By Aubrey Monaco

Two places have recently brought the world together with heart-wrenching situations.

According to CNN, 17 missionaries (16 from the United States and one from Canada) were kidnapped in Haiti by the 400 Mawozo gangs in mid-October. Among the hostages were seven women, five men, and five children. UNICEF Children’s Agency’s Regional Director Jean Gough said, “Nowhere is safe for children in Haiti anymore.” This kidnapping has come about amid increased gang violence and kidnappings and just months after a catastrophic earthquake and the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, said the Miami Herald.

Additionally, just before the kidnapping, the United States promised to put 15 million more dollars into reducing gang violence in Haiti, according to The Associated Press. This violence has displaced many Haitians already. CNN states that the local government in Haiti is working to find a peaceful solution to this problem.

The United States sent FBI agents and hostage recovery specialists to work with the Haitian government for this case as well. U.S. National Security advisor Jake Sullivan said that the United States has to handle this situation “as carefully as possible so at the end of the day [the U.S.] achieve[s] [its] objective, which is the safe return of every single one of those both adults and children.”

As stated by Pamplin Media Group, on November 21, two hostages were released and are safe. Names and ages of these hostages have not been given, and it was also not stated whether kidnappers received money for their release. An additional three hostages were released on December 5. Finally, on December 16, all remaining hostages were freed.

Both the Haitian and United States governments have demonstrated non-violence in their efforts to recover these hostages, as they are working together to achieve a peaceful answer for everyone.

At Mount Mercy, students must see these situations and recognize how non-violence, a Critical Concern of the Sisters of Mercy, can play a positive role in alleviating and even preventing frightening situations. The Mercy community can follow the example of these leaders in everyday life, but also in this specific circumstance, and determine what can be done locally to help such as offering aid through donations, petitions, and volunteering.

In Afghanistan, meanwhile, a new Taliban regime has begun. The Taliban is a group that rose to power in the late 1990s, vowing to restore peace and security, as well as enforce their version of Islamic law, according to BBC News. They have banned entertainment like music and movies, and have doled out inhumane punishments to those who go against them. Since 2001, the United States has occupied territory to help keep the Taliban out of power in Afghanistan.

However, on August 30, 2021, the United States completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan. President Joe Biden stated that the Taliban posed little threat to the U.S. and that the military stationed in Afghanistan had not been accomplishing its goal for a long time, said Vox. But, this decision showed little concern for Afghans, as one of their major and only protections was taken away with the withdrawal.

Now, the Taliban has risen back into power, and many Afghans are being displaced, not able to find a haven soon enough. The Taliban has already committed horrendous acts in Afghanistan.

On October 29th, 2021, three people were shot and killed by the Taliban because of music played at a wedding reception. Ten other guests were injured. According to a Taliban spokesperson, it is not acceptable to kill people for playing music, only verbal persuasion away from playing music is allowed, as stated by CNN. But, though this was stated, and a ban has not been placed on music since August, other incidents like this one have occurred.

In another instance, according to AP News, certain Taliban members, like Mohammed Javid Ahmedi, are attempting to build mosques within hospitals and separate staff by gender, while the top priority of other staff is to be paid their incredibly delayed wages. “There is no salary for staff, no food, no fuel for ambulances and other machines,” said Abdulbari Umer, Taliban Deputy Health Minister.

These instances show that Afghan citizens need safety and freedoms restored. The United States is admitting more refugees, but it has been a slow process.

Similar to Haiti, Afghanistan needs the help of people all around the world, including the people of the Mercy community, again with aid like donations, volunteering, petition signings, and more.

The Mount Mercy Senior class is taking a step in this direction. Seniors have worked together in theology class to organize donations for the incoming Afghan refugees, especially children, in Buffalo. Donations will include winter hats and gloves, backpacks with school supplies, coloring supplies, hygiene products, and any other materials needed for these families.

The Critical Concern of non-violence impels us to take action to help those impacted by violence in their countries.
*Behind the Mask: Student and Staff Spotlights*

**Mr. Hardy**

Right off the bat, Mr. Michael Hardy, Mount Mercy Academy’s new gym teacher and Athletics Director, gained the liking of many by declaring he was “born and raised a Yankees fan.” Growing up in Niagara Falls, sports and athletics were an important part of his life. In high school and elementary school, Mr. Hardy played multiple sports, including hockey, football, and of course baseball, which will “always hold a place in [his] heart.”

Many of his coaches helped him become the person he is now, and he is “trying to do the same for our students and athletes” by developing in each student a “passion for all sports.” In addition to playing sports, Mr. Hardy enjoys watching football (rooting for the Bills) and watching baseball.

Before coming to MMA, Mr. Hardy was a physical education teacher at Lackawanna Middle School. There he coached three sports: football, girls’ basketball, and baseball.

Mr. Hardy was looking for a “fresh start” and “new opportunities” when he came to Mount Mercy, and he is thankful that his transition from his old job to his new one was made “as easy as possible,” thanks to the welcoming teachers and staff.

So far, the most memorable event Mr. Hardy has participated in at Mount Mercy was the “Dig Lav” volleyball game. This event, put on by the JV and Varsity Volleyball teams and volunteers, raised money for Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. (Did you know that the lavender ribbon represents all types of cancer?). Mr. Hardy said that everyone worked well together, that everybody made their own contributions, and that it was a great experience to have raised $1000 for the Roswell Park Alliance Foundation. The check was presented on December 9 to Mary Russo, a Mercy alumna and fundraising coordinator for the foundation.

Mr. Hardy is looking forward to continuing to develop Mercy’s physical education and athletics. He hopes to “support students and our athletes with everything that they need to be successful.”

**Miss Greenan**

A teacher by day and a performer by night, Miss Grace Greenan is a truly inspirational woman. She’s simultaneously pursuing a career in music while being the campus minister and teaching theology and music at Mount Mercy Academy, a truly impressive feat.

Before she was a teacher and campus minister, Miss Greenan walked the halls of Mount Mercy as a student herself. She was involved in many clubs, including student government, school musicals, and Pure Magic (the former name of the Mercy show choir). She says that her Mercy education prepared her well for college, helped her make good decisions in her life, and kept her faith strong.

Music is an integral part of Miss Greenan’s life, whether she is listening to music or composing original songs. Her passion for music runs deep and began when she was young. She was four years old when she started writing her own songs. After graduating from Mercy, she decided to study pre-dentistry at Canisius College, but her love for music won out. “I think that every person, at some point in their life, has to choose whether or not they want to follow their passion or settle for something a little bit more realistic,” Greenan proclaimed.

When asked about her most memorable performance, she said, “Definitely, my first release party! I released an album in 2019, and it was the first time I had ever performed my original music in front of people. I even filled Buffalo Iron Works. I had support from my Mount Mercy friends that I hadn’t seen in a few years. The show was a huge success. I was able to repay everyone who believed in me and supported me. It was an altogether great feeling.”

As for her students who want to pursue a career in music, Miss Greenan advised, “Just keep practicing. If you want to do something that is related to the arts in your life, the only way you’re going to get better is if you keep doing it. So don’t let anybody tell you that it’s not worth your time because if you love it, then it’s definitely worth your time.”

In regards to teaching music and theology, Miss Greenan expressed gratitude for instructing Mercy students. “I enjoy teaching a lot! It has its challenges, but I’m never bored. I’m definitely very grateful to be here,” Miss Greenan exclaimed.

Besides music, teaching, and ministry, she is also passionate about caring for the planet. Miss Greenan is vegetarian (and vegan when the option is available) as a means of showing appreciation to the Earth. “I’m always trying to strive for a greener lifestyle,” she said.

She incorporated these values into her theology class by showing her students the documentary *David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet*. Viewing this documentary gave students a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the Critical Concern of the Earth. Miss Greenan hopes to further students’ understanding of how daily activities impact the environment not only in her teaching and advocacy but also as an advisor to the Great Outdoors Club.

“I think we can all say that we’re lucky to have Miss Greenan back in the halls of Mount Mercy!”

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**Photo by Caitlin Mann**

Spotlight by Gabrielle Bauerlein and Isabelle Reaska

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**Photo by Claire Denning**

Spotlight by Tylie and Zoe Czerniak

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**Easy Cookies to Make for the Holiday Season**

By Abigail Kopf

With the weather becoming colder and Christmas music still stuck in our heads, several of us are still hanging onto our holiday spirit. When the holidays roll around, I always say that I will make Christmas cookies, yet I never do. Maybe the problem is that I have no time on my hands, or baking seems to take too much work and effort, or I’m just lazy. No matter, I found (and tried!) an easy way for you to make the cookies that you’ve always meant to bake but haven’t found the time for.

These cookies are peanut butter blossoms. They’re peanut butter cookies with Hershey’s Kisses on top, and when I made them, they turned out amazing!

For this recipe, all you need is one cup of white sugar, one cup of peanut butter, one egg, and 18 Hershey’s Kisses. This yields 18 cookies. To see how easy they are to make, just take a look at the recipe (right)!

Now, I imagine that if you have a peanut allergy and are reading this, you’re wondering what kind of cookie you can make. Well, don’t worry, you can substitute peanut butter for sunflower butter or another peanut-free alternative. Baking with a peanut allergy is simple with this recipe!

I am not the biggest fan of peanut butter and chocolate together, but the second that these cookies cooled down, I ate three of them! Especially with a nice glass of milk, one cookie just isn’t enough!

After baking these cookies, I realized that if you find the right recipe, baking does not have to be a production. Maybe I’ll try to bake more during school breaks! I hope that this recipe motivates you to make something sugary, just like it did for me!

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**Peanut Butter Kiss Cookies** (Recipe from Allrecipes)

**Ingredients:**
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 egg
- 18 milk chocolate candy kisses, unwrapped

**Directions:**

Step one:
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Step two:
- Combine sugar, peanut butter, and egg.

Step three:
- Shape into 1 inch balls and place on ungreased cookie sheet. NOTE: If dough is too sticky, refrigerate 1/2 hour or until easy to handle.

Step four:
- Bake for 10 minutes. Remove cookies from oven. Press chocolate kiss into the center of each warm cookie.

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Mount Mercy Varsity Soccer Defeats Buffalo Seminary on Senior Night

By Abby Mailloux

On Tuesday, October 19, 2021 the Mount Mercy Varsity Soccer team took on Buffalo Seminary for their Senior Night at Mulroy Park. Seniors Mary Bea Lalley, Maddie Edwards, Mya Wood, and Amaya Milkowski were honored for their commitment and dedication to the team over the past four years. All four seniors have played a valuable role on Mount Mercy’s Varsity Soccer team throughout their entire high school careers.

Mercy girls, boys from Bishop Timon High School, family, and other friends came to cheer on the team. “The atmosphere was great and had a big impact on how we played,” mentioned senior Mya Wood.

The Magic went into the first half of the game strong. With a great assist from Olivia Fuller, Rosie Bandura sank the ball in the back of the net, putting the Magic up 1-0 before the half.

During the second half, the Magic kept the lead. Within the last few minutes of the game, Jenna Brown sent a ball through the defense to me. I secured the game for the Magic leaving the game 2-0.

Goalie Amelia Lalley had five saves and an amazing shutout. “Amelia has hands like glue,” declared fellow goalie and senior, Amaya Milkowski.

Senior Maddie Edwards was named the MVP of this game for her determination to win every ball and stop Buffalo Seminary’s offense. “When our team comes out as a united front, there is no stopping us and that is exactly how Senior Night unfolded. There was flow throughout the whole field, every play was supported, and that helped lead our team to a 2-0 win,” said coach Madelyn Higgins.

Beyond Senior Night, “The girls have worked on being the best version of themselves each and every day,” stated Higgins proudly. The Magic carried all of these positive qualities plus extra determination to their division championship game, tying Mount St. Mary Academy 2-2 to share the Monsignor Martin Division B Title.

Volleyball Senior Night: Magic Beats O’Hara

By Madison Serafini and Emma Labby

MMA’s Varsity Volleyball team hosted its “senior night” game on October 7. The varsity team won their first three matches against Cardinal O’Hara, a big win for our varsity players! The theme of the night was “black out” with lots of student support at the game, including the JV volleyball team, the soccer team, and more who donned black apparel to cheer on the Magic.

To celebrate our seniors, Grace Spero, Mary Vattes, Mara Santana, and Kyra Soto, both the JV and varsity teams decorated the gym, made shirts and signs, and rolled out a red carpet that seniors ran down after being announced by junior Madison Serafini.

When asked what her favorite part about playing volleyball was, co-captain Grace Spero responded, “My favorite part was spending time with the team and getting to know everyone.”

Co-captain Kyra Soto added that she enjoyed “practicing with teammates and forming bonds with the underclassmen.”

As captains Grace and Kyra were also asked to give their best advice to younger volleyball players. Grace said, “As a captain, I learned that being there for your team is extremely important, to always cheer your team on since it gets everyone’s energy up, and to never give up because a game can change with just a few points.”

Kyra said, “It is important that you’re always there for your other teammates, supporting them always.”

Grace added that the season overall was a great success and she was very happy to form friendships that will last a lifetime.

Coach Rachel Kaufman was also very pleased with the outcome of the game. She was proud of the great communication on the court and high energy of the team and in the student sections.

After the big win, the wizard mascots (Emma Labby and Quinn D’Anthony) and player Madison Serafini set off confetti cannons to celebrate their seniors’ exciting win.

Not only were the two teams involved in the success of the evening, but so were some Mercy parents. A special thank you Margaret Vattes, Amie Zimmer, and Jen Ellicott who made baked goods, and to Coach Kaufman for putting gift bags together to honor the seniors.

Overall, the night was a great success and a good time for all involved.
Christmas Crossword

By Madison Serafini

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Across
3. He brings presents to children on the nice list.
5. They control Santa's sleigh.
6. A sweet treat to make and give to Santa.
8. Works for Santa to make presents.
9. The things you hang on a tree.
10. They are under the tree when you wake up on Christmas morning.

Down
1. A plant hung over a doorway.
2. A famous holiday ballet starring a girl named Clara.
4. A special countdown to Christmas.
7. A stingy man who was taught a lesson by three ghosts.

——Puzzles——

Spooky Word Search

By Madison Serafini and Amanda Solomon

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Can you find the following words?
Spooky
Haunted House
Dark
Scary
Ghost
Candy
Bat
Trick-or-Treat
Costume
October

Crossword Answer Key

1. Scrooge
2. Nutcracker
3. Misletoe
4. Advent Calendar
5. Ornament
6. Candy cookies
7. Santa
8. Elf
9. Reindeer
10. Presents

——Photos——

Juniors Natalie Vicarietti and Fiona Tournour show off the pumpkin they decorated during the Halloween assembly. Photo by Kennedy Cerrone

Seniors prepare to strike during the capture the flag game against the sophomores. Photo by Kennedy Cerrone

Freshmen played charades during the Halloween assembly. Photo by Kennedy Cerrone

Sparks preformed at the annual Christmas concert. Photos by Miss Rachel Kaufman
**Review of Interstellar (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)**

By Sophia Nasca

The vastness of space can be felt in such minuscule earthly things, like the loneliness of daily life, when you stare up at the wide display of stars on a cloudless night, or feel the immeasurable concavity after losing someone. I always found it interesting that such tremendous feelings can be summed up in smaller experiences. You can sense this hollowness while you listen to the soundtrack of the film Interstellar. Most people don’t regularly listen to film scores or movie soundtracks as they’d listen to music with lyrical content, but the Interstellar soundtrack is truly fantastic, especially when paired with the movie. We start with rain and thunder in “Dreaming of the Crash,” which filters into the sound of waves. A stormy, lost-at-sea sense. You feel encapsulated in this roaring storm, yet the sounds bring serenity and clarity into your mind. It intensifies, the low sound vibrating through your chest. We hear similar organ chimes again. It quickly becomes loud and fast, bringing up emotions you never knew you had and urging you to pour them out. Memories flicker before your eyes in frames, speeding up. Your whole life begins to unwind in front of you. You shut your eyes, not wanting to relive it. But you have to. The joy, sorrow, agony, fear, excitement, everything. This is one of my favorites in this soundtrack.

Within “Dust” you feel an impending doom, and curiosity, which is quickly swallowed with a similar sound that we heard in “Cornfield Chase.”

You can hear “Dreaming of the Crash” creeping in at the beginning of “Day One” with similar wave sounds. Hans Zimmer’s use of dramatic and scene-fitting sounds causes this soundtrack to impact its listeners deeply, eliciting all kinds of emotions. Even with the mild repetitiveness of this collection, I was astounded at the range of feelings that was conveyed through the tracks.

Another one of my favorites was “Stay.” The beginning leaves some uncertainty in the listener. As you listen on, you feel weightless, and the immensity of space overcomes you. The helplessness fades away to unusual comfort as you view the endless expanse before you. You let out a breath, feeling complete in some way. The empty corners of your soul are filled with light, warming you in the frigid vacuum you’re floating in. The loud ending of this track is almost overbearing, although “Stay” offers an overall slowness that most of the other tracks do not.

The quiet piano introducing “Message from Home” is reminiscent of the title, a homey nostalgic feeling. Analogous to hearing a mother play piano from another room. Something feels lost or left out, a feeling forgotten or a person lost from the story. A missing piece. The memory is warm but with subtleties of longing and grasping for something already lost to time. The sporadic yet ardent feeling of recalling memories is absent from “Message from Home,” and we are left to meditate with our feelings. This makes it one of my favorite tracks of the entire soundtrack.

“The Wormhole” is a stark contrast to “Message from Home.” Again, we feel this massive presence looming over us.

The clock ticking in the background of “Mountains” causes panic. Things are happening too fast, and panic and making you feel like you are spinning. We hear similar organ sounds that seem a bit different from the rest of the tracks that I feel is most palatable. A majority of the other tracks seem so complex emotionally that it feels we haven’t experienced the feelings yet to apply them to the songs. Humans haven’t advanced enough to experience the supermassive presence in “The Wormhole” or even the vastness of “Stay.”

The title of “Afraid of Time” perfectly coincides with what we feel with the other tracks. I feel “Mountains” would be better renamed “Afraid of Time” since the song “Afraid of Time” doesn’t exactly give me the panicked feeling the name suggests. This seems like the aftermath of losing something to time or reaching for something in the past.

Where do we fit among the stars? Do we have a significant place in the Universe, or do we even deserve one? These are questions I’ve heard a lot while trying to learn about the Universe we live in. Unfortunately, “A Place Among the Stars” does not at all convey the curiosity such questions provoke. Though, it delivers on the existential pain that thinking about such questions too deeply causes.

“Running Out” is almost horror movie-esque.

One of the more optimistic tracks in this collection is “I’m Going Home.” It is a peaceful track that conveys happiness and contentment. The sporadic却 ardent feeling of recalling memories is absent from “Message from Home,” and we are left to meditate with our feelings. This makes it one of my favorite tracks of the entire soundtrack.

We end with “Where We’re Going.” It is quiet and unassuming for the most part. The end of our journey is in appropriate quietness, except for one random crescendo, followed by the same tune heard in “S.T.A.Y.” which I enjoyed hearing at the end. The summarizing intensity was something I anticipated, despite thinking we’d end on a peaceful note.

**Favorite tracks:** “Cornfield Chase,” “Stay,” “Message from Home,” and “Mountains”

**Least favorite tracks:** “The Wormhole,” “Running Out,” and “I’m Going Home”

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**Squid Game: The Number One show on Netflix**

By Paige Angle

_Squid Game_ is a Korean TV show that has been shown a lot of love by viewers from all over the world. It is directed by Hwang Dong-hyuk and stars HoYeon Jung (as Kang Sae-byuk/player 067), Lee Jung-jae (as Seong Gi-hun/player 456), Wi Ha-joon (as Hwang Jun-ho), Anupam Tripathi (as Abdul Ali/player 199), and Park Hae-oo (Cho Sang-woo/player 218). _Squid Game_ has been number 1 on Netflix’s top 10 list in the U.S. for 24 days.

_Squid Game_ is about 456 people going into a “game” to win money. The players did not know that this “game” would be risking their lives. They were notified that they could win a total of 4.6 billion won (approximately 3 million USD) at the end of the game if they were the last one standing. They played a total of 6 games.

The games were red light green light, squid game, tug-of-war, dalgona candy, glass stepping stones, and marbles. Jenna Angle, a junior at Mercy, states, “My favorite game they played is probably marbles. It’s depressing and sets the mood for the rest of the show.” This show can easily be described as emotional, unique, and thrilling.

I would easily rate this show five out of five stars. This is because of the fascinating plot and engaging relationships between the characters. On the other hand, the plot twist towards the end of the show left many watchers in awe, wondering what will happen next.

_Squid Game_ is an astonishing show. I would recommend this show to those who like thrillers and dramas.
Billie Eilish Breaks New Ground with Happier Than Ever

By Ashley Cirbus

Happier Than Ever, Billie Eilish’s sophomore album of 16 outstanding songs was released July 30, 2021. According to Rolling Stone, by its second week, it had 59 million streams and 19,100 album sales. Eilish’s first album When We All Fall Asleep Where Do We Go? was a success, and Happier Than Ever’s success exceeded it. There was a lot of pressure on her to top the success of her first album, and that’s exactly what she did.

Eilish is someone known to experiment, especially with her clothing, hair, and music. She is always changing, and that’s what keeps people eager to see what she experiments with next. Eilish took on a different approach to making Happier Than Ever than When We All Fall Asleep Where Do We Go?, with the aesthetics of the two albums being completely opposite. Happier Than Ever seems to take the lighter approach with its old Hollywood style, yet the songs reflect some darker subjects. Some of these various subjects in the album include body shaming, beauty standards, paparazzi, male toxicity, being taken advantage of, abuse, and much more. Included in the album is a monologue, where Eilish speaks instead of sings, called “Not My Responsibility.”

In this speech, Eilish discusses being body-shamed in her career and taking a stance on women’s beauty standards. When Eilish isn’t seen wearing baggy clothing that most expect her to wear, she is shamed for not having the “standard” (in our society) body.

The instrumental in the background for “Not My Responsibility” stays the same for the next song called “Overheated.” In “Overheated,” she sings about the paparazzi and instances where she is objectified by the media. Though both pieces have a different approach to the subject, they still prove the same negative message about body shaming of women, a message that Eilish often tries to address.

Not only does Eilish experiment with the aesthetic and meanings of the songs included on the album, but she also experiments with sound. She uses different music styles in almost every song, and that’s what makes them sound unique. Take the most popular song of the album, for example, named “Happier Than Ever.” The song is initially sad-sounding, yet transitions into a powerful rock song. This song includes Eilish screaming in the background, which shows how much emotion she puts into every piece of music she does and the production that goes into making a song with her brother Finneas.

In conclusion, Happier Than Ever by Billie Eilish proved her talent, and that her work towards the album paid off since this is one of my favorite albums. It’s definitely a favorite of others too. “My opinion on the album overall is that it’s very relatable, and I enjoy listening to it,” said sophomore Amyiah Wheeler.

My favorite songs from the album are “I Didn’t Change My Number,” “Billie Bossa Nova,” “Oxytocin,” “GOLDWING,” “Halley’s Comet,” “Overheated,” and “Happier Than Ever.”

I hope you consider listening to Happier Than Ever because it is truly a masterpiece.

Wuthering Heights: A Classic Read for a Cold, Dark Day

By Aubrey Monaco

“Whatever our souls are made out of, his and mine are the same.” - Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights

Emily Bronte’s classic work Wuthering Heights brings readers into the unsettling world of Heathcliff, Cathy, and those around them. Cathy is raised with only her older brother, Hindley, until their family grows after their father brings home a boy found on the way back from his travels. Over time, Hindley grows to resent Heathcliff, while Cathy begins to truly love him.

The obligation of finding a comfortable life eventually takes precedence over love for Cathy. This makes Heathcliff very resentful, and he takes his anger out on others; he eventually faces consequences because of this.

This is a great book for anyone interested in romance and mystery novels, and it gives additional twists of settings, language, and ideas of the mid-1800s. Classified mainly as a Gothic novel, this story does not overdo any classic elements of the genre, like romance, mystery, and supernatural experiences. They balance each other nicely to make a very original story that evokes many profound thoughts and questions.

Of the classic novels I have read, this one ranks very high on my list. With Bronte’s use of a first-person-point of view from a supporting character, the main characters’ thoughts and feelings are not completely known, making readers unsure of what comes next. This unreliability thus strengthens the element of mystery.

The story starts off slower, giving background information regarding Mr. Lockwood, a guest at the estate where Cathy once lived. Once introduced to Cathy and Heathcliff, the story quickly becomes attention-grabbing. Readers follow the formation of their relationship, and how it quickly turns from loving to contentious due to the stubbornness and selfishness of both characters.

With Bronte’s images of death, hauntings, and spirits, this book makes a perfect read for the deep winter season. Wuthering Heights will make you ponder what you think you know about love, its limits (even in death), and how it can affect people. It will also make you consider the extent to which people will go for revenge, and how people can cross lines that should never be crossed.

Wuthering Heights is a great complement to other works of the Bronte sisters, like Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Anne Bronte. If you are looking to start reading classic literature, this is a great place to begin. While acclimating to the language of the mid-1800s may be difficult, the striking quality of the story and its imagery will quell this hindrance. The novel will hold your attention until the very end. Five out of five stars.

Unraveling A Spanish Mystery

By Vayana Stoyanova

Do you read mystery? Do you read romance? How about history? Well, Ruta Sepetys’ The Fountains of Silence has got it all, and more. Set in autocratic Spain in the 1950s, this historical fiction novel shines new light onto the terrors of people’s lives during and prior to the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War from the perspective of a wealthy, eighteen-year-old American on vacation.

Besides Sepetys’ brilliant writing, this novel is especially captivating because of the intrigue it inspires and deeply-developed characters you will want to root for.

Texan Daniel Matheson travels to Spain with his Spanish mother and her oil executive husband on a work trip, which is just a vacation for Daniel. While there, he falls in love with a Spanish girl named Ana, who works at the hotel he stays in. Through photographs, she helps him uncover the tragic mysteries of the oppressed and mistreated people of Spain under the cruel dictator General Francisco Franco. Daniel’s dream is to be a photojournalist, and the photos he takes during his time in Spain forever impact his life and others’ lives.

If you’ve read Sepetys’ Salt to the Sea, you know how compelling her writing and story-telling is. What makes this book even better than her previous works is the element of mystery it contains. The characters, their aspirations, and their relationships make the book great, but what really pulls you in is the wall of mystery uncovered by a naive American boy on vacation. Working together with Ana, who takes risks that could ruin her life and reputation in a vividly different world, the characters in this book shed light on one of the many ugly truths of Franco’s regime that weren’t even heard of until 2011! If you dare, uncover this truth for yourself and learn a little more about all the hidden things that go on in the world.
Mercy and Timon’s New Halloween Traditions and Old Ambitions!
By Lucy Duggan and Alexis Garmong
On October 21, 2021, Mount Mercy Academy held its first-ever haunted house, which was a huge success. Nearly 300 guests attended, more than the school predicted. Children enjoyed trick-or-treating through the halls, food from the cider mill, pumpkin decorating, and a raffle. Attendees were grateful for the event, especially following COVID restrictions that limited so many celebrations this past year. Students and faculty hope that this event will become a continuous tradition.

The haunted house required much preparation throughout the week. Faculty encouraged students to donate bags of candy and other supplies as needed. Students also participated in door decorating to add a spooky twist to the building.

During the event, colorful strobe lights lit up the darkened hallway and flashes of color from each costume danced from door to door. Outside of classrooms on the first and second floors, students gathered, holding bowls overflowing with candy to give out. At the same time, students and volunteers distributed a variety of donuts and apple cider in the cafeteria.

Parents and children of all ages traveled throughout the school, enjoying the decorations, collecting candy, and snacking on Halloween treats. Students, faculty, and guests were excited to mingle and enjoy the spooky season in each other’s company.

Adding to the festivity, the Fantastic Friends of WNY, a non-profit organization that focuses on bringing celebrations to people with special needs, held their yearly Halloween party at Bishop Timon High School. The event included crafts, pumpkin painting, and trick-or-treating. Timon was happy to offer their gym for the occasion and prepare such activities. Other volunteers included Mercy students, a few students from St. Francis High School, and a West Seneca West senior.

“It was a great experience and I had the advantage of meeting a new friend and her friends. It’s something I never thought I’d do,” said Mount Mercy junior, Madison Serafini, enthusiastically.

Both Mercy and Timon held successful Halloween events that attendees certainly won’t forget in the years to come!

The Ten Knocks
Short Story By Anonymous Contributor
Hello there! My name is Steve, and I’m 20 years old. I’m here to tell a story that happened about three years ago in a town called Denburgh. However, this story isn’t about me, it’s about my friend, Lisa Merlin. She was a great person.

Did you catch that? Indeed, I said “was” What I mean by this is that Lisa…she’s gone. This story is about how she disappeared.

Lisa and I were hanging out one night when her mom, Jessica Merlin, told us that she had to go to the store for a bit. “I should be back in about an hour. Don’t open the door and don’t talk to strangers,” she said, but I think any parent would.

When she left we heard another car pull in. Lisa and I assumed that her mom had just forgotten something, so we didn’t care.

Then, we started to hear noises as if someone was struggling. We heard the door open and close again, but the noises stopped after that. They were kind of scary, but we just thought that Lisa’s mom was listening to music that she often described as “what your generation listens to.” We laughed really hard about it for at least another 20 minutes before we looked at the clock and started to wonder where Lisa’s mom was. As the clock hit 7:00, Lisa and I realized that her mom had been gone for about three hours, and we started to get scared.

We ended up turning on the news because we were worried and bored, and what we saw was terrifying.

“About 15 minutes ago, the authorities found a woman by the name of Jessica Merlin, dead from a horrific car accident. We located the body a mile away from the Walmart on Achilleas Ave,” a reporter said solemnly.

The screen then flashed to a photo of her car, while the reporter explained that this car crash didn’t look like an accident. The reporter warned the town to stay inside, in case there was someone dangerous out there.

Lisa and I freaked out listening to the report. We sat on the floor, and I comforted Lisa as she cried over the loss of her mother. The incident was only three miles from her house and we didn’t know if the person who may have caused it was going to come our way, so we closed all of the curtains and locked all of the windows and doors. I sat with Lisa on her bed until she stopped crying, and then we rested and watched Netflix on my laptop.

I eventually heard my phone ringing, so I stood up and grabbed it.

“Did you lock the second-floor bedroom window?” said the person on the other line when I picked up. That window led to Lisa’s mom’s room. I ran to it, but... it was locked. Hesitantly, I answered the caller.

“...Yes?”

But the other line had already gone silent.

I was about to check on Lisa when I heard someone knock on the front door three times, three extremely slow times. I ran to Lisa’s room, and we put our phones away and pulled out some books to read. I pulled out a book called The Library of Vines, one of her favorites. I figured she was reading it to distract herself and fill her mind with good memories.

About five minutes later, there were another three knocks on the front door. It startled both of us. This time, the knocks were slow but louder. The person on the other side sounded like they wanted to break the door down. I looked at Lisa and told her to stay on the bed. She watched me as I stood up, slowly walking through the house. Two more knocks sounded through the house and I visibly jumped. They were loud and not nearly as slow as the other six had been. I grabbed a kitchen knife and slowly went up to the door while looking through the peephole. Nothing. There was no one there.

I began walking back to Lisa’s room when suddenly, I heard two more knocks, sounding like they came from Lisa’s room. They were more like banging than knocking, but despite my fear, I still ran to her room.

All I saw were large vines coming from her book. Lisa was gone. I was in shock until I heard the door being broken down, and officers rushed in.

I don’t remember much after that, but I woke up somewhere unfamiliar. They eventually told me that I was in a hospital. I was never told why though. After being here for so long, I started to remember what happened. So, I guess the one knocking... was me.

MMA Volleyball Team Presents Check to Roswell
By Madison Serafini
On October 25, the MMA volleyball teams hosted their Dig Lavender game to raise money for cancer awareness. The lavender ribbon represents all cancers. The teams came together to fundraise by selling baked goods, baskets, and charging admission to enter the game. The volleyball teams may have lost their games, but the success of the fundraising made the night worth it.

On December 9 the varsity team, along with some members of the JV team, presented their check to Roswell’s Angel Fund, which helps patients in need pay for the cost of treatment.

The team raised and donated $1,000. The check was written in memory of Mathew Sanscrainte, beloved husband of Mercy math teacher Brittany Sanscrainte.
Mystery in the Streets of London

Short Story By Megan Amicone and Catherine Klodzinski

Another loud bang is heard in the streets of London for the fourth night in a row. All the neighbors in the tall, tightly-squeezed houses lining the street already knew what happened, as it has happened for the last four nights. A murder. It all started on a Thursday evening, at a time when all of the windows in the narrow houses began to go dark. All the citizens of London began to turn in for the night, and for the next four nights, a singular loud gunshot was heard throughout the neighboring houses at exactly 10:37 p.m.

The first night, the London police were called to the scene of the crime on 2nd avenue. They completed their investigation, yet nothing was found. The second night, they were called for a gunshot heard on 5th avenue. Yet again, nothing was discovered. The third night, a shot was heard on 3rd avenue. The police showed up again, but still, no evidence was found. By the fourth night, the police had begun to patrol the streets at 9 o’clock and continuing until that fourth gunshot was heard, on 4th avenue. From what was posted in the city’s newspaper, it seemed like the police were doing their best to get to the bottom of the occurrence, but something wasn’t adding up. Every night, the police investigated, yet no bullets were discovered.

The people were worried, but they didn’t worry enough to take matters into their own hands, except for one. Her name was Eleanor Jones. She was a student at London’s top university and had a passion for mystery and crime. She wasn’t well known and didn’t mind it being that way. She had caramel brown hair and chestnut brown eyes. Eleanor had a few friends or family. She lived in a two-story apartment on 4th avenue and had heard about these mysterious murders but didn’t pay them mind. It wasn’t until the fourth gunshot rang out on that fourth night, that she became intrigued.

It was a quiet and cloudy Sunday night. Eleanor Jones had been at home since that morning and had begun to get ready for bed. Everything had stayed quiet until a loud bang was heard, coming from directly in front of her apartment. She ran outside to see her neighbor lying dead in the middle of the street. In Eleanor’s mind, she began to piecemeal together that this was the next incident, the next murder following the three she had heard about just this morning. There she stood, at the foot of the newest victim, but she realized something. There was one bullet lying in the road next to where she stood. She didn’t touch it but just stood there and waited until she heard the police sirens come blaring down her street.

She informed the officers of everything she knew and even began to point to the bullet that she had seen on the road. But when she did, the bullet had vanished. She stood there in confusion, wondering if what she saw was ever really there. But she knew for a fact she saw it. After the police left and the scene had been dealt with, Eleanor could not sleep. She began conspiring plans and ideas on how to solve this apparently unsolvable mystery. By the time dawn came around, she had created the perfect plan on how to solve this, starting with the bullet.

The next morning, she planned to take a walk to the news station, and getting as much information on the case as she could without seeming suspicious. Yet on her walk, something caught her attention out of the corner of her eye. She turned to see something shiny coming from a pile of trash in the alleyway that squeezed between two larger apartments, quite similar to that of her own. She ran over to see not only piles of trash but four metal bullets. Ones that looked exactly like the one she had seen on her street on the night of the fourth murder, ones that had suspiciously vanished. With this new evidence, she ran to the police station and quickly informed the case’s lead officer about what she had discovered.

She thought they would be interested, but instead, they seemed to invalidate her and the evidence. Confusion swirled around in her head. She had legitimate, tangible evidence, so why wasn’t it enough to at least take a look? She began to look around, and under a stack of files it looked like something that would piece everything together. At this point, she was certain that this new evidence pointed to…

*The answers to this mystery and the rest of the story will be revealed in Issue 2!*

The Ghost of Shadow Meadows

Short Story By Tylie and Zoe Czerniak

As we drove up to Marcy’s new house, I couldn't believe that I was finally going to see her again. The moment I opened the door, Marcy was immediately shaking my hand. “I’m so glad you made it!” It has been years since I last saw her, before she moved to Shadow Meadows.

“Hey!” Marcy grabbed me by the hand as we rushed inside to get settled as the old clock ticked away. “Mum can’t believe that you were interested, but instead, they seemed to invalidate her and the evidence. Confusion swirled around in her head. She had legitimate, tangible evidence, so why wasn’t it enough to at least take a look? She began to look around, and under a stack of files it looked like something that would piece everything together. At this point, she was certain that this new evidence pointed to…”


“Okay! I almost forgot to tell you the other part!” Marcy said. “The old Angelica Meadows used to be called ‘The Fairy Meadows.’ The name was changed when Angelica died there because her spirit haunts the meadows.”

“Back up, Marcy, who’s Angelica?” I asked.

“Marcy looked embarrassed. “Oh right! I probably should have explained. You see…”

Before Marcy could respond she looked at her watch. “Oh no! The movie starts in 3 minutes! We better get to our seats!” Marcy grabbed me by the arm as we rushed inside to get settled as the movie began. Marcy whispered into my ear. “Don’t worry, the movie will explain who Angelica is.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

Afterward, Marcy explained that she had found the answers to this mystery and the rest of the story will be revealed in Issue 2!"
Students Put on Play Despite Struggles and Succeed
By Amelia Cook

On the nights of November 6 and November 7 at Saint Francis High School, a group of students worked together to put on a production of the play Almost, Maine. Almost Maine is a story that takes place in a small town called Almost in Maine. Its plot, unlike that of most plays, was not a singular story, but rather many different ones taking place at the same time. The theme of love and the ways it can affect people weaves the stories together.

The cast consisted of nine people in all, five Saint Francis students and four girls from other schools, including Novella Keem and Erin Hudson from Mount Mercy.

When asked about the outcome of the play, Erin said, “I think the show went well. I think that we put our all into the show. If there were any mistakes in the show, I couldn’t tell at all, and even if there were, it still flowed through very smoothly. It just was a really good show, and I think everyone was great.” Erin also noted that the cast of the show bonded and added that they were all friends by the time the performance came around.

However, uncertainty struck during tech week (part of a show’s preparation) due to unforeseen circumstances: one of the cast members got COVID-19 and was forced to quit. This would have been extremely detrimental to the show because she was the lead in two important scenes that couldn’t be cut. At this time, two members of the cast, Kayla Kurek and Erin Hudson, volunteered to take over the scenes with only four days to memorize the lines and blocking (the staging of actors).

“It was really stressful doing it on such short notice, but we did it, and we pulled it off,” said Erin when asked about the experience. Despite the challenges, they pulled through and performed well.

In the end, the Saint Francis play was a success. Novella Keem put it best when she said, “It was really enjoyable, and I’m really sad that it’s over, but I’m glad I was able to experience it.”

The Vlog

Short Story By Jenna Angle

Anxiety strangled me as I began to pack my suitcase. Today is the day that I leave for a two-week vacation in Paris. The thought of being a tourist in a foreign country haunts me because I am afraid of the unknown. I managed to calm myself down and ventured downstairs to greet my best friend, Kate, who was waiting for me in the car.

“Come on, let’s go! I want to get to the airport early so we can get some footage for your vlog,” Kate enjoined as I threw my suitcase in the car and locked up my house. My parents would be staying with my sick Aunt while I was gone.

Kate and I vlogged the ride to the airport because I wanted to have lots of footage for my viewers.

“Hey, vlog. We just arrived at the airport, so we are currently waiting for our plane.” I exaggerated, and after about an hour of laughing and vlogging, we boarded the plane. I got comfortable in my seat and took a long nap until we landed.

“Oh, we just landed in Paris. It’s about two o’clock in the morning, so we are going to find our hotel and get some rest. See you all later!” I hollered into the camera as I traveled through the foreign airport.

Approximately two hours passed, but we finally arrived at our hotel room. Kate and I couldn’t find the hotel room at first, and almost everyone we ran into was unpleasant. The whole situation was difficult for us as foreigners lost in a strange new world.

Kate and I woke up around ten o’clock in the morning since neither of us could sleep. We started our first full day in Paris by visiting some of the local cafes near our hotel.

I grabbed my camera off of the bakery table and attempted to vlog Kate and me at the cafe, but I was quickly interrupted by a handsome man walking towards us.

“I didn’t mean to listen to your conversation, but I overheard you asking for directions to the Eiffel Tower. I could show you where that is if you would like,” the man offered as he sipped his coffee.

I could tell by the expression on Kate’s face that she wanted to take the man up on his offer, but I was not about to follow a stranger around this foreign land. Even though I knew that trusting the man was wrong, I accepted his offer anyway. On our way out of the bakery, the man expressed that his name was Victor, and he shared a few facts about himself.

Our first three days in Paris were a success. Kate and I visited many tourist attractions and restaurants. I vlogged everywhere we went since it was great content. It was the end of our third day in Paris, and I decided to look over all of the footage I recorded starting with the Eiffel Tower. I decided to post all of the videos on Youtube and upload the rest of the content when I returned home. I couldn’t sleep well so I scrolled through the comments on the first part of the vlog.

“Who is that strange man in the background?” almost all of the comments asked.

I went back into the video and spotted a tall, handsome man standing behind Kate and me everywhere we went. I woke up Kate and showed her the comments and the man in the video. Kate and I booked a ticket for the first plane we could, which was at five o’clock in the morning. Kate and I waited in the airport, both of us on the phone with our parents explaining the situation we were in.

Finally, I arrived home, but my parents were still at my Aunt’s house. They weren’t going to be home for about an hour. I opened up my suitcase so I could explain to my vlog what happened. As soon as I opened up the suitcase, an orange note fell onto my lap.

“Why leave so soon?” The note read. Then underneath my camera was a picture of my house. I screamed in terror then dashed to my bedroom and immediately called the police. When I opened up my bedroom door I saw a small bouquet of roses on my bed. I tip-toed over to the flowers and opened a card that sat on top of my bed.

“I hope you like them. Thank you for such a fun vacation -V” the card screamed.

“Victor was with us the whole time!” I hesitated to say it out loud.

Then I heard a creak coming from my closet.

Mental Health Awareness Club Starts At Mount Mercy
By Ashley Cirbus

At Mercy this year, I took the initiative to start a “Mental Health Awareness Club.” The club is moderated by Ms. McCleary and Ms. Snyder and we meet in room 12. I started the club in honor of my dad who passed away from suicide in June 2019. From this, I learned that mental health awareness is so important in any space, including school. This was a club I’ve wanted to start since I was in 8th grade but never got around to taking that initiative until this year.

On Tuesday, November 2, we had our first meeting. There were definitely many more people than expected, and I hope more can attend in the future. It was a great brainstorming meeting, which included Timbits! We thought about what we would do for future meetings, and everyone had a lot of great ideas.

Next meeting, November 30, we plan to create mental health awareness posters to post all over the building. In future meetings, we will do things such as art and music therapy, learning meditation and breathing techniques from Ms. McCleary, going outside, and taking walks when we need a break.

Eventually, we will set up fundraisers at least once or twice a year. Some examples of fundraisers we were thinking of doing are bake sales and donating the money to mental health organizations. These ideas are just the beginning for what’s to come!

My goal for this club is to create a safe and supportive environment for those dealing with mental health issues or those who know someone dealing with mental health issues. Another goal I have is to make sure everyone feels supported by their peers. I am excited for the future of this club and the impact it may have on people.
Sparks: The All-New A Cappella Group

By Zoe Czerniak

Grab your microphone and warm up your vocal cords because the Mount Mercy Academy’s show choir is back! Mount Mercy’s “Sparks” is our school’s new a cappella group/show choir conducted by Miss Greenan. Show choir refers to singing in time with elaborate choreography. The group, 23 students strong, is currently singing a cappella songs. Weekly practice is in the Fred Kirisits Choral Room on Wednesdays from 3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Miss Greenan was also part of Mercy’s previous show choir, “Pure Magic,” when she was a student here. She has many fond memories of the group. “I think my favorite memories would be spending time with the people in the group, and specifically experiencing the music trips with people who I now consider my lifelong friends,” she reminisces.

Some “Sparks” commented on what they like about the choir, why they wanted to join, and their favorite song so far.

Why did you want to become a Spark?

“I wanted to become a Spark because growing up I always had a passion for music, whether it was me being in choir, select choirs, or playing instruments, it was something I always loved. So when I heard Miss Greenan was creating this group, I just knew that I wanted to join it!” said Addison Zimmer.

“I wanted to become a Spark because music has been a huge part of my life for a really long time, and I’ve always loved singing and writing songs,” said Amelia Cook.

“Well, mainly because I watched Glee and Pitch Perfect, and LOVED it. After that, I have always wanted to be part of a show choir,” added Tylie Czerniak.

What is your favorite part about being a Spark?

“My favorite part about being a Spark is being able to collaborate with other students at every grade level, which allows me to meet new friends as well,” said Olivia Macholet.

“I love being a Spark especially because of the people that we’re with. Rehearsals are so much fun, and I know that everyone else there loves music just as much as I do,” said Amelia Cook.

Tylie Czerniak likes the teamwork that goes into the group. “My favorite part about being a Spark is the sense of community and teamwork we all develop for our love of singing!”

“My favorite part about being a Spark is that I am able to meet other people who have the passions as me and love to sing,” said Addison Zimmer.

How did you feel when you received the callback email?

When the “Sparks” received their callback email, they were exhilarated. “I felt excited when I received the email,” Olivia Macholeth responded. “I love singing and it’s a great passion of mine.”

Were you nervous when you auditioned?

When the “Sparks” first auditioned many of them were anxious. “I was absolutely terrified. I’ve never actually sung in front of people before,” Novella Keem said.

“Like most people, I have insecurities about my singing voice. My advice? You never know if you don’t try. Even if you’re nervous and don’t get the part, be happy you tried rather than did nothing,” Tylie Czerniak said.

What’s your favorite song you practice in “Sparks” so far?

Many of the members from “Sparks” agree their favorite song is “White Winter Hymnal,” the first one they practiced as a group.

The show choir is just starting out but already has big aspirations! "I'm booking shows in several locations around Buffalo during the school year,” said Miss Greenan.

Our “Sparks” debuted this year’s Breakfast with Santa right here at Mount Mercy and performed again at the annual Christmas concert.

The Mount Mercy Sparks preformed at Mount Mercy’s annual Christmas concert. Photo by Miss Rachel Kaufman

Climate Scientists Win Noble Prize

By Aubrey Monaco

Three scientists have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics, according to Smithsonian Magazine, for “the physical modeling of Earth’s climate, quantifying variability and reliably predicting global warming.”

These scientists, who have been recognized for their accomplishments, are Syukuro Manabe, Klaus Hasselmann, and Giorgio Parisi. These Nobel Prize recipients have conducted pioneering research for current climate models, and these models gave an early warning signal about human-caused climate change.

In the 1960s, Manabe produced research about increasing carbon dioxide emissions on the Earth. His first climate model paved the way for future ones. In the 1970s, Hasselmann created a mathematical model that demonstrated the link between weather and climate. Then, in the 1980s, Parisi advanced an understanding of patterns in chaotic systems. These achievements together have greatly advanced our understanding of climate change and what is necessary to halt it.

“As public awareness of climate change grows, it is encouraging to see the Nobel Physics Prize recognizing the work of scientists who have contributed so much to our understanding of climate change,” said the chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Dr. Hoesung Lee.

Our Effect on Wildlife

By Joyce Hibbs

The years 2020 and 2021 have been difficult for people all over the world. We see tragedy on the news every day, but do we ever stop to look at what’s happening to our wildlife? When we truly look at how our wildlife is faring, we may be surprised to see that they are not thriving.

The animal population is decreasing rapidly at the fault of humans. Some of the biggest threats to wildlife right now include illegal wildlife trade, habitat destruction, the presence of invasive species, pollution, and climate change. Humans contribute to many of these threats.

So, what exactly is happening?

The illegal wildlife trade industry is the fourth largest criminal industry in the world, after drugs, arms, and human trafficking, according to the World Animal Protection nonprofit. Gaining over 20 billion dollars a year, it is also a huge threat to some of our favorite animals like the elephant and rhino.

In regards to habitat destruction, forest fires are one of the biggest causes. According to World Animal Protection, “Half of the world’s original forests are gone, and what remains is being cut down ten times faster than it can be replaced.”

Even so, the largest threat to wildlife is invasive species. They can destroy natural habitats, as well as other animals in that habitat. Invasive species put 42 percent of endangered species at risk.

We constantly hear about the effect of pollution on humans, but less acknowledged is its impact on our wildlife. According to Conservation International, about 8 million tons (17.6 billion pounds) of plastic are dumped into our oceans each year, and there are too few regulations or policies to prevent that. Due to extreme levels of pollution in our oceans, more than 600 species of water animals are endangered. More animals in our oceans are dying of microplastic consumption than of natural causes.

Our lifestyles can affect wildlife both positively and negatively, so let’s make it positive!
Dear Catherine

How do I better manage my time, especially when my life is super busy?

Time management is a learned skill, and until you figure out what works best for you, it’s really difficult! I’ve definitely fumbled around, searching for more time in the day that obviously didn’t exist. My best advice is plan, plan, plan. Plan out your days and create a (flexible) agenda for yourself. You don’t need to come up with a block, school-like schedule for your free time, but set aside time to complete specific tasks.

When you’re really busy, try to utilize all of the unexpected, free moments in your day. You’d be surprised by how much you can get done if you solve a couple of math problems or write the conclusion to your English essay at the end of your classes. I’ve found that most of my teachers give me four or five minutes at the end of every block, and I can usually finish one homework assignment throughout the day.

When you have more freedom in your day, it’s especially important to plan how you’ll spend your time. During this past weekend, I outlined how I would spend my Sunday so I could enjoy my day but also work productively. I planned to spend an hour on English assignments and thirty minutes studying when I first woke up, and then another hour studying and an hour working on my biology lab in the evening. I made sure to spend my afternoon with friends and watch at least one episode of Criminal Minds in between homework assignments, to break up the bulk of what I had to do.

It’s not easy to develop time-management skills, but I hope this helps!

How can I stay more organized?

If you don’t naturally have a hyper-organized, type-A personality, staying organized can be extremely difficult. Organization is a skill gained through trial and error; find out what works for you and what doesn’t.

I stay organized by creating lists, color-coding, and using my agenda. Lists aren’t for everyone, but I create lists for basically every aspect of my life, and I’d define myself as (relatively) organized. Using my agenda (the Mercy agenda is your friend!), I write lists for short-term and long-term assignments that I need to complete. In my own journal, I try to write down every nonacademic task or goal I’d like to accomplish in one day. I keep a running log of what needs to be done in a certain span of time, and what I’d simply like to do as well. It might help you to determine each day which tasks are high, medium, or low priority. Whether you keep track of this information on Post-It notes, in your “Notes” app, on your hand, in a notebook, or in a planner, creating lists is an almost fail-proof way to become more organized.

If you’re a visual learner, you may find it helpful to color-code. In school, you can assign colors to different classes or units in a subject to keep your materials separate (even on Google Drive!). When writing in your agenda (there’s a reason I’m emphasizing using your agenda…), you can highlight due dates and test or quiz dates in different colors. I also find color-coding helpful outside of class. I write on my calendar with different colored pens to signify the difference between birthdays, vacations, holidays, sporting events, concerts, and work.

Overall, the best way to stay more organized is to experiment with different methods and find what helps you most. I’m sure that after completing a quick Google search or watching a TED Talk about organization, you’ll find a handful of methods that may help you. I wish you luck in discovering the best techniques for you!

My friend is going through a really tough time with her mental health and often comes to me for support. I’m always happy to lend a listening ear, but sometimes I feel like I’m becoming her therapist. Most of the conversations we have are really triggering and it’s weighing me down. I don’t know what to do because I want to be a good friend and I’m worried about her, but I’m struggling to fill this pseudo-therapist role. Advice?

Situation like the one that you’re in with your friend are always tough. For the person in your shoes, it can be extremely stressful to balance your worry for the other person, while also acting as their main supporter. Trust me, I understand. Constantly listening to someone you love talk about their deteriorating mental health is straining. Yes, they’re the one suffering, but it can weigh heavy on your heart too.

First, be sure to speak with an adult if you feel that your friend is at-risk of harming themselves or others, or if someone else is possibly harming them. The friend may be upset with you at first, but it is for their own wellbeing and, in the long run, they will understand.

If such a risk isn’t present, I’d first recommend that my friend reaches out to an adult so they can look into counseling. If you’re comfortable with it, you can even offer to go with your friend to speak with an adult. Feeling supported by you with this step may help them feel more comfortable to talk to an adult. Asking for help is definitely scary, as is starting therapy. However, if your friend needs to talk to someone about their declining mental state and difficult feelings, they should talk to a professional, not you. I’ve learned that you can’t force someone to find help, but you can encourage them and pull them in the direction of counseling, which can really help!

As for feeling like you’re the therapist, setting boundaries is crucial. It may sound selfish, but you need to prioritize your wellbeing and cut off triggering conversations. It seems like you should have a candid talk with your friend and simply say that you’re struggling to listen to these specific topics. Of course, you should reassure them that you’re happy to provide support and appreciate that they feel comfortable talking to you. While you have to be honest, you also have to be gentle. From your friend’s perspective, it can be difficult to hear that they were unloading on you. Before talking to them, make sure you plan how you’re going to go about setting these boundaries.

I’m sorry that your friend is struggling and you feel weighed down. More than anything, I hope you take away that you deserve to prioritize your own wellbeing and set boundaries from my response. Best of luck!

Have a question for Catherine?

Access the Google Form that was emailed to you to submit a question!

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Disclaimer: “Catherine” is just another Mercy girl, like you. She’s trying her best to give you the best advice she can, but her responses still reflect her views, not absolute facts. She hopes to give advice that can help, but acknowledges that these are her opinions and she is not always right.