



January 2023
Issue 1

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SkillsUSA District
Results

Gold Winners

- Nicole Corino - Architectural Drafting
- William Trach - Industrial Motor Controls
- Kylee Fischl - Job Skills Demo A
- Leland Kunkle - Precision Machine
- Brody Owens - Prepared Speech
- Anthony Muniz - Related Technical Math
- Phoenix Kalavoda - Technical Computer Applications
- Craig Conville - Technical Drafting
- Chase Neumann - Welding Fabrication
- Brooke Knauss, Chase Newman, & Reese Balk - Welding Fabrication

Silver Winners

- Tyler Bechtold, Owens Rakos, Joshua Reif, Ryan Burket, Kameron Behler, & Savannah Campbell - Quiz Bowl

Bronze Winners

- Samantha Nametko - Cabinetmaking
- Devin Spadt - HVAC
- Levi Berk - Welding

Carbon County's #1 Student Newspaper

CCTI WINS BIG AT SKILLSUSA

11 Students Now Advance to SkillsUSA State Competitions, overperforming initial projections.



Brody Owens

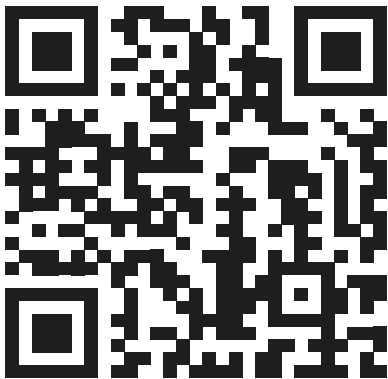
Photography by CCTI

On December 13th, 2022, CCTI over-performed expectations at its first SkillsUSA competition of the year. Students competed against other schools in a set of competitions held at Johnson College in Lackawanna County. When the results were announced, CCTI won 20 medals: eleven gold, six silver, and three bronze; compared to other schools that only placed in a few of the top spots. CCTI's success was only achieved through a culmination of months of hard effort from competitors. Student competitors were given time to hone their skills in advance: either through class time, or the

use of After School Help to prepare for their competition. Maritza Reinbold, a SkillsUSA advisor and CCTI's Graphic Design teacher, allotted an hour of class time each class for her students to focus on their projects instead of classwork. It would be during this time that students could communicate with their peers and instructors to iron out any weaknesses or issues. Reinbold's main goal was to ensure her students were well-prepared for the event. Not only were students well prepared for their competitions, but students were highly motivated. A week before the event, CCTI held a pep rally during student

lunch for SkillsUSA and DECA competitors, boosting student morale. Additionally, instructors didn't pressure their students to succeed, rather students were encouraged to enjoy their competition and learn from the experience. Without high tension and demand from their peers and instructors, students performed at their best and exceeded internal projections. Given the right time, training and resources, students performed their best while feeling their best. CCTI's monumental win means that 11 students advance to statewide competitions. With CCTI's win, students should look upon the greater struggles ahead, but not overlook the hardships of the past that allowed them to succeed. Upon giving students time, resources, energy, encouragement, and an environment free of insistence, students were able to outperform what many believed to be possible.

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2 CCTI CURRENT EVENTS

CCTI's Return to Social Events

Ash Little

As many students and parents know, Carbon Career and Technical Institute is not quite like its sending schools. Typically, the only dance they had was a formal event: Prom. This changed when they announced their revamp of a previous event, the CCTI Halloween Dance. Held in October, students were invited to join the school in its first attempt at an informal dance since the COVID-19 pandemic. On October 27th, 2022, the dance was held between 5:30-8:00pm inside the school's cafeteria. Students were encouraged to wear their Halloween costumes and prizes were awarded to students with the best costume!

The dance was proposed in early October after many suggestions from both students and parents; the original idea had been discussed during board meetings and between staff. Though, it was only this year that Director Brent Borzak decided to take the lead and make the dance a reality. According to Director Borzak, he believed that the dance was both a reward and a social event that would bring the whole school together. Overall, the dance upped school spirit right at the end of the first marking period.

Dakota Trach, a senior from the Graphic Design program at CCTI offered her insight on the event; having gone dressed as a witch, Dakota stated, "[I was in attendance because] a lot of my friends were there, and I thought it would be fun." She believed the dance lacked in some areas, primarily in entertainment; the decorations were lackluster, as were the snacks provided, and the lights were barely enough to illuminate the room on their own. Trach suggested that CCTI should include more activities in these types of events, "The worst part was probably that no one really got into it that much."

Similarly, Craig Conville, a senior from Drafting and Design Technology at CCTI agreed, "It was a very 'indifferent' event. I can't say I disliked it, but I can't say it was super memorable either." Likewise, Conville attended the dance with Nicole Corino, another senior from Drafting and Design Technology; both agreed the music could've been better and wished for more options, for example more trending songs or including an area to do song requests.

On the other hand, Olivia Bellis, a Graphic Design senior from CCTI rated the event a 9.9 out of 10



CCTI's School Dance

Photography by CCTI

overall. Ratings fell between 7-9, though most were positive. She seemed excited about the dance, regardless of the flaws of the event. All students agreed that they wished to see more social events and dances in the future and the dance was a great success for both the students and staff. Hopefully, there will be more events that transpire in the future. With programs changing and more student activities becoming available, social events such as the Halloween Dance are sure to come. CCTI is expanding its avenues of opportunities for both students and staff alike.

CCTI Students Reimagine Lansford's Train Station

Dakota Trach

Out with the old and in with the new, CCTI Drafting Design and Technology students are working on plans and concept drawings to turn the Lansford Train Station into a recreational center. Students Nicole Corino, Craig Conville, Anthony Muniz, Tyler Bechtold and Maxim Simbarsky, under the instruction of their teacher, Jermey Pease, have been asked by the Borough of Lansford to help make concept drawings and designs for this community wide project. The Lansford Train Station has been around since the 1940's and has housed many different industries. The most recent owner was Ken Hill who owned and operated in the building for 65 years. Finally, in December of 2021, Hill decided it was time to pass the building into new

hands. Hill agreed to sell the station to the Borough of Lansford in hopes to keep the history of the building alive. The borough is looking to have it remodeled into a recreational center to attract more tourism and give the community a place to hang out. Nicole Corino is the lead of their student run team. When asked about the project she had only positive responses; "I am enjoying this project a lot. I enjoy helping the community and I am all for reusing old buildings instead of leaving them abandoned, so I thought it was cool they were doing this and I'm glad to be involved." The students have the task of creating a new space and environment while still keeping the history of the station by keeping the original ticket

booth window, some doors and original windows. The students have already started brainstorming some great ideas for this new space. Some ideas they have are to include some museum rooms, murals, a restaurant, vendor spaces, a garden for concerts and events amongst many other ideas. They have begun making concept drawings, collages, floorplans, site plans and renderings to envision what the train station will look like in the future. In order to make these concept drawings the team uses AutoCAD, Revit, Sketchup (3D rendering software) including a standard pencil and paper.

Palmerton Boys Cross Country Win Districts

Dorissa Koehler

On Wednesday, October 26th 2022, Palmerton's Boys Cross Country Team won 1st Place in districts for the first time in 35 years at Desales University's 5K Cross Country course. The team had pushed all season long and some even made new personal records. Senior Jeremy Salvaggio in the Carpentry program has been running in cross country since his eighth grade year and mentions the sport has changed him forever: "My motivation for cross country was the challenge: I got to try a sport I never knew I'd be good at and it showed me how hard the sport actually is. People take cross country for a joke, but you don't realize how physically and mentally taxing it is until you're on that line and the starter gun goes off." Salvaggio mentions that cross country is not an easy sport and it should be taken seriously: "Cross country has changed me in many ways. It made me a more motivated and hard-working athlete. It created bonds with my teammates that I've never had before in sports. It gave me something to feel proud of, seeing improvement every year made me so happy about my progress as a runner." The senior boys didn't place at the 2022 States Competition, but they left feeling proud and happy to end their last season with a bang.



Boys Celebrate Win

Photography by Holly Swan

CCTI Participates in Red Ribbon Week

Isabel Wentz

Carbon Career and Technical Institute held a spirit week, on the week of October 24th, 2022, where CCTI's student body came up with the themes for the spirit week. Haley Kuehner, student council member, believed that students enjoy the spirit week. Kuehner stated: "We wanted to start the school year off fun and exciting so we chose to do spirit week because we feel students love to participate in them and always look forward to them." When questioned about how they decided themes, Hannah Devonshire said "During the meeting while we were coming up with the ideas, there were some disagreements. But, in the end, the Student Council narrowed down their decisions, agreeing on all of them... Not all were wanted in the beginning, but the more that we had talked about what we wanted to do with that idea, more members started to agree."

Monday was Disney Day, where students dressed as characters from Disney media and brought in Disney items. Some students enjoyed Disney day, but others held different opinions, Devonshire for example stated: "I think that I would change

Disney Day. We do Disney Day every year and I think it would be better to change things up." Tuesday's theme was fashion disaster. Samantha Nametko, student body member, said "I think fashion disaster was the worst day. No one really participated." Nametko believed there were better themes to use, "Camo day, I think our school has a lot of kids who would participate in this day." Wednesday was Hawaii day, and Savanna Marsteller, 10th grade, said "Today's theme for spirit week is definitely my favorite out of the whole week of themes!" Thursday was Dress your best day where students could dress up in their best clothing. Haley Kuehner, 11th grade, said "I would have changed Dress Your Best because I just feel it wasn't the most popular theme over the years... I love seeing students participate in themes such as Dress as your Favorite Teacher, Creative Backpack Day, Movie Character Day, Throwback Day." Friday, the theme of the day was costume day, students dressed in their halloween costumes and some brought inflatable costumes! Sapphira Marcozzi, 10th grade, "This school year's spirit week was a 10/10!"



Red Ribbon Week

Photography by CCTI

Jim Thorpe Football Team Win 27:14 Against Lehigh

Dorissa Koehler

The Lehigh football stadium held its last game of the season at 7:00pm on Friday, October 28th, 2022, resulting in a home game victory. The Indians beat the Olympians by 13 points, concluding the game 27:14. Xavier Moore, a junior in the Carpentry Program at CCTI, played defense in the final game. He joined Lehigh's football team due to recommendation by his track coach. Moore feels that his sport has affected his outside of school life because it is time consuming, but he also has a positive attitude about it: "I think football has made me a more rounded person because the exercises help stimulate my mind and I feel when I'm on the field, [that] no one cares about what is going on in my life outside of football. It also taught me good work ethic and that not everything in life is going to be easy."

CCTI’s After-School Programs Boost Opportunities

Brody Owens

When Nova Kuntzman and Craig Conville pitched the idea of TechTalk at CCTI, they had no idea whether it would be a reality. But after speaking to CCTI’s Afterschool Director, Michelle Klock, they were encouraged to go forward with their idea to Administration. “[We] really didn’t think we’d get that far,” wrote Kuntzman: “Both Craig and I were so excited. When we saw each other in the hallway, both of us said ‘Is this it? Is this the meeting?’” Their meeting made history, making it CCTI’s first ever student-run club. Though, without CCTI’s after-school program, their dream would have never been realized.

After-school programs are an essential part of one’s education by providing students the opportunity to improve their grades by providing them the extra time they need, while also being a place to hold extracurriculars. They also provide teachers the avenue to bridge learning gaps in the classroom where they have to teach upwards of 30 students at a time.

This has been reflected in test scores in the past two years. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, students in Grades 9-11 underperformed expectations on the Keystone exams in the last two years.

The 2022 test scores were below pre-pandemic results. In Biology, especially, student scores dropped to a low 41.9% proficiency score.

After-school activities also provide more reasons for students to improve their academic standing as extracurriculars (such as clubs or sports) require students to be passing all of their classes in order to participate. Students have something to keep looking forward to when they are a part of a club or sport.

Yet participation in After school activities has declined. According to a survey by the After School Alliance there was a 60% decrease from 2004, as millions of American families are unable to benefit from these programs: mostly due to cost or transportation issues. As reported by the Wallace Foundation, these programs are now funded 10 million dollars less than they were in 2014 when adjusted for inflation. 10 million fewer dollars that could have made these programs more accessible.

Today’s After school programs play a critical role in students’ lives, supplying them with opportunities to improve their grades and make a real difference in their community. Without them, students lose an important resource to help them succeed in their education.



Tech Talk Records an Episode

Photography by CCTI

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever Rated Highly By Fans

Marissa Blasko

Black Panther Wakanda Forever, released on November 11, 2022, was directed by Ryan Coogler and produced by Marvel Studios. While the movie was mainly shot in the U.S: Atlanta Georgia and Massachusetts, The movie featured aerial shots filmed in Africa and it has grossed 330.3 million dollars worldwide.

The idea of a sequel began just months after the initial release of Black Panther in February 2018. According to harpersbazaar.com, the sequel was spurred on by viewer demands and the high ratings it received upon the original movie’s release. However, the idea was put on hold after Chadwick Boseman, who played the main character, died in 2020 due to Colon cancer. The sequel filming began in June 2020; Chadwick Boseman’s Black Panther co-stars dedicated Wakanda Forever to honoring his legacy.

The movie was positively received by critics, receiving 84% on Rotten Tomatoes, 95% on Fandango, and 7.4/10 on IMDb. As well as critics, Wakanda Forever was loved by fans worldwide with an audience rating of 4.2/5 stars, with one fan writing: “Wakanda Forever will have you on the edge of your seat from beginning to end. They did an exceptional job paying honor to Chadwick Boseman throughout the movie.”

Overall, a sequel to Black Panther was anticipated from the moment the first movie was released. Black Panther Wakanda Forever has exceeded the expectations of many awaiting fans while simultaneously honoring the legacy of Chadwick Boseman.

Students Lead Spa Day for Local Women Business Group

Maya Kowalczyk

On Thursday, September 15th, CCTI welcomed the Carbon Chamber Women in Business organization with a delicious lunch crafted by our Culinary Arts staff, students, and lead instructor Chef A.J. Burke. The members then enjoyed a tour of the school and were honored with gifts of handcrafted mugs with a specially designed logo by our Graphic Design students and pink t-shirts designed and printed in-house by Digital Marketing and Design. Our guests also had the opportunity to experience a salon service performed by the CCTI Cosmetology students in the school’s salon. The Carbon County Women in Business group meets the second Thursday of

each month at various locations for lunch, networking and personal and professional development, and aims to empower women to “cultivate their personal power to create their most ideal life both personally and professionally,” according to their Facebook page. They have been in existence prior to 2018. The CCTI Salon opened to the public on September 9th, 2022 and has public hours on a variety of dates from January through May 2023. Those interested can call the CCTI Cosmetology Clinic to book an appointment at (570) 325-3682 ext. 1129. See the website for additional details at www.carboncti.or/about/public-services/.

Diversity In Holiday Celebrations

Ash Little

With the holiday season coming to an end, many individuals are beginning to prepare for the onslaught of Spring; though it’s important not to forget the traditions many follow during the winter season. These activities can be small at-home occurrences to something quite larger, like volunteering or assisting in local donations and holiday programs. Many spend the winter season curled up at home, while others are hard at work and school; and then there are a few that choose to celebrate and enjoy this season a little bit differently from what has become the “norm” for the holiday season.

Jordyn “Jo” Drumbore, a junior in the Cosmetology program at CCTI doesn’t follow the typical holiday season. She expresses that her family celebrates the holidays, but they don’t make a “big deal” out of Christmas. Drumbore states, “[t]o my family, it’s an excuse to eat great comfort meals.” She even goes to say baking is one of her favorite activities, because it’s both soothing and results in great treats. Drumbore celebrates Christmas with her paternal grandparents, though occasionally she’ll visit her more tight-knit maternal family. She

discussed her disappointment during Covid-19, as the pandemic prevented her from visiting family during the holidays.

Drumbore mentions that though she doesn’t have many traditions, she does follow the “Christmas Morning” that many experience: waking up and exchanging gifts before eating together. Typically, her mother makes chicken parmigiana with baked ziti and she states, “I hope next year we can try different dishes. It could be a new tradition of sorts, to make something not considered a traditional Christmas meal.” Furthermore, Drumbore believes she doesn’t celebrate in the traditional way, but this doesn’t take away from the joy of spending time with friends and family.

On the contrary, sometimes the stereotypical holiday season is only modified slightly. For example, Dorissa Koehler, a senior from the Carpentry program at CCTI celebrates Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s: spending these holidays with her immediate family, though occasionally will spend the holidays with close friends. She enjoys the winter season, she even goes as far as to say, “I enjoy

how our earth looks [and feels] all times of the year, [it’s like] Mother Nature is letting herself show emotion. I find winter beautiful.”

Koehler enjoys spending time with her family, and her favorite activity is taking outdoor winter photos in the snow. Koehler’s family traditions include the New Year’s Eve tradition of getting Chinese food for dinner; a tradition started by her mother that she plans to pass on later in life. Many believe that consuming Chinese food on New Year’s Eve brings good luck for the upcoming year. Koehler states that Covid-19 has yet to affect any of these traditions, and she hopes to continue them in the future.

Though, some members of CCTI staff celebrate the holidays in a more traditional sense. Ashleigh Rehrig, a paraprofessional of the Culinary Arts program spends most of the holiday season with her daughter. She picks and cuts her family’s Christmas tree, bakes cookies and partakes in large family gatherings. Rehrig mostly participates in outdoor activities with her daughter and she’s recently taken up Elf-on-the-Shelf. Rehrig states, [I] started three years ago for my

daughter to count down the days for Christmas, but this elf [can get] very annoying or frustrating because I have to think of new things and hiding places every day for 24 days.” She seems to enjoy seeing her daughter’s face light up every morning though, regardless of the tedious activity.

Rehrig’s family used to have Santa visit her sister-in-law’s home during their gathering before Covid-19 interrupted their traditions. Though, the event was only temporarily canceled until the pandemic was less of a threat. She seemed disappointed that their traditions had been interrupted, though she’s happier now that her family can continue their traditions freely. Rehrig states that she plans to continue these traditions, while potentially making more, to pass down to her daughter in the future.

Although members of CCTI celebrate the holidays differently, the students all come together to help support some of the non-profit organizations in our community. For example, the school recently supported the Toys for Tots organization, and other organizations that allow CCTI to give back to its wonderful community in time for this holiday season.



The BUZZ

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Signs-up are available in Room 303.

Temporary

Dakota Trach

Spherical soap of wonder.
Gentle, timid, fragile,
You glide gracefully through the blue
abyss,
Iridescent in the light.

A fleeting moment.
I long to capture you, indefinitely
But a caress of a foreign hand,
You shatter, porcelain on concrete.

The clock marches on.
I long to return to when,
You danced freely in the wind
Innocent and pure.

Briefly, you are.
Pointless, it seems
Priceless, you’ve become
Timeless, you remain.

Expectations

Ash Little

Tired, Exhausted
Time is nonexistent,
Weekends fly, Weekdays drag
It’s a never ending time loop,
Where the torture continues,
From one generation to the next.

An hour, maybe more, for math
Still, thirty minutes for history,
Pray it doesn’t need longer.
A break, to break down.
History’s still not done, but maybe a
walk will help?

Now it’s dinner, and there isn’t enough
time.
Eat quickly, and don’t bother talking,
There’s no time for another break.
Can’t afford to lose more valuable time.
The shower can wait, hopefully the acne
goes away...

Start again with science this time,
Maybe the chemistry won’t take long—
—It does.
Now it’s twelve. School starts in seven
hours,
Every health class, every teacher always
says:
“Eight hours of sleep!”
Sure, maybe when high school is over.
Time for English! An essay,
On why the curtains are blue, and why
everything is the way it is.

Now it’s three a.m. and there’s four
hours left,
Four hours until the time loop begins
again.
There’s always the chance of the loop
ending (it never does),
But it changes slightly, day to day.
As the cycle continues, but now a new
stress appears.
‘Hey, can you come in tonight? We’re
understaffed.’

Maybe tomorrow will be better,
But the truth is...
Tomorrow is always worse.

Note from The Buzz: Creative Writing is not only a speciality, but also a craft. It takes effort, and a lot of thought to portray the desired idea or emotion that an author wishes to convey in their work. Therefore, the staff and students of The Buzz have decided to open the Creative Writing Section up to the students of CCTI and allow them to share their original works and ideas. These works will range from works of short fiction to poetry and more!

Social Recharge

Episode One: Firstly

Ash Little

I don’t want to say that school is...easy, we all know the truth to that one, but. The days are hard, y’know? I have to admit, it’s even worse when all you can think about is the words you’re about to say. Or how you’re going to say them. Your thoughts begin to deteriorate when you focus on who you’re about to say it too. It doesn’t make sense, I know it doesn’t. But the creeping, crawling feeling always grows from the pit of my stomach, and it eats my chest as I try to breathe. I gasped for a breath, to just let out a whisper. I hate the interactions, the sociability that arises when the dreaded year of learning and supposed “fun” begins. Everyone’s excited, delighted even, but all I feel is a wallowing and agonizing pit growing deep inside me; a pit that always makes me choke in the end. It’s like taking a drink of water and ending up coughing as soon as you swallow—but it’s a constant, lingering choking that doesn’t end until I’m alone again. Safe again.

There’s always been this...thing following me about; plaguing my mind, skewing my words as they escape my lips. I don’t even know who I am after each letter. Nobody knows, yet they all know that something’s there. It’s like they can sense it too, see the monster that dwells just beyond my mind. Even though these people have known me all my life—I’ve known them too, and not all are good—It’s like I’m someone entirely new. I don’t know myself, yet everyone pretends to know me. Why me? These people, they never change, I’ve seen it first hand. I know they don’t, yet what makes me think I’ve changed?

It’s been the same people since kindergarten: the liars, the jocks, the nerds. Even the outcasts push me away, leaving me without a place. Without a purpose. Sometimes I feel like I’m in a glitched video game. Regardless of where I go, the suspenseful music continues to pound in my ears, even if nothing is there. Still...the knowledge I hold upon myself is limited, and I feel like I’ll never truly know who I am. I fear that I’ll never find myself, but every time I think about it, I try to think about other things. Asdale, my home since I was a kid; it’s quaint, and quiet—almost nothing happens here, but it’s home— and my friends plus the few good memories I hold. Sadly though, I can’t even remember all of the good things with my mind plagued by the persistent thoughts of escaping this hellish place.

If I’m being honest, it’s hellish to me, but for others? It’s just a normal start to an average, lame school year. All new teachers, new faces, new words. I remind myself that I just need to remember the few words I practice every day, hoping they’ll come out perfect and make me seem less inferior. Yet, the smallest of words makes me cringe, despite being a measly few letters. It’s mindless for such anxieties to consume my thoughts, but I can’t control it. I can’t control the terror, the dread that comes with every minute of the day.

And yet, my feet carry me mechanically, almost falling into the routine I’ve experienced for years, and yet something is different. I can’t tell what it

is, but it’s...different. Maybe it’s because it’s the final first day I’ll ever have? Still, no phrases have been uttered from my lips, and I’m still just waiting. Awaiting what? I don’t know. I feel lost in the flurry of my mind, stuck in a raging war I never chose to partake in. Distantly, I hear names being called, attendance. I should pay attention, I know I should, but I can’t. I can’t help the dread that builds, hte choking feeling starting again and—My name? That was definitely my name, I think? I hope because before I can rationally think, the soft yet harsh letters fall from my mouth. “Here.”

The moment they tumble out, I feel the hands of the monster wrapping around me, engulfing me in this antagonizing blur of possibilities. Moments of my life, ones I’ve long forgotten, flash before my eyes and swallow the limited amount of pride and self-appreciation I have. I’m fighting, screaming, thrashing and kicking my way through—trying to be the one in control. This monster isn’t me! It never has been, and it never will be! I can’t let it take control of my life, this is my life, my time! My blood feels like it’s boiling, it’s almost as if there’s literal magma flowing through my veins; my skin feels bubbly, filled with hot, gaseous air that’s desperate to escape. There isn’t room to breathe, and each breath I could manage was like a wave of cold water flowing over me, somehow chilling me to my core. Every breath I took only caused more water to fill my lungs as I slowly drowned. The end couldn’t come soon, and it only dragged on as my chest burned and tightened.

From hellish agony to suddenly nothing, a sense of calm and tranquility. Peace, rather than feeling absolute anguish. I cracked my eyes open, only just realizing how they’d been closed and I took in my surroundings again. Standing in the doorway of Asdale High School, I inhaled sharply, enjoying the twinge of icy breath that filled my lungs before I exhaled warm air. It was over, and yet, I couldn’t remember anything except for the everlasting panic that consumed me. A set of hands lightly, yet playfully, shoved me outside the school. I glanced back, and for the first time that day, I could feel the smile tugging on my lips as I watched my friends, all of them laughing amongst themselves as they crowded me, pushing me toward the buses.

I didn’t feel alone anymore. The monster that had plagued my day was but a mere shadow on the ground. I wasn’t alone, because I had them. When I fell, they would pick me up. When I felt like I couldn’t, they’d show me how. I didn’t need to feel isolated with them, because...they always made sure I was included. With a wide grin on my face, my feet carried me along the sidewalk alongside the people who I love and trust. I wasn’t fighting to prove who I was. Even as the bus pulled up to my stop and I got off, I felt free to be who I was. So, even though today is over, I’d like to introduce myself. Hi, my name is Caspian, and day 1 out of 180 is finally over.

Gray Morals

Dakota Trach

It felt like glass shattering on a linoleum floor. The world was crashing down around me, and there was nothing I could do to slow it down or stop it. I have never before felt this overwhelming sense of helplessness, defeat. How could this have happened? How could I have lost? I followed all the steps, completed all the tasks. This isn't how it's supposed to end. Yet here I am, the end in sight, but not the ending I wanted.

As a child I read books, indulging my imagination. They always whispered tales of faraway lands where magic and mysteries took place. The characters would find themselves tasked with impossible challenges, yet they would rise to the occasion and conquer the villain. They would complete their tasks and come out on top, living happily ever after. The kingdom would be saved, dragon slain, villain exiled. But here I sit, feeling lied to.

I thought that I could be like the heroic characters leading their armies into battle. Wielding magic as though it was as easy as breathing. I wanted to be the one to save the princess from her twelve-story prison. I wanted to be the one to battle the villain at the end of the story, saving the kingdom from a terrible dictatorship. I thought I could be the one to save everyone. I thought I could be the hero they needed. Now I feel like a fool for thinking I was capable of anything.

I believed those stories, held them close to my heart, following them blindly like a trail of breadcrumbs through a dark forest. But this was not fantasy, I was not a character in a story. This is real life, my own terrible reality, and if there is one thing anyone has ever learned from living, it is that life isn't fair. I was a fool for thinking any differently. I am a fool, a desperate fool. And as the desperate fool I am, I pleaded until my inevitable demise.

"But it's not fair!" I yelled, struggling against my enclosure. "I did everything I was supposed to." It came out as a whisper, hot breath against the cool metal of the iron cage. My breath was visible in the cold air of the cell, fleeting.

"Well isn't someone selfish?" A baritone voice commented, coming from the hallway leading into the line of cells. I could hear the smirk in his voice, teasing and taunting, flaunting his victory the same way one would torture a starving man with food just out of arms reach.

"If it were a contest we both know you'd be the reigning champion," I replied sarcastically. The man merely laughed before responding.

"Eloquently spoken seeing as I have been on a winning streak as of late." He spoke with a narcissistic tone in his voice only succeeding in making the blood beneath my skin boil even more. I should be worried about my skin melting off of my bones, leaving my body to become a pile of mush and flesh if my blood were to reach an even higher temperature. I know I'm supposed to be the good guy in this story, but murder was far from the last thing on my mind.

"What do you want?" I asked through gritted teeth. I had a couple guesses up my sleeve, none of them very pleasant, but the anger coursing through me succeeded only in blinding my sense of judgment even further. The man on the other side of the bars only seemed to smile wider.

"I know you must have thought this over, tried to get inside my head, but you're too much fun to have around to simply dispose of," he said

matter of factly, "That's when I had another one of my genius ideas." His hand waved through the air elegantly. "I thought to myself, what do all winners receive?" Feet pacing back and forth in front of my cell as if he was pondering the thought at this very moment. "And do you know what all winners receive, nemesis?" The question was directed my way, though I knew it was rhetorical. "They all receive a trophy."

I glanced at him questioningly, what did a trophy have to do with my inevitable demise? However, I am not surprised in the slightest, if there was no tangible object for him to flaunt his victory it might as well have been his greatest failure.

"And what exactly does this trophy have to do with me?" I asked, annoyed, anxious. I was, had been, preparing for the worst, I wish I could say I was ready to welcome death with a warm friendly hug, converse like old friends. But that was not the case, I don't think I would ever be ready to willingly welcome an unwanted acquaintance.

"My dearest nemesis, I thought you were smarter than this? You're beginning to make me question your worthiness of being my eternal rival." He slouched lazily, mocking me. "Why, haven't you figured it out? You are the trophy." Time felt as if it had stopped, breath leaving my lungs. My chest was tight with fear, my brain slowly comprehending the words just spoken.

"No," I breathed, disbelieving. "This wasn't how it was supposed to happen, you're the villain! You weren't supposed to win!" Desperation clawed its way through my voice, sinking its razor sharp claws into the flesh of their recipient.

"Don't you get it?" he asked sharply, "I am not a villain, you are not a hero, we are simply people, nothing more, nothing less. You act like everything is black and white, clear cut. When will you understand that it's not? This isn't some fairytale where you can categorize a person as good or bad. This is reality and here we all have one distinguishing feature, there's a monster living in each of our souls, some are just better at keeping them hidden." For the first time since he stepped foot in the room he backed away from my cell. "I hope being in this cell doesn't hinder your mental capacity. It would be a shame for you to go brain dead before the real fun has begun." His attitude did a one-eighty, anger and malice gone within the time it takes to blink. "Don't enjoy yourself too much now, I know how much you enjoy entire solitude." With that he turned briskly, vanishing through the tunneling hallway.

He was right, as much as that phrase pains me to say, it is the truth. Villains and heroes don't exist, and monsters live within us all. Nothing was black and white, we were all simply morally gray, a little bit of everything all at once. We all have monsters living in the pits of our stomachs, the very deepest darkest depths, or that's where most of them live. Some of them have built homes on the sleeves of their hosts bearing their hideous faces to the world. I wonder what it would be like to flaunt the cruelest, darkest parts of me. But that is a question that will never be answered. He might have won this war, but no one can ever take away the life that lives inside of my head. No one can take away the monster that thrives in the pit of my stomach, and little do they know we have become fast friends.

Consistent

Anonymous

The thought of you doesn't come and go,
It's constantly there.

Lingering, a shadow in the darkness,
Close to touch but far from reach.

The echoes of your voice trials through
my mind,
The touch of your skin permanent on my
own.

Your kiss,
Still soft on my pale lips

As if it were yesterday,
But it's been months.

It's cold.

Your warmth is gone.

The only thing that made the numbness
bearable,

Slipped through my fingers,

And once again,

I am lost,

For you are the one who made me whole
And there is nothing but the ghost of you

Constantly following me.

Missing your presence is simply
Consistent.

The Moon And Her Stars

Anononymous

Like the moon and the stars,
You light me up then fade away.
That's why I seem to love the night
time,

Because I wait for you all day.

Even though I know the outcome,

I still pay to see your face,

Just for a couple hours,

And then I watch you drive away.

I despise the sun because she doesn't
make me feel the way you do.

Even tho she's so good for my soul,

I can't express what it is you do;

The way you glisten when the clouds
shift from your view,

And the twinkles from your eyes as if
you're all brand new.

I know it's temporary, for time doesn't
stop

Though I wish it would, I can't seem to
wrap my head around the fact that you
only come when you must.

I wish it were dark forever,

For that's the only time you're around.

The sun doesn't make me feel anything
anymore,

Only you, with your stupid flaws that I
admire so much.

You remind me

Of the things I can't seem to get
enough of.

You remind me,

Of the moon and the stars.

The **BUZZ** *Meet Our Reporters*



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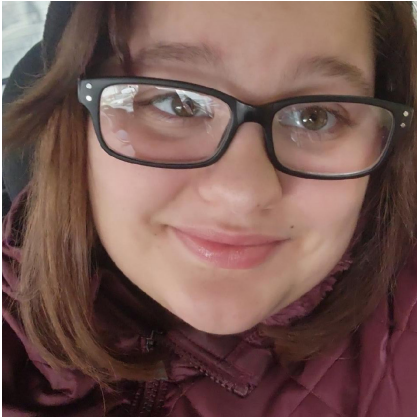
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Reporter



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Reporter

Across

- 1. Cold, delicate, small
- 2. A happy feeling
- 3. A festive animal from the arctic
- 4. A warm piece of clothing
- 5. In order to get presents, you must be ____.
- 6. You hang these on a tree
- 7. The flavor of a candy cane
- 8. May your ____ come true
- 9. A frozen form of water
- 10. We hope you had ____ this year

Down

- 1. When you wish upon a ____.
- 2. Happy ____.
- 3. A type of tree.
- 4. Santa's main form of transportation.
- 5. Where most people spend the holidays.
- 6. ____ Christmas!
- 7. An object to keep you warm.
- 8. What you decorate for Christmas.
- 9. An ice hut.
- 10. Spending time with ____ and family.

2023 Holiday Crossword

