

**Catching waves** No matter how dangerous the tides, these students are obsessed with surfing **LIFESTYLE 7**

**Swifties rejoice** Fans are buzzing about the release of Taylor Swift's new album "Midnights" **ENTERTAINMENT 16**

**She quit cheerleading** to be one of the JV football team's linemen, and she hasn't looked back. **ATHLETICS 19**

# the MIRROR

NOVEMBER 2022 | Van Nuys High School | Van Nuys, California

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**The newcomers** They left their homeland for a better life. They were **frightened** and **alone**. They faced **danger**. They risked **everything** to get here. **These are their true stories.**

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“He found a dismembered body in one of the trash bags. It was a message that he and his family were not safe.”

“Everything seemed to have settled down until one of her older brothers went missing one night.”

“As the threats continued, her mother decided that they would find a way to immigrate to America.”

[vnhsmirror.com](http://vnhsmirror.com)

THE MIRROR | BEVERLY REGINO

**BEYOND JUDGMENT** Senior Joshua Castro finds that most people who know him accept him for being queer.

# I'm queer. This is my coming out story

By Joshua Castro

I realized I was gay in middle school. I went through a journey of navigating my way through a spectrum of labels, testing out which ones fit me best.

At a young age, I already knew my parents' views on gay people. They called them sinners or unnatural. They treated gay people as something they

had to endure to be around. God forbid that one of their kids would be gay. Even my relatives outside of my immediate family rejected homosexuality.

My family would call girls with short hair unlovable tomboys and said boys would never like them with hair like that. If a boy acted a little flamboyant, he'd be called bakla (slang meaning queer in Tagalog) and be shamed for it. They would judge

boys for having hair too long, or for the way they would sit.

Now they try to guilt trip me and say things like, "You're my only son. You shouldn't be acting like that." Their constant, ignorant comments forced me to hide and repress myself and my identity. There's a me that I show to my friends, and a me that I show to my family. My relatives created a toxic environment for me and my siblings, where we

were overcome with insecurities and self-hatred about being gay.

But I am pretty lucky that most of the people outside of my family are supportive of me. I have never experienced homophobia in school. Sometimes I'll overhear someone use homophobic slurs like "faggot" in conversations, but I don't let that get to me. The most I'll feel about it is disgust towards that person, almost like second-hand embarrassment.

Prior to figuring myself out, I had crushes on two girls but they turned out to be more of an admiration for them as well as my desire to impress them to be their friend.

The first person I came out to was a close friend in middle school. She didn't give me any kind of reaction. She took it like

**My relatives created a toxic environment for me and my siblings, where we were overcome with insecurities and self-hatred about being gay.**

it was a new, interesting fact about me, and I was good with that. Her indifferent attitude was sort of comforting, and made me feel like I belonged, even if I knew I wasn't like everyone else.

My eldest sister suspected I was queer at the same time I was figuring it out, so it wasn't much of a surprise when I told her either. I just confirmed her suspicions. I was a little scared that she'd open me to my parents or to my other siblings, but true to her word, she didn't tell anyone.

There's an overwhelming pressure society puts on gay people to come out. Maybe most people don't realize it, but when-

ever I'm asked if I had come out to my parents, or if they knew, it puts more expectations on me. It becomes something that I'm obligated to do, and have to do eventually.

But I've discovered I'm still able to live without needing the support of my parents. The people that I've met and friends I've made have given me the confidence I lacked before and the care I was deprived of. They led me through my lowest points and encouraged me to keep moving forward.

*Joshua Castro is a podcast creator for "To Be Discussed" on vnhsmirror.com*

LGBTQIA+ VOICES

## Coming out

**After discovering your true self, how did you come out to your friends and family?**

### A GLOSSARY OF SEXUALITY

**biromantic:** romantically attracted to more than one gender, but not sexually attracted.

**bisexual:** romantically or sexually attracted not exclusively to people of one particular gender; attracted to both men and women.

**demisexual:** sexual orientation in which a person feels sexually attracted to someone only after developing a close emotional bond with them.

**transmasculine:** anyone who identifies on the masculine side, but may not identify as a man.

### Czarina Fernando

**Came out in May 2022. Identifies as queer and demisexual**



"It was hard to figure out my label. I knew I liked boys and girls, but I didn't really think the labels bisexual or pansexual really suited me, so I felt really comfortable

with the label queer. Before coming out as demisexual, I was confused as to why it was more difficult for me to do intimate things with some people, just to find out I can't go out with them until I fully get to know that person."

### Jen De Rosales

**Came out October 2021. Identifies as bisexual**



"I came out to my friends who were supportive of me. A couple of months later, I dropped the bomb on my mom while she was trying to lecture me about something. I don't

remember what happened after that, but I felt like crying. The weight off my shoulders lifted and it's always been that way ever since."

### Kai Joyce

**Came out June 2016. Identifies as biromantic, demisexual and transmasculine**



"It's been a whirlwind trying to figure myself out, especially with so many different labels to choose, some of them I still don't really understand myself. Using the label transmasculine for myself has

always just felt right. Yes, I'm a boy. Yes I was born a girl. Yes, I still like wearing dresses and makeup! If Jaden Smith, David Bowie and Harry Styles can do that, why can't I?"

# NEWS BRIEFS

**LOCAL ENROLLMENT UP** | Residential Program enrollment numbers are up about 8 percent over last year according to official LAUSD records. Last year, the total number of enrolled students was 1,049, while this year 1,135 are in the books. Despite this increase, the number of students enrolled in the three magnet programs has seen a drop, decreasing from 1,222 to 1,182 due to lower district caps and class size reductions. Residential enrollment is increasing by about one new student every day because of the school's new International Academy program for non-English speaking students which was rolled out this year.

**OPTIONAL DAYS MOVED** | The district and the teacher's union reached an agreement to move four accelerated days that were added to the 2022-23 academic year to other places on the school calendar. The teacher's union contends that adding the days was a publicity stunt by the superintendent that would interrupt normal instructional time, while the district argued that the extra days were needed to address loss of learning during the pandemic and provide enrichment opportunities for students. Instead of four random Wednesdays, the optional days move to the first two days of Winter break, Dec. 19-20, and Spring break, April 3-4 next semester.

**SENIOR OLYMPICS** | A four-day Senior Olympics is being hosted by ASB from Nov. 7-10 on the school football field. Open to students of all grade levels, the event will feature an obstacle course, relay race, dance competition and volleyball game, which students can sign up to take part in. Ticket prices have yet to be announced, but proceeds will go toward supporting the Senior Prom, scheduled for April 15, 2023.

**CANNED FOOD DRIVE** | Students are encouraged to bring canned and boxed food to their fourth period classes. ASB is sponsoring a Canned Food Drive taking place from Nov. 28 to Dec. 9. The food that is collected will be donated to SOVA Community Food and Resource Program, the Jewish Family Services food pantry located in Van Nuys. The class that collects the most donations will be rewarded with a food party. Some teachers may offer extra credit for participating. Students of all grade levels are free to participate in this event.

**NEW ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL & MAGNET COORDINATOR** | Magnet Coordinator Ms. Dawn Brown and Math teacher Ms. Elizabeth Torres have received promotions that will bring them new responsibilities and challenges. Each have been in their current position for at least a decade and are about to start a new chapter in their academic careers. Ms. Torres will follow Ms. Brown as the new Medical/Math Science Magnet Coordinator and Ms. Brown will join the administration as a new Assistant Principal. Both are transitioning into their new positions while a Math teacher is being hired to take over Ms. Torres' classes.

**NEW NINTH GRADE ACADEMY COORDINATOR** | Former Dean Donald Cloutier is now the Freshman Academy Coordinator. Mr. Cloutier started in his new position at the start of the semester. The coordinator oversees the operations of the Freshman Academy, which was established five years ago to improve residential ninth grader's graduation rates through student and teacher support programs, including the Crimson Club, which honors students who maintain satisfactory grades, and after-school tutoring. His new job entails helping teachers and students and overseeing all things related to the Freshman Academy. Mr. Cloutier hopes to expand the program's outreach to at-risk students.

## How to make your college application stand out Advice from a former application evaluator

Zachary Skolnick

THE MIRROR STAFF

As the deadline to submit college applications looms right around the corner, seniors are faced with the question of what college admissions officers are looking for in a potential student.

It is important to understand what makes one college application stand out from the rest. By far, Ms. Nora Kayserian, Magnet counselor and former college applications evaluator for Occidental College — President Barack Obama's alma mater — feels the most important aspect is to be diverse and unique. Diversity should show in a student's academics, accomplishments, extracurriculars and essays.

"Many factors can make a student diverse," she said. "That could be sexual orientation, race, gender or social economic status."

While every student is diverse, expressing unique qualities can be tricky. Plus, it is often hard to brag about oneself. Staying humble on your application may be a sacrifice.

"I can guarantee that every student on campus has a strength that will make them stand out and be unique," A-G Counselor Mr. Greg Achen said. "It is all about reframing something in your mind. Only you know your own aptitudes."

**COLLEGE WISDOM** Magnet counselor Ms. Nora Kayserian (L) and A-G Counselor Mr. Greg Achen (R) guide students on their paths to college. According to both, it is important for an applicant to be diverse and unique if they want their application to stand out.

It's also important to be yourself, make sure to show colleges what you can bring to their campuses. One way to do that is in your written responses. Ms. Kayserian points out that essays should feel authentic.

"Creativity goes a long way," she said. "It's not like an essay you write for English class, it is more like a journal prompt. But the best essays are the ones that show vulnerability. Ones that touch the heart of the reader. Don't be afraid to be who you are."

Showing genuine interest helps you stand out. For schools that require supplemental essays, where the applicant must explain why they want to attend, it is essential to do your research.

"Students who have gotten to know the campus and the programs, and who can visualize themselves at the college campus have a better chance," Ms. Kayserian said.

Try to find out what the school has to

offer, review the classes and majors, or look into what the surrounding city has. Many colleges have virtual tours on their websites, intended for students to get a first hand look at what the life would be like if they attended

Aside from essays and extracurricular activities, academic life can be a factor as well. Depending on the school, one section can outweigh the other and play a big part in an applicant's admission.

"It really depends," Mr. Greg said. "Overall, colleges want well-rounded students who have the academics, community services and the involvement in school activities. If something does not exist, be that trailblazer and make it happen. Stand out."

Ms. Kayserian reminds students that the name of the college they attend says nothing about what they could and will become.

"No matter what college you go to, you can make a huge impact, but you could also go to a great college and not make an impact at all," she said. "It's not the college you go to that matters, but the impact you make with the knowledge that you have."

For help with your college applications and essays, visit the College Office, located in room 305. They can provide resources and support. They ask that all students, no matter their grade, join their School-ology group so they can stay informed and up to date.

**“If something does not exist, be that trailblazer and make it happen.”**

**Mr. Greg Achen  
A-G Counselor**



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## Asbestos concerns close auditorium

Allison Antonio & Lindsay Han

THE MIRROR NEWS & FEATURES EDITORS

The Donna Hubbard Auditorium was abruptly shut down on Oct. 21 because inspectors think that asbestos may be present in the ceiling, specifically around hooks in the ceiling.

Asbestos is a naturally occurring hairy silicate mineral which is too small to be seen with the naked eye. Breathing asbestos fibers can cause a buildup of scar-like tissues in the lungs called asbestosis, which can potentially result in lung cancer and other diseases, such as mesothelioma.

The substance was commonly used for construction, insulation and fireproofing, but it was banned during the 1970s, after its

potential toxicity became widely known.

The auditorium opened in 1914 when the school first opened. Originally it had a mezzanine level, which was demolished after the 1933 Long Beach Earthquake. It was remodeled in the early 2000s to repair minor damage from the 1994 Northridge Earthquake. The entire interior of the auditorium, including its structural and electrical systems were updated.

Various state and federal regulations require that asbestos be removed. The California Education Code states that "Any public primary or secondary school building in which asbestos abatement work has been performed shall not be reoccupied unless fewer than .01 fibers per cubic centimeter of air is measured."

The building may remain closed for up to two months. Clue, the play that has been

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**DO NOT ENTER** The Donna Hubbard Auditorium was closed Oct. 21 because of potential asbestos contamination. Many events have been postponed such as the fall theater production "Clue," or have been moved.

in preparation for months, has been postponed until at least January. Other events originally set to take place in the auditorium will now take place in the small gym.

# Freedom or force: The divide over hijabs

By Lindsay Han

THE MIRROR NEWS & FEATURES EDITOR

A headscarf. At first glance it may just seem like an article of clothing, but it's much more than that. It is a physical form of representation for women

all around the world to show devotion towards their God, and express their identity.

Choosing whether or not to wear a hijab, the Islamic term for a headscarf, requires that a female wears it to cover the head, neck and chest. It is often influenced by family, tradition and societal expectations in Muslim countries.

"I've grown up in a hijab-wearing household," senior Rayana Yasin said. "My mom had us start wearing them at an early age."

Some make the decision to wear it early on in their lives, like junior Adiba Rysa, who started wearing a hijab when she was in third grade.

"My parents thankfully never forced me to do it, but I saw a lot of older girls wearing hijabs," she said. "I thought they were so cool. I remember when my mom was washing the dishes, and I told her I wanted to wear a hijab."

No matter what age one decides to wear a hijab, the purpose of the cloth stays the same. It's a way for women to conceal their beauty from unknown men and maintain a level of modesty.

But others consider the meaning of hijabs to be more strict.

When 22-year-old Mahsa Amini died in custody after being arrested by Iran's religious morality police for wearing her hijab too loose, women in Iran began to protest against the government's hijab laws. In the aftermath of videos of Amini collapsing to the ground being released, authorities claimed that her death was caused by heart failure. However, many Iranians believe that her real cause of death was murder. As a result, female demonstrators have taken to the streets of Iranian cities, casting off their hijabs and cutting their hair short in public as acts of protest.

Los Angeles, often referred to as Tehrangeles — a portmanteau of Iran's capital Tehran and Los Angeles — is home to as many as 700,000 people of Iranian descent, the largest Iranian population in the world outside of Iran.

Several weeks ago, a crowd of over 5,000 protesters gathered in downtown calling for Iranians to overthrow their hardline government over Amini's death.

Human rights groups estimate that over 200 people have been killed so far by Iranian security forces as they were attempting to stop the protests over the killing of one woman.

The protests have gathered support and attention after videos of the protests

and emotional appeals were posted to social media sites like Twitter, Instagram and TikTok. The Iranian government eventually shut down access to social media amid growing indignation around the world.

Although the outrage has been directed towards the Iranian government, Rysa is wary that the media may shift some blame on the women who choose to wear the hijab.

She sympathizes with those who don't have the freedom to choose whether or not they want to wear the head covering.

"There are a lot of people who are sadly forced to wear it and we often see that in the media," Rysa said. "A lot of kids who are already born in a Muslim family have to follow their religion because their parents follow it. I know people personally who wear their hijab when they're at home, but when they come to school, they take it off because those people are being forced. I feel like it depends on a lot of factors such as where you grew up, what your parents are like and how you learn about religion."

While in the West there is a widespread belief that hijabs are forced onto women, Yasin counters that wearing the hijab is meant to be a decision made on someone's own accord, not a requisite.

Rysa feels disheartened by the negative stigma hijabs have, since many people perceive them as a symbol of male control over women's bodies.

"It's really sad that not everybody gets the same opportunities to see the beauty in it or really learn why we wear it, because it's more cultural," she said.

Regardless of the stigma, the hijab is an integral part of Rysa's identity.

"Oftentimes, people do embrace the hijab because they learn to love it," she said. "I learned to love it and respect it very much. I don't know what I would be like if I didn't wear my hijab."

**MORE THAN A SCARF** Senior Nuzhat Anwar wears a hijab, the Islamic term for headscarf. "It's because we want to please our God Allah and to protect our beauty from other people," she said.

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# Seniors struggle to untangle the web that is college applications

By Rain Santos

THE MIRROR STAFF

"Everything is so competitive now," Maureen Cruz said.

Competitive is exactly the right word to describe the atmosphere seniors across the nation are suffocating in as they begin the dreaded process of completing college applications, a procedure that can prove to be overwhelming and stressful for a number of students.

"Since everyone is trying to be a well-rounded student, so many people are involved in so many things that the whole application experience becomes stressful and overwhelming," she said.

The cutthroat attitude that comes with trying to be accepted into prestigious universities, in addition to attaining heaps of scholarships, weighs heavily on the mental health of seniors.

Cruz plans to go into the medical field to learn more about nursing and nutritional

sciences. She shares her fear of not being able to get accepted into the schools she wants since the acceptance rates decrease every year. So far, Cruz has started her application process by writing multiple drafts. She plans to apply to UC Davis, UC Irvine, UCSD and UCLA.

"I'm just trying to get into college," she said.

Students collectively share feelings of anxiety and anticipation upon the whole application ordeal. Some began their applications as soon as they

started freshman year, while others are struggling with knowing where to start.

Ava Azarmi plans to attend a college for 2D character animation. Currently, she's only written a rough draft for her Common App essay.

"It's 117 words too long and I can't tell if it's the worst piece of writing known to mankind or something I can use, but it's a start," she said.

Her essay outlines the familial and creative influences that inspired her to pursue

animation.

"I began the essay with what it was like growing up with my eccentric grandmother, and the countless creative projects I was a part of because of her, from puppet shows to photography books

to albums," Azarmi said. "She sparked my desire to create in every direction at once, like her. Throughout the essay, I describe my exploration in theater, playwriting, music and art, and the moment I realized animation combines all those forms of art."

On top of her college applications, she has been expanding her art portfolio and creating pieces that effectively display her art techniques.

"I do think some suppressed corner of my brain is excited for college," Azarmi said. "I'll finally be able to study what I want to pursue and live on my own."

Raina Marangattu plans to go to a four-year college where she will major in pre-med biology with a minor in mathematics. Marangattu intends to incorporate what science means

to her in her application and how she has taken charge of all the opportunities presented to her inside and outside of school.

"I also wanted to talk about my unique background and church community, so they can see more about what makes me, me," she said.

Marangattu is also including descriptions of her participation in various extracurriculars like Science Olympiad, ASB and a Kaiser internship.

Aside from UCs, Marangattu plans to apply to schools that offer medical programs where she can get her undergrad and medical degree from during her college years.

A source of help on campus is the Career and College Center in Room 305 where seniors can get resources to complete their college applications.

According to College Counselor Ms. Dona Duke, students should be primarily concerned about adequately responding to the essay questions.

"You don't have to be a straight-A student," she said. "Write about you. Be yourself, they want to see your personality"



SENIOR AVA AZARMI



SENIOR MAUREENE CRUZ



SENIOR RAINA MARANGATTU

# OVERHEARD



*The bees drove the pizza lady away. On the opposite side of Kittridge, a swarm of bees were chasing people around. It was scary and overwhelming. One even got stuck in my hair. At least I didn't get stung.*

**Emily Fabra** on the Oct. 17 bee attack outside the Kittridge gate.

*It was super fun and exciting. When we all sang "Let It Go," it showed that we all had the same childhood. Everyone singing along to the same song made me realize we were seniors and how time had gone by so fast.*

**Charissa Yu** on the senior talent show as the rest of the student body takes the PSAT.

*It was so much better than last year's Spring Fling dance. There were lots of decorations and things to do. Plus, we had an actual theme this time.*

**Mark Perez** talking about the Homecoming Dance that was held Oct. 15 on the campus quad.

*They make college seem a lot less intimidating, especially since I'm graduating next year."*

**Marcela Aguirre** talking about campus visits from college reps.



# SAVE THE DATE NOVEMBER

**4** Senior Sunrise

**7-10** Senior olympics

**11** Veterans Day

**14** Canned food drive

**15** Freshman Funday

**18** Teacher debate

**21-25** Thanksgiving break

**30** UC apps due

# New KILLER on campus FENTANYL

As the drug gains a foothold at LAUSD schools, the new superintendent and school administrators seek a multipronged approach to address a potential crisis

**By Zachary Skolnick**

THE MIRROR STAFF

In late September, the local media was rocked with news that hit a little too close to home. At least seven LAUSD students are known to have overdosed on the drug fentanyl. 15-year-old Melanie Ramos, a student at Bernstein High School in Hollywood, died, raising many questions surrounding the safety of students and their exposure to drugs.

For students, the word drugs is often thrown around and can have a broad meaning. Fentanyl falls into this category. Most students really don't know what fentanyl is or how dangerous it can be.

"I just know it's a strong drug that is super-addicting," senior Brianna Carrillo, ASB vice president, said.

Fentanyl is an imitation opioid. Opioids are drugs made from the opium poppy plant containing chemical compounds used for physical and psychological pain relief.

Easily the most potent opioid, fentanyl can be 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine or heroin, making it extremely deadly. It is a synthetic drug, meaning it does not come from the opium poppy plant, but rather, is chemically produced in a lab.

Since fentanyl can be chemically produced, it is very inexpensive to make. Other high-value prescription drugs can cost dealers tons of money. Often to save money, drug dealers mash cheap fentanyl into the shape of prescription pills, creating what is called a "fentapill."

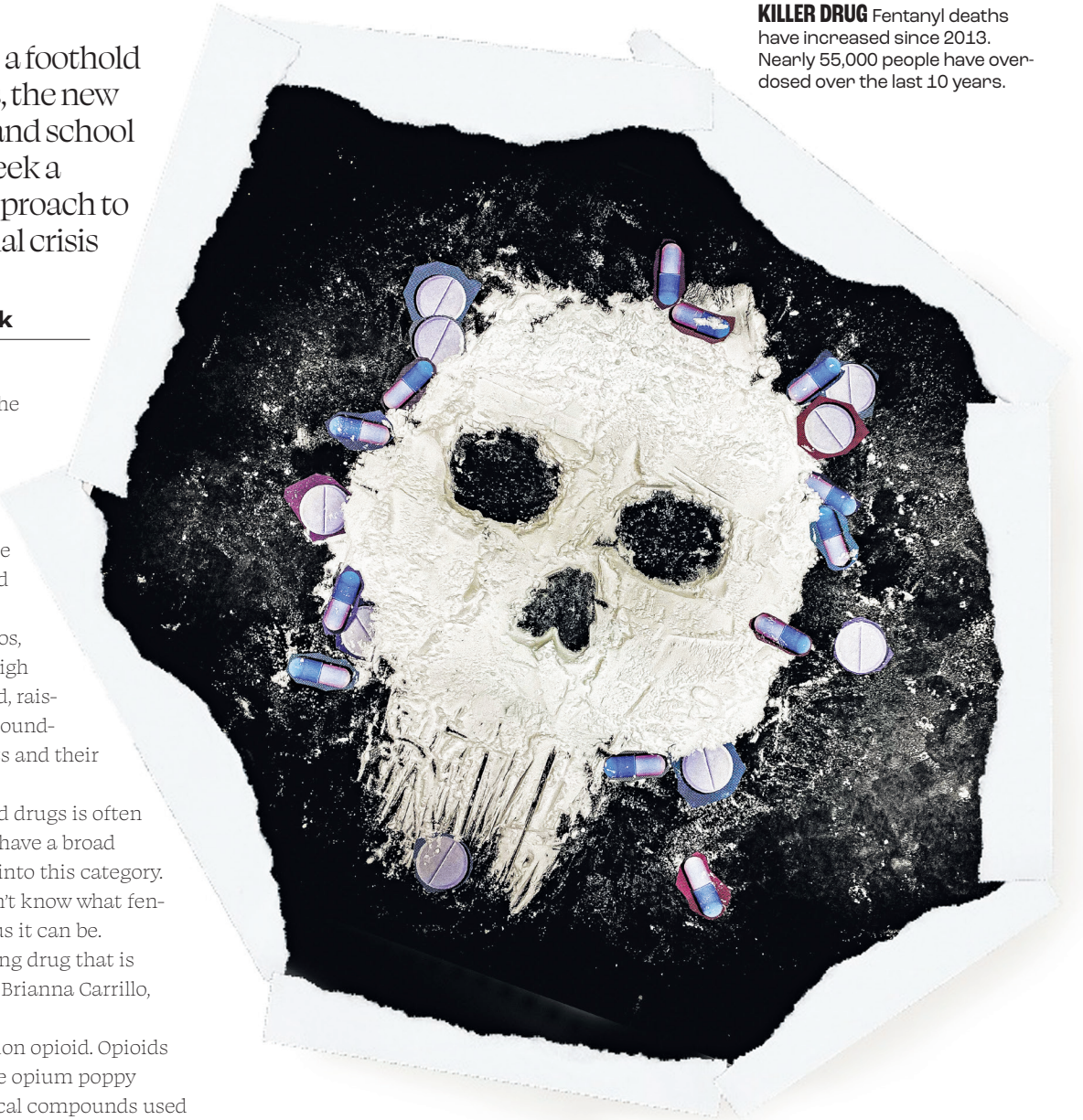
Students who buy the pills think they are just going to get high, but in reality, they can easily end up dead. The pills can vary in the amount of the drug they actually contain, so ingesting just a few extra grains can be the difference between life and death. In many cases it is impossible to know if a pill contains fentanyl, or how much it has without the use of a medical lab test.

In response to the fentanyl epidemic that is taking hold in LAUSD schools, Superintendent Alberto Carvalho has set a goal to supply all LAUSD schools with Narcan, a quick-acting nasal spray that counteracts the effect of an opioid overdose, by the end of October. Los Angeles School Police have already begun carrying Narcan on their person.

But the treatment is not a cure-all. Any person who has been administered Narcan still needs to be provided with immediate medical attention.

Side-by-side with Narcan, Superintendent Carvalho plans to launch a new 'Make a Choice' campaign which will provide schools with resources to educate students

**KILLER DRUG** Fentanyl deaths have increased since 2013. Nearly 55,000 people have overdosed over the last 10 years.



THE MIRROR | PHOTOILLUSTRATION BY DIEGO AGUIRRE

## Recreational drug toxicity

How lethal is fentanyl compared to other well-known drugs?

Fentanyl .....	<b>26.9%</b>
Heroin.....	<b>21.5%</b>
GHB.....	<b>13.4%</b>
Dextromethorphan .....	<b>10.7%</b>
Alcohol.....	<b>10.7%</b>
Cocaine .....	<b>7.2%</b>
MDMA.....	<b>6.8%</b>
Ketamine .....	<b>2.8%</b>

THE MIRROR | INFOGRAPHIC BY BEVERLY REGINO  
SOURCE | CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL

on the reality and risks of fentanyl. One component of the program will be student-to-peer counseling, where knowledgeable students will have sit-downs with other students to talk about fentanyl. Superintendent Carvalho feels that students will respond better by listening and talking to peers.

"Right now the district wants to be seen as helpful versus if they are actually helping," senior Carrillo said.

Although the school has not had any overdoses, administration is taking the issue seriously.

"I don't necessarily see the district as doing this 'just because,'" Principal Lourdes De Santiago said. "I genuinely think that our

district is moving forward and making decisions in the best interest of our students and their families."

In recent years, the district has used crisis and intervention counselors to allow students to share and seek counsel to address any trauma or struggles, which includes fentanyl and drug addiction.

Currently, the school has two Psychiatric Social Workers (PSWs), Ms. Karina Lares, and Ms. Kat Stockly, to help students that may be struggling with addiction.

"We support recent efforts to address this ongoing issue," both PSWs said in an email statement. "The accessibility to Narcan in schools can be life-saving. However, this alone does not solve the problem at hand. Investing in preventative efforts such as educating the school community as a whole is imperative in raising awareness on this issue."

With the programs being implemented so recently, some district policies and procedures have yet to be determined.

"Even sometimes when we trust something, the outcome is not what you thought it would be," Principal De Santiago said. "The world is struggling right now, and we have to look out for one another. If you see something, say something."

**If you know anyone who is struggling with fentanyl or other drugs, contact these agencies:**

SAMHSA's National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Hotline:  
**1-800-662-HELP (4357)**

Song for Charlie: Real Talk About Fake Pills  
[Songforcharlie.org](http://Songforcharlie.org)

# Fighting amongst Ourselves

By Angelina Kanno

THE MIRROR STAFF

**T**wo girls began brawling in the quad as lunch ended on Oct. 18, sending hordes of students frantically running towards the action.

A huge crowd formed in minutes. Most of the spectators held their phones aloft to record the chaotic violence playing out before them.

Spectators began shoving as they jockeyed to get a better angle of the action. No one intervened, letting the fight continue until an administrator stepped in to separate the two.

Fights on school grounds have become a common occurrence since in-person classes resumed after the covid lockdown.

Why the fighting has been on the rise is unclear.

"The main reason could be conflict within themselves," senior Fernanda Solis said. "They don't have anywhere else to resolve that conflict so it leads to fighting."

Normalizing confrontation is another contributing cause.

"Right now, we live in a world where violence is viewed as the answer for most cases, but it's really not," senior Amalia Chamichyan said.

The Oct. 18 combatants had a previous conflict that was thought to be resolved when they talked

to Restorative Justice Counselor Donald Cloutier. Renewed hostilities escalated the conflict.

An earlier fight broke out on Sept. 19 in front of the school as three female students from Panorama High School targeted a Van Nuys student after classes had ended for the day.

One of the attackers used a metal fork as a weapon, cutting a male student on the back and stabbing another in the forehead. Numerous staff members prevented the situation from escalating even further, according to Assistant Principal Annabel Bonney.

"We can't control the people who are outside of campus," Ms. Bonney said. "We just keep an eye on our students. All our staff went out there and split the students apart."

An investigation by school police ended with the three assailants being arrested the following day and charged with assault with a deadly weapon.

The reasons behind fights are often foolish, according to junior Kate Macaraeg, who witnessed the latest fight in the quad.

"The majority of the fights don't have a clear reason," she said. "This sounds kind of inappropriate, but school fights are so funny because half of the time you hear the background on why they have a fight and the reason is always stupid. It leaves me wondering why they're wasting their time on that."

A common cause for fights tends to be the spread of unchecked misinformation among students — rumors, gossip and innuendo.

"I try not to listen because kids are not really a reliable source," senior Siv Nair said. "I love my friends, but they don't know everything. So if students do tell you something, you shouldn't go around saying it because that

information can be wrong, and it can ultimately hurt others."

Students often begin fighting without thinking about what could happen afterwards.

"Think about your actions and the consequences before," Assistant Principal Ms. Dawn Brown said. "Why are you choosing to fight? Do you plan to go to jail for a fight? Is that what you want for your future?"

Having more faculty members present before, during and after school is a crucial component to curbing fights according to Ms. Brown.

"What the faculty members are trying to do is just be visible," she said. "We have campus aids, deans, admins and counselors supervising the campus during lunch for us to be visible, so that hopefully when students see something, they say something. If we're all out there visible, hopefully we give out a feeling of safety so students can just enjoy lunch with their friends and hang out and know they're in a safe place."

To junior Kate Macaraeg, staff members like JROTC teacher Sergeant Jorge Martinez, Performing Arts Magnet Coordinator Ms. Fanny Arana and Ms. Brown seem to be on top of keeping students in check.

"I see those four around the campus a lot," she said. "They're always walking around, making sure students are not causing any harm. Everytime they see something wrong, they will call the problem out."

Another preventative option would be adding security guards and increasing the school police presence. The LAUSD Board of Education voted to remove school police from cam-

pus starting fall 2020 in the wake of efforts to defund police after protests surrounding the death of George Floyd at the hands of police.

"The faculty should include more security," senior Eduardo Pachero said. "Especially security guards that are experienced in de-escalating situations but also have a personal background of training."

Having police officers stationed closer to campus, as well as patrolling campus grounds might make students think twice before brawling.

But stopping the physical violence often begins with the students themselves. Science teacher Mr. Brent Shano implores students to share their problems with someone they can confide in.

"I would encourage anyone struggling with anything to find a trusted adult on campus and get plugged into the school community," he said. "There are a lot of resources here. From teachers, to administrators, to social workers, to counselors, we have support staff in place so keeping any kind of personal issue to yourself is not the answer."

Mr. Mitchell agrees with this notion.

"By understanding their situation, we could help them," he said.

Regardless of how it is done, Mr. Mitchell believes more efforts towards campus safety are necessary.

"There is never an excuse to hurt someone, ever," he said. "There should be an effort made to make the kids as safe as possible."

Even if violence is depicted all over the news and social media, Mr. Shano reiterates that the ultimate responsibility lies within the person who chooses to act on their emotions.

"There is never the wrong time to do the right thing," Mr. Shano said. "At the end of the day, do the right thing for yourself. We are responsible for ourselves, and we need to hold ourselves accountable. Learn how to problem solve versus just getting into the emotion of violence."

**“There is never the wrong time to do the right thing.”**

**Mr. Brent Shano,  
Science teacher**

## SCRAMBLING FOR SOLUTIONS

An increase in fights between students on campus has left faculty and students desperate for some conflict resolution.

# CAMPUS LIFE BRIEFS

**FUNDAY FOR FRESHMEN** | An annual event designed for first-year students to mingle and relieve some stress from demanding classes, Freshman Funday will take place Nov. 15 during periods 5-6 on the football field. Hosted by ASB, students can play a variety of games, indulge in free snacks or just mingle with friends. The event is limited to Freshmen only, who must have a summons to attend.

**KEY CLUB AT MAGIC MOUNTAIN** | An event where Key Club members can meet and mingle with other members from the California, Nevada and Hawaii region will be held Nov. 12 at Magic Mountain in Valencia. Fall Rally South, an annual gathering, features an auction of division officers and fundraising for the Pediatric Trauma program to help protect children from trauma. Key Club is a worldwide student organization sponsored by Kiwanis International with a mission to help children.

**NEWSPAPER NOMINATED** | The school newspaper, The Mirror, has been nominated as a finalist for a third consecutive National Scholastic Press Association Pace-maker award, the highest honor a student publication can receive. The paper joined the small, exclusive group of winners in 2020 and 2021. Student journalists are also in the running for a total of nine individual awards in six categories, the most of any school this year. Winners will be announced Nov. 12 at the NSPA Fall convention in St. Louis.

**SCHOLARS HOST BERKELEY REP** | United Scholars Club will host a meet and greet with Michael Bryann Gaetos, UC Berkeley Assistant Director of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. Gaetos will discuss campus offerings, admission requirements and answer any questions potential applicants may have. The esteemed Bay Area school usually admits a significant number of applicants from Van Nuys High. Anyone interested is invited to Room 301 during lunch on Nov. 16.

**LIBRARIAN PUBLISHES KID'S BOOK** | Not only a book lover, but now a published book author, school Librarian Suzanne Osman's first work, an illustrated children's book, was released in late July. Almost a Witch illustrated by Eamon Winkle, is about a young girl who comes from a family of witches and experiences becoming a witch herself. Ms. Osman wrote the 41-page book to show children they can be unique and find their own crowd. Available online on Amazon or Barnes and Noble for \$25.

**INSPIRING NEW INNOVATORS** | I Too Can STEM is hosting a space themed event at Lake Balboa Park on Nov. 5 from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. During this event, students of all ages can come and engage in experiments that will teach them more about what engineering is like in space and how the solar system works. Some of the experiments will include solar system bracelets and space landers. I Too Can STEM strives to bring robust science, technology, engineering and math learning to every family, inspire young adults to pursue careers in STEM and the diversity needed to inject relevant and informed innovation into the community.

THE MIRROR | SAMANTHA RAMOS



**WARM WATERS** Senior David Lamb catches a wave at Topanga State Beach. He fell in love with the ocean at a very young age and began surfing when he was eight. "It's my safe space," he said. "The waves calm me, but there is something so exciting just riding them. It feels like you're flying."

## Student surfers search for that perfect wave

By Allison Antonio & Lindsay Han

THE MIRROR NEWS FEATURES EDITORS

She focused on the rhythm of the waves and the way they swelled and shrunk before her, over and over.

Huge splashes of cold water struck her ankles, making her shiver. The surfboard wobbled beneath her.

She checked her surroundings to make sure she wasn't too far from the shore and shifted her legs on either side of the board to steady herself.

Suddenly, the nose of her surfboard crashed into a hard surface. A huge rock hit her board. Her foot slipped off the board and before she could process it, her body fell off the board and into the water.

Immediately, she swam up to the surface and climbed back onto the surfboard.

For sophomore Kimiko Ramirez, scrapes, bruises and treacherous tides don't discourage her. She takes them as exciting challenges.

Ramirez discovered her love for surfing in elementary school.

"I fell in love with the sea when I was very young," she said. "I loved the animals. I loved going into the waves and swimming to do boogie

surfing. It's just relaxing. I feel like I'm at peace."

Some surf enthusiasts have been influenced by their environment and by those around them. This was the case for junior Daxton Beaumia, who lived in Hawaii, a surfing paradise, for 11 years.

"A lot of people I knew surfed and my mom's old roommate was the one who actually got me to try it," he said. "We would go to the beach almost every weekend and when I saw him do tricks, I thought I wanted to do it as well."

It wasn't just the tricks that made him fall in love with it. It was the intensity of being on a surfboard.

"What makes me feel the best while surfing is the speed," he said. "The speed of riding the waves."

After getting the opportunity to learn how to surf on a field trip, sophomore Pater Chantananunghak felt exhilarated. He realized that it was more challenging than he initially thought and ended up enjoying himself.

"There's a lot more to surfing than just standing on the board," he said.

Surfing relieves stress for junior Trapper Kirkpatrick.

"You just feel free," he said. "When you're out in the water, you feel like there's nothing to worry about. It's just you and the water."

Peak surfing season in California runs

from fall through winter, when water temperatures are at their chilliest. That's because the air becomes dense with moisture which allows for larger waves to crash onto the coast. The bigger the wave, the more challenging.

Southern California is known for its surfing culture, with some of the best surfing spots in the world to catch a perfect curl.

"Personally, I really love to go to this middle ground of a beach that's close to Malibu, but also really close to Santa Monica," Ramirez said.

Kirkpatrick prefers Malibu Beach because he claims its waves are unmatched.

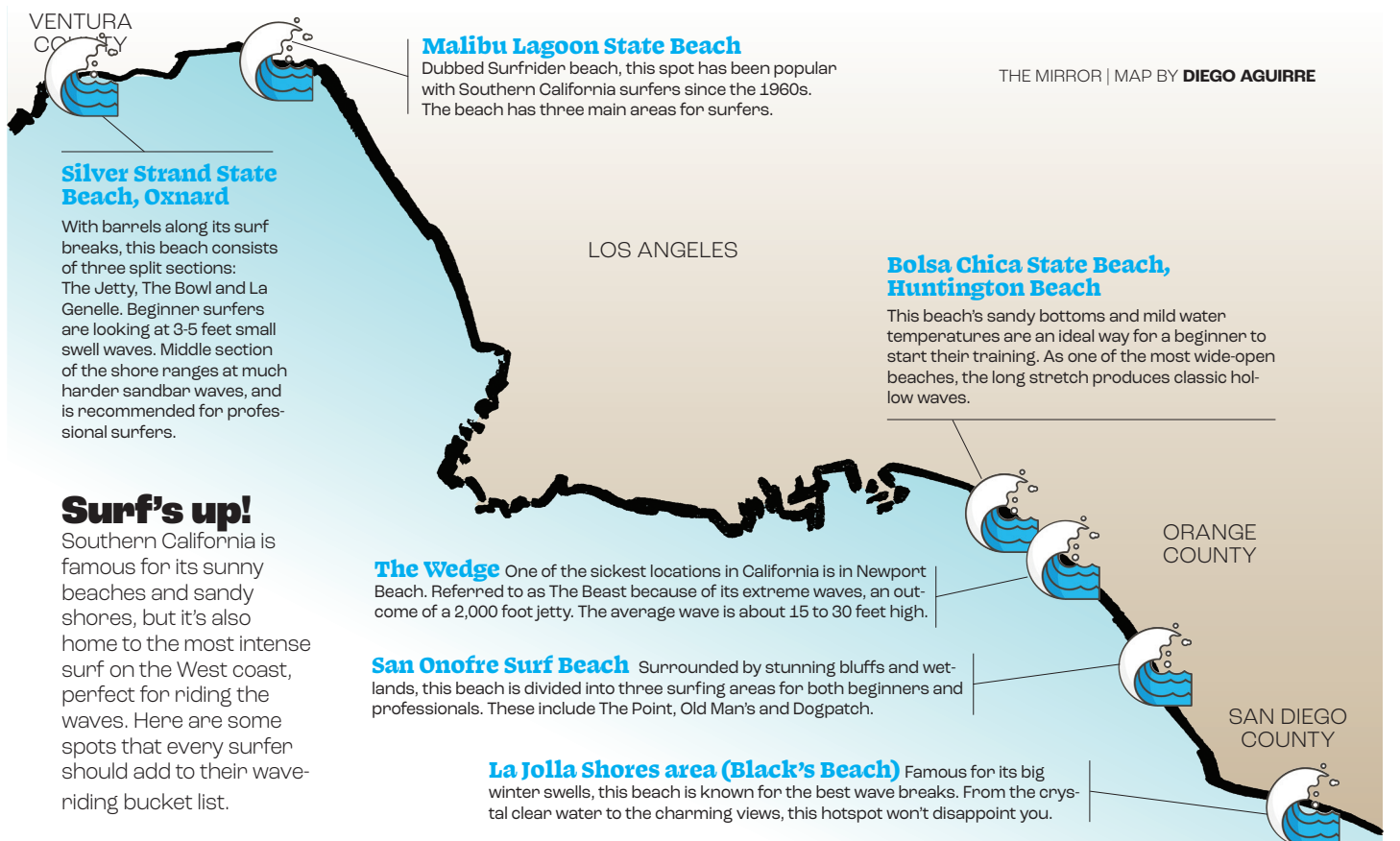
"I like surfing there because the waves are better," he said. "In general, it's more of a surfer beach. Other beaches are really hard to surf at, and I'm just not that good."

In a dangerous and difficult sport like surfing, surfers experience injuries caused by contact with their surfboard onto rocks and coral. This is one of Kirkpatrick's fears, and Beaumia shares a similar concern about seriously hurting himself.

Moving fast enough to avoid getting hit by the wave is something Ramirez struggles with.

"It's usually timing," Ramirez said. "Sometimes I grab the wave too early, and sometimes I grab it too late."

But no matter how difficult surfing may be, she wants to keep improving.



**Surf's up!**  
Southern California is famous for its sunny beaches and sandy shores, but it's also home to the most intense surf on the West coast, perfect for riding the waves. Here are some spots that every surfer should add to their wave-riding bucket list.

# New arrivals

## Fresh faces join faculty

**OVER THE COURSE OF THE SEMESTER** a whopping 24 new teachers have joined the faculty. They each come from different backgrounds and various prior careers, from accountants to Broadway musical producers. This huge increase comes from the school attempting to fulfill teaching vacancies, resulting from the nationwide teacher shortage. In August, the National Education Association (NEA) reported a shortage of 300,000 teachers and staff across the U.S. According to Assistant Principal Ms. Maria Phillips, teachers across the district mainly left to pursue higher paying jobs. Another reason for this increased shortage is burnout from teaching during COVID-19. Ms. Phillips says many of the teachers who left came back to the teaching profession due to dissatisfaction and boredom with their remote jobs. As of now, the school has 133 teachers on staff, including the new additions.



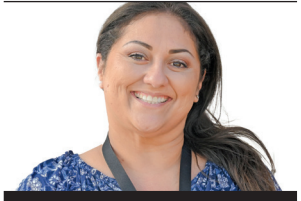
**Gregorio Alarcon**  
Math teacher

"I love teaching and inspiring students to love math and pursue a career that inspires them and others. I want the ones who struggle the most to learn and enjoy practicing math. I chose to teach because I wanted to work in a field where I had a direct effect in the lives of youth."



**Justin Baldrige**  
Theater teacher

"Watching students make their breakthroughs on the stage is what I consider to be the most rewarding aspect of my profession. I want theater to build self-confidence in people and I want them to understand the power of their voice, to be opinionated and to believe in those opinions."



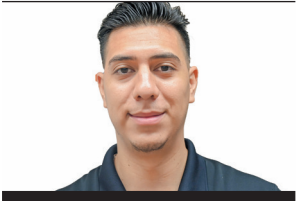
**Jessica Barcena**  
Health teacher

"In my junior year of college, one of my family members had mental health issues and I didn't understand much. When I started researching, I saw the amount of young kids struggling with mental health. I want my students to be self-confident and self-reliant; to not depend on everyone else or anything else around them."



**Peter Barot**  
Biology teacher

"I like working with students and helping them gain knowledge, but the hardest part of teaching is challenging the students who don't put in much effort. I like teaching freshman and sophomores the most. My teaching philosophy is helping and teaching students meet LAUSD standards. In my free time I enjoy watching football."



**Miguel Becerra**  
Spanish teacher/Volleyball

"As a teacher, it would feel very rewarding to have a great impact on at least one student. I want my students to be safe and comfortable with this class, but I also want to let them know that they can trust me, even though they see me as this big, tall guy."



**William Cox**  
PE teacher

"I want to make sure that all the students develop not a love, but at least a like for physical activity, get away from the gaming systems and get away from the computer. I want to install that type of healthiness and drive in some of these students."



**Estela Del Real**  
ELD and History teacher

"I was an ELD student as a kid and always wanted to help kids like myself. My teaching philosophy is that everybody can do it. Everybody is smart."



**Maria Gonzalez**  
Resource Specialist Program teacher

"I wanted to be a mentor, because I never had a mentor growing up. Sometimes a student doesn't have someone to tell them they can do what they want. I want to be a voice to them, a source of inspiration and somebody to remind them every day that they can."



**Katherine Guzman**  
English teacher

"I think teachers need to be more understanding about why their student is acting a certain way. There is probably a reason why they misbehave so you just need to be open minded."



**Daniel Hamlin**  
English teacher

"What I like most is when something I'm teaching clicks with a student; that lightbulb moment when they don't need my direction and they don't need my help anymore."



**Dana Hung**  
Science teacher

"I want students to know that even if they fail at something, they just need to move forward and see what they can do differently next time."



**Juan Luna**  
PE teacher

"I want to make sure that when kids leave my class, they come out a better person than when they got here. I want them to learn something from me and be better citizens."



**Maria Martinez**  
Special Ed and Math teacher

"The most rewarding aspect is seeing students succeed, and being able to give them the skills to succeed."



**Alison Murphy**  
History and Ethnic Studies teacher

"I chose history because I wanted to make a difference in future generations and make a positive change for everyone."



**Colin Rabago**  
Math teacher

"The most rewarding aspect of teaching is the progression of knowledge my students have, and interacting with them. There's a kind of satisfaction I feel when being able to help others get to a better place."



**Richard Reynoso**  
Math and Health teacher

"It doesn't matter where you start, but matters where you end. That's what it's been about for me, to be able to improve constantly."



**Josue Rodriguez**  
Spanish teacher

"Anyone can learn if they put effort into it and teachers need to find the students' interests to incorporate fun into the subject."



**Evard Sargsyn**  
Science and Math teacher

"For me, teaching is not just giving skills, but giving them a chance to succeed in life."



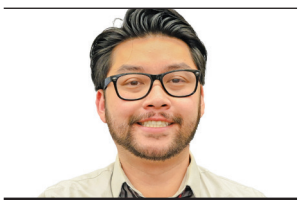
**Anna Servantes**  
English teacher

"Finding a way to motivate students to care about their education is the most challenging part because that used to be me in high school. I don't want them to make the same mistake."



**Maryam Shirkhan**  
Special Ed & Resource Math teacher

"I want to learn about the students and the qualities they might have because I believe there is no lazy kid. There's just different types of learning, so when you find the specific one for each student, then they'll be motivated."



**Angelino Simbulan**  
English teacher

"I think high school is supposed to be fun. I'm here to teach them specific standards that they could apply anywhere else and their careers."



**Elliot Timnak**  
Math teacher

"I want to encourage students to be clear and methodical in any problem they encounter in life and I think working with math problems helps carry those traits over to life."



**Kenneth Weber**  
History and Ethnic Studies teacher

"I love watching people grow. Not academically, but like the skill set to be an adult. Students don't get it, they don't see it. There are so many things that you guys have no idea that are coming to you as an adult that I feel like it's our jobs as teachers to help prepare you."



**Alexis Weddle**  
Choir teacher

"It's the best part of the show watching my students start at square one and then seeing them on stage shining, knowing where they came from, where we weren't necessarily shining from the start."



# A taste to remember...

## Members of VNHS Unidos share their favorite Hispanic foods from childhood

By Allison Antonio & Angelina Kanno

THE MIRROR STAFF

He peers over the sizzling pan, hot, aromatic steam wafting up towards his face. Measuring cup in hand, he looks towards his mother on his right.

"How much do you add for this dish?"

Her face scrunches up in confusion and she quickly dismisses his question as she grabs the open spice bottles and shakes their contents into the pot without looking.

"You'll know." It's all she says before sauntering back into the living room.

Because measurements are not common in his household, Unidos Club Secretary Jimmy Martinez learned to measure with his heart from his family members, especially his mother.

"My family likes my mom's cooking," he said. "There's never an exact recipe. You always know it by heart and learn recipes with your mind."

With a large Latin American population on campus and newcomers from Latin American countries enrolling everyday, many of these students grew up learning all kinds of recipes and eating a huge variety of dishes.

Club President Yanitz Alztorre's mom, who is from Sinaloa, Mexico, learned to make pozole from her mother, so it's a dish she knows from when she was little. Pozole is a thick soup typically made with pork, hominy, garlic and chili.

"My family and I eat pozole with bolillo, which is a type of bread with a soft inside and the outside is very crunchy," Alztorre said. "I really believe these two make a great combination."

Martinez eats the dish a little differently. His father is from Zacatecas, Mexico so he eats a different variation of the soup, which can include different



**FOOD FROM THE HEART**  
Pozole is a spicy Mexican soup made of pork, hominy and red chili.

types of proteins, like beef or chicken and be eaten with chickpeas, rice, cabbage, onions and lime as garnishes.

"Pozole is a classic," Martinez said. "You can never go wrong with pozole. All the spices added to it hits the spot. I grew up eating the dish, so it's always comforting for me."

Ceviche, a cold dish which is made with raw seafood that's cooked with lime juice, is Club Treasurer Nancy Alvarado's go-to food. Although it's usually a summer dish, she even enjoys eating it when it's cold outside.

"Ceviche is great all the time, but I say this dish is at its peak when eating it during the summer time," she said. "I like ceviche all year long."

A popular dish in El Salvador is a pupusa, a thick flatbread made with corn-meal or rice flour which can be stuffed

CREATIVE COMMONS | IVETTE DEGOLLADO

with a variety of savory fillings. Some of Alztorre's family members come from El Salvador.

"My family comes from different Hispanics, like Salvadorans who eat a lot of pupusas," Alztorre said. "Personally, I didn't even know that dish before. But that dish does taste really good."

Just as there are many different Latin American countries, there are even more types of Latin American cuisines. Large countries like Mexico have many regional variations. Oaxacan food is quite different from Mexico City cuisine. Regional Mexican dishes differ from Guatemalan and Salvadoran dishes.

"Most Mexicans are really into spices and incorporate that with their dishes," Martinez said. "However, Salvadorans really like sweet foods. They tend not to like spicy food."

He finds the difference between his and their cultures interesting.

### FIVE MINUTES WITH... Gregorio Alarcon

Math teacher and alumnus, Mr. Alarcon grew up in Van Nuys and attended high school here. With a love for all things mathematics, he attended the University of California San Diego (UCSD) where he majored in economics. After graduating, he worked as an accountant, but became dissatisfied with how it was mostly individual work. When he tutored a ninth grade Algebra class at Gompers High School in San Diego, he realized his true calling was teaching. In October 2021, he came to Van Nuys to coach the junior varsity baseball team, and became a campus aide in May of this year. When he heard that a teaching position was open at Van Nuys, he seized the opportunity. Mr. Alarcon has been teaching Geometry and Algebra 1 and 2 on campus for a month. He plans to continue teaching in the future and inspire students to love math. **[Interviewed by Olamide Oluvide]**

#### Why do you teach math?

I only teach math because I took over all the classes of the previous teacher who had my position.

#### Why did you choose to major in economics?

I used to have a job in accounting, but it was very isolating. Everything was computers and papers, and it felt very lonely. Teaching is more social, it involves interacting with people, so I chose to teach instead.

#### What do you think about the current state of the economy?

I think it's a very difficult time, with inflation and the war that's going on with Russia. America needs to do better.



**ALSO AN ALUM** Math teacher Mr. Alarcon grew up in Van Nuys and is graduate of this school.

#### What is the most important thing that students learn in economics?

It teaches students to look at the big picture. Imagine this. One of the gas stations is further from where you are but it has cheaper gas than the one that is closer to you. There are so many factors to consider when looking at this situation like the distance, cost and time. Some students might pick the further one because it is cheaper but it's farther away so you'd have to buy more gas to accommodate for the gas you wasted getting there. Other students will pick the closer gas station. Helping students explore their decisions and the reasons behind them is really important.

ALARCON: THE MIRROR | BEVERLY REGINO

## Daimler Koch The funniest mistakes in the English language are sometimes hiding in plain sight



I once remember reading an opinion article from a certain newspaper, whose name I conveniently don't remember anymore. And the first line of that first

paragraph has stuck with me all this time because it is extremely funny or embarrassing, depending on who you are.

The line went: "As I write this, I'm looking at my third-grade daughter riding her bicycle through the window." It went something like that; I read this article three or four years ago, at least.

Some might be searching for the humor in that line, and I honestly can't blame them, though they will be searching in vain. The humor comes only when you realize that either the author is looking at his or her daughter

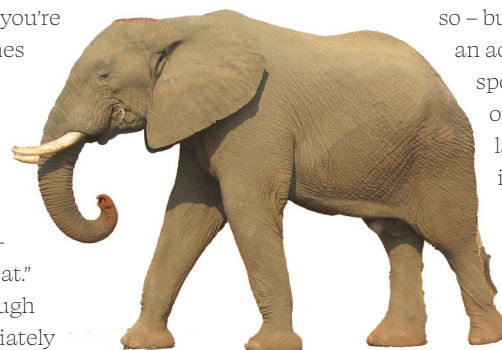
through the window while she is riding her bike, or the daughter is some sort of Evel Knievel prodigy gearing up for a stunt career in Hollywood.

A misplaced prepositional phrase "through the window" causes the confusion there.

Now granted, this type of humor isn't intentional (most of the time, anyway). Nor is it immediately laughable, unless you're watching clips of Jay Leno's Headlines skits from his time on the "Tonight Show." For the most part, it's an acquired taste, something you maybe only get the hundredth time.

Here's another example: "She collapsed on the couch covered in sweat." Or take a look at this: "Coming through the doorway, the bacon was immediately

**"I once shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got in them, I don't know."**  
**Groucho Marx**



smelled by Bob." Try a load of this: "Chewing the pillow, the person scolded the dog." Or how about this classic, said by the one and only Groucho Marx: "I once shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got in them, I don't know."

Perhaps it's slightly sadistic – again, those who make this mistake never set out to do so – but otherwise, it's loads of fun. It requires an active imagination and a trained eye to spot, but nothing more. After all, in my opinion, you could probably get a better laugh out of these than by, say, spending an hour on TikTok each day.

Misplaced modifiers are truly a hidden gem in the mine of the English language. Just make sure that it's other people that are making this mistake – and not you.

CREATIVE COMMONS | FELIX ANDREWS

# The newcomers JOURNEY into the unknown

They left behind everything they knew for a chance at a better life. They risked it all and now they're here. These are their stories

First they killed her brother. Three days later, they killed her dad.

This happened about 11 years ago when sophomore Camila Pineda was living in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, the town where she was born and lived with her parents and siblings.

"It's much more free over there," she said. "There aren't many laws, and if there are, they are broken by the police and they are broken by the same people who implement them."

Her father owned a ranch in San Pedro Sula where he found himself constantly struggling to avoid getting entangled in the gang-related activity prevalent in the region. Gangs would persistently try to persuade him to do favors for them, such as stashing drugs on his property. He refused every time, but one night they made it clear there were consequences if he didn't abide by their requests.

As he was throwing out the trash, he found a dismembered body in one of the trash bags. It was a message that he and his family were not safe.

"My dad went into hiding with my grandma, who lived in areas that are well-hidden near the beaches," Pineda said. "He went there for a few days and when he came back, he was much more calm."

Everything seemed to have settled down until one of her older brothers went missing one night.

"My brother studied at night," she said. "He liked learning about being a barber, he liked cutting hair. We noticed that he was being forced to do some bad things. He explained to my worried parents that it was the only choice, and one day he just didn't return home."

Three days after her dad filed a Missing Persons Report with law enforcement, he was killed.

"After that, my mom became stronger," Pineda said. "My mom was taking care of us as a single mother and had her own businesses."

As financial conditions for her family became increasingly worse and the threats continued, her mother decided that they would find a way to immigrate to America.

"She said she wanted to give us a better life."

In 2018, another one of her brothers went missing. When he was reported to have been seen alive, Pineda's mother temporarily left in hopes of finding him, leaving her to travel from Honduras to America with only her younger brother.

"I thought to myself that I could do it, that I could

make the journey," she said. "Because my aunt was going to come later, my mom left me with three thousand pesos, and I told her that I was going to make it."

Although the passage was treacherous, she knew it would be worth it once they entered America.

"When I crossed the river I was detained with my little brother," Pineda said. "During the time I was crossing it, criminals robbed me and took all our money and jewelry. But the important part was that I crossed. I knew that the moment I crossed the river I was practically there already."

Never having found her lost brother, her mother joined them after making the journey to the United States where the family was reunited. They could finally set up their new life in America.

"After two months, my mom returned to us," she said. "And she is here now, and she's working as a babysitter. She always says that she was only left with two kids. I see it as a new opportunity that life has given us, because there are some people who die on the way here."

Many other students have had similar experiences where making the journey to the United States was rough. Born and raised in Jalapa, Guatemala, sophomore Caleb Fuentes arrived in America with his brother in August of 2021 when he was 16.

"When I was younger, I worked with my dad," he said. "He had a business selling coffee, so I learned a lot about that. Though I helped him almost throughout my whole life, it was hard; my brother and I weren't very wanted or loved. I left my house, and I felt more at peace and more free."

Fuentes lived on his own for nearly three years before immigrating to the U.S.

Unable to endure their situation any longer in Guatemala, he and his brother found someone who would help transport them to the United States in hopes of a better life.

"From the day that we got the person to bring us, there were already a lot of people going with them so it felt a little more safe," he said. "I felt like I wasn't alone."

Fearing that they would get caught and killed by law enforcement or criminals, many people wanted to get off the bus and go back to their home countries.

"We did suffer a lot throughout the whole trip, because you're cramped in little spaces with multiple people with you," Fuentes said. "Getting to Monterey Mexico, we got put in a truck with 17 people. That was very hard because it's so hot, and apart from that you feel like you can't breathe. A lot of people got sick, including my brother.

Thankfully, he recovered."

"The group spent ten days in Monterey, where the conditions were unforgivingly brutal.

"If you had money, you ate, and if not, then — oh well — you had to starve," he said. "We slept in a small room with 25 to 30 other people. Some people had to sleep sitting or standing up because there was no room."

"The situation took a frightening turn when police dogs caught scent of the group. The police arrested them all.

"I kept running, but eventually the dog caught up to me and got me from the back," he said. "That's when my brother chose to go back to Guatemala and I turned myself in to immigration. Thank God I'm here now. I'm so grateful that I'm able to be here, and now it all depends on me to move forward."

A month prior to Fuentes' arrival, sophomore Karla Luax arrived in the United States in July 2021. She lived in Guatemala City, a city of about one million people, all her life.

"It was pretty, but very dangerous."

When she and her cousin crossed Mexico's southern border, they were caught by Mexican immigration officials. They were arrested and faced with having to stay in a hostel for up to 60 days. Knowing they couldn't stay there, the two escaped by sneaking out of a window.

"When immigration got us, they took everything," she said. "They took our money and our bags of clothes."

Immediately after crossing the American border, they had to turn themselves into U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after they were detected as underaged individuals. The government agency then tended to their situation accordingly.

Another student, sophomore Carlos Rodriguez, was forced to leave his native home Honduras because of bleak economic prospects. The World Bank reports that the poverty rate there is nearly 65 percent, while 42 percent of Hondurans live in extreme poverty. He came to the United States in July 2021.

"It's not like this country, where one has more opportunities," he said. "Over there, there aren't that many. It was difficult, but thanks to God we were able to get out."

After he enrolled here, it wasn't easy for him to adjust.

"The first days were difficult because I didn't know anyone," Rodriguez said. "I only knew my cousin, but he was

a senior and I was a freshman, so I would only see him for one class period. I would be by myself most of the day."

For many newcomers, especially those from poorer countries, going to American school is a culture shock.

Fuentes notes that there is a huge contrast between the American school system and the schools in his home country of Guatemala, where school is compulsory through the sixth grade.

"All the classes over there take place in one room, and that's where they teach you all the material," he said. "And here you have to switch classes every hour. Also, over there, school begins at 7 a.m. and ends at noon."

Educational resources are also more readily available here and learning is considered a higher priority.

"There are many opportunities at this school and many teachers who actually want their students to learn," Pineda said.

As schools strive to accommodate an increasing population of new immigrants, Luax acknowledges that her teachers attempt to make Van Nuys High more inclusive and welcoming for newcomers.

But for Luax, that isn't enough.

"I feel like the school is focused around kids that are born here," she said.

Fuentes also appreciates what the school does to make him feel included. However, he believes school events could be more diverse and incorporate more non-English speakers.

"For most school activities I only see people that are born here," Fuentes said. "In the plays, for example, it's only people that speak English in every scene."

Most newcomers want to learn English, but often feel left out because understanding the nuances of the language can be difficult. Rodriguez practices speaking English as much as he can, but self-doubt shadows him constantly.

"I really want to learn English," he said. "I practice in private by myself, and when I go to McDonalds, I practice there by ordering in English. I believe I do a pretty good job, but I do feel embarrassed."

And he isn't the only one who feels this way.

"One time these girls came up to me and they asked me what time it was, and I just didn't know how

to respond," Luax said.

Fuentes finds ways around the language barrier.

"I try to go with what I know, but sometimes I pull out google translate," Fuentes said. "It can be hard, but I always try to find a way to communicate."

His challenges haven't been confined to the school campus. Fuentes has experienced racial discrimination outside of school, particularly during one of his jobs at the hand of his manager.

"Before I had my car, I would take the bus to my job and get there late," he said. "My boss would tell me that I was irresponsible, but my work is 30 minutes away from my house and I would ask him to understand that I didn't have a car, so getting there was hard."

"One time he came up to me and he told me that he didn't want Latinos working for him. I felt very bad about this, but he didn't fire me because he knows that I'm the one that does the most work there."

Fuentes had no choice but to keep working there due to his financial circumstances. Since he got to the U.S., he's been going to school and working both construction and restaurant jobs to maintain financial stability.

Despite this, he is grateful he has friends that he can relate to and turn to for support.

"Maybe they suffered as much as I did and that's why we're so close," Fuentes said. "I feel great with them because I can understand and trust them."

The American dream portrayed by the media often isn't reality.

"Now that I'm here, I can see how difficult things actually are," Pineda said. "I came here with the idea to work, but I have to study first."

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Still, Pineda maintains hope for the future as more opportunities come her way. Her brother's school will be helping her find and pay for an apartment where they won't have to provide legal documentation.

She considers faith to be her driving force as she perseveres through life.

"I have heard other stories from students who have lived a hard life," Pineda said. "I always say that the last thing to lose is faith.

I always tell myself that someday I will see my brother again."

Like Pineda, Luax believes that her origin will not stop her from achieving her goals.

"My friend and I want to become nurses and work with the elderly," she said. "I don't think that because I'm not from here I wouldn't be able to reach that."

Fuentes too has laid out all kinds of plans and goals for himself after

he finishes his education.

"I would like to be a truck driver, as well as start a business in Guatemala," Fuentes said. "Now that I'm turning 18, my plan is to invest money in the coffee plantation that my dad worked on because I worked on it throughout my whole life. I've learned that doing all these things should bring a lot of money. I plan to just move forward."

He encourages others to keep moving forward in times of struggle and reassures that hard work ultimately pays off.

"I put a lot of effort into life," he said. "Keep pushing. I know life is hard, but if you have faith you can do anything. My grandfather said that if you have one quetzal [Guatemalan currency], and you're smart and know how to save it, you'll manage to one day have a million bucks."



**THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL** (left to right) Camila Pineda, Carlos Rodríguez, Caleb Fuentes, and Karla Luax overcame struggles and hardships trying to make it to the United States from their home countries in Central America.

# The newcomers JOURNEY *into the un*

They left behind everything they knew for a chance at a better life. They risked it all and now they're here. These are their stories

**F**irst they killed her brother. Three days later, they killed her dad. This happened about 11 years ago when sophomore Camila Pineda was living in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, the town where she was born and lived with her parents and siblings.

"It's much more free over there," she said. "There aren't many laws, and if there are, they are broken by the police and they are broken by the same people who implement them."

Her father owned a ranch in San Pedro Sula where he found himself constantly struggling to avoid getting entangled in the gang-related activity prevalent in the region. Gangs would persistently try to persuade him to do favors for them, such as stashing drugs on his property. He refused every time, but one night they made it clear there were consequences if he didn't abide by their requests.

As he was throwing out the trash, he found a dismembered body in one of the trash bags. It was a message that he and his family were not safe.

"My dad went into hiding with my grandma, who lived in areas that are well-hidden near the beaches," Pineda said. "He went there for a few days and when he came back, he was much more calm."

Everything seemed to have settled down until one of her older brothers went missing one night.

"My brother studied at night," she said. "He liked learning about being a barber, he liked cutting hair. We noticed that he was being forced to do some bad things. He explained to my worried parents that it was the only choice, and one day he just didn't return home."

Three days after her dad filed a Missing Persons Report with law enforcement, he was killed.

"After that, my mom became stronger," Pineda said. "My mom was taking care of us as a single mother and had her own businesses."

As financial conditions for her family became increasingly worse and the threats continued, her mother decided that they would find a way to immigrate to America.

"She said she wanted to give us a better life."

In 2018, another one of her brothers went missing. When he was reported to have been seen alive, Pineda's mother temporarily left in hopes of finding him, leaving her to travel from Honduras to America with only her younger brother.

"I thought to myself that I could do it, that I could

make the journey," she said. "Because my aunt was going to come later, my mom left me with three thousand pesos, and I told her that I was going to make it."

Although the passage was treacherous, she knew it would be worth it once they entered America.

"When I crossed the river I was detained with my little brother," Pineda said. "During the time I was crossing it, criminals robbed me and took all our money and jewelry. But the important part was that I crossed. I knew that the moment I crossed the river I was practically there already."

Never having found her lost brother, her mother joined them after making the journey to the United States where the family was reunited. They could finally set up their new life in America.

"After two months, my mom returned to us," she said. "And she is here now, and she's working as a babysitter. She always says that she was only left with two kids. I see it as a new opportunity that life has given us, because there are some people who die on the way here."

Many other students have had similar experiences where making the journey to the United States was rough. Born and raised in Jalapa, Guatemala, sophomore Caleb Fuentes arrived in America with his brother in August of 2021 when he was 16.

"When I was younger, I worked with my dad," he said. "He had a business selling coffee, so I learned a lot about that. Though I helped him almost throughout my whole life, it was hard; my brother and I weren't very wanted or loved. I left my house, and I felt more at peace and more free."

Fuentes lived on his own for nearly three years before immigrating to the U.S.

Unable to endure their situation any longer in Guatemala, he and his brother found someone who would help transport them to the United States in hopes of a better life.

"From the day that we got the person to bring us, there were already a lot of people going with them so it felt a little more safe," he said. "I felt like I wasn't alone."

Fearing that they would get caught and killed by law enforcement or criminals, many people wanted to get off the bus and go back to their home countries.

"We did suffer a lot throughout the whole trip, because you're cramped in little spaces with multiple people with you," Fuentes said. "Getting to Monterey Mexico, we got put in a truck with 17 people. That was very hard because it's so hot, and apart from that you feel like you can't breathe. A lot of people got sick, including my brother.

Thankfully, he recovered."

The group spent ten days in Monterey, where the conditions were unforgivingly brutal.

"If you had money, you ate, and if not, then — oh well — you had to starve," he said. "We slept in a small room with 25 to 30 other people. Some people had to sleep sitting or standing up because there was no room."

The situation took a frightening turn when police dogs caught scent of the group. The police arrested them all.

"I kept running, but eventually the dog caught up to me and got me from the back," he said. "That's when my brother chose to go back to Guatemala and I turned myself in to immigration. Thank God I'm here now. I'm so grateful that I'm able to be here, and now it all depends on me to move forward."

A month prior to Fuentes' arrival, sophomore Karla Luax arrived in the United States in July 2021. She lived in Guatemala City, a city of about one million people, all her life.

"It was pretty, but very dangerous."

When she and her cousin crossed Mexico's southern border, they were caught by Mexican immigration officials. They were arrested and faced with having to stay in a hostel for up to 60 days. Knowing they couldn't stay there, the two escaped by sneaking out of a window.

"When immigration got us, they took everything," she said. "They took our money and our bags of clothes."

Immediately after crossing the American border, they had to turn themselves into U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after they were detected as underaged individuals. The government agency then tended to their situation accordingly.

Another student, sophomore Carlos Rodriguez, was forced to leave his native home Honduras because of bleak economic prospects. The World Bank reports that the poverty rate there is nearly 65 percent, while 42 percent of Hondurans live in extreme poverty. He came to the United States in July 2021.

"It's not like this country, where one has more opportunities," he said. "Over there, there aren't that many. It was difficult, but thanks to God we were able to get out."

After he enrolled here, it wasn't easy for him to adjust.

"The first days were difficult because I didn't know anyone," Rodriguez said.

"I only knew my cousin, but he was

a senior and I was a freshman for one class period. I was alone."

For many newcomers from poorer countries, going to school in America is a culture shock.

Fuentes notes that there is a gap between the American school system and his home country of Guatemala, where compulsory through high school is not required.

"All the classes over there are in English, and that's where they teach, and that's where they have to learn. Also, over there, school starts at 7:00 a.m. and ends at 1:00 p.m."

Educational resources are not as available here and learning is more challenging.

"There are many opportunities here, many teachers who act as mentors to learn," Pineda said.

As schools strive to accommodate a growing population of new immigrants, some teachers attempt to make their classrooms more inclusive and welcoming.

But for Luax, that isn't always the case. "I feel like the schools here are not for people born here," she said.

Fuentes also appreciates the support that makes him feel included. "There are events that could be more difficult for non-English speakers."

"For most school activities, they are for people born here," Fuentes said. "For example, it's only people born here who can participate in the scene."

Most newcomers feel left out because of the nuances of the language. "It's difficult. Rodriguez practices speaking English as much as he can, but self-doubt still follows him constantly."

"I really want to learn English," he said. "I practice by myself, and when I go to McDonald's, I practice ordering in English. I believe it's a pretty good job, but I don't know how to be more confident."

And he isn't the only one who feels this way.

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# Known

By Angelina Gevorgyan, Samantha Ramos & Angelica Venturina

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# Los recién llegados VIAJE a lo desconocido

**P**rimero mataron a su hermano y tres días después mataron a su papá. Esto pasó hace 11 años cuando la estudiante de segundo año Camila Pineda vivía en San Pedro, Honduras en el pueblo en donde nació y vivió con sus padres y sus hermanos.

"Era más libre en Honduras," ella dijo. "No hay muchas leyes, y si hay, son violadas por la policía y la misma gente que las hace."

Su papá era dueño de un rancho en San Pedro Sula en donde se encontraba luchando para evitar meterse en enredos con pandillas. Las pandillas trataron persistentemente de persuadirlo para que les hiciera favores, las pandillas querían que él les escondiera drogas en su propiedad. Él se negaba cada vez que venían, pero una noche la pandilla le dejó en claro que habrían consecuencias negativas si no accedía a ayudarlos.

Cuando él salió a tirar la basura, encontró un cuerpo desmembrado en una bolsa de basura. Esta fue una indicación inequívoca de que

él y su familia no estaban a salvo.

"Mi papá se fue a esconder con mi abuela, quien vivía en un área que estaba bien escondida cerca de unas playas," Pineda dijo. "Se fue por unos días y cuando regresó se sintió más calmado."

Las cosas estuvieron calmadas por un tiempo, hasta que un día unos de sus hermanos desapareció una noche.

"A mi hermano le gustaba estudiar en la noche," ella dijo. "Le gustaba estudiar cómo ser barbero porque le gustaba cortar cabello. Notamos que empezó a hacer cosas malas. Él les explicó a mis papás por qué hacía estas cosas, que no tenía otra opción. Y un día no regresó a la casa."

Tres días después que su papá reportó desaparecido a su hijo, lo mataron.

"Después que mataron a mi hermano mi mamá se hizo más fuerte," Pineda dijo. "Mi mamá nos cuida como mamá soltera mientras que atendía su tortillería."

Mientras que sus condiciones financieras empeoraban, las amenazas seguían. Su mamá decidió que iban a emigrar a los Estados Unidos.

"Mi madre dijo que quería una vida mejor para nosotros," ella dijo.

En el 2018, otro de sus hermanos desapareció. Cuando alguien reportó que lo vieron vivo, su mamá de Pineda los dejó en esperanza de encontrar a su hijo. La madre de Pineda regresó a Honduras, dejando solos a Pineda y su hermano pequeño en su viaje a los Estados Unidos.

"Yo me dije a mi misma que lo podía hacer, y qué podía hacer el viaje," Pineda dijo. "Porque

mi tía iba a venir después, mi mamá me dejó tres mil pesos, yo le dije que lo iba a hacer."

Aunque el viaje es muy peligroso, ella sabía que iba a valer la pena cuando llegara a los Estados Unidos.

"Cuando crucé el río me detuvieron con mi hermanito," Pineda dijo. "Mientras que estaba cruzando, nos robaron y nos quitaron nuestro dinero y nuestras joyas. Pero eso no importaba porque lo más importante era cruzar, sabía que cuando cruzara el río ya habría llegado a mi destino."

Después de no poder encontrar a su hijo, su mamá emprendió el viaje de nuevo hacia el norte y se reunió con sus hijos en los Estados Unidos. Sintió que por fin pudo comenzar una vida nueva.

"Después de dos meses, mi mamá regresó con nosotros," ella dijo. "Y ahora está aquí con nosotros trabajando como niñera. Ella siempre decía que solo se quedó con dos hijos. Lo vive como una nueva oportunidad que la vida nos dio, porque hay una gente que muere en el camino."

Muchos otros estudiantes han tenido la misma experiencia haciendo el viaje a los Estados Unidos. Nacido y criado en Jalapa, Guatemala Caleb Fuentes estudiante de segundo año llegó a los Estados Unidos con su hermano en agosto del 2021 cuando tenía 16 años.

"Cuando yo era pequeño trabajaba con mi papá," él dijo. "Mi padre tenía un negocio vendiendo café, aprendí mucho de allí, aunque lo ayudé casi toda mi vida, era duro; mi hermano y yo no éramos queridos. Por eso me fui de mi casa. Me sentí más en Pineda y libre."

Fuentes vivió solo por tres años antes de viajar a los Estados Unidos.

IncaPineda de soportar su situación en Guatemala, él y su hermano encontraron a alguien que los podía llevar a los Estados Unidos esperando así una vida mejor.

"Desde el día que el "coyote" nos trajo y había mucha gente con ellos y me sentí más a salvo," él dijo. "Sentí que no estaba solo."

Temiendo que fueran atrapados y asesinados por la policía o por criminales, muchas



**LA LUZ AL FINAL DE LA TUNEL** (de izquierda a derecha) Camila Pineda, Carlos Rodríguez, Caleb Fuentes y Karla Luax continúan enguidos con la frente en alto incluso después de sus luchas por llegar a los Estados Unidos

Dejaron su tierra natal en busca de una vida mejor. Estaban asustados y solos. Enfrentaron el peligro, arriesgaron todo para llegar aquí. Estas son sus verdaderas historias.

By Angelina Gevorgyan, Samantha Ramos & Angelica Venturina

personas querían bajarse del autobús y volver a sus países.

“Sufrimos mucho porque estás apretado en espacios pequeños con varias personas contigo,” Fuentes dijo. “Llegando a Monterrey, México nos subieron a un camión con 17 personas. Eso sí fue difícil porque hacía mucho calor y aparte de eso se sentía como si el aire se acababa, mucha gente se enfermó incluyendo mi hermano, afortunadamente, se recuperó.”

El grupo pasó dos días en Monterrey, donde las condiciones eran implacablemente brutales.

“Si tenías dinero comías y si no, entonces te tenías que morir de hambre,” él dijo. “Tuvimos que dormir en una habitación con otras 20-30 personas. Algunas personas tenían que dormir de pie o sentadas porque no había espacio.”

La situación dio un giro aterrador cuando los perros policías percibieron el rastro del grupo, la policía los arrestó.

“Seguí corriendo, pero finalmente el perro me alcanzó y me agarró por la parte de atrás,” él dijo. “Ahí fue cuando mi hermano optó por volver a Guatemala y yo me entregué a migración. Gracias a Dios estoy aquí, ahora agradezco poder estar aquí y ahora todo depende de mí para seguir adelante.”

Un mes antes que llegara Fuentes, Karla Luax estudiante de segundo año llegó a los Estados Unidos en el mes de julio del 2021. Ella vivió en la ciudad de Guatemala, una ciudad con alrededor de un millón de habitantes.

“Era bonito pero muy peligroso,” ella dijo.

Cuando ella y su primo cruzaron la frontera de México, fueron detenidos por oficiales de inmigración. Fueron arrestados y tuvieron que quedarse en un albergue por 60 días.

Sabiendo que no podían quedarse allí decidieron escapar por una ventana.

“Cuando la inmigración nos agarró, se llevaron todo nuestro dinero y nuestras bolsas de ropa,” ella dijo.

Inmediatamente después de cruzar la frontera, tuvieron que entregarse a las autoridades de inmigración y aduanas. Debido a que eran menores de edad, la agencia gubernamental se ocupó de su situación.

Otro estudiante de segundo año Carlos Rodríguez se vio obligado a

abandonar Honduras debido a serias dificultades económicas. El Banco Mundial informa que la tasa de pobreza allí es de casi el 65 por ciento, mientras que el 42 por ciento de los hondureños viven en la pobreza. Vino a Estados Unidos en Septiembre del 2021.

“No es como este país donde uno tiene más oportunidades, allá no hay tantas,” él dijo. “Fue difícil, pero gracias a Dios pudimos salir.”

Después de inscribirse aquí, no fue fácil para él adaptarse.

“Los primeros días fueron difíciles porque no conocía a nadie,” Rodríguez dijo.

Para muchos recién llegados, especialmente de los países más pobres, ir a la escuela en Estados Unidos es un choque cultural.

Los recursos educativos están más disponibles aquí y el aprendizaje se considera una prioridad más alta.

“Hay muchas oportunidades en esta escuela y muchos maestros que realmente quieren que sus alumnos aprendan,” Pineda dijo.

A medida que las escuelas se esfuerzan por acomodar a una población cada vez mayor de nuevos inmigrantes, los estudiantes reconocen que sus maestros intentan hacer que la escuela secundaria de Van Nuys sea más inclusiva y acogedora para los recién llegados.

Sin embargo, ellos creen que los eventos escolares podrían ser más diversos e incorporar a más personas que no hablen inglés.

“Para la mayoría de las actividades escolares solo veo estudiantes que nacieron aquí,” Fuentes dijo. “En las obras de teatro, por ejemplo, son las únicas personas que hablan inglés en cada escena.”

La mayoría de los recién llegados quieren aprender inglés, pero a menudo se sienten excluidos porque puede ser difícil comprender los matices del idioma. Rodríguez practica hablar inglés tanto como puede, pero poco a poco va dudando de sí mismo.

“Tengo muchas ganas de aprender inglés,” dijo. “Práctico en privado yo mismo y cuando voy a McDonalds práctico allí ordenando en inglés, creo que hago un buen trabajo pero me siento avergonzado.”

Al igual que Luax, Fuentes encuentra formas de sortear la barrera del idioma.

“Trato de ir con lo que sé, pero a veces saco el traductor de Google,” Fuentes dijo. “Puede ser difícil, pero siempre trato de encontrar una manera de comunicarse.”

Sus desafíos no se han limitado al campus de la escuela. Fuentes

ha experimentado discriminación racial por parte de un supervisor en su lugar de trabajo.

“Antes de tener mi auto, tomaba el autobús a mi trabajo y llegaba tarde,” él dijo. “Mi jefe me decía que era irresponsable, pero mi trabajo está a 30 minutos de mi casa y le pedía que entendiera que no tenía auto, entonces llegar a tiempo era difícil.”

“Una vez se me acercó y me dijo que no quería que latinos trabajaran para él. Me sentí muy mal por esto, pero no me despidió porque sabe que yo soy el que más trabajo hace allí.”

Fuentes no tuvo más remedio que seguir trabajando allí debido a sus circunstancias económicas. Desde que llegó a los Estados Unidos ha ido a la escuela y ha trabajado tanto en la construcción como en restaurantes para ayudar económicamente a su familia.

“Es muy racista, pero por necesidad, tengo que aguantar,” dijo.

A pesar de esto, está agradecido de tener amigos con los que puede relacionarse y a los que puede acudir en busca de apoyo.

Las dificultades que atraviesan muchos inmigrantes en este país, ponen en duda la noción de que el llamado “Sueño Americano” sea una realidad.

“Ahora que estoy aquí, puedo ver cuán difíciles son las cosas en realidad,” Pineda dijo. “Vine aquí con la idea de trabajar, pero primero tengo que estudiar.”

Aún así, Pineda mantiene la esperanza en el futuro a medida que se le presenten más oportunidades. La escuela de su hermano le ayudará a encontrar y pagar un apartamento donde no tienen que proporcionar documentación legal.

Ella considera que la fe es su fuerza motriz mientras persevera en la vida.

“He escuchado otras historias de estudiantes que han vivido una vida difícil,” Pineda dijo. “Yo siempre digo que lo último que se pierde es la fe. Siempre me digo a mí misma que algún día volveré a ver a mi hermano.”

Al igual que Pineda, Luax cree que su origen no le impedirá lograr sus objetivos.

“Mi amiga y yo queremos ser enfermeras y trabajar con ancianos,” ella dijo. “Yo no creo que por no ser de aquí no pueda llegar a eso.”

Fuentes también ha trazado todo tipo de planes y objetivos para sí mismo después de terminar su educación.

“Me gustaría ser camionero, así como iniciar un negocio en Guatemala,” Fuentes dijo. “Ahora que voy a cumplir 18 años, mi plan es invertir dinero en la plantación de café en la que trabajaba mi papá porque yo trabajé en ella toda mi vida. He aprendido que hacer todas estas cosas debería traer mucho dinero. Planeo seguir adelante.”

Alienta a otros a seguir avanzando en tiempos de lucha y les asegura que el trabajo duro al final da sus frutos.

“Puse mucho esfuerzo en la vida,” él dijo. “Sigue empujando. Sé que la vida es dura, pero si tienes fe puedes hacer cualquier cosa. Mi abuelo decía que si tienes un quetzal [moneda guatemalteca], y eres inteligente y sabes cómo ahorrarlo, algún día lograrás tener un millón de dólares.”

“

*He escuchado otras historias de estudiantes que han vivido una vida difícil. Yo siempre digo que lo último que se pierde es la fe.”*

**Estudiante del segundo año  
Camila Pineda**



# Editorial It's wrong to ignore your right to vote



**BUTTONS DOWN** A stack of voting buttons illustrate the patriotic nature of casting a ballot. Gen Z should wake up and flex their power before it's too late.

**A**h, yes.

Voting. A cornerstone of American freedom. The framers of the Constitution vigorously debated voting rights, the extent of the population they should be granted to and the power they should hold. More than a century after that, African-Americans and women both tirelessly fought for the right to vote, with words and ink and protests, and won it. And yet, the rights these numerous demographics toiled and hustled to gain access to are disregarded by many, dismissed with a metaphorical wave of the hand. Especially by 18-year-olds.

Not to harp on the maturing greenhorns of Gen Z — everyone between the ages of 8 and 23 — but they could do better at maintaining responsibility in their life, getting off of TikTok and Instagram and actually getting around to pausing that online game. Okay, maybe that last point isn't possible yet, but nevertheless, they still have a long way to go before reaching true adulthood.

Naturally, of course, once they turn 18, voting rights get shoved onto them, thanks to young Vietnam War soldiers who proclaimed they were old enough to fight but not old enough to vote. And yet, what do they, the Gen Z 18-year-olds? They don't vote. According to the US Census Bureau, individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 have the lowest voter turnout by age group.

Now, don't blame the average Gen Z 18-year-old. After all, they're focused on attending college, working, managing responsibilities and planning how to delay moving out of their parents' house. They're probably busy catching up with their friend's latest Instagram story.

The average 18-year-old just leaves voting rights scattered around on the floor, a dead tool in an even more dead toolbox. A toolbox that bristles with opportunities, yet is left laying in the dustiest corner of the teenager's toolshed.

But the complaints about the voting-age are somewhat misplaced. They've developed some alternative methods of voicing their political points of view that are pretty creative.

For example, scrolling through TikTok to find a topic or issue that upsets them and proceeding to leave a sarcastic and passive aggressive comment. Or maybe checking out the news every once in a blue moon, and then ranting to their friends about what they perceive to be the various problems ever-present in society.

And yet, what good is that going to do? We all have opinions that need to be heard by a trusted friend every now and then, but who else is listening besides that friend at that moment? If a person were to stand in public on the sidewalk of the busiest street and chant the same message over and over for a mind-numbing number of hours, how many people would listen?

Who is really listening to other perspectives when they're sending around hashtags or posting social media stories? And even if a person were to find a way to get enough people to listen to them, how would they ensure that their points of view would be considered and potentially implemented in the realm of political affairs?

The only true way to make a politician listen is to vote. Get up off

your couch, go to your nearest polling place and vote.

Place that completed ballot, that sacred slip of paper symbolizing your God-given right to representation into the ballot box (or mailbox, if you so prefer) and breathe a sigh of relief knowing that your opinion is going to be heard.

But wait, there's more! What if, say, they're neutral in regards to the subject or politician at hand, and thus, they'd rather not go vote in the first place?

Even if this theoretical teenager is neutral, there's still no reason to hang back from the ballot box. Although they may be truly ambivalent about all of the political candidates running for office, that doesn't necessarily mean that they equally agree or disagree with all of the political parties these candidates represent.

Surely, there must be a political issue that this neutral individual has an opinion on, as Gen Z has proven to be quite vocal with their opinions. And if they feel a certain way, why, other than for the simple convenience that's derived from inactivity, would they hold back from voting?

This leads to an even more baffling question. If Gen Z is truly becoming more focused on social issues and rights then why are 18-year-olds hanging back? Are they really so lazy that they would choose to remain idle in the face of a potentially dire future where Donald Trump is dictator for life?

It's really not surprising, and in fact it is depressing, that young people ages 18 to 29 have the lowest voter turnout across the nation. The most troubling, pessimistic fact about Gen Z is that they take not just voting rights but the world for granted. Individuals belonging to this generation believe that the world owes them a society they desire, and upon realizing that the realities of their life don't conform to the envisioned standards and expectations of their idealized utopia, they proceed to sit in their own little corner and complain.

Unfortunately, they don't recognize how their time and energy can be better directed and more efficiently spent if they approach contentions head-on from the beginning. What's the point of struggling to maintain abortion rights for women if 18-year-olds just want to keep their voice to themselves when they have the opportunity to make a real difference? What's the point of expanding LGBTQ+ rights if the younger generation won't exert and protect the rights they currently retain? What's the point of keeping Trump and his supporters at bay if the generation which claims to represent the spirit of a revolutionizing nation actively refuses to officially represent its own political values?

Then again, who knows? Maybe Gen Z will surprise us. Maybe they will enter that old toolshed one day and take a look around. Maybe they will, one day, discover that deserted toolbox sitting in a dusty corner. Maybe they will dust off the toolbox and take a look inside. And hopefully, if and when they do that, they will use their voting rights, and use them well. For if they truly believe that the issues they care about are crumbling away, this tool may be the only one that can repair what's broken in our society.

the MIRROR

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**MANIAC OR GENIUS?** How much of Kanye's controversial reign is justifiable? Trick question: None.

## Dashiell Dekker Ye (or how this generation separates art from the artist)



A provocateur will challenge societal boundaries through their artistic lens, not for self-gratification, but for the sake of artistic integrity. A true artist will create a piece and take no audience into consideration, as it is the piece that matters above all. An artist won't explain the virtue of their work, but will create and stand by it. However, an artist will not claim nor identify as one, nor preach the word that their merits can reach a level beyond observation or go to a new plain of existence entirely. It is by this reasoning that I believe Kanye West is no provocateur, nor an artist, just an erratic maniac.

You can legally and logistically say anything you want. No one is stopping you from claiming yourself to be a god and the most influential artist of a generation, or saying that you're going to go to drastic extents to spread negativity towards specific communities (like stating you're going to go "Defcon-3 on Jewish people") – though you will be held accountable in

the event that you say something stupid.

The sad truth is that there was a time when you could call West a daring artist, visibly and audibly distributing his hellish mentality through music that rang in everyone's ears. Celebrities are gods in the eyes of the general masses, and if ever there was a hierarchy, Mr. West would be at the tippy top of it. However, we all know just how quickly it takes for someone to fall from the top.

What we are currently bearing witness to with West is a prime example of how young people in the digital age utilize the mob mentality that comes with cancel culture – which plays a pivotal role in the modern landscape of music, and Kanye specifically.

For the past couple of months, the artist has been the source of egregious controversy. From his divorce, to his bid for presidency and evident struggle with mental health, the man has a knack for getting himself into hot water. Only now are people finally speaking up.

I bore witness to many declarations from people removing his music from

their streaming libraries and playlists, which was one of many examples of my generation completely missing the point of denouncing a horrible public figure. There is a stark difference between advocating an artist's work as opposed to the person behind said art. They are not one in the same. The art is, if you can believe, not always inherently an unapologetic depiction of the artist behind it. To denounce West is to denounce West, to denounce his music because of how you view him personally isn't the same thing. He is not by default 'good' because the music is, nor is his music 'bad' because he is. His music and his character are unrelated.

The fact of the matter is that this man has always been irreverent and nonsensical. His adoring fans hold even more respect for him now, while those who despise him become more infuriated. There's always multiple sides to a story, but sometimes something is evident.

**The sad truth is that there was time you could call Kanye a daring artist, visibly and audibly distributing his hellish mentality through music that rang in everyone's ears.**

Sometimes, there's just a narcissist with blind supporters.

To use the excuse that he is simply challenging the mainstream is to lie, because there's a difference between being provocative and being vindictive and childish. There are people out there who need something to hold

onto, someone to follow. For many people that person is West.

The people seeking a redemption arc for West are blatantly ignoring the fact that he is flagrantly prejudiced, creatively bankrupt and I'll restate it: insane. He is insane. West is insane and we all need to stop talking about him. Maintaining his presence in the public eye deliberately keeps him within the confines of the mainstream, and to continue to talk about him is to give him the power we so desperately want to take away from him.

## Bree Gerdes Some grabby hands grab all they can at school dances



School dances are the perfect occasion to dress to the nines, have fun with friends and party the night away. They're also a perfect occasion for unsuspecting girls to be viewed as easy targets for sexual harassment.

Like many rituals, school dances are rooted in sexism. The first high school proms were a segregated, sexist mess meant to teach young men and women how to act respectable at college parties.

What was their definition of respectable? When applied to women, it was to stand there, look pretty and not speak until spoken to. For men, being respectable meant socializing with everyone and doing whatever they wanted.

The first prom, formally referred to as the promenade dance, was a coming-out party to introduce young high school girls to "polite

society" and eligible men in their twenties and even older. Teenage girls were handed out like candy to older men, which was typical at that time.

This dance scene lasted into the 1940s and 1950s when high school dances really blew up. A post-war world set the high school dance culture in stone. Since then, they've become an important part of the typical high school experience.

Many connect school dances to significant moments in their lives: their first party, their first slow dance and their first kiss.

Some girls look forward to their firsts because they are told they are meant to be

THE MIRROR | DIEGO AGUIRRE



with someone special. Girls are encouraged and groomed to have high expectations and want them to be met. Most girls want their prince charming, but many times all they get is a misogynistic teenage boy who doesn't know right from wrong.

School dances enable inappropriate grabbing, especially on a crowded dance floor. Guys think they can just grab what they want, and it's no big deal. They act surprised when a girl gets upset that they touched them somewhere they didn't want to be touched.

The blame shifts to the party that has been wronged.

To avoid these unpleasant encounters with grabby, sweaty hormonal teenagers, some girls choose not to attend school dances at all.

And to be clear, women are not the only people who should have this fear. This happens to men and non-binary people as well.

It doesn't seem fair to miss out on the party just to avoid being sexually assaulted.

Society can do a better job teaching that no means no, and that boundaries are to be respected.

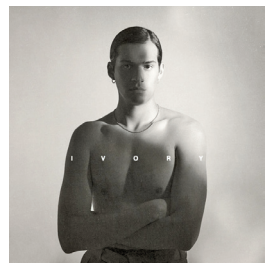
Realistically, not everyone would behave according to these ideals, but enforcing these aforementioned values is a good start.

We can't get rid of problems without solutions, so we have to start thinking of some. We must learn from our and others' mistakes, implement societal changes, and then proceed to move on.



**Katrina's playlist**

Four tunes to put fallen leaves back on the trees



**KILLING ME |** Omar Apollo

Pop

Experimenting with indie pop and psychedelic tunes, this song touches upon the flirty aspects of acoustic R&B as Apollo sings about how his inability to repress obsessive emotions towards another person leaves him feeling stifled.



**HELMET |** Steve Lacy

R&B/Soul

Finding himself caught in a hazardous relationship, Lacy's anger and confusion, when paired with his powerful vocals, creates a song made for releasing suppressed emotions from past relationships and unreciprocated love.



**COLOGNE |** beabadoobee

Alternative

Beabadoobee's soft vocals coincide with the coy lyrics, conveying a nostalgic longing and desire for intimacy and affection from one's significant other, and intensifies that emotion with the incorporation of heavy guitar riffs.



**FALLING BEHIND |** Laufey

Alternative/Jazz

Harboring the daze of sentiment that comes with one-sided love, Laufey sings from the perspective of those without a special someone, expressing that feeling of being left behind in a world where everyone else is falling in love.

# Taylor Swift's new album **Midnights** is the **Anti-hero** we all needed

By **Katrina Gomez**

THE MIRROR A&E EDITOR

Swifties became absorbed in a "Lavender Haze" when singer and songwriter Taylor Swift released her tenth studio album "Midnights" on Oct. 21.

Swift first announced this album after winning best direction, best long-form video and video of the year for "All Too Well (10 Minute Version) (Taylor's Version)" at the 2022 Video Music Awards in late August.

She went on to post teasers for the album on her various social media platforms.

"Midnights, the stories of 13 sleepless nights scattered throughout my life, will be out Oct. 21," she wrote in a post on Instagram. "Meet me at midnight."

The post included the album's cover and a cryptic thirteen-song tracklist.

"I've been following all the Swiftie news and theories," junior Alyssa Chung said. "It's so entertaining to watch other Swifties get excited about the album and try to piece together Taylor's genius in dropping hints in various media."

Teasing the album's release, Swift took to TikTok, creating a series called "Midnights Mayhem With Me." In each episode of the series, she revealed one random song title through the use of an old-fashioned bingo wheel.

Swift detailed more about the album, explaining how the photos of the back covers of the four vinyl editions combine to form a clock.

"The album covers and teasers are not like anything we've seen for a while," sophomore Swiftie Adrianna Bean said.

Hours after initially releasing "Midnights," Swift released a deluxe version of the album titled "Midnights (3am Edition)," which includes seven additional songs.

She collaborated with singer and songwriter Lana Del Rey to create and produce the album's fourth track, "Snow on the Beach." Swift explains that this song conveys the surreal feeling of reciprocated love between two people, each unable to decipher

whether that moment is real.

Swifties are elated at the fact that Del Rey is featured in the album.

"I absolutely adore Lana Del Rey's music and I cannot tell you how excited I was when I heard she was going to be featured in one of the songs," Chung said. "For me, it's sort of like two worlds colliding and I couldn't wait to see how Lana's sort of dreamy and coquette style paired with Taylor's music, since this duo isn't something very conventional or something that you'd expect."

Swift has said that many sleepless nights allowed her to create this memoir of songs, songs which express the numerous emotions and scenarios everyone experiences as they lie awake at night. Swift's ability to be candid in her music is a characteristic seen in her entire discography, and can be observed throughout her new album.

After the release of the sixth episode from "Midnights Mayhem With Me," Swift commented on how significant the album's third track, "Anti-Hero," is to her as it delves into her personal insecurities. According to Swift, the song reveals aspects about herself that she dislikes and how such insecurities are something that she must deal with.

Music videos for instant hits, like "Anti-Hero" and "Bejeweled," were posted on Youtube shortly after the album's release, pleasantly surprising fans.

"Taylor

Swift never disappoints," Bean said.

From the hundreds of songs Swift has released, a number of her most popular songs fall under the bright and upbeat genre of music. Similar to her two most recent studio albums, however, "Midnights" seems to steer in a deeper direction.

"After the masterpiece of Taylor Swift's twin albums 'Evermore' and 'Folklore,' I believe that in this new album she's entered into a new era where she will continue exploring her multifaceted abilities to produce alternative pop music," senior A+ Escobar said.

Fans like Bean value the variation of genre and tone crafted by Swift throughout her albums, and consider it a defining aspect of her music.

"The thing I love about Taylor Swift is that she changes her style. Different albums and songs resonate differently depending on what mood or chapter of life you are in," Bean said. "You can relate to her music no matter the circumstance because there is an album or song for every emotion and situation."

As Swift's discography continues to grow, many fans see a shift in her genre of music.

"It's a very satisfying change to see if you've been a fan of Taylor's for a while," Chung said. "I'm really excited to see where 'Midnights' will lead us in this trend of change."



**STORIES OF REFLECTION**

Taylor Swift released her tenth studio album "Midnights," a dream-pop inspired piece about remembering past lovers and emotions.

CREATIVE COMMONS | COSMOPOLITAN UK

**read**

"Station Eleven" follows the lives of a small troupe of actors and musicians called the "Traveling Symphony" who try to navigate their way through fallen cities after a devastating pandemic puts an end to half the world's population.



**listen**

Despite Lucid's soft singing and comforting lyrics, "A letter to my younger self," contains an impactful message. It is about going back in time and reassuring one's younger self, accepting one's past and being content with where life has led them.



**watch**

A reimagining of Norman Lear's CBS caucasian sitcom from 1975, "One Day at a Time" tells the story of a multigenerational Cuban-American family as they tackle life's twists and turns while still managing to be delightfully



**play**

In "Night in the Woods," players witness the perspective of protagonist Mae Borowski as she returns to her childhood home, only to find how much everything has changed. Players work to uncover the history of the town, as well as its dark secrets.



**eat**

Now that a new Porto's Bakery has opened its doors to customers in the West Valley (Northridge), presenting, Porto's Fresh Fruit Tartlet," a buttery tart filled with sweet vanilla custard, topped with freshly cut strawberries, blueberries, apples and



# Must Watch

## Fantastic Spanish Language Films

Here is a curated list of classic and contemporary Spanish language films. No matter your taste in movies, one film from this list is bound to strike a chord with you.

By **Dashiell Dekker**  
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

### La Montaña Sagrada (1973)

Alejandro Jodorowsky

Cinema may never reach the peak of total sacrilegious euphoria that Mexican-carny connoisseur and renaissance filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky reached when he unveiled “The Holy Mountain” at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival. A film so polarizing, so controversial and so undeniably, megascopically beautiful, it holds up today as one of the single greatest achievements in filmmaking history.

The premise is as simple as can be: An all-knowing master of the world guides a Christ-like figure through a labyrinth of surreal cities and colorful landscapes, along with seven other prophets, to ascend a mountain hidden on a long lost island, all as a means to transcend their plain of existence and meet the creators of the universe. This film is way less focused on its narrative structure and infinitely more fixated on creating an intoxicating, disorienting world with an endless array of interpretive traditions, carnival inspired attractions and disturbing sequences of religious allegory so burned into my mind, it is truly singular and unlike anything you will ever see.

The film has recently been gorgeously remastered from its original camera negative in 4K and is available to stream and buy on mint-condition Blu-ray, via Arrow Video. It may be an inaccessible film filled with the strange, unordinary and unnerving, but it is an essential. “The Holy Mountain” is a profound out-of-body experience that leaves no belief unsaturated, no human nature unscathed and no taboo unrevealed.

### Amores Perros (2000)

Alejandro González Iñárritu

Featuring a cast of three primary characters, Octavio (Gael García Bernal), Valeria (Goya Toledo) and a hitman-for-hire named El Chivo (Emilio Echevarría), we follow their respective lives and more importantly how they are irreversibly altered after the three collide in a heinous car crash.



**ON THE SILVER SCREEN** These distinctive and unconventional Spanish-language films are guaranteed to peak your interest.

Set up into three parts, each conveying a different character's point of view, the film shows how one event can be told from many different perspectives and serves as a crucial example of just how dangerous miscommunication can be.

This poetic drama is a classic in the eyes of the Mexican cinema world and it ranks very highly in my all-time favorites. I'd recommend it to anyone who has the emotional capacity to witness seeing animals being severely hurt, as this aspect is central to the plot.

### Mosquita y Mari (2012)

Aurora Guerrero

It's a very heartening thing to see a film about two girls in love, written and directed by a queer woman and set in Southern California. This is a film I've always wanted to exist and once I found it, I knew it would strike a chord with me.

“Mosquita y Mari” is a story of two Chicana teenagers (Fenessa Pineda and Venecia Troncoso) who form a confusing bond after being assigned as study partners. They roam Huntington Park awaiting the miracles of life to bless and guide them during their young years, but come to find that all they need is each other.

This film lacks a lot in presentation and almost all nameable filmmaking departments, including but not limited to color-grading and audio-mixing, and that's what gives it its signature. This is an incredibly personal, unapologetic film that is focused entirely on its narrative and emotions, helmed by filmmaker Aurora Guerrero as a master of conveying emotion through details, aside from its actors, in a setting most people wouldn't typically find expressive or vulnerable. I'm sure you, too, will see the intricate beauty of this relationship unfold, as its down-to-earth, borderline documentary style

cements this film as a true piece of neo-realism with a duo of actresses whose performance seems so genuine, it feels invasive just watching them.

This is one of my favorite coming-of-age and romance films, and contains one of the most accurate and lovely on-screen dynamics ever shown on screen.

### No (2012)

Pablo Larraín

Shot entirely on a betamax camera, the same camera used for television broadcasts in the 1980s, Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larraín brings us a raw, satirical period-piece about the 1988 “No” campaign against the reelection of Chilean-dictator Augusto Pinochet.

This film stars Gael García Bernal as young movement recruit Rene Saavedra and depicts in exciting detail his contribution to the voting revolution that gave the people of Chile the ability to put their foot down and say no. Going through the inner workings of dictator-run journalism, censored TV broadcasting and the rise of street riots, “No” is a film that shows the real world through an infinite number of lenses, reflective of the manner in which we intake information through different perspectives each and every day. The politics of this timeless film perpetually resonate with its audience, and are communicated in a way not seen too often.

The camera used is frenetic and when paired with the righteous subject matter, the film proves to be a quite fascinating study on how governmental reign overlooks the media we consume and, in turn, how powerful the voice of the general public can be.

“No” is an incredibly educational as well as entertaining drama, with a very frantic filmmaking style and a fantastic lead performance that brings many period-pieces to shame in both their cliché presentation and execution.

### Y Tu Mamá También (2001)

Alfonso Cuarón

Alfonso Cuarón is an artist above all else who formed his roots in Spanish-language melodramas. It was in 2001, that Cuarón would write and direct “Y tu mamá también.”

The film is playful, like its title suggests, but also unexpectedly, relentlessly intense. Best friends Tenoch (Diego Luna) and Julio (Gael García Bernal) embark on a road trip through Mexico's most scenic routes in a film that begins as any typical raunchy comedy from the early 2000s, then proceeds to slowly transform into one of the most emotionally devastating pieces of drama ever written. Tenoch and Julio are brothers from different mothers, both with respective girlfriends and upper-middle class lifestyles. They are blind to the realities of the world but they want to seek them out. So they venture towards a beach on the Oaxacan coast – not before convincing the significantly older Luisa (Maribel Verdú) to tag along. With the boyish intention of using the trip as a means to sleep with her, the three set out on a journey that leads their three-way relationship to some unexpectedly personal and toxic places.

Their relationships are nuanced and complicated. It's very easy to designate characters to consistent behaviors or even sexualities, but this film finds ways to show the true diversity of the emotional range humans are capable of, and in a manner that very few films have been able to pull off so profoundly and openly. The ability to portray vulnerable masculinity in such an honest way was very resonant for me when I saw it. It's a film I appreciate more with age, and it will always hold a tremendously large place in my heart.

With the perfect script, the subtle political commentary, the excellent use of narration and the pulsating masterful cinematography by Emmanuel Lubezki, “Y tu mamá también” is a masterpiece beyond words.

## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT BRIEFS

**HIP HOP DANCE ASSEMBLY** Versa Style Dance Company, a non-profit dance ensemble to promote the artistry of Hip Hop, will be performing in the small gym on Nov. 16 from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Founded in 2005 by LA natives and co-artistic directors Jackie Lopez and Leigh Foaad, the troupe is made up of dancers who represent the diversity of the city. A surprise performance will open the show.

**PLAY POSTPONED** The drama department's performance of the play Clue has been postponed. Drama teacher Mr. Baldridge confirmed that due to the Donna Hubbard Auditorium closure for asbestos inspections and the small gym's lack of proper equipment, the performance date has been moved to January 2023. More details about tickets and showtimes will be announced closer to the undecided date.

**CHOIR IN CONCERT** Organized by new Choir Director Ms. Alexis Weddle, chorale students will perform in the first Fall Concert of the year on Nov. 17 from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and again on Nov. 18 from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Both Chamber Singers, Varnaines and Vocal Ensemble will perform. The event will be held in the small gym due to the Donna Hubbard Auditorium's asbestos inspections until early 2023. Ticket prices will be announced soon.

**DRAMA PLACES FIFTH** The advanced drama class attended the Fall 2022 Drama Teachers Association of Southern California (DTASC) acting competition at Westlake High School on Oct. 22. They split into 5 teams: Large Comedy, Large Drama, Female Playwrights, LGBTQ+ Playwrights and Dead Poet Society. Large Comedy placed 5th against 60 schools in LAUSD in the large group category and LGBTQ+ Playwrights got an honorable mention in the small group category.

**BAND FACES LAUSD RIVALS** The marching band will attend their second competition of the season against other LAUSD marching bands at College of the Canyons on Nov. 5. They will perform “No Quiero Saber,” “Como La Flor” and “Dreaming of You” by Selena Quintanilla. The band will continue competing throughout the rest of the semester and performance times may vary, but admission is free.

# A classic Who dunnit

The cast of “Clue,” the upcoming Fall production, shares what audiences can expect from the performance

By **Katrina Gomez & Alexis Martinez**  
THE MIRROR STAFF

In a flash, the lights are out. Six strange guests are stuck in a secluded and mysterious mansion for a dinner party that quickly morphs into an evening filled with secrets, blackmail and murder.

Based on the board game and inspired by the 1985 Paramount movie of the same title, Clue is a murder mystery that follows the story of six strangers who were invited to a mysterious dinner party by an anonymous host.

The guests find out they are being black-

mailed by the host. They are then given a variety of weapons and instructed to kill the butler since he has extensive knowledge of each guest's dangerous secrets.

After the host is found lying dead on the floor, the guests, the butler and the maid are tasked with figuring out among them is the killer. By uncovering evidence and exploring the motives of each individual, the characters navigate their way through a series of perpetual accusations and incessant lies to discover the real truth.

Students are working alongside their new theater teacher Mr. Justin Baldrige. This is

his first production at the school.

“The kids here are fantastic,” Mr. Baldrige said. “They’re dedicated, they have a lot of fun with it, they take it seriously and they engage themselves in all of the exercises and activities we do. They’re really great.”

Many of the cast and crew members consist of new faces too.

“Last year we had a lot of seniors who had done this before,” sophomore and Assistant Stage Manager Madi Thacker said. “This time, it’s a lot of new people and they’re being taught by the old, returning people, so it’s nice to see all these new bonds forming.”

Throughout rehearsals, cast members like senior Colleen Macdonald, who plays Mr. Green, experienced complex feelings about their character.

“I identify as a female, so I think it’s kind of interesting to have to jump into the male perspective, one of a homosexual man,” Macdonald said.

The egotistical B-list actress Ms. Scarlet, who owns a secret escort service in Washington, was a challenging role for junior Maddie K.C. Jordan to get into.

“To play her, I feel like I have to embrace the persona of a businesswoman, like I’m the boss of everything,” she said. “I feel mean sometimes, but it’s really fun to know that you’re in a safe environment to do that and to play it up and embrace that inside yourself.”

With all of the craziness the story has, Mr. Baldrige wants the audience to enjoy the show.

“I want them to leave feeling like they had a good time at the theater because of the lovely modern farce like slamming doors, running around and the who dunnit aspect,” he said.

Originally set to come out in November, the show is being pushed to mid January due to asbestos inspections in the auditorium.



**MYSTERY SOLVED** The cast of the upcoming play “Clue” includes (left to right) Julian Pankowski, Sophia Hillstad, Addison Cudd, Maddie KC Jordan, Colleen Macdonald, Bryan Navarro, Dante Damiano and Kaden Berve. Performances have postponed until early 2023 because the auditorium is closed for asbestos inspections.

THE MIRROR | KEELY DUARTE

## Not like other Sportz

By **Alexis Martinez**  
THE MIRROR STAFF

What’s a sport that requires no physical energy and strictly relies on the ability to make people laugh?

Just as thrilling as football or water polo, ComedySportz is a fast-paced improv comedy game where two teams of players compete against each other to make the audience laugh, winning points in the process.

Unlike last school year, this is the team’s first year since covid-19 hit where they’ll have the ability to compete against other schools in-person with a full team.

“I consider this our first year of ComedySportz,” senior and captain of the varsity team Ella Robinson said. “Online was online, so it didn’t really count. We only had a single game at the end of the year with half the people we have now.”

Being in-person isn’t the only aspect that’s new to the team.

“We have students hosting, announcing and being referees,” sophomore and varsity team member Julian Pankowski said. “It’s a lot of new things with students being more involved, which has been great.”

Their first game was held on Oct. 7 in the auditorium against new Comedy-



**FUNNY AS SPORT** ComedySportz JV captain Djaeda Hall competed on Oct. 7 in the auditorium, trying to make the audience laugh with her improv.

Sportz rookies and veterans. Robinson commends her team for a successful performance despite it being rushed.

“We only have one rehearsal per week, so the show was pretty good quality,” Robinson said. “I definitely would have done a lot more work on myself as referee because the referee kind of hones the audience’s energy, but the audience was loud. The audience was good.”

As referee and host, Robinson not only monitors the game and keeps the audience engaged, but leads the improv skits as well.

The premise of the game is quite simple. It takes the idea of stand-up comedy, but instead of planned jokes and

quips, the players are put on the spot to entertain the audience through a series of improv games. The team that racks up more cheers from the audience wins that game. With each game won, points are added to either the blue or red team, and whichever team that retains the most points by the end of the match wins.

The shows are interactive and make the audience feel like they are a part of the show. Audience members pick topics for the players to use in a scene and decide who wins a game based on the team’s overall performance.

Senior and junior varsity team member Maddie KC Jordan feels that the game’s unpredictability is what makes it so exciting.

“Having lines is the easiest part of being in any production because they guide you,” Jordan said. “But in improv, there is no guide. That’s the beauty of it and that’s also the challenge of it. Not being able to know what your partner is thinking for the scene and what they have in mind is difficult because you could have two totally different ideas for the scene. You have to play off of each other, which can be pretty fun.”

ComedySportz has become a second home to sophomore and varsity team member Rachel Khutorskoy.

“I love comedy and I love making people laugh, so this is a perfect outlet for me,” she said. “Instead of being disruptive in class, I can use that creativity in improv and people will actually listen.”



**40 YEARS** “Fast Times at Ridgemont High” was shot at Van Nuys High and released in 1982. Spicoli, played by Sean Penn, remains an iconic character.

## “Fast Times at Ridgemont High” still makes an impact 40 years later

**SHOT ON LOCATION** at Van Nuys High School, Amy Heckerling’s 1982 iconic adaptation of the Cameron Crowe novel of the same name “Fast Times at Ridgemont High” continues to influence and resonate with generations of high school students decades after its initial release.

Set in sunny Southern California during the summer of ‘82, “Fast Times at Ridgemont High” is a raunchy slice-of-life comedy starring an ensemble of lovable losers in the midst of becoming adults.

The impact of the film is reflective in both the breakout star-performances and the timeless soundtrack, which features Stevie Nicks, Led Zep-pelin, Donna Summer and The Cars, making this an endlessly entertaining piece of low-brow angst that takes the time to look at the state of youth from both a comedic and realistic point of view.

It can also be noted that the film helped make Vans sneakers popular, as Spicoli glorified the slip-on shoes during multiple scenes.

Hazy, lazy, fun and free in a world of Top 50 and zero to sixty, “Fast Times at Ridgemont High” is the perfect film to watch with your friends while chasing vibes. | **Dashiell Dekker**

## JV FOOTBALL The cheerleader who became a football player **NATALY MARTINEZ**

It may be tempting to believe that the masculine and rugged environment that is American football would be too harsh for a girl to endure.

But don't say that to sophomore Nataly Martinez. She thrives on the speed, thrill and intensity of this sport.

Martinez currently plays as one of the junior varsity football team's linemen. She is the only girl on the team. She follows in the footsteps of Kaella Chin, who was the varsity team's female kicker last year.

When Martinez saw Chin playing last year she was inspired, thinking that it was about time females broke into this male-only sport. Maybe she too could be an influence for other girls wanting to play football.

At the time, Martinez was on the JV cheer squad. Their team landed second place in the World Class Championships competition, winning a banner.

She was disappointed to find out that taking part in both sports was against school policy. Disregarding all her insecurities and uncertainties, she decided to take a break from cheer and go out for football.

"I was really happy to see her," Coach Kenneth Osorio said. "I'm very appreciative that she chose to be on our team. I think that's important for all sports, that all students are represented."

The team has welcomed her as an equal, treating her with kindness and respect. She finds that her team members motivate one another to work harder.

"When we are on the field, we are all the same, no matter our gender," she said.

Since she plans to keep playing football until she graduates, she doesn't see why she can't eventually become the captain of the varsity team.

"I have to put my best efforts forward during practice to be the best football player I can be," she said. "I try my best and work hard to get to the level that I need to be at. What I love about football is that I can practice hard and show off my skills on game day. And if I fail, I'm going to get back up no matter what people say, and do my best next time."

She wants people to know that football is a sport that people of all genders can play and that the football team welcomes anyone who wants to try out. Her message to other girls who think they have what it takes to play football is to not be nervous about joining a male-dominated sport. | **Isabel Valles**

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*When we are on the field, we are all the same, no matter our gender.”*

**JV football lineman  
Nataly Martinez**

### **BREAKING STEREOTYPES**

Nataly Martinez disagrees with the idea that football is "a man's sport."



THE MIRROR | SELMA TIMPERS

## Water polo team blows the competition right **out of the water**

THE MIRROR | NICOLE TOVAR



**By Emely Arevalo**

THE MIRROR STAFF

**A**rman Mkrtumyan's alarm on his iPhone goes off at 4:30 every morning.

He jumps out of bed and heads to the kitchen to grab some cereal for breakfast.

He rushes into the bathroom to wash his face and brush his teeth. Then he heads back to his bedroom, changes into his swim trunks and pulls on shorts and a t-shirt. He grabs his backpack and he's off to Panorama High School for water polo practice by 6 a.m.

After practicing at Panorama for an hour and 30 minutes, the players shower, get ready for school and board the bus to arrive back at school and be in their classrooms before the bell for first period rings out.

This is the routine he follows every school day during water polo season. The school's team practices every morning at Panorama High, the nearest school that has an aquatics facility.

All the early morning sacrifice and training has paid off, as this year's boys water polo team is undefeated, leading first in the Valley Mission League with a rank of 6-1.

The team has bested every school it has gone up against this season, including Panorama, Kennedy, North Valley Marine Institute (NVMI) and Granada Hills Charter (GHC).

Although a majority of the team's games last season were canceled due to covid-19, the players were able to accomplish their goal of making it to play-offs. The team ultimately lost the playoffs to GHC with a score of 16 to 7.

Prior to joining the team, many water polo players didn't know how hard they were going to have to work. In the beginning, junior and Team Captain Viet Thanh was entirely unprepared for the dedication and discipline this sport demands.

"I thought we would just be swimming but it's definitely not just swimming around," he said. "In the beginning, it was definitely something

new for me. I went to practice, waking up at 4:30 in the morning. I was not even in the right swimsuit, I was wearing swim trunks and a swim shirt."

While water polo is considered to be one of the hardest sports, not many people are aware of the sport's gameplay, rules and objectives. The team wants to bring the water polo team into the spotlight, starting by teaching people how to play the sport.

The game takes place over four eight minute periods. To begin playing, two teams consisting of six

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*It was definitely something new for me. I went to practice, waking up at 4:30 in the morning. I was not even in the right swimsuit, I was wearing swim trunks and a swim shirt.”*

**Team Captain Viet Thanh**

field players and one goalkeeper each get in the pool. Their goal is to get the ball into the other team's net, which is positioned on the other end of the pool. As the game starts, both teams line up on opposite sides of the pool as the ball is placed in the center. The players must all then swim to the ball, a segment that is called the swim-off.

A player is only allowed past the two meter line if they have possession of the ball. The five meter line serves as an area where penalty fouls are awarded when a player commits any kind of a foul inside the line. Whenever a player has the ball, they must attempt to shoot within 30 seconds. After this limited time frame, the ball is turned over to the other team. With exception to the goalkeeper, players are not allowed to push the ball with water or touch the ball with both hands.

**WATER WIZARDS** Junior Aiden Smith passes the ball and scores during their away game against Kennedy on Sept. 9 with an end score of 7-14. This strong start to the season and their effective teamwork allowed the boys to take win after win.

Unlike other sports at our school that have designated areas for practice, such as a football field or tennis court, the school's boys' water polo team does not have access to a pool on campus in which they can practice. Team Captain Edgar Lalafarian finds the fact that they have to practice at another school unfair. He dislikes the team's ongoing dependency on Panorama's pool.

"If the school wants to make us feel included, they should give us a pool," he said.

Maintaining a practice routine such as theirs can be challenging, but the players persistently remain determined to balance their school work, personal life and water polo.

"It takes a lot of discipline to be in water polo," Thanh said. "If you aren't disciplined, then you won't be waking up this early every single day."

Although the players all have different levels of experience, having found common ground with their passion for the sport, they have come together to form a strong team and work hard everyday to improve their team as a whole.

"Any kid that is gonna get up at six in the morning to come to practice, they're dedicated," Coach George Davancens said. "It's because they love the sport, and they love each other, too."

The players' rigorous training and effective communication during games have resulted in back-to-back victories for the team.

"I feel like it's been a very good season so far," Mkrtumyan said. "I've had a lot of fun this year, and I think a lot of the other people have too."

With the advantage of knowing their opponents strategies from previous games, Thanh predicts that the team has a pretty clear path to winning future matches.

"We are going up against teams we have already gone up against before, so I hope we go undefeated."

# Players say they “hope to make an impact on the history of this school’s football team. We want to change the way people see us.”

**HOMECOMING WIN** The unexpected triumph Reseda made history with a score of 30-16, bumping the team out of of place in the Valley Mission League, qualifying them for the playoffs.

By Selma Timpers

THE MIRROR ATHLETICS EDITOR

A s football season was getting underway, six new coaches and a full roster of fresh players provided hardcore fans hope that the team would start to turn around, especially since there was nowhere to go but up from the previous season’s performance.

Soon enough, the school’s varsity football team celebrated their first win in three years on Sept. 9 when they beat Hollywood High. Since then, their successes have slowed and progress was impeded as they lost five coaches and a number of players were either cut from the team, quit or were sidelined by injuries.

“I don’t think the school could have done anything to affect or impact them leaving,” junior and Varsity Team Captain Cesar Robles said.

A number of players quit because they weren’t motivated, were having trouble keeping up with their school work or they decided they just didn’t enjoy the game.

“I think the people that stayed were the ones that really wanted to play,” Varsity Team Captain Gideon DeLa Torre, a senior, said.

“There were a lot of people in the beginning of the season, but they didn’t really know what

they were getting themselves into. We had a lot of people that left, which shows that they just wanted to join for the title of being a football player, rather than to actually play.”

Only the diehards have remained.

Of the group of original varsity team coaches, only one was left standing: Coach William Cox. As head coach, Cox has been alone in moving the team forward.

But having only one coach leaves Robles with the sense that some of the remaining players have lost their earlier drive because Cox may be stretched too thin.

“There’s been a huge decline in morale since the coaches have gone,” he said.

The Wolves ended their season with a 2-7 record, ending up sixth in the Valley Mission League. Last year they were 0-9. There was definite improvement.

Players say that, with a full coaching staff, practices were more productive because they



THE MIRROR | PHOTOS BY BEVERLY REGINO

“The show must go on. We have to keep working hard despite the people that leave.”

Varsity Captain Gideon DeLa Torre

could make the most of one-on-one training.

But the players give a big chunk of credit to Coach Cox for the team’s legendary win against Hollywood, as well as the surprising homecoming triumph over Reseda.

“They’ve made such a huge impact on my team, especially on me as an individual,” DeLa Torre said. “It’s to the point where every game that I play, I always think about them, because they’ve given me so many lessons and taught me all the techniques that I needed to learn. I miss my coaches, they really sparked that fire within me to be the best version of myself. At this point, I want to do this for them.”

The extended coaching staff left an oversized impression on the remaining players, who remain devoted to the fans, their teammates, their coach and their sport.

“The show must go on,” DeLa Torre said. “We have to keep working hard despite the people that leave.”

Their second win of the season on Oct. 14 against Reseda with a score of 30-16 propelled the team to a berth in the playoffs in late November.

“Our hard work paid off, since we made it to the playoffs for the first time in five years,” Robles said.

Some players are so devoted they have even kept going through injuries. Robles endured an elbow hyperextension, while DeLa Torre sustained a knee injury in addition to multiple concussions.

These incidents are a result of inefficient teamwork, says Wide Receiver Nathan Velasco

of this school’s football team,” Robles said. “We want to change the way people see us. We want to change [the] whole perception.”

One of the biggest challenges has been trying to keep the entire team in check with just one coach — no easy feat. The captains have taken the responsibilities to ensure that the players stay on track.

Their team captains help run the practices alongside Coach Cox, as well as take a more active part in mentoring the boys during the season. The captains feel responsible for reassuring the team when they become overwhelmed with anxiety or uncertainty.

“We have to keep our guys motivated,” Gonzalez said. “We have to talk to them and see what’s going on.”

Team captains have seen more of their players unable to cope with pre-game anxiety as the season has progressed. Robles and DeLa Torre try to step in, reassuring their teammates and keeping the team on track.

“A lot of them break down and get nervous,” DeLa Torre said. “It’s really nerve racking for them. Sometimes it’s a matter of just giving them a pat on the back and saying ‘hey, it’s okay, calm down. You’re good. It’s okay to be nervous, just do your job.’”

Success often leads to more success, so ultimately, all the team can do is try its best.

“People only see us on the field, but they don’t know what’s going on behind the scenes,” Velasco said. “We’re trying. It’s hard losing players and coaches so suddenly, but we’re still trying for our fans and for the school.”



**TURNAROUND?** Varsity Football Coach William Cox has led the team to two victories after a three-year dry spell.

## SPORTS UPDATE

**GIRLS VOLLEYBALL** | The girls varsity volleyball team spiked and dug their way into the Valley Mission League playoffs after ending the regular season with a winning record of 14-9. The girls triumphed over their perennial rivals the Sylmar Spartans 3-1 on Sept. 30, the Reseda Regents 3-1 on Sept. 28 and shut out the Panorama Pythons 3-0 on Oct. 12. The team landed in fourth place overall, just behind the San Fernando Tigers. They face the 16-3 King/Drew Eagles at home on Oct. 27.

**GIRLS TENNIS** | Armed with their racquets, the girls tennis team found themselves seeded 10th with a spot in the championship playoffs as the season draws to a close. In the first round of the Division 2 playoffs, the girls hammered Garfield High 5-2. In the next round, they faced the San Pedro Pirates on Oct. 26, but lost with a score of 17-12. Their season in the Valley Mission League ended with a decent 6-3 winning record, but the team ended up dead last in the final standings, placing fifth behind the Sylmar.

**WRESTLING** | Last season, Coach Ramon Tovar wasn’t able to recruit enough boy wrestlers to even field a team, but for the 2022-23 season, 20 would-be scrappers — including four females that have answered the coach’s call and will don their tights as they hit the competition mats. First up for the team: a meet against the Cleveland Cavaliers and Chatsworth Chancellors on Nov. 7 at Cleveland High. Coach Tovar thinks he has “really talented” wrestlers who have a good chance of placing well this year.

**CROSS COUNTRY** | The season started on Sept. 28 with sweltering hot temperatures at Pierce College in Woodland Hills that soared to 106 degrees, which postponed their first competition to late in the evening when temperatures had cooled down. Needless to say, the running conditions were trying, but everyone pulled through and finished the three-mile course. They also competed on Oct. 12, and Oct. 26 in preseason trials. Their first league meet is on Nov. 2 against Canoga Park, Reseda, Panorama, Kennedy and San Fernando.

**CHEER** | No pressure, but this year’s cheer squad has a hard act to follow since last year’s crew won their Division 1 Los Angeles City CIF championship by beating 11 of their rival schools. Some members of that winning team are returning to compete once again. However, there are a lot of first-year newbies that have to learn tick ups, bows and arrows. The bad news is that the coach hasn’t even committed to a single competition yet. Sources say that students are quitting the team due to the loss of multiple coaches.