my home by car. I love going there. It has baseball and soccer fields, basketball courts, a playground, tennis courts, and also a pool and a skate park. My friends and I skate there once a month. Belvedere is so safe that it's like you're at home.

The city could make some parks safer by setting up a police station in them or at least have more patrol cars driving around them. People should feel safe at all our parks all the time.

Erik Tovar, 17, Roosevelt HS

Although I live near two parks, I don't go to either of them. In my neighborhood, Koreatown, the parks are dangerous. There are taggings on walls and at night when I drive by I can see gang members inside. They are also dirty. I've seen broken bottles, cigars and used cups on the ground.

The first time I went to one of those parks was with my friends in middle school. We saw homeless people sleeping and a drunk man walking around. I saw a group of men playing cards, but I didn't see any children. The park



Erik says Hollenbeck Park is safe during the day but not at night.

Photo by Daniel Guzman, 17, Roosevelt HS

smelled like rotten eggs. We left and went to hang out at a café. I never went to the park again.

Instead, on weekends my parents and I drive 15 minutes to Griffith Park. The best thing about Griffith Park is that there are hiking trails. We like challenging ourselves, so we take one of the long trails. We hike with my dog. The park is clean and safe—I haven't seen any litter or tagging.

I wish the city would have more police at the parks near me. This would keep the gang members away so people in the neighborhood could use them. If the parks were safe, I would go there after school to do homework or hang out with friends. I might sit under a tree and read a book instead of playing on the computer at home.

**Ju-Young Kim, 17,
UCLA Community School**

Outside of my apartment building in downtown, the walls of the nearby buildings are hidden beneath graffiti, and there are drunks curled up on the sidewalks. I also live near the border of two rival gangs. The streets in my neighborhood are dangerous, and sadly they keep me from going to Vista Hermosa Park, which is a few blocks from my home.

One day in March, I went for a run at Vista Hermosa. I wasn't worried about going out alone at 5 p.m. since the sun shone bright and people were walking home from work.

As I was running up and down a hill next to the park I noticed a car was slowly coming to a stop near me. A middle-aged man stuck his head out the driver's window and stared at me. I scowled at him, trying to disguise my fear. I jogged up the hill again and

turned around. I felt relieved when I saw that he was gone. I was worried that he'd return so I went into the park to lose him.

Once I got inside, I saw other people running or enjoying the view of downtown. It was almost like I was in another world. The park has a clean playground and a soccer field that is always used by leagues. But after only one lap around the park's nice dirt trail, I was still afraid of being followed so I headed home. On the way I had to pass by six males all covered in gang tattoos.

Having a lovely park doesn't matter if the neighborhoods around it aren't safe. The city should provide more police and install more security cameras around the park. Maybe then it'll be safe enough to enjoy.

**Estelita Pascual, 17,
Downtown Magnets HS**

Living in the hills of Sylmar there are no restaurants or cool stores within walking distance of my house. So if there were no parks in my neighborhood I'd feel like I had nothing to do. But I'm lucky. There are two parks within three blocks of my house, and they both feel safe.

El Cariso Park is big with lots of trees. It has a pool where my sister loves swimming. Every time I've been there, there have been more than a dozen people running or walking and some parents playing with their kids. I've invited friends to come run or have picnics with me for a few years now.

Sometimes when I feel like hanging out in a more secluded place I go to Veterans Memorial Park, which is smaller. It has short hiking trails that I love. My family goes several times a week to exercise. It's like stepping out of the city without going far. Other times I'll go by myself to read. Even though there aren't a lot of people around I still feel safe because there is always a sheriff's deputy or two strolling around.

**Jazmine Mendoza, 17, Social Justice
Humanitas Academy (San Fernando)**

Win money!

You could be one of three teens to win \$100 by taking our survey about poverty

The United States is known as the land of opportunity, where with hard work you can achieve anything. But does the American Dream still exist? Millions of Americans today are struggling to pay their bills, find a job, get medical care or have enough to eat. In 2010 more than 46 million Americans lived below the federal poverty line (which means they lived on about \$23,000 a year for a family of four), according to the Census Bureau. By answering this survey, you can help L.A.

Youth find out what teens think about poverty, like what they think causes it and if they think there's a way to rise out of it. If you answer every question, you will be entered in a drawing. Three people will be randomly chosen from all the entries to win \$100 each.

Please fill out the survey only once either here or at layout.com. To be eligible to win the money you must answer all the questions and your name, address and phone number must be included.

To be eligible for the drawing to win \$100, please fill in the following information. Your information will be kept confidential. It is used only to mail checks to winning entrants. The deadline is December 1, 2012.

Name _____

Email _____

Age _____ Sex: M F

School _____

Grade _____

Teacher write in if you were given the survey by a teacher _____

Home street address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____ - _____

Your race or ethnicity: Latino Black White Asian

Other (write in) _____

Teachers who have 100 students
will be entered to win one of two
\$250 STAPLES GIFT CARDS.

YOUR FAMILY

- Who works in your household?
 - Both parents
 - Neither parent
 - One parent
- Does anyone in your household work more than one job?
 - Yes
 - No
- Do you or your siblings work to help support the family?
 - Yes
 - No
- Who do you live with? (Check all that apply.)
 - Parent(s) & siblings
 - Relatives
 - Grandparents
 - Not with family
- How many cars does your family have?
 - None
 - Two
 - One
 - More than two
- How do you get around? (Check all that apply.)
 - Bus/
 - I drive my own car
 - Metro train system
 - Bike
 - Parents drive me
 - Walk/skateboard
 - Other (write-in): _____
- Do you receive free or reduced price lunch at school?
 - Yes
 - No

- How does your family pay for health care?
 - We have insurance through a parent's job
 - We have government assistance, like Medi-Cal
 - We don't have health insurance
 - I'm not sure

- Has your family had trouble paying for or been unable to pay for any of the following within the past year? (Check all that apply.)
 - Rent or house payment
 - Transportation (car payments, gasoline or bus pass)
 - Utility bills (electricity, water, Internet/cable, cell phone)
 - Medical bills
 - Child care
 - Food
 - Clothes

- Have you had to cut back on any of the following in the last year because your family didn't have enough money to give you? (Check all that apply.)
 - Eating out with friends
 - Going to movies
 - Shopping for clothes
 - Buying video games/music
 - After-school activities
 - Other (write-in): _____

- Is your family saving money so that you can go to college?
 - Yes
 - I don't know
 - No

YOUR ATTITUDES

- Check all of the following statements that you agree with.
 - People are poor because of circumstances beyond their control, like the loss of a job, medical problems or they don't get paid enough money
 - People are poor because of bad choices they've made like being lazy or abusing

- drugs or dropping out of school
- A person's success depends on the quality of their school
- A person's success is based on luck
- People born into rich families are more likely to be rich in the future
- Children in poor families are more likely to be poor in the future

- How would you rate your family's financial situation today?
 - We're rich
 - We're not rich, but we're comfortable
 - It's tough to pay bills, but we manage
 - We're poor

- Here is a list of things the government could do to directly help the poor in America. Check the ones you would support:
 - Increase minimum wage
 - Provide money to help families pay for daycare
 - Provide money to help families pay for medical expenses or health insurance
 - Provide free or discounted transit passes
 - Provide more money to buy food (food stamps)
 - Provide more job training

- Whose responsibility is it to help the poor? (Check all that apply.)
 - People should help themselves
 - The government should help
 - Churches and community organizations

- Do you believe that through hard work people can get out of poverty? Please explain why or why not.

RULES

- 1) Contest entries must be original artwork of Los Angeles County youth ages 13 to 19.
- 2) The work may be done in any medium, including acrylics, oils, charcoal, pencil, pen, watercolor, collage, multimedia, photography or sculpture. The dimensions should be 8 1/2" by 11". Three-dimensional artwork should include a photograph of the artwork.
- 3) Each artist may submit only one entry.
- 4) The artist's name, age, home address and phone number should be included on the back of the artwork. If the artist is in school, the school's name should be included. If the artwork was created as an assigned project in a classroom, the teacher's name should be listed. Artwork will be returned if a return address is provided.

The teen staff of L.A. Youth will select a first-, second- and third-place winner as well as some honorable mentions. The first-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$100. The second-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$75, and the third-place student and teacher will get \$50 each. Winners and honorable mentions will be published in the May-June 2013 issue of L.A. Youth and on layouth.com.

Questions?

Contact us at (323) 938-9194 or editor@layouth.com.

DEADLINE:
MARCH 31,
2013

We're moving in 2013! For our mailing address go to layouth.com or email us at editor@layouth.com

L.A. Youth art contest



1ST PLACE
\$100
2ND PLACE
\$75
3RD PLACE
\$50

Most of us have spent time thinking about the future. What will life be like and what will our world look like?

For this year's art contest we want you to create a piece of art that shows us what the future looks like to you. What do you hope will change for the better or what do you fear will change for the worse?

Next are some ideas to get you thinking about what type of future you

envision. You may imagine a different future from the examples here and that's OK.

What do you think will happen with race relations? Will we all get along or will we become more divided? What about world peace? Do you think countries will get rid of their weapons or that we'll go to war again?

Or maybe you want to show what role you think technology will play in our lives. Do you imagine a post-apocalyptic world where robots have

taken over humans? Or do you imagine exciting technological advances improving our lives?

A lot of people are worried about the environment. Do you think we'll have solar panels on every house or do you think we won't be able to stop the harmful effects of global warming?

Before you get started, think, what's most important to you when you think about the future? How can you express your idea in a way that other people will understand what you're saying?

When does like become love?

It's been hard to know when to say 'I love you' to the guys I've dated

By Zzzzah-Zzaz Burnley
16, King Drew Medical Magnet HS

In past relationships I've said the words "I love you" and I've heard "I love you too." I wonder, how do I know if this is true? What's the real meaning of love? I've said it to three people. It was exciting each time but I questioned when I should have said it and even if I should have said it.

It was the summer after fifth grade when I first met Alton. I was spending my summer vacation in Mississippi visiting my relatives. I was only 9 and he was 11. One hot day we were chilling on the porch when three boys approached and asked who me and my sister were. We introduced ourselves and talked for a couple of minutes.

About a week passed and one day my cousin Carla ran in the house telling me that Alton liked me. I was shocked and happy, because I thought he was cute.

We returned to Mississippi the following year and that's when Alton and I started talking. We were both shy so we would write letters to each other and when we did talk it was in a group. He asked me out two weeks before I was leaving to go back to California. I opened his letter while sitting on the porch and it said, "Do you want to go out with me?" I wrote back saying, "I would, but I'm leaving in two weeks." After reading it he looked up at me with a sad face. He folded it up, put it back in his pocket and rode off on a four-wheeler.

A day or so later he gave me another letter asking me to go out with him for the second time. I said, "I like you too but you're in Mississippi and I'm out here. It's not going to work."

When I came home and started seventh grade, we started talking through Facebook and when I got a phone we exchanged numbers and talked often. After a few months, we weren't officially together but it seemed like we were.

I HOPED HE FELT THE SAME WAY I DID

One afternoon we were texting about the fact that we could have talked in person but we didn't. I said that now that we were in different places I regretted not talking to him when I had the chance. Out of the blue I decided to text "I love you." I was anxious. What is he going to say? He said it right back. I sent a smiley face and he sent one back. We kept talking but there was no discussion about the fact that we said it.

After that, I was always the one who said "I love you"

first. I felt super happy when I would get the text "I love you too." But I wondered, "When are you going to say it first? Are you saying it back just because I'm saying it?"

I looked forward to seeing him the following summer but we never went back to Mississippi. I don't even know how it ended. We just drifted apart.

At the time I thought I loved him but looking back on it now, I'm embarrassed that I was telling someone I loved him when I was that young. How did I even know what love was? It's something we hear our parents and older couples say and then we decide to say it. I was shy so it was easier to say "I love you" because we weren't

I thought, "OK I'm going to say it now." I said, "I love you too." His face lit up and he smiled. I did too. It felt like we were the only two people in the world. What a perfect couple, although we had no idea what love was. Saying it to each other made the relationship official.

face-to-face. When he received the message his facial expression could have been shocked or confused or unsure how to respond but I'll never know.

The second time was different because I was older and I felt I had a better understanding of what love meant.

I met Terrence at his auntie's house toward the end of seventh grade. That was the place my sister and I would go after school. I would hang out with his cousins. He would be there too sometimes but we'd be in the backyard listening to music and he'd be in the den on the computer.

We were at the house one day in eighth grade and one of his cousins told me, "You know Terrence likes you." I thought he was cute but nothing more. His auntie had a big van and every day she'd take us home. One day it was just me and Terrence sitting in the back seat. We asked each other, "What do you like to do?" He was eating Oreos so I asked him, "Are Oreos your favorite cookies?" After that day, we talked more.

Around late February he asked me out through a text

message. I said yes. Terrence and I would hang out on the bench before school started. Throughout the day I'd be with my friends and he'd be with his, then after school we'd meet up and hang out in the hallways and go back across the street to his aunt's house. Terrence, his cousins, me and my sister would listen to music, dance, sing.

Every time I'd see him, I'd blush. After arriving home, I loved to text him, even though I'd seen him all day.

One day after a month or two, he texted me that he loved me. I thought, "Why so quickly? How do you love someone after dating them for one or two months?" I wasn't sure if I loved him. I always thought I'd know I loved someone when I was married to them because I was committed to them. After he told me, it was all I could think about. I like you so does that mean I love you too? I felt bad that he said it to me and I didn't say it back.

I WAS READY TO SAY IT

A couple days later, we were at his auntie's house sitting on his couch. I thought, "OK I'm going to say it now." I said, "I love you too." His face lit up and he smiled. I did too. It felt like we were the only two people in the world. What a perfect couple, although we had no idea what love was. Saying it to each other made the relationship official.

After that we'd say "I love you" when we were hanging out at his auntie's house. We'd be on the couch talking and I'd say it and he'd say it back.

I thought I was in love because we were really close. I knew his favorite song, "Heartless" by Kanye West, and I'd think of him whenever I'd hear it. I felt comfortable sharing things with him and he'd share everything with me. I felt like "I love you" is what you're supposed to say when you really like someone.

But one day close to graduation I told him that since we were going to go to different high schools, we should go our separate ways. I said that in high school, we'll meet different people and start new relationships. He agreed and we broke up.

The third time it took about a month to say "I love you" after he said it to me, and that's how I knew I really was in love.

Diondre and I met at school after lunch. The bell had just rang for everyone to start heading to fifth period. I was a freshman and he was a sophomore. He said "hi" all excited. I said hi back. From there we started talking during nutrition and lunch. There was a big group of us and he would always sit next to me. After a few months



Illustration by Alison Lee, 16, Whitney HS (Cerritos)

he would do stuff that was unlike friends, like massage my shoulders. If I said “it’s hot,” he’d say, “I know you are.” It was awkward. Uh, friends don’t do that.

One day he asked me, “Do you want to go out with me?” and I said no. Over the next year Diondre asked me out so many times and I rejected him each and every time, but he knew how I was feeling. He’d say, “I don’t know why, you know you like me” and I wouldn’t say anything. I had started to like him but I didn’t want to risk our friendship by getting into a relationship and something going wrong.

A week before school ended he told me he was moving to Utah. I thought it was a joke, but he didn’t come to school on the last day. I didn’t have his phone number but he found me on Facebook. We started talking. How have you been? Those simple conversations.

One day he messaged me on Facebook and told me he loved me. I wrote back, “You love me? How do you know that? It could be a strong like.” He said, “I’m telling you I do.”

After that he kept saying “I love you” and I didn’t like that. It was pushy, like he was forcing it on me. I’d write, “Oh I know you do, you keep telling me this :)”

I FELL FOR HIM

But the more he kept saying it, the more I believed it. I started to like him because I knew how much he liked me. I loved talking to him because he wanted to know everything about me. How are you doing? How’s your day going? When I would ask, “What about you?” he’d say, “Don’t worry about me, it’s about you.” He made me feel really important.

One day I told him that I had liked him and I didn’t know why I pushed him away when we were at school. He said he knew I liked him. After that we were closer.

I was at my cousin’s house one night and we’d been texting each other all day. I couldn’t get enough of talking to him. Out of the blue I texted “I love you.” I was eager to see his reply. I knew it would be good but I still wanted to know what he was going to say back. He said “I love you too” and “You finally said it. I’m so happy.” We were both happy.

I’m not sure how it made him feel but for me, it didn’t change things. I had known that I really liked him but I hadn’t told him. We’d talk every day. As soon as school was out and I would turn on my phone, I’d always have a text message waiting. It would say, “Hey, how was your day?” or “I miss talking to you.”

Now we consider ourselves boyfriend and girlfriend but we can’t see each other. The only thing in the way is the 700 miles.

Teens say “I love you” too quickly and when they’re too young, even me. Love isn’t like saying hello. In the future, even if I feel it I’m not going to say it too early. I’ll wait because I want it to really mean something. After we’ve spent more time together I’ll eventually say it. I’ll know more about that person so it’ll make it more meaningful.



Zzzzah-Zzaz’s favorite part about relationships is the beginning, because it’s fresh and new.

On Nov. 6 Americans will elect a president, but since most teens can't vote it can be hard to feel like the election relates to you. Still, it's important to know what's going on, because issues like jobs, college costs, health care and immigration do affect you. Politics can be confusing so we wrote these stories to help you



make sense of it all. Melissa writes about trying to figure out which political party fits her values. We also have a story from Avika, who explains why the election matters to her and why it should matter to you too. And we've researched where Barack Obama and Mitt Romney stand on the issues to help you figure out who you support.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE?



Illustration by Courtney Loi, 15, Sierra Vista HS (Baldwin Park)

By Melissa Nuñez
16, Warren HS (Downey)

I've grown up with Republican parents. I would hear them talk about the issues in the news and I would agree with them because, being my parents, I thought they were always right. When George W. Bush ran in 2000 I was 5 years old and my parents talked about how they liked his family values. By the time I was 8 years old I would tell my parents I was a Republican. I took it so seriously that I even told them that I was going to be the first Hispanic woman Republican president.

As I got older it bothered me that I didn't have a reason to be a Republican besides that my parents were. So in sixth grade I looked up "Republican Party" and "Democratic Party" on Wikipedia. I read a few sentences but it made no sense because I didn't know what some terms meant like "laissez-faire," "fiscal" and "Reaganomics." So I Googled "Republican

What do they stand for?

I wasn't sure if I was a Republican or a Democrat



Melissa says if you're confused about politics, don't be afraid to do some research and find out more.

beliefs" and the websites I found were more helpful.

I read that Republicans have traditional family values, like the woman staying at home and taking care of the children while the man works. Republicans believe in lower taxes and less government spending. I knew from my dad that Republicans were against abortion and for the death penalty. Republicans are against same-sex marriage. Republicans are conservative, which means they stick more to tradition.

I read that Democrats believe in social programs like welfare and food stamps. They believe that higher taxes and more government spending will increase prosperity for everyone. Democrats support abortion rights and same-sex marriage but are against the death penalty. Democrats are liberal, meaning they are more open to change.

After reading all of this I thought I had a clearer understanding of what each party stood for and I was sure I was a Republican. I think there should be less spending on welfare because I've seen some people

Why the election matters to me

Even though I can't vote, I want to know what the candidates plan to do about issues like jobs and college costs



Photo by Kevin Yin,
17, Walnut HS

misuse it. I am against abortion and for the death penalty. I don't think we should destroy the chance for another human to be born and if someone commits a horrible crime like mass murder they should get the death penalty.

I didn't know much about the debate over same-sex marriage so I didn't have a view on it yet. But in eighth grade I started hearing people debating whether two people of the same gender should be allowed to marry. I thought, "If they love each other, there shouldn't be a problem." Even though my parents are conservative, they taught me to be open-minded. I became a supporter of gay rights and same-sex marriage.

I THOUGHT MY SUPPORT OF GAY MARRIAGE MADE ME A DEMOCRAT

I knew Republicans were against gay marriage because I'd heard the debate over Prop. 8, which was a California proposition that took away the right of same-sex couples to marry. I thought that to be part of a political party you had to agree with everything. Since I didn't, I thought I must be a Democrat or a "moderate," which at the time I thought was someone who is not a Republican or a Democrat.

After the 2008 election when I was in ninth grade, I heard about Meghan McCain, the daughter of Senator John McCain. She was a popular topic on the news because even though she's a Republican and the daughter of a former Republican presidential candidate, she supports gay marriage, is pro-choice and believes in legalizing marijuana. I became even more confused.

The summer before junior year I was thinking about my future. I want a family but I also want to have a career. I've always known that Republicans are traditional when it comes to family but I never thought much about it. I've seen it in my family; my parents decided it was better for my mom not to work so she could raise me. So I thought, "I think differently about this too. Does that make me more of a Democrat than a Republican?" I liked being a Republican but I wasn't going to give up my belief just to agree with a political party. I felt like I had to give up being a Republican even if I didn't want to.

I finally got my doubts cleared up during my U.S. history class junior year. My teacher was talking about what makes a person a Republican or a Democrat. I asked him, "What if someone has a view that's not Republican, like being for same-sex marriage, but the rest of what they believe is Republican?" He said that not every Republican thinks the same way. There can be Republicans who have views that are more like Democrats. I finally got the answer to my question. I felt relieved. I could be a Republican even though not all my views were Republican.

I hope that reading this article helps you understand the difference between a Republican and a Democrat and how you can figure out what party you identify with more. If you're stuck in the middle, you might be a moderate, which means you have a few views from both parties. I'm a moderate Republican—I'm not a hardcore Republican but I'm also not a liberal. Knowing what party you are will make your decision easier when it's time to register to vote and you get asked what political party you want to be part of.

By Avika Dua

17, Walnut HS

I was in eighth grade during the 2008 presidential campaign. It was the first election I followed because I was required to watch the news as homework for my social studies class. At first I couldn't understand most of what they were saying, but it became easier to understand after a few days. The more I understood, the more I felt that the election was important. I decided to support Barack Obama over John McCain because my parents were supporting Obama, he gave powerful speeches and he seemed to care about the things I cared about—health care for all and gay rights. I begged my mom to buy me an Obama shirt and started debating kids in social studies about abortion and immigration.

Though I was excited to wear my Obama shirt and talk to classmates about something more important than crushes or the school play, I couldn't vote and the issues I cared about didn't directly affect me. It wasn't until my dad lost his job a month before the election that I felt touched by one of its central issues—the economy. Since I knew my family's financial situation was going to get worse, Obama's promise to cut taxes for the middle class and provide health care for all meant even more to me. As each day passed with my dad at home and my older sister telling me to ask my parents for things less often, I wanted Obama elected more.

After the election when I was a freshman, I looked into other issues, like education and national defense. I took liberal versus conservative tests and fell in the liberal range. I realized I was a liberal Democrat and signed up for emails to get information on Obama's 2012 campaign.

I WANTED TO HELP RE-ELECT OBAMA

The summer before junior year, I wanted to start a "Students for Obama" group in Walnut—a conservative town—with my two best friends. We registered our group on barackobama.com and then heard from Allie, our region's field director. We met her and she told us how we could organize volunteers. Some ideas she gave us were to recruit volunteers outside of grocery stores, meet and discuss campaign issues, and register voters. I pictured the group having a huge Facebook fan base.

We made a list of around 30 classmates who we thought might be interested in joining. Using Facebook, we invited them to an intro meeting at the park, but there were only four confirmed attendees (three of them being the hosts). One person commented on the event page, saying, "How can *we* help? We're too young to vote. I really don't think sticking Obama signs on people's lawns is going to do anything." I deleted the event page a few days later, since it seemed like people weren't interested.

And I can see why. Most politicians are more than two or three times our age and talk

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page about issues, like taxes and health care, that seem to only affect us through our parents. We say we'll start caring when we're 18 and actually have jobs and a vote.

But our futures really do depend on the next president's policies on issues like jobs, the cost of higher education and immigration.

The economy is a big one. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 12.5 million people are unemployed. I often feel discouraged when my parents tell me that I should be interested in studying computer science or health care because that is where job opportunities are, rather than studying something I care about. Seeing my dad go from job to job also makes me scared for my own prospects. I want to see the next president lower the unemployment rate in the next four years.

Rising college costs also have me worried. My friends and I spend a lot of time scouring the Internet for scholarships because we're afraid that even if we get into our dream schools, we won't be able to afford them. I'm doubtful that I'll be able to afford college without financial aid and student loans. I believe that education is a right that the federal government should guarantee everyone by providing financial aid. I'd like the next president to support education by budgeting more money for Pell Grants and student loans.

Immigration policy also concerns me because I don't like the idea of a "melting pot" turning away immigrants. Congress could vote on the DREAM Act, a proposal for a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. If it passes, the president will decide whether it becomes law. Also, Obama's executive order that allows undocumented young people to apply for work permits without being deported could be undone or kept depending on who is elected president.

Since getting involved with the election, I've made videos with my friends about why young people should vote. We interview people about the 26th Amendment (which gave youth ages 18-20 the vote) and the increasing involvement of young people in elections. We show the videos to people who can vote but feel that their vote doesn't matter, and to people who can't vote to get them interested in learning about the issues. One of our videos even aired on C-SPAN.

I'm too young to vote, but I believe people my age can start thinking about what we find important so we feel ready to make informed decisions when we turn 18. However confusing politics may seem, it's about what issues matter to us, and how we want to see them addressed.



Avika is going to encourage her friends who are 18 to vote.

Election
2012



BARACK OBAMA

Democrat, Age: 51

44th president of the United States, former U.S. senator from Illinois. Also served as a state senator.

Graduated from Columbia University; Law degree from Harvard.

Married to Michelle and has two children. Vice-presidential running mate is Joe Biden, a former senator from Delaware.

Photo courtesy of whitehouse.gov

Compare the candidates

Find out where the candidates stand on the issues you care about

By Araceli Gutierrez & Renzo San Juan

17, Cleveland HS (Reseda) 15, Belmont HS

Economy

Fact: The unemployment rate is at 7.8 percent and the budget deficit was \$1.1 trillion during the last budget year.

OBAMA

- Wants to extend the Bush tax cuts for people making less than \$250,000 a year and eliminate the cuts for people earning more.
- Would cut taxes on businesses from 35 to 28 percent and make up the difference by getting rid of tax breaks.
- Created initiative that aims to create jobs by doubling exports by the end of 2014.
- Supported an act that would have offered a 20 percent tax break to businesses to move jobs back to the United States and eliminate tax deductions for companies that outsource jobs. The act didn't pass Congress.

ROMNEY

- Wants to keep Bush tax cuts for everyone, including people making more than \$250,000 a year.

- Wants to cut taxes by 20 percent and make up the difference by getting rid of deductions, but hasn't said which ones.
- Would cut taxes on businesses from 35 to 25 percent.
- Has said he supports the "cut, cap and balance" approach to curbing deficit spending (when the federal government spends more than it has). The approach would cut federal spending and pass a Constitutional amendment that the federal government has to have a balanced budget every year.

Immigration

Fact: There are roughly 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States.

OBAMA

- Pushed for passage of the DREAM Act, which would provide a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants who came to the United States before they were 16, attended college or went into the military.
- Issued an executive order that deferred

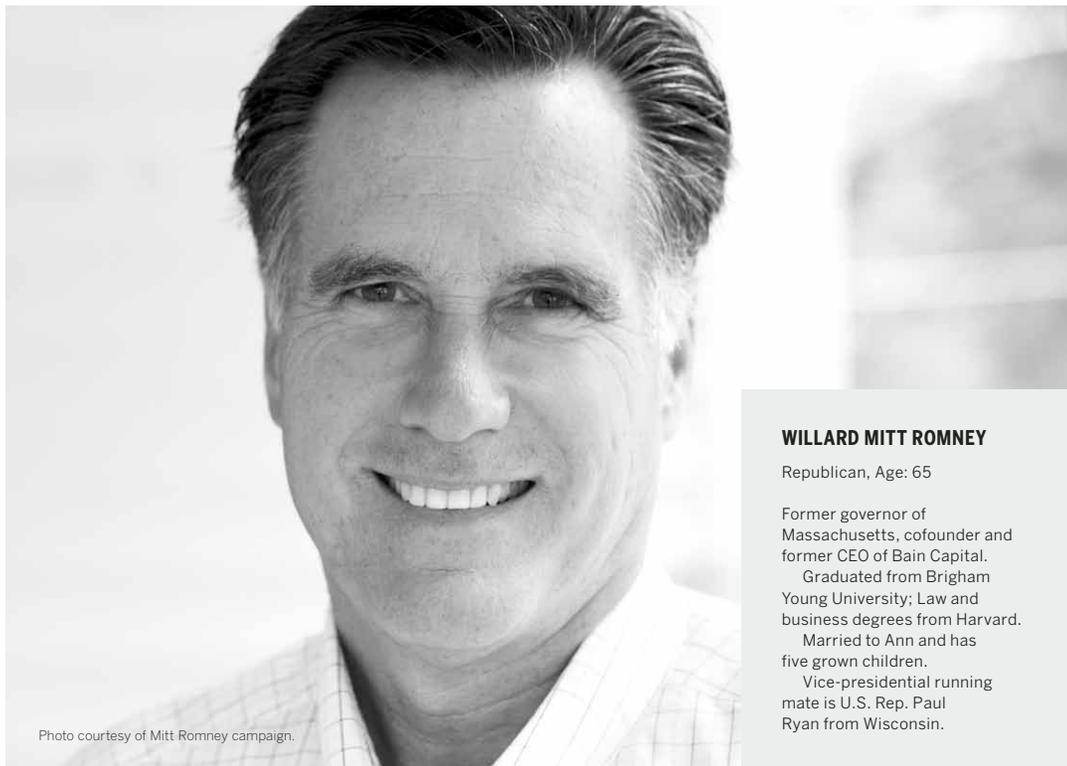


Photo courtesy of Mitt Romney campaign.

WILLARD MITT ROMNEY

Republican, Age: 65

Former governor of Massachusetts, cofounder and former CEO of Bain Capital.
 Graduated from Brigham Young University; Law and business degrees from Harvard.
 Married to Ann and has five grown children.
 Vice-presidential running mate is U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan from Wisconsin.

- deportation of young undocumented immigrants (“dreamers”) and allows them to get a work permit. The two-year temporary visas can be renewed.
- Supports increased penalties on employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers.
- Has deported almost 400,000 immigrants a year, which is more than George W. Bush.

ROMNEY

- Allow more highly educated workers to come to the United States on visas.
- Opposes in-state tuition and driver’s licenses for illegal immigrants.
- Says he will complete a high-tech fence to enhance border security along the U.S.-Mexico border.
- Will develop a mandatory system that would enable employers to be sure that those they hire are eligible to work. Employers who hire undocumented workers will be penalized.
- Does not support Obama’s executive order that defers deportation of young undocumented immigrants, but said he would not revoke their temporary visas.

Environment

OBAMA

- Set higher fuel economy standards that require automakers to nearly double the average fuel economy on new cars and trucks by 2025.
- Favors an “across the board” energy strategy that includes investments in alternative energy and increased domestic oil and natural gas production.
- He supports cap and trade, an approach to control pollution with economic incentives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

ROMNEY

- Energy plan includes more drilling for oil in limited areas such as the Arctic to relieve rising oil costs.
- Proposed a comprehensive survey of America’s energy reserves and opening them for development.

- Plans to approve the Keystone Pipeline, which would bring oil from Canada to the Gulf Coast.

Education

Fact: The cost of attending college has increased at twice the rate of inflation.

OBAMA

- Signed a law that says college graduates can pay no more than 10 percent of their income toward their student loan, which tries to make student loans more affordable.
- Doubled funding for Pell Grants and increased the number of recipients from 6 million to 9.7 million since 2008.
- Replaced No Child Left Behind with Race to the Top, which has rewarded states more than \$4.35 billion for reforms to raise standards, help teachers improve and turn around struggling schools. The reforms he’s pushing include using standardized test results to evaluate teachers, which has been opposed by teachers unions.
- Awarded \$1 billion in competitive grants to reform community colleges.

ROMNEY

- His plan, A Chance for Every Child, emphasizes school choice, accountability and ensuring that qualified teachers are in every class.
- In favor of school vouchers, which would pay for tuition at private schools for low-income and disabled students.
- Supports the effort to extend the low interest rates on student loans.
- Would let the Pell Grant program modestly increase with inflation and promises to “refocus Pell Grant dollars on the students that need them most.”

Women’s rights

OBAMA

- His Affordable Care Act requires insurance companies to offer contraception free of charge.

ROMNEY

- Supports decreasing barriers to entry into the workforce for women.
- Said he would abolish the Affordable Care Act requirement that employers provide contraception free of charge for those employers that have a moral or religious objection.
- Says he would eliminate federal funding for Planned Parenthood.

Abortion

OBAMA

- Supports Roe v. Wade, the decision that made abortion legal.

ROMNEY

- Wants to overturn Roe v. Wade

Marriage for same-sex couples

OBAMA

- He had opposed same-sex marriage but earlier this year he said he personally supports it. However, he believes this is an issue that individual states should decide.
- His administration will not enforce the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which prevents legally married gay couples from getting the same federal benefits that straight married people usually get.
- Ended Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, a policy against gays serving openly in the military.

ROMNEY

- Opposes same-sex marriage but supports domestic partnership benefits like hospital visitation rights.
- Would support a Constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

Foreign policy

OBAMA

- Ended the war in Iraq by withdrawing the remaining combat troops.
- He said that he wants to withdraw the remaining troops in Afghanistan by 2014.
- Part of a coalition using sanctions by Congress, the UN Security Council and others to pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons programs.

ROMNEY

- Criticized Obama for failure to lead on issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iran’s nuclear ambitions.
- Has called Iran’s nuclear development “the greatest national security threat that we face.” He supports sanctions but also says military action must be an option to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.

Health care

Fact: 44 million Americans don’t have health insurance, and 38 million have healthcare plans that don’t pay for all their medical expenses.

OBAMA

- His Affordable Care Act requires Americans to buy health insurance or pay a penalty by 2014. Provisions include allowing young people to stay on their parents’ health insurance plan up to age 26. And health insurance companies can no longer deny coverage because of an illness.

ROMNEY

- Plans to repeal the Affordable Care Act but has not offered an alternative.

By Austin Skootsky*16, Hamilton HS*

Before this past summer, I had only ridden the bus in Los Angeles twice. When the L.A. Youth editors asked me to write about the new Expo Line, which is near my house on the Westside, I was excited. I'd never ridden a light-rail train or even heard of the Expo Line before. I wasn't sure what to expect. Funnily enough, when trying to get home from L.A. Youth after agreeing to write this story, I accidentally got on the wrong bus, and I spent an extra three hours traveling downtown and back.

However, I wasn't discouraged. I recruited my older brother, Justin, a college student who was home for the summer, to come with me.

The day before going, we looked up the Expo Line online at metro.net. We found maps, a schedule and a useful "Destination Guide" that told us about the different attractions at each of the 12 stops. We also looked up the cost. It was \$5 for a day pass (which gives you unlimited rides), but you are also required to purchase a TAP card for \$2. When I rode the Expo Line two months later, the TAP cards had been lowered to just \$1.

Around noon we parked for free on a residential street near the Culver City station on Robertson Boulevard. However, there is also a huge free parking lot at the station that we didn't know about. The Expo Line runs along Exposition Boulevard and connects Culver City to downtown. After purchasing our TAP cards, my brother and I went up the staircase to wait for the train.

The Expo Line's stations are incredibly nice. The Culver City stop is elevated, so I could see the bell tower of my high school. The stops were all clean, and the metal incorporated into the architecture made the stations feel polished. There are plants, and each stop has artwork that was commissioned for the Expo Line. I was impressed.

About five minutes after arriving, our train pulled in. The trains themselves are not as amazing as the stations. Their exteriors are old and scratched up. Luckily, the interiors were relatively clean and the seats are the same as bus seats.

However, what the Expo Line trains may lack in looks they make up in efficiency. Soon after we sat down it sped off, and the time between stops was just a few minutes each.

On the train, we looked over the Destination Guide we had printed (they are available in the train cars too). The California Science Center caught our attention, and my brother was also interested in seeing FIDM (the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising).

We got off at the La Cienega/Jefferson stop. We went to look at some of the unique architecture nearby, like the Samitaur Tower, which my brother had read about recently. It looks like a series of discs and cones stacked

up, and it curves and protrudes at weird angles.

We got back on the train and rode to one of the two USC stops. We went to the California African American Museum (admission was free). I had never been there and I had assumed it was a history museum. However, I was surprised to realize it was an art museum that focuses on African American artists and history. The most interesting exhibit was one that featured artwork by high school students. There was one piece that fascinated my brother and me. It was a huge drawing of an overweight teenage boy on a toilet, staring at the viewer with a look of mild surprise. We had no idea what it was supposed to mean.

THE SCIENCE CENTER WAS AS FUN AS WHEN WE WERE KIDS

After leaving the museum we went to the California Science Center, which is next to the African American Museum. Admission was free here too. We had a blast seeing all the stuff we remembered from when we were kids, such as the Drunk Driving Simulator. I tried the Hurricane Simulator, but I felt less like I was in a hurricane and more like I had just rolled down the windows in a car. I noticed that we were at least three times older than the average person there, but we still had a great time.

We traveled to the Pico stop to go to L.A. Live. We took pictures of ourselves at Staples Center posing with the statue of former Lakers announcer Chick Hearn, and then we stopped by the ESPN Zone to play arcade games.

Finally, we boarded the Expo Line again and rode to the last station on 7th Street, where you can also transfer to other rail lines. My brother insisted we visit FIDM because he wanted to see the campus. We ended up at their scholarship store, where they sell clothing and

use the money to fund educational scholarships. We browsed a bit, and my brother acted as a model for a man trying to pick out a tie for a friend.

It was now 5:30, and we were ready to head home. It took only 28 minutes to ride back to Culver City. I didn't think it was possible to

go between downtown and Culver City that quickly. My parents had always complained about the time it took to get downtown whenever they had to take me there, so in my mind downtown had always seemed really far away.

Recently, I went on the Expo Line again with some friends. It was fun to go to a different part of Los Angeles than we would normally. I think it's a great addition to the city.

Austin (right) and his friends Fateen Mukarram, 15, and David Citrin, 16, checked out the sights at the Expo Park stop along the Expo Line.

Photos by Ha Young Kwen, 18, Wilson HS (Hacienda Heights), Austin Skootsky, 16, Hamilton HS; and Justin Skootsky, 21.

**HOW TAP CARDS WORK**

TAP cards are plastic cards the size of a credit card that are sold for \$1 from ticket vending machines at select train and subway stations. You can also buy them on buses when you get a day pass or at Metro Customer Centers and sales outlets around L.A. To find a location, go to taptogo.net.

You load the TAP card with however much money you want and then you "tap" the card on a scanner and board the train or bus. The amount of the fare is deducted from the card automatically.



Even though he just got his driver's license, Austin says he'll still use the Expo Line.

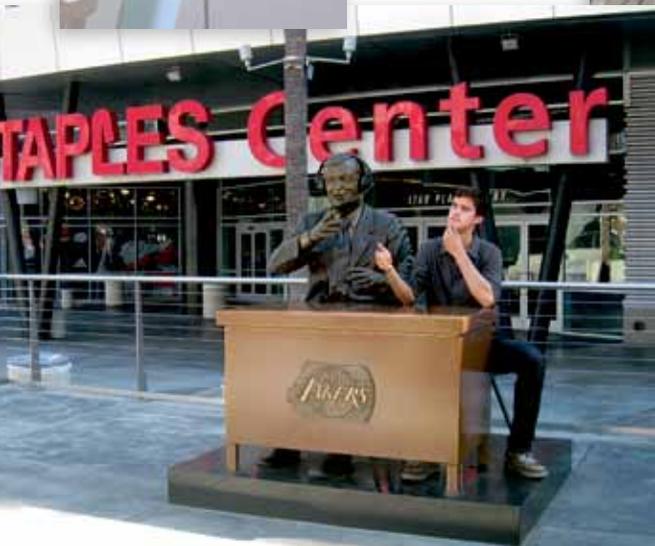




GET ON BOARD THE EXPO LINE



THERE'S LOTS TO DO ALONG THE NEW LIGHT RAIL LINE THAT CONNECTS CULVER CITY TO DOWNTOWN



My brother and I share a special bond

Even though my older brother can't talk or walk, we're still there for each other

By Katie Park

16, Crescenta Valley HS

When I was a kid, I wanted an older sibling to look up to, someone I could follow and copy what they were saying and doing, enough to annoy them. It looked like fun to have that kind of relationship and these were things you could only do with an older sibling.

Unfortunately, I don't have that. I have an older brother who is 19 years old, but he is like the baby of the family. He has a severe case of cerebral palsy so he can't walk or talk. However, even though he has this disability, I have come to learn that he has so much more to offer than I had thought. Even though he can't speak, I love him. He has taught me as much as my mom and dad have.

I don't remember the early days of my childhood with my brother. He was always just there, a presence in my life. The earliest thing I remember is that he always got more attention than me, even when I was young. My mom says that whenever I saw my mom and dad playing with my brother I would start to cry so that one of my parents would have to play with me too. I was supposed to get attention as the baby of the family, but I didn't get it so I was confused.

Because I didn't get that much attention as a child, in Korean I'd ask my parents, "Mom, do you like me or not?" in a half playful, half serious way. I'd ask her that every single day. I knew the answer would be yes but I needed to hear it just to be sure.

When I was around 5, we would go to Torrance to see if acupuncture would help my brother improve his coordination so he could walk by himself. It was an hour-long drive. I hated car rides because I would get car sick. I'd always complain, "Can we just not go this week?" My parents would just say to sleep in the car.

I THOUGHT HE GOT TREATED BETTER THAN ME

When we arrived, my dad had to carry my brother from the car to the wheelchair. I'd say, "Daddy, can I be carried too?" My parents would laugh and say, "We're going to leave you here then." Normally I'd walk out of the car but once I stayed and they left me there. Now that I look back, I realize that I was being selfish but I was jealous.

When I was in elementary school, he and I shared a room. He would make noises when I was trying to

sleep. I'd think, "There he goes again." I'd say, "Please be quiet." Sometimes I'd go to my parents because he was so loud. They knew better how to get him to go to sleep. Sometimes I slept in my parents' room if he was too loud. It really annoyed me because I'd be cranky in the morning if I didn't get enough sleep. I could not understand why he could not just sleep when it was time to sleep.

Around age 6, I realized that my brother was different. At church or at home when my friends would come over, I always got questions like "Why is he like that?" I wouldn't say anything because I didn't know

that something was wrong with him but now I knew it was a disability, one that prevented him from doing all the things a healthy person can do. He was born with it and it wouldn't go away so my family would just have to live with it. I wouldn't get frustrated with him as much because he couldn't help that he needed more attention and couldn't listen to what I was saying.

WE STARTED SPENDING MORE TIME TOGETHER

In middle school, my mom started asking for my help around the house. She did this because she knew I could

I would talk to him about my report cards, my fears, fights with friends, and even what went on at school, which I could never remember when my mom asked, but somehow I always remembered when I talked to him. Even though he could not respond, he always seemed to be listening.

how to respond. I had the same question.

My mother used to be sick all the time with migraines and stomach problems. When I was around 10 I asked her why she was always sick. She told me that when I was 4, she was lifting my brother and her back twisted, and that she hurt it so severely that it affected her whole body afterward. I had known she got hurt but I hadn't known that he was the reason. I started to resent that my brother had this disability. If he hadn't turned out like this, then my mom would be healthy and my family would be happier. I wouldn't have felt neglected and we could have gone on family vacations and out to eat and to the movies, like my friends' families.

As I got older, I learned that he had cerebral palsy. We would go to the hospital and I would hear the doctor use the term "cerebral palsy" and I knew they were talking about my brother. I had always known

handle simple chores and take care of my brother. In the beginning, I only did what she told me to do. Sometimes I fed him if my mom was too tired. Sometimes I had to watch him when my mom was out. He would be sitting on his mattress. Because he couldn't talk, it was silent. I hated silence so we watched TV. Out of the corner of my eye I would watch him just to make sure he hadn't fallen over. If he did, I would pick him back up.

When I was in eighth grade, he started getting really sick. At first my mom thought it was a cold. But it didn't go away and after one or two months, we noticed that he was getting skinnier and weaker. He had been able to sit up by himself and walk with my mom standing behind him, but after a while he couldn't do either of those things. My parents went to the hospital to find out what was wrong. We found out he had Guillain-Barre syndrome, which had attacked his nervous system and weakened his muscles. He had to be hospitalized

for a month.

Since my dad had to work and my mom had to be at the hospital with him, I was alone for a month. My friends would take me home from school. I'd make a snack and then go into my brother's room. It felt so empty because there was always someone in there when he was home. His room was next to mine so I could always hear him and my parents talking to him and playing with him. But it felt dead after that so I felt like I needed to fill that space. I'd turn on music or a Korean drama just to listen to something because the house felt so empty.

I would stay in my brother's room until 9 and then I'd

his. He couldn't walk or talk or even feed himself. I started thinking that he would get lonely just sitting there by himself in his room all the time. Sure there was my mom, but when just your mother is talking to you for the first 15 years of your life, you get pretty lonely.

So I tried to talk to him. I didn't know what to say. I would ask him about his day and he would blankly stare at me. My face would turn red because I remembered he couldn't reply. I would try to tell him about my day but I would usually just say that my day was good, not giving him any details because I didn't know how to talk to him yet.

As the days went by, there were more things that

"My world is so tiny compared to what is actually out there. I can't just focus on myself, there are so many more important things than my own life."

A few days after, I tried to talk about it with my friends but they said, "Yeah the world is big, what do you want me to do about it?"

HE'S A GOOD LISTENER

A few weeks later I had to take care of my brother and I was still thinking about it. I said to him, "I've been so selfish my entire life and I've just realized it." I told him about how every time I complain about the little things in my life, it's a hint of how immature I have been when really, I have been so blessed compared to the rest of the world. I talked to him about all of the other children my age who don't get the opportunities that I get, like an education, and if I ask my parents for food or clothes or electronics, I usually get what I want. I talked about all the children who don't know when their next meal will be. I talked of kids in Africa and other parts of the world who can't go to school at all. I talked and I talked for two hours and at the end I realized that I wanted to give those children the same opportunities I had. I wanted to help them like so many other people had helped me throughout my life. I started to care about others more through that experience. After I was done, I looked at his reaction and he was giving me a really exasperated look like, "Are you just realizing that now?"

No one else would have helped me realize this because no one else but him would have let me develop my thoughts as I spoke. Even though he gave me no actual response, he nodded so I knew he was listening. I could infer that he was nudging me in the right direction.

Now when I talk to him, it seems like he understands what I'm saying. Sometimes if I'm arguing with my mom while I'm helping her wash his face or take off his shoes, I'll say something back to her and he'll clap or laugh. I'll say, "Look, he's agreeing with me."

I can't say that my bond with my brother is perfect. I still wish for a regular older sibling relationship sometimes. It is probably a wish that is never going to go away for me. However, I've realized that in life, you can't have everything you'd like. Maybe for me having a normal sibling relationship just wasn't meant to be. Maybe I was supposed to have this bond so I could learn to be less shallow. Maybe I wasn't. Whatever the reason, even though I wish I had an older sibling I had always dreamed of, I am happy with my brother just the way he is.

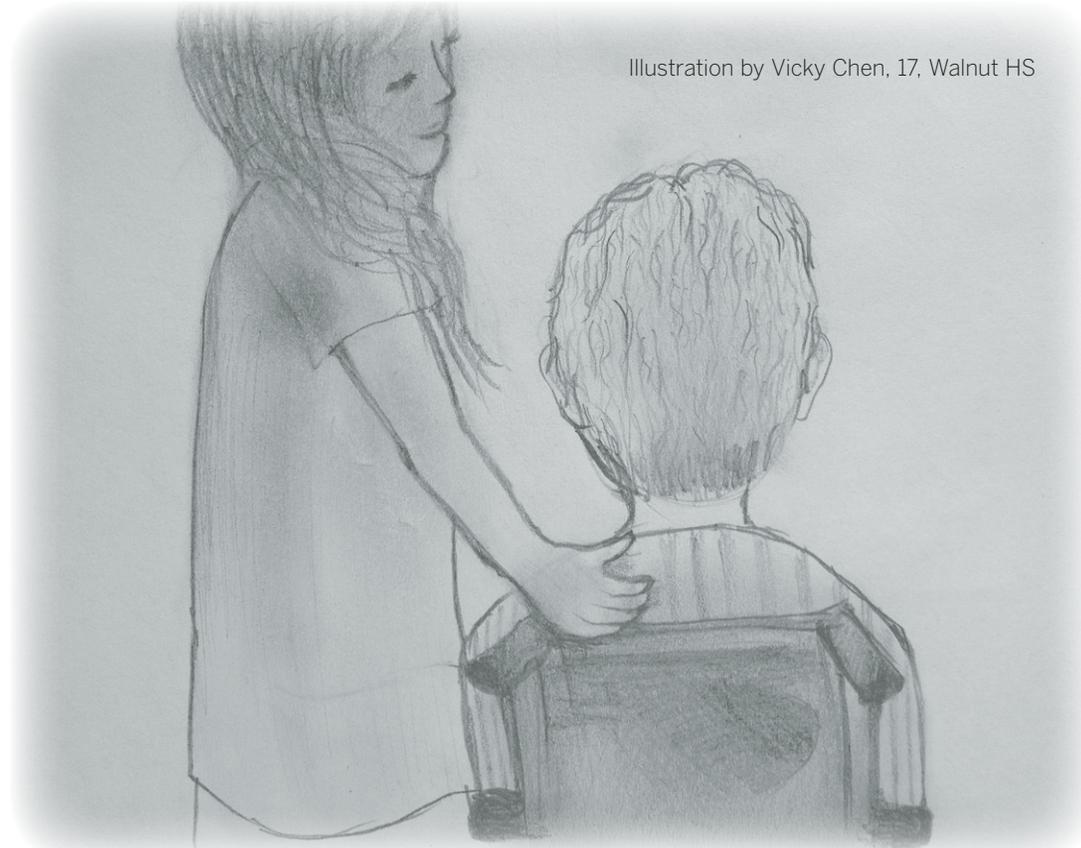


Illustration by Vicky Chen, 17, Walnut HS

go into my room. My mom would come home at 10 or 11.

At first I thought that I didn't really care that he was gone but now that I look back on it, I guess I did care and I did miss him. I'd always ask when he was coming home.

His hospitalization was even more shocking to me because he needed to have surgery, but he couldn't get it. The doctors told my parents that because my brother had cerebral palsy, if they put him under anesthesia for surgery, there was a chance that he might not survive. When I heard what the doctors said, I felt a hole at the bottom of my stomach.

When he came back, I helped out my mom more willingly. His diagnosis made me realize that he might not always be alive so I should appreciate the time that I have with him.

I started to watch what he was doing. I realized that he didn't have much to do by himself in that room of

I could tell him. I would talk to him about my report cards, my fears, fights with friends, and even what went on at school, which I could never remember when my mom asked, but somehow I always remembered when I talked to him. Even though he could not respond, he always seemed to be listening. He would look at me when I talked, and sometimes he would clap or make noises as if he was replying to what I had said. He seemed like he genuinely cared and for the first time, I didn't resent my brother having a disability. It was because I had to take care of him that I had someone to "talk" to.

As I got to spend more time with my brother, I realized he was so much more than just a person with a disability. He had a personality inside of him too and was someone I could talk to.

In June of this year, I was at the top floor of my school and the only thing I could see was the school. I thought,



Katie hopes that you understand people with disabilities more after reading her article.

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NEXT
ORIENTATION:
SATURDAY,
DECEMBER 8
11 A.M. - NOON

THE L.A. YOUTH EDITORS HELPED ME improve my writing. They would work with me one-on-one for hours editing my drafts. It was all worth it because I got to see my articles published. When I got letters from readers I saw that I was writing about things that other people care about too. I discovered that I like to write and express my own opinions as a teen.

Miguel Molina, 18, Film & Theatre Arts Charter HS (2012 graduate)



Feeling good about the Lakers

With Nash and Howard on the team, I think the Lakers will be champs again

By Cliff Chang

14, Walnut HS

I have been a Lakers fan since 2008, the year Kobe Bryant won MVP. It was really fun the next few seasons to watch a Laker game on TV, cheering when Kobe made a game-winning shot, or when Pau Gasol and Andrew Bynum made a big-time play.

This season, the games will be even more exciting because of the Steve Nash and Dwight Howard trades. Bynum is gone and I will miss him, but Howard, the best center in the NBA, replaces him. I look forward to watching Nash and Gasol perform pick and rolls, and Howard grab the rebound off of a Kobe miss and dunk the ball. But the one thing I will love the best is that the Lakers will not be losing anymore. Last season is history and this season, with four superstars on one team, the Lakers will again be champions.

After 2010, I sadly saw the Lakers fall from championship contention. Kobe was the only one on the team who did something and most of the bench players who contributed to their championships in 2009 and 2010 had left. During the 2011 season, I still watched Laker games on TV, but it was frustrating when they could not make a wide-open shot, or when they refused to play defense. I could not stop screaming at the players. I doubted the Lakers' chances of winning a championship in the next few years. They just had neither the talent or desire to win anymore.

I was really mad when this year's draft came, because teams like the Miami Heat, which just won a championship, and the Oklahoma City Thunder, which played against Miami for the title, had first-round picks. But the Lakers, with a terrible bench squad, traded their first-round pick, leaving them with only the 60th pick. That crushed my hope that the Lakers would improve.

But now, the Lakers have made enough moves to



Even with the additions of Nash and Howard, Kobe Bryant is, and always will be, Cliff's favorite NBA player.



Photo by Sydney Chou, 16, Sonora HS

make up for the past two seasons. When I heard that Nash would be a free agent this offseason, I never thought he'd join the Lakers; after all, the Lakers and Phoenix Suns (Nash's former team) are enemies. But after my brother told me that Nash agreed to come to L.A., I could not believe it. I kept thinking to myself the following days in summer school, "THE LAKERS GOT STEVE NASH!!!!" I knew I was supposed to be focusing on history, but the trade was so exciting and my class so boring, that all I could think about was the new and improved Lakers.

Then, when talks about Howard demanding a trade came up, I really hoped the Lakers would land him. I kept searching for updates on the trade, and after I got back from a trip this summer, I learned that Howard

was traded. For real? Howard is on the Lakers now? Wow. Once the deal was finalized, I wanted to see the faces of all those OKC and Miami fans and say "ha ha."

Nash and Howard give the Lakers advantages. Nash, a two-time MVP and five-time league leader in assists, brings his passing ability to L.A. He can create shot opportunities for his teammates, especially Gasol and Howard. However, the best thing about acquiring Nash is how he fits the team perfectly. Nash couldn't care less about how much he shoots, and that is why he is the best match for Kobe, Gasol and Howard.

DWIGHT HOWARD NEEDS TO REMEMBER THAT THIS IS KOBE'S TEAM

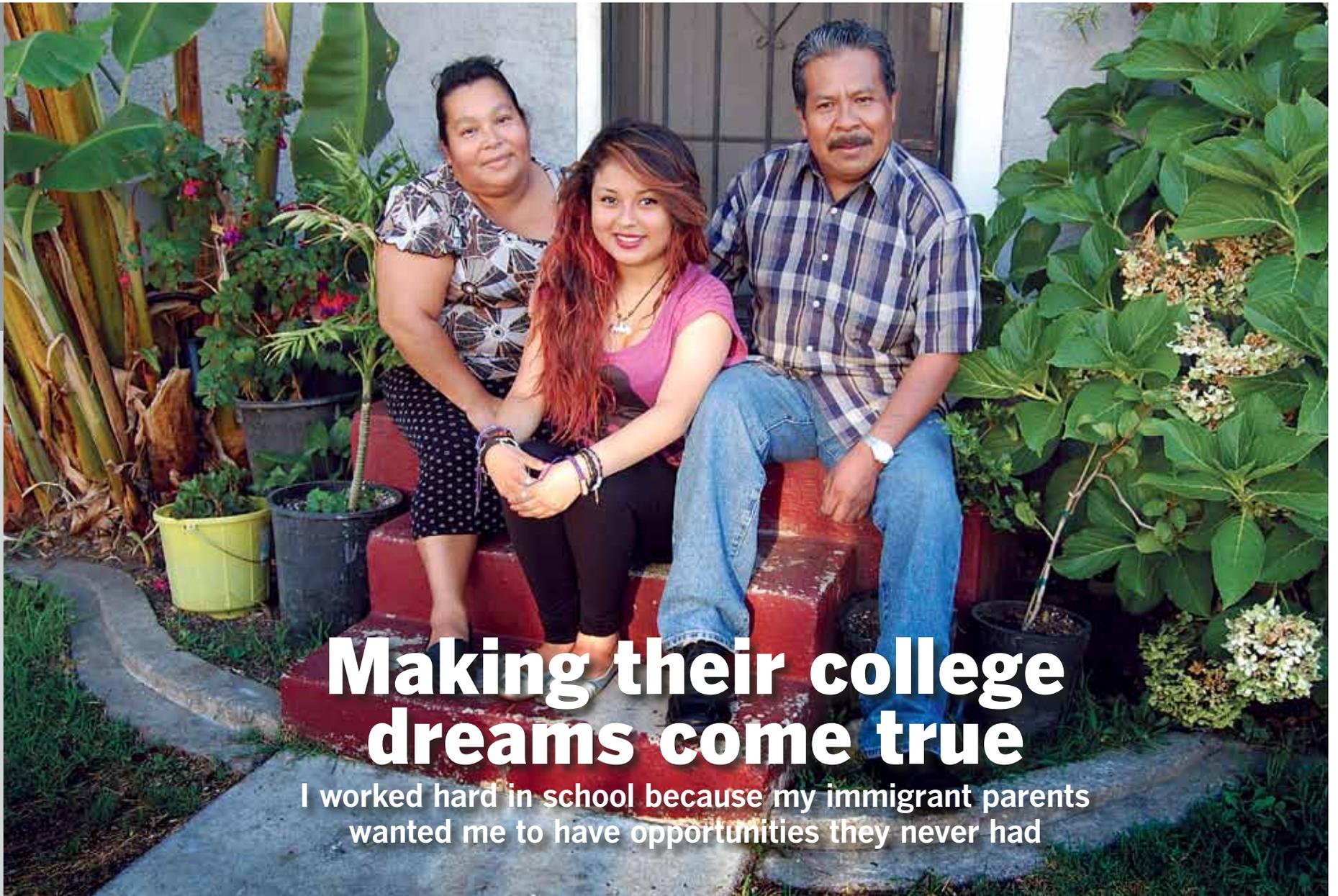
Howard is a three-time Defensive Player of the Year, which means he will swat shots close to the rim and create fast break opportunities. However, Howard is used to being the star of the team. Now that he's on the Lakers, he has to realize that the Lakers are Kobe's team, not his yet. If he cannot accept that, then this will be Kobe versus Shaq all over again. Yes Kobe and Shaq won three titles together, but their feuding caused Shaq and Coach Phil Jackson to leave. Howard may be the best center in the NBA, but Kobe is the best player in the NBA, and Howard must realize that.

However, my biggest fear about this Lakers roster is its bench. The back-court is weak. The only bench players for Nash are Chris Duhon, Steve Blake and Darius Morris (who is currently inactive) and the only bench players for Kobe are Jodie Meeks, Darius Johnson-Odom and Andrew Goudelock. When they played in the 2012 Summer League, a sort of "tryout" for rookies and not-so-good players, they usually got blown out by 20 to 30 points per game. Those statistics make me nervous about whether L.A. can beat good three-point shooting teams like the Heat and Thunder.

This season not only has new players, but also a semi-new coach. I believe Mike Brown did an OK job coaching last season (his first with the Lakers); the Lakers won the division title. But now that Howard is a Laker, Brown might not be the best coach for the team. Howard got his former coach and former general manager fired. If Brown is not good enough to withstand the pressure put on him by Kobe, Howard and Nash, this season will not be as easy as I expect.

But I still have faith. Neither Nash nor Howard has won a championship before, so they have the desire to win. If Brown turns into a worse coach than he was, Kobe has learned to be a coach himself, proving so when he was injured and out at the end of last season.

The NBA season begins Oct. 30 with the Lakers playing the Dallas Mavericks, and I can't wait.



Making their college dreams come true

I worked hard in school because my immigrant parents wanted me to have opportunities they never had

By Yesenia Reyes
18, *Animo Locke HS #1 (2012 graduate)*

My grandparents, uncles, aunts and parents came to the United States in the 80s so they could escape the civil war and poverty in El Salvador. They had worked in the fields and still barely made ends meet and wanted to be able to provide a better education and life for their kids.

They settled in Los Angeles because most of their family was here. A few years later, I was born. Since school was free here, unlike in El Salvador where my mom dropped out because her family didn't have enough money for both food and school supplies, they believed that the most important ingredient for success was for me to be motivated.

Even at the age of 5 my dad pushed me, which meant pressuring a 5-year-old to learn the alphabet perfectly. He always sat at the table helping me with my home-

work—mainly math because he didn't need to know English to help me.

Around fourth grade I learned why my dad cared so much about my education. One day as he watched me finish an assignment, he said he wished he could have done homework like I was doing. Instead, he and his brothers had to work in my grandpa's sugarcane fields once they were old enough to handle a machete. So around age 9 he dropped out of school to help support his family.

I felt sorry for him that he wasn't able to go to school. I was young, but I realized that it was important not to let him down. Whenever he told me his stories about growing up and not having the chance to go to school, I'd tell him that when I became a doctor or lawyer (his dream jobs) that I would buy him a car and a mansion.

My dad bragged about my grades to his friends. His excitement was so contagious that whenever we went to the 99¢ Only store I would immediately ask him to buy paper, markers and pens.

My mom, though, rarely asked what I was learning. She was always busy doing housework or running errands. I was OK with that since my dad was always eager to help.

But once I got to middle school my dad couldn't help me because he didn't know English. "Oh how I wish I could help you like when you were little, but I can't," he would say in Spanish. "So just stay focused and I'll watch." It hurt that he couldn't help me because he had been forced to drop out of school. And knowing that his dreams were half-fulfilled through me, I felt more pressure not to let him down.

I WAS DETERMINED NOT TO DROP OUT LIKE MY SISTER

When I was in seventh grade, one of my older sisters, who was in 11th grade, dropped out of school and moved in with her boyfriend. Soon she got pregnant. My mom and dad were upset. I felt like I had to do even

better in school to make up for my sister and three older cousins who had all dropped out. It was like I had to go to school for my entire family.

One day my dad told me why my mom never got excited about how I did in school. She thought that by the time I reached high school, I would drop out like my sister had. But when my sister dropped out, I got mad at her for not valuing her education. I didn't care much about what my mom thought, because if my dad believed in me, then why shouldn't I believe in myself?

I made it through middle school and decided that someday I would go to UCLA, since that was one of the only schools I'd heard of. In ninth grade I kept doing all my assignments, memorizing facts for tests and getting straight As. When I came home, my dad would ask if I had homework and remind me to eat, set up a table for me to study at and tell me to turn off the TV and radio. Then he would go outside so I could "have some space." He figured that if I got good grades I would automatically get into UCLA. Neither of us had any idea that it took more than good grades to get into a college like UCLA.

In 10th grade I met a teacher who showed me what it would take to make my dad's expectations and my college dreams come true. My English teacher, Ms. Coffey, told us that colleges want students who can do more than just repeat information they had memorized. Colleges want students who are involved in

adults. School used to just mean getting good grades, but now I felt like I was getting smarter.

After noticing how often stereotypes appear in pop culture, I began to criticize them. My dad likes to watch a game show on a Spanish-language channel that has female dancers wearing bikinis who never talk. The hosts also repeat stereotypes that Mexicans wear sombreros and are ignorant.

I'd say to him, "Can't you watch something else? This is really sexist. And they make jokes that make fun of Latino culture. Why are you watching something that makes fun of you?" He'd respond by saying, "Yeah you're right," but would never change the channel.

Just the fact that my dad admitted I was right made me feel powerful and that education had the potential to change things. Even though he still watched those shows, he didn't laugh at the jokes if I was around. If I was learning things like this now, I could only imagine what I'd be able to learn once I got to college.

My mother saw me questioning things as a sign that I was growing. She would always take my side in arguments about gender roles, like whether women should always be the ones cooking and cleaning the house.

One day this spring my dad was upset because none of his pants were ironed. As he took the iron out he complained that my mom was always too busy to iron his clothes. She helps my sisters and my cousins by taking care of their kids. I told him that he should iron them

hadn't taken so long to realize I was serious about my education, but I was happy that she supported me now.

Even though sometimes my dad and I disagree about gender politics, my dad has started to appreciate my ideas more. One night when we were eating dinner my parents said that kids in our community are raised as gangbangers and that's why they don't go to college.

I told them that students of color, which are all the students in my community of South Los Angeles, go to schools where way less money is spent on them than white students who live in rich neighborhoods. I've heard guys in school say that it's better to drop out and get a job now rather than stay in school, because they'd be doing the same type of job after they graduate anyway. If our schools had more resources, I told my parents, students would be more interested in getting good grades and going to college.

"*Tienes razón, te voy entendiendo,*" my dad said. (That makes sense, I see what you're getting at.) I felt proud that my parents respected my ideas. I saw how my education doesn't help only me, but could help my family and my community.

By the end of March I would come home every day hoping to see any envelope with a college's name on it. I got my first one from Humboldt State but I didn't immediately tell my parents. I was afraid. I didn't want to disappoint them if it was a rejection letter. I took it into my room, closed the door and when I read the first word, "Congratulations!" I was so happy.

WITH EACH ACCEPTANCE, MY PARENTS GOT MORE EXCITED

I translated the letter for my parents. They had huge smiles on their faces and started asking me questions. "Where is this college?" "Would you want to really study there?" They were concerned about the distance, but I reassured them that it wasn't too far and that I'd never forget that this was my home. This happened over and over again as the acceptance letters kept coming in.

I was no longer afraid to open the letters in front of my parents since I had gotten into other schools. My mom and dad kept telling me, "We know how much work you have put into this. Do whatever you think is best." I tried my hardest not to cry when they said this, but my eyes did get watery.

I could see how happy they were and I knew that I was on my way to making their dreams come true, while achieving my goals too. I'm at Wellesley College in Massachusetts now. I want to be a veterinarian, which makes my dad happy because his dad loves animals. But whatever I do, the most important thing for me is that I make them proud.



Yesenia says that she wants to come back to her community and inspire students to fight injustices.

I got an envelope from Humboldt State but I didn't immediately tell my parents. I was afraid. I didn't want to disappoint them in case it was a rejection letter. I took it into my room, closed the door and when I read the first word, "Congratulations!" I was so happy.

extra-curricular activities and their communities and who can become leaders.

I LEARNED TO THINK FOR MYSELF

Ms. Coffey taught us about the injustices around us and how to identify racism and sexism. Instead of just memorizing facts, dates and equations, I started questioning things. We read a magazine article that said misogynistic (hatred towards women) lyrics in popular music like rap have led to an increase in domestic violence. After that, I noticed that most of the music videos I saw showed women as objects. They're dressed in revealing clothes and a lot of the songs talk about sex.

Before this I didn't really care about what I was learning in my classes as long as I got good grades. But now I saw how the things I was learning connected to what I saw and did every day. Instead of being the girl who got good grades and was always quiet, I debated my classmates about whether juveniles should be tried as

for her once in a while. It wasn't fair for her to do everything. I told him he was being sexist and he said that as his daughter I should be ironing for him. I got annoyed and told him that I would never iron clothes for a man just because I'm a girl. I would do it as a favor, not as my duty.

My mom joked that he could iron her clothes right now. She then started talking about how in El Salvador, poor girls are taught that women are to follow a man's orders. It angered me that such old-fashioned behavior still exists in El Salvador. I was glad that I didn't have to obey any man like that. In the end, my dad ironed his pants as he scowled and said under his breath that we should be doing this for him.

My mom started getting excited about me going to college. She saw how hard I had worked and started boasting to the family about how proud she was of me. At family parties she would list the colleges I was considering and she constantly asked me about all the mail I got from colleges. I wished that my mom

her! I chuckled, because for a moment Plath had had this effect on me. She had broken my heart with just her words.

The poem was scary. The idea of blackness, I didn't know exactly what that meant or how God topples from the sky. When I read, "I fancied you'd return the way you said, But I grow old and I forget your name," I wondered, "What doesn't come back?" Though the poem was confusing, I loved it. It was unlike anything I had read before.

I CONNECTED WITH THE GIRL IN THE POEM

Like Plath's mad girl, I wanted to escape stress and responsibility. At the time, I was applying to some private and magnet high schools. As a 13-year-old I was already feeling the pressure that I had to do well in middle school so I could get into a good high school so I could get into a good college and be successful.

After I read "Mad Girl's Love Song," I flipped through our book looking for more of Plath's poems, but there weren't any. There were a few lines about her. She was born in Boston in 1932 and committed suicide in 1963. She went to Smith College, married poet Ted Hughes and had two kids. She wrote a few poetry collections. But there was nothing about her personality.

I wanted to know what had happened to her to make her write something like "Mad Girl's Love Song." I went online and learned she had suffered from depression and stayed at a mental hospital. She also spent a lot of time with her mom, who was really supportive, and had lost her father at a young age. Like Plath, I could always count on my mother for help, and my dad hasn't been a part of my life for many years.

After reading "Mad Girl's Love Song," I wanted to pursue writing as a career. I wanted to write beautiful lines about sorrow, lust, despair, hope and faith. I didn't talk much in class because I had a stutter. But as a writer I could communicate my ideas without feeling ashamed like I did when a teacher called on me and I stuttered the answer.

Mrs. Fennell gave me good advice, like "write what you know." She always spoke to me like one writer to another. Her honesty and encouragement gave me hope that someday I could write as well as Plath.

Even so, getting started was difficult. Sitting at my computer, I would begin. "Mrs. Sommers' travel to the lush gardens of China marked the beginning of her love of magnolias. In China, folk people told the story of a poisoned magnolia that could only be healed by the true love of two young teenagers (hmm ... now what? Ugh! Writer's block). But the reality was this magnolia was neglected because of the legends of the superstitious villagers. They feared being poisoned and dying, so the magnolias were avoided at all costs. Soon the magnolias' leaves shriveled and wrinkled like shrimp and drooped. The leaves fell, and the species died altogether ... The End."

Surely, this could never compete with Sylvia Plath.

Some of my drafts were covered in scribbles of unintelligible words and others in spirals, stars and triangles born from my frustration. It became routine. Start again, crumple, throw away. It was like stuttering in my head. I just couldn't get my ideas onto paper

even if they seemed clear in my mind. My words could never compare with the powerful language of my idols: Plath, Soto, Maya Angelou, Edna St. Vincent Millay. Even when I thought my work was fine for an eighth grader, it was crap compared to Plath.

In spite of my frustration, I loved writing too much to give up. Writing was its own reward. And I remembered Mrs. Fennell's advice, write what you know. Plath wrote about feeling, Soto about culture, Kooser about his home in Nebraska, and Angelou about her childhood. So I described a school day or how our physics teacher smelled like peanut butter.

During second semester in Mrs. Fennell's class, we formed student book clubs and got to read whatever we wanted. My club was three friends and me. I made sure we read *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath.

A semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* incorporates some of Plath's real-life experiences. Like her protagonist Esther Greenwood, Plath felt a need to prove herself as a writer and overcome a stereotype that defined women as homemakers and pretty faces. Plath knew she was more than just a "pretty face" or a future mother. Like Plath, I knew I wanted to be appreciated for my talents, not my physical features.

However, unlike Plath I never went through the depressions or suicide attempts. Even so, I felt sympathy. I wished I could have been there for her. I think what truly made me admire her was how thanks to her determination, she came back after a six-month stay at a psychiatric ward and still managed to earn high honors at Smith College.

I SAW HOW WRITING COULD BE LIKE THERAPY

Through writing, Plath had overcome intense scrutiny, tragedy and even near-death experiences. Writing had been her therapy. Writing proved my savior when I felt anxious about starting at a new school (I had just been accepted at Notre Dame High School). Would I be judged? Would I feel different? I wondered, "What would Plath do?"

I recalled a passage from *The Bell Jar* in which Esther remembers a story about a fig tree and thinks, "I wanted to crawl in between those black lines of print the way you crawl through a fence, and go to sleep under the beautiful big green fig tree." I wanted to crawl away and sleep too. I saw myself sitting in my own fig tree, waiting for something I couldn't put a name to. Hope? I now understood why Plath's writing truly became her saving grace. It would be mine too.

While I loved *The Bell Jar*, one of my friends in the group said, "This is really intense. It's emo and suicidal. I don't know how I feel about this book."

In the middle of the book, Esther discusses how she was found by her mom in the basement with her hair missing and her eyes bloodshot and swollen. She was purple and her face was unrecognizable. I was mesmerized by the vivid description of her suicide attempt but while our group was talking about it during class, my friend didn't want to participate in our discussion. She turned to the next table to start another conversation.

In one chapter, Esther, a writer, envisions talking to her boyfriend, a pre-med student, who says poems

are just dust. She disagrees and says that poems are no more so dust than the cadavers he cuts up. Suddenly, she lashes out at her boyfriend, thinking he, like the people he "cures," is just dust. She tells him, "A good poem lasts a whole lot longer than a hundred of those [cadavers] put together."

NOT EVERYONE LIKES PLATH'S DARK WRITING

This chapter was one of my favorites, and I wrote a journal entry about it. When I walked into class I was excited to share what I had written, which was a reflection about undervaluing the power of poetry. Even as I went on about how much I identified with Esther, my friend turned away from our group. I thought she was like Esther's boyfriend, denying me a chance to voice my opinions even if we did not agree. Like Esther, I believed poems were much more than dust. My poems reflect my character, conviction and dreams of being a famous writer and supportive mother someday. They express my belief in God. My poems are not merely dust.

After we finished the book, my friend said it was very depressing and that she didn't like it. This upset me. She was my friend so I valued her opinion, but insulting Sylvia Plath felt like insulting me.

I raved about Plath's poetry for the rest of the year and constantly talked with my friends about her, her passion and her literary honesty. I didn't do this because I admired her for her suicide; I just loved her work.

But my friend wasn't the only one who dismissed my "irrational" (in her opinion) admiration for Plath. By the end of eighth grade, a few of my classmates also found it eerie of me to admire a writer who had committed suicide. While writing goodbye comments in our yearbooks, they wrote: "Daisy, the best of luck, please don't jump off a bridge" or "Daisy, good luck in high school, please love life."

As much as I understood that they were probably teasing me, I ignored their comments and have even scratched out a few of them. I will not be ashamed of loving a writer who was strong enough to announce her pain but who unfortunately committed suicide.

So I keep writing and reading. I have faced rejection (from *Teen Ink* magazine and my school's newspaper) and writer's block. Even writing in school has proved no easy task as I barely scrape low As on my essays despite my best effort. I am by no means the student everyone thinks of as the "kid who rocks at writing." Still, I long for the day when, like Plath, I will break the heart of a young, promising student and help him or her escape, if only for a few seconds.



Some other writers Daisy admires are Sandra Cisneros, Betty Smith and Virginia Woolf.

In defense of my faith

I want people to know that Islam is a peaceful religion

By Hanifati Mokhammad

18, Pacific Coast HS

I wear a *hijab* (pronounced he-jab), which is a scarf that covers my hair and neck. Sometimes when I'm at the mall or the grocery store I think people are staring at me, but when I turn toward them they look away.

I wear a hijab because I'm Muslim. In the Qur'an, Islam's holy book, it states that women should wear head covers to be protected and be known as a Muslim. When I started wearing it in high school it wasn't a hard decision because my mom wears one and my friends wear them. I wanted to wear a hijab in middle school, but my mom asked me if I was ready to face questions from my classmates. I got a little nervous so I decided to wait until high school. When I started wearing my hijab, no one asked me questions about it since some other students were Muslim and wore hijabs too.

People who don't understand my religion think Muslim women wear head scarves when they go outside because men told them to. They think Muslim women are oppressed but we're not. We're allowed to get an education and have a career, we're allowed to have property and own a business—anything that men can do.

I was born in America. I'm not that different from anyone else in the United States. I like to write stories, draw pictures, go out with friends and chat with friends online. It bothers me that people look at me and what happened on Sept. 11, 2001 runs through their minds. When they stare at me and look away I get paranoid. What are you thinking? I don't think people know a lot about Islam, since their only knowledge about it is from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, and a lot of the stories on the news make Islam look bad. To some people Islam is a religion of hate and terror, but actually Islam is a peaceful religion.

AT RELIGIOUS SCHOOL WE LEARNED TO BE RESPECTFUL

Islam is not just my religion but it's also my way of life. Ever since I was little my parents thought it was important to teach me about Islam and who I am as a Muslim girl. When I was in kindergarten, I started going to the Al-Noor Islamic center for religious school on the weekends. We read the Qur'an and learned about the prophets. There's a *hadith* (saying from the prophet) that

says Paradise lies under your mother's feet. We learned that you have to be respectful to her and also your father. At the end we'd say our prayers and then we'd go home.

Prayer is one of the five pillars, or basic acts, of Islam. Muslims pray five times a day, every day, at dawn, early afternoon, late afternoon, evening and night. In elementary and middle school I'd come home from school and pray. In high school it got easier because

my relatives in Indonesia. There were so many people there who were poor; my heart was breaking so much.

I was 7 when 9/11 happened. My mom didn't tell me about it because I was too young to understand. In middle school I learned more about it at youth group. I was told that Muslims hijacked planes and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York. I was thinking, "Why did they do this?" They were saying they were Muslim but they shouldn't call themselves Muslims. There's nothing in the Qur'an that says to attack a country. They did it because they had a problem with America, but disliking America has nothing to do with being Muslim. They were making Islam look bad. A lot of Muslims were born here, or came here to have a better life. My parents came here from Indonesia because they wanted their kids to have a good education and to be able to find a good job.

When I was in science class in eighth grade I heard a comment that bothered me. I was sitting next to a girl who was talking to a boy about the presidential election. He said he didn't want to support Obama because he might be Muslim. I had read his biography. Obama used to live in Indonesia, which has a large Muslim population, and his middle name, Hussein, is Arabic but he's not Muslim. I was angry that he was implying that he couldn't trust Obama because he was Muslim. I said, "He's not a Muslim. He just has a name that sounds like it." He stared at me and then he kept talking and changed the topic.

During the summer before ninth grade my mom and I had to go to Narbonne High to talk to an administrator about switching to Pacific Coast High School, which is where I'm going now. When we were walking in the hallway, we passed two students and one of them said "Welcome to America" loudly and sarcastically. He probably said it because of our head scarves and because my mom was wearing Indonesian clothing. My mom sounded upset. She said

to me, "You were born in America. There's no reason for you to be told 'Welcome to America.'"

We ignored him and went inside the office. As we waited, a woman came in with the boy, telling him to apologize to us. He said, "I'm sorry for saying that." I was surprised, but my mom smiled and said it was OK. She let it go after he left.

In 11th grade, on the day of the 9/11 anniversary, I went to Yahoo! and saw the headline "Qur'an burning"



I go to an online school and I'm at home a lot. The importance of prayer is to remind us that God is forgiving and always there for us. I pray for regular things like for someone to be healthy and for forgiveness of my sins.

Another pillar of Islam is charity. I try to be nice to people and give money to the poor. When I was in seventh grade I wanted to give all the money I had in my wallet to the homeless on the streets when I was visiting

and clicked on it. The article said that a Florida pastor named Terry Jones decided to make it “International Burn a Qur’an Day.” It scared me to think that someone would be that intolerant toward Islam, which he called “the religion of the devil.” What he started was stupid and cruel. It’s not free speech, it’s more like a hate crime against Islam and the Muslim world.

I talked about Islam with my mom and friends who are Muslim. We wondered why he would burn the Qur’an when it has stories and teachings about all the prophets Christians and Jews believe in, like Adam, Abraham and Moses, about Jesus’s mother being surprised to have a child, and all those other stories.

ALL FAITHS SHOULD BE WELCOME IN AMERICA

It upsets me that he was using the anniversary of Sept. 11 for “revenge” against Islam. Even more frightening, the pastor forgot about religious freedom in this country. The United States is not a Christian country; it’s a country where you can practice any religion: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.

Some people have something nice to say. When I was in the hospital in middle school, this woman was talking to us in the elevator. She said she was married to a man from the Middle East. She said she respects our religion although she’s not Muslim.

I want people to respect each other and learn about Islam and question if what you hear about it is correct. Some mosques (Islamic church or temple) hold interfaith services for people who are not Muslim and they explain what it is really about. They just teach, they’re not trying to convert anyone to Islam.

Recently when my mom and dad told me there was an anti-Islam movie made by someone who lives in America, I wondered why someone would do that. I didn’t understand why he would twist the truth and make people angry. The movie called the Prophet Muhammad a fraud, a womanizer and many insulting things that aren’t true. The movie misinterprets what Islam is and what the Prophet is like. But then I heard that there were violent protests in the Middle East and people have been killed, including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens. Protesting and saying “no, you cannot disrespect our prophet” is good but the violence went too far. I got an email from the organization Celebrate Mercy about how they were starting a letter-writing campaign to show people we’re sorry about what happened. They were asking people to send letters to the ambassador’s family to show that Muslims are not violent and Islam is peaceful. I hope it helps people see how Muslims really are.



Hanifati says people should try to learn about religions instead of basing what they know on assumptions.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAM

By Beeta Baghoolizadeh

from L.A. Youth archives

What is the difference between the words Islam and Muslim? The word Islam refers to the religion, and the word Muslim refers to a person who follows the teachings of Islam. So to call someone an Islam sounds just as strange as calling someone a Christianity or a Judaism.

Is Allah God? Allah is God. Allah is the Arabic name for God, just as *Dios* is the Spanish word for God, or *Khoda* is the Persian word for God. Arabic is the language of Islam, but many people misunderstand Allah to mean the Islamic God. God is Allah, just as Allah is God.

Does the Qur’an, the holy book of Islam, say that women must wear head scarves? The Qur’an does not explicitly say that women should wear scarves. It does, however, instruct women to be modest and cover themselves, as it does for men. In the Qur’an the first thing it says about this is that men must lower their eyes and then it says the same for women. Then it tells men to dress modestly, and tells the same to women. The Qur’an does make a reference to the *jilbab*, a garment used to cover breasts, but it does not say that women must wear scarves. To wear a scarf is solely a woman’s choice. Many do it because they believe that, among other things, the Qur’an is referring to wearing a veil in this passage. In a mosque and during prayer, most women wear scarves as a show of respect, the same way men are more inclined to wear long sleeves and long pants to a mosque. Dressing modestly isn’t about trying to desexualize women—it’s about living simply and not obsessing over one’s own appearance.

Who is Mohammad? Where does Mohammad fit in the line of prophets? Prophet Mohammad was the messenger of God who lived about 1,400 years ago. He was God’s medium to spread the word of the Qur’an, which was revealed to him by the angel Gabriel. He was a follower of Abraham’s religion, which he called “Islam,” meaning submitting to God’s will. Abraham had two sons—Isaac and Ishmael. In the Bible, Abraham chose to sacrifice Isaac, who was Moses’s and Jesus’s ancestor. In the Qur’an, Abraham chose to sacrifice Ishmael, who was Mohammad’s ancestor.

Is Jesus the messiah in Islam? In Islam, we do consider Jesus to be the messiah. We believe that he will return to the world at the end of time to defeat the Antichrist.

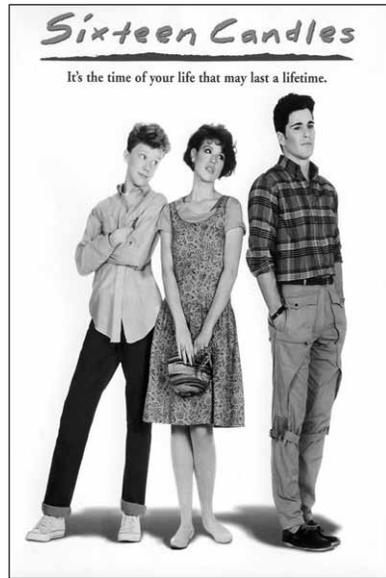
Why is Jesus not considered the son of God as in Christianity? We believe that Jesus was a prophet of God, just like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Mohammad. He was a messenger for a group of people on behalf of God, but he is not the son of God because we believe that God was not given birth to, nor does He give birth to anyone. For us, “there is no God but God.”

Explain Ramadhan and the fasting. In the lunar Muslim calendar, Ramadhan is a month in the year. It’s a holy month in Islam because it was during this month that Prophet Mohammad first came in contact with angel Gabriel and the first few lines of the Qur’an were revealed to him. Even before he became God’s messenger, Mohammad would travel to a cave to meditate and fast for the entire month of Ramadhan, having little contact with anyone. He would fast from sun-up to sun-down, and contemplate philosophical ideas. Later, during the revelations of the Qur’an, the full instructions for fasting were sent down and that it is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Why do Muslims pray five times a day? The point of prayer (known as *salaat*) is to allow us to have a direct connection to God. Islam is a very personal religion without a true “middleman.” Religious leaders are not required for Muslims to have a “conversation” with God. Muslims pray five times a day—at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and evening—so that at different times of the day we remember that God is with us and that we are never alone. It’s also a humbling experience that helps us remember that the only “thing” worth worshipping is God.

What is the role of women in Islam? Contrary to what many people think, women are highly regarded in Islam. It repeatedly says in the Qur’an that men and women were created equally. Eve was not created from Adam’s rib. Women play an important role in the Qur’an as well. A chapter in the Qur’an is called *Al-Nisaa*, meaning “Women,” and another is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, called *Maryam*.

Actually, before the Qur’an was revealed to Prophet Mohammad, female infanticide was rampant on the Arabian peninsula because boys were favored, but Islamic law forbid that practice. In fact, the Prophet only had daughters to carry on his name. Islam also granted women their rights, something that was unheard of at that time, like rights to inheritances, a say in their marriage (arranged marriages without the approval of the bride are forbidden in Islam), voting—and even a simple thing like education. Muslim women were guaranteed the right to vote centuries before American and European women.



Sixteen Candles

Reviewed by Jazmine Mendoza

17, Social Justice Humanitas Academy (San Fernando)

Sixteen Candles takes me to the 80s through the eyes of Samantha Baker, played by Molly Ringwald, who wakes up expecting her 16th birthday to be the best day of her life.

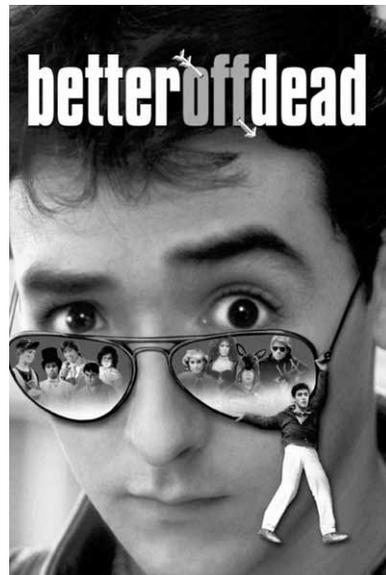
But that doesn't happen because her family is too occupied with her older sister's wedding, which is the next day. Her family not remembering really sucks for Samantha because she knows that no one at school will remember. She's a nobody, which makes her relatable, because not everybody is a prom queen or jock. Most of us are like Samantha, ordinary.

At a school dance later that day, Samantha is ignored by her dream guy Jake Ryan while a geek who has a crush on her, played by Anthony Michael Hall,

embarrasses her. To get her attention he dances outrageously right in front of her on the dance floor. Although I feel embarrassed for Samantha, this part always makes me laugh no matter how many times I watch it. His geeky friends are impressed until she runs away. Then they laugh at him because they knew it would've been too good to be true. I would have done the same thing as Samantha.

In the end it wasn't all bad that the geek did that because they talk later and she eventually learns that nothing should stop her from going after what she wants, just like how daring he was to embarrass himself in front of her to catch her attention.

Samantha's situation—being in high school and feeling out of place—doesn't seem that different from today. There is always doubt, fear and even embarrassment at some point in high school. Even though Sixteen Candles is from the 80s, it's able to perfectly capture high school drama in a way that's still relatable today. If you're wondering if Samantha ever gets with Jake, you'll have to watch the movie yourself.



Better Off Dead

Reviewed by Brittany Montaño

14, St. Anthony HS (Long Beach)

A heartbroken teenage boy, a French exchange student and a mad paperboy, along with bad perms and feathered hair, are just some of the things that make this 80s romantic comedy hilarious.

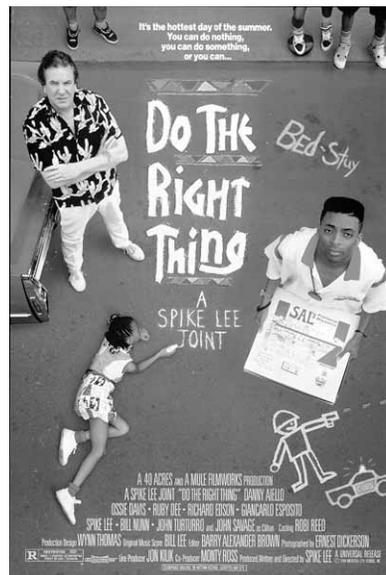
In Better Off Dead, Lane Meyer (John Cusack) has been dumped by his first serious girlfriend. He tries to kill himself but his plans backfire and something always goes wrong, which makes it funny, like when he blows up the family's garage. During all this, Lane meets an exuberant French exchange student named Monique. She helps Lane regain his confidence and prepare to beat the cool jock (who is dating his ex-girlfriend) in a skiing race.

While attempting to win the race and his ex-girl-

friend back, Lane, like any teenager, deals with family problems. Like his mother's experimental cooking, which actually crawls off the plate in one scene, and the spiteful paperboy, who attacks Lane throughout the movie for his two dollars. The end of this twisted story has a happy ending. Lane wins the race on one ski; there is more, but I will let you find out.

I found this movie on the \$5 rack at Target. It looked cool from the cover, because it had Cusack. I watch this movie repeatedly. Although Lane deals with embarrassment from being dumped, it taught me that no matter the obstacle in life, you can overcome it with humor. Like when the paperboy comes to get his money, Lane tells him, "My grandmother dropped acid and she freaked out and hijacked a school bus full of ... penguins, so it's kind of a family crisis ... so come back later?"

Movies about teens today are too serious but this movie brings a humorous perspective. I think everyone can relate to this movie. We still act melodramatic about our problems but also laugh at the ones we thought were so important.



Do the Right Thing

Reviewed by Derek Mejia

16, Roosevelt HS

Do the Right Thing, a 1989 film directed by Spike Lee, is a powerful examination of racial tension between whites and blacks but also of how much we as humans deny that we have these feelings.

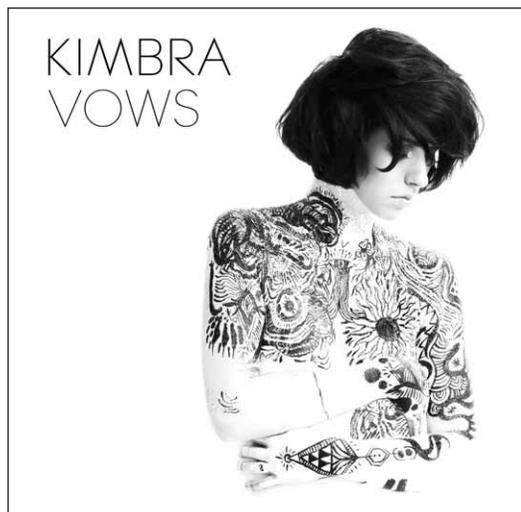
The film is set on the hottest day of the summer in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bed-Stuy. It starts off slow with everyone waking up to the sound of Mister Señor Love Daddy's radio show, as they all prepare for their day. Mookie, played by Lee, goes to his job delivering pizzas for Sal's Famous Pizzeria, while Da Mayor, the neighborhood drunk, drinks his day away and a character named Buggin' Out complains about Sal not having any "brothers" on the Wall of Fame in his pizzeria.

The movie builds in tension as Buggin' Out con-

fronts Sal about the Wall of Fame, which starts a big argument between them that becomes violent. But the film ends on an empathetic note with Mookie and Sal beginning to understand each other. I think Lee ended it that way to show that people in a community have to get along no matter what their values or views are.

The first time I watched Do the Right Thing two years ago, I was left thinking about the times I've experienced someone judging me based on my race or where my parents are from. Do the Right Thing was so realistic that I felt connected to the characters, even Sal because we all try to fight our prejudices. Although the film is set in New York during the 80s, there aren't a lot of differences between my life and those of the characters. We all hang out with friends and we all have those feelings that we aren't accepted, because 23 years later there's still racism.

This is one of my favorite movies. It reminds you that you are not alone and that there are people out there disgusted by racism. I know I've felt alone, but Do the Right Thing always cheers me up and I wouldn't be lying if I said it made me cry at the end.



Kimbra

CD: Vows

Reviewed by Brittany Montaño

14, St. Anthony HS (Long Beach)

While watching the “Somebody That I Used to Know” video, YouTube recommended a video I might like by Kimbra, the New Zealand pop star who is featured in Gotye’s song. I watched the “Good Intent” video and instantly fell in love with Kimbra’s voice. I was mesmerized by her vocal range and her ability to fuse modern pop, a classic voice like country singer Patsy Cline, and R&B. This album is so different from the repetitive pop songs that I hear on the radio.

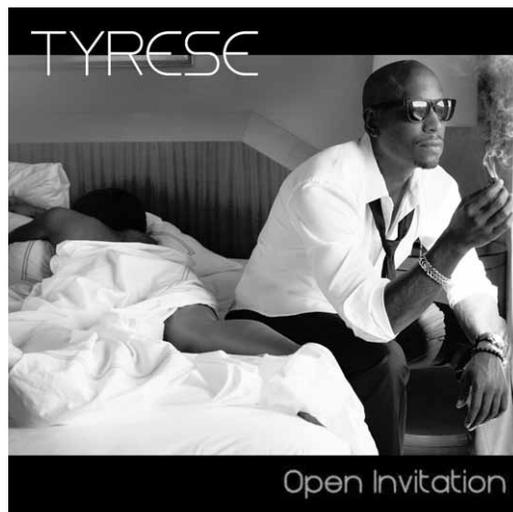
Whenever “Cameo Lover” plays on my iPod, I always get excited, like the feeling you get when you’re in the car and all your friends start singing to the song on the radio. The combination of trumpets, techno and the tambourine is fresh. I find myself prancing around the house to the beat, singing “Love is like a silhouette of dreams/ So open up your eyes, open, open.”

Kimbra’s songs are poetic. In “Old Flame” she sings, “But I flicker and sway/ Still dancing on the aftertaste/ I remember gold days.” This song talks about how at times you may feel down. It makes me feel like I’m not the only who feels that way.

On the deluxe version of Vows there is a bonus song called “Warrior” that features A-Trak and Mark Foster of Foster the People. When I saw the video, I thought it was hilarious. There is a boxing match in which Mexican fighters are dueling, as Kimbra, A-Trak and Mark Foster sing. It’s a club song that makes you want to start dancing.

Vows has songs that will make you cry, laugh or start dancing. This album is my favorite.

I was mesmerized by her ability to fuse modern pop, a classic voice and R&B.



Tyrese

CD: Open Invitation

Reviewed by Zzzah-Zzaz Burnley

16, King Drew Medical Magnet HS

Open Invitation ends a five-year gap between albums for Tyrese, the R&B singer and actor. He’s best known for the 2001 movie Baby Boy and more recently he’s been in Legion and Fast Five. Tyrese said in an interview, “I didn’t have an album full of songs and music that I could relate to and because money was not the issue or motivation, I really did it when I felt like it was the time to.” His music is heartfelt and passionate. I like his music because his lyrics tell stories, which I assume are from experiences he’s had.

Open Invitation has both slow songs and faster songs. I bought this CD because I loved his hit single “Stay,” which is a slow song about him confessing his wrongs in a relationship. “Even though I messed up, oh, I messed up/ You took good care, always took care of me/ Baby would you just stay.”

The rest of the album is just as good. “Best of Me” is about another girl Tyrese was crazy about. “And if I had to do it again I’d still choose you/ You bring out the best in me, cause you are the best baby.” I wish Tyrese was singing this to me because it’s so romantic.

I can play this album all day because I feel a connection to his lyrics. His album also contains hardly any profanity. This is a CD that you don’t have to turn down when your mom walks into the room. It’s a great album. If you don’t believe me, go get it. I promise, you won’t regret it.

His album contains hardly any profanity. This is a CD that you don’t have to turn down when your mom walks into the room.



Dev

CD: The Night the Sun Came Up

Reviewed by Jennifer Gonzales-Romero

19, University of La Verne

I’ve been hooked on Dev’s music since I heard a leaked version of her album The Night the Sun Came Up on YouTube last summer. With her sweet yet seductive voice, sassy lyrics and electro-pop beats, this is the only album I’ve listened to that I actually like every song.

On songs like “In My Trunk” and “Lightspeed” Dev gives us a taste of her sassiness. “By the time you on it, I’ll be off it/ By the time you get it, I’ll be done wit’ it/ You know that we be going lightspeed ahead/ Everybody told me I should slow down/ But instead all I could do was take it lightspeed,” she sings on “Lightspeed.” I like her lyrics because they always make me feel like a badass when I sing them.

Then on songs like “Kiss My Lips” and “Breathe,” Dev sings to men about how she wants them to treat her. The straightforwardness in her lyrics motivates me to be more comfortable talking to guys about my feelings for them. “Get your hand off my hip and kiss my lips, kiss my lips, kiss me all over/ Are you gonna’ take that risk, take that risk/ Cuz we’re only getting older,” she sings in “Kiss My Lips.”

I also like “Naked.” Dev and Enrique Iglesias sing about wanting to be together even if everybody else doesn’t want them to. This song reminds me of someone I really want to be with.

I don’t know what it is about Dev’s voice but combined with her great lyrics, I just can’t seem to get enough of her music.

The straightforwardness in her lyrics motivates me to be more comfortable talking to guys about my feelings for them.

Are you in foster care?

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Working with my editor

Amanda over the past year has been great. Not only has my writing skills improved but so has my confidence. I feel like I'm getting a lot off my chest and learning at the same time. That's something you definitely can't do while in school. You don't get to tell your teachers your personal problems in English class because it's a

classroom. This is your own personal classroom where you grow, vent and learn. The writing process helps me look back at things and grow from them. When I saw my story published in the paper, I felt like I was important and what I went through mattered. It's great to let everything out and build up your writing skills and reach out to other foster youth. Writing for L.A. Youth is a great experience.

—Precious Sims, 19

Precious was excited to see her stories published in L.A. Youth.

