



INFORMED



-The student-led magazine at SBAS-

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Who are we?

We are Simon Balle's student-led school magazine.

With articles ranging from school-related issues to global affairs, we hope to keep our community informed of the things that are important to us.



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More Than a Melody: The Psychology of Music

Ever notice how a song can make you laugh, cry, and suddenly remember that embarrassing thing you did in Year 7 -- all in under three minutes? That's music messing with your brain, in the best way. Music has a unique ability to move us in ways only a limited number of things can. It can make us laugh, cry or pretend we're in a music video while staring dramatically out of the bus window. And this isn't just a poetic idea -- science shows that music has deep ties to how our minds and brains work. From sparking memory to physically reshaping our brain, music is both an art and a psychological phenomenon.

Unlike language, which is largely processed in the left hemisphere, music lights up areas across the entirety of the brain. The amygdala -- often dubbed the brain's 'emotional centre' -- is responsible for why a melody can make us cry or smile, while the reward system releases dopamine, the classic *feel-good* chemical. Remarkably, a familiar song can spark this dopamine rush within seconds -- much like Pavlov's dogs salivating at the ring of a bell, but fortunately less messy and much more socially acceptable!

Music also acts as a powerful memory cue. Hearing a childhood favourite can instantly transport us back in time, sometimes to moments we thought were long forgotten -- like that awkward school talent show performance we try to pretend never happened, or that one time we memorised the wrong lyrics and sang them with total confidence. Psychologists call this *Music-evoked Autobiographical Memory* (MEAMs). Research suggests that these vivid recollections occur because of music's broad neural effects, engaging areas like emotion, identity, and memory. Unsurprisingly, familiar and meaningful songs are the most powerful triggers: the stronger the personal connection to a piece of music, the greater the chance it will unlock experiences from the past.

And this evocation isn't just a fun trick -- it's transformative. Since the 1980s, dementia researchers have used music to help patients recover access to memories that seemed lost, reconnecting them with their past.

It isn't just dementia that tunes are helping with;. Stroke patients who listened to music daily showed greater improvement in verbal memory and cognition in just two months. That's neuroplasticity in action: the brain literally rewiring itself in response to experiences, stimuli, and injury.

Possibly even more fascinatingly, long-term musical practice can leave a physical mark on the brain. Trained musicians develop a distinctive feature in the motor cortex called the musician's Omega Sign -- a tiny omega-shaped twist that reflects fine motor control for precise finger movements. Interestingly, pianists tend to have this mark on both hemispheres, while violinists have it on only the right side, which controls the intricate movements of the left hand. In other words, years of practice leave a subtle, permanent signature in the brain -- no trophies required.

It's no secret that people's music preferences vary wildly. Psychologists have explored whether the Big Five personality traits can predict what someone listens to, and while the results aren't foolproof, some interesting patterns do emerge:



Openness (curious, open-minded): People high in this trait often gravitate toward complex or unconventional genres like jazz or classical.

Conscientiousness (organized, responsible): These listeners tend to avoid intense genres like heavy metal, preferring calmer, more predictable background music.

Extroversion (sociable, energetic): Extroverts enjoy upbeat, energetic music like pop or hip-hop, often in social settings where the volume matches their personality.

Agreeableness (kind, compassionate): Favour upbeat, conventional music and generally respond strongly to various emotional tones.

Neuroticism (tendency to experience negative emotions): More likely to enjoy intense or rebellious music, using it as an emotional outlet, especially for negative feelings.

Of course, no playlist defines personality -- plenty of introverts love heavy metal and extroverts love quiet acoustic tunes. But the general links suggest that our music choices may reflect aspects of who we are.

Music begins shaping us at an early age and stays with us throughout our lives. Babies can detect rhythm long before they can speak; lullabies not only comfort us but also help with early language development. Later, older adults who sing or learn instruments often maintain sharper memory and problem-solving skills.

In everyday life, music powers us: fast-tempo tracks boost athletic performance, while calming melodies lower cortisol levels, offering us a self-prescribed therapy recipe for stress relief. Across cultures, music is everywhere -- rituals, celebrations, storytelling, and teenage rebellion alike. Nearly every society has music, suggesting it's as essential as language -- and arguably better at getting people to dance awkwardly in public.

Meet Pippin! The Special Addition to Our All-through Community

Cleo
Feature Writer



As I'm sure you know, we here at Simon Balle All-through School now have our very own therapy dog. His name is Pippin and he's a bundle of energy, ready to comfort you whenever you're feeling down. Pupils, and even teachers, are allowed to visit him, and he is usually bounding around the school (with a teacher to look after him) to create joy wherever he goes! So, now that we have a therapy dog, what are the benefits? When having a therapy canine in school, there can be many great positives: boosting emotional and mental health, help in reducing worries at home, in school or anywhere else, and it can help improve social skills. Currently, Pippin is being trained to be a proper therapy dog. With a soft beige coat, dark-brown eyes and small ears, Pippin is a constant ray of sunshine.

Special Senses:

Therapy dogs are extremely important, especially for those who have high anxiety, extreme stress or have had traumatic experiences in recent times. Dogs are man's best friend for a reason: they are welcoming, cheerful and unconditionally loving in a way that humans can sometimes never be. Whether you're affected by a recent trauma or just having a bad day, dogs will always pick you up when you're down. Dogs' incredible sense of smell combined with their ability to read facial expressions enable them to offer comfort at the right times. Therapy dogs can be found not just in schools, but hospitals, care homes, community centres and even libraries. Not everyone realises, but the effect therapy dogs have is very strong. However, it's not just dogs that can be therapeutic - other animals can be too, including: cats, horses, rabbits, birds and even llamas.

Statistics and More Information:

Across the United Kingdom, more than 500 therapy dogs have been implemented in schools by the Dog Mentor Programme, which is a training programme that introduces specially selected dogs into schools to be mentors for staff, students and visitors. Throughout the United Kingdom, it has been estimated that there are roughly a few hundred schools with therapy dogs, but the numbers are still growing. In England, the most common therapy dog breeds are golden retrievers - calm and intelligent - and labrador retrievers - eager to please and constantly happy - but there are a couple other dog breeds which are suited for therapeutic use.

In the future...

Hopefully, looking into the future, everyone will be able to properly meet and get to know the special member of our school community. Pippin creates a special addition to school life and being a part of Simon Balle.



The Forgotten Half: The lack of research into women's health

In a world where gender equality is an accepted aim, it would be hoped that something as fundamental as health was involved in this societal change. Yet, even now, there are holes in the healthcare industry surrounding research into female health, which has devastating impacts on the economy, and, more importantly, the lives of millions of women.

A prime example of this can be seen in problems purely faced by women surrounding reproductive issues and menopause, with a clear lack of research into these issues. In fact, in the UK, only 2% of medical research funding is spent on pregnancy, childbirth, and female reproductive health, despite one in three women experiencing reproductive issues. One in ten women are affected by a painful condition called Endometriosis, yet it takes 7-8 years to receive a diagnosis on average. This means that thousands of women suffer needlessly while navigating a maze of misdiagnoses and ineffective treatments. In fact, 40% of women need to visit their GP more than 10 times before being referred to a specialist.

Notably, these issues are also prominent in more general conditions. A study found that women with metal hip replacements were 29% more likely to experience implant failure compared with men. This could be linked back to anatomical differences, and inadequate testing to account for this. Additionally, a woman is 50% more likely to receive the wrong initial diagnosis for a heart attack. These deficits threaten both genders, but women suffer disproportionately because of their underrepresentation in studies.

When tracing back to animal studies in the initial stage of medicinal testing, many medical researchers avoid conducting studies on female mice, due to greater costs and concerns that fluctuating hormones and reproductive systems of female mice may confound the study's results. Similarly, despite being at a higher risk of severe illness and death as a result of the disease worldwide, pregnant women are excluded from 80% of covid-related clinical trials. As a result, in the UK, pregnant women were not able to access the COVID-19 vaccines until April 2021, despite the vaccine first being introduced late in 2020.

Not only do these issues impact the quality of life for 51% of the population, but they also impact the economy. More than 60,000 women in the UK miss work due to menopause symptoms alone. Every year, £11bn is spent on the cost of work absences due to severe menstrual pain, demonstrating the significant economic burden created by this systemic neglect of women's health. A recent analysis of the NHS proposed that investing £1 extra per woman (around £30m total) in gynaecology services could yield over £319m in economic benefits.

Fortunately, the government's awareness of the situation is increasing. In 2022, England's first women's health strategy was introduced, which aimed to correct "decades of gender health inequality". This provides realistic hope for the future, demonstrating the progression of awareness on the issue.

Ultimately, the persistent neglect of women's health research reveals a contradiction at the heart of modern healthcare: while equality is the overall aim, it is not yet reflected in practice. Prioritising women's health research is essential for preventing delayed diagnoses, ineffective treatments, and significant economic loss.





Charlotte
Feature Editor

Born Too Late?

Generational diaspora means feeling out of place in one's own times or environment. Since 2011, this feeling has been increasingly reported by young individuals between the ages of 8 and 16 years. Whereas in 2011, it affected roughly about one teen in every 60,000, by 2021, this number had risen to be about one teen in every 1,200. Overall, 63% of those who report this feeling are female, while about 36% are men

One era that always seems to have been overly romanticised is the Victorian era. As such, most individuals who idealise this era often seem to speak almost exclusively about the middle and upper classes, taking their lifestyles as the norm for Victorian England. The truth, however, is that such a narrow perspective does not include the vast majority of the population, whose daily lives were defined by poverty, instability, and social inequality.

Even for most working-class families, the most basic necessities of life, such as food, were often too expensive. Child mortality rates were extremely high, and surviving past early childhood was far from guaranteed. Children were often forced into dangerous labour including work in mines and climbing narrow chimneys because their families relied on every possible source of income. Those that could attend school weren't always safe either; corporal punishment was widely used and considered an acceptable method of discipline at the time. None of these practices are legal in the UK today, and for very good reason.

This sharp division between social classes mirrored itself not only in the living conditions but also in forms of entertainment and public attitudes. The Victorian era often dehumanised people who did not fit into the narrow standards of appearance or ability. "Freak shows" and human exhibitions were forms of mainstream entertainment, reinforcing harmful ideas about normality and otherness. These practices reveal a period marked by deep prejudice and systemic cruelty far removed from the elegant, idyllic image often presented in popular media.

All in all, the Victorian Era was one of tremendous disparity: unparalleled wealth and comfort for the privileged few, and a great deal of suffering for those many living and working under hard and oft-times exploitative conditions. To sentimentalize the age without such understanding distorts the real picture of life as it truly was.

Another decade which people are frequently nostalgic for is the 1980s. The main points of discussion regarding this era basically focus on the joyful moments of bright fashion, popular music, early video games, and new technology that prevailed at the time. This notion, however, overlooks too many of the challenging realities that defined daily existence.

The political atmosphere was tense. The Cold War was not something that just whispered quietly in the background; real concerns about nuclear war existed. Many people grew up with a constant feeling of uncertainty that is generally not depicted through nostalgic media.

The decade was economically uneven: although some families benefited from new industries and growing businesses, many others struggled. Whole communities - especially those built around factories and mining - were hit by deindustrialisation. Job losses, poverty, and long-term economic damage came with this, common in many regions.

Social issues also abounded. The AIDS crisis caused immense damage and was exacerbated by stigma, lack of comprehension, and slow political movement. While the LGBTQ+ communities were battling a major health emergency, they were simultaneously facing discrimination and fear. Racial tensions and issues in policing shaped the experiences of many minority communities.

Consumer culture also changed in the 1980s. Advertising and media became much more influential and pushed strong ideas concerning wealth, appearance, and success. While some people enjoyed new products and trends, others felt pressure and comparison that affected their mental and financial well-being.

As while the 1980s had memorable music, fashion, and technology, it wasn't the carefree decade that it is sometimes portrayed as. People lived through economic struggle, health crises, and political anxiety. Remembering these parts creates a more accurate picture of this time.

Most often, of course, these periods of historical fascination are neither remote nor, indeed, very ancient at all. They are much more likely to be periods as recent as the mid-2010s - periods well within the living memory of our parents. This is an attachment based on material culture rather than a wish to fully inhabit the social and historical context of those years. Attention settles on fashion, aesthetics, and trend cycles more than on lived experiences. Thus, practices or styles that have been cast aside or devalued might provide the sources of identity-making for younger generations.

This is closely linked to the unprecedented access to information provided by digital technology. Members of the first generation to grow up with the internet can rapidly acquire images, narratives and cultural artefacts from virtually any point in recent history. In contrast, earlier generations relied primarily on second-hand accounts from parents or teachers and the limited summaries available in textbooks or encyclopedias. The accessibility of vast online archives makes it easy to immerse oneself in curated representations of periods one has not personally experienced. Such exposure can create a sense of familiarity or nostalgia that is based on selective visual and textual sources rather than lived reality. People will build a knowledge of a decade off maybe a few books, a number of social media posts, or aesthetic mood boards, and assume them to be representative.

It's important to note these decades were not aesthetic frameworks but real social, economic, and cultural conditions in which people actually lived.

What Happens at Sixteen? Your Medical Rights

Alex
Feature Writer



The official definition of an adult is someone aged over 18 years. But a lot more changes happen when you turn 16 than you maybe realise - especially in the healthcare field. Healthcare is one of the main dictating factors about people living their lives in a healthy manner - and some people reading this will already be 16, or will be approaching it in a matter of time. It's such an important thing to know the decisions you're able to make - and this article is basically here to inform you and others about what people are able to do!

Before 16, all medical decisions are made by the parent and child. This changes at 16 - medical choices are to be made by the individual. This means that every decision is to be made by the person receiving treatment, as long as the decision has been advised or overseen by a Medical Doctor. This goes from getting braces, to open heart surgery, to cosmetic changes.

Along with this newfound individuality to choose treatment, being 16 also allows people to pick their General Practitioner - it's their responsibility to pick who, where and when appointments are made. Although, there's a downside - prescribed medication now has a cost. It's no longer supplied to people by the government's health scheme. Instead, it's the individual's responsibility to purchase this medication. Luckily, the much more expensive area of dentistry is still paid for by the government until one reaches the age of 18.

One other interesting medical rule sits in between the ages of 16 and 18. In fact, you must be 17 and over to donate blood. The reason for this: I'm not sure! I can't find anything on why this is. It's already well established in many other laws mentioned, that people at age 16 are able to understand risk factors to certain procedures. There is no biological reason to this either - every other medical procedure which could have an effect on growth and hormones are judged by a Doctor on a patient to patient basis. Quite Bizarre...

Overall, I think this information is very important to know, and use when you can. Do you think some of these rules are fair or not? Do you find it strange that people are allowed to have cosmetic surgery before donating blood, for example? Let us know what you think.



Ms Warburton
Staff Writer

Fear Itself

Twelve months ago I asked to write something for Informed. It is important to note that I asked: I wasn't approached or invited, I had things to say and I was delighted for a platform on which to say them. I really liked the idea of the student magazine and wanted to get behind it, as well as get involved. The opportunity to speak directly to all students and staff, raise an issue close to my heart and start a worthy conversation. This was going to be great.

But I didn't write anything. Not the first day Mr Kerswill agreed to let me contribute, or a week after, or a month, and now- nearly a year down the line - I have not written a word. Why couldn't I make myself do it? After all, I had put myself forward and I'm never usually shy about being heard. It's been suggested that I like the sound of my own voice. I'm not one to avoid a soapbox. What I will do though, is let fear creep in. What if my article is rubbish? Mundane? What if my topic is pedestrian? Played out? Not as good as Mr Kerswill's? Or, worst of all, what if the whole thing ends up just...fine?

Just write a few hundred words - you're an English teacher - it will be fine. I don't want it to be fine. I want it to be brilliant, an encapsulation of every school value at once, a piece of writing to cause a buzz about the school. I want Pulitzer to create a prize which serves all-through schools in the East Herts region and make me its first recipient. I want a Sports Hall-type live stream in form, my humble speech echoing through the rapt tutor groups.

It was too much. This self-imposed pressure. What school value was I demonstrating? (A lack of) resilience? (An absence of) respect for the other contributors waiting for me? I suppose I was forcing them to exercise kindness. This article wasn't an opportunity anymore, it was just a symbol of fear and self-doubt. Fear, leading to procrastination, leading to more fear? As a teacher, I dish out the advice all the time: just start, don't worry too much, don't feel silly, how bad can it be? You'll be fine.

And now I'm one day before the Official Last and Final Deadline and I nearly let the fear get the better of me. But I didn't, and here it is, and it feels just fine.

The Future of Voting and Young Power in Politics

Toby
Feature Writer



The world is currently undergoing widespread political change. Here in the UK, we're seeing the Conservatives being practically overthrown as Reform UK may become the new opposition. The US is under threats of a potential civil war, while the conflict in Ukraine is still vivid. Young people, however, are often underrepresented and forgotten in the world of politics. But this has changed. They're now standing up in countries which they believe aren't upholding their core values and are using TikTok as a weapon to fight back.

Social media is used every day. It's a form of communication, connection and how we express ourselves. However, unexpectedly the government in Nepal immediately banned 26 social media sites in Early September. Some of these include WhatsApp, Youtube and Instagram. Many advisors have expressed criticism for these actions, with some saying the government was seeking to stifle an anti corruption campaign, housed online which used the slogan #NepoKids. This was a social media hashtag used to protest against the children of government officials' luxury lifestyles. This, plus current unrest in Nepal infuriated and united young voters in a wave of protests across the country. Many were demonstrative, but some in major cities like Kathmandu turned violent, with 19 protesters dying in clashes with police.

This fueled the fire even more, with some protesters breaking into government buildings. The Minister for Communications said police could use weapons like water cannons to combat the public. On the 9th of September, the main parliament building went up in violent, red flames with billowing black smoke erupting into the air. Videos of the building burning spread, like wildfire, across Tiktok, Instagram and X as short form reels.

Many other government buildings or homes of government officials were destroyed in the process. The Prime Minister has resigned and the country is in a state of disarray. This is a clear demonstration of the power that mass organization provides, especially in youth that can weaponise social media.

Furthermore, focusing on recent trends in the UK and US, the likes of Nigel Farage and Donald Trump have found their base within young white men, which has energised this voter type in a way that Kemi Badenoch or Keir Starmer haven't been able to. This is evident as many polling services find that Reform UK is performing well, with YouGov stating Reform sits at 32% with male voters. And the BBC finds that for many people digital media is the way they access information with 65% of the public using the internet for news. It can be argued that because so many individuals use social media as their news source that male influencers like Andrew Tate or Joe Rogan have reinforced right wing ideals. This is especially highlighted within their debate style, as it shuts down the other perspective and doesn't allow for a rounded conversation, providing bias. Furthermore, Labour policies such as the Online Safety Act and the proposal for an Energy Drink Ban could be deterring younger voters. However, this shift to the right isn't common with all young voters as YouGov also finds that for those aged 18-24, The Green Party is the most popular sitting at 42% approval rating, and Labour second at 21%.

The Wardrobe of Revolution

Chloe
Feature Writer



Across history, fashion has been used as a powerful message to signal change and unity. Clothes are more than fabric stitched together, they are statements. From the suffragettes' white dresses to the pink hats of the 2017's women's right march, fashion has been a way of communicating protests and politics for a long time.

Fashion and Feminism

Fashion and feminism have a long complicated history. During the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 70s, many women were sick and tired of being seen as inferior and being told what to do and wear. Bras were burnt. Skirts were shortened and corsets were forgotten. This rejection of traditional fashion helped pave the way for later feminist ideas that emphasise choice and self-expression.

Decades later, feminist fashion continues in new forms, with some women feeling empowered by wearing lipstick and high heels, while others prefer androgynous or utilitarian styles. Women have proved there is no correct way to dress, rather it's reclaiming the ability to decide how you wish to present yourself.

Fashion and the Fight for Racial Justice

Fashion has also been a central part in the struggle for racial equality. In the 1960s, during the U.S civil rights movement, African-American protesters marched in their Sunday best: crisp suits, polished shoes and neat dresses. It wasn't about vanity, It was a strategy.

By dressing with dignity, they were challenging racial stereotypes and demanded respect in a world that denied them justice. Fashion became a form of non-violent protest and resistance. A quiet, visual declaration of self worth.

Thrifting and the New Politics of Consumption

In recent years, a new kind of fashion activism has emerged with everyday choices. Particularly with the younger generation, thrifting or buying secondhand clothes is more than just saving money: it's a fight against the waste and exploitation of the fast fashion industry. Globally, the fashion world produces over 100 billion garments every year, many of which are worn a mere handful of times before being discarded. This endless cycle of production, consumption and disposal fuels climate change and relies on exploiting underpaid workers in developing countries. This rise of second hand clothing allows people to take a stand against disposable fashion. Additionally, the comeback of styles from previous decades, such as early 2000s Y2K or 1980s clothing, shows how fashion is cyclical, allowing people to embrace past trends sustainably rather than buying new fast-fashion pieces.

Ultimately, fashion is more than just a way to look stylish — it can serve as a meaningful form of self-expression and activism, allowing people to challenge societal norms, support ethical and sustainable practices, and make a statement about their values, all through the clothes they choose to wear.



Audrey
Student Editor

Who Really Profits from Spotify?

With over 700 million monthly active users, Spotify has become the world's largest audio streaming platform, revolutionizing the way we listen to music. However, despite its popularity, most listeners are unaware of Spotify's ethics and how they treat their artists.

The way in which music is consumed and how artists are paid will never be the same as before apps and streaming services became popular. Listeners would go out and buy a record, a CD or cassette which, in my opinion, makes a music experience more special than it is now, as although music is appreciated and celebrated, it isn't collected and treasured the way it was back in the 80s and 90s. Even though physical sales are making a comeback, with more people collecting vinyl and CDs, streaming now dominates the music market. In the UK, CD sales fell from around 67% of the market in 2005 to just 14% in 2020.



This would not be a problem if the artists were paid fairly. However on average, Spotify pays between \$0.003 and \$0.005 per stream, meaning that even 1,000 streams only earn an artist a few dollars. In contrast, physical sales pay more per unit. Even though artists only receive a fraction of the money, it is much more than streaming services. However whilst this is a huge difference, this is not necessarily Spotify's fault but the fault of the society that we live in. With constant advances in technology there are massive benefits but also threats to many job sectors. This forces artists to rely on other forms of income such as touring or merch.

Having said that, Spotify's per-stream royalty rates are notoriously low, leading to widespread criticism from artists who argue they are not fairly compensated for their work. This model has led high-profile artists like Taylor Swift and Thom Yorke to temporarily remove their music from the platform.

Unlike physical sales or downloads, which pay artists a fixed price per song or album sold, Spotify operates on a royalty system (payments made to the rightsholders of a song) based on the number of streams for their songs as a proportion of total songs streamed on the service. Spotify distributes approximately 70% of its total revenue to rights holders, who then pay artists based on their individual agreements.

Therefore, while Spotify has made music more accessible than ever, it has significantly altered how artists earn a living. Physical sales, though less common, still offer higher returns per unit, highlighting the challenges musicians face in a modern digitalised society. Ultimately, as listeners, it is vital to educate ourselves on the ethics behind the platforms we use so that we can better support artists.

America on ICE

Phoebe
Feature writer



On 20th January 2025, current president Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 47th president of the United States. In the first 100 days of his second presidency, ICE raids had almost doubled since the previous year and ICE itself reported that they had arrested "over 65,000 illegal aliens". Ever since, ICE and other enforcement agencies have become even more powerful in the USA. It must be questioned where this power comes from. This article will look into what happened to make ICE as powerful as it is today and the effects this has on American society, culture and future.

Although many previous presidents have undertaken deportations of undocumented immigrants before, Donald Trump has caused a huge increase in deportations. It initially started in September 2017, when the Trump administration announced it would be ending DACA, the directive that protected undocumented immigrants from deportation and offered work authorization to young undocumented immigrants (often called "Dreamers") who were brought to the U.S. as children. Only a day later the Senior Judge of the US District Court of Washington had to block Trump's executive order trying to end birthright citizenship. This order was called "completely unconstitutional" and therefore was not put into place.

On the 23rd of January, only 3 days after his inauguration, high profile ICE deportations were occurring in major cities such as Boston, Denver, Philadelphia, New York, Newark, Miami. In Newark, the mayor provided information that ICE had detained immigrants as well as citizens without a warrant after raiding a local establishment. These major deportations were proof that the new policy changes under Trump's presidency were only making it easier for immigration enforcements to not only detain immigrants but also other unrelated citizens. Not one day passed before Benjamin Huffman, the Former Acting United States Secretary of Homeland Security sent a memo stating that immigrants temporarily admitted by Biden can be removed. This created a wider faction for immigration enforcement officers to detain. In March, Attorney General Pam Bondi issued a directive that allowed law enforcement officers to enter migrants' homes without a warrant. This truly came into effect in one instance last April in which immigration agents broke into a family's home and stole their valuables despite them being US citizens and not the targets of the warrant issued. This is an example of the empowerment of immigration agents under the Trump administration. In July, the Department of Defense increased the number of authorised military personnel appointed to support ICE from 1,200 to 1,700 and in August Trump froze the training of all non-ICE federal agencies through the end of the year to accommodate immigration enforcement hires.

This timeline of erosion of protections for immigrants has led to widespread implications for immigrants living in America. First of all, this means that many immigrants or even citizens may be worried to leave their homes for fear of deportation. This may result in widespread migration out of the USA, as citizens move back to their home countries. However, many can't afford to or it is too dangerous to leave. The other option for those living in fear is to stay home which may inevitably cause serious mental health concerns. An example of this is that some establishments owned by migrants have been closing in recent months due to more fear surrounding raids and detention. Migrants are often core citizens in communities and their deportation can cause large impacts in many communities. They also spend and earn money on things like any other person which will cause consequences for the economy. ICE also now has the authority to enter primary schools under false pretences in search of undocumented students. Stories of this will likely spread to other migrant families in the areas as these instances happen.

Fantasy Heroines: Brave, Broken, and Romanticised

Emily
Feature Writer



When you were younger and you read books like Harry Potter and The Hunger Games, was there a character within that universe that you wanted to be or resemble?

For instance, the vast majority of girls who read Harry Potter wanted to be characters like Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood. But, if you really think about that for a moment - think about the universe that was created and the situations that those characters had to endure, would you still want to be them? Let's not forget that when Hermione ran away from Hogwarts she had to erase all memory of herself from her parents' minds! Would you want that to happen to you? Would real magic and mystical creatures really make all of her near death experiences worth it?

Then we have Katniss Everdeen - she makes a best friend early on in The Hunger Games: Rue who is twelve years old. Rue reminds Katniss of her twelve year old sister Primrose. About two days after Katniss meets Rue, Rue is shot dead by a District One boy, devastating our protagonist. Yet Katniss is glamourised and people wish they were in her place as the Herculean hero of her story. Why do we wish to embody these characters? It can be argued that it is down to people not considering the events that take place in a character's story, but rather the image of the characters themselves. Katniss fits into the commonly used stereotype of strong and independent fictional girls, who also coincidentally represent the ideation of a thin, feminine build.

In both Harry Potter and The Hunger Games, the reader sees examples of characters defying death and overcoming impossible odds, then envisioning themselves in these situations in order to experience the thrill of survival without actually having to live through it.

Interestingly, when romance is introduced into a story, it makes the dangerous and life-threatening experiences seem more poignant. After all, we all go through troubling periods in our lives and having someone or something to be doing it all for makes it all seem more worthwhile. This is particularly evident in fairytales, such as Cinderella, where she endures years of neglect and mistreatment, only to meet her Prince Charming.

Romantic elements are also introduced due to the fact that romance as a concept has recently been redefined. Boundaries have become more widely-spoken about in romantic relationships, as well as the increased awareness around the need for mutual respect within any kind of relationship dynamic. There has also been a redefinition through same-sex relationships and relationships with people who have genders different to the ones they were assigned at birth; all of this is causing teenagers to rethink what it really means to love. Some books help with understanding what a healthy relationship looks like – how to treat each other and help your partner out in times of need. Granted, not all romantic books lean onto the healthy side of romance, which could risk demonstrating unhealthy expectations for younger readers.

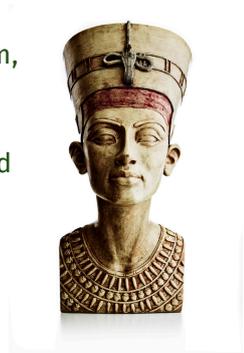
Ultimately, our desire to become fictional characters says less about wanting their lives and more about wanting what they represent - bravery, resilience, and purpose. Fiction allows us to experience danger, heartbreak, and triumph from a safe distance, carefully edited to highlight strength while softening trauma. While these stories can inspire courage and help readers explore ideas of love and identity, they can also risk glamourising pain and unrealistic expectations. Perhaps the real value of these characters is in learning from them.

Should Historical Artifacts be Displayed in Their Original Countries?

David
Feature Writer



Many countries around the world are known to have their national treasures displayed by other governments; famous ones include the Egyptian Rosetta Stone currently held at the British Museum, the Greek Elgin Marbles also at the British Museum, and the Egyptian Bust of Nefertiti in the Neues Museum in Berlin. These items have sparked international debates about whether they should be returned to their country of origin. The Bust of Nefertiti, for example, Egypt has unsuccessfully tried to reclaim many times over the years. Egypt believes that as the laws governing the export of antiquities at the time were imposed by colonial powers, which Egypt says means it never truly consented to the removal, whereas Germany maintains that the bust was acquired legally and was part of a protocol signed by German excavators and the French-led Egyptian Antiquities Service at the time. Before making up your mind on this matter, there are several things you must consider:



- Would as many people be able to see them? For example, while important parts of national history, they are also of interest to many other countries – would as many people be able to see them in the Cairo Museum as in the British Museum?
- The circumstances in which the items were acquired. Many of these items were illegally taken during colonial era activity, in dubious circumstances. For example, the Rosetta Stone was discovered by the French, then stolen from Egypt by the British, during the Napoleonic wars.
- Would they be safe in their home country? The Elgin Marbles, for instance, would not be as safe or as well preserved back on the front of the Parthenon, even though that is where they were originally found. They might be worn away by harsh weather such as rain or even dust storms, as well as being at risk of being stolen.
- Almost all of them are a piece of national history; they could be a source of pride for people in poorer countries like Kenya. Do you think that they should be in the private collections of rich businessmen rather than in Kenyan museums for the Kenyan people to see?

Personally, I believe that historical artifacts should be returned to their countries of origin. Many of them were taken from colonised countries under dubious circumstances. Others are of great importance, and had no right to be bought from a private owner. In reality, these artifacts aren't owned by a country. They aren't owned by a museum. They aren't even owned by a person. They are owned by a people. No one person should be able to legally sell a historical artifact, even of their country because they alone do not truly own it.

The Rise Of Minor Parties in The UK

Ivy
Student Editor



The fact that many people in the UK are disenchanted with the major political parties was brought to light by the 2024 general election. More voters today believe that because Labour and the Conservatives are too preoccupied with their own internal issues rather than enhancing people's lives, they are disconnected from ordinary issues and people. Minor parties like the Green Party, Reform UK, and the Liberal Democrats have started to garner attention and support as confidence in the larger parties has decreased.

Traditionally, the UK has been described as a two-party system, dominated by Labour and the Conservatives. This is mostly because minor parties find it challenging to secure seats in Parliament under England's First Past the Post election system. However, recent changes suggest that this dominance is weakening. The 2010 Liberal Democrat coalition government, along with the growing number of by-election wins by independent candidates and minor parties, shows that voters are becoming more willing to support alternatives to the main parties. This shift can be partly attributed to the growing lack of trust in the Labour and Conservative parties. Over the past decade, both parties have had scandals, such as MPs' controversies surrounding expenses and lobbying. Furthermore, social media has allowed the public to see and discuss these issues. This has led to the widespread belief that politicians are part of a distant "political elite," increasing the gap between voters and the main parties. As a result, many people are turning to minor parties because they see them as more honest or more representative.

Minor parties have also benefited from the rise of single-issue politics. Smaller parties frequently concentrate on particular topics that are important to particular groups, which might make them seem more trustworthy than the main parties, which aim to appeal to a broad spectrum of people. For instance, George Galloway won the Rochdale by-election by emphasising the Palestinian cause, which struck a deep chord with local voters who felt neglected by Labour and the Conservatives. Changes in the media have further helped minor parties grow. In the past, Labour and the Conservatives dominated newspapers and television due to their funding and long-standing influence. Today, social media allows smaller parties to communicate directly with voters and target people who share their views. Even though they haven't won many seats in Parliament, this has allowed parties like Reform UK and the Green Party to expand their membership and prominence. The emergence of minor parties has also been significantly influenced by regional politics. Parties that emphasise regional identity and interests have garnered more support from voters in Scotland and Wales since devolution. Westminster-based parties are thought to be less effective at expressing local issues than parties like the SNP and Plaid Cymru. This support grew as a result of events like Brexit, especially in Scotland, where the majority of voters wanted to stay in the EU but were forced to leave.



Overall, the rise of minor parties suggests that the UK is moving away from a strict two-party system. While First Past the Post favours the larger parties, growing dissatisfaction, media change, and regional identity have allowed smaller parties to challenge traditional British politics.



Dominic
feature writer

A French Interrailing Adventure



Who would have thought that travelling across France by train could be such a treat? Well, I can confirm it certainly is! Following the 2025 GCSE Examination period, I was fortunate enough in July to embark on an interrailing journey around a country that I am so passionate about: France. The journey consisted of three key stops: Paris, Annecy (Alps) and Istres (Provence). All of these stops offered so many different opportunities: all really enriching and confidence-building. Having studied French for so many years, and being brought up by two multi-lingual parents, I consider it to be in my blood, which is why this trip felt very special to me. Through my experiences, I was able to see firsthand the diverse benefits that learning a language can have - whether that be ordering my favourite meal in a French bistrot or navigating the metro system in Paris. There is no doubt that languages develop many personal skills and also help to broaden a strong cultural awareness which I believe is invaluable.

Right then, on y va?!

3rd July 2025 - Le grand départ à Paris!

Sun-cream packed, travel apps and playlists downloaded and the all important snacks tucked away in our rucksacks - we were ready to depart. The journey began with a speedy train crossing from Kings Cross St Pancras all the way to Paris Gare du Nord. As we exited **le tunnel sous la Manche** and sped across France at almost 200mph, I really appreciated looking out the window to feel encompassed by the vibrant and verdant French countryside. This gave me a tingle of excitement that this trip was going to be unforgettable!



Upon arrival in Paris, we dropped off our luggage in the apartment, and headed towards the **River Seine** to take a **promenade en bateau** and explore some of the most famous Parisian sights. A highlight for me was being able to capture a full length shot of the Eiffel Tower (see left) as this is not possible at a much closer distance. The weather was glorious with temperatures reaching 36°C which meant that I had the optimum conditions for my photography. Our tour guide spoke clearly and this experience developed my ability to comprehend natural fluent French rather than opting for the English headphones. I would 100% recommend this experience to anyone wanting to gain an insight into what Paris has to offer.

Next Stop: **La Pyramide du Louvre** - one of the most famous art museums in the world. During this trip, we decided that we were not going to explore the Louvre again as I had already done this in my last trip to Paris but it was just as pleasant to take a stroll admiring the architecture. We then crossed over and entered the **Jardins des Tuileries** which created the perfect balance between nature and grandeur.



Over the next few days, my Mum and I had the pleasure of discovering the neighbouring **quartier** known as **Montmartre**. This is where the formidable **Sacré-Cœur** resides. As with many of the Paris monuments, the queue was like a serpent meandering at every twist and turn. After having observed this amazing cathedral, we were greeted with a beautiful view of the Parisian skyline which stretched for miles and miles. We were lucky enough to spot some of France's most iconic monuments from this viewpoint. Although **Montmartre** is located on the outskirts of Paris, it is something that shouldn't be missed by day or by night.

As our time in Paris came to a close, we enjoyed a visit to the **Parc Zoologique de Paris** (a nearby zoo and one of the biggest attractions in Paris). Visiting this zoo was one of the best things we did in Paris, particularly as it was partly raining on this day. Whether it was the amusing penguins (see right) or observing the towering giraffes, this was a great end to the first part of our Interrailing adventure.

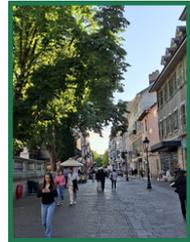


We ended our stay in Paris with a trip to the top of **la tour Montparnasse** where we experienced a marvellous sunset. **Le soleil se couche!**



8th July 2025 - Le voyage à Annecy!

As the Paris sunshine faded into the mist, we knew that our next travel day had arrived. Although the weather was grey, it was time to move to our next destination, **Annecy** - the Little Venice of France! To cover 340 miles, we used France's SNCF (**société nationale chemin de fer**) network consisting of one of its main trains, the **TGV**. The **TGV** is France's fastest train and can reach speeds up to 200mph! This means that we arrived in Annecy in just over **4 hours** which would have been much longer on a normal train. It felt a real privilege to travel by **TGV** on the upper deck and an experience which I won't forget for a long time.



As we arrived in Annecy, we were greeted by the impressive mountains and the beautiful azure waters. We were revitalised by the cleansing air of the **Rhône-Alpes** region. Annecy is recognised for having one of the cleanest lakes in Europe and it certainly lived up to its reputation. We were lucky enough to have a boat tour on the lake and then even travel in a pedalo around the water's edge. Although my Mum found it tiring in the pedalo, I rather enjoyed it.



After a day out, we then explored some of the local bistros and cafés which were all really welcoming and served some tasty food. French cuisine plays a major cultural role in the customs of France. Tourists must endeavour to appreciate the tastes and flavours by sampling the local specialities such as **tartiflette** and **fondue Savoyarde**.



During the second day of our time in Annecy, we undertook the city bus tour which took us round all of the sights and sounds on offer. Having this at the start of our stay meant we were able to return and plan our schedule for the rest of the week. If you are thinking about travelling to somewhere new, I would highly recommend visiting the local tourist office in the area to find out what tours and excursions are available, as these can significantly enhance a holiday.



Towards the end of our time in Annecy, one of my favourite excursions was to a local gorge named, **Les Gorges du Fier**. Walking along the walkways was simply breathtaking; the geology, the landscape - everything just felt very natural and calming. At specific points, there were several sections of information about the history of the gorge and also the type of rocks that were present in the structure. We also found out about different visualisations (such as face shapes) which could be seen in the rocks as a result of natural erosion / weathering. This trip was part of a package which then allowed us to visit one of the local castles which was equally as informative.



On our last day in Annecy, it was **le jour de Bastille** (14th July and a national bank holiday). This is a very special occasion in France where French people celebrate the beginning of the French Revolution and sounds of **La Marseillaise** can be heard for miles around. There were many festivities across the country and Annecy did not disappoint. We were treated to a 30 minute firework display which was just magnificent - a perfect finale to our time in Annecy.

5th July 2025 - Le dernier arrêt: Istres

The final stop as part of our Interrailing adventure was Istres, a town 35 miles northwest of Marseille located in the Provence region, 250 miles south of Annecy. On the trains from Annecy, we were able to feel the temperature increasing as the mercury hit 40 degrees. Thankfully, for the most part we were sheltered and applied sun-cream whenever needed. In the future, I would definitely like to come back to southern France because it feels like a much more authentic part of rural France without millions of tourists.



As we navigated Provence, my Mum and I visited a neighbouring city called **Arles**, renowned for its outstanding architecture and particularly the **Roman amphitheatre**. The exterior structure was truly magnificent and highlights the Romans' significant influence on France's cultural heritage and development.



In the next edition of 'Informed', I will be exploring the importance of learning a language. Keep your eyes peeled!

In Istres itself, we strolled around the old town where my Mum reminisced about her experiences as this was where she completed her year abroad as part of her University French degree. From my perspective, it was really special to hear her experiences of when she was younger exploring France.



In Arles, we spotted the inspiration for this painting, **'The Yellow Room', by Vincent Van Gogh**. Many tourists and holidaymakers stop by to photograph this iconic building. Arles' most famous and celebrated artist produced much of his work while living here, attracted by the quality of light which the region is well-known for.



To conclude...

On the 19th July 2025, we made the momentous journey home travelling 800 miles by TGV via **Marseille, Lyon, Lille and London St Pancras**. This was on one of the biggest travel days of the year, known as Le grand chassé-croisé des vacances.

Through writing this article, I have been able to reflect on how much these experiences have further developed my understanding of the French language and culture. I feel I have gained confidence in my conversational skills with native French speakers and I will never forget this experience.

Timeless Fashion

With the stress of keeping up with the latest trends, seek relief in knowing that some clothing items are here to stay fashionable. Whether its winter or summer, spring or autumn, these staples will never get old.



Lucy
Design Director

Knitted Jumpers

Whatever the style, the comfort of a knitted jumper is never going out of fashion. The variety of different patterns and fabrics keeps the popularity for this cozy number alive.



Linen Trousers

Worn all year round, linen trousers are used in both casual and formal outfits. They style great in every season. They are timeless as no matter the circumstance they immediately give the impression of put together.

UGG Boots

The perfect winter shoe with unlimited cheaper versions that replicate the branded original. They are so unique yet so familiar: like a fluffy sock and wellington boot mixed into one to create the perfect partner for snowy walks.



Puffer Coats

This year, don't dread the idea of ruining your outfit with a large coat. Instead, embrace it. Puffer coats are especially timeless as they can be matched with whatever outfit you decide to style.



Play

Playing used to be fun,
Playing would take you to a magical realm,
It would let you tame a unicorn,
Or fly on a magic carpet,
Or even sail through a treacherous storm.

Playing used to make us giggle,
Playing would get us muddy,
When our only worry was not wanting to wear our wellies.
We would jump up and then down,
Having so much fun,

Playing is for children,
Playing is immature,
Now we want to put on our wellies as we walk through the door,
Now our worries are bigger,
Much bigger.

Playing is stupid,
Playing isn't real,
It was just a game,
We once used to play in the rain,
Now we watch it splatter and leave a stain,

Playing is now a memory,
Playing is in the past,
We once used to beg to go to the park,
Now staying isolated is much less of a task.

Playing used to be fun.