

Dr. Roudabush: Our  
Laudable Language  
Chair

By Jacob Lawler

The thrill of learning has always been a huge part of Dr. Roudabush's life, from her earliest school days to being a first-generation college student, and now in her role as chair of language arts. She has always been curious and loved exploring good stories.

Beginning her educational journey in the Virginia public school system, Dr. Roudabush was shaped by incredible teachers. Along with reading great books, she was encouraged to "grow beyond" her past to create the life she wanted. Her early life instilled the belief that "education is not just about learning the facts—it's about being encouraged, nurtured, and guided towards reaching your full potential."

Dr. Roudabush became the first member of her family to receive a university education when she studied English and history at the University of Virginia. Then, she graduated with a master's and Ph.D. from Virginia Commonwealth University, and this experience influenced her perspective on higher education and her sense of curiosity and discovery that remains with her today.



Dr. Jennifer Roudabush

Literature and writing have always been her favorite subjects. She loves how stories bring people together by showing the world through someone else's eyes. Watching her students have that lightbulb moment as they grasp a story or develop their voices is one of the most rewarding parts of her job.

After graduating, Dr. Roudabush began her career at Virginia Commonwealth University, teaching writing, literature, and film classes. Interestingly, she did not always know that she was destined to be a teacher, but she found that she loved it as soon as she saw what a difference she could make in students' lives. When she was younger, she dreamed of being an artist or book illustrator but was afraid to mention those goals for fear of being laughed at or put down. Those arts still captivate her, but now she gets to channel those passions in an even more fulfilling way, by encouraging students to follow their own creative goals.

Dr. Roudabush's ideas on education made her a perfect fit for the Well-Trained Mind Academy when she was hired in 2016. She was excited to work in a place that shared her goal of providing a rigorous education adaptable to each student's needs. She loved the idea of working with middle and high school students, so she could "still ignite that spark of curiosity before it gets buried under the pressure of college-level exams and adulthood."

As chair of language arts, she helps guide the curriculum and oversees instructors to deliver the best experience to their students. She also plays an active role in WTMA's cohort program as a mentor for junior and freshman students, advising families and helping students develop connections.

Dr. Roudabush lives in Virginia with her husband and two kids,



surrounded by two dogs, a fourteen-year-old cat, and a fluctuating number of chickens. She enjoys gardening, playing outside with her kids, and recently took up crocheting. Between her love of books, her ideas on education, and her dedication, WTMA is lucky to have Dr. Roudabush!



Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Fall 2024 Well-Trained Tribune! First of all, my sincerest thanks to our great teacher Madame Lisa Gentile—none of this could have happened without her. Also, amazing work and dedication from our writers!

Newspapers have played an integral role in public education since ancient times. Around 59 BC, the “Acta Diurna” gave readers information on local events and recent deaths, much like today's papers. The invention of the printing press opened the door to modern journalism and newspapers spread across Europe by the early 1600s. The first U.S. newspaper, "Publick Occurrences, Both Forreign and Domestick" in 1690, was quickly suppressed. Despite its inauspicious start, journalism gained popularity in colonial America and became a powerful tool for independence. Today, freedom of the press is a deeply revered staple of our democracy enshrined in the First Amendment.

With that brief history, we hope you enjoy our little newspaper. We've worked hard this semester to make it fun, informative, and entertaining. This fall edition features articles on single-use plastics, the movie *Twisters*, an opinion piece on autism, and a holiday kolaches recipe.

Enjoy and Happy Holidays!

Mae Paul, Editor-in-Chief

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Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Does It Actually Work?

By Mae Paul and Alexandra Georgiou

If you look in your fridge right now, the likelihood that most of your produce is stored in some sort of plastic container is extremely high. Whether it is your cheese or your ketchup, almost everything in today’s world finds its home surrounded by plastic. Over four hundred million tons are produced annually to sustain humanity’s constant use of plastics. They are in the clothes we wear, the water we drink, and the air we breathe. Recently, they have even been discovered in our brains.

Plastics are poisoning every organism on the planet, yet our most frequently discussed line of defense has only successfully eliminated 9% of the total plastic ever produced. Many Americans are dutiful in recycling, carefully sorting their Styrofoam from their plastic water bottles and soiled pizza boxes from aluminum cans, all in hopes of reducing pollution. However, over 90% of that plastic will end up in a landfill or littered on the side of the road. The entire recycling system gives the illusion that we are helping the environment, while the dark truth is that most of what we recycle is thrown out.

This comes as a shock to many, especially given that the “reduce, reuse, recycle” slogan was taught often to schoolchildren and preached throughout their lives. So why is recycling such a failure?



Graphic by Mae Paul

The fossil fuel industry manufactured the modern concept of recycling in a successful attempt to get Americans to buy more plastic. Its allure as a cheaper alternative to more sustainable options like glass or metal, while posing the promise of reusability and sustainability, made plastic attractive to consumers.

As more people began to question whether plastic was as harmless as it was made out to be, the fossil fuel industry, also known as Big Oil, invested in a massive disinformation campaign. They lied to their customers about the reusability of plastic, boasted about their lofty goals to reach high recycling rates, and then remained mysteriously silent when they did not meet those aims. In schools, students were reassured that their single-use plastic silverware was recyclable, though it was all ending up in landfills.

So, is the consumer the most responsible? A recent study published in *Science Advances* found that a quarter of global waste comes from just five companies: Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestlé, Danone, and Altria. Coca-Cola claims to be “committed to growing [their] business in the right way.” They pledge to reduce their plastic usage by 2025, while Nestlé, the other food and drink conglomerate, aims to package everything in reusable material by the same year. Other companies have switched from plastic to more sustainable materials like aluminum or glass. Dove, a huge skincare company valued at over \$5 billion, has released body washes in aluminum bottles while

encouraging customers to refill their containers instead of purchasing single-use plastic bottles

The main issue with plastics is that they end up in landfills that harm the environment. The landfills poison the air and release methane gas, a substance known to contribute significantly to the warming climate. The landfill area also takes away natural habitat from wildlife. In the US alone, over an estimated million acres of land have been converted to landfills. They release a toxin called leachate, which contaminates the local water supply, thus harming the lives of the community that has the misfortune of living near a huge pile of garbage.

Plastic does not just end up on land but is also a huge problem in rivers, lakes, and oceans. About 75-199 million pounds of plastic drift into our oceans every year with devastating consequences for marine animals. About a hundred million unfortunate creatures die from plastic waste per year, whether from eating or getting entangled in it. The world’s largest waste site, called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, covers twice the surface area of Texas and contains debris from Asia and America, mostly from ships dumping their trash overboard. As a result, garbage outnumbers wildlife six to one here.

Regardless of political stance or nation, humanity must take collective action to help reduce the consumption and production of plastics, which will benefit not only humans but also our planet. If we continue throwing everything out without a second thought, the consequences will be even more dire. Where will we put all that garbage? How will plastic waste affect marine ecosystems? How will this contribute to a warming climate? These are questions that we must answer... and quickly.

Thorin’s Genetic Mystery: The Lost Neanderthal Lineage

By Ava Brewer Newman

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Grotte Mandrin is a well-studied cave system and prehistoric hotspot in the Rhône Valley in southern France. Since 1960, hundreds of thousands of prehistoric remains and artifacts, dated over 80,000 years, have been unearthed from the rocky location. Breakthroughs are constantly happening in the caves, and the most recent one has sparked new revelations in the scientific community.

In 2015, a team of archaeologists found a set of relatively intact ancient bones at the entrance of one of the caves. Due to restrictions about announcing a discovery before it had been studied, the public did not know about the remains until the full study was released on September 11th, 2024, nine years after the original finding. Though archeologists are still excavating and testing the remains, the newly published paper still harbors many interesting details.

Consisting of a full mandible, scattered teeth, and a few phalanges, the remains were identified to belong to an adult male Neanderthal from between 42,000 and 50,000 years ago. Being the first Neanderthal discovery in 50 years, scientists affectionately named the bones Thorin, after a character in *The Hobbit*. Genetic testing of

Thorin challenges our current notions of the hominids known scientifically as *Homo neanderthalensis*.

During testing, the scientists first recovered 65% of Thorin’s genomes from a molar, before comparing it to other Neanderthal remains. Thorin’s genetic material more closely matched the genome of Neanderthals who died 50,000 years before him. To make things even stranger, Thorin’s DNA showed no signs of crossbreeding with *Homo sapiens* that could have caused his strange genome. In fact, he had DNA that suggested previous mating in his lineage with close relatives within a small population.

Scientists struggled with this conflicting information for years before concluding that Thorin’s ancestors split from other European Neanderthals 105,000 years ago and continued to live separately as an unknown number of inbred communities. As a result, the genome from 50,000 years before remained in Thorin’s group. Additionally, the specimen possessed two extra lower molars, which can sometimes indicate inbreeding, and its strange DNA has similarities to Neanderthal remains found in Spain. Altogether, it implies an unknown lineage extended across southern Europe.

Previously, scientists had believed that there was one homogenous population of Neanderthals inhabiting Europe. Thorin challenges this and suggests that small Neanderthal communities were scattered across the large land mass, possibly from early Neanderthals migrating to France from Gibraltar. Thorin also supports the theory that Neanderthal communities were small and isolated, which could have contributed to their extinction.

As scientists piece together the puzzle, they have questions about this possibility. Did the group size change over time? Why did one group split into at least two groups and exist separately for 50,000 years? How did Thorin’s body get to the cave? Scientists are hopeful that the ongoing research at Grotte Mandrin will uncover the answers to these mysteries.



Twisters: The Whirlwind Country Album

Review by Adelee Baird

The movie, *Twisters*, came out in theaters July 19th on the same day that *Twisters: The Album* quickly rose to the top of the charts. Featuring 29 original songs written by many well-known country artists, the album was bound to do well. In the US, it quickly shot up to 3rd in top Country albums.



Justin1569 at English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Against many genres and other songs, the album reached seventh place on the Billboard 200, only nine days after its release. In the UK, the album rose to first place in the compilation and soundtrack categories. *Twisters: The Album* is not the first all-country soundtrack. Why does it stand out?

Not only was the album written by several popular country artists, such as Luke Combs, Miranda Lambert, and Shaina Twain, but it also has 29 unique songs, each written specifically for the movie. Its writers also include up-and-rising music stars Megan Moroney and Benson Boone. Each song showcases the thought, time, and work put in by many authors.

The songwriters' hard work perfectly captures the characters, scenes, and overall theme in *Twisters* for which they were written. Even when listening to the album outside of the movie, you can easily picture and feel how the movie felt, which makes for exciting and memorable songs. There are even several nods to *The Wizard of Oz*, including the song "Ain't in Kansas Anymore." The creators thought it through and didn't leave anything out.

Many people listened to and fell in love with the soundtrack before they even watched the movie. There is a bit of everything for all kinds of music lovers in the album. While all the songs are country, many of them have other tones such as rock, R&B, and pop. This brings diversity while still sticking to the country genre and fitting the mood of the movie.

The first song of the album, "Ain't No Love in Oklahoma," was written by Luke Combs. He was given a short scene and told to write a song for it. He did not disappoint. The most popular on the album, his song is catchy and perfectly fits the scene and character for which it was written. With multiple lyrics that have opposite meanings, it creates a pull-and-tug effect in lines like "Scared of nothin', and I'm scared to death" as well as

"I can't breathe, and I catch my breath."



Image modified from Stratosphere, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

In second place is "Song While You're Away," which was written by Tyler Childers, another popular country artist. His song has meaningful lyrics that tell the story of a couple growing older together. It talks about them being young and hungry for life, and "starvin' for something worthwhile to lose." The song then ends with the impactful lyrics "Tryin' to hold on to the lovely, through the bitter of our time."

All the songs are noteworthy instrumentally and rhythmically, but the lyrics are just as well done. If you prefer captivating tunes that you can dance to, this album is for you. If you like good lyrics that you can belt at the top of your lungs, this album is also for you. Don't miss out on this new and exciting country album. It's as good as the hype. *Twisters: The Album* was a smashing success with its popular country artists, memorable tunes, and on-point lyrics. It will be some time before anyone steals this album's thunder.

Twisters: A Perfect Reboot of a Classic Movie

Review by Kaitlyn Lamb

In recent years, Hollywood has produced several nostalgia-dependent reboots of 80s and 90s movies. Some are better, like *Top Gun*, *Maverick*, and this year's *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*, and some are worse, like Disney's extensive library of live-action remakes. *Twisters* is a sequel to the 1996 movie, *Twister*. The original is excellent, but it lacks the name recognition that other franchises, such as *Ghostbusters*, might have. Luckily, *Twisters* understands that. It deliberately falls somewhere between a sequel and a spinoff. None of the original characters are directly referenced, but there are a few easter eggs. The film manages to be a completely separate entity while still paying homage to the original classic.

*Twisters* follows Kate (Daisy Edgar-Jones) as she returns to Oklahoma alongside her friend Javi (Anthony Ramos) to get a full 3D scan of a tornado. The duo meets Tyler (Glen Powell), a.k.a. the Tornado Wrangler. Kate and Javi's team is full of Ivy League graduates equipped with state-of-the-art technology. Tyler's teammates are "rednecks with a YouTube channel," accompanied by a British reporter who is in constant fear for his life. The contrasting groups compete by chasing the

biggest tornadoes, leading to some of the best action scenes.

The CGI is impressive. Every moment seems inexplicably real. It feels like the filmmakers found a tornado and started rolling.



Twisters

*Twisters* does not create an earth-shattering conflict, because it does not need to. Tornadoes are dangerous enough as they are – the stakes do not need to be raised artificially. The film has immense respect for people who have faced devastation in the wake of a tornado. Each character is motivated by wanting to help those

in need. There is a message, but the movie does not beat the audience over the head with it.

The story is masterfully woven so that every individual's choices are authentic and logical. The opening sequence is surprising and emotional and shows Javi and Kate's backstories well. They bring it up just enough so that it does not feel like cheap action to keep the audience's attention, because the film prioritizes both the emotional and rational experiences of the viewer.

The plot is very well-paced. Scenes that focus alternately on emotional weight and humor break up the tornado chasing, maintaining the perfect balance for viewers to take the movie seriously and still have a good time. *Twisters* is simply fun. The humor is spot-on, the actors are great, and the soundtrack is awesome. Who does not want to see trucks barreling through fields after tornadoes? It is just enjoyable. This sequel is arguably better than the original. The characters feel more real, and the world is much more immersive. *Twisters* is the perfect summer blockbuster and bodes well for the future of Hollywood.

Epic Universe and D23: Disney Plays Catch-up with Universal

by Kaitlyn Lamb

Each year, Disney hosts D23, a weekend-long convention where fans can learn about upcoming projects. In addition to announcing several films and TV shows this year, Disney promised a plethora of expansions to their parks. It is not a coincidence that most of these ideas are coming to Disney World in Florida. Disney’s main theme park competitor, Universal Studios, is currently building a massive, revolutionary park in Orlando called Epic Universe. Epic Universe is set to open on May 22, 2025 and will encompass four lands based on Universal properties: The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Super Nintendo World, How to Train Your Dragon, and Dark Universe.

Celestial Park serves as the lobby of Epic Universe. Its rollercoaster, Stardust Racers, can go 62 mph, which will make it the fourth fastest ride at Universal Orlando, the fastest being the VelociCoaster in Islands of Adventure. Notably, Stardust Racers includes not one, but two, carts on two separate tracks. The carts, each filled with guests, will twist around each other and go down drops in synchrony. Celestial Park proves that, unlike Disney, Universal is not entirely dependent on existing properties to create fun experiences.

Easily one of the most well-known features of Universal Studios is its Harry Potter-based attractions, so naturally, Epic Universe is going to have some Potter-themed aspects. Guests will walk the streets of Wizarding Paris, as seen in the *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* films. To incorporate the original trio of Harry, Ron, and Hermione, attendees will travel by the Métro-Floo network from Paris to the British Ministry of Magic. There, guests will ride the Battle at the Ministry, which takes place during the trial of Dolores Umbridge.

Universal has already opened two parks based on Super Mario Bros. games, one in Japan and one in California. Epic Universe’s version will include three rides: Yoshi’s Adventure, Bowser’s Challenge, and Minecart Madness. Yoshi’s Adventure is a slow, kid-friendly attraction where guests experience the park from the back of a Yoshi. Guests will wear goggles while taking part in Mario Kart: Bowser’s Challenge. This ride is fully interactive with multiple endings, so visitors will never have the same experience twice. Super Nintendo World’s rollercoaster is Minecart Madness, based on the Donkey Kong games. Guests appear to ride on a wooden track in the jungle, but in reality, the minecarts are attached to another track hidden below, giving the illusion that the carts are jumping over gaps in the track.

The Isle of Berk is meticulously themed like the Viking village seen in the popular *How to Train Your Dragon* films. This area will



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cover over fifteen acres of land and feature three attractions. Dragon Racer’s Rally swings guests through the air as though riding a dragon, Fyre Drill is a river ride, and Hiccup’s Wing Gliders is a rollercoaster.

The fourth and most unique park at Epic Universe is Dark Universe, an area based on Universal’s classic monster movies of the 1930s to 1950s. Guests enter a cemetery near the fictional village of Darkmoor, featuring a restaurant atop which sits a huge windmill that bursts into flames every twenty minutes. Frankenstein’s Manor houses the main attraction for Dark Universe, *Monsters Unchained*, a ride with animatronics of Dracula, the Mummy, the Wolf-Man, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, Frankenstein’s Monster, and more. An organ inspired by *The Phantom of the Opera* spotlights 14 pipes with flames shooting over three feet in the air as the music plays. The Wolf-Man-inspired rollercoaster, *Curse of the Werewolf*, lasts over 2 minutes. Universal representatives have spoken about the risks of a horror-oriented park, and Disney fans have long dismissed Universal for being too rollercoaster-focused, rather than family-friendly. With Dark Universe, Universal is fully leaning into the appeals of the teen and adult audience by creating an entire PG-13 park.

As for Disney’s announcement at D23, the most significant development was a land based on classic Disney villains. Not much is known about this park yet, except that it will be built in Disney World’s Magic Kingdom and features two major attractions. It is easy to see why Disney wanted to have a darker-themed world. Universal is expanding parks for both older and younger audiences and Disney wants to compete with them, particularly when it comes to Dark Universe. In Magic Kingdom, Frontierland is going to be expanded to include Pixar’s *Cars*, and there are plans for a family rollercoaster and an attraction for younger guests. In Animal Kingdom, Disney is planning to replace DinoLand with Pueblo Esperanza, a Latin American-themed area with an Indiana Jones ride and a ride based on *Encanto*, while also adding a land based on Pixar’s *Monsters Inc.*

Perhaps it isn’t fair to compare Universal and Disney’s plans since Universal is so much further ahead in development. Disney is falling behind and desperately trying to keep up with Universal. Universal’s Jurassic World-themed VelociCoaster has become a fan favorite. Disney’s fastest ride only reaches 60 mph in comparison to the VelociCoaster’s 70 mph. Most of what Disney has done lately is retheme existing rides. Their only significant development was changing Splash Mountain to Tiana’s Bayou Adventure, based on *The Princess and the Frog*. While many fans were disappointed to see one of Disney World’s most iconic rides go, most were pleased with the final result. The animatronics on this ride are unique and impressive, to be sure, but Universal is also creating new technology for animatronics at Dark Universe and is able to do more projects faster.

Disney’s lack of creativity has led to a consistent decrease in attendance, and though it still has more visitors, Universal is growing at a faster pace. Both companies have primarily been retheming existing attractions, but the sheer quantity of Universal’s projects is far more impressive. They have constantly been adding new rollercoasters and transforming entire parks in record time. Disney World was once the pinnacle of theme parks, but now it has diminished into a shadow of what it used to be.



Stuck In Space: The Starliner Setback

By Abigail Garcia

“Stuck in space” has been used as the premise for numerous science fiction novels over the years, but this idea has become the reality for two astronauts, Butch Wilmore and Sunita “Suni” Williams. Their stay on the International Space Station (ISS) was supposed to last “about a week,” yet they found themselves stuck in space.

In 2014, NASA signed contracts with both Boeing, a well-known and renowned aerospace company, and SpaceX, another spacecraft manufacturer owned by billionaire Elon Musk, to participate in the Commercial Crew Program by supplying transport vehicles. Early on, Boeing was expected to lead the race between the two companies, yet it faced setbacks and struggles, causing it to fall behind the rapid progress of SpaceX, which sent its first crew to the ISS in 2020.

On June 5th, 2024, Boeing’s transport vehicle Starliner, carrying two astronauts and nearly 8,800 pounds of cargo, launched from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida. While the craft had three orbital flights under its belt, it had never carried a crew before, and all it needed was one more successful test flight to be approved for regular use in missions by NASA. Boeing Defense, Space, & Security President and CEO Ted Colbert reported the launch to be a “great start” to a hopeful mission, yet on June 6th, problems arose. As Starliner approached the ISS, NASA and Boeing noticed helium leaks and issues with the craft’s reaction control thrusters.

After tests were run both in space and on the ground, and following much deliberation, NASA decided for safety reasons to return Starliner without its crew, leaving astronauts Wilmore and Williams on the ISS. The craft was safely returned to Earth at 12:01 AM on September 7<sup>th</sup>, landing in the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. The landing went so well that the manager of NASA’s Commercial Crew Program Steve Stich stated during a press conference that “it would have been a safe, successful landing with the crew on board.”

Combating Ableism: The Ongoing Struggle for Understanding Autism

Opinion by Ava Brewer Newman

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurological and developmental condition causing differences in social communication and interaction, stimulation, and behavioral patterns. In the past 20 years, there have been more resources for those with the disorder than ever before, which can be attributed to the trend of greater acceptance and understanding of disabilities and disorders. Indeed, compared to when the term “autism” was first coined a hundred years ago to describe a set of symptoms experienced by some schizophrenia patients, it has now been scientifically studied and categorized as a relatively common spectrum disorder. Autism (Spectrum) Disorder has been on the receiving end of multiple edits in the DSM since it was first added in 1980.

However, despite progress and greater positive representation in the media of people on the autism spectrum, ableism is still prevalent. Oppression, discrimination, and persecution against autistic people still commonly occur. Autistic adults are 25 times more likely to attempt suicide than non-autistic adults, and suicide attempt rates are double in autistic children and teens versus their neurotypical peers. Discrimination causes higher rates of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem in autistic people.

Many people associate autism with a specific set of symptoms or concepts, believe false information, or consider neurotypical people to be “normal” and expect neurotypical behavior even in the neurodivergent, making it difficult for autistic people to find acceptance and understanding among friends and family. Those with autism can often cite multiple instances of remarks or actions towards them reeking of ableism, such as being told inaccurate information or suggested to hide autism symptoms, being bullied in school, or being misdiagnosed and denied resources because of a professional’s personal beliefs.

Many questions remain, however, such as how the astronauts and their families are handling the months-long delay caused by the issues aboard Starliner. Williams, a Naval aviator, and Wilmore, a combat veteran, are experienced astronauts, so risk is hardly unfamiliar to them. The astronauts were reported to be in “good spirits” and even voted in the 2024 presidential election. Williams said in a call from space to Earth on September 13th, “We’re both Navy. We’ve both been on deployments. We’re not surprised when deployments get changed.” Williams even described space as being her “happy place.”

Despite their noticeable lack of fear, the astronauts have reported missing their family and friends, a sentiment mirrored by their loved ones. A TikTok posted by Bruce Wilmore’s daughter, Logan, shows how she misses and is waiting for her father. The video’s caption with millions of views, reads, “not dead, just stuck in space im not worried at all just miss him!”



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Another question being raised is how this mishap has reflected on Boeing as a company. While issues are understandably undesired—but not unexpected—during a test flight, the events of Starliner have affected far more than just NASA’s future plans regarding working with the company, but also public opinion, too. The quality control of Boeing aircrafts has been called into question numerous times in recent years, with the crashes of new versions of Boeing’s best-selling 737 Max jets in 2018 and 2019 that killed a combined 346 people. Later, the door of a 737 Max 9 that was not cleared for long flights over water lost a door plug due to a missing piece of fuselage, leaving a gaping hole in the side of the plane. Miraculously, no deaths occurred as a result of this malfunction.

Ableism is inherently based on false assumptions and stereotypes to “justify” itself and imagine a moral or practical basis for it. Many assumptions are spread because most people learn about new subjects through media representations. Such representations are not always positive or accurate, and the general public is not inherently motivated to accurately understand autism. Hence, earlier-acquired ableism or misunderstanding can still affect someone’s worldview even after they have learned more accurate information about autism.

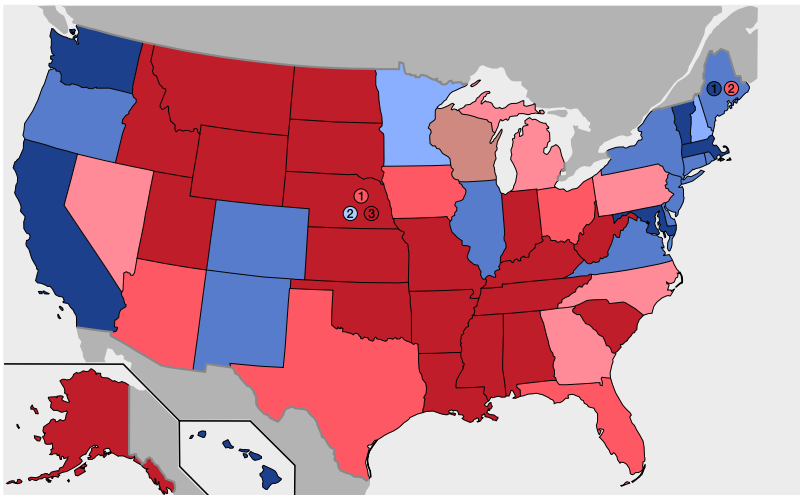
As our society becomes more inclusive towards autistic individuals, it also hides ableism behind a well-meaning mask: some argue that movements or arguments focused on ableism miss the point and imply that those with the disorder need saving. What these people fail to understand is that ableism has nothing to do with those it is targeted against and is instead a representation of the bias or assumptions of the ableist. Furthermore, claiming that autism needs to be or can be “fixed” is not helping autistic people, but trying to get rid of their autism, which is ableist in itself and consists of conditioning autistic people to behave in a more neurotypical manner.

In conclusion, autism cannot be controlled by those affected by it and it should not define them. Ableism is a problem and always has been. If we want a moral society, we must include persons on the autism spectrum in our definition of it, which requires an understanding of ableism and a fight against it. Media representation of autistic individuals should be common, positive, accurate, and accessible to a variety of audiences, providing education and awareness campaigns to counter the misinformation that fuels ableism. Personal efforts should be made to manage unintentionally ableist language and beliefs, and the problem of ableism should be addressed.

The American People Re-Elected Donald Trump

By Mae Paul

On Tuesday, November 5, Americans reelected Donald J. Trump to the presidency with 312 electoral college votes, 42 points over the required 270 needed to win the election. Delivering a decisive victory in what most thought was a neck-and-neck race, he gained ground in all the counties he lost in 2020 and won the swing states of North Carolina, Georgia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. The results rolled in quickly, with most news agencies declaring him the winner in the early hours of Wednesday. On top of winning the White House, Republicans gained full control of Congress while holding a supermajority in the Supreme Court.



2024 United States presidential election results by margin of victory  
[Born Isopod and voters of the United States of America, CC BY 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

In a particularly turbulent election year, President Joe Biden dropped out of the race on July 21, the first incumbent president not to seek reelection since Lyndon B. Johnson in 1969. After his disastrous debate performance on June 27, President Biden faced criticism over his mental fitness and announced he was ending his reelection bid via a public letter posted on X. He wrote “It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as your president...I believe it is in the best interest of my party and the country for me to stand down.” Following this announcement, he expressed his support for Vice President Kamala Harris. The Trump/Vance campaign, originally focused on defeating Biden, had to change gears at short notice to take on Harris and her running mate, Governor Tim Walz of Minnesota.

The campaign cycle was unusually violent, with two assassination attempts against the former president within two months. The first was committed on July 13 at a rally Trump hosted in Butler, Pennsylvania. Lapses in security allowed a shooter, Thomas Crooks to climb to the roof of a nearby building and fire shots, killing one person and injuring three others, including Mr. Trump who suffered a minor injury to his ear. The second assassination plot occurred in September in West Palm Beach, Florida, where Mr. Trump was golfing. The suspect, Ryan Routh, hid behind a fence for many hours and was spotted by security before he fled. No shots were fired, and the Secret Service quickly detained him. Later that day, Mr. Trump wrote in an email that he was “safe and well.” Routh was charged with attempted assassination of a former president.

Many people have been discussing Project 2025: an extremely controversial plan for the next Republican president. Though it is unclear whether any of it will be implemented as policy when Donald Trump takes office, many from his first administration including six former cabinet officials reportedly participated in the creation of this project published by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank based in DC. While his opponents repeatedly condemned Project 2025 and tied him to it, despite his repeated assurances that he had nothing to do with it, Kamala Harris called the plan “detailed and dangerous.” Trump responded, “I haven't read it. I don't want to read it purposely. I'm not going to read it.”

While controversy surrounded Project 2025, the media said little



Protester near Wisconsin Avenue entrance to RNC "hard" security zone  
[SecretName101, CC BY 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

about Agenda47, which began taking shape in 2022 on the Trump campaign website. This set of policies would be enacted through executive actions and cover a wide range of policies, from autoworkers to homeschooling and immigration. Trump vowed to sign an executive to make the future children of illegal immigrants not receive automatic U.S. citizenship. Regarding education, the president-elect pledged to fight to allow homeschool parents \$10,000 a year per child, completely tax-free to spend on costs associated with homeschool education to give every homeschool family access to the benefits available to non-homeschooled students so that they can participate in athletic programs, clubs, after-school activities, educational trips, etc.

Additionally, Mr. Trump announced his intention to create a government efficiency program led by tech billionaire Elon Musk and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy. Speaking at the Economic Club of New York, Mr. Trump said, “I will create a government efficiency commission tasked with conducting a complete financial and performance audit of the entire federal government and making recommendations for drastic reforms.” Under the second Trump administration, there may also be rollbacks of climate policies aimed at combating global warming and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

On the fiscal side, Mr. Trump’s agenda included major changes to the American tax system, most notably using tariffs on imports to replace income taxes as the government’s main source of revenue and cutting corporate tax rates to 15% down from the current 21%. With regard to immigration, Trump expressed his aim to crack down on criminals, drug dealers and human traffickers and engage in a large deportation operation deploying the National Guard to remove immigrants. Yet, experts question the feasibility of such a deportation campaign since Congress lacks enough money to carry out such orders. Moreover, deportations, if they do occur, would face legal challenges in the courts. Mr. Trump also wants to continue construction on his border wall, which he started during his first term as president.

About the war in Ukraine, Mr. Trump said at the September debate, “I want the war to stop.” He promised that under his administration, Ukraine and Russia “will be able to come together and negotiate a deal that ends the violence and paves a path forward to prosperity.” At the same time, he has criticized the Biden administration for sending millions of dollars in aid packages to Ukraine. At a CNN town hall last year, Trump commented, “They’re dying, Russians and Ukrainians. I want them to stop dying. And I’ll have that done. I’ll have that done in 24 hours.” How he plans to accomplish that is unclear.

Following the October 7 attacks by Hamas in which 1200 Israelis were killed and hundreds taken prisoner, Mr. Trump proclaimed himself “the best friend that Israel ever had,” stating, “you have a big protector in me.” After 15 months of war, over 46,000 Palestinian deaths—mostly civilian—were officially recorded, though a Lancet study estimated a more accurate death toll between 55,298 and 78,525 in just the first 9 months.



Laura Osnes Shoots for the Stars

By Dorothy Slater

Actress and singer Laura Osnes smiled as she rose from her seat, ready to watch her students perform for the last time. Leading a workshop at Christian Arts and Theatre (CAT) Performance Center in California, she had spent the previous two hours teaching the Broadway choreography for Grease’s “We Go Together (Reprise).” Laura answered eager questions about her experiences working in professional theatre. As the music started and the teens rocked the dance floor, she could tell they were taking her advice to be confident and not worry about their appearance. Memories flooded back from her time as Grease’s Sandy on Broadway.

Laura Osnes was born on November 19, 1985, in Burnsville, Minnesota, and raised in nearby Eagan, a suburb of St. Paul. She first caught the acting bug portraying a munchkin in a second-grade performance of The Wizard of Oz. She studied musical theatre at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point but dropped out to pursue a professional career. Laura fell in love with her future husband, Nate, when they were understudies in a production of Aladdin after the leads accidentally collided and were sent to the hospital.

Her big break came when she competed on the reality show Grease: You’re the One That I Want! and was cast in the role of Sandy in the 2007 Broadway revival of Grease. From there, her career took off, with standout roles in South Pacific, Anything Goes, and Bonnie and Clyde. Though the short Broadway run of Bonnie and Clyde suffered negative reviews and overall poor ticket sales, Laura still earned a Tony nomination for “Best Leading Actress in a Musical.”

Laura’s most iconic role came in 2013 when she starred in a reworked version of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Cinderella. Wowed by the expense of her wedding gown, Laura brought warmth and elegance to the title role, garnering for her a second Tony nomination. Off stage, she charmed castmates and audiences alike, creating fun, playful moments like gifting a fish to her co-star Santino Fontana and documenting her journey through Broadway.com’s The Princess Diary to give viewers an inside peek at what went on behind the scenes. On stage, Laura performed a caring character, then would go backstage where nothing about that caring factor changed.

Her time as Cinderella showcased not just her talent but also her genuine kindness. Stage crew members fondly recall her daily rituals like drawing smiley faces in the dirt makeup on their cue books. The cast exchanged gifts, including a custom puzzle Santino made featuring Cinderella with brown hair, a tribute to Laura’s version of the character.



Laura Osnes and Santino Fontana in Cinderella "cinderella1376" by Huntington Theatre Company is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Laura’s Broadway career proceeded with the origination of the role of Julia Trojan in Bandstand. She received five award nominations for this show whose dedication to veterans resonated deeply with her. Each show was dedicated to a different veteran, allowing the cast to make connections with many people who have served.

Through the ups and downs of her career, Laura’s faith has been a big part of her life and something that she holds onto no matter how crazy the world is around her. Invited back for a one-night Bonnie and Clyde show in 2021, she was ultimately unable to perform because of a change in the theater’s COVID vaccination policies, which led to a media storm and controversy. Despite the difficulties, Laura handled the situation with grace and ultimately relocated with her husband to Tennessee for a fresh start.

Although she has not returned to Broadway since then, Laura has pursued acting elsewhere, appearing on TV and voicing animated characters like Chinny Chilla in Chip Chilla. She has also written and released songs such as “Enough,” “Technicolor,” and “Small Talk.” Laura

Osnes took what the Fairy Godmother in Cinderella said: “There is music in you,” and made it true in her life.

Laura Osnes is an inspiration to people of all ages to be creative, to be themselves, and most of all, to be kind. With zealous ambition, Laura motivates one and all to be themselves and chase their aspirations to make them a reality. She remains solid in her faith and core beliefs as she shares her artistic talents with the world. Her path from a small-town girl to a Broadway star reflects her unwavering commitment to pursuing her dreams and staying true to herself. She is living proof that “dreams really do come true.”

A Story of Friendship and Betrayal: The False Prince

Review by Adelee Baird

“I sometimes lack the talent of knowing when to speak and when to keep quiet.” This is something that I can relate to with Sage. However, I think right now is one of those moments I speak up.

The False Prince - the first book in the Ascendance Trilogy by Jennifer A. Nielsen - follows the story of Sage, a young orphan boy. Along with two other orphans, Tobias and Roden, Sage is taken in by a cunning nobleman named Conner. The book is set in the medieval period and revolves around the kingdom of Carthya. Conner, the main antagonist, devises a plan to overtake the throne with the help of one of the boys. Most of the action in the book is at Conner’s mansion, Farthenwood, where “lies and truth blur together.”

The story is told in first person from Sage’s point of view. We are given his thoughts and commentary throughout, making for an entertaining tale. Sage’s sense of humor, stubborn ways, and witty thinking draw you in on the first page and keep you reading. The writing is descriptive, but not to the point that you’re drowning in overly detailed paragraphs. For many, Nielsen’s writing style is easy and enjoyable to read.

While Nielsen’s writing style is amazing, so is the creation of all her characters. Each figure has a unique personality that has you either falling in love with them, absolutely despising them, or a mix of both. Not only are her characters well-written, but their development throughout the book makes them feel like real people. Another reason her characters feel so genuine is that they’re not perfect. They have flaws, especially Sage, whose struggle with trying to change and trust others is admirable, especially in the later books.

In addition to the authentic writing and intriguing characters, the plot is also phenomenal. The book has an interesting storyline keeping you on the edge of your seat. It has a few plot twists that have you either horrified or jumping up and yelling, “I knew it!” Some reviews of the book believed certain parts of the story were predictable. However, even those who thought the story was predictable said that they enjoyed the book and would read it again.

The plot twists may have occasionally left a bit to be desired, but the themes and message were strong. There is a lot of deception throughout the book, mostly with Conner’s plan and Sage’s history. But there is also a message of standing up for what you believe in and holding on to your morals, despite the hate and pain you get from others. The question of what is moral is also asked in the book, and Conner’s plan makes us wonder at what point the end justifies the means.

The False Prince is great for girls and guys alike. If you’re into fantasy, adventure, a bit of mystery, and just the tiniest splash of romance, then this book is for you. The False Prince is a must read.



https://unsplash.com/photos/a-book-with-a-crown-on-top-of-it-bkIivYZn2L8

Nature’s Healing Power in the Great Outdoors

By Skye Miller

Spending time in nature has many benefits for your health and well-being. Research shows that people who spend more time outside tend to be happier and have better mental health. Studies have also revealed that being in nature improves cognitive abilities and academic performance. Nature’s calming environment, fresh air, and peaceful sounds help boost relaxation and reduce stress. Exposure to nature also positively affects memory, problem-solving, creativity, and physical health. Studies suggest that spending at least 2 hours a week in nature yields the most benefits.

Exposure to nature helps both mental and physical health. Spending time in green spaces can help relax the mind and rejuvenate your spirits. Exposure to natural environments can enhance mental clarity and attention spans. In addition to providing mental health benefits, activities such as running, hiking, and biking can boost cardiovascular health and overall fitness. Maintaining mental clarity and physical health is crucial for overall well-being. For students and people with busy lives, spending time outdoors can help manage stress and improve focus, which can lead to better academic and personal performance.

Spending time in nature improves both the quantity and quality of sleep. Typically, the body follows a 24-hour internal clock known as a circadian rhythm. It regulates cycles of alertness and sleepiness by responding to light changes in the environment. Artificial light, including electronic devices, interferes with circadian rhythms and reduces the natural production of melatonin, which causes the feeling of sleepiness. On the other hand, nature’s natural light helps to regulate circadian rhythms and boost melatonin production. Exposure to natural light in the morning also helps reduce the production of melatonin, making you feel more alert and awake. Improving sleep by spending time in nature can enhance your daily productivity, mood, and overall quality of life.

Do you find yourself overwhelmed with homework, extracurricular activities, and planning for life after school? With a busy schedule, it is easy to neglect going outside and miss its benefits. If you feel tired or stressed about something, giving your brain a break and going outside can be beneficial. Spending time in nature before a test can improve your grade and the efficiency with which you complete it. Going outside even for a brief time before getting back to work can help you feel refreshed, less stressed, and more able to concentrate. It gives you a break while still benefiting your work, as your brain continues to process information while you are outside. Exposure to nature not only improves your academic performance, but it can also make you more interested and engaged with your learning.

There are many ways you can spend time in nature, and it does not have to be complicated. Do you like sitting on your porch, playing catch with your dog outside, watching the birds and wildlife in your backyard? Those are great ways to spend time outdoors. Other possible activities include walking in the park, riding bikes in the woods, or hiking in the mountains. It does not have to be a big exuberant activity; it can be simple. You could just sit under a tree and read a book, watch the leaves fall, lie on your front lawn, watch the sunrise and sunset, or simply go outside and listen to the sounds around you. These activities can be beneficial, even if not very long. If it gets hot where you live, you can try going out in the early mornings when it is cooler. Even if there are not many plants in your area, you can still enjoy and benefit from a walk outside.

Nowadays, people spend a significant amount of time staring at screens. Due to the negative effects of screen exposure, it is crucial to spend more time outside. Spending time in nature positively impacts both your mind and body. Including it in your daily life can lead to a healthier and more balanced lifestyle. Next time you feel overwhelmed or stressed, remember to go outside, breathe in the fresh air, enjoy the beauty of the outdoors, and let nature work its magic.



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Kolaches: Pleasant Polish Pastries

by Jacob Lawler



Try your hand at making this traditional Polish pastry this holiday season with family and friends!

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup mashed potatoes (should be very thin, not firm or chunky)
- ¼ cup shortening (Crisco or some other similar brand)
- ¼ warm water
- 2 eggs
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup whole milk (warmed)
- 2 ¼ quarter teaspoons yeast
- 3 ½ cups flour
- Filling (store-bought pie filling or similar works well)

Instructions:

1. In a mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, dissolve the yeast and sugar in the warm milk. Cover and let sit for about 5 minutes. Bubbles should appear on the top.
2. Add the salt, beaten egg, mashed potatoes, and shortening. Mix well.
3. Add the flour to the mixture. Mix until the dough is smooth. It should be sticky. If it is too sticky, add more flour one tablespoon at a time.
4. Spray a sheet of plastic wrap with cooking spray. Cover the bowl with the plastic wrap. Let it rise until it doubles in size.
5. Gather your kolache fillings. Cherry, apricot, poppy seed, cream cheese, and prune are good go-to flavors.
6. When the dough is ready, portion out equal-sized pieces and roll them into balls.
7. Place on parchment-lined baking pans, brush with oil, and cover with plastic wrap. Let it rise again until almost doubles.
8. Using your fingers, make an indentation in the tops of the kolache and dollop with your favorite fillings. Let the dough rise again until light and fluffy.
9. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes or until nicely brown.
10. Cool completely and enjoy!