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The need for comprehensive sexuality education

IN OURSCHOOLS

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DID YOU KNOW?

KALBAISAKHI

Where the name comes from and what it signifies

Nor'wester, also known as "Kalbaisakhi", is a seasonal thunderstorm accompanied by strong winds and heavy downpours. It hits the Indian subcontinent hard during April and May bringing sudden changes like strong winds, lightning, thunder, and heavy rain.

"Kalbaisakhi" comes from the two words "Kal," meaning black, and "Baisakhi", the first month of the Bangali calendar. It's named after the dark clouds that signal its approach. Kalbaisakhi storms take place when warm and cold air clash, causing quick weather shifts. These storms usually occur when spring is ending and summer is starting, usually from mid-April to mid-May.

Kalbaisakhi signifies the shift from spring to summer in the Indian subcontinent. It brings abrupt weather changes like strong winds, lightning, and heavy rainfall, affecting agriculture and daily routines unpredictably. While the rain provides much-needed water for crops, the storms also pose risks with their fierce winds and hailstorms, making agricultural planning challenging due to Kalbaisakhi's unpredictable nature.



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The First Slam Dunk is sports anime distilled to its essentials

RAIAN ABEDIN

In the climax of the original manga, the five central characters from Shohoku High School play against Sannoh Kogyo High School, the reigning champions. However, this final match was never featured in the anime adaptation – as it was discontinued before they got around to that. Almost 30 years later, *The First Slam Dunk* features this climax, except that this particular adaptation adds backstories never seen in the anime or manga, creating an experience that not only builds on top of its already established legacy but stands its own ground as a standalone film.

The First Slam Dunk has, in many ways, perfectly distilled everything that makes sports anime good – from its colourful characters to the amazing grunge rock that drives the momentum of the match – the movie knows the essence of good sports anime.

The narrative is aided in two particular ways – one from the director, Takehiko Inoue (who was also the author of the manga), and his deep understanding of basketball. No play here seems unrealistic, the group dynamics and how the ball moves and sounds feel fresh, without any of the added bells and whistles of the heightened reality presented in many sports anime. The realism adds a layer of tension you really cannot recreate by giving your players a visual metaphor akin to a superpower. Takehiko Inoue clearly understands this, his direction makes the match hypnotic to watch.

Then, there is the animation. *The First Slam Dunk* utilises a mix of conventional 2D animation for off-the-court



scenes and 3D for all the on-court sequences. The result is, to my surprise, spellbinding.

3D is often looked down upon by fans of anime for how poor the execution generally tends to be. Here, the kineticism that only 3D movement could provide worked

greatly to the movie's benefit – couple that with the frankly gorgeous shading on the characters and certain sequences that evoke moments from the *Spiderverse* movies, and what you have is something that can serve as the standard for anime films moving forward.

How to write a stellar PERSONAL STATEMENT

ROBIAH AREFIN IBN MAHMUD

During college admissions season, hundreds of thousands of students across the globe scramble to get their applications in order. Apart from meticulously curating the dreaded activities list, begging teachers for recommendation letters, and fervently praying that your transcripts are submitted on time, perhaps the biggest hurdle is writing that personal statement—understandably so, given it requires you to squeeze every meaningful aspect of your identity and personal narrative within 650 words or so.

Let's get started.

Much like any other piece of writing, the first step is brainstorming. Start by deciding whether you want to write a narrative or a montage essay. A narrative essay could be anything from a challenge you overcame, meaningful relationships you've had, to perhaps a retelling of how you designed an automated feeding system so hungry birds do not interrupt your morning slumber – an actual, famously successful essay.

Here, it's important to maintain a good problem-to-solution ratio. Dedicate less space to elaborating on your challenges, and more space to talk about the creative ways in which you overcame those challenges and the unique lessons you learned. While colleges can empathise with the difficulties you faced, they care far more about your problem-solving skills and ability to self-reflect.

Alternatively, you could write a montage essay which is essentially a compilation of snapshots of different parts of your personality, interests, and lived experiences. Montage essays uniquely allow you to get creative with how you structure your response. For instance, a particular student used the different stickers on their laptop to talk about their passions and values. Another talked about the many families they've lived with and how each of them taught them a different lesson. Using objects, dates, and people as hooks to tie in different elements of your identity is a very effective technique to write a montage essay.

Being memorable is a hallmark of a good personal statement. If your essay is unique from the fifty other applications an admission officer (AO) has read that day, this automatically gives you an edge.

So, how could you stand out? The devil is

in the details. It is highly likely your story will intersect with thousands of others! The key to standing out is to be specific. Very specific. Name-drop people, places, dates. Use visceral language to describe exactly how you felt, involving all five senses. Make it so that even if you blur out your name, a friend reading it will instantly know it's you. Having a catchy intro and compelling outro are also effective hacks to remain memorable. After all, you're more likely to want to read further if the essay begins with, "I've been pooped on many times," instead of "I like to take care of animals." Yes, the former is a real essay.

The magic ingredient that can make or break your personal statement, regardless of format, is

insight. Your essay should be a window through which the AOs can peek into your soul. As such, you need to let your personality shine through your essays. If you're witty, try incorporating your effortless dry humour into your writing. If you're a big fat nerd about everything astrophysics, then, by all means, geek out about black holes and quasars. Be unapologetically you.

Then, surprise with your insight. Say you're writing about climate change advocacy. Lots of fellow applicants will also be climate change activists. But amongst a sea of optimistic green campaigners, are you a cynic who doesn't believe much change is likely? That's your hook. But do you also choose to set aside your pessimism to protest for climate reform anyway? Now that's the unique insight AOs will be excited to hear about. This may look a bit like deliberate attention-seeking, but that's the nature of the game.

Finally, accept that your college essay will never be flawless. There are so many potential values you can express within an essay: vulnerability, empathy, intellectual vitality, etc; it's impossible to cover them all.

That's where you need to look at your essay holistically alongside the rest of your application. Maybe your personal statement misses out on your selfless nature, but you can always highlight that quality in your supplemental essays or activities. Even if you can't, that's okay. You don't need to win a Pulitzer or be a jack-of-all-trades to get into college. You just need to ensure your personal statement is well-polished, thoughtful, memorable, and honest about who you really are. It might not be perfect, but a little imperfection won't get in the way of that coveted acceptance letter.

Robiah is a former A level student at Mastermind English Medium School



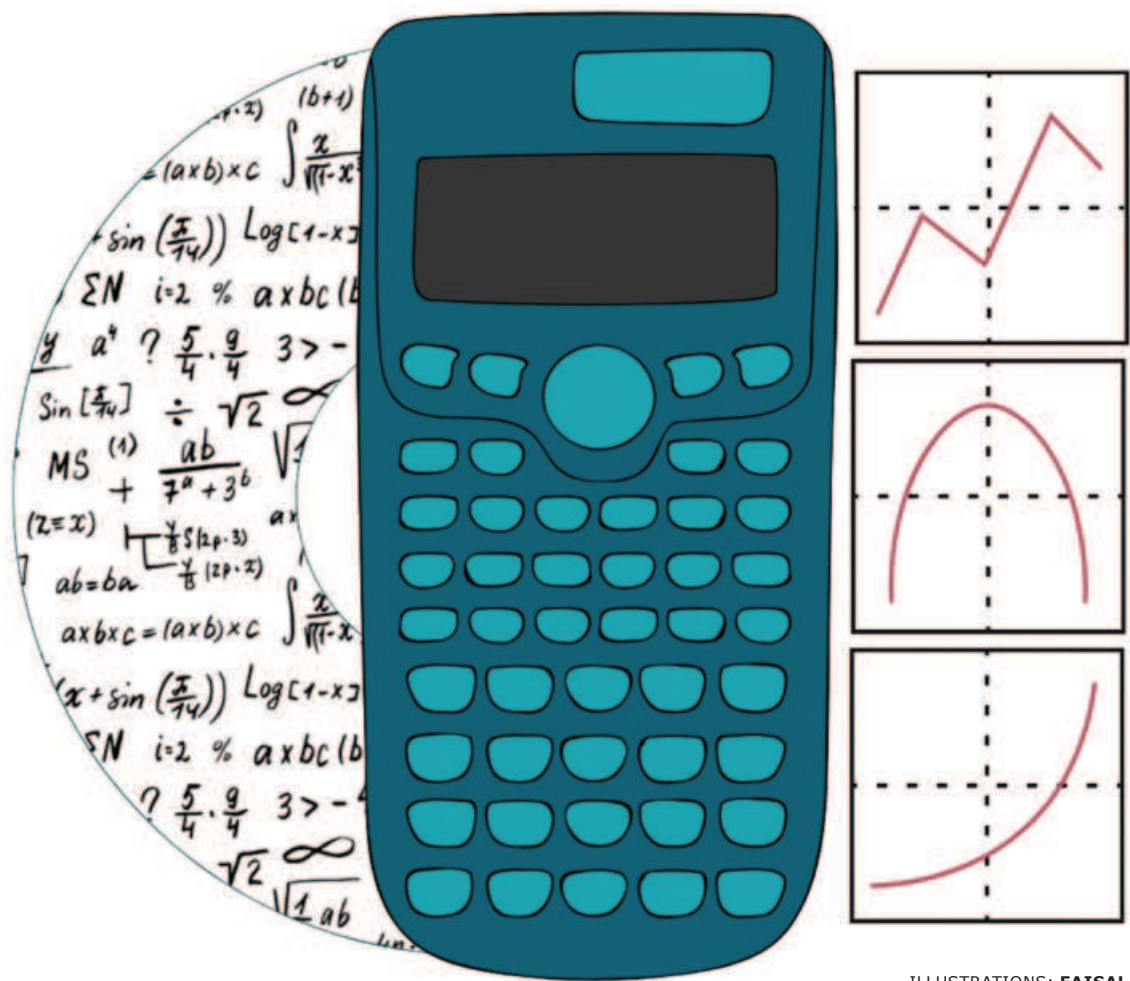
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Is A level Further Mathematics for you?

ARONNYO RISHI

Towards the end of A levels, the Further Mathematics class of a batch usually comes down to a fifth of its initial size. Being arguably the most difficult subject out of all the A levels, Further Mathematics has certainly garnered a bit of notoriety. Covering complex branches of mathematics, it's a great subject for STEM students. However, taking it for all the wrong reasons can not only deprive you of its benefits but make your life a whole lot more difficult.

Seniors tend to fearmonger when it comes to Further Mathematics, presenting it as some monumentally difficult struggle that eats away at your time and ability to do everything else. While this deters most O level graduates from taking it, it also attracts some who want to prove something to themselves or others. Mistaking it for a one-way ticket into prestigious universities, parents and teachers can also pressure you into taking it.

If your reasons for pursuing it aren't genuine interest or curiosity, it will be as difficult as you've been told. Success in O level Additional Mathematics isn't an indicator of how you'll do in Further Mathematics. The mere prerequisites for Further Mathematics include the syllabi of all the A level Mathematics components, including Mechanics, Statistics, and Pure Mathematics. You must learn the entire A level Mathematics syllabus before even starting A level Further Math, double-booking AS and A2 content in one year.

The biggest difference between A level Mathematics and Further Mathematics is that the latter involves a lot of abstract mathematical theory. Oftentimes, the questions won't even have any actual values and you'll have to solve them entirely algebraically, presenting different variables in terms of others. It demands a great depth of understanding in mathematical thinking, understanding of derivation, and

how you reach the places you reach in a sum.

The inherent difficulty is exacerbated by the lack of help you receive. Due to the small number of candidates taking the subject, there's a scarcity of solved past papers and other helpful resources online. Additionally, coaching centres teaching Further Mathematics are usually very exploitative. Not only are the teachers frequently not very good at teaching, but they sometimes hike up tuition fees to absurd amounts because students have no choice but to sign up since few places elsewhere offer the subject.

Although the process seems bleak, there are lots of pros to taking Further Mathematics. It's a very good starting point for many STEM professions, such as engineering. It can even make your university life easier as it covers many high-level calculus topics. It also looks great on your resume if you're applying to UK universities, due to the emphasis they place on A level grades.

Despite how it might seem, the purpose of this article isn't fearmongering. It's to temper your expectations with Further Mathematics. It's vital to approach the subject from a place of genuine curiosity about mathematics, as opposed to treating it as merely a means to an end. Choosing it with the intent of enthusiastic exploration, as opposed to ego-booster or resume-building, is the only sustainable way to grind those long hours of practice that are needed to get good at it.

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to be inherently good at math to be able to study Further Mathematics. As long as you enjoy mathematics and see the beauty in arithmetical critical-thinking, you've got what it takes.

Aranyo Rishi Chowdhury is an A2 student at S. F. X. Greenherald International School.

Challenges that may arise with taking Further Math

1. You must learn the entire A level Mathematics syllabus as a prerequisite.
2. Your school may not have adequate resources to support you.
3. Comparatively fewer helpful resources, such as solved past papers, are available online.
4. Teachers at coaching classes may exploit you and your lack of options.
5. Friends and teachers may exaggerate the difficulty level, which may cause you to perceive the challenges as more challenging than they are.

Benefits to taking Further Math that'll make it all worth it

1. It gets much easier after the first year, once you've gotten that initial grind in.
2. It's a fun, rewarding, and very intellectually stimulating challenge – if you're into that sort of thing.
3. Universities will know you're serious about your love for STEM.
4. You'll go into Math, Physics, and Engineering courses in university with a very useful skillset.



The need for comprehensive sexuality education IN OUR SCHOOLS

SHANUM SARKAR, ROBIAH AREFIN IBN MAHMUD

When navigating the tightrope between a carefree childhood and forthcoming adulthood responsibilities, teenagers can never seem to catch a break. All these challenges intensify a million-fold when they hit puberty, as their bodies and brains undergo transformations that often go unexplained and unexplored. Through these turbulent times, the importance of sex education in guiding adolescents cannot be overstated.

There are many commonly-held misconceptions about sex education. To better understand what it really is about, we spoke to Dr Riad Mahmud, a health specialist at UNICEF. He explains, "Contrary to popular belief, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) isn't exclusively about sexuality. Beyond information on safe sex and pregnancy prevention, CSE teaches people to be aware of their bodies, respect boundaries, and understand consent."

He elaborates on its importance, stating, "CSE equips adolescents with crucial knowledge, attitudes, and skills, enabling them to protect their health, well-being, and dignity."

Existing academic research echoes Dr Riad's sentiments. The 2015 Global Review by the United Nations connects CSE to improved sexual and reproductive health, leading to the reduction of STIs, HIV, and unplanned pregnancy by encouraging safer sexual practices as well as reducing sexual violence and promoting gender equality.

Despite its importance, Bangladesh lacks specific government policies regarding sex education. "CSE is not officially mentioned by the government," explains Dr Riad, "and very limited components of CSE are being implemented through various adolescent health programmes under multiple ministries like the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education."

Hence, sex education has only been implemented in bits and pieces, almost exclusively under the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) curriculum. The brunt of it has been included in textbooks such as Physical Education and Health, Life Skill Education, Wellbeing textbooks, among a few others.

Many out-of-school interventions also exist simultaneously to the NCTB content. Jahura Begum, the principal of Udayan Higher Secondary School, recounts two UNICEF-backed events on menstruation awareness that were conducted on campus involving seminars, visual presentations, and an art competition. Dr Riad also cites the School Based Adolescent Health Program (SBAHP) and Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) to be active initiatives, particularly in rural contexts.

While sex education is technically a part of the education curriculum, its ineffective implementation leaves much to ask for. Dr Riad provides insight into some of the challenges, "Despite the inclusion of basic reproductive health education in textbooks for grades six to ten, the avoidance of the term 'CSE' stems from societal taboos surrounding sexuality, influenced by religious and cultural considerations."

This leads to crucial conversations being conducted in hushed tones or avoided entirely.

Thus, the sensitivity of certain CSE components requires teachers to have specialised training, which often isn't implemented. Dr Riad also notes, "The absence of CSE in the Teachers Training Curriculum leaves educators unprepared to deliver age-appropriate information."

Regarding this, two students, Omar Faruk Saikat, a 10th-grader at UCEP Bangladesh, and Farabi Jaman Shehjadi, an HSC graduate from BAF Shaheen College, spoke of their experience. While Saikat observed many of his teachers feeling hesitant, Shehjadi opines that her teachers were actually quite comfortable teaching sex education components. This lack of consistency in the expertise of teachers across different institutions.

Ensuring the content is age-appropriate is also important, as

Srabon Chowdhury*, a teacher at Viqarunnisa Noon School & College, shares, "We don't explain things in a complicated way to young students. Younger students start out by learning general themes such as family, kindness, and respect for others' boundaries. Later, they're exposed to more mature topics such as gender-based violence, sexual consent, pregnancy, and more."

But even when CSE is internalised by students in the classroom, it's often difficult to implement it at home due to stigma. Shamima Chowdhury, a former consultant at UNICEF, explains, "Parents also need to be provided with CSE because the students otherwise cannot apply what they learn in school at home." She emphasises the importance of community buy-in as well, particularly in rural areas, ensuring students can express what they learned without inhibition.

Privilege also heavily intersects with the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) resources. As Dr Riad points out, "Some youth, particularly those in gender diversity clusters, refrain from seeking SRH services due to a fear of identity exposure." Shamima notes, "Out-of-school children are also very vulnerable."

Moreover, CSE is yet to reach alternative streams of education like private schools and madrasas. Thus, nearly 4 million students remain vulnerable to misinformation and negligence towards their own bodies.

So, what can be done to improve the situation? Shamima, alluding to her work in rural Jaipurhat from 2018 to 2019, suggests that the NCTB should gradually introduce more progressive themes by "piloting" new additions to the curriculum in a select number of institutions and communities, instead of launching it directly. Principal Jahura further emphasises the need to reach more rural corners of Bangladesh where much progress is yet to be made. From the students' perspective, Shehjadi suggests that teachers should foster closer bonds with all students and not be biased, so students can properly internalise the concepts they're exposed to.

Despite the many shortcomings of the implementation of CSE, some tangible progress has still been made. Jahura notes that over the years, her student body has grown to become more open-minded toward issues like menstruation, sexuality, and puberty, crediting much of the progress to the inclusion of sex education in textbooks. "The current curriculum textbook is able to express these topics very nicely as well," she adds.

Yet, progress cannot serve as an excuse for complacency. While current initiatives are a foot through the door, we still have a very long way to go. Our youth have a right to access crucial information about their bodies, and it is our responsibility to ensure that what they're provided with is comprehensive, accurate, and inclusive.

Reference:

The United Nations (2015). *Global Review finds Comprehensive Sexuality Education key to gender equality and reproductive health.*



EXPLAINED

El Niño, La Niña

In light of this particularly hot summer, let's take some time to understand an important weather system that affects global temperatures, food security, and economies

AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

Thousands of kilometres away, the force of the wind and water temperature of the surface of the Pacific Ocean affect the climate we experience across the world. This is one of the world's most important climate processes – the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO).

What exactly is ENSO?

ENSO is the system of interaction between water in the Pacific Ocean and the atmosphere above, measured in changes to sea surface temperatures and atmospheric pressure. There is a neutral state of ENSO, during which the interaction between water and air is normal, the winds aren't too weak or too strong, and the sea surface temperature is average – not too hot or too cold. Then, there are the two extreme states of ENSO – El Niño, when the winds are too weak and the water hotter than usual, and La Niña, when the winds are too strong and water colder than usual.

Neutral ENSO: The way it's supposed to be

Powerful winds, known as "trade winds", sweep across the equator, from east to west along the Pacific Ocean. The winds take the warm surface water along with them in the

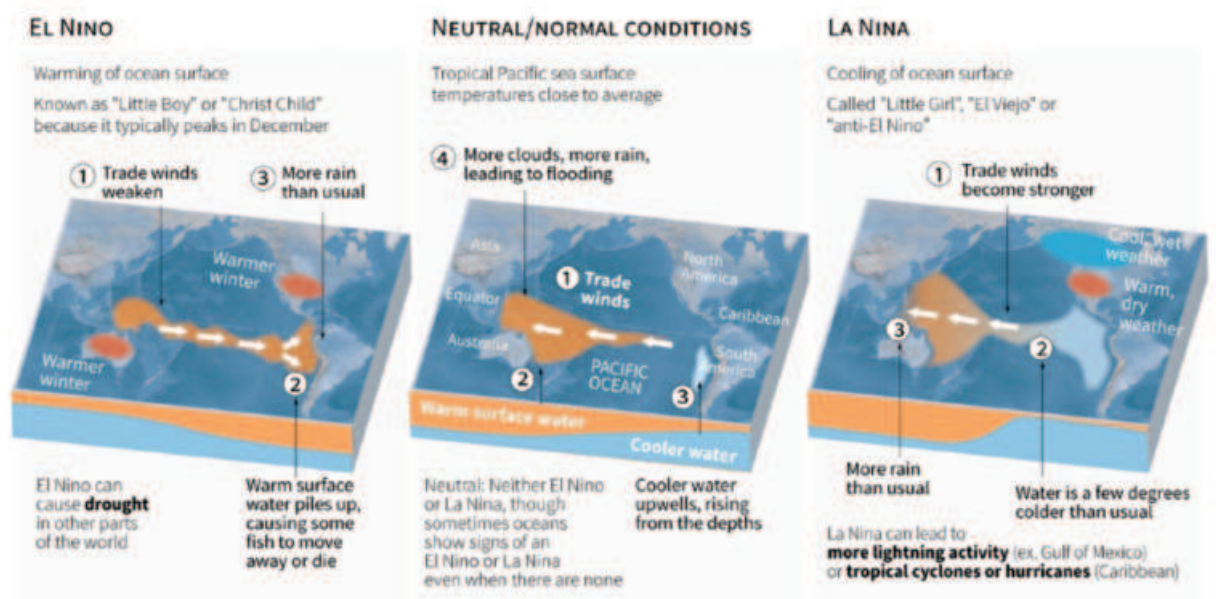


PHOTO: AFP

By properly tracking and analysing the phases of ENSO, it is possible to predict the upcoming temperatures, rainfall, and even any incoming climate catastrophes, saving lots of people from losses to their livelihoods. However, as of now, we have not yet invested in the infrastructure to analyse the El Niño and La Niña phases and their effects on Bangladesh.

same direction, away from South America and towards Australia and Asia.

The transition layer of the ocean between this surface warm water and cold deep water is called the thermocline. Here, the temperature changes abruptly. In the neutral state of ENSO, the thermocline is tilted. With more warm water now in the Western Pacific, the thermocline pushes down in the west and rises in the east. This process is called upwelling. The surface warm water is pushed away to the west, and other cold water comes up from below. This water tends richer in nutrients and is the reason behind the rich fisheries found on the west coast of South America.

During the neutral phase, sea surface temperatures remain close to their long-term average. These conditions can last for years, but they are broken if they are pushed

into one of two intense states, El Niño or La Niña.

El Niño: The warm extreme

El Niño occurs when the power of the trade winds, which in the neutral phase push surface warm water from east to west along the equator, weakens. Thus, little to no water is moved and remains on the Eastern and Central Pacific. The trade winds may even start blowing in the opposite direction, pushing warm water back east towards the west coast of the Americas.

The thermocline in the east is pushed deeper and can completely flatten out. This puts a cap on the upwelling, as warm water hasn't moved away, cold water cannot move up to take its place.

As cold water from the depths of the ocean tends to be richer in nutrients, the absence of it results in a decrease in fisheries along the coast of South America.

A global El Niño event is declared when sea surface temperatures rise at least 0.5 degrees Celsius in a region along the equator in the middle of the Pacific, known as Niño region 3.4.

The oceans store up much more heat from global warming than the atmosphere does, and during El Niño, with more warm water at the surface, more heat can get out of the ocean. As a result, El Niño years are warmer worldwide.

La Niña: The cool extreme

Powerful trade winds, instead of weaker as in El Niño, get even stronger. Thus, they push more water, more than they usually do in the neutral state, west toward Asia. The thermocline becomes shallower in the Eastern Pacific, increasing upwelling of the coast of the Americas. More cold, nutrient-rich water is brought to the surface.

A La Niña event is generally declared when sea-surface temperatures in Niño region 3.4 become 0.5 degrees Celsius colder than average. The number of fisheries off the coast of Peru increases.

Episodes of El Niño and La Niña typically last nine to 12

months, but can sometimes last for years. El Niño and La Niña events occur every two to seven years, on average, but they don't occur on a regular schedule. Generally, El Niño occurs more frequently than La Niña.

Is climate change affecting El Niño and La Niña events?

In 2021, the UN's climate scientists, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said that as of yet, there is no clear evidence that climate change has affected these events. While climate models do suggest that El Niño events will become more frequent and more intense as a result of global warming, potentially boosting temperatures further, but this is not certain.

How do El Niño and La Niña events affect the weather here in Bangladesh?

The El Niño and La Niña events affect global temperatures, rainfall, tropical storms, and carbon dioxide levels. The hottest year to date, 2023, was a result of the combined effects of man-made global warming and the natural phenomenon of El Niño.

Last monsoon, rainfall was 67 per cent below the normal level, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD). This, along with the record-high temperatures, came at a huge cost to the livelihoods of farmers of Bangladesh.

El Niño events are typically associated with increased rainfall in parts of southern South America, the southern United States, the Horn of Africa and Central Asia. In contrast, El Niño can cause severe droughts in Australia, Indonesia, and parts of southern Asia.

By properly tracking and analysing the phases of ENSO, it is possible to predict the upcoming temperatures, rainfall, and even any incoming climate catastrophes, saving lots of people from losses to their livelihoods. However, as of now, we have not yet invested in the infrastructure to analyse the El Niño and La Niña phases and their effects on Bangladesh. In the low-lying coastal region of Bangladesh with a significant dependence on the agricultural sector, this is long overdue.

SIRENS

A.M. FAHAD

Summer is unkind. As a cruel seething sun slowly consumes the heart of the city in its heat, the sweat on your chin finds itself evaporating before it can fall to the hot floor of a motionless bus. And before you can release the weight of the world on the floor upon reaching home, A wind brushes past the nape of your neck and sends a warning of sorts, as all the lights of the house flicker and fade away in a singular sweeping motion. This is a love story set in darkness. Away from the car horns, the blaring street lights and neon signs. Here exists an evanescent you, and a transient, fleeting me. You see, this city is destined to die, with all its smallness in the vast scheme of things. I think love is a hackneyed word, one nuclear flick away from the tyrants with their teeth soaked in blood and their figurative buttons of oblivion. A final point of human failure. But before we reach that point in time, do you not want to see how this story ends? Where your arms are crossed into mine, and mine into yours. I would like to see how the flickering of light from the candles forms reflections on your eyes. Show me how you smile—how your eyes give off the sadness of an ocean before warming up to a tender ray of light. Tell me how the mother cat from work plans on raising her fur devils with the current state of the economy—or if it is somehow possible to sneak in a pack of ramen in our bag of groceries. Show me where you struggle to swallow the gulp in your throat, when the gazes of a hundred thousand insects in the streets suffocate you. In truth, our lives are not so different from these candles. We are fickle creatures. And I cannot assure you of a future. But this cursed city pulsates with an enormous longing for life. I also would like to be no different, and hold onto you. I would like to believe that our lives are more than the flicking of buttons, our bodies—more than hollow flesh and bones.



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA



ILLUSTRATION: FAISAL BIN IQBAL

The Faceless Old Woman Who Secretly Lives in your House

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

I am not the faceless old woman who secretly lives in your house.

There are no words exchanged, there is no mysticism, there is no wind in the twisted, contorted corridors of this vast, small, empty, breathless, sad place.

If they knew, your mother would have said, "It's in your head, darling," and your father would have screamed, "Put that head in the toilet bowl where it belongs."

Except your father never screamed and your mother never spoke.

Because it's all in your head, at the end of the day.

Even this house, with its every surface covered in your endless scribbles and its very essence bearing the impossible weight of your feather-like soul—

Don't you know by now that it's in your head, my love? Don't you know that the house is only floating in space and time, suspended by the invisible cables hooked to your head, my love?

I am not the faceless old woman who secretly lives in your house.

Because your house doesn't exist and hasn't since the day you buried me.

The dirt flowed out of your hand without resistance that day.

You coated the slick blackness of my coffin in record time, pressuring my body into submission and pulverising my soul until it came to no longer exist.

Except it existed but it was only in your head.

Don't you remember that day, my love? When the dirt was stuck under your fingers, and the blood coloured your lovely pale face crimson, and you scrubbed and scrubbed your hands under the cold of the running water till they became raw.

Don't you remember the day when the emptiness of your home became a deafening din and changed it into a house, my love?

No, I am not the faceless old woman who secretly lives in your house.

No matter how much you want it to be me.

And it's not your mother and it's not your high-school English teacher with her cute pumps and it's not the pretty cashier at the departmental store that you flirted with on the day you left me.

No, my love, it's none of us who haunt these desolate, depraved, ruthless, quiet, barbaric corridors.

My love, don't you know that it's the ghosts of your blank soul packed with its queue of memories of anger and jealousies and regrets that inhabit this treacherous house?

Don't you know that you are the faceless old woman who secretly lives in your own house, my love?

Don't you know?

Schools need to rethink how they

TEACH LITERATURE

RUBAMA AMREEN

Literature has always been my favourite subject. Stories and poems are my solace during tough times, and it was only natural for me to want to study English Literature for my O levels. You can only imagine what a shock it was when all my teachers began discouraging me from going down that path.

We're introduced to literature early in our lives, even before school, through lullabies and bedtime tales we are told as children. Fables of daring youth, wicked witches, candied houses, and ornate castles are our first taste of culture and heritage. Learned out of an academic setting, many of these stories become engraved into our minds.

As soon as a child's educational journey begins, everything they have learnt up till then is disregarded in favour of a more formal format. Suddenly, the stories they love do not seem as fun as they used to.

When you have to answer a dozen questions from your favourite fairy tale and memorise the exact lines of a rhyme just to hurriedly scribble them down during a test, you tend to forget to actually enjoy what you are reading. Some schools even assess their students on summer reading material.

Usually, from third grade, students are assigned famous literary works to study. These range from abridged versions of Shakespeare's plays to poems by Wordsworth. On their own, they are quite indulgent to read. However, educational institutions are heavily dependent on repetitive learning methods like rote memorisation, although literature is meant to be speculative and open to interpretation. By

neglecting an immersive learning experience for the kids, schools limit the creative and interpretive skills that could have been nurtured in them otherwise.

The older you get, the more tedious it becomes. Schools are resistant to novel perspectives, especially when it comes to old classics. The syllabuses are hardly ever subject to change. A lot of the time, children study the same pieces their parents did when they were in school.

Not to mention, many schools do not include a Literature course in their curriculum past the mandatory level. Students are dissuaded and even ridiculed for their interest in the subject, even by Literature teachers themselves.

Uzma Binte Ahmed, an eighth-grader at Maple Leaf International School, switched schools twice, and talks about her literary experience at each of them.

"For me, most of my learning of literature had been at Siddiqui's International School," says Uzma, "As an eight-year-old, I loved literature because of the way it was taught. We would have very engaging discussions, and by seventh grade, we had covered most of the classical works in their simple forms."

"However, when I switched to Manarat Dhaka International School & College, I found the way they taught literature to be extremely demoralising. They would hand-pick the most awful books ever, intending to prevent students from picking the subject for further studies. A lot of students protested against this, and it was a major reason for my shift to Maple Leaf International School later. Initially, I was the only student to select Literature for my O levels, along with History. Turns out, they did not even have a teacher for History, and I did Literature classes alone for a

month or so before I convinced a few others to join me."

When asked why more students were not eager to continue literature despite its popularity, Uzma answered, "The way the subject is taught before eighth grade is horrible. It is just another way to discourage students from pursuing a path in the arts."

It is no secret that the arts are severely looked down upon in our country. From an early age, children are persuaded to strive for a career adjacent to the sciences or commerce. Artistic professions, such as music, literature and photography are seen as a hobby at best, and many even go to the length to call them "useless", as they are difficult to capitalise off of in our competitive world.

From personal experience, I can account for the ridicule a lot of Literature students have to face. I have been asked countless times why I chose the subject, and even after careful explanation, many still blatantly tell me that I have no definitive future in the field and that I should concentrate more on my other, more practical subjects.

The state of literature in schools is indeed a dismal one and requires much attention. If this is kept up, soon, very little of the population will be able to create and appreciate the beauty of the literary realm.

Literature is not just stories and poems read for amusement; it is the expression and interpretation of human emotion, an appeal for empathy during the direst times. It is vital that schools recognise this, and supply the patience and understanding to nurture it in young people.

Rubama Amreen wishes that exams never existed. Console her sorry self at rubama.arahman@gmail.com.



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA