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L.A. youth

the newspaper by and

The discrimination
I've faced has
made me wonder
if I'm welcome in
America PAGE 10

Do I belong here?

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L.A. youth

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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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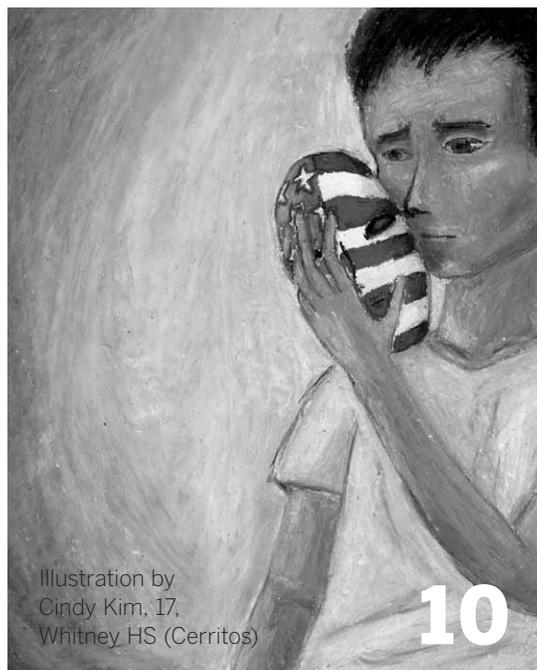
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ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

I enjoy drawing in class, for class, outside of class, at my house, on my bed, in front of the TV, and of course for L.A. Youth! Drawing relaxes me and I can allow my imagination to take over my hand. My favorite things to draw are people, animals and landscapes. When I draw landscapes, I daydream of going there. —*Cindy Kim, 17, Whitney HS (Cerritos)*



BEHIND THE SCENES

I joined L.A. Youth to be an illustrator. But after an L.A. Youth discussion about teacher evaluations, the editors asked me to write. I didn't feel confident in my writing but they persuaded me. It was very frustrating. I'd spend 30 minutes trying to start a sentence. But I'm proud of myself because I did something that I usually don't do. Now I'm going to be both an illustrator and writer for L.A. Youth. —*Izuriel Marquez, 17, Chavez Learning Academies (San Fernando)*



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.

MAY-JUNE 2012 ISSUE

RACIAL PROFILING

I REALLY CONNECTED with the stories about racial profiling. Growing up in South Los Angeles near Jefferson High School, I am used to seeing those types of things every day. I've seen people walking down the street in baggy clothing and my immediate reaction was, "This person must be in a gang" or "This person seems dangerous," and I could have been wrong. I've decided that I'm not going to judge someone without getting to know them first.

Barrina Thompson

Hollywood HS

I REALLY THINK it is unfair that the police think you could be a criminal just because of your skin color. It's sad that the writer felt unsafe outside because of what he wore or how he looked.

Jocelyne Juarez

Centennial College Preparatory Academy (Huntington Park)

THE ARTICLES ABOUT racial profiling by Maceo Bradley and Andrew Chen were really interesting. It was nice reading about not only how people are being discriminated against, but how people discriminate as well. This shows that people who discriminate aren't always bad. Sometimes they are just regular people who discriminate without knowing it.

Nemesis Gutierrez

Hollywood HS

A GIRL WORRIED THAT SHE WASN'T AS SMART AS STUDENTS FROM WEALTHIER SCHOOLS

THE ARTICLE "WILL my best be good enough?" is amazing! Three years ago I was a bright student, but I did not understand why I had low scores when it came to SATs. A lot of the vocabulary on that test was far ahead of my level. I felt bummed. One teacher told me to not let one measly test put me down and to still apply to as many colleges as I wanted to. I ended up with eight universities to

choose from! When I started college, I noticed a couple of my classmates were academically ahead of me. I knew I had to work twice as hard to catch up to them. I took advantage of the resources my campus offered, such as tutoring. Now I'm a college senior who has made the Dean's list several times at Cal State Long Beach. I have come to appreciate hard work and learned an important lesson: you are more than just one test!

Alma Pacheco

Comment from layout.com

I ENJOYED READING the article, "Will my best be good enough?" because of how similar it was to how I feel. I am also from a Mexican family and neither of my parents finished high school. I know that if I don't do well in school and get scholarships, I won't have enough money to pay for college. Last year I took a test to qualify for AP Calculus. Since AP classes are basically college classes, I expected the test to be challenging. However, I didn't expect it to completely confuse me and make me feel dumb. I go to an LAUSD school and worry that other districts offer a better education because they have more money. Just as the SAT workshop was a wake-up call for the author, the AP test opened my eyes and made me see that I need to work hard to get where I want.

Jose Cruz

Hollywood HS

I RELATE TO the article, "Will my best be good enough?" My mom is Mexican, and she finished high school before she had to take care of her little sisters. She wanted to go to a prestigious university in Mexico, but unfortunate events stopped her from doing so. She is my motivation and always gives me advice or stays with me when I'm studying or up late at night doing a project. I am living the dream she has. I want to go to one of the best colleges because I want to prove that kids who have Latin American parents can be as good as anyone else. This article was also a wake-up call for me so I know what to expect. My teacher

says, "You think you're smart, but out there, there are kids smarter than you and smarter than them." I really want my high school to prepare me for college.

Sandy Hernandez

Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

DON'T SAY MENTAL HEALTH SLURS

I COULD REALLY connect with the article, "Think before you speak." Like Julia, I hear people around school using words like "OCD" and "bipolar." I have to admit that I say things like that sometimes. But after reading this article, I realized that I shouldn't say those things about people. Most people say it as a joke, but when you think about it, it's not funny. This article changed my perspective. From now on, I'm going to be more careful with what I say.

Melody Nazarbegian

Wilson MS (Glendale)

A GIRL LEARNED ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

THE ARTICLE, "OPENING my mind," gives readers a look into bipolar disorder and how mental diseases are not always like the ones you see on TV. Many people with mental disorders can live regular lives when they get the right treatment. Thanks for informing people about how mental illnesses work and how they can be brought on by trauma or stress.

Gaby Cordova

Hollywood HS

ADVICE FROM A COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OFFICER

I LIKED THE article, "How colleges pick who gets in." I felt like I could connect with the writer because he feels that even though he has good grades, he might not be one of the top picks to get into the university of his choice. Like him, I feel like I am at a disadvantage and that white people get more chances because they are richer and both their parents probably know English. On the other hand, the article said that those who come from a bad background could be seen as having made it out of their bad environments. I live in South Central Los Angeles and hopefully colleges look at me as working hard to get out of the ghetto.

Jeffrey Puebla

Hollywood HS

IS GRAFFITI ART?

I FOUND THE article "Redefining art" inspiring. I enjoyed how the writer described street art as a way for the artist to express himself or herself to the world. I've always wanted to go see the amazing street art on the walls at Venice Beach. I've always found street art to be very beautiful. The article inspired me to search for more art from famous and non-famous street artists. I would like to become a street artist one day. Some of the street art speaks to me and I hope I can create a masterpiece.

Yamilette Ponce

Paramount HS

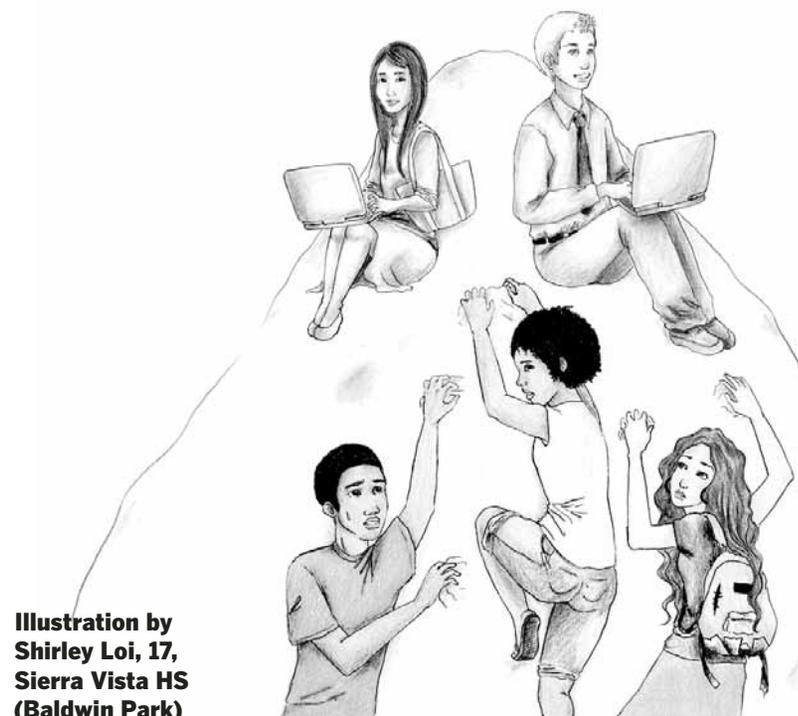


Illustration by Shirley Loi, 17, Sierra Vista HS (Baldwin Park)

Grading teachers

Our staff writers say there are better ways to evaluate teachers than using students' test scores

AT A RECENT staff meeting, we talked about how schools can determine if a teacher is effective at helping students learn. It came up because the Los Angeles Unified School District wants to use student scores on standardized tests as part of their teacher evaluations. The district believes test scores are one way to measure how effective a teacher has been. But the teachers union says test scores are unreliable. Our teen staff agreed, although a judge recently ruled that the district has to use test scores in evaluations. Our staff share their ideas for how to grade teachers.

I admit it. This year I was one of those students who fell asleep halfway through taking the California Standards Test (CST). And it wasn't because I didn't get enough sleep the night before. It's just that the test is boring, especially the English portion. I have to read all those long articles to answer five basic questions that correspond to each article. It feels like a waste of time.

I know the tests are important because my teachers have told us how the state uses the test results to determine whether our school and our teachers are doing a good job teaching. But to me the CST is not an accurate way to evaluate schools and teachers because there are a lot of factors that aren't taken into account, like students who fall asleep halfway through the test. My teacher didn't notice me sleeping because my face was turned away from him.

Students like me are why I believe that the district should not use standardized test scores to determine whether teachers are good. It wasn't my teacher's fault that I slept during the test and ended up having to guess on most questions.

By Izuriel Marquez, 17, Chavez Learning Academies (San Fernando)

I think it's important to have students be part of teacher evaluations, since we are the ones who spend the most time with the teachers.

The best teachers I've had are dedicated to their students and the subject they teach. I have always hated math. I

usually get As, but in math I got mostly Bs and sometimes Cs. But last year, I had a teacher who would show up to school at 7 a.m. for tutoring and help me one-on-one. My teacher would make class fun (as much as math can be). And when someone asked a question, he was happy to answer it. With all that, I managed to get an A. Finally!

He was a teacher who was considered "bad" because his students' standardized test scores were not always the best. I think asking a student would change that perception. I would say that my teacher was good at making sure that we understood everything, and didn't make you feel afraid to ask for help. It was the first time that I didn't hate going to math.

By Emily Bader, 15, Cleveland HS (Reseda)

As a student, I always thought my voice should matter but no principal has ever asked me how well a teacher was performing in class. I would have loved to share how my woodshop teacher was hardly there and we were left alone with big saws and dangerous machines.

But in 10th grade I transferred to a program where students' opinions counted. When a couple of my classmates complained about how our English teacher wasn't doing a good enough job keeping students quiet and didn't assign enough work, our advisory teacher got concerned. Our advisory teacher came up with the idea to make a survey to evaluate every teacher.



Illustration by Shirley Loi, 17, Sierra Vista HS (Baldwin Park)

We were thrilled because it meant our voices were going to be heard. Within weeks every student had completed a survey for all of our teachers. It had questions like, "How well is this teacher prepared for class?" and "How is classroom control with this teacher?" After the surveys our English teacher assigned more and harder homework and the students treated her with more respect.

We saw how crucial it was to give feedback. If a teacher is not doing a good job, students get affected the most. I didn't see or hear anyone criticize teachers just for being mean or say a teacher was doing a good job just because they gave out easy As. It felt like a privilege to have our opinions valued so I think all of us were honest in our evaluations.

By Jazmine Mendoza, 17, Chavez Learning Academies

I interviewed my anatomy teacher because I wanted to know how he thought teachers should be evaluated. He liked having an arranged evaluation because

it allowed him to show the administrator what he wanted to be evaluated on. But instead of the same administrators evaluating the same teachers, he preferred that they rotate because administrators with a science background would be able to understand and appreciate his methods. He said that teachers tend to behave better under observation, so there should also be a minimum of three unannounced visits. "And as a teacher, I need to be OK with that," he said. "I should be proud of what I'm doing and if I'm not, I should be looking for another profession."

I agree with this. Toward the end of the year in my history class, I kept falling asleep and my teacher didn't call me out on it. If an administrator had observed my history teacher unannounced and saw me sleeping, maybe they would have questioned his teaching abilities. Unannounced visits allow them to see how much energy a teacher puts into making sure their students learn.

By Heidi Carreon, 17, Gladstone HS (Covina)

THANK YOU FOR HELPING KEEP L.A. YOUTH OPEN!

WE WANT TO THANK EVERYONE who donated to L.A. Youth during our funding crisis in May. Thanks to our wonderful and generous supporters, we raised more than \$200,000 and were able to keep our doors open. Donors from around the country responded to our fundraising plea, allowing us to continue providing an independent voice for Los

Angeles teens. As we approach our 25th anniversary, you can help us sustain our organization by making a donation at layouth.com/donate. Your tax-deductible donation will help us continue to provide an invaluable free resource for teachers and continue to transform the lives of our teen writers, illustrators and photographers, as well as our teen readers.



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Spinning it old school

I think vinyl records are the best way to listen to music

By **Sydney Grant**

16, CHAMPS (Van Nuys)

Whenever I'm having a particularly horrible day, I come home from school and immediately retreat to my bedroom, lay on my floor, stare at the ceiling and lose myself in the sweet crackling sound of a vinyl record. It's like ear therapy.

My obsession with records started after I watched (500) Days of Summer. In the movie, Zoey Deschanel and her co-star Joseph Gordon-Levitt visit a record store. I love her, so it struck me as the coolest thing ever. I'd never been to a record store before and I felt like I needed to go there right then to discover what made records better than listening to music on your iPod.

A few months later, two weeks before Hanukkah, I had no idea what I wanted gift-wise. After hours of poring over every pair of jeans, sweater and shoe known to man (actually woman), I stumbled upon something interesting in the middle of the Urban Outfitters December catalog. As soon as I saw it, I knew that this was what I had spent so long browsing and clicking for. From its sleek jet-black buttons to cute mint green exterior, it was perfect. This was unlike any holiday present I had received before: a turntable to play the records that had captured my interest that summer.

You might be thinking, "You bought a what? From where?!" I would just like to say that I am fully aware that Urban is no place to purchase a turntable, but I was in eighth grade and didn't know any better.

The first vinyl I listened to came with my turntable. It was Arcade Fire's Funeral, one of my favorite bands and an album I had already in my iTunes. I swear I must have listened to that thing 20 times by the end of the week. It got so bad that my mom would scream at me from the kitchen to turn it down because she was "sick of hearing the same songs play over and over again."

Listening to that album put my iPod to shame. The clearness of the instruments, the just so audible crackling in the background of each song, the sound quality. The crackling is my favorite part of vinyl. It resembles the comforting cooing a fireplace makes, except more muted. The grooves (the lines the needle traces while the record is playing) on the Arcade Fire album are especially deep, which gives it a fuller sound.

I went on a vinyl-buying rampage the first few weeks after receiving my turntable. I stalked all the flea markets and record stores near my house, flipping through every record. I knew to go to the flea markets from my pre-vinyl-loving days, except then I was more interested in the floral dresses than the records. I went up to this old man with a ZZ Top cover band-worthy beard and looked at his vinyls for sale, which lacked any apparent order.



Photo by
Araceli Guitierrez, 17,
Cleveland HS (Reseda)

I was looking for any band or songs that I recognized. I only knew an album by Elvis, but purchased four other random records too that proved to be hits and misses.

Not only is the sound better, but each record has its own special character. One could have amazing album artwork, like Animal Collective's Merriweather Post Pavilion album, which if you stare at long enough appears to be moving. With vinyl, you buy the entire album and listen all the way through. I've discovered amazing musical gems between more famous tracks, such as "O.N.E." by Yeasayer.

I NEVER KNOW WHAT I'LL FIND

I buy most of my vinyl from Freakbeat Records, a record shop that's only a 15-minute bike ride from my house. Thanks to their convenient 99 cents section I've purchased several dozen albums, like the Star Trek soundtrack and The Puppies, a 90s child rap group. Spare me the judgment: it's a fun album.

I can commonly be found sitting on the floor of the 99 cents section alone or with a few of my friends, searching for new additions to my ever-growing collection. I'm on a quest for Elvis's Greatest Hits album, which I have yet to stumble upon outside the Internet. It's gotten to the point where the owner of the store knows me and my hunt. Each visit I receive both a hello and news regarding my Elvis search.

Although vinyl sound quality is best, it is possible to accidentally purchase a bad record. I think the

worst record I ever suffered through was one that was recommended by a fellow vinyl addict at a flea market. I was doing my usual browsing when he approached me, insisting that I purchase this odd-looking album with what appeared to be a robot on the cover. I was hesitant, but felt uncomfortable resisting and since it was only 89 cents, I bought it. After returning home and listening to it, I was distressed to discover it was a collection of horrifying "robot" noises. I couldn't believe there were no words on the songs, just grunting and beeping. I sold it to Freakbeat. Perhaps someone with erm ... different taste than mine now appreciates it more than I had.

I have two milk carton cases full of records from Peter Dinklage to Wu-Tang. I guess you could say that I'm obsessed, but I look at it as a hobby—something I love doing. Before I stumbled upon that record player, I couldn't have said the same about anything else.



Sydney's current obsession is Teen Dream by the indie band Beach House.

By Melissa Nuñez
16, Warren HS (Downey)

This summer, I was volunteering at my local library and my first week there I met another volunteer. We started talking about senior year and school. Then she asked me a common question: “Do you have any brothers or sisters?” I told her no, but the fact is that I once had a brother. It made me think about him, but I didn’t say anything because I had just met her.

I always ask myself, “Should I mention him or not?” Technically, I am an only child but it’s complicated. If I say yes, I have to tell them that he passed away. I want to only tell people I know well and not those I’ve just met because it’s very private. But if they ask a follow-up question like, “Did you ever want siblings?” I tell them. There are times they say, “Oh, I’m sorry” and then we keep talking about other things. But other times there’s an awkward silence. Some ask questions like, “How old was he?” or “How did he die?” because they want to know what happened.

Feb. 14, 2003, when I was 7, was the day my parents told me that I was going to have a little brother or sister. I ran in circles and jumped around the apartment screaming and yelling because I was so happy that finally I was going to be a big sister. For years, I had been asking them for a baby brother or sister. I was tired of being an only child.

I wanted someone else to play with and talk to. I imagined that if I had a sister, I could do her hair, put makeup on her, play house and she’d be like my daughter. If it was a boy I would give him advice on girls, play sports and watch TV with him.

When my mom was pregnant I took it upon myself to make sure she was OK. I helped her around the house, watched TV with her and rubbed lotion on her pregnant tummy. I would even read to the baby because even though he or she wasn’t born yet, I knew he or she could still hear me. I would be so excited to go home after school because I would get to spend more time with my mom and my future brother or sister. Nine months felt like an eternity.

I turned 8 on Nov. 7, 2003. Three days later my mom went to the hospital to give birth. It was a late birthday present. My parents left me with my mom’s friend. The next day I got the news that I was a big sister to a baby boy who my parents named Nicholas. I was so happy that finally my baby brother was born. A few days later, I was allowed to go visit my mom in the hospital and when I asked her where the nursery was she told me about the problem.

Nicholas had been born with an abnormal heartbeat and had been taken to Miller Children’s Hospital in Long Beach. The second week I went with my parents to see him in intensive care.

I CONNECTED WITH HIM RIGHT AWAY

I saw a beautiful baby boy who looked like me except he had lighter hair and skin. When I talked to him he looked around the room like he was looking for my face. It was like he recognized my voice from all those times I had talked and read to him. The next few times

He’ll always be part of my family

I’m grateful for the time I spent with my little brother before he died

we visited him, my mom was able to hold him and I would bring books to read to him. He seemed to like it because he would turn his ear toward me and listen.

At the hospital I talked to a counselor who explained to me what was going on with my brother. She said, “Nicholas isn’t feeling well right now.” She said he had to stay in the hospital but I could visit him, talk to him, read to him and give him lots of love. It was comforting that I was still able to be with him. She gave me a book about a baby being sent to a hospital because he was sick. I would read it to him over and over again and one time I took it to my third grade class and read it to the class.

After a month or so Nicholas was transferred to pediatric care where he was in his own room with a crib, TV and bathroom. It was like his home away from home. Most days my mom would pick me up from school and because my dad would be working, we would have to take three buses to get to the hospital. I had never been on that many buses so it was like my own little adventure and I loved it. When we would get to the hospital, I would leave my backpack in the room, go over to Nicholas’s crib and say hi, give him a kiss and tell him about my day. After eating I would do my homework and when I finished, I could watch the Disney Channel. I would sit next to Nicholas’s crib and talk to him about the show I was watching. When my dad got off work he would pick me and my mom up from the hospital and we would go home.

Every year I’d think about how old he would be at that time and what he would be doing. At the start of eighth grade I thought about how he would be starting school that year and he would’ve gone to the same elementary school I did.

Nicholas’s doctor informed us that he could go home but that he was at risk for hydrocephalus, a buildup of fluid inside the skull that leads to brain swelling. I pictured water going into his skull, making his head bigger, which helped me understand.

When he came home I helped my mom change him and give him baths. I would watch movies with him; his favorite was *The Little Rascals*, which always made him laugh.

In February at one of his checkups the doctors detected the beginnings of hydrocephalus. He had 11 operations. During every operation I was worried because anything could go wrong. On July 12 he was able to come back home. He needed special care but he was home and that was all that mattered to me. I could keep him now.

HE HAD TO GO BACK TO THE HOSPITAL

Then on July 16 my mom told me that he had gotten a fever. He was hospitalized again and that’s when things got worse. The fever had been caused by a septic shock, a serious condition that occurs when an infection leads to life-threatening low blood pressure.

On July 19 the doctor gave me and my parents the news that my baby brother had only a few hours to live. I cried and screamed and kicked the floor, repeating over and over, “He can’t die, he can’t.” My parents were finally able to calm me down and then I fell asleep. When I woke up I went over to his hospital crib but he wasn’t there anymore. My parents came in and by the looks on their faces I knew that my brother had died. I was sad I wasn’t able to give him a last goodbye. He passed away on July 20, 2004 at 1:20 am.

After my brother’s memorial my house was quiet for a few weeks but then we were able to talk about it. I said I was really sad because I really wanted a brother and my dad said he had been really excited about having a son. My mom talked about how she missed him. But we talked about how he was in a better place now. It made me feel better because if he had lived he wouldn’t have had a normal life because of all the care he would have needed. But now, he wouldn’t suffer.

That fall I entered fourth grade and I saw the school counselor during lunch for about two months. We’d color and make bracelets and we would talk about my time with Nicholas and how I felt after he passed away. She let me talk about how I felt angry and she would say that it was normal because it was part of grieving. She made me realize that thinking this way isn’t going to help so I

Melissa holds a picture of her brother, Nicholas, who was born with a problem with his heart and died when he was 8 months old.

Photo by Jennifer Gonzales-Romero, 19, University of La Verne



was able to accept that there was nothing that would change his not being here.

Every year I'd think about how old he would be at that time and what he would be doing. At the start of eighth grade I thought about how he would be starting school that year and he would've gone to the same elementary school I did.

There were times that I really wished my brother were there. In eighth grade, my math and science classes were harder than my seventh grade classes. At the end of my first semester my GPA had dropped to 3.5 and I didn't get the highest award for my GPA like I had before. I was really bummed. I didn't tell my mom because I didn't want her to get mad. I wished Nicholas were there because I would feel comfortable talking to him about it.

I would go to the playground over the summer and I saw little kids playing. I would think about how Nicholas could've been one of those kids.

In high school I got busier so I wasn't bored like I used to be and I didn't think about him as much. At the end of my sophomore year my best friend, who was like my brother, and I grew apart. I started realizing someone can leave you unexpectedly. Before I was so sure about everything. After Nicholas died I thought nothing else could go wrong because something so tragic had already happened. But something will go wrong again. There were times when I really needed a best friend and I didn't have that anymore. If Nicholas were here I would still have someone, a brother.

I IMAGINE HIM BEING THERE FOR ME

I want to make him proud. There are times when I get stressed with schoolwork and feel like giving up, but then I think, "If he were here, he would cheer me on." If I'm struggling in a class but at the end I get a good grade, I feel happy and think that he would be happy too.

Most of the friends I've made in high school and even some from middle school have no idea about Nicholas and it's not something I talk about just to make conversation. But during my junior year, I was tutoring with a classmate after school in the library. I was talking about L.A. Youth and she asked what story I was going to write and I told her. She said her dad had passed away so she understood. She said she wasn't able to give him a proper goodbye and I told her I wasn't able to give my brother a proper goodbye either. After that conversation we talked about other stuff and I gained a friend.

At home I'm not an only child. We still have him present with pictures and by having a special place for his ashes. We reminisce about the times we had with him. He's still in our lives.

I don't talk about my brother so others can feel sad for me. I talk about him because he's special and what happened is important to me. I thank Nicholas for having an impact on my life. I learned that life isn't going to be easy and that I shouldn't take it for granted. I learned to appreciate the little things.



Melissa still thinks about her brother on special occasions, like her birthday and award ceremonies.

Do I belong here?

The discrimination I've faced has made me wonder if I'm welcome in America

By Miguel Molina

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

One night at the end of ninth grade, my family and I were waiting for the bus near USC. My parents were happy because we had just seen a documentary my older sister was in about a garden in South Central. Our good mood ended when three white boys drove by slowly and screamed out of their car window a racial insult that I think was “wetback” and flipped us off. I wanted to yell at them but I was afraid they’d stop the car and start beating us. It made me think of African Americans who were lynched in the 1900s, and I was scared. My mom said “*niños pendejos*” (stupid boys) to the air. They had ruined a good night.

This was the first time I had faced racism and it made me wonder if people looked down on Latinos. But I didn’t find out why until 10th grade, when my class did a project on stereotypes in the media. That day our teacher was talking about the stereotypes of different people. We learned the stereotypes about Mexicans: that they are poor and lazy. I didn’t know that was how a lot of people saw us. My mom would always tell me to work hard and get my education so I wouldn’t become a dropout. I thought it was just my mom’s way of motivating me. But now I realized that she didn’t want me to end up like the Latino students in my neighborhood who don’t go to college. I suddenly realized what Latino students meant when they teased one another by saying, “You’re such a Mexican.” At lunch if someone said, “I ate this delicious torta” another Latino would say, “Oh you’re such a Mexican.” They were basically saying it sucks to be a Mexican. I wished I weren’t a Latino with brown skin.

Before I learned about stereotypes, the image I had of myself was of a student who liked to play soccer and listen to music. I thought that I was like everybody else;

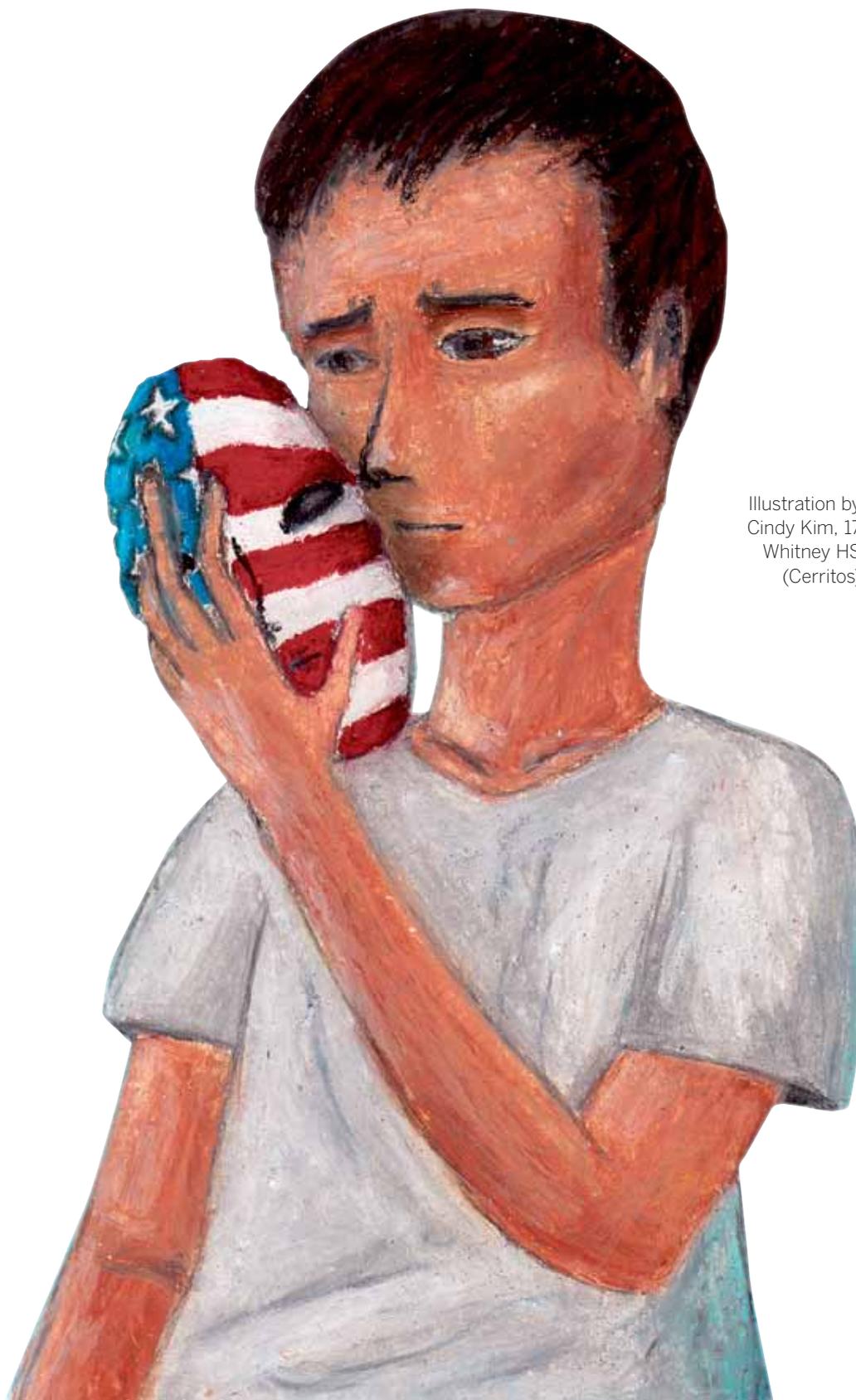


Illustration by
Cindy Kim, 17,
Whitney HS
(Cerritos)

I didn't consider race or its importance. The new image I had of myself was of a "Mexican" who is unsuccessful and stupid.

I TRIED TO GET RID OF MY ACCENT

I was ashamed of who I was. I stopped wearing my Mexico soccer jersey and just left it in my drawer. I didn't want an accent because I thought it made me sound less intelligent. Once I told my mom that I was only going to talk to her in English. I thought that if I talked only in English, I would lose my accent. For a few hours I talked to her in English, saying "Why?" and "When will the food be ready?" instead of "Por qué?" and "Cuándo va a estar la comida lista?" But my mother couldn't understand what I was saying so I gave up and continued talking with her in Spanish. I also read books out loud in English because I thought it would help me lose my accent, but it didn't help because I was just reading in my accent with no one correcting me.

At the time, a few of my Latino classmates called me "beaner." I had thought they called me that because I liked Mexico. But when I learned about stereotypes, it was embarrassing because it meant somebody who was a failure. I wondered if they understood what beaner meant. I wanted them to use my name but I thought people would think I was overreacting so I didn't stand up for myself. It wasn't until 11th grade that I told people to stop calling me that. When other Latino students started using it too, I decided it had to end. I told them white people invented that word to look down on Mexicans. After that they stopped calling me beaner.

I thought that it would be hard for me to be successful because I am a Latino and people look down on them. My school required students to interview eight people who work in the field they have an interest in. In 10th grade I was interested in microbiology. I was excited about my project. I thought that I would be able to use a microscope to look at microbes. But when I called scientists to schedule an interview, I thought that I was not going to be taken seriously. I thought that my accent made me sound stupid. When I'd ask if I could interview them most of them said, "No, I'm busy." Looking back now, I'm pretty sure they were busy, but I thought that my accent was the reason those scientists didn't want to talk to me.

I managed to get two interviews but I stopped trying to get more because I wasn't motivated. During the interviews I was conscious of my accent and I stuttered, which I thought made me sound unprofessional and unprepared. The scientists answered all of my questions and showed me around the lab. They were being nice so I thought maybe my accent didn't matter and that helped me relax.

OTHER MEXICANS MADE FUN OF ME

Being called a failure by another Latino made me believe that I was going to be failure. One day in 11th grade we were having a group discussion in history class. Two kids at my table were insulting another kid, telling him he looked like someone who sells gum on the streets. I was staring because they were being rude when the kid next to me said, "You look like one of those Mexicans who sells food on the Metro." I saw

the people at the table laughing at me and I felt embarrassed. I told him that he was also Mexican. He said, "I don't look as Mexican as you." I was confused. Was it his light skin that made him less of a Mexican and more American?

That was the first time I'd heard someone say I don't look as Mexican as you. Could it be that the people who succeed in this country are those who look American? I hated these thoughts. It made me wonder if I belonged in the United States. It made me wish that I were a different race. It made me lose confidence in myself.

Toward the end of 11th grade I started to realize that not everyone was looking down on me. For a school project, I chose to write restaurant reviews. When I went to a restaurant in Little Armenia, it was just me and another table of white people. "Oh wow," I thought, "This place looks fancy and expensive. I don't belong." As soon as I sat down, I started to sweat even though it wasn't that hot. I took off my jacket. I saw the waiter talking to the chefs and I thought they were judging

thing as her. It made me realize I'm not the only person who struggles to feel accepted and that I can get over it.

One day my teacher asked the class to share what they thought was the most important thing for a person to succeed in education: getting support from your family, economics or handling stereotypes and racism. I was the only person who chose handling stereotypes and racism because it had affected me. I said that facing stereotypes and racism was most important because if you don't know how to handle it, you won't have the confidence to succeed—like when I thought that my accent ruined my chance of getting an interview. The fact that that choice was listed helped me realize that it's something that a lot of people face. It made me feel normal.

BECOMING A LEADER AT SCHOOL

GAVE ME CONFIDENCE

While I was running for school president my senior year, I wasn't sure I was going to win. But I told myself that to be successful I have to stop looking down on

Before I learned about stereotypes, the image I had of myself was of a student who liked to play soccer and listen to music. I thought that I was like everybody else; I didn't consider race or its importance. The new image was of a "Mexican" who is unsuccessful and stupid.

me. I kept thinking, "Are they going to serve me?" But I didn't leave because I had to write a review. Minutes later, the waiter stopped talking with the chefs and took my order. He was happy to serve me and asked me if I needed anything else. I ordered frog legs and when I finished eating I saw the owner and I knew I had to talk to him for my project. I started asking him questions about his restaurant and I guess that he liked that because he gave me a free baklava. After I left the restaurant, I thought, "That wasn't bad at all." I was just overreacting because of my past experiences.

As I went to more restaurants, I felt more confident and I wasn't as nervous. It helped me realize that not all people think of me as a failing Latino. Now I take my friends and family to most of the restaurants I have visited.

Also in 11th grade my class read *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. Growing up in the 1930s, Angelou doesn't like herself because she is African-American. She does not like her "nappy" hair and dark skin. In the book she is trying to discover who she is as an African-American woman and starts to accept herself more at the end. She looks at her grandmother as a strong, successful African-American woman. She owned her own shop and one time she stood up to a white dentist who wouldn't help Angelou when she had a bad tooth. It felt like I was going through the same

myself. When I won, I realized that I can be successful and people like to listen to good ideas.

Before, I was trying to be more American by getting rid of my accent. Now I realize that speaking Spanish doesn't make me less of a person. It means I'm more educated because I can speak two languages and I should practice it more instead of trying to forget it. I read the Spanish newspaper *La Opinión* to find out what's going on with immigration policies and to practice my Spanish.

I know I can be successful because it's me who gets to make that choice. My plan is to attend college. I want to prove to people who think that Latinos are failures that we can be successful. I do belong in the United States. An American is a person who overcomes struggles to become successful and that is what I'm doing.



Miguel is now proud to be Latino. He likes talking with people and doesn't worry about his accent anymore.

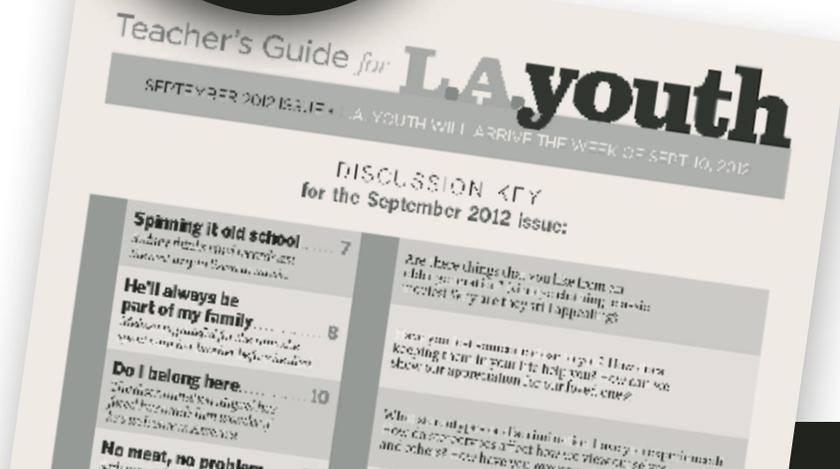


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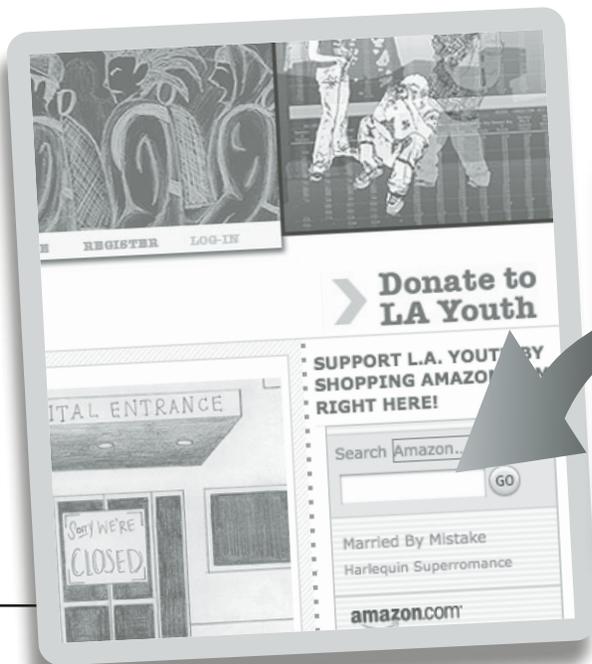
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Many teens try to be vegetarian at some point in their lives, whether it's for their health, animal rights or the environment. We decided to see how hard it would be to not eat meat for seven days.

an Juan
ont HS

First day I skipped lunch because cafeteria was serving hamburgers. I felt home dizzy with my stomach empty so I ran to the fridge but I was disappointed by what I found inside: rotten fruit and mushy lettuce. I ate three pieces of bread in the end part that everyone ate. Then I shoved handfuls of bread in my mouth. My parents went to the grocery store with me for a week. I should've talked to my mom before but my sister tried to be vegetarian and it stressed my mom out so I decided to try this one to myself. I got some ingredients to make a salad for lunch the next

day. I ate my salad while my meat-eating friends were eating. "What the heck are you eating, it tastes rotten so I didn't bother to eat it," they said. I went to my classes hungry and wondering whether I should continue. But then I walked into the kitchen and my mom cooking vegetarian food for the next three days. I kissed her and had some of her vegetable soup, mushrooms, spinach, onions and tomatoes. On Wednesday, my mom taught

me how to prepare her veggie pasta. The recipe: lots of red and green bell peppers (my favorite), mushrooms, vermicelli noodles and some garlic. It was great! However, even with all the good food I was eating, I noticed that I got tired faster while running or playing volleyball. I researched what might be wrong. I found out that vegetarians might not get enough iron, zinc and protein. My parents told me to take multivitamins daily and eat peanuts, which are high in zinc. I realized that being vegetarian is more than not eating meat. I still have to make sure I stay healthy.

My energy started improving. The next few days passed by like a breeze because I always had something good to eat, whether it was Thai red curry takeout or huevos rancheros I made at home. When my parents or my sister took me to restaurants, I thought that I would have limited choices but instead my eyes were opened to vegetarian dishes that I never noticed before, like veggie rolls, chop suey and my favorite, avocado sushi.

After a week of not eating meat I felt great. I tried to continue being a vegetarian but my parents encouraged me to be a pescetarian (you eat fish but not any other type of meat) because it would be easier. I'm cool with that because I love seafood. It's a good stepping stone to becoming a full vegetarian in the long run.

vegetarians, and my first experience was, "They'll never be able to eat this meat product here!" Favorite foods are bacon, sushi, and I always thought that would be tough, even for me. It wasn't. Vegetarianism has always been one of my interests. I'm a health-conscious person (I eat kale). So when I told my mom I was vegetarian for a week, my breakfasts remained

nearly the same: eggs with toast or yogurt and granola. Dinners were also relatively unchanged because my mom often cooks vegetarian dishes: pizza with leafy vegetables and olives, pasta with sundried tomatoes, and eggplant parmesan.

Lunch was my biggest difficulty. I almost always eat a beef or turkey sandwich for lunch. Before the challenge, it had never occurred to me that I ate meat nearly every day! To solve this problem, we found a thermos and I ate leftovers from whatever dinner we had the night before.

Ironically, though, it was so easy to be vegetarian that I forgot I was doing the challenge, and on the second to last day, I ate beef jerky during a classroom potluck. I didn't even realize I had failed until hours later! When I did, I laughed and had to explain to my family what was so funny.



Camille Didelot-Hearn
16, Los Angeles
Center for Enriched Studies

I'm known in my family as "the carnivore." My older sister just left for college and she's planning on being a vegetarian because she loves animals, but I think she's crazy. I love eating my dad's tri-tip, chicken, ribs and steak. However, I am always up for a challenge, so I was ready to take this one on. I thought it could

be healthy for me, since one of my New Year's resolutions was to eat healthier. But trying to be a vegetarian in a meat-eating world was hard.

The first day, I woke up to the smell of sizzling bacon. I waltzed into the kitchen and grabbed a piece before my mom reminded me that I couldn't have any. It was torture watching my family eat that bacon in front of me while I sadly ate my cereal, but I did it and I was proud of myself. I made it a whole two days before the first incident.

My family and I were at the dinner table, eating artichokes with a cream sauce. As soon as I finished, I was

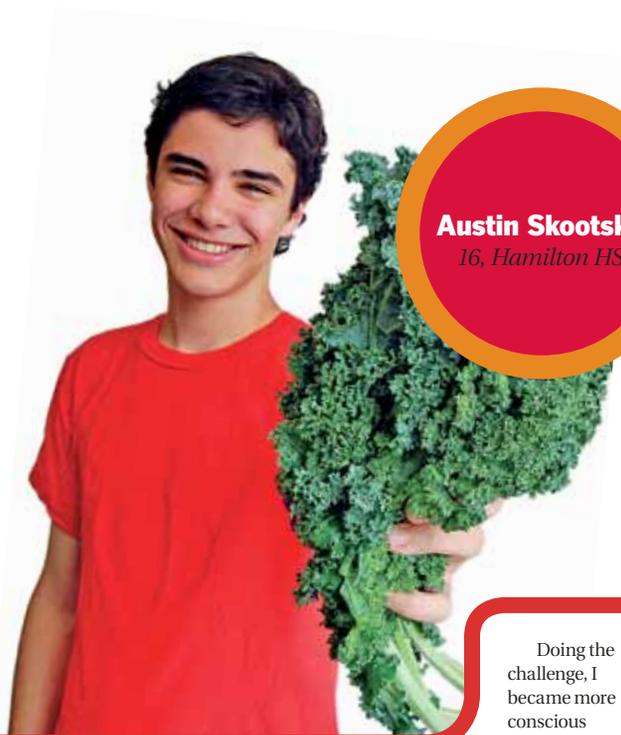
in the middle of saying how happy I was that this vegetarian challenge was going so well when my dad blurted out that there was a dry veal base in the sauce. He'd completely forgotten about the challenge. But I realized it wasn't my fault, so I moved on, looking forward to the rest of the meatless week.

The second incident was when I slept over at my friend's house. I forgot to tell them that I was going vegetarian for the week, so when my friend's stepdad offered me steak, telling me how he had made it just for me because he knows that I love it, I couldn't say no. I couldn't resist the smell and I didn't want to be rude and not eat the food that he had specially prepared for me. I felt guilty while eating it, but my mom said that I did the right thing.

Between these incidents, I would find myself opening the fridge and staring at the leftover steak but proudly resisting it and eating vegetables or even fruit with my dinner. I would sometimes go to bed hungry, but I would ignore it until the morning. My family eats meat a lot. We didn't have any substitutes for protein that I could eat, so I was stuck with whatever was in our fridge.

The third (and last) incident happened when I was baby-sitting. The girls who I baby-sit always eat lunch whenever I come over, and I have some of it because I get hungry too. This is like second nature to me so when I ate the small piece of bologna, I didn't even think about it until I got home. I was in the middle of telling my family how my day went when I realized that I ate a slice of bologna, which is certainly not vegetarian.

Ever since the challenge, I've been eating more fruits and vegetables. I'm still including meat in my diet because meat is a great source of protein. It was a tough challenge and seemed like the longest week ever, but I made it through!



Austin Skootsky
16, Hamilton HS

Doing the challenge, I became more conscious of how much meat I eat, which

has made me feel more guilty about what I eat (mostly for environmental reasons, such as the amount of energy and water needed to raise one cow), but it hasn't actually changed my diet. As long as In-N-Out exists, I'll likely never give up meat.

No meat, no problem

I wasn't happy when my family decided to be vegan, but now I like tofu and soy milk



Seth eats vegan pasta with soy “chicken” tenders, tofu sausage and broccoli.

Photo by Silvia Velasquez, 13, Glendale HS

By Seth Falcon

14, *Environmental Science and Technology HS*

My favorite food used to be spaghetti and meatballs with lots of mozzarella cheese. I also liked lasagna, pepperoni pizza—basically anything with lots of meat and cheese. So when my parents told me that I was going to be a vegan, I was annoyed.

Last year, my parents had a barbecue for Easter. As we all piled our plates high with thick steaks, we

noticed that my aunt had only rice and beans on her plate. She said, “I’m not eating meat anymore.” We were all astonished. “Why not?” we asked.

She explained to us that she had become a vegan. I’d heard this word before, but I didn’t know what it meant. My aunt explained that vegans don’t eat anything that comes from animals, like meat, fish, dairy and eggs, unlike vegetarians, who don’t eat meat or fish but do eat eggs and dairy.

My aunt said being vegan had health benefits. Later that day, my aunt gave my mom some books explaining the benefits of the vegan diet. They must have made some good points because a few days later, my mom told my dad and me that we should become vegan. She said it could strengthen our immune systems, which could help our body defend against health problems like diabetes and prevent heart attacks. My dad is always ready to try new things, so he joined my mom.

I wanted to keep eating all kinds of great tasting meat, like crispy fried chicken and big juicy steaks. I ate healthy most of the time and I exercised too, so I didn’t worry about health problems. I kept this to myself though, because I doubted I could get my parents to change their minds. They said we would try it for only a few months, but I was still not looking forward to it.

There are two types of vegans: ones who don’t eat animal products and ones who also stop using animal products, like wool and leather. We were only changing our diets.

YUCK!

My first day as a vegan was terrible. For lunch I threw together a sandwich with lots of lettuce, tomatoes and some mustard. It didn’t have that same meaty smell or taste. Without ham, it tasted like cardboard. Our first vegan dinner was bland rice and vegetables. Afterward, I rummaged through our fridge looking for leftover meat, but my parents had given all of it away to friends and family.

The following week was much better. My mom bought a vegan cookbook and learned how to cook with tofu. I had never tried tofu before. It looked like a chunk of white slime. But when my mom served dinner, the tofu looked like scrambled eggs mixed with vegetables. And it tasted just like egg! I gobbled my food up in minutes and got seconds.

After that day, my mom’s recipes got more complex. She made pancakes with soy milk and an egg substitute, vegan pasta that she bought from Trader Joe’s with soy “meat” balls, and tofu “chicken” sandwiches. Everything tasted just like its non-vegan equivalent, so I never missed meat anymore.

For lunch at school I took leftovers or a Tofurky sandwich, which is vegan turkey made of tofu. At first, my friends asked me why I was vegan, what I could and couldn’t eat, and what I ate as meat substitutes. One day one of my friends asked me if I wanted some chicken. “No, I’m fine,” I said. I didn’t crave chicken anymore. It didn’t even feel like real food to me. “Come on! You know you want some,” he said, as he waved it in front of my face.

“It’s not going to work,” I said, laughing. “You can’t convince me!”

He tried for a few more minutes, but he couldn’t

WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VEGAN AND VEGETARIAN?

Vegetarians don’t eat meat or fish. Vegans don’t eat any foods that come from animals, such as meat, fish, dairy or eggs. Some vegans also don’t wear clothes or shoes made from materials that come from animals, such as leather, wool, silk or fur. To learn more about veganism, go to vegan.org.

make me eat it. My other friends just watched and laughed at him. So he gave up and went back to eating.

I STARTED FEELING HEALTHIER

One day, a few months after we became vegan, I weighed myself and noticed that I had lost about five pounds. I needed to wear a belt for pants that were too small just a few months ago. I usually went to bed at 9 p.m. but I could stay up an extra hour because I had more energy, and I could still wake up the next day at 6 a.m. feeling rested. I could focus in school better and didn’t fall asleep in class anymore.

I thought this sudden onset of effects was pretty weird, so I asked my parents about this. They said they felt it too. “I feel more energized,” my dad said. His cholesterol levels have also gone down.

The only thing that is a bit of a problem is eating out. Whenever I go to a friend’s party, most of the food is not vegan. When I go to the movies, I can’t eat popcorn because of the butter, or most of the candy because it either has milk or gelatin, which is made of a protein found in animal skins and tendons. At my school dance at the end of eighth grade I was told that I would get something vegan. But I never got anything so I picked at some salad and fruit. For the rest of the night I felt kind of sleepy. Now I’ve learned my lesson. I eat before I go somewhere and then I have no problems.

A few years ago if you’d asked me to try being vegan, I would have called you crazy. But now I believe that this diet is great because it’s made me feel healthier. And even though people sometimes call me crazy for giving up meat, I don’t listen to them. I’ve been vegan for more than a year now, and I don’t plan to stop anytime soon.



Seth has lost 15 pounds since he became a vegan.

Wikipedia works

Now I use the website to look up more than just random facts

By Keziah Kim

17, Flintridge Preparatory School

It was the third day of school last year and I was sitting in my biology class, waiting for the bell to ring so I could go home. Just then, Eric, a smart guy next to me, asked the teacher a question. I didn't even catch what he said. What got my attention was that the teacher said, "Well, let's look it up." Then he went straight to wikipedia.org.

This surprised me. My teachers rarely used the Internet to look up information in the middle of their classes, and he went to Wikipedia! I thought that most teachers didn't like Wikipedia because anything on the online encyclopedia can be changed by anyone.

The teacher looked up whatever Eric had asked about and a few seconds later a comprehensive summary and a picture were projected on the screen in front of us. Throughout the year our biology teacher would use Wikipedia a few times a week to help explain things or to look for pictures of plants, animals or bacteria.

You may be thinking, "What a weird teacher. Wikipedia is not a reliable source. No students, let alone teachers, should be using it." I don't blame you. If anyone can change a Wikipedia entry, you don't always know that the person making the change knows what he or she is talking about. So the information you find might be incorrect.

From experience though, I think using Wikipedia is OK. A few years ago, my friends and I looked up the Wikipedia pages for our school and our rival school. We messed around on those pages, changing descriptions and sports statistics to make our school look better and the rival school worse. We also decided to go on some pages for historical figures and change really significant facts, to see if anyone would catch and correct them.

Five minutes after we started messing around on our school pages, we checked them to see if our changes got saved. We hit refresh and all the changes were gone. Surprised, my friend also checked the historical pages we altered and all of our changes were gone. After seeing my writing erased in minutes, if not seconds, and



Keziah learned on Wikipedia that her favorite singer survived a risky throat surgery, which made her respect him even more.



learning about a community of volunteers who correct mistakes, I dare not mess with Wikipedia again.

THE TRAINED VOLUNTEERS MAKE ME TRUST IT MORE

In early July I learned that there is a dedicated community of people that works on fixing mistakes and editing pages. I had to read an article for my SAT class titled "Wikipedia and the Death of the Expert" by Maria Bustillos. The article said that there's a network of thousands of trained volunteers who try to prevent errors and solve disputes. I thought this was cool. If people are putting in that much time it must mean they care about correct information, so I feel like I can trust the information on Wikipedia more.

So while your favorite celebrity's page might contain errors (since they're still alive, information about them like what movies they've been in is frequently changing), pages about significant historical figures, like Napoleon, will usually be correct.

For my European history class last year, I had to write an essay about the role of women in the Renaissance, a cultural movement that began in Italy in the 14th century and spread to the rest of Europe. When I got home that evening, I started by reading the tiny section about women in my textbook. I was annoyed. I had to write a three-page paper and the textbook did not have enough information. I was going to need additional sources.

So I went to Wikipedia (it's bookmarked because I use it so much) and I typed in "women" and "Renaissance." I got a page on the Renaissance and another page on American historian Joan Kelly, who questioned whether women had a role in the Renaissance. I was

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

surprised that Wikipedia even gave results, because my textbook had said women were not an important part of that time period. According to Wikipedia, a few women were able to participate by paying artists to paint, but they couldn't succeed as artists or writers. I noticed that there were three footnotes in the first paragraph, which led me to websites like BBC History and published books.

I don't completely rely on Wikipedia. In fact, no one should depend on a single source no matter how reliable it seems, because that is the easiest way to write a one-sided, biased paper. In eighth grade I wrote a paper about the Korean War and after I read about it on Wikipedia, I realized that I had been biased toward the Korean point of view.

All of the Wikipedia pages I've seen are written in language that's easy to understand. Almost all historical figures and events, works of art, and key themes are linked so that if you click on a term in an entry, it leads to another page that gives more information. I had to do a Spanish presentation about the culture in the Castilla-La Mancha region of Spain. I looked up "Castilla-La Mancha" on Wikipedia in Spanish. There was a link to a lengthy page for the novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha* and the author Miguel de Cervantes. The page on *Don Quixote* explained bits of information I didn't even expect, such as the book's influence on politics in Spain.

But as helpful as Wikipedia has been with explaining the role of women in the Renaissance and Spanish history, I would still rather spend my time looking up my favorite singers and TV shows.

I'm ready to vote

Registering was easier than I expected, and it's free

By Kristy Plaza

18, Duarte HS (2012 graduate)

For the past two years I was part of a club at school called Youth-2-Youth that held voter registrations at school and led discussions on politics. I learned the importance of being an educated citizen and that I hold some power—the power to vote. I am responsible for helping choose the people who will run our country and make decisions on issues I care about, like same-sex marriage, immigration and abortion rights.

This is why I registered to vote as soon as I could. I can't wait to vote in the upcoming election. I feel lucky that my first time voting will be for president!

When I was a sophomore, I saw a presentation by Rock the Vote. They said that as young people, we hold more power than we know. We have influence over what happens in our country because the moment we turn 18, we are voters. I felt empowered, even though I had to wait. This was my first encounter with the political process. It made me want to be a part of it.

When I got home, I created an account on the Rock the Vote website so I could get updates on elections and a reminder to vote. As the years went by, I received many reminders to vote and whenever I got those reminders, I would sigh with

a little frustration and look forward to when I could.

About a week before I turned 18 my plan was to register through Rock the Vote's website. However, before I could even start the process, I was sent a voter registration application in the mail. I am not sure who sent it to me, but it looked like the voter registration forms at the post office.

I'm pro-choice and I favor legalizing marriage for same-sex couples. Once I filled that out, I signed and dated the form. The return address was already printed on the envelope; all I needed was a stamp. I mailed the form and I was done. It was free to register and it took only about five minutes.

It's also easy to register using an online form. I think

Rock the Vote is the best place to go because they will email you (if you choose that option) to make sure that you have signed and mailed the registration application. If you have any questions you can email them.

Go to www.rockthevote.org and click the large, red "REGISTER HERE" button in the upper right corner. This will take you to a form that will ask all the same questions as the application I filled out. This form gives the voter more political parties to choose from, such as: Democrat, Republican, Green, Libertarian, other or decline-to-state. Once this form is complete, Rock the Vote sends your application to your email so that you can print it out. All that's left to do is sign it and mail it to the return address found in the email.

Another way to register is at the DMV. The voter registration form is on the back of the driver's license/California ID application. Once you finish you sign it and turn it in. Everything is finished at the DMV.

Despite how easy it is to register to vote, not everyone does. My parents don't vote.

They believe that their vote wouldn't make a difference because according to them the candidates "suck anyways," so there's no point in voting.

I'm disappointed that my parents don't vote. I believe that it's my duty as a citizen to vote and I can't wait. The registration process was easy and it didn't take much time. Though all I did was mail in some of my information, I felt as if I achieved something significant. And I feel a sense of pride knowing that I am doing my part by being an educated and politically active citizen.



Photo by Zzzahkia Burnley, 15,
King Drew Medical Magnet HS

REGISTERING TO VOTE:

You must be a United States citizen, a resident of California, 18 years of age or older on Election Day, not in prison or in county jail, and not found by a court to be mentally incompetent.

The deadline to register to vote in the presidential election on Nov. 6: registration must be postmarked no later than Oct. 22.

For more information or for a registration form go to: sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_vr.htm or call 1-800-345-VOTE (8683).

I decided to fill out the paper application instead of going to Rock the Vote. Whether I completed the form online or used this paper application, I had to mail in the paperwork. So instead of printing anything out, I used the already printed form.

It asked for my full name, address, birthday, status of U.S. citizenship, my party affiliation (which political party I wanted to sign up for) and for my driver's license number or the last four digits of my Social Security number. I was nervous when it asked for my driver's license number because I don't have one, but then I noticed that I could use my Social Security number. Overall, I was surprised how easy this form was to fill out.

I GOT TO CHOOSE MY POLITICAL PARTY

For party affiliation, I could choose from three options: Democrat, Republican or decline-to-state (which means not choosing any political party). I also had the option of writing in one of the smaller parties, like the Libertarian or Green parties. I chose the Democratic Party because when it comes to abortion,



Kristy frequently reminds her friends and family members to vote.

Cheap and chic

I like shopping at thrift stores because I can look good without spending a lot

By Camille Didelot-Hearn

16, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

When I walk into a thrift store, the smell of the older clothes that have a past overpowers me and reminds me of all the times I've been there and all of the things I've bought. It's almost like when you walk into your grandparents' house. This is the unique smell that thrift stores have. And it's one of my favorite smells in the world.

This may sound strange to some people, but I love clothes that have been worn before. My family has saved so much money by shopping at thrift stores instead of at stores like Target, Kohl's or Forever 21. It lets me have my own style and express myself the way I want to.

I have so many clothes from thrift stores—my jean jacket, a bunch of floral dresses, and tons of button-ups and jean shorts. I always get compliments on this baby blue tank top which has flowers on it that I love, and it makes me happy to think that it's pretty much one of a kind and that I got it for much cheaper than at a department store—it was only \$4.99!

My dad is an expert at thrift store shopping—he finds designer shoes for my mom for \$20 and when he goes online at home he finds out the original price was \$200. Because of my dad, I know how to thrift store shop. When you find something you like, you need to immediately see if there are any stains or damages on the item, because those are common reasons why people donate things. Once you buy something, wash it at home before you wear it because you never know if people washed it right before it was donated. Also, sometimes if something has a tiny hole or a faint stain, the people at the store will let you bargain the price down.

The thrift store that I shop at the most is the Goodwill on Beverly Boulevard. When I walk in I see several sections: women's clothes, men's clothes, furniture, shoes, electronics, etc. It's very organized. It's almost always clean and there are dressing rooms with full-length mirrors to try things on. A shirt or blouse costs from \$2 to \$4, while shorts, skirts and pants are \$3 to \$5. However, a nice jacket or a designer pair of shoes are around \$15.

SOME OF THE CLOTHES ARE ACTUALLY NEW

Movie sets donate leftover outfits with the price tags still on them. I have a red button-up shirt that had been used for a TV sitcom, though I don't know which one. The Goodwill manager told my dad and



Photos by Emily Bader, 15, Cleveland HS (Reseda)

me that a truck had just come by to drop off about 10 of the same shirts from the set.

When I was little, I was embarrassed about going to thrift store shopping. I thought the clothes were dirty because someone had already used them. My friends were getting new clothes from places like H&M and Urban Outfitters and I wished that I could have brand name clothes and be just like them. Whenever anyone would ask me where I got my clothes because they liked them, I would lie and say that I didn't know because I didn't want everyone to know that my family didn't have a ton of money.

When I was in eighth or ninth grade my best friend Hannah suggested that we go to Goodwill, and that's

how I found out that I'm not the only one who can't afford to always buy brand name clothes. The next time someone asked me where I got my shirt, I proudly said Goodwill. That's when I found out that many of my friends love thrift store shopping. If we want to go shopping, we plan our day so we can stop by all of our favorite places. We start at the Goodwill on Beverly, because it's the one we like the best. We also go to Out of the Closet on Fairfax, which has funky hats and boas from movie sets, but also regular clothes. We also like the National Council of Jewish Women on Fairfax, where I love bargaining over the price of whatever I'm buying.

One time I was with my friends at Wasteland, which is a pricier and more vintage-looking thrift store on Melrose. We started trying on the really high heels and the funny dresses with huge skirts or weird patterns, while taking pictures and giggling like crazy.

We got kicked out for "disturbing the other customers." It was pretty hilarious! Even if you don't find something that you like, you and your friends can definitely have a good time at any thrift store.

THRIFT STORES IN THE LOS ANGELES AREA

GOODWILL

Multiple locations.
Go to locator.goodwill.org to find stores near you

OUT OF THE CLOSET

Thirteen locations in Los Angeles, West Hollywood, Pasadena, the San Fernando Valley and Long Beach. Go to outofthecloset.org and click on "Locations"

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN

Nine locations in Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley. Go to ncjwla.org and click on "Find a Location"

WASTELAND

Three locations in Los Angeles, Santa Monica and Studio City. Go to www.shopwasteland.com and click on "Store Locations"



Camille's favorite recent thrift store buy is a \$200 brown leather jacket that she got for \$15.

Sharing a room is messed up

Why can't my sister be as neat as me?



By Zzzahkia Burnley

15, King Drew Medical Magnet HS

I'm a clean fiend. My sister's the messy one. So sharing a room has been frustrating.

If you were to open my drawers, you'd see shirts with shirts, pants with pants and everything folded neatly. I like knowing where things are and being able to find them quickly. And I don't have to iron as much because my clothes aren't wrinkled.

"Your drawers look like the Macy's

clothing store, and mine look like the homeless shelter," says my sister, Zzzah-Zzaz, who admits she's messy.

If she goes looking for something to wear and can't find it, she'll throw all her clothes onto the floor or on her bed. To "clean up" she stuffs clothes and other things into drawers where no one can see them.

When we were in elementary school I was too busy playing with my toys to care about how our room looked. The problems started in middle school. We lived with our aunt and she forced us to

Zzzahkia (right) and her sister, Zzzah-Zzaz, have always shared a bedroom.

start keeping our bedroom clean. This was easy for me because I was naturally clean. But it was hard for Zzzah-Zzaz because she wasn't. She didn't get in trouble as much as she should have, though, because she'd hide her things. She was undercover messy.

My sister would get caught when my aunt would see the sleeve of a shirt or part of a scarf hanging outside her drawer, or when she'd catch my sister struggling to open a drawer that was overstuffed with clothes, journals, purses, chargers for electronics, makeup and school supplies. My aunt would then order her to clean it. Or when my sister was at school, my aunt would put everything from under my sister's bed on top of it along with pulling the drawers out of her dresser and dumping everything on her bed. With all of that covering her bed, she would have to clean before she could go to sleep.

When I watched her cleaning, I'd think, "It doesn't take that long to fold your clothes. And you should never have to take everything out your drawers to find something. You just have to pick up one shirt to get to the one under it."

OUR ROOM DIDN'T STAY CLEAN FOR VERY LONG

Even when my sister did put stuff away and organize her drawers, it would last for two weeks, at the most. For about one week, I got the clean bedroom I liked to live in. The two sides of our room looked like mirror images. All our shoes were in the bins, our comforters were both perfectly straight and all of our stuffed animals were sitting neatly on our beds.

I could relax not having to clean up after her. Her dresses were on hangers instead of under her bed, the floor was clean instead of dotted with rubber bands from her hair and her jacket was in the closet instead of on a bedpost. I have to admit, I hung my jackets on the bedposts, too.

After about a week she got too lazy to care about keeping her stuff organized and then I'd see her slide notebooks under her bed. Then I'd notice her stuffing clothes in her dresser drawers again. And then the rubber bands would start reappearing. After the second week, I'd be so irritated that I'd help clean even though I knew

it would get messy in two weeks.

While I was helping her fold shirts, I'd say, "You need to keep this clean, because I don't have time to be helping you."

I stopped helping Zzzah-Zzaz a few months ago. I was tired of this. She needed to start taking responsibility for staying organized. Of course she didn't. Even though she always said "thank you," I felt she was unappreciative. If she truly appreciated my help, then she would have kept the drawers the way I had helped her organize them.

When her clothes mix up with mine in the closet and I have trouble finding my stuff, I get irritated that her mess is invading my space. So I'll pick up her clothes and put them on her bed, just like my auntie used to do.

When she sees the pile of clothes I've made on her bed, she'll tell me, "I'm not doing this." She'll put her clothes away without folding them so they're still messy. Then I'll put them back on the bed because I want her to fold them. She eventually folds her clothes and puts them away neatly.

We get into arguments about her being messy a couple times a week. She's messy every day, but I try to ignore it most days because it's not worth fighting all the time.

Some people might say that I should just let her be messy, and that it's not my place to be the clean police. If we didn't share a room, I wouldn't complain as much because I wouldn't have to see her mess very often. But if they had to share a bedroom with her, they might feel like me.

I hope that someday she'll change and she'll fold her clothes (without anyone telling her to), keep her papers organized and when people ask her where her things are, she'll be able to tell them. I don't know if this will happen. But if she has her own house someday, people will judge her and she won't want to be known as the woman with a messy house.

I know I probably won't have my own room while I'm in high school, but I hope in college I'll have a neat roommate.



Zzzahkia believes that if you stay organized, you should be successful.

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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 article 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)*



Staff members
judge a photo
contest

L.A. YOUTH GIVES ME EXPERIENCE in journalism, which is what I want to major in at college. The weekly meetings with the rest of the staff are great because I get to hear from other teens about topics like the Trayvon Martin shooting, mental illness and college. When other teens share their personal experiences that relate to the topic we're talking about, it makes me realize I'm not the only one who's had that experience. —*Melissa Nuñez, 16, Warren HS (Downey)*

**NEXT
ORIENTATION:
SATURDAY,
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L.A. youth

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How (not) to get the guy

I wanted guys to know I liked them, but I was a failure at flirting

By Jazmine Mendoza

17, Chavez Learning Academies (San Fernando)

One day during sophomore year I heard my guy friends complaining about how it was hard to get girls to talk to them. They said, “You girls are so complicated” and “I don’t understand them!” I told my friend Andre that it was simple to approach a girl—just be yourself. But he said that wasn’t good advice because girls would always reject him because he wasn’t good looking enough.

My guy friends told me I had it easy. I just had to stand there and be pretty and guys would want to ask me out. I didn’t see it that way though. What if I didn’t want to wait for a guy to ask me out? I asked them, “Why isn’t it acceptable for me to ask a guy out?” They replied that it was a man’s job, just like he pays for dinner.

So that summer I decided that if I got the chance I would try making the first move. I got that chance a few weeks later. There was a hot guy I saw every day on the bus on my way to summer school. He was tall, with Nick-Jonas-like fluffy hair and a sweet smile. He seemed sensitive too. He always gave up his seat to anyone who was standing on the bus.

I tried grabbing his attention by wearing dresses every day to look extra pretty and wearing my favorite perfume. He didn’t seem to notice. Since he would always wear a hat, my friend and I would call him the “hat cutie.” And we made sure to mention it when we were near him so he would overhear us. “I wonder what ‘hat cutie’s’ name is?” or “I wonder what ‘hat cutie’ looks like without his hat?” He would look at us when he heard “hat,” so I think he knew we were talking about him. But he never talked to us.

MY FRIEND FORCED US TO TALK

One of my friends found out his name through her friend who knew him. We were on the bus and when she told me she knew it, I tried to guess it. “Joseph.” “Ricardo.” Then my friends started guessing with me. We weren’t getting it and she was laughing and said she was going to scream out, “Steven, there’s a girl here that would like to meet you!” I didn’t think she was serious, until she actually did it. I wanted to slap her.

He walked over slowly, looking confused. All my friends were giggling and staring at him. He sat down



Illustration by Rachel Chung, L.A. Youth archives

next to me and we introduced ourselves. His eyes were wandering like he wanted time to go by faster. I was giggling along with my friends. Fidgeting with his fingers he asked me, “What upcoming movie are you excited to see?”

I felt bad that my friend had put him in such an awkward position, but I felt excited to be talking to him. I felt my cheeks flush and I couldn’t think of a movie. I told him that I didn’t know any upcoming movies. Every time I looked at him I felt the sweat running down my forehead.

I kept thinking that would be the last time he would talk to me because my friends and I kept laughing the whole time he was there. After a few moments of silence he just said he’d talk to me later (even though we had hardly talked) and returned to his friends.

Even though I wanted to die, it actually worked. After that he said “hi” to me every day as I boarded the bus. We started sitting together, talking about school and family. Before school we would go to the donut shop, after school we’d go to the park and we’d IM every night. We were sort of dating at that point. But by the end of summer we ended things. We were both taking summer school at a community college, but we went to different high schools. We weren’t sure how often we’d get to see each other. I didn’t get discouraged, though, because I thought I totally knew how to talk to guys now.

At the beginning of the school year I decided to try to make the first move on a guy at my school who I had been interested in for more than a year. I had never had the guts

to say anything before, but I didn’t want to regret not doing anything.

HE WASN’T GETTING MY HINTS

I tried flirting, if you could call it that. I let him use my notes in English class but he didn’t seem to get that I was interested in him. I told him almost every day that he had gorgeous hair and that it looked really soft and I wanted to know if it was so I would run my fingers through it. He probably thought I was weird for focusing so much on his hair and running my fingers through it, but that was better than running my fingers through his hair without explaining why. He blushed a little but went on as if nothing happened. His blushing made me think he liked me a little but was too shy to say anything. That motivated me to keep flirting.

When I got bored in class I would rest my head on his shoulder, hoping he would take it as a sign that I liked him. I even tried holding his hand by drawing hearts on his knuckles, but he would rub them off right away without saying anything. That made me feel like I was bugging him. But I didn’t stop because I wanted him to know I liked him. Sometimes I would just stare at him and tell him he had nice eyes or a nice smile (one time I even complimented his ears). I spent so much time admiring him that I realize now why I didn’t have an A in class.

I told one of my guy friends that my hints weren’t working. He laughed and said those flirting techniques wouldn’t work. He said I had to be more “alluring.” I didn’t bother asking him what he meant because it sounded ridiculous. To me acting “alluring” sounded like acting desperate. I wanted things to be like what I’d seen in movies like *The Notebook* and *Pretty in Pink* where girl likes boy, boy likes girl, they go out and love prevails in the end. Seeing that it’s 2012 I thought people were over old-fashioned gender roles.

But even though I had tried so hard to get him to notice me, he never seemed to respond. When I was about to give up on him forever I decided I should give it one last try.

I was too scared to ask him out face-to-face, so I wrote a letter telling him that I liked him. I tried to be funny and not make it too awkward. I wrote, “Hey, I really like you and I was wondering how you feel about me.” I listed a bunch of answers with boxes he could check off and then he would return the letter to me with his answer. The choices were: I think you’re cute;

IS IT OK FOR A GIRL TO ASK A GUY OUT?

"My first girlfriend asked me out. She was talking to me and got my number. We started texting and about two months later she asked me, 'Will you be my boyfriend?' I felt weird but I was happy that she did it. I'm shy and I wasn't taking the hint that she liked me. I was just guessing that she was talking to me because she's a really nice person. But I'm glad she did because it was a nice relationship."

TYLER BRADSHAW, 16, REDONDO UNION HS

"Yes, because such a decision shouldn't be driven in such a traditional, biased way. Girls should have the freedom to ask a guy out if they want."

SAUL VERA, 17, CHAVEZ LEARNING ACADEMIES (SAN FERNANDO)

"I think a girl shouldn't have to wait on a guy to ask her out. If they really like somebody they should go for it."

ADRIANA LOPEZ, 17, CHAVEZ LEARNING ACADEMIES

"This girl asked me to a school dance. It was a turnoff and I didn't like it. It seemed like she was desperate. I said no. If it was someone I liked I would say yes but I think I should ask her."

BRANDON LEE, 15, LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR ENRICHED STUDIES

"Before I thought it was kind of awkward and not so girly-like. But now I'm in high school and I think it's perfectly fine for a girl to ask out a guy. And it doesn't always have to be the guy paying for everything. It can be the girl or half and half. That's how girls feel more independent. I've seen so many cases where the guys always ask the girls out and the girls are the shy ones. But now the girls can ask out the guys and the guys feel good!"

LUCERO GARCIA, 17, ANIMO LOCKE HS #1



"Just because a girl asks, it doesn't make the man less of a man. My girlfriend was the one that asked me out and I am perfectly OK with that. I felt awkward because I'm so used to guys doing everything first. But I learned that it's mutual so it could be a girl asking a guy out or a guy asking a girl out."

NERY GARRIDO, 17, ANIMO LOCKE HS #1

"I think it's the guy's role. I wouldn't be able to ask a guy out. I would feel like the man in the relationship."

BRIANNA RUBIO, 16, MIRA COSTA HS (MANHATTAN BEACH)

"I think it's OK. It's the 21st century. I asked a guy out but when he said no I played it off because he's my best friend. I would never do it again unless I really liked the person. If I got rejected I'd be embarrassed."

AILEEN LEE, 17, CRESCENTA VALLEY HS

"I think it's fine because I'm against gender roles. Making guys in charge of asking someone out puts all the pressure on males. The other problem is that it creates an awkward situation for girls because if they do like someone, they can't ask them out."

AUSTIN SKOOTSKY, 16, HAMILTON HS

"No, because the guy is the one who is supposed to because he's the man. I have a cousin whose girlfriend asked him to go out. I thought it was cool and nice, but on the other hand I think that a guy should be the one to ask her. Don't sit down and expect a girl to take you out. You should get up and take initiative."

VICTOR OTUYA, 18, FREMONT HS

I like you, but as a friend; I really like you; I love you (this is where I tried to make it humorous); and eww, you're weird. I was really nervous to give it to him so I put it in one of his shirt pockets and told him to look at it after class.

He never replied to me though and we both acted as if nothing ever happened. It was finally clear to me that he wasn't interested in me romantically but we're friends to this day.

I realized I didn't have the magic touch to get

whatever guy I wanted. But I didn't get discouraged because it wasn't my fault that he didn't like me. I would've regretted not trying anything.

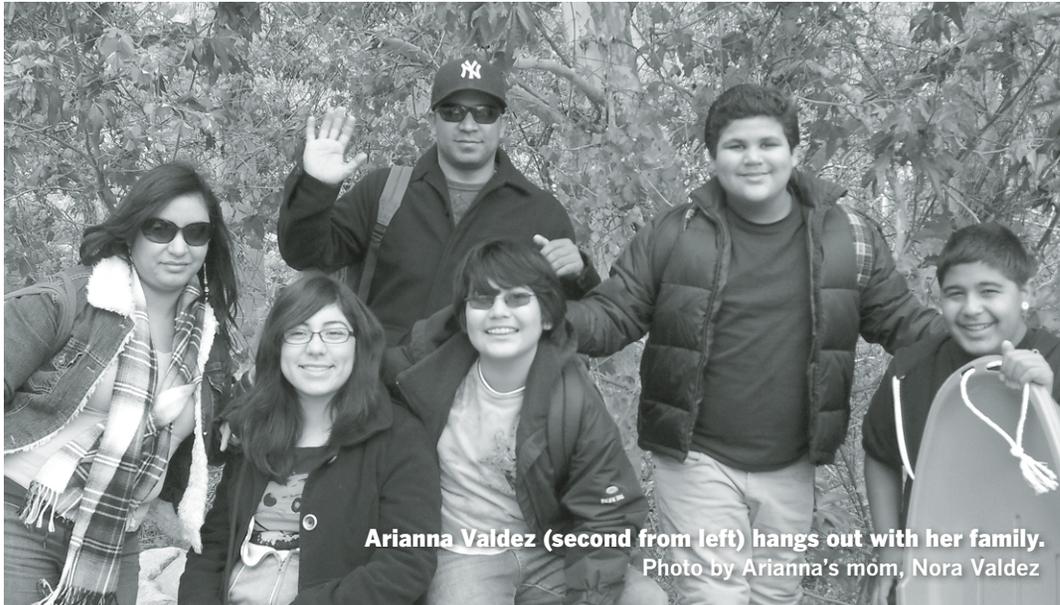
After that I got back together with a guy who I had been dating before the summer. When I look back at all this, I don't see it as a failure. I see it as a learning experience. It was nice to try something new, but maybe I put myself out there too much. I learned that I should focus on friendship first and then let a relationship grow from there.



Jazmine says that all guys and girls should have the confidence to make the first move.

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

A moment that changed your life



1ST PLACE \$50

Cancer brought me closer to my family

By Arianna Valdez
Paramount HS

I was 14 years old and thought I knew it all. I had good grades at school, but at home I fought a lot with my mom and stepdad. My parents divorced when I was young, and I developed anger toward my father for leaving my mom. I had become distant from my extended family as well. I couldn't stand my hair; I complained about it every day. I am an only child, but I have a stepbrother whom I hated. I wanted nothing more than to hang out with my friends. I always wanted to be left alone, listening to music, surfing the web, you name it. I was always

bitter and crabby. I took my life for granted.

May 2010, I'm diagnosed with cancer. Over two months, I was being tested and had two surgeries to determine if I was still in an early stage and could be spared the infamous chemotherapy and radiation therapy. Luckily, the cancer hadn't spread into my bloodstream and cleaning out the tumors would be easy. Although it didn't last as long as you would expect, those two months were hell. I cried myself to sleep every night, fearing the changes that accompanied chemo. I would have to be home-schooled. Chemo would cause me to be nauseous, weak, tired. I'd have to be on a strict diet—unhealthy food could get me sick. I would lose all my hair. I would have tubes connected to

my heart coming out of my chest, and so much more. Thankfully, after the second surgery I was cancer free. Of course, I have to remain in remission and observation for five years to be sure the cancer doesn't come back, but there's only a small chance it will.

At first, I didn't understand why I had gotten cancer. I would think, "Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Does God hate me? How could he let anyone suffer what I'm suffering? Especially a kid!"

Once I started accepting that this was real and I couldn't do anything but fight it, I figured I would enjoy my life as long as I could before getting really sick. I started hanging out with my family more. I spent the weekends with my aunts and cousins, or with my dad and his side of the family. It was hard to do too much, though, because I spent more time at the hospital than I did at my house.

Once I was "cancer free," I was still stuck with the mentality that it could come back at any moment, and I would regret not having enjoyed my life as much as I could have. I decided that from then on, I would live life to its fullest. I wouldn't take anything for granted. I would try new things. I would love my brother and my parents, forgive my father, take lots of pictures, smile, laugh and act goofy. I'd be outgoing.

Two years later, I'm still cancer free. Three more to go until I'm considered safe. I have to say, God answered my questions. Why did I have cancer? Why me? Because my life was going to waste. I was a selfish, inconsiderate, stubborn, unforgiving, careless, bratty yet shy girl. But when the cancer hit, it completely changed me. When I saw my mom cry, it hurt me. When I heard my dad's voice crack, his one and only child, his daughter, diagnosed with cancer, I regretted ever being mad at him. When my stepbrother and cousins were speechless, I reassured them. As I cried, my aunt held my hand and cried with me. She even went to appointments with my parents and me.

I'm not the same girl I was before I had cancer. Today, I take too many pictures, smile too much, goof off too much. My brother and I have become close and my cousins have their "big sister" back. Cancer brought my family back together. Sometimes my hair is hard to manage, but I can't say I hate it. Don't wait for something like cancer to come around and change your life. Take it upon yourself to make things right and truly worth living for.

2ND PLACE \$30

My dad's death turned my world upside down

By Christopher Colchado

Hollywood HS

The second I heard the news from my mom almost seven years ago, "Your dad died. He's in a better place now," it changed my life so much. Those were the most painful words I have ever heard. I had no father anymore. Never will I be able to hug him or tell him that I love him or talk about my problems with him because he's gone. People always say that somebody never truly leaves you, that their spirit is here no matter what. Well, can you hug a spirit, can you cry on their shoulder? Will a spirit teach you things? It is impossible.

After my father died, my whole world collapsed. My brother became a delinquent and made my mom cry night after night and all we did was fight. I felt no support from anybody. I tried being strong but it was impos-

sible because the pain I felt was so unbearable that I could not help but break down every time I was alone. To my family I appeared to be heartless with no emotion but nobody understood that I was hiding it, trying to protect my mom from feeling more pain. The hardest thing I have ever done was pretend that my father's death did not make me sad, when in reality I was devastated beyond belief.

Before my father passed away, I was a straight-A student. For a while I gave up on school. Last year it finally hit me that my mom is still around and I should work on making her proud instead of disappointing everybody. She has done nothing but take care of my brother and me so I did my best and almost got straight As once again. Now I understand how much you have to appreciate your parents and loved ones because once they die nobody will bring them back no matter how much it hurts or how much you miss them. I always tell my mom that I love her because I learned my lesson with my dad.

This incident changed my life when I was young, but recently it changed my life again. I have learned how to live life. I learned how beautiful things are and how to enjoy them while they are there. Even though I have been through much struggle with my family, I still love life and being alive as much as I miss somebody who is dead. I know that maybe I will see them once I die. Until then I am going to live my life to its fullest and never look back.

3RD PLACE \$20

A bike helped me lose weight

By Victor Loza

Marshall Fundamental HS (Pasadena)

A life-changing moment in my life was Dec. 24, 2010. On this day, I purchased my bike. I was always a lazy kid who never participated in any type of physical activity. I was extremely overweight—almost 300 pounds. I was upset with myself, always thinking, "How did I let this happen?"

Being able to grab the bike and take it for a ride was difficult. I didn't know where to ride. I didn't have anyone to ride with or to motivate me.

I would ride my bike for 20 minutes and I'd be exhausted. That's how out of shape I was. Little by little I got more in my comfort zone. Video games were becoming something I would do when I wasn't able to leave the

house. My family noticed weight loss. I never noticed. Then one day I put on shorts that used to fit snug and now were baggy. After noticing that I started to feel very happy.

School was out for summer and I had just turned 16 years old. I had met some friends who also rode bikes. Our goal for the summer was to just ride. We would go on long rides and only stop to rehydrate, eat or sleep. In the middle of the summer I had a doctor's appointment. I weighed in and the doctor told me I had lost 20 pounds! I was proud of myself. I was exploring the world, losing weight and gaining self-confidence by riding a bike.

By the end of summer I had lost about 50 pounds. If it wasn't for that bike I would have probably been writing about getting a high score in a video game. Cycling has changed my life. I have lost tons of weight I never thought I was going to be able to lose. I now know my city a lot better and I'm not always indoors hiding from this great world. My confidence has increased and I will carry this life-changing experience with me throughout my life.

GRAB A BIKE, IT'S GREAT!

NEW ESSAY CONTEST

A moral dilemma

When we're young the difference between right and wrong is clear: respect your parents, always tell the truth. But as we get older it becomes harder to do the right

thing, and we may even begin to question whether something is really that bad.

Tell us about a time when you faced a moral dilemma.

Maybe a classmate asked if they could cheat off your test, or you were out with

friends who started shoplifting or someone offered you drugs at a party. Describe the situation and explain why it was hard to know what to do, like maybe you felt the pressure to fit in. What decision did you ultimately make and how did it affect you?

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\$50

Write an essay to L.A. Youth and tell us about it:

Essays should be a page or more. Include your name, school, address and phone number with your essay. The staff of L.A. Youth will read the entries and pick three winners. Your name will be withheld if you request it. The first-place winner will receive \$50. The second-place winner will get \$30 and the third-place winner will receive \$20. Winning essays will be printed in our November-December issue and put on our website at www.layouth.com.

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DEADLINE:

Friday, Oct. 19, 2012

Ophelia

By Lisa Klein

Reviewed by Cassandra Ellis
16, *Wilshire Academy*

“My lady: I pray this letter finds you in a place of safety.” From the first sentence, I was drawn into a world so full of love, insanity and deception that it could only have originated within the mind of Shakespeare. Only it’s not Shakespeare. *Ophelia* by Lisa Klein is a retelling of Hamlet from Ophelia’s perspective.

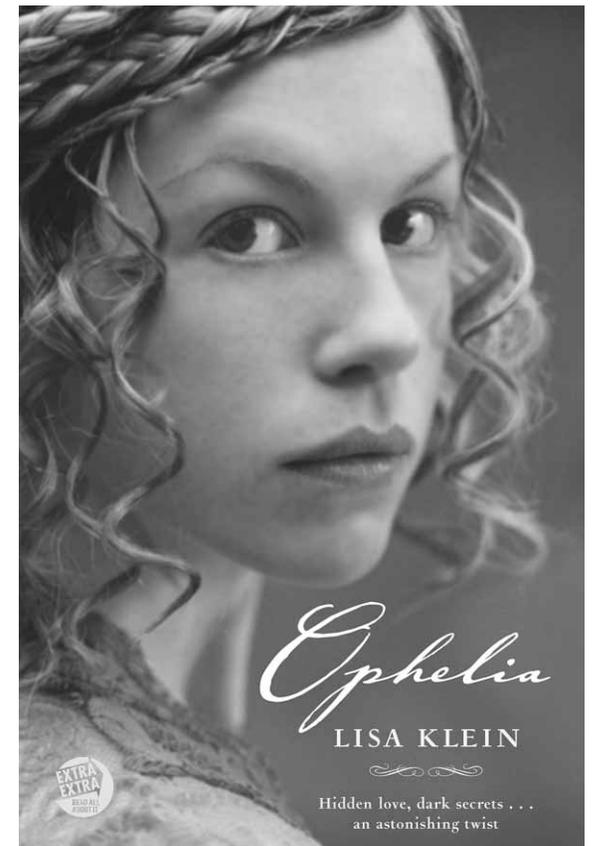
I hadn’t read Hamlet before I read *Ophelia*, so I was glad that it wasn’t a sequel. If you have read Hamlet, you’ll probably notice that Klein has changed the time period. *Ophelia* is set in the 17th century, not the middle ages. If you want to read an exciting story that was written by Shakespeare but don’t want to claw your way through the original, you can read this. This book is easier to read than Shakespeare because the language is similar to how we talk today and the format is a novel instead of a play.

After the exciting prologue, the story goes back a few years. It begins when Ophelia, her father Polonius and her older brother Laertes join the court of King Hamlet and Queen Gertrude at Elsinore. Through her brother, Ophelia meets

Hamlet, son of the king and queen. For her, it’s love at first sight. For him, she’s just Laertes’ scruffy kid sister and he couldn’t care less. For years her crush lasts but he barely notices her. In the meantime, Ophelia’s father sends her to “become a lady” and she eventually becomes the most valued lady in waiting of the queen. The story really picks up shortly after, when Ophelia sees Hamlet again, now that he’s returned from university.

When Hamlet sees how Ophelia has changed, he immediately falls in love with her. Against all odds, they try to be together. One evil deed (if you’ve read Hamlet you know what I’m talking about) causes their love and their lives to shatter. Bitter lies, cold truths, murder and plots of revenge follow. Ophelia is forced to choose: live or love? This choice sets her on a path to find out who she really is. I was excited to see her becoming a stronger person. She went from doing anything and everything for Hamlet, which I thought was lame, to doing things for herself. I liked that she didn’t let herself be a doormat anymore.

I loved reading *Ophelia*. Even though the story was set 400 years ago, Hamlet and Ophelia went through a lot of things that I think are relevant to myself and other teens these days: wanting to grow up, the need for parents’ respect and approval, and love. If you’re a romantic or love Shakespeare or suspense, you’ll probably like this book.



Thirteen Reasons Why

By Jay Asher

Reviewed by Frank Gaspar
15, *The School of Arts and Enterprise (Pomona)*

While participating in my library’s teen book club last summer, I came across *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher. Once I started, I read it faster than any book I’ve ever read.

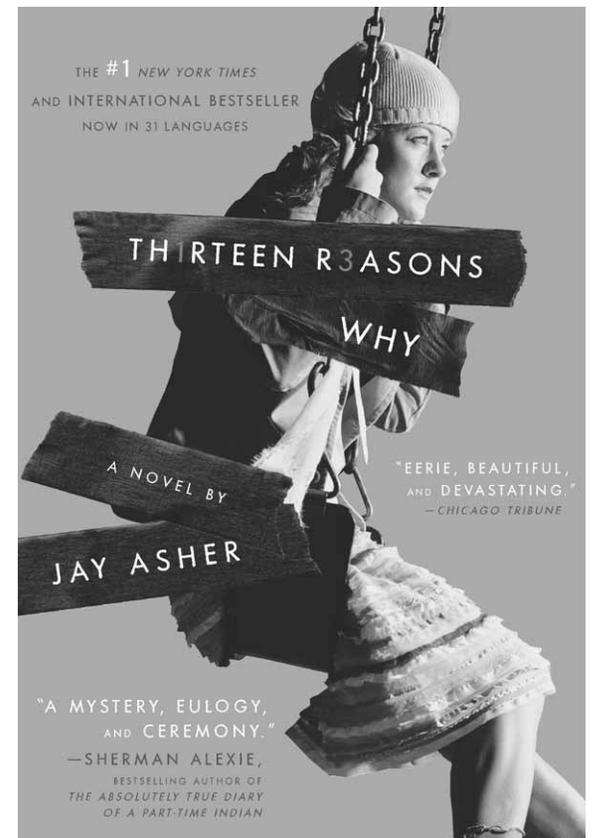
The novel is about high school student Clay Jensen, who finds a box of seven audio tapes on his front porch one day. When he listens to them, he is surprised to hear the voice of Hannah Baker, his former classmate and crush who killed herself. Clay listens carefully as Hannah’s voice explains that every side of a tape contains a reason why she killed herself, and each reason happens to be someone from school. She also says that every “reason” would receive the tapes.

In addition, Hannah provided all of the listeners with a map in their lockers. Each map contains a bird’s-eye view of the city with stars marking important locations, which Clay visits as they’re brought up on the tapes. He doesn’t know what he did to her, but listening to the tapes over the next few days changes him.

Clay becomes more aware of how other people feel. Prior to Hannah’s suicide, Skye, a girl he had a crush on, “insisted on being an outcast one day” and stopped talking to people. No one knew why. Knowing that Hannah committed suicide after isolating herself from other people, Clay realizes he doesn’t want to risk losing another friend, so he decides to reach out to Skye.

I enjoyed how Asher made me feel like I was in the story. Here’s what Hannah said to Justin, one of her first crushes, who also appeared in the tapes. The imagery created a vivid picture in my head of what was going on: “You stepped out of the gutter and planted one foot on the lawn. My dad had the sprinklers running all morning so the grass was wet and your foot slid forward, sending you into a split. And your decision? You ran back down the street while Kat and I laughed like crazy in the window.”

Before reading this book, I hadn’t deeply considered how my actions can affect others. But now I am more aware of what I do and how I do it. If I notice that someone is keeping to themselves, I make sure that I talk to them, so they don’t feel like they’re alone. I try to do what I believe Hannah should have done by staying optimistic and helpful, to ensure that I have no regrets.





One Direction

CD: Up All Night

Reviewed by Camille Didelot-Hearn
16, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

The boy band craze from the 90s is back. I was a huge fan of the Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync, and my new favorite album is Up All Night by One Direction. It has catchy pop songs that instantly put me in a good mood. My friends and I always play it whenever we hang out and I also blast it in the car.

One Direction is a group of five boys put together on the British version of The X Factor. I can't help but love Liam Payne, Niall Horan, Louis Tomlinson, Zayn Malik and Harry Styles. They can all sing and when they harmonize they sound incredible.

My heart flutters when I hear the lyrics on "One Thing," which go "I don't, I don't, don't know what it is/ But I need that one thing/ And you've got that one thing." I belt out this song in the shower or whenever I'm home alone, pretending they're singing to me.

"I Want" sounds a bit like Queen because it has a great guitar solo and piano parts. It describes when girls go crazy about them. I like the different sound.

My favorite is "More Than This," which has my favorite line: "When he opens his arms and holds you close tonight/ It just won't feel right/ 'Cuz I can love you more than this, yeah." It's a romantic song about a boy with a broken heart who is about to lose the girl he loves. It gives me chills every time I listen to it.

Most people don't take boy bands seriously, but give these boys a chance. Their music may not be the best ever written, but it is definitely fun to listen to. This album will make you want to stay up all night because you'll never be able to let go of these boys once you hear their music.

Give these boys a chance. Their music may not be the best ever written, but it is definitely fun to listen to.



Paramore

CD: Brand New Eyes

Reviewed by Jaanvi Sant
14, San Marino HS

Brand New Eyes, alternative rock band Paramore's third album, is one of my favorite CDs. The album has gentle acoustic guitar songs and fast, upbeat ones, so the different styles match my different moods. I also like that the lead singer, Hayley Williams, is female, which I haven't come across in many bands. Her clear, strong voice conveys so much emotion that I feel what she is feeling.

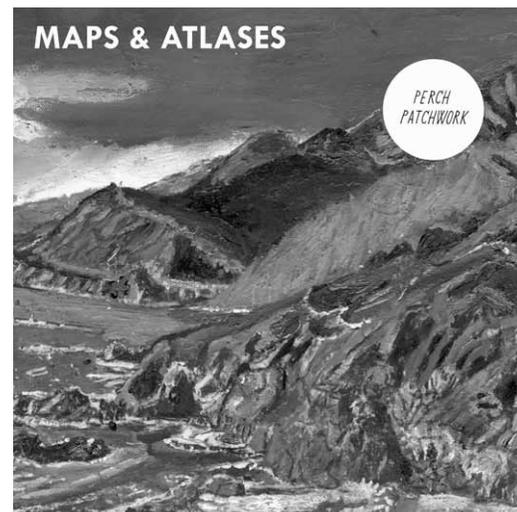
The calming song "Misguided Ghosts" never gets old to me. Williams sings, "See, I'm trying to find my place/ But it might not be here where I feel safe." I interpret her words as saying that sometimes we have to leave our comfort zone because fear holds us back from reaching our full potential. It reminds me that I have to take chances and try new things even though it might be scary.

The slow song "All I Wanted" is about still having feelings for someone who has already moved on. Williams' voice is more powerful on this track as she belts out, "All I wanted was you." My heart beats fast, especially during the high notes, when I listen to this song because the emotion is so raw.

One more ballad I love is "The Only Exception." My favorite part is when Williams says, "I'd never sing of love if it does not exist," but the last line is "I'm on my way to believing." The song is like the "happily ever after" of a storybook.

The lyrics on Brand New Eyes are like a sibling who gives me advice and guides me through life. If I'm having a bad day and want cheering up, or I just feel like hearing great guitar riffs, I can count on Paramore.

My heart beats fast when I listen to "All I Wanted" because the emotion is so raw.



Maps & Atlases

CD: Perch Patchwork

Reviewed by Andrea Lopez

17, Chavez Learning Academies (San Fernando)

When I listen to Maps & Atlases' album Perch Patchwork it's like going on three-minute vacations. The island-like sounds make me feel like I'm traveling to the most remote and exotic places in the world. And lead singer and guitarist Dave Davison's lyrics let me see the world through his eyes.

When I listen to Davison sing I feel like I'm stepping into a world I cannot understand, but where I'd love to venture. On "Israeli Caves" he sings: "When you look out on the Midwest plain/ Do you realize the moon is still the same?! That rose above the Israeli caves/ The day the words you praised were written." I imagine myself prancing through a meadow where the environment is fresh, free and peaceful, unlike my neighborhood in the Valley. And every time I listen to "The Charm" I am heartbroken, pretending that I am Davison as he shares emotions that everyone feels. "I don't think there is a sound that I hate more/ Than the sound of your voice/ When you say that you don't love me anymore."

Perch Patchwork's songs are referred to in some reviews as a combination of folk and math rock. I feel that "math rock" fits Maps & Atlases because the band's music uses unusual beats. When I move to songs like "Living Decorations" and "Banished Be Cavalier" it looks like my foot is having a seizure.

Maps & Atlases risk combining happy melodies and riffs with sad lyrics. But they're able to pull it off. Their music sounds fun and spontaneous, like the lyrics and music belong together.

Every time I listen to "The Charm" I am heartbroken, pretending that I am Davison as he shares emotions that everyone feels.

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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.

