

# Applause

Volume 27, Number 5   School of the Arts, North Charleston, SC   January 2026



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Kyle Wells

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year!

This issue marks the fifth paper of the year, making us officially halfway done with the twenty-seventh volume of *Applause*. This past week has been big for me. On Tuesday, the 20th, I performed my Senior Thesis, and at the time I'm writing this, I'll be turning eighteen in about thirty minutes. In the middle of those two things was finishing up this issue and getting it ready for upload.

However, I think it came together very well, and I hope you all will enjoy reading it.

Later this month, on January 29th, *Applause* will be putting on its annual concert, this year's being *All You Need is Love: Songs of the 60s*. Students have been working diligently to prepare, so I recommend checking out pages ten and eleven for more info about the show and some behind the scenes photos.

There's a myriad of great articles this month, and I highly suggest reading this issue's editorial on the "Walk for Peace" to see some good in the midst of all that has been going on in the world lately.

As always, I'm very proud to present to you the January *Applause*!

Your Editor,  
Luciano Cusatis




## SOA Calendar

by Trinity Collins

**Friday, 1/23:** CW guest author: Emily Van Duyne, RMMT, 8:30-11:30 AM  
**Tuesday, 1/27:** Junior Honors Ceremony, RMMT, 6-8 PM  
**Thursday, 1/29:** *All You Need is Love: Songs of the*

'60s, RMMT, 6-8 PM  
**Friday, 1/30:** Convocation #2, RMMT, 2-3:30 PM  
**Friday, 2/6:** *For The Culture Friday*- Black History Month, Courtyard/Breezeway, 11 AM-2 PM  
**Tuesday, 2/10:** Band Senior Thesis Recital, RMMT, 6-8 PM  
**Wednesday, 2/11:** MS

Piano Winter Jazz Concert, RMMT, 6-8 PM  
**Thursday, 2/12:** HS Piano winter jazz concert, RMMT, 6-8 PM  
**Friday, 2/13:** *For The Culture Friday*-Black History Month, Courtyard/Breezeway, 11 AM-2 PM  
**Friday, 2/13:** 6th grade dance, Cafeteria, 1:30-3:30



# Applause

since 1999, the official student publication of  
**School of the Arts**

*Founded in 1995 by Rose Maree Myers*

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## In This Issue

**Students Prepare for All You Need is Love: Songs of the 60s**

by Trinity Collins

**SOA Athletes Continue Strong this Winter**

by Fletcher Seminaroti

**Strings Majors Present Their Senior Theses**

by Trinity Collins

## Editorial: “Walk for Peace” a Living Light

As we celebrate the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the monitors in the hallways and cafeteria --thanks to Ms. Gomez-- flash one the many famous pieces of wisdom Dr. King lived by: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Considering the darkness pervading much of the world as we enter this new year, Dr. King’s words resonate with relevance and hope.

Anyone who has been following the “Walk for Peace,” a 2300-mile pilgrimage begun in late October by a group of Buddhist monks of the Huong Dao Temple in Fort Worth, Texas –or who has visited the monks on their walk—has seen Dr. King’s statement embodied and carried across America with deep fortitude, courage, and humility. Several SOA students and faculty made the trip to the Columbia area in mid-January as the monks, accompanied by the stray dog, Aloka, whom they rescued in India, made the State House a stop on their journey. Some even joined the march.

“I had a wonderful experience meeting the ‘Walk for Peace’ monks and Aloka four times last Saturday between Lexington and Columbia,” said SOA theater teacher Mr. David Loar. “I’ve walked in many marches over the years, and on most of those occasions, I was seeking, and energized by, the mass-crowd experience. This time, given the quiet, peaceful nature of the monks and purpose of their walk, I wanted a quieter, more personal experience.”

The leader of the march, the Venerable Bhikkhu Pannakara addressed the thousands gathered on the State House lawn, explaining the purpose of their walk: They hoped to spread the teaching and practices he and his fellow monks incorporate into their daily lives at their temple in Fort Worth. The thousands of weeping and smiling observers some raising prayerful hands others grasping flowers, who showed up on the streets of Columbia provided evidence that the quiet words and resolute action they observed are what so many of us wish to and can embrace.

Mr. Loar expressed the impact of the walk on his Facebook page, comparing it to other momentous events he has joined. “Greeting the Walk for Peace monks and Aloka four times yesterday morning ranks right up there with seeing RFK speak in a hotel ballroom in my hometown in 1968 (just a month before he was assassinated); seeing Obama break into “Amazing Grace” during the memorial service for Rev. Pinckney here in Charleston; walking in DC with some 250,000 other demonstrators to try to stop the beginning of the Iraq War; and the Unity Walk across the Ravenel Bridge after the murders of the Emanuel Nine. I’m obsessed with these men, in love with this dog, and in full support of Peace.”

The Venerable Bhikkhu Pannakara concluded his talk in Columbia with a fitting echo of Dr. King’s words, wisdom to guide us in this new year: “For the year 2026, let us move forward without hatred, without anger. May only loving kindness and compassion stay with us for the rest of this year and for the rest of our life.”



Walk for Peace passes down Meeting St. in West Columbia

## Sass Attack: Ellis And The Night Of The Living Consumers

by Ellis Richards

*Sass Attack was originally started by former Applause writer David Sass in 2011. Our junior creative writing major, Ellis Richards, has continued the tradition.*

Ever get yelled at by someone you don’t know? Leered at by a grumpy coach who can’t even remember his own phone number? Chastised by a mom because her kid scanned something while you weren’t looking?

If yes, then congrats! You’re equipped with all the knowledge you need to work a minimum wage shift at any chain grocery store in the American south! If not, well then I suggest a (probably even worse) position at any of the fast food restaurants framing our very own highway seventeen, and for you to strap in for the story I’m about to tell you.

My typical work-day schedule is just my shift stamped onto whatever else is happening; long day at school, longer bus ride, and then a rushed shower so I can get in the door before six with all the unnecessary modifications to my uniform on. I clock in, log in to my register, and start my shift with a typical flick of my isle light.

“Is this lane open?” (standing next to the bright sign signifying my isle is available)

“Of course!”

He seems alright, medium sized cart, cordial, and he hands me his card quickly with no fuss! In fact, everything goes perfectly fine until it’s time for me to bag him up.

“Everything in these two bags.”

Now, taking a moment to recover from the crushing weight of his audacity, I’m at the very least a bit doubtful about what he’s requesting.

“I can try, but I can’t promise this will wor-”

“It will.” Oh ok...

Now his cart is smaller, sure, but it’s not two bags small. My eyes flick between all his groceries, trying to make a plan in my head for this now mountain of stuff to fit into two small Aldi bags. Finally it clicks, and the products spin into a vaguely brown blur as I assemble this puzzle of a cart with the speed and mastery of a Tetris world champion... Done! My palms are clammy, my hearts accelerating, I’m chewing my cheeks—

“Oh this is way too heavy.”

So you ask me to put your entire cart into two bags... Which I then do quickly and diligently, and then have the nerve to complain to me about the weight?? The weight of the bagging arrangement you insisted on even as I suggested otherwise!?! The weight that also could have been inferred before I even finished with the same basic critical thinking skills expressed by most (at least not this doofus) adults on earth? I’ve been a blank mask or irritation for around T-minus twenty seconds, and an audible clearing of his throat makes me think he’s catching on. Not wanting to catch flack from a guy who probably calls the law-firms on billboards, I go about quickly taking a third from each bag into a fresh paper one to get him out of my line; Because one more minute of this



Ellis Richards at work

and he'll be leaving in a bag and i'll be sending letters to my sister from my twelve by seven concrete cell in the depths of ADX Florence.

“And have a nice rest of your day~!”

## Opinion: The Importance of Physical Media

by Lila Hayes

If you haven't heard, physical media is back. At least, according to the social media posts flooding everyone's feeds leading up to New Year's Day. Users swore that 2026 is the year to go analog and ditch modern technology, which entails switching from modern technology and streaming services to print newspapers, CDs, vinyls, DVDs, and flip phones.

There are a few reasons for the movement. Recently, more people have been craving freedom from their phones as they become an everyday staple of life, and can pull users away from other hobbies in favor of social media. There's been a growing awareness of the stress and burnout that overuse of social media can cause, leading to the resurgence of physical media. Others cite climate concerns, the high environmental impact of the production of cell phones pushing them towards older forms of entertainment. Though physical media has its own environmental damage to answer for, many consider the contributions made by data centers to be high enough to make the switch.

Some on the internet criticize the comeback, saying that it's another “microtrend” and an easy way to fall into overconsumption. And they're right; it is easy to fall for another trend encouraging you to purchase items you won't value, but supporting large-scale businesses isn't the only way to get into physical media. If you have a library card, you're free to check out books (instead of e-books) and DVDs at your local library. Thrift stores, local vintage markets, and yard sales often have hoards of vinyl records and secondhand CDs for low prices. If you don't want to dig through the stacks at the thrift store, you can easily burn CDs yourself with a thrifted CD player and any computer.

Physical media feels more intentional; it forces the user to take time to set a record needle, flip through pages of a print newspaper, or burn a CD instead of the simplicity of a glass screen. It has a sense of permanence, too, especially printed film or digital photos. The memories are preserved, rather than simply saved on your phone. They can be stored in a scrapbook, mailed in letters, or organized in an album for future generations. Going back to physical media doesn't just get you off of your phone, it gets you back into your life.



Lila Hayes

declines in storytelling quality. Specifically, the season contains many unresolved plot holes, inconsistent character behavior, and undeveloped story arcs. In interviews with the Duffer Brothers (creators), they were asked about the countless plot holes, and for most of them, all they had to say was “I don't know.”

Several major unresolved questions exemplify these issues, including: What happened to the military after the explosion? Why was Max not surprised that Hopper was alive? What happened to the Turnbows? How did El gain the power to bring multiple people into her mind, let alone bring them into Vecna's mind? When asked about the military, the Duffer Brothers responded fatuously, “In that 18-month gap? I suppose there's not much else to do. You can't explore this other dimension. There's no Eleven to chase anymore because she's gone. So, my guess is they just sort of slowly dismantled operations and left town.” Their explanation is witless. A true storyline isn't shown, and suggests that the final season was planned heedlessly.

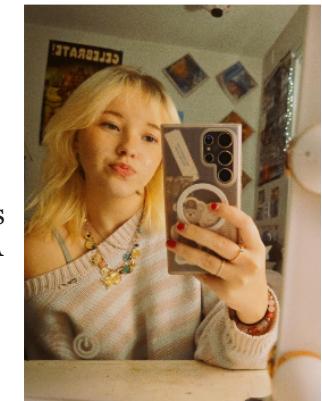
Another issue is the season's lack of emotional depth. In previous seasons, there were meaningful character interactions and connections to the viewers. Season 5 has the opposite; important events occur quickly with little buildup, and emotional moments aren't given enough time to develop, resulting in scenes written to be intentionally impactful turning out shallow.

It weakens previously well-developed characters, altering their personalities and decision-making. In seasons 1-4, Nancy is intelligent and cautious, being one of the group's logical thinkers. In season 5, however, she acts impulsively. For example, her immediate decision to shoot the exotic matter depicts a vast shift from her strategic thinking, rendering her character secondary.

The breakup between Nancy and Jonathan was beyond poor writing. Their relationship had been built over multiple seasons through shared trauma, loyalty, and emotional growth. Then, out of the blue, the chemistry between the characters disappears, leaving viewers confused on whether they were broken up. It lacks dialogue or closure, making the breakup feel forced. With their relationship being a warm spot in the show, their breakup makes season 5 feel empty.

Will's coming-out scene was a missed opportunity for meaningful character development. Will has consistently been portrayed as a complex and sensitive character, yet in this depth depriving scene, his emotions are handled with little care. It's said that Vecna 'forced' Will to come out, which destroys the personal significance of it. From a realistic and emotional perspective, coming out is a deeply personal moment that is normally first shared with close family or friends. In a public and hurried context, it's completely unrealistic, making Will unrelatable.

The relationship between Will Byers and Mike Wheeler, often referred to as “Byler,” can reasonably be classified as an example of queerbaiting. Although the Duffer Brothers stated that they “never hinted at it,” the narrative contains multiple hints suggesting a potential romantic spark. Mike is often portrayed as more attentive and caring toward Will than toward Eleven, his canonical girlfriend. Before season 5, the Duffer Brothers didn't confirm that Byler wouldn't be happening. Numerous subtle cues, such as shared glances, physical touches like elbow bumps, and other small gestures between Mike and



Trinity Collins

Provided

## Opinion: My Problems with the Stranger

### Things Ending

by Trinity Collins

*Stranger Things* is a great show with intricate plotting and a way to connect with viewers in that appeals to everyone! That's what I would say if Season 5 didn't exist.

Unfortunately, season 5 of *Stranger Things* shows a huge

Will, reference Robin's earlier advice to Will about recognizing signs that someone has a crush on you. These moments show that *Stranger Things* built up the possibility of Byler, but did not follow through, ergo queerbait.

Despite its many flaws, *Stranger Things* 5 still had some positive aspects. The visual effects were mind-blowing, building suspense in action sequences. Character development was great in some characters, especially for Lucas and Max, showing growth and emotional depth. Will gaining powers was a well-planned-out surprise, along with finding out where Max had been all this time. The exploration of the Upside Down and its mechanics was very intriguing and added to the show's supernatural elements. Additionally, the series avoided an overly tragic ending, offering satisfaction for some viewers.

Still having more unlisted flaws, *Stranger Things* 5 was a disappointment with few good scenes and washed out characters. Unsatisfied fans were left with a hope that there was a secret new ending and the urge to rewrite the current one themselves.

## Opinion: Where is the Annual Poetry Out Loud Contest?

by Rachel Wheelon

In its twenty-one-year history, SOA has always participated in the national recitation contest "Poetry Out Loud," begun by poet Dana Gioia, when he was president of the National Endowment for the Arts, in conjunction with the Poetry Foundation, publishers of *Poetry* magazine since 1912. The SOA competition was held in the media center every January. However, in 2025 the Poetry Foundation withdrew its support of the competition, allegedly citing the need to spread its philanthropic efforts among other literary efforts. Their logo was replaced the "America 250" stamp, and the online anthology from which students chose their poems –compiled by the Poetry Foundation, who also paid the hefty permission fees—underwent a drastic revision.

The Poetry Out Loud website provided the following explanation for the changes:

"As the nation prepares to commemorate its 250th anniversary, the federal government is emphasizing programming in 2026 that honors American history and culture. Accordingly, the poems selected for the 2025-2026 Poetry Out Loud competition highlight American poets as well as poems that embody the nation's indomitable spirit, creativity, innovation and the nation's rich cultural and historical heritage."

The removal of hundreds of previously offered poems not only severely limits what students can recite for the competition, but, more importantly, eliminates the wide scope of themes they explored. The pieces remaining are in all in the public domain, meaning no permissions are required. NEA had cut funds for POL last year, but this cut is devastating to language educators and students. For a poem to enter public domain, it must be old enough for the copyright to have expired. This means that there are no contemporary poems available for recitation.

In 2025, 1,300 poems were offered. In 2026, student can choose



Luciano Cusatis

from 400. Not only are there no living voices –one of the major draws of the competition- but there are no non-American poets in the mix.

Shakespeare? Erased.

The British Romantics? Erased.

Poets of the Civil Rights Movement? Erased.

Emily Dickinson, Naomi Shihab Nye, Li-Young Lee? Erased.

Openly gay poets? Erased.

Diversity? Erased.

SOA has sent six students to the National Championship and more than a dozen to the State Finals. In 2024, Jessie Leitzel, now a sophomore at Harvard, was one of nine National Finalists. The competition continued to be a major part of our ELA curriculum. SOA's English Department chose not to hold a school POL competition this year, due to the anthology's misrepresentation of the American poetry tradition, whose roots are in England and whose branches are alive and well. Restrictions are being called a "celebration," by the POL website, and to claim that the available poems are a representation of the nation's pride is blindness to a nation moving backwards.

But the loss of POL at SOA is not hopeless. Maybe after the 250 celebration is over, things will change? Probably not without the support of the Poetry Foundation. However, two SOA students chose to enter as individuals, which has always been an available option. Two winners were chosen to move on to the State Championship from the Lowcountry individual competitor: our two students were the two winners! Congratulations Evelyn Gwynn and Adolina Adams!

## Checking In on Teacher Cadets

by Rachel Wheelon

Teacher Cadets have had anything but a boring new year. Mr. Martin has been crowned "Teacher of the Year." Ms. Quade has started student-teaching. SOA Alumni have come to visit. SOA and Academic Magnet cadets got a look into the other school. All in all, we've set the pace for a successful year.

Over break, Mr. Martin posted on his Instagram, asking SOA alumni to sign up for a class visit. In our class, Maya Bundy, 2025 vocal major, came to give us some advice on college. With many of us being seniors, we got to know what college life was like, how we should prepare in high school, and all the emotions that come with graduating. She gave us insightful information, helpful tips, and positive outlooks. She definitely helped to aid the stress some seniors are facing as they finish applying to colleges and begin receiving decisions.

Most recently, SOA and Magnet students got the chance to observe the other campus' classrooms. Each school got to sit in three classes of the other school to see how the teaching differed, what the classroom was like, and even get a peek into spirit week at Magnet. Of course, this left some dressed up Magnet students at SOA where spirit week was not happening. However, overall, all students had a positive experience and enjoyed the insight into the other school.



Provided  
SOA Teacher Cadets observe a class at Academic Magnet.

## Meet SOA's New Student Teachers

by Cannon Gibbs

*This semester, three SOA Teachers, Mr. Martin, Ms. Horn, and Ms Roff, have student teachers working with them. Staffwriter Cannon Gibbs interviewed each of them to help introduce them to the people of SOA.*

### Ms. Quade, High School English (Mr. Martin)

**Cannon Gibbs:** Where did you grow up, and what do you remember most from your time in school?

**Isabelle Quade:** I am from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, just two hours north of Charleston. The thing I remember most from school was the teachers. I can still recall every teacher I've ever had, what they taught, and how they impacted me.

**CG:** Where do you attend school now?

What brought you there, and what do you study?

**IQ:** I am a senior at the College of Charleston and will graduate this May. I went to CofC for a lot of reasons but mainly because the school just seemed like the right fit for me. I study English and Secondary Education; with my degree and certifications, I will be certified to teach High School English and K-12 Art.

**CG:** What are your goals for after college, and how do you think student teaching will affect your career?

**IQ:** After college I would like to be a teacher

in CCSD; this district has been nothing but a joy to observe and intern with, and I hope to continue teaching here. Student teaching will have a large impact on my career because it is the biggest hands-on experience that I have had with students. I believe that the student teaching experience will help me grow in numerous ways before getting my own classroom.

**CG:** As someone pursuing English, what is your favorite book?

**IQ:** It's so hard to decide on a favorite book so I won't officially decide and instead I will offer two. My favorite series of books is Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games. Her books are action packed and interesting yet very deep and meaningful. My favorite stand-alone book would have to be Emily Austen's *Everybody in This Room Will Someday Be Dead*. The novel tells a dark but amusing story that I find myself being able to relate to at times.

### Emma Hudspeth, Middle School Math (Ms. Roff)

**Cannon Gibbs:** Where did you grow up, and what do you remember most from your time in school?

**Emma Hudspeth:** I grew up in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and what I remember most from my time in school were my teachers and my peers. It's essential to take the time to build relationships with those who surround you for 8 hours a day.

**CG:** Where do you attend school now? What brought you there, and what do you study?

**EH:** I attend the College of Charleston, where I study Middle Grades



Ms. Quade

Frankey Coakley



Ms. Hudspeth

Frankey Coakley

Education with concentrations in math and social studies. I came to Charleston because of its beachy atmosphere, which is still close enough to home for me to visit whenever I want.

**CG:** What are your goals for after college, and how do you think student teaching will affect your career?

**EH:** After college, I plan to continue investing in my relationships and further developing my career. I believe this opportunity to work with everyone at SOA will provide me with numerous benefits as I transition into my own classroom. From student teaching, I hope to gain more confidence in managing a classroom and meeting students' needs beyond the curriculum.

**CG:** As one pursuing math, what's the hardest part about the subject?

**EH:** I believe the most challenging part about math is not giving up when it gets tricky. Math is a subject that builds on prior knowledge, so it's crucial to review the material and practice as needed. Be willing to struggle and learn from your mistakes.

### Ms. Aubrey Black, Theater (Ms. Horn)

**Cannon Gibbs:** Where did you grow up, and what do you remember most from your time in school?

**Audrey Black:** I am originally from Alpharetta, GA, and I used to love my English classes! I have so many fond memories from reading novels and the bonds that created with me and my classmates. Many of the friends I still speak to from high school were from my theatre and English classes!

**CG:** Where do you attend school now?

What brought you there, and what do you study?

**AB:** I am currently a second year in the MAT Performing Arts Education program at the College of Charleston. Fun fact: I have a twin sister who is attending cardiovascular perfusionist school at

MUSC, and we thought it would be fun to go to graduate school in the same city!

**CG:** What are your goals for after college, and how do you think student teaching will affect your career?

**AB:** My goals for when I finish my Masters are to find a position as a high school theatre teacher, hopefully in a warm place! I have already learned so much from my time at SOA, and I cannot wait to see the educator I am at the very end of this experience! I am so grateful to Ms. Horn and the whole Theatre department for welcoming me and allowing me to student teach for the semester.

**CG:** As someone pursuing Theater, what is your favorite play?

**AB:** This is a cheat answer because I have two, but *Peter and the Starcatcher* (which I know SOA recently put up, I am absolutely heartbroken that I was not here to experience it) and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*. If we're talking musicals, *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* is an all-time favorite!



Ms. Black

Frankey Coakley

## Where Were They Then? Ms. Mitchum

by Sheridan King

*Curious about her path to SOA, staff writer Sheridan King interviewed with sixth-grade English teacher Ms. Jennifer Mitchum for this month's edition of "Where Were They Then?"*

**Sheridan King:** What was your childhood like, where did you grow up? Do you have any favorite memories?

**Jennifer Mitchum:** I am a true South Carolina native. I was born at Roper hospital in downtown Charleston, and grew up in Hanahan. My parents divorced when I was young and my mom moved away after my 6th grade year. The Lowcountry was deep in my heart, so I stayed here with my father. My dad's family was all about the water. We would go out in our boat every Sunday. We fished on the lake, cruised the Tail Race Canal, swam at Lion's Beach, crabbed along the pilings of the Folly Beach pier, and enjoyed long weekends at our beach house there on Folly. I love the Lowcountry!

**SK:** What was your early education like?

**JM:** I was a daycare kid, so I feel like I was in school all the time. I enjoyed it though and would often make lessons for the kids at daycare. My mom always said that I was born to be a teacher. I went to Fishburne Elementary, Hanahan Middle School, and graduated from Hanahan High School. It was a small community and I grew up knowing the people around me. It felt like a large family.

**SK:** What inspired you to be a teacher?

**JM:** I was drawn to teaching from a very young age. I think it was a natural calling. There were quite a few high school teachers that really sealed my decision. Their passion for the subject they taught and enthusiasm for students really inspired me.

**SK:** Where did you go to college and what did you study?

**JM:** I went to College of Charleston and studied education.

**SK:** Was there any major lesson you learned in college or at your first job that has stuck with you since?

**JM:** I stayed in the dorms my freshman year, but quickly realized dorm life wasn't for me. I think it was the hotel sized room that was the problem. I am a morning person and my BFF roommate is a late nighter. It was not a productive mix for either of us. I moved out after first semester, but I am convinced it saved our friendship. She is still my BFF! I think the important lesson I learned through that time was that keeping your words kind and giving people grace will help you grow.

**SK:** What was your first job?

**JM:** My first job was wrapping presents at JC Penney.

**SK:** What led you to SOA? How long have you been here?

**JM:** My first year teaching middle school at Hanahan Middle was my introduction to teaching with the arts in mind. I joined a group of

teachers who were trying to infuse arts in their classes. We visited SOA when it first opened. As I walked through the halls of the old campus and saw the students and their creative spirits, I left saying, "One day, I will work there." I spent the next 10 years making my resume wonderful so that the people at SOA would want to hire me. I enjoyed infusing arts into my classes during that time. One night at church, a friend who was Mrs. Rose Maree Myer's secretary told me she was looking for a 6th grade ELA teacher. That was 2003. I applied, and here I am! I love SOA!

**SK:** What has been your favorite memory so far at SOA?

**JM:** I don't know that I have one favorite moment that I remember as a favorite. I have a lot of them! Performances. Graduations. Students succeeding after a struggle. Funny classroom jokes. Sweet students who make me smile . . . daily. They are all special. I think what I've realized over time is that SOA has a heart and a soul that is so full of beauty and goodness. The wonderful things students share on a stage are only a fragment of what makes them beautiful and good. I am so blessed to be a small part of this amazing family of artists!



**Ms. Mitchum's yearbook photo at her first teaching job**



**Ms. Mitchum in Kindergarten**

Provided

## Where Are They Now? Acadia Reynolds

by Lila Hayes

*Receiving prestigious awards for her writing as well as a full ride to Princeton University, Acadia Reynolds has already experienced great success since graduating from SOA last May. She is currently majoring in Civil Engineering at Princeton with a minor in Creative Writing. She stopped by while on winter break and discussed what she has learned and shared some insight.*

**Lila Hayes:** In the fall of your senior year, you had a piece published in the *Kenyon Review* that also won the Patricia Grodd Poetry Prize. What do you think the strengths of the poem were, and how did that achievement impact you?

**Acadia Reynolds:** When you're writing and editing for a purpose, instead of purely for yourself, it's important to keep your audience in mind. Every journal has its own feel and looks for specific things. The *Kenyon Review* tends to publish a lot of intensely personal poetry, and puts a high value on lyricism. I knew that when I submitted, and so I had that in mind when I was picking which poem to send to the Grodd contest. The poem was written about the very complex relationship I had with a family member, and I think the reason that it was so successful is because it captures that sense of emotional rawness. Revisions are always necessary when writing, and something that I've struggled with in poetry is keeping the honesty of the first draft intact while trying to make it into the fully finished piece that it needs to be. The poem that won went through a huge amount of editing, probably the most of any poem that I wrote at SOA, but I think that it managed to keep the balance

Provided

between sincerity and polish.

My experience with the Kenyon Review gave me a taste of what professionalism looks like in the writing world. I signed a contract, approved the edits that the Kenyon team wanted to make, recorded myself reading the poem for the website and fixed the recording when it was sent back to me for adjustment, and got paid at the end of it. Most writers have to wait longer for that, and being able to go through that process at 17 with the support of the incredibly efficient Kenyon staff was a great learning opportunity. I think it also gave me confidence in my writing, and encouraged me to submit to more journals and contests. And, of course, thousands of copies of my poem were printed and sent out into the world, and I'm proud of the fact that so many people have read my work.

**LH:** You were able to take a creative writing class with Joyce Carol Oates. Was it daunting to present your work to her? What were the main things you took away from the class?

**AR:** Just to be clear, she came in and gave some lectures, but we had another teacher as well who was the one reading our work. Joyce Carol Oates is a brilliant writer and lecturer, and I feel privileged to have been able to spend so much time around her. Something I learned over the course of the semester is how to let go of small details. Occasionally the class would get stuck on one detail and spend time debating if that small part is effective, and she would redirect us back to the story as a whole. The plot, the characters, the setting, the atmosphere, the dialogue, the conflict; all of that needs to work first, before the story can even be considered line-by-line. Getting caught up on minutiae is rarely the way to make a piece of writing better.

**LH:** What are your future plans for continuing in creative writing?

**AR:** In the short term, I'm going to minor in creative writing at Princeton, so I've got more classes ahead of me. My favorite part of my class last semester was getting to read the work that my peers had been working on. All of their pieces were very different, but every single one had something in it that impressed me, and I look forward to learning alongside the other writers at Princeton. Looking back at things that I wrote years ago, I've been noticing distinct phases in my writing ability. The first thing I learned, when I first came to SOA, was how to write a story that makes sense. I discovered plot structure and figured out where all the commas should go and realized the importance of conflict. After that, I learned to write pretty. I made sentences that made sense and also sounded nice and built the story through language. Now, I'm focusing on making my writing more interesting and dynamic. I'm learning to be intentional in my choice of scene, setting, and plot. This is something that started to click for me during my senior year thesis. My book was the first time that I made a fully fleshed-out outline before I started writing, and having the plot written out plainly helped me realize which scenes were boring or slowed the book down.

**LH:** How has your experience at SOA contributed to your decision to study Civil Engineering at Princeton, and how does your time in Creative Writing continue to impact you?

**AR:** To be honest, I don't remember how I decided that I wanted to go

into civil engineering. I made that choice about three years ago and stuck with it. I'm most interested in the structural side of civil engineering. It was described to me as the science of making buildings as safe and efficient as possible, and that sounded great to me. Princeton also offers an environmental track, so maybe I'll explore that side too. I don't know yet.

At SOA, I had the time and the motivation to get better at writing. I had teachers to support me and classmates who were equally good at writing. That sort of thorough, long-term instruction is a rare opportunity. Spending seven years with daily creative writing classes is something that I'll never have the chance to do again, and I'm grateful that SOA offered me that. Also, I made my best friends in the creative writing program, and although I now live thousands of miles from some of them, I still love them immensely.

**LH:** In the future, do you plan to pursue careers in both civil engineering and creative writing?

**AR:** I intend to pursue a career in civil engineering, for sure. Creative writing, like most artistic jobs, takes a huge amount of luck and dedication to make a living off of. Although I'd spend all day writing stories if I could, it's realistically not a career path that I can rely on. But I'm going to keep writing, and maybe I'll get lucky. If not, that's fine too. So far, I'm loving civil engineering, and being able to write well is important no matter the job.



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## Applause Presents All You Need is Love: Songs of the 60's

by Cannon Gibbs

The annual *Applause* Concert Series will return to the RMMT, Thursday, January 29 at 6:00 PM with its ninth show, *All You Need Is Love: Songs of the 60's*. The show is a follow-up to the unplugged performance held in the Academic Magnet Lecture Hall in December. That concert contained twelve acoustic selections, this show will feature four hits from that one, as well as nineteen new songs.

The program includes a total of twenty-three songs from 60s artists such as The Beatles, Bob Dylan, Roy Orbison, Sam Cooke, Nancy Sinatra, The Rolling Stones, Jefferson Airplane, The Beach Boys, Simon & Garfunkel, Stevie Wonder, and more.

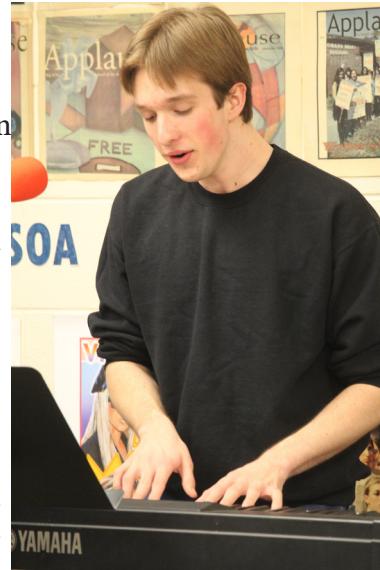
The concert features Dr. Cusatis, with twenty-seven SOA students: MK Ammons, Moses Blom, Beckett Carrington, Quincy Christian, Kennedy Colie, Trinity Collins, Luciano Cusatis, Madi Deation, Audra Elm, Lila Elm, Madie Fletcher, Calev Harrold, Ellery Kotron, Kendall King, Sheridan King, Kate Largent, Maddie Leluc, Jack Leon, Marley Mendes, Kynisha Middleton-Gladden, Emma Norton, Nicko Palihan, Lachlan Smith, Zion Stanton, Rachel Wheelon, Callie Williams, and Parker Williams, as well as AMHS senior Cole McGowan, and SOA graduate Cameron Barnett.

With students across a variety of majors, no matter the instrumentation required by a song, it's usually able to be met. Dr. Cusatis told *Applause*, "Most of these songs, especially the ones from the early sixties, are heavily orchestrated, so it's cool to get such a large sound to fill the stage of the RMMT."

While students certainly utilize their skills from their major for the show, it also provides a great chance for them to showcase their other talents, and perform in a way different from what they usually do at SOA.

In addition to the show in January, the program will also be performed off campus in early May at the North Charleston Arts Festival and at least one Park Circle venue.

Dr. Cusatis added, "These shows require a lot of work in a short



Trinity Collins



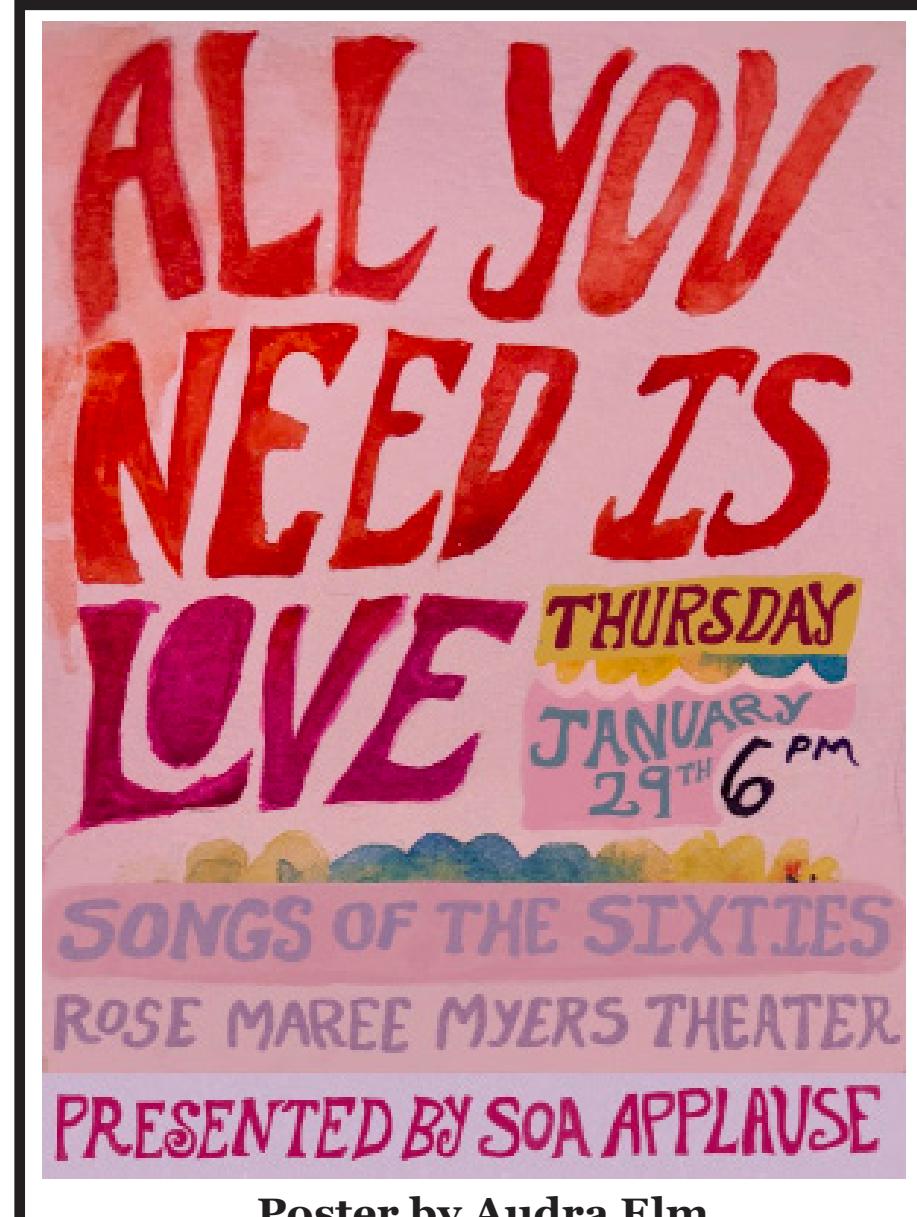
Trinity Collins

Strings Major Lila Elm playing guitar for The Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want"

time, but it's well worth the experience for everyone involved to be able to play rock 'n' roll music among such skilled singers and instrumentalists from all majors. And the shows are always well received," he says, "which is why we started touring the show for the last four years." Admission is free, and the concert is open to students and the public, so come support your classmates and see a great show.

### All You Need is Love Setlist

To get yourself ready for the concert give all the songs a listen on the playlist below!



## Students Prepare for *All You Need is Love: Songs of the 60's*

Photos by Trinity Collins

Students have been practicing every Monday and Thursday after school to get ready for the performance. Come see all their hard work on display on January 29th!



## SOA Musicians Perform Around Town



New Dirty Shoes, consisting of students Dante Criscitiello, Audra Elm, Grey Harlos, Sam Harris, and Ty McGinnis, at a recent gig at Charleston Pour House, 1/15/26.



Audra Elm, bassist of New Dirty Shoes, performed a solo acoustic show at Bowen's Island Restaurant on 1/14/26, mixing covers with originals.



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## SOA's Spotify Wrapped: A Look Into 2025's Top Hits On Campus

by Rachel Wheelon

Every year, Spotify users get to look forward to their “Year in Music” (a.k.a. Spotify Wrapped). For some, this is carefully curated throughout the year, with songs being listened to a specific number of times to land their spot in the Wrapped. For others, Spotify Wrapped is a more authentic representation of their music taste. But what was on SOA’s Spotify Wrapped? What were the songs of the year on campus? I took a poll of around thirty SOA Students to find some answers to these questions.

As far as artists go, Tyler, the Creator, was the most-listened to, followed by Billie Eilish, Frank Ocean, and Sabrina Carpenter. Noah Kahan and The Beatles were other repeated favorites. It’s no surprise that the top artist was also responsible for the top album, CHROMAKOPIA. However, though most of the top artists were contemporary, the listening age fell anywhere from twenty-one to eighty-two.

Even with the restrictions on electronics in school, the amount of music listened to by SOA students would not lead to that assumption. Senior vocalist, Shea Tucker, listened to the most music out of everyone polled with an astounding 77, 232 minutes. With only 2,089 minutes, senior theater major, Maddie Snider, had the lowest minutes of music compared to the rest of the data. With these highs and lows, the average number was around 60,000 minutes.

While some people carefully curate their Wrapped throughout the year, the majority of SOA students claimed that “it’s just music, not a representation of me.” Therefore, when Wrapped comes around, there can be some weird things. When asked what the most odd thing they’ve seen on someone’s Spotify Wrapped, responses were certainly humorous. In terms of songs, the weirdest were Mesopotamian chants and rituals, cat noises, and Mongolian throat singing were mentioned.

In terms of music, 2025 certainly had a lot to offer, and most students were satisfied with their Spotify Wrapped. However, some are definitely paying closer attention to their 2026 choices.





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## A Look at Deaf and Hard of Hearing's Collaborations with Dance

by Sheridan King

*A continuation of a series highlighting what the Deaf program has done through the years.*

Dance has many creative aspects to it, including rhythm, expressions, and the overall need to tell a story. The Dance Department at SOA has done a few collaborations with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Department, and they all beautifully display the connection between the two. "Both rely on movement, rhythm, and emotion to tell stories without spoken words." says Mrs. Duffy.

During the 2011-2012 school year, some Deaf students were given the special opportunity to perform an interpretive dance at the Francis Marion Hotel for a Dance Teacher's convention. Mrs. Ashely Pitman-Ratigan, the teacher at the time, was a big part of the many activities they did together. She also taught some of the Deaf students popular dances to get ready for Prom!

Another interesting project, one done through photos, shows the emotion and expressions of dance. It incorporates ASL signs and concepts to create individual interpretations of the pictures taken. "When dancers and ASL students collaborate, they transform music into something you can both see and feel, making performances more accessible and meaningful for everyone." Mrs. Duffy stated. The students in the images are clearly happy to be there, and I know everyone who has done a collaboration with this major, and others, thoroughly enjoyed it.

In recent years, American Sign Language has found its place in some contemporary dance studios. Company 360 Dance Theatre in Fredericksburg, Virginia, led by choreographer Bailey Anne Vincent, incorporates ASL into all of their performances. An article says that it may represent a lyric that is being sung or trying to emphasize an emotion that is being portrayed.

"Choreography is writing, but instead of writing words, you write movement." says well-known choreographer, Twyla Tharp. With ASL being united with dance, the meaning of the dances performed changes entirely. There are so many ways for these departments to be working together, and it's clear they have taken many of those opportunities. These performances have been amazing, and hopefully there can be a way for more in the future.



Deaf Students learning to Shag

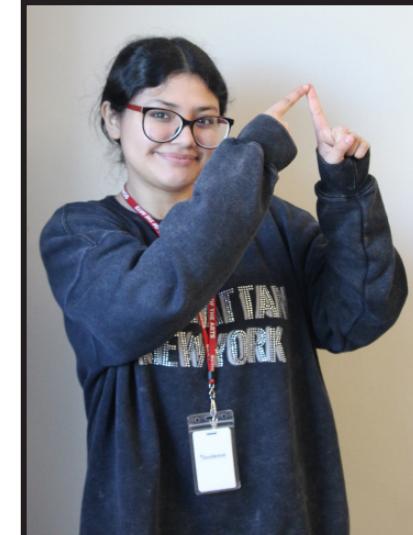


Deaf Students dancing together in preparation of that years prom

## Sign of the Month:

### "Goal"

by Sheridan King  
Demonstrated by Katerin Figueroa



1. Hold your dominant hand up with your pointer finger to the sky.
2. Move your other hand with the same motion to your dominant hand.



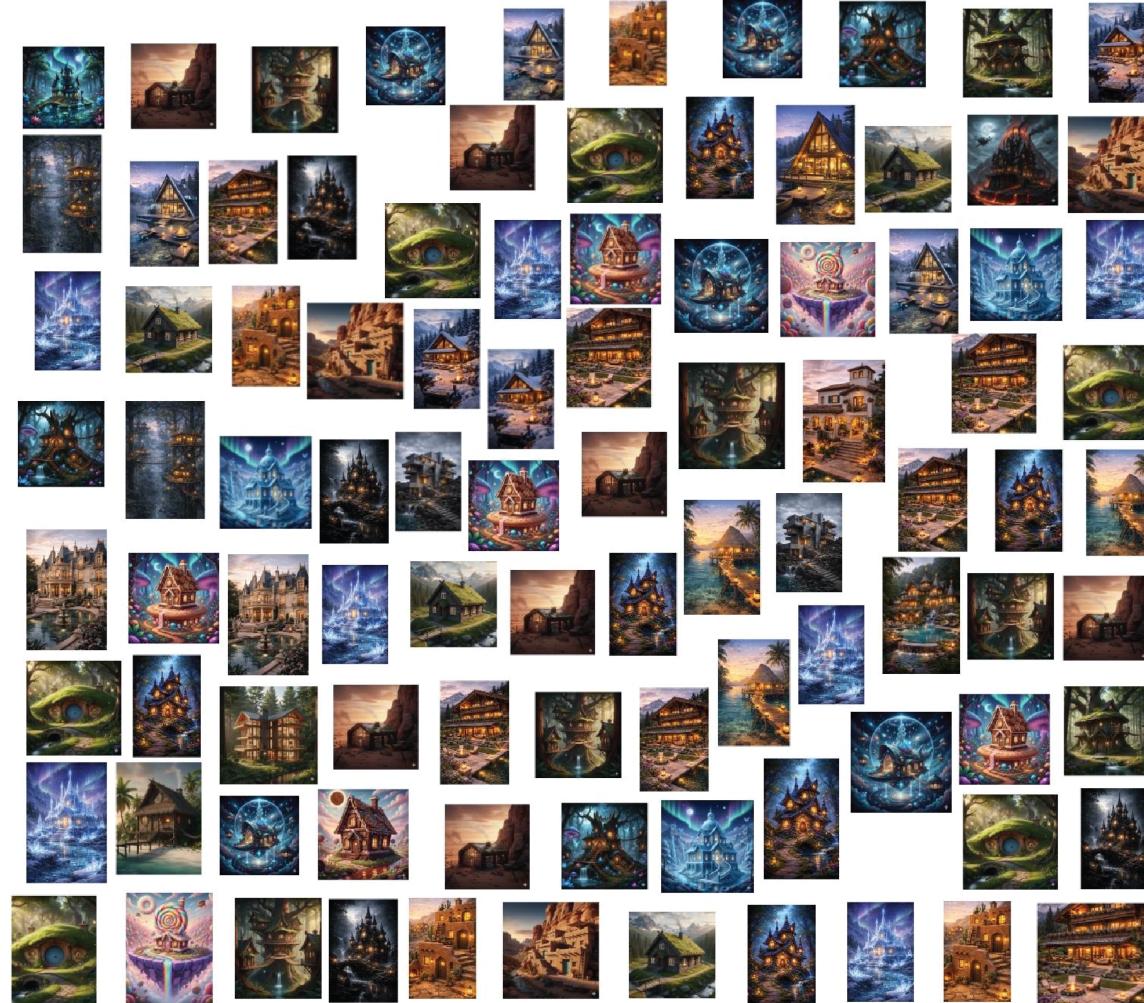
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MK Colvin, senior Vocal major, went hiking in Cedar Mountain!



Meredith Leeke, junior Vocal major, earns national scouting award at Camp Ho Non Wah.



Sophomore Band major Jack Leon at Rockefeller Center in NYC.



Alyssia Reyes, sophomore Theatre major, went to Puerto Rico to see family over break!



Junior Creative Writing major Keller Fauerbach and his brother skiing on Mt Bachelor in Oregon.



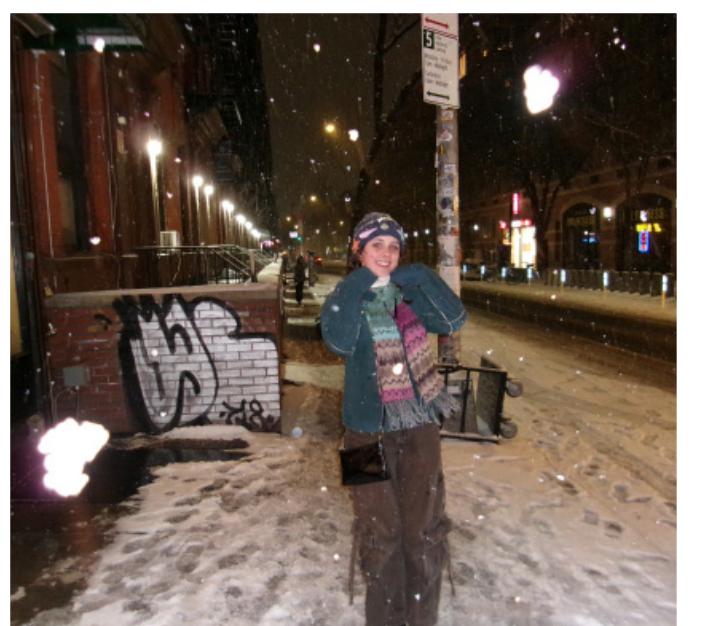
Senior Band major Caleb Harrold and his mother went to Barbados over break!



Maren Spangler, senior Creative Writer, and her mom, went to NYC!



Lily Kate Foreman, sophomore Band major, visited Cocoa Beach, Florida.



Ellery Ketron, sophomore Vocal major, visited New York City in the snow!



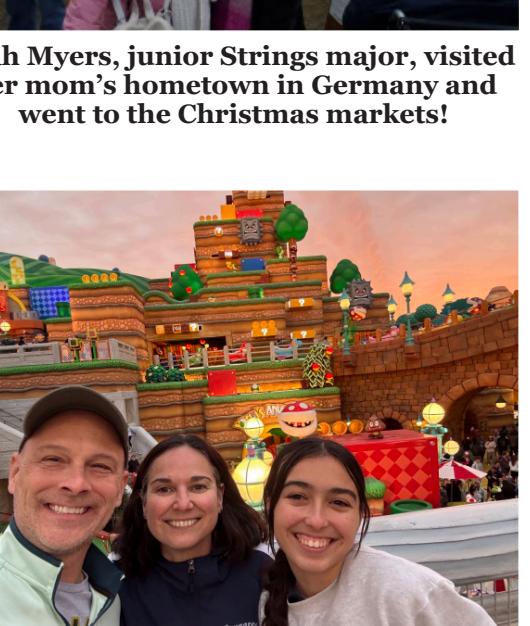
Aiden Withers and Hunter Fulp, junior Creative Writing majors, went bowling at Ashley Lanes!



Zoe Harvey-Prioleau, junior Creative Writing major, her sister Layla, a sixth grade Theater major, and Joanie LaPolla, former Piano major, went to Great Wolf Lodge!



Donte Foxworth, senior Band major, and his dad, went on a cruise with a stop in Costa Maya, Mexico!



High School science teacher Mr. Short and his family visited Universal.

# What did SOA do over Winter Break?

by Applause Staff



Leah Myers, junior Strings major, visited her mom's hometown in Germany and went to the Christmas markets!



## SOA Athletes Continue Strong this Winter

by Fletcher Seminaroti

As the winter sports season continues, SOA students have been putting up impressive stats in both basketball and wrestling for Academic Magnet.

The Lady Raptors have been heating up the court this season, so far going 6-7 with recent wins over Andrews and Hanahan. They are ranked 3rd in District 4, with top performers such as senior Piano major **Josie Barrineau**, who is averaging 7.2 points per game.

The boys' varsity basketball team has persevered with a record of 5-12 halfway through the season. Recent victories include Charleston Math and Science as well as Hanahan. Star player **Omari Wynn-Ferrell** is leading the Raptors with an impressive 20 points per game. Omari had 32 points against Olympic High School, Charlotte, NC, during a holiday tournament at James Island High School.

**Dean Barnwell**, a captain for the Magnet wrestling team and junior Piano major, is leading the team with an impressive 9-2 personal record.

The Raptors are currently 1-3, recently beating Stall in a tight battle ending in 42-41. Dean is shooting for a state championship after placing 7th in the 175 2A weight class.

Preseasons are currently beginning for various spring sports, so check back next month for the first overview of those, as well as one last update to see

how our winter sport athletes conclude their seasons.



**Josie Barrineau** in a game against Phillip Simmons, Friday, 1/16



**Dean Barnwell** has been a standout for the AMHS Wrestling team this season.

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## SOA Slang

by Fletcher Seminaroti and Dante Criscitiello

*Each issue, our resident language experts Fletcher Seminaroti and Dante Criscitiello research the newest words around the halls of SOA, here they are.*

**Chud** (n) Used in a friendly manner to poke fun at someone who doesn't do much.

Ex: *Athan, you chud, you stayed in all weekend.*

**Badge** (adj) A friend who poses as if they are a federal agent.

Ex: *Yo, watch out for Dante, he's super badge and we could get in trouble.*

**Chopping Up** (v) Referred to when someone is making good conversation, usually based around an interesting topic.

Ex: *Dude, I saw you talking to that girl, you were chopping up crazy.*

**Calc** (n) Short for calculator.

Ex: *Smart hb: Yo, pass the calc.*

**Honking** (v) The action of blabbering nonstop.

Ex: *That teacher was straight honking during class today.*

**Deep** (adj) Describing an activity with a lot of people.

Ex: *"Do you want to go to that party on Saturday?" ... I don't know, is it deep?*

**Gloving** (v) - Making cool patterns with your hands while wearing light-up gloves. Considered by some to be corny, but also beloved by many others.

Ex: *"Y'all see this, In iinite puppet just made some crazy new gloving moves last Friday."*

**Sleeper**: Something you appreciate that isn't as understood by everyone else.

Ex: *"Wow, that movie is an elite sleeper pick. I'm surprised you like it.*

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## What Holiday Gifts Did the *Applause* Staff Receive?



Each staff member brought in a fun gift to show off!

Dante: An album; Fletcher: boots; Luciano: gloving gloves; Frankey: A giant duck; Trinity: A pink record player; Lila: a kite; Sheridan: an album; Sage: a guitar



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## Strings Majors Present Their Senior Theses

photos by Trinity Collins

Eleven Strings majors performed their senior theses on Tuesday, January 20. Each played a challenging solo piece and an ensemble selection with a few classmates.



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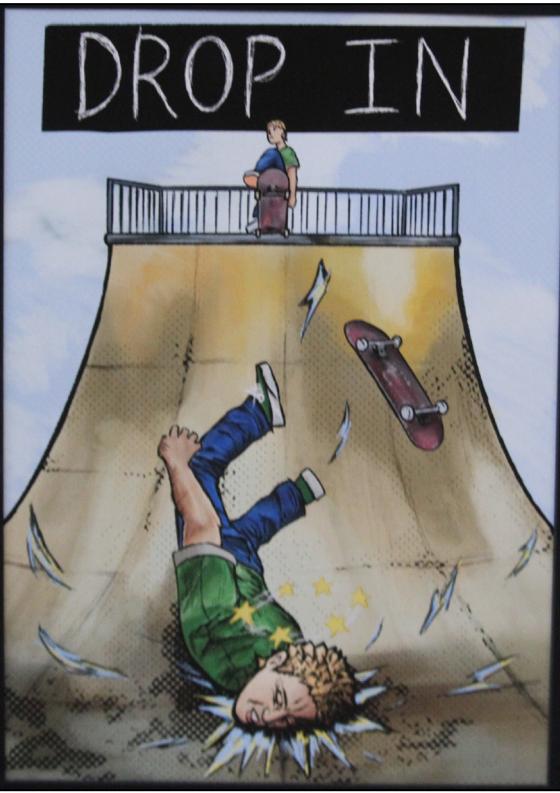
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Lorelai Williams, 9th



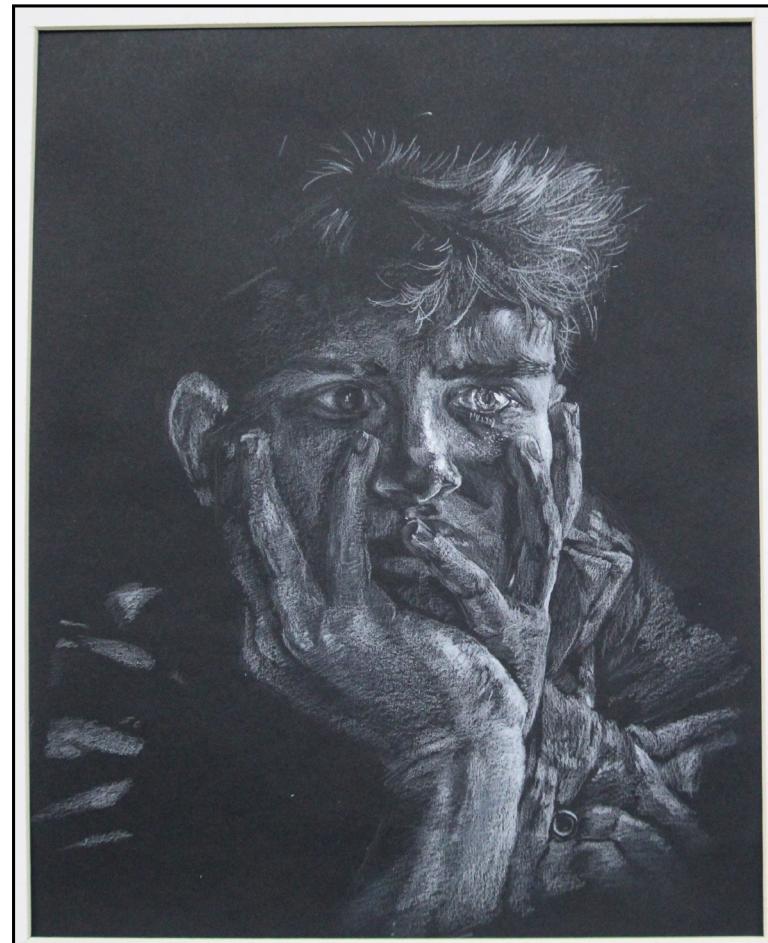
Sean Curran, 11th



Harper Powell Peterson, 9th



Harper Powell Peterson, 9th



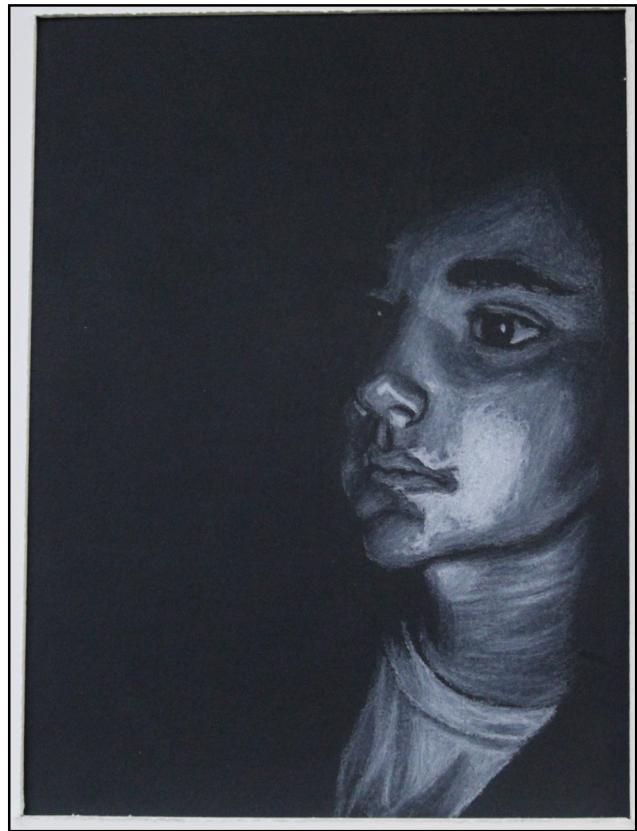
William Oldal, 10th



Madison Edwards, 11th



Ashley Yax, 11th



Henry Duncan, 10th

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## Congratulations, Evelyn and Adolina!

Adolina Adams and Evelyn Gwynn competed in the individual student track (SOA did not participate as a school this year) of the Regional Poetry Out Loud Competition on January 17 at Charleston Stage. Only two winners were chosen from the ten Lower State competitors, and Adolina and Evelyn will move on to the State Championship in Columbia on March 7. Good luck!

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## A Great Christmas Surprise from our Singers!



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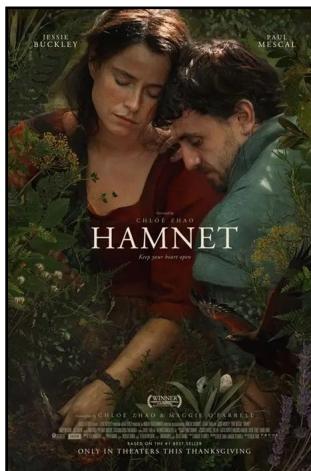
**Classic Movie Review: *Hamnet* (2025)**

by Rachel Wheelon

There are few films that I consider perfect in all elements; *Hamnet* is one of those few. In this adaptation of Maggie O'Farrel's novel, director Chloé Zhao tells the historical fiction story of how William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* came to be. Exploring themes of love and loss, the film shows the raw impact of grief on the family when *Hamnet*, son and brother, dies from the plague.

Starring Jessie Buckley as Agnes Hathaway, Paul Mescal as Shakespeare, and Jacobi Jupe as Hamnet, the star-studded cast has been nominated by the Golden Globes, and is shortlisted for the Oscars. It has already won a Critics Choice Award, multiple Film Festivals, and the AFI Award for Film of the Year.

This movie is one I cannot stop recommending, but it's not for everyone. The intense emotional scenes were hard for me to handle, and there was not a dry eye in the theater both times I saw it. However, if you can handle the difficult parts, the beauty of the film in its entirety is one I can't put into words. All the tears I cried, and trust me, there were MANY, were worth it, and I highly encourage you to see it in theaters.

*Hamnet***Classic Album Review: *The Force of Life* (1974)**

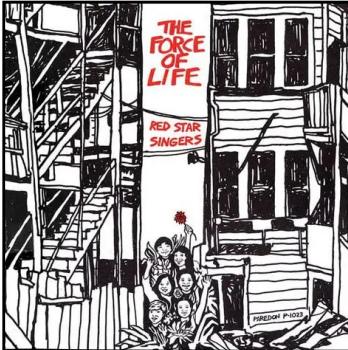
by Lila Hayes

Of all the protest bands formed in the '70s that you can stream, the Red Star Singers might be the smallest and most underrated. Formed in 1971, the band released their first and only album, *The Force of Life*, in 1974 to a country that was coming off of the peak of the anti-war movement and continuing the fight to end the Vietnam War.

*The Force of Life* is a musical time capsule, but also an album that feels universally applicable. The album kicks off with "Still Ain't Satisfied," a song led by Bonnie Lockhart about women's suffrage. When I had the opportunity to interview her last semester, she named this song as one that she still sings at her performances. With minimal instrumentals, Lockhart sings pointedly about constant need for progress in women's rights. Lockhart was simultaneously a part of Berkeley Women's Music Collective, a lesbian feminist band, which influenced her experiences leading up to the release of *The Force of Life*.

The band's songwriting excels in the final and title track especially, with an ode to the grassroots movement. It's more optimistic than a lot of the other tracks, a hopeful end to an album that encapsulates the political turmoil of an era. It's willful, the voices of Lockhart, Gary Lapow, and Ron Rosenbaum sounding like they're wishing the lyrics into existence. "Get some power to the people," they sing, and Lockhart is still fighting for that from her home in the Bay Area.

The Red Star Singers may be long disbanded, but their music lives on in San Francisco, where Lockhart and others perform, and on streaming services (though Lockhart was mystified to find out that people can stream the album). For a virtually unknown album that's fiercely political and unapologetically demands better from the government, take 40 minutes out of your day and listen to *The Force of Life*.

*The Force of Life***Contemporary Album Review: *Lamp Genso* (2008)**

by Trinity Collins

Need something calming to listen to, but sick of those pesky lyrics you can understand? *Lamp Genso* is the album for you!

Lamp is a J-pop band that started up in 2000, but gained popularity through TikTok in 2021, and now has 1.9 million monthly listeners on Spotify. One of their most popular albums is *Lamp Genso*, an album easily recognized by the bright poppies on the cover. This album sounds like a calm walk through a green-filled trail down a mountain. Despite this, the message is a little different. Heartbreak and moving on are the main themes of the songs.

It perfectly balances softness and sadness, but still manages to be comforting. The slow tempo and soft usage of instruments and singing make the emotions of the songs feel safe rather than sad. Instead of a heavy heartbreak, this album makes heartbreak seem soft and careful; more sad than angry. This makes the album easy to listen to and not feel yelled at, but comforted.

The album opener is "Hakanaki Haru no Ichimaku," which translates to "Act One of a Fleeting Spring." It gives a great sense of what the rest of the album is like. The theme is ephemeral love, nostalgia, and bittersweet memories. One lyric that represents the theme is, "I held on fleetingly to the faint memory of spring within you," meaning they are clinging on to the last memories of a person who's already drifting away, with different words having meanings of their own. One being "spring," symbolizing love, new beginnings, warmth, and happiness. "Within you" meaning those feelings existed inside the person they loved. "Faint memory" showing that those good times were already fading. And finally, "held on fleetingly" meaning they tried to hold onto it, but it briefly slipped away.

My personal favorite song on this album is "Yume Utsutsu," which translates to "Half Asleep." The song is about lingering feelings and memories for a lost loved one. The opening line is "My room is stagnant today," emotionally referencing the absence of the person who used to bring warmth and life into it. It begins with a quiet, finger-picked acoustic guitar, accompanied by flute and a touch of piano. The melody is faint and dreamy. A soft, high-pitched voice sings long, hazy notes that make you feel drowsy. This song feels like being carried on clouds so high up you can't see the ground.

The fan favorite out of this album is "Hatachi no koi," a song just about youthful romance. The music starts off a little less softly than it was in "Yume Utsutsu", with high-pitched chimes of a marimba. After a few tunes with the marimba, a deep and high-pitched voice enter at the same time, harmonizing. For the first part of the song, the emotion is relaxed and makes you want to swing from side to side, singing along. But as you get about a quarter in, the male voice disappears, then comes back with more instrumentation, making the vibe crescendo from calm to a little more exciting.

*Lamp Genso* is an album that feels gentle, comfortable, and emotionally honest.

Its soft instrumentals and dreamy vocals create a peaceful atmosphere, even while telling the stories of heartbreak and longing. This contrast makes the album unique because it allows the listeners to either tune into the sadness in a comfortable way or just have calming music that doesn't change their mood. Whether you are looking for study music, relaxation music, music to cry to, or just looking for music that feels warm and reflective, *Lamp Genso* is an album that allows you to do so and get lost in its beauty.

**Contemporary Book Review: *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010)**

by Dante Crisicitiello

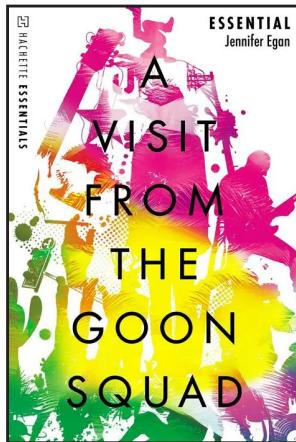
Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is a novel that explores how

*Lamp Genso*

time affects people's choices, relationships, and identities. The book does not follow a single, straightforward storyline. Instead, it is made up of interconnected chapters that focus on different characters, many of whom are connected through the music industry. At the center of the novel are Bennie Salazar, a troubled record executive, and Sasha, his assistant, whose struggles with identity and self-destructive behavior shape several key chapters.

As the novel moves between past, present, and future, readers learn about Bennie's rise and fall in the music world, Sasha's attempts to rebuild her life, and the lasting consequences of decisions made years earlier. Each chapter adds another piece to the larger story, showing how characters drift apart yet remain linked by shared experiences. One of the most memorable sections is told through PowerPoint slides, which captures a child's perspective and highlights the emotional distance within a family.

The "goon squad" in the title represents time itself, relentless and unavoidable. While the structure may feel fragmented at first, it ultimately reinforces the novel's message about aging, regret, and change. Egan's realistic characters and inventive storytelling make *A Visit from the Goon Squad* a meaningful and engaging read.



*A Visit from the Goon Squad*

## Video Game Review: *Hollow Knight* (2017)

by Trinity Collins

*Hollow Knight* is a 2D platformer with boss fights, a massive map, and a beautiful overarching story that Team Cherry developed. Team Cherry is made up of only three people: Ari Gibson, William Pellen, and Jack Vine. These three developers are extremely talented, as evidenced by the praise they received after releasing a prototype version of *Hollow Knight* in a 72-hour Game Jam in 2014. The game's Metroidvania mechanics and map design were particularly commended. Not very long after this release, the Kickstarter page had made over \$57,000, which let the 3 talented developers take their small game into a massive project. 3 Years later, the full game was released, and it was a massive success, as over 500,000 copies were sold on the first day of launch. By July of 2018, *Hollow Knight* had sold over 1.25 million copies. It was also nominated for Game of the Year 2017, but its late release date did not allow the voters enough time to play it for themselves.

In my experience with *Hollow Knight*, it has completely ruined other 2D platformers for me. (even though I'm not very good at it.) The map is huge and always has something new around the corner. The enemies are well-designed and well-placed, so you aren't running into enemies that are in the most unfair spot. While the game can be challenging, the healing mechanic helps to balance out the difficulty. I haven't made it very far in the game yet, but I will definitely play more in the future! Overall, *Hollow Knight* is an indie game phenomenon that blows just about every other 2D platformer out of the water. You NEED this game. Go buy it. Please.



*Hollow Knight*

## Restaurant Review: 39 Rue de Jean

by Dante Criscitiello

39 Rue de Jean gives you that classic French brasserie vibe, like you've been transported into downtown Paris. It's a really lively spot, but still classy. You can sit inside or out, and both options just feel right for Downtown's friendly, walkable feel. The menu has a bunch of classic French dishes, so even if

you're not super familiar with French food, you'll find something you like. They've got favorites like steak frites, mussels, and coq au vin. Every dish comes out looking great, and you get plenty of food, which makes it feel like a deal. This spot really pulls in a nice crowd, locals mixed with folks just visiting. It's got this lively but cozy vibe, which is perfect whether you're just grabbing a quick bite or celebrating something big.

One of the most appealing aspects of 39 Rue de Jean is how versatile it is. It works just as well for a relaxed weekend brunch as it does for a celebratory dinner, making it a reliable choice for many different occasions. Seasonal menu updates keep the experience fresh and encourage repeat visits, while the energetic yet welcoming environment helps explain why the restaurant has remained a staple in the local dining scene. Overall, 39 Rue de Jean successfully balances authenticity, atmosphere, and accessibility, making it a standout spot worth visiting.



39 Rue de Jean



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## January Horoscopes

by Ellis Richards <3

### Aquarius (January 20 - February 18)

Rest and relax after such a hectic Christmas. I mean seriously, I don't know anyone else who had to make food unpaid for twelve plus people like some twisted Cinderella story where she wore Uggs instead of slippers. Oh the horror.

### Pisces (February 19 - March 20)

It's time to go out with your people and have fun! I'm forever team Skyzone as the optimal hangout activity, but the bar dodge machine is always broken or turned off because it launched another kid into the wall. Velocity is the better trampoline park but it's way too far away so toddler-tosser3000 wins out.

### Aries (March 20 - April 19)

Throw seasonal depression out the window, it's time to party! Consider (mainly indoor) concerts, dinner with friends, and even pottery cla- Scratch that. The sign says "for 50+ singles" ... I mean one of those things is true but like...

### Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

You are strong! Like a bull! But, even bulls rest and so should you! I even went down to my local petting zoo for some authentic bull input on the best vacation spots! One thousand and three hundred pound Texas Longhorn Marty tells me quote, "moo."

### Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

WAIT DON'T GO YE- wait... You- You actually have a month with no pressing issues or serious hazards?? I'm about as shocked as you are Gemini, like I totally had this whole plan to baby proof the house with like pool noodle ends and rubber tubing and- Oh sorry.

### Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

January is an opulent stage for the taking Cancer! Just stick to the Technicolor Trench Coat kind of drama and not the Macbeth kind please. Don't even think of a King Lear spin on things, I'd like to keep my eyes please and thank you.



### Leo (July 23 - August 22)

The grind is tiring, but thankfully you're built for it! Going into January you're set to flourish in the hustle-bustle with work opportunities abound and new friends to be made. You could even go full entrepreneur with your own Shark-Tank pitch! I'd say your chances of making the "instant plunger" a staple in American households are about twenty-five/seventy-five.



### Virgo (August 23 - September 22)

Get organized and fast! Seriously, I'm tired of spending my free time worrying about someone who can forget entire assignments after just starting like some sort of goldfish-human hybrid. Don't tell me you're not either; I've noticed the odd amount of anemone decor...



### Libra (September 23 - October 22)

Since you've got like a billion Pinterest boards I'm assuming you're great at interior design! Consider using January as a month of redecoration and new beginnings for your space(s). Want a gothic room? Go on Etsy! Stickers for your water bottle? Go on Redbubble! You... You want an iron maiden?? How about a therapist.



### Scorpio (October 23 - November 21)

The visionary you are! Use your perspective for photography, illustration, writing, anything really- because the time is now to really embrace your art! With a nitro fueled creative engine; I can imagine the crushing emotional weight of your pieces, and feel it in my...lap? Oh it's just my cat.



### Sagittarius (November 22 - December 21)

So you know how you'd have to spend six-hundred years gaining a billion dollars a minute in order to equal Scrooge McDucks wealth? Well that could be you if you play your cards right this January. Or, you could have someone else play them for you! Everyone could use a financial advisor these days.



### Capricorn (December 22 - January 19)

Have you considered that you may be magic royalty from outer space because I swear I'm dazzled a bit more every time I see you! All I suggest is that you maybe channel your star power into perfect grades instead of writing vaguely targeted instagram notes. "U know who u are..." do I?

## 2025 Trivia

by Luciano Cusatis

1. What is the name of the new pope who was elected in 2025?
2. In June, the Oklahoma City Thunder won the NBA Championship, who did they beat?
3. Which Netflix movie, released in 2025, became the most watched movie of all time on the platform?
4. Which movie won best picture at the 2025 Oscars?
5. Despite having the most grammy's in history, Beyonce didn't receive her first album of the year award until this year. What was the name of the album?
6. In April, Jane Goodall sadly passed away. Which animal was she famous for studying?
7. 2025 also unfortunately saw the death of this influential Black Sabbath frontman.
8. K-Pop band BTS reunited in July after a three-year hiatus. What was the reason for the split?
9. The Los Angeles Dodgers won this year's MLB World Series. Who is their superstar, notable for his proficiency as both a batter and pitcher?
10. In November 2025, New York City elected its youngest mayor in over 100 years. What is his name?

### Answers

1. Pope Leo, 2. Indiana Pacers, 3. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 4. Aurora, 5. Cowboy Carter, 6. Chimpanzees, 7. Ozzy Osbourne, 8. Mandatory Military Service, 9. Shohei Ohtani, 10. Zohran Mamdani

**Cole Anderson,  
10th grade Band**



Luciano Cusatis

**3/10**

**Cameron Leach,  
12th grade Band**



Luciano Cusatis

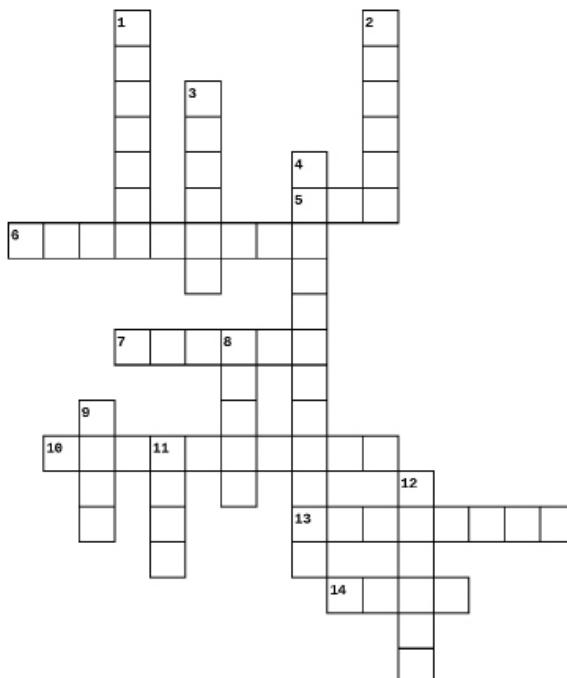
**5/10**

1. Pope Francis
2. Lakers
3. K-Pop Demon Hunters
4. Mickey 17
5. I don't know
6. Koalas
7. Ozzy Osbourne
8. Time away from the public
9. Babe Ruth
10. Zohran Mamdani

1. Pope Charles
2. Pacers
3. I don't know
4. Wicked
5. Cowboy Carter
6. Monkeys
7. Ozzy Osbourne
8. Military
9. Shohei Ohtani
10. Braeden Brightharp

## January Holidays Crossword

by Frankey Coakley



*All of the following are things with National Holidays dedicated to them in January*

### Across

5. Other than a coat, what would you hang on a coat rack?
6. Grab your noodles It's time for some
7. A fun thing to put in your bath
10. Protect your fragile packages with some
13. Home of the Buffalo River
14. \_\_\_\_\_ and Cookie

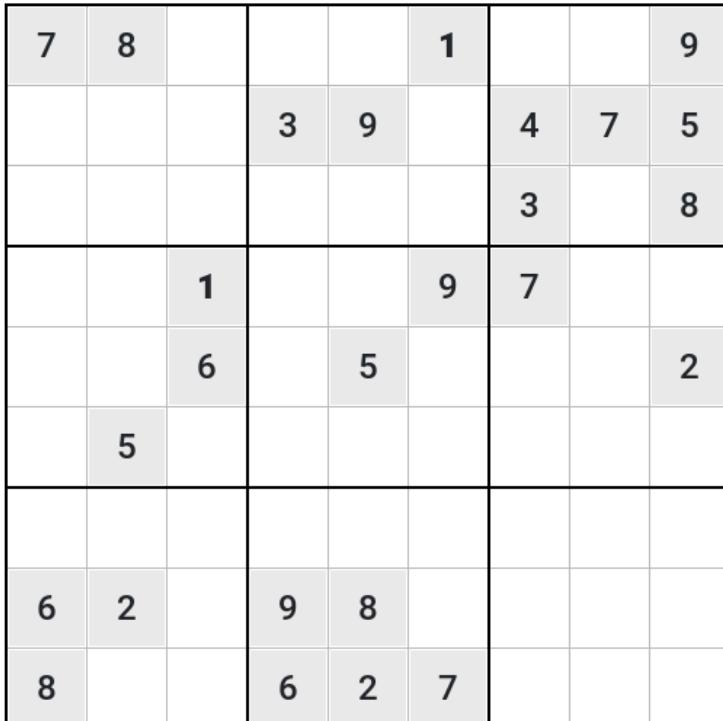
### Down

1. If you don't have something than you've got
2. Eat all you want at \_\_\_\_\_
3. What goes great with butter and a movie?
4. Top your pie with some nice cold
8. What's best with cream cheese spread across it?
9. Some baths are better with a rubber
11. People watch these for fun?
12. The bird of America

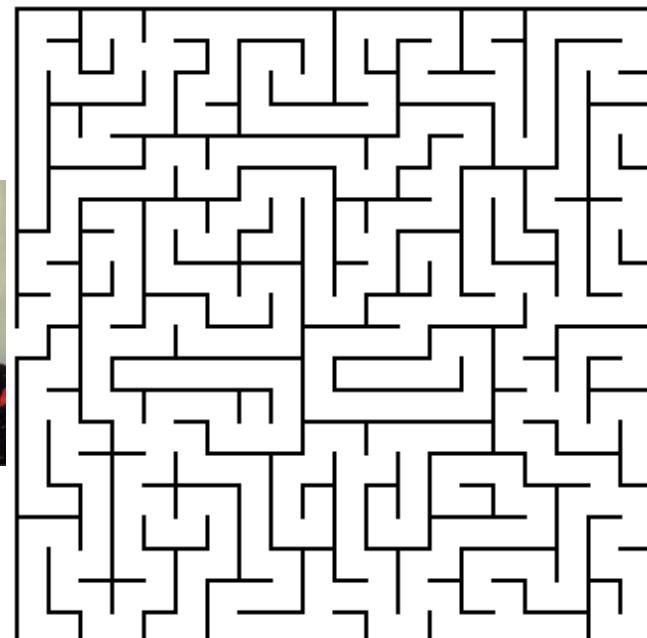


## SOA Sudoku

by Frankey Coakley



## Help Ms Mitchum Find Her Pom-Poms!





"I got a MacBook."

Mac Frazier, 6th grade Theater



"I got a little bee Jellycat."

Noah Adams, 7th grade Vocal



"A vacation to Belize!"

Bella Billew, 8th grade Strings



"I got some palm trees around my pool."

Ms. Stallsmith, Counselor



"My teaching clothes!"

Ms. Quade, English Student Teacher

## What was the best gift you received over the holidays?

by Dante Criscitiello and  
Luciano Cusatis



"A Coach bag"

Anja Tetre, 9th grade Vocal



"Waders for fishing"

Azi Barranca, 10th grade Strings



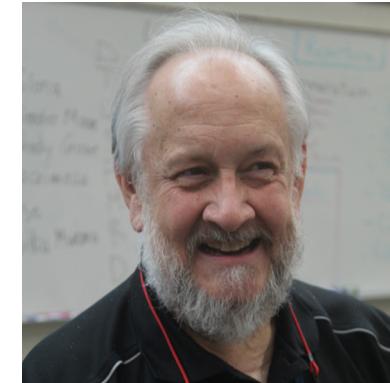
"Some nice loafers"

Dean Barnwell, 11th grade Piano



"I got my first tattoo and some fun socks."

Juvon Gilliard, 12th grade Strings



"My son and daughter-in-law came over and painted the foyer of my house."

Mr. Rogers, Vocal Teacher