DHAKA, THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2026, *MAGH 15, 1432 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

RISING STARS

FOR YOUNG MINDS ON THE RISE

SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS RISING STARS ONLINE

HEAVY SCHOOL BAGS AND THE BURDEN OF OUR INACTION

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

DID YOU KNOW?

HUMMINGBIRDS SEE COLOURS THAT HUMANS CANNOT

According to research by Princeton and UBC Zoologists, hummingbirds see a range of combination of colours involving UV that humans cannot. Due to a fourth retinal colour cone, they can detect ultraviolet light. This is opposed to the three types of colour-sensitive cones that humans have in their eyes which are attuned to red, blue, and green light.

While humans are only able to detect only one kind of nonspectral colour – purple – birds can potentially see up to five different types. These are purple, ultraviolet and red, ultraviolet and green, ultraviolet and yellow, and ultraviolet and purple. Although hummingbirds can detect nonspectral colours, experts have admitted that it is impossible to really know how the birds themselves perceive them.

A research team from Princeton, UBC, Harvard, the University of Maryland and RMBL analysed a data set of 3,316 feather and plant colours. They found that birds likely perceive many of these colours as nonspectral, while we do not. Additionally, the researchers emphasised that nonspectral colours are not necessarily special relative to other colours.

"Tetrachromacy — having four colour cone types — evolved in early vertebrates," said Mary Caswell Stoddard, an assistant professor at Princeton University. "We think the ability to perceive many nonspectral colours is not just a feat of hummingbirds but a widespread feature of animal colour vision."

Editor & Publisher
Mahfuz Anam

Rising Stars In-Charge
Faisal Bin Iqbal

Rising Stars Team
Abir Hossain
Azra Humayra
Zabin Tazrin Nashita

Photographer
Orchid Chakma

Graphics & Layout
TDS Creative Graphics

Production
Shamim Chowdhury

Send your articles, feedback, and opinion to rs@thedailystar.net
Find our content online at thedailystar.net/rising-stars

Five international writing competitions for high school students

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

Writing competitions can serve as an excellent stage for young writers looking to platform their creativity, acquire new skills, and garner hands-on experience. In this article, we'll dig into five prestigious international writing competitions that welcome high school students from around the globe.

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition
The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition is the world's oldest international school writing contest, inviting students from across all Commonwealth countries to share their ideas on global themes such as sustainability, community, and cultural identity. Open to participants aged under 18, it features two categories — Senior (14 to 18 years) and Junior (under 14) — with separate prompts for each. Participants are expected to interpret these prompts through their own lens, crafting pieces that blend originality with awareness.

Young Writers Award
The Young Writers Awards, organised by Bennington College, is open to high school students worldwide from grades 9 to 12. Participants may submit one entry in poetry, fiction, or nonfiction categories. One-act plays are also accepted but must not exceed 30 minutes in length. There is no specified theme for submissions in any of the categories.

John Locke Essay Competition
Hosted by the John Locke Institute, this event invites high school students from around the world to submit essays in categories including philosophy, politics, economics, history, law, psychology, and theology. Entrants must be 18 years of age by the end of June in the competition year. The competition values clarity of thought, logical reasoning, and originality of argument. A strong entry typically blends academic rigour with a personal voice, showing that the writer can engage independently with complex ideas.

The Adroit Prizes for Poetry and Prose
This competition is open internationally to high school and undergraduate students and invites submissions in both prose and poetry categories. Contestants may submit multiple entries in each category as well as multiple submissions for the same category. Prose entries may include short stories that explore identity, loss, or belonging, while poetry can range from lyrical and abstract to narrative and confessional.

Immerse Education Essay Competition
Immerse Education Essay Competition invites ambitious young writers aged 13 to 18 from across the globe to submit academic essays on a topic of their choice from a curated list of subject questions or an open prompt. Participants may choose from a range of subject-specific questions, and are expected to write essays that display both understanding and independent thought. It is essential that you are able to cite peer-reviewed sources accurately.

Things to keep in mind
Before you decide to work on a submission, it is crucial to read all the guidelines thoroughly of the specific competition you are choosing to enter. For instance, submissions are often required to be sponsored or reviewed by a high school teacher or academic referee. Also, make sure to look through the winning essays from previous years to grasp a clear understanding of the tone and quality of writing expected.

Other than that, it is advisable to proofread your essay multiple times. Refrain from using AI to generate ideas or paraphrasing existing work without proper attribution, as such practices will be flagged as plagiarism and result in disqualification.

The rewards of these competitions commonly involve monetary prizes, certificates, or scholarships to summer programmes conducted under the given institution. Top entries are often published, showcased on official platforms, or reviewed by esteemed writers and academics. Writing competitions are excellent opportunities to develop essential skills such as research, critical thinking, and citation, which you will find greatly useful in future endeavours. Even if you don't manage to win, the learning curve is definitely worth the effort.

EDUCATION

How English medium students can effectively utilise online resources

ZARA ZUBAYER

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Picture this: You spent the entire school year frolicking around coaching centres with pals, quoting TikTok references memorised better than your board exam syllabus. The only thing sourer than the tamarind at your coaching's designated *fuchka* stall? The expressions on your parents' faces on results day.

Depending on coaching as a rite of passage is a rabbit hole we all fall into, and not everyone can find a "Wonderland" like Alice. However, it's important to note that there are numerous free online resources available that, when utilised effectively, can significantly improve your grades.

Plan accordingly

The coaching environment can feel overstimulating for many students. For me, it was the constant clicking of pens, the crowd of students squeezed together in a small room, the fidgety deskmate, and that one student firing away questions at the teacher. And yet, I hesitated to leave—if everyone's learning from this very hyped, famous teacher, why can't I?

Everyone needs a game plan before attempting something major. Studying independently is only fruitful if you're confident enough in your self-teaching abilities. Some students need concepts broken down into steps, whereas others prefer to read and marinate in the content. That being said, online resources will only prove useful if you're disciplined enough to learn, retain, and apply.

Finding the right online resources

The first mistake many of us make is trying to consume every YouTube video ever made on a topic. If you're expecting that a marathon on organic chemistry will make you the next Marie Curie, you're in for a rude awakening. The internet is overflowing with videos, notes, and websites to refer to, catering to both the Cambridge and Edexcel examination boards. A famous friend to all is Khan Academy, but it's the wrong first stop to make if you're looking for syllabus-accurate content.

Search for the subject code instead, for example, "Physics 9702 (Cambridge)". This usually leads you to resources that have a thorough rundown of individual topics, and good ones usually follow the sequence of the syllabus. Quality over quantity is key, so find syllabus-aligned content that is easy to digest.

Finding resources that actually make sense

Physics was one of the subjects that gave me a few grey hairs on the way to getting decent grades. I tried many coaching centres, and was still blank when it came to solving questions.

The UK-based examination syllabuses are designed with concepts that are conceptually easy to grasp but difficult to apply. After some trial and error, I discovered YouTube channels like Alpha Learning, Prosperity Academy, and O/A-Level Mathematics, among others, that both explained topics and solved past papers.

Moreover, the Reddit app has numerous communities where students share their resources, and some even provide links to handwritten notes—if you're someone whose handwriting resembles more chaos than cursive.

You'll find more study materials on the internet than any coaching centres can provide, in several versions and forms as well. The confidence builds slowly, and you might even find that you're ahead of your peers who are fully dependent on coaching centres.

When learning stops being a luxury

With the way the private education sector functions, the accumulated cost of coaching can often total a school's monthly fees. Not to mention the staggering additional cost to sit for mocks before exam season. You have access to every sort of material just a few clicks away, which will save you the tiring commute, with the sacrifice of spending less time with friends.

Are you actually learning anything?

You have the colourful sticky notes, the set of five-coloured pens, and the pastel highlighters. However, you've reread the same paragraph for the past hour, replayed the playlist twice, and still, there remains an itch that feels unscratched. Independent study makes it painfully easy to feel productive without actually learning anything.

The simplest way to check whether a resource is working is to close it. If you can't explain the concept out loud, solve a question without peeking, or teach it to someone else, even an imaginary student, you probably haven't grasped it yet. Online learning only works when it's active: pausing videos, attempting questions, making mistakes, and revisiting weak spots instead of endlessly consuming content. Sitting for mock exams also helps you estimate your preparation.

Board exams are perhaps one of the few moments in life where you need to reach your maximum academic potential, so don't let yourself become a procrastination connoisseur. It's unrealistic to want great grades with a quarter of the effort and then blame the difficulty of the exam. So, always walk into an exam room expecting the worst, or you'll be stuck in the loop of A levels while you watch others live your shiny university dreams.

Zara Zubayer is a half-pianist, occasional grandma (she knits), and collector of instruments she never learns. Suggest a new hobby she won't commit to at zarazubayer1@gmail.com

Structure of the local government system in Bangladesh : Explained

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

Have you ever wondered how decisions are made at the grassroots level in Bangladesh? Who looks after local infrastructure, sanitation, or community welfare? It is not feasible for the central government alone to manage responsibilities of entire localities across the country. Much of the general people's day-to-day interaction with the state occurs through public services and decision-making processes that affect their immediate communities. This is where the local government steps in.

In larger countries, governance is usually decentralised through provincial or state autonomy, allowing regional governments to manage local affairs independently. Bangladesh, however, follows a unitary system of government, meaning authority is concentrated at the centre. To ensure that governance reaches every corner of the country, Bangladesh relies on a layered local government system.

The key purpose of this system is to give ordinary citizens a direct role in decision-making. Through elected representatives, people should be able to voice their concerns, influence development priorities, and hold local officials accountable. This system is meant to allow communities to participate in politics without needing to engage at the national level, making democracy accessible for everyday life.

At present, our local government is primarily divided into two structures: rural and urban. These structures are spread across each of the eight divisions of Bangladesh. The rural administration ensures that essential services reach the countryside. These include birth registration, maintaining law and order, etc., and development projects relating to education, healthcare, and agriculture.

The first tier

The "union parishad" or "union council" is the lowest administrative unit, which is further divided into nine wards, each of consists of a several villages and are represented by a member who sits on the union council. Each union is headed by a chairperson and consists of members, including reserved seats for women, all of whom are directly elected by local residents.

Similarly, urban areas are governed under a separate administrative framework designed to address the challenges of higher population density, rapid development, and more complex public service requirement such as traffic management, waste management, clean water supply, and so on.

Smaller towns are administered through "municipalities" or "*pourashava*", while larger cities fall under "city corporations". Both are headed by an elected mayor and councillors representing different wards. Due to rapid development in rural areas, an increasing number of unions are being reclassified as municipalities.

Each city corporation in Bangladesh is headed by an elected mayor and is divided into several administrative wards where each ward is represented by an elected councillor.

City wards in Bangladesh are the smallest administrative and electoral units within city corporations and municipalities. One general councillor is responsible for each ward. One selected reserved woman councillor represents three wards. For example, Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) has 30 wards, each led by an elected councillor. In addition, RCC has 10 reserved seats for women where each elected woman councillor represents three wards.

Voters in each ward therefore cast three votes: one for the mayor, one for the regular ward councillor, and one for a reserved woman councillor.

The second tier

The union councils, city corporations, and municipalities are brought under a single administrative framework by the "upazila parishad" or "sub-district council". Each sub-district council is headed by an elected chairperson and includes two vice-chairpersons, with at least one seat reserved for women. The chairs of union councils and mayors of municipalities under a sub-district also sit on the upazila parishad.

The primary function of the upazila parishad is to serve as the second tier of local government, responsible for coordinating government services, handling the council's funds, monitoring the local security situation, and formally reporting its findings to higher levels of government. They also work with the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) who is the top government officer of the sub-district (an upazila chief executive, so to speak) to manage local administration and development.

The third tier

Above the upazila level sits the 'zila parishad' or 'district council'. Bangladesh has 64 districts, each functioning as an important administrative and coordinating unit between local governments and the central authorities. This district council is meant to coordinate development activities across the entire district, oversee inter-upazila infrastructure projects, and manage services that are too large to be handled by a single upazila.

A zila parishad is headed by a deputy commissioner (DC) and includes elected members from different upazilas within the district. However, in practice, district councils have historically been weaker than other tiers of local government simply because there have not been elections at that level. For long periods, zila parishads have been administered by government officials. Thus, their role has often overlapped with that of the district administration.

Unique local governance structure for the CHT

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) — comprising the three hill districts of Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and Bandarban — has a separate and unique system of local governance. This special arrangement exists due to the region's distinct ethnic composition, geography, and historical context.

Each hill district has a Hill District Council (HDC) instead of a conventional zila parishad. They're intended to be largely autonomous and are composed of elected representatives, with reserved representation for indigenous communities. The HDCs are responsible for a wide range of subjects, including education, health, local police, land management, agriculture, tourism, and cultural affairs.

Above the district councils is the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC), meant to coordinate activities among the three HDCs and act as a bridge between the hill districts and the central government. CHTRC oversees general administration, development planning, and conflict resolution.

Traditional institutions also play an important role in the CHT. The region is divided into circles headed by a traditional chief (such as the Chakma, Bohmong, or Mong chiefs). They exercise customary authority over land and local disputes in accordance with long-standing practices. Each circle is divided into smaller units called "*mouzas*", which consist of several villages. Every *mouza* is led by a "headman", while individual villages are overseen by a "*karbari*".

ILLUSTRATION: **ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA**

These traditional systems coexist with formal administrative structures, making governance in the CHT distinct from the rest of the country.

Despite structural layers of administration, the local governance in Bangladesh is far less effective than it appears on paper. Many of these systems are inherited, directly or indirectly, from colonial-era administrative arrangements that prioritised control and revenue collection over democratic participation.

Elections at several tiers have often been delayed for years, weakening public accountability and reducing representative bodies to extensions of the central bureaucracy. Locally elected representatives frequently lack real authority, as key powers remain concentrated in the hands of government-appointed officials.

Ultimately, Bangladesh's local governance remains hindered by centralised control, outdated structures, and limited citizen influence, leaving communities underserved, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive reform.

Punomi Rahman Titir is a contributor at The Daily Star. Find her at punomirahman@gmail.com.

EDUCATION

Heavy school bags and the burden of our inaction

MEHRAB JAMEE

Before the start of a new school year in January, *amma* would take me shopping to buy a year's worth of school kit. We'd get new uniforms, a new tiffin box, new shoes, and if I had rough-handled my bag enough the previous year, a new school bag as well.

I was a scrawny kid for my age. And the school I went to mandated that students bring separate copies for classwork and homework. These copies, added with four or five books, a water bottle, and a tiffin box, made the bag so heavy that I could barely stand with it, let alone carry it to my class on the fifth floor.

Empathetic to my difficulties, my parents bought me a trolley bag one year, the ones you could drag like luggage. I really loved that bag, even though it didn't solve the problem entirely. I still had to carry it to the fifth floor, but that bag gave me huge street credit amongst my classmates, with its handle and wheels that wowed second grader.

Yet, to my dismay, after a week of using the bag, my teachers noticed and called my parents to bar me from using that bag on account of setting 'a bad precedent'. Students aren't supposed to drag articles of education so close to the floor, so I was to carry a normal school bag up the stairs like everyone else.

Now, as an adult, I struggle with backaches and problems with my posture, and it makes me wonder how much of it can be traced back to the weight I carried as a kid.

Universal medical guidelines suggest that the weight of the schoolbag shouldn't be above 10-15 percent of the child's body weight. Heavier school bags may lead to a variety of musculoskeletal disorders, reducing the quality of life of the child that can persist into adulthood. So, why are school bags for children so heavy? What is the cost of putting so much weight on such delicate shoulders? And what are we doing about it, if anything at all?

In 2016, the High Court replied to a writ petition questioning the inhumanity of children being made to carry heavy bags. According to the High Court's response, primary school children cannot be forced to carry backpacks weighing over 10 percent of their weight. Moreover, according to a study published in the *International Journal of Advanced Research in Nursing* in 2025, the average weight of schoolbags carried by fifth to seventh graders is still above five kilogram, which exceeds the 10 percent limit by quite a lot.

"On a regular school day, my daughter carries around four books, two to three exercise copies, a diary, a tiffin box, and a water bottle," says Reneta Nowrin, mother of a seven-year-old school-going student. "If she has art class, she also carries art supplies. Obviously, the bag is too heavy for her, and she bends forward under the weight. My husband or I try to carry the bag for her, but she has to carry it up the stairs at school herself as we aren't allowed to go in."

In addition to government-mandated textbooks and separate exercise books for each class, many schools also encourage students to purchase and carry extra supplementary books or materials, adding even more weight to already heavy school bags. Failure to implement the mid-day meal programme and the supply of drinkable water in most schools only adds to the burden children have to carry.

Regarding the advent of heavy school bags and the mid-day meal programme, Shaela Nasrin, Headmaster at the capital's Motijheel Government Girls High School says, "I have been an educator since 1991. I don't think this problem really existed in the 90s. In those days, children would get a longer break at mid-day as there was only one academic shift. They would go home, have lunch, and come back to school again. Many of the government schools had a mid-day tiffin programme as well. Now, ours remains one of the few schools with a meal-plan. The problem, in my opinion, is multifaceted. Consumer culture has a lot to do with heavy bags. So many students attend different coaching classes before or after school. They carry everything they need for the day in those bags, and parents often support this culture as well. At the end of the day, we can only communicate the government circulars to the guardians. We can't enforce it."

According to the study cited earlier, 80 to 90 percent of the children who participated in the study reported experiencing upper or lower back pain, neck pain, or shoulder pain. Multiple studies conducted across different countries reach similar conclusions: carrying bags weighing more than 10 percent of the body weight of the child leads to long-standing muscle pain, deformity in the spine's natural curvature, and even chronic pain resulting from nerve compression involving the brachial or cervical plexuses.

The effects are even worse for students in primary school.

"We view bones as tough and solid structures, but in actuality, the spine is very malleable in children up to high school age," explains Dr Anowar Hossain from the Department of Physical Medicine, Mugda Medical College Hospital. "I often see children hunched forward from all that weight. Besides the pain felt at such a young age, it may lead to permanent hunch-back, poor posture, reduction in core strength, and degenerative conditions like cervical or lumbar spondylosis in their later years."

Relating to the broader problem, Dr Hossain adds, "I have a daughter in the fourth grade myself. Despite my warnings, she carries a very heavy bag, with six books and six copies on most days. She feels that if she doesn't carry all those books, she will fall behind in class."

Heavy school bags are not a new problem. Many countries have solved this problem by installing lockers, water filters, and ensuring meals at school, which directly negates the necessity of carrying extra books, water bottles, or heavy tiffin carriers. As evidenced by the High Court ruling, this isn't a problem we haven't tried to tackle in this country either. But issuing circulars and providing guidelines isn't enough. Schoolbags continue to weigh down on our children's shoulders. Yes, issuing the circular was a step in the right direction. But we also need to take concrete, implementable steps.

We need to find out what students carry in their bags, determine how much of it they really need to bring from home, and help schools secure the funds required to implement the necessary solutions. From an economic viewpoint, solving this problem will potentially return the investment manifold by increasing productivity and decreasing health expenditure. But it isn't just the economic gain policymakers must consider. It is our duty, as a society, to ensure that our next generation might enjoy a decent quality of life. It is also our moral obligation to guarantee that their shoulders are not burdened with the load of our inaction and apathy.

Mehrab Jameeis a 5th-year medical student at Mugda Medical College and writes to keep himself sane. Reach him at mehrabjamee@gmail.com.

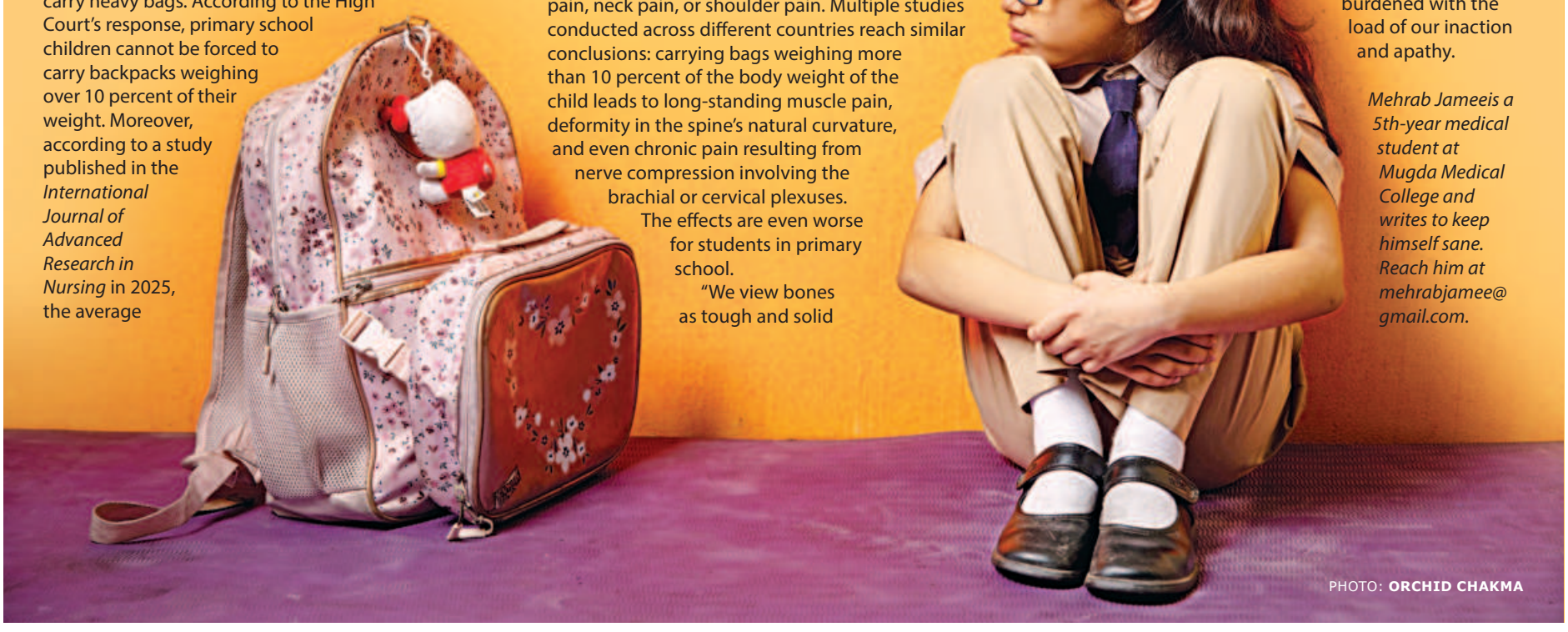

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

EXPLAINER

THE PROUST EFFECT

How sensory experiences can transport us back in time

ZARA ZUBAYER

Some of us cling to nostalgia like it's the only thread connecting the past to our current selves. Others keep memories at an arms-length distance, partly as a defence to lessen the emotional weight. Yet, the "Proust effect" suggests that memory is not always something we consciously choose to revisit. Sometimes all it takes is a whiff of your old perfume to transport you to a memorable summer; the tartness of mango dusted with salt and chilli that takes you back to your school days; the smell of rain on dry soil to bring you back to your childhood playground, as a kid with scraped knees and relentless energy. These involuntary recollections are known as "madeleine moments", which are only triggered by sensory experiences such as taste or smell.

The term "madeleine moment" came from an account of the French novelist Marcel Proust in his novel, *Swann's Way*. In the book, Proust's narrator dips a madeleine cake into tea and upon tasting it, he enters a neurological voyage. The taste triggers a vivid memory of his childhood. What's more interesting is that he doesn't try to remember, the memory arrives fully formed, with emotions, details, and sensations. Proust wasn't necessarily writing psychology, but he described memory with such precision that science eventually caught up to him. As such, the phenomenon came to be known as the Proust effect.

Research confirms Proust's insight. Smell and taste have direct neural links to the hippocampus, which processes memory, and the amygdala, which processes emotions. This is why odour or taste-evoked memories are often more authentic, emotional, and detailed than memories triggered by visual or verbal cues.

In another study, participants exposed to odours that are personally nostalgic consistently reported a strong sense of "being transported back in time" to their original experiences. It demonstrated that sensory cues can involuntarily trigger autobiographical memory. These memories are unlikely to be altered with time by the brain, and retain their emotional intensity and vividness. In other words, the scientific community has validated what Proust first observed with his madeleine and teacup: a simple taste or smell can unlock a fully formed, emotionally rich memory from the past.

This is also depicted in the movie *Lion* (2016), based on the true story of Saroo Brierley. Saroo is adopted at the age of five from an orphanage in India by an Australian couple, which changes the trajectory of his life. Growing up in a Western environment, he retains almost no recollection of his early childhood in the villages of India. Decades later, the taste of an Indian sweet at a friend's house unexpectedly triggers vivid fragments of his childhood. This sensory experience sparks a determined and emotional journey to locate his biological family. Although dramatised, the movie illustrates how involuntary memories can unlock powerful autobiographical recollections.

The Proust effect goes far beyond literature and psychology, it's also widely taken advantage of in marketing and branding. The use of scents, flavours, textures and even sounds play a strategic role in attracting you as a consumer. For example, cafes and bakeries often use the smell of baked goods to stimulate a sense of comfort and warmth. Vendors and markets, knowingly or unknowingly, harness the Proust effect. Sensory cues like aroma and flavour transport individuals back to formative moments, enhancing their enjoyment and encouraging spending. Supermarkets and food brands often capitalise on nostalgia by recreating flavours and packaging of traditional snacks.

The science behind how our subconscious might carry memories that only sensory experiences help us recall gives us a fascinating notion: the body betraying the mind. The brain can often block memories as a way of protection, but the body has the ability to remember. This goes far beyond the sentiments of nostalgia and brings the idea of time travelling back into our memories. The Proust effect is a reminder that memory is not only stored in the mind; it is embedded into our senses, our bodies, and our experiences, making the past an ever-present part of who we are.

References:

1. National Library of Medicine. (2022). *How the sense of smell influences cognition throughout life*
2. Science Daily. (2021). *Why odour triggers powerful memories*
3. Sense company. (Unknown date). *The Proust Effect: Familiar smell opens door to past*
4. Frontiers in Behavioural Neuroscience. (2014). *A review on the neural bases of episodic odor memory: from laboratory-based to autobiographical approaches*

Zara Zubayer is a half-pianist, occasional grandma (she knits), and collector of instruments she never learns. Suggest a new hobby she won't commit to at zarazubayer1@gmail.com.

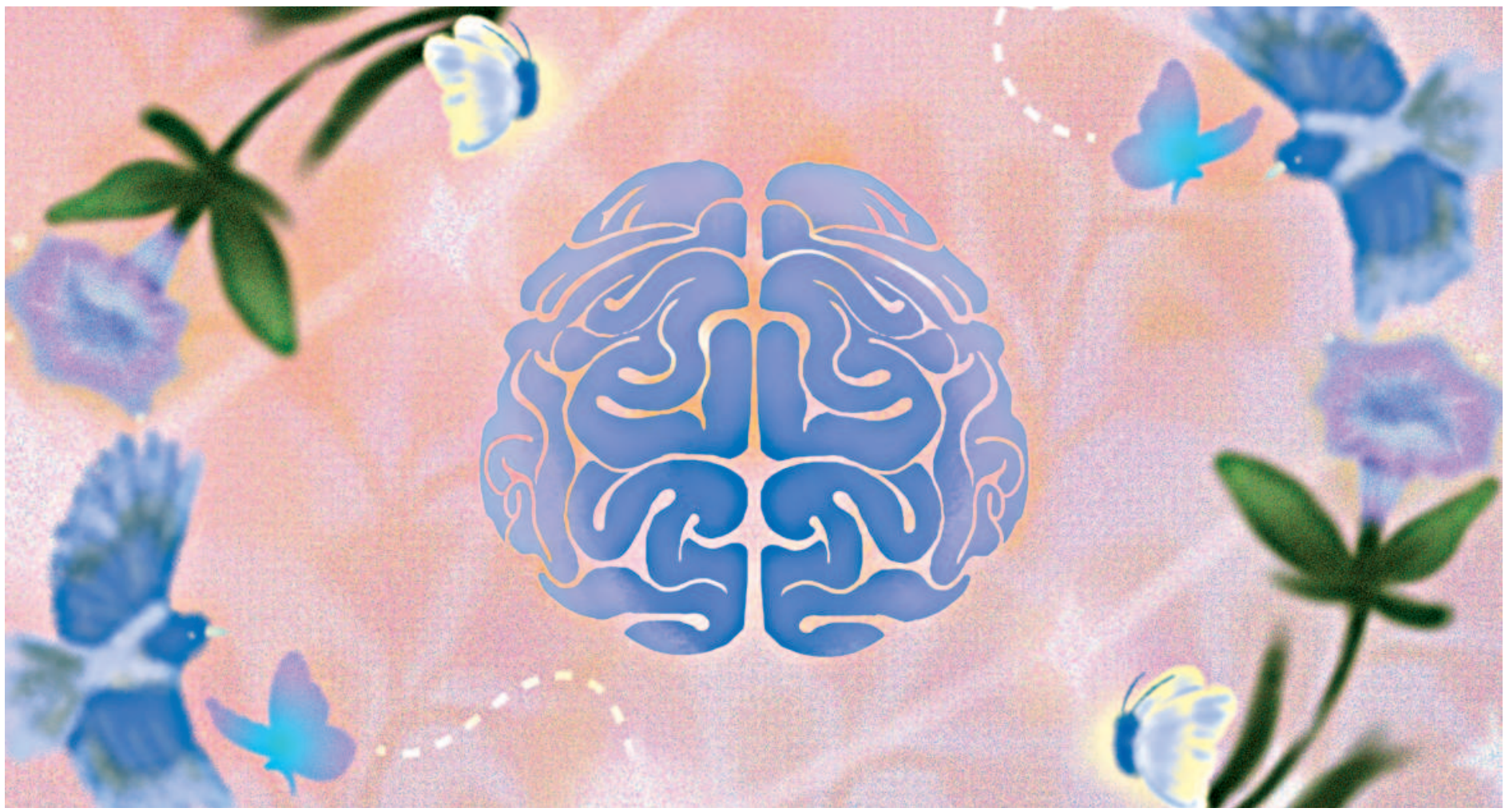

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

FICTION

To exist in two places at once...

ILLUSTRATION: **AZRA HUMAYRA**

TINATH ZAEBA

There is an arrangement in the world that appears accidental, but it is absolutely intentional: the moon and the ocean continuously regarding one another without ever meeting. Neither belongs to the other, and yet each seems shaped by the fact that the other exists. The ocean expands outward in fluid uncertainty; the moon remains suspended at a precise, unreachable distance. Stillness above, restlessness below. If anything connects them, it is a question neither can answer: can you exist in two places at once?

The moon holds its place in the sky with absolute certainty, occupying a location that cannot be walked toward or returned from. It cannot descend, it cannot venture. Its entire meaning appears bound to the horizon from which it is seen. To exist there means to belong there, yet the moon's shape changes constantly: full, half, slivered, gone. It never remains the same, yet it never leaves. How strange I think, that something so fixed is also something that evolves so much.

The ocean behaves differently. It has no exact boundary; it shifts, collapses, reforms. A line of water approaches the edge of land, withdraws, and approaches again, the art of almost touching. A single wave can reach a place and vanish from it before the next wave finds its mark. There is no settling. Only repeating attempts at arrival.

Between these two forms — the held and the moving — lies an ongoing experiment with distance. The moon is always where it is. The ocean is always becoming where it moves. Yet every night, without agreement or intention, their surfaces mirror one another. The ocean offers the moon back to itself through reflection. Suddenly the moon appears in two places: one suspended in the sky, one floating in water. Neither position is false and neither is complete.

Maybe presence is not limited to physical location but multiplied through longing. The moon does not move, yet it appears to descend when seen in the water. The ocean absorbs nothing, yet carries the image of something it can never hold. The idea of closeness becomes slippery. If they're so far, one so above, and one so far down below, how are they always perfect in unison?

The moon remains above the whole world, even while fragments of its image break apart across the waves. A reflection, disturbed by ripples, turns singular light into scattered pieces. The ocean cannot hold the moon steadily, and yet it keeps trying. A still object becomes many through distortion and a shifting surface becomes a record of devotion.

Is it possible to exist in two places at once?

The moon appears twice: once by being, once by being needed.

The ocean appears twice: once by movement, once by memory.

When the moon is seen within the ocean, it does not leave the sky. When the ocean reflects the moon, it does not stop moving. They remain separate, occupying distinct realities while acknowledging the illusion of closeness. What joins them is not touch, but willingness.

The ocean never holds the moon. The moon never reaches the water. And yet, every night, the world insists on placing them together. Distance doesn't quite matter when fate is as certain as a gravitational force. I exist in two places at once.

Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of 5 and a student of Economics at North South University. Get in touch via tinathzaeba25@gmail.com.

POETRY

Survival should not cost them their souls

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

TASFIAH LIAKAT

They teach her how to be afraid
But not how to dream.
She grows up full of apologies,
For taking space, being seen, existing.
He learns early
Softness invites judgement, mockery, cruelty;
Tears are a weakness
To be rid of with fists and shame.
Her body is the problem
And so are his feelings.
Be careful, smaller, polite;
A woman's lot in life –
Be strong, silent, stone;
As a man must be.
Let's raise one half to be afraid,
And the other to be empty
When her back bends, call it devotion
When his silence deepens, call it strength.
You wonder why the kids are hurting
While teaching them how to be everything but whole
Teach them both
Her body is not a crime
Nor is his heart a weakness
Survival should not cost them their souls.

EDUCATION

Why the literature curricula in schools fail to instil the love of reading

AYAZ KADER

When I was in the sixth grade, English Literature was my least favourite subject. Our syllabus was oriented around the classic *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Orczy. Although the novel is considered to be a literary masterpiece consisting of strong themes and historical allusions, the way it was presented to us created a distorted perception of the subject.

Our exams and quizzes focused on recalling specific incidents from the book, encouraging rote memorisation over genuine engagement. This standard practice strips literature of its wonder, often discouraging a true appreciation for reading.

A standard school literature course should have the primary objective of instilling the love of reading in students. However, forcing students to memorise poems and remember every trivial detail of a book essentially purloins the fun out of it. This phenomenon is, quite possibly, one of the primary contributors to the decline in reading interest. When students sit down and read the novel they've been assigned, just to look for a specific answer for their homework, the act of reading is reduced to extracting "value".

Reading is not natural to the human psyche. Our brain repurposes existing brain circuits, like hearing and vision, to make up the information being taken in while reading. Therefore, most authors narrate a story in a way that is better suited for an immersive experience. It is constructed in a manner that allows the reader to form vivid images in their minds. If anything, having the readers retain minute details is not an objective that authors aspire to with their work. However, in schools, there is a heavy emphasis on the latter.

As a result, students don't feel inclined to read for fun, especially if they haven't been doing so from an early age. What is more concerning, particularly in this day and age, is that human attention is easily captured by an endless stream of stimulating content. With reading being riddled with all sorts of hurdles, a lot of young individuals are possibly being deprived of the opportunity to expose themselves to a world full of rich and fantastical texts.

Moreover, when they relate reading to school assignments, it becomes an experience devoid of pleasure. It becomes a strictly utilitarian task, one which readers partake in exclusively for the sake of academics. Sure, if students read by themselves outside the school syllabus, they may develop an affinity for reading. But this is hardly the case because schools obviously have a great influence on younger minds.

So, what should be done?

Literature curricula exclusively focus on "canonical books" like classics, which every student is required to study. But if the goal is to make reading fun, focus should shift away from retaining details about the book and author. Instead, classroom discussions should revolve around open-ended interpretations and analysis of the text, where each student uncovers the text in their own unique way.

In fact, one of the greatest mistakes is forcing interpretations upon students even though they may not find them relatable. If readers are granted the opportunity to engage with novels, then the arbitrary details that they were previously forced to remember are replaced with aspects of the book that resonate with them. Not only does this empower their voice, but it also allows young readers to navigate and grasp the central themes of a text by themselves, instead of being told what to think.

Similarly, exam questions should move away from a comprehension-based format. Questions should test engagement instead of rigid memory retention. For instance, questions like "Describe what the character does after discovering the secret" may be replaced with more subjective ones like "What action of the character did you find most captivating? Discuss in your own words".

Beyond developing reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, reading can also encourage readers to find out more about themselves as well. By seeing themselves in a character or aspiring to the virtues that they sense in their favourite heroes, it could instill values such as resilience, ambition, generosity, integrity, and nobility. It is precisely through fiction that we can begin to imagine a better version of ourselves as well as the world around us.

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**