

The Invictus



Avocados are the ‘green gold’ that has become the world’s new conflict commodity

John Wiles (Y7) criticises the growing love of avocados in the US which is responsible for causing large problems in Mexico: including kidnappings and killings to exploit the demand of this ‘Green Gold’

In 2019, Mexican cartel members travelled to the city of Uruapan with logging equipment and weapons. They were not preparing themselves for guerrilla warfare but for felling trees and tilling land, a war of agriculture. Any locals who protested, proclaiming that the forests were protected, were held at point blank and commanded to be silent. These cartels (a group of independent market participants who work together to improve their profits and dominate the market) were members of the criminal group called the Viagras who normally traffic



drugs. However, this time cartels had been forcing inhabitants out of their farms and destroying protected woodland to grow avocados. Consequently, many Mexican citizens' lives have been torn apart through loss of land or it being unsafe to live in their homes any longer.

In the state of Michoacán, where most of the country's avocado production takes place, avocado exports were worth 2.4 billion dollars in 2018, with the fruit being dubbed as the region's 'green gold'. An increased market demand has meant that the business of avocado production provides wages up to 12 times the Mexican minimum wage, so it's no wonder the industry has become an increasingly popular one to work in. However, it has also become an increasingly dangerous one, both environmentally and socially.

Michoacán has now become the hotbed of a new cartel focused around avocado production. From teams of pickers being forced to work at gunpoint without payment, to the hijacking of trucks transporting avocados, locals have many stories about the dangerous nature of the industry – within which a dozen or more criminal groups are operating.

After seizing control over most of the local forests, the Viagras announced a tax on residents who owned avocado trees, charging \$250 a hectare in what they called 'protection fees'. Nobody disputed the tax for knowledge of the deadly repercussions if they did. For instance, The Jalisco New Generation cartel also wanted control over the same stretch of land, causing great tensions between the two groups. In May, Jalisco shooters sped into the woods and a vicious gunfight broke out. Ten criminals died over the battle for this land. Jose Maria Ayala Montero, a vigilante that works for a trade association working to protect growers, states that "The threat is constant and from all sides". By weaponizing fear the cartels have left avocado growers feeling scared, alone and caught in the middle.

In Michoacan, where there have been dozens of cartel splits over the last dozen years, organized crime's invasion of the avocado industry is a microcosm of what is happening elsewhere in the country. Many locals now long for the early 1990s, when just one family trafficked drugs through the region and the state was largely at peace. This only changed because Americans fell

in love with avocados. Between 2001 and 2018, average annual U.S. consumption of avocados has increased from £2 to nearly £7.50 causing more cartels to flock to avocado farming states – increasing the violence and the brutality of this criminally controlled trade. Last year, 1,338 people were killed in Michoacan, more than any of record and this year has been even deadlier with the death toll on track top 1,500.

Yet, boycotting the avocado industry would create a string of issues of its own as many locals rely on farming the fruit to feed their families. A recent U.S. warning that it could withdraw orchard inspectors sent a shiver through the \$2.4 billion-a-year export industry. Some growers are taking up arms, they say their crop is worth fighting for. "If it wasn't for avocados, I would have to leave to find work, maybe go to the United States or somewhere else," said a local farmer, whose small avocado orchard earns him far more than he would get from any other legal — or illegal — crop.

The Western perception that an avocado-rich diet helps fight the climate crisis needs altering. We need to recognise that avocado farming is actually a cause of environmental degradation and catalyst for criminal violence. What is needed now is increased transparency on the behalf of producers regarding their production chains, and an increased awareness of the origins of food products on behalf of consumers.

We need to rethink our diet and lifestyle trends and reduce the consumption of avocado to minimise our personal contribution to the environmental impact caused by "green gold". We live in a global and fully integrated planet where what you happily eat with your friends and family while watching sports could be destroying entire ecosystems. This will affect you in the long run – think about this the next time you're eating your guacamole and tortilla chips.

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Can Jeff Bezos be the unlikely environmental superhero we all want him to be?

Elvie Garrill (Y7) explores the harmful toll on the environment billion dollar company Amazon has and argues that its founder, Jeff Bezos, must be more aware of his carbon footprint

Bezos is the world's richest man, earning a whopping \$222,900 per minute — or \$3,715 per second, and is on track to be a trillionaire by 2026. His wealth stems from the company Amazon, which he founded 26 years ago to sell the books in his garage. Yet even though he is a billionaire, his charitable efforts are selective and sparse compared. The Chronicle of Philanthropy estimates that Jeff Bezos gave \$68 million to charity between 2000-2017, which is only 0.1 percent of his wealth. Bezos has billions in his bank but is doing very little to help guide us through climate change. Estimates of how much money it would take to end global climate change range between \$300 billion and \$50 trillion over the next two decades and Bezos has well over \$100 million which could easily help us get on our feet.

Thankfully, the Amazon tycoon has begun this process, announcing in November he would be giving \$791 million to 16 groups fighting climate change. Bezos said the money is "just the beginning of my \$10 billion commitment to fund scientists, activists, NGOs, and others." But he must remember that tackling climate change is not about pumping money into different organisations, it's not a business investment. Tackling climate change will only be won when we change our mindsets, and that starts with addressing our carbon footprint.

Indeed, many believe Bezos' climate fund faces a reckoning with Amazon's carbon footprint. Take California's Inland Empire, a region with some of the worst smog in the US. It's a community

dominated by warehouses for e-commerce, and a lot of pollution comes from vehicles moving goods to and from those facilities. Amazon is the biggest private employer in the region and local groups are pushing the company to switch to zero-emissions electric trucks to combat this.

Amazon is one of the world's biggest employers, with 1.3 million people on its payroll. But this figure is deceiving. It does not account for those making the products in low and middle-income countries. For instance, hundreds of schoolchildren have been drafted in to make Amazon's Alexa devices in China as part of a controversial and often illegal attempt to meet production targets. According to the documents, the teenagers — drafted in from schools and technical colleges in and around the central southern city of Hengyang — are classified as "interns," and their teachers are paid by the factory to accompany them. Teachers are asked to encourage uncooperative pupils to accept overtime work on top of regular shifts. There are also

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'His Earth Fund should send funds directly to grassroots communities'

millions of underage children mining for material to make Amazon products, earning as little as 4p a day whilst working 12-hour days. Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo's mining area wash minerals, transport supplies and perform other tasks to earn money. In some cases, they work in the actual mines. Local and international laws forbid this form of child labour, but parents often encourage their children to do it to earn money for their families. This exploitation needs to stop.

No amount of greenwashing will absolve Jeff Bezos or Amazon of the harm they have inflicted on planet. If Bezos' Earth Fund wants to save the planet, it should send funds directly to grassroots communities who are the least responsible and hardest hit by climate disaster and the kinds of greedy business practices Bezos engages in. So next time you think about buying something off Amazon, think about how your product was made. Think about if you can buy it anywhere else, where it could be hand-made or more eco-friendly.



Humans' destructive behaviour is the cause of the coronavirus pandemic. Not nature.

Lucy Illingworth (Y7) argues that humans need to stop blaming nature for the crises we face in the world today, and that to protect our future we must come together now

As we start to surface from the current Coronavirus pandemic we must begin to analyse how we treat the natural world and reflect on the treacherous impact we have on our surroundings without even realising it. Our unbalanced relationship with nature is not only having a catastrophic effect on wildlife but also on us. This destructive behaviour is endangering our own health so we must act now to avoid dire consequences.

Leaders at the UN, WHO, and WWF International believe that pandemics are the outcome of humanity's destruction of nature. This means that activities such as poaching, deforestation, oil production, and over farming are all catalysts for zoonotic diseases – diseases that originate in animals and pass to humans. Early last year a leading economist at the UN said that COVID-19 was an "SOS signal for the human enterprise" and went on to talk about how human wealth depends on nature's health. Additionally, a WWF report concludes that between 60 and 70 percent of all diseases that have emerged in humans since 1990 came from wildlife.

The origin of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic may be a prime example of this. Our treatment of an elusive creature known as the pangolin has led to it facing extinction with its name highlighted on the Red List of Threatened Species - three species of pangolin are listed as critically endangered. These shy animals are the most trafficked mammal in the world and at one point an estimated 150,000 pangolins were slaughtered in China - every month.

The reason for this insanity

towards pangolins is partly down to illegal poaching. Pangolins can be worth up to £250 per kilogram. Between 1994 and 2000, almost nineteen tones of pangolin scales were exported from Malaysia for use in traditional Chinese medicine in China and Hong Kong. The scales were described as having extraordinary healing properties and, if ground to powder or burnt to ash, it was thought that they could be used to ward off evil spirits, treat malaria and other diseases. However, the scales are made from keratin (the same substance in your hair and nails) so they have the same medicinal powers as chewing your nails – none! Despite this, Pangolin meat is still sold on the black market for its healing powers and Pangolin skin is used as leather for boots, purses, and handbags.

The relevance of consumption of wildlife is significant to the modern coronavirus because it is thought to have been the possible cause of COVID-19 and many past viruses. The AIDS outbreak, for example, was caused due to the slaughtering of chimpanzees in Africa. After humans consumed the chimpanzee meat, AIDS crossed species from chimpanzees to humans. Similarly, COVID-19 is thought to have taken the leap from bats, to pangolins, to humans. This supposed cross contamination was thought to have occurred in a wet market in Wuhan, China where a cage of bats was placed next to a cage of pangolins and the coronavirus spread.

In early 2019 sick pangolins, in China, were found to have the coronavirus, but this was ignored after the infected pangolins all died. The evidence was then

revisited in 2020 when the word coronavirus had a different ring to it. Scientific evidence showed that the pangolin virus was a 99 percent match to the human virus. Pangolins are now suspected of being the intermediate host filling the gap between bats and humans. Events like this force us to consider what happens when we invade the natural world for our own benefit. So what can we do?

Step 1: Dr Jane Goodall, an English primatologist and anthropologist, warns that we need to change the way we think about food because "our disrespect for farmed animals has created this situation where disease can spill over to infect human beings". So we have to "change our ways", move to more plant based diets, and eat less or no meat.

Step 2: She also believes that changes should include: lifting people out of poverty, and rethinking our needs as consumers – questioning whether we need all of the "stuff that we accumulate".

Step 3: Dr Goodall says that "we have moved forward a lot" and "more and more people are getting aware, but not enough yet". So we have to inform others of the current situation in order to make a change and save nature.

If humanity carries on the way we were before the pandemic then we risk losing more fascinating creatures and risk endangering of our own economies and health. Therefore we must take immediate and drastic action in order to save future generations. If we don't do things differently we're finished.

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'Our disrespect for the natural world has created a world where diseases can spill over and infect human beings'

In Los Angeles, the city of dreams, Skid Row is a nightmare problem to solve

Iman Khan (Y7) examines the history of Skid Row, a neighbourhood in Los Angeles known for its condensed homeless population, and criticises the lack of help its inhabitants receive

Skid Row is a neighbourhood in Downtown Los Angeles that has the largest population of homeless people in the USA. It has between 8,000 – 11,000 people living there and is one of the most notorious and dangerous neighbourhoods in LA. “Almost all of our homeless services are located in this one area, it’s really the only place to go if you’re homeless and want assistance. It’s become a dumping ground,” Skid Row historian Dr. Doug Mungin has said. “After people are released from prison or jail or from a mental facility, they are dropped off on Skid Row because the city wanted to make sure that these types of people remain separated from the rest of Los Angeles.” Skid Row has become society’s garbage heap, a place it sends the people it wants to turn its back on.

Without any hope of escaping this life of degradation, the inhabitants of Skid Row have turned to a life of drug addiction and violence. More than 12,000 homeless drug addicts pass through its streets each year,

with thousands living in the vast network of tent encampments that line the sidewalks. Fire Station 9, which covers Skid Row, is now the busiest firehouse in America, responding to over 35,000 calls for service last year, including a record-high number of overdoses and mental-health emergencies. For the past decade, political leaders have relied on two major policies to address the crisis — “harm reduction” and “housing first” — but despite \$619 million in spending in 2018, more people are on the streets than ever. The government does not help these people or else the numbers of homeless people on Skid Row would not be rising. Because of the lack of help from the government, nothing is getting better, and more people are going to Skid Row.

Skid Row has its origins in the 1970s, when after decades of racialised residential segregation, employment discrimination, and financial redlining, the area became disproportionately populated by people of colour, specifically Black Americans. In 1975, Los Angeles adopted

a redevelopment plan, which established Skid Row as an unofficial “containment zone”, where homeless people, shelters and services would be tolerated. As a result, most visitors to the parts of Los Angeles that attracted visitors from around the world never saw a homeless person. For this reason, Skid Row is often referred to as the place to contain anything bad that’s going on in the rest of the city.

Then the Covid-19 pandemic came along. Everyone struggled with this pandemic but what about the homeless? On Skid Row people live in unsanitary, cramped living conditions where they share their belongings. The perfect conditions for a virus to spread. In addition, those living on Skid Row likely don’t have enough money to buy masks and any necessities to keep safe. I personally think the homeless are not talked about enough and are marginalised by society especially during the pandemic. In a recent interview, a woman living on Skid Row expressed how much she wanted to leave the area, saying “If they told me tomorrow to leave, I would say, please, house me anywhere else but not here anymore.”

The reality is that Los Angeles’ has created a new class of “untouchables,” people who are permanently disconnected from the institutions of society. It has tried to hide away from society those who threaten to ruin its Hollywood image. Money is at the root of this crisis - jobs that pay too little and housing that costs too much. For this reason, the government needs to invest more into affordable housing and the creation of jobs. These people deserve a second chance at life.

‘Skid Row has become society’s garbage heap, a place it sends the people it wants to turn its back on’

‘In 1975 Los Angeles established Skid Row as an unofficial ‘containment zone’



Are cryptocurrencies going to remain a bit on the side or become a new digital gold?

Mustafa Rafique (7G) takes a look at the rise of new digital currencies such as Bitcoin and questions whether we should be investing in this new form of banking



Cryptocurrency is a form of payment that can be exchanged online for goods and services. Many companies have issued their own currencies, often called tokens, and these can be traded specifically for the goods or services that the company provides. Think of them as you would arcade tokens. You'll need to exchange real currency for the cryptocurrency to access the goods or service.

Ultimately, it's a virtual currency that has different levels of rates that go up or down. You can invest money and if the rates of the coin go up, you earn money, if the rates lower then you lose money. Cryptocurrencies are therefore like most other forms of investment: unpredictable.

Positives of Cryptocurrency

- Access: Anyone with Internet access and an account can use cryptocurrencies. Since they are decentralized and not restricted to any one country, they trade 24/7 all over the world.
- Security and privacy: Most of the platforms run on block chain technology which

has proven quite secure. You can remain anonymous. As of today, very little, if any, government reporting is involved making this characteristic the most controversial aspect to cryptocurrencies.

- Peer-to-peer: Users control their own digital wallet versus using a bank.
- You can exchange crypto currency for real money by using a third-party exchange broker. These third-parties (which include bitcoin ATMs and debit cards) will exchange your bitcoins for cash at a given rate. It is simple and secure. Or, you use a peer-to-peer transaction to sell your bitcoin.

Negatives of Cryptocurrency

- Price volatility: The value of bitcoins and other cryptocurrencies can change drastically over a small period of time. Bitcoin reached a value of \$17,000 in January 2018 before falling to \$7,000 less than a month later.
- Anonymity: While the details of cryptocurrency users and transactions are often held in a public ledger, names and

locations are encrypted. This can be an issue when complying with regulations on customer identification or fraud protection.

- Cyber security: Cryptocurrencies exist digitally, and the proof of ownership is often limited to the private keys used to authenticate transactions. This makes cryptocurrencies a prime target for hackers, especially because many businesses aren't aware of how to protect this new form of currency.

What is Bitcoin Mining?

Chances are you hear the phrase "bitcoin mining" and your mind begins to wander to the Western fantasy of pickaxes, dirt and striking it rich. As it turns out, that analogy isn't too far off. Bitcoin mining is performed by high-powered computers that solve complex computational math problems; these problems are so complex that they cannot be solved by hand and are complicated enough to tax even incredibly powerful computers.

The result of bitcoin mining is twofold. First, when computers solve these complex math

'Think of cryptocurrencies as you would arcade tokens - they need exchanging before they can be used'

'With printed currencies counterfeiting is always an issue - it's a different story with Bitcoin'



problems on the bitcoin network, they produce new bitcoin (not unlike when a mining operation extracts gold from the ground). And second, by solving computational math problems, bitcoin miners make the bitcoin payment network trustworthy and secure by verifying its transaction information.

When someone sends bitcoin anywhere, it's called a transaction. Transactions made in-store or online are documented by banks, point-of-sale systems, and physical receipts. Bitcoin miners achieve the same thing by clumping transactions together in "blocks" and adding them to a public record called the "block chain." Nodes then maintain records of those blocks so that they can be verified into the future.

When bitcoin miners add a new block of transactions to the blockchain, part of their job is to make sure that those transactions are accurate. In particular, bitcoin miners make sure that bitcoin is not being duplicated, a unique quirk of digital currencies called "double-spending." With printed currencies, counterfeiting is always an issue. But generally, once you spend \$20 at the store, that bill is in the clerk's hands. With digital currency, however, it's a different story.

Digital information can be reproduced relatively easily, so with Bitcoin and other digital currencies, there is a risk that a

spender can make a copy of their bitcoin and send it to another party while still holding onto the original.

Bitcoin vs Traditional Currencies

Consumers tend to trust printed currencies. That's because the U.S. dollar is backed by a central bank of the U.S., called the Federal Reserve. In addition to a host of other responsibilities, the Federal Reserve regulates the production of new money, and the federal government prosecutes the use of counterfeit currency.

Even digital payments using the U.S. dollar are backed by a central authority. When you make an online purchase using your debit or credit card, for example, that transaction is processed by a payment processing company (such as Mastercard or Visa). In addition to recording your transaction history, those companies verify that transactions are not fraudulent, which is one reason your debit or credit card may be suspended while traveling.

Bitcoin, on the other hand, is not regulated by a central authority. Instead, bitcoin is backed by millions of computers across the world called "nodes." This network of computers performs the same function as the Federal Reserve, Visa, and Mastercard, but with a few key differences. Nodes store information about prior

transactions and help to verify their authenticity. Unlike those central authorities, however, bitcoin nodes are spread out across the world and record transaction data in a public list that can be accessed by anyone.

Verdict

Bitcoin is many things, but a stable coin it is not, according to Brian Davidson, economist at Fathom Consulting. Bitcoin fails the three main tests of a currency – that it is a store of value, that it qualifies as a unit of exchange and that it is a unit of account.

Its supporters say the rocketing value of bitcoin – from below £2,000 four years ago to £45,000 in April – shows it is a store of value, but it is a volatile and unpredictable form of currency. Since that April high, Bitcoin's value has slumped by 40% to about £26,000 and it is this unpredictability that means Bitcoin will never become a legitimate cryptocurrency that replaces the dollar or pound. The world's governments are not going to let everyone start trading money anonymously and evading taxes using bitcoin. If cryptocurrency does take off, it will be in a government-backed form, like a new "Fedcoin." Full anonymity and government evasion will not be one of its features. So, while there has been a recent gold rush for the new digital currency my advice would be to invest with caution. Do your research first before committing to anything.

'The world's governments are not going to let everyone start trading money anonymously and avoiding taxes'



The ABCs of LGBT: Clearing up the misconceptions of sexuality and gender identity

Annie Smith and Callie Watson (Y7) unpick the acronym LGBTQIA+ and explain the difference between our biologically determined sex and socially constructed gender



Many people are often confused by what LGBTQIA+ stands for, and sometimes don't understand why somebody would want to date the same gender or even change their gender. This is often part of a wider misconception: that your gender must match your biological sex.

Gender, unlike our biological sex, is a socially constructed concept. For this reason, a man can identify as having a female gender just like a woman can identify as having a male gender. Simple! Almost. Most people think of gender as this binary split, with anybody who identifies differently put under the umbrella terms of 'nonbinary' and 'gender-fluid'. If we were to remove those terms you would find a list of up to 72 genders! Your pronouns most of the time link to your gender identity, however this isn't always the case. For instance, if somebody was 'gender-fluid' they are people whose gender changes over time. A gender-fluid person might identify as a woman one day and a man the next. And while the

quest for the right pronoun can sometimes be daunting using them can have real benefits, particularly when gender neutral pronouns are used. Studies have shown they boost positive feelings towards LGBT people and reduce mental biases that often favour men.

The acronym LGBTQIA+ stands for the different sexual attractions and gender identities we can have. First up is L which stands for lesbian. This when a non-male is physically attracted to another non-male. The G stands for gay, meaning a non-female is attracted to another non-female. B is for bisexual, which is where an individual is sexually attracted to either a man or a woman. Transgender is what 'T' stands for, a person who has a gender identity different to the sex that they were assigned at birth, for instance you could identify as female despite being born a man. The Q stands for queer, which is a word that describes sexual and gender identities other than straight. I is for Intersex, the term that a person may use when they have both male and female sex

characteristics. Finally, the A stands for asexual which is the lack of sexual attraction to others. The + stands for all the other sexualities and gender identities, such as pansexual.

Thankfully, we are living in a society that is becoming more tolerant and understanding of different sexualities and genders. However, there are still many countries where it is illegal to be openly part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Around 69 countries still have laws that criminalise homosexuality and there are several countries where this is punished with the death penalty. Furthermore, a concerning number of people fear 'coming out' due to their family or friend's religious beliefs. The LGBT+ charity Stonewall found that a third of lesbian, gay and bi people of faith aren't open with anyone in their faith community about their sexual orientation. But why? Although many religions are respectful and accept the LGBT+ community, some are homophobic and make it clear that they will not tolerate LGBT+ people. This is a massive problem for society as it progresses as it is quite possible facing such scrutiny and judgement will impact on people's mental health. In turn this will only encourage more discrimination. People not being able to express themselves freely because of others' beliefs isn't right.

Be kind to your friends, support those who fear coming out and accept everybody for their differences. If we can encourage open conversations about sexuality and gender it creates a safe space where everybody feels welcome.

'Using gender neutral pronouns boost feelings towards LGBT people and reduce mental biases'

'Around 69 countries still have laws that criminalise homosexuality'

Are top fashion clothing brands failing the push for gender equality?

Keira Gill (Y7) calls for clothing brands to stop stereotyping their products for certain genders

In the wake of Pride Month, I have begun to question why clothes are separately sectioned off in shops. A recent poll found that most people are uncomfortable seeing men wear women's clothing than if it was the other way around. The fashion industry plays a role in creating this mindset. Style tends to be built around the concepts of masculinity and femininity. We see this mainly in stores, with clothes naturally divided into two sections: Men and Women. It's the cliché that surrounds us and influences our outfit choices. Men wear suits and women wear dresses; that's how it's "supposed" to go. Considering the obvious fact that one size does not fit all, and the great strides made in fighting gender stereotyping, why do we so easily accept that men's and women's clothing departments are the best way to organise our shopping?

Research from the American Psychological Association finds that a person's gender has little to no bearing on their personality, cognition, and leadership abilities. Sure, a consumer might identify as a woman, but she might also be interested in sports or perhaps enjoy hiking or camping. Maybe she manages a large group of people at her job or makes major financial decisions. A man may be interested in cars, but he might also enjoy clothes shopping. Yet brands have caught themselves and consumers in a vicious cycle: stereotypes trap people into thinking they are meant to desire a certain product, then brands continue to market said product toward the gender that has typically bought it. As a result, companies have convinced women to spend

more on products that are nearly identical to those marketed to men, a phenomenon dubbed the "pink tax."

On the other hand, a man might be persuaded to purchase beer when he'd prefer a bottle of wine, as aisles are stocked with brands such as Mad Housewife, Seduction and Little Black Dress. The effectiveness of gendered marketing is changing as modern consumers—particularly those of younger generations—are seeking brand experiences that are inclusive toward people of all gender identities and don't judge their preferences based on stereotypes. "Brands both reflect and influence societal norms, and for much of our existence, our concepts of gender have always been organized in binary terms," says Kate Snyder, strategist and head of anthropology at Instant Grass International, a consumer insights and research firm. "We're in the midst of a powerful cultural movement, one in which people are beginning to embrace the fluidity of gender and that the way we identify and express ourselves doesn't have to strictly fall under masculine and feminine binaries. Brands should be mirroring and representing this shift in order to stay with the times."

More recently, Harry Styles made history as the first male to be on the front cover of Vogue magazine. In the December 2020 issue, Styles modelled a frothy periwinkle blue Gucci gown paired with a black Gucci tuxedo jacket. Most of us have marvelled at the general gloriousness of the imagery but there has been a right-wing backlash from those who evidently feel uncomfortable with such blurring of gender lines. "Anytime you're putting



'Stereotypes trap people into thinking they are meant to desire a certain product'

'The way we identify and express ourselves shouldn't have to fall under masculine and feminine binaries'

barriers up in your life, you're limiting yourself," said Styles, who made his Met Gala debut last year in a black sheer lacy Gucci blouse accessorised with a single pearl earring. As society moves to remove gendered tropes and to create a more inclusive space, it raises the question of the need for labels at all.

Brands have certainly made significant headway in the journey to be more gender-inclusive, with some luxury fashion houses such as Gucci and Saint Laurent taking the lead in paving a more inclusive path. And with Gen Z and millennials putting increased pressure on brands to hold them accountable, there will be added expectation for brands to navigate this space with integrity as they move forward, to appease these consumer groups that value authenticity and advocate for social change more than ever before. We must respect an individual's right to self-expression and push for the normalisation and celebration of that right—regardless of whether their choice is gender-conforming or not.

Connor's Chronicles #3: How an Egyptian queen defied gender roles to become an indomitable leader of her time

Connor Baldwin (Y9) delves into the history of Queen Cleopatra and examines how her subversion of femininity was weaponised against her to bring about her downfall



Throughout history, there have been many women who have ruled. However, no female ruler has dominated popular conscience as much as Cleopatra. Her image has been at times expansive and reductive; she has been portrayed by some as a just and effective leader who grew the power of Egypt, in spite of the restraints of her gender, and by others as a foolish and misguided queen, who caused the loss of her country's independence by allowing her heart to guide her.

Cleopatra VII Philopator was born in 69BC to the pharaoh Ptolemy VII. Although the image that has prevailed of Cleopatra was of a ruler who relied on her beauty, she was well educated. It is thought she spoke Ethiopian, Hebrew, Arabic, Median, Parthian, Syriac, Latin and Egyptian, making her the only ruler of Egypt to learn the language. By the time of her birth, Egypt was a Roman client state. While independent, it depended on the support of the growing Roman Republic, who often intervened in its wars in return for wealth and grain. The threat of conquest often loomed

over Egypt; Cleopatra's father was forced to support the Romans in return for the little independence Egypt maintained.

In 58BC, political unrest forced Cleopatra to enter exile in Rome. However, in 55BC, she joined her father in his invasion of Egypt. At this time, Egypt was led by Berenice IV, Cleopatra's oldest sister. They were aided by the Romans (one of whom, Mark Antony, she would later marry). The invasion was successful, with Cleopatra's father later beheading Berenice. Under Ptolemy, Cleopatra was designated heir alongside her brother.

Cleopatra's father died in early 51BC, and Cleopatra inherited a kingdom in crisis. Drought had caused widespread famine, and Egypt was heavily indebted to Rome. During this time, Cleopatra married her brother Ptolemy VIII, a common practice amongst the pharaohs. However, Cleopatra also rejected her brother as co-ruler, in defiance of her father's will. Meanwhile, Rome was consumed by war. Julius Caesar had crossed the Rubicon in 49BC, beginning a war with Pompey. After the Battle of Pharsalus - a decisive

victory for Caesar - Pompey fled to Egypt. He was executed by Ptolemy VIII, outraging Caesar, who had intended to show leniency to his former ally. This caused a rift with Egypt; Cleopatra allied herself with Caesar, while Ptolemy VIII raised an army as an attempt to regain power from his sister. In 48BC, the Egyptian capital, Alexandria, was besieged by Ptolemy's forces, with both Caesar and Cleopatra within the city. In Early 48BC, reinforcements arrived, forcing Ptolemy VIII to retreat. At the Battle of the Nile, Caesar defeated Ptolemy and the pharaoh was killed as he attempted to flee.

Around June 46BC, a son was born to Cleopatra and Caesar, named Caesarion. Caesar remained publicly silent about his son, though Cleopatra publicly declared her son the father of the great general. Cleopatra and her brother, Ptolemy XIV, visited Rome later that year. During this time, there was relative peace, both in Rome and Egypt. However, on the 15th March 44BC, Julius Caesar, dictator of Rome, was assassinated by his former allies. Cleopatra remained in Rome, hoping that

'She has been portrayed as a foolish and misguided queen who caused the loss of Egypt's independence'

'Her twins with Mark Antony signified an era of rejuvenation for Egypt'

her son would be named Caesar's heir. When Caesar's adopted son, Octavian, was named heir instead, Cleopatra fled Rome. In the same year, Cleopatra likely had her brother poisoned, allowing her to gain sole rulership of Egypt.

The death of Caesar sparked a war between Caesar loyalists (led by Octavian) and Caesar's assassins, known as the Conspirators. Cleopatra supported the loyalists, but her forces were captured by the enemies of Octavian. Later that year, Cleopatra began a relationship with the general Mark Antony, who was currently attempting to establish himself as the most powerful man in Rome, opposed only by Octavian.

With Mark Antony, Cleopatra attempted to fashion him as a true Egyptian pharaoh, as much ruler as she was. She bore him twins – Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene – who signified to the Queen an era of rejuvenation for Egypt, one that depended on the union of Roman and Egyptian cultures, as well as Mark Antony's victory in the struggle against Octavian. However, Mark Antony's grasp of power in Rome was weakening. Octavian had ignited a propaganda machine back in Rome that presented Antony as a weak man, a man who had abandoned his virtues and, in a twisted subversion of Roman values, was a slave to Cleopatra. The Egyptian queen also came under fire, being portrayed as unnatural and an insult to the expected woman's role. Octavian exploited her defiance of preconceived gender roles to present her a threat to the security of both Egypt and Rome. He accused her of having seduced both Marc Antony through sorcery, and having murdered her brother. This reveals that, although Cleopatra had used her sexuality to strengthen Egypt and her rule, it was also used to by her enemies facilitate her downfall. Just as she used her infamous beauty and intellect as an instrument to ally herself with the most powerful



men of her age, the same beauty was also weaponised by Octavian in order to present her as a subversion of Roman ideals, allowing him to present his wars as much as a crusade against an unnatural 'Oriental Queen', as a war to remove his last rival.

In January 33BC, Octavian denounced Mark Antony as a slave, and a danger to Roman freedoms. Antony, in turn, denounced him as a callous dictator. Initially, Mark Antony far outmatched Octavian, in terms of support, soldiers and ships. However, over the course of the campaign, his forces were weakened, due to betrayal by many key figures - generals and allies alike. This culminated in the disastrous Battle of Actium in September 31BC.

Cleopatra's navy had been besieged in the port of Actium and over the course of the battle more than 5,000 of Cleopatra's soldiers were killed and 250 of her ships were sunk. Though both Cleopatra and Antony survived, any hope of victory was lost. Cleopatra fled to Alexandria, where she was joined by Antony who soon committed suicide after the surrender of his army. Octavian then occupied Alexandria, capturing Cleopatra and her children. He promised to show her mercy, but she insisted she 'would not be led in a triumph', a Roman tradition where a conquered ruler was paraded through the streets as a prisoner.

Cleopatra then designated her son Caesarion as her heir and forced him to flee Alexandria. Shortly after, on 10th August 30BC Cleopatra, pharaoh of Egypt, committed suicide. Though the popular image is of her dying from the bite of an asp, it is unknown whether she died from a snake-bite or some other form of poisoning. She was buried beside Mark Antony, though her tomb remains unfound. Her son would later return to Alexandria under false pretences, where he was murdered by Octavian. With his death, Egypt was officially brought under Roman control. Only 3 years later, in January 27BC, Octavian reformed the laws of Rome, taking the name of Augustus and title of first Emperor of Rome.

Though Cleopatra has often been painted as nothing more than a seductress, she was also a competent leader and politician. However, her beauty – and relationships with both Caesar and Antony – had a huge influence on the fate of both Egypt and Rome, making her the most influential and infamous Egyptian in all of history. Though she sought to bring Egypt under a new golden age of expansion and prosperity, her failures ultimately led to the end of Egypt's independence, and the rise of the Roman Empire, something that would have a profound impact of the course of world history.

'Octavian exploited Cleopatra's defiance of preconceived gender roles, presenting her as a threat to Rome'

'Her failures ultimately led to the end of Egypt's independence and the rise of the Roman Empire'

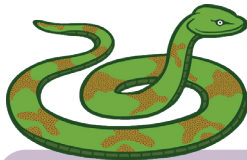
Napping Dog

by Alfie Middleton, Y7



Judged by practicing artists, lecturers and one of the Royal Academicians, Alfie Middleton's drawing has been selected from over 33,000 entries to be part of an exhibition curated by the Royal Academy. It will be not only displayed online but also physically exhibited at the Royal Academy in London.

Mercia Literary Corner



Melluscrographa

She slithers through forests looking for flesh,
With her green eyes she detects,
With her vicious teeth she attacks.
She stabs, she squirms, she squeezes -
she is a monster,
an iridescent villain.
Who is she?
She is Melluscrographa.

- Abdunaser Abdulmanan (Y7)

Imagine

Imagine a world that is healthy
Ice caps staying afloat
Where we don't have to worry about polar bears
Or that we will never get the chance to vote

Imagine a world that is peaceful
Wouldn't that just be divine?
If we could avoid conflict with peaceful discussion
If we could tackle and prevent underage crime

Imagine a world that is equal
Because we are still a long way away
Where you can be black and be treated as a human
Without hate and discrimination every day

Imagine a world where girls feel safe
Walking home alone at night
And don't need to fear repercussions
Because the skirt that they're wearing is tight

Imagine a world where masculinity
Is whatever you want it to be
Where you can cry if you want, where you don't have to be strong
Why isn't this reality?

Imagine a world where we are believed
When we say we're not okay
Where we aren't accused of seeking attention
Where we don't distance ourselves far away

Imagine a world where we, Gen Z
Don't have to clean up this mess
Others before us have spoiled this Earth
And now we're being left with the wreck

- Wednesday Addis, Y9



Reflections on Natalie Haynes' Lecture

Last month, a group of Year 7s were given the opportunity to attend a lecture by the classicist Natalie Haynes. Haynes has written a number of books, including 'Pandora's Jar' and 'A Thousand Ships', from the perspective of often silenced or vilified women in Greek mythology. In these books Haynes gives a voice to these women.

In the lecture Haynes told us she called her book 'Pandora's Jar' rather than 'Pandora's Box' because she believes 'box' is a mistranslation from the Ancient Greek. She also believes it is important that Zeus gave Pandora a jar rather than a box as a top-heavy jar can be easily opened compared to a sturdy box, making Pandora's mistake perhaps not an act of recklessness. The lecture was an eye-opening opportunity to understand more about often-overlooked female characters in Greek mythology. Like Haynes, I believe we need to reevaluate the presentation of these women and not just cast them off as Machiavellian villains.



Have a go at these maths problems and hand in your attempts to your maths teacher for house points.

Q1: The hour hand on the Mad Hatter's watch moves at the correct speed, but the minute hand moves one and a half times as fast as it should. Yesterday, it showed the correct time at 3 p.m. When did it next show the correct time? Give your answer as a 24 hour time.

Q2: Gill leaves Lille by train at 09:00. The train travels the first 27km at 96 km/h. It then stops at Lens for 3 minutes before travelling the final 29km to Lillers at 96 km/h. At what time does Gill arrive at Lillers?

A 09:35 **B** 09:38 **C** 09:40 **D** 09:41 **E** 09:43

Q3: John takes 40 minutes to walk to school and then to run home. When he runs both ways, it takes him 24 minutes. He has one fixed speed whenever he walks, and another fixed speed whenever he runs. How long would it take him to walk both ways?

Q4: It is 225 minutes until midnight. What time is it on a 24-hour digital clock?

Q5: One hundred and twenty students take an exam which is marked out of 100 (with no fractional marks). No three students are awarded the same mark. What is the smallest possible number of pairs of students who are awarded the same mark? For example: two students can both score 95, but 3 or more students cannot score 95.

Maths House Point Challenge #3

Answers to Spring 2021 Edition (Challenge #2)

Q1: 9 times Q2: 255
Q3: 12:24 Q4: 2 hours and 10 minutes Q5: 32 chairs



The double pandemic: considering the public health crisis nobody is talking about

Megan Ricketts (Y9) examines how lockdowns and movement restrictions, enforced as part of the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to a surge in domestic violence cases



There is another public health crisis to add to the growing toll of coronavirus: Mounting data suggests that domestic abuse is acting like an opportunistic infection, flourishing in the conditions created by the pandemic. Yet, very little attention is being given to this 'new pandemic'. More people need to understand what is happening and that anybody can be a victim of domestic violence.

Growing evidence shows the pandemic has made intimate partner violence more common—and often more severe. According to the American Journal of Emergency Medicine and the United Nations group U.N. Women, when the pandemic began, incidents of domestic violence increased 300% in Hubei, China; 33% in Singapore and 50% in Brazil. In the U.K calls to domestic violence hotlines jumped by 200% in the spring of 2020 compared to call volume before lockdowns began. Indeed, an estimated 5.5% (2.3 million) of the British population aged 16-74 experienced domestic

violence in the past year. Those 2.3 million people didn't feel safe to call their house a home.

Isolation has always been one of the most powerful weapons in the abuser's arsenal, shattering support networks and making it far more difficult for victims to get help or escape. Moreover, when there's little to no time apart, such abuse can quickly grow worse. Jacky Mulveen, project manager of Women's Empowerment and Recovery Educators (WE:ARE) said "COVID doesn't make an abuser but exacerbates it. It gives them more tools, more chances to control you. The abuser says, 'You can't go out; you're not going anywhere,' and the government also is saying, 'You have to stay in.'" Our quarantines have become a petri dish for domestic violence to flourish.

The New York Times contacted women stuck at home with an abusive husband or partner and conducted interviews over WhatsApp. One of them, Ana—who asked that her full name be withheld—told the newspaper her partner had been regularly

abusing her. He insists on total surveillance at all times. If she tries to lock herself in a room, he kicks the door until she opens it. "I can't even have privacy in the bathroom—and now I have to endure this in a lockdown," she wrote in a message sent late at night. Home isolation, however vital to the fight against the pandemic, is giving more power to the abuser. It gives the abuser an opportunity to call the shots—to say what their partner should or should not be doing.

When it comes to domestic abuse, men are often targeted as perpetrators, rather than acknowledged as potential victims too. Unfortunately, society still has a toxic view of masculinity, one where men are told to 'man up' if they speak up about their emotions. It is probably for this reason that men are three times less likely to speak to someone about their problems. We need to promote more tolerance in our society so men feel empowered to voice their emotions, not embarrassed.

Not enough is being done to remedy the domestic abuse pandemic. Shockingly, 85% of victims must seek help five times before they receive any help. Beyond the obvious psychological impact this would have on victims, there is also an economic one. Between 21-60% of victims lose their jobs for reasons stemming from abuse, such as a controlling partner. If you are suffering or know someone who is, it is important you report the issue. Speak up about it and don't keep quiet. Call the police, ask 'to speak to ANI' in a pharmacy or call the domestic abuse charity 'Refuge' who have a 24-hour helpline.

'Home isolation is giving more power to the abuser; an opportunity to call the shots'

'Our quarantines have become a petri dish for domestic violence'

Is gaming depleting your health bar? Looking at the health risks and benefits of video games

Despite being one of the world's most popular pastimes, gaming has retained a negative stigma. Amir Ali (Y8) explores why and questions whether the benefits outweigh the cons

One of the best health benefits gaming can have is its ability to improve manual dexterity. Controller-based games can be great for your hands. In a study involving a group of surgeons, researchers found that those who played video games were faster at performing advanced procedures and made 37% fewer mistakes than those who didn't.

Special video games have also been used as physical therapy to help stroke victims regain control of their hands and wrists. This is because playing video games regularly can increase grey matter in the brain thereby boosting brain connectivity. Another benefit of video games is that gamers actually have particularly good social skills. The typical stereotype of a gamer is that they are shy and use gaming to escape from reality. However, the opposite is true. Past research involving children found that those who played video games were more likely to have good social skills, perform better academically, and to have built better relationships with other students because of the social and collaborative aspect to some type of games.

However, despite the benefits, gaming can have negative consequences for our health. Dopamine addiction is one of these. When you play video games, your brain releases a neurotransmitter called dopamine, which influences your mood and feelings of reward and motivation. Over time, your brain gets used to this steady supply of dopamine, and the nucleus accumbens requires even more dopamine release for gaming to feel fun.

This in turn prevents you from enjoying anything that is not as stimulating as a video game.

A further drawback gaming can have is harboring our motivation levels. Throughout human history, we have commended those who venture into the unknown, find something valuable, overcome some kind of problem, and then bring it back to society. We value people who overcome the odds. Video games have hacked this circuit. They have found a way to deliver all the psychological rewards that we often seek to gain from the real world. What we want from video games is often very similar to what we want from life. We want excitement, adventures, friendships, victories, and status. Games have found a way to serve that to us with little effort on our end. As a result, a person's ability to feel motivated in real life can suffer. What would you rather do – spend hours revising to hopefully get the reward of a good mark, or switch on Mario Kart for a few minutes to swerve past Luigi and take pole position?

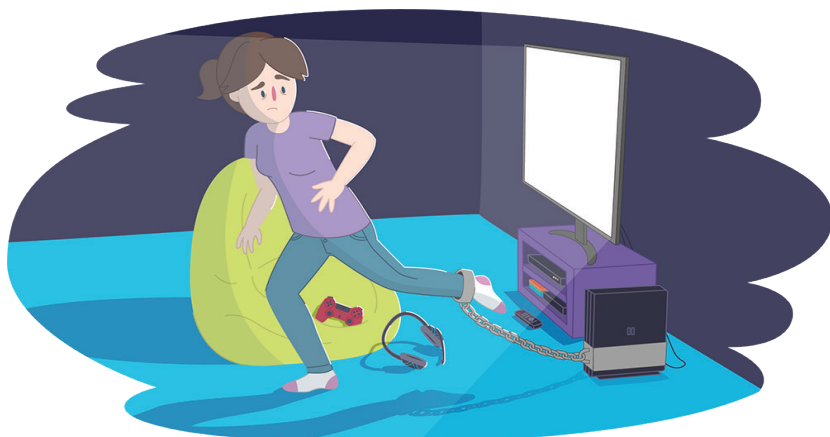
Social disconnection is another problem in the gaming community. Though we play

'Video games have hacked this circuit and found a way to deliver the psychological rewards we often seek from the real world'

'Evolution did not design human beings to be solitary creatures'

multiplayer games, we rarely end up connecting with the people in our games. Isolation can be extremely detrimental to your mental health. Evolution did not design human beings to be solitary creatures. We thrive in groups where we can support each other. An Iranian study on second-grade students in 2009 found that individuals who were addicted to video games tended to have lower social skills than those who were not. Social interaction is a skill, and so if you spend most of your time alone in your room playing games and not interacting with other people then that skill will deteriorate. That can lead to social anxiety, which makes the problem worse.

It is important to note that many of these negative side-effects are the result of prolonged exposure to video games: playing too much for too long. I believe the solution is to maintain a balanced lifestyle. Make sure you socialize with friends, spend time outdoors and work hard on pursuits beyond gaming alongside enjoying your games. This is the best way to achieve the benefits of gaming without facing the risks.



The UK needs to diversify its national holidays so we can all bank on them

Saniyah Mahmood and Imaan Kayani (Y8) outline why Britain should make changes to its bank holidays so that other religious holidays are also acknowledged



Bank holidays were first introduced by banker, politician and scientific writer Sir John Lubbock, who drafted the Bank Holiday Act in 1871. He added Easter Monday, Whit Monday, the first Monday in August and Boxing Day to the two common law holidays that already existed, which was Good Friday and Christmas Day. The focus was on allowing individuals time off work to observe key dates in the Christian calendar, sensible since the UK was a predominantly Christian country in the Victorian age.

However, there are now approximately 3.4 million Muslims in the UK which makes Islam the country's second biggest religion. In addition, there are more practicing Jews, Hindus and Sikhs in the UK than ever before. We live in a religiously diverse country that is very different to the predominantly Christian population that inhabited the UK when the bank holiday system was introduced. Yet, no changes have been made to such system since 1871. Currently, school children are given two weeks off for Christmas but not even

a single day to celebrate Eid. There's also no acknowledgement of Hanukkah or Diwali. We talk about how the UK is a tolerant country but how is this true when most religious holidays are not given a bank holiday? Why aren't Muslims allowed one day to celebrate their religion?

Eid is the main Islamic holiday that occurs twice a year. It is split into two parts 'small Eid' and 'big Eid'. Small Eid is also properly known as Eid al-Fitr, which occurs earlier in the year, and Eid-al-Adha (big Eid) comes later in the year. Eid al-Fitr is translated to 'feast of breaking the fast'. This is the fast of Ramadan, where Muslims all over the world don't eat from sunrise to sundown for a month. Eid al-Fitr features two to three days of celebrations that include special morning prayers greeting friends with the words 'Eid Mubarak', meaning blessed Eid. During Eid, Muslims are encouraged to seek forgiveness.

It's often said that further public holidays cannot be considered due to the cost. Figures show that each public holiday costs the government £2.3 billion per day, and while

this is a staggering figure it does not take in to consideration that economic benefits that bank holidays can also bring. Public holidays enable citizens to take a day off work, allowing them to tend to their hobbies, take trips, get together with friends and family or engage in retail therapy. For this reason, they have a positive impact on commerce and leisure spending, especially for tourism due to the added recreation time. For instance, one study showed in 2019 that the two May bank holidays alone gave a boost of £118m to British small and medium businesses.

For this reason, we cannot make a case for or against further public holidays just on the basis of money. If we did, we wouldn't have any public holidays at all. There are bigger considerations we need to make. Wouldn't it be a statement as a nation to embrace these religions, and the people who hold them dear, by showing we are ready to recognise their place in our society? Creating these public holidays would be an important step towards promoting the understanding and tolerance of different faiths - not just at home, but abroad too.

'There have been no changes to the bank holiday system since 1871'

'School children are given two weeks off for Christmas but not even a single day for Eid'

Reconsidering the tragic tale of Lord Voldemort - is Voldy really all that mouldy?

George Smith (Y8) argues Voldemort is the victim of terrible circumstance and deserves our sympathy

Voldemort in J.K. Rowling's 'Harry Potter' book series is often seen as the epitome of evil, a murderous psychopath who causes the suffering and destruction of many a witch, wizard and muggle. He is the stereotypical villain: he dresses in black, uses forbidden curses and leads a posse of wizards called the 'Death Eaters'. He kills unicorns and drinks their blood. He resembles a snake and speaks parseltongue. He tried to kill an innocent baby! But wait a moment. Let's look again at him. What if there was more to he-who-shall-not-be-named than this villainy? What if he was just a product of years of bullying and abuse – merely caught in the hands of the dark arts? What if, the Dark Lord was actually a victim?

Childhood Trauma

Voldemort was born as Tom Marvolo Riddle on 31 December, 1926 at Wool's Orphanage in London. His father was Tom Riddle Senior, a wealthy Muggle who was forced into a relationship with Merope Gaunt through the suspected use of a love potion. Rowling has stated that Voldemort's conception by influence of Amortentia—the love potion—is related to his inability to understand love; it is "a symbolic way of showing that he came from a loveless union." Indeed, once the effects of the potion had worn off Riddle Senior quickly left the family home, leaving Merope poor, destitute and gravely ill.

This is what forced Merope to approach her local orphanage; perhaps she believed it was her unborn child's only chance of survival and consequently Riddle was raised without parents in a

shabby institution where he was relentlessly bullied by his peers. On one occasion this bullying resulted with him hanging another child's rabbit out of pure anger and despair. Another example where he reached his breaking point was when he led two children, Amy Benson and Dennis Bishop, against their will into a cave during a day trip out. What happened in the cave is a mystery but all we know is that Tom Riddle did something so terrible, the two would never speak of it again. For most readers this is irrefutable evidence of Voldemort's cruelty, of a man beyond redemption. Yet, when we read these actions in light of his traumatic childhood, I think they cast Voldemort in a different and more sympathetic light. Child maltreatment roughly doubles the probability that an individual engages in crime and so it is unsurprising that Voldemort inflicts the damage he does. While this does not justify his crimes, I believe it allows us to see Voldemort as a victim of terrible circumstance – of a loveless, parentless, homeless life and as someone who comes to the conclusion that he can't rely on anyone else but himself.

Later Adulthood

After leaving Hogwarts Riddle took a job at the antiques shop, Borgin and Burkes. It was during this time that he met the witch Hepzibah Smith who claimed to be a descendant of Helga Hufflepuff. Hepzibah took a liking to Riddle and showed him her most prized possession – the Hufflepuff cup, a lost heirloom of the late Miss Hufflepuff. Riddle stole it from her, seeing this as a chance to gain a new life of riches, fame and security.



'Riddle lived in constant fear, knowing he would be hunted down by this child'

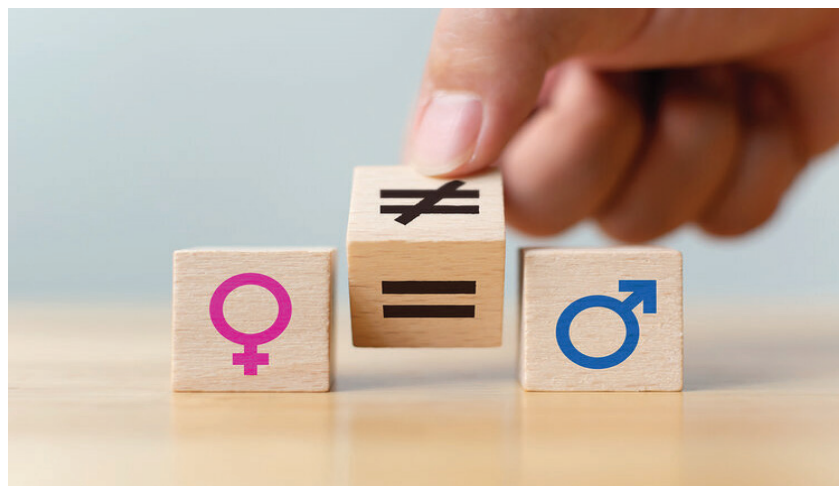
'Child maltreatment roughly doubles the probability that an individual engages in crime'

A despicable action you are probably thinking. But remember that poor Riddle could not feel love or friendship, so he did not steal the cup out of cruelty towards Hepzibah. It was a theft of opportunity.

Later, he took to the forests of Albania to take on more magical research. It was here that he learnt of a prophecy that told of his demise, that he would be killed by someone born at the end of July and that neither could live while the other survived. Paranoia would soon set in, causing Riddle to live in constant fear knowing he would be hunted down by this child. You can see then that when Riddle goes after Harry, he's not an evil sadist attacking a family 'just because'. He's trying to kill someone who he has been told with certainty will kill him. Telling someone with a fear of death that they are going to die (in a world with viable immortality) is particularly cruel. When you factor in the lack of upbringing Riddle received, is it really that shocking that he swept off to do something terrible?

Taking a look at gender bias in the education system: - because sexism isn't old school

Katy Hopkinson (Y8) exposes the stereotypes and institutionalised sexism children face on a daily basis and looks at how Mercia is leading the way in overcoming these issues



In December of 2017, the National Education Union (NEU) and UK Feminista launched a ground-breaking report on sexism in schools entitled: "It's Just Everywhere". The report found that sexual harassment, sexist language and sexist stereotypes are commonplace in schools with over a third of girls in mixed sex schools stating that they had personally experienced some form of sexual harassment at school. Many girls described how sexist behaviour was "just how it is", accepting the behaviour as a normal and expected part of their life. Similarly, according to Plan International UK, two in three girls between the ages of 14 and 21 have experienced sexual harassment in public and one in three had sexually harassing comments made about them in a public place. Although the rate in boys, 4 in 25 below the age of 18, is significantly lower, it is still too high by any stretch of the imagination. We need to tackle sexism in our schools if we are to break the mould – the expectations about men and women, and girls and boys,

that perpetuate harassment and gender injustice.

Let's take a look at the standard secondary school you would find in the UK. Walk down the corridor and you'll see gender-based loos, visit a PE lesson and you'll observe separate sports for girls and boys, glance at the uniform and you'll notice different expectations dependent on the child's 'presented' gender. Whether it is a student or teacher telling someone to 'man up' or 'don't be such a girl' – it is vital we challenge these stereotypes and call them out for what they are: sexism.

In PE it is understandable that certain gender divisions will be necessary – for instance having separate changing rooms for girls and boys. Yet, some schools continue to split up boys and girls for the PE sessions themselves. Thankfully, at Mercia School we promote inclusivity and actively encourage boys to do dance and girls to play football. We have mixed sports teams as well as single sex teams. Having mixed gender classes can also help to combat the stigma that certain sports have – for instance

that rugby is only for 'butch' girls. In primary school, we all did PE together; we swam, we ran, and we did athletics together. How in primary school did our gender not really matter but two years later it seems to define us?

Tackling sexism in schools requires all of us to take action, in particular by empowering our teachers. The NEU's report found that almost one in three teachers in mixed-sex secondary schools witness sexual harassment in their school on at least a weekly basis. A further 64% say they hear sexist language in school on at least a weekly basis. This is a shocking discovery and very worrying for teachers. How would you feel if your student was being sexually harassed but you could do nothing about it? I would feel powerless, and most teachers do. Think of a time you heard sexist language; how uncomfortable would you feel hearing this daily? We need to keep calling out sexist, racist, homophobic and transphobic slurs for what they are so that students know schools are a safe and protected space.

This is why in order to combat sexism in our schools we need a whole school approach. We need to empower our students and teachers so that they can call out and challenge sexism. This approach requires listening to students, taking their concerns seriously and drawing upon their lived experiences to talk about sexism in the classroom and throughout the curriculum. By doing this we can combat the stereotypes that often perpetuate harmful and narrow ideas about what it is to be a man or a woman. The stereotypes that often normalise sexual harassment in the first place.

'How in primary school did our gender not really matter but two years later it seems to define us?'

'We need to combat the stereotypes that perpetuate harmful ideas about what it is to be a man or a woman'

Academia and aspirations: What The Scholars Programme has taught me about further education

Aimi Shabir (Y8) explains what she learnt about academia and university by being part of The Brilliant Club

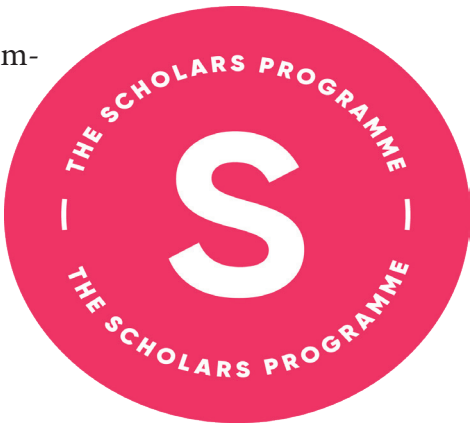
In 2020, a selection of pupils from Year 8 and Year 9 were chosen to be in the Scholars Programme. This is a programme run by an organisation called ‘The Brilliant Club’ that provides students with the opportunity to work with a PhD researcher and experience university-style learning. It helps them to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to secure a place at highly selective universities. During our time in the programme, we were able to explore literature in a deeper, more thought-provoking way by reading texts through a particular critical lens. This was a great opportunity for those students to experience English in a higher level than what they would normally do in class.

The Brilliant Club exists to increase the number of pupils from underrepresented backgrounds progressing to highly selective universities and aims to decrease the entrenched link between a pupil’s background and their access to higher education. It provides pupils with an experience of

university-style learning through seven tutorials and two trips to highly selective universities. Qualities that we were able to develop from working within the programme have been teamwork, time management, confidence, problem solving and communication skills. Pupils work towards completing a challenging final assignment about the topic they were studying and then receive a final grade.

Our PHD tutor, Lucy Kay-Brownson, helped us to understand more developed ways of writing an essay. At Mercia school the topic we were studying was ‘Through the Looking Glass: An introduction to Literary theory’ which was very interesting. Extracts we read and annotated throughout the tutorials included Don Quixote’s ‘Windmills’ where we discussed the use of Chivalric Romance and we also applied feminist readings to Carol Ann Duffy’s ‘Medusa’ and Maya Angelou’s ‘Caged Bird’. At the end of the tutorials, we had to choose a fairy tale to write our final essay about

“The Brilliant Club exists to increase the number of pupils from under-represented backgrounds progressing to highly selective universities”



and I chose Little Red Riding Hood. A couple of weeks later we received our results and 100% of pupils achieved a 2:1 or above in their dissertation.

All pupils who participated received 60 hours of tutoring from their PhD supervisor which allowed 16/24 pupils to achieve a 1st in their final dissertation. Overall, Mercia pupils outperformed other students in different nations across the United Kingdom and did exceptionally well. In 2021, the pupils who participated in the Scholars Programme were able to graduate through a zoom call which was better than not being able to graduate at all. During the call, we listened to three undergraduates who were currently studying at Christ Church College at Oxford University. They told us about the degree they were studying and what their life was like at Oxford University. We were able to ask them questions to help us understand a university lifestyle and it helped us gain an idea of what we would like to do in the future. During the second part of the call, it was the certification ceremony where we watched our names being called out for the graduation part. I enjoyed being a part of the programme as it was new and different but ultimately very exciting to be able to discover topics about literature.



How students have learnt the art of translation for an Oxford University competition

Dira Stinton (Y9) explains how students at Mercia School were prepared for submitting a French translation as part of The Anthea Bell Young Translators competition



Translation: the process of translating words or text from one language to another. At first glance, it can seem like a simple task provided you know the vocabulary. However, translation is a difficult art to master, considering context, history, audience, and many other factors. At Mercia School, we have a passion for translation, so much so that the French Department has made it possible for students to enter a competition run by the University of Oxford, The Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators.

Over the past few weeks, Miss Heritage and Miss Bunn have run sessions to help us improve our translating skills; practising with both literary and non-literary texts in preparation for the competition text.

The first text we translated was a comic strip about an evacuee sent to live with a French family in the countryside during the Second World War. Whilst translating, we had to consider the way the text type of a comic strip affected our translations; the text had to fit neatly inside the speech bubbles provided, to make it easy for the target audience to read. We also

discussed the differing ways some colloquial French phrases could be translated. In one instance, wordplay was created in the source text around a French term of endearment, 'ma petite puce' (literally, 'my little flea') to which the evacuee responds 'mon grand pou' (literally, 'my big louse'). We had to work as translators on conveying the same humour through a similar pun in English. The source text is displayed as a pull-out quote and some translations of the wordplay are offered below:

"Do you remember your new name pup?...Annick, my old dog" (Ehsaan Ali, 8D)

"Do you remember your name from now on, my little pumpkin?...Mt name is Annick, my big courgette." (Aya Khamkham, 8C)

Year 8 and Year 9 translators then worked on a non-fiction text about the artistic movement of Impressionism. We had to learn about the historical context of this movement, including prominent painters and the artistic techniques they used. The text focused on a painting by Claude Monet. Here, we had to understand the key artistic terminology and apply it

correctly throughout the piece, while also making it easy for the younger target audience to understand. During Miss Heritage's sessions, we looked at some Impressionist paintings to gain a deeper insight into what the text was trying to convey.

Finally, after much preparation and practice, we received the competition extract. It was from a novel called 'Le Jardin du dedans-dehors' which can be translated as 'The Inside-Outside Garden'. The novel was about a young girl and her family who move to Iran during a time of conflict and instability but find solace in their new garden. We had to ensure that we struck the correct balance between respecting the original figurative language of the French version, but also being able to enjoy some creative freedom in certain aspects of the text. Our translations have now been submitted and we cannot wait to see the results! Everyone did an incredible job and learned a lot about the world of translation. We all had an amazing time pushing ourselves to create the best translation we could and we are so excited for any translation opportunities that present themselves in the future.

'Tu te rappelles comment tu t'appelles désormais ma petite puce?...Je m'appelle Annick, mon grand pou'



Restrictions and rigged elections: Taking a look at Belarus, the last European dictatorship

Sergio Deska (Y8) exposes the oppression and fear Belarusians continue to suffer at the hands of their president, Alexander Lukashenko

President Alexander Lukashenko has been in power for nearly 27 years and is nicknamed by some as “Europe’s last dictator”. Officially, he won last year’s election by a landslide victory of 79.7% is now in his sixth term as president - an election opposition movements and Western governments are claiming was rigged.

Lukashenko’s rival, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who ran for election after her husband Sergei Tikhanovsky, a famous Belarusian Youtuber, was sent to jail for inciting social hatred, claims she received 60 to 70% of the vote. I believe her because the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, a top election monitoring body, say that all previous elections held during Lukashenko’s reign were never judged free and fair. But, after his assertion of victory, Lukashenko assumed power and Tsikhanouskaya fled to Lithuania to escape threats of arrest and possibly even death. Lukashenko is pure evil and corrupt. He also will do anything to stay in power.

One way that Lukashenko maintains his power is by inciting fear and distrust of the West amongst his people. This was seen clearly during the Coronavirus pandemic when Western countries first started implementing lockdowns across Europe. Lukashenko did not follow heed, telling his people “I am convinced that we may suffer more from panic than from the virus”. Rather than arm his people with knowledge of the virus and how to stay safe, Lukashenko advised Belarusians that in order to combat the virus they should work hard, drink vodka and go to the sauna. Apparently COVID is immune



to spirits and steam. This utter buffoonery also recalls the words of Trump, who recommended that Americans inject themselves with bleach to protect themselves from the virus.

Like most dictators, Lukashenko also cruelly oppresses and silences anybody who challenges his power. The country’s powerful secret police - still called the KGB - closely monitors dissidents. Earlier this year, in February, the police violently arrested more than 100 people in Minsk when they were protesting peacefully for free and fair elections in Belarus. Activists like Olga Kovalka, who fled to Poland, have to leave Belarus as she faced jail time for speaking against the president.

More recently, Lukashenko has come under fire for the detention of an opposition Belarusian journalist and his girlfriend. Roman Protasevich and his Russian girlfriend Sofia Sapega are bloggers who speak out against Lukashenko’s rule. They were flying home to Lithuania from Greece when their plane was forced to land in Minsk

after a reported bomb threat. Belarus has claimed the flight was diverted because of an emailed bomb threat from Hamas, but the Palestinian militant group denies any involvement. As the plane landed witnesses said Protasevich was “super scared”, and one quoted him as saying “I’ll get the death penalty here”. He had been charged with inciting mass protests, but Belarus’s KGB security agency also placed him on a list of “individuals involved in terrorist activity”. A confession tape was later released, where Protasevich praised Lukashenko and admitted attempting to overthrow him. On his wrists there were visible marks, seeming to imply he had been tortured and coerced into giving the confession. Lukashenko has since said he was only “thinking about the country’s security”, attempting to pass off his oppression as the actions of a responsible leader. The reality is that Lukashenko is nothing more than a tyrant and if we do not continue to protest and challenge his power, Belarus will soon become the European North Korea - if not worse.

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Hong Kong's fight for freedom: the little island refusing to be silenced in its quest for democracy

Leonardo Watson and Jeremiah Donovan (Y7) condemn China's tightening grip over Hong Kong, a country desperate for change and democratic leadership



In the early 1980s the communist government in China argued that Hong Kong, which had been a British colony for the past 150 years, should be returned to Chinese rule. The two sides signed a treaty that would see Hong Kong return to China in 1997, under the principle of “one country, two systems”. China promised it would give Hong Kong fifty years to keep its capitalist system and enjoy many freedoms not found in mainland Chinese cities. As a result, Hong Kong has its own legal system and borders, and protected rights including free speech and freedom of the press.

But it seems that these promises are fading. In recent years, Beijing has taken what critics say are brazen steps to encroach on Hong Kong's political system and crackdown on dissent. For instance, in 2003, the Hong Kong government proposed national security legislation that would have prohibited treason, secession, sedition, and subversion against the Chinese government. In 2012, it tried to amend Hong Kong schools' curricula to foster Chinese national identity, which

many residents saw as Chinese propaganda. And in 2014, Beijing proposed a framework for universal suffrage, allowing Hong Kongers to vote for the city's chief executive but only from a Beijing-approved short list of candidates. Protesters organized massive rallies, known as the Umbrella Movement, to call for true democracy.

More recently in 2019, China attempted to pass an extradition bill that would have allowed the Hong Kong government to consider requests from any country seeking extradition of criminal suspects. This would have meant people wanted for crimes in China could be sent there to face trial. It faced a massive backlash because Hong Kong did not want its residents to be exposed to China's deeply flawed justice system. Reports of police brutality, including the excessive use of tear gas and rubber bullets further exacerbated tensions. On August 12, 2019 thousands gathered at the airport to condemn police brutality, causing over 200 flights to be cancelled. I should know because I arrived on that very day (Leo Watson). It was

peaceful and meaningful in what they wanted to show. Rumours that riot squads were about to arrive spread all afternoon and many left early. Feeling deceived, angry protesters returned to the airport on August 13 and actively blocked passengers from boarding. Footage of police officers hitting people with batons and using pepper spray were widely circulated and helped garner condemnation from the international community. Finally, after months of protests, the government finally withdrew its plans to pass the bill in September 2019.

‘Beijing has taken brazen steps to encroach on Hong Kong's political system’

‘This legislation effectively criminalizes any dissent and allows Beijing to establish a security force’

Beijing took its most assertive action yet on June 30, 2020, when it imposed a new national security law on the city. The legislation effectively criminalizes any dissent and allows Beijing to establish a security force in Hong Kong and influence the selection of judges who will hear national security cases. Pro-democracy activists have condemned the bill and expressed fears that it could be “the end of Hong Kong.” Indeed, in the months after, police arrested dozens of Hong Kong's most prominent pro-democracy activists. These moves have silenced many Hong Kong residents who had fought for democracy and prompted others to flee the city.

Hong Kong is fast eroding the human rights of its residents and has become a worrying example of how far China will go to expand its communist empire. The international community needs to do more to protect the country and speak out against China's brutal oppression. You can help victims Hong Kong's police brutality by donating on the official website hongkongwatch.org/donate.

The Palestine crisis is a failure of global leadership that has ignored the suffering of millions

Zeeshan Ali (Y8) criticises the continuing conflict in the Middle-East between Palestine and Israel, and argues more must be done to protect innocent civilians

History of the conflict
The roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict stretch all the way back to the end of World War One, when Britain took control of the area known as Palestine after the ruler of that part of the Middle East was defeated in the war. The land was inhabited by a Jewish minority and Arab majority. Tensions between these groups grew when the international community gave Britain the task of establishing a “national home” in Palestine for Jewish people. For Jews it was their ancestral home, but Palestinian Arabs also claimed the land and opposed the move.

This tension was catalysed further in the wake of World War 2. The Holocaust had left 6 million Jewish people dead and many more refugees without a land of their own to return to. This prompted Jewish leaders to declare the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, taking a large part of Palestine for their own. Many Palestinians objected and a war followed. Hundreds of

thousands of Palestinians fled or were forced out of their homes in what they call Al Nakba, or the “Catastrophe”. By the time the fighting ended in a ceasefire the following year, Gaza was controlled by Egypt and another area, the West Bank, by Jordan. They contained thousands of Palestinians who fled what was now the new Jewish home, Israel. Neither they nor their descendants have been allowed by Israel to return to their homes.

Israel still occupies the West Bank, and although it pulled out of Gaza in 2005 the UN still regards that piece of land as occupied territory. It is currently ruled by the Palestinian militant group Hamas, which has fought Israel many times. The international community often labels Hamas as a terrorist organisation. It refuses to recognise Israel as a country and wants Palestinians to be able to return to their former home – and they are willing to use violence to achieve its aims. Since then, Israel has held Gaza under a blockade, with means

it controls its borders and limits who can get in and out.

Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank say they are suffering because of Israeli actions and restrictions. Israel says it is only acting to protect itself from Palestinian violence.

The Situation Today

The conflict seen in the recent weeks and months is the result of Palestinians protesting for recognition of their ancestral home. When the international community gave the Jewish people a home of their own in 1948, they simultaneously denied the Palestinians own existence. They made them exiles in their own land. This is why over 150,000 people took to the streets of London to protest the Israeli airstrikes of Gaza that left over 219 dead. When Muslims were celebrating Eid happily with their families in the UK, Palestinians were praying for a day when the attacks would stop, praying for a day when they could go safely out from their barricaded city to look for food, praying for a day when they would not be worried they could lose their home or their family.

The international community needs to do more to help the people of Palestine. Countries like the USA have sent billions to Israel for Military Assistance but where is the help for the people of Palestine? The situation in Palestine is a failure of global leadership and for too long we have ignored the suffering of Palestinians and Israelis trapped in this conflict. My hope inshallah is that Palestine is free one day. I and many other Muslims would love to go to Masjid Al Aqsa to see our heritage and where our prophets have been.

‘Palestinians were forced out of their homes in what they now call Al Nakba, or the ‘Catastrophe’

‘The international community has denied the Palestinians own existence’



The hidden migrant crisis at the Mexican border: should the US government be doing more?

Julia van Eeden (Y7) explores the growing crisis of the immigrants arriving at the Mexican border, who risk their lives in the hope of achieving The American Dream

The Mexican border crisis traces its origins back to the 1970s, when a large influx of migrants arrived at the border between Mexico and the US. The large amount of migrants, all arriving in a short amount of time, overwhelmed the federal agencies in the USA. This is primarily because the migrants try to enter the country in one of two ways: by seeking asylum, which is only granted if their home is deemed 'dangerous', or by hiding in vehicles and therefore travelling undetected across unprotected and typically treacherous sections of the border.

The height of the crisis, however, came in April 2018 when the USA, under the presidency of Donald Trump, tightened its already strict border controls. These laws stated that any adult crossing the border illegally could face criminal proceedings. This forcibly separated over 2,300 children from their parents, creating high levels of trauma and harm to these young people. Furthermore, over 68,000 children arrived at the border unaccompanied. Many of these children are then held in prison-like detention centres with very little care for their health and well-being, while having very limited freedom. These centres fail federal standards by all accounts: excessive overcrowding, poor hygiene and terrible food standards. Many children sleep on mats on the ground with thin foil blankets. Save the Children CEO Mark Shriver calls the legislation passed by the US government "a grave violation of children's rights." The high number of unaccompanied children resulted in them being



put into facilities used previously for adults, usually with even worse conditions.

Many organisations are urging the US government to intervene in order to protect vulnerable children. In November of 2020, this came in the form of a US district court judge blocking the expulsion of unaccompanied children caught crossing into the United States. Yet, while one issue was being remedied, another more dangerous one was brewing: the outbreak of Covid-19. This saw the US order a complete shut-down of its borders and it began to immediately turn away families without giving them an opportunity to seek asylum. As a result, families had to camp in violent border cities and face detainment in immigration facilities. With one of the world's highest recorded death tolls, it is hard to believe such areas were safe from the virus. Consequently, many children are getting harmed. Obviously, the Biden government is doing things differently compared to Trump, but is this all good?

'These detention centres fail federal standards by all accounts'

'Covid-19 saw the US order a complete shut-down of its borders and deny asylum to vulnerable immigrants'

Biden's government stunned his supporters by announcing plans to only allow 15,000 refugees into the US in 2021 but increased this to 62,500 after a large backlash. On the other hand, the zero-tolerance policy created by Mr Trump has been reversed, and Biden is seeing that families are reunited, though over 1000 families remain separated. Biden has also allowed entry for all of the minors arriving at the border. Though this all sounds welcoming and inclusive, Mr Biden has called for migrants to not attempt the dangerous journey to the US in an effort to stem the recent influx. "I can say quite clearly: don't come over," he said in an ABC News interview in March.

While the US has a duty of care to protect its citizens against the virus, this should not come at the cost of others' human rights. Detainment should only be used when a necessary and proportional measure of last resort. We all share the responsibility to push for fair and accessible asylum procedures and humane reception of migrants.