

Student Reporter



Kaylyn Yu
Grade 10
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Hosting Chantilly High School's First Winter Home Meet



Despite the cold, the meet went as scheduled, finishing successfully.
[Source: Andrea Colbourn]

Winter track has kicked off the season with high spirits, filled with the thrill of new experiences and greater heights. Although most meets in the winter season are held indoors due to the cold weather, certain ones are pre-arranged for the outside. The first outdoor winter meet had been canceled because of the extreme temperatures that day, so many

were anxious about running at Chantilly High School with the forecast's ominous prediction. Despite the cold, the meet remained active as scheduled, elevating the track team's excitement to compete over the weekend.

By 10:00 am on Saturday, December 21st, a total of 11 schools were registered and present to race at Chantilly's track. Due to

the low temperatures, the school gym was opened for competitors to stay indoors when not participating directly in the meet. The field within the track was bustling with all sorts of individuals: coaches providing last-minute advice to runners, racers warming up with various stretches, and teammates cheering enthusiastically for their school's participants. To protect against the bitter cold, parkas, beanies, scarves, gloves, blankets, and other warming essentials were passed around. Sharp winds and freezing temperatures deterred many runners' spirits, but everyone managed to support each other and maintain a constructive attitude to push through until the end.

Some participants, like the captains, were assigned specific duties to help the meet proceed smoothly. There were tasks for setting up hurdles and blocks for sprinters and check-in positions that involved passing out appropriate hip numbers to competing athletes. Volunteers prepared the concession stand to sell nourishments to all visitors as well.

Byon Chunmeour, a sophomore at Chantilly High School,

stated how he pitched in at the home meet: "I arrived at the campus at 8:30 am to drop off food at the concession stand. The coaches assigned me to set up blocks and hurdles at various locations. I helped our jumpers with their jump marks with the measuring tape and also checked people in at the shed by asking for their event and giving them their heat and lane number as well as their hip number. I enjoyed the experience, I got to talk to all my friends who were running or jumping at the meet, and I wasn't too cold."

Taejoo Kim, a freshman at Oakton High School, shared his experience; "I loved the meet, it was my first time going to another school for track, so it was a great experience to see a new school and meet new people. It was very fun to run even though the weather was very cold."

The long-awaited home meet at Chantilly High School was another fulfilling track event, for those engaging as a competitor as well as volunteers and supporters, reinforcing school spirit and boosting team morale. Creating a basis to set new records, the track team was pleased with the overall effort made at their school.

Student Reporter



Jenna Kim
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Top 5 Things To Do in Seoul, Korea

The new year is here, and for most Korean-American families, a trip to Korea is an upcoming event in their plans. In fact, my family and I recently completed our Korea vacation, and here are the top 5 places, shops, and eateries that I recommend for your next visit.

1. Have Fun at Lotte World!

First, let's turn our attention to a Disneyland dupe with the most exhilarating rides, beautiful castles, and a still less than quarter price. Lotte World, an amusement park exclusively located in Seoul, is a hit spot for many travelers. For instance, the Flume Ride is a water drop ride that seems to unknowingly pay homage to the Splash Mountain at Disneyland. There is also a tradition of wearing cute school uniforms to the park for nostalgia, so you will notice many friends and couples dressed up at this park!

2. Try Out Convenience Store (편의점) Food!

Though it sounds odd, Korean convenience stores have been a hit globally, from their cute but cheap drinks and snacks to their affordable meals. I personally would recommend trying the favorites of Korean students: banana milk, the Triangle Kimbap (삼각 김밥), and Buldak Carbonara Ramen.



The beautiful castle, roller coasters, and skies at Lotte World!
[Source: Author, Jenna Kim]

3. Go to Karaoke (노래방)!

One of the classic pastimes of many Korean students and adults is going to Karaoke rooms at night! Not only can you sing with your friends and family, but you can marvel at disco lights, measure a score for your accu-

racy, and have fun for hours with little cost. It's classic, a tradition, and super fun. You shouldn't miss it!

4. Shop at a Korean Mall!

Malls in Korea are not only extremely clean and modern but are filled with exclusive items

and brands that you cannot find in many other countries. According to your taste, Yeouido (a large island on the Han River in Seoul) has many malls that you can visit. For small designer brands, The Hyundai is an extremely hip underground shopping center for teens and young adults. For families, affordable and exclusive brands (ex SPAO and Olive Young) are located in Times Square and IFC. With such a variety, I would suggest visiting all of them!

5. Visit a Book Cafe!

There are so many cute book cafes in Korea, and my personal favorite is Cafe Comma, in Yeouido, Seoul. It is filled with many books, has good coffee options, and has a great ambiance. Moreover, you can find many social gatherings on the first floor and more studies on the second. If you want a good place to read a good book, host gatherings, or catch up on some emails, a Korean Book Cafe is for you.

Lastly, do make sure that you have time to rest and enjoy your trip! Many times we like to set up unrealistic agendas for ourselves, but pure rest and enjoying your time around Korea is just as rewarding. So, I end this article with the hope that your Korea trip will be filled with much fun, as well as rest and peace.

Student Reporter



Chloe Je
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The Impact of Music on the Brain

Music is often considered the universal language that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, resonating deeply within the human brain. Research has shown that music significantly impacts cognitive, emotional, and physiological processes, shaping how we think, feel, and emotionally heal.

One of the most profound effects of music is its ability to influence mood and emotions. Listening to music activates the brain's reward system—releasing dopamine—the "feel good" neurotransmitter. This evokes feelings of pleasure and happiness. Upbeat tunes can energize and uplift, while slower melodies often promote relaxation and stress reduction. This emotional resonance is why music is frequently used in therapy to manage anxiety, depression, and trauma.

Music stimulates various areas of the brain such as those related to memory, attention

spans, and problem-solving. For example, listening to music with a steady rhythm can enhance focus and productivity, making it a popular tool for students and professionals. On the other hand, songs with complex structures challenge the brain, fostering creativity and critical thinking. Music also has a unique relationship with memory. Familiar tunes often trigger vivid recollections and emotions, a phenomenon leveraged in therapies for individuals with Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

Neurologically, playing an instrument or engaging in music-making activities multiples different brain regions simultaneously, including the motor, auditory, and visual-spatial systems. This multisensory engagement enhances neural connections and promotes brain plasticity, which is the brain's ability to adapt and reorganize itself. Musicals, for instance, often exhibit heightened

skills in language processing and spatial reasoning due to these strengthened neural pathways.

Furthermore, music influences the brain's physiological state. Slow, rhythmic music can synchronize the body's heart rate and breathing, incising a state of relaxation. Conversely, fast-paced music can increase arousal and readiness, beneficial in scenarios requiring alertness and motivation. These effects explain music's widespread use in both fitness settings and relaxation like yoga and meditation.

Music also has therapeutic applications in medical contexts. Music therapy, for instance, has been shown to alleviate pain, reduce the need for sedatives during surgeries, and enhance motor recovery in stroke patients. By engaging the brain's emotional and motor centers, music provides an effective non-invasive tool for improving quality of life.

In essence, the impact of mu-



Music has the ability to control moods as well as focus and can even be used in a medical setting.
[Source: Author, Chloe Je]

sic on the brain is multifaceted and profound. Whether through evoking emotions, enhancing cognitive abilities, or promoting physical healing—music is a powerful force that enriches our lives in ways that science continues to uncover and celebrate.

Student Reporter

A+ Habits for a Thriving School Experience



Erin Lee
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Granada Hills Charter
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Creating a to-do list is the key to organization in school!
[Source: Author, Erin Lee]

Success in school is not solely about homework and studying; it's also about developing new skills and habits along the way. It is a time for a shift in both mindset and daily actions. In order

to have a great and productive year and finish the school year off strong, encouraging healthy school habits is the key to guiding students toward success both academically and personally.

A good night's sleep is like a secret weapon that will unlock a student's full potential for the rest of the day. The amount of sleep one gets determines how much motivation and effort he or she will have for schoolwork. Going to school daily, fully rested, enhances concentration and improves memory, making it easier for the brain to understand and learn new information. To make this happen, it is crucial to establish a regular sleep schedule and stick to it. Aim to go to sleep no later than 11 PM.

Instead of cramming information before tests and pulling all-nighters, a habit of regularly reviewing material learned each day can be extremely beneficial in the long run. Constant reviewing of material not only strengthens one's understanding, but also makes it easier to study for an upcoming test on that subject. This could be reviewing notes or writing a summary of what was learned that day. Speaking

of notes, having notes for each class is important to better understand the material. Developing a system of note-taking that works best for you is important to consistently practice that habit. Whether it's digital or handwritten, the act of putting pen to paper can make a big difference.

Balancing school and personal life may be challenging as time is a precious resource. Therefore, creating a schedule that includes specific times for studying, assignments, sports, extracurricular activities, and recharging can help students tackle their chaotic school life while keeping calm in their personal lives as well. Additionally, keeping a separate planner to prioritize tasks and set realistic goals during the school week can keep everything organized.

Incorporating these simple A+ habits into daily life will not only enhance students' academic success but also help create a foundation for a productive and peaceful school experience. Despite the challenges school may bring, maintaining these healthy, consistent habits can lessen the stress and contribute to a better version of life!

Student Reporter

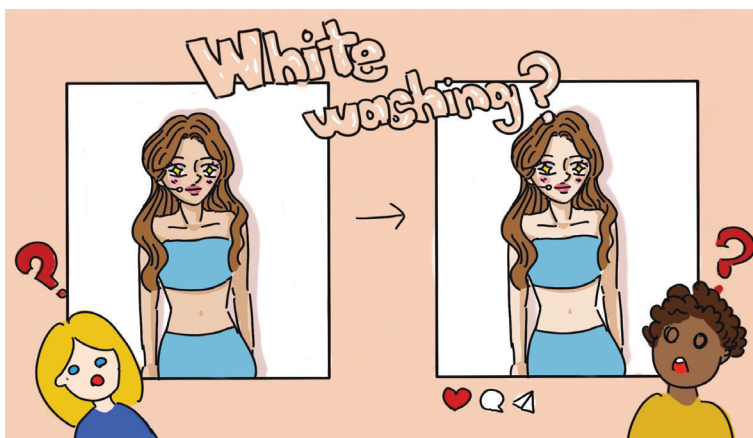
Why Koreans Whitewash Idols: Origins of Beauty Standards



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As K-pop initiated its golden age in the international market, the industry faced growing controversies, especially from its increasingly diverse fan base. One of the major concerns of some international fans is that the K-pop idols are "whitewashed," meaning that K-pop idols are being forced to match the Western—specifically Caucasian—complexion. Such a claim emerges from the K-pop industry and Koreans' exceptional preference for "white and flawless skin." For instance, many K-pop idols' skin colors in media are edited to look whiter and brighter, and the idols are passionate about keeping their skin fairer with make-up, skincare, and therapy. However, while it is undeniable that K-beauty standards emphasize whiter skin tones, such a trend does not originate from Western influence, nor does it imply racism or colorism; rather, it is rooted in Korea's unique cultural and historical context.

To understand the origins of this preference, it's crucial to differentiate between the Korean ideal of "white skin" and the Western notion of "Caucasian



International K-pop fans often express confusion at the "whitewashed" photos of K-pop idols.
[Source: Author, Sujin Kang]

white skin. The Korean view of the ideal "white skin" focuses on light skin that glows like a pearl with a flawless and plump texture, while the "white skin as part of race distinction" does not necessarily involve such characteristics. In fact, records from the Chosun Dynasty describe the Western merchants' skin with terms like "hong-in (redmen)" or "myeon-cheol (iron-face)," suggesting that the Western white skin was viewed as "light in color but easily reddened and rusty." This presents

a perceivable equivocation between the Korean and Western "white skins."

Why then do Koreans and K-pop idols prefer such white skin? One of the functional reasons is that fairer skin better emphasizes other facial features. Since one of the K-pop idols' priorities is to look good on camera, making facial features stand out with contour and color is essential. A contour works better with a fairer skin tone, contrasting the facial

features that need to be emphasized with the rest of the face. Also, since Koreans tend to use more reserved and skin-toned colors such as beige and pink in makeup, a fairer skin tone is important to help those colors stand out and add a natural vivacity to the face. For instance, Taeyeon, a member of SNSD, is known for pulling off a diverse spectrum of styles and makeup due to her clear and white skin tone.

Moreover, the partiality of white skin is due to its historical symbolism of wealth and status. Korea had been an agricultural society for thousands of years, and untanned skin conveyed that the possessor did not have to work in fields under the raging sun. Also, fairer skin suggested enough wealth for the possessor to eat with a balanced diet and nutrients, so having white and untanned skin indicated the wealth and status of the possessor and had been the standard of beauty throughout history. As such, the K-beauty standard of "white skin" has its own cultural and historical reasons beyond Westernization.

Student Reporter

Too Much, Too Soon: The Stress of Early Study in Korea



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In South Korea, the relentless push for academic excellence starts at a young age. Elementary school students are expected to learn high school-level subjects earlier, which places immense pressure on their young shoulders. To understand the impact, I spoke with a fourth-grade student, whom we will call "Soo" because she wanted an anonymous interview. Soo recently began studying high school math and is already feeling the strain.

Soo, who is currently in the fourth grade, spends her afternoons at a private academy, grappling with algebra problems that most students don't encounter until much later. "I started high school math a few months ago," Soo shared. "At first, I thought it would be exciting to learn something advanced, but now it is just too hard and stressful."

Her daily routine is extremely demanding. After a full day at school, she heads straight to the academy, where she spends several hours before returning home to finish her homework. Weekends, instead of being a time for rest and play, are filled with additional study sessions.

"I don't have time to play with my friends anymore," Soo said. "I miss playing games and just having fun."

The pressure is also taking a toll on Soo's mental health. She often feels anxious and overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon her. "I get really nervous about making mistakes," she confided. "Sometimes, I feel like I'm not good enough, and it makes me very sad." Soo even mentioned that the constant studying has affected her sleep. "I dream about math problems," she said. "Even when I go to bed, I can't stop thinking about the homework I have to finish. It's like my brain never gets to rest."

This kind of early academic pressure can have long-term negative effects. According to researchers Malik and Marwaha, children need time to develop socially and emotionally, and pushing them too hard academically can lead to burnout, anxiety, and even depression. In South Korea's highly competitive educational environment, however, many parents feel that early academic achievement is essential for their chil-



Soo, overwhelmed with her studies, covers her face in frustration as she struggles with her math homework.
[Source: Author, Seo Yun Lee]

dren's future success.

Soo's parents are among those who believe that advanced study will give their child a competitive edge. "We just want the best for her," her mother explained. "We want her to have good opportunities and be successful. It's tough, but we believe it's necessary." Despite their good intentions, the reality for students like Soo is a life

dominated by study and stress.

As we reflect on Soo's experiences, it becomes clear that the drive for early academic achievement must be balanced with the need to preserve childhood. The voices of these young students remind us of the importance of allowing children to enjoy their formative years without the constant burden of academic pressure.