

The Echo

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The time has come to bundle subscriptions

More than eight out of ten Americans get their news online according to Pew Research Center. And while some of us still find joy in holding onto the printed pages of a newspaper or magazine, let's face it, we are all reading online. According to the New York Bar Association, the United States has lost one fourth of its local newspapers. This includes 2,000 publications, 70 dailies, and over 2,000 weekly newspapers. More on this later... And while we all know we should get our news from a variety of sources, we often hit a wall when we want to, a paywall that is. Some people juggle between paying for different publications as articles and interests develop, however, they don't always make that process easy. According to Harvard's Nieman Lab, only 41% of news publication sites make it easy for subscribers to cancel their online subscriptions. Additionally, The New York Times doesn't allow sharing logins and passwords. Even when one wants to support journalism, there comes a limit.

That is why I am proposing an idea for a monthly subscription fee: one can subscribe for up to 10 publications. Yes, the details need to be worked out, but that shouldn't be a problem. Perhaps a local news outlet, such as North Shore Ledger who broke the story about the fibber George Santos long before any media giant picked it up, could count for half of a major publication. This in turn guarantees payment for small local papers- keeping them alive. Once one has reached their monthly limit, a choice is made to pay for additional content or not. Some people may only subscribe to 8 initially so they leave room for what is yet to come. "What's your top ten?" needs to become the new catch phrase. Yes, people can post their top ten on their social media sites to demonstrate how well read, interesting, literate, scholarly, or bipartisan they are. It can become the new meme. When people see what others have as their top 10, they'll be inspired. As a result, Americans will support local news outlets, save money, increase their reading subscriptions and not be turned away.

Fondly,
Virginia Cohrs



NEUQUA

Writer's Week's purpose goes beyond the words on the page

By Ava Nelson and Leah Dennison

The annual Writer's Week is back March 20-24 to showcase the words and stories written by students, faculty and other authors.

"Writing allows you to hold up a mirror to yourself, or a telescope to the world, or a microscope to things that are going on around you."

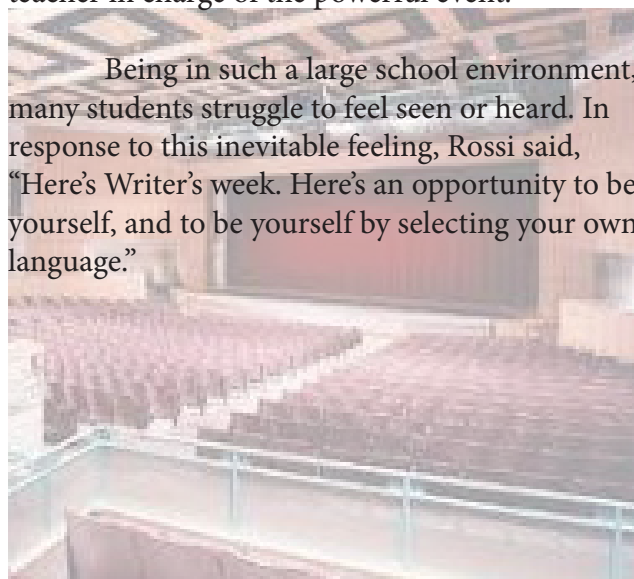
Writing is such an important factor in daily life. It's a way of communication and expression. It's a way to learn and grow. It's a path to the understanding of ideas and inner thoughts, yet it isn't recognized enough. Neuqua dedicates an annual week to do just that: Writer's Week. The event is a way to celebrate all of the good that comes from words by giving writers a chance to share their creations on stage to their peers, whether that be through a poem, comedic sketch, or monologue. "We want to show that writing plays a central role in helping us understand ourselves, celebrate beautiful things, express our joy, find avenues into love," said Michael Rossi, the teacher in charge of the powerful event.

Being in such a large school environment, many students struggle to feel seen or heard. In response to this inevitable feeling, Rossi said, "Here's Writer's week. Here's an opportunity to be yourself, and to be yourself by selecting your own language."

Writer's week gives a voice to the students who feel like they don't have one. It's a chance for students to share a side of themselves that others may not be aware of. It also gives audience members the opportunity to learn about their peers and teachers. It's a well-rounded event which impacts both sides of the spectrum: performers and listeners. There's no doubt that such powerful words can leave a large impact. When talking about the impact of Writer's Week, Rossi said, "When I hear them share their stories, not only do I have a new respect and appreciation for them, but I also am challenged to think about myself and my own life."

The process of becoming a speaker at Writer's Week is simple. Each year, students are encouraged to submit their writing. After doing so, students simply wait until further notice is given. From there, students will eventually be assigned specific periods and days of the week to share their writing. Teachers will bring students down to the auditorium all week to listen to the various pieces of writing.

Writing is a beautiful thing, and it isn't celebrated enough. It's a bond-builder, a form of expression, a coping mechanism, and Writer's Week helps to share all the good that comes from writing. Although it can be scary to share your art, it's a powerful experience to do so. There's no harm that comes from showing who you are through one of the strongest ways of communication. "You get four years here, and it's the story you're going to be telling for the rest of your life, why would you want it to be something anonymous? Why would you want it to be unremarkable?" So don't be afraid. Share your story.



Branch out to new hobbies this spring break

By Emma Vorasorn

Spring is the perfect opportunity to try new things and start the year fresh. Although most people simply want to sleep during their spring break, there is a world of things to do during the blooming season. Instead of rotting away in your room this break, I recommend picking up gardening.

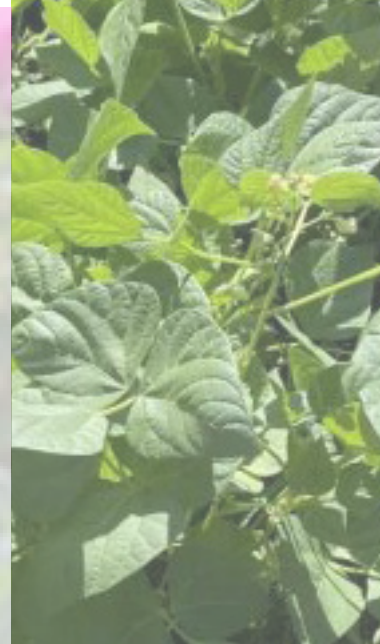
Eating healthier is a resolution many of us try to keep in mind during the new year, and what better way to do that than starting your own edible garden? I know that for me, I can barely keep a potted plant alive for more than a week. However, maybe knowing that you can eat your hard work will be a reason to stay motivated.

When starting your garden there's a few things to consider; think about the size that you want, the location of the garden and the type of plants you want to grow.

I recommend starting small so that the garden does not begin to feel like a chore. Try starting off with a raised bed, which are easy to find at stores that carry gardening supplies. A raised bed is basically just an above ground box for planting. This is much easier than planting directly into the ground, especially if you are a new gardener.

Once you decide the size of your garden, pick a location. Keep in mind that most fruits, vegetables, and herbs require at least ten hours of sunlight to sufficiently grow.

The most exciting part about this process is picking out your crops! Starting off with herbs, there is parsley, rosemary, basil, chives, thyme, and mint. Parsley is super easy to grow, and it will keep growing back for at least 12 months. Rosemary has an even longer life, lasting for a couple years after being planted. Living off of mainly rainwater, it requires little attention. Basil is one of my favorite smells ever, and it tastes absolutely delicious as seasoning. The other herbs listed require a little more maintenance, but it is so worth it to add that little bit of flavor to your meals.





Finally, my favorite type of crop to grow, fruits. Most fruits grow on trees, but there are some that do not and will be perfect for your garden, strawberries and grapes. Strawberries are extremely low maintenance and only require a small space to grow. Since grapes are vines, they can be trained to grow on trellises.

Overall, growing an edible garden is the perfect way to decompress yet still remain productive this spring break. There are so many things that you can grow, and as you become a more skilled gardener, you can venture out into the more difficult crops to grow. Happy planting!

Lettuce, green beans, carrots and cucumbers are some of the many vegetables you can choose from when starting your personal edible garden. Lettuce can grow year round, even in the varying climates of each season. Green beans can grow even in poor soiling conditions. Carrots ideally should be planted in the cooler season and can grow very easily just as long as they are planted in sandy/loose soil, or else they can become deformed. Lastly, cucumbers improve soil, and they should be planted by a fence for climbing

Long-time teacher, First time author: Inside the creation of “The Doxxing of Clearwater High”

By Ben LeGrand



Through his 18+ years of teaching here at Neuqua Valley, Michael Rossi has never been short on stories. From regaling the freshman cross country team about his own high school misadventures, to emphatically acting out Julius Caesar’s assassination in his English classes, students remember the tales Rossi tells. While students may be more familiar with the little anecdotes he shares or his teaching of other famous works, Rossi’s latest escapade is his first published novel, “The Doxxing of Clearwater High.” Using his personal teaching experience, Rossi has developed a novel documenting the working life of every aspect of a high school yet under crisis. After finishing the book, I sat down with Rossi to discuss his inspiration, process and the overall experience of getting a work like this done. Mild spoilers for “The Doxxing of Clearwater High” ahead.

Ben: First off, what’s the book all about and what was your inspiration for telling/writing this story?

Rossi: The book is about what would happen in a community if the teachers at a high school had their personal emails, texts messages, private data points that are recorded on their phones and computers harvested and then released to the public and what would be the fallout of that. That’s really what the book is about.



Rossi will discuss his book in an upcoming authors event at Anderson’s Bookstore on April 15th

I wanted to write the book because, well if I’m being honest, I wrote a book before this and I loved it and it’s probably I’m most proud of that I’ve ever written but when I tried to sell it, every agent told me, ‘you need to have a story or a book that you can sell in a sentence,’ and I couldn’t sell that book in a sentence. It was about characters who slowly change. This is a book I can sell in a sentence, it’s got an interesting hook, and it’s got an interesting premise. The origin of the book was something that I thought I could sell, but as I started to write it and started to shape it, I realized that what I really wanted to do was tell a true story about a whole school community. When you read a book about a school it’s usually from a teenagers perspective because teenagers have very interesting lives and things are always happening to them and everything they experience is dramatic, they have all the interesting stories of, you know, falling in love, or getting in fights. Teachers’ stories are much more subtle, so sometimes you’ll see a book about a teacher and it’s a little bit slower, but you never really have a book that’s about both the teachers, the students, and the administrators and they all have equal narrative stakes and they’re all equal. So as I started writing it I realized that this was a book that just didn’t exist, that I really wanted to see and I wanted to read. I mean, during my day, I work with students and so I go into the student world, I work with other teachers and so I go into the teacher world, and then I talk to my bosses and then I go into the administrator world.

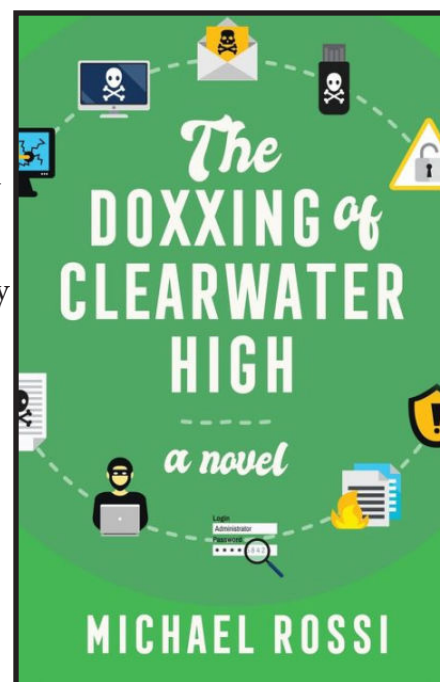
Ben: Yeah, and this really is all three.

Rossi: Yeah so there's three levels of bustling, busy place that a school is and I just didn't see a book that existed that had all of those so I really wanted to tell those stories. The more I started writing it, and the more I started exploring how these stories might interact or might not intersect because the truth of a school is, people's stories take place in parallel lanes but very rarely do they intersect or cross. I really found that to be a fun challenge and something that I was deeply interested in and so I started writing and I found I had more and more stories to tell. So it was just a lot of fun discovering those stories and figuring out what I was trying to say, and how I could speak to thoughts that I had about privacy and about communication and how we view teachers and how students look to them as adults. The book just grew from there.

Ben: How hard is it to write and connect all of these different characters and callbacks and little jokes and their overall intertwining stories? How hard is it to connect while writing like that and what's your process?

Rossi: I wrote the book as a series of short stories. I wrote each character section individually. Beaumont's story intercuts a couple times; I wrote his whole story out and then I put it in the book and as I was assembling the book I tried to find different ways to layer them together. I had 2 characters who both liked music and were interested in music so I had this character that was their friend, so I decided to weave those together because they would know the same person. School is like, all of these people who are living the same experience yet don't know anything about one another and so a big part of the book is, here you know everything about your teachers and all these things come out about your teachers but you don't really know them, you don't know anything about them. It's that way for the kids too. It's weird that you'll be in a class with somebody that you've gone to the same school with for 4 years and you just don't know them, you don't know their story. I wanted the book to capture that and I wrote each character's story individually and then wove them together. I had a general timeline of what I wanted to happen over the course of the book and I fit all of the pieces around that.

Ben: That sounds very tough. Do you kinda write in 2 hour spurts then take a day off, or are you writing the whole time? How's your process with that?



Rossi: You have to write everyday if you want to do it. The 1st thing you're gonna write is not gonna be good, and the 2nd thing you're gonna write is gonna be a little bit better. You don't really get into that flow state until your 3rd time around. The first chapter I wrote I was like, 'Ugh this is not good' but I was warming up, and the 2nd chapter I was doing better. It wasn't until the 3rd chapter until I really hit my stride. You have to write, you have to get into that flow state. Writing is exhausting and painful and frustrating; everybody enjoys having written, but very few people enjoy writing. Once I got into that flow state the story just came out of me. By the time I got to the last chapter and wrote the last sentence I was very impressed because I had finally achieved that sort of optimal balance between letting it come and also controlling it.



Ben: One thing I think anyone who knows you will notice, is how much the book sounds just like you...

Rossi: [laughs]

Ben: How do you put your own voice this well into a book?

Rossi: [chuckles] Well I don't know, I- that's funny.

Ben: It really does. There's so many jokes in there that sound exactly like what you would say in class, or what you would say in general.

Rossi: I can only talk like myself and to an extent, it's bad writing if all the characters sound the same so I did try to make sure the characters had different voices and spoke in different ways. I tried to make the teenagers sound like teenagers and the adults have their own way of speaking. I have a very literary affectation as a speaker.

Ben: [chuckles]

Rossi: It drives my classes nuts. I have a kid who's like, 'That word you just used, what does that mean?' and then I'll explain it and they're like, 'Ok, the word you just used to define the word; what does that mean?' [laughs]

So I do have a way of speaking that is kind of literary but I tried to make it not sound too much like me. But it is the way I think right?

Ben: It definitely all works throughout the book.

Rossi: I mean the book represents how I see the world and how I see teachers and how I see students and how I see administrators. It is my thoughts so it would have to sound like me I suppose.

Ben: Who would you say is your favorite character? Do you have one or is it kind of hard to pick a favorite from your own writing?

Rossi: I can tell you my least favorite is Carlton. Carlton is the person that I worry that I would become or I am on some level. Carlton is a character who is perfectly mediocre and normal and average and should be ok with that, except he feels like he's not getting the attention he deserves and so he begins to act out. The internet encourages people to act out and so he just gets worse and worse. He behaves worse and worse; he loses whatever decency or normalcy he would have.

Ben: Agreed. That chapter was a really good look at how social media might affect people in general. That was one of my favorites.

To quote Rossi himself, "Rode a tiny little bicycle in football pads today for the pep assembly. and I don't think I've ever had a better visual metaphor for my life."



Mr. Rossi: My heart is with the kids. I just loved writing Gus and Beaumont. I loved the teenage chapters because they're just so vulnerable and raw. Gus' story is about somebody who romanticizes romance and has to really reckon with what an actual adult relationship is like. He goes on a little journey where he realizes that happily ever after is not a thing at all.

Ben: Yeah, definitely real.

Mr. Rossi: Beaumont is about, 'how do you rebel in a world where there's nothing to rebel against?' Everything's safe and clean and he's trying to find his place. I thought that was a different way to take on what is a very traditional story.

The Lana chapter I really liked because that was the most pure: 'This is a teacher, this is a student' relationship chapter. I don't see that story anywhere in other books. The sacrifice that she makes for that student, to make herself the villain so the other students will accept her.

Ben: That was such a tough choice to read through.

Mr. Rossi: That's a thing a teacher would do and only a teacher would do. I really enjoyed how that turned out.

How do you think Neuqua would react to a crisis like this?



Mr. Rossi: The most fun character to write was Jen because she's so impulsive and so 'anything could happen' while I was writing her chapters. I was constantly surprised at what she did and what happened to her. I originally wrote her to have a happier ending but when I showed it to my wife, my wife said 'There's no way the principal would let her back, there's no way anyone would. She's a mess' [laughs]

Ben: While I was reading it I thought it was tough that the people at the diner and the new town kicked her out for abandoning the kids instead of the sex tape. I thought they would understand more and it was definitely a tough twist. Like 'Really? You're gonna kick her out for what happened to her?'

Mr. Rossi: It was Ruth who kicked her out. Ruth is somebody who had a moral compass. So yeah I really enjoyed writing her [Jen's] chapters because she's so different from who I am. It was fun to see what happened to her in the end.

The character I think I was most proud of was Vince because I think I achieved with him a realistic, complex person who has his own secret and labors to be a decent leader even though he's flawed himself. I think that's the kind of person I admire, the kind of person who is flawed but tries to be good and so I really enjoyed him the most when I was finished.

Ben: How do you think Neuqua would react to a crisis like this? Or is that kind of already reflected in the writing?

Mr. Rossi: [laughs] Yeah I think this is exactly how it would reflect.

Ben: [laughs] It is pretty universal.

Mr. Rossi: Everybody would be freaked out for a day or so, and then because so many teachers are involved, they would not be able to clean house and get rid of everybody. It would be weird for some kids because they'd come to school and they would've seen a nude picture of or whatever else leaked. Life would continue on but things would just be weird in different moments. What it's in the book is what I think would happen. It would be weird but it wouldn't be that explosive, it would just be kind of weird.

Ben: After you finished the book, how did the publishing process unfold? Do you have to go through the actual companies, or was this one self published like you said?

Mr. Rossi: Yeah so I self published after a long period of trying to get someone to buy it. I just couldn't get anyone to buy it. The reason being that I'm nobody, I'm just a teacher, you know. If you want to sell something you need an agent, and if you want an agent you have to have an intro, someone to introduce you. There just aren't those opportunities where I'm at.

Ben: Sounds like a lot of hoops to go through.

Mr. Rossi: It's in New York, the publishing world is in New York. So I finally decided to self publish because I thought maybe If I had a proof-of-concept book I'd get some attention. So I went through the process of hiring people to edit it, design it, and figured out how to release it. I'm published under Kindle Direct and under Ingram Spark so that my books can be available in stores but also online. I have the Kindle version and then I'm doing a book release at Anderson's in April.

Ben: Very cool, I'll have to mark that down.

Ben: One more; What do you hope readers take away from this book?

Mr. Rossi: I hope that they appreciate that teachers are human and teachers have a weird root of humanity. I hope they recognize the value of some secrets. There are some things that should be kept quiet because they allow the person to be a fully integrated person. Not everything should be out there. I think that when we creep on one another or when we go to each other's Instagram accounts, we're looking to understand somebody without the cost of an actual relationship with them. I think that that's not quite transgressive but, ultimately foolish. It's hard to really get to know a person and some people you won't ever get to know. At the very end of the book there's this enigmatic girl who's super pissed at Vince and he doesn't know why. He can't understand her anger and why she's so mad at him and why she says the things that she does. There's a brief moment where he wants to try and find out but he realizes that there's just stuff you can never know about a person. I think that's what I want the takeaway to be: how profound the unknowability that we are to one another.

Ben: That definitely portrays throughout the whole book.

Mr. Rossi: I hope people enjoy it and hope they think it's a fun book. It's a book about teachers and students; how many of those are there right? I hope students see themselves and I hope teachers see themselves.

Be sure to check out Rossi's page-turning novel on Amazon and Kindle



Neuqua senior Sam Hotchkiss takes blue & gold at Mr. NVHS 2023

By Lily Ha

“On top of having a really fun show, it was an awesome honor to have. It makes me really happy to know that I’ll be leaving a legacy here.”

Neuqua Valley High School senior Sam Hotchkiss was selected as the winner of the Mr. NVHS Competition, one of the most honorable titles at Neuqua. This event was held in the auditorium on Wednesday, Mar. 1. In addition to his many achievements and involvements, including being captain of Neuqua’s Ultimate Frisbee team and his participation in Gold Rush, Hotchkiss is known for his active work in Best Buddies, Special Olympics, and his always cheerful demeanor around the halls of Neuqua.

For this year’s Mr. NVHS Competition, students, staff, and competitors’ family members came to watch the selected seniors’ performances and talents for Mr. NVHS. The competitors’ performances were evaluated by three teacher judges and the audience was welcomed to donate one toiletry item in order to vote for their favorite contestants.

The seven contestants, not including Michael Amato, who was sick the evening of the performance day, were Shlok Harshavat, Sam Hotchkiss, JV Krol, Ethan Lopez, Dylan Sedgwick, Joel Setya and Alan Wei. All contestants had individual talents to share with the audience, whether their specialties were playing the piano, dancing, singing or lip-syncing. The participants also tried to interact with the crowd at various times throughout the show to make their own acts fun and exciting.

Mr. NVHS, a celebrated Neuqua tradition, is a mock beauty pageant held at Neuqua Valley every year. The competition consists of various categories in which contestants will compete and are given a score. The contestant with the highest score is crowned Mr. NVHS and receives 2 free prom tickets and Amazon gift card.

The competition categories included opening dance, formal wear, vacation wear, spirit wear, talent/performance and a hot seat interview for each contestant. It was organized by the Student Council’s Special Events Committee. Kaelyn McGhie and Sydney Fullett, both Neuqua students and the chairs of Special Events, served as the hosts of this event. They did a splendid job as the hosts by leading the show smoothly, as well as asking the important hot seat questions. Specifically, their monologues entertained and engaged audience members throughout the show.



For Sam Hotchkiss, the Mr. NVHS title was an unexpected yet wonderful surprise for his final semester as a high schooler. During the Mr. NVHS competition, Hotchkiss performed a lip sync to 'Twist and Shout,' which brought out all kinds of laughter in the audience. During his hot seat questionnaire, Hotchkiss admitted being happy he could cherish his unforgettable time through the Mr. NVHS competition, referencing some moments from his four year high school experience.

His idea of participating in the Mr. NVHS title goes back to 2019. "I'd been trying to think of a talent that I could do since when I first saw the show in 2019," he stated. "I struggled to find one until I started hitting around a hacky sack one summer. I concluded that would be my talent." He added, "I trained a lot, but never got good enough to the point that I could use it as a talent. Instead, I stuck with one of my favorite activities, singing and dancing."

However, for Sam Hotchkiss, the Mr. NVHS title was a big surprise. "I wasn't confident that I was going to win, even though I knew that I definitely had a chance. It was rewarding to be crowned after all the commotion and chatter that the show caused during the school week."

His dream of thriving in Neuqua Valley started in his freshman year when Mr. Perry, Assistant Principal at the Birkett Freshman Center, signed him up for a field trip to a local leadership conference in downtown Naperville. "I was one of the two freshman Gold Rush members at the time. I figured he was hoping to inspire me as a young lad so I could take on the rest of high school."



The field trip taught him two things. One, that he loves missing school. The other, that even though he may not seem like a strong leader, he had the ability to make a positive impact on society. "It was up to me whether I was willing to do it or not," he emphasized.

The Mr. NVHS pageant is always a spirited event at Neuqua Valley, and each year's crop of seniors continues to impress.

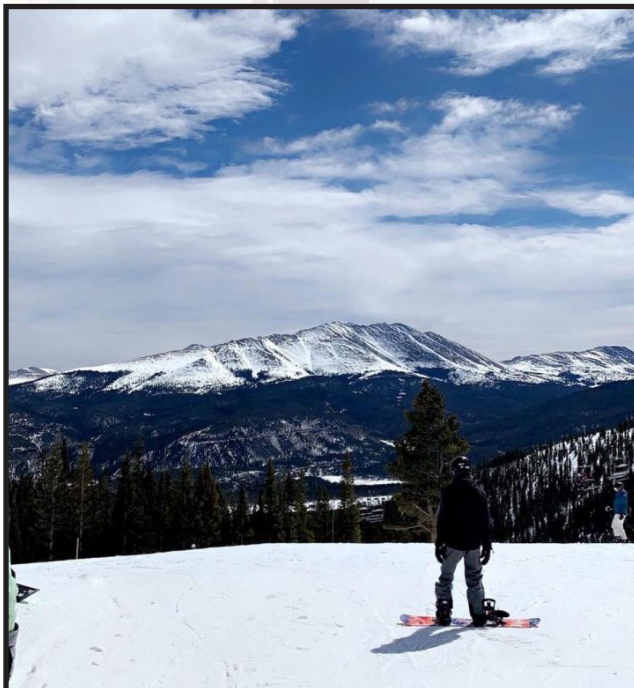
Travel Tips for Spring Break

By Patricia Novak

Now that Spring Break is upon us, (thank goodness) and people are going on vacation, a lot of people will be traveling. Doing a little bit of research before traveling might allow your trip to run a hundred times smoother.

Tip number one, making a packing list. First step to this is knowing how long you're going to be on a trip for, taking into account preplanned fancy dinners, whether or not you will be swimming or skiing and extra clothes for a possible mishap.

Plan your vacation beforehand. Now this is not required, but if there's something that you definitely want to do while you're on your trip (like a special dinner, or scuba diving) you have to make reservations before you go.



There's a few different tips for trips that require the airport: Check into your flight online beforehand. It takes away all the stress before getting to security. All you have to do when you get to the airport is get your bag tags and drop off all your checked bags. Then, you're free to get into the line for security.

If you've ever flown before, you know how long the lines for security can get. Just being prepared with knowledge on what you can and cannot bring onto the plane with you makes the whole process a whole lot easier. If you think of why the lines take so long, it's because no one knows what they're doing, someone leaves a phone in their pocket, forgets the water bottle in the side pouch of their backpack, or wears shoes that take forever to get on and off.

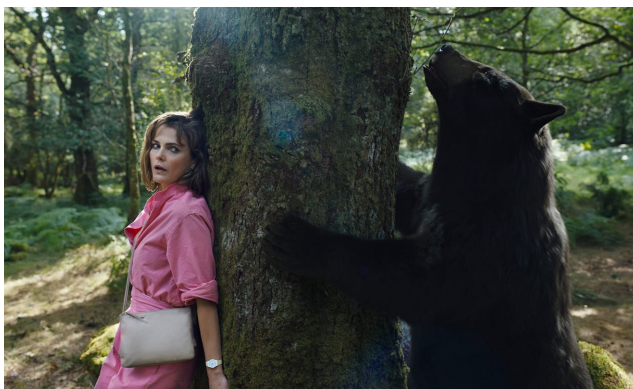
Although travel has its struggles, vacation is supposed to be fun and relaxing, an escape from your everyday life. Being even a little bit prepared will decrease stress by so much. Leaving stress behind is probably the most important part of spring break and these tips will help you to do that!

The new year at the movies: Ranked

By Jake Panek

New year, new movies. Coming off the heels of 2022, which was an all-around fantastic year for film, there have already been a handful of big movies in 2023, but which ones are worth checking out? Here are all of the new releases I've seen in theaters during the new year, ranked:

#11: Cocaine Bear 40/100



It's almost fascinating how utterly inept "Cocaine Bear" is. Here is real, tangible proof that you can't make a B-movie on purpose, especially not one that treats its concept this frivolously, but the real crime of this film is that whenever the titular bruin isn't on screen brutally mauling a bunch of random, throwaway, paper-thin clichés of characters, it's just as brutally boring. If there's anything of value to take away from this movie, it's the cast, who all seem to be having enough fun with the material they've been given, but that's still not enough to distract from just how mind-numbing and practically nonexistent it is. Even at a mere 95 minutes, following these characters becomes such a slog. "Cocaine Bear" technically delivers on its title and is content with doing absolutely nothing else, and I can't think of a bigger waste of your time than this.

#10: Women Talking 47/100



The story of "Women Talking" is urgent, sure, but not one that feels suited for film on both a writerly or visual level. Sarah Polley's adaptation of the novel of the same name by Miriam Toews has a lot of powerful potential that's occasionally brought to the forefront by some of its ensemble (particularly Claire Foy), but the main action of the film being exactly what its title implies results in rote, overly scripted, endlessly repetitive monologues that seem to disregard the fact that these characters are supposed to be women who've lived in an isolated religious cult their entire lives, not women who have studied feminist theory—and that's without mentioning the woefully undercooked attempt at trans representation. Visually, the ultra-desaturated color grading isn't inherently an issue on a scene-by-scene basis, but it, coupled with the competent but bland framing, blocking and editing of the Mennonite women's meetings, gets immediately stale. For all of the valuable discussions and questions that it raises, "Women Talking" is a film that rarely manages to appropriately translate and convey its ideas to the screen.

#9: Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania 60/100



After “Thor: Love and Thunder,” I had given up any and all hope for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, so maybe that’s why I’m just totally indifferent on “Quantumania.” Even if it’s nowhere near the joys of the simple, more grounded stakes of the first two “Ant-Man” films, there’s still enough small-thing-get-big/big-thing-get-small shenanigans sprinkled into the generic world building of the Quantum Realm and a neat surreal centerpiece to keep things going, and it also helps immensely that Jonathan Majors is genuinely great as Kang, the new big bad guy for whatever phases of the MCU we’re in now. As far as \$200 million dollar “Sharkboy and Lavagirl”/“Spy Kids 3-D” remakes go, “Quantumania” is as inoffensive as it gets.

#8: Plane 72/100



It’s all in the title, really. “Plane” is a rock solid entry into the generic action movie canon, one that hits all of the beats you’d expect it to but pays off with some delightfully graphic bouts of action. There’s almost a sense of patience in how Jean-François Richet conducts the videogame-y set pieces, even as they continue to increase in scope and scale, and it’s also really fun to watch Gerard Butler play an action lead that isn’t a hero because he’s some unstoppable badass but because of how stoppable he should and steadfastly refuses to be—he really only gets into one actual fight in the whole film and then spends the rest of it

hobbling around, grunting, and getting even more beat up, and it’s a blast. “Plane” is a perfectly enjoyable time at the movies and a future dadcore cable classic, and that’s all you really need to know about it

#7: M3GAN 72/100



You’d be forgiven for assuming that watching the marketing for “M3GAN”—the seconds-long clip of the uncannily humanlike robot dancing as she’s about to murder a man—is basically having watched the movie, but (unlike a certain other movie on this list) there’s a surprising amount of fun to be had with how much it mines out of its silly concept. If there’s anything this movie needs, it’s an R rating or at the very least a higher body count, even if the violence itself still contains enough gnarliness to satisfy. Formulaic plot aside, “M3GAN” is a film too obviously oriented around its own memeability at points, but it’s also a film that knows what it is, does what it needs to do and is ultimately harmless, so it’s just pointless to get genuinely mad at it for anything.

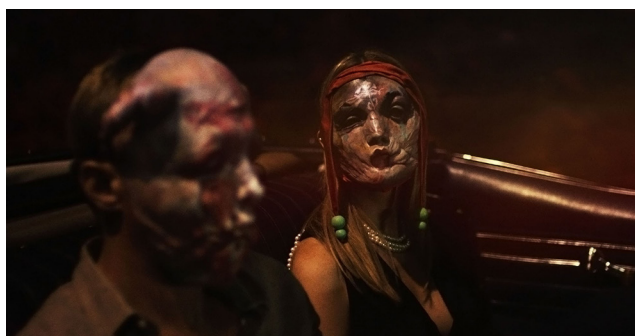
#6: Emily 77/100



As someone who’s never read “Wuthering Heights,” I’d be lying if I said that I got anything major out of this film other than a new inclination to read “Wuthering Heights,” but for a directorial debut, “Emily” is pretty great.

Given how little is actually known about Brontë's short and reclusive life, Frances O'Connor's fictional rendition of it is realized through consistently fascinating and often almost thrilling impressionistic rhythms—many of the simple images that crop up throughout are given an almost surreal tinge through the equally uncomplicated but staggered frames and edits, particularly in one stunning sequence early in the film—and Emma Mackey, who has already proven herself to be a great talent on Netflix's "Sex Education," truly shines as the fabled heroine, capturing every vibrant moment of jubilation, anxiety, love and pain so brilliantly and effortlessly. As far as biopics go, "Emily" is a welcome and exceptionally singular surprise.

#5: Infinity Pool 79/100



What would you do if you knew there were no consequences to your actions that couldn't be paid off? How does one react to watching a clone of yourself get murdered? How do you know you're not the clone? As if these premises aren't chilling enough on paper, "Infinity Pool" is yet another fascinating vision from director Brandon Cronenberg that barrels through the disturbing and erotic dispositions of the ultra-rich in a heinous third-world playground with a great satirical edge. Alexander Skarsgård sells the tormented, twisted mental state of his character as he gets sucked further into the maelstrom, but it's Mia Goth's shrill performance that steals the show—even with all of her recent star-making roles in "X" and "Pearl," this might just be her best work yet. It may be too scattershot to fully hit its targets of class, masculinity, ego and new money in any truly meaningful way, but even at face value, there's enough depraved allure in the nightmarish concept of "Infinity Pool" to keep me entertained.

#4: Magic Mike's Last Dance 80/100



I'm of the firm belief that "Magic Mike XXL" is genuinely one of the best sequels of all time and one of the best American films of the 21st century, so even if "Magic Mike's Last Dance" fails to live up to its predecessors by default, this conclusion to the trilogy is still satisfying while also taking the tone and themes in yet another new direction. Where "Magic Mike" dealt with the sobering realities of the economic crisis and transactions of labor and "XXL" luxuriated in its euphoric bromance and the male entertainers' palpable passion towards their work, "Last Dance" settles into a romance about the art of dance and female agency and pleasure, and Channing Tatum and Salma Hayek are both fabulous at selling it. Steven Soderbergh's return to the helm of the series is also more than welcome, with the film finding its own groove through some terrific montages. The new ensemble of characters that it rapidly introduces may not be as memorable or impactful as those of the previous films, but they all still stick the dramatic landing perfectly fine.

#3: Pathaan 84/100



Fasten your seat belt indeed. "Pathaan" is a gloriously pulpy action film starring worldwide superstar Shah Rukh Khan, complete with globetrotting locales and dance numbers. As its own story, the film is often formulaic, blatantly derivative and just plain dumb in its plotting and characterizations, but the showmanship on display is undeniable.

Khan is as majestic as ever, but it's Deepika Padukone as a double-crossing femme fatale and John Abraham as the epic villain named... Jim who both fight for the spotlight. Once the film kicks into high gear, Siddharth Anand's direction of the increasingly absurd action sequences only gets more and more enjoyable. On top of being a grand comeback vehicle for The King of Bollywood, "Pathaan" is an absurdly entertaining work of pop art mayhem that no high octane action lover should miss.

#2: Knock at the Cabin 91/100



M. Night Shyamalan is easily one of, if not the very best working filmmaker today, and his latest, an adaptation of "The Cabin at the End of the World" by Paul Tremblay, is yet another absolute slam dunk for the director. "Knock at the Cabin" sees the wildly idiosyncratic form of "Old" and faith-based themes of "Signs" all crammed into a mean 100 minute thriller, and the result is never any less than staggering. Shyamalan has definitely worked with more interesting and fully realized characters before, but the same certainly can't be said for the ensemble—everyone here is at the top of their game, especially Dave Bautista as the physically menacing but disarmingly gentle Leonard—and the devastating ending that "Knock at the Cabin" builds to immediately ranks among his very best.

#1: Saint Omer MASTERPIECE



Laurence Coly has been accused of murder, of leaving her 15-month-old child on a beach to be swept out by the tide. It's not the seemingly indefensible act that lies at the core of "Saint Omer," the narrative debut of documentarian Alice Diop, but the journey that leads to its motive, which reveals itself to be almost abstract in implication and yet deeply, compassionately human. In a just world, both Kayije Kagame and Guslagie Malanda would be sweeping every acting award imaginable or at the absolute least getting nominated for their work here, and the sparse visual style that captures the lengthy courtroom sequences is stunning and effectively raw. "Saint Omer" is an unbelievably astounding, capital-M-Major work of art house filmmaking that turns the lens on the viewer and asks them to be the juror in a compellingly impenetrable case, and certainly one of the very best legal drama films since the likes of "12 Angry Men."

Even though the start of the year has historically been somewhat of a dead zone for movies, we've seen a lot of amazing ones so far in 2023, and there are only more on the horizon. Be sure to go see some new releases in theaters, and I'll see you at the movies!

A deep dive into this year's excellent speech season

By Viraj Desai

As the Speech 22-23 season has come to an end, Neuqua is excited to announce that 3 students have qualified for the top three positions! JV Krol placed 2nd in Oratorical Declamation, Aditi Vadakath placed 2nd in SOS, and Luke Fosdick is 2x State Champion in extemporaneous and impromptu speaking. These three students, along with everyone on the Neuqua Speech team, are extremely proud of their accomplishments and for their team as a whole. This season has definitely been one of the best seasons Neuqua has ever had in the history of speech.

To start off, Luke and JV have some insight on the categories they were in and can help explain speech better to those who are not familiar with it. Luke competed in two categories: extemporaneous and impromptu speaking. "In extemp, you draw 3 political questions, choose 1, and then have 30 minutes to write, source, and memorize a 7 minute argumentative speech that answers the question. In impromptu, you draw 3 quotes/prompts, choose 1, and then have 2 minutes to prep and memorize a 6 minute speech that analyzes the prompt and demonstrates it through examples," he explains. He also adds that, "they're both really stressful and really exhilarating, and they require lots of focus!" Luke feels really proud to have represented Neuqua in two immensely exciting and rigorous categories. JV's category is oratorical declamation. He explains that this category, "involves giving someone else's speech, whether that's a Ted Talk, narrative article, a commencement address, or anything someone else gave." This year, he chose to read a commencement address for the state competition. "I'm ecstatic" says JV.

This year, he chose to read a commencement address for the state competition. "I'm ecstatic" says JV. "I'm the first person our coach has ever had place in Dec, and over a decade of coaching, and I'm only the second person in Neuqua history to place in Dec, so I feel like the man." Both JV and Luke are immensely proud of their accomplishments and are so happy to be representing Neuqua Valley in these categories!

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Neuqua's 3 trophy winners, JV Krol, Aditi Vadakath and Luke Fosdick



Throughout the season, all students have worked incredibly hard to prepare for this competition and the season in general. Being a part of speech is a huge commitment as it requires students to give up every Saturday for tournaments, and the participants have done an amazing job this whole year. JV says he put “SO much work and effort into the speech prior to the weekend of state.” He is really proud of himself and thinks that his hard work and dedication is definitely what caused him to receive his placing. Luke Fosdick, the state champion, says that this victory required an immense amount of practice. “I was at speech every day after school for 2-3 hours,” he says. Since his category was extemporaneous and impromptu speaking, he was required to come up with speeches on the spot for various topics. Therefore, he had to keep up with the news and make sure that he had enough knowledge on any topic that could have been thrown at him. “I started taking notes on index cards for every article, and by the end of state, I had more than 600 in my box,” explains Luke.

Even though the results of this competition were incredible, ending the speech season is a bittersweet process, especially for the seniors. “It’s so bittersweet,” says Luke Fosdick. “It’s by definition the best possible end to a senior season, but it makes me so sad to be done permanently.” He recalls his favorite memories of his whole speech career as winning his first tournament, placing 2nd in his junior year and 1st in his senior year, doing warmups in the secret back rooms in Peoria, beating a former Neuqua senior in extemp, and many more. JV also adds that speech has been an amazing opportunity for him to create new lifelong friendships. “I’ve got a group of friends composed of kids from Neuqua, Glenbard West, Wheaton Warrenville South, and Metea, and sharing a meal and stories after a tournament is one of the things I’ll miss the most next year.”

Having competitions with different schools also helped JV and many others connect with people from other schools as well as their own Neuqua peers. Being in speech has provided an outlet for Luke, JV, and many others to be themselves and find incredible friends, and leaving everything behind next year is definitely going to be a challenge for many people.

The Neuqua Speech team, in conclusion, had one of its most amazing seasons yet. Luke, JV, Aditi, and many others have made everyone at Neuqua so proud of their accomplishments and immense effort put into their work this year. Although leaving this behind will be hard, they ended this season knowing they are champions, and that their hard work benefitted them substantially. The entire Neuqua Valley community couldn’t be prouder of their 2022-2023 speech team.



The team celebrated a regional championship as well.



Microaggressions: What they are and why they're harmful

By Sanchali Pandey

We all hear them. We all see them. We all know there's something quite wrong about them. But what are they really? Microaggressions are seemingly casual, everyday slights that are made in a way that targets minorities and/or marginalized groups. Sometimes, they are made so casually that you don't even know one has been made, and often-times, the person making them intends no harm. These are clear proof that even though racism, in its overt fashion, may be somewhat subdued in today's society, it is still very much alive.

If these microaggressions run unchecked, they are enough to take a significant emotional and psychological toll on the ones receiving them. Furthermore, the constant proliferation of these slights can truly harm any environment and turn what may have once been a safe space into something violent and hostile, especially in an academic setting. So what can we do to combat them?



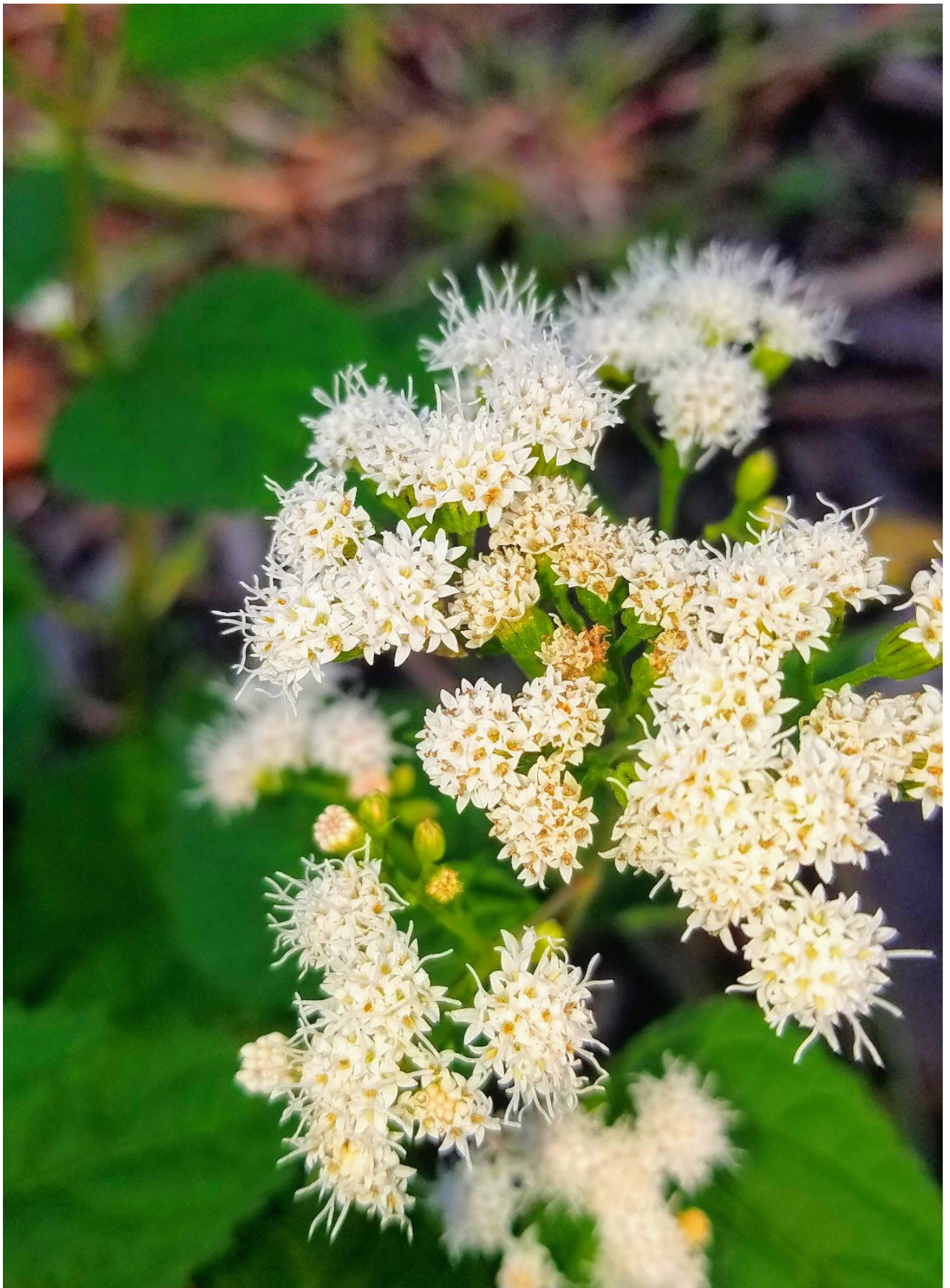
Well, first things first: all internalized racism, homophobia, misogyny, sexism, etc. must go. However, how to go about doing this, as the word internalized implies that these ways of thinking have already significantly nested themselves in one's mind? One thing that could be possible is for these ideas to be stopped in schools themselves, and people could be made aware of why these ways of thinking are completely wrong. However, this might not be possible in all situations, but where it is, it should definitely be implemented.

Another possible course of action is that when a microaggression is heard, whoever said it should immediately be stopped and made aware of what is wrong in what they have said. This will cause them to reflect on their words and likely prevent them from thinking of something similar of the sort in the future. However, sometimes it's not likely to do so because the fact that a microaggression had been said would not have even registered until several moments later.

So, what can we do? Well, the truth is, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to putting an end to microaggressions everywhere. However, we as individuals can consider the following questions and thoughts to help identify where in ourselves possible biases may lie:

1. What do we personally feel that we have a bias towards or against and are scared of?
2. Is it possible for us to be friends with more people who are different from us? If so, we should do so.
3. Learn to accept when people criticize and try to teach you about something rather than simply fighting against it.
4. Try and stand up during any instances where you might see a form of discrimination and/or bias occurring.

In a world where—rather than full blows—subtle slights abound, it's imperative that we realize when these slights are occurring and what is possible, on our part, to stop them. After all, if we keep on letting these insults go unrestrained, will anything really change from our past?





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www.nvhsecho.com*

