

An alternative way to spend your free period has its benefits



by Carly Travis

The other day I was in the bathroom eavesdropping: “Did you know the library has coloring sheets?” one girl exclaimed to another.

Although the conversation wasn’t directed towards me, I responded in my head thinking, ‘No, but what a great idea.’

Their conversation continued and the girl went on to explain that she was coloring during her free period and I couldn’t help but think how enjoyable that must have been.

Funnily enough, this isn’t the first time I’ve heard of people coloring outside of class. In fact, I’ve recently noticed a shift in the way people are spending their free periods.

I was in the library when I noticed a group of friends doing a puzzle and playing chess. Because I’m curious and nosy, I asked them if this was their free period and, to my bewilderment, it was.

I was initially surprised because I’ve only known people to sit (or sulk) in the library finishing last

night’s homework or studying for a test. It never occurred to me that it’s acceptable to simply relax opposite your science lab or during lunch.

As an avid procrastinator and occasional opportunist, I usually spend spare time catching up on homework, getting ahead on homework, or studying for an upcoming test (and by ‘upcoming’ I mean 40 minutes away). If I’m not doing any of the above, I’m watching YouTube videos or mindlessly scrolling through Twitter. The notion of spending your free period doing things that free your mind of school work, originally seemed like a waste of time. However, I now think that stretching your brain during the day is equally important. It’s like when you exercise: stretching may seem unnecessary, but it prevents injury.

When it comes to your brain, it’s constantly working and therefore needs a moment to play and take a break. Regardless of what your day entails, boosting your mind with a jolt of creativity is key to keeping your brain enhanced and engaged throughout the day.

In one of my favorite web series, “If Our Bodies Could Talk,” James Hamblin, Senior editor at The Atlantic, explores different trends relating to health and lifestyle.

In an older episode, Hamblin interviewed writer Patricia Marx who’s written

for “Saturday Night Live” and “The Rugrats.”

In the segment, she explains how she’s tried every brain enhancing activity out there and noticed a significant improvement in her cognitive ability. In the end, the two writers practiced some of the exercises, and I was surprised at how each of them responded. For example, Marx drew a picture that looked like a square with randomly sized circles next to it. She asked Hamblin what it was, and after he got it wrong, she exclaimed, “It’s a make your own Swiss cheese kit.” Genius.

In school, we’re solving problems all day long, some that use logic, and others that don’t. When we’re faced with a problem, it feels natural to solve it from point A to point B, yet the whole point of a problem is to take us out of our comfort zones, forcing us to zig and zag and use the creative juices lingering in our brains.

I’m not suggesting you invest as much research as Marx did, but I am suggesting you invest a little time into giving your brain a break in order to tap into those imaginative resources. Go outside, read a book (one that’s not school related), do a puzzle, or grab a coloring sheet from the library. By exercising your mind, you’re ultimately setting yourself up for success in the long run.

Compassion can combat school shootings

by Logan Etheridge

Since the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, there have been over 150 school shootings across America.

In case you’re doing the math, this breaks down to about one school shooting a week, every week, for the past three years.

According to CNN, 60 percent of school shootings occur in “small, quiet suburbs.

Unfortunately, the issue of teenage homicide is not going away.

In 2015 alone, there were over 50 school shootings in the United States, according to Everytown Gun Safety.

As a result, debates over gun policy have dominated the media, numbing its audience to the problem of gun control and the tragedies it causes.

Because of this, the average citizen often forgets that gun policy alone cannot fix our country’s issues. Teenagers especially have minimal influence on American gun control.

We must remember that it will not be a politician’s law that ends teenage homicide, but students who fight the factors that lead to peers seeking violence.

This role that we are forced to play is more important than any law politicians may pass. If we want

to play our part in stopping school shootings, we need to focus on the individuals involved.

“Students will usually turn to extreme measures out of desperation,” said New Trier school psychologist Ashley Mellilo. “It often comes from a place of incredible pain and is used as a way of trying to escape,” Mellilo said.

Students who choose to violently injure their peers are no exception. According to Pacific Standard, only 23 percent of shooters have mental illnesses.

This means three out of four shooters do not. They are teenagers, who feel as though their suffering has been so great that they have no option except to take out their pain on those around them.

While this doesn’t offer an excuse for their actions, it sheds light on how the everyday student can help prevent school shootings.

“It’s really the little things,” Mellilo said. “The smallest act of kindness can turn a whole day around. As high school students, it’s important to acknowledge that this person means just as much as your other friends.”

“Small acts of kindness” sounds cliché, I know. It bears a staggering resemblance to junior high anti-bullying seminars in the school auditorium, when the only thought on your mind was ‘at least I don’t have class.’

But that’s the issue. If we all started listening to those speeches on compassion in junior high, we wouldn’t have to worry as much about high school students feeling as though they have been wronged and isolated by their peers and that their only option is mass shooting.

The statistics prove this to be true. Pacific Standard reported that 70 percent of school shooters have been cited as “social-outcasts” or “loners.”

If you’re seeing the pattern, it’s the kid who could have benefited from a few students taking to heart that boring junior high lecture.

Of course, not every school shooter fits this profile, and not every outsider is troubled or suffering. But since 70 percent of school shooters are identified as lonely students, it makes sense to focus on students who are thought of as outcasts.

Often, people who have a seemingly endless number of friends, perfect grades, or varsity jackets struggle with internal issues—like depression, anxiety or feelings of inadequacy.

“Anyone considering something like this wants someone to notice. Common signs include withdrawal, a change in habits, and often a decline in hygiene,” Mellilo said.

It’s time we take action. Not through politicians’ gun control or presidential apologies, but through the students, us, me, you, and our daily push towards compassion.

Editorial

Why your vote for the 2016 election matters

Turning 18 and becoming a legal adult opens new doors of opportunities. You have no legal curfew (driving or otherwise), you can buy as many lottery tickets as your allowance permits and you can permanently ink your skin. Those are the most common luxuries an 18-year-old looks forward to.

This is probably due to several reasons, the biggest perhaps being that the “most important” election only happens every four years: the presidential election. 2016 is one of those years. But in years when a presidential election doesn’t occur, there are still important elections of officials. For example, senators are elected every six years, and representatives who serve in the House of Representatives are elected every two years. Arguably, almost every year there is someone or something “important” to vote for.

Another aspect of voting that many teenagers forget is the one that might affect them the most. When you go to vote on Nov. 8, you’re not just electing the officials who go off to Washington. You’re also electing local representatives. These representatives include judges, county commissioners and aldermen.

Reaching the legal voting age also fails to excite because with so many candidates, it’s difficult to stay educated on who is running and what (s)he stands for.

One United States History class doesn’t cut it.

So how do these newly-turned 18-year-olds educate themselves? There are loads of different resources available on the internet. While we don’t suggest that you trust everything the politicians say, it might be useful to look at the candidates’ websites—just to get acquainted.

A more amusing source of learning is a quiz on isidewith.com. Similar to a typical BuzzFeed quiz, the quiz asks a series of questions of different national issues, including gay marriage, abortion rights and immigration policies. Once the quiz has been taken, it calculates the percentage of views you share with the 2016 presidential candidates. The higher the percentage, the more your views match. It practically makes the decision for you.

A more time-consuming option is to watch the nightly news, or tune into the next Democratic or Republican debate. If you can’t sit on your couch for over an hour listening to people you don’t personally know argue over topics you don’t entirely understand, then pick your favorite news outlet and watch a recap. A useful website is theSkimm.com. It can tell you all the latest political news in simple language littered with pop culture references. All of these resources are easily accessible, so there should be no excuse for remaining uninformed.

Finally, some teenagers decide not to vote is because it’s “too much of a hassle” to register to vote or physically go to the polls in November. With all the technological advances we’ve made, this seems like a lazy excuse. New Trier offers eligible students the opportunity to register to vote during advisory! Even if you miss those days, it’s as simple as googling “register to vote in Illinois” and clicking on the website that ends with “.gov.”

According to the Illinois Online Voter Application, there are only five requirements to vote that most New Trier students meet without lifting a finger. These are: being a citizen of the United States, being 17-years-old on or before the date of the Primary Election and turning 18 on or before the date of the General Election (November 8), living in your election precinct at least 30 days prior to Election Day, carrying no prior convictions or jail sentences, and not claim the right to vote anywhere else. Those five simple requirements allow you to have a say in the United States government.

In order to apply to register to vote, you need an Illinois Driver’s License number or your Illinois State ID number, the date the License or ID was issued, the last four digits of your Social Security number, and your birth date. While you might have to ask your parents for the last four digits of your social security number and pull out your license from your wallet, that’s it. Once you have all that information, login to the official Illinois Online Voter Registration Application website and enter it in. It’s that simple.

Even if you aren’t old enough to register to vote, it is never too early to educate yourself. Those who are old enough to vote, it’s your time to make a difference and become part of history. No more excuses. Educate yourself about the candidates, local and national, and be registered for the Presidential Primary on March 15.

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