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Taft Admissions: An Inside Look



Photo Courtesy of Robert Falcetti

SKY COMFORT
Editor-In-Chief

At first glance, applying to The Taft School might seem similar to applying to college: essays, transcripts, recommendations, and standardized testing. Behind the scenes, though, it is a far more layered, human-centered process that balances personal potential with practical logistics. While the goal is to shape a dynamic and diverse student body, the undeniable reality is that space is limited.

At Taft, every applicant's file is read by at least two readers before being presented to a committee of at least eight admissions officers who work together to evaluate and shape the future of the school. Committee meetings discuss smaller groups, such as "9th grade girls," because final decisions are limited by a critical factor: beds. Just like in college admissions, numbers matter. The number of accepted students must stay consistent year over year, with particular attention to boarders versus day students, legacy and sibling applicants, and athletic recruitment.

This year, Amanda Bohnsack completed her first admissions season as Taft's Director of Admissions after working at Deerfield for five years. While the schools and their mottos differ, she notes that the processes and applicants are strikingly similar. At Taft, she brought a clear vision for how the process could become more structured, consistent, and transparent. This clarity was particularly valuable in building a class that balances in coming student geography, talent, experience, and readiness. Many metrics used in admissions, such as yield indicators (an estimate of the likelihood that a student will accept their offer), offer better insight into evaluating Taft's large number of applicants. Yield indicators are especially important

to mitigate over-enrollment, a serious issue that can result in triple rooms on campus. By tracking these numbers more carefully, the school can better manage space and avoid last-minute complications.

This year, the admission team emphasized three core values to look for in each applicant: resilience, curiosity, and engagement. During the interview process, candidates were asked about those three qualities, which encouraged reflection and gave admissions officers deeper insight into each student's character and motivation. When reading applications, these values often came up to describe certain essays and student traits. They serve as a guiding lens to ensure that the admissions process remains both thoughtful and efficient. Students who do not reflect Taft's motto, its portrait of a graduate, or its boarding school culture can be more easily identified and reconsidered. Alongside this, there is consistency from year to year in how many players each sports team needs. As Bohnsack notes, "It's not just about shaping a strong class, it's about balancing programs, space, and school culture." Receiving 1,650 applications each year and maintaining an acceptance rate of about 20 percent presents a challenge that requires both strategy and sensitivity. As the volume grows, so does the need to rely on structure, data, and values to shape each incoming class.

Associate Director of Multicultural Recruitment, Shavar Bernier, reflects on some of the updates that have shaped this year's process. "We've gotten better at tracking our progress and evaluating what we're doing throughout the process." While these improvements have brought a new level of clarity and control, the process remains deeply personal at its core. Metrics may help guide decisions, but

the ultimate judgment depends on the connection between the applicant and the reader. This connection comes alive most clearly through the student's writing, their interview, and the way their story comes together across the application. Reflecting on some of the standout essays he's read, Mr. Bernier recalled one about a boy who saved a friend from drowning. "It was pretty epic," he said. "The essay ended up being about regular people doing extraordinary things. It was written with humility, humor (he wasn't a good swimmer), and craft." This kind of writing, thoughtful, genuine, and deeply human, reminds the admissions team of what truly matters.

The process is holistic for a reason. When an application truly stands out, it is not just because of high grades or impressive activities. Instead, it is because of the voice and personality that emerge through the essays, the recommendations, and the interview. "It's nice when you have the complete picture (recommendations, grades, parents' statements, school, geography, and so on) and then can almost anticipate a couple of themes that will come up in the essay," Bernier said. "It's easy to see when someone searches for the best school essay topics." By contrast, when a student writes from a place of honesty and personal reflection, the result often aligns with the rest of the application in a meaningful and memorable way.

In the end, the admissions process is both deliberate and deeply personal. While metrics help manage the volume of applications and bring structure to an increasingly complex system, it is the stories, values, and voices of each student that bring them to life. Taft is not just looking for strong students. It is looking for young people who will thrive in, contribute to, and be shaped by the community around them.

No, There Haven't Been a Million Plane Crashes

Here's Why It Feels That Way

RACHEL CHAE & ELEANOR LEMON
Staff Writers

Have there been more plane crashes this year? It's a question that's been on our minds, especially in February and March, when it felt like every time we opened *The New York Times*, there was another aviation disaster making headlines. From high-profile incidents involving international airlines to emergency landings caught on grainy camera footage, the visibility of these events has sparked widespread anxiety and speculation. With Google searches for "is flying safe?" spiking in February, it had started to feel like something bigger was happening – that maybe the skies weren't as safe as we thought. But was the spike in media coverage a reflection of an actual increase in plane crashes or just the result of the viral nature of our favorite social media platforms? Perception does not always match reality, so that's the part that is harder to figure out – and perhaps explains why so many others were asking the same question.

According to the National Transportation Safety Board, January and February typically record about 20 fatal aviation accidents per month. *The Guardian* reports that there were only 10 fatal civil aviation accidents this January, and in February, there were six. However, it is worth considering that the data reflects the number of deadly accidents but not the resultant number of deaths. In late January, a mid-air collision between an American Airlines flight and an Army Black Hawk helicopter led to 67 deaths in the first fatal commercial airline crash in the U.S. since 2009. Another collision on February 6th in Alaska, barely a week later, killed 10 people. CNN reported that these two collisions were "two of the deadliest plane disasters of the last decade in the US."

Still, aviation experts stress that air travel remains one of the safest modes of transportation. Peter Goelz, former managing director of the National Transportation Safety Board, told the Associated Press that although he was unsurprised by the public reaction, he still emphasized that "commercial aviation is a



Photo Courtesy of The Guardian

profoundly safe way to move large numbers of people, and it gets safer every year." Furthermore, this isn't just expert reassurance – it's backed by decades of data and statistics. Modern aircraft are equipped with multiple layers of redundancy, and pilots must undergo rigorous training and safety checks regularly. Plus, when you look at the numbers, the contrast between flying and other forms of travel becomes even clearer. In 2022, just 33 serious injuries were reported from commercial air travel in the U.S., according to U.S. Transportation Department data. That same year, car travel caused around 2.3 million injuries. The math is simple: flying is still one of the safest travel methods.

So why were we so scared? Social media, with its algorithm-driven echo chambers, can exacerbate this myth by reinforcing narratives that align with our fears and suspicions. One minute, you're watching *The Daily Mail's* 15-second TikTok recounting a recent accident; the next, you're doom-scrolling conspiracy theories and falling deeper into a spiral of misinformation. We become trapped in this echo chamber, and what we see seems only to confirm and reinforce our worst fears. Such conspiracy theories propagate through the spread of viral videos and sensationalized headlines, suggesting that there could be some grand hidden truth or deliberate cover-up.

This not only fuels an unnecessary sense

of panic, but also disrespects the victims and their families. Every plane crash involves real people – passengers, crew, and the loved ones they leave behind – who are all left to mourn profound loss. Their tragedy is not a viral TikTok or an alliterative headline; it is an incredible pain and grief that so many are left to grapple with. Behind every headline we see, it is important to remember that there are lives that have been altered forever. Someone is forced to live without their daughter, someone has lost their best friend, and someone cannot call their mom anymore. Their stories deserve dignity, not exploitation for clicks.

At the end of the day, it's not that we're gullible – it's that we're overwhelmed. When every other TikTok on your feed shows flaming engines or midair emergencies, it's easy to start believing that the sky is falling. But part of growing up in a world surrounded by alarming headlines and deceptive articles means learning to ask: is this really the full story? We have to remind ourselves that algorithms are designed to keep us watching, not to keep us informed. And if we're not careful, we end up overreacting to patterns that simply don't exist. Ultimately, being more thoughtful about what we consume, believe, and share isn't just smart – it's necessary.

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One Voice, 25 Hours: Cory Booker and the History of the Filibuster

ALLISON PALMER
News Editor

Throughout U.S. history, filibusters have been praised as an opportunity for minority political groups to delay and potentially block legislation from passing through the Senate, while also receiving condemnation for their intentional obstruction of the flow of meaningful debate. Regardless of opinion, current Senator Cory Booker has made history with the country’s longest-ever filibuster at 25 hours and five minutes. For those unfamiliar with the term, a filibuster is a continuous speech designed to prolong debate and delay or prevent a vote on a bill. These extensive speeches are permitted because, unlike in the House of Representatives, there is minimal restriction on a Senator’s speech duration, meaning that if a Senator simply continued to speak for long enough, they would hope the opposing majority would either permanently delay or pull the bill altogether to continue with regular proceedings.

The history of the filibuster dates back to the first-ever gathering of the U.S. Senate in 1789, when Senator William Maclay wrote in his diary, “The [intent] of the Virginians . . . was to talk away the time so that we could not get the bill passed.” Since then, filibusters have remained an integral part of U.S. Senate culture, with minimal regulation over time. The only limits put in place to prematurely end a filibuster were created by Woodrow Wilson in 1917, which would allow Senators to file a motion to invoke cloture, meaning if two-thirds of the Senate (later changed to 60 Senators) voted to end the filibuster, the speech would be forced to finish. This policy, known as Senate Rule 22, was invoked for the first time only two years later, in 1919, when the Senate voted to end a filibuster against the Treaty of Versailles following World War I. Their popularity rose, especially among Southern Senators opposing the Civil Rights Movement, throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Previous to Senator Cory Booker, the longest filibuster on record was held by Senator Strom Thurmond, a southern Democrat from South Carolina, when he opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 for 24 hours and eighteen minutes. Thurmond was protesting the passage of the first federal civil rights legislation since the post-Civil War Reconstruction era.

Now, 67 years later, Senator Cory Booker, a New Jersey Democrat, has shattered this record with his continuous 25-hour speech. Booker did not once sit down, eat food, or use the restroom during his protest of the Trump administration’s first months. When asked about the legacy of record-breaking filibusters, Booker stated, “I always felt there was a strange shadow in this institution that the longest speech was held by Thurmond.” Given the inherently racist nature of the previous record holder, Booker was hopeful that Thurmond’s legacy would not remain permanent, stating, “Maybe, just maybe, I could break this record of the man who tried to stop the rights upon which I stand,” Booker said. “[But] I’m not here, though, because of his speech; I’m here despite his speech.” During his 25 hours, Booker covered a vast range of topics, from condemning Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to objecting to Trump’s foreign policy moves, including his warmer tone toward Russian President Vladimir Putin and criticism of NATO. Through his protest, Booker used his voice as a Democrat in the minority of the Senate (53 Republicans to 47 Democrats) to strategically draw national attention to issues that he believed were being ignored or overshadowed by the Republican majority. Whether the speech will galvanize support that will lead to tangible legislative change remains uncertain. However, Booker nonetheless serves as a reminder that individual voices can still command attention and influence national discourse.



Photo Courtesy of USA News

Taft Papyrus

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Earthquake Hits Myanmar Amid a Civil War

CHELSEA SOETEMO & MANDY XU
Staff Writers

On March 28, 2025, at 12:50:52 local time, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake hit the Sagaing Region of Myanmar. Twelve minutes after the initial quake was a second with a 6.4 magnitude. These earthquakes brought down thousands of buildings and destroyed infrastructure in multiple regions. According to the World Health Organization, crucial healthcare foundations were damaged, with four hospitals and one health center entirely destroyed. As of April 13, the death toll had surpassed 3,600 and is still projected to grow, with thousands injured and missing. Aftershocks continued, and Thailand, southwest China, and Vietnam were also affected. In particular, a tower in Bangkok collapsed, resulting in the deaths of at least 21 people, while dozens remain missing.

Furthermore, on the weekend of April 5, rain fell on parts of Myanmar, complicating relief efforts and increasing the risk of diseases like cholera. Many survivors are left homeless, living outdoors without access to clean water or shelter. The United Nations had called for urgent support, tents for displaced people, and international aid.

In response to this tragedy, surrounding countries such as Russia, China, and India promptly sent rescuers to Myanmar. Immediately after an earthquake, there is a 72-hour “golden” rescue window when people trapped under rubble are most likely to survive. After that window closes, the chances of survival without drinking water are almost zero. However, during Myanmar’s 72-hour rescue window, rescuers and humanitarian aid organizations seeking access to crucial areas were blocked by military authorities and had to go through lengthy checkpoints. Because of this, countless lives that could have been saved were lost, and survivors struggled without the necessary food and medical care. The military, officially known as the Tatmadaw, claims this delay to be for security reasons. However, many accuse the military of using these excessive security checkpoints as a form of punishment against the Myanmar people who have resisted their rule for decades.



Photo Courtesy of USA Today

Myanmar has had a troubled history. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1948, the country has been mostly under brutal military control by the Tatmadaw. Many were optimistic that Myanmar would transition to democracy after the National League for Democracy was introduced in 2011. However, in 2021, the Tatmadaw carried out an illegal coup to reassert its control over the country. This hostile takeover sparked an uproar of defiance from the people of Myanmar: civilians took to the streets in protests, and armed ethnic groups fought for their autonomy. For the past four years, Myanmar has been grappling with a civil war.

March’s devastating earthquake only exacerbated issues in the already vulnerable Myanmar. It is an emergency within an emergency. The biggest concern now is the health and safety of Myanmar’s people. UN reports show that cases of malaria and tuberculosis have grown sevenfold since the civil war started. The UN’s 2025 report on Myanmar stated that “the healthcare system is in collapse.” And that was in January, before the earthquake. It is difficult to imagine the extent of the chaos now, with hospitals destroyed, citizens displaced, and thousands injured.

Such immense suffering on the other side of the world may seem detached and distant from us here at Taft. However, we urge readers to embody Taft’s motto and play our part in serving the global community. Many organizations, including UNICEF, Heart to Heart International, and Project HOPE, are scrambling to send aid to Myanmar. Your donation to these organizations can provide essential needs to those who have lost everything.

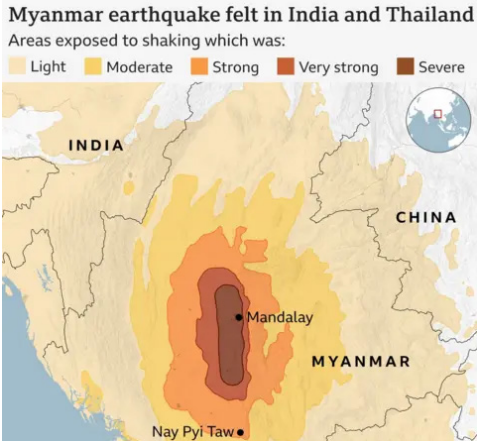


Photo Courtesy of USGS

More Than a Decision Letter: Surviving College Admissions

COURTNEY EDWARDS
Editor In Chief

It’s 11:43 p.m. I’m staring at the Common App portal, trying to craft the perfect 650-word story that somehow captures everything I’ve ever done, everything I’ve ever felt, and everything I want to be. My browser has 19 tabs open—college rankings, essay tips, YouTube videos titled “How I Got Into My Dream School.” I should be sleeping, but I can’t. Not when everything feels so fragile, like one wrong word might ruin everything.

Welcome to college admissions season, where we try to sell the best version of ourselves without really knowing who we are yet. We hear it all the time: “It’s more competitive than ever.” And it is. Schools that once had acceptance rates above 30% are now in the teens. The top-tier ones? Single digits. It’s hard not to feel like you’re entering a lottery—except the ticket costs hundreds of dollars in fees, test prep, and lost sleep. That pressure makes everything feel like it matters too much. One B sophomore year? One missed club meeting? Suddenly, it feels like your whole future is hanging in the balance. Even the “safeties” don’t feel safe anymore.

I applied to sixteen schools, six of which I didn’t even visit. I added some of them to my list the night before the application deadline. I just felt like I needed more chances because everything is such a gamble. A gamble where the house always wins.

We’re told to be authentic. Vulnerable. Unique. But the college essay has turned into its own performance. It’s less about who you are and more about how you tell your story—and whether that story fits what the school wants to see. All of us are just trying to answer the same unspoken question: Do I make your campus look good? That’s the dirty secret: it’s not about finding students who would thrive there. It’s about curating a class that reflects well on the school.

Now that the process is over, I wish I could say I feel relieved—but honestly, I still carry some of the weight with me. I made it through the deadlines, the essays, and the decisions, but the fear and self-doubt didn’t disappear overnight. Looking back, I realize how much of myself I poured into trying to be what I thought colleges wanted. I spent so many nights questioning whether I was good enough, whether I’d made the “right” choices, and whether rejection would define me. Even now, with everything submitted and settled, part of me still wonders what it all meant. Was I chasing a school or an idea of success that was never really mine to begin with? I’m proud of how far I’ve come, but I’m also still trying to heal from what the system put me through.

In the end, college decisions came and went. Some brought joy, others disappointment, and most just left me feeling...tired. But what I’ve learned is that my worth was never in an acceptance letter. It wasn’t in a ranking, a test score, or an essay. It’s in how I showed up for myself through all of it—in the late nights, the quiet doubts, the moments I kept going when I wanted to give up. The system may not be built for students, but I made it through anyway. And that, in itself, is something to be proud of.



Photo Courtesy of Business Insider

Death by Desk Chair: A Campus Crisis

HOLLY RICHARD
Staff Writer

Imagine getting your worst math grade of the year back on third-floor Wu. Bordering on tears, you trudge all the way to the history wing for the in-class essay that you’ve been dreading all day, just to get there and be welcomed by a plastic chair that squeaks. Perfect. Just what you needed to set the tone for 60 minutes of historical analysis. These chairs aren’t just uncomfortable—they’re demoralizing. Commonly found in C129 and A117, these chairs are too low, too stiff, and heavily lacking in the back support category. It’s hard enough to focus during an Honors US History in-class essay without your back slowly turning into a question mark. And not to mention how difficult it is to line the legs of the chairs up just right with the legs of the table so that you’re not straddling a piece of metal.

Let’s be real here: the plastic chairs aren’t the only elephant in the room—I also have serious beef with the Wu rolling desk chairs. These “chairs” are not even chairs—they’re *not-quite-chairs*, *not-quite-desks* hybrids on wheels. What’s better than a chair that has a desk attached to it, but can only fit one notebook on it and is at a slight angle? Bonus points if your water bottle tips off the edge and crashes to the floor during a silent test. The seats are curved in a way that might work if we were all built like the letter S, and the tray underneath, which I assume is meant for storage, mostly serves as an ankle hazard or a place where you leave a folder and forget about it by the end of class. Add in the wheel and the constant twisting and turning, and suddenly, every classroom transforms into a bumper car arena. These chairs are not comfortable, not built for 75-minute class periods, and most certainly not ergonomic.

But wait—just when you thought I’d exhausted the worst of Taft’s seating options, enter the wooden swivel chair. You’ll find these contraptions in a few classrooms on campus, most notably C130 and the MAC. At first glance, they seem almost distinguished and conference room-like. But don’t be fooled by the solid oak facade, these chairs are a trap. The most notable issue? The moment you dare to lean back on one of these, you may as well sign a contract saying you’ll be halfway to the floor by the middle of your Human Geo Harkness discussion. The deceiving part is that they *look* sturdy, but the spring-loaded backrest gives you just enough support to make you think you’re safe, right before reminding you that you’re definitely not. Nothing quite says “academic focus” like being horizontal on the floor before the end of class. Between the plastic folding chairs, the wheeled desk hybrids, and now these deceptively dangerous wooden launchpads, it’s hard to believe anyone makes it through a full day of classes without back pain—or a mild concussion.

Is there really not enough in the Taft endowment to invest in more comfortable chairs? We’re talking about a school with 12 tennis courts and two hockey rinks. Surely, we can find somewhere in the budget for chairs that aren’t also used to tailgate a football game or play bumper cars. Better seating isn’t a luxury—it’s a basic condition for learning and staying attentive, especially when we’re expected to be in these classrooms hours on end without making it physically obvious that we’re going to be complete hunchbacks by the time we graduate. Is it really too much to ask for a chair that supports both our backs and our GPAs?



Photo Courtesy of Sky Comfort

A Love Letter from a Future Rhino

VERONICA ANTOV
Staff Writer

With the halls buzzing with novelty, Taft is an entirely more lively place on revisit days. You may remember yours if you attended one, but by now, you have probably forgotten most of the associated emotions. When my brother came for his revisit day, his experience was nothing short of invigorating, and if any part of it was static or boring, it was having to take a break from the activities to eat lunch with me. He’s a busy guy, so I couldn’t persuade him to sit for an interview, but I will write this review from his perspective after hearing all the stories he told me.



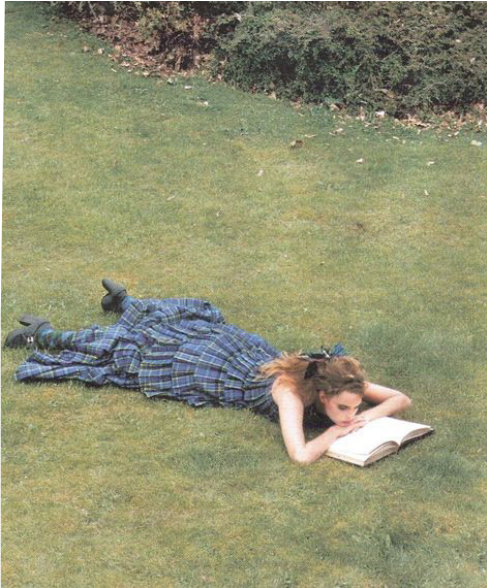
My brother has had numerous excuses to visit and spend time on campus in the past, but none could possibly have felt as exclusive as this: this time, he was clutching a ticket. He prowled the halls like he’d been there a million times before, which isn’t even the case; he just has a great sense of direction. When his programming ended, I waited in the throng outside Potter Gallery to meet him, only to find that he wasn’t there at all, but instead on his way back from my locker after having gone to drop off his jacket. You would think he was the current student, not I, if you hadn’t seen him glowing with pride. Every little quotidian task that we do begrudgingly or take for granted made him feel ten times happier, more mature.

There was nothing he enjoyed more than the rhino-shaped cookies that turned his lips blue (totally worth it). He heard all the latest gossip and discussed all the latest pop culture with the friends I introduced him to. He was happy to even be given a sheet of his host’s notebook paper and a spare pen to solve math problems in an algebra class. And he just wouldn’t stop pestering me about playing ping pong in the Jig. He was enjoying himself because everything that was exciting seemed to be at his fingertips. It wasn’t just the difference between middle school and high school that he was enamored with, but also all these unique things that Taft had to offer. In addition, he was completely convinced that he knew more people here than I do, which might just be true, but I’m reluctant to believe it. It seems a little absurd, doesn’t it? (Please get back to me on that if you have an opinion; I might be the crazy one.) Anyway, if a lanky blond kid approached you to thank you for your hospitality and you didn’t remember him at all, don’t worry about it. He’s just a little overzealous, though for great reason. He was in awe of how many people stopped to greet him or ask how his day was going.

When my brother and I were reflecting on this experience, I was reminded of how intimidated I was when I first visited Taft. I am so glad he wasn’t so much intimidated as impressed. I think we can all learn a thing or two from him. If you take even a minute to consider where you were before Taft, you’ll find that you’ve come a long way from that wide-eyed kid you once were. But you’ll also find that you still attend the same school that once seemed so imposing: these are the same archaic halls, poised students, and memorabilia of accomplishments. All of these same opportunities and thrills are still at your disposal. Now is the time to attend a college fair, applaud your peers’ concert, or learn the rules of squash. I remember that when I first visited Taft, the advice I heard everywhere was “try something new at Taft because there are so many opportunities here.” And this could not be any more true. For me, and hopefully for you too, seeing Taft through someone else’s eyes is all it takes to remind you of how special this place is and how lucky we are to attend it.



Photo Courtesy of Mr. Falcetti

Dear Horace...	April Book Recs
<div>CHRISTIAN YEUNG <i>Opinions Editor</i></div> <div><div><div>Dear Horace, Who keeps taking all the fruit from the dining hall?</div><div>Dear Fruit-starved Student, It is unclear who this mystery pony-tailed man is, but there are rumors that whole bunches of bananas and dozens of apples disappear into his deep pockets and Tupperware boxes. That's another name to add to the list of mysterious visitors at Taft.</div><div>Dear Horace, What is this bright light outside my window?</div><div>Dear Hibernating Student, After so many months in the cold, dark Connecticut winter, you might have forgotten about the Sun. Fear not, Spring is upon us, and hopefully, warmth will come with it.</div><div>Dear Horace, Why do Seniors get so many privileges?</div><div>Dear Salty Non-Senior, Some may say they deserve it after so many years of waiting for Senior skips, no Spring Sit Downs, and the Senior Jig Line (RIP). And who knows, you might get your wish. I heard we might not be seeing them again next year.</div><div>Dear Horace, What are these rumors about Spring exams?</div><div>Dear Unfortunate Lowerclassmen, Ah, as if one dreaded winter exam wasn't enough, why don't we double it and pass it along? I'm sure rumors are just rumors, but who knows? Then you can finally take a two-hour exam while the flowers are alive outside!</div></div><div></div><div></div><div>Photo Courtesy of Google</div></div>	<div>ELEANOR PURICELLI <i>Staff Writer</i></div> <div><div>Yellowface - R.F. Kuang</div><div><p>R.F. Kuang's <i>Yellowface</i> is a thrilling novel following Junier Hayward and Athena Liu: two aspiring authors intending to be twin stars. But as Athena gains success, June continues to fall short. But one night, when Athena suddenly dies in June's presence, June impulsively steals Athena's unfinished work: a new novel about Chinese laborers during World War I. Sending Athena's work to her agent as her own, June soon rebrands herself as Junier Song and publishes the novel. As the novel gains literary fame, June becomes engrossed in a series of lies and online controversy. Despite living in Athena's shadow, June insists she is the novel's true author. But as the truth is slowly revealed, June is faced with the question: what happens when the wrong voice claims a story that isn't theirs, and how far will they go to protect it? If you're in search of a twisted novel with morally complex characters, <i>Yellowface</i> is one that you will not want to miss.</p></div><div>The God of the Woods - Liz Moore</div><div><p><i>The God of the Woods</i> by Liz Moore follows the mysterious disappearance of 13-year-old Barbara van Laar from Camp Emerson, a wealthy, prestigious Adirondack summer camp. And Barbara isn't just any camper, she's the daughter of the camp's powerful and secretive owner. As the investigation begins to unfold, officials recognize parallels to the unsolved disappearance of Bear van Laar, Barbara's older brother, from fourteen years earlier. The search for both van Laar siblings slowly reveals hidden secrets of the family's troublesome dynamics. Liz Moore's <i>The God of the Woods</i> tells a complex yet thrilling story that allows readers to discover the unknown truth of the van Laar family's past.</p></div><div>Lessons in Chemistry - Bonnie Garmus</div><div><p><i>Lessons in Chemistry</i> by Bonnie Garmus follows Elizabeth Zott, a chemist working in an only male field in the 1960s. After various dilemmas within her personal and professional life, Elizabeth unexpectedly finds herself as the host of America's newest and most popular cooking show: Supper at Six. Elizabeth utilizes her platform to not only revolutionize cooking through chemistry but also to encourage other women to refuse traditional gender roles and to challenge the status quo. A hilarious and thoughtful novel, Bonnie Garmus's <i>Lessons in Chemistry</i> is the perfect read about feminism and empowerment.</p></div><div></div><div>Photo Courtesy of Vogue</div></div>

Clubs at Taft: Abundance or Overload?

ALLISON PALMER
News Editor

The student body at Taft is generally well-rounded, balancing demanding academics, elite sports teams, and impressive extracurriculars. But walking down Main Hall, I couldn't help but notice the new floor-to-ceiling display of all of our clubs and organizations, and think to myself, is all of this really necessary?

As someone who joined too many clubs freshman year under the social pressure to be involved beyond Taft's already demanding schedule, I think this behavior has tipped the scales from exciting to overwhelming. Here at Taft, we seem to have created a culture in which the more clubs you join, the merrier, but I think it's time we address the cost of all of this involvement.

There's no doubt about the integral role clubs play in creating spaces where students can explore specific interests outside of the classroom; whether it's learning to fish or joining an affinity group, clubs provide a meaningful space for learning, forming connections, and growth. However, the sheer number of clubs at Taft, many with overlapping missions or struggling to meet, shows that what was meant to enrich student life often adds stress and highlights inconsistency. Too often, I hear about students joining clubs just because they want to "bolster their resumé" rather than build real communities or explore genuine interests. The exclusivity of a club should not count towards why a student wants to join it; instead, we should focus on shared passion, not status. When involvement in these clubs and organizations is driven by pressure, not purpose, it reduces the value of being in one and makes it almost entirely obsolete. This leaves us with kids in love with the idea of being in a club just to say they were selected, but with no drive to contribute to the club's mission.

Many clubs at Taft also lack any serious longevity; I can 100% confirm that there are clubs posted on the wall of Main Hall right now that have not met in two years because, again, I was a follower of club-joining culture in my early years here and joined several clubs that ultimately lacked the time or organization to last. This highlights the notion that if so many of these clubs are started from a place of excitement and passion, yet burn out so quickly, students are spread so thin they cannot deeply commit to any of it. There's also an issue of redundancy: with so many clubs aimed at accomplishing almost identical goals, it makes it difficult for any individual organization to make that big of a difference. Moreover, with so many clubs existing only by name, the nature of the club system, in general, begins to feel almost entirely performative.

I'm not against the idea of starting new clubs, and I do not want to limit student creativity. I just believe that if we, as a school, worked to counter the club culture that we have now, Tafties would feel less overwhelmed, and each individual organization would have a deeper and more profound impact. If each student focused on one or two clubs that they truly enjoyed, we would be taking steps as a community toward a school that genuinely prioritizes engagement and passion over checking boxes. Because sometimes, less is really more.

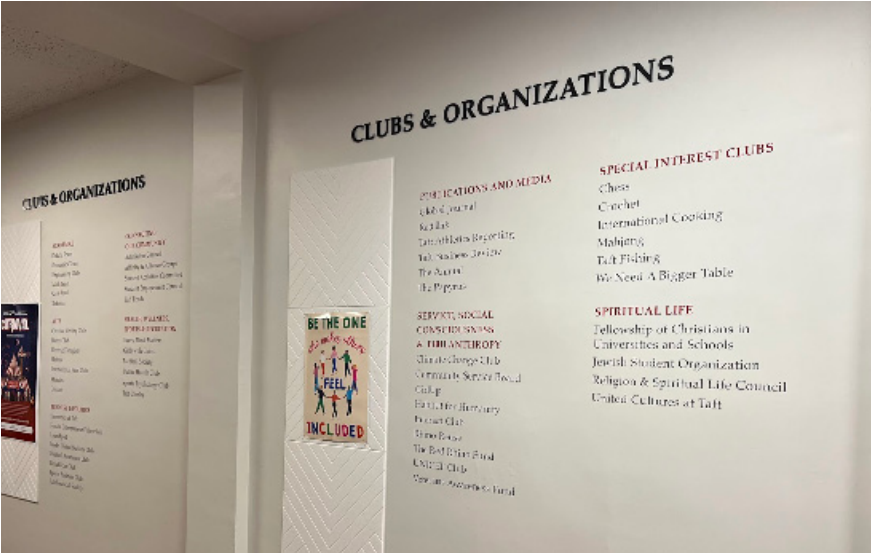


Photo Courtesy of Allison Palmer '26

To Room or Not to Room: That is the Question

ELEANOR PURICELLI & ELLIE TAYLOR
Staff Writers

While spring at Taft is often considered the highlight of the school year, filled with numerous hours playing spikeball on Jig Pat, this term also brings up the exciting yet troublesome topic of next year's living situations. To help with this, we have compiled a foolproof guide of each dorm's pros and cons so you're guaranteed to make the best decision.

Starting with our **lower school girls'** dorms, there are two options: Congdon or Mac House. Both dorms are conveniently located in the center of campus, and they seem incredibly similar, but in reality, they have stark differences. Congdon may be connected to the Health Center and adjacent to Wu, but Mac has the prime location for a last-minute run to the food stand. However, Mac is situated under numerous trees, preventing natural light from coming into some of its rooms, unlike Congdon. Also, Congdon's common room is located on the dorm's main floor, while Mac's common room is in the infamous "Mac basement," which has a reputation for flooding and a lingering, mysterious odor. Despite this, Mac is considered the more homey of the two, with students always in the common room. Finally, the two have very different flooring options. Will you pick Congdon's carpeting or Mac's hardwood flooring? You seriously can't go wrong with either.

Next on our list: **lower school boys**. Which floor, HDT 2, 3, or 4, is the ideal living space for you? While the location of these dorms is similar, the stair climbing is a different story. If stairs aren't your thing and you're seeking a close-knit community, HDT2 is your future home. This small floor, situated closest to Main Hall, is prime for those wanting to hone in on their academics. However, if you are looking for fun, then HDT3 is the call. Being the largest floor, you are sure to find your people. But be careful—this floor is said to have some ongoing bathroom issues. Finally, HDT4. Considered the Goldilocks of all floors (mainly by its residents), HDT4 is the perfect balance between productivity and fun. While you may be faced with a treacherous walk to your room, you will be in the center of the action as these boys are the life of the party. But don't say we didn't warn you about the trek... All things considered, which floor will you choose?

Moving on to the **upper school girls**, perhaps the most contentious of them all. There are three options: Centen, Voge, and USGD. These three dorms have a variety of rooming options and are located in vastly different areas of the school. Centen is the furthest away from the Main Building, but is the only dorm predominantly with doubles. So if you're looking to have a roommate in upper school, Centen is the place to be, but beware of the bathroom sinks, which tend to spew out murky brown water from time to time. Next, USGD, popularly known as "the Rock." By far the smallest girls' dorm on campus, USGD features just under 20 singles and is only one floor. So if you're not in search of a roommate or have a last-minute falling out, USGD is the place for you! Finally, Voge is the perfect in-between of these two dorms. Newly built and situated in Main Building, Voge's connecting singles present the option of having a roommate or a single. A roommate may make your final two years at Taft more thrilling, but your own space will allow you to easily focus on schoolwork and dreaded college applications. Despite this, we should warn you that Voge does lack a kitchen, and you can sometimes find the occasional mouse roaming the halls. It's up to you, but in the end, Centen, USGD, and Voge are all amazing dorms.

Last but not least, we arrive at the **upper school boys**. Presented with the choice of either ISP or CPT, Taft's oldest boys have two very different options. Like HDT, CPT is faced with the same choices around its stairs and lifestyle. CPT2 is quiet and focused, but it has quick access to Bingham. CPT3 is on the rowdier side, being the largest floor, and CPT4, in the words of Noah Jettelson '25, is "perfect." The main difference for these boys is the option of living in ISP. Only containing nine residents, this dorm is perfectly situated in front of the food stand and above the dining hall. Its size allows for a tight community, almost like its own family. ISP's downside, however, is that you will be separated from the remainder of your classmates who live in CPT. But do not fret, for no matter the floor or dorm you pick, you will be sure to have a fun and community-oriented time in the upper school!

We hope you have gained some valuable insight on these dorm reputations, whether it be bathrooms, stairs, or mysterious odors. Now, you can make the choice that's perfect for you, but know that wherever you choose to live, or rather, wherever the housing gods (Ms. Duffy) may place you, you won't regret it (hopefully).



Photo Courtesy of Taft School

Streaming Diplomacy: How IShowSpeed Accidentally Bridged the U.S.-China Divide

STEVEN ZHANG
Staff Writer

The clatter of chopsticks and the hiss of sizzling oil filled the air as IShowSpeed — one of America’s biggest and most popular streamers — sat down at a noodle bar on the bustling streets of Shanghai. Surrounded by a group of young and incredulous fans, he slurped on a bowl of beef noodles while laughing with the other diners as his cameraman live-streamed his entire experience to millions of viewers in the U.S. and abroad. After taking his first bite, sweat rolled down his forehead, and his eyes widened as he laughed and said, “You sure you put a little spicy here?”

What began as a spur-of-the-moment adventure for the 20-year-old influencer, whose real name is Darren Watkins Jr., quickly turned into something bigger: a viral cultural exchange that challenged long-held assumptions about Chinese life and culture. IShowSpeed’s streams, which ranged from four to six hours of uninterrupted broadcasting, offered a rare and unscripted look at everyday life in the country for millions of viewers. In a time of heightened political tension and discourse surrounding the U.S. and China, where headlines often focus on security, surveillance, and suspicion, IShowSpeed’s livestream at a noodle bar became an unlikely stage for soft power and global diplomacy.

Over the past two centuries, the cultural relationship between the United States and China has fluctuated between curiosity, cooperation, and deep suspicion. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, trade, missionaries, and student exchanges sparked American curiosity about China, though often through a skewed Western lens. That began to change in the 1970s with Ping-Pong Diplomacy and Nixon’s visit to China, leading to a surge in cultural exchange. American brands and media poured into China, while Americans embraced Chinese food, films, and traditions. Yet in recent years, tensions have returned — driven by trade disputes, surveillance fears, and the stigma of COVID-19. IShowSpeed’s stream cuts against the grain of this modern pattern by humanizing cultural exchange and reintroducing spontaneous, people-to-people contact. It bypasses government channels and shows how individuals can revive cultural exchange even when official relations are strained.

IShowSpeed’s livestreams began on March 24 in the heart of Shanghai, the biggest city by population in China and a global financial hub located in the coastal northeast. Then, IShowSpeed travelled to the southwestern cities of Chengdu and Chongqing, then Hong Kong and Shenzhen, located on the southernmost tip of China. During his streams, IShowSpeed was exposed to various parts of Chinese culture and daily life — from trying local street food and hotpot to meeting celebrities and Shaolin monks to experiencing robust public transportation and driving advanced EVs. For China, IShowSpeed’s livestreams quickly became an unintentional but effective display of soft power: a nation’s ability to shape others’ preferences through appeal and attraction rather than coercion. IShowSpeed’s livestream has largely dispelled narratives of China’s widespread poverty and technological inferiority — viewers have reacted positively to the

advanced infrastructure, friendly people, vibrant street life, and the blend of tradition and modernity in Chinese cities. Ironically, with just a few livestreams, an American celebrity has inadvertently become a more effective cultural ambassador than official diplomats of both countries.

Chinese viewers have certainly expressed satisfaction with IShowSpeed’s livestreams: Chinese vlogger Li Sanjin, who has amassed more than half a million followers on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, claimed that IShowSpeed has “eliminated all Western media propaganda about China.” While this is perhaps not entirely true, the exposure of the American streamer has certainly aligned with Beijing’s official narratives. However, the livestream hasn’t come without its controversies. For example, many have criticized the itinerary in Hong Kong for being too simplistic, failing to show many of the iconic landmarks such as Victoria Harbor and the urban downtown districts. Others have questioned whether parts of the trip were curated — either by local organizers or authorities —to present only the most favorable image of China, carefully avoiding politically sensitive issues like censorship and human rights. While IShowSpeed’s spontaneity and chaotic humor gave the stream a raw, unscripted feel, it’s clear that no livestream, no matter how authentic, can fully represent the complexities of a country as vast and varied as China.

Nonetheless, what made IShowSpeed’s livestream resonate with audiences was not its perfection but its humanity. Instead of delivering a political message, he was simply reacting, engaging, and learning in real time. In doing so, he participated in a centuries-old tradition of reopening windows between two increasingly polarized societies. IShowSpeed reminded viewers that a cultural connection can only begin with curiosity and humanity. Whether or not IShowSpeed’s streams in China will change long-term perceptions remains to be seen, but it has undeniably shown that even in a fractured geopolitical landscape, influencers and social media can still forge unexpected connections around the world.



Photo Courtesy of South China Morning Post

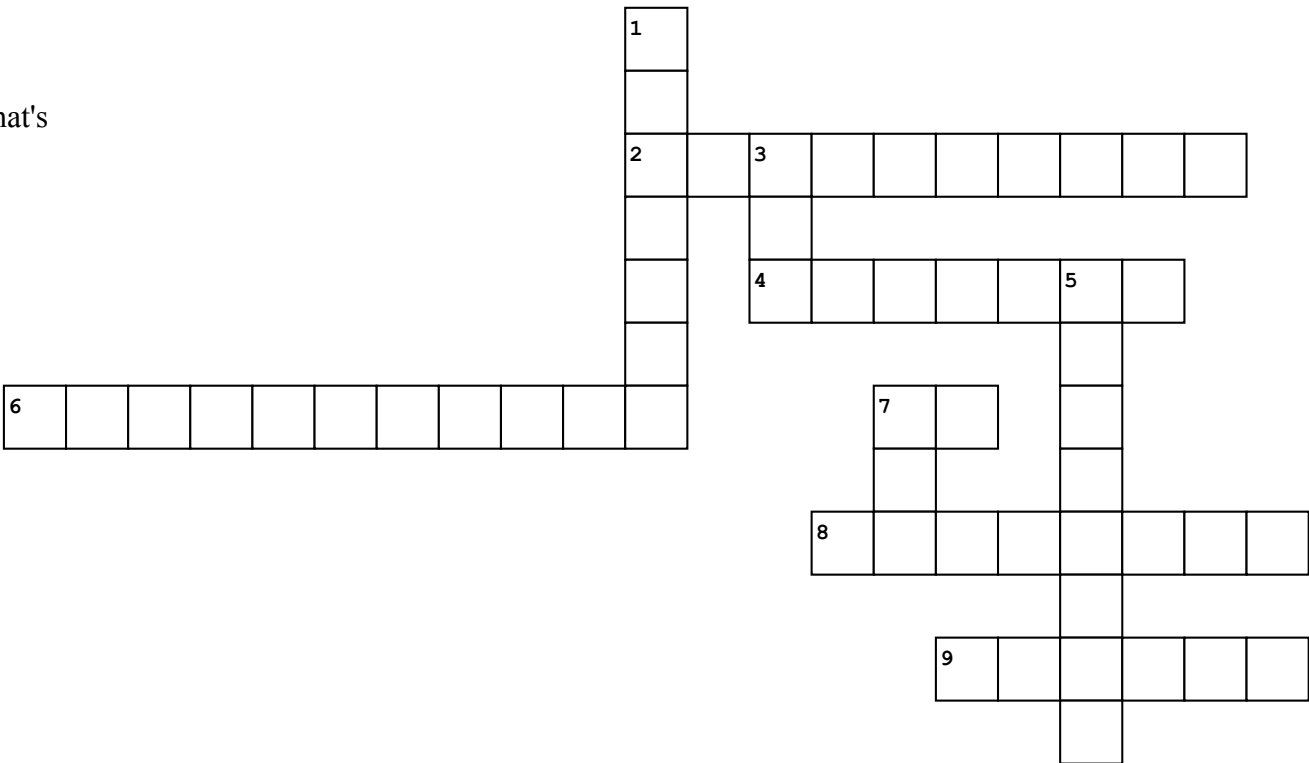
April Crossword

Across

- 2. What some members of the class of '25 may have
- 4. Also known as USGD
- 6. The Red Rhino Fund's annual bash
- 7. While sitting on Jig Pat, someone may ask "What's the ___?"
- 8. Played on Camp & MacMullen field
- 9. The 25th Annual _____ County Spelling Bee (Spring Musical!)

Down

- 1. A favorite pastime in Potter's Pond
- 3. Home of the Mini Crossword and Wordle
- 5. A beloved Friday tradition in the Spring
- 7. Mr. Becker's Alma Mater



White Lotus: Trouble in Paradise?

Little Notes to Aspiring Poets

LUCY RYAN & HOLLY RICHARD
Staff Writers

Imagine booking your dream vacation at a luxury resort in one of the most desired locations around the world—perhaps Hawaii, Sicily, or Thailand. Just envision the turquoise waters, extravagant suites, and endless leisure that these 5-star resorts have to offer you. Now imagine that same place as a setting for betrayal, backstabbing, and oh yeah... a dead body or two. That’s the plot of Mike White’s *The White Lotus*, HBO’s widely popular murder mystery that encapsulates a perfect mixture of suspense, social satire, and uncomfortable truths of the ultra-wealthy. Each season begins with a mysterious death, then rewinds to slowly unravel how the paradise turned violent. With each season revolving around a new location and miserable rich people, the show reveals not just how someone dies but the painfully accurate portrayal of the mega-rich moving through the world without questioning their impact on others. Throughout all three seasons, the wealthy hotel guests tend to ignore, manipulate, or patronize the resort staff, treating them as tools to enhance their own comfort. Yet, these moments aren’t overly dramatic; instead, the show relies on sharp and comedic writing along with an intense score to expose the discomfort and awkwardness of the characters’ dynamics. *The White Lotus* transforms paradise into a pressure cooker of awkward interactions, moral gray areas, and class-based power struggles—all wrapped in a deceptively beautiful setting.

(Spoiler Alert!) With its quotable lines and campy archetypes, *The White Lotus* has become a social media phenomenon. Victoria Ratliff’s waspy southern accent has been particularly popular; I know I have heard my share of “*Piper, Nooo*”’s (Pie-pur, Neaux) over the past month. A problematic favorite, Ms. Ratliff and her family highlight all the pitfalls of privilege: corruption, self-indulgence, and hubris, just to name a few. The Ratliffs are a seemingly perfect family from the upper echelons of southern society; Mr. Ratliff has a successful career in finance, while Mrs. Ratliff (when not abusing prescription drugs) frequents the country club. North Carolina blue-bloods, Mr. Ratliff and his son Saxon, are both Duke alums. When they are not engaging in drug-fueled rampages or under federal investigation for white-collar crimes, they can be seen proudly touting the likeness of their alma mater. Needless to say, Duke has not been very pleased with *The White Lotus*’s unfavorable portrayal of their alumni. On March 27th, a representative from the school made a statement concerning the shows use of their logo, expressing that “characters prominently wearing apparel bearing Duke’s federally registered trademarks creates confusion and mistakenly suggests an endorsement or affiliation where none exists”; furthermore, that the use of the logo “is troubling, does not reflect our values or who we are, and simply goes too far.” Despite a less-than-receptive response from the school, Jason Issacs (Mr. Ratliff) wore a T-shirt with the Duke Blue Devil to the April 6th season finale premiere.

Unfortunately for Duke, however much they try to distance themselves from corporate offenders and finance frat boys, the Duke memes born from this season of *The White Lotus* will haunt them for the rest of NCAA history. Despite criticisms, the hyperbolized clichés in *The White Lotus* have some truth to them - that is what makes the story so interesting. *The White Lotus* boldly confronts social truisms in a fascinating and satirical way. These exaggerated characters are significant because their stories feel plausible; chances are you’ve met a Saxon Ratliff at one point or another (probably at Taft). The allure of *The White Lotus* is that it feels like a fiction but is a simultaneous reality; a masterful work of social commentary and a must-watch for those who love exotic locations, luxury, and a little bit of murder.

Image courtesy of HBO Max

ESTER LEE
Staff Writer

When I think of April, I picture cherry blossoms floating in the breeze, tulips stretching their sleepy necks towards the sun, and daffodils clustered like gold in the grass. It’s a season of beginnings, gentle changes, and things coming into bloom - both in nature and in ourselves.

If you open your email, you will see that Ms. Hincker delivers a daily poem - yes, April is poetry month! We’re all invited this month to look, listen, and feel a little bit more deeply through poetry. For those of you who’re not sure how to write, don’t worry, I got you! For all of you aspiring poets, I gathered some tips for writing poetry.

Choose YOUR topic:
Start with something that you usually don’t pay attention to. It’s often easier to begin with an everyday object - like your water bottle, a worn-out shoelace, or the peeling bark of the tree next to your dorm - there’s beauty in your everydayness, something that’s woven into your daily life. Don’t be afraid to go on to abstract ideas later, like the shared bittersweetness you felt at your middle school graduation.

Observe with all your senses and be descriptive:
Try to glean something that you have never observed before from it. What does it look like, sound, smell, feel like? Maybe the color of the leaf seems to change if you stare at it for long enough, or the wind rubbing against your cheek feels soft like your mother’s hands. Scrap as many details as you can find; you might find something that interests you.

Poetic devices will help you out:
Integrate simile, metaphor, personification, assonance, symbolism, and more in your poem, based on what you described. You can say that the “petals pressed against painted pavements” or “the glowing signboard of the store flickered like a worn out firefly, the yellow light that smelled faintly of dust floating in the night sky...” These add more texture to the poem, and they taste great when you use the correct flavors.

Connect it to yourself:
Putting it in personal context may make the poem more meaningful as it taps into your world. Being honest is enough; ask yourself, “What does this remind me of in my own life?” For me, the awkward silence that I felt when I accidentally waved back at someone who wasn’t waving at me was like when my mom forced me to make up with my older sister after a fight - the air felt uncomfortable and a bit stifling. A crack in the ceiling may remind you of the time when your heart split open like that wood during a goodbye hug. These connections, even if they’re small, are what turn words into something real!

Don’t think it needs to be good!
Poems don’t need to rhyme, be long, be short, or even “make sense” to anyone but you; the readers have fun interpreting them. I personally like free verses without structure, as I can try new things with it; one time, I made an indent when I was starting every new line,, so the poem became diagonally written. The rules are yours to break. It’s important to say something true to yourself rather than simply sounding impressive.

To me, poetry is like a way to notice the world around me and the small moments that spark new ideas. And poetry can actually change you, too; a 2015 study found that patients who read poetry improved their “cognitive function,” eventually improving their capacity to cope with stress and to help reflect on their feelings. Another 2021 study found that poetry helps teenagers with challenging emotions by reducing fear, sadness, or worry. In other words, poetry can make you be more honest with your feelings - and a little less alone.

So if a thought tugs at you or a small moment sticks in your mind, follow it. Pick up your pen, and start writing - one line at a time, even if you think it’s nothing. I’d love to hear your voice on paper!




Image courtesy of Sharon English School

Move Over *Godfather*: Why *A Minecraft Movie* Stands Alone as the Pinnacle of Cinema

MALIN ADAMS & TATE CELEBI
Staff Writer & Head Writer

When the first trailer for *A Minecraft Movie* was released in September of 2024, the reactions of internet sleuths were mixed. The CGI was criticized for looking nothing like the actual game in an utterly unacceptable fashion. Jack Black's 'Steve' appeared to just be Jack Black in a blue unisex blouse. And yet, the fact that they were making a movie about Minecraft, the most goated videogame of all time, other than maybe Tetris, was definitely something. As more and more teasers and clips blessed our feeds, outrage was beginning to amplify, but so were the feelings of anticipation for millions worldwide. By the time April 2025 rolled around, a month that will perhaps go down in infamy, there was truly no way to predict how good Mojang Studios' brainchild would actually be. But take *Titanic*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Superbad*, or any truly great film for that matter - their greatness would go on to be measured by the theater experience.



Image of Black and Momoa, courtesy of Google Images

In order to document this historic cinematic event, the Taft *Papyrus* dispatched us on a quest of fate to AMC Southington 12 for research. We arrived on location expecting mostly empty seats, which is unfortunately pretty standard for central Connecticut movie theaters. But that's a discussion for another time and place. Anyways, we were sorely mistaken. Our first clue that we were dead wrong was when the assignment had to be postponed a day due to the AMC being sold out. The next day, the boys arrived at a different theater (but just as good), and we immediately recognized that literally every single person on the premises was there to watch the main event. The room was abuzz with downright shameless and borderline depressing excitement as grown men walked by dressed as Steve, the film's protagonist and the character portrayed by Black. By the time the trailers and automotive commercials ended and we were greeted by the iconic Warner Bros logo, we knew we had completely underestimated how freaking electric the next hour and forty minutes of our lives would be. Within ten minutes of Jack Black opening the movie with critical exposition, we were bombarded by ballistic Skittles from juveniles in the back row. Keep in mind that this theater had thirty rows, and we were somewhere situated in the middle (which was actually really nice since we got a great deal). In conclusion, these kids had absolute cannons. However, being the mature adults we are, we continued to attempt to watch the *Minecraft Movie* in peace and absorb the layered plot as it unfolded. The peace didn't last long, though, as when Jack Black uttered the well-known phrase "flint-and-steel," the theater erupted into a scene that can honestly best be described as reminiscent of a Playboi Carti concert. From then on, there was never a dull moment. From Jason Momoa delivering the defining performance of his career to Jack Black's impeccable delivery of lines such as "I am Steve" and "chicken jockey," we were immersed in a life-changing experience. It was truly a "tell your grandchildren" moment.

Coming back to Earth and leaving AMC Plainville 20, the best way to describe our condition was stunned into silence. We were speechless, but what could have even been said at that point? Whether or not you've played a minute of Minecraft in your life (chances are you have, you nerds), we cannot emphasize enough that you have to see this movie at some point in your life. Perhaps the Beatlemania-esque hype will die down in a few months, but for now, we can honestly say that our perspective on life was never shifted more at a movie theater than in this moment. Frankly, we have never seen a better movie than this. *A Minecraft Movie* is unprecedented.

The Great 8 Breaks 894

COCO O'BRIEN
A&L Editor

In a moment that will go down in National Hockey League History, Alex Ovechkin finally did what once seemed impossible: he passed Wayne Gretzky to become the NHL's all-time leading goal scorer. The crowd went wild, Ovi belly-flopped onto the ice, and the hockey world collec-

tively lost its mind.
Prior to the fateful April 6 game, Gretzky's record of 894 career goals stood untouched for over two decades. Most hockey fans believed it was unbeatable, that every rookie who laced up a pair of skates could only dream about one day becoming the second-best goal scorer in NHL history. But then along came Ovechkin, and he didn't just chip away at Gretzky's number: he chased it down with remarkable consistency. Season after season, through roster changes, rule changes, and improving goaltending, Ovi kept finding the back of the net. With each milestone goal—600, 700, 800—the record felt a little more possible.



Image courtesy of Getty Images

Ovechkin was first drafted in 2005 and made his NHL debut in 2005. In his first ever game in the league, he scored two goals, immediately making a name for himself. From there, the numbers piled up: 50-goal seasons, highlight-reel goals, and eventually, leading the Capitals to a Stanley Cup victory in 2018. Through it all, Ovechkin's innate knack for goal-scoring remained his signature. Even when teams knew exactly where he'd be—in his so-called "office" on the power play—they couldn't stop him.
What's made his journey even more impressive is his consistency and longevity. He's scored 40+ goals in thirteen different seasons, even through lockouts, injuries, and pandemic-shortened seasons. He's 39 now and still plays with the same ferocity he had at 25. This season, after breaking his leg in November, he came back strong, proving that age and injury couldn't slow him down for long.
Beyond the statistics, Ovechkin has been the heart and soul of the Capitals for nearly two decades. He made D.C. a hockey city. When the team struggled in his early years, he gave fans something to cheer for. And when they finally lifted the Stanley Cup, nobody was happier than number 8.
So, does breaking the record make Ovechkin the greatest hockey player of all time, or simply the greatest goal scorer? The answer likely depends on what aspects of the game you value the most. Gretzky still holds the all-time points record, bolstered by an unmatched 1,963 assists, and Ovechkin's assist total is far lower at 724. He may not dominate every part of the game in the way Gretzky did, but his sheer ability to score goals is unmatched. In an era defined by stronger defenses and better goaltending, his ability to score is unrivaled. As for whether his record will be broken, most believe it's unlikely, at least in our lifetime. There is some talk about Auston Matthews of the Toronto Maple Leafs as a potential challenger, but even he would need to sustain an extraordinary level of scoring consistency and health to come close. Right now, Ovechkin's mark feels like a benchmark that won't be easily surpassed, if at all.

April Horoscopes

COURTNEY EDWARDS
Editor-In-Chief

Capricorn: December 22 - January 19
Hard work is paying off, even if progress feels slow. Keep going, and don't be afraid to ask for support if you need it.

Aquarius: January 20 - February 18
You may be full of creative ideas today—write them down before they slip away. Someone around you might be more on your wavelength than you think.

Pisces: February 19 - March 20
Take care of your emotional well-being today, even in small ways. A short walk, a quiet moment, or talking to someone you trust could make a big difference.

Aries: March 21 - April 19
You're feeling motivated, and it's a great time to take action on something you've been putting off. Just remember to pace yourself—burnout won't help your goals.

Taurus: April 20 - May 20
You may feel more productive than usual today, especially when it comes to handling tasks or finances. Stick to your routine, but stay flexible if plans shift.

Gemini: May 21 - June 21
Conversations flow easily right now, so take advantage of opportunities to connect. A quick chat might lead to something more meaningful.

Cancer: June 22 - July 22
You might be feeling more reflective than usual. Give yourself some quiet time to recharge and focus on what really matters to you.

Leo: July 23 - August 22
Teamwork will be helpful today—don't try to do everything on your own. A little recognition is coming your way, so enjoy it without overthinking it.

Virgo: August 23 - September 22
Today is a good day to tackle your to-do list. Just don't let small imperfections slow you down—progress is better than perfection.

Libra: September 23 - October 22
Try to stay centered, even if things around you feel a little off. Taking time to clear your mind will help you make better decisions.

Scorpio: October 23 - November 21
You might notice something others miss—trust your instincts. It's a good time to focus on personal goals or long-term plans.

Sagittarius: November 22 - December 21
You're open to new ideas and experiences, which could lead to something refreshing. A change in routine might actually work in your favor.

The Varsity Reject's Guide to Joy

HANNAH XU
Staff Writer

Let's be honest: not everyone is destined for varsity greatness. Some of us peaked during the third quarter of eighth grade rec basketball. Others never got the callback after try-outs. And some of us, after sprinting our souls out all fall, just want a place to breathe. Welcome to intramural sports: the spiritual home for the slightly sore, mildly competitive, and deeply unbothered.



Image courtesy of The Taft School

Step 1: Accept your fate.

You didn't make varsity. You may not even know what JV stands for. That's okay. It's time to lean in. Mr. Hoffman, now leading intramural squash with the wisdom of a man who has watched thousands of balls miss the wall, knows what it's like. He hadn't even heard of squash when he got to Taft. Now, he spends his afternoons convincing students that whiffing the ball for an entire week is character-building, not embarrassing.

"Choosing to do something that you have never done before is rewarding, and it takes courage," Mr. Hoffman says. Especially when that "something" involves flailing in a glass box while your peers walk past like you're a human zoo exhibit.

Step 2: Sign up for a sport you've never heard of.

Pick a sport that sounds vaguely familiar and commit with the confidence of someone who's never held a racket. Ms. Garcia gets it. She didn't ask to coach tennis; she got drafted. However, instead of panicking, she took summer lessons and came back ready to teach students how to hold a racket and maybe, serve without injuring a bystander.

Her tennis crew? A chaotic mix of off-season football players, soccer kids juggling club schedules, and people who thought tennis looked "relaxing" (Spoiler: it's not). But Ms. Garcia keeps it fun, loose, and judgment-free. Her favorite part is "watching people trying their best, making stupid mistakes, but having fun."

Step 3: Become weirdly invested.

At first, you're just there to fulfill a requirement and avoid conditioning. But then you hit the ball. Not well, not consistently, but with purpose. Suddenly, you care.

An anonymous student, for example, couldn't connect with a single serve for three straight lessons. Then they did. Ms. Garcia describes it as one of her proudest coaching moments—and this from someone who once coached herself into the position.

Mr. Hoffman sees the same magic in squash. Some players go from hopeless to "kind of good," and a lucky few beat him. (Do they actually beat him, or is he just a really gracious loser? We may never know.)

Step 4: Lie to your friends.

You'll tell them you "just wanted a chill season." That you're "focusing on academics." You'll casually mention "needing downtime after fall/winter sports." They'll nod. They'll believe you. They have no idea you're now emotionally attached to your tennis serve or that you watched YouTube tutorials on squash.

But deep down, you know the truth: you came for the easy credit, and now you're arguing line calls like it's Wimbledon. Intramurals weren't supposed to matter, but somehow, missing a serve *does* sting a little now.