

THE MAMMOTH TRIBUNE

"MADE BY STUDENTS FOR STUDENTS"



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WINTER



- 5 **Student Spotlight**
Highlighting junior Sergio Hernandez Ruiz and his talent for music and design
- 9 **Artistry at the Academy**
A special feature on some of the art prodigy's in Mrs. Parsons' first art class
- 11 **Dreams Come True at the Yule Ball**
A recap of Western Center Academy's winter formal traditionally held at Monte De Oro Winery
- 15 **Keeping Up With the Herd**
Keeping up with three former WCA students who all currently attend Southern Utah University
- 24 **Does Duolingo Actually Work?**
Determining whether or not the language app Duolingo is actually efficient in its ways
- 25 **Sarah McBride Is Making Strides**
Informative article about the first openly transgender person elected to congress, Sarah McBride.

- 3-4 Around Campus
- 7 Burger Bash
- 8 Word of the Herd
- 13 Academic Decathlon
- 14 Your Next Winter Trip
- 17 Moana 2
- 18 Wicked
- 19 Game Awards
- 20 Game Review
- 21-22 Movies to Watch by the Fireplace
- 23 New Years Traditions
- 27-28 They are Missing
- 29-30 Word Games



THE TRIBUNE STAFF



Back Row: Lucas Land, Maddox McAVaney, Kolton Klug

Middle Row: McKayla Binette, Yaretzi Gutierrez, Melody Cortez, Vivianna Ugarte, Kaisara Arambula, Alejandro Peña, Gabriela Sagastume, Lovina Seelhofer

Front Row: Adriana Ordaz, Jayla Moss, Lily Hawkinson, Gabriela Ordaz, Kaylie Davis

Not Pictured: Zeydi Ponce

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Hey Mammoths!

Welcome to 2025! As the cold weather sets in and we bundle up in our warm coats, it's the perfect time to embrace the simple joys of winter—and the first edition of *The Mammoth Tribune* this semester! This issue perfectly encapsulates our dedication to bring you a new collection of intriguing articles, created for students by students. Inside, you'll find everything from our beloved *Around Campus* section to an inspiring Student Spotlight on **Sergio Hernandez (2026)**. We're also diving into a variety of topics, including Tesla's latest robot, the impact of Duolingo, and a highly anticipated *Moana 2* movie review. We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together. Here's to a smooth transition into this next semester.

And to my fellow seniors, isn't it crazy that 2025 is finally here? Let's make it a year to remember!

-Lily Hawkinson, Editor-in-Chief

"Made By Students For Students."

AROUND

With the beginning of this semester bringing a new chapter of this school year, it's good to remember all the highlights from the beginning of winter.

The week before Thanksgiving Break, Nov. 19 through Nov. 21, we held our annual Thanksgiving Food Drive where our goal was to fill up the entire district van with a variety of canned foods. At the end of the week, the whole bottom layer was full from generous donations to go to the Valley Community Pantry.

On Dec. 6, ASB and Link Crew joined forces to host the Toys for Tots drive. Students had the opportunity to donate toys worth \$10 in exchange for a pajama day and raffle ticket to win a variety of prizes at the end of the day.



CAMPUS

By Lily Hawkinson

The festive spirit continued on Dec. 7, when WCA participated in the annual Hemet Christmas Parade. Our Line Dancing Club gave a spirited performance, and a decorated truck added to the holiday cheer. Meanwhile, ASB members handed out candy to the crowd, spreading joy throughout the community.

Dec. 10 brought Human Rights Spirit Day, inviting students to wear blue or yellow to show their support for human rights around the world. During lunch, UNICEF set up a table and offered candy to students.



As finals week approached, Dec. 16–19 marked the final winter spirit week of the semester. Each day featured a unique theme:

- **Monday, Dec. 16:** "Snow Day" invited students to bundle up in cozy sweaters, beanies, and their warmest winter gear.
- **Tuesday, Dec. 17:** "Candy Cane Lane" encouraged red and white attire and included a Bring Your Own Mug activity. Students who brought mugs could enjoy hot cocoa at lunch, reminiscent of the popular Bring Your Own Banana Day earlier in the year.
- **Wednesday, Dec. 18:** "Holiday Party" was all about festive flair, with students showing off their cutest—or ugliest—holiday sweaters.
- **Thursday, Dec. 19:** "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" gave students a chance to relax before Winter Break, dressing in pajamas to embrace the cozy holiday spirit.

These events captured the essence of the season and united the student body in celebration, creating memories that will last well beyond the semester.



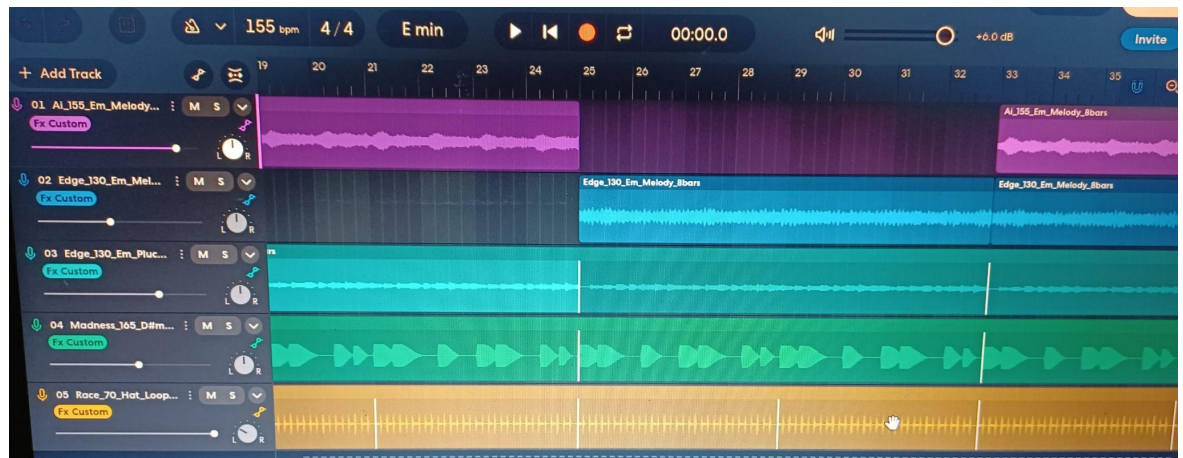


Student Spotlight: Sergio Hernandez Ruiz

By Kaylei Davis

At first glance, **Sergio Hernandez Ruiz (2026)** might come across as just a chill guy. While that's true, there's much more to him than meets the eye. Few people realize that Sergio is a deeply thoughtful musical artist—and even fewer know he's been producing his own music for nearly a year

Sergio started making music by simply listening to various genres of music such as rock, metal, pop and hip hop. He picks up on the melodies and how they sound to get ideas for his own music. He says that he started making music because it's a way for him “to express himself and his emotions in a safe way.” His inspiration for producing his own music consists of artists such as Juice WRLD, Trippie Redd, Lil Uzi Vert and Eminem. These artists inspire him because they came from the bottom and worked their way up to the top.



A song he produced with BandLab

To help him on his journey as a music artist, he's taken classes to further his skills. Currently Sergio is taking Creative Writing to improve his lyric-writing abilities, which aligns with his love for storytelling. Last year, he took multimedia to help him create album covers using various platforms like Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator. His process of producing music involves using the sites BandLab and Soundtrap, where he customizes available sounds to match the melodies and beats he envisions. Additionally, he has some experience playing the guitar and piano, which enhances his creative process. This year he is also taking WCA's first art class to, in his words, become more artistic. He plans for his music to be just as diverse as his music taste.

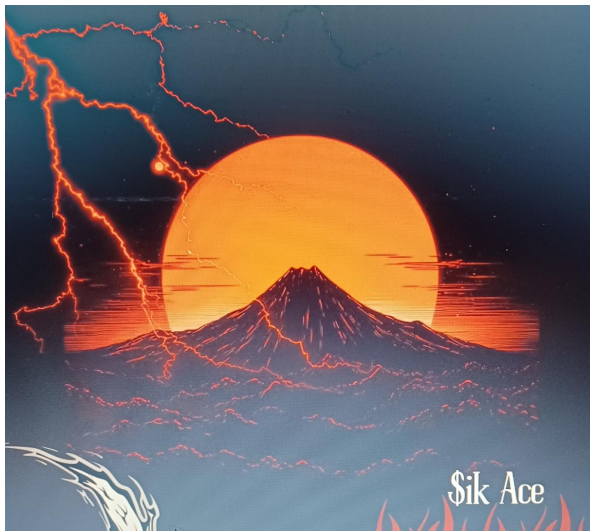
His favorite album “Fighting Demons” by Juice WrlD



To Sergio, making music is more than just something to do on the side in his free time. With the support of his family, Sergio wants to study music in college and continue producing his own music. He hopes to either join a music label or make his own label. His music will be released on the platforms Soundcloud and Spotify under the name \$ik Ace. The name symbolizes two aspects of his character. “Sik” as in cool and “Ace” as in his favorite card and his favorite character from the anime *One Piece*. Sergio also wants to get better at his vocals by listening to music and putting more effort into singing. He also one day hopes to collaborate with famous artists such as Trippie Redd, Eminem, and Charlie Puth.



Lastly, Sergio wants to encourage anyone else who wants to make music to follow their heart and never let anyone tell you to stop. At the same time, he also recognizes the fact the music industry is tough to make it in, but advises others to persevere and push through, just as he is doing.



A possible album cover he made





Bye Bye College Applications (For Now)

By Mckayla “Sarinya” Binette

Many seniors have finally submitted their UC and CSU applications on Dec. 2 and celebrated their accomplishments on Dec. 6 with the annual Burger Bash. Each year, WCA hosts this lunch party with complimentary burgers to honor the hard work seniors put into applying to major California universities as well as out-of-state schools and private colleges.

During the event, **Ms. Arave** made her rounds, checking off the “Applied to College” box on our College Kickoff shirts while we enjoyed delicious burgers and mingled with our friend groups. With only 78 students in the graduating class, it was a rare chance to see nearly everyone we’ve shared our school journey with—some for the past seven years. Though a few students joined us in high school, whether as freshmen or even seniors, most of us have found our place and our crowd.

Underclassmen, your turn will come soon enough! Senior year sneaks up faster than you think, and in just a couple of years, you’ll have your own Burger Bash to celebrate. In the meantime, enjoy your time here.



Seniors on being a senior:

“It’s fun, but also stressful because I want to spend time with friends and also make sure I don’t fail.”

– Alejandro Peña (2025)

“It’s kinda scary but at the same time I’m excited for the future and experiencing college.”

–Kendra Johanssen (2025)

“I haven’t fully captured the idea yet, overall not here, Hoping for the best.”

–Jessica Sadler (2025)



Seniors on submitting college applications:

“It was very stressful, and I also had a lot of work outside of that, hard to find time. Now I can chill for the next month or so.”

–Gabriela Ordaz (2025)

“It’s a big relief having everything done and I’m thankful that a lot has been taken off my plate.”

–Kendra Johanssen (2025)

“It was like a weight off my back; I turned them in and I felt like everything is going to be okay, finally.”

–Samantha Hoggan (2025)



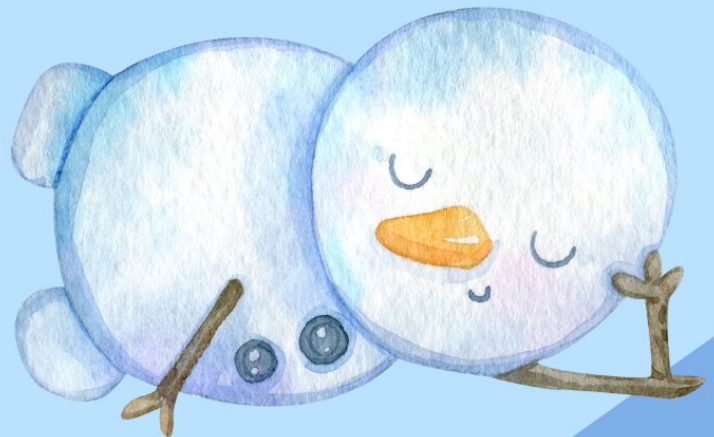
Word of the Herd

Are you a writer, artist, photographer, or poet? Would you like to show off your creativity? If so, then please submit your creations to the Word of the Herd !

**How to submit:
Join the Word of the Herd Google Classroom with the join code **jhe4we3****

**Deadline for Submissions :
Sunday, February 9, 2025
at midnight**

Have your short stories, poetry, prose, photography, art, and scripts published in the Word of the Herd!



Artistry at the Academy

By Samira Seelhofer

The Western Center Academy has introduced an exciting new class designed to nurture the creative talents of its students. This dynamic group of students has the freedom to bring their imaginations to life, resulting in breathtaking and awe-inspiring works of art. As part of our efforts at *The Mammoth Tribune* to spotlight student achievements, we decided to feature some standout artists from Mrs. Parsons' class. Among them, **Kat Ruiz (Class of 2027)** was recognized for her distinctive style, and **Persia Batiste (Class of 2026)** impressed us with her stunning self-portrait.

Kat Ruiz has always been a fan of all forms of art, from acrylic and charcoal painting to photography—she loves the variety of creative expression. She believes participating in art, especially in class, has become a crucial stepping stone for her potential career paths. Exploring tattoo artistry, in particular, has been positively influenced by the creative outlet the art class provides. Her most prized piece is her completed "Identity Mask." For this project, Mrs. Parson challenged students to honestly portray their inner selves. The outside of the mask reflects how others perceive her, while the inside reveals her true emotions and ideas—the thoughts and feelings she doesn't always share. Kat found it to be a meaningful way to learn more about herself.



Kat doesn't just create art; she sees it everywhere in her daily life. Her favorite example is the sky—whether it's a sunrise, a sunset, or the ever-changing patterns of clouds. "It's like one big painting," she says, often pausing to snap a photo and capture its beauty. This habit of finding art in the world highlights how essential creativity is to everyday life. For Kat, however, art is more than self-expression. It's a family tradition, passed down through generations, and a way for her to connect with her loved ones and understand them better as individuals.

Another exceptionally talented artist, Persia Batiste, has embraced the new art class at WCA, proving its value as a great addition to the campus. Drawn to her art with an insatiable appetite for creation, she is passionate about making beautiful things. What Persia appreciates most about the class is the “freedom of creativity.” Through her artistic endeavors, she hopes to “improve and change” the world around her. In her opinion, the most beneficial aspect of the class is learning to “explore different mediums and techniques.” This opens up new ways to display her artwork and transform its appearance, an opportunity she deeply values. Overall, Persia finds the class “very fulfilling,” describing it as “the best way to express my vision and my heart.”

Persia also cherishes her “Identity Mask.” as well. It represents the people closest to her-- everyone who has helped her become the person her mask represents. She admires it as a constant reminder of the person she is and hopes to become. The hand sculpted nose displays her resourcefulness, while the mouth, crafted from scratch, highlights her creativity. The most meaningful part of the mask, however, is that it stands as a symbol of her commitment to remain true to herself, to grow, and to shape her identity on her own terms.

For Persia, art extends beyond what she creates; it exists in nature itself. Even something as simple as the intricate placement of rocks can be “so beautiful.” Persia believes art can be found everywhere—“in waking up in the morning, as you are welcomed to experience the world in front of you.” Being open to seeing beauty in everything is how she sees art everywhere “it is versatile and can be anything.”

The highlight of the new art class is that it allows Persia to freely express her creativity, which she describes as something that “cannot be contained.” Releasing this creativity brings her a profound sense of “warmth and fulfillment.” Artists are constantly striving to create, to bring their thoughts to life where there are “no bad ideas.” Persia believes artistry embodies “freedom,” and she emphasizes the importance of self-expression as a path to personal fulfillment.



Dreams Come True at The Yule Ball

By Vivianne Ugarte

On Dec. 14, WCA celebrated the ending of the first semester, as per tradition, with its annual Winter Formal. It was a bittersweet event as many freshmen were experiencing the first of many WCA formal dances, while many Seniors realized that it would be their last Winter Formal. Monte de Oro Winery buzzed with excitement as guests poured into the venue, dressed to impress and eager to show off their outfits. The night unfolded with lively dancing, energetic jumping, and smiles on everyone's faces. Guests also enjoyed familiar favorites like tacos, tiramisu, and the unforgettable lemonade. As the evening drew closer to its end, one of the most anticipated moments finally arrived: the crowning of this year's royalty. **Ethan Tsai** was named Freshman Prince, and alongside him, **Bridgette Johansen** was crowned Freshman Princess. For the sophomores, **Eder Vides** claimed the title of Prince, and **Marley Roughton** as Princess. The Junior Prince and Princess were **Diego Rosales** and **Persia Batiste**. Finally, amid much anticipation, **Alan Trejo** and **Tagan Brown** were crowned this year's Senior King and Queen. The night ended on a high note, leaving attendees with lasting memories of an unforgettable evening.





Hard At Work: Academic Decathlon

By Maddox McAvaney

The Western Center Academic Decathlon team has been working diligently to defend its county championship, which it has held for the last two years. This year's team members include **Kirolles Moussa (2025)**, **Gabriela Ordaz (2025)**, **David Pelazini (2025)**, **Xander Warner (2025)**, **Destiny Horn (2026)**, **Maddox McAvaney (2026)**, **Mary Tian (2026)**, and **Anastacia Ybarra (2026)**. The team has been preparing for the ten events of the Academic Decathlon, which includes seven subject tests in science, social science, mathematics, art, economics, literature, and music. In addition, there are three performance-based events in interview, speech, and essay.

Academic Decathlon is a challenging academic competition that requires a total commitment from participants. The team has been meeting for two hours a day since the beginning of the school year. Xander Warner stated, "I would describe AcaDec as another set of classes for me. AcaDec is like a whole other day at school." Gabriela Ordaz added, "It's also like a college experience." Destiny Horn, emphasized the camaraderie, saying, "It's a lot of work and a huge time commitment, however working as a team and watching each other grow makes it worth it."

At the beginning of the year, the team set ambitious goals of winning the county championship, competing at the state competition in Santa Clara, and making it to the nationals in Des Moines, Iowa. They also have set individual goals for themselves. Anastacia Ybarra shared that she is "making a difference to my team by scoring high and studying every night has made me strive to be the best I can be." David Pelazini is determined to "challenge myself in my final year of high school and expand my knowledge in many subjects." Mary Tian hopes to "win a medal and help my team make it to nationals."

To be successful in Academic Decathlon students need to work as a team. Kiro Moussa highlights this saying, "I love how everyone uses their own strengths to help the entire team succeed." Anastacia describes the team as "an empowering group to be a part of, we all strive to do our best." Destiny added that working as a team has "provided me with a lot of support and encouragement throughout the learning process."

As the Academic Decathlon team prepares for the county competition, they all agree that it has been more than just a competition. Kiro says, "It helps me explore interests, like music and literature" Destiny reflected on her enjoyment declaring that "Mr McDonald, has helped to make sure all of us thrive in the best way, making AcaDec very fun. I've already learned so much!" I, Maddox McAvaney, think that overall, Academic Decathlon is hard, but the challenge is worth it. It shows me what I'm capable of.

The Riverside County competition starts on Jan. 16, with the essay, and then continues with the subject tests that will take place on Jan. 18. Finally on Feb. 1, the decathletes will compete in Speech, Interview, and the Super Quiz. The awards ceremony will follow where WCA hopes to earn numerous individual awards and be crowned county champions again.





Your Next Winter Trip

By Yaretzi Gutierrez

Winter marks the beginning of many activities that aren't available all year round. Here in Southern California, snowfall is rare, but there are plenty of fun and memorable activities to embrace the snowy season, both outdoors or indoors.

A place to consider going this winter is Big Bear, where you can enjoy many fun activities in the snow, such as snow skiing at Snow Summit, snow tubing at locations like The Alpine Slide at Magic Mountain, the Big Bear Snow Play, or the Grizzly Ridge Tube Park. For a unique experience, join a snowshoe tour at the Big Bear Discovery center, as recommended by *bigbear.com*. Classic winter pastimes like snowball fights, making snow angels, and building snowmen are also great ways to enjoy the snow with family or friends.

Another classic winter activity is ice skating, which is fun for all ages, whether you're a beginner or a seasoned skater. Local ice rinks include Riverside Icetown, which is open until mid-January, and The Peltzer Ice Rink in Temecula, available through Jan. 20. If you're in the Santa Monica area, check out the new ice skating rink presented by Disney+, open until Jan. 20.

Image Credit: Big Bear Mountain Resort



Image Credit: Courtesy Downtown Santa Monica, Inc.



Although being in the snow during the winter season is exciting, there are other ways to enjoy the season from the warmth and comfort of your home. Cozy indoor activities like watching winter-themed movies, reading by the fireplace, making hot chocolate, or baking treats can create a relaxing atmosphere. You can also meet up with family or friends and entertain yourselves with board games, bonfires, or a movie marathon. For a truly unique experience try an indoor snowball fight using crumpled white paper or cotton balls, or build an indoor "snowman" using household items like socks, pillows, and craft supplies.

As this new year begins and the holiday season has come to a close, I hope these ideas inspire you to try out some of these diverse pastimes and make the most of the rest of the winter season.

Image Credit: Classpop.com



Image Credit: Bending Energy Photography



Keeping Up With the Herd: The Southern Utah University Pipeline

By The Mammoth Tribune

In last month's issue, we caught up with WCA graduate **Jake Ressler**, a Mechanical Engineering major, who's thriving at Southern Utah University. However, Jake is not the only WCA grad making waves at SUU. **Fallon Arave**, **Dara Bailey**, and **Brittany Brown** also go to SUU and are representing the WCA community with pride. Fallon, a Fixed Wing Aviation major, is active in the SUU Women in Aviation Club and the mountain biking club. Dara, an Elementary Education major, has showcased her talents in several SUU Theatre productions and sings with the concert choir. Meanwhile, Brittany, an Exercise Science major, shines on the SUU Thunderbird women's soccer team. *The Mammoth Tribune* checked in with all three of them and found these graduates are excelling in their fields and inspiring others along the way.

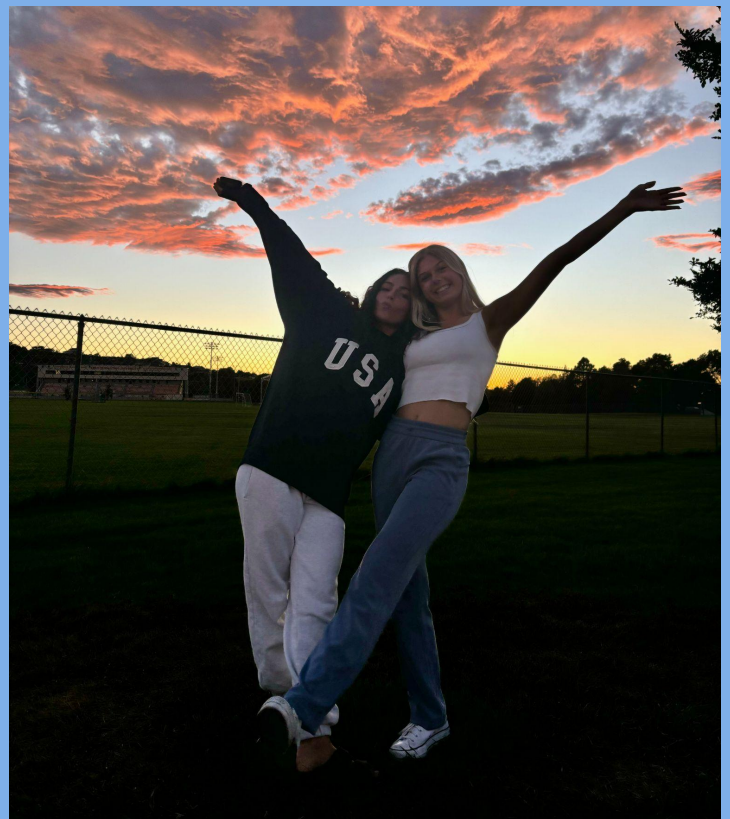


What is college life like outside of the classroom?

Fallon: I have so much fun exploring beautiful Southern Utah. I go out and either Mountain Bike, Dirt Bike, Ice Skate, Snowboard or anything else that seems fun nearly daily (unless I'm working.) I cannot stress enough how amazing it is to live here and explore Southern Utah through outdoor sports. It's especially amazing when I get to fly over it!

Dara: Being so close to Zion National Park my roommates and I go on a lot of hikes and adventures! Brian Head also allows snowboarding during the winter season. There are constantly different school events that are happening around campus. Cedar City is also the pinnacle of a college town with a beautiful Main Street and farmers markets every Saturday.

Brittany: Outside the classroom most of my time is consumed by soccer. There are a lot of nice hikes and sites to see nearby, though. I've visited Zion and Bryce Canyon on several occasions.



What do you like best about Southern Utah University?

Fallon: My favorite part about college is actually a combination of both my school work and outside activities. I absolutely love flying and most times when I fly I think to myself “I cannot believe I get to fly airplanes for college.” and then I think “I can’t believe I get to fly airplanes for the rest of my life! This is the best thing ever!” It’s funny but it’s true. I can’t get enough. I also love spending time with my friends and exploring Southern Utah through the many sports I’ve picked up over the last two years.

Dara: At SUU I have met the kindest people and made more friends than I can imagine. I think I have truly found my people here and happy I know that I’ve made lifelong friends.

Brittany: My favorite part of SUU is the campus itself. In the fall, all the leaves were so pretty. The mountains and red rocks are also so unique.



What are your plans for the future?

Fallon: I am currently enrolled in SUU’s partnership with SkyWest which is a pathway program that allows me to go straight to flying for SkyWest as soon as I graduate from SUU. From there I plan to take the pathway program from SkyWest to United Airlines.

Dara: I hope to be an elementary school teacher teaching 2nd or 3rd grade. Although I have loved my time in Utah, I plan to move back to California when I start teaching.

Brittany: I plan to become a personal sports performance trainer and run my own business.



Was It Necessary? *Moana 2*

By Alejandro (AJ) Peña

Moana 2 is Disney's latest in-theater movie release, featuring Auli'i Cravalho and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson reprising their roles as Moana and Maui. This sequel was released eight years after the original, with a budget of around \$150 million. While *Moana 2* has a generally similar plot and feel to the first movie, there are some differences in terms of the songs, as well as the general production of the movie. With that said though, it's definitely not bad as far as sequels usually go.

Set three years after the first film, *Moana 2* shows what Motuni looks like after Moana's revolutionary journey. The village has embraced seafaring as a central part of its culture as it is heavily implemented into the lifestyle of the village. After Moana finds an artifact that alludes to the past of her people and a lost island, she gathers a crew and prepares to leave the village once more on an expedition that may be even more intense than her last.

Though this movie shares a lot of themes and familiar faces from the original, some elements don't quite hit the high bar set by the original. The songs have a different vibe with the absence of Lin Manuel-Miranda, the plot feels generally less dire, and the antagonist(s) feel more tame compared to Te Ka from the first *Moana*. Some people speculate that some of the slightly off feeling from this movie could be that it was originally supposed to be a TV show that was set to release straight to Disney+, but was later changed to a Movie later in production.

Nevertheless, *Moana 2* is not a bad movie by any means, and is definitely an entertaining movie to watch with the family. It has engaging characters and witty jokes. It does a pretty good job at building meaningfully on characters and concepts from the first movie, and it definitely expands on the world that Moana lives in. If you were a big fan of the first film, chances are that you will probably be pretty content with this one too. It'd also be worth watching so that you can understand *Moana 3*, which was hinted at by a mid-credits scene.



Look to The Western Sky...

By Kaisara Arambula

The Broadway musical *Wicked* has finally made its way to the big screen. The film adaptation delivers the same enchanting narrative with its rich storytelling, compelling characters, and memorable music. Based on Gregory Maguire's novel, *Wicked* offers a fresh perspective on the classic story of *The Wizard of Oz*. It delves into the backstories of the Wicked Witch of the West, Elphaba, and Glinda the Good Witch, exploring themes of friendship, identity, and societal judgment. The film brilliantly captures the transformative journey of Elphaba, whose quest for acceptance and understanding against a backdrop of prejudice serves as a profound commentary on the nature of good and evil.

With the power of modern technology, viewers are immersed in a vibrant Oz, complete with stunning landscapes, magical creatures, and dazzling costumes. The cinematography aims to mimic the Broadway stage while enhancing it with cinematic techniques that elevate the storytelling experience. In addition to the visuals, the film features an amusing musical score, composed by Stephen Schwartz, whose iconic songs like "Defying Gravity" and "For Good" have become anthems of empowerment. Fans have been expressing their love for these songs all over social media, showing their support for the actors.



Image Credit: People.com



Image Credit: Hypebeast



Image Credit: Splash News

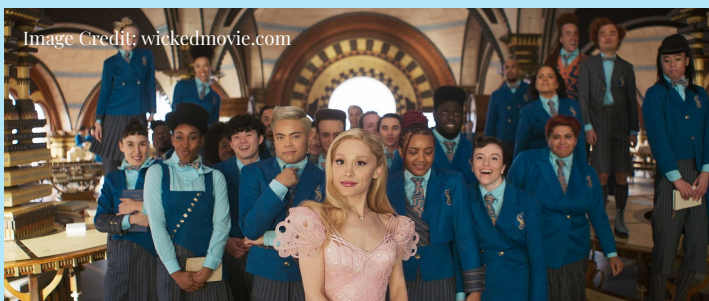


Image Credit: wickedmovie.com

The casting choices have sparked considerable excitement and controversy. With Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo portraying the lead roles of Elphaba and Glinda, audiences are curious to see how they bring those characters to life. The chemistry between the two is crucial to the narrative, and early promotions suggest that the cast has created a dynamic that pays homage to the original while carving out its unique interpretation.

At its core, *Wicked* goes beyond mere entertainment; it challenges societal norms and invites viewers to examine preconceived notions of good and evil. The film adaptation emphasizes these themes further, tapping into contemporary discussions surrounding identity, acceptance, and the morally complex nature of humanity.

The Annual Game Awards Are Here

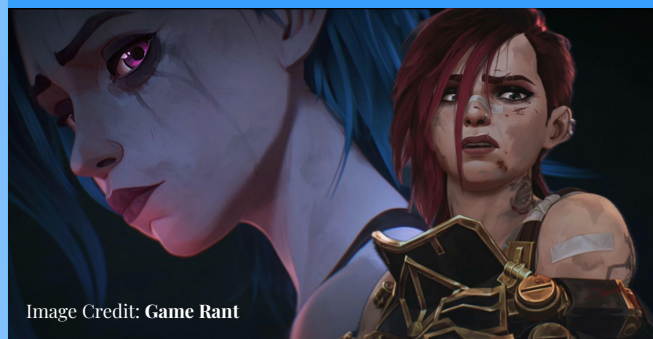
By Kolton Klug

This year has been a somewhat mediocre year for gaming. Many AAA releases have fallen short of expectations. Titles like *Concord* have left a bad taste in the mouths of many in the gaming community. However, there were a handful of fantastic games that were released this year, and the Game Awards committee is always able to spotlight these masterpieces. This year, there are 30 categories that games or individuals can win in, ranging from best performance to the best adaptation of a game. What makes the Game Awards so special, in my opinion, is that anyone has a chance to win in these diverse categories.

Some of the most notable categories this year include Best Adaptation, Best eSports team and game, and of course Game of the Year.

For Best Adaptation, several games made it to the mainstream media through TV shows and movies. Some of the most noteworthy include *Arcane*, *Fallout*, and *Knuckles*, which made it to the nominations with *Yakuza* and *Tomb Raider*.

For the best eSports team this year, the nominees are Natus Vincere, Faze, T1, Liquid, Gen.G, and BiliBili Gaming. There have been some extraordinary showings in the competitive scenes of popular multiplayer games. In *Counter-Strike 2*, Natus Vincere made waves by revamping their roster with rookies and underdogs, ultimately defeating the powerhouse team Faze to claim the PGL Copenhagen Championship. We also watched pro player Faker dominate for his team T1 in *League of Legends*. With such impressive achievements, the competition for the best eSports team and best eSports game this year is incredibly fierce.



Of course, there's the Game of the Year, one of the most anticipated awards in gaming. Again, this year there were only a handful of stars that were released with almost all of them being AAA releases. Last year, *Baldur's Gate 3* was the undisputed winner of Game of the Year, but this year may be different. The nominees for Game of the Year 2024 are as follows:

- *Black Myth Wukong*, a game based in ancient Chinese mythology that broke the Steam player charts, taking *Palworld*'s spot with the most users playing a non-multiplayer game simultaneously.
- *Astro Bot*, a Playstation exclusive game that brings back many nostalgic and forgotten characters and aspects of previous Sony game.
- *Balatro*, one of the only indie games on the list that combines the pressure of poker with the strategy of RPG games.
- *Metaphor: Refantazio*, a turn-based anime RPG game made by the Persona series creators.
- *Final Fantasy VII Rebirth*, the newest addition to the classic franchise.
- *Elden Ring: Shadow of the Erdtree*, This year's most controversial pick for Game of the Year.

The controversy surrounding *Elden Ring: Shadow of the Erdtree* stems from its nature—it's not a standalone game but a DLC. Many feel it's unfair for a DLC to compete for Game of the Year, especially since the base game, *Elden Ring*, already won the award in 2022.

Let's Go *WEBFISHING*

By Lucas Land

WEBFISHING is a indie multiplayer fishing game, initially released in 2022 on itch.io but has recently been remade for Steam and released on Oct. 12, 2024. The game was made by a single developer named “lamedeveloper,” and as the title suggests, the game is all about fishing.

The game is a 3D sandbox fishing game where players do just that, fish. Players can fish at different locations, and once they get a bite, a minigame starts where players have to repeatedly click in order to successfully reel in the fish. The mini game's difficulty increases with the rarity of the fish. Once a fish is caught, a text box reveals the fish type, accompanied by a humorous joke about the catch.

Other than fishing, *WEBFISHING* offers several engaging side activities. Players can customize their characters, hunt for treasure using a metal detector, or play instruments such as the guitar and tambourine. Currently, there are 79 different fish that can be caught: categorized into 32 freshwater species, 32 saltwater species, seven junk items, and two miscellaneous catches. Each type of fish requires specific bait.



Image Credit: wiki.gg



Image Credit: VG Times



Image Credit: Itch.io



Image Credit: Rock Paper Shotgun

Customization is a key feature: players can personalize their avatars, fishing rods, titles, and bobbers. Fish can be sold to purchase more bait or to upgrade equipment, adding a light progression system. The game has drawn comparisons to *Animal Crossing* due to its charming animal avatars and relaxing atmosphere.

Whether you choose multiplayer or single-player mode, *WEBFISHING* is a great way to unwind. It doesn't try to do anything fancy, but it does provide a simple, relaxing experience. At just \$5, it's a worthwhile investment for those looking to pass the time with a stress-free game.



Image Credit: Reddit

Movies to Watch by the Fireplace

By Melody Cortez

Winter is a great time for sledding, skating, and snowball fights, but it's just as enjoyable to stay inside with a mug of hot cocoa and a cozy movie. Even though the holiday season has come to a close, you can still enjoy some of these excellent films that will surely be a great start to the new year. Whether you prefer exploring through the snowy tundra of Narnia or adventuring through Mount Doom to destroy the one ring, you will surely find a movie that sparks your imagination and gives you a feel for the season.

If you are in the mood for nostalgia, *Frozen* might be the movie to watch. In case you aren't familiar, the story is about two sisters, one with magical powers and the other without. The girls, Anna and Elsa, lost their parents to a storm that sank their ship. After isolating herself for her whole life, Elsa suddenly loses control of her powers, sending the kingdom of Arendelle into an eternal winter.

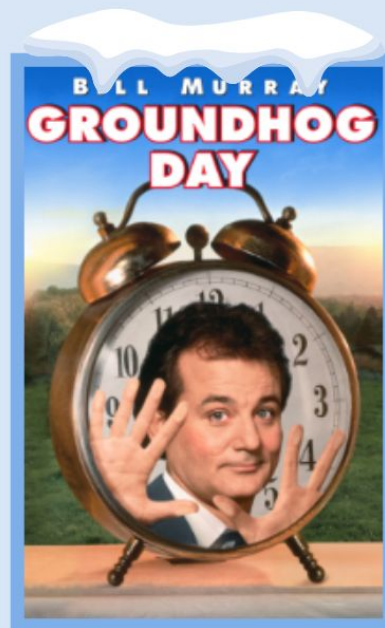
Another exceptional winter movie would be *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms*, a 2018 film about a young girl, Clara Stahlbaum, who is searching for a magical key to unlock a special box. A golden thread leads her to a separate world of four realms, three of which are at war with the fourth realm. Clara has to navigate through this new world all while battling Mother Ginger, the ruler of the Land of Amusements.



Since California is not known for its cold weather, a film like *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* will certainly help you pretend like it is. The story is set during WWII, when four siblings (Lucy, Peter, Edmund, and Susan Pevensie) are sent to a safe house where they'll be away from the bombings. Here, Lucy discovers a hidden wardrobe that leads her to an entirely different place, Narnia. There she meets the White Witch, the evil ruler of Narnia. With the help of her siblings, Lucy attempts to dethrone the queen and bring peace to the land.



If ice powers and snow castles aren't your thing, you should check out the 1993 film *Groundhog Day*. It revolves around a sarcastic man named Phil Connors, who works for a Pittsburgh television station and is filming a report about the annual Groundhog Day. After travelling to Punxsuatawney, Pennsylvania, he has grown tired of covering the same story year after year. When he starts to head back home, a huge blizzard stops Phil and his team from doing so. They are forced to go back to Punxsutawney, where they awake only to find that it's Feb. 2 all over again. Phil has to learn how to become a better man in order to return to a new day.



Running a solid nine hours and 20 minutes all together, the trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, is the perfect set of movies if you're looking for a diverse adventure. The storyline centers around a hobbit, Frodo Baggins, who obtains an all-powerful ring with the ability to destroy the world. He, along with eight others, have to destroy the ring before it gets into the hands of Sauron, an evil spirit who is trying to get it to regain his power and rule the world.



New Year Traditions

By Lovina Seelhofer

New Year's Day is for new beginnings, and with those new beginnings come various superstitions meant to start the year off right. Many of these customs are lesser-known but carry deep cultural meaning.

For example, cleaning is strongly discouraged on New Year's Day. Tasks like doing laundry, dishes, or tidying up are seen as "cleaning away" the good luck that arrived with New Year's Eve.

In Spain, a cherished tradition for welcoming the new year is eating 12 grapes, also known as "Las doce uvas de la suerte," or "the twelve grapes of luck." At midnight, you must eat 12 grapes one right after the other, and this is supposed to bring you good luck for each month of the year.

If you hope to travel throughout the new year, one tradition suggests running around your neighborhood with a suitcase. This is meant to manifest travel adventures for you in the new year.



Image Credit: The Washington Post



Image Credit: San Antonio Express News



Image Credit: Parade

Brazil also has a manifesting tradition which depends on the color of your undergarments. Each color carries a specific meaning: white symbolizes peace, purple represents spiritual inspiration, pink invites romance, and green brings health. Brazilians aren't alone in this tradition—Italy and Spain share a similar custom where wearing red undergarments is believed to bring good luck in the new year.

These traditions showcase how cultures around the world turn the start of a new year into something meaningful and festive. Each superstition or tradition represents the hopes and dreams people have for their future, whether it's seeking luck, love, peace, or adventure. More than that, these traditions create ways to share something special with family and friends, creating memories that last a lifetime.

2025

Does Duolingo Actually Work?

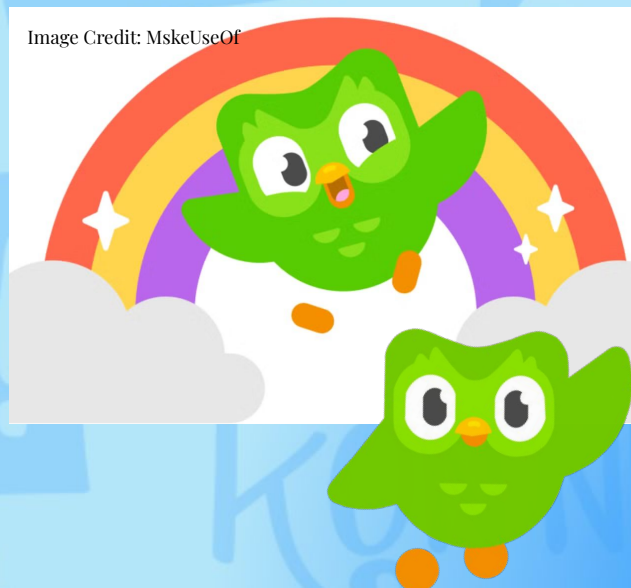
By Em Sagastume

This is a question I've encountered countless times across various corners of the internet: Can Duolingo really help someone learn a new language? As a major Duolingo fan, I never gave much thought to whether or not it was truly effective since I've always used it more so for recreational purposes. However, after receiving my Duolingo Year in Review 2024, I started to wonder about its true effectiveness.

After scouring the internet, I have come to the conclusion that Duolingo does help people learn languages. Although Duolingo isn't the perfect method for learning a language, it is certainly one of the best apps available, primarily due to its engaging and interactive features. One of the reasons Duolingo is so popular is because it feels like you're playing a game. The app's structure is designed with a progression path, where users can complete units and earn trophies after each section. Additionally, Duolingo allows users to personalize their experience by customizing their very own avatars, offering a fun way to express creativity, even though the avatars don't serve much purpose beyond the profile. The app also encourages social interaction, allowing users to add friends, complete challenges together in the "Friends Quest," compete in "Friends Clash," and track a shared "Friends Streak." These features separate Duolingo from other traditional learning apps. Instead it creates this dynamic experience that can easily fit into any spare moment, making language learning feel less like a chore and more like an enjoyable activity. WCA student **Christian Quintana (2025)** is learning Japanese and has maintained a 306-day streak and earned 84,516 points, a huge feat. He states that he loves Duolingo, especially for its point system and the excitement of seeing words you recognize out in the world.

The Duolingo language courses are quirky. Unlike most language learning apps that rely on memorization, Duolingo teaches through context. New words and phrases are often introduced through imagery or by building on previously learned vocabulary, creating a learning experience where unfamiliar terms are paired with words users already recognize. And while this may sound unusual, it helps users retain information more effectively. One downside, however, is that Duolingo does not provide grammar lessons. While this might be a concern for some learners, many are able to pick up grammar intuitively through repeated exposure in the lessons, almost like solving a puzzle. Plus, Duolingo's website offers detailed language tips that can serve as mini grammar lessons or provide further linguistic insights. But if a user truly wants to achieve fluency in a language, Duolingo should be used alongside other sources. Another WCA student, **Ching Yeh (2026)**, who is learning German and has maintained a 407-day streak, shared that it feels nice to accomplish something every day and believes that he has gotten a decent entry level on learning the language.

What I believe truly drives people to dedicate so much time to Duolingo is its mascot, the bird Duo. This mischievous green owl may appear sweet and harmless at first, but he's known for showing a more intimidating side. Both Christian and Ching have expressed their love (and fear) for the threats that Duo sends out in notifications and widgets, whether it's holding a knife or putting countdowns to remind users to practice. Despite this, both recommend Duolingo, confident that it can help someone learn a language.



Sarah McBride Is Making Strides

By Gabriela Ordaz

When the 2024 presidential election was called on Nov. 5, 2024, both the House of Representatives and Senate races had yet to conclude. As the races for the House and Senate continue to be called, reactions range wildly. While many incumbent representatives regained their seats, such as Minnesota Representative Ilhan Omar and Michigan Representative Rashida Tlaib, there were some challengers who won over incumbents, such as Montana Senator-elect Tim Sheehy. Another one of those notable newcomers is Congresswoman-elect Sarah McBride.

Born in Wilmington, Delaware, McBride soundly beat her opponent, John Whalen III, with 78,224 more votes, according to *Ballotpedia.com*. McBride will be taking over for incumbent Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester, who did not run for reelection this year. McBride's campaign focused on several key issues, according to her official campaign website, including expanding access to healthcare and reducing costs, ensuring access to reproductive health care, advocating for worker's rights, climate change actions, etc.. She is motivated by the death of her husband, Andrew Cray, who died in 2014. They had married the same year when Cray and McBride found out that Cray's cancer was terminal. Cray was a notable LGBTQ+ health advocate and attorney, according to an article titled "Sarah McBride Wasn't Looking for a Fight on Trans Rights" by David Remnick for *The New Yorker*.



Image Credit: Variety

In an interview with Amna Nawaz for PBS News, McBride says that she ran on her "track record of bipartisan results in the Delaware State Senate, passing paid family and medical leave and the largest investment in our state's Medicaid program since the Affordable Care Act passed, and on what I would do in Congress, and that's to focus on bringing down costs facing families, to provide affordable housing, childcare, and health care to every single one of my neighbors."



Image Credit: Rich Fury



Image Credit: Andrew Harnik

McBride made history when she became a state senator, and she made history yet again, becoming the first openly transgender person elected to the House of Representatives. McBride came out as trans in her senior year at American University, after finishing her final term as student body president, according to the interview she did for *The New Yorker*. In the same article, McBride describes the struggle she had when deciding whether she should come out or not. “I wrestled with the idea that my dream and my identity seemed mutually exclusive; I had to pick. My life was passing me by, and I was done wasting it as someone I wasn’t.” Despite her hesitance, in 2020, after she came out, McBride was elected to the Delaware State Senate.



Her election was met with excitement from many queer advocates and allies, yet at the same time, she was met with scorn from her own to-be colleagues. Hardly a week into her new member orientation, McBride was directly and deliberately targeted by what has become known as a “congressional bathroom bill. In an article titled “The congressional bathroom ban is the latest transgender policy battle,” written by Monica Potts and Cooper Burton, they explain that South Carolina Republican Representative Nancy Mace introduced the bill that would require all people who work at the Congress building to use the bathroom of the gender they were assigned at birth. The bill affects not only McBride, but, since then, Rep. Mace has proposed an even more far-reaching bill that would apply to all people working on any federal property. According to Potts and Burton, House Speaker Mike Johnson issued a statement after facing pressure from his colleagues such as Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Green saying that the gendered restrooms in the Capital and the House “are reserved for individuals of that biological sex.”



McBride has since said that she will not be fighting the bill, drawing criticism from left-leaning queer political activists for her in-action. Many still have come to her defense, pointing out the same thing that Potts and Burton pointed out in their article: that women policy makers did not have a bathroom near the House floor until 2011, a full decade after the first woman was elected to Congress. In her interview with *The New Yorker*, McBride responded to Speaker Johnson’s statement, saying “This was not done to bar me from restrooms. This was done to invite me to take the bait and to fight. I am maintaining my power by turning the other cheek and doing what I promised Delawareans I would do, which is to focus on the job in front of me. Yes, when that calls for me to defend my L.G.B.T.Q. constituents, I will do that; when it calls on me to defend workers in my state, I will do that; when it calls on me to defend retirees in my state, I will do that. But *I* should not be the issue.”



They are Missing

By Adriana Ordaz

Every year, on May 14, hundreds gather in Antlers, Oklahoma to bring awareness to missing and murdered indigenous women. According to the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC), murder is the third leading cause of death for Indigenous women, ten times higher than all other ethnicities, and as of 2023, more than half of reported cases have been regarding those under 18.

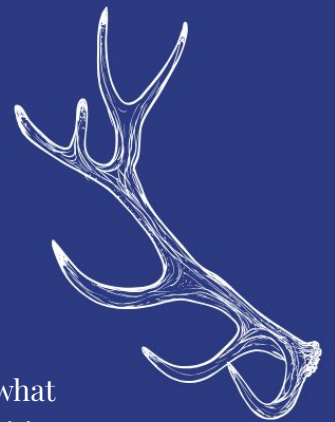
Image Credit: Frazer Harrison



Cole Brings Plenty

But this issue does not fall solely on women, in fact, according to the CDC, more men are victims due to arguments or conflicts, men having a 51.5 percent chance of being murdered as opposed to women's 39.1%. Cole Brings Plenty, a 27-year-old actor who appeared on "1923," was found dead on April 5, 2024, after he went missing amid a domestic violence investigation. Willis Derendoff, 34-years old, was last seen on Dec. 10, 2020, at the Extended Stay America hotel near Airport Road in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Though, whether it be a man or woman, it doesn't change the fact that Native Americans not only go missing disproportionately, says CBS, but only about 9% of murders are solved, and more often than not, they are given far less attention than other cases, specifically those concerning Americans or Europeans.



In the summer of 2021, Gabby Petito and her fiancé, Brian Laundrie set out on what they said would be a "cross-country adventure of a lifetime." The young couple set out to visit the country's national parks from Blue Point, New York on July 2, sharing their journey on social media. Unfortunately, less than two months into the trip, Brian returned home to Florida without Gabby, sparking a nationwide search for the 22-year-old. Just two days after Brian himself was reported missing on Sept. 17, 2021 after telling his parents he was going to hike in Sarasota County's Carlton Reserve, a 25,000 acre nature reserve. Gabby's remains were found in a remote area of the Grand Teton National Park, having been strangled to death. Her body seemed to have been in the wilderness for about three to four weeks before it was discovered.

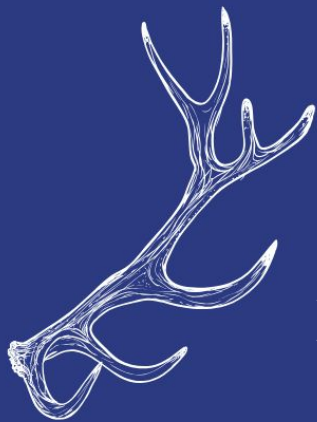
Image Credit: Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



Gabby's death is no doubt tragic, but it is incredible that so many nationwide contributed to find her and bring her home. However it is saddening that many other cases don't get the same media attention. According to the *Daily Mail.com*, at least nine other bodies were found during the search for Gabby. While these cases received some media attention, none garnered nearly as much attention as Gabby's. Petito's case highlighted the inconsistencies of both media and police attention on missing persons cases, which often focuses on white victims compared to people of color, causing many to call for law enforcement to treat all missing persons and homicides the same.

A reporter from Wyoming's Survey and Analysis Center tells how the media perpetuates the situation, "Indigenous people — especially indigenous women — are often negatively portrayed as sex workers, drug addicts, and criminals, while their non-indigenous counterparts are depicted as respected family and community members," says their report on missing and murdered Indigenous people.

According to the report, as of Sept. 24, 2021, about 710 indigenous people have been reported missing in the state over the past decade, like Jade Wagon, a 23-year-old who was reported missing and later found dead in the Wind River Reservation. Her death was ruled an accident, though her family questions about what happened that day. Jade was among the 710 Indigenous people who have been reported missing and murdered in Wyoming. The report also found that 85% of the missing were minors, 57% were women and girls, and indigenous people were more than 100% more likely to still be missing after 30 days than white people.



Gwen Ifill, a journalist, calls this phenomenon "missing white woman syndrome," where missing and murdered white women are portrayed as innocent and perfect

victims and receive media attention, while cases of missing and murdered women of color are often ignored. By no means does this mean that the white people who do gain major media attention do not deserve it, they do, but so does everybody. Whether someone is white, indigenous, hispanic, or Asian, if they go missing they deserve attention and they deserve more than being cast aside because they are thought of as someone not worthy, as a runaway, or as an accident. We are all humans, we deserve no less.

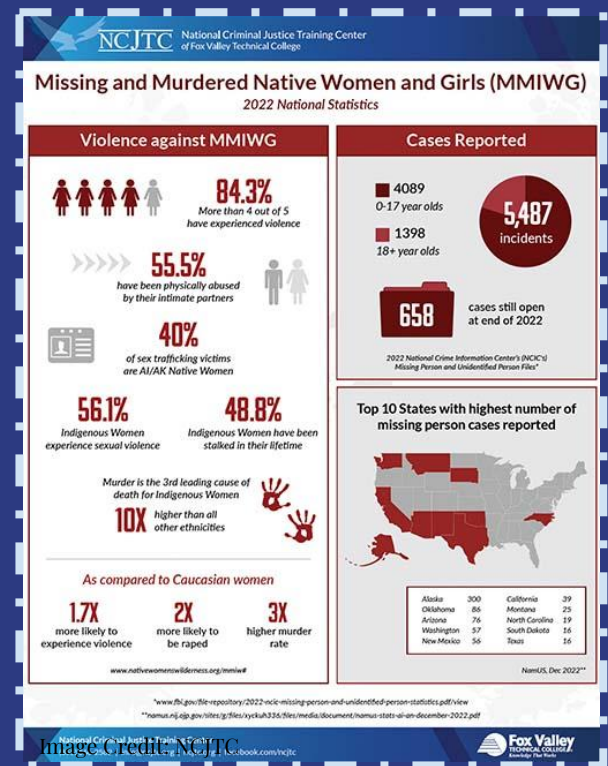


Image Credit: NBC News

Willis Derendoff

Winter Word Search

By Lily Hawkinson

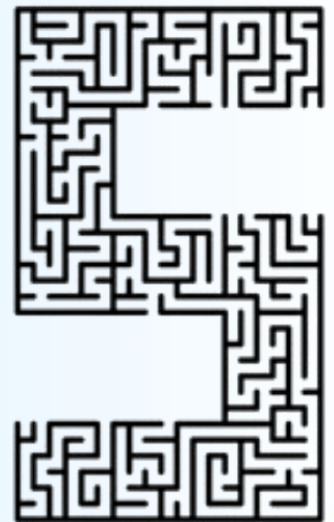
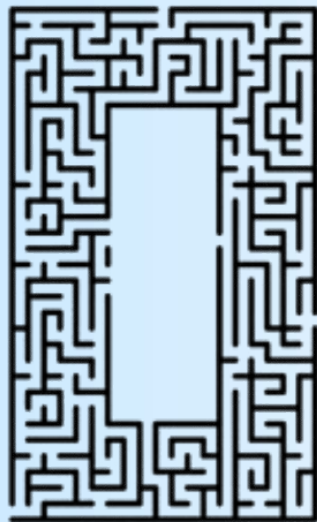
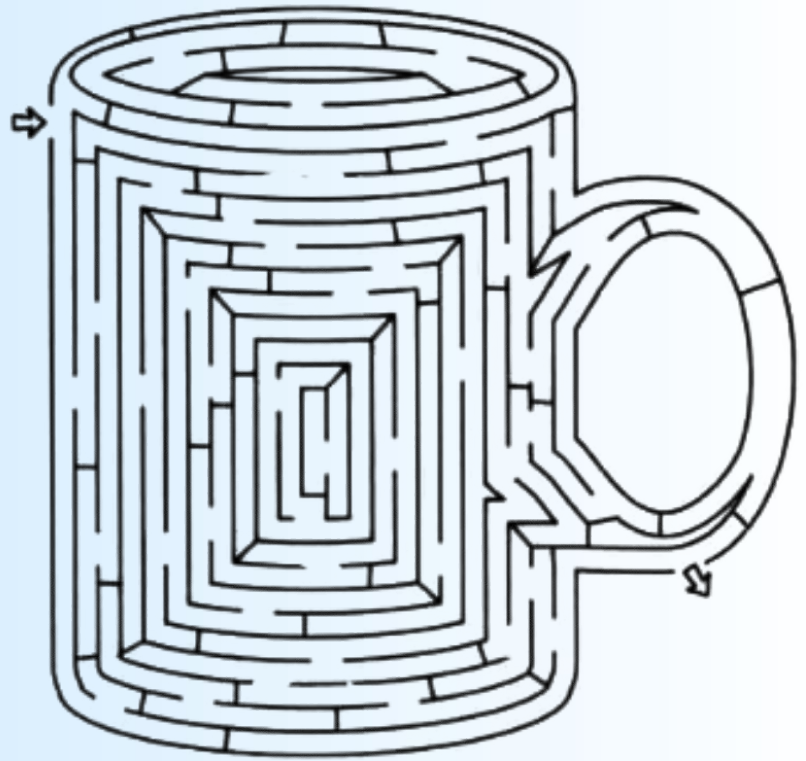
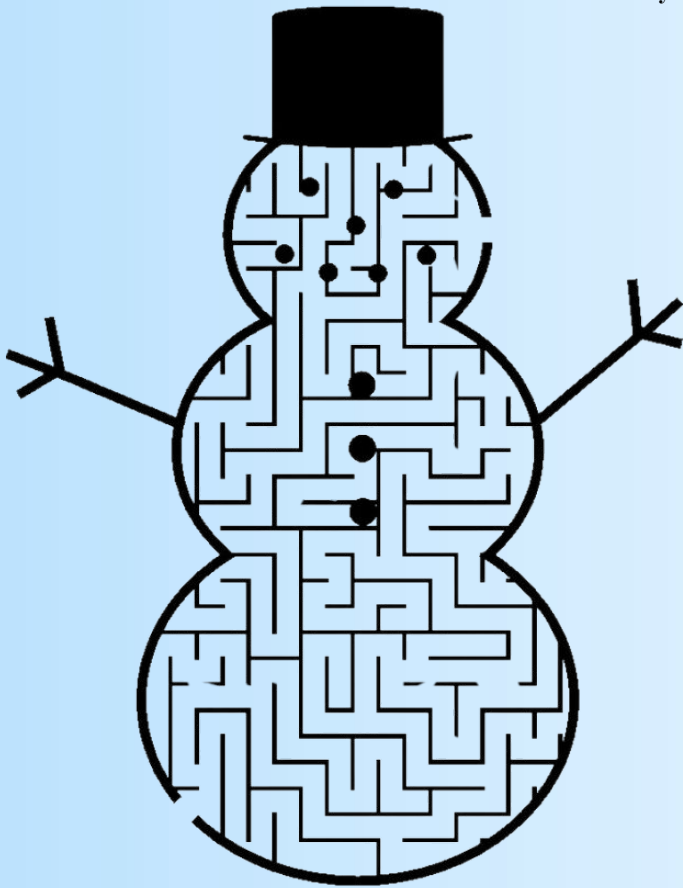
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New Years Day
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Snowman
Frost
Snowflake
Grapes
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Winter Mazes

By Lily Hawkinson





Western Center Academy