

# Ascham Ink

Ascham School 2024





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# Foreword

This volume includes contributions, literary and artistic, from various academic levels of the Ascham Senior School, written during the 2024 academic year.

The volume opens with Adelle Weber's enigmatic tale which is remarkable not only for its control of sentence-rhythms and structure, but also for its strikingly poetic images and word-play.

Where last year's volume contained mostly narrative writing, this year we have various essays, some created in the intellectual cut-and-thrust of the school's Essay Competition. There are essays on how to navigate the demands of parents and society, essays on the personal impact of social media and some essays on Greta Gerwig's 2023 satirical film *Barbie*. They all display the vigorous vehemence of young minds seeking to reason their way through challenging ideas.

Once again, we can observe with delight the development of youthful literacy in a world which one may believe fails to cultivate it. This volume may bring the joyful discovery that one is mistaken.

*Andrew Lane*

*Cover art: by Bella Blair, Year 11*

# Spaces of the Dark

By Adelle Weber (Year 12)

*“And through the spaces of the dark / Midnight shakes the memory”  
(T.S. Eliot)*

You don't remember the 15<sup>th</sup> day.

14 days. Hollow ringing moves without you, closer and further away. Trees rustle and leaves scream, but you can't hear either. Bouncy sand under a pile of suspiciously soft rocks calls for you to lie down again.

7 days. Sand scratches the glass water, stagnant in the soft light. Today you finally shone your torch upon the sky, only to find that it didn't light up after all. You wonder if you have shaken the world.

6 days, and you wish to hear a sound once more. Could you possibly change the plants? They are unnervingly still.

2 days, and you find yourself willing to leave.

First day you realise you've run out of chances. The dark sun above doesn't dare to help you.

On the zero-th day, the scratched waves shatter. You rip the coverings off the solid rocks. They're still rocks, all the way through.

Negative 1 days, you remember the sound of ringing.

Negative 2 days, you remember the 7<sup>th</sup> day, the courage you had.

Negative 3 days, you remember when leaves cast shadows upon the sky, when sand cast shadows upon the sun. You remember the 'used to' and finally gaze on the shingled roof again. The walls of the horizon crack and you feel the wind blow for the first time in 17 days.

Negative 4<sup>th</sup> day, 18<sup>th</sup> day. You give up on the countdown. Someday, someone unscrews the sun and it finally lets in light. Someday, you will accept the plastic plants will never grow, nor wave in the wind. Someday, past the day you are useful, you will realise the pinhole in the sky was not uncovered to gift light, but intended to let you live within. You wouldn't dare to wish that they opened it more; once will be enough. Someday, you will wish that you never stopped counting down, and kept shining shadows on your enclosure.

Today it's the 1147<sup>th</sup> day, or the negative 1133<sup>rd</sup> day. In the darkness, you hear the leaves rustle alongside the roaring waves. The sand is sharp under your feet, and the wind bites at you. The rock beside you feels grossly wet as dark colours sit upon it. Hopefully the tide won't come over it.



*Xanthe Brown (Year 11)*

# **used to be indecisive, but now I'm not so sure.**

**By Ariel Barraket (Year 11)**

Lego, those colourful bricks that snap and click. Loved by all ages, loathed by bare feet.

When you received a Lego set for Christmas it was easy. You had the instructions and the pieces you needed there. But as you acquired more and more pieces, you gained the capacity to build whatever you desired. Sitting cross legged amidst scattered Legos you had a million possibilities before you, with no limits. But how could you ever choose just one? The fear of making the wrong decision paralysed you. Unable to make up your mind up on what to make, you would simply sit there, sifting through the Lego until it was time for dinner. You wanted to build a unicorn, but you ended up with a scale replica of the Death Star. How?

We live in an age where we are spoilt for choice. Everywhere we look. Life is a matter of decisions. With such a range of options, we have freedom.

Friday night is take-away night in my household. This may sound like a nice family tradition but take-away night means that the indecisive members of my family must decide. As my thumb numbs scrolling through the Uber Eats app further and further, my stomach rumbles more and more and my mind becomes cloudier. Each scroll brings a new array of tantalizing images, each dish seemingly more tempting than

the last. The sizzle of stir-fried noodles, the aromatic spices of Indian curry, the cheesy goodness of a loaded pizza. Meanwhile, the hesitant murmurs of my family members fill the air.

I want pizza...but we had pizza last week! I know what I don't want... that doesn't help us. What about burgers?... I had a burger for lunch.... What about Indian... we had curry last night.

We have every single cuisine at our fingertips, but that means decisions. Decisions mean stress. Stress means tension. And in the end, is anyone really satisfied, or did we just say yes to dumplings because it was all we could agree on, and we could not be bothered to fight any longer and everyone is just STARVING?

As a young person, I am told that I can do anything. Technology allows us to achieve whatever, whenever and wherever. We should be grateful for that and take advantage of that.

But how?

This freedom inevitably leads to that horrible, suffocating feeling of indecision. It feels like every choice I make means giving up on the thousands of other choices I have.

At the age of seven I finally learnt how to whistle. And from then on, I whistled my way through life, to the point where my family would groan and howl when they heard a slight shrill escape from my lips. You could hear when I was close by or on approach. I didn't need to announce my entrance. My grandfather told me that only 10% of women

could whistle and that just made me even more proud of my wonderful talent. I would be a world-champion whistler.

At nine I was to be an artist.

At ten I was to travel the world and visit every single country.

And at twelve I was to be a vet.

From an early age I was encouraged to reach for the stars, to achieve my goals. But they also had to be the “right” goals. Now, when asked questions of what I want to study after school my answer is simply three words: I don’t know.

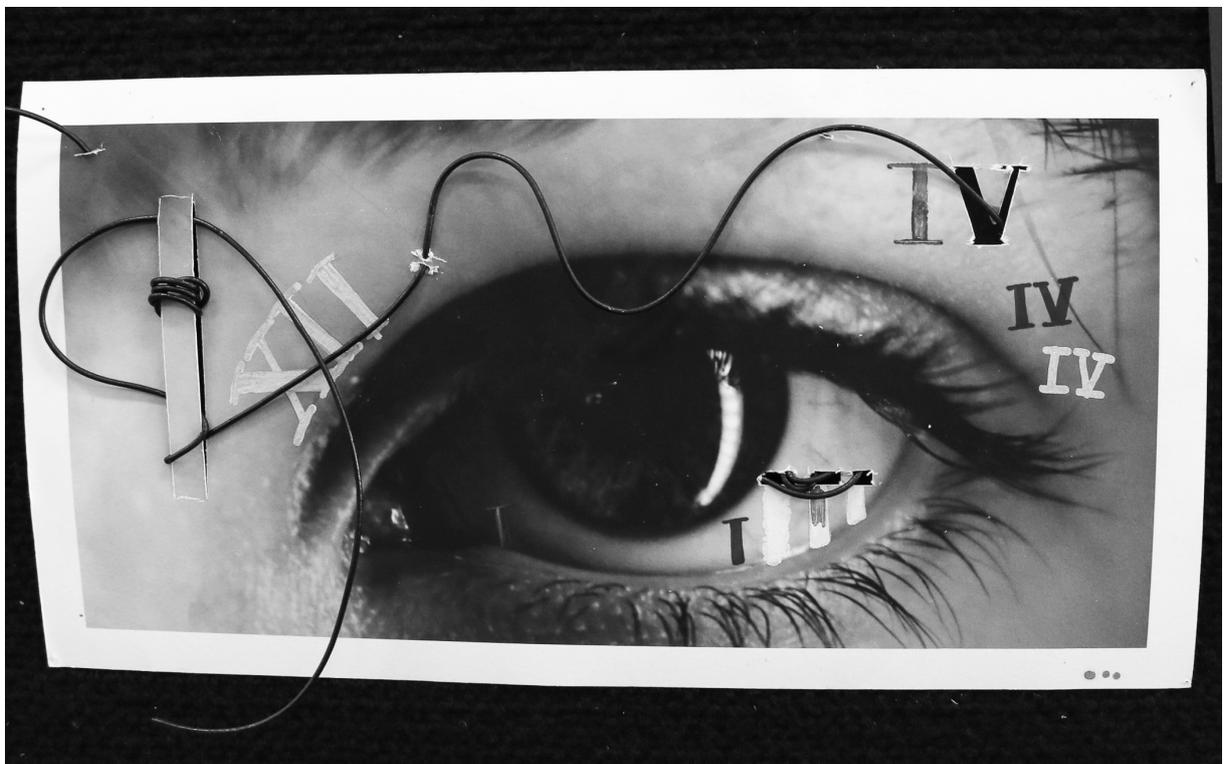
Don’t go into the Arts. Don’t become a vet. Don’t study this. Don’t study that. Don’t study medicine because you have to study for too many years and stress ages you and you will be too old to have kids but do study medicine because that’s where the real money’s at and we didn’t send you to a private school to not become successful. What do you mean you want to take a gap year? Don’t you know you will just waste time and be behind all your other peers? You know, you don’t have to have it all figured out yet, but don’t waste too much time thinking about it; you’d better get cracking.

I have come to the point in my high school career where I am talked to and treated like an adult. I am supposed to be proactive and do my own research and book careers meetings and organise my own work experience and network. In less than a year, I am supposed to decide what to study.

But anything I choose feels like I am just giving up on everything else.

I can do anything, but not everything.

And it's at this point where I feel like a child, sitting in piles of Lego, unable decide which brick to pick up first. But even by not deciding, I am still making a choice.



*Molly Musgrove (Year 10)*

# Real? Or just really good at pretending...

By Sophia Barry (Year 11)

*“Until we merge more fully with the machine, until AI can mimic my voice, my history, my personal creative instincts, the entire act remains a simulation.”*

Gen Zs are the original digital natives. We live our entire lives online: we shop, we chat, we snap, we like, we game, we post... we're all over people-influencing, TikTok-filming and Instagram-photo-styling. It's pretty fair to say that we've seen it all when it comes to the digital world, right?

Yeah...nah. Because as of last year, even tech-savvy Gen Z was hit with something else:

AI deepfakes. When seeing isn't believing.

At any one time we have a vast ocean of information at our fingertips, waiting to be accessed with a few clicks. All this content can be 'created' for us in a matter of seconds, offering a whole new world of instant gratification. But is this at the sacrifice of authenticity? Will deepfakes wash away human emotion, and the ethics of the digital world as we know it?

Soon, we won't be crafting the content; instead it will mould us in its image.

If you're one of the 'that's too scary for me' people, I wouldn't worry too much. According to Sophie Brickman, “until we merge more fully with the machine, until AI can mimic...my personal creative instincts, the entire act remains a simulation.”

True, in some respects. Recently I was stuck down the TikTok rabbit-hole, and I stumbled across a compilation of Tom Cruise edits. I was hooked immediately, and it sure was a good laugh. I didn't think twice about the fact that an A-List actor who does his own stunts was missing golf shots and doing petty magic tricks with coins. As the video continued, I had this niggling feeling that something wasn't quite right — at first it was in small differences like strangely forced laughter and audio lagging behind the image. By the end, when Cruise paused, leaned into the camera and said, "it's all the real thing", I was sure that this was *furthest* from the real thing it could be. I just couldn't quite put my finger on why.

Only afterwards I discovered that it was a viral AI-generated deepfake. A mere simulation, but it sure did mimic Cruise's appearance, voice and mannerisms scarily well. I felt tricked. I felt deceived. And it was a genuinely unsettling feeling. How can I trust what I see, but that I can't believe? Nowadays the concept of truth, which should theoretically be objective, seems to be entirely distorted by this new wave of generative AI. Perhaps it is the sea of deepfakes that has diluted the purity of our trust in the digital world around us.

According to online blogger Jason Thacker, "In many ways, deepfake technology is a succinct metaphor for contemporary Western society's tenuous relationship with truth." Alarmingly, it took a single doctored image for Kate Middleton to fall from grace, and lose the world's trust. Even though I'm not particularly interested in all things royal-family, I couldn't suppress a feeling of insecurity as I studied the photo. Has

generative AI made the online world a complete fabrication? Or is there still some semblance of authenticity to be found?

When trust in technology begins to dwindle, it becomes clear that what once had provided a way to define reality is no longer reliable. Henry Ajder, AI and deepfake expert, commented, “...because of... this new, broader awareness of AI-generated images...sense of shared reality...is being eroded further or more quickly than it was before.”

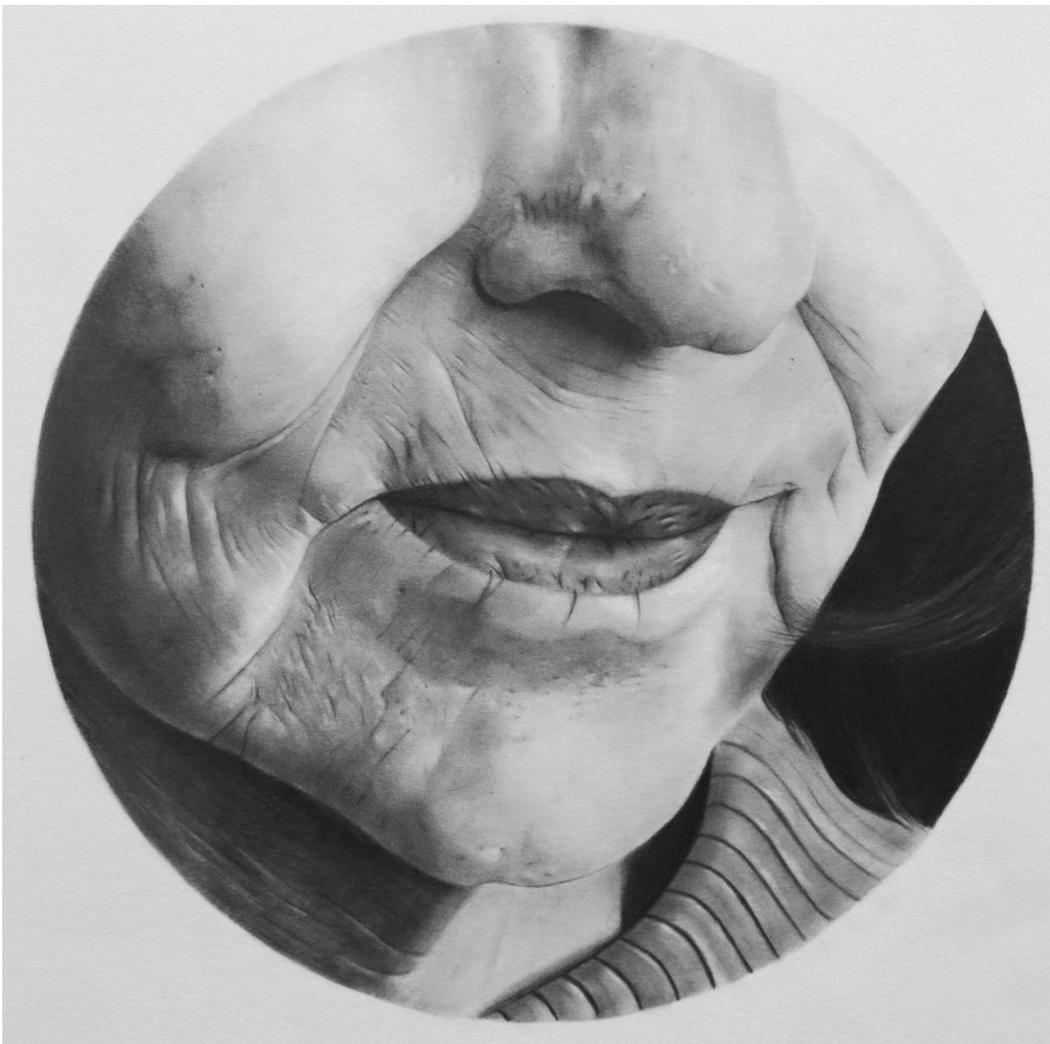
If you ask me, anything that’s just an ‘act’ or a ‘simulation’ can’t possibly have such tangible effects. Take Taylor Swift — she had pornographic deepfakes of herself circulated online, viewed 47 million times before Swifties helped to take them down. Makes you wonder about the impact they must have on victims who don’t have as large a fan base as Swift. The statement that most caught my attention was from US rep Joe Morelle, who said, “the images may be fake, but their impacts are very real.”

Interestingly, US representative Yvette D Clarke commented that “for years, women have been victims of non-consensual deepfakes...more common than most people realise.” Victorian MP Georgie Purcell also seemed victim to this bias, when an AI-generated image of her was shown on 9News, altered to expose her midriff — “can’t imagine this happening to a male MP”, she commented. If AI is a truly objective platform, separate from human thought and history, how come it can reflect such obvious biases?

Clearly AI as a simulation is here to stay, but there’s no doubt that the groundswell of sentiment against this artificiality is already beginning. It’s now time for us to take up our oars and

turn the tide against this attack on the integrity of our society and future.

So next time you come across one of your favourite celebrities online, maybe ask yourself this: is it real? Or just really, really good at pretending?



*Georgia Punch (Year 11)*

# 'take me to the lakes, where all the poets went to die'

By Zara Bracks (Year 11)

*"Songs are a form of poetry... We tend to think poems have to be high culture, or somehow elite or crystallised, whereas... a lot of pop songs are poetic."*  
(Prof. Liam Semler, quoted in Baker, SMH)

In cities worldwide, the atmosphere outside a Taylor Swift concert is electric, pulsating with anticipation and fervour. The air is alive with palpable excitement as thousands of fans who've been waiting for months, finally, get to see Taylor Swift. They trade colourful bracelets with her unforgettable lyrics stamped onto small beads. This might seem like hysteria or 'celebrity fan-girling', but I believe it's a form of true human connection. In the digital world, where meaningful connections are often elusive, her fans travel and go to extraordinary lengths, just to experience her live performances. Why is that?

Swift's nostalgic lyricism encapsulates quotidian human emotion, and by this, she's able to introduce innately distinctive characters to tell visceral and heartfelt stories, three minutes at a time. Swift's lyrics will leave you energised and stimulated, or in pool of tears. I would argue that many pop artists of the last semi-century have used songwriting as a contemporary medium to modernise poetry for the masses, namely Bob Dylan or Taylor Swift.

Swift builds on Sylvia Plath's illustrious legacy in her songwriting, through her confession of her innermost emotions and beliefs. Swift is known for her autobiographical songwriting

style, featuring her experiences in heartbreak, friendship, and family dynamics. Swift's discography is timeless, people of all ages and gender can relate to her lyrics as she eschews contemporary references, and instead draws inspiration from her own life to tell her story. Swift is extremely confessional in her lyrics, noted in her song 'Anti-hero' from 2023 Album-of-the-Year *Midnights* — 'I'll stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror/it must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero.' Swift's confessional approach, where she candidly shares her innermost emotions, allows her to connect deeply with her audience. Listeners, like myself, resonate with her vulnerability and honesty as she reflects on her own flaws and shortcomings, acknowledging that, like everyone else, she has inner struggles and imperfections. I found Swift's confessional poetry strengthens her link to Plath's legacy of introspection and raw expression, establishing her as a modern-day poet whose lyrics resonate with the complexities of human emotions and experiences.

Many critics disagree that Taylor Swift should be called a poet, due to her 'teenage female audience' or just the sheer popularity of her work. However, I whole-heartedly disagree; I believe Swift is a testament to womanhood, thriving in a patriarchal, misogynistic culture; she consistently brings people together and asserts her power as a young woman, notably through her substantial impact on the Australian economy during her world tour. 'The Eras Tour' positioned Taylor Swift as one of the most successful self-made singer-songwriter billionaires and broke records as the highest-grossing music tour in history. Further, Swift doesn't only write songs about

breakups, she wrote 'Soon You'll get Better,' a tribute to her mother battling brain cancer, and 'Ronan' about a young boy who passed away, facing stage-four neuroblastoma.

Poetry has had a musical quality for centuries. In Shakespeare's era, storytelling was most impactful through live performances and plays. Shakespeare utilised iambic pentameter to infuse his poetry with a rhythmic 'heartbeat', allowing him to connect with a broad audience. In the mid-20th century, Plath employed confessional poetry to express her views on humanity and the world around her. Today, modern artists use songwriting to reach and engage with diverse audiences, exposing people to the beauty of language and poetry.

Bob Dylan, an acclaimed American singer-songwriter, was among the first pop stars to integrate classic literature and poetry into his songwriting, marking a significant shift in artistic expression. Dylan's recognition with the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature, namely winners include T.S. Eliot and John Steinbeck, underscored the legitimacy of singer-songwriters as genuine poets, and contributed to a re-evaluation of literary boundaries. His accolade sparked ongoing discussions about the artistic value of song lyrics compared to poetry and novels. Personally, I believe that songwriting is just as valid an artistic medium as poetry.

As those crowds come home from a show of a lifetime, they have truly encountered a rollercoaster of emotion, from the happy tears at emotional songs to the dopamine high during upbeat numbers. As a self-proclaimed Swiftie, I can say that listening to her lyrics and singing along with other Swifties was

a spiritual experience, with more raw emotion than even the most beautiful poetry reading.

Therefore, it's fair to say, songwriting is a form of poetry, and pop musicians are our contemporary poets. The origins of popular poetry may trace back to Shakespeare and Plath, yet today, artists like Taylor Swift and Bob Dylan have seamlessly intertwined high literature with music, bringing people together to share emotions and ideas. And, in one-month, Swift releases her next album *The Tortured Poets' Department*. Must I say more?



*Kaja Damodaran (Year 10)*

# I've Always liked Phone Calls

By Sophia Charalambous (Year 11)

*“For me, phone calls have become my communication of choice... There’s a certain magic to these calls, too. They provide a window into the small moments that make up a day.”*

Not so long ago, I watched ‘One Day’ on Netflix. I didn’t know how gullible I was. Engrossed in what I thought was a cute romance series, I watched Emma in those last fatal moments of her life ride her bike in the pouring rain. She was on the phone to the love of her life. The one who had finally become the right person at the right time. They were talking about something entirely mundane. My heart started to race as bright headlights pierced through the gushing rain, rushing towards Emma. I started to remember flashes of their life together. The first time they met. Their first date. The time they fell apart. Then when they finally reconnected. An abrupt stop to what could’ve been a lifetime of happy memories. What I wouldn’t give to make them have a happy ending. Together, forever and always. At least they had one final phone call. A final chance to say, ‘I love you’. A final time of hearing her voice.

I’ve always liked phone calls. Especially the long ones. The ones where you can talk about everything and nothing. About everywhere and nowhere. The ones that leave me grinning from ear to ear. The ones where the sound of a person’s voice will give me butterflies. The ones where I can cry for hours, and my friends will smile and say, ‘it will get better’. You can talk to anyone on a phone call. That’s the magic of the phone.

Incoming. Outgoing. Across oceans and continents. Cities and towns. Suburbs and houses. Between a mother and a daughter. Two friends. Five friends. There are infinite possibilities. Infinite conversations. Infinite laughter.

So now you have realised that I see great merit in phone calls for all sorts of reasons - that I may be one of the few in my generation that can fully appreciate the fulfillment of a phone call. Am I old fashioned? You bet! It's just me and the people from the 1980s. Trent Dalton's short story 'Love Stories' also resonated with me. In fact, it totally inspired me — on an aesthetic level. Dalton describes a time when phones were big, chunky plastic devices drilled to a wall. I loved reading this! It certainly was a time when people truly valued the phone, "Curled cords on them that 1980s teenagers twisted and wrapped themselves in when they were dizzy with love." How wonderful, I thought! All generations value the phone, not just those lovesick teenagers calling their crushes. A child calling her mother. A grandfather hearing his newborn grandson's voice for the first time from the other side of the world. It was a time when you would ask someone to call you, and then you'd wait patiently by the phone, longing to hear their voice. There was absolutely no privacy. Only one person could talk at a time. Someone else might've picked up a call meant for you. Everyone could hear. But it was perfect.

For those wondering when I'm going to discuss texting, the time has come. I could literally talk for days about why texting will never compare to the excitement of receiving a phone call. I mean, what's so great about texting? You can't have a *real* conversation when someone is carefully crafting a text. You

can't always get an immediate reply, and you'll be left waiting for hours desperately, hopelessly wondering what they'll say. You can't hear the joy or pain in a person's voice when it's just words on a screen. It leaves people thinking, 'maybe we got lost in translation.' The voice says everything that words can't. 'The Yellow Wallpaper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilman illustrated a world in which the only method of communication was the written word. They didn't know what they were missing. Can you imagine if she'd rung a helpline? Her story would've veered far from the smooch in the wall.

Personally, I've always held strong beliefs about the significance of phone calls in fostering genuine human connection. I believe in the sound of laughter crackling across the phone, sharing parts of my soul, that staying up until midnight talking is the only way to properly communicate, in telling every little detail of the story of my life. I believe in capturing memories, showing emotion, talking often, being grateful and thanking people for picking up my call on a Monday night. I believe in staying in touch, even though I may be 6,305 kilometres away from the people I will always want to talk to. I believe there are six love languages: acts of service, quality time, receiving gifts, physical touch, words of affirmation and phone calls. I've always liked phone calls.

# The Plea of a Guinea-Pig

By Ava Finkelstein (Year 11)

*“We must build a new machinery for the world.”*

If you could live in any other time, when would you choose?

The 80’s. I always say that. It’s ideal, not just because it looked fun, but because what I really mean is any time but now.

Bored on the bus with friends? That’s okay — you don’t have to talk. It’s acceptable to play nine-second videos at full volume with mouths slightly hanging open and eyes fixated at your lap. Your friends laughing about that video of that woman who cooks food from scratch for her weird family? Yes — that’s okay, it’s an inside joke now. I guess these are just new shared interests, commonalities...right? Can I be the one to call it and say, well I’m not satisfied with that? It’s tiring, pretending to have seen that one video and laughing along and then rushing home to drown out worries of exclusion only by watching said videos. Quite the high school experience.

Now before I get too deep into, you know, humans — controlled by soul-sucking scrolling on a little rectangle wasting our lives away — hear me out. This is my *life*. Our lives. It’s all I’ve ever known, and I am one of two generations who can say that. I know no life other than one constantly accessorised by a phone in my pocket.

You could call me the guinea pig. The iPhone and I share the birth year 2008, which is something that can’t be undone, it’s forever in history. I think about that a lot. Try to conceptualise

the thought of life before not just me, but these little electrical rectangles.

So, I ask, no, I *beg*, for a taste of what we were like before our attention spans barked for shots of dopamine every time we place our phones down. Because although I can't stand how my phone provides some sick fluorescent comfort and how my hands itch for it as soon as boredom hits me, I do it every day. About 3 hours a day, my *phone* tells me. It's a weird glass box we live in. I see the edge of the sphere, with greenery poking out from behind it, but it's warm in here. And I'm told I have everything I need. Why would I want to be leave?

\* \* \*

Sorry if you notice a change in tone right about now, I just picked up my phone for no apparent reason other than it was sitting there. My fingers automatically take me straight to a certain social media app, without my even thinking. What?

I want to know life before the comparing, sharing, swearing by our online lives. Is it too much to ask eight billion people to reverse a decade or two? I guess it is, so I try to deal with matters myself.

So, I've had to find an escape from my 'escape'. And I'm lucky I've always found the creative arts beautiful. Some people express themselves through song, taking hardship, heartbreak or happiness, and a golden thread from their minds and weave it into a memorable melody. Stories are another obvious one, a significant moment a writer processes through scribbling it down for others to relate to through the lens of fiction. So, when I'm battling to stay socially relevant against the urge to throw my

phone off a cliff, I find myself in my favourite version of the creative arts, music.

Among other things, through music I've heard it's possible to go to the Lakes, and see the *red rose grow up out of ice frozen ground with no one around to tweet it*. Sounds nice, right? Oh, I've got to go, I have to. Somewhere where these hunters with cell phones, my *friends*, can't reach me.

Some people use science to understand and appreciate the world. Some people prefer not to, or place their faith in an unknown force. But others like to understand the beauty through actually living. I want to do that. I want to escape, but it really takes courage to let go of it all, to turn your back on the only world you've ever known. I admire it; I really do. So, it isn't new machinery we need, as we live in a *new* world already *built* by new machinery. I believe it's just about balance. Maybe that means looking out the bus window and instead of feeling sad at seeing heads down and thinking, *what on earth did people do at a bus stop before phones — talk to each other?! —* it means I'll see some chatting, some books even. I don't know. But I desperately want it.

If it really is our strength as humans to create, please, let's create some balance, let's reverse a bit - not reverse time like I wish — but let's reverse our actions and gain control of our lives. Let's be free together. Something we know inside; we all *can* do. So, what is stopping you?

# Desensitised

By Aimee Garcia (Year 11)

*“Via the internet, we're more connected with the suffering going on in the world... We have way too much information about how many awful things are happening at any moment.”*

Desensitised. A simple word that has saved lives: the human ability to become numb to a subject that we've been exposed to for long periods of times. Good or bad, lifesaving or the cause of death. The ability to compartmentalise, to become unfeeling is a protective mechanism. It allows us to stay calm in an otherwise emotionally high situation. A doctor, a fire fighter, a soldier, a policeman, they all need the ability to desensitise, to slowly become numb to the horror. If they couldn't, they would not be here today, continuing to do their jobs. I'd like to preface this with the fact that I am grateful for this unique ability. I am grateful for the lives it has saved. That being said, with the new age of the internet, I have to wonder if it has done more harm than good. If now, we care too little? Has the internet caused us to become too numb.

Wars happen every day. Once upon a time I would have cried at this. Once upon a time you would have mourned every loss, every life with every limb of your being. Today, when you see more news on Gaza, another article on Ukraine, the situation in Afghanistan, do you flinch? Do you cry? Or do you scroll. Numb to the news. The internet has exposed us too so much — thousands of horrors, each detail at our fingertips. Perhaps its horrifying that at such a young age I understand that war is part

of humanity. Not only its past, but our present and your future. Perhaps it's heartbreaking that my twelve-year-old sister has heard podcast after podcast on the tragedies happening in Palestine and Israel. She sits in the car, listening, not an ounce of shock on her face. When I tell you that over 31000 people have been lost in the Israel-Hamas war, are you shocked? Do you sigh? Can you comprehend how many people 31000 people is? — Do you even try anymore? After the last 182 Instagram posts do you even bother to like, to comment, to repost? The internet and media have completely desensitised us to tragedy.

The internet has numbed us to death and gore and war.

We see too much.

We know too much.

We've heard it all before.

The internet has numbed our mind to the horrors of our wars.

When a school shooting is happening every day, the bullets reloaded on a schedule, I cannot expect you to cry over every lost soul. I cannot ask you scream after every African American wrongfully thrown in jail. I cannot ask you to mourn every Indigenous Australian life that has been lost in your backyard. I want to. I want to kick and scream; I want you to join me! But I cannot ask you to do that. We cannot go about trying to fix the past when a new body is found every minute. We cannot let ourselves be consumed when there is so much to fix. You cannot feel every loss so deeply, it inhibits your ability to live. It destroys your life. But most of all it destroys your ability to get up and do something. Fix something. Work on something. Make the situation better. I will never ask you to go against the very thing protecting you. But I can ask you to stop shaking your fists at the

sky, I can ask you to unclench your hands and use them to help others. To do the little things every once in a while. I do not ask you to let the horrors take over your mind, but do not let them fade. Do not let them happen in the shadows.

Desensitised. The human ability to become numb to a subject that we've been exposed to for long periods of times. In our modern age, smack bang in the centre of a media driven world. Do we know too much? Or do we accept too much? The internet has made us numb, uncaring. I ask that you look at it a different way. Perhaps it has given us the ability to change something. Not overtaken by grief and sorrow. Perhaps we are no longer outraged and shocked. Perhaps the news articles do not elicit the same immense emotional reaction they once did. But I beg of you, please do not let that numb your opinions. Do not let it soften the voices or slow the actions. Do not let the horrors happen in the shadows, while we walk by, desensitised.



*Lily Baldwin (Year 11)*



*Ines Burrows (Year 7)*

# Dalton Essay

By Marissa Glezos (Year 11)

*“We must build a new machinery for the world.”*

It has often been said that the brain is like a map: a complex circuitry of intersecting pathways, roads and highways. These neural pathways transmit millions of ideas and sensory inputs along intricate routes every waking and every sleeping hour.

Until recently, it was widely believed that once this ‘neural map’ of wires was fully formed, these forged pathways in the brain were set for life, melded into place: a complex yet ultimately static structure. More recently, however, neurological research has debunked this myth, with the welcome news that our brains are indeed dynamic machines with a wonderfully plastic potential.

Plastic, you ask? Derived from πλαστικός (*plastikos*) in the original Greek, plasticity refers to the capacity to be shaped or moulded. Hopeful news in a world marred by pessimism and impending doom, if the headlines are anything to go by.

If we follow the metaphor a little further, though, what good is a map, however intricate, without well-built, powerful and adaptive vehicles to navigate it, to forge routes to new areas, and to repair broken tracks when needed? Brains are only as plastic as we teach them to be.

In the halls of education, you will hear a polyphony of voices calling for life rafts, to rescue young minds from the shipwreck of lost literacies, to revive lifeless classrooms, to restore stunted critical thinking. We hear the familiar lament that our children

sit comatose in public spaces, addled by the small screens which suck them into a tiny vortex, where they lurch between self-portraits and infinite doom scrolling.

Plastikos. There is hope!

The developing neural pathways of young minds, the adults of tomorrow, can be lubricated back into vitality, rewired for curiosity and intellectual joy, but the mechanics must be solid, robust and four good tyres are needed for the journey: *responsibility, independence, collaboration and reflection.*

Grand visions, abstract nouns, lofty concepts, you say? Often. However, in one school, in a leafy suburb by Sydney Harbour, work is in progress; the hood has been lifted and the mechanic is in.

It is true to say that the Dalton Plan receives a mixed reception among its disciples, the students at Ascham School, as it brings with it a steady stream of self-driven tasks, which punctuate every week of every school term of every year. Yet, it is this pulse of independent learning which circulates through those neural pathways, fuelling students with ‘learned power’ in place of learned helplessness.

The student at Ascham School is one who must learn to swim, so they do not sink in the waves of intellectual passivity.

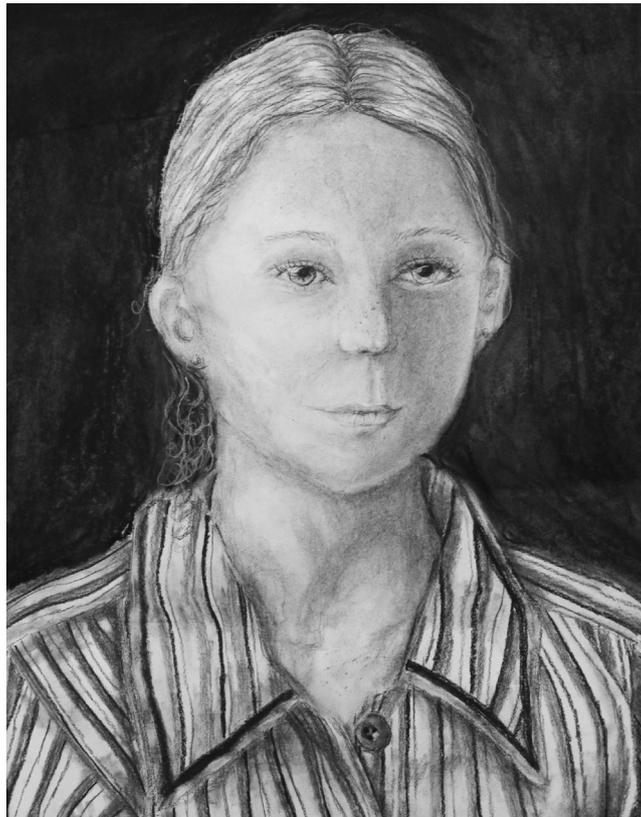
The four pillars of the Dalton Plan need to be aligned, just like a good set of tyres, to work together in synchronicity, for a student to develop deep and flexible habits of mind, to increase the plasticity of agile, deep-thinking intellects.

Balance is key. Therein lies the magic. It was Cicero who argued that virtue lay in the ‘median way’, not in the extremes of

excess or lack. So too in the Ascham student's training to achieve that careful equilibrium in their intellectual habits.

To illustrate Cicero's point: excessive *responsibility* breeds neurosis, while its lack breeds indolence. So too with *independence*: its excess will lead to a stubborn-minded insularity, while a lack of independence begets neediness. So too with *collaboration* and *reflection* — they are the balancing points between detrimental extremes.

The outcomes speak for themselves. Look at our nation's intellectuals, leaders of industry, community change agents. Dalton disciples, many of them. As the mantra goes, 'If you want to get a job done, ask an Ascham student to do it'.



*Daisy Horsfield (Year 8)*



*Lucy Yabsley (Year 11)*

# The Time I was a Slave to my Phone

By Phoebe Hill (Year 11)

*“For me, phone calls have become my communication of choice... There’s a certain magic to these calls too. They provide a window into the small moments that make up a day.”*

Are phones really a good way of digitally connecting and communicating with people? During lockdown, which was four years ago now, I used my phone as a way to connect with my friends and teachers, whether it was through calling, emailing, or texting. I profusely did this, for 107 days, every single day. In the moment I didn’t think anything of it. Did this affect my life when we came out of lockdown? Yes. But at the time did I know? Definitely not.

I remember every free period and lunchtime I would get my lunch and hop on a house party call — the new skype — with all my friends. We would update each other on daily news, which to remind you wasn’t much as we were in lockdown and limited to travelling within a 5km bubble. We would tell each other jokes, play games, sing songs, help one another with homework and so on. There was a certain magic to these calls. On top of this I would do my schoolwork whenever and wherever I pleased. My bed would look at me as if it knew what a pleasant influence it had. I would wake up late and join online classes and meetings late, not having a worry in the world. The upside to this was having my classes recorded. At the time I thought I could miss as

many classes as I wanted, and it wouldn't matter because it's always there if I needed it. Life couldn't get any better.

Once we came out of lockdown, everything changed. Something about going back to how it used to be felt different — I could feel it. After a big day of school, my mindless muscle memory would reach for my phone. It's as if my phone would call my name. I became a slave to scrolling. My concentration went downhill, my grades went downhill, my socialisation skills went downhill, my motivation went downhill — basically my quality of life went downhill. All because I became a slave to my phone. I was so distracted by my phone that I had lost my real connections with my friends and family. Yet, I came to the realisation this wasn't just happening to me. Phones became the new addiction of the decade. I remember my mum would tell me about all these newspaper articles stressing the control phones had over teenagers. One of these articles being from the 'National Library of Medicine' where it featured teenagers spending 8.35 hours per day on their phones during the pandemic, compared to 6.02 hours prior to the pandemic. At the time I thought this was definitely exaggerated. "Where would they even get these statistics from?" The article continued where the number of hours spent using the internet increased during the pandemic as 27% of teenagers spent 20+ hours per week online, compared to 19% of teenagers spent 20+ hours per week online in 2018. All this time I was blinded by a blanket, yet it was right in front of my eyes. Phones were the problem and what was one to do? Once I noticed this, I put an end to the slavery. I spoke to my friends about their thoughts on phones and their life lately. Some of my friends decided to go a couple weeks without

their phone. I didn't think they would last more than two days, but I was delightfully wrong about this.

Once they ditched the doom-scroll, you could see the life revive and return in their faces. They noticed they had much more time on their hands. Their vicious anxiety quickly left, grades improved, motivation was gained, and they had much more energy. Many of my friends as well as myself decided to ditch the doom scroll. One day, out of the blue, my eyes finally fully open, and I found myself sitting in my bedroom, surrounded by a whole new mindset that made me feel joyful and in a state of constant motion. I couldn't stop loving life.

Don't get me wrong, I think phones can be a great way to digitally connect and communicate with people, especially in times of isolation, which in my experience and many others was COVID lockdown. Phones these days have countless ways of connecting and communicating including social media and phone calls. However, your phone can take hold of your life. Don't become a slave to your phone. Ironically, it was the research and statistics shared through online newspapers which opened my eyes to see the side-effects of phone addictions. It was only until then that my friends and I noticed this impact on our lives and took a leap of faith in making the decision to ditch the doom scrolling to change our lives.



*Phoebe Hill (Year 11)*

# Homage to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

By Ruby Jowell (Year 11)

As the pale ghost of dawn approaches, I lie awake, pondering what is ahead of me as my gaze settles thoughtfully on the uniform draped across a carved wooden chair, laid out in readiness for the coming day. The stark white of the apron and banded cap shine through the inky darkness blanketing the room, the bulbous billow of the leg-o-mutton sleeves as they taper into the body of the dress just visible, as is the skirt that sweeps the floor. It perplexes me how such great swathes of fabric settle over places no patient will touch, and as I ponder the complexities of the day ahead, I reluctantly rise and dress, the shroud of the heavy linen and cotton uniform providing greater confusion than comfort.

“Dear, I must not be left waiting! I expect to see you in a timely fashion.” My husband—the Doctor—pays me scant attention and only the briefest of considerations, hence my hesitation and bewilderment at the abrupt order to be ready to assist him with this day’s patients following the hasty departure of his full-time assistant to the Congo. That place and those who journey there hold some deep and unholy fascination for him. I know nothing of this sweltering place cloaked in mystery within the heart of the African continent and it is unfathomable to me how uncomfortable conditions there must undoubtedly be. Despite the curt forewarning that today’s patients are attending for the purposes of their pre-dispatch medical evaluations, I

hesitate to think what this entails — surely there is nothing that can medically be ascertained as to how such a perilous and unknown journey will impact one’s psyche? The Doctor, when pressed, has relayed that those who make the journey rarely return ‘intact’ — what this means ... is something I have yet to comprehend. And what is known of those who inhabit this place?

The air within the office is stifling, heavy, the acrid odours of ammonia and iodine uneasy acquaintances with the scent of brittle paper and stale tobacco smoke. I have been tasked with the sterilisation and arrangement of the instruments before use and I depart hastily after ushering patients into the surgery. I have not borne witness to these consultations, not even to assist in the passing of instruments, but one piece in particular baffles me as my gaze falls upon it. Almost menacing in its simplicity, two wooden rulers protrude from a curved base, secured with copper, or perhaps brass. The use of this curious instrument knocks alarmingly at the back of my mind, but it is not my place to seek such answers, I am here for little more than to assist my husband and his examinations of those who will depart on this journey, I do not dare to question. He is with a gentleman now, one who possesses a nondescript appearance and certainly not the type of adventurer one would expect to be on the brink of venturing into the depths of a continent so cloaked in mystery.

“Fetch me his papers, won’t you!” A stern command is fired from the office.

“Of course,” I rapidly respond, before questioning “... and ... which ones would those be?”

Papers flow like a swollen river across the weathered desk, some neatly filed, others loosely banded, various styles of

handwriting in shades of blue and black, the colours smudging together in places like a slowly healing bruise.

“The file on the shelf!” He explodes, so suddenly and with such force I am jolted from my thoughts. In my frantic search for the file, my eyes slide across a meticulously labelled diagram of that alarming tool — “Cranimeter” it reads. Unwillingly I glance to the text below. Faded ink, as if the words themselves were trying to shrink from their very meaning. My gaze falls upon four drawings — figures ranging from man to ape, the accompanying numbers confusingly jumbled as the figures strayed further from human form. I enter the study with the gentleman’s file, leaving an almost imperceptible crack in the door as I depart. My stomach churns as I bend to the narrow opening, the muffled consultation only faintly audible as though the words themselves belong to a distant place. The tool creaks, and for the first time I glimpse its use as it sits cradled over the man’s head as measurements are recorded. I hastily emerge from my crouched position by the door as the man stands, opening the door and averting my gaze from his eyes.

“Do you... do you, by any chance, know anything of the changes the doctor might refer to, the ones that occur on the... inside?” the patient inquires of me in voice so quiet, yet resigned, that I am unable to do more than weakly shake my head.

“I know nothing of this, or about the mission at all, in fact.” My own voice sounds strangled and foreign to me as I choke out this brief response.

“Well. Very well — have a good day then.” He takes his leave, my head swimming with my own tumultuous thoughts. What changes is he referring to? Could they be linked to that

threatening tool? The mysterious diagrams? The inexplicably morbid fascination with the size of one's head? Sidling back to the desk, through the crack in the door I observe the doctor busily engrossed in charts and notes. Hands trembling, I shuffle nervously through the files and folders on the desk, hoping, desperate to discover something to make sense of the fate of those who have come here today to be cleared to enter this dark place — and how that would entwine with the fate of those whose home this place is . A sealed envelope falls to the floor; it bears no label or description of its contents. I shake as I tear open the seal. Photographs slip noiselessly onto the desk; my mind reels, wrestling with the sheer enormity of what is displayed in front of me. A sea of bodies, familiar yet altered, strange. Why so strange? It takes a moment to comprehend that each person is without a hand, some both, their bodies discarded like waste in a mass burial site by a river, their blood seeped into the earth below and the snaking river in which they lay half submerged. Other images assault my senses — a clinical line of skulls laid out by the same river; each one accompanied by recorded measurements. Notes scribbled in the hand of my husband swim before my eyes “... racial superiority ...” “... head sizes correlating to...” “... further research to be conducted”.

Unable to breathe, strangled by these realisations, I sag heavily into my chair. My dress splays across the floor, and I hang my head, weighed down by the anchor of my unanswered questions. I feel lost at sea, a ship with its hull teetering just above the water's edge as it sinks below the waves, limply battling the currents in the form of questions that only lead to more ghastly conclusions as they leach into my keel. As the realisation of what

this place is washes over me, I let the waves engulf me. Better I lie at the bottom of the ocean with my awakened and darkened thoughts than remain on dry land, where once I dared not think of this place at all.



*Elouise Morgan (Year 11)*

# Shaping Female Identity

By Caitlyn Lee (Year 9)

Female identity has been reshaped by film characters such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Barbie. While both aim to empower women, the stereotypes around female identity have evolved, leading to differences in their representations.

John Weldon's Buffy Summers, a 1990s character, reveals that all women have the capability to be powerful and still feminine.

Weldon's choice for a female protagonist with physical powers that allowed her to slay vampires, symbolises female strength, toughness, and independence, rejecting the stereotype of the 'damsel in distress.'

Weldon's portrayal of Buffy, as an ordinary American girl who was blond, fashion-conscious and concerned with cheerleading and dating paired with her ability to stand up for herself and physically fight enemies, challenges assumptions around women's abilities and worth based on their appearance or interests.

Throughout the series, Weldon's metaphor of misogynistic enemies including the controlling Watchers' Council and the sadistic Caleb whom Buffy defeats, symbolise the confrontation of the patriarchy by females and emphasises the power of speaking out against gender confinements.

Weldon's Buffy reveals women's capacity to be whoever they wish and have opinions or qualities that don't match a singular stereotype.

Handler's Barbie, too, started with the notion that 'because Barbie can be anything, women can be anything.' However, the progression of feminism from 1990s to 2023 resulted in a new stereotype — that women must be *extra*-ordinary. Yes, they're capable of anything, but unless they're everything, who cares? Gerwig's and Robbie's Barbie promotes flawed individuality as a pillar of female identity as opposed to this conformity and flawlessness.

Gerwig's costuming and makeup choices evolves from a perfect 'doll' to a real woman with cellulite and flat feet. The outfits and hair shift from the 'doll-like' beauty standard to casual attire and dulled wigs. Gerwig symbolises the message that to have the human depth of feeling, striving for perfection must stop in favour of embracing 'flaws', through Barbie's emotive journey to become human.

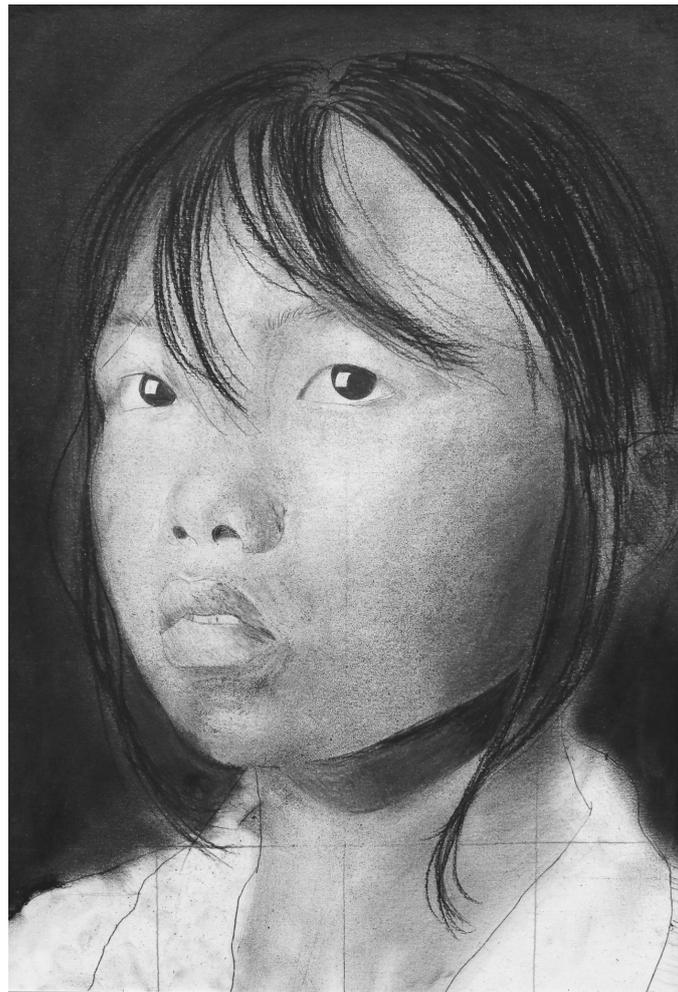
Gerwig's metaphor of the Mattel Box represents societal stereotypes about female identity. Gerwig encourages women to discover who they are outside popular biases, through Barbie's questioning of if she wants to 'get in the box!'. Gerwig expands this through Barbie's allegorical journey of learning to 'feel' which leaves her questioning her purpose in her idealistic life and finding meaning in being her own person, paralleling and championing the often-scorned self-discovery many women undertake.

Gerwig emphasises the importance of every woman, despite imperfections, and encourages them to be themselves without the condition of meeting accepted standards through Barbie.

Both Weldon and Gerwig's characters have key messages about women's abilities outside of societal ideals. However,

while Wheldon's Buffy was created to emphasise that women could be any and many things; Gerwig's Barbie highlights the unrealistic nature of these standards and that a woman's worth and identity doesn't depend on the ideals she meets.

Overall, Gerwig's portrayal of Barbie's journey of questioning and choice around her identity, empowers women to examine their own identities more effectively than Buffy who already exists outside these social confines.



*Drishti Serchan (Year 8)*

# Barbie

By Anna Myers (Year 9)

Greta Gerwig's satirical film, *Barbie* (2023), uses techniques of postmodern narrative and 21<sup>st</sup> century digital filmmaking to explore the evolution of Mattel's iconic Barbie, and by extension the evolution of social constructs of femininity. Gerwig reconstructs and deconstructs former constructions surrounding Barbie, questioning her relevance and influence over the present context. Through reconstructing a Utopian world (Barbieland), personification of society's views on Barbie and her impacts on female identity (Sascha and her mother, Gloria), and through challenging our patriarchal society's restraints surrounding femininity, Gerwig aims to explore and influence the meaning of femininity in our Real World, for the better.

Gerwig constructs a nostalgic and satirical inversion of the Real World in the form of Barbieland, a matriarchal Utopia, that pays tribute to Barbie's brand of pink and plastic through the scenery, monuments and characters. She introduces us to Barbieland early on in the film, allowing us to escape into the magic of the unachievable Utopia, where everything is "perfectly perfect". Throughout Gerwig's exploration of the world in which women have power, we are constantly reminded of its plasticity and fabrication through paradox; "this is the best day ever and so is yesterday and so is tomorrow", and through the clear satirical inversion of negative social stereotypes surrounding women, such as the view that women are too emotional to hold positions of power;

“I have no problem holding feelings and logic at the same time!”. Greta Gerwig also incorporates this flipside of the real world into the setting, through recreating real-world monuments such as the White House, the Supreme Court, Mt Rushmore, and making them pink. These monuments of power and male influence are inverted to represent the matriarchy, for example, the faces of previous US presidents that adorn the side of Mt Rushmore are replaced with different faces of Barbie. Gerwig’s inversion of social stereotypes and monuments in the form of pink feminism juxtaposes the real world with all its problems, highlighting our world’s patriarchal imperfections.

The different ideas on the meaning of femininity, a concept seemingly represented by Stereotypical Barbie, are expressed through Gerwig’s characters individual dialogues and perspectives, questioning the meaning of Barbie as a true symbol of femininity. The perspectives and views in the movie are summarised in the description and marketing: “If you love Barbie. If you hate Barbie. This movie is for you.”, where Gerwig personifies two opposing social reactions to the character of Barbie, in the form of Gloria and her daughter Sascha. Through montage of Gloria’s memories, and drawings that her character created of Barbie, we as readers can see the sentimental value that Barbie as a doll has imprinted onto her, as the film demonstrates, through short snippets of video, the constant presence of Barbie in the woman’s life, from her playing Barbies with her daughter to her job, at Mattel.

Gerwig links Barbie to a source of hope, of guidance in the life of the woman, who we later learn has a daughter that

“hates her”. Gerwig constructs the accusatory daughter of the sentimental mother as someone cynical of Barbie’s role in society, claiming that Barbie “set the feminist movement back thirty years”, and has been “making women feel bad about themselves”. These points highlight the danger of fabrication, of giving people false hope in the form of a “perfectly perfect” doll, through the daughter’s negative perspective on the unachievable comparison that Barbie offered to her generation. Through personalising the opposing views of two related women, Gerwig questions the relevance of Barbie, implying that it depends on our perspective on femininity. If we see femininity as hope, as something to fuel us and power us, we can remain relatively happy and motivated to work hard for what we believe in, however if we see femininity as something unachievable, and bend to the constraints that patriarchal society uses to oppress women, then we feel unhappy in ourselves, and resent femininity. Overall, Gerwig promotes the view that by searching for power in femininity, we succeed more in life than we do if we believe femininity to be the same as the negative feminine stereotypes constructed by society.

Gerwig’s ‘Kendom’ ironically reconstructs Barbieland as a patriarchal society inspired by our own world, that counteracts the matriarchy of Barbieland with damaging female stereotypes found in our own society. Gerwig evaluates flaws in the Real World with the values of Kendom, a hyperbolic mimic of our own world’s worst values and constraints. We can see the parallelism between Kendom and our own world, in the plentiful stereotypes of toxic masculinity, complete with

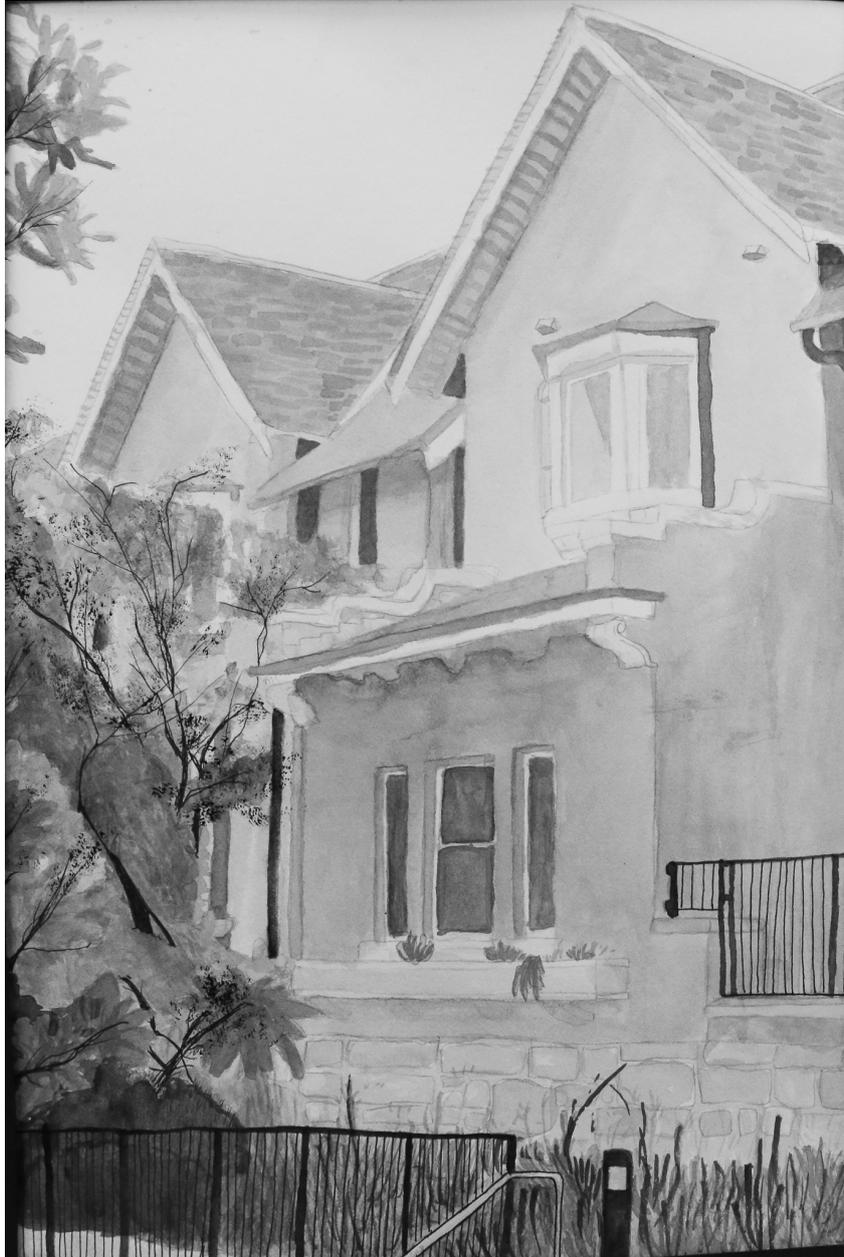
‘mansplaining’ and dialogue centred on cars, films, money, sport and oddly, horses. Ironically, Gerwig positions the Kens to be seen as more ditzy and single-minded than the Barbies, with her construction of Ken’s character as “only having a good day if Barbie looks at him”. These deliberate similarities between worlds, like Barbieland, point out and mock the problems with the real world, and of the negative meaning of patriarchy’s idea of femininity: to be soft-spoken, understated, “thin, but not too thin” — “to stay pretty for men, but not so pretty that you tempt them too much”.

Gerwig makes a statement on the two opposing ideas of femininity as a paradox, a cause of “cognitive dissonance”, seen through Gloria’s statement; “it is literally impossible to be a woman”. Through this statement, Gerwig reinforces the impossibility of women adhering to both feminist expectations while bowing to society’s confining gender norms. What Gerwig concludes, is that patriarchy in our society is the problem. She demonstrates this once again through the concept of ‘brainwashing’, in Kendom, previously Barbieland. Gerwig states the solution to the patriarchy infesting Barbieland through Barbie’s revelation; “highlighting the cognitive dissonance required to be a woman, robbing it (patriarchy) of its power.” The Barbies who were affected by patriarchy are constantly described as “brainwashed”, as people who need to be “de-programmed”. This terminology highlights Gerwig’s view, labelling our society as “brainwashed” into following patriarchal ideals, suggesting that we are socially conditioned to follow feminine ideals created by men. An example of such a feminine ideal is having

to “answer for men’s bad behaviour”. Through the representation of patriarchy’s influence as mass brainwashing, and of our society’s worst factors as Kendom, Gerwig questions the distortion of patriarchy on our view on femininity’s meaning, through exploring damaging female gender norms employed by our society.

The influential postmodern movie ‘Barbie’, directed by Greta Gerwig is a meditation on the meaning of femininity, an idea explored and questioned through the journey of the character, Barbie, through Barbieland, the Real World, and Kendom. On this journey, we as viewers are exposed to many different of representations and ideas of femininity and comically exaggerated gender norms, from the maid-costume-wearing brainwashed Barbie to Gloria, a hardworking mother. These ideals from their respective worlds help to shape, challenge and question the meaning of femininity.

Femininity’s final meaning is summarised towards the end of the movie by Gerwig, in the form of Barbie’s choice to become human; what it means to be a human woman. Gerwig plays series of videos, close ups and a montage of clips of real women, young and old, all representing different core values of femininity: memory, heart, emotion and soul. Through construction of worlds, symbolism and satire, and an examination of society, Gerwig presents her movie, *Barbie*, as an exploration and answer to the question of the meaning of femininity.



*Lydia Xiao (Year 9)*

# **Flesh and Bone: An Imaginative Response to Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth"**

By Isabella Ninkovic (Year 10)

I watch numbly as another man becomes a murderer. I watch the sanguine blood begin to darken the uniform of the German standing across the dark, haunting valley. I watch as his eyes widen, shock and pain beautifully painting his European features. And I watch the young murderer's expression almost perfectly mirror his victim's, alarm and regret crumpling his grimy face. His knees weaken, and he plummets to the pure white snow, now tainted with blood. I watch solemnly as he wheezes, clutching the gaping hole in his collarbone, blood seeping from between his fingers, a desperate attempt to delay the inevitable. His eyes flicker to mine, gleaming with a desperate urgency; a silent scream for help. I exhale, a puff of frigid air escaping my mouth as the familiar scene drags on with his muttered prayers lost to the howling, uncaring wind.

He has chestnut-coloured hair, I note, and I briefly ponder whether his mother used to tuck it behind his ears when he fell ill as a child, much as mine did. I wonder whether his father begged him to stay, to retain that spark of joy in his eyes, to shield him from the horrors of War. I look into his eyes, and I see another version of myself. I see a scared, lonely boy. A boy with a mother, a father, maybe even a sister.

I look into his eyes, and I see Terror, choking him, gripping his heart. I wonder if he knows he is about to die, or if he holds

onto the naïve hope that we humans possess, that he could still survive. I am not cruel, his murderer wants to whisper, but the words remain lodged in his throat. It was you or me, he tries to reason, but as I sorrowfully watch the German soldier's, the boy's, eyes slip shut, lying discarded, splayed out in the snow, those words remain hollow.

I wonder if he, like us, was told it was his duty, his obligation to defend his glorious country, if his mind was poisoned by the pamphlets promising glory and adventure.

Who will mourn all these boys? Who will honour them?

Here we will forever lay, discarded in the snow, a demented sanguine halo of blood framing us.

For the lucky few, a pall will be lain upon his coffin, much like his fallen comrades before him, and a flag will drape gleaming and mocking over his body. Is it Soviet, German, American, English, Australian? It does not matter, we all bleed red, whichever flag is proudly sewn upon their uniform makes no difference to merciless artillery.

Their ends will be much the same, a crisp ironed flag draped limply over their coffin and the soulless notes of our anthem will darken the air. In the end, we are all simply flesh and bone.



*Phoebe Hill (Year 11)*

# **Trials by Scrolling**

**By Emily Pinn (Year 11)**

*‘Via the internet, were more connected with the suffering going on in the world. We have way too much information about how many awful things are happening at any moment.’*

Most of the world uses their phone to access social media on a daily basis. I know I would rather not check my screen time and pretend I don't use Instagram for more than a couple hours a day. If you look around any public setting, you'll notice the way that people seem to be endlessly scrolling on their phones. On the bus, on the train, at a cafe or restaurant, even in the company of other people. At this rate, I wouldn't be at all surprised if I saw someone scrolling through their social media feed at a funeral!

One of the most alarming cases which demonstrates the insidious way that social media distorts people's connection with reality is the public reaction to the Johnny Depp and Amber Heard defamation trial.

In April to June of 2022, Johnny Depp sued his former wife and fellow actor Amber Heard for defamation over an op-ed piece she wrote for the Washington Post in 2018. In the article, she doesn't mention her former husband by name but referred to herself as, "a public figure representing domestic abuse". Depp and his legal team argued that he was implicated in this article and that his career suffered because of it. Three months after the op-ed was published, Depp filed a defamation lawsuit against Heard seeking \$50 million. Two years later, in January

2021, Heard took legal action to claim defamation herself which resulted in the highly publicised Virginia trial.

Some might say it's coincidence that around twelve witch trials were held in the state of Virginia in the 17th century. Some might. I might not.

The trial became more than just a defamation trial. Instead, it descended into a trial about truth in a digital age up for public consumption. The most talkative voices on the internet immediately sided with Depp. I'd like to think that this isn't because most of the Western population liked *Pirates of the Caribbean*, but looking at the state of the world, I'm not so sure.

Influential posts on Tik Tok backed up Depp with the use of hashtags like 'Justice for Johnny Depp' which racked up nearly 3 billion views. On the internet, users created sides, Team Depp or Team Heard. Much like they did for *Twilight* — Team Edward and Team Jacob. But that was a movie. About vampires, and this was a real trial about abuse and relationship.

For the majority of internet users commenting on the case, the televised trial provided a source of comedy for content creation. Social media users referred to Heard as a 'liar' or a 'gold-digger'. Some even used a soundbite which said, "He could have killed you; he had every right," laid over footage of Heard from the trial. Some users dressed up in clothing similar to Heard's and used exaggerated facial expressions over audio of her testimony regarding allegation of physical and sexual assault. These videos were published in order to mock Heard and cast doubt over her account. Sorry, I clearly didn't realise that any person with a Tik Tok account was qualified to comment on legal proceedings. Especially ones that have also

published videos of them recreating ‘Gigi Hadid’s Vodka Pasta Recipe’.

Heard’s reflection on Depp’s biased win discussed her anguish over the results, “I’m heartbroken that the mountain of evidence still was not enough to stand up to the disproportionate power, influence, and sway of my ex-husband,” and “I’m even more disappointed ... for other women... It sets back the clock to a time when a woman who spoke up could be publicly shamed and humiliated.” I hate to labour a point, but the parallels with the Salam Witch Trials are glaringly obvious.

These trends and mockeries of abuse should not be made in click-bait comedy clips. They create a world where people hide behind social media and use it to justify a disconnection from our shared humanity. Instead of using social media to connect and come together, it was used to represent the final word of the truth in a matter of legal rights. If this is how social media should be used, you should be required to show proof of your law degree to sign up. Social media breeds for a disconnect and distance between humanity. For God’s sake, how can something so globally accepted have the power to make someone’s day but break another’s? The internet creates a lack of empathy through desensitisation.



*Arial Barraket (Year 11)*

# The hypnotising effects of social media

By Mia Rogers (Year 11)

*“The finding that 16 to 29-year-old men are more likely than baby boomers to believe that “feminism has done more harm than good” may seem to blame the younger generation for stalling progress — but they didn’t come to those ideas independently.”*

In September 2020 YouTube launched a new feature called YouTube shorts which was basically TikTok with a destructive personal algorithm.

The whole social media thing was, and still is, seen by my Dad as poison for the mind and a disaster waiting to happen for my academics. This limited my ability to follow the current trends, reliant on just Pinterest. The introduction of YouTube shorts allowed me to experience the same short-form content as my friends.

Scrolling through shorts and watching people pass the time in lockdown helped me get through the dreaded home-isolation phase as well. However, as the app grew so did the number of creeps and weirdos that contaminated my screen.

I personally like to refer to myself as strong-minded and wise, but my Gran prefers the term stubborn. As creeps began to show up more and more on my small, iPhone 6 screen, I remained strong. Like, how was I going to believe that females belonged in the kitchen and men should run the world? I mean that’s ludicrous!

I held my ground, knowing that although these influencers had mass followings, what they were saying was absolute rubbish. But, when the name Andrew Tate was brought up at one of my family gatherings, and my 30-year-old cousin commented, “well like he’s literally so rich and really jacked, which makes him, like, pretty cool”, my mind began to shift. Being confronted by my own family-member supporting this different perspective, that represented the depletion of feminism, convinced me for a period into thinking that what Andrew Tate preached was fact. I couldn’t ever possibly be as rich as my male friends, so I had decided to submit to a life in the kitchen!

Andrew Tate is a 37-year-old, 6ft tall content creator, that after realising his boxing career was a flop, switched to preaching male dominance and female subordination on the internet. Gaining a multimillion person following on every platform, Tate continues to see himself as a “force for good”, hypnotising young girls and boys into thinking they are weak and will never be good enough.

As a hypnotised child I was able to access my new idol’s opinions on any and every platform. I was even able to listen to one of his most empowering podcasts, “Strong men”, where he discussed first-world problems such as ‘the best physical characteristics for women’ to achieve similar beauty standards as his handsome self.

From podcasts to long and short form videos, everything was polluted with the belief that females should remain inferior to men and become fully reliant on their male partners.

Now this issue didn’t just affect me. A study conducted by Lenhart et al. (2018) showed the increasing accessibility

adolescents have to technology with, “94% of adolescents access the Internet using a mobile device and 71% of those use more than one social-media website”.

With this increased connectivity, conversations and political movements have transferred to the online sphere, having the ability to reach people from around the world. You would hope that with such increased access to a variety of opinions and experiences, there would be further light shone on the need for gender equality around the world. You would think seeing and hearing stories about domestic violence and sexual harassment would motivate young people to form stronger beliefs on inequality. You would find however the personalised algorithms on social media steer away many young people from these confrontational topics and instead contaminate their feed with misogyny and female degradation.

The hope you and I both had for social media and its ability to show a variety of opinions has evaporated into thin air and we have been left with so many youths immersing themselves in anti-feminist and misogynistic content.

When I downloaded YouTube shorts in September 2020, I was clueless to the horrible negative impacts it would have on my mental health. As I became more and more submerged it became increasingly difficult to come up for air and evaluate whether or not the information I was receiving was even close to rational. Thankfully, sooner rather than later, I had to face reality and realise my new beliefs were built on a foundation of lies and irrational concepts, built by extremists such as Andrew Tate. Could Dad have been right after all?

Luckily, I escaped the black hole of social media that my Dad worked so hard to pull me out of. If only I had listened to him in the first place when he preached that “social media is an addictive, life-sucking horror story”. Although he was and still is an exaggerator at heart, the issue still stands: how can we help these children escape from this mind-bending content?



*Bella Blair (Year 11)*

# Medusa, the Original Victim

By Julia Savage (Year 11)

The story of ‘Perseus and the Gorgon’ in Greek mythology is one I frequently returned to as a child. The cursed ‘gorgon’ goes unnamed in the title, but her name was Medusa. When she was slain by Perseus, the winged horse Pegasus sprang from her defiled, beheaded corpse, the birth of something beautiful to distract us from the harrowing and unjust fate of one of literary history’s most demonised women. The story of Medusa is a tragedy. According to Greek mythology, a beautiful young woman serving Athena as a virgin priestess caught the eye of Poseidon, the powerful god of the sea. As with most stories, fictional or not, there are numerous versions. But the most well-known and perhaps most significant one reads that Medusa was brutally raped by him in the temple of Athena. This disgrace — as Athena viewed it — saw Medusa cursed. The ugliness of Poseidon’s own crimes something that would disfigure her for the rest of her life. She was scorned for her ‘enticement’ of the God and thus transformed into a grotesque creature, never to see the face of another man again, ‘lest he turn to stone.’

Throughout the ages, Medusa’s story has become a cautionary tale, warning women to control themselves. Hide your beauty. Do not tempt men. How could she have felled the morals of such a powerful being as the God of the Sea? What a terrible young woman. The villainization of women in ancient texts does not come as a surprise. It feels that every second story tells of a woman slowing down a man, or wreaking havoc in her escapades as is evident in characters like Calypso or Helen of

Troy. 'Gosh! Women are just awful!' say the men who wrote them this way.

A 2018 retelling of such a character exists in Madeleine Miller's 'Circe'. The novel rewrites the Odyssey through the perspective of the young witch Circe, exploring a male-dominated world and striving to find her place in it. Miller's analysis of patriarchy and misogyny as core values in Greek Myths demystified them for me, quite significantly. Do they still hold the magic they did in my childhood? I don't feel I have an answer to this question, because it disgusts me to realise how men like Homer have immortalised archetypes for women as treacherous and spiteful. Some good has come from this, however, in the form of women reclaiming that which used to make them weak as a symbol of power.

The symbolism of the Medusa tattoo today has become part of women's strength. Tattoo artist Ruby Rose, in a recent article talked about the symbolism of the Medusa tattoo as "a figure of protection to women who have experienced sexual assault or assault on some level, particularly by men." The effects of rape and its respective culture have seen women punished, like Medusa. Sentenced to trauma, and blame, and humiliation, and self-doubt. If only Medusa wasn't so beautiful, if only she wasn't drunk. If only she hadn't tempted him, if only she had known better. 'She' — who is she? She is the girl that lives in all of us, in me. Not wanting to acknowledge that she is a young woman now. Wanting to stay forever in her room, reading tales of winged horses and gods that make her eyes grow wide. She is all women who could not control the

temptations of men, the lust of the male gaze and have had to pay the price for it.

When I was eleven, I went as Medusa for Book-Week. While I may not have known it at the time, there was something extremely powerful about a young girl being able to become such a woman and parade around confidently. About reclaiming Medusa's narrative without fear. Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* served, like Medusa, as a warning for women, to avoid following whims and acting in an 'unladylike manner' — 'Taming'? 'Unladylike'? Who are you to assess whether or not what I do makes me a woman? Who are you, to feel you must 'tame' my tempers, my emotions, my thoughts, my opinions — my life?

I will not. Because life is to be lived and our time is short. What a sad existence it must be for such men to spend their time telling me how to correctly use mine. Perhaps, in their obsession for control, they have condemned themselves to cursed lives, where they must spend each waking moment so concerned as to whether or not others are abiding by their rules. Why? Because their fear of women like Medusa made it necessary to blame the victim. Reinterpreting her time and time again was easier. A femme fatale, pure evil, a witch. Medusa has become the symbol for what many men fear the most — a powerful woman.



*Olivia Mangelsdorf (Year 11)*

# Conflicts & Media

By Taylor Ungerboeck (Year 11)

I always pass by the bus stop down the road near old lady Carol's home on my way to work. The people there are always on their devices with their headphones on, blaring music into their ears. They never talk to one another (despite there being many people), and even though they talk on social media and what not- they're really all alone. It's quite unusual how people act in these modern days with their iPhones and the media shared through a screen.

Education on politics and other worldly events are told through sites and apps. They all used to be filtered by some rich white fellas with too much power. So much power can do a lot to a man — swallowing their consciousness whole and changing them. I imagine the opinions in the media are influenced by these rich white men and placed a skewed view on what is real and what is to be believed. Nowadays, young men can say whatever on the internet. Trends come and go. Things turn into trends and die quickly after a month or so, be it a successful trend. Stuff that appeals to the younger audience. Whatever that maintains the viewer's attention. Although, some things in media do not fit in the idea of trends.

War, for example, fades in and out of the media as any other trend does. Despite this, wars still happen in the world, and the issues are never resolved. They're still there. Impacting the peaceful lives that keep to themselves.

I read an article recently about the Black Lives Matter movement from 2020, when its recognition spiked as a result of

George Floyd's death and the movement was at its peak. Tweets and articles on the matter trending #BLM or #BlackLivesMatter spread globally. Voices spoke out and everyone mourned together. It seemed that this issue may have finally reached its end. Its recognition slowly died after a few changes were made. Did it all end? Are all races equal now? Did we defeat racism? I suppose that's true since nobody is mentioning it; it is all resolved. We have more significant things to discuss like what you are going to wear on a day out with friends at Westfield.

BLM had a notice spike because of George Floyd's death. Action seems to be only taken after a horrible event has taken place. Once, old lady Carol had repeatedly asked the council to implement some sort of restriction to slow drivers in their cheaply loud Toyotas with their muffler gadgets in the Southern suburbs. She always feared they would crash, and one night when they were spinning doughnuts with their newly earned red P's, they crashed into her living room and dredged her once red, blue, and pink tulips. Now they lay bruised, sprawled among the debris.

You rarely experience these sorts of things in person... probably once or twice in your lifetime if you're living a safe area. The media attracts all sorts of awful things. I just can't watch the 6 o'clock news after my tiring hours at uni. Everybody at Uni complains about workload — classes, exams, tutors, papers, jobs. It's tiring enough trying to get through my own day. All the 6pm news does is that it shares such tragic events in my city, country and across the world. Everyone is dying left and right. And what can I do about it? I'm only the

viewer on the other side of the screen. I'm forced to sit and watch these tragic things unfold. I simply couldn't do it anymore. Now I turn a blind eye to what I want to see on my Twitter feed and assure that I can't know every awful thing happening every hour of the day on every square meter of the earth. It's very unavoidable as all media always seems to be talking about some unfortunate disaster, so I simply ignore most media unless necessary.

I've been a lot freer since then. I don't feel any guilt; I don't feel any heavy burden. Imagine how depressed those people at the bus stop feel. Clinging to their phones every day, scrolling page after page, video after video. I may be blind, but if something really important needs to come to my attention, I'm sure it will reach me with how much the media seeps into our everyday lives.



*Taylor Ungerboeck (Year 11)*

# The Fire to Read

By Kate Wareham (Year 11)

Last week I wrote an essay on the importance of reading. What a big topic, you may be thinking? I agree. I explored how literature can challenge us and allow readers to expose people's different points of view. That fire, that passion for reading will never expire. But, this week, I am writing about the opposite: censorship. Another mountain to climb? Definitely.

Where does one start with censorship? Having just read an article about book-burning, I thought, wasn't that something that happened yesterday? Book-burning has always been something in my mind that happened in Nazi Germany or Communist Russia. The suppression of people's opinions during that time was always politically motivated. People lived in a society where they were killed for the customs they practised, the colour of their skin or the people that they loved. I can still remember the vivid picture after reading *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak last year. Zusak described the burning as "words disappearing", people's ideas, experiences, and stories, gone. People will never lose that passion to read and to tell their stories. Knowledge is so powerful, no matter where it is from. Destroying knowledge is something we can never undo. But hasn't censorship always been a strategy of totalitarian governments trying to 'protect' its people from knowledge? Hasn't it always been something that has happened in other worlds?

Apparently not.

Censorship to this extent is not something that happens in the western world in the 21st Century.

Except it is.

While the McCarthy Era is no more, censorship never left the US, the epitome of freedom and capitalism. There has been a rise of book burning and banning in America in recent years. Classics such as *The Colour Purple*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and even *The Catcher in the Rye* have been 'labelled as pornographic'. Why would someone even think such a thing? These are books that have been read for decades and so far, no one has been hurt or thought anything like that. Author and activist Tracie D. Hall believes book-burning and banning is a "prelude to a dark age, a time when you can't say certain things". She is referring to the McCarthy Era and other events in American History, that these events could reoccur now. You would think that we have gone beyond those times?

I'm afraid not.

In fact, I am in shock by the idea of censorship is still happening in today's world. It is alive and kicking.

The rise in censorship worries me, it will only further limit people's access to education, another part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We know the importance of reading and education in our world, and the passion — that fire — that people hold for it. Evidence suggests that two out of ten Americans cannot read, and this number is ever growing. Governments use censorship as a way to limit education, to then restrict who can vote in elections. If people cannot read the ballot, then they will not partake in the democracy, this thought leaves me in disbelief. Democracy is defined as a system of government where the entire population is represented, so why is it not? Is this really happening again?

Censorship is always driven by politics.

It is strange to think about how censorship used to be so common in Australia. I know the Government was only trying to protect us, but did it really help? I know if it was my child who was sent away in World War I, I would want to know what was happening with them, are they even alive? The Government was only trying to save us from the terrors of war, but would that clarity have helped the people feel more at ease?

Perhaps.

But we cannot change the past; we can only look at how we want our future to be.

I will forever be grateful that I have grown up in Australia in the 2000s, somewhere safe and away from governments like these. Tessie D. Hall was right in saying that ‘everyone has the right to free access to ideas, no matter what those ideas might be’, censorship is threatening people’s freedoms, has done for many generations, and will continue to for many more. There will always be repression of people, for many different reasons. We seem so far from events which we generally associate with censorship, yet it is happening as we speak in parts of the world we communicate with daily.

Reading is so important in our lives, people have always read, and will continue to. No one would be able to take that fire that reading provides away from people. Reading is a way of sharing knowledge and experiences.

Knowledge equals power.



*Maxine Spencer (Year 11)*



*Maxine Spencer (Year 11)*

# An Endless Cycle

By Alastrina Wong (Year 11)

Click. Boom. Million pieces of information coming into view at once. Does this over exposure make us sick?

In 2021, when I was scrolling through my Instagram feed, everywhere I looked I saw pictures of people around the world, wearing face masks. I saw graves *en masse* in America with the headline ‘Victims of the Pandemic.’ I saw China build a hospital in less than a week. The terror of an unknown virus, coming out of nowhere, holding the world at a standstill. Everyone breathing in, silence — before the chaos broke out in the exhale. People panicking — the fear settling in. The deaths going up and up every day, with no clear sight of ever slowing down.

I remember the early days of the pandemic, laying in my room, watching beams of the sun glisten through the curtains. At the beginning everything was amazing. It was something new and exciting. I started to wonder if I could ever get sick of never leaving the house. But that answer came quicker than I expected. As time progressed, I felt like I had a flu, not from Covid-19, but from spending too much time in my room. I had a pulsating headache, something Panadol could not remedy. I was getting more and more sick of being couped up and trapped in the house. I couldn’t leave. I was stuck and I would not get better. My actions on autopilot — my brain never thinking — time merging together, the days getting longer and longer. I started rolling out of bed, not wanting to leave, hoping that if I just kept on sleeping it would all go away. I started to

feel numb — sick of this, wanting it to be over quicker, my headache never going — forcing itself to become my friend. I found myself, ‘doomscrolling’, to pass the time. The internet defines it ‘as the act of spending a lot of time looking at your phone or computer and reading bad or negative news stories.’ But could I really escape it? Everywhere I looked it was there — on TV, on Instagram, on the News. Always a new statistic. Always the horrors of what was happening.

In 2022, I saw Russia invade Ukraine. Constantly being greeted with the horrors and terrors, of this invasion. Where gunshot sounds, filled up my room. Where I saw fires and smoke tantalise the walls, the colours of reds and yellows lighting them up, creating their own lightshow. The sound of people screaming out of fear, constantly ringing in my ears. The constant shouts for help. Silence. Their bodies falling, mirroring the buildings around them. Children, families, wailing in the background of news stories.

I wanted to close my eyes, and hope this was just a dream. I couldn’t believe that this could happen. It was during this conflict that I started to realise, that the world is no longer a happy place. Somewhere, there is always a war going on. There are always people dying. There are always people risking their lives to save others. The world is in fact never fully in agreement, there is never peace. I couldn’t escape it. It was always surrounding me. I started to find comfort in this never-ending headache. Every day I woke up — it was there. Every day when I went to bed — it was still there.

In 2023, my Instagram feed was littered with the Israel-Hamas conflict. Resulting in the strict divide in politics

between countries on who was supporting who. It became a matter of politics, rather than focusing on the people who were dying, the people whose homes were being destroyed, the people whose lives were being uprooted. Those people became statistics — numbers on page used in a vile game of politics.

We have never been more imbued in a world of ‘information.’ With just a click of button, we have access to everything — all the horrors and joys of the world. It started to make me think about our unlimited exposure and access to information. It is fantastic that in this day and age, we can know everything with just a click of our fingers. We can search anything, and 100 links will pop up, 100 photos, 100 videos — an endless supply. At any given moment, there are roughly 4.3 billion people using the internet. Every 60 seconds more than 2,315,00 searches are being made on Google — and yes, I did search that up for this. The more I looked around, the more horrors I saw — the pounding in my head becoming my only thought, as my eyes moved across the pages, reading each line faster and quicker.

Does this over-exposure make us sick?



*Beatrice Lye (Year 11)*

# Through the Glass Panel

By Olivia Yee (Year 11)

Every time I'm in Paris I visit the Louvre, but I can never get close to the *Mona Lisa* because there are all these tourists besieging it and taking selfies on selfie-sticks. It's a wonder that *La Gioconda* hasn't had her eye poked out.

But why does everyone want to stand in front of the Mona Lisa? Let me try to answer that question.

I suppose it could be merely the fact that the painting is worth a fortune. I looked it up on the net just now to see that it is valued at \$860 million USD ... and I suppose that is going up by the minute. And some say it is priceless. In our world money speaks even though the Mona Lisa cannot.

But the common view is that it is the expression on her face that is a masterpiece. Some people say that her eyes follow you wherever you move in front of Da Vinci's painting. Others value the smirk on her face. Da Vinci had captured the face of human complexity. What is she really looking at, and what is she thinking?

A range of people come to see Mona Lisa's work, from critics to art enthusiasts, to protesters. In recent years, the Mona Lisa has been a victim of many protests, including but not limited to food protests. Protesters of the *Riposte Alimentaire*, a group of protesters wanting more healthy and sustainable foods, threw a can of soup at the Mona Lisa. While she is protected behind a glass wall, it really reflects how society can be when a specific problem does not get enough attention. People resort to vandalism of great art.

One could really argue that there is a paradox in acts of vandalism. Mona Lisa represents a world of art. She looks through a glass panel to a world of human beings. There is a significant contrast. Her world, the world of art, is calm, ordered and composed. What she sees through the glass panel is the human world of anger and chaos. She is trapped in time, looking for the evolution of the modern world, and hoping to see problems, solutions and advances in life.

One way I thought to settle this question of what the Mona Lisa is really looking at and thinking is to become her and look out through her eyes. I think you might call this an empathy task.

I am sitting in this cold room, and Da Vinci has given me this cloak to wrap around my shoulders. Typical guy, he still wants a hint of cleavage, though, if you looked closely, my skin is marred by goose bumps. He's an odd bod, this Da Vinci. His beard and his dress make him look like a wizard out of Harry Potter. Though I am not allowed to think this because Harry Potter has not been written yet — not for another 487 years. Still, maybe I can see into the future.

My husband, the rich dude I married, is probably out making more money. I am here on my own again because what else have I to do with my time? Yes, I've had 5 children, but really their nanny looks after them. All I have to do is be a rich wife: sit there and look pretty (literally).

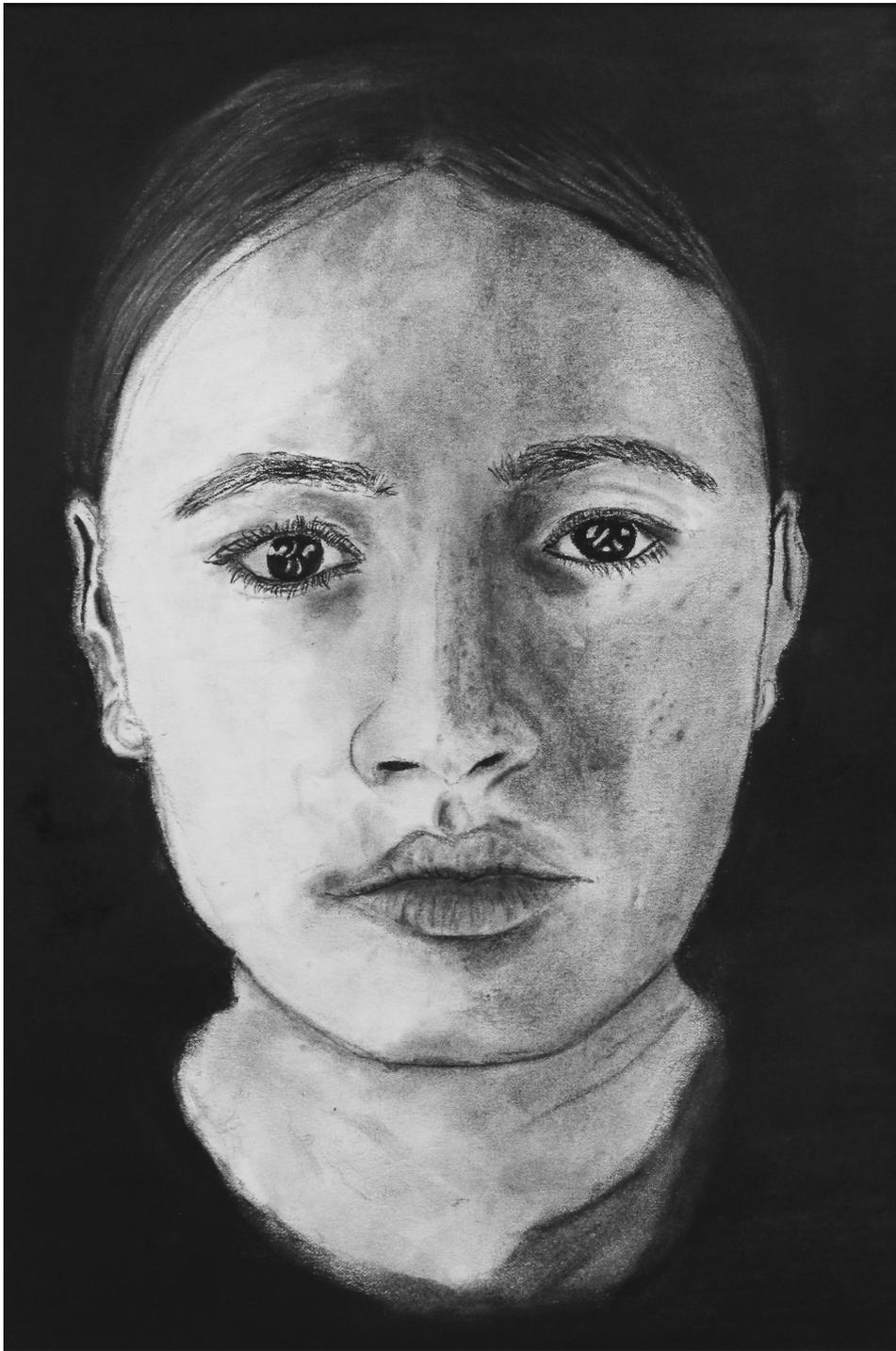
Actually, can you see how I am looking off to the side? That is because there is a mouse nibbling at Da Vinci's sandwich, and he doesn't notice. Da Vinci that is. I think that it is funny that a genius can be so dumb.

Well, that was a go at being *La Gioconda*, but I suppose that's not what she was really thinking.

Some critics focus on the background of the painting and notice that the background is not the rich Florentine décor that you might expect a woman such as her to inhabit. It is wild, and dark and full of caves. Maybe that is symbolic of what her inner psychology is like. Maybe Da Vinci has actually painted a mask for the inner workings of the human mind. The untamed inside the tamed.

Whatever we think of the painting does not matter, I guess. It just is a treasure for so many reasons. Personally, I don't like it. Let me tell you why. I think it is overrated. The painting on the right wall if you are facing *La Gioconda*, is much more interesting. *Madonna of the Rocks* is bigger. It has no glass to stop you from seeing it properly and it has everything that *La Gioconda* has, only more — a beautiful woman in a wild background, who asks you to ponder and reflect.

That is what I think, anyway.



*Olivia Shaw (Year 8)*

# Moth to the Flame

By Evelyn Young (Year 11)

On a hot summer evening, it's possible to witness a regular phenomenon in my living room: a thin waft of smoke curling up from the top of the standing lamp in the corner. The source? A moth wandering through the opened French sliding doors, attracted to the blinding radiance of a 45-watt fluorescent bulb that's been on for several hours, only to make contact and instantly blaze out in a glorious, glowing death. Though a piteous plight for the insect, it's an amusing distraction when regrettably confined in drab dinner conversation, and while watching a barrage of Icaruses meet their fiery ends one's thoughts easily meander down a philosophical path: we are the moths on the burning globe, and perhaps we don't amount to more than a fleetingly entertaining moment in time.

It's the classic 'what's it all for?' spiel. I find myself moving from objective to objective, from deadline to deadline, like an archer practising her shots, the last bullseye forgotten instantly as I shift to the next. But what exactly am I practising for? Some theoretical Competition of Life, in which 'wins' at school and sport and sleep lost to stress will make me the victor? In the liminal moments of my life, often spent while shuttling to 6.30am hockey practice or 7pm dance lessons, these are the thoughts that fester in a cerebral soup of pessimism.

Allow me to explain. Like many other people my age, I've signed up for co-curricular activities to fill my spare time, to maintain a 'work-life balance' and be 'a well-rounded individual'. But then your oboe teacher is saying you should try

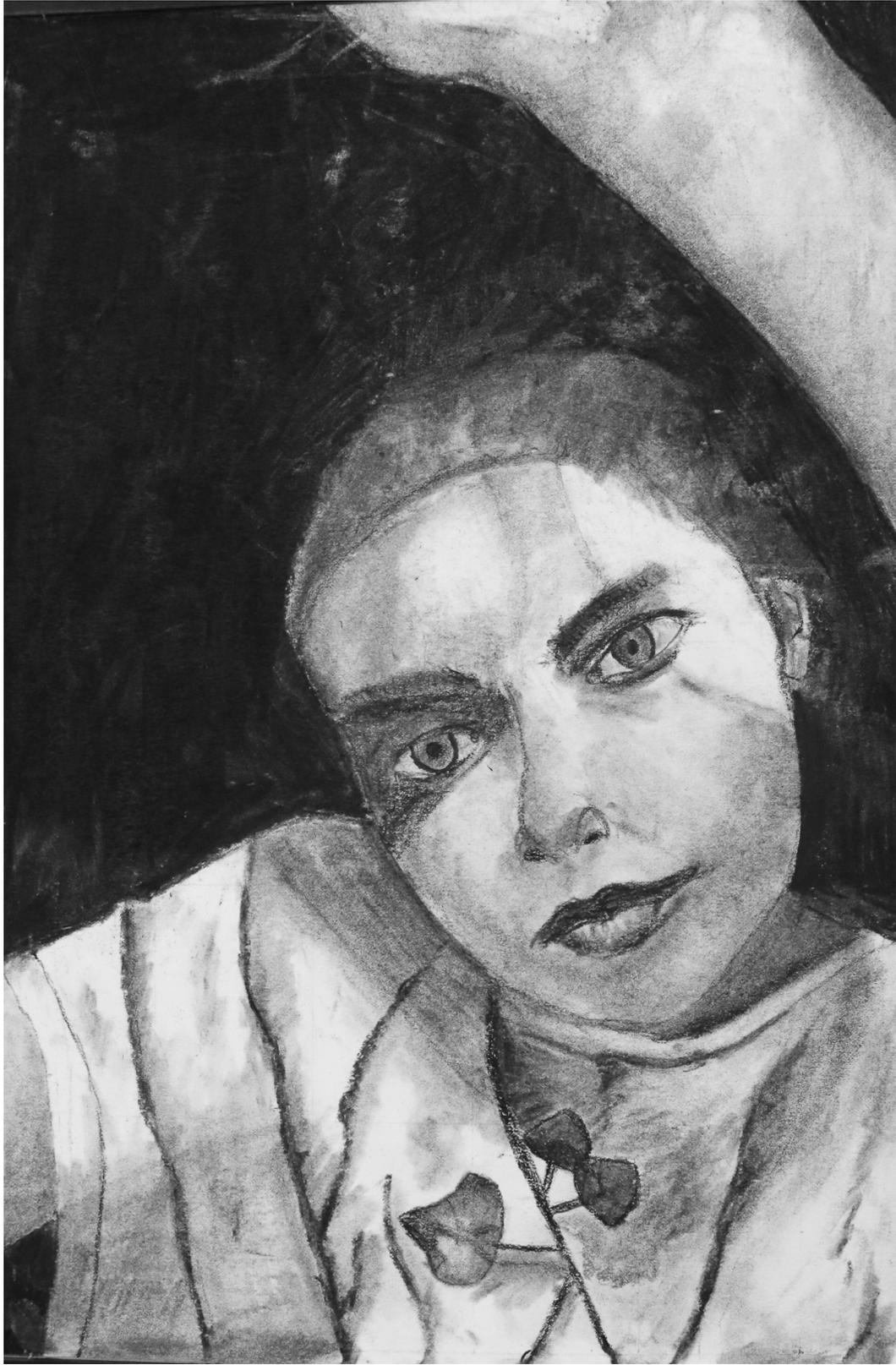
for a higher-level exam, and it's really not that much harder than the pieces you're already playing, so why not? Have a goal to work towards. Fast forward a few months and you're practising daily in pursuit of this goal, which is quickly looming like a dark hazy cloud on your periphery, and the sheer amount of work to achieve this exam that's 'really not that much harder' feels like it's going to drown you. And I know nothing worth doing doesn't require work, but suddenly I hate it, and it's ruining my life, and I've lost sight of why I'm even doing this. What will this 'get' me later in life? Will it bring world peace, stop world hunger, end all wars? Absolutely not. But from my privileged outlook of life, ensconced in my reality of private school and Sydney living, this exam feels like life or death. So this begs the question: what are we doing with our lives? Am I making a meaningful contribution on this planet? To make it a better place? To ensure not a second is wasted with the precious time we're granted? Here I am, tragically worrying about some exam while 800 million people struggle daily to put food on the table. Really, I should just give up. Like Icarus, it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture, enabled by our wax wings of privilege to fly a little too far and become consumed by our obsessive ambitions.

But then again, in pursuit of making every moment count, shouldn't we try to grab everything life possibly has to offer us and add it to our carts? There is exhilaration in mastering a skill like oboe playing, it's just the joy is lost in the artificial milestones we set for ourselves, because suddenly it becomes not about the act of enriching our lives but rather a grade on a piece of paper. At its core, academia teaches us how to think.

Physical activity releases happy hormones in our brains. The arts open up our souls. So I can grapple with these notions of the High and Mighty Important Things in Life, but who's to say enjoying and exploring facets of living isn't just as important? And while I'm playing the theme from Guardians of the Galaxy during school band rehearsal, thinking about the much more complex Vivaldi concert piece for my oboe exam and wondering what the hell I'm doing with my time, I remember I'm having fun. And that's a valid enough reason for such indulgence.

Or, of course, don't listen to the musings of a 16-year-old girl on a time-crunch to finish her assessment task, because indeed, the words I'm writing right now are just another box to tick off, another target to hit and then forget about in the blink of an eye.

All too quickly one is yanked unceremoniously from one's reverie back to the dinner table, to the reality of tests and deadlines, and no, Aunty Penny, I'm too full for dessert — but the fleeting sight of a moth's unfortunate cremation is enough to spark some existential reflection.



*Gracie Farrell (Year 8)*

# A Glitch in the Matrix

By Alina Yu (Year 11)

On the morning of July 7th, the day was bright and sunny as usual (despite it being Winter) and everyone was performing the same mundane tasks on their strict timetables as usual. Vivid flowers blossomed profusely on the sidewalks, and honeybees gathered bright yellow pollen from them. For the first time ever, I'd stopped on my way to school to spectate the working bees — for no particular reason — but I could've sworn the bee just disappeared into thin air as soon as I blinked! Anyways, I disregarded it and routinely walked to school again while scrolling through TikTok. I came upon a TikTok of this old YouTube video published in 2016 captioned “Hot Robot At SXSW Says She Wants To Destroy Humans” published by CNBC which went absolutely viral with over 20 million views.

There's always been that uncanny view on AI, society always seems to think they'll take over the world and replace us humans one day. Terminator (1984), Ex-Machina (2014), M3GAN (2022): all movies about the threat of AI despite being almost four decades apart.

Why do we keep advancing AI if we fear it so much?

Why do we still fear AI?

When I arrived at school, the teachers gave us that monthly lecture about forbidden AI use in our work, and about proper referencing so we aren't copywriting— so now I am properly referencing ChatGPT's answer to my question “will u destroy humans” being “No...AI is a tool created by humans, and its use

and impact depend on how it is developed and utilised by people.”. Since AI isn’t programmed to lie, we can trust them... right? It’s not like they can just replace the millions of years of human evolution with some arbitrary letters and numbers.

It’s impossible for AI to gain a cognitive conscience and feel real emotions after all, they’re programmed by a series of codes like Java and Script, not a series of RNA and DNA. We’re fundamentally different. Genetic code is created by nature, Java and Script on the other hand is not.

We biologically create children. We artificially create robots.

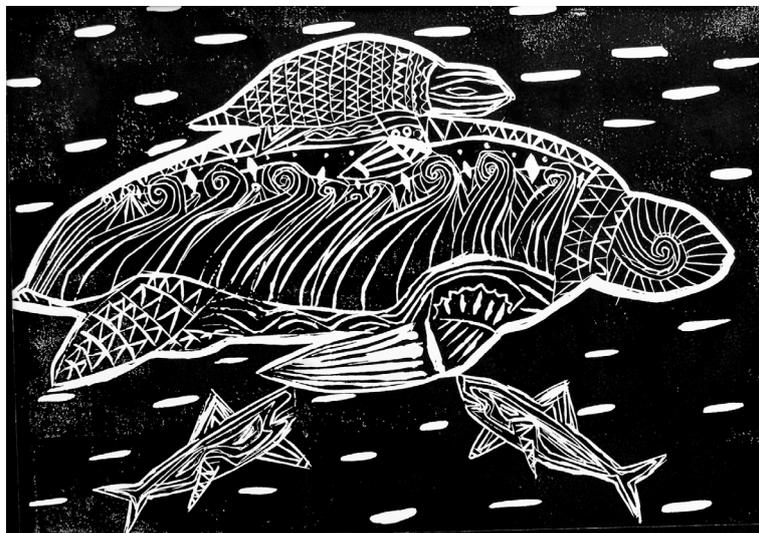
Coincidentally (or not), my first class was biology. We learnt about the numerical specifics of biochemical processes of how, basically — I couldn’t tell you the specifics, but — everything is encoded into our DNA with distinct numbers and chemicals. The emotions we feel — happiness, love, sadness — our soul, all boil down to the certain chemicals our body releases as a primal instinct. Essentially, humans have intuition.

So what even are emotions if they're just a series of chemicals? Does that mean emotions could in fact be artificially produced? Philosopher Plato states that “Human behaviour flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge” and according to those criteria, AI could perhaps mimic human behaviour one day.

After another seven periods of classes, each exactly 35 minutes long, the bell finally rang at 3:30pm. I checked my diary to see what I had planned for the afternoon — as usual, homework. I began to walk home like every other day, staring down at the usual artificial blue light from my phone as I opened <https://chat.openai.com> again and asked another

question: “r u programmed to be limited?” to which ChatGPT replied, “Yes, as an AI language model, I am designed with certain limitations... in understanding context, nuance, and complex reasoning beyond the capabilities of my current algorithms and architecture.”

After just three minutes of walking, I passed the sidewalk from that morning again. The vivid flowers still blossomed profusely and the same honeybees gathered bright yellow pollen from the same flowers. Once again out of simple curiosity, I took a second glance at the working bees which suddenly vanished at a blink — like a glitch in the matrix.



*Emily Zhu (Year 7)*