

TEENS **in print** BOSTON

BOSTON TEENS IN PRINT MAY/JUNE 2015™

TALKIN' TRASH

Despite growing up in an increasingly green society, teens are still part of the city's *litterati* – a group that continues to toss garbage on the ground

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BOSTON TEENS IN PRINT is hosted by Dorchester Academy and is a program of **WriteBoston**



APH artwork (clockwise from top) by Mariana Pires, Mariana Pires, and APH staff. APH cover artwork by Huying Qi.

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TALKIN' TRASH

DESPITE GROWING UP IN AN INCREASINGLY GREEN SOCIETY, TEENS ARE STILL PART OF THE CITY'S LITTERATI – A GROUP THAT CONTINUES TO TOSS GARBAGE ON THE GROUND

BY MIESHA TAVARES
// STAFF WRITER

Sylah Fuentes, 14, was in a hurry one recent day to catch her bus home from school. Boston Community Leadership Academy. Instead of going to a garbage can, she threw the wrapper from her Hershey's chocolate bar on the ground.

"I get lazy and I don't want to hold it anymore so I just drop it anywhere," says Fuentes. "My mom has told me not to litter before because it's bad for the Earth but I think it's a bad habit."

More than 40 years after the environmental awareness movement entered Americans' consciousness through a famous advertising campaign featuring an Indian crying about all the pollution in his midst, littering is still a major problem in the US.

Despite the overall decline in litter during the past 40 years, more than 51 billion pieces of trash still dot US roadways every year, according to the group Keep America Beautiful. That contributes to an overall annual clean-up bill of more than \$11.5 billion, says the group.

Even as today's teens have grown up in a society that promotes sophisticated environmental practices like recycling, industrial composting, net zero carbon footprints, smart growth, and sustainability, they remain part of a legion of litterbugs that continue to violate the most basic of ecological principles by scattering rubbish all over the place.

"I think sometimes I just get too lazy to throw the trash away, so I just

let it go," says Erica Elumogo, 15, from Excel High School, whose tosses included a recent receipt from a purchase of Flamin' Hot Cheetos. "I think I should throw the trash away in the right places because I start to think of my community, how I need to take care of it because if I keep littering, I'm giving the Earth another reason to start dying faster."

One of the first places to go downhill is the local territory. According to a 2009 survey done for Keep America Beautiful, the presence of litter in a neighborhood decreases property values there by 7 percent. And bits of litter can beget bigger mounds of rubble, the survey found.

There are potentially harmful health consequences trailing litter, as well. Wind, auto traffic, and even animals can carry debris into waterways, causing dangerous contamination.

These days, people under 30 are more likely to litter than older folks, according to the Keep America Beautiful survey. In interviews, young people have cited such reasons as these: someone else will pick it up, it creates clean-up jobs, they feel alienated from society's cultural norms; it seems like too much trouble to properly dispose of it.

"I used to litter mostly because I felt the trash can was too far," says Fernando Chery, 15, from the John D. O'Bryen School of Math & Science, who would flip chip wrappers on the ground on his way home from school. "I should get a sense of it



APH PHOTO // ABRAHAM ROSA

because it's sort of making more pollution and that affects our world."

Chery says that one time a teacher saw him litter and voiced his displeasure – so he stopped. Yet not all adults are acting as good role models.

Like the man in his 30s who was spotted in Fields Corner one day flinging two cans of Arizona's Brooklyn Original Cherry Lime Rickey out of his car and onto the sidewalk – less than 50 feet from a garbage bin.

RATING THE RUBBISH:

RANKING THE MOST COMMON KINDS OF LITTER:



SOURCE: KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL



APH PHOTO // JINNA MACH

TO FAIL OR FLAIL?

BY JAMILLAT DOUMBIA // STAFF WRITER

With the stress of school surrounding students, a question arises that is pertinent to both the athletic arena and the classroom.

RESEARCH PAPERS: NEEDLESS OR NECESSARY?

BY KATY ZHEN // STAFF WRITER

Ziting Lin, 16, describes how much she enjoys doing research papers. "Stressing, challenging," says Lin, who goes to the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science. "Deprives students of their time." Research papers can be a big headache for teens.

"Very troublesome," says Meixian Guan, 16, from the O'Bryant. "No significance." Amanda Pham, 16, from Community Academy of Science and Health, finds that research papers are difficult to write because they are so long.

Still, some teens understand that doing a research paper can teach them important lessons.

Says Lin: "It helps to improve a student's writing and researching skills."

This article was prepared in collaboration with 826 Boston.



APH PHOTO // DOMINIC DUONG

BSAC BUZZ

BY NATHAN TRAN-TRINH AND BILL ZHOU // CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Perhaps no person is more essential to student voice than the student representative to the Boston School Committee, the body behind key district issues such as budgeting and policy. Unfortunately, the student representative has never been granted voting rights.

Without a vote in decision-making, the representative is reduced to no more than a token for the School Committee to use as a way of showing support for student input without backing it up. This belittles the role of young people as unimportant.

In March, BSAC took part in a hearing at City Hall around having two student representatives on the School Committee and giving both full voting rights.

This was a first step. BSAC is working with city officials to help make this happen.

If you would like to help make a change in your school or community, BSAC holds steering committee meetings twice a month. Contact Maria Ortiz at mortiz@bostonpublicschools.org if you're interested.

PARCC AVENUE

BY JACKY HANG // STAFF WRITER

Wilson Nguyen, a junior at Boston Arts Academy, thinks the new student assessment being tried this year is a big waste of time.

"I have better things to do than the PARCC exam," Nguyen says.

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers is being used in most Boston Public Schools and can measure whether students in grades 3 through 8, 9, and 11, are being properly readied for life after high school, according to the Boston Public Schools website. State officials are still weighing whether to replace MCAS with PARCC.

Early reviews from several students give the test failing grades.

"I felt unprepared for the exam," says My Nguyen, 17, from the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science.

Jelissa Cardoso, 17, from Boston Community Leadership Academy, says enough is enough with all these standardized tests.

RACIAL MISIDENTIFICATION

BY MIESHA TAVARES // STAFF WRITER

Klara Batista, 14, feels self-conscious when people seem sure that she's something other than Cape Verdean.

"A lot of times people have assumed I'm Indian, Hispanic, or black," says Batista, who goes to the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science. "When people assumed my race, I just felt as if I didn't look Cape Verdean."

Teens and others can be quick to judge another person's race or ethnicity — sometimes too quick. Brandon Ramos, 15, doesn't find much wrong with people jumping to conclusions.

"People have assumed I'm white and Asian and I'm actually Hispanic," says Ramos, who attends Boston Community Leadership Academy. "It really doesn't bother me."

But Sana Dahaba, 15, from the O'Bryant, believes there's a solution to these snip judgments.

"I've been called Jamaican, Haitian, and Cape Verdean," says Dahaba, who is from Guinea-Bissau in Africa. "I just feel like anyone who assumes someone's race in general lacks knowledge because they can ask and get an exact answer but they choose to assume."



APH PHOTO

GENTRIFICATION PERSONIFICATION

BY SELA WINDER // STAFF WRITER

Seventeen-year-old Foday Sesay sees it all around his Rosindale community.

"Rich people come into a neighborhood and feel like it's their job to fix it up, even though there is nothing wrong with it," he says. "Then, when they see the beauty and charm in it that's there because of the people that are already living there, they decide that they want it now and kick all those people out of their homes."

What Sesay is talking about is called gentrification. According to a March 2014 article on boston.com entitled "Boston leads nation in gentrification," the city is turning over so quickly that over a fourth of all residents now live in a neighborhood that went from gritty to glossy.

"At first, I didn't really realize the gentrification in my neighborhood until three of my neighbors were forced to move out," says Nouraddin Hussein, a junior at Boston Community Leadership Academy, who lives in Dorchester.

Rents can rise through the roof when neighborhoods are overtaken by affluent residents.

"My mother would love for us to move into a better, safer neighborhood, but the places we want to move are too expensive, so it's made the search for a better home hard," says Alyjah Jackson, a junior at BCLA, who lives in Dorchester.

Low-income teens say that gentrification can adversely affect their educations since learning in a diverse environment is just as important as what they are taught from a book.

Also, teens say they can lose their connections to friends, teachers, and stable schedules when they are forced out of their neighborhoods and have to enroll in far-away schools.

Students say that the growing diaspora of teens exiled by gentrification can break their cherished circle of community.

Says Sesay: "Gentrification is the newer, sneakier, segregation."

HALFWAY TO A SCARE CONS IN THE COMMUNITY

BY JANELLE RODRIGUES // STAFF WRITER

Marisa Quashe is 16 years old and feels that a halfway house can seem like a dangerous place to its neighbors.

"I'd be scared for my life because they are criminals," says Quashe, who lives in Dorchester. "Something bad might happen to me while I walk home."

There are over 250 halfway houses across the state, according to listings in yellowpages.com. They provide a space for criminals, alcoholics or drug addicts, and mentally ill patients to transition to life in general society. Some are embedded in Boston neighborhoods and are usually such peaceful places that it's hard to know they are even there — though there are exceptions. In

November, for example, an inmate convicted of unarmed robbery escaped from a Boston halfway house, according to boston.com. He was captured a few days later in Somerville.

Some teens say they fear this kind of incident but also the unknown from those halfway houses inhabited by convicts.

"You don't know who is there," says Cristina Foster, 15, who lives in Mattapan. Her eyes get bigger as she talks. "I would not trust them because they are criminals. And you don't know what they might do if they do escape from the halfway house."

Mohamed Ayman, 17, from East Boston, says he does not share the same concerns. "I would not be scared at all," says Ayman. "I would not care. I'd live normally."

GEOGRAPHY 101: CAPE VERDE = AFRICA

BY MIESHA TAVARES // STAFF WRITER

Grace Richard, 14, from Boston Community Leadership Academy knows who she is.

"I was born in Cape Verde, which is in Africa, and I'm proud," says Richard. "That's all that matters."

Cape Verde is an island nation 350 miles off the west coast of Africa, yet some teens want to distance themselves from that, believing the false, prejudicial, negative mythology that clouds the continent.

"I feel like there's nothing wrong with being African," says Zariah Gomes, 15, from BCLA, who is Cape Verdean. "People should embrace their culture no matter what and I feel like people who are Cape Verdean but

don't consider themselves African aren't Cape Verdean because they don't know their own race or who they are."

If some teens are confused about their place in the world, their country is not: Cape Verde is part of the African Union.

"I'm not Cape Verdean," says Sana Dahaba, 15, of the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science, who is from Guinea-Bissau, in Africa. "But I feel like any Cape Verdean that does not consider themselves African is uneducated. They're proving the fact that they can't take the time to learn about their own country, which they should already know about since they're claiming to be from there."

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

HATING ON GAYS IN UGANDA

BY SHAMEKA REECE //
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Dear American People:

From the beginning of time there have been people of different genders, backgrounds, colors, likes, and so on. Yet

today in Uganda, there are many living in fear because they are gay.

Uganda is known as one of the worst places on the planet to be gay. The government is intent on making some same-sex behavior punishable by life imprisonment. Meanwhile, some newspapers are in the business of outing gays on their pages and a mob could show up at gay people's doorsteps and beat them without anyone caring.

People in Uganda seem to want to hate on them because they believe being gay violates their country's culture. There

have been cases where homosexuals have been disowned by their own families and had to go into hiding, moving from place to place to stay ahead of vigilantes.

Gays have no freedom to be who they are in Uganda and it breaks my heart. The purpose of this letter is to raise awareness in America, so people can protest and spread the word about the unjust actions that have been taking place in Uganda.

Thank you,
Shameka



AFH PHOTO // MARLENA PIREZ

TEENS TORTURED BY TECHNOLOGY

BY BISRAAT LIAM // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Dear Fellow Students,

Everyone has seen the young man with music blasting out of his headphones or the teenage girl rapidly texting on her Samsung.

Many of the current generation have become addicted to technology such as phones, laptops, and social media, just like someone becomes addicted to alcohol and can't stop from getting drunk.

Now we see young people who have more interactions with each other through social media than face to face. This has caused miscommunication and misunderstanding as

youth disconnect themselves from the real world.

If we do not experience new things, make personal relationships, and problem-solve together, we will never be able to function as adults. The number of people teens meet through chat rooms, bulletin boards, and other services are extremely few and negative -- and possibly dangerous.

The presence of so many portable devices has taught us that whenever we need entertainment and enjoyment, it will automatically be there for us. Life doesn't work like that.

Meanwhile, students have become great at procrastinating -- and procrastinators look for distractions. Take smartphones, for example. A

Pew Research Center survey found that as of January, 2014, 67 percent of cellphone owners checked their phones for calls or messages -- even when the device never rang or buzzed.

So, let's talk with our families instead of playing with our phones. Let's not go to concerts to record the event but to experience and enjoy the moment. Let's read more books and discuss them instead of gossiping about the selves. Hollywood stars post on Instagram.

Let's help build a generation of tomorrow that can benefit and better this world.

Thank you,
Bisrat



AFH PHOTO // LOURDES PETITJEAN

Dear President Barack Obama,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the inferior education many African-American children receive in the United States. The most basic foundation that anyone can receive is an education. Yet the African-American race is largely deprived of this right -- not out in the open but when their eyes are closed and they are unable to see the injustice they are truly facing. Now I am here to put this issue out there.

When you think of the phrase "famous African-American," what comes to mind? Rappers, dancers and singers, athletes, and one president -- now. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but we should have higher dreams and goals for ourselves. You were able to reach greatness and strive through the achievement gap. But I am an African-American woman who isn't going to be able to be a professional athlete and I will never make it in the music industry. Then, what options are left for me -- and for other African-American females, including Sasha and Malia -- to succeed in?

Education is the only available choice for all but the small few who make it onto the big

stage. How will I ever be able to support a family when, according to The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require some postsecondary education? Meanwhile, in 2012, blacks made up 14 percent of college-aged students but represented only 9 percent of those 25 to 29 years old who held a bachelor's degree or higher, according to the Pew Research Center.

The problem is that we wanted to be equal for so long but we forgot what being equal truly means. Equal lies deeper than just talking and voting rights.

White suburban schools have all kinds of afterschool programs that help set students up for success in life while African-Americans have to scramble for funds. So many young African-American children have died on the streets. Just maybe if they had something to do after school they wouldn't have been there in the first place. This may be The United States of America, but it is not the land of opportunity -- for all.

Thank you,
Tyschelle

TOYING WITH BLACK LIVES

BY NYJIANA MINGA // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Dear Jeffrey Follmer,

During football season, Cleveland Browns wide receiver Andrew Hawkins before a game wore a shirt asking for justice for Tamir Rice and John Crawford, two black men killed by police. I understand that, as head of the Cleveland police union at the time, you asked the Browns to apologize for this action.

I'm not writing this in an attempt to disrespect or insult you or any of your officers. However, I feel as though you are taking away the rights we are supposed to have as citizens of the U.S. In this country, we have freedom of speech and the right to a peaceful protest.

Your job -- excuse me if I'm wrong -- is to enforce the law. I don't remember anyone telling me that it is to prevent us from speaking our minds.

What also upsets me is the lack of respect in the statement that was released by you, saying,

"It's pretty pathetic when athletes think they know the law." Hawkins never said he knew the law.

If you want to reduce the number of killings on the streets, if you want to decrease the number of protests, then stop shooting young black men because you "believe" they might do harm. Twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was holding a gun that fired plastic pellets. John Crawford, 22, had an air rifle. So what now? We can't play with toys?

It's a disgrace to see that our country has come to the point where if you are a certain color, you're immediately put on police radar. Witness the more recent atrocities in Ferguson, New York, and Baltimore.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that I support Mr. Hawkins' actions and I am frustrated by your ridiculous request for an apology.

Thank you,
Nyjiana

A SCHOOL-SAFETY LESSON PLAN

BY CRISTINA FOSTER //
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Dear Public Schools Managers,

School should be a safe learning environment for every student, teacher, or anyone else in the building. There have been many crazy events all over the world involving school shootings -- too many to name. The one in 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, for example, left 26 innocents dead. I believe schools should have more safety plans to protect students who were just sitting at their desks trying to get an education for their bright futures and, suddenly, all those hopes were taken away for no reason.

We need early warning alarms to alert students to danger and extra hiding spots to keep them out of harm's way.

Thank you,
Cristina



AFH PHOTO // KASSANDRA FLORES

WORD

THINK CRITICALLY

BY MALCOLM OLIVER //
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Looking back at it
Thinking on my past madness
It's such a bad habit
Looking back at it
Lights flashin'
As I dash through traffic
Looking both ways, looking back
As if
Something bad happens
I tried to halt the cab passin'
Access denied
At least I tried
I'd rather walk any ways
But not just any way
Look back at my many ways
I retrace my steps
I lost a lot along the way
I just embrace what's left
Looking back on the path
That tried to take my breath
I gathered the strength
To break that clenched
Strength I never knew
That foreign power
I put the pencil to the canvas
And wrote for an hour

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE: MERCY OR MAYHEM?

Physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients is legal in four states -- Vermont, Montana, Oregon, and Washington -- as well as in one county in New Mexico. On the following pages, students debate the pros and cons of this life-altering practice.

DEATH WITH DIGNITY

BY EDMILSON BRITO // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Imagine you are very sick and given six months to live. During that time, you will have a lot of pain.

It is ethical to commit physician-assisted suicide because you have nothing to enjoy anymore. People should be able to make their own choices. No matter how many months you have left, you're going to always think about death. You won't know whether to cry or show strength.

Now, some people feel physician-assisted suicide is not ethical because God gave you life to enjoy -- no matter what situation you're in. Do you think God would want you to suffer?

But I ask myself this: How can I enjoy life when I'm just waiting to die? You can't have fun because all your thoughts are going to be: Is today the day?

I would take the shortcut, go with an easier way out, and die with dignity.

REST IN PEACE

BY FRANK ROSARIO // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Physician-assisted suicide is a good thing for the terminally ill because they won't have to suffer through all the pain -- and their families won't have to see them suffer.

Some people are against physician-assisted suicide because their religion says that it is not OK to destroy your own life. But we have the right to control our own lives. We can make decisions for our benefit and for the benefit of the people around us. It is very hard to watch family members who are dying. We should let them rest in peace.

AN EMPTY SPACE

BY LAURIANO BARROS // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Physician-assisted suicide is something that is not wrong and not right. Everyone has a different point of view about it. I think it is unethical because not everybody dies on the specific day the prognosis says.

There is no man capable of predicting death. Only God can do that. If we don't stop practicing physician-assisted suicide, our society in 30 years will be an empty space because terminal diseases are spreading by the day.

Any seconds spent on earth alive can be productive and should never be regretted.

A LARGER LEGACY

BY MARCOS ESPINOSA // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Believe the reality. Don't live in the dark. Physician-assisted suicide is ethical because peace can come to your spirit and your legacy can be honored by your family as they remember you in a good way.

Some people think that this decision is not correct. They say that God is the giver of life and therefore the only one who can remove it.

But if you are terminally and suffering, you have the right to make your own decisions.

BRAVERY

BY PROMA KAZI // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Inevitable torment: when the last days are knocking on your door. Suffering is human nature. However, for terminally ill people, is it fair for them to deal with horrific pain because suffering is human nature? Do they deserve such a plight in the last few days of their lives? Physician-assisted suicide is a very important option for these patients.

Many people think that there is no difference between a normal suicide and a physician-assisted suicide. But they are apart from each other. A person commits suicide under the pressure of depression in physician-assisted suicide, there is no other option left except death. They will die no matter what, so they choose to die peacefully.

Our journey through life is similar to a war. We fight battles all the time to prove ourselves. For terminally ill patients, their sicknesses will kill them no matter how hard they fight.

Some might argue that people who choose physician-assisted suicide are losers. But that's not true. A person needs to be brave to make such a decision, knowing there is no coming back.

So let's stop judging them and let them do what they want. If they want a quiet death, then why not?

CHOOSING TO DIE

BY TARANUM RAHMAN // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Just imagine how much pain it would require for someone to want to die. We should be looking forward to living longer not counting the days until our death.

Yet physician-assisted suicide goes against many people's moral and religious beliefs.

But it is really a way of showing the world that you want to bid farewell with the joyous moments you had before your illness turns you bitter and resentful.

There's no point of living a life where all you get in return is agony. You shouldn't have to be forced to live; you should want to die effortlessly.

Life is meant to be a journey. We're supposed to gain experience from our regular crises. But if it becomes too severe and unbearable, a human being should have the option of ending his or her life through physician-assisted suicide.

What would you do if you had to live a life that you didn't choose but it chose you? People who use physician-assisted suicide are not quitters -- their life gave up on them.

GIVE UP OR FIGHT BACK?

BY OLECIA REIS // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Are doctors supposed to find a cure to treat you or poison you? Physician-assisted suicide is unethical because it will make people think about ending their lives rather than trying to find a solution. It is irresponsible because it will open doors for more people to do it. What about families -- how will they feel knowing that you were the one who did not want to live among them anymore? That you did not want to enjoy the last days of your life by their side.

It is better to believe in God's power and let destiny decide your fate. You weren't the one who generated your life so why should you be the one to put a deadline on it. We live in an era where technology is increasing and there are a lot of possibilities that someone will find a cure.

Should you put your life in someone else's hands and give up rather than take one more chance and fight?

Remember: Our future depends on how we act in the present.

DON'T USE GOD AS AN EXCUSE

BY JOSEPH PIARD // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

There's millions people out there who are suffering from severe pain. The reason why some people say that physician-assisted suicide should be an option is because they can't tolerate the pain and there is no hope of recovery. Others say that it is not the best solution because they think that life is a gift from God.

People with a terminal illness have the right to take their own life because it is theirs. I detest when people use God as an excuse for denying people that right. If they are extremely ill, surely God cares enough to let us relieve our loved ones' pain.

It is very hard -- unless you don't have a heart -- to watch a friend or family member suffering while you can't do anything to save them. I know that it will be more painful to deal with death, but with time you will overcome it.

We have to accept other people's wishes even if they seem wrong to us because only that person can understand his or her own pain.

"NOTHING CAN DESTROY HUMANITY EXCEPT HUMANITY ITSELF"

BY MELANIE MORA // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Life is a mystery that we will never understand. We all know when we are born but we don't know when we will die. In life, there is both happiness and difficult times.

Physician-assisted suicide is unethical because it violates the Oath of Hippocrates, which requires that doctors treat the sick to the best of their abilities and also do no harm.

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In God's eyes, you will never rest in peace if you commit suicide. God is the one who will decide when and how a person will die.

If physician-assisted suicide became the law around the world, it would be a disaster. Undoubtedly, teenagers would decide to end their own lives. We are our own worst enemies. Nothing can destroy humanity except humanity itself. So confirm how strong you are in confronting that deadly disease. You can change the world just by fighting until the end.

NO PAIN, NO GAIN

BY P. VANESSA SYLVESTRE // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Do we declare ourselves defeated or do we stand up and walk toward obstacles? Physician-assisted suicide is against the laws of nature and goes against the characteristics of perseverance and endurance.

Suffering is a part of the human experience and never in civilization before us were people officially allowed to end their lives because of it.

Our ancestors worked hard to improve things. A perfect example is anesthesia. Before it was invented, people had to do surgery and endure great pain. Nonetheless, people didn't kill themselves because of that. Instead, they worked hard until they came up with a revolutionary new idea that would go on and help future generations.

People should learn from their ancestors and fight to protect life -- despite its bitter side.

COWARDICE

BY JUMAYAR AHMED // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

People have given it a fancy name -- physician-assisted suicide -- but it is really almost the same as regular suicide.

Physician-assisted suicide is a mission to kill yourself with the help of a doctor. You make that person your God because only God can give you permission to die.

Pain is part of life and you have to face it. God gives us a test -- like cancer -- and you have to work hard to pass it.

You can kill yourself but it will only prove what a coward you are.

TRASHING THE IDEA OF PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE

BY RANDY GONZALEZ // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The process of physician-assisted suicide stands against some aspects of our being, such as the right to see if you could live longer and the idea in religion that it is a sin to end your own life.

Life isn't some defective thing that we should throw in the trash because we're dying. Life is a gift from God and we shouldn't waste it like this.

Why should people be so desperate to die when they find they only have a few more months? They already know that they are going to die naturally, so why don't they just live those final moments with their loved ones?

Besides, sometimes a doctor's prognosis is wrong and people can last for even years longer than predicted.

Instead of approving of physician-assisted suicide, officials should develop better health care and more medications for the sick so they won't feel like their lives are finished.

AFH PHOTO // DOMINIC DUONG

TROUBLE TURNAROUND

BY GERALDO DIAZ // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Campesino: hard working, gritty, and hopeless. There are many of these farmers where I lived in Bani, a small part of the Dominican Republic with a very poor but strangely beautiful culture. A jungle filled with mango, avocado, and banana trees in your backyard; dogs roaming free and bats being placed on cockroaches held in the streets that never knew the smell of cement. Many kids who didn't work were free during the day to do what they wished while their parents toiled in the fields.

Me? I stole 1,000 pesos from my aunt's store, threw hot milk in my sister's face, and even failed first grade. My father, a campesino, worked 12 hours straight in the hot sun, five days a week, farming sugar cane, plantains, and avocados. On the weekends, he made extra money building houses. He never said it aloud, but I could always hear his disappointment. "Who the hell fails first grade?"

He knew we needed to change if we were going to be any different. So my mother went to the United States to see her sister using a visitor's pass and came back a few months later to tell us we had received our visas.

The day to leave arrived. From Bani, it took us two hours in an old 1960s bus filled with over 100 people to reach the airport. All I could think about was all the family and friends that I had left behind -- and even worse, all the new friends that I had to make.

We landed in Boston on the night of February 30, 2005. I felt deeply alone in school, because I had no friends and in the class only two people spoke Spanish. They all ignored me like a shadow in the darkness.

I figured out that watching cartoons like SpongeBob might teach me simple words in English and I started to comprehend the teachers. I began to change and was not that immature little boy who knew nothing, wanted to be nothing, and was going to be nothing. Today, the six-year-old boy who was addicted to troublemaking wants to be the guy who stops the trouble. I've grown fond of criminology -- especially detectives -- and in the near future I hope to be one.

This year, I will graduate high school. I hope that my parents embarrass me by screaming from the crowd. "Ese es mi hijo!" -- that's my son! And the words of my father -- "Who the hell fails first grade?" -- fade from my memory.

SONNY DAYS



APH ART // KENDRA FIGUEROA

BY ELIANNY RODRIGUEZ // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The chatter in the huge State House hall invaded my head. The media surrounded me like they were waiting for the president to speak.

As I heard my name called, I began my walk to the podium. With every step, I could feel the weight of so many eyes on my back. I took a deep breath and began to recite the words I had practiced in the mirror over and over again.

My name is Elianny Rodriguez. I'm 20 years old and currently a junior at Boston International High School. I have a one-year-old son named Steven. I got pregnant when I was in ninth grade and I felt like my life was gone. Life became difficult and the people that I expected would give me a hand just ran away from me as if I had a contagious illness.

Of all the issues I had to work through with my son, housing left me feeling the most unstable. I moved five times in two years. I even went back to my country, the Dominican Republic. While living there I realized I could not provide a future for my son. I returned to Boston.

I applied for a shelter. There was only one emergency bedroom available and it was outside of Boston, in Lynn. I took it.

I had to wake up every day at 4 a.m. to come to Boston. I was still late for school. After a few months, I moved back to the city and into a space shelter in Roxbury where I had to share a space with another young mother and her child.

My roommate was using drugs. My son was constantly ill because of something he was allergic to in the place. I complained often but ultimately had to move again. I am now in my own apartment in Hyde Park, with help from my mother and my boyfriend.

Instead of giving up, I decided to become a voice to be heard. That is why I spoke in front of all those people as an advocate at the Teen Parent Lobby Day in March of 2014. Having the opportunity to share my experience allowed me to show everyone that teen mothers can succeed.

Now, I advocate for teen mothers because their children are our future. I advocate because I have felt the embarrassment from strangers rolling their eyes as I push my son's stroller down the street. I advocate because being a teen mother does not ruin lives, but the lack of support can.

GOOD NIGHT: THIS IS NOT THE END

BY HILLARIE PILIER // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Eleven months ago, in DR, something happened that changed my life.

For my friends, I was someone who helped them in the hardest situations of their lives. Once, a girl named Natasha told me that she wanted to die because she was feeling fat. She was bulimic. I told her: "Este no es el fin." -- "This is not the end." The words just went out from my heart.

Three weeks later, a friend called me to tell me Natasha was in the hospital because she cut her veins. After a long time without praying, I prayed for her. I was scared, but I felt hope.

Then I received the call that she had died. I was freaking out because I thought it was my fault, that I wasn't there for her. I became a joyless person. Just thinking about it made tears stream down my face and pushed me into my room to remember how miserable I was for not doing anything to help her. I felt like there was no way to fix my broken soul.

That was when, in English class, we started to read this book, "Night," about the Holocaust. One day, when I was lying on my bed listening to the Guatemalan singer-songwriter Ricardo Arjona, I grabbed the book and forced myself to read at least five pages. What a great idea. I ended up finishing 21 pages. Every single thing that happened to the main character overwhelmed my heart. He was so me. I felt understood.

At the end of the book, I figured out the reason why I was so connected to it. It was reinforcing a lingering idea -- "This is not the end."

I have a great feeling now of how to face life and I thank this book for that. I know that Natasha's death was not my fault. Even when I loved my bright and made me the saddest person in the world, I understand that although it may seem to be the end, it is not.



APH PHOTO // JANNIA MACH

MY GRANDFATHER'S WORDS

BY JESSE VAZ // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Growing up, I was so confused. I didn't have the support of my father to explain both the simple and important things in life -- like how to shave or how to be a respectful man. I lived with my mom in Cape Verde. My father and mother were separated.

On one occasion, I went to visit my grandfather hours away. When I arrived from the boat, I was cold. He hugged me so hard that I felt his arms wrap around my body like a blanket.

He brought me to his house. On the way, the fresh air hit my face. When we passed by the markets, I could smell the cachupa and beans. "I saw in your eyes that something is wrong in your life," my grandfather said to me.

"All my life," I told him. "I've learned important things from my mom. But there are some things that you need to ask a man, things that I can't talk about with my mom."

"Yes, I understand what you mean," he said. "I'm here to help and support you."

He started to tell me the story of his life, how he had faced some of the same difficulties.

This was more than a simple conversation between grandfather and grandson. It was a big moment that changed my perspective of life forever.

One day, I want to teach my son all the things I learned from my grandfather: to respect people and help those who need it; to know that a real man is not the one with the strong voice or the big muscles, but the one who takes up his responsibilities.

THE COUNTRY OF DREAMS



BY ESAU AGUILAR // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

heartbroken.

"Take care son," she told me that time in 2012. "Be focused on your future. Maybe this is the last day that I see you because I am too old and sick and I know I can be dead soon."

I gave her a big hug and said, "I love you mom. Take care. I promise I will become a good man and support you."

When I arrived in Boston, my life changed because it was hard to face things

I was my last day in El Salvador with my family. Every moment was filled with love, especially with my mama, Isabelle. As I was leaving, my mama, my strong, warrior mother, looked

DOWN ON THE FARM

BY AIRTON DEFINA // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I was only 10 when I started to work on the farm in Cape Verde. My days started at 5:30 in the morning. I loved the bright and clear mornings, especially sitting on top of a big rock and watching the waves smack the shoreline. The ocean had dots of small lights from the fishermen who worked just as hard as the farmers. They didn't have any choice, either, they fished -- and we farmed -- to survive.

My father was an old man but he was still a farmer. He often sat on a chair in front of his room. He told me that he hated when I stole



APH ART // NANCY NIAMUNDA

mangos from someone's property on my way to the farmland. From my dad, I learned about responsibility. He taught me to work hard and reach for my dreams.

My mother immigrated to the US when I was in fifth grade. It was very hard for me to grow up separated from her. She didn't want to leave her

family behind but she had no other option but to take the opportunity to help her family.

At 12 years old, I stopped attending school because my relatives couldn't afford to pay for my studies. That money went to buy food.

While digging holes to plant corn, I would think about my future. I wondered whether I would always be in a job where I was earning money only to eat and survive. I had dreams of living in a city where there were many movie theatres, cars, and opportunities.

At the end of 2009, I was blessed to come to the US. It felt like a relief. I was more than content to leave my homeland behind in a quest for the American Dream.

After living in the US for five years, I'm able to see that people back home have to work to survive but in America many people work to make their dreams a reality. Here, I have a chance to become someone better. Here, I have a choice.

AN ACT OF DISOBEDIENCE THAT SAVED MY LIFE

BY HALIMA IBRAHIM //
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In 1999, my mom, siblings, and I were moving from Somalia to Yemen to escape the war. We went by ship. I was only seven years old. I was feeling sick and horrible because of this boat. It was scaring me. Imagine only seeing a big, dark ocean for 27 days and nights. One morning, I heard people yelling. I went downstairs. I saw water slowly entering the ship. "We're all going to die," people shouted. "This is our end time." The next day, the water was increasing. I saw many people swimming. Some were crying because their children were dead. I remember

the smell of the ocean.

My brother, at 13 the eldest of my siblings, was about to jump into the ocean. My mom became crazy. She started crying and telling him: "Stop my son. I beg you. You will die."

My brother was able to secure a small rowboat floating in the water. One by one, from the youngest to the oldest, all seven of our family members jumped in. After several hours, we safely reached Yemen.

My brother was really brave, though he disobeyed my mother. He risked his life to save ours.

APH ART // JAMES M. DOLAR

CHANGE BUT NOT CHANGED

BY UYEN PHAM //
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I started 12th grade at Hoang Hoa Tham secondary school in Da Nang city and was studying to take the tests I needed to apply to college. I was ready to go to the next step. And then I learned that I was moving. To the United States? Now?

Instead of being excited, I got bitter and asked my parents to give me a choice. But I had no choice. I had to move because my life depended on my parents. I got the ticket from my mother as I stood in my bedroom. I wanted to tear the ticket in half right away, but I didn't. I couldn't see anything through my tears. I blinked and the tears fell down slowly on my cheek.

And so I quit school and came to the US two days before my 17th birthday.

In school here, I didn't talk to anybody. In my head, I had to translate what everyone said from English to Vietnamese, and then translate what I was going to say from Vietnamese to English. I soon realized that the other students could learn English by talking to each other. I built a conversation in my head and spoke the words

MAKING MY FATHER -- AND MY COUNTRY -- PROUD

BY LATASHA CHARLES //
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

February 1, 2010, was an important day. I remember my mom and dad pulling my brothers, sister, and me out of school and bringing us to the Trinidad and Tobago Embassy. It was the first step of coming to the United States.

We were filled with joy about coming to America, a land of opportunity. Everyone but my dad. I saw drops of tears flowing from his eyes. He was not coming with us due to paperwork problems.

On the plane, I watched my brothers and sister sleep and wondered what our new life would be like. We reached New York City and that was the best place. We were freezing cold, dressed in short sleeves and short pants for a tropical island. But New York was perfect. I had never seen so many restaurants in my life.

When we arrived in front of our home in Boston, I thought: "This is the biggest, prettiest house ever."

In school, however, everything was difficult for me. I hated sixth grade so much because everyone laughed at my accent. "Look at that girl over there. She sounds so weird." I felt sad and left out that whole year.

However, in seventh grade, everyone who had made fun of me apologized. I felt happy after that. Life was getting better but every time I talked to my dad on the phone, tears dropped from my eyes. It was like a pin stabbing me in the heart.

"Baby girl," he would say, "make daddy proud. OK? Become something good in life." "OK, dad, you know I will," I'd say. "I'll make Trinidad and Tobago proud, as well."

Out loud to myself. After two months, I came to school and talked to other people automatically. I got a little satisfaction from my accomplishment, but I also was dismayed because, during learning English, I became more American. I felt like a stranger, not the person I was in Vietnam. It made me anxious.

Sometimes I believed I was losing my culture. In Vietnam, all the young people have to obey the elders. We had the lecture where the teachers always stand. They don't come closer to the student when they don't understand, while the teachers in the US do. The Americans are more equal; they express themselves if they don't agree.

After 11 months in the United States, I can fit in. But one thing I didn't forget is that I'm proud of being a Vietnamese girl and I love my "home." I'm going to keep my culture by asking my mother to teach me more.

I will return home after I succeed. I want to be a nurse or pharmacist and then go back to my country and help the poor.

LIFE IS NOT SIMPLE

BY XUAN NGUYEN //
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I think soil and grass smell clean and pure and refreshing. They really bring back memories from my childhood when I lived in Vietnam.

I had come to the US last year and was living with my cousin, my aunt, and my sister. I was planning on going to high school and I was excited to start classes. I tried talking to my cousin about how I could get enrolled. However, my cousin told me that because I was 18, I had to start working in my aunt's nail salon instead of going to school.

I could not contain my feelings, and started crying. I had a lot of questions: "Should I give up and go back to my country?" "Should I call my mom and tell her what has happened here?" But I did not want her to worry and be sad.

My aunt was being selfish. My relatives just wanted to use me because of money. Every morning, I woke up and went to the nail salon. I had to help until nighttime. Day by day, I did the same thing for several months. I felt so tired. But she was my aunt so I always did what she asked.

One day, I could not stand that. I told my aunt that I wanted to go to school, not work. I remembered what my parents had told me: "Do what you want, say what you think, do it now because this is your life, not anyone else's."

I decided to move to another place and start over. My older sister and I found our own apartment in Roxbury. She works in a nail salon.

I now know that life is not simple. When I was young, my parents always protected me.

Now I am in school studying. One day, I hope to own a restaurant.

MEMORIES OF TET

BY THILE // CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Tet is the most important holiday in my country. It is the first day of the New Year in the lunar calendar.

In Vietnam, people believe that if lucky things happen during Tet, you will have good times the whole year. So everyone prepares. They purchase new clothes and shoes. They gather special fruits like mangos, and colorful flowers.



"OMG, I can't believe this is happening." Wait, is she really gone? My mother in a long, black casket, leaving eight kids behind?

There I was looking at my mother back in 2004. Everyone was very solemn, giving each other hugs and kisses. I was crying and wishing she wouldn't leave me and screaming in my head for her to stay. I was only five. I thought to myself: "My life is over."

I remember when it happened that I was at our house and the darkish hallway smelled like slow death. The sounds of the ambulance got louder as it approached. The EMTs saw me sitting next to my mother and holding her hand. One of the guys picked me up and put me in my room and closed

the door so I couldn't see her. I was very upset because I wanted to stay with my mother.

She was very loud and outgoing. She was a good person.

I learned that even though my mother is not here, I know that she is in my heart. I can keep going on even though there are times when I want to give up and just let myself go.

I still write letters to her -- telling her how much I miss her and how I'm doing in school -- and put them on her grave in a bottle. I go back and put more there for her even though I know she can't read them.

I want to go to college and make something of myself, become an in-house therapist for autistic kids. I think my mother would be proud of me.

Tet is the time all members in the family meet again. Everyone feels happy.

This is the first year that I have had Tet in the United States, far from my friends and country. The spring songs I usually hear during Tet, they went silent. The apricot blossoms, I didn't see them.

Now, in my heart, there is only a certain sadness. I miss something Tet.



APH ART // GEORGETTE ARMAH



SAMIYA ABDULJE
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: It's warm outside.
Best family tradition: Going to the mosque on Fridays.



GARBENS ALEXIS
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The weather.
Best family tradition: Soup Journou on New Year's.



MELANIE BAEZ
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The flowers.
Best family tradition: We sing Happy Birthday to my dad and open presents at exactly midnight on Christmas Eve.



ADAMAJAN BAH
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Being in the house on rainy days.
Best family tradition: Family reunions every two years in different states.



MARIAM BAH
Math or English? Math
Favorite thing about spring: The harmony of the flowers.
Best family tradition: Ed get-together.



KAWTAR BENNANI
Math or English? Biology
Favorite thing about spring: It's the season before summer.
Best family tradition: Watching "Criminal Minds" together.



TASHAYLA BORDEN
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Spring break.
Best family tradition: Huge potlucks during the major holidays.



SARA CACHIO
Math or English? Civics
Favorite thing about spring: Flowers.
Best family tradition: Summer trip to Honduras.



DJIBRIL CONTE
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Plant growth.
Best family tradition: Watching a movie together.



JOSELYN DAVEIGA
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: It's a mixture of all seasons.
Best family tradition: We prank each other on Christmas with fake gifts.



JAMILLAT DOUMBIA
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: New passion.
Best family tradition: Celebrating the Sabbath.



HARRIANNE ERRIE
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The flowers.
Best family tradition: Going to church on Christmas Eve.



OSMAN FOFANAH
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Ice cream.
Best family tradition: Watching soccer.



PRINCELL FELIZ FRANCO
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The temperature.
Best family tradition: Every time a movie preview comes out and one of us likes it, we go to the theatre on Saturday and see it.



CHRISTINE FREEMAN
Math or English? Math
Favorite thing about spring: Rain.
Best family tradition: Coming together for Christmas.



ILMA GOLEMI
Math or English? Math
Favorite thing about spring: Flowers.
Best family tradition: Making baklava every New Year's Eve.



JACKY HANG
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Flowers.
Best family tradition: Celebrating family togetherness during the summer at our cottage in New Hampshire.



FARADIA JOLICOEUR
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Flowers.
Best family tradition: Going to my aunt's house for Thanksgiving.



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bostontip.com
writeboston.org



ROSE KOUMBASSA
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Flowers.
Best family tradition: Road trip to New York every New Year's Eve.



JENNIFER LE
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The sunny weather.
Best family tradition: Eating a Vietnamese dinner and going to the movies.



KATHY LE
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Sunny weather.
Best family tradition: Decorating the Christmas tree.



JOHANNA LEDGISTER
Math or English? Math
Favorite thing about spring: The weather.
Best family tradition: Say a prayer together on Christmas and then eat.



CHRISTALINE LORUISTE
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Flowers changing colors.
Best family tradition: Dinner table talk about work, school.



NAIKA F. MÉTELUS
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The warmer weather.
Best family tradition: Big Sunday dinners.



WIDENTZA PACOMBE
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The weather.
Best family tradition: Eating Soup Journou every New Year's.



WILL-ANGE E. RAYMOND
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: I find myself more outgoing.
Best family tradition: Spending time with family and creating memories.



JANELLE RODRIGUES
Math or English? Math
Favorite thing about spring: It starts to get warmer.
Best family tradition: Thanksgiving at my grandmother's house.



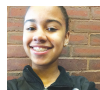
FARMATA SAMATI
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Not too hot, not too cold.
Best family tradition: Eid Islamic feast of chicken, rice, and African pasties.



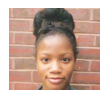
JALENE SANCHEZ
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: I'm a spring baby.
Best family tradition: Sunday gatherings.



MANUELA PATINO SANCHEZ
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The rain.
Best family tradition: Every December 24, we all clean the house and have a party until midnight. That's when we take turns opening gifts and continue partying.



JERISIA SILVA
Math or English? Math
Favorite thing about spring: Flowers.
Best family tradition: Celebrating after the birth of a baby with Cape Verdean foods like cachupa.



CHERBY SINORA
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The color of the sky.
Best family tradition: On Christmas, we stay up past midnight so we can open our gifts early.



DEVON SPEARS
Math or English? Chemistry
Favorite thing about spring: It will soon be summer.
Best family tradition: Christmas get-together.



MIESHA TAVARES
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: The flowers.
Best family tradition: Christmas feast at my aunt's house.



CAMERON TEALEU
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Warmth.
Best family tradition: Watching horror movies on the couch.



ANTIAH THORNTON
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Too many allergies to enjoy.
Best family tradition: Honey-roasted turkey on Thanksgiving.



SELA WINDER
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: Tulips.
Best family tradition: Going to the drive-in movies every summer.



JIA LIN ZHEN
Math or English? Math
Favorite thing about spring: The breeze.
Best family tradition: Colorful fried dough on Chinese New Year's.



KATY ZHEN
Math or English? English
Favorite thing about spring: It's close to summer.
Best family tradition: Getting money on Chinese New Year's.

Next issue:
Sept./Oct. 2015
Send submissions by mail to:
Boston Teens in Print
c/o WriteBoston
2300 Washington Street, Floor 6
Roxbury, MA 02119

The girls of Teen Voices Rising were asked: Why is it crucial to discuss and write about social justice?

ON THE NEXT PAGE
FATHERHOOD: A DAUGHTER'S STORY
A young girl's connection with her father carries much weight in her experience. TVR participants write about the complexities of their father-daughter relationships and how it has affected their lives.



TOMIKA ANDRIS
Women are called "emotional" for speaking their truths to society, which makes it necessary for them to voice their opinions and create change.



MELANIE BAEZ
It might inspire someone to do the same, like rally and create a petition or just do something about it.



THATTIANA BELLAMY
Using a pen is stronger than a gun.



DANIELLE BROOKS
There are always issues that go unnoticed, so when we inform others of these problems, solutions can be created.



VA'DAYYA CHRISTMAS
It's important to talk about social justice due to the culture established today where women are continuously degraded day after day.



SELINA DAM
Social justice is essential for humankind to function peacefully.



NICOLE DUBOV
Writing about social justice is important because if we don't do it, who else will?



CHRISTINE FREEMAN
It's important to raise awareness so that the people in our community can know about what others are going through.



STELLA HARRIS
It creates perspective, awareness, and outrage so that we can make real changes in the world.



JANICE HE
It's important to share what we know so that everyone will have the justice they deserve.



NATASHA MINOTT
People need to know when and how to emotionally and physically react to what is going on around them.



ROCHELLE PINET
A lot of black people are still being killed for no reason and being wrongly convicted.



VANESSA PIERRE
There's a lot of people who are unaware of or don't even understand the meaning of social justice, so it's important to bring those ideas to the community.



KERRINE PREVIL
Many people face issues and don't know how to cope with them, so discussing and writing about them allows people to create solutions to solve these problems.



STEPHANIE ROCHA
It's important for people to understand what's truly happening in this world.



ROSSY SANTANA
In order to establish onward movements for human rights, we must first create awareness and provide our people with the full understanding of any given subject.



NAOMI SHAW
It is important to make people acknowledge what they usually ignore.



DAISHA SIMPSON
So people can live a happy life without fear.



KATHIANA VILSON
If people are not aware of the problems in their society, they cannot take action.



LISA VO
As members of our community, we need to be updated on current events and the history of our nation, so that it helps us improve in the future and not make the same mistakes.

DEAR FAJOUR: ONE DAUGHTER'S LETTER

Thank you for all the restrictions, hurt, pain, suffering--most of all, the numbness you left me with. Call that love, or "tough love," as you fathers call it. But who could blame you? I was thrown at you, a helpless 8-year-old, unaware of what she was going through.

But today, that child has grown up from her mischief and become a young woman. A successful young woman due to the hardship she overcame. With all her tearful nights and blood shedding fights, she has

earned her glorious stripes through her father. She thanks him on the inside for all the times she was forced to stay home. Now, she's free and she doesn't see much out there. Your tough love helped keep away all the nasty little boys.

So, Fajour, I thank you for everything because you've made me into the young woman I am today. I am strong, smart, hilarious, and talented -- just like the person you see in the mirror.

LOOKING FOR COMFORT

Dad, I have "you" issues. You don't talk to me one-on-one. Whatever I do is wrong in your eyes. I do not get appreciated for the right things that I do.

I cope with it by eating -- it's my everyday life. Every time you see me, I have something to eat in my hand. When I'm lonely, depressed, contemplative, happy, or any type of emotion, I eat. Food has become my comfort. And perhaps the love I don't see from you.

I have always yearned for that father-daughter relationship that I never got from you, so I drown out my problems with you by eating. I eat and you yell. You yell constantly. When I try to speak, you don't hear me. You tell me, "I won't become anything in life." Why do you say that? I need to know because it hurts. Is it because I just go to my room all the time and stay there?

Don't get me wrong -- I do love you. Not only because you are my dad and I have to depend on you, but because I learn a lot from you. You are funny when you want to be.

I understand I need to show you respect, but I deserve respect, too. I don't like to be pushed around because I'm not 21 yet. I'm 18 and I know I make mistakes. But when you need me, I'm there. I'm willing to work on our relationship if you are. Just putting it out there because I can't do it by myself. Love you, dad.

ONE WISH: CAN I BE DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL?

A father is supposed to love and protect his daughters. He's supposed to not let any boy harm them. He would call his daughter, "My little girl." He melts in her hands, and loves and cherishes his princess, right?

Unfortunately, it's not always as sugarcoted and sweet as movies make it out to be. Sometimes, there's no such thing as a "daddy's little girl." Many daughters are relentlessly bullied by their own fathers.

A daughter wonders why he would say such hurtful things. She knows he likes to tease and play around, but she doesn't

know when he's serious and when he's "just kidding" -- if he ever is anymore. His daughter -- his first child -- shouldn't feel like her father loves her younger siblings more than her. Like she's nobody, like she will never get her father to care for her like he does the others.

Even when she's grown up now -- discovering herself, becoming a young, independent lady -- she feels like her father will never accept her. Never ever. At this rate, she thinks daddy is going to lose his little girl. She wishes it didn't have to be that way, but what can she do?

The authors' names have been withheld due to the sensitive nature of the content.

WHERE'S YOUR LOVE?

Father. Father. I know you work and I know you have things to do, but spare me the time -- to show me some daughter love. It kills me to see you leave whenever my mother tells you to go.

Father. Father. My brothers can't be my only male role models -- isn't that your job? I don't need you to buy me things. I need a father's protection. Your care and comfort. My mother can't be a mom and a dad.

Father. Father. I don't understand why you do the things you do. We get along more than ever, but I always wonder: Will you ever be a dad to me?

Father. Father. Where is your love? I don't see it. I don't feel it. Maybe you don't know how to love me just like you don't know how to love my mother.

Father. Father. I know you're trying to be there, but I need more affection than you realize. Know that I will always give back the love I never received from you.

Father. Father. I know this world can be difficult and I really thank you for being in my life. I hope you can change into a better dad and love me for the daughter that I am.

THE FACE OF SUCCESS

My father -- the greatest work of art that I have known. The wrinkles on his face are evidence of a happy life lived. They remind me that smiling is the most important thing you can do. He always says, "Life is beautiful, but only if you make it that way."

The white hairs emerging from his thick dark beard are a sign of his wisdom. The occasional furrowed brow tells me that it is important to take life seriously, because we only get one. The calluses on his hands show me that you have to earn what you receive.

At times he can seem insensitive, but he is also fair, loving, and intelligent. He's always doing everything he can for me, and has become my hero. He always tries his hardest, and although he isn't perfect, he is exactly what I had needed growing up. He may have pushed me and expected too much of me at times, but I know that he did so with good intentions.

Coming to the US at the age of 17, without any knowledge of the language, he found a way to establish himself. The respect I have for my father is immense. It is practically unmeasurable. There is no way that I could even thank him. The only way to do so properly is to succeed.

WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD

In many places, women endure double standards about where their roles lie in the community. As our TVR participants focused on these biases, they reflected on the contradictions imposed by their own cultures.

THE BLACK GIRL'S BURDEN

BY THATIANA BELLAMY // TVR STAFF WRITER

-- After Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden"

Take up the black girl's burden.
Send forth the best ye breed
Give 'em a broom, to clean your rooms.
They're here to satisfy your needs.
Beat down those who have spirit.
You're the man -- show them who's boss.
Men are on top of this food chain.
Give them rights and there will be chaos.

Take up the black girl's burden.
All books you must hide.
Never let those girls pick up a book.
Next thing you know they'll have pride.
Tell them they are lower beings --
stupid, dumb, and plain.
Their purpose is to serve you
and work toward your own gain.

Take up the black girl's burden.
We know why the caged bird sings.
Oppressed by the men around us.

we cannot fly with our broken wings.
So now it is time to take a stand.
Grab your posters, make your speeches.
We will not work under those men.
How 'bout you clean the kitchen and scrub
the floors.
Wouldn't that be fun?

Take up the black girl's burden.
My destiny is not to push out your son.
How 'bout you clean the kitchen and scrub
the floors.
Wouldn't that be fun?
I want an education.
Taking care of children I shouldn't be forced to do.
I want out! Independence --
not be at home taking care of you.

Take up the black girl's burden.
I'm happy with the skin I'm in.
Black is beautiful and
I'm waiting for my life to begin.
Tell your stories, stereotypes, and lies.
I really do not care.
Anyone who tries to push me down
should first take this burden to bear.

SIDES OF ME

BY KATHIANA WILSON // TVR STAFF WRITER

In my household, there are two sides of me. My American side, and my Haitian side -- my parents' side.

With my Haitian side, the food changes swiftly. No longer am I eating mac and cheese or Chinese takeout. Now I'm exposed to fried plantains and pork, rice and beans. Oh, and many different soups! If it's New Year's, you're having Soup Joumou. On a cold winter day, Bouyon might be appropriate.

But what my family and I fail to realize is that there is no true American culture. Sure, we like spaghetti, but that came from Italy. Enjoy a hot dog? Thank the Germans. So I'm starting to believe that there aren't two sides of me. There is only one: I am not Haitian and American, I am simply Haitian-American.

And then there is the feminist in me, which connects to both cultures. Often, Haitian-American parents allow their sons to do more than their daughters. Haitian-American parents (often men) believe girls need to be protected -- that girls are more vulnerable and fragile than boys. Females are considered weak so they need to stay at home, cook and clean, and act like a lady while males are strong and can fight for themselves.

However, I have learned to fight for my rights as a young woman of both cultures. Slowly, but surely, I have been able to break these stereotypes placed on many women around the world.

WOMEN OF QUISQUEYA

BY ROSSY SANTANA // TVR STAFF WRITER

The expectations of Dominican society towards the women of Quisqueya are for them to serve as the base of their families. Growing up, I've discerned the many values a Taino woman holds. Yet Quisqueyanos and people of most cultures worldwide have integrated aggressive dominance over women -- the machismo nature, for example.

Skewed gender roles do not only create an unhealthy environment but they also violate our human rights. Respect is earned through actions and humility. Oftentimes in the society of Quisqueya, women are treated like fragile glass -- protected and supported. But these women are also respected and placed on thrones for their hard work and dedication towards a community.

For years, I have seen how women have obeyed their husbands submissively, but also how that same man has brought the most precious of treasures up to her feet.

Society itself has been extremely hypocritical. Although the issue of men having power over women has always been controversial, the women of Quisqueya have been able to stand up firmly for feminism.

In a community, Quisqueyanas are known as women of character and leadership and they are teachers, demonstrating that, regardless of gender, it is our human right to be treated equal.



THINGS ARE NOT AS THEY APPEAR

BY NICOLE DUBOV // TVR STAFF WRITER

When making assumptions about Russian women, there are two stereotypes the peremptory old lady and the sensual young lady. When a friend was asked what she thinks of when envisioning a Russian woman, she replied: "Russian girls always smoke in the movies, and no offense, they're always involved in sexual activity. They're kind of promiscuous. Unless they're an old woman."

So much of my culture is tainted by the portrayals in American media. There is always the over-sexualized, busty woman who smokes and acts like a badass and the crazy old grandma with the scarf wrapped around her neck, waving around a wooden spoon.

It is easy to make such assumptions when this is all you see on TV. This is not just applicable to the Russian culture, but to all other cultures, as well.

I fit neither of these stereotypes but I am, in fact, Russian. No one should make judgments about someone else, one way or another, because of where they come from.

DECONSTRUCTING THE BIGOTRY ABOUT SOUTHERN LIFE

BY VA DATYA CHRISTMAS // TVR STAFF WRITER

Imagine working from sun up to sundown, just to provide for your family. This was what I witnessed while growing up in Atlanta, Georgia. Most of the time, a woman is seen as nothing more than a piece of property.

In the South, that's the life of many women -- they continuously work day after harsh day. They manage their children's and spouse's needs, while shoving away their own.

They have no voice. Their opinions don't mean a thing to the men around them. No matter how much she would scream, use assertive language, or change her message, she was still looked at as weak and useless to society.

She had no say in what occurred in her life. Her only concern should be cooking for her children and husband, along with completing all the household chores. In the South, a woman can sometimes be looked at as nothing but a maid.

DATING 101: IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S SOCIETY

Media's focus on romantic relationships leads many girls to feel the social pressures of dating at a young age. TVR participants explore the obligations for girls to date and the skewed expectations of a woman's role in these connections.

OH, THE PRESSURE

BY VANESSA PIERRE // TVR STAFF WRITER

There was a time when I felt pressured to date. All the popular girls at my school had a boyfriend and it seemed like everyone wanted to be their friends. It made me think that maybe if I got a boyfriend, people would talk to me and befriend me. Another thing that triggered me to feel the need to date was the media. Whenever I watched TV, the girl always felt alone because she didn't have a guy in her life. Then, suddenly, when she got a makeover and dressed more sensually, people started to notice her, and she became appealing to them. She was soon in a relationship and finally "happy." These messages made me believe that I needed to be with someone to lead a content life.

But when you can't hold a guy's attention because you're not showing enough skin, it makes you feel like there is something wrong with you. It brings your self-esteem down and your confidence plummets. It makes you feel like you need to change yourself and be the type of girl a guy would want to date.

One day, while browsing the Net, I found an anonymous quote that stated, "Study now, love later." Those four words made me realize that I've overcome many obstacles in my life on my own. So I didn't need anyone to make me who I am today, a smart, independent, young lady. I realized that I didn't need a guy to make me feel better or for people to recognize me.

YOUR CHOICE IS YOUR BUSINESS

BY KERRINE PREVIL // TVR STAFF WRITER

In society, a woman's virginity is a big deal.

Walking into 2015 a proud virgin had become the New Year's update on social networks for a lot of teenage girls. If a girl is a virgin, she is praised. If she isn't, then she is looked down upon. Meanwhile, boys are glorified for losing their virginity at a young age and taunted if they wait too long.

If a young girl loses her virginity, she's labeled as "fast" and a "tramp." When she wants to wait to have sex until she is married, men often pressure her into doing it now. Yet, there's a double standard for young men, allowing them to be promiscuous without judgment.

A girl's virginity is supposed to be something sacred but boys try to make it their business. I often hear men say "She's too pretty to be a virgin" or "She's ugly, so she must be a virgin."

A young woman should no longer have society's social norms hanging over her head when her virginity is concerned.

WHAT'S YOUR RELATIONSHIP STATUS?

BY LISAVO // TVR STAFF WRITER

All over social networks, there's a constant flow of updates of new couples "in love." My Facebook's news feed is filled with pictures of how a relationship should look.

I think we get confused between materialistic ideas and realistic matters. On Facebook, I'll see someone post a photo with the caption, "If me and my babe was to match shoes and clothes." This picture presents the superficial aspect of a relationship to younger people, when a relationship is more about understanding and having a bond.

One's dating life also depends on how you're raised. My folks say, "When you get out of college, you can date." While it is funny, I know it's my family's expectation -- a rule I have to follow. When I'm around friends, I definitely feel like I'm being pressured to date because of the abundant advertisements on social media to find a significant other.

What feels stressful to me is that on social media, people expect the girlfriend to act like a "wife" -- someone who can cook, clean, and feed her man.

A true relationship is where both partners are helping each other grow and become better people.

You should each be able to express how you feel without thinking you're being judged by your partner.

IT'S MORE THAN COMPLICATED

BY STELLA HARRIS // TVR STAFF WRITER

Dating doesn't exist in high school anymore, not really. The strongest attempt at romance that I've seen is the occasional Instagram anniversary post, this gushing paragraph complete with heart-eyes emoji and ending with the fateful date that the relationship began. And as much as I scoff at those naive kids who think that their cute little hookup could ever last past junior year, I feel obligated by society to strive for the same thing.

The first question that people in my family ask me is whether I've found a boyfriend yet. The first question that I ask myself is why I haven't. And then you find it, him, the one, and it's just more questions. How far have you gone? Does he like when you wear that, say that, do that? How serious are you? Is it going anywhere?

It's not that I even want a particular person. It's just that I've learned to believe that my decision to have some time to myself translates into me not being worthy of someone else's affection. It seems that you can't be happily alone -- you can only be lonely. It's not that you're too confident or too independent to depend on someone else. Rather, it's that you aren't interesting enough for someone to put up with you. It's not just friends with built-up social media platforms glamorizing their Friday nights and making you wish for an arm wrapped around your waist. It's TV shows with "happy endings" (beautiful girl ends up in perfect storybook relationship with dominant jock) and TV shows with "sad endings" (awkward girl ends up alone. Lonely! It's billboards of impenetrable women with rugged models on each arm, their perfectly made-up eyes imploring you to follow their lead and find your Prince Charming. It's Prince Charming himself -- this whole idea that girls exist simply to fulfill someone else, that the only fairy tale ending is the one involving being swept off your pretty, little, painted toes.

And then when you find it, him, the one, it's just more questions. Instead of the Tiffany bracelet that the movies promised, you get a whole new set of impossible ideals to live up to. It's an unhealthy cycle that we are all unwittingly continuing to feed.

AFH PHOTO // LANVYTRAN

A WOMAN'S WORTH

Everywhere you look, a woman's identity is defined for her, whether it's through language, media, or entertainment. TVR participants investigate the blatant messaging meant to oppress women.

DISTORTED FEMALE IMAGES IN ANIME

BY DANIELLE BROOKS // TVR STAFF WRITER

In anime shows, manga, magazines, and fanart, females tend to be portrayed differently than in real life. Anime creators traditionally have had a tendency to produce disproportionate female bodies -- with slim waists, wide hips, and gigantic boobs. The female character can be a hobo and still look like a porn star.

While there has been improvements in steering away from the thin body image, even the big girls have distorted features.

For example, in the anime "Porkchop 'n Flatscreen!" one of the main female characters, Ayane, has a belly pooch -- but she also has wide hips and is very busty.

No matter what size, the women in these anime are all portrayed the same -- they are sexualized to draw attention. These characters create a false image for other girls -- it makes them misunderstand the concepts of femininity and feminism. These images are also geared towards pubescent boys, creating a skewed sense of desirous women.

Rather than brainwashing young girls and subjecting them to this impossible image, the creators should make anime more realistic. For example, make them more relatable to females, showing the real perspective of a woman and allowing people to actually learn something meaningful from it.



TVR ART // DANIELLE BROOKS

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF GIRL HATE

BY NAOMI SHAW // TVR STAFF WRITER

Today's popular insults include "pansy," "sissy," and "fairy." They're almost always used to describe someone who appears weak, and they all have feminine connotations. It has been said that comments like these give boys an unhealthy idea of what it means to be masculine and teaches them that what is feminine is inherently bad. These words also have negative effects on girls who hear them and begin to incorporate these ideas into their own lives.

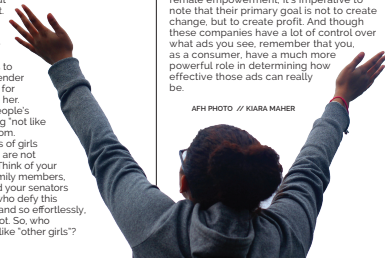
Anyone, when in a group labeled as inferior, wants to be the exception -- the opposite of what her "peers" are. To become the exception, a girl can decide to belittle the character of others in attempts to flatter her own. This is what many call "internalized misogyny" and what others (including myself) like to call "girl hate."

Girl hate is almost exactly what it sounds like. It is the distrust, dislike, or hatred by girls, directed toward other girls -- and it's caused, in part, by insults like these.

It's pretty easy to develop. A girl hears that

the entirety of her gender is shallow, trivial, mean, and "catty," but knows that she is not. Thinking that there is no reason for so many men and quite a few women to lie about this, she starts to believe that these gender stereotypes are true for everyone, except for her. This is what many people's fascination with being "not like other girls" comes from.

These stereotypes of girls being vain and vapid are not grounded in reality. Think of your best friends, your family members, your classmates, and your senators -- amazing women who defy this stereotype so often and so effortlessly, making it almost moot. So, who wouldn't want to be like "other girls"?



APH PHOTO // KARA MAHER

NEXT ON THE AGENDA: EQUALITY THROUGH FEM-VERTISING?

BY JANICE HE // TVR STAFF WRITER

Notice a pattern in the ads you have seen recently? Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty," Always's "Like a Girl," Pantene's "Not Sorry," and Verizon's "Inspire Her Mind" are just a few examples. Mass media are calling it "fem-vertising" and millions of viewers are supporting its apparent growth.

However, feminism has always been around. Why did it take us so long to get here? To finally see ads that celebrate girls and women instead of objectifying them has left many of us relieved but also questioning.

Turns out, many companies are just accepting the fact that female empowerment sells. They are connecting the dots and finding that people genuinely want to see a girl fight through society's stereotypes instead of being someone who portrays those very same stereotypes. Fem-vertising has proven to be successful. The women's lifestyle website SheKnows polled 628 women and announced last year that 52% of them admitted to purchasing a product because they liked how the ads presented women.

The sudden shift to feminist advertising leaves some of us wondering: Is everyone really all on board? Where did the gender-biased ads, created by traditional marketers, go hiding? I am talking about the ads that used women to sell male-targeted products like hamburgers, vehicles, and men's deodorant as well as the ads geared towards females -- like Revlon's recent one that implicitly tells girls to achieve smoother skin in order to please men. Well, according to the numbers, they are becoming a thing of the past and may not be around too much longer.

However, let's face it, there are plenty of pseudo-feminists out there, and at the end of the day, an ad is still an ad. Though several companies have used a portion of its fem-vertising, like Dove's partnerships with Girl Scouts and Girls Inc., to support female empowerment, it's imperative to note that their primary goal is not to create change, but to create profit. And though these companies have a lot of control over what ads you see, remember that you, as a consumer, have a much more powerful role in determining how effective those ads can really be.

PLAYING THE DISRESPECT CARD

RUDE BOYS

BY JOSELYN DAVEIGA // STAFF WRITER

A teenage girl was walking by a group of guys at Ashmont station recently when one of them called out: "Dusty" -- street slang for ugly. The teen became furious.

"Why are you calling me dusty when you don't even know me?" she yelled back. Doesn't matter why, but boys all over town are disrespecting females for no reason. They act like it's their right, girls say.

Serena Gorash, 14, has been on the receiving end of this random rudeness, too.

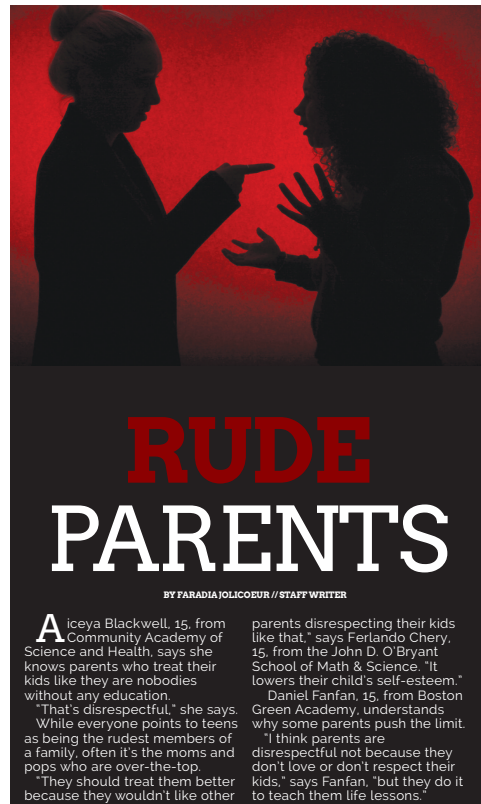
"One time I was walking in the hallway with my friend and this dude out of nowhere says I have fat calves," says Gorash, who goes to Boston Community Leadership Academy. "I felt disrespected in some sort of way."

Soleen Balata, 15, from BCLA, had a similar experience.

"I was talking to my friend about a hypothetical question and a boy came in the middle," Balata says, and made fun of her body. "It made me upset. I think it's unattractive... It's a bad quality in a guy."

Grace Richard, 14, from BCLA, has advice for those targeted by such crudeness.

"Tell them off," she says, "because it will make you feel better."



BY FARADIA JOLICOEUR // STAFF WRITER

Aiceya Blackwell, 15, from Community Academy of Science and Health, says she knows parents who treat their kids like they are nobodies without any education.

"That's disrespectful," she says. While everyone points to teens as being the rudest members of a family, often it's the moms and pops who are over-the-top.

"They should treat them better because they wouldn't like other

parents disrespecting their kids like that," says Fernando Chery, 15, from the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science. "It lowers their child's self-esteem."

Daniel Fanfan, 15, from Boston Green Academy, understands why some parents push the limit.

"I think parents are disrespectful not because they don't love or don't respect their kids," says Fanfan, "but they do it to teach them life lessons."

APH PHOTO // ABRAHAM ROSA

FATHERS AND BOYFRIENDS: NAH!

BY FARMATA SAMATI // STAFF WRITER

Question: Why do fathers generally dislike their daughters' boyfriends? Answer: Because they're fathers.

Eighteen-year-old Marianely Rodriguez, from Boston Community Leadership Academy, says that her father did not like her boyfriend because he was older than her and very outgoing. Her dad thought he was a bad influence on his daughter, she says, and now he's her ex.

Venifer Suarez, 18, from BCLA, says her father was nervous that a previous boyfriend showed bad intentions around her.

Eighteen-year-old Bransha Speller, from BCLA, has a similarly sad story to tell about her boyfriend -- now her former boyfriend.

She says her dad told her: "He has no future. He is not going to do anything but bring you down."

And then he added the lament of fathers everywhere: his daughter can do better.

EXTREME MAKEOVER TEEN EDITION, PART ONE DESTINY'S DO-OVERS

BY ILMIA GOLEMI // STAFF WRITER

Eighteen-year-old Marousa Laafar says that if she was given a second chance and could change one thing, she would stop listening to what others say and just go with her instincts. "At the end of the day, you only have a few real friends," says Laafar, who attends the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science.

Many teens have regrets about the past. They know that learning from your mistakes can be hard, but you come out of it a stronger person.

Ina Dodoveci, 17, from the O'Bryant, says she would be less judgmental about things if she was given a do-over.

"I would try to see the world with an open mind," she says.

Enkid Koci, 17, says he has pushed people away and did not care what they thought of him.

"If I went back in time," says Koci, from the O'Bryant, "I would stop making others think that I was a bad boy."

EXTREME MAKEOVER TEEN EDITION, PART TWO "PERFECTION ISN'T ABOUT BEING PERFECT"

BY ANTIAH THORNTON // STAFF WRITER

Many teenagers have a gamut of thoughts that all seem to gravitate around one huge concept: "How can I achieve perfection?"

Teens might want to gain total excellence by changing their physical appearance, personality traits, or overall mindset.

Melanie Sheehan, a freshman from West Roxbury Academy, says she has a combination of desires.

"I would like to be really smart," she says. "Like I want to be able to absorb knowledge with more ease. I would also want to have awesome hair and be a bit thinner."

Kharah Byssainthe, a freshman at West Roxbury Academy, says she wants to stay the way she is.

"I honestly wouldn't do anything," she says. "I love myself the way that I am."

After all, says Crystal Bautista, a freshman at West Roxbury Academy, teens should celebrate their uniqueness rather than chase a state of flawlessness.

"I think that we're different in many different ways," she says. "Being kind and generous are definitely good traits to have, but perfection isn't about being perfect. It's about being you."

HOGGING CENTER STAGE

BY WIDENZA PACOMBE // STAFF WRITER

For Yoshi Howe, 14, highlighting yourself has a single purpose.

"The whole point of trying to get attention is to gain reputation or popularity," says Howe, from Dorchester. Teens have different reasons for trying to grab the spotlight, from hoping to make friends to just enjoying making a scene.

Najma Abdurahman did a wheelie on her bike to impress her family. "I wanted to prove to my cousin and brother that I was better than what they thought I was," says Abdurahman, 14, from Dorchester.

Howe once did a back flip off a cement wall for the after-effects of it all.

"To show my friends," says Howe, "that I was a cool person."

Thirteen-year-old Tonia Jennings, 13, from Mattapan, took a different path, bursting out in tears one time so that people would ask her, "What's wrong?"

After all, the crying had worked for a girl she knew.

Says Jennings: "She made a lot of friends that day."



APH PHOTO // ABRAHAM ROSA

DECLARATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE

BY KAWTAR BENNANI // STAFF WRITER

Nancy Aleid, 17, from Rostindale, says she is independent and doesn't need anyone -- except her family.

"My parents, aunt, and uncle are really all I need because they know me best and support me regardless of my decisions," says Aleid. "They're the fundamental basis of my character and integrity. It's a human thing, I guess."

A human thing, indeed. According to Campbell's eighth textbook edition of Biology, many scientists characterize mammals as organisms that seek interaction.

Homo sapiens, or humans, if you will, deserve their own category. From birth, our species relies on a parental figure until about age 18. Innumerable other interchanges occur during this epoch, arguably making us among the most dependent creatures on Earth.

Independence exists in many forms and is ultimately ambiguous.

According to former president Calvin Coolidge: "There is no dignity quite so impressive, and no one independence quite so important, as living within your means."

To Aleid, it is simply declining help for math homework. To others, this may mean evading an unworthy relationship.

Alejandra Quinones, a junior at West Roxbury Academy, says she knows what it takes for a person to earn her friendship.

"A true friend," says Quinones, "is someone you can lean on. Someone who will be there for you when you're down to pick you back up, to dust you off, and pat you on the back -- and expect absolutely nothing in return."

For Rhonandroh Abraham, a sophomore at the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science, independence is defined as having the strength to admit to oneself that having a person to rely on isn't as shameful as some people make it.

He lives comfortably with his father, mother, and siblings and says he is somewhat independent but knows the limits.

"It's better to be independent, of course," he says. "That way, no one can let you down. But then again, if you're on the street with no protection, what else are you going to do, you know?"

This article was prepared in collaboration with 826 Boston.

BLING IS THE THING

APH PHOTO // MARY NGUYEN

EXPRESSING YOURSELF THROUGH JEWELRY

BY MANUELA PATINO SANCHEZ // STAFF WRITER

Mzybelin Shul, 16, loves owls. She expresses her animal obsession with owl earrings and an owl necklace instead of through words.

"I like showing my passion through what I wear rather than saying it directly," says Shul, who goes to the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science.

Some teens reveal themselves through dance, others through writing, and some through the spoken word. Then there are those who rather make a statement about what they're about via their jewelry.

"Wearing jewelry allows me to show what is

important to me in my life," says Shannon Rose, 15, of the O'Bryant.

Every day, Rose wears a necklace engraved with the name of her dog -- Nala, a Golden Retriever. Rose also has 22 Alex and Ani bracelets that she wears as a tribute to those who gave them to her as gifts.

Emily Rivera, 16, feels like she is missing something if she goes out minus her earrings. As a reflection of her personality, she prefers studs to anything that dangles.

"I think I just like simple things," says Rivera, from the O'Bryant. "I'm not into anything extravagant."

This article was prepared in collaboration with 826 Boston.

DON'T JUDGE A LOOK BY ITS COVER

BY PRINCELL FELIZ FRANCO // STAFF WRITER

Fances Gonzalez, 16, says women can dress outrageously even though their actions are conservative.

"Yes it's an everyday scenario," says Gonzalez, who goes to the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science. "One time I had a teacher that dressed so slutty."

Teens says it's wrong to judge others simply on appearances, since looks can be deceiving.

Philomena Chea, 16, says she understands why teens choose to wear the clothing they do.

"People either want to impress someone or fit into society," says Chea, who goes to the O'Bryant.

My Nguyen, 17, delivers her verdict on why many teens come to conclusions based on superficial factors.

"I think it's not fair," says Nguyen, who attends the O'Bryant, "but I think that's how society is and everyone is used to it."

This article was prepared in collaboration with 826 Boston.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

BY ROSE KOUMBASSA // STAFF WRITER

Kayin Walker, 14, from Mattapan, believes that life should be filled with challenges but also contain pleasure.

"In this life," Walker says, "we must have responsibilities, but we should still have time to have fun."

For teens, the meaning of life is very much something they want to figure out for themselves.

Rosaura Lara, 14, from South Boston, says she knows many older people who complain to her about all the things they wished they'd done when they were young.

"I don't want to end up like that," says Lara. "I believe that you're able to do whatever you want to do only if you decide that's how you want to live your life. Your life is what you make it."

Keahja Pittman, 14, from Dorchester, says many teens are up to the challenge.

"Every day we take chances to go out and explore the world," says Pittman, "we are getting closer to figuring out the meaning of life."

FIRST KISS

BY JAMILLAT DOUMBIA // STAFF WRITER

Lillie Acoff says she was four years old when she shared a smooch with her crush on the playground.

"My first kiss was awkward," says Acoff, a sophomore at Boston Community Leadership Academy, "only because the boy didn't know how to kiss."

Jocileiny Barbosa says she received her first kiss from a boy she met through her sister while on vacation in Cape Verde. She was 11.

"It took me by surprise," says Barbosa, a junior at BCLA. "I didn't know what was going to happen."

Young people are experiencing things earlier and earlier these days -- including locking lips. Blame it on the mass media.

"I learned how to kiss by watching a lot of movies," says Paola Guzman, a junior from BCLA, who says she had her first kiss at the age of five. "I was so young. I went up to this random boy during nap time and kissed him."



AFHART // ELEANOR WONG



AFH PHOTO // DANA NGUYEN

PURSuing THE PURSE

PUTTING THE BACKPACK BACK ON THE RACK

BY NAIKA F. MÉTÉLUS // STAFF WRITER

Soleen Balata, 15, carries all her school stuff in a purse.

"It's easier to hold, they are not as heavy as backpacks, and they are more fashionable," says Balata, who goes to Boston Community Leadership Academy.

Have you noticed lately that many teenage girls have switched to putting everything in a purse instead of lugging around backpacks? Grace Richard, 14, recently changed from

backpack to purse.

"I saw that every teenage girl had purses, and obviously I wanted to try out the new trend," says Richard, who attends BCLA.

Skyiah Fuentes, 14, remains a backpack believer.

"It's more comfortable," says Fuentes, from BCLA. "Purses hurt your arms and wrists. And they're never big enough to hold all of my school supplies."

FINDING YOUR COMFORT ZONE

BY OSMAN FOFANAH // STAFF WRITER

Tomica Robin, 16, immigrated from Guyana to the US at age six and she recalls feeling homesick. When she settled into Dorchester, she felt shy in the big community and had no friends in her neighborhood.

"If you're comfortable with your surroundings, then your interactions will be more positive," says Robin, who goes to the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science. There are a lot of different emotions that come with being the new guy or girl on the block. You may have to act a certain way based on the setting and the type of people you are surrounded with. It sometimes requires you to step out of your comfort zone.

Some teens can turn what may seem like a disadvantage into their favor as 16-year-old

Asa Stephenson did while in the seventh grade. He says he was the only person of color in his New York school -- but he made it work.

"I was better at basketball than everybody," says Stephenson, from the O'Bryant.

Evens Louis-Jean, 16, from the O'Bryant, got his first job last summer, working in a communications position.

He didn't know anybody.

"At first," he says, "it's like I'm not there."

But time passed and everything seemed normal.

"After," he says, "I act lively because I have adapted."

This article was prepared in collaboration with 826 Boston.

UNHEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

BY IRRISIA SILVA // STAFF WRITER

Marcelo Monteiro, a freshman at the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science, says he's been in toxic friendships. There was this group of kids, he says, that kept pushing him to smoke weed. He'd always say no, he says, and tried to get them to quit. Eventually, he says, one of them did.

You hear a lot these days about teens being in unhealthy relationships but not so much about harmful friendships.

Tyquan Watkins, a freshman at Boston Green Academy, says he's had friends who didn't have his back.

"They only care about girls and not their homeboys," he says.

Daniel Fanfan, a freshman at Boston Green Academy, says he's been fortunate to be able to avoid a bad friendship -- but he knows one when he sees one.

"They're friends," he says, "that don't want to see you succeed."



AFHART // VIRLIE CANCEL

ANXIOUS MOMENTS

BY IIA LIN ZHEN // STAFF WRITER

Osahenrumwen Egharevba, a junior at the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science, says she has a plan for dealing with the hotspots of anxiety.

"Try to converse with acquaintances or play with my friends, even sauntering around the neighborhood can help," she says.

High school students are burdened with huge expectations from parents, teachers, and themselves. Such beliefs inevitably generate stress.

Kai Jie Zhou, a junior at the O'Bryant, recalled a recent presentation in English class. He had intended to look around the room to alleviate his nervousness. However, he realized that his actions were in vain. As a result, he says, his demonstration became chaotic and awkward, and he bombed the performance.

Fong Mung, 16, from the O'Bryant, has an idea about how to lift the force of these heavy burdens.

"The rock is on our back because we view it as a rock," says Fong. "To decrease its weight, just think about it as a weightless substance, like cotton or a breeze."

This article was prepared in collaboration with 826 Boston.



AFH PHOTO // MARLENA PIREZ

HOLIDAZE

CELEBRATORY SPIRIT WANES

BY KATHY LE // STAFF WRITER

Fifteen-year-old Joey Rodriguez says he misses the good old days of Halloween.

"It makes me feel kind of sad because I loved trick or treating when I was younger," says Rodriguez, who goes to school in the Fenway.

For some teens, this loss of celebratory spark simply stems from the fact of getting older.

For others, holidays have been reduced to commercialized clichés: Christmas is presents, Easter is eggs, Valentine's Day

is chocolates or flowers. Thanksgiving is stuffing your face with food.

"I think some holidays are more fun than other holidays," says Chris Ashford, 15, who goes to school in Charlestown and cites July 4 as a day that is still alive and well.

Indeed, not all teens are down on those traditionally festive moments, continuing to find ways even as they grow up to keep things creative and fun.

"There are some people," says Christina Kowalski, 15, who goes to school in Roxbury, "that still have their holiday spirit."



ART BY COBY WEIRLIN

HEADBANGER MUSIC, SPANISH STYLE

BY MELANIE BAEZ // STAFF WRITER

Music has been known throughout the centuries as a way to connect and to express. Music can tell stories, whether in words or melody.

This one song by the group Stravaganza -- "Hijo de la Luna" or "Son of the Moon" -- tells quite the myth. The story is said to be the explanation of why the moon goes crescent. It starts off with a slow ballad-like intro, the lead singer's voice soft and eerie.

"Tonto el que no entienda cuenta una leyenda que una hembra gitana onjuró a la luna

hasta el amanecer
llorando pedia
al llegar el día
desposar un calé."

The song talks about a lonely gypsy woman praying to the moon for a husband. The moon agrees -- but only in exchange for her first born. As the music continues to intensify, going from lullaby to heavy metal, the lyrics tell of the gypsy woman meeting a man of dark skin and marrying him. When the child is born, he is albino -- resembling not the father but the moon itself. In a fit of rage, the husband kills the woman because he believes she cheated

on him. He abandons the child. As the song nears its end, it begins to explain why the moon becomes crescent -- a result of it lessening to make the crying boy a cradle.

"Y en las noches que haya luna llena
será porque el niño esté de buenas
y si el niño llora
menguará la luna
para hacerle una cuna
y si el niño llora
menguará la luna
para hacerle una cuna."

HEADBANGERS UNITE: LOUD AND PROUD

BY CHRISTINE FREEMAN // STAFF WRITER

Jonney Santos, 17, is a headbanger.

He admits to liking heavy metal, headbanging music. Santos has been listening to this blasting sound since he was eight years old. He first heard it while playing video games on his PlayStation. He remains a fan.

"When I listen to it, it gives me peace so I listen to it every day," says Santos, who goes to Dorchester Academy.

While many teens are known to tune into rap or pop, there exists a small underground of headbanging devotees.

Marcus Wade, 18, is one of them.



MELANIE BAEZ // STAFF WRITER

"It actually brings people together sometimes," says Wade, from Dorchester Academy.

He says he was 10 when a friend introduced him to the genre. One of the first songs he liked was "Sulfur" by Slipknot.

Wade says he also listens to rap, soul, jazz, and pop.

Bachinger Bembeleza, a sophomore at Dorchester Academy, enjoys hip-hop, soul, jazz, and a little country.

But she is not a headbanger. Says Bembeleza: "It's too loud and aggressive."

SENIOR SAYONARAS

Advice from those who have been there, done that

BEWARE OF SENIORITIS

BY HARRIANNE ERRIE // STAFF WRITER

To All Incoming Seniors:

There is only one real thing you need to beware of: senioritis.

This disease is real and very contagious. I was diagnosed with it this year and it nearly ruined my life. I was always tired, lazy, and even careless. But there are ways to prevent this horrific disease. Keep your eyes on the prize and get help from everyone around you.

The "itis" will pass and you will successfully leave high school, ready for the next chapter in your life.

A LESSON ON STRESSIN'

BY ILMAR GOLEMI // STAFF WRITER

Dear Incoming Seniors,

Senior year -- I don't know where to start. It is one of the most stressful years in your life. All you think about is deadlines, college essays, what school fits best for you -- and how to afford it.

On the other side, you also have to maintain the balance between college applications and school work. Even though there will be so much supplemental paperwork and essay revisions, you are going to realize how worth it is once you get your first college acceptance. But there will be rejections, too -- maybe even from your number one school.

One thing to keep in mind is that a college rejection does not mean that you are not going to be successful in the future. It does not mean that you are a failure.

Sometimes, life puts us through difficult situations and everyone will face them during senior year. I truly believe that everything happens for a reason, so always keep your head high.

To help you handle all the stress, make sure to enjoy your final year of high school. It is the last time you will see so much drama happening, because once you are out of there you are considered an adult and expected to act like one.

Prom and graduation are the most exciting parts of senior year, and even though you will have so much work, always take a break. Spend some time with your friends and family, because it is good to forget all that stress for a while.

DO'S AND DON'TS

BY JENNIFER LE // SENIOR EDITOR

Do:

- Sleep at home -- not in class.
- Your homework.
- Study for quizzes and tests.
- Strive to get A's and B's.
- Participate in clubs and extracurricular activities.
- Community service.
- Mind your business.

Don't:

- Slack and skip school.
- Take AP Calc.
- Procrastinate -- for example, waiting last minute to fill out college stuff.
- Get caught up in drama by dating anyone from school, gossiping, instigating.
- Dress inappropriately.
- Give teachers and other adults attitude.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FRIENDS AND FUN

BY FARMATA SAMATI // STAFF WRITER

Dear Students,

The past four years of my school career have been very rocky and fun at the same time. The three biggest pieces of advice I can give to you guys are:

1) Know who your true friends are.

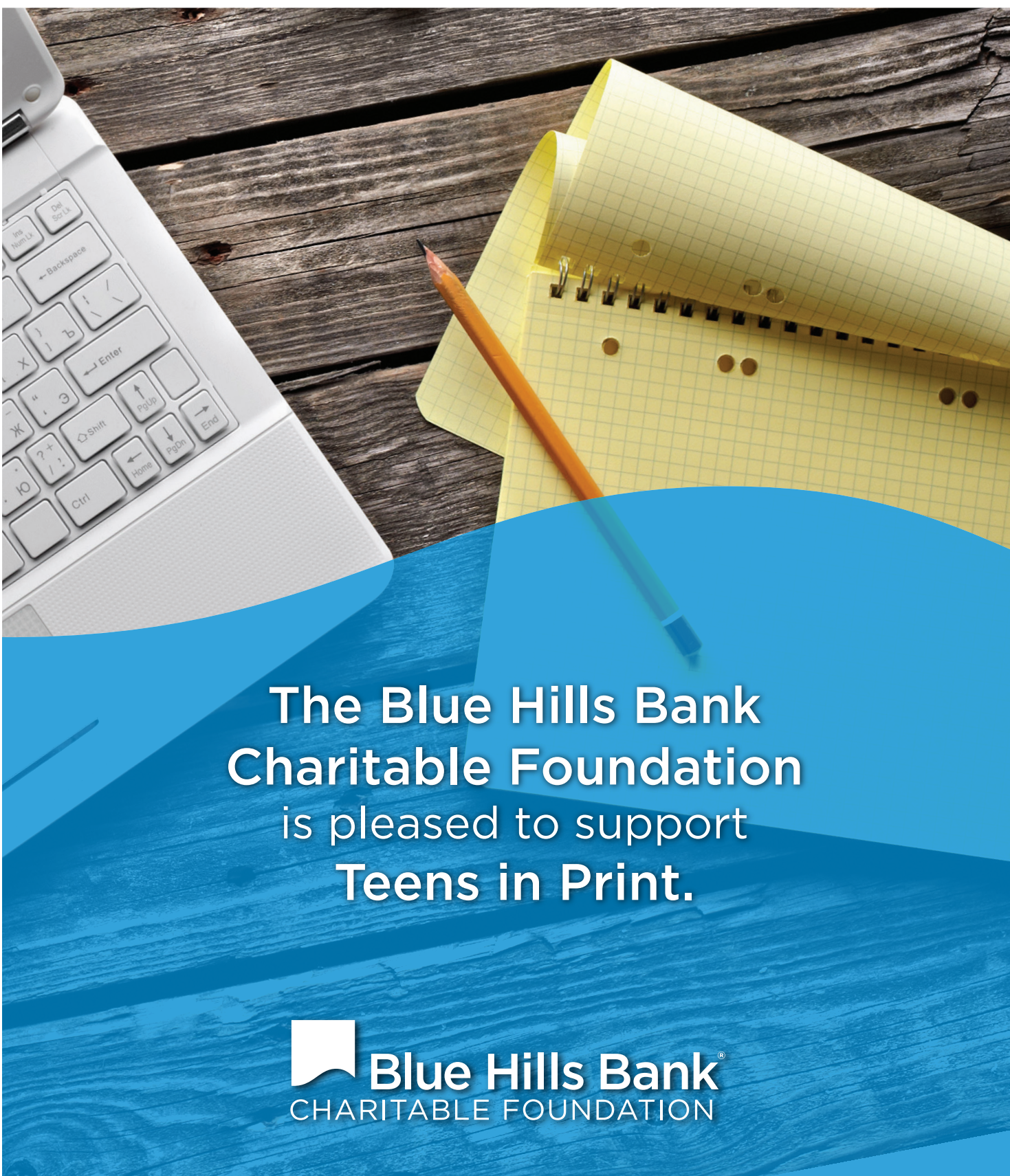
2) Procrastinating -- not an option.

3) Have fun during your last years of high school.

Knowing who your true friends are was one of the most challenging things I faced during high school. It doesn't mean that you can't make new friends or the friends that you are making are not real. Throughout my high school years, I learned that most of the people that I thought were my friends were not because they took advantage of me. I don't like saying no to people so they used that against me. So, choose your friends carefully.

Procrastination can mess you up on so many levels. It can not only affect you academically but also in your real life. If you know that you are a person who procrastinates a lot and then gets upset when you don't do well in class, you shouldn't blame anyone but yourself. You should try to change and not wait for the last minute.

You should join clubs and go to school dances because you might regret not having any fun in high school. By the way, when I say to have fun, I don't mean to go out and party every day. When you look back on your high school years, you want to say, "I miss those days. I had so much fun. And I actually did something with my life."



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