

OCTOBER 30, 2025

VOL. LVII, ISSUE 10

HARVARD INDEPENDENT

the student weekly since 1969



INDYWEEN

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A Conversation with Harvard Nonprofit Founder Olivia Zhang

L'Oréal honoree, author, founder, and Harvard student Olivia Zhang '27 speaks on transforming loss into purpose to empower the next generation of leaders.

BY RANIA JONES '27

Her story started with loss. “My situation specifically was born out of a really difficult time,” nonprofit founder Olivia Zhang '27 explained. What started as a mere effort to memorialize her mentors—her elementary school teacher and grandfather, who Zhang lost both to cancer within two months of each other—led to the creation of Cancer Kids First, the world's largest youth-led pediatric cancer nonprofit with over 40,000 volunteers across 80 countries.

Visiting her grandfather during chemo treatments in China, Zhang recalled observing significant gaps in quality of care, specifically for “patients in lower-income regions.”

“The [work] that stands out most to me is the work that we do in international countries,” Zhang reflected. “In low-income countries, [the childhood cancer] survival rates are less than 30%, compared to 80% in high-income countries,” a discrepancy Zhang attributed to lack of access to medicine, equipment, and care.

She recalled traveling to Indonesia and Colombia, where she met families whose children were undergoing treatment. Those moments, where she hand-delivered toys and care packages, remind Zhang of why she created CKF: not just to fill systemic gaps, but to reinvigorate patients' and families' dignity and joy, values typically neglected by larger institutions.

Since its founding in 2020, CKF has grown into a global force, delivering over \$600,000 in resources to hospitals and organizations worldwide, and in doing so, reaching millions online through digital advocacy. This growth, Zhang admitted, was not without its own series of challenges.

“During the pandemic, we were very focused on scaling, and we lost sight of what made us special...the whole fact that we're built by youth, for youth,” she said. “[Now], we have 111 chapters in different regions so that they could help facilitate that one-on-one interaction with patients and also volunteers.” Zhang prioritized giving local teams autonomy so each region could host its own events and fundraisers while staying connected to CKF's larger mission.

Zhang's latest project grew from her large social media presence, currently over 150,000 followers across TikTok and Instagram. Initially achieving viral recognition from videos related to her nonprofit work, Zhang's social media content more accurately captures her daily life now: “I went viral mainly because of my nonprofit work, but also because I naturally post about Harvard. I was showing the life of running a nonprofit while also going to school at

Harvard.”

With millions of views, followers began to ask Zhang for a “how-to guide” on starting your own organization, which, according to Zhang, began as a shared Google Doc with advice and now has over 400,000 downloads.

The public reception to the Google Doc, she laughed, was overwhelming, with thousands of people reaching out to Zhang asking for more, whether it be through one-on-one mentorship or via a podcast or book.



This demand transformed into “Youth: The Young Person's Guide to Starting a Nonprofit,” Zhang's debut book, set to be released in February 2026. After cold emailing over 170 literary agents, Zhang landed a publishing deal in early January 2025 and spent months editing and curating the manuscript.

“I didn't realize how much time and effort went into the creation of a book,” Zhang admitted. Thinking back to her 14-year-old self, Zhang recalled the lack of a toolkit readily available to help her build CKF, especially as she sought answers to questions like, “How do you balance [your nonprofit] with all your AP classes? How do you fire somebody who's the same age as you or older than you? How do you pitch yourself as a young person to get adults to trust you?”

As the resource she always wished she had, Zhang's book is more than a how-to guide—she hopes it's a declaration of youth empowerment. “Younger generations need to feel empowered and like they have the resources to take action and help change the

world,” she said.

This zeal to usher a new generation of nonprofit leadership earned Zhang national recognition as one of L'Oréal Paris's 2025 “Women of Worth,” an annual award honoring 10 women who uplift their communities through service. As 2025's youngest honoree, Zhang shared how growing up, people often discredited her success. “I would hear people talk about how [I] must have been connected by somebody, or [my] parents paid ‘XYZ’ for [CKF] to grow to a scale.” This sentiment, Zhang noted, remains resonant for so many women in the leadership space, especially young women of color.

“Receiving this honor means a lot, because it's a reminder for myself to be proud of how much I've accomplished, and at the same time, I hope it inspires other young women of color who maybe face similar things, that they do matter.”

As a part of the initiative, Zhang received a \$25,000 grant and participated in a series of interviews in Los Angeles, alongside previous honorees Helen Mirren, Eva Longoria, and Asia Naomi King.

“In December, I get to bring my mom to a red carpet,” Zhang shared, smiling. “She immigrated to the U.S. with nothing...So I'm really grateful that L'Oréal gave me the opportunity to honor the first woman who inspired me.”

That same gratitude shapes how Zhang sees her generation's potential. Adults, she said with quiet conviction, often underestimate what Gen Z can accomplish. “But when we're constrained, that's when we become most creative,” she explained.

“We're more in tune with empathy and actual experiences. So I feel because of that, we have a lot of creative solutions to problems that older people can't necessarily think of,” Zhang said.

Zhang's vision of leadership is not hierarchical or performative; rather, it's human. The best solutions, she noted, come when these two worlds work together. “It's important when it comes to any sort of issues that an old person collaborates with a young person, so you have new and old ideas that come together to address something.”

RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) CAN'T WAIT TO READ OLIVIA ZHANG'S DEBUT BOOK.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OLIVIA ZHANG '27

The New Economics of National Security: A Conversation with Gina Raimondo

An exploration of how the U.S. government's focus on industrial policy is reshaping free-market orthodoxy.

BY NASHLA TURCIOS '28

On Oct. 21, Harvard Kennedy School's John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum hosted a conversation between United States Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo '93 and former Treasury Secretary and Harvard professor Lawrence H. Summers. Together, they examined the Biden administration's approach to industrial policy—particularly its push to rebuild America's semiconductor and technology sectors—while debating the tension between free-trade ideals and national security risks. Over the course of the discussion, Raimondo offered an unfiltered look at how global rivalries and changing domestic policies are reshaping America's economic philosophy.

Raimondo served as the 40th U.S. Secretary of Commerce from 2021 to 2025 and previously as Rhode Island's first female governor; she is now a distinguished fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, where she co-chairs a task force on economic security. Summers—the Charles W. Eliot University Professor and President Emeritus at Harvard—directs the Kennedy School's Mossovar Rahmani Center for Business and Government. He has also held several senior federal posts, including U.S. Treasury Secretary, director of the National Economic Council, and chief economist of the World Bank.

Industrial Policy and National Security

Summers began the discussion by framing the Biden administration's economic strategy, pointing to the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors and Science Act as a defining example of its new approach to industrial policy.

Signed into law in August 2022, the CHIPS Act marked one of the most ambitious industrial policies in recent U.S. history. The law allocated \$53 billion in federal incentives for domestic semiconductor manufacturing and research. This includes \$39 billion in direct grants and a 25% tax credit for companies that build or expand chip facilities in the U.S. The program aimed to reduce America's reliance on foreign suppliers—particularly Taiwan, which produces over 90% of the world's most advanced semiconductors.

For Raimondo, the emphasis

on industrial policy reflected matters of national security rather than a broader political or economic ideology. “Theoretically, you want free markets—no government, limited government interference in the markets,” she said. “And the president, to his credit, decided in rare instances, related to national security, where the market has not gotten it right in pursuit of profit, a case could be made to intervene.”

“Industrial policy is necessary in instances like the CHIPS Act, where it is a true matter of national security. It's not the government investing to make money. The return you get is an improvement in national security,” Raimondo continued.



Since its passage, the CHIPS Act has catalyzed large investments across the U.S. semiconductor supply chain. Adjusting for inflation, it has already driven more than \$110 billion in U.S. chip-facility investment, with monthly construction spending nearing \$7.5 billion. Announced projects now exceed \$500 billion, according to the Semiconductor Industry Association. Thanks to the act, production of leading-edge chips by the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company has begun in Arizona. They have begun producing 4-nm chips, with advanced packaging capacity scaling up.

Manufacturing, Politics, and the “Made in America” Debate

Raimondo's reflections on the CHIPS Act led to a broader question about the role of manufacturing in America's economic identity.

“The case is often made by the Biden administration that manufacturing itself is good—that having a big manufacturing sector is really important

for a country. Do you share that view?” Summers asked.

“That is not my view,” she replied. “This is an argument that I routinely lost with President Biden.”

Recounting their exchanges, Raimondo described the former president's insistence on rebuilding domestic production across the board.

“The argument would go something like this: ‘Hey Gov’—which is what he called me—‘I am sick of America being at the end of the supply chain. Why can't we just make everything in America? Why can't we make bicycles and backpacks in America?’”

Raimondo noted she would counter that such a strategy was neither practical nor economically sound. “I would say, ‘Mr. President, we don't have enough labor. It's not a good in which we have an advantage, and it's not critical to national security. ‘By the way, if we try to make everything in America and we don't have capacity or labor, inflation will go through the roof.’”

Biden was unconvinced. “He would say, essentially, ‘I don't agree with you. I want to make more. I want to make everything in America.’”

This tension mirrors a larger political shift. Both President Trump and Biden have championed “Made in America” agendas, but for different reasons: Biden to protect key technologies and middle-class jobs, Trump to revive domestic industry through tariffs and economic nationalism. Together, they represent a bipartisan turn toward using industrial policy as a tool in an era of global competition.

Subsidies, AI, and the Market's Limits

The conversation soon turned to subsidies—how, when, and why government intervention in markets should occur.

“Is your theory that, everything that somebody subsidizes, we should stop them?” Summers asked. “Harvard subsidizes students to come here much more generously than most of the other universities in Boston do. We tend to think it's good.”

“How do you think about when subsidies are not okay and when subsidies are okay?”

Raimondo emphasized that she generally trusts market forces to function on their own. “I generally think the market gets it right. And politicians, when allowed too much with the market, get it wrong.”

She tied this tension back to technology, noting that industries like AI and semiconductors blur the line between economic policy and national defense.

“In instances like the supply chain for artificial intelligence—for biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, for critical medicines, semiconductors, or our food supply—there’s a national interest, an economic interest, a national security interest, a societal interest to make sure the market does get it right,” she said.

“If left to its own devices, the market does not price in national security benefit and does not price in long-term societal benefit,” she continued.

Raimondo’s answer reflected one of the central dilemmas of modern industrial policy: how to preserve market competition while using public funds to safeguard key industries. For sectors like semiconductors and artificial intelligence, where technological leadership affects national power, the government must intervene without distorting innovation or creating dependence on state support.

This debate has taken on new urgency as China’s state-backed model has demonstrated how far subsidies can go in building global dominance in manufacturing and advanced technology. Massive public investment in industries like solar energy, electric vehicles, and microelectronics has allowed China to scale rapidly, often outpacing competitors limited by market constraints.

The Politics of Industrial Policy

Nonetheless, views on industrial policy—and on the free market itself—have grown increasingly distinct across party lines. Under the second Trump administration’s “Make America Great Again” agenda, economic nationalism and tariffs have reemerged as central themes, marking a departure from the free trade consensus that once defined Republican orthodoxy during earlier periods. Many Democrats now find themselves defending market openness once associated with the right.

Raimondo noted the reversal.

“It is a whacky world in which we live when the Democrat is saying less government intervention is better and these folks are saying, ‘Make everything in America,’ shut down free trade, and

own golden shares in steel companies and chip companies.”

An audience member then shifted the conversation toward one of the most politically charged issues in U.S. trade policy: tariffs.

“What good things are we getting from the current tariff approach?” the attendee asked. “We know all the bad things—but if they’re bad, why did President Biden keep so many of the tariffs that President Trump put in place?”

“Both presidents Biden and Trump are not wrong that the way free trade played out hurt a lot of Americans,” Raimondo said, acknowledging the complexity of this issue. “It crushed



certain regions of the country. But my view is that’s not an argument against trade—it’s an argument for truly free trade with countries that play by the rules, and for real support to retrain and redeploy people who lost their jobs.”

She added that keeping tariffs in place was as much about political instinct as policy.

“President Biden kept a number of the tariffs, I think out of that instinct: I want to be on the side of the American worker,” Raimondo said. “If you’re a politician, it’s tough to take a tariff off once it’s on. You don’t want to be the one saying, ‘Go ahead and flood the market

with cheap imports.’ That’s a tough political decision.”

Summers offered his own caution. “There are on the order of a hundred times more people who work in industries that use steel as there are in industries that produce it,” he noted. “When you raise the price of steel, you have to think very hard about what you’re doing to the aggregate number of manufacturing jobs—and you may often be reducing rather than increasing it.”

Innovation, Research, and the Future of Industrial Policy

Beyond debates over trade and protectionism, the forum also focused on industrial policy’s role in promoting innovation and growth. Raimondo emphasized the importance of government-supported research while warning against attempts to pick winners and losers.

“I think that the government should be in the business of funding research,” she said. “Two areas I worry a lot about are quantum and biotechnology. It is hard for private capital investors to continue to invest in biotech for a whole bunch of reasons. Same thing with quantum. It takes massive amounts of money, it’s risky, and you’ll probably lose your money. [But] we need more basic research.”

At the same time, she cautioned against direct government control over industry.

“I see that as being different from the government saying, we are going to own a piece of Intel. Because at the end of the day, it is just harder. I do believe in the market,” she continued.

“Having the government divine which industries we ought to be for versus ones we are against, I think is tough,” Raimondo concluded.

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Generation Z Through the Looking Glass

A conversation with Associate Professor Nancy Rappaport on how Generation Z sees its future.

BY ISHAAN TEWARI '28

No Home, No Retirement, No Kids.” This New York Times headline from June 11 captures the uncertain future awaiting Generation Z. Confronted with an increasingly competitive job market, deep political divisions, and an escalating climate crisis, the world’s second-youngest generation sees a stable future slipping further from reach.

While some have called Gen Z’s outlook pessimistic, others argue that the generation views the world through the eyes of a pragmatist, or even a cautious optimist. In other words, although Gen Z is experiencing a unique set of challenges, its response to these problems—and its attitude to the future—is yet to be clearly defined.

As Gen Z enters the U.S. workforce, a new cohort is poised to reshape the economy, politics, and society. The *Harvard Independent* spoke with Nancy Rappaport, an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives this generation brings to the table. Rappaport is the co-author of “The Behavior Code,” a guide that helps educators respond effectively to challenging student behaviors. She also runs a clinical practice and teaches a first-year seminar on developmental psychology. The following interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

* * *

The Independent: What is the purpose of pessimism? Why do we feel it, and what is the role of pessimism in our lives?

Rappaport: So I haven’t studied pessimism. But what I would say, from having done clinical work, is that pessimism is a way of having low expectations with the hope that then, when bad things happen, you’re not

disappointed, because you didn’t have any expectation that things would go well. It’s a protective mechanism. If you take the risk and have high hopes, and it doesn’t turn out, the fall is so much bigger.

[People may] think [pessimism] protects them from being disappointed. I’m not so sure. In my clinical work, I would say that sometimes backfires, because if you don’t have high expectations, then you miss out on a lot. You don’t get the joy of thinking, “Oh, I’m about to sit down and have this great meal.” You’re like, “Oh, the meal is probably burnt. Okay, why bother cooking it then?” Because you’ve already, in your mind, decided it’s burnt.

There’s a guy named Seligman—and he was sort of the granddaddy of positive psychology—and he wrote a book I love to talk about in my class called “Learned Optimism.” He said that basically when people are depressed, it’s because they think it’s permanent and pervasive, and that when you have learned optimism, it’s because you learn persistence.

I think a pessimist is not going to go to that place [of learned optimism]. They’re going to say, “This is never going to change.” And it’s not very productive. You have to be able to come up with some kind of strategy to manage disappointment.

The Independent: Would you agree with the characterization of Gen Z as pessimistic?

Rappaport: Let me just pause this for a little. I’m not good with generalizations. It probably comes from my having taught a generation of kids. I think it’s a cookie-cutter approach to defining a generation by a broad brush stroke. So I would hesitate to do that anyway. Because I see the diversity of how my students approach life, and they don’t come in and tell me, “I’m Gen Z, so I’m

pessimistic.”

Is this a generation that might worry more than other generations? It’s possible. There are a lot of disruptions happening right now—and we just had a pandemic where people didn’t get to go to school, and they had to hole up in their houses. The reality is my generation has really ended up [with] things that are pretty [messed] up, and so realistically your generation has a lot of work to do.

The Independent: What do you think specifically is making Gen Z become realists?

Rappaport: I think first of all, this generation is having to integrate information faster than we’ve ever asked anybody to do. We just started with AI, but prior to that, [there was] instant communication. And that means that there’s not a lot of time to pause and to be as reflective, because you’re constantly being bombarded by information.



Think about George Floyd and Black Lives Matter. It's not very easy to put on blinders unless you make deliberate efforts. You're going to see the kind of atrocities that are happening in the world, and I think that's going to create some anxiety for folks. It's a different world.

I remember when I first started child psychiatry and teaching in the early 90's, there was a woman named Elkind. In her conceptualization of that generation, it was around that there was this "imaginary audience." Now it's not imaginary. It's there 24/7. Now, you could say that that's not a real audience, that we still have an imaginary audience—just a different kind. But I don't think that's true.

You take in an inundation of information that's very difficult to integrate, and doesn't allow you to escape. And then you add on a later layer of having an audience at all times. It's going to pressure cook folks.

The *Independent*: We know that Gen Z is facing a mental health crisis that is different from previous generations. A lot of your work focuses on mental health and psychological development. How do you think this crisis changes the way that Gen Z views its future?

Rappaport: Particularly in the Harvard crowd, [I would say] that there is no room for slack. You have to really push yourselves to excel. Sometimes, there's a feeling that you can't focus on the process—you have to focus on the outcome, because the world is such a competitive place. How else are you going to get ahead?

You read something that says, "AI just knocked out every job." [So you think,] "Where does that leave me? Well, I need to excel." And I think sometimes, there is the worry of, "How am I going to contribute if I have values of wanting to give back? Because what I'm being asked to do seems so huge."

The *Independent*: Does the fact that Gen Z—and Harvard students in particular—are facing heightened competition worsen mental health outcomes? Do you think this idea of "learning to fail" could help people who feel disillusioned with the state of the world?

Rappaport: I think [competition] makes people more focused on outcomes. So it drives more perfectionism and anxiety about results versus investing in the process. [And] you have more catastrophic thinking, because everything feels so high stakes, and it doesn't seem like there's enough room to have setbacks.

If you go back to "learned optimism," I wish people would be exposed to learning to fail. There's a whole book on how important that is. I think it would allow us to be more patient both with ourselves and the world. Having some kind of humility—about you're going to do the best you can, define what you value and what gives you meaning.

The *Independent*: You mentioned that your students challenge the claim that Gen Z is pessimistic. What ways of thinking do you identify as having made your students feel less so?

Rappaport: First of all, I certainly try to create a community, try to give some nurturing myself, and appreciate what [students are] bringing to the table. Harvard can be a kind of lonely place, depending on where you land. If you look at [Robert] Waldinger's research—he looked at Harvard graduates over sixty years, and he looked at what is the most salient health factor for folks. And it doesn't turn out to be making a lot of money or having a fancy career. It is building connections and feeling that inordinate stabilizing force.

You could say that [students may] be more isolated. That's something you have to counter and really intentionally build a

community and build connections. Ultimately, I don't think it's going to be individual therapy that's going to save us. It's really going to be figuring out ways to build community and connection that's going to help your generation. That's my two cents.

* * *

According to Rappaport, the future of Gen Z is not as grim as it appears. There are indeed enormous challenges on the horizon. Gen Z must learn to find its place in a brand new economy while finding its place in a divided society and addressing a serious mental health crisis. However, Gen Z seems to be rising to the challenge.

"Everybody says this is a world of pessimism," Rappaport said. "We're burning, just find a fire hose.' And I'm not of that school. You could call me an optimist, maybe, or a realist; I have a darter optimism for your generation. I feel like you all are going to inspire me, and I am really glad that I can pass the baton and see what you do, because we need some really creative solutions."

**ISHAAN TEWARI '28
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MORE HOPEFUL ABOUT THE
FUTURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE.**

**GRAPHIC BY NUALA
MERNIN '29**

AI Advancements: Implications for the Human Creative

While large language models offer tools, members of the human creative field find the natural mind irreplaceable.

BY NOAH BASDEN '29

On Oct. 14, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman announced on X that the latest version of ChatGPT would be more personable—an artificial intelligence engine capable of responding in a “very human-like way,” or even acting like a friend. This news comes amid rising controversy over how far AI should go in mimicking personal expression and the subsequent threats that such generative technology poses to human creativity.

Debates on the future of education around AI have been ongoing at Harvard. The issue has become so prevalent that Harvard College Dean David Deming’s convocation speech this year mainly focused on AI and its implications and applications in wider society. Reports estimate that by 2030, activities that account for 30% of work hours across the U.S. economy could be automated. Generative technology advancements are no longer a purely academic concern for Harvard students, but a tangible threat facing creative spaces and the workforce that students are preparing to enter.

For Delphine Doreau, the former Program Director for Animation at Pulse College, Dublin, with over 30 years of international experience in the creative space, the distinction is clear: AI will never be able to replace human individuality. “I think the whole creative process is fundamentally human,” Doreau told the *Harvard Independent*.

This is an idea shared by neurologist Dr. Dean Burnett who cited AI’s lack of emotion as reasoning behind its inability to replicate human art at last year’s Walnut Unlimited’s Brainy Bar event. “AI does not have that [emotion]—it is all pure logic,” he said.

The notion that AI cannot replace the human experience was echoed by the words of an anonymous Harvard upperclassman and Sidechat contributor @whoeversmeltitdealtit. “When ChatGPT grows a digestive tract, it may be able to understand the unparalleled importance of defecation,” they said in an interview with the *Independent*. The upperclassman preferred to have their student identity remain anonymous to ensure that their online presence could stay unfiltered.

Sidechat is an anonymous social media app that allows students to post and comment within and outside their higher education community. @whoeversmeltitdealtit has been making and publishing reviews of mainly Harvard bathrooms and the occasional Harvard Square meals on Sidechat over the past year.

A typical review from their account contains a rating of a Harvard or Harvard-adjacent bathroom rooted in the typical criteria of cleanliness, privacy, smell, and size. Following the numerical ranking, @whoeversmeltitdealtit leaves a long-form comment to summarize the experience for any other users of the respective locale. The most recent review

Technical art, yes. Pretty pictures, OK. Thinking out of the box, never,” Doreau explained.

Though resolute in her surety that AI will ‘never’ be capable of thinking outside of the input data it receives, this is not a uniform view across the world of AI. Professor Lenore Blum, Distinguished Career Professor of Computer Science, Emeritus at Carnegie Mellon University, told the BBC in an interview this May that she believes that “AI consciousness is inevitable.” Similarly, the view that AI may one day become conscious is shared by Henry Shevlin, Associate Director at the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, University of Cambridge, who has argued that there will be “engineered conscious AI by the end of the century.”

Concerns about AI have permeated all facets of life, from academia to entire industries. However, @whoeversmeltitdealtit remains firm that humanity still has hope, at least in the creative sense. “I hope to one day win a ‘Pulitzer’ Prize in journalism for my investigative work and primary source reporting.”

Through their work, they hope to demonstrate that an urge to create

absurd and niche ideas for no other reason than personal amusement exists. This impulse to direct genuine effort into something intentionally nonsensical reveals something AI may never grasp: that ‘meaning’ doesn’t always have to be ‘meaningful.’

As AI continues to advance through increasingly personable models, the question of where human creativity ceases and AI capability begins remains unresolved. “The minute the authenticity of the human experience is lost, you’re done. Here’s the line,” Doreau said.



of the second-floor bathrooms at the Charles Hotel received a 7/10 rating: “Could definitely have been cleaner, but I cut some slack for high foot traffic. Good size tho.”

This Harvard student’s bathroom reviews represent a case for AI’s creative limits. The experiential content they produce seems inherently human in nature. Consider their self-developed theory on the correlation between bathroom cleanliness and floor level: “The emotional rollercoaster of fear, anger, confusion, joy, sadness, and relief could never be replicated by a machine,” they said. Nevertheless, as AI systems advance in their abilities to mimic personal and observational humor, the boundaries of what is—or will be—uniquely human continue to grow harder to define.

What is less clear among members of the creative world is the question of how much further AI can or will go. “AI won’t ever be a creative genius.

**NOAH BASDEN '29
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HIS BATHROOM HAS BEEN
REVIEWED OR NOT.**

**GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE
ASIHENE '27**

Midterms: How They're Made and Why They're Taken

Students' and one professor's perspectives on midterm exams.

For first-year students, midterms mark one of the first formal assessments of their Harvard College career. “It felt a little bit daunting or scary just because I never took a college—Harvard College—midterm, and I didn’t know what to expect,” Sarah Zhang ’29 told the *Independent*.

The first major round of exams for Harvard College students started in mid-October. These midterm assessments can take the form of in-person tests or remote projects and essays. Harvard College offers more than 3,700 courses across 50 concentrations. There are no official statistics on what proportion of courses require midterms, but examinations remain central to most undergraduates’ academic lives.

Research shows that test-based examinations improve students’ retention of course material and motivate them to learn it, a sentiment echoed by professors at Harvard.

Professor Jason Furman ’92 currently teaches Economics 10a: “Principles of Economics,” which administers a midterm exam with 30 multiple-choice questions that students must complete in one hour. He believes the purpose of a midterm “is both to motivate students to learn the material, and also to assess what fraction of the material they learned and how well they’re able to apply the material,” he explained to the *Independent*.

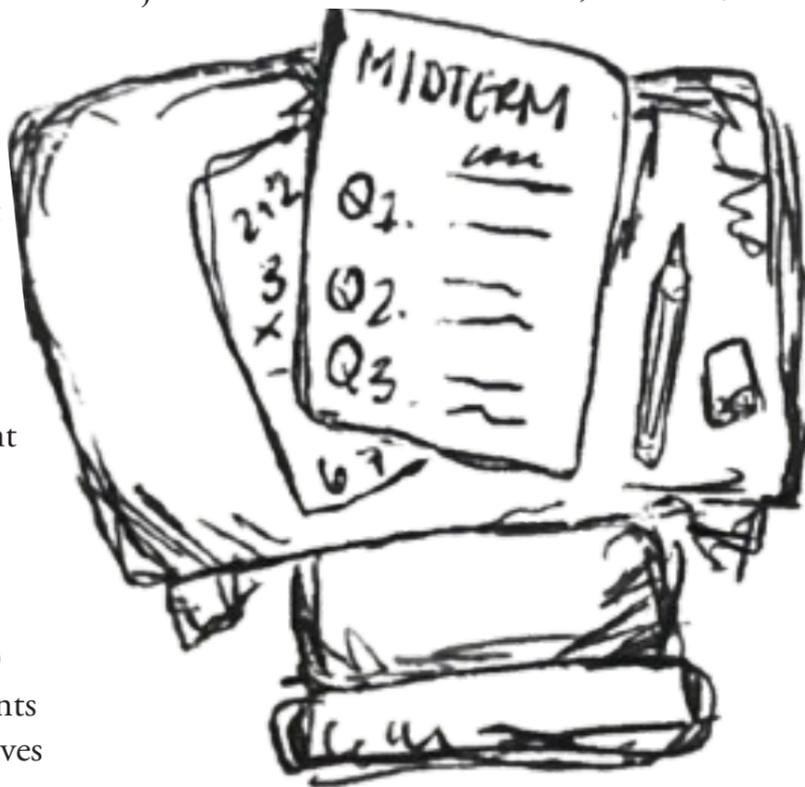
Ec 10 is popular among undergraduate students and has been for many years. Statistics from 2017 showed that more than 600 undergraduates were enrolled in the course. With such a large class size, it is a challenge to maintain equity—for every student to understand and respond to a test question in the same way. By mitigating individual differences through multiple choice, Furman hopes he can accurately gauge the class’s overall understanding of the material.

“You make one careless error, and that means you get one out of 30 questions wrong. That’s not a huge deal. If your midterm is two big problems, you have some issue with one of them, and all of a sudden, it affects the whole

thing,” Furman said, explaining why he prefers his assessment format.

As a potential concentrator in a humanities discipline with mainly take-home essays, Wren Horne-Sarkees ’29 added to Furman’s emphasis on the merit of multiple-choice questions for midterms. “It’s very different seeing how much one assignment affects your grade, especially when there’s classes that, say, don’t have p-sets. That one essay can make or break [your grade],” she told the *Independent*.

Since essay grading is more subjective than a traditional exam,



humanities students may feel more pressure to succeed on midterm assignments. “I feel like I was definitely stressed out at times,” Horne-Sarkees added.

However, Furman also acknowledged a drawback of multiple-choice exams, especially ones with a 60-minute time cap. “[Students] definitely can feel some time pressure,” he said.

Furman also gave his definition of what makes a good test question. “You should have ones that are taking a concept in class, but applying it, forcing you to think about how to apply it in any type of way.”

Sarah Zhang ’29, who recently took a midterm in Ec 10 and Math 21a: “Multivariable Calculus,” reflected on a similar idea. “I do think that, at least in the classes I’m in, the midterms are more conceptual than calculation-based,” she said.

Experiences with midterms also varied between humanities and STEM-focused courses. Social science exams share with humanities midterms the freedom to write long-answer responses, which allows them the space to elaborate on their ideas as long as they are deeply familiar with the material.

Amy Tan ’29 was able to compare midterms in STEM and social sciences courses. She recently took midterms in Ec 10 and Government 50: “Data Science for the Social Sciences.” While Ec 10 had a multiple-choice exam, Gov 50’s exam was entirely written. An exam

like this requires the student to comprehensively understand the intersection between data science and government in order to accurately and eloquently explain ideas.

“You could argue that Gov 50 is a little harder in the sense that, if you just don’t know what you’re doing, you can’t just pick something, you have to know [it],” Tan told the *Independent*.

Across all concentrations, instructors create midterm exams they believe best prepare their students for the future. Although they can be nerve-wracking, midterm exams are not designed by instructors to cause excessive stress or to confuse students.

As Ryan Jiang ’29 put it, “I always try to approach tests with a carefree attitude, in a way, so you’re not too stressed, which might hinder your performance.”

ELLIE GUO ’29 (EGUO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WAS PREPARING FOR A MIDTERM WHILE WRITING THIS ARTICLE.

GRAPHIC BY ANNABELLA BURTON BOONE ’29

FORUM

Thoughts from New Quincy: Seamless Surfaces

How cities learned to turn walls into mirrors of power and desire.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

Each morning this summer, I passed the same wall on my way to work. Behind me, the brakes of a bus hissed, and a gust of warm air carried the smell of exhaust and garbage. The wall changed constantly—first a movie poster, then a perfume ad, then a mural commissioned by a sneaker brand. Each new layer hid the last, though traces remained: dried glue, uneven color, the faint outline of an older slogan. The city is always painting over itself, practicing renewal without ever beginning anew.

After streets opened the city to movement, walls gave it order. They kept danger out and value in, separating the visible from the unknown. To live within the walls was to belong; to stand beyond them was to be foreign. When the polis emerged, public stone became a surface for inscription—laws, decrees, rituals. A wall defined not only where the city ended but who could speak within it.

In the medieval and early modern city, the wall evolved once more. Long before the factory or the poster, it served as a noticeboard between rulers and the ruled. Edicts, proclamations, and broadsheets were fastened to stone; the street became a managed forum. Power spoke through architecture, and the wall was its clearest voice.

With industrial modernity came a subtler language of control. The wall no longer shouted decrees from the crown or the church; new voices spoke through print instead. The press multiplied words, and the factory multiplied eyes. Posters replaced proclamations; the city learned to steer through desire instead of fear. Yet the wall's purpose endured: to regulate what could be seen. The modern city replaced surveillance with spectacle.

The citizen had always watched, but now the gaze itself became a kind of labor—measured, exploited, endlessly renewed.

In the cracks of that transformation, people began to answer. The handbill, the wheatpaste, the graffiti tag—all emerged as unsanctioned acts of speech. A wall might hold a missing cat poster, a strike notice, or a name written in marker. These were gestures toward a different kind of publicness—one collectively improvised by residents.

A blank wall could briefly turn into a democratic medium. Each addition redefined the city's surface: layered, contested, alive. Even when officials scrubbed the paint clean, traces of rebellion lingered beneath the surface. The city was still legible to those who walked it.

Eventually, that legibility was noticed. The raw energy of street expression became something that could be imitated, sponsored, and sold. Developers discovered that a mural could raise property values faster than new plumbing. Brands discovered that 'rebellion' sold better than obedience. Corporate campaigns adopted the handwriting of graffiti, the visual noise of protest, and the authenticity of local voice.

Walking through Manhattan, it is hard to distinguish between protest and product. The same fonts that once shouted "NO WAR" now whisper "NEW ARRIVAL." The same aesthetic of urgency—grain, blur, collage—circulates across luxury campaigns. Public art is rarely public anymore; its rebellion has been rehearsed. The wall hasn't gone silent—it speaks in a voice so smooth it's mistaken for our own.

Now, what was once printed begins to glow.

Digital billboards ripple across façades, their light spilling into the street—Times Square as the logical afterlife of the poster. The wall no longer ends at brick or glass; it continues inward, reflected on every screen.

From the street, this all still reads as life—motion, color, texture. But look long enough and the vibrancy flattens into a sensed choreography. Every surface solicits the gaze, measures it, calculates its ROI. Cameras track who looks up; algorithms predict who will. The wall no longer displays; it performs. It sells you back to yourself, tailored and responsive.

Inside, another wall glows. My feed updates as quickly as the street below—new campaign, new face, new message.

The promise of infinite expression hides a perfect enclosure. I scroll, but I do not wander. The walls of the feed, like the walls of the city, have become selective mirrors. The illusion of freedom depends on the visibility of the frame.

There are no blank surfaces left. Every wall—concrete, glass, digital—has been conscripted into production. Even silence is monetized. A clean façade is an ad waiting to happen; an untouched



screen, lost engagement. The city no longer breathes between messages. What once passed for rebellion now shows up in luxury campaigns: Dior written in graffiti, Netflix ads painted to look like murals.

Still, sometimes, it slips. A tag half-erased. A poster torn by rain. A digital ad that fails to load, leaving a rectangle of grey on your Instagram feed. These ruptures feel sacred—reminders that the world beneath the overlay still exists.

I think about how fleeting that openness once was—the decades when a wall could still belong to the street. You could read the city then: paper softening in the heat, ink bleeding through layers of paste, slogans half-buried beneath the next campaign. A wall was a commons—shared, contested, alive.

The graffiti writer, the passerby, the maintenance worker—each left a trace, deliberate or not. Groups like the Guerrilla Girls turned that visibility against the city itself, posting protests where billboards usually spoke. That fragile ecosystem of expression has since hardened into a circuit of consumption. The wall remains, but the forum is gone.

Sometimes I think about the edges of cities—the industrial towns and forgotten blocks that haven't yet learned to speak this new language. Their walls still bear half-faded signs on brick, phone numbers painted in cursive, and graffiti that no one bothers to scrub away. There, the wall is still a commons—layered, contradictory, alive. You can tell time by the fragments and space: an old soda logo, a political sign from an election no one remembers, a poster announcing a concert.

There, the wall still holds memory instead of Nike's newest campaign. It still carries an argument, not branding. But those spaces are dwindling. Developers arrive, or the ads find a digital substitute, and the texture flattens. The blank wall becomes a placeholder for what's coming—a banner or a QR code.

Sometimes I imagine those places surviving longer: a slower city, less optimized, where surfaces stay open to contradiction. In Athens, old brick and sun-worn concrete are covered with decades of graffiti, political slogans fading beside hand-painted signs. It would be uneven, maybe even ugly. But it would be public in a way that my city isn't. Conversation, not campaign, would determine what endures.

That city feels impossible now. Each morning, workers arrive before sunrise to paste a new layer. By eight, the wall is reborn. The rhythm is precise: remove, replace, repeat. The surface glows with novelty, though the logic beneath never moves.

As I pass the wall again, the mural is gone. In its place, a LOEWE bag stretches across the brick, each panel pressed flat, the seams invisible. It looks clean, almost weightless.

Power depends on that illusion—on the ease with which the new layer feels natural. The wall has always been a tool: to enclose, to display, to extract. What's changed is its texture. It no longer hides or protects; it flatters. It teaches us to mistake visibility for freedom.

A gust of wind catches one corner of the ad, lifting it for a moment. Beneath, a fragment of the older mural flickers through—a face, half-erased. For a moment, it looks like the wall I first noticed, when the panels were still being pressed flat and the bubbles worked out by hand. The illusion is the same: each new layer pretending to begin again. The wall exhales. Then the corner drops, and the city resumes its performance.

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GRAPHIC BY CHAU NGUYEN '29

Channeling Capone

A celebration of dressing up and the joy of Halloween.

BY CLAIRE CHUNG '29

In third grade, I strutted through hallways and across the playground on the most exciting day of the school year, dressed in a pinstripe suit, bowler hat, and sunglasses—finished off with a bright red lip. In my full ensemble, I was more than ready for the Halloween parade as 1920s gangster Al Capone.

My fascination with Capone, and with gangsters in general, had begun that year during our “Chicago history” unit, designed to help us connect with our city’s past. Though my teacher had brushed past the gangsters in a single day, preferring to linger on the World’s Fair, the stories and photographs of their crimes remained vivid in my mind. I was mesmerized by their boldness, their heists, and most of all, their dress. The fedoras, sharp suits, and gleaming accessories seemed iconic to my younger self, who lived in Justice hoodies and sweatpants.

I would pretend to be them in my room, tipping my imaginary hat as I struck deals and sent my enemies to “sleep with the fishies.” I checked out books from the library and memorized mob members’ names, a skill that might have been useful had I been a private eye, but was mostly mildly aggravating to everyone around me. Halloween was an opportunity for me to showcase my newest obsession and, without realizing it, the version of my identity in that moment.

That day, I was met with confusion from classmates and amusement from parents, but I embraced it. Every time someone asked me, “What are you?” I proudly replied, “Al Capone.”

Throughout elementary school, my love for unusual costumes persisted. Anything I was obsessed with—dementors, mimes, Sypro (the purple dragon from “Skylanders”)—I decided to become

for Halloween.

By fifth grade, I had ditched the video game characters for group costumes. Once you hit 10, solo costumes suddenly indicate outcast status; group costumes become social currency. “What are you being for Halloween?” turned into “What are you guys being?” The shift was jarring and sudden, like a new set of rules had been written overnight. From that point on, my friends and I chose more “normal” themes—The Wizard of Oz, superheroes, fairies, and more. Even though my costumes were no longer as personal (or as odd), I was still obsessed with dressing up.

Halloween became an excuse



for us to spend hours scouring Pinterest, online shopping, or thrifting—pulling together pieces we’d never otherwise wear. I loved the hunt and the rush of stumbling upon the perfect accessory to complete my outfit. Halloween was the one time of year when, if people said you were too much, maybe they simply weren’t enough.

Now, as my first college Halloween approaches, the holiday carries nostalgia and a taste of home. Though Cambridge is nothing like the Chicago suburbs, the decorated houses just beyond campus and the bright autumnal colors are familiar sights. They remind me of trick-or-treating, pumpkin carving, and trading candy late into the night.

That nostalgia extends beyond Halloween scenes. In my first year of college, independence feels newly exciting—both in everyday life

and on Halloween. It’s the kind of creative freedom that brings me back to childhood wonder, letting me rediscover who I am in a new environment. Without the comfort of old friends to lean on, I’ve had to start over again from scratch. There’s no longer history to rely on. Because of this, solo costumes are back, an exhilarating yet daunting reminder that I’ve come full circle. Choosing a costume on my own again feels like a return to the confidence and emboldened curiosity I had as a kid, when dressing up meant showing what I love, not who I was friends with.

Still, that doesn’t mean I’ve lost my love for group costumes. I still adore planning, coordinating, and matching with a good group of friends. Whether solo or in a group, I love Halloween for the escape it offers—for one day (or, let’s be honest, a whole weekend) you can become whoever you want to be.

Maybe that’s the real lesson this year: the divide between individual and group costumes was never as significant as I thought. What once felt like a choice between conformity and self-expression isn’t serious at all. Whether alone or with friends, Halloween has always been about the same thing since I was Al Capone—a chance to revel in pretending, dressing up, and being “too much.” A fedora that’s a little too tacky. A lip that’s a little too red. A costume that’s a little too weird. That’s what makes it special.

**CLAIRE CHUNG '29
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DRESS UP FOR HALLOWEEN.**

**PHOTOS COURTESY OF
WALLACE SELPH '29 AND
SASHA CAVELL '29**

Harvard Ghost Stories

What Harvard's haunted stories reveal about campus culture.

BY LUCY DUNCAN '28

Students in Hollis Hall once received a chilling ultimatum: they had 36 hours to evacuate their rooms, or face a supernatural punishment. The message, purportedly from the ghost of a Revolutionary War soldier, appeared in the winter of 1940 and claimed that the spirit was tired of living in the attic and wanted the entire building for himself. The 36 hours passed without incident, but to this day, no one knows who left the message. Even now, students occasionally report hearing disembodied footsteps and knocking, or feeling sudden, inexplicable chills.

Analyses of folk tales such as this can provide valuable insight into a culture's values and beliefs, and Harvard's ghost stories are no exception. From George Washington's Continental troops lingering in Hollis Hall to apparitions of famous Harvard residents past, these haunting tales share a common thread: they are laced with reminders of the prestige, accomplishments, and wealth that have historically defined our school's culture.

Few institutions as old as Harvard are without their spooky stories. Legends tell of the ghosts of departed faculty roaming colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, and of a murdered student said to haunt Yale's campus. Like these other age-old universities, Harvard's extravagant architecture and centuries of rich history make it a prime site for more than its fair share of paranormal activity.

When these stories circulate, it rarely seems to be for their fright factor. Indeed, if you asked the average Harvard student if they truly believed in any of these tales, they'd likely laugh in your face. Instead, these stories tend to serve as curiosities—pieces of “insider” Harvard lore shared among students, marking the boundary between those in the know and the public. They serve to separate students of elite higher education from the rest of society.

Students' attitudes toward these legends are merely a symptom of a larger cultural phenomenon that has long defined this campus. The one thing that all Harvard students have in common is that they

were accepted into one of the world's most prestigious and exclusive institutions. Upon arriving on campus, however, they quickly realize that this accomplishment no longer sets them apart from their peers. It is for this reason that so many Harvard students seek to further differentiate themselves by attempting to create and access spaces that are often exclusive for exclusivity's sake, from final clubs to Crimson Key. On this campus, there is a prevalent desire among students to constantly prove that they are the best of the best. Our attitude towards ghost stories, I argue, is a side effect of this; being in the know about Harvard's lore and lesser-known stories allows students to prove, if only to themselves, that they truly belong here.



One of the most enduring ghostly tales centers on Widener Library, one of the most well-known buildings on campus. Anyone who has visited Widener has likely found themselves in the background of a tourist's photo or overheard a tour guide recounting how Harry Elkins Widener perished aboard the Titanic. What visitors may not know, however, is that his mother, Eleanor Elkins Widener, is said to haunt the library's halls. During renovations in the early 2000s, Harry's portrait was removed from the walls, and soon after, chunks of plaster began to fall from the ceiling. Employees blamed the disturbance on Eleanor's spirit, angered by the perceived

disrespect to her son's legacy. When the portrait was replaced, the supernatural activity ceased.

As with many aspects of the school, Harvard's ghost stories reinforce the University's prestige. Widener's legend harks back to his family's donation and reminds us of the immense wealth contained in that building alone—almost \$80 million in today's currency. Tales of Revolutionary War soldiers haunting Hollis Hall and Wadsworth House remind students of Harvard's deep historical roots. Few schools can claim to have hosted Revolutionary troops, and so at Harvard, Halloween provides a convenient excuse to casually reference George Washington's time on campus. The incorporation of these legends into everyday conversation serves as a sort of self-validation, an opportunity for students to remind themselves and others that they attend Harvard.

Washington is not the only notable name said to linger. Lowell House is rumored to be haunted by Amy Lowell, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and sister of the house's namesake. Residents have reported smelling cigar smoke near her portraits, and even seeing full-body apparitions. These stories keep the Lowell family's legacy alive, connecting current students to Harvard's storied past.

And as with much else at Harvard, its ghost stories function as subtle symbols of status, reinforcing the prestige that has defined Harvard's very identity since its establishment. Through the creation of myths, famed universities like Harvard help create their idealized image—one of wealth, prestige, exclusivity, and rich history. With recent efforts to promote values of equity and inclusivity, it will be interesting to see how these ghost stories evolve.

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GRAPHIC BY KATHARINE WEINER '29

When Halloween Grows Up

College may change Halloween, but it doesn't kill the excitement of it.

BY HAILEY KIM '29

Imagine the first Halloween night in college feels different. You pass clusters of students covered in glitter and fake blood, music spilling from a random location, and for a moment, you can't help but think of the years spent running through quiet neighborhoods with a pillowcase full of candy.

Among college students, there's an unspoken rule that once you enter college, the magic of Halloween fades. You start to wonder if that's true—if the excitement you felt as a kid has worn off. The pumpkin-shaped buckets and DIY costumes are replaced with curated group themes and tacky special effects. Ask almost anyone, and they'll say that college Halloween is just an excuse to party: recycled outfits, crowded basements, and blurry photos captioned "boo."

And, sure, the party scene definitely exists. Group chats overflow with messages about who is getting ready where, which night will be "the big one," and what everyone's dressing up as. It's the kind of routine everyone talks about: scrolling through Amazon for a last-minute costume, chatting with familiar faces in the Yard at midnight, and heading to Lamont the next morning pretending you don't remember what happened last night.

But somewhere in the midst of all that chaos, there's a quieter kind of Halloween, one that rarely makes it to Instagram stories. It may be less about parties and more about simplicity, lingering in the background.

You see it in students gathered around a table outside the Science Center, arguing over which design is the most creative. Not long after, it's roommates taking the commuter rail to Salem just to feel festive among tourists wearing crooked witch hats. And later still, it's snapping photos with the ghost decorations in Annenberg. College may change Halloween, but it doesn't kill the excitement of it. Even small things like that are reminders of how the holiday slips back into our lives each year.

There's something strangely refreshing about how Halloween sneaks up every year. On a campus where cloudy weather and midterms can weigh everyone

down, the holiday seems to bring people together. No one's too busy to admire the scary spider in someone's dorm window or compliment a professor's spooky t-shirt. Those little exchanges add up.

In a place that often feels divided by p-sets, packed club schedules, and post-graduate career ambitions, small shared traditions like wearing matching costumes with your entire friend group can help students slow down from the constant pressure to be productive. These traditions remind students that it's okay to have fun for no reason, and that connection doesn't always have to come from pre-professional organizations and study breaks.



Maybe growing up doesn't make Halloween any less magical, you just celebrate it differently. As kids, it was about scoring a king-sized candy bar or watching "The Nightmare Before Christmas" in class. In college, it's about finding small ways to make the ordinary—the walk back from section or the rush to grab dinner before the dining hall closes—feel special. It's less about haunted houses or jump scares and more about the little things, laughing over matching Amazon wings or how much pumpkin-shaped Reese's everyone's consumed by Halloween weekend.

Here at Harvard, Halloween even has its own traditions. In dorms and Houses across campus, students share dorm "trick-or-treat" routes and ways to make your dorm spooky. Students this year can trick-or-treat Dean of Students Thomas Dunne's house on Halloween night. Harvard University's "In Focus" page reminds us of the "ghosts in Massachusetts Hall and the basement of Memorial Hall. And in previous years, the College Events Board has hosted Halloween-themed events

with a photo tent, costume competition, and pumpkin-carving competition.

What ties Halloween weekend all together isn't the costume or the parties. Instead, it's that, for once, everyone's celebrating together. For a weekend, it doesn't matter if you're a first-year or a senior, comping a club or running one. Halloween becomes a rare campus moment when stress takes a back seat and everyone just has fun. That's why it matters so much. Because in a competitive environment like Harvard, it's easy to get caught up in the next deadline or achievement, forgetting how to enjoy without proving anything. It's a reminder that even here, where everyone's chasing different paths, we're still rooting for each other.

That's why Halloween still feels special in college. It may not be the same night of pillowcases and porch lights, but it's still what we make of it. We get to choose how we celebrate. Some say college Halloween can feel performative, a weekend of costumes and photos rather than anything meaningful. But that misses the point. Sure, it's different from what it used to be—but different doesn't mean worse. In a way, it's even more real now, because what makes it special isn't solely the candy or costumes, but the people finding joy in the midst of the chaos of everyday life.

This weekend, when campus fills with costumes, spooky decor hanging from dorm windows, and crowds heading to a dorm pregame, remember: Halloween doesn't lose its magic when you grow up, it just finds new ways to bring people together. You see it in the music coming from open windows, the blur of people hopping between parties, and the walk back with friends at 2 a.m. when no one can feel their fingers, laughing about nothing and everything all at once. It's simpler now, but it still feels good.

HAILEY KIM '29 (HAILEYKIM@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) LOVES CANDY CORN.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WALLACE SELPH '29 AND SASHA CAVELL '29



trick or treat!



JOHN
HARVARD

GRADE
INFLATION

ncl

Harvard's Haunted House

Harvard narratives that haunt us in the haunted house we call college.

BY ABBY LI '29

At Harvard, you don't need ghosts to make the place feel haunted—stress is enough to fill the halls with the unease of ambition that never sleeps. It's hiding within busy comp schedules and crowded day-to-day schedules, breathing through the walls of dorms that never quite feel “homey” enough, and slipping into the quiet. It's a kind of unease that doesn't appear terrifying. The pressure Harvard students feel has a low and steady hum, a reminder that behind the put-together look of students at the College, the real haunting is made of ambition, pressure, and an expectation to thrive.

For first-year college students, September and October are marked not just by new classes and the enduring freshman flu that arrives by week two of school, but by the emergence of a newfound feeling of competition. It starts innocently enough: visit the club fair, attend a few comp meetings, send in a few applications. But soon, the whisper begins: *You're not doing enough*. The thought lingers between p-sets and Brain Break, whispering louder each time you take a moment to rest. Someone out there, you're sure, is comping three more clubs, joining five different publications, or launching a startup or two before breakfast.

Comps start to feel less like a way to join extracurriculars and more like a campus-wide ritual sacrifice. A typical afternoon schedule for an ambitious first-year may include a Crim Biz mixer, CBE social, and an IOP interview, all within two hours. As they make their way to Lamont to complete tasks or fill out countless applications, the library's fluorescent lights illuminate their anxiety and enthusiasm, adding events to their color-coded GCals like they're warding off bad spirits.

From the comp culture brings rise to certain absurd hierarchies. There are a few club names we all know, and being closely

associated with them is its own level of honor and prestige, such as finance and consulting groups. The ambition and success of these clubs are not to be undermined, but at a certain point, the honor of them becomes their own ghost, haunting you to “be better.” In Harvard's great haunted house, the scariest thing might just be the silence that creeps in when the rush of the day finally stops. Is imposter syndrome a monster you can ever outrun?

Not all Harvard horror stories unfold in lecture halls or on spreadsheets. They don't *only* live in club applications and resume lines. Some live closer—in the spaces we return to every night. At Harvard, the haunted house isn't just a metaphor. Sometimes, it's your actual dorm room. Freshmen are thrown together with strangers: different sleep schedules, hygiene habits, and definitions of “clean.” Yes, it's part of the college experience to coexist, but sometimes, living feels like survival.

“Coexistence,” you're told, means “you don't have to be *best* friends with your roommates, you just have to learn to *coexist* with them.” But no one really teaches you how to coexist. It might mean learning to breathe through someone else's mess or pretending you don't hear the door repeatedly slamming open and shut. Coexistence is a compromise, but sometimes it becomes a surrender in the haunted house you live in.

Maybe the real terror all along is the mountain of trash growing beneath your roommate's desk, now sentient. Or, the discovery that your family heirloom necklace has migrated into someone else's drawer. Unlocking your dorm after three back-to-back classes, being hit by a wave of mold, stale air, and seeing the flickering and buzzing of harsh lighting: *Welcome home*. The room feels heavy due to the uncanny quiet before confrontation, but only if you work up the courage.

This haunted house is a shared space. Worse still: the roommate who's not just disorganized, but self-appointed *in charge*. I've heard stories, friends with “dorm moms” who enforce bedtimes and deliver lectures on alcohol consumption. In every haunted house, someone sets the rules. In this one, they live a few feet away, are your age, and share the same sickly glow of the ceiling light.

These small everyday horrors build quietly, like creaks in the floorboards. At one point, the pressure doesn't stay quiet. It breaks through the surface, it's sudden and impossible to ignore. Last weekend, someone hurled a brick through a window and down a hallway in the freshman dorm Canaday Hall B. The

incident drew a police response and a wave of uneasy chatter across campus. A flying brick is big news. Just another story with too many unexplained parts, it's one of Harvard's specialties. Although Canaday has never lacked horror stories, between its carpeted floors and rat problem, the dorm has added another misadventure to its legend.

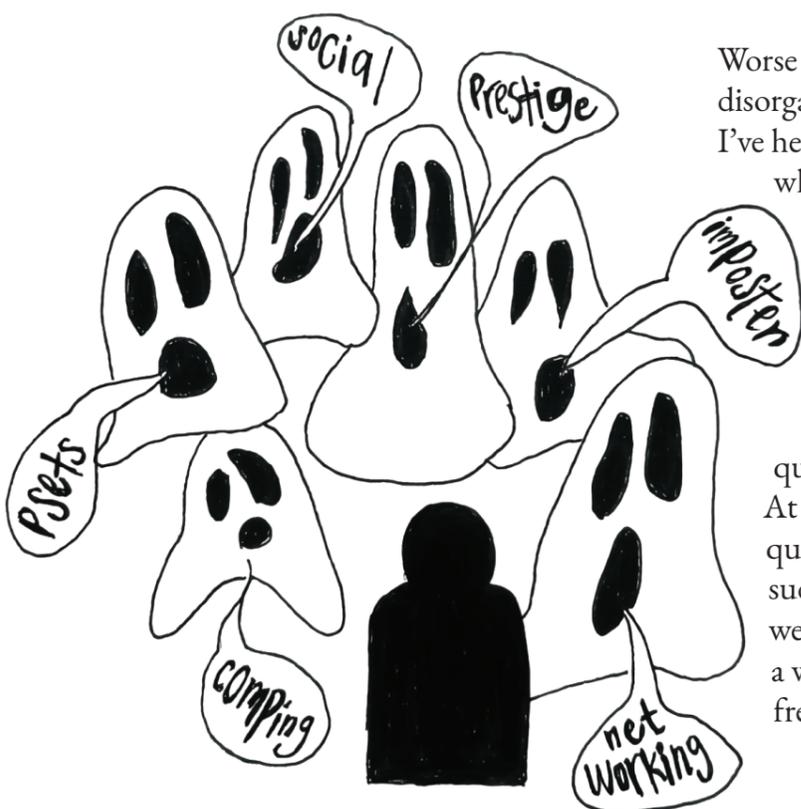
Canaday has always had its own series of unfortunate events and urban legends, just as every other freshman dorm does. The dorm's latest is just one manifestation of the madness beneath the surface of the student housing complex. Perhaps this utter madness is a symbol of pressure breaking through the glossy Harvard image. Just in time for the end of October, Harvard has written yet another chapter in its ever-growing anthology of campus horror. Maybe it's about the pressure simmering underneath everything, the competition, the whispered reminders that everyone's doing more. The roommate tension that builds and builds until even silence feels loud.

But what makes it even scarier isn't just the power dynamic—it's what it reveals. Harvard's haunted house isn't just haunted by creaky floors or flickering lights and scary roommates. It's haunted by ambition—behind the glossy facade, pressure, competitions, and the expectations we bring in with our suitcase, mishaps in the haunted house may be inevitable.

Forget the ghost stories. The real horror is already home.

ABBY LI '29 (ABBYLI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS EXCITED FOR HER FIRST HALLOWEEN IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

GRAPHIC BY MIA STEWART '29



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ARTS

Harvard's "The Addams Family Musical" Delivered a Fun, Heartwarming, and Delightfully Weird Experience

The spooky musical held residency in the Agassiz Theatre from Oct. 22 -26.

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26

On the final official day of 2025 Family Weekend, Harvard community members of all ages made their way to the Agassiz Theatre to watch the last performance of "The Addams Family Musical," which came to campus just in time for Halloween. Presented by the Office for the Arts, the Harvard rendition of the classic story, first imagined by cartoonist Charles Addams in *The New Yorker Magazine* in 1938, was directed by Riley Jackson '27 and Mia Schenenga '27, music directed by Leyna Blume '27 and Sebastian Lennox '27, and choreographed by Paola Lee-Vega '26.

"The directors are super cool and a constant positive presence," violinist Feodora Douplitzky-Lunati '28 said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. "The directors were incredibly organized and facilitated a lot of rehearsals and even offered time outside of the standard conventional rehearsal time to work on stuff together," added Soldier Ancestor Matteo Markel '28.

The Addams family is an eccentric, unorthodox, black-donning clan that prides itself on traditions, trust, and honoring their ancestors. Addams's cartoons have since been adapted into live-action television shows, films, a Netflix spin-off, an animated series, and a Broadway musical written by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, with music and lyrics by Andrew Lippa.

With little understanding of the musical adaptation or story itself (only more familiarity with Jenna Ortega's "Wednesday"), I was looking forward to seeing Harvard's take on this classic. My expectations were exceeded, and the two hours and 45 minutes that followed were funny, emotional, and simply great theater.

The musical centers on the unlikely romance between Wednesday Addams (Lexi Sexton '29) and Lucas Beineke (Brady Rafferty '27). Wednesday's dark sarcasm contrasts sharply with Lucas's cheerful optimism, yet their chemistry shines. Sexton and Rafferty make the audience root for their relationship despite their families' disapproval, their quirky and awkward connection tested as the story unfolds.

Wednesday prepares her family to host Lucas and his parents—Alice (Chelsea Bohn-Pozniak '27) and Mal (Adam Stone '29)—for dinner. Her one request is for her family to be on their best behavior to make a good impression ("One Normal Night"). Wednesday tells her father Gomez (Arthur Câmara '28) that the two are engaged, but requests he keep it a secret from her mother Morticia (Andreea Haidau '26), which Gomez finds an impossible task ("Two Things"). The night is going well until Morticia requests they play a game called "Full Disclosure," a family tradition in which they drink out of a special chalice and tell a secret to the group. Gomez attempts to hide his knowledge of the engagement, which Morticia quickly sniffs out.

Meanwhile, protective of his older sister and worried she will begin to ignore him, Pugsley (Nell Ranalli '29) plots to spike Wednesday's chalice with a secret serum. The concoction would make her act erratically, which Pugsley hoped would force Lucas to fall out of love with his sister ("What If"). Pugsley steals the serum from Grandma Adams (Frances Yee '28)—who actually may not be anyone's

grandmother, an especially funny twist revealed toward the end of the show—and sneakily adds it to the chalice. Chaos breaks loose when the spiked drink accidentally ends up being taken by Alice instead, who subsequently performs a heart-wrenching number about the frustration and disillusionment she has felt with her marriage and the discontent in her own life ("Waiting").

Bohn-Pozniak's performance is desperate and captivating. Her angst and longing for excitement were palpable and moving, especially when contrasted with the strong independence of Morticia. The two at first glance were entirely different, yet as the plot developed, flaws and cracks in both marriages were revealed and related ("Secrets.") Haidau was intriguing, seductive, and commanded the stage with her presence. It was truly remarkable to watch her become Morticia, with her line delivery and interactions with the cast both charming and frightening.

"Morticia's external personality is about as polar opposite from my own as you can get, which is exactly why it was so much fun to embody. One of my friends told me it took them a solid 15 minutes to recognize me onstage. That was the best compliment," Haidau said in an interview with the *Independent*.

"Though her character risks appearing outwardly cold or apathetic, fundamentally Morticia's story is that of a woman hurt by and concerned for her family. All of her actions come from a place of love, or concern, or betrayal, or her questioning her own values. I wanted to allow that warmth and feeling to be tangible alongside the untouchable poise she's most recognizable for," she continued.

After Wednesday and Lucas announce their engagement, Gomez's secret is exposed. Morticia and Mal disapprove due to the couple's youth, while Alice is supportive. Lucas ends things with Wednesday, believing their families' dysfunction makes their relationship impossible. Morticia vows to leave Gomez for lying, but he wins her forgiveness ("Not Today," "Live Before We Die," "Tango de Amor"). Finally, Mal, Alice, Wednesday, and Lucas simultaneously rekindle their relationship in a vulnerable number about trust and acceptance ("Crazier Than You").

The show concludes with the marriage of Wednesday and Lucas, while Uncle Fester (Chloe Chao '27) departs to be with his love, the moon. A true standout, Chao anchored the musical with humorous breaks and served as a leader of the talented ensemble of various ancestors, who supported the main cast in dance, song, and technical transitions.

Sexton and Câmara delivered incredible and fun performances. Through blank stares and impassioned arguments with her family and Lucas, Sexton conveyed the complications and qualms of being a teenage girl in love with understanding and authenticity. Câmara was hilarious and complex, and I cheered on Gomez no matter what mistakes he got himself into. It was heartwarming to watch him navigate his relationship with his daughter as she stepped into the next chapter of her life

("Wednesday's Growing Up"), and the conflicting emotions this brought him ("Happy/Sad").

"The Addams Family Musical" cast perfectly encapsulated the quirkiness of the show's characters and brought the story's themes of change, acceptance, family, and love to life. The incredible musical direction gave guidance and passion through each of the songs. Fun and interactive choreography allowed the cast to truly fill the stage with energy and emotion. The costuming and props brought life to the characters and complemented their personalities and eccentricity, accompanied by timely and creative lighting, stage, and technical elements.

"It was a blessing and a privilege to have been a part of this project, and it was a gift to work with the dozens of unimaginably talented people who made The Addams Family a reality," Câmara told the *Independent*. "The unique thing about the show is that it's pure fun: that meant everyone involved in the production had to have fun, both on and off stage. That brought us together in a really special way, and I cannot overstate what this community means to me."

"The Addams Family has been the most collaboratively creative show I've been a part of. So many of the choices we made, be it the comedic timing within a scene or choreography tricks or fun effects, were the result of rehearsals spent experimenting with everybody's ideas," Haidau added. "Theatre requires trust: in each other as a cast and a team, in the audience and their willingness to laugh, in ourselves. We really trusted each other in The Addams Family."

As the show concluded, it was clear to me not only the hard work and dedication the cast poured into the show, but the bond and community they built with one another, evident in the group hugs and cast-wide acknowledgments that filled the stage. Maybe they weren't totally acting; the authenticity and bond of the Addams family and their companions lingered long after the curtain closed. And before it did, I, alongside the rest of the audience, gave the cast a standing ovation—one very well-deserved.



LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 (LAYLACHAARAOUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26

More Than Just Sunday Scaries

A guide for what to watch if horror movies keep you awake for days at a time.

BY EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29

For years, my dad and I have watched so many horror movies on Halloween that I could hardly sleep without fearing that Freddy Krueger would chase after me in my dreams. However, as the tradition continued, I became desensitized—horror movies no longer scared me. Because of this, I'm always taken aback by the "I can't watch horror movies, they're too scary" excuse, which is, frankly, abused by the average movie enjoyer.

Of course, I don't blame anyone for being afraid while watching horror—that *is* the point of the genre. But, I do lament the fact that so many people are missing out on a Halloween season staple. Then, I stumbled across a subgenre that sounded so absurd that even the concept was hilarious: horror comedy.

What could be funny about a horror movie? Turns out, the subgenre is quite flexible, taking classic horror tropes, such as the "final girl" ("Halloween") or the psychotic hillbillies ("Texas Chainsaw Massacre"), and turning them on their heads. It also involves placing characters into classic horror scenarios so exaggerated that the situation becomes satirical instead of "scary" ("Sharknado"). For scaredy cats who want to get into the Halloween mood without having to constantly look over their shoulders, this genre is for you.

"Tucker & Dale vs. Evil"

A personal favorite, this movie follows two kindhearted, yet socially awkward, hillbillies, Tucker and Dale, who just bought a lakeside cabin in the woods. On the way to their "vacation home," the duo encounters a group of college students who are frightened by their "threatening" demeanors. (The pitchfork that Tucker was holding probably didn't help, either.) When the college students encounter Tucker and Dale at the lake again, they believe the duo is planning to kill them—the situation only escalates from there. Tucker and Dale's obliviousness, combined with the college kids' irrational fears, make for an entertaining film that will leave you guilty for laughing despite the gore.

"Attack of the Killer Tomatoes"

Yes, you read that right. "Attack of the Killer Tomatoes" is a 1978 parody film that follows America's scramble to prevent attacks by large, sentient tomatoes. Riddled with references, satire and dated special effects, the movie plays on the films "Jaws" and "The Birds." If you're looking for humans undercover as tomatoes in an attempt at espionage, the hit song "Puberty Love," and a heartwarming love story all in one, this is definitely for you.

"Scary Movie"

"Scary Movie" and its sequels are perhaps the most well-known horror comedies. A clear spinoff of the movies "Scream" and "I Know What You Did Last Summer," this film follows a group of teenagers being stalked by a serial killer—but the teens aren't entirely innocent either. While this sounds like a setup for a classic horror film, the character's absurdity is what makes this a horror comedy. Bumbling figures as "Doofy Gilmore" and "Cindy Campbell" bring a different take on stereotypical horror scenarios that will make you look at all horror movies in a comedic light.

"Scream"

I'm aware I just mentioned that "Scary Movie" spoofed "Scream," but this film still has many satire elements that let us classify it as a horror comedy. As one of the scarier movies on the list, maybe wait until you can stomach a jumpscare or two. Still, "Scream" is still not a conventional horror movie. The film is entirely self-aware, even going so far as to list the "rules" to survive a horror movie (i.e., never say, "I'll be right back"—you aren't coming back). Such subtle dramatic irony is present throughout the film, making it pioneering in its genre.

"Zombieland"

This take on a classic zombie film sees a group of eclectic apocalypse survivors who go by the names of the cities they're from, traveling across the country to find a sanctuary free from the zombification virus. Similarly to "Scream," there are certain rules the protagonist, Columbus, believes he has to follow to survive, though he learns to let go of his rigidity with the help of his companions. While somewhat less satirical, some elements are extremely humorous (for example, rough-and-tumble "manly man" Tallahassee spends a majority of the film searching for a Twinkie), and others pull at your heartstrings, making for a more emotional watch.

"Willy's Wonderland"

"Willy's Wonderland" was everything that I wanted from the 2023 "Five Nights at Freddy's" movie—and more. This 2021 film depicts Nicolas Cage as a completely silent protagonist only listed as "the janitor." Cage must survive the night in the titular abandoned family entertainment center, where the animatronic mascots come to life and attempt to kill him. The contrast between Cage's intense surroundings and his unperturbed character makes the film very entertaining, especially when Cage takes an hour break from his job to drink soda and play pinball (even leaving mid-fight with a murderous animatronic—when you're off the clock, you're off the clock).

"Bubba Ho-Tep"

Have you ever wanted to watch a movie where an elderly Elvis Presley and African American John F. Kennedy '40 fight an ancient mummy in a nursing home? If so, this is for you! Elvis, played by Bruce Campbell, claims that he was sick of all the fame and switched places with an Elvis impersonator, who died in 1977. JFK, played by Ossie Davis, claims he survived the 1963 assassination, but, afterward, his skin was dyed brown, and he was abandoned in a nursing home by Lyndon B. Johnson, who wanted the presidency. While both backstories are already ludicrous, the introduction of the cowboy mummy "Bubba Ho-Tep," who feeds on the souls of the elderly, adds another layer of madness to the film.

The "Evil Dead" Franchise

The original "Evil Dead" trilogy sees the protagonist Ashley "Ash" Williams fighting demonic spirits, called "Deadites," unleashed by the ancient book, the "Necronomicon Ex-Mortis." While the first movie is action-based, the next two lean into the comedic aspects of the Deadites. Fun fact: Jason, the main killer in the "Friday the 13th" franchise, is hinted to be a Deadite in the 1993 film "Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday," and there is

a crossover comic called "Freddy vs. Jason vs. Ash" that confirms they exist in the same universe! And, check out the TV series "Ash vs Evil Dead" if you didn't get enough of Ash dismembering Deadites in the first three movies.

"Panman"

If anyone else has heard of this movie (besides those I've already mentioned it to), I would be extraordinarily surprised. This underground indie film that introduced me to the "horror comedy" genre follows a serial killer who sports a pot on his head—though they couldn't call him Potman for obvious reasons—and kills people with a frying pan. While embarking on his murderous rampage against a specific culinary class, Panman meets a girl, falls in love, and avoids eating pesto along the way. Though this may seem utterly absurd and unrelated, I can't say more for fear of spoilers. I wholeheartedly believe that "Panman" deserves to be among the famed cult classics such as "Donnie Darko" and "Galaxy Quest."

There are scores of bad horror movies coming out that use famous children's cartoon characters, such as "Popeye the Slayer Man" and "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey," since the copyrights have expired and the original characters are now public domain.

Out of fear I've rambled on for far too long about this kitschy genre, this listicle must come to an end. Yet I could recommend so many more films. If you don't want to watch any of the ridiculous movies I've listed, but still want to tackle horror, I'll leave you with some advice: imagine what horror movies look like without the special effects. When you watch them through the correct lens, any horror movie can be a comedy.

EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29 (EDENBRIDGEHAYES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS ONE OF 12 FANS OF "PANMAN," AND THE OTHER 11 ARE PEOPLE THAT SHE'S FORCED TO WATCH IT.

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27



Out of Sync

A reflection on how every place keeps its own time.

BY KAYLA LE '28

You look older.” Hearing those words from my 45-year-old English teacher when I was a sophomore in high school felt particularly insulting. I was torn between considering it a sentimental comment or if Ms. Sworn was trying to pick a fight. This moment—though small—was one of the first times I became hyperaware of how I was changing. She reminded me that time moves even when I’m not paying attention.

I had always believed in growing pains. I thought that growth was something that you felt, that you would one day wake up seeing the world an inch higher or suddenly understand what empathy is (granted, some people will never quite get there, no matter how old they are). Ms. Sworn made me realize how quiet the process of change can be, how, sometimes, you only recognize it when someone else points it out first.

That feeling has only gotten stronger as I move between places more often. Each place runs on its own clock, leaving me slightly out of sync with every displacement.

Ms. Sworn’s words stick in my mind most when I come back home from college. My room there has an unsettling stillness, like the air has been holding its breath until I walk in to stir it. Every time I enter, I go through the same ritual: I turn the fan on and wait a minute for the air to breathe life back into the room before stepping inside. My mom even told me that she keeps the light on in my room to make it feel less empty.

The same bright pink candle sits on the table, half-burned, waiting for me to release the second half of Twisted Peppermint aroma into the room. The whiteboard above my desk still says:

“TO DO:
Review AP Human Geo Vocab”
and underneath it the mantra “Embrace new happies! :)” in faded expo marker.

The room remembers me younger than I am.

When I visit Vietnam every few years, my 4-year-old nephew Binh greets

me taller and armed with a new English word I didn’t teach him. He’s even gained the sentience to insult me. To see in action the paradox of someone I thought would stay small forever grow faster than I can keep up is jarring. He measures his height against mine, the same way I measure time against my own room at home. But it’s strange that, for him, I am the unmoving benchmark.

Time keeps shifting roles: who’s still, who’s moving, and who’s waiting.

Over the summer, my parents and I hiked up Tianman Mountain. At the final stretch leading up to the Heaven’s Gate arch, they told me to continue without them because the incline was too steep. I didn’t think too much about it as I slowly ascended the stone steps towards the bright, blue sky. But when I finally turned back to look at the view from above, I saw their small figures sitting together on a bench, looking up at me from 999 steps down.

For as long as I can remember, I’ve always felt like growing up meant trying to catch up to my parents. But from 999 steps up, time felt like it shifted.

Suddenly, I was the one waiting for them.

For a moment, we were living on different clocks, the same day at different paces.

Time isn’t something that happens to you, but something that unfolds between people. I only notice it through the distance it spans and the widening gap from one life to another. I don’t move forward so much as I circle back. Growing up

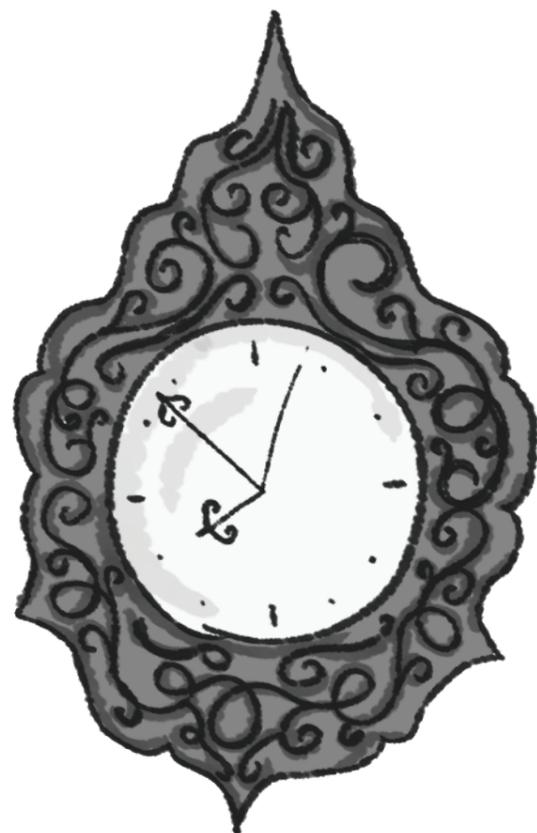
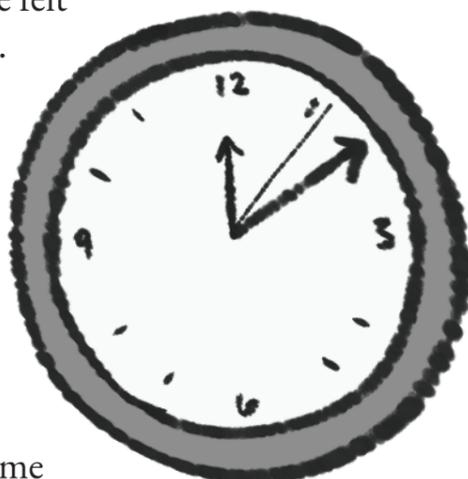
is paradoxical. I’ve started to realize that I’ve only ever understood time through comparison, measuring myself against what has stayed the same. But lately, I’ve started to see how the things I once counted on to stay still are quietly moving, too.

Everyone moves at a different speed. Binh racing ahead, my parents lingering behind, and me somewhere in between. Still, I find a strange comfort in that—a quiet reassurance that even if we’re not moving at the same pace, we’re all moving together.

Now Ms. Sworn’s words, “You look older,” strike a different chord with me. I no longer hear them as proof that I changed, but as recognition that our clocks started to tick at different speeds.

KAYLA LE '28 (KAYLALE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS BOTH DESPERATELY TRYING TO CATCH UP AND ANXIOUSLY WAITING.

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28



Sugary Salvation: A Review of the Candies that Define Halloween

A qualitative, but objective, review of the most iconic Halloween candy.

BY ZAID AL-ISSISS '28

It's Halloween, and you're on your way home after a laborious night of trick-or-treating. Your costume is getting itchy, and your patience is running thin after being asked for the fourth time why a "grown-ass man," such as yourself, looks like a "walking stop sign" in your rendition of the Red Line. Right now, climbing the stairs to your room seems an impossible feat. The only thing keeping you going is the promise of the imminent sugary salvation you've fought tooth and nail for all night, and you're not going to let your night be ruined by a poor selection of Halloween candy.

You plunge your hand into your treasure trove and your fingers curl around the first thing they find: the distinct yellow box of Sour Patch Kids Zombies, with purple and orange flavors to match the Halloween spirit. You rip into the box and bite the head off of a purple zombie; tongue swirling and lips puckering as you lick off every bit of the wonderfully sour coating. As you chew through the zombie, the sweet grape flavor begins to kick in, albeit a little too strongly for your liking. You prefer the acidity of the outer coating but gladly welcome the sugary insides in this time of despair; all that matters is activating the receptors to trigger a flood of dopamine through your body. Overall, not a terrible outcome for your first pick. You can do better, but it's a promising start.

Plastic rustles as you select your next choice of the night. Your eyes glance at the purple packaging, and you look away in denial. "Surely those aren't what I think they are," you wonder, fully knowing that they are, in fact, what you think they are: a bag of Ghost Peeps. You feel obliged to at least try one, so you pry the gooey ghosts apart from each other and wince as you place one into your mouth. As you work your way through the tough yet chewy exterior, bits of the Peeps get stuck in your teeth. The flavor—if it can even be called that—is crude and unforgiving. Spitting out the rest of the Peep, you curse at *Just Born, Inc.* for creating such awful candy, and you never look back.

After a glass of water to cleanse your mouth from those cursed Peeps, your impatience gives in, and you look into the bag. You scrounge around for the Reese's you accumulated throughout the night, a choice you know won't disappoint. It is an uncharacteristically warm October night, so the Reese's have melted slightly in the bag.

You don't care. You rip one open and push the solid pieces into your mouth, cleaning up the melted chocolate stuck on the wrapper with your tongue and licking every last bit off your fingers. It's everything you wanted and more. You appreciate that the bats—though slightly deformed—are thematically on-point, though not too lifelike (because who wants to eat bats, that's so 2020). More importantly, you love the interplay between the sweet chocolatey outer layer and the nutty inner fillings, which is sweet but not mind-numbingly so. Though it took a couple of attempts to get here, you're glad to finally enjoy your favorite.

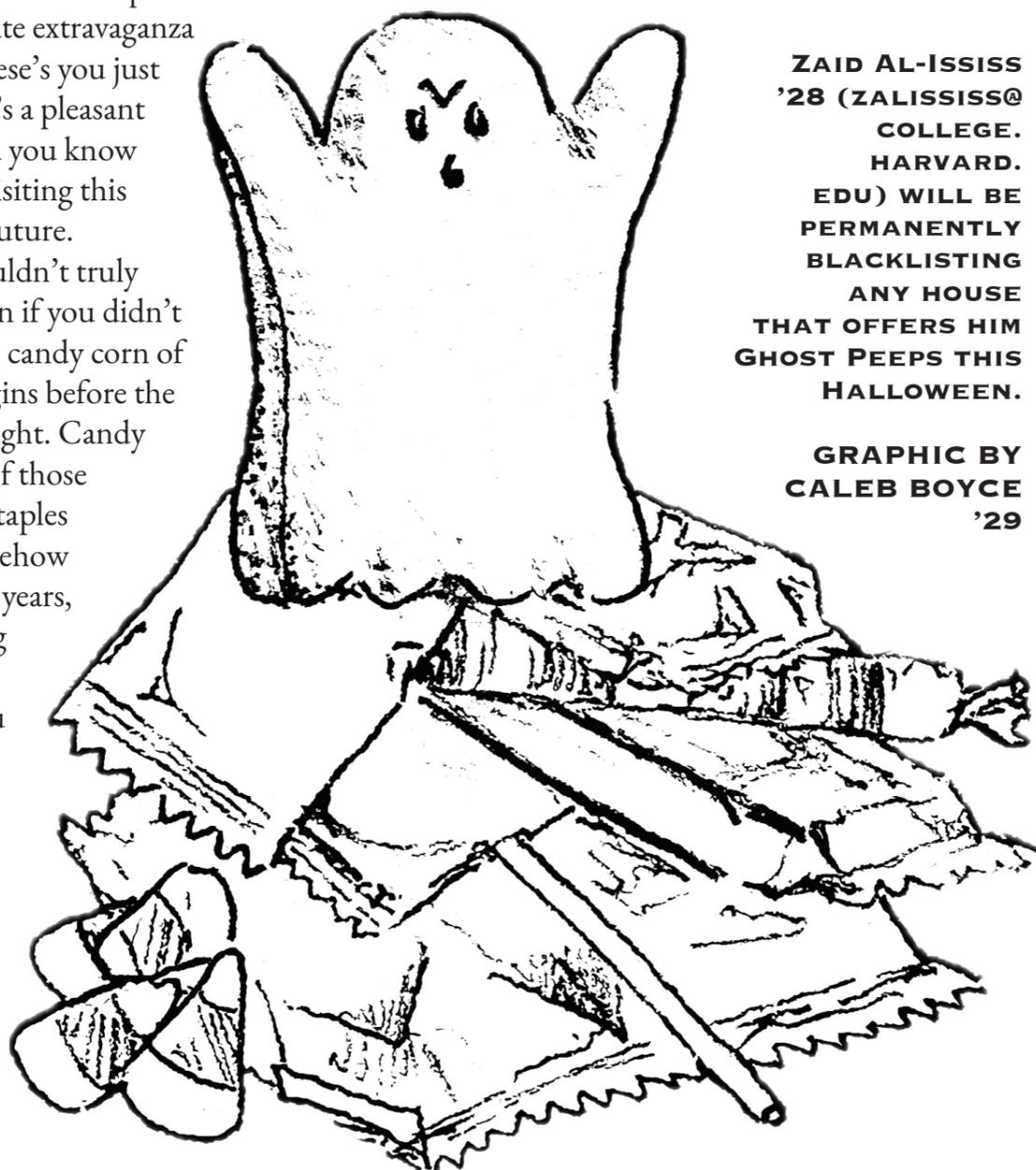
After the rush from having a Reese's (more like two or three of them) subsides, you're ready to jump back into the bag. This time, you pull out a White Chocolate Kit Kat, a flavor you are not well acquainted with but are willing to give a chance. You separate the two halves and bite into the first one with a satisfying crunch. You aren't the biggest fan of white chocolate: after eating an entire bag of white chocolate in one sitting a few Halloweens ago, the subsequent dizziness and stomach pain motivated you to abstain entirely. Until now. The combination of white chocolate and crunchy wafer is unique and exciting. You don't mind the white chocolate, and in fact, like the balance it provides after the milk chocolate extravaganza from the Reese's you just devoured. It's a pleasant surprise, and you know you'll be revisiting this treat in the future.

It wouldn't truly be Halloween if you didn't sample some candy corn of dubious origins before the end of the night. Candy corn is one of those Halloween staples that has somehow persisted for years, despite being seemingly inedible. You scoop up a handful that fell to the bottom of the bag, trying to be optimistic and open-

minded about the mysterious candy. You start munching on a few of them, feeling the waxy outer layer peel away to reveal a granular inside. The candy corn tastes stale and off-putting, forcing you to chew faster to get them down. There are no two ways about it: candy corn is not fit for human consumption. Yet, in comparison to the aforementioned Ghost Peeps, they seem like divine ambrosia. How ridiculous is that?!

By this point, your head is throbbing and you feel dizzy, perhaps due to recalling the horrific Ghost Peeps, or more likely the consequences of eating a full bag of Halloween candy in one sitting. Either way, you've had enough candy to last a whole year, but that's what makes Halloween so special.

There is no other time of the year when gorging on heaps of candy that have been awarded to you strictly based on your appearance is socially acceptable, let alone so vigorously encouraged. Sure, by the end of the night you'll be left feeling sick and wanting to never look at a piece of candy again—except maybe a Reese's, you can never have enough of those. Yet, you consistently celebrate Halloween because digging through a bag of candy looking for your favorites offers a momentary feeling of liberation, no matter how ridiculous you'll feel afterward.



ZAID AL-ISSISS '28 (ZALISSISS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL BE PERMANENTLY BLACKLISTING ANY HOUSE THAT OFFERS HIM GHOST PEEPS THIS HALLOWEEN.

GRAPHIC BY CALEB BOYCE '29

A Day in Salem

Exploring the history and charm of one of Massachusetts's most famous towns.

BY OLIVIA LUNSETH '28

Few places capture the spirit of Halloween quite like Salem, Massachusetts. Just 16 miles north of Boston, this historic seaside city draws crowds for its haunted history, witchy charm, and autumn atmosphere. Earlier this October, my friends and I decided to make the trip ourselves—a quick getaway from campus to explore the cobblestone streets and see if Salem lived up to its reputation.

The town, with its abundance of ghost tours and pumpkin-lined streets, has a haunted energy that comes from the darker history that gave the city its fame. Starting in 1692, hysteria swept through the Puritan communities of Salem Village (present-day Danvers) after several young girls claimed to be bewitched. The chaos spread to Salem Town (present-day Salem), where the legal proceedings—the Salem Witch Trials—took place. Bridget Bishop, the first person convicted, is believed to have been hanged on Gallows Hill, which now stands as a museum and theatre.

Alongside Gallows Hill, the Witch House also serves as a reminder of what happened in 1692. As one of Salem's most famous attractions, the house is the only remaining structure directly tied to the trials. Once home to Judge Jonathan Corwin, who presided over the trials, the house offers visitors a rare glimpse into 17th-century Salem. While I only stopped by at the end of my Salem visit to admire the exterior, tours of the interior are also available for \$15. Tickets become available daily at 8 a.m., and during busier times of the year, they can sell out quickly, so it's wise to plan ahead.

In fact, having a plan is helpful for most activities in Salem. A lot of the tours and museums require tickets, and some sell out early, so plan ahead. The town plays into this history, with witch-themed activities and shops. The most popular tours of Salem are the History and Hauntings of Salem Guided Walking Tour, Salem's Best Ghost Tour, and the Bewitched Walking Tour of Salem. These tours are a great way to learn about Salem's history, especially in places that don't have plaques or clear historical markers. If you'd rather save some money but still want to see as much of the town as possible, Bluebikes are a convenient and affordable option, available for \$2.95 per 30 minutes or \$10 for 24 hour access.

My friends and I, however, decided to explore Salem on our own instead of joining any of the guided tours. We spent the afternoon strolling

along Essex Street, the heart of downtown Salem. The pedestrian mall is lined with witch-themed shops, such as The Coven's Cottage, countless bookstores, and souvenir stands that cater to both history buffs and Halloween enthusiasts. Despite the slight drizzle, the street was packed with visitors browsing crystal displays, handmade candles, and racks of costumes.

One of our favorite stops was ASCEND, a crystal and jewelry shop that instantly caught our attention. Even though I'm not particularly into crystals, I ended up buying a gold bracelet with two red stones and I've worn it almost every day since. Every shelf in the store is filled with gems, stones, and creative pieces of jewelry that add to the mystical appeal. Toward the back, there's a small section for psychic appointments and tarot card readings. If you're hoping to get a reading, book ahead—walk-ins often face long waits, especially in October.

We then stopped by Kakawa Chocolate House for hot chocolate and truffles, a perfect warm-up after walking in the rain. For coffee, Odd Meter Coffee Co. was one of our first stops; I ordered the Witch's Wand latte, which felt appropriately on theme for the day. Harry Potter fans should also visit Wynott's Wands, a whimsical shop filled with handcrafted wands and magical decor. If you're looking for a gift for someone who enjoys weaving, knitting, or any other fiber arts, Circle of Stitches is the place to go. Lined with fabrics, yarn, and handmade goods, it was an exciting stop for my roommate, who loves sewing.

If we'd had more time, The House of the Seven Gables would be our next stop. Built in 1668 by merchant and shipowner John Turner, the house was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2007, inspiring Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel of the same name, and offering an in-depth look at Salem's colonial past.

Before leaving, we took a walk down to Salem Harbor, which was absolutely worth it. Located on Massachusetts Bay, the harbor offers a stunning view of the ships and sea. Beyond its witch-trial legacy, Salem has deep maritime roots and is home to the Salem Maritime National Historic Site. The park is currently restoring the Friendship of Salem, a replica of an 18th-century merchant ship that once represented the city's global trading power.

Of course, before we could start exploring, we had to figure out the best way to get there, because like most Harvard students, none of us had a car. Luckily, getting to Salem without one is still

simple and affordable.

For Harvard students eager to escape campus and soak in the Halloween-like atmosphere, traveling to Salem is easiest through public transportation or car rental. My friends and I took the Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail when we visited Salem earlier this October, which cost \$10 roundtrip and left from North Station every half hour to hour. We took the Red Line from Harvard Square to Park Street and then the Green Line from Park Street to North Station. Roundtrip, it took us a little under an hour, but two of my blockmates managed to do it in just under 40 minutes, so it is possible to get lucky with the timing!

I recommend looking at the schedule for the commuter rail and planning out what time you want to be at each stop. Because there are often long waits between commuter rail trains, it is good to have a general idea of when the Newburyport/Rockport train will be arriving, otherwise you could be stuck at North Station for almost an hour.

While renting a Zipcar to drive is another option, keep in mind that parking is complicated and expensive in Salem around Halloween. It would take about an hour and 15 minutes by car, and there is also a ferry that runs from Boston to Salem for the price of \$53 round trip or \$33 one way, taking about 50 minutes.

For Harvard students looking for a quick, affordable fall getaway, Salem checks every box: it's close, walkable, and packed with history and charm. Whether you plan to take a guided ghost tour, wander through the witchy shops on Essex Street, or simply enjoy a cup of hot chocolate while people-watching downtown, Salem has something for everyone to enjoy during the spooky season.

Making the trip to Salem with my friends was a well-needed break from the Harvard bubble, and it reminded me how refreshing it can be to explore outside of Boston. So, if you can find the time, hop on the train to Salem with your friends and see for yourself why the fabled town is worth the trip.

OLIVIA LUNSETH '28
(OLIVIALUNSETH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR
THE *INDEPENDENT*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WALLACE SELPH '29 & SASHA CAVELL '29



SPORTS

Sports Spotlight: Vanessa Zhang

Zhang's journey to back-to-back medals in the final tournaments of the season.

BY JULIA BOUCHUT '29

C On Oct. 19, Vanessa Zhang '28 finished out the golf season, accomplishing an impressive feat: back-to-back first-place medals for the final two tournaments of the season. According to Harvard Athletics, Zhang is only the fifth female golfer in Harvard's history to have two consecutive wins. In both tournaments, Zhang was the only golfer to finish under par, scoring one under in the Quinnipiac Classic and six under in the Lady Blue Hen Invitational.

Typically, these two tournaments are the most intense of the season as they are back-to-back and usually fall during the peak of midterm season, Zhang explained in an interview with the *Independent*. This year, the golf team first left campus on Sunday, returning Tuesday, to then leave again from Thursday to Sunday. "We're literally only on campus for a day and a half," Zhang shared. "Everybody's starting to feel like everything's starting to catch up to them and school's getting harder."

Unlike in previous years, the Quinnipiac Classic was particularly intense since it took place during a nor'easter storm. The course was covered in puddles, and there was even a power outage the night before the tournament, Zhang said. "It was raining so hard that it was just super unclear whether we'd be able to play or not."

Still, the golfers completed nine holes

out of the 18 they were set to play on the first day, before they were told the conditions were unplayable. "It was probably the worst conditions I've played in."

The next day, the golfers played 27 holes, as opposed to the eighteen holes typically played on the last day of a tournament. In the end, the tournament participants were only able to play 36 out of the 54 holes that were planned for Quinnipiac.

However, Zhang persevered, remembering her team behind her, supporting her every step of the way. "Being super present and just remembering that everybody else is going through the same thing, so it was no excuse to play any worse than usual, was really helpful."

Quinnipiac was not the first time Zhang had competed in difficult weather, having played several tournaments, including the NCAA regionals last spring, in the rain. "Part of getting better at [playing in harsh weather] is just being in those situations," she shared. "Then you feel the wind on your skin, and you're like, 'Okay, I need to add this much club to adjust for the fact there's wind,' or 'I need to aim this much more left or this much more right because of the wind.'"

On the second day of Quinnipiac, Zhang checked the scores and noticed that she was ahead. She was confronted with the choice of

either playing more conservatively and aiming for greens or playing aggressively and aiming to hit as close as possible. She ultimately decided to play aggressively, reframing her lead as widening the gap rather than hoping the other players wouldn't catch up, she said. "I started playing like my usual self...and then as soon as I had that realization, I think I birdied three of my last five holes."

Luckily, this year Zhang had completed her midterms and was able to enter the final tournament of the season, the Lady Blue Hen Invitational, stress-free. However, during the practice round, she started feeling sick. "I thought I was on the cusp of getting sick, where I was like, if I drink enough water and sleep enough, then I'll be fine."

The next morning, she woke up ill. "I've literally never felt worse in my life," she shared. Still, knowing that this was the last tournament of the season, she pushed through and tried to do her best. "I went and shot I think my best one-round score of the season so far."

During both these tournaments, Zhang managed to stay focused despite the conditions she was playing in, asking herself what she needed to do and tuning out distractions. "The first thing I do is put on my glove, then I'm gonna dry my hand in my pocket, then I'm gonna leave my umbrella, and then set up," she said. "It was those incremental steps where I was really breaking things down and being super present that were super helpful."

Overall, Zhang has come a long way since starting her collegiate golf career at Harvard, honing essential skills, including time management and being a team player. Still, since arriving at the University, the people around her have marked one of the most significant transformations, she said. "Meeting all these new people, where everybody has something so special about them, it just makes you want to become a better version of yourself."

While the fall season is over, the team will compete again in the spring for another four tournaments. Between her growth this last year and her first place win during the last Ivy League Championship, Zhang will certainly be the one to watch.

JULIA BOUCHUT '29 (JULIA_BOUCHUT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ACCIDENTALLY ASKED ZHANG IF SHE HAD RECEIVED THE HIGHEST SCORE IN BOTH TOURNAMENTS.

GRAPHIC BY JUSTIN MA '29



Fantasy Roundup: Week 8

A recap of the notable games from the NFL this past week.

BY TYLER DANG '28

Another week closer to the Super Bowl and another week of games. In a league already plagued by injuries, Cam Skattebo joins the list after a nasty tackle left him with an ankle injury. Around the league, many teams are continuing their dominance as the Buccaneers and Baker Mayfield beat the Saints, Drake Maye and the Patriots overwhelmed the Browns, and Daniel Jones and the Colts won against the Titans. Meanwhile, teams like the Dolphins and Tua Tagovailoa or the Texans under C.J. Stroud proved that they still have some fight in them. Finally, the Jets have their first win, so all teams have at least one win! For full team rosters, see Week 0's issue.

First and Lowell (4-3) vs Bring it Home (4-3): 121.72-122.12

Top performers: Saquon Barkley (33.4) | James Cook III (33.6)
Underperformers: Dak Prescott (6.62) | Deebo Samuel

The Inn-Zone (3-4) vs The Ball Currier (3-4): 111.38-103.76

Top performers: Ladd McConkey (20.8) | Zay Flowers (14.1)
Underperformers: Steelers D/ST (-8.0) | Chuba Hubbard (9.4)

Pfirst Down (5-2) vs Kirkland Cousins (2-5): 178.22-126.98

Top performers: Breece Hall (32.86) | Travis Kelce (21.9)
Underperformers: Christian McCaffrey (9.8) | Stefon Diggs (10.4)

Standout Games:

Jets @ Bengals: 39-38

Immediately, the Bengals appeared poised for a strong offensive display, scoring on their first two possessions. While Justin Fields and the Jets were able to respond with a field goal, the Bengals refused to take their foot off the gas, scoring another touchdown. With five minutes remaining in the first half, the Bengals' defense began to show its weaknesses as two defenders missed a tackle and collided with each other, resulting in an extra five yards gained. The Jets would then score a passing touchdown shortly after. The Bengals' offense continued to look powerful as Chase Brown scored a touchdown.

Entering the fourth quarter, the Bengals led 31-16 on account of the Jets' awful rushing defense. However, the Jets showed that the Bengals couldn't handle the running game either after a rushing touchdown by Breece Hall, followed by a scrambling Justin Fields on the two-point conversion. The Bengals responded immediately with a second Brown touchdown, but the Jets refused to quit, scoring another touchdown and a two-point conversion to trail 32-38.

The Bengals would turn the ball over on downs on their final drive of the week. With two minutes remaining in the game, the Jets handed the ball to running back Breece Hall, who threw a four-yard lob for the game-winning touchdown.

Packers @ Steelers: 35-25

Coming off a devastating loss to the Bengals last week, Aaron Rodgers' first-ever game against Green Bay needed to go well to get back on track. However, Rodgers and the Steelers started slow, only able to put up field goals. The Packers were barely better with a singular touchdown in the first half and no field goals. Tight end Tucker Kraft played great, but the Packers just could not convert on third down. Finally, at the very end of the first half, Rogers connected with D.K. Metcalf for a touchdown to put the Steelers up 16-7.

In the second half, a huge 59-yard pass between Jordan Love and Kraft set the Packers up for their second touchdown of the night. The Packers would score another touchdown to take the lead and never let it go. A pair of field goals and a recovered fumble by the Packers ensured that a Steelers touchdown on their last drive was inconsequential. While Rodgers' return to Green Bay was disappointing, the blame cannot be put on the quarterback. The Steelers' defense let up 35 points, and their receiving corps leaves a lot to be desired.

Looking Ahead:

The Browns, Jets, Eagles, and Buccaneers will have their bye week. While these teams rest, fans can look out for the Chiefs-Bills game (KC -1.5) and the Cardinals-Cowboys matchup (DAL -2.5). Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs have had an awkward season, starting out slow but are beginning to pick up steam. With a win against Buffalo, the Chiefs can cement themselves as true contenders this season. On the flip side, the Bills started strong, but back-to-back losses against the Patriots and then the Falcons would cause their perceived strength to fall. Picking up this win will certainly put the Bills back on track for a Super Bowl appearance.

As for the other game, both the Cardinals and Cowboys have losing

records so far. Arizona is on a 5-game losing streak, but they are consistently scoring well; it's their defense that is the biggest contributor to their losses. Similarly, Dallas has been unable to find defensive consistency, while Dak and the offense attempt to make up for the point deficiencies. This game will certainly be an outstanding display of offensive prowess.

In terms of some players you should look out for, Jahmyr Gibbs and D'Andre Swift should be at the top of the list. Jahmyr and the Lions play the Vikings, a team against which Gibbs had three touchdowns on 23 carries. As for Swift, the running back and the Bears face the Bengals, who just allowed the Jets, of all teams, to rush for 254 yards and two touchdowns. Swift has scored a touchdown in his last four games, so he should be comfortable against the Bengals.

As for some games you would be excused for forgetting, the Vikings-Lions game (DET -9.5) seems quite one-sided. The teams have already matched up this season, with the Lions easily taking the win. Since then, the Vikings have failed to display a consistent offense, and with injuries still plaguing the team, it is unlikely that they will be a considerable hurdle for Detroit.

Similarly, the Jaguars-Raiders game (JAX -3.5) is skewed toward the Jaguars. The Raiders under Geno Smith have been horrendous as Smith looks like a different (and worse) player than when he was in Seattle. While Jacksonville is far from being true Super Bowl contenders, they are much better than the Raiders.

TYLER DANG '28 (TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HATES THAT THE TITANS ARE NOW TIED FOR THE WORST RECORD.

GRAPHIC BY JUSTIN MA '29



OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES AND ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS
OF DESIGNERS BELONG ONLY TO THE CREATOR AND DO
NOT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE INDEPENDENT

WITCHES BREW

CROSSWORD BY: FRANK KLEIN '28
DESIGN BY: CHRISTY ZEMBROWSKI '28

ACROSS:

- 2. Bad Luck Sign For The Superstitious
- 4. Flag Waver?
- 6. Quick Thinking
- 8. Guise For A Fairy Tale Wolf
- 10. Most Common School Supply Brand For Business Majors
- 13. "Get Out" Genre
- 14. Prebiotic Soda



SCARY GOOD MERCH



DOWN:

- 1. "Is A Hot Dog A _____?"
- 2. "Like A Hell-Brother _____ And Bubble" - Macbeth
- 3. Weep
- 5. Chicken Of The Sea
- 7. Slobber
- 8. Greek Sandwich
- 9. As Opposed To All Wrong
- 11. Start Of Modern Star Wars Title
- 12. Technology Used By Pokémon Go

Latie Merriam
Kayla Chaousi