

## Editors Column



Angel Song  
Grade 10  
Harvard-Westlake School

## Is Halloween Horror Nights Universal Studios Really Worth It?



Universal Studios at night, but beware! There may be monsters lurking anywhere. [Source: Author, Angel Song]

If there's one thing I'm not afraid of, it's horror movies...or so I thought. This realization struck me after I had an opportunity to visit Universal Studios for its Halloween Horror Nights event recently. Horror Nights may not be for everyone, but it was surely a surreal experience, finding myself walking amongst cast members in costumes and screaming in haunted houses.

Although Halloween is over a

month away, this Horror Nights event began on September 5th and will conclude on November 3. The attractions that come with Horror Nights begin at 7:00 pm. Unfortunately, I did not notice that Horror Nights officially began until I saw cast members running towards me with realistic chainsaws. When one of them aimed their weapon at my legs, I didn't just flinch, I let out a high-pitched scream and ran away. As someone

who fears humans more than unreal creatures, like ghosts, zombies, or monsters, this exchange was one of the most terrifying experiences at Horror Nights.

Part of my plan was to visit all of the haunted houses. This year's houses were inspired by works including *Insidious*, *A Quiet Place*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. I was also able to hop on the Terror Tram, the Halloween version of the Universal Studios Studio Tour, and visit outdoor "haunted houses," which recreated movies like *M3GAN* or *The Purge* series.

There were eight haunted houses, and I'd say *Ghostbusters*, *Monstrous 2*, *Dead Exposure* Death Valley, *A Quiet Place*, and *Universal Monsters: Eternal Bloodlines* were hardly terrifying, as they involved fake monsters. For anyone wondering, I heard the *Insidious*-themed house was quite scary, but that one was surprisingly fine. On a side note, while it wasn't scary, *The Weeknd's* haunted house was a bit gory, so make sure to check

this off your list if you are not a fan of blood and guts.

I would never like to revisit the *Texas Chainsaw* and *The Purge* houses, however. For *Texas Chainsaw*, there were many jumpscare with members holding sharp weapons. The worst part was when I had to pass through a door, and there was a chainsaw man standing right next to it, refusing to budge. Not to mention the gore and a terrible smell permeating the entire house. For *The Purge*, I don't think a lengthy explanation is necessary other than the fact that 1) it is outdoors and 2) *Purge* participants will chase and threaten you.

After multiple terrifying encounters, I found out about my fear of chainsaws. But this experience is definitely something that I'd like to revisit next year, for the renewed haunted houses and attractions. Before we part, here is a pro tip for any scaredy-cats wanting to try out Horror Nights: stand behind someone in haunted houses. I avoided many jumpscare with that trick.

## Student Reporter

## The "Inner-Child" Trend and Cute Consumerism



Sora Ju  
Grade 10  
Geffen Academy

Do you know someone who collects Sonny Angels? Or maybe a friend who's obsessed with Hello Kitty and everything Sanrio? If the answer is yes, you might be witnessing one of the biggest trends taking over right now—"inner-child consumerism." From Hello Kitty Crocs and Sanrio X Yu-Gi-Oh! to Happy Meal toys at McDonald's, or Snoopy at American Eagle, it might seem like cute collectibles are everywhere—and all of a sudden, too! But what factors might be driving this craze?

Hello Kitty, for example, has been an iconic figure for decades, but in 2024, she's experiencing an even bigger resurgence, and her substantial 50th-anniversary merchandise collection is being eagerly consumed. Meanwhile, Snoopy, the beloved Peanuts character, continues to dominate fashion and merchandise, raking in over \$124 million in royalties in 2021 alone. Clearly, the appeal of these timeless characters isn't going anywhere.

But it's not just pure aesthetic appeal and nostalgia at play in this



Hello Kitty dishware at HomeGoods is met with ever-high supply and demand, flying off the shelves as shoppers embrace the cuteness and nostalgia. The surge in demand reflects how reconnecting with childhood favorites is becoming a joyful trend, turning everyday home décor into something special. [Source: Author, Sora Ju]

sudden consumption boom. A lot of it has to do with the "inner-child" trend that's taken over social media, especially TikTok. Teens and adults alike are diving into this trend, reconnecting with the cute and whimsical things they loved as

children. Videos of collectors showing off their extensive collections of Sonny Angels, Calico Critters (also known as *Sylvanian Families*), or Hello Kitty merch—collectible figures that have gained increasing popularity on social media recently

—are racking up millions of views, creating an even greater demand for these products.

"I've liked Hello Kitty since I was little—like a lot of people have," said Ruby Ortega, an avid Sanrio collector. "But now, I find so much more Hello Kitty, and even Snoopy, stuff at places like Marshalls and TJ Maxx. It's like everyone's into it now!"

Retailers are responding to this growing demand by stocking up on all things cute, and shoppers—both young and old—are eagerly snatching up everything from Hello Kitty mugs to Snoopy throw blankets. This wave of inner-child consumerism isn't just about looking back at childhood memories—it's about finding comfort and joy in a world that feels increasingly chaotic.

With both teens and adults embracing the cute revolution and brands rolling out endless collaborations, it looks like inner-child consumerism is here to stay—and what about you? Have you given in to the cuteness craze?

## Student Reporter

## Biting Into Harmful Habits: Eat, Slurp, Repeat.



Emily Lee  
Grade 10  
Sunny Hills High School

Mukbang, which originated in South Korea in the early 2010s, is a phenomenon that involves individuals consuming large amounts of food while interacting with an audience through live streaming or pre-recorded videos. Mukbangs have gained immense popularity globally, transcending cultural boundaries and becoming a significant aspect of online entertainment. The appeal lies not only in the visual aspect of the food but also in the social interactions that occur during these broadcasts. However, psychology has helped to show that many mukbangs have become harmful to both the host and the viewers, as they foster unhealthy habits and lifestyles.

Mukbangs have increasingly transitioned from healthy chatting and eating to an unhealthy glorification of food. One prominent example of this is Nicholas Perry, known as Nikocado Avocado on the internet. Before his rise to fame, his content revolved around his ve-

ganism and conversations with his fans. However, when he decided to drop his vegan diet and began indulging in popular mukbang foods such as Samyang buldak noodles, he progressively grew bigger and more tempered. He often threw tantrums online where he wasted food and engaged in physical altercations with his husband, Orlin Homes.

With these drastic changes, viewers began expressing concern for the physical and mental well-being of their favorite mukbanger. However, Perry continued to binge eat and got to the point where he needed a wheelchair and oxygen tube. When looking through a sociocultural perspective, it is evident that Perry's place of residence, the United States, is a place where junk food is more affordable and convenient than healthier organic options. Because so many Americans normalize consuming greasy food daily, it is clear that Perry was influenced by his surrounding cul-

ture to eat unhealthily. In addition, the mukbang culture emphasizes that the videos with the most food generate the most views, thus also contributing to his eating habits.

From a psychoanalytic view, it is apparent that Perry has developed a tendency to binge eat because of his content, as well as his earnings depending on consuming mass amounts of highly processed food. His continued routine of eating for views maintains his harmful habit. Because he has become so accustomed to this, his brain registers binge eating as a way to uplift his mood, gradually becoming a coping mechanism for Perry, especially in times of sadness or stress, which he demonstrates in his videos where he throws a tantrum and binges right after.

By psychologically observing mukbangers like Nikocado Avocado, it is evident that many are now turning away from their traditional purpose to exchange companionship with viewers over



Buldak is a common ramen sold in stores that many mukbangers will eat during their videos. [Source: Author, Emily Lee]

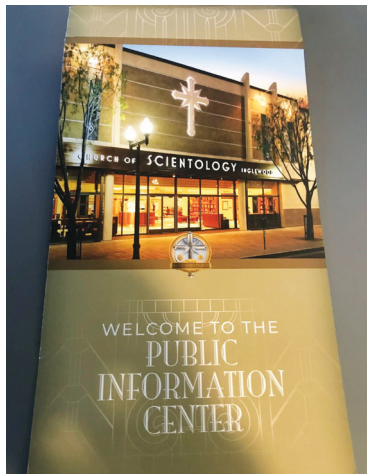
food, and are instead developing into outlets for individuals to publicly reveal their destructive eating habits. Therefore, no matter how delicious those fire noodles are, it is vital to recognize that prioritizing fame and wealth over physical and mental well-being is a dangerous path to choose.

Student Reporter

## SCIENTOLOGY: A CIVILIAN'S PERSPECTIVE



**Jeremy Cho**  
Grade 8  
Richardson Middle School



A Scientology pamphlet that is handed out at the Scientology Center in Inglewood, California.  
[Source: Author, Jeremy Cho]

Dec. 1954, the Church of Scientology, which is a controversial cult created by Lafayette Ronald Hubbard (David Miscavige would take over the organization after Hubbard's death). The Church of Scientology is based on Hubbard's book Dianetics, and the basis of the religion was that

75,000,000 years ago on Earth, inside a sector called the "Galactic Confederation," the civilians of the Confederation, elected Xenu (ZEE-MUE). He took these other beings to Earth and threw them into volcanoes (which were clumps of Thethans). He would be overthrown by a rebel force and imprisoned inside an electronic mountain fortress. Scientologists believe that people born on Earth can release Thethans then they can get psychic abilities.

When I went to the Church of Scientology's center located in Inglewood, California, the building was extremely clean, with screens behind the lobby area. I was greeted by a secretary who took me to see an introductory video on Scientology. After that, I met another staff member who took me to the upper level of the building; this is where I spotted Scientology's course room. The course room allows its younger members to

study a variety of subjects. While I was there, the staff became suspicious of me because of the number of questions I had been asking, to the point where one of the staff members asked, "Were you paid to come here?" Later, they asked if I could take a personality test, but I refused. When I was leaving, I picked up a Scientology pamphlet, the personality test, and QR codes which led to their website.

A teacher at a Torrance Unified School District middle school and a local Scientology expert, first heard about the church when she was a child. On the television, they were advertising Dianetics. When asked, "Do you think Scientology is creepy and why?" the teacher said, "Scientology is creepy since it's extremely secretive. She would even compare Scientology to the Mormons or the Amish, who both ridicule you once you leave the cult. Finally, when asked, "What do you think the life of a Scientologist would be like?," she

responded by saying, that it would be very limiting and there would be many aspects of life you would be unable to do.

The Church of Scientology can be seen as a sketchy organization because of the many controversies behind the organization. For example, Shelly Miscavige's disappearance had caused Leah Remini, actress and former Scientologist, to get to the point where she filed a police report to the LA Police Department, labeling Shelly Miscavige as a missing person. Unfortunately, the LAPD had closed the case soon after. In a Twitter Post talking about Shelly Miscavige, Leah Remini said, "I will never stop fighting."

Although mysterious, the Church of Scientology has many members. Many things go on that non-members are unaware of. With all of its controversies, one has to wonder, what is going on with the Church of Scientology?

Student Reporter

## NHHS and UCLA: Partners by Blood



**Reanna Lee**  
Grade 10  
North Hollywood High School

September is off to a great start, as North Hollywood High School partnered with UCLA to host the first blood drive of the year! With the Associated Student Body (ASB) running the event, it was held in the practice gym during school hours by appointment or walk-in. Students aged 16 and up and staff could sign up with a member to donate blood.

Each ASB member was to sign five people up under their name, including myself. Many of the upperclassmen I knew were not interested or had already signed up. However, in the end, I finally got my required five sign-ups and was relieved to know I could contribute to the event's participation. On the day of the blood drive, the practice gym was set up with different stations: the check-in area, form submission desk (those that were 16 years old required a consent form), waiting area, blood pressure station, a resting area for after the procedure, and the actual operation area. After donating blood,



The ASB crew in a group picture before the blood drive started!  
[Source: Sylvia Garcia]



The practice gym setup for the UCLA Blood Drive.  
[Source: Author, Reanna Lee]

patients would stay in the resting area for about fifteen minutes. The donation size is one pint, so ASB members provided snacks and drinks to maintain stability before allowing them to head back to class.

Taking care of the patients was just one job, however. All of the ASB members were assigned their own roles, including managing the front desk, wristband duty, passing out snacks, and organization/floaters. Every member would switch once the next period began. That way, everyone would have a chance to experience something new.

Many of us also received hall passes in order to summon students for their appointments.

Although I am not very into the medical field, I was curious to see how the entire operation worked and observed from a distance. Patients who did not know their blood type were also able to receive results from just this blood drive, which was interesting.

This was my first blood drive with the ASB, so I'm glad that I was able to see how busy it was! After the event, the Fundraising Committee made a count and the

blood drive had a result of 94 blood bags—8 more than last year! It was amazing to think that these donations would save lives, and I was even more proud after hearing that our school, North Hollywood High School, was the top donor at UCLA. This is why I love the ASB team. We are here to create an amazing impact in our school community that will hopefully gain many new members in the years to come. Because we have had a great improvement, I hope that our next blood drive will be just as successful!

Student Reporter

## SoFi's Special Design Blocks Out Heat for Fans in 104 Degrees



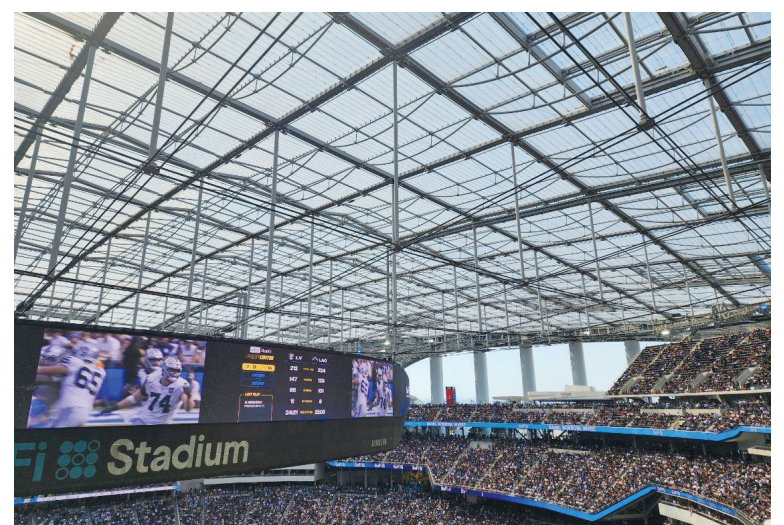
**Summer Park**  
Grade 10  
Harvard-Westlake School

On the opening weekend of the National Football League (NFL) season, my family went to a game between the Las Vegas Raiders and Los Angeles Chargers at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, Ca. With the weather over 100 degrees, we were bracing for the worst as we put on layers of sunscreen. But much to our surprise, the game experience was actually pleasant as the oppressive heat was not much of a factor throughout the stadium, even in the upper deck we sat in, due to the special design of the stadium.

SoFi Stadium, home to two NFL teams, the Los Angeles Rams and Los Angeles Chargers, opened in 2020. The stadium has a roof made up of panels that can slide open or shut to control the temperature. For this game, the roof was completely shut to block out the strong rays

for kick-off at 1 pm. The designers smartly opened up the ends of the stadium to serve two main purposes: 1) to recreate the feeling of an outdoor stadium for a mostly indoor stadium with sliding roofs and 2) to allow for the flow of air to cool the stadium on the hot days like we had for the Raiders-Chargers game.

After the game, I asked a couple, Jose and Imelda, how they dealt with the heat. Jose said his straw wide-brimmed hat did the trick of in blocking out the rays, "This straw hat does a much better job than a baseball cap of protecting more of my face and my neck from those harmful rays." Imelda said, "For me, I need to carry a water spray on hot days so I can spray myself to cool myself." I'll have to remember this for the next time I come to a football game when the weather is hot.



The SoFi Stadium roof can open and close to help protect fans from outrageous heat.  
[Source: Author, Summer Park]

In our sections, I saw other tricks folks tried to keep cool during the game, including having the mini-fans on non-stop or getting lots of ice and putting them inside their shirts. With lots of fluids and layers of sun-

screen, I thoroughly enjoyed the game despite the high temperatures, as the design of SoFi Stadium did its job of regulating it. I look forward to going to SoFi for another football game, no matter the weather.

## Editors Column



Isleen Lee

Grade 11  
Harvard-Westlake School

## Why American Literature Is More Relatable to the 21st Century Than You Think



The books pictured above from left to right (The Scarlet Letter, We The Animals, and The Great Gatsby) are classics that I look forward to reading the most! [Source: Author, Isleen Lee]

What do the novels *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *Little Women* all have in common? For starters, these are all incredibly famous books with a global presence. In addition to their popularity, they are pieces of American literature and contain themes such as the American dream, wealth, social class, or identity. As a junior, my school's 11th-grade English and history courses focus heavily on the U.S.

This year, the English class I am taking is called "Imagining America," while my English elective is known as "The Road Ahead." Thus, all of the books that we read are written by American authors and consist of some widely-known classics such as *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The Age of Innocence*.

In my English class, we are currently reading *The Scarlet Letter*, by author Nathaniel Hawthorne, which I find very intriguing and en-

joyable. Initially, due to my thoughts of American literature being boring, verbose, and predictable, I assumed that this book would present itself similarly. However, I felt that my thoughts were completely wrong after reading the first few chapters, and I was completely enthralled by how dramatic the book was. Although set in colonial Boston during the 17th century, the book was not difficult to understand, especially due to the vivid description of the setting and characters. Similarly, *The Age of Innocence*, by Edith Wharton, which I am reading in my English elective, takes place during the late 19th century amidst the elite class of New York. Not only does it have a dramatic plot, but reading it gave me a glimpse into what "high society" was like in New York during this period.

Reading both of these books has made me realize that although American life in the past was vastly different from how it is today, many

similarities remain in our modern, 21st-century lifestyle. For example, the most prevalent theme in *The Age of Innocence* explores the hardship of conforming to societal norms while also wanting to break away from these traditions, while *The Scarlet Letter*, put in Gen-Z terminology, discusses "cancel culture," or social exclusion due to scandalous behavior, and grapples religious beliefs with innate human nature. Many people today struggle to fit in, while others don't want to fit in. Some people struggle to figure out their identity, while others face cancel culture for saying or doing things they personally believe in, even if others disagree with them. I have realized that these books, which are often stereotyped as "too hard to understand," are still relevant to the present day. Before this school year, I didn't look forward to reading classics, but now, I'm excited to uncover the unpredictable plots of my assigned readings!

## Student Reporter

## Yayoi Kusama's Footprints: Pumpkin Sculptures



Kaylyn Yu

Grade 10  
Chantilly High School

Yayoi Kusama is a Japanese contemporary artist known for her unique art styles in sculptures, especially with pumpkins. For Kusama, pumpkins are a significant source of comfort and joy dating back to her childhood. One of her most famous artworks is the iconic yellow-and-black spotted pumpkin sculpture.

I recently visited Washington DC's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and came across the huge, sunlit pumpkin installation of Yayoi Kusama's work outside of the building. I was very surprised to recognize the distinctive piece because it was not my first time viewing the vibrant sculpture. The first instance I admired the art piece was in Incheon, Korea, inside a hotel residence called Paradise City. The classy, high-profile display led me to believe that it was something rare and singular I would only lay my eyes on once. However, a few months later, in Jeju, Bonte Museum, I encountered the captivating



The installation in Paradise City was labeled "Great Gigantic Pumpkin" by Yayoi Kusama. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Yu]

yellow pumpkin again. Although it was situated somewhat differently, with a complementing background and less flashy lighting, it was unmistakably the same piece. My family and I could not notice any difference from the one we had examined previously. I did not think much of it at the time, though, and continued to inspect Kusama's other works at the mu-

seum with intrigue.

My third sight of Kusama's pumpkin, in Washington, DC, left me confused. Once again, the golden establishment seemed exactly like a copy of the pumpkins I'd observed in the past, including the interesting polka-dot design and elaborate sculpting. The assumption that the giant pumpkin was a one-of-a-kind art piece faded slightly. I had always thought the works I had appreciated had been authentic ones created by Kusama herself. After my last experience with the sculpture, I decided to complete some research to figure out how there were multiple figures of supposedly one piece of art all over the world. Had Kusama created numerous samples of the same art? Were there many manufactured copies in the world with a distinct original?

To my disappointment, the internet offered a limited amount of information about the striking pumpkins and their authenticity. I found the displays I had

explored formerly, each source showing the beautiful art individually, indicating they were not the same one. The pumpkins seem to have been moved around into different exhibits often in the past, but not anymore. Through further research, I discovered that Yayoi Kusama's largest pumpkin carving is located on Naoshima Island in Japan. The pumpkin retained the same alluring color schemes as the ones I had seen, but I could tell that the shape and size did not match. I also gathered that there were a few other permanent installations of the enormous vegetable sculptures around the world aside from those I had come across before.

In the end, I could not pinpoint the exact origins of how multiple forms of Kusama's popular piece was scattered across the continent. Nevertheless, whether real or not, I was pleased to understand more about her art and consider each exhibit worthwhile.

## Student Reporter

## Internet Culture Is Ruining Our Kids



Chloe Je

Grade 9  
Orange County School of the Arts

Most mainstream social media platforms require you to be at least 13 years of age to create an account. However, it is no secret children much younger are finding loopholes and exposing themselves years ahead of the recommended age. Whether they are stealing a sibling's or an adult's device or are making a false account, children as young as seven are now diving head-first into a dizzying world of influencers, trends, and negative media.

Now, it's common knowledge that most kids have short attention spans. However, when they are fed short videos utilizing hyperstimulation, these children are found struggling to maintain focus in school and social settings. Anything less than an overwhelming sensory experience like these videos would be found as dull and boring.

Influencers on these platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram,

are another dangerous influence on underage users. Most influencers advertise certain products, whether it be beauty products, a certain style or brand of clothing, or household items, that are usually expensive and unnecessary. Older and more mature audiences will be able to recognize these as passing trends and advertisements, making more educated decisions on whether they purchase said products. However, young children have been known to be gullible and easy to manipulate, especially when coming from someone they idolize. If their favorite TikTok influencer says they have to get a certain makeup product, it will surely be on their wishlist. These children are not the target audience, and yet they continue to be among the leading consumers.

"Sephora Kids" are children and tweens who are found roaming Sephora, buying popular prod-

ucts like Drunk Elephant, which contain ingredients harmful to youthful skin, like retinol, glycolic acid, and Vitamin C. In addition to makeup products, 40-ounce Stanley cup water bottles are found under Christmas trees, dedicated to these seven-year-old girls. The idea that happiness comes from material possessions is becoming rooted deeper into the children's heads.

Children, especially of Gen Alpha, seem to use a new wave of slang words, so incoherent that anyone outside of this internet bubble will not be able to understand them. Every generation has a set of words that reflect the culture of their time. However, it's what these words are referring to that makes the increased use of them slightly unsettling. Words like "rizz," meaning the ability to attract others romantically, and "gyatt," which means to have a large bottom, can be unpleasant



Children are gullible and susceptible to negative influences from social media, especially content that is not meant for them. [Source: Author, Chloe Je]

and inappropriate to hear when spoken from a six-year-old's mouth.

Children don't have the social, mental, or physical maturity to be exposed to social media at such a young age. Technology is the face of the future, but we must learn how to utilize it for the better, so it does not have long-lasting negative consequences for future generations.