

Northfield Mount
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December Spotlight-ify: Deans Edition!

By ESA BLUME '25

Spotlight-ify is a part of the Lamplighter issue's arts and culture section that focuses on the favorite songs of NMH faculty members.

In this issue, we are focusing on some of the deans: Grace Rehnquist (Associate Dean of Students),

Kim Shearer (Associate Dean of Students and Campus Dean), and Demetrius Laffitte (Associate Dean of Students).

Grace Rehnquist:

Q. Gets you up in the morning

A. Broken Glass (Cover) by Lake Street Dive.

Q. Picks you up when you're feeling down

A. Homesick by Noah Kahan.

Q. Is your hype song

A. Juice by Lizzo.

Q. Makes you feel the most relaxed

A. Wasted by Tomberlin.

Q. You listen to every day, no matter what

A#1. All too Well (Taylor's Version or 10 Minute Version) by Taylor Swift.

A#2. Salt in the Wound by Boygenius.

Q. Is your favorite sad song

A. We Don't Eat by James Vincent McMorrow.

Q. You think everyone should listen to

A. Gold Dust Woman by Fleetwood Mac.

Q. Is your favorite Christmas/seasonal song

A #1. Classic: White Christmas by Bing Crosby.

A#2. New: Underneath the Tree by Kelly Clarkson.

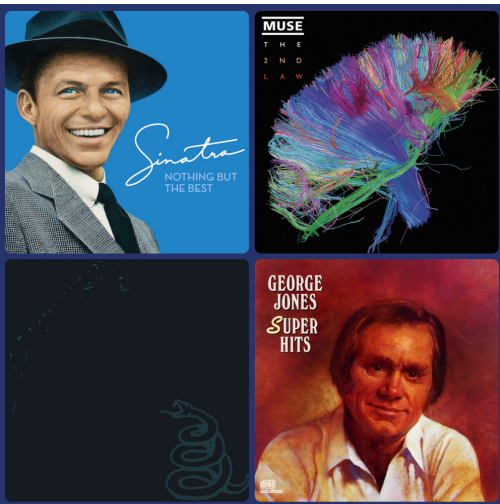
Bonus Q. If you were riding into battle on a horse, what song would be playing in the background?

A. Mr. Brightside by The Killers.



3 fun facts: I love musicals, I have 50+ hats, my middle name is inspired by a William Wordsworth poem.

Kim Shearer:



Q. Gets you up in the morning

A. Anything by Disturbed.

Q. Picks you up when you're feeling down

A. Show Tunes, I love a great musical.

Q. Is your hype song

A. New York, New York by Frank Sinatra.

Q. Makes you feel the most relaxed

A. I love country music (not pop country). Country music reminds me of my dad and my son.

Q. You listen to every day, no matter what

A. My music choices differ from day to day, but I could always listen to «Madness» by Muse.

Q. Is your favorite sad song

A. I don't have a favorite sad song because I don't like to feel sad. But if I have to pick one it would be «He Stopped Loving Her Today» by George Jones.

Q. You think everyone should listen to

A. Cast No Stones by Cody Jinks.

Q. Is your favorite Christmas/seasonal song

A. Carol of the Bells.

Bonus Q. If you were riding into battle on a horse, what song would be playing in the background?

A. Enter Sandman by Metallica.

3 Fun facts: I was once punched (on purpose) in the arm, really hard, by a total stranger at Yankee Stadium, I had a baby that was born with two bottom teeth, I once had a pet beetle that would only eat roast beef.

Demetrius Laffitte:

Q. Gets you up in the morning

A. Man in the Mirror by Michael Jackson.

Q. Picks you up when you're feeling down

A. Circle of Life from Lion King.

Q. Is your hype song Gonna

A. Make Me Lose My Mind by DMX.

Q. Makes you feel the most relaxed

A. Killing Me Softly With His Song by Lauryn Hill & Fugees.

Q. You listen to every day, no matter what

A. Before I let Go by Frankie Beverly & Maze.

Q. Is your favorite sad song

A#1. What's Going On by Marvin Gaye

A#2. I Will Always Love You by Whitney Houston.

Q. You think everyone should listen to

A. Don't Stop Believing by Journey.

Q. Is your favorite Christmas/seasonal song

A. The Christmas by Donny Hathaway.

Bonus Q. If you were riding into battle on a horse, what song would be playing in the background?

A. Award Tour by Tribe Called Quest.



3 fun facts: Chef, can surf (ride a surfboard), I learned how to Ballet and Tap at a young age.

Empowering the Community: Model UN at NMH

By MICHELLE TANG '26



Photo by CHIARA PINCI '26.

Imagine researching a topic of a social issue that you have never heard of, pushing through the discomfort of negotiating with unfamiliar faces, and getting used to giving a political speech in front of a crowd. If you are excited or intimidated by the thought, Model UN (MUN) would be a good option to exhibit your talent or overcome your fears.

Ban Ki-moon, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, once said, "Model UN is where young minds experiment with solutions for a better world." As an educational simulation where students represent countries in international conferences, MUN engages students in exploring international political issues and taking a stance for their assigned country. It simulates the complex dynamics of real-world politics.

At NMH, the MUN co-curricular has been a popular option for students aiming to enlarge their scope of knowledge. This year, it attracted more than fifty students. Every Friday night, student leaders guide participants to practice writing resolution papers and opening statements, which are the stepping stones to preparing for actual MUN conferences and discovering the unknown potential.

On the surface level, MUN covers a wide range of topics. "We learn about different countries' stances on specific issues such as nuclear disarmament, climate change, private investment, and technology regulations," says Wilson Cheung '24, a student leader of the cocurricular.

As students dive in deeper, they explore the intricate core of MUN. As an effective learning method, it allows students to explore international relations first-hand, creating an immersive learning experience that delivers a sense of humanitarian spirit.

"This sort of role play allows you to step into different countries' shoes, try to imagine their attitude, and get into understanding why those were their concerns," commented Tim Relyea, the Department Chair of Social Sciences. For students, MUN is a way to build empathy and understanding by getting used to the interchanging perspectives of different countries.

In addition to the academic and intellectual aspect of MUN, another layer of the cocurricular's charm is its interactive nature. "You need to be able to have the courage to step out of your comfort zone to speak to others and communicate your thoughts," said Luisa Ortiz, '26, who has four years of previous MUN experience before joining the NMH MUN cocurricular this school year.

Although MUN UN poses challenges and obstacles for its participants, Cheung upholds that they are brilliant opportunities for students to develop and better equip themselves with skills. He emphasizes that MUN's procedures of drafting resolutions, plotting strategies, and carrying negotiations teach students—aside from the social issues themselves—the necessary skills to navigate themselves in the future. "[It's] not only hard skills such as research and writing skills but also a handful of essential soft skills, including rhetoric and ways to compromise and negotiate with each other," he said.

Some of the soft skills involved in MUN are "informal networking and lobbying," said Relyea. "You might call them soft skills, but they're just as important as being able to research and speak well. The collaborative aspect of MUN is what makes it powerful."

"One of Model UN's most important takeaways is how to work together with others even when they have opposing perspectives," said Ortiz. She asserts that her sentiment echoes with a broader social connotation, given that even in daily life, one doesn't necessarily have the same point of view as friends and teachers and must learn to communicate constructively.

Within the NMH community, the MUN program provides a space for people to learn about international politics and spreads its influence in many other ways that can subtly transform the community. Familiar with handling chaos at MUN, many of its members can apply their conflict-solving skills in the broader community. Ortiz comments, "with the skills that MUN teaches you, it is easier to juggle different friendships and relationships and juggle people who have opposing views."

NMH's Model UN, much like the actual United Nations, intends to spread harmony and peace. Tiffany Thiri, the faculty advisor of the co-curricular and math teacher, said, "Model UN instills in the students a sense of hope [for diplomatic resolution]. There's real hope in the fact that we can somehow come together and come up with shared agreements and resolutions in the face of a conflict."

Given NMH MUN's current popularity, many look forward excitedly to future possibilities. The student leaders of the cocurricular are currently trying to host NMH month: an MUN Conference where they hope to invite other schools to NMH and design their motions. With roughly 50 current members on the roster, NMH MUN continues to expand its reach at this school and beyond.

A Trip Down Memory Lane: Nostalgia Through Video Games

By Damon Tung '25



Photo by Eric Mclean.

Picture this: It's a snowy Saturday morning in 2019. You wake up at 11 AM, grab a cup of hot chocolate, and immediately begin playing Fortnite—your main task of the day. You log in and find three of your best friends waiting in the lobby. What better way to start your morning off than a victory royale?

Fortnite Battle Royale is a popular online multiplayer game where 100 players on an island battle to be the last one standing with the given resources found (similar to the Hunger Games). The game combines elements of survival, strategic decisions, and scavenging to outlast the 99 other opponents. The game “zone” is constantly shrinking, which can harm the player and eventually eliminate those who stay in it for too long.

Recently, the gaming world has been buzzing with the re-release of OG Fortnite (Original Fortnite Battle Royale), which has reignited passion within the gaming community. This resurgence is not merely about the game itself—it symbolizes a powerful wave of nostalgia, specifically among the teenagers who grew up playing it. The hype surrounding this event spread all the

way to Northfield Mount Hermon School (NMH), as students were dedicating their entire weekends to playing the game, even missing out on Halloween festivities and other on-campus activities.

The surge in popularity of OG Fortnite transcends the game's features, as the focus is more centered on the emotional connection players have with the original game. This surge of nostalgia is not solely about revisiting the original map and weapons but about recapturing a time when the joys of gaming were unadulterated, and life itself was simpler.

The re-release serves as a time machine for many, transporting them back to their youth and allowing them to relive cherished moments. “Getting a chance to play the original Fortnite game again really took me on a trip down memory lane, bringing back memories of seventh grade when my friends and I would come back from school and spend the rest of the afternoon playing this game,” said Paolo Rodriguez '24.

Similarly, Rafi Shalabi '24 said, “I've stopped playing the game since 2021. Coming back after two years with the map that I grew up playing

really hits me differently, it just feels so familiar!”

The nostalgia for Fortnite seems to be a widespread feeling that occurs to many who return to a game they played in the past. Pratyush Kumar, a Computer Science teacher at NMH, says that he used to be a Pokémon gaming fanatic in his middle school years.

“My fondest memory was saving up money in first grade and purchasing my first Pokémon Yellow Special Pikachu Edition cartridge. This was the game that started my addiction for Pokémon,” he said.

Kumar highlights that he and his Gameboy were inseparable, and at times, he would even game during class with his friends. “I wish I kept my Gameboy as it brought me such great memories. Sometimes I would walk past the toy aisle and see my favorite Pokémon, Charizard, and it would bring me great nostalgia,” he said. It is evident that love for a particular game can persist over decades and that regardless of the game, this sense of nostalgia is a universal experience shared by all gamers.

Nostalgia in video games is quite powerful as it is not just about revisiting old gameplay or mechanics but about recapturing the emotions and experiences that helped shape individual memories and identities. Similar to a favorite song or a classic movie, video games can serve as time capsules, allowing one to return to joyful, care-free, or even challenging moments from one's life.

When players revisit games like Fortnite, they're not just reliving the game—they're reliving their youth: their friendships, the countless hours of joy, and the challenges they experienced. It is a form of digital nostalgia that is universally understood among gamers.

Nick Bowman, an associate professor of journalism and creative media industries at Texas Tech University, conducted a study on the interconnectedness between video games and nostalgia. In an article from the Guardian, he shares that, “In our research we found that people who have social nostalgia memories – memories of playing games with friends in the past – feel connected to themselves and their friends in the past, and also feel connected in the present.”

Bowman continues to explain how recent technological advancements have allowed many people like him to relive their childhood memories: “It's fun just to see these things come back. It's all that nostalgia too – there's that game I used to play when I was 10 or 13, and now it's working on my PC.” This connection elevates video games from a simple digital artifact to a priceless memory.

The return of OG Fortnite delves into a well of nostalgia, symbolizing more than merely a beloved game. It embodies an era of fond memories, recognizing the game's everlasting impact on a generation and a bridge uniting the past with the present. Gamers are reliving cherished moments, reminiscing past joys, and reconnecting with a time when simple pleasures have brought immense happiness and can once again.

The Slot Machine In Our Phones: Short Form Video

By EMILY LIU '27

A dance tutorial. A private chef cooking pasta in the Hamptons. A comedy sketch about people fighting over the bill. Another video appears simply in a swift swipe of the finger. Slowly but surely, an hour passes and you don't even realize it. Just 5 more videos, you tell yourself.

It's no secret how many spend massive amounts of time on platforms like TikTok. In the Wall Street Journal, pediatrician and director of the Reading & Literacy Discovery Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, John Hutton describes these platforms as "dopamine machines" because they trigger the reward system in the brain. For each enjoyable video watched, dopamine gets released, creating an addiction to watching them in search of pleasure.

In a Forbes article, Dr. Julie Albright compared these platforms to a slot machine. Just like a slot machine, the short video feed is random, and it contains a combination of interesting and boring videos. This imposes a hunger to keep watching until one stumbles upon their desired content. Most of the time, getting there takes multiple tries, which keeps people constantly wondering when the next video will bring them pleasure.

In the Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma*, professor emeritus of computer science at Yale University, Edward Tufte, gives a chilling comment about short video sites, "There are only two industries that call their customers' users: illegal drugs and software." The comparison reveals just how manipulative the algorithms in social media can be.

Social media was created to be addictive, and its effects on people's daily lives are visible. Sitting in class with the phones away from desks sometimes does not work because it only takes one vibration or notification to catch people's attention again. There is an irresistible urge to check the latest update because that's how people programmed themselves to do so. Once one does check that notification, they're trapped. They have found themselves inside an endless feed where content is being pumped out at them and trying to make them stay on the app for as long as possible.

In a poll sent to the NMH community about individual usage of screen time, 65 NMH students responded anonymously. The results showed that Instagram and TikTok were the most popular social media platforms that are home to short-form videos. In the poll, when students were asked how screen time affects their daily lives, a student responded, "It stresses me out for sure. I use it to procrastinate, when bored, lazy, or tired. It doesn't help with any of those things and I almost always feel worse after." Another student replied, "It's a massive distraction. I find myself mindlessly scrolling some nights like a zombie. I wake up and think to myself, 'What am I doing?'"

Results from the poll also show that the number of short-form videos consumed by these NMH students was almost equal to that of long-form videos like TV shows, Instagram/Snapchat stories, and movies they watched combined.

NMH has taken numerous measures to keep students off of their phones for at least a while. Phone

policies all NMH students are aware of are the ones in the dining hall and chapel. Students are not allowed to use technology during weekday nights and Sunday nights. They were created to allow students to have face-to-face conversations at the dinner table and enjoy moments of being present in the community. When the phone policies were first implemented, phones could not be seen in the dining hall, and faculty could take students' phones. Now, policies are more lenient, with only reminders about phone usage.

According to Kim Shearer, Associate Dean of Students and Campus Dean, there are fewer heads down focusing on a screen, and it's much louder during dinner than breakfast or lunch. "It's really noticeable. If you look around the dining hall at breakfast or lunch, how many heads are down? It could be seven, eight students not even talking just on their phone. But at dinner, actually it's getting

noisier at dinner because actually you're talking." Shearer adds, "For one meal a day, the school would just really like to see students conversing and having, you know, communication with your teammates or your friends or your classmates, whoever it may be."

An experience that 9th graders are all too familiar with is placing their phones in the common room during study hall. This policy started ever since cell phones became popular, and the goal of the no phones policy for 9th graders has not changed. Mary Reeder, a dorm faculty member on campus for over 20 years, explained, "I would say [phone policies] started 20ish years ago. And I feel like the rules were more strict. The freshman had to put their phones outside their door instead of bringing them to the lounge. 'I think it [started] because people could be distracted and not do study hall. That's how having the policy is good.'"

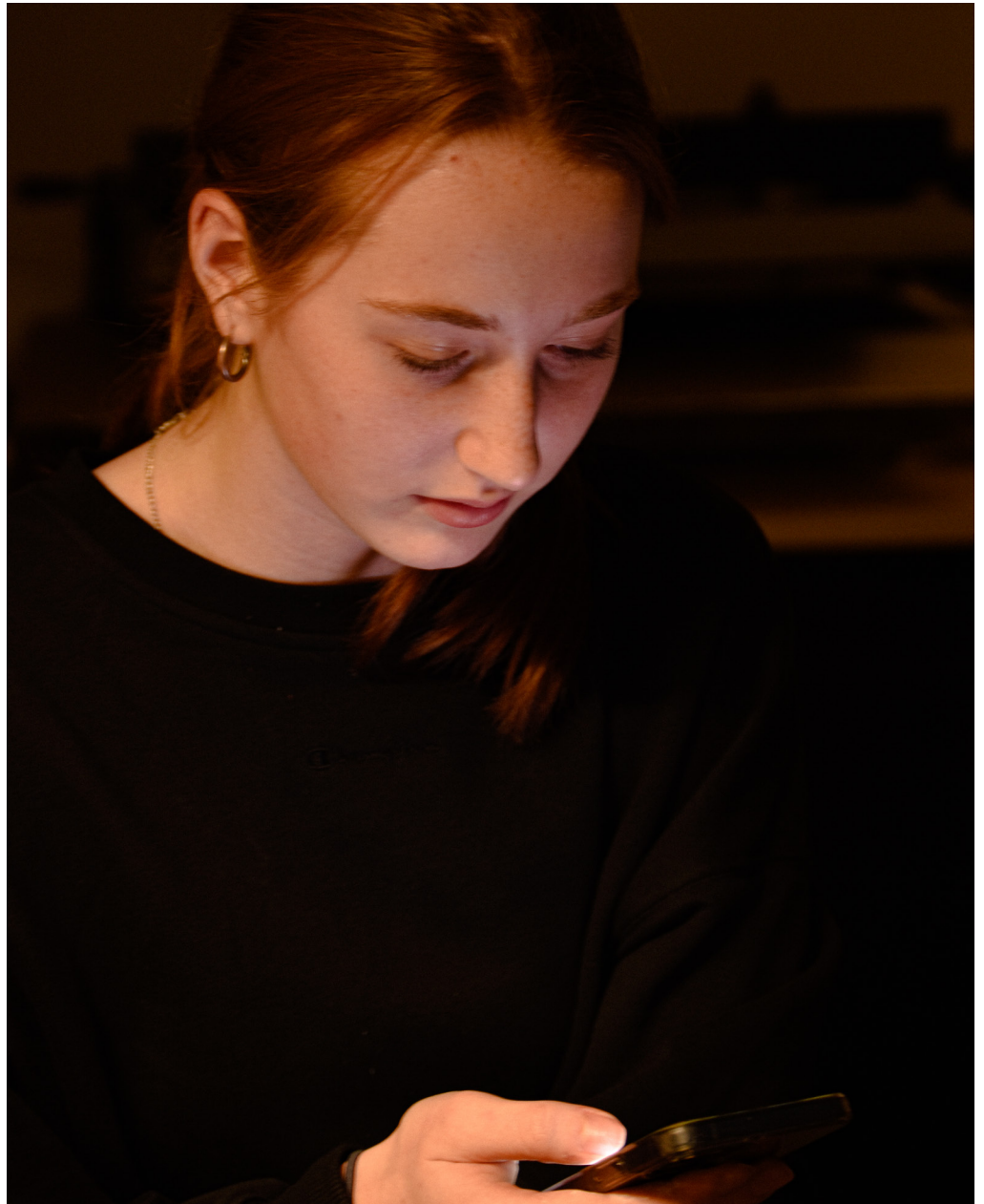


Photo by SARAH JANG '24.

The Whisper of Shadow Lake

By EMERY VITRANO '26

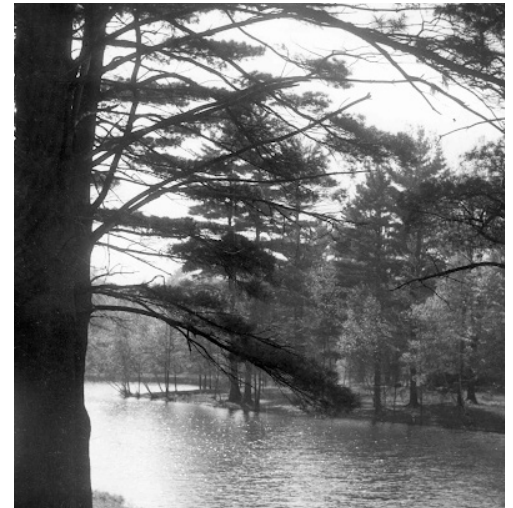
-1971-

Like an old memory, a black and white photograph depicts the sun shining brilliantly onto a lake. The stillness of the photo appeases the eyes, while the shadows display depth into a more concealed part of the lake. Hiding in the trees, a framed warming shed stands on the riverbank. It patiently waits for life, like an animal eyeing its prey. Built by students who attended the Northfield Mount Hermon school, the shed guards the lake like an angel as the trees cast shadows over it.



-1970-

Students and faculty float in the lake during a pleasant summer day. Past the haven of the roped swimming area, a raft sits out in the murky waters. The hungry lake bottom engulfs the swimmers' feet as they wade through the waters, home to hungry leeches.



-1936-

"Whatever is growing [on the lake] is some kind of invasive plant" - Peter Weis. Shadow Lake does not look the same as it once did, as a blanket of green covers its uninviting waters. Mother nature has taken control of the lake as it slowly dies away. Perhaps it could use some love, attention, and appreciation.



-1913-

An old memory of Shadow Lake illustrates a condition far from the current reality. The life seems to have vanished and the trees form a shield around the lake capturing it in time. The shades of gray paint half of a picture, leaving the imagination to paint the other half.



-1900-

Thirteen people, ice, and one big hole. As NMH is blanketed by snow and a surge of cold weather, students in their work jobs harvest ice used to store perishables.



-1965-

On a sunny day, thick, dark muck is dredged out from a crater of what used to be a lake. Two men stand by a truck gazing off into the distance. Perhaps they are concentrated at the lake monster hiding in the shadows or the machinery digging into the pit.



-1965-

"Pull Pull Pull," shouts from the boys in the annual rope pull echo across the lake bottom as students compete in a game of tug of war. In the background, three observers view the competition at a distance. In hopes of winning, the boys pull the rope with all their might in a century-long tradition. They jump up and down in celebration, their laughter heard from the heart of campus.

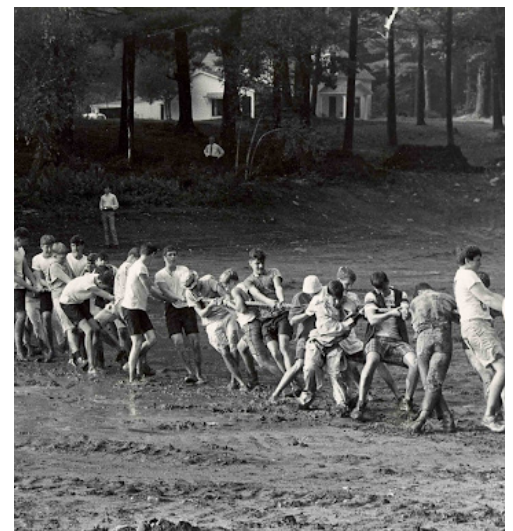


Photo by NMH Archives.



Illustration by JESSICA ZHANG '25.

The NMH Bookstore's Silent War Against Inflation

By JUNSANG RYU '27

It's 10:03 in the morning and A Block classes have just ended. From freshmen to seniors, students begin to fill the bookstore—all of a sudden, it's bustling with people. As two seemingly endless lines form along the counters, there is barely any room to move.

The school bookstore is always a popular destination for students. It offers a wide range of everyday essentials, such as school supplies, merchandise, snacks, and bottled drinks. However, one detail about the school store may come as a great wonder to many new students at NMH. Although the store features a wide variety of snacks and drinks, surprisingly, there aren't any price tags displayed for these items.

"I was really confused in the beginning. Essentially, I don't get why they don't have snack prices listed," says Joshua Nazaire '27. He also added, "The price of my Pepsi always changes." Another student at NMH, Aaryaman Rathor '24, said "I would like to know why there are prices displayed for the school merch but not the snacks."

Despite these complaints, there is a very good and legitimate reason why it's challenging for the store to display these prices. The answer lies in in-

flation and the skyrocketing rates of food prices.

According to the Consumer Price Index, food prices, especially those associated with junk food, rose 5.7% during the first six months of 2023. Nestle increased its prices by 9% during the first half of 2023, and Pepsi increased its prices by 15%. While an average bag of chips (16 oz) would have cost \$5.08 in 2021, it was worth \$6.41 in 2023. Due to such radical changes, it's not a surprise that NMH has not escaped inflation.

"We used to have prices listed for all of the snacks and drinks. But inflation kept affecting the snack prices and we couldn't simply change the price tags every time it did," said Frank Gibbons, the manager of the NMH school store.

Inflation is an essential part of understanding modern economics. The International Monetary Fund describes inflation as "The rate of increase in prices over a given period of time. Inflation is typically a broad measure, such as the overall increase in prices or the increase in the cost of living in a country." In this context, inflation at NMH refers to the increase in the cost of snack prices.

When inflation is low, the companies that produce snacks stamp the items' prices on the packag-

ing, making it convenient for consumers to check their prices. However, as food prices have risen significantly in recent years, many companies have stopped stamping prices on these items. With a mere increase of 2.4% over the past year, simple peanuts are one of the only items in the school store that wasn't impacted by this economic hazard.

It is important to note that the snack prices at NMH are lower than what they would be in the outside world.

"We try to provide our students with affordable food prices as much as possible. I would say the snack prices at NMH are slightly lower than an average convenience store. However, it's also important to consider the fact that the school store needs funding to operate and all of this money originates from our sales. Any additional profit, I believe, goes to running other parts of the school," added Gibbons.

Although it may come across as inconvenient, there won't be any pragmatic solution to this case unless the inflation of food prices is tackled nationally. The school bookstore is trying their best to provide the NMH community with affordable snack prices.

My Home is Where ...

By ANNA LAZORINA '26, Photos by ANNA LAZORINA '26

Blue armchairs, common area, Norton dorm, Northfield Mount Hermon. And one Sunday evening, we — teenagers from Korea, China, Germany, Ukraine and Russia — were doing the most common weekend activity at American boarding school: watching a movie and making popcorn. So similar and different at the same time. So lonely and sociable at the same time. So homesick and independent at that time. So free and tied to each other at the same time.

Pow! Khh! Krr! “Seems the popcorn is ready, guys!” Sam said, taking the pocket of popcorn out of the microwave and coming from the dorm’s kitchen to the common room. The others were already there: Dasha was sitting on one of the blue armchairs. She held a TV remote in her hands, switching channels. Emily lazily sat on the other chair, and Mocha (a faculty member’s dog) jumped on her lap. Hisu, coming from the shower, joined the girls and took a seat on the blue ottoman.

The previous day I had asked the girls to bring something that reminded them of home, and so that evening we were mainly talking about connections with our items and our personal definitions of home.

I took a mug and came to the girls, “What’s up?”

It was a tiny angel-toy her mom made for her. It's the family tradition: her grandma had an angel, so did her mom, and now it was her turn. It said Mimi on it: her sweet nickname from home. This angel was a sign of always being protected by family, despite how far she is.

- Emily -

“It’s hard to be an exchanger at a boarding school for one year, because there is always a rush. A rush to get a full experience and enjoy every bit of it. “I’ve known that I’d come to the USA for sophomore year since I was a child,” Emily said. “While my friends all went to England, which is a lot easier, we [Emily’s parents and her] thought that if I’m going for an exchange year, then it should be real. I feel like if you do a year abroad, I really want to be gone.” Emily didn’t go back home for long weekends and neither will she leave for spring break. It’s her only year, and she must get everything out of it.

“I know that when I’ll come back home, there will be no major changes. Everything will be just the same way it was before. And, to be honest, it scares me.” Emily records videos to her friends from home, who also went for an exchange year, every day in the evening and it’s weird to imagine that soon the people watching those videos will be people from NMH. Emily has 3 homes now: her family in Germany, old friends in England and new friends at NMH. “My home is where loved people are. So, if my friends are sitting in the dining hall, that is my safe place.”

Everyone makes new friends at school, but no one really talks about how quickly it can happen and how close you can become with people you’ve known only for a month. “I’m trying to convince dad to allow me to stay for another year... But he never will. I know it for sure.” She looked at the wall in front of the desk, covered with pictures from this year’s events: Gym Jam, the Halloween dance and TronBon.



It was a little carpet she got in the market in Hong Kong, with an image of a creamy rabbit candy on it. It's her favorite candy. Every day, when she comes back to her room, she's transported home for a short second.

- Sam -

“Sam, when I was at NMH...” the girl’s mother used to say often. She was trying to describe NMH and its beauty to her daughter. “I heard incredible stories about snow in New England,” Sam said and looked at the window. Ironically, there were no promised beautiful white landscape. Only puddles and mud. Back in Hong Kong, it was the stories about opportunities for skiing in New England that lit a fire in Sam’s eyes about moving to the USA.

Over a year, the meaning of NMH became much deeper to Sam. It’s about experience. Being a student in a Hong Kong day school, Sam always had to choose in between her interests: cello and skiing. And NMH gave her an opportunity not to choose, but to enjoy both.

Like most of the international students, it was a tough process adjusting to a new environment. Sam immersed herself into school life, joining orchestra, different sport teams and clubs. A dark-red bag with a cello was standing in the corner of the room with a huge backpack, packed with equipment for skiing standing nearby. A poster of the skyscrapers of Hong Kong was hanging on the wall. “As an international student here, it made me more proud of where I come from and of my culture. I want to share Hong Kong’s culture with everyone.”

Sam’s room looks extremely cozy. Fairy tale lights, LEDs and many plush toys reminded me of my home, but for Sam it’s just a pretty room and nothing more. “Hong Kong is definitely the only home for me, and I don’t think I’ll ever consider NMH one.” Sam’s home isn’t the place where most of her friends are and not the place where she spends most of her time. It’s neither a house in San Francisco her parents own, nor the Norton dorm at NMH where she currently “lives”. Sam’s own definition of home is where she was born.



It was a travel pillow, gray with two eyes on it, with whiskers and ears, making it look like a cat. For her it wasn't just a pillow to sleep on, but one to look at and remember her twin-sister, who gave it to her. So she won't feel lonely and will always be safe.

- Dasha -

The war between Russia and Ukraine made Dasha's life change 180 degrees. "One of the reasons I came here was a war, because my parents wanted me to be safe." Recently, Dasha's sister, Anya, moved to the Western part of Ukraine to study in college, because it's safer there. The girls' father is fighting. He chose to join the Ukrainian army forces when the war started to defend their land. Mom is left alone at home. "She isn't super romantic about it. Obviously, she misses us. But she understands it's safer for us."

It was the Global Scholars Program that helped Dasha to get to the school and get a scholarship. "I didn't know about this program at all before the war. The political situation in my country kind of pushed me towards this decision." Even though it's hard to be far away from her family, especially during such a period, and although Dasha is constantly on her phone, checking on her dad, it really gives her opportunities she had never dreamed of before.

Here at NMH, Dasha feels like a link between the US and outside worlds. "Here in the US, some people aren't even aware of what's happening in the world." And so, Dasha tries to bring a sense of reality by reposting videos from home about what is really happening and sharing trustworthy websites and news channels. She's always welcome to answer any of the questions people have.

Dasha has a really clear definition of her home: it's where her family is. "I don't feel like NMH will ever become my home, simply because my twin and parents aren't here."



That red-blue hoodie was special to her. "Sometimes I don't feel I belong anywhere," she said, "but this hoodie's shape and colors remind me that I'm a third-culture kid."

- Hisu -

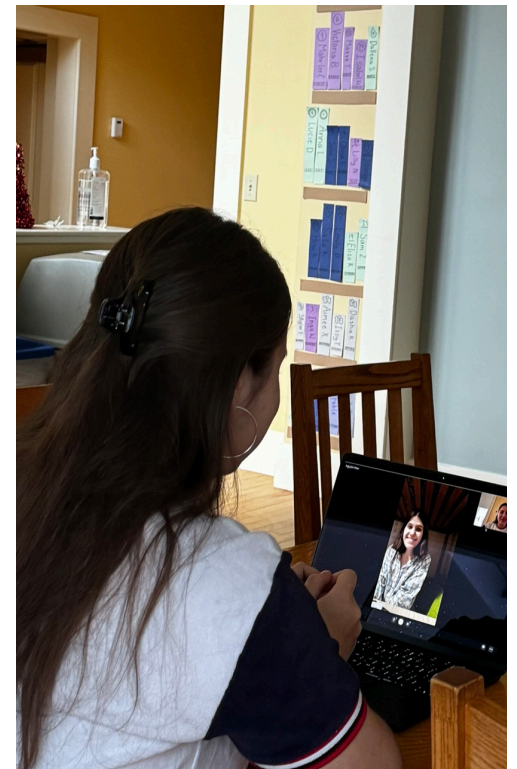
"My transition in Hong Kong was difficult: I spoke little to no English and little to no Chinese. It was just my family and I." Once Hisu got used to new life in Hong Kong, they moved back to Korea, and those moves happened a couple of times. "Honestly, I feel that NMH is the only place where I feel belonging, because I never had this kind of relationship with Korea or Hong Kong."

Hisu's childhood was unique but hard: the little girl and her family moved a lot. "I remember that my only goal in life all the time was making new friends."

"I was contemplating a lot about my identity because as a person from Korea ethnically, living in a foreign country, it's kind of [like] losing sense of who you are, because you can't really relate to locals anywhere." Hisu uses the term "third culture kid", when relating to herself. And it seems that you'd imagine Hisu's transition here at NMH to be very smooth and easy. However, she struggled with connecting herself here with other Chinese and Korean students, because she "is neither of those."

Over time, real friends managed to prove to Hisu that what is most important is her personality and the energy she brings to people. One phrase from her close friend completely changed Hisu's view on sense of belonging, "I think it's really cool that you can identify yourself with both Korean culture and Hong Kong culture and you don't have to be able to completely identify with the locals. It's just you what makes you you."

Hisu doesn't have her own definition of home. "I think you can never really perfectly belong to a place. It's more of a question of how you feel at a certain place. And in order to achieve it, you have to be in balance with yourself."



It was a peaceful Sunday evening. 7 pm. The movie finished as well as the popcorn. Mocha was running in the common room, trying to find some popcorn we accidentally dropped. In the next 15 minutes, other girls arrived, and slowly the common room filled up with people. As usual, it was two groups. Group 1 was represented by Americans. Group 2 was us and other international students, who came recently. We exchanged glances and laughed: nothing was changing. It could be your 4th year at high school and you might be as fluent in English as a native speaker, but something will stay the same forever — in spite of completely different backgrounds, we shared something in common: we were international students.

"... In spite of completely different backgrounds, we shared something in common: we were international students."

Average Joes United

By SOREN ANDERSON-FLYNN '25

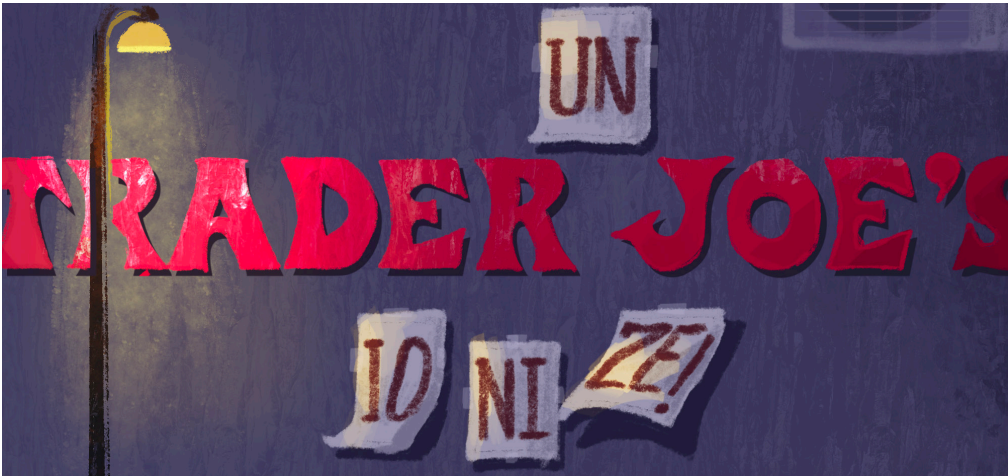


Illustration by JESSICA ZHANG '25.

People get a lot of fantastical ideas when they sit down to watch TV. Grown men think that they could be better football players than professional athletes and children start to imagine that they'll grow up to be superheroes. When Maeg Yosef turned on the TV, she started to genuinely believe that she could unionize her workplace.

What was her source of inspiration? The NBC sitcom *Superstore*.

Superstore, a recent comedy about a fictional big-box retailer in St. Louis, was the show of choice for Yosef and her wife during a period of weeks in 2021. The show's 4th and 5th seasons center around an employee unionization drive. Crucial to the drive were issues of corporate cruelty, intimidation, and exploitatively low pay and benefits.

During the nights and subsequent mornings after watching *Superstore*, Yosef — who lives in Greenfield, Massachusetts — couldn't get the workers' bravery and willingness to stand up for each other out of her head. For days on end, she would discuss the storyline with her wife during their dark early-morning drives to work. Eventually, the reason that the arc stuck in her mind crystallized for her: the show was telling her that her workplace could unionize too.

Initially, Yosef was hesitant about the idea. She worried that she'd be ridiculed for talking about unionizing, and even worse, she knew that if she broached the subject with the wrong people, her job would be at risk. She promised herself that if no one seemed interested, she'd drop the idea. But unable to quash her hope, she pushed forward and began the process of organizing.

The unionization effort at the Trader Joe's (TJs) in Hadley, Massachusetts — the store where Yosef has worked for nearly 20 years — was inspired by much more than *Superstore* or even just Yosef. As is true with almost every unionization drive, a main force behind this campaign was problems involving workers' pay and working conditions.

According to Yosef, "We [Trader Joe's in Hadley] have folks on Medicaid and food stamps. Our wages are just not enough for many folks to survive." Yosef also spoke about the conditions that workers in her store suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic. "When the pandemic first hit, working in the store was like working in a mosh pit, and the company's response was 'you can't wear masks, you

can't wear gloves, [because] we don't want to make customers uncomfortable.'"

This policy led many Trader Joe's workers to question their faith in the company. "The pandemic really put things into perspective for us workers," Yosef said. "Like, why am I at work risking my life, why am I just being used, what's the point?" These questions became the motivator, along with *Superstore*, for Yosef's organizing.

In early 2022, Yosef began having hushed conversations with her fellow Hadley TJs workers about the possibility of starting a union. She discovered that other members of her store shared her concerns and were also thinking about organizing. Unionizing soon became a group effort and a number of the store's workers formed into an organizing committee. The committee featured workers with all levels of experience at the store: from people like Yosef and longtime Hadley TJs employee Jamie Edwards, to Mitchell Redfield, who had only been at the store for a couple months. After multiple months, the organizing committee had made enough progress in convincing their fellow workers about the benefits of unionizing that in May, they felt ready to publicly announce their intent to hold a union election.

Organizing was not a straightforward process, but according to Redfield, the idea of unionization slowly gained momentum due in large part to the young employees of the store. "The younger people [in our store] are very pro-labor. Of the people in our store that are anti-union, the youngest one of them is probably in their 40s or 50s. Everybody who's been against the union is way older."

On July 28th, 2022, after winning its union election, the Hadley Trader Joe's became the first of the chain's 564 locations to unionize.

There's been an uptick in U.S. labor organizing in recent years. Before the Trader Joe's effort, high-profile and nationally covered union drives took place across the country at stores like Starbucks and Amazon. These union drives, many of which revolved around similar issues as the eventual Trader Joe's drive, served as "beacons of inspiration" to workers across the economy, Yosef said.

According to Harris Freeman, a professor of labor law at Western New England University and the UMass Amherst Labor Center, unionization

drives have dramatically increased in recent years because of the pandemic. Workers have gained "a different sense of their own importance and impact on the economy," after being forced to risk their lives so their companies could turn a profit, he said.

Wanting to take advantage of their importance, many workers have turned to unionization because of the collective power that it provides. "If you go to your boss individually and say, 'Boss, I want a raise,' your boss can say, you're so unappreciative, you're fired," Harris told me. "But if two of you go to your boss and say it together, the very same thing that is protected by law, as union activity."

Reinforcing a point that Redfield made, Harris believes that young people in particular are trending towards unionization. "It [unionization] is just the systemic response to the perception that one isn't being treated fairly. And this perception is especially common among young people who have undergone a pandemic, multiple economic crises, and skyrocketing income inequality during their short working lives," he said.

Hearing all of this compelled me to visit the Hadley Trader Joe's myself, but when I walked into the store on November 20th, I realized that I had forgotten something crucial: it was three days before Thanksgiving. And you never go shopping right before Thanksgiving.

The store was a battlefield. What felt like thousands of people crammed themselves into narrow aisles, breathing on each other, occasionally glaring at each other, and squabbling over bottles of coconut water (organic, obviously). An army of shopping carts jangled aggressively throughout the store. While I was standing in the produce aisle, breathing in this pungent aroma of chaos, I felt one of these carts strike me square in the side.

FOOM! I tumbled backwards, flailing my arms for support, and accidentally knocked down a few loaves of gluten-free bread. When I gained my bearings, I saw that my unwitting attacker was a little brown-haired girl, no older than seven or eight. She stood wide-eyed, stunned at what had happened. Very quickly, a woman I presume to be the girl's mother rushed over to me and apologized for allowing her daughter to drive the cart while the store was so busy.

I assured the woman that it was no problem, and while I did, I glanced back at where I had fallen down. And that's the first time I got a good glimpse of what I went there to see: the workers.

Within seconds, a man wearing a long-sleeved black shirt with a Trader Joe's logo on it had materialized out of thin air and picked up the bread I knocked down. He acted like nothing out of the ordinary had transpired. I admired his willingness to act so quickly to solve a problem that others had created.

Over the next two hours, I stood in the store. I was pretending to shop, but I spent most of my time observing the workers. I watched them counteract the general mood of anxiety with an air of tranquility everywhere they went. They stopped conflict before it began and they often treated customers with an underserved level of cordiality. By and large, they displayed a type of kindness that's uncommon today.

It's easy, and somewhat logical, to attribute the store's positive atmosphere to Trader Joe's itself. TJs prides itself on excellent customer service and a positive, even progressive, ethos. A 2019 article in Forbes Magazine praised Trader Joe's by saying "From the Hawaiian shirt uniforms to the bright murals and welcoming store layout, Trader Joe's is truly one of a kind." Glowing reviews like this have helped the chain accrue more than 10 billion dollars in revenue each year.

However, Redfield believes that the corporation has actually done little to create its positive reputation. "Their brand is the friendly neighborhood grocery store because of the crews," she said. Trader Joe's may have been able to attract a young, positive, and progressive workforce because of their Hawaiian shirts and bright murals, but since these symbols are purely aesthetic, they don't actually say anything about the company or the executives behind the brand. The people at Trader Joe's may be progressive, but is the corporation?

Freeman doesn't think so. In fact, he doesn't think any large companies can be truly progressive. "There's often a sort of a popular thought about certain types of employers being bad employers, but others [being] not so bad, like 'Walmart is really bad, but Target seems better,'" he said. "And I don't think that's really true... When it comes down to the economic bottom line, they all have an incentive." That incentive is to maximize profit and limit labor costs. And in order to do this, companies across the world do the same thing: union bust. Despite the flowers, Trader Joe's is no exception to this.

Trader Joe's demonstrated its willingness to union bust after the Hadley store announced its attempt to unionize in May, 2022. After the organizing announcement, the store was immediately met with a barrage of anti-union rhetoric and propaganda.

According to Freeman, this almost always happens whenever workers attempt to unionize. "It's just very challenging to engage in an organizing drive because it's pretty normative [for workers] to experience intimidating conduct. Workers are routinely subjected to an anti-union diatribe from their employers, which is protected as free speech under the law."

These anti-union diatribes often take the form of "captive audience meetings": mandatory meetings in which employers promote anti-union rhetoric and tell workers why they shouldn't unionize. According to Redfield, during captive audience meetings in the Hadley Trader Joe's, workers were told that unionization would impose "outlandish rules and regulations" on the store and that it would "mess up" the atmosphere of the workplace.

But despite these obstacles, in July, the Hadley TJs voted to successfully unionize. The final tally was 45-31 in favor of unionization, and after this, the store decided to form their own independent union, Trader Joe's United (TJU). Edwards became TJU's president, Yosef became the communications director, and Redfield took the role of recording secretary. Just two weeks after Hadley unionized, a Trader Joe's in Minnesota voted to unionize with TJU, and the union has been adding more stores to its membership ever since.

However, nearly 18 months later, TJU is still fighting for their first contract. The union has accused the company of negotiating in bad faith. TJU leadership believes this is a purposeful tactic. "A common union busting strategy is to drag things on and then push for a decertification vote, hoping that peoples' morale will have broken," said Redfield.

"Labor law in the United States lets employers engage in practices that are marginally legal," Freeman says, "and it allows companies to use illegal tactics that don't result in much penalty or remedy

for the workers in those situations." Essentially, labor law ties workers' hands behind their backs during unionization drives.

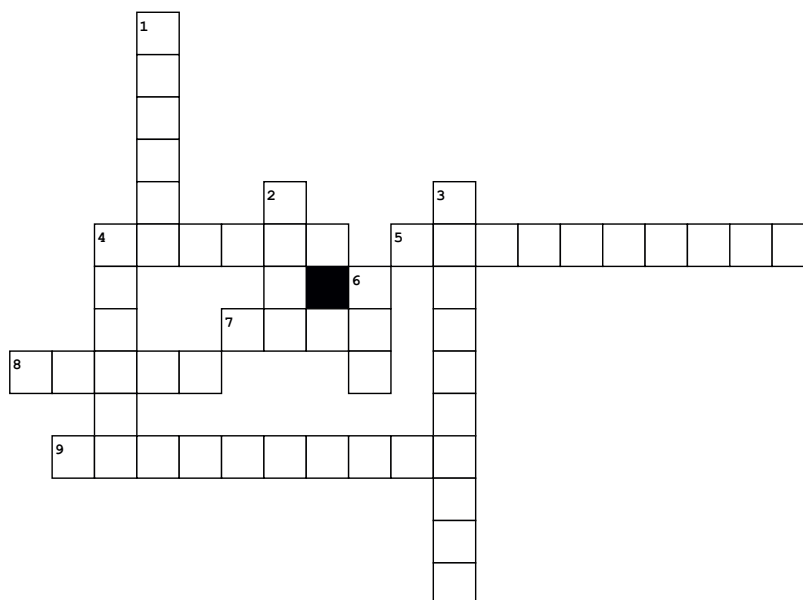
But still, since TJU has already overcome captive audience meetings and anti-union sentiment to get to this point, it feels more than possible that they could win the uphill battle for a first contract, too.

About a week after my first reporting trip to the Hadley TJs, I found Mitchell Redfield stocking the shelves of the store. Wearing a pink Trader Joe's sweater and adorned with pink hoop earrings and two silver nose rings, she walked up and down a refrigerated aisle filled with dairy products and drinks, moving crates of new produce and straightening bottles of coconut water as she went. The liquid in the bottles made sloshing sounds as she moved them, so she didn't notice me standing a mere few yards away.

I wanted to walk up to her and talk to her about my reporting, but out of fear that she'd be reprimanded for chatting with a customer, I left her alone. I stepped away and let her to move to another part of the store.

After I made sure that she was in another aisle, I walked to where she had been working and picked out a bottle of organic Trader Joe's brand coconut water. I brought it to a cash register and exchanged pleasantries with an older gentleman who rang up the beverage for me. After I purchased the bottle, I asked the man if he happened to have a sharpie I could borrow. He said "yes," and handed me one. Using the sharpie, I scribbled out the word "organic" from the bottle and replaced it with something more meaningful: "united." I then gave back the marker, took a sip of some Trader Joe's United coconut water, and walked out into the brisk November night.

2023 NMH Recap



Across

4. HUM 2 Travel Program Destination
5. New school spirit sports event
7. The main character's first name in Les Mis
8. 2023 Class Orator
9. '23 Dwight night theme

Down

1. Semi-finalist fall sports team
2. Arts gala theme
3. Inanimate object actor in a one-act play
4. Cross-country pie race costumes
6. 2023 Hogolympics Winner abbr.



Lamplighter

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