

The Muckraker

Jonathan Lethem

Bestselling author visits JFKS



Faculty

Five American teachers are leaving us; they will be missed

Crime Scene

A report on phones and money stolen from girls' locker room

Statistics

Exploring the relationship between studying and scores

Philosophy

Determinism and the illusion of free will

The Muckraker

Speaks

Only few hours of class “work” remain until the ashes of this school year’s countless papers can join those of the previous and Alice Cooper’s greatest hit can announce summer break.

This edition calls to an end Volume 17 and thereby makes room for a fresh volume next school year. In the past months, much has changed concerning *The Muckraker*, and the start of a new volume will act as motivation to continue building upon the quality of the paper. For this we welcome any feedback, whether in person or via Facebook or mail.

This issue is the product of a tight time schedule, causing preparations to have been slightly chaotic. In fact, this text was written on a bus in Moscow during the Math/Physics Leistungskursfahrt. Still we are proud to report on an award-winning author, publish two insightful articles from retiring journalist Max Sherwood, present the literature and arts column with a feature on interesting festivals, introduce a philosophy column, and continue giving a voice to students’ concerns – in this case, regarding a theft in the girls’ locker rooms.

Enjoy this issue and have a great summer,

Cheers,

The Muckraker Editors



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Five American Faculty Members Depart

MR. GERMANN, MR. and Mrs. Loewen, Ms. Eckhardt, Mr. Becker. These five dedicated faculty members are all leaving the school at the end of this year. Each one of them deserves an article of his/her own, but there is no way I can cover their accomplishments of the past few years, so I’ll simply share a few of my experiences – I’m sure most readers have their own.

I had Mr. Loewen for math in the 8th grade. He inherited part of an 8th-grade homeroom class that had been purposefully broken up after some unruly behavior the previous year. (This did not keep our grade-level from participating in what was called “the worst ski-trip in JFKS history.”)

While my memory isn’t perfect, I’m betting that Mr. Loewen had quite a challenge keeping this homeroom class under control. Always patient, however, he took his time, making sure all his students understood the algebra and geometry around which young 8th graders must wrap their minds. His classes were relaxed and communicative and, for the most part, we came out with a solid understanding of the math skills we needed later in high school. Despite the years which have passed, people in Mr. Loewen’s 8th grade homeroom still greet each other in the hallways, and he will be missed.

I first heard about Mrs. Loewen in 2010, when some good orchestra friends began talking excitedly about “the new orchestra teacher.” That year I had her for music class, and while she tried to teach me notes on the staff she explained the Sonata Allegro form to her orchestra students. During the past four years, scores of students got to know Mrs. Loewen, who, while patient and kind, expected her students and musicians to fulfill the highest standards they could achieve. As a result, the orchestra has consistently performed many amazing concerts, including the huge *Carmina Burana* in the Berliner Dom. We hope that her future students in the Bahamas (that’s right) will enjoy her musical leadership as much as her students have in Berlin.

Mrs. Loewen isn’t the only music director leaving this year; Mr. Germann also has conducted his last concert as JFKS band director. Not only has he been the band director for as long as most of us have been alive, Mr. Germann has also served as an assistant principal and taken students to AMIS honor band sessions all over the globe. These events have become his passion and, to his great credit, he is taking a high position in the AMIS organization, offering students from around the world the same band experience he’s

created for JFKS students for so many years. He’ll still be in Berlin, so we can expect (or demand) visits from him at JFKS next year.

The theater department will also see a director go this year. Mr. Becker has created some of the most magical moments that our aula stage has seen; 2012’s *Beauty and the Beast* attracted such big crowds that ticket sellers had to turn people away.

As a “techie,” I vividly remember Mr. Becker’s fast “get it done” work pace and his creative thinking that came into play during theatre productions again and again. This fast productivity also was evident in his computer labs, where he showed us the tip of the iceberg of the everyday chaos that he’s managed to keep under control, allowing hundreds of us throughout the school to access the Internet. Although almost on his way out, Mr. Becker recently managed to find a good deal for some much-needed replacements for our library computers. He genuinely cares about our school and has always gone above the “call of duty” for keeping everything running; many of us will miss working with him on shows, and we hope the school networking infrastructure doesn’t fall apart without him.

Last but not least is a faculty member who is probably a stranger to most of our school’s younger students. Many of this year’s juniors and seniors, however, knew her on a personal level. Whenever we’ve been stressed and confused about our college or future prospects, we’ve gone to Ms. Eckhardt for help. Although she’s been busier than all of us during college application season, she knows not only how to keep us on track, but to get us to focus on that all-important question: “What do you really want to do?” Never afraid to be straight with us, Ms. Eckhardt has helped us through the most nerve-wracking part of high school, and we’ll never forget that.

Every one of these faculty members has done huge amounts of good for the John F. Kennedy School, and none of them can be easily replaced. We hope that they enjoy remembering JFKS and have great luck at their next stops along the road.

■ Max Sherwood

JFKS Welcomes a VIP Guest

THE PROCESS OF writing short stories and papers and receiving recognition for them has always been a struggle; one any aspiring author will encounter. Nonetheless, with much skill and good fortune, many writers make it to the top. One example is the New York Times Bestseller Jonathan Lethem. On the 19th of May, the English Department was truly honored to welcome him at our school, where he spent quite some time discussing his career and works with teachers and several 11th grade English classes. He gave helpful insight, tips and advice for a life as an author.

The discussion began with the author's life and how Lethem began writing. First, he disclosed his ambiguity and indecisiveness about his career ambitions during adolescence. Following his graduation, he initially decided to follow his father's footsteps as an artist and began studying painting and sculpture. During his time as a college student he beamed a fanatic reader, realizing he truly "appreciated the art of words". Plowing through novel after novel, his increasing interest in literature led him to taking classes on writing in Berkeley, California. Thereby, he sacrificed the possibility of being an artist by dropping out of university.

Upon the realization that although he wanted to be a writer, he never wrote, he began coming up with ideas and works of his own as well. Lethem estimated to have written one thousand pages of fiction in his early years as a writer, admitting that these were largely unpublishable. He described learning to write as acquiring "a slow set of tools" and emphasized that these primarily accumulate while reading. "For any aspiring authors", he continued, "one must read the life's collective works of certain authors whom you find appealing".

Despite all this, Lethem warned that writing is an unstable career and advised to strive after another job, while writing on the side. Combining the job of an author with journalism and teaching was indicated to be a good idea. The author himself is also a professor at a university, currently instructing at the American Institute of Berlin, whilst tackling the task of writing. When asked about what the highlights of writing were, he replied, "learning the language of narrating" and "enjoying it like a reader, making it like it's your own". His narrative talent is undeniable, and his visit was inspiring and memorable.

■ *Simona Koch & Clara Frick*

Panic in the Sport Hall

ON THURSDAY, MAY 22nd, we were calmly walking back from an exhausting sport hour to our changing room. The changing room was unlocked but we thought nothing of it. When we entered the room, we noticed things scattered around, not in the place we had left them. That's when we looked into our bags and noticed phones and money missing. After a collective panic attack, we realized that someone had in fact looked through our stuff. We ran to the sport teachers to explain to them what had happened. The sport teachers contacted our principal, Mr. Anderson, and notified him of the robbery. He then contacted the police department.

With emotions running high in the changing room, we tallied up the missing belongings: 5 phones, an iPod, and a couple hundred euros from different people. What we were all wondering about was why the changing room wasn't locked. Why didn't anyone see these people coming and leaving? How could so much be stolen all at once?

On Friday May 23rd, a policeman came to the school to talk to the students who had their belongings and money stolen. One of the sport teachers reported he saw two young men entering the sports hall, one wearing a light blue shirt. A report was filed and the policeman assured the students they would try to catch the thieves and return the belongings they took.

This is not the first time something was stolen from the changing rooms. There were other incidents where money or an iPod or a cell phone was stolen, but only from individuals. This time, almost all the girls in the changing room were affected.

So think twice before leaving your valuables in an unsupervised, unlocked changing room.

■ *Alexandra von Anhalt,
Matilde Borio & Aqueena Krisp*



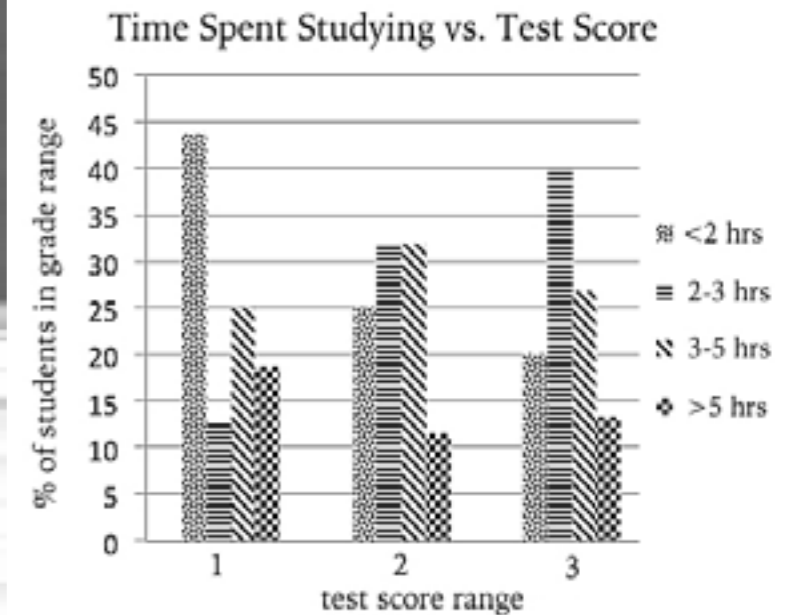
How Much Does Studying Really Help?



WE ALL KNOW at least one student who studies for hours on end and aces tests with a passion. We come to assume that most people scoring "ones" study endless hours to achieve their goals, but is this really true? This is the question I've tried to answer with my recent AP Statistics project.

In order to gather data, I handed anonymous surveys to 75 JFKS Oberstufenstudents. The survey asked students what they normally score on tests and how long they usually spend studying for such tests. I expected the results to show top students studying the longest amount of time, with decreasing study time mirroring lower grades. Surprisingly, this was not the case. Most students scoring twos and threes study between two and five hours, but 44% of students scoring ones study for less than two hours on average!

Already surprised at the results, I ran a statistics test to see whether I could prove a direct relationship between the time spent studying and higher test scores. Interestingly, my results are unique to JFKS: at every grade-scoring level, there are students who study for different durations. For example, the proportion of students studying between 3-5 hours is just a hair higher for those making threes (26.7%) than it is for those making ones (25%). Proportions like these are why the test could not prove a relationship.



There were other interesting trends in the data. For example, among students getting threes, there was a lower proportion studying for less than two hours than among those getting ones. We might expect students with low grades to study the least. In fact, my results suggest the opposite. Students receiving the best grades were most likely to study for less than two hours.

Also, as grades worsened, the proportion of students studying between 2-3 hours increased. Students scoring threes had the highest proportion of those studying between 2-3 hours. Perhaps people who could use more studying are already studying between 2-3 hours?

It turns out that JFKS students can have unexpected behaviors. According to the data, low study time can actually indicate a top-scorer, and people studying for 5 hours or more make ones, twos, and threes on tests. The moral of the story? Don't judge people based on how long they spend studying – and know what works for you.

■ *Max Sherwood*

Inputs and Outputs: Explaining Determinism



DEAR FELLOW STUDENTS, I would like to share with you some revelations I've had over the past couple of months; theories I've developed and only been interested in for a short time. I ask you, therefore, to forgive me if the following conceptions appear somewhat incomplete or scrambled. I assure you, they are a work in progress. I must also remind all readers to read everything presented to them with scrutiny. By no means are these concepts final and criticism or suggestions for revision are always welcome. With formalities out of the way, allow me to begin.

The entire concept rests on one very important comparison, the similarities of the human brain and a computer. When learning the very basics of both, I could not help but realize the functional comparability. The brain, as is common knowledge, relies on an array of sensory and motor neurons to function. The easiest way to exemplify this is by reflexes. When you, for example, touch a hot stove, electric impulses travel to the brain stem, which reacts by sending more impulses to arm muscles, causing you to pull away instantaneously to avoid further damage. The brain itself relies on the same system, receiving information and giving orders. Unlike reflexes, however, responses take more time to generate, as impulses must travel through the vast network of the brain before a decision can be made.

Say that, out on an evening stroll, you encounter a menacing individual with a lard dog, approaching you head on. Images of the dog, its breed, behavior, size, and the man, his clothes, mannerism, and facial expression are taken in by

your eyes, which send them to the brain for interpretation. Your brain, faced with the input, processes the images and develops a plan. Being a pacifist, you cross the street early and avoid trouble. What would happen, however, if you weren't one? This is where the idea of personality and brain structure come into play. We all know that individuals with certain personality traits produce specific reactions, or outputs, when faced with the same situation.

While some of you may cross the street, others may choose the bold approach, walking bravely past or even challenging the man with a rock hard stare. If the brain is nothing more than a vast tangle of connections, one could conclude that different personalities are simply the result of various neurological arrangements. While the input of man and dog produce the output to cross the street in the pacifist, the same input produces an entirely different response in a more aggressive individual. Both brains decode the seen image into the same array of electronic impulses. Since the two minds are structured differently, the impulses travel along different paths and produce vastly dissimilar results.

If you take the idea further, it can be applied to every situation. Every day, one is faced with situations (inputs) that require responses (outputs). Every decision you make, by this model, is controlled by your unique brain structure.

You may now ask, quite reasonably, how this information is relevant. "Why do I need to care about this, Niko?" I'll tell you. With all decisions being determined by your mind's structure, all your actions are more or less outside your influence. Two factors control your actions. Your environment (How the world behaves around you) and your personality (the way your brain is put together). Neither of these can be actively changed by the individual. All your decisions, hopes, dreams...everything you think and do is the result of an uncontrollable roll of dice. Free will is a comforting illusion and emotions such as guilt, pride, regret, anger etc. become entirely irrelevant with this knowledge.

All this remains, of course, nothing more than my humble opinion. The thoughts of a student with no intellectual merit to support them whatsoever. I merely wish to share the thoughts I have. I remain open to criticism and look forward to hearing readers' responses.

■ *Nikolas Severson*

Summer Booklist

DEAREST BOOKWORMS, SUMMER is approaching rapidly. The countdown has started, the very last exams are left behind, and only the thoughts of warmth, ice-cream, and school pranks remain. Yet, have you considered the time during summer break you might want to spend with your nose in a book? There are those who repel the thought of reading a book, yet reading could change one's view and can aid in many things. To all who might want to take chances and to the booklovers who still need a hint here and there for what to choose.

1. *The Last Song* and *Dear John* by Nicholas Sparks (recommended to girls, boys welcomed): While reading this novel, toes digging in sand, ocean waves in the background, and a light summer breeze are especially welcome. You might want to consider a private spot though, since both may tickle your emotions...

2. *The Physician* by Noah Gordon (for girls and boys alike): If you check the very back of your bookshelf, this book may be one of the forgotten treasures left to dust. It revolves around a young boy on his journey of fighting for his dream of becoming a doctor. It takes place in the 11th century, when conditions in London were horrendous. Do not recoil from this book merely for the fact that it takes place in long past history, rather, embrace learning something new. If that does not suffice, watch the movie (it is quite different compared to the book, but nevertheless a masterpiece. Bonus: Hot actor plays lead role). All factors of a fantastic novel are regarded and fulfilled; nothing left out.

3. *All Our Yesterdays* by Cristin Terrill (both genders): A 'Timeless' love story. Can cause confusion at first due, to the changes in time, yet the storyline is carefully and perfectly constructed. The novel emphasizes the importance of each and every decision, and questions the simultaneously loved and feared science of time travel.

4. *Handle With Care* and *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult (males and females): After reading these, you will feel like your mind and heart have been extracted, trampled upon, and thrown into the ocean... but in a good way. These books are no quick summer read, they rather carry the meaning of life and all its values, of difficulties, and of truth. Warn your friends and family previous to picking up the novels, since you will be unable to put them down.

5. *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern (all genders): This book will enchant you. Never will you want to visit another Circus. The intertwined stories make up a beautifully threaded storyline with surprises and charms around every corner. This novel will make you indulge in the story and leave you speechless. Just like Mr. Morgenstern said: "The finest pleasures are always the unexpected ones."

Now go out there and rock the last few weeks of school, and then: ENJOY YOUR WELL-EARNED SUMMER VACATION!!! And so that none of you even consider getting bored, here are some artsy festivals you might enjoy:

1. The *Open Air Gallery* turns the Oberbaumbrücke into an art mile. Over a hundred artists display their paintings, photographs and sculptures on the distinctive bridge between Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain. Also, the festival visitors are allowed to get involved! A 120 meter long canvas invites everyone to paint, draw or doodle; you do not have to be good at drawing in order to have fun in participating! Your last chance for this amazing experience is the 6th of July.

2. Then there is the *Biennale*, which takes place at several different locations. It is a famous contemporary art exhibition. Until the 3rd of August, creative minds will critically examine and experiment with the latest trends in the art world.

Best wishes,

Mary Poppins & The Wizard of Oz

