

Allies in a Battle of Rainbows

Exploring inclusivity of LGBTQ+ identities on campus and what students can do about it

Rebecca Beddingfield (she/her)
Media Editor



AJ Laxa and his boyfriend John Wagas. “My favorite thing about AJ is that he stays absolutely, 100% undoubtedly true to himself. No matter what struggles or hurdles are thrown his way, he knows who he is and does what he knows is best for him. He is always totally himself, and doesn’t compromise or change for anyone,” says Wagas.

PC: AJ Laxa

From Spirit Week to Interact to LGBTQ+ club, AJ Laxa (12) has been fully invested in his experience at American High School for the past four years. While Laxa identifies with all of these things, he also identifies as a trans man, which means that his gender is different from what his birth sex is often associated with. For Laxa, his journey for finding his identity started in late elementary school.

“[My mom] would always question how I dress and—it’s kind of Filipino culture like, ‘Oh, are you a tomboy?’ I didn’t know what that was; I would just keep researching and researching and I would be in these loops of going on the Internet and trying to figure out like, ‘Oh, what is the difference between gender and sexuality?’”

Laxa identified as gender fluid up until the underclassman years of high school after more research brought him a new understanding of his identity.

“I felt just like a man—like a transgender male—and I guess that’s just how I fall [on the gender spectrum],” says Laxa.

Others at AHS have discovered ways to identify

themselves that feel more accurate to who they are. Akari Che (10) is nonbinary, which falls under what is known as the “transgender umbrella” that includes anyone that does not identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth.

“I think it was because identifying as female and being stereotyped as one felt strange to me for most of my life. In ninth grade, I guess I came to realize it’d be better to go by nonbinary,” says Che.

American High School is often labeled as extremely accepting and progressive, being a school in the Bay Area with what might be the most accepting generations of LGBTQ+ identities to ever walk the Earth. However, life at AHS still causes a plethora of problems for those who identify as LGBTQ+, especially trans identities, and many problems can be connected to education itself.

“I remember hearing that we were supposed to [talk about sexuality and gender identity in health class]. She even said we were going to but she never did. I think it would have been great to hear about that,” says Laxa.

Laxa not only embraced

his gender identity but his sexuality as a queer man. However, the center of both topics often links back to the role of education. For Jane Doe, a closeted sophomore student at AHS, when her middle school did not teach her adequately about LGBTQ+ identities, she had to learn in a different way. Doe’s name has been changed to protect her privacy.

“I think I always kind of knew, but I didn’t know it was an option to even like girls. In eighth grade my best friend told me she was bi[sexual] and I think that opened my eyes and made me realize that I’m just not really that attracted to guys,” says Doe.

Before even entering AHS, LGBTQ+ students often already have a sense of who they are without the education or potential allies to support them. When Shree Sathiyam (11) discovered her sexuality in middle school, the lack of education surrounding her identity affected the way she viewed herself that changed with a better education.

“I wanted to tell people. but also it was middle school

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She’s a Server, Your Honor

Why giving back to the community locally and internationally matters

Liana Dong
Staff Writer



President’s Winter Retreat, an overnight event planned and executed by the members of District Council, involves leadership workshops and attendee bonding. Students are sorted into expertly named teams to spend their weekend with.

Look out for yourself. It’s a sentiment that most people hear from a very young age and take to heart, dedicating their entire lives to personal success in a cutthroat education and job market. In a society so focused on doing just that, many forget to give back to others and the community that raised them. Alicia Chen (12) strives to serve her community as a member of Interact’s District Council and Fremont Unified School District’s SURFBoardE.

As an Outreach Coordinator for Interact 5170, the largest and most prolific district of the worldwide service club, Chen takes a hands-on approach to achieving Interact’s goals.

Soha Manzoor, District Governor and senior at James Logan High School, explains, “Interact will always be guided by our motto, service above self. We strive to create a positive environment for all members to give back to their communities! . . . Our international project this year is Build for Tomorrow and we are raising money to build schools in Nicaragua, while our community

project is Recovery Through Resilience as we raise awareness and education toward the issue of substance abuse.”

Chen works with her co, Monta Vista High School senior Shreya Guha, to complete the responsibilities required for their role.

“In short, we handle chartering of new schools, facilitating Rotaract stay overs at Cal, Santa Cruz, and Davis, and working with middle schoolers,” Guha explains. “We have calls with each other and our advisors to go over our goals, progress, and any obstacles. We usually divide the work in half, or assign one person to do it and then the other will do it next time, just communicating our own needs to make sure we accomplish what is required of us.”

For Chen, participating in District Council is worthwhile despite how much of herself she must invest in the group.

“Before I was on District Council, I was pretty naïve in terms of how much time I would need to dedicate to the team. However,

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Our Mission Statement

We at the Eagle Era strive to be a reliable and compelling source of news for the members of the American High School community. We are dedicated to regularly providing students, staff, and the community beyond with newsworthy information accurately, truthfully, and objectively through printed issues, online articles, and social media posts. We hope to include a diverse range of content that impacts the readers of the Eagle Era in a unique yet creative manner. As a student-run newspaper, we aim not to reflect the values interests, and ideas of the staff alone, but of the AHS community as a whole.

Letter From the Editor

Dear Eagles,

What a year, am I right? It's hard to believe that it's only April right now. You know that feeling when it's Thursday and it's almost the end—but not quite—and the day is just dragging on? I think we're stuck on the Thursday of the year. Truthfully speaking, as a senior, I can't say that I'm not disappointed with how 2020 has turned out so far. I was imagining dressing up for Springfest, watching the Spring musical, going to my first prom, crying at the Moving Up rally, and then finally making memories at Grad Nite before coming to a close at the graduation ceremony. It's strange looking back at my concerns in January and my concerns now. I was out there worrying about my short hair not going with my prom dress; now I'm here just wanting to start college on time. :)

I do understand, though, that there are bigger things on hand, and I hope all of you are staying healthy and

safe. Pop out occasionally for some fresh air, but don't stray. Friends are important to catch up with, but your wellbeing should be your priority. Occupy your mind with studying, cooking, drawing, singing, binging TV shows, facetimeing, and picking up some new hobbies. And please don't go out to protest the shelter-in-place...

Now, as I bring this Letter from the Editor to a close, I'm sad to say that this is the last one I'll be writing. (Wow, that's a terribly depressing sentence out of context.) Don't you worry—I'll still exist. Beyond feeling sad, however, I am IMMENSELY proud and happy to say that next month's issue will be headed by next year's editors, Rebecca Beddingfield and Liana Dong. I've had a fantastic run this school year, and I couldn't be happier to finish it off with Annie Liu.

Michelle Lee
Co-Editor-in-Chief

Dear Eagles,

After two years of being a part of the Eagle Era, I'm finding myself at a bit of a loss regarding how to start this letter—the last one that I'll be writing as editor-in-chief.

My journey in journalism began almost on a whim; there was at least a smidgen of impulse behind my decision to check the box for "Journalism 1" on my course request form back in sophomore year. I'd been reading the Eagle Era since freshman year, but I never fully imagined I'd be capable of being a part of it. Two years later, I couldn't be happier that I decided to join this amazing and hardworking team.

It's truly been an honor to serve as co-editor-in-chief of the Eagle Era this year, and I've had an incredible experience working with our talented and hardworking staff in order to serve as a news source that strives to represent every student's voice. I'm forever grateful for all the memories, funny anec-

dotes, mistakes and lessons learned, and most importantly, the fact that I've been able to contribute to something larger than myself.

Having poured so much time and dedication into the Eagle Era over the past two years, it definitely pulls at my heartstrings to realize that I'll be graduating soon and this chapter of my life is coming to a close. However, I couldn't be more excited for our new editors to take over. As per tradition, the production of the May issue will be led by next year's editors-in-chief, Rebecca Beddingfield and Liana Dong. I'm proud to leave the Eagle Era in their hands as well as the rest of our talented staff (and advisor, Mr. Savoie!), and I can't wait to see where they'll take the paper next.

Signing off for now,
Annie Liu
Co-Editor-in-Chief

She's a Server, Your Honor (cont.)

after meeting each person and having spent time with them, I quickly realized the caliber of how much happiness it brought me," she explains. "I know it is extremely overused, but when you love something, you find time to do it. Being on District Council has really improved the quality of my life, and it's become integral to my routine. I would say I am motivated by my love for service, but what keeps me going is seeing how full of joy everyone is after each event, because it solidifies that our work is important and benefits the community in a multifaceted way.

Divya Kunisetty (12), director of Area 4, mirrors a similar sentiment.

"I am motivated to participate in DC when I see the impact of our hard work and effort. As a single entity, it's hard to make a significant impact, but when we come together as a whole, we're able to take huge strides in serving our community and international projects," she explains.

For DC advisor Jimmy Nguyen, Chen's growth paints her as an extremely promising individual.

"Out of all the students I worked with in DC and Interact, I can honestly say that

Alicia has some of the strongest potential I've seen," he explains. "I've seen her accomplish a lot of amazing things, and I know that she will continue to find success in college. She's the kind of person that when you work with her, you want to try harder and improve yourself too. I think she'll continue to do big things and accomplish every goal she has set for herself, without a doubt. To be honest, I can say that people who get to work with Alicia in the future are lucky, because they're getting someone who will go above and beyond every time."

Guha shares a similar appreciation for Alicia through their months of partnership.

"What can I say about this girl other than she is an amazing human! She is the perfect mix of funny, quirky, smart, hardworking, and chill," she says. "I have always been able to be myself around her and I am so glad that she is my co, because this experience would not have been the same without her. She is the best hype woman, the sweetest sister, and kindest soul. We have definitely grown as a pair and I am so appreciative of that!"

Along with serving for Interact, Chen also participates in SURFBoardE, the student

organization responsible for sharing student input with FUSD.

"Among other community groups under the support of the Fremont Unified School District (FUSD), the student body is largely impacted by every district decision," Chairperson Karen Li explains. "SURFBoard E is an official student representative organization at the district, composed of three student representatives from each secondary level school. This student group meets bi-monthly and serves as a liaison between 35,000 students and the Board of Education."

Fellow representative Rachana Aithal (10) is one of three American High students that contribute to SURFBoardE.

"I chose to join SURFBoardE because I strongly believe in the power of the student voice in shaping the very fabric of our district," she explains. "Alicia and I are both representatives for American. Along with Lavanya, we work together on any site-specific assignments we have been given, and we work to effectively represent our student body."

Through their work, student representatives of SURFBoardE effectively

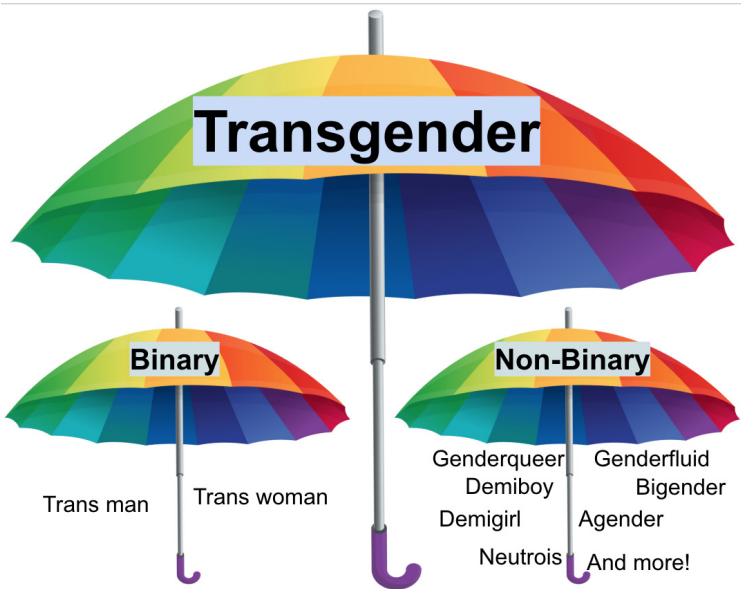
communicate peer concerns in a way few others can.

"Every member understands a unique part of their community; thus they are able to provide different perspectives on student concerns regarding our learning environment. When we need to conduct outreach to understand individual opinions about district policies such as GATE testing or our school calendar, SURF representatives like Alicia branch out to contact peers from student groups ranging from English learners to AP students to student athletes."

For Alicia, her future in service is far from over even as her high school career ends.

"Although my plans for the future are not yet set in stone, I still hope to give back to the community in ways that are beneficial and spark inspiration for younger kids," she explains. "On the larger scale of things, a big goal I have is to partner with philanthropic associations and spread awareness for causes that may get less attention. However, on a smaller scale, I strive to be kind to those around me, creating a ripple effect that will amount to a much greater scale and impact."

Allies in a Battle of Rainbows (cont.)



Transgender (sometimes shortened to trans) is considered an “umbrella term” for both binary (male and female) and non-binary identities. In contrast, being cisgender (sometimes shortened to cis) means that your gender matches the birth sex that is most commonly associated with that gender.

PC: Transgender Teen Survival Guide

and a lot of us didn't really understand; even for me I'd say my thinking in middle school was close-minded in a way [that] I really didn't want to tell even my close friends. Middle school wasn't as accepting as high school so it led to me hating this part of me, but then as people grew more accepting by learning new things it helped me too," says Sathiyar.

While high school does fill in some of the experiential gaps that middle school often did not, coming out of the closet could still have negative consequences for those at AHS. Doe sticks by her decision to stay in the closet, with plans to come out in her college years.

"Some people just aren't as supportive and have homophobic beliefs. I'm scared most of them will cut me off or start spreading rumors about me," says Doe.

Dating for LGBTQ+ students at AHS can also be a tricky matter, sometimes including transphobia and closeted relationships.

"Even before I had a crush on John, I had this mentality that 'oh, people won't date me because I'm trans,' or they had to be anything other than gay or straight, because I had this internalized idea that people were just transphobic. Even with John, he added me on Facebook in sophomore year winter break, and I was going on his profile, trying to make sure that he was supportive. It's just something that you have to do to make sure you're in a caring relationship and they are not just doing it because they want to 'experiment,' so I felt really lucky to have a crush on someone and

have them like me back for who I was," says Laxa.

Fortunately, John Wagas (12) did prove himself to be supportive. He would poetically describe that "like a good love story, it has an unexpected beginning." Wagas and Laxa would start talking after weeks of standing outside Peffer's classroom door individually at brunch. When they finally started talking, Wagas describes how "he soon became my favorite part of every school day, and I looked forward to lunch because that meant being able to see him."

However, similar to Laxa, Wagas would face transphobia directed towards the boyfriend that he deeply cared for. During PE of sophomore year, Wagas was part of a friendly discussion on being transgender with one of his friends that asked about Laxa when another person invited himself into the discussion with a series of inappropriate questions regarding transgender people.

"It was beyond unsettling for me and made me so disgusted that he would say such things about trans people and ask inappropriate questions about my boyfriend. My friend and I tried to tell him to go away and to leave us alone, even telling him that he was being offensive, but he kept bugging us for the rest of the period," says Wagas.

And for those with different pronouns that appear on their legal documents, coming out can require a lot of effort. Most transgender students at AHS are minors, meaning that they cannot legally change their name without parental consent.

Students like Laxa have to jump through a lot of hurdles from their name on the class roster to the yearbook to avoid being "dead named," a term corresponding to a transgender person being referred to by their birth name that they no longer identify with.

"Mrs. Smith and Mr. Savoie [are some] of the only teachers who have been openly accepting, like, they use my pronouns. Sometimes teachers forget, which I understand, but they have to be reminded of it. But Mrs. Smith especially was the one who caught on really fast. And even to this day, she calls me sir whenever I go to her class, and it's so nice to hear," says Laxa.

Teachers are one of the important keys of inclusivity in a reality where many parents are not accepting of their children's identities in the LGBTQ+ community. In this scenario, teachers often become the adults that these students turn to for support.

"[My parents] weren't accepting, which affected my school work because my head wasn't in the right spot 100% of the time," says Zainab Hassanin, an alumnus from AHS. "Many teachers helped because they were accepting and offered their support knowing my parents weren't."

For those with transgender identities, this support from teachers can be expressed as early as the first day of school. While many teachers chose to call names off the roster, running into the inevitable risk of dead-naming a student, others take a creative approach. One of these creative minds is English teacher Mrs.

Smith, who, instead of calling names off the roster, hands out small informational cards on the first day. On the front side, each student fills out the name they would like to be referred to in class, the pronunciation of that name, and a motto that that student lives by.

"I've been doing a variation of the info card since I first started teaching, so that would be about nineteen years ago, and the pronunciation of the names was part of my own experiences in school since my first name is Dara, and the D-A-R-A combination can apparently be pronounced a wide variety of ways, so I guess it came from a place of empathy," says Mrs. Smith.

Along with teachers and education, students of all different backgrounds play a role in creating a more inclusive setting for their peers. One practical thing, Laxa says, is making the clarification of pronouns more commonplace.

"I like when people who are cis put their pronouns in their bio. It kind of normalizes that. It's kind of hard to have cis people change entirely, but it's the small things that matter," says Laxa.

Even outside of the social media bio, sharing personal pronouns in real life can make a more inviting situation for those under the transgender umbrella. While Che is more comfortable with they/them pronouns, they do not actively tell others their preferred pronouns.

"I guess I haven't really come out to my friends yet. I don't think of it as something so important that I should announce, although I have mentioned it to some friends when the topic had come up," says Che.

And some cisgender students are stepping up to the plate, one of them being junior Audrey Yu, who in her leadership position, took time to individually ask her peers about their preferred pronouns.

"I accidentally misgendered someone [in high school] and I felt awful about it. I wanted to be a person who would help others feel more comfortable, especially in an unknown

environment. I think it was also because I remembered how a lot of my internet friends had pronouns that didn't coincide with their looks and the stereotypes, and a lot of people would just assume, and that just didn't sit right with me," says Yu.

While AHS is moving forward on the pronoun front, some parts of the campus feel stuck in the past. Outright negative sentiments towards the LGBTQ+ community are still prevalent, predominantly among cisgender male students. Laxa explains that he feels socially conscious sometimes using the gender-neutral restrooms when people are around due to the fact that they are largely known as staff-only restrooms.

"I do use them [gender-neutral bathrooms], but there is a process to have to use them, and it's kind of tedious to have to do that... Personally, I've experienced more guys who are anti-transgender people, so that's why I usually use the girl's restroom when there's a bunch of people around," says Laxa.

One of the ways those sentiments are expressed is through LGBTQ+ related slurs. These often create an uncomfortable situation for those in the community. Sathiyar gives an example of the type of situations that can arise, this one specifically occurring in the parking lot at AHS.

"One day I was in the car with one of my friends and this one dude who I didn't really know started saying f*g and a lot of other slurs, and it did make me super uncomfortable. Luckily, my friend who was driving saw it and asked the dude to stop which made me kinda happy. The dude didn't stop though, which sucked, and [there're] people out there that don't understand the weight of words no matter how many times you tell them," says Sathiyar.

Allies become educated, listen to understand, seek inclusivity, and speak up for those in the LGBTQ+ community. You can learn more about different LGBTQ+ identities and what it takes to become an ally on The Trevor Project Website.

Exploring the star athlete and leader's personal growth in high school

An athlete, a leader, and a friend. To many, senior Bridget Agyare is a well-rounded student who leaves a positive impact on others no matter what she is involved with. However, the volleyball varsity captain and the head of leadership's athletics department she is today is not the same person she was when she started high school.

"Coming into high school, I never thought about being a leader or head of anything. By the end of high school, I could see I've really changed from someone quiet who was afraid to go out for things. Freshman year, I would have never tried to interview for leadership or to do anything like that. I think that [the] experience of varsity [volleyball] my freshman year was a valuable experience that helped me feel like you have to put yourself out there, take risks, and go for anything, like leadership. You have to take advantage of the opportunities," explained Agyare.

Coach Sarah, the coach of the volleyball team, has been able to see first-hand

the change that Bridget went through over the past four years.

"[Bridget] went from being quiet and reserved to being a stand-out leader. By her junior year, she was the glue that really held the team together. She became that player that everyone could depend on, and it did not matter [which] position she was playing," said Coach Sarah.

Sophomore Jalyn Javier was on the volleyball team with Bridget this year and has been able to personally experience the impact that Bridget has made.

"Whenever I was doing bad, [Bridget] always lifted me up and always encouraged me. Whenever I did something good while we [were] on the court, she [was] there clapping for me. She always [had] my back. This past season, she had the position that I want to play this coming season. She's always giving me advice and watching her play [has] helped me achieve that goal."

Underclassmen like Jayln have been able to see the way that Bridget supports everyone through-

Bridget Agyare (12) gets ready to serve during her volleyball game.



SUBTLE



Bridget Agyare (12) poses with friends who come to support her during her volleyball games.

out their time on the volleyball team. However, the journey to becoming the captain of the volleyball team was not an easy one.

"I think her biggest struggle was becoming [that] the leader underclassmen needed. [Her personality] showed me that you don't have to be the loudest or most outspoken [to be a leader]. When Bridget speaks, everyone listens and they take it to heart... I have never seen that over the last 8 years I have been coaching... She sits back and allows people to grow and gives advice or a push when she sees [them], or we, need it," said Coach Sarah.

The time Agyare spent on the volleyball team helped show her a new perspective on how she is capable of achieving her goals.

"Who I was freshman year is different than who I am senior year. It comes to show that when you are put into new situations, it's going to be uncomfortable at first. If you work hard and pay your dues to the program, then you grow into the person that you always wanted to be," explained Agyare.

After a few years on the volleyball team, her teammates encouraged her to join the leadership team at school. There, she had the opportunity to once again get out of her comfort zone

and impact others positively.

"Bridget is a 4-year Varsity Girls Volleyball player and was one of the team captains this last year. However, it was in her role last year as Co-Athletics Commissioner that she started to take on more responsibility. She worked with Hannah Hillman last year to help plan and coordinate events like Powderpuff and the Gatorade Day as well as promote athletics. In other cases, Bridget worked with Hannah to provide me with help at games where I was short-handed," said Athletics Director Mr. Hashimoto.

Mr. Hashimoto has been able to observe a difference in her leadership style over the past two years.

"I have seen Bridget take a gigantic step forward this year. Last year, she worked alongside Hannah, whereas this year she has taken the reins and moved the athletic[s] department forward in a major way. We plan on building off of the advisory council she helped form this year. She helped start and contribute to the social media platforms, but where I have seen Bridget shine in a way that I had not seen before is her public speaking. In the past, I saw her let others take the lead when it came to presenting, but this year, I found out what a fantastic

public speaker Bridget is," said Mr. Hashimoto.

Other students in leadership have also been able to see that Bridget has become more vocal and active recently as a leader in the athletics department.

"Overall, Bridget is a pretty reserved person, but I noticed that this year, she is speaking her mind more often. As the committee head for athletics, she takes charge in a very efficient manner. She is well respected by the whole class, and we all appreciate her work so much. This year, attendance to sporting games [has] increased because of her leadership. Bridget knows when it's time to have fun and when it's time to get to work. She has always been an effective leader," said Senior Vice President Mingyu Wu (12).

Agyare's experience of being on the volleyball team for several years and being able to connect to other athletes has helped contribute to her leadership skills.

"Both years [that I was on leadership, the athletics] committee has been really close with each other. The committee just in general has a different dynamic than other committees because we understand what it's like to be on a sports team to have that chip on your shoulder. We

SHIFTS

all work really well together because we know what the athletes and the general population at our school want...We get along really well," said Agyare.

By being a dedicated person and understanding the needs of the athletes, Bridget spends hours a week to create a sense of community for the athletes.

"A lot of what people don't see is the amount of time Bridget puts in outside

a lot of time after school going to games whether it be her own volleyball games or other sporting games to support her school, they have played a key role in developing relationships with her family.

"It's definitely hard because these activities take up a lot of my time, but even doing these activities bond[s] friends and family. My parents would come to every one of my games.

has strengthened more recently, especially because they can relate more with each other.

"When [Bridget] moved to middle school, we drifted apart, but the last year, we got super close...I talk to her a lot now, and we laugh a lot. It feels good to have a sister that's so close... [We] might [be closer because] we're both in high school now. She drives me to school and we're [now]



Bridget Agyare (12) comes to the Homecoming football game with friends and other members of leadership.

of the school day to ensure events run as smoothly as possible. For example, to help promote our athletics on the new Instagram and Twitter pages, Bridget went to as many fall and winter sports as she could to take pictures to get to me to post online. There were some weeks where she was going to a sporting event after school Tuesday through Friday," said Mr. Hashimoto.

What makes Agyare put in this much effort into what she does to support this school is seen by others on the leadership team.

"[Bridget] is very strategic, but most importantly, Bridget is very passionate [about] what she does. I think that's the most important aspect of any leader: passion. She cares about athletics and she strives to bring representation to sports and other activities," explained Wu.

Though Agyare has spent

They would watch me and be there to support me. Even though we are not talking or interacting, it was a way for my mom to show me support and my dad to show me support," said Agyare.

Agyare has also used her the time that she spends at athletic events as a way to get closer to her friends.

"I would go to every single game at American...I [would get] to hang out with my friends while supporting my friends who were playing their own games, so it [was] a win-win [situation]. Even though it [was] taking a lot of time, I'm there for my friends and my family is there for me. It makes you feel better about your community. You get really close with the people in your community," said Agyare.

Even with all that Bridget Agyare is involved with, Alisa Agyare (9), her sister, feels that their relationship

in the same school. It may [also] be that we're both older, and we recognize that we have to get closer, in order to build a stronger relationship."

Agyare has also experienced a similar change in her friendships at school, including with Jennifer Lee (12). The two of them got to know each other better during their sophomore year when they shared many classes together. Even though they no longer have as many classes with each other, they have managed to develop their friendship.

"I think both of us have matured a lot over the past couple of years which has made our relationship a lot stronger. We don't need to talk to each other every day to stay friends because we know that a friendship doesn't require constant texting. I can turn to her whenever because I trust we will always be there for

By:
Aarya Vaidya
Staff Writer

one another," said Lee.

Rachita Mehta (12), who has known Agyare since third grade, has also been able to keep a strong friendship with Agyare throughout the years.

"We've grown even closer throughout the years. It's funny because [Bridget and I] are sort of opposites, but whenever we're together, my mood always rises and we always find a way to make each other laugh. She's the first person I call when I have news or tea, and also the first person I go to when I need advice," explained Mehta.

As Agyare has grown as a person over the past four years, she has led her friends to do the same, including Mehta.

"She's impacted me a lot honestly. I'm not as shy as I used to be and my personality is a lot different than before we met. And she's always there to support me and have my back no matter what, allowing me to be the best version of myself. She's helped me become the person I am today, for the better."

With all of the activities that Agyare is involved with, she has used it to create a positive impact on

others while staying true to herself.

"She's probably one of the most productive people I've seen, and she knows what she's doing with her life. Volleyball makes her just super happy. Whenever I go to her games, I can see how she enjoys...her time and her mood is uplifted. Leadership has also taught her that she's a competent person and has given her more confidence," said Lee.

Bridget has enjoyed her experiences over the past four years. As she moves onto the next chapter in her life, she hopes to take advantage of the leadership skills she has developed in order to continue bettering her community.

"I definitely think in college I want to have leadership roles like I did in high school, because I just had so much fun leading people in [the] athletics committee and in the volleyball team. I want more experiences like that in college. Of course I am going to study, but I want to be relatable in the community, because I think that it's a great way to [have] happiness in life."

Bridget Agyare (12) and other volleyball team members get on the court for an enthusiastic game.



MAKING THE MOVE

How does moving halfway across the world change people?



Sahar with her boyfriend, Omar Youssef

Shreya Daschoudhary
Staff Writer

Sahar Waseem might seem like your typical junior in high school. She takes challenging courses, pushes herself academically as well as through extracurriculars, and works hard to make the most of eleventh grade. However, unlike most others, Sahar actually moved to America from India quite recently. While the transition has been difficult, Sahar has adapted many of her hobbies in order to get more accustomed to American culture.

Sahar moved to America on April 4, 2018, during the last month of her freshman year.

"Life in India was not bad," she states. "I just didn't like my extended family (whom I had to live with) a lot, as lots of problems went on. I was not happy with my school, I really thought I could've done academically since I never got the grades I wanted. That being said, I made some of my best friends there."

Although Sahar had to leave her friends behind physically, she still stays in touch with her best friend Hiba Ahmad (11).

Ahmad does miss her friend, although she's grateful that they've still kept in touch, as well as some of the changes.

"There have been a lot of changes in her because America was like starting from scratch. We used to be just a bunch of pretentious tomboys trying hard to be cool, [but] we've embraced ourselves better now. Distance makes the heart grow, so somehow I feel closer to her now."

Sahar's mom Saima mentions that although she was worried about a cultural rift, she feels that moving was a good decision.

"She seems happier. She's made some good friends. Her studies are better now. She just misses her brother and old friends."

Sahar has also made a lot of new friends since moving, who've helped her through her sophomore year.

"I met her in freshman year, [when] we had an English class together. She enrolled as a new student later in the second semester. I decided to befriend her as I ended up being in a group project with her and two other girls. She also noticed that I liked a band that she also liked," says one of her close friends Cheyenne Jimenez (11). "I viewed her as a smart yet really shy girl. She seemed a little shy in the class and didn't talk much, but she answered

questions despite being a new student."

After getting to know her better, Cheyenne realized that Sahar wasn't as shy as she initially seemed, which just made them even better friends.

"As we got closer, she turned out to be way louder and also pretty confident, but that I found admirable. As time went by I noticed that she'd work harder and harder, probably due to the classes she took, but nonetheless she remained the same for the most part, she just became more comfortable and open."

Another close friend, Katrina Mina (11) agrees that she initially saw Sahar as a very shy girl. However, she says that the most noticeable change came from the fact that junior year is very stressful.

"She spends her brunch and lunch time in the library to study. She's a friend who's very hard working and will get things done on time but despite that, she's a loyal and caring friend who's always there for her friends and will help them when they need it."

"Sometimes it feels like I'm talking to a completely different person since I've met her" says her boyfriend Omar Youssef. "The important things have

mostly stayed the same but since meeting her she's become a happier and more hopeful person."

"I've known Sahar since sophomore year, which was when we first met, but it wasn't really until we went to band camp together that I really got to know her," Tanya Kammampati (11). "Admittedly, I didn't know her prior to when I first met her. so I thought she was in the same boat as me: just a typical high school student trying to pass through school while still taking part in fun activities. Since then, I don't feel she's changed as much, but I do feel like I've seen a more extreme side of her in terms of competitiveness, especially since it's junior year now. I also now see her as more interesting as I now see her as especially hardworking and strong academically speaking."

However, while the environment might have changed, Tanya mentions that Sahar has many of the same aspirations and motivating factors as other students.

"I think Sahar challenges herself just like any typical kid would: because they want to impress their parents. I know that certain subjects she's taking only because they're APs and she's not too happy

with them. I think it's also because she wants to show she's capable of a lot, which she really is, even the side effects aren't the best. I think it's because she knows she's smart enough to achieve lots and sort of wants to prove that."

One of the guard captains, Wenchi Lai (11), someone who has been around Sahar for a while now, also agrees that she has changed.

"In the beginning of the marching band season, I noticed she was an enthusiastic person. She was a first season, and it got pretty hard, but it never discouraged her. When people helped her, she took the feedback carefully and applied it. I really admired that from her. I think since then, she has definitely become more initiative and serves as a role model in a sort of way. Over the summer, I often see her practicing whenever possible and that attitude is really important. There's a sort of time push in color guard where you have to get things memorized and done in a certain point, like a toss or a set. I feel like through these pushes, Sahar became more confident, so that was really great to see."

ALL KINDS OF ART IN ONE ARTIST

Explore the workings of an artistic mind

Khushi Kanchibotla

Staff Writer

Art. A very well-known word that encompasses many things. Singing, animation, dancing, theatre, and painting are just a few of the many forms of art. Every person who has taken up some form of art knows the difference it can make in their life. For junior Elena Fu, who hasn't constricted herself to just one form of art but rather multiple, she knows the intricate beauty of those various forms. Her Chinese name is Jiayi, which means home arts, and was coincidentally picked by her grandmother who was a painter; Fu thought her passion for art was meant to be.

Her journey with painting began in middle school with a few extra wooden boards and paint. She always thought it was fun to sketch for the books she would write but only got interested after bringing life to a tree on those wooden boards. Starting with a few landscapes, which turned out to be "pretty ugly" in Fu's words, she managed to grow the courage to sell some of her paintings at American High's very own Holiday Boutique.

Fu reveals, "My mother is a great influence on my art. In fact, she convinced me to sell some of my paintings [at the Holiday Boutique] but they didn't sell too well." Mrs. Fu has helped Fu grow during her experiences with art. Nitpicking, Mrs. Fu pointed out the small details, allowing Fu to touch upon aspects that she did not catch before.

Fu's artistic hand has impressed many people throughout her life. Some people for entertainment, others for business. Having

met in church a few years ago, Haily Eddlemon is one of Fu's best friends to date. Eddlemon says, "It's starting to become a tradition for her presents for my birthday to be paintings."

Another person who was awed by Fu's impressive hand is Mrs. Do, a librarian at American High School. Looking for a mind that flows alongside the works of art, Mrs. Do looked for an illustrator for a project she was interested in. Finding that spark in Fu, Mrs. Do says, "She is someone who listens closely in order to understand preferences, artistic mediums, perspectives, and angles, not just the way to 'look' but to actually see perceptions of light and shadow, along with capturing the essence of someone/something in a visually aesthetic form." Mrs. Do, impressed with Fu's portfolio, expresses her enthusiasm to work with Fu again.

In addition to growing in the world of painting, Fu also uses her talents in the digital world. Interning under Mr. Joseph Joly for the past few months, Fu has been developing her digital work in various ways. Mr. Joly views Fu as an artist with a work pattern similar to his. He recalls "aesthetic" being the first word that popped up when he first saw Fu's artwork. Mr. Joly says, "She can evoke a range of feelings within the same work. She looks at things that nobody else sees."

An example of Fu's work under Mr. Joly would be his wife's business' logo. Mr. Joly's wife, Mrs. Lilia Joly, is a family therapist, and they took the help of Fu to design her logo. Mr. Joly explains

the symbolism behind the small details of the beautiful lily which serves as the logo. The thorns at the bottom represent the barriers one puts up to protect themselves from the emotional pain and stress. The therapeutic process leads to one discovering the issues and noticing the triggers that bring out the thorns, something one may have not noticed before. So, gradually as the flower grows, brighter colors are used and a family is depicted inside the flower to represent the emotional and mental growth they have gone through.

Mr. Joly says, "Elena had to understand the profound reasons for [the logo] and then illustrate it. The kid nailed it. She's one of my favorite artists already. She senses her art." Fu views this internship as an opportunity to experiment with style and creativity. As Mr. Joly provides the idea of the project, Fu gets practice in exercising different areas of art, not just sticking to her area of expertise. This opportunity also helps Fu to get acquainted with the idea of working with an employer, preparing her for the real world.

Not only does she depend on outside sources to grow, but Fu also continues to grow by herself. Over the past few months, Fu began painting individual portraits. Fu explains how she has always been interested in capturing the emotions of a person, calling it introspective. Lately, she has been working on these portraits with an idea to sell them online. As for the movement, the plan is quite tentative as Fu needs



to work on more portraits to have an "elaborate, expansive, and updated portfolio." Fu plans on using the profits to help the homeless, mostly around San Francisco. Fu says, "I would really like to actually talk to the people who this will be affecting as well as some experts, like managers of shelters, to get a full rounded opinion." Fu wants to simply use her skills for the greater good and give back to the community.

Apart from her art, Fu has also experimented with drama in the past. Kayla Villegas, another one of Ellie's best friends, talks about her experience acting together. Fu started her acting career in the sixth grade when she played a henchman for the villain of a play. The play was about a comic book thief, and Fu says, "I adored anything comic book or superhero related. So of course I had to audition."

Throughout middle school, Fu was quite terrified to audition, but in freshman year that all changed when she tagged along with Villegas to one of her plays. Fu remembers being roped into the play and ended up playing several minor roles. She may think that she isn't great at acting, but Villegas has other thoughts. Villegas says, "She can stay in character really well! Last year she was Grimsby in the Little Mermaid and killed it as a proper old British man. We used to do improv scenes for fun, and she was so good at coming up with things on the spot." Fu mentions how she would be willing to participate in more theatre in the future but more for the community and the fun rather than the acting.

Fu may not have an extensive history with drama, but she sure does with music. Fu's parents originally enrolled her in piano classes, but she wasn't that interested in it. However, her parents told her that playing an instrument was a must and so she decided on the guitar. After a year of guitar, Fu's interest

in guitar died down and then grew in the drums. She joined percussion in the band during middle school but ended up with the xylophone. Since that was too similar to the piano, Fu went back to the guitar. She began taking lessons for guitar but had to recently stop due to a finger injury. Fu has gotten to the point where she has fallen in love with her music and guitar.

Fu views music as therapy. There is a song for any mood one is in. Fu was a part of the junior band for the Battle of the Bands as the lead guitarist. Fu claims it was an entirely impulsive decision to join and admits to being insecure at first. She recalls her change of mind when she started playing fingerstyle Safe and Sound by Taylor Swift and thought she had nothing to lose if she auditioned. Sruthi Bhamidipati (11), one of the singers in the junior band, says working with Fu is amazing as they both have similar styles. Bhamidipati met Fu in sophomore year and had an instant connection due to their love for words and music. Bhamidipati says, "She works well with everyone, and I think it's very easy for people to respect her."

Art works in different ways for everyone. For some it's a job, some a hobby, some a passion, some a way of life. For Elena Fu, art is all of those words; it's her passion, her escape, and her love. For the future, Fu says, "I definitely want to continue art in my future, maybe as a part time. I just really want to help people." Fu has a unique way with her artistic abilities, and her sister Marissa Fu says, "She always puts huge efforts into the idea and conceptualization, as well as paying attention to each of the individual details." Fu may not be the best artist out there in the real world yet, but she is definitely on her way to the top few.



GOVERNING THE MASSES

What exactly goes on within the student government?

Weston Liang

Staff Writer

Most, if not all high schools have some sort of student government. American High is no exception. Here at American High, we have ASB, Class Council, and Leadership. Together they all form American's student government that achieves their own goals, as well as the goals of the school. But what exactly is the goal of student government and why do students run for them in the first place? Many students in American High are more or less unaware of what actually goes on within student government. Some may think that it's all just a popularity contest, while others may think that they all want to seize control of something. These blurry lines can cause considerable confusion between those who and are not in student government.

To run for a position, a student needs to find a reason first. No one just runs for a government position without a proper reason. Benjamin Tarver (11), Student Council Senator for the class of 2021, has one.

"I decided to run for senator because I wanted to assume a greater leadership role in our class, as I believe I can practically apply my leadership abilities to help my class thrive during our last year of high school. After all of these years of getting to know my classmates... I wanted to do something to help give back for all the help I've received these past few years," answered Tarver.

Giving back to the community is a reason for many Student Council members. Tarver ran for exactly that reason. The job of Student Council Senator, according to Tarver, is to oversee Student Council and help organize events such as Spirit Week, class socials, and other events. Due to these jobs, a Senator needs a strong work ethic, good communication skills, critical thinking skills, and flexibility, among other traits. However, all of this leadership for the role of Senator may sound like it all belongs to the Class President to some people. Our Class President should clear up a bit of the confusion.

"The Senators still have more or less the same jobs as the president, but they do not have as much responsibility or are not as expected to do as much as the President or VP. However I do not want to discredit the Senators, since all it is just a label and the four of us all work together," said Class

President Nicole Lai (11).

It seems clear that the titles of the Student Council positions are much less hierarchy-based than some may think. Instead of the "one overrules one below" system, the members of Student Council all more or less work together, although each position may have more responsibility for specific events and actions. This system does add in the efficiency of making the work environment much less competitive and much more cooperative. It seems to compel the students to work together rather than work against each other.

But as a whole, student government is usually either misunderstood of its purpose, or just straight up unknown of it at all. Unless someone actually goes out of their way to investigate, they will most likely be unaware of what truly goes on. This sense of unknowing starts to culminate with a lot of prejudice assumptions.

"I've heard people say that elections are just a 'popularity contest.' However, this really is not the case as the council is genuinely passionate about ensuring our class members can have a fulfilling school year," explained 2021 Senator Veda Periwal (11).

Calling the student government a popularity contest is one of the assumptions that some students might make. To someone who has no knowledge of the positions, it may seem like it is a popularity contest. Non-council members who do not know the inner workings may assume that nothing really happens and that one's title of President, Vice President, Senator, etc. is nothing more than to just make your college resume look better. It turns out that one must have a lot more than just wanting to get a better resume.

"Make sure you actually want to do it! You may regret it if the only reason you want to do it is because you think it'll look good on college apps. Student council is a big time commitment and it requires a lot of passion and dedication... It's an incredible opportunity to serve the school and you also learn a lot about yourself in the process," advised ASB Secretary Bella Jiang.

Having a mindset of "I'm joining because I want to get involved" versus a mindset of "I'm joining because I want to look cool" can make the difference of whether you

enjoy the position or absolutely hate it, assuming you are actually elected at all. You will want to run for a position with plans in mind. What do you plan to bring to the table? It does not matter if you are running for Class Council, ASB, or Leadership. You will need to be prepared for the work commitment. A part of that commitment involves being able to hold onto the virtues and ideals that student government holds.

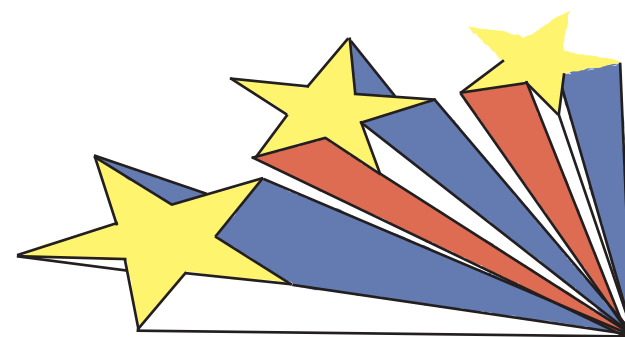
"We embody the virtues and ideals we seek to promote. This means that we actively promote class spirit and participate in our events in order to encourage our peers to do the same. We also do our best to look out for our fellow classmates and ensure that their voices are heard when we are planning and organizing events. We can't function as a student council if there's a disconnect between us and our class," answered Senator Tarver.

Considering this, it is clear that to be an executive, you will need a considerable amount of school spirit. This includes a high amount of participation. Why help host all of these events when you are not even going to attend them? Not to mention that a lack of school spirit can end up leading to the suggestions of potentially lackluster events. All because someone lacked school spirit and/or student relatability.

Relatability is especially important in this case. The name of "Student Government" says it all. There is always the unpleasant stereotype of the "school staff that tries to look cool." A school government run by students is probably the best way to avoid pushing that unpleasant stereotype.

"I've heard from various people that Spirit Week is the one week that people actually like coming to school and that's because of the effort of student government students and other involved students who want to give their class something to be proud of," answered 2020 Class Senator Shreya Patil (11).

Spirit Week is probably American High's most anticipated event for many students. Thus, in order to keep that anticipation up, the Student Council must make sure to keep up the effort to make every year's Spirit Week enjoyable to all. There is the risk that one bad Spirit Week can dampen the school's spirit considerably.



Caption "I love being able to see how our hard work and time translates to incredible events and decor. It is very fulfilling to see how we can improve someone's day, even if it's just a smile!" stated ASB Treasurer Divya Kunisetty (12) on the importance of the student government. A notable example is the massively popular Spirit Week.

All of this goes back to putting in the commitment as a Student Council member. Especially someone like Senator Tarver, who stated that he wishes to give back to the community. How has he accomplished this?

"I have worked alongside class executives to organize events such as the Sophomore year Halloween Social, our Class Banquet, our past two Spirit Weeks, Springfest, and other related council events. As a member of Leadership class, I have played a role in planning and executing coin drives, Love Eagles Week, Winter Week, and other Leadership class events," responded Senator Tarver on the influences that the student government has on the school.

All of this is to help make the school a better environment for the students. Due to the generally work-heavy environment that high schools have, many of the events held by the student governments can seem to help. Senator Tarver believes that these events can act as a destresser, saying how it's "really easy to get swamped with school work and extra-curricular activities at American and forget to have fun and interact meaningfully with your

friends once in a while."

All of the work that a Student Council Senator has to do seems to be quite the large load and probably really taxing. Due to Senator Tarver being the 2021 Senator, he has yet to do a considerable amount with the position he is elected. However, he still does quite a sum of work with the Student Council and Leadership.

"Benjamin is one of the most dedicated and passionate people I know. In leadership, he is always finding ways to actively help no matter the circumstances. I also admire his sense of responsibility as he works hard to accomplish what he thinks he needs to," answered 2021 Class President Jeffrey Wei (11). What about the opinion of an ASB member? Is the opinion of the other party any different?

"Ben is one of the most rational students I have worked with in Leadership. There's a joke in our class that Ben and I like to have these extremely long conversations about political philosophy, which is true, but these conversations have allowed me to understand the way Ben thinks and operates... Ben is more open, conversational, and versatile in the way he handles a variety of viewpoints," stated ASB Vice President Rishabh Shastri (12).

It would be an understatement to say that Senator Tarver is just competent. He is admired by many and always does what needs to be done. It can even be stated that Benjamin Tarver is the shining example of what it means to be a student of spirit.



Just a Sketch, Paint, and a Post Away

Artist's feeling for art expands from passion into a potential career

Nydia Kuo
Staff Writer

When starting a new piece, the first step is always slowly sketching the idea out and cleaning up any flaws she sees. Once she is satisfied with the sketch, she moves on to the base colors of the figure she drew, starting with the face. After finishing those two steps, she colors in the background and completes her painting. With these seemingly easy steps, Sara Fang (10) creates astonishing artworks.

For as long as Fang can remember, art has been a part of her life. Every day, she would take at least thirty minutes to work on her art piece, some days even continuing for several hours without taking a break.

"I've done five to six consecutive hours [of drawing] before. I had bad wrist and neck pains the next day," says Fang.

Like people always say, time flies when you're having fun. While focusing on

hesitation.

"You can see the little details that she drew for each and every drawing/painting which somewhat shocked me when I saw [her Instagram account]. It takes a lot of talent to produce such a good drawing," stated Chen.

Almost everyone who saw her art left behind positive words for her awe-inspiring artistic skills.

"The bright color she uses on the paintings for watercolor really grabs my attention, and this was the reason why I decided to follow her on social media. I actually look forward to what she draws in the future," Chen said.

Every art piece Fang posts have followers commenting on how much they like it, but loyal fans like Divya Ramaswamy (10) would go beyond typing a good comment.

"Her arts have always been good, [so] if I had the money I would probably buy her art. Her shading

the art class enjoyable," says Zhang.

Take a look at the pictures Photo 1 and Photo 2. The one on the left is what he drew before taking classes with Fang, and the one on the right is his most recent drawing. During the interview, Zhang mentioned that he only started taking lessons this year. Compared to before, his drawing has greatly improved under Fang's guidance.

"As a teacher, I would say that she is hardworking, confident, and kind," stated Zhang.

Now, what did she do to receive such high praise from this student?

"Hard-working because she told us that she takes time off from her lunch to make examples for us to draw. Confident because she is never nervous to teach. And kind because she doesn't really care if we do bad and she encourages us to do better," explained Zhang.

All the effort she puts into teaching is seen clearly by her students.

Fang slowly draws a path for her career in the art industry, but she also mentions that art would be her side career. One of the reasons for this decision was because of the fear her mom, Ada Fang, has for this career path.

"Art-related jobs [are] not the best career choice. No one can be sure that people will buy every painting Sara paints. Being an art teacher is not any better either. Not everyone wants to learn how to draw; she might not have enough students to open a studio."

Throughout the years, any career related to the art industry has been greatly avoided because of its unstable income. Being able to produce a good drawing and painting is one thing, but being able to sell art is another story.

"I'd rather have Sara choose art as a side career and not [as] her main one. I would still support her to continue to draw, but I don't want her to choose this as her main source of income."

Many people also think that investment in art is a



Fang's first time doing digital art, this is also the drawing she is most proud of.

waste of time and money. We are in a world where education and business are viewed more highly than art. Sara may be stopped from choosing this as her main job, but she is completely supported if she chooses to continue to draw and paint in the future. Not only does her mom support this decision, but her cousin at Berkeley High (11) also strongly encourages her to do so.

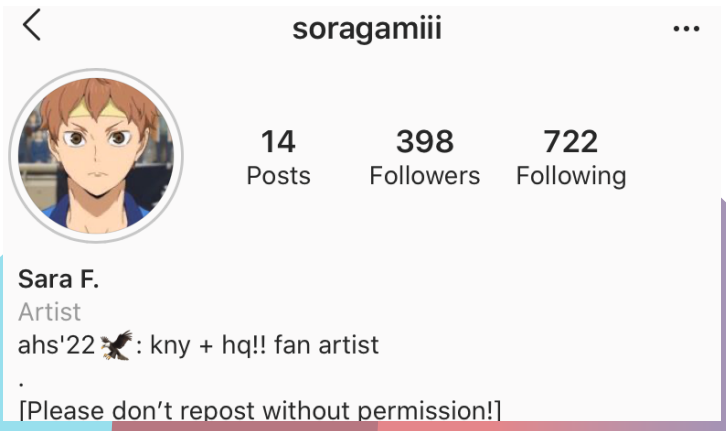
"I believe that Sara is capable of using art in many of its intended forms, and that is something very few artists can actually do. She

[is able] to use it as a hobby, as an outlet, as a business (making and teaching), as a form of appreciation, and most importantly, she is actually good at it," said Iris Lei.

Art is something that plays a huge role in Sara's life. It started off as something she liked to do for fun, and it slowly developed into something that could be an asset for her potential business.

"I would wholly support Sara's choice in doing art as a side job. She would be brilliant at it with the knowledge she's already got," stated Lei.

Follow Sara Fang on Instagram for most posts on her drawings and paintings.



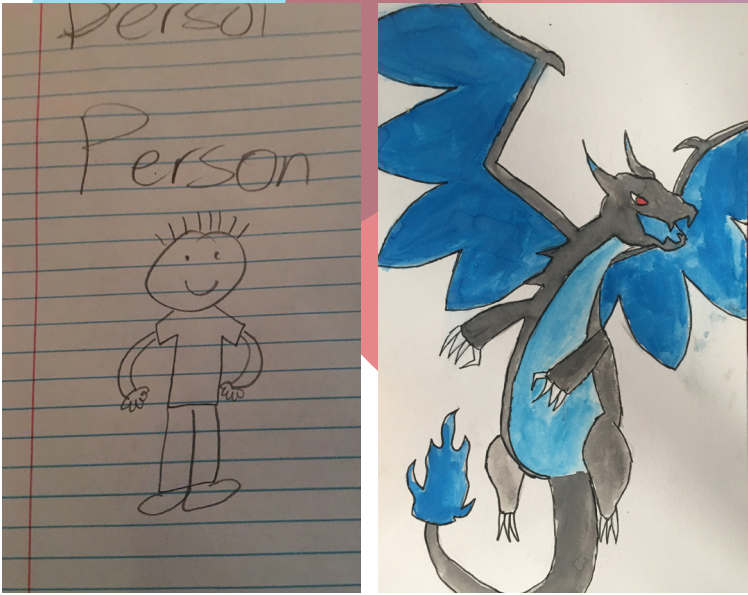
her art and enjoying the creation process, time quickly slips past her hands. In the beginning, the reason Fang drew was only because she liked to; it was just a hobby and nothing more. As she grew older, she started to take technical classes, and this is where she got serious and passionate about art.

After putting in a lot of hard work and time into all of her creations, more and more people slowly started to take notice of her art account and what she posted on Instagram and Reddit. Iris Chen (10) from James Logan said that on a scale of one to ten, with one being the worst and ten being the best, she would give all the paintings Fang posted on Instagram a ten without any

skills are amazing."

Fang's art journey goes beyond posts on social media. In fact, Fang also teaches at a daycare center called American Chinese School at its After-School Program. At this place, she teaches students like fifth-grader Ethan Zhang from Parkmont Elementary School all her knowledge on how to draw and how to paint. Fang teaches kids from a range of third graders all the way to seventh graders.

"Her art class is very nice. Before, I was pretty bad at drawing, and I would say that I have gotten much better after a few classes [with her]. Learning all of the techniques and how to draw the base of a picture along with her jokes make



Two different art pieces made by Ethan Zhang before (left) and after (right) taking Fang's classes.