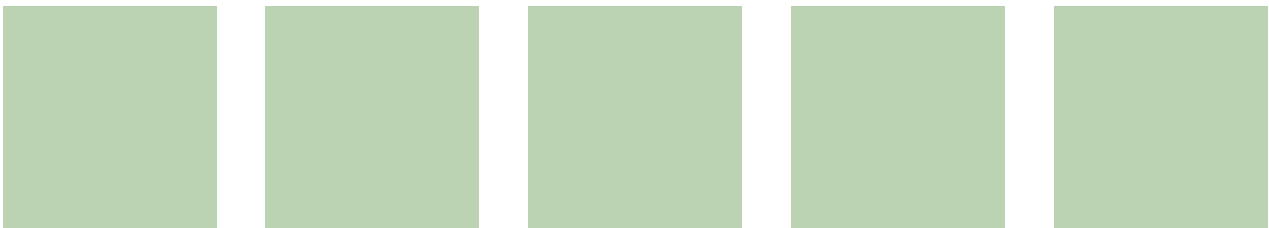
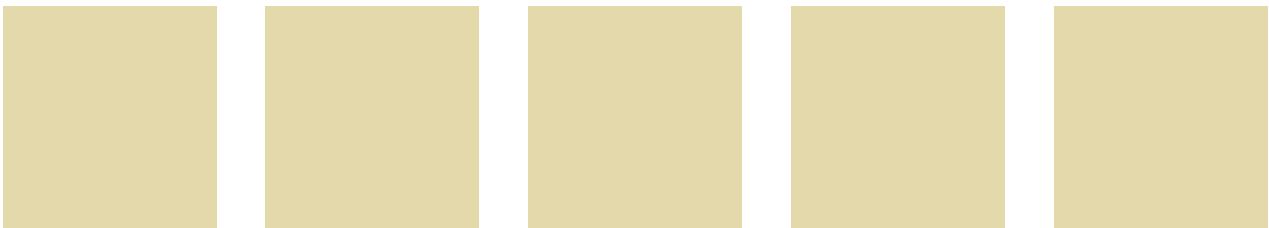
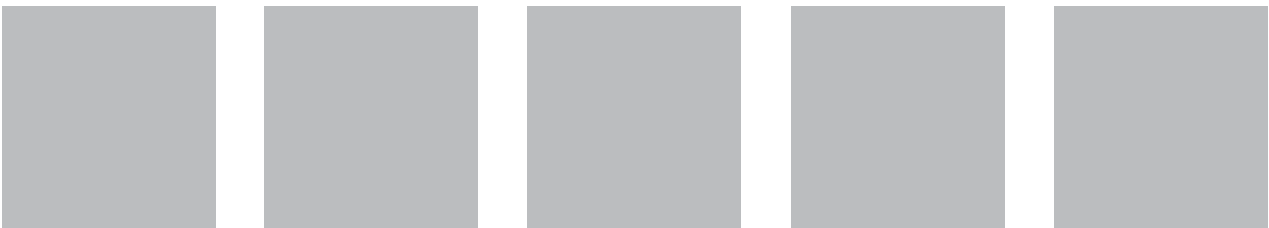
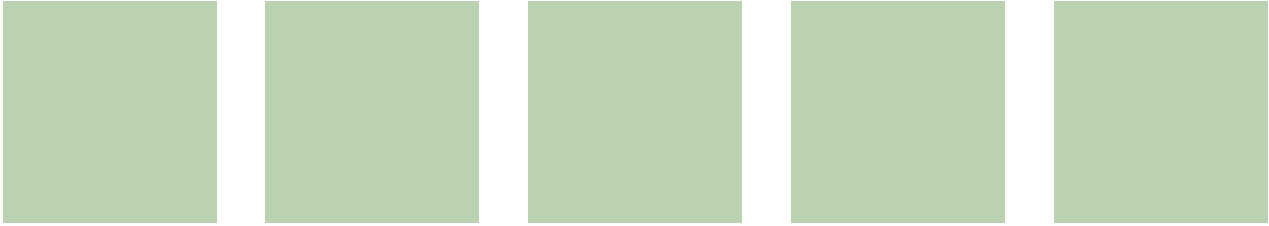


# The Echo

Edition 24.2

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## **Wildcats -**

We've made it to the end of the third quarter. It's officially Spring, the days are getting longer, the sun is shining brighter, and it seems like those dark and dreary winter days are behind us for the year. It is the midwest, so I would be surprised if we get one more snow before the end of the year.

The third quarter is usually the roughest part of the year. Most of our time is spent indoors. We're waning from the school spirit that charged us up at the start of the school year, assignments are starting to pile up, there is a research paper that is simultaneously due in English and US History, you had 13 tests/quizzes on Wednesday, March 2nd, AP and state testing are around the corner, and most of us are focusing on every day off that will ultimately lead us to Spring Break.

Well, we got there, and all that's left is the fourth quarter. It's time to be your own Demar DeRozan and become king of the fourth. Whether it's sprinting through the finish line or stumbling your way to the end, the finish line is in sight.

Seniors, this is it. Your last 35 days of high school are around the bend. It's time to make some memories. Take every opportunity to soak in and reminisce on these last days of high school. Attend every event: senior spectacular, prom, the musical, concerts, the fine arts festival, even a track meet. Take the advice from a Neuqua graduate that didn't go to most of these events. You don't get this time back.

Juniors, start thinking about what teachers you want to write your letters of recommendation. Ask them now! Don't wait until next fall. Also, if you're not sure what you're going to do after high school, that is no issue. I dropped my first Intro to Education course in college and look where I ended up  
\*shrugs\*

Sophomores and freshmen, be inspired by the graduating class.

Enjoy the last quarter of the 2021-2022 school year! This is our last news magazine of the year. Look out for the senior edition in May!

**Mr. Verdin**  
**The Echo Adviser**

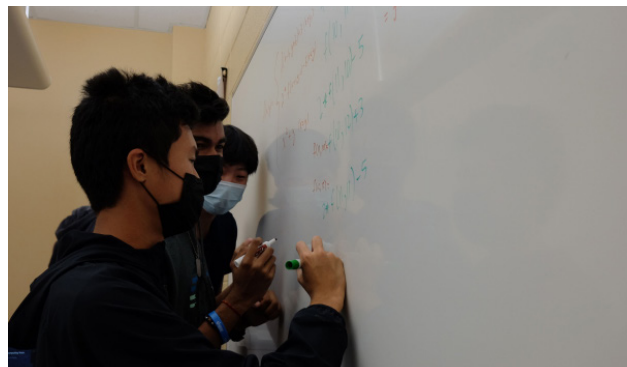
# Stable transition to “mask recommended” amid COVID-19 concerns

By Lily Ha, Staff Writer

Since the transition from “mask required” to “mask recommend,” Neuqua Valley School has been swiftly adapting to a new environment inside and beyond the school. In an email announcing the transition to “mask recommended” on Feb. 18, 2022, Dr. Lance Fuhrer, principal at Neuqua, noted how “our school culture is rooted in respect, and this transition does not change that.” He also pointed out that “students share any concerns with their teacher.”

Prior to this announcement, there had been complaints and conflicts over the policy of mandatory mask wearing. For example, on Feb. 11, 2022 about thirty students and parents held a peaceful protest outside Neuqua Valley High School, standing against the Indian Prairie District 204’s decision to continue its mask mandate. They advocated for their rights and freedoms over public safety. At the same time, others considered this mandatory policy beneficial, with a very outspoken individual at that protest going into the crowd with a piece of notebook paper saying “I Love Wearing Masks!”

Upon further discussion, Indian Prairie School District as a whole decided to transition to a mask recommended model for staff and students. “In light of the recent positive data, we will move to masks recommended and not required for all students in grades K-12 and staff” said Superintendent Dr. Adrian Talley. “Masks are highly recommended for all; however, they will not be required.” Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker similarly eliminated the state’s order requiring people to mask up in indoor public spaces starting Feb. 28, 2022. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot lifted a similar citywide mandate



Sabrina Sabatin

on the same day; however, masks remain mandatory in health care and long-term care facilities and in congregate settings such as shelters and prisons.

The transition to optional mask wearing has been met with praise and criticism. As mask wearing is up to students’ voluntary choice as of Feb. 22, 2022, it has been important how many students and teachers would stop wearing their masks. The district emphasized that it would do its best to monitor transmission data and make adjustments to its mitigation strategies in order to continue to prevent the increase of COVID-19 transmission in the school environment.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also revised its face-covering guidelines in late February and now recommends certain precautions based on what county you are located in. As of now, DuPage and Will County have been cited as low-risk communities, where people should “wear a mask based on their personal preference, informed by their personal level of risk.”

The mask transition has been a bumpy road, and it will likely continue to be so. But with lower COVID-19 transmission rates, the turn back to normality seems to be in sight.

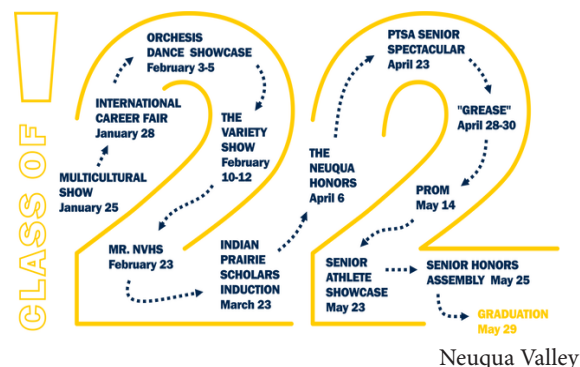
# Is the return of in-person senior events spectacular?

By Olivia Durcan, Staff Writer

As the middle of second semester approaches, special events designated for seniors come around the corner. Since COVID-19 restrictions are slowly lifting (and the 2021-2022 school year is the first full in-person school year since 2019-2020), new changes arise. Coordinated events can now be attended in person in contrast to virtual via Zoom. Students, parents and staff can access information regarding the senior events on the Neuqua Student Splash Page.

Many of the well known and celebrated senior events may revert back to in-person celebrations, like Senior Spectacular. The Mardi Gras/Fat Tuesday themed celebration specializes in appreciating the various accomplishments by seniors. The 2022 Senior Spectacular will take place on Saturday, April 23. More in-person events are also returning due to more opportunities of normalcy, but that also opens opportunities for concerns and varying opinions. Seniors of Neuqua spoke out and communicated their feelings towards upcoming events now being in person. Roshni Balantraptu, a student, said “personally, I think it’s great that we’re back to being able to have events in person again. However, I have grandparents at home that I don’t want to put at risk, which is why I make sure to wear my mask in public. I really hope that all the seniors will be able to have a safe graduation at the end of the year, because I feel like those experiences are the biggest highlight of the year.”

Anthony Burcham, another senior, stated their concerns, noting “I am concerned; I think a lot of people are going to catch COVID. I’m incredibly anxious and likely won’t go to any events that I don’t have to.



A calendar of Neuqua senior events is available on the Student Splash Page.

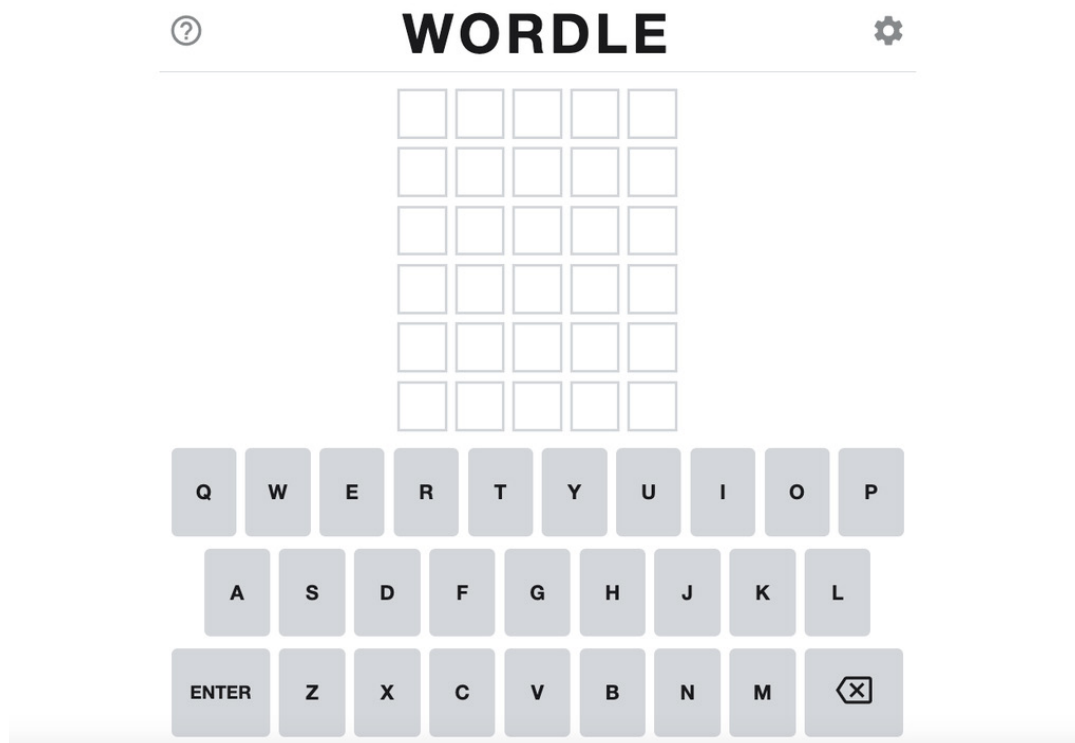
I knew there would be a time when people stopped wearing masks or doing other safety precautions; either because they’re too tired of it or they weren’t required. However, I didn’t expect so many people to stop so quickly. I hope my friends who do end up going to these events continue to stay safe.”

Many seniors continue to be excited and happy for events returning to in-person and for opportunities to end the year off with friends and celebrate accomplishments, albeit concerns of COVID-19.

Upcoming senior events will continue to be made aware of and more details pertaining to plans will be updated in the upcoming weeks as they near. Many seniors and underclassmen express and have similar and/or varying concerns surrounding these events due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. More concerns and information will be shared and communicated by the DuPage Health Department and Illinois Department of Public Health.

# Wordle: the word puzzle that has taken over the world(1e)

By Udhay Nallapatti, Staff Writer



The New York Times

Following its initial release in October 2021, Wordle has taken the world by storm. Initially, many people did not realize what it was or what it would be, but as the game spread across a variety of social media platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram, many people started to participate in its daily puzzles. People who have once thought to themselves “Man, this is just another fad” have now been reeled into a recurring, day-to-day, Wordle high. And if that doesn’t describe its enjoyability enough, people will religiously stay awake until midnight every night, just to play the Wordle first.

If you are reading this right now, you have most likely experienced this high yourself or been witness to your friends’ cries of joy or disappointment after playing that day’s Wordle, but for the ones who haven’t, here is a quick rundown of what Wordle is and the elements that make it so addicting.

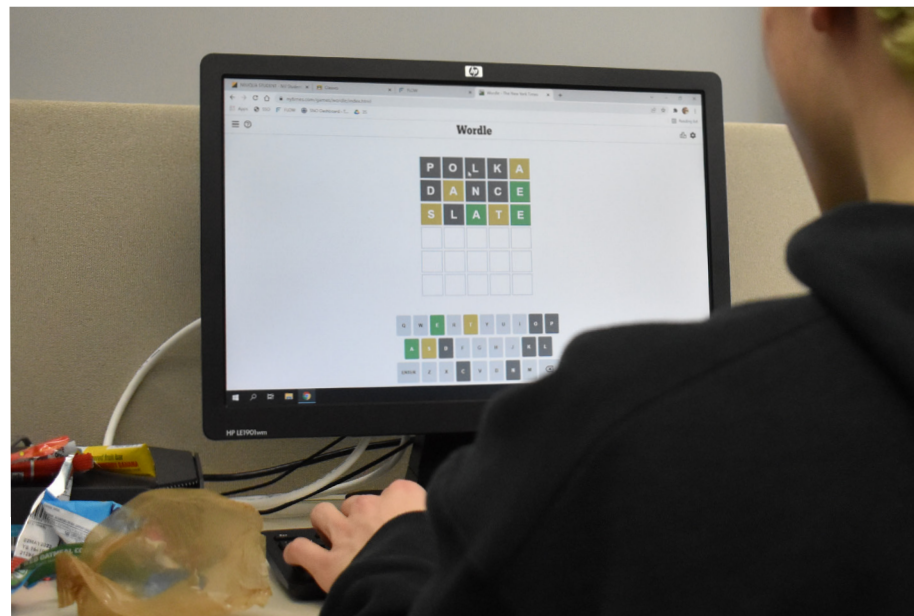
Wordle is a daily, single-player word puzzle consisting only of five letter words and only allows the player six chances to guess the word for that day. The game is built to be very simplistic and to allow players to have a fighting chance at guessing the word, Wordle has a color coded system of giving hints: it consists of green, yellow and grey squares. A green square signifies that the letter is in the final word and in the correct position. A yellow square hints that even if the letter is in the final word, it is not in the correct place. Just as importantly, a grey square indicates that the letter isn’t in the final word at all. To win the Wordle for the day, a player must get all 5 green squares in six tries.



The beauty of Wordle is its informal nature and the simplicity of the game's design. Initially made to appease his wife's love for word puzzles, the creator, Josh Wardle, created the game to be a fun distraction. Wardle has seemingly adapted this game to be suitable for all ages so by making the game any more complicated than it is would most likely just reduce the amount of people who tune in everyday. Furthermore, due to a single person only having six tries to guess the word for that day, it leads to high-risk high-reward scenario where if a person gets it right they feel elated, whilst on the other hand if a person were to fail in guessing the word in six tries, they will have to wait for the next day to play. Along with its simple nature, Wardle has not pursued monetization of the domain in any way, meaning that it features no ads or any pesky pop-ups that someone would usually expect to pop up on a smaller end website (although now that the New York Times has taken over Wordle, ads maybe subject to change).

Now that you know what it is and why to play, how about you learn how to win it! The most important tip for beginners is to pick a starting word to help you get moving and check letters off the list. Some solid starting words include ADIEU, AUDIO, ROATE and STARE (just to name a few). A good starting word will usually have letters that are almost always guaranteed to be in a word such as vowels, making AUDIO a good choice because it often reveals the vowels that are in the final word, while eliminating the other vowels. From here, players can now focus on the consonants within a word. Another tip for solving the word is to use X. Confused? Well what that really means is that if you happen to find any green letters, type those and use X in the spaces that you don't know for certain yet. This is helpful because by ordering the green letters, players have an easier time sound out or processing words from memory. It is an even more useful tip if players have a mix of green and yellow letters. The final tip for success is to remember that letters can often be used more than once in a word and by forgetting that simple fact, players often get stuck on a word or lose the Wordle.

Even if you happen to lose a Wordle it isn't the end of the world. Because Wordle actually has enough words for the next three years already put into its system! Now that the New York Times has taken Wordle over from its creator, Josh Wardle, players can be happy knowing that they will still have many more days of Wordles to come.





# Writers' Week makes a comeback in 2022

By Ben LeGrand, Assistant Editor-in-Chief

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After the mess of the pandemic's effects on school events, a Neuqua English department staple is returning. From March 23rd to March 25th, Writers' Week is back in person. This will be the 9th year Neuqua holds Writers' Week, which features local authors, special guests, Neuqua students and even faculty sharing their works of literature. Guests and students have the opportunity to share anything they've written, from stories to poetry, and even songs. Speakers will be in the auditorium all day, and any teacher can choose to bring their class period down to listen.

"Writers' Week is a celebration of the written word at Neuqua... the idea is to celebrate how writing affects our lives," Neuqua English teacher and Writers' Week curator Michael Rossi exclaims. With the pandemic canceling 2020 Writers' Week and last years being online, this will be the first in-person Writers' Week for three grades of the student population. "It's such a joy to hear students share their words... It means a lot to the community. Writers' Week returning is one of many ways that we're able to say the school is healthy, the school is returning to normal and we're gaining things back that we've lost."

Rossi wants students to realize the importance of such an event; "Writers' Week is a chance for people to express how they feel, how they think, what they're going through... This is a time where I think student voices really need to be heard... What are you thinking about the last 2 years?"

Not only does the event speak for student voices, but teacher perspectives as well. "The truth of Writers' Week is the truth of teaching. You go up on stage and you talk, and half the class would be tuning you out... but the other half may be listening to you... and maybe 2-3 [students] it's exactly what they need to hear." In these recent trying times, sharing vulnerability through your writing is as tough as ever, yet also more important than ever. "Your voice matters. You have a voice, and it matters and how you share that voice is important," shared Rossi when asked about the most important lesson he would like students to take away from the event. The sense of relatability that strikes when someone verbally shares their experience is one the community has needed.

Writers' Week is that chance for all who want to share their vulnerability and experiences. The return of Writers' Week, along with all the other great events Neuqua holds, is the return of our school identity and a sign of our triumph through the tough time of the pandemic. Be sure to check out and enjoy the speakers; they're displaying a sign of passion and courage not many of us would have.

# In need of a prom dress?

By Gabby Dziekan, Staff Writer



Provided by Julie Many  
Julie Many at her senior prom in high school.

With around three months of school left, the anticipation of end-of-the-year activities are starting to settle in, especially prom. Here's a list of some of the best places nearby to start looking for that perfect dress.

## **Anew Consignment**

One of the best hidden gems on this list. This store has a wide range of not only second hand clothing ranging from fur coats and shoes, but it also has a pretty decently sized section of quality used prom dresses. Each piece is so unique and from different time periods. Price ranges are around 50 to 300

dollars. If sustainability is something important to you, as well as not spending a fortune, I definitely recommend checking out this store in downtown Geneva. Address is located at 27 W. State Street Geneva, IL 60134.

## **Wolsfelt Prom**

This is one of the bigger retail stores for prom dresses in our area. Each girl who walks in the door will have a knowledgeable consultant to help her find that dream dress. Wolsfelt offers a wide range of sizes, colors and designers, alongside a pretty large umbrella of prices ranging from 250 to 800 dollars. They have a lot of current style dresses, so if you're looking for more of a trendy dress, Wolsfelt will have something for you. You can walk in or make an appointment in case you want to secure a spot on those busy days. Address is located at 153 Ashland Ave, Aurora, IL 60505.

## **MDM Special Occasion**

I would go to this store if you have no idea what you like yet and are looking to browse around. This is a good place to explore your options if you're in a time crunch. This store can sometimes

be a hit or miss. However, it is worth checking out if you have some extra time and aren't looking to drive far to look for dresses. This store has a good selection of affordable dresses from 60 to 800 dollars. If you find yourself at Fox Valley Mall, it's on the upper level right next to Macys.

### **Peaches Boutique**

You've probably already heard of Peaches as it can be quite popular with Neuqua students. If you want to make it a little field trip, grab a few friends and go to Peaches Boutique! This store prides itself on being the largest prom boutique in the US, over 45 fitting rooms as well as thousands of dresses to choose from. Because they have such a large selection of dresses they also have many different prices ranging from 50 to 2000 dollars. If you wanted to buy your dress online, Peaches has a pretty easy accessible website as well. The address is located at 5915 S Archer Ave, Chicago, IL 60638.

Before starting any prom shopping, remember to get a good night's sleep. As exciting as it can be, it also has the potential to be exhausting. Make sure to eat before your appointment and stay hydrated throughout the day. Take all the time you need in order to find that perfect dress that makes you feel comfortable and confident. After all, you are the most important. Keep an open mind and a positive attitude. Happy shopping!



Gabby Dziekan

Some friends have fun while they shop at Anew Consignment.

## **CALLING ALL SENIORS!**

Do you want your prom dress and photos to be featured in our Senior Edition and on our websites/social media? Submit your photos to us by emailing [nvhsecho@gmail.com](mailto:nvhsecho@gmail.com) with your name and photo(s) or DMing us on Instagram.



# Euphoria: the realisticness and un-realisticness

By Peter Wujek and Maya Stone, Business Managers

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HBO

“Euphoria” has captured the hearts and minds of young adults around the nation and even across the world. The story follows the lives of high school struggling with issues large and small. Rue Bennett is the narrator, and many events of the show center around her drug addiction and relationships. We meet her friends and classmates and get glimpses into their own personal issues, creating a unique TV show that explores different perspectives and interesting personalities. Jules Vaughn is Rue’s best-friend and some-times lover. Maddy Perez is part of a friend group including Cassie and Lexi Howard, sisters, and Kat Hernandez. Last important high-schooler to know is Nate Jacobs, Maddy’s on-and-off boyfriend who is violent and manipulative. As the show has completed two seasons, each character has had an episode that centers around them. It is important to know that no character is a good person. Every single character struggles with jealousy, manipulation and general hate, but the audience is able to understand their backstory and receive some understanding about their motivation.

Another aspect of “Euphoria” that can be realistic centers around the subplot of Jules and Nate’s dad, Cal. In the first episode, the 17-year-old Jules is seen on a hookup app, where she meets Cal and tells him that she is 22. This becomes a central plot point as Cal films the encounter, and the disc is fought over. It seems like this would be some completely crafted situation, only happening in the deepest nightmares of a concerned parent.

In reality, this kind of thing happens all the time. It seems to be a universal experience for underage gay teens to venture onto hookup apps like Grindr to find a community. A 2018 Northwestern study found that “more than half of sexually active gay and bisexual adolescent boys found sexual partners on Grindr.” According to NPR, “the number of male victims is vastly underreported.” This is a realistic aspect of being a queer teen that the world overlooks, but “Euphoria” does a great job of capturing. The show reveals how easily teens are preyed on by older men and how dangerous it can be.

Finally, the makeup and outfit approach in the show has some realisticness. Especially with Generation Z, a movement towards more expressive dressing and makeup has occurred, and the show focuses on the individuality of each character and their clothing/makeup choices. Specifically Jules, played by Hunter Schafer, has shown out as being the most dramatic in their clothing and makeup choices, and inspiring fashion and makeup in the lives of everyday students. Parties centered around the fashion of the show have taken place, and an inspiration towards more “risky” outfit choices have been on the rise.

Now, how different is “Euphoria” from everyday life?

First, the watcher obviously notices the intense sexual scenes that frequent the show. It seems like every single person in the show is having graphic sex every single day. This is not real life. As a high school student, I can assure you that everyone is not having sex 24/7. That would be immensely exhausting especially with the 24/7 amount of homework that is given! Sex culture does exist, but it is not anywhere near as prevalent as it is in the show.

Because “Euphoria” centers around a high school, you would also assume that the characters are high school students that at least try not to fail. That’s where you would be wrong. While many episodes take place in school, none of the characters ever seem like they’re learning, studying or doing homework. If they aren’t high or drunk in class, they are brawling, gossiping or causing other general drama. How do these kids survive the dean? Are there no detentions and suspensions?

The end of the second season also focuses on Lexi Howard’s play. There are some spoilers ahead, but you likely know that. Lexi decides to write her own play and put it on in the school, but that whole scenario is completely insane. I understand a script getting approved, but the way it was staged was totally unbelievable. She has multiple huge sets, including a street, bedroom, school and a rotating locker bank that is used once. How? As a theater kid who has done 30+ shows, I have never had that insane of a set. I have no idea how Lexi got the funding or the approval to do this. The last scene of the episode included, with the simulated locker room orgy of football men, was the most unrealistic thing I have seen on a high school stage. Yes, it adds to entertainment value, but in the grand scheme of “realisticness,” it falls short.

“Euphoria” is incredibly famous for a reason: it creates a story that can resonate with viewers, and provides comfort to those dealing with similar situations. Even as “goody good” students who are on The Echo Staff, there are aspects of the shows in terms of peer pressure and high school difficulties that relate to us as well. For some, the show is a filmed version of their lives, and for others, it is a means of entertainment and understanding to issues that they may be ignorant towards. It will always hold a somewhat relatable grasp on high school students, even with its unrealistic aspects.

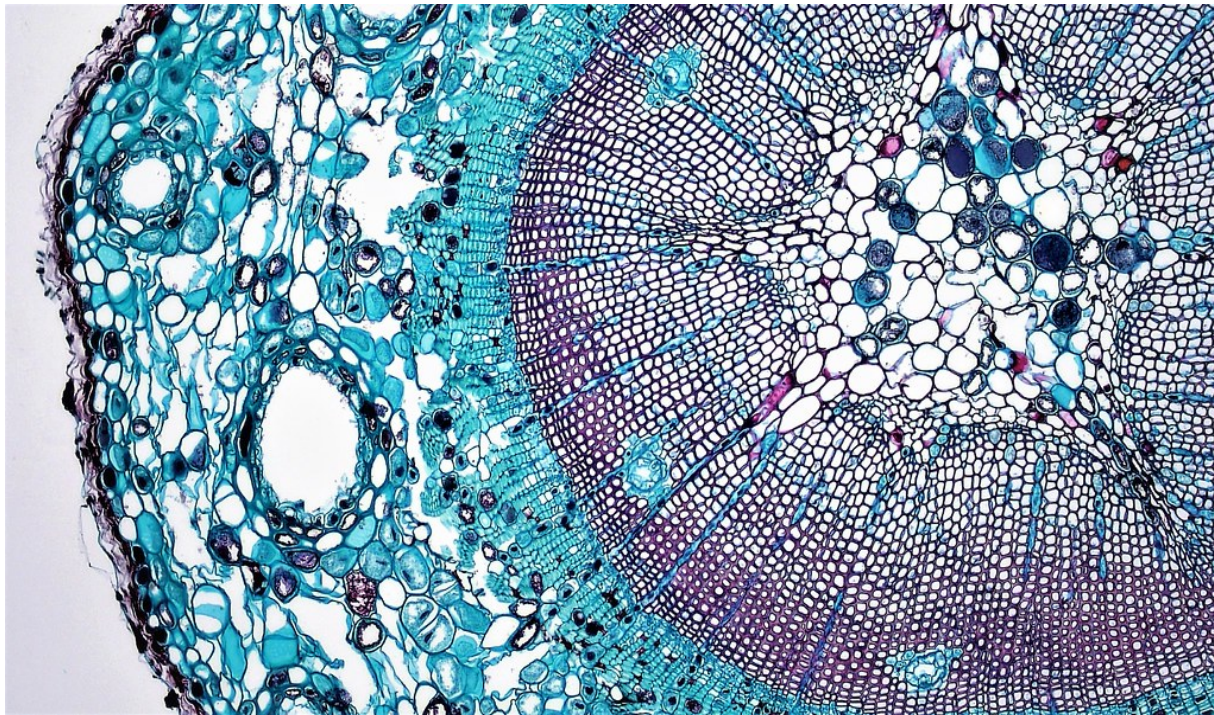
Editor’s Note: “Euphoria” is available to stream on HBO Max and is intended for mature audiences (therefore unsuitable for audiences under the age of 17). Viewer discretion is advised.



# The potential of stem cells

By Sudi Harbool and Ramla Akhtar, Guest Contributors

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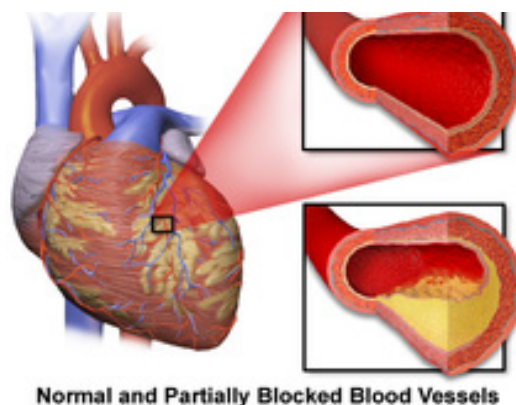
Flickr

Every organism stems from a single cell that emerged 3.8 billion years ago. The discovery of the cell was a ripple in the ocean of science that catalyzed a series of advancements bringing hope and improvements to life. Yet thousands of incurable diseases still taint the lives of millions. But upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the foundation of life, cells, could also have the cure to life's problems. The stem cell's ability to infinitely divide gives it the potential to cure numerous diseases and alleviate a patient's pain during treatment.

## **Potency as a treatment**

The capability of stem cells to treat fatal diseases makes it a potent treatment in the field of medicine. Heart disease and cancer are the two most fatal diseases in the United States. Heart disease often manifests itself as a myocardial infarction. This is a case where the heart receives inadequate blood due to an arterial blockage, and the region of the heart associated with that blocked artery begins to die and form scar tissue. Over repeated attacks, a buildup of scar tissue makes a patient susceptible to heart failure. Fortunately, a study published in *Lancet* proved the regenerative properties of stem cell therapy. In the study, 17 heart attack patients had a 50% reduction in scar tissue after an infusion of their heart stem cells, which led to an increase in the lifespan of the studied individuals by making them less likely to suffer heart failure. Another widespread, agonizing disease penetrating the global population is cancer. Scientifically, the rationale behind stem cell treatment is that instead of targeting all fast-growing cells, this therapy specifically targets cancer stem cells. In a study conducted by the Harvard Stem Cell Institute, it was proven that when a specific class of stem cells that initiate melanoma were targeted, it brought forth an antibody that

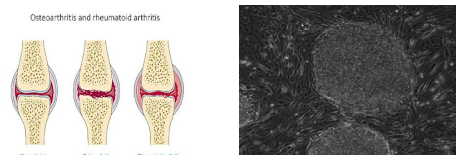
slowed and helped hinder the tumors' growth. stem cell therapy is in the process of becoming a viable treatment that can help an affected individual live a longer, healthier life. Proof that stem cells have the potential to treat two fatal diseases that plague the global population paints a bright future for millions of families who have loved ones suffering from these diseases.



**Normal and Partially Blocked Blood Vessels**

### **Pain relieving potential**

Stem cells can alleviate a patient's pain during treatment. They are able to work as an independent analgesic or can be used in conjunction with other treatments to lessen pain. As an independent analgesic, stem cells can be used to treat the pain of "severe osteoarthritis, neuropathic pain, and intractable musculoskeletal pain," all of which do not have conventional medicine. The stem cells work by releasing neurotrophic factors and providing a cellular source to replace damaged neural cells, helping them modulate and reverse neuropathic pain. Osteoarthritis is one of the common forms of arthritis. Stem cells have the ability to relieve the excruciating pain that can come with this disease. The pain-relieving properties of stem cells can also be used in a set treatment alongside other therapies. For example, when used alongside chemotherapy, stem cell therapy can reduce its side effects. Chemotherapy targets all fast-dividing cells, but stem cells have been employed as "nanoparticle carriers" to "enhance therapeutic efficacies and relieve treatment side effects," meaning that the use of stem cells can deliver some pain relief to cancer patients. Knowing that stem cells can provide pain relief for cancer patients brings hope in the field of medicine and cancer research. Nonetheless, stem cells have to undergo a lot of trials before they are considered a viable analgesic, but they have the potential to help many patients feel less pain in the future.



Stem cells have the ability to indefinitely divide and can potentially cure diseases and work as an analgesic. The success of stem cells in patients with heart disease and cancer is only the tip of the iceberg, as the role of stem cells in the medical field is filled with potential. With the promising results shown from various current studies, stem cell therapy can certainly be seen as a viable treatment in the future. It may not be long until the emergence of stem cell therapy as a treatment in the ever-growing field of medicine.



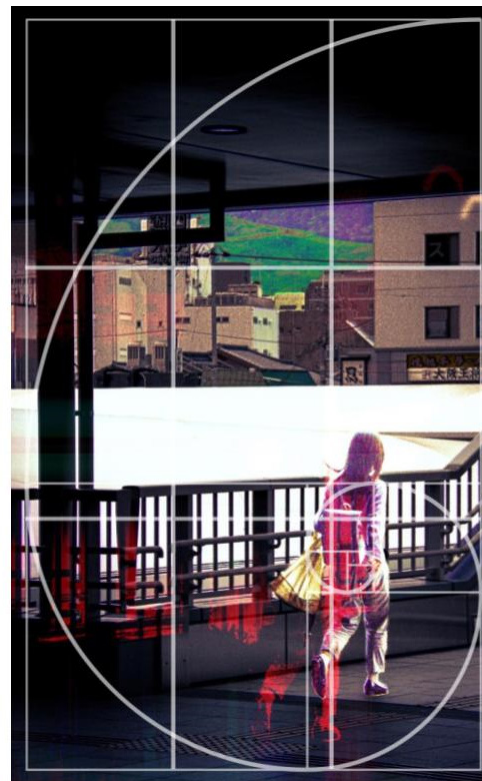
# Photos of You

By Ryder Stejskal, Staff Writer

You may not realize it, but you already have professional grade equipment for a field that is founded on physics and was developed for hundreds of years with science through art. And you, strangely enough for the circumstances, carry this equipment with you, wherever you go. If you haven't figured it out already, I am talking about your smartphone. Your phone probably has a camera. Actually, it probably has more than one camera. No, it definitely has more than one camera. Nowadays, there are at least two cameras on every smartphone: one on the back and one that is front-facing for selfies. You have two cameras with you at all times, and you aren't taking photos of everything?

We often may forget that we are surrounded by miracles of practical magic. Everything that you are surrounded by, use or see was made or manipulated by a human. Someone invented chairs, desks, tables, vents, air conditioning, your phone and the camera it uses. Some things that have been invented and changed by humans, though, are developed over long periods of time with no distinct creator or leader. With photography, artists and scientists worked, over time, to turn a strange light phenomenon into a working system that can capture whatever is in front of it and maintain it as a still image forever. It quite literally freezes time.

It all started with the use of camera obscura to "trace" images. By some chance, we found that when light enters a small hole it will invert the image of whatever is outside onto the wall opposite of the hole. Bonus points if you have a lens because now that image is focused and sharp. Sound familiar yet? Light, sharpness and lens: these are all camera terms already. After camera obscura came the first cameras. You think a polaroid is cool?



All photos by Ryder Stejskal

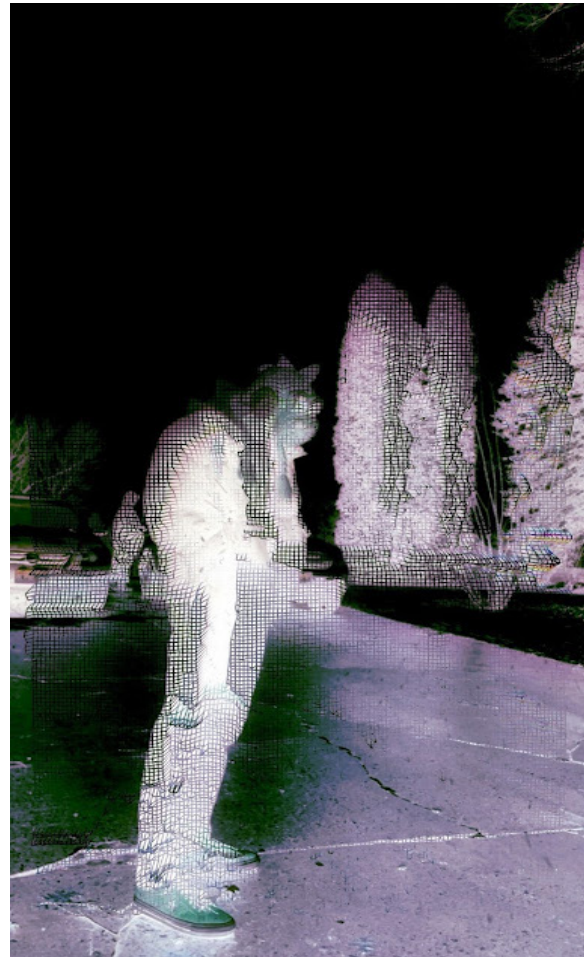
These cameras developed onto sheets of metal. Then, we switched to film; it was much easier than metal. Digital cameras came after the age of computers, which would soon turn into the small circular protrusions on the back of your phone and the pinhole on the front.

Carrying these miracles isn't much of a responsibility. With great power comes, well, not much nowadays. When you have all of the information you could ever need at your fingertips and grow up surrounded by millions of camera-like miracles, it is hard to develop the ability to appreciate each and every detail about them. But at least now you may be able to appreciate something that you hold so close with you more than before.

Photography and imaging are separate, but still connected very well to, their equipment; the same way that architects don't

mind too much what kind of crane is used to build their buildings, photographers don't mind too much as long as they have a camera. Obviously, as photographers are their own entire combined design and construction team, you'll get a long talk about which cameras, brands, lenses and tricks to use if you ask any hobbyist photographer about it. If you aren't a hobbyist photographer, you have no idea what brands are even related to photography or you have never picked up your phone to snap a picture of something you thought looked cool, try here: when you see something, snap something. The more you shoot, the more you start to notice things. If photographers are masters of the seeing eye, then working on your photography skills will help with seeing hidden beauty throughout the world. Like a mathematician sees math in everything, photographers see "potential photos" all around them and sometimes even use math too. All of the sciences combine with photography. Math and physics we've covered, but film development specifically requires chemistry. This doesn't mean that you have to find a space in your home to convert into a full film-development laboratory, but it does make taking pictures on film a lot cooler when you know there is an intricate process behind it. You have probably even seen or have used a disposable camera before; meaning, you have also seen the special character that film photos can harness. They are always some level of fun and take on a unique touch to them, the kind that you can't replicate any other way.

Saving memories is a great attribute that photography provides, so if you want to step up your memory-making game, consider getting a film camera. Even better, you can source them right here in Naperville. For cameras, try @neonhell on Depop (@nhcamera on Instagram), a great option for vintage film cameras for the right price. You can pick up film from Neonhell, or you can purchase some from Michael Lee, a current senior at Neuqua Valley, who can also develop it for you in just a few days. If you've been thinking about film, this is your sign to get started and what better way to start than local, smart and quick.



# “The Batman”: Robert Pattinson’s caped crusader soars in an intense, moody adaptation

By Jake Panek, Staff Writer

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Warner Bros.

“The city is beyond saving,” narrates the self-proclaimed nocturnal animal as he zooms down an empty street in Gotham City on his motorcycle. “But I’m trying.” This line comes not even twenty minutes into “The Batman,” but it’s immediately clear that it’s one of the rare comic book films that’s really trying amidst a landscape of conveyor belt blockbusters. As daunting as its two hour and forty seven minute runtime may seem, Matt Reeves’ take on the Dark Knight is an effortlessly slick filmmaking concoction that honors the world’s greatest detective in one of the most formally impressive live-action adaptations of the character.

In many ways, the film is just another step forward in the progression of comic book films becoming even more “gritty” and “serious,” but it feels odd to make such a comparison since “The Batman” rarely feels like it’s part of a larger universe or even a comic book film, and that’s part of what makes it so satisfying. You can recognize the influences channeled by each actor and Reeves’ screenplay—Kurt Cobain, the Zodiac killer, Michael Corleone, the films of David Fincher and the “Saw” franchise to name a few—but it’s their blend that results in a consistently delightful and fresh final product.

The mystery looming over Gotham City in question is centered around The Riddler (Paul Dano), a serial killer who, in the film’s terrific opening scene, murders the city’s mayor. This sets off a domino chain of events that leads Bruce Wayne (Robert Pattinson), Selina Kyle (Zoë Kravitz) and Commissioner James Gordon (Jeffrey Wright) down a rabbit hole of criminal enterprise and



corruption and with each cryptic puzzle that brings Batman and The Riddler closer together, more secrets get revealed about both Gotham's history and the future that The Riddler has in store for the metropolis.

The first thing worth mentioning about "The Batman" is its portrayal of Gotham. Say what you will about "The Dark Knight," but that film's city is undeniably generic and visually indistinguishable from, say, Chicago. Here, every inch of Gotham feels like a real, breathing environment; as if the Gothic architecture of Liverpool and the perpetual rainfall aren't an instant enhancement of the mood, the world that production designer James Chinlund creates is transformative. The Iceberg Lounge isn't a luxurious nightclub but instead a claustrophobic, strobe-lit rave; the Batmobile isn't a literal tank but instead a sleek, relentless muscle car; the Batcave isn't an ultramodern wonder but instead an abandoned train station left to rot beneath Wayne Tower—it's a wondrous, alluring setting, but one that always feels grounded.

On top of that, it's just gorgeously photographed by cinematographer Greig Fraser—who between this and his (hopefully Oscar-winning) work on "Dune" has been having a pretty good year. The whole film is bathed in grainy shadows and muted, underlit colors, and there are plenty of sequences with enough formal flourish to fill three MCU films—a fight in a pitch-black hallway lit entirely by muzzle flashes is just the tip of the iceberg. It's somehow even more impressive when you take into account the sparingly used and/or seamlessly integrated CGI, which lends to the realism and physicality of the action. In terms of the look and feel of this film and its Gotham, this is the closest we've gotten to a film adaptation of Rocksteady's Arkham video game trilogy, and, as a massive fan of those games, I immediately clicked with it.

"The Batman" also takes a risky page from the Arkham games in that it sidesteps being an action-packed thriller and instead spends most of its runtime on people standing around and analyzing crime scenes and riddles. This will undoubtedly turn off some moviegoers seeking a barrage of set pieces, but the slow burn that it favors only makes the moments where we see the Bat in action more awesome. Even if this method being applied to such a sizable runtime results in a few sections in the middle third of the film feeling slow, it never once loses its focus, which is mostly—and rightfully—placed on its ensemble cast. Every single actor is doing something incredible here, whether it be Paul Dano's equally comic and terrifying Riddler, Jeffrey Wright's Commissioner Gordon or an unrecognizably hilarious Colin Farrell as The Penguin, and I bet that the nearly 7,000 people who signed a petition saying that Robert Pattinson shouldn't be cast Batman back in 2019 feel especially stupid. I can't imagine anyone else tackling this filthy, freaky and reclusive portrayal of the caped crusader, mainly because it goes against the charismatic image we often associate with the character, but Pattinson sells it with ease—my favorite scene of the whole film comes the morning after Bruce uses Selina to gather intel and he obsessively, voyeuristically rewatches a clip of her in a bathroom mirror. And speaking of Selina Kyle, Zoë Kravitz is just as deserving of praise in her role opposite Pattinson. As if her mere on-screen presence isn't devastating enough, her character and the nearly erotic dynamic she shares with Bruce is probably the most compelling thing about "The Batman."

It's unsurprising that plans for a new trilogy and spin-off series centered around The Penguin and Arkham Asylum are already in action, but it feels pretty incredible to watch a major comic book film and feel like you're watching a singular work, even if it is just for now. Regardless, "The Batman" is stupendously entertaining fare, and you bet I'll be there on opening night for the next two of these.

# Book banning: fostering communities of ignorance

By Lily Ha, Staff Writer

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Flickr

Preventing books from reaching the eyes of children has recently emerged as a national issue in the United States.

According to the American Library Association (ALA)'s report, in the fall of 2021, there were 330 cases of book challenges that sought to remove particular books from libraries or school curriculums. In particular, according to NBC, Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin of Texas, there were 75 formal requests for book banning at the school districts in the first four months of the 2021-2022 school year. This is a surprising hike from one request at the same period of the previous year. In one of many articles by The New York Times, Suzanne Nossel, the chief executive of PEN America, stated that "it's a pretty startling phenomenon here in the United States to see book bans back in style, to see efforts to press criminal charges against school librarians". Book banning is being led by parents, community activists and lawmakers. The New York Times described these book banning efforts as "a pace not seen in decades."

The current attempts for book banning are unprecedented. A growing number of people are inserting complaints to libraries and schools that certain books should be removed from shelves because they are inappropriate for children. This trend reflects people's increasing grievances toward the descriptions of gender, race, sexuality, pornography, history and ideologies in books. Among the top 10 most challenged books tracked by the ALA, are "George," "Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and

You,” “All American Boys,” “To Kill a Mockingbird,” “Of Mice and Men” and “The Bluest Eye.”

On one hand, citizens should be able to act on their concerns by mounting “book challenges.” Free expressions are the basis of democracies, and thus, book challenges might be perceived as the rights of citizens as members of communities. On the other hand, these book challenges can lead to “book burning” which is a form of censorship. Individuals, politicians and organizations seek to eliminate books from libraries, school reading lists and bookstore shelves because they object to their content, characters, ideas and themes. The opponents of book banning emphasize that book banning violates the First Amendment rights of speech and press.

In October of 2021, Texas State Representative, Matt Krause, put 850 books on a watch list, many dealing with race and LGBTQ issues. For the first 100 books on the list, 97 were written by ethnic minorities, women and LGBTQ authors. According to NPR, he claimed that the books on his list “might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of their race or sex” . In early February, the Indiana Senate passed a bill to remove obscene materials from schools. This bill allows “the criminal prosecution of school librarians and other school staff for disseminating ‘material harmful to minors,’” as stated by The Center Square. The Oklahoma legislature is also discussing a bill that would ban public school libraries from offering any books on sexuality or gender identity. In Tennessee, on January 10, the McMinn County School Board removed “Maus,” a graphic novel about the Holocaust, from an eighth-grade curriculum due to the issues of nudity and curse expressions.

Students might feel offended if their favorite books are on the banned list. They may consider the trend of book bans as personal attacks on their race, gender and sexuality. The contents of books are all related to broader topics, such as freedom, human rights, equality and dignity. Some books may portray offensive and troubling topics; however, they reveal the truth of human identities and social structure. Additionally, other books are on the list because they deal with issues or themes that powerful people do not agree with and do not want a large audience to continue to read. Students have their knowledge and experiences on race, LGBTQ and gender that are dealt with and seen on the news every day. Blocking books due to the repugnance of certain opinions or ideologies will not stop students from reading or ever reaching information on such literature.

Many banned books continue to be read in classrooms as school-assigned readings. A large number of students have been inspired and empowered by books, specifically, “Animal Farm,” a 1985 novel by George Orwell. It is an allegory about communism. Napoleon, who is considered the main antagonist of the book, represents Joseph Stalin, while old Major refers to Karl Marx, known to be the founder of communism. This book is quite famous and critically acclaimed for its satire. Before the book was even published, it was rejected several times by publishers, as it was written during the UK’s wartime alliance with the Soviet Union. It was also temporarily banned in the UAE because of its talking pigs, seen to be against Islamic values.

The books on a watch list are an important part of understanding different perspectives and historical events that have shaped us into who we are. Supporters of book bans do not agree with some parts of the literature. However, they should never be allowed to have the power to remove some books from either a library or school which are castles of knowledge and education. Neuqua sophomore Elicia Desmaratti pointed out, “Honestly, with what’s happening in Texas and Florida, I’m leaning towards what books shouldn’t be banned just because school is a learning environment. They are not supposed to be comfortable or inoffensive. When people try to filter out the ‘bad’ literature by banning books, they are fostering communities of ignorance.”

# Sachin Fong: making his mark on Neuqua as Mr. NVHS

By Lily Ha, Staff Writer

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Aarti Gupta

For Neuqua Valley High School senior Sachin Fong, winning Mr. NVHS was an unexpected yet wonderful surprise for his final semester as a high schooler. Fong already won Homecoming King, so winning Mr. NVHS showed his strong impact on Neuqua and its students.

“My initial reaction was a little bit of shock but also a lot of excitement. I really wanted to win, and on top of having a really fun show, it was an awesome honor to have.”

He admits that he “honestly did not expect it, [as] a lot of people had a really good talent going in and [he] had some pretty steep competition.”

During the Mr. NVHS competition, Fong performed “Careless Whisper” by George Michael on saxophone, while wearing a white tank top and sunglasses. He thought it would bring out some laughter in the audience. There were also so many memories that he cherished during his time at Neuqua Valley. He mentioned these during his hot seat questionnaire, referencing some moments from Homecoming every year, how he won Homecoming King last fall, his participation in the Crystal Concert and his recent hosting of the Variety Show.

In addition to his many achievements, Sachin Fong is known for his photography and role as the Co-Editor-in-Chief of Neuqua Valley’s school newspaper, The Echo.

For his last words, Fong just wants to say that he has been “very glad that this year” especially as he has been able to leave his mark on Neuqua. “I feel like I get to be behind the scenes and in front of the curtain,” he shares, adding that “it makes me really happy to know that I’ll be leaving a legacy here.”





