

2024

HEAR ME OUT

Spring Edition





CONTENTS

School Leadership teams

- NOTE FROM HST - page 2
A MESSAGE FROM PLYMPTON ACADEMY STUDENT
LEADERSHIP TEAM - page 3

PHSG

- HOW ARE HUMMINGBIRD GETTING ALONG? - page 5
OUR PLANET'S SPRING - page 7
ALUMNI SECTION - page 9

Articles

- AS A WOMAN - page 11
YOU ARE MADE OF STARDUST - page 13

Subjects

- FRENCH AND GERMAN READING - page 15
ART IN YEAR 12 - page 17
RS IN YEAR 12 - page 19

Poetry

- SPRING - page 20

Short Stories

- TRAPPED IN A STORM - page 21
THE GARDEN - page 23
REBUILDING - page 25
- 



NOTE FROM HST

Verity

I cannot even begin to explain how excited I am to be producing my first edition of 'Hear Me Out'. These initial three months as Head Student have been busy to say the least, however I've really enjoyed my role so far and am thankful to be involved in everything that I am. I've tried out a couple of new things within this first edition as I strive to elevate the number of people reading 'Hear Me Out', so I hope that you enjoy reading those parts as well as all the other amazing pieces that have been submitted. Please never feel you can't approach me with any worries or concerns you may have!

Kitty

I have been really enjoying my first couple of months of being on HST; although it has been a lot of work, the results and the people I've worked with have made it all worth it. Within my role of Head of Student Council, I have loved getting to know students from all years and working together to try and improve the school, making it the best place possible for the students. A main topic we have been focussing on has been the food service, and I have recently met with a representative from Chartwells (our school's catering provider) and Eloise, the Head of Food Service at Plympton Academy, a school in the South West hub of TSAT. This is a connection that both myself and student council would like to maintain, and hopefully strengthen in the future. I feel very privileged to have been given this role, and I'd like to thank everyone who has helped me so far

Ellathea

I am really enjoying both my role as Deputy Head Student and as Head of Diversity and Inclusivity, and I hope you all enjoyed the events the Diversity group ran for LGBTQIA+ history month on Friday 7th February. We loved seeing you all in the colours that best represent you and are thankful for your engagement in our bake sale and 'I am beautiful because' hearts! Thanks to all of your generosity, we raised £266.04 for the charities Just Like Us, Proud2Be, and Not Alone Plymouth. It was a truly successful day, so thank you all so much for your support and we hope that you continue to engage in all the events we have planned for the rest of the term. Thank you again for being so welcoming and engaging so far

Frankie

Since starting in my role as charity and well-being lead, I have worked with our wonderful charity ambassadors to support various events, such as the LGBTQ+ bake sale and mufti day. Behind the scenes, I have also been working to create a support network for chronically ill and disabled students- watch this space! As the weather warms up, I am looking forward to continuing the paint a brick project to allow members of our school community to leave their artistic mark on the school during the 150th birthday celebrations. As always, please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or ideas!





A MESSAGE FROM PLYMPTON ACADEMY STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM

Here at Plympton Academy, we have been busy improving our school socially and environmentally. Since September, our leadership team have been exploring the possibilities of introducing sign language provisions for both students and teachers to improve the experience at school for all students. Equally, we have also been looking at ways in which we can promote an 'Earth Alliance' within our school to improve the environmental impact that our school has. Notably, as part of The Thinking Schools Trust, we have begun collaborating with your very own student leadership team to share ideas so that, together, we can improve our schools. These are just some of the highlights from what our student leadership team have been up to, and we are greatly looking forward to continuing collaborating across the trust.

But who are our student leaders?

Head Student- Toby L: takes Sociology, Photography and History

Head of Communication- Phoebe H: takes Dance, Photography, Sociology and does an EPQ on 'The impact of social media on young people's mental health'.

Head of Charity and Community- Erin B: takes BTEC Sport, BTEC Health and Social Care, Sociology and is doing EPQ on 'The impact of Girlguiding in the modern world in supporting young girls to develop lifelong skills'.

Head of Environment- Tom W: takes Religious Studies, History, Performing Arts and does an EPQ on 'NASA and other space agency's aims to progress humanity and their plans to try and understand the wider universe and what implications this may have for humanity'.

Head of Diversity- Elizabeth R: takes Physics, Maths, Geography and does an EPQ on 'disability awareness' as it's very important to her.

Head of Canteen Provision- Eloise T: takes Double Performing Arts, Music and Religious Studies

Back to you, Verity!

WRITTEN BY PLYMPTON ACADEMY STUDENT LEADERS



Plympton Academy

Inspiring Success



How Are Hummingbird Getting Along?

Last year was an extremely successful year for our famous Hummingbird team. We gained a new sponsor, Becton Dickinson (BD), who have given us a huge boost to our budget, which enabled us to change the colour of the car from blue to a race car green. As well as this, the car itself has had a few yearly touch ups including fixing gears, seatbelts, and electrics.

As for our main races last year; in May we travelled to RMB Chivenor in North Devon for a South-West heat. We came 4th overall, just missing out on the international final qualification. However, we did win the sustainability award for our car. Then, in July, it was a 2-and-a-half-hour drive down to Predannack in the Lizard Peninsula, where we won all our races in our car type category. As well as best presented team. This meant we qualified for the international final at Goodwood Motor Speedway.

So, in October, it was a 4-hour drive along the south coast to Goodwood, just near Southampton. Here, we completed against teams from all around the UK as well as teams from Portugal, Poland, Gibraltar, and many more. In our races, we came 21st overall out of 90 cars. But, the main accomplishment of the day was

that our team won the best portfolio award - much to Eloise's delight, who was key in writing the piece.

So, what is next for our Hummingbird team? Well thanks to our sponsors BD, we have been gifted a new kit car to build, design and race! Our trusted year 10 and 11 mechanics (along with Mr Thackray who is a little less trusted) are hard at work preparing the car to be built, getting branding and media ready for the new racing year, with more races, building and pure awesomeness!

Want to be a part of Hummingbird? Be a driver or a pits member on the racetrack, in on the action? Or a part of the mechanics building, fixing, and testing the new cars? Or maybe your artistic flare can design the new car with inspiring colours, logo and even a new mascot? We want you!! Emails and posters regarding what you can do to get involved will be sent out soon. If you are interested, keep your emails up to date and get involved.

For any burning questions, feel free to email dgy02@tsatstudent.org.

And follow our Instagram for updates and much more: [hummingbird.f24](https://www.instagram.com/hummingbird.f24)

WRITTEN BY DAISY GERAGHTY







OUR PLANET'S SPRING

Spring is a beautiful and remarkable sight as you witness new life being born and old life continuing to grow. As 2024 starts we should make some changes to preserve this natural beauty.

But, first let us talk about the regrowth our own Earth has done in the past year!

Climate scientists had hailed 2023 as the 'Beginning of the end' for the fossil fuel era. This is such wonderful news to hear, not only will there be less bad toxins in our ecosystems but a general improvement to our health.

What can you do to help our Earth?

We will always start small because the constant small changes will have a big impact.

You could start off by always putting your rubbish into the right bin and don't put plastic in the recycle bin unless the package says so.

Thrift, donate or sell! Due to the recent surge in fast fashion, so many clothes are wasted after being thrown into the bin.

Give love to these old clothes by donating them or thrifting them to get the best wear out of your old clothes.

Do the best to preserve our Earth as there will be no 'Planet B'

WRITTEN BY EARTH ALLIANCE

7







PHSG ALUMNI SECTION



Quick note from the editor: This is an idea I've had to inspire current students and to highlight the different ways you can go after Plymouth High. I've always loved hearing about various PHSG alumni and so I wanted to be able to bring different stories of how alumni have gotten on after leaving Plymouth High to you! Therefore, each edition I will make an effort to reach out to an ex PHSG student and have them write about which direction their path has taken since their days at our school. For this edition I managed to get in touch with Annabel Mitchell...

Hi, I'm Annabel, and I'm a Trainee Clinical Associate Psychologist!

I started PHSG in 2012, and I left in the summer of 2019 after completing my A Levels in Psychology, History, Biology, and Extended Project.

After completing my A Levels, I studied BSc Psychology at Bath Spa University in September 2019. During this time, I completed modules studying cognitive neuroscience, child and adolescent neuropsychology, developmental psychology, research and statistics, and I completed my dissertation researching parental perspectives on child development. Throughout my time at Bath Spa, I was involved in the Psychology Society, and in my third year, I was elected to be President. I also undertook the voluntary role of a research assistant alongside my studies and was a co-author of a rapid literature review of social work supervision practice, which was published in the British Journal of Social Work.

In the summer after graduating in 2022, I worked full-time as an Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention Tutor for the UK Young Autism Project and continued to do this part-time during my MSc until January 2023. This role involved teaching programmes using Applied Behaviour Analysis and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for children with autism and developmental disorders. The teaching curriculum included speech and language, social skills, and self-help skills. This significantly improved my skills in working with vulnerable children with a range of diagnoses and working as part of a team with a child-centred approach.

Following my undergraduate degree, I studied MSc Health Psychology at the University of Bath between September 2022- August 2023. As part of this MSc, I completed a 16-week full-time placement working at the charity Headway in Bath. During my placement, I completed my dissertation researching the extent to which Headway had improved patients' quality of life following a brain injury. Day to day, I was involved in running cognitive rehabilitation groups, collecting and organising data, working with patients to document goals and aims for the future and reviewing literature with regard to acquired brain injuries and comparing statistics and methods of rehabilitation to ensure the best practice was being implemented and recommended for the patients. I was a Research Apprentice working within the Pain

Stories Lab at the University of Bath and was involved in research with a focus on chronic childhood pain. From January until September 2023, I worked part-time as a Mental Health Care Assistant for Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health NHS Partnership. This role gave me experience working with adults in a mental health setting. Being based on an older adult and dementia assessment ward, I worked with a wide range of patients ranging from early-stage dementia to end-of-life care. This role involves monitoring patients' physical and mental health, keeping accurate records, taking frequent observations, and supervising patients to ensure their safety.

I started my current role as a Trainee Clinical Associate Psychologist with Devon NHS Partnership Trust in October 2023 and work within a Learning Disability Intensive Assessment and Treatment Team (IATT). This role is part of an apprenticeship with Plymouth University, and I am completing an MSc in Clinical Associate Psychology, specialising in Learning Disabilities. The training is an 18-month full-time MSc programme, and my week is currently split between university and work. I am due to complete this training and May 2025, I will be a qualified Clinical Associate Psychologist and continue to work in the same team I am in. My current role involves working with patients with learning disabilities who require support and interventions due to their mental health. This is an extremely varied role and includes completing assessments, which then leads to making diagnoses, planning and undertaking person-centred interventions, providing support and guidance to families of patients and care providers, as well as taking the lead on training staff within the IATT.

My biggest advice (no matter what subject or career route) is to say yes to any work experience opportunity. I have never had straight A* results (or 9s now!) but always went out of my way to gain extra experience to demonstrate my skills in other ways, and without doing that, I definitely would not have been successful when applying for my current job.

I have really fond memories of my time at PHSG and made lifelong friends. I am extremely grateful for the support and encouragement I had from all my teachers who made it possible for me to continue on to have the start to my career that I have had. I am more than happy to chat if anyone has any questions about Psychology or working in the NHS; my email is a.mitchell26@nhs.net.

WRITTEN BY ANNABEL MITCHELL



Annabel's First Day in Year 7



Annabel's Recent Graduation Photo





AS A WOMAN



As a woman, I'm tightly chained by the shackles of expectations, held in the cages of fear, and have the noose of the patriarchy knotted firmly around my neck. As a woman, I'm forever playing a game of chase with full control over my decisions and my own body. And as a woman, I'm tired of not being free.

I want to take you back to an especially important year. 1928: the year women got the full right to vote on the same terms as men. We've all (hopefully) heard of the suffrage movement which led to this incredible moment in our fight for equality and understand that the suffrage movement was the first true feminist fight we saw in history that had such a significant impact. For once, women felt like we were finally working towards our most coveted wish... equality. However, that was nearly 100 years ago. So why are we still not equal?

Naturally, I accept we are in a far better situation than we were in Victorian England, for example, we are now allowed to take our education to the same level as our male counterparts. Yet, there are so many aspects in life where we perhaps think we are more liberated than we actually are.

Take menstruation, considering as a school we are fundraising for ActionAid this International Women's Day, it's rather fitting. Some girls, including myself, have and continue to suffer terrible pain due to their periods. Cramps, headaches, nausea, leg pain, back pain and many more issues trouble us once a month for a whole week on average. Yet, this pain is often belittled, and we are told to just carry on like our bodies aren't fighting us to just give them a break. We continue as normal, doing exams in school, playing sport, and having to socialise as though we don't feel at our worst. We're told we're moody and unnecessary and we are treated as though we've lost our sanity when all we really lose on our periods is our tolerance for unwanted and unfair remarks. Even sanitary products - the basic necessities we require that time of the month - are not fairly given to us. Women are still having to pay for them? On average, a woman spends £5000 on period products in her lifetime. Pair that with the pay gap and women are immediately economically disadvantaged compared to men.

Now, I'm not here to rant about all the ways women are still hugely disadvantaged to men. For starters, I'd be here for months if I was. However, I'm wanting to use this to highlight that we have to continue to push back, realise that we're not yet where we deserve to be and I want people to understand that being a feminist is not a thing to not talk about and should not be a reason someone loses interest in you. Although, that being said, if someone does, they weren't right for you anyway and you deserve far better.

But it's strange, because us women always seem to feel as though we should water some part of ourselves down in order to be accepted. I'm sick of still feeling like I have a responsibility to someone else, as though my one duty in life is to please others and not myself. And it's not that everyday I'm told this, of course not, yet it's so deeply embedded into our patriarchal society

that a woman should be caring and affectionate and kind and polite that I feel as though if I'm not overtly pleasant to everyone I meet, then I'm doing something wrong.

For those of you that aren't familiar with the term 'patriarchy,' though, it refers to a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. An easy way to see how integrated it is within our lives is to create a reversion of this; exploring how a matriarchal society (the opposite of a patriarchal society) would look. If we lived in a world in which all patriarchal values were converted into matriarchal principles then we would have more women in power than men, women wouldn't be told we're too emotional for said positions of power and women would most certainly not be overly sexualised in every essence of their being. However, instead we have this world in which men take those places of hierarchical standard and women are often pushed to a lower level than men which allows us to become disadvantaged in our love lives, career paths and parenthood (if we choose to have children).

In recent years there's been this idea developed of a 'girl's girl' in the world of social media. The meaning behind this notion pertains to women looking out for each other, whether this be shown through one woman helping another woman who is being harassed or simply acting as a decent human being and not knowingly romantically associating yourself with another woman's partner. This of course is a good thing in many respects, and personally I strongly believe in women supporting women; why should we tolerate patriarchal values through degrading one another? Despite this, I maintain that this can make us think as if we have to instantly like and get along with any woman we meet, which can equally perpetuate the problem of us girls feeling as though we must be nothing besides agreeable.

Of course, fighting for female equality is not an easy feat. There are so many things working against us that I didn't even mention, such as how women are often demeaned in casual conversation, violence against women and healthcare discrepancies between men and women. However, those that know me understand that I'm anything but a pessimist and therefore I genuinely believe that eventually (don't ask me when that is) women will be liberated from societal constraints and will be completely equal to men if we all (and that includes men) unitedly strive for it, because no woman warrants being considered less than someone simply for her gender.

So, Happy International Women's Day everyone (8th March 2024)! Let us continue to celebrate all the wonderful women in our lives and understand their struggles by embracing this year's theme of investing in women and accelerating progress.



YOU ARE MADE OF STARDUST



You, dear reader, are made of stardust.

I don't mean this in some metaphorical pixie dust kind of way. I mean the physical matter that makes you... well you, was forged in the heart of a dying star.

Let me explain. When the universe was a tiny newborn of just 380,000 years old, the first hydrogen atoms emerged. Eventually, this hydrogen gas was shepherded into denser and denser regions of gas by the force of gravity. These areas eventually became so dense that something amazing happened. Once the pressure and temperature in the centre of the cloud was high enough, hydrogen atoms began to fuse together, releasing energy in the form of light as the first generation of stars were born.

So, these stars did what stars do best: happily fusing hydrogen into helium for a million years or so before they burnt through their fuel, causing the outward forces of pressure to drop. When the pressure dropped low enough, gravity suddenly took over and the stars exploded in just a few seconds. This massive explosion is known as a supernova, and in the sheer power of the shockwave it creates, new heavier atomic nuclei can be formed. This new matter gets propelled into the universe and into the heart of the next generation of stars until they burn through their fuel and die, and so the cycle continues.

In this way, heavier and heavier elements are formed, from the iron in your blood to the phosphorus that makes up your DNA. It was all made of stardust.

So, when you gaze up at the night sky- awe and wonder welling at the pit of your stomach- you are the universe gazing back at itself. Why then, dear reader, when you look in the mirror do you hate what you see? Why do you try to contort your body to be slimmer, or smaller, or smoother or flatter or more palatable to others or to take up less space? Would you tell the universe that she needed to take up less space? Of course not- you simply admire her many curves and colours. We never tell the universe she must hide the imperfections on her face, we draw constellations between them, inventing mythology which is passed down the generations to allow explorers to find their way home by night.

And, dear reader, have you ever stopped to consider just how magnificently improbable you are? How many of your ancestors had to defy all the odds of war, famine, and disease to meet each other, fall in love, and allow you just a fraction of a chance at being born? If your great great... grandfather had been mauled to death by a sabre tooth tiger, you certainly wouldn't be here to tell the tale, but what if by chance, one of your parents had been running late on the day they first met- even by just a few seconds? One traffic light had been red. They left their keys in the house. They stopped to tie their shoelaces.

The universe may have never got the chance to experience the stellar beauty and wonder that is you; and what a terrible shame that would have been.

And here's the most exciting part: each one of those ancestors was made of stardust too and, through your DNA, you get to carry their stardust with you; in the lopsided dimple that appears when you laugh, or the way the first hairs on your head curled into ringlets.

In the same way those first stars sent their elements out into space, so that the next generation may grow stronger, your ancestors' genes have evolved and adapted through the aeons to make the precious, beloved, one-of-a-kind human being you are today.

We also carry stardust in the memories we cherish. For me, I carry the stardust of my Grandad; in the shape of my nose, the colour of my hair and in my sense of humour: in particular, my tendency to always laugh or make a joke at just the wrong moment in social situations- thanks for that one! I also carry with me the stardust of his stories. I always saw a starry twinkle in his eye when he told me of his escapades as an evacuee in Cornwall during the Second World War and of his adventures serving in the Royal Air Force.

The night sky is a porthole to the past. My favourite stars are called Mizar and Alcor located in the constellation of Ursa Major, the big bear. Mizar and Alcor are around 80 light years away. This means that when I look at them through my telescope today, the light that hits my eye has been travelling at 300,000 kilometres a second for 80 years. This means that I am seeing the light those stars produced when my grandad sat looking at the sky on his first night as an evacuee, wondering what his future would look like and if he would ever see his family again.

In the grand scheme of things, these stars are incredibly close to us. Some of the stars we see in the night sky are so far away that although they have now died, we will still be able to see their light on earth for generations to come. In which case, if their light is still inspiring us, are they really gone?

And in the same way, dear reader, when you are no more, the universe will not let your stardust go to waste, far from it! The elements in your body which were forged in dying stars will seep into the soil, fertilising and nourishing the life around it. After all, isn't that what a legacy is- Planting flowers in a garden you'll never get to see?

Perhaps the next generation of stardust will look at those flowers and marvel at their beauty: each perfectly formed petal and bud, and in gazing at their beauty, your beauty, on their darkest days, be reminded that the universe really is an awesome place to be.





FRENCH AND GERMAN READING

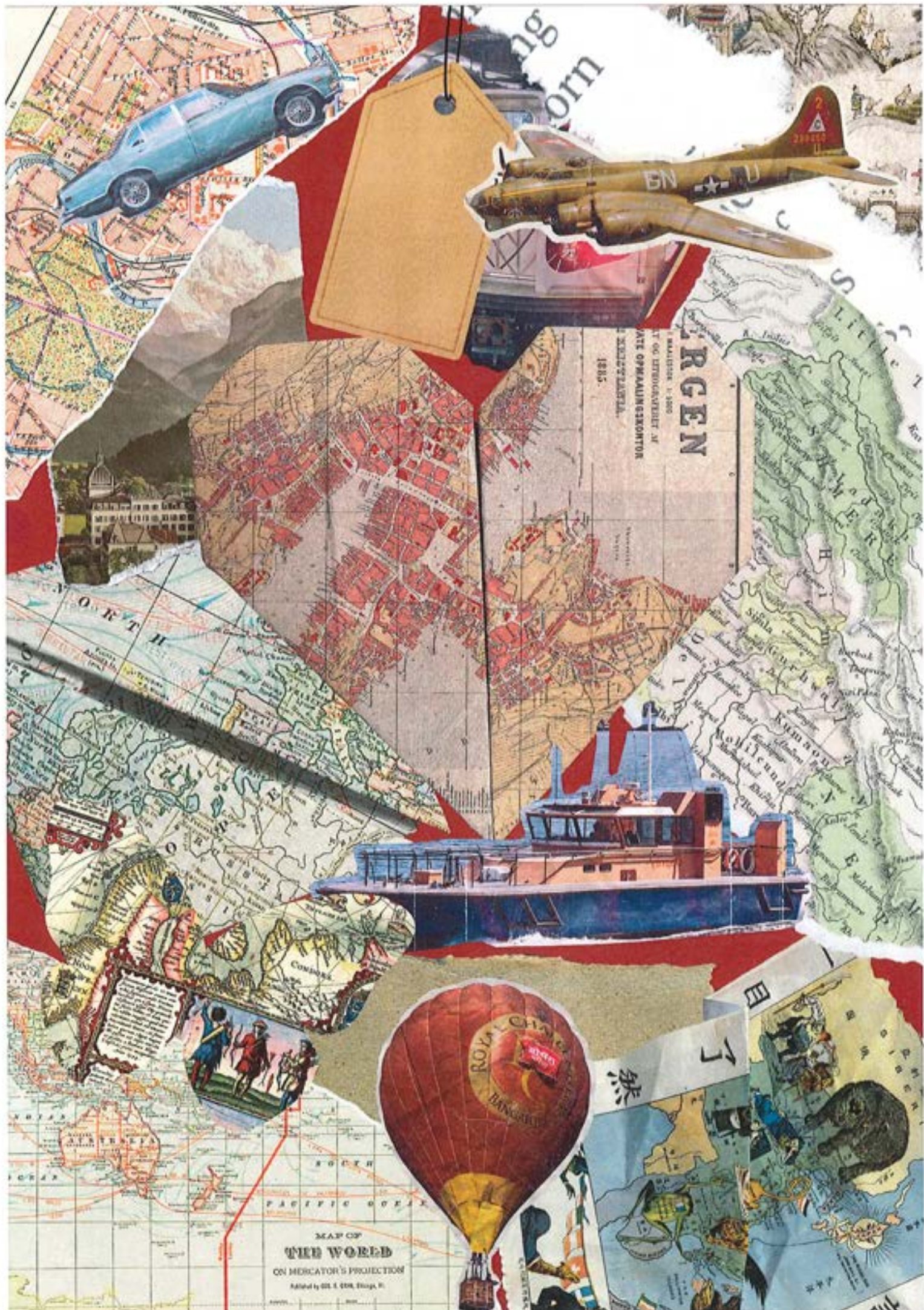
LE FRANÇAIS

C'est une nouvelle idée que je pensais pour la magazine et je voulais l'essayer dans mon premier numéro. Personnellement, j'ai été intéressé en les langues pour une couples des années maintenant parce qu'il y a beaucoup des raisons pourquoi ils sont très important et lire en la langue, qui vous apprendrez, est une manière fantastique pour pratiquer ! J'apprends le français, l'allemand et l'italien mais j'appris aussi un peu le néerlandais. J'ai fait les deux l'allemand et le français pour les examinations GCSE et maintenant je prends l'allemand pour le bac. Je veux ce section de 'Hear Me Out' être accessible et donc je vais toujours écrire sans chercher aucun mots, bien que il sera également vérifié par quelqu'un d'autre, alors vous pouvez être sûr que c'est correct. Dans le futur, j'écrirai sur divers sujets, cependant car c'est mon premier de ces, je voulais plus expliquer qu'est ce que c'est. J'espère que ce sera utile pour les élèves qui apprends les langues et que vous l'appréciez.



DAS DEUTSCH

Diese ist eine neue Dinge für das Magazin, die ich in meiner erste Ausgabe wollte ausprobieren. Personalich, habe ich mich nun für Fremdsprachen seit eine Paare Jahren interessiert, weil es vielen Gründe gibt, warum Fremdsprachen sehr wichtig sind und lesen in dem Fremdsprachen, die man lernt, ist sehr hilfreich. Ich lerne Deutsch, Französisch und Italienisch, und ich habe ein bisschen in Niederländisch gelernt. Ich machte beide Französisch und Deutsch für meine GCSEs und ich studiere noch Deutsch für das Abitur. Ich will diesen Abschnitt zugänglich machen und deshalb werde ich es geschrieben, ohne suchen für einigen Worten, jedoch wird es nachgesehen von jemand anderem, also man sicher sein kann, dass es richtig ist. In der Zukunft, werde ich über andere Fächer schreiben, jedoch da es meine erste von diesen ist, wollte ich es mehr erklären. Ich hoffe, dass es nützlich für die Fremdsprachen Studenten sein wird und, dass es sich gefallen wird.



ART IN YEAR 12

Currently in art we are a couple of weeks into our own lead project, mostly experimenting and exploring ideas. All stemming from a word of our choice that we'd focus on until about this time in 13, which Mr. Varrall probably (definitely) told us. Regardless, I chose 'mutation,' which doesn't have to be taken simply as mutants and creatures; it could be a synonym for change. Something slowly evolving into something better or worse. It could also be a beginning abruptly transforming into an ending. To me, it is an overwhelming, all-consuming force that can make you vulnerable. Mutation is a constant in life; it's happening everywhere all the time. For instance, the plants are constantly growing and moving; it's literally some of the defining features of life. But it's not just nature; the buildings are slowly crumbling. The pavement beneath your feet is wearing away with every step. The people around you are always mutating into different forms of themselves.

This is one of the pieces I've done so far which shows the vulnerable feeling that comes with the inescapable force of mutation.

WRITTEN BY KEIRAN DANIELS





Imogen Spilling on her work 'mirror':
 "a piece mirroring the current economic crisis and the effects of it on young people"

Sanuthi Mudannayake's Jenny Saville artist study



Lilly Chevin (yr13 but work from yr12)
 on her work
 based off the topic of light and dark:
 "a piece exploring women of the horror
 genre using light aesthetics"



RS IN YEAR 12

I have been taking RS since September last year. But I will not lie, I used to hate it! Similar to many school children, forced prayers and hymns, harvests and nativity plays gave me an instant dislike of religion. Especially as I was not raised as Christian.

As I rose up the years into secondary school, I came here and still hated it... I vividly remember thinking in year 8: who on earth would take RS A-level unless they wanted to be a priest? It didn't really cross my mind again, until 6th form options came around. When I walked around the school, I said I wanted to look at humanity subjects, ended up in RS.

As I talked about it more, it just made sense. The thing that I didn't understand before is that RS is not religion, it's thinking. And one thing I know that I love is thinking.

Since September, we have been learning about philosophers such as Aristotle, the Buddha, St Aquinas, Augustine (or Gus Gus as I like to call him) and many more. I like to imagine the philosophers and thinkers as the real people they once were, as a kind of history that I was never taught: the history of people and, not events, their stories. As I have learnt more and more in RS, it has gradually become my favourite subject.

There is a lot of content, but it's fascinating and thought-provoking. There are a lot of essays, but they become fun to write (shocking, I know). There is a lot of thinking, but it's not about the difficulty of maths equations, it's about people and belief and culture and systems.

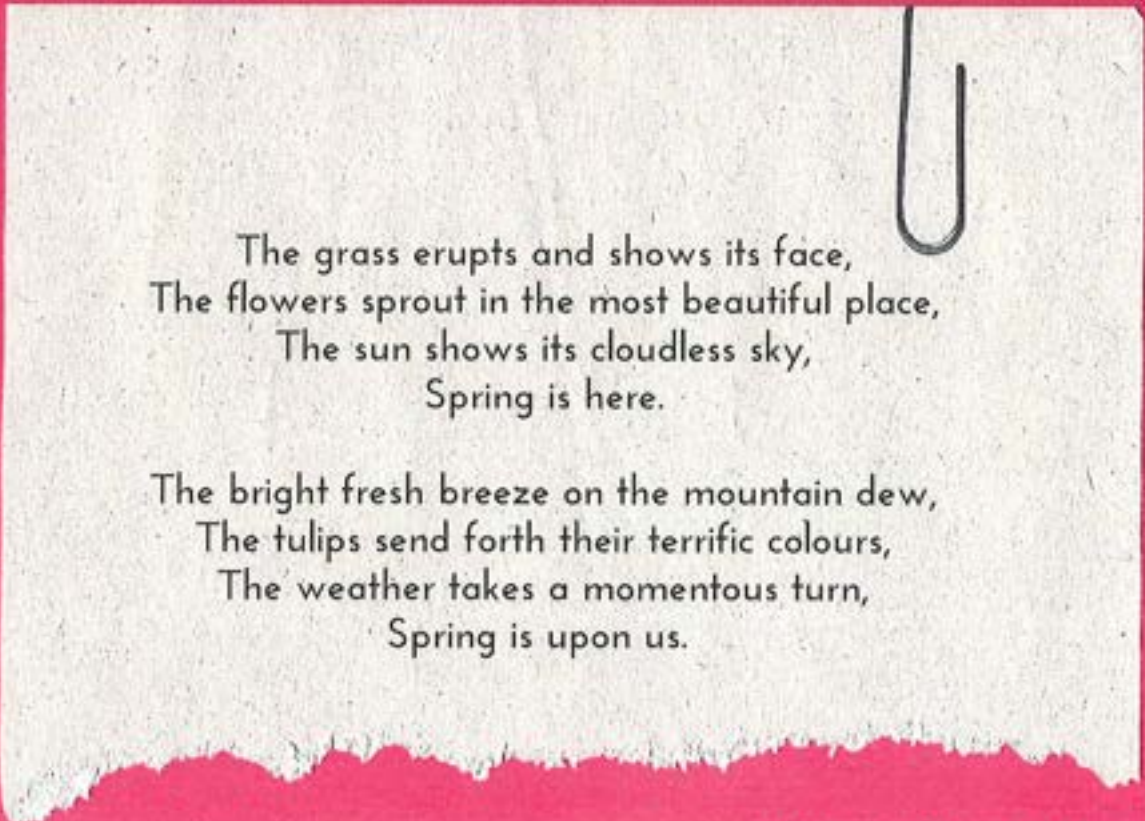
I admit, I might have a bias. As a future anthropologist, culture is my thing. But there is (I think) a universal question that we all consider at some point in our lives, 'where do we go after we die?' Our topic of 'soul, mind and body' is on this thinking point. We all realised, whilst doing this topic, that we had strong pre-existing beliefs on what the answer was. My favourite thing about this topic (other than thinking about death) was wondering where I fit in the equation. Plus, it felt pretty great producing the sentence: I think the closest is substance dualism, like Descartes, because I'm definitely not a materialist.

WRITTEN BY JENNA CHAPLIN





SPRING



The grass erupts and shows its face,
The flowers sprout in the most beautiful place,
The sun shows its cloudless sky,
Spring is here.

The bright fresh breeze on the mountain dew,
The tulips send forth their terrific colours,
The weather takes a momentous turn,
Spring is upon us.

WRITTEN BY ELLA FOX



TRAPPED IN A STORM

A smiling face. That's all I see when I look in the mirror. But there is so much more going on beneath the surface, hidden from everyone else.

Rain lashes at the window. Outside, a storm rages, whipping the branches of the trees into a frenzy. The sky is a dark, midnight black, threatening to engulf anyone and anything that's brave enough to venture near it.

Last year I was diagnosed with M.E. You probably don't know what that is. Most people don't. And that's the problem - it's an invisible illness, one no one sees. For over a year I've been like this, drained and alone. It was really hard at first, the overwhelming exhaustion. It still is. But the pain was the worst bit. All I wanted to do was curl up in a ball and cry. Some days I did. No one understood what I was going through; it felt like my life had been taken away from me.

The rain falls in a torrent now, flooding the street beneath me. I didn't think it was possible, but it is even darker than before. I can barely see the houses opposite, until lightning strikes across the sky and lights them up. Thunder rumbles, and wind howls, like a wolf stalking its prey in the dead of night.

As the months passed, it didn't get any easier, but I learnt to hide it better. I felt drained, but that was my new normal. School was especially hard, and soon became the only thing I could manage. I would go to school, then collapse on the sofa at home until I went to bed. That became my new routine, but it wasn't what I wanted. Before I got ill, I would spend time with my friends and go out, and I wanted to go back to that. So I started to try to get better, more so than before. I balanced my school work with doing things I love. I talked to my friends. And I felt happier.

The rain eases, only slightly, and the wind calms, now merely a dog chasing a squirrel. Lightning becomes more frequent, illuminating the sky for longer, a light in the enduring darkness.

Life's still not perfect. I am still ill, and I expect to be for at least another few years. But I'm dealing with it better now.

It's still raining, but slower now. It sounds like a dance, the rain drumming against the road; the wind singing a beautiful song. The sky is still dark, but, after all, only in darkness can we see the stars.

WRITTEN BY EVA TREVAN







THE GARDEN



The sound of birds and trickling water fill my ears and the familiar scent of flowers drifts through my nostrils. I can't help but smile at the swinging chair hanging from the great oak tree. I think of all sights the tree must have seen, through the wars and suffering, through the darkness and pain. But also through children playing hide and seek behind it, through lovers engraving their names into the soft bark. You can still see the letters faintly- J and S. I decide I will put my name there too, Kayley Gardiner aged 8, maybe one day someone will see it. I sit on the chair and swing gently from side to side, the soft wind filling my hair.

A robin sits, staring at me from his branch. My mum always told me 'Robins appear when loved ones are here'. I just know that this one is my grandpa. The way he looks at me, his feathers a little scruffy. This was his favourite place to sit. When I was younger I would sit on his lap here and he would read me stories.

I stare at the pond in the middle of the garden, it has always been the best part of the garden. It has little lily pads and tadpoles swimming through it. I walk over to it and dip my hand in and I shudder, it's a little colder than I expected. There is a small fountain in the middle of the pond that sprays a few droplets of water over my face and my mascara begins to run leaving black smudges on my cheeks.

The morning dew is still glinting in the sunlight, lying perfectly on the grass. I spot a spider still spinning its web, I can see it is struggling against the droplets but despite all odds it keeps going and fights back.

The dappled sunlight shines through the lush leaves of the oak trees and that's when I remember the hideout! How could I forget the hideout?! I duck under the hollowed-out bush and sit on the stool. Dad made the stool for my sister and I when we were younger. He is so good at DIY; he made a rocking horse, a table, a bird box and a little doll house. We had put the bench, table and doll house in the hideout and the rest outside. We had all made little peg-dolls for the dollhouse too. We had used string for hair and painted their faces, and sewed them outfits. Mine has a pretty, blue dress with daisies on and my sister's has a pink dress covered in bees. Mum's one is the best though- she is like an artist!

I take the small teapot with mine and my sister's name engraved in gold and poured myself a cup of pretend tea. I pretend to take a sip and pretend to burn my tongue. I then use the doctor kit to fix it and play with the dolls to distract me from the pretend pain.

Then, my mum calls me for dinner, we are having my favourite tonight, pasta.





REBUILDING

BANG. CRASH. BOOM.

On this Friday afternoon, the memories come gushing back. The house used to always be warm and inviting, with the smell of my mum's perfume on the cushions. What I would give, what we would both give, to breathe in that scent again. Now, all that is left is bricks and rubble; a dismal sight to match with this dismal weather.

To my surprise, the world carried on as normal - Mr Dent carried on mowing the grass and Mrs Dent carried on feeding the birds - after the incident. Everyone acted as if it never happened. But how could we? The grief engulfed us like the walls had engulfed our parents on that fateful night. It wouldn't - it couldn't - be the same again.

I still remember it all vividly: the screams, the panic, the pain as it shot through me like a gun, and the incident was the trigger.

I was happy; content, even, in my bones. Then...

BANG. CRASH. BOOM.

Smoke danced up my nostrils and the shrill screams from my mum pierced my ears. Chaos rained down onto us as the fire pranced around the room like one of the ballerinas we went to see a couple of years ago. Coming out of my trance, me and my sister (with her perfectly straight blonde hair - now crazy, and out of line) were swept swiftly off the sofa by our dad. The smell of burning plastic crept through the house as the smoke detector screeched at us in warning. I remember the feeling of my dad's arms with goosebumps running down and the feeling of the rise and fall of his chest as he carried us out the door. He scrambled back through the flames into the mist to save our mother.

But... it was too late for my parents. Gone. The house caved in on them: the fire had won.

After the fire had stopped roaring and the flames had stopped licking the house, I sat down and cried a river of tears facing the debris. Only then did I realise how my life would change - this tragic end to my story.

BANG. CRASH. BOOM.

It is one of those endless summer nights, and the wind blows in my face as the gorgeous aroma of flowers fills my nostrils. My spirits have lifted - I have finally made peace with the past. The builders are still working deep into the orangey - pink sunset. I can see them clearly from my perch on the garden wall as they clack bricks together forming a relaxing hum of noise.

We are rebuilding the house - my childhood dream. The flowers have been planted in the garden - daffodils, my mum's favourite - each one spreading joy. I have planned it all out: from the roof to the garden, the wallpaper to the cushions, it is just how they would've liked it. Maybe some things can be the same again.





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