While it is human nature to fight for self-survival, it is also in our nature to be empathetic; to have kindness and sympathy for those who are being mistreated.

—Mason East, pg. 89

It is through these especially difficult times that the value of a philosophical education can be fully appreciated.

—Austin Kruse, pg. 77
Live Ideas: Undergraduate Primary Texts Journal

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Live Ideas: Undergraduate Primary Texts Journal is the open-access, peer-reviewed undergraduate journal of Kansas State University's Primary Texts Certificate program. It is co-produced by students and faculty at K-State and is published online quarterly (Oct., Dec., Feb., Apr.). Live Ideas was co-founded by Jakob Hanschu and Dr. Laurie Johnson in 2018 with the mission of providing a platform from which undergraduates could express their original ideas or add to the conversations of existing ideas in creative, unbounded and meaningful ways. It is a student-led adventure into thought-provoking and creative expression. The founding editors would like to firstly acknowledge Dr. Glenn Swogger and the Redbud Foundation he founded to support the liberal arts and sciences, without whose financial support the creation of this journal would not have been possible. Second, we would like to thank the numerous reviewers, contributors, and friends that helped us get this journal "off the ground."

— Jakob Hanschu & Laurie Johnson

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About 18 years ago, Dr Glenn Swogger, then CEO of Kaw Valley State Banks, called to ask how he might help support K-State’s Primary Texts Certificate program, which sponsors Live Ideas Journal. He’d heard of the program, liked the idea of teaching through original works, and wanted to know more. That elicited the first of a lot of trips I took to Topeka to visit with this incredible person and his wife Claire.

Why was Glenn Swogger drawn to the Primary Texts program even though he was not an alumnus of K-State? He graduated from the University of Chicago when the core texts program there was thriving, and he had gained immeasurably from that education. He ended up getting his doctoral degree in psychology and working at Menninger Clinic in Topeka. Later, he inherited his father’s banking business, but he continued to research and write especially in social/political psychology, producing many published and unpublished works. All along the way, he retained and fostered a very lively curiosity and thirst for learning about all kinds of things. This deep intellectual curiosity continued to shine in his publications and in his social life, and that is what made the Primary Texts program important for him.

A partnership of sorts was forged between Dr. Swogger and the Primary Texts program. Eventually the support came through the Redbud Foundation he and Claire started. In 2017, after years of increasing donations that allowed for the creation and perpetuation of our core course, the Live Ideas speaker series, various scholarships, and the Live Ideas Undergraduate journal, I sat with Dr. Swogger and the Redbud Board in one of our annual meetings. I got the surprise of my life.

Glenn and Claire Swogger
In loving memory and gratitude.
Unsolicited, they proposed supporting the program with a $2 million endowment that would provide for a faculty chair of Primary Texts and ongoing program support—approximately $80-$84,000 per year in proceeds from the endowment. In anticipation of that gift, they started donating at that level. The endowment has not yet been accomplished, but the Redbud Foundation continues to provide for the program as if it had. This level of dedication, at a time of deep budget cuts, is an incredible boon for students, allowing them to enrich their education and enjoy learning.

Each year, the Primary Texts program gives $7-10,000 in scholarships, and that amount is increasing. It provides $5,000 in support each year to the Latin Classics minor in the Modern Languages Department, hosts at least two speakers to contemplate current events and problems through primary texts, employs three students in editorial positions, gives 10-15 students the chance to gain editorial experience as peer reviewers and editors, and gives many other students the chance to publish their work in *Live Ideas Undergraduate Journal*. The journal is published online and physically through K-State Printing.

The program now provides six undergraduate Live Ideas Institutes per year with scholarships, each four evenings long, giving undergraduate students the chance to workshop their projects with peers. And, most importantly, we continue with our core mission: we connect students with some of the best professors and classes using primary texts on campus. I’m confident that this program is one of the best things to ever happen to the College of Arts and Sciences, and it’s largely thanks to the enduring support of Glenn and Claire Swogger and the Redbud Foundation.

Glenn passed away August 7 to join the love of his life, Claire. I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude, and that of the participating faculty and every student past and present who has benefited tremendously from the support and friendship of Glenn and Claire.
Keri Brock Interview: Winner of our Spring 2021 Short Story Competition

Suan: How did you feel when you won our writing competition? Have you won writing competitions before, and did you think you were going to win?

Keri: I was overjoyed when I got the email congratulating me! I remember seeing my name, the title of my short story, and the word “congratulations”. I started freaking out, told my family I won, then calmed myself down enough to read the rest of the email. I didn’t really think I would win. When I wrote “Foolish Freshman”, I did not write it with the intention to submit it for publication. I wrote it because I felt like I needed to and wanted to.

This short story competition is the second one I have ever submitted a story to. The first one was for K-State’s literary magazine and the short story I submitted for that competition was the first short story I had ever written. I did not win that competition, my story was not that good, but it was the first one I had written and I’m glad I wrote it. It provided me the opportunity to figure out how to write a short...
story. After writing that short story, I felt the need to write another, which led me to write “Foolish Freshman”.

I wrote “Foolish Freshman” over winter break and that’s when I saw the competition for Live Ideas. I figured why not? I submitted “Foolish Freshman” to the competition, but still wanted to continue writing. I continued Nikki’s story of her freshman year of college writing a part two and a part three to follow part one, which you know as “Foolish Freshman”.

**Suan:** One thing I really loved about “Foolish Freshman” is its characters. What was your inspiration for these characters, and how do you recommend writing characters that are interesting and authentic (like yours)?

**Keri:** All the characters, except for the man in the diner, are based on real people I have met and knew very well. The characters, although based on real people, are not exactly like those people. I changed their names and tweaked their personalities, interests, and appearances. When I met these people my freshman year, I remembered thinking how unique and authentic everyone was. I think, when people are young and figuring out who they are or who they want to be, whatever identity/personality they feel is theirs or wants to be theirs, they are as true and authentic to that identity/personality as possible. This makes young adults great muses for characters.

My advice to make interesting and authentic characters is to meet as many people as you can, get to know them, and study them. Everyone is different and everyone has their own mannerisms, way of saying things, and thought processes. As you get to know more people, your ideas for characters will grow. Have fun when you are creating characters. Mix and match personalities of people you have met until you create a character as authentic and detailed as a real person. Also, if you are writing in the first person like my story, the writer should think about how the narrator would see the characters. What habits and comments of the characters would the narrator think about and what habits and comments would the narrator be blind to. For example, Nikki did not see the red flags and warning signs in the relationships with her friends when she was friends with them. It wasn’t until she retold her story and described them to the man in the diner when she was able to realize who they really were.

**Suan:** What was your writing process like for this story? Did you plan out the plot, or did you go with the flow?

**Keri:** I am usually a very organized person who loves to plan things out, but that was not the case when I wrote “Foolish Freshman”. I had tried to write this story about a year earlier, but could not understand
how and put it aside. Over winter break of the 2020-2021 school year, I just wanted to write, so I sat down to try to write the story again. This time it poured out of me and almost felt effortless. It took me about a week to write. I knew I wanted specific plot points to occur in the story and was able to work them into the story without too much planning. Ideas and lines would pop into my head anytime during the day and night, so to remember them, I kept a section of notes on my phone and came back to them when I had time to write.

Suan: What are the top three stories you’ve ever read/watched/listened to? For example, I love the story of the movie The Godfather, the Percy Jackson book series, and the TV Show Invincible.

Keri: My favorite movie is La La Land and it is what made me want to become a writer. I saw it three years after it came out over spring break (right before Covid) and only decided to watch it because I remembered it won some awards. I ended up loving it (obviously) and it unlocked this creative part of me that I did not know I had. I also became obsessed with watching old movies from the Golden Hollywood era since La La Land has lots of old Hollywood references and themes. In the height of the pandemic, I was watching classics like Casablanca, Singin’ in the Rain, and Roman Holiday. I turn to old movies and La La Land whenever I feel writer’s block and they always do the trick!

One of my favorite writers is John Green and my favorite book is The Fault in Our Stars. I love how authentic it is to young adults and teenagers. My favorite band is Coldplay and I love Taylor Swift’s Folklore and Evermore albums. I often listen to Coldplay and Folklore and Evermore whenever I have writer’s block.

Suan: What are you up to now?

Keri: As I said in my answer to my first question, I could not stop writing Nikki’s story and wrote a part two and part three. All parts put together was just under 90 pages and I loved writing all of it. I wanted to publish it in some way, maybe as a novella, but then I wanted to write more. I have spent this summer developing those 90 pages into a book! I rewrote “Foolish Freshman”, keeping it true to the story you published, but made it more detailed and day to day. I have also taken out the Randa character and changed Maria’s name to Randa since I like it more. I felt like there were too many character to keep track of since I was expanded the story’s length. I moved some of Maria’s (now Randa) and Sarah’s roles around so they covered Randa’s role. I also changed Josh’s name to Jake because I thought it suited the character more.

Part two takes place during Nikki’s Spring semester of her freshman year. It shows Nikki’s journey with coping and moving on and finding a way to get justice for
herself. Part three takes place during the summer after her freshman year and the reader finally gets to meet her east-coast based best friend, Philip. During the summer, she faces challenging decisions that will change her future in college and in life in general.

My hope for this story is to show the raw truth of what it can be like at times to be young and to be a freshman in college. I feel like there are not enough stories about college that truly show what it’s like day to day and how young adults transform slowly and not always steadily into adults.

I am also writing more short stories and submitting them to more magazines and competitions in hope of getting more stories published.
Women Answering the Call to Arms
Sydney Wolgast
senior | essay

Abstract
This paper is primarily about two women during the American Revolution. They each reacted to the danger around them in different ways, one dressed as a man to join the army while one grew into herself but stayed in her gender sphere. They both had stories they wanted remembered, one had it stolen while the other took control of hers.

Keywords: American Revolution, Women, Deborah Sampson Gannett, Eliza Wilkinson
In 1775, a twenty-two-year-old Connecticut woman, Deborah Champion began her journey as the sun rose on a September morning accompanied by a family slave by the name of Aristarchus. The night before, a young man had rushed into her home to pass along vital information to her father Colonel Champion, an officer in George Washington’s Continental Army. Deborah’s mother attempted to keep her out of the meeting by sending her out to town to purchase sundry condiments, although she knew that there were already some in the storeroom. After much discussion, her father asked if she had the courage to ride out into the night as it was decided that Deborah was the best person to make the ride north to Boston and deliver the documents that were hidden away in the bodice of her dress, fastened securely under her neckerchief. Colonel Champion did not believe there would be any real danger on her journey and Deborah was simply excited to serve her country and General Washington. She and Aristarchus rode all day only stopping to change horses at her uncle’s farm. After leaving her uncle’s house, Deborah stashed the papers in her saddle bag under some food that her mother
had packed for her. They knew that it was almost impossible to completely avoid the British unless they were to go completely out of their way. So, despite taking the safest route possible by heading straight north to Massachusetts rather than go through Rhode Island, Champion was stopped by a British soldier at dawn that wanted to bring her to see his commanding officer. Thinking quickly, she told the young sentry that it was far too early to wake his superior which caused the young man to hesitate. With her hood pulled low over her face, Deborah appeared to be an elderly woman taking a morning ride with her servant or visiting an old friend. This convinced the soldier to let them pass without alerting the rest of the army. Later, Champion passed the hidden documents into the hand of George Washington. She would later say that he “was pleased to compliment me most highly as to what he was pleased to call the courage I displayed and my patriotism.”

Deborah displayed bravery that was acknowledged by the commander of the Continental Army and yet she received no recognition for her deeds. She was not honored in some ceremony or given a medal, her actions became a footnote in history. Champion was not the only woman to have done something risky and daring for their cause or to have faced danger on a daily basis. Girls hid information and documents in the layers of their skirts, women defended their houses and families. Others simply wanted to live through the violence that seemed to surround them and their children. Everyone experienced the war no matter their socioeconomic station or where they lived in the colonies. Battles were fought both in empty fields and in the streets of populated towns where women and children sheltered in place while canon fire shook the walls. There were women who had to make the decision to leave their homes behind so they would not be caught up in the gunfire. Grace Barclay, a resident of Long Island, detailed in her journal how America’s foes, the British, took over her town but General George Washington had the cool forward thinking to call for a retreat. She described the place she hid in as a “quiet nook where we had hoped to find peace and safety, we shall have disturbance, fear, and danger; since the enemy have possession of the island, there could be no doubt of it, but to some extent my father’s neutral stand, and sacred profession, will protect us.” Grace went on to write how unfairly the colonies had been treated, that they had been overtaxed and oppressed. To her, the war was particularly savage because it called on brothers to choose a side, meaning that family members might see each other on opposite sides of the battlefield. The American Revolution was more bloody and deadly than many believed it would be. Families thought they would be able to picnic on the hillside while watching a battle as entertainment.
On June 17, 1775, shortly after the American Revolution began, the Battle of Bunker Hill took place near Boston, Massachusetts. While the idea of war was not a new one, the violence and bloodshed that occurred close to towns was. The day after the battle, Abigail Adams wrote a letter to her husband describing the cannon fire that was heard at all hours. She and her family were so distressed that they could no longer eat or sleep without being afraid that the fighting would never end. Her son, John Quincy Adams, detailed the battle in a letter to a friend, Joseph Sturge, decades after the event took place. He wrote that he saw “those fires, and heard Britannia’s thunders in the Battle of Bunker’s hill” and “witnessed the tears of my mother and mingled with them my own, at the fall of Warren a dear friend of my father, and beloved physician of me.” Abigail thought that it would be safe to take her children to witness the Battle of Bunker Hill only to discover that they were in legitimate danger and witnessed soldiers and friends die. She quickly realized that she would have to be mindful of what was going on around her and her family.
in order to protect them as best she could and having to make important decisions on her own. Women as iconic as Abigail Adams were directly in the path of the war but carried on anyway simply because she had no choice but to do so. This paper argues that women faced extraordinary violence, yet they did not reap the same benefits as their white, male counterparts. The sacrifices women were forced to make in order to survive were not praised by the newspapers or historians. They were left behind with little choice but to take up what were considered to be masculine tasks while the men were called away to fight for independence but did not share in the liberty that was eventually won.

This paper focuses on women’s wartime experiences because of the threats they faced throughout the American Revolution. Historians are able to learn about the actions and lives of women at the time of the war primarily through journal entries or letters that survived. This provides these heroines a certain amount of ownership over how they are portrayed, what the world was like through their eyes. Deborah Sampson Gannett and Eliza Wilkinson were two women that played a role in the American Revolution but their stories were presented differently. At the age of twenty-two, Deborah disguised herself as a man and, after a fail first attempt, enlisted in the Continental Army. She was able to hide her true identity for nearly three years before she was discovered. Deborah was, by all rights, a hero like the men she fought side by side with, however most of society did not agree. People simply did not know what to do with a woman who fought in the war, only men were allowed to wear a uniform and pick up a gun in defense of their homes. Down south in Charleston, widowed Eliza Wilkinson responded to the war waging around her in a more traditional way. She was forced to go through unwanted personal growth as she witnessed the siege and capture of her town by the British Army. She endured countless harassment and raids on her plantation by the enemy who took whatever they could get their hands on. Eliza understood that in order to survive she would have to essentially depend on herself. She could not rely on
the men around her because they had been captured by the British which left her adrift and forced into the position of head of house along with the responsibilities that came along with it. However, she did not let this change who she was after the war, she remarried and lived the rest of her days quietly. Like many other women of this era who were forced into positions typically reserved for men while maintaining their feminine identity, Eliza returns to being a footnote in history. Women were known for who they were married to or who their fathers were, not for their own accomplishments. These two women had a story worthy of being told, one had it manipulated by an author who was more interested in profits than facts. The other took great pains to preserve her experiences of violence and hostility written originally in letters but were later copied into a book by her own hand.

The long and bloody war between colonists and the British began in 1775 and forced people to choose sides. Nowhere was safe, neighbors and family members turned on each other, towns became battlefields and homes turned into lodgings for soldiers. Those who attempted to stay out of it, like the Quakers who did not believe in violence, were thrust into conflict when their homes were raided as punishment for not celebrating the victory of either side. The American Revolution has become romanticized in today’s society, movies and novels show happy endings and lovers reuniting. It is often forgotten that this war was incredibly violent and thousands died of infected wounds, blood loss, or some kind of disease they picked up along the road. It is sometimes easy to forget about the women of the American Revolution, the women that influenced and shaped our country, until the last few decades there was little research done on any of them. They had just as much reason to fight for their country and loved ones as any man, and experienced the violence of the war in their own way. Most did not charge into battle, although there are stories of those who disguised themselves as men, rather they feigned innocence and charm to gain the trust of the enemy all the while spying on them. With a steely determination, mothers, sisters, and wives fought the only way they knew how, because women were meant to fade into the background, to speak only when spoken to. This allowed them to gather information that could be passed along to those that needed it, being underestimated became a superpower.

For nearly two centuries, the experiences and dangers that women encountered during the American Revolutionary War were pushed aside in favor of the literal battles men fought. In the last several decades, historians have begun to dig into the lives of those who could be considered to be the mothers of independence and democracy. However, the most popular subjects are those who wrote influential
pieces or whose husbands were founding fathers. Dr. Eileen Hunt Botting wrote an article about the writings of Mercy Otis Warren and Hannah Mather Crocker. These women were members of important political families and therefore were privy to more information than the average person had access to. They published books and articles that chronicled the American Revolution but through a lens of political philosophy. Other women, specifically the spouses of Founding Fathers, have been studied by historians for the roles they played during and after the war. Many created ways to raise funding for supplies or sewing circles that made uniforms. Others directly influenced the politics that would shape the nation. Holger Hoock wrote an entire book over the violence of the American Revolution aptly named *Scars of Independence*. He describes the war in great detail, lamenting over battles, wounds, and those fortunate enough not to get lost in history. There are only a handful of pages dedicated to the threat of rape women faced as men’s morals loosened. The “troop movements provided a current that uprooted women and complicated their struggle to maintain families and livelihoods” that was “well before Virginia’s delegates in the Continental Congress voted to approve the Declaration of Independence.” To ignore what wives, sisters, and mothers survived and accom-
plished over the course of the war is to do them a great disservice. They deserve to be remembered for their bravery in the face of danger.

The societal roles of men and women leading up to the Revolutionary War appeared to be written in stone. Males were typically the providers, they were tough and could speak their minds anywhere they pleased. Females, on the other hand, usually handled the tasks pertaining to the home or child care which were strenuous in their own right. Today these women have become caricatured by authors and Hollywood directors who portray women and their gender spheres as uncrossable. However, this is far from the truth. When the war began and men were sent away to fight for their freedom, women of all classes took it upon themselves to care for their homes, farms, and businesses. They had to work the fields in order to grow a bountiful crop or keep the doors of their store open to maintain an income. These ladies took control of their lives as best they could and proved to everyone what they were capable of. It could be argued that they were able to progress women’s rights to a certain extent by accomplishing seemingly extraordinary feats while remaining firmly in their gender spheres. However, there were some who ventured into the masculine world by creating a facade in order to fight alongside the men.

Deborah Sampson Gannett was to many a woman playing dress up. She disguised herself as a man to fight in a way that she had no right fighting. In an attempt to tell her side of the story it became hijacked by Herman Mann, author of *The Female Review. Life of Deborah Sampson*. While the information he used was actually from interviews he did with Deborah he took liberties that would make his book more appealing to audiences. Mann repeatedly reinforced her femininity ensure readers that her virtue was intact while she was a soldier. Fifteen years before the American Revolutionary War began, Deborah Sampson was born in her grandfather’s home in the New English town of Plympton. This town is located near Plymouth, Massachusetts where one of her relatives on her father’s side settled in 1629 when he was young. He was an intelligent man that eventually became the Governor of the Colony of Plymouth. One of her mother’s ancestors came to America on the Mayflower, and those that followed possessed some kind of defining quality. Her grandfather was a well-respected and prosperous farmer with a comfortably sized estate. Deborah was born into a family that possessed money, they had stable housing and easy access to necessities. Unfortunately for her father, Jonathan Sampson Jr., he lost a portion of the land he was supposed to inherit to his brother-in-law which left him with less income. He struggled to find a way to provide for his family, in 1758 he was identified as a laborer in a legal
document, this likely meant that he traveled around looking for work. He left for England while his children were young, Deborah being under the age of five, when he died at sea. Whether he actually perished in a shipwreck or if that was a story his wife told so that others would not know she had been abandoned we do not know. His wife attempted to keep the family together utilizing her skills with economical management, but she fell sick and was left with no choice but to scatter her children across the country. Deborah bounced from home to home for years working as a servant. Eventually she found a place to live at the age of ten with Jeremiah Thomas and his family in Middleborough Four Corners where she stayed until the age of eighteen. Here she would have helped care for the younger children and other household chores that typically fell to the women. However, she also learned how to do things around the farmyard like milking the cows and tending to the vegetables. One of the most important things that Deborah acquired from her time with the Thomases, was the ability to read. It was this that “contribut-
ed to her sense of empowerment as well as to her aspirations,” she was noted to be a reader well into the end of her life.\textsuperscript{13} She also became a weaver, one of the few jobs that women were allowed to do and receive compensation for.

On March 5, 1775, the British marched on Boston where they pillaged and burned the city. It was at this point that Sampson learned just what exactly was happening in the world around her. The acts of oppression ordered by the crown and the riots held by the colonists sparked something within her. Deborah would have heard of the battles that plagued the colonies. She understood that the British were attempting to assert control over the colonies and that more destruction would happen unless Americans decided to take a stand. It seemed that every day there was news of a new battle to be fought somewhere and that the fighting would never end. Her biographer, Herman Mann wrote that Deborah had a dream where a large snake slithered up to her bed. Terrified, she leapt up unsure of what to do to ensure that the creature did not bite her. Suddenly she heard a voice saying “‘Arise, stand on your feet, gird yourself, and prepare to encounter your enemy.’”\textsuperscript{14} Sampson was able to fight off any wild animal that her dreams threw at her. This was what gave her the confidence to not follow the norms pushed upon her by society as much as they had in the past. She kept these words in the back of her mind as the fighting continued and she witnessed the battle at Breed’s Hill. She could hear the cannon fire and would later learn that the Americans lost to the British and that the land near her home only served as a thought provoking reminder of the battles waging around her. Deborah claimed that for several days after, she was unable to sleep and that she had different thoughts then those typical of her age and sex.\textsuperscript{15} However, it is unlikely that this dream, whether she actually had this dream or if this was a figment of Mann’s imagination, was not what spurred her into action as she was only fifteen at the time. By the time Deborah was born, her family, who had been wealthy and influential, were destitute and left to find any form of work possible. She had recently aged out of her servitude and while she had experience in weaving, the stipend and benefits offered to the men who enlisted in the army were simply too good to ignore. It offered her a pension after her service that would give her the financial stability that she lacked her whole life. For women to toe the line, or to leap over it, into the masculine norms they had to have an unquestionable, often mystical, reason. In Deborah’s case, it was the dream Mann created because women could not make decisions based on logic but rather emotions. This was why he made it up, the public would not accept that a woman could make rational choices. They could not join the war for the same reasons as men, it just was not something
they thought to be possible. This is how Deborah lost control of her story, a man swooped in to write about her, to give her a chance to explain her actions but he took that from her in order to publish something the public would accept.

Sampson saw the men of the town, and those that visited, search for recruitment stations where they could enlist in the Continental Army. Everyone from boys to runaway slaves were looking to fill the draft quotas. Those who served their time were promised a stipend and possibly a parcel of land. She used her weaving skills to create her disguise and would continue to do so throughout her time in the army. The uniforms that they wore were loose fitting which would have hidden her feminine shape and bandages were used to bind her breasts. The first time she attempted to enlist was in Middleborough as Timothy Thayer around the middle of March, 1782. However, she was discovered and threatened with legal action. In April of the same year, Deborah successfully registered in the army under the name Robert Shurtleff. The name was most likely intentional, there was an abundance of Shurtleffs in the surrounding areas, and Robert was an incredibly popular name. There was even a Shurtleff family in Plymouth County and an actual Robert Shurtleff in Carver. Deborah would have been able to describe every detail if
asked where she was from. Shortly after her arrival at West Point, she was chosen for the light infantry in Captain George Webb’s company, Colonels Shepard and Henry Jackson’s Fourth Massachusetts regiment. At the time of her enlistment, the Continental Army had roughly eleven thousand officers and men in the infantry and another thousand in artillery defense. Deborah no doubt found that life as a soldier was more difficult than she originally thought. The days were hot and sticky, attributing to fatigue more than fighting the enemy. Blisters would have covered her hands as they got used to handling a rifle and bayonet. She recounts the names of three men that died by her side in an interview she did with Mann for his Female Review, a book about the amazing adventures Deborah faced. The resolve of the General Court of Massachusetts January 20, 1792, she is described to have “exhibited an extraordinary instance of female heroism, and by discharging the duties of a faithful and gallant soldier.” On the twenty-fifth of June, both American and British soldiers marched towards Tarrytown in order to find a place to sleep for the night. There, Deborah and her fellow soldiers were met with British Colonel Delancy’s troops aided by the local Tories. Delancy and his soldiers were on horseback where they rained bullets down on the Americans who were on foot and were therefore unable to return fire. They came around a second time but were met with a volley of bullets as the Continental Army had time to prepare. This was the short skirmish that led to Deborah being shot and wounded by a musket ball that would stay in her leg until she died at the age of sixty-six. She successfully maintained her disguise for two years before she was honorably discharged and received a pension. She was awarded forty-eight dollars per year by the government in 1803, the amount increasing to seventy-six dollars in 1816, and once again in 1818 to ninety-six dollars.

Deborah Sampson Gannett defied the gender norms placed upon her by society by disguising herself as a man to fight in the war. However, rather than gain respect and liberty like every other man, she was seen as someone who disrupted society. She did not become a beacon of women’s civil rights, in reality she stalled any traction women of the time had made towards equality. Deborah hid her femininity and took on a masculine identity and is one of the only, if not only, people to have done this at the time of the American Revolution. Instead of demonstrating what she was capable of within her own gender sphere, she crossed into another. Deborah was not the only person to bend gender norms, her husband, Benjamin Gannett, wrote to the government questioning if he would be able to draw his wife’s pension after she had died. He claimed that without it both of his daughters, who often relied on charity, would
require the money to survive. Benjamin, being eighty years old at the time could no longer work to provide for them. In every other case the government oversaw, the wife was the person to ask for her husband’s pension, not the other way around. This was how women were able to provide for their children if the men who fought were to killed in battle, or if they happened to die of old age. Benjamin was the one who required the funds to keep his daughters from servitude or homelessness. The pension was originally worth six hundred dollars, which would have helped significantly as Deborah had an injury from a battle that never quite healed. It was briefly thought that the case would be dismissed, her husband had never served and they were married after the war so he did not receive the same status as a war widow. However, the government acknowledge how unique the case was, a woman took up arms and bled for her country, now her spouse was in need of financial aid. It was determined that because Benjamin cared for his wife while she suffered from the wound she sustained, he would be awarded eighty dollars a year.

The most famous acts of protest against the British, like the Boston Tea Party, took place in the north. Battles like Boston’s Bunker Hill or New York’s Battles of Oriskany have been written about by scholars and immortalized in modern day musicals. It is easily forgettable that the American Revolution was not limited to northern colonies. Five years after the war began, the British created a new strategy, their goal was to isolate the south so supplies and information could not be easily shared. By cutting off trade routes, entire towns became prisoners of war and were reliant on the enemy for basic necessities and varying forms of protection. This left women unable to depend upon the men as the British wanted to emasculate them in order to have more control. Women were practically left to fend for themselves as they were forced to interact with the enemy soldiers occupying their town. Eliza Wilkinson, a widow constantly travelling between her and her father’s plantation, was regularly accosted and looted by red coats and their Hessian allies. While standing in front of the enemy, she did not waver in her convictions or step outside the bounds of her gender sphere. On May 12, 1780, the city of Charleston surrendered to the British Army under the command of Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis after a three-month siege leaving nearly the entire population of 6,000 to be prisoners of war. He was told by his superiors to “use every effort to prevent supplies and reinforcement being thrown into Charles town” while to also guard the garrison against escape. This was not a new phenomenon. The idea was to isolate the south from the north in hopes that the people would once again become loyal British
Continental soldiers were primarily contained on ships while officers were held so they could be exchanged. The rest of the city was judged on their loyalty to the Crown and based on their answers, allowed to return to their homes upon surrendering their arms. Anyone who refused or attacked British soldiers was labeled enemies and rebels according to General Henry Clinton in June, 1780. Cornwallis appointed John Cruden from North Carolina as the Commissioner of Sequestered Estates and “from 1780 to 1782 he confiscated an estimated four hundred estates for the ‘Military Chest,’ including land, houses, livestock, furniture, plate, produce, and more than five thousand enslaved laborers” in an attempt to please the British Army. He then attempted to recreate South Carolina’s successful plantations by hiring overseas labor and slaves to maintain flourishing crops. A person’s economic status, whether a wealthy plantation owner or servant, did not factor in who was looted. Eliza Wilkinson wrote in a letter “I ventured to speak to the inhuman monster who had my clothes. I represented to him the times were such we could not replace what they’d taken from us, and begged him to spare me only a suit or two; but I got nothing but a hearty curse for my pains.” The soldiers continued to take the buckles from her shoes and the earrings from her sister’s ears, not caring that the items could not be easily replaced. Her father’s plantation was also plundered, the British attempted to search her mother’s pockets only to have their hands slapped away so that she could pull the small sewing kit out herself. Eliza simply could not understand why the red coats disrespected the elderly, until the war started elders were honored and taken seriously because of their life experiences. To watch the army who were once tasked with protecting the average citizen mock and assault anyone with little regard for their actions was shocking.

Wilkinson and her family witnessed and experienced the violence the British Army was capable of after the capture of Charleston, they watched as many of their own troops fled while the enemy advanced. The red coats were savages with no care of gender, race, or age in regards to their victims, they destroyed everything and took prisoners. Eliza wrote that they “had always heard most terrible accounts of the actions of the British troops at the northward; but (fool that I was,) I thought they might be exaggerated,” and that she “could not believe that a nation so famed for humanity, and many other virtues, should, in so short a time, divest themselves of even a trace of what they once were.” England had once been their homeland, their protectors during wartimes, but they became the enemy and many did not know exactly what that entailed. The British had begun to surround smaller cities and islands in hopes to keep
the Continental army out of the south. Wilkinson saw how afraid people were of the soldiers that invaded their homes, they felt unprotected as the majority of the men had been called away fighting for their new nation. Eliza described:

a large boat-load of women and children on their way to Charles-town, as that place promised more safety than any other. I pitied them greatly, (though we were much in the same situation;) one lady especially, who had seven children, and one of them but a fortnight old; thus, in her weakly situation, to venture her life and that of her babe, rather than fall into the hands of the enemy, whose steps have been marked with cruelty and oppression.31
Everyone was terrified of what the British would do if to them, they believed that risking their lives by crossing rivers at night with whatever they could bring in search of somewhere a little safer was their only option. In reality, there were very few places that were truly safe in the south, many of the Continental troops that remained were being hunted by the enemy and those affiliated were simply in the way. Multiple times throughout the British occupation of Charlestown, Eliza and her family were visited by the enemy to ransack their homes or to pry any information they might have from them. One instance of this happening was when the red coats believed that she might know the location of General Benjamin Lincoln’s troops. She was badgered by the enemy but Eliza strongly claimed that “I was determined they should know nothing from me, let the consequence be what it would; for I did not seem to fear them on my own account.” However, when one of her slaves was questioned, he readily handed over every bit of knowledge he had about the whereabouts of the Continental Army.

On more than one occasion, Eliza and her family encountered members of the enemy troops within the area. One afternoon a group of British soldiers in a barge came to her father’s plantation while he was strolling near the gardens. He believed that if they were to come to shore they would take him without a care for his poor health. Two of her father’s slaves who were nearby grabbed him and placed him in a small rowboat that allowed them to outrun, or out row, the British. They immediately went to warn Eliza and her visitors so they would be able to evacuate to the nearby woods. They walked for three miles through dense foliage and stifling humidity from the bogs. Tree roots would catch on the hems of their skirts while some seemed to reach up and grab their shoes. Eventually they came across a Continental Army camp where they met Colonel Robert, an old friend of Eliza’s father, and General Lincoln who the red coats had spent the majority of the occupation searching for. The wandering groups felt relieved that they were able to find patriot allies. At one point Eliza was drawn into a conversation with a captain she could not quite remember the name of, it was either Goodin, or Goodman. She told them about every interaction she and her family had with the British whenever they came to interrogate or loot them. Eliza explained the anxiety they felt when they ceased to hear any news of General Lincoln’s troops. This, apparently, pleased the captain as he exclaimed “O, Madam, what men are these that would not undergo anything when they see and know the ladies are friends to the cause they are engaged in!” The thought that women were praying for the safety of the American men appeared to uplift their spirits. The next day, the camp was broken up and the mixed group of army and civilians
continued through the woods and settled near a ferry dock. They managed to avoid the British until the next morning where the enemy seemed to appear out of nowhere. Cannon fire rang out around Eliza witnessed men run off to fight. Eventually a soldier stopped in front of her out of breath, he kept shaking his head and when he finally found the strength to speak he said “General Lincoln and his army are cut to pieces!” It was not until much later, after moving away from the battle, that Eliza learned that the general and his troops retreated to fight another day. Eliza was literally in the midst of a battle and was able to think rationally enough to find her family and take shelter.

Later Eliza rejoiced to hear that General Cornwallis surrendered to General George Washington. This was the news she and her family had been anxiously waiting for years while living under British occupation. At last, the war was coming to an end and the newly independent territory had a small taste of the freedom and liberty many fought so hard for. Eliza was not ashamed to admit that she gave a petty laugh at the red coats and loyalists she passed in the street, she called it her sweet revenge. While she and a friend were leaving town after visiting to purchase ribbon and fabric, they found themselves escorted by British soldiers to an her brother’s estate where a Captain Stanford and some of his men were quartered. Of course she and her companion were patriots and wanted nothing to do with the enemy but had little choice as their carriage was forcefully guided. In her letters, Eliza rather angrily describes her conversation with Stanford and demanded that the materials from town be returned to her as it was all she had. The British throughout the occupation would not allow them to have cloth as they believed Continental uniforms were being made by civilians. Eliza bravely survived her encounters with any red coats that came to her plantation and managed to live through battles waging around her for years. She was able to understand the situation she was in and became a politician in her own right which is something men had previously told her was not a role she was able to do. Eliza knew that the female gender was weaker in body but stronger in ever other way. She was deeply offended that men appeared to think so little about what women were capable of. Angrily, she wrote “what contemptible earth worms these authors make us! They won’t even allow us the liberty of thought, and that is what I want.” Eliza did not appreciate men reminding her that their household tasks of knitting and cooking were the only ones they were suited for.

The American Revolution took place nearly two centuries ago and yet historians are only now uncovering the actions of those forgotten in time. Women encountered the same danger and violence as men as canon fire caused houses
to shake and soldiers died in the street. Recognizable figures like Abigail Adams and Martha Washington are written about because of who they were married to. This, of course, is not to say that they do not deserve to be remembered for their own accomplishments. Women performed crucial tasks during the war such as raising money and supplying uniforms for the army. However, some women stepped out of the perceived roles women were assigned at the time. Some became spies, hiding important information under their clothes while others smuggled soldiers out of British occupied cities under the cover of darkness. One woman even fought in the Continental Army disguised as a man for nearly three years. While most women were behind in the “safety” of their homes to tend to their children, property, and businesses. They flourished with the extra responsibility and enjoyed the ability to make decisions on their own. Most of these deeds by women of the revolution have either been lost to history or rewritten as romanticized stories due to the subservient role women played in society during the colonial era.
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**The Fish and the Cup Bearer**

**Cody Skahan**

senior | short story

**Abstract**

My short story is a story about a rational minded person who is confronted with the choice of graduate school, a decision that calls for something beyond rational thinking. In order to help come to a decision, he turns to astrology, and is mentored by a friend in the logical side of astrology to inform his decision that pulls him at emotionally and logically.

*Keywords: Astrology, Tragedy, Coming-of-Age, College, LGBT*
“Staring at it isn’t going to make the decision any easier” Percy was startled out of his daze by Caspar’s cold hands on his shoulders “Besides, you don’t graduate for another 3 months. You can pick a grad school then…Why don’t we go look at the stars for awhile?”

Turning his attention away from his laptop, and to Caspar, Percy sighed and said “You’re right. Is it that cold out?”

Percy followed Caspar as he squeezed himself out of their bedroom window and onto the roof of the house they were renting. Laying down next to Caspar, who was enamoured with the constellations above, he began to think about the first time they had met.

Percy was a Biology major, but he had to take an Anthropology class to fulfill one of his general requirements. He managed to put it off until his sophomore year, but his advisor reminded him that it was best to get those classes over with before he got too far into his major.
So, he enrolled in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, and Caspar was the TA for his discussion section. Percy quickly developed a huge crush on Caspar. Caspar had a way of speaking that was just so enthralling and convincing, that, combined with their memories together, made it so that Percy would do or sacrifice just about anything to stay with Caspar.

Unfortunately, that reminded Percy of his present predicament.

Turning to Caspar, he asked “I know making the decision to stay here was easier for you because of your mother’s health, but how did you decide on K-State anyways? I would love to stay with you, but I don’t know if I can say no to MIT…”

For answer, Caspar glanced at the stars. “I took a look at my astrological chart.”

Anticipating Percy’s withering look, Percy clarified “Well, I didn’t completely let astrology decide for me, but I did use it help me make the decision. It has a sort of fuzzy logic to it that helped me sort through the facts and everything in my subconscious, and eventually, the decision kind of came to me intuitively.”

Percy responded. “Well personally, I like to rely on concrete, logical facts that I know I can count on to make decisions. Besides, I don’t like how much you let it control your life. Ever since that Eclipse last month you can’t stop talking about astrology…”

“I don’t let it control my life, but
guide, it actually allows for a lot of human agency and is kind of comforting.”

Turning to Percy, Caspar said “You should let me read your chart, I think astrology could provide you with a lot of comfort as well.”

“No.”

“C’mon,” he nudged. “It’ll help.”

“No.” Percy repeated as he stood up and looked down at Caspar. “You know I don’t believe in any of that.”

Later that night, not being able to sleep, Percy eased himself out of bed carefully to not wake up Caspar. Opening up his laptop, he checked out the websites for K-State and MIT for perhaps the thousandth time.

MIT was obviously the much better school, and better for Caspar’s career as an aspiring microbiologist, but it would also be the first time Percy lived somewhere that wasn’t Kansas. It is not that he was particularly attached to the state, but it was all he ever known, and most of his family and friends lived here.

Being honest with himself, the decision would be a very simple one if not for the fact that Caspar was going to be attending K-State.

He looked over at Caspar, who turned over in sleep as if somehow sensing Percy’s thoughts and eyes. Before Caspar, Percy’s life was straightforward. He was going to go to MIT like his dad had, get a job as a microbiologist, and focus his efforts on his career. As a microbiologist, he wanted to study viruses like COVID-19 in order to prevent the possibility of a future pandemic. In his eyes, the best way to stop a pandemic was through science and technology.

Now, it was more complicated. Caspar had a different way of looking at problems that made him rethink the social aspects of pandemics. For one, there was the fact that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color were at an increased risk from COVID-19 because of systemic health and social inequality. Additionally, there was the problem of people who refused to wear masks or get vaccinated.
There was the way the news talked about the pandemic, the deepening mistrust in science, people spouting off fake cures…

Before he met Caspar, these were things he thought science alone could take care of. Percy really did not care that much about these sorts of details, yet Caspar did, and through Caspar, he learned to care. And the more he learned and cared, the more he cared about Caspar. They had moved into together earlier this year, and between Caspar and their friends at college, Percy felt he had joined a new, happy family. He desperately did not want to let go of that happiness.

Sighing, he shut his laptop, got up, and put on his coat. He decided to see if a walk would help clear his mind.

Not too far into his walk, Percy was drenched from the rain. Only a few blocks from his house, it had started pouring. Fast enough to drench him within seconds, but steady enough to indicate it would not let up for some time, Percy decided to continue his walk.

Besides, he really liked the way the lights from the cars that passed him looked through the rain. Every once in awhile, a car would drive through a puddle and throw another wave of water at him, but its not like he could get any wetter.

Eventually, he walked past the restaurant where he and Caspar had spent
their first date. He paused for a beat, and then walked up to the building, wiping the glass front with his sleeve to get a better look inside. Yep, he could see the seat at which they had sat, and the rain on his hands reminded him of his sweaty palms from that night. Stepping out of the restaurant, neither Percy nor Caspar had wanted the date to end. So, they decided to walk around downtown a little, much like Percy was tonight. Percy couldn’t remember which one of them had initiated it, but before he knew it, they were holding hands.

His mind still in the past, Percy stepped away from the restaurant, and attempted to retrace their path through the city.

First, they had walked to the city park. They did perhaps ten, twenty, thirty laps of the park, talking about their childhood, lives, and dreams. “I want to travel the world as an anthropologist, visiting cultures all over the globe and learning from them” Caspar had told him.

“I would love to travel as well,” Percy responded, “there’s something so fresh and exciting about seeing the world, as long as you have a stable home to return to at the end of that day.”

“So where is home for you?” Percy remembered Caspar asking.

“Well, if you’re asking where I grew up, I grew up in Kansas City. But it doesn’t really feel like home to me, as much as I love my family. Where’s home for you?”

“I’m not sure, I guess I’m still kind of looking for a place to call home.”

After that, they had walked to go get coffee because Caspar loved coffee, and the night was getting long. He knew a diner that was open all night with “the best coffee and apple pie in town.” Since then, they had spent many nights in that diner during late night homework and studying sessions, or just when they felt like getting out of the house.

“What is the Mitochondria?” Percy asked Caspar.

Rita, the waitress who usually had the night shift had said in passing “Even I know that one, and I’m a high school dropout!”

“Seriously Percy,” Caspar assented, “it’s so easy, just move on to the next one.”

“Oh, if it’s so easy, then what is it?” Percy teased.

“The powerhouse of the cell!” Caspar said with characteristic theatrical flourish.

Percy chuckled in the present, to this day he would sometimes ask Caspar what the mitochondria was just to relive that moment.

Recently, neither of them had felt like leaving the house as much, and it had become less safe because of COVID, so they hadn’t been to the diner in awhile. Percy considered going in just to say hi to Rita, but he didn’t see her in there, and he didn’t want to get water all over the place and give her more work.
Their last stop that night had been the hill overlooking town. It was quite the jaunt, but they were fueled by coffee, and the desire for the best view of the sky in the city.

The view seemed even more spectacular that night, with Caspar pointing out the constellations he knew to Percy. He asked Percy when he was born, and so as to not ruin the perfect evening they had been having, Percy, humored him.

“That makes you an Aquarius, so I’m going to say you’re analytical, intellectual, and full of ambitious dreams. Am I right?”

“Wow, that’s not bad at all!”

Not too far off, but at the time Percy had privately written it off as a vague and lucky coincidence. Percy’s opinion towards astrology became less negative over time, but he has still maintained what he considers a healthy skepticism without offending Caspar. That was before Caspar was super into astrology, so all he could tell him was his sun sign, and their compatibility.

“I’m a Pisces, so there are definitely better matches out there, but do not fret, it could be worse.”

“You had me there for a min-
ute, Caspar, I was worried this ship was doomed to sink before it even really set sail.”

Percy was more likely to be somewhat “emotionally distant, but constant” and Caspar was “emotionally invested, but inconsistent.” To some degree that had been proven to be true, but Percy became more and more invested over time, to the point where it hurt so much to think about losing Caspar, even if he was chasing his dreams.

Thinking about the parallels between that night, and his current predicament, Percy decided to make the long journey up the hill to perhaps gain some clarity.

Just as Percy was about to crest the first rise leading to the top of the hill, he heard a yell behind him, and saw a flash of light in his eyes. A car was hydroplaning towards him faster than it should have been. The car was only feet away, and Percy’s feet felt rooted in place as time seemed to come to a stop. He imagined he could see the panic in the driver’s eye and the useless attempts to stamp on the breaks, but that would’ve been impossible because of the blinding headlights.

His vision went white.

Just before the car hit him, Percy felt an impact from behind. He landed on the grass next to the street, as the car continued uncontrollably down the road. Percy watched as the driver finally got the car under control, and continued on its way. Just then, he remembered the impact he had felt. Turning to his side, he saw Caspar lying near him.

Percy’s heart stopped. He stood up as fast as he could, and dashed over to look Caspar up and down. There didn’t appear to be any cuts, scrapes, or bruises, and Caspar wasn’t making any noise. In fact, he was smiling.

“Are you ok?” he half asked, half whispered

“I feel great, I’m just glad I got here in time” Caspar responded.

“How did you know to follow me, or know where I was?”

“Easy,” Caspar responded, pointing at the sky, “there’s a full moon, and it told me to follow my guts.”

Percy, then chuckled. He helped Caspar get to his feet, saying “I guess I ought to let you read my chart, then.”

“It appears that way.”
The following night, Percy sat on the floor across from Caspar with his stack of books, Percy’s natal chart, a few candles, and other miscellaneous esoteric paraphernalia scattered around him. Caspar smiled at Percy, and lit the large candle sitting between them. Percy found the whole scene a little dramatic, but he had decided to completely suspend his judgement and go along with whatever Caspar intended to do.

Caspar began to give Percy a crash course in astrology and chart readings. “Astrology has been around for thousands of years, dating back to at least the Greeks. Despite this vast wealth of knowledge, astrology is a faith-based science. The astronomy is the absolute science part of it, everything after that is a leap of faith.”

Caspar paused a moment for emphasis. “Are you ready to take the leap of faith?”

“Yeah, about as ready as I ever will be.”

Caspar smiled at Percy. “Great. So, do you have any specific questions?”

“I mean, besides anything that might help me with picking a grad school, not really.”

“Ok, well in that case we will start with a general chart reading, and then later on we will look at the 4th and 9th houses because they deal with college and higher education. They helped me a lot when I was making my own decision. I found interesting placements and aspects with Mars there, which is the planet of desire, conflict, and passion, so I listened to my heart, and picked K-State.”

“Hey, I thought this was supposed to be about me, not just an excuse for you to have an ego trip and talk about yourself the whole time.”

Caspar laughs “Fair enough. Alright, well first off, your sun is in Aquarius, which you already know…”

“Tell me something more interesting.”

“Patience, young padawan. Astrology is all about patience. Your moon is in Libra, and the moon refers to you inner, emotional self. This means you have a need for balance and harmony in your life extends from your personal environment to your social life, and all the relationships you have with others. From what I have seen, you are good at seeing other people’s perspectives, and giving an objective and fair-minded approach to things—”

“I like to pride myself on being—”

“—except when it comes to things outside of STEM. You are much better than when I first met you, but your ego gets in the way of seeing the beauty and knowledge of the collected wisdom of humanity.”

“I’m trying, but there is just so much out there that makes me question them.” Percy argued passionately.

“Admittedly, there are people who view astrology as completely deterministic of human action and personality, and
don’t really think too much for themselves. Sun columns give astrology a bad name.”

“Anyways, it is hard for me to see the value of anything that isn’t based on rationality and logical considerations of thing” Percy said, calming down a little. “I can understand why other people might find it helpful or interesting, but I do not think its for me. I want to learn more first, though, if for nothing else, than for you. Keep going.”

“I know, and you have been doing great. I just know that there is something to astrology that could help you a lot, even if you don’t fully believe in it. It’s a useful way of thinking about things and making sense of the world” Caspar admitted. “Anyways, to round out the big three, your Ascendant happens to be in Libra as well, actually within only two degrees of each other. The Ascendant is the mask that other people see you as, which interestingly lines up with your inner emotional self in this case.”

Percy puffed his chest up a little at this “Well, that’s got to be pretty rare, hasn’t it?”

“Well, not really. The odds are about 1 in 12. If they were the same degree, that would be 1 in 360. But it’s nice to see you get so excited about astrology.”

Percy grumbles “Yeah, well, whatever.”

Chuckling, Caspar continues to read Percy’s chart, going through the placement of his other planets.

After Caspar finishes listing off the placement of Percy’s houses, Percy asks “Well what does that houses thing you mentioned earlier mean?”

“Well, each sign and planet is placed within one of the 12 houses. The house corresponds to specific areas of your life. But, we’ll talk more about that tomorrow night, I think that is enough for tonight. Until then, I want you to study each of the planets, and investigate the meaning of which sign and house they are in. Eventually you will be ready to get into aspects, the Midheaven, the nodes, and some other things.”

“Like eclipses.”

“Yes, like eclipses.” Caspar says, blowing out the candles leaving the two of them in darkness.

“Why were you so dramatic with the candles and everything last night?”
Percy asked Caspar. “You just printed my chart off from the internet, too, which I thought didn’t fit the same aesthetic or vibe.”

“It feels right. It may be cheesy and silly, but I really think that it makes the reading more immersive, and maybe more proper?” Caspar responded, a bit sheepishly.

“Well, it does make the experience more interesting and almost fun.”

“Exactly! I think before you were going about it all wrong, trying to approach it from a strictly scientific perspective. It’s sort of a light-hearted spiritual experience, intended to be very subjective and personal.”

“I really do like the idea of that. I must admit I am kind of looking forward to tonight. What do you want to do today? Any big plans?”

“I think I am just going to stay in, and prepare for tonight. You know what would be fun? You could run to the store and we can make dinner together. Then, we eat out on the deck and have a romantic dinner together, just the two of us.”

“That sounds pretty great. I do have a bit of homework to work on for class, and I have a biology test next week, but I could use a study break for sure.”

“Sounds like a plan, Stan.”

In response, Percy groaned.

For dinner, Percy had bought a bunch of different vegetables to make into a stir fry, and Caspar had prepared a cheese and fruit platter for them snack on. To really set the mood Percy had brought home a bottle of wine, and Caspar brought out the candles they had used during the reading the night before.

The overall intoxicating atmosphere caused by the lavender scented candle, delicious food, and the few glasses of wine Percy had put him in a very pleasant mood, and looking at Caspar, who almost seemed to be glowing in the moonlight as they sat outside on the deck, Percy could not imagine the evening going any better. At this thought, he felt a pang in his heart, and knew that if anyone asked him right in this moment, he would unhesitatingly commit to K-State so he could stay close to Caspar.

“Not to completely kill the mood, but how’s your mom doing?” Percy asked Caspar who had curled up beside him after finishing dinner. There really wasn’t room for two people on the chair, but Percy did not mind too much. Besides, Caspar’s skin was actually quite cool to the touch, a welcome balm from the humidity.

“Oh, you know, about the same. My dad has hardly left her side for the past few weeks, but she doesn’t seem to be getting worse or better.”

“Well…things could be worse. Do you mind if I tell Spencer and them? They have been asking about her recently, and you know how much they loved tacos she used to make for them.”

“Yeah, of course. I would say they
can visit, but the hospital still has the COVID restrictions in place, so only family members can visit. Besides, I don’t think she would recognize them right now."

“Man, that is tough. You are such a trooper for staying and taking care of her. It’s nice to know that when I go senile prematurely, you’ll be there to take care of me.”

“You mean like I already do?”

“Ha, ha, so funny.” Percy said, wrapping his arms around Caspar. Percy dosed for awhile, until he was awakened by a gentle gust of wind across his face. Caspar had already started clearing away their plates, replacing them with his astrological books.

After cleaning up from dinner, Percy arranged himself across from Caspar much like the previous night. Despite this, something felt different to Percy than last night. He couldn’t tell what it was, but the air seemed charged with energy.

“Right,” Caspar began, “let’s get started. I was pleasantly surprised at some of the questions you asked me earlier today. Obviously you did your research.”

“Well you know me, I want to learn as much about something I disagree with so I can refute it as completely as possible” Percy responded, knowing that Caspar would pick up on the irony.

Percy and Caspar had talked about astrology while making dinner together, and Percy had bombarded Caspar with questions about what various planets and signs meant in particular houses on his chart. He had to admit that astrology was much more sophisticated and intriguing than he thought.

He saw tonight as the real test. If Caspar’s observations of Percy’s chart could reveal something that he shouldn’t or couldn’t have known about, it would go a long way to convince Caspar about the efficacy of astrology.

“So first off, let’s start with the 4th and 9th houses. Your 4th house has Neptune in Capricorn, as well as the Sun, Mercury, and Uranus in Aquarius.”

Interrupting him, Percy said “Yeah, I was reading about that today. The Neptune thing means that I am complex, original and introspective, as well as sensitive and indecisive. That actually makes a lot of sense regarding my current predicament. What would you advise?”

“My, my Percy, I daresay I am impressed. Well the advice I would give is that you need to spend more time on yourself to understand what the question means to you. You have already looked at the two schools for who knows how many hours, but why is the question so hard for you, beyond the obvious?” Caspar inquired.

Percy mulled this over in his head for awhile, taking his time to answer. "Hmm, that’s a good point. I feel like that I have been so concentrated on this decision that I haven’t really been able to
zoom out, and understand how it affects the rest of my life, and my future. I’ve focused a lot of time on how it affects me in the immediate future over the next few years, but nothing really beyond that.”

“Well, it sounds like you are on the right path. Unfortunately, you won’t be able to completely answer that and think about that as deeply as you should in one night, so I’ll let you make note of that, and then we can move on. Sound good?”

“Ok, yeah. So now the other planets in the 4th house.”

“Right. So there are some interesting conflicts here. Uranus says that you may struggle with your family or home life, and want to be able to leave and be more independent. On the other hand, the sun being here shows that you may be more predisposed to prioritizing your family over your professional life. I can see these two opposing forces affecting you.”

“…....I’m speechless!” Percy exclaimed, surprising himself a little with how loud and excited he was. “I read about Uranus and the Sun in the 4th house today, and it just did not make sense. How could two planets that were so different coexist? I thought it was simply astrologers covering their bases by not leaving out any possibility, but the way you explain it makes so much sense….I think my case is a little different because I see you and my friends here as my true family. I feel like we have been able to build a great home here, as opposed to with my real family. Now, that is being threatened if I decide to go to MIT…”

“Well the last planet may help clear things up a little more for you” Caspar interjected. “Mercury in your 4th house means that you are likely to be adventurous, but that your home life is still extremely important to you, and you are always looking for something to occupy your mind with. You love education, and are always looking for new perspectives, being open to change your mind if thoroughly convinced. I can definitely see how you have grown into this over time, which shows how astrology sometimes points to who you are becoming, rather than who you are.”

“For sure. You have definitely been important in that transformation, and I feel like I have changed a lot since leaving home and coming to college. Being away from the influence of my dad has… allowed me to grow a lot in being more open. So, what is your advice, how does this help me?”

“Well, I can already tell you that there is a bigger transformation to come. Because of this placement, you feel more comfortable at pursuing at home. But you need to also work on feeling comfortable away from home, whether this requires going out more often, or leaving for an extended period of time. That’s how true peace of mind is found, culminating in a very powerful self-transformation
Percy let out the breath he was holding. “That’s…intense. I think I need some time to think this all over. I’m going to go for a walk, and see if that Rita has a fresh pot of coffee at the diner ready. Do you want a cup?”

“I think I’m ok, I’ll work on cleaning up everything here.”

“Hey, Percy, it’s been far too long!” Rita said when she saw him walk in. “I just made a fresh pot. The usual?”

“Yeah, that would be great. Thanks Rita!”

“Of course. Do you want it to-go, or do you have time to chat?”

“I would love to chat. Truly, I would. It has been too long, I have been much too busy recently, and I feel like I barely leave the house anymore. But, I got a lot of things I need to think about tonight. Maybe another night.” Percy handed Rita his payment, with the extra tip he was accustomed to.

Rita waved her hand at Percy “Nonsense, it’s on the house. I remember when you and Caspar used to come in here and leave me huge tips all the time.” There was a wistful note in Rita’s voice, but Percy hardly noticed because his mind was still on what Caspar had told him.

“I’ll keep you in my thoughts, and remember, you’re welcome here any time Percy.”
“Thanks, Rita, that means a lot. I’ll see you around.”
“Bye!”

Leaving the diner, Percy was comforted by the familiar ding of the bell on the door, and made a mental note to come back more often.

Percy blinked, and realized he had spent the entire walk home staring at the stars. Walking into the bedroom, he almost tripped over the books laying open on the floor. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw that Caspar had fallen asleep reading, and had not put everything away yet.

Percy pulled a blanket over Caspar, who must have been freezing, and picked up a book on the floor. He spent almost the whole night going over the 4th house, trying to understand what Caspar had told him.

The following day, Percy’s mind was swimming too much from the previous night to focus on anything at all. He finally began to understand why Caspar was so enthralled with astrology. Every time he tried to do his math homework, the graphs and symbols turned into astrology charts and signs, and his biology homework seemed to be strangely personal.

Eventually, he gave up, and looked for Caspar.

He found Caspar looking over Percy’s chart in their room. On hearing Percy enter the room, he looked up, saying “I have something really interesting to show you tonight. I think you will finally be able to put the whole grad school debacle to bed”.

“Great! I have been thinking about what you told me last night all day, but I think I need to do something to take my mind off it for now. Do you want to watch Netflix for awhile?”

“Sounds great, I’ll make you some popcorn, and you can pick what we watch.”

After awhile, Percy fell asleep.

Caspar was amazing at staying completely silent and still during movies, and Percy had not got much sleep recently. He dreamt about Ganymede, the beautiful son of the King of Troy who was abducted by Zeus to be his cup bearer. Zeus was entranced by the mortal’s beauty, and wanted to keep him to himself. This story was commonly associated with Percy’s sun sign, Aquarius, but for some reason, Ganymede had always reminded Percy of Caspar.

Upon waking, Percy noticed Caspar staring at him intently with a smile. “What?”

“Nothing…you just look so peaceful when you sleep.”

Percy noticed that the TV had shut off due to inactivity. “Just how long have you been watching me?”

“Long enough. Look, it’s dark out.”
Percy turned to the window. “Yeah, you’re right. There was something you wanted to show me?”
“Yeah, let me go get the candles and set everything up. I found something really big in your chart.”

Percy’s back hurt a little as he sat on the ground next to Caspar for the third time in as many nights, but it somehow felt right. Sitting with his legs crisscross on Caspar’s “meditation pillows”, Percy was finally able to put a name on the energy he had felt the night before. It was a spiritual energy unlike he had ever felt before. He couldn’t decide if he was more intimidated or intrigued by it.

Percy watched Caspar for quite some time as he leafed through a number of astrology books. The newer ones Caspar had purchased himself as he became more interested in astrology, but he also had quite the collection of old books he had received from one of his aunts. All of them were filled with Caspar’s characteristic scribble as he had circled certain sections, and written tiny notes all over the margins.

“A-ha!” Caspar exclaimed. He smiled sheepishly at Percy, who had practically left his body in surprise at the sudden noise. “I found it.”

“So,” he continued, “do you remember that eclipse we had a few months ago?”

“Yes, of course. How could I forget it?”

“Well, I have to ask you, did something happen to someone you love during the eclipse?”

Percy lost his breath for a second as he thought back to that day, the day he tried so hard to erase from his memory. “Well…yeah, now that I think about it, it was during the eclipse. How did you know that?”

“Well, it just so happens that the eclipse passed through your seventh house, where you have Jupiter in Aries.”

“Ok, what does that mean?”

“Well, you have Mars in Cancer, which means it is three signs away from the Eclipse in Aries and your seventh house. That means the Eclipse squared your natal Mars. The seventh house is related to relationships, and as we know, Mars is the planet of passion, desire, and conflict.”

“I think I kind of know what you are getting at. I read that squares usually create conflict, or at least some sort of difficulty between the bodies and houses involved.”

“Right, and this one was especially powerful because it involved an eclipse. Eclipses are chaotic forces, disrupting the natural order, speeding up time, and open and shut doors of possibility. Since the eclipse was located Aries, which is ruled by Mars, and was square Mars, I knew that it had something to do with you someone you had a very close relationship with, and maybe even loved.”

Percy stared down at his hands in silence. He wasn’t completely sure how to respond. Caspar had reeled him in hook,
line and sinker. He had never expected that astrology could be so precise.

So excruciatingly precise.

He could feel the tears stinging his eyes. Percy felt Caspar’s cold hands on his cheeks, drawing his face upward. Caspar’s eyes were only a few inches from his, and there was an intoxicating depth there that Percy had not noticed before. They seemed to be inviting Percy to dive completely into them, promising eternal wisdom and a solution to all of his problems. But that depth seemed to contain a hint of pain as well. The wisdom had a price, one that Percy was unsure if he was willing to pay.

“You need to let go.”
“I-I can’t let you go…”

“Percy, I died that night. There is nothing you can do about it. Sure, if I had seen the eclipse in your chart then, I might have known something was going to happen, but there was no way you or I could have stopped me from getting COVID at work. Staying here won’t change anything either. Go to MIT. Become the best damn microbiologist there is, and prevent something like this from happening again. All you can do now is move on, and use these books as guides. They won’t give you the answers, but they will keep you from getting lost in the turbulence along the way.”

Percy took the books from Caspar’s outstretched hands, the hands that weren’t really there, the books he wasn’t sure if he needed, and watched as Caspar seemed to disappear before his eyes.

The content of the books may be still questionable for Percy, but the books also contained part of Caspar inside of them, and so he determined that he would read them all.

Tears streaming down his cheeks, Percy blew out the candles to fully plunge himself into the darkness like the one he felt inside him.

The End.

Further Reading:
Zap Boom Pow: Don’t laugh at us for reading comics

Lori Leiszler
senior | essay

Abstract
Have you ever wondered if there was more? More to the way you learned and were taught, in addition to the usual textbooks you read? This article addresses the benefits for students of all ages to learn in and outside the class by reading and interacting with comics and graphic novels. Now more than ever, people are visual learners, and comics address that need and enhance people’s lives.

Keywords: literacy, comics, education, visuals
When I brought home *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* in fourth grade, my dad saw me reading a page full of doodles and made me return it to the library because it would surely “rot my brain.” In my childhood home, *Eragon* and *Harry Potter* were also forbidden because they had magic, and my sister and I bought *The Hunger Games* on the sly because mom would have been distraught if she had known we read such violent stories. My parents called such things rubbish, and they would rather see me reading “kid-friendly, educational” things like the Bible (see Judges 19), or better yet outside on the farm, working cows.

I was twelve the first time I read a comic book completely. I was rummaging in our basement through a pile of dusty books from my grandmother’s estate sale, and found *Peanuts*. Though I no longer remember the full title or the individual strips, I still remember sitting on the cold concrete floor for hours, pouring over the strips, delighted, hoping in the back of my mind that no one would come downstairs to tell me, “Go do something more useful.”

*Because comics, you see, are a waste of time.*

Or at least, that’s what everyone told me. I realize now that my above statement is ludicrous, but only after ten more years and two college classes delving into comics. (In the strange way things go, I work in Hale Library now and can tell you right away where to find *Persepolis* or *El Deafo.*) I came to realize that the term “comics” refers to more stories than just your average Sunday funnies, and that each of these can be a valuable tool in helping all of us learn. I bring this up because comics are important, appropriate, and educational; yet despite the many articles written in favor of comics, many educators — and parents — still view them disgustedly or, more often, apathetically as charming but useless.

Research in 2013 by Katherine Block shows a majority of language arts teachers in K-8 teach graphic novels less than once a year, despite indicating that they believe the form is beneficial and motivating to students (18). Block also shows no correlation between age of teacher and willingness to teach comics, meaning the younger generation of teach-
ers who have lived through the recent boom in the comic industry are just as unwilling to teach comics as their older counterparts. Likewise, a survey from 2011 of 60 educators who teach grades K-12 shows a majority of teachers believe graphic novels “hold high interest and motivation for readers;” yet the majority of those same teachers also don’t implement graphic novels in the classroom (Lapp et al 26).

As a future educator myself, it irks my gut that some of my students’ parents, my future colleagues, and even my present college peers might not see the viability of comics as a learning tool, or that they see the benefits but refuse to act. I want to change that. Maybe you never experienced the joy of reading comics as a kid, but — no matter your age — it’s not too late to start. Or maybe you’re reading this because you’ve loved manga for years but always got mocked for it; in that case, let this be your validation: Comics encourage engagement and retention, help students encounter a wide variety of important genres, strengthen visual literacy, and teach skills that students can apply in other classrooms and in life outside of school.

Firstly, comics get and keep readers’ attention in a way that prose alone does not. Like Cecile de Rocher says in “Working on Understanding Comics,” kids are on board with comics; this is actually one of the few areas of education where students are often more familiar with the material than their teachers are (28). Instead of growing resentful of the change in times, teachers should embrace this enthusiasm students have for reading comics. Students of the past lived in a highly-textual world, but students now live in a much more visual world, and the form of comics, particularly graphic novels, draws them in. As Rhonda Knight says, “Graphic novels in the classroom reside in a sort of middle zone for students; the format draws them toward the ‘entertainment’ side, but their brains tell them that graphic novels are ripe for analysis” (181). Because students think visuals are entertaining, reading graphic novels seems more
fun to them, and they will want to engage more with the material. This can in particular help people with attention disorders who want to read more but have always been told to just “try harder.” In a world where many students complain about lessons which aren’t engaging enough and teachers complain about students being too easily distracted, the visual, entertaining aspect of comics can help students stay focused.

This engagement through comics, because it is a visual and verbal form, also helps people better retain information that they’ve read and learned. Many teachers and child psychologists, like Anita Woolfolk Hoy in her *Educational Psychology*, acknowledge that, “In explicit (semantic) long-term memory, bits of information may be stored and interrelated in terms of propositional networks, images, concepts, and schemas … [and] information coded both verbally and visually (using images) is easier to remember.” (Module 23) Learning through comics, because it’s a form that utilizes a combination of both text and images, sticks in brains longer, making it easier for people to remember long-term what they’ve read. This is especially true for students in special education classes, who either get distracted from straight prose easily or need something more sensory to engage with. Because they’ll see and understand more with comics, they won’t think of reading in graphic novels as daunting, which will encourage them to read more. Reading more will in turn increase their knowl-
edge, which will repeat the cycle of confidence, calling students deeper and deeper into reading and learning.

It’s important to note at this juncture, however, that what people read in terms of comics doesn’t have to — and shouldn’t — be narrowed down to a small genre. The term “comics” actually refers to many works, and those works cover a variety of genres, more than what the humorous connotations of the word “comic” suggest. As expert in the field, Scott McCloud, says in his Understanding Comics, comics are, “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (20). McCloud’s definition says the form of comics extends from things like stained-glass windows to the Bayeux Tapestry and far in between; the content of comics is just as varied, from “autobiofictionalographies” like One! Hundred! Demons! to Sunday strips like Garfield to superhero stories like Ms. Marvel.

The wide variety of comics hold important stories and life lessons that, rather than “wasting students’ time,” will enrich it while meeting important school standards. Art Spiegelman’s Maus, for example, is a graphic novel with mice as the main characters, but the story is anything but trivial; the plot follows Speigelman interviewing his father, a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor, on his life experience. This isn’t by any means a comedic story, even if there are jokes in the text, but it could be taught in high school ELA class-
es and bring up important themes of family, memories, and history. Teaching with this book could also meet several Common Core Standards for reading and writing at the high school level. Katie Monnin, in her 2015 article, says teachers can align reading around “Key Ideas and Details” and writing around “Text Types and Purposes” (240). The former could allow for analysis of the development of ideas over the course of reading, and the latter could be accomplished through having the students write arguments supporting claims central to the graphic novel. These are only a couple of examples, though Monnin discusses many more.

Beside the many genres of comics being useful for teaching, the very design of comics also usefully teaches students to read scenes. As Spiegelman points out, “Comics are a gateway drug to literacy.” Comic panels allow readers to go through time at their own pace, fixing their eyes on each panel to reflect on its meaning and make connections between the individual panels and from the overall work to themselves. In literature, the more complex a scene, the more universal the emotion readers can draw out of characters; in comics, the less realistic and the more iconic something is drawn, the more emotion readers can put into characters. Iconic refers to the reduction of details in an image to represent something much more detailed in real life, to make it more universally recognizable. It’s like the difference between an iconic keyboard heart (❤️) and a palpable, realistic human
heart. This “amplification through simplification,” as McCloud discusses, in part draws readers into the story, and it hinges upon the readers’ understanding of iconic meaning in lines, gestures, and facial expression.

You may have noticed this if you’ve ever drawn your self-portrait or looked closely in the mirror. To a point, the more detailed you become, often the less you recognize yourself. All the details describe you, but sometimes they can distract you from your perception of yourself. You can more easily project a mental image of your perfect self when you aren’t staring in the mirror. This is why, in comics, oftentimes the characters can be drawn in more iconic ways to allow readers to project their ideas onto the characters. Many comic artists detail backgrounds in their stories more than the people, so that readers subconsciously have the freedom to project themselves on the characters and not imagine changes in the settings. This understanding of icons, for myself and students, is partly acquired through life experience, but can also be enhanced through contact with the form — and more familiarity with the form will help students learn more about icons, expression, and meaning in comics too.

Students can gain this understanding through analysis in their reading, but they can also recognize important elements of stories through the process of making their own comics, as well. This is especially helpful for students in lower grades who might be already used to reading children’s books with pictures. Drawing their own characters will allow
students to grow in creativity and visualize the emotion and action of their characters in ways that many straight-prose stories only do by expecting readers to have vivid imaginations. Learning how to draw expressional faces and making characters have postures based on the scene will also allow younger students to think about how people in real life show their emotions. Reading, “Bob felt angry,” differs a lot from a drawing of Bob with a red face and his hands aggressively on his hips. This will help students gain the life skill of paying attention to those kinds of details and recognizing body language of people even outside of school.

In addition to teaching students about body language, having students draw their own comics will help them gain a better understanding of many parts of stories that go beyond just comics. This technique is especially useful for middle and high school students learning about writing conventions. Drawing various backgrounds and playing with different styles will help students recognize scene changes and moods, like how changing the background of something shows movement. Playing around with the size of panels will also help students understand how they can manipulate time in a story; they can use ordinary panels for regular time, and they can elongate or shorten those panels to show time seeming really slow or fast, depending on the characters’ actions. Even writing the words in their comics can successfully increase students’ understanding of English, as when the teacher explains how words in comics that are usually stressed, like “boom” and “wham,” are figures of speech called onomatopoeias. The possibilities are extensive, and, with a bit of creativity, any ELA teacher can use this form to teach their students important skills.

In summation, comics draw readers in, keeping their attention and encouraging them to grow in literacy through many important topics. Comics are important, and should be encouraged in the classroom — and home — because they serve the dual purpose of entertaining and educating students, and the benefits can carry into other parts of students’ lives. Reading more comics will give students confidence in reading things
besides comics, and that confidence can lead them to enjoy reading (Schwertner, 63). Enjoying reading can lead to more reading, which will increase their literacy — which affects every subject, not just English. As the NEA noted in 2004, reading now competes with technology for people’s attention, except technology is winning. The advent of the era of technology has correlated with a steady decline in literacy rates in children and adults, with less than half of adults in America now reading for fun (Gioia 2004). Adults who are less literate are less inclined to vote, grow civically engaged, seek medical help when they need it, or get knowledge jobs (Post 2015). Businesses spend about $3.1 billion every year to help workers who didn’t gain proper literacy skills when they were in school (Hayes 2015). Taking advantage of people’s love for visuals now could encourage everyone, whether they’re a grade-schooler, a full-fledged adult, or an in-between college student like me, to see reading through comics as fun, like watching movies or videos. Teaching comics won’t take away from people learning; it will enhance it, and this can be an engaging solution to many real-world problems that people could face even after they leave school.
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“I Just Listened to the Music, and Breathed in the Day”: Music in The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Randi Loyd
senior | essay

Abstract

In the novel The Perks of Being a Wallflower, written by Stephen Chbosky, music represents as avenue of relationship building and understanding for the main character, Charlie. However, in the film version of the novel, the music Charlie connects with is severely lacking. In the novel, Charlie gifts music to his friends in order to facilitate acknowledgement and understanding in his life. Chbosky employs the use of music as secondary material for the audience to further understand Charlie’s trauma, similar to the letter-writing Charlie engages in with “Dear Friend.” A close reading of the song “Asleep” by The Smiths relates this suicidal depression to the audience in a very effective way, as “Asleep” is referenced continually throughout the novel in gifts and mix tapes. Yet, the film fails to confirm this understanding of trauma, and it turn, letter-writing, leaving cinema audiences disconnected from Charlie’s true character development.

Keywords: Music, Trauma, Chbosky, Novel, Film Review

[Warning: This essay deals with potentially disturbing issues of sexual abuse and suicidal ideation]
It proves quite difficult to adapt a novel made up entirely of letters, called an epistolary novel, into film. According to David Roche, “[letters] are really difficult things to dramatize. They’re quite boring in terms of film” (Roche 2007, 1). Because epistolary novels provide a deep look into the thoughts of the letter-writer, directors must convey the right information for the flow of the film while simultaneously keeping the audience’s interest and attention. Throughout the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, the main character, Charlie, embarks on a story told through a series of letters to “Dear Friend,” about the wonderous and sometimes hostile process of surviving teenage adolescence. During his first year of high school, Charlie meets new and older friends and struggles with mental health and depression as he tries to outrun his childhood traumas. Chbosky uses popular songs to effectively portray Charlie and his struggles. Similarly, the novel’s film adaptation, also written and directed by Chbosky, uses songs to channel Charlie’s emotional trauma within his letter writing. However, Chbosky consistently
ignores the larger themes of depression and isolation presented in the novel version. For example, throughout the novel, the lyrics Charlie presents to his friends and family as gifts allow the audience to understand Charlie’s traumatic experiences, and, in turn, his resulting actions. Charlie’s gifts are analogous with the letters Charlie sends to “Dear Friend.” These gifts are vessels for Charlie’s thoughts and emotions and function as a cry for help; a concept of the emotional narrative completely lost on film audiences. The gifts are represented in the film with the use of sound and the songs Charlie listens to in the novel, which helps to mimic the voyeuristic nature of Charlie’s letter writing in the novel, but in total, fail to truly convey Charlie’s complex character.

Letter writing remains the sole medium for the emotional connection between Charlie and “Dear Friend,” but the inclusion of songs allows Charlie to convey deeper meaning in his prose. Charlie continually writes about his life and the problems he faces, but the letters themselves are gifts, sent by Charlie and received by “Dear Friend,” who is anonymous. Charlie writes, “You sounded like such a good person … the kind of person who would understand how they [the letters] were better than a diary because there is communion and a diary can be found” (Chbosky 1999, 206). Charlie found connection to “Dear Friend” through the “communion” or sharing of his deepest secrets. The isolation Charlie faces throughout his life impacts the connections he longs to strengthen through gift-giving. Charlie recognizes the lack of connection in his life and actively tries to repair this damage by gifting his thoughts to “Dear Friend” and establishing a relationship with his friends and family through gift-giving. Charlie’s gifts portray a plea for acknowledgement, something
sorely lacking in his life. Similarly, all the gifts Charlie presents are conduits containing Charlie’s voice, much like the letters to “Dear Friend.” These concepts of gift-giving, intimacy, and Charlie’s desperation for understanding become completely lost on the film audience. The deeper connection that Charlie strives to achieve through his repeated gift-giving is not depicted in Chbosky’s efforts on film, though Chbosky attempts to bridge this connection gap through the technical aspects of film, using both sound montage and a musical soundtrack.

To convey Charlie’s intense psychological trauma, Chbosky uses the interesting tactic of brief, disorienting montages of Charlie’s childhood. This is an attempt to convey the motivation of Charlie during his traumatic episodes. At the climax of the film, when he walks home from the house of his friend Sam, the sound quality also changes. Chbosky employs a technique called sound montage, by using clips of different sounds to create a disjunction in relation to Charlie’s mental state. The audience experiences a soothing piano ballad but also hears snippets of the past memories Charlie fights to repress [1:29:02]. This method gives the audience a peek into his mind similar to how readers of the letters in the novel experience his breakdown. This showcases the degradation of his mental state because of the exclusion he faces, and the intimacy of the letters he confides in. This intense care for detail mimics Chbosky’s writing in the novel, which helps to convey the epistolary nature, but fails to help the audience understand Charlie’s motivation during his mental breakdowns.

Chbosky’s use of sound montage in the film suggests that the songs chosen for the soundtrack have a deeper meaning and can be analyzed to uncover more nuance in Charlie’s trauma. Laura Anderson, author of “Beyond Figures of the Audience,” claims, “popular music soundtracks are conceived as shaping the psychological processes by which audiences make sense of film texts” (Anderson 2016, 30). Soundtracks should represent the missing connection between the audience and Charlie and help the audience to “make sense” of Charlie’s actions. As such, the music Charlie listens to represents his mental state and unconscious desires. Because of the way music is connected to
psychology, it is especially important to consider in young adult books and movies. Karen Coats writes in “‘The Beat of your Heart’: Music in Young Adult Literature and Culture,” “Music becomes an important code for social and individual identity formation, much like it functions in actual teenage culture” (Coats 2012, 112). Therefore, we have to pay attention to the “code[s]” in The Perks of Being a Wallflower.

Coats suggests, the most important song in Charlie's life, “Asleep,” by The Smiths, signifies this “code of social and individual identity.” To solidify the connection between Charlie and the audience, Chbosky rightly chooses to include “Asleep” within the soundtrack, which is an important song repeatedly mentioned throughout the novel. The lyrics of this song provide insight into Charlie’s trauma, which becomes a part of his identity due to the intense nature of his childhood sexual trauma. Lead singer of The Smiths, Steven Morrissey, croons, “Sing me to sleep, I don't want to wake up on my own anymore” (Morrissey 1986). These lyrics are a parallel to the letter Charlie writes within the novel, which reveal the suicidal loneliness Charlie experiences in his everyday life. These feelings of self-harm and depression are expressed through Morrissey's metaphor of sleep as death. He sings, “Don't feel bad for me. I want you to know, deep in the cell of my heart, I will feel so glad to go” (Morrissey 1986). These lyrics signify a deep yearning for an end to suffering – an end to life. The resulting gladness that Morrissey mentions stems from the relief of the pain the singer, and listener, feel. The haunting tune drifts with the words, “There is another world. There is a better world. Well, there must be” (Morrissey 1986). This is a suggestion of the afterlife that Morrissey pleads there must be, in order for him to escape his loneliness. A world where he can go to sleep and never wake up. The song ends with a repeated “bye” as the singer gives a final farewell to the people in his life and the world that could not save him. Chbosky uses this song in the novel and

The album cover art for The Smiths’ album The Queen Is Dead. The single “Asleep” is track eleven on the 2017 collector's edition of this album.

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film version of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* as a source for Charlie, and his audience, to understand the trauma and depression Charlie truly feels. In the film, the employment of the song, along with the montage of Charlie’s isolation at home and school [9:26], provides the audience with at least a partial conception of Charlie’s life.

During a Secret Santa event, Charlie gifts his friend Patrick a mix tape with the song “Asleep” on the tape twice. Jan C. Susina, author of “Sound Tracks of Our Lives: Mix Tapes and Playlists in the Young Adult Literature Classroom,” suggests, “A well designed mix tape allows the individual to craft a musical narrative that evokes a specific mood and feeling through the lyrics of music or songs” (Susina 2020, 302). This recurrence of the song “Asleep” within the novel reiterates the importance of the song in Charlie’s life, and the mood associated with the lyrics. However, since film audiences too often do not pay attention to the soundtrack, playing the song only once for a brief moment in the first ten minutes of the film does not provide the crucial suicidal details at the time in the narrative, the halfway point in Charlie’s realization, when viewers most need this information. This, in turn, further alienates the audience from Charlie’s true feelings. This fault in the film ruins Chbosky’s attempt to convey the intimate emotions that the novel reveals.

To adapt his beloved epistolary novel, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, into an entertaining film, Chbosky needed to imitate the intimacy of Charlie’s letters. His tactic of employing the material of songs using sound fell short from emanating Charlie’s unique voice and psychological state. Furthermore, the film fails to acknowledge the importance of gift-giving within Charlie’s life and the importance of the song “Asleep” to Charlie and subsequently, his friends. Charlie gives and receives songs that represent his innate need for companionship and understanding. The songs in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* are themselves vessels of Charlie’s thoughts, like his letters. The film’s treatment of letter writing is too subtle to truly convey the vastness of correspondence and its many analogous mediums represented in the novel. Though the film forsakes Charlie’s letters and gift-giving for a more classically cinematic approach, the novel still binds Charlie and the reader together through the trials, tribulations, and intimate secrets Charlie pens, finding the “Dear Friend” in us all.

References


Susina, Jan C. 2020. “Sound Tracks of Our Lives: Mix Tapes and Playlists in the Young Adult Literature Classroom.” In *Teaching Young Adult Literature,* edited by Mike Cadden,
Time and time again, we are asked to reflect on our history as a means of navigating our future—and in a global pandemic, this is no exception. While minimal literature may exist on specific issues we currently or subsequently faced from COVID-19, philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Immanuel Kant have written and discussed philosophical frameworks that can be generally applied to our specific moral dilemmas. This essay will address three ethical dilemmas related to the coronavirus pandemic through my understanding of Utilitarian and Kantian philosophy, and provide personal analysis on the efficacy of both frameworks in addressing each dilemma.

Keywords: Philosophy, Coronavirus, Pandemic, Utilitarianism, Kantianism
Introduction
COVID-19 hit the United States abruptly back in March 2020. Within just a few weeks, schools shifted online, travel was suspended, and our entire world shut down. We were forced to make rushed decisions on how to navigate through an inconceivable reality. Through quarantines, lockdowns, mask-mandates, and an uncertain return to normality, COVID-19 forced us to reassess even our most basic human interactions and operations. Yet, in a time with so much uncertainty and so little guidance on how to maneuver through it, we can look to philosophers like Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Immanuel Kant to help us interpret these contemporary ethical dilemmas.

This paper is not attempting to definitively judge human behavior nor is it trying to comprehensively develop the best solution for each scenario. My analysis uses simple and intuitive stances on science, economics, and policy, and will primarily use these tools for my Utilitarian and Kantian analysis of each dilemma.

Philosophy is often ignored in conversations regarding policy, and during a global pandemic that has infected over 100 million lives at the time that this paper was written, it is worth discussing the moral permissibility of our actions just as much as their social and economic consequences. In this essay, I will present three different ethical dilemmas pertaining to ongoing or subsequent challenges related to the coronavirus. I will analyze each through my understanding of Utilitarian and Kantian philosophy. I will discern how each philosophical framework attempts to answer these scenarios, and advocate a particular philosophical view for each dilemma.

Moral Theory, Utilitarianism, Kantianism (brief contribution by Suan Sonna)
Moral theories guide us on how we ought to act in circumstances where something of value or importance is at stake and can potentially be lost or violated. Aside from presenting us certain moral principles or laws, moral theories aim to provide a systematic account of what is good or bad, right and wrong. A moral theory does not randomly assert its principles, but it claims that each rule reasonably follows from the other and is therefore, in that sense, systematic.

Utilitarianism is the moral theory that we should maximize happiness and minimize misery to the greatest extent possible for the greatest number of people. The big question here is what we mean by “happiness.” Some utilitarian philosophers think sensory pleasure is how we ought to define happiness (hedonistic), while others define happiness as having the greatest number of our preferences satisfied (preference utilitarianism). For the purposes of this paper, we will try and take a simple definition of utilitarianism. We will use the hedonistic model and consider
any satisfied or unsatisfied preferences as contributing to sensory pleasure or pain respectively.

Kantianism is the moral theory that our actions ought to obey the dictates of reason. Kant begins by noting that having a good will is the only “good without qualification.” In other words, a good will (or the will to do good) is something that is good without having to worry about counterexamples or wondering whether something’s goodness actually depends upon something else. Happiness is good, for example, until we encounter a psychopath who draws happiness from someone else’s suffering. The goodness of happiness depends upon the goodness of its source, whereas the will to do good is always good regardless of whether or not someone succeeds or fails. Indeed, if I fail to do a good action, say I intend to help a situation but end up making it worse, then I would be condemned for the consequences of the action but not the intention itself – to help and do good. This scenario helps explain why Kantianism focuses more on the intentions or reasons for actions as opposed to their consequences: a good will is the only good without qualification and therefore, the Kantian supposes, ought to be the starting point of morality.

Notice, however, that just saying “the will to do good is the only good without qualification” does not actually explain what goodness is. In response, Kant be-
lieves that reason can actually filter what may be considered good. One of Kant’s rules is to “universalize your maxim”, meaning you should test the rule that’s guiding your action by asking yourself what would happen if everyone acted on the same rule. While you might think that stealing is permissible for you, if everyone stole then there would not be such a thing as property in the first place. And, if that were the case, then there would not be anything to steal, meaning the action you are performing is self-defeating. You do not have any justification for playing by a different set of rules, especially if every person is a rational agent like you who can also see the universalized nonsense of stealing.

This leads us to the categorical imperative: treat others as ends in themselves rather than mere means to an end. This is to say that you should respect people’s autonomy or ability to rationally govern themselves – including yourself. For instance, lying is not the sort of thing you can rationally consent to. If you “consent” to being lied to, then you are technically not being lied to anymore since there would be no deception. If no one can rationally consent to being lied to, then lying is in principle the sort of action that one mustn’t ever do. The moment you lie is the same moment that you place yourself above the deceived person and treat their rationality, which is the same as yours, as a mere means to your ends. You are not considering their rationality, their equality with you, their human rights, and they therefore are not an end in themselves.

The main difference between utilitarianism and Kantianism is how they treat reason and happiness. Utilitarianism holds that we should use our faculty of reason in order to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, meaning reason is subordinate to pleasure. Kantianism maintains that reason should govern our actions and even our pursuit of happiness, meaning the dictates of reason are the primary focus or good. This is why Kantianism stresses the inviolability of rights, since rights come from reason, whereas Utilitarianism usually lacks any notion of rights, since reason is subordinate to happiness. For instance, your “right” to control your body, on a utilitarian picture, could cease tomorrow if the vast majority of people would be happy to harvest your organs for the greater good. Then again, both systems of thought have deeply influenced the way we think today. The phrase “Do whatever makes you happy as long as you don’t hurt anyone” is a colloquial version of the utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill’s harm principle. The emphasis on rights as a stopping point for any debate or rational disagreement is largely a Kantian inheritance. Rights are not the sort of things that can be debated or change tomorrow. With this understanding of Kantianism, we can now introduce the first scenario.
Scenario 1: Essential Goods Distribution – Toilet Paper (Austin Kruse)

The first dilemma this paper will address is one that many will remember experiencing during March of last year. As news began to spread of the virus, people raced to stock up on food, cleaning supplies, hygiene products, and other essential goods. This resulted in massive shortages on products like hand sanitizer, bleach, disinfectant wipes, and toilet paper. On one end, the uncertainty of product availability seemingly justified overbuying items that would likely disappear from shelves within a week, especially given the uncertainty around the seriousness of the virus and the length of a possible national lockdown. However, by engaging in panic hoarding, one prevents others in the area from having access to these same products, which leads to our first hypothetical scenario:

The local grocery store has been bombarded with customers over the past couple of days after news spread of a deadly virus that has entered the United States. Each customer has typically been buying around five large packages of toilet paper rolls and by the end of the day the grocery store only has 10 large packages of toilet paper left. The grocery store does not have a limit on the number of packs a customer can buy and are unsure when they will get more in stock. You already have enough toilet paper at home to be sufficiently stocked for the next month, but are in the unique position of arriving at the store just in time to still be able to buy toilet paper. So, how should you shop?

Before we can approach this dilemma, it is important to list some rational assumptions we can make. First, let us assume that there are still a great deal of
individuals who have not yet made it to the store to buy toilet paper, but are still in need of it. Second, the store will not impose a limitation on the amount of toilet paper a customer can buy at one time within the foreseeable future. Third, the store will likely not get anymore toilet paper for months once it is gone.

Based on the information provided, there are several courses of action a Utilitarian might take to address this dilemma; but I think there is one that makes the most sense when you consider what we know about general Utilitarian principles. In this situation, it is clear that the store will run out of toilet paper within the next day, and that if you do not buy what is remaining, the next two customers likely will. Thus, in order to maximize the most good and ensure the toilet paper can be distributed to as many people as possible, a Utilitarian might buy all the toilet paper themselves and sell individual rolls right outside of the store (with no additional price markup) to ensure that the short supply of toilet paper left can go to the people who still need it. This is the only way to ensure that one or two individuals do not outright buy the remainder of the toilet paper for personal use since the store has not implemented any limit on the amount an individual can purchase, and allows for more people in the area to benefit from having access to the resource than just the one or two individuals. In addition, the distribution of toilet paper needs to occur in an impartial way, given that Utilitarianism provides equal consideration of interest for every person affected and should not prioritize one individual over another, regardless of their relationship to us. While we don’t know the intentions of others who would have bought the toilet paper, or with certainty how the toilet paper we have sold will be used, I do not think it makes sense to include it in our Utilitarian analysis since it cannot be easily inferred, and only by buying it ourselves are we able to ensure an equitable distribution of the resources.

A Kantian might respond to this scenario similarly, but with a different justification. Since action should be dictated by reason, Kant’s philosophy would suggest that one can buy the remaining toilet paper if they have the will to distribute it rationally and justly. Although the consequences of our distribution are unknown in this scenario, as long as we don’t intentionally distribute the toilet paper to someone with the intention of reselling it at a much higher markup or discriminate unfairly, the integrity of our action remains.

Because both theories arrive at the same conclusion here, it is less about comparing which solution is better, and instead focusing on whether the solution is a good one. In this scenario, I believe it is. The solution prevents further overbuying and price gouging, and it allows more individuals to benefit from the limited resource until stores have additional quantities to restock.
Scenario 2: School During the Pandemic

The next dilemma is also not unfamiliar, and is especially relevant to university classes. Millions of college students including myself were asked to return to our university’s campus for the fall 2020 semester. Class structures varied, but primarily consisted of either in-person, online, or hybrid classes depending on the university, department, and professor. Typically, these hybrid classes are offered partially online and partially in-person, but also allow for students to take the class fully remote. This brings us to the second hypothetical scenario:

After returning to campus after five months into a global pandemic, you are offered the choice between attending your hybrid university class lecture online or in-person. Academically, it is clear that you would benefit more from attending the class in-person but you are equally concerned about possibly becoming infected or infecting someone else with the virus that has continued to spread in your area. How should you decide to attend the class?

As in the first scenario, I think there are several assumptions we should make. First, let us assume that the university we are discussing has a mandatory mask mandate and sanitation protocols that are generally followed by most or all students when they are inside any university building. We will say next that the university has a sizeable student body, and while on-campus presence has shrunk, the
university and city in which it is located are still large enough for potential chances to be exposed to the virus. Finally, you do not have any antibodies that may protect you from catching it.

It appears as if the Utilitarian might opt to take class entirely online, since the chances of catching the virus and transmitting it to someone are reduced. Even with the university’s safety protocols in place, there are still numerous high touch areas throughout campus that simply cannot be cleaned after every interaction. In addition, the sidewalks outside and campus bathrooms, both in which a mask mandate is much harder to enforce, could be other potential places of transmission. In this scenario, a Utilitarian would likely use some utility calculus to weigh the costs and benefits of each decision, but I think they would arrive at the conclusion that the pleasure derived from attending a class in-person is not worth the potential risk of transmitting the virus in the process, in which the costs of our action if the virus spreads would greatly exceed the marginal benefit of in-person attendance.

When analyzing this dilemma, a Kantian’s response is much less clear. While it is not irrational to think that virus transmission could occur through the physical attendance of class, the protocols in place hopefully reduce that probability. While some Kantians may rationally will that attending class in-person does not pose a risk for virus transmission, others who disagree may choose to take classes fully remote.

For this scenario, an analysis on the better solution is much more difficult to construct, especially since we continue to learn more about the virus everyday. However, given this dilemma, it appears that the Utilitarian analysis may provide a better solution to navigating hybrid classes, especially if we consider that if everyone alternated between in-person and online for their hybrid classes, there would still be roughly half of the university body travelling around campus every day. This greatly increases the risk of transmission that could occur either in an in-person class or travelling to and from it, and since we can assume that the university’s student population is substantial, it is not misguided to worry about how fast a virus could spread in such a population. While some Kantians may also opt out of attending classes in-person completely, I believe that utilitarianism is the only philosophy that will definitely endorse that option.

Scenario 3: Coronavirus Vaccine Distribution

The final dilemma is one that world leaders are scrambling to answer. Towards the end of 2020, news broke out of several successful COVID-19 vaccine trials which may potentially pave the way for a fully-developed COVID-19 vaccine by the beginning of the new year. Given that there probably won’t be enough
vaccinations to administer to everyone until the latter half of 2021, this poses the ever-growing challenge of deciding who should receive the vaccine first. The United States’ Center for Disease Control has developed guidelines to tackle vaccine distribution, which will likely go to health care workers and nursing homes residents, and immunocompromised individuals shortly after. However, the distribution that follows is still being contested, which brings us to the final scenario:

The federal government has recently approved a safe and effective vaccine for an infectious virus that has spread across the country. Government officials have already decided that the first wave of vaccines will be distributed to health care workers, nursing home residents, and immunocompromised individuals. Once those individuals have received their vaccination, the government will move to distribute the rest of the available vaccines, but are unsure who should receive it next. Unfortunately, they will eventually run out and those who do not receive the vaccine in this first wave will have to wait several additional months in order to get theirs. Therefore, how do you decide who should get the vaccine next, and who should have to wait?

As with this scenario, additional assumptions need to be made in order to use philosophy to answer this dilemma. First, we need to assume that the vaccine will either be free or low-cost for everyone, meaning no one is unable to get the vaccine on the basis of not being able to afford it. Next, safety measures
like mask-wearing and social-distancing policies will remain in effect after the first wave of vaccines has been administered. Lastly, for the sake of brevity, we will accept that one vaccine dose is sufficient to developing immunity against the virus.

A Utilitarian would construct a vaccine distribution schedule that would prioritize those most at risk of either contracting the virus or most at risk for experiencing health complication if they did. This makes sense given what we know about Utilitarianism: in order to maximize the utility of the vaccine, it must go to the people who rely on it the most. Utilitarianism would likely agree with the CDC’s recommendations that health care workers, nursing home residents, and immunocompromised individuals should receive the vaccine first, and would likely continue by distributing the vaccine to government workers essential to core societal functions, those involved in the health profession, low-income or minority groups that may be more impacted by the virus due to their socioeconomic situations, and individuals whose living or working conditions put them at a greater risk of becoming infected. This specific prioritization of the vaccine aligns with the philosophy of Utilitarianism because it considers the effects the vaccines will have on certain populations, and uses those considerations to prioritize vaccines based on whose needs for them are greater and where the vaccines will do the most good.

A Kantian perspective is a bit different. Rather than distributing the vaccine in the accordance of whose need for it may be greater, Kant’s philosophy would suggest that everyone receive equal consideration for the vaccine, since no individual life is more worthy of the vaccine than another. This would mean that the vaccine would need to be distributed in a first-come-first-serve or random manner so that those in charge of distributing the vaccine do not have to make the decision of deciding whose life is more worth preserving. Kantians would argue that the decision to distribute a vaccine to an individual should be regardless of that person’s occupation, economic status, or age, and those factors should not play any role in the discussions surrounding vaccine distribution.

With distribution efforts only just beginning to commence, the use of philosophical analysis to address this dilemma is especially important. However, after comparing how each view might tackle vaccine distribution, I think the Utilitarian framework ultimately provides a better solution in addressing the crisis at hand. Due to the nature of the virus, certain populations are going to be much more vulnerable, and so it makes sense that we provide such populations with the vaccines first. The Utilitarian position is the only one that considers these vulnerabilities in its analysis, and by providing certain groups with the vaccination first,
it can help reduce the increased stress that has been placed on hospitals during this time. This seems to be in line with the current discourse of world leaders on how to distribute the vaccine, and I imagine it will be the route that they take once the administrative logistics are finalized.

Almost a year later, COVID-19 is still wreaking havoc across the country. A second wave of the virus has prompted many of our leaders to reenact lockdown policies and mask mandates that continue to alter our everyday lives. Recent pharmaceutical discoveries in vaccine development give us hope, but as cases continue to soar in the United States, many wonder if life will ever return to normal. Unfortunately, philosophy does not have an answer for these uncertainties. Philosophy cannot tell us how much longer this may last, nor if the challenges brought on by COVID-19 are any closer to being over. That is a question I am not even sure experts in science or policy can answer. But despite this ambiguity, philosophy still has a role to play in this discussion. We can and should look to philosophy in conjunction with other academic disciplines to help us navigate tough ethical dilemmas, and this paper does just that.

It is through these especially difficult times that the value of a philosophical education can be fully appreciated. It may not have the answer, but philosophy’s ability to provide clarity amidst the uncertain is the reason why it continues to be a worthwhile disciple and a dependable framework for future decision-making—especially in a pandemic.
In this essay, I will address the questions: What are some ways human beings can treat each other as less than human? Does this enduring feature of our experience have to do with human nature itself? What role does society play regarding the time period and region in power imbalances or mistreatment of people? I will dissect the mistreatment of people concerning race, poverty, and stereotyping, and how they contribute to the power imbalances that have existed throughout the ages. I will also examine how these factors lead to human beings treating others as less than human, and how these injustices have been or have not been rectified.

Keywords: Religion, Violence, Holocaust, Racism, Social Justice
Thesis:
Throughout history, clear power imbalances have been created between different groups of people. Oftentimes, this results in grouping of ‘human’ and ‘less than human’. We see this in Ancient Greece, post-colonial America, colonial Africa, and pre-revolutionary Europe, just to name a few. These power imbalances are caused by the majority having the power and being a part of the majority (being human) is dictated by race, financial standing, and sometimes, religion. Over the past few centuries, many of these balances have been rectified, while others have not, through a variety of ways.

Humanity:
The philosopher Plato viewed human beings as “inherently rational, social souls burdened by imprisonment within their physical bodies.” The definition of humanity may have changed over time or differed from how Plato viewed humanity, but we can agree with at least one aspect of what the ancient philosopher thought. Today, we may associate different events, actions, or things with ‘humanity’ – helping the homeless, comforting a stranger who is distressed, the heroism displayed by firefighters during 9/11, etc. It’s easy to think of nice things when we consider this term, and it’s a common notion that not only are we all a part of ‘humanity’, but we are all human. This begs the question, why have some people treated others as ‘less human’?

It’s a natural instinct to be empathetic/sympathetic and to want to help
your fellow man, however why have we as people in history, not felt this way towards certain groups of people? In the book *Less Than Human*, David Smith reasons that “treating others as sub-human opens the door for cruelty… for power and dominance.” Multiple time periods and historical events have led to this sub-human classification of smaller groups of people in various locations around the world. The Holocaust in Europe during the 20th century is a prominent example. The Nazis insisted to the rest of Europe that the Jewish people (amongst other ‘inferior’ groups) were ‘rats,’ and that they were an ‘infestation’ on the continent, causing issues for the people of Germany in particular. Nothing was actually wrong with these groups of people, nor did they differ from their ‘human’ counterparts, but the power the Nazi party held in Germany and the military strength of the country allowed this notion to gain traction and spread across the world. Years after the war was over, Nazi sympathizers were able to look back at the atrocities committed during the war and wonder – why did we treat the Jewish in this way? How did we let such inhumane atrocities get committed?

**The Role of Racism**

Race may be the ultimate reason utilized for the mistreatment of groups of people. During the Holocaust, not only were the Jewish people discriminated against for their religion, but they were looked at as the ‘Jewish Race.’ Anyone who was not a part of the ‘Aryan Race’ was
considered inferior. Racism has historically been very prominent in the United States since its founding in the 18th century. The enslavement of Africans that spanned over 2 centuries instilled the roots of racism that African Americans experienced in the 20th century and still experience today. Examining the mistreatment of enslaved people in our country paints a clear picture of the lack of humanity that the white Americans had and felt they saw in slaves. Why did Americans (and Europeans) treat Africans as less than human?

One conjecture may be that settlers who lived further from the equator developed transportation quicker, which meant they had access to other lands and groups of people who could further their technological development. It is no secret that Europeans have participated in wars and developed weapons since the beginning of the first millennium. This advancement and access to other lands made it possible for lighter-skinned people to travel the world and advance in society. Historically, it seems that people closer to the equator (who had darker skin) developed differently and not as fast technologically, namely people on the continent of Africa. Europeans found that they could exploit free labor by kidnapping these people and bringing them to their countries or colonies to grow in power economically. The American Colonies built what would eventually become the United States from this free labor. Prior to this, American colonists also enslaved the Native Americans,
but this proved unsuccessful.

During this time of technological development and travel, people with lighter skin became more and more powerful as they conquered and colonized more land. The United States has one of the most well-known examples of slavery leading to the continuing mistreatment of people and labelling them as less than human. The 3/5 Compromise is a primary example of how those in power (White, American men) treated those who were Black as less than human (they were only considered equal to 3/5 of a white man). Although slavery officially ended with the Emancipation Proclamation, racial problems continued to persist through segregation and Anti-Black American laws that were put in place up to the 20th century. This was able to last so long because African Americans and other minorities were only a small portion of the American population— which was the minority. As these populations have grown, more effort to change racial policies has been made.

Stereotyping and racism are often synonymous in American culture. Stereotyping has contributed to ‘acceptable racism’ that still takes place in our society. It is an acceptable way for those in power to still belittle or reduce the humanity of those who hold racial minorities. Common stereotypes of African Americans as seen in multiple forms of media are that they are: violent, aggressive, or un-intelligent. From The Conscience of the Court by Zora Neal Hurston, the main character, Laura Lee Kimble is being tried unjustly for assault on a white man in the South during the 1900’s. This character is depicted as an unintelligent, Black maid, who speaks in broken English throughout the story. This is a common character type for black people, often referred to as ‘the help’. This story is not uncommon of what African Americans and other minorities experienced in the American ju-
dicial system (and continue to experience to this day). Laura is nearly convicted of aggravated assault on a white man and the jury comprised of White Americans are calling for her execution, “For felonious and aggravated assault… Premeditated attempted murder… and usage of obscene and abusive language” (Hurston, 682). Laura Lee’s inability to understand judicial language also contributes to her nearly being sentenced to death. This practice of biased and racist court proceedings proceeds to this very day, this is not something that has been rectified in America.

Racism is present in nations around the world, for example, ethnic cleansing has taken place in China, Bosnia, and Somalia, amongst other places. Those who hold power view these minority groups as less than human because they look different: their skin color, the way they dress, the language they speak. While everyone has humanity and kindness for their fellow man within them, they refuse to see the humanity in these minority groups because they’re different. Racism has taken place for centuries, there isn’t one place in the world that has solved this issue.

As nations technologically progress and grow, more inter-racial interactions become common. I believe this is how racism will eventually become a matter of the past; when a majority of the population is interracially mixed, because then people will view others as their ‘fellow’ man.

**The Role of Poverty**

Poverty is a key issue that affects people world-wide. It has been a common theme in various countries and time periods that the more money or possessions one has, the more valuable they are as a person. In the short story *Boule de Suif*, the main character is a prostitute in a group of aristocrats who becomes stranded in an army-occupied city. The aristocrat characters look down on her because she is poor and must earn her money in a disagreeable way. The plot of the story is ironic in that while Boule de Suif begins as the poor minority, she becomes the one who holds power by the climax because she is the only one who can free the group of travelers from being imprisoned by the Prussian soldiers in the story. However, once she has saved the group and served her usefulness to the wealthy passengers, they return to treating her as less than human, “She seemed rather shamefaced and
embarrassed, and advanced with timid step toward her companions, who with one accord turned aside as if they had not seen her. The count, with much dignity, took his wife by the arm, and removed her from the unclean contact” (Maupassant, 304). The wealthy passengers only treat Boule de Suif as a person when they need her, now that she has served her purpose, she is no longer considered human.

Pre-Revolutionary France (where Boule de Suif takes place) was notorious for class division that led to great poverty. The French Revolution was largely talked about during the DAS 300 course, and how the effects of wide-spread poverty led to it. While Boule de Suif is a part of the poverty minority in France, it is necessary to understand that those in poverty ultimately and eventually became the majority, which is how the Revolution ended up taking place. Poverty in France was rectified through this because those who were affected grew in population until they were able to take power. Prior to this Revolution it was impossible for those born into a lower social class to advance above their stations; this meant the poor kept getting poorer (lack of schooling and job opportunities) and those who were wealthy became more so. This concept and event are famously illustrated in Les Misérables.

Poverty is associated with minority groups, which is why these groups often have a lack of power. Women, racial minorities, and immigrants have usually been victims of poverty. From the short story Anna on the Neck by Anton Chekhov, Anna is a woman who marries a wealthy man in order to support her family in Russia. This is not an uncommon way that people who belong to these poor minorities have found to advance their wealth and security. However, advancing in wealth has not always been easy, and it is still a way for those in power to treat others as less than human. Those who are wealthy have historically been able to afford education, have higher-paying jobs, and live less stressful, healthy lifestyles in general because they are not constantly struggling. It is no surprise that those who were raised in poverty, tend to have no other option but to live that way. Sylvia from The Lesson by Toni Cade Bambara is a prime example of someone who is looked down upon due to their poverty level, “So [we] turn the corner to where the entrance is, but… I kinda hang back. Not that I’m scared… But I feel funny, shame. But what I got to be shamed about? Got as much right to go in [the store] as anybody… [we] tumble in like a glued-together jigsaw done all wrong. And people lookin at us” (Bambara, 5). Throughout the rest of the story, Sylvia highlights the differences in her lifestyle (having to make 50 cents stretch) compared to the lifestyle of those who can afford the toys in the store. She is aware that the people in there look down on her;
it’s noted that no sales associate approaches the group of poor children and they feel as if they don’t belong.

Poverty is still widespread and has not been completely rectified in our American society (amongst others’). Those who are rich still hold most of the power, but Americans don’t have this common notion that those who aren’t wealthy are ‘less human’ than those that are. It has become common in our culture to have empathy and compassion for those who struggle financially, which may be because the ‘middle class’ has emerged as a majority in the nation. It is now natural to be humane towards those in poverty, though a power imbalance remains.

**The Role of Religion**

Religion has been a huge disagreement throughout the centuries, it has been the main cause of many wars (notably between England and France). Christianity has been the dominant religion in the Western part of the globe and has played a major part in nation development and colonization. Religion is also something that has been tied to race, meaning a lot of people who are considered a racial minority, are even further marginalized for their religion (that most of their race may practice). Once again, a prime example of this is Judaism during the Second World War; the Jewish people making up a small percentage of the population of Germany and Europe in general. Being in the majority practiced religion allows power and humane treatment; being in the minority historically, has not.

A prime example of this minority religion leading to inhumane treatment is Muslims who practice the Islamic religion, particularly Post 9/11. After the events affecting the World Trade Center in 2001, the Islamic religion gained fame in the United States and was instantly associated with negative connotations. Islam is a minority religion in America (though practiced extensively in other parts of the world) and has had a 20-year history of being associated with oppression and murder by the American people. Had this religion been widely practiced in the nation (or had its existence and knowledge
been more widespread), it would not be as inhumanely treated as it has been the past two decades. America has a Christian majority, and one bad event, as well as ignorance has led to the inhumane treatment of all Muslims in America, whether they actively practice the Islamic faith or not. While information about this religion has become more widespread in America, the mistreatment of this group of people has not been completely rectified.

From the French novel L’Étranger (The Stranger/Foreigner) written by Albert Camus, we see what further effects being a part of a minority religion can have on people. In the story, Meursault is a white man living in French colonized Algeria. He murders an Arabic man and is served a reasonable punishment (execution). However, other elements of the story point out to the discrimination that the Arabs who practice the Islamic faith face in Algeria during this time period. It is a miracle that Meursault is tried for his crimes, as those who practiced the Islamic faith were viewed as ‘less than’ in this region at the time (meaning their deaths/murders were less significant).

Another reason why those practice minority religions are looked down upon is because they believe in different things. The Native Americans were famously colonized and referred to as ‘savages’ for their lack of belief in the Christian God. Spanish Conquistadors participated in the same kind of religious colonization, and Christian groups still attempt to convert those who practice different religions to this day. While difference in religion isn’t a huge indicator of mistreatment by a majority power in America today, it is still significant in other societies and is considered an integral part of American identity. The only way to completely rectify mistreatment of minority religious groups is to keep advancing in technology. Social media and the internet have made it possible for those who belong to majority religious groups to learn about other religions and view them as equals.

The Role of Gender

Gender identity and sexuality have been huge indicators of mistreatment and inhumanity throughout the millennia. Women in most societies across the globe were treated as less than human and viewed as property up until the 20th century. Women were stereotyped as weak, un-intelligent, or over-emotional by those in power (men), and still are to this day.

“I think about your life in days to come, the bitter life which men will force on you. When you’re mature enough for marriage, who will be there for you…? Who... will marry you? No one, my children. You must wither, barren and unmarried” (Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, 1490). The words “barren” and “unmarried” are often negatively associated with women. Throughout most of existence, women have been reduced to their ability to give
birth and to marry; to not do these things makes you ‘less than’. Even if women had these things (marriage and pregnancy), they were still looked at as less human and less capable of things than men. For a long time, women’s value and humanity was based on whether they would make a good, presentable wife or mother. Antigone is a titular character in another tragedy by Sophocles who is sentenced to death for a crime. Her fiancé attempts to save her but is refused by Creon who stresses that she would no longer be a suitable wife.

King Henry VIII of England is famous for his 6 wives, most of whom were divorced or beheaded because of their inability to produce a male heir to the throne. It did not matter that they produced healthy female babies or who they were as people. This meant that as a society, England did not care for females, there could not be a female heir to the throne because they were not fit to rule. For the longest time in American society, women were considered property of men, and did not afford any rights stated in the constitution. The United States is one of the few developed nations that has not had a female president, and women
historically, have not been present in the workforce until recently. This is due to stereotyping: women can’t be president or put into high-ranking job positions because they’re incapable of that level of work, they’re too emotional, they’re not as smart. Men (who hold the power) view women as ‘less than human’, they are not equal.

Over the past few decades, women have been gradually gaining equality in society and in the job force. Recently, America has elected a female vice president, something the nation has never seen before. Women wear what they want, do what they want, and aren’t valued by how suitable they are for marriage or how fertile they are. There are still people who want to reduce women to being ‘less than’ than their male counterparts, but this is changing every day. This problem and mistreatment is not completely rectified, and probably won’t be until women are no longer the minority in the workforce, and are allowed complete bodily autonomy in the eyes of the law nationally.

**In Conclusion**

Throughout history, clear power imbalances have been drawn between those who belong to majority groups and those who identify in the minority. This is through race, gender, religion, and financial standing. While most of these imbalances have been rectified in some way or another, these imbalances are still leading to the mistreatment of people in minority groups. I began this essay by asking why it is that we treat others as less than human, and what this has to do with human nature. The answer is clear: those in power are only able to remain in power by mistreating those who make up minority groups. Human nature dictates that we do what’s best for our own survival, which means doing everything in our power to survive, even if that means hurting someone else. Time period and region are important factors in our empathy and humanity: pre-20th century living was largely dictated by self-survival and empathy was not a widely used term. This is why events such as slavery and mass-starvation were able to go on for so long. Western regions developed faster than others, which is why inhumane treatment took place against other minority regions (they weren’t as developed, so they must be less intelligent, and less human).

As technology advances, people can make connections with each other across the globe. News spreads faster, inhumane treatments are quickly brought to light on outlets such as CNN for those halfway across the world to see. Every day humanity grows, and we become more humane towards minority groups. While it is human nature to fight for self-survival, it is also in our nature to be empathetic; to have kindness and sympathy for those who are being mistreated. This is the reason why modern humans don’t look
at each other as ‘less than human,’ this is what allows society to develop further. This problem is not completely solved, but hopefully, in time it will be.

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—Mason East, pg. 89

It is through these especially difficult times that the value of a philosophical education can be fully appreciated.

—Austin Kruse, pg. 77

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