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WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ALTADENA?

**Shanti Hubbard-Bennett •
age 14**

On Jan. 7 at 6:18 p.m., the Eaton Fire in Altadena, Calif., ignited. Debra Quartman, my great-aunt who is an Altadena resident, said it was very windy that day. She and my great-uncle kept getting notifications that their power was going to go out at some point in an effort to avoid power-related fires. Debra's neighbor called and said there was a fire in her neighborhood, so she went out into her backyard and saw the fire was east of her.

Later that night, the power went out across the street. Debra still had power, so her neighbor came over to charge her phone. At 9 p.m., my great-aunt and great-uncle lost power, too. They had already put some essentials in their car, so by the time the power went out, they decided to evacuate to a family member's house. The next day, a neighbor called and said that their house was gone, and so was Debra's. It was a really sad day.

Fueled by the strongest wind storm Los Angeles has seen since 1950, the Eaton Fire destroyed and damaged over 10,000 structures and killed at least 18 people. The fire, which lasted 24 days, was one of the 10 different fires happening all across L.A. in January, sparked by climate change.

The toll of the Eaton Fire on Altadena, a historically Black neighborhood since the 1960s, has been massive. Most of the houses lost have been in the same family for many generations and would probably stay in the same family for many more generations to come, but the fire has destroyed that prospect. People who were affected by the fire lost everything, as did the community. Two charter schools were lost, and along with both of those schools, the principals lost their homes, as well. People also lost their businesses, like restaurants and stores.

"Right now my neighborhood looks like a war zone, like someone just dropped a bomb in my neighborhood and it blew everything up, house after house gone," said my great-aunt a few weeks after the fire. "There are probably four houses up my street that are still intact, but the rest are completely gone."

In the 1960s, Altadena was one of the only places that was racially acceptable for African Americans, as they faced discrimination elsewhere, according to the *Guardian*. "We tried



Photo by Shanti Hubbard-Bennett

to get property in Pasadena, but, of course, they redlined everyone to Altadena, so that's how we landed there," Trevor Howard Kelley, an Altadena resident whose family has lived there for 57 years, told the *L.A. Times*. "They could come here and get their businesses without having to go through a lot of red tape that they were experiencing in other states."

Now that all has been lost, will Altadena be able to come back as a Black neighborhood, or will everything be different?

My great-aunt and great-uncle Debra and Chandler Quartman lost their home and everything in it. Their house was the home base to their nieces and great-nieces. It was the home they shared, and it afforded their great-nieces a chance to go to school in an incredible school district. One of my dad's favorite memories in that house was my cousin's graduation. My great-aunt and great-uncle rented a taco truck and had it in their backyard for the party. Everyone had so much fun.

My great-aunt's house was so

beautiful and magical, especially when I was a little kid. The inside of the house was very pretty, but the backyard was my dad's favorite part. It was kind of like an open backyard, and it led into the forest behind their house. But the house itself wasn't the only magical part, it was also the memories and the people there. All of grandpa's parents' memories were in that house after they died. Now all of that is gone.

The Eaton Fire has affected many families beyond my own. These families are left asking: What is going to happen to Altadena? Is Altadena going to come back as strong? Is Altadena going to continue to be a Black neighborhood? Are the people who lived there going to rebuild their houses, or are they going to move somewhere else? These are questions that everyone is asking themselves, and the answer is no one knows. Residents of Altadena are worried that it won't go back to being the Black neighborhood it once was.

Right now it's too soon to know where people are going to move. What

I've heard is that people are staying at family members' houses. I have also heard that people are going to move to places like Orange County.

Being a child at this time is heartbreaking. We went back to school a few days after the fires, and everyone was trying to make things normal again, but it was anything but normal. Three students at my school lost their houses, and two teachers lost their houses, so it couldn't go back to normal. No one knows what they can say and how they should act.

Altadena has a long way to go and a long way to rebuild, but I believe and I hope that Altadena can go back to what it truly was. Altadena was a very meaningful place to so many people for so long, and this fire has ruined the community for now. Everyone hopes it can go back to what it was: a community and a safe place for a lot of Black families. And we all continue to ask ourselves these questions, wondering what will happen next.

NewsBrief



Fake News and Meta: What Happens Next?

Brooklyn, Scarlett, Nathalie, Aida and IndyKids Staff



Image by Dima Solomin on Unsplash

On Jan. 7, 2025, Mark Zuckerberg, the owner of Meta, announced the end of its fact-checking program. This new policy affects Facebook and Instagram. Meta has lifted restrictions on certain topics to allow for “more speech.” Meta claims that the priority is for users to have more freedom of speech and for Meta to make fewer mistakes in policing content.

Meta’s fact-checking program started after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when Russia spread disinformation on social media with the intention of misleading the public.

Mark Zuckerberg’s relationship with President Donald Trump has evolved over the years. After the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, Trump was banned from Meta for two years. According to a report by NPR, “Trump has accused Zuckerberg personally of election interference and threatened him with life in prison.” Zuckerberg attended Trump’s inauguration on Jan. 20.

The tradeoff is there might be more harmful content on Meta’s platforms, but users will have fewer restrictions on speech. Meta’s hateful conduct policy is being loosened, allowing for more “insulting language” and “calls for exclusion” to be used to discuss immigration policy, gendered spaces and professions, and LGBTQ rights.

nation & world

What Caused the L.A. Wildfires?

NATHALIE MEDINA • age 10

On Jan. 7, 2025, a fire broke out in the Pacific Palisades and Eaton communities in Los Angeles, Calif. The fires spread more than 20,000 and 14,000 acres, respectively, destroying or damaging thousands of structures. Thirty deaths were reported in the fires. According to NBC News, around 200,000 people fled their homes.

Weather changes and climate instability played significant roles in the destructive nature of the fires. Fossil fuels contribute to extreme weather events because of the release of carbon dioxide, which creates pollution and affects our climate. Recently, the weather in California went from dry to wet really quickly, also called weather whiplash. There isn’t a specific “fire season” in California anymore, because rain has been delayed. According to CNN, “It has been the driest start to winter on record in Southern California,” leaving “California and its Mediterranean climate vulnerable to extreme fire behavior.”

More than 1,000 individuals fought the Southern California wildfires who aren’t regular firefighters—they are incarcerated. “California is one of more than a dozen states that operates

conservation camps, commonly known as fire camps,” where prisoners learn firefighting skills, as reported by NPR. The Department of Corrections in California says these firefighters are there voluntarily and are paid between \$5.80 and \$10.24 daily. California’s minimum wage is \$16.50 per hour. Firefighters for the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection make between \$50,000 and \$60,000 annually, significantly more than their incarcerated counterparts. In the 2024 election, California and Nevada voters were faced with ballot measures on whether or not prisoners could be used for unpaid labor. Nevada voters chose to end this practice, while California voters did not.

Many people are working to rebuild their lives and communities after the devastation from the fires. Incarcerated firefighters’ role in stopping the fires has reignited conversations around fair labor in prisons. Similarly, the amount of destruction caused by the fires has made Californians more aware of the dangers of ignoring the climate issues of today, especially as meteorologists are predicting an increased wildfire risk in California in June and July due to abnormally hot and dry conditions.



Photo by Shanti Hubbard-Bennett

Australia Bans Social Media for Ages 16 and Under Online

AIDA CEPEDA • age 10

Australia is banning social media platforms for kids under the age of 16. For kids’ safety, they are banning some of your favorite apps, like X, TikTok, Reddit, Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook. Some apps that are not being banned are YouTube, Messenger Kids, WhatsApp, Kids Helpline, and Google Classroom, because they provide a safe environment for kids. If the banned apps do not find a way to get kids under 16 off of their app, they will get fined up to 50 million Australian dollars. The ban will take effect on Dec. 10, 2025.

The law requires the apps to figure out how they’re going to keep kids under 16 off their platforms. These apps are not allowed to use anything related to the government, like IDs and driver’s licenses. Instead, they might use biometrics or behavior signals. Julie Inman Grant, Australia’s eSafety commissioner, says she found a company in Washington, D.C., that analyzes hand movements to verify somebody’s age.

An eSafety Commission study determined 84% of 8- to 12-year-olds were already on social media. Grant told NPR, “Interestingly, we asked, ‘Were your parents or any adults aware that you were setting up these social media accounts early?’ And 80% of them said yes. And in 90% of cases, it was parents that helped them set up their accounts.”

The ban has sparked a lot of controversy in Australia. Sen. David Shoebridge says, “This policy will hurt vulnerable young people the most, especially in regional communities and especially the LGBTQI community, by cutting them off.” Tech companies warn the ban might drive kids to dark corners of the web.

But there are several parents who are worried knowing that their kids have almost full control over apps such as TikTok and Snapchat. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese says the law supports parents concerned by online harms to their children. “Platforms now have a social responsibility to ensure the safety of our kids is a priority for them,” Albanese told reporters.

The U.S. had a chance to put some more safety measures online with the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA), which passed the Senate last summer. According to CPR News, KOSA would have forced social media companies to protect kids’ data, put their accounts on strong privacy settings, and take “reasonable steps” to prevent them from being harmed on their platforms.

Mike Johnson, the speaker of the House of Representatives, blocked the Kids Online Safety Act from being put to a vote last December.

Only time will tell whether Australia’s ban will work, and what effect it will have on other countries’ social media policies when it comes to minors.



Photo by dole777 on Unsplash

Women in Saudi Arabia in Prison for Talking About Human Rights Online

SCARLETT MORA • age 10

Manahel al-Otaibi is a 29-year-old women’s rights activist who got arrested and sentenced to 11 years in prison in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian government claims she committed cybercrimes and broke the kingdom’s counterterrorism law. However, human rights organizations say she was simply expressing criticism of the law that prevents women from making their own decisions.

Al-Otaibi was held in solitary confinement and was abused so much that she broke a leg. Amnesty International and ALQST, a human rights organization that documents and promotes human rights in Saudi Arabia, are calling for her to be released from confinement. She is not alone. Other women have been given harsh prison sentences for tweeting or sharing their opinions online, including Nourah al-Qahtani, who received a 45-year sentence in August 2022 because she tweeted calling for the release of political prisoners and expressed criticism of her country’s human rights abuses.

Bissan Fakih, Amnesty International’s campaigner on Saudi Arabia, commented on al-Otaibi’s sentence, saying, “the Saudi authorities have exposed the hollowness of their much-touted women’s rights reforms in recent years and demonstrated their chilling commitment to silencing peaceful dissent.”

Women in Saudi Arabia won the right to drive in June 2018. Saudi Arabian women have also been able to work as university administrators, astronauts,

and bank directors. However, the male guardianship system still allows male relatives to make decisions about women’s lives.

Saudi Arabia’s personal status rules were made into law on International Women’s Day in 2022. The personal status law restricts the freedom of women by requiring permission by a male to make decisions.

These include if a woman wants to marry, needs a court’s permission for guardianship over a child, and if the father claims that the mother is “incompetent” and should have her guardianship terminated. Also, the personal status law deters women from marrying, divorce, or remarriage.

“We have more and more women in prisons, either for not wearing abaya or for dancing in public or for tweeting their opinions, whatever the subject, even on unemployment,” said Lina al-Hathloul, head of monitoring and communication for the rights group ALQST.

Groups like ALQST and the Middle East Democracy Center have been committed to documenting human rights abuses and calling for the release of political prisoners in Saudi Arabia. In early 2025, Saudi

Arabia released dozens of political prisoners early, including Salma al-Shehab, who was sentenced to 27 years, and Fatima al-Shawarbi, sentenced to 30 years.

Many people still remain in prison in Saudi Arabia for expressing their beliefs or are subject to a travel ban.



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OUR NATURAL WORLD

Life on Earth is interconnected. Plants and animals depend on each other, as well as on the soil and bodies of water near them, whether creeks, rivers, streams, or oceans. All of the living things and their natural environments are part of an **ecosystem**. According to Lucy Andrews, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management at the University of California, Berkeley, an ecosystem is “all of the plants and animals that live in a place and depend on each other for survival.”

Humans have made many changes to the natural environment that have harmed it. These changes include **mining** for special resources; burning **fossil fuels**, which warms the planet; chopping down trees and other natural habitats to make space for people and **industries**; and polluting the soil and water because of **factories**, garbage, and other industrial projects. These changes have caused a loss of plant and animal life around the planet. Animal populations have declined, and many species are in danger of extinction.

The warming of the planet due to human activity is causing climate change and more extreme natural disasters. However, there are efforts being made to stop the warming of the planet and restore ecosystems that have been lost.



AI AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The technology we use has an impact on the environment, and that impact is increasing with artificial intelligence (AI).

In Google’s 2024 environmental report, the company reported that their data centers consumed 6.1 billion gallons of water, which is a 17% increase from the previous year. Google attributes this increase to “the expansion of AI products and services.” Over 30% of the freshwater Google withdrew in 2023 came from watersheds with medium or high levels of water scarcity.

AI requires a lot of water because data centers need it to keep cool, and sometimes water is also used to help generate the vast amounts of electrical power needed to fuel the information networks.

In the fall of 2024, researchers from the University of California, Riverside teamed up with the *Washington Post* to help people understand how much water ChatGPT needs to write a 100-word email. They found that it took a little more than one 16.9-ounce bottle of water for ChatGPT (using GPT-4) to write a 100-word email.

This adds up. If 16 million people used ChatGPT once a week to write a 100-word email for a year, this would use up 435,235,476 liters of water.



Why We Need to Preserve Freshwater NOW

SHANTY TEJEDA • age 10

Freshwater is all around us. We drink freshwater and use it every day. But what if it is under threat? Freshwater habitats and species are endangered and at risk of extinction, as discovered by scientists in a study published by *Nature* in January 2025. The study states that 24% of freshwater species are in danger of extinction. Scientists have studied other waters, but when they finally analyzed the global risk of extinction to freshwater species, they discovered that the ecosystem and animals are currently critically endangered.

You might be wondering: What is freshwater? Freshwater is an ecosystem and a type of water found in lakes, wetlands, and swamps, according to *Nat Geo Kids*. According to *National Geographic*, “freshwater is 2.5% of the world’s water.” Even though freshwater comprises just 2.5% of the world’s water, it is home to about 100,000 different species of plants and animals. Wow, that’s a pretty big number! Freshwater plays a huge role in nature, as plants in freshwater habitats, such as algae, water lilies, and willow trees, filter pollution and distribute nutrients to the ecosystem.

Deforestation, wildfires, and dams are slowly killing freshwater habitats. Trees are unable to distribute vital nutrients to the water as deforestation and wildfires destroy the plant life, adding ash to the water. Similarly, damming impacts water flow and reduces the size of the habitat, which is unhealthy for the animals like dragonflies, crabs, and beavers that reside in the freshwater ecosystem.

Illegal gold miners are also affecting our waters. Unlicensed gold miners use mercury to separate gold from the soil. Although cheap, mercury is very harmful to the species that reside in freshwater. Sand mining, like illegal gold mining, is

also damaging and can be harmful to the water as it changes the flow of the water and can be toxic, affecting the habitat. It also makes it hard for the animals to remain in one place.

There is an even greater issue affecting freshwater today: the population. Humans are overusing freshwater as it is used to make cotton—something we use a lot for our clothing—as well as computer cooling systems and our drinking water.

There are a lot of problems surrounding freshwater. As stated in *National Geographic*, “Due to geography, climate, engineering, regulation, and competition for resources, some regions seem relatively flush with freshwater, while others face drought and debilitating pollution. In much of the developing world, clean water is either hard to come by or a commodity that requires laborious work or significant currency to obtain.” This means that not all countries have access to the same quality of resources, such as water, food, and air, and developing countries will be impacted the most, as they already don’t have access to purified water. The freshwater problem is not just a normal problem, but a crisis that will put additional freshwater species at risk of extinction and will impact our day-to-day lives.

Scientists are currently working on ways to conserve and protect freshwater habitats and species. Whether you’re a human or a crab that lives in the habitat, freshwater is a vital resource for everyone. If you would like to help, recycling and reusing, using water-efficient appliances, and taking shorter showers are everyday actions you can take to save the freshwater environment, and the environment in general.

Kingdoms of Life

BIOLOGY



Biome Definition and Examples

A biome is a geographic region characterized by its climate, vegetation, and animal life.



Dos Rios: The Park That’s Supposed to Flood

ZOE SOPHIA CARRILLO • age 12

Dos Rios is a new state park in Central Valley, Calif., the first of its kind in more than a decade. All the park’s plants and trees are native. Dos Rios—or Two Rivers in English—is named after the Tuolumne and San Joaquin rivers that meet up near the end of the park. However, this park is not like others. Dos Rios is a park that’s supposed to flood, because it is a natural floodplain.

A floodplain is flood-prone land that is usually around bodies of water such as streams, lakes, and rivers. It helps to contain water from floods or rainstorms. Before Dos Rios was created, the floodplain’s natural habitat was destroyed to make room for farmland. During the spring, the snow from the Sierra mountains melts. The water gets into the two rivers, which causes them to overflow. Floods were frequent in the area, destroying crops and even homes. River Partners, a nonprofit organization, played an essential role in restoring the floodplain into what Dos Rios Park is today. In 2008, they bought the land from a farming family. “This place is reducing flood risk for downstream communities by absorbing floodwaters as they pour out of the Sierra Nevadas,” conservationist Julie Rentner told NPR.

In addition to protecting nearby communities, floodplains can reduce the spread of waterborne diseases by filtering water. This process happens by slowing down floodwater through wetland vegetation within their root systems. Filtering water can help keep people from getting sick by trapping harmful pollutants and settling them out of the water. Not only that, but floodplains can minimize the intensity of the

aftermath of a flood or rainstorm. They also combat climate change by pulling and capturing carbon out of the atmosphere. During this process, plants nearby can also capture carbon, leading to growth and healthier plants. Floodplains also help to replenish groundwater. Water from the floods is stored in the soil, which is essential for things like drinking water and putting out fires.

Floodplains are biodiverse, which benefits different species of plants and animals to thrive. Dos Rios also provides a way to protect the animals. Some protected species living in the park include mammals such as riparian brush rabbits, birds like Swainson’s hawks, and many different species of fish, like Chinook salmon.

Having a new unique park can encourage people to go outside and enjoy nature by trying activities such as kayaking and hiking. The new park benefits not only tourists but Native communities, as well. The River Partners team played a role in allowing Indigenous peoples to gather plants in the park to benefit their communities. The vegetation in the park is used by Indigenous tribes for medicinal and cultural practices, as well.

With the success of the park and great benefits to all living beings, there are plans to create similar parks in the future. “We’ve done the planning, we’ve done the mapping,” Rentner told NPR. “We’re thinking about doing 10 more Dos Rioses just in the next decade. Maybe more.”



An example of a floodplain. Photo by Els B on Unsplash

culture & activism

Homework: A Tool for Success or a Source of Stress?

BROOKLYNN THEN • age 10

I imagine you are a student, excited to leave school, and you hear your teacher exclaim, “Do pages 41 through 44 for homework!” You groan, realizing you have to walk back to get your math book. This time, hopefully, you won’t spend hours at the table doing it. Homework that is just busy work and uses little to none of the materials taught during the day is the worst.

For students who may not understand the homework when at home, pressure to do it correctly may lead to feelings of frustration. Not all caregivers can provide the support that the student needs. This creates stress. Amy Vaughan-Roland, writing for the American College of Education, suggests that teachers “maybe set aside some time in the morning for ‘Homework Club’ and invite students to work on the packet as their morning warm up activity.”

There are times when homework isn’t a battle. When students come back from school, homework can be a way for caregivers to see what the student is working on in class. Furthermore, doing something repeatedly can help with **automaticity**. For example, practicing words in a foreign language can help to learn it better.

Harris Cooper, a professor emeritus of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University and author of *The Battle Over Homework*, has examined more than 60 research studies on homework between 1987 and 2003. He found that when designed properly, homework can lead to greater student success. Too much homework, however, can cause stress and frustration.

The 10-minute rule, recommended by the National Parent Teacher Association and the National Education Association, suggests that students work on homework for 10 minutes for each grade they are in (fourth grade, for instance, would be 40 minutes). And generally, homework has been found to have a greater positive effect on students in grades 7 through 12, because they have

a longer attention span and are more independent than those in primary school.

In conclusion, homework that is useful, and not simply time consuming, is ideal.

Automaticity: the ability to perform an action or task without having to think about it



Photo by Jessica Lewis on Unsplash

Someday You Could Be...an award-winning journalist like **Amy Zimmer**!

IndyKids reporters interviewed **Amy Zimmer**, the bureau chief for **Chalkbeat New York**, back in the fall of 2024 about her career in education reporting.

Aida: What inspired you to become a journalist?

Amy: I went to high school in Queens—a really big high school—and we had a newspaper and a journalism program. When I was a junior, I took a journalism class and worked on my high school newspaper, and then, when I was a senior, I became the co-editor-in-chief of my high school newspaper, and I really loved it back then. Back then, we literally had to print out the articles and cut them and paste them onto big sheets of paper, and then take those big sheets of paper to a printing press in Manhattan, and they would print out our newspapers.

I was pretty shy when I was in high school, and I loved how journalism gave me an excuse to talk to people. I was really curious, and I always wanted to learn about other people and places and things, and I felt like this gave me sort of my key to do that. I could talk to anyone. I could go anywhere, because I was writing a story about it. I could ask anything. And it was really empowering.

I went to college, and I didn’t do any journalism, because I thought, “Oh, that was something I did in high school,” and I wanted to learn new things, but it always was sort of inside me that I had enjoyed that experience in my life. And so, then, after college, I did a whole variety of jobs. I worked in museums. I taught math. But I always thought about what made me happy, and it was actually working on a newspaper. So, eventually, I went to graduate school for journalism, and I’ve been doing local reporting for the past 20 years.

Em: What got you into education reporting, specifically, as your beat?

Amy: There were many reasons. Number one, I grew up in New York, graduated from New York City public schools, [and] going through the system myself, I was always curious about it. And then the other part of it, I grew up in a household of educators. My mom was a teacher initially, and then, later, was a guidance counselor in New York City. My brother taught, and so I always cared about it. I was [also] lucky in that when I started working full time as a journalist, I covered everything. I covered crime, I covered fires, I covered city politics, and I kept coming back to education. I felt like the stories about schools and young people were the most important to me. And I also thought it’s a place where you can have a lot of impact.

At Chalkbeat, we do a lot of things. Number one, we cover daily news, the announcements from the chancellor or the mayor that affect the school system. Number two, we’re very equity-focused, and part of that means giving people information they need to navigate the system. So we cover things like how to apply to kindergarten or middle school or high school, because knowledge is power. And then, number three, we do a lot of accountability work and investigative work. And so that means if the mayor or the chancellor says we’re going to change how math is taught in middle and high schools, then we write about that, but it’s our job to follow up and find out: Well, how is that going? Are teachers prepared to make the change? How do they feel that the curriculum is? How are kids faring? How are they performing? Do they feel like they’re learning more? So it’s on us to then go back and investigate, are these policies working, and things like that.



Amy Zimmer, bureau chief for Chalkbeat New York



Meet **IndyKids** Reporter:
10-Year-Old

Brooklynn Then!

INDYKIDS STAFF

Meet **Brooklynn Then**, a 10-year-old **IndyKids** reporter from Manhattan, N.Y. Brooklynn’s main hobbies are making a type of bracelet called kandi. She would also like to find out if she could visit every website on Earth, and she would love to go to the United Palace again near her home.

As a young journalist, what topics are you most passionate about, and why?

Brooklynn: I personally love to write about school and social media topics. It’s because a lot of people my age have mixed opinions about school, especially homework. I like to write about social media because social media can be where you can find funny things, like memes or the spinning roach video.

Can you share something you’ve learned from your experience at **IndyKids**?

Brooklynn: In *IndyKids*, I learned that there are different segments of an article like a lede. I also learned how to reference sources correctly and to put things in my own words and how to work with editors.

How do you think being a kid reporter contributes to raising awareness and promoting positive change in your community or the world?

Brooklynn: Being a kid reporter shows awareness and promotes change because in reality, adults don’t sometimes do all the work. Kids can speak to kids in a way that might be more powerful and have genuine understanding better than adults in some cases.



PERSONAL ESSAY

The Story of My Muslim Immigrant Parents: **Life Before vs. After 9/11**

SAHRA SASA • age 12

I’m a first-generation Muslim American with immigrant parents: My dad was born in Damascus, Syria, and my mom was born in Milan, Italy. Growing up with immigrant parents is hard enough, since you practice a different religion and have different values than everyone around you.

My dad immigrated when he was 9 years old. He hasn’t been able to visit Syria and see his family that still lives there, because of the war, and we were scared that if we went, he would be forced into the Syrian military. My mom and her family lived in Italy and in the United States but settled down fully in the States when she was 13.

When I interviewed my mom, she said, “The American teen culture is very different from the Italian teen culture.” She said that there were more bullies here. Something else my mom mentioned was that in Italy people of all ages would hang out together, but in America sometimes it’s seen as “embarrassing” to hang out with someone younger than you, like a younger sibling.

When my mom was in college, she converted to Islam and decided to wear a headscarf, and not long after that, 9/11 happened. My mom was interviewed for the *Providence Journal* and was featured on the front page. She said, “Not one day went by that I wasn’t verbally attacked by at least one person.” After 9/11, the Muslim community in her area decided to have a campaign educating people about Islam. “I spoke at universities all across New England and schools elementary and middle, and just like different events would invite me to be on panels,” she said.

I asked my mom if she saw any similarities from back then to today. She said she noticed statistically that hate crimes have been increasing

these past few years. USAFacts reported hate crimes have risen by 108% in the last nine years, from a low of 5,597 to a high of 11,643. Ignorance and stereotypes lead to misinformation.

You should never judge someone based on their background, as my mom said. “People just prefer to just hate someone rather than know their story.”



Photo by Kyle Glenn on Unsplash



A Snapshot of My Life, by IndyKids reporters

My Favorite Thing About Nature

My favorite thing about nature is the ocean. I am afraid of what might be under, but the water is so beautiful, and you can see it almost every season. It provides some refreshment, and you can swim in it. That's why I love the ocean.
Brooklynn, age 10,
from Manhattan, N.Y.

My favorite thing about nature is the trees and flowers that grow during the spring and all throughout the summer. It's nice when I'm able to go outside during warm weather and read under the shade of the trees.
Zoe, age 12,
from Queens, N.Y.

My favorite thing about nature is to watch the sunset and flowers, and they look beautiful and calming.
Nathalie, age 10,
from Manhattan, N.Y.

My favorite thing about nature is the flowers, because the flowers smell good and they look really pretty.
Scarlett, age 10,
from Manhattan, N.Y.

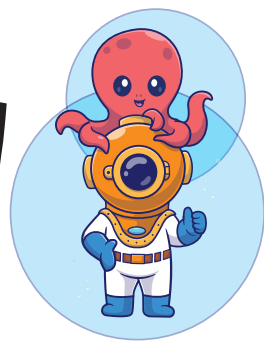
My favorite thing about nature is when the sun sets. It's so beautiful and calming to watch.
Sahra, age 12,
from North Scituate, R.I.

My favorite thing about nature is the fact that you can watch the sunset and that you can climb on trees and sit on the top of them.
Aida Cepeda, age 10,
from Manhattan, N.Y.

What I love about nature is that it's relaxing, and I like that it is calming.
Shanty Tejeda, age 10,
from Manhattan, N.Y.



Getting Wild With... Octopuses!



BROOKLYNN THEN • age 10

The oldest octopus fossil we have is about 330 million years old.

Octopuses have rounded bodies, bulging eyes, and eight long, lanky tentacles. Octopuses generally live in warm and tropical water at varying depths and in dens.

Octopuses have nine brains: one in their head and one in each tentacle (also called ganglia). An octopus has three hearts—two pump oxygen into the blood, and the third heart pumps out oxygenated blood. Octopuses might spew out an inky fluid from their bodies or camouflage themselves. Jon Ablett, who cares for the cephalopod collection at the Natural History Museum in New York City, explains, "Thousands of specialized cells under their skin, called

chromatophores, help them to change color in an instant. In addition, they have papilli—tiny areas of skin that they can expand or retract to rapidly change the texture of their skin to match their surroundings."

Climate change deeply affects octopuses because they are very sensitive to changes in acidity. Overfishing of their food supply and pollution destroy their habitats and also harm octopuses.

Photo by
Diane Picchiottino
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