

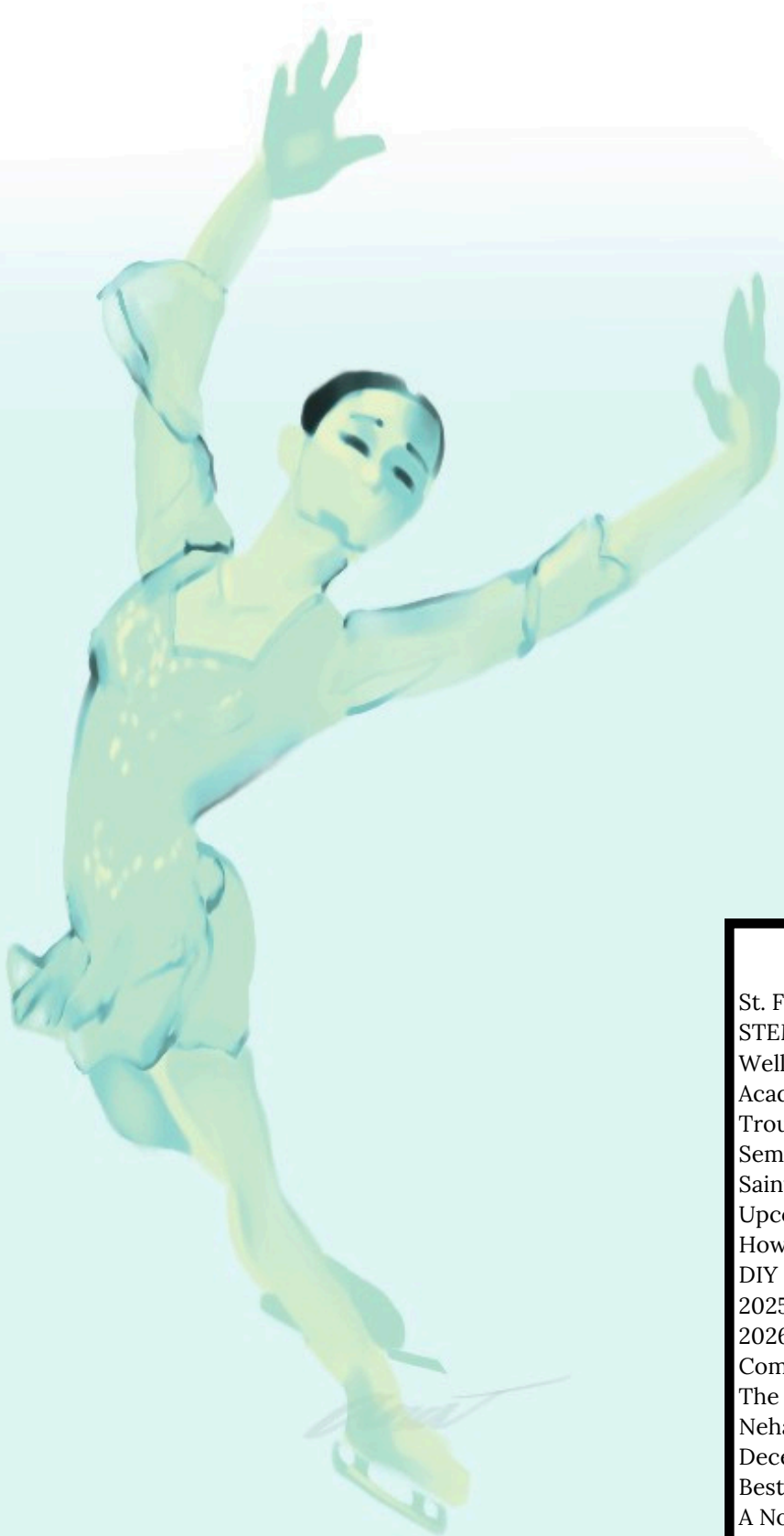
# The Mandolín

St. Francis Catholic High School

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"Spread the word."

Issue 135



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# A Season to Remember: St. Francis Volleyball Finishes Second in NorCal

**BY MERCY COLLIER '26**

The St. Francis Varsity volleyball team ended their strongest season in more than a decade with a second-place finish in NorCal Region Division II, falling just shy of the state championship round but cementing one of the program's most memorable runs.

Despite their loss to No. 1 seed Rocklin in the Sac-Joaquin Section championship match, the Troubies qualified for the CIF Northern California Regional playoffs — extending their season by three weeks and giving St. Francis its first appearance in the state postseason tournaments since 2022.

Ranked second in their NorCal division, St. Francis hosted every match leading up to the regional finals. As the Troubies rolled past their opponents, the bleachers were packed with families, friends, students and faculty, filling the stands with a sea of red and gold, with fans' energy fueling the team's push to the finals.

In the first round, St. Francis defeated both Ripon (seeded No. 15) in four sets, then outlasted Cardinal Newman (seeded No. 10) just two days later. After taking the first two sets against Cardinal Newman, the Troubies dropped the next two, forcing a fifth set to 15 points. Cardinal Newman reached matchpoint at 13-14, but St. Francis refused to let their season end. The Troubies scored three straight points to win 16-14 and advance to the semi-finals.

Two days later, St. Francis defeated West Park in four sets and advanced to the NorCal finals — becoming the first St. Francis team to do so in 12 years.

For the final game of the season, St. Francis hosted Clovis West (seeded No. 4).

With the gym filled to capacity and energy high, the Troubies battled until the very end. After dropping the first two sets, they fought back to win the third 25-23. In the fourth set, Clovis West held gamepoint at 24-16. The Troubies pushed hard and won five straight points, but ultimately lost 25-21 — just missing their chance to go to the CIF State Finals yet finishing a standout season at the highest regional level.

St. Francis finished their season with a record 35 wins and 9 losses, including two first-place finishes in local tournaments: the Central California Classic and the Carmichael Invitational Volleyball Tournament.

Although much of the Troubies' success comes from the hard work the team puts into daily practices, their victories also stem from their exceptional teamwork and unmatched camaraderie.

"The connection this team had was special," said Varsity Head Coach Taryn Campbell. "They genuinely enjoyed playing together, supported each other, and stayed united even during tough stretches. That level of togetherness is rare, and it's one of the biggest reasons this year stood out."



PHOTO COURTESY OF **MARK HONBO**

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Every year, the team sets the tone for its season with one motto: “Hold the rope.” The phrase symbolizes teamwork and unity, reminding players to pull one another back up when something is weighing them down. This season, the Troubies did just that.

“This season was so much fun because of how good our team chemistry was because we were all friends and included everyone,” said Team Captain Malia Fat. “Every year, we put a red ribbon on our shoes to represent us holding our rope and to stay united as we play no matter where the game is going. This was truly the most fun season of all my four years.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF **MARK HONBO**

The trust and friendship the team shared made it hard for the underclassmen to say goodbye to their six seniors on Senior Night. On October 20th, St. Francis gathered to celebrate the seniors on Varsity volleyball before their home match against Oakridge. The Troubies dominated the first two sets with scores of 25-12 and 25-13, dropped the third set, but came back in the fourth to win 25-20. Securing a solid win over the Trojans was the perfect way to close out Senior Night.

To understand what made this season special, you have to go back to the first big game of the season that set everything in motion: Holy Court.

The Troubies won in a thrilling three-set sweep over Christian Brothers in the annual rivalry match. After winning the first two sets with scores of 27-25 and 25-21, the Troubies faced a nail-biting third set. CB led 16-9, until St. Francis tied the score at 23-23. From there, it was a point-by-point fight to win by the two-point margin needed. After going deep into extra points — 14 points over the normal 25 — St. Francis put the ball away, winning in a rare 37-35 finish.

“Our biggest growth came in our confidence and mental toughness,” said Campbell. “We learned not to panic when things went wrong and to trust our training. That mindset kept us composed in tough playoff situations and helped carry us deep into the season.”

The St. Francis team that played its final match in NorCal regionals had come a long way since they started their season, but what always remained unchanged was what made this team so special: their determination, teamwork, and persistence.

Although it is a preseason non-league game, Holy Court is one of the most anticipated matchups of the year. This year, it definitely set the tone for the season. With this match, the team learned how much they could accomplish when they worked together, refused to give up, and rose to the moment when it mattered.



# STEM Day

BY ADA FRUIN '27

Saturday, November 8th was National STEM Day as well as St. Francis's community STEM Day. The event aims to promote science, technology, engineering, and math to local elementary and middle school students. This was St. Francis's second STEM Day event; the first was earlier this year, in March, during National STEM Week.

STEM Day planning is largely student-led. Members of Echelon Catapult, Science Olympiad, and Robotics attended meetings with robotics coach Marcus Grindstaff to coordinate events and order supplies.

Volunteers arrived at the armory at 9 a.m. to set up their tables and experiments. At 10 a.m., families began arriving to visit the experiment stations, create STEM Day T-shirts, and learn about St. Francis programs. Activities included film canister rockets, frog dissections, and dessert "soil" models, showcasing chemistry, biology, and earth science concepts. Popular favorites from the March event returned, including strawberry DNA extraction and oobleck.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATALIA ESPARZA '28

The event also highlighted St. Francis's range of STEM academic teams. The International Space Station Program (ISSP) and Robotics both had interactive activities; the Robotics team demonstrated one of its underwater robots in a pool and allowed visitors to remotely pilot a robot in Monterey Bay. Other displays featured Mathletes, Science Olympiad, and the SFHS HackHERs club, along with a table for Echelon Catapult, a non-profit STEM education organization run by St. Francis and Jesuit students.

In the week leading up to STEM Day, students went on FOX40 Studio 40 and KCRA to promote the event. During the event itself, a reporter from Good Day Sacramento interviewed Grindstaff and several students. The segment aired during the event as planned, but the reporter was so impressed that she said she planned to feature STEM Day again that evening.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATALIA ESPARZA '28



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Midway through the four-hour event, visitors took a break to enjoy a barbecue lunch and discuss the exhibits outside of the armory. Soon, the majority of people were back on their feet to explore the stations they had yet to visit.

The afternoon concluded with two rounds of The Chemistry Game, a lighthearted competition that introduced students to basic chemistry concepts.

Parent feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many saying that the event had improved since March and others noting that the St. Francis STEM Day was more interactive and engaging than other National STEM Day events they had attended.

## Wellness Center 10 Year Anniversary

BY KATIE KOO '27

Celebrating its 10-year anniversary this year, our school's Wellness Center stands as the epitome of our school year theme, "Console, Understand, Love."

At its heart, the Wellness Center provides a safe place for students to pause, reflect, and recharge. However, over the past decade, the Wellness Center has extended its reach beyond just its physical space. By offering online resources like podcasts, leading assemblies through the Guardian Angels peer team, and holding lunch bunch groups, the Wellness Center has been able to make a large impact on the St. Francis community.

The Wellness Center was born out of a recognition that student support at St. Francis needed to go beyond academics. "Everyone has their story, everybody has life," said Kymberly Weinandy, St. Francis's current wellness counselor. "People needed support—not just for mental health, but also for social and relationship challenges. Students experience losses and face pressures, so having a space for guidance is really important."



PHOTO COURTESY OF KYM WEINANDY

Ten years ago, wellness support at St. Francis existed, but it was just a small room within the counseling center. Weinandy and another counselor recognized the need for more: more space, more resources, and more opportunities for students to access support.

"It was quite the project," Weinandy said, "but the school was very supportive because it was so obvious that students needed mental health support...It was my dream to build it out."

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Through vision, collaboration, and a commitment to student well-being, the tiny startup program transformed into the Wellness Center St. Francis students know today.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **KYM WEINANDY**

Reflecting on how mental health and wellness have evolved within the school community over the past decade, Weinandy said, "It's much more challenging for students now than 10 years ago because the level of social media was not at all what it is now." She explained that while technology and online connection are a big part of students' lives, learning to use them wisely is key. "I think we have to learn to be good digital citizens," Weinandy said, "but we also need to put down the phone a little more and spend more time face to face. Ultimately, that's what's going to make a difference."

Through her work at the Wellness Center, Weinandy continues to encourage students to find balance between the digital and real worlds, helping them rediscover the power of genuine, in-person connection.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **KYM WEINANDY**

Looking ahead, Weinandy plans to continue expanding the wellness programs, ensuring the next generation of students can thrive. Weinandy envisioned broadening outreach even further: perhaps taking the Peer Team "on the road" to engage the wider school community or hosting a Safety and Wellness Fair.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **KYM WEINANDY**



# Academic Team Spotlight: Mock Trial

**BY DESLYN GALANG '28**

Dominating the courtroom for more than twenty years, St. Francis Catholic High School's Mock Trial program has seen immense growth and success in the past two years, with the addition of Team 2 and winning third place overall in Sacramento County, a St. Francis record.

Through the Mock Trial program, Sacramento students simulate courtroom proceedings as attorneys, witnesses, pretrial counsel, clerks, and bailiffs. After months of hard work, they go to the Gordon D. Schaber courthouse and present their final cases in front of a judge and attorneys, who score the event. This year, the courthouse will hold a pre-competition in December that Team 2 will participate in as a qualifier for the competition in January. Make sure to wish your fellow Troubies good luck!

Last year, the Mock Trial team had an unprecedented amount of interest, expanding into two teams. Mr. Richard Siggins, a visual arts teacher and moderator for Mock Trial for seven years, said, "More people can get the experience. We are always evolving and trying to find the perfect medium between being as competitive as we can, and giving the

greatest number of students the chance to participate."

Team 1 consists of students with more experience, and they jump straight into work at the start of the year. Team 2 is used as a way for new people to the program to gain experience and learn the ropes of Mock Trial.

"Some may view it as tedious, but really breaking down every aspect of Mock Trial in a way that people can learn easily, effectively, and efficiently is incredibly fulfilling," said junior Team 2 captain and attorney Mackenzie Thomas. "The entire team is incredibly fast learners as well, which makes my job that much easier, and watching them grow in their respective roles as well as alongside one another is inspiring."

In August, leadership sends out information on how to audition. Interested students can try out as either an attorney or a witness. If they would like to be an attorney, they write a sample opening statement. If they would like to be a witness, they memorize a statement then simulate a line of questions, acting as a different character. Once they make it onto the team, leadership assigns them either as an attorney, witness, pretrial attorney, clerk, or bailiff.

Attorneys write directs, cross-examinations, opening and closing statements, and learn how to stand their ground against opposing counsel through objections, a skill that requires confidence and perseverance.

"To be an effective witness, it all comes down to preparation and confidence. The important part is to fully understand your character and their facts in order to reply to any question that comes your way. The more you know, the easier it is to stay calm and



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confident,” said sophomore Sana Sarkari, the witness captain for Team 2. “The best witnesses make their characters believable while also sticking to their facts.”

Pretrial attorneys study constitutional case law, write a statement, and then debate a judge on their stance. While they have a memorized statement, the judge interrupts them throughout their presentation to make them justify their argument.

Junior captain and pretrial attorney Kaitlynn Sequeira-Pacheco said, “For me, the most challenging part of pretrial is being confident enough in yourself to stand your ground in front of the judge. I overcome that barrier in competition by reminding myself that the judges are not expecting a profound legal argument from a high school mock trialer, and it’s my whole job to defend my position against their questions. Also, I’ll probably never have to interact with them again!”

In light of the Team 2 pre-competition, Sequeira-Pacheco has been leading the pretrial attorneys by fostering a comfortable and collaborative environment: “For the new people in pre-trial, it’s especially hard, as, this year, Team 2 will be in a smaller competition before the main one even starts. I think making sure they’re involved in the discussion, and feeling comfortable to share opinions and ask questions is especially important towards supporting people new to pretrial!” Sequeira-Pacheco said.

Clerks and bailiffs manage the courtroom and ensure that the trial runs smoothly, with the clerk keeping time and the bailiffs calling witnesses to stand.

Above all, the Mock Trial community is one that lasts all four years of high school.

Here, Troubies form friendships and memories that last a lifetime.

“Of course, it is great to see them win, but I think the greatest thing is to watch the individual students grow over the four years. It is also always so moving to watch the team grow as a family, who look out for each other and form true, meaningful relationships,” said Siggins.

Senior captain and attorney Cate Harcos values the people she has met in Mock Trial: “The friendships I’ve made and the engaging work have kept me in Mock Trial all four years. I love everyone that I have met through Mock Trial,” said Harcos.

Furthermore, the program inspires students to pursue future careers in law. Juliet Shah, a senior captain and attorney said, “I have truly found a passion and love for law through Mock Trial, and it has shown me that I want to continue doing this in college, law school, and beyond.”

Mock Trial is always looking for new talent to join, no matter the experience level. “Advice that I would give to people new to Mock Trial is to be ready to learn. I came in knowing absolutely nothing about Mock Trial, the law, or how a trial works. I had to pay close attention to how the older girls worked and listen to the coaches,” said Harcos.

Shah shares the same sentiment: “Just try it! Whether you are interested in law, or want to improve your public speaking skills, or just make new friends, give it your all. Don’t be afraid to speak up to get your voice heard and don’t be afraid to put yourself out there. Anyone can succeed in Mock Trial, you just need the confidence to put yourself out there.”

# More Than a Club: Building Young Entrepreneurs One Pitch at a Time

BY KATHY DHALI '27

Have you ever had a business idea? Have you ever wanted to present and create a business? Well, then the Troubies Who Mean Business (TWMB) club is the perfect place to start.

TWMB is a St. Francis club that helps teach its members about business, entrepreneurship skills, financial literacy and how to start and organize a business idea. It also educates students by inviting engaging guest speakers and business owners to share their own experiences with starting their own businesses. However, TWMB is more than just lectures – it also offers amazing opportunities for students to present and bring their own business ideas to life. Every year, the TWMB team competes in the National Association of Women Business Owners Entrepreneurial Pitch Competition, where students from around Sacramento come to present their business ideas and products. After presentations, their ideas are judged by local businesses, and all students have the chance to win a prize of up to \$500.

Not only does TWMB give its students opportunities to share their business ideas, but it also helps them gain new skills. Whether it's learning how to invest in stocks or what the best steps are to take in furthering your entrepreneurial career, TWMB prepares all Troubies for a life of creating future businesses. After learning new skills, students can join the Junior Achievement (JA) Stock Market Challenge. Students compete for a chance to advance to the National Stock Market Challenge and face high schoolers from across the country.

Through competitions like the NAWBO

Entrepreneurial Pitch Competition and the (JA) Stock Market Challenge, Troubies Who Mean Business transforms curious students into confident entrepreneurs. The club doesn't just prepare its members for business success; it builds a community where young minds learn to turn their ideas into reality, one pitch at a time. For students at St. Francis who are willing to take the leap from dreaming about business to actually doing business, TWMB is ready to guide them on that journey.

Mary Anne Kelly, the club's advisor, described how much of an impact she has seen the club make on its members. "One of the most rewarding moments comes when I watch our students step into their own confidence."

Club president Malia Fat '26 also shared her excitement about upcoming opportunities with the club: "We have an upcoming competition that our club members are participating in. This is a Pitch Competition, part of the National Association of Women Business Owners. Our members prepare a creative idea and present it to a panel of judges. This is an incredible opportunity that TWMB Club offers and we can't wait to see these incredible ideas our Troubies come up with!"



PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. FRANCIS INSTAGRAM

# Semester One Recap

BY VIOLET PANTON '29

As the first semester of the 2025-2026 semester comes to a close, we look back on all the fun experiences we shared. Goodbye red leaves, Gilmore Girls, Fall Starbucks menus, and cool weather. Hello Christmas lights, peppermint lattes, and of course, the defrosting Mariah Carey. Let's take a moment to remember some of the highlights from this semester.

We kicked things off with the very first day of school. From watching glow-up tip videos and wandering around campus looking for your next class, to posing in front of your house while your mom says "look how much you've grown!" – the first day was definitely a memorable one.

Each semester, St. Francis hosts a day where grandparents and parents join their students on campus to have lunch. This year's event was exceptionally fun. Everywhere you walked, you saw Chick-fil-A bags and Chipotle bowls left and right. These days are a fun way to enjoy good food and spend some quality time with family!

To celebrate our patron saint, St. Francis of Assisi, the school held its annual St. Francis Day. We ate, played games, did "Just Dance" with the theology teachers and celebrated St. Francis with a mass. This year's theme was Italy, inspired by St. Francis' roots in Assisi. Students dressed up in flowy skirts, soccer (or football) jerseys, and of course the last-minute graphic tees saying "Viva la Italy" we found at Target the night before. We enjoyed Italian ice, cookie decorating, and the famous, unforgettable breadsticks.

To celebrate the spirit of Halloween, St. Francis students came decked out in extremely creative costumes. The campus was filled with frat boys and My Little Ponies. Grus, minions, and Vectors roamed the campus. Our costume

contest was a huge hit, with everyone in Serra Court cheering for their favorite costumes.

One St. Francis' biggest source of pride is our amazing sports teams, and fall sports did not disappoint. All three cross country teams qualified for the Sac-Joaquin Section Championship at the Willow Hill Reservoir on November 15 and came away with a victory. The varsity team headed to state in Clovis on November 29.

Varsity volleyball qualified for the Norcal Finals on November 18. The game went into four sets with a final score of 25-21. The JV team finished the season with a record of 20-7 and a league record of 7-5.

Our water polo team made it to playoffs with an 8-21 record, but lost the first-round playoff game to Lodi. For the second year in



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a row, tennis finished as the section runner up, with McClatchy taking first. Their overall record for the season was an impressive 14-1.

Our flag football team won the CCS Division final over Branham with a score of 13-6. The Troubies came away with a 19-8 record this season. All of our sports teams had incredible seasons, and we can't wait to see what they can accomplish next year!

And finally – the moment we were all waiting for – Homecoming Week! The week started off with dressing up in red and gold, and the Jessies dominating the canned food drive. On Tuesday, we practiced our songs and cheers at class meetings and dressed up in our class colors.

With Wednesday came our sports rally, which was tons of fun. Wearing our class jerseys and cheering on our classmates in games like dodgeball, tug of war, marshmallow toss, and knockout made an unforgettable day. The Rapunzels came out on top and won sports day!

On Thursday, many students participated in the very stressful but exciting Dec Night, where classes added finishing touches to their dec and set it up in the gym. Friday was the big Hoco rally. We showed



PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. FRANCIS INSTAGRAM

our spirit to the alumna with cheers, chants, and class pride.

When the SBOs announced the winners of Hoco Week, no one was surprised to see that the Jessies took the win! Congratulations, Class of '26!

Finally, after the week of dec, spirit sticks, cheers and tutus, it was finally time for homecoming night! We dressed up, did our hair, put on our heels, (for pictures at least) and moshed the night away. The mosh might have sent a minor plague through the school, but it was totally worth it.

As we look back on all the fun times we had this year, it's natural to feel a little sad, but can't wait for everything the spring semester has in store!

# Service Spotlight: Red Door Desserts Makes Holiday Giving Delicious

**BY MERCY COLLIER '26**

As cinnamon and sugar fill the air this holiday season, one Sacramento bakery is serving up more than sweet treats – it's delivering second chances. Red Door Desserts, part of Saint John's Program for

Real Change, turns every delicious cookie sold into an opportunity for women rebuilding their lives.

Red Door Desserts is a professional bakery and hands-on employment training program for women living at Saint John's, the

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largest residential program for formerly homeless women and their children in the Sacramento area. Women learn baking and pastry arts, order management, packaging and shipping, and the supply chain process.

Each participant completes at least 400 hours of training across Saint John's culinary program, including Red Door Desserts and Plates Catering — the organization's catering arm that serves corporate functions, conferences, and community events. In 2024, 79 women went through the training; this year, that number is expected to be closer to 100.

The goal isn't just to make beautiful desserts — it's to prepare women for long-term employment and self-sufficiency. Every order supports the women and children living at Saint John's residential facility, where women receive mental health and substance abuse counseling, life skills training, support services, and child care while mothers attend classes.

Through Saint John's Employment Training Program, 96 percent of graduates secure unsubsidized employment. Graduates go on to work in a wide variety of industries, from restaurants and retail to warehouse operations and home healthcare.

"Every purchase of Red Door Desserts goes right back into the program to provide



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAINT JOHN'S PROGRAM

wrap-around services and job training to women on a journey to build a better life for themselves and their family," said Nicholle Cox, Assistant Director of Social Enterprises at Saint John's.

Red Door Desserts makes it easy to give meaningful — and delicious — gifts this holiday season. The Holiday Gift Box (\$30) includes a dozen freshly baked treats, including four Salted Chocolate Chip Cookies and four Lemon Crinkle Cookies, as well as four Chocolate Brownies.

Another option is the Signature Box (\$35), which features a mix of Salted Chocolate Chunk, Lemon Crinkle, and Classic Sugar cookies. And, for a gift that keeps on giving, the Red Door Desserts Club offers a subscription that delivers a new box of sweets each month for \$30 that can be shipped nationwide.

Whatever you choose, you're sharing a festive gift that also makes a difference.

This season, if you or your family are looking for a thoughtful present for friends, teachers or relatives, consider a gift from Red Door Desserts. They'll enjoy the cookies and appreciate a gift that shares the spirit of the holidays by supporting families most in need.

To place an order with Red Door Desserts, visit [sjpreddoordesserts.com](http://sjpreddoordesserts.com)



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAINT JOHN'S PROGRAM

# Upcoming Events of 2026

BY SAGE WITZGALL '29

It's hard to believe 2025 is coming to an end, but with 2026 just around the corner, it's time to look at what is coming next.

The year will start off with the 2026 Winter Olympics, hosted by Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. The opening ceremony will be held in Milan's San Siro Stadium. There will be a total of eight new medal events this year including ski mountaineering (a new sport), dual moguls (freestyle skiing), and a women's large hill event in ski jumping. These events and others will be held from Friday, February 6th, through Sunday, February 22nd.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE**

Another major sporting event to be held in 2026 is the FIFA World Cup (soccer), co-hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico. On Thursday, June 11th in Mexico City, the first teams will face off in the opening match, and the World Cup will conclude on Sunday, July 19th in New Jersey. 48 teams will be competing across 16 different host countries in a total of 104 matches. Both the FIFA World Cup and the Winter Olympics take place every four years.

On February 8th, the Super Bowl LX (60) will be hosted in Santa Clara, California at the Levi's Stadium. The famous halftime show will be headlined by Bad Bunny, a Puerto Rican rapper, singer, and songwriter.

He was the first Spanish-language artist to have an album top the US Billboard 200 chart and the first male Latin headliner for the Super Bowl halftime show. So far, the top team favorites for the 2026 Super Bowl are the Kansas City Chiefs, the Buffalo Bills, the Los Angeles Rams, the Detroit Lions, and the Philadelphia Eagles.

Make sure to stay tuned for all these major 2026 sporting events!

Moving on to music, many artists have announced their 2026 tour dates. Ed Sheeran and Ariana Grande both plan to start touring in June of 2026. Journey, Rush, Lady Gaga, Cardi B, the Weekend, and Bad Bunny will all be touring in 2026 as well.

Sabrina Carpenter, Tate McRae, and Lil Wayne will be wrapping up their tours within the next year.

If you're more of a movie buff there are some great movies coming up as well. Avengers: Domsday, Spider-Man: Brand New Day, Toy Story 5, Scream 7, The Hunger Games: Sunrise on the Reaping, and the live-action Moana will all be released in 2026.

Finally, our nation will be celebrating its 250 year anniversary. So be sure to have an extra special 4th of July this year to celebrate 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

2026 is looking pretty great. Let's make the most of this new year Troubies!



# How to Stay Active During the Holidays

**BY VEDA WAHNSIEDLER '29**

During the holidays, it's always a struggle to maintain physical fitness, but staying active doesn't have to be complicated. Whether your sports get cancelled because of the weather, or you do not have time to exercise, you can always find a few low maintenance activities to help your body feel refreshed.

One of the best ways to stay active is by taking daily walks. Try setting aside just 15 minutes for a walk when you wake up, after lunch, or before you go to bed.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **GUARDIAN STORAGE**

A short walk will clear your head and help calm you during all the holiday chaos. It's also a great family bonding activity if you go with your parents or siblings! Walking also improves your muscle and bone strength, making it a great way to reduce the risk of an injury before winter sports.

Another activity to try over the holidays is yoga. A good stretch will keep you flexible and recharged during the winter. Find an easy yoga tutorial on any platform (TikTok, Instagram, or Youtube) and follow along!

The best part about yoga is that you do not need any equipment, making it easy to do at any time during the day. A daily stretching routine will not only make you flexible and balanced, but will also improve your immune health, reduce stress, and lessen headaches. The breathing techniques and meditation included in many routines will relieve you from many negative effects on your body.

Staying active doesn't have to be complicated. With just a walk or a few minutes of yoga each day, you can keep your mind and body feeling refreshed all winter long!

## DIY Holiday Crafts

**BY KATHY DHALI '27**

The holiday season has a special kind of magic – one that can be captured and shown through the arts of handmade crafts. This article shows how to make fun craft do-it-yourself crafts projects that transform simple materials into festive crafts and decor for the holiday season. Whether it's for fun family activities or quiet time and creative thinking during the busy holidays, these crafts are a great way to get in the festive spirit.

### Wood Slice Christmas Magnet

If you're looking for charming personalized holiday decor, then this craft is for you. By the end of this fun craft, you'll have a beautiful decorative magnet that captures your favorite festive images on rustic wood slices.

To make this craft, you'll need the following supplies: Christmas cards (either printable or your own holiday cards), small wood slices, Mod Podge (matte or gloss), Mod Podge Sparkle, a paintbrush, a pencil, scissors, strong magnets and glue.

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### Directions:

1) Print out images or gather cards to cut out. Place the wood slices on the designs chosen and trace them with a pencil.

2) Cut out the shapes, staying just inside the pencil line. Paint a thin layer of Mod Podge on the back of the paper circle, then place the paper face up on the wood slice wood. Smooth out the paper to remove any air bubbles and allow it to dry. Repeat the process with the other 3 wood slices or however many times you want!

3) Apply one or two coats of Sparkle Mod podge to the decoupaged wood slices and allow the pieces to dry completely.

4) Finally, place glue on the back of the magnet, attach it to the wood slice, and allow it to dry completely before using it.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **MODGE PODGE ROCKS**

### A Pom Pom Christmas Garland

A pom pom Christmas Garland is a decorative string of colorful yarn pom poms used for holiday decorating. Before starting, make sure you have the following supplies: yarn - about 4-5 skeins (red, green, Christmas variegated, and two of the white yarn with gold flecks), Pom pom makers (3 3/8", 2 1/2", and 1 5/8") scissors, and a needle that fits the yarn.

### Directions:

1) Using the pom pom makers, create pom poms in various sizes.

The garland pattern requires 1 large pom pom with Christmas variegated yarn

1 large pom pom with green yarn

4 medium pom poms with cream/gold yarn

2 small poms with red yarn.

You can make as many as possible

2) Thread a yarn with a needle. Use a piece of yarn that is 8 to 10 feet long. Arrange the poms in the desired order for the garland, then string the poms onto the yarn by pushing the needle through the center of each one.

3) To finish the craft, center all the pom poms evenly and hang the garland wherever you want!

Whatever you choose to make, these fun holiday crafts bring joy and creativity to the festive season. Anyone can make them, so go grab your supplies and hot cocoa and get crafty!



PHOTO COURTESY OF **POM POM GARLANDS**



# 2025 Pop Culture Recap

BY SANA SAKARI '28

2025 was a year where pop culture was filled with reinvention. From the movie screens to fashion statements to music charts, this year mixed nostalgia with creativity. Early 2000's trends resurfaced with modern twists, musical artists both new and old dominated the charts and films brought a lot of different styles. It was a year that celebrated identity and showcased cultural breakthroughs and connections.

## Movies:

This year, movies brought lots of bold colors and emotions, with bold new releases along with some major franchise reboots. K-Pop Demon Hunters became the year's breakout movie, staying in Netflix's Top 10 since its release back in June. The movie's blend of vibrant animation, as well as its songs and message, made it a global phenomenon, leading it to be in the Billboard Top 100 and 200 for weeks. Newly released *Regretting You*, explores themes of love, loss, family, forgiveness and navigating mistakes, while Marvel's reboot of the *Fantastic Four* series brought excitement for fans of action movies. Anticipation was also built throughout the year with *Avatar 3: Fire and Ash*, which is set to release on December 21, promising another visually stunning movie by world-renowned director James Cameron. All together, the films of 2025 prove that audiences crave not just thrills, but also stories that emotionally connect.

## Music:

In 2025, the music industry was filled with new releases and artists.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **REPUBLIC RECORDS**

New singers such as Benson Boone, Sombr and Olivia Dean had a breakthrough in music this year, quickly capturing the attention of many fans internationally. Tate McRae was one of the biggest breakthrough artists this year. With the release of her studio album *So Close to What*, and a world tour that included stops in London, Buenos Aires and (most importantly) Sacramento, she dominated the teenage music scene. Returning artist Taylor Swift, also released her new album *The Life of a Showgirl*, and became the first artist in history to have all 12 tracks be in the top 12 of the Billboard Hot 100. Bad Bunny added to the 2025 music scene as well with the release of his sixth studio album, *DeBí Tirar Más FOTOS*, that mixed nostalgia with Reggaeton beats.



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His album stayed on Billboards both nationally and internationally for over 35 weeks. Even with all the new releases, one of the biggest anticipations of the year trending across Tiktok and Instagram, was the possible return of Harry Styles. After the record breaking release of his last album Harry's House, the singer went on a two year break. However, posts and rumors have said that he has been in the studio recording. For now, only time will tell.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **ROLLING STONE**

### **Fashion:**

Fashion in 2025 was all about being simple and chic while blending nostalgia with modern flair. Just like in 2024, the reemergence of 2000's fashion was seen as low-rise jeans, metal jewelry and layering made a comeback – but reimagined with a more polished and minimalistic look. From dresses to nail art, polka dots were everywhere this year. Earning their spot as the pattern of the year. This classic design managed to be both playful and elegant, no matter how it was styled.

Fashion houses leaned into balancing bold and sophisticated looks, showcasing that the past could be reimagined with elegance. 2025's fashion scene was defined as confident simplicity, proving that timeless styles truly never go out of fashion.

As 2025 comes to a close, it's clear pop culture has entered into a brand new era, filled with nostalgia and authenticity. Across fashion, music and film, creators gave us an incredible year to look back on and leave us excited for what's to come in 2026.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **BRITISH VOGUE**

# New Year, New Semester: 2026 New Year Resolutions

BY CHARLOTTE HWANG '29

As 2024 came to a close, many of us watched fireworks and stayed up until midnight to ring in the new year. With that new year came a question: did you make new resolutions? Did you promise to be a better person?

According to a study conducted by Columbia University, around 75% of people gave up on their New Year's resolutions within 30 days. Once the initial novelty of the new year wears off, many struggle to actually achieve their goal.

Some of the most common resolutions include exercising more, learning a new skill, saving money, getting organized and living life to the fullest. Chances are, you've probably set one of these before and maybe, like most people, found it hard to stick to.

So this year, try making a simple yet meaningful resolution. Here are a few unique goals that can actually benefit you for 2026:



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAINSTREET FAMILY CARE

**Be More Mindful:** How many times have you locked the front door only to go back and check a few minutes later just to be sure? In 2026, try being more mindful about everyday tasks – like locking the door or putting your homework in your backpack. You'll save time and reduce stress.

**Take the Stairs:** Everyone says that in the new year they'll "exercise more," but building consistent habits is hard. Between homework, tests and extracurriculars, there's not always time for the gym. For your 2026 resolution, try taking the stairs whenever possible. It's a quick and easy way to stay active without wasting precious time in your day.

**Take More Naps:** A Harvard study found that short power naps can actually help boost productivity, improve your mood and strengthen memory retention. So, in 2026, instead of chugging another Starbucks drink, try a quick ten-minute nap. You'll feel refreshed and recharged for the rest of the day.

New Year's resolutions don't have to be super impressive or life-altering. Even the small things can have a lasting impact on your habits and life. Let's make 2026 the best year yet!

# Composting Christmas Trees

**BY CORINNE ATKINS '29**

Show the Planet a Little Love this Season. It's almost that time of year again — soon, families and friends will gather around, placing tinsel, lights and handmade ornaments on their carefully selected Christmas trees. But there is one question we face every year: what do you do with your tree once the season is over?

Luckily, there are many options for your tree after the Christmas season. Trees can be composted, used to help wildlife, or even used for making crafts.

Composting your tree might sound daunting, but in reality it is as easy as throwing it away! Cut your tree up into small sections to make firewood . You can also put the tree into a wood chipper to make mulch, and if you include the pine needles, you will have added nutrient benefits. Pine needles enhance the soil quality and allow the soil to breathe better by reducing soil density.

Additionally, you can use parts of your recycled Christmas tree to make nests and bird feeders. By cutting holes in a larger branch and filling it with seeds, you can create a consistent and healthy food source for the birds in your local ecosystem. The idea also works for making a squirrel feeder. You can use the Christmas tree as a base and decorate it with treats to entice squirrels, such as seeds, pine cones, and nuts. You can hang these from the branches or hang garlands to create a fun squirrel wonderland!

Surprisingly, you can even use your old tree to help marine creatures. Placing the tree in water creates a home for fish and other marine wildlife. Remove the pines to free up space for swimming through. The tree will act similar to structures you might place in your fish tank.

It will allow for shelter and hiding places, as well as creating a breeding place for algae, which is an important part of a fish's diet.

The furry creatures are not exempt from being helped this season. Using leftover parts of your tree, you can make dens and other shelters for wildlife to use. You can use branches, and even the trunk of the tree, to make a simple pile. Small animals will go into the pile and slowly make it their own to help them in cold winters for somewhere to sleep, hide from predators, or store their food for later use.

If you are more of a crafty person, there are also lots of craft ideas that allow you to put your recycled tree to good use. For example, the trunk of a smaller tree can be used to make coasters. To make the coasters, simply saw the branches and seal them with a lacquer for a beautiful and rustic addition to your home. The leftover branches of your tree can be used to make pine needle wreaths. You can even use your old tree to make a candle. To make a candle, use the thick branch of a tree, hollow it out, fill it with candle wax, add a wick, and you have your very own, inexpensive candle. For some new wall decor inspiration, you can make wall decor with your leftover tree. To create wall decor, use your leftover tree trunk and saw similar-size pieces to hang in any unique pattern you would like to give your space that cozy “cabin in the woods” vibe.

So Troubies, be creative this year. Whether you want to show the planet a little love, help out a furry friend, or even decorate your home, there are so many ways to recycle your Christmas tree. The options are endless.



PHOTO COURTESY OF [ARBORDAY.ORG](http://ARBORDAY.ORG)



# Holiday Playlist

**BY CAMERON DUNDON '28**

While some begin blasting carols on November 1st and others restrict themselves until December, Christmas music has irrevocably changed our society. It has evolved from classical piano pieces to timeless carols to pop ballads, all of which exhibit a plethora of holiday cheer. No matter what type you listen to, it is undeniable that Christmas music is an integral part of holiday celebrations.

Despite Christmas music's foundation in traditional Christian hymns, the songs have developed, becoming a beloved part of modern Christmas traditions.

"I love Christmas music because it's joyful and just the best way to get in the holiday spirit!" said sophomore Maddie Toledo. Many share this perspective, as holiday music is one of the most popular parts of Christmas. According to a CBS survey by Garrett Behanna, in 2023, 76% of people planned to listen to Christmas music during the holiday season.

From church choirs to caroling door to door, there are many classic Christmas songs that are instantly recognizable. "My favorite is definitely 'Silent Night'! It really puts me into the holiday spirit and I remember listening to it when I was really young," Toledo said.

Most of these songs have roots in Christian choirs and have continued to be sung for decades. However, these hymns have also grown into more prominently known songs beyond the choir community.

Two prevalent examples of this phenomenon are "Silent Night," originally composed by Joseph Mohr, and "Joy to the World" originally composed by Isaac Watts.

Both of these songs depict the birth of Jesus as a peaceful and joyful event, and have continued to share that sentiment in the modern era.

It is difficult to discuss music of the holiday season without talking about Bing Crosby. He introduced many holiday songs to the masses, including "Silent Night", "God Rest Ye Marry, Gentlemen," and "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas." Crosby heavily modernized Christmas music by changing it to appeal to all audiences, a tactic that is still employed today by music artists.

Despite the heavy impact of classic Christmas songs, many will agree that it simply isn't Christmas without Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas is You". Christmas music of the 80s and 90s left an irreversible mark on the modern music landscape, with artists like Wham! and Mariah Carey shaping our perspectives on what holiday music is.

"Last Christmas" by Wham! was released in 1984, and completely reshaped how Christmas music was written in the following decades. Instead of the classic reliance on family and Christian tradition, Wham! created a love song that simply occurred during the Christmas season.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GOOGLE IMAGES

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Many other artists began to do so as well, creating names for themselves in the holiday genre, as well as in mainstream music.

However, most agree that Christmas simply is not Christmas without the self-imposed queen of the genre, Mariah Carey. Her hit single “All I Want for Christmas is You” is still incredibly popular, despite its release in 1994, with Carey herself even referencing it every year. “I feel like Mariah Carey is just super influential; it wouldn’t be Christmas without her music,” Toledo said when asked about the song.

Although it is incredibly easy to focus completely on Christmas music of the past, it is still important to recognize the transition holiday music has been facing in recent years. Beginning in 2011 with the release of Justin Bieber’s *Under the Mistletoe*, with Ariana Grande’s two EPs following shortly after, and Sabrina Carpenter’s EP released over a decade later, Christmas music has slowly evolved into a genre that blends the classic sentiment with pop and R&B style.

Beginning in 2011 with the release of Justin Bieber’s *Under the Mistletoe*, with Ariana Grande’s two EPs following shortly after, and Sabrina Carpenter’s EP released over a decade later, Christmas music has slowly evolved into a genre that blends the classic sentiment with pop and R&B style. When asked about her favorite modern Christmas song, Toledo said, “It’s definitely Ariana Grande. I feel like she makes holiday music more modern and fun!”

Ariana Grande’s Christmas music has become a staple for many, blending classic songs like “Last Christmas” and “Santa Baby” and her signature style on her first EP titled *Christmas Kisses* in 2013. She went on to make a second EP in 2015 titled *Christmas & Chill*, featuring more original songs. She also released “Santa Tell Me,” first in “*Christmas Kisses*,” then again as a single in 2023.

Music is a uniting force — from blasting in the car to playing softly in the background of Christmas dinner. So, whether you are listening to classics like “Joy to the World” or the iconic Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas is You,” I wish you a merry Christmas filled with good music and cheer.

## Neha’s Nook: Winter Books

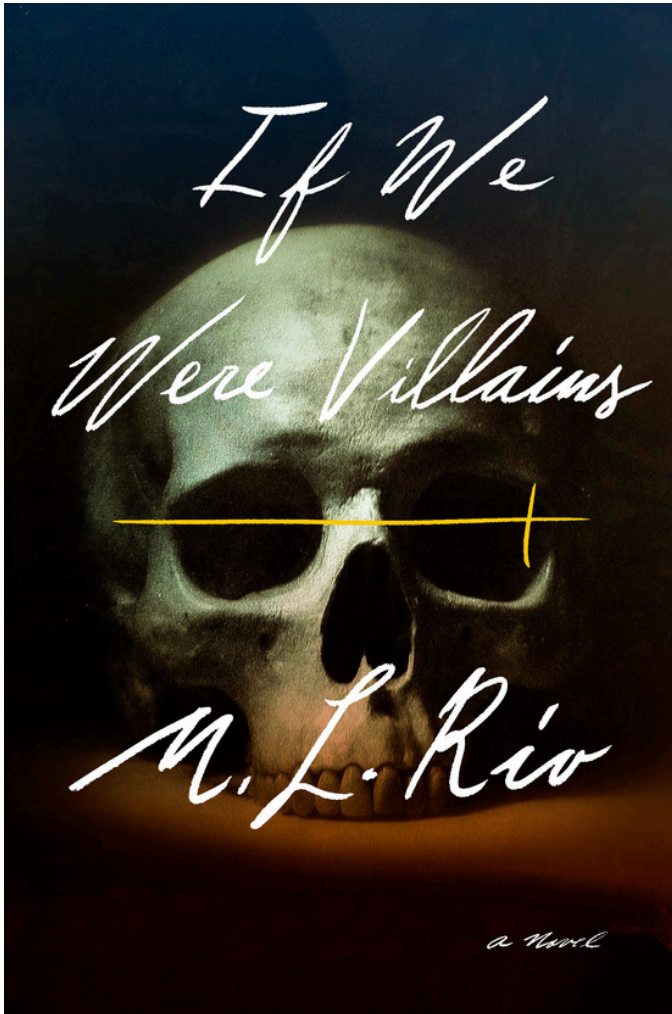
BY NEHA VASANTHAN '28

It’s not easy to experience a winter wonderland in Sacramento, but with the magic of imagination through reading, anything is possible. However, no ordinary book can immerse readers enough to feel as though they are living the story and feeling the overflowing winter vibes. The book needs to be vivid, remarkable, and captivating. Of course, *Neha’s Nook* is the perfect place to look for said magnetic stories!

“If We Were Villains” by M. L. Rio, a dark-academia mystery/thriller, is filled to the brim with heart-racing suspense and crushing emotions. Like snowflakes, M. L. Rio’s writing style is unlike all others. This, combined with the intricately developed characters and chilling plot, makes for a memorable novel.

The story follows Oliver Marks, who has just completed a decade in jail, and unravels how the snow landed by jumping back to his college days.

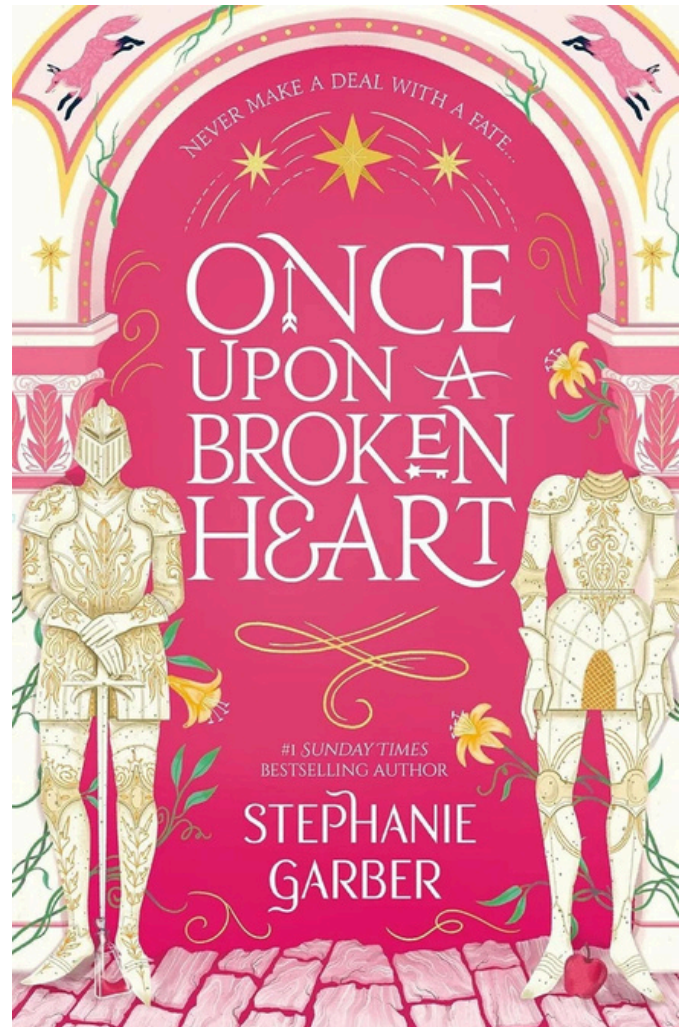
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PHOTO COURTESY OF **GOODREADS**

Oliver and his six friends are bardolators, or Shakespeare fanatics, and obsessive actors in an elite college who begin to jumble the lines between the stage and their own lives. The story is one of art, passion, and intrigue. The book has been widely regarded as similar to “The Secret History” by Donna Tartt. Both standalones tell the stories of intense characters in university, their identities slowly changing as the fall leaves drop from the trees when autumn turns to winter.

Contrary to the title, the “Once Upon A Broken Heart” trilogy by Stephanie Garber (another suggestion for this season!) is, by comparison, much lighter in tone. Amidst her intense heartbreak, 16-year-old Evangaline Fox makes a deal with the elusive and supernatural Prince of Hearts. Across the three books in the trilogy, Evangaline Fox and the Prince of Hearts navigate through the Magnificent North, dealing with high stakes, emotional turmoil, and magic along the way.

This trilogy is a fantasy, romance, Young Adult, and adventure series in one.

PHOTO COURTESY OF **EBAY**



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The first book is “Once Upon A Broken Heart,” the second is “The Ballad Of Never After,” and the third and final book in the series is called “A Curse For True Love.” There is an additional trilogy featuring a few of the same characters and set in the same realm, called the Caraval trilogy. Both trilogies are enticing, evocative, and portray the lengths people are willing to go to achieve their happily-ever-afters. All six of these Stephanie Garber books are international bestsellers and critically acclaimed novels. Additionally, Stephanie Garber herself is a local author who often does events at the Barnes and Noble in Roseville.

Winter break is peak reading time; however, until then, the Troubies are busy with finals. Naturally, everybody needs a break from studying, but what if the breaks aren't long enough to finish a full novel or a series? Worry not, as there is a perfect winteresque read for this problem. Ali Hazelwood's short story, “Cruel Winter With You,” is a quick 72-page read. This short story may be smaller, but the writing and the plot are as large and extraordinary as a full-length novel—it just takes less time. Due to a vicious snowstorm, the romcom's lead Jamie is stuck in a house with Marc, the boy whose heart she broke as a child. Marc is now not only a tech billionaire, but he's also the one who got away. This short story is full of winter magic.

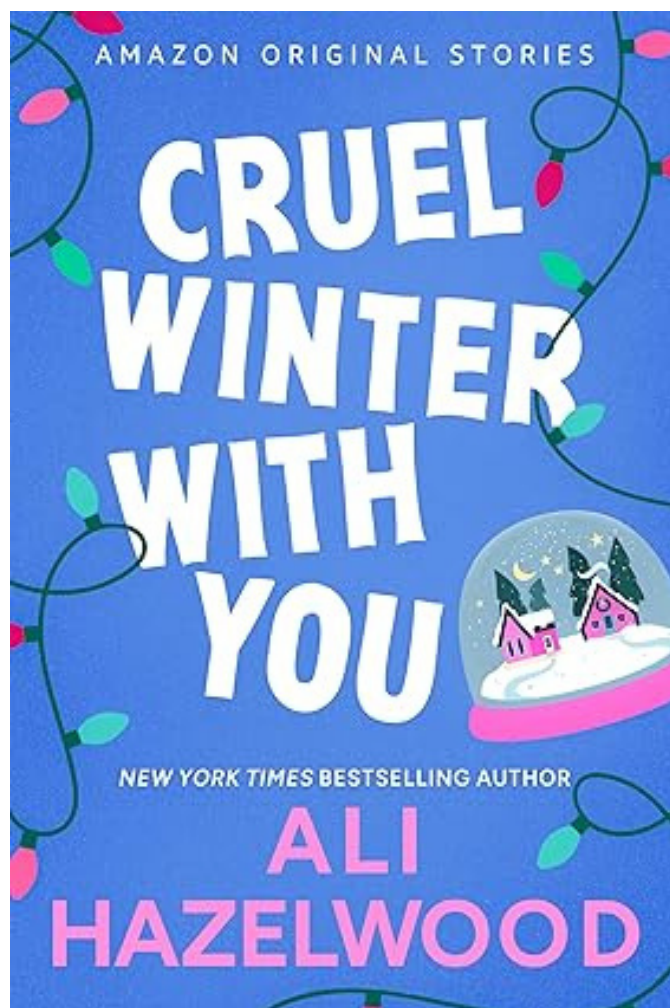


PHOTO COURTESY OF EBAY

Ignite the fireplace, prepare hot cocoa, pull on fuzzy socks and a warm blanket, and get ready to read the perfect winter book. From the dark and mysterious Dellecher College to the bustling city of Valenda to the snowstorm in Northern Illinois, these winter books will teleport the reader to their winter wonderland.

## December Recipe

**BY DANIELLE PAYANT '26**

As we celebrate the holiday season, there is no better time to bake sweet treats than while we're on break. This recipe is a super fun and easy way to bring some holiday cheer to friends and family, no matter your skill level.

Even better, these fudge bars are completely gluten free and can be easily modified to be dairy free for those with dietary restrictions. If you leave one out for Santa, I heard there might be an extra present under the tree. Happy Baking!

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**Ingredients:**

- **3 Tbsp.** Unsalted butter, cubed
- **2 ½ Cups** Dark chocolate chips
- **1 (14-oz)** Sweetened condensed milk
- **1 Tsp.** Pure vanilla extract
- **½ Tsp.** Kosher salt
- **3 Tbsp.** Christmas Sprinkles

**Directions:**

First, butter an 8x8 baking pan and line with parchment paper. In a large saucepan over medium heat, combine butter, chocolate chips, milk, vanilla, and salt, stirring constantly with a rubber spatula, until chocolate is melted and smooth, for about 5 minutes. Pour into the prepared pan.

Top with desired sprinkles. Refrigerate until set, at least 2 hours.

Run a sharp knife around the edges of the pan. Using parchment overhang, lift out fudge and transfer to a cutting board.

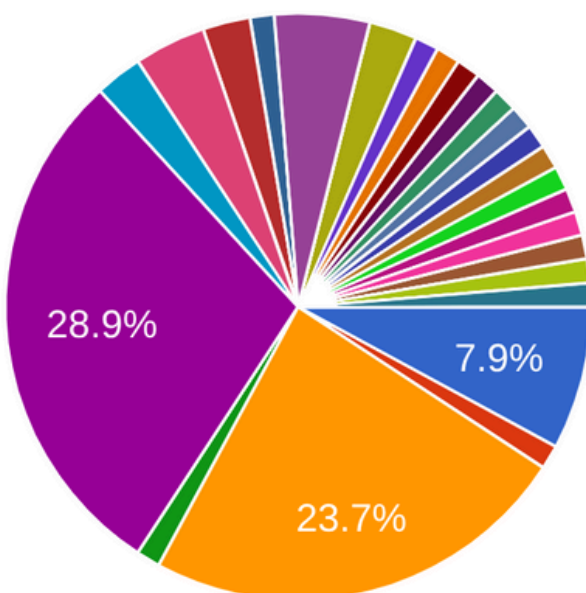


PHOTO COURTESY OF **Linda Pugliese**; Food Styling: **Makinze Gore**

If fudge is difficult to remove, wait 5 minutes until it warms slightly and try again. Cut into small squares (about 1½").

## What is SF's Favorite Holiday Song?

BY HADLEY BARNES '29



- Blue Christmas-Elvis Presley
- mistletoe by justin beiber
- A Nonsense Christmas
- The Chipmunk Song (Christmas don't...
- All I want for Christmas is a hippopotamus...
- all of them
- I want a hippopotamus for Christmas
- hallelujia
- Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree
- Jingle Bell Rock
- Last Christmas
- White Christmas
- All I Want for Christmas Is You
- It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year
- Silent Night
- Deck the Halls
- Mistletoe
- I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas by Gayla Peevey · 1985
- Mistletoe by Justin Bieber

## A Note From the Co-Editors-in-Chiefs

Dear Readers,

As the first semester comes to a close, we want to extend our gratitude to everyone who has supported *The Mandolin* these past months. It's been a full and vibrant season, and we feel honored to have covered everything from the first day of school to the last events leading into break. Each edition is crafted with care and passion by our incredible staff, all in the hope of bringing our community stories that inspire and connect.

We wish you a Merry Christmas, a joyful holiday season, and a very Happy New Year. Thank you for being a part of *The Mandolin* family. We can't wait to continue sharing the stories of St. Francis with you in the new year.

With love,  
Mercy Collier '26 and Kate Hwang '27



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