

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY AUGUST 13, 2020, SRABAN 29, 1427 BS

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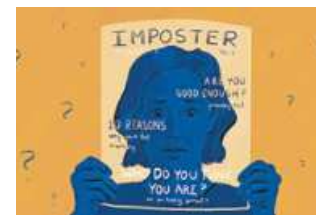


A LOOK INTO
STANDARDISED TESTS

PG 3

HELLO. IT'S ME, YOUR
IMPOSTER SYNDROME.

PG 4



to be a youth



PHOTO: DARSHAN CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

I had a birthday recently. It's true that birthdays become less and less exciting as you grow up. Your age, that all-important number, becomes more of a nagging reminder to get things done instead of being an excuse for youthful exuberance like it used to be. What a nightmare!

Looking at me panic over getting old in my early 20s must seem ludicrous to some of my friends in their mid 20s. They've been telling me how I have all the time in the world whereas their time is quickly running out. But wait, the mid and early 20s are separated by no more than 5 years, which isn't a lot of time at all. I don't want to feel like my time is running out at any point in my life. What a nightmare!

I can always feel too old if I really want to, I felt too old when I was 12 and I had a classmate who was 11 and a half. Time is fleeting, and age is too. But one thing that doesn't have to be fleeting is youth. Youth is being open to change, being proactive, being with the times. No one will be 18 forever, but I think being young will always be an option.

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

ALBUM REVIEW



DAYDREAMS AND MEMORIES

AAQIB HASIB

Agnes. That's where it all started for Glass Animals' frontman Dave Bayley.

That was the first track where Glass Animals (GA) wrote an autobiographical song, detailing the experiences of Bayley with losing a friend. The song became a fan favourite, leading the band to reconsider their writing style.

Bayley mentioned in a previous interview how writing about personal experiences felt selfish, and he wanted to highlight the stories and experiences of other people. But realising how telling one's own story is truly what distinguishes a band from the others.

The result is *Dreamland*.

Conceived around the time when their drummer and childhood friend, Joe Seaward was recovering from a very serious accident, *Dreamland* is a collection of stories from their life experiences.

The tracks *Tokyo Drifting*, *Your Love*, *Dreamland*, *Heat Waves* and *It's All So Incredibly Loud* were all released as singles beforehand, and are without a doubt some of the best tracks off the album.

But the true brilliance is when someone listens to the entire album from start to finish, you get this single cohesive experience as if you just watched a movie featuring the lives of a few different characters, all of whose lives are somewhat

intertwined.

This movie aesthetic is further enhanced by the break/interlude tracks set between the songs, all of which are taken from old home movies of Bayley's family.

Throughout the album, the band explores themes of friendship, abuse, relationships, mortality, etc.

The production of the songs is fantastic as well. From the use of synths to samples, everything feels like it serves a purpose and isn't just a complicated layer of sound trying to be pretentious.

Melon and the Coconut and *Waterfalls Coming Out Your Mouth* feel a little weak in comparison to the other tracks, but not to a fault. Instead, you are left with a deep appreciation for every other track on the album, all of which are memorable.

In an era where synthwave, psych-pop, electro and all its other sub-genres have saturated the music industry, GA has always been a breath of fresh air. And *Dreamland* stands as a testament to just how talented the band is.

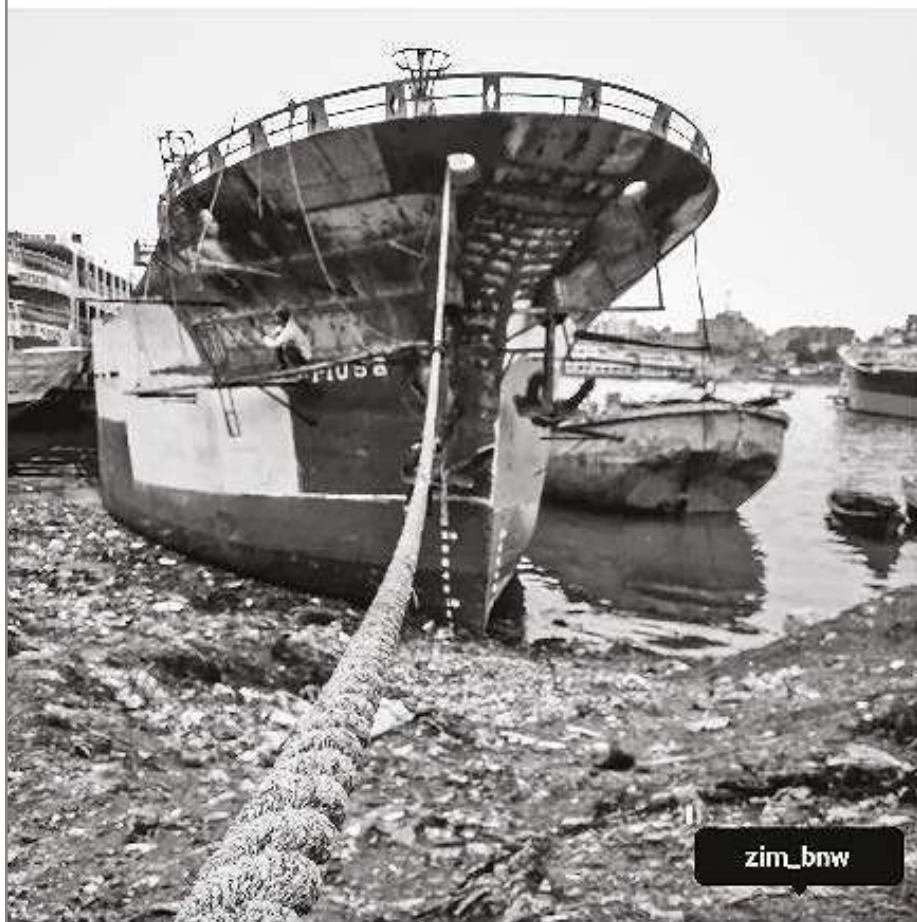
Anyone who is too impatient to listen to the whole album from start to finish should give *Heat Waves* and *Tangerine* to just get an idea of the vibe this album gives off.

When Aaqib isn't writing, he is making bizarre cat memes. Follow him on Instagram @aaqibhasib



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A Look into Standardised Tests

NABIHA NUSAIBA

The last few months of any given calendar year is nothing short of pandemonium for high school seniors who plan to apply to universities abroad. Students run from one office to the other, trying to produce and procure the best possible essays and recommendation letters respectively. No matter which country they apply to, you'll notice they have one thing in common: a plethora of colourful books will safely be cocooned in their arms, or perhaps, be sneaking out from their constantly bulging school bags.

The aforementioned books all have one purpose: helping pupils 'crack' standardised tests. You see, having a standardised test to grade students makes sense on a lot of levels. Scholars all over the world study under a hand and lap full of curricula, all of which have their own level of difficulty and grading system. Having one test that provides the same questions, conditions and most importantly, grading system aides admissions officers immensely by successfully bringing all applicants under the same roof. At least, on paper.

After conducting many studies, College Board – the non-profit organisation that provides the SATs – has concluded that one's test scores are indicative of their college-readiness. The studies were based on the new SAT, which is more reflective of what students are learning in class unlike the previous version, which was more about testing one's intelligence. A video by Vox adds that students' test scores are also an indicator of their wealth inequalities. Students in poorer neighbourhoods are likely to go to underfunded and under-resourced schools whereas the opposite is true for students in wealthier neighbour-



test takers don't come from predominantly English-speaking households, schools, or countries. This is especially true for international students, many of whom suffer on the English segment of the SAT but do considerably better in the Maths section. Even though acing the math section helps immensely, often, it is not quite enough to pull up their results near to a perfect score.

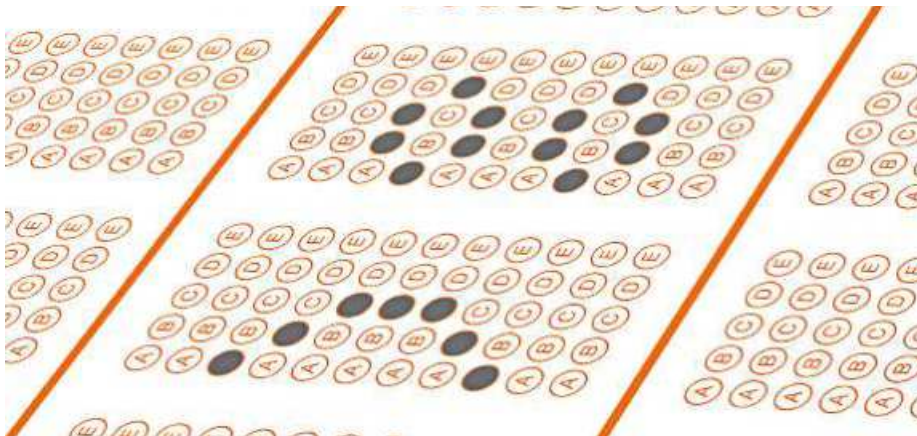
Graduates who stay back and wish to be recruited into civil service jobs may be more concerned about the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination. This test, taken in three distinct levels, matches successful candidates into 27 different

questions test the candidate's basic skills in 10 different areas (language, national and international affairs, geography, ethics, etc) and while they are essential, they don't do much in evaluating the candidate's proficiency at their future job. Instead, that proficiency test is reserved for the second test, where only candidates who applied to the professional cadre answer education/job-related questions worth 200 marks out of a 900-mark written test.

When candidates are tested on basic knowledge first and professional skills

second, examiners risk losing candidates who may have otherwise been better qualified for their jobs but not so adept at general knowledge. Don't get me wrong, basic skills are vital, but before we part ways, ask yourself this: would you choose to visit a good doctor who's terrible at geography or a relatively worse doctor who knows all the world capitals?

The writer runs every day. Out of time, ramen and K-Drama episodes. Send her an email at n.nusaibaah@gmail.com to join her on this rigorous workout.




hoods. These factors lead to a 260-point difference between the test scores of rich and poor students. The problem doesn't end there, higher-scoring pupils are more likely to get into more selective or prestigious schools, leading them to earn more when they enter the job market. Lower earnings for students from low-income households, who go to less prestigious schools or community colleges create a vicious cycle of poverty. Additionally, students from low-income households may have to work when they're not in school, giving richer students the benefit of extra time, which they can then use to learn from expensive private tutors.

Language is another considerable barrier for prospective students. A large group of

sectors, including postal, law enforcement, and health services. Some jobs fall into the general cadre and do not require specific undergraduate degrees. Others fall into the technical/professional cadre and have specific undergraduate requirements. Although the second and third levels are somewhat too completely specialised, the first test is fully standardised. Since most of the candidates are eliminated in the first round, the content of the test is a little concerning.

Everyone sitting for the first stage of the BCS exam takes the very same test, regardless of their cadre of choice. So, a prospective administration officer (general) essentially answers the same questions as a health professional (professional). The



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▪ **শ্রেষ্ঠত্বের স্বীকৃতি :** কলেজটি ২০০৮ সালে ঢাকা বোর্ড কর্তৃক শ্রেষ্ঠ শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান হিসেবে স্বীকৃতিপ্রাপ্ত।

▪ **সাম্প্রতিক ফলাফল :** এইচএসসি পরীক্ষায় ঢাকা বোর্ডে ২০০৯ সালে ১০ম এবং ২০১৪ সালে ৭ম স্থান অর্জন করে। ২০১৯ সালে এইচএসসিতে ২২১১ জন শিক্ষার্থী অংশগ্রহণ করে, পাসের হার ১০০% এবং ৮৫৩ জন জিপিএ-৫ অর্জন করে। ২০২০ সালের এসএসসি পরীক্ষায় ১৩৮১ জন পরীক্ষার্থী অংশগ্রহণ করে, ১০০% পাসসহ ৯৪৬ জন জিপিএ ৫.০০ অর্জন করে। চ্যানেল আই'র তথ্যমতে, শতভাগ পাসের ভিত্তিতে ঢাকা মহানগরে সেরা শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠানের তালিকায় মাইলস্টোন কলেজের অবস্থান প্রথম।

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কর্নেল নূরুন নবী (অব.), উপদেষ্টা
 প্রাক্তন অধ্যক্ষ-ফৌজদারহাট ও বিনাইদহ ক্যাডেট কলেজ
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লে. কর্নেল এম. কামালউদ্দিন ভূঁইয়া (অব.)
 -অধ্যক্ষ।

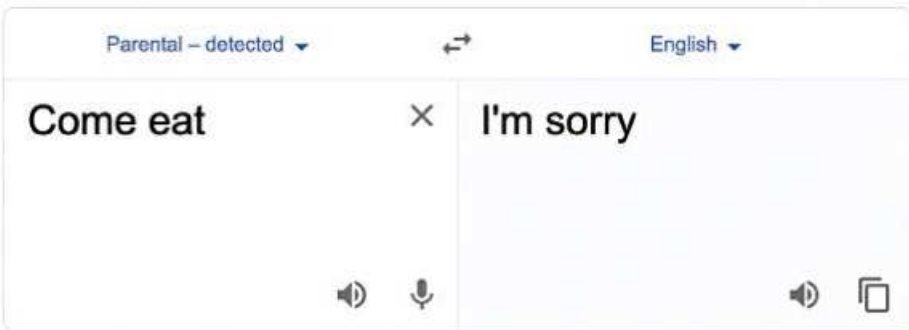
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Should Parents Apologise?

ARIFA KHAN

Last week, when my mother ruined the biriyani I was so enthusiastically trying to cook by pouring water all over it, she didn't apologise. Instead, she made up a story about how I told her I was cooking some other dish—mind you, I hadn't even asked her to help me cook. Over the course of my 19 years of existence, I cannot remember one time when my parents had apologised for doing something wrong, whether the issue was a big one (like making me miss an important internship opportunity because they wanted to go on vacation) or a small one (like my mother ruining my biriyani). On the one instance I told my dad he should apologise to me for shouting at me (because his co-worker messed up a work report) to vent his anger, he told me, "I'm the adult, I know better and adults don't need to apologise to children."

Sure, he's an adult, but does that make him immune to mistakes? After all, we're all equally human and capable of error. Parent's often think that apologising will



make them a lesser human being in the eyes of the child, when in reality, it will only help the child realise that their parents are capable of differentiating right from wrong, no matter the situation. The more we normalise the act of apologising, the easier it will become over the years. While parents look at their mistakes and outbursts as something so irrelevant and small that they forget about it the next day, the child often remembers it as a pivotal incident that carries a lot of trauma and leaves them emotionally vulnerable in the

future. This is especially applicable in our younger years when we aren't capable of understanding a parent's mistake, so we end up blaming ourselves and grow up with the burden of having done something wrong. Instead of making excuses, parents should acknowledge their mistake, explain themselves and make it clear to their children that they accept it and will try to do better in the future, just like children are often expected to do. This helps the child feel like they are an important figure in their family and portrays to them that their

parents aren't perfect beings who can do no wrong. They understand that their feelings of sadness (and sometimes anger) are valid. Children learn by example, and by taking responsibility and owning up to their mistakes, parents can teach their children the importance of owning up to theirs in the future. Whether it's a small fight on the playground over a toy or one at the workplace, learning to apologise without feeling small or embarrassed is an important trait people should have. More importantly, teaching children to apologise will instill in them the ability to hold themselves and others accountable when they do something wrong, even if the person apologising is in a position of power. While I'm no parent, I understand that it's a tough job, but accepting that you're capable of making mistakes can go a long way in making this job so much easier and building a deep, healthy relationship with your child. Come to think of it, I've never heard my parents say congratulations when I accomplished something good either, but that's a story for another day.

Hello. It's Me, Your Imposter Syndrome.

NAFISA AFSARA CHOWDHURY

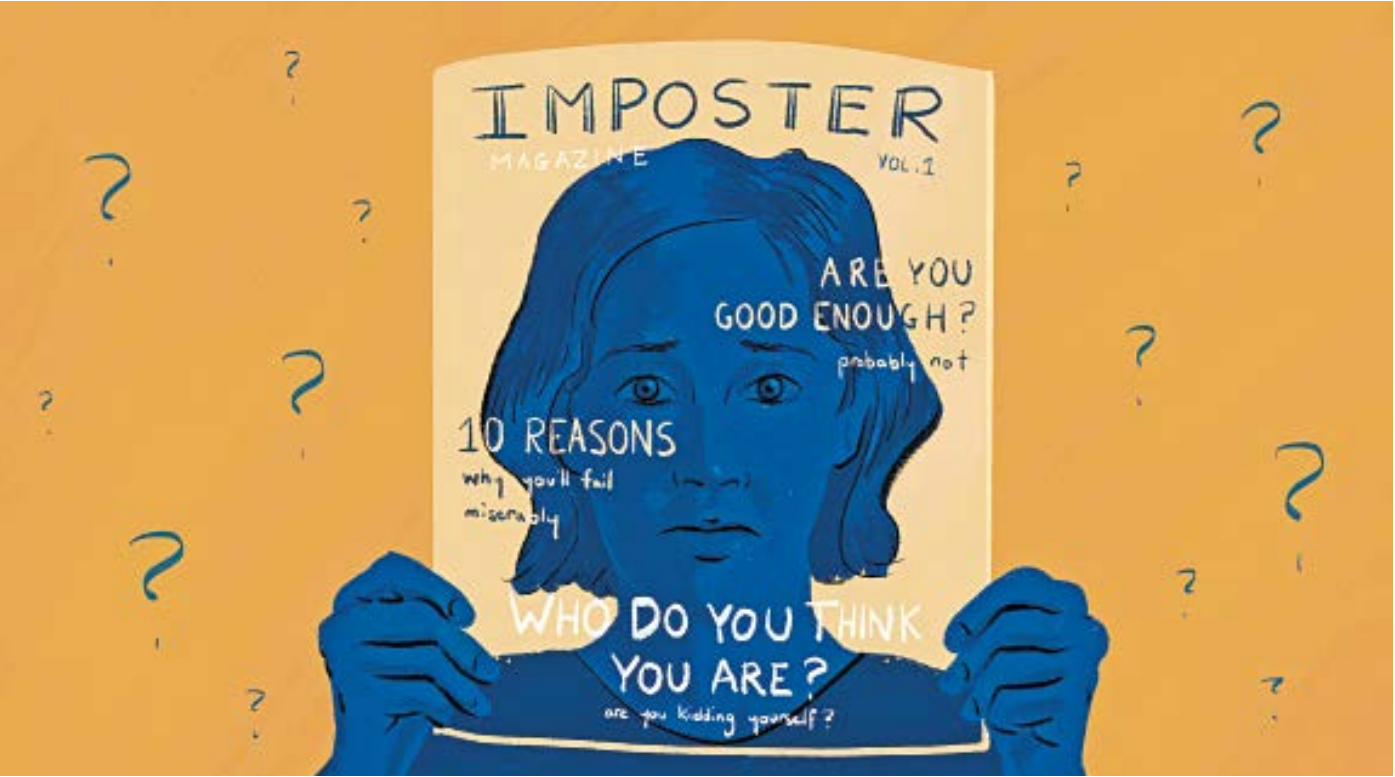
Psst. Hey, you. I apologise in advance for this sudden rude intrusion but it is of utmost urgency that I bombard your brain this very minute. See, I don't exactly enjoy having to do this, but it has come to my knowledge that you seemed oddly calm about an upcoming crucial project at work, which is why I was immediately dispatched to ground you back to reality. Shall I proceed with orchestrating my usual routine of Self-Sabotage™, then? You know, the one where I infiltrate your mind and shatter your Self-Esteem to tiny little pieces? But fret not, I take pride in my work. Your suffering is 100 percent guaranteed.

TO THE RESCUE

Wow, okay. This is not looking good. Your brain is in absolute shambles and in dire need of some serious damage control. For starters, I cannot bear to witness these harmful bouts of Over-Inflated Confidence that you are currently experiencing, so I will straight away redirect your thoughts to the All-My-Failures-Listed-In-Ascending-Order Compartment. I promise you these undesirable feelings should begin to subside in no time. Good heavens, it also looks like you're severely deficient in Feelings of Inadequacy as well. Quick! Drop everything, go stand in front of your mirror, strike a power pose, and repeat after me, "I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH" three times before things go up in flames inside here.

I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES

Phew, that was close. You should be grateful I was there in the nick of time. Anyway, now that I have taken care of the more pressing issues, there are some other things I ought to address while I'm here. Much to my dismay, it appears that you have returned to giving yourself Positive Affirmations once again. Sure, I



understand that there is a sense of comfort in tricking yourself into believing that you landed this project due to your hard work, but don't you think it may be time to face the truth? There has clearly been a colossal mistake. Fine, I will say it myself. Everything that you achieved so far (which isn't much, to begin with) only happened as a series of mere flukes. I repeat, *mere flukes*. What's that? Oh, you're shamelessly gorging on the lies of your friends, family members, and even your boss now? Do you have any idea how frustrating it is for me to watch this? I spend my precious time giving you invaluable lessons on Deflecting Praises and Dismissing Accomplishments but evidently, all my efforts go

in vain. Listen, I know you think they care about you, but ask yourself, do they know you like I do? To make matters worse, these same people will have you believe that I (the ever-faithful voice inside your head) am the outcome of perhaps some childhood trauma, or the patriarchy that constantly gaslights women, but I feel compelled to tell you... that is a load of nonsense. I am purely the outcome of your own overwhelming mediocrity. That is the plain and simple fact. **WON'T YOU EMBRACE ME ALREADY?** Look, I have religiously guided you through every important step in your life, I have carefully safeguarded your dirty little

secret of being a pseudo-competent phony, all I ask from you now is that you do not make my job any more difficult. We have danced this self-destructive Macarena for years now. I have my own life too, and I would much rather do something else than work tirelessly to protect you from the perils of Positive Thinking and Self-Actualisation. So please, help me help you and we can finally crush your spirit together. Or else one of these days, (God forbid) you might actually end up doing something worthwhile.

Nafisa is currently preoccupied with sabotaging her own life. You may kindly leave her a message at sara.chow26@gmail.com

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE



PHOTO: DARSHAN CHAKMA

TO BE A YOUTH

MRITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

What does it mean to be a youth? To be able to relate to depressing indie music for hours trapped in our bedroom? Or trekking to the top of a hill and reveling in one's achievement with a great view? Or constantly trying to find your place in the world—a world that looks increasingly complex as days go by?

The term "youth" has become somewhat of a buzzword that people use as part of their everyday jargon. Different businesses, competitions, events and campaigns have the word thrown in using funky fonts, graffiti-style designs and forceful use of teen lingo to try to appeal to the younger crowd. But who is this...youth?

"Youth, to me, is a state of being," says 17-year old Farhan Rashid. "Just how babies crawl before they learn to walk, youth is a stage we all must pass to become an adult. Youth therefore is an important part of life where we develop emotions, logic, perspectives and all that really make us human."

When you're in your teen years, your priorities are different. Not having a moment to yourself between school, tuitions and extracurriculars can be overwhelming. Yet the beginning of youth is spent discovering yourself and finding your personality. What type of music do you identify with? What colours do you wear? And who do you call your friends at school and around your neighbourhood?

It is during our youth that we navigate some difficult situations; nobody said coming of age was easy. Experiencing emotions like sadness or having anxiety for the first time, whether it happens to you or somebody around you, is a struggle in and of itself. Growing family responsibilities and stepping up to your duties at home can be daunting. Watching your parents age before your eyes is as scary as growing up is exciting. More importantly, the changes don't end there.

"To me, youth and being young is more about a feeling. It's a feeling of caring less, having fewer responsibilities and not worrying a lot. Just being lively without trying. I miss it the most because I feel like my youth is going away fast," 23-year old Nusrat Zahin confesses.

Perhaps you were never involved in personal finances before, now suddenly you find yourself looking for part-time gigs or a student who you can pass on your very limited knowledge to. Handling, negotiating and saving your own money makes you feel like more of an adult. It's something which every youth aspires to be. At 18, I ventured out for the first time and joined a school as a part-time teacher. I was the youngest staff member and wasn't taken very seriously. However, this independence and discovering what you are like is arguably the best part about youth.

Youth is of course a transitory state. No matter how much we try to make sense of our experience as a young person, none

of us will be one for long. So when do we leave our youth? As responsibilities keep piling up and realities catch up to us, we find ourselves aware of the uncertainties of life. Scared of the decisions we're taking, doubtful of the commitments we're making, and not knowing if we can live up to our own expectations. Career, investments, health and our own families suddenly start demanding more from us. And as we move along our path going from one state to another, we give in and oblige.

Nevertheless, it is said that youth can change the world. Why so? Perhaps because nobody believes in their own potential as much as a young person does. The kind of selfless giving and optimism the youth has is why young changemakers are unparalleled. They are doing commendable work all around the world. From raising money for charity and voluntarily teaching disadvantaged children to running multi-million dollar companies, the youth is taking giant leaps in making our world a better place for future generations.

There are several issues the current generation care for. Climate change, mental health, human and animal rights, women empowerment and education are some of these crucial causes. We interpret the world differently and have our vision about the planet and its inhabitants and raise our bold voices to show the power of youth. When you see young people distributing food to the poor in the sweltering heat of

Dhaka or holding online sessions to try to educate more people at different locations about a misunderstood topic, that is the power of the youth. When students forget their differences and join hands to stand against injustice or use their skills and knowledge to create new frontiers in science, that is the power of the youth.

Youth is not being scared of the countless flights of stairs when the elevator is closed for maintenance. Youth is being able to function a whole day during finals with only two hours of sleep. Youth is making travel and business plans with each group of friends you have with little planning about the practical side of things. Youth is about coming from a small town and fulfilling dreams to make it in the big city. And youth is, of course, having a strong ideology and going out there to change the world because you believe things can be changed.

To me personally, youth is a state of mind. It's feeling invincible knowing you have your whole life ahead of you. It's knowing you have time to explore the things you love and do the things you've always wanted to do. That I will have choices to make and decisions to take. Life is a journey and I—a youth—am ready; I can grow, learn, experience and shape my life as I go along.

Mrittika Anan Rahman is a daydreamer trying hard not to run into things while walking. Find her at mrittika.anan@gmail.com



ECHOES BY
ASRAR CHOWDHURY

Do you fear maths?

Does it matter?

I
A maths test starts. You wait for the questions. Your heart is beating. Your palms sweat. You're at a crossroads. If this is the way you feel about maths in general or a maths test in particular, "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one."

II
Carl Friedrich Gauss was a famous German mathematician. When Gauss was a child, his maths teacher gave a problem to the class. Add: $1+2+...+100$. It'll take ages to solve the problem. There's many steps in the solution. The teacher could take a nap.

Gauss came up with the answer in a few seconds: 5,050! The teacher asked, "How?" Gauss said he added 100 and 1 to get 101. Then 99 and 2 to get 101 again. So, in essence Gauss had 50 sets of 101. It became a multiplication problem of $50 \times 101 = 5,050$.

Why is it most of us can't think like Gauss? The answer lies in the way maths has been perceived over millennia.

III
Maths is probably the first test we take against a clock. Two minutes to solve a problem. This very thought gives butterflies and goosebumps. We fall out of love for maths, before we ever fall in to see what the fuss is all about.

To make matters worse, teachers and parents use our ability to do math as a metric to judge us against others. If you



PHOTO: AFP

know maths, and you have a good IQ, you're the next Einstein in the family. The blue boy all the aunties love. If you're not, the fear and anxiety of maths starts for the rest of your life.

IV
Maryam Mirzakhani was born in Tehran in 1977. When she was in school, one of her teachers thought she wasn't talented in maths. But little Maryam kept persevering. She was an incarnation of Gauss. She wasn't talented in the eyes of the metrics of society because she wasn't solving prob-

lems in the set formula of steps. She was playing with numbers, like an artist plays with colours and a musician plays with notes.

Because Maryam kept on persevering, she became the first female to win the Fields Medal—the highest honour in mathematics—in 2014. She died in 2017 at the age of 40 due to cancer.

V
Albert Einstein, the German mathematician-physicist, is the ultimate genius. He's shown to have an IQ that's astronomical.

His pioneering achievements in relativity defined and re-defined physics for generations. Did you know, Einstein's two papers on relativity were published ten years between them? The first in 1905 on special relativity, and the next in 1915 on general relativity.

What was Einstein doing in those ten years? He was thinking and re-thinking. Maths is like any other subject. Established problems can be solved quickly against the clock. Deeper problems have to be played around with to get the right portrait or the right tune.

VI
If maths makes you feel anxious, it doesn't necessarily mean you're bad at maths. The reverse could be true. You're bad at maths because you feel anxious. That's the way society has made it to be. After playing with maths if you find other things are more interesting like colours in paintings or notes in music, "follow your heart" like Santiago in *The Alchemist*. Knowing maths doesn't mean you're a wizard. Not knowing maths or not being good at it, can and never shall be the end of the world. Your fate may be written elsewhere.

Asrar Chowdhury teaches economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

ENOUGH WITH UNNECESSARY ROMANTICISATION

RASHA JAMEEL

Here's a new year's resolution everyone should've taken into account more than all the mindful journaling and weight loss goals: a cease on the mindless romanticisation of everything.

Romanticism is a movement that originated in 18th century Europe and refers to the widespread practice of glorifying past experiences by addressing them as "inspirational".

It's basically how our collective perception of aestheticism in today's "hashtag era" was birthed.

But in recent times, it seems that we've taken the movement too far. We're now regarding one of the worst pandemics in history, the coronavirus outbreak, as a blessing which has allowed us to reconnect with our loved ones and our long-forgotten passions.

Here's why it's not cool.

If I acknowledge the quarantine protocols to be blissful, it's because I'm privileged enough to do so. The idea that the quarantine is a blessing, that it's an op-

portunity to engage in different hobbies or to catch up on favourite television shows, may be true for some of us, but it's only applicable from a position of a substantial degree of privilege. Not everyone has a job that allows them to work from home. Many occupations require hands-on work that can't be carried out through means of electronic devices. The quarantine itself can act as life-threatening for people of low income.

That's just one of the many examples of romanticisation taken too far. As the inherently supportive audience of mainstream movies and books, we often overlook the problematic representation of sensitive issues such as war, unfounded phobias, toxic relationships fraught with abuse and stalker behaviour, sexual harassment, mental health disorders, etc.

Too much to take in? It's only the tip of

the iceberg.

Here's what's too much: Colleen Hoover being hailed as a feminist icon, despite romanticising abusive relationships. Hoover's not the first writer to glorify toxic relationships and abusive behaviour.

Before her, there were 'critically acclaimed' (read: falsely glorified) writers like Junot Diaz who were showered with praise for works like the short story collection *This Is How You Lose Her*, depicting a misogyny-laden narrative. In the fictional worlds created by Hoover and Diaz, women who put up with abuse from their significant others, do so because they're madly in love.

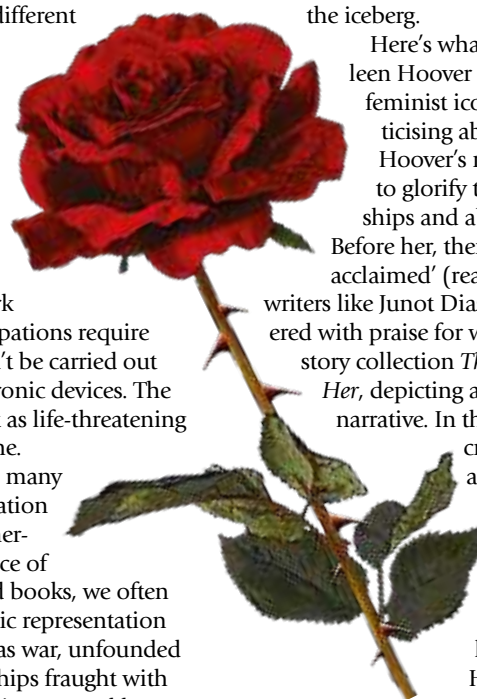
Here's what's also too much: An entire movie industry, quite possibly one of the world's largest, leaving no stone unturned

from justifying pedophilic behaviour to religious prejudice, and actually getting away with it. It's Bollywood, no surprises there. There's nothing quite as disturbing as the realisation that you grew up equating sexual harassment and stalker behaviour to romantic gestures, or accepting overzealous nationalism as the only expression of patriotism.

Here's another thing that's also too much: people treating mental health disorders like OCD and depression, as aesthetics. If you feel the need to fake scars as part of a "depressive theme", you've never suffered from depression, you're just unabashedly ignorant. If not having the perfect cup of lukewarm drink messes with your mood, you do not have OCD, you're just a perfectionist.

Seriously, stop looking to justify non-justifiable behaviour, tragic calamities, and unwarranted violence. We can be better than this.

Rasha Jameel is an overzealous Ravenclaw who often draws inspiration from mundane things such as memes. Send her your memespirational thoughts at rasha.jameel@outlook.com



THE RED NIGHT

SHOUNAK REZA

The dark red clouds
Hide an even redder moon
Above the shore into which
Waves, the colour of blood,
Crash and wash away the hundred pebbles
That the blind choirmaster felt
A minute ago.

Now the choirmaster has one foot
In the blood red waves of the sea.
The shore smells of the hidden moon,
Lonely and forgotten.
Near the cave of forgotten spirits,
Away from the ancient chapel,
The choirmaster hums a requiem.
Mysterious hues gather around him,
Floating in the air, smelling of decay,
The requiem joins the hues,
A strange party on an unexpected evening.

Now the waves come rushing to him,
Calling his name,
Shouting poems written on the day
He was born. Smokes from a distant past
Engulf him from all sides.
While he waltzes towards the red clouds
And the red moon above it,
The waves crawl their way beyond the shore,
To welcome a new choirmaster,
Who awaits his mighty guests
As the moon whispers to the sky,
“The red night is over.”



Woe is not me

PROTEETI AHMED

1
He doesn't smile as much as he used to. Even if he does, it doesn't reach his eyes as much as it did before. I asked, I did ask, I tried. But he would just shrug it all off. I overheard a fight with his parents the other day when I was talking to him over the phone. I didn't know how to address that and ask him if he was okay, so I just took him out for burgers the next day with all our friends. He'd never tell me about it anyways. He doesn't even tell me the little stuff, let alone something as heavy as this. He doesn't even tell me things after I rant all about my bad day to him. I still just ask how he is. He says he's fine. He's always fine.

2
He's... evolved? He's been smiling a bit more lately, more of them reach his eyes too. But I say he has evolved because of this new person I see online. He started blogging about himself. Just him. What he feels, what he wants to say. And boy does he know how to talk about these things. His new blog has become a beacon for others as well. It is a safe space where they can have conversations. He always was a great writer. I wonder what pushed him to be brave enough to put himself out there like this. So I ask



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

him how he is. He says he's fine. He's always fine.

3
He's been smiling less again lately, but that's because he's been busy laughing so much. He really got some traction as he continued writing his blog on social media. Our very own class celebrity. He writes about other things too nowadays. He writes a lot. But I know he feels more.

He's smiling less, laughing more, but this laughter doesn't reach his eyes at all. I thought he was doing better. I shared my sentiments with a mutual friend. They said well, now he's just doing it all for the attention. Just mokey blogs under an ingenuine facade. He'll get over it. I don't believe that. I go over to him and ask him how he is. He says he's fine. He's always fine.

4
I don't know what went wrong. They say he's not fine. But he's always fine... right?

5
He cried. He confessed. When people who did not genuinely care about him became too invested in his change in behaviour, he started a blog just to spite them. And it turned out to be something wonderful. But not for him. For him it was torture, being thanked and looked up to, when he was just lying through his teeth and trying to convince himself he was okay, really. And then being called an attention-seeker by people he thought would understand, when he was actually hiding instead. So I told him. I told him I would rather he hog my attention and tell me more about a string of therapists that didn't work out than be in a dark place alone. Attention. If they seek it, you'd do well to stretch a hand out towards them. It is not the problem, it is merely a symptom. And you know what? People rarely actually seek attention. So if they do, and you're the one they felt safe enough to come to, count your blessings. If nothing else, just humour them. Anything is better than the alternative.

And oh yeah, he'll be fine.

Proteeti Ahmed is trying. Share life stories that also follow Murphy's Law with her at proteeti.14@gmail.com

Debunking the Myth of the Tortured Artist

ADHORA AHMED

What do Vincent Van Gogh, Sylvia Plath and Kurt Cobain have in common? All three of them fit the stereotype of the “tortured artist”: a troubled but immensely gifted person who produces masterpieces from the depths of their tormented soul. Whenever such artists come up in conversation, battles with their inner demons inevitably become part of the discourse, often perceived as the inspiration behind their art. However, is pain necessary to create art?

The abundance of tortured artists in history has romanticised – even normalised – suffering for the sake of art. It has led to the belief that mental illness and altered mental states are conducive to creativity, despite the lack of conclusive research providing concrete evidence. As a result, many artists have experimented with drugs or refused to seek help in order to fuel their art, which can not only hamper their productivity, but also has the potential to jeopardise their careers. Kanye West’s recent emotional breakdown and Syd Barrett’s untimely retirement from music are a few among countless examples of what this toxic myth can cost to artists.

This doesn’t mean that suffering is always incompatible with art, quite the opposite. Art can be a healthy outlet for one’s inner woes. Frida Kahlo found an escape from her physical and emotional agony through painting. Using this principle, art therapy helps to treat a wide range of diseases. Hence, it can be presumed that art has a positive effect on the mind. Moreover, it does not always have to stem from a place of anguish; it can be born out of

happiness or curiosity. But, some people tend to devalue light-hearted works of art, arising from the false notion that works influenced by happiness don’t take as much effort as those inspired by sorrow. Yet, they forget that behind every seemingly effortless piece lies years of practice, which is an invaluable commodity.

Speaking of practice, art is labour: a sentiment that rings true for those who make a living out of it. Creative professionals work hard at their craft, often for long hours and low wages. These conditions naturally impose a lot of stress on them, making the tortured artist myth an unfortunate and unflattering reality for many. Some creative industries, such as those of K-pop and manga, are notorious for their brutal work ethic. Not only do the artists physically suffer from overworking, a heavy toll also befalls their mental health. These factors may lead to writer’s block or other forms of burnout, which then adds more stress to struggling artists dependent on their creative output to make ends meet. Therefore, the life of a full-time artist isn’t as romantic as it seems.

Being a tortured artist, in the end, is not something to aspire to. These geniuses may give birth to timeless classics, but the obstacles they face to create such masterpieces are hardly worth glorifying. If anything, the trials and tribulations of artists should humbly remind us of their humanity, which is something we all have in common.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

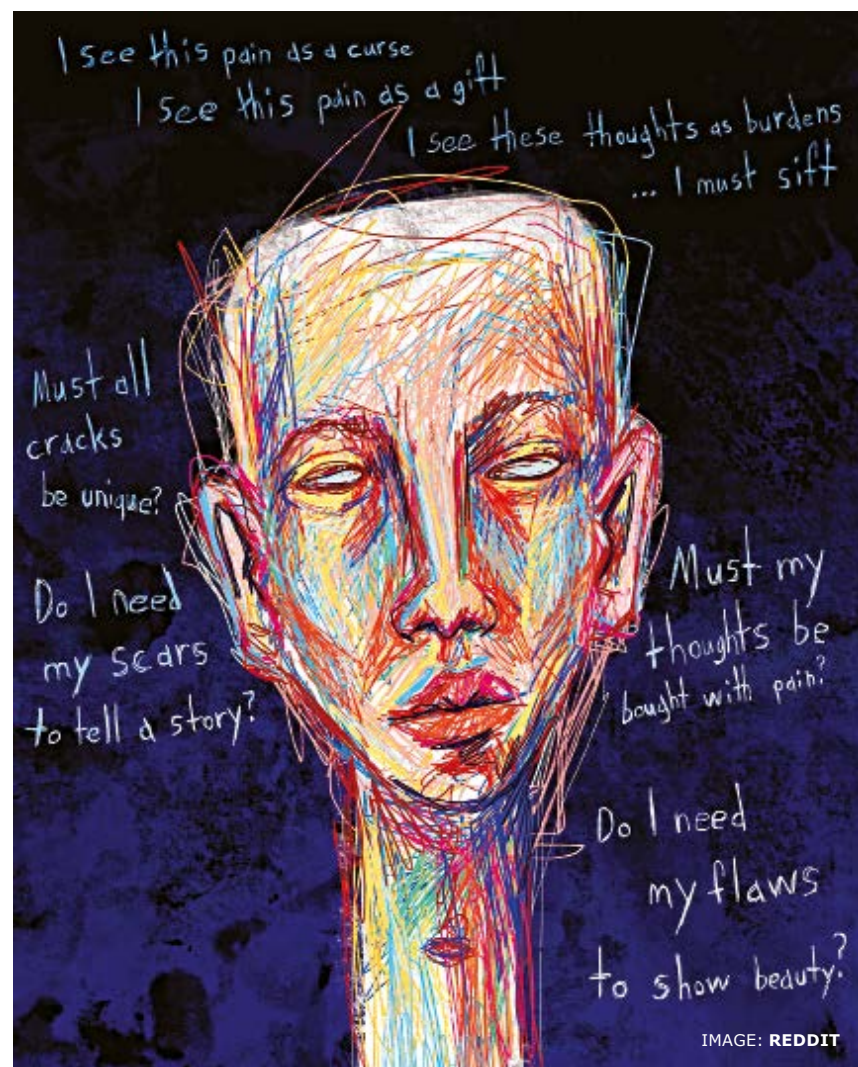


IMAGE: REDDIT



PHOTO: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Art and Its Essentiality

AYSHA ZAHEEN

Art’s pertinence has always been evident, but debatable. It’s not core to our survival, like food or security. Art may be the oldest form of outlet and communication but being uninformed about it does not make us inherently ignorant. Whatever art teaches us can be learned from the sources that have served as muse in the first place. Art is merely a medium, not an irreplaceable component of life. In fact, if you try to categorise art in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, art will only be placed under ‘self-actualisation’. Self-actualisation is merely the understanding of one’s talent and incentives. Talent can be monetised, yes, but there are jobs that do not require talent and pay enough to sustain.

All we talk about is how art is not a solemn necessity, thus, not the best medium to earn money. Let’s put that thought aside for a while and consider something else, the sheer effort behind it. The contemplation that goes behind the creation is oftentimes taxing itself, then comes the process of portraying it into something tangible. All of this requires time and effort, both very irreconcilable with zero market value when it comes to every other sector *but* art.

Local artists here in Bangladesh have it difficult. For the oddest reasons, people cannot wrap their heads around the fact that even art costs mon-

ey. There are people who are eager to pay decent compensations, but the majority are ignorant. Not only are many apathetic to the toil itself, but the fact that an artist does not necessarily specialise in every possible arena is also not understood. Chastising artists for wanting to charge a customer or not agreeing to their proposed work is worryingly prevalent. Not only do artists put in hours, but they also procure a device to communicate *your* desires and preferences. Just because artists happen to have a knack for creating art, does not mean that they make art out of thin air with minimal to no effort. Digital art is highly disregarded in this situation for the sheer assumption that creating art is easier due to the aid of digital means and technology. Art requires effort, no matter what the device.

Now, sprinting back to essentiality, art is often assumed as only a medium of recreation. Art creates balance when everything is in disarray, helping normalise emotions and dealing with them. Art celebrates beauty in the mundane and shoves it in our faces. It’s the most important unnecessary necessity. We need food for survival, but we crave food for the taste of it. Art is, very similarly, the essence of life that artists engender.

Aysha’s brain unclogs at the sight of a crown of raven curls. Don’t ask her what it is because she won’t tell at zaheenaysha10@gmail.com