



ACADEMICA
INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES

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News

Colegia TV

By Zineb Boumala

If you are reading this article, you have access to the Colegia Platform and you most certainly have heard of Colegia TV. Have you ever wondered how and why this platform is there? Well, in this article and with the help of Mr. Kairalla who I had the chance to meet, you will know everything

channel). This is a vast platform giving students who want it a chance to present their ideas and talents.

The ColegiaTV Episodes, that you can now access directly on your home page, are a spin-off of the well-known American



about that section of your program.

For a little bit of context, this space was created 4 years ago to connect people together in their shared passion of broadcasting information and topics like a real and authentic TV channel. Not only can you find those episodes every Monday but you can also listen to podcasts made by the teachers, you can find different contests (such as music, film-making...), and watch students going on television (with Telemundo, a spanish-language

morning announcements. All students can join the project and are more than welcome to try this experience while bringing their own twist to it.

What is it about ? Colegia TV episodes are made by students from different schools meeting up to show their own students life and events around their school, or even, their city. This allows students from around the world to watch and discover new cultures, different traditions and the genuine routine of a student from another

country. By doing so, we, the viewers, can feel welcomed into a new world, which is fascinating and lets us be more open-minded. Additionally, they can also choose to cover trending topics and news that they prefer to explain in the form they want.

In fact, the process of making this original form of content is quite simple but requires time and commitment. Usually, as those are made by groups of pupils from the same school, they get to film or/and interview together and get to anchor together at the same place. But, for the international students, do not fear, you can still be a part of this project by being seen through a Zoom meeting, so that you can still present your work and feel like a journalist.

And for ambitious ones, you can absolutely bring people from your school together and grow the project to create completely new episodes. WhatsApp groups are made and topics are chosen by the students and fully scripted, edited and presented by them. In the end, the results are amazing. A complete News Channel with topics covered entirely and well-explained.

Why should students get involved? Well, why not? This is what stuck with me the most during my meeting with Mr. Kairalla. ColegiaTV is a golden opportunity to expand your set of skills.

The future of business lies in those valuable capabilities of working in a group, of talking to new people, to be persuasive and which overall could open new doors to the career you chose. You can afford to take risks, it is now or never. With a simple phone and a cheap microphone you could be interviewing businessmen, astronauts, singers, doctors.... Whatever you desire, whatever you want to show or share, whatever new idea you want to bring to life, whatever



ways you want to get involved, you can achieve it.

ColegiaTV allows you to train and work like a professional, therefore giving you a taste of what a journalist works like. Maybe, as international students we could all bring an idea to the table to gather all of our cultures and ideas for new upcoming episodes. The more we will be, the more impact and knowledge we can share. Try and find out new opportunities by just reaching out to your teacher and becoming involved.

Social Media Club

By Sofia Pinto Ciprian

The Social Media Club was founded during 2015 and 2016 by Lia Seirotti and Milisse Vera. These club sponsors thought of this club as a way of promoting the school's activities through social media. This club has carried out many projects, but one of the most important and interesting ones is the hashtag #HowWeGoToSchool, that is not a project itself but it involves many students around the world.

The campaign shows students during their journey at AIS. it is possible to appreciate the different cultures and the diversity that form the student body.



This club is now sponsored by Casey Vsetula and Arielle Cusmano, who are also the ones that organize the club's activities. The students that belong to this club meet each month to prepare some projects or activities for the upcoming events. It is possible to see some of their projects in their official social media platforms.

This club attracts many positive rewards. The students that are in it work together to create content and they discover different aspects from other cultures, and they can also share it with the world! This club unites students from many parts of the world and it also helps with the school's visibility.

Art Competition 2025

By Félix Kein
ABU DHABI



The 2025 Dual Diploma art competition results just came out! Here are the results and the important thing to remember. After an exciting contest between lots of participants, the Dual Diploma Building Community Team (which is around 15-20 teachers) narrowed down the artwork to the top 6. They then nominated the top 3 winners.

In 1st place, 16-year-old Carlo Volpi Erba, an Italian student in the Dual Diploma Program, with an outstanding art piece wins it all! Carlo was inspired by equity, cooperation, and mutual help. He wanted to give a message of union through difference.

"[Equity, cooperation, and mutual help] are essential values we should all

embrace. These two words are powerful and, if put into practice, can help us build a more united and fairer world (...)" said Carlo Volpi Erba, in an interview with the Dual Diploma Times. Carlo was very amazed and proud when he saw the result, he never considered himself skilled and capable of winning a prize. He only saw in this competition a way to express himself, his ideas and share his passion.

In 2nd place is Spanish student, Daniela Moreno Martín. She is passionate about dance and painting. In this art piece she wanted to show us the diversity of the world we are living in, by including several well-known monuments such as Big Ben, the Eiffel tower and the Statue of Liberty. She was really surprised and delighted when she saw the results.

The 3rd place was won by María Victoria Buendía Rodrigues, a talented Hispano-Portuguese student. She first participated in the competition as a challenge and wasn't expecting anything. The jury was impressed by the powerful values she wanted to express. She took inspiration from renowned artist Sandro Botticelli with his art piece called "theological and cardinal virtues." She used, as the painter, women to personify the values she wanted to express. She tried to represent the different ethnicities of the world to show that those values are held in common by every culture.

"If I could describe my art in one word? I think it would be humanity. Those values that I shared with my art are common to the world and are an essential part of every good human being"- María Victoria Buendía Rodrigues in an exclusive interview with the Dual Diploma Times

The competition was really close. Kristine Smythers, a Global Teacher and member of the jury, was really impressed by the talent that the entrants showed in this first edition of the contest, and said that they had a hard time deciding the top winners. Well done to any participants and we'll hopefully see you next year for another edition of this wonderful competition.



Just Stop Oil: On Protests and Civil Disobedience

By Laia Condes Martí



Just Stop Oil is a UK-based environmental group pursuing government action against non-renewable fossil fuel usage. You might have heard about them: blocking university entries, throwing soup at artworks, human-chaining in the heart of London's roads... Their tactics have been criticized and actions deemed "pathetic" by UK politicians like Keir Starmer.

The truth is they seem "too radical" for the average citizen who, while not commonly engaged in activism, cares about some mainstream social movements, like climate change and civil rights. They might, instead, consider peaceful protests as better alternatives for achieving a reduction in our impact on the environment. But, can these comfortable protest methods be enough for actual change?

Climate change is one of the most relevant issues in our contemporary

world. It affects everyone, at different levels, but independently of their race, gender, and country. We can currently see many effects of this global crisis: stronger hurricanes, more droughts and heat waves, a higher sea level... Because of the internationality of this issue, there is a massive number of people who take action: recycling, promoting a less polluting lifestyle, and even straightforward activism like protesting.

Understanding the popularity of this movement can help us comprehend the principal forms of protest. Current popular ways of protest can be categorized as moderate. This moderation serves a purpose: the average citizen is less informed on the topic or only has a general idea of what climate change is and how it affects society, and therefore does not wish to be involved in forms of protest that might be riskier and more challenging.

It is understandable, as one prefers to protect oneself if they do not deeply understand the implications of such a movement. Furthermore, from an outsider's perspective, this form of protest can also be more comfortable: marches are typically programmed and announced, oftentimes accompanied by an explanation of which services (like public transport) will not be available during the manifestation and providing alternatives.

The result is a social movement that does not cause a discernible change nor challenges the status quo. Moderate protests fail to challenge the same institutions and companies that are committing injustices and perpetuating environmental damage. Superficial protesters achieve superficial solutions. If protests are unable to bother those with the power to change things, like oil companies, they will not bother to change anything.

There is an alternative, though, of which Just Stop Oil is aware: disruptive protests, or civil disobedience. Henry David Thoreau, an American philosopher, coined the term "civil disobedience" through his essay "Resistance to Civil Government". The author did not pay taxes as a protest against slavery, the Native American genocide, and the Mexican War. His refusal brought him to jail in 1846. Thoreau argued that the individual should prioritize their consciousness rather than following unjust laws.

Civil disobedience can currently be understood as the refusal to follow the law to draw attention to an issue. This tactic is commonly used by Just Stop Oil, as their actions tend to break the law to bring attention to climate change.

There are many reasons why civil disobedience works. Firstly, as disruptive protests unexpectedly interrupt everyday activities, politicians cannot ignore the disruptions as they would receive backlash and media outrage. This generates extensive media coverage that will give the protest a platform, and therefore further the message. In addition, governments are hesitant to allow many civil disobedience demonstrations to happen for fear of losing control of the situation, making concession the only viable option for restoring order.

While moderate protests often blend into the background, civil disobedience plants a seed of doubt, confronting the average citizen with the earnestness of the issue. Civil disobedience is the reason Just Stop Oil has been able to stop the UK government from licensing new oil, coal, and gas projects.

Three years and more than three thousand arrests after their foundation, Just Stop Oil announces to hang up the hi-vis in April, with the pursuit of a new strategy. They have not only helped the climate change movement in the UK but have revitalized civil disobedience and resistance activities worldwide, proving that moderate actions only lead to moderate change. I hope that their actions are valued in the future as much as we value those of activists like Martin Luther King Jr., Marsha P. Johnson, and Emmeline Pankhurst, who also participated in successful civil disobedience acts.

As for the rest of us, it is paramount to remember that, even though I have focused on the climate change movement, there are many other causes less generally approved of: LGBTQ+ rights and transgender care, the

Pro-Palestinian movement... There are many people whose voices go unheard, whose lives are at stake. If we want to build a fair world, we must reevaluate our

approach to change and how we think that we can build a better world; a strong start lays the groundwork for change, after all.

How Celebrities Are Redefining Fashion Standards

By Yasmine Diani
RABAT, MOROCCO



What if the real fashion designers were no longer designers but celebrities themselves? From Rihanna to Zendaya, ASAP Rocky to Kim Kardashian, stars no longer just follow fashion trends—they create them. Red carpets and social media are now the new runways on which tomorrow's fashions are fashioned.

collaboration, streetwear has taken over the luxury world. Dior outfits cover models in sneakers, Balenciaga sells hoodies for exorbitant prices, and Louis Vuitton has entire lines made out of urban lookbooks. The message is loud and clear: beauty is being redefined, blending luxury with a laid-back attitude.

The Rise of Luxury Streetwear

Who would have expected that a pair of Nike sneakers would be worth more than a high-end handbag? All thanks to Kanye West's Yeezy and Travis Scott's Nike

Red Carpet Influence on Mainstream Trends

A single show-stopping red carpet look can go viral overnight. Take Kim Kardashian's rain-soaked Met Gala dress,

Timothée Chalamet's gender-fluid suit, or Lady Gaga's outrageous outfits. These are not merely fashion statements—they are influencing everyday fashion in real-time. Gender-fluid looks, boldness, and weirdness are now making their way into every closet.

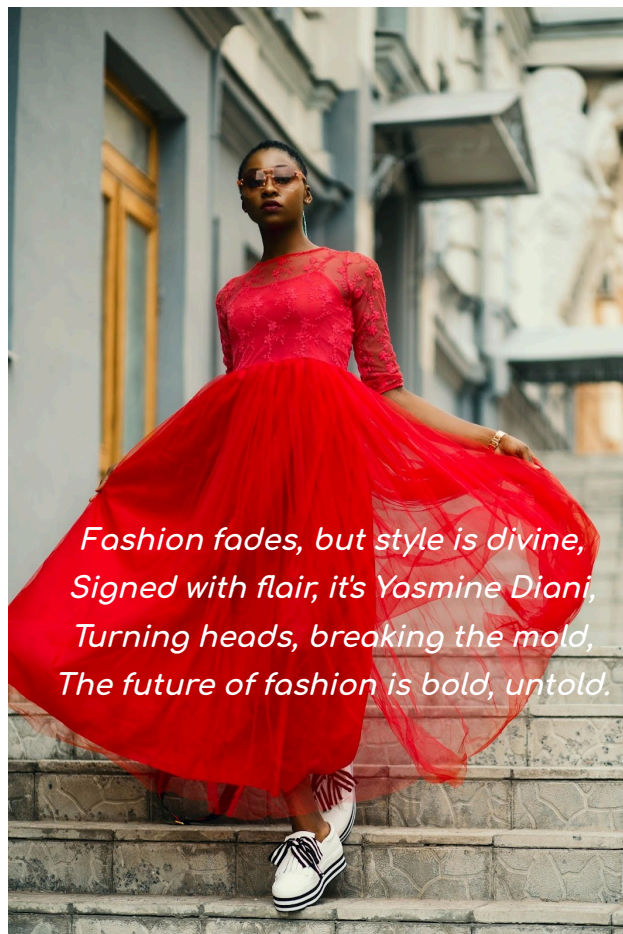
Celebrity-Brand Collaborations: A Game Changer

Those days of celebrities simply sporting designer labels are gone; now they design them. Rihanna's Fenty disrupted high-end fashion, Beyoncé's Ivy Park transformed sporty chic, and Pharrell Williams currently leads Louis Vuitton Men. These partnerships are no longer merely promotional gimmicks; they are revolutionary forces transforming the fashion world.

Digital Icons Shaking Up the Industry

Today, one post on Instagram is more powerful than a fashion show. Bella Hadid brings back Y2K fashion with just a paparazzi snap, Kylie Jenner sets fast fashion trends with every outfit she posts, and Hailey Bieber begins the "clean girl" trend with her minimalist outfits. Social media has given celebrities unprecedented power: overnight trend creation.

From the sidewalks to the red carpet, celebrities are now the actual fashion architects, setting trends like never before. They've graduated from the iconic status of style icons to the wardrobe designers, post by post on Instagram. So, where does this trend take us? Will they redefine fashion to the point where we no longer need designers at all?



*Fashion fades, but style is divine,
Signed with flair, it's Yasmine Diani,
Turning heads, breaking the mold,
The future of fashion is bold, untold.*

The Trend Around Secondhand Clothes

By Julie Gallas

Second-hand fashion is making a big comeback, becoming more popular than ever. Once seen as an option for those on a budget, buying second-hand is now a conscious choice for many, driven by environmental awareness, economic reasons, and a love for unique styles. Experts predict that the second-hand market will be worth over \$77 billion by 2025, showing that this trend is here to stay.

One major reason for this growth is sustainability. The fashion industry is one of the biggest polluters, producing large amounts of waste and carbon emissions. Buying second-hand helps reduce waste and limits the demand for new clothing production. Online platforms like Vinted, Depop, and Vestiaire Collective have made second-hand shopping easier, allowing people to sell and buy clothes from anywhere. This makes it more accessible, especially for young people looking for trendy, affordable items.

The rising cost of living is also pushing more consumers towards second-hand fashion. Many people now prefer to buy high-quality or even luxury items at lower prices rather than spend more on fast fashion. Additionally, vintage and Y2K styles are in demand, making second-hand stores the best place to find unique pieces that stand out.

Even big brands are joining the movement. Companies like Levi's and

Gucci have introduced second-hand sections to their stores, encouraging customers to give clothes a second life. Physical thrift stores are also becoming more popular, offering a more traditional shopping experience while promoting sustainability.



However, the second-hand market still faces challenges. Ensuring product quality and authenticity, especially for luxury items, remains difficult. Some buyers also hesitate due to concerns about hygiene or the social status of wearing used clothes. Despite this, the trend is growing fast, and consumer attitudes are changing.

The future of second-hand fashion looks promising. Technology, such as AI authentication and virtual try-ons, could improve the shopping experience. As young generations continue to favor sustainability, second-hand shopping is not just a trend—it's shaping the future of fashion.

Stress As Your Superpower

By Laia Gámez Palazón
BARCELONA

What if stress isn't as bad as you think? We have always been told that stress is our worst enemy. But what if I told you, it can be beneficial?

Imagine: Maria has a very important exam tomorrow. And she has two options: let anxiety paralyze her and go blank or use that stress as motivation to study harder and perform better.

What I want to show you with this example is that the difference between one reaction and another simply depends on how Maria interprets the stress she feels.



In fact, it's scientifically proven that the consequences of stress on the body change depending on how we perceive it. A study by the University of Wisconsin in collaboration with Harvard showed that people who believed stress was harmful had a higher risk of developing health problems and even a higher mortality rate, compared to those who saw it as a useful tool for growing in the face of challenges.

What types of stress exist?

Not all stress is bad. Actually, it's a natural part of life, but it's important to know how to identify each item in order to deal with them.

Eustress, also known as **positive stress**, helps us improve our productivity. It is stress that generates attention and emotion, increases productivity, amplifies self-awareness and lasts only a short time.

For example, if you have a public presentation, eustress can give you that tingling sensation that helps you focus and do well.

On the other hand, **distress**, known as **negative stress**, is stress that perceives the situation as overwhelming. More noticeable symptoms include anxiety, negative feelings, insomnia, headaches or decreases productivity.

Using the same example as before: distress can cause you to freeze before speaking, make your hands sweat, or make your mind go blank.



How can I turn stress into something positive?

There are 5 simple steps that can help you.

1. **Do something you enjoy.** Taking time to do at least one thing a day that you enjoy will help lift your spirits when you're feeling down due to stress.
2. **Exercise.** Physical activity releases endorphins, which make you feel good and reduce the stress hormone cortisol.
3. **Change your perspective** by replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. To illustrate, instead of thinking, "Why does everything always go wrong?", change that thought to, "I can find a way to overcome this."
4. **Help others.** Caring builds resilience, which releases feel-good hormones and helps you disconnect from your worries.
5. **Make sleep a priority.** Getting at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep can help you think more clearly and have more energy.

Finally, how you think and act when facing stress can completely change how it affects your life. If you see it as a **tool that prepares you**, not an enemy that destroys you, you will be creating what some experts call the biology of courage.

Opinion

Why Do We Watch Horror Movies?

By Dayana Ríos Galván
BURGOS, SPAIN

Movies are a very important aspect of our lives. They make us cry, laugh, fall in love and even get scared. But the real question is, why do we watch horror movies? If we have a terrible time with jump scares, why is the horror genre one of the highest-grossing genres?

First of all, in my opinion, it's incredible that every country has their own favorite taste of horror. Classical horror movies in Europe are about castles, vampires and werewolves. In the United States, they tend to focus on home invasions, robberies and ghosts. And in Latin America they're largely about legends of strange creatures.

I'd say that all horror in general can be classified into two broad categories: grotesque horror and psychological horror.

Psychological horror is the most popular kind. It's a somewhat late-onset terror, sometimes manifesting after the film has already ended. For example, some people begin to feel it in bed. Some even imagine figures in the dark because of the film.

Grotesque horror is violent, bloody and wild. In this type of movie, the directors spend a lot of money in achieving realistic prostheses that make the viewer wonder if they are real.

For such an indulgent society, it seems strange that we consume so much terror. I think I know one of the reasons why we do that: there's no other genre that demands as much attention as this one, and it can even produce pleasure.



Experiencing fear in a controlled environment can produce pleasure, as it's an emotion we're not used to experiencing.

When the protagonist is having a bad time, we do too, except we do it from the safety of our own homes. We as spectators experience intense emotions from our comfortable couches, controlling the situation. And all thanks to the amygdala.

The amygdala is a small part of our brain that processes the things related to emotions. It identifies the situations that can endanger us. Our body reacts by releasing adrenaline, increasing cortisol and sugar levels in blood. This chemical reaction can make us feel pleasure, as long as the brain feels the situation is controlled. In other cases, our brain will tell us to run away. That's why most people have the impulse to escape. Because we are watching a movie, our brain perfectly understands that we are safe.

Also, there are people who are more stress-sensitive that may have an uncomfortable physical experience that isn't pleasant for them. And that's totally fine too!

Did you know that horror movies have many positive functions for our mental health?

One of them is catharsis. By experiencing fear in a safe environment, we can release repressed emotions. They also help us tolerate anxiety, reducing stress to the point of being able to enjoy the movie. Finally, they help us strengthen our personal safety by allowing us to experience our fears in a safe environment.



Reviews

Inside Out

By Sofia Pinto Ciprian

BARCELONA



I am going to write about the movie *Inside Out*. The main characters are Riley, a teenager who goes through many situations and problems during the movie, and her emotions: Joy, Anger, Fear, Sadness and Disgust.

Riley during her teenage years has to face many problems and Joy tries to keep her happy as much as she can by controlling her memories and by trying to keep Sadness away. These two emotions, Joy and Sadness, lost control of Riley's emotions and her mind. Due to this problem, Riley has to face some emotions and situations that has never experienced before, something that involves the rest of the rest of the emotions. Finally, Joy, who always wanted to avoid Sadness at first, realizes that she is as important as the positive emotions and Riley needs all of them. So she stops trying to control and manipulate Riley's head and she lets her learn to deal with her feelings, her problems and her own life.

This movie might seem childish, since it is a cartoon, but, in fact, it reflects and shows a real problem that is very common nowadays, specially during our teenage years and after those ones. This movie explains a very complicated situation in a very simple way, so simple that even the littlest ones could understand, that's why this movie is very

special and interesting. I remember watching it when I was a little kid, I loved this movie because I found it funny and entertaining. The difference is, when you grow up and rewatch this movie, you notice that this movie has a huge background that makes you think and reflect about the hidden things that it shows, but you are not able to see this until you reach a certain age.

I have chosen to talk about this movie because many Dual Diploma readers are teenagers and it is an important stage of our lives in which we have to take care of our emotions and our mental health.

Titanic

By Alejandra Chirinos Ramirez
SPAIN



If you are interested in watching a movie but you don't have any idea of one, here I have a suggestion for you. Maybe you have heard about the film *Titanic*. If you haven't watched it yet, you should continue reading this article. Meanwhile, if you have already seen this film, let's see if you'll agree with my opinions.

This is a mixed-genre movie, as we can differentiate between a romantic tragedy for those who love a very intense romance film. Moreover, it's based on a historical success, so if you like watching documentaries based on real events this is perfect for you.

Now, we are going to explore deeper through the real history of the *Titanic*. After reading an article from the *National Geographic*, I discovered, in 1970, the director of a steamship lines, Joseph Bruce Ismay and William Perri, decided to build a trio of ships, the Olympic, the Titanic and the Gigantic which were meant to be the fastest, largest and most luxurious of the century. Above the three of them, the Titanic became the most famous of them both because it was the largest but also because of its dramatic history.

When they constructed the Titanic ship, it was so cutting edge that even if four of the compartments of it get flooded, the transatlantic would have been able to stay afloat, with the misfortune that on the crash with the iceberg, five compartments got flooded, and the ship finally sunk.

As a history that moved an entire population, the director James Cameron wasn't able to say no to the opportunity to be the one being in charge of recording such an amazing movie. But how were the cast chosen? At first, it wasn't secure that the papers of Jack and Rose were for Leonardo Di Caprio and Kate Winslet. What happened with Winslet, was that she was still a "novice" and many doubted the choice to give her the role, as they were thinking about Gwyneth Paltrow. With Leonardo Di Caprio, it was more a miscommunication problem. After the director gave the role to Kate, Leonardo was asked to read some lines with Kate beside. He said that he wouldn't do that, so James Cameron told him that he, as the director, would not risk such an important film which would take him 2 whole years, with a wrong cast. So, forced, he interpreted a scene, and he was such an incredible actor, that, apart from their first incident, James gave him the role of Jack Dawson.

The film shows how the society was divided into classes, something that some directors don't do as well as they could. They transmit very well the idea of how in the past, and even in the present, if you were rich, they would treat you better and you would have more opportunities than a person who does not have stable finances. During the last scene, it shows very clearly how rich people were able to escape from the catastrophe and had more resources than others.

THE DURATION

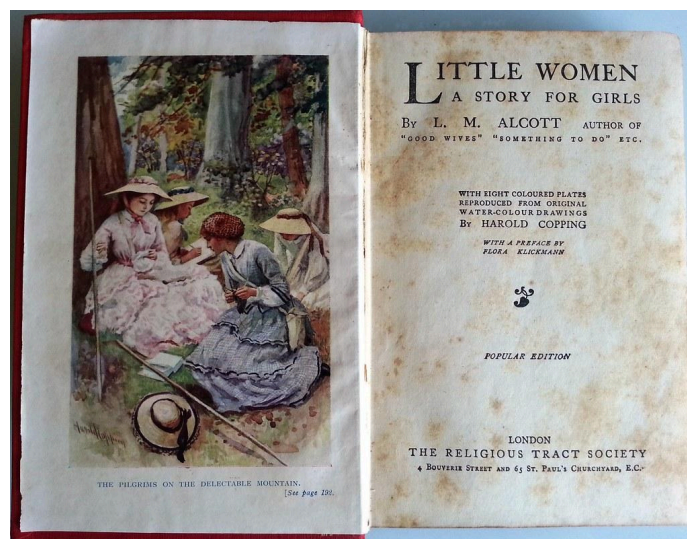
For some people who do not enjoy as much as others the cinematic world, or maybe just romance and dramatic movies, they would say that it was too long and at some parts they got bored. From my point of view, the scene that was too much was the last one, where the director tried to extend the moment, I guess to give it more drama, but ended up having a 27-minute scene which feels gratuitous.

Don't wait to get to see this film, because it could change the way you think about the whole history of the Titanic, and it is a right choice for a Saturday night movie, suitable for kids older than 12, which you can see with your family or friends and discuss what you think.

Little Women

by Ariadna González Montero

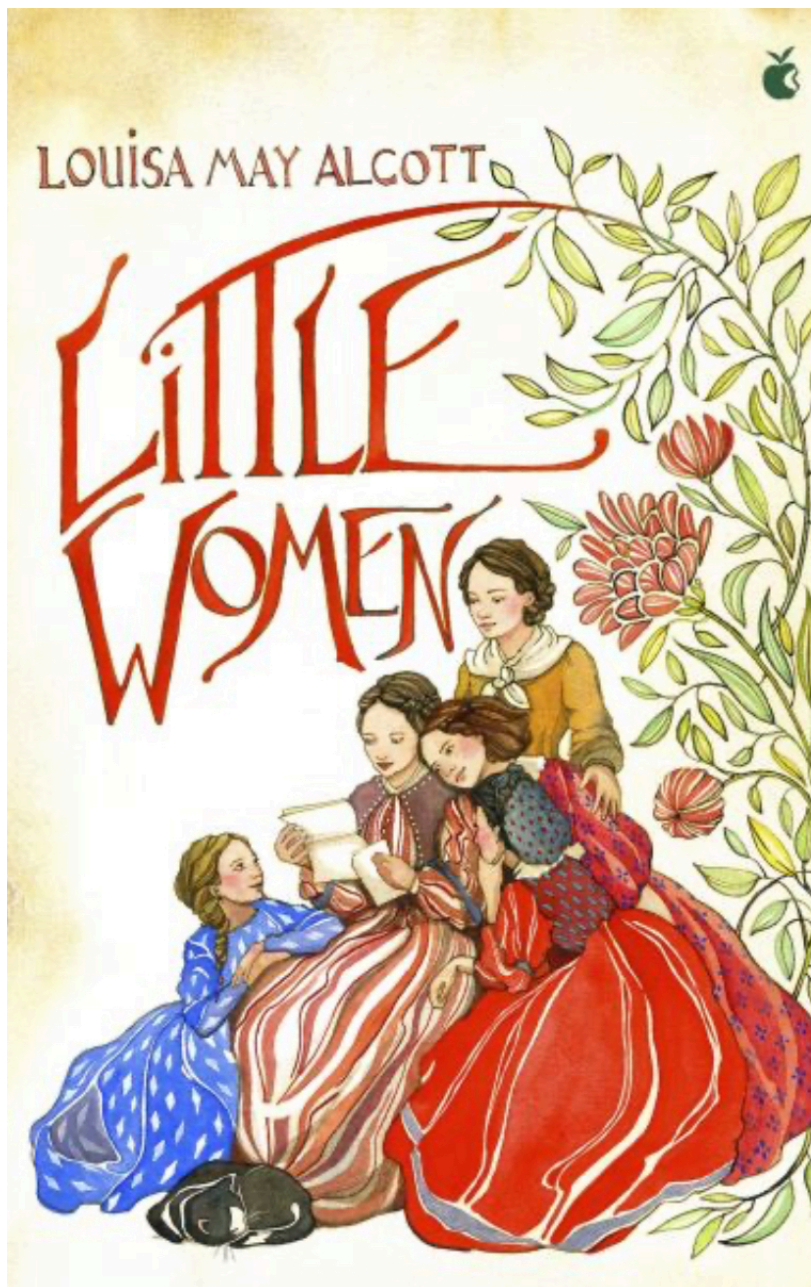
This book, which also has some film adaptations, follows the story of the March sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy during the American Civil War. The story begins before Christmas, and we can see that the March family is financially struggling. The sisters feel sorry for themselves, but their mother is going to help them by showing them that money isn't everything, and that they have the



most important thing, love. During the book each of the sisters' personalities will be shown, and you'll get to see how they overcome adversities and grow as individuals. This book was written in the year 1868 by Louisa May Alcott. It was originally published and divided into two parts, and it was a total bestseller when it was originally published.

More than just a book

Little Women has a very strong message about personal growth. During the book you're going to see each of the sisters' personal growth, as you're going to read about their lives, how they get married, how they work or how they overcome adversity. The problems each of the sisters have to face during the book are daily life problems that are relatable and make the story feel real.



But *Little Women* isn't just about personal growth. It also has a really strong message about society. The character of Jo is a representation of how women were treated. During the story you get to see how being a woman made trying to live your life independently really hard. Also you can see how society expected women to get married at a young age, and if they didn't, then they weren't good.

It also has a very strong message about being poor and trying to live with society's prejudices. Being poor during a time of war is really difficult. Treatment for illness or food are especially difficult to procure.

"I am not afraid of poverty; but I dread the thought of my girls forgetting that true wealth is found in love and kindness, not in money." - Marmee, Mrs. March

This quote is a clear example of how the book wants to show that love and character are more important than money. Also, it shows the way Marmee, or Mrs. March, tries to educate her

daughters, by showing them how to be independent, kind and how to live the life they like, without just thinking about money.

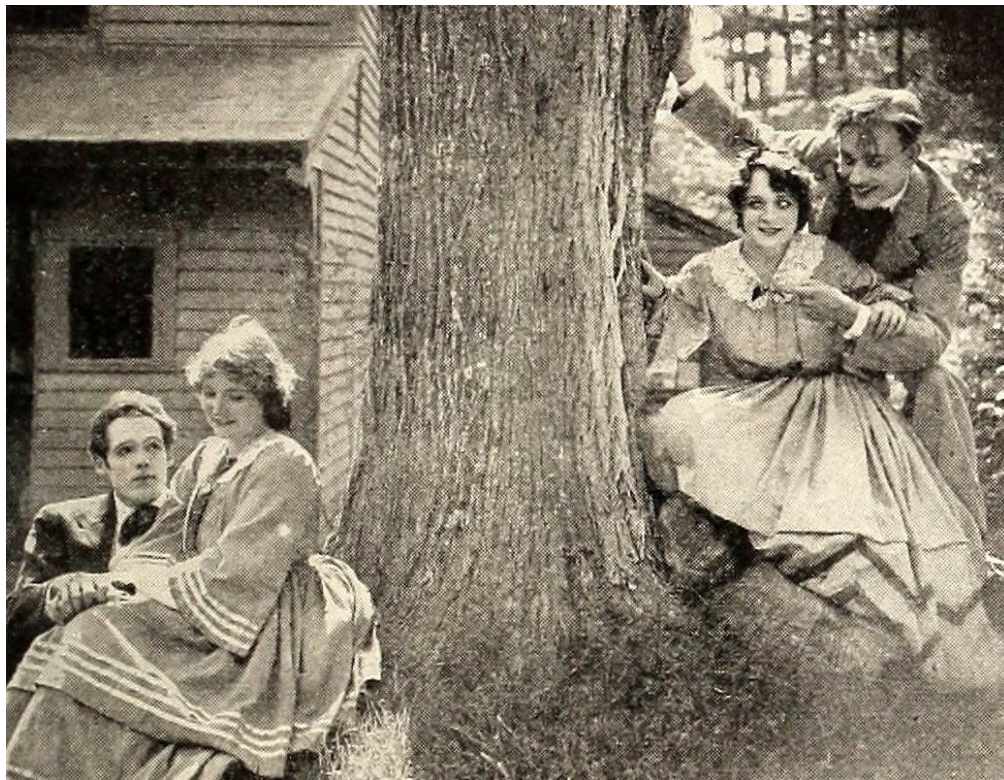
The characters

It's easy to connect with the characters, they are normal people and the book shows problems that any normal person could have, like trying to control yourself in a moment of anger, trying not to be selfish, trying to speak up for yourself...

Every character is a representation of how to solve a problem, and their evolution during the book is amazing. For example, we have Jo, the protagonist, who during the book we're going to see her changing, trying to be a better person, for example trying to accept her femininity or working on her anger.

My recommendation

Little Women is a classic, and I would recommend reading it even if you don't like literature. For sure it isn't perfect, for example, there are some sad chapters, but the way they're written makes you feel like things like poverty or death always have a positive part, and are beautiful in a way. But it's true that there are more good aspects than bad ones. As said, this book makes you feel connected with the characters and relate to their stories, apart from making you meditate about topics like society's prejudices or the importance of love. If you like books that are written looking at the positive aspects of life, that make you think and teach you valuable life lessons, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott is for you.

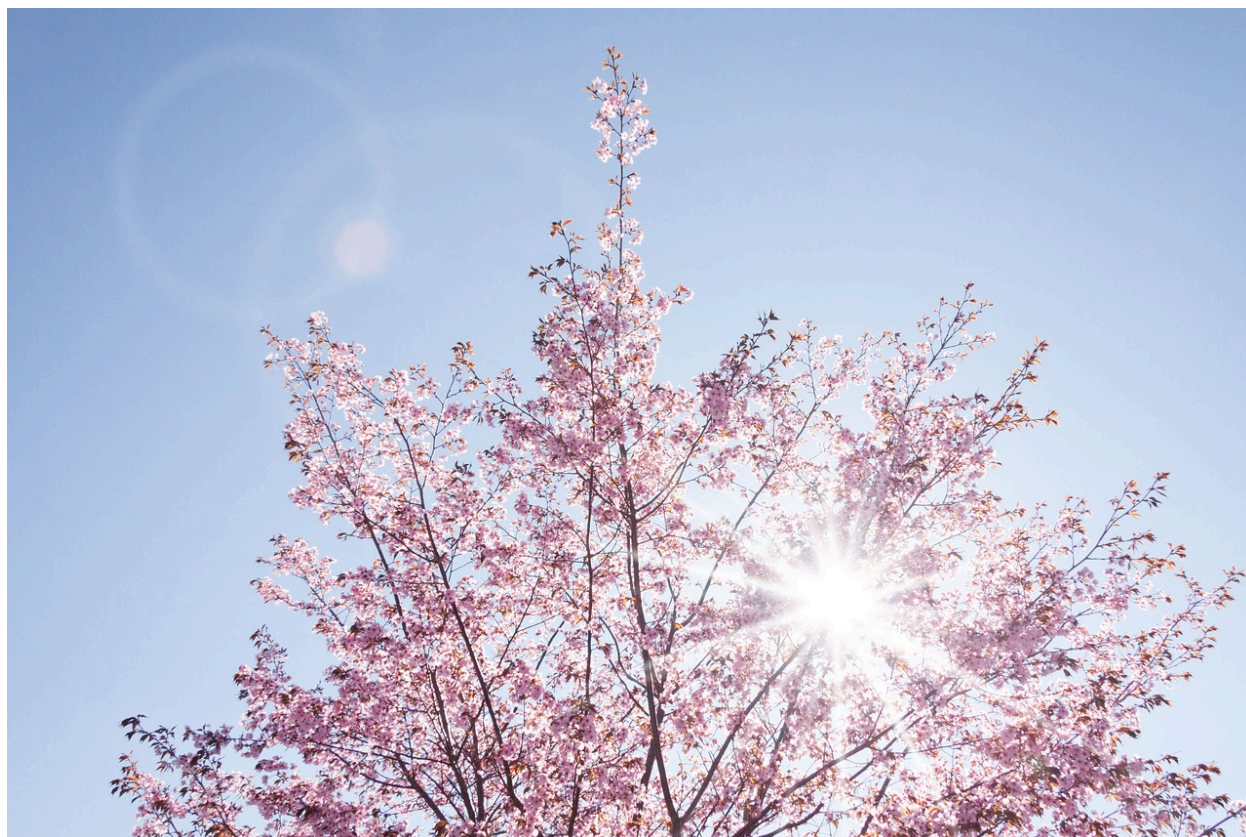


Fiction

The Spring I Met Lily

Lucía Llorens García

CASTELLON



After a cold winter, we finally welcomed a warm spring.

I left my coat on top of my desk chair and grabbed my backpack. I walked through my lonely house, walking past the room where my mother used to play the piano. After her death, neither my father nor I had dared to move that instrument from its place. I took one last glance at it before heading out into the street and starting my way to school. Down the street, the trees were beginning to blossom and the whole landscape was taking on color. I saw people lounging on benches or taking pictures and for some reason, it seemed ridiculous to me. In my eyes, all the seasons were the same and despite the temperature, the cold went through my whole body.

When I got to school, I sat in my seat and watched my friends chat. Ever since my mother's death, it was like people didn't know how to treat me anymore, almost like they

were afraid to break me. So I opted to watch from the sidelines and smile so they wouldn't worry. Basically, that was the new routine I had grown accustomed to. Not that I liked it, but I couldn't ask for much more.

After class, everyone dispersed to their respective extracurriculars, some went to sports, some went to extra support lessons, and some just went to a club. I tried attending track and field, as it had been recommended to me to get some exercise and clear my mind. Honestly, half the time, I didn't feel like going, so I just went straight home.

As I was walking towards the exit, I spotted a teacher. If he caught me, he would force me to go to the activity. Quickly, I slipped into the nearest classroom.

As soon as I entered, pleasant music invaded my senses. I focused my eyes on a blonde girl moving her fingers gracefully on our school's big piano. Instinctively, I remembered my own house's piano, abandoned months ago, and I felt blue. As soon as the girl noticed my presence, the melody stopped and she turned to me. I got lost in her eyes, a deeper blue than my own.

"Can I help you?" her voice was sweet, in tandem with the instrument.

"Sorry, I was trying to skip extracurriculars and got in here."

"I see. Come out as soon as possible, please." Her tone was firm, not quite rude.

The room plunged into a deep silence.

"Bach," I muttered.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean, that was a Bach piece. Prelude in G Major." I pointed to the piano.

"It is. How did you know?" she blinked in surprise.

"My mother is a pianist. Well, she was." She nodded, understanding the situation. I felt gratitude at not having to hear another 'I'm sorry for you' again.

"Do you know how to play?"

"I haven't played in a long time, my mother only taught me the basics."

"Even the basics sound good if they're played right," she shrugged.

My mouth formed a small 'o'. I walked slowly to the instrument and the blonde girl stood up to let me demonstrate. Remembering my hours in front of the piano, I traced my way over the keys and began to play 'Canon in D'. Once I finished, I rested my hands on my lap and waited for her opinion.

"Pachelbel," she said as she leaned against the tail of the piano. "Even though Canon in D is not a sad piece, you make it sound very melancholic."

"Are you kidding me? It's impossible to tell that just by listening to a few notes." I stared at her looking for a trace of amusement.

"Music is an art, just like painting, writing, dancing or acting. And like all the arts, it is a way of expression. What's the point of playing an instrument without conveying anything?"

"I guess you're right...but how can you know that?"

"Isn't it true that when you talk to someone you would be able to tell what they are feeling? It's the same with music. There are clues. Your posture, the pressure you use on each key, how you play the piece..."

I nodded, thoughtfully.

"I'm not saying it's a bad thing. In my opinion, tortured artists create the best stuff," she continued.

"Now that you mention it..."

"At least that's how I perceive it. I think happiness is harder to express since we all might have felt it at one time or another, in a way, it's something we take for granted. But sadness, anger, anxiety... Everyone experiences it in a different way. You can't share something so intimate, that's why we need to express it. That's why art is so important."

I clenched my fists tightly to repress the urge to cry.

"What's your name?" she asked me suddenly.

"Leo," I replied.

"Become an artist, Leo. Bring out everything you have inside, thrill your audience, teach them how to perform. Create art, chart your path, move on and remember those you left behind."

"What's your name?" I mimicked her question.

"Lily."

Lily...

That was the name I remembered as I listened to the cheers and applause from the audience after my concert. It hadn't been an easy road, no one becomes a pianist overnight. But Lily never said the road would be easy. So I couldn't suppress a smile when I took my seat again and saw my eternal inspiration take the stage and start playing a song I knew all too well: Bach's "Prelude in G Major".

"Ladies and gentlemen, with you: Lily Bennett" the presenter announced.

And those blue eyes met mine of the same color.

The Perfect Neighborhood

By Lucia del Río Velado
MADRID

I wake up in the morning to that sound I already despise. I eat breakfast, get dressed, and prepare my backpack. I grab my coat and keys and leave the house. As I step out of my building, the concierge greets me kindly as if he hadn't been up since six in the morning and wishes me a good day with a big smile. A few meters away, I reach the first traffic light on my route (which, as usual, is red), and there I find Fernando as I do every day, an elderly man who always waits there for his daughter to take him to his daycare center. He greets me, and once the light finally turns green, I continue my way.



Not even two streets later, I come across children and teenagers also heading to school, but their faces show exhaustion, sleepiness, and, without a doubt, no enthusiasm for reaching their destinations. But despite the change in atmosphere, I remain cheerful (perhaps because of the elderly man's kindness, the concierge's friendliness, or simply because I enjoy walking the path ahead of me).

A few steps later, I pass by the bakery, and the scent of freshly baked, warm bread floods my senses (perfect for a cold January morning in Madrid). The smell of bread follows me down the street until I reach the flower shop, where the flowers awaken my senses, and the owner, who is always outside arranging the flowerpots, hands me a tulip (which I always end up saving to give to my grandmother). With a smile and a flower in hand, I continue my walk, now surrounded by the fragrance of the tulip. But I don't have much time to relish it, because just a few stores later, I arrive at my old nursery school, where I always stop to say hello, peeking in to reminisce about old times.

Now, only the final uphill stretch remains before I reach my destination (a destination that many others are also heading to, also going up that street). The only difference is that I have a flower, a smile, and energy (though also a bit of hunger from the scent of the bread), feeling in that moment, like a bright exception in a somber world, like a spark in a sea of ashes.

Halfway up the street, traffic begins to build, hordes of cars and congestion that manage to wilt my tulip and strip away the lingering taste of fresh bread (drowned out by the overpowering smell of gasoline and pollution). Everything changes on that hill, and by the time I get to class, I'm out of breath and not nearly as happy as before, holding a now-wilted, ugly tulip. It's as if I've stepped into a completely different neighborhood, a different society, a different world...

At the end of the school day, after saying goodbye to my friends, I begin my walk to get home. It takes the same fifteen minutes, but this time without traffic or pollution, yet also without the flower, without the bread, without the elderly man, and without the concierge. It feels as if I live in two parallel neighborhoods, or as if there were always a good and bad side to each of them. As if neither is...ideal. As if a perfect neighborhood, an ideal society, simply doesn't exist.

Perhaps we will never achieve a perfect society, and there will always be negative things, and not everything in our neighborhood will be good... But it is evident, and in our hands, to decide whether to keep enduring that uphill struggle or to take another path, one that contributes to creating a neighborhood where no one is the sole bright exception in a dark world, but rather, where we are all that light.

Let's make our neighborhoods our homes, and from these homes, our new, own way of solving challenges and difficulties that arise in our lives.

"If Trees Could Weep"

By Sara Mitchell Sanjuan



-Chapter I: The First Ring-

The sun hits the small bud as it breaks through the earth into a vibrant meadow.

The air thrums with life; insects buzzing, bark creaking, leaves ruffling. And amongst it all, an oak sapling. It holds a single leaf above its short stem, pale green and still in the early stages of its life.

The bright light all around breathes innocence onto the Earth like the soft breeze that makes the grass sway gently.

Time passes without fear. Not of death, for it is natural. And nature is a caring mother.

In this age, life is beautiful. Green and bright and free.

Nature sustains itself, thus creating harmony amongst the inhabitants of this blank slate that is the planet.

The only sounds that break the silence are the bird's melodies and the soft wind blowing.

Amidst the peace, you can feel the earth moving beneath the soil, feel the bark stretching, the oak's stem growing.

Balance and purity govern all, sustenance and coexistence, life.

-Chapter II: Rooted-

A tender touch on bark. The oak, no longer a sapling, has now matured. With it, a canopy of branches, adorned with leaves, reaching out as if to catch the wispy clouds overhead.

New eyes peer into the world. Another species takes root. One whose hand is gentle, caring.

They use only what is necessary. They lead a simple life. One attuned with nature. A respectful society.

Slowly, the trees in the grove watch as they evolve from simple beings to more complex ones, capable of speech; a language unknown to them. They form bonds among one another and teach their young how to forge their footsteps through nature in a non damaging way.

There is a pact between the humans and the trees. When a storm brews, they shelter beneath their branches. When a tree is wounded, the humans care for it.

They use only the materials which have been severed from nature on their own. They eat from the fruit which is given to them. They tread only paths shown to them. They do not force life's hand.

It is a peaceful life of coexistence. One helps the other, attending to each other's needs. The humans are the trees' eyes. The trees are the human's bond to the earth.

-Chapter III: Etched-

Humans are remarkable creatures. Their ability to comprehend their surroundings and adapt to them is one the trees could only wish for.

Time passes and society shifts from nature to industry. Although they cultivate the bond between them and the trees, they begin to ask nature for more.

Lovers etch their names in the bark. Kids pick flowers for their hair. Students sit on the grass to read.

Another way to enjoy nature is discovered. One that harmonizes in a slightly off-pitch manner. A melody which doesn't quite fit the beat.

The trees don't complain. They are being acknowledged and loved in the humans' own way. The birds continue to sing amidst their greenery, and they wave their branches as passerby walk through nature's parks and forests.

Change looms in the air like the dawn. The trees feel it, although they are not sure if it will bring prosperity or despair.

The trees in the clearing etch rings inside themselves. They are historians, narrating the planet's evolution. They have no eyes, but they see everything around them. They know the balance is shifting. Yet they can do nothing about it.

-Chapter IV: Lost-

The trees had never thought they would become slaves.

Simply a resource to be exploited for the humans' benefit.

The bond, once lively and strong, has been severed in the most brutal manner. No longer do humans teach their young to respect nature or tread carefully. A once flourishing society has become a corrupt and insensitive one.

Chemicals bind the wind. Plastic silences the trees. Pollution blinds the stars. And the voices of those who fight for respect are cut down, like the stumps now scattered across the once-green field.

The people in charge sign treaties and attend talks, yet they live in complete ignorance despite what they witness. Minor advancements are made. One step forward for every five steps back.

No one bats an eye. Choosing to ignore what surrounds them. No longer are humans adapting to their environment, they are forcing the environment to adapt to them.

And the balance is tilting evermore.

Animals disappear, lives shorten, death becomes a common fear. Loss and pain take their place as the values to live by.

Once respectful, tolerant people have been taught hate, and they brandish it like a knife.

-Chapter V: The Last Ring-

No longer is coexistence a possibility. The Earth is too far gone to save.

The meadow is now filled with cobblestones. The old oak tree's roots strain under the infertile soil as humans build on top of it. Its leaves struggle to breathe, taking in more chemicals than air. It can feel its insides blackening, like a disease, spreading.

The tree longs to stretch out its branches, to reach for the clouds again. Yet the sky is now grey and barely visible through the tall buildings surrounding the once lush clearing.

Selfishness has overpowered sensibility. Nothing could have saved the planet from the humans' greed. It is not in their nature, for nature is a just ruler, it has been taught to them. Hate, greed, ego, bloodlust, fear. They do not characterize the human race; they describe the last generations of their society.

A person which should have grown in harmony with nature, was taught to exploit it in exchange for artificial goods. They were indoctrinated into a cult of consumerism and waste and led astray from the natural path of life.

Hypnotized by success and money, blinded by them, until that was all they knew.

The rumbling of a machine crawls across the cobblestones where the tree's brothers should stand. A group of men walk by the grumbling monster, dressed in orange, plastic vests and helmets.

There are no words to describe the despair of this scene. If only trees could weep.

The saw rests on the rough bark. If only trees could scream.

The screeching noise resonates across the earth as the metal tongs cut through the memories, the history, erasing all. If only trees could run.

The trunk tilts dangerously as the saw meets the centre of the tree. If only trees had hearts.

Resin flows down the stump, an obituary for the enslaved tree. If only trees could bleed.

Silence slices the meadow as the branches hit the cobblestones. Leaves dance to the ground. If only trees could die.

The trunk is taken, the stump lies bare. Thousands of rings adorn its centre. One for each memory. Trace your fingers on it and you can feel history seep through your fingers, like the sticky resin still oozing from it.

No one does. And soon enough the stump is removed. Uprooted and replaced by more cobblestones.

If trees could weep.

Newspaper Club Members, 2024-2025 school year

Alejandra Chirinos Ramirez
Ariadna González Montero
Beatrice Parpaglione
Danielah Kayila
Dayana Rios Galván
Esther Lopez Pflueger
Félix Kien
Giorgia Coldani
Gonzalo Francisco García Valverde
Julie Gallas
Laia Gámez Palazón

Laia Condes Martí
Lara Afifeh
Lucía Del Río Velado
Lucía Llorens García
Meritxell Falqués Cusidó
Narel Benítez Vázquez
Nicole Castillo Guerrero
Sara Mitchell Sanjuan
Sofia Pinto Ciprian
Yasmine Diani
Zineb Boumala

Please direct your questions or comments
to our club email:

ddpnewspaper@aveteaching.com