



# Ben's Pen

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A Publication by Benjamin Franklin Middle School Students

## Annie Jr. Was a Smashing Success!

by Leanne Alazawi

Annie Jr. was played for our middle school on January 29, 2024. It was a fun experience for me to be part of the cast as one of the orphans. The cast and stage crew did a fantastic job; a special thanks to the directors and helpers, Miss Hill, Miss Regan, Mr. Krueger, Ms. Smith, and Mrs. Mayer. In the musical, we played fun theater games, we practiced our lines, and we acted out our roles. It was hard work, but in the end, it was a great experience. The lead role, Annie, was played by Avery Clark. The ensemble and the orphans did an amazing job. There were some 5th graders who were new to this musical this year, and hopefully, they will participate again next year. Even though this will be the last year for the seventh graders to be in a middle school musical, they will have fond memories of this experience. This musical, and experience for me, was amazing and I am glad I joined. I can not wait to join next year's musical!



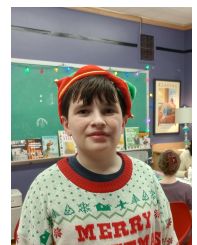


## Fun Fest

On the last day before the December break, students at FMS participated in various Fun Fest activities. Two members of the Newspaper Club wrote about their experiences on that day:

from **Sanya Das, Gr. 6:** Winter Fun Fest was a really fun experience for me! I received my passports when I got to my homeroom in the morning. Everyone was comparing passports to see if we had any classes together. At 8:20, I had my first activity, the Holiday Draw Together, in Ms. Mihelbergel's room. For that activity, we voted on what to draw for the Christmas season. The majority voted "baby" Grinch. Being an artist, of course I loved it. We then got dismissed at 9:03, to go to our second activity, Board Games in room 354 with Mr. Moore. I played Sorry! with three of my friends, and that was pretty funny since we kept getting angry over the game. Our next destination, at 9:45, was to room 377, where we watched a holiday video, *Ratatouille*, with Ms. Speyer. Finally, after lunch, there was a gym activity, where we played some basketball games. I have to admit, when the games were over, I was tired, so I spent my whole free time sitting against the wall. And that was my Fun Fest experience!

from **Hannah Schlieper, Gr. 6:** On the day before the break, FMS had a Fun Fest with lots of activities. My Fun Fest experience was very entertaining. I got to do many things such as Pictionary, mumball, reading, and board games. If I had to pick my favorite, I would probably pick mumball, although all the stations were fun. Overall, the Fun Fest was pretty great in my opinion. I look forward to anything similar taking place in the future.





## Disney on Ice Is Time Well Spent

by Andrew Caputa

On January 25, 2024 I went to see Disney on Ice. Many clips of Disney movies were presented while people were on ice skates. The skaters did a great job. Some movie clips included *Frozen*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Rapunzel*, and *Encanto*. There were a lot of people there. When you first walk in, there is a lot of merchandise and food that you can buy. While attending the performance, I saw a lot of lights that were used to decorate the stadium and a Mickey Mouse-shaped curtain portal where the characters would come out. The characters were dressed in Disney costumes. The performance was about two hours long. If Disney on Ice returns to Buffalo again next year, I recommend that you go to see it.



## My Trip to Atlanta

by Mackenzie Fulgham

My mom, my dad, and my siblings and I packed our bags for Atlanta. When I got in the car and we started driving, all my siblings were asleep but me. We took pit stops to Dunkin Donuts then to the gas station to get gas and some food. After that, my dad started driving and my parents took turns driving. Then we got to the hotel. After that we went to visit some family, we talked and played, then we ate some food from Popeyes. Next, we left and went back to the hotel. In the morning, we went back to go see some of our family members before we got back on the road. After visiting with family, it took an hour and thirty minutes to finally make it to Atlanta. We made it there around 10:00 PM. We all got ready to get some sleep for the night. In the morning we ate breakfast, and then we went to the Coca-Cola factory. We had to wait until the doors opened. We saw pictures of Coca-Cola vending machines and then we watched a movie about Coca-Cola. After that we got to look for the Coca-Cola secret formula. Then we got to take pictures. We also got to taste all kinds of sodas from different places around the world. Next, we went to the shop, and then we went back to the hotel, packed all our stuff and got on the road. In the last part of our driving trip, it was snowing a lot but finally we made it back home. It was a fun experience for me and my family.





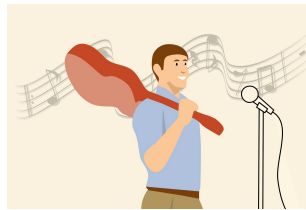
## Pop Music

by Alan McMann and Andrew Caputa

As you already know, there are many different genres of music including rock, heavy metal, pop, classic, country, rap, hip-hop, R&B, and jazz. In this series of the music articles, we will focus on pop.

Modern pop music has undergone several changes over the years, with a new wave of musicians and artists redefining the genre. Today's pop music is characterized by its catchy hooks, upbeat tempos, and electronic beats, incorporating elements of dance music and hip-hop. Pop music has become more diverse and inclusive, with artists from all backgrounds and cultures contributing to the genre. Pop music is even popular on social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube allowing young artists to express themselves and grow in terms of fame.

With artists like Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift, Justin Timberlake, Maroon 5, Bruno Mars, Ed Sheeran, Beyonce, Ariana Grande, Harry Styles, The Weeknd, Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, and Rihanna, pop is one of the most powerful and influential genres of music worldwide.



## Country Music

by Alan McMann and Andrew Caputa

Country music is a genre of American popular music that originated in the Southern United States in the early 1920s. It is very popular with millions of listeners. Country music is characterized by its unique sound, which often includes a mix of instruments such as the guitar, banjo, fiddle, and drums. One of the great things about country music is that it often tells stories through its lyrics, which can range from tales of love and heartbreak to stories about everyday life in rural America. Many famous country music stars, such as Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, and Jelly Roll, have become household names and continue to inspire new generations of musicians and fans. Overall, country music is a very popular genre today, however, some people argue that it has changed and is not as original or enjoyable as it used to be, but that is up to you to decide.



## Using a Virtual Reality Headset

by Andrew Caputa

Last Christmas, I got a VR headset and I was very happy. As soon as I got it I played a game called Gorilla Tag. The game is engaging, fun, and you can play it with up to ten people. You can play it with your friends or you can join it with public codes and play with people around the world. If you think virtual reality headsets are just for video games, I have news for you. You can download exercise activities, you can watch hulu and Netflix, and you can also play a strategy game, like chess. You can learn how to play a mixed reality piano. When you are a college student, you can download information that you need to learn for your college classes and other research projects on your VR headset. My step-brother and I predict that in the future people will use gloves as controllers. As the years go on, you will see more and more people of all ages with VR headsets.



## Book Reviews



*The Lost Hero* by Rick Riordan  
Reviewed by Sanya Das

Are you a fan of Greek and/or Roman mythology? Perhaps you have read a book by Rick Riordan, who has written the famous series called *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*. If so, you will want to read *The Lost Hero*, a mix of Greek and Roman mythology, the first book of another series by Riordan. We start off with an amnesiac boy, Jason, who has woken up on a random school bus, holding hands with a random girl: Piper McLean, he sees a random best friend: Leo Valdez, and has no memory of his past. Suddenly, on their class field trip to the Grand Canyon, his obnoxious bully Dylan, turns into a storm spirit, and captures their teacher, Coach Hedge. Then, he, along with Piper and Leo, are given a prophecy sending them off on a quest to save the bratty queen of the gods, Hera, from Gaea, the most powerful goddess of the earth, who has a vicious plan to overthrow the gods. If you are a fan of suspenseful plot and action, this book is a must-read.

*The Reason I Jump* by Naoki Higashida  
Reviewed by Mrs. Zummo

*The Reason I Jump* by Naoki Higashida, translated by KA Yoshida and David Mitchell, gives the reader an opportunity to gain the author's perspective of what it is like to be a non-speaking 13-year-old who has autism. Higashida relies on an alphabet grid to be able to answer as many as 58 open-ended questions about his personal experiences with autism. The author gives very well-thought out and thorough responses to each question, and he also wrote a short story, entitled "I'm Right Here," as a way to further help people understand what it feels like to not be able to speak to express yourself. This book, originally published in Japan, was eventually translated to English, for an even greater global impact. Some of my favorite parts of this book relate to Higashida's responses to questions about why he avoids eye contact, why he often puts his hands over his ears, and why sometimes he will start to run away from the people who are taking care of him without any forewarning. In my opinion, this book is a fantastic resource for anyone who would like to learn more about what life is like for some people with autism who are not able to speak. This non-fictional book gives the reader an opportunity to develop more empathy and a greater appreciation for the immense potential of certain individuals who, through no fault of their own, cannot easily express themselves.



*Wonder Cat* by Sasami Nitori  
Reviewed by Sloane Christmann

*Wonder Cat* by Sasami Nitori is a comic book. The main characters are Kyuu-chan who is the wonder cat, and Hinata who is Kyuu-chan's owner. Hinata adopted Kyuu-chan during a winter season. Hinata found Kyuu-chan in a box that had "Please take me home." with the s spelled backwards, on the side of the road. Hinata takes in Kyuu-chan, and they go on many different adventures together, such as, when Hinata tries to give Kyuu-chan a bath for the first time and he finds out that Kyuu-chan's foot markings are actually just socks. I would recommend this book, because it was fun to read and had great mini comics. There are multiple different books that relate to it.



## Clay Projects

by Sanya Das

What is clay? Clay is a soft, loose material that can be used to make many things such as pots, bowls, mugs, jewelry, sculptures, construction, medicine, etc. The most known use of clay is clay art, also known as clay modeling or clay illustrations. "Clay illustrations are 3D figures, portraits or sculptures made out of different types of clay. The artwork requires you to mold, craft and shape pieces of clay to arrive at an imaginative or real-life end product. Once completed, the artwork can be preserved as a digital illustration or a physical piece," states redbull.com. With clay, you can make anything with your creativity from a cute dish, to a small animal, or even a new vase to make up for your mom's broken one! So, what do you want to make?

Tips:

- You can always paint your creations with paint after it dries to give it color.
- Always use glaze (like Mod Podge, glass seal, or resin) to prevent your creations from getting ruined.
- You can use sandpaper to sand the rough sides to make it smoother.
- Water helps stick clay together and makes it easier to mold.
- Leave your creations in an air space with no direct sunlight to prevent them from cracking!
- It also requires patience because the drying process takes at least one day to dry, depending on how big your creation is.

Here are some things I have made!





Students Share Solar Eclipse Experiences - Thanks to a presentation in the auditorium by Dr. Kevin Williams from Buffalo State, students at FMS were well-prepared for the solar eclipse. Here is what some students said about their eclipse experience:

from Nick Scott, Grade 7: My mom, my neighbors, and I met outside. At first, the sky looked gray. Within a few minutes, it became as dark outside as if it was midnight. Then I knew we were in the total eclipse. My mom was able to get a picture at that time. After my mom took the picture, the daylight started to come back right away.

from Sloane Christmann, Grade 5: My solar eclipse experience was bizarre. It started when my mom called my sister, her friend, and me out to the backyard. The whole time she stared at the sun with her glasses but she didn't see it much because of how cloudy it was that day. At around 3:18 PM, my sister's friend and I were at the end of the road, and all of a sudden, it got really dark and we remembered that my mom said she wants us back for full totality, so we had to quickly run back to the house and we got there just in time. It was finally full totality. After a few minutes the totality ended, so my sister, her friend and I, all rode our bikes to the park. My solar eclipse experience was not what I expected, but it was just as good.

from Jena Roehner, Grade 7: During the solar eclipse my siblings and I were outside with our friends. It was cloudy at first and we could not see the eclipse. It suddenly started to get very dark and I could see the sun shining from behind the moon. I could hear lots of people screaming and even some fireworks when the sun was fully covered. I was sad that it was cloudy, but it was still a very cool experience.

from Jennyelis Rizek, Grade 7: On April 8, at 3:18 PM, I was outside with my dad and three sisters and my brother. Even my dog was outside. Just a few minutes before totality, my mom was able to get home from work. My neighbors were also outside. My mom was able to record a video and take some pictures before the totality. When it was still dark outside people were setting off fireworks and cheering with family. Some people were having family barbecues. Even though it was cloudy and we could not see it the whole time, we still had a lot of fun with family.

from Sanya Das, grade 6: My solar eclipse experience was amazing! My family made it five minutes before the eclipse in Lincoln Park, and there were TONS of people! Some were barbequing and having a picnic. Some were having a baseball game and playing around. I could not see the partial eclipse through my solar eclipse glasses, since it was pretty cloudy. My dad kept telling me, "Put your glasses on!" even though we were already in totality. The darkness was cool, the way animals reacted was funny, and I will remember this experience forever!



From my front yard, there was a view of the eclipse after the sun started to reappear, as shown to the right of the red line. -Mrs. Zummo

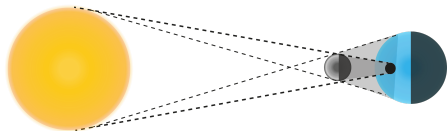


Mrs. Ricotta's students made visual representations of the eclipse, as shown above.

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from Andrew Caputa, Grade 6: My solar eclipse experience was beautiful. My favorite part was when it got very dark. My family and neighbors were cheering. Our pets stayed in our houses. Did you know the next total solar eclipse in our area will be on October 26, 2144? That is 120 years from now! Now you will have something extraordinary to tell your future children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, so they will think of you if they see the next eclipse in 2144.

from Alan McMann, Grade 6: I was outside watching the eclipse from the second it started being partial, however, I did not use my glasses because it was so cloudy. If it was sunny, I would have worn them, but I just could not see anything, so I used some sunglasses instead. Boy, was that just breathtaking! The partial eclipse was cool to watch, but totality was crazy! Did you feel how cold it got? Also, the animals were crazy in my neighborhood, some people were setting off fireworks, and they were cheering. That was my Total Solar Eclipse experience.



The eclipse pictures shown at the right are from sixth grader Alan McMann.



The projects completed by my students were students were shown on this table at the event.

Students Create 3-D Figures for Future Ready Project by Mrs. Zummo

Fifth, sixth, and seventh graders in my classes created various geometric figures using a special pen called the 3-Doodler Start Plus. This type of item used a special plastic filament that warms up just enough to be able to create various artistic and mathematical designs. Some of my students created 3-D prisms, and then they created line plots to demonstrate the attributes (related to the number of vertices, edges, and faces) of these prisms. Other students used the pens to make colorful representations of prime numbers. Also, some of my students made various graphs from the Canva website after evaluating responses from student-generated surveys. There were teachers from other schools who also displayed their projects at this event at Kenmore Junior Senior High School on February 29. The event was well attended by teachers, administrators, other district employees, students, parents, and Ms. Guthrie, a representative from the NYS Education Department. I enjoyed participating in this opportunity, and I would like to create a different type of Future Ready project with my students next year.

Pep Rally Kicks off Wellness Week by Rylee Shoemaker

On Monday, March 18, 2024, we had a pep rally for Wellness Week. My gym teacher, Mrs Leggett, presented a lot of slides on the big screen in the auditorium. We got to clap and show appreciation for everyone who participated in clubs, and in our school musical. The names of all the clubs are listed below. The participants for chorus, orchestra, band and all county chorus were able stand up so we got an idea of how many people are in music programs. My favorite part of the pep rally was when they showed pictures of how the teachers looked when they were little and what sport some of them played when they were younger. The pep rally was a fun way to kick off Wellness Week!

Clubs/Activities at Franklin Middle:

Annie Jr. Cast & Crew	Architect Club	Caring Closet Club	Chess Club
Craft Club	District Leadership Council	Drama Club	Environmental Club
Keyboard Club	Little Free Library Club	National Jr. Honor Society	Outdoor Club
Recycling Club	School Newspaper Club	Stage Crew Club	Student Council
Technology Club	Walk and Talk Club	Video Announcement Club	Yearbook Club