



THE ECHO

TODAY & TOMORROW

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INTO THE FUTURE

OPENING LETTER:

Abby Apeland
Staff Writer

Each year, the game of life is restarted with new twists and turns, ups and downs and unprecedented events that we have to face. It constantly challenges us mentally, emotionally, physically and brings change to our everyday livelihood. With these changes, we have to ask ourselves whether we will let this impact our lives positively or negatively. Nothing is definitely a problem or benefit, but rather it is how you choose to perceive it. However, when we entered 2020, we were hit with a damning new element that would indefinitely change our lives.

No one knew what to expect or be able to guess the severity of this virus- the calamity and chaos that would soon follow. Countries shut down their states, scientists raced to learn as much as possible, people who never cared about the news became avid watchers and the media became vital to our everyday lives as people hoped to learn something about our new scary situation. Small businesses and companies to big and successful corporations shared the similar feeling of trepidation against their uncertain reality. People were dying, suffering and everything was up in the air. As governments and scientists worked together to figure out a solution, we had to begin living our new normalcy of quarantine.

Quarantine came with its own addition of struggles, people were in a constant state of fear, isolation and uncertainty. However, we started to find positives in our new lives, as people found ways to come together and spread joy. Human ingenuity was, and still is, being challenged to think outside of the box and adapt to make the best of our situation- often-times, social media being used to connect with others. Some people decided to take this time to focus on

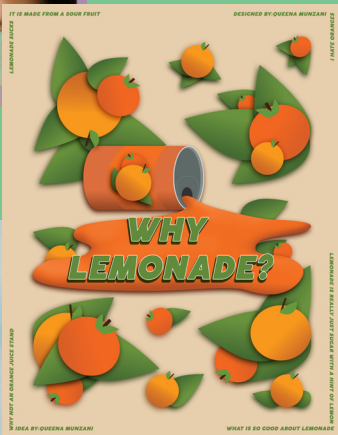
themselves and improve their own wellbeing, mentally and physically. People turned their time and energy into working out, meditating, reflecting on themselves and progress on their own goals. Our best and worst versions of ourselves were revealed as many things happened and many things changed.

With our strength and humanity, we adapt and survive. 2020 was a year where we were faced with unpredictable times of turmoil and life-altering changes in our society. Many new and old issues were brought up and fought for; however, we took these happenings and overcame them. We have learned more about ourselves, the true value of the things and people in our lives at a greater insight.

With the vaccine in the works, there is a brighter future for this 2021, though the fight with COVID-19 is not close to the end and more obstacles will eventually come our way, we have the values and lessons brought on from our experiences this past year to use as a guide. Many unforgettable events happened that will change the course of history. To our fellow students and staff, with 2020 down for the history books and the numerous pages they will write on it in the future, let's ring in this new year with a blank slate that 2021 will provide for us to make it our own.

ARTMAKING IN QUARANTINE

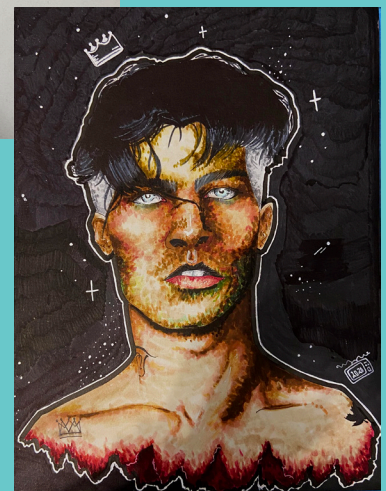
QUEENA MUNZANI found a wholesome positive to the pandemic, stating that “I was able to create more work for the people I love, and develop my own unique style that I pass on throughout all my works”. Similar to other artists, Queena uses the extra time virtual learning grants students to develop her own, beautiful style.



ZAHRA SAJJAD, a Senior, admits that “quarantine has made a hit on my overall spark of inspiration and my confidence in what I do,” aligning with many other frustrated artists. Finding the positive side of this pandemic, Zahra also stated

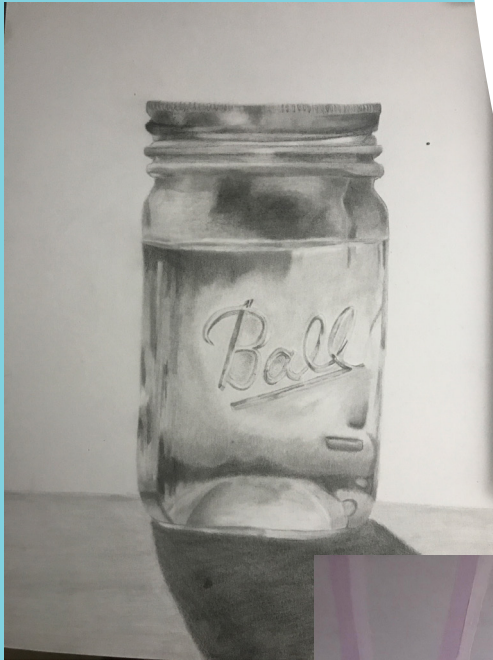


“I started to really refine my style and reflect on what my art really is and the messages I want to send through it.”

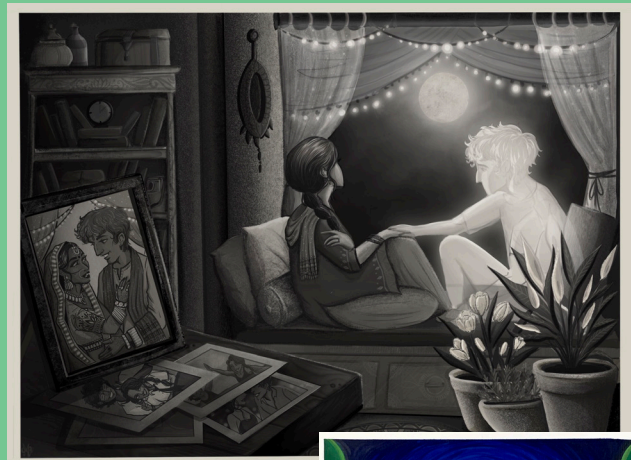


ANTINE

Neuqua artists have roamed farther outside the box than ever this year due to the limitations COVID-19 sets when it comes to artmaking- with limited access to materials typically available through any art class, less opportunities for peer critiques, and essentially no hands-on instruction. Students taking art classes virtually have been forced to adapt to these new circumstances in regards to their artistic process in many new ways. The Echo gathered the opinions and works of Neuqua students enrolled in AP Studio, an advanced art class full of extremely talented artists, to see what our very own creatives have to say about these unusual times.

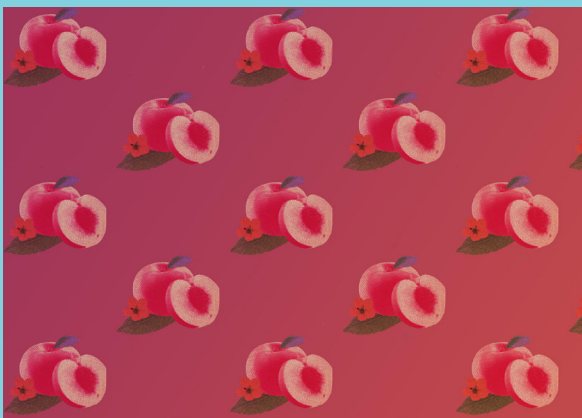


SAMANTHA GO, like many throughout the pandemic, found herself more stressed than usual. However, she describes that “I’ve been working in my sketchbook and I’ve gotten noticeably better because of how I often used artmaking as an outlet for my stress during the pandemic.”



ANUSHKA SINHA expresses that “there was no one around that I could discuss my ideas with, or even get to watch/experience other people’s art making process, one of my favorite things that feed my creativity.”

Many artists, along with Anushka, find that inspiration from peers is a big motivation that they miss in the virtual learning environment.



BEHIND THE DESK

A LOOK INTO E-LEARNING

Sachin Fong & Ben LeGrand
Staff Writers

Neuqua Valley has been doing E Learning for nearly 6 months now. With the push back on a return date and many schedule changes, E Learning has certainly provided students with an entire new batch of problems to adapt to. With 1st semester coming to a close, We interviewed students from every class to get some students' perspectives on E Learning.

HOW HAVE YOU LIKED E LEARNING SO FAR?

There were many differing opinions and views about the E Learning situation. Many students enjoyed it while others despised it. One junior said, "E-learning is good! I've definitely been more comfortable working from home." While another junior claimed they disliked E Learning because of the at-home distractions, "E-Learning has honestly been kind of a pain because it's so hard to stay focused when there are so many things around you that can distract you." One sophomore summed it up well, "I both like and dislike E Learning. It is good because it gives me the opportunity to be more in control of what I do and when I do it. This control is really nice. However, I really dislike the fact that there is no social aspect of school anymore. I have to keep in touch with friends outside of school which is hard with the amount of homework and activities that I have." With many differing opinions from each student and grade, the opinion of E-Learning is certainly varied. As with most choices, it has its pros and cons. While some students are enjoying the at-home freedom, others struggle to stay focused with so many distractions.

The Freshman have an interesting perspective to E Learning as well. Going through their first year as a Wildcat without being in school provided a tough situation. "It has been really good, but I would much rather be in school. It is hard to learn school through

a screen and it is hard to meet new people. Sometimes I don't know anybody in my class because I'm a freshman so it has been a little hard to make friends." The lack of meeting new teachers, staff, and friends as a Freshman is certainly a challenge. Another Freshman feels they have gotten used to E Learning, "E-learning, at first, was something to get used to. I missed the social interaction, but I appreciate all of my teachers efforts to make class more engaging. Now that I've been doing online classes for a little bit, I feel like the convenience of waking up a little later and ending school a little earlier makes it more efficient." Many students have certainly adapted to E Learning and are settled with the current situation. Another Sophomore had a similar feeling and response, "E learning now at least isn't as hard as it used to be. At the beginning of the year it was weird to wake up and go to school but now I feel like I have adapted to it and I'm enjoying it." After 1 semester, many students have accepted the situation and made the best out of it. There are certainly pros and cons, and an overall dislike for E Learning, but many students have accepted these and grown to adapt.

WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF E LEARNING? THE WORST?

Almost every student said that the best part of E Learning was the flexibility and being able to work from home. One sophomore even went to say they could attend your zooms from their bed, "The best part of E-Learning is that I get to stay home.

"I ALSO REALLY LIKE THE AB SCHEDULE; IT HELPS ME STRUCTURE MY WEEK AND STAY ON TOP OF MY WORK"

If I don't feel like getting out of bed for a class, I could move materials to my bed and just do it from the comfort of my bed, even though technically it isn't recommended." Students also like the flexibility of the schedule and the ease of all their work in one place, "The best part of E learning is the fact that lesson plans are posted online for most of my classes and there's an abundance of resources still which helps me a lot in all of my classes." stated one junior. Another sophomore likes the AB schedule and the ease of doing homework with it, "The best part of e-learning is definitely the early release time which gives me more time for homework and doing the stuff I enjoy doing out of school. I also really like the AB schedule which helps me structure my week and stay on top of my work." The freedom and flexibility is something that many students have found positive during the E Learning environment.

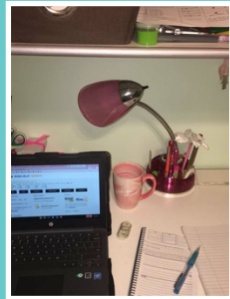


Photo: Megan Huynh, Sophomore

THE WORST?

Overwhelmingly the students surveyed said that the lack of seeing people, interacting with teachers, and meeting new friends is the worst part about E Learning. "The worst is the inability to make new friends through Zoom. Every year I look forward to meeting new people in my classes, but it's super hard to do that through Zoom..." said one sophomore." A senior agreed, adding on the sad part of missing their senior year, "The worst part of E learning is the lack of social interaction because we are all on Zoom and it's hard to deal with due to the fact that I'm a senior and I miss seeing everyone." The social environment is one of the best parts of school. The lack of one during E Learning makes it very difficult.

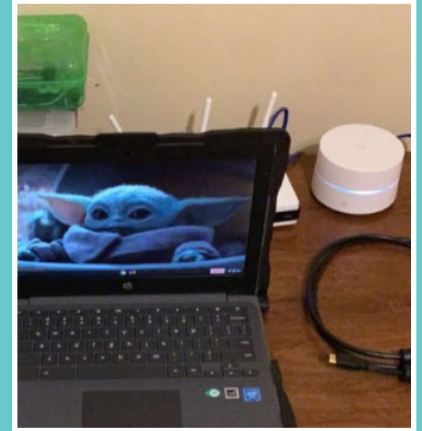


Photo: Ritesh Mukherji, Sophomore

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE LEARNING?

10 students said they do feel like they are learning, while 5 said they are not. Many students said they need to put more effort into paying attention, "Honestly, I think that if I put in more effort I would learn much more because the teachers have been very helpful. However, sometimes I struggle pushing myself to put in more effort which has made me feel like I am learning less than I was in person." Maintaining effort levels in a suboptimal time like this has made school very hard. Another student credited their teachers for remaining involved trying to teach, "I do believe that I'm learning. My teachers are doing a great job at getting the lesson taught via zoom." While another student says they feel the amount of learning they do depends from teacher to teacher, "In some classes yes but in others no based on how my teachers teach." Online learning is very challenging, but the students and teachers continue to work on it until school comes back January 25th.

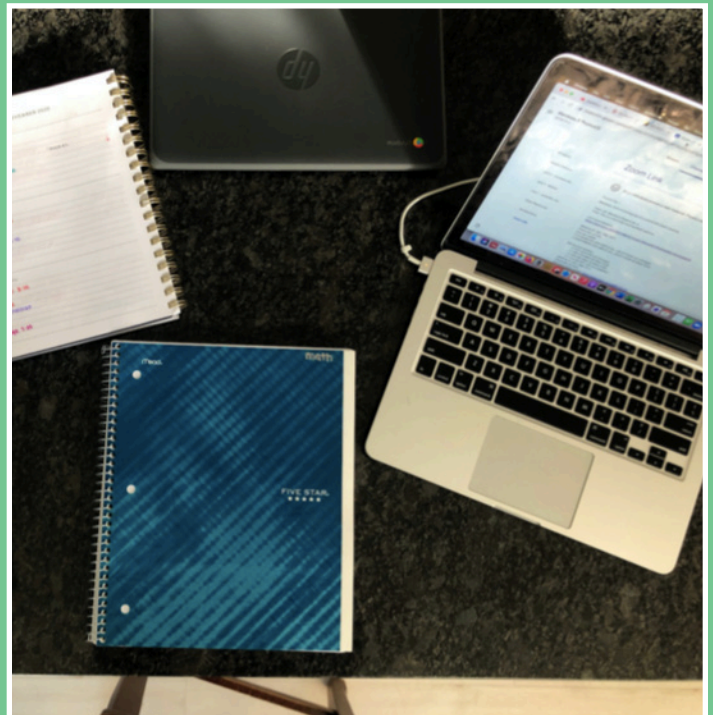


Photo: Gabrielle Cristofaro, Junior

WHAT'S ONE INTERESTING EXPERIENCE YOU'VE HAD SO FAR DURING E LEARNING?

With the new school environment, new experiences will certainly occur. We asked the students to give us some of their funniest, and craziest moments.

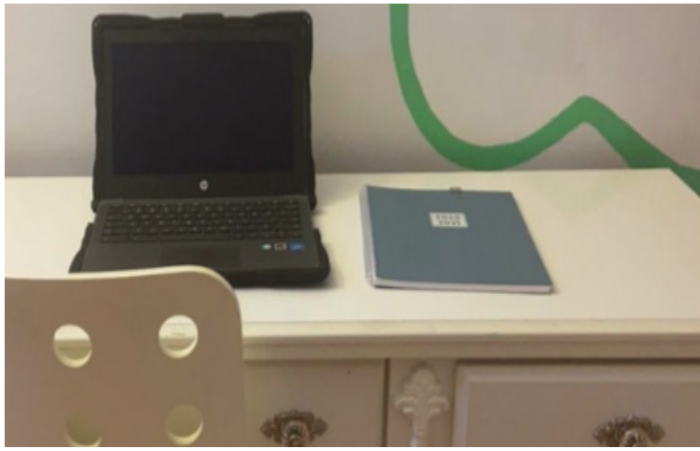


Photo: Ava Stipp, Freshman

One Junior said their dog makes paying attention a bit more complicated, "Some interesting experiences I've had during E Learning is having to stay focused on a really loud household. For example, someone will ring the doorbell and my dog will go crazy in the middle of one of my classes so it can be difficult paying attention in an at home environment." Pets,

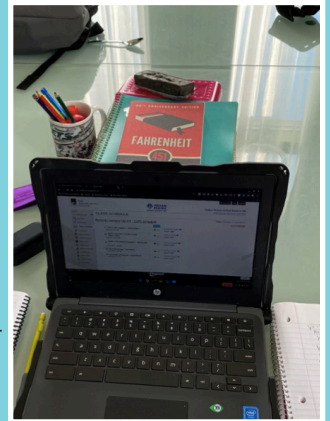


Photo: Ava Stipp, Freshman

and loud family members are definitely new obstacles in E Learning. A freshman had a similar experience with their family, "I have a brother and a sister, and they sometimes spy on me while I'm on Zoom and always try to be in the background of my camera." E Learning has provided these new, and sometimes funny, happenings of everyday school life.

OVERALL, WHAT'S YOUR OPINION ON E-LEARNING?

Of the 15 students interviewed, 9 students liked E Learning, and 7 students strongly disliked it. Every student added that they understand that E Learning is the best option and almost every student said they would much rather be in school as well. "I think E-Learning is our best option right now due to not spreading covid, but is always inconvenient and harder than actually going in person." This statement from a Junior student sums up most of the responses. The students are doing the best they can to adapt to E Learning and making the most out of

"IF YOU SET A ROUTINE FOR YOURSELF AND LOOK AT THE POSITIVE ASPECTS IN REGARDS TO IT HELPING YOUR GRADES OR IN THE DIFFERENT NEW ACTIVITIES YOU CAN EXPERIENCE EVERYDAY, YOU WILL BE MORE MOTIVATED TO WORK HARD!"

- JESSICA PIMENTEL, SENIOR

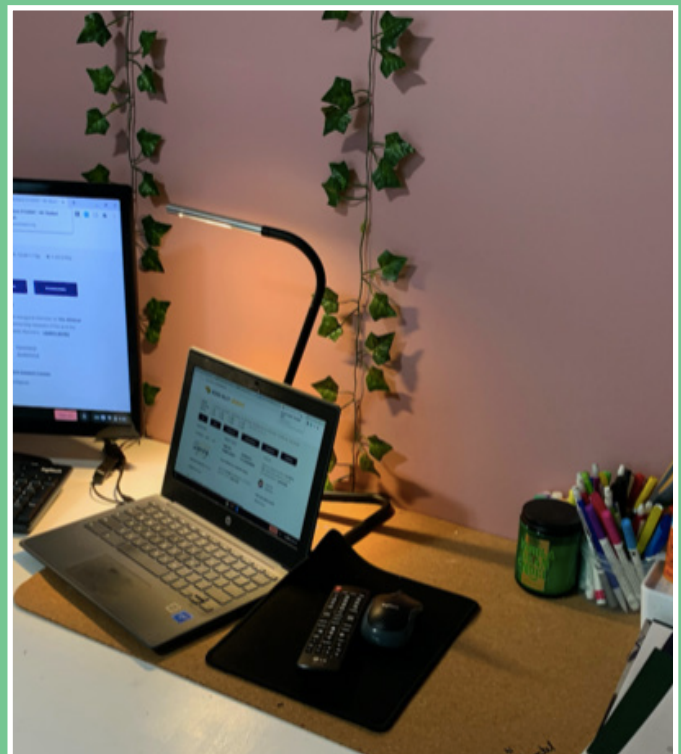


Photo: Jessica Pimentel, Senior

Looking Back: Covid-19 and the Holidays

Abigail Apeland
Staff Writer

With COVID-19 as a dark, ominous shadow looming over our daily regimes, the virus held no exceptions to impacting the holidays. As the year progressed, many people hoped for an improvement to the pandemic situation. This was not the reality. In fact, numbers of cases started rising back up just when schools like Neuqua Valley High School were about to reopen to in-person learning. With family members and friends longing to reconnect and bask in the holiday cheer and positivity once more, a critical point was amiss- that COVID-19 would cease to exist during the holiday season.

This was not the case as a surge of COVID cases shot up recently in many states, including Illinois. With this new occurrence, government officials of each state have been urging the public to stay home with their immediate family, as it was a major concern that cases would rapidly rise over the holidays. There was the underlying fear that the public would ignore government officials' warnings. Proving this fear was reality, COVID cases went up as families travelled all over for gatherings and vacations, increasing the risk of spreading COVID to others.

However, there have been many creative solutions to still connect with family and friends. Utilizing technology, like the app Zoom, to host virtual meetings and connect with others remotely, people are reinventing what communication entails. The Center of Disease Control and Prevention has posted suggestions on how to safely celebrate any holidays. Wearing masks, social distancing while eating outside, limiting the number of

guests and celebrating with the people you have been staying with. Another option was to safely prepare any home-cooked food and goods and deliver them to families and friends in a contactless way, for example, leaving it on their porch.

With these officials' suggestions, some fellow Neuqua students have chimed in on how covid has changed their holiday plans and what they are doing instead.

How have your plans for the holidays changed this year?

Manya Iyer, sophomore, responded, "usually I take a vacation with my family, but this year we have chosen to be socially distant for the holidays and only see those who have also been social distancing. This year, instead of going on vacation, we are spending Christmas and New Years at home."

"My family and I would be traveling to India this year which we do every other year, so that was canceled. However, I'm safely going shopping with my sister when she comes back from college," said Kabir Singh, junior.

Finally, Alyssa Coscino, senior said, "We would always go to Downtown Chicago and eat at a restaurant and then go to the Kris Kringle market, but we aren't doing that this year due to COVID. Also, we are isolating from our nana, who usually visits us, as she is at higher risk."

How has COVID-19 positively or negatively affected the holidays for you?

Coscino said, "COVID has negatively affected my family for the holidays because it's obviously harder to celebrate the holidays while still following the COVID guidelines, especially with my big family."

"Well, there's cancelled trips, but also I won't be able to celebrate my birthday with friends and our family in general won't meet up with other people," Singh noted.

Iyer has found both positive and negative aspects of the lockdown: "COVID has allowed me to spend more time with my family and the people I love. However it has also prevented me from doing things outside and with more people. I miss the after school adventures and wish COVID would end so things could go back to the way they were. COVID has been a blessing and a curse at the same time."

What do the holidays mean to you and your family?

Iyer particularly enjoys time with her family: "the holidays are special because it is a time for us to bond and have fun! We usually get take out and watch movies all night long. Being able to take time off of work and school allows us to spend quality time together."

Similarly, Alyssa Coscino said, "For our family, the holidays are for spending time with family and sharing food and gifts."

Singh responded, "The holidays mean getting a chance to reset, be thankful for those around you, and prepare yourself for the new year."

While there were many setbacks during the holidays brought about by lockdown measures and social distancing requirements, the spirit of the holidays was by no means shattered.

Families who often travel had to completely revamp their holiday plans in order to adhere to quarantine travel restrictions. However, the time spent at home served as a sort of reset for many. Families such as the Iyer household found fun at home through classic activities such as board games, movies nights, or baking holiday sweets.

Another challenge brought about by lockdown was isolation. Families such as the Coscino clan could not unite with high-risk family members like grandparents. However, many were quick to pick up some new tech -often the infamous Zoom call- to remedy this separation.

All in all, the juggernaut that is COVID-19 proved to be quite the wrench in the works for the holidays, but families were to work around it. Regardless of what the 2021 holidays will have in store for us next winter, we can be sure to look back at the holidays of 2020 as a once-in-a-lifetime winter.



Photo: Maya Stone, Staff Writer