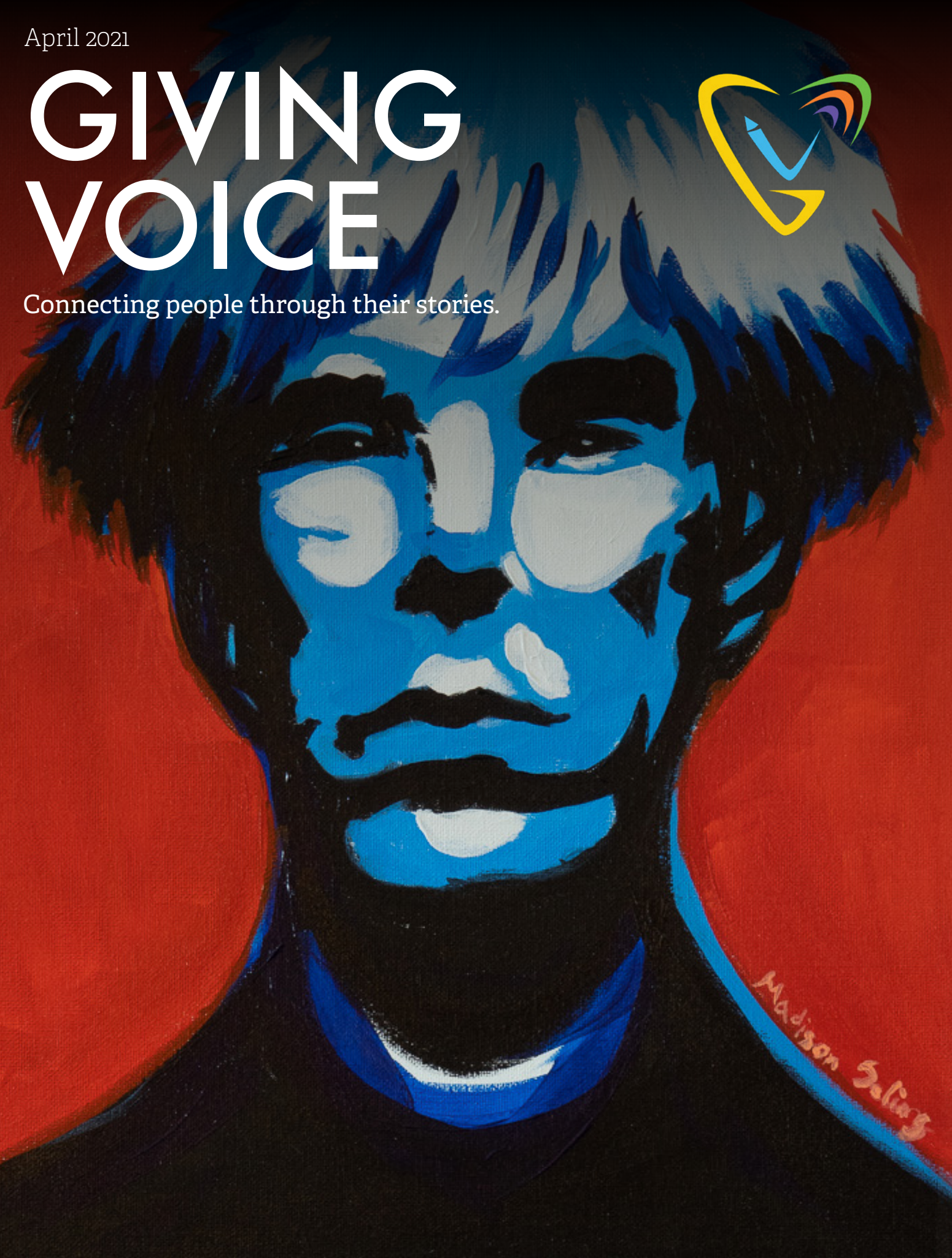


April 2021

GIVING VOICE

Connecting people through their stories.



Madison Selig



A Note From Our Editor

Welcome to the April issue of *Giving Voice*!

Our team is working on exciting new collaborations—and while I cannot reveal everything that is happening, I can tell you that we are in need of more student writers, illustrators, and photographers. By joining the *Giving Voice* team, young people have the opportunity to gain professional publication experience, be reimbursed financially for their work, and join a team that values finding positive solutions to problems and celebrating the great things in our community.

It also gives students an opportunity to explore topics that interest them and ignite their passions. In this issue, Alayna Steward dives into the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the problems that still remain 31 years after it was enacted. Steward offers action items to our readers, connecting them with the resources they need to address the gaps still remaining in the ADA.

Another contribution to this issue is from Adeline Ferolo, who reached out to both of the Peoria Mayoral candidates and had the opportunity to interview one of them. In it, she offers young first-time voters the opportunity to hear more about issues that matter to them—from providing education to low-income students, to jobs and transportation. What a wonderful opportunity to be able to dive into the journalistic field as a high school senior!

Cailyn Talamonti created the artwork that accompanies Kratika Tandon's article, "The Climate Refugee Crisis." The image is emotional and moving—bringing to life Tandon's cry: "We need to act rapidly in order to alleviate the issue of global migration due to climate change." There is so much talent in these pages—and we cannot wait to see the team grow!

We are very grateful to the Gilmore Foundation for providing us with the funds needed to give professional and uplifting experiences to so many students. If you are interested in becoming a writer or connecting a student with us, visit bigpicturepeoria.org.

Mae Gilliland Wright, PhD
Giving Voice Editor-in-Chief

GIVING VOICE

Connecting people through their stories to foster empathy, equity, and community collaboration.

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A Conversation With Dr. Rita Ali

by Adeline Ferolo

“With the April 6, 2021 general election date approaching soon, it is important to become an informed voter—especially if you are new to the local political scene.”



Peoria County's local election is in full swing, and it is time to become involved in the community and vote! If you are unfamiliar with the City of Peoria's politics, this year is extremely important regarding the race for mayor. The current mayor, Jim Ardis, held office for the past sixteen years and is not running for reelection. Following the February 2021 primaries, the race was narrowed from five potential candidates to two—Dr. Rita Ali and Mr. Jim Montelongo. Both have served on the Peoria City Council. With the April 6, 2021 general election date approaching soon, it is



important to become an informed voter—especially if you are new to the local political scene. For many high school seniors, this is their first experience participating in local politics. Luckily, I had the opportunity to have a conversation with Dr. Rita Ali about her background in politics and her interest in youth-specific initiatives in Peoria.

Upon introduction, Ali was incredibly friendly and charismatic, describing her first experience with politics during her time at Manual High School. During her freshman year, Ali campaigned for freshman class president against her close friend. She eventually won the election with the spontaneous slogan, “*In order to get up, we got to get down!*” Following her election as class president, she tackled her

first big issue: allowing girls to take industrial arts classes. These classes included mechanical and architectural drawing and were reserved for boys only. By organizing a group of students and taking it to the school board, the following semester industrial arts classes were open to all students. Outside of high school, Ali also served on the Police Community Relations Committee and the Community Action Board at just fourteen years old. Ali plans to create similar opportunities for high school and college students to become active in the community by instituting a Young People Advisory Board upon her election. It would constitute high school and college students in hopes of engaging with young voters and their ideas for the community.

“Ali’s interest in youth-directed initiatives also expands across employment and educational opportunities in the community.”

Ali’s interest in youth-directed initiatives also expands across employment and educational opportunities in the community. As the current Vice President of Workforce and Diversity at Illinois Central College, Ali is familiar with educational opportunities in Peoria. She hopes to strengthen and reevaluate the Peoria Promise program, ensuring financial aid to low-income students in pursuit of a college degree. Additionally, she hopes to expand the program to low-income high school students taking dual degree courses. This could allow high school students to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate degree without having to pay college tuition. Ali plans to implement accessible training programs for jobs in the healthcare industry, a prominent economic sector of Peoria. Outside of these initiatives she also hopes to connect Peoria with other cities by advocating for an Amtrak passenger railroad line. This would be a cost-friendly and safe option for transportation, especially for college and high school students hoping to spend a weekend in Chicago or St. Louis. Ali certainly has youth-focused plans for the Peoria community, reassuring me at the end of the interview, “Even (with) the leadership position as a mayor, know that I am accessible and that I have your interests at heart.”

Watch the full interview with Dr. Rita Ali, where we discuss these and other issues in fuller detail: [click here!](#) ♦

Note: The Montelongo campaign was contacted three times over a span of two weeks in an attempt to secure an interview for this article, but they never responded to these requests. For more information on the Montelongo campaign, refer to his official website by [clicking here.](#)



About Adeline Ferolo



Stories, arguably, are the most underrated form of currency that floods the digital world, through highlighted Instagram posts and viral YouTube videos. As a rising senior at Richwoods High School, Adeline Ferolo aims to express herself and the issues closest to her authentically through engaging, storytelling, and other mediums. She is a competitively academic student. Her interests range across many creative outlets—as an active writer for the Richwoods Shield, the monthly school newspaper, and as a contributor to the youth-led blog EnviroWrite, which explores rising environmental concerns. Recently she has discovered her passion for the medium of film after attending the National High School Institute summer program at Northwestern University, where she had previously studied creative-intensive subjects ranging from sustainable architecture to graphic design. Within the past year, she has focused her efforts on exploring the visual medium in both her academic and personal life, opting to create experimental videos for class projects and continuing to explore different aspects of the visual language.

BE AN ARTIST



BE AN INFLUENCER



The Science of Comedy

by Jenin Manna

The audience didn't know what to make of my polka-dotted dress, orange sash, and pigtails until I opened my mouth.

"I am Ludmilla Linski—Soviet Russian Spy!"

Linski is one of the characters I have depicted in theater, and believe it or not, she's among the least absurd.

In my pursuit of the scientific career of medicine, I always thought that I would have to relinquish my love for the performing arts—until I realized that comedy is integral to medicine. This philosophy began when I started volunteering at the daycare, where I met children like Neva. One particular afternoon,

"comedy is integral to medicine"



Art by Sophie Liu

Neva's face contorted as she approached me with a scraped knee. When the water works commenced, I brushed off her knee, bandaged her wound, and raised her to my hip. Employing a baritone voice that could rival Morgan Freeman's, I bellowed, "Nevaaa, please don't cry!" All traces of sadness dissipated as laughter overtook her.

That humorous interaction was one of many. During my volunteer work at the hospice clinic, I befriended Roseanne, a secretary who I conversed with during our lunch breaks. When I told her that I competed on the Speech team in the 'Original Comedy' category, she suggested that I perform for the other secretaries at the office. As I looked upon the faces of my audience members who were stricken with boredom from the monotony of their work, I set a goal for this performance: I wanted to revitalize the clinic. I shifted into character, contorting my face, adopted different voices, and relished in the laughter that permeated the room.



After volunteering within the community of Peoria, I wanted to broaden my scope. I volunteered virtually with the Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children, and my destination was Alajuelita, Costa Rica—a small town rendered hopeless by the pandemic. I used my Spanish language skills to create posters displaying the safety precautions needed to combat the coronavirus. I worried that the impact of my presentation to the residents of Alajuelita would be hindered by my virtual presence and I would not be able to connect with the people I was trying to help. In an effort to diminish the barriers between us, I tried incorporating humor within my lecture... although the residents of Alajuelita may have been laughing at the flaws of my Spanish!

Comedy allows me to pursue my aspirations in medicine on an even grander scale. I want to help my patients overcome greater obstacles than a scrape on the knee. I want to restore their hope in dire situations and diffuse the monotony of their hospital experiences with laughter, and alleviate their ailments with both medical relief and amiability. Comedy and medicine may seem incompatible, but the culmination of my experiences volunteering at the daycare, medical clinic, and around the world have revealed that their relationship is symbiotic. Although my patients may never experience the eccentricities of my theater characters like Ludmilla Linski, I hope that in becoming a physician, I can heal with one laugh at a time. ♦



About Jenin Mannaa

Jenin Mannaa is a rising senior at Dunlap High School. Her stellar academic performance has granted her entrance to the National Honors Society at her school. Jenin has expressed her love for advocacy through her involvement on the Dunlap Speech Team as Junior and Senior Captain. Within speech, her primary goal has been expressing her identity as a Muslim American woman. Jenin attended IHSA State for Oratorical Declamation her junior year of high school. Within her speech team, she was also awarded Sophomore and Junior MVP. Jenin's passion for the arts is evident through her involvement in Stage 323, where she was inducted in the International Thespian Society. She has also been involved in Concert Choir, Women's Chorale, and Show Choir throughout her high school career. Moreover, her devotion to garnering support for ethnic minorities motivated Jenin to create Dunlap's UNICEF Club, which educates students about the tribulations of underprivileged individuals in impoverished countries. Within UNICEF, she leads fundraisers, and within the first few months of the club she raised approximately \$500. During her summers, Jenin has spent over 200 hours volunteering at the Unity-Point Methodist Hospital within the daycare or shadowing various doctors within Peoria.



About Sophie Liu

Sophie Liu is a senior at Dunlap High School who has won numerous art prizes such as the Scholastic Art and Writing Gold Key Award and several honorable mentions. As someone who also values academics, business, and volunteering, she has participated in and led many activities in her community. Her volunteering contribution has awarded her the Gold President's Volunteer Service Award. She is one of the club leaders of her school's Interact Volunteering Club. During her summers, Liu has participated in several business camps such as Kelley Business's Young Women's Institute, where she has gained knowledge and experience in her passion. She also runs her own online art business where she creates commissioned art pieces and gains firsthand business experience. Liu plans to continue her love of business, volunteering, and art in college, where she will major in either Marketing or Business Analytics and minor in art.





Deep Sea Mining: A Race for Material

by Izaak Garcia

When people think of the deep sea, it is often linked with dark and intimidating monsters that devour people in one bite, hostile to everything around them. But the real threat is humans. The process of deep sea mining involves obtaining minerals and other resources taken from the ocean floor and turning them into products such as watches, electronics, and much more. The most common

deep sea mining sites are in the Pacific Ocean, between the countries of Japan and Australia, stretching all the way to the west coasts of North and South America.

Many popular and valuable minerals such as silver, copper, and gold are in high demand all around the world. While many areas of the world such as Tanzania and the Arctic are rich in minerals and precious metals, the main source where these materials can be found are in the ocean floor. Because of this, more and more countries are expanding their own individual deep sea mining industries. But in the end, enough is never enough.

The majority of the research being done by organizations such as the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution on deep sea mining is aimed towards the protection of systems called hydrothermal vents (areas of the ocean where seawater meets magma). Underwater volcanoes and tectonic plate boundaries create ridges and converge to form these hydrothermal vents. Surprisingly, around these vents, scientists found a whole new biological community and environment. These marine organisms rely on the chemical processes that occur in the hydrothermal vents to survive and function in this deep sea atmosphere.





But scientists and environmental activists are still trying to come up with solutions that ensure that companies can continue to mine safely from the deep sea without harming and disrupting the natural ecosystem. This process takes time, and meanwhile more environments are being destroyed and uprooted by deep sea mining machines and equipment. All around the world, countries are expanding their own deep sea mining industry, but a huge concentration of mines exist in the Gulf of Mexico and in the Pacific Ocean.

Citizens interested in making a difference can write to their representatives in congress. Voting is an important responsibility—paying attention to each candidate’s views and positions can help the environment. Along with these two suggestions, supporting non-profit organizations that protect the oceans is an extremely useful way for citizens to involve themselves. Organizations such as the Deep Sea Coalition aim to protect all parts of the deep sea, from its ocean floor to the biodiversity of the species living there. To get involved and support the Deep Sea Coalition, you can go to their [website](#). ♦

“ scientists and environmental activists are *still trying* to come up with solutions that **ensure** that companies can continue to **mine safely** from the deep sea *without harming* and disrupting the natural ecosystem ”



About Izaak Garcia

Izaak Garcia is currently a senior at Richwoods High School, enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program. After high school, Garcia plans to study Computer Science. He has played soccer with FC Peoria and Richwoods for over a decade combined. Garcia has also played tennis for 4 years, securing a spot on both junior varsity and varsity teams. Along with this, he has competed with the Richwoods Worldwide Youth Science and Engineering team for Biology and Computer Science for 2 years and earned multiple awards for the school. Garcia is also heavily involved with the arts. As a multi-instrumentalist, he has played the saxophone for 8 years and piano for 2 years. During his junior year of high school, he was involved in theater at Richwoods as stage crew and manager. He helped with two total productions and was being trained to be stage manager for senior year before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted school. Outside of school activities, Garcia is involved in Jack and Jill of America (an organization for young African American men and women to serve the community). He served as his chapter’s treasurer during his freshman year of high school. Along with Jack and Jill of America, he enjoys coding, learning new coding languages, and video games.

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Art by Adrien Vozenilek

We're Here, Too

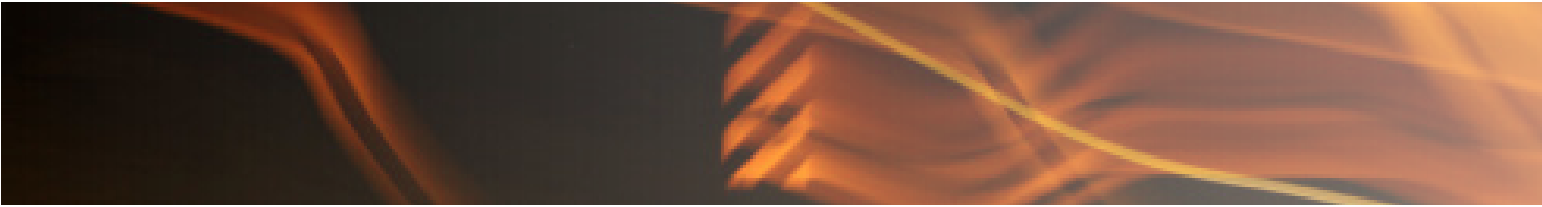
by Alayna Steward

Last year marked the American Disability Act's thirtieth year in effect. The ADA prohibits discrimination against disabled people in transportation, employment, public accommodation, and more. This act was a huge leap for disabled people, yet there are still so many areas where this law is lacking.

Last year showed us just how important disability rights are, with COVID-19 disproportionately affecting the disabled. Additionally, we saw disabled people being barred from voting. The Supreme Court sided with Alabama's decision to ban curbside voting, which for many disabled people was the only way they could vote. We also saw deaths of disabled people of color by the police—such as 24-year-old unarmed and vulnerable Marcus-David Peters, who was shot and killed by an officer during a mental health crisis. Additionally, we saw natural disasters leaving disabled people stranded with no means to get to safety. The majority of people who die during a natural disaster are the disabled and elderly. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, it was found that nearly half of those who died were 75 and older.

It seems that the disabled are constantly on the backburner of the equal rights conversation. So, one might wonder: what did the ADA actually accomplish? When it was passed, the ADA made it federal law that public spaces be accessible. This meant implementing

“ Last year showed us just how **important** disability rights are, with COVID-19 **disproportionately** affecting the disabled.”



ramps, elevators, braille, curb cuts, and more in order to provide disabled people the accommodations they require. It was also supposed to be a means to welfare reform, resulting in an increase in employment of disabled people. However, in terms of accessibility, many public spaces are not fully compliant, including concert venues, restaurants, and even city sidewalks. In New York City, only 3.4 percent of crosswalks have audible signals installed, which help blind/visually impaired people know when it is safe to cross the road. Another instance is the safety of sidewalks during the winter. Driving down the road a few weeks ago in Peoria, I watched as a man in a wheelchair pushed himself in the opposite car lane, unable to use the sidewalks because no one had cleared the snow and ice, putting him in unnecessary danger. In terms of welfare reform, the gap in employment of disabled to non-disabled people has grown, showing the ADA has had less of an impact on employment among the disabled community than we thought it would. In 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that 17.9 percent of disabled people were employed, compared to 61.8 percent of non-disabled people.

Even then, the ADA falls short in preventing discrimination against disabled people. Disabled people still cannot get married without the possibility of losing benefits and financial aid from Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid. For many disabled people, this means they have to choose between marriage and basic needs (food, shelter, etc.). Disabled people are also at a higher risk of losing custody of their children, being evicted, and even dying because they are left in financially vulnerable positions. There are still cases of disability-based discrimination that are overlooked.

While it's heartbreaking to learn about these facts, it is necessary. In order to help, we have to not only speak up and act, but also educate ourselves on the issue. Disabled people are people and are just as valid as their non-disabled peers. Learning more about this topic can help us understand the struggles disabled people are facing. Fortunately, the Biden administration has addressed very specific policies in regard to disability rights. Soon, there may be important changes to the ADA and how the ADA is applied in certain situations that will help disabled people. The disabled community is watching. It's time something changed. ♦

To learn more about the disabled community and how you can help, check out the following websites:

- [Advocates for Access](#)
- [Volunteers of America](#)
- [AARP: Create the Good](#)
- [ADA National Network](#)
- [NPR.com: "Disaster Relief For The Elderly And Disabled Is Already Hard. Now Add A Pandemic"](#)
- [NPR.com: "Supreme Court Blocks Curbside Voting In Alabama, An Option During Pandemic"](#)
- [Time.com: "Black, Disabled and at Risk: The Overlooked Problem of Police Violence Against Americans with Disabilities"](#)



About Alayna Steward

Alayna Steward is a sophomore at Bradley University majoring in Music Business. They have been invested in music and writing their entire life. They are involved in a few musical groups on campus, including Bradley Chorale. They like strawberries, the color yellow, and cats. As a queer disabled person, Steward understands the importance of creative and self-expression and having your voice be heard. They hope that their work will not only inspire readers, but also give them a voice and let them know that they are not alone.



About Adrien Vozenilek

Adrien Vozenilek is a senior at Peoria Notre Dame High School. Currently, their focus is portraying family history and their Italian heritage through 2D works centered around heirlooms. Adrien will be a freshman at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and plans to become an art therapist for LGBTQ+ youth.

THE CLIMATE REFUGEE CRISIS

by Kratika Tandon

Jakarta, the largest and capital city of Indonesia, is a fast-growing metropolitan province that is home to millions of people and offers a dynamic blend of cultures. It is famous for its rich history, busy markets, and beautiful scenery. However, at approximately 10 centimeters per year, it is also the fastest sinking city in the world. According to a

Medium article from August 20, 2020, the city is predicted to be largely underwater by 2050. Approximately 20% of the city is already below sea level, and rising aquatic levels are threatening the existence of the Indonesian islands. The citizens have little choice in the matter as the global politics of climate activism continue while the capital city begins to disappear. An NPR article from June 20, 2018 states that since 2008, approximately 24 million people have been displaced globally by devastating climate disasters. As climate change presents a growing threat to vulnerable populations around the world, climate displacement of environmental refugees has become a growing problem.

Climate migration is in no way a new phenomenon, but current conditions are worsening rapidly. A report by the 2006 Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change projects that the world will have 150-200 million climate change refugees by 2050. However, the term "climate refugee" itself is tricky. There is no international agreement on who should qualify as a refugee since these migrants do not fit into the *legal* definition of a refugee: migration due to fear of persecution. According to EcoWatch of February 8, 2021, the identification of these displaced individuals is important because "essentially no legal framework exists that allows a person displaced by climate change to apply for visa, refugee, or other protections."

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) presents three types of environmental migrants. The first are environmental emergency migrants. These are people who flee temporarily due to an environmental disaster or sudden environmental event, such as a hurricane or earthquake. Second, there are environmental forced migrants. This occurs when populations leave due to deteriorating environmental conditions in their area. This could include deforestation, coastal deterioration, and water scarcity. Finally, there are environmental motivated migrants, also known as environmentally induced economic migrants. These are people who leave to avoid possible future problems. A possible reason for environmentally motivated migration could involve declining crop productivity due to desertification.

“As climate change presents a growing threat to vulnerable populations around the world,

climate displacement of environmental refugees

has become a growing problem.”



Art by Cailyn Talamonti

“ We need to act rapidly in order to alleviate the issue of global migration due to climate change. ”

Dina Ionesco, head of the Migration, Environment, and Climate Change Division at the IOM states that “responding to the challenges of environmental migration in a way that benefits both countries and communities, including migrants and refugees, is a complex process... involving many different actors.” Working through this problem will require collaboration on a global political level. However, some small steps are already being taken. A report commissioned by an [executive order](#) passed on February 4, 2021 by the Biden administration includes proposals for how the US could respond to this global migration. This executive order is focused on rebuilding and enhancing programs to resettle refugees and planning for the impact of climate change on migration.

The climate crisis is inevitable—and pretty soon, Jakarta will not be the only sinking city. We need to act rapidly in order to alleviate the issue of global migration due to climate change. Climate refugees not only get displaced due to natural disaster and climate change, but they also have very little protection. The wealth gap clearly manifests itself among the effects of climate change, and before we are on course for “climate apartheid,” as mentioned by a UN report of June 25, 2019, we need to make changes. We can actively support the movements to pass new legislation and sign circulating petitions. Since we humans acted collectively to get to this point, the best we can do now is act together to offer hope and refuge.

[Click here](#) to sign the Environmental Justice Foundation Petition. ♦

About Kratika Tandon

Kratika Tandon is an incoming freshman at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is majoring in biology and graduating with a minor in environmental economics and policy. She graduated from Dunlap High School as class valedictorian. Tandon is incredibly passionate about sustainability. As such, she is interested in many different career paths that involve helping the environment. She is most interested in writing about the subjects of environmental issues, social justice, life during a pandemic, and racial equity. She is proficient in informative and expository writing as well as public speaking. Tandon was a part of her high school's speech team for four years. This past season, she competed in two events at the state championship tournament: original oratory and informative speaking. She wrote and perfected these speeches on her own, both tackling specific topics dealing with the environment. Tandon was also the president of her school's local Interact Club. She possesses great leadership, communication, and teamwork skills. She is participating with Giving Voice because she wants to use her voice and writing to inspire others and facilitate change.



Student Creators Wanted

Big Picture Peoria is looking for students to help with various creative projects, including:



Podcasting



Photography



Graphic Design



Writing

Email bigpicturepeoria@gmail.com for submission guidelines and payment rates.



Giving Voice is published monthly by Big Picture Initiative, a grassroots 501 (c)(3) nonprofit. bigpicturepeoria.org



About Cailyn Talamonti

Cailyn Talamonti (Manhattan, IL) is a senior at Bradley University. In May 2021, Talamonti will be graduating with a major in Animation and a minor in Graphic Design. She currently works as a freelance artist and designer, creating content for local bands, companies, and others. One day, she wants to be a webcomic artist. Her work is available at cailyntalamonti.com.

An Affirming Lifestyle

by Elizabeth Setti

When staring at one's reflection in the mirror and reflecting, the thought "if only I was better, then I would be happier" seems to reoccur. This behavior has slowly become habitual for the majority of society, consequentially making those negative words and ideas turn into beliefs. Reversing these tendencies and fostering a positive relationship with yourself is a life-long process that eventually can become second nature. Though breaking this norm is difficult, it results in an overall improvement in quality of life.

Humans tend to chase perfection even if those expectations are not realistic. Eventually, when those hopes are not fulfilled, we critique

ourselves instead of practicing self-love and compassion. The cycle of pursuing impractical goals and then self-loathing when the desired outcome is not achieved is harmful for the mind and body. *Medical News Today* states this pattern can lead to "a shorter lifespan, IBS, eating disorders, depression, and suicidal tendencies." The damaging outcomes of self-hate should not be seen as an excuse never to set high intentions, but as a reminder to learn acceptance.

Incorporating daily affirmations can improve the relationship you have with yourself. Affirmations are personal encouragements that can be stated, written, or simply just thought to ameliorate mindset and emotion. *Oxford Academic* conducted a study that showed individuals who participated in positive self-affirmations had increased brain activity associated with valuation and self-processing. The study also linked a plethora of other benefits including reduction of stress and improvement in academic work.



"Incorporating daily affirmations can improve the relationship you have with yourself."



“I radiate love and others reflect love back to me, my body is healthy and full of energy, and I see the beauty in everything.”

You can begin the practice of self-affirmations by adding them in your morning routine, almost as a ritual for yourself. Undertake any method that seems most comfortable and prioritize accomplishing at least one affirmation every day. Completing the task early is preferable because it cultivates a positive environment for the remainder of the day. My favorite affirmations to use are: “I radiate love and others reflect love back to me, my body is healthy and full of energy, and I see the beauty in everything.” Additionally, while the affirmations may not always feel completely true, stating them confidently will decrease possible uncertainty. Affirmations may not be ideal for every person, therefore experiment with other methods such as meditation, journaling, or reading. Finding what is most effective for growth may take time and attention but will yield vibrant results.

Starting a self-love journey is good for everyone. If you assume that you do not need improvement or that you are not worthy of it, know it is a common issue and there is always room for change. Ending the perpetual standard of always craving perfection and detesting ourselves is necessary for solving the mental health crisis our society is facing. Civilization will not turn narcissistic but instead reinvent the criterion on which we base our confidence. Creating a new standard for future generations that emphasizes a healthy personal interrelation will end a toxic era of self-hate. ♦

About Elizabeth Setti

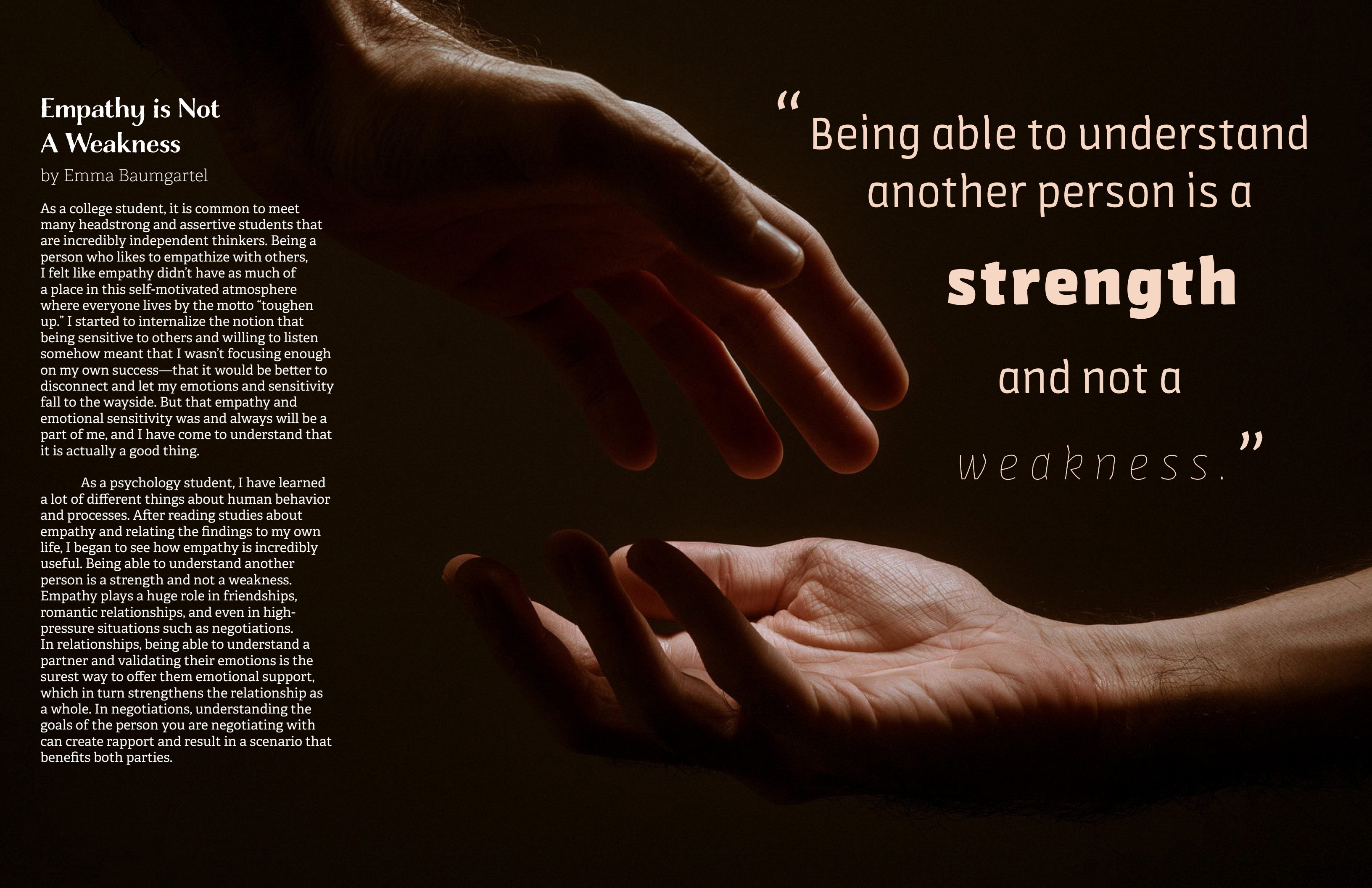
Elizabeth Setti is a junior at Richwoods High School in the International Baccalaureate program. Setti plays volleyball for both Richwoods and Central Illinois Elite Volleyball Club, where she has the opportunity to travel throughout the Midwest and compete at high levels. She is the editor (and previously a writer) for the sports section of “Richwoods Shield,” her school’s newspaper. Setti serves on the student leadership team and Noble Knights, and is a member of her school’s science club. She was recently diagnosed with Anorexia-Nervosa, which she developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. She feels it is important to share her story and spread awareness about eating disorders. As such, Setti created a blog called “A Hidden Addiction,” where she tells her story and her journey to recovery.



BE AN ARTIST



DISCOVER

A close-up photograph of two hands reaching towards each other against a dark background. The hands are positioned as if about to clasp or support each other, with fingers slightly curled. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the skin texture and the contours of the hands.

Empathy is Not A Weakness

by Emma Baumgartel

As a college student, it is common to meet many headstrong and assertive students that are incredibly independent thinkers. Being a person who likes to empathize with others, I felt like empathy didn't have as much of a place in this self-motivated atmosphere where everyone lives by the motto "toughen up." I started to internalize the notion that being sensitive to others and willing to listen somehow meant that I wasn't focusing enough on my own success—that it would be better to disconnect and let my emotions and sensitivity fall to the wayside. But that empathy and emotional sensitivity was and always will be a part of me, and I have come to understand that it is actually a good thing.

As a psychology student, I have learned a lot of different things about human behavior and processes. After reading studies about empathy and relating the findings to my own life, I began to see how empathy is incredibly useful. Being able to understand another person is a strength and not a weakness. Empathy plays a huge role in friendships, romantic relationships, and even in high-pressure situations such as negotiations. In relationships, being able to understand a partner and validating their emotions is the surest way to offer them emotional support, which in turn strengthens the relationship as a whole. In negotiations, understanding the goals of the person you are negotiating with can create rapport and result in a scenario that benefits both parties.

“ Being able to understand
another person is a
strength
and not a
weakness. ”

“ empathy has a place wherever human connections are made and therefore should be encouraged. ”

However, within a professional, sales-driven environment, empathy is not considered a necessary tool for success—despite research showing the social benefits of having empathy. As I get closer to entering the workforce, I have also noticed that emotional intelligence and empathy never seem to be high on a list of employable skills, unlike “time management” or “complex problem solving.” Though empathy isn’t often mentioned as a key skill in the workplace, it is crucial for collaboration and communication and can result in better professional outcomes. The bottom line is this: empathy has a place wherever human connections are made and therefore should be encouraged.

Students, including myself, often hear that effective communication or forming working relationships is key in the workplace. But the truth is, without being able to relate on an emotional level, conversations will not be nearly as effective, and those human connections will be weaker. The ability to create authentic connections by relating to others is a huge strength... and it all comes from empathy.

Empathy is not an innate process. But according to psychologists studying empathy such as Jamil Zaki, empathy is a skill that can be learned—by police officers, doctors, even those with racist beliefs. Zaki explains that in today’s society where political or social divisions abound, a person can challenge their empathy skills by attempting to understand a person you disagree with. If you want to learn more about Jamil’s research on empathy [click this link](#) to watch his TED Talk. ♦



Art by Aryanne Westfall



About Emma Baumgartel

Emma Baumgartel is an incoming senior at Lake Forest College in Illinois, majoring in Psychology with a minor in English Writing. Baumgartel previously attended Richwoods High School. She has always enjoyed writing—especially about current events and psychology—and believes in advocating for the truth. At Lake Forest, Emma was a writing tutor as well as an editor for *Inter-text*, LF’s social science journal. Next semester, Baumgartel plans on joining the college newspaper to gain more writing experience. After graduation, Emma is planning on continuing to submit articles to online publications, as well as a blog on [Medium.com](https://www.medium.com). She also hopes to land a professional content writing or marketing role.



About Aryanne Westfall

Aryanne “Ary” Westfall is a sophomore at Bradley University majoring in Animation and minoring in Theatre Arts. She is pursuing a career as a storyboard artist and enjoys creating graphic novels in her free time. As a member of the Digital Art Team, Westfall spends her time connecting with other artists and creating as much as she can.

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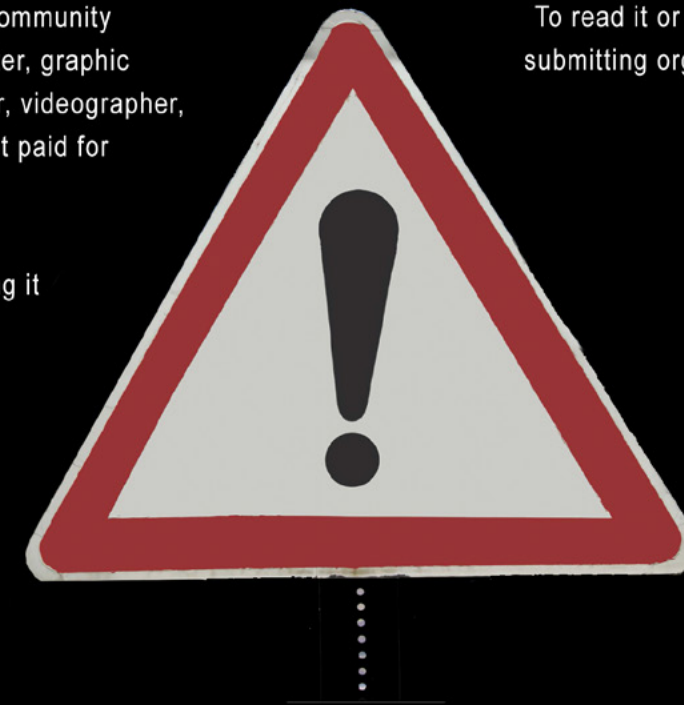
Students!

We are connecting people through stories to foster empathy, equity, and community collaboration. If you are a writer, graphic designer, artist, photographer, videographer, poet or influencer you can get paid for what you love to do.

Big Picture Initiative is making it possible for students to be heard and seen through a digital magazine titled “Giving Voice.”

The first monthly issue premiered October 1. To read it or find more information about submitting original work or content for our consideration, please visit www.bigpicturepeoria.org.

Thanks to the kindness of Gilmore Foundation we are able to share student voices and mentor their legacy of giving lives on in “Giving Voice.”



“It’s maddening we’re still having to express why the American landscape of storytelling should reflect the American landscape of human beings.”

—Dominique Morisseau



Broadway’s Got A Long Way To Go

by Anjali Yedavalli

New York City’s Broadway has a reputation for being inclusive—for being a space where you can find yourself and forge connections unlike any other. Yet the diversity problems that plague its L.A.-based counterpart (aka Hollywood) seem to plague it, too.

An annual study from the Asian American Performers Action Coalition found that during the 2016-2017 season, 86.8% of shows were written by white playwrights and 66.8% of the roles were played by white performers—which would make them the only group to be overrepresented in terms of their relation to the demographics

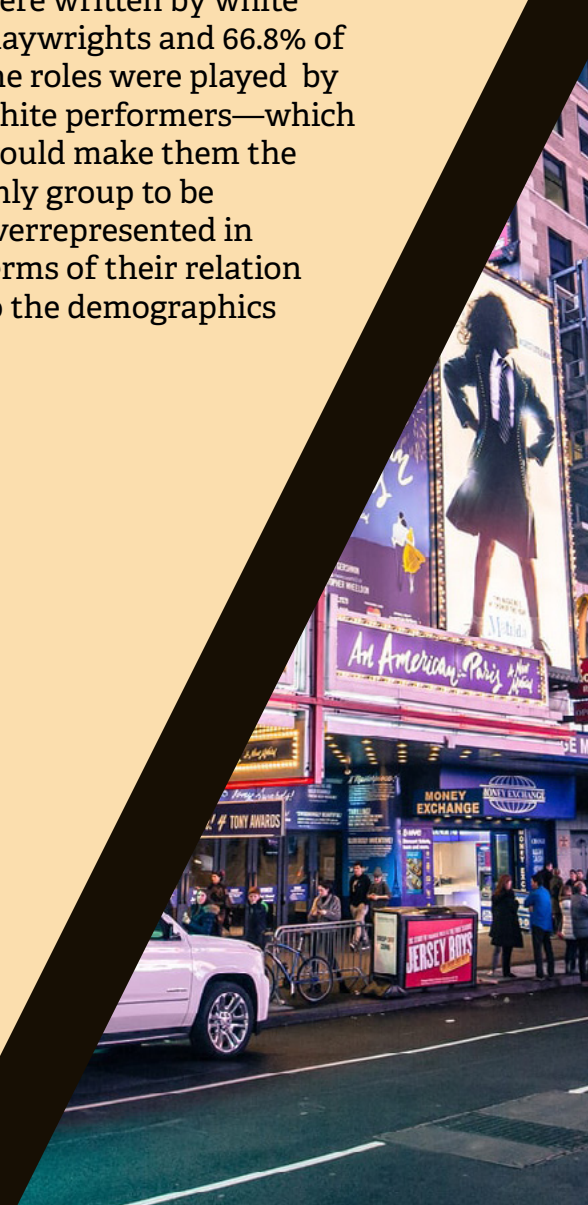


of New York City. Another study by Actors’ Equity found that women and people of color find far fewer job opportunities on Broadway compared to white male artists. They are also more likely to land jobs in lower-paying shows.

These statistics are not all that surprising. Broadway, like many industries, was created as a “bastion of white patriarchal supremacy,” according to Tony-nominated playwright Dominique Morisseau. “It’s maddening we’re still having to express why the American landscape of storytelling should reflect the American landscape of human beings,” she observes. This requires that people of color have a presence behind the scenes—as directors and playwrights—to tell these stories in the first place. So, what are the other steps to be taken?

When actress Aisha Jackson, who played Princess Anna in Broadway’s *Frozen*, stumbled across a cast listing on Disney’s Facebook page, she said she “made the mistake of reading the comments.” “People were saying Anna couldn’t be Black,” Jackson notes. “People were saying, ‘Oh, I’m sure she’s good, but a Black Anna, really?’”

Actor Noah J. Ricketts, who played Kristoff on Broadway, discussed an incident where someone burned a hole through his cast picture hanging outside of the theater. “I looked over at my white counterparts... their pictures were pristine,” he recalls. “So, why me? And why aren’t there more principal roles for people of color on Broadway?”



It is not an actor of color's job to make audiences feel more open to diverse casting, so the only way to create a world in which people of color are accepted is for the industry to make it a priority to give them equal opportunity. Thankfully, this has already begun. In 2017, Shoba Narayan became the first South Asian female in a principal role on Broadway since *Bombay Dreams*. Jackson and Ricketts paved the way for Black actors to make iconic Disney characters their own. Shows like *Ain't Too Proud*, *Tina*, and the Tony Award juggernaut *Hadestown* feature a cast that is predominantly people of color.

Not every show with people of color can be as financially or critically successful as *Hamilton*, but maybe they don't have to be. They just have to continue getting made, and spaces must continue to be carved so that all versions of all stories can be told on a Broadway stage. In the meantime, casual theatergoers can play their part too. Supporting artists of color through their social media and attending shows that embrace diversity both on and offstage can help show the industry what is really important.

Learn more about diversity in the theater industry at bfrj.org, and read Playbill's "5 Steps Toward Making Theatre More Diverse" by [clicking here](#). ♦



About Anjali Yedavalli



Anjali Yedavalli is a senior at Dunlap High School. Aside from taking academically rigorous classes, Anjali is involved in Speech Team (IHSA State qualifier in 2020), Student Council, UNICEF Club, the school plays, Jazz Choir, and is the Madrigal Queen of Dunlap's Madrigal choir. Anjali's main goal in the community is spreading passion for both academics and creativity. She has organized and led multiple public speaking workshops for middle school students and volunteered her time at North South Foundation, an organization dedicated to funding underprivileged children in India. In addition, she has joined and contributed to the Dunlap Young Musicians, a student-created music group that performs at senior homes on the holidays. She is also active in her Sunday School (Chinmaya Mission) and has helped write promotional songs and plays to help fundraise for the school. Last but not least, Anjali is a classically trained Bharatanatyam dancer of Mythili Dance Academy and has contributed to shows that have raised over \$500k for a variety of charities.

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CELEBRATING CLEAN WATER

by Trent Miles

The 28th Clean Water Celebration (CWC) is a two-day event held every spring at the Peoria Civic Center in Peoria, Illinois. Due to the pandemic, the program will be held virtually this year on April 26, 2021. Students will be able to discover how to change the world by conserving water—our most valuable resource. Illinois students, teachers, industry professionals, scientists, and environmentalists need to be working together to revolutionize the way to talk about water.

The CWC is a one-of-a-kind experience, “a phrase coined by a small group of stakeholders, now expanded nationwide” said by Karen Zuckerman, chairperson of the Sun Foundation’s Clean Water Celebration and the CWC Navigating Committee.

The aim is to instill in students the value of thinking globally while living locally. The CWC contributes to the discussion about the right to have access to clean water and raises awareness in the community and schools about the value of water conservation and environmental sustainability.

I felt it important to gain the perspective of someone who could tell me more about the CWC. Luckily, I had the chance to chat with Karen Zuckerman for a Q&A session.



Q: What is the celebration going to look like this year?

A: "Due to COVID-19, it was especially hard planning the CWC. This year, we worked with the sponsorship of Illinois American Water to develop lesson plans that engage in environmental sustainability. Interactive Studios has created a way that enables students to travel along the Peoria Riverfront to visit with and learn from Clean Water Champions: scientists, artists, conservationists, storytellers, and youth advocated through a [YouTube channel](#).

Q: What are ways students can get involved?

A: "The event is catered towards artists, students, and teachers who have a passion for environmentalism. Essentially, during this event, you can create action plans centered around protecting water. Students can get involved at home or at school when teachers create lesson plans structured by CWC material. Leadership roles such as being a presenter or key-note speaker are available during the celebration. For example, we had East Peoria High School, Pekin High School, and Pontiac High School facilitate a presentation. Again, getting that hands on experience is essential."

Q: What do you want your audience to get out of this experience?

A: "The Clean Water Celebration is a unique event that began as a collaborative effort between the Rivers Project and the Sun Foundation. We hope that students can think globally, act locally, and increase knowledge within community and schools about water conservation."

Q: What is your favorite part about the CWC?

A: "My favorite part about the CWC is the networking component. The ability to see all ages gather together in one space and listen to each other. Being able to create and execute lesson plans centered around change within our environment... It's very important that we get a fresh outlook on water conservation and making sure that we are talking about it."

For more information about the Clean Water Celebration, visit the [Sun Foundation's website](#). ♦



“ WE HOPE THAT STUDENTS CAN THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY, AND INCREASE KNOWLEDGE WITHIN COMMUNITY AND SCHOOLS ABOUT WATER CONSERVATION. ”



About Trent Miles

Trent Miles is a senior at Richwoods High School and has been working for Big Picture Initiative since May 2020. He is academically competitive and a well-rounded student. Trent is the founder of his school's Climate Action Club, Vice President of the Minority Academic Advancement Project, and a contributing Op-Ed writer for The Shield (school newspaper). Outside of school, he is heavily involved in Jack and Jill of America, where he currently serves as the Chapter Legislative Chair. Trent is also a writing intern for the New York-based platform LORYN, where he manages the featured artist page, interviews artists, finds talent, and more. He has earned several writing and Presidential Community Service awards. Trent contributed more than 1,000 hours of community service through various service projects, including a winter wear drive, collecting toiletries, and helping at the Neighborhood House in Peoria, Illinois.

Student Creators Wanted

Big Picture Peoria

is looking for students to help with various creative projects, including:

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- Photography
- Graphic Design
- Writing

Email bigpicturepeoria@gmail.com for submission guidelines and payment rates.



Giving Voice is published monthly by Big Picture Initiative, a grassroots 501 (c)(3) nonprofit.



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FACES OF INFLUENCERS

by Doug and Eileen Leunig

This month *Giving Voice* unveils “Faces of Influencers,” a feature dedicated toward the art of portraiture. This feature is a companion of a project Big Picture Peoria began in the fall of 2020 called “Portraits of Peoria.” That project involves local professional artists portraying significant personalities who have made a difference in our community. The portraits will be displayed as public art on storefront windows in downtown Peoria starting this spring.

Similar to that concept, “Faces of Influencers” will be a feature in *Giving Voice* for student artists. The portraits won’t be exclusively focused on local personalities. Instead, students can draw from the vast global pool of influencers who are a part of their lives. Their heroes are in front of them on TV, sports, the internet, and in their homes and schools. The only criteria we asked students to consider was to choose someone they admire. In addition to their art, we asked them to write a paragraph about themselves and their reason for choosing their subject.

The premier of “Faces of Influencers” comes from five students in Joseph Ortez’s and Carmen Sanchez-Lorente’s art classes at Peoria High. Ella Van Kuren, Clarice Gates, Mina Phetsavanh, Madison Seling, and Khennedy Adkins-Dutro have given us an insight into the world as they know it.

Each month *Giving Voice* will focus on art classes in different schools. The practice of mastery begins early and is sustained when encouraged. We are looking forward to *Giving Voice* continuing to encourage and mentor more creative expression of all kinds.

If you know of students who are interested in participating and expressing themselves creatively, please put them in touch with us. Email us at bigpicturepeoria@gmail.com. It gives us great pleasure to provide the vehicle of expression for creativity.

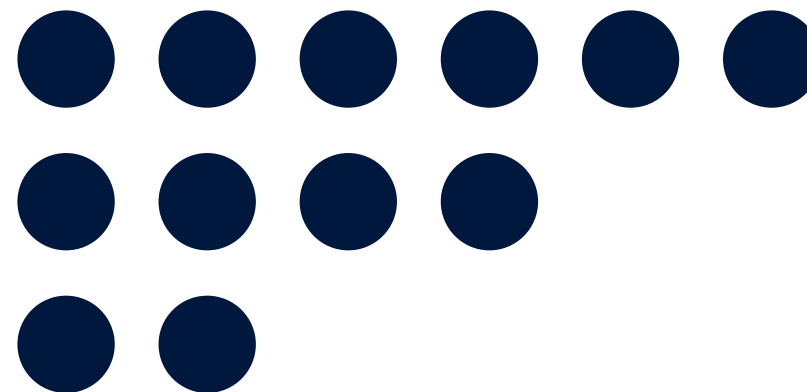
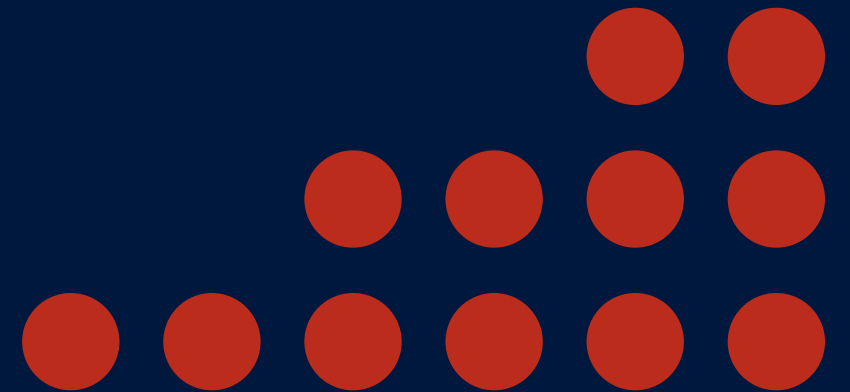




Andy Warhol by Madison Seling

“ Madison Seling is a senior at Peoria High School. She is an aspiring artist that loves to draw and paint. Seling has an impressionist style of drawing and likes to paint portraits of people. She hopes to go to college and become a dermatologist whilst keeping up with art on the side.

As the leading figure in the visual art movement known as “pop art,” Andy Warhol is one of my favorite artists. He did what good artists do: he created art and shared it with the world, along with his message. His art was explosive with color and composition. He was a fan of repetition and patterns. Andy Warhol used technology to reproduce and replicate art. He felt that if the intention to create and send a message was present, then that work was art. Though most people know him for his pop art, Warhol played a large role in defining the concept of “art.” It is thanks to him and many others that we can produce so many wonderful things and are able to call it art. ”



Boy George by Clarice Gates

“ Clarice Gates is in 11th grade at Peoria High School, where she studies in the preparatory school of the arts program taught by Joseph Orteza. She hopes to become a professional artist. You can find her artwork on Instagram: @claricelikestodraw.

Boy George is the lead singer of my favorite band, Culture Club. Culture Club was most popular in the 1980's. Boy George shocked everyone with his gender-bending appearance and soulful voice. He had several number one hits and came across as educated and witty in his TV interviews. He slowly fell into drug addiction starting in 1984, and at the worst of times had a 400-dollar-a-day heroin habit. He eventually got help, overcame his addiction, and is now touring again with Culture Club at the age of 59. He has also worked as a DJ, music producer, and mentor on “The Voice UK.” Boy George inspires me never to give up and always have faith in the impossible. ”

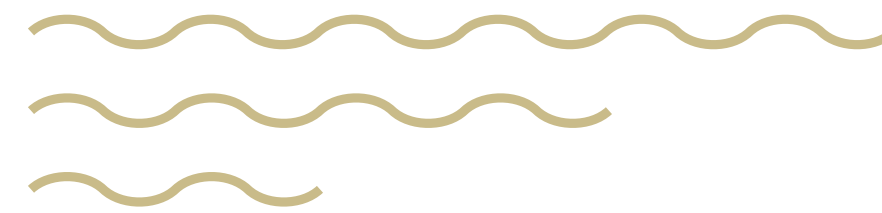
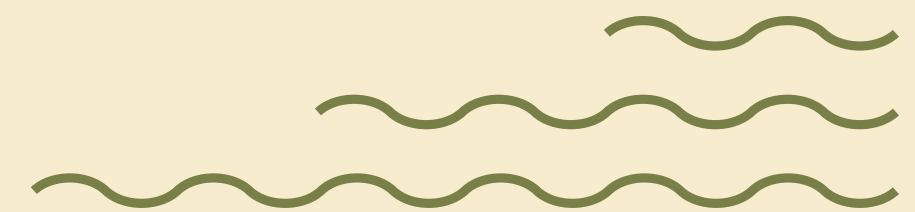




Leonora Carrington by Ella Van Kuren

“ Ella Van Kuren is a 15-year-old student and Peoria High School. She enjoys art, music, and sleep. She hopes to improve her art skills greatly and continue to create as long as possible.

Leonora Carrington was one the longest surviving artists of the surrealist movement. She was born into a rich family in Britain and was expected to marry a wealthy person. However, she wanted to do more. Carrington faced sexism in the artist community. Additionally, her family put her in a mental asylum where she was forced to lie in her own excrement. Once freed, she moved to Mexico and became a recluse. She made beautiful artworks and sculptures up until her death in 2011. ”



Hyunjin Hwang by Khennedy Adkins-Dutro

“

Khennedy Adkins-Dutro is a sophomore in the preparatory school of the arts program at Peoria High School. Her interests include finding new music, learning to paint better, reading, writing Drabble stories, and watching Anime. Adkins-Dutro's goals in life include becoming an influence to many younger people who look like her. She wants to show them that if you put your mind to something, you can do anything. Adkins-Dutro hopes to become a singer one day and travel the world. Ultimately, her goal is to be happy and content with everything that happens.

Hyunjin Hwang is a member of a K-Pop boy group Stray Kids. He was born in Seongnae, Seoul, South Korea and attended the School of Performing Arts there. Hyunjin is Stray Kids' lead rapper, main dancer, and sub vocalist. In his K-Pop profile, it is noted that he wanted to become a singer because being on stage made him very happy and the music is very appealing to him. Before his debut, Hwang was a Trainee with the JYP entertainment company for two years where he met his fellow bandmates.

”





Nely Hatfield by Mina Phetsavanh

“ Mina Phetsavanh is a sophomore at Peoria High School. Always more of a quiet person, she has ventured out and explored more of what she can do. Phetsavanh finds herself thinking more and more about how to improve and think about the things around her more positively. She want to be a psychologist or an entrepreneur. Phetsavanh also wants to be able to help those going through a tough time get out and see a brighter side in life. For now, she will keep on making art and making the best memories she can.

I painted someone that inspires me: Nely Hatfield, a teacher at Peoria High School. I never looked at a celebrity and thought, 'Wow, they inspire me!' Instead, those who inspire me will always be the people that surround me. Nely Hatfield always welcomed me with warm smiles and has been there when I needed to vent. Hatfield has patience and calmness, speaks words that no one else has spoken, and can make anyone's day just by being near her. That is what inspires me—I want to be someone like that. ”



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