

▶ BIKING IN L.A. P.14 ▶ MATH IS HARD FOR ME P.6

# L.A. youth

OCTOBER 2009  
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the newspaper by and about teens



## My second chance *at* school

**AN ALTERNATIVE  
HIGH SCHOOL GOT ME  
BACK ON TRACK  
TO GRADUATE**

page 10

### ALSO INSIDE

SCHOOL BUDGET CUTS 5  
I GOT MY FAMILY TO RECYCLE 8  
RAP WITH A MESSAGE 20

## About L.A. Youth

### How did L.A. Youth start?

Former teacher Donna Myrow founded the nonprofit teen newspaper in 1988 after the Supreme Court Hazelwood decision, which struck down student press rights. Myrow saw a need for an independent, uncensored forum for youth expression. L.A. Youth is now celebrating its 21st year of publishing.

### How is L.A. Youth doing today?

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 350,000 in Los Angeles County. Hundreds of students have benefited from L.A. Youth's journalism training. Many have graduated from college and have built on their experiences at L.A. Youth to pursue careers in journalism, teaching, research and other fields. Our Foster Youth Writing Project has brought the stories of teens in foster care to the newspaper. For more info, see [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

### How do teens get involved with L.A. Youth?

Teens usually join the staff of L.A. Youth when they read the newspaper and see a notice inviting them to a newcomer's orientation. They also get involved through our summer workshop for writers. Sometimes a teacher or parent will encourage them to get

involved. Newcomer's orientations are held every other month on Saturday mornings. Call for info at (323) 938-9194. Regular staff meetings are held every Saturday from 1 to 3 p.m.

### Where is L.A. Youth distributed?

L.A. Youth is distributed free to teachers at public and private schools throughout Los Angeles County. It can also be picked up for free at many public libraries and is available online at [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

### How is L.A. Youth funded?

L.A. Youth is a nonprofit charitable organization funded by grants from foundations and corporations, donations and advertising.

### What's L.A. Youth's mission?

We will provide teens with the highest level of journalism education, civic literacy and job skills. We will strengthen and build our relationships with more teachers to bring relevant issues into the classroom and improve the quality of education. We will reach out to the community to better educate policy makers about teen issues; create a more positive image of teens in the mainstream media; and raise the credibility and awareness of L.A. Youth.

## Free copies of L.A. Youth for Los Angeles teachers

L.A. Youth is distributed free six times a year to high school and middle school teachers in most of Los Angeles County. Teachers also can download a free Teacher's Guide for each issue at [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com). We do not share your info with other organizations or businesses.

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**Senior Writers:** Lia Dun, Marshall HS • Justin Koh, Cleveland HS • Elliot Kwon, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS • Charlene Lee, Walnut HS • Samantha Richards, S.O.C.E.S.

**Staff:** Gabe Andreen, Pilgrim School • Stacey Avnes, S.O.C.E.S. • Yasamin Azarakhsh, Notre Dame HS • Ben Bang, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS • William Brent, Central L.A. HS for the Visual and Performing Arts • Caitlin Bryan, Valley Alternative Magnet School • Valerie Bueno, West Covina HS • Patricia Chavarria, Cesar Chavez Continuation HS • Tiffany Chen, Walnut HS • Sally Choi, The Linden Center • Sydney Chou, Sonora HS • Lily Clark, Immaculate Heart HS • Emily Clarke, Palisades Charter HS • Vanessa Cordova, Glendale HS • Jose Dizon, La Cañada HS • Sara Dominguez, South Bay HS • Stanton Ellison, West L.A. College • Lane Erickson, South HS • Rene Franco, Providence HS • Esteban Garcia, Warren HS • Meklit Gebre-Mariam, University HS • Audrey Hahn, Cleveland HS • Emily He, Whitney HS • Brett Hicks, Loyola HS • Destiny Jackson, Mayfair HS • Chianne Jolly, Luther Burbank MS • Nadi Khairi, Reseda HS • Ellen Khansefid, Hamilton HS • Jennifer Kim, South Pasadena HS • Se Yeon Kim, Hoover HS • Allison Ko, Wilson HS • Kevin Ko, Wilson HS • Sam Landsberg, Hamilton HS • Brian Lee, C.A.M.S. • Elis Lee, Crescenta Valley HS • Janie Lee, Troy HS • John Lisowski, New Roads School • Beatriz Lopez, Gardena HS • Tanya Lopez, Logsdon School • Brian Lopez-Santos • Breanna Lujan, West Covina HS • Luisa Mendoza, Lynwood HS • Chantelle Moghadam, Viewpoint School • Taylor Moore, Westchester HS • Gabrielle Muhammad, Frederick Douglass Academy HS • Jasper Nahid, New Roads School • Emily Navarro, Environmental Charter HS • Ashley Ngo, C.A.M.S. • Jennie Nguyen, Glendale HS • Michelle Paik, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS • Jessica Palomo, Ramona Convent • Jean Park, Harvard-Westlake School • Casey Peeks, Marlborough School • Charmaine Peggese, Cerritos HS • Ernesto Pineda, Animo Film & Theatre Arts Charter HS • Serli Polatoglu, AGBU-MDS • Sophia Richardson, S.O.C.E.S. • Nicholas Robinson, Central L.A. HS for the Visual and Performing Arts • Michelle Ruan, Alhambra HS • Francisco Sandoval, Nogales HS • Aaron Sayago, Fairfax HS • Aleksandra Sekulich, Fairfax HS • Jessica Son, La Cañada HS • Hannah Song, Mark Keppel HS • Kaitlyn Tsai, Walnut HS • Freddy Tsao, South Pasadena HS • Sunitha Warriar, C.A.M.S. • Stephany Yong, Walnut HS

**Publisher:** Donna C. Myrow

**Co-Managing Editors:** Mike Fricano, Amanda Riddle

**Editor:** Laura Lee

**Administrative Director:** Robyn Zelmanovitz

**Design Consultant:** Wayne M. DeSelle

**Communications Consultant:** Lea Lion

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## M A I L

These are letters we received about stories in the September 2009 issue of L.A. Youth:

**VIDEO GAMES AREN'T TOO VIOLENT**

I THINK THE story "In defense of video games" is excellent because it describes how playing video games doesn't make people violent. I feel the same way because I play all the games the writer does and they haven't turned me violent. I like the way his parents treat him when it comes to video games. My mom is against those violent games. She even took some games away for a while. I also agree that the Grand Theft Auto series is too intense for people who aren't mature enough. Violent games don't teach you anything bad and spending time playing video games is great and enjoyable.

**Daniel Sarkissian**  
Wilson MS (Glendale)

I LIKED THIS article because I agree with the writer that just because people kill others in video games, it doesn't mean they are going to kill in real life. I have played many violent video games and I haven't been violent. I have friends who play violent video games and they're not violent. Parents think that we're going to turn violent over a video game that is not even real. I think they need to play the games so they can see the truth.

**Rafael Arellano**  
Paramount HS

I REALLY CONNECTED to the article "In defense of video games" because I understand what the author is trying to tell the reader. I feel the same way about video games that are so-called violent. I can see how people misunderstand video

games as being violent, but really they are all fun. If kids get ideas to kill someone after playing a video game they aren't mature enough to understand games.

I have loved video games since I was a little kid and I have not once thought of violence. I also think that parents and adults do not understand the technology of our time so they are afraid that their kids will get the wrong message. The video game era is not violent, but fun. People should understand that video games don't affect the youth except when kids play long hours throughout the night.

**Mario Alvarado**  
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

**SAVING MY MONEY INSTEAD OF SPENDING IT**

I READ THE article "Saving for something better." I spent all of my birthday money on an Xbox 360 and a DJ mixer, which was the wrong thing to do. I could have saved the money and used it for something better, like my college fund, or put it in a savings account. The next time I get money I will save it for college. Also, I will spend less on food when I go out with my friends. I think I will save a lot of money by cutting back. After reading this article I know how to spend money and I will be prepared for the future.

**Chris Nazaryan**  
Wilson MS

**HARASSED BY A BOY AT SCHOOL**

I THINK THAT this article was very realistic and very well written. "Should I be afraid?" is about a girl who was harassed by a fellow student who seemed to like her. To make

*Continued on page 4*

## C O N T E N T S



## COVER STORY

# My second chance at school

*An alternative high school got Patricia back on track to graduate. page 10*

## PLUS

### Determined to finish

*Four teens share how an alternative school helped them succeed. page 12*

## Budget cuts make it harder to learn . . . . . 5

*L.A. Youth writers say crowded classes and fewer supplies mean less time for teaching.*

## Math doesn't add up for me . . . . . 6

*Beatriz has always struggled to learn math.*

## Doing our part . . . . . 8

*Breanna got her family to help the environment by recycling.*

## Catching on to juggling . . . . . 9

*It took patience to learn but now Freddy is always trying new tricks.*

## L.A. on two wheels . . . . . 14

*Charlene got out of her car and explored the city on bike paths.*

## Taking on teen pregnancy . . 16

*Ernesto was part of a play that taught him and his classmates about the consequences of sex.*

## There's more to school than books . . . . . 18

*In Korea all Ben did was study, but in America he can pursue his interests.*

## Rap that makes me think . . 20

*From religion to social justice, Stanton found hip-hop with a message.*

## I was out of control . . . . . 22

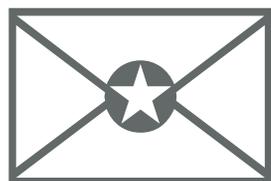
*Sara used to break windows and cause trouble, but now she's trying to think before she acts.*

## What you need to know about the flu . . . . . 25

*Information from experts on swine flu and how to avoid getting sick.*

## Book and CD reviews . . . . . 26

*L.A. Youth writers recommend the books Looking for Alaska and Carrie, plus CDs from The Aquabats, The Upwelling and HIM.*



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things worse, the boy kept calling her over and over, until the point when he said that he was going to cut himself if she didn't talk to him.

The part that really got me was the fact that she kept telling her counselor and the counselor told an assistant principal, but the assistant principal didn't do anything. Even after she was threatened with rape, the assistant principal still didn't do anything. I think that schools need to pay more attention to these types of incidents and try to stop them. High schools should ensure that all students feel safe while at school.

**Rene Chino**  
*Camino Nuevo Charter Academy*

**AFTER YEARS OF BEING TEASED, I FEEL BETTER ABOUT MYSELF**

I THINK THE article "I no longer feel worthless" is very touching. It made me wonder how people feel when they get teased or bullied by

others. Some people think it's OK to tease others who have some kind of disability or look different. Everyone should be respected no matter how different they may seem.

The writer was going through a very hard time in her life and her getting teased lowered her self-esteem. At some point she actually started thinking about doing harm to herself. We should remind ourselves that we all have feelings and I'm sure with a little more respect and kindness this world would be a better place.

**Hasmik Arutunyan**  
*Wilson MS*

THIS STORY IS amazing because it is about a young girl who was criticized by people because of a physical disability. People shouldn't get criticized because of how they look. That isn't fair. I won't criticize people for how they look because my parents taught me not to. This story was really good and I just kept on reading and reading. I'm happy that the girl finally feels like

she fits in the world.

**Jesse Bajonero**  
*Camino Nuevo Charter Academy*

I REALLY LIKED this article. The writer has a physical disability and people made fun of her. I see that all around me. Sometimes walking down the halls at school I see kids making fun of those who have disabilities. Sometimes it is for no reason at all.

No one should be made fun of because it hurts people's feelings and it's disrespectful. When someone is being teased they feel like no one is there for them. Everyone should try to get along with those who need support so they don't feel left out or worthless because that's not true.

**Liliana Paola C.**  
*Paramount HS*

**I USED TO BE OVERWEIGHT, BUT I GOT HEALTHY**

I REALLY ENJOYED "From fast food to fitness." It reminded me of

what I had gone through. What I really enjoyed was how the writer described the steps he took to get to where he is now. I went through the same thing. I finally told myself I needed to lose weight. When we started doing the mile in P.E. I disliked it at first. Then in seventh grade I couldn't wait for the mile day to come. I also was able to do 40 pushups and 100 sit-ups straight. I think this story will change others' lives for the better. It will inspire young kids who probably feel the same way.

**Humberto Perez**  
*Camino Nuevo Charter Academy*

I LIKED THE article "From fast food to fitness." This story had a lot of detail. It showed exactly how the writer lost weight by going to the gym and exercising at six in the morning. He made huge sacrifices like not eating fast food and doing pushups. I kind of relate to this story because when I was smaller I was fatter and now I'm getting fat again. I feel like I should start doing

the same things the writer did to lose weight.

**Ricardo Garcia**  
*Paramount HS*

**I LOVE TO DANCE**

THIS ARTICLE SHOWED that dancing is a way to express yourself. It inspired me to continue dancing and to always be confident. When you're trying something new, try to have fun with it. Do not let others make you feel embarrassed. Don't stop doing something that you really like to do.

**Yesenia Montano**  
*Camino Nuevo Charter Academy*

I CONNECTED WITH the writer of "Just dance" because I love to dance and express myself. I love to jerk too. The first time I heard "You're a Jerk" by New Boyz I started dancing. It was a challenge to learn how to jerk, but I got the hang of it. I could tell the writer has a lot of fun dancing with friends.

**Adela Davtyan**  
*Wilson MS*

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# Budget cuts make it harder to learn

THIS YEAR THE state cut \$6 billion in funds to schools to close a \$24 billion budget deficit. That meant schools had less money for teacher salaries, programs and classroom supplies. To deal with the cuts, they had to lay off teachers, resulting in larger class sizes. L.A. Youth writers share the effects these cuts have had inside the classroom.

## MY TEACHER HAS LESS TIME TO GIVE US FEEDBACK

There are 45 students in my AP English class. It started out with 50 but some students saw it was too crowded so they dropped it and went to regular English. Whenever we told the teacher, Ms. Higa, that someone dropped the class, she sighed and said "Thank god." I didn't leave because it's AP and I really want the class. She's strict but I like the way she teaches. We have class discussions about stuff that happens in the news.

She told us that in the past she would correct an assignment and give it back to the student. The student would give it back with the corrections made and again she'd find more mistakes and mark them and give it back to the student. She said the most would be seven times back and forth. Now she can't do that. She says there are too many students. It's more stressful for her because she has six classes and they're all full. She tells us our work has to be perfect the first time. She's going to correct it once and that's our final grade. I think that's a disadvantage because we obviously make mistakes and we don't have a chance to make corrections.

I think I'll still learn. But I wish there were fewer people because we'd get more one-on-one interaction with the teacher. I blame the governor. Shouldn't he have taken the money from somewhere else? Education is something we need. Soon we're going to be the ones out there in the world and we need the knowledge.

—By *Beatriz Lopez, 17, Gardena HS*

## A CROWDED MATH CLASS MAKES IT HARDER TO KEEP PEOPLE FOCUSED

My statistics class had 39 students but now we have 36. One student dropped the class and another two were moved to other classes that had more room. Before, one girl sat at the



**Michelle's math class at Alhambra High has 36 students.** Photo by Michelle Ruan, 17, Alhambra HS

computer desk because there wasn't room. My math class last year had 32 students.

My math teacher, Mr. Matossian, had been certain that our class size would decrease. He said, "The teachers' contract with the school district is pretty clear. ... After the third week, the limit becomes 36." Thirty-six students in a class is still a lot of people. Even though Mr. M. has three out of five classes filled with the maximum of 36 students, he said "It would be nice to have 20-something, but this is the real world."

He admits it's hard to keep people focused, but I think that he's doing his best by using a projector and digital video camera, which records him working out problems at his desk at the front of the class. Instead of using the white boards, which sometimes people in the back or corners can't see, the projected image is big enough for the whole class to see. Mr. M. has been using this technique for a few years and so far, it works.

Still, the larger class sizes make learning harder because we all want the teacher's attention when we don't know how to do something. In my math class, not all raised hands are answered. In my English class of 36 students, instructions get muddled at times because when the teacher tries to tell us what to do, the noise level is pretty high and her words get lost with everyone else's conversations.

My drama class is the biggest class I have with more than 40 students. I'm not sure that it's going to drop to 36 because it's not a core class.

Teachers stay after school, but not for a long time. I have after-school activities so I can't go often for help even if I want to. I wish that there

was more funding for school but I know I'll just have to make the best of it.

—By *Michelle Ruan, 17, Alhambra HS*

## MY SCHOOL CAN'T AFFORD PAPER FOR HANDOUTS

My school doesn't have the money to let teachers make enough copies to give one handout to each student. One class set of each handout is all it can afford, so students are forced to write questions from the handout onto separate paper. Some of these questions go on for a whole paragraph and it can take a half hour to write them all. Comparing this year to previous years, I see that we're losing a lot of learning time because we're being forced to spend time copying down questions, rather than thinking about and writing down answers.

It's not just the time we're losing though. My biology teacher says she won't use handouts this year. She says that since the school doesn't have enough paper as it is that she wants to save paper for class sets of tests. Because of this, we're not getting worksheets and other material that expand understanding. To me it seems like the school is saying supplements are no longer necessary.

Even with the reduced amount of paper being used, several of my teachers have told me that they think the office will be out of photocopy paper by December. I wonder what we'll do then. Most likely, we'll have to copy things down from overhead projectors, but I have a few classes that don't have those. This school

year looks like it will be a difficult one.

—By *Lane Erickson, 16, South HS (Torrance)*

## WE FALL FURTHER BEHIND EVERY CLASS

Because of the budget cuts, class sizes have increased this year, making it

harder to learn. Instead of being able to go over the previous night's math analysis homework quickly and teach the new lesson slowly, we spend half of class answering questions, leaving only 10 to 20 minutes for the next lesson.

This lack of individual time in the classroom makes homework frustrating. On numerous occasions, I have done my math homework hesitantly, constantly checking my notebook to see if I am following the correct steps. The next day students came to class with questions about the previous night's homework, taking up more time from the next lesson, creating a snowball effect.

Many students are considering getting private tutoring. We have no chance of succeeding if each concept isn't taught thoroughly in class.

My math teacher, Mr. Davies, agrees that this is a problem.

"The class sizes are way too big," he said. "That means a lot less time for individual instruction. The teacher can compensate for this by offering tutoring after school. Teachers have to work harder and longer."

In my AP European history class, the lack of individual time with students is a problem when trying to prepare everyone for the big AP exam in May. My teacher has arranged for Saturday lecture sessions where she can go over essay prompts and review lectures that were rushed through during class.

It bothers me that in California we pay some of the highest income and sales taxes in the country but the Legislature is incapable of balancing the budget.

—By *Stephany Yong, 15, Walnut HS*

# Math doesn't add up for me

I've always struggled to learn math but I know it's important

By **Beatriz Lopez**

17, Gardena HS

I've never liked math. I hate it even. Every time I get stuck on a math problem and can't figure it out, I want to crumple the stupid piece of paper and throw it across the room. Instead, I take a deep breath and try again, but in the end I still don't understand so I give up.

I've always wondered what the big deal about math is. I understand we use math for money purposes and that some careers require it. But what if your career doesn't? My parents and teachers told me I might need math for a career, so I always chose one that didn't require higher-level math, like a chef, an author or a journalist. Everyone should learn addition, subtraction, multiplication and division because those are the math basics. But why should I care about triangles and their angles, the slope of a line, or what sine and cosine are?

In elementary school, addition was easy but subtraction was hard. Having to borrow numbers and add them to the number next to it was confusing. In third grade I felt the pressure to memorize my multiplication tables. Every day the school announced, "Learn your multiplication tables." When you did they gave you a T-shirt with all the tables. It took me until fourth grade to learn all of them, from 1x1 to 12x12. After that it just got more complicated. My parents would check my math problems and if they saw a mistake, they'd lose their patience and yell, "We just told you how to do this." Once my dad called me *burra*, (donkey in Spanish), which means you're slow. I was in shock and I started crying. If he saw me as slow, maybe I was. Later I realized he had just lost his patience.

I didn't struggle with everything. I would get 4s and 3s (which are the same thing as As and Bs) in English, science and social studies on my report cards, but on the math section there would always be 2s (which are Cs). That 2 followed me all through elementary school.

When I got to middle school, I still got bad grades in math. In seventh grade a group of students were given pre-algebra and algebra at the same time. My guess was that they wanted to give students two years to pass algebra before they graduated from middle school. I would have pre-algebra before lunch and algebra after it. Pre-algebra was almost the same as algebra but algebra was more complicated.

The material would be fresh in my mind and I would apply what I'd learned in pre-algebra to algebra. I passed both classes with a C. As long as it was a passing grade, I was happy.

## MY SCHOOL PUT GEOMETRY AND ALGEBRA STUDENTS IN ONE CLASS

When I got to geometry, I thought I'd be in a class with the other 10 students who passed algebra. Since it would be smaller I thought I would have more interaction with the teacher. On the first day, I found out that the class was divided into two. Two tables in the corner were for the 11 students who had passed algebra and were taking geometry. The rest were students who had to repeat algebra.

The smart, "nerdy" students chose to sit together at one geometry table. I sat at the other table with the ones who were barely passing the class. Since the teacher was busy with the algebra students, she couldn't really keep an eye on us. Sometimes after we sat down she would give us a section to read and tell us to do problems and other times she would go straight to the algebra students. For the first few minutes we would do nothing but talk. Eventually she would tell us what to read and after we did, we continued talking.

When she did teach us she'd pay more attention to the other table of geometry students than us. Their table was right in front of the board. If they had a question, she'd go up to

the board and explain it to them. After she was done explaining, we'd ask them, "What does this mean?" but they'd say, "I don't know" and turn their backs on us. "Snobby little b\*\*\*\*es," we thought. My table would always complain. "She's not even paying attention to us," my friend once said. I thought this was something we just had to deal with.

A few months after the class started, I was at my cousin's house complaining about geometry and how I didn't understand anything. My cousin said she had hated that class too but passed it with some help. Before I left, she gave me a book with the answers to the problems in my textbook. Not just the odd ones and not just the answers, but the complete way to do every

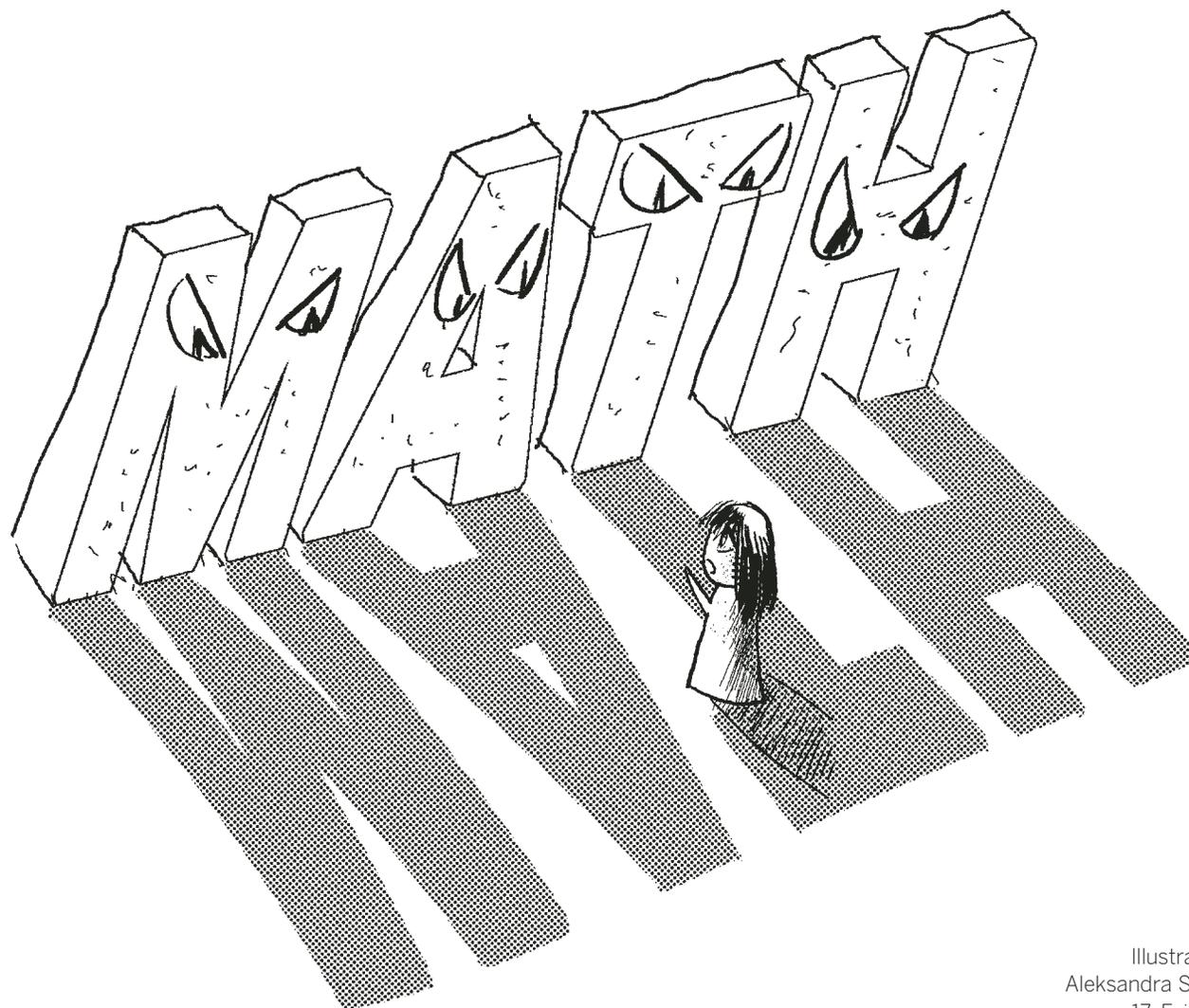


Illustration by  
Aleksandra Sekulich,  
17, Fairfax HS

single problem. "I'm saved!" I thought.

After that night, I did every homework assignment. I tried to understand how the book got to the solution but it was still hard because, like our teacher, it didn't explain why you had to do the steps. Later it just seemed easier to copy. I would bring the book to class and show it to the people at my table to help them out. We worshipped it. We even nicknamed it "The Brain." I didn't feel guilty because I needed to pass and this was the only way. I got As on my homework but when it

In 11th grade, I finally took my last math class, math analysis. I slowly realized math mattered. The teacher would lecture us about how important the class was. She'd talk about colleges and how they were looking for good grades and well-rounded students. She'd say it would look good if we had an A in this class because it was higher-level math.

There were seniors in the class. The seniors were worried about how colleges would view their math grade, something I had never thought about. I thought it didn't matter if

the homework. Only once did I get a perfect score. It was a review of long division. I was proud of myself. Then came the next test, which led me back to my aggravated mood toward math. I got Ds both semesters.

I keep thinking that if I could go back in time, I would pay more attention in class and ask more questions while the teacher was explaining the material. I never bothered asking questions because I get nervous approaching a teacher. I just tried to do it by myself and if I didn't get it, oh well.

## AT HOME, I STUDIED MATH MORE THAN EVER. BUT I DIDN'T DO BETTER ON THE TESTS BECAUSE THE QUESTIONS WERE MORE COMPLICATED THAN THE HOMEWORK.

came to tests and quizzes I would get Cs, Ds and Fs. I knew it looked suspicious but the teacher never questioned it, which was a relief. Because of the book, I passed with a C. I was happy it was over. I knew I'd have to take math in high school but I didn't think algebra II would have anything to do with geometry so I wasn't worried.

### MY NEW POSITIVE OUTLOOK DIDN'T LAST LONG

In ninth grade I went into algebra II with a fresh attitude, thinking, "I'll probably do better." But soon I was miserable. When I didn't understand something, I knew I wouldn't do well on the test. By second semester, I wasn't trying at all. I had broken up with my boyfriend and that was the one class we had together. He sat in the front row. I didn't want to look at or think about him so I didn't pay attention. I spent that whole hour doodling. My teacher offered tutoring twice a week after school but I didn't go because I had already given up. I had decent grades in my other classes. And I kept telling myself I could take it again if I failed.

To make up my D, I had algebra II again in 10th grade. I knew I had to pass it. I did more of the work because I was familiar with most of it. Even though I understood some of it, I still didn't see the point. I kept thinking, "Why do I need to learn logarithms or the quadratic formula if I'm never going to use it in life?" I got a C. I was disappointed that I didn't get an A or B because it was my second year, but at least I had passed.

I got Cs in math because I got As in the other subjects. I started worrying about my senior year, when I would be applying to colleges. What if the Cs and Ds I got in math ruined my chance of getting accepted? I also knew I had to pass because I needed three years of math to graduate and I didn't want to repeat math analysis the next year. I didn't want to risk failing my senior year and not being able to graduate with my class.

At a parent conference my teacher told my dad that she was there before class if I needed help. But it was easier to get help from the other students because they were my age and I felt I could talk to them better. I'd ask the students who had good grades and sometimes I understood it.

In class, I took notes. She'd talk about double-angle and half-angle formulas. I'd understand the first part, which had to do with substituting sine or cosine numbers into the formula. Then she would say something that didn't sound like English at all and that's when I went blank. I spent a long time at home trying to figure out what she meant but just got more irritated.

### I CHANGED MY STUDY HABITS, HOPING TO IMPROVE MY GRADES

At home, I studied more math than ever. I turned off the music and placed my notes next to my homework to see how to do it in case I got stuck on a problem. Before a test, I would review the section (I never did that). But I didn't do better on the tests because the questions were more complicated than

I would also talk to a counselor about putting the geometry students in a separate class. I never thought it was fair for the school to put us in a class with algebra students where we didn't have enough interaction with the teacher. But I don't blame that teacher or any of my math teachers. Other students passed. Only the ones who were already struggling with math had problems, like me.

I care more now because every teacher is emphasizing the importance of having good grades in all your classes and how just one D or F might ruin your chance of getting into a college you want to go to. I know now that I should have paid more attention in algebra and geometry. Higher-level math derives from it. Every new section builds on something I saw in algebra or geometry.

If I go to a Cal State and have to take math, I'll ask for help, maybe use study groups or tutoring. I will need to do more than the minimum. I still don't like math, I don't think I ever will. But I know that it is required in college. Because I have a plan, I feel a little more confident going into my next math class.



*Beatriz now knows that she can't neglect math just because she struggles with it.*

### HOW CAN STUDENTS SUCCEED IN MATH?

To get a teacher's perspective on how to do better in math, I interviewed my algebra II teacher, Shirley Warren.

#### What should we do if we don't like math?

**How can we do better?** If you don't like math you need to figure out why you don't like it first. Maybe you never liked it since you were little or didn't understand something. If you're not getting it then take tutoring, do all homework and classwork assignments, and take notes. Try to relate it to life if possible.

**What if you don't want to go to tutoring because you're sick of math?** How about working with a friend. Have a brother or sister quiz you at home. Go on the Internet [for more information].

**How do you prepare for a test?** Always take good notes. If the teacher reviews the day before the test, listen carefully. Reread the chapters and go over the examples in each section.

**What's the best way to study?** Do it quietly. Review notes at home from that day, every day. Ask questions if you didn't understand something. Sometimes it's a basic concept you don't understand. For example, you understand the steps to do a problem but you mess up on the arithmetic. Go back and try to understand it because it will affect the higher-level math you take.

**What are some memorization tips for formulas?** You can relate it to a phrase or words. For example, for "rate x time = distance" I'll remember it from a bus system [in Denver] called RTD. Understand the meaning and purpose of the formula—that helps too. And never try to memorize it all in one day. Have a plan. Take a small section to learn each day. By the time you have a test you'll have it already.

**How do you stay motivated?** For me, I always like challenges. I'm always wanting to do well for the sake of doing well.

—By Beatriz Lopez, 17, Gardena HS

# Doing our part

I got my family to help the environment by recycling

By **Breanna Lujan**

17, West Covina HS

I have always cared about the environment. I pick up my trash, turn off the lights when I leave a room and take short showers. Still, I didn't know much about global warming until the issue came up in my freshman biology class. My teacher showed us *An Inconvenient Truth*, the documentary by Al Gore. Watching, I was shocked by the statistics and photos that revealed just how much global warming was already impacting our planet, like the fact that many animals are near extinction and that the rainforests are disappearing. I realized that our environment was in danger and that it was our fault. I knew that I had to do something. I couldn't fly to the Amazon and tell the loggers to stop cutting down trees or demand that everyone switch to hybrids. I had to start small. Then it hit me: recycling.

I searched for "recycling" on the Internet to find out exactly how it works. I discovered that by recycling, the metal from soda cans can be used to make new soda cans, plastic bottles can be turned into new water bottles and recycled paper can be used to make a variety of paper products such as newsprint and paper towels. Recycling is very efficient. For example, using recycled aluminum requires 95 percent less energy than if that same can was made from new metal, according to an aluminum recycling facts website.

## I CONVINCED MY FAMILY IT WOULDN'T BE HARD

I decided to present the idea of recycling to my family. I knew that I had to tell them the incentives, which include receiving money for turning in glass, metal and plastic recyclables, and saving the planet, as well as the fact that recycling is easy. One day after my parents returned from work and my whole family was at home, I ushered them into our den. I told them I wanted us to recycle. "It's easy," I said, "You just have to put your bottle somewhere else." They didn't say anything or ask me any questions. Maybe they thought that I wasn't serious, I thought, until my father said, "We'll give it a shot."

The first step was getting containers to hold the plastic bottles, aluminum cans, glass and paper materials. I decided to use only two to



**Breanna (far right), along with her parents, grandmother and sister, all pitch in to collect newspapers, bottles and cans to recycle.**

Photo by Charlene Lee, 16, Walnut HS

simplify things for my family. I went to Target and bought one moderately sized trash bin for \$9.99 and one laundry basket for \$5.99. The trash bin I assigned for bottles and cans. I placed it in our backyard near the BBQ grill where most of our family events take place, with the intention of collecting the bottles and cans left over from gatherings. I made it even easier for my family by setting aside a plastic grocery bag in the kitchen near our trash can for bottles and cans that I would take outside to the bin. I put the laundry basket, which was for paper, in our kitchen between the wall and dining table.

"Bre, can't we put this somewhere else?" my mom asked me as she stared at the laundry basket in her kitchen. True, the basket was a bit of an eyesore, but I told her that this was a small sacrifice for the good that she was doing. My father didn't say anything about the

bin near his BBQ grill, but I caught him shoving it out of the way several times.

## WHO PUT THIS CAN IN THE TRASH?

I thought things were going well until a month later when I saw several soda cans and a glass bottle inside the trash can. I reached into the trash can, pulled out the containers and walked through the house asking, "Who do these belong to?" Of course no one claimed them. So I devised a plan. The next day each time someone walked out of the kitchen I checked the trash can. To my surprise, everyone but my grandmother committed the awful crime of throwing everything away. I approached each of them—my aunt, my mom and my dad—and told them that I knew they weren't recycling and that I wasn't going to stop pestering them. I knew that I was being annoying (I continued to watch them like a

hawk), but that was the only way that my family was actually going to change.

Several weeks passed, and gradually the bins began to fill up with soda cans, water bottles, and old newspapers and magazines. Once the bottle and can bin filled up we dumped the contents into plastic trash bags, loaded them into one of my parents' cars, and took the recyclables to the recycling station near our local grocery store. We emptied our bags into the recycling structure in the parking lot. We get about \$1.50 per pound for aluminum cans, plastic bottles and glass and generally bring home \$4 to \$5 per trip about twice a month. We take our paper to a recycling center in the City of Industry, about 15 minutes from my house—far enough to cause my parents to complain once in a while about taking me.

Each time I went in my backyard and glanced into the container, I was excited and grateful because my family had helped me with something that I am passionate about. Occasionally, I had to remind my aunt to put her Coca-Cola can into the recycling bin and my dad to place the newspaper into the basket after he was finished reading it.

My grandmother, though, has exceeded my expectations. Although she recycles primarily for the money, she has become the most enthusiastic about it. While on her daily walks she carries a plastic grocery bag. At first, I didn't understand why she needed it but after seeing her bag bulging with cans, I understood. After her walk she empties her daily treasure into the recycling center near our neighborhood market. Eventually the money adds up because she picks up around four to five cans each day.

After two years, recycling is now routine in our home. The bins fill up every week or two and we take another load to the recycling center. Everyone is constantly on the lookout for recyclables, scavenging their offices or lunch areas at work for bottles and cans. My mom even asked the City of West Covina about getting a recycling bin and discovered that if we used a city bin, our recyclables would be picked up by the city and we could receive a tax deduction. Though I simply made sure that my family placed their "trash" elsewhere, I feel that this small action is making a major difference.



*Breanna also puts plastic bottles in the recycling bins at school and encourages others to do the same.*

**By Freddy Tsao**

15, South Pasadena HS

I love juggling. It calms me down when I'm stressed. I turn on iTunes and juggle and dance to whatever is playing on shuffle.

I got into juggling in sixth grade when I saw a notice on the bulletin at my middle school inviting people to join the South Pasadena Juggling Club. I'd been curious about juggling ever since I went to circuses when I was little, so I jumped at the chance to learn.

I had no idea what to expect when I arrived at my school gym where the juggling club met. I was astonished by the commotion. There were people juggling balls and rings, and a group of people juggling clubs with one another. There were about 20 people of all ages, and I even recognized a few people from school.

Still dazed by what was going on around me, a man came up and introduced himself as Bryan. He turned out to be the founder of the club. He got me started by tossing one ball in the air. Easy enough, right? After a couple of tosses of throwing one ball in the air at the same height, he handed me a second ball. It started to get challenging. Juggling with two balls requires you to toss each ball at a certain height and approximately within shoulder width of each other. As I tried to juggle with two balls, they were flying out of my reach and I couldn't catch them. I have never been a great multitasker, and trying to juggle two balls was a lot to get my head around.

**BEFORE JUGGLING THREE BALLS I HAD TO MASTER TWO**

A couple weeks later I was still trying. "Imagine yourself in a box," Bryan said. This technique failed for me, because I couldn't imagine myself in a box when the balls were still flying all over the place and would sometimes land 10 feet away from me. I became too lazy to pick the balls up from the ground, so I started juggling next to the stack of mats against the wall so I wouldn't need to bend down and pick up the balls when I dropped them. Bryan suggested that I juggle in a "J" formation to absorb the shock when the ball comes down, meaning that you should catch the ball like you're catching a water balloon.

After weeks of practice, I could finally juggle two balls. I was excited for a moment, but then Bryan gave me a third ball. I knew it was going to be hard, but when I couldn't do it after trying for a month, I decided to stop juggling. I didn't think I would ever figure it out.

Juggling popped up in my life again the next school year in seventh grade P.E. My teacher would test us on how many times we could juggle without dropping what we were juggling. We started with scarves, and then moved on



Photo by  
Charlene Lee,  
16, Walnut HS

# Catching on to juggling

It took patience to learn but now I'm always trying new tricks

to balls, rings and finally clubs. Scarves were easy and I quickly moved on to the challenge of juggling three balls.

When I saw all these people who had never juggled before move ahead of me in class, I was jealous. Being the competitive person that I am, I decided to join the juggling club again. I went back with a goal—to pass juggling in P.E. I was greeted with familiar faces, and I also saw that a lot of my friends had joined for the same reason.

Bryan and I tried more techniques, such as

a two-person, three-ball juggling technique, where two people stand side by side and use only their outer hands to juggle three balls as if they were one person. That helped a lot, because it gave me a feel for the rhythm of juggling without actually having to juggle three balls at once.

After much practicing and bending down and picking up dropped balls, I was finally able to (clumsily) juggle three balls in P.E. and moved on to rings. Rings were easier once I was able to juggle balls. After all the hard work and

dedication, I was finally able to juggle! Now that I could actually juggle, I decided to continue with juggling club; not only to learn new juggling tricks, but also to try other juggling equipment such as the unicycle and hula hoops, and hang out with my new friends.

**THE HULA HOOP MADE IT MORE FUN**

One day my friend, a woman named Yukie, brought several hula hoops to juggling club. I had always been good at hula hooping, but I had no idea that it was part of juggling. Yukie and I became hula hooping buddies. We learned how to do several hula hooping tricks, including one where you start with the hoop around your waist, bring the hula hoop onto your arms while the hula hoop is still revolving, and bring it back down again to the waist. The trick we're currently working on is juggling balls to each other while hula hooping at the same time. This is difficult because our hula hoops can easily bump into each other if we get too close. However, one day when we were practicing, we did the trick for a minute. "Oh my god, we did it!" Yukie said. We were both ecstatic. Usually, we last for only 30 seconds, so we're still working on consistency.

I love the people in my juggling club like Bryan, Yukie and Spencer, who is a librarian and an actress. When we take breaks from juggling, I enjoy talking to her. Once I asked her a question for history class and we started talking about Shakespeare. "I've been in hundreds of Shakespeare plays!" she said. I think it's cool that she knows about a bunch of different things. I also ask her for book recommendations, since I'm a fan of mystery novels. My friends who joined the club in middle school stopped going in ninth grade because of homework, but new middle schoolers and high schoolers have joined. When my friends and I grab juggling balls and start passing them with each other, I'm amazed at how diverse and close we are.

It's a fantastic feeling to know that I've learned to do something that took a lot of hard work, dedication and patience. The experiences that I have had juggling with friends are completely worth it. It's wonderful being so close with people who share the same passion as me—juggling.



*Freddy says that as long as you put in the time to do something, you'll succeed.*

# My second chance at school

After ditching and a serious illness, an alternative high school got me back on track to graduate

**By Patricia Chavarria**

18, *Cesar Chavez Continuation HS*  
(Compton)

Growing up my parents would tell me almost every week how important my education was. They would tell me not to end up like them—waking up early for work and coming home late just to get paid a low salary for a job you don't like. So I studied hard and got good grades.

But beginning in middle school I started to lose interest in school and my grades got worse. A lot of my classmates said that you couldn't be held back, so I didn't try my hardest. I didn't bring my books to math class, because I liked talking to my friends rather than doing equations and fractions.

When my mom saw my report cards she would ask why I hadn't turned in homework. I told her that I would try harder, but I didn't. She would ground me for a week or two and take away my television and phone privileges.

After seventh grade I had to take summer school because I was behind. Throughout eighth grade I tried my hardest so that I could graduate with my class. It was difficult, but I did it. My mom was so proud that she took me out to dinner and kept telling me how she knew I wasn't going to let her down.

Freshman year at Compton High was a new start. I realized that every mistake would be counted against me graduating. I tried to always be the first one to turn in class work and while other people chatted about who they liked, I kept my head in my books.

But algebra was my weakness. In class I would look at the board and see all these numbers, letters and symbols and regret not taking math seriously in middle school. It was irritating trying to do my homework when I didn't understand it, so I copied a friend's homework.

I knew that I should have gotten help from a teacher, but I was so fed up with math that I chose hanging out with my friends instead of trying to learn it. I also knew that I needed to understand math to pass the state exit exam (CAHSEE), which I needed to graduate. But since I wouldn't be taking the exam until

sophomore year and could take it again as a junior or senior, I didn't worry.

By sophomore year I was a well-behaved, A student, except for math. I had a C, but my teacher gave me that grade only because he saw me trying. I deserved a D. My mom wanted to know why I had a C, so I explained how I had problems understanding math. She said that I should ask the teacher for help.

But one morning in mid-November I woke up feeling more tired than ever, because I had stayed up late watching *Smallville* with my older brother. Not going to school and pretending to understand what the math teacher was saying sounded great. I knew I could fool my mom, who drove my sister to school and then went straight to work. I thought that if I stayed home for one day it wouldn't hurt me.

## I WORRIED ABOUT GETTING CAUGHT

My mom knocked on my door and said she was leaving. I tried to go back to sleep, but I couldn't. I kept worrying that my mom would come home at any minute because she forgot something. Since I couldn't sleep, I cleaned the house a little and watched TV. At 2:20 p.m. I walked to my sister's school and picked her up, like I did every day. My brother came home from work around 5 p.m. and then my mom at 6. She asked me how school was. I lied and told her school was great.

The next day I felt the urge to ditch again. I wasn't in the mood to take notes about things that weren't going to help me fulfill my dream of becoming an actress. I watched *Maury*, *Smallville*, *Scrubs* and my favorite movie, *The Phantom of the Opera*.

By January I had missed about 40 days in a row. Every day my mom asked me how school was and if I had homework. I would lie and tell her school was fine. And every night I listened to music in my room, while my mom thought I was studying. It was unbelievable to me that no one had found out. Some of my friends called me to see if I was OK. I was nervous. I didn't want them to know the truth because they would probably tell the principal or call my mom. I told them I was out of town and didn't know when I would be back.



**Below, a sign in Patricia's classroom motivates students. At bottom, Patricia with her favorite teacher, Mr. Mills, who teaches English.**



But then I felt guilty because I was lying to my best friends.

I visited my dad's family on weekends and they would tell me how proud they were of me for trying to learn math. This made me feel even guiltier. I knew school was important because I needed to graduate to have a chance at a better future.

One day in late January I saw that the school had sent a letter to my parents. I was terrified. I opened the letter, which said that I hadn't been going to school and that the counselor needed to speak to my parents in person to talk about my absences. I hid the letter in my dresser. I knew my mom would be furious. I was filled with guilt and regret. At dinner I wanted to tell my mom. My mouth would open, but the words wouldn't come out.

#### **I TOLD MY MOM THE TRUTH ABOUT MY DITCHING**

I skipped school the next day and thought about what I was going to do. I couldn't go back to school without a parent coming with me to talk to my counselor. I decided to tell my mom everything because I couldn't live with the lies anymore. That afternoon while I waited for her to get home I was trembling. We sat down and I told her that I had been ditching school for more than two months because school was stressing me out with all the exams, grades and homework. My mom yelled at me and told me that school was important for my future. She told me that she only wants me to do better than her. She was so disappointed in me that she cried. Seeing that, I knew I had failed her.

The next day was Saturday and I woke up feeling really sick. I had a sharp pain at the bottom of my spine, like I was being stabbed. My mom took me to the hospital. The doctor said I had an infection and gave me four shots. The doctor prescribed painkillers and said I couldn't go to school because I couldn't sit. He wasn't sure how long it would take to heal, but that I couldn't go back to school until it didn't hurt anymore. While home recovering I was required to lie on my stomach all the time. Now I was missing school for a legitimate reason. My mom even missed work to take care of me.

Around March I finally felt better. My mom and I talked to my counselor, who said that I couldn't stay at Compton High because I didn't have enough credits. I wasn't surprised. I knew there was a limit to how many days a student could miss. It was my fault. I kept asking myself: "When did I become so irresponsible? Why didn't I care?" I thought about how I wouldn't see my friends anymore or graduate with them. I thought of all the colleges that had just slipped out of my hands.

The school district told me that I had to go

**By January I had missed about 40 days in a row. Every day my mom asked me how school was and if I had homework. I would lie and tell her school was fine. And every night I listened to music in my room, while my mom thought I was studying.**

to Cesar Chavez Continuation High School. I had heard about that school from some of my friends and I also had a cousin who attended Chavez. They said that all the bad kids went there and that there were always fights. I asked the lady from the district if there was another school I could go to, but she said that was the only school that would accept me. She told me if I earned enough credits I could return to Compton High and graduate with my class. Hearing this made me feel great. I was determined to do my best.

#### **A FRESH START AT A NEW SCHOOL**

Starting at Chavez I was nervous. I didn't know anyone. But the students were not as scary as people had said. I didn't make friends, which was OK because that gave me time to focus on school.

There were two school sessions; my classes didn't begin until 12:15 p.m. I had English, history, algebra II and biology. One question kept running through my head: "What if I struggle even more in math and I give up again?" This time I promised myself I would ask the teacher for help if I had trouble.

There were about 10 students in each class, so the teacher had time to help any student who was behind. My math teacher would sit with me and go through graphing, solving equations and other problems I needed help with. At Compton High where there were about 30 students in a class, the teacher wouldn't have had time to do that.

Despite the fact that there were some fights and ditching at Chavez, I thought school was going well. I even made some friends. I had great teachers and good grades—even in math. But one Sunday morning in February of junior year I started to feel that same sharp pain in my spine. My mom took me to the hospital. I was so scared. The doctor said I needed surgery. She said they needed to make a hole in my lower back and put tubes in it because the infection went even deeper than before. After surgery I had to stay home on my stomach all

day for two months. I mostly slept because of the pain or watched TV. I missed three months of school and I knew I wouldn't be returning to Compton High. There were only a few weeks left in the school year so my mom and I decided I should start fresh beginning with senior year.

I was so behind that my counselor put me in both morning and afternoon sessions at Chavez. I went to school from 8:30 a.m. until 3:21 p.m. and I took four classes in each session. In March, I also started a program in which I took two other classes that I needed to make up. These classes were self-paced and taught on the computers at school. Each class went from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Taking all these classes was a challenge. After dinner, I had to help my sister with her homework while doing mine because my mom worked late. Then I would spend a few hours doing my homework, usually staying up until about midnight. My desire to graduate kept me motivated.

My life hasn't been what I imagined back when I was a freshman. I thought that when I was a senior I'd be hanging out with friends, going to prom and preparing for UCLA or USC. But now I don't see my old Compton High friends very often, I couldn't go to prom because I didn't have enough credits and I'm still at Chavez because I was so behind that I couldn't graduate on time. I'm angry with myself for listening to the devil on my shoulder that told me to ditch. But I am thankful for Chavez—a school where students like me, who ditched and regret it, get another chance.



*Patricia says that education is important for your future, so don't give up, even when school gets tough.*

# Determined to finish

*Teens who were at risk of dropping out share how an alternative school helped them succeed*

LOS ANGELES COUNTY has one of the highest dropout rates in the country—more than 20 percent of students leave school before graduating. But not everyone who is at risk ends up dropping out. One option for those students is a continuation school, where students go if they are short a lot of credits, they've been kicked out of school for disciplinary reasons or had very poor attendance. (Teen parents also can attend continuation schools.) We went to Cesar Chavez Continuation High School in Compton and talked to three students who had just graduated and one current student. They said smaller class sizes, more individual attention and teachers who care kept them on a path to graduate.

**L.A. Youth:** Why did you come here and what were your expectations?

**Bianca Rodriguez, 17, formerly of Compton HS:** I came here because I got pregnant. I expected it to be better than a regular school because there was a teen mothers school [on the campus also]—so I expected them to give me leniency about coming to school and how I have to get my work done.

**Riyanna Iverson, 17, formerly of Compton HS:** I got here because I didn't go to class [for long periods of ninth, 10th and 11th grades]. I came [here] second semester of 11th grade. I heard bad stuff about the school—all the students banged and the teachers weren't good and you could just do whatever you want. But [Bianca] was here before I was. She was telling me that the school wasn't like that so I had high expectations when I came here.

**Patricia Chavarria, 18, formerly of Compton HS:** I came here because I used to ditch a lot. My cousin went here and he told me that it was a bad school. When I got here it was different. The teachers actually do care.

**Shabrika Flemister, 19:** My lack of commitment to my education.

**L.A. Youth:** How has it been better here than at Compton?

**Bianca:** Here if I tell some of my teachers that I have to take my daughter to an appointment, they'll give me the work and be like "OK, just turn it in when you come back." The classes are shorter (they're only 45 minutes), so I can come to school, then go home, go to work, then pick up my daughter and actually spend time with her. I like the teachers here. I like how the school is small.

**L.A. Youth:** Did you feel like you got a lot of individual attention at Compton?

**Riyanna:** [There was] only one teacher that I talked to at my old school. Here I have a relationship with all of my teachers. And I talk



From left: Shabrika Flemister, Bianca Rodriguez (holding her daughter), Riyanna Iverson and Patricia Chavarria.

Photo by Jasper Nahid, 15, New Roads School (Santa Monica)

to them on a personal level. If it wasn't for Mr. Sinclair I would have not passed the CAHSEE (the California high school exit exam, which all students must pass to graduate). I love Mr. Sinclair; he's my favorite math teacher. And I hate math, so that's saying something.

**L.A. Youth:** How have the teachers been able to get through to you?

**Riyanna:** Mr. Castro—awesome teacher. He was my first period. I wanted to be at school early so me and him would have conversations about what was going on in America and about music. Chavez was the best thing that ever happened to me. I don't think I would have been able to graduate if I would have stayed at Compton. The [teachers here] put so much faith in you. So you want to prove them right and let them know that it wasn't wrong for them to believe in you.

**L.A. Youth:** How has Chavez been more

than what you expected?

**Bianca:** Coming here, I thought I wasn't going to graduate on time. But the teachers made me want to come to school. I didn't want to go to college, because I didn't like school. Now I want to go to college. I want to better myself and do better for my daughter.

**L.A. Youth:** Why do you think kids drop out?

**Riyanna:** For me there were a lot of people telling me that I wasn't going to graduate. And because of them telling me that, it just made me not want to do [well in school], because they were telling me I couldn't.

**Bianca:** My brother dropped out. He was like, "Why should I go to school when I can hang out with friends?"

**Patricia:** They don't believe in themselves.

**Shabrika:** I think a lot of people drop out of school because of peer pressure, drugs ... and

their home lives are very unstable.

**L.A. Youth:** What would improve the experiences for students here?

**Riyanna:** We need music programs and sports. A lot of the kids wanted that, me in particular with music. I play the guitar and I would have liked to bring my guitar and go to a music class. And a lot of boys play basketball and there was no place to play basketball.

**Bianca:** I think they should have child care on campus. I recently got cut off of child care and it was hard for me to come to school. Also, music programs. I like to play piano.

**Patricia:** They could have art. It's a way to express yourself. I like drawing and painting.

**L.A. Youth:** What are your plans after graduation? And has being at Cesar Chavez changed those plans?

**Riyanna:** Cesar Chavez hasn't really changed my plans. It made me want to do them more. My plan is I am going to attend Cerritos College and then transfer over to Cal State Fullerton or UC Irvine and I'm going to study criminal justice and psychology.

**Bianca:** Chavez has changed me. I didn't want to go to school and now I'm going to college. I'm going to Cerritos and then I'm transferring to UC Irvine and I really don't know what I want to do but I'm going to do something in psychology and dealing with children.

**Patricia:** I'm thinking after next year I'll go to Compton College and transfer to UCLA.

**Shabrika:** I would like to go to the military academy—either the Army or the Air Force. If I was to study something I would do anything from psychology to being a personal trainer or criminal justice. Those are my passions. Coming here helped shape those things.

**L.A. Youth:** What message do you have?

**Shabrika:** Since I've been here I had to take 10 classes a day from 7:30 to 4:15. Then after school I have to go clean, look for a job, shop for groceries. I just want to encourage anybody that they can do it, if you got the heart and you got the strength.

**Patricia:** Students shouldn't give up. They should try to find help and people to encourage them.

**Riyanna:** Just because you have to go to continuation school doesn't mean you won't make it to a university. You could be the next Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton.

# L.A. youth ART CONTEST: The real me

A mirror reflects what you look like on the outside but can't fully capture who you are. We want to know how you see yourself. Show us what defines you. It could be what you're passionate about—maybe it's art, sports, fashion or school. Or it could be the side of you that others don't always see—the part that is creative or cares about others or is proud of your culture. Show us the real you.



## RULES

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

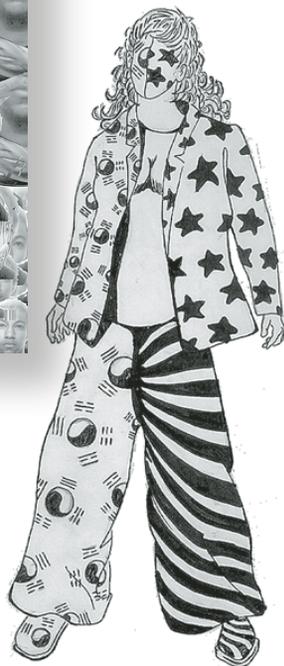
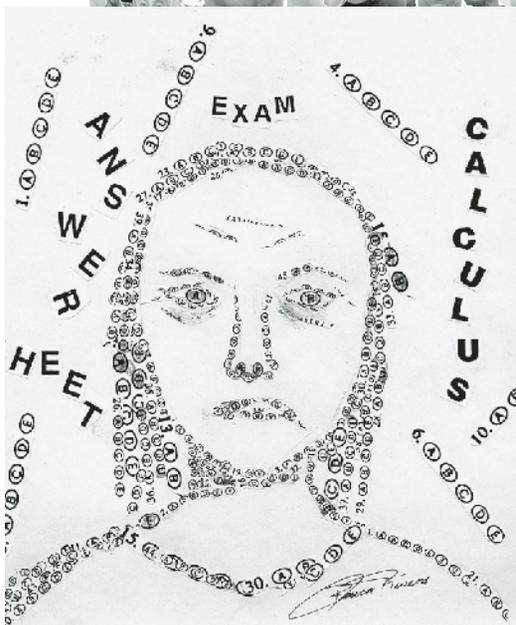
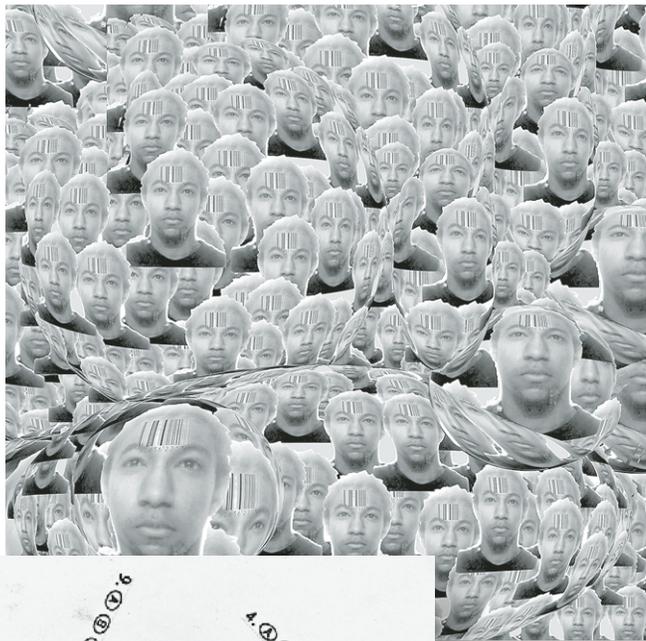
The teen staff of L.A. Youth will select a first-, second- and third-place winner as well as some honorable mentions. The first-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$75. Second- and third-place winning students and teachers will each receive \$50. Winners and honorable mentions will be published in the May-June 2010 issue of L.A. Youth newspaper and on [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

### Questions?

Contact (323) 938-9194 or [editor@layouth.com](mailto:editor@layouth.com).

Send submissions to:

**L.A. Youth**  
5967 W. Third St., Suite 301  
Los Angeles, CA 90036



ARTWORK FROM L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

**DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 2010**

By Charlene Lee 16, Walnut HS

After spending last summer stuck in an office facing an empty wall, I wanted to spend this summer outdoors. I knew there were bike trails in L.A. because I always drive down the 605 freeway and see bikers zooming by on a path next to the freeway. I wanted to see the city from a view other than my car. So I decided to give sightseeing on my bike a try.

My first destination was the **1 Ballona Creek Bike Path** in Marina del Rey. I realized I had forgotten both a helmet (a big no-no, according to the bike safety patrol officer I met on the path) and water.

I was worried that I would be too out of shape to bike even a mile because I had quit all my school sports my junior year. But luckily, the concrete path was flat and easy. I started near the end of the trail and raced through

two and a half miles in less than 30 minutes. The sailboat-dotted marina was on my right and the large creek on my left. Though this trail was more private than the touristy beach paths, it also had piercing winds that made it cold. I was disappointed with the little scenery I saw besides the marina and the creek, which was concrete and covered in graffiti. I decided to make my next ride more secluded from the city to see more nature.

This led me to bike through the **2 Marvin Braude Mulholland Gateway Park** in Tarzana with my friend, Sammie, who recommended it because she'd gone there as a kid. This time, transportation was tough because we had only one car but two bikes. After digging out her parents' bike rack from her garage, we spent 20 minutes outside strapping it onto her car. It was 10 a.m. and it was already so hot. We went back inside to grab our sunglasses, sunscreen, trail mix and water (one bottle each), then headed out.

The hardest part was riding up the steep concrete path to the entrance of the trail. We were already tired when we reached the top but we now needed to ride on a dirt path to the other side of the mountain. My bike was getting fixed so I had borrowed Sammie's neighbor's bike, which was a beach cruiser. It turned out to be the wrong kind of bike because the basket blocked my view of the path in front of me, which made it difficult to dodge the rocks and plants. At the top I saw a huge valley with trees, flowers and rolling hills. I had never seen so much beautiful, un-

developed land before in L.A.

After two hours of biking, Sammie and I called it quits—our water supply was depleted and the 100-degree heat was overwhelming. After getting back, we had proof of our hours riding in the sun: helmet strap tans on our chins.

My next trail was the one I had seen while driving down the 605 and the one I had been waiting for the most: the **3 San Gabriel River Trail**, which stretches from the base of the San Gabriel Mountains east of L.A. all the way down to Long Beach. This was my longest ride—20 miles out of an 80-mile roundtrip path.

I went online to plan the trip and found websites with instructions, pictures and maps. There I found out where the entrance was, where we had to park and how long the trail was.

My 21-year-old cousin, his two college roommates and I parked for free in the Santa Fe Recreational Area lot in Irwindale and rode to the entrance of the trail,

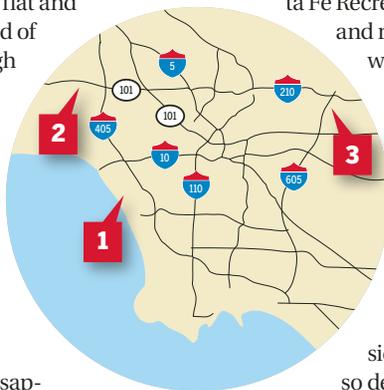
which started at the top of the Santa Fe Dam wall. We headed south just as the sun was beginning to set. The wall curved ahead so we could see the tiny silhouettes of people biking and running atop it. As we headed toward the freeway I had two different views—on one side, there was a mass of trees so dense I couldn't see the ground and on the other, power lines and giant warehouses. It was strange feeling both in the city and outside of it at the same time.

When we got to just above the 605 freeway, we stopped because I wanted to see the view. I felt relaxed watching the traffic below me. Unlike the cars that were rushing to go somewhere, I was taking the time to admire where I was. Then I realized we needed to ride back because the parking lot was about to close. We rode back fast and were relieved that we returned just in time, as the exit gates were closing.

Next time I want to ride all the way down to Long Beach. I never knew there was another side of Los Angeles—one that was free of cars and gasoline. Now I know these trails exist whenever I (and you, as well) want to leave the city and escape to areas of nature and peace.



Charlene says to check out [labikepaths.com](http://labikepaths.com) to get the info you need to plan a bike trip.





**These photos are from Charlene's trips to a bike path in the San Fernando Valley and another along the San Gabriel River. At right, Sammie and Charlene get ready for their ride.**

Photos by Charlene Lee, 16, Walnut HS and Ryan Yee, 21.



I GOT  
OUT OF  
MY CAR  
AND  
EXPLORED  
THE CITY  
ON BIKE  
PATHS

# L.A. on two wheels

# Taking on teen pregnancy

The play I was part of taught me and my classmates about the consequences of sex

By Ernesto Pineda

17, Animo Film & Theatre Arts Charter HS

Last school year when my drama class picked The Pregnancy Project as the play we would perform, I didn't know what the play was about. I was just trying to get a part to see what it was like to act. Luckily I got a part, and once we started reading the play, I realized the topic, teen pregnancy, was important.

In South Central, where I live, I see young mothers on the bus or at the store, with their children in their arms or in strollers. It starts to seem normal, but should it be? I think that by doing this play, we showed people that they should be aware of the consequences of sex.

The play takes place at a school. One of the main characters, Lucy, says she's beyond high school boys. She goes to a college frat party and drinks too much. She has sex and realizes she might be pregnant because she didn't use protection. She thinks, "This can't happen to me, my life is perfect." Lucy finds out she is pregnant and is afraid of what her friends will think.

The other roles are the students in a sex education class. My character's name was Stu. I was the comic relief. My friend Juan believed it fit me perfectly. Stu had very bad luck with girls. I have the same experience. I tried to make my lines as funny as I could, like this monologue: "Could you imagine how amazing the robot stork would be? Not that it matters. I can't find

one girl who doesn't think I'm best friend Stu, or buddy Stu or guy who is funny but I couldn't date in a million years Stu ..."

It was hard to remember my lines. But it was still fun practicing our lines and feeling what it was like to act and getting everyone to cooperate. In the play, everyone in the sex education class wears a pregnancy belly (even the guys) to experience what it is like to be pregnant. We used pillows. At first some of us forgot to bring our pregnancy bellies, so we would get square couch pillows and put them under our shirts. It looked like we had square babies in our stomachs.

## REHEARSAL WAS LIKE A SEX ED CLASS

Since we don't have sex education at our

school, my teacher, Nicole, decided to teach us so that we were more informed. She gave us study sheets that showed the reproductive system and different contraceptives, like condoms, the birth control pill, diaphragm, spermicide and emergency contraception (the morning-after pill). Some of those I hadn't heard about. It was nice to be more aware of other forms of protection. Nicole talked about how effective each method was at preventing pregnancy. Abstinence, which is not having sex, is 100 percent effective; a condom is 98 percent effective when used correctly.

As it got close to the performance, people were tired. We'd read our lines hundreds of times. Nicole said it was important because our school, which is very small with just 100

## Condom

A latex sheath (called a rubber) covers the penis and collects the semen, preventing sperm from entering a woman's vagina. A backup form of



birth control could be used, such as birth control pills, Depo-Provera or Implanon.

### SUCCESS

**RATE:** With typical

use, 15 women in 100 will become pregnant in one year. With perfect use, two women in 100 will become pregnant in one year. **PROS:** It provides good protection against most STDs, including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Plus, it's cheap, easy to carry around and can be bought at any drugstore without a prescription. **CONS:** It can fall off or break if it's not put on correctly; likewise, it can leak if not withdrawn carefully. Condoms must not be used with any oil-based lubricants like Vaseline or massage oil. Some people are allergic to the latex but plastic condoms are available. **HOW TO GET IT:** At drugstores and supermarkets; costs 50¢ to \$2 each. They are often available free at family planning or health clinics.

## Birth control pill

A woman takes a hormone pill every day that



stops ovulation, so no egg is released.

### SUCCESS

**RATE:** With typical use, eight women in 100 become pregnant in one year.

With perfect use, fewer than one woman in 100 will become pregnant in one year. **PROS:** Provides non-stop protection against pregnancy. You'll know exactly when your period is going to come. You'll have less PMS and cramps. **CONS:** Offers no protection against STDs including HIV, so you must use a back-up method. It can cause side effects such as nausea, headaches, moodiness. Some women have no side effects, but usually side effects go away after a few months. You need to remember to take the pill every day at the same time. **HOW TO GET IT:** Through a prescription from a doctor or a family planning clinic; the cost runs \$15 to \$40 a month plus the cost of the medical visit. Many clinics have sliding scale fees—so an exam and the pills may be free or low cost.

## Depo-Provera injection

A woman gets a shot of the hormone progestin in her arm or hips every three months. Like the Pill, Depo-Provera prevents pregnancy by keeping the ovaries from releasing eggs.

# Ways to protect yourself

From costs to how effective they are, the pros and cons of different birth control methods



### SUCCESS

**RATE:** With typical use, three women in 100 become pregnant in one year. With perfect use, fewer

than one woman in 100 will become pregnant in one year. **PROS:** Once you get the shot, you don't have to think about it for another three months. **CONS:** You have to see a doctor for another shot every three months. Offers no protection against STDs including HIV. Some women have weight gain and irregular periods. Can cause bone loss, which is generally reversible after stopping. **HOW TO GET IT:** Requires a medical visit every three months with a doctor or family planning clinic; the cost is about \$35 per shot, plus the cost of the office visit. Many clinics have sliding scale fees—so an exam and the shot may be free or low cost.

## Diaphragm

A woman uses spermicide to coat this dome-shaped rubber cup with a flexible rim. Then she places it inside the vagina to cover the cervix, where it blocks sperm.

**SUCCESS RATE:** With typical use, 16 women out of 100 become pregnant in one year. With perfect use, six women out of 100 become pregnant in one year. **PROS:** It can be put in



place up to six hours before intercourse and can stay there for 24 (though fresh spermicide should be applied without removing the

diaphragm each time you have intercourse). It is usually not felt by either partner during sex. **CONS:** Won't protect against STDs including HIV; can increase the risk of urinary tract infections and toxic shock syndrome. Can be

students, had three students in three years who were pregnant. Some teens aren't aware of how serious the risk of pregnancy and STDs is, which might be due to lack of information. Last year a 10th grader was doing a presentation about sex education to 40 students. (At my school, students design projects that they choose.) She said teens don't know how to use a condom correctly. She put us to the test. Out of four groups, only one put the condom on the banana correctly. She was proven right.

We performed the play for the students in our school at a theater downtown. We were all nervous, just waiting backstage. Jose was so nervous he was sweating. I said, "It'll be all right. We can do this," even though I was nervous too.

Not only does the play tell Lucy's story, it also shows the other characters' perspectives on sex. One character is afraid of having sex and another believes she's prepared. Another doesn't know anything. She thinks she can get pregnant from a toilet seat if a guy used it before her (this is not true).

One character, Tilly, is pressured by her boyfriend, "If you love me you'll do it," so she asks herself, "When are love and sex the same thing?" That line hit me. What is the difference

between love and sex? How do you define how you really love someone? If you have sex with a person, do you then love them? Is there confusion that sex is love?

#### OUR CLASSMATES TOOK IT SERIOUSLY

When the play was over we had a question and answer session when two people in the play answered questions. One person asked, "Do you think you could do this outside of school?" They wanted us to continue and perform the play somewhere else. I felt we made an impact and they learned something. Afterward the students and teachers said we did a good job. Some said the play had a good message.

I liked the message the play was trying to get across—to be more cautious and don't take the risk of pregnancy lightly. I hope teens use protection and ask someone reliable for information if they're going to be sexually active. Know whether you are ready for sex: Is it the right thing for you to do and the right time to do it?

I think all schools should have comprehensive sex education that includes how to protect yourself. I think my school should assign a teacher to teach sex ed. All my parents have told me about sex is "use a condom." When

your parents or school don't teach you, who do you turn to? Most teens don't know where to go to get informed.

I think everyone should think about the consequences of having sex. It's a big decision. It can change your life. My personal decision is I'm going to wait to be sexually active. I don't want to risk getting someone pregnant. I don't want that responsibility at a young age. I see how it changed my parents' lives. My dad was 21 and my mom was 17 when she got pregnant. My mother was an A student. She had to quit high school and get a job. By choosing not to have sex now, I can focus on different things, like hanging out with my friends, and I can prepare for what to do once I graduate from high school.



*Ernesto believes teens should take the time to get more informed about how to protect themselves.*

## WHERE TO GET BIRTH CONTROL

Check out these resources to find a health clinic near you where you can get confidential services, including birth control and STD testing. Most clinics charge sliding scale fees based on a teen's income, making many services free.

#### PLANNED PARENTHOOD

Call (800) 576-5544 for locations. Or go to [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

#### TEENSOURCE.ORG

Click on the "Find a Clinic" link

#### HEALTH SERVICES INFORMATION

Call (800) 427-8700 in Los Angeles County to get referred to a clinic near you

messy (because of the spermicide) and clumsy to use until you get the hang of it. Also, it has to stay in place for six hours after intercourse and then needs to be washed thoroughly with soap and water. Gaining or losing more than 20 pounds might mean you need a different size. **HOW TO GET IT:** Through a prescription from a doctor or family planning clinic; the cost is \$30 to \$40 plus medical exam and fitting. The spermicidal jelly, cream or foam costs from \$8 to \$15 a tube. Many clinics have sliding scale fees—so an exam and the diaphragm may be free or low cost. A diaphragm will last about a year.

#### Female condom

A thin plastic sheath, shaped like a sock with flexible rings at each end. The ring at the closed end holds the pouch in place inside the vagina, while the ring at the open end remains outside the



vagina. The pouch collects semen and prevents it from entering the vagina. It should be used with a spermicide or

another form of birth control such as the Pill, Depo-Provera or Implanon.

**SUCCESS RATE:** With typical use, 21 out of 100

women will become pregnant. With perfect use, five out of 100 will become pregnant.

**PROS:** Protects against STDs, including HIV, and you can get it without a prescription. Also, you can insert it up to eight hours before having intercourse. **CONS:** The outside ring can slide inside the vagina during intercourse. Can be awkward to use; must be removed right after intercourse, before you stand up, to prevent semen leakage. **HOW TO GET IT:** Buy it at drugstores or supermarkets or get it from family planning clinics; costs \$2 to \$4 each.

#### Implant (Implanon)

A small plastic tube is inserted under the skin of a woman's upper arm, and the tube releases hormones that prevent pregnancy.

**SUCCESS RATE:** Less than one woman in 1,000

becomes pregnant in one year.

**PROS:** It protects against pregnancy for up to three years—without you having to do anything. **CONS:** Doesn't protect against STDs including HIV; may cause irregular periods, nausea, headaches, weight gain. Some women may be able to see the rods under the skin.

**HOW TO GET IT:** Requires a medical visit with



a doctor or family planning clinic; the cost is \$500-\$800, plus the cost of removal. Many clinics have sliding scale fees—so Implanon may be free or low cost.

#### IUD

A doctor inserts a small t-shaped piece of plastic into a woman's uterus. The two types, one that releases hormones and another that is covered



by a copper wire, work in different ways to prevent pregnancy.

**SUCCESS**

**RATE:** Fewer than one woman in 100 become pregnant in one year.

**PROS:** It protects against pregnancy for five to 10 years without you having to do a thing. The copper type is an option for women who cannot use a hormonal method of birth control.

**CONS:** Need to check the string every month to make sure it is in place. Doesn't protect against STDs, including HIV; may cause irregular periods. **HOW TO GET IT:** Requires a medical visit with a doctor or family planning clinic; the cost is \$250 plus the cost of having a doctor insert and remove it. It's a lot of money, but it lasts five to 10 years. Many clinics have sliding scale

fees—so an IUD may be free or low cost.

#### Emergency contraception

It is an emergency method of birth control and should not be used as your regular birth control method, but can be taken within five days after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy. A woman takes a pill (called Plan B) containing hormones to prevent pregnancy. It will not disrupt an already established pregnancy.

**SUCCESS RATE:** If taken within three days of unprotected sex, one woman in 100 will get pregnant. It is more effective the sooner it is taken.

**PROS:** It can prevent you from getting pregnant

if you had unprotected sex.

**CONS:** Doesn't protect against STDs including HIV; may cause nausea. If you do not get your period within three



weeks, you should do a pregnancy test. **HOW TO GET IT:** If you are 17 or older, a male or female can buy Plan B at drugstores or family planning clinics; costs \$10 to \$45. Many clinics have sliding scale fees—so Plan B may be free or low cost. If you are younger than 17, it requires a visit to a doctor or family planning clinic.

Source: [itsyoursexlife.com](http://itsyoursexlife.com) and Planned Parenthood Los Angeles

# There's more to school than books

In Korea all I did was study, but in America I get to pursue my interests

**By Benjamin Bang**

*17, Palos Verdes Peninsula HS*

I moved to the United States from Korea two years ago for a better education. In Korea, teachers and schools don't care who you are or what you are interested in, they only care about what and how much you memorize. I felt like I was caged. In America, you can choose the classes you want to take and explore your interests before going to college.

When I was in Korea, I met a friend who lived in San Francisco and visited Korea a lot. He told me he could choose his classes. He had time to do extracurricular activities and on top of that had a girlfriend. I was jealous that he was doing things that I had no time to do. It felt like he was living in a totally different world. I wanted to find what I truly enjoyed doing too.

In Korea, most kids have tutors starting from first grade if they want to go to a good college. When I was a first grader, my mom, who was an English tutor, used to tutor me and other kids in English. I had a math tutor who gave me a packet full of work that she would check the next week. In middle school, I went to three English grammar academies, but I never understood anything, not even noun and verb agreements. We never wrote using the rules they made us memorize.

On top of studying, parents make their kids do everything. When I entered third grade, my parents made me play piano and violin, take swimming and Chinese classes. As a little kid who'd rather watch cartoons or play sports, I felt like these activities were a waste of time. Most of all, I was so tired from swimming that every time I'd go to violin class I'd fall asleep. One time, I didn't even open the violin case, and slept until the time was up. On the days I didn't have violin lessons, I took Chinese. But I was just a kid, it's not like I was going to go to China, so soon I forgot what I had learned.

When I entered middle school, I had tutors on Saturdays and Sundays. My friends and I were so busy that it was hard to hang out. In school, we were told that we would have four exams in each subject during the year, which would mostly determine our grades. The school

chose our subjects. Our classroom stayed the same (teachers would rotate, not us). I had seven to eight subjects that would change each day. They were social studies, math, science, Korean, moral education, English, P.E., technology/domestics, music and art. In moral education, we memorized rules such as the ways to make a society better.

In music, art and P.E., the written tests were a big part of our grades. In P.E., when the test came closer, most of the students actually brought books and studied at school. I mean, there were questions like, how many players are there in a soccer game, what rules are there in baseball and what is the size of an official

brought in his tutor's work and turned it in as if it were his own. The teacher didn't care as long as we turned something in, so he got a better grade than I did. I was pissed. Another time, when I asked for feedback, the teacher told me to come back later but as the class ended, she would leave the room to avoid my question. I lost interest in art and I thought it was just another boring subject.

I am not trying to say that the Korean educational system is pointless. It just didn't suit me. I didn't like that all of us had to do the same thing, when each of us has different talents. And four exams deciding my grade for the entire year was just too cruel.

WHEN COACH AWARDED ME WITH MOST IMPROVED PLAYER I WAS SO SURPRISED THAT I DIDN'T STAND UP. MY FRIENDS SHOOK ME AND I REALIZED THAT I JUST WON THE FIRST AWARD IN MY LIFE.

basketball. We would learn faster if we played those sports and learned from experience.

## THERE WAS MORE READING THAN PAINTING IN ART CLASS

Art focused on art history, not creating art. Test questions asked the name of the painter of a given painting, what a technique was called, the time period of an art trend, and so on. When the non-written part of the test came, we barely knew how to paint. In seventh grade, when we had a scratchboard project, my friend

friends after lunch at school or when we rarely had common free time, the field was dirt and sometimes the nets were missing and to think of referee and a coach was just funny.

As I got better at English, I spent less time in ESL (English as a Second Language). I had room for two more classes and took art and electronic art. Teachers would go around the room to give feedback on my paintings. They didn't teach because it was going to be on the test, but because they really wanted us to learn. In electronic art class, I used Photoshop for the first time. One day we had to go out with a digital camera and take photos of the campus. Afterward, we used Photoshop to combine the photos and come up with a finished project. I also got to create patterns, nametags, business cards and maps. Compared to my Korean school, this school was fun.

For ninth grade, I went to Sunny Hills High School in Fullerton, but I had to move to Rancho Palos Verdes to live with my aunt when my dad and mom returned to Korea. I knew if I went back to Korea, it would be almost impossible to catch up and I hated that system. I didn't see any reason to return, so I asked my parents if I could stay here for college. They agreed under one condition, that I go to at least UC Berkeley or UCLA.

## I LIKED GETTING TO CHOOSE MY CLASSES

As soon as I came to Palos Verdes Peninsula High, even more choices were available. I had a counseling session to go over my schedule. The counselor recommended that I join the track team when I said I like running and playing soccer. Since the soccer season was over and I didn't want to get out of shape, I said yes. She also asked me whether I wanted to join the honors program, which I knew would definitely increase my chances of getting into Berkeley or UCLA if I got good grades, so I said yes. That was a big step, since it had been only a year since I came to the United States. However, I think that was the right choice, since honors classes have helped me improve a lot in English. She asked me if I wanted to continue art. Of course I said yes.

Even though I got into honors English, I was



**Ben has gotten involved in lots of activities at Palos Verdes Peninsula HS. Here are two pieces of art he created, a picture of him running track and his soccer award.**

Collage by Sophia Richardson, 15, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies

I played my butt off even though it was raining. I got hit in the face with the muddy ball, trapped it on my chest, slide tackled, and played so hard that my entire body was soaked with mud and rain. Since I played better than the coach (and I) anticipated, I started and played the whole last game. A few months after the season ended, we had our banquet. I didn't feel like going but I followed my friends to the banquet. Then, boom! Coach awarded me with Most Improved Player. I was so surprised that when I heard my name, I didn't stand up. My friends shook me and I realized that I just won the first award in my life. I started grinning, and couldn't stop.

The education in Korea is like making stamps, the same thing over and over. Some students like it. Being in one classroom makes you become close to other kids. But I did not like how the school and the society were forcing education to make us all the same.

The education I'm getting in the U.S. is so different. I choose my own classes, joined honors, play sports and actually enjoy coming to school. Choosing my own classes, clubs and sports made me more independent. In Korea, students don't go to academies and have tutors because they want to. They do it because their parents told them to, or they feel they are behind or because the whole crowd is doing it. When I participate in clubs and classes that I like, instead of blindly following the crowd, I learn more and actually achieve something.

I think it was the right choice to come to the U.S. In August when I visited Korea to see my family, my friends told me that I am more confident and outgoing. I feel good about that change.



*Ben hopes he stays as enthusiastic and passionate about school as when he first came to the United States.*

still struggling with speaking English, and I was bad at making friends. I didn't have anyone to eat with during lunch so for about a week I ate alone. One day, I saw some guys from track who were eating together, and I joined them. I still eat and hang out with that group. Without track, I would still be wandering around and eating alone during lunch.

In September 2008, we had a club fair at the start of my sophomore year. I was so excited that I signed up for so many clubs—Christian clubs, art club, Model United Nations, Junior State of America (JSA), Key Club, friendship

club, math club, and the list goes on. I tried to go to most of the clubs' meetings the first day, but they overlapped so I ended up choosing four clubs. I lacked English public speaking skills so I thought Model United Nations and JSA, which are debating clubs, would help me. I was helping out with disabled people at my church so friendship club, where we hang out with kids with disabilities, was another opportunity to be involved with those kids. In Christian club, we meet every Friday during lunch, which strengthens my faith.

I took a few honors classes, art and sports.

For drawing and painting 2, we were in the same room as AP studio art students. Their work inspired me to try harder. I submitted three pieces to our art show and when I saw my paintings hanging on the wall, I felt tingling inside.

#### **I PROVED MYSELF ON THE SOCCER FIELD**

For sports, I tried out for the soccer team and barely made junior varsity. I knew I wasn't good, so I tried hard. I was a bench player for most of the season and rarely played. In the second to last game, coach subbed me in and

# Rap that makes me think

From religion to social justice, there's more to hip-hop than party songs

By Stanton Ellison

17, West L.A. College

Music is one of the things I live for, from turning on old Wu-Tang Clan songs while I work out to blaring System of a Down every morning before I start my school day. I enjoy all types of music: Johnny Cash's country, R&B, even metal, but my favorite is hip-hop.

But lately, the rap being played on the radio is all idiotic. If the rappers aren't making songs insulting women, then they're glorifying gang culture and drug dealing or talking about their cars, rented mansions and jewelry. Like the song I heard on the radio once, "Ask Them Hoes," in which Lil Wayne says, "Scarface b\*\*\*h cocaine by the pie/ Got them hoes sniffin' like them hoes 'bout to cry." People hear this and think that selling drugs and objectifying women is something to be idolized.

This kind of music made me turn to another type of rap—underground rap. Underground rappers are so talented. When I hear them coming up with something original and using metaphors that create a verbal image, I get chills.

When I was listening to radio rap in middle school on Power 106 and 93.5 KDAY, a lot of it was portraying the negative stereotypes that people have of black people. I just could never get into it. I listened to it just for the beat or the way I could dance to it.

Then my freshman year in 2006, on the way to a football game on the team bus, my friend Jared shared his iPod with me. He played a song called "Dance with the Devil" by Immortal Technique. In the song, Immortal Technique tells the story of a young man who wanted to live a criminal life and was so desperate to be like the Scarfaces and mob bosses that he tried to get into a gang through an initiation. He was supposed to rape a woman to show that he was merciless. He raped a woman on the roof of a building only to find out that the woman was his mother. He jumped off of the building and at the end of the song Immortal Technique says:

*"Crying out to the sky because he was lonely and scared  
But only the devil responded 'cause God wasn't there"*

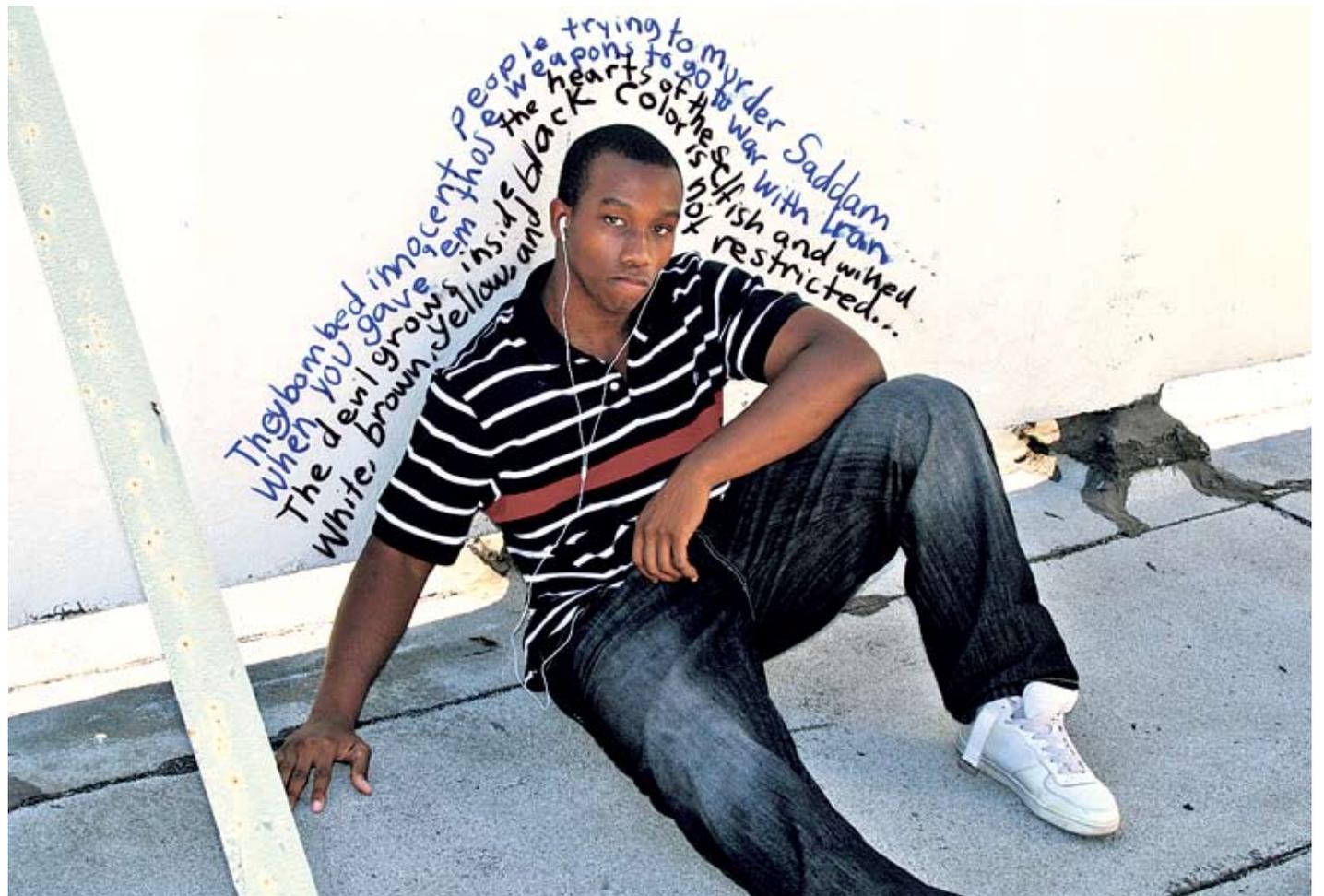


Photo illustration by William Brent, 16, Central L.A. HS for the Visual and Performing Arts and Sally Choi, 15, The Linden Center

*And right then he knew what it was to be empty and cold  
And so he jumped off the roof and died with no soul ...  
The devil grows inside the hearts of the selfish and wicked  
White, brown, yellow and black color is not restricted  
You have a self-destructive destiny when you're inflicted."*

I got goose bumps all through the third verse. I couldn't believe this was a rap song. It felt like I was listening to the narration of some twisted movie. That's when I got into underground rap. I thought that if this is what underground rap music is like, then I have been

missing out. The song had powerful lyrics and made me think. It may be extreme but it is the path some could take if they choose to be criminals. Some people I used to be close to joined gangs and did horrible things, and others may not have joined gangs but they fell into the mentality of "the more crooked you are the more you are respected." The power in the lyrics didn't just come from the words Immortal Technique used to rhyme, but that he was talking about something that I knew about.

Later on in the year when I created my MySpace page I decided to look up Immortal Technique to add "Dance with the Devil" to my page. His "friends" list had dozens of other underground rappers, so I looked at their pages and was amazed by the way all of them

had a distinct style. Like Jedi Mind Tricks, a rap group based in Philadelphia, whose music originated from personal experiences, the highs and lows of their lives. They also like to incorporate rock music and classical piano into their songs, which makes an odd but cool sound. Other artists like Demics and Diabolic were more political. KRS-One, a famous rapper from the late 80s and 90s, talked about how people in the "ghetto" needed to be educated and advance themselves so nobody could keep them down. He is what made me want to learn more about classic hip-hop, like N.W.A. and Public Enemy.

When I listen to new underground rap I see what seems like a rebirth of where N.W.A., Run-DMC and Public Enemy left off, talking about

issues of the time and what is going on in life. Back then, rap was more than just something you could play at a party and dance to, it was rebellious, anti-establishment, religious and political. It focused on the hardships of people in the urban ghettos and the inequality they had to deal with. Run-DMC made songs like "It's Like That:"

*"Money is the key to end all your woes  
Your ups, your downs, your highs and your  
lows.  
Won't you tell me the last time that love  
bought you clothes?  
It's like that, and that's the way it is."*

Rappers like Immortal Technique, Jedi Mind Tricks and Diabolic, who have something good to add to rap, don't get any recognition while rappers who have no skill, like Soulja Boy, are always played. This is why I don't even bother to turn the radio on anymore.

Underground hip-hop began as a way to make people aware of what's going on around them—in their neighborhood, the government or even religion. Like one of my favorite songs by Canibus, "Channel Zero:"

*"The holy script from Genesis 1:26  
Says let us make man in our image under  
our likeness  
First of all who's they?  
You see if God was truly a single entity  
that's not what he would say."*

I think he means that we follow religion so blindly that we don't even see the contradictory things religious doctrines say. When I heard that I was shocked that he actually said that out loud. I don't hear a lot of rap lyrics about how the Bible might be wrong. I usually hear that when I'm listening to rock, like Tool and A Perfect Circle. So when I heard this, I agreed with his questioning of biblical verse because when I read religious texts like the Bible and the Qur'an, I also ask questions.

Another song about religion is one Immortal Technique made on his second CD, Revolutionary, Vol. 2, called "The 4th Branch," where he said:

*"The voice of racism preaching the gospel  
is devilish  
A fake church called the prophet  
Muhammad a terrorist  
Forgetting God is not a religion, but a  
spiritual bond  
And Jesus is the most quoted prophet in the  
Qur'an  
They bombed innocent people tryin' to  
murder Saddam*

*When you gave him those chemicals  
weapons to go to war with Iran  
This is the information that they hold back  
from Peter Jennings  
'Cause Condoleezza Rice is just a new age  
Sally Hemings."*

I love this song, not only because the lyrics are original, but because it expresses what's going on in the world. It reinforced my views on religion and politics that I was afraid to say because I didn't think anyone else felt that way. I believe that religion isn't what God you pray to or whether you attend a cathedral or a mosque. It's knowing your purpose in life and being comfortable with your own mortality. I also feel the Bush Administration is responsible for lots of the financial and health-care problems we have today. Knowing that someone else who isn't a politician but just an educated entertainer openly expressed his ideals made me feel less weird for thinking that way.

When I began to listen to underground rappers I wondered why none of their music was played on the radio. In the song "Freedom of Speech," Immortal Technique mentions the shifty things the music industry was doing. I did research to see if what he and other artists were saying was true. A website called hiphopdx.com talked about how commercial rappers get corporate sponsors. On another website I read a list of liquor companies that sponsor artists. Companies work with record labels and tell the artists, if you help sell our product then we will give you money for cars, clothes and jewelry.

What some artists don't realize is that once they do this, the companies have the power to dictate what they say in their music. So if they wanted to make a song criticizing the government, the companies can say, if we consider this song too controversial you will lose our sponsorship. That is why major labels won't sign rap artists like Immortal Technique, who is huge in the underground rap scene. His messages are too controversial. Corporate sponsors won't support him so he would not make as much money as artists who mention a brand of alcohol.

It isn't as hard as it might seem to find this music. iTunes has two or three underground rap stations in its radio section. Pandora.com lets you type in any artist and song and similar songs will play for free. This is how I discovered skillful lyricists like Apathy and Gang Starr, who were big in the 90s when Tupac was still alive and making music and it was good to be an educated rapper. Some other artists who are making great music today are Chino XL and Crooked I.

## STANTON RECOMMENDS CHECKING OUT THESE CDS BY SOME OF HIS FAVORITE RAPPERS.

### Immortal Technique

CD: The 3rd World (2008)

It's fun because he's Peruvian and black so he's talking about what's going on in America and what's going on in Peru—the reggaeton side of him.

### Jedi Mind Tricks

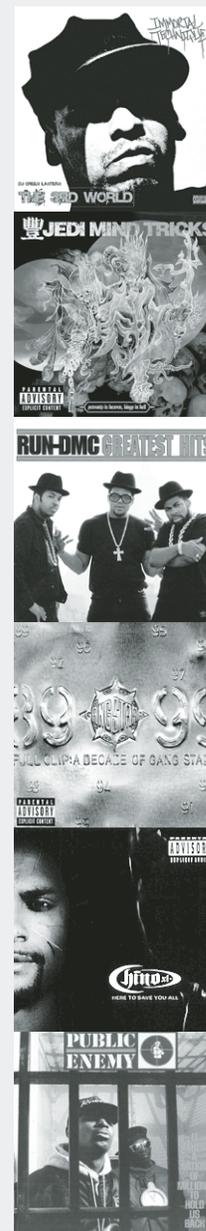
CD: Servants in Heaven, Kings in Hell (2006)

They don't use what a typical rapper uses as beats. They use South American and Indian beats to make interesting sounds.

### Run-DMC

CD: Greatest Hits (2002)

I like the sound of old rap. It's more raw but at the same time it's more fun. It tells you what's going on but it's also enjoyable to hear and not always serious.



### Gang Starr

CD: Full Clip: A Decade of Gang Starr (1999)

They sound like old Wu-Tang Clan or old Tupac. I relate to most of these songs. One of my favorites is "Mass Appeal," which is about not following the crowd and being original.

### Chino XL

CD: Here to Save You All (1996)

He has a way with words. He uses metaphors to insult other rappers who aren't as skillful or socially conscious.

### Public Enemy

CD: It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back (1988)

They are in your face. They don't use metaphors or analogies to tell you what's going on. They're not afraid to say it.

I think we shouldn't marginalize rap and listen to only one style. Party rap is fun because you can dance to it and conscious rap is great because you may hear a song that makes you think and learn something. I believe rap is so versatile. Instead of playing just one type of rap, radio DJs and record labels should pay attention to all aspects of hip-hop, because this culture has more than one voice to be heard.



*Stanton says he likes this kind of music because the artists aren't afraid to tell you the truth.*

# I was out of control

I used to break windows and cause trouble, but now I'm trying to think before I act



**By Sara Dominguez**  
18, South Bay HS (Torrance)

**G**rowing up I did crazy things, like break windows. I thought what I did was funny. I didn't think my behavior would affect my future, but it did.

I had hard times growing up. When I was a baby my siblings and I were taken away from our parents because they couldn't take care of us. We went to live with guardians. I saw my guardians as real parents and I had fun living with them but I was acting out too much. I was impatient and couldn't sit still. I'd get Saturday school because I wasn't listening to the teacher. I was doing stuff I wasn't supposed to do, like going on inappropriate websites. I thought I was doing things any other kid would do but I was taken away from them when I was 11 because they couldn't handle me.

My behavior got worse when I left my guardians' house. I missed them so I didn't care about trying to behave anymore. I went to three foster homes in one year. It was hard to move around, having to get adjusted to so many people. When I was 12 I was sent to my first group home, which is a home where you live with other kids and adult staff members when you can't handle a foster home. I'd get in trouble for running away. I got kicked out a year later. I didn't want to leave. The staff members were my friends. One let me hold her keys and hung out with me. I had called her mom.

At my new group home, I called and talked to some of the staff at my old group home. They told me they were going to come visit me but they never came. I wished I had people visiting me. The other girls would have their families pick them up on the weekends. I didn't have any family in my life at the time. I was sad about it.

I didn't like school so I was always acting

up. Sometimes I'd walk up and down the hallways, disturbing the classes. One time I ran away from school and found a shopping cart on the sidewalk. It was calling my name. I brought it all the way up the street back to school. I was going to run down the hallway with it. I thought, "I'm going to go disrupt the class. I'm going to have fun. Whoo!" But when I got to school, the school staff locked the door before I got in so I pushed it up and down the street instead. I thought it was the funniest thing to do instead of being in school.

I didn't care about getting in trouble. I did something bad every day but there were no consequences. I still got to do stuff, like go to Dodgers games, the pool and the park.

Then one day I was tapping a loose window and accidentally broke it and my hand started to bleed. I got a kick out of it. After that I realized I liked to break windows.

The first time I broke a window on purpose, using a rock, the staff ran after me. I ran around the group home. It was funny. It was like a police chase. Then one of them grabbed me. Three or four staff threw me on the ground and held me down until I was calm. As punishment I had an earlier bedtime.

## GETTING IN TROUBLE WAS A JOKE TO ME

There were big rocks out in the yard. Every day I would pick out a window, find a rock and throw it at the window. I liked to see them fix the windows over and over. I thought, "That's so funny. They have to replace it. I don't have any money to replace it." The girls knew when they heard a window shatter, that was me. The staff would chase me and I liked getting attention from them. I'd get in trouble but it wasn't bad.

One day one of the staff members sat down and talked to me. She said she wanted to quit because she was tired of restraining me. I felt bad because I didn't want anybody to lose

their job over me. I liked her. I was surprised. I was too busy doing what I wanted to do to see that my actions were making it hard on the staff. After that, I tried to act better but I couldn't. It was just so much fun.

I was so out of control that I went to the mental hospital. One day I was upset and I wanted to run away so I walked to the liquor

store. I was out of control and doing things that were dangerous, like running around with a pair of scissors. The third time I went to the hospital, after I'd been at my group home for a year and a half, they didn't let me come back. When the people from my new group home came to pick me up I was pissed. I thought my old staff had rejected me. I was going to

After I was at my strict group home for two years I began to see people leave who weren't here as long as me. It upset me. I wanted to leave too. I started to regret all the trouble I had caused. I didn't want to be bad anymore.

store. I walked back to the group home drinking a Hawaiian Punch. I whipped out a razor I had stuck in my pocket and I tried to break it open to get the blade out. To scare the staff, I was going to act like I was going to cut myself, just small scratches, not deep. When I got back to the group home they saw the razor and a bunch of the staff tried to take me down on the grass. I was forcing them off of me, then more staff had to hold me down and control me. They had to call an ambulance. "I'm not going," I screamed. I was scared. They put me on the stretcher and strapped my arms.

I was there for a week. My group home staff picked me up and took me back. They sent me to a mental hospital two more times because I

miss some of them.

## I NEEDED MORE RULES TO HELP ME BEHAVE

I came to my new group home, called Star View, in October 2006 when I was 15 years old. It's a stricter group home with locked doors and a lot of rules where teens get sent to get help with their problems, like anger or behavior. I finally changed when I got here. Before I hadn't been ready.

But I wasn't ready to change right away. Star View has windows all down the hallway. I walked down the hallway, hitting the windows, boom, boom, boom. I was testing them. It wasn't glass. I had to examine them

because they looked thick. They were plexiglass. I couldn't break them.

But I found other ways to get into trouble. I threw chairs and I got slammed on the floor by the staff. When I got mad at the other kids or punched a hole in the wall, I'd get sent to the timeout room, a blue room with carpet on the walls. They put you in the room, close the door and leave you until you calm down. I was sometimes in there for four hours. It made me more frustrated. I would bang on the windows and kick the door. They would come back and take off my shoes. Different times I ripped off the bottom of my T-shirt. I wrapped it around my neck and tied it in knots over and over. I was mad and wasn't thinking about what I was doing. I didn't want to hurt myself. The big male staff would come in the room and rip the T-shirt off my neck. I would have a red mark on my neck. I felt upset at myself because I did a stupid thing.

At Star View, it wasn't fun to mess around. My old group home didn't have a timeout room. They had to hold me until I calmed down. And I got to go on the day trips even if I got in trouble. But at Star View if I acted up I didn't get to go anywhere. It was tough getting in trouble.

A year and a half after being at Star View, I got back in contact with my family. I saw my sister and my guardian, who I call my mom because I lived with her for many years. She said, "I love you." I felt happy because I thought I was never going to talk to her again. But they said I couldn't live with her because I needed to be good. My mom would always visit me. She told me to do good and not get in trouble. She said she wanted me to get out of my group home.

After I was here for two years I began to see people leave who weren't here as long as me. It upset me. I wanted to leave too. I started to regret all the trouble I had caused. I didn't want to be bad anymore. I wanted to improve so I could get out of my group home. I wanted to live with my family. I would think about my family and how I wanted a nicer future. I didn't want to end up in a mental health facility for adults when I turned 18. I was scared of that. I started to shape up.



*Sara says life has taught her many lessons and now she's working toward building a better future for herself.*

If I was good they would let me visit my mom on the weekends. We watched movies and ate junk food. Those visits helped me stay out of trouble because I had someone in my life to see. I would feel bad if my family wanted to see me and I let them down because I got in trouble.

The staff helped me behave better. When I would get mad at somebody and want to fight them, Dee would tell me to calm down and "breathe in and out." It helped.

The staff talked to me. They asked questions like, "What's wrong?" and "How was your visit with your family?" They were asking about things that I liked. It made me happy. I didn't have my family by my side but I felt like I had family—the staff—in my life.

I'd tell the staff if someone was bothering me. They'd tell me to ignore them. I'd listen to them and I wouldn't get in trouble. One time when I picked up sharp pieces of plastic outside in the gated area, Vernice, a counselor, told me, "Hand it over and don't come inside with it because people could get hurt." I listened to her and I handed the pieces over. I was happy I didn't make it a bigger situation and get my privileges taken away, like going on outings.

#### **I GOT SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

I want to shout out to all the staff—Dee, Vernice, Michael T., Mark, Jazz, Joel B. my therapist, Leah my old therapist, Stephanie, Vicky, Princess, Debbie M. and my teacher Mr. Grady. They've all supported me. After I got in trouble once, I did good for a whole week. Vicky brought me Denny's. If it weren't for them I would have given up and not cared.

I don't get in trouble or go to the timeout room that much anymore. I feel good that I've improved. I'm trying to grow up.

Now that I'm 18, I want to live in transitional housing, which is an apartment where you live on your own and the system pays for it. I want to live near my guardians so they'll be able to see me more. I'm an auntie. I need to improve for my sister and her baby, for my family, so I won't end up in an adult facility and mess up my life.

I regret everything I did. Don't act bad because then you'll regret it. Don't always react. Think before the consequences are coming your way. Don't mess up your future. I wish I didn't do the things I did so that I would have never been at Star View or my other group homes and I could still be with my guardians. I think about that every day. Why am I here? Then again I've met all these people that came in my life and I'm happy for that too.



# Calling all foster youth in Los Angeles County

Do you want to let other teens know what foster care is like? Here's your chance.

L.A. Youth is looking for foster youth ages 14 to 18 who want to write an article to be published in L.A. Youth.

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- HELP** other foster youth by sharing your experiences
- INFORM** others about "the system"



Foster Youth Editor Amanda Riddle (left) works with Sally on her story.



Contact Editor Amanda Riddle at  
**(323) 938-9194**  
 or [ariddle@layouth.com](mailto:ariddle@layouth.com)

Invite Amanda to speak at your school, group home or foster agency about writing for L.A. Youth.



**Got questions?**

Go to [layouth.com](http://layouth.com) and click on the Foster Youth link to learn more and read stories written by foster youth.

# What you need to know about the flu

I talked to experts about swine flu and how to avoid getting sick



Gabe holds a flier from the county health department that reminds us to wash our hands as one of the best ways to prevent getting sick this flu season.

**By Gabe Andreen**  
17, Pilgrim School

I was confused about how swine flu, which is also called H1N1, was different from the regular flu that comes every year. Back in the spring they were making a huge deal of it. Reports in the newspapers and on TV were telling you it's scary and you hear about people dying. When my dad went to China for business, they took people's temperatures when they got off the plane and if it was 1 or 2 degrees above normal they quarantined them. But when I came back

to school there was a kid who got the swine flu and he was fine. It was confusing. Since it's flu season, I wanted to learn more. What I found out was reassuring. Although as teens we're more likely to get sick than older people, if you stay home and rest you can get better.

Here is information based on an interview I did with Susan Hathaway, a nurse, and Ben Techagaiciyawanis, a health educator, from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. If I get the flu I won't be as worried as before. Be cautious, wash your hands, but don't freak out.

**What is swine flu? How is it different from the regular flu?** Swine flu, or H1N1 pandemic flu, is a respiratory infection caused by a new flu virus and it's responsible for large outbreaks in many parts of the world. Its genetic components are composed of a

combination of swine, avian and human influenza. The name has stuck to call it swine flu because it's easy to say in news reports. We think that name is confusing because this particular strain of the flu virus spreads only among people, not pigs. It's not

found in pigs.

Most people don't have immunity to it because it's a new strain of the flu. It's affecting mostly young adults and children, whereas seasonal flu [regular flu] most often affects those 65 and older.

**Why does it affect young adults and children more than the regular flu?** We don't know exactly why. There is some thought that people who were born before 1957 may have seen a similar type of the flu in the past and they may have some immunity.

**What are the symptoms of H1N1?** The symptoms are similar to other flu symptoms. You may have a fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache; you could be tired.

**How can people get it?** The same way you can get seasonal flu or other respiratory infections. Mainly we're talking about coughs and sneezes, drops that spread. If someone sneezes or coughs on an object it contaminates that surface, and if another person touches that same object or surface and rubs his or her eyes, nose or mouth, those are pathways for the germ to get in.

**What can I do to prevent getting sick?** Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or the insides of your sleeves when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands often in soap and water. If you don't have access to restrooms, you can also use alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Do not touch your eyes, nose and mouth because germs can get into your body that way. If you're sick, common sense is to stay home. Avoid close contact if you're sick or with others if they're sick. You should stay home for 24 hours after the fever ends.

**You call it pandemic H1N1 flu. What does "pandemic" mean?** It doesn't mean that a disease causes severe illness. It means that it's widely spread. What we're finding with

this strain of H1N1 is that most of the cases are mild to moderate.

**Will more people get sick than from the regular flu?** Every year in the U.S. there are 36,000 deaths from seasonal flu and 200,000 hospitalizations. Thus far there have been more than 500 deaths due to H1N1 so we'll see how it plays out for this current season.

**Do you recommend getting an H1N1 vaccine?** It's recommended for certain priority groups, including children and young adults from six months to 24 years of age. It's recommended but it's not mandatory.

The vaccine is expected to come out in mid-October. We're recommending that you check with your doctor to see if he has the vaccine. And then if he doesn't have the vaccine or you don't have a doctor, there are going to be more than 250 places with it in Los Angeles County starting in mid-October and running through mid-December. You can go there and get the vaccine for free. Those will be listed on the L.A. County website, <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.

**Does the seasonal flu shot prevent H1N1?** No, it's entirely different. The seasonal flu vaccine is for protection against seasonal flu and the pandemic H1N1 shot is for protection against pandemic H1N1.

**Do you have any last thoughts?** Just to remind you that most people that have had the swine flu in the U.S. got better on their own. They didn't need to get medicine, they just needed to stay home. Don't panic if you think you have the flu. Also, wash your hands, cover your cough and stay home if you're sick.



Since doing this interview, Gabe is washing his hands more.

## Looking for Alaska

By John Green

**Reviewed by Stacey Avnes**

15, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies

Looking for Alaska is more than just a teen angst novel, it's a gripping story of life, death, love, taking risks and friendship. This book is the most perfect composition of high school events ever written.

Loner Miles Halter (Pudge) decides to leave Florida to go to boarding school in Alabama because he doesn't have friends. He wants to make friends at his new school, but he expects that things will be the same as they were before—he will be unnoticed. Instead, he meets unruly Chip, Japanese rapper Takumi, shy but lively Romanian Lara, and sexy, outgoing Alaska, and his life changes forever.

Pudge has a crush on Alaska and is having the time of his life, until Alaska mysteriously dies. The friends are angry, sad, vengeful and confused. They don't know what to do, and they work together to find out what happened, which brings them closer. Each time they find clues to her death, they find out things about Alaska they never expected.

I didn't want to put the book down because the writing felt as if a real teen was telling the story. Like when Alaska says, "It's the eternal struggle, Pudge: the good versus the naughty. Sometimes you lose a

battle, but mischief always wins the war." That is like the teen motto. I know that I do whatever I can to get out of certain situations, even if it means being a little mischievous.

Before reading this book, I read mostly classics. Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters had become my favorite authors. The lifestyles depicted in those stories are a lot more restrictive and conservative than in Looking for Alaska. This book brings teenage antics up a hill to get the attention of the dean of the school while freaking him out at the same time. It is still tasteful while being hilarious.

There were times in the book when I felt I was with the characters, feeling what they were feeling and experiencing what they were experiencing. A lot of the things that happen in high school are in this book, even the events that people want to forget. A lot of us know the feeling of liking someone you cannot have, like when Pudge first realizes that he likes Alaska and she claims that she is in love with her current boyfriend. To me, those parts of the story make it more relatable to real-life high school.

This book has taught me not to take things for granted—especially friends. To see in this book how something can be taken away so quickly, I now know to start taking things like arguments with friends less seriously because for all I know, they could be gone tomorrow.

## Carrie

By Stephen King

**Reviewed by Esteban Garcia**

16, Warren HS (Downey)

I'd heard great things about Stephen King. I'd seen The Shining, the film adaptation of King's novel, and loved it, so when I saw some of his novels on the list of books we could read for English, I chose Carrie. It proved to be an incredibly thrilling read.

Carrie is the story of a teenage girl suffering from the crushing humiliations of being an outcast in a small-town high school and her mother's biting Christian fundamentalism. Early on, her peers in the locker room torment Carrie after she gets her first period and is bleeding in the showers. Later, we see her mom's severity when she forces Carrie to pray for hours to repent for her sins (like visiting a bikini-clad neighbor and accepting a boy's invitation to the prom).

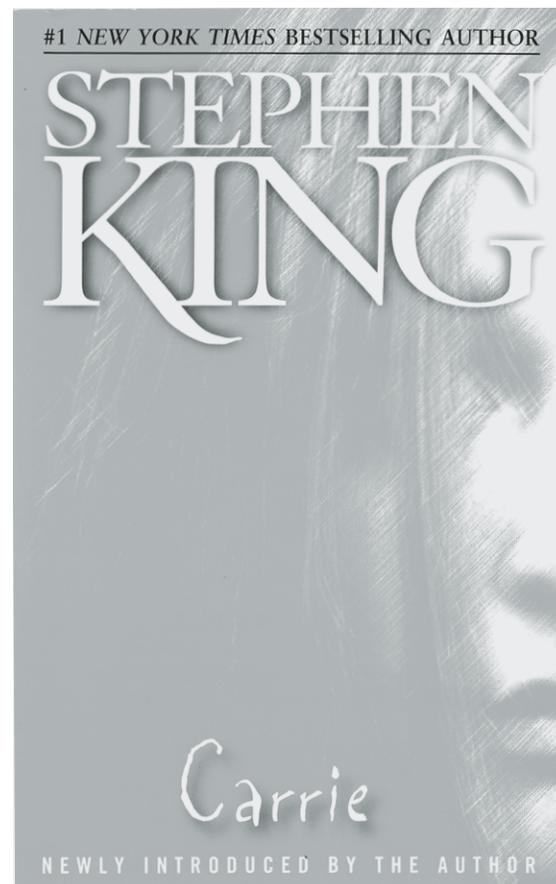
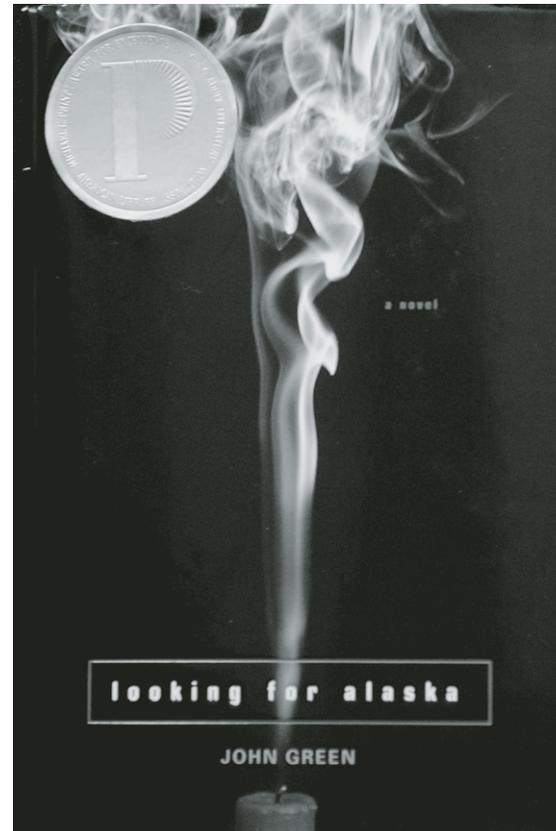
As the plot unfolds King slowly introduces Carrie's telekinetic powers—the ability to move inanimate objects with only the power of her mind. After she is humiliated at prom, Carrie goes on a rampage, destroying much of her town and its inhabitants with her telekinesis. I appreciated, though, that Carrie's powers weren't the focus of the story; Carrie is primarily about high school life.

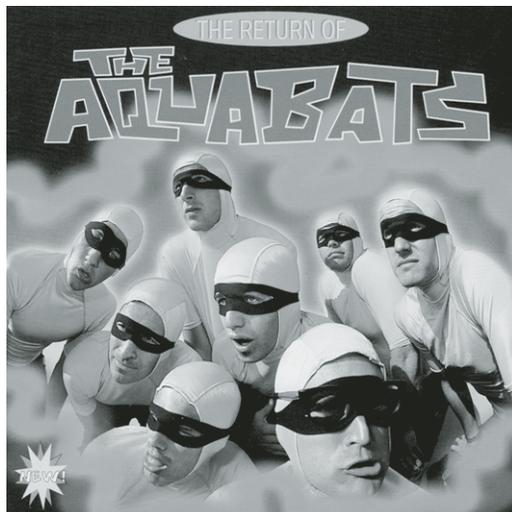
Before reading Carrie, I didn't think a book could

capture suspense the way a film can but this novel proved me wrong. King's descriptive style brings alive the pain of the main character. Parenthetical phrases give the readers constant insight into the thoughts and emotions of the characters. When the words, "(dead are they all dead Carrie why think Carrie)" splash across the page, it felt like those thoughts were my own. These made reading the novel all the more enjoyable and only once seemed pointless.

While something like buying a root beer for a dime may be dated (Carrie was published in 1974), the overall theme and feel of the book still connected with me. Carrie is a view into the life of the other side of high school. For misfits, the story could possibly be a refreshing and honest view of their own situations. The scenes of Carrie's amazing revenge convey a sense of personal victory—the intensity of the emotions forces the reader to feel it all, and I did.

Before reading Carrie, I wasn't sure what to expect of a horror book, but I couldn't stop reading it. I slipped a few pages in during morning announcements, before bed, during lunch, and between classes and I finished it within one week.





## The Aquabats

CD: The Return of The Aquabats

**Reviewed by Sam Landsberg**  
16, Hamilton HS

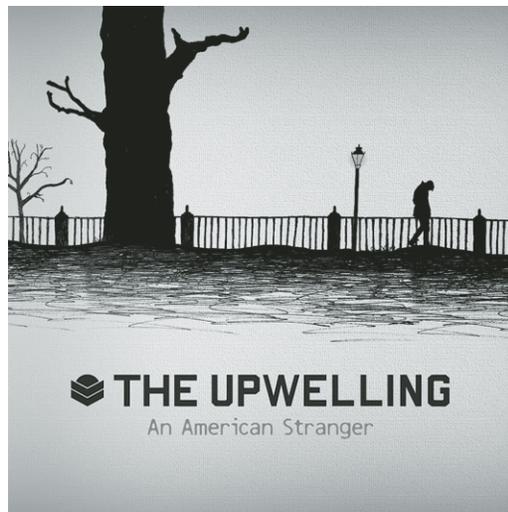
**T**he title says it all. The Aquabats' debut album, ironically called their "return," is filled with the silly antics that define The Aquabats. The eight-piece band, complete with a full brass section, perform ska (music with upbeat guitar riffs and horns) and sing about things most bands might look down on as song subjects.

The opening song, "Playdough," which starts off with pounding notes and then a brass solo reminiscent of mariachi, is all about the carelessness of childhood. That doesn't sound like a silly subject, until you add in action figures from Star Wars and Scooby Doo. The song is all about losing your action figures and how upsetting it is. The album includes three songs, "Playdough," "Martian Girl" and "Idiot Box," that were re-released on their second album, *The Fury of the Aquabats!* Although the versions on *The Fury* are undoubtedly better mixed, I prefer the versions on *The Return*, which seem more genuine and raw.

The Aquabats make a point of not taking life or music seriously. The song "Martian Girl" is about falling in love with a girl from Planet V, who came to earth to eat people. But they are still talented musicians and songwriters. In the tradition of Monty Python and Devo, The Aquabats make it acceptable to act immature, because they do so with great talent.

The Aquabats have changed a lot over the years, but their first album, from 1996, is still one of their best. It is a perfect example of ska, which is all about having fun.

**The Aquabats make a point of not taking life or music seriously, but they are still talented musicians.**



## The Upwelling

CD: An American Stranger

**Reviewed by Chantelle Moghadam**  
15, Viewpoint School (Calabasas)

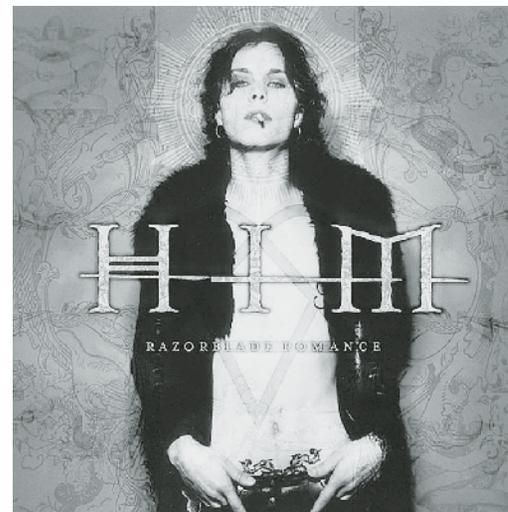
**R**eady to get away from the repetitive alternative rock sound played out by so many bands? Then definitely check out *An American Stranger*, The Upwelling's debut album.

From the catchy, upbeat single, "American Girls," to their slower songs such as "Paris" and "New Streets," each song is completely different. There are songs about rejection ("American Girls"), songs about satisfying a need to get away ("Wanderlust"), and songs about leaving the love of your life ("Who Needs You Now").

The lyrics of New York City brothers Ari and Joshua Ingber are enchanting and thought-provoking. The combination of those lyrics with the drums and melodious guitar is what makes this album as amazing as it is. If a song can make my heart swell with feelings, I know it's a good song. "Paris" is one of my favorites because of its lyrics. "Should I have told you what you've always known?/ I love you to the marrow of your bones." When I first heard this line, I immediately loved the song because it brought back memories of a past relationship.

Although it is difficult to compare The Upwelling to other bands considering their distinctive sound, they are somewhere between Daughtry's upbeat sound, The Killers' old-school style and Coldplay's appealing lyrics, creating a sound that is different from all three. The Upwelling is surely one of the best alternative rock bands that the world has never heard of.

**If a song can make my heart swell with feelings, I know it's a good song.**



## HIM

CD: Razorblade Romance

**Reviewed by Patricia Chavarria**  
18, Cesar Chavez Continuation HS (Compton)

**I**f you're looking for a CD with amazing songs about love and death I recommend HIM's *Razorblade Romance*.

One of my favorite songs is "Join Me in Death," which is based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Lead singer Ville Valo sings about finding someone he truly loves. But instead of being together in life, he wants to be with her forever in death, where they can't be torn apart. My favorite lyrics are: "This world is a cruel place/ and we're here only to lose/ so before life tears us apart let/ death bless me with you/ Won't you die tonight for love/ Baby join me in death." Some people might find those lyrics scary or disturbing, but I find it romantic that someone will sing about a thing like dying for love.

Another great song that will keep you singing every day is "Right Here in My Arms." I can't help listening to it on repeat on my car stereo and iPod. The lyrics are amazing and hypnotizing: "And her heart is weeping because happiness is killing her/ She'll be right here in my arms so in love/ Right here in these arms she can't let go." The guitar intro on this song is so great that it has me playing air guitar.

All of the songs on this album are great! Some of my other favorites are "Bury Me Deep Inside Your Heart," "Poison Girl" and "Death Is in Love With Us." This CD is to die for. Long live His Infernal Majesty.

**I can't help listening to "Right Here in My Arms" on repeat on my car stereo and iPod.**

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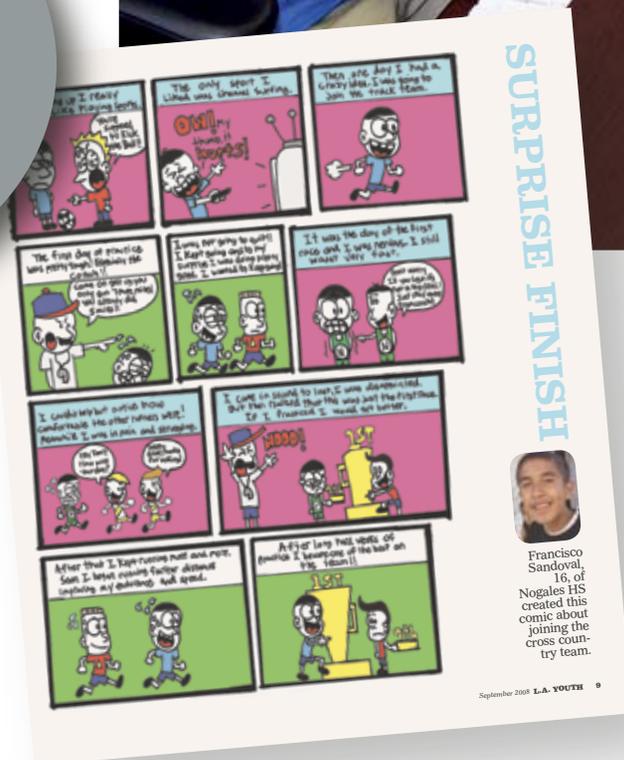
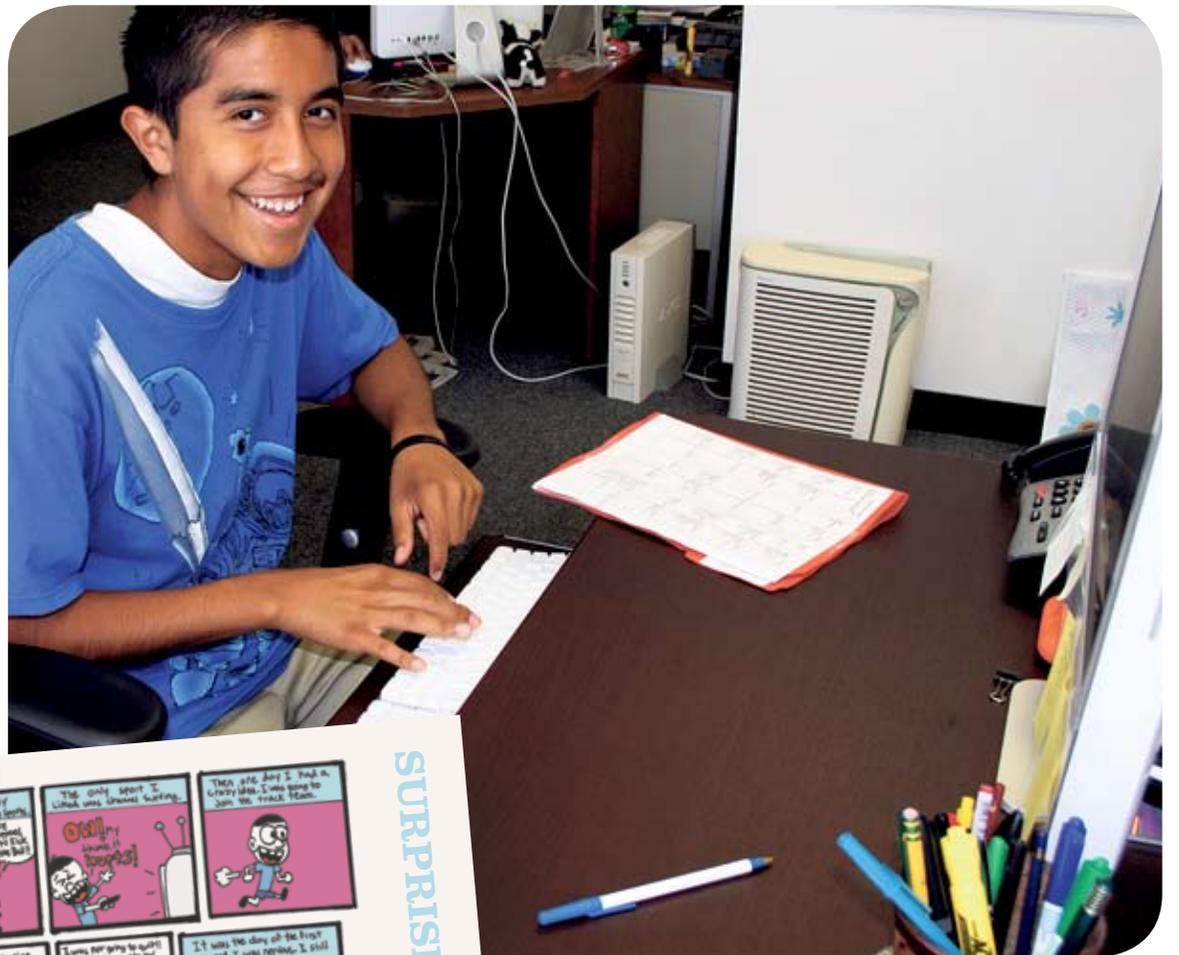
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**L.A.** Youth has given me an opportunity to showcase my art to hundreds of thousands of people. I have had four comics, four illustrations and five CD reviews published in the newspaper. Without L.A. Youth, my art would have remained in my sketchbook. Even better, the kids at my school would see my artwork in the paper and compliment me.

L.A. Youth has also given me the opportunity to discuss current events with other teens, like the war in Iraq and the 2008 presidential election. At school we're busy studying history and other subjects, and we never have the chance to discuss issues like these. I also like that at the weekly staff meetings I've met teens from other parts of L.A. County who are different from the kids I go to school with.

L.A. Youth has taught me to become a better writer, too. I am more confident expressing my ideas on paper than I was before I joined.

—Francisco Sandoval,  
17, Nogales HS (La Puente)

# L.A. youth

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