SIRIUS ACADEMY WEST
YEAR 10

write your own

information article

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

PATHWAY

PLEDGE 5.
WRITE AN INFORMATIVE ARTICLE
ABOUT A TOPICAL ISSUE.

THE CONSTELLATION TRUST

Write your own information article

Sirius Academy West remain committed to providing all students with additional opportunities and experiences that enrich their time at the academy and supplement their normal timetable.
We are keen to offer all of our students a range of co-curricular opportunities. These opportunities help our students to explore and express their character and build skills they need for resilience, empathy and employability. These form part of our Personal Development Pathway, that include a series of age-related Pledges, which students are encouraged to fulfil and retain evidence of completion.
One of the Year 10 Pledges is to write an informative article on a subject of their choice. Congratulations to all the students that submitted entries. We are delighted to be able to showcase some of the outstanding entries from our Year 10 students. The topics range from the impact of Covid-19 to everyday sexism.

Enjoy!

Mr Gordon (Assistant Head Teacher - Student Experiences)

In English lessons, we aim to make our students aware of the surrounding world and be conscious of their place in it, equipping them for life outside of school where they will become thoughtful and considerate contributors to society. By fulfilling this pledge, students have been able to immerse themselves in important issues affecting themselves, their families, and their communities. They have developed their voice and have proved that they can speak out on issues that matter to them. I believe each piece in this magazine gives us an insight into the unique personality of its author and I hope you enjoy reading them.

Jack Hostead

Assistant Director of English

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MURDER, MOTHERHOOD AND MATHS:
HOW MISOGYNY INFILTRATES ALL THREE
Maisie Williams

"Not all men"
"Not all men"
But-
"NOT ALL MEN"
It may not be all men, but it is all women. Every young girl has been told that if a boy is being mean to her, it means he likes her. Every teen girl has been told to not go out because it's dark and something might happen. Every grown woman has been asked when she is settling down, getting married and having kids. ALL women have experienced some form of misogyny in their lives, meaning 50.59% of the UK have experienced discrimination for simply having a uterus. So, if we are able to live with this burden for the entirety of our lives, how we are still "the weaker sex"?

MURDER
Eight days after she was killed, the human remains were confirmed to be hers. Nine days after she was killed, vigils were held around the country in her memory. And two hundred and ten days after she was killed (yes, I counted), her murderer was convicted and given a whole-life prison sentence. Her name is Sarah Everard, and her murder caused the country to wake up and realise how dangerous it is to live in our country as a woman. It is appalling that it took her innocent life to be taken from the world much quicker than it should have been for some people to realise this, but unfortunately it has.
However, Sarah's life is not the only one. I bet you'd be shocked if I told you that six women are killed every hour by men around the world. In the just the UK alone, a woman is killed by a man every three days, and this statistic hasn't changed over the whole ten years that it was being studied. Meaning in 10 years, no improvements were made.
No progress. Nothing.

MOTHERHOOD
One in three people with a uterus in the UK will have an abortion by the time they are 45. Surprised? No? Well, I bet you are when I tell you 95% don't regret it. Yet somehow, even though it is a pretty common procedure with a very low rate of regret, it is still a taboo subject. So taboo that it is prohibited entirely in 26 countries and only legal to save the life or preserve the physical health of the person in 75. However, these laws don't actually stop abortions from happening. They stop SAFE abortions and create a harmful two-tier system. Those who are wealthy simply travel to a country where abortion is legal, come back home and pretend like nothing happened. Yet those who are less fortunate are forced to opt for unsafe, backstreet abortions (which around 22 million people undergo and 47,000 die from each year around the world). You would never think of banning having your kidney stones removed, of which affects 1 in 10 people every year (Remember the first statistic I gave you? Yeah? That's more than this!), so why is it different from abortion? A woman's body is her own, and just like how you chose whether or not to have your COVID vaccination, she should be able to choose whether or not to be pregnant and have children. Having a child is a big responsibility, and if someone doesn't think that they are ready for or capable of dealing with it, they shouldn't have to. It isn't fair on the parent and it isn't fair on the child.

MATHS
I know, I know; the feminists are at it again! How can maths possibly be related to misogyny? It's gone too far! Hahaha, I wish I was joking. I wish I could say I was pulling your leg. In fact, I wish I could say that everything I've written so far has come from my imagination and is simply a massive pretence. However, there are 130 million girls between the ages of 6 and 17 who do not have the luxury (yes, luxury) of being able to go to school (where maths is taught, does this make sense now?) Equal education is a basic human right, yet there are well over 20 nations that do not allow girls to attend school and many more that do not educate girls and boys on the same subjects. This inequality increases school-related gender-based violence, child marriages and female genital mutilation (FGM). UNICEF states that "gender-equitable education systems help keep both girls and boys in school, building prosperity for entire countries". When girls are given the opportunity to have an education child and maternal mortality rates decline, skill gaps that create pay gaps are closed and the lifetime earnings of girls dramatically increases. Schools that include girls helps to eliminate negative gender norms and toxic masculinity, and the involvement of boys in gang violence and armed groups falls, improving their lives too. This helps create a brighter future as healthy relationships between men and women are created, which can only decrease the rate of divorce and domestic violence.

CONCLUSION
Wow! That's a lot of topics I've covered in only 9 paragraphs! I picked three of (what I felt was) the most important topics to cover, but I would like to make it clear that there are so many aspects of misogyny that I haven't been able to dive into. Things such as the spiking epidemic, FGM, medical discrimination, maternity leave, miscarriages, child marriage, job and sport discrimination, the pink tax, wage gaps, period care (should I go on?) all greatly affect not just women and girls, but people assigned female at birth and those with a uterus. However, I hope that I have made you think about the many, many more things we have to think about that may have never entered your mind, just to live our lives.

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"Can I touch your hair?"
Chidimma Dim

This article explains how asking to touch black people's hair and touching it without consent is offensive and dehumanizing.

A recently viral video has reignited the debate about Black hair and the politics surrounding it. In a Twitter video that has amassed over 6.5 million views, a Black woman assumed to be named Gracie is seen with her natural hair out, in what looks to be her workplace, as her presumably non-Black people surround her and touch her hair in awe. One of the individuals in the video is heard saying "you've never seen natural Black hair?" Aside from the sanitary concerns that come with people touching your hair, the act of touching a person is inappropriate and unprofessional. Even asking "can I touch your hair?" is inappropriate and should be prohibited. 'I don't understand what is so egregious about asking an employee to touch their hair,' you may wonder. You may also be thinking 'but I really like her braids and want to see how they feel' or 'I've never seen an afro up close and wanted to see what the texture was like.' It is invasive and micro-aggressive behaviour to ask an employee if you can touch their hair. The only thing more offensive is assuming that it is okay to touch a person's hair and proceeding to touch it without getting permission. Below is a list of three reasons why you should never ask a Black person to touch their hair, much less a people.

1. Sanitary concerns. Research indicates that only 66% of Americans wash their hands after using the bathroom and a study conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that most people (97%) fail to correctly wash their hands. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) keeping your hands clean is one of most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs. In addition, the CDC indicates that "handwashing can prevent about 30% of diarrhoea-related sicknesses and about 20% of respiratory infections." The unfortunate truth is that most people are not washing their hands correctly, if they are washing them at all, which leads to the spread of germs and illnesses. Our hands contain an abundance of germs. Among the many reasons why it is completely inappropriate to ask someone if you can touch their hair is all the germs that are carried and transferred by our hands. Would you want someone touching your hair with their germ-infested hands?

2. Perpetuates inequities. If you are a non-Black person reading this, ask yourself this: how often have your peoples ever asked to touch your hair? It is likely that as a non-Black person the number is low, if ever at all. For most White-identifying employees, the idea of a people asking to touch your hair is incomprehensible. Asking to touch a Black person's hair when you do not and have not ever asked to touch your White counterparts' hair further perpetuates inequitable treatment and makes the presumption that Black hair is an aberration. By asking to touch a Black person's hair, you are feeding into the narrative that White hair is the norm and anything outside of it abnormal. When you assume that White hair is the default, you are furthering the divide that Black employees may feel and creating a hostile work environment. If you are interested in learning more about a people's hair, simply ask them to tell you about their hairstyle because you are intrigued and want to learn more about it. But keep in mind, no employee is under an obligation to educate you on their hair, the significance of a particular hairstyle or why they decided to rock a particular hairdo.

3. The historical context. When a Black employee is asked by another employee, especially one with seniority if they can "touch your hair," it leaves the Black employee in an awkward position where they feel obligated to say yes so, they are not labelled as difficult, mean, angry or all the above. When a Black employee refuses to allow their person to touch their hair, this can have negative effects on the relationship with said persons. On the flipside, when Black employees succumb to their person's desires and allow their hair to be touched, it could leave these employees feeling like they are on display. Understanding the history and patterns of treatment for many Black people around the world can give more insight into why the request to touch a Black person's hair is so offensive. In the early 1800s, an African woman named Sara Baartman was sold into domestic servitude and became a European tourist attraction, where her naked body was put on display. Baartman was put on display because of the European fascination with her body. In 1906, an African man named Ota Benga was also put on display in the Bronx Zoo. Benga became a spectacle because of his boyish appearance. He was put on exhibit and placed in a monkey cage, where a quarter of a million people went to see him. There are many more stories like this throughout history. For centuries, people of African descent have been ogled and treated like zoo animals all for the sake of entertainment and the public's fascination with their features and body, which have routinely been labelled as 'other.' Asking to touch a Black person's hair is likely to conjure up feelings of otherness and makes an individual feel like they are on display, with their body being seen as entertainment for their White counterparts. Before you ask a Black person if you can touch their hair, think about these three things and reconsider. Instead, if you are really fascinated by a person's hair, ask them where the style originates from or how long a style like that can last. Keep in mind, though, that if they are reluctant to answer or do not feel comfortable talking about their hair, you must respect their decision. Lastly, it is important to understand that much of the information you would want to ask for can be found by doing a quick Google search. Before asking your person about their hair, I encourage you to do research on your own about the historical context and politics of Black hair.

LGBTQ+ by birth, fabulous by choice
Mason Buck

Recently, the British government have put the ban of the use of conversion therapy in Britain. However, it's not completely been banned. Many LGBTQ+ members are in outrage that it's been announced that with consent it is legal above 18+. A member inside the government has recently said "we do not intend to ban adults from seeking such counselling freely, but consent requirements will be robust and stringent." Many people are unhappy about the current proposal to allow adults to give 'informed consent' to the barbaric practices. Someone who has been under the therapy has given the statement "As someone who underwent nearly 20 years of conversion therapy, which resulted in me being hospitalized twice, I find this unforgiveable.' This makes some people wonder, do the government really care for the minorities?

Others who have been under the therapy describe it as barbaric and stripping your ego and your identity. They say that at the start they were told their desire was sinful and later realised it was a result of some deep trauma or unhealthy relationships with one of their family members why they believed this. As a result, they went through "healing prayer" ministry and shared their intimate moments of same sex engagements and relationships to why they were attracted to the same sex but are told their prayers are unheard because of their lack of faith in God and to change their ungodly ways. These victims are told its their fault that they are not healed. They get to the point where they believe the way out of a sinful life is to take their lives. This is just one of the stories that have been published. Others question the government on where their priorities lie for the minorities being shamed out of society by groups because of who they choose to love.

The "modern society, we live in is questioned to how we can call it modern and equal when people can be bashed and told to do such things like "pray the gay away" which is common thrown out phrase by the organisations who support these practices. Studies shows homosexuality is not a mental disorder as its seen in further developed animals as well as humans. The practice is so unethical to even comprehend allowing it. Today's views that have evolved throughout society's have shaped how we can allow this. Without the bashful comments and opinions on LGBTQ+ rights people wonder, would people have the need and insecurities for practices such as these?

To try and stop the loop hole the government created, people have protested many times all over the country to try and prevent people from losing their lives from the horrid practices and the government still don't hear the voices of the people who are trying to speak out. Even today in a "equal and ethical" society people are still being silenced and still being unheard. Many people like myself ask when will our voices matter, and how many lives will have to be lost before it is safe to love freely?

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The Impacts of Covid-19
Ellie Robinson-Key

Why isn't the government doing anything to help support those that are scared? Or even help the vulnerable and elderly? I have had Covid-19 and it is horrible: it messes with your head when you're just sat in the house all day poorly and cannot have any freedom at all. 10,202,370 confirmed cases, 145,218 deaths which is still increasing as we speak just in the United Kingdom. Why isn't anything else being done about it?

The vulnerable and elderly are put at risk every day; everyone's life is being put at risk but they are still expected to go to school, work etc. If the government really wanted to help then why isn't our Prime Minister keeping it very strict now the new variant is making its way through our streets? How long until another 10 million deaths or even cases? Why not put us into lockdown temporarily just until they find out what this new variant is and who it may affect.

If it was you in this predicament, what would you do? Nothing is fair but isn't putting everyone's life in safe hands and protecting US ALL important to any of you? Everyone is scared but if you already have had Covid it does not mean you won't get it again; no matter what, all of our concerns should be put into place and everyone should reconsider and help the people in society to stay safe.

Do you have to go to school? Why can't those that want to work from home? Why isn't it our choice to protect our families by working from home if we would prefer to? What happened to it being our choice? It is very important that everyone gets the help that they deserve because you never know how Covid-19 has affected people and what it can lead to in that person life.

When is something going to be done about this to keep us all safe? How many more people have to suffer until something is done about this devastation? Please just go and think and see if there's anything you can do to help. Even if it is just wearing a face mask or even staying 2 metres away from someone. ANYTHING HELPS US ALL PLEASE! Nobody else needs to suffer in silence.

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Everyday Sexism
Kae Watson

Sexism is very prominent in our society, even now when society has grown and gotten over certain issues. Although we have come a long way, the world is still very male dominated.

For example, sexism is heavily influenced in the movie community. A lot of movies still use male main characters, and then movies with strong female leads tend to not do as well, because men are used to seeing men be the powerful ones whereas women are normally portrayed as weaker, more fragile and sensitive people. The movie industry then doesn't make as much money from female leads, implicating that they would have to carry on using only male leads. In my opinion, movie franchises should try to expand their audiences to reach people who want strong female leads, so there is more diversity in the film industry, and so that everyone is represented in an equal way to each other.

Sexism is also very prominent in video games. From my experience it's normally a male lead, and if there are females in the game, they are extremely sexualized. This sexualisation is what we call "the male gaze", which I will talk about in detail further along in this article. Women are often used as a form of eye candy, and are normally presented as just a body, and something to be used to look at. Video games focus on the women looking a certain way, to attract the large male audience. If a lady is oversexualized in a movie or videogame, it is more likely for men to buy it. A lot of games that target their games to younger boys, teenagers for example, focus heavily on the sexualisation of women, almost as a way of boys figuring out about the female body, and what they are into.

The male gaze is where a movie, videogame, book etc., is seen through a heterosexual males' eyes. These certain games or such, have a tendency to objectify and sexualize the female characters. A lot of things are heavily focused on women looking a certain way, and acting a certain way to live up to the standards of sweet and innocent, but also attractive and there to be looked at. They are primarily sexualized, and seen as people who can't do things themselves, they always need a male to help them or to "come rescue them." Women are still very heavily objectified, and seen as weaker individuals, and lesser people of society. Not only are characters in movies or videogames sexualized, sexism occurs an awful lot in the real world, a lot more than most people actually think it does.

For example, women can't go outside dressed the way they want to. Nowadays, a lot of women choose to cover up, or else men will sexualize them, even though they are just presenting themselves the way they want to. Women are still seen as objects, even though we've proved we are more than that. Gender stereotypes still heavily influence the society, and the way a lot of men actually think. For example, the stereotype that women must be into dressing up, wearing makeup, living up to the males' expectations. When in reality, the woman has nobody to live up to, and should only have to please herself, not the others around her. We hear a lot of men commenting on rape situations asking questions like "what was she wearing" etc. These comments are what make younger women believe they can't dress the way they'd like to, and if they do, they have to "deal with the consequences." It doesn't at all matter about what the woman was wearing, for example the Sarah Everard case back in early 2020, she was wearing a big rain coat, so it can't have been what she was wearing. The sexism behind "it's the woman's fault" is extremely diminishing, as it always puts the blame on the woman, when realistically it's almost never their fault. But men refuse to acknowledge that and then go on to pin the blame on the woman. Women are still viewed as objects, and people who are only there to be stared at, which can be extremely degrading and completely ruin women's self-esteem. A lot of women feel so uncomfortable going out of the house unless they are completely covered, because of the number of stares they get for expressing themselves. Sexism is still a very large issue, and more people need to acknowledge it instead of brushing it off and pushing it to a side without a second thought.

Discriminative Laws Around The World
Olivia Smith

Around the world, so many countries have laws from the past that are forgotten about yet there are laws that are known about and still being used even though they discriminate against groups of people.

An example of these laws is the abortion laws around the world. In Texas, as of September 1st, 2021, it is illegal to have an abortion after being 6 weeks pregnant. In Germany, under section 218 of the German criminal code, abortions are illegal to have and if you do have one you can end up being in prison for 3 years (even up to 5 years). In the Philippines, abortions are illegal under any circumstances. In many more countries, they have abortion rules about how far along you are allowed to have one. Some countries only allow them in extreme circumstances like risk to the mother's life and still some countries say that under no circumstances are you allowed to have an abortion.

These abortion rules are discriminatory to the women who are carrying the baby. Why should the government or leaders of these countries/states decide if a woman can have a baby or not? It is the woman's body; the woman's choice. For example, with vaccines, it is always up to the person receiving it or their parent/guardian to decide if they get it. People say the reason you can decide for or against a vaccine is that it is going into your body, so you decide. Your body; your choice. So why, when it comes to something that affects just women, do leaders decide who can and can't have choice? For example, with the Covid-19 vaccine in the places I mentioned are given to the people who live there, but only if they want it. Also, in the places that have a set time limit on abortions like Texas, the woman may only just have found out she was pregnant and wouldn't have enough time to decide on an abortion. Also, a handful of women wouldn't even know if they were pregnant at 6 weeks.

Another discriminative law around the world is the law against LGBTQ+ community. There are 69 countries around the world that still have laws making homosexuals criminals. Some of these places include Afghanistan, Barbados, Chad, Dominica, Egypt, Guinea, Jamaica, Maldives, Pakistan, Singapore, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. In Yemen, unmarried gay men get 100 whip lashes or one year in prison. Married gay men face death by stoning and gay women are to be imprisoned for up to 3 years. In Iran, being gay means you face death. In Nigeria, they stopped gay bars, support groups, couples, and public displays of affection and if you are gay, you get 14 years in prison. Some other states do punish gay men and women by stoning them to death. In Afghanistan, there has been cases of a family member killing a gay relative to restore the family's honor. In Pakistan, even though it is not clearly stated, being a homosexual is punishable by a fine or imprisonment from two years to life in prison. A lot of countries around the world have many different laws against being gay. A lot of these places however are only against gay men. For example, before the law was changed, in England it was only illegal for a man to be gay.

These rules are discriminatory to any member of the LGBTQ+ community as it can make them feel unsafe, unwanted, and unloved based on who they are. People who are a part of this community cannot/do not decide to be a part of it. Being gay is not a choice; it is a part of who you are, and you can't change that. Knowing the fact that in 69 or more countries you can have stones thrown at you until you die just because of who you are.

Why do beliefs get in the way? Why can't we just let everyone live happy and feel safe in the only world we have got?

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The Shortcomings of the Education System
Abigail Reilly

The school system. At some point in our lives we've all been part of it. The idea that we go to school for a certain amount of years, get good grades, get a job and eventually die is integrated into each and every one of our brains from the moment we're born. I could talk for hours, maybe even days about my opinions on this "life" we all live, but for now I'm going to be talking about education and how the current system is becoming more and more useless and outdated as time goes on.

What is so bad about the school system?

So, you're now sat there thinking but what really is so bad about the school system; it helps us get good jobs and good lives and without school we'd be poor and dumb on the streets, right? The problem is you're wrong. The current education system hasn't changed for hundreds of years since the Industrial Age and still in the modern day teaches us those same, exact industrial values, which would be fine, if the world hadn't changed exponentially. You see, for 6+ hours a day, all us children do, is follow instructions. When we don't, we're punished. Likewise, when we do what we're supposed to we are rewarded. These are Industrial Age values that were really important for factory workers: their success depended on following instructions and doing exactly what they were told. In today's rapidly changing world however, these values won't get you very far. Being the most creative in the room or the best at communicating ideas and collaborating with others will get you the furthest, yet we rarely get the chance to improve these skills in an education system of constantly being told to copy out pages of information and to stop talking or doodling. We're lectured for several hours a day at school in a culture Sal Khan from Khan Academy calls a "fundamentally dehumanizing experience". The worst part is though there are alternatives with the introduction of technology to how we learn but most of these resources are barely being used for the fear of losing control.

Inauthentic learning is yet another one of the problems with the current education system. Most of the learning that happens in schools today is not authentic, because it relies on memorisation; a defined generic set of knowledge is expected to be learnt by all children and every few months schools assess how much of this information is remembered with tests. The problem with this is most of the learning is gone the day after the exam so it's clear how unauthentic this learning is. The only thing schools measure is how good your memory and retention skills are and test scores are the only thing we value. There is little room for passion in the current education system on top of that, disregarding the most important questions in a child's life: what am I good at? What do I want to do in life? How do I fit into this world? The system just doesn't seem to care though. We all learn the same and look the same at school however, once again the system not respecting the basic value of being human in that we're all unique and no two people are the same.

The lack of autonomy in the education system, especially secondary school onwards, is yet another reason why the education system is in desperate need of a reformation. Many students are falsely lead to believe we should just follow whatever is laid down for us instead of being able to take charge and make the most of our lives; this is predominantly one of the reasons, I dislike school. The lack of control and freedom over our own time makes us feel like we are almost trapped in an endless prison, not even being allowed to express our individuality, go to the toilet or get a drink when we want. Many experts believe autonomy is incredibly important for children though. Daniel Pink, an American author, commented "autonomy is an innate physiological need". Imagine all your life, you're told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it, then suddenly one day you have to fend for yourself with no practise of your own time management. That's us. That's what most children growing up in the education system have to deal with eventually and it needs to change rapidly.

Now possibly one of the worst parts of school is how draining and negatively effecting it is on mental health. This is yet another area I could speak endlessly on, however, for now I'm just going to leave you with some statistics about how damaging the current system is on mental health. The third leading cause of death in the UK in 10-19yr olds is suicide. You may think this isn't very high up, however if you take a minute to think of possible ways to die I guarantee you can come up with at least quadruple three. Globally, one in seven of the same age range experiences a mental disorder, meaning at any given time there's a possibility four students in a classroom have some sort of mental disorder. In a survey of 8,600 school leaders, teachers and support workers, 83% said they had witnessed an increase in the number of children in their care with poor mental health, rising to 90% among students in colleges. Not to mention the hundreds of people that suffer from eating disorders, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, bullying, fatigue, anxiety, depression, homework exam stress, peer- pressure, poor home/ family life and drug or alcohol abuse caused by or that affect performance in school. Now, I've gone on about the various issues in the current education system, yet I still haven't provided any true solutions to help improve these. The truth is, we can make changes to the education system such as moving more online and a later start time to fit with teens shifted circadian rhythm (I bet you didn't know life expectancy has been shown to increase with a later start time?) however at the end of the day, we would need a complete reform of the system, and hopefully eventually the work system, to see real changes in children's and teachers' attitudes to school and the way we learn in them.

To conclude, in any given class everyone is at different stages of understanding because everyone learns differently, as everyone is different (one of the key messages the schooling system just doesn't understand) but no matter what, our Industrial Age system has become outdated and ineffective. If the system wants children to prepare for the modern world and wants learning to be useful, effective and engaging, without doubt we need to fundamentally change our system of education to serve a useful purpose once more. I'll leave you with this question: would you happily be forced to a place where some of your basic human rights are stripped, you have to (personally) waste 6 hours of your day so you can learn information you'll forget relatively quickly just so you can get a piece of paper to say whether you can or can't remember facts that will determine how well you'll do in life, all before even becoming an adult? Not to mention this cycle happens for at least 15 years of your life while struggling through whatever may be happening in or out of school that could be deteriorating because of attending school.

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The Christmas Crisis
Oliver Sargerson

It's simply ridiculous that people would even imagine putting their Christmas trees and decorations up before December. In my view, the best time to put up decorations is obviously somewhere from the tenth of December up to the twentieth. (Anyone who puts them up after the twentieth of December has Scrooge as their idol, as they must hate Christmas.) The best decorations to put up are the lights, but not an excessive amount, as it will waste electricity and will keep everyone on your street awake at night. The second-best decoration, according to me, must be the Christmas tree, as it really brings out the Christmas spirit and is the biggest symbol of Christmas in modern times.

On the Christmas tree, the decorations that must be put on are tinsel and baubles, as they really brighten up the tree and make it stand out. The star or angel on top really makes a Christmas tree a Christmas tree. After all, tinsel and baubles are synonymous with Christmas. The shops sell them in every different colour, shape and size. There is way too much choice, and the pressure to have the 'perfect' tree is just too much for some people. Therefore, they either simply don't bother, or become obsessed by decorating it, and are constantly making changes to make it 'just right'. For what? For who? It's your tree. Have it your way, just not up in November. It should still be in the loft, packed away, minding it's own business. It becomes center-stage mid-December, and not before. Everyone judges the tree in your home, and that's OK, in December, when most people are in the Christmas spirit, but seriously, in November, it's ridiculous. Bloody ridiculous, I tell you. I like Christmas, don't get me wrong, but at least get Halloween and Bonfire Night out of the way first. Then, give yourself a bit of normality before the Christmas frivolities begin.

The thing that really annoys me is seeing Christmas decorations immediately after Halloween, as if they couldn't wait for the best event of the year to be over (in my humble opinion), and just feel the need to infect the neighborhood with the festive spirit, at the very beginning of winter. They're so impatient that they can't even wait until December, the month that Christmas is actually in! It's stupid how people have no respect for other events, and prioritise Christmas over anything else, and don't even care about Halloween. People will say when it turns Halloween, it is almost Christmas, which proves my point further. What about people that celebrate their birthdays in December? The obsession with Christmas kind of negates their special day. It shouldn't, but it does. If they were born in August, for example, their birthday is not overshadowed by Summer, but when they're born in December (especially really close to Christmas) they don't get presents for both occasions. The well-known phrase goes "oh, I bought you this, it can do for your birthday and Christmas" much to the disappointment of the birthday boy or girl.

I honestly do enjoy Christmas but like most other celebrations that are enjoyed throughout the year, it is simply one day. One day, not months, or weeks on end. Although the celebrations do seem to last longer than any other yearly festivities. Christmas decorations being up are a pathway to the emotions of childhood, filled with excitement and magical family memories, which I completely understand, but if you put them up too early by the time Christmas finally arrives, you're so bored of them and fed up of seeing them, that there is no excitement left. Therefore, leading to people taking them down on Boxing Day, when you should be enjoying a day with family or friends.

People link Christmas with being friendly, and happy and jolly, but there is such a thing as overkill. I'm called the Grinch or a Humbug in my house but my view is my view and I'm entitled to put my decorations up late if I want to; and I will. I will stick to my guns and do as I want, in my house, in December. I know that there is the scientific view that decorating for the holidays makes you happier, and since the pandemic when we've had little freedom, extra holiday cheer is definitely needed this year, but for goodness sake at least wait until the same month that we celebrate Christmas in! It's maybe because I don't like the Christmas shopping, and the Christmas tunes, which seem to be playing everywhere, on repeat, for what seems like forever, and the pressure to get everyone's presents bought, and the freezer stocked up, or the business of work that makes me resent people who put their decorations up early, but I cannot think of anything better than coming home from a hard day at work, and having the normality of home life for just a few extra weeks before all the craziness and chaos of the festive season begins.

In case you haven't realised already, I find it simply ridiculous that some people 'choose' to put their decorations up early. Why? Why? Why? What does this achieve? It is not a competition to see who puts theirs up first. Even if it was, somebody would always be last. That, or they'd leave them up permanently, and live in some sort of Christmas Groundhog Day loophole which is never ending. I love Christmas, for a short space of time, not for weeks and months on end. Honestly, I do, even if my view on decorations is that they should definitely, categorically, unreservedly not be up in November. They shouldn't. It's wrong. It's ridiculous. I honestly, could never, ever, even think of putting them up in November. Celebrate every day with friends and family, not simply Christmas (with decorations).

Anyway, rant over. Merry Christmas.

OUR OCEANS ARE SLOWLY SWALLOWING UP THE LAND – AND IT'S GOING TO GET WORSE
Amy Leek

Climate change is exactly what it sounds like: the changing of the climate. It has been happening for millions of years but has only started getting progressively worse since the industrial revolution. Human actions have caused a huge increase in CO2 emissions into the atmosphere, causing the planet to rapidly heat up with no point of return if we don't act soon. It has caused ice caps to melt, an increase in natural disasters, and animals to perish in the intense heat. If we don't stop destroying our planet, we won't have one to look at in the future.

Natural climate change is caused by volcanic eruptions and the change in Earth's orbit around the sun. Human-caused climate change is what we have to worry about. Humans need energy in their homes in order for electricity, as well as other buildings. Energy is provided through two types of energy sources: renewable and non-renewable. During the Industrial Revolution, we began using a lot of non-renewable energy sources such as gas, coal and oil which are extremely powerful but emit harmful gases into the atmosphere. For example, carbon dioxide traps the sun's heat energy in the atmosphere, causing the globe to warm up at an alarming rate. In 2019, a total of 36.7 billion metric tons of CO2 were emitted, which is the highest it has ever been, and it needs to be reduced or there is no turning back for our Earth.

Climate change has recently been affecting our planet in many ways that have been worse than it ever has done. For example in the 2010s, Earth had been losing 1.2 trillion tons of ice every year. Ice caps melting will cause habitat loss for animals like polar bears, reducing the population and causing them to become endangered, as well as making the sea levels rise. A rise in sea levels can cause an increase in floods in areas along the coasts, and they will eventually become permanently submerged in the ocean. Studies say that within the next century, New York could be swallowed by the Atlantic Ocean, which is a big problem for the people that live there and in surrounding areas. The ocean will only continue to eat up the land until eventually there is no more ice left to melt. Climate change is also causing an increase in natural disasters like hurricanes and forest fires. From July 2019 to February 2020, Australia suffered a series of intense wildfires in its forests, killing wildlife, people, destroying habitats and properties. This was caused because the heating of the Earth has caused the ground to become drier, which easily catches fire in the heat. This has had devastating impacts, as 11,264 fires occurred in that time period, burning 13 million acres of land and destroying 2,439 homes.

We can't change the past, but we can change the future, and prevent ourselves from destroying our home. We are already making huge progress to stop to CO2 emissions by using renewable energy sources like wind power, solar power and hydroelectric power. In 2020, 29 percent of energy sources were made up of renewables, and it's possible to make that percentage even bigger. Societies and the community can also help reduce carbon emissions by purchasing electric vehicles, and many car companies are producing many electric cars right now. By 2040, all purchasable cars will be electric, which will have a huge impact on the greenhouse gases being emitted into the atmosphere.