



The QM Observer

SEE YOURSELF

KEVIN NKENGFOA AND ALBERTA N'GUESSAN

This year saw the initiation of the 'See Yourself' Project, spearheaded by the English department. Catalysed by the series of protests that took place around the globe in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, a group of enthusiastic black students from year 12 and 13 regularly gather to discuss their experiences with the English curriculum at QMGS. Students expressed how the racial undertones expressed by books such as John Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Lord of the Flies' affected them. A new selection of books was offered to the students to read and comment on: 'Liclle Bit' by Alex Wheatle, 'Boy, everywhere' by A.M Dassu . Both books focus on modern issues in the UK such as gang violence and the Syrian Refugee Crisis and will be introduced to the KS3 Lesson Programme. See Yourself aims to encourage the open dialogue surrounding race and immigration with talks of future events involving guest speakers.

Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes, was an amazingly captivating book where the main character, a victim of police brutality and describes his experience of racism in America.



This book helped me to understand the importance of learning about the repercussions of racism in our modern-day society. I highly recommend this book as a tool to educate the pupils on race issues around the world. Many thanks to the teachers and students involved who made sure that each of our voices were heard and taken into consideration when attempting to diversify the curriculum. We were each able to express ourselves freely and help take the school a step further in terms of tackling racism and allowing students of colour feel represented in school events. The English Department is making headway in the re-invention of its curriculum so stay tuned to see the many exciting events to come!

THE EVERYONE'S INVITED LIST

In recent news, the Everyone's Invited List was published last month, which revealed 3,000 schools over England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland where there had been several reports of sexual assault and harassment. This stimulated further action within school. The Everyone's Invited campaign involved many different testimonies from brave survivors from primary schools, secondary schools, sixth forms and universities. It was atrocious to see how many schools were listed and especially heart-breaking to read the testimonies of the survivors. For those who are not familiar with the term, rape culture, it is when attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that are normalized in society, trivialize the topic of sexual violence. In order to help the students within our school who may have experienced this, I conducted an interview with the school's headmaster, who was very worried for the well-being of the students at this school. Prior to the release of the list, there were already multiple actions taken to improve the experience of the pupils such as discussion groups with sixth formers where SWAT analyses was done, PSHEE lessons led by Mr Farnell and Mrs McPhee who made sure to educate students about positive relationships and a higher investment into the staff in the Welfare Hub who are always around to help students who may be struggling. The school's approach is one that will constantly be improved and adapted with open dialogue being encouraged and more discussion groups that include both male and female students. The school is doing it's best and will continue to do its best to secure the safety and wellbeing of its students.

ALBERTA N'GUESSAN

A GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS, ON THE ROAD TO A COMMUNITY FOR ALL.

SAVINA KATARIA

A defining characteristic for Queen Mary's lies in its name, a grammar school for boys, from age eleven to sixteen. Entering year twelve, sees a major change with a mixed gender sixth form, populating and educating men, women, non-binary and any other individuals in between. With media outrage and public outcries for change on how women are treated in society, those from sixth form took part in sessions on school cultures as a whole. This translated into regular meetings and SWOT analysis, looking at strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats that QM had with social issues, particularly, supporting sixteen to eighteen female students. Through conversations with Ms Weston, Ms McPhee and Mr Langton, positive changes had been identified, such as the creation of a Girls' Rounders team. QM has always prided itself on sporting excellence, and the inclusion of female teams and games, can only add to that success.

Staff members and students alike were unaware of certain definitions, topics, issues, that arose from discussions in focus groups. This allowed the identification of a key barrier: education. QM's academic nature is certainly prevalent, and a renewed PSHE curriculum shows that students are learning more about socio-political issues. For future year sevens, and current students, education to stop ignorance is a move which our school is actively partaking in. In the next academic year, a podcast surrounding school cultures is to launch, helping facilitate a space for conversations on inclusivity, but most importantly, furthering education of students at QM. From race, to gender, to identity, we hope to pioneer intersectionality for all.



BACK TO NORMAL

The last two academic years of Queen Mary's Grammar School have been quite fragmented due to Coronavirus, but it does appear that we may be closer to 'normal' here than we think.

Although we are unfortunately having to stay in bubbles and keep our masks on, these things appear to have become a regularity now, so perhaps may be argued as insignificant, to an extent.

We wish the Year 13s and some 11s good luck, as they leave QMGS; but this does mean that specialised rooms can be used by all during lessons.

ZAYAN PANNUN

The labs have been a major advantage for the practical in the Sciences; the Music room has allowed our budding musicians to get even better; and the workshops have opened for the major part of Design & Technology. Do not worry, though, the surfaces are wiped down before being used again. A special thanks to the cleaning staff who we see every day, ensuring we are safe!

The field has also been available for break times and lunch times between the Year groups. Many sports also take place on the field, including the competitive Sports Week! Many other competitions have taken place, for all Years, which gives that opportunity-filled vibe at Queen Mary's, although not the inter-Year ones. Cricket has also been a major topic for this Summer Term!

The library also has its own system, which thankfully,

allows all our students to read for whatever purpose they have! Mrs Walker has been very busy to literally deliver the books to our students.

Even we at the QMO have been able to deliver this copy to YOU, via virtual meetings and a lot of hard work.

In conclusion, it appears that QMGS is back to a sense of 'normal'. Do you agree?



CHANGE YOUR MIND

As with the 2019-20 cohort of Change your mind, this year has been a difficult one for the team. However, despite such unprecedented challenges, Change Your mind continues to prosper with 48 Primary school bookings this year even with several months of the year missed due to Covid. Having participated in 5 presentations this year I can testify on the positive impacts that joining Change your mind has had on me and will have on you if you decide join this team.

Presenting to Primary school pupils of ages 10 to 11 is a central part of this program and equips you with greatly enhanced skills in communication, increased confidence in yourself and ability to present to others.



Myself, and all other members of Change your Mind would not have been able to develop these critical skills if it wasn't for participation in the program as well as the opportunities it offers such as leadership of fellow team members, educating others (and even yourself) about mental health and wellbeing as well as instilling a genuine sense of pride in yourself for knowing you make a difference to people's lives.

Anyone who is passionate about having a direct, substantial and most importantly a beneficial impact on young people would find Change your mind an immensely enjoyable and worthwhile experience. This program is open to all those entering Year 12 in September as a Block E option to accompany your A level studies and I would strongly encourage speaking to Mrs McPhee or Change your Mind members to learn about the benefits and opportunities of partaking in the Change your Mind program. You will make a real difference through participation in this fantastic program!

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SPORTS DAY

Monday 21st June saw the start of the Sports Week, an important part of the annual school calendar, where participants and supporters all showed a strong sense of school community. Throughout the week, students took part in events such as basketball, dodgeball, softball, football and diamond cricket. There was huge success from a variety of years in these sports, and the talent and enthusiasm were great to see.

On June the 23rd, in the outstanding weather, year 12 participated in their Sports Day during the afternoon. It was launched with the annual tug-of-war, with each House pitting their strength against each other, all giving their best efforts, but Darby prevailed.

Later, a variety of competitions were held including track and field events.

There were some excellent performances from all involved. Such as the boys 4x100m, a much anticipated track event which ended extremely close with Darby managing to secure the win against Petypher who marginally came second by under 0.5 seconds.

Congratulations to Rhiana Burrell of year 12, who gave great performances in the shot and 100m, breaking two school records (12.9 seconds for the 100m race and 11.3m for the shotput event), which led to the girls' victory in the senior's competition and also for trying out for the Olympic High Jump Team GB. Many others achieved victories in their events, such as Joe Webster and Will Roberts who came first in discus for Petypher house and Matthias Henry who won the Javelin competition for Darby.

The sportsmanship displayed during the week is a factor all



AMY FOX & THOMAS HAYDEN

MS. MCPHEE

students should be proud of, with loud cheers for fellow students, and some even running alongside participants in parts of races to support them. This was a great epitome of what QM school spirit is and all participants and supporters should be immensely proud of their achievements throughout.

RESULTS:

- Y7 Darby
- Y8 Gryphon
- Y9 Gryphon
- Y10 Gryphon
- SENIOR; Y12 boys- Gryphon
- Y12 girls- Petypher



LET'S GET READING

Over lockdown we, and many others, started reading more. Reading is an enjoyable activity that has proven benefits such as reduced stress and depression levels – exceptionally relevant given the unprecedented times we are currently facing – as well as improved cognitive function, among many more. One book we read recently was *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas.

The Count of Monte Cristo follows Edmond Dantès, a man falsely accused of treason and sentenced, without trial, to life imprisonment on the island fortress of Château d'If. It is here that he learns of a great fortune buried on the nearby island of Monte Cristo. After escaping from prison, he vows to exact revenge on those who previously wronged him and thus embarks on a perilous quest of ruthlessness, disguise and deceit.

At over 1,200 pages, this novel is a journey, to say the least, but every word does justice to the beauty of its 19th century Parisian setting.

On the 23rd of April, year 12 history students had the privilege of participating in a talk with Mr Drewett about his experiences as a soldier serving in Northern Ireland as a part of our A Level studies on the making of Modern Britain. Mr Drewett participated in nine tours between 1972 and 1994 as a part of the sectarian conflict known as 'The Troubles' in which British troops attempted to keep the peace amongst intense civil rights disputes between Unionist and Nationalist groups.

Students learned about the reality on the ground of the experiences of the people in Northern Ireland and gained a greater appreciation of the human cost of this period in history. Insights about the background of the infamous Bloody Sunday events and first-hand stories about the life of the soldiers and civilians living through the conflict amongst the constant threat of outbreaks of violence were fascinating to us, both as students of history and people concerned with humanity.

Above all, Mr Drewett's words provided a fantastic level of insight into the events of the Troubles well beyond what could be found in any history book due to their profoundly personal nature. Thank you very much to Mr Drewett for offering his valuable first-hand perspective of a deeply emotional time.

AIDAN BURNS

Dantès' revenge is meticulously thought out as he learns of his enemies' secrets and seeks to expose them in what can only be described as pure eccentricity. We could not recommend this novel more; its rich setting and complex characters make for a truly unforgettable experience.

Current read: *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Feel free to join us!

STEVIE BECKETT & ISMAIL RAZZAK



KNIFE CRIME

On the 28th of April, Andrea, who works for an organisation known as Fearless, gave a powerful talk on knife crime awareness to 10G. Fearless deliver workshops to young people and professionals, working with young people in schools and other youth settings across the United Kingdom. Their workshops explained the option to report crime anonymously and cover topics such as knife crime. The session was fast paced,

emotive and engaging, as she used role play discussion-based tasks to increase the impact and keep us engaged.

She also confronted and challenged the anti-snitching culture, which has increasingly become a barrier for young people. Fearless encouraged us to have the confidence to report crime, despite factors like peer pressure. As a student who took part in the workshop, I can honestly say it has had a huge impact on me and made me think about things I had never considered previously. We would like to say a massive thanks to Andrea and Fearless for giving this workshop.



PARDEEP SANDHU



SCHOOL COUNCIL

Although the coronavirus pandemic has impacted all aspects of school life, one organisation determined to continue its work for the betterment of the school was the School Council. Under the new leadership of Mrs. McPhee, this year has seen a shift in the organisation of the School Council, allowing for a more student-driven environment for the needs of pupils. This has manifested itself through the School Council's work in creating a new Charter setting out the aims and expectations of not just members but pupils across the school. The newly created School Council charter will be signed by all elected members and will serve as a clear demonstration of the commitment of students and the Council to the fair representation of students' needs, whilst also telling other students what their role to help the School Council is.

THOMAS SHARMA

MENTAL HEALTH

VARUN DEWITT

Mental health is something that can impact anyone and can often be unrecognisable. In light of this, it is notable that great efforts have been made to raise awareness and support students who have been under immense stress. From worthwhile workshops to captivating lessons, a variety of aid has and is being offered by the school. A new development in PSHEE this year is that Y12 have had lessons on drugs, alcohol, student finance and psychotherapy. Lessons will also be introduced into Y13 next year.

Mrs McPhee has ensured that mental health and wellbeing has been sustained throughout this testing academic year, by notifying year groups about the Kooth mental health service, an online service that students can access 24/7. Kooth not only provides peer to peer support but also; self-help tools, discussion sessions and journal writing. Students can express themselves and manage emotions, with the advantage of being anonymous and receiving reliable solace.

Mental Health Awareness Week was open to everyone in the school community. Students were encouraged to start conversations about mental health and the things in our daily lives that can affect it in lessons.

LGBTQ+ AWARENESS



During this academic year, Queen Mary's Grammar School has made efforts to emphasise the importance of inclusivity; this holds true with respect to members of the LGBTQ+ community. Despite the burden incurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school has continued to provide relevance to this topic by way of education. There have been PSHEE lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity, for example, which have been given to students of Years 7 and 8, in June. These lessons pertain to the inclusive nature of the school by teaching the way in which one should treat others, irrespective of their sexuality, and to take heed as to the significance of raising discussion of such matters, both within and outside of the wider community.

In addition to lessons, QMGS has offered further insight into the experiences of LGBTQ+ people by providing students with resources that concern this very topic. One such example is the recommendation of related books, in the school library, by Mrs Walker. Whilst such literary works may not be directly received by students, they help to encourage greater engagement with the subjects of which they are comprised and to further them outside of the classroom.

Unfortunately, owing to the aforesaid circumstances, the Rainbow Society has been temporarily discontinued. As a club dedicated to enhancing the position of the LGBTQ+ community within the school (through the discussion of important issues), the society is intended to be re-established as soon as conditions become satisfactory, preferably during the coming year.

MUHAMMAD ADNAN

The School Council has also continued its endeavours to deliver on its initiatives and causes across the year and is proud to report the success of many. For one, in honour of international women's day, a presentation on plastic-free period projects was led by Y12 representatives; more recently, representatives (and other students) from across years 7 to 10 led a sale of snacks and drinks in aid of Save the Children.

The School Council's structure would not be able to accomplish many of its aims without the support of members of staff that give up their time to allow the expression of student voice within Queen Mary's. On this note, the School Council would like to thank Mr. Langton for his attendance of nearly every meeting and careful consideration of students concerns; it would also like to thank Mrs. McPhee for her guidance and leadership across the year. As the next academic year looms, pupils should be sure to expect hopefully more frequent news of more projects as the easing of lockdown restrictions allows for more freedom and scope to hold events.

Online Mental Health talks for students took place, in February, whereby Mr Abbas offered an articulate account of his personal journey with Mental Health. A wide range of support was shared, including speaking to family, friends, and teachers at school, not to mention online support such as Bernardo's, NSPCC, and Young Minds,

Another great talk was delivered by secondary school teacher T'Challa Greaves where he opened about his own experiences of racism and mental health issues. It was truly a remarkable and engaging online event which outlined the importance of mental health, and the recognition and approach to racism. Key mentions were that mental health is not just being "unstable" but also about our "psychological and emotional wellbeing", which we all need to look after.



FAREWELL YEAR 13

At this time of year, QM says goodbye to our Year 13s, our most recent A-level examination groups. I think it is safe to say that for these students these past two academic years were not the experience they thought they would have, facing many crucial school months at home doing virtual learning. However, as a school, we could not be prouder of them as a cohort for still managing to strive for the best, maintain their positivity and achieve their goals, all of which will set them up well for their next steps beyond QM. We would like to say an extra thank you to our Head Boy, Matthew Daniels and our Head Girl, Darcy Crocker as well as the other members of PSLT who have helped support Year 13 through these very strange and unexpected circumstances. As our 2021 cohort, we wish you nothing but the best! Keep progressing and live life to the full, wherever your next steps may lead you!

KATY MAE STANISTREET



DESIGN

EDITORS:

ORAN LALLY
SASHA SHADROUH
VEENA PATEL

EDITORS:

ALBERTA N'GUESSAN
SAVINA KATARIA

Queen Mary's Grammar School

Academic In purpose - Generous In approach - Enterprising In spirit - International In outlook

Sutton Road, Walsall, West Midlands, WS1 2PG
01922 720696

enquiries@qmgs.walsall.sch.uk
www.qmgs.walsall.sch.uk

@qmgs1554