

FOCUS

**FCS STUDENT MAGAZINE
EARLY 2018**



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**FRIENDS'
CENTRAL
SCHOOL**

FOCUS

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Meeting For Worship: A Risky Business

Editorial

BY: RISHI SINGH '18



Quaker author Robert Barclay once said, “When I came into the silent assemblies of God’s people, I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up.” This sentiment encapsulates what many Quaker institutions, including Friends’ Central, view as the aim of Meeting for Worship: a gathering for communal centering silence. I sat down with three members of the Friends’ Central community to discuss their experience with Meeting for Worship: Mr. MacFarlane, Anna Schall, and Ezra Kruger ‘18, who all agree that the time is meaningful and sacred. They also agree the tone of messages shared in Meeting for Worship have shifted in the last two years, particularly the messages from students. Mr. MacFarlane credits the senior class for year to year changes, saying, “From a faculty standpoint, I think it really depends on the students, and that comes from the top down, typically.” Ezra, on the other hand, believes that the changes in messages are due to students’ drive to voice their concerns and ultimately better our school.

Despite the lack of consensus on why this shift occurred, the shift is evident. Anna Schall, who has been a part of our community for the same amount of time as the seniors, has found that many members of our community feel moved to speak about their experiences within the Friends’ Central experience and how that experience has changed, “It does feel like, starting with the election last year, to Sa’ed Atshan being ‘put on pause’ and Ariel and Layla being put on leave, there was a big shift that happened. It did become political, and it did become a space where students were speaking their minds, and that’s really great. It is absolutely valid for someone to take those experiences and have some message that is based upon

them.” She points out that Meeting for Worship is a place to share any message without being punished.

The idea is one that is presumably attractive to students who feel otherwise unheard. This is an advantage that Mr. Mac says, “reflects that we are trying to develop student voices, real deep learning, that’s not just about getting a grade for a transcript, and a sense that we are looking at the whole child.” He vocalizes the idea of a school community supporting more than only academic pursuits, but he also notes the importance of keeping in mind that Friends’ Central is more than a Quaker institution; it is a high school. “It has to be different because it’s a school setting. What Mr. Felsen, our former Head of School, used to say—which I think is right—is that Meeting for Worship is a risky business. You gather almost 400 adolescents in a room in the middle of the week and you give them silence that they are free to break at any moment, and you’re gonna hear some things that don’t feel good. You’re going to worry about how these things land on other students.”

The sense of consideration for those around us seems to fall in line with the lessons in humanity that many of us have learned in our time at FCS. However, Ezra believes “polarization is not necessarily bad. If we are aiming to be a Quaker institution then stipulations around messages goes against that entirely.” While Anna says, on behalf of the Religious Life Committee, that “Meeting for Worship is open to interpretation. It is a space where you can access wisdom from people who are having completely different experiences.” They each espouse the duality of ‘speaking your truth,’ even if it is one that is critical of other individuals, in an environment that unequivocally encourages inclusivity.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of Meeting for Worship is having the opportunity to discern for ourselves what is necessary to express, to impact those sharing our space. There is a lot of freedom that comes with the practice, and therefore, we must have a sense of probity. As Anna puts it, “[The Religious Life Committee] has certainly never defined Meeting for Worship. What’s really cool about Quakerism is that we will all have different answers to what it is.” Developing a personal understanding of the time we allot for centering silence is more important than striving for an experience we feel we should have.

Movie Review: *The Greatest Showman*

Review

BY: LISA GREEN '20

When a friend invited me along to see *The Greatest Showman*, the latest movie with music by Pasek and Paul which has been panned by many critics, I was hopeful, but wasn’t expecting much. However, after watching the first three minutes, which were entertaining, clever and intriguing, I knew I would walk out of the theater with an unforeseen opinion. *The Greatest Showman* is a

semi-fictionalized version of the life of Phineas Taylor Barnum, the man who founded the very famous Barnum and Bailey Circus. The film delves into perspectives one wouldn’t expect it to from watching the trailer. For example, it portrays Barnum’s wife, Charity, who leaves her family behind to help her husband pursue his dreams. We also meet Phillip Carlyle, a wealthy socialite-turned

successful ringleader, as well as Lettie Lutz, an incredible vocalist and bearded woman who has been persecuted and mercilessly teased throughout her life, but is finally given a chance to perform.

The movie starts out with a sequence presenting Barnum as an abused child who was consistently yelled at and made to feel like he would never amount to anything, ultimately making him relate to all other outcasts. It perfectly sets up the story as one of redemption for members of society who were never given a chance solely based on where or how they were born.

As for the music, Pasek and Paul never disappoint. The first song, “A Million Dreams,” is one I haven’t been able to get out of my head since seeing it. The melody is of course, beautifully catchy, as is every song, but what truly sets this tune apart is the message that if you set your mind to something and pursue it at every opportunity, you can make even your wildest dreams come true despite your background or the obstacles in your way. The next standout, “The Other Side,” is a simple song during which Barnum is trying to convince Carlyle to be his financial partner in the circus. In a short three minutes, it is able to set up not only Carlyle’s character, motives, and background, but also shows the audience how much Barnum is still considered an outsider in New York society. This moment makes the upper class’s eventual begrudging appreciation for Barnum and his performances even more impactful.

Meet Ryan Coffey Keaton

BY: JULIAN BRENNAN ’20

The college admission process is a stressful, exciting, and overwhelming stage which almost all juniors and seniors who attend Friends’ Central go through. One of the people who keeps the process rolling smoothly for everybody by encouraging students and serving as a professional advisor and seasoned “sounding board” is Ms. Ryan Coffey Keaton. Ryan joined Friends’ Central over the summer of 2017 as Co-Director of College Counseling. In her new role, she hopes to help students in the midst of submitting applications and writing admission essays “relax” and “enjoy themselves.”

Ryan’s approach to her position is centered around personal connection and experience. She reflects on her own experience attending college: “I went to SUNY Geneseo, which is a state university of New York, at the College of Geneseo, which was a teachers’ college when it was founded. It was incredible. It was bigger than my high school experience. It was about an hour and a half away from home. I never really envisioned myself moving away from home, but living an hour and a half away was a pretty safe bridge to this new experience. I studied speech, communication, and rhetoric in business, and I loved it. College was the first time I encountered people who were very serious about going to school. It wasn’t just like people were going to a job. I think that can be a big change [in perspective and attitude] when going from high school to college. In college, people seem to know what they’re

Finally, there is no way to review this movie and not mention the powerhouse, Golden Globe winning, fan-favorite, “This Is Me.” It demonstrates the perseverance of Lettie and the other “Oddities” who join her. Despite the “Oddities” immense contribution to the circus, they are excluded from the after party, and when this occurs, they do not shy away from confrontation. Instead, they belt this incredible show stopper and stun every upper class society member in their path. The exquisite performance is an incredible declaration of wanting to be accepted despite one’s flaws, and it combines with unforgettable, mesmerizing accompanying music.

If you are craving an hour and a half long escapist, fantastic storytelling event set to memorable music that only gets better with every listen, this is without a doubt the movie for you.



Interview



doing a lot more and are a lot more committed to it for the right reasons. That was the kind of attitude around which I really thrived.”

Though she eventually grew successful and came to embrace her time at university, Ryan shares that she didn’t start “thriving” immediately when she began: “It took me a little bit of time to get my feet underneath me. I went from being a really top candidate in my high school to quickly confronting that there were some deficits in my education and really struggling my first three semesters of college. It took me three semesters to get back on my feet and to perform at the same level that I was used

to performing at in high school. From my conversations here, I think people pretty much think that you're born into being ready for college, and that wasn't my experience at all. I knew I wanted to go to college, and I knew I was capable of working hard in different ways, I just had not had to work very hard in high school. When I first transitioned from high school, I think my ego took a little bit of blow, because I was used to performing at a really high level. The victory was so much sweeter because I had struggled and really bounced back, enabling me to learn new things about discipline: when to get up, how I learn best, how to self-advocate."

While studying at Geneseo, Ryan served as a campus tour guide for visitors. During her senior year, she accepted the call to be a senior admission fellow. In this position, she went to college fairs, evaluated applications, and represented universities that were close to Geneseo. She found this all "very interesting," and says her involvement as a college student led to her career as a college counselor. Before moving to the high school level, Ryan worked in the admissions office of universities for about a decade. These institutions include Niagara University, Bryn Mawr College, and Swarthmore College. She explains why she moved from working in colleges to working in high schools: "I knew that I liked the relationships that I was developing with students and talking to them. I switched sides of the desk because I did want to work more with students. I appreciate that aspect of my job: the coaching, the encouraging, and seeing my students grow day-by-day. Though I loved reading applications, [counseling high schoolers as they prepare to apply for college] is more fulfilling for me."

Ryan finally came to Friends' Central after spending many years in college counseling at Abington Friends' School.

She discusses her experience at Friends' Central thus far, saying, "I love how open people have been in terms of accepting me into the community. They're excited to work with me. I feel very, very welcomed here. I love going to concerts, basketball games, and art exhibits."

An interesting fact about Ryan is that her husband is also her predecessor at FCS. Before she started in this position, her husband, Mr. Michael Keaton, worked in the same office. Mr. Keaton left the school to join Drexel University as an associate dean. Ms. Keaton talks of her husband, saying, "Our schedule is like hand-and-glove. When I'm more busy, he spends more time with the kids and vice-versa. In our conversations, we lovingly tease each other about the hard aspects of our jobs, but we don't really get any work done. We don't talk about kids getting into schools over the dinner table. I've encountered a fair amount of people who don't know I'm married to Michael. That's pretty funny and just makes me smile."

Ryan, a native of Sanborn, New York, loves to read, travel, and use her glorious alto voice. She has two children--seven-year-old Morgan and four-year-old Isaiah--who are Friends' Central Lower School students. Ryan will be performing in the ensemble of the Narberth Community Theatre upcoming production of *Sister Act* and makes note of the fact that she recently traveled to Abu Dhabi in the Middle East. She closes with the following words of wisdom: "I think, for the most part, high school students really underestimate themselves. They think they're boring, they think they haven't accomplished anything, they think that everyone else is doing a better job. This isn't at all true. Every person has a really great story and the college search process is about finding a college community where your story fits."

Ms. Dafne Foote: Life is an Adventure, and She Never Stops

Interview

BY: VICKY LIU '20

On the last day before winter break, I had an intriguing talk with Ms. Foote, an Upper School Spanish and 11th grade homeroom teacher who joined FCS at the start of this school year. I was thrilled to hear about her fascinating journeys all over the world, the stories of her varied job experiences, and the hobbies which occupy her time outside of school. She spends much of her time at FCS in room 34 on the third floor of Main Building, where she teaches Spanish II and Spanish IV. So far, Ms. Foote has enjoyed her teaching here, and guarantees "once you teach at FCS, public school teaching can't compare."

When Ms. Foote arrived at Friends' Central, she didn't just leave behind her previous job. She left behind her entire home in Colorado! The sole reason for her brave move? The opportunity to teach at FCS. Ms. Foote has known about our school for years from her sister's three sons, as they are all alumni. They've told Ms. Foote many fond stories, and by listening to them, she fell in love with the school. Therefore, when she was asked to teach here,



she immediately seized the opportunity, and relocated to her current abode in Haverford. Teaching on City Avenue is truly a "dream come true" for the former Coloradan.

The places to which Ms. Foote has ventured span across the Western Hemisphere. By looking at the square-shaped flag hanging on the wall beside her desk, you

know she grew up in Argentina. In North, South, and Central America, she has visited Mexico, Perú, Chile, Guatemala, and El Salvador. She has also traveled a lot in Europe in countries such as Italy, Sweden, England, Spain, and Germany. Plus, she resided in Paris with her sister for a while. Most of these adventures were for the sake of business. Ms. Foote used to be a marketer which required her to travel often. Some highlights of her marketing career include serving companies such as Coca Cola and Disney.

Following her years working as a marketer and her time studying at Brown University, where she earned a B.A. in economics, Ms. Foote re-entered the classroom, this time as a teacher. Though Ms. Foote loved being a marketer, she wanted to switch careers because marketing didn't allow her to demonstrate her "love for kids of all ages." She shares about her prior teaching experiences: "For the last several years, I worked with kids with a variety of learning disabilities for 18 hours a week in addition to my job. I used to be an art teacher as well." Ms. Foote's love of children has already radiated into our community. For example, Connor Liu '20, a student in her Spanish II class, recalls the time he was sitting alone in the Rextau-

rant. Ms. Foote saw him and walked towards him to ask if he was okay. Connor felt wonderful being a beneficiary of Ms. Foote's kind and caring nature.

Ms. Foote believes lively and exuberant teaching fosters more connections among students and allows them to better advocate for themselves. She delights in conducting interactive classes. After class, she values the time during which she assists students by engaging in one-on-one conversations.

In addition to teaching, Ms. Foote has a variety of interesting hobbies. She enjoys working out, hiking, skiing, biking, painting, hanging out with friends for coffee and meals (she loves Argentina milanesas and any good steak), and watching movies. When Ms. Foote speaks about skiing, she mentions her previous home in Colorado. The weather there is chilly which is ideal for skiing, and her house was surrounded by mountains. Additionally, Ms. Foote enjoys designing websites with her husband, Kevin, a graduate of MIT. In addition to Kevin, her family consists of her 17-year-old son, Max, who will be graduating from Friends' Central in June, her 13-year-old daughter, Sofia, who's an eighth grader at FCS, and her dog, Georgia.

The Driving Force Behind Strengthening Our Community: FCS Honor Council

Spotlight

BY: VICKY LIU '20

In almost every room at FCS, there is a pure, white, exquisitely designed poster displaying our institution's Honor Statement. These posters reflect important values of the Quaker tradition, such as Stewardship, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Simplicity. The content and design on all of these terrific posters were created by the Honor Council, a club which aims to improve the quality of life for all constituents of the community by raising awareness about how to morally and properly treat others and the environment. The club currently consists of eight members, two of whom, Peter Gullace '18 and Connor Liu '20, serve as presidents. The club is guided by a faculty advisor, Jim Rosengarten, who also serves as our History Department Chair.

The Honor Council's main goal is to improve the school's Honor Statement. In order to achieve this, members brainstorm and spread positive ideas to fellow students. When asked about their club, the members summarize, "Our goal is to ask ourselves the queries we propagate and think about how we, and everyone, can act honorably as members of a Quaker school." Jim elaborates, "We want people to live their lives as students in a way that helps them to live their lives better, in ways that the queries encourage us to. The queries act as a guide, something to have in our minds constantly so that it affects our decisions." However, the club members emphasize that people have to be responsible for their eventual choices. While the Honor Statement can seek to inspire and heal, it can't prevent all disrespectful behaviors on campus. The effectiveness of the statement depends on how seriously people embrace moral and ethical principles.



An example of an issue which Honor Council is working to resolve is plagiarism. Plagiarism still occurs on campus, but according to the council, it is happening much less frequently this year than it was last year. The Honor Council wishes to utilize this issue as an opportunity to use the Honor Statement as a vehicle to eliminate plagiarism. One idea the council has to achieve this is to hold a Meeting for Business where students could discuss plagiarism separately by grades or in smaller groups. Honor Council members are also considering inviting a speaker to come to talk about the testimony of the year, the Peace Testimony.

The Honor Council has maintained the same prestigious spirit and values since it was founded in 2011. Over the years, the group has achieved many praiseworthy improvements and achievements. For instance, since 2017, the council has made Mr. Klein's room available each week for folks to bring up ideas and complaints they have

about the school. The Honor Council takes this feedback to heart and factors it into their decision making.

Another highlight in the Honor Council's "life" occurred during an assembly in January 2016. With support from Student Council, Honor Council leaders delivered a presentation about their mission. Following the presentation, all students gave valuable feedback to the Honor Council, which the Honor Council later discussed.

In addition, back in 2011 and 2012, council members visited and phoned members of Honor Councils in different colleges and high schools in order to learn how they operate and to gain some tips. So far, Honor Council has kept the pulse on our community and has helped reflect

on what and how we are doing well and how we can do better.

For anyone who is interested in helping revise the Honor Statement or wants to aide in creating community-related jokes (the club posts a hilarious weekly pun on its bulletin board on the third floor of the Main Building), joining Honor Council would be the right choice. Joining the club could lead to profound self-discovery, the forming of meaningful relationships, and many other wonderful things. Honor Council's weekly meeting is on Tuesday in Jim's room, Room 32 in the Main Building. Should you need more details or you have any questions, please email either one of the fabulous leaders, Peter Gullace '18 or Connor Liu '20.

Students Venture to Israel to Share Their Passion for Lacrosse

Spotlight

BY: JULIAN BRENMAN '20

Lacrosse enthusiasts Jessica Horenstein '19 and Thea Volpp '20 have never found the commute from home to practice strenuous. Jessica, a resident of Penn Valley, and Thea, who lives in Wynnewood, both play on the Friends' Central team. In addition, both girls began their lacrosse careers at the nearby Lower Merion Girls' Lacrosse. In late December, however, the duo left the parameters of the Main Line on a mission to the Middle East, where they each participated in the Israel Lacrosse Winter Service Trip, a program which takes teenage American Jewish lacrosse players to Israel to compete in various tournaments, create bonds with peers, and introduce lacrosse to Israeli youth. Jessica and Thea spent eight days in Israel, as well as two in Poland.

This December marked Thea's first time participating in the program, as well as her first time visiting Israel. Thea shares how this experience came to be: "Starting last summer, I was looking into doing some kind of community service. I heard about this trip, and I was talking to Jess about it, since she did it two years ago. Then we decided to do it together this year. I loved it."

While this was Jessica's second voyage to Israel with the program, she reflects on how her two experiences contrasted with each other: "The first time I did it I was in ninth grade. I was still really young and I definitely enjoyed the trip a lot, but I knew I wanted to go back. This year, when Thea expressed interest in it, I was kind of reflecting on it, and was like, 'That was a really fun trip. I'd like to go back.' It turns out it was actually a lot better this year." Jessica adds, "I think it's really special that everybody on the trip was Jewish, because it's another factor that brings everyone together. Although it seems like there are [many Jewish people] in our small community, there aren't that many Jews in America on a relative scale...There are probably even less Jewish lacrosse players! Therefore, it's just a very close community that we're going to have friends from forever."

Thea explains the significance of her recent work in Israel: "A lot of kids in Israel have never seen lacrosse before, and so the goal of the trip was to show them what lacrosse is and get them interested so they can further develop their National Israeli Lacrosse team. They want to make lacrosse more of a sport there. We'd play in front of them, and then we'd kind of coach them in clinics. Along the way we became friends with a lot of the people on our team and a lot of the girls on the Israeli National Lacrosse Team, as well as the people we met at the schools that we coached at. It was a lot of fun." As two of the most talented lacrosse players at FCS, Thea and Jessica have had the privilege of being shaped by some remarkable professional coaches. Thea reflects on what it was like switching roles, and becoming the coach for the Israeli children: "Actually becoming the coach was rewarding. We were introducing the sport to them, which was a big deal. I spend a good amount of my life playing lacrosse. Since I've been playing for so long, it's meaningful to share it with others."

In addition to spreading her enthusiasm about the sport with others, Jess says the trip improved her game as well: "Going back to the basics actually kind of helped [my lacrosse playing] a little bit, because you don't think about those [basic] things when you've been playing for so many years, and when you go and teach somebody, you have to really step back."



The girls spent much of their trip focused on sticks and balls, yet managed to also make time to learn about, tour, and immerse in Israeli culture. Jessica describes a particularly special day: “We woke up at 4:00am, and got to hike up Mt. Masada, which, though touristy, is a special and important thing to do. After that, we went to the Dead Sea, and in that same day, we were able to go to Yad VaShem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem. Then, we spent some of the night in Jerusalem at the Western Wall and around the city. That was a really special day for me, getting to get that taste of Israel that I wanted very badly. We went to these beautiful gardens in Haifa, and then drove to an Arabic town called Acrel. Getting to see that was cool. Getting involved in Israeli culture, whether that was learning Hebrew words, or meeting new Israeli people from the clinics and just around, was fascinating.” The players indeed gained a flavor of the land.

Jessica elaborates about her time in Israel: “Somebody said something that really stuck with me. That person said, ‘now we get to go home and be ambassadors for Israel.’ We can easily contradict people’s misconceptions about the country. Even though it has seen a lot of violence in its time as a state, it’s not the place you would expect it to be. It’s the complete opposite than that poster country for war or violence. In Israel, I’ve never felt safer. I knew that even if there were any type of violence, G-D forbid, that I would be protected because of what the I.D.F. (Israeli Defense Forces) does. I’ve been told so many times that if something were to happen, people would let you into their house. It’s important that people know that Israel’s not a state of violence. It’s a state of people who are so good-natured and fun-loving, and just happy people. It’s also a really big cultural center. There are many Arabic towns, many Christian towns, as well as Jewish people.” Thea expresses similar views about her time away: “While I was in Israel, I was learning a lot and I was exposed to a lot. It was pretty much what I expected, it was really enjoyable. We really wanted to stay. The last night was really sad. Israel is a great place to visit, but also a great place to live. The food’s great, the people are great. It was really special to be there because the connections you make

with people are really special there. I knew that I’d enjoy my time there, but I didn’t know that I’d end up wanting to stay for that long.”

Jessica and Thea left on such a high note that they both feel that this experience was only the beginning of more time playing lacrosse. Jessica declares, “I don’t know if I want to play lacrosse in college, but I want to stick with the sport. I can’t imagine quitting now.” Thea reveals, “I’ll be happily returning to Israel this summer with my family, and hope to participate in this winter service trip again in the future.”

As far as trophies, Jessica and Thea didn’t return empty-handed. They won a tournament against the Polish National Team. Though competition is exhilarating, Jessica exclaims, “In the end, the most exciting thing was watching them have fun, because that’s what’s the sport’s all about. It’s about learning new things and meeting new people. We still keep in touch with all of the Israeli girls over social media, and kind of seeing how their lives stay in Israel is really cool.”



Thoughts on Caring for Something Semi-Tangible

BY: SYDNEY KAPLAN '18

It is difficult to care for something semi-tangible. By “semi-tangible,” I mean something that there may or may not be physical representations of in our world that can never truly be “touched.”

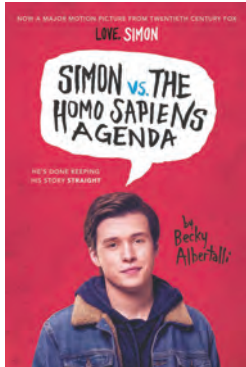
One example of something that is semi-tangible is J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series. There are the books, the movies, festivals, parties, merchandise, arts & crafts, fan-fiction, and more. However, no matter how much Harry Potter may mean to someone, or how much one may wish they could exist in the Harry Potter universe, the Wizarding World cannot be touched or visited. It is forever just out of reach. Somehow, everything in this world that

is related to Harry Potter is simply not enough for many fans. That longing for a place, for a certain way of being, can never be satisfied.

Other examples of semi-tangibility include: people who are no longer living; other stories and fictional worlds in books or movies; and even celebrities who, despite existing in our world, will likely never be within reach. The idea for this short article crossed my mind a few months ago while I was trying to fall asleep, and I immediately jumped out of bed to write it down. I know the idea of semi-tangibility may sound strange to some, but I think it is quite interesting and worth pondering.

BOOK REVIEWS

Sydney Kaplan '18



Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda

By Becky Albertalli

Genre: YA Fiction/LGBTQIA+ Fiction

Written in 2015, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* is a coming-of-age novel written by Becky Albertalli that centers around closeted gay sixteen-year-old Simon Spier. Simon has a close-knit friend group and a nice family life. He enjoys participating in his school's musical productions. He also likes to communicate with a boy known to him as "Blue" through email. When Simon accidentally forgets to log out of his email account on a school computer, another stu-

dent, Martin, finds out Simon's secret and blackmails him, threatening to out Simon. *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* beautifully chronicles the struggles Simon faces as a closeted gay teenager. It is an excellent read; not only is it an LGBTQIA+ young adult novel, it is hilarious, entertaining, heart-warming, thought-provoking, and relatable. I will never forget reading this book--home alone, sitting in the kitchen drinking tea, looking at Tumblr, and smiling from ear to ear. A film adaptation of the book called *Love, Simon* is coming out in March 2018.



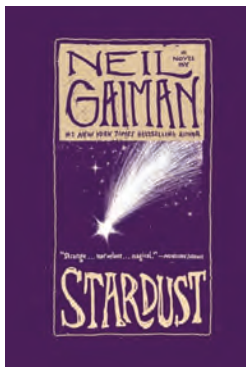
Frankenstein

By Mary Shelley

Genre: Gothic Fiction/Horror Fiction/Soft Science Fiction

Originally published anonymously in 1818, Mary Shelley's fantastic work of literature, *Frankenstein*, has been re-published multiple times. Frankenstein (the creator, his creation is referred to as "the Creature") is a fascinating and terrifying portrayal of the human psyche. Seduced by his desire for greatness and knowledge, Dr. Victor Frankenstein fashions a horrible being out

of dead people's body parts. *Frankenstein* is an excellent representation of human nature and the things we struggle with: greed, power, knowledge, truth, and death/loss. The tale of *Frankenstein* is worth a read - although, I would say, wait until senior year.



Stardust

By Neil Gaiman

Genre: Fantasy

You may have seen the 2007 film adaptation of *Stardust*, a novel written by Neil Gaiman, as a child. The novel itself, published in 1999, is very different from the film (although both are very good in my opinion). The story at first takes place in April of 1839, but then fast-forwards to seventeen years later, around October of 1856. Set in the town of Wall, England, as well as in Faerie (and a kingdom within it, Stormhold), *Stardust* centers around a young man named Tristran Thorn. (In the film, it is spelled

and pronounced as Tristan). Unbeknownst to him for the majority of his young life, he is not just human. Tristran is part Faerie, as his mother is from the Faerie side of the stone wall that separates it from Wall, England. During his journey through Faerie, Tristran grows tremendously and meets an incredible cast of characters, including but not limited to: Yvaine, Captain Shakespeare, and the brothers of the Stormhold Royal Family. *Stardust* is a captivating story, filled with wonder, magic, evil witches, and so much more. Believe me when I tell you that although it may sound like such, *Stardust* is not a children's book.

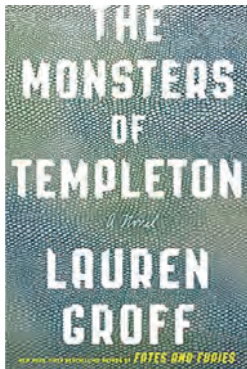
Ms. Katie Dickerson



American War
By Omar El Akkad
Genre: Science Fiction/Dystopian

It's 2074, and Philadelphia--along with the rest of the East Coast--has fallen into the ocean because of global warming. Texas and California have been returned to Mexico. The nation's capital has moved to Columbus, Ohio. When the government decides to ban petroleum, the South secedes, causing a second Civil War. Against this backdrop,

readers meet Sarat, who, after her father's death, is forced to move to a refugee camp with her family. As Sarat gets older, both she and her siblings get involved in various aspects of the Civil War and the Southern resistance. If some of this sounds a little too close to home, that's likely because it is. Akkad examines current politics and other global issues by layering his book with allegory and forces Americans to take a critical look at their own role in other countries.



Monsters of Templeton
By Lauren Groff
Genre: Contemporary Fiction

I've read a few of Lauren Groff's books, and this, though her first, is the one I've enjoyed the most. The novel follows Willie, a twenty-something who finds herself in a few troubling situations, leaves graduate school, and returns home. There, she is tasked with tracing her family lineage

to find her father's true identity. Willie's story is interspersed with fake historical documents from her ancestors, chapters narrated by a group of runners, and images of the family and the monster that's discovered in the local lake.

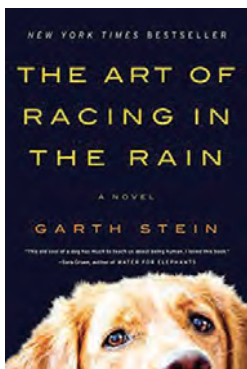


The Hate U Give
By Angie Thomas
Genre: Young Adult

The Hate U Give has been at the top of the *New York Times* Bestseller Young Adult Hardcover book list for 48 weeks, which is one of the many testaments to its appeal. Another is the fact it is in the process of being turned into a movie with an all-star cast like Amandla Stenberg, Common, and Issa Rae. *The Hate U Give* follows Starr Carter,

a young black girl who tries to balance her home life versus her private school life, her first relationship, and her family discord. On top of all that, Starr witnesses the police shooting of her unarmed friend Khalil. She must decide whether to testify against the policeman who shot him. There's something for everyone in Starr's story. Sure, you could wait until the movie's released (though no date has been given), but, let's be honest: the book is always better.

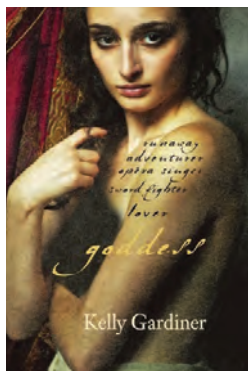
Gia Matika '18



The Art of Racing in the Rain
By Garth Stein
Genre: Realistic Fiction/Philosophy

The Art of Racing in the Rain is an absolute masterpiece. Garth Stein offers us a whole new perspective of the human condition, told to us by Enzo, a labrador mix. Enzo tells the story of Denny, a racecar driver, and his family, and recounts his life on his last day on earth, sprinkled with bits of humour and tenderness that one might not expect from this sort of narrator. As he recounts ups and

downs in his own voice, readers understand the troubles with Enzo's loyalty and love for Denny and his daughter, Zoë. After a tragedy, Zoë's grandparents step into their roles as the antagonists of the story, and we gain bits of wisdom as we follow Enzo through his life. Garth Stein is an American author who was inspired by a film from Mongolia, where there is a belief that a dog's next incarnation is a human. He himself is a racecar driver, and semi-retired after crashing in the rain.



Goddess

By Kelly Gardiner

Genre: Historical Fiction/LGBTQIA+

Goddess tells the story of Julie D'Aubigny, a master fencer and star of the opera. On her deathbed in a church, she recounts adventure after adventure to the priest who sits next to her, hoping she'll repent before she dies. She tells stories of her lovers, which include men and women, old and young, as well as her adventures as an expert in a sport traditionally for men. Making friends and enemies at the famous Opéra in Paris, Julie's story will keep you on your toes and

begging for just one more tale. I read this book over the summer after borrowing it from the library, and I didn't want to return it when I finished. My own copy now sits next to my bed for easy access to a piece of history that I hope will not be forgotten. Gardiner writes the story in a way that's engaging and includes all the recorded history about this amazing woman, and even include notes about her research and the details she made up herself, so you can not only enjoy the story, but discover a part of history--a woman who threw society's rules out the window and truly made her mark on history.



Ready Player One

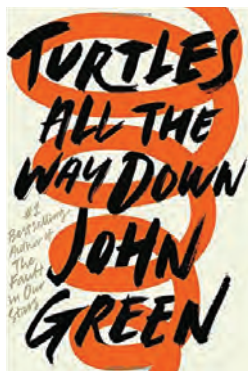
By Ernest Cline

Genre: Science Fiction

Ready Player One dives deep into virtual reality, where most of Earth spends their time in a free, international game, called the OASIS, with sensory stimulants that make the user feel the experiences rather than just see them. The main character is Wade Watts, a player who goes to school online and is a genius when it comes to the game and its creator. Full of references to 80's movies and video games, the story simulta-

neously is a blast to the past and a taste of the future. The story is detailed and exciting, and while most people won't understand each and every line that pays homage to the 80's, readers can still enjoy the riddles and plots that are explored by the characters. Readers stay fascinated with every step. When there's a break in the action, Wade keeps us interested with hard choices and wry humor perfectly suits the tone of the novel. A movie adaptation is coming out at the end of March, and we can only hope it lives up to the book.

Ms. Vicki Schwoebel



Turtles All the Way Down

By John Green

Genre: Contemporary/Realistic

John Green's long awaited new novel is here, and it's his best one yet. Sixteen year old Aza and her best friend Daisy take notice when local billionaire Russell Pickett disappears. The reward for information in his case is a hundred thousand dollars, and Daisy is sure their sleuthing will lead to clues and ultimately to the reward. After all, Aza spent summers at "sad camp" with Russell's son, Davis, after his mom and her dad died, so

reconnecting with the Pickett family isn't hard. As Aza and Davis reconnect and begin to fall for each other, Aza's ever-present anxieties and compulsions begin to spiral, and readers are shown what it's like to live every-day consumed by claustrophobic, obsessive thoughts. Aza's voice is raw and heartfelt, and Green also throws in a hefty dose of nerdery and humor that will win over teen and adult readers alike. Green's latest is an unflinching, honest look at mental illness that is at times challenging to read, but will linger with readers long after finishing.



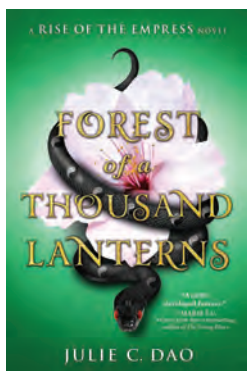
Caraval

By Stephanie Garber

Genre: Fantasy

Scarlett and her sister Tella have lived their entire life on the island of Trisda, secluded from the rest of the world. Eager to escape her tyrannical father, Scarlett is excited when he arranges a marriage for her--and thinks only of taking Tella with her. One night, a mysterious sailor convinces Tella to leave, and Scarlett feels compelled to follow. She finds herself wrapped up in Caraval, a magical event that blurs the lines between

performance and game, often with deadly results. Scarlett is now a player in Caraval, and she must find Tella, who has been kidnapped by Caraval's strange creator, Legend. Scarlett must solve cryptic puzzles and navigate the deadly terrain, unsure who is a player and who is an actor, while fighting off feelings for the mysterious sailor. *Caraval* is thrilling, mysterious and unique; it's unlike anything else on YA shelves. Stephanie Garber's debut will enchant any fantasy, sci-fi or romance fan, and leave you hanging on the edge of your seat at the book's conclusion.



Forest of a Thousand Lanterns

By Julie C. Dao

Genre: Fantasy

Eighteen-year-old Xifeng has lived with her cruel aunt Guma for her entire life and is often beaten for stepping out of line. Xifeng is resentful and often dreams of running away with her secret lover, Wei. While she and Guma embroider for a living, Guma assures Xifeng that her destiny is much greater—she has seen in the cards that Xifeng’s beauty and cunning will one day get her a powerful position in the kingdom, but only if she embraces the dark magic deep inside her. One day after a particularly horrific beating

disfigures her face, Xifeng and Wei set off for the Imperial City, hoping that Xifeng can enter the Empress’s services as a lady-in-waiting and eventually fulfill her destiny. As time passes, Xifeng struggles to maintain friendships, navigate the treacherous eunuchs and concubines at the palace, and also with the darkness lurking under her skin. Xifeng is a complex anti-heroine whose character will linger with readers long after the last page. Dao’s debut is a polished and masterful Asian-inspired retelling of Snow White’s Evil Queen. This is a beautiful, lush story with complex and diverse characters that will delight readers.

Ms. Katie Dickerson: Experienced English Teacher and Expert Advisor

Interview

BY: JULIAN BRENNAN ’20

The sweet odor of paperbacks, the feeling of the tips of recently sharpened pencils, and the charm of chalk dust are all things that invigorate Ms. Katie Dickerson, an English and homeroom teacher and co-advisor to Focus.

The education lover reflects on the experience she had when she was a younger youngster living in Brick, New Jersey, studying in high school: “I really loved school. I was really nerdy, which I’m sure is not a surprise to anyone. My teachers were really important to me when I was younger and I think that’s why I knew I wanted to become a teacher. During my junior and senior years of high school, I had two teachers who were very influential for opposite reasons. For my junior year, my AP American Literature teacher was a lovely person. She was very sweet, she was very caring and she was very helpful if I had a problem that I needed help with. She made English really fun. My senior year, I had a teacher who was not very nice. She was actually pretty mean. She kind of shaped the way I teach because she taught through embarrassment and shame. I learned what not to do by observing her. Though she was mean, she was pretty smart, though.”

After she was graduated from high school, Ms. Dickerson studied at Arcadia University. At Arcadia, she majored in English, minored in Spanish and sociology, obtained her secondary education certificate and was part of the honors program. All of this led to her earning a Bachelor’s Degree in English. As a college student, she studied abroad to improve her Spanish skills in Spain during her freshman year; in Argentina when she was a sophomore; in Guatemala while was a junior. Ms. Dickerson says the following about her experience studying abroad and her level of proficiency in Español: “It was really great studying abroad. I am ‘fluent-ish’ in Spanish. I know enough to get by in a foreign country, but my grammar is not perfect. It comes back pretty fast, though. I visited Peru this past summer, and I was surprised that I remembered words that I hadn’t used in a few years.”



Getting back to English, Ms. Dickerson first taught English to ninth and eleventh graders at Esperanza Academy in Philadelphia and reflects on that experience: “It was a good first place to teach. It was kind of challenging, which prepared me to teach at other places. There was a lot of support for me.” Following two years at Esperanza, Ms. Dickerson joined the faculty of Philadelphia’s Olney Charter High School, where she taught English for half a decade and later became the head of the English department. It was over the course of her tenure at these two institutions that Ms. Dickerson studied at night and earned a Master’s Degree in English.

Though she enjoyed her time at Olney, Ms. Dickerson expressed a desire to grow. She shares, “with seven years of teaching experience, I was the most experienced English teacher at the school, which in some ways was really frustrating, because I wanted other people to learn from who’ve been doing this for a longer time. I started looking around for schools with English departments with more experience. Some friends who work at other private schools in the area mentioned that Friends’ Central had an opening. So, I sent in my resume, Mr. Vernacchio called me, we did a skype interview, I delivered my ‘demo lesson’ and then I was invited to join the team.”

Ms. Dickerson describes her observations during her first few months on City Ave: “Something that I still can’t get over and that shocks me every day, in a good way, is the amount of freedom and trust we give the students. Students can be anywhere on campus, which is so unheard of where I was teaching before. I think this freedom helps to build relationships between staff and students and students and the institution.” When asked how she enjoys advising the staff of Focus, Ms. Dickerson responds, “It’s been a cool way to get to know students who I don’t teach and to learn about things that happen around campus that I wouldn’t otherwise know about.”

When Ms. Dickerson isn’t educating, advising, or “English-ing” she enjoys kickboxing, visiting the gym, dining at the Trolley Car Diner in Philadelphia, and using her lifeguarding certificate, which she has had for more than half of her life, to teach young children how to swim. In addition, Ms. Dickerson was on her high school’s track team and climbed an active volcano in 2009. Her favorite hangout? On campus, the adirondack chairs in the Felsen Common, and in general, the Jersey native exclaims without a pause, “The beach!”

Gone Campin’: Pierce Hayton Reflects on His Coast-To-Coast Adventure

Spotlight

BY: JULIAN BRENMAN ’20



When you hear the word “camp,” you may think of the place you go in the summertime to partake in sports, crafts, and recreation. Perhaps you remember the time you snoozed in sleeping bags in the backyard or at a nearby campground for a night as part of a Boy Scout or Girl Scout event. When Pierce Hayton, a current sophomore, hears the word “camp,” he reminisces with a grin about the two times he, his father, and his sister, Zoë, spent nearly a month driving from California to Philadelphia. During these periods, the Haytons spent most of their nights sleeping beneath the stars at renowned campgrounds anywhere between the state known for sunny weather, fame, and fortune and their home here in Pennsylvania.

Pierce explains how these two quests came to be: “Right after winter break in seventh grade, my dad has this idea. He says, ‘Hey, how about I sell my current car, we fly out west to California, buy a new car there, then drive it back home?’ Of course, me and my sister [sic] were totally on board with that. We flew out there and saw some of our grandparents, which worked out well, then we bought the car, and arrived back here just under three weeks later. We did the same thing before ninth grade.” Pierce adds, “Along the way, we camped at places like Glacier National Park, (seen in the 1st and 2nd photos) The Redwoods, (seen in the 3rd and 4th photos) and many other little campgrounds you find across the West. The badlands in South Dakota, (seen in the 5th photo) which had very odd, sandy-typed terrain, were a great place to camp at. We’d spend a few nights at every place. We’d camp at two

places, then we’d stay at a hotel so we could do laundry, shower and clean up basically. We’d drive six or seven hours a day east, stop for the night somewhere, camp two or three nights there, explore that area, then just continue all the way back to Ohio. Then we went east.”

The outdoorsman shares his favorite aspect of the journey: “My favorite place to camp was the Redwoods. It was awe-inspiring. You see these trees, and you think to yourself, ‘Wow, these are hundreds of feet tall and they’re hundreds of years old and they create this incredibly dense canopy.’ You can leave and go back to California where it becomes dry and warm, but when you go in the Redwoods, it’s humid and shady. It’s cooler. It feels like a very different environment. It feels like you’ve left California and you’re now in this new land. Then you go back out and you’re like ‘Wow, now I’m back in California.’ I also really loved visiting Salt Point. Salt Point is on the very northern coast of California. It’s this beautiful spot along the ocean. I woke up really early one morning to go out there and see the sun rise and light up the ocean from behind me. It’s this big old cliff, and I’m the only person out there. I remember standing out there, looking at it, and thinking to myself, ‘Wow. This is stunning.’ When you see something like that you realize how humans are so tiny compared to the rest of the world.”

Pierce says the logistical aspects of camping aren’t as treacherous as some make them out to be: “Sleeping in a tent isn’t that bad if you have some good sleeping pads. You obviously have a sleeping bag, but you’ll want to put





some sleeping pads under it so you're not sleeping on rocks or roots or anything. We have inflatable ones which are really comfy. The sleeping pads also help insulate you from the cold ground. If you have a good sleeping bag and a good sleeping pad, you're not going to feel it too much. For cooking, you have to plan ahead when you're doing these types of things. Though you'll be in a campground with other people, so you're not too far from civilization, you still don't want to have to make a run back and forth to town every night to cook your dinner. What we do is we go to R.E.I. and they have these meals that you just add hot water to and you let them sit for six minutes and they're good to eat. Those are usually dinner. For lunch, we bring bread and sandwich materials. It's a lot of simple foods when camping—nothing extravagant. Some campgrounds have a shower but not all of them do. We'd have to go a few days without it!"

While many of the aspects of Pierce's camping episodes were fantastic, some were what others would deem "hair-raising." Pierce shares his encounter with a grizzly: "I woke up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the

night and I see this big lumbering figure looking at this table. I see two reflective eyes looking at me and I walked back to my tent calmly. It was a bear who was trying to get food. I didn't get hurt and luckily, I felt pretty safe." Most families struggle with relationships. Despite common belief, Pierce says the intense quality time provided by camping and driving coast-to-coast strengthened the relationship between him, his father, and his sister. He elaborates, "Camping helped me and my sister not fight as much because we're like, 'Well, we can fight for these four to eight hours and be unhappy, or we can learn to live with each other for these four to eight hours and enjoy the experience'. Fighting isn't going to make anything change. Don't get me wrong, we did argue a lot because obviously we're trapped in a car for anywhere from four to eight hours in a single day. But I think my dad's always been good at mediating and preventing these fights and arguments from starting. Me and my sister generally get along very well anyways."

In addition to benefiting his family relationships, Pierce says camping gave him, his father and his sister many skills they use as individuals: "As a result of this camping, me, my dad, and my sister have become a lot less uptight. We're now a lot more 'go with the flow' type people. We accept what's going on. This attitude gives you this appreciation for nature, because you learn to recognize what's going on and choose how to deal with it. It helps you with problem solving, accepting a situation and growing through it."

If camping seems like something you'd like to do, Pierce suggests that "a great way to get into camping is to go with friends of yours. It was great when I went with Jacob Groch and his father and his sister because we had the benefits of camping, but my family and I weren't going solo. I had the other people to hang out with. Going with others can be fun because it can help alleviate some of the fears of camping. If you don't know what to do, you can talk to the other family to get help. If you and your family want to go, you should definitely do it." Pierce notes that camping taught him things he didn't know about himself: "I've learned that I'm more crafty and more resourceful than I thought I was. You don't have access to a Rite Aid or a Target or a Giant, so you have to make do with what you have and continue from there." In closing, Pierce exclaims, "When camping, bug repellent is a life saver." As far as his future camping plans, Pierce reveals, "We are hoping to go camping either spring break or beginning of summer."



Evan's Top Eight Movies of 2017

Review

BY: EVAN PASZAMANT '18

For those who do not know me, I am very critical when it comes to art. In my opinion, some things in art work well and some things simply fail. This assessment of art might sound harsh, but as a film critic who writes for sources outside of FCS, it is my job to state my opinion of certain films. I think of it this way: if every movie were valued the same, would there be any progression in the film industry? In my opinion, the answer to that question is no. So that is why I am here! I have watched almost every movie that has been released theatrically this past year, and I have carefully picked my Top Eight Films of 2017. This list is meant to start a conversation. If a film critic doesn't

start an argument or a conversation, then that individual simply isn't fulfilling their job description!

I will warn all of you that this top ten list does not include Jordan Peele's horror masterpiece, *Get Out*. This list also does not include *Dunkirk* or *Coco*. While all three of those movies are wonderful, I personally believe they are overrated and are not as incredible as those on my list. Also, I do not order my favoritism of films. If they made it to my top eight list, that's enough of a ranking in my eyes! So, if you all are done complaining about *Get Out* (I'm keeping it real here!), here is the Evan Paz Top 8 Films of 2017!

#8

Okja (Netflix)



Last year, we all found out that Amazon can make quality award winning films with the Oscar Winner *Manchester By The Sea*. Starting off this list is a movie that proved to me that Netflix (who has recently increased their price) can actually make a high quality movie too. Unfortunately, because this is a Netflix movie, it probably will not be nominated for any awards this season. But you know what? Who cares! In my opinion, this film is better than at least half of the Oscar-bait movies that this award season has to offer.

In short, *Okja* tells the story of a genetically-modified pig (that looks more like a hippo) and her "owner" who desperately wants to rescue her from an American Corporation. Personally, one thing I often dislike about movies that preach activism is that they claim that activists are always saintly when in actuality they too have their

darker sides. What frustrates me about movies that preach that corporations are evil is that corporations also have innocent, compassionate, humane sides as well. After all, humans are the ones running the corporations. With this in mind, it came as a surprise to me that *Okja* took into account all of these factors! This movie shows that there are grey areas on both sides of an argument, which is probably one of the boldest moves I have seen in a movie all year. Between the incredible acting and the perfect natural scenic backdrops (South Korea is truly gorgeous!), *Okja* conveys a disturbing and piercing story from beginning to end. As a fun little side note, *Okja* was made on a \$50 million dollar budget and the graphics are impeccable. The third worst film of the year, *Justice League*, was made on a \$300 million dollar budget and had some of the crappiest graphics I have ever seen in a movie! Money doesn't always mean better!

#7

Beach Rats (Neon)



"Evan, what the heck is this movie?" I'm so glad you asked. Not a lot of people have heard about this film which is such a shame because it's really good. Throughout this year I have noticed a trend with the award contender films. Last year, the theme that was heavily pushed during the awards season campaign trail was movies about the black youth experience (for example: *Moonlight*, *Dayveon*), and this year the trend is shifting to strictly focus on youth questioning their sexuality, going through relationships, and how that impacts those surrounding the central character. While some might argue that *Moonlight* is about sexuality as well, which it is, most would agree that the central focus of the film is not Chiron's realization of his sexuality. This year, *Beach Rats* and *Call Me By Your Name* entirely center around the gay coming of age story. I'll get to *Call Me By Your Name* in a second but first let's talk about *Beach Rats*.

Beach Rats centers around a young adult growing up in a white middle class household in Brooklyn, New York. Frankie is addicted to drugs that are prescribed for his dying father, vapes often, and is a member of a "gang" if you will. Right off the bat, the film immediately reveals to the viewers how the central character is questioning his sexuality. He goes onto cam dating websites and "hooks-up" with older guys in the woods. This film is very graphic but not graphic in a distasteful way like *Game of Thrones* where there needs to be a sex scene every fifteen minutes. *Beach Rats* uses these scenes as a means of showing a shift of the boy's discomfort with his sexuality to ultimately becoming one with the notion of being gay. This movie is done in a risky way, but it really paid off. In my opinion it is possibly one of the best "questioning sexuality" films of all time.

#6

Logan
(20th Century Fox)



A few years ago, my husband Hugh Jackman (I wish) stated at a press conference that he would be in one final *X-Men* movie as Wolverine. As the world mourned, director James Mangold created what could possibly be one of the greatest closure movies to a character yet. There is one movie on this list that beats it though! Honestly, if the Oscars would look at superhero movies more seriously, this film would be nominated for many awards and in my opinion, Patrick Stewart would probably win a Best Supporting Actor Oscar. I am not going to spoil anything I promise! All I will say is that his last monologue is one of the best delivered and written monologues in a film that I have heard in a long time.

Logan takes place in the near future where the X-Men have disbanded. Wolverine (Logan) surrenders to alcohol as his powers to self-heal dwindle, and Professor X is hidden away in a desert as his memories fade away. One day a woman shows up and asks

Wolverine to transport a girl to the Canadian border so she can be safe. Ultimately, it is revealed that she has powers quite similar to Wolverine. And it wouldn't be a superhero movie without the protagonists being chased! However, even though I write down that *Logan* is a superhero movie, in actuality it is very relatable and very human. *Logan*, very similar to *The Dark Knight*, takes the aspects of a standard superhero film and brings them to a new level of realism where you can visualize the hero's walking amongst you and can strongly relate to them. With the exception of the last ten minutes of the movie, which I personally thought was unnecessarily political, *Logan* has a heart and a life of its own that bends the concept of what a superhero film is supposed to be. Maybe the greater picture of this film is for us to look at ourselves as being the heroes in our own lives. Oh, and to finally settle the *Wonder Woman* vs. *Logan* debate, *Logan* is definitely better.

#5

The Promise
(Open Road)



I'm not going to lie to you. This film initially flew very low on my radar of films to see. I didn't plan on writing a review of it, and I didn't plan on spending money to go see it. I support the Armenian community and I strongly push the fact that the Armenian Genocide happened even though many to this day doubt it. I just didn't think that I had to see this movie. Thankfully, Soseh Yepoyan invited me to go see *The Promise* with her. *The Promise* not only gave me an outsider's understanding as to what the Armenian Genocide was, but it gave me a glimpse as to what horrors a genocide can cause an innocent group of people. As a Jewish person whose great grandparents escaped the Nazis in Poland and Germany, I have watched films such as *Schindler's List* and felt deeply connected to that film on a personal level. In the film I bear witness to piles of dying individuals rotting away along

a creek side, a horrifying image that gives us the viewers a reality check. As I watched *The Promise*, I could feel the same emotions in this movie as well. While *The Promise* was attacked on social media and at the box office by Anti-Armenian Genocide Groups as they blocked screenings and purchased seats so others could not see the film, the truth of this movie still pushed through.

I am not going to go into what *The Promise* is about, as if I did I would be diluting the shock and eye opening effect of the film. Between the story, the acting, and in particular the writing and visualization found in the script, *The Promise* exposes a piece of world history that is still ignored by many to this day. If you can find this movie, watch it. It is an honest, heartbreaking, and, more importantly, meaningful experience.

#4

Baby Driver
(Sony Pictures)



It has not been since *Mad Max: Fury Road* that I have watched a movie and smiled like a kid in the candy store throughout the film out of pure excitement and amazement. To me, from the trailers, *Baby Driver* looked like a cheap *Fast and Furious*/*Oceans 11* type of movie that would be action-focused without a soul. But oh was I wrong! The artistry through the usage of music and color in *Baby Driver* is so beneficial to the appreciation of the movie. The film uses music as a means to drive (no pun intended) the story forward. When there was a car chase, the music would not drown out the natural sounds of the cars. By using music sparingly, the impact was even greater.

I seriously could not stop smiling throughout the whole movie as I grabbed onto the arms of my seat.

Baby Driver tells the story of Baby, a getaway driver with a traumatic past that prompts him to listen to his iPod constantly. Throughout the film, he is trying to escape his life being a getaway driver while falling in love with a waitress. The movie not only has incredible action sequences, but the usage of color in subtle places truly shows that the film has been thought out in great detail. When you can see that a director looks at all the details of the film (the colors for example), you know that the director has created a masterpiece.



#3

Call Me By Your Name

I always find it interesting that when we talk about diversity and how we need more in Hollywood, often the only groups that are spoken about are women and people of color. While I believe that people should be nominated solely because of their talent and the work they create, I also do believe that everyone should be given the same chance at success. But in this age of Hollywood movie-making, it seems like the notion of diversity excludes quite a few groups, including but not limited to hispanics, asians, members of the LGBTQ community, and those who are differently abled. The fascinating thing about the recent Golden Globes is that a Spanish director was nominated and actually won! But for some reason the tabloids and general public, including Natalie Portman, perceived the directing category to only feature white men. Does race and gender determine what defines diversity in Hollywood? In my opinion, the LGBTQ community should also fall under the diversity categorization, and *Call Me By Your Name* further emphasizes my point.

Set at an Italian Villa, *Call Me By Your Name* is a coming of age story that follows a young Jewish boy as he confronts his sexuality when a graduate student of his father studies at the Villa over the summer. First off, if anyone ever wants to become a director, this film is the perfect place to start because from the opening montage of the film to the very last scene of dialogue, everything that is shown in this film aids to move the story forward. Most of this has to do with the choices that director Luca Guadagnino has made such as the opening where the photos in the background actually tell the story of the film. A subtle moment that is pure genius. Luca Guadagnino, one of a few out gay directors in Hollywood, in my opinion was completely robbed from being nominated for the Golden Globes as well as the Oscars. Another director, Dee Rees, who directed the slightly boring film titled *Mudbound* is also a member of the LGBTQ community and to most people she was robbed of being nominated for the directing categories as well. In the case of the Oscar directing category this year, I strongly believe that there were there were two directors who were nominated for the sake of checking off “diversity” boxes which is truly a shame. But set aside all of that, Luca Guadagnino has created a pristine love story that opens everyone’s eye to finding love and finding yourself in the gay community.



#2

***Darkest Hour* (Focus Features)**

The quote on this movie poster is the perfect way to sum up my second favorite movie of the year, “A Masterpiece.” Back in 2012, visionary director Steven Spielberg created a masterpiece in filmmaking titled *Lincoln* which starred Daniel Day-Lewis and Sally Field. These days, so many movies rely on action, computer animated effects, and 3D to both advertise the film as well as cover up the fact that the movie may not be that great. Don’t get me wrong, I love a well done action movie and when CGI and 3D is used correctly the movies tend to be spectacular. But there is something about watching a movie without any bells or whistles. Just pure acting, set designs, costumes, and most importantly the camera. When I saw *Lincoln* for the first time in theaters, I was blown away by the storytelling through the camerawork and the breathtaking acting by everyone. When I saw *Darkest Hour*, I left

the theater the exact same way, only this time I believed that *Darkest Hour* was the superior film.

In my opinion, director Joe Wright has created a perfect movie. You will rarely ever hear me say that, but everything in this movie gave me the chills of excitement. The cinematography, which was robbed of an Oscar nomination, is some of the best I have ever seen. In one particular scene, Winston Churchill (Played by the legendary Gary Oldman), is traveling up an elevator shaft. The entire screen is completely pitch black but in the right third of the screen an elevator with a metal gate at the front travels up the screen. The shot is one of many mesmerizing moments in this movie that makes you realize what filmmaking is about. Filmmaking has survived the test of time strictly because of the actors and the camera. Sure other things have come into play like sound and special effects, but in the end it is this connection between the actor and the camera that reigns prominent. This movie is now easily in my top 10 films of all time and I cannot express enough in words how badly you need to see this film.

#1

War For The Planet Of The Apes (20th Century Fox)



Six years ago, 20th Century Fox announced that they were going to reboot the *Planet of the Apes* Franchise with a new trilogy. The first movie, *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, was a pretty good movie. The visual effects, such as the motion capture work (think the blue aliens in *Avatar*), were very well done and the movie was overall very enjoyable. The second film changed everything. *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* told the story of humans vs. apes but with a depth that made the audience realize that there are both good and bad humans and the same for the apes. The believability of the apes in this movie was so shocking and revolutionized what an actor can do in film. This year, *War for the Planet of the Apes* introduced the world, in my opinion, to the greatest closure film to a film series ever. That includes films such as *Return of the King*, *Deathly Hallows Part 2*, and *Logan*. I'm not including *Star Wars* in this listing because Disney is pump-

ing out more movies than we can keep track of, let alone want.

War for the Planet of the Apes, my favorite film of the year, follows Caesar as he leads the apes to a place of safety, similar to Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt. Director Matt Reeves and Screenwriter Mark Bomback have tied in the biblical stories of *Exodus*, themes and moments from *Schindler's List* and the Holocaust, all to tell a powerful story of a survival and the treatment of others. It is best to view this film with little to no knowledge of what lies ahead, so I will leave you with this. In my opinion, this movie gives the world a wake up call as to what happens when we decide to treat something or something differently just because of appearance and ability. This movie brought me to tears and I hope you have the chance to experience this extraordinary film that is now in my top ten movies of all time.

So what do you think of my Top 8 Movies of 2017? Make sure to keep the conversation going and keep on watching movies my Friends!

Guest Writer Invitation

Recently, Focus has decided to reach out to other clubs and publications for special articles that talk about a certain topic or have an announcement to share with the school. We also want to start having guest writers from the students and the faculty!

Consider this a formal invitation to email or come talk with any of us at Focus about writing an article for the publication. Whether it's a global issue, a new development at school, or even something you want to share, we would love to have your perspective be a part of our magazine and online newsfeed.

We are so excited to hear new ideas from you!

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