

Editors Column

# Learning from the Navy : SAME Engineering Camp



**Erin Ryu**  
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Harvard-Westlake School



**Squad 1 stood victorious after having captured all the rest of the squads' flags after the cardboard boat race.**  
[Source: Author, Erin Ryu]



**After a hearty meal of MREs (Meal Ready to Eat), Squad 1 posed in front of a beach, ready to return to the airplane hangar.**  
[Source: Author, Erin Ryu]

Recently, the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) wrapped up its engineering camp at Port Hueneme, Ventura County, in California. The naval base was used to host high school students interested in engineering, the military, or the intersection of both. I had the privilege of attending the camp, and was sponsored by the Oxnard Post, or the American Legion Post 48, and learned a multitude of skills from this unique experience, ranging from those used in construction in addition to leadership and teamwork. 40

high schoolers from all over, including regions in California, the East Coast, and even internationally, like Spain, convened for a week of a lifetime.

The camp started off similarly to any other program, with students being separated into squads and getting to know each other. However, we would soon be thrown outside of anything we were used to. We started by sawing away and sanding wooden beams to make jenga blocks, then were able to meet one of the chief commanders of the Sea

Bees (the name given to the navy's construction battalion, the team that deals with infrastructure and construction), and finally retired to, not the usual dorm rooms and bunks, but rows of cots in a gymnasium. The next day, after getting up at 5:30 AM, we got a chance to create concrete beams, take a dive into the different branches of the Sea Bees, and try out soldering, steelworking, and operating equipment. For the rest of the week, we had numerous student-led projects, including building pop-

sicle stick bridges, bottle rockets, unmanned underwater rovers, and cardboard boats. When we weren't hard at work planning and creating, we were able to spend time with Nav-Air, visiting airplane hangars and participating in simulations, and Nav-Sea, visiting operating facilities used to test and build underwater warfare. One of the highlights of the week was working with my group to create a boat out of pieces of cardboard, duct tape, and Saran Wrap that was able to hold four people back and forth from a pool. Afterward, we were able to go to the beach, where I was able to spend time reflecting on the plethora of opportunities I was given and the great role models I was exposed to throughout the week.

Though the prospect of attending a military camp was daunting at first, I found to falling in love with each activity I participated in throughout the week. As I continued to forge deeper connections with my squad, I was able to rekindle my interest in aviation, which was always with me but never fully realized until this camp. Although SAME is over now, the memories and experiences will always be with me and the other students as we become scientists, military personnel, and better citizens in the future.

Student Reporter

# Where's the Party, and Can You Take Me There?



**Reanna Lee**  
Grade 11  
North Hollywood High School

Every season is Broadway season in New York City—and what better place to watch a Broadway show set in the Big Apple? First produced in 2023, *The Great Gatsby* is a musical based on the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel of the same name. When I first read the book, I was a first-semester 10th grader looking to expand my reading checklist. Little did I know that this book would change my perspective on literature forever.

As a theater kid, I fell in love with the drama and grandeur of *The Great Gatsby*. When I found out it had been adapted into a Broadway musical, my worlds collided. I knew I had to see it, so when I visited New York this past summer, I immediately made a reservation at the Broadway theater.



**My Playbill and the venue before *The Great Gatsby*, while I eagerly awaited the start.**  
[Source: Author, Reanna Lee]



**The actors bowed after the show finale of *The Great Gatsby*, which I was able to attend in New York.**  
[Source: Author, Reanna Lee]

Upon entering the venue, the air was different. The excited chatter of the audience filing in hyped me up, and from my seat I could see the stage clearly, where there was a beautifully illuminated green background that matched the theme of the playbill. At first glance, this musical was already looking like a masterpiece.

When the lights dimmed and the crowd hushed, a silhouette appeared on the stage, one that would later be introduced as the narrator of the story, Nick Carraway. Throughout the musical, he was always on stage, whether it be in the spotlight or the shadows,

watching the drama unfold before him. Anyone familiar with the novel would know that the unraveling of each event in the story leaves you more shocked than the last. How difficult is that in the world of theater? Not very. The extravagance of the American 1920s timeline within *The Great Gatsby* is probably the easiest to adapt into a Broadway-style musical, but I was still blown away. The execution of everything was incredibly well done—I was surprised at

how easy it was to follow along with. I was especially impressed with the set design and lighting. Every scene and song was so creative and unique. It was almost as if each character took their own part as narrators alongside Nick, implementing things like shock and beauty to the show. Not to mention, they illuminated the actors, who were all insanely talented (even considering two of them were understudies!), amazingly. I was totally inspired by Dariana

Mullen, who played Jordan Baker, because of her absolutely stunning vocal skills. In my opinion, she shone the most in this production out of all the actors. Her singing was so powerful, and her acting skills were out of this world. It helped that Jordan was my favorite character.

This was definitely the best show I have seen in a while. If I could watch it again, I 100% would—and I recommend this to anyone visiting New York City!

Student Reporter

# Tackle Problems as a Leader: The Red Cross LDC



**Tae Lee**  
Grade 9  
Science Academy STEM Magnet

Every summer, the American Red Cross hosts a leadership camp, open to high school and college students, designed to build confidence and core leadership skills through teamwork activities. This program works to promote diversity, as well as raise awareness regarding methods to decrease mental and physical struggles. The Red Cross's leadership development camp (LDC) spanned five days, with a packed schedule on each one, ensuring participants leave with meaningful lessons and experiences.

From the very first day, I noticed something different about LDC. Unlike other programs I'd attended, this camp is almost entirely run by the youth, with returning participants taking on the roles of counselors, organizers, and program leaders. Seeing people my age lead with such confidence inspired not only me, but other delegates as well. This

unique peer-led approach created an environment where leadership felt attainable and learning was fun.

The heart of LDC lies in its workshops and activities, which combine skills with personal growth. Days were packed with activities that developed students in areas like public speaking, interviewing, and quick thinking. One morning, I found myself on stage in front of all the delegates and staff, sharing a personal story. On another day, we talked about private struggles we each face, assuring that no one should feel alone with their challenges. The day after that, we practiced disaster preparedness by running through real-life emergency scenarios. I learned how to perform CPR, triage, and how to respond to situations using the Red Cross's International Humanitarian Law principles. These weren't just camp games— they were skills I

could take and use to help people in my community.

In addition, I believe that LDC is more than its formal sessions. The magic of the camp wasn't only in the lessons, it was in the people. During shared meals, closing circles, and those brief moments between activities, delegates formed friendships that often last long even after camp ends. These bonds were genuine, built from shared experiences during the course of five days and nights. Sharing a roof with other delegates after a long day connected us, making sure nobody felt alone throughout their time at camp. For many of us, LDC was the first place we met peers who dealt with similar struggles, and that mutual understanding became a source of motivation long after the week ended. We came from different cities, cultures, and backgrounds, but were connected by the same goal: to help. I realized that leadership



**My camp staff and I pose for a timeless memory of the Red Cross's LDC camp.**  
[Source: Author, Tae Lee]

isn't just about being in charge; it's about listening, understanding, and building trust with those around you.



Student Reporter

Cooling Off from SAT Prep at Caribbean Bay



Kevin Jeong  
Grade 10  
Cheongna Dalton School



People are waiting for the wave pool to start to experience massive waves which will help them cool off during the hot summer heat.  
[Source: Author, Kevin Jeong]

For many international high school students, summer “break” is just a different flavor of school: hours of SAT prep, a bunch of extracurriculars, and endless problem sets. But one sunny August day, my friends and I got tired of

this repeated cycle and headed to Caribbean Bay, Korea’s famous water park.

With temperatures hitting 38°C (that’s over 100°F for those of you in America) and the air thick with humidity, the park felt

like a microwave, but the cold water that splashed us sent a shiver down our spines. We weren’t just escaping the heat; we were escaping the constant pressure of academics.

I’d been to Caribbean Bay with my family before, but with friends, it felt brand new. We started at the Mega Storm, a massive water slide that had us screaming through every twist before plunging into the pool below. The adrenaline instantly melted away any lingering thoughts about the SAT. From there, we challenged each other to the Water Bob-sleigh, floated down the Lazy River, and took on the obstacle course. Every ride turned into a contest of who could scream the loudest or who could not scream at all.

“It was the first time in weeks I wasn’t thinking about school,” said my friend Siwon Kang, “The water rides just made me feel like a kid again.” Ryan Cho, another friend, added, “It’s not just about the rides, it’s enjoying the last bit of summer together. That’s what made it special.”

But it wasn’t just about thrill rides. The shaded cabanas scattered around the park offered us a cool and chill place to relax. We lounged with ice-cold slushies, shared snacks, and plotted

our next ride while the summer sun continued to grill our skins. These small moments were just as memorable and fun!

By the end of the day, our legs ached from climbing stairs to the slides, and our skin was burned from hours exposed to the sun. But mentally, we felt renewed. The stress of academics had been replaced by a lightness we hadn’t felt in weeks.

Caribbean Bay wasn’t just an escape from the heat, it was a reminder of balance. In a country where summer often means more studying, it’s easy to forget that rest is just as essential. A day spent laughing with your friends can recharge you in ways a quiet study break never could.

Looking back, the trip wasn’t just about cooling off. It was about connection with friends, with the moment, and with the kind of joy that comes when you forget about schedules and deadlines. The SAT will come and go, but memories with your friends are priceless.

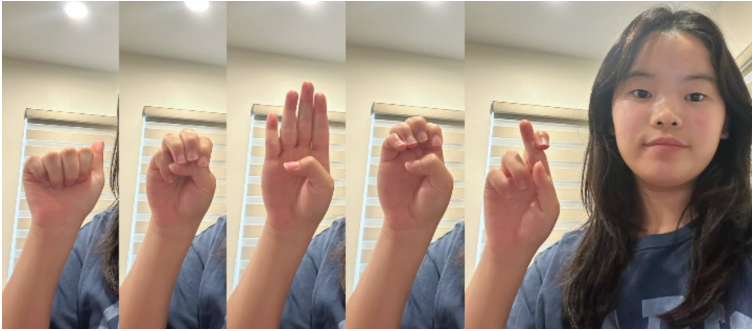
In the end, Caribbean Bay gave us more than just an escape from studies; rather, it gave us the kind of summer that reminded us how making memories is important. Sometimes, the best preparation for the future is to let yourself live fully in the present.

Student Reporter

Sign Language: Communicating Through Hearts and Hands



Amber Lee  
Grade 10  
La Mirada High School



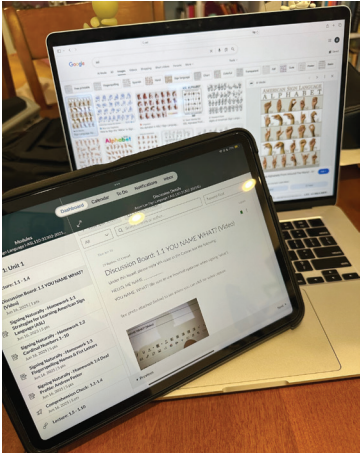
Signing my name (AMBER) in American Sign Language.  
[Source: Author, Amber Lee]

Imagine a silent world where instead of hearing and speaking, you communicate with your heart and hands. That’s what sign language and deaf culture felt like to me after taking the American Sign Language (ASL 1) course over the summer. While exploring different classes for my interests, I discovered this dual enrollment course offered by my school.

At first, I was reluctant to enroll, as learning a new language isn’t easy. To be honest, I didn’t even know that each country has its own version of sign language, like how American Sign Language and Korean Sign Language are different. Though, as someone interested in linguistics, I gave it a try.

The first thing I learned in the class was how to sign my name. It felt as if I went back to kindergarten, signing the alphabet one by one. Although the strict deadlines and the many assignments every week were stressful, I was happy to learn new signs as the unit progressed. In the blink of an eye, I was done with the six units and had learned to not only sign my name and an introductory statement, but also shapes, colors, numbers, household chores, directions, ASL folk stories, and more.

Although it has been a couple of weeks since the course ended, I took away a major lesson on how emotion plays a huge part in communication. One of the first things



The ASL 1 course module is filled with assignments like discussion boards, comprehension checks, quizzes, tests, and homework from the Signing Naturally app.  
[Source: Author, Amber Lee]

I learned in the ASL class, after the alphabet, was how essential facial expressions are when signing. If you sign the correct words with an expressionless face, the person who is receiving your sign could misunderstand your message. Ranging from smiling and furrowing your eyebrows to tilting your head and entire body, the signer’s expressions are very important.

Focusing on making various

lively expressions while signing made me realize how little we express ourselves in our everyday lives. On the streets, people stare down into their phones or maintain a blank face. In school hallways, most students are expressionless, looking drained and stressed. I’m not saying we never smile or don’t make any facial expressions at all, but it does feel like we spend more time being face-to-face with a screen than an actual human nowadays. The deterioration of our communication skills from these everyday routines of being online can definitely be resolved by learning sign language, as you will learn how to get used to expressing yourself with your facial expressions and signing actions.

Learning ASL felt like moving back to the basics of communication in the best way possible. I’m planning to take ASL 2 next summer, for both my academics and personal interests. While it’s not common to regularly interact with deaf people as a student, I would definitely recommend trying out sign language, as it truly feels like entering an alternate universe that is silent yet lively in its very own way.

Student Reporter

The Crucial Impacts of Hope Squad at School



Ava Je  
Grade 8  
Sierra Vista Middle School

Recent data show evidence of a significant and worsening crisis in youth mental health and suicide attempts. In response to this growing issue, my school is part of a peer-to-peer suicide prevention program called Hope Squad. It is run by three school counselors and a group of carefully selected students taught to recognize emotional distress in others and connect them with trusted adults for help. For the past 3 years, this nationwide program has helped build a safe community on campus by ensuring that no one feels alone or discouraged.

Oftentimes, students hesitate to reach out to adults or other resources for help because they lack a connection and feel unsafe discussing vulnerable topics. However, they may feel more comfortable turning to friends in Hope Squad, which allows them to seek support in a safer, more approachable way. Having this program develops a special bond among the students at school, creating an environment where no one is judgmental and everyone is supportive. It promotes respect, mental health awareness, self-care, kindness, and trust.

Furthermore, Hope Squad



Hope Squad organizes game and craft booths for peers during lunch.  
[Source: Author, Ava Je]

hosts fun activities during lunch at school. The group comes up with various ideas for special days, such as Wellness Wednesday, where students can participate in crafts or games focused on mental health. Being able to connect with other students while creating memories helps build trust among everyone. In addition, posters are hung up around the school, reminding everyone about upcoming events, ways to get help, and positive quotes.

However, Hope Squad is about much more than games and crafts.

At its core, the program focuses on suicide prevention, approaching the topic with great care and compassion. Members are educated on how to have serious conversations with peers and recognize when someone may be experiencing suicidal thoughts or emotional distress. It is very crucial to connect students to professional counselors and trusted adults when needed. At my school, Hope Squad meets two times per week for presentations, discussions, and projects. Members receive a list of trusted resources, such as



Hope Squad hosts activities, such as crocheting, for students at school.  
[Source: Author, Ava Je]

the Hope Squad website and Say Something, an anonymous reporting system where warning signs of potential violence or self-harm can be reported. Ensuring that every student feels safe and supported is our priority.

The change that this suicide prevention program has made at my school is definite. Not only does it connect students through relaxing and entertaining activities, but it also makes sure that they all have a close peer for serious talks and to seek help from. Hope Squad is a crucial