



E-Zine 2022

Semper Juvenis

Welcome to the E-zine 2022

Headteacher's welcome

As my first year as Headteacher of King Edward VI Aston School draws to a close, I am reminded that there are still areas of school life to which I have not yet contributed. The e-zine is a prime example and on reading back-issues of this famed online publication, I am struck by the quality of the journalism and the technical know-how demonstrated by our students. The e-zine fulfils a unique role in our communications portfolio; it enables students to demonstrate their inquisitive nature across a variety of digital and traditional formats, culminating in a digital publication which is varied, colourful and full of life. In many ways it represents the future of publishing, as paper-based and less ecologically-friendly formats continue to lose ground.

This year has been one of the most awe-inspiring and educational of my career. To assume the leadership of our wonderful school is an honour and privilege. I can't express this adequately in words. To really experience life at Aston, you have to stand on the touch-line of the rugby field, watch the enthusiasm of competitors at House competitions, observe the seriousness of exam preparation in the study rooms and watch the hands shoot up in lessons when the teacher asks a question. When you combine talented teachers and committed support staff with gifted students in an environment which has witnessed learning for almost 140 years, you're bound to see a great result. I've been fortunate enough to see this happen on a daily basis and it's only appropriate that I thank the staff and students of Aston for making this an effortless outcome of life at this school.

I commend the work of the editorial team who have brought this issue of the e-zine to you and wish you all the very best for a restful summer break.

With my best wishes

M Brady
Headteacher



E-Team 2022

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Interview with Ms Ritson

What is your favourite appetiser or comfort food?

Crisps. I would go so far as to say I have an addiction. Current favourite is Giant Wotsits.

Why did you stop teaching English so much?

The Head of Sixth Form role meant a cut in teaching hours. I still have two GCSE classes and a key stage 3 class, plus I teach all of year 7 drama.

In your opinion, what is the most beneficial extra-curricular activity for a student looking to go to university?

To read! Every student can read around their chosen degree and will then thrive when it comes to writing personal statements, interviews or just chatting with like-minded people. You can also read outside of your subjects or listen to podcasts just to become more aware of the world and develop yourself as a person.

What is the best book you have ever read and why?

What an impossible question! Some of my top favourites are: *The Life of Pi* (a great adventure story and exploration of religious choices,) *The Day Of the Triffids* (a 1950s dystopia about violent plants who can walk) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (an essential read exploring racial tensions and justice set in 1930s USA). I love fiction and also recently finished a great new novel by Amor Towles called *The Lincoln Highway*, a superb coming of age story about four teens travelling across 1950s USA. I am currently finishing, and have spent some time crying whilst reading, *Hamnet* by Maggie O'Farrell, a poignant reimagining of Shakespeare's family life and death of his son. I also have an Audible account so will often have two books on the go, listening to one in the car and reading something else at home.

What is your favourite song and what was the best gig you've ever been to?

Again, a very tricky question! I have seen most bands that I love over the years. One of my favourite songs is *Train in Vain* by The Clash, despite it being released in the same year I was born. If I had a time machine, they are the band I would go back and see. I am currently listening to Tigercub and Royal Blood a lot and saw the latter recently for the second time. Even though they are a two-man band, they make a lot of noise! A long time ago I saw Amy Whitehouse a few months before she died and it was a sad gig as she was very late, forgot lyrics and looked lost. I have seen Muse a few times and highly recommend them as they put on an excellent show.



Interview With Ms Ritson

Have you ever smoked?

No. Tried it. Thought it must be worse than drowning

What is your funniest memory from your time at university?

A rainy afternoon, with little to do, so we attempted to fit the smallest people in our halls of residence inside small cupboards and drawers. I was one of them.

Do you have the authority to open the side gate early for 6th formers?

I do not. Why would anyone want to leave early anyway

What are the biggest changes you've seen in your time at the school?

I have seen a lot of staff changes, which is quite a natural thing in a workplace, including my own English department, making me currently the longest serving English teacher. I have seen many building changes, including E6 (the geography room) once being the drama studio, the careers room being remodelled into the Sixth Form laptops area and the west basement staff study room remodelled to become Learning Support. I have seen curriculum changes and new specs, the creation of a Mandarin department and the loss of Sixth Form enrichment opportunities due to cuts in funding (how they all loved to do cooking!) I have also seen a lot of stray cats wander across the school and eventually get rehomed by staff.

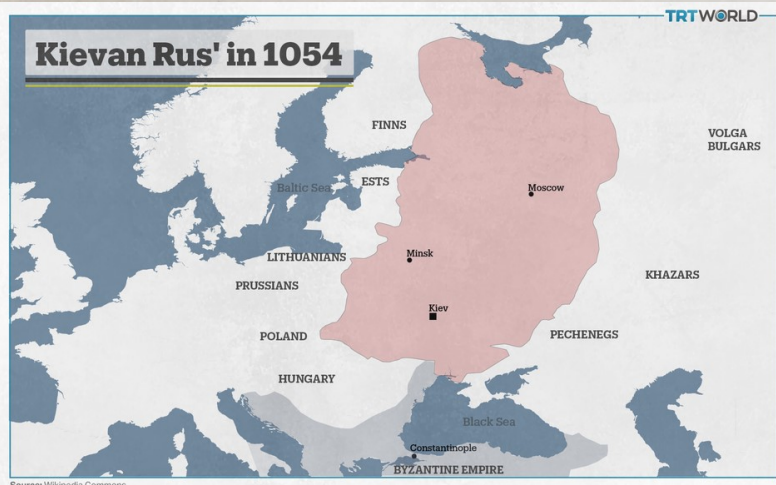
Do you have a favourite year group from your time at the school?

I am not allowed to have favourites. However, last year's graduates, the class of 2021, were particularly special as I taught some of them English for 5 years straight.



Ukraine

For many people, the news of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was quite unexpected, despite the fact that the Russian army had been gathering at the border for some time. The truth is, the intricate history of aggression can be dated back centuries. As someone who comes from Ukraine I would like to take this opportunity to help the reader understand this conflict by delving into the history.



In 882 AD the Viking ruler Oleg founded Kievan Rus in the territory of modern-day Ukraine. The Ukrainian language is a lineal descendant of the colloquial language used in Kievan Rus. In the 13th century the Mongol invasion disintegrated the federation. Some people left and travelled east to form Russia, some north to modern day Belarus and some stayed where they were. The Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian people are all ancestrally related, which makes present-day events even more disturbing.

A century after the Tsardom of Russia was formed in 1547, Ukraine was invaded by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Russian empire took advantage of this situation and signed a treaty with the Cossacks (Ukrainian people) offering to protect their autonomy in exchange for defending the border with Russia. But this deal proved to be a mistake as the Russians took advantage of the situation over time. Ukraine became a part of Russia, and its sovereignty was diminished. From then on, the Tsar would treat Ukrainians as second-class citizens.

In 1922 the USSR was formed and while the population in general was treated terribly in the years that followed, the people of Ukraine and Kazakhstan would feel the worst impact. Stalin implemented changes that would lead to famine in both countries. This atrocity would last for a year and millions of Ukrainians starved to death. People would walk over the corpses of their neighbours on the street as the Russian soldiers would raid homes to confiscate any form of food. This was part of Stalin's plan of Russification as he wanted to eliminate the natives of the land and migrate ethnic Russians to settle in Ukraine. Most of them settled in the east of Ukraine.

The USSR collapsed in 1991 and this resulted in its republics, including Ukraine, gaining full sovereignty. Russia attempted to get on Ukraine's good side and become allies, but after all the troubles that Russia had brought to the Ukrainian people, Ukraine declined and tried to join the EU. Ukraine had inherited over 1,500 nuclear warheads after leaving USSR and Russia made a deal where they would "disassemble" them and keep peace with Ukraine. That peace did not last long, as in 2014 the Ukrainian president made a sudden decision not to sign a trade agreement with the EU and promoted Russian alliance. This caused a ripple of events, as the Ukrainian people started revolting against the idea of being sided with Russia and a civil war began.



Ukraine

This war resulted in the hundreds of civilian casualties and a change in government. The previous Ukrainian president fled to Russia, which raised suspicion that he had been placed in position of power by the Kremlin, because he could not have gained the position as president legitimately as he had a prior conviction. This is starting to sound like a conspiracy theory, but the Kremlin has always been known to use shady tactics like that to get what they want, like when they blew up civilian houses in Russia and blamed it on the Chechens to gain popularity for a second Chechen war. Another example would be when Ukraine was in turmoil after the civilian war, Putin moved in and illegally annexed Crimea. He then started a war on the east front, knowing Ukraine was not prepared for any of this, as it was without a leader, Ukrainians could not trust police after they killed hundreds on orders of a puppet government. Nevertheless, Ukraine prevailed and held its own against Russia and stabilised its economy and leadership.



Now Russia has made its aggressive advance and the entire world is watching. Putin believed he could take Kyiv in a matter of days but this has not gone to plan as sanctions are being laid on his oligarch friends and Ukraine has been given support from countries all over the world. As much as Putin wants to justify his actions by preventing NATO coming closer to his doorstep, it is plain to see that this is a bloodthirsty conquer-quest of a dictator who has no regard for his own people. Many of his own people have been incarcerated for protesting against the war. The videos of Russian POWs



show that many of them must hold a rifle because they might be shot for desertion. I personally feel bad for the Russian people who just get by, and are now facing even harsher lives because of the sanctions. Most of them want no part in this conflict, but cannot speak out while Russian mothers are losing sons to a pointless war.

The only way for Ukraine to be a peaceful country, is to drive out our invaders, because peace talks won't work with a bloodthirsty dictator with little man syndrome. Hopefully, this war will end with few casualties and a possibility to rebuild our nation and thrive again.

I will end this column with a quote my dad said before leaving to fight alongside his people, "we fight not because we hate those in front of us, but because we love those behind us"

Alex Krytsun – Year 13

The Defunding of the NHS

The NHS (National Health Service) is a free health system based in the UK, its goal since its conception in 1948 has been the same, to provide the people a fair class society on which no man, woman or child should die to an illness that could have been cured if they went to hospital. It has been a shining example of what the UK can achieve if we work together and share no hatred as we treat each other like brothers and sisters. The NHS is one of the greatest achievements in human history, but in the last 10 years the NHS has become overwhelmed as defunding from our government has left it a shadow of what it once was. In this article I will explore the roots of the NHS, how it has been defunded, the greater need for private healthcare and the solutions of which we can help the NHS to thrive once again.

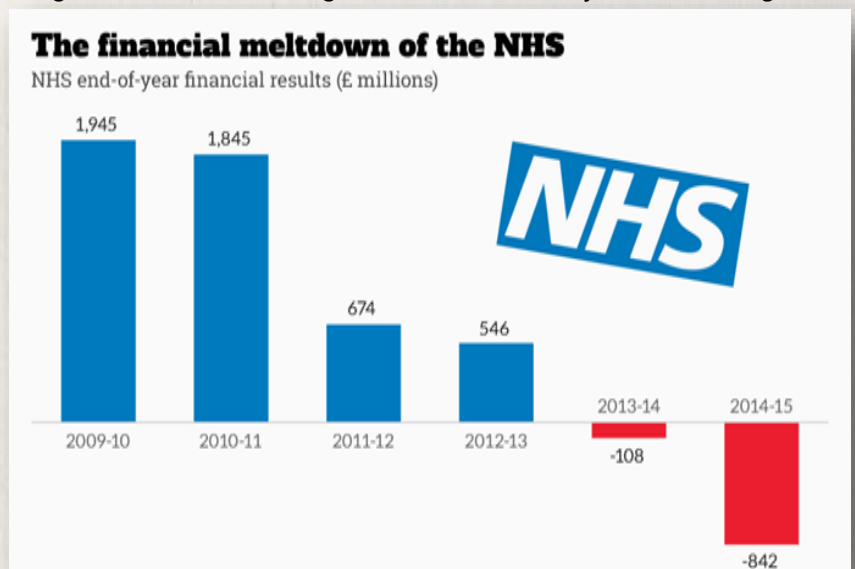
History

When the Labour party came into power in 1945, they had a brilliant but bold plan to create a free health system that accepted all class divisions, but these plans were under much criticism mainly by the labour parties long term rivals the conservative party who believed that the economy would go down as millions of people were paying money to the government through the hospitals. But despite this criticism the labour party still went ahead and on the 5th July 1948 the NHS opened officially.

The defunding of the NHS in the last 10 years

Since the Conservatives took power in 2010 the NHS service has decreased rapidly with waiting lists for doctors stretching for over 2 years, as the 2008 economic crises slowed down the money being given to the service as of the last 10 years since the conservatives have been in power the NHS has suffered the most it ever has with budget cuts as the health ministers have underprepared the NHS for viruses such as Covid-19. According to statistics, since 2010, government funding has decreased by an alarming rate shown from the image to the right:

If the government continues at this rate many lives could be lost from preventable illnesses. Due to the hospitals having long waiting lists many people are switching to private healthcare meaning that the UK is slowly turning into what it was pre-NHS, with poorer people not being able to afford healthcare as they die from curable illnesses. A solution could take place if the government focuses more money into the NHS than getting Downing Street re-decorated or putting money into businesses like Matt Hancock's neighbours' business. We then could turn around our countries healthcare I could see in the next 10 years the NHS will be more prepared for future global viruses such as the Coronavirus Pandemic.



Nihal Sumal –Year 7

Alternate Thursdays and Community Apprentice

Alternate Thursdays

Every other week on a Thursday period 5-6, Year 7 students have the choice of taking part in an after-school activity as part of curriculum enhancement or they can go home early. The activities vary from sports like football at Aston Villa to board games. The games you play are great fun and if you go to an offsite activity and take a school bus you will always be back on time. The teachers are great and teach very well.

In the sport activities, you get changed into the school PE kit or your own suitable clothes and head to the classroom where your teacher will be waiting. In the other activities you will not need a kit or anything and can just go to your classroom. If you are ever confused about where to go or have a question about whatever activity you are doing, you can ask Ms Noreen as she is in charge of Alternate-Thursdays.

I have been to two of these activities one of these activities is football at Aston Villa where we got four captains and made four teams. Then we chose a professional team's name and started playing each other. If you won the game, you would be awarded 3 points, 2 points for a draw and 1 point for a loss. The other activity I did was building fitness and resilience which is when a guest would come to the school and turn easy games like catch into examples about life.

I have learnt to never give up from the football as my team would be losing and then we would go to second place. Also, when I'd play, I would have to be focused if I wanted to succeed. I have learned from building fitness and resilience that if you have an opportunity, you should take it before someone else does.

In the future, I would like to do multi sports or board games as they are great fun and challenging. In multi sports, there will be people who could be better than you at that sport and you can learn from them. In board games you might not know the rules or make good decisions but there will be other students to help you out.

Ibrahim Secka—Year 7



Community Apprentice

This year I have been lucky enough to be involved in the Community Apprentice scheme. It is a really interesting course which I feel has helped me develop my public speaking skills. Before I joined the programme, I would often start shaking terribly when speaking in front of a group of people, even my own class. However, having completed the course I have realised that I have gained the confidence to speak to large audiences. The course is not only educational, it is fun. Participants get the chance to come up with great ideas, grow as a team, share many fun times together and so much more. I personally found the 10-week experience so enjoyable that those weeks went by like they were 5 days. If I were offered the chance to do something like this again, I would sign up immediately. It's one of the best extra-curricular things I've ever done and I'm so grateful that I was able to take part. Even though my team did not go on to win the event, we all still felt like winners. I would recommend Community Apprentice to next year's Year 9s.

Lorenzo Almoguera—Year 9

Feminism

Feminism. A word wielded with pride by many, whose hearts burn with the desire and yearning for equality for all, regardless of whoever they may be. Feminism. A theory which recognises the inequality in this world we live in, and the change which needs to happen. Feminism. The political movement which kindles hope in the hearts of girls and women in countries across the globe, who covet the same education as their male counterparts.

So, what exactly is feminism? There are many misconceptions surrounding this term, so I will begin by saying that feminism is the belief in social, economic and political equality for all genders. Feminism is an umbrella term for a range of views about injustices against people and therefore, it can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. In my opinion, feminism is very important in the imperfect world we currently live in, and the change that we, the next generation, need to make.



A 2021 investigation by 'UN Women UK' found that 97% of women aged 18-24 living in the UK said they had faced some sort of sexual harassment. Let that sink in for a second. 97%. In addition to this, nearly two thirds of the world's illiterate people are women. These statistics convey the inequality against 51% of the world population, and we need to do something about this.

This is by no means solely a contemporary issue, as the silencing of women has been painted in societies' ethea for countless centuries - with the first record of the silencing of women portrayed in Homer's Odyssey, with Telemachus (son of Odysseus) commanding his own mother to "return to her chambers", this example of a woman being silenced has been delineated repeatedly in the rich fables of antiquity, and it is now our chance, as the next generation to help change the sporadic unfair treatment of women, in order to give them the same opportunities as their male counterparts and shatter the 'glass ceiling' which barricades some women gaining economic growth, simply because of their gender.



-Emily Davison-

The strive for equality is not a new thing, women and men have been fighting since the 19th century for women's rights and equality - a worthy example is the venerable sacrifice of Emily Davison on the 8th of June 1913. This is when she gave her life to shed light on the Suffragette Movement within the public sphere, which she achieved successfully, as women over thirty with 'property qualification' gained the vote five year later - a step forward in the direction of attaining the vote for all women. Other notable suffragettes include Emmeline Pankhurst and Millicent Fawcett, whose endeavours (even when they were arrested persistently and abandoned by those they cherished) have not in the slightest descended to folklore, and live in the hearts of people who stand in reverence of their actions even now.

Feminism

As teenage boys, we should be more obliged to be feminists due to the incontrovertible truth that men are the main reason that some women feel unsafe walking in the street at night. Sadly, it is mainly men that attack and verbally harass women and fortify 'the patriarchy' by holding prejudices against women which, sooner or later, hold back women who strive to hold higher corporate positions. Of course, not all men hold those beliefs or commit abhorrent acts of violence towards women, but through the #metoo movement we've seen just how many women have faced such harassment.

By raising feminist issues, we can help to end to the misogynistic culture which allows some men to shake off sexual harassment as casual 'banter'. That said, we should not be doing this by training women in self-defence or encouraging women not to walk on their own at night, as people have done in the past. This does not stop the issue. By teaching men and boys to be aware of the gender pay gap, women's rights and sexual harassment we can make a real change in attitudes and this will decrease the numbers of women who go through such things every single day.

Moreover, women are not the only casualties of the ruthless 'patriarchy'. Studies have shown that perhaps as a result of the assigned role and expectations of men in our contemporary society and the underlying perception of masculinity, men are more likely to have a weak mental state than women. Three time as many men than women die by suicide every year and only 36% of NHS talking therapies are for men.

These statistics prove my point that efforts need to be made in order to break down the barrier that stops men from expressing their feelings - this is where feminism ties into this issue. With the 'equality of all genders', we need to make more efforts to get more men to talk about their feelings in order to derange the archetypal view of 'the repressed man' for evermore.



Feminism



Feminism is not only about putting forward parliamentary bills and debating against sexism, it's also about altering the way we speak to one another in order to avoid using sexist comments - as lyrical genius Taylor Swift highlights in a CBS News Interview, and says "A man does something, it's strategic. A woman does the same thing, it's calculated. A man is allowed to react. A woman can only overreact." These statements accentuate the treacherous, underlying sexism which reinforces the social stigma against women who strive to achieve success. For some women, this 'glass ceiling' which hinders their well-earned success is nothing new.

An experiment by Martin Schneider and Nicole Hallberg proved how women are taken a lot less seriously than their male counterparts, even if they happened to be of the same skill level. Ms Hallberg stated that she knew this tenacious sexism all too well, and said she figured "it was part of her job". This explicates the need for us to do something about workplace sexism, whether that be promoting anti-workplace-sexism laws or even by challenging sexism - we will not and cannot tolerate it and need to speak now, to combat it.

To conclude, I think that the need to confront sexism and misogyny is more important now than ever, and the chance to change the world for the better is in our hands. For more information on feminism, I hugely recommend the books 'Women and Power- A Manifesto'- by Mary Beard and 'Men Explain Things to Me'- by Rebecca Solnit. Feminism is a huge topic so naturally I'm not able to cover everything about it in a one-thousand-word article, but thanks a lot for reading this far and I hope you've learnt something new!

Yusuf Nadeem—Year 11

Smoking (a satirical article)

Most people are against the idea of smoking without even realising the massive benefits it provides. Sure, there might be some minor disadvantages, but the overall package is breath-taking, literally.

The only real disadvantage of smoking is that it could kill you, but even falling down the stairs at the wrong angle could do that. Death by smoking is not guaranteed either: there are only 250 life threatening chemicals in cigarettes. This only makes you 100% - 300% more likely to get a heart attack, 600% more likely to get a stroke and only 1500% - 3000% more likely to get cancer compared to a non-smoker. As assured above, death is not guaranteed by smoking.

The biggest advantage of smoking is that it helps people with mental health problems by making them forget about their worries - like a pigeon closing his eyes to a cat - which massively helps the brain relax. Sure, they might have to deal with the problems once they have all piled up and the due dates have passed but we all know that anyone with mental health problems is completely capable of doing so.

This means that you can cure your depression through smoking, which costs only £3,421.60 per year and averaging at £200,000 in a lifetime.

Sure, it might be more expensive than a Lamborghini Urus and 12,500 big macs put together but at least it can temporarily fix your depression, can the 13th most popular sports car and 12,500 burgers from your favourite restaurant do that?

Another advantage of smoking is that because it reduces your life expectancy by an average of 10 - 13 years, you will not be wasting as much money on it: instead of £220,000, you will only be spending □ £200,000 (as mentioned above). Sure, you might be wasting 10 years of your life and most likely be dying before reaching the age of 65, but it means you will get to save £20,000. It's not probable that the age after 65 provides you with much money anyways. For example, the only thing Kentucky was able to achieve after the age of 65 was that he invented the 9th most loved fast-food restaurant in the world, earning only £700,000 a year and £7,000,000 in 10 years.

Another advantage to smoking is that it increases the infertility rate which helps with over-population. This is because it significantly reduces sperm count in men and creates some minor issues for women during pregnancies. Like causing your offspring to have defects in the mouth and lips and possibly even die due to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). But at least you will temporarily be free from depression and reduce over-population by killing your children.



Ahmad Bilal – Year 10

Clash Royale

Clash Royale

Clash Royale is a massively popular mobile game produced by Supercell. The objective is to conquer the other team's bases, while defending your own. The game was released in March 2016. Clash Royale is important to a variety of people as it encourages them to play together and work as a team or even get competitive as they try to get better than one another. The game is based on strategy and levels of cards, creating a profound sense of achievement once you manage to reach the next arena by outplaying peers or manage to upgrade your characters.

Gameplay

The game is surprisingly simple. You start on the bottom of the screen as the blue team and the enemy – a real player online – starts opposite you in red. You each have three towers – two princess towers at the front and one king tower behind. Your objective is to whittle away the enemy's towers' health whilst defending your own, resulting in you having more towers left at the end of the two-minute game than the other. In the result of a draw – for example both teams have one tower destroyed – the game goes into a two-minute overtime. In this period, the first player to take a tower is instantly declared the victor. Also, at any point during the initial two minutes or overtime, if you destroy the king tower, you instantly win.



Cards

The way you defend yourself and attack the enemy is through placing cards. There is an assortment of rarities, ranging from common to legendary. However, common cards can outplay legends when played right against people your level, as this is mostly a game of strategy. There are also 3 types of cards – spells, troops and buildings. Troops are the

most common; they are entities which have hitboxes and move to fight enemies or attack towers. Spells affect cards in an area, like 'rage' which makes your troops attack faster, resulting in greater damage per second, or 'arrows' which does minor damage to all enemy entities but in a great area. Buildings stay in one place, but still attack enemies. They are generally used defensively as you can only place them in your territory, but some buildings such as 'X-bow' have enough range to still reach the enemies towers.

Clash Royale

Elixir

How are all cards balanced when some do hundreds of damage points and move rapidly while others are slow and weak? The answer is the in-match currency – elixir. For most of the match you get one elixir per second, with a cap of ten. To place any of your cards, you must use the set amount of elixir for it. Cards which seem more practical have high elixir, to make it fair. Therefore, all cards are equal, as a high cost of elixir is a setback due to an inability to place cards for some time as your elixir slowly increases, making you vulnerable or unable to strengthen your attack. For example, electro giant is a one-man push, boasting 2500+ hp and capable of over 250 damage. On the other hand, there is the fire spirit, which does half that damage and has only 200hp. But these cards are balanced, as the e-giant costs eight elixir but the fire spirit is only one.

I believe that Clash Royale is a must-play for a plethora of reasons, from the ability to always improve gameplay to the strategic nature of the matches. As you get better, you go up levels called arenas, encouraging you to competitively rise the ranks. The community is kind and accepting to new players, and therefore, in conclusion, is the best game for all mobile gamers.

Abdullahi Cabdi – Year 10

Top 5 Clash Royale Statistics

- In 2021, 62.84 million people downloaded Clash Royale.
- Nova eSports with \$366,823 is Clash Royale's top-earning esports team.
- Sergio Ramos has won a total prize pool of \$212,024 by 2020.
- Clash Royale is the second leading strategy mobile game in the US in 2021.
- Clash Royale reached \$100 million on iOS in a record 51 days.



It's Music to My Ears!

What is music to you? This one question alone has jarred my mind FOREVER! Only recently has it popped back into my mind, and I often reflect how music has affected me and how it has influenced me as a person. Putting feelings into words can be very hard however I can say for sure, Music is like a super-natural medium. It allows you to express yourself lyrically through sounds and gives you something to do freeing you from your shackles of boredom. It even has the power to change your feelings emotionally and mentally, and the best thing about it is that music is subjective to YOU! There is no right and wrong It doesn't matter what language it's in or how it sounds, its what makes you happy (or sad). It could be Country, Rap, Pop, Jazz, Classical, or K-Pop all different forms of art and science combining vocal and instrumental sounds to form harmony and expression.

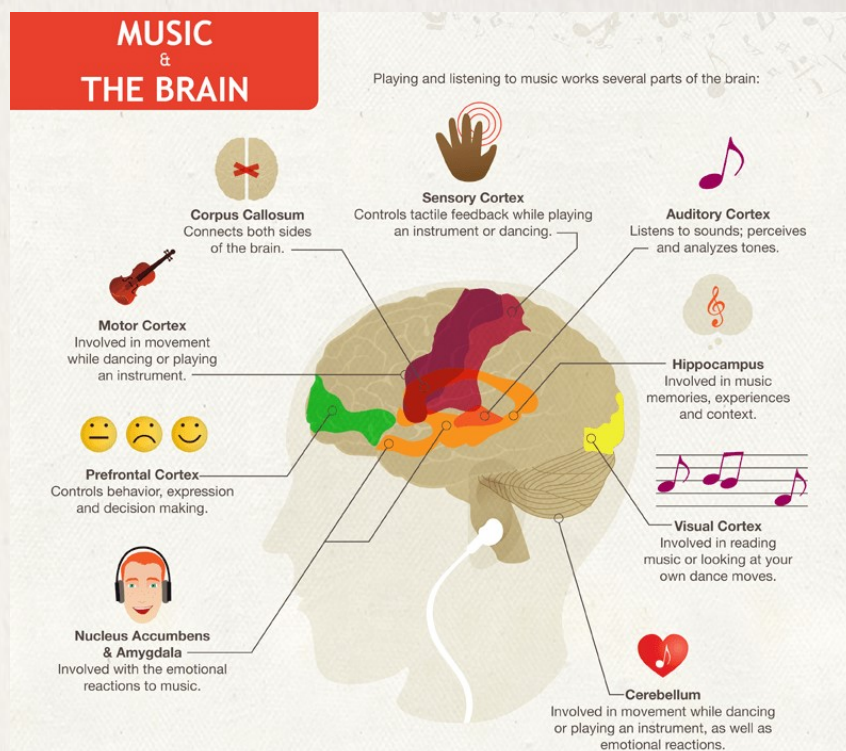
Listening to Music is good and all, but the physiological effects of playing an instrument differ on an ASTRONOMICAL margin...and its fun :) . There is an abundance of empirical evidence that shows the impacts of playing an instrument on the brain. Your brain is a muscle and like an athlete it needs to work out to get stronger fortunately there are many ways to train and strengthen your brain; cognitive games and even learning a new language. Learning an instrument implements all of this. In a sense the language part is the music notation and cognitively it improves your memory massively and reduces stress exponentially.

There is a huge variety of instruments you can choose perfectly adapted for you! The trumpet for instance is small, lightweight, and relatively easy to carry. They are sturdy and can efficiently assist in your bodily health, by improving your lung capacity. The guitar and electrical guitar are great for rock groups and so are the drums.

I started playing the Piano a few years ago. At first, I found it hard and exhausting not understanding notes and note values, but after time and with perseverance I began to understand the basics. I started with learning the notes with easy mnemonics then, simple chords such as C major, B major, D minor, F minor. Before I knew it, I was playing scales then pieces and here I am now preparing avidly for my Grade 6 exam. The journey is difficult, but it is most definitely worthwhile, and you WON'T regret it.

IMPORTANT FACT – *Learning an instrument and getting to a certain grade allows you to obtain UCAS points which assist in your admission to Colleges and Universities.*

Sohan Puppala – Year 9



Core Values of Aston

Kindness

The third school value I will be talking about is kindness. Kindness means putting others before yourself and thinking about others. The exact definition of Kindness is the “quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate”. This can be shown in school life in a variety of ways such as holding a door open for others or volunteering in school to help others. This is important because it sets a good example across the school and it shows that you are a good person, it also lets teachers know who to pick for awards and end of year trips. I would hope that people would be kind to me so this is why I should do the same to other students and staff. Kindness is important in and out of school.

Kindness is the
language which
the deaf can hear
& the blind can see.

Mark Twain

Integrity

The fourth and final core value of Aston is Integrity. Integrity means owning up to things and doing the right thing. The exact definition of integrity is the “quality of being honest and having strong moral principles”. This can be shown across school life in a number of ways for instance not talking about people behind their back or owning up to things if you have done something wrong. This is important because it sets a good impression on everyone, teachers and pupils, and it sets a good tone about you.

To conclude I think our school values are just important in school as out of school. I also believe that they will make you a strong, kind, honest and diligent person whilst in King Edwards Aston and if you keep following them after you leave the school it will make you a good person then as well. If I had choose 1 of the values, I would say that diligence is the most important to me. This is because being hard working will mean that I have done everything that I can possibly do to achieve the grades that I am capable of.

Toby Bowler—Year 8

INTEGRITY

**IS DOING THE
RIGHT THING.
EVEN NO ONE
IS WATCHING.**

~ C.S Lewis ~

Urban Wildlife

I have been lucky enough to travel to see some amazing wildlife in its natural habitat, for example I have observed blue-spotted rays on a night-time scuba dive and watched rare Andean Condors in Colca Canyon in Peru. During the pandemic restrictions I decided to learn more about the wildlife around me, particularly in urban and parkland areas.

I found whilst I was familiar with birds and mammals visually, I often heard an interesting bird call and couldn't match it to a bird. To become more familiar with birdsong I downloaded a Birdnet app from Cornell University, this app 'listens' to birdsong and identifies which bird is making the sound. I frequently use it to distinguish different birds on my walk from the train station to school.



Around Aston I have heard nuthatches, mistle thrushes and wrens. The Eurasian wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) is a tiny bird, 10 cm in length, with an impressively powerful and melodic song. They were known by Celtic Druids as 'the king of the birds' and they believed they could use their song to predict the future. One particular morning I was alerted to the presence of a sparrow hawk by the frightened voices of crows and pigeons making alarm calls.

Some of the birds that interest me most are those that are unusual or one of a kind. The duck on the right hand side below has a mixed colouring. It is a hybrid between a mallard (such as the duck on the left) and a domestic duck. An egg laying duck must have escaped at some point and interbred into the wild population, because of this it has a truly one of a kind colouring!

Some useful links:

- this is the app that I use for recording birdsong: <https://birdnet.cornell.edu/>

- this is a useful app for recognising trees: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/tree-id-app/>

Mr Mackie



Wren Field Recording.wav



Is Time Travel Possible?

Introduction

I am a big fan of Sonic, The Avengers and Doctor Who. One thing in common between these franchises is Time Travel. Like any Doctor Who fan, I would love to be a Time Lord. Wouldn't it be cool if we could go back in time to correct our embarrassing moments in the past (for example, parties during lockdown), or go to the future to see if flying cars actually get invented? In fact, when you take a flight to a country in a different time zone, it feels as if you are time travelling. When you watch the news and a journalist is reporting live from another time zone, it can feel like some sort of weird time warp. Like me, you too may have wondered if time travel is actually possible. In this article, I want to find out if time travel is scientifically possible and what are its practical uses in modern life.



Is time travel possible?

The short answer is yes, we are all travelling in time! For example, from your 11th birthday to your 12th, you are travelling 1 year in time at a speed of 1 second per second. But this sort of time travel is not going to help us change the past or foresee the future. Scientists in general agree that visiting the past or the future is impossible. The famous physicist, Stephen Hawking even wrote in his book 'Black Holes and Baby Universes', "The best evidence we have that time travel is not possible, and never will be, is that we have not been invaded by hordes of tourists from the future." Ouch! But we must accept that he has a point.

However, although sci-fi style time travel is not possible, we can still bend time.

Time Dilation

Supposing you are walking down a road at 5mph and Sonic dashes by at 50mph. At the same time, a car drives past at 51mph. From your perspective, both Sonic and the car are whizzing past you very fast. But from Sonic's perspective, the car is very slow in overtaking him. This means that the faster you travel through space, the slower you experience time. Guess who found this? Not Sonic, but the famous physicist, Albert Einstein in his Theory of Relativity, proving that time is an illusion that moves relative to an observer.

Time Travel

Practical use of Time Dilation

Did you know that each time you use the GPS in your smartphone or in a car's satnav to get to your nearest pizzeria, you are using time travel calculation? The GPS satellites

orbit the Earth at a high speed and therefore they experience time dilation. However, their clocks are constantly adjusted to sync with our time so that they can give us the correct information in Earth time. This is how we are using time travel calculations in our modern-day life.

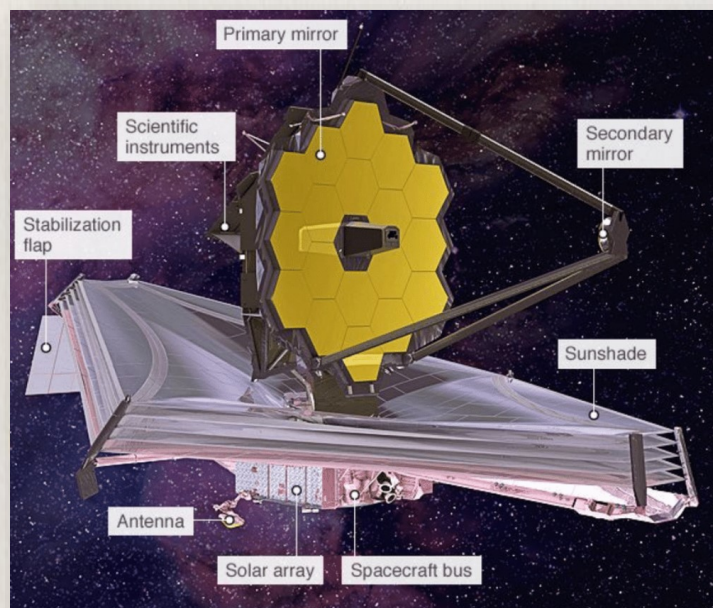


Experiencing time travel

In December 2021, NASA launched its most powerful and complex telescope, the James Webb Space Telescope. It is capable of looking back in time at the first galaxies that formed after the Big Bang! This is possible because the farther away the object is in the universe, the farther away you are looking back in time since it takes light, time to travel across the universe to us. Any stars you can see with the unaided eye are within about 4000 light years of us and that means you are looking at stars as how they appeared 4000 years ago. So, in a way, we are already experiencing time travel when we gaze at the stars! Conclusion

Although I would love to hop into a TARDIS like a Time Lord, I found it fascinating to learn that we actually encounter time travel in our daily life through GPS, telescopes and by just living life at a speed of 1 second per second.

Deven Daly—Year 7



- James Webb Telescope -

Eleven Years Later

When I arrived at Aston in July of 2011 I was excited to be working in a school I had only heard rumours about before. "They teach utilitarianism and Kant to year 8s there!" I had once heard someone marvel about the place at a teaching event, and so, as soon as I saw a job advertised at this crazy school, I knew I wanted the post. If anyone was going to be teaching university-level philosophy to twelve-year olds, it was going to be me!

And that was Aston all over when I got here. High-performing and high aspiration. Intellectually limitless and full of possibilities. Mrs Whittall, the Head of RE when I got here, gave me total free rein on a year 10 enrichment Philosophy course. "It's not for an exam," she said, "so you can basically teach them anything." And so, I did. I found myself teaching complex issues like the ethics of abortion to Key Stage 3 students and even more complex issues, like free will and determinism or the political philosophy of anarchism to Key Stage 4. And students seemed to really like it. Our GCSE results were great, despite being done so early, and our AS uptake was huge. As far as secondary school Philosophy teaching went, it was a dream job.

It wasn't all RE and Philosophy though. My first week at the school was most memorable for witnessing my first Festival of Cultures. One student performed a magic and mentalism act that could rival Derren Brown it was that good. I had always associated Aston with the performing arts. The actor, Gwilym Lee, who, long before starring as Brian May in the Queen biopic, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, or DS Nelson in *Midsomer Murders*, was a member of the drama society I was in at Cardiff University, Act One. If Aston produced people of this high calibre I was excited to see how.

The first full year I was here the school put on a production of *Les Misérables* in conjunction with Handsworth Girls. I have seen *Les Mis* on the West End, and on screen, and I can honestly say - and not just because several members of my first form were in the production - that the Aston version was the most scintillating version I have ever seen. As someone with a background in music and theatre myself I have always believed a school's extracurricular arts prowess is as important, if not more important, than its academic profile.

I was also struck when I arrived at Aston at how many members of staff had either been there forever or, more strangely to me, as someone who couldn't wait to leave my own school at the end of my exams, had actually been former students at the place yet had chosen to come back and work there. I wondered if I would stick it out until the summer as I had chosen the part-time job to give me time to do other things in the week, like maybe some academic research. But, as it had with so many others, Aston sucked me in. For an anarchist non-conformist it's pretty hard to look in the mirror and realise that you have become part of "the establishment", but that's exactly what had happened! Of course, I have also helped try to reimagine "the establishment" a bit in my time as co-ordinator of the Student Council. I wanted to facilitate the Council to run itself, rather than run it for students, I believe in the importance of developing student democracy and giving students a voice.



Eleven Years Later

What I loved about Aston when I came here is that students were drumming, singing, acting, painting, performing magic, writing poems, running businesses, writing computer programmes and organising events without needing it to “be for something” and with the full understanding that there was more to life than a GCSE or A-level. Today, those same students are out doing great things in the world beyond Aston’s walls. Tomorrow, if you find your own passions and hobbies, it will be you.

For some of you the passion is sport. I am not a proper sports person. When I set up Wrestling Club in 2012 - “the only wrestling club with no actual wrestling involved” - almost as a joke, I had no idea that it would lead to some of the strangest and funnest memories of my time at the school and last for nearly a decade itself. It was when students started doing their own WWE-style entrances and developing their own catchphrases that we reached peak wrestling club - at points the club was thirty minutes of entrances and only five minutes of actual results and competition. And, of course, there was the joy each summer of awarding our cheap, toy, plastic belt to the latest reigning, defending, undisputed wrestling club world heavyweight champion of the world (the two “world”s were important) in the final assembly, usually amongst a range of other far more valuable and expensive-looking trophies.



On that note, this is, sadly, where I leave you. In recent years I have found that what I love lies elsewhere. Other venues and other pursuits. I would be a hypocrite to stay here, even if it remains tempting. I wish to try my hand at producing more philosophy and want to see if I can get a job in a university somewhere. I may fail spectacularly, but I won’t know until I have tried. And while I have had some success at writing academic papers and books while working here full-time and running my department, I don’t like doing things by half and not being able to give them my full attention. The evenings, weekends and holiday time I have given over to marking work, planning lessons, producing study packs and answering your emails for over a decade will now be given over to academic research and the future. It’s scary. I have no job lined up and am not leaving Aston to go somewhere specific. I am merely taking my own advice: doing what I love and hoping success will follow. I have taught university-level philosophy to twelve-year olds for eleven years now. It’s time to see if I can do it at a university instead.

Schools are meant to be finite places. Buildings we dwell in for a limited period of time: two years, five years, six years, seven years, eleven, and then move on. You will leave here one day too, but you, like me, will never forget it, and it will continue to form part of who you are in all your future endeavours. They are finite places, but they leave an indelible mark. Aston has changed a lot since I first walked through its gates in 2011, as it is meant to, but what hasn’t changed - as all of my students who have studied the ship of Theseus should know, at least the *dualist* ones - is its spirit. Like any school leaver of any age, I am excited (and mildly terrified) to see where the future takes me, but I will miss what I leave behind and know that I have been forever changed for the better by being a brief part of Aston’s long and storied history.

Dr. McKee



Coding

I have a great passion for coding as it is very useful and it is a massive tool for technology over the past years. Also, as well as playing a major role, such as playing the script for a scene, it can be lots of fun too! For example, if you want to create a small, simple scene, you could use coding to create characters – also known as ‘sprites’ – and move them in all directions, make any noise of your choice, and create a nice, detailed background.

But coding is not all that meets the eye. If you wanted to create a big, important, scene using coding, you can easily mess things up by typing the wrong number, placing the wrong block or even changing the variable. This could result in anything from a minor error, to a very big mistake!

The computer programming language that I currently use is called Python. Luckily, Python is clever enough to detect the major errors and inform you what and where the error is. Still, it is not able to detect everything you want it to; if you wanted an Olympic diver to perform a 540° somersault and you type in the incorrect coding – the diver may end up somersaulting infinitely! That is why you need to check for errors that Python cannot foresee.

But on the bright side, I shall explain to you why coding has played such a vital role in my past. Firstly, when I was in Year 6, myself and some other pupils were assigned a project – to complete three courses, each consisting of nine tasks. The good thing: I was doing this in Minecraft which is a good programme for starting out on. The bad thing: there were approximately 30 tasks to complete fast, and they were not easy. Somehow, I ended up flying through them, with a few exceptions – one task took an entire fortnight! The first two courses were quite simple using MakeCode: a great tool for coding using blocks, but the last one was using Python. I’ll admit, it wasn’t too hard at first, but gradually, it got harder each time. After a month or two, I completed Advanced Coding using Python, but I wasn’t too confident with it – I also realised that I had to sit an exam.



At this point, I was considering giving up but I looked back on how far I had come, and I noticed that I was ahead of the game compared to the other students in my class. I thought about it, and I decided that even if I fail, it was worth a try. I was given five attempts to sit the test. The first time it seemed a bit too hard – and I received something far below 60% – the pass mark. But with tactics and revision, on the second try, I aced a fantastic 83%. I was a role model – the first among 15,000 students in my multi-academy, to not only receive a coding certificate, but to have completed and aced Python too.

Now, I want to continue learning so I attend an ‘Aston-ishing’ Code Club. Right now, it takes place on Mondays on Week 1 at E3 during KS3 lunch.

That’s it for me. I hope you choose to enjoy coding too. Join the Code Club – I’ll be waiting for you!

Abdullah Zaman – Year 7



MAGICAL MYSTERIES OF THE EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS

There are many mind-boggling mysteries that have intrigued humans for centuries such as: The Bermuda Triangle, The City of Atlantis, Black Holes, White Holes; The Gravity Hills. These are just a few of the millions of mysteries surrounding us. But, the one that stands out the most for me is the mystery of the Egyptian Pyramids. There are so many aspects pertaining to the Pyramids which suggest that these may or may not have been built by humans in the first place.

Let us look into this in more detail. Recently, Egypt has invited billionaire Elon Musk to visit the country and see for himself that its famous pyramids were not built by aliens. The SpaceX CEO had tweeted what appeared to be support for conspiracy theorists who say aliens were involved in the colossal construction effort. But Egypt's international co-operation minister does not want them taking any of the credit. She says seeing the tombs of the pyramid builders would be the proof.



The tombs discovered in the 1990s are definitive evidence, experts say, that the magnificent structures were indeed built by ancient Egyptians. Research has however, given several arguments that the Pyramids may not have been constructed by the Egyptians as the technology used and the precision with which these mammoth sized structures were built in the times they were, seemed rather impossible.

The pyramids of Giza were aligned with the three stars on Orion's Belt. This kind of alignment seemed rather impressive for humans to achieve without the help of highly advanced tools in the times they were built. The most famous of Egypt's Pyramids rise from the desert. Built more than 4,500 years ago, the Pyramids at Giza are monumental tombs where ancient Queens and Pharaohs were buried.

But how, exactly, did the Egyptians build these things? The Great Pyramid is made of millions of precisely hewn stones weighing at least two tons each. Even with today's cranes and other construction equipment, building a pyramid as big as that of Pharaoh Khufu's expectations would be a formidable challenge.



EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS

Here are the top 5 pieces of evidence that Aliens built the Pyramids:

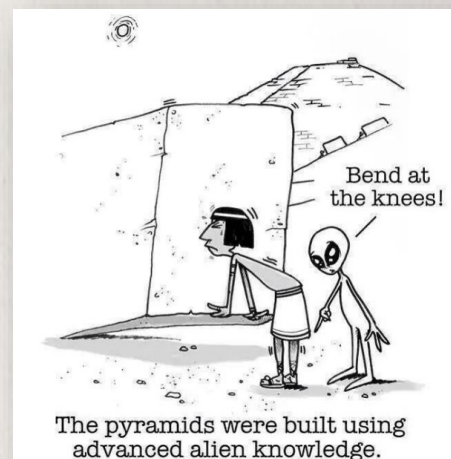
1. The monolith blocks which were used to build the pyramids weigh 2 tons each, with some of them weighing as high as 50 tons. They did not yet use the wheel, so how could the ancient Egyptians carry these stone blocks from the other side of Nile River?

2. The pyramids were built facing the exact magnetic north. Without a compass, which was not available 5000 years ago, it was certainly not possible for the ancient men to be so precisely accurate regarding building the pyramid in such a way.

3. The three pyramids of Giza are complex and aligned exactly with the position of three stars of the Belt of Orion. As the science of astronomy would not have been that developed thousands of years back, it has to be the work of aliens who would have the knowledge of the astronomical positioning of the stars.

4. The perimeter of the Great Pyramid when divided by two times the height of the monument gives a number which exactly equal to pi, and it is matching till the 15th decimal place. Such mathematical accuracy is certainly too hard to be believed as the work of people who had such limited knowledge of mathematics.

5. There are hieroglyphs present in the wall carvings in the Temple of Seti at Abydos that resembles the helicopter exactly. There are carvings of other modern day vehicles on the same wall carving as well. The hieroglyphic carving includes a submarine and a spaceship. These vehicles were invented thousands of years after the hieroglyph was made.



Here are the top 5 pieces of evidence that Humans built the Pyramids:

1. Contrary to popular belief, it wasn't slaves who built the pyramids. We know this because archaeologists have located the remains of a purpose-built village for the thousands of workers who built the famous Giza pyramids, nearly 4,500 years ago.

2. There were ancient name stamps and seals – bureaucratic evidence of how the officials kept track of the huge operation to feed and house the workers.

3. Animal bones were found at the village indicating that workers were being fed the best cuts of meat. There were also bread jars, hundreds and thousands of them – enough to feed all the workers, who slept in long, purpose-built dormitories. Slaves would never have been treated this well, which suggests that these labourers were recruited from farms, perhaps from a region much further down the Nile, near Luxor.

4. Building the pyramids was not an easy job. The skeletons of some of the workmen show that their muscles were under a large amount of strain.

5. Graffiti found near the Pharaoh Khufu's burial chamber in the Great Pyramid of Giza, 'The Friends of Khufu Gang' (the name of their work crew) has been painted in.



Who do you think built the pyramids? Humans or Extra Terrestrial Beings?

Armaan Currim—Year 7

Gene Technology

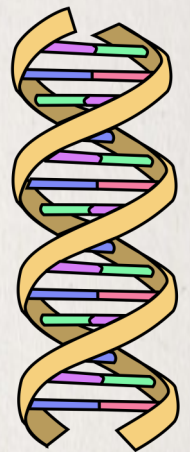
A technology capable of altering the genetic makeup of organisms, with the potential of treating inherited genetic disorders, improving worldwide crop yields, and eradicating disease. Surely such an innovation is simply a product of science fiction? Not anymore.

DNA is the universal language of life. This molecule provides the instructions that dictate the genetic traits of an organism, including eye colour, height, and inherited illnesses, through the complementary pairing of its organic bases. A revolutionary technology such as CRISPR, can aid humanity in editing this language, by repairing faulty segments and editing flaws, a vital leap for healthcare as we know it.

Where does this technology originate from?

Our story begins in the primitive life forms, notorious for their disease-causing potential, bacteria, where CRISPR is a natural occurrence, acting as the immune system of the cell. When bacteria are invaded by viruses, a specialised protein, known as CAS9, removes a snippet of the viral DNA with great precision, before integrating it into the bacterial DNA. This acts as a chemical memory, which is used by the CAS9 protein to routinely assess the bacterial cell for invaders of the same type. If this type of virus attacks again, the protein identifies and destroys it, before it can damage the cell.

Using this mechanism, the CAS9 protein can be biologically engineered in laboratories, to carry a specific gene and integrate this into the genome of any organism. This possesses the power to produce drought-resistant crops, with modified genes to withstand scorching temperatures and low water levels, or even altering the genetic makeup of mosquitos to give them malaria resistance. We can use this mechanism to snip out DNA from cancerous cells in adults, which would provide a treatment for cancer, that would resemble no more than an injection for the patient.



As revolutionary as these possibilities may sound, the dark side of CRISPR casts a shadow of doubt over its use in the medical industry. With a tool capable of selectively changing genes, CRISPR may give rise to a 'designer baby' epidemic, where millions of families around the world use the technology on developing embryos, for reasons other than health and wellness. Altering the genes for eye colour, height, hair etc will lead to an overwhelmingly destructive society in the future, focussed on designing the ideal human being.

What's more is that this technology remains in its early stages. Research must be carried out to a greater extent before decisions surrounding use and ethics can be made, as we do not have enough knowledge yet to understand the ways in which CRISPR may malfunction, especially if used on a wider scale, and this is a great threat to the human gene pool.

Humanity will continue to strive for technologies such as CRISPR, tools to help us not only extend our lifespans, but to also enjoy that life free of ailment and illness. Although these advancements are remarkable, we must proceed with caution, and understand that as human beings, we have a responsibility to protect our species and avoid the destructive implications of these mechanisms we are now developing.

Saied Dakak – Year 12

The US Supreme Court: an undemocratic beacon of hope in the divided states of America...

In a white marble palace in Washington lies a power unmatched in the land.

While the Presidency and Congress take up front pages for their political squabbles, corruption and lies, nine unelected tenured-for life lawyers in black robes sit in a courtroom in DC making decisions that will affect the lives of millions of people.

They sit in the highest court on the land: the Supreme Court of the United States of America.

The Supreme Court sits on top of the federal judiciary. Below this are 13 Courts of Appeal known as Circuit Courts and below these are 94 trial courts known as District Courts. The majority of federal cases begin here but once they've been decided they can be appealed to the Supreme Court.

Sitting on the bench are nine justices: one chief justice and eight associate justices. The President of the United States has the power to nominate justices to the bench given that there is a vacancy.

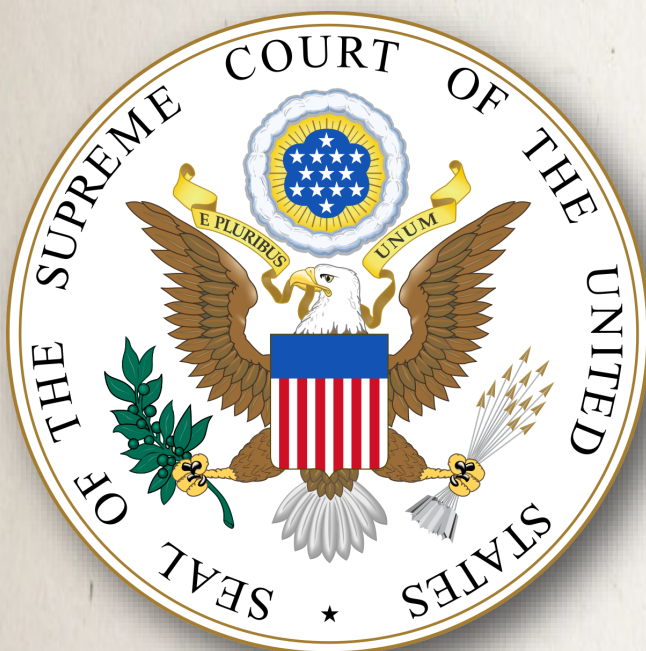
Justices can only leave the court by impeachment, retirement or death. This means that the number of justices a president can nominate is largely down to coincidence.

For instance, President Jimmy Carter was unable to appoint a single justice to the court. On the other hand, his successor Ronald Reagan was able to appoint four.

So, who are these nine justices on the Supreme Court?

The longest serving justice currently on the bench is 73 year old Clarence Thomas appointed by George HW Bush in 1991. The oldest justice on the court is none other than Stephen Breyer. Appointed to the court by President Clinton, the "prosecutor" Breyer has often been overshadowed by fellow justices but has remained the voice of reason on an ever divisive court.

From 1994-2005, no justices were appointed to the bench. This ended with the retirement of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who was the first woman to serve on the court, followed by the death of Chief Justice William H Rehnquist. Consequently, federal judge John Roberts was appointed as Chief Justice and months later Samuel Alito filled the remaining vacancy.



The US Supreme Court

The most recent justice to leave the court was none other than “notorious RBG” - Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She was a champion of women’s rights serving as an inspiration for many not just in the U.S but across the globe. Ginsburg was perceived as a “loose constructionist” - someone who views the constitution as open to interpretation contrary to it being a document with clearly written answers.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor was the first woman of colour to be appointed to the court when she was nominated by President Obama in 2009. A year later former Harvard Law School dean Elena Kagan became Obama’s second nomination to the Court. Breyer alongside Sotomayor and Kagan make up the ‘liberal’ bloc of the Supreme Court.

Amy Coney Barret, nominated by President Trump weeks before the election, became Ginsburg’s replacement. Barret subsequently became Trump’s third nominee to the court - after Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh.

Unsurprisingly, none of these nominations came without their fair share of controversy. Trump’s first nomination Neil Gorsuch should have in theory fell to Merrick Garland - nominated by President Obama in his final year.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell begged to differ. He argued that since it was an election year the vacancy should be filled by the incoming President. A sigh of relief for the progressives and liberals certain of a Hilary Clinton win. That is until she didn’t.



Trump’s victory surprised the globe, but no one was more stunned than the political circles in Washington. Gorsuch was sworn in as an associate justice weeks after Trump’s inauguration and a year and half later Brett Kavanaugh followed suit - but not after his brutal interrogation at the hands of the Democrats.

Trump’s victory surprised the globe, but no one was more stunned than the political circles in Washington. Gorsuch was sworn in as an associate justice weeks after Trump’s inauguration and a year and half later Brett Kavanaugh followed suit - but not after his brutal interrogation at the hands of the Democrats.

The composition of the court remained a 5-4 conservative bench until the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg on 28th September 2020. Whilst some political commentators believed this to be the “October surprise” that would sway the presidency towards Trump, it was unable to keep him in the White House. On the other hand, it did everything to ensure that the court would remain conservative for possibly decades more to come.

The US Supreme Court: an undemocratic beacon of hope in the divided states of America...

This term could already prove to be one of the most consequential in the court's history.

The case *Dobbs vs Jackson Women's Health Organisation* deals with a Mississippi state law that prohibits abortion after 15 weeks. The ruling will likely be a challenge to the landmark case *Roe vs Wade* which legalised abortion nationwide for women in the United States in 1973.

Another major case that will be decided by the Supreme Court this term includes a law which supposedly infringes upon the Second Amendment. In the case *New York Rifle and Pistol Association vs Bruen*, the justices will decide whether New York's laws governing concealed carrying licenses are constitutional. This will be the first major case the Supreme Court hears regarding 'the right to bear arms' for over a decade.

In the landmark 2008 case *District of Columbia vs Heller*, the Supreme Court ruled that a DC ban on handguns was unconstitutional. Two years later in *McDonald vs City of Chicago*, the Supreme Court reasserted that the Second Amendment is applicable to the states and their political subdivisions.

Although the rulings are expected to come out later this year, the ideological divisions on the court suggest conclusions have already been made.

"And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave, over the land of the free and the home of the brave" ends the U.S national anthem.

But will the flag be waving over a United States of America, or a nation divided over what individual liberty truly means?

Muhammad Arman – Year 13

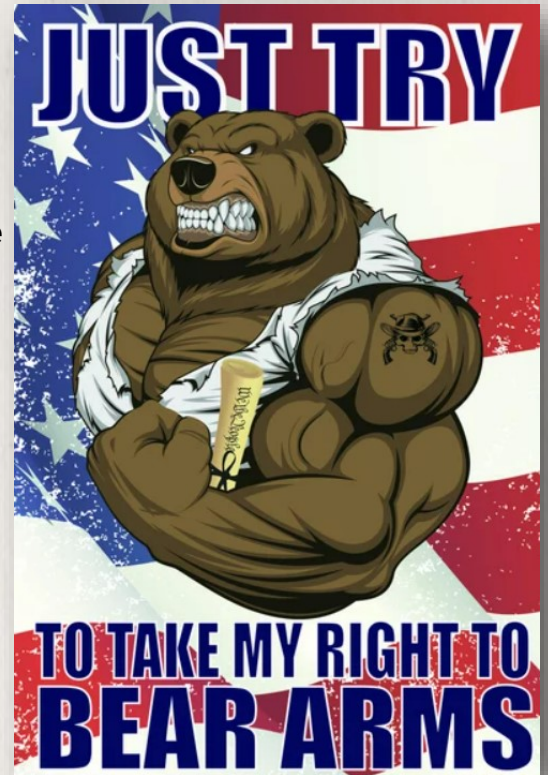


TABLE TENNIS - FOR BEGINNERS

TIPS AND TRICKS TO DEVELOP YOUR GAME

I was nine years of age when I first tried my hand at a game of Table Tennis with my dad. It always seemed like an easy game until I actually gave it a go. This made me realise that while table tennis is a lot of fun it is also a sport that requires a lot of skill that would take time to develop. As I started playing more and more frequently it grew on me and became my favourite sport.



I decided to write this article to throw some light on this very exciting, fun and technical game; also, to share some techniques which will enable a new player to develop their game and to understand what it takes to master this game.

Here are 7 tips to become a better Table Tennis player quickly:

1. Know what spin is on the ball

The key to acquiring this important skill in table tennis is to carefully watch your opponent's racket when it makes contact with the ball.

If your opponent's racket is moving from:

- Low to high — the spin is topspin
- High to low — the spin is backspin



2. Compensate for the spin with your racket angle.

If you have been served a topspin, angle your leading racket face down and contact the ball above its centre.

If your opponent sends you the ball in a backspin, angle your leading racket face up and contact the ball below its centre.

While holding your racket at the suggested angle, stroke gently forward. Only after you have developed a feel for the spin should you stroke the ball with more force.

3. Use your whole body when you stroke your forehand.

Make sure that you rotate your hips and shoulders backwards during the backswing and then forward into the ball as you stroke your forehand. This motion is coordinated with a transfer of your body weight from the back foot to the front foot. The harder you hit your forehand, the more forceful your weight transfer is. A common forehand mistake is to use only your arm to hit the ball, which severely limits your power and consistency.

TABLE TENNIS

4. Maintain a good ready position.

A good ready position is balanced and prepares your body to move instantly in any direction. Use it when preparing to return serves and between strokes.

The basic sequence of a table tennis rally is:

- A. Put yourself in a good ready position
- B. Move to the ball with your feet, staying balanced
- C. Stroke the ball
- D. Return to your ready position
- E. Repeat B, C and D until the rally ends



5. Train your strokes until they are automatic.

When you first learn a new table tennis skill, you use a lot of mental energy to formulate how the stroke would look and feel. Once this mental picture is relatively accurate, you should then practice that skill repeatedly until you no longer have to think about how to do it. This is your automatic stage.

6. Use your own table tennis racket.

It is important to get your own racket and use it exclusively. Every racket has its own feel and playing characteristics, and you will benefit greatly by using only one racket so you're not always trying to adapt to a different/new one.

7. Keep your returns low over the net.

In general, the lower over the net you place your shots, the less angle your opponent can use and the harder it is for them to hit it with power. You will want to place the ball very low over the net (and as close to the end of the table as possible).

A WORD FROM THE WRITER

From my experience, I have used these tips in almost every match. I have learnt table tennis is about practice and technique, as much-if not more- than skill. This means that if you practice you can become the next Xu Xin.

Armaan Currim—Year 7



Rugby and Basketball at Aston

My two favourite sports are basketball and rugby. At Aston the sports department supply my interests in an outstanding way. This article is about these two sports at Aston and why I like them.

Rugby

The first sport I would like to cover is rugby as this is my favourite sport. I am currently part of the A team at Aston, playing fullback. The Captain of the Aston A team is Levi Miller. We have had some high points and successes this season, winning most of our school matches and going on to compete in the Greater Birmingham tournament.

I also play rugby outside of school for the U13s at Moseley Rugby Club, where I play hooker in the scrum and outside centre. A normal rugby season ends in April; however, at Aston the season ends in December so we were perhaps less prepared for the tournament than we might have hoped. I hope this can change because not all of the students at Aston play club rugby and the team would gain a lot of experience and become better at the game if we played for the full season. There was also an afterschool rugby club on Tuesdays at the start of the year which Year 7 and 8 can train in.



Basketball

Moving on to basketball, currently there are two clubs running every week for Year 8. The clubs run before school on Wednesdays and Fridays, and everyone is welcome to join. They start at eight and end at half past eight, leaving the students who attend five minutes to dash to registration. The school has also recently put up brand-new basketball hoops on the bottom court; there are currently two hoops up. Hopefully we can get an Aston team up and running soon.

To conclude, if you want to play rugby at Aston School, you will sadly have to wait until next year when the new school season starts, however there are many clubs outside of school which you can participate in. There are currently clubs running weekly for basketball so if you are in school by eight o'clock and want to join us in the sports hall to play, you can. The new hoops also mean you can practice your skills at break and lunch times.

Toby Bowler—Year 8





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