

Editors Column

# Mean Girls: A Timeless Story of High School Social Hierarchy



**Summer Park**  
Grade 11  
Harvard-Westlake School

Rugby Theater, from February 12th to the 14th, was one of the most high-energy weekends at Harvard-Westlake all year. The production of Mean Girls didn't just bring the 2004 Tina Fey classic to life; it basically turned the school into North Shore High for four straight shows. Whether you caught the 4 p.m. Thursday matinee or the packed Saturday night finale, the vibe was loud and surprisingly real. The program describes the musical as "... hilarious and quotable as the film that inspired it, while delivering a timely reminder about empathy, accountability, and the cost of cruelty."

For anyone not familiar with the movie, the plot follows Cady Heron (played by Elliot Murphy), a girl who grew up in Africa and then had to face something way more dangerous: the American high school social ladder. Diya Schievink nailed the iconic role of Regina George, the queen bee whose influence shapes the social order. Between Cady trying to fit in and Regina reigning supreme over the popular group, "The Plastics," the cast really showed how messy



Creative stage lighting glows as the excited audience waits for the musical to begin. [Source: Author, Summer Park]

and exhausting trying to be popular can be.

What was impressive, though, was the sheer scale of the production. This wasn't just a few people singing on a stage; it was a collaborative operation with a cast of 25 students and a full pit band. The 11 student-musicians, playing everything from the violin and cello to the electric bass and drums, reminded everyone

of the serious talent at our school. The music was live, the choreography was sharp, and you could tell they'd been grinding since rehearsals started two months ago. Under the direction of Sabrina Washburn and Hudson Phillips, Assistant Director, the cast clearly put in the work to make sure every joke landed and every dance break felt polished. A big shoutout is owed to the tech crew and the creative team for making

the sets and costumes look so professional.

Junior Elise Kennedy, a dancer in the ensemble as well as the dance captain, said, "My highlight of the musical was performing 'Fearless' every night. It was the end of the first act, and it was always really fun. I want the audience to take away that musical theater can be a really fun way to take stress off their mind and enjoy themselves even when they're busy, and my overall experience was really incredible. I love the community of theater at Harvard-Westlake, and I'm really grateful that I got to perform with so many amazing people." Her sentiment is something we all need to hear as students deal with the stress of high school.

The play was entertaining, but it also hit on a deeper note. We all know what it feels like to navigate cliques or feel like you have to act a certain way to belong. By the time the curtain closed, the takeaway was simple: popularity is temporary, but empathy and finding your actual community are what matter.

Student Reporter

# A Sweet Reminder to Take a Break



**Helena Lee**  
Grade 8  
Talbert Middle School



Caption A: A simple DIY style recipe for Oreo Truffles attempted during a lively Saturday afternoon; getting out there will give you fun adventures you may have never expected.[Source: Author, Helena Lee]

Chocolate, sweet, and chewy, the Oreo truffles I made were actually...not that bad. Not bad for someone who only knows how to make grilled cheese and ramen (just kidding...kind of). My new friends were laughing and playing the imposter game around me, and it was the first time in a while that I just got to chill. No assignments at hand, no stress, no procrastination; just

equal parts coconut oil and cocoa powder.

For many students across the country, the third quarter (January to March) is the worst part of the school year. With summer in the distance, many continue marching through the heavy sludge of these few months. While every warrior has their own ways of dealing with this taxing journey, I found a healing po-

tion through the treats I was able to make. On February 14th, I attended Fountain Valley Library's Chocolate Workshop, and it reminded me of something I forgot to take a break! While looking at local events to participate in, I stumbled upon a delicious-looking two-hour class held at my local library. I decided it was worth a shot and went.

Participating in this one-day activity taught me more than just how to make delectable chocolate cookies and cream bonbons; it gave me the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone and meet new people. When I walked into the room where the workshop was being held, it did not take me long to realize that everyone there came with friends, while I arrived solo. Luckily, I ran into someone from a school I used to go to, and she introduced me to her friends. It takes a lot of energy and guts to insert yourself into others' small talk, especially when people around you already know each other. Despite this, I ended up having a lot of fun meeting participants from

different backgrounds while visiting my local library. That was a big reason why this break from schoolwork meant so much to me: meeting new people without academic pressure.

I expected this workshop to be an awkward experience where I would sit down, talk to no one, and make a mediocre rendition of a recipe that I couldn't really get the hang of. However, it ended up teaching me, or rather reminding me, of how important it is to do things RECREATIONALLY. It also pushed me to interact with new people and break the barriers of looming social anxiety.

Young adults go to bars and raves. Children schedule playdates. Teens...accumulate volunteer hours? But chocolate invites patience and enjoyment, paired with an environment where you can connect with others and take a break. The next time I feel reluctant to do something that I'm not familiar with, I will remember the sugary, rich taste of chocolate that gave me an entertaining Saturday afternoon.

Student Reporter

# Speaking Up Changed Me More Than Any Test Score



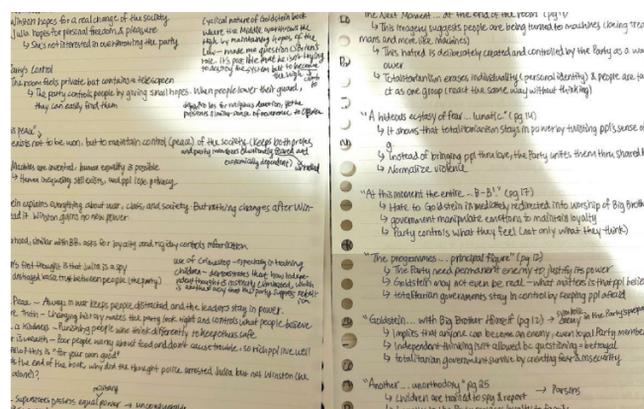
**Sarah Li**  
Grade 11  
Crean Lutheran High School

Growing up in China from kindergarten to middle school, I preferred invariability: everything was under my total control. Early accomplishments in academics convinced me that exhaustive planning leads to victory. I thought that the phrase "practice makes perfect" is applicable to all subjects. As a result, at the commencement of my junior year, I held the belief that thorough preparation was the path to success in AP English Language and Composition. If I annotated each and every page of a book to the extent that notes covered the margins, highlighted meaningful quotes with various colors, and completed countless writing practices, I felt assured and confident that I would succeed. But the emergence of Socratic seminars, discussions on required reading materials, disrupted this equilibrium due to their variability. No scripts exist, and no structures are set. It is impossible to "delete" and "revise" one's insight or comment.

My first Socratic seminar is still vivid in my mind. Under the teacher's instructions, we arranged our desks in a circle. I silently told myself to be the one who speaks up first so that I

could get it over with early. However, as soon as our teacher asked who was willing to start the discussion, I hesitated: I didn't raise my hand. It felt like my arm had turned into a massive boulder, impossible to lift up. My concern was that my understanding of the book was overly superficial. I feared my remark didn't sound "smart" or, in other words, lacked sophistication. For some amount of time, I remained silent, paid attention to others, and tried to find an entry point to cast out my own thoughts. Then, I suddenly realized that I would leave this seminar without gaining any additional understanding of the novel and my peers' novel perspectives on my opinion. Therefore, I shared an observation of foreshadowing, a trivial rather than a significant realization.

Surprisingly, nobody regarded my comment as "simple" or "on the surface level." Rather, it increased students' engagement. Multiple individuals built on my view by offering a plethora of supportive evidence. Eventually, what I perceived as a simple idea served as a fundamental building block of subsequent in-depth debates. From my perspective, this valuable experience taught me



Notes I wrote preparing for my first Socratic seminar: they are full of highlights, underlines, and other things I wanted to remember. [Source: Author, Sarah Li]

that discussions are not centered on expressing flawless and "advanced" viewpoints. As long as you articulate your argument, no one will remember the few minor grammar mistakes you made. No one will judge how "elementary" your thoughts are.

Navigating through the semester, I have participated in innumerable Socratic seminars. Gradually, I no longer felt my heart racing. My arms are no longer bulky and "frozen" like a statue. I approached the discussion in di-

vergent ways, such as ceasing to strive towards perfection. During the seminar, instead of mentally rehearsing my comment, I immersed myself in the discussion. I consider them as a precious opportunity to exchange thoughts on designated book chapters, promoting in-depth thinking and further questions.

Thanks to my teacher, I learned from these seminars that my voice need not be perfect to be valuable. Growth happens when facing the unpredictable.

Student Reporter

## Cheerleaders in Korea: The Forgotten Heroes



**Soomin Ryu**  
Grade 10  
Seoul International School



The cheerleaders celebrate their final game after AISA 2026. [Source: Author, Soomin Ryu]

In most international schools in Korea, the cheer season overlaps with one of the most anticipated and important sports: basketball. Thus, you'll always find the cheer team on the sidelines of every home basketball game, keeping the energy high with catchy chants and flawless dance moves. However, because of the respect and engagement basketball receives,

it's easy to often overlook the hard work and dedication that cheerleaders put in, and how important they are to the overall game.

"I've always been interested in cheerleading since middle school, as I saw videos of cheerleaders online, and I've always wanted to try it," says Jane Jung, a varsity cheerleader, at just 9th grade, at

Seoul International School. "It was a very positive experience for me to connect with people within and outside of my grade."

During AISA 2026, one of the biggest sports conferences for international schools in Asia, the cheerleaders played a huge role in the positive atmosphere. In between the stressful tension from basketball, the cheerleaders' remarkable dance moves and loud chants constantly rang across the gym, bringing everyone to the edge of their seats. "I think cheerleading allows the crowd to be more hyped and become more invested in the game, and also contributes to the support of cheering with the audience, as well as motivating the basketball team," says Jane Jung.

AISA brought cheerleaders from numerous schools to provide motivation and energy to every team school during the games. "I think cheerleaders have a huge impact during basketball games because it brings the mood up," says Sally Kim, a freshman basketball player at Seoul International School. "Sometimes players can be really tired and extremely unmotivated during situations where they are losing or just don't have the energy to keep moving. That's when the cheerleaders step up and give great chants to keep the players moving."

Despite all that hard work, the intense focus on the scoreboard means people sometimes overlook what the cheer team adds to the experience. "I think it gives a huge motivation for the players and even those who are watching to help and keep motivating the players. It also kind of intimidates the opponents and distracts them, giving a huge advantage to the team they are cheering for. So overall, cheerleaders have a significant role during basketball games due to their huge cheers that keep the players and games going," says Sally Kim.

"I don't feel sad about basketball players getting the attention because it is their game, but I do feel sad sometimes that people undermine cheer, because they sometimes think it's unnecessary and ridiculous," says Jane Jung. "I would like people to view cheer as more of a sport rather than something to overlook."

Student Reporter

## Students Advocate at the State Capitol



**Evalyn Yu**  
Grade 10  
Palos Verdes High School

On Feb. 18 and 19, Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District (PVPUSD) students traveled to the California State Capitol to advocate for e-bike safety legislation, and were formally recognized on the State Assembly floor for their efforts.

This trip was a part of Capitol Convoy, a unique advocacy program sponsored by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Council of the Parent Teacher Association. Students are selected to travel on a fully funded trip to Sacramento, where they engage directly with state legislators and propose solutions to issues affecting students across California.

Over the course of two days, students met with state assembly members and their staff to advocate for statewide e-bike safety programs similar to that of PVPUSD's existing policy, which requires students to complete an e-bike safety course and registration process before being allowed to park on campus.

Throughout the program, students gained hands-on experience in civic engagement, public policy analysis, and advocacy. "It definitely confirmed the fact that I want to go into politics. I enjoyed being able to see how government offices were run, and I was



Students traveled to the California State Capitol in Sacramento to advocate for e-bike safety policies. [Source: Julie Hickman]

really impressed [when] talking to legislative aides [because] they really wanted to hear our stories," junior Madeline Loorya said.

Adults who went on the trip also emphasized this program's impact. "What these students do in two days is probably more than what some political science majors will experience in their first year of college. It is a really impactful and priceless opportunity. Everybody walks away just feeling like they've been a part of something really cool and special," Parent Teacher Student Association Legislation Representative Julie Hickman said.

Upon landing in Sacramento, the Capitol Convoy group was welcomed by State Assembly Member Al Muratsuchi, who shared his journey into politics and his legislative work on education. Later, they met with State Senator Ben Allen, who discussed his environmental policies and encouraged students to get involved in public service.

Students also received a guided tour of the Capitol Building and visited the Stanley Mosk Library. There, they spoke with Assembly Member Laurie Davies about Assembly Bill 1569, a bill she introduced this year that

would require students in K-12 to complete an e-bike safety program before parking e-bikes on campus during school hours.

The next day, students revisited the State Assembly Chamber, where Assembly Member Maratsuchi formally recognized the Capitol Convoy group on the Assembly floor and highlighted students' advocacy in service to PVPUSD and the state.

Students spent the rest of the day in legislative appointments with the staff of assembly members, where they presented their research on e-bike safety and proposed several solutions, including implementing statewide safety courses, registration, and requiring safety devices such as rear-view mirrors.

Capitol Convoy provided students with a meaningful introduction to the world of advocacy.

"It is really easy, especially in difficult times, to feel like your voice doesn't matter," Hickman said. "What I hope is that this trip shows students, administrators, and faculty that every voice can be heard, and that every voice collectively can make a big difference in the laws that govern California each and every day."

Student Reporter

## Student-Athlete Recognition Rally



**Kaylyn Wee**  
Grade 10  
Ayala High School

Recently, Ruben S. Ayala High School hosted its spring sports rally for the 2025-2026 school year. Rallies are school events held to recognize students on campus. There are two types of rallies: one for celebrating and another for honoring academic achievements. This event brought the whole school together in the gymnasium, which was decorated to the theme of Zootopia 2. With energetic performances and fun games, the rally boosted school spirit and showed appreciation for the spring sports athletes.

The sports that were recognized were Boys Volleyball, Boys Baseball, Girls Softball, and many others. Students walked onto a stage set up in the middle of the gymnasium with custom posters, made by Associated Student Body (ASB), and their song of choice playing in the background. They took pictures while the crowd cheered them on. The athletes were seated in the front middle of the gym before walking on to be supported by the school.

Between each sports team's appearance, the cheer and dance

team performed to keep the energy high. There were four class competitions and performances, a cheer team routine, and performances from both the spirit and dance teams. This rally was particularly special as there was a banner reveal for all the new CIF achievements our school gained from each sport; the most exciting had to be Boys Volleyball, as they were CIF champions for their first year as an official team sport of Ayala.

This rally's theme was represented by the theme of the movie Zootopia 2, and the hosts and speakers were trying to solve a case as officers of the ZPD. The whole gymnasium was covered with posters with each climate-controlled district, like the tundra or the desert. As the gym was divided into four sections, each grade was assigned a different district with their graduating year and class color: the freshmen were yellow, sophomores blue, juniors pink, and seniors purple. There were also balloons and streamers in the school colors - red, black, and white. Just by stepping into the



During the spring sports school rally at Ayala High School, the most exciting moment was the reveal of the new CIF banners. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Wee]

gym, it was obvious that the area was decked out with decorations and school spirit.

To make the rally interactive and exciting, there was a game

where students competed against other classes. There were cards on which students were to spell out a word with the letter placard they were given. All classes participated at once, and the seniors won this game in 2 minutes. In the end, there was also a "Bulldog Spellout Competition" in which the loudest class to shout our school cheer won points. A machine calculated how loud each class was. The sophomores ended up winning with a score of 109.

This year's spring sports rally was a big success because it combined fun competition with celebrating athletes. The theme was creative and immersive, one that has not been done yet across all schools, creating excitement. The interactive games, spirit wear days, and lively performances kept students entertained while ensuring athletes were recognized and supported. Everyone who was involved in the preparation of the rally, like the ASB class and performing students, should be proud of their hard work and dedication to the amazing event.