



# 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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## Simon Balle Says: Uniform or Non-uniform?

I'm sure that we have all had a moment where we wish we could make changes to our school. That's why this column reveals the true opinions of some of Simon Balle's students on uniforms. I have interviewed some students at our school to see what we can change to make Simon Balle better.

Uniform - some people want to wear their own clothes, whilst others don't. A pro of school uniforms is that it creates a sense of order, it makes the whole school look more organised and makes us feel like more of a community. School uniforms also mean that we don't have to waste time figuring out what we want to wear in the morning, as one student says "school uniform makes things more organised and I don't have to plan my outfits in the morning". However, not having a school uniform would allow students to express themselves through their fashion. It can also be a way of connecting with others who have similar styles.



One student says "it would help me express myself more and find my own friend group". Although there are worries from students about being judged for their own clothing, for example if it does not have relevant brands, the school would implement rules to prevent this discrimination. For example, a rule stating that logos aren't allowed to be bigger than a credit card. Another common criticism of school uniforms is that they are expensive.

A recent study reveals that the average British parent pays £249.51 for school uniform a year. As the cost of living increases, it no longer seems right to ask this of parents, even with the more affordable ways of getting a uniform, such as secondhand shops. Uniform still seems like an unnecessary extra cost when over 25% of parents in the UK can only afford school uniforms for their child, by spending less on the weekly food shop.

## Doomscrolling Your Life Away

Audrey  
Feature Writer



Our generation spends hours mindlessly scrolling through TikTok and Instagram, I for one look at the time only to realise that I have spent an hour on social media instead of the 5 minutes that I had told myself that I was going to. So why is this, and what is the effect that this has on our mental and physical health?

Before we get into that, Doom scrolling is mindlessly scrolling, swiping and consuming content on social media and websites without consciously knowing we're doing it. Although this brings us brief moments of pleasure and enjoyment, it is only momentary and we end up feeling like we have wasted our time just scrolling through videos of other people's lives and routines which can make us - the consumer- just feel fed up with our own now seemingly dull lives.



And yet, despite how social media makes us feel, we still use it excessively?

When we are scrolling through Tik Tok or Instagram, our brains release dopamine, a chemical that causes anticipation. This motivates you to keep scrolling - as the next video could either be highly entertaining or very boring. If it is entertaining, then the dopamine is further released and this reinforces the behaviour and the action of scrolling itself. However, if the video is irrelevant and monotonous then the lack of dopamine causes you to continue to scroll in order to find the next 'hit'.

Social media videos are very short (most being 1 minute or under) and therefore the reward is immediate. The more videos we watch, the more our attention span shortens as we become familiar with the constant state of stimulation.

This is why it is often difficult to focus on other tasks for prolonged periods of time, as we expect the instant gratification that we receive from scrolling through social media. Research indicates that the average human attention span has decreased from 12 seconds in 2000 to around 8 seconds today and this is largely down to social media and the impact that it has on our brains through the instant release of dopamine.

What can we do to help ourselves with our addiction? Try to set timers on your devices, or even just watch a video the whole way through. It is essential that we do other things which aren't related to our phones. This could include exercise or meeting up with friends, it is vital that we have a healthy balance between online and offline life because otherwise, we will all just become spectators in our own life and our individuality will be replaced with a herd mentality.

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## Embrace your limits and do what you want

Mr Jude Kerswill  
Staff Editor



Are you the best possible version of yourself? Are you living your best life? The answer, I hate to tell you, is probably no. But that's ok.

In a world that is hyper-connected, with a seemingly unlimited set of paths or decisions to make at every juncture, life can often feel overwhelming. Noone feels this more acutely than students: pulled in different directions by parents, teachers, their friends, the people they follow on social media. For students and 'fully-fledged adults' (if there is such a thing) alike, surveying the landscape of choices with only four thousand weeks to make the most of ourselves can often feel like a daunting prospect instead of an exciting one.

With thousands of life coaches, gurus, books, podcasts (the list goes on) out there claiming to have the answer to our existential woes, we can often feel like having life 'sorted' is just one read away. But it isn't. There is no silver bullet to 'winning' at life and the harsh reality is that most of us will always feel like we've never truly realised our potential. Oliver Burkeman, Guardian journalist and author, explores this phenomenon in his book, *Meditations for Mortals*. Burkeman cuts through the self-help noise to deliver a clear and oddly-comforting message: life is finite, you will never have as much control over it as you want, and easing into that truth is freeing and releases you from a lifetime of self-torture.

This article contains an English teacher's humble take on a couple of Burkeman's nuggets of wisdom. Use, adapt or discard as you see fit. Really. It's your life.

### It's worse than you think.

It often feels like there's not enough time in the day to get everything done, doesn't it? We have to-do lists; if you're like me, a to-do list of to-do lists. Well, the truth is that it's worse than you think. It doesn't just feel like there isn't enough time: there literally isn't enough time to get everything done. There are always more tasks to complete and only a limited amount of time in life to get them done. That isn't your fault. You are not responsible for the conflict between the finite nature of time and the infinite amount of things there are to get done. So stop beating yourself up for the inability to complete an impossible task.

At some point in human history we stopped living day-by-day and became planners. We realised that if we thought ahead we could plan events. We could plan meals. We could plan our future; our success; our best self. With the power of planning and our overactive imaginations, assisted by various forms of media, we planned out our lives and created a version of ourselves that completed 'it' - that is to say, life. Our perfect future self was content, wise, confident that they had made the right choices; lived their best life.

Most of us strive to be this version of ourselves but find it incredibly difficult. This too is worse than you might think. It's not difficult to attain this Buddha-like status: it's literally impossible. Even if you were to reach all of your goals and live your wildest dreams, you'd still find the next thing. The next goal. The next step to contentment. Your "best self" is an illusion. It's you at the end of the rainbow. Put simply, it doesn't exist.

Once we accept that things are worse than we think - that we can't ever get it all done; that the best version of ourselves is pure fiction - we can relax. With a list of things that is impossible to complete, choose the things that you want to do. Things that you will actually get a sense of pleasure or satisfaction from. Of course - there are some things you have to do. Work-related tasks are sometimes unnegotiable, for example. But the rest is strictly optional, and you should treat it as such.

Do what you can. Do what you want. Safe in the knowledge that no one who ever lived completed their list. And no one who ever lived was the best version of themselves. Because they are both impossible tasks.

### **Just do it... once... and for the sake of it.**

Motivation is tough at the best of times, especially when it comes to creative endeavours. Case and point: at the time of writing, the deadline for this article was at least two weeks ago. The problem is that we often look to the wrong place for the reason we undertake something. We tend to overcomplicate things.

The primary reason for doing something that doesn't absolutely need to be done should be enjoyment; satisfaction; gratification within the present moment. But our obsession with planning and living our best life (see the previous section) once again gets in the way of what should be quite a simple process. We start to believe that a single undertaking of the thing we want to do isn't enough. "I can't just go for a run," you tell yourself, "I need to be the kind of person that runs every other day. One day I should be able to run fifteen marathons in a row." A pretty anxiety-inducing mountain to climb (or run up), that.

So you give up on running at all. What's the point? You're never going to be the next Mo Farah so why bother?

The same logic applies to writing, drawing - anything that you could enjoy the process of but ultimately requires a bit of work. We forget to do these things for the sake of them. We become so hung up on some abstract (and usually unrealistic) notion of success; of being the 'kind of person' that runs or writes or draws, that we forget to actually run or write or draw. Just once. And for the sake of it.

You might develop a habit out of it. Maybe you will become a success in that field, whatever that means - although you should go easy on yourself in regards to this. But the only way you could ever get there, if that is the dream, is by enjoying the process. And if you don't get satisfaction out of doing it for the sake of it - why would you want to be the 'kind of person' that does that thing anyway?

So, my challenge to you, reader, is this: choose something that you've been meaning to do for a while. Something that doesn't absolutely need to be done but that you might get some satisfaction from doing. Do it. Not to develop a habit out of it; not to become a master of it eventually. Just do it... once... and for the sake of it.



David  
Feature Writer

## Our school's role in stopping climate change

### Our school's role in stopping climate change!!!!

When you hear the phrase "climate change", you probably heave a bored sigh; you might want to skip this whole article and just move on to the next one. But climate change is a significant problem in our modern society. It is responsible for the increasing numbers of extreme natural disasters and the loss of many people's homes. For example, each year 20 million people are forced from their homes due to climate change. However, many people do not quite realise just how catastrophic it really is. There are only a few precedents in earth's history where carbon dioxide levels have reached this high, and one resulted in the largest mass extinction ever, which wiped over 90% of complex life forms off the face of the planet. We are using the resources of what is equivalent to 1.6 Earths to maintain our current lifestyle and our natural environment cannot keep up. It is not too late to turn it around though, but it will take everyone's help.

Stopping climate change starts with you, and there are a myriad of things you can do to help, so do not worry if you can't manage some of them. Here are some options:

- Use cleaning products that do not contain harmful chemicals – the chemicals will seep into the earth and eventually reach a body of water where they can seriously hurt the wildlife, if they haven't already.
- Save electricity – turn off lights and heating when you do not need them on, and when they are on try to use them as efficiently as possible.
- Use public transport when you can – it produces less emissions per person as it transports more people at a time. Buses, for example, transport on average 30-100 people, and only produce 93 grams of CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger kilometre. However, cars transport on average only 5 people, and produce 164 grams of CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger kilometre.
- Recycle your batteries – this will stop them going into landfill and to reduce the mining of minerals they contain, like lithium, cobalt, manganese, nickel and graphite.
- Raising awareness – Spread the word: you could put up posters in your windows, give money to green charities, tell your friends at school about our planet's predicament, or even put a notice in your school's magazine!

Schools use a lot of energy and generate a lot of waste, so it has become a struggle to keep them environmentally friendly. Some schools have installed solar panels, while others are trying to focus more on reducing, reusing and recycling. Simon Balle is currently doing a lot to help combat climate change. The heating system's inefficiency is perhaps the biggest environmental problem that the school faces, especially in the winter. Various solutions are available, but all are costly, and so have not yet been explored. However, we do all we can to retain heat; we triple glaze our windows, put thicker panels on our walls, and use more efficient ventilation. Also, some of our energy comes from solar panels on the roofs of the 3-storey block, science block and larch.



- Check that you are using an environmentally friendly company to supply your power – ask your parents about how they get their energy, and whether or not it's renewable. Perhaps you could get them to tell you how big their supplier's carbon footprint is and recommend a more sustainable company if theirs is not already environmentally friendly.





Maisie  
Feature Writer

# The Regression of Women's Rights in Afghanistan

If you were to think about women in Afghanistan now, you would most likely picture images of the women being forced to wear full body burqas. But it hasn't always been this way.

"As a girl, I remember my mother wearing miniskirts and taking us to the cinema. My aunt attended university in Kabul"-  
Horia Mosadiq.

Before the war in Afghanistan, between 1950 and 1970, the country had a now unimaginable period of stability where women were seen as equal to their male counterparts. They were able to attend university and other forms of education and wear whatever they pleased. This all changed when the Taliban took control in 1996. By 1998, they were in control of 90% of Afghanistan. Although they were not able to keep this control during the war, in 2021 they re-captured control of the entire country, something they had been unable to do before. The Taliban, made up of Islamic fundamentalists, wanted to make Afghanistan an Islamic state. While the Taliban initially claimed that "Women will be very active in society", their laws enforced and actions that were to follow such as banning women from all public spaces and taking away free speech, contradict this statement.

In September 2021, the Taliban issued a temporary ban on girls attending secondary school, a first hint to the Taliban's attitudes towards women. I know that many of us find school a drag a lot of the time but we take this fully for granted, imagine having your rights to an education stripped away from you within a single month and then therefore your access to a future outside of your home.

In that same week female employees were ordered to remain at home and only those with jobs that couldn't be done by men were to remain working.



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Women's freedom was quickly shrinking when in October of 2022, women were banned from public places such as parks, gyms and public swimming pools. The Taliban higher education minister then ordered that all women still in attendance at university be suspended and essentially kicked out. Women who took to the streets to defend the last fragments of their freedom were abused and threatened with execution. However it wasn't only protesters who were met with violence, a woman in Kabul had her thumb cut off for wearing nail varnish. A new law emerged only recently stating that women are no longer allowed to be seen through windows, Any windows that look into where women would be must be blocked by a wall or obscured in another way.

“Since the Taliban took power, I was hiding, I could not do what I was doing before. There is no future for me and millions of other women and girls”- Shamaile Zarei, Amnesty UK interview.

The ongoing crisis in Afghanistan has been largely overlooked in the media due to uproars like the 2024 US election. Animals in the city of Kabul now have more rights than a woman does. Our rights such as our access to education should never be taken for granted because this is a brutal wake up to how fragile women's rights are all over the world. It might be easy to overlook this almost fictional sounding brutality happening so far away but it is a devastating reality for the 20 million women and girls living in Afghanistan right now. If you would like to become more involved with helping these women and providing them with opportunities for a better life you can donate to charities like this one.

<https://womenforwomen.org.uk/work-we-do/afghanistan-response>

## Asylum Seekers and ‘The Odyssey’

Zoe  
Student Editor

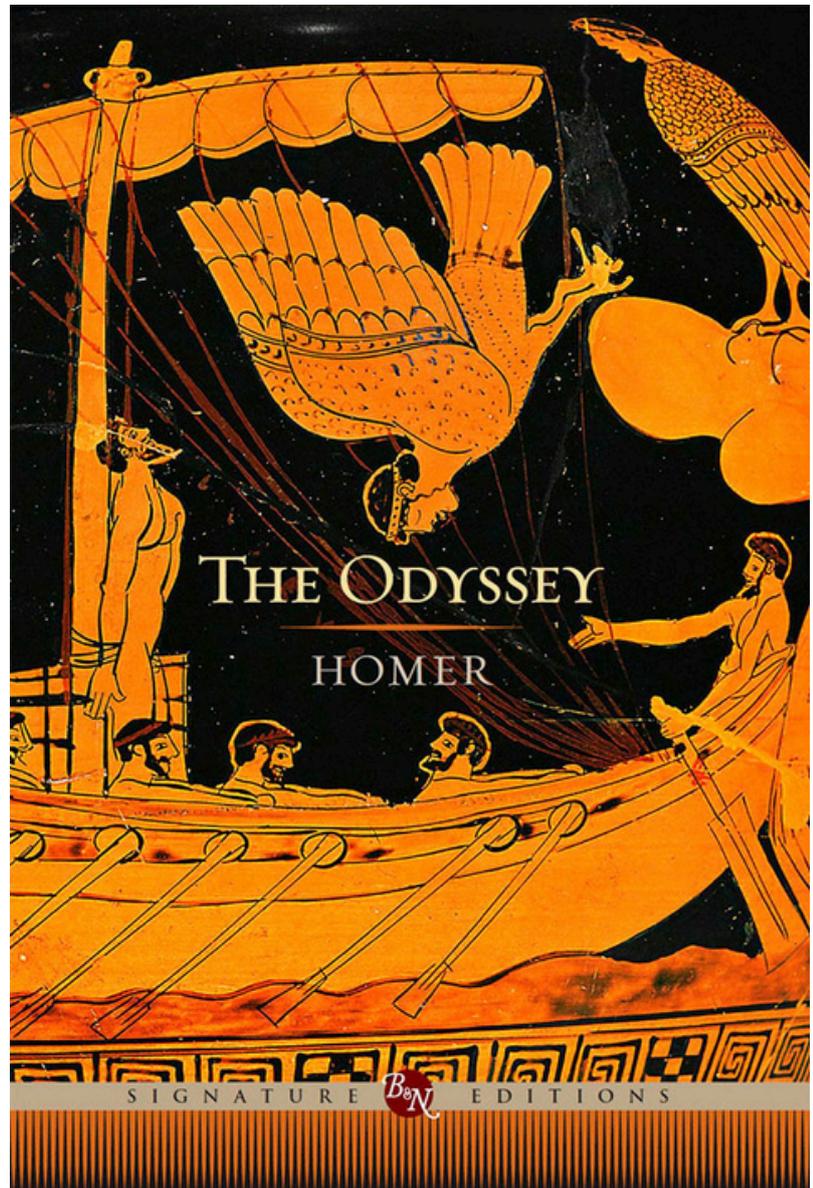


The Odyssey is an epic poem often dedicated to Homer, that was written around the 7th century BCE. It tells the story of an ancient Greek hero, Odysseus, sailing back home to his family after a decade long war. His journey is greatly delayed by sea monsters, witches, cannibals and giants, as well as a detour to the underworld. Odysseus loses his crew and ship, all while worrying about his wife, Penelope, and son, Telemachus, back on his kingdom of Ithaca. On that island, Penelope and Telemachus face a hoard of unwanted guests. How can these ancient stories from the past still relate to the present we live in?

Nowadays we may not have demi-gods and witches but there still is war and scattered people on their own journeys home. The Odyssey has been resonating with some asylum seekers in Jordan who have fled Syria and other refugees forced to leave unsafe homes or war-torn nations. One of the central themes of the Odyssey is xenia also known as reciprocated hospitality. When visitors came to your house, a good ancient Greek would be prepared to offer them food, drink and sometimes new clothes before even asking their name, it was expected that these kindnesses would be returned with gratitude and humility.

In the Odyssey those that fail to offer hospitality are punished by Odysseus, for example, the Cyclops (one-eyed giant) is blinded for attempting to eat Odysseus and his crew. Also, the suitors who plundered Odysseus' home of food and attempted to force his wife into marriage are all slain in a dramatic and bloody fight at the end of the poem.

While this might not fit with our modern ideas of justice, it stressed the importance of the law of xenia in this time. Though there is no great hero to enact revenge on those who do not offer hospitality in the modern age, we could learn to again adopt the ancient moral of xenia.



It is no wonder that when asylum seekers are taught the Odyssey they can see beyond its literary value or canonisation and instead connect with its themes. Their view of the text does not derive from a dusty library disconnected with reality but from a place of lived experience. Many asylum seekers understand what it is like to drift in an ocean with a war smouldering behind them. They know what it is like to hope and depend on the kindness and hospitality from those on the foreign lands they end up on. The constant worry for the family they have been separated from haunts them as it did the protagonist of this ancient epic.

In recent years there has been a rise in conflict and so refugees and asylum seekers. Europe has been accepting Ukrainian refugees. Globally there is a refugee crisis from peoples fleeing Syria and Palestine. Yet, the system by which immigrants and asylum seekers can enter Europe is outdated and inefficient, there are extensive backlogs, migrant detention centres that are full and a lack of language translators.

On top of this there has been a rise in the far-right across Europe and many of the parties hold anti-immigration messages. Over the past 3 years there has been success of the far-right in European elections, we have seen this in Italy, Germany, France, Croatia, the Netherlands and Portugal. Not forgetting that the Reform UK party had 14% of the vote in the 2024 election. There is a clear link between the anti-immigration sentiment and the success of the far right. In Germany there has been a hardening of the border, in Poland a change to stop asylum seekers entering from Belarus and in Italy there has been two new centres opened in Albania that will hold people seeking asylum from Africa to Europe.

Immigration and asylum are deeply complex issues that can only be viewed in their modern contexts. It is no good comparing the struggles of millions to the singular hero of a Bronze Age text. However, it is fascinating that a poem so distant in time can still be interpreted in a modern perspective. It is not comforting to think that humans have changed so little to still face wars and displacement as we did three millennia ago. Literature provides a connection of solidarity through time and for the students that study the Odyssey they can read ancient words with a modern frame. Perhaps through constant reinterpretation of literature we can reexamine the ancient morals of hospitality and bring in some of those hopes to today.



Nitika

Feature Writer



Meara

Feature Writer

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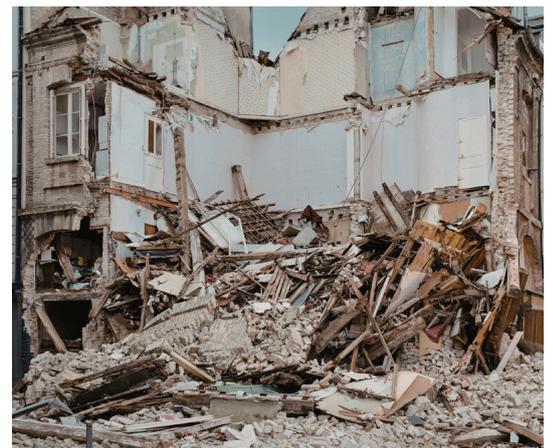
## The War in Gaza: Staying Informed

### **The War in Gaza: Staying Informed**

Israel, a Middle Eastern nation bordering Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, was established in 1948 as a refuge for Jews persecuted in Europe. Since its creation, conflict with Palestine has persisted, with Palestine seeking to reclaim lost land and Israel defending its territory. Hamas, a pro-Palestinian political group classified as a terrorist organization by the British government, governs the Gaza Strip. On 7 October, 2023, Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israel, killing 1,195 people (including 815 civilians) and taking 251 hostages. Since then, the conflict has taken the global stage, occupying headlines and social media, and dividing public opinion with constant debate and widespread attention. While many (predominantly Western) governments have announced their support for Israel's right to protect itself, a growing number of activists and organisations have emphasised the disproportionate anguish of the Palestinians, with mass protests worldwide calling for recognition and action to ease the suffering.

### **Where did it all start?**

The 7th of October is often viewed as the climax—or rather, the incitement—of the current escalation, but the roots of this conflict stretch back much further. The struggle dates back to 1948, when the establishment of Israel led to the displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians in what they call the Nakba (catastrophe), marking not only the loss of their homeland but also the beginning of decades of dispossession and unrest.



Tensions intensified as Israel expanded its territory, annexing East Jerusalem and occupying the West Bank and Gaza, following the 1967 Six-Day War. The military occupation, coupled with settlement expansion in Palestinian territories, deepened the sense of injustice. Over the years, Palestinians have faced land confiscations, restricted movement, and economic hardship. Gaza, home to 2.3 million people, has remained under an Israeli-imposed blockade, justified on security grounds but resulting in severe restrictions on travel trade, and essential resources. Often described as an "open-air prison," a term used by Human Rights Watch's Omar Shakir, Gaza symbolizes the profound human toll of this decades-long struggle.

With this historical context, the reality of the situation comes into scrutiny, revealing complexities that challenge widely accepted narratives, and demand a more nuanced understanding.

## What's been happening since?

One year after the attack, the situation remains dire. In response to Hamas' assault, Israel launched a massive military campaign in Gaza—what began as systemic oppression has escalated into all-out war. Relentless airstrikes and ground operations

have leveled entire Palestinian neighborhoods, displacing 2 million people. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government frames these actions as essential for peace, justifying ongoing violence as a means of preventing further attacks.

Despite claims of targeting Hamas, the civilian death toll has been catastrophic—44,778 Gazan civilians killed compared to 1,126 soldiers. With hospitals overwhelmed or destroyed and aid struggling to get in, Gaza's infrastructure has collapsed.

The conflict has also reignited accusations of war crimes on both sides—Hamas for rocket attacks and hostage-taking, and Israel for indiscriminate bombings, attacks on civilian infrastructure, and worsening blockades. Allegations of sexual violence at Israeli detention camps have intensified scrutiny. Many experts argue Israel's actions amount to genocide, citing mass casualties, forced displacement, and resource deprivation. Regardless of terminology, the immense suffering underscores the urgent need for accountability and protection of life.

What's going on now?

Over a year on from the events of October 7th, the Israel-Palestine conflict remains a stark reminder of the consequences of unresolved historical grievances. The actions of that day were, with no doubt, shocking, but did not emerge from nowhere, and rather rose from decades of inequality and oppression.

On the 15th of January this year, a ceasefire was announced, and began four days after, after a long period of negotiations involving third-party countries like the US, Egypt, and Qatar, marking the end, or signals of the end, of over 15 months of fighting and devastation.

The ceasefire is set to take place over three stages, starting with exchanging hostages of both sides (an initial 33 Israelis from Hamas, and 1900 Palestinian prisoners from Israel), and ending with a complete end of conflict and the rebuilding of Gaza.

For Gaza, under the deal, an average of 600 aid lorries will be allowed in every day to distribute supplies - a stark increase from the average of 50-90 lorries coming in per day last December, as well as the monumental challenge ahead of rebuilding. An estimated 70% of Gaza's buildings have been destroyed or damaged in some way, and the project is guessed to cost over £35 billion, according to UN officials.

However, with long-standing tensions between Israel leaders and Hamas, and with an explosive risk of conflict breaking out at any point, the ceasefire remains precarious, as human rights organisations and international governments both work to ensure stability.



Rosie  
Student Editor

## The 'Trad Wife' Lifestyle and Antifeminism

Since the late 1960s, the feminist movement has faced intense backlash from anti-feminism. Despite the significant increase in women's rights across the world within the last two centuries, such as the introduction of women's suffrage and legislation enforcing equal pay, in the 21st century, the continuous advances of social media have only given more fuel to the fire of the anti-feminist movement.

It is no secret that social media is incredibly influential. Platforms create algorithms directed specifically at the consumer's interests in order to keep them scrolling. Users can share false information and an aesthetic but unrealistic lifestyle with just a click of a button. So when it comes to a mixture of politics and social media, the outcomes are dangerously influential.

In the past few years, the trad wife lifestyle 'trend' has emerged across social-media platforms, in particular TikTok and Instagram. The lifestyle romanticises the role of being a housewife, making cooking, cleaning, having and looking after children and being the perfect wife to your husband, all seem like the perfect, aesthetic life. In essence, this trend advocates for the return of women to the role of the traditional early 1900s housewife. But what the trend neglects to show, is the reality of being a full time housewife. The times when it is exhausting, messy and repetitive. The reality that being a housewife usually means that women have given up their own career and have to sacrifice the time for their own interests for the sake of their family and children. The trend promotes the idea that women should "go back to their roots" of being a housewife rather than utilising the rights that modern society has given them that enable them to access higher education and a multitude of careers. The trad wife lifestyle and the act of "homemaking" are being offered as a radical rebellion against feminism itself. It serves to make audiences question why women need, or need to use, the civil rights that they have gained in modern society, as being a housewife is actually an idyllic and laidback role, rather than the repressive role that feminism has claimed it to be.



In a more extreme sense, the trad wife trend has also romanticised relinquishing financial power to your husband, as surely it seems a good idea to let him deal with the "boring" things? Again, what the trend fails to mention is the precarious situation that you are left in by giving up all control to both your own and any shared finances. All money can be left under the husband's name and, if the marriage were to end for any reason, the woman would be left helpless with no money to her name.

Promoting these ideas and this lifestyle as an opposition to feminism via social media, is spreading these ideas to audiences of all ages, including both children and teenagers who are easily influenced by the information and content that they consume. Despite the majority of social media platforms enforcing a minimum age requirement of 13 years old, it has been found that 75% of children aged 12 and under in the UK have a social media account. These younger audiences are being influenced by certain aspects of antifeminism through the trad wife lifestyle, majority of the time without even knowing it.

However, social media is incredibly unrealistic. The content that we see is created specifically to show the most exciting and aesthetically pleasing parts of life. The feminist movement allowed women to gain so many civil rights: it introduced legislation to enforce equal pay, gave women suffrage, gave women the right to work, the right to a better education and enforced legislation that denounced discrimination against women. Just because being a housewife may be fulfilling for one woman, does not mean that it should be the only option for all women. Feminism does not want every woman to have a full-time career in the place of being a housewife, but rather serves to show women that they can, and give them the opportunity to, do both.

So whether the trad wife lifestyle seems perfect on our screens or is a perfect reality for some women, it should not disregard the work and achievements of feminism that have gained so many integral rights for women over the years.

Emily  
Feature Writer

## The Dangers of a Trump Second Term

On the fifth of november 2024, Donald Trump won the presidential election, putting him in charge of the United states of America (USA). During the election, Trump's republican party won with 312 votes over their main competitor, the democratic party led by Kamala Harris, which lost to them with 226 votes. Of course, with this new power Trump plans to do simple law changes such as to lower taxes for particular individuals (this is a very common stance for leaders to gain votes), but he had also planned to create some new policies, mostly summed up by what the US government has named 'Project 2025', a 900 page policy wish list formed by Trump and his colleagues with the hope to decree the laws includes in 2025, as the name suggests. This includes many of what he deems improvements to his previous plans during his previous presidency in 2017-2021.



One of these rules includes the law that has probably brought up the most backlash from the American public, which is the law to ban abortion access for all women in America, making it an illegal practice. This has stirred up quite a lot of controversy due to the fact that when a young or vulnerable mother has an unplanned pregnancy she may be unable to care for a young child. As said in the words of pro-life activist Fredrica Mathwews-Green, 'No woman wants an abortion as she wants an ice cream cone or a porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its leg.'

It is difficult to establish exactly what Mr Trump's views on abortion are; when asked he refused to answer the question of whether or not he believes abortion is murder, but later confirmed that he could not disagree with that statement

There are other matters on the topic of Project 2025 such as Donald Trump's plan to ban gender affirming surgery for transgender individuals, giving adoption agencies the right to deny same-sex couples, restricting legal immigration pathways, as well as also having stopping a lot of the progress that America has already taken towards helping the global climate crisis and many more matters.

However, the plan that has received the most backlash and, conversely, the most support remains the banning of abortion access. Despite this, abortion is clearly a complex idea with no simple solution. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the president's own wife has been quoted as saying 'Why should anyone other than the woman herself have the power to determine what she does with her own body? A woman's fundamental right of individual liberty, to her own life, grants her the authority to terminate her pregnancy if she wishes.'

Despite the seemingly desperate state of the USA at the moment, there are ways in which we can help. These include small, but effective things including donating to charities that support the causes that you believe in, visiting the USA, and maybe taking part in some protests for rights that you believe people should have. It is difficult to find a way to support people in need sometimes, but there is always a way to help the causes that you believe in.

Alex  
Feature Writer

# Artificial Intelligence - are we being smart

## about this?

Artificial Intelligence has recently become a huge part of our world, and very quickly too. Although this can be great, and provides us with opportunities to work more efficiently, it could also pose many problems.

AI can be amazing in many ways. It can optimize our lives and make tasks so much more simple to complete. For example, it can summarise complicated and detailed information into bite-sized and simplified statements that many can understand. This can especially help schools when introducing new concepts to younger students. In primary school or early secondary years, these tools will really help. Teachers have to spend lots of time trying to find the best ways of presenting certain ideas to students, which give them a good understanding, without overcomplicating it. AI can help in this, by the teacher inputting a prompt, and being handed an easily understandable piece of information.

However, artificial intelligence is not just a positive tool for humanity; it can also be misleading and harmful. First of all, not all sources of information for AI are trustworthy outlets. Many websites will have misinformation, which then is taken by AI and used in a generated answer. Some AI models will filter out these websites, and only use trusted sites, though many of us are oblivious to which ones do, or don't, or how we can find out.

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Some AI models use machine learning, which takes human input or comment, and stores it to become more humanoid. Though this may not seem a problem initially, it dilutes the objective machine which AI should be, and stops it from remaining completely impartial.

Any input to certain AI models about certain controversial political topics, will give a more subjective and biased view towards a certain group of people. This can affect many uses of AI, for example, asking AI about recent news - which therefore may not give an answer which users could develop their own opinions about and rather limits them to a single perspective - which is controlled by input of strongly held opinions of other people using AI.

AI can also pose threats to us, specifically posing a risk to our livelihoods. Creative job sectors such as the music industry, art industry and other creative subjects are at risk. AI images online are common and are being used a lot of the time. AI music models are starting to release music and are becoming increasingly smarter and skilled by the day. Jobs that involve creativity are starting to be taken over by AI. Jobs which matter to us. Jobs which should be valued. Jobs which humanity sees as the most impactful and expressive, which inspire the world's culture. And these jobs are being taken over at a rapid rate. All jobs require a certain level of creativity, and as a clear consequence artificial intelligence is starting to creep into important careers. We are starting to see a situation where the world's pool of occupation, which was overflowing with weird and wonderful professions, has started to slowly drain with less and less options for people to choose.

AI is new and unknown. Knowing this, we need to be careful - use it, but with caution. Take the time to think about whether the content you are reading or viewing is truly trustworthy. Take the time to be creative by yourself. We should be using AI as a tool to improve our creativity, not replace it.





# The Menendez Case: Villains or Victims?

Thirty-five years after they killed their own parents, Lyle and Erik Menendez's story continues to cause conflict and provoke outrage within the modern day media.

Netflix's recent series 'Monsters' has received a mixture of criticism following its dramatised depiction of the brothers' tragic lives.

## **Their story**

In August of 1989, Erik Menendez (18 years old) and his older brother Lyle (21 years old) shot their parents, Jose and Kitty Menendez, in their family home in Beverly Hills.

What further shocked the public was the fact that within six months of their parents death, the brothers spent around \$700K on travel, cars, Rolex watches and parties.

In 1990, the pair were arrested on the charge of first degree murder, as a result of the brothers' confession to their psychologist. After a televised mistrial in 1993, a second trial in 1996, found the brothers to be guilty, and they were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. But just how 'cold-blooded' was this murder?

## **Motive: Callous or Courageous?**

It all seems simple; the who, what, when, where... but what about the why? This is where the case becomes much more complex, as the brothers were not motivated by greed or money, but rather a much darker and more sinister reason.

The defence shocked the nation when the brothers described how their father, a prestigious and successful businessman, abused them throughout their entire childhood, whilst their mother, despite knowing, did nothing about it. They described countless cases of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse inflicted by both of their parents, continuing until days before they committed the murder.

## **What can we learn from their case?**

It is important to think about how this case triggers questions about how we, as society, differentiate the line between a malignant criminal and a victim. What can be in place to better navigate crimes like this?

Were the brothers' actions justified by the horrendous abuse they endured? Or must we set strict guidelines which assert that in no situation is murder excusable? Would their case have been treated differently if it were 'The Menendez sisters'?

Although we may never know the full story of what happened on the night of the 20th of August 1989, or what happened in the previous years which led to this terrible act of parricide, I hope that the case of the Menendez brothers can generate a conversation about how we, as society, can progress forward in our views and treatment of male victims of domestic and sexual abuse. It is the opinion of many that, were the perpetrators females, their victimisation would be the focus of the trials. This could lead the jury to vote in favour of their innocence, due to the more common nature of domestic and sexual abuse towards women.

So, like the show, I will leave it up to all of you to become immersed in their story, and to make up your own judgement of who the real monsters are.



Cleo  
Feature Writer

## Fun at the Mini Farm!

The Larch Mini Farm is an amazing part of the larch with tortoises, rabbits, guinea pigs and chickens. Every day, children come into the larch farm to look after the animals and learn about them.

During the half terms and holidays, you can sign up to look after the animals so they do not starve and have clean bedding while the children are not at school. The larch has farm leaders in year six, so they have the job to look after the animals more thoroughly by coming to school earlier to make sure the animals have everything they need.

This is a summary of all the animals living in the Larch mini farm.

### TORTOISES:

The tortoises live in a wooden hut with hay, water and food inside so they do not get dehydrated, starve or freeze. Their hut is surrounded by a small fence, so they have space to walk around in and exercise freely. They need to have fresh vegetables like lettuce, cabbage and broccoli and they eat whenever they please. There are three tortoises in the larch mini farm and they are all friendly to look after. The tortoises go inside during the winter time since it gets too cold for them.



### RABBITS:

The rabbits live in a big hut surrounded by a sheltered pen full of toys and logs, in order to get daily exercise. Like the tortoises, they eat vegetables like carrots, along with an essential bottle of water always available to them. There are two rabbits in The Larch Mini Farm called Oreo and Cookie. These rabbits have extremely soft fur and have long hind legs for jumping and running quickly.



### GUINEA PIGS:

The guinea pigs live next to the rabbits in a double layer hut, supplied with a water bottle, food and hay to keep them warm. Due to old age, two of the guinea pigs passed away, leaving the two younger ones to take their hut. They are social and active, making them wonderful parts of The Larch Mini Farm.

### CHICKENS:

Finally, we come to the chickens, who we have raised from just eggs! They live in a large coop with a water tank, food and warm huts for them to sleep in. Every day, they are let out into the outside of their coop, so they can have exercise needed. Sadly, about a year ago, foxes got into the chicken coop and killed all of them, apart from one chicken named Biscoff, which was really upsetting for us. However, they then got more eggs that hatched into baby chicks and have now grown up into chickens in the larch farm. Biscoff is now our oldest chicken, and has a stunning coat of golden and black feathers. She is living her best life alongside the younger hens in a large, fox-proof coop. The rest of the chickens have feathers which are golden and white, but they all have a different pattern.



Hopefully, we can see you soon in The Larch Mini Farm. We would like to see as many different faces as possible. We can't wait to see you helping out on the farm this upcoming break or holiday!

## Crosswords

Sam  
Games Writer



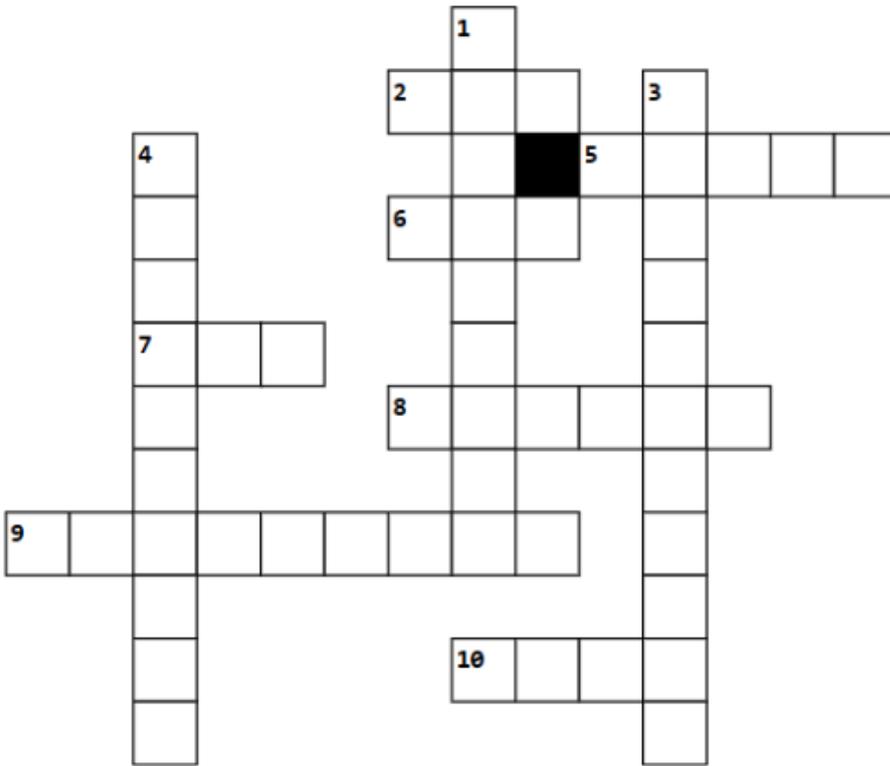
## Simon Balle school focused

### Across

2. What house has the yellow colour theme?
5. What subject is our school known for?
6. Which house has the green colour scheme?
7. Which house has the black colour scheme?
8. Which house has the red colour scheme?
9. Which house has the white colour theme?
10. What house has the blue colour scheme?

### Down

1. Which is the first year in Simon Balle?
3. What is our school rated by Ofsted?
4. What is currently being built in the school?



## General School focused

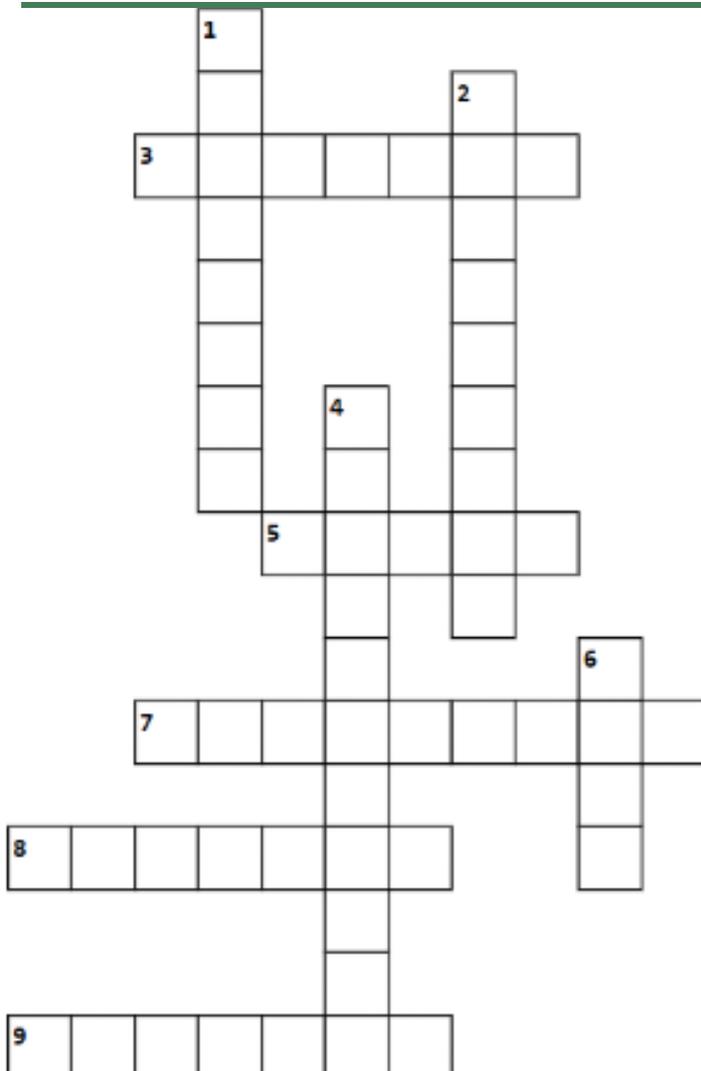
### Across

3. Where do you typically eat in a school?
5. What subject do you learn to add and subtract?
7. In England, What is the first year of school called?
8. What branch of science do you learn about forces?

9. Where would you collect books?

### Down

1. Who teaches in schools?
2. What subject do you learn about the world?
4. Who is the leader of the school?
6. What do you write in in schools?



## Answers

### Simon Balle school focused

#### Across

2. What house has the yellow colour theme?  
Lea
5. What subject is our school known for?  
Music
6. Which house has the green colour scheme?  
New
7. Which house has the black colour scheme?  
Rib
8. Which house has the red colour scheme?  
Mimram
9. Which house has the white colour theme?  
Ashbourne
10. What house has the blue colour scheme?  
Beane

#### Down

1. Which is the first year in Simon Balle?  
Reception
3. What is our school rated by Ofsted?  
Outstanding
4. What is currently being built in the school?  
Sports hall

### General School focused

#### Across

3. Where do you typically eat in a school?  
Canteen
5. What subject do you learn to add and subtract?  
Maths
7. In England, What is the first year of school called?  
Reception
8. What branch of science do you learn about forces?  
Physics
9. Where would you collect books?  
Library

#### Down

1. Who teaches in schools?  
Teachers
2. What subject do you learn about the world?  
Geography
4. Who is the leader of the school?  
Headteacher
6. What do you write in in schools?  
Books



Charlie  
Story Writer

## Time Lost

And here the flecks of winter come again, said the man to himself, sighing as he sunk back into his armchair to watch the shimmering specks of snow settle on the trees outside. This thought was only articulated in his mind, he assumed. Though, it didn't matter if it was said aloud, for nobody was there to hear anyway. He checked the calendar on the wall beside the stopped clock. Is it Christmas again already?

So, again he stood, the thudding sound of his slippers echoing across the empty cabin. Reluctantly he lugged himself past the crackling fire (the only source of warmth in such a cold dwelling), past the whistling kettle and the solitary mug, to a dusty mahogany chest. Weak brass clasps were all that secured the memories which lay inside, slowly succumbing to the entropy forced upon them by time and a haste to forget—a willingness to fall into loneliness. Although he had locked himself in that cabin to escape the torment of his past, the man annually reminded himself of it through tears in order to keep those who live there alive. He flicked open the clasps. Inside lay a pristine photo album, the only blemish upon it being a slight coating of dust. Old skin shed to make room for the new.

Today will be the day to shed. There has been far too much wallowing.

Album in hand, the man trod back over to the worn armchair and settled into it with a slouch and a sigh which reverberated across the room. Out in that empty, enameled expanse, the snow still raged on, the furious winds rattling the weak branches of dying oaks, held up only by the steadfast grip of their neighbours' roots. This eve the book felt lighter and easier, the cover and pages more accepting of the man's turning, and the pictures of Her easier to see, for there was no wet haze in front of his eyes.

There they were, together, in front of the Statue of Liberty; then the Eiffel Tower; the local pub; the Orient Express; the hospital. Tears pricked the man's eyes—not out of yearning or a desperate need for Her back with him as it had been for a long time, but out of respect for Her and nostalgia for times lost. And loneliness. For a while there was a hole of grief in his heart—now that he had conquered that grief, the man longed for human connection once more. Up in this cage of his own design, atop a lonely mountain, he felt so very alone.

Letting go of the pictures and the album, the man stood. Slippers echoing, he walked past the smouldering fire, the unpoured kettle, the solitary cup and the brass-clasped chest. Putting an unused coat over his fragile body, the man walked up to the door. Outside, the snow seemed to hang in the air, the winds suspended in time.

He turned the brass handle and stepped out into a bold white land.