

OCTOBER, 2020

VOL. 1

# WE NEED TO TALK

An activism-focused, student-run newspaper





# Letter from the Editor

It feels amazing to be able to present the first edition of We Need To Talk, a global, student run, activism focused newspaper. From articles on climate change to cultural appropriation, this edition highlights October's social justice issues including the Call To Action section, which offers resources for you as a reader to help pitch-in. This newspaper is the product of numerous efforts from high school students all over the globe who worked together to make something wonderful.

First, I want to give a shoutout to **Rhea Sarkar (America)**, our managing editor, who saw the rough vision for this newspaper and immediately agreed to create something amazing. From opening applications to publishing this on our website, Rhea has been there to help out, spread the word, and answer questions. This edition would truly have been impossible without her.

Next, I want to thank **Anna Hsu (America)**, our copy editor. Her positive energy and enthusiasm was a driving force of this team. She was never afraid to get her hands dirty and helped out with everything, from graphic design to editing articles. She made this edition a thousand times better and we could not have done it without her.

I also want to acknowledge our wonderful graphic designers, **Aneri Shah (America)** and **Wajeeha Khan (Pakistan)**. Aneri and Wajeeha spent so much effort making this edition look absolutely wonderful. They were an absolutely crucial part of making this edition happen and I cannot thank them enough.

I also want to thank our amazing editorial board that had to deal with every late night Slack message and technical difficulty. They were always willing to step-in and did not stop until this newspaper was published.

History Editor: Bruktawit Fisseha (Ethiopia)  
Current Events Editor: Barsha Parajuli (America)  
Spotlight Editor: Rachel Lewis (America)  
Opinion Editor: Vishakha Singh (India)  
Arts Editor: Jyotsna Bisariya (India)

Finally, I want to thank our staff writers, the very core of this organization who spent hours fixing their articles and making this edition perfect. Their creativity and dedication is the most important part of the newspaper. Each writer came with their own unique and innovative ideas that made this edition.

Staff Writers:  
Deeksha Chitale (India)  
Ishika Jain (India)  
Jaelene lyman (South Africa)  
Sameeksha Garg (America)  
Sanjana Mittal (America)

We hope you enjoy our first edition! If you have any questions/comments, shoot us an email at [weneedtotalk@gmail.com](mailto:weneedtotalk@gmail.com).

Thanks,  
Saranya Singh  
Editor-in-chief, We Need To Talk



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Call to Action &  
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Editor

# We Need To Talk

## Opinion Piece

By Barsha  
Parajuli



A group of police officers is seen advancing with heavy equipment.

### The Policing System and Its Failure to Address Mental Health

***Trigger Warning: Mentions/depictions of violence and death***

On September 2 2020, a video from a police's body camera, written reports, and autopsy reports were released regarding the death of a black man named Daniel Prude; he died on March 23, 2020 in Rochester, New York. For months everyone had been unaware of Daniel Prude's death. It was formerly stated by officials that he died by overdosing on PCP. However, new reports present evidence that he had died by asphyxiation and the autopsy report declared it a case of homicide.

#### **The Murder:**

Daniel Prude was a Chicago native, living with his sister Tameshay. He had started acting strange, most likely due to a mental health episode. So, Tameshay put Daniel on a plane to New York where Daniels' brother, Joe, lived. Tameshay hoped that Joe could help Daniel through this. Joe Prude told the New York Times that Daniel was talking to himself, saying how everyone was out to get him, and how the episodes got more and more frequent, so Joe requested for help. He called an ambulance and asked that Daniel be admitted to get some help as he was having a mental health crisis. Three hours later, they sent Daniel back home, which was shocking because he was having this mental health crisis and was admitted for evaluation and help. But the doctor refused, saying it wasn't necessary. Joe recalled that when he came back, he was acting like his normal self. Daniel wasn't resentful about the idea that his brother thought he wasn't okay, instead was accepting of what had happened and thankful for the care he was receiving. They were talking, just about normal brotherly things, when Daniel asked for a cigarette. Joe had gotten up to get one but when he came back, the back door was open and Daniel had gone out into the freezing cold, completely bare, most likely having another episode. Joe then called 911.

## The Policing System and Its Failure to Address Mental Health

A while after the police came in contact with Daniel Prude, Daniel took his last breath under the suffocation of one of the police officers.

**The video: <https://youtu.be/JhKeHLe8j1E>**

**[Trigger Warning: Please proceed with caution as the video might be disturbing for some viewers. Audience discretion is advised.]**

Daniel Prude's death uncovered just how inexperienced the police can be in every other emergency taking place except a physical one. It may not be the first you have heard about the issue, but the police are spread too thin. They are receiving phone calls for things that they aren't equipped to handle. The police respond to everything from murder/kidnapping phone calls, to intervening in the issues of homelessness and shoplifting. They are prepared for the worst as they should be. But that means that it is so dangerous for those same people to be handling issues where it is CRUCIAL to know how to de-escalate like in the case of Daniel Prude and those with mental illnesses. You may hear the phrase "Defund the Police," and it may sound extreme, but the idea behind it is basically what we've been talking about. It's the slogan that supports divesting funds from police departments and reallocating them to non-policing forms of public safety and community support, such as social services, youth services, housing, education, healthcare, and other community resources. This could drastically help communities in dire need of assistance rather than protection as almost one-fourth of the people in the US who are shot by the police are those with mental health crises according to the Thomson Reuters Foundation. How can we maintain public safety without the aggressiveness that the police present which sometimes results in the loss of the very lives that they have sworn to protect? What system should the most praised democracy in the world use to keep our citizens safer and less scared?

## Reforming Policing:

The United States policing and public safety system is quite unique from those of other advanced democracies and they could honestly learn a lot from them. Policing systems in many of these countries are more centralized; for example in Sweden, there is one national police force overseen by the national government. A mental health ambulance, staffed with two specialized psychiatric nurses and a paramedic, respond to emergency calls in Sweden from people with severe mental health or behavioral distress. Before this initiative, those kinds of calls were handled by the police but now this psychiatric team works with the police in cases like these. For the conservatives here in the US afraid of bigger government oversight, we can take lessons from Canada or the UK, that also have national, state, and local authorities. A 2020 study found the team "created a safe environment and actively involved the patient in their care by creating an open and safe place for dialogue." This type of environment that is present in many European nations like the UK uses a method that's on the basis of policing by consent. The countries with this type of philosophy believe that the police should gain authority with the notion of respect, rather than fear. This model of policing encourages that success is measured not in how many arrests officers have made but rather, by the absence of crime itself. The actions taken by these countries aren't an act of weakness on crime, but they have shown that they have been able to statistically raise the public safety of those in their community. Being a respected body of authority has been proven a much more impactful and effective way to maintain public safety than to be a feared body of authority.

## The Policing System and Its Failure to Address Mental Health

That atmosphere comes from the type of environment the police end up creating and that is when policing education comes into play.

Police training varies a lot from country to country but the US spends a surprisingly low amount of time training their recruits. On average, police trainees spend about 21 weeks in training and they are modeled in military boot camps while, for example in Norway, police-hopefuls must complete a bachelor's degree where they even spend one year on society and ethics and then more time in training in specifically psychiatry and sociology.

"I think that the United States must learn that it takes time to educate people," says Rune Glomseth, a professor at Norwegian police university college. "Police are a very special role in society and you can't just train them for a few weeks. You need time."

Giving better training to our police officers won't only help increase public support for the police and public safety, it also allows the police to be more firm on their grounds and actions. If the police are trained more extensively, they know what they are doing, they know the procedures, and they can stay calmer during an incident. It allows them to be more competent and not react in an unwise way because they can remain a cooler head. This in turn will give officers more options to take decisive and effective action without harming themselves, or the person they are trying to reach.

Accountability is also a huge part in how police officers end up doing their job at the end of the day. In the US, it's extremely hard to hold police accountable for their actions for a lot of reasons and one of the reasons is that it's extremely hard to even start an investigation for police officers misconduct. Why? Because of police unions. Police unions have managed to arrange strong protections for the members of their union unfortunately many times at the expense of public safety. In some states, there is something given to the police as a "cooling-off period." where they are given a period of time between when they are accused of something and when they have to get interrogated, and some of these cooling off periods can be as short as 24 hours or as long as 30 days. Most other citizens aren't given that time frame because it is known that the first 48 hours after the accusation are the most crucial and the police know that. Once they finally get interrogated, they still have more protections. In some places, police officers are allowed to request for documentation of all the evidence that is presented against them and they can know who filed these complaints which allows for intimidation among their communities. In the US, a lot of the time we see circumstances where institutions are more interested in protecting the police than they are about protecting the public, and that's why the police are so unafraid to use excessive violence because they know that it's unlikely that they could get prosecuted. That type of excessive force is what leads to a 22% murder rate among police of mental health incidents and is the reason why we need to tackle the issues regarding protections of police union.

We shouldn't be afraid of the very people tasked to keep us safe, however, the police make it hard when they use tactics of manipulation, intimidation, and brute excessive force. We do have to keep our public officers to a higher standard BECAUSE of the role they play in our society, and we cannot excuse misconduct. Their actions have criminalized people with mental health adding on to the stigma that already surrounds it. Their actions have caused mass protests across the globe, and it's time to listen to these protests. We need police reform and we need it now.

# We Need To Talk

## Opinion Piece

By

Vishakha  
Singh



Examples of cultural appropriation as Halloween costumes are shown above.

### Cultural Appropriation in Halloween

For long, the topic of cultural appropriation in any way or form has been hotly debated. There is a range of opinions from "Cultural Appropriation doesn't exist" to "It is blown out of proportion" to "It is unacceptable" and everything in between. Every time a person of one culture/race wears a piece of clothing or hairstyle from a different culture/race, they receive immediate backlash for cultural appropriation from the internet or even the people around them. Many celebrities have been cancelled from their scheduled events because of this backlash.

Popular Opinion: Cultural Appropriation is unacceptable.

The popular opinion is that traditional clothing, hairstyle etc., of one culture should not be worn by people of a different culture to protect its purity and prevent its exploitation. This means that a non-Japanese person should not wear a traditional Japanese Kimono. Or a non-Korean person should not wear traditional Hanbok. Or a non-Black person should not braid their hair and make dreadlocks.

The argument here is that people of a one culture/race can simply wear it for 'fashion' and remove it whenever they want. It is not the same for the natives of that culture since it is their identity. People of the said different culture are applauded for wearing the clothing or hairstyle while natives of that culture have suffered greatly for long for doing the same! And this is simply not fair.

Simple enough, right?

Not really.

Many people say that Cultural Appropriation doesn't exist. This means that a white person wearing dreadlocks, a Spanish native wearing Saree, a Russian wearing a Kimono is nothing wrong! The argument here is that culture is not a person's property to steal. It can not be taken away from a culture and thus, it is not exploited by people of different culture wearing it.

## Cultural Appropriation in Halloween

Another angle to this issue is that it does exist, it is also unacceptable but it is often blown out of proportion. The argument here is that any person can wear anything from any culture as long as it is not meant to disrespect or mock the culture.

This means that a non-black person can wear braids or dreadlocks as long as it is not meant to stereotype black people and degrade them. For example, the infamous 'blackface' wherein non-black people are shown to be black with makeup for no relevant reason. But wearing braids as such is not cultural appropriation in itself.

There have been numerous incidents where people have intentionally or unintentionally committed the act of cultural appropriation and faced massive backlash for it. This topic is especially debated at the time of the kid-favourite festival of Halloween. Many parents are hesitant or refuse of letting their kids dress up as a character or superhero of a different race than them in fear of appropriating their culture.

The question: "Can white kids dress up as superheroes and characters of colour for Halloween?" has long been the elephant in the room which people were hesitant to address. This lead to either not dressing up as your favourite superhero for Halloween or complete ignorance of culture and end up unintentionally making a mockery out of it.

Cultural Appropriation is defined as unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people of the society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.

By the definition, it seems quite clear that white kids, being the privileged and dominant race, cannot dress up as characters of colour such as Moana and superheroes such as Falcon or the beloved Black Panther. But is this all there is to the story of cultural appropriation?

Of course, not!

The whole point of a kid wanting to dress up as Moana or Black Panther is that they admire them. They look up to those characters and superheroes not because they are of colour, but because they find in them what they want to be.

Of course, representation in media is extremely important to let people of colour know that their existence is acknowledged and appreciated. However, the kids don't walk around with a checklist looking for role models who are of a certain ethnicity, speak a certain language and have a certain culture.

The kids, children and tweens are isolated from any discrimination of their friends of a different culture, race or ethnicity. They do not see the racial difference as strongly as adults and most teens do. When they make a black friend, all they see in that child is a new friend to play with.

Therefore, dressing up as Moana, Black Panther or any other superhero or character of a different ethnicity is perfectly fine as it is only a sign of admiration and open-mindedness on the kids' part. It shows that they are free of any racial, ethical or cultural discrimination. If anything, it will educate them more about such things in the long run.

In my point of view, cultural appropriation is almost all of the times blown out of proportion. For example, the cultural appropriation that Beyoncé was accused of and hated for was cultural appreciation.

I, as an Indian, can say that it was great exposure of Beyoncé including the dark-skinned south Indian beauty as well as showing the Indian traditional clothing as an act of appreciation. Lastly, when you think about it, cultural appropriation is like fighting racism with more racism. It is like saying that you cannot eat Chinese food because you aren't Chinese, or that you can't wear a certain piece of clothing because you are of a certain culture/race/ethnicity.

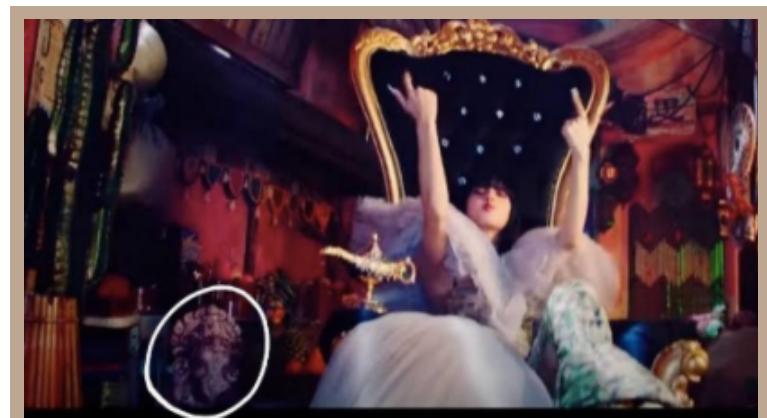
# Cultural Appropriation in Halloween

## Examples of Cultural Appropriation:

<https://youtu.be/uUCrK4aQOlq>

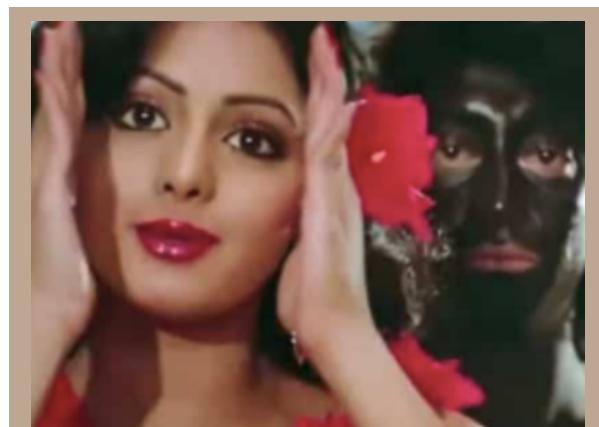
**1.** In this video, Lee Hyori, a famous South Korean singer, performs her song "White Snake." However, she is seen dancing inappropriately to Gayatri Mantra which is a sacred prayer in Hinduism. This is disrespectful and unacceptable since the Gayatri Mantra is sacred and sentimental to Hindus and the singer used it with no regard to its context.

**2.** Here, the K-pop girl group, BLACKPINK uses the statue of the Hindu God Ganesh as an aesthetic in their music video. This is again a complete disregard to the context of Hinduism as well as its sentimental value to the Hindus since it is used as nothing but a prop. The popular group received massive backlash and the statue has since been edited out of the music video but there has been no apology made or an official statement released regarding the issue.



A statue of the Hindu God Ganesh is seen with one of BLACKPINK's members, Lisa.

**3.** This is the infamous 'blackface' from an old Bollywood movie. The background dancers despite being non-black were made to look black with the help of make-up for absolutely no reason. The recently discovered 'brownface' has also sparked some controversy among fans and general movie-goers. 'Brownface' is where actors and actresses are shown to look darker than they are for the sake of the characters who are poor or from a lower status. This, implying that dark-skinned people are either poor or people of a lower-status in society.



A Bollywood movie depicts background dancers dressed up in Blackface, a type of mockery towards Black people.

**4.** This is mostly seen in more recent movies of Bollywood rather than the older ones. Some examples of the 'brownface' are Bhumi Pandekar's character from the movie "Bala"; Ranveer Singh's character from "Gully Boy"; Alia Bhatt's character from "Udta Punjab."

Cultural appropriation is said to be "nothing new" in the fashion industry.



Examples of cultural appropriation that are seen in newer Bollywood moves are shown above.

# We Need To Talk

## Opinion Piece

By Sanjana  
Mittal



A child is staring at his computer during online school.

### The Pros and Cons of Online School VS. Face-to-Face

As of March 2020, a global pandemic has taken over our world, causing chaos throughout America as well as its people. This was specifically caused by a virus called COVID-19 or Coronavirus and it has killed over a million people worldwide. Starting school this year in the USA, students are faced with a life changing decision regarding the way they receive their education through this dark time. The students need to make a choice between physically going to school or continuing their online classes from the safety of their homes.

The choices that students must decide between include going face to face, where students physically go to school, or staying online, where students receive all education from the safety of their own living spaces. Both options possess their own pros and cons which might help assist students make a choice for this difficult decision.

Looking at the benefits of going face to face, one can see that they vary depending on the student, as all of them learn differently and this decision can also correlate to living arrangements. Safety is a huge concern during this period and students going to school might not seem like the best idea, but there are many advantages that come with in-person learning. Bringing an increase in productivity and effectiveness in understanding of different studies, face to face learning can make students learn efficiently. Attending school in person can also help avoid any conflicts that could potentially occur at home, as school may be the place a student can go to stay safe or the only place a student can go to during the day.

When thinking about the pros of in person learning, not much comes to mind as the safety of yourself and others is extremely vital as of now which rules out in person learning in most students' minds almost immediately. However, thinking about their future, students should understand the benefits which might cause them to have a change of heart.

## The Pros and Cons of Online School VS. Face-to-Face

Although face to face learning can have good outcomes in education, there can be a bigger picture to look at.

Is the risk worth it in order to receive the education students are still obtaining but a little less efficiently? Staying online limits opportunities for students but can bring a bright future for them and those around them. Especially if seniors are living inside their homes. Convenience is another huge benefit from staying online as students can come to school from any location as long as there is an internet connection. Although the opportunities of no social interaction can feel limited, the options given online can fill this void in. These opportunities can be provided by the school, learning websites, and YouTube by just a few clicks on a laptop. Online learning can make students deprived of a social aspect in their life but if they wait a few months, they can help thousands of people. It can bring isolation in lives which scares some but spending time with your healthy family, can help greatly in the future.

Putting things into a different perspective can change someone's view on a decision tremendously, but after looking at both sides of the decision, one choice should be clear. This decision truly varies on the student themselves as they must see what choice will be more advantageous for them moving forward. According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 85% of online students who took both online and face-to-face courses, thought that they had the same or a better learning experience online. This means that taking a risk factor might be taken for no reason as the learning experience could be almost equal. However, only 37% of online students felt as if online school was more effective or better than face-to-face learning. Students might be staying safe while staying online, but they could miss many of the opportunities that used to be given in class and lose the social aspect of their life in the process.

Before making this life-changing decision, students should examine the different choices given to them and evaluate the choice they believe they want to go with. Thinking about the future is vital when it comes to receiving a learning experience as the education system makes people like Bill Gates, as knowledgeable as they are today. The pros and cons for online learning and face-to-face might not strike as a huge deal now, but once a choice is made, every step of the way matters. No choice will have no obstacles as they will always come in everyone's path. So, no fear should be felt if a setback does occur. In the end, no choice trumps the other as the decision should be made according to the student and the student only.

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# We Need To Talk

Spotlight

By Ishika  
Jain



Greta Thunberg is seen giving a speech at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting.

## GRETA THUNBERG

**"How dare you? You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"**

- Greta Thunberg, New York, 23 Sept 2019

Greta Tintin Eleonora Ernman Thunberg is a seventeen-year-old Swedish environmental activist who has gained international recognition for putting forward the fact that humanity is facing an existential crisis arising from climate change. Even though she is diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, OCD, and selective mutism, which means that she can only speak when she thinks it's necessary, she realized, at the age of 8, that climate change is a serious issue. Thunberg thinks of her illness as her superpower. She has publicly raised her voice to criticize world leaders for their failure to take sufficient action to address the climate crisis.

## What is climate change?

Climate change is a long-term shift in global or regional climate patterns. It includes both global warming driven by human emission of greenhouse gases, and the resulting large-scale shifts in weather patterns. There are natural fluctuations in the climate, but scientists say temperatures are now rising faster than they should naturally be.

Scientists believe that the primary cause of climate change is the burning of fossil fuels for energy consumption, in addition to the release of greenhouse gases from agriculture, deforestation and industrial processes. Temperature rise is accelerated by the loss of sunlight-reflecting snow and ice cover, increased water vapour and changes to land and ocean carbon sinks.

## Spotlight: Greta Thunberg

Deserts are expanding, and drought, untimely rainfall, heat waves and wildfires are more common. More intense storms will destroy agriculture and infrastructure, also harming aquatic life. There could also be a shortage of fresh water, which would dramatically alter our ability to produce food.

Climate model projections summarized in the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report indicate that, during the 21st century, the global surface temperature is likely to rise a further 0.3 to 1.7 °C (0.5 to 3.1 °F) in a moderate scenario, or as much as 2.6 to 4.8 °C (4.7 to 8.6 °F) in an extreme scenario, depending on the rate of future greenhouse gas emissions and on climate feedback effects.



The emaciated polar bear shown above depicts the negative effects of climate change.

### How did Thunberg start activism?

Thunberg first heard about climate change when she was 8 years old (in 2011) and could not understand why so little is being done about it. The situation made her depressed. She struggled with depression for 3-4 years before she began her school strike. When she started protesting her parents did not support her much. Her activism started at her own home. She convinced her parents to lower the family's carbon footprint and overall impact on the environment by becoming vegan, upcycling, and giving up flying. Her mother, who is a Swedish opera singer, gave up her international career. This boosted Greta's spirit.

Deserts are expanding, and drought, untimely rainfall, heat waves and wildfires are more common. More intense storms will destroy agriculture and infrastructure, also harming aquatic life. There could also be a shortage of fresh water, which would dramatically alter our ability to produce food.



Droughts, rising temperatures, and extreme weather negatively impacts agriculture.



Thunberg poses with a sign that translates to "School strike for climate."

In August 2018, she started spending her school days outside the Swedish parliament to call for stronger action on climate change, holding up a sign reading *Skolstrejk för klimatet* (School strike for climate). Soon, other students from all over the world engaged in similar protests in their own communities. Together, they organized a school climate strike under the name 'Fridays for Future.' After Thunberg addressed the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference, student strikes took place every week somewhere in the world. In 2019, there were multiple coordinated multi-city protests involving over a million students each. To avoid flying, Thunberg sailed to North America where she attended the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit. Her speech there, in which she exclaimed "how dare you," was widely taken up by the press and incorporated into music. Her influence on the world stage has been described by newspapers as the "Greta effect."

## Spotlight: Greta Thunberg

Thunberg's activism evolved from solitary protesting to taking part in demonstrations throughout Europe, making several high-profile public speeches, and mobilising her growing number of followers on social media platforms. In August 2019, she took a "sabbatical year" from school, intending to travel in the Americas while meeting people from the climate movement. The trip across the Atlantic Ocean from Plymouth, England to New York, USA was announced as a carbon-neutral transatlantic crossing serving as a demonstration of Thunberg's beliefs in the importance of reducing emissions.

Thunberg attended the UN Climate Action Summit in New York City on [23 September 2019]. That day, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) hosted a press conference where Thunberg joined fifteen other children. Together, the group announced they had made an official complaint against five nations that are not on track to meet the emission reduction targets they committed to in their Paris Agreement pledges: Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, and Turkey. The complaint challenges these countries under the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. If the complaint is successful, the countries will be asked to respond, but any suggestions are not legally binding.

She has since attended several strikes and summits all over the world: the Global Climate Strike in Montreal, climate protests in New York City, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25), the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and meetings of the European Parliament's Environment Committee to talk about the European Climate Law. In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic response required behavioral changes. Thunberg and School Strike for Climate moved their activism and protests online. In August 2020, she ended her 'gap year' from school and returned to the classroom.

### Response to Greta Thunberg's activism

Thunberg has received both strong support and strong criticism for her work from politicians and the press. Pope Francis thanked her and encouraged her to continue her work on climate change activism. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres endorsed the school strikes initiated by Thunberg, admitting that "my generation has failed to respond properly to the dramatic challenge of climate change. This is deeply felt by young people. No wonder they are angry."

Democratic candidates for the 2020 United States Presidential Election such as Kamala Harris, Beto O'Rourke, and Bernie Sanders expressed support after her speech at the September 2019 action summit in New York. German Chancellor Angela Merkel indicated that young activists such as Thunberg had driven her government to act faster on climate change.

Thunberg and her campaign have also been criticized by politicians such as the Australian prime minister Scott Morrison, Russian president Vladimir Putin, the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), and repeatedly by U.S. president Donald Trump. The criticism ranges from personal attacks to claims she oversimplifies the complex issues involved. But criticism could not stop her from voicing her concern for climate change and her future.



Thunberg's bicycle on a street in Stockholm reads, "The climate crisis should be treated as a crisis!"

## Spotlight: Greta Thunberg

**"When haters go after your looks and differences, it means they have nowhere left to go.  
And then you know you're winning!"**

### Awards and Achievements

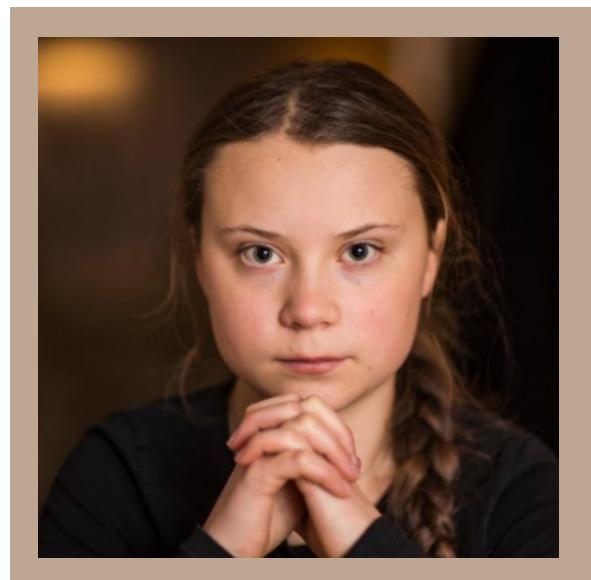
Thunberg has received various honours and awards over the course of her activism. She has been nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize. She has been awarded Swedish Women of the Year, named as one of Time Magazine's 25 Most Influential Women, Ambassador of Consciences Award, Right Livelihood Award, Time's Person of the Year, Forbes's list of 100 Most Influential Women, and many more.

Thunberg has inspired a generation of children to strike against climate change and hold regular protests against global inaction on the matter. Thunberg has chastised global leaders for not treating the threat of climate change as a life-threatening emergency.

**"The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say - we will never forgive you."**

**"I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is."**

**"The moment we decide to fulfil something, we can do anything."**



The pictures above are portraits of Thunberg.

# We Need To Talk

## Spotlight

By Rachel  
Lewis



Sixteen-year-old Meril Mousoom is a teenager as well as a social justice activist. She works on college applications and applies for scholarships as a senior at Stuyvesant High School.

Photo credit: Meril Mousoom

### MERIL MOUSOOM

**High school senior Meril Mousoom works to increase funding for public schools and currently protests and speaks out for a safe reopening of New York City public schools**

Most high school students were not looking forward to the start of the 2020-2021 school year, which tossed piles of homework into their blissful days of freedom. For Meril Mousoom, though, the summer was not a three-month-long Netflix marathon, but a time to fight for change.

Mousoom is a senior at a competitive magnet school called Stuyvesant High School located in downtown Manhattan, New York City, New York. She has participated in activism for the Dignity in Schools Campaign in New York (DSC NY), and multiple other causes, since she was 13 years old. Mousoom joined DSC NY during the summer before high school after finding that she suddenly had a lot of time on her hands. She spent previous summers studying for the New York City high school entrance exam, which by then she had already taken.

"I applied to one program. Then I felt like I wasn't doing enough with my summer. I applied to a nonprofit summer program about violence against Asian Americans... After that, I applied for Girls for Gender Equity. Then they added a thing about school funding and they were also a member of [the] Dignity in Schools [Campaign]. So from then on I started attending the monthly Dignity in Schools meetings, and ever since then I've been involved," Mousoom said.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person activism, Mousoom continues to work on her social justice goals. She tries to accomplish something activism-related every day, such as virtually meeting with fellow organizers to plan a rally.

## Spotlight: Meril Mousoom

Mousoom has also physically attended multiple protests during the summer months, but a lot of her other events now occur online, which is not a completely negative change.

"It's definitely more accessible to people, because it's so much easier to hop on to a Zoom meeting, rather than being [at] an actual place," Mousoom said. "I remember being very stressed out during my freshman year because I really liked being a part of Girls for Gender Equity, but... they had weekly meetings. Sometimes they would be before a test, and I just felt like it was so important that I couldn't cancel."

Mousoom and other student activists and allies in New York City refused to return to school until they felt proper safety precautions were put in place. Mousoom believes that the difficulties surrounding school reopening are part of a larger problem, one that she has been speaking about for years.

"Funding is a really key reason why we can't have [a] great school reopening... there was never enough money for these systems in the first place," Mousoom said. Though Mousoom is just one young activist, she has already impacted high-profile issues, such as the aforementioned New York public school funding deficit and whether the state should increase taxes on wealthy residents.

"Politicians... aren't going to agree to something just because you say it," Mousoom said. "We had a meeting [with a state senator] and it went really badly because he ended up making some really nasty comments. I just felt really unsafe and angry, so I made a letter, and I got a bunch of young people to sign it. It was like 100 people. Then, there was a town hall that we invited him to. He came and we read aloud the letter denouncing the comments that he made, and we showed [that] so many people signed it. I feel like because of that guilt, he actually ended up signing onto the bill."

The protests that Mousoom participates in have even attracted the attention of the New York governor, Andrew Cuomo.

"[Cuomo recently] said he will tax the rich. I don't know in what capacity, I don't know when, he's just very vague like that... [but] it's been really great because a month ago he was like, 'Oh, I'm not going to tax the rich. The rich are gonna leave New York City,'" Mousoom said. Mousoom is enthusiastic about the cause, but she credits the governor's change in stance to the actions of the entire movement.

"Yes, I love protesting, but I'm just one person. There have been so many protests to tax the rich, and so many calls," Mousoom said. "There are literally thousands of people doing this, and naturally, some are more involved than others, [but] there were so many people who came to protest, and I'm really, really honored to be a part of that."

Although some people who are interested, but not active, in social justice causes focus all their attention on the actual issue, Mousoom says they need to realize the difficulties that activists encounter by incorporating the planning and executing of protests and other events into their daily lives.



Mousoom is seen standing and holding a protest sign.

## Spotlight: Meril Mousoom

"There are always people behind the movement. [We should be] taking care of the people behind the movement [by] keeping tabs on them. How are they doing? Are they burnt out?" Mousoom said.

For Mousoom, her dedication to protesting all summer has come at a cost — literally. "In New York City, we have these transit cards called Metrocards. For me, it's been kind of expensive to keep on going to protests like every single week. I do have a job, but I don't have time to work all the time, because of activism," Mousoom said.

Fortunately, her sacrifices have not gone completely unrecognized. One stranger took her and her friends out to lunch after a protest after they made speeches. Another donated \$80 to help pay for her subway transportation this summer.

"I know in the grand scheme of things [that] probably, for that person, \$80 wasn't a lot, but it was really meaningful to me personally," Mousoom said.

In addition to money, Mousoom's near-constant activism has restricted another important resource for her: time.

"I'm trying to apply to college, so [I'm] like 'oh, should I apply for this scholarship or should I go to this meeting to plan a rally?' It's been kind of hard managing that," Mousoom said. However, not everyone needs to dedicate all their free time to activism. "

A lot of people aren't doing activism as their full time job, like a lot of the adults, for example. I think that's the definition of a people-powered movement. It's great that I spent my entire summer doing this, but in reality not everyone can do activism full time, all the time. It's important to take breaks."

Students who usually can't attend protests can still empower the social justice movement through social media.

"I'm constantly doing protests, so I'm promoting my events. It's been kind of discouraging to see a lot of people like a post, but not everyone will come through. The best way is to actually physically be there, but... a share, or a retweet really does help," Mousoom said. "People aren't really socially aware of the way that they can support [movements]."

Mousoom believes that when more people protest for and amplify a cause, politicians take notice and change can occur.

"Young blood is really important. When you think about school funding, for example, in New York State, I think a lot of the lawmakers do care about school funding and some of them are signed on to the bill [to fund schools], but a lot of them aren't. They will only start paying attention when people urge them to, and [when] people go out in the street," Mousoom said. "I hate to say it, but it kind of is a numbers game."

# We Need To Talk

## Current Events

By  
Sameeksha  
Garg



The Bidwell Bar Bridge that crosses Lake Oroville northeast of Oroville, California.

### **Infernos on the West Coast and the News This Fire Season Brings**

What should have been a normal Wednesday in San Francisco on Sept. 9, 2020, under present circumstances turned into a scene from a post-apocalyptic movie. The sky was a sickly orange in what seemed like an all-day eclipse. This meteorological fluke was caused by strong winds that blew smoke and ash from wildfires blazing in northern California. The smoke particles scatter the color spectrum in a way that only allows orange-red light to reach the surface, which causes an orange sky.

While San Francisco has not seen an orange sky again, there is still cause for concern. This year's fire season has been record-setting. To date, wildfires have burned over four million acres of land in California this year alone, a new record that is more than double the previous one set in 2018. On top of that, on October 5, California recorded the August Complex as its first gigafire (a fire burning more than a million acres) in modern history. It started as a series of small fires caused by lightning strikes that morphed into a massive fire. It is 67% contained as of October 10.

2020 has been record-setting not just for California, but also other western states. Oregon has seven active fires and almost a million acres have been burned, double that of a typical year. Washington has also seen about 750,000 acres destroyed by fires. Wildfires this year have left at least 40 people dead and destroyed more than 7,000 structures across the three states. So, what causes these fires? Unfortunately, most of the fires are man-made. Some are accidents — from parties ending in mayhem, like the El Dorado fire caused by a gender-reveal party gone wrong, to cars that send soot into vegetation. Others have been caused by utility equipment like power lines that could spark and ignite fires in remote areas. Unavoidably, dry lightning storms could also ignite dry vegetation and cause some of the biggest fires.

## Infernos on the West Coast and the News This Fire Season Brings

The severity of this year's fires has been attributed to the climate crisis by climate scientists and state authorities. Human-caused climate change controls the size, spread, and intensity of these fires. The region has extreme temperature swings between hot, dry weather during the fire season, and the heavy rain that helps plants grow and creates fuel for the next year's fires. The fire season has also been getting longer for the same reason. Typically peaking in late summer and early fall, now it sometimes starts as early as the spring and goes into the late fall. Due to climate change, California's wildfires have grown to eight times the size since the 1900s and the annual area burned has increased by 5 times.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, residents of the west coast have been thrust into a new normal. Where the outdoors were a refuge in the pandemic, smoke-filled air has made that nearly impossible across much of California. In these catastrophic wildfires, the risk of breathing particulates is severe. Wildfire smoke can lead to increased distress calls from people with heart and lung disease, and prolonged exposure is harmful to all. Additionally, smoke-filled air can aggravate COVID-19 symptoms and cause more coughing, making infected people more contagious than they would be otherwise. Now, before leaving the house, residents check the air quality index on AirNow, a website produced by the Environmental Protection Agency.

In order to curb these fires, experts stress that policymakers must recognize the inevitability of wildfires, and take actions to stop development in fire-prone areas, as well as make evacuation easier in communities in the case of a fire. Forestry experts also suggest the use of "prescribed burns" to clear excess vegetation in a controlled setting in order to prevent fires.

# We Need To Talk

History

By Deeksha  
Chitale



A child reads a book below a large window.

## Activism in “Mirrors and Windows”

Literature has proven, time and time again, to be one of the most powerful tools for social change, for it shapes the most potent forces of humans - hearts and minds. Inherently activist, great literary work has enabled society to view environmental, political, and ideological challenges and their prospective solutions from various perspectives. A “mirror” is a story that reflects one’s own culture and helps build one’s identity. A “window” presents a view into someone else’s experiences. The phrase “mirrors and windows” was initially introduced by Rudine Sims Bishop, a scholar of literature. Well articulated literature can serve as a window to the world, a mirror for affirming self-identity, or both.

Not surprisingly, children’s literature is both a tool of and for activist thought and of action. Last year, there were more books than ever written about black characters, according to researchers at the University of Wisconsin. Children’s books are more diverse now than ever before. From the extensive collection of works for children and young adults which embrace diversity, some great ones are - All are Welcome by Alexandra Penfold, The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi and The Sun is also a Star by Nicola Yoon.

In the past too, authors and poets sought to resist social inequalities through their works. A number of satirical works about the prevalent injustices in society were published during the 18th and 19th centuries. Charles Dickens and many of his contemporaries believed that if readers cried for fictional suffering, then they would try to meliorate the actual suffering they encountered around them. Uncle Tom’s Cabin is a great example of the impact that books can have on the attitudes of people towards a subject. Written by Harriet Beecher Stowe and published in 1852, it is said to have played a major role in abolitionism and “helped lay the groundwork for the Civil War”.

## Activism in “Mirrors and Windows”

Subsequently, the second wave of feminism prompted a divulgence of women's contributions in the literary field. Books such as *The Rise of the Women Novelist* by Jane Spencer insisted that women have always been writing. They argued that it was crucial to develop female identities in literature. Other works, such as Mary Scott's *The Female Advocate* and Virginia Woolfe's *A Room of One's Own* were attempts to recuperate the rights of women from centuries of male domination.

**“When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows, we will see that we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities, because together they are what makes us all human”~ Rudine Sims Bishop**

# We Need To Talk

Art

By Jyotsna  
Bisariya



Art is linked to increased productivity and creativity in the brain.

## Feeling Artsy? Here's How Making Art Helps Your Brain

A lot of my free time is spent doodling. I'm a school student and I understand the circumstances we all have to face during this time. Homework, assignments, and tests make us all feel stressed out and in these pandemic times we have shifted to a different mode of learning. Everything has been shifted to online mode. Sitting all day in front of a computer makes us feel very stressed out so all I have left is art. I try new types of art every time, which makes my mind work differently every time. When I create, I feel like it clears my head. It helps me make sense of my emotions. And it somehow, it makes me feel calmer and more relaxed.

That made me wonder: What is going on in my brain when I draw? Why does it feel so nice? And how can I get other people — even if they don't consider themselves artists on the creativity train? It turns out there's a lot happening in our minds and bodies when we make art or even doodle. "Creativity in and of itself is important for remaining healthy, remaining connected to yourself and connected to the world," says Christianne Strang, a professor of neuroscience at the University of Alabama Birmingham and the former president of the American Art Therapy Association.

This idea extends to any type of visual creative expression: drawing, painting, collaging, sculpting clay, writing poetry, cake decorating, knitting, scrapbooking and even dust doodling can be considered as an art form but the list doesn't end here because the sky's the limit. "Anything that engages your creative mind — the ability to make connections between unrelated things and imagine new ways to communicate — is good for you," says Girija Kaimal. She is a professor at Drexel University and a researcher in art therapy, leading art sessions with members of the military suffering from traumatic brain injury and caregivers of cancer patients. And no matter what your skill level, it's something you should try to do on a regular basis.

## Feeling Artsy? Here's How Making Art Helps Your Brain

Here's why:

### 1. It helps you imagine a more hopeful future

Art's ability to flex our imaginations may be one of the reasons why we've been making art since we were cave-dwellers, says Kaimal. It might serve an evolutionary purpose. She has a theory that art-making helps us navigate problems that might arise in the future. She wrote about this in October in the Journal of the American Art Therapy Association. Her theory builds off of an idea developed in the last few years — that our brain is a predictive machine. The brain uses "information to make predictions about what we might do next — and more importantly what we need to do next to survive and thrive," says Kaimal. When you make art, you're making a series of decisions — what kind of drawing utensil to use, what color, how to translate what you're seeing onto the paper. And ultimately, interpreting the images — figuring out what it means.

### 2. It Lowers Stress

Although the research in the field of art therapy is emerging, there's evidence that making art can lower stress and anxiety. In a 2016 paper in the Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, Kaimal and a group of researchers measured cortisol levels of 39 healthy adults. Cortisol is a hormone that helps the body respond to stress. They found that 45 minutes of creating art in a studio setting with an art therapist significantly lowered cortisol levels. The paper also showed that there were no differences in health outcomes between people who identify as experienced artists and people who don't. So that means that no matter your skill level, you'll be able to feel all the good things that come with making art.

There are many more advantages just art such as:

### 3. Increases Blood Flow to the Brain

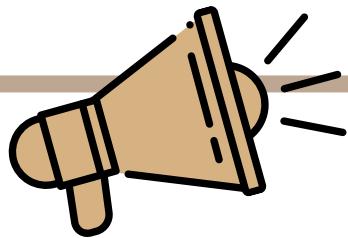


### 4. It lets you focus deeply and many more.....

In one recent study in the journal *Art Therapy*, researchers found that after just 45 minutes of art-making, levels of the hormone cortisol — which is associated with stress — were reduced in participants' saliva, regardless of their prior art skills.

Another small study found that spending 30 minutes creating art, especially free-form painting, was associated with reduced anxiety levels in first-year college students preparing for their final exams. Art classes also reduced stress and anxiety in people caring for ailing family members.

While the calming effect of art-making is not universal and larger studies are needed, for many stressed out people, it may be just the ticket. "After about five minutes, I felt less anxious," said one participant in the *Art Therapy* study. "Doing art allowed me to put things into perspective."



# Call to Action

1

## <https://blacklivesmatters.carrd.co/>

This link will take you to a website which has more donation and petition cards for Black Lives Matter UK, US and Australia and also other crisis such as Stand With Hong Kong Protestors, Yemen crisis and Free Palestine. It also has information for donations, protest locations and more.

2

## <https://environmental-action.org/action/sign-this-quick-climate-change-petition/>

This petition is meant to attract attention from the higher-ups such as government officials to intervene into the issue of climate change.

3

## <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/california-healthcare-workers-real-solutions-to-the-pandemic>

This link will take you to sign a petition for the healthcare workers in California for better working space safety and conditions in this time of pandemic, especially since they are risking their lives to keep many safe.

4

## <https://www.aclu.org/action/>

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) advocates for local, state, and national policy changes to ensure all individuals have access to civil rights and freedoms and equal protection under the law. From this web page, you can sign petitions and send messages to government representatives to support various issues.

