



THE OFFSPRING

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THE OATH OF HIPPOCRATES

Teodora Costache, 10 G

We live in a world of statistics now. It's easy to watch the news and forget that the numbers presented as death toll used to be real people. Most of them most likely spent their last days surrounded by people they didn't know. But not by people that didn't care. Doctors and nurses are doing everything in their power to put an end to this.

The world has never seen something like this before. We think that because we have managed to make so many improvements in modern medicine we are now untouchable. Only now are we painfully realising just how unprepared we are. A lack of medical supplies affects not only the patients, some of whom don't even have a bed in the hospital, but also the doctors who have to work in highly unsafe conditions. They knowingly put their life and their family's lives on the line every time they go to work.

The real reason we are struggling so much right now is not because doctors and nurses are undertrained or inexperienced. It's because we never gave a thought to preparation for a lot of people getting sick at the same time. It's like the Titanic, there are lifeboats but not enough. And now, medical professionals have to make very hard decisions regarding the life and death of their patients, the people they swore to protect and help.

There is still very little known about the virus and we still don't have a vaccine. But that is not for lack of trying. Multiple potential cures are currently being investigated, some of which are already in the second, or close to, phase of testing. That is a record time! And it is all thanks to the doctors and researchers working daily to save lives.

Doctors are getting sick and dying every day along with their patients. They are on the front lines of this pandemic. Now more than ever, hospital staff deserve not only our respect, but our understanding and help. It is through hard times that humanity shows its true nature. Let's be kind to each other!

Spiru in the times of pandemic. Spiru#Acasa

When we experience a heavily emotion-charged event, let's say a planetary quarantine, it impacts how vividly we remember the days and seconds prior to it. What we were doing, who we were talking to, or the way somebody said something. We remember these things; our memories are tagged and those moments look fresh and alive, like tiny flies in the gleaming light of a torch. (*Charcoal sketch, Victor C, 9A*)



So, it had been the 8th of March. The classrooms still preserved the sweet fragrance of hyacinth, and the crispy sound of chocolate candies wrappers, generously handed out. Back in those times, we would gulp down that piece of chocolate, with a hand still half-powdered in chalk. No time, for a quick hand wash during break, we would say. There was barely time to get ready for the next class, different room, another floor. How strange would *that* be now! Not to wash hands every 10 minutes or so. Not to keep a distance between you and a colleague with whom you would swap the large class registers. I remember it was Tuesday and no one knew exactly what was going on. We were still making plans for the next weeks. It dawns on me how ridiculously weird the Romanian tale beginning phrase sounds: “A fost *odată*, ca *NICIodată*”. (*Clay work, Lea T, 5th grade*)

The first weeks of Corona pandemics were hovering like a hangover above pretty much everything. We started processing our new lives, discovering new communication channels. But then, like the hero awakening after a deep slumber, we, teachers and students, came back to the new life. The regular classrooms became ZOOMful/ HANGOUTSful/ MEETful of digitalized students, surprised to see and live what we all did. The lessons were taught to small faces fitting tiny squares on a screen. Sometimes a sibling, a puppy, or a grandparent would sneak in silently. And then, Mrs Daniela Soare, the Informatics teacher, came up with this idea: *What if...* our creative students would show the world that they respect physical distancing while putting their good mind and creativity to work? I instantly embraced the idea and invited the students to send in works, of all kind. **Spiru#Home. Spiru#Acasa** project was born.



Sir Ken Robinson stated once that “schools kill creativity”. Not ours. Sketches, essays, poems, songs started to pour in. Some students did wonderful covers, composed songs or played an instrument. Others graphically interpreted limericks. Some wrote charades in French or got down to the old diary, turning it into a friend, a silent witness to the incredible, unparalleled adventure. For others, the clay, the water colors or the charcoal became magic tools, and the craziest ideas molded like putty in their restless hands.

In his last major public presentations, Steve Jobs said: “It’s the intersection of technology and liberal arts that make our hearts sing” So... what makes *your* heart sing? For the students in Spiru, sharing is whatever makes their hearts sing. Otherwise, how can so many student initiatives be explained? The Change Hub, The Teded Club Spiru, the Reading Club.... they all continued their mission. This sharing & caring philosophy is a contagious attitude, which positively (and hopefully irreversibly) affects our state of mind. One ought to inspire hope, confidence as much as these are the most valued things we lack these days. It is the passionate people that inspire, energize, and influence the others, and our students have well understood that. Lately, the Change Hub Club - present students and alumni, have offered to coach their former trainers the online teaching.

There can be times of challenges and there can be times of excitement. The excitement has been to give back to the community you grew up in. You, the teacher. You, the student. The challenge was this: show others that Spiru is a school where creativity thrives even in times of incredible constraints.

You are all invited to enjoy the beauty of their works! (*Graffiti, Bianca M, 10th B*)



*think that's good because we are preparing for the incoming future. But... what I hate about this is that I haven't seen my friends for almost two weeks!
I'm looking forward to seeing you gone!
No hugs for you,
Alex M., 6th grade*

*Dana Sburlan
Teacher of English and Educational Councilor
May, 10, 2020*



The Haunted Circles

Abe woke up in the middle of the night. He could hear strange noises, so he decided to take his cane and go outside to see what was happening.

...
Looking through the wheat field, he sighted some plowed crops. 'That is strange' he thought. 'I haven't turned up the earth for a long time', and he kept walking.

...
'What is that?'. 'Why is there no more corn in this area?'.
He looked at the ground astonished. It was only now that he realized. The missing crops formed a circle. Abe ran to his house to call the police immediately.

Mihai-George Rusu, Cls. 6

CHARADE

*Mon premier est une épice.
Mon deuxième est une nécessité pour la vie.
Mon troisième est un endroit sur internet.
Mon quatrième est une boisson.
Mon tout est un sentiment positif.
curry eau site thé – curiosité
DARIANA, XI F*

Dear coronavirus,

Bucharest, 18.03.2020

Thanks for keeping me home. Fortunately, I can still do my work and "go" to school, due to technology. You know, I'm using Google classroom for reading lessons and sharing homework. You pushed us to replace the school with the Internet, and I

Human and humane

Corina Ionescu, 10 A

One compound noun: lockdown derives from a careless population+ one bat+ a new virus. This equation sums up the most recent pandemic. As the infamous COVID-19 took over the entire globe, our perception of life has changed. Deaths, elders separated from their families, interdiction to go outside- it looks like an ill-scripted apocalyptic film made on a low budget. Unbelievable as it may seem, this has been the reality of millions of people around the globe for the past months. Did this period have a strong impact upon us as societies, but more importantly, as individuals? I have one thing on my mind that needs to be heard and praised: hail to all the doctors and medical assistants around the globe. I had a great respect for them before, but now it is ten times greater. These people were alienated from their families and loved ones because they presented a risk for them. Just imagine how heart-breaking and demoralizing it must have been for all the medical staff to be basically trapped in this vicious circle: family over duty. Endangering your life by staying countless hours in the hospital to help the ones infected with Corona virus, and not only, just to serve your community, is astonishingly human. I really hope that their branch will receive the deserved respect in the future. And because I mentioned “human” and “respect”, do we really know what those words mean anymore? As Goethe said, “No matter whether you are of high rank or low, you can’t avoid paying the price of your common humanity”. Illness can affect anyone, regardless of their sins and virtues, and that means we are all equally vulnerable in front of this virus. We cannot defeat the natural laws of biology, no matter our rank in the society, and that is com-

pletely fine. We, as rulers of the world, sometimes forget our condition as mortals (and beings in general). We are not even close to being gods, and we start getting farther and farther from being human, in the deep sense of the word, too. Although we are humans in terms of species, that does not necessarily make us humane. And here is where the pandemic paradoxically helped us. After years of living by the jungle rule, there has come a period in which people finally manage to be more sympathetic. They were suffering, and so they could understand that others are also having a hard time. From posts on social media, to donations to charity and voluntary work, humanity as a whole bonded together to support the less fortunate in the area of health and their families. Moreover, the respect for the elders and the will to help them became a priority. People drew the conclusion that this part of the society is more important than it has once been thought. In most cases they represent the main support, both emotionally and financially, for the younger generations. Without them, for example, lots of kindergarten children would have to go home by themselves and wait for their parents to finish their working schedule. A nanny is unaffordable for some, and so their children would have to roam the streets alone and prepare their meals, without grandparents to help. It is true that Corona virus wrecked havoc on our lives. Our perception of little things will be forever altered. Despite this, I do believe everything is happening for the better. The quarantine period helped us reevaluate our needs and roles in the communities we live in. Hopefully, there will be mentality changes regarding the way people act with one another. Though, it is upsetting that it required panic and human lives for us to embrace our true nature: vulnerability combined with compassion.

GENERATION GAP

Ilinca Dima, 9 G

It is the first time in the history of humanity that by doing nothing, you are doing everything. Everybody dreamt at some point in life to be a superhero, but never had the suit, the chance, the power. And now? Now all of us can be one by just staying home, alive.

Statistics show that 96% of the Covid-19 death cases are of people over 45 years old. How can we compare this to the 0.06% that is between the ages of 0-17 years old? There is no comparison. For a child this may just as well be flu, but for your beloved parents and grandparents it's the fine line between dead and alive.

It sounds scary and it should be. Ignorance has no say in this matter. With this being said, let me ask you: “How many times did you go out, even if it meant getting a cold?” If your answer was “Whenever i got the chance”, congratulations, you are as honest as they make them. So now my next question for all the Gen-Z out there: “Why stay in now?” Because you love. And this makes you wise and it keeps you inside for the ones you love. Covid -19 is not only the biggest pandemic of the century, but also the most ageist one. We stay home for all the parents, grandparents, sensible people out there. Maybe we know them and maybe we don’t, but we care regardless, because that is the human nature. True character is shown in times of crises, so show how bright yours is, show how kind, wise and altruist you are, now is the time.

Some people will say that by staying inside at your young age shows fear, paranoia, shows that you are a “chicken”. And to those I say: If in this life I am going to be a chicken for anything, I will be to protect the ones I love, and for that I shall be the proudest chicken of them all. And you should, too!

Youtubers VS Corona: FIGHT!

Aurelia Popescu, 9 G

“Top of the mornin’ to ya, laddies!”

That’s how the first #HopeFromHome charity livestream started, hosted by the Irish YouTube creator, Seán McLoughlin, known to many others around the globe as Jacksepticeye. His near 12 hour livestream on World Health Day managed to raise almost \$660,000, almost 40% of the global total raised. He, along with the people he worked with from the platform Tiltify, has managed to bring together Youtubers and



streamers such as Markiplier and JaidenAnimations and raise more than \$1.7 million for charities helping in the fight against CoVid-19.

After 11 hours of talking to his audience and playing games, Jacksepticeye wrote in an Instagram post: “Words cannot express how crazy today was. [...] I am so emotionally overwhelmed but I have nothing but love and gratitude to all of those who donated and made such a huge difference today. I love you all, thank you!”. His livestream was also joined by other big personalities in the YouTube gaming community, such as PewDiePie and Markiplier, the latter having a charity stream of his own. McLoughlin told the CNN that he tried to reach as many creators as he could: “I felt like more money could be raised if we mobilized everybody and all of their communities [...] under one banner. And then everybody could do their own small streams within that.”

While Jacksepticeye was the leader of it all, that didn’t stop the other participants from taking the spotlight: Jaiden Animations showed off her bird Ari, melting the hearts of her viewers, Ethan Nestor of CrankGameplays shaved his head, much to Markiplier’s annoyance (these two own a channel together) and Mark invented the so-called “Kick Squad” which he used to help other streamers’ donations increase.

Of course, the streams didn’t only consist of joking around and playing games. Jacksepticeye also had a few calls during his livestream with professionals in the medical field and finances, trying to raise awareness about the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic, the effects it will have and give advice to what his viewers should do during these times, such as staying inside and washing their hands.

Living vicariously

Bogdan Maria

IX- G

May 12, 2020

Stuck at home for more than two months is an experience none of us have had to deal with in our lives. Until now. So, for not going insane and continue our lives, I think we all relied on our social media and internet services and social media to communicate and stay connected. But it went much further than that.

Although, YouTube, Netflix, Facebook or Instagram are amazing ways to distract ourselves, who hasn't caught themselves in a loop, refreshing the feed continuously, waiting for some new content that could deflect them for even just a fleeting moment? It happened in the past too from time to time, but now it was much more intense, I believe. Moreover, during lockdown, the line between real life, which might not seem very interesting in some moments, and virtual one, more appealing, beautified, doubled by the temptation of the addicting online presence, could get pretty blurry.

In the midst of the pandemic, one of our basic human traits was denied: the need to socialise face to face and see other people. In order to do so, we chose the closest thing mimicking it: we used apps like FaceTime or Skype to see our friends and family, from whom we were separated. And that was both comforting and frustrating.

To add insult to injury, even our work has moved in the online space. We've all had to take a Zoom class, or turn in an assignment using Google Classroom. But without any clear boundaries, it can feel like we're either spending all day at the desk working or doing nothing (that you can really account for) at all. The axis of our work-life balance was completely bent, completely whacked.

As the corona-virus spread around the world, getting accurate information about the disease became more and more important. And more difficult, because platforms that have billions of users now depending on them for sharing news, provide therefore fertile territory for those who want to spread misinformation. On Facebook, for example, there are groups opposing vaccines and 5 G technology, plenty of comments suggesting there is a link between this virus and the new networks and so on. One of the members of one of these groups posted at some point something like this: "I've heard it's not a serious virus, it's about as bad as a flu or a cold. So really, this is a perfect plan to cover up EMF/5 G related illnesses." Scroll down and one could see that others have shared links to websites and videos connecting the corona-virus to the roll-out of 5 G in the part of China where the virus originated. And the examples could go on and on, there are plenty of conspiracies, very hard to navigate through and find that accuracy we all actually need.

All in all, it can sometimes feel like everything we do is through a phone/laptop screen. Without much real interaction, we can fall into the trap of living our lives vicariously, and denying ourselves the little graces that only the real world can offer. So, I encourage everyone to press the "Shut down" button of their electronic device from now and then and take even a few minutes to go outside and take a deep breath in. Or maybe there's an app for that, too?

Bucharest No Man's Land

Text and photo Aurelia Popescu, 9 G
Tuesday, May 5, 2020

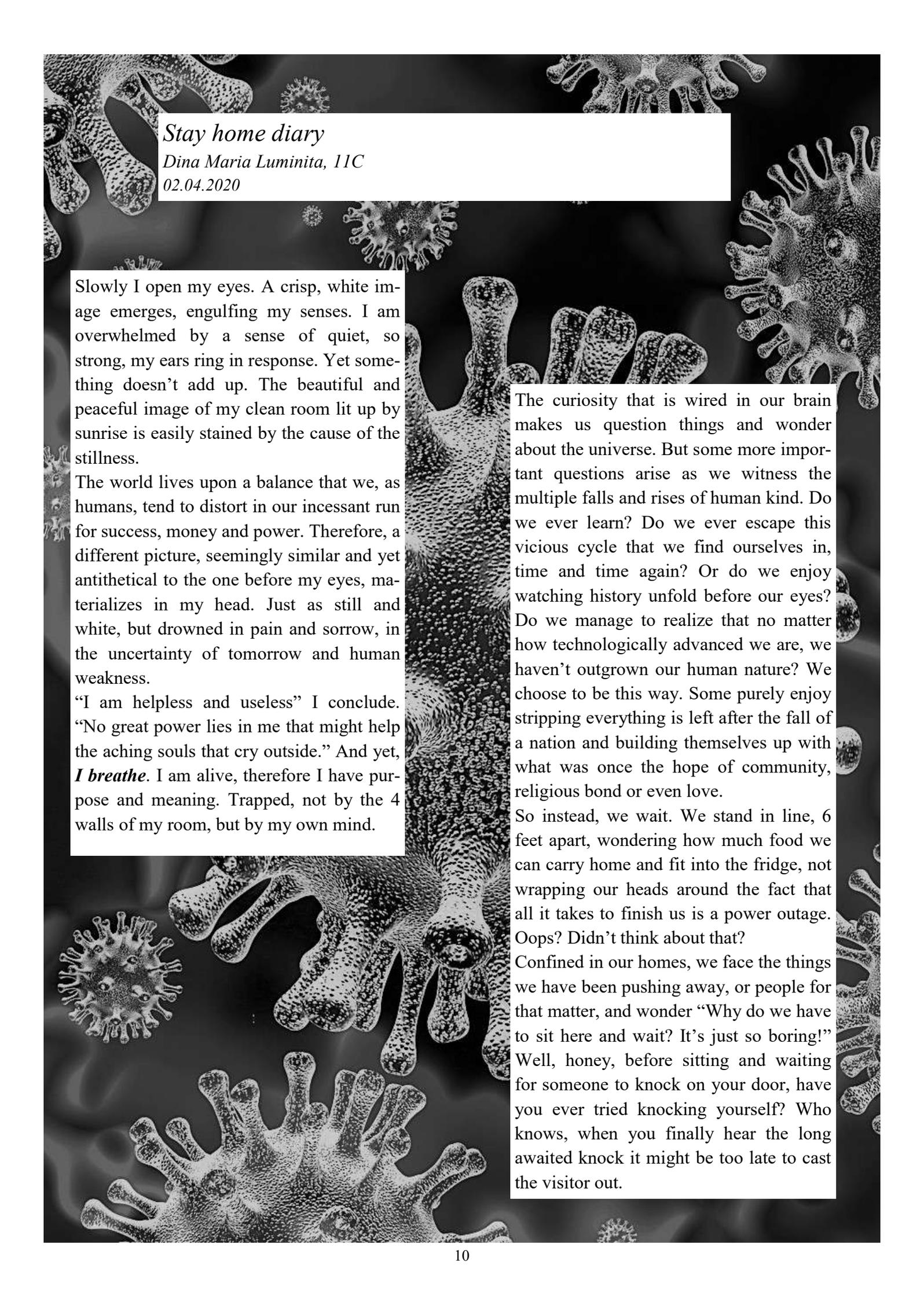
Who would've thought a few months ago that the streets of the city in which we live would become empty, void of the sounds that we had grown so used to, the zooming cars and, most importantly, the people? Would we have thought that the busy squares we all used to go to with our classmates would become empty, as if we were living in a deserted town, the kind of town which only appears in disaster movies? Apparently, these films have become reality. And none of us can actually believe it, can we?

Now, as we walk through the Bucharest we used to call "full of life", we see that almost all its life was sucked out due to the pandemic. The always busy Romana Square is now crossed only by a few cars and empty buses. A military car and a normal police one stay parked were once people were drinking coffees and laughing together. All of that seems so far away now that many of us are beginning to question if it was even real. The gates of the Cișmigiu Park now stay closed and are covered by a big sign which reads "Park Closed during the Emergency State". Another policeman sits by his car near its entrance, watching if anyone is going to adventure into the big park.



It is so weird thinking that the places we used to go through almost every day are now closed, isn't it? All the places we used to walk through to get to school or somewhere we could hang out with our friends are now either closed or abandoned.

However, we are getting closer and closer to when we will be able to go to these places, as the 15th of May is nearing. But be sure to wear your protection when you go out after that date. And maybe that way, our Bucharest will be able to be the place it used to be not a long time ago: full of life and adventures.



Stay home diary

Dina Maria Luminita, 11C

02.04.2020

Slowly I open my eyes. A crisp, white image emerges, engulfing my senses. I am overwhelmed by a sense of quiet, so strong, my ears ring in response. Yet something doesn't add up. The beautiful and peaceful image of my clean room lit up by sunrise is easily stained by the cause of the stillness.

The world lives upon a balance that we, as humans, tend to distort in our incessant run for success, money and power. Therefore, a different picture, seemingly similar and yet antithetical to the one before my eyes, materializes in my head. Just as still and white, but drowned in pain and sorrow, in the uncertainty of tomorrow and human weakness.

"I am helpless and useless" I conclude. "No great power lies in me that might help the aching souls that cry outside." And yet, ***I breathe***. I am alive, therefore I have purpose and meaning. Trapped, not by the 4 walls of my room, but by my own mind.

The curiosity that is wired in our brain makes us question things and wonder about the universe. But some more important questions arise as we witness the multiple falls and rises of human kind. Do we ever learn? Do we ever escape this vicious cycle that we find ourselves in, time and time again? Or do we enjoy watching history unfold before our eyes? Do we manage to realize that no matter how technologically advanced we are, we haven't outgrown our human nature? We choose to be this way. Some purely enjoy stripping everything is left after the fall of a nation and building themselves up with what was once the hope of community, religious bond or even love.

So instead, we wait. We stand in line, 6 feet apart, wondering how much food we can carry home and fit into the fridge, not wrapping our heads around the fact that all it takes to finish us is a power outage. Oops? Didn't think about that?

Confined in our homes, we face the things we have been pushing away, or people for that matter, and wonder "Why do we have to sit here and wait? It's just so boring!" Well, honey, before sitting and waiting for someone to knock on your door, have you ever tried knocking yourself? Who knows, when you finally hear the long awaited knock it might be too late to cast the visitor out.

Quarantine dark humour

Corina Ionescu, 10 A

When this infamous virus appeared on the world's scene, I, with my "know it all" attitude, could assure anyone that this whole charade is nothing but a massive manipulation, and we should not worry about anything. As usual, it turns out I was wrong. Although on a much bigger and sadder scale than before, I still managed to make a fool of myself in front of everyone because of my conspiracy theories.

My daily life was normal, almost boring some would say, until one Monday afternoon when it was announced that schools are closing on Wednesday (why on Earth would any government from any country in this world basically let children spend one more day surrounded by viruses and all sorts of bacteria from other human beings when they should be doing homework in their rooms, but this is not the point of my statement). That day was not out of the ordinary for me, just as any other day in my life, who am I trying to lie to here; I went to school, had a mental breakdown hearing that I would have to take three more tests that week, and then back home to stay with my cat. People on the streets did not seem concerned with the situation and nor did I. Things were following their normal path, no one would have imagined the events that were to come.

One morning the population woke up quarantined, and no one knew how to react to this new situation- except me and my fellow socially awkward, introverted brothers, things not being far from how they were before. From the very first day the internet, and even my message box- surprisingly, because people do not write to me unless they want homework, or something school related- were uncomfortably crowded with messages like this: "I won't be able to make it through this isolation period" or " I can't spend one more hour inside!!! I need fresh air and my friends". I was, and still am, annoyed by this kind of complaints as I find them totally unnecessary and attention seeking.

Coming back to discussing about me, any Leo's favourite subject, I have been feeling pretty fine since the self isolation started. I am not bored, even though I do almost nothing during the day, but I am obviously not having the time of my life either. In addition to this I am sleeping more than ever, and learned that suffering from chronic laziness finally helps me. Isn't it weird that when I was finishing kindergarten, my teachers gave me the role of "the lazy girl" in our last festivity? I think they put a spell on my destiny, there is no other plausible explanation. I tried to put up a schedule, and do something productive every day, but I think it is more than self explanatory that I failed miserably and I abandoned the mission within a week.

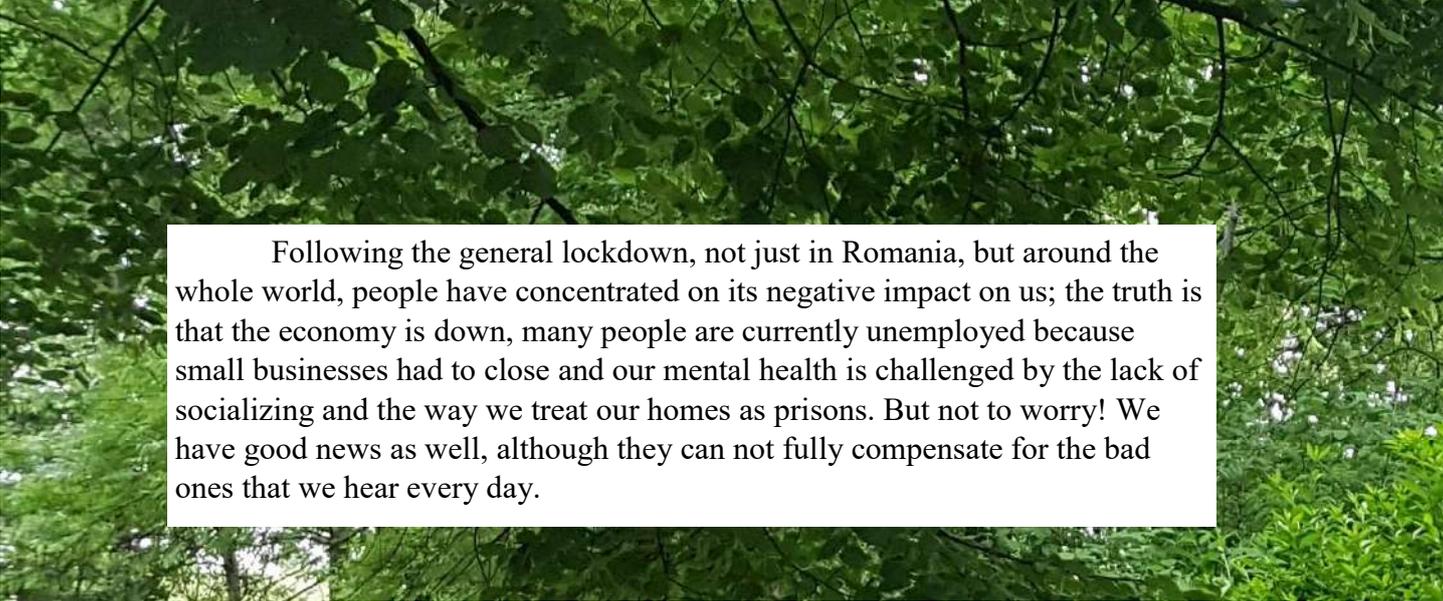
Unfortunately, the cases are getting worse from day to day, and mass media is definitely not helping us having an accurate view of what is happening outside. At one moment, I had such a distorted vision of the nowadays pandemic, that I imagined the rats coming out of the canals and running all over Bucharest, even on the "Italiana" street, in front my high school, just like in Albert Camus's "the Plague". To my surprise, people were actually having gatherings at their places, in the parks and grills by the forest. It seemed that there was no plagued rat to complete the apocalyptic scenario, but maybe it would have been better for our future if it were.

In the end, we must understand that despite of the inconvenience this situation is causing to each and every one of us, on an individual level, in times like this we have to keep in mind the lives of others as well. I cannot help but wonder- and this should be a thought to mull over for everyone: at the end of the day, to what extent are we trapped now, and to what extent were we also trapped before the quarantine?

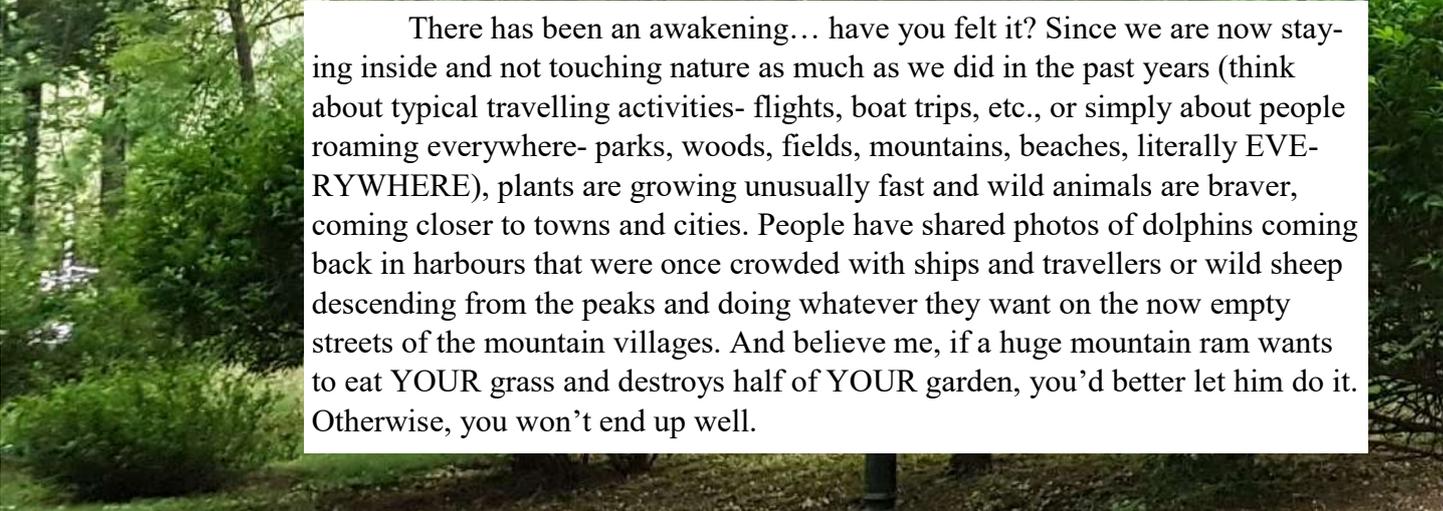


Nature is reviving!

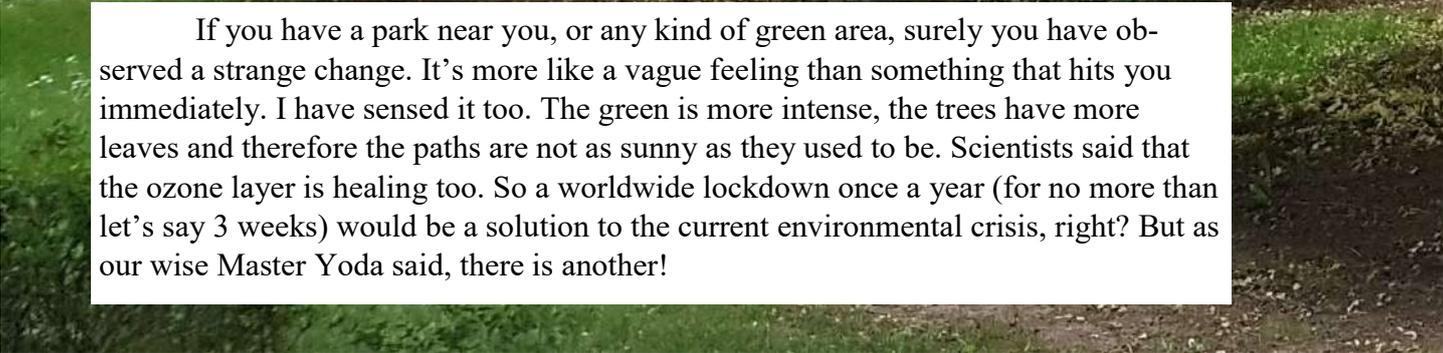
Text and photos Alexandra Zaman, 9 G



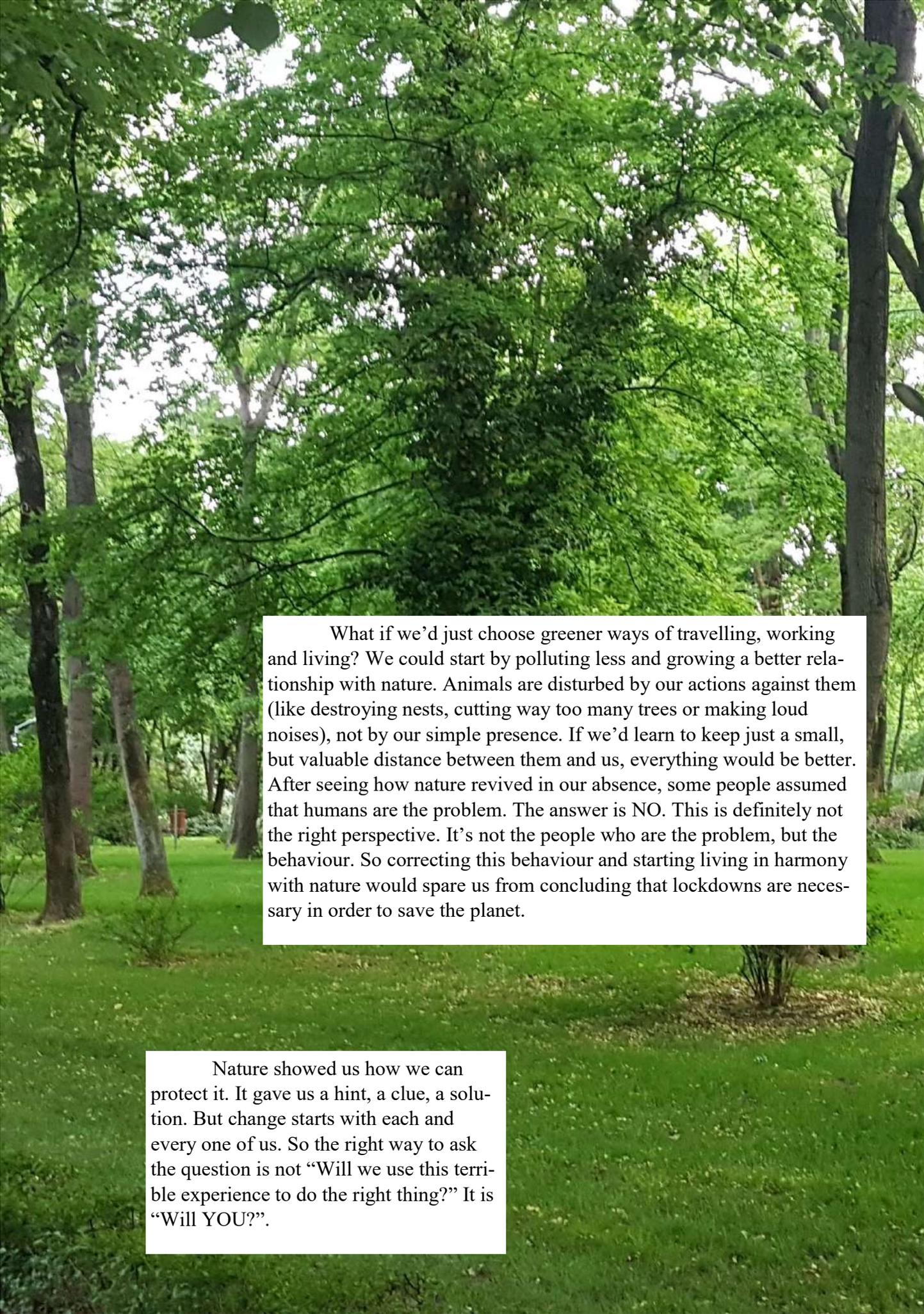
Following the general lockdown, not just in Romania, but around the whole world, people have concentrated on its negative impact on us; the truth is that the economy is down, many people are currently unemployed because small businesses had to close and our mental health is challenged by the lack of socializing and the way we treat our homes as prisons. But not to worry! We have good news as well, although they can not fully compensate for the bad ones that we hear every day.



There has been an awakening... have you felt it? Since we are now staying inside and not touching nature as much as we did in the past years (think about typical travelling activities- flights, boat trips, etc., or simply about people roaming everywhere- parks, woods, fields, mountains, beaches, literally EVERYWHERE), plants are growing unusually fast and wild animals are braver, coming closer to towns and cities. People have shared photos of dolphins coming back in harbours that were once crowded with ships and travellers or wild sheep descending from the peaks and doing whatever they want on the now empty streets of the mountain villages. And believe me, if a huge mountain ram wants to eat YOUR grass and destroys half of YOUR garden, you'd better let him do it. Otherwise, you won't end up well.



If you have a park near you, or any kind of green area, surely you have observed a strange change. It's more like a vague feeling than something that hits you immediately. I have sensed it too. The green is more intense, the trees have more leaves and therefore the paths are not as sunny as they used to be. Scientists said that the ozone layer is healing too. So a worldwide lockdown once a year (for no more than let's say 3 weeks) would be a solution to the current environmental crisis, right? But as our wise Master Yoda said, there is another!

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, slender trees and a thick canopy of bright green leaves. The ground is covered in a lush green lawn with some small bushes. The scene is bright and vibrant, suggesting a healthy, thriving natural environment.

What if we'd just choose greener ways of travelling, working and living? We could start by polluting less and growing a better relationship with nature. Animals are disturbed by our actions against them (like destroying nests, cutting way too many trees or making loud noises), not by our simple presence. If we'd learn to keep just a small, but valuable distance between them and us, everything would be better. After seeing how nature revived in our absence, some people assumed that humans are the problem. The answer is NO. This is definitely not the right perspective. It's not the people who are the problem, but the behaviour. So correcting this behaviour and starting living in harmony with nature would spare us from concluding that lockdowns are necessary in order to save the planet.

Nature showed us how we can protect it. It gave us a hint, a clue, a solution. But change starts with each and every one of us. So the right way to ask the question is not "Will we use this terrible experience to do the right thing?" It is "Will YOU?".

Global economy in two takes

Aurelia Popescu, 9 G

Take1: giants and the white collars

Today, not many people are interested in looking for expensive clothes, accessories or make-up. Most of us are either looking for hygienic products, like soap or bleach, masks and, most importantly, food and drinks. So, with this drastic change in public interests, what happened to those companies which used to sell expensive and over-the-top products?

Before the pandemic started, the biggest companies on the market had been the fashion ones and those associated to this side of the industry. They used to obtain in annual revenue in the U.S. alone of approximately \$4 billion per year. But now that the interests of the buyers changed to cleaning products and groceries, the revenue that the fashion industry receives has fallen drastically. The net worth of the owner of one major cosmetics company has reportedly shrunk by more than \$30 billion.

However, companies known for their work in delivering products straight to people's doorstep, or online platforms which are used by schools during their online classes, have gained almost just as much as the perfume tycoon lost. And it is no shock, since people have been stuck inside their houses for almost two months. Delivery companies now don't sell just regular clothes or electronic devices like they used to do before the pandemic. They now own stock upon stock of masks and anti-bacterial gels to sell to the public. And, of course, video chatting platforms aren't only used by students and teachers, as many board meetings in big companies have been taking place online.

As quarantine is coming to an end, the fashion industry's revenue has started growing back, but it still hasn't reached the level where it used to be in January. These few months will definitely leave a mark upon the companies which used to reign just a few months ago and it may take long for them to recover. But one thing is sure: masks will become a new fashion statement.

Take 2: struggling economies

Global economy will abruptly contract by 3.2% percent this year, says a recent UN report. It is also estimated that global economy will lose almost \$8.5 trillion in the next two years because of the CoVid-19 pandemic which will eliminate approximately all the earnings of the last four years.

The contraction will be economically accentuated. Furthermore, it will be the biggest ever since the Big Depression of the 1930's, in addition to the fact that, at the beginning of this year, the economic prognoses were considered to be anemic (just 2.1%).

The UN report that has just come out also estimates the growth of the GDP in developed economies will decrease to -5.0% in 2020. A modest increase, of 3.4% - barely sufficient to compensate for the lost production – is expected in 2021.

Commerce won't be doing very well either – a 15% contraction of worldwide commerce is estimated in 2020 because of the drastic decrease in demand and of the disruptions in the supply chains. For example, in Netherlands, more than 140 million unwanted tulips were lost due to the pandemic. That is, in the absence of buyers, they literally went to the dustbin. British milk took the same way, French blue cheese, too.

And here there's no secret – almost 90% of the worldwide economy was under some form of blockade. The supply chains were perturbed, demand for certain products, especially agricultural, plummeted and as a result millions of people are now unemployed. In the base scenario, developed economies are estimated to contract by 5% in 2020, while the production of developing countries will decrease by 0.7%.

More dangerous is the fact that the pandemic will determine the falling of more than 34.4 million people into poverty this year. And until 2030, another 130 million might join those who already live in extreme poverty – a huge hit to the global efforts to bring hunger to a stop. The pandemic, which affects disproportionately harder the non-qualified jobs, with small salaries, will bear less influence on the more qualified. This will further deepen the inequality of income.

On the other hand, the UN report also underlines the fact that the crisis will most likely accelerate the transition to digitalisation. The pandemic will favour a new normality, says the report, because human interaction will change fundamentally, as well as the general independence, the commerce and the globalisation process. However, a sudden increase in online economic activities may eliminate many existent jobs while on the other hand creating new and numerous ones in the digital economy.

The UN encourages global solidarity and the need to improve the public health systems in the report. The systems will also need to be fortified in order to resist the economic shocks. The social protection systems will need to be more efficient at a global level, the economies rehabilitated. In order to achieve all of the above, world governments are called to cooperate.

Virtually Inside The British Museum



Text and photo Alexandra Zaman, 9 G

Now that everyone stays inside and we cannot travel anymore, many of us appealed to the virtual tours of the museums around the world. Recently, I discovered through “Google Arts And Culture” some amazing tours.

The 360° view makes you feel like you're right there, just that the museums are completely empty. After all, exhibits are there in order to be seen by people, not stay hidden!

Here's one of the tours I really enjoyed:

The British Museum

Honestly, if a great discovery like the Rosetta Stone or a statue from the Easter Island is not in its country of origin, there's a great chance you'll find it at British Museum. Let's not forget several mummies, Greek vases, Aztec statuettes and many more valuable artefacts brought from every corner of the planet. If it's a rainy day and you spent it mainly trying to learn the British accent, you'd better take a break and take a look through this giant museum. Here's a guide:

1. Open "Google Arts And Culture" and search for British Museum. In the first row, select the 'Partner' British Museum. A short description of the museum and photographs of some of the exhibits will appear. Below them, you will see some tour suggestions; among them will be one called simply "British Museum". Click on the yellow man and there you are!
2. You will be shown the ground floor by default. You cannot go upstairs or downstairs, so instead explore the Egyptian exhibition. Head left until you see two pharaoh statues (their heads, actually). The first thing you'll see is the famous Rosetta stone that was used to decipher the hieroglyphs. Then there are a lot of statues, most of them recovered from royal tombs, and also sarcophaguses. Everything is richly decorated, with small and complex details. Although some of the explanations on the boards are too blurry and you cannot read anything about the exhibits, others are clear. Also, you can use the guiding boards just like you do in real life. Believe me, the museum will take you hours, or even days.
3. Behind the Egyptian exhibition, there's a gallery with Assyrian bas-reliefs. Far left from the entrance to the Egyptian exhibition, you will see two male figures with lion bodies (probably distant cousins of the Sphynx, just sayin') that mark one of the entrances to the Assyrian gallery. And behind that one there's another gallery, with Assyrian and Greek objects. Guess what... there's another row behind the Assyrian & Greek gallery, with pieces brought from the Parthenon in Athens.
4. After you're done with this part, return to the main hall. Opposite you'll find a library with small artefacts of different origins and lots of books that will give you late 19th century explorer/collector vibes. But we're not done with the ground floor!
5. Behind the huge white staircase, there's the Pacific cultures exhibition. You'll see the statue from the Easter Island and several other belongings of different tribes that inhabit the Pacific islands. Head right for the North American exhibition.
6. To explore the upper floor, exit the tour and click on "British Museum- Outdoor". Go to the end of the bottom line. Start with the image of two paintings on a red wall - European artefacts. Close to that gallery you will find the money gallery and the clocks one.
7. Here's a little trick: go to the large hall with two Greek statues. Place yourself behind the woman, and be sure to have the left staircase right in front of you. If you click on the yellow wall just above the staircase, you will enter the Coptic Egypt exhibition. There are many other exhibitions you can access through walls (now that's something you wouldn't be able to do in real life, right?), but I'll let you discover them!
8. Click on the last but one picture in the images line. That will take you to Ancient Levant. From there you can access 'Greeks in Italy', Ancient Cyprus, the Roman Empire and 'The Greek and Roman life'. The last picture will take you back to the Parthenon bas-reliefs.

Have fun exploring British Museum! Or you can choose from plenty of other museums using the same instructions from above. Most museums have uploaded virtual tours on the internet. But remember: 'DO NOT TOUCH THE OBJECTS!' 😊

Enjoy and stay safe!

WITH WAR COMES... AESTHETICS

While not trying to romanticize war, we have to face the fact that something good must come out of every mishap. Be it the need to feel comforted, be it anything else, it is in our human nature to find the silver lining in everything. With war comes peace- or rather, in this case, aesthetics.

Japan faced a rough and tough time during World War 2 – the nuclear attacks on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the fall of the empire... Quite traumatic. Not to play the victim card, Japan's obviously done its part in all of this chaos, but let's not get political, that is not what we're going to be talking about today. As devastating as it was for the economy, the people and the overall country, the Japanese kept their composure and fought through it. The end of WW2 plays a preceedy significant part in Japan's culture, or rather the time following it. Prewar Japan was not so open to strangers, more conservative and internalized. Why is that even important? Well, because after the war came a golden age of culture explosion. And that brings us to more or less three decades later... the 70s Japan.

Oh! 70s Japan... Personally, one of my favourite chunks of Japanese culture. Political activism, rebellion against the establishment, women's liberation movement... quite a lot was going on in there. But the 70s is also a time for the youth to shine in what I can only call a glimpse of Japan before it becoming the hyper-modernized country we all know and are awed by.

Tokyo, the capital city, was home of a type of aesthetics so classic yet so funky, holding a nostalgic feel to it. We can only thank Greg Girard, Canadian photographer, for capturing the essence of the olden Japan in his enchanting photography.

When talking about the streets of Japan, especially Tokyo, we can't forget to mention the immaculate sense of street fashion its people had. It's as if their brains were wired with the ability to effortlessly come up with unique, yet casual day to day outfits. It was the first time the youth started to embrace their individuality and value their solidarity as a way of rebellion against the adults.

The economic growth played a big part too, as it fueled the clothing industry and gave Japanese designers studying overseas a chance to make it big. If you were to ask me to label the Japanese fashion at this point in time, I don't think I could – it's too broad, too versatile to put it all in one single box. Self-expression at its finest.



Billboard advertising Pasolini's 120 days of Sodom, Tokyo, 1977, Greg Girard



Shibuya Crossing, 1976, Greg Girard

The 70s were also a great time for the music industry. Once again, the bloom of the economy helped a lot with that. It was the rise of city pop, loosely categorized as a subgenre of pop music. Just like their street style, the music is hard to pinpoint to a single genre as well – it has hints of R&B, soft rock, punk and boogie. Its wandering nature makes it to be perceived as a feeling or a vibe, not just as music. The youth listened to it on their afferent Walkman, a staple for that time. Of course, not everyone was fond of city pop, some even referring to it as “shitty pop” for being too mainstream and cheesy.

Artists used complex arrangement when creating their music, along with some truly original songwriting. The western influence is crystal clear, but rather stylized and accustomed to the Japanese culture. Tatsuhiro Yamashita is one of the biggest names of city pop, even considered the “king of city pop”, with albums like “Melodies” and “For you” reaching the top of the charts. The appeal of city pop isn't just in the music, but also in the mesmerizing cover art. The visuals are heavily influ-

enced by the capitalistic tendencies of the urban areas of Japan. Eizin Suzuki's work can be found on a number of Tatsuhiro Yamashita's album covers, one of my personal favourites being his work on the “For you” album.

Following more on the path of Japanese art, the attention to detail and the use of bright and strong colours are the main “attraction”. Illustration type artworks were frequent. Cleanly done, original, with hits of surrealism – iconic.

By now it's obvious that Japan, previously a war-torn nation, has turned itself into a cultural center. From the mere streets and the casual fashion to meticulously constructed music and art, 70 s Japan's aesthetics is and will forever be unmistakable.

Pandemics in history: The Black Death

Coca Daniel, 12 G

As humanity faces a new worldwide pandemic, I figured we can make a small incursion into one of the deadliest diseases mankind has ever come to experience. Even though we live in a world that can draw no comparison to the Middle Ages Europe, it is useful to take a sneak peek to what caused it, how it spread and what were the outcomes of the Black Death, because, as we all know, history definitely is the best teacher.

To begin with, let us pose the question of how the Black Death originated. The historical consensus has it that this plague traces its roots in China and Inner Asia, around the year 1300. However, a key mention to make is that the plague is thought to have come from Asia over 2,000 years ago; however, as recent research has indicated, the pathogen responsible for the Black Death may have existed in Europe as early as 3000 B.C. For those of you that have more insight into biology, I have to add that the infection with the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* is at the bottom of the plague. As modern genetic analysis indicates, the strain of *Y. pestis* introduced during the Black Death is ancestral to all extant circulating *Y. pestis* strains known to cause disease in humans. Hence, the origin of modern plague epidemics would lie in the medieval period. Other scientific evidence has indicated that the Black Death may have been viral in origin.

Now, let us wonder how the plague spread to mainland Europe. Well, similarly to nowadays, people in the Middle Ages were engaged in economic activities, such as commerce and trade. In 1347, the army of Kipchak khan Janibeg was decimated by the plague while besieging the port of Kaffa (now Feodosiya, in Crimea). With disaster looming, the khan turned to desperate measures: he ordered his men to catapult plague-infested corpses into the town in an effort to infect his enemies, the first example of biological warfare in recorded history.

It was not long until the Genoese ships from Kaffa carried the malady westwards, to Mediterranean ports, whence it spread inland, affecting Sicily (1347), North Africa, mainland Italy, Spain, and France (1348) as well as Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, and the Low Countries (1349).

It also struck England, when a ship from Calais carried the plague to Melcombe Regis, Dorset, in August 1348. Consequently, it reached Bristol almost immediately and spread rapidly throughout the southwestern counties of England. London suffered most violently between February and May 1349. The Black Death reached the extreme north of England, Scotland, Scandinavia, and the Baltic countries in 1350.

Surely, it is worth mentioning that the plague returned in Europe in 1361–63, 1369–71, 1374–75, 1390, and 1400. Modern research has stated that, over that length of time, plague was introduced into Europe several times, coming along trade routes in waves from Central Asia as a result of climate fluctuations that affected populations of rodents infested with plague-carrying fleas.

The plague was highly contagious and, as Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio wrote - “the mere touching of the clothes appeared to itself to communicate the malady to the toucher.” The disease was also terrifyingly efficient. Great numbers of people who were perfectly healthy when they went to bed at night could be dead by morning.

The treatment, however, was accustomed to the times. Most physicians relied on raw and unsophisticated techniques such as bloodletting and boil-lancing (practices that were dangerous as well as unsanitary) and superstitious, mystical practices such as burning aromatic herbs and bathing in rosewater or vinegar

Meanwhile, in the ensuing panic, all those who were still healthy avoided the sick. Doctors would not see patients; priests denied administering last rites; all stores closed down. Many people sought refuge in the countryside, but even there they could not escape the disease: It affected cows, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens as well as people.

To quote Boccaccio once again, it was a real every-man-for-himself time, “each thought to secure immunity for himself.”

The consequences were grave and the future after the plague looked grim- the drastic reduction of the amount of land under cultivation, due to the deaths of so many labourers, which proved to be the ruin of many landowners. The shortage of labour compelled them to substitute wages or money rents in place of labour services in an effort to keep their tenants. There was also a general rise in wages for artisans and peasants. These changes brought a new fluidity to the hitherto rigid stratification of society. What is more, there was a sharp increase of Anti-semitism, as the Jewish population was held accountable for the outbreak and spread of the disease. Large pogroms ensued, and many were burned at the stake.

To conclude, it is certain that we have the privilege not to face a pandemic as deadly as the Black Death, which we must be grateful for. But, let us look back into history and understand the implications of a worldwide, highly infectious virus, and take the necessary precautions in order to resume our beloved everyday life.

In drawing up this article, I have quoted several references from websites such as <https://www.britannica.com/event/Black-Death/Cause-and-outbreak> and <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/black-death> .

The Spanish flu and the Cholera

Delia Cojocariu, 9 G

Unsurprisingly, for the ones who studied the history of mankind, mostly everything follows a pattern, even an illness. If we look back in humans' history we will notice that epidemics causing enormous losses happened almost every hundred years. Two examples stand out.

The Spanish flu (1918-1919) was an unusually deadly pandemic which infected 500 million people (about a third of world's population at the time). It is considered one of the deadliest pandemics in human history. To maintain morale, World War One censors minimized early reports of illness and mortality in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. Newspapers were free to report the epidemic's effects in neutral Spain, such as the severe illness of King Alfonso XIII and these stories created a false impression of Spain as especially harder hit. This gave rise to the name "Spanish flu". Historical and epidemiological data is inadequate to identify with certainty the pandemic's geographic origin.

The Cholera Pandemic (1817-1824) began near the city of Calcutta, India, and spread throughout Asia to the Middle East, eastern Africa and the Mediterranean coast. Hundreds of thousands of people died as a result of this pandemic, including many British soldiers, which attracted European attention. By 1818 the disease broke out in Bombay, on the west coast of India. In March 1820 the disease was identified in Siam (Thailand), in May 1820 it had spread as far as Bangkok. In 1824, the transmission of the disease ended. Some researchers believe that it may have been due to the cold winter of 1823–1824, which would have killed the bacteria in the water supplies.

In my opinion, every big move has a reason behind it and there is no coincidence in this world, even though it may seem impossible or cruel. There are a lot of things that we don't know and a lot of information which is kept hidden from us. There is a purpose in everything that is happening, even though it may seem senseless. Because we don't have the whole information, we can't really connect the dots. But what we can do is not letting ourselves controlled by anybody and draw our own conclusions.

Leap year: How does it work and why?

Alexandru Iordan, 11 D

In the ancient world, mathematicians pinpointed the value of 365.25 days as the average length of a year. It was a serious necessity at that time because, as populations and civilizations would develop, unfulfilled demands of various resources could generate minor to grievous situations among the citizens. The key to prevent such issues was to discover how long each season takes. Luckily the answer would glow each and every night above their heads within the reach of their observant eyes: the night sky. Mathematicians had a long burning passion for celestial bodies.

The Sun would enlighten their work during the day and the world above and beyond would inspire them and glimmer every night...just out of reach.

The more they observed, the oftener did they notice the rehearsing pattern stars would follow to return to their old positions. None of the celestial bodies would withdraw from that flawless dance, not even the “godly” Sun or the “mysterious” moon, and so the bright patient minds counted the steps of that mesmerizing waltz and found they were around 365.

And a very important value that was ‘till the coronation of Julius Caesar, as politicians in ancient Rome would ask mathematicians to “miscalculate” the value of a year so their rule lasted longer. The period before the coming of emperor Caesar is also known as “the years of confusion”. Some years would even last 380 days and some would be a few weeks shorter. The emperor stepped in and after successfully leading his troops in glorious battle he took a long trip

back home alongside Cleopatra. During that time he willed to create a calendar even more accurate than that of Eudoxus (popularly recognized as having calculated the length of a year to be 365.25 days). He gathered his best philosophers and, aided by Sosigenes of Alexandria, he managed to complete his project, the **Julian calendar**. It is a combination of old Roman months, the length of the Egyptian calendar and the 365.25 days of the Greek (Eudoxus) calendar. That way, Julius Caesar gave birth to that which we today call “a leap year”. As a consequence, the Julian year had only one rule: “any year divisible by four would be a leap year”.

There are many calendars one would need to consider in order to successfully find the date of certain historical events. The Gregorian calendar hits a more accurate value, that modern technology relies on. If we used the Julian calendar today we would be 13 days behind as the decimal value difference (365.242 for the Gregorian calendar) is enough to cause issues.

We use leap years in order to sync our calendar with the place of the Earth on its orbit, hence we keep a better track of our location according to the four seasons. Leap years usually occur every four years when we add an intercalary day in our calendar (The 29th of February) in order to compensate for the non-integer average value of 365.2422 days as measured by the Gregorian calendar. The decimals account for about 5 hours and 50 minutes. If we didn’t add a day in our calendars every 4 years, our time reckoning would slowly, but certainly, drift apart from the tropical year (the exact amount of time in which the Earth completes an orbit in a year) and get out of sync with the seasons. With that deviation of almost 6 hours every year, the seasons would shift by about 23 or 24 days every 100 years. Supposing that happened, Northern Hemisphere dwellers would be celebrating New Year’s Eve in the middle of summer in a matter of a few centuries.

Modern Story time

by Tudosie Sara-Maria, 9 G

An audiobook does more than meets the eye, well, ear in this scenario. Audiobooks shift time and space, allowing you to live the electrifying life of “Sherlock Holmes” while on your way to work. They give you a subtle way to escape reality.

We all grew up listening to stories, on the lap of our grandparents or at bedtime, cuddled up with a teddy bear and the most colourful and enormous book our little eyes had ever seen. I’ll take a wild guess and say that even now we love listening to a great adventure—but what if we no longer have the opportunity?

Many of us nowadays are engulfed in work, side-projects and constantly trying to keep healthy hobbies. It is certainly not easy to squeeze in some “storytime”; stop to drawback of the curtains, for there is a solution! And this is where audiobooks come into play.

Those who are fond of reading, yet never quite find the time anymore to indulge into it, will particularly like audiobooks—all they require is a pair of headphones, a mobile app (therefore,

yes, you get to keep your phone nearby for those who were worried) and however much time you have at hand. I especially recommend listening to audiobooks—simultaneously saving time and trees—on your way to somewhere or when trying to multitask. Music is thrilling, of course, but sometimes it just isn’t enough. It doesn’t have suspense, drama and it obviously lasts too little! Audiobooks, on the other hand, can altogether transform your soundings. They are a brilliant manner of rediscovering books!

Lately, our skills have been pushed to their limit. We now speak more, louder, at every chance we get; we walk, commute, drive and refuse to sit still unless tied to a desk and computer; we smell perfumes and foods and too little of the fresh air; we search the world with our eyes, scanning for our next occupation and tiring ourselves out before we even begin. But what about hearing? Why do we no longer close our eyes and just listen? Inhale and exhale and no longer remember that we are in an office or on the sidewalk?

So, drown the world out with a story. Drown it out with the latest chapter, fidgety feeling and sentences that you don’t want to end. I dare you to tune the world out with an audiobook.

Leap days fix that presumably insignificant problem in the short term by giving our planet the approximately exact additional amount of time it needs to complete a full orbit around the Sun.

For determining whether a year of the Gregorian calendar is a leap year or not there are several rules:

-The year must be evenly divisible by 4. If the year is also divisible by 100 then it is not a leap year.

-If the year is also divisible by 400 then it is a leap year. (2000, 2400, 2800 are leap years while 1900, 2100, 2200 are not)

All in all the creation of a calendar to help guide all human activities is one of the greatest achievements of mankind. Having a leap year does not only aid us keep a steady economy, but it also binds us with our customs and traditions. It helps us live a healthy joyful time and it can’t get any simpler than adding one more day every four years to do so.

The Imitation Game

Bianca Prejoianu, 11 B

The Imitation Game is one of those movies I always wanted to see but never quite made time for it. Now after 2 hours of challenging mind games and unbearable tense moments I can safely say it is one of the best movies I've seen all year. If I were to break down this movie to one single word that will definitely have to be "brilliant".

The pacing of the movie was quite impressive. Nothing felt rushed for the sake of moving the plot along and nothing felt slowed down so that they would fit a particular time stamp for the movie. Everything fell into place perfectly. I was quite a fan of the fact that we're not specifically told at the start that there are actually two different narrative frames, one happening after the war in which Alan is being investigated by the police for his homosexual tendencies, and one happening during the war in which we spend most of the time watching Turing grow both as a mathematician and as a person, learning both the secrets of Enigma while also learning to be kind to the others around him.

I don't think I can say much about the plot because it follows the very real discoveries of a very real Alan Turing so I don't think I can talk about realism and story building here. What I can do however is congratulate the director for choosing a very interesting story and portraying it with such care and respect. The accuracy of the events is incredibly close too with pretty small exceptions.

Now when I said brilliant at the beginning, I was not talking only about the quality of the movie but also about the undeniable brilliance of every single one of the main characters. Every single one of them is an extraordinary individual, a prodigy of some sorts. However, what sparks my interest is one particular relationship between these characters. Apart from the protagonist played by amazing British actor Benedict Cumberbatch who is very experienced in playing insufferable geniuses such as BBC's Sherlock or Dr. Stranger from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, we have individuals such as Joan Clark who throughout the movie seems to be the most similar to Turing but also the most different. I'd love to be able to call her a mirror character but I simply cannot. Her overall intellect and abilities were on par with our misunderstood genius if not even greater and just as him she was also an oddball never expected to succeed because of those time's mentality towards equality and women. Their experiences were to some extent the same and that's why they understood each other and formed the relationship they did. This is unfortunately where the similarities end. One of the things that ties them together is oppression and the closeted minds of those around them, but their responses to this oppression is in my opinion what differentiates these two characters and leads them to become who they are in the movie. For example, looking at the two and seeing them interact not with each other but with the world you see radical differences. While Joan is very open to conversation and is very outgoing and sweet the contrast of broody, cold, unforgiving Alan is quick to steal the spotlight. These attitudes are both stemming from oppression. However, they could not be more different. Why is that? Well, that's actually quite simple to answer. The oppression both of those characters faced is incredibly different. While Alan was continuously shut down by his peers and constantly punished because of their inability to understand him, Joan was born into a world in which she was taught that her intellect does not matter and only the social skills and ability to attract powerful men are what she needs. One of those scenarios turned its victim into a socially inept person and the other into a very socially capable one. I don't think I have to specify who is who, but what I'll have to specify is why this relationship between these characters is such an important asset of this movie. Through these relationships and through these characters we are shown the power of a male/female friendship who, even if really similar, needed each other to fill different holes within their mentality. Also thanks to both of these characters we are highlighted moments in history in which people were much less tolerant, much more hateful and we are shown the full consequences of that.

All in all it is an amazing movie who kept me on the edge of my seat the entire time I was watching it. I did not feel like a normal viewer being fed a story, I felt personally affected by the pain and happiness of the characters, ending up fearing for the war myself as I was sitting home in Romania in 2020 facing a completely different type of crisis.

Dark comedy: can it go too far?

Corina Ionescu 10 A

“My eldest patient says my generation is too reliant on technology. I called him a hypocrite and unplugged his life support”. Did you find this joke funny? Sick? Maybe a little bit of both? Well, these are the impressions that often accompany dark comedy- defined as humour that treats sinister subjects, like death, disease, deformity, handicap or warfare with bitter amusement and presents such tragic, distressing, morbid topics in humorous terms. The simple fact that this comedy approaches such sensible themes for today’s politically correct society, makes it a taboo subject and a form of unorthodox enjoyment only for “sadistic” people. I assure you this is just a generalization, as I am a non-sadistic person that appreciates this type of jokes. But can it go too far? Is there a thing harder to digest than the main idea of dark humour- death?

As far as the understanding of this witty, sometimes mind-twisting humour is concerned, a lot of neurological factors are involved. Processing a dark joke takes a bit more mental gymnastics than, say, a knock-knock joke. It requires parsing multiple layers of meaning, while creating emotional distance from the content so that it registers as benign, instead of hostile. Simply, this morbid comedy can be correctly approached only by the ones who have already achieved a level of emotional development that enables them to do so. Pretty much any joke that relies on word play will put your brain to work- dark jokes just require a bit more emotional control to earn a laugh. Please, bear in mind that I used words like “understand”, not “like” or “enjoy”, there is a big difference.

When it comes to people appreciating this humour though, I will say in their defense that variety is the spice of life. No one can imagine a world where nothing bad ever happens. Moreover, no one can imagine a world without anything fun in it, regardless of what that fun thing is. Then, why would we not have both fun and tragic events in one joke? Some people chose black comedy to break the mould from the mainstream type of comedy- which usually bases on gross discussions about intercourse and, sometimes, the inferiority of women and minorities. As some consider these subjects normal for the patriarchal society we live in, so do the dark jokes fans see death and the human imperfection as natural phenomena. Facing morbid realities with laughter- in the appropriate

contexts!- is neither disrespectful, nor shameful. Jokes have the aim to cheer us up and, if said appropriately, even dark jokes achieve their goal. Nothing surpasses the pain felt surrounding the topics of death and grief, so how can black comedy go too far, while other kinds of comedies, approaching sexual or racial issues, do not?

Yes, it is true that these jokes can touch a nerve and trigger bad memories, or even worse. Everyone has a weak spot, and for the most of us that sensibility is represented by our families and loved ones. As mature as someone may be, when something dreadful happens to his beloved ones, the last thing that person would like to hear is a stupid joke about the incident. For example, my grandfather passed away a year ago. I was left without one of the most important members of my family and this wrecked havoc on my life. Obviously, black comedy couldn’t help me get over my grief period, it would have done the contrary, actually. However, after I accepted what had happened and learned that death is, in fact, a part of life, I also came to the conclusion that I am not the centre of the universe, and so a joke read on the internet, or said by a stranger- regarding death, was not meant to particularly hurt me. No doubt dark humour does not help if used as a coping mechanism, but once the person is able to detach her feelings from the joke, things become simpler.

If you are willing to start your journey in the dark comedy world, here are some movie recommendations for you. One of the best is “American psycho” (movie based on the book with same name, by Bret Easton Ellis). Others could be “A Clockwork Orange”, “The Lobster”, “God Bless America”, and even “Fight Club”(there is some punching going on, but Brad Pitt with that haircut makes it worth seeing).

To conclude, in my opinion, dark comedy cannot go “too far”. It is a type of humour as any other (maybe a bit more sensible), and should be treated as well. We all indubitably suffer during our lives; it is sad, but this is the reality. And, as living creatures, our life span is limited. Since the ancient times humans have been fascinated by the subject of death, building cultures on it. As nobody ever had the opportunity to share what comes after death, it logically becomes the final chapter for us, mortals. Following this idea, other than causing emotional pain, dark comedy cannot cross any other barrier for those who have accepted the situation. Whether or not you enjoy black humour, a person’s preferences should not be debated.

WHY ISN'T THE WORLD'S MOST SPOKEN LANGUAGE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS?

- Ștefania Iacob, 11 H

“To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world” – Chinese proverb

Starting my article with a Chinese proverb is not a coincidence at all. At first glance, one might say that English is the world's most spoken language. In fact, in terms of native speakers alone, Mandarin Chinese is by far the most spoken language in the world. It's the official language of mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore and one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Therefore, the fact that there are approximately 918 million speakers worldwide comes as no surprise. Without a shred of doubt, Mandarin is concentrated, whereas English is spread out (if you count both native and non-native speakers, English is the widest spoken language in the world).

However, the first and perhaps most important question all of us should take into consideration is the following:

Why isn't Mandarin taught in schools?

After giving this matter a serious thought, I've come up with some reasonable explanation as to the fact that Chinese isn't taught in schools. Nevertheless, this shouldn't be a deal-breaker for anyone trying to learn this language. As I see it, if you are strong-willed, nothing is impossible to achieve!

1. Not only does Mandarin represent the world's most spoken language, but it is also one of the hardest.

I think it's pretty reasonable to say that Mandarin is a tough nut to crack, mainly due to the fact that it is a *tonal* language, which means that the meaning of a word changes based on the way we pronounce it. Additionally, with a set of about 50.000 characters, it is probably one of the most complex languages to learn.

But don't lose your faith: there are no verb-conjugations, no tenses and no gender-specific nouns either. Quite motivating, isn't it? Perhaps that's also one of the reasons why Mandarin is one of the most popular languages to learn today!

2. There are not so many native speakers willing to teach Mandarin.

However, countries like the US or even Sweden have found the solution to offer students the opportunity to learn the world's most spoken language. But there is also a matter of financial issues to consider.

Given the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy, more American schools are adding Mandarin Chinese to their foreign language offers. Some schools in the United States are paying for Chinese classes on their own, but hundreds are getting some help.

The Chinese government is sending teachers from China to schools all over the world and paying part of their salaries. At a time of tight budgets, many American schools are finding that offer too good to refuse.

A decade ago, most of the schools with Chinese programs were on the East and West Coasts. But in recent years, many schools have started Chinese programs in heartland states, including Ohio and Illinois in the Midwest, Texas and Georgia in the South, and Colorado and Utah in the Rocky Mountain West.

“The mushrooming of interest we’re seeing now is not in the heritage communities, but in places that don’t have significant Chinese populations,” said Chris Livaccari, an associate director at the Asia Society.

Yet, no Western nation is taking Chinese language education more seriously than Sweden. TIME magazine reports that the Swedish education minister Jan Björklund recently announced plans to add Chinese to their nationwide grade school curriculum. According to Björklund, learning Chinese is going to "be much more important, from an economic perspective" than the traditionally offered European languages.

In brief, quite similarly to what happened in the past, it all comes down to economy and the unremitting rivalry between Europe, the US and Asia. Still, it’s very encouraging to see that more and more people are showing a high interest in learning Chinese.

3. There is always a growing concern that teacher will focus more on the Chinese culture, albeit not on the actual language skills.

We can all agree to the fact that China benefits from a great cultural richness, as it is also one of the oldest cultures, originating thousands of years ago. Although in my opinion learning a language without knowing some bits of the country’s culture can’t be accomplished, the majority of people want to focus mainly on the actual writing and speaking skills.

Moreover, some Chinese language teachers are so enthusiastic to praise the great and brilliant Chinese culture that they can’t take an objective view at some problems and issues.

Does all of this bring us to a point where we can surely explain why isn’t the world’s most spoken language taught in schools? The answer is ‘no’ and it will probably continue to stay like this until more governments decide whether teaching such a complex language in schools is worth it. The reality is that we live in society where people tend to regard different cultures with suspicious, hesitation and uncertainty.

Nonetheless, when all is said and done, what really matters is the fact that learning a foreign language gifted us with the unique chance to explore a country’s culture, even from miles away, to illuminate the dimmed corners of lesser-known civilizations and especially, to remain curious throughout our entire lives. As the medieval English philosopher Roger Bacon said, ‘knowledge of language is the doorway to wisdom’.

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Baking my way through quarantine

Maria Bogdan, 9G

Text and photos

Quarantine is the first experience of its kind that our generation had to adjust to. Therefore, I think everyone had to deal with a huge amount of external or internal pressure to not “waste two months” and feel like they’re unproductive 24/7.



So, as a cure to our lack of motivation during the first weeks of these unprecedented times, many of us reunited with old passions, shuffling through the interests that perhaps didn’t make the cut in a world which felt like it was going 100 km an hour. In my case, to unwind and try to reconnect to a simpler time in my childhood, I decided to take up baking.

Who hasn’t been enchanted by the smells coming from the kitchen and hasn’t thought about learning the secret of transforming food into pure emotion? I, for one, have been. The treat which intrigued me the most as a young girl were cookies, so I decided to dive into the world of baking with a chocolate cookie recipe.

I tried my best: I followed the recipe strictly, I whisked the ingredients as told and I carefully spread the small dollops of dough onto the baking sheet. And yet, to my utter surprise, just like the rough, crusty edges of a brownie, my cookies had failed. They were too flat. And kind of burned, to be honest. But when I bit from one of them, expecting the worst, I was delighted to realize they were incredibly delicious. So, after eating more than I care to admit, I was determined not to give up and continue baking. Improving.

After a few other goodies, me and my father decided to make brownies, my mum’s favourite dessert, as she had been having a rough couple of weeks. I prepared the chocolate chunks, while my dad whisked the eggs, sugar and flour together. Shoulder to shoulder, we assembled it and patiently waited for it to bake in the oven. The experience of cooking with my dad warmed my heart fully, like the molten center of a fudgy brownie.

Finally, after waiting for an hour for it to be baked, we called my unsuspecting mum to the dining table and showed her the concoction. She was so happy that a dazzling smile covered her face. Baking brought us together that day and made us forget, even for just a couple of hours, about what was going on in the outside world. That evening it was just the three of us enjoying the goodness of a still warm brownie paired with a cold cup of ice-cream.

So, baking has been both my coping mechanism and that new hobby during the quarantine time. What about you, what have you been doing these weeks?



Oh, and below I'll transcribe the brownie recipe - if this essay made your mouth water:

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup 8oz/240g unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 2 tablespoons (30ml) vegetable oil
- 1 1/4 cups (9oz/260g) white sugar
- 1 cup (7oz/200g) packed light brown sugar
- 4 (2oz/57g each) large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon (15ml) pure vanilla extract
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup (3.5oz/130g) all purpose flour
- 1 cup (3.5oz/100g) good quality, unsweetened cocoa powder
- 7 oz (200g) roughly chopped chocolate or large chocolate chips

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Preheat oven to 175°C | 350°F.
- Lightly grease an 8x12-inch baking pan* with cooking oil spray. Line with parchment paper (or baking paper); set aside.
- Combine melted butter, oil and sugars together in a medium-sized bowl. Whisk well to combine. Add the eggs and vanilla; beat until lighter in colour (another minute).
- Sift in flour, cocoa powder and salt. Gently fold the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients until JUST combined (do NOT over beat as doing so will affect the texture of your brownies).
- Fold in 3/4 of the chocolate pieces.
- Pour batter into prepared pan, smoothing the top out evenly, and top with remaining chocolate pieces.

Bake for 25-30 minutes for just under-done brownies (fudgier texture) or until the centre of the brownies no longer jiggles and is JUST set to the touch. **OR 35-40 minutes if you like your brownies well set and firm.**

- NOTE: Brownies will continue baking and set in the hot pan out of the oven. If testing with a toothpick, the toothpick should come out dirty for fudge-textured brownies.

After 15-20 minutes, carefully remove them out of the pan and allow to cool to room temperature before slicing into 16 brownies. They set while they cool.

ENJOY!

