

Y²M

YOUNG MENSAN MAGAZINE





Marco F., 14, Broward Mensa

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Cover: Juliette L., 7, San Francisco Regional Mensa's winter landscape painting is one of many in her already large collection. See Juliette's painting tutorials and more of her adventures by visiting her [YouTube](#) channel.

Writing in a Winter Wonderland

By Molly Bundschuh, YM² editor



WE'RE COZILY NESTLED into my favorite time of the year. It's finally cold here in Texas, and though I've never seen a white Christmas, there's usually hope for a light dusting of snow here and there as we move deeper into winter. We've blown past Thanksgiving (an obstacle blocking the way between Halloween

and Christmas, as far as I'm concerned), made it through a parade of December holidays and celebrations, seen the other side of the solstice, and landed in a brand-new year. It's an annual ritual for me: leaping into January with ambition, fueled by the possibility of "new year, new me," before burning out sometime around March. Still, I can't help feeling reinvigorated by the *tabula rasa* that January brings.

In keeping with the spirit of the season, there are some new things for readers to enjoy in YM². This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Mensa Honor Society, and to give it the birthday it deserves, I'm including a little something about the program in each issue of YM² in 2023, starting with a Mensa Honor Society spotlight written by Noel V. back in 2021. If you're a Mensa Honor Society member and have a great story to tell about your academics, volunteer service, or leadership achievements, send me an email, and you might get featured in a future issue.

We're holding a "Show Us Your Pets" photography contest, and I can't wait to see your pictures of the animals in your lives. Finally, I've included a "What's That Thing?" close-up picture challenge that is guaranteed to keep you entertained for at least 30 seconds. Maybe these new additions will turn out like 90 percent of New Years' Resolutions and end up on the cutting room floor next fall. But for now, it's January, and I'm embracing it.

For our Spring issue, I'm asking writers to explore technology, from historical developments and current trends to future possibilities and everywhere in between. Until then, think on these questions:

1. You're an ambassador for the city/state where you live. Why would I want to live there?
2. A genie grants you three wishes. Is it OK to ask the genie for infinite wishes? Defend your position!
3. Should students be allowed to grade their teachers?

Send your answers, articles, poems, artwork, comics, and more to YmMagazine@americanmensa.org by March 1. Happy Reading!

Molly

Molly Bundschuh
Gifted Youth Programs Manager
American Mensa



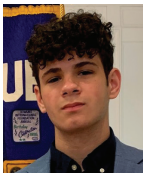
Simran A. brings a gift to her new friend Bahua while on a trip to Punjab, India. See the full story on **p. 14**.

CONTRIBUTORS



Emma S., 18, of Miami Mensa, loves drinking kombucha, swimming, and listening to podcasts when she drives to school. She carries a travel-sized

version of the Constitution in her purse and always offers a piece of gum. Her favorite book is *Beneath the Scarlet Sky*; she has read it five times since her freshman year. She enjoys writing for her school newspaper and local newspaper. She dreams of living in Washington, D.C., one day and working as a political journalist.



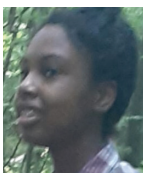
Noel V., 16, of Southern Connecticut Mensa, has been a member of Mensa since 2014. He is an Eagle Scout, a prosecuting attorney on Weston High

School's mock trial team, president of the American Heroes Club, and a key player on Weston and CT Rush soccer teams. His favorite classes are AP U.S. History and AP English Language. Noel looks forward to becoming a lawyer and advocating for the rights of underprivileged citizens.



Simran A., 8, of Southeast Michigan Mensa, is an avid reader. She loves to read fiction and nonfiction and particularly enjoys books on history,

geography, and social justice. When Simran is not reading, she solves logic puzzles and math problems and volunteers for her community. She loves to help other kids read and shares her love for STEM with other kids. She has raised thousands of books, STEM supplies, and, recently, smart devices for the community of Detroit. Simran wants to pursue both teaching and medicine when she grows up.



Anaya P., 16, is a sophomore from Boston Mensa. She enjoys reading and has always liked to draw. Her favorite subjects besides art are history,

Greek mythology, and mythology in general. She was in the TAG talented and gifted program through late elementary and middle school.



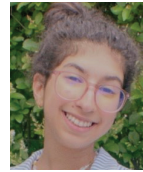
Mary Elizabeth H., 10, of Chattanooga Mensa, has been writing since she was 4. From one of her previously published Mensa articles, she was

invited to be a part of the introduction of The Seabin Project partnership with The Tennessee Department of Transportation, Keep The Tennessee River Beautiful KTRB, The Tennessee Aquarium, and Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly for recycling on the Chattanooga waterfront. She enjoys math, Spanish, reading, art, technology, family time, playing with her dogs, and riding her horse.



Logan P., 14, of Greater New York Mensa, loves to read, play piano, and play board games with his family. His favorite thing to do is to travel and see new

places. Logan is part of his school's robotics team and loves to play chess virtually against friends and players from around the globe. He is a huge fan of the NBA and loves watching his favorite team, the New York Knicks.



Zoe S., 16, of Central New Jersey Mensa, is a sophomore whose favorite subjects are English and social studies. Zoe is passionate about writing

and serves as an editor or staff member for publications in and out of school. She also takes part in her school band, Junior State of America, and speech and debate. In her free time, she enjoys playing the drums, reading novels, and listening to new music.



George J., 16, of Mensa in Georgia, a junior at The Westminster Schools and a Davidson Fellow, is a flutist in several bands, including the Georgia All-

State Band. He loves writing and has earned a Gold Key Award from Scholastic Keys for his poetry. He's on the national circuit as a competitive policy debater and has a passion philosophy and ethics. His love for volunteerism includes being an active student member of the Make-A-Wish Foundation Youth Leadership Council of Georgia, starting Mighty Math to tutor math to special-needs neurologic patients,



playing flute for nursing homes via UnMute, organizing beach cleanups, volunteering in nature preserves, and assisting with mitochondrial disease walk-a-thon events.



Sophie L., 12, of Southeast Michigan Mensa, recently moved from Santa Monica to the Detroit area.

Sophie's an 8th grader, who enjoys art, figure skating, Irish Dance, playing the piano, knitting, and listening to music, especially from the 40s-60s. She loves math, foreign languages, and science and hopes to become a marine biologist in the future.



Brody P., 9, of Greater New York Mensa, is a master at solving puzzles! He completes 500-plus-piece jigsaws in less than a day and loves to solve

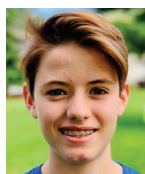
riddles and rhymes. A gifted piano player, he has been mastering pieces such as Beethoven's "Fur Elise" for his friends and

family to enjoy. Brody spends his free time coding his own games and artwork and playing in his local soccer league. He loves to read and travel.



Juliette L., 7, of San Francisco Regional Mensa, is a prodigy painter who paints to help save the lives of blood cancer patients by donating the

proceeds from the sale of her paintings to the Asian American Donor Program (AADP). She is also a spokesperson for AADP. Juliette enjoys playing the violin, singing, swimming, and practicing martial arts. She is an aspiring doctor and wishes to cure cancer one day.



Marco F., 14, of Broward Mensa, is an honors student from South Florida. He holds a third-degree black belt in Taekwondo, having won

numerous state, national, and international championship titles. He is a First Class Scout and enjoys spending time outdoors while camping, hiking, and

skiing. At school, Marco is a Student Ambassador and National Junior Honor Society member and plays the trumpet. In his free time, he enjoys drawing anime, playing video games with his friends, and traveling with his parents and two dogs, Luna and Sparky.



Madeline L., 13, Mensa 76 loves to draw, listen to music, and talk to her friends. She plays piano, saxophone, guitar, volleyball, and

basketball and runs track. She is a spirit officer on her cheer team and was again selected this year as an All-American cheerleader and recently performed in a parade at Magic Kingdom. She is Vice President of her school's National Junior Honor Society. She advanced to the state Texas Science & Engineering Fair this past spring and hopes to advance again this year, having won a ribbon at her school's science fair so far. She volunteers her time in various community activities, is an avid Harry Potter fan, and aspires to one day become an architect or a radiologist. ■



Carry the Cords

The Mensa Honor Society is open to Young Mensans in grades 5-12 who are committed to achieving excellence in their communities and schools. Members of the Mensa Honor Society focus on:

- ▶ volunteer service projects
- ▶ extracurricular activities
- ▶ commitment to scholarship

Service project hours may also be used for the President's Volunteer Service Award. Members are eligible to receive honor cords for graduation as well as membership certificates.

To learn more, visit AmericanMensa.org/MensaHonorSociety

RANDO **M**

Tilden S., 6,
French Broad Mensa



Shark Facts!

- Humans are more dangerous to sharks than sharks are to humans.
- This is one thing that most humans do not want to hear: Epaulette sharks can walk on beaches!
- Nurse sharks: Don't let the name fool you; they become active hunters at night.
- Do you know how basking sharks got their name? They love to bask in the sunlight by swimming close to the surface.
- There is a species of deep-sea shark called a goblin shark.

FEATURED **M**

Interview with YM rock star, Thomas Thunder

THOMAS F., 15, of Rhode Island Mensa, is a prodigious drummer and songwriter. Thomas composed and released his first full-length album, *The Pharaoh's Temple*, in 2021.

YM²: How did you get started playing music?

Thomas: I began playing music as a toddler by banging around on tables, pillows, and my stuffed animals. I started drum lessons at 5 and received my first drum kit at 7. I joined the School of Rock program to play in a band setting, and by 9 years old I wrote my first song. This song, titled “A New Kitten,” won an award in the New England Songwriting Competition. I continued to write music and released several songs with guest musicians Derek Sherinian (Sons of Apollo, Alice Cooper, Dream Theater), Ron Bumblefoot Thal (Guns N’ Roses, Sons of Apollo.), and Tony Franklin (The Firm). I released my debut album this past September. In addition to playing drums, I also play the bass guitar and some keyboards. I write all my music using a Digital Audio Workstation and midi instruments.

Where did the name Thomas Thunder come from?

My nickname, Thomas Thunder, came from playing the double bass drum; it sounded like thunder. My family and neighbors had remarked on that, so they started calling me Thomas Thunder.

What are your biggest musical influences?

I have many musical influences. Bands like Dream Theater, Sons of Apollo, Tool, Rush, and Pink Floyd inspire and influence my playing and songwriting.



I love progressive rock and metal. The odd time signatures, genre-bending, and complicated song arrangements interest and challenge me. For example, my song “Crystal Illusion” has a part with 7/8, 13/16, 15/16, 17/16, and 12/16 time signatures. I just love this “math rock” style that bands like Tool, Dream Theater, and Rush are known for.

Can you describe your creative process for writing music?

My creative process for songwriting basically includes cultivating an idea or theme and then writing a melody that I feel accompanies it. For example, in writing my song “The Pharaoh’s Temple,” I envisioned an adventure story about an archeologist discovering a temple that hurled him into a time

portal where he confronted mummies, monsters, and other magical creatures. I write a melody on a midi keyboard in a DAW (I use Logic Pro and Garage Band), and then I write all the other parts: guitar, bass, and drums in the same program. I do that for every song I write. I then record the drums at a studio and/or other parts like the bass guitar on one of my songs. I have guest musicians play keyboards, guitar, and fretless bass guitar. The song will then get mixed and mastered.

With the perspectives and challenges of being a teenager, how do you compose and write music that’s compelling for adults?

Well, I just write the music that comes



out of me. Most of my music is instrumental. I have two songs on my album that I wrote lyrics to and have guest singers. I just write what I find interesting. I enjoy complex melodies, timing, and arrangements, so it seems many adults enjoy that as well.

What musicians would be your dream collaboration?

My dream collaboration would be playing live with the guest musicians on my album, as well as playing with the musicians in the bands Rush and Tool.

What's your favorite drum performance of all time?

This is hard to say, as I have several favorites. Neil Peart, Danny Carey, Alex Van Halen, Mario Duplantier, and John Bonham are just a few of my favorites. I also like Simon Phillips, Todd Sucherman, Jeff Porcaro, and Steve Gadd. So many great musicians to learn from.

Which do you prefer, playing live music or recording music?

Honestly, I love recording. I enjoy the technical challenge of making a drum track sound as close to perfect as one possibly can. I'd love to be known as a great session player and the guy people call to lay down tracks for their songs. Playing live is fun, and the entertainment aspect can be a great way to express yourself.



How do you balance your professional music career with your "normal" life?

It's all blended into one. Music is my life. I just started Berklee College of Music's online program as a dual enrollment with my homeschool high school academics. I'll receive college credit for all my courses I take now. So, I'm blending my academics as a teen with my goal of achieving a degree from Berklee and becoming a professional. I spend four hours a day practicing and

four to six hours per week playing in a band setting. It's just who I am.

What challenges have you faced navigating the music industry as a young person?

Well, I'm just starting out, so that in itself is the biggest challenge: getting my music heard in a sea of other musicians. I write music that's not "pop music," so finding my audience will continue to be my goal and greatest challenge. Also, only being 15, finding a band has been extremely difficult. This is something I'm hoping will happen soon, finding other musicians close to my age who love progressive rock and are proficient and dedicated to their craft. They are out there; I just haven't found them yet.

Do you have any advice for other kids who want to break into the music industry?

You need your parents' support, both emotionally and financially. Finding a mentor in the industry who is established to help guide you is very important. You have to love what you do, and it should never feel like a chore or bother. I eat, sleep, and breathe music, so it just is natural for me. However, you have to believe in yourself, take the good with the bad, and keep pushing forward.

What song, album, or artist are you listening to most lately?

Dream Theater, Rush, and Tool are always on my playlist. I've really been into Gojira lately. This is an amazing progressive metal band with a phenomenal drummer. I also love reading music, so I spend a lot of time reading digital sheet music while listening to songs.

What other hobbies and interests do you have outside of music?

Honestly, almost everything I do is music related. Videos I watch, writing music, listening, playing ... it's what I love and makes me happy. I do love going to Disney World, and playing retro video games, too.

Why did you join Mensa?

I joined Mensa at 5 years old to provide me with academic opportunities. I'm a proud young Mensan. Thank you! ■



Lunch Bag | \$15

Auto-Botic Toy | \$20



 **MENSA**^{kids} **STORE**

mensastore.com



Rainbow Spring Toy | \$6



Hoot Owl | \$24



Travel Fidget Popper | \$12

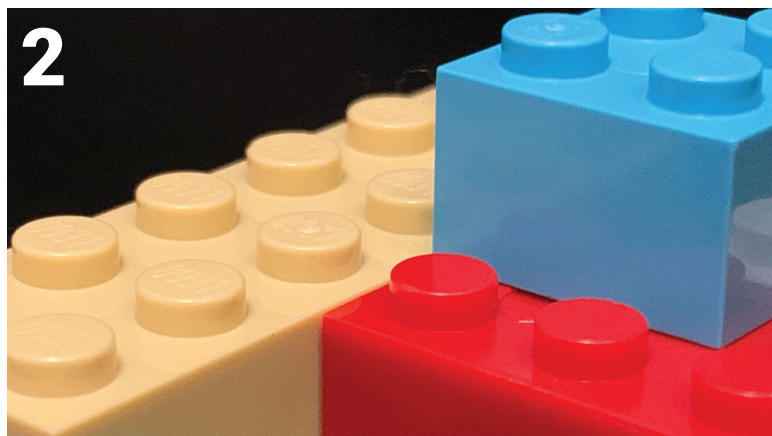


Kanoodle Game | \$15

What's That Thing?

By Molly Bundschuh

Can you figure out what these 10 objects are and what they all have in common? Find the answers on the next page!



Answers:

- 1: Nintendo Entertainment System controller
- 2: Lego
- 3: Chess pieces
- 4: Trivial Pursuit
- 5: Dungeons and Dragons
- 6: Jenga

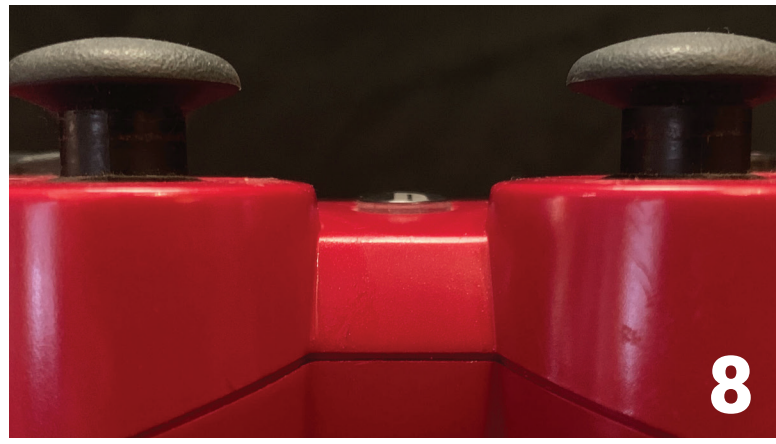
- 7: Carcassonne
- 8: PlayStation
- 9: Rubik's cube
- 10: Pokémon



10



9



8



7



6



Spotlight: The Mensa Honor Society

By Noel V., 16, Southern Connecticut Mensa

Editor's note: In recognition of the Mensa Honor Society's 10th anniversary, we're rerunning this piece written by Mensa Honor Society member Noel V. from YM's Fall 2021 issue.



The Mensa Honor Society is open to all Young Mensans who meet certain qualifications and complete a fairly straightforward application. There are two distinct Mensa Honor Societies: Junior Mensa Honor Society for grades fifth through ninth and Mensa Honor Society for grades 10 through 12. The purpose of this prestigious society is to recognize students who meet five criteria.

The first criteria is Community Service. Members must complete a minimum of 25 hours of community service at their school or in their community the year prior to applying and provide supporting documentation. The hours are cumulative, and you can earn stickers of accomplishment for the four levels of membership: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. If you maintain membership, you can earn Mensa Honor Cords for your graduation. Service hours are a great way to get involved in your community and help make the world around you better. Over the past few years, I have volunteered at my local library, nature center, and in several positions at Green Up Days in my town. I have been struck by the appreciation offered

by my neighbors and especially honored when older citizens would exclaim how good it was to see younger generations upholding the values and traditions that make our communities so special.

The second criteria is Participation. Members must be active in at least one activity outside of school, such as a sport, scouting, music, or arts, for which they don't receive a grade or compensation. I recently became an Eagle Scout and actively competed on my high school's mock trial team as a prosecuting and defense attorney. I also play on my school's soccer and basketball teams and a regional select soccer club. Because I applied my Boy Scout community service hours to meet the criteria for service, I was able to complete the participation requirement by using one of the sports teams. I submitted proof for both my sports and mock trial participation. For soccer, I printed up my team's

roster, and for mock trial I had my team adviser submit a letter documenting my attorney roles.

The third criteria is writing a Statement of Intent. This is the applicant's opportunity to explain the reasoning behind their goal of joining the Mensa Honor Society. This statement must be handwritten by the applicant and submitted along with the application. This is to be no more than three paragraphs.

The fourth criteria is Scholarship. Members must be in good academic standing and submit an official transcript with a grade point average of 3.8 or above on a 4.0 scale. There is also a signature required on the application that I asked my guidance counselor to sign and mail to me.

The last criteria is Character. Applicants must submit a letter of recommendation from a teacher, school administrator, or community representative who can affirm the applicant's character. In my case, I asked my honors biology teacher to write my recommendation.

Applications are accepted year-round. All applications must be renewed yearly between Aug. 1 and Sept. 1.

In all, this was a truly rewarding experience. Once one is approved, you will receive a congratulatory email and a mailed certificate with a letter of acceptance. I encourage all of you to apply!

For more information, please visit us.mensa.org/MensaHonorSociety. ■

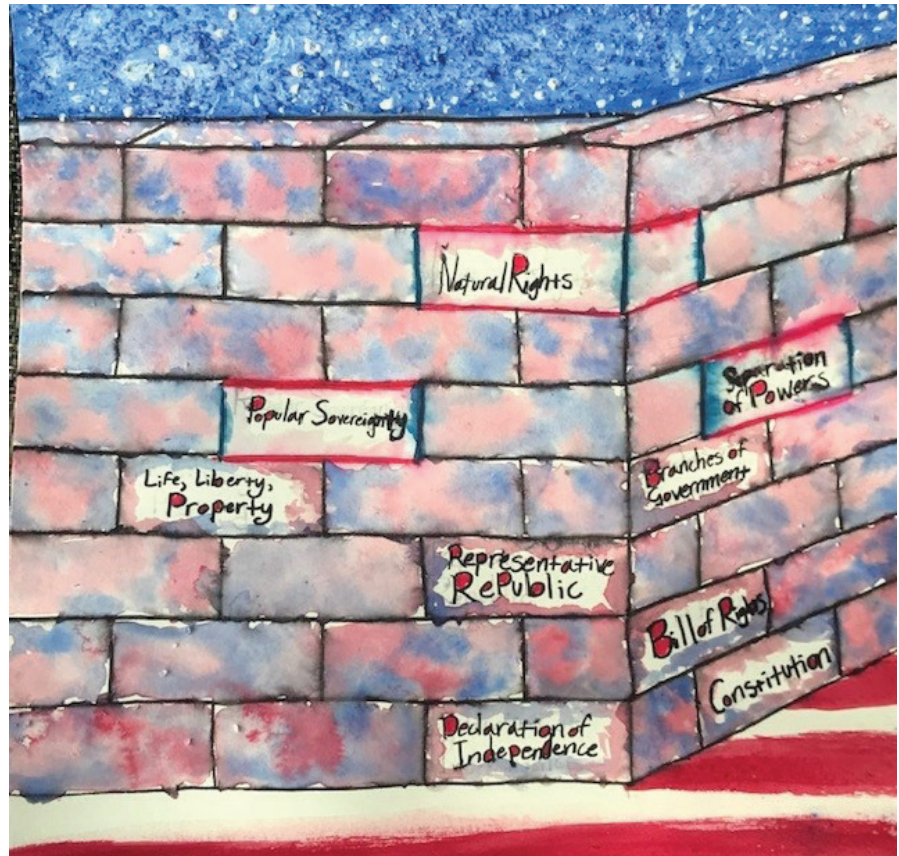
The Cornerstone of America

By Emma S., 18, Miami Mensa | Illustrated by Sophie L., 12, Southeast Michigan Mensa

The strongest, most important piece of a foundation is its cornerstone. As the first to be set, this crucial stone dictates where each of the other pieces will be placed. American society is built upon the foundation of the United States Constitution, and democratic ideals such as natural rights, popular sovereignty, and a separation of powers are the cornerstone of this foundational document. These founding principles continue to shape the U.S. government and influence life in America to this day.

As theorized by John Locke, natural rights not only define the reasoning behind the fight for American independence but framed the structure of the U.S. government as well. Life, liberty, and property were the rights Locke understood needed to be protected above all else. He believed no one, not even the government, should be able to infringe upon such basic and necessary rights. The Founding Fathers, specifically Thomas Jefferson, shared his perspective, and as such, natural rights were woven into the Declaration of Independence. Subsequently, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution establish the government's purpose as a protector of those natural rights.

French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau elaborated on how governments derive their power in his treatise, *The Social Contract*. Rousseau explained that the people are the ultimate ruling authority, and the government exists solely to carry out the will of its people. The relationship between citizens and their government is complex, yet it can be boiled down into extremely simple terms. All people are born with certain inalienable rights, but they accede individual power to a government to protect their rights, a concept known as popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty set up the basis of the representative republic, in which individual citizens vote for elected representatives to carry out the will of the people, which America still uses today. Every elec-



tion day, citizens exercise their rights in voting booths to take a step to form the country they call home.

This accession of some individual rights creates a need to keep the government from abusing its powers. Another Enlightenment philosopher, Baron de Montesquieu, called for a limited government to prevent corruption and tyranny. Montesquieu proposed a separation of powers — one absolute ruler turned into three branches of government, each with its own ability to check and balance the other two: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. The Constitution split the federal government's power among three branches. It also created a system that gives lower levels of government power to regulate state-specific or local issues.

These principles allowed American society to stand firm against the challenges over the past 200 years. From breaking away from the largest super-

power in the world in 1765 to fighting bloody battles that pitted brother against brother to defending this nation from terroristic attacks in 2001 to becoming the largest superpower in the world, the USA achieved the status of being the land of the free and home of the brave. To continue the strong legacy of freedom found in America, the Supreme Court determines whether or not laws violate the Constitution to uphold the democratic ideals of the Age of Enlightenment.

Today, everything from courtroom hearings to education policies to defense tactics revolves around these three main ideals: natural rights, popular sovereignty, and a separation of powers. Seventeenth-century ideologies seem outdated; however, they form the basic rights American citizens now claim. These values define and cultivate the culture of this country in times of struggle and prosperity. ■



Dismount

By Mary Elizabeth H., 10,
Chattanooga Mensa

I walk up to Prince and mount him. He shakes his head and nickers, almost like he's saying, "Hello!" I walk into the arena atop my horse. He does swell for half the class, and then it happens. Prince rears, and he starts to run. I curl into a ball and flip off purposely. I land on my feet, and before I regain my balance, I run to calm Prince down. I grab his rein and soothe him, stroking him gently with each of his angry breaths. He finally calms down, and the world comes into focus. He's still stamping his hooves but only ever so often, and his breaths are calm now, not furious. Suddenly, I hear my mom's distressed yelling, telling my dad to get me out of there. I refuse. My dad asks me if I want to get back on, and I say yes. I see my mom's shocked face as Dad throws me back on. We accomplished a lot today, including my first dismount. ■

Learning to Read Is Bahua's Greatest Joy

By Simran A., 8, Southeast Michigan Mensa



On my trip to India, I met Bahua. She is an 8-year-old girl from a very poor family in Amritsar, Punjab, India. She lives in a small garage with six family members. My grandmother, who lives in Amritsar and knows Bahua's family, told me all about her. When my parents planned a trip to India, I knew I would get to see Bahua. I was excited and packed gifts for her. I brought her some books and crafts. She was immediately drawn to art, and I could see her smile ear to ear.

"I love to read and play with my little brother," she said. Bahua said she didn't really know how to read but still tried every day. She practiced reading because she enjoyed it and wanted to learn more.

Bahua's parents didn't know how to read either, so Bahua had no one to help her but her teachers. Bahua loves

school, just like me. "I have to help my dad at work, so I don't go to school every day," Bahua told me. Her dad irons people's clothes, and Bahua delivers them from house to house. That's how Bahua's family earns a living. But Bahua doesn't like the work. The thing she loves to do most is read. I would love to read with Bahua the next time I visit.

Visiting Bahua made me feel very grateful to have access to school and books. It also made me want to help others who are not so fortunate. I then decided to raise books for underprivileged kids in India and Detroit. I donated more than 5,000 books to the Children's Hospital of Michigan.

I hope Bahua can go to school and not have to work with her dad. After the pandemic is over, I plan to visit Bahua again. I am sure she would love to read to me. ■

Why Coding Is a Great Skill for Young Mensans, and How to Get Started!

By Logan P., 14, Greater New York Mensa

Coding is a great and fun skill for young Mensans to start learning. The world is becoming more digital, and coding is much more valuable in society. Researchers and computer scientists can now use these languages to solve universal problems. Coding programs are varied and widely available to all ages and skill levels, even if you've never coded on a computer. There has never been a better time to learn how to code than right now!

Let's get started by discussing some great ways to get introduced to coding or enhance the skills you may already have. Programming languages such as Scratch, Python, C#, and JavaScript are just a few of the endless opportunities for Young Mensans to try, explore, and master.

For younger Mensans, a simpler way to learn to code is by using block coding. A great platform for block coding is [Scratch](#). Scratch is a free platform created by MIT students that has become very popular and widely used in homes and schools worldwide. The lines of code are already premade and compressed into blocks that are easier to use. Some great starting projects for beginners in coding are learning to use simple commands such as controlled movements. Controlled movements are when you tell the avatar that you are coding to move a select amount of spaces if a button is pressed. One specific project that uses controlled movements is a dodge game. This basic game has two sprites: a player and an enemy. You can use controlled movements on your player and avoid the enemy who follows you. You can get creative and add a timer to see how long you last if you know how to do that. With a bit of imagination and some knowledge of coding and what these blocks do, you can make almost anything you can imagine on this program!

If you are a little more advanced and want more versatility in your cod-



ing, you should try Python. You can access Python code by using the websites [OYOclass](#), [Replit](#), and [Visual Studio](#). Python differs from Scratch because you no longer use blocks. Here, you write out the code yourself. This can be more challenging, but you can code anything from quizzes to games to simulators if you practice it.

JavaScript is a more literal coding language that utilizes linear code that is typed out. You can use it to create webpages. Some coders might feel that Python is more advanced than JavaScript because JavaScript is more user-friendly. If you are ready to try typing out code but are still learning the ropes, you should start with JavaScript.

If you are advanced, you can code using C#. C# differs from the other languages because it goes along with other coding platforms, such as [Unity](#). Unity is a development platform for games, but you code it separately in a different application using C#. You will need to go back and forth between the two applications, but if you are skilled enough to do this, you can create amazing games. For example, you can create a single-player platformer game where you can move around and dodge obstacles while jumping. You can create many different things using C# and Unity. Another benefit of C# is that it's

universal between Windows and Mac computers.

The ability to code also helps people think in diverse ways. For example, the coder needs to think like they are receiving explicit directions, just like a computer would, because the computer will not understand if you aren't clear enough. This can also help with communication skills. Imagine you are linearly typing in the number 92 in Python, which requires you to write instruction code by typing it out in a line. You wanted the device to output the number 92, but instead, it gives you the number 18. Why? The computer may have thought that you meant to type 9 multiplied by 2, giving you the product of the two numbers. It becomes obvious at this point that the computer doesn't understand abstract thinking but works best when you code with literal terms or language.

"Coding is just inputs and outputs," writes Adrienne B. Tacke, author of *Coding For Kids Python: Learn to Code With 50 Awesome Games and Activities*. You input a command into the computer, and in turn, the computer gives you the result that you are looking for. In other words, the computer can create exactly what you tell it. It is like speaking to a computer, and it speaks back to you.

Good luck in your journey through the world of coding! ■

Can AI Art Really Be Called Art?

By Zoe S., 16, Central New Jersey Mensa

My elementary school art classroom was a buzzing hub of activity for all things creative, from sketches to sculptures to self-portraits. However, despite the constant stream of fifth-grade chatter and countless classic masterpieces that shrouded the once-bare walls, there was one simple poster that captivated my attention more than any work by da Vinci or Michelangelo. It read, “Earth is just ‘eh’ without ART.” Although this adage might seem childish, its message pertains to people of all ages. A world devoid of artistry and expression is not one that many of us would find fulfilling. Recent advancements, however, have begun to take steps toward this potentially insipid reality — thanks to artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is the use of computer systems to perform tasks that usually require human expertise, such as calculating the time it takes to get to Los Angeles from New York or translating a phrase from Spanish to English. AI’s duties, usually employed to make humans’ day-to-day routines more efficient or organized, have recently invaded an unmistakably human field: art.

Special algorithms allow artists to “feed” or expose AI algorithms to, for instance, works from the past century, facilitating the algorithm’s recognition of patterns and recurring themes. After repeated input of these models, the AI algorithm can begin to create its own similar pieces by imitating the art to which it was exposed. As such, countless AI art generators have emerged in the form of websites, apps, or, most recently, a feature on the popular app TikTok, in which users can input words or phrases into a text box, and the software will generate an image based on its algorithms’ knowledge and associations.

These new technologies raise a question that, unlike our inquiries about tomorrow’s forecast or the name of the song stuck in our heads, can’t be answered by your Siri, Alexa, or Cortana: What makes art, art? How can we define something so abstract yet familiar to each of us, whether our experience includes murals or mere finger painting? For one thing, art is characterized by the expression of emotions, beliefs, and identities — three things that are inherent in all of humankind but absent among artificial intelligence. Sure, the images generated by AI art sites like hotpot.ai may be more aesthetically pleasing than anything I could draw myself. Still, to many, this means nothing if these AI-created works lack the “soul” that a drawing I poured my deepest emotions into would possess. If computer-generated art lacks the same passion and perspective integral to each work created by people, can we really call it art?

So, is the instantly available work of our artificially intelligent counterparts worthy of this title? According to one competition, it surely is. This past September, the Colorado State Fair’s digital art prize went to a work crafted by Jason Allen of Pueblo West, Colo. (pictured below), with the help of an AI program called Midjourney, which uses algorithms to convert text into graphics. Other competitors denounced Allen for using AI to create his artwork, accusing him of cheating and declaring him unworthy of the blue ribbon and cash prize he was awarded for something that, according to many, wasn’t truly his.

I might not still draw hand turkeys or paint still lifes of my Beanie Baby stuffed animals, but the most important lesson my 10-year-old self learned in art class will forever ring true: that the world is in dire need of originality in expression and that the best art comes from what’s already within. ■





Writing Inspirations

By Anaya P., 16, Boston Mensa | Illustrated by Madeline L., 13, Mensa 76

It was a hazy day. I was in second grade. I don't remember much of what being 7 was like; most of it's fuzzy. But I do remember it was late spring. The leaves on the trees had just started to bloom, summer break was near, and that April it was hotter than usual. Everything was beautiful around that time, down to how the sun hit my homeroom.

My teacher was a fun type. Let's call her Ms. Branson. She liked to do hands-on projects, usually involving food for some reason. I remember when we were learning about Henry Ford, and she instructed us to make peanut butter cars in an assembly line. Another time, she orchestrated the entire grade to role-play as pioneers in the schoolyard. (We churned butter too!) She is one of the only teachers I think fondly of even now. At that time, we were creating our own "poetry jars." We were supposed to write a poem and then decorate a jar as a display. My desk was more unkempt on the outside than it was on the inside for

once. The top had strips of paper, yarn, and the smell of Elmer's glue. I painted my jar and everything, but I was frustrated. I still couldn't think of anything to write! I think Ms. Branson could tell something was wrong because she stepped over to my table and asked if I needed anything. "I don't have anything good to write about!" I complained.

"Why don't you write about your mom?" Ms. Branson replied, her voice hoarse as always. Yeah, no. I wasn't going to do that; I don't like writing about myself for projects in general because I don't see the value in it. I told her I didn't want to, probably in a whiney voice too, though I didn't really mean it that way.

She countered. "Well then, you can choose *anyone* you look up to, like a famous person! What about Ms. Angelou?" Ms. Branson was talking about Maya Angelou. Our class had read one of her poems, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," to start our poetry unit. During sharing time, I even told Ms.

Branson that Maya Angelou was one of my favorite people. The funny thing was that I didn't even know that much about her. I didn't even like poetry and certainly didn't get the poem's meaning until years later. I did that a lot; there were times when I said I liked something that I didn't care much about and somehow tricked myself into liking it. This was one of those times. But I didn't have any other ideas, and for some reason, I was intrigued. Something tugged inside me that wanted to know about her.

A month went by. Ms. Branson handed out our graded projects. I glanced at the top right corner of my rubric. A check plus! That's the highest grade I'd gotten for poetry ever! "You look excited. Did you like the poem?" She bent down a bit to meet my eye line.

I still didn't care much for the poem itself, but Maya Angelou — *she* had caught my attention. I couldn't believe that someone could have seen so much! She made me feel inspired. That's how I got into writing. ■

The Sound of Darkness, The Sound of Light

By George J., 16, Mensa in Georgia

My bus seat was a mess. Packets of printed precalculus problems, a calculator, and pencils cluttered my lap while I played a balancing act with my laptop. The monotonous bounce of the school bus shook the past couple of hours' eraser shavings until suddenly, the buzzing ceased.

Startled, I dropped my pencil and lifted my head to glimpse the red light above the highway exit. As I watched the teachers at the front of the bus talking, I lowered my noise-canceling headphones to my neck. The world that had been drowned out by music drew color through sound. The students' banter battered my ears — their breathing heckles, their raucous chants — bringing me out of the reverie I'd swaddled myself in.

"Y'all, get your stuff ready. We'll be at the cave in five minutes," Mrs. Jackson, our teacher, announced. Mixed cheers and groans, coupled with the rummaging of bags, rounded out the remainder of the road trip. After frantically slotting sheets of paper into my binder and stuffing everything into my overfilled backpack, I sat quietly in the decelerating bus. We finally parked, and the creak of the doors beckoned the fleshy flood that bounded through the aisle and out of the yellow giant. I inched out of my seat and into the open air. The parking lot stood on a hill above the cave, and I peered down the gradient into the stone's shade.

Students lined into the cave as ants to their colony. Forced to their knees by the cavity's ceiling, they crawled along the muddied ground. Orbs of light from atop their heads lit the path. I lowered myself to the ground and clambered along, listening to the cloth and crag resonate. The crawling ceased as we reached a raised roof chamber. We moved quietly as our headlamps lit a cavern slathered with graffiti before finding a spot to sit comfortably. "Turn off your headlamps," said Mrs. Jackson.



"The cave will be completely dark — it's a fun experience."

The cave *was* dark — so dark that I could not see the ceiling, nor the walls, nor the very floor that I sat upon. My eyes pulsed in the darkness, heavily like two hearts harbored in my eyelids. I waved my hands in front of my face but could only feel where they were. The darkness became suffocating, stealing my serenity and sight. Despite the initial panic, my head eased, and I grew used to my loss of vision. My ears opened once more. I heard the breath of the students and the cave, a cacophony of rasps and a soft hum. And a whisper. It leaked through the opaque world, from one shoulder to another. And another whisper. It susurrated in the ebony expanse, from one shoulder to another. And a third whisper. Then a fourth. Each whisper birthed two more. But none dared break the sanctity of the cavern with any sound louder. The whispers burrowed through my ears and into my thoughts. The next moment I inched closer to another student and opened my mouth.

Light bore into the stone once more. Illuminated headlamps shone fresh discs

of light, new to the eyes but not troublesome. Returning from the Earth's orifice, however, was different. Despite how much I watched the rays beyond the tunnel, entering the sun's land scalded my eyes to a squint, yet only for a short minute. My eyes had begun to open once more as the dirt below, the rubble around, and the thicket ahead painted into form in front of me. I heard the birds' trill, the leaves' sway, the acorns' plummet. The cars' race, the leaves' crunch, and the students' breath. My travail had ended, and the world bore new displays. Peering up at the sun once more relit my kindled vision. But the sight was alarming: The sun had nudged only a foot in the sky. As if leaving a movie theater, time had moved on, leaving but me. I, who was captured in the secluded lifetime. I, who had dreamt cradle to grave. I, who had lost not. The outside world had observed my delivery and welcomed me. In accordance, I welcomed the world. Nature's current and the students' chatter hummed in — all the way until I fell again to the darkness of sleep later that night. ■



Navajo Love

By Marco F., 14, Broward Mensa

It is said that when someone's heart breaks, so does a piece of this world. This creates fissures, valleys, and even cracks in the pavement. "Navajo Love" is my fable of how the Grand Canyon was formed.

There once lived a Navajo girl named Abey. She was born and raised in the Bitter Water Clan on the Arizona plateau. Her parents were humble people and very overprotective of their daughter. Abey was an adventurous girl who loved to be outdoors, but her parents were always concerned about her health and safety. As Abey grew up, she became more mature and was getting close to the age to marry. This would be a big ceremony for the Navajos since it could lead to many opportunities for the clans in the future.

While Abey grew up, one boy from the Mud Clan caught her eye. His name was Atsa. She loved him very much, and he loved her, but there was one terrible thing in the way. Their clans had been at war for many years. It was all because of how much land each of them had. Over time they kept intruding into each

other's territory, which caused fighting among the clans. Abey's family tried separating her and Atsa as much as possible, but it did not stop their love for each other. Abey would beg her parents every day to be with Atsa, but she heard the same answer: no.

One night Abey became so frustrated with her family that she prayed to Mother Earth, asking that she would be able to live her life with Atsa. Days passed, then weeks, and even months. Every day it felt like her heart was breaking more and more. As she waited, she began to notice cracks in the ground and sudden shakes during their meditation time. It was bizarre because they lived on flat land. One day everything changed. The ground shook so hard that the hogans fell, and Abey was struck with fear. Atsa was directly across from her when a large crack began to form. Atsa screamed her name and told her to jump. Abey didn't know what to do. Should she leave her family and go with her true love? She made a quick decision and jumped. As she sat there with Atsa, the earth before them collapsed into a giant valley. Atsa ran back home

with Abey and told his family where she was from. The Mud Clan welcomed her to their village with open arms, although they knew she came from their rival clan.

Since that day, Abey was happy to be with Atsa, although she missed her family. Because she was still very sad, more and more valleys formed until there was just one enormous crater in the earth; it was colossal and spectacular! It became the Grand Canyon as we know it today. It also helped the Navajos with many resources they couldn't do without, such as water from the river below. Over time, the war between the Mud Clan and the Bitter Water Clan ended because they were now naturally separated, and there was no longer a need to fight over land. Abey could now live happily with her husband and also see her family by climbing down into the canyon, crossing the river, and climbing up to the Bitter Water Clan village. Abey and Atsa would always be grateful to Mother Earth for blessing them, their clans, and the Navajo people. Sometimes from heartbreak, beautiful things can be created. ■



IF YOU DREW EVERYTHING THAT CAME TO YOUR HEAD, WHAT WOULD YOU BE DRAWING RIGHT NOW?

STORY AND ILLUSTRATION BY CECILE E., 11, MIAMI MENSA

I would draw a shapeshifter. The concept is a girl who could change forms because I have been influenced by a lot of the art content I've been watching recently, and I want to explore more character design. Many artists I look up to specialize in creating original character illustrations, and some of them even further develop their stories in hopes of producing animated series or comics, something that I also want to experiment with. I envision my shapeshifter would be female, significantly older than me (I rarely draw people my age), and she would have a striking hair color, such as black or white. I would draw her in a dynamic pose, perhaps in the middle of shifting into another species, and use an eye-catching and bright color palette that appropriately contrasts the piece's main focus. I believe that these elements would create an intriguing and memorable artwork. I enjoyed this exercise to increase my creativity, grow my capacity to think quickly, and construct a captivating image based on a single idea.

MY NAME IS FEAR

BY ANUMITA P., 12, NORTH TEXAS MENSA

I am many things, both good and bad.
I can give you nightmares, or I can
make you glad.
If you meet monsters, I will engulf you.
If you feel pain, you'll feel me too.
If you read or see horror, you'll feel me
with thrill.
If you are told to do something dumb,
I'll stop you from saying, "I will."
You'll deny me at times.
You'll destroy me when your courage
climbs.

I can keep you up at night.
I can put you in fight or flight.
I can stop you from climbing
mountains.
I can fill you until you're too scared to
open your window panes.

I'll save your life if you're in a fire.
Because I'll make sure you keep
running away long after you tire.
I'll creep up on you when you read
scary thrillers.
I'll also keep you away from killers.

I'm helpful, you see, but you must
beware.
Because it's not always good to get a
big scare!





Zavian P., 7, Metropolitan Washington Mensa

A WORLD DIVIDED

BY NIKITA K., 11, GREATER LOS ANGELES MENSA

A wall or war separates the world
Dividing what was once one
into numerous fragments

Clashing at the peaceful plain stretch
of ice
with flaming hot blades
And dropping bombs of agony,
disorder, grief
and anger across humans

We have already torn up our own land
And yet we still harm
the grounds of others
of animals too

Unless those of us
who still have innocent thoughts
can teach the world to be
what it once was
What it was as a union



NIGHTINGALE'S LANGUISH

BY GEORGE J., 16, MENSA IN GEORGIA

Dusk whispers love through air:
Those nightingale carols, afront lonely
perils.
Yet twilight songs aren't sung in pairs.
The sleepwalker's ears grasp the
windowsills.
They drink nectar melody,
Hear a rich tapestry,
Brighter than the constellations!
Though to the oscine kin,
A history they couldn't win.
The gods heard their prayer,
They set proper Tereus' tale.
But the sole songbird fears the sundial.
Past edging shade in blossoming
dawn, conspires
The daybreak chorus to drown
eventide aria.



TIGER BEATS

BY HOPE H., 9, PALM BEACH AREA MENSA

Orange, black
opens up eyes
stretches front paw
then next paw
opens mouth
yawns
stands
still a moment more
zebra grabs attention away
opens mouth
shows its teeth
runs tongue in the breeze hunts
blood runs from its mouth
as he has a feast
these are tiger beats

RESOLUTION OF A NEW YEAR

BY MICHAEL L, 14, NORTH TEXAS MENSA

A promise of peaceful, perpetual prosperity.
 What it lacks in depth it makes up for in clarity.
 A small wish, an aim, a promise, a resolution.
 I should be of ease, of a quite simple constitution.
 I'm just a goal, after all.
 Not something to, say, appall.

Right? At first, there is no blight.
 Merrily moving to light.
 Blissful progress is obtained
 hopefully to be sustained.

Then some voids appear, infractions are made.
 New wishes come to remedy the malady, to fix those cracks
 To tidily tumble me in a mass of paper and string,
 Pretending there were never any blemishes on the pristine
 thing.
 But when one unravels the Gordian knot, the corroded plaques,
 That one realizes my demise has simply been delayed.

Lord, why do you curse me so?!
 Made and soon unmade
 Formed and fast broken,
 Massacred and quickly put to sleep
 in a home little more than a fading memory,
 gone faster than I.
 Resurrected.
 Reborn anew.
 Like a phoenix, but sadly worse;
 I simply wish for a reverse.
 Every year, billions over, I get revived.
 But for almost none of those times have I survived.

It is possible, I suppose.
 A few accomplish it. Brave citizens those.
 That manage with a theme, or something with little breadth.
 For what they lack in clarity, they make up in depth.

Kathleen W., 13, Maryland Mensa



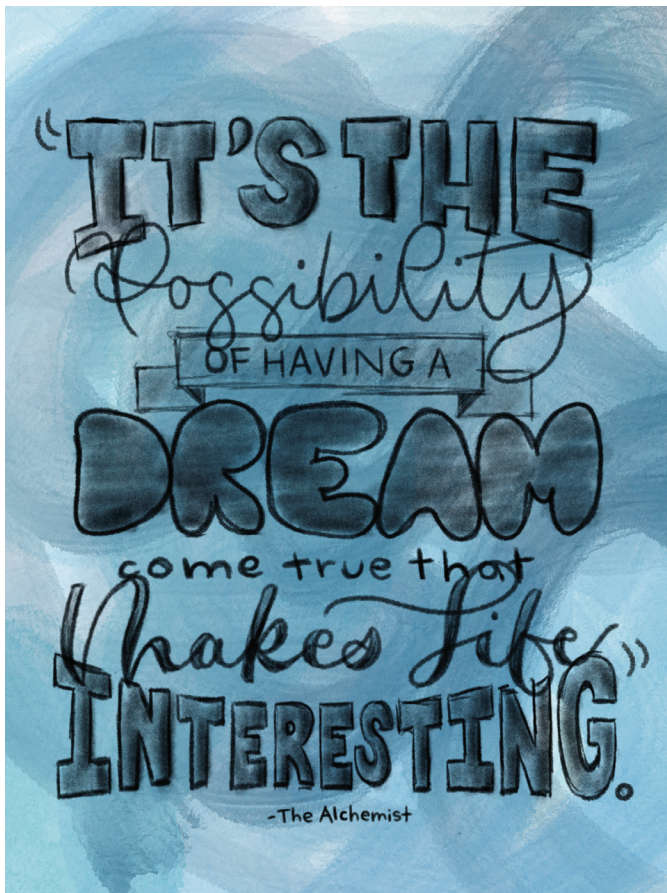
PINK

BY CRISTINA S., 16, CENTRAL FLORIDA MENSA

I really love the color pink —
 my sheets are pink
 my perfume is pink
 my bracelets are pink.
 Pink is such a lovely color, but
 I tell everyone that my favorite color is gray —
 for my middle name
 (and because it's cool).
 I'm not sure why, but I can't show people the pink-loving
 side of me.
 I have a mean resting face,
 and sometimes I can't hold my tongue.
 To others, I'm sure I can seem hateful,
 like a porcupine, untouchable.
 (the people I allow to get close to me don't even get to see
 me in the way I really am)
 Whenever I take little quizzes about personalities and
 whatnot
 I get something completely different than what people
 would think.
 Other people think I make decisions based purely on logic
 I don't.
 If I'm upset,



my response will be venomous.
 If I'm angry,
 my answer can kill
 Yet when I'm asked questions based on the soul,
 how I truly feel inside,
 I'm told that I'm not this way.
 I took a quiz that was supposed to tell me what human
 emotion I was.
 I got love,
 but why? I never express love.
 I spend most of my time imagining myself expressing love.
 I tell myself that I'll be that way when someone allows it.
 But in reality, I'm the one holding myself and others back
 from it.
 It's cliché to say someone has walls around them and their
 emotions.
 I don't think I have walls around me.
 I think I have myself.
 I'm too mean,
 too blunt,
 too angry
 to love.
 I yearn, not to be loved, but to be able to love.
 I want someone to see the sides of me that only online
 quizzes and my Amazon cart can see.
 I just want someone to know that
 I really love the color pink. ■



Jeanelle D., 13, San Francisco Regional Mensa

▼ **Amogh B.**, 7, of Northern New Jersey Mensa, was awarded 'Great Leader' of the second grade by his elementary school. Congratulations, Amogh!



▲ After qualifying with a third place finish at the State of Tennessee Beta Convention, **Stewart C.**, 15, of Memphis Mensa, has competed in the 2022 National Beta Convention in Nashville, Tenn., and placed in the top five in the nation. He placed third in the nation in ninth grade social studies.



◀ **Vanessa E.**, 10, of Northern New Jersey Mensa, wrote a letter to her superintendent and board of education back in February about their seriously lacking gifted and talented program on the elementary school level. Not only did they bring it up at their next BOE meeting, they actually rewrote the curriculum for the GT program for the entire district over the summer. Then Vanessa was voted into office as the student council president of her school.

▼ Author **Nikita K.**, 11, of Greater Los Angeles Mensa, recently published *Gentle Shadows, Fierce Wings*, a poetry collection. Her poem "Your Opinion Matters" won first place at a school competition.

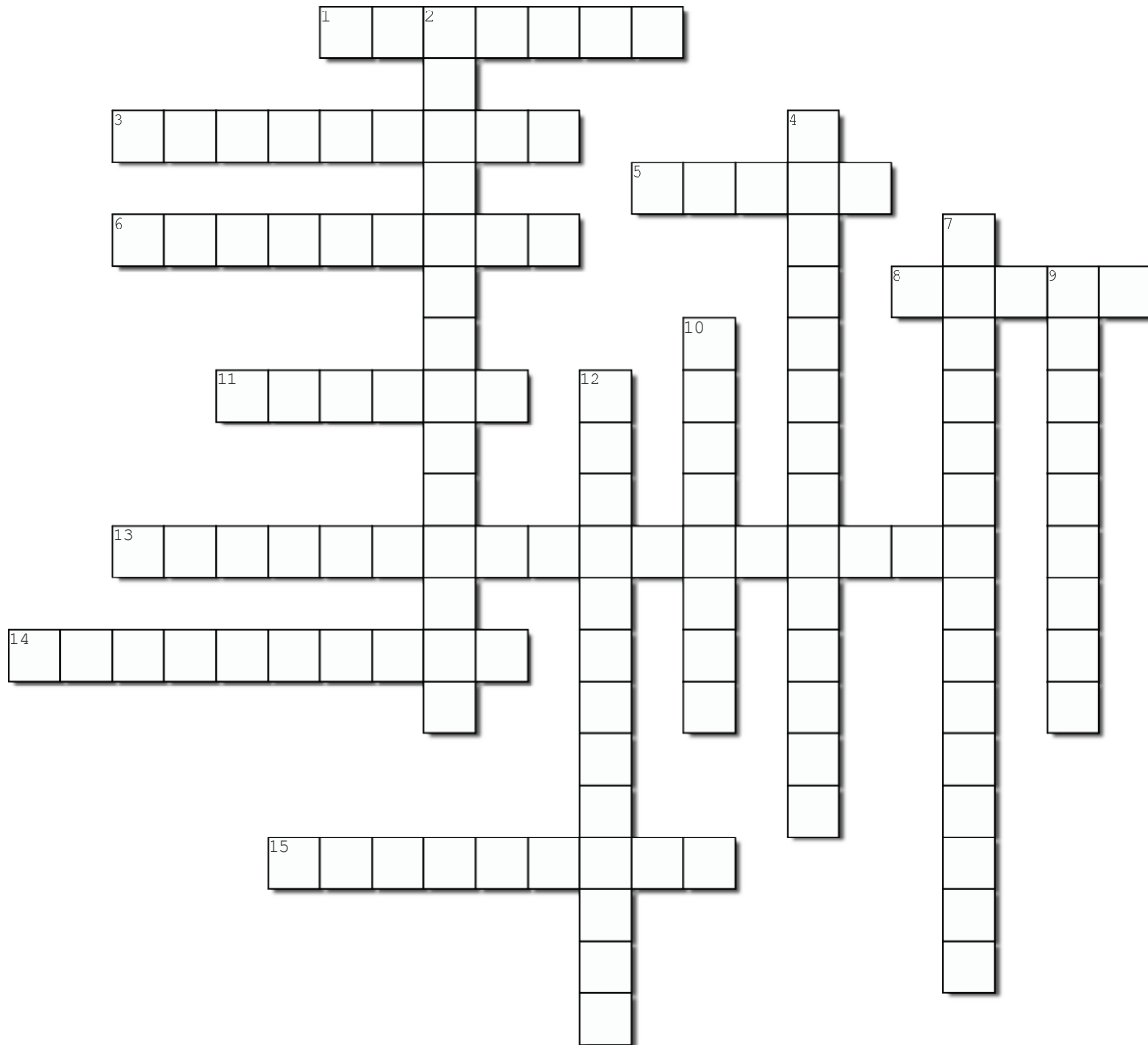


◀ **Anaya P.**, 16, of Boston Mensa won first place in the under 18 category of the 2022 Art of Autism Women's History Month contest. The title of the piece is called, "Afro-Autistic American." The pictures feature two of her contributions along with those from her artist peers as well as the stand-alone photo. She also won the artist maker prizes in the picture below.

◀ **Simran A.**, 8, of Southeast Michigan Mensa, was recognized by the governor of Michigan with the Michigan Heroes Award for her volunteer work. Simran, who is passionate about science and education, has organized a weekly virtual STEM club, participates in 4-H education projects, and has donated books, activity packets, and tablets for kids in need. (Simran is pictured here with Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.)

Crossword

By Brody P., 9, Greater New York Mensa



Across

1. The ancient dog breed of China.
3. Often used as a mascot for the fire department.
5. This dog loves sports.
6. This tiny dog is most likely a native of Mexico.
8. The late Queen Elizabeth II of England had these dogs living with her like royalty.
11. The national dog of France, this breed originated in Germany.
13. One of the smartest dogs in the world, also cousins with the golden retriever.
14. Has one of the best noses in the world.
15. This dog has a long body and short legs.

Down

2. The biggest dog in the world.
4. A great police dog, also good for tracking lost or dangerous things.
7. First developed as a hunting dog in Scotland, now used as a service dog.
9. Scooby Doo is a ...
10. Many people have this dog on guard.
12. This dog often has two color eyes (orange and blue).



ART

By Marin Darmonkow
Reviewed by Anaya P., 16,
Boston Mensa



When I first read the title of this piece, I thought, *Whoever wrote this book better be autistic.* After reviewing it, my stance

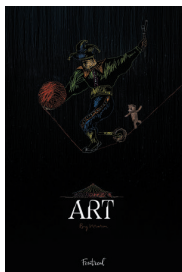
hasn't changed. While I don't know whether the illustrator is autistic, I do know one thing: This piece showcases an issue that has been embedded in the media when it comes to how we portray or represent autism.

The book starts with the introduction of an autistic individual named Art by an unknown third person. This narrator describes him as mysterious yet simple and filled with wonder. He's established as lonely; his only friend is a teddy bear, and his biggest dream is to join the circus. This paragraph is then followed by a sequence of abstract illustrations depicting him at the circus entertaining the king, implied to be a dream.

At first this might not seem harmful; however, this work displays a form of objectification. Art is treated like an exhibit. The narrative does not empathize with him; instead, it observes his aspirations from afar, like looking at a painting in a museum. Even his name Art deifies him, as his autism makes him a mystical being, rather than human.

The concept of referring to his autism as a work of art isn't inherently problematic, though. Speaking well of the aspects of autism spectrum disorder isn't unhealthy because autism is inherently neutral — not good or bad. I think this piece would work better if Art was given more agency. I like the idea of the narrative being told from his point of view, albeit short. Art says, *"I am a work of art because I'm autistic"* — that's him owning his ASD rather than an outside source observing him.

As for the illustrations, I like the use of collages mixed in with the drawings. It gives the book the feeling of a children's picture book.



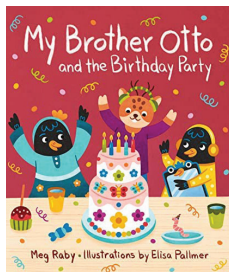
OUR WORLD IS A FAMILY

By Miry Whitehill and Jennifer Jackson and illustrated by Nomar Perez
Reviewed by Serena O., 5,
Sangamon Valley Mensa



Our World is a Family is a book about people moving to different countries and trying to do nice things together. I like the book because people spoke different languages like me.

My daddy is from Nigeria, and he teaches me his language, Igbo. The pictures are very colorful and made me happy. I am always friendly, and I like to meet other people. The book is fun and will teach kids to be nice.



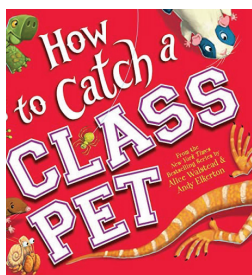
MY BROTHER OTTO AND THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

By Meg Raby and illustrated by Elisa Pallmer

Reviewed by Trinity O., age 5, Sangamon Valley Mensa



My Brother Otto and the Birthday Party is a funny book with lots of pictures. I liked the characters and all the colors. My mom told me that not all kids are the same; God made each of us unique. Otto has autism and likes the color yellow. He didn't like loud sounds, but he liked Ruthie. Ruthie is Otto's friend. Otto had fun at the birthday party and blowing bubbles. I would like to read this book again, but I plan to give it to my friend with autism.



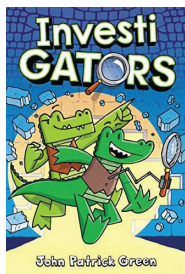
HOW TO CATCH A CLASS PET

By Alice Walstead and illustrated by Andy Elkerton

Reviewed by Arthur S., 4, Greater Phoenix Mensa



I really love this book. I have read it several times. The class pets are sneaky. They have cell phones and the internet, which helps them go to the playground. Then suddenly they are just back in their cages! I think maybe there is a page missing. Some of the children look like me. They make some traps to catch the pets, and I want to make a trap, too. A lot of the words rhyme, so it is fun for me to read. I hope that I will have a class pet one day.



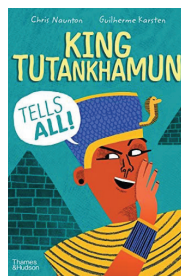
INVESTIGATORS

By John Patrick Green
Reviewed by Sean A., 7, Mensa In Georgia



As a kid who has a wild imagination that is usually filled with adventures and my favorite superheroes, I thought *Investigators* provided an exciting read. This story is about two gators named Mango and Brash who are "investigators" for an agency known as S.U.I.T. Throughout the story, they go on fun-filled adventures solving cases and mysteries with

my favorite being the "missing mustachio" case. This is a case that draws in readers with its twists and turns. As a Batman fan, I liked that the gators had access to mind-blowing technologies made by the A.R.M.S department of the agency. These tools aided them in their investigations, just like Batman's tools do for him. I know any kid with an interest in superheroes will definitely like this part of the story and would probably want to work for A.R.M.S, like I want to. Knowing its audience, the book has a lot of puns, great animation style that appeals to kids, and a how-to-draw part to get kids to be creative. Therefore, this book by John Patrick Green gets a solid five stars from me. The only part I did not like was the conversation between the two gators about the death of an old partner, which was too dramatic for me.



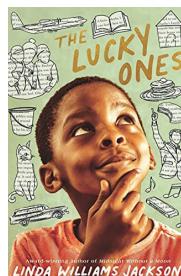
KING TUTANKHAMUN TELLS ALL!

By Chris Naunton and Illustrated by Guilherme Karsten

Reviewed by Max V., 6, Maumee Valley Mensa



This is a fun, silly, and interesting book to learn about King Tutankhamun. This book tells the story of King Tutankhamun from his point of view as if he were alive. It is a combination of stories and mostly facts. Some things King Tut talk about are how he became a king, the afterlife, his clothes, and how his tomb was discovered. This book was also kind of funny because of the drawings, captions, and some of the characters. That made it fun to read and learn about ancient Egypt. I learned that King Tut was only 9 years old when he was king, and he died when he was 18 years old. The book also has the steps of how to make a mummy. What I really liked was the map in the back of the book of the Egyptian empire. It showed me where King Tut ruled and some important places he was. I also liked the information page about hieroglyphics, which taught me the meaning and information about the pictures and symbols. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn about King Tut because it's a pretty fun book and I learned a lot.



THE LUCKY ONES

By Linda Williams Jackson

Reviewed by Aayush S., 8, Maryland Mensa



This book presents how a dream comes true for an 11-year-old insignificant boy named Ellis Earl Brown who lives in a raggedy, old house. One of the important events in Ellis Earl's life was when he joined the RFK Welcoming Team, and the experience made him think that the impossible is possible.

This thinking caused him to have more belief in himself, and that helped him recite his speech at a church before a huge crowd when it looked impossible to do. I have also learned that even if a dream seems impossible, if you believe you can, you will. The quality of the writing is great because it is age appropriate for 7- to 12-year-olds, and it is thoughtfully written and has lots of details. Even though I did not know the meaning of a few words, the writing is so good that I am still able to clearly understand the meaning of the story. I found this book entertaining throughout, and this book also fits well within the genre of realistic fiction because the book has many descriptions (for example, outhouse, leaky tin roof, lime green station wagon) that make it easy for the reader to visualize realistically what is happening in the story. However, with that visualization, I think that the story would be better if Ellis Earl's grandparents were nicer to their family because then Ellis Earl would not be as miserable in his life. Based on my experience, I believe anyone who reads this book will enjoy it with happiness.



A BREATH OF MISCHIEF

By MarcyKate Connolly and
illustrated by Yuta Onoda
Reviewed by Samara W., 9,
Broward Mensa



An epic quest for elements, *A Breath of Mischief* is a fantastic book about a girl named Aria, who is a windling and was raised by the Wind. She spends most of her time with her best friend Gwyn, who is a gryphiling. One morning, the wind chimes were silent. There was not a single breath of wind. An evil man named Worton had stolen the Wind. Aria and Gwyn set off to take back the wind. To get the wind back, Aria and Gwyn have to give Worton an item from each element. Along the way, Aria makes new friends with different abilities, and personalities. Aria and her friends realize that Worton was going to use the items Aria had collected to take over the elements for wealth. After that, the friends worked together to defeat the evil Worton and rescue their elements. I think this book is suitable for both children and adults. This book fits perfectly with the children fiction genre. This book was wonderful, and I would recommend it to anyone interested in fiction books with an adventurous plot.

Reviewed by Aubrey H., 10, Miami Mensa



Aria is a windling. She lives in the sky with her best friend, Gwyn, and her parent, the Wind. By day, Aria soars at the Cloud Castle. By night, Aria falls asleep to the music of the Wind. Nothing is better than the Wind. One morning, Aria wakes up to the castle on the ground. The beautiful chimes aren't chiming, and there isn't a single breath of breeze. The Wind is gone. Aria and Gwyn go on a desperate search to

find the Wind. While traveling, they stumble upon a major discovery. The Wind is being captured by a sinister otherling named Worton. Worton will give the Wind back only if Aria and Gwyn bring back special magic talismans. Nothing will keep Aria from rescuing the element that raised her. She and Gwyn are on a race against time. Worton can't be trusted, and it's not only the Wind that needs saving.

The way MarcyKate Connolly writes *A Breath of Mischief* is perfect. Her use of imagery and figurative language flows perfectly with the words. As she describes Aria, the perfect picture forms in my head. MarcyKate formats her words so perfectly, it feels like I'm actually there.

I believe *A Breath of Mischief* is entertaining and appropriate for its intended audience, middle schoolers. There are some words that those in younger grades wouldn't understand. For example, the words *fitful* and *predicament* are used. These are middle-grade words that younger ones wouldn't understand.

A Breath of Mischief's genre is Fantasy Adventure. In my opinion, this is the perfect genre for this book. Aria and Gwyn are on an adventure. Gwyn is a fictional creature, and MarcyKate uses personification to give nonhuman items human qualities. Aria and Gwyn get help from other fictional creatures on their quest. Fantasy adventure is the perfect genre for this book.



TIME VILLAINS

By Victor Piñero
Reviewed by James P., 9, Columbus
Area Mensa



This book begins with a small group of smart friends and an easy school project, but what seems like a simple assignment turns out to be a magical adventure. An imaginary dinner with guests such as Edward Teach, John Montagu (4th Earl of Sandwich), and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart results in pandemonium as the group of friends find themselves trying to stop one of the surprising dinner guests, and the guest flees and begins searching for his long-lost pirate ship crew. Can the friends stop this rogue dinner guest from taking over their city? Anyone who enjoys reading science fiction and adventure should get their hands on this book.

Review by Michael P., 9, Lehigh Pocono Mensa



The book is about Javi Santiago, a sixth grader who is struggling in history class. One day, his family receives a mysterious antique table. Soon after, Javi gets an important assignment in history class: If you could invite any three people to dinner, who would they be? Javi enlists his sister and best friend, Brady and Wiki, to help him not get another failing grade in history. But after Javi completes the assignment, Brady rings a bell, and the antique table transports the historical figures to the present! One of these people is an incredibly

dangerous supervillain who wants to take over the town and eventually the world! Will evil win or will good prevail? Find out in *Time Villains*!

I like how there are so many different figures from history ranging from activists, famous literary characters, and royal figures to warriors, pirates, and artists. Some of my favorites: Dr. Jekyll, Dorothy Gale, Rosa Parks, and Cleopatra. The battle of good versus evil made the book really hard to put down because we didn't know who would prevail until the very end. The best part is that even though there are intense parts, it also made me laugh out loud.

There is a section in the back (Wiki's Pedia) that includes information on each character, which is helpful if you aren't too familiar with some of them. If you enjoy historical fiction with fun, action, and suspense, you will love this book as much as I did!



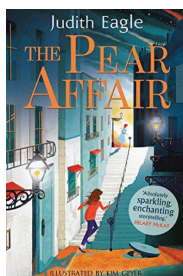
BRAND NEW BOY

By David Almond and illustrated by Marta Altes

Reviewed by Dylan N., 10, Mensa of Eastern North Carolina



This book is humorous. I recommend this book to fifth graders. The characters are silly and funny. They remind me of my friends at school. The book kept my interest in solving a mystery of one character. Each chapter gave me more clues. If you love solving mysteries, this book is for you. My favorite character is George. He and all his friends have a British accent. George always says, "I'm perfectly splendid." He is an interesting boy. My second favorite character is Maxie. He thinks aliens and UFOs are real. Like me, Maxie enjoys eating chips. His favorite chip brand is Crisps. Elementary school students will enjoy reading *Brand New Boy* for its humor, dramatic plot line, and funny characters.



THE PEAR AFFAIR

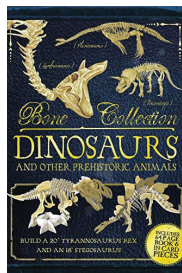
By Judith Eagle and illustrated by Kim Geyer

Reviewed by Aubrey H., 10, Miami Mensa



Penelope "Nell" Magnificent often gets forgotten by her parents, but she's OK with that. Nell's parents are always obsessed with expanding Magnificent Foods, their supermarket chain. When Melinda and Gerald want to take a vacation to Paris, Nell jumps to the chance. Perrine (Pear), Nell's former *au pair* who lives in Paris, stopped sending letters, and Nell wants to know why. While in Paris, Nell meets some friends, and together they discover a sinister plot for Paris and England. Will Nell and her new friends be able to

discover a solution in time, with Pear's life on the line? It fits well in the middle-grade fiction genre. There are some words that kids of younger ages would not understand. For instance, the word *lorgnette* is used in this book. The writing just flows with the paintings. I can visualize the pictures perfectly because of the beautiful way Judith Eagle describes every photo. Overall, I also think that the writing was easy to understand, but it had a few unfamiliar words that I did not understand at first. After I kept reading the context, I used context clues to figure out the meaning of these unfamiliar words. I believe that *The Pear Affair* is entertaining and appropriate for its intended audience.



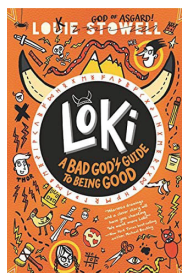
BONE COLLECTION: DINOSAURS AND OTHER PREHISTORIC ANIMALS

By Rob Colson and illustrated by Steve Kirk and Elizabeth Gray

Reviewed by Elizabeth T., 5, Chicago Area Mensa



I really loved reading this awesome book. I have six other books about dinosaurs and this book was my favorite dinosaur book to read! The illustrators' pictures and drawings of the animals and bones really came to life and looked so real! I loved seeing the pictures of the bones of each of the dinosaurs, reptiles, birds, and mammals. There were so many fun facts in this book! I really enjoyed how the author explained how fossils were created after millions of years. My favorite part of the book was learning all of the timelines and all of the dinosaurs and animals during each period. It was so cool to learn how our planet started with one giant continent called Pangea and that through the Jurassic and Cretaceous Periods the continents of the world started forming. This book also gave fun facts about early reptiles and birds that lived millions of years ago, too. I love that this book wrote about my three favorite dinosaurs: stegosaurus, ankylosaurus, and styracosaurus. Another favorite part of the book was reading all about the woolly mammoth that were very similar to elephants that are living today. If you love dinosaurs and are curious to read the history of how birds, reptiles, and water animals started, you will love this book!



LOKI: A BAD GOD'S GUIDE TO BEING GOOD

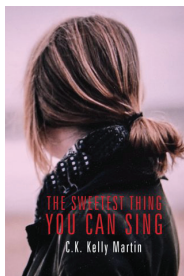
By Louie Stowell

Reviewed by Rivers W., 9, Mensa of Eastern North Carolina



In *Loki: A Bad God's Guide to Being Good*, Louie Stowell demotes Loki to a mortal in this comic-style kid's book. Not only is Loki re-

quired to live as a mortal — even worse, he is a child! “I am appalled at this indignity. I’m thousands of years old. I should not have a bedtime!” Loki complains before noting that he should “absolutely under no circumstances be expected to fold undergarments!” To regain his old life, Loki must win a challenge of Odin’s design, where he can earn — or lose — points. We lament when Loki loses morality points for teaming up with a disguised ice giant against Thor. We cheer him on as he is kind to a student and earns points. Will it be enough to save him from an eternity in a pit of venomous snakes? This book is worth the read and enjoyable. The plot shifts almost as much as Loki does! I loved the funny alternate definitions for phrases and the snotty corrections from Loki’s diary. I would recommend this book, and I cannot wait for the next installment!



THE SWEETEST THING YOU CAN SING

By C.K. Kelly Martin

Reviewed by Lamia A., 16,
Maryland Mensa



The Sweetest Thing You Can Sing is a touching story of the realities of adolescence. Serena, a 15-year-old girl, struggles to deal with the competing pressures the world places on her shoulders. She wants to maintain friendships, track down her missing brother, and most definitely avoid another heartbreak. In the midst of these events, however, she meets Gage, a young man who completely changes her outlook on life. Adolescent readers can sympathize with Serena’s constant oscillation between frustration and ecstasy. *The Sweetest Thing* is poignant and touching, following the highs and lows of one young woman’s decision-making process. Masterfully crafted, it is an accurate reflection of a high schooler’s thought processes and hobbies, rather than a stereotyped version common in high-school-targeted literature. However, this piece does contain mature content, and those unused to realistic fiction might find it slow-moving. For others, however, it is a lovely slice-of-life work that connects with readers.



JILLIAN VS. PARASITE PLANET

By Nicole Kornher-Stace

Reviewed by Brendan G., 6,
Delaware Valley Mensa



I really enjoyed this book. It was a dramatic and interesting story. It is appropriate for elementary-aged students, and I think many kids will like it because it is very entertaining. This is a story about Jillian and her quest to save her parents. Jillian is a little girl who lives on Earth. Her

parents brought her to the Parasite Planet on take-your-kid-to-work day because they work there. While there, she finds her parents nearly dead near a pod and sees Sabrina, a robot using herself as a Band-Aid on her parents. Jillian discovers that the parasites are responsible for her parents’ injuries, so she and Sabrina go on an adventure in an attempt to save her parents! My favorite part was the battle because I want to be a famous warrior when I grow up! My favorite character was Sabrina because she was a shapeshifter! Be sure to read this book for a fun space adventure!



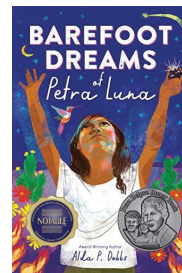
STEPSISTER

By Jennifer Donnelly

Reviewed by Giovanna P.,
15, Connecticut & Western
Massachusetts Mensa



This book was excellent, and I am happy I read it. I liked the interesting angle this book took in continuing the story of Cinderella and showing different sides of the well-known children’s tale. The book begins with the stepsister, Isabelle’s, point of view and shows the reason behind her jealousy and frustration with Cinderella. This book also follows the story of a young, beautiful wizard named Chance who made a bet over her soul and future. The middle of the book becomes a bit mundane and tedious. Although it does not really take away from the rest of the story, the action could have played out a little bit faster. One thing I enjoyed about this book was the development of Isabelle’s character: As the story continued you could witness her character slowly changing. The only reason it is not five stars is because of the whole drawn-out chance versus fate ordeal. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who enjoys darker stories. The author creates an entrancing environment that sucks the reader right into the pages of the book. I think an appropriate age range for this would be 13 and older, although I could see myself reading this when I was younger, just no young kids and definitely no one younger than 10. Some of the things that happen could be scary and inappropriate for a child to read or listen to. Content-wise there is some kissing, war/fighting, and general gore. Also, there is a borderline abusive relationship between Isabelle and her mother.



BAREFOOT DREAMS OF PETRA LUNA

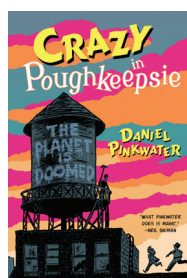
By Alda P. Dobbs

Reviewed by Josie S., 10,
Minnesota Mensa



In 1910, in a small village in northern Mexico, everything changed for Petra Luna. Petra’s Mama died from childbirth, and her Papa was dragged away by the

vicious Federales, forced to fight for them. Now, it's just Petra, her *abuelita*, little sister Amelia, and baby brother Luisto. When their village is burned down, they journey across Mexico, looking for a safe shelter. Petra promises her father to take care of her *familia*, and vows to forever keep that promise. She dreams of learning to read, but her Abuelita calls it a "barefoot dream," not meant to go far. On their journey, they must endure fear, hunger, and pain. Will Petra's family make it through this dangerous point in history? Kids 10 to 16 and adults would appreciate this powerful story of survival and hope as a strong and brave 12-year-old girl navigates through unimaginable tragic events. This book may not be as enjoyable for younger kids because it has a lot of elements of war and suffering. It's a quick read and will make you laugh and cry. Amelia was one of my favorite characters because she always had a positive outlook on things. I believe this book is a must-read.



CRAZY IN POUGHKEEPSIE

By Daniel Pinkwater

Reviewed by: Ayaan M., 7, Greater
New York Mensa



Set in the greater New York area, this book is true to its title and full of craziness till the end. The guru that Mick's older brother brings back from Tibet is joined by a group of kids in Poughkeepsie on a crazy journey. Kids would follow Guru's directions without knowing about Guru's plans until almost the end. There are unexpected twists in the story, and the author makes it extremely relatable for readers in and around the Poughkeepsie area! The author uses simple language and explains words that are not commonly used. Boys and girls who are 9 years or older would like this book because they can understand the twisted journey the author intentionally takes the readers through. I think 6- to 8-year-olds years old might enjoy parts of it but cannot appreciate the complexity of the journey. My favorite parts of the book are the crazy ghost parties where ghosts dance and amazing food is served when ghosts can't really eat, knowing about gurus and their mystical powers, and Guru's message that every journey has some learning.



HAVEN: A SMALL CAT'S BIG ADVENTURE

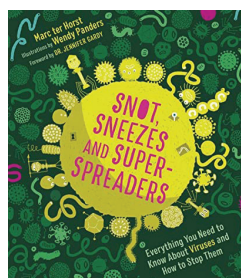
By Megan Wagner Lloyd

Reviewed by Sam C., 9, North
Florida Mensa



When her owner, Ma Millie, gets sick, a small pet cat, Haven, goes on an unexpected adventure to find help. She meets a fun-seeking fox named True, who comes with her and helps in many ways. I like this

book because Haven goes through many hardships such as climbing a ravine and fighting off a bobcat, but she always figures out a way to overcome them with courage, friendship, and teamwork. The plot started a little slow, so I thought it would be boring, but then the adventure began, and then I wanted to read from cover to cover. I think the author was trying to teach kids that teamwork helps you do things you might not be able to do alone. For kids who like *The Last Dogs* series or animal adventure books, I think they would really like this book.



SNOT, SNEEZES AND SUPER-SPREADERS: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VIRUSES AND HOW TO STOP THEM

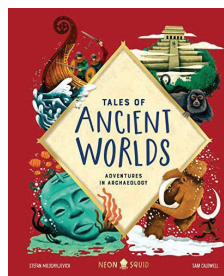
By Marc ter Horst

Reviewed by Ayaan M., 7,

Greater New York Mensa



This is a brilliant book that explains everything about viruses and protection against them in a very kid-friendly way. Covid-19 has been a topic of discussion during recess at our school, and I imagine every school has kids like me who didn't understand how pandemics such as Covid even start and how they spread so quickly across continents. Also, I learned how wearing masks and getting vaccinated actually work to protect us against these viruses. I found this book to be very helpful in understanding the history of viruses, the difference between viruses and bacteria, and all about vaccinations, including how they were discovered and how they help us all from getting very sick from these viruses. My favorite parts of the book are how mysteries of virus outbreaks are solved and using the lily pond as an example to explain about how Covid-19 spreads. This is a great book for any kid who wants to know about viruses. It is very simple to understand and has so many fun facts.



TALES OF ANCIENT WORLDS: ADVENTURES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

By Stefan Milosavljevic

Reviewed by Dylan
W., 9, Metropolitan
Washington Mensa



Easy to read, this book is very beautiful, filled to the brim with historical facts and more! The book starts with a short intro to human paleontology that includes the story of Lucy and Ne-

anderthals. Later, the book looks at ancient cultures, such as their art, tools, clothing, beliefs, and objects that they left behind. This book is very interesting, and I learned a ton from it! As the readers go through the book, they travel through time to discover the human past from long, long ago. Readers learn about ancient structures such as Stonehenge, the pyramids of the Nile Valley, the Terracotta soldiers buried in Xi'an, aqueducts of the Roman Empire, the history of Pompeii, and much more. I highly recommend this book to any eager ancient-history-loving reader.



MORTIMER: RAT RACE TO SPACE

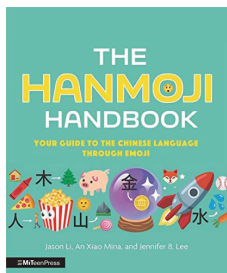
By Joan Marie Galat

Reviewed by Jack H., 7, Central Florida Mensa



Before I began reading this book, I thought the cover was so eye-catching, and it made me so excited to start reading! I love animals and anything space themed, and I was sure it would be a good read. I really liked how Mortimer and some of his friends are named after types of cheeses, and I thought it was fun to read about them all. I think Mortimer was very sneaky at the beginning and at first didn't agree with his character too much, but I am glad in the end he realized what was right.

This book is definitely full of fiction, from the talking rats to having Mortimer use YouTube! The author made it fun to read, and it's easy to follow along with the story. I thought it was clever how they called certain characters "iceberg hands," however, I won't tell you who those are before you read! Another character who is important in the story is Celeste, and she was one of my favorites because she seems sensible and stood up for what was right. This book is probably better for kids who can read chapter books well, and even adults would probably like it too.



THE HANMOJI HANDBOOK: YOUR GUIDE TO THE CHINESE LANGUAGE THROUGH EMOJI

By Jason Li, An Xiao Mina & Jennifer B. Lee

Reviewed by Maggie H., 8,

Western Pennsylvania Mensa

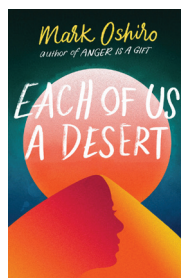


The Hanmoji Handbook: Your Guide to the Chinese Language Through Emoji is simply the best introduction to written and spoken Chinese. It shows how many Chinese words are pronounced and the origins of the written symbols. *Hanmoji Handbook* teaches about the history of Chinese writing and how it

became a logographic language. This means generally words are symbols rather than letters or symbols representing sounds. The book compares this process to the current development of emojis. Yes, I said the development of emojis. It is a surprisingly interesting topic.

The book teaches that, unlike English, Chinese is a tonal language. If you say a word in different tones, it will have a different meaning. For example, if you say "ma" in a certain tone it will mean "mother," or if you say it with a different tone, it would mean "scold."

The book really made me want to learn even more about Chinese. The authors explain the subject matter well and present the topics in a way perfect for children over 7 up through adults with a casual interest. I would recommend this to anyone who is interested in Chinese, and I think it might be a good introductory book for classrooms where Chinese is being learned.



EACH OF US A DESERT

By Mark Oshiro

Reviewed by Ana T., 13, Delaware Valley Mensa



Beautifully written in the format of a letter, *Each of Us a Desert* is a story about finding your purpose. This was a book that pulled you in and allowed you to deeply sympathize with Xochitl, the main character. Personally, I became very emotionally invested in this book, and it isn't a stretch to say that this might be one of the best books I have ever read. Her struggles and mindset were very similar to some of my own, and they encompassed a wide range of difficulties. It is my belief that almost anyone would be able to find one or more things in this book that they have experienced before or can deeply sympathize with. As she tries to find others like her and eventually where she is meant to be, she encounters friends, enemies, and those that are somewhere in between. Xochitl experiences plot twists that will surprise even those who think they can predict everything in the story. The things I believe might cause some dissatisfaction with readers are the few small typos throughout the story. They do not affect the story in any way, but as a perfectionist, I was slightly annoyed. I would highly recommend this book, and I think that it is suitable for all ages. ■

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Practice your expert
photography skills
by snapping a shot of
something you already
know and love — your pets!

Send your JPEG files to YmMagazine@AmericanMensa.org by Feb. 15 with the subject "Show Us Your Pets!" and our judges will select the best photos to publish in the Spring issue of YM2. We will select three winners from the following age groups:

- Ages 6 and under
- 7-12
- 13+

RULES:

Only current Mensa members may participate. Photos must be taken by Young Mensans. Young Mensans may submit up to three photos for consideration. Photographs must be original and unaltered. If you don't have your own pet, that's OK! Maybe a family member, friend, or neighbor has a pet you love. Besides, we have no way of checking if the pet is actually yours. Photographs may be used by American Mensa in internal publications, publicity, or other use, with the name of the photographer used only with permission of parent or guardian of the photographer.

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