

The Jag

ISSUE 05



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Black Student Union

by Sarah Lyu

The month of February is truly many things for us at SMUS, there's the new term, a long weekend, and the musical. February is also, more notably, Black History Month. For this publication, I sat down with my good friend Jehiel McCoy (11), who is co-head of the Black Student Union (BSU) for a little conversation about what Black History Month is and how we at SMUS can celebrate and appreciate Black culture.

Can you give us some insights on Black History Month as a whole?

Jehiel and I talked extensively on the significance of Black History Month, which, by the way, is celebrated internationally. Jehiel, coming from an American perspective noted that "Black history is really... well, history." It is no lie to say that the history and experiences of many minority groups, such as African Americans have been heavily overshadowed by colonizer stories that centre around the White experience in the US. There "is more to it than just that, right? America as a country was partly built on the backs of enslaved African Americans. By creating a space for the truth to be spoken about and memorialized we are doing important work." Jehiel went on to elaborate that Black History Month began as just a week to bring the world's attention to the achievements and accomplishments of influential Black individuals. Through our candid conversation I gathered that Black History Month is really all about the celebration and appreciation of Black culture/identity as well as acknowledging the hardships that many Black Americans and Canadians have faced. Jehiel noted that "it's important to feel proud of who you are, no matter where in the world you happen to be."

How does Black History Month pertain to our community at SMUS?

"Although SMUS is a diverse and multicultural community to be sure, there is notably a lack of Black representation at our school." To this, I asked about Jehiel's experience being one of the few Black students attending SMUS. He responded, "In my hometown, I have a strong Black community to lean on, so coming here was definitely a bit of an adjustment, but after I found my footing here everything became easier. I think I'm a pretty good representation for my people. I always try to put my best foot forward but sometimes it can be a little isolating." By creating a space where people feel comfortable sharing their stories, Jehiel has done his part for the community. I personally believe in SMUS' acceptance and willingness to learn and appreciate different cultures.



What is the story behind the BSU?

"I was a part of the reason that the Black Student Union was created in the first place. There was an incident in my first year here and afterwards one of the grade 11 students that year, Thulisa Egbeyemi ('25) reached out to me and the rest is history." Jehiel went on to note some other students who played a crucial role in the startup of the BSU such as Joh'nell Cleveland Jr. ('24), Chioma Duru ('24), and Ruki Madzimure ('24). Although the catalyst for the BSU at SMUS is less than ideal, we as a community have so much to gain from the existence of the BSU. People like these grads and Jehiel are the reason that our community is able to receive exposure to Black culture and identity.

What can we at SMUS expect for Black History Month?

The BSU has many activities planned for the month of February, with Jehiel stating that "there will most definitely be a chapel," which by the time this article has been published, we will have had the pleasure of attending. Additionally, "there has been a request to bring back African geography trivia for assembly, so make sure to study up for that. Also, there will be a movie night featuring different screenings of influential Black films. We're between movies like *The Color Purple* (1985) and *Sinners* (2025). There's also been some talk about a cookout in the Sun Centre commons which is pretty exciting." Most of all I'd encourage everyone to participate and try your best to immerse yourself in all the events and experiences that this Black History Month has to offer!



Diplomacy is NOT a Spectator Sport

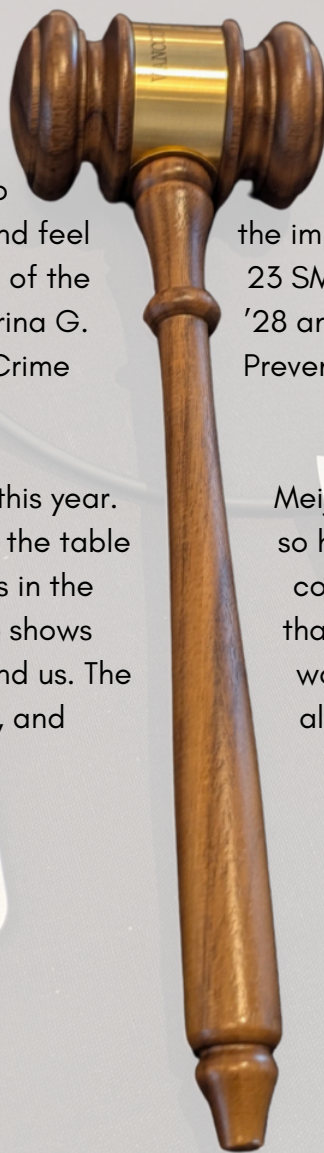
by Bronwyn Ellis

From January 23rd to 25th, 24 students travelled to the Hyatt Regency hotel in Vancouver to debate world issues at the world's largest high school run Model United Nations conference, VMUN. As a staff member this year, I got to see a whole new side of the conference at my fourth and penultimate VMUN. SMUS had students in 12 of 20 committees debating a variety of world topics from cyberwarfare and the protection of human rights advocates to nuclear infrastructure in conflict zones. Alongside current world topics, several students had the opportunity to relive the past committees discussing topics including the first and the Meiji Restoration in Imperial Japan. To expect going into VMUN this year, but I came out friends and lifelong memories. It was incredible to comprised of delegates from all over the world and feel club head, I am beyond proud of every single one of the would like to give a very special shout out to Sabrina G. their respective committees, the Commission on Crime and the Joint Crisis Committee (JCC-A).

I will never forget the memories I made at VMUN this year. history alongside being burned as a witch, hitting the table shooting people with nerf guns, and playing cards in the were kicked out. Our participation in VMUN 2026 shows in diplomacy and gain insight into the world around us. The is our duty to never turn a blind eye, not spectate, and

through various historical crisis Balkan war, the Thirty Years War, be honest, I had no idea what to of the conference with a few new be a part of such a big conference the impact we all had on each other. As a 23 SMUS delegates in VMUN this year. I '28 and Kieran M.'27 who won awards in Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ),

Meiji powder will go down in my MUN so hard that by hand was bruised, corner of a delegate social until we that the youth of today can participate world is an ever changing place and it always get involved.



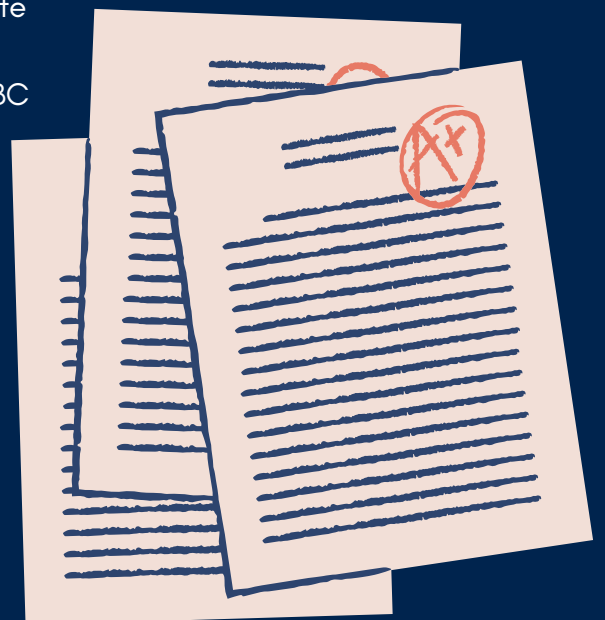
Holistic on Paper, Standardised in Practice

by Byrdie Fisher-Franke

Throughout high school, we are assured that there are no such things as provincial exams. To further cement this, we follow the proficiency scale to show that learning is holistic and looks different for every child depending on their background and neurological framework. With this in mind, why do we take our curriculum and morph it into a whole new system that risks marginalizing students who worked better with an older model, all to supposedly ensure we have “practical skills.”

Knowing that our province holds a great number of international students, the idea of a test to determine B.C.’s literacy rate makes sense. Without provincial testing, how should the government know what to change about their education system? However, an issue arises when we see those scores on transcripts that impact students’ futures. All of a sudden the government wants to stop using language that doesn’t define everyone’s learning, but apparently does define their futures. If we look back at the FSA’s that most B.C students took in grade 7, we recognise that they barely crossed our minds, with many of us getting a score just to soon forget we had been tested in the first place. If the FSAs are no longer mandatory, because they disadvantaged schools with diverse learners, why do we continue to write exams that essentially replicate them at a higher, more consequential level? At what point does measuring holistically on numeracy and literacy stop supporting students and begin defining them?

According to Columbia Academy, a top ranked B.C private school “in place of the old Provincial Exams, BC has introduced Graduation Assessments designed to evaluate student competencies rather than just content memorization.” Along with the proficiency scale, this is a trend we’ve seen the BC government follow with many of their decisions. They claim that they’re improving student learning by changing to a more “holistic” approach, but instead just build the curriculum into a new set of selective rules they prefer. If they really were understanding where students were coming from, the Ministry of Education would appreciate that everyone does possess different skills, which means that some students do better with a “memorising content” based approach. Although analytical skills are important in day to day life, creating an exam that includes these skills as well as more traditional learning skills is the only way to truly include everyone. So, if the B.C government is so set on the idea that they are doing the right thing, maybe they should reflect on the student body before making their decisions based on doing the opposite of what they didn’t like in the past.



From Greenland, To Venezuela, To Minnesota

by Bronwyn Ellis

United States Operation in Venezuela

The morning of January 3rd, 2026 saw large scale military strikes on the capital of Venezuela, Caracas, conducted by the United States (US) military. In this operation, they took captive Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores, who were transported to New York City. The two face charges of narco-terrorism, cocaine importation conspiracy, and possession of machine guns. Many categorize the actions of US President Donald Trump's military as kidnapping and the United Nations have condemned him for his operation. To justify his military operation, the President says that they would sure up Venezuela's oil reserves, theoretically costing billions of dollars that the US does not currently possess. The removal of President Maduro is seen by some, particularly in Venezuela, in a positive light as he is a known dictator. However, President Maduro being a dictator does not excuse the actions of a foreign military impeding on another nation's sovereignty and essentially kidnapping their leader. There are many countries with a stake in this situation as China was a major investor in Venezuelan oil and Colombia is now strengthening its borders, concerned that they may be next.

The United States Wants to Buy Greenland... Again

The most recent attempt by US President Donald Trump to purchase Greenland was not the first by the US. In 1867, President Johnson's administration had purchased Alaska and wanted to expand their arctic territory, although no formal offer was made. In 1946, just after the Second World War, President Truman made a \$100 million offer to the Danish government to set up military bases after Germany's invasion of Denmark, again to secure the arctic. Denmark rejected the offer, and no further suggestions from the US government were made on purchasing Greenland until President Trump expressed interest in 2019. As this attempt went nowhere, President Trump threatened military action to take Greenland in early-January this year (not long after the Venezuelan operation). Denmark, the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) protested any potential US involvement in Greenland. President Trump's motivations on taking Greenland are quite clear: access to resources (including oil and minerals), control over trade routes, and the opportunity to secure the arctic against Russia and China. Although he claimed that the US will not use military force, should he invade Greenland, NATO does not have a protocol for a NATO country attacking another NATO country. In article 5 of the NATO treaty, all member countries agree to mutual defense if attacked, leaving many to wonder how this would play out.

ICE Raids in Minnesota

Before reading, please note that this section contains mentions of death, guns, ICE, and other themes that may not be appropriate for everyone. If you are triggered by any of the aforementioned topics, please do not continue reading.

On January 24th, ICU nurse Alex Pretti was shot 11 times by two United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in Minneapolis Minnesota. Around two weeks earlier, Renee Nicole Good was shot by ICE agents while in her car on January 7th. These are the two highest profile deaths by ICE agents this year, however they are not the only ones. 6 other people have died at the hands of ICE agents across the US since January 5th. Last year (2025), there were 32 deaths of people in ICE custody, the highest number since 2004. ICE claims that ICE agents have to make split-second decisions and blames their short training period for causing deaths. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has now become involved in these killings in Minnesota. However, it is clear that their investigation is far from over. President Trump's first year of his second term has seen a major crack down on immigration and deportations, which much of the international community condemns. However, the President is difficult to characterize, as his administration operates simultaneously on both national and international stages, drawing attention to multiple issues at once. Regardless, it is becoming hard to ignore the violation of human rights south of the border, no matter how unbiased one attempts to be.



Test Taking Tips

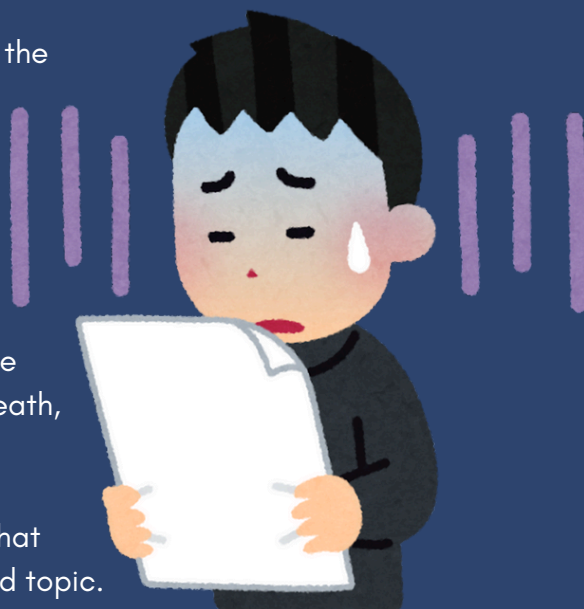
by Yuhe Pan

As the school year progresses and we slowly begin moving into important exam seasons, life can often be overwhelming and stressful around the time of assessments. For this edition, I wanted to share some strategies in regards to test taking, consisting of a combination of general tips and strategies that have worked for me personally in the past.

Multiple choice questions are tricky in the sense that they can often be misleading. If the answer is not apparent from the get-go, using a process of elimination is effective, until you find yourself stuck between two answers that seem equally correct. To mitigate this occurrence, it may be helpful to first try and answer the question first, without looking at the multiple choice options. This can lessen the chance of the different answer choices being confusing. Second-guessing your own judgement is also common when it comes to these questions. I'm sure we've all had the experience of spontaneously changing a multiple choice answer, only to find out our original answer was correct after all.

Another general rule is to complete the questions you know the answers to first. However I believe that this tip should be coupled with an emphasis to not panic when you come across a question that you don't know the answer to. There isn't really a way to avoid panic completely in this kind of circumstance, since the combined stress of taking a test and time constraints makes it a perfectly natural reaction. Therefore minimizing this response is vital to ensure smooth sailing for remaining questions. Just take a deep breath, and move on as best as you can.

Short answer questions can be even more derailing, given that the answer often relies entirely on your memory of the tested topic. Typically I like to flip back into the multiple choice section to see if any of those questions might have links to an answer I'm struggling to remember. If doing this serves no help, then the next best option is to write down any information pertaining to the question that you do remember, so that you can at least gain partial credit.



A Current Grade 12's College Application Advice to Grade 11s

by Youlan Li

Hey everyone. I am Youlan, a grade 12 student who just went through the entire college application process. I mainly applied to schools in the United States, but also applied to a few Canadian universities. Today, I want to share some of my advice because I was in your shoes one year ago – very confused, thinking the entire application process would be quite daunting. So in this article, I will be sharing some things I wish I'd known before, in the hope it will make you feel a bit more confident.

First of all, let's talk about the US college application. Oftentimes, it will require more components than other countries – a Common App Personal Statement, extracurricular (EC) activities that only have ten spots (each with 150 character description), teacher recommendations (number varies by school, usually around 2), specific schools' supplemental essays, and SAT/ACT scores (though some schools are test-optional). Throughout these components, one thing you want to avoid is being repetitive. For example, you don't want to describe one of the activities you've listed in the EC section all over again in your supplement essay; instead, you want to showcase different aspects of you – whether that's your interests, talents, or an experience that is so memorable that it has shaped who you are. The Admission Officers (AOs) want to learn about you and see if there's one thing that drives and motivates you, so it's quite important to have a "theme" or "narrative" that's consistent throughout your application. They want to learn about your personality and how you will contribute to the campus. So my advice would be to imagine if you're a student at the school you want to apply to / go to, how would you contribute to the campus? Initiating new activities? Joining student organizations? Involved in research opportunities? Engaging in conversations with your friends and classmates? The AOs want to imagine you living and studying on their campus, and you want to show them what energy and potential you could bring to make their school a better place.

Now, moving onto Canadian schools, you will likely hear that your grades matter the most – and that is indeed correct. However, for schools that ask you to submit additional essays, for instance, the UBC Personal Profile, you want to show your various interests and what you're involved in outside of the classroom. Since I didn't personally apply to the engineering or business programs, I can't speak much about it, but sometimes you would be asked to do an additional interview. As a result, it's really important that you check your email carefully every day to avoid missing important follow-ups. For schools with an early round of application, I recommend submitting your application earlier so you can get your admission results earlier and feel more relieved as results roll in.

Grade 11 is both a stressful and important year, but trust me, it will all work out in the end. You will feel so proud of yourself for making it this far. Best of luck everyone!

Exhaustion Isn't a Personality Trait

by Jazmin Salvati

As a Grade 12 student, I've realized that exhaustion is treated as normal. Late nights are expected. Almost falling asleep in class is laughed off. Being tired is seen as a personality trait. But it shouldn't be. Teenagers need eight to ten hours per night, and most of us aren't getting even close to that.

The most common response to student exhaustion is "go to bed earlier." However, this response ignores how teen sleep actually works. The internal clock of a teenager shifts later, meaning it's more difficult for us to fall asleep early at night. Even if we set out to sleep at 10pm, our brains don't always cooperate.

The impact of insufficient sleep goes beyond feeling tired. Sleep deprivation affects attention, memory, and critical thinking skills, all of which are essential for learning. Students who are not well-rested will likely have trouble concentrating in class and retaining information. Lack of sleep can also lead to irritability and higher stress levels. Over time, these effects can be damaging and contribute to lower academic performance and decreased well-being.

Turning off electronic devices 30 minutes before bed can signal the body to prepare for bed. Instead of cramming in homework or scrolling through social media, reading a book or listening to calming music can tell the brain that it's time to sleep.

Although many use melatonin supplements to fall asleep, it can lead to serious issues in the future. For example, becoming too reliant on sleeping medications can stop the body from being able to sleep independently. Rather than depending on melatonin, developing consistent sleep habits is generally a safer and more effective approach.

School and family also play an important role in supporting healthy sleep habits. Heavy academic workloads, early start times, and extracurricular commitments can make it difficult for students to prioritize rest. Providing education on sleep wellness and encouraging healthy sleep habits can help students better balance their responsibilities with their sleep needs.

Sleep is a fundamental requirement for learning, health, and academic success. While exhaustion has become a normalized aspect of school life, the long-term effects of sleep deprivation should be taken seriously. Understanding how sleep patterns work and prioritizing healthier sleep habits can help students improve their focus, academic performance, and overall well-being.

Super Bowl Playoffs

by Dev Wirk

The Seahawks are going to the Super Bowl! This NFL season has been a rollercoaster with lots of surprises and disappointments. In this edition I will recap this crazy NFL season and give my Super Bowl predictions at the end.

Going into the season we all had our guesses on who was going to make it to the Super Bowl. Most people had teams like the Buffalo Bills, Baltimore Ravens, Kansas City Chiefs, Philadelphia Eagles, Detroit Lions or the Los Angeles Rams making the Superbowl but everyone was wrong. The Super Bowl we have is the Seattle Seahawks against the New England Patriots.

This season brought several surprises. The Seattle Seahawks and New England Patriots both finished 14-3 and advanced to the Super Bowl, while the Denver Broncos also posted a 14-3 record. The Jacksonville Jaguars exceeded expectations at 13-4, and the Chicago Bears finished strong at 11-6. Notably, all of these teams had ten wins or fewer last season.

There were also major disappointments. The Kansas City Chiefs struggled to a 6-11 record, the Baltimore Ravens finished 8-9, and the Detroit Lions ended the season at 9-8. All three teams had reached the playoffs last year but failed to do so this season, making their performances massively disappointing.

Now for my Super Bowl predictions. I predict the Seahawks will defeat the Patriots, 44-17. I think the Seahawks fans will be so loud that the Patriots won't be able to hear anything. I saw this firsthand at the Seahawks vs. Rams conference game, where the crowd was deafening. I don't think the Patriots are prepared for that kind of atmosphere. On top of that, the Seahawks have one of the best defenses in the NFL, which I believe will shut down the Patriots' offense and help secure a Super Bowl victory for Seattle!



Alexandrin Français

by Ridley McLeod

Je m'oublie avec lui, le vent qui me chante

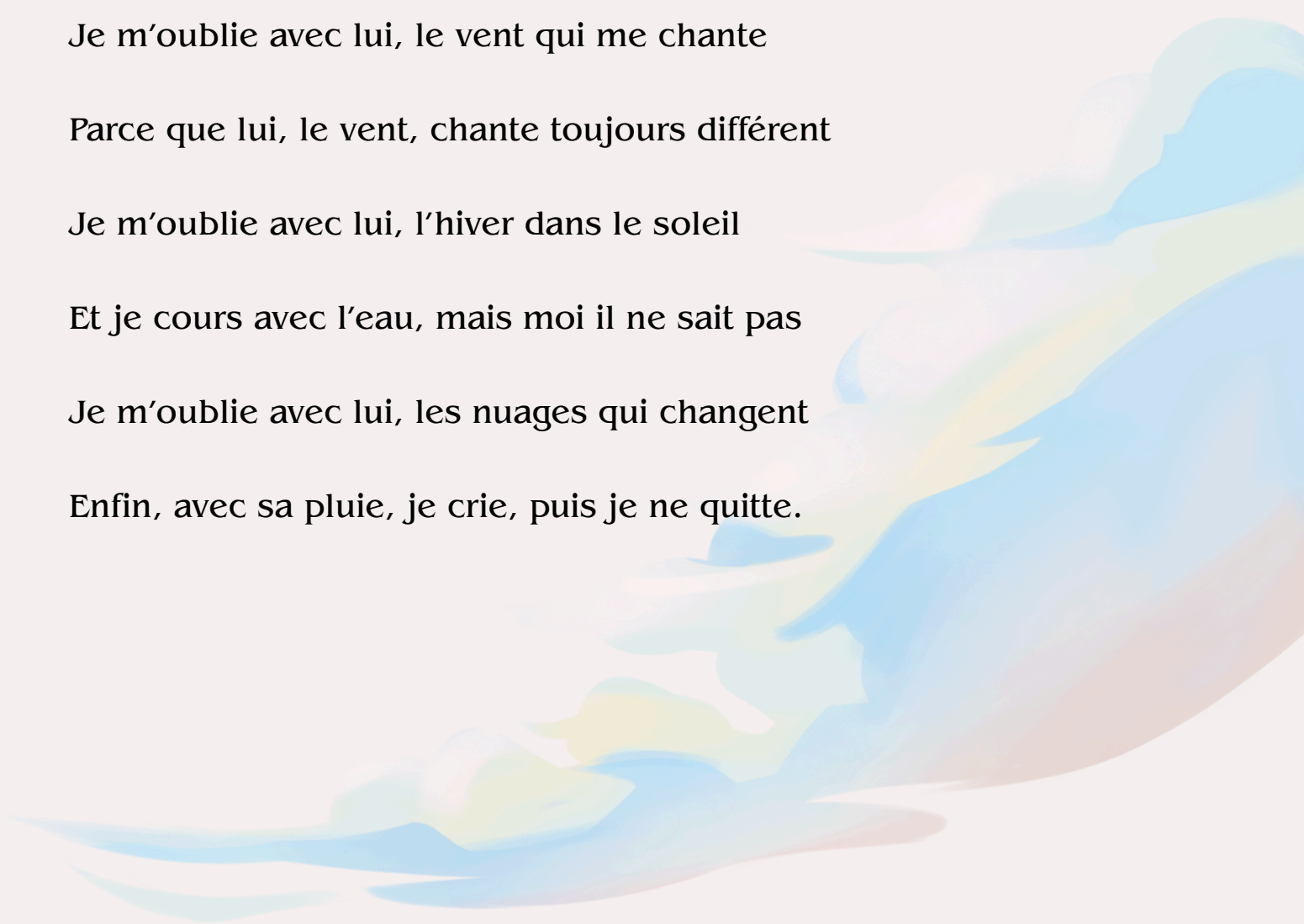
Parce que lui, le vent, chante toujours différent

Je m'oublie avec lui, l'hiver dans le soleil

Et je cours avec l'eau, mais moi il ne sait pas

Je m'oublie avec lui, les nuages qui changent

Enfin, avec sa pluie, je crie, puis je ne quitte.



Día de Reyes Magos

by Isabel and Valentina

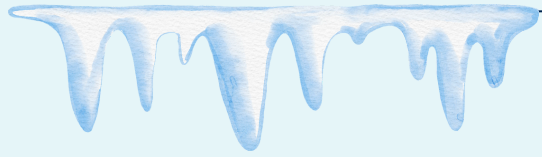
El Día de Reyes se celebra el 6 de enero y es una tradición muy importante en la cultura latina. Ese día recordamos la historia de los Reyes Magos: Melchor, Gaspar y Baltasar, los cuales siguieron una estrella para encontrar al niño Jesús y llevarle regalos como oro, incienso y mirra. Por eso, este día simboliza la fe, la ilusión y el acto de compartir.

En México lo celebramos porque forma parte de nuestras tradiciones religiosas y familiares. Para muchos niños, los Reyes Magos traen regalos, lo que representa alegría y esperanza. Desde días antes, los niños escriben cartas pidiendo lo que desean y las dejan la noche del 5 de enero junto a sus zapatos en el árbol de navidad. Esta tradición fomenta la imaginación y refuerza la emoción de la espera.

Una de las costumbres más importantes es partir la Rosca de Reyes, un pan dulce en forma de aro que simboliza la unión y el amor. Dentro de la rosca hay muñecos que representan al niño Jesús y a sus familiares, y a quien le toca debe invitar tamales el Día de la Candelaria, el 2 de febrero. Esta costumbre fortalece la convivencia entre amigos y familiares.

Este día es especial porque nos une como familia, mantiene vivas nuestras tradiciones y nos recuerda la importancia de compartir y convivir con las personas que queremos, especialmente con mucha alegría y respeto.





冷冬

by Ricardo Chen, Yina Ding, and Kathryn Yi

“這個冬天不太冷
從來的冷冬 迷朦也是凍
素素世界太灰太沉 令我夜裡沒有一個夢
碰上你我竟不經意不受控
愛上你氣溫也突然為我驟暖 風也未流凍”

一个寻常的上学日，我像平时一样急匆匆打开宿舍的门，被突如其来呼啸的刺骨的寒风逼得向后踉跄了几步，才站稳。哆哆嗦嗦地从我厚厚的衣物里艰难地掏出手机，屏幕亮起，灰色的背景上毅然映射着：4摄氏度。

我沉默地站在宿舍门口，是身体太畏寒了，还是我又双叒叕地被天气预报背刺了？我说不清，也根本道不明。只得默默拢紧羽绒服，但那股冷意像从骨头缝里一丝丝渗出来的，粘稠，顽固，挥之不去。它绝不给你痛快的一击，只是慢慢地、耐心地浸透你。总之，这感觉并不好过。

不知为何，这感觉却让我想起了眼下的日子。十二年级的申请季。它既不像战场，没有硝烟与号角；更不像在平静的湖面上慢悠悠的划船；倒更像一场在寒风呼啸的无边无际的灰色原野上的长途跋涉。一股不知来自何处的冷风，阻力你前进，你看不见敌人，甚至也看不清远方的旗帜，只是知道必须往前走，每一步都踩在看不见的刻度上，度量着与某个模糊未来的距离。

最冷的时候，是突然之间发觉自己已经开始习惯这种冷。

所有人都在向前，或走路，或奔跑，或冲刺。空气里弥漫着一种心照不宣的、紧绷的寂静。徒留我站在这片茫茫人海中，用尽浑身解数尝试寻找属于我自己的那一条路。但是抬起脚，就像举起了一块千斤重的石头，让我心有余而力不足。

窗外的暮色漫上来时，我正坐在宿舍的窗边，捧着那罐刚从小冰箱里拿出来的菠萝味的芬达。冰冷的易拉罐好似一声提醒，短促得来不及捕捉。我究竟是谁？我望向窗外，看到了学弟学妹们在宿舍门口嬉戏打闹的身影，渐渐与我脑海里自己和朋友们的模样重叠。我闭上眼，试图回想那些真正属于自己的瞬间：某个读完书后久久不能平静的黄昏，一次毫无目的却让人安心的散步，甚至只是此刻碳酸饮料在掌心留下被冻得通红的圆印。

或许，我的敌人从始至终有且仅有我自己。

为了寻找灵感，我尝试翻找我杂乱的书桌，指尖触到一根去年年底演唱会的应援棒。它静静的站在我书桌的最边缘，塑料管身冰凉，甚至上面黑色的字都已变得有些斑驳，长条形的灯管已然再也不会闪耀。我把它拿出来，放在台灯下。光线透过磨砂的外壳，内部隐约可见干涸的电池漏液痕迹，像一道永不愈合的暗色疤痕。

那时候的喊叫和音浪似乎还能透过应援棒传来。歌手在台上嘶吼着：“愛是個什麼東西 我一直問我自己。”，全场挥舞的蓝色应援棒像涨潮时的海浪，一阵接着又一阵。我们也跟着唱，声音或许跑调却用力，仿佛真能把什么甩在身后。那时候的冷，是散场后夜风扑在汗湿的T恤上激起的战栗，是畅快的、流动的。

而现在的冷，是凝固的。它沉淀在每一次按下“提交”键后跳出的绿色窗口里，点击“庆祝”，那一小块虚拟的彩带一闪而过，然后留下更大的空白。它沉淀在等待邮件提示音响起的间歇中。它让一切都变得缓慢而沉重，连回忆都蒙上一层隔膜。应援棒里那道干涸的漏液痕迹，像刻在塑料内壁上的、通往另一个平行宇宙的坐标。

宿舍的灯总是亮到很晚。台灯上的光落在打开了很多标签页的文书文档上，把那些反复删改的句子照得惨白。我有时会盯着某个单词出神，直到它的形态变得完全陌生，变成了毫无意义的abcd。那一刻，语言失效了，努力也显得可疑。所谓的“个人陈述”，或是“补充文书”，究竟是在陈述谁？亦或者到底是在补充什么？

夜深了，我收拾好桌上的东西，关掉台灯，刷好牙，躺在我那温暖的让人感觉不真实的被窝里。维多利亚的冬天还是这么的冷。但我开始去想，冷是不是也分很多种。一种是外面的，天气预报会报的，想让你凝固的数字。另一种是里面的，它来自记忆里那些让自己发烫的瞬间，是那些瞬间冷却后，留给你的、不会消失的刻度。

我翻了翻身。被窝很暖。那根不会再亮的应援棒，就躺在不远处的书桌上。我知道，它里面封存着一片海，一片曾经为我涨潮的、蓝色的海。这就够了。

INTERVIEW w/ MS. BANMAN

by Claire Ru

In this issue, I interviewed Ms. Christina Banman, the Senior School choir director at SMUS, and the vocal director for the musical. As a student who joined the musical for the first time, I found singing to be both a challenging and rewarding experience. Hence, I conducted this interview with Ms. Banman to learn about her views on SMUS choir courses, the SMUS musical, and singing in general.

What can you expect in SMUS Choir classes?

[Students] can expect a choir class to be a relaxing space, but we also work to achieve a high quality. You can learn how to sing with good technique, how to use your voice in its most effective way, and hopefully make some friends.

As you arrive in class, you pick up your binder, and we warm up together by playing various singing games and exercises that involve the voice. Then we'll look at one of our pieces of music. Sometimes we'll sit and listen to a piece of music and talk about what we're hearing. We're always preparing for the next concert, especially at the beginning of the year. And so everything we're doing is in the context of the pieces that we're eventually going to perform. Within that, you're learning how to sing properly with good technique in a way that feels efficient and effective.

[Throughout the year, you learn] to blend and balance within your section and sing a different part from somebody else while holding on to your own part. Then, as the class progresses at the end of the year, you have the chance to work on an independent music project of your own choosing, which could include songwriting or composing, learning an instrument, or getting a band together with other people in the choir and presenting it at the coffeehouse.



What are some takeaways from choir classes apart from more mature singing techniques?

Singing is vulnerable. It presents your voice, and you don't get to hide behind an instrument. If you can find the confidence [to sing], then that confidence will transfer into other areas of your life.

[For example, singing] a solo in front of a room full of people gives you the confidence to be able to do other things, like public speaking or saying hi to that friend that you want to be friends with. [Singing also enhances your leadership skills.] The more times you've taken choir, you get to build up that confidence and then transfer that into becoming a leader in choir: being the first person to sing the right notes, singing a little bit louder than everybody else, checking in with somebody who maybe doesn't know what they're doing, and helping them along.

What is your experience working with students in the musical? Are there any differences between them and students in choir classes?

I get to do a lot more one-on-one work in the musical, especially with the people who have leads or solos, [than in] choir. Choir is more of a group thing. In musicals, I get a chance to dive into individual singing voices, focusing on what they can do to make their performance more effective.

Also, what I love about musicals is that [we are a big group] working together towards the same thing, and you get to show it off at the end. It's a team project where nobody loses. When you've got a strong singer next to you, even if you've never sung before, you can find and match their sound, even if you don't know how to read music, even if you're not sure about your own sounds.

How would you recommend this year's musical, *Les Misérables*?

Les Mis is a once-in-a-lifetime musical. If you're going to see a show, you should come see this show, even just to learn about pop culture. We've got some incredible singers this year. The orchestra is incredible. The sets are going to be incredible. Everyone should come.

What does it feel like to learn singing from a young age, and what has this experience brought you?

Singing is like a language: the younger you are when you start, the more it feels intuitive and

instinctual. But if you come to it later in life [and you are] determined to acquire the skill, you can still learn [it]. Everyone can learn how to sing. You just have to figure out how to coordinate your body to make it happen.

When you learn how to use your voice in one capacity, you can apply it in other capacities. The techniques for good singing are the same as those for how to position your body correctly. Like I always mentioned, we have a body and a face. [As such], learning to sing and finding power in singing can translate into using your voice with power and purpose [in other spaces].

What does knowing how to sing feel like?

[Through the musical, many singers have discovered that singing] feels easier than you think it does. It should feel natural. This may sound cheesy, but knowing how to sing feels magical. It really does. I think it's that confidence piece again. Singing is the scariest thing, right? So if you can build confidence singing, what can you not do?

What's your favorite song to practice/ to sing?

My students would say that I'm into weird and wonderful modern choral music. I love that sort of stuff because there is a meaning and intensity to it.

