A Magazine of Merion Elementary School

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Alaska, Disney World, Dubai, San Francisco, Rome, and more!
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Cover photo: Kenny Mellon
Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,

I really liked The Serpent’s Secret article. It sounded epically cool so I went to the town library and got it. It was super good. The paragraph on it was really detailed and convincing. I look forward to more epic books!

Another book I read that was in Merion Muse was The Hive Queen by Tui T. Sutherland. Good and convincing hook, Yanna! Since I already read it, I didn’t order it. Super epic book. I can see why Yanna chose to write about that book in Merion Muse. Can’t wait until the next book!

I hope there will be more cool ‘hook books’ in Merion Muse next year. The Warriors and Wings of Fire series are some of my favorite books. So excited!

From,
Anna Ogle

Dear Editors,

I really like your newspaper. I liked the comics, the Bala Cynwyd Middle School interview, and most of all, the way all of it was written and organized. For the next newspaper, I would like to see more comics and more interviews, but other than that, I loved Merion Muse.

Sincerely,
Joey Fagan

Dear Editors,

I really like how you added the Comic Caption Contest and the word search but I think you need more contests. The comics are my favorite part of the newspaper—so were the recipes for desserts. There are so many other things I’d like to see. I would really like to see more about animals.

Sincerely,
Brynn Underwood

Dear Editors,

I really liked all of the stories and pictures in Merion Muse. I liked that the photographers got to take their own pictures and I think the Editors did a really good job at editing the newspaper.

Sincerely,
Jordan Chestnut

Comic Caption Contest

Winners

In the previous issue of Merion Muse, we invited all Merion students to write a caption for this comic. We received nearly 100 entries and below are the top three, as voted on by the Merion Muse editors.

WINNER

“This is what happens when you order in French.”
Annie Breslin, 4O

Second Place

When you know you’re not getting a tip...
Harry Kwaiit, 4C

Third Place

“Relax, this is duck.”
Jonah Spitzer, 4O

Art by Devin Pettit
Books, Books, and More Books!
An Inside Look at Reading Olympics

By Isabella Gilligan

What was the name of the flightless dragon in Where the Mountain Meets the Moon? In Who Was Daniel Boone, who taught Daniel how to read? Both of these questions are examples of what students might be asked during Reading Olympics.

Reading Olympics is an annual event where fourth and fifth graders throughout Montgomery County compete on teams to answer questions about books they have read. For this year’s competition, students from all different schools in Lower Merion Township came to Lower Merion High School on March 21. At Merion, however, the preparations began many months before.

In January, students in fourth and fifth grade who wanted to participate were assigned to teams that consisted of eight to ten students and two teachers. The teams typically met at 8:30 AM on either Monday or Friday mornings. At those meetings, the teams did a variety of things, from coming up with a team name to working on practice questions about the books they had read. All students in Reading Olympics received a list of books to read to prepare for these questions. This year’s reading list included The Wild Robot, The Lost Treasure of Tuckernuck, and Island Book One: Shipwreck.

On March 21 at 5 PM, Merion students boarded buses and rode to Lower Merion High School for the competition. Samantha Torrecampo in 5D said that her favorite part of Reading Olympics was “probably arriving at the high school because that is where everything starts.”

When the competition begins, two teams from different schools report to a classroom where officials ask questions about the books on the reading list. If the first team answers a question incorrectly, the other team can answer it. A team earns one point for each question they answer correctly. Eden Charlson in 5D commented about one of the questions that completely stumped her team:

“It was a question about the book Some Writer! The Story of E.B. White. No one in my group had read the book, so I just had to guess the answer and I was so close to the correct one! I said The New York Times, and [the answer] was The New Yorker.”

At the end of the competition, teams can earn a ribbon based on how many points they get. A team with fifty or more points receives a blue ribbon; 40 to 49 points means
“It was a question about the book, *Some Writer!* The Story of E.B. White. No one in my group had read the book, so I just had to guess the answer and I was so close to the correct one! I said The New York Times, and [the answer] was The New Yorker.”

a red ribbon; 30 to 39 points earns a green; and 29 or fewer points receives a yellow ribbon. Ribbons are handed out at the Merion awards ceremony in June.

After the competition, Lucy Thoen in 5D said, “My favorite part was probably just answering the questions with my team and earning a blue ribbon from all of the hard work my team put in.”

Reading Olympics is a fun activity, and there truly is something for everyone there. Whether you’re interested in sports or science, fantasy or realistic fiction, you can count on Reading Olympics to have the perfect book for you! Happy Reading!

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**A Good Read:**

**An Interview with Mrs. Schumacher**

Few teachers are more involved in Reading Olympics than Mrs. Schumacher, our school librarian. I met up with her and asked her some questions about Reading Olympics.

**When did Reading Olympics start?**

Children in Lower Merion have been participating in this event for over 40 years.

**How are the books chosen?**

I am not part of the committee, but there is a committee of librarians and teachers throughout Montgomery County who pick the books.

**What impact do you think Reading Olympics has on students who participate?**

I think it encourages people to read and develop a love of reading. They get to meet new friends and compete in a fun game.

**What is the overall purpose of Reading Olympics?**

To allow kids to see that reading is a fun activity that you can enjoy for your entire life.

**What type of student do you think is best suited to Reading Olympics?**

Every type of student because there is something for everyone! And there is a book for everyone too!
MERION THROUGH
A NEW LENS:
An Interview with Mr. Goodman

By Raha Khazaali

This year, our school newspaper Merion Muse added a photography department so I thought it would be a good idea to interview our photography advisor, Mr. Goodman. He has a big job with Merion Muse. He shows students how to take pictures that help readers better understand the articles we publish.

**Do you like working with Merion Muse on the photography?**
I love inspiring people to look at the world around them in new ways. Each time someone takes a photo, they are challenged to think about how to tell their story from their own perspective.

**How many years have you worked on Merion Muse?**
This is my third year working with Merion Muse.

**Why did you choose to be a photography advisor on Merion Muse?**
Working with photography is a unique opportunity because it gives students more creative freedom than they typically have when writing articles. So much of the focus of writing in school is rule-based—how to organize a story, structure a paragraph, use appropriate grammar—but telling a story in pictures offers a practically limitless world of creativity. Students can create adventures in pursuit of their subjects, experiment using light, color and composition, and capture a moment that would otherwise be missed.

**Did someone teach you to be a photographer or did you learn it yourself?**
I am mostly self-taught, but I have spent years working with other photographers and learning from them. The more you listen to people and try to understand their way of seeing the world, the better you’ll be as an artist. Every artist’s individual creative process is highly personal, but that process requires inspiration, collaboration, and appreciation, and those things can’t happen in isolation.

**What inspires you to be a photographer with Merion Muse?**
In Merion Muse, we empower students to set their own goals, find their voice, and lead the creative process. By fostering an environment free from judgment and competition, we open the doors to experimentation, and we never quite know what the end result will be. It’s very exciting to follow the path that the students take us on, and to discover that we’ve arrived at places we never even imagined.

**What do you enjoy most about working with Merion Muse?**
It’s immensely rewarding to work with new fourth graders each year, and to see the growth in fifth graders who are participating for a second time. Every year we push ourselves to try new things—to challenge ourselves to do better, to be better. As an adviser, it’s my job to encourage people in new directions; but ultimately, I’m learning right along with the students, and we teach each other.

*Mr. Goodman, behind the camera. Photo credit: Raha Khazaali.*
Spring Author Visit:

Peter Catalanotto

By Annie Breslin

This year, Merion Elementary School is honored to welcome author and illustrator Peter Catalanotto as our Author in Residence on Friday, May 10. Mr. Catalanotto will host two assemblies for all Merion students from Kindergarten through 5th grade. Some of his featured books will include, Matthew A.B.C., Ivan the Terrier and Emily’s Art.

Peter Catalanotto is associated with 48 children’s stories. I got a chance to ask him about how he goes about writing, when his best writing happens and why he includes a lot of animals in his stories. We all have a lot to learn from this well-known author so keep reading to get to know him a little better before his visit.

Was there a particular event in your life that inspired you to start writing children’s stories?
As I started illustrating picture books, an editor noticed how much I was adding to the story with my pictures. He said, “Since you like to add ideas to other people’s stories, I want you to try writing your own.” So I did!

What are the steps that go into the process of perfecting a book?
Rewriting is where the best writing happens. A first draft is for figuring out what your story is going to be, the rewriting is where you decide the best way to tell that story. I rewrite each story 10-15 times.

How long does it take to write an average story?
I spend four to six months writing a story and six months illustrating it.

On a regular basis how often do you write books?
I've created 48 picture books in 30 years — 18 of them I wrote!

I notice there have been several animals as characters in your stories, including a kitten, tiger, monkey, and several times a dog. Are animals a preference for you in writing a book?

I like writing animals as main characters because all people, no matter where they’re from, can relate to the human qualities I give them.

* * *

I don’t know about you, but I sure am looking forward to meeting Mr. Catalanotto!
Cocoa Meringues

By Elena Goodman

INGREDIENTS

3 egg whites
\( \frac{1}{2} \) teaspoon salt
1 cup sugar
2 teaspoons water
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 tablespoons cocoa powder
1 cup chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 250°F.

In a large bowl, whip egg whites until soft peaks form.

Gradually add the salt, sugar, water, and vanilla to the egg whites, and continue whipping until stiff.

Fold the cocoa and chocolate chips into the mixture.

Drop spoonfuls of the mixture onto a lightly greased cookie sheet, and shape into a cone form.

Bake at 250° for 45 minutes. Then turn off oven, keeping oven door closed, and let meringues rest in the oven for another 45 minutes.

Remove from oven, let cool, and enjoy!
The Right Word

By Alessandra Cahill

Shake your head,
Remember what you read.
The definition book
Is where to look.
X, scribble, no.
Where did that sentence go?
Suddenly, it hits you.
“Oh!”

Filipino Folktales

By Samantha Torrecampo

The Philippines have many folktales rich with myths and legends that say so much about Filipino culture and history. Here are two of the most well-known folktales in the Philippines that I enjoy.

The Story of Pina

A retelling of a story originally by Nenita St. Romana-Cruz

There was a girl named Pina (sounds like pin-ya) who lived with her mother on a farm. Pina was very lazy, so she never did anything but play. When her mother would ask her to find something, Pina would say, “But Mom! I can’t find it!” One day, Pina’s mother got sick and she asked her to cook some food for her. Pina refused at first. Finally, Pina gave in because of her mother’s shouting, but she couldn’t find the soup spoon. Frustrated, Pina’s mother wished a hundred eyes to grow on Pina for being so lazy. After this, Pina was nowhere to be found. However, a strange yellow fruit with a hundred eyes was growing in Pina’s backyard. Turns out, the strange yellow fruit was Pina! Her mother named the yellow fruit a pineapple.

The Monkey and the Turtle

A retelling of a story originally by Jose P. Rizal

Once upon a time, there were two friends, a monkey and a turtle. One day, they found a banana plant on the water. They decided to split the plant in half. The monkey chose the top part of the plant, and the turtle chose the roots. The monkey thought the top part was better since it had fruit on it, so he planted it but he watched in sorrow as the plant died. The turtle, however, planted the roots and was given a nice tree with many pieces of fruit. But since the turtle was small, he could not reach the fruit above, so he asked his monkey friend if he could get the fruit for him. The cunning monkey climbed up and ate all the fruit himself! In revenge, the angry turtle put bamboo sticks around the tree and tricked the monkey into coming down, killing him. Monkey’s friends tried to exact the same revenge on the turtle, but the turtle deceived them into throwing him into the lake, not knowing that the lake was the turtle’s home. The turtle survived.
Crazy Aaron:
The “Secrets” to His Putty Magic

By Amelia Krivitzky and Samantha Berdow

Have you ever felt the stretchiest, most amazing putty ever? We have! It was created by the one and only Crazy Aaron of Narberth. We interviewed him and asked some questions that might interest you. Here’s what he had to say.

What inspired you to start Crazy Aaron’s Thinking Putty?

I had no idea that I was going to make putty. I got a degree in computer science, then found a job writing software. [Programming] was something I loved when I was growing up, but as a job, it didn’t interest me. I was bored. I was looking for something to play with and I found putty. I would play with it at work. Eventually I noticed that my piece kept getting smaller. My coworkers were stealing it from me when I wasn’t looking because they thought it was cool. It made me think that it wasn’t just me and maybe there was something to this. So I started experimenting, and eventually learned how to make my own [putty]. Then I learned how to make better putty than was already [in the stores]. So it became a business.

What different skill sets did you have to start your company?

“To start, I knew how to use computers. If you’re going to have a business, you’ll need to have a website where people can buy things online. Normally you have to pay someone a lot of money to create a website, but I was 22 years old and didn’t have any money. So it helped that I knew how to do it myself. The other skill that I had was knowing how to find things. I was good at finding ingredients and materials for my putty. If we wanted red putty, where could we get red? I knew I would be able to find red in small little stores where no one would look.

How do you come up with different names and types of putty – and do they each have their own patent?

None of them have patents, because with a patent you have to tell the government all your secrets, so we have no patents just secrets. As for the names and colors, I just try to think about what’s in style, and then I try to think about how to make that thing happen.

Do you first make the putty and then think of the name, or the other way around?

Originally I would make the putty and then think of a name. Later, I would think ‘What’s really cool right now, and what do kids want?’ So I would start with the name and then think of [what goes into] the putty.

What are some challenges with using the different types of putty such as holographic?

Some words might mean one thing, but people think it means something else. If you were to open a [can of] holographic putty, you might think there will be gemstones inside. If there aren’t any, you might be disappointed. So it’s hard to please people with that.
Who purchases your putty and what is the farthest you’ve sent your product?

We like to sell [our putty in] local toy stores that aren’t chains. We don’t sell to Walmart because there are lots of them. We sell to stores like Sweet Mabel and Character Development. To answer your question, we sell to toy stores all around the world.

How is your putty different from others, such as Crazy Geezers, National Geographic, and Peanfun?

Crazy Geezers is a complete copy. They stole our typeface and stole our logo. So we are the original. National Geographic saw our product and tried to copy it as closely as they could. They walk up to the “line” but don’t cross it, so that is fair. And Peanfun, I’ve never heard of that. Something that makes our putty different from them is we make it ourselves in a factory right here.

What do you enjoy most about your company and what is the biggest challenge you face?

I like making people happy. Putty makes people happy. It helps a lot of kids. The biggest challenge is continuing to expand all around the world. You would think it would be easy to travel to different countries and say, ‘I have a great product you guys would love it’. The fact is a lot of countries are not interested in welcoming things that weren’t made by them. So, it’s hard to travel to some places.

What is your favorite putty you have made?

Star dust. It’s black and it has some sparkles in it. It glows when you stretch it and the stars move.

Describe a typical day for Crazy Aaron.

I wake up at 7 AM and get the kids off to school. Then I go to the office, usually by 8 AM. After I get settled, I go around and greet everybody. Then I go to my lab and work on something new. After that, I go to my desk and respond to emails. Then I have lunch. After that, I usually have a lot of meetings with different people in the company to keep things organized. Near the end of the day, I spend more time thinking about how my products can become better than they already are. Lastly, I go home and have dinner with my family.

* * *

We hope you learned a lot about the man behind the putty: Aaron Muderick was 22 years old when he started his company, Crazy Aaron’s Putty World. His putty inventions are secrets, he likes to make people happy, sells it at unique toy stores, and his favorite putty is Stardust. The next time you and your family are in Norristown, Pennsylvania, stop by his store or visit his website at www.puttystore.com.

Photo credits: Faith Coyle
Plastic vs. Paper Straws

By Maeve Gilligan

Would you think twice before drinking out of a plastic straw? Most people would not, because a straw usually comes with your drink at a restaurant. Straws in general are a non-essential part of our life, but 500 million Americans use drinking straws each day. If you really need to use a straw, there are alternative solutions, like paper straws, or metal straws, which means that there are at least two different choices that will not negatively affect the environment.

Why are paper straws better than plastic ones? First of all, 7.5% of plastic in the environment comes from plastic straws. Paper straws are better because they are biodegradable, so they decompose over time. That means they won't affect the environment as much. Like I said before, 500 million straws are used every day, \textit{JUST in America}, which could mean billions or even trillions of straws could be hurting the environment around the world. While you are reading this, plastic straws are getting piled up in trash cans everywhere. Some may be floating or sinking in the oceans posing danger to marine life. More and more people have stopped using plastic straws, but even so, more and more marine life is suffering.

What steps have already been taken to prevent plastic straws from hurting the environment? Well, plastic straws have been banned in Seattle, making Seattle the largest U.S. city to do so. Starbucks also plans to get rid of straws by 2020, and McDonald’s recently announced that it will ban plastic straws in their U.K. and Ireland restaurants.

Not everybody thinks before accepting a straw, but everybody should. The thing that makes me the most angry is when restaurants give you straws with a cup that doesn't need one. I understand if young children need a straw so they don't spill their drink, but adults can certainly drink without one. Some restaurants have started to ask if people would appreciate a straw, and I hope that most say no.

The next time you are out to eat, think about two things before grabbing a straw: “Do I really need a straw?” and “Am I going to recycle this plastic straw?” If the answer is “no” to either of those questions, you should not take one. Our planet will thank you for it!
In the year 2018, there were multiple wildfires around the country, but the ones I’m focusing on are the California Wildfires that took place last fall—the ones that left people devastated, families broken, and homes and neighborhoods destroyed. These fires have left a mark on all those who had to face them, and they will forever be etched in U.S. history.

In the month of November 2018, California faced its worst wildfire season ever with a total of 8,434 fires. These catastrophic events took the lives of 87 people and the homes of many, leaving more than 500 people injured. Believe it or not, the causes of the fires were climate change and us. Wildfires can start with something as small or simple as a downed power line, a flat tire, or a cigarette butt. If you mix any of these with tinder-dry forest or rough winds caused by seasonal climate and weather patterns, that’s all you need to start a fire. Things like heat, oxygen, and fuel (such as trees) can make the fires triple in size and damage. According to USA Today, one of the wildfires was “burning the equivalent of 60 football fields per minute.” To say the least, the fires were enormous.

Firemen swarmed the area, trying to contain the fires before any more destruction could happen. When they had completely put them out, debris covered the ground, smoke lingered in the air, and trees, burnt to a crisp, were laying everywhere. These catastrophic fires left many people living in trailers, and even destroyed the entire town of Paradise, California, which was home to 27,000 people. A lot of residents lost their possessions, and some even lost family members! Insurance companies have claimed that the wildfires cost them a total of $11.4 billion, due to the enormous amount of damage. Many kind-hearted people around the world are still helping out.

We should all be aware of what we all do to help prevent wildfires, no matter what our age. You can help by picking up litter, especially flammable items. You can also help California by donating things to the survivors. After all, you just might save a life.

Images from skynews.com
Six Tips for a Successful Cookie Booth

By Sarah Whalen

1. Set up cookies

2. Add extra decor

3. Design display as wanted

4. Interact with customers

5. Exchange with customers

6. SMILE!
What is Education Worth?

By Garrett Saxonhouse

Do you know who Arthur Wolk is? He is an attorney who lives in Gladwyne who sued the Lower Merion School District. In December, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in the district's favor. This came after a two-year legal battle, but why would someone sue our school district?

Mr. Wolk claims in a self-made interview on YouTube that he saw an elderly man from Belmont Hills who could not afford the taxes and had to sell his house. He claims he did some digging and found out that over a 12-year period, the school district has raised taxes and has more money set aside than the State of Pennsylvania allows, which is $20 million. Meanwhile he claims they have $60 million in the bank.

A big opponent to Arthur Wolk is Savelmsd.com, a group that is run by parents, students and teachers. The group paints a darker picture of Wolk. They claim he is using Pennsylvania's minimum education standards as its maximum.

SaveLMSD also says in the lawsuit papers that Wolk requested that families must pay for their student's computers, also they claim that our enrichment programs, such as sports and Challenge may be at risk if Mr. Wolk had succeeded. Lastly, they claim Mr. Wolk is more interested in paying less money in taxes than in his community's education.

I think everyone can agree that both sides represent themselves and their opponents differently than their opponents. Even though the case has been decided for now, Mr. Wolk, in a statement, said he plans to continue to fight the Lower Merion School District. In an announcement, the District said they are pleased by the ruling. In a previous statement from 2016, the District stated, "The Lower Merion Board of School Directors... believe that all children—regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic status and special needs—deserve a world class education."
Dubai,
City of Gold

By Sameer Darshan

Do you know where the Middle East is? If you do, that’s great! If you don’t, it is a region in East Asia. There are many countries in that region including the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Dubai is the biggest city of not only the UAE but also of the entire Middle East.

People like me come from all over the world to live in Dubai along with those who are originally from Dubai. I was fortunate to live in Dubai for more than three years. Dubai is called the City of Gold because people buy a lot of gold there.

It is fun to live in and visit Dubai because there are many special things to see and do. One of them is Burj Khalifa. It is the tallest building in the world. It is 2,722 feet tall and has 163 floors. You can go to the top by buying tickets to the world’s fastest elevator. It is also close to the Dubai Mall, which is one of the biggest malls in the world.

Above: Burj Khalifas, the world’s tallest building. Below on the left, a view of Dubai.

People like me come from all over the world to live in Dubai. I was fortunate to live in Dubai for more than three years. Dubai is called the City of Gold because people buy a lot of gold there.

You can also visit Palm Jumeirah, which is an artificial island made by people. You can get there on a driverless train called a monorail. On Palm Jumeirah, there is beautiful water and a big aquarium. There is also a hotel called the Atlantis where you can play with dolphins.

Dubai also has many clean and clear beaches to visit, even in winter because of the region’s hot climate. One of those beaches has one of the world’s most expensive hotels called Burj Al-Arab.

There are many other things to do and places to visit in Dubai like theme parks, shopping malls and different activities in the desert, particularly desert safaris. Dubai is a place where you can have a lot of fun in a very small area.
A Trip To

By Anna Schmittdiel

Have you ever wanted to visit a city all the way across the country, all while being surrounded by fresh, salty air? If so, San Francisco is the place for you! With lots of tourists, busy streets, and huge attractions, San Francisco is a packed and, well, a very small city, according to size. It’s only 46.89 square miles, but there’s lots to see and do there, so keep reading!

The attractions to visit are amazing. One example is the world-famous Golden Gate Bridge. It connects San Francisco and Marin County, crossing the San Francisco Bay. You can go across by tour bus, car, and even foot! Another is Fisherman’s Wharf, which is kind of like Narberth, just on the water, with a carousel and small walkways, not even streets, lots of shops, and plenty of visitors. There are also so many cool parks: You might find a dog park or one with a playground or just a long line of grassy fields. You can see all these places on a double-decker tour bus with no roof!

The amount of tourists in San Francisco will blow your mind. All of the streets are crowded with visitors. This can be beneficial because if you are in a park playing catch all by yourself, someone might come over to you and say, “Can I play?” and then you will have a new friend! The tourists can be a bit overwhelming, too, because someone can accidentally step on kids like us. All you have to do is be careful.

The busiest streets are usually the ones in the city. The ones in the suburbs are mostly like the ones here. However, the street names, in my opinion, are a bit better. Some streets are named Jupiter, Uranus, or Saturn. Lombard Street, the most famous street in San Francisco, is a twisty, turvy, lopsided street that you can drive or walk down. It is famous because it is one of the steepest streets in San Francisco, and some even say that it is the crookedest street in the world. With its flowers planted in a row, and its bushes in a perfect line, Lombard Street is a must-visit on your list.

All in all, San Francisco is a great place to visit! I hope you have a chance to go there soon!

Top: A view of San Francisco from high above the city. Bottom: The Golden Gate Bridge, which, believe it or not, is red!
PLASTIC POLLUTION: Problems and Potential Solutions

By Faith Coyle

Plastic pollution is a BIG problem in our world. It negatively affects our oceans, our drinking water, the air we breathe, and our land. As the world's population continues to increase, so does the amount of garbage and plastic used every day.

Out of sight, out of mind, right? It is easy to think that when plastic leaves our homes or our hands into recycling bins, it will be recycled, right? Wrong. Recycling and landfills, while their intentions are good and we need them, can also be the cause of major problems. Large piles of trash that include plastics enable pollutants to enter the ground, harm wildlife, and pollute our groundwater. Plastic is one of the most overused materials in the world today because it is inexpensive and readily available. As for recycling plastic, it is a material that does not naturally decompose. According to National Geographic, “91% of plastic is not recycled and only 12% gets incinerated.” When plastics eventually degrade (after about 400 years) or if they are burned openly outside, they pollute nearby air with methane, which is a gas linked to global warming.

Millions of sea creatures die every year because of plastic pollution. The plastic gets into the ocean or another body of water and can release deadly chemicals that pollute the water and can kill or hurt the animals. Another way that plastic can kill marine life is if a plastic soda six-pack holder, or some other kind of plastic, gets stuck around an animal causing them to suffocate or making it hard for the animal to live.

So the question is, what do we do? I asked the Narberth Mayor, Andrea Deutsch, how the borough of Narberth came to ban single use plastic bags and straws. “We want people to know Narberth cares about the environment. We hope to inspire other communities to do the same.” Have you ever seen the dog in the middle of Station Circle? That dog is courtesy of Sweet Mabel Workshop. It is made from all different pieces of plastic. Sweet Mabel is coming to Merion this year as our Artist in Residence. Every student in Merion will contribute several pieces of plastic that you can fit into the palm of your hand. Then Sweet Mable will use all of our plastic to create a plastic art sculpture to hang at our school.
What You Can Do

Try Not to Use Plastic Water Bottles. It is okay to use plastic water bottles once in a while. If you’re going to school and you need a water bottle, and you’re running late it’s okay to grab one, but if you use a plastic water bottle every day for lunch, try to reuse the same bottle for as long as you can by washing it.

Use Reusable Bags. When you go to the grocery store, try to bring your own reusable bags, instead of getting a single-use plastic one.

Don’t Use Plastic Straws. Only use straws when you absolutely need them and, if you need one, try getting paper, bamboo, or metal reusable straws.

Recycle. Go to the Lower Merion Township website to see what can and cannot be recycled.

Can you find all of the pieces of trash on these pages?

*Photo Credit: Nieve Clifford*
Wonders of the Cosmos:
The Making of Milkdromeda

By Max Hunter Hansberry

How much do you know about the cosmos and the making of Milkdromeda? It’s very interesting and it starts with an understanding of the galaxies. A galaxy is a group of stars held together by gravity. There are at least 100 billion galaxies in the cosmos and some people believe it might be two trillion. No one really knows.

Earth sits within the Milky Way galaxy. The Milky Way is part of a local group of more than 50 galaxies bound together by gravity. The largest and closest major galaxy in our local group is Andromeda. It has approximately one trillion stars, which is over twice as many stars as the Milky Way, which has only 200 to 400 billion stars. It’s only 2,537 million light years away, which is not that far considering some galaxies are 30 million light years away.

There are three types of galaxies: spiral, elliptical, and irregular. Both the Milky Way and Andromeda are spiral galaxies that are shaped like a pinwheel. Imagine the beach: Loose sand at the surface and denser sand as you dig down. This is what a spiral galaxy is like. On the outer arms of the galaxy, everything is spread apart; near the core everything is much closer together.

The Milky Way and Andromeda are fated to collide in five billion years creating Milkdromeda. Gravity is pulling them together. When they combine, stars near the outer arms will wave through one another, near the core they will smash into one another. It might look like a giant eye with Andromeda’s bright core surrounded by arms that stretch out in a circular shape. I hope you agree that Milkdromeda is pretty interesting.

Disney World Tips

By Leo Walls

I’m pretty sure we all know about the very famous Walt Disney World. We’ve all heard about its Christmas Day parade and magical rides. But if you’re planning a trip, you need to know what to do and what not to do.

Let’s talk about FastPass first. There is a thing called a FastPass that allows you to skip a long line (assuming the FastPass line itself isn’t too long). A Tier 3 FastPass will get you three FastPasses a day for unpopular rides, and a Tier 1 can get you one FastPass for really popular rides like Space Mountain and Splash Mountain. But in the Magic Kingdom, there are no tiers, you can just get multiple FastPasses. There is a certain amount of days ahead of time that you can book them depending on where you’re staying. If you’re staying at a Disney-owned property, you can get your FastPass two months ahead of your trip dates. If you’re not staying at a Disney-owned property, you can book one month ahead. Either way, be sure to book your FastPasses as soon as you can online to make sure you get the ride times you want!

Now let’s talk about the rides. One of my favorite rides was Expedition Everest in Disney’s Animal Kingdom. If you’re a thrill-seeker like me, you’ll love this ride, and you should definitely get a FastPass for this one. For Star Wars fans, you’ll really like Star Tours at Hollywood Studios. In Magic Kingdom, you don’t want to miss the thrilling Space Mountain.

Finally, in Epcot, I loved the extreme Test Track, but you don’t want to stand in the regular line because the regular line was over three hours long when I went there (fortunately I had a FastPass).

Now, let’s talk about souvenirs. If you want to stay low-priced, get a holiday ornament or a hat. I got a hat that was Donald Duck-themed with a beak. You can get a stuffed animal for about $23. (I know it seems like a lot but it’s actually one of the least expensive souvenirs.)

Now that you know what to do and what not to do in Disney, go out there and have some fun!
Your Deadly Medicine

Nature's Poisons and their Modern Medical Uses

By Isabella Gilligan and Emily Wang

There are many deadly plants and poisons found in nature around the world that today are being used as life-saving medicines. Here are just a few that have become beneficial, thanks to advances in medicine and science.

One such poison is *Digitalis*, which comes from the flowers of the Foxglove plant. *Digitalis* can be used as medicine when consumed in small doses. Doctors first decided to begin using *Digitalis*—which is usually dangerous because it can slow down or speed up a person's heart rate—240 years ago. They extracted and injected small doses into patients with heart problems. *Digitalis* was found to be able to strengthen a person's heartbeat, control irregular heart rhythms, and increase blood flow, which reduces swelling.

![The Foxglove plant, source for the poison, Digitalis. Artwork by Emily Wang.](image)

After creating a medicine from *Digitalis*, scientists continued to experiment with different types of natural poisons and discover more cures for diseases. For example, Botulinum is a deadly poison made by bacteria that slows muscles. When certain muscles like the heart and lungs slow, a person may not be able to breathe. But it turns out that Botulinum can actually be helpful for people who have diseases that make their muscles twitch, as well as people who are cross-eyed. In the 1960s, doctors experimented with helping cross-eyed patients by injecting small amounts of Botulinum into their eye muscles. The toxin relaxed the muscles and caused their eyes to straighten out. The patients were cured! Botulinum can also now be used to help treat migraines.

We have one more poisonous plant to introduce, which is the Pacific yew tree, or *Taxus brevifolia*. This tree is extremely dangerous. The leaves, seeds, and bark are poisonous, and just 50 grams of yew needles have enough poison in them to kill an adult in a few hours! However, in the 1960s, some scientists at the National Cancer Institute extracted the chemical paclitaxel from the yew tree and used it to make a drug called Taxol. Taxol can be used to slow the effects of certain types of cancers by killing the cancer cells, giving doctors more time to treat their patients and save their lives. Taxol is currently being used to treat many types of cancer, such as breast, ovarian, lung, and pancreatic cancer. Isn't it extraordinary that a deadly plant can also cure cancer?

It might seem disturbing to think about injecting poison into your body, but sometimes a small amount of something harmful can actually help you—just like with vaccinations.

**Warning:** Definitely don't try this at home! You should never ever take any medicine without a prescription from a doctor, and you should always follow the instructions about how much medicine to take very carefully. Medicines are designed to help you, but too much can hurt you!
Fight, Flight ...or Freeze?

Our Three Responses to Fright

By Claire Magee-Billson

Boo! Are you scared? The fight-or-flight response is your brain’s natural reaction to a very frightening event. It was first identified by Walter B. Cannon in 1915. He studied and then taught psychology at Harvard. Although this psychological reaction is usually referred to as “fight or flight,” there is also a third response called “freeze” which is not quite as well known.

The fight-or-flight response comes to us from our ancient human ancestors. It helped protect them if they had to act or make decisions when a predator ran towards them. The fight-or-flight response starts in a place in our brains called the amygdala, which is responsible for survival instincts and emotions. These days, we don’t often face threats from wild animals, but we can have the same responses to smaller threats or things that worry us, especially if we think they have the potential for disaster. If we have to speak in public, we might feel like we want to run away, or freeze and feel unable to get any words out. We might have to talk ourselves down, and remind ourselves that it isn’t life threatening. Once you have fought through your fear and spoken up, you will remember that you can do it next time you have a similar situation.

What’s the worst that can happen?

The fight-or-flight response is very helpful, even life saving, in a case of immediate danger—for example, if you are faced with a tiger on the loose. Without this natural response that tells your body to flee, you might waste time planning, which could mean that you would get eaten! While you are experiencing the fight-or-flight response, your eyes will focus in one place, your muscles will tense, your breathing will be fast and shallow, and your heart will be beating faster than usual. The prefrontal cortex, which is the part of your brain that deals with words and thinking and planning, will turn off. The brain then triggers a surge of the hormone adrenaline that will give you a burst of energy to fight or run. This will all happen without you even thinking about it!
However, the fight-or-flight response can also be unhelpful if it activates too frequently. It can lower your immune system and leave you more likely to get sick because you are worrying too much about things you think are dangerous when you are actually physically safe. You need about twenty minutes to physically recover from the brain’s reaction to the fight-or-flight response, and the adrenaline can keep rushing for up to an hour. Millions of people around the world suffer from adrenal fatigue which happens when your body is flooded too often with the fight-or-flight hormones, adrenaline and another one called cortisol. These are the hormones (natural chemicals produced by your body) which make your heart race and your breathing fast. Adrenal fatigue causes you to feel exhausted and miserable.

If you are feeling anxious or worried a lot, you can learn to switch off the fight-or-flight response. After all, you don’t need the same response to the dark as you do to a wild tiger! Good ways to calm the worried feeling are to take deep breaths, listen to calming music, practice mindfulness and staying in the present moment, talk to a parent or teacher about what worries you, and eat healthy food. Exercise is another good way to calm down because the fight-or-flight response is meant to be followed by a burst of energy and activity, giving you the energy to run from danger. Yoga is also helpful for calming the body and mind. Another thing that can be helpful is to think about the situation. Ask yourself, “Am I really in danger?” or “Why do I feel this way?” Some answers might be “I don’t feel well, I’m really sick” or “I don’t know this question, I’m going to fail my math test!” If you think about the reasons, you might realize that you are actually safe, and that these worries can be managed.

**So how does your brain decide in split seconds between fight, flight, or freeze?**

Good question! Psychologists believe that your first option might be to freeze and try not to be noticed, because predators look for movement. If that doesn’t work, you might want to run away (flight). And fight, if there was no escape, would be the last option!

Oh! And did you know that when you are tickled and you laugh (or maybe you’re not ticklish and you don’t), it is actually your brain reacting with the fear response? Your brain says “I’m in danger,” but then it realizes it’s safe and the laughing starts. Isn’t it amazing what our brains can do?!
Bears Don’t Hibernate:
Do You Believe me?

By Emily Wang

I could start with an elaborate introduction, but I choose to get to the point right away. Did you know that bears don’t hibernate? All bears, by the way. And before you throw this article down and shout about how ridiculous it is, let me state my case. Almost everyone believes that bears hibernate, but I can prove them wrong. In fact, bears do not hibernate—they torpor. Torporing is a state of decreased physiological activity in an animal. It’s similar to hibernation, but different at the same time.

In the winter, as you know, small animals hibernate because of the lack of food that they need for energy. Without food in the winter, the animals wouldn’t have the energy to stay alive because they need to be constantly moving to maintain their body heat. Therefore, hibernation is a perfect solution. But for bears, it’s a bit more complicated. You see, bears are too heavy and large to hibernate. All animals that hibernate have to be less than 50 pounds. This is because a small animal’s surface-area-to-volume ratio is higher than that of larger animals, providing more places for heat to escape.

When bears torpor, their heart and breathing rates decrease like in hibernation, but their body temperature only decreases slightly. In contrast, hibernating animals lower their body temperatures to near freezing because of the reduced activity! A colder temperature leads to a lower metabolism (the process of energy creation that occurs inside our cells) after cellular activity slows down, which enables the hibernating animal to survive on less energy. Basically, by torporing, bears can save energy and survive, just like all the other animals that hibernate and estivate (which is what animals do if they spend a hot or dry period in a state of torpor or dormancy).

Furthermore, the main difference between hibernation and torpor is that bears (and other animals that torpor, such as hummingbirds and black-capped chickadees) wake up extremely easily. Unlike in hibernation, the slightest movement can disturb them. This misinformation about bears has led to many deaths and injuries when people got too close to a bear in torpor. As a side note, don’t follow their example!

Another believable myth about hibernation is that it only happens in cold weather climates. In truth, animals in tropical weather conditions also hibernate even though it’s warm. For example, bats in the rain forest hibernate.

So there you have it: bears don’t hibernate. This is a very little-known fact, so now you know the truth. Just remember, when you see a bear in torpor, don’t wake him up!
Endangered Animals and Ways to Save Them

By Lilian Wang

Have you ever wondered about endangered animals? Well, there are way more of them than you think. They are not just well-known animals like the giant panda and the snow leopard. I'll bet you don't know that gharials, which live in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, are also facing extinction. You probably don't even know what they are! I'll tell you about some of the most important animals to our ecosystems that are at risk of becoming extinct.

One of the most threatened species is the giant panda. They are being threatened by people destroying their habitats. As the human population in China continues to grow, pandas’ habitats are being overtaken by human development—more buildings, litter, and so on—which is pushing them into smaller and less livable areas. Habitat destruction also leads to food shortages. Giant pandas need to eat 20-40 pounds of bamboo each day. They feed on several different varieties of bamboo that bloom at different times of the year. If one type of bamboo is destroyed by development, it can leave the pandas with nothing to eat during the time it normally blooms, increasing the risk of starvation. Since pandas reproduce so infrequently, it is difficult for their population to recover from such a low point. You should at least consider helping them by donating money, adopting pandas, or volunteering to help Chinese wildlife reserves. These wildlife reserves have been set up in China to make sure pandas don't ever become extinct.

Another species that is at risk of becoming extinct is one you probably never heard of—the gharial. Gharials are fish-eating crocodiles that are native to the northern part of the Indian subcontinent. The population of gharials is estimated at fewer than 235 individuals. With 110 sharp teeth in its thin and long snout, the gharial is well adapted to catching fish, its main diet. They once inhabited all the major river systems of the Indian subcontinent, from the Indus River in the west to the Irrawaddy River in the east. Its distribution is now limited to only 2% of its historical range because of the loss of riverine habitat, depletion of fish resources, and entanglement in fishing nets. To help save them, people can stop polluting the water where gharials live, stop fishing where gharials can get caught in people’s nets, and stop using their skins to make clothing.

Finally, here’s an endangered animal that will blow your mind: the solenodon. Solenodons are mammals found primarily in Cuba and Hispaniola, both islands in the Caribbean. The solenodon looks kind of cute and manageable enough, sort of like an over-sized hedgehog. But there’s something that only solenodons can do: they can inject rattlesnake-like venom through its teeth... and it’s a mammal! Do you believe that? Try to imagine hedgehogs spitting venom at you. It’s impossible, mainly because hedgehogs are cute and wouldn’t do that. Solenodons are vital to their ecosystems because they are insectivores, and they help keep the bug population under control. The solenodon was thought to be extinct until scientists rediscovered it in 2003. In the last decade or so, predators like domesticated dogs and cats have been living around them. They are also threatened by loss of habitat due to human disturbance, and are in grave danger of becoming extinct.

Now do you understand the risks of animals becoming extinct? You can be a big help just by donating money or volunteering to help in wildlife preserves like the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge in Philadelphia. Hopefully with all the people helping out, gharials, giant pandas, solenodons, and other animals won’t be at risk anymore. If you love animals and care about them, go save them from extinction!
Has Earth Revealed an Eighth Continent?

By Jack Hollowell

Many scientists argue that Zealandia should be named a continent, but not everyone agrees.

We all have been taught that there are seven continents on Earth, but studies have led geologists to believe there is now an eighth.

A presumed eighth continent, referred to as Zealandia, is being debated over whether it should be a recognized continent on the world’s map. It isn’t a gargantuan landmass that geographers have somehow missed, but rather, it’s mostly submerged under the coastal waves of New Zealand. You see, the proposed continent is 94% underwater, but some argue they can still prove it is a continent.

The evolution of Zealandia began about 125 million years ago when the tectonic plates shifted and instead of compressing, the eastern portion of Gondwanaland was lengthened. Gondwanaland was a supercontinent long, long ago but is currently known as the individual lands of Africa, South America, Australia, Antarctica, Arabia, and the peninsula of India. This stretching lasted for 100 million years and had many consequences including the formation of the Tasman Sea floor. About 53 million years ago, the sea floor began to open, creating a gap and separating a piece of land from Gondwanaland. This land would later be known as Zealandia.

Zealandia is somewhat strange in that just before it was separated from Gondwanaland, it was stretched. This stretching thinned out the continental crust (which is the relatively thick part of the earth’s crust that forms land masses), making it submerge and sink more than a thicker continental crust. It continued to be stretched until about 23 million years ago, when the tectonic situation shifted yet again. The plates began to collide, pushing parts of Zealandia out of the water. The parts visible today are known as New Zealand and New Caledonia.

There is much debate over whether Zealandia should be classified as a continent or not. There is a lot of evidence that Zealandia really is a continent. First, the continental shelves of Zealandia lie about 3,280 feet below sea level, while the nearby oceanic crust is about 9,800 feet below that. This means that there is a great distance between the crusts, which is typical for a continent. Also, just like other continents, there is a colossal range in altitude from the sub-ocean depths to Aoraki/Mount Cook at 12,217 feet above sea level. Unlike the nearby oceanic crust that is made of basaltic rocks, the crust of Zealandia is composed of a variety of rock types including granite, limestone, and
sandstone, some of which are rather old and typical of a continental crust. Researchers argue that all these examples are reasons for Zealandia to be classified as a continent.

Others argue that Zealandia is not a continent but a microcontinent because of its size. They think that it is too small to qualify as a continent. They also believe that because it is partially submerged it shouldn’t qualify. But Madagascar, one of the largest so-called microcontinents, is six times smaller than Zealandia. This would imply that Zealandia is too large to be a microcontinent. Other scientists have posed a solution that would create a new standard for classifying land masses to include a mini-continent, a level between continent and microcontinent.

An exploration of Zealandia in 2017 showed many things about the continent. It is about three-fifths the size of Australia and 94% submerged underwater. More than 8,000 specimens were studied and several hundred fossil species were identified. Spores and pollen from land plants and shells of organisms found show that Zealandia’s geography and climate were drastically different in the past. The sediment cores obtained will help scientists understand how the Earth’s tectonic plates move and how the global climate system works. Scientists said that records of Zealandia’s history will help us predict future changes in climate.

Nick Mortimer, a geologist with GNS Science in Dunedin, New Zealand said, “I hope Zealandia will now start to appear on world maps which show the other continents. There is an extra one, and it is as real as all the others.” Though there are many who agree with this statement, there are many others that dispute it. As the debate between geologists and geographers and the exploration of the geological structure of Zealandia both continue, hopefully a clear decision will become evident. Until then, I believe it should be a continent. Which side do you agree with?
Colosseum, Catacombs, and Chocolate Gelato:

My Trip to Rome

By Alessandra Cahill

Feeling the sweltering Mediterranean sun beat down on you, hearing the Vespas roaring through the cobblestone streets, seeing tourists snapping photos at national landmarks... one moment you hear the sound of rush hour traffic, cars beeping and honking at one another; the next you hear fountains trickling in a piazza while sitting in a cafe eating chocolate gelato. The smell of pasta lingers in the air, obviously because there's an Italian restaurant nearby. You're not in Philly anymore—that's right, you're in Rome!

From the authentic food to the gawking sights to world history galore, Rome can enlighten your Italian knowledge and your taste buds at the same time. Last summer, I was lucky enough to take a trip for four days to Rome with my mom. Because Rome is on a different time schedule than the eastern U.S., where we live, it may take a little getting used to when you first arrive. It's perfectly normal to feel tired (fancy name—jet lag), but be prepared, especially if you are landing in Rome when it is morning, because back at home it's still night.

One thing you absolutely must do in Rome is visit the spectacular historical sights. Of course, it is impossible to see them all, but there are definitely some highlights, like the Colosseum. The Colosseum is a gigantic sports stadium built for the Roman emperor Vespasian back around 80 B.C. Gladiator fights and chariot races were the most popular attractions. Thousands of people came to see the fights and races, so the Colosseum was immensely large and could seat 50,000 people. Today the Colosseum is falling apart a bit, but it is still amazing. When I went there, I felt extremely small in comparison (and I am a tall person). Some other must-sees are the Vatican museums, Saint Peter's Baslica, and the worldwide wonder, the Sistine Chapel. The Sistine Chapel has incredible artwork that was painted by Michelangelo, a famous Renaissance artist. Michelangelo was asked to paint a holy display on the ceiling of the chapel by Pope Julius II. But if you look carefully, you can see a picture of God with his naked bum right above the alter. It sounds offensive, but when you see it up close, it's hilarious! The reason Michelangelo did that was because he hated the pope, and the two spent a lot of time bickering. Painting a naked bum over the alter, right where the pope would stand, was Michelangelo's revenge.

Rome isn't just beautiful buildings, however. There is an aura of eeriness, too. When early Christians populated Rome, they were hunted down by the Roman soldiers because they believed in one god, not many. So when a Christian person died, they had to put the body and belongings somewhere besides a Roman tomb (for obvious reasons). That's when the catacombs were invented. The catacombs are long, dark tunnels dug underground where Christian people buried the deceased. They covered the bodies with dirt and used stones to tell who the person was and their rank in society. There are also ancient paintings in the catacombs. Archeologists believe the oldest existing painting of the Virgin Mary is there. I'm surprised it still exists! Sadly, only a few tombs in the catacombs remain untouched today, for after people stopped putting the dead
Standing on the ancient arena floor of the Colosseum, where the gladiators used to fight.

in them, grave robbers broke in. They did not steal bodies, just valuable belongings. I went on a night tour, so it was really creepy. The tunnels were all dark and musty, but it was cool.

You absolutely can't take a trip to Rome without sampling the food. Believe it or not, some American favorite foods come from Italy! Pasta dishes of all kind are common, and there are many pasta options on every menu. Lasagna, spaghetti, ravioli—you name it, it's there. Paninis (Italian sandwiches) are everywhere. Do you love ice cream? Italians didn't invent it, but gelato is basically the European version of the cool, sweet dessert we all love. There's a gelateria on almost every block, and you can have gelato at 8:00 AM if you want it! (If you lived in Italy, your mom probably wouldn't say no to ice cream for breakfast.) You've also heard of pizza, which is actually an Italian food. When I tried Italian pizza, I was very surprised that it tasted nothing like American pizza. Actually, now that I've compared both, Italian pizza, in my opinion, is better and healthier. I guess you can take the Italian out of the American, but when you go to Rome, it all comes back.

The restaurants themselves are unique. Once, when I was dining outside on a little street off of the Piazza Navona, I heard one of the chefs in the kitchen belting out tunes in Italian. I remember my mom telling me the song translated to something about flying. Then a just-married couple walked by, the bride's wedding dress trailing behind her gracefully. They had gotten married at the church two doors down. I bet that never happens in an American restaurant!

Now, if you find out you are going to Rome, you might think, "But Romans speak Italian. I don't know any Italian!" Don't worry. I found out all you need to know are survival phrases, like, "Thank you," "Where is the bathroom?" and "How much for this?" It might sound strange, being in a place where you don't understand anything that anybody says around you, but you'll be able to pick up on some of the language while you're there. And trust me, Rome is worth it!
Ice, Ice... Bears!

My Adventure in Alaska

By Eden Charlson

The bright, royal blue of the lakes washed over my eyes as we started the two-hour plane ride in a six-passenger airplane called the Beaver. There were so many mountains, lakes, and rivers, I could’ve sworn we were in a book. I started to drift off in my own crazy stories and thoughts when the plane started to tilt. Then BAM! The hot air pushed us up, and at the same time the cold air pulled us down. The turbulence made me feel as though the air and gravity were three year olds and the Beaver was a cookie. I spoke the first words I had said in an hour. “That. Was. Scary.” It was true. What was also true was that I was about to live one of the most memorable times of my life.

My family loves adventure, nature, and the outdoors. When we returned from our last national park vacation, we were craving more adventure. We decided to do something big, something awesome, something cold. We chose to go to Alaska last summer. And to make it the perfect vacation, we chose to see much of it through the windows of a thirty-foot R.V.

Alaska is a vast, open landscape. The mountains climb higher than the moon, the stars stretch farther than you can imagine, and your love of Alaska grows with every passing second. The largest state—it makes up about ¼ of the United States—it is home to Mt. Denali, also known as Mt. McKinley, the tallest mountain in North America. Even in summer, the weather tickles your legs with a breeze and a slight chill. Whether you’re flying above it in an airplane or walking on the slipping, sliding, icy snow, you know you’re someplace special.

As the roaring motors of the planes faded away, my mom, dad, sister Hannah, brother Zev, and I walked to the Bear School—or “school of destiny” as I like calling it. We settled into our seats to learn how to be in the same environment as grizzly bears. At Brooks River nearby, bears come to catch salmon all on their own. When school was dismissed, I felt ready to conquer anything!

On our way to the river, we saw a big bear stirring in its sleep. Score! As we got closer, the rushing sound of the salmon river made me jump inside my body. And suddenly there it was. Destiny. A miracle. Right in front of my eyes must have been at least thirteen Alaskan coastal brown bears, and hundreds of extremely loud wolf-gray seagulls. Some bears were catching bright red salmon, others were standing on rocks like seals on beach balls. It was a magnificent sight. One bear was eating a salmon like a cheeseburger, the carcass perfectly peeled in its huge paws and shining like a full moon in winter.

I heard a splash. Two adolescent bears with open jaws were trying to gnaw at each other. Their large bodies seemed to tower over us like redwoods, even though we were fifteen feet away and ten feet up. Then I heard another splash! I jerked my head to find an Alaskan grizzly standing there on a six foot waterfall ledge grasping at jumping, spawning salmon. It caught a few and then wandered away as another smaller bear came up. They kept coming and going, and I didn’t realize how fast the time was passing.

Pictured on the left is a moulin, a place where glacier water has melted through air pockets in the ice to create openings.
Suddenly, my mom came running down the wooden pathway and said in a tense whisper, “Come with me.” I followed her and directly below our sturdy ledge was a tan-furred mama bear with four cinnamon-coated cubs. It was one of the greatest sights of my life.

For the next hour we followed those five fantastic bears around. We followed them back to the river, and watched the mama tuck her babies away behind a shrub while she caught Vermilion salmon. My heart melted as we saw the cubs put their tiny little paws around one another as they watched mama bear. It was so sweet. Then, big mama started a low growl at a burnt umber bear who was approaching. I guess she didn’t want a rerun of when a big, big bear, named 747 had eaten one of her five cubs—a story that one of the guides told us.

Soon it was time for us to depart. “Do we really have to go?” I begged my mom. But I already knew the answer. The light drip of the raindrops fit my mood 100%. I didn’t want to leave this fairytale and the bears, not ever!

* * *

A few days later, I found myself looking at a glacier that stretched out for over seven miles. The ice shone like millions of little fireflies in a jar. The sight gave me chills—or maybe it was just the crisp Alaskan summer breeze. With our guide, we would climb the rocky side of the glacier, then cross over to a sliver of the snow.

The start was nice and steady. Soon after we began to see crevasses and baby blue ice. Then I heard a faint sound that sounded like a stream, but it wasn’t. It was a mini-moulin. Moulines are places where glacier water has melted through air pockets in the ice to make openings with waterfalls. Some moulines are so huge they can swallow a house. “Look!” I proclaimed to our guide as I pointed to a small hole. “It’s a moulin, like you were telling us.”

A half hour later, we arrived at an ice cave, Gnarnia, that had just been found a few weeks before by our guide. Inside it was mixed shades of pure royal and electric blue ice. As we slipped inside, I ran my fingers against the smooth, cold, frost. I felt like a star, all alone, but surrounded by everything you need. I didn’t know if this was reality or a dream. The rushing of the water above us, the drip of the water below... and the ice. Oh, the ice! It was all different shades of blue, royal, electric, baby, and sky. I can now tell you what heaven looks like, I was there.

To end our amazing extravaganza, we climbed down in a hole to a place where we could look 360˚ around and see pure milk-white waterfalls. Our guide told us we could get a drink. The water was crisp, clean, and cold as it trickled down my throat.

My trip to Alaska took me to a whole other world. When glaciers and animals are all around you, when the stars and mountains reach out past the sun, and the lakes and rivers are so blue and deep, you never want to leave. The beauty and joy that my trip to Alaska brought to me will always fill me up.

Pictured on the right, an Alaskan grizzly enjoying a meal.
White

By Trinity Bethea

White is...
Sails on sailboats, sailing on the ocean blue
Snow on trees, in bittersweet winter
Clouds in the sky, on a nice summer day
The test you get in school after you’ve just studied for five hours
The skeleton in your body that has been with you all of your life
Your teeth that are pearls, nice and clean
Your skull that helps protect and support your brain
The feeling of nothingness in a blank, dull room
Marshmallows that you roast on a campfire
Tiles on the floor in your cozy house
A paint that you use while coloring
The shiver of cold you feel in December
The coats you use to stay warm and for comfort.

White is...
The feeling of being confused in a situation
The printer you use to print your final draft of a writing piece
White is the feeling of a bad quote when you think “They could have done better than that! I would have written a better one!”
White is the eraser on a pencil in school
The clock that you watch tick down the minutes until dismissal
White is the flashcards that you use to remember
The projector you use to show your students homework
The different stripes and stars on the American Flag
The whiteboard you write on
The name tag you get so people remember you
The notepad teachers give you for your last project of the year.
Elon Musk:
The Daredevil of Business and Science

By Yijia Mao

You've probably heard of daredevils: People who do crazy things that verge on being terrifying. They try to do what seems impossible. One person who did the impossible in business and science is Elon Musk. He founded multiple companies, including SolarCity, Tesla, and SpaceX. How is he a daredevil though? Let's go through his story and find out.

Elon Musk was born in Pretoria, South Africa on June 28, 1971. When he was 10, he became interested in computing and taught himself programming. By age 12, he had sold a BASIC-based video game to a magazine for about $500 (a lot of money for 1983)! At 17, he left South Africa to attend Queen's University in Canada and then studied business and physics at the University of Pennsylvania. Musk later went to Stanford University to get a PhD in energy physics. When the Internet boom (a sudden explosion of Internet popularity) started, he dropped out of Stanford after two days to become a part of it.

He then co-founded his first company, Zip2 Corporation, which provided an online city guide software to newspapers. After Zip2 was purchased by Compaq Computer for $341 million, Musk used his share of $22 million to co-found another company called X.com, an online bank that later merged with PayPal. In 2002, PayPal was bought by eBay for $1.5 billion, and Musk received $165 million.

All this sounds exciting, but what could be a better idea than landing a greenhouse on Mars? Musk went to Russia looking for rockets, but found them overpriced. He founded SpaceX, where he serves as CEO and CTO (Chief Technology Officer). SpaceX develops and makes space vehicles and aims to push forward in space technologies. In 2008, SpaceX's Falcon 1 rocket became the first privately funded, liquid-fueled vehicle to launch a satellite into space. As if this isn't amazing enough, SpaceX also managed to land two rockets on two different platforms (one floating on water) after returning from space!

The list gets longer, because Musk also founded Tesla, an electric car company (by 2022, he's planning to produce a hovering car), and Solarcity, a solar panel company. A few small cherries on top of his business empire include Gigafactory, Hyperloop, OpenAI, Neuralink, Pravduh.com, and even the Boring Company, which he founded while stuck in traffic (he tweeted, "I'm just gonna dig a hole").

Now you can probably see what makes Elon Musk a daredevil. He created many companies that could sink into bankruptcy any day, but he's still making more. In February 2019, he announced that he's leaving OpenAI to take care of SpaceX and Tesla. Although his companies often run into financial difficulties, and some may eventually fail, Musk has really redefined what we believe is humanly possible.
A Tribute

What We Love

About Ms. Heffron

Recently, Ms. Heffron announced her retirement after 23 years of hard work and dedication to Merion Elementary School. Following her announcement, Merion Muse decided to compile this list of all the things we love about our wonderful principal.

She’s smart.
She’s kind.
She’s a leader.
She’s strong.
She’s pretty.
She’s considerate.
She cares about everyone’s health and safety.
She celebrates all cultures.
She’s interested in everything.
She’s very supportive.
She’s inspiring.
She always smiles and speaks to students.
She likes the Steelers.
She says goodbye to you at dismissal.
She allows a lot of things that we love to happen at school.
She started School Families.
She’s full of humor.
She’s always there for you.
She listens to new ideas.
She helps understand everyone’s personality and how they behave.
She welcomes every new student to school.
She still remembers our siblings who went to Merion.
She treats everyone equally.
She helps everyone have their own education plan.
She tries to understand both sides of a story.
She makes sure we have popsicles on Field Day, even with the “No Food” policy.
She approved yoga balls in the classroom.
She supports new ideas from teachers.
She has a big collection of stuffed animals.
She takes time to get to know students, teachers and families
She’s dedicated and works hard.
She responds with wonderment and awe.
She helps find ways to make things fun.
She’s calm and doesn’t get angry.
She loves Notre Dame.
She’s supportive.
She’s committed.
She’s benevolent, magnanimous, and emphatic.
She gives us comfortable workspaces.
She allows us to have special events like Cultural Heritage Night and Spanish Festival that other schools don’t have.
She knows everyone’s name.
She helps us solve problems.
She asks you how your day is going.
She gives advice.
She checks in on us.
She’s interested in you and everyone.
She allowed Merion Muse to happen.
She’s the world’s greatest.
She’s the best.

Ms. Heffron is . . .
Helpful
Empathetic
Friendly
Fun
Respected
Outstanding
and
No one wants her to leave!
LMSD will never forget her...

Merion would be nothing without her.
The *Merion Muse* advisors congratulate the entire staff for their many contributions to this year's publications!

**Editors**  
Alison Badler  
Alessandra Cahill  
Eden Charlson  
AJ Higgins  
Devin Pettit  
Sasha Romanski  
Lilian Wang  

**Photographers**  
Nieve Clifford  
Faith Coyle  
Isabella Gilligan  
Elena Goodman  
Piper Jaffe  
Raha Khazaali  
Bryanna Maher  
Kenny Mellon  
Yanna Oler  
Jonah Spitzer  
Sofia Viatour  
Leo Walls  
Sarah Whalen  

**Production**  
Samantha Berdow  
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Nieve Clifford  
Sonya Curyto  
Isabella Gilligan  
Elena Goodman  
Raha Khazaali  
Bryanna Maher  
Kenny Mellon  
Asal Petramfar  
Sarah Whalen  

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Aliyah Alwyn  
Ari Anafi  
Hannah Barr  
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Trinity Bethea  
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Finn Ryan  
Garrett Saxonhouse  
Anna Schmittdiel  
Stella Sommer  
Samantha Torrecampo  
Emily Wang  
Lianna Wang  
Terrance Xia

Advisors  
Ann Campbell, Tracy Coyle, Dannielle Doran, Ben Goodman,  
Stephanie Hershman, Lauren Higgins, and Kirstin Lindermayer