

Editors Column

Real Life in L.A. vs. Social Media Fantasy



Sora Ju
Grade 11
Geffen Academy



Though Erewhon's rainbow of smoothies dominates social feeds, the scene captures just one facet of Los Angeles—an aesthetic highlight that contrasts with the far more ordinary rhythms of real life in the city.
[Source: Author, Sora Ju]

Countless posts on social media show the lives of influencers and celebrities living out what seems to be the epitome of a glamorous

daily life in Los Angeles. For those who use TikTok, the “I love being an LA POS” trend, in particular, is sure to be something rele-

vant—perfectly curated clips of Erewhon smoothies, long lunches at trendy cafés, shopping sprees on Rodeo Drive, and sunsets in Malibu. These videos capture a dreamy, aesthetic version of Los Angeles life. But as someone who actually lives there, this version of LA only captures a small part of the reality.

I love living in LA. I go to Community Goods often—a popular cafe known for being one of Justin and Hailey Bieber’s favorites—(and yes, their matcha is worth the two-hour-long line on weekends), and I love Erewhon’s hot bar as well as its limited-edition smoothies just as much as anyone. But these experiences are not a big part of my daily routine, or most people’s who are living in the city. They are small luxuries, things we enjoy once in a while.

The version of LA that influencers and celebrities post online is beautiful, but it is also highly selected and filtered. Behind every seemingly effortless brunch or designer shopping day is a lot of money, planning, and, oftentimes, sponsorship also plays a factor. Meanwhile, the real LA lifestyle looks more like sitting in frustrating traffic on the 405 freeway, grabbing coffee before school occasionally, or hanging out at a friend’s house, because going out every morning and night simply

is not realistic for most citizens.

A regular day for most of us in LA starts early, rushing to school or work. Some mornings, I might stop for an iced matcha latte from a local spot instead of a \$20 smoothie. After school, I stay at home completing my homework, and occasionally try to squeeze in time with my friends and family. On weekends, sure, locals might go to the beach, try a new restaurant, or window shop at The Grove, but these activities are more of a treat than the norm. The LA aesthetic moments are a part of life in this city, but they are more sporadic, sprinkled between the regular, messy, busy parts of real life that we all know.

Social media tends to glorify a lifestyle that only a tiny percentage of people can actually afford, and this can make everyday life feel less exciting in comparison. However, the charm of living in LA is not merely the luxurious lifestyle we often see perpetuated online—rather, it’s the city’s mix of cultures, the small family-owned restaurants and hidden gem shops, and the sunny people, which make the city feel alive beyond TikTok and Instagram’s glorified highlight reels. Definitely, the matcha is good and the sunsets are even better, but the real LA is more than just an aesthetic.

Student Reporter

When Motivation Fades: Purpose Beyond Pressure



Grace Kim
Grade 11
Ruben S. Ayala High School

At Ayala High, everyone seems to be busy chasing something — grades, college acceptances, varsity spots, or leadership titles. But behind the packed schedules and perfect planners, a lot of students are quietly burning out.

“I used to wake up excited to go to school,” said junior Emily H. “Now, I just go through the motions. It’s like I’m doing everything right, but I don’t feel anything.”

That feeling is more common than people think. Burnout happens when students keep pushing without time to rest or reset. Math 3 teacher Mr. Kim says it’s something he’s been seeing more often. “Students today are under constant pressure from parents, teachers, and even themselves,” he said. “They tie their worth to performance, and that’s a heavy weight to carry.”

A big reason for burnout is comparison to others. With social media full of posts about grades, awards, and acceptances, it’s easy to feel like everyone else is doing better. “Every time I went on Instagram, I’d see someone posting about their GPA or their college,” said junior Jason T. “It made me feel like I was already behind.”

That constant comparison



Although it may seem like the end of the world when it is happening, burnout doesn’t mean failure.
[Source: Author, Grace Kim]

often feeds into another kind of pressure – the fear of failure. Many students push themselves because they’re scared of what will happen if they don’t. But that pressure often leads to losing motivation altogether. It’s like run-

ning a race that never ends. No matter how far you go, the finish line keeps moving farther away.

For some, burnout forces a slowdown – and that’s when changes begin. Emily H. started taking weekends off from study-

ing and picked up painting again, something she hadn’t done since middle school. “It helped me realize I’m more than my grades,” she said. “Once I stopped trying to be perfect, I actually started enjoying learning again.”

Mr. Kim believes the key is finding balance. He often reminds his students that rest isn’t lazy — it’s necessary. Taking breaks, setting limits, and reconnecting with hobbies can actually help students stay motivated longer. He encourages all of them to see motivation as something that needs care, not constant pressure.

At a school like Ayala, where high expectations are the norm, it’s easy to forget that students are human, too. Between academics, extracurriculars, and the push to succeed, many forget to take care of themselves as much as they do their goals. Learning to pause, recharge, and reflect doesn’t mean giving up; it means building the strength to keep going.

In the end, success isn’t just about how hard students work, but how well they care for their well-being along the way. Motivation can fade, but purpose, when nurtured with balance and compassion, will always return.

Student Reporter

Dia de los Muertos at Lexington Junior High



Grace Song
Grade 8
Lexington Junior High School

On October 31st, Lexington Junior High School held a lively celebration that brought together students and teachers to honor Mexican culture. During lunch, the school was filled with music, food, art, and performances for the celebration of Dia de los Muertos. From the moment students stepped out of class, they could feel the excitement in the air, with decorations, food, and energy creating a festive atmosphere that everyone could enjoy.

Although this was a one-day event, it took months to prepare for it. Several different classes contributed to this event, including Advanced Home Economics. Advanced Home Economics is an elective class offered at Lexington that teaches food preparation, nutrition, and more. For this Dia de los Muertos event, Advanced Home Economics made an impressive 472 enchiladas and 400 sugar cookies. Kayla Umayam, a student in the class, explained, “We learned that we were going to do the catering event about two and a half weeks before the actual event. The first week was going through what

the event actually was, and the second week was how a catering event works. Like jobs, food service, and what food we are making. Then the last half week was actually making the food.” Thanks to the dedication and hard work of Advanced Home Economics, students were able to enjoy a hot enchilada with a sweet sugar cookie that day.

Meanwhile, the art class at Lexington transformed the Multipurpose Room into a small gallery with pieces of art inspired by Mexican culture. Some students decorated skulls with colored paint, while others embossed aluminum with flowers or skull designs. Some even used yarn to thread intricate patterns onto paper. Thanks to their creativity and effort, the multipurpose room was filled with colorful flowers, skulls, and festive decorations.

Spanish classes also made meaningful contributions by creating boxes honoring influential Mexican figures. These ofrenda-style boxes were decorated with flowers, candles, and food, along with a short biogra-



On Dia de los Muertos, P.E. Dance students performed “La Llorona” and “Thriller,” showcasing the hard work they put into weeks of practice.
[Source: Sierra Stempke]

phy about each chosen person. Displayed in the multipurpose room, the boxes told stories about athletes, activists, grandparents, and more, each made with care and appreciation.

Lastly, the four P.E. Dance classes came together to perform “La Llorona” and “Thriller.” Each class practiced these two dances separately during their periods for nearly a month. On the day

of the celebration, students wore face paint inspired by Day of the Dead designs and festive clothing. As lunch began, the dancers performed their well-rehearsed routine, bringing energy and excitement to this event.

Overall, Lexington Junior High’s Dia de los Muertos celebration was a huge success and a day of bonding, celebrating, and learning Mexican culture.

Editors Column

Metafiction in the Classroom



Audrey Park
Grade 12
Northwood High School



In-class simulations for AP U.S. Government may encourage students who represent interest groups to create flyers in order to attract voters to a certain party. [Source: Audrey Park, Author]

For a student, there’s only one place where you can ask Joe Biden about the current political climate and strike a fierce debate with a National Rifle Association representative, all within the same hour. It happens in a history classroom.

During the past few weeks, my AP United States Government class participated in a simulation for a Presidential election. Students were either assigned supporting roles or volunteered for highly involved positions, such as the presidential candidate for each party or the media cover-



Simulations in AP U.S. Government may mirror real-life elections, where mailers and advertisements must be made according to an interest group’s values. [Source: Author, Audrey Park]

age teams. Ultimately, the work that students put into perfecting their role would be accumulated throughout weeks and eventually pay off in the General Election, where the candidates selected by the various primaries would do their final campaigns.

Throughout the simulation, there were various breaking news segments, which introduced new, controversial information, and advertisement breaks for interest groups in order to keep the experience as authentic as possible. Ultimately, this simulation helped numerous students internalize pertinent systems within the United States election process through enter-

tainment and debates.

Because of this successful run, I reflected on simulations in other subjects and the factors that make them so effective. For instance, my Personal Finance course through Irvine Valley College’s dual enrollment program explored different types of insurance by assigning student groups to roles. From being selected to represent health insurance workers or car accident victims, students were educated on the real-life repercussions that require insurance through active recall and research.

Another simulation that necessitated consistent active recall happened during Introduction to

Health. Some students would be a ‘mental health awareness advocate’ and research their assigned topic or disorder. They would then talk to a select few ‘audience members’ at an imaginary convention and inform them about how they could support individuals with their specified conditions. On top of the research aspect, these conversations would be personal and more direct. Instead of debates, ideas about certain conditions that are often stigmatized would drive emotional connection or interest.

Although simulations can be time-consuming and require extensive research when prompts aren’t offered, they have been incorporated into various Humanities and Social Science-related courses throughout all four years of my high school experience. Most instructors who assign these projects have likely found that simulations are a plausible alternative to dense textbook pages or mind-numbing worksheets. Simulation-based activities not only immerse students in the past or possible future scenarios, but they also demonstrate that entertainment can be an effective supplement for learning.

So, the next time a teacher announces a class simulation, don’t simply turn your head away in apathy. Otherwise, you’ll miss the instructions on how to live in the content you’re learning.

Student Reporter

How to Host a Holiday Donation Drive



Ellie Kim
Grade 10
Portola High School

With recent government shut-downs affecting programs like food stamps and housing assistance, many families are struggling this holiday season. With Thanksgiving right around the corner, consider this a chance to give back to your community and help those in need have a warmer holiday season.

As my high school’s ASB Service Projects Commissioner, I organized our annual Thanksgiving food drive. Here are a few key things I’ve learned about organizing a successful donation drive for your community.

The first step is to determine both your donees (people who will be receiving donations) and donors (the people giving them). As for donees, ask yourself who you want to help: children hoping for gifts, families needing food, or individuals experiencing homelessness and in need of warm clothes? With this figured out, reach out to a non-profit organization that can distribute your donations. Consider supporting local organizations, which serve as a great option for many nearby families who are part of your own community. However, partnering with a larger non-profit can also boost the credibility of your



Portola’s ASB gathered together with all the goods collected from student donations after one of the school’s first Thanksgiving Food Drives. [Source: Author, Ellie Kim]

donation drive. As for donors, although your main goal should be the community as a whole, decide which group would be most likely to donate.

In my case, although the donation drive was open to anyone part of the Portola community, the main target donors were the students and their parents. This

leads to the next two crucial elements in the success of a donation drive: incentives and publicity.

For incentives, ask yourself: what would make a person want to donate? Parents are often motivated by the cause behind the drive—who is helped by it, how it helps those people, etc. Therefore, we emphasized that the donations

would be going to local families struggling and in need of basic necessities. On the other hand, students are often motivated to donate by fun and more tangible incentives. Think of what connections and what supplies you have at your disposal to truly maximize community participation.

Finally, the most impactful element of all is publicity. No one will donate if no one knows about your drive. Use social media, physical flyers, and word of mouth to spread information about it. Make sure to advertise all important information: where and when to donate, what items are accepted, who the donations will benefit, and—most importantly—the incentives offered.

Although organizing a community-wide service project may seem daunting, there are still small, yet meaningful contributions everyone can make to their community. Try dropping off a couple of the cans lying in your pantry to a local non-profit organization or donating some extra blankets to a homeless shelter. When times are tough, the best we can do is stand together. Let’s each start in our local communities to make this holiday season a little warmer for everyone.

Editors Column

Starbucks Holiday 2025: What’s New



Kaylyn Yu
Grade 11
Chantilly High School

On a random school day, I noticed several people—both students and staff—with eye-catching red-and-green Starbucks cups. After a while, it occurred to me that it was the day of the release of their holiday menu, which was why everyone was excited to try the new drink flavors.

November 6, 2025, was Starbucks’ official release date for the holiday menu with the classic winter favorites, along with limited-edition merchandise. Returning winter signature drinks included the Peppermint Mocha, Sugar Cookie Latte, Iced Gingerbread Chai, Egg Nog Latte, and several other flavor combinations. The Holiday Bakery also brought tasty additions, such as the Cinnamon Pull-Apart and Polar Bear Cake Pop. Lastly, a major impact was roused by the special edition merchandise, specifically the “Bearista” cup.

For \$30, the “Bearista” cup is an adorable 20-ounce teddy-bear-shaped glass cup with a straw. Although its cute design was a factor that led to its extremely high demand, the low supply na-

tionwide was the main reason for its increased value. With the aid of social media and influencers, the bear cup gained popularity over the span of just a few days, even causing fights within store locations. People began reselling the merchandise at extraordinary prices on eBay and other websites to desperate customers, with prices up to a few hundred dollars. Influencers began thinking of recreations of the revolutionary cold cups, using common bear honey bottles from the market or picking up dupes from other places for a much more affordable way to enjoy a cute drink.

Besides the lionized “Bearista” cups, other merchandise was also promoted. Hello Kitty and Starbucks conducted a collaboration, releasing an iconic boxed plush as well as the well-known logo on cups and mugs. Other Christmas-themed mugs and tumblers were also displayed along with these.

Following the frenzy of the new release, Starbucks held its annual Red Cup Day on November 13th, handing out limited-edition

reusable red grande cups with any holiday beverage order. As the stock was finite, many rushed to receive the prize.

Since Chantilly High School was located near a Starbucks location, I decided to visit with some friends in hopes of getting a red cup. I was surprised to find so many people in the small store, but I was able to successfully collect the last red cup before supplies ran out.

Lin Lett Aung, a teenage employee at Starbucks, commented that she enjoyed the recently added holiday menu and had fun making the drinks. “I got the Hello Kitty plush, even though it is really cute, I would rather spend \$40 on something more useful.” She shared that the store in which she worked was also packed with unusual visitors in the event of Red Cup Day.

Although the trendy Starbucks merchandise and holiday hype are engaging, it may not be worth it to obsess over a short-lived promotion, and enjoy the reality of the winter season that the Starbucks menu highlights.



The “Bearista” cup is an adorable 20-ounce teddy-bear-shaped glass cup with a straw that has caused a national craze. [Source: Matthew Chu]