

THE HARVARD  
**independent**  
11.09.17 THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

*When in the course of Harvard events,  
it becomes necessary for one class to  
dissolve the absence of concentrations  
which has connected them with another,  
and to assume among the upperclassmen  
of the College, the higher-level course  
requirements to which the Syllabi of  
Professors and of Harvard's Registrar  
entitle them, a decent respect to the  
opinions of sophomore-kind requires  
not that they should dare the cause  
which impel them to their concentrations.*

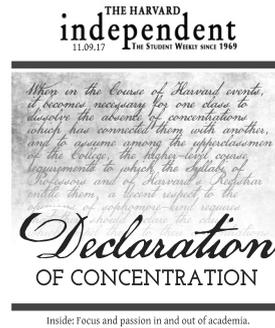
**Declaration**  
**OF CONCENTRATION**

Inside: Focus and passion in and out of academia.

# 11.09.2017

## Vol. XLVIV, No. 10

# CONTENTS



*The Indy declares!*

Cover design by  
Audrey Effenberger '19.

- 3 Declaration Horoscopes
- 4 Thes-is the End!
- 6 Sex Week Sex Ed
- 7 Weike Wang
- 8 Podcast Ep. 3
- 9 Skipping Stones
- 10 Weltanschauung

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# INDY FORUM

## The Signs as Concentrations

### Aries

VES. The trash piling up in the corner of your room? Art. Sleeping through morning lecture for a Gen Ed? Art. Dropping out? Art.

### Taurus

Special concentration that's a mix of philosophy with a dash of linguistics and just a pinch of Folk & Myth. Cook at 120 degrees for three years and serve at every holiday dinner for the next few years when your family asks if you'll ever be employed again.

### Gemini

Social Studies (for now, but definitely Government by the end of junior year once you realize how much goes into that required thesis and how little will to survive you have left).

### Cancer

Bio. You're incredibly indecisive, so you actually aren't even sure what concentration you're really doing. You just know that the acronym ends with a 'B' and you're pretty sure it stands for something biological.

### Leo

Theater, Dance, and Media. You love drama. You live for it. You hate to be directly involved in it but you need to know every single detail. Your constant thirst for the tea and nothing but the tea has kept you well-hydrated through the years. Now devote your whole fucking life to it.

### Virgo

Pure math. Because f\*ck you, that's why.

### Libra

Econ. Okay, we get it, you're a busy student athlete. Now tell us more about how you just kind of "ended up" in this department.

### Scorpio

Engineering Sciences, because it's the closest field to pure sadomasochism that you can get in the professional world. You've heard of BDSM, now get ready for Engineering Sciences, SB-DSM (Science Bachelors - Devoted to Suffering and Misery).

### Sagittarius

Computer Science. Maybe it's because of your incredible knack for overthinking, or maybe it's mostly a function of social awkwardness, but you've really settled into CS. It's really helpful that every other person doing CS hasn't ever stopped mentioning that they do CS, or which tech companies they're interviewing for, or pitching their newest start-up idea, because that means you can skate by without ever having to talk ever again surrounded by your eager typical CS classmates.

### Capricorn

EPS (Earth and Planetary Sciences, or Excited Pothead Students). You were almost too chill and laid back to even fill out your plan of study to declare your concentration. "It's, like, whatever," to everything except when it comes to proclaiming your love for the One True MILF: Mother Nature.

### Aquarius

Government. You love to fight. Like, really love to fight. You've got business cards with "Fiscally conservative but socially liberal" emblazoned under your name. You're ready for your senior thesis, which is an intensive introduction on how to survive and recover from swamp crotch after your first year sweating your balls off in your small apartment right outside of DC.

Just in case you're still not sure what to declare...

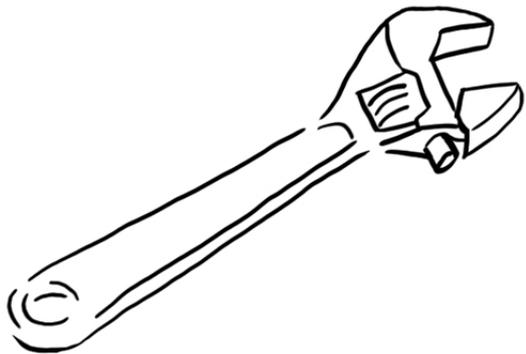
By HUNTER RICHARDS

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### Pisces

WGS. You just really enjoy getting upset. Why else would you devote your life to studying the institutional oppression and fighting the patriarchy? Junior tutorial is actually a lesson in perfecting your ugly cry face because you're likely to get more than heated during your class readings because society is just really some shit.

Hunter Richards (hrichards@college.harvard.edu) declares her utter lack of caring anymore.



## Engi queer ing: THESIS IS THE END!

By HUNTER RICHARDS

It's all fun and games until you're covered in clay dust, crusting up, walking 2 miles home from the ceramic studio after 3 hours working on your thesis. "I'm crusty," I repeat into my phone, slick with sweat from the heat of laying large slabs of clay and running into the kiln room.

Maybe it's just my severe ADHD showing but concentration, or at least sticking to one, was never meant to be my forte. I never pictured that this was where I would be. As a freshman, I really thought that at this point I would be knee-deep in a stem cell lab. Too bad I finally admitted to myself junior year that: I. Fucking. Hate. Biology. I didn't realize that you could actually LIKE what you do until junior year, when I accidentally took an Environmental Engineering class because it was the only credit that fit in my schedule. And I loved it. I mean, I REALLY loved it.

Four weeks into the semester, I was sitting in office hours for a bioengineering class looking up some formula for hemoglobin when I realized I was actually staring at the Plan of Study for Environmental Engineering. I packed up my things faster than I ever had before, which means a lot coming from someone who started itching to pack up my things as soon as I sat down in bioengineering lectures. I called my mom on the stoop of my dorm entrance crying in the rain because I knew what I wanted to do but wasn't sure how to do it. My mom has no idea that I sat out there upset for at least another half hour, since two shuttles passed me and we all know how irregular that schedule can be.

Switching concentrations is a lot more like leaving a toxic relationship than I want to admit some days. The weight off my shoulder that came with finally admitting that I hated the very thought of being surrounded by

bioengineering for the rest of my life was incredible. After I finished dancing on every surface of my suite's common room and singing any praise I could muster (all of which my roommate caught on video because what's college without some good ol' fashioned blackmail), I made the switch formally. And it's great! But they never really warn you that switching back and forth between disciplines leaves you feeling like an imposter no matter what you end up doing. In environmental classes, I always feel like there's something I missed because I joined late. In bio labs, I always felt like I wasn't prepared because of the lack of interest. In my mechanical classes, I never felt like I really belonged even though it's the only field I consistently spent my time in.



Doing a thesis is incredibly isolating. You want to Google all the things you're unsure about but the fact is, you can't. Because there are no answers. Because you're the one who has to come up with the answers. Talk about intimidating.

There are good days, like when your roommate is looking for any excuse possible to avoid doing a 5-minute blog post for a Gen Ed and is willing to read your 35-page, single-spaced, 11-point Calibri font thesis progress report. There are bad days, like when you have to run an experiment for 6 weeks to collect data but you only have 4 weeks to do it in. At the beginning of the semester, thesis updates were very formal and clear. We all really want to represent ourselves and our work in the best way possible, obviously. Around two months in, however, my presentations have more question marks than citations. But that's what you're supposed to expect.

My roommates have accepted that there's a giant bucket of moss sitting in the windowsill of our common room that I water and tend to. They're a bit hesitant to let me lay out the clay tiles I've created after I admitted most of my work had legitimately MOLDED, but hey, when you're experimenting to see whether something can promote growth, you get kind of excited to see how well it can mold. Even if you're extremely sensitive to mold and spend a couple months sick. You live and you learn, and sometimes it feels like you're barely surviving and bullshitting your way through it, but that's honestly all you can hope for. Or at least, I hope so.

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# INDY FORUM



‘Moss Milkshake’ – the secret is that instead of making it with love like your mom might, or a boner for capitalism like Liquiteria, I use a whole lot of anxiety that I’m failing at everything and nothing I do is right but a dash of optimism that maybe I’m not as big of a trainwreck as I think that I am.

My roommates sneak me snacks, usually pushing a package of Oreos near me with a long stick in between my low growls and mumbling while I code. I can most often be found at my desk with both Matlab and a bottle of wine open, except I’m usually more preoccupied with one over the other. I don’t know where I would be without peach moscato, but having a Trader Joe’s that carries cheap peach bellini right across the street from the studio I do my thesis work in has become dangerous. It doesn’t seem fair that there isn’t an additional thesis stipend for wine and food to carry you through the thesis process.

No matter how many times my mom or roommate (who, honestly, is just Mom 2.0) tell me how interesting my thesis is or how hard I’ve been working, I don’t really acknowledge the work I’ve been doing. Even after having my thesis adviser and mentors tell me they’re excited to see what I’m doing with this idea, I still struggle to see my work as impressive. But the real difference is that I’m just as transparent about how much I’m struggling through a thesis as I am about the components of my thesis.

They don’t put working clocks in windowless labs because it’s always a fun game of whether you’ve been there for 30 minutes or 6 hours. Finally, you find yourself covered in sticky hydrogels and sweat, full of shame for the syringe that essentially just nut all over you because you got too impatient to push the injector slowly and the pressure got the best of you. Unlike your boyfriend from sophomore year who had the same problem, the syringe doesn’t ever pretend like this is the first or anywhere near the last time you’ll find yourself in this predicament.

I’m the biggest advocate for loving your body. I don’t mind the extra 10 pounds from all the junk food I’ve shoved down my gullet while writing my thesis just in the last 3 months alone. Who doesn’t like being a lil thiccccc, right? But the moment I have to

dig through boxes in the lab to find a pair of large-sized gloves because I caught myself feeling more claustrophobic than I ever did living in a Canaday double. “Choke me harder, Zaddy,” my hands whisper to the pair of size small gloves cutting off all circulation to my fingertips.

I tote around a bucket full of moss, and nobody ever asks me about it. I keep to myself that I’m 99% sure I accidentally killed the tiniest snail ever when I shoved 250 grams of moss into the same brand of blender I’ve used to make margaritas to create a “moss milkshake” I can grow for my thesis. All I know is I don’t know where that tiny little shell went but I know he wasn’t that fast, and now I guess I’ll just have to live with that. Who cares if Liquiteria is going out of business when I’ve honed the perfect recipe for my

Hunter Richards (hrichards@college.harvard.edu) enjoys typing more words complaining about her thesis than just words she typed for her thesis.



Sex Week giveaways. Alaya Ayala '21.

## The Sex Ed Class I Always Wanted

Sex Week at Harvard.

By ALAYA AYALA

behind Sex Week at Harvard were kind enough to tell us why during their “Dental Damn, Why Does It Hurt When I Pee? STIs in the BGLTQ Community” event on Tuesday, November 7.

Walking in, the first thing I noticed about the workshop was that there were dental dams next to the table where they had Double Stuf Oreos, and I immediately gave them props. The classroom in Boylston filled up quickly after my arrival, but not so quickly that I didn’t get a chance to take in the impressive array of condoms, coupons, lube, and sex toys arranged at the front of the room. It was a bit awkward sitting there waiting for the presentation to begin, but I’m willing to cede that most of the awkwardness I felt was because I was the only one to have arrived alone and without a friend to giggle nervously with. Woes of being a loner aside, the presentations that were given were incredibly informative, concise, and friendly.

The first presentation was given by a SHARC representative on the types of protection available to everyone, regardless of their gender, and regardless of what gender they might be having sex with. I found myself constantly surprised by the preventative methods I was being taught – the slide informing us that brushing your teeth after oral sex increases the chance of STI transmission blew my mind. The SHARC member was thorough and matter-of-fact in her delivery. Each slide gave us the ins-and-outs of how condoms, dental dams, and lube prevented STIs by reducing skin-to-skin contact and the chances of cuts caused by friction – two ways in which STIs are spread.

We were encouraged to take as many free supplies as we wanted from the table in front and it was emphasized that if we ever need someone to talk to about safe sex, SHARC is there for everyone.

The next presentation was given by two doctors from HUHS that are members of their BGLTQ Care Staff. They informed us of different medications and vaccines we should consider looking into that could help with the prevention of Hepatitis, HPV, and the like. There were a lot, and they told us to strongly consider talking to our doctors about our options for staying safe.

They also talked about how setting up an STI screening is as easy as logging into the Student Health Portal, and made sure to stress that most STI screenings are covered by the Student Health Fee. As someone coming from a high school where there wasn’t even a Sex Ed class, I was amazed by how many resources there are on campus to get free information and protection.

Awash in the knowledge that had just been imparted to me, I made sure to grab several handfuls of condoms, dental dams, and informative pamphlets.

This workshop was the result of a collaboration between SHEATH, HUHS, and the Office of BGLTQ Student Life. To find out more about Sex Week and ways in which STIs can be prevented, check out the following websites.

[harvardsexweek.org/sex-week-2017](http://harvardsexweek.org/sex-week-2017)

[harvardsharc.squarespace.com](http://harvardsharc.squarespace.com)

[bglqtq.fas.harvard.edu/resources](http://bglqtq.fas.harvard.edu/resources)

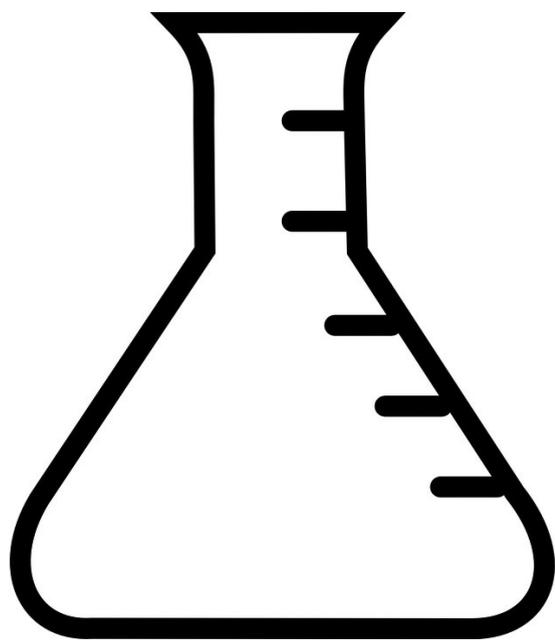
Alaya Ayala (alaya\_ayala@college.harvard.edu) enjoys free stuff and learning more about how to be a healthy member of the BGLTQ community.

What comes to mind when you think of Sex Ed? Does a *Mean Girls* quote ring in your ears? Do you picture some teacher rolling a condom onto an innocent banana?

Regardless of what you’re imagining, I’d bet that your Sex Ed class sang the benefits of abstinence, and most certainly did not tell you how to have safe, non-hetero sex.

This is problematic, of course, if you were one of the thousands of teenagers that identified on the BGLTQ spectrum and didn’t know that gay sex wasn’t inherently safe just because they omitted to tell you about it in Sex Ed. There’s a widespread myth in the BGLTQ community that homosexual sex is safe because there’s no risk of pregnancy. As SHEATH member, Harry Hager '21, succinctly put it: “Just because pregnancy isn’t a risk, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be prepared.”

Every member of the BGLTQ community needs to practice safe sex, and the students



# Chemistry

Indy alumna Weike Wang on her forked career path and new novel.

By CAROLINE CRONIN

Dr. Weike Wang admits that everyone imagines someday writing and publishing a novel. She, however, never expected that she would be doing just that. The Indy alumna and graduate of the class of 2011, has just published a novel earlier this year. Titled *Chemistry*, it is the unique narrative of a young woman struggling to complete her PhD research while contemplating the complexities of her personal and familial relationships. The novel's publication and the story it tells brings to forefront many of the questions Wang has asked herself in trying to navigate multiple career paths after Harvard.

But even though Wang gained the discipline to complete this project from her own background and education at Harvard, the book is not majorly autobiographical, as many readers first assume. She, "did draw from her experiences as an undergrad, and in the chem labs at Harvard specifically." Although, she mainly wanted to, "try to pull into universal problems that any reader would latch onto: being very unhappy in your job, having a need to do a good job but not being able to achieve it." The main character deals with that struggle explicitly while her fiancé and parents' expectations weigh heavily on her mind.

The navigation of that struggle has led some reviewers to classify *Chemistry* within the millennial category of, "the stunted coming of age novel." Wang responds, "I wanted to make it different by having her figure it out completely on her own. I was trying to figure out how she could come of age on her own and

deal with things that might seem unique to readers." Therefore, "This girl is a millennial in the sense that she has the luxury to think about her own crises. She is not so caught up in her parents' crisis of survival." The multiple crises encircling the character, though, are dealt with in the specific context of her identity; "She is a one and a half generation immigrant and is dealing with that in a new level." Wang laughs at the existential questions of identity that such a conflict and storyline beg: "In some way that is existential but it has a long history in literature - characters figuring out what fulfills them!"

Figuring out what fulfills us takes up a lot of mental energy amongst the soon to be graduates. Wondering how we might reconcile our love of writing and sport, business and politics, chemistry and English is a well known past time of Harvard seniors as we contemplate entering the "real world." For Wang, her love of literature has been quite separate from her love of science. There are, "totally separate spheres." The empathy that you find in the humanities is not easily found in the sciences, an area where, "the production of results is what defines your success." And this is the question that may be defining Wang's narrative. "I am still dealing with this question of how to combine them and I actually don't think they talk to each other - it is a hopeless cause," Wang answers laughing.

But before we throw in the towel and count each passing day to graduation with mounting dread, Wang offers a bit of advice for Harvard

college students: "Respecting your teachers is really important. I had great teachers in the English department - they were very supportive and very generous with their time. And I think that once you leave the school, your world narrows in terms of resources. You can't do fifty different things at once; you can at college but it is just not possible at a high level." Therefore, while Wang has miraculously managed to successfully pursue two of her passions, we must all deal with the questions of knowing ourselves and making life decisions with that knowledge, just as her character in *Chemistry* must do.

Caroline Cronin (ccronin01@college.harvard.edu) is taking that wisdom to heart and hopes to make the most of more than one passion as well.

## Big Dreams and Little Kids



Tell Me More's latest!

By KELSEY O'CONNOR AND  
MARISSA GARCIA

This season on *Tell Me More*, we are asking undergrads about their childhood dreams: When you were five years old, what did you want to be when you grew up? This week, the third episode of Season Two is out, and we know your ears are itching for it. Harvard is a place where childhood dreams can come to fruition, they can change, and often reality can exceed them. Students are in a unique position where anything can happen and we're trying to find out what will.

Though he no longer identifies as an early riser, Andrew Perez '20 certainly used to be at age six. Addicted to chocolate milk, he would stumble out of bed to the stairwell and beg his father – who would be downstairs at 4 AM,

preparing for his work day – for chocolate milk. When his father would indulge these six-year-old pleas, he would hand over the glass of milk not with the conventional pairing of cookies but rather with bits of career wisdom: “You know, if you don't want to work twelve hours a day and be super tired all the time when you get home, go to school. Keep your head in a book, and you won't have to do this.”

Andrew internalized this, and his journey took him through the public school system of Pico Rivera, California (a suburb outside of Los Angeles), a preparatory school in the heart of the city, and Harvard, forging the way as a first generation student. His phone's home screen is a photo of his two younger nephews donning Harvard gear. He tells us, “They are going to grow up thinking that Harvard is normal. Going to a school like this is what is supposed to happen. And that reminds me of why I am here.”

This season we've also heard from Kianna Goldsberry '18, whose medical ambitions are radically different from her dream of being an editor; and Susie Clements '19, whose vision of making ideas happen is still coming true, though in a slightly less complicated way than her five-year-old self imagined. For these episodes and more stories from your classmates visit [harvardindependent.com/podcast](http://harvardindependent.com/podcast) or subscribe on the podcast app and Soundcloud.

New episodes of Tell Me More every other Monday!

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# Skipping Stones

By ABIGAIL KOERNER

Alone on a dock in the middle of the night, an old man said to his young grandson, “Listen.” The boy turned his ears towards a smiling face which didn’t often smile. The old man held his body up with strain in every muscle. Sitting with legs dangling over the edge of the wooden dock reminded him of youth when he might skip stones out across the water to pass the time. He’d watch the rings unfold, expand, combine and vanish into ripples. The boy drew stones from his pocket and began to skip them.

The first stone flung out from his hand and reached the surface with a great plop and whirl as it sunk down and did not skip. The second skipped once. The old man chuckled to himself and reached into the boy’s pocket himself. “Look,” he said, and tossed the stone out with the flick of his wrist. With four perfect skips, the stone sunk. In the light of the moon, they could see the pattern in the water where each ripple unfolded, expanded, combined and vanished. The old man smiled and began his story.

“Once, I was a boy like you,” he said. The boy folded himself into the softness of the old man’s shirt and wrinkles. The smell of cigar smoke complimented his aftershave. An old arm wrapped around his little body in an embrace. Their legs dangled over the edge when the old man went on about each stage in life—birth, death, love, loss.

The boy turned his grandfather’s hands over and over in his own. His hands were rough and calloused. His bones couldn’t uncurl themselves from the claw-like position in which they were held. Arthritis riddled his joints that once bent his hands in

the shape of hard work. The old man was the author of his story and his hands illustrated it all. Like the ripples which stones left on the water, lines left memories etched in his hands. The boy traced wrinkles like a lullaby. His grandfather’s voice was the song, hands the melody, and their legs dangled.

Someone should have photographed this moment when in the light of the moon, the two of them sat together with their legs dangling over the edge of the dock. It was just past dusk and for once it was quiet. They embraced there for a long time and for the last time they ever would.

Finally, it was pitch black. The old man had told tales for hours. The nocturnal had emerged and the quiet of dusk was complimented by sounds of owls cooing and crickets chirping. Water rushed under the dock to the cadence of generations of hearts beating. The old man looked down at the boy nestled in his side and looked up at the moon above. “Let me tell you how I’ll die,” he said. His hands unfolded and picked up a stone to skip. With five skips, it sunk. And the old man whispered, “my heart will just stop.”

Abigail Koerner (ajkoerner@college.harvard.edu) writes short fiction, but not always while skipping stones.



*Aging ivy. Francesca Cornero '19.*

# Weltanschauung

*The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* offers new perspective, refusing to spell out Perfection.

By MARISSA GARCIA

Though the occasion is a competition of words, there first must be a celebration of numbers:

1 Night. 9 Freshman. 4 Reads.

In preparation for what would come to be a one-night-only performance put on by nine performers, director Gregory Lipson '20 read *Spelling Bee* four times over this past summer, in what could essentially be called another Reading Period. In a process dubbed as The Four Reads, he recalls, "The first one is just reading without any ideas or just reading to enjoy. The second one is to start noticing big themes. The third one is really to start noticing characters. And the fourth one - that's when you really start thinking about your own specific vision." It was then he set his sights on his goal as director: the *transformation* of the spellers.

To which I say, consider the goal fulfilled! For as I collapsed on my futon after the two hours spent in the stiff seats of Lowell Lecture Hall, I found myself scrambling onto the Search bar of Spotify to stream the soundtrack, already somewhat nostalgic for all of *Spelling Bee's* quirks - from pigtails to magic feet to Caprisun for eliminated guest spellers, given out by community service volunteer Marge (Jackie Walzer '21). And yet, I couldn't help but



Courtesy of Linda Qin '19.

uncomfortably realize that the performance I had just witnessed was one entirely exclusive from the likes of its soundtrack. The previous cast recordings now sounded starkly - and frustratingly! - impersonal.

There should be nothing about a middle school spelling bee that parallels life here at Harvard. The two could not be more dyssynchronous. And yet, discordance is the very rhyme and reason of *Spelling Bee*. Imperfect spellers strive for the same title of Victor, the same trophy - desperately grasping for any tangible proof of perfection. And once the trophy is finally in the grasp of Barfée (Derek Onserio '21), he hesitates. He considers misspelling the word he needs to win. He glances at Olive (Sophie Bauder '21), the one who will come in Second Place

if he chooses to spell his word correctly. She encourages. He reconsiders. He spells - correctly. Panch (Jonathan Castillo '21) cries, "We have a winner!" He receives his trophy.

And no one wins.

Because the winning word is *Weltanschauung*, which means a certain perspective on life - a personal or communal philosophy. And with Olive's resignation from winning and her pushing Barfée to earn the title, the original prestige attached to the trophy is relinquished. Paradox ensues. Chip (Mikaël Scaramucci '21) cannot spell due to distraction. Leaf (Ben Topa '21) spells even farther than he thought he could. Marcy (Laura Frustaci '21) misspells... purposely. Schwartz (Molly Peterson '21) overcomplicates - instead

# INDY ARTS

of simplifying – the spelling. Olive could have won, but instead passes the torch to Barfée. No elimination is truly from an incompetency of skill. It was rather from the discovery that it is impossible to conform competency to a trophy.

The Spelling Bee prized no particular personality, as perfection is the one word that cannot be spelled out.

And so, inevitably and unmistakably, a middle school spelling bee *does* parallel life here at Harvard.

Lipson emphasizes that the all-freshman cast was deliberate. Though the intention was to give freshmen an opportunity to play fulfilling roles, the age group is rather fitting for the subject matter at hand. After all, freshmen are always the ones who succumb to the plague of existentialism. Now a sophomore, he articulates, “I remember – last year, first semester – just thinking to myself,

‘What is this place?’ ‘Who am I?’ This big existential question of, ‘What’s going on?’” And yet, ironically so, Lipson discovered the answers in his acting seminar. Despite acting being an art devoted to being anyone but yourself, his acting teacher emphasized that the key to the art is being *no one* but yourself.

And so, this is precisely the reason why I had the peculiar and unfamiliar experience of *not* longing to be collapsed on my futon, headphones on, soundtrack seeping into my subconscious. It was bizarre, the fact that I yearned to be back in the stiff seats of Lowell Lecture Hall. But what those nine freshmen did was remarkable. They wove their own dynamism within the stagnant memorized lines of the musical. It was this dynamism that was indicative of both their characters’ and their own transformations: the original goal of Lipson, now accomplished. And as Rona (Olivia Graham ’21) would say, those were my favorite moments of the bee.

In the levity of a spelling bee resides the gravity of the importance of reinventing ourselves, or as Lipson puts it, “think[ing] of [our]selves in some new way” – a philosophy that sounds uncannily, perfectly similar to the bee’s “winning” word.

Marissa Garcia (marissagarcia@college.harvard.edu) confesses that the extent of her spelling talents begin and end with Spell Check.



# captured and shot



The last blue days of autumnn.

By FRANCESCA CORNERO