

— A Student Newspaper —

THE HIGH SOCIETY

February 2025



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Get to know your teacher!

An interview with Mrs. Neal

This issue we are focusing on Mrs. Neal, a teacher of Biology as well as a Year 10 form tutor.

What are your favourite parts of teaching biology?

Teaching biology is an absolute delight - it isn't just about memorizing facts; it's about understanding ourselves, how our bodies work, as well as the living world around us. I love showing students how biology impacts their daily lives, from the food they eat to the diseases they fight. I love seeing a student's face light up when they finally grasp a complex concept. I love witnessing those a-ha! moments. Seeing students develop a genuine passion for biology is incredibly rewarding for me. When they start asking questions and sharing their own experiences, that is when the lessons become really fun and different. You never know what each day will bring in a biology classroom.

What is your favourite part of teaching KS3/4 and A-level? Are there any differences?

All 3 sciences and all biology topics are very connected, but between KS3-4 and A-level the depth of the content changes (although the topics themselves stay similar). For example, microscopy and cell structure are introduced in Year 7 through the "What Am I?" topic, but in KS4-5 the same topic is expanded and taught in more detail. I love everything I teach and I love helping students to make these connections between different topics and to see biology as a whole.

What is your favourite thing about AHS as a school community?

Both students and staff are very welcoming and I love being part of this community. As soon as I started my teacher training here, I knew this was the school I wanted to be part of.

Do you hold any other responsibilities within the school?

I am also a Form tutor. Being a Form Tutor is definitely more than just taking registers or going through daily notices. Seeing students develop over the years, both academically and personally, getting to know each student individually, understanding their strengths and weaknesses, and building those supportive relationships is incredibly rewarding.

Why did you decide to get into teaching?

I studied Biology at university and spent time tutoring students during my university years and realised how much I loved teaching. Although I started my career in the pharmaceutical industry, in marketing, I always wanted to go back to teaching. When the time was right, I didn't have to think twice about this career.

How does biology and science integrate into other subjects?

Biology encourages students to analyse data, formulate hypotheses, design experiments, and draw conclusions. It involves presenting research findings, and discussing complex concepts. Students are expected to be able to do this from Year 7 through to Year 13 and I think this is a very transferable skill. Biology cultivates a curiosity about the world and a desire to learn and explore. This lifelong learning approach benefits all areas of study. When I introduce myself to my students I tell them that one of my expectations from them is to ask questions. I think the skill of asking questions is important to develop, because the more you ask questions and get answers, the more interesting the subject becomes. This skill will help students in other aspects of their studies

Anastasia K 12D

A TRIP TO ABERDYFI



Nestled along the beautiful Welsh coastline, Aberdyfi is a place where adventure meets nature, making it the perfect destination for a school trip. A visit to Aberdyfi with the Outward Bound Trust offered not only the chance to explore the stunning scenery of the Welsh coast but also the opportunity to learn valuable life skills, boost confidence, and enhance self-esteem.

The Outward Bound Trust's centre in Aberdyfi provided a range of exciting outdoor activities, all designed to push students out of their comfort zones, build teamwork, and inspire self-discovery. Activities such as rock climbing, kayaking, hiking, and problem-solving challenges gave students a sense of accomplishment as they conquered new challenges. These activities helped develop resilience, leadership skills, and a strong sense of companionship among classmates.

Throughout the trip, students embraced the adventure, enjoying:

- Canoeing on the estuary
- Hiking over the local peaks
- Watching stunning sunsets, accompanied by hot chocolate!
- The thrill of spending the night in forest cabins

While the physical challenges are thrilling, the Outward Bound Trust's programme is equally focused on personal growth. Students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences, learning how to set goals, overcome self-doubt, and push through difficult moments. These experiences often lead to a boost in self-confidence, as students realise their ability to tackle challenges and achieve things they didn't think possible.

The trip to Aberdyfi provided a safe and supportive environment for students to grow, whether it was gaining the confidence to speak up in a group, trying a new activity for the first time, or simply learning to trust themselves and others.

The trip was more than just a getaway—it was an unforgettable experience that helped students develop important life skills, foster a sense of togetherness, and build confidence. Whether they're overcoming a fear of heights, learning to work as part of a team, or simply enjoying the great outdoors, the trip offers countless opportunities for growth and self-discovery.

By the time students returned home, they had not only enjoyed a thrilling adventure but had also gained a newfound sense of independence and confidence that will stay with them for years to come.

Aishaani U 8S



Sexism and Stereotyping in Theatre

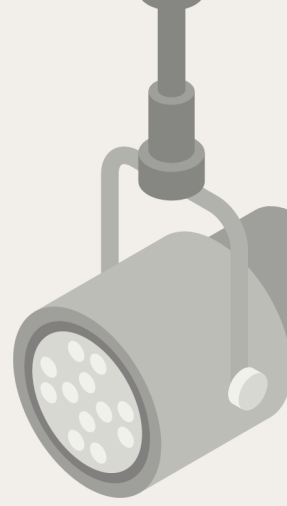
Since the 16th Century BCE, theatre has had a big impact on society through creating a wide culture of entertainment and, occasionally, education or awareness. In contemporary times, it has become a safe haven for people, both actors and audience, to express themselves freely without feeling like they have to be judged. Despite this, throughout its development, theatre has involved many stereotypes that have been harmful to society and targeted marginalised groups, which has also had an impact on how some people see the world. Although there has been significant progress in theatre within the last 60 years, there is still much more room for improvement.

Stereotypes

A stereotype is a widely held and oversimplified image or idea of a particular group. It is mostly caused by ideas or depictions from media (such as film and TV) and are usually offensive to the targeted group(s), sometimes even harmful.

Racial stereotyping, although not much of a problem in new or modern musicals and plays, is sometimes visible in older musicals. There are quite a few musicals created during the mid-to-late 20th Century that, although perhaps being accepted at the time, have now become problematic or controversial due to a change in society and the way certain topics are viewed. For example, three-time Tony Award winner Avenue Q features a Japanese character called 'Christmas Eve', who is always seen wearing a very stereotypical traditional kimono with the actor putting on an exaggerated Japanese accent. This is not the first time in theatre that Asian people in particular have been stereotyped - such as in the 1991 Miss Saigon revival, where a white man was cast to portray a leading Vietnamese role, in which he wore heavy makeup to alter the shape of his eyes and the colour of his skin. This was particularly controversial as the character which the actor was playing was unintentionally a harmful stereotype of Vietnamese people - being 'money-hungry', aggressive and corrupt. As well as this, all of the female Vietnamese characters in the musical were very sexualised, as they were all prostitutes for the story. The female lead, Kim, was also portrayed with a "Lotus Blossom" archetype - a very common personality trait used for Asian characters, and for East and Southeast Asian characters especially.

Another very common stereotyping within theatre is gender stereotyping, especially within women. This type of stereotyping is quite harmful as women take up a smaller percentage of roles within theatre. In plays and musicals that have a male leading role, the female supporting leads are almost always the main character's love interest or portrayed as a mother figure. On top of this, with productions that have a female-heavy cast or a female lead, there is still stereotyping within them. One of the main supporting female characters in the hit musical Mean Girls, Karen, is completely portrayed as stupid and incompetent, as well as being blonde. The very well-known stereotype that 'blondes are stupid', which has been held for over a hundred years, is portrayed countless times in film, media and theatre. Another example of this is in Legally Blonde, however it is used positively as a way of beating it - the main character, Elle Woods, a blonde who is perceived as dumb at the beginning of the musical, defies the stereotype by proving her intelligence in a highly competitive academic environment.



Sexism and Stereotyping in Theatre

Modern theatre is a lot more inclusive with their casting, such as colour blind casting and casting actors with no regards to gender. For example, in the 2022 West End production of Legally Blonde, Elle - a traditionally white blonde character - was played by Courtney Bowman who is an Afro-European woman. For a more local reference, the 2021 pantomime Sleeping Beauty at Aylesbury's Queen's Park Arts Centre featured a Princess Charming; this was a great example of inclusivity for both more female roles and for representation of the LGBTQ+ community.

Sexism

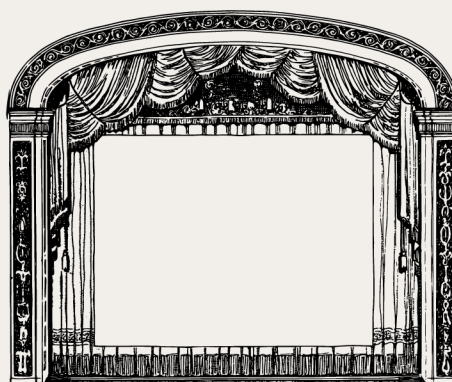
Both gender stereotyping and sexism are also a huge problem in theatre, and unlike racial stereotyping which is not as common as it once was, it is still quite prominent in the industry.

Since Greek theatre, plays always involved an all-male cast, with younger men and boys playing female roles which were primarily a romantic interest for the protagonist. This was until the year 1660, when the first professional actress was allowed to play a role in Shakespeare's Othello. After this, the feature of women in theatre propelled throughout the 18th Century. However, sexism is still present within theatre today, proving that there is still much more room for improvement, even in comparison to early theatre. Female characters are usually used as a plot device or romantic interest for the main character. For example, it feels as if the death of a female character has to occur in order for the main character to develop through the story, however it is not fully acknowledged or is sometimes forgotten about - it doesn't have much of an impact on the main plot. In Shakespeare's Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is presented as fierce and independent, however this is used in a negative way for the audience to dislike and ridicule the character as she is not conforming to the traditional characteristics of a woman. When she dies at the end of the play, she is forgotten about quite quickly, despite being a large part of the play, and the story continues without any more regards to her.

Although sexism in the theatre industry is mostly directed towards women, men sometimes experience sexism and/or homophobia outside of performing. Many people believe that men in musical theatre are feminine, or 'gay' - with the word used in a derogatory way and with the purpose of insulting or making fun of them. This can affect the industry as more men will feel as if they aren't 'masculine' enough by taking on musical theatre, preventing them from wanting to experience it, whether as an actor or as an audience.

Overall, theatre has shown its many progressions and improvements alongside society's views on these topics. However, there is much more progress still to be made, especially with gender roles and how they are portrayed, such as with female characters. Although stereotyping is much less common nowadays, there are still some circumstances in plays or musicals where it can be harmful to particular groups of people.

Helena C 12E



Climate disinformation and critical thinking

Hanna S 12D



As year after year passes by, the destructive impact of climate change looms bigger and brighter on the horizon. It may be the intensity and frequency of the destruction that intimidates us, but it is crucial that we are fully informed about events that will no doubt have a massive impact on our lives. Especially in the age of rapid disinformation like never seen before, it is key that we as students can look at evidence and form our own opinions free from the influence of bad actors. So below I have outlined some 'golden rules' I use when researching.

No source is perfect.

No source, not even the BBC, is free from factual error. What this does not mean is that all mainstream sources are secretly lying to you. Rather, with the overload of news and information around the world, it is common to make basic factual errors or, in a developing situation, to have to be corrected when new information is released. For example, in my previous article on AI, I said that those programmes use massive amounts of water and energy. However, new AI programmes like China's DeepSeek may be more energy efficient and projected to become even more so. Even with access to all the information on a given topic, the simple passage of time is enough to discount previously held truths.

All sources have biases

The fact that news is generally communicated by humans means that all news communications will have biases. Many times, these biases are not controversial enough to be seen as a 'bias', but by technicality they are. The solution to this is not to completely reject all news sources, but to rather know why they present situations in a certain way, and whether this is beneficial or not. The use of bias is also present in many of the rhetorical techniques that writers use to reach their audiences, so while the language of an article may seem overly emotional or insincere, it is important to note that the facts in it may not necessarily be false. As an addition to this point, many sources may be partially truthful and twist facts to fit a certain narrative, and this may be different for different topics. Almost every news source does this to some degree, so it is important to read around many sources to evaluate whether a topic has been represented honestly.

Scientific Research itself is imperfect

Science is a human discipline, and this will be a trend here, but like every human discipline it is imperfect. To prove a theory, it does not require one single paper, but multitudes of papers covering every niche case and angle of that theory. Climate change is an area of study that has been well documented over the years, and has had conclusive evidence backing it up since the 1970s. However, unlike the 1970s, we now have the worrying trend of false research papers that have been generated using AI and can spread misinformation faster than before. Something may seem self-evident simply by confirming the existence of a singular study, but it is ever more important to actually check the content of that study and to see what others in that field are saying about it. For example, one 'article' I found about the 'climate hoax' quotes a paper from a scientist whose research was funded by the American Petroleum Institute.

To conclude, I believe the main question you should always be asking yourself is why a piece of news is communicated in the way that it is. Whether that reason is nefarious, beneficial or anything else, knowing the context of a situation is key to properly understanding it.

An Interview with the Headmistress, Mrs Forster

This month, we had the privilege of sitting down with Mrs Forster, our headteacher, to discuss her thoughts, experiences, and vision for AHS. Here is what she had to say...

What inspired you to become a headteacher ?

I transitioned from the commercial sector into teaching because of my deep love for nurturing young people's minds. I am passionate about helping young people to grow, develop, and build their careers. It is incredibly rewarding to have such a positive impact on their lives.

What is your vision for the school over the next 5 years?

My vision is to nurture independent young adults who are strong, confident, and self-aware. I want them to recognise the importance of their next steps and be dynamic, talented, and confident in the subjects they choose for both their GCSEs and A-Levels. My goal is to provide the tools and support they need to succeed, ensuring that they are exactly where they need to be at each stage of their development.

What achievements of the school are you most proud of?

I am extremely proud of the Ofsted report that praised our calm and positive environment. It's fulfilling to see both students and staff happy, thriving in a space that fosters calm, positivity, and growth. We have created an environment where everyone can truly excel.

What role do students play in shaping the school's policies and activities?

Students play a vital role in shaping the school's direction. We actively seek their input through platforms like student councils, surveys, and focus groups. Their feedback helps us design policies, extracurricular activities, and initiatives that resonate with their needs and aspirations. Empowering students to have a voice ensures they feel heard, valued, and more invested in their school community.

What challenges do you face in your role, and how do you overcome them?

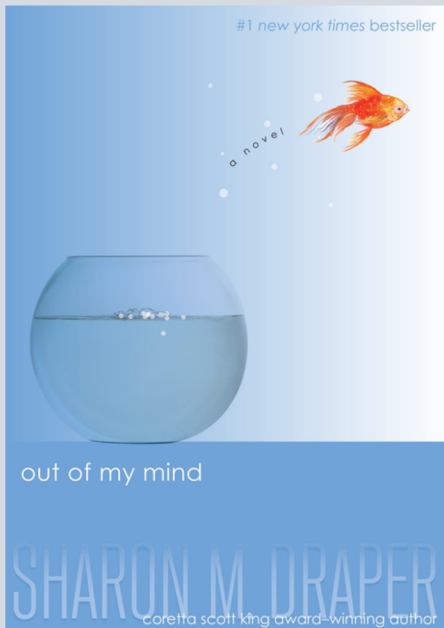
One of the biggest challenges is navigating the impact of global and national instability on our school community. Such instability often leads to funding cuts or reduced resources, which can have further repercussions on the support we're able to offer. Additionally, the lingering effects of COVID-19 have been particularly significant, especially on young women. It has highlighted the importance of providing support to the younger generation to help them regain confidence and navigate their futures. To address these challenges, we focus on creating a protective and nurturing environment within the school, ensuring that our community feels supported, resilient, and prepared to overcome external pressures.



Aleeza M 10C

SEND Representation in Reading

Out of Mind - Sharon Draper



This novel tells the story of Melody Brooks, a girl with cerebral palsy. Melody is nonverbal and relies on alternative communication to express herself. She is often underestimated for her intelligence and misunderstood by many of her peers. The book highlights how every individual has a voice, even if that is through diverse communication modes (eg. an AAC device). It also showcases how simply being kind and encouraging can go a long way!

I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about cerebral palsy or alternative communication! A filmed version of the book can be found on Disney +.

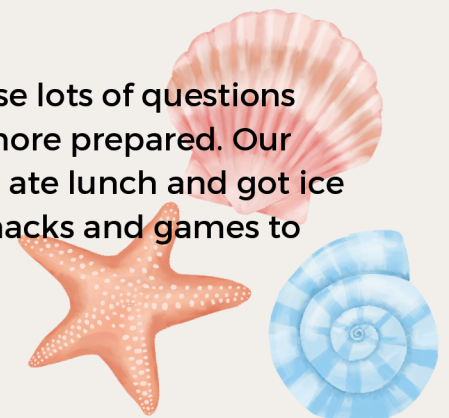
A TRIP TO DORSET

In October for our geography trip we drove down to Dorset to collect data for our physical and human Geography fieldwork enquiries.

We investigated the signs of urban deprivation in Boscombe and carried out some measurements on Swanage beach to identify the signs of longshore drift and if the coastal management strategies were working. We took a walk along the coast to see Old Harry's Rocks and attempted to see Durdle Door and Lulworth Cove on the last day despite strong winds and heavy rain trying to blow us off our feet! It helped us with our GCSE because we studied the local area which helped us prepare for our GCSE paper 3 which is about fieldwork.

The fieldwork we did in Dorset was used in class to help us practise lots of questions which will most likely come up in the exam so we will be much more prepared. Our favourite part of the trip was our freetime by the beach where we ate lunch and got ice cream. If we were to go on the trip again we would bring some snacks and games to play in your rooms and on the coach.

Phoebe, Eleanor and Matilda 11S



In Support of Humanities: Sustaining Creativity in an Age of STEM

In recent years there has evidently been a shift in our perception of humanities as a valuable area of study. With developments in AI and escalated global conflict, there has been an understandable encouragement of STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. Although unintentionally, this recent emphasis on the importance of these fields seems to have undermined the significance of humanities. All too often, the study of subjects such as English, Religious Studies, Geography, to name but a few - are dismissed as something easier than their technical counterparts.

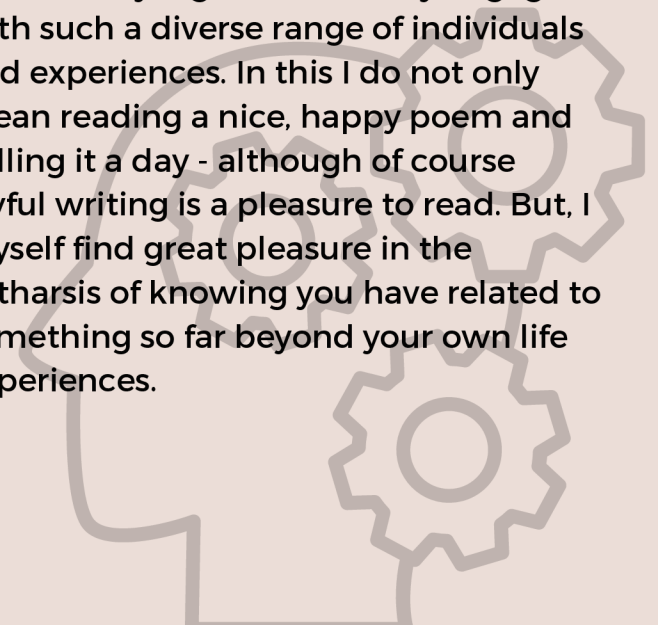
Whilst STEM subjects are undoubtedly of great importance, it is vital not to overlook the range of skills that are acquired through humanities. Consider English Literature, for example. This subject, through analysing texts, gives students the ability to gain insight into thoughts and emotions, as well as the ability to eloquently express their thoughts and analyse in detail. Even for a student interested in the medical field, why should we erase the ability to communicate effectively by discounting the effect of humanities on our development?

Because of the creative and broad range of ideas that can be explored, the emerging narrative is that it is 'easier' and there is 'no wrong answer' for subjects such as English. Even in a conversation with a friend before our Literature exam, something she said struck a wrong note.

I asked her if she was nervous for the exam, knowing that, as she had mentioned before, humanities were not something that she was particularly interested in or came naturally to her. However, her answer surprised me. She said she was sure it would be boring - but she would do well, not because of a natural affinity for it or having worked hard to better her skills, but because there was 'no wrong answer.'

This seems to be the resounding argument for why humanities are apparently 'easier' and less valuable. However, humanities require the evidence of an emotional response. Granted, if analysing a poem there are a wide range of ideas your answer could include - but without a response emotionally to the text and use of critical analysis and specialist terms, there can be problems in expression. These skills of expression are extremely valuable, and in losing the study of humanities we lose these with it.

Another valuable aspect of humanities is the ability it gives us to truly engage with such a diverse range of individuals and experiences. In this I do not only mean reading a nice, happy poem and calling it a day - although of course joyful writing is a pleasure to read. But, I myself find great pleasure in the catharsis of knowing you have related to something so far beyond your own life experiences.



Reading is vital - the grittiest, most emotionally taxing narratives can leave us with a strange sense of satisfaction - you walk away from it thinking yes, I can see exactly what Sylvia Plath, or Charlotte Bronte, or Charles Dickens was talking about. And I think it makes us better people, to experience hardship or joy in the eyes of others, leaving us determined to alter or rejoice for the world in which we live.

Furthermore, while AI is growing even stronger, we must ask ourselves what will remain in the careers field. Technology is a wonderful thing to explore - but when does it stop? There is no similar problem in a humanities based study - there is an endless universe of possibilities. Not to say that there is no wrong answer, rather that there are many right ones when the task is correctly approached. STEM is valuable, and this does not aim to offend or discount the experiences of those pursuing it - rather to encourage a positive attitude towards humanities, and reassure those truly committed to them that there is value in pursuing it. STEM is not the only valuable path.

An existence without humanities is one governed by logic and a robot-like adherence to regulations, but ultimately soulless unless there is some creativity in it. Even a doctor coming home after a long day probably entertains herself with something a humanities career created - the books she chooses to read, the TV shows she switches on.

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”**

Finally, there is one resounding answer to the question of why we must not discount the study of humanities. Yes, we need biologists, chemists, mathematicians, engineers - for the logical and binary answers. There is great progress to be found there in improving our quality of life. But we must ask ourselves, why have we tried to improve this in the first place? To feel emotion, to express it in a multitude of ways. So sciences keep us alive, but - humanities give us something to live for.

Nathalie Y 12K



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