

Student Reporter



Eunice Minji Choi
Grade 11
North Hollywood
High School

The Grove's Annual Tree Lighting



After a failed attempt to see the tree lighting, I made my way through the crowd to try to enjoy the fireworks show. [Source: Author, Eunice Minji Choi]

It's the most wonderful time of the year! Halloween is over, Thanksgiving is just wrapped up, and Christmas is right around the corner. Excited for the holiday season, residents of Los Angeles have already put up their lights and decorations. The Grove, LA's most popular shopping mall, is keeping up with the holiday spirit. On November 25, 2024,

The Grove's annual Tree Lighting event happened. But, unfortunately, it wasn't as dreamy and Christmas-y as I had imagined.

I went to The Grove for the iconic Tree Lighting event right after work, which is less than half a mile away. My first misjudgment was going to The Grove at 6 pm—traffic was at a standstill. It

took over 30 minutes to get close to the mall, and I ended up having to walk the remaining two blocks. Then, when I entered the crowd through the entrance, I could not turn back. It was packed—I mean packed. Everyone was stuck to another person. I was squashed between 2 tall men, not the most comfortable situation I've been in. My friend and I pushed through the crowd and got to the middle, but it was no use. We were towards the Farmers Market, near Dylan's Candy Bar, which is far from the actual tree. From our vantage point, the tree was nowhere to be seen. Our hopes of seeing the tree were gone, so we started pushing to leave.

After escaping the crowd, we were starving. Marmalade Cafe was packed, and the entrance was blocked by the crowd. The Cheesecake Factory had a 3-hour wait time, so that wasn't an option. We opted for Chill Since '93 to grab a sandwich, and the line was not as long as I expected—thank goodness. After dinner, it was time to finally see the Christmas tree...or at least attempt to. We tried to make our way back to the main area, but it was near-

ly impossible. To make up for the failed experience, we decided to wait till the fireworks show. 30 minutes passed and nothing, so we decided to leave.

Leaving the vicinity took another 30 minutes. We kept driving straight to make our way home and came across a beautiful scene. The houses along 3rd Street were the definition of a winter wonderland. From Santa to Frosty the Snowman, life-size inflatables of important Christmas figures enhanced the houses. This ride somewhat made up for the lost experience of the tree lighting and fireworks show.

Is The Grove's annual Tree Lighting event worth it? If you make it to the event itself, near the tree, I think it's 100% is. The beautifully lit tree and breathtaking fireworks would be the best way to start off the holiday season. For next year, I would advise to get to the mall way before 5 pm, and if you want to get food, make sure you make reservations days before. If you get those down, you'll have a wonderful time. Now for next year, good luck. Happy Holidays!

Student Reporter



Kaylyn Wee
Grade 9
Ayala High School

Prelims for CIF Girls High School Tennis

Recently, I had the opportunity to move up to Ayala High School's Varsity Girls Tennis team. Because of this, I also had the chance to go with them to Prelims for CIF. CIF is a big deal to many tennis high school players in California, and they work hard to get there. Lots of determination, effort, and skill are needed to qualify for the tournament. Moreover, CIF and Prelims are two different things yet are connected, and I had the chance to learn all about them.

CIF stands for California Inter-scholastic Federation, and the CIF tournament is the official championship competition where the top qualifiers from Prelims compete for regional or state titles. This means Prelims must occur first. Prelims are two days of qualifying rounds, and the purpose is to get ranked for CIFs by selecting the strongest players and teams to advance. Now, if a team makes it to the CIF tournament, then they must play with teams from other leagues besides their own. Throughout the season, not only are teams prioritizing their wins, but they are also focusing on obtaining a spot in CIF and Prelims.



The second day of prelims at the Claremont Club were fun and exciting as players tried to win their matches. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Wee]

As mentioned, Prelims takes up two days, and because of this, I had to miss 2 days of school, however, I had fun, and it was an amazing experience. The first day took place at Claremont High School, and the second day took place at Claremont Club. Since I was able to experience both days, I can say the first day may be more important. This is be-

cause how well you do and the ranking you get determines your spot and ranking for the next day. Now, for each team, 6 players are able to play, 2 singles players and 4 doubles players, no sub-in players.

If questioned, several players and coaches will agree Prelims and overall CIFs are a great ex-

perience. It's an opportunity for players to showcase their skills and abilities, and it is a chance to receive awards and titles. Not only that, but it is also a chance to meet other athletes and people who share the same passion for the sport. College recruiters can even recognize star players through these tournaments and see their talent. So if a team or a player is chosen to go to Prelims, there should be no doubt in participating.

Overall, I am very happy I was able to go to Prelims with my team. With all these amazing details, this was also an opportunity for me to be able to bond with my new team a little more. Being the newest teammate and spending more than half of the season with another group of people was uncomfortable and slightly intimidating. But I really think I was able to connect with multiple members of the team and create memories with them. Prelims this week was a great time, and I really hope my team and other teams will be able to advance throughout the tournament while having fun.

Student Reporter



Huichan Kim
Homeschool

Redefining Success In Cambodia

What is your definition of a successful life? Many people often believe that amassing material things like excellent educational achievements, prestigious jobs, and wealth are what makes a successful life. I, too, was part of "many people" until recently.

A few weeks ago, I came across an announcement for an overseas volunteer program organized by the Seoul Youth Dream Center. I wanted to try something new in my life before the year ended, so I applied without any hesitation and was accepted. The school I would be sent to help was the Don Bosco School, in Poipet, Cambodia. It is a private Catholic school, which has its foundation based on the educational philosophy of Saint John Bosco, an Italian priest who stressed the education of the poor and forsaken youth. His educational approach was based on love and respect. Don Bosco School exists in many countries worldwide and strives for many youth's safe growth and educational achievement.

Before leaving for Cambodia,



My teammates and I were physically worn out, but many local students' assistance made work easier, and we finished it in a short time. [Source: Author, Huichan Kim]

I had two days of pre-training. I learned what I would do for volunteer work, studied a bit of Khmer, the official language of Cambodia, and learned the basic hygiene rules and principles.

On November 6, the group arrived at Siem Reap Angkor airport. The local time was 9 P.M., and we had to drive to Poipet. After 4 hours through complete darkness and an unpaved road, we finally arrived at Don Bosco

School at 1 A.M. On the first day, my teammates and I worked together to place bricks alongside the sports field. I placed the bricks on the sand ground, positioning them to match the pattern, and struck them with a rubber hammer to set them firmly. While working, I also socialized with local students and made friends with them quickly. The weather was scorching hot, and the bricks were heavy, so I was worn out but completed the

task with help.

On the second day, the group visited a local home and delivered supplies. When I handed these supplies to the local people, the tears they shed were unforgettable. There was trash all over the place, and the unpaved road made it difficult to move around. It was the first time that I saw these harsh conditions, and I was unsettled.

On the last day, the group went to the night market. After doing nothing but hard work for the past few days, we went out and had so much fun together. We freely walked around the market together, buying food and items that would remind us of each other.

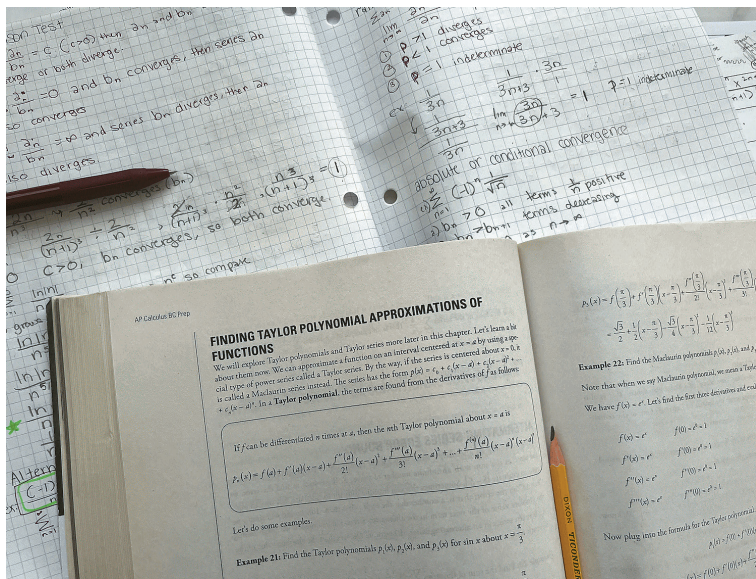
Overall, this volunteer program was a life-changing experience. My thought process has started to change. Before volunteer work, I was very secular and self-centered. I dismissed helping people in difficult situations as I thought it was someone else's responsibility. But now, I realize that I should love and care for others as I would for myself and help people in need.

Student Reporter

Tis the Season!...For Finals?



Jenna Kim
Grade 11
Pacifica Christian
High School



Studying for the AP Calc BC final via Princeton Review, it's a great resource!
[Source: Jenna Kim, Author]

Christmas season is here, with its candy canes, silver lanes, and toys. But for most high school students in America, what is truly awaiting at their doorstep are six exams- all heavily weighted, and cumulative. I like to think of finals season as Halloween's last goodbye, as though it's stretching out its hand into the winter season of joy for its one,

last scare. Ever since my Sophomore year of High School, I have been caught, not surrounded by mistletoe and wishlists, but by piles of schoolwork and study during the winter season. And like most, this daunting culmination of chaos, stress, and work is worsened by procrastination or lack of planning. But this year, I encourage you to take the grand-

pa of Halloween by its horns and tell it, "No, you won't trick me," and work ahead, plan ahead, and don't let the Grinch of finals trick you. So, here are some of my tips as a Junior in High School on how to survive Finals Week this year.

1. Plan Ahead

As I briefly mentioned before, planning for finals week is essential to succeeding in your exams. This means, not only knowing what exams you have, what content teachers are testing you on, and what day they are on, but what practical steps you need to take in order to succeed, and assigning studying for these to specific days and times. For example, for my AP Economics final, I know that it will be cumulative, and the teacher usually uses FRQs from the College Board itself. Therefore, I will need to complete FRQs and Content Review videos for each unit. But more importantly, I need to assign what day and time I will study those materials. But how much time do we really have? Not as much as we think.

2. Be realistic

This brings me to my next point of study:, being realistic.

Although we want to say that the first thing we do when we get back home from school is study, all the way until 9 PM without breaks, that usually isn't the case. Thus, we end up taking those breaks, not finishing our allotted work in time, and feeling distressed. In reality, it wasn't us that failed, but our unrealistic plans. So, when you're planning to study, it is essential to understand how much time each task will realistically take, and the time in the day you have to work productively.

3. Look Forward to Your Success

Lastly, look forward to your success! The biggest mistake I've made when it comes to big exams or tests is thinking negatively about my results, when I haven't even received them yet! Believing that you will succeed, means that you will. Then, studying and planning will only be a small step to your predetermined success.

Overall, good luck to students who are taking finals, and know that your success is already determined. You got this, and don't let the Grinch of finals get to you.

Student Reporter

How Teachers Spend Winter Break



Christine Baek
Grade 11
Western Reserve Academy

Winter break is a time of recharge for students after their longest stretch of academic endeavors. Often conjuring images of holiday travels and warm relaxations, winter break is a much-anticipated period. For teachers, however, winter break not only marks a pause in their demanding schedule but also a time to plan for what is ahead. This offers them a chance to step back from the structured chaos of the classroom and embrace a slower pace, even if just briefly.

For many teachers, the first few days of break are all about rest. The academic days, with demanding schedules of classes to teach and the burden of dealing with students outside of the classroom, require constant focus and energy from them. Here, winter break gives them the opportunity to sleep in and reconnect with hobbies they enjoy.

You can't leave out the time spent with loved ones during breaks. Since teachers don't have much time to spend with their families on the academic calendar, many travel to their relatives' houses or hometowns to reconnect. Mr. Ong, for instance, is traveling to Pennsylvania, where all

his family members will gather. This Pennsylvania trip is significant to him because this will be the first time in a long while that he'll see all of his family come together.



Many teachers go away for the holidays, spending time with family and loved ones before returning (earlier than students) to prepare for the new semester.
[Source: Author, Christine Baek]

participation of doing such things over break. For example, attending family gatherings, decorating homes, volunteering, etc... are all examples of how they may spend their precious break time.

However, winter break for teachers is rarely absent from school-related thoughts. The quiet days allow them to reflect on the past semester and plan for the upcoming school days. Also, keep in mind that teachers have less time than students to enjoy the holiday season. They are required to come back, at least in my neighborhood, by January 6th to start planning and hold meetings for the upcoming school days. Most teachers begin their lesson plans, next unit exams, and the finals for the second semester, all during the period.

Balancing between personal rest and school preparation can be challenging. Unfinished gradings, missing assignments, and persisting deadlines often clash with the desire to rest. Yet, many teachers find a way to embrace both aspects of their lives through winter break, using it as a way to reset and recharge before the second half of the year.

Student Reporter

Uncovering Myths Surrounding Red 40



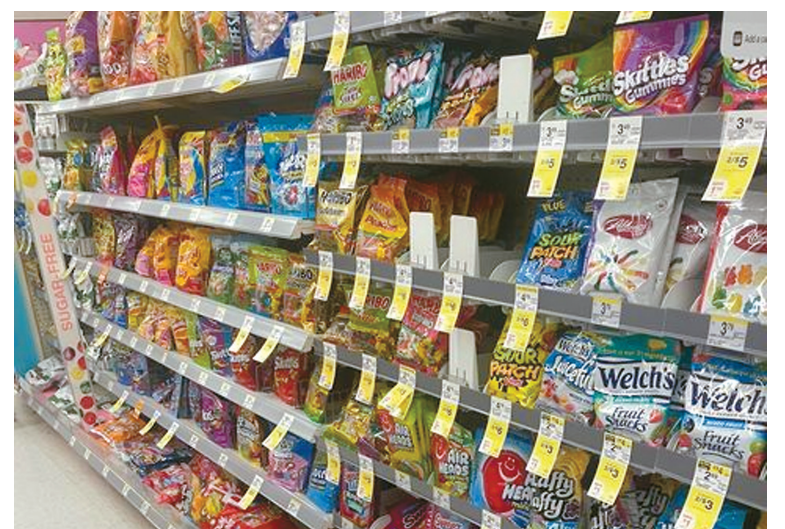
Bailee Kim
Grade 11
Crescenta Valley
High School

Have you heard of the negative effects of eating foods that include Red 40 and other artificial dyes? Food dyes, especially Red 40, are widely known to people as the cause of cancer, gut problems, and other health issues that are difficult to treat. Most people continuously hear rumors regarding the negative effects of Red 40 on social media apps. Although we all know that social media tends to distort words and make situations seem more dire than they actually are, it is difficult to disregard the information that the dye which is commonly used in our favorite candies and foods might be detrimental to our health. In fact, most information about Red 40 on social media is a myth and not real at all.

One common misconception people have about Red 40 is that it's a strong carcinogen. This news was already spread through social media and is now engraved in many of our minds. However, there is no proof that

Red 40 causes cancer. With a glance at the internet, people often panic when they see a long list of health issues that correlate with the consumption of dyes. Ironically, most of these issues do not pose a risk unless the amount of consumption is significant. The chances of Red 40 causing neurotransmitter damage, gut bacteria issues, or damage to DNA in healthy cells are extremely low and will likely not occur with a normal amount like most foods contain.

While everyone is concerned regarding Red 40, the dyes that should have actually been controversial are Red 3 and Blue 2. Blue 2 was tested through animal studies, and researchers have found that there was a statistically significant increase in the risk of brain tumors when it was given in high dosages. Although there were results, researchers had concluded that they could not assert that the tumors were completely from the dye, but it is still necessary



The candy aisle many now avoid due to misconceptions about Red 40
[Source: Author, Bailee Kim]

to be cautious of it. Moreover, Red 3 has also been found to increase the risk of cancer through the test and may cause behavioral issues, such as ADHD in children. Due to these health concerns, the Food and Drug Administration, FDA, has prom-

ised to take steps forward banning the use of Red 3 and Blue 2 in food products. So, instead of believing internet gossip, people should research and address misinformation, shifting attention to genuinely dangerous issues like Red 3 and Blue 2.