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An Interview With Mila Bileska - a NOVA Success Story

By Jovana Vasilisa Jovanovikj

Our Jovana Vasilisa Jovanovikj interviewed Mila Bileska, a current senior at NOVA. She has actively participated in many STEM-related competitions, courses, and summer programs, including Pioneer Academics, NASA SpaceApps, Yale Young Global Scholars, and CyberMath Academy at Harvard University. Because of her dedication and success, she is a shining exemplar for her fellow students. NOVA Times has interviewed Miss Bileska to share the story of her achievements and plans.



Courtesy photo

Creating Change Through Social Innovation and Green Ideas

Interview with Irina Janevska, founder and president of ARNO

By Adora Limani

Through an insightful Zoom meeting, NOVA Times was able to hold a discussion with the inspiring Irina Janevska. Ms. Janevska is a prime example of an individual who has devoted their life to serving their community through innovative ideas and actions that reach the core of social activism. Her organization's mission is to create social change through the implementation of contemporary technology approaches and present a model of how our generation can tackle old problems with new ideas.

The Ineffectuality of the Student Council

By Anonymous

The NOVA Student Council is supposed to represent the student body. More importantly, it needs to convey the problems we, the students, are facing to the NOVA administration and officials. At the beginning of this school year, the NOVA Student Council elected its new leadership. Sadly, their way of handling problems is by not handling them at all.



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Tests vs. Project-Based Learning: A Student's Opinion

By Stefan Nikolaj

The success of education systems is measured quantifiably. Grades and test scores provide students with an indication of how much they know. For this reason, tests have been the main form of quantifying students' performance. Not only that, but students revisit the material they have previously studied when preparing for a test. Thus, tests seem like they help both students and teachers - right? Well, I intend to prove the contrary.

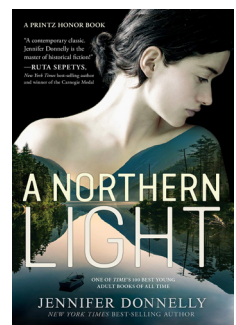


Image by Kaboompics via Pexels

Realistic Fiction: The Untrue Life Story of Mattie Gokey and the Real Death of Grace Brown

By Lina Nikolovska

While historical fiction novels may not be the most famous genre amongst teenagers, they encapsulate the true essence of literature and history and present a perfect example of how art and literature express complex events and ideas. Jennifer Donnelly, the author of *A Northern Light*, intertwines the real-life murder of Grace Brown with the fictional story of Mattie Gokey.



What To Do With the IB DP?

By Teona Antova

The IB Diploma Program comprises six subject groups and the core. Students choose two languages (A and B), a science subject, a discipline in the social sciences, and Mathematics. Then, they can choose an arts subject or pick one more subject from the previous groups. The core consists of Theory of Knowledge (TOK), Extended Essay (EE), and Creativity, Action, and Service (CAS). The IB is a two-year program for grades 11 and 12.

Many NOVA high-school students will enroll in the IB Diploma Program next year. To ease the transition, NOVA Time has asked three current juniors who take this program about their workload and their school life.

All that, combined with the rigor of the program, makes the DP (in)famous for its workload. Students need guidance to manage their time successfully. One student remarked that one has to be very organized. They also advised that “creating a schedule is very important” and that “you should respect deadlines.” On the other hand, another student focused on the importance of having a leisure

activity “for a few hours” so that “it is easier to balance workload.”

IB subjects are also renowned for the challenge they can impose on their students. Two students remarked that all courses are “equally demanding,” but the differentiation between “SL and HL” can make a “huge difference.” One student spoke of exact terms - they pointed out that “Math and Physics HL” are among the most challenging subjects.

Choosing the subjects is imperative to one’s academic future, especially when it comes to university applications. Two of the students counseled students to “research the curriculum for each subject carefully” before making a final decision. The third one reasoned their choosing of Chemistry HL, Biology HL, and Psychology SL because of their intention to “study medicine at university.”



Image by the IBO

When asked about what they liked the most about this program, the students offered different responses. One student remarked that the opportunity to choose the subjects is the best characteristic of the DP. Another one pointed out CAS as the part that enables students to go “beyond learning just from books.” The last student said that studying the subjects “in-depth” is what they liked the most about the program.

The IB DP will be an essential part of the high-school education of NOVA students. Regardless of whether you are in grade 9 or 10, it is never too early to start familiarizing yourself with the Program considering your options.

Interview With Mila Bileska

Our Jovana Vasilisa Jovanovikj interviewed Mila Bileska, a current senior at NOVA. She has actively participated in many STEM-related competitions, courses, and summer programs, including Pioneer Academics, NASA SpaceApps, Yale Young Global Scholars, and CyberMath Academy at Harvard University. Because of her dedication and success, she is a shining exemplar for her fellow students. **NOVA Times** has interviewed Miss Bileska to share the story of her achievements and plans.

Interviewer: Jovana Vasilisa Jovanovikj

Have you ever run into problems while you were a high-school student, and how did you overcome them?

It is natural to occasionally struggle with the material of courses and experience a temporary GPA drop. Personally, I dealt with situations like these by devoting more time to understanding the academic concepts that caused me struggles. Usually, I begin by reading the coursebook from the very beginning of the unit/chapter. Since I am predominantly a visual/reading learner, it is easy to study the missed material solely by reading. However, it is of utmost importance to discover your personal learning style to optimize the time you require to learn.

Usually, during the midterm and final weeks, the coursework gets piled up. Based on experience, this can be very stressful. However, instead of devoting yourself to thinking about the upcoming tasks, I recommend that you write down the deadlines and approximate time required to complete

each. Consequently, it would become much more efficient to approach the coursework gradually, separately, and with a “clear mind.”

Can you tell us more about the IB Program, and what are the pros and cons? What would you say to those that are beginning the IB program?

Like most programs that include college-level coursework, the IB is demanding and somewhat challenging. Although I have obtained the AP diploma, my current schedule includes four IB courses, three of which are at the Higher Level. Unarguably, the program requires dedication and tireless engagement, yet it provides each student with a unique opportunity to explore their interests and experience college-level coursework.

Personally, I find every ounce of knowledge a major ‘pro.’ In the case of the IB, it promotes the student to think critically and independently. Moreover, the final grades, unlike the APs, are a composite score of

many different internal assessments and tests, therefore providing a more accurate representation of the student’s progress.

Like most academic programs, the IB has a ‘con’ that is generally self-inflicted by the student. To elaborate, time management and utmost dedication are the keys to being successful in the program. If the student is unwilling to give their 110%, then the IB program will be an overwhelming burden.

Your history suggests that Physics is your favorite subject. What is the reason you chose this subject? What would you say to other students interested in Physics or other natural sciences?

Yes, Physics has been my greatest passion. Since childhood, I have pondered on crucial questions regarding the origin and mathematical mechanism of the universe.

To others who are interested in pursuing a career in STEM: Do not hesitate to embrace your curiosity. In many instances, the material

and concepts may appear impossible to grasp, but, with enough persistence, you will be able to discover and invent novel, advanced technologies that will further humanity's cause for scientific and intellectual exploration.

You have participated in several Physics competitions. NASA sponsored one of them. What was the structure of these competitions? What have you learned from them? Could you explain how to participate in this kind of competition?

In 2019, I participated in the NASA SpaceApps Challenge, where I won the second place trophy. The competition encompassed the course of three days. In essence, all teams had to spend 6/8 hours daily working on the projects. There were those of us, inclined to give our maximum, who stayed overnight and tirelessly expanded on the presentations.

My team and I chose to design a concept for an interstellar traveling agency. When we split the tasks, I invented and performed calculations on four different futuristic engine designs, including the Schwarzschild Kugelblitz Drive. The competition allowed each team to express their complete creativity. In other words, there are no specific guidelines for the completion of the projects. Finally, on the last day, I presented the idea before a judging committee that was composed of leading NASA scientists and researchers.

To participate in this competition, I recommend following the NASA SpaceApps Facebook page to receive updates. Each year the competition is held in October, and the registration is online.

Additionally, you got accepted into the Pioneer Research Program, the world's only college credit program for high school students. Could you give us more details as to the topic of your research paper? Why would you recommend Pioneer? How do high school students fare in academic publishing?

This program enabled me to experience college-level research. Moreover, it introduced me to professors and researchers from college institutions in the US. The principle of this program is to write a self-initiated research paper that is mentored by a university professor.

In my experience, the program had five individual and five group sessions. Initially, in the group meetings, my mentor introduced us to microcontrollers and Python data analysis. This knowledge enabled me to postulate a research question and design the necessary equipment to test the hypothesis. My Pioneer paper, titled "Measuring Planck's Constant Using Light Emitting Diodes," was recently published in an international journal of physics research.

Insofar, I have involved in many programs; however, I find myself

recommending Pioneer Academics the most. Foremost, it is the only research program that awards college credit. Moreover, the experience is invaluable and allows you to have a sample of your best work, which you can send to universities throughout the application process.

After submitting my Pioneer paper, I became inspired to modify and strengthen the hypothesis of the experiment. Looking back, I was motivated by my urge to perfect the work I've done. Therefore, I spent

countless hours redesigning the experiment and minimizing the margin of uncertainty of the results. My paper got published in the Journal of Physics and Astronomy.

Looking at the final product of my research, I decided to pursue publishing since the method I have used to measure and conceptualize a physical constant with a significantly low magnitude was novel. More importantly, undergraduates can further explore my models in their laboratories.

Frankly, high-school students don't fare well in academic publishing. To become a published author, the student needs to transcend the boundaries of pre-college education and research or design a completely new approach for looking at a specific topic. It may appear tiresome and difficult - but, evidently, is it not undoable.

Have you already applied to university? Do you know where you would like to pursue in your studies next year? How does one navigate this complicated process of application at universities?

Currently, I have applied to some universities so that I can see how the overall process goes.

Concerning my academic plans, I will be mainly submitting applications to institutions in the US, UK, and Canada in hopes of furthering my education there.

In most honesty, the process is overwhelming. Therefore, I highly recommend starting as early as the summer preceding the application season. During that period, it is imperative to get familiar with the universities and application portals. Luckily, our high school provides enormous support throughout this process. Your academic counselors are the best resource for questions regarding college apps and undergraduate studies.

What would be your advice to the younger students on how to succeed in NOVA high school?

For me, success is synonymous with dedication, persistence, and intellectual satisfaction. To be successful, you must insist on pursuing your passions and surmounting the obstacles that may arise. What I realized early on is that each bit of knowledge empowers you, no matter how 'irrelevant' it may seem. In essence, you cannot achieve success, but it always comes to students whose thirst for knowledge is not influenced, nor motivated by grades.



Courtesy photo

The PISA Dilemma in the Post-COVID-19 World

By Jovana Vasilisa Jovanovikj

PISA has been a successful program organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The testing results allow professionals to compare and contrast the education system of many countries. Due to the pandemic, the next testing round will take place in 2022.

OECD started this ambitious project in 2000. Since then, every three years, 15-year-old students from around the world take standardized tests in reading, mathematics, and science. The goal of PISA

countries have started using the PISA tests as benchmarks for the improvement of their educational systems. The results even found their place in election manifestos and political campaigns.

Macedonian students took the test in 2015 and 2018. The results have placed our country near the bottom in the Balkan region - only Kosovo ranks worse than us. The average PISA test score for OECD member countries is 500; the average for Macedonian students is approximately 390. Furthermore,



Image via OECD

(which stands for Programme for International Student Assessment) is to compare the performances of the students, and, thus, to rank the quality of the different educational systems.

In 2018, 79 countries participated in the survey. Every year more countries join the testing. This evaluation also includes relevant personal data for the test-takers, such as gender and socio-economic characteristics.

The results of PISA tests show huge gaps between the educational systems of the participating countries. The correlation is not necessarily geographic: countries in East Asia and Scandinavia typically rank at the top of the global table, while Southern and Eastern European countries usually produce scores at the middle. The Latin American and the Middle Eastern countries generally underperform.

Initially, countries did not take the results very seriously, but the

only 1% of Macedonian test-takers are considered top performers, compared to the 9% world average.

The history of the country does not justify this poor showing because the other former Yugoslav countries rank much better. Slovenia is in the top fifteen, while Serbia and Croatia occupy the middle of the ranking.

The next round of PISA testing will be pivotal for the whole world. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the rhythm and the timetable of education all around the globe. ICT devices became a prerequisite for attending school. But, even the most developed countries have digital gaps between the various socio-economic categories. Thus, the PISA results will emphasize the differences between the social status of the students.

However, some countries had difficulties adapting to the new models of distance and blended learning. For instance, in North

Europe, Here We Come!

The Macedonian National Football Team qualified for the European Championship 2020. The team made history since this was the first time the country would play in a European championship.

By Ana Stevanovska

The Macedonian National Football Team managed to qualify the country for the European Championship 2020. Since this was the first time, the team made history.

North Macedonia has been waiting for this moment for decades. The Macedonian National Team started in 1993.

As always, some people leave a lasting mark, while other players become forgettable. Football experts have described the current players as not "regular players that come and go" and praised their skills. Qualifying for Euro 2020 made the public call the football players "lions."

The journey to the Euros began in 2018 with the introduction of the new tournament for national teams called the UEFA Nations League. North Macedonia was in the lowest division, League D. Then, the league split into four groups - the country was in the fourth group, with Armenia, Gibraltar, and Liechtenstein.

After six played matches in the 2018/19 season, the country topped the group with five wins and one loss. The first position in the group meant that Macedonia would have a chance to qualify for the Euro 2020 by playing with the three other teams that finished on top of their groups in the League D (Kosovo, Belarus, and Georgia).

For the play-off semi-final, the country played against Kosovo. Before the match, the captain Goran Pandev

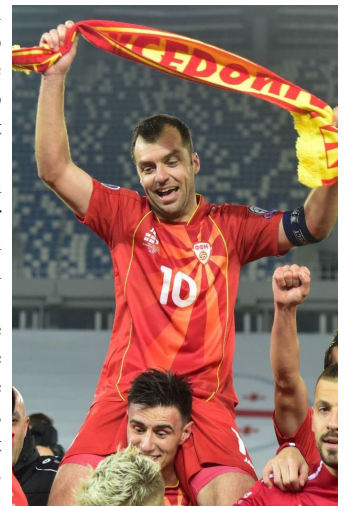


Image via ffm.mk

said that it would be the most important match of his career. Despite playing in many other prestigious leagues, his career wish was for his country to qualify for a major tournament.

After a long game of twist and turns, the country defeated Kosovo by 2-1, and Macedonia had to face Georgia in its capital, Tbilisi. The showdown came. Elif Elmas managed to get the ball, pass it to Ilija Nestorovski, who in turn passed the ball to Goran Pandev. Pandev scored the goal and fulfilled his wish - the team won with a score of 1-0 and qualified for the Euro 2020.

People took to the streets all around the country and celebrated. The Macedonian National Football Team should play for the European Championship in the summer, 2021.

Macedonia, most of the primary school students attend school through distance learning.

Therefore, the PISA tests in 2022 will measure the impact of the current pandemic on the success, resilience, and adaptability of their education systems. These data will shape the future of the education systems around the world for years to come.

Creating Change Through Social Innovation and Green Ideas

Irina Janevska is an activist with many innovative ideas and actions. Our reporter, Adora Limani, has interviewed Ms. Janevska on her work.

Interviewer: Adora Limani

What is the essence of ARNO - what does it do?

ARNO is an organization for social innovation established in 2013. Our idea is to bring new approaches to solving community challenges - its essence - to share expertise and to respond to local problems through innovation. We focus on four different strategic areas. Those are sustainable development, youth, philanthropy, and social innovation (new methodologies are useful in developing new approaches). We believe that young people should be the core of our interventions and that everything starts with love for people.

It is definitely a unique organization. How did you start ARNO? What were some of the challenges and opportunities that you faced at the very beginning?

I grew up in the third sector because I started volunteering and youth activism when I was 16. It first started with my engagement as a peer educator - meaning that I was going to schools to teach my peers about sexual reproductive health and rights. I was part of an international network supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). My first years were devoted to advocacy for young people, as I was trying to be more vocal to represent their voices. We conducted many campaigns about HIV, sexual reproductive health, and rights. We also covered identities, which was quite revolutionary at that time. To this day, I am very proud of it. As I was at the beginning of my BA, I realized that I could use media to influence public behavior. So, I worked as a communications officer at the Center for Institutional Development (CIRA) in Macedonia. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund from the United States approached me one day, asking whether I had my own NGO since they recognized that I was doing a great job at promoting green ideas. That is how I received the support to start an initiative and lead as a president of a brand new organization. It is worth mentioning that I was simultaneously part of other NGOs, participating in various civic action initiatives. Whenever I would find that something was not right in our society, I would always try to be vocal and use all my skills, knowledge, connections, and networks to provide opinions and solutions, as well as point fingers if something is wrong.

What is the importance of social entrepreneurship to you personally? How do you believe that it has impacted everyone else in our community?

I started working in the UK due to a scholarship that I received from the British Embassy. Since the UK is known as the motherland for social entrepreneurship, I had a chance to see many social enterprises firsthand and was amazed at how much change they can bring to communities. I was inspired by visiting Jamie Oliver 15, one of his restaurants in London. The restaurant operates as a social enterprise because he is engaging young people that would otherwise go to juvenile prison if they commit another crime. When I came back to Macedonia, I wanted to open a similar type of restaurant, but then reality hit me, and I realized that this was impossible due to funding constraints. However, this inspired me to visit the gastronomy high school here in Skopje. You guessed it - our first project was a collaboration with this vocational school. My eyes opened when I realized what poor education we have in our country. Also, being a chef is seen as a prestigious profession everywhere, except for in the Balkans.

Getting back to the first project, we offered cooking classes for a fee. The students learned from recognized chefs and attended our workshops. We used the profits to invest back in the students from this school. We bought them uniforms, something that most of them could not afford. We used the remainder for skills building and for the photographer who took professional photos. Our project was a great success, and it made me realize how we can truly make something change with innovation. Each year we received more applications and regional awards for the green ideas project. When we received the first award in 2015, I saw how much it means to give startup money. We could get real support in terms of building a brand. I realized that investing in people and their entrepreneurial ideas is something that will not stop with the end of the grant or award, but that it has a long-term multiplier effect. That is when I realized that we could solve problems by making a profit while at the same time being fair and just to people and nature.

I see that you are a person who values civic action. Did you know this from a very young age? How did you know that that was



what you wanted to pursue?

I was very extroverted when I was young, and I knew that I do well around people. To be honest, Communication Sciences at South East European University was actually my second choice. My first choice was Drama school since I wanted to be an actress. I was part of an independent theater group for seven years. My parents were against it since they are both scientifically oriented and did not quite believe in the arts. When I was ten, we had a wasteland with scrap metal in our neighborhood that would frequently injure kids playing there. So my friends and I took the initiative to collect signatures from the whole community to force the owner to remove the waste. Thus, my first civic action was to conduct a successful petition. It was an important encouragement to know that even a ten-year-old could have the power to change things in the community.

Many people believe in the notion that a single person cannot create substantial change, but it is clear that you have personal stories that prove that idea wrong. In this case, what role does ARNO play from an environmental perspective, more specifically?

We promote the concept of a green economy. We were one of the first organizations in the country to initiate that. Due to the lack of knowledge, we raised awareness through presentations and workshops. We also organized competitions that built momentum. Financially, we secured national and regional awards. Green startups from Macedonia received \$70,000 in investments; most of them are still operating. Then, we work on policy proposals, too. We push institutions

Opinion

and local governments to become role models and not buy single plastic bottles of water when they organize events. A thorough reform of school curricula and the implementation of local examples in school books are also crucial. With this, we want young people to differentiate between green and social ideas, sustainability. We want young people to learn from local examples, rather than global giants such as Starbucks and McDonalds. We also support civic actions and try to connect people. Recently, we had an open call for a RICE (Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs) project. I was thrilled to notice that many of the ideas of young people who applied present social enterprises with environmental missions. For example, we have a team of young people that want to develop a business idea of a zero-waste shop, where people buy things in bulk, like at the time of our grandparents when things were not necessarily packaged, but people were measuring on their own and using their packaging. We are very proud to see young people do not only think about the social aspect of the enterprises but the environmental component as well.

What types of people is ARNO striving to work with and to impact? Who is your target audience, and what kind of people do you wish to work with?

The first policy we have is the ethical code of conduct: we are looking for people who

have the same values as the organization. These values include promoting democracy, diversity, non-discrimination at any level. We strive to have diverse people in the organization (minorities, LGBTQ+, other groups). This diversity makes us relevant and gives us credibility when we talk to other communities. We also try to be gender-balanced, but currently, we have more females than males working in the organization, as we try to empower women. We see the relevance of contributing through different perspectives and from different views within the organization. In terms of external audiences, our current focus is to include youth from rural areas because we notice that there is an issue with their lack of activity and exposure. We get more applications from big cities like Skopje, and this is not in line with our goal for sustainability. We cannot be sustainable if we do not have equal development at all levels of society. To address this issue, we have implemented quotas requiring a minimum of 30% of participants to be from rural areas.

What advice would you give to NOVA students that want to contribute to social entrepreneurship and might want to start their own NGO similar to ARNO?

I would tell them to listen to their call and not to do it just because it is something that everyone says is good or a new trend. The students should listen to their hearts. If they

believe that they can help someone through social actions, then this is what they should try. Even if they fail, they should learn that, just like in real entrepreneurship, there are ups and downs in social entrepreneurship, too. There is no such thing as a constant trajectory, but it is a great way to learn about your skills and to find out where you belong in society. They should focus on joining a cause that matters to them, something that is close to their heart, not because it is a community service activity.

I believe that when it comes to altruism and areas such as philanthropy, many people only engage in them because they are susceptible to the connotation of it being a good deed or that it immediately renders you a good person. I think the key to creating an NGO such as yours would be to believe that those initiatives are the best thing for you and your community, rather than indulging in the moral superiority which surrounds it.

Very well put! Philanthropy is difficult to deconstruct, but you said it very well.

Ms. Janevska has offered her contact details to the NOVA student body. Here are the links to her [Facebook profile](#) and the [Facebook page](#) of ARNO. Currently, they do not have any open projects, but the RICE project will receive applications from interested young people next year.

The Ineffectuality of the Student Council

By Anonymous

The NOVA Student Council is supposed to represent the student body. More importantly, it needs to convey the problems we, the students, are facing to the NOVA administration and officials. At the beginning of this school year, the NOVA Student Council elected its new leadership. Sadly, their way of handling problems is by not handling them at all.

The Student Council has failed to address issues that the students are facing. Yes, they have - no denying it. Up until now - 4 months after the school year has started - the SC list of accomplishments includes one fundraiser (movie screening), reducing advisory classes by 5 minutes, and producing a COVID-19 documentary on their Instagram page.

They have not even attempted to fix any real issues the students currently have, choosing instead to busy themselves with trivial matters. Even though the students are always complaining about issues, such as the Wednesday classes feeling like a marathon or the overbearing amount of screen time and schoolwork on a daily basis, the leadership of the SC has done nothing about it. That is not due to no one raising these issues during the weekly meetings of the Student Council.

Although the administration ultimately decided to take out the Wednesday classes from the schedule, the SC is not the driving force behind this decision. The SC leadership stated that it is impossible to go against the school administration. Of course, that was proven otherwise by the determination of students and teachers. Students kept on criticizing the Wednesday classes in the surveys. The students had to do this by themselves, while the Student Council decided to remain in hibernation.

The SC has been instead making excuses as to why they cannot do anything about our current state. This theme has persisted throughout the whole school year. Every real issue raised in the meeting gets immediately deflected on the basis that the administration will not change its mind. However, we did see NOVA deciding to end Wednesday classes due to constant complaints by students. As a result of the leaders' refusal to take action, we had to endure two months of 30-minute classes with little value. Regardless, the SC leadership is still refusing to take action against too much screen time and schoolwork. At this point, it is quite apparent that these excuses given are just



Image by Pixabay via Pexels

that - excuses.

The first semester is almost ending. We should use this opportunity to sort out all the ineffectuality that the Student Council has displayed since the lack of representation will continue until the start of the next school year. Students need to organize themselves and demand a vote of no-confidence in the entire SC leadership. If that vote succeeds, there will be another election so that the Student Council can make progress and finally be able to serve its intended purpose - representing the student body.

The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of NOVA Times.

Tests vs. Project-Based Learning: A Student's Opinion

By Stefan Nikolaj

The success of education systems is measured quantifiably. Grades and test scores provide students with an indication of how much they know. For this reason, tests have been the main form of quantifying students' performance. Not only that, but students revisit the material they have previously studied when preparing for a test. Thus, tests seem like they help both students and teachers - right? Well, I intend to prove the contrary.

What's bad about tests, then?

1. They're stressful.

Personally, as a student, my biggest issue with tests is the stress they cause. Because tests determine your grade, the result of a test can follow you for a long time, so it's crucial to get it right the first time. To get into any top university, you essentially need to have perfect grades, which causes even more stress for students who want to achieve more.

A single poor performance can massively lower an average grade, which can then negatively affect college opportunities. This can then make good students who put in a lot of effort, but have one bad day, appear like incompetent students. Since grades are just a number, there is no additional space for clarifying why or what happened or how it does not represent previous achievements.

On the other hand, in the case of tests with multiple-choice questions, someone can just pass out of sheer luck. There are even whole articles and research done on patterns in questions with multiple choice answers. Someone who can recognize such patterns can easily answer such questions without having a deep understanding of the actual material they are being tested on.

In both of the cases presented, tests were an inaccurate quantifier of students' knowledge, and, honestly, both of those situations have happened to me. In both of these cases, getting the results of the test is demoralizing – if trying hard makes you fail and doing nothing makes you pass, then what's the point of trying?

2. They only test a specific kind of skill set.

The only thing traditional tests actually test is how well a student can memorize information. Rarely do they include critical thinking questions. Additionally, you cannot study a subject in-depth and know all the details by heart. It is much more important to know where to find something, how to check its value, and how to implement it.



Image by Tima Miroshnichenko via Pexels

Open book tests are a step towards the right direction in this case, but they still suffer from many of the issues with regular tests. To compensate for the fact that students have external assistance, teachers make open book tests much harder, which makes them even more stressful.

3. They create animosity and distrust between the teachers and the students.

Usually, with tests, you are not allowed to use anything except a pen. However, due to tests being highly influential to one's future, students will always attempt to find ways to cheat on tests. To prevent this, teachers have to walk around the classroom, looking at anyone who does anything suspicious. Then, drama occurs when they find something and distract everyone. Cheating on tests has happened and will always happen because it is human nature to try to gain any advantage possible to succeed.

With online testing, there are no teachers to walk around - it is much easier to cheat. This led to some schools using draconian measures to prevent cheating. Even with all this effort put into preventing misconduct, students always find a way. This results in massive amounts of time and resources wasted from both sides, trying to one-up each other. Again, all of this energy and time is used up to create nothing of value, except for mutual distrust.

So, then, what's the alternative?

My proposed alternative to testing is one that's already being introduced in our school – project-based learning. With it, the students focus on applying everything they've learned

into creating a project. With project-based learning, multiple criteria are getting assessed, not only knowledge and memorization. Furthermore, instead of receiving just a grade, teachers have the opportunity to write feedback for each student in their report cards.

So far this year, I have done both projects and tests, and I can safely say that a significant majority of students prefer projects to tests. In my opinion, the prime benefit of project-based learning is teamwork. If the goal of the school is to make us prepared for real life, then teaching us to collaborate is the most important thing school can do. With project-based learning, all the benefits and drawbacks of working with a team are explored. Skills like leadership and organization get developed, too.

Another benefit to doing projects is that, in the end, there is a finished product. There is something to be proud of and to look back on. To conclude, tests are not only bad for students and ineffective for teachers, but there is a simple alternative that has many more benefits over tests. If schools say they care so much about our mental health, why continue to do something that affects our mental health so negatively? Nobody is ever looking forward to doing a test, but everyone wants to hang out and work with their friends, so why not make that part of the school curriculum?

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Realistic Fiction: The Untrue Life Story of Mattie Gokey and the Real Death of Grace Brown

While historical fiction novels may not be the most famous genre amongst teenagers, they encapsulate the true essence of literature and history and present a perfect example of how art and literature express complex events and ideas. Jennifer Donnelly, the author of *A Northern Light*, intertwines the real-life murder of Grace Brown with the fictional story of Mattie Gokey.

By Lina Nikolovska

A Northern Light is a historical fiction that tells the story of Mattie, the main character who lived with her three younger sisters, Abby, Lou, Beth, and her father, on a farm in the United States. Mattie is intelligent and manages to secure a full scholarship to Barnard College, despite the objections of her father. However, she cannot afford the book fees and travel costs. Mattie faces one of the most common problems for girls her age at that time: she has a desire to go to college, but she is not able to. Furthermore, she has emotional and romantic reasons not to leave her family farm. Mattie goes to work at a hotel to earn money for her family instead of her education. Here, Mattie meets Grace Brown, and they become best friends. However, after the murder of Grace, Mattie takes her savings and moves to New York City.

The novel theme and setting effectively portray the historical events and issues that are associated with that time and region. The novel's setting is the Adirondack Mountains of northern New York (the North Woods) in the early 20th century. The French missionary Joseph-Francois Lafitau is accredited with the earliest use of the name, spelled Rontaks, in 1724. In the Mohawk language, Adirondack pertains to a porcupine, an animal that occasionally eats bark. At the period of the novel, the Mohawks had no written language, resulting in Europeans using various phonetic spellings. An English map dating back from 1761 labels it as "Deer Hunting Country," and Ebenezer Emmons named the mountains Adirondacks in 1837.

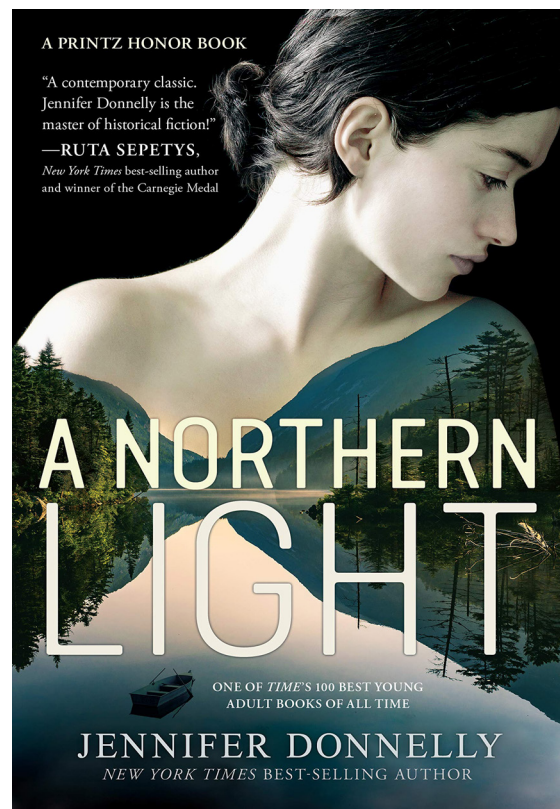
Jennifer Donnelly uses Mattie's story to highlight the importance of the regions - both historically and geographically. It includes descriptive passages that hint at the ancient history of the people who arrived in the area following the settlement of the Americas around 10,000 BC. The work unveils the mystical nature of the mountains, which began to rise approximately twenty million years ago for reasons geologists still find obscure. The novel pertains to the historical significance of the events that took place in the mountains. While they did not set up a settlement, the Alooquian peoples and the Mohawk Nation

used the Adirondacks for hunting and travel. Visiting what is now Tichondorega in 1609, Samuel de Champlain initiated the European colonization of the area, followed by the visit of the Jesuit missionary Issac Jogues in 1642.

Donnelly further illustrates the historical and geographical value of the mountains when, in 1664, the English seized the land. After the events of the American Revolutionary War, the people of the New York State took control

forbidding. As Romanticism developed in the United States, people viewed wild nature as a source of inspiration and beauty. William Henry Harrison Murray's 1869 wilderness guidebook portrayed the area as a place of relaxation and leisure rather than a natural obstacle and a place of historical dispute and mass deforestation. Investor and railroad promoter Thomas Clark Durant obtained a large tract of central Adirondack land and built a railroad stretching from Saratoga Springs to North Creek - which are all names associated in the novel. By 1875, there were more than two hundred hotels in the Adirondacks, including Paul Smith's Hotel. The Great Camps are significant to the location and architecture mentioned in the novel since these camps connected with the Adirondack Architecture, which refers to the rugged architectural style within the Adirondack Mountains area in New York.

Hence, *A Northern Light* by Jennifer Donnelly explores the complexity and marvelous nature of historical fiction, presented through a coming-of-age story set against the backdrop of a real murder that took place in the Adirondacks in the summer of 1906. Inspired by the shocking Chester Gillette murder case of 1906, which has also laid the foundation for Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and the film *A Place in the Sun*, the story in *A Northern Light* resembles sensational novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Little Women*, and other classics that hark back to times of lost innocence, and emphasizes the historical and geographical significance of the Adirondack Mountains relating to the lifestyle and mindset of that time period.



of the state. Because the new government needed money to discharge war debts, they sold nearly the entire original public acreage - about 7 million acre. That allowed Lumbermen to invade the mountains with a few restraints, which resulted in massive deforestation. In 1989, UNESCO designated part of the Adirondack region as part of the Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere.

Donnelly's novel also gave notice to the effect of Romanticism in the United States at that time. Before the 19th century, people perceived the wilderness as desolate and

If you wish to read the book, you can look for it in your local bookshop or contact the school library.

A Travel Guide To Asia

Even though the pandemic has stripped us of the opportunity to travel, a good traveler always plans! The Asian continent is home to 48 diverse and beautiful countries. It would take years to explore each nation, but all of them offer an unforgettable experience. From magnificent landscapes in Thailand to breathtaking and historical architecture like China's Great Wall, Asia is a must-visit tourist destination that should be on any traveler's bucket list.

By Angela Dimovska

The Great Wall, China



Image by Alex Qian via Pexels

China is the largest East Asian country, covering almost the entire landmass of the region. One of the many factors that make China so diverse is its topography. In China, you can find some of the highest and lowest places on Earth - both mountainous terrain and lowlands. Its climate varies from either dry and desert-like conditions in the north-west to monsoon in the south-east.

One of China's most popular and beautiful tourist attractions is the Great Wall of China. The Great Wall was built to protect China from foreign invasion, as well as the Silk Road trade. A common mistake about the Great Wall is believing that the Qin Dynasty built it. Although Qin Shi Huang, China's first emperor, started essential parts of the construction, it was the Ming Dynasty that completed a considerable amount of the present wall. Built with soil, brick-stone, and sand, the wall is 5-8 meters tall.

You should definitely visit the Great Wall because it is a building project with the longest duration and the highest cost of human lives ever. There are many useful tours that you could go to explore this magnificent building project. You could go to the 4 Day Secrets of Beijing Tour and experience the Great Wall during the nighttime, or the 3 Day Discovery Great Wall Hiking from Jiankou to Jinshanling

tour.

It saddens me to inform you that human activity has contributed to the destruction of more than 30% of the Great Wall. As tourists, what we can do to keep the wall intact and clean when visiting, is not to draw graffiti, litter, or meddle with the bricks. Taking a brick home has been prohibited by the Chinese government.

Bangkok, Thailand



Image by Icon0 via Pexels

When someone mentions Thailand, the first thing that comes to mind is how much of an exotic and intriguing country it is. Situated in Southeast Asia, Thailand has a tropical climate, characterized by mostly hot and humid weather. It's also important to mention the monsoon season starts in May and ends in October.

The country's capital city, Bangkok, is really a sight to behold. You can marvel at the gleaming temples or catch a tuk-tuk through bustling Chinatown. When in Chinatown, tourists flock to the Wat Traimit to see the largest Gold Buddha Statue in the world. From the top of the Wat Traimit, you can gaze below and see the beautiful streets while also enjoying a cool breeze - so you won't overheat. If you want to get away from the crowded streets, you can relax in Romaneenart Park. You can often see locals there that are jogging or just taking time out of their day to unwind.

To get the full experience, you can catch the Chinatown Food Tasting and Walking Tour, where you will be able to try some of the most delicious dishes of Thai cuisine and visit all of Chinatown's breathtaking scenery, in addition to being budget-friendly.

Additionally, Thai food is spread all across the globe because of its exquisite dishes with a wide range of flavors. It's characterized by its pungent aromatic components with a spicy edge with exceptional texture, color, and detail, leaving you with a taste that guarantees you'll want more. Tom Yum Goong (Spicy Shrimp Soup), Tom Kha Kai (Chicken in Coconut Soup), Pad Thai (Thai style fried noodles) are some of the most representative specialties, among many others.

I hope that this guide was informative and will be useful for you when you are planning a trip to any of these Asian countries. I prepared it with the aid of websites, and I encourage you to check them out for more information. Among these, you will find www.chinahighlights.com, www.thailand-guide.com, and www.worldtravelguide.net.

NOVA Times advises you to commence your traveling to the Far East after the COVID-19 pandemic has ended.

About Us:

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