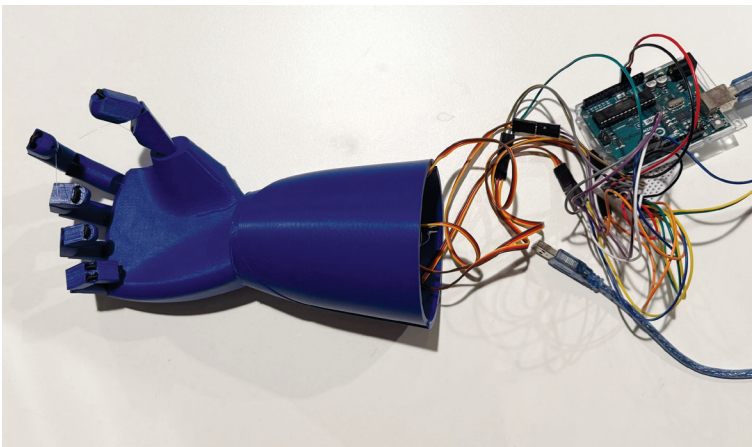


Student Reporter

## Enjoy Your Break: Engineering Projects at Home



Theo Lim  
Grade 12  
Crescenta Valley High School



The finished product: a robotic arm. Lots of wires to organize, but that's for later!  
[Source: Author, Theo Lim]

As the first semester of my senior year came to an end, winter break finally arrived. Unlike the sunny breaks I was used to, this one was unusually cold and rainy; it definitely wasn't the ideal weather for a SoCal resident. I spent most of my time at home, aside from hangouts and holiday outings with family and friends. At first, I enjoyed the rest. But after a few days, I started feeling the need to keep my brain active. That

was when I decided to restart an old summer engineering project I never fully finished: a robotic prosthetic arm.

The project began on my laptop with CAD (computer-aided design) software. From the palm to the individual finger joints, I had already designed a 3D model last summer, so all I had to do was ask my friend with a 3D printer to do me a favor. With the base properly printed out, I moved on to

prepare the components needed for the movement of the hand.

From various online websites and a local hardware store, I gathered the following parts: rubber bands, fishing wire, servo motors, hot glue, an Arduino Uno, breadboard, and flex sensors. Assembly was where things got really exciting: it was time to do some hands-on work. With a rubber band, I connected the finger joints to the palm to add tension. This helped the fingers return to a natural position after bending, making the motion feel more realistic. Then came the most frustrating step, where I had to connect the fishing wires from each finger to a servo motor. The angle and length of each wire mattered a lot: the finger wouldn't bend properly if the wires were too tight or too loose. My friend and I went through constant trial and error, adjusting the connections until all the fingers folded smoothly and evenly when the motors spun.

Then came coding. I had to re-learn C as a programming language, but I was glad to see so many tutorials and resources

online. Flex sensors were used to measure how bent the sensors were, so I calibrated and mapped those values. Essentially, the more bent the sensor is, the more the fingers would bend. With all five sensors attached to the fingers of the glove, I was ready to use the other hand to control the robot arm. Watching it work after so many trials felt unreal, and I was reminded of why I enjoy projects like this: working with a friend, troubleshooting together, and turning a shared frustration into a shared accomplishment.

This project taught me so much, from CAD and coding to assembly, but more than anything, it reminded me how fun building things can be. My friend and I failed countless times, redesigned parts, and retried over and over. Yet, that was the best part. Whether it's a simple build, like a light sensor-activated nightlight, or a complex LEGO creation, I recommend everyone try a homemade hands-on project when they're bored or looking for something new. The joy of building something is unbeatable!

Student Reporter

## Geoje Island: Places to Visit in the Winter



Irene Kim  
Grade 11  
University Laboratory High School



In response to growing visitors, shops have been built near Maemi Castle, such as this new cafe built above it, shown in the top left.  
[Source: Author, Irene Kim]

This winter break, my family and I visited Geoje Island in South Gyeongsang Province, South Korea, which is at the very southern tip of the country. While heading to the island, I learned that freezing weather was forecasted for the days ahead. I was worried about what we'd do surrounded by the sea, without swimming being an option. But to my surprise, I was not only entertained throughout the trip, but I also learned a lot of history.

My family's first historic stop was Maemi Castle. Located at the northeastern edge of Geoje, Maemi Castle, also known as Maemi Fortress, features an intricate brick wall facing the sea. At first glance, the wall is simply beautiful and visually complex, with its curved structure and stairs leading to watchtowers, but learning the backstory completely changed my view. After losing crops and arable land to Typhoon Maemi in 2003, Soon-sam Baek built the wall with his own hands, taking decades to accomplish, to prevent further damage from natural disasters. The hundreds

of stacked bricks were works of unimaginably hard dedication and persistence. Soon-sam Baek continues to build and manage the wall today, serving visitors nationwide.

The pedestrian path leading to Maemi Castle was filled with street vendors, making it fun to walk through. As we passed by, shop owners announced freshly baked bread of different

kinds, tea, and traditional Korean drinks, some even offering samples to try. We didn't buy anything, so I can't comment on the quality, but the experience of walking through was lively and exciting.

The next site we visited was the Historic Park of Geoje POW Camp, located in the center of Geoje. The interactive park-museum built on the actual prison-

er-of-war camp grounds was arranged into a walkable tour with displays to visit. Geoje POW Camp was used during the Korean War to hold North Korean and Chinese Prisoners captured by the forces of the US-led United Nations and South Korea. The park included photos and doll replicas of POW life in the camp, as well as information on the war.

The park was entertaining and worth my time—approximately an hour and a half—but I would recommend researching the war and camp prior to visiting and using the park as a supplement to that knowledge. There were a couple of points throughout the park where I was suspicious of the framing of information—either it was picturing life in the camp in an overly positive way to target a younger audience or standing pro-US and Seung-man Lee, the then president of South Korea, on information about the war.

Despite the cold weather, visiting Geoje Island was a fun and, surprisingly, an intellectually exciting experience.

Student Reporter

## What We Notice Only When School Pauses



Sarah Li  
Grade 11  
Crean Lutheran High School

Christmas break goes by in the blink of an eye. One moment, the morning feels never-ending. The next instant, the alarm signifies a return to the school routine. However, for many students, breaks never represent a pause from pressured school life. Feeling like an automaton, they study and review repeatedly until the vacation comes to an end. It is a continuation of school life, just without a classroom.

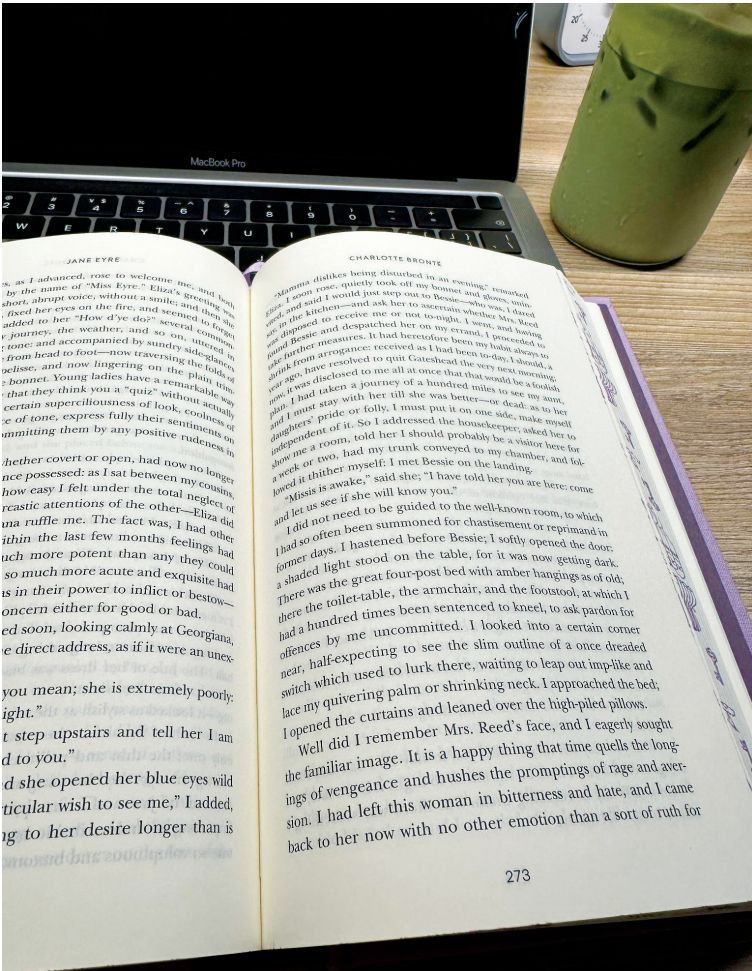
Breaks are designed for rest, but, especially nowadays, students feel like they should not even temporarily stop studying. AP review packets, SAT practice problems, and assignments from tutoring centers filled up what was supposed to be allotted leisure time. Even when schools don't give much homework, students often think that they should still be productive and stay on top of things. In a highly competitive academic environment, students possess a mindset that they should always accomplish more tasks than they've done. As a result, vacations lose their primary reason for existence. The so-called "free time" and the absence of deadlines, rather than relief, become a fresh wave of academic stress. In fact, many students don't return to school refreshed; individuals are typically just as exhausted as they were preceding their recess.

For me, though, I didn't spend the holiday break in endless studying or tight schedules. Instead,

I chose to relax and recharge. I woke up naturally, without setting an alarm at 6:30 in the morning. I delved into literature, enjoyed company with my family, and increased my time outdoors. I wasn't expecting that these activities would assist with my academics, and, even more importantly, cultivate my mind and spirits in ways that if I had solely studied through the vacation, couldn't have never experienced.

Reading wasn't just a source of entertainment for me. It introduced me to new worlds and thoughts. Observing life from various individuals' points of view enhanced my skills in empathizing with others and comprehending complex emotions. It also improved my concentration, which calmed my busy mind after a stressful school year. Other than improving my focus, my critical thinking skills were sharpened because the stories made me consider the underlying reasons driving each character's decisions and the subsequent outcomes.

Being in nature was also a crucial part of my time off. It provided a precious opportunity to step away from computer screens and textbooks that I spend all my time staring at during school days. The fresh air helped clear my mind, which allowed for full concentration on ensuing tasks. To my surprise, outdoor activities sparked my curiosity. The beauty and intricacy of the natural world raised questions that encouraged me to



I finished the book Jane Eyre during the recent winter break: it taught me life lessons and beneficial skills, showing that relaxation can be very beneficial during breaks.  
[Source: Author, Sarah Li]

delve deeper. This made studying more like an exciting exploration rather than an obligation.

Ultimately, this break taught

me that rest isn't a waste or a demonstration of falling behind. It's rather the key to academic success and staying healthy.



Editors Column

Mammoth Ski Resort Impacted by Avalanche



Summer Park  
Grade 11  
Harvard-Westlake School



Mammoth Ski Resorts closed during the busiest holiday season due to an Avalanche that occurred just before Christmas. [Source: Author, Summer Park]

An avalanche at Mammoth Lakes, located in Southern California, greatly affected holiday operations, closing the ski resort from December 25 through December 27. The closure disrupted holiday plans for skiers and snowboarders during one of the bus-

iest times of the year. Visitors who had planned extended stays found themselves waiting, going instead to the Village nearby for sledding, tubing, or even bowling venues, as the effects of the closure were felt strongly.

My family and I were among

those impacted by the shutdown. When we returned to the mountain on December 28, Mammoth was technically open, but was far from fully operational. Several lifts remained closed, and the lines for the lifts that were running were unusually long. Ski patrol presence was noticeable, and staff members seemed more cautious and vigilant, showing signs of the safety concerns surrounding heavy snow. It was not until December 29 that the resort finally returned to near-normal, allowing us to ski more freely and fully enjoy the mountain.

Many visitors had purchased multi-day tickets that could not be fully used as planned. Tea, who was visiting Mammoth with her family, was one of many guests who bought four-day quad passes before the avalanche. Due to the unexpected closures, her family now plans to return in either January or February to make up for the lost ski days. Their experience is an example of how an unexpected natural disaster alters the

course planned by visitors.

Although Mammoth Mountains did not make immediate public announcements confirming fatalities, news of the avalanche and its tragic consequences quickly spread through various news sources. Reports later revealed that two people had died as a result of the avalanche: one ski patrol member and one skier.

“The loss deeply affected the ski community, especially given the close-knit nature of mountain staff and frequent visitors,” said a ski instructor from New Zealand.

Throughout this difficult period, ski patrol workers, lift operators, ski instructors, and other staff worked hard to maintain as much normalcy as possible. Ultimately, the experience gave me a deeper appreciation for the mountain and the people who work there. Even as we enjoyed our time skiing, we kept those affected by the avalanche in our thoughts, recognizing the trip was far more than a holiday vacation.

Student Reporter

Reducing Screen Time with App Limits



Ava Je  
Grade 8  
Orange County School of the Arts

With many recent advancements in technology, such as new features on cell phones, the average screen time for teens has been consistently rising. Screens have taken over the majority of people’s time, with endless hours of doomscrolling. However, there is a solution to combat this increasing problem.

A 2024 article by the Jama Network states that many studies from over the years have shown that setting limits on a user’s phone can significantly reduce their screen time, which results in a healthier life and mind. Many teenagers with limits turned on have reported that it helps them manage school, explore hobbies, be creative, and connect with friends, as well as regularly getting a healthy amount of sleep.

For Apple devices, along with many other technology companies, App Limits or Screen Time Limits are features that allow the user or their guardian to set specific daily time boundaries for apps and websites. App limits refresh at midnight every day, and different limits for specific days are available as options. Moreover, the user can request more time from their guardian, or they can have them input their Screen



Limiting screen time can lead to a significant reduction in screen usage, which leads to many positive benefits, such as finishing work earlier or spending more time with friends. [Source: Author, Ava Je]

Time passcode as well. Another option is Downtime, which is where a guardian can choose to completely restrict their child’s apps and websites completely with no option for a request for more time.

As someone who has had Screen Time Limits and Downtime on all of my Apple devices, I have experienced the effects of it myself. Through the years, my

Screen Time Limits and Downtime schedules have fluctuated as I grew older and spent more time on my phone. However, the effects are evident despite my different restrictions. Having Screen Time significantly decreases phone usage and serves as a reminder to put down my phone and continue working. There are so many instances when I check my phone for any messages or notifications,

and end up going down a rabbit hole of one addicting app to another.

I have also learned that Downtime really pushes me to stay away from screens more than App Limits, since users have no option for extra time. This complete limitation prevents me from getting the slightest bit distracted, which results in better efficiency and productivity.

Looking back on my overall screentime, I can see that my average hours were much lower when my downtime was on compared to when it was off. Having it on during school hours allows for more focus and encouragement to socialize with friends instead of being on my device for the entirety of lunch.

Overall, App Limits and Downtime are extremely beneficial features on Apple devices that can be set up by anyone. While also helping me maintain a healthier sleep schedule and reduce screen time, it has evidently helped me balance my online time with other hobbies and academic work. Enabling this feature has the power to encourage all teens to take a break from their devices and prevent phone addictions from getting worse.

Student Reporter

137th Rose Parade, A Volunteer’s Experience



Katie Lee  
Grade 10  
The Science Academy STEM Magnet

The 137th Rose Parade made history as it faced rainfall for the first time in 20 years. Even with the rainy conditions, the annual New Year’s Day tradition continued as normal with bright-colored, creative floats, festive marching bands, and equestrian units filling the streets of Pasadena, California. Spectators in ponchos showed their dedication to this event by arriving early. The rain created a new atmosphere, leading to unforgettable memories for both participants and spectators.

During the parade, I had the opportunity to volunteer at the first-aid stations with the American Red Cross, allowing me to experience this event from a unique and new perspective. I was assigned to Station 3 out of 13 that were set up throughout the entire parade route. The volunteer teams for each first-aid station gathered together at 4:00 A.M. to set up the stations. Our duty was to assist the spectators who were experiencing dizziness, nausea, sprained ankles, hypothermia, and more. Working in the real world taught me to stay calm in any situation and to respond quickly to those in need. This experience not only strengthened my interest in the medical field but also made my first experience at the Rose Parade unforgettable.

Before the parade began, there was a lot of preparation to ensure that the first aid stations would work efficiently. From meeting early in the morning to organizing

the medical supplies, the position of the first-aid tents allowed us to respond quickly to anyone in need. Watching the coordination between the volunteers, Red Cross staff, and parade officials gave me new insights and appreciation for the smooth operation of a large event like the Rose Parade.

Volunteering at the 137th Rose Parade was an unforgettable experience that showed me how much coordination and effort it takes to run a large event. Even with the extreme rainy conditions, the parade continued to bring excitement to thousands of people, including the volunteers at the first aid stations. Whether it was from the small actions, such as handing out Band-Aids, or seeing the bright smiles on spectators, being part of the American Red Cross team reminded me of the importance of preparation, staying calm, and teamwork. In addition, this experience also reminded me how even the smallest acts of service can make a big difference.

This parade not only made an impact and created new memories for other people present at the parade, but also left a big positive impact on me as a volunteer, inspiring me to continue serving my community to positively impact others. It encouraged me to step outside of my comfort zone, gain more confidence, and appreciate the value of helping others and my community during important events like the Rose Parade.



Even though I was there as a volunteer, the parade floats were able to be seen from Station 3, giving me a great view of the event. [Source: Author, Katie Lee]