

THE COLUMNS

by pupils; for pupils

HSD's Newsletter: Issue 95

Well done to the Form 4s for making it through prelims! I know it can be difficult to generate motivation, but well done for completing all of your exams. While school and exams are important, remembering the bigger picture is always crucial. There is time to improve before the actual exams and maintaining your mental health is always of utmost importance. I would also like to thank the PSHE Department for organising talks from 'stay safe, stay alive'. They spread a profoundly important message to the Form 6s on safe driving.



Editor, Ruby

This Week in Photos



COP 28: JUST ANOTHER PR STUNT?

Jack Mitchell

A little over a year ago, I wrote about COP27, which took place in Egypt. I ended with the slightly pessimistic question: ‘will the few commitments made be enough?’. I had hoped that world leaders would have committed to slightly more than they had or invested more in their current programmes, but instead we have actually seen the opposite in many cases. And COP27 was held in Egypt, a poor country that has many issues with climate change. COP28 is being held in the United Arab Emirates, where the President of the event is also the head of the national oil company – which produces over 3 million barrels of oil every day.

Despite the clear conflict of interest, the UAE was allowed to host COP28 (Conference of the Parties – 28th event). The real controversy began when the BBC found evidence that the COP28 organisers were intending to use the green summit to further their oil production by making oil deals with countries such as Australia and Canada. A spokesman for the Middle Eastern country did not deny that oil deals may play a part in the United Nations’ 28th Climate Conference. The country has a low chance of succeeding in its goal to become net zero by 2050, primarily because they are trying to ramp up their oil production to reach 5 million barrels per day in just a few years.

Nearly 170 world leaders will be attending, a significant increase from the mere 110 who arrived in Egypt. Among those who are going are the Indian PM Narendra Modi, Brazilian President Lula da Silva, and Presidents Macron and Scholz, who are in charge of the two largest EU countries. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron and King Charles III will all be attending the conference – it was revealed that they all arrived in the UAE for the climate preservation in separate private jets. The Pope, Francis, had meant to travel the over-2500 mile journey from the Vatican, but cancelled due to catching the flu just days before he was set to travel. He won’t be the only head of state missing from the global summit. The premiers of the two largest economies in the world – and the largest emitters of greenhouse gases – China and the United States will both be notably absent from the event. Joe Biden won’t make an appearance in Dubai, citing his schedule being filled up with the conflict between his ally Israel and Hamas and his presidential election campaign. This comes after he said that climate change is ‘the ultimate threat to humanity’, and him attending both COPs of his presidency so far. His Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, however, has never attended a COP summit, and so was not expected to.

COP28 comes after the football World Cup held in Qatar last year and the innumerable Formula One races hosted by Middle Eastern countries that emit vast quantities of greenhouse gases and commit many human rights abuses. While I have used examples of ‘Sportswashing’ – using sports to improve a country or brand’s image – the principle remains the same as in the UAE: hosting a large, globally recognised event in an attempt to stop the world thinking of them as a ‘petrol state’.

We can only hope that COP28 will be more effective than its predecessors at changing opinions and that oil deals won’t be the only commitments made that affect the climate.

Unwrapping Christmas Too Early?

Roena Seenarine

As we approach the end of the 11th month of the year, it becomes more apparent to us that the festive season is approaching. I mean, how could it not? From the second you walk into a supermarket, you are bombarded with an array of everything from candy canes to light-up stockings. Some may say that this is for the benefit of us, the consumers, but what if we are being robbed of joy, while at the same time, the true meaning of Christmas is slowly slipping away? It almost feels like, as soon as Halloween celebrations are over, this immense pressure is put on us to start preparing for the big day; buy presents, decorate, plan events etc. It's almost as if every year these greedy companies one week earlier than the last, I mean September? Are they trying to drive us crazy? There are some major issues with this holiday havoc that need to be addressed.

First off, this intense dramatisation of the lead-up to Christmas ends up spoiling the once-magical day by either overshadowing it or due to having Christmas shoved in our faces for months on end we are practically sick of it by the time it actually rolls around. These major corporations purposely create this superficial, unrealistic idea of what Christmas is supposed to feel like in hopes that we'll turn to them in desperate search of the perfect day. We are forced to sit through adverts that contain images such as food stacked up to the ceiling and the "joy" on children's faces after unwrapping exactly what they wanted. This is simply just not the reality for most of us, which in comparison can make a day with amazing food, good company and a few nice gifts seem dull in comparison.

Another factor that we must consider is that the UK is filled with millions of people who aren't Christian or don't even have any religious beliefs at all. While for a lot of us, Christmas holds many happy childhood memories or deep significance, it's crucial that, as a multicultural and diverse society, we acknowledge and respect the traditions and beliefs of those who don't partake in Christmas festivities. Prematurely flooding public spaces with Christmas decorations and products may inadvertently create an exclusive atmosphere that would make non-celebrants feel like outsiders for an extended period with no real reason.

Advent calendars and Christmas trees are examples of Christmas traditions that have held a valuable place in our society for hundreds of years. Like in many other cultures, we mark the significance of the day with a variety of different customs. For example, an advent calendar is supposed to signal the countdown to Christmas from the first day of December right up to the event and during these days we take on putting up our trees and shopping for our loved ones. However, our seasonal experience is diluted by early celebration which results in the build-up and anticipation being diminished. The hasty speed at which we are forced to embrace the holiday spirit can lead to Christmas-related experiences being more spread out than they should be, which causes the charm to wear thin before the actual celebration.

Finally, celebrating Christmas months in advance is distracting from other events. In the time when we should be focussing our efforts on global issues and cultural developments we have no choice but to waste our time thinking about the day. It becomes challenging to concentrate on the matters that require our immediate consideration when we are being forced to. Not to mention the vast amount of other occasions that are skipped over simply because their scale doesn't compare to that of Christmas. Events with cultural, historical, or social significance often take a backseat in public discourse as the Christmas frenzy takes centre stage, contributing to a potential loss of appreciation for the ongoing of the world within the winter months.

The bottom line is the premature celebration of Christmas not only risks diluting the magic of the holiday but also imposes unrealistic expectations, creating a superficial ideal. This commercial frenzy undermines the authentic joy of the season and distracts us from diverse cultural celebrations. In our multicultural society, inclusivity should be prioritised, respecting the beliefs of those who do not partake in Christmas festivities. Moreover, early festivities diminish the significance of cherished traditions, eroding the anticipation and charm associated with the holiday season. As we navigate this Christmas chaos, striking a balance is crucial for preserving the true spirit of Christmas and appreciating all it has to offer.

Junior Eurovision

Izzy Clark

Eurovision - that glitter-covered, slightly-camp pop spectacle that has in equal parts delighted and horrified audiences across Europe (and Australia) for over half a century - is something of a cultural touchstone in Britain. Throughout the years, we've been both last and first in turn, placing 2nd and 2nd-from-last just 12 months apart. But whilst we've won Eurovision five (five!) times, where we've never reached the dizzying heights of first place is at a slightly-smaller though no less thrilling edition of the contest - Junior Eurovision. (Thankfully, we've never placed last there either). Since the UK's return to the competition in 2022, after a seventeen-year hiatus, we've only been rising in the ranks. We've never been truly terrible at Junior Eurovision, either, placing 3rd and 2nd in 2003 and 2004, and managing a respectable 14th in 2005 (3rd from last). Last year's entrant, Freya Skye, secured an impressive 5th place in Yerevan, Armenia. This year's performers, Stand Uniqu3 (consisting of Hayla and Maisie, 12, and Yasmin, 13), did even better, narrowly missing the podium in 4th place. For those of you who didn't spend your Sunday watching Junior Eurovision like I did, here's a recap of what you did (and didn't miss), featuring my enlightening commentary.

Spain - Sandra Valero, "Loviu". Actually adorable. As the self-designated representative of Advanced Higher Spanish, I feel automatically obliged to enjoy any Spanish language media I come across. Well done on 2nd place!

Malta - Yulan, "Stronger". What a voice! Excellent staging and some very impressive vocals, and a good job on the stage presence out there alone. Definitely deserved better than 10th place.

Ukraine - Anastasia Dymyd, "Kvitka". So cute. As the youngest in the event, at 9 years old, Anastasia did such a phenomenal job representing her country on such a large stage, and is such a good performer at such a young age. Congratulations on 5th!

Ireland - Jessica McKean feat. Sophie Lennon, "Aisling". Wow! I really like this song, and think it deserved so much better than last place. Irish is such a lovely language, and the costumes were actually beautiful. Hoping for a Scots Gaelic entry soon from Scotland.

United Kingdom - Stand Uniqu3, "Back To Life". Unironically, I love this song. It's everything fun, lively and cheesy that a Eurovision song should be, and the girls did such a great job at bringing this dance-worthy number to life. 4th place (but winners in my heart, of course!)

North Macedonia - Tamara Grujeska, "Kazi mi, kazi mi koj". Contrary to popular consensus, I actually loved the whole look and idea of this performance. Tamara is a great singer and really sold the performance and aesthetic for me. Completely robbed in 12th place.

Estonia - Arhanna, "Hoiame kokku". Again, another powerful voice! And at 11 years old! Junior Eurovision might now appreciate ballads as much as me, but Estonia have been putting out some solid music to both editions of Eurovision for last few years.

Armenia - Yan Girls, "Do It My Way". This is how you do Junior Eurovision. EDM? Check. Neon colours? Check. A dance break? Check. A giant dragon statue? Check, for some reason. This was loud, sugar-fuelled chaos, and I loved it. Well done on 3rd, girls!

Poland - Maya Krzyzewska, "I Just Need A Friend". Just wow. Poland might not have had the best track record recently, but I liked this song a lot, and thought that Maya did a good job singing in two different languages. A well-earned 6th place.

Georgia - Anastasia and Ranina, "Over The Sky". I loved the costuming and staging for this entry, even if it was a bit avant-garde and weird. The singing was very good too, and I think the three definitely deserved better than 14th place.

Portugal - Júlia Machado, "Where I Belong". Beautiful, refined, graceful and certainly deserving of better than the 13th place it received. Portugal excel at fairly minimalistic, eerie music, and Júlia embodied that idea perfectly.

France - Zoé Clazure, "Coeur". The French know how to party! From hosting a phenomenal event to sending another great entry a second year in a row, this event was a display of Francophone brilliance. Well done Zoé for a well-earned win!

Albania - Viola Gjyzeli, "Bota Ime". Elegant and sophisticated, Albania's Eurovision entries always bring a flavour of cultural beauty to the stage, year after year, and this was no exception. The staging was beautiful, too.

Italy - Melissa and Ranya, "Un mondo guisto". I love a duet, and I love live piano, so this was right up my street. Both girls did a lovely job of this performance, and rightfully secured themselves a pride-worthy eleventh place.

Germany - Fia, "Ohne Worte". Sign language in Eurovision! Whilst Fia's vocals could have been a tiny bit clearer, she did a brilliant job at bringing sign language into the world of Eurovision, and definitely made her country and the signing community proud.

Netherlands - Sep and Jasmijn, "Holding On To You". What a way to end the show! The performances came to a close with a bang, complete with a live DJ and lots of bright, flashing lights, bringing club atmosphere to the French evening.

It was certainly a night to remember, and congratulations once again to Stand Uniqu3 for making the UK proud, and to Zoé Clazure for her hard-earned win.

This week in photos: continued



A Short History Of Christmas Trees

Megan Beckham

Today, Christmas trees have become an iconic symbol of the holiday season. From homes to Christmas markets to appearances in art, every year Christmas trees are lit and decorated for the holidays, but the tradition and idea of a tree goes way farther back than ever expected. What has become a normalised and well-known tradition has been around in some form for quite a while, is not even associated with the holiday to begin with.



The general idea of Christmas trees dates back to the ancient Egyptians, and had nothing to do with the actual holiday, but was the start of what would become a symbol for it. Come the end of December, the Egyptians would decorate their homes with lots of plants and greenery, as they believed the winter solstice (the shortest day of the year) meant that their sun god, Ra, was ill and at his weakest. The plants they decorated were then used to symbolise prosperity and recovery, and to serve as a reminder that spring and summer months would come again, bringing prosperity. Forewords on, evergreens became a symbol of life, hope, and the notion that good things were coming.

The notion of actually decorating trees for the Christmas season, and what has evolved into a more modern idea of a Christmas tree is thought to have started in Germany sometime during the 16th century. This is when the idea of trees became more associated with both the holiday and the religious element of it, as Many people would often bring trees in to their homes and decorate them with candles, representing stars, as a sign of faith.

Christmas trees started to rapidly gain more recognition and popularity in the UK in the 1840s after a portrait of Queen Victoria, her husband Prince Albert (who was born in Germany) and their family around a Christmas tree was printed in the London newspapers. Queen Victoria was very popular amongst the general public, and things instantly became fashionable when used by the royal family.

The tradition was quickly adopted not only in the UK but eventually made its way to America as well, as Christmas trees became more and more popular, eventually turning into the timeless symbol it is today

PUZZLE OF THE WEEK: SOLUTIONS

Neil Bhat

Last week's solutions:

Zara King from F5 listed out all of the palindromes in the given range, then counted them to get the correct answer of 108. This takes lots of time, effort and care, and should be highly commended.

Dr Smith of the maths department solved the problem in a faster way, then generalised it. He wrote:

“Clearly, 1-9 are all trivial palindromes, so there are 9 of those. Two-digit palindromes must be of form AA, and there are 9 of those too. Three-digit palindromes must be of the form ABA where A is {1-9} and B is {0-9} so there are 90 options. Hence there are $9 + 9 + 90 = 108$ palindromes in the range 1-999 Let's take it further for fun... Four digits: ABBA (you could name a band that!) must be 90 options again Five digits: ABCBA: $9 \times 10 \times 10 = 900$ options (no leading zeroes!) six digits: ABCCBA 900 options again Seven digits: ABCDCBA will then be 9000 So for seven digits we have

$$\begin{aligned} &9 + 9 + 90 + 90 + 900 + 900 + 9000 \\ &= 9(1 + 1 + 10 + 10 + 100 + 100 + 1000) = 9(1222) \end{aligned}$$

Or, in general for the number of palindromes in the range $1 - (10^n - 1)$, there will be:

- If n is even, i.e. $n = 2k$, then the number will be $9 \times (\text{the integer made of } k \text{ 2s})$
- If n is odd, i.e. $n = 2k + 1$, then the number will be $9 \times (\text{the integer made of } k \text{ followed by } k+1 \text{ 2s})$

I enjoyed this solution, and used a similar method to compute the correct answer when writing the problem.

PUZZLE OF THE WEEK

Neil Bhat

The problem for this week is as follows:

You have 2 gladiators. They have 'strengths' of 25 and 75 initially. You know your opponent also has 2 gladiators, whose strengths also sum to 100. You don't know the individual strengths of the opponent's gladiators, but every positive integer combination of strengths is equally likely.

You and your opponent each put one gladiator at a time into the ring to fight. In a fight, if a gladiator is stronger than their opponent, they win, and their strength increases by the strength of their vanquished opponent.

If they lose, they are eliminated. If they have equal strengths, a coin is flipped to decide the winner. You win if you defeat all of the opponent's gladiators. You must pick which of your gladiators goes first. Your opponent is also playing logically.

Which choice gives the best chance of victory?



EDITORS' NOTE

Congratulations to the Form 4s for completing their prelims! With dissertations, competitions and applications piling up, it's easy to forget that it's almost Christmas (as close as December 1st can be). Whenever you start celebrating, whether that be with decorations, food or parties, it's important to remember how lucky we all are to be able to enjoy ourselves like this. As Mr Clarke said in the Form 5 and 6 assembly this week, it's vital to be good, be kind, and have hope.

Editor Izzy

Have a fab weekend!

THE COLUMNS TEAM