



The Comet Newsletter

April 2020

Things to Do During Self-Quarantine

As necessary as it is, self-quarantine during a pandemic can be stressful and worrisome -- and sometimes a little boring. That's why *The Comet* has compiled a list of things to do while stuck at home. If you've been up to something else, shoot an email to thecometnewsletter@gmail.com and tell us about it. Enjoy!

Catch up with old friends and family. Scroll all the way down on your messages and pick someone at random to talk to. It could be that girl from camp whose name you forgot, or perhaps an obscure aunt you've never met. Chances are that they'll appreciate you reaching out during these times!

Write whatever's on your mind. My friends and I have been writing daily logs of our day ever since this pandemic began. You can also try your hand at short stories, poetry, or a blog about cheese.



Watch movies. Hold a virtual Netflix party with the whole squad, or just watch solo. We recommend *Little Women*, *Hidden Figures*, and *Wonder Woman*, among others. Viewers' discretion advised.

Play virtual games with friends. It's especially important in this state of lockdown to be social. During self-quarantine, apps such as *Photo Roulette* and *GamePigeon* have skyrocketed in popularity, so much fun that you could play for hours (but don't). Better yet, FaceTime your friends while playing to increase face-to-face interaction.

Email teachers and staff. Lockdown can be hard for everyone, so it would make your teacher's day if you reached out to them during these difficult circumstances. Tell them how you're doing and how much you're missing their class right now. Although it won't guarantee you an 'A' in the class, you'll be sure to put a smile on their face.

Find ways to help the community. Even in tough times, there is always something you can do to help. Strong math skills? Tutor a kid online. Love arts and crafts? Try making homemade face masks to donate to local hospitals. Let us know what else you're doing to help around the community (or even your house)!

Cook a meal. Before you hasten to reply, I must say that I'm not exactly a *Chopped* chef either. However, as your family loves you unconditionally, they will probably be delighted by anything you cook (or at least pretend

to). Bonus challenge: only use food you have right in your pantry.

Improve your typing skills. How fast can you type? Get speedy with sites such as Typing.com or KeyHero.com, or race your friends on TypeRacer. For an elementary school throwback, download *Type to Learn* and reminisce over memories of Technology class.

Exercise. Although it's not recommended to go outside, you can work out in your own home or backyard. Try exercise videos on YouTube, or better yet, FaceTime your friends and create your own workout routines. Push-ups have never felt so good with friends on your side (or screen).

Take a break from your phone. Although it's tempting, screen time can be harmful in huge amounts. Instead, break out those dusty *Monopoly* and *Clue* board games for an old-school-vibe night, or just catch up with your loved ones. Discuss current news or whether *that movie* should've gotten the Oscar. Whatever it is, make sure to treasure this time with your family.

- Naomi Ling

What's Happening?

The COVID-19 Crisis

There's no way to sugarcoat the circumstances right now; there's a whole lot of rather distressing events going on. But, it's important that we treat this situation with composure and seriousness. There are ways you can help to end this unfortunate pandemic as soon as possible. I know this may sound like a broken record, but the best thing you can do to help yourself and the people around you is to stay home, wash your hands frequently, and practice social distancing.

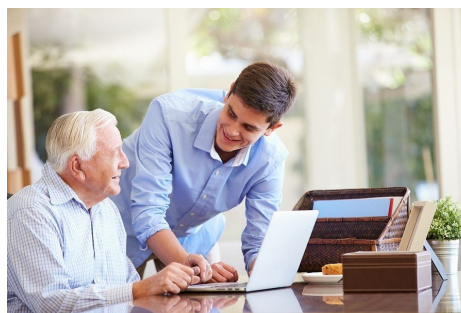
As of 8:00 pm last Monday, Governor Hogan has ordered all of Maryland to stay inside their homes. The order states that "no Maryland resident should leave their home unless it is for an essential job or for an essential reason, such as obtaining food or medicine, seeking urgent medical attention, or for other necessary purposes." As of now, there are 2,331 confirmed cases in the state of Maryland, 152 of the cases being from Howard County. The number of cases will no doubt continue to



increase, which is why it is imperative to practice healthy habits and social distancing and to use reliable sources to obtain information about this outbreak.

Also in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Maryland State Superintendent has ordered closure of schools through April 24th. Since the future for school closures is still up in the air, HCPSS teachers are currently working on ways to teach us from home. For high school students, remote learning in Howard County will start on April 14. Middle and elementary school students will start remote learning on April 20.

It is easy to feel powerless in time like this, but keep in mind that there are many things you can do to help those who are most in need. If you have spare time during your break from school, you can use this time to help assist in grocery shopping for elderly neighbors or family members. Looking to make a contribution but don't know where to start? Browse through local or global fundraisers on sites like GoFundMe to look for a cause to donate to.



Remember that even if you make a small contribution to your community, you're making a big difference in someone's life at a time where we all need it the most.

Though the future seems unclear, we will get through this crisis as long as we work together to make the world healthy and safe for all.

- Livia Zhao

Cooking

As you know, things probably won't be back to normal for a while, especially the supermarkets, with everyone frantically grabbing as much as they can off the shelves and scuffling over toilet paper. Alexandra and I will be posting recipes you can throw together with just a few pantry staples.

Corn dogs are simple but luscious snacks that can be found at every street fair or amusement park. With a few pantry staples (and no weird ingredients like cornstarch that nobody has), you can whip up your favorite fried treat in just 20 minutes!

You will need:

- Two eggs
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ of a teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ of a teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{3}$ of a cup of milk (any kind you want)
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup All-Purpose Flour
- 1 cup bread crumbs (just throw bread into a blender, or put it in a plastic bag and smash it with a rolling pin, then toast it on the stove)
- cooking oil (enough to cover a few hot dogs)
- 6 hot dogs

1) Shove skewers into the hot dogs, so you can easily eat them. Don't stick it all the way through, or else it will fall apart.

2) Combine the All-Purpose Flour, baking powder, salt, milk, sugar and egg, kneading it until it looks like bread dough and dividing it into 6 equal parts.



3) Sprinkle some flour on your table, then roll out each piece of dough until it is twice as long as the hot dogs you are using.



4) In another bowl, beat the eggs until they are homogeneous.

5) Pour the bread crumbs onto a plate.

6) Wrap a piece of dough around a hot dog, making sure to seal it tightly.

7) Dip the hotdog into the egg mixture, then roll it around in the breadcrumbs.

Cover every bit of the hot dog, or else the eggs will fall off of the hotdog when frying.

8) Fry the corn dogs on medium heat until they turn golden brown.



9) Eat while the batter on the corn dogs is still crispy and warm. Bon Appetit!



Once you've finished those corn dogs, you can make some mouth-watering **peach cobbler** for dessert! For the ingredients, you'll have to prepare:

- 4 cups of peeled, sliced peaches (the canned ones you have stocked up in your pantry work well)
- 2 separate cups of sugar
- ½ cup of water
- 8 tablespoons of butter
- 1 1/2 cups of self-rising flour
- 1 1/2 cups of milk
- Ground cinnamon - optional

All these are things you'll most likely have in your kitchen! Now, onto the directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees (Fahrenheit).
2. Combine the peaches, 1 cup sugar, and water in a saucepan and mix well. Bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat.
3. Put the butter in a 3-quart baking dish and place in the oven to melt.
4. Mix the remaining cup of sugar, flour, and milk slowly to prevent clumping. Pour the mixture over melted butter. Do not stir. Spoon fruit on top, gently pouring in syrup. Sprinkle top with ground cinnamon, if using. Batter will rise to top during baking. Bake for 30 to 45 minutes.
5. Scoop onto a plate and serve with whatever toppings/sides you'd like! (I'd suggest vanilla ice cream, or whipped cream if you'd like).



Enjoy! This recipe might take a bit longer than the corn dogs, but it'll be worth it. Hope you try these during your time off school. Stay safe, everyone, and try not to lose your mind from boredom!

- Emily Zhang and Alexandra Ni

Sports Time

Right now, as most people know, all major sports (NBA, NHL, MLB, NFL) are being put on hold because of COVID-19. Some major football trades are going on. Deandre Hopkins, originally playing for the Texans, got traded to the Cardinals for David Johnson. Also, The Raiders are closing a deal for Marcus Mariota, who is originally from the Titans. Another major piece of news is Tom Brady will no longer play for the New England Patriots. With the Patriots, Brady has won six out of nine played Super Bowls and has had major success throughout the seasons.



Since there isn't a whole lot else going on, I thought I could list a few interesting sports facts. First, did you know NFL referees who officiate the Super Bowl also get a version of the rings that winning teams get? They are not as impressive, but still something to show off. Next, Olympic gold medals are made mostly of silver. Only about one percent is actual gold! Finally, there are only two days of the entire year that no major sports are played, the days before and after the MLB All-Star Break.

- Justin Blackman

Ten Questions with Ms. Mairs

In this column, we put a spotlight on one exceptional CMS teacher each month.

Ms. Mairs is the Clarksville Middle media specialist.

- 1. What made you decide to become a media specialist?** I was working as a high school English teacher around the time I got married and then had my first child. I'm a perfectionist when it comes to grading, and knew I couldn't grade the way I wanted to and take care of a baby. I thought about everything I loved about teaching English and decided that being a media specialist would be the perfect next step!

2. **Who do you look up to as a role model?** I've had a few personal role models in my life whom I would characterize as being determined and intelligent women who were also approachable, cared about others, and were able to laugh at themselves. I definitely look up to Michelle Obama for being poised, well-spoken, well-dressed, successful in her own career, loving toward her family, and not afraid to admit to and accept her shortcomings.
3. **What are your daily duties as a media specialist?** As a media specialist, I plan and teach lessons related to research skills, information literacy, and literature appreciation. I collaborate with classroom teachers on their curricular needs. I help students and staff on a daily basis with technology and other questions. In the rest of my time, I manage the school's website, buy books and other materials, and keep the library collection up to date.
4. **What is the most rewarding part of your job?** Helping students and staff is definitely the most rewarding part of my job. I also love being around books and guiding students to books they enjoy.
5. **What do you do in your free time?** In my free time, I love to shop and read and visit new places. I enjoy watching my son run and my daughter dance. My husband and I like to go to plays, out to eat, and to big cities like New York and Chicago.
6. **Do you have any pets?** No pets currently. We used to have a cat named Elizabeth, but she died of old age a couple of years ago. If I were to get a new pet, I think I'd like a Weimaraner.
7. **How are students in the 21st century prepared for careers and beyond by learning media skills?** I believe media skills are crucial for success in college and beyond. In our society that is always talking about "fake news," it's critical that students (and adults!) know how to find and verify information using reliable and varied resources. In order to research successfully, I think it's important for students to learn how to effectively search for, organize, and cite resources. On a very basic level, reading a wide range of materials exposes students to the vocabulary and varied writing styles they will need to become successful writers themselves. Writing is a crucial skill that is needed by every college student and in every career field.
8. **How can students find opportunities for leadership roles in school and the community?** There are so many leadership roles that go beyond simply being the president of an organization or the captain of a team. Whenever you take the initiative in a situation, you exhibit leadership. I encourage students to find ways to lead in their current activities, such as offering to

be a helper to a dance teacher with the toddler classes. In terms of school, be on the lookout for Canvas and TV announcements that offer unique opportunities such as leading a book club discussion at a public library branch or serving as delegate to the SMOB convention.

9. Do you have any inspirational messages to share with CMS students and staff? How about a quote from my favorite poet, Mary Oliver: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

10. If you were stuck on a piece of floating junk in space with only a toothbrush, mini accordion, and nail polish, how would you survive?

Being an astronaut has always scared me, so I'm not sure I would survive regardless of what I had with me. I would probably just paint my nails to see beauty, play the accordion to hear the joy in music, and use the toothbrush to scrub my teeth to stay hygienic.

- Naomi Ling

Photography

#1: Supreme Court



#2: Home



#3: Warmth#4: Library of Congress

- Lincoln Tripp

Travel

Awesome Foods in Puerto Rico

All of these foods can be found at Donde Olga Bar and Restaurant.

1. Mofongo

Mofongo is mashed plantains, which usually accompanies larger dishes as a side dish. I honestly think it isn't that great because it's bland, has a kinda weird texture, but everybody has their own preferences, I guess.

2. Alcapurria

Alcapurria is a batter made from plantains, which is then stuffed with either beef or crab meat, and then fried. BEST FOOD IN PUERTO RICO, I LOVE THIS STUFF.

3. Bacalaito

Bacalaito is a fried flat pancake made of a batter with cod in it. This is good when it's just fried and crunchy because it gets soft and chewy after a while, so eat it quickly.



4. Rellenos de papa

Rellenos de papa is pretty much if you have mashed potatoes, stuff ground beef or crab in it, and then fry the whole thing. (A lot of food in Puerto Rico is fried.) Also quite delicious.

5. Pionono

Pionono is the same thing as Rellenos de papa, except the mashed potatoes are replaced with plantain batter. The plantain batter is sweet and sour, and the meat is salty, so it makes for a really interesting flavor.

6. Piña colada

Most people already know what piña colada is, but I'll explain it again just in case. It's a drink with coconut cream or juice (I don't know which), pineapple juice, whipped cream, and usually alcohol. There is non-alcoholic piña colada, so kids can drink it. It's really good as a refreshing cooler after a long day of playing in the sun. I had about a million of these during my trip.

So that's all from my part, see you next time.

- Siyuan Dai

Paw Patrol

Home of all things Paw and Patrol

School is closed and I'm sure everyone is feeling the effects, good or bad. Whether you're bored out of your mind or have never been better, you are responding to the absence of school, a stimulus. Stimuli are anything in our lives or environments, and your reaction is the response.

In the 1890s, Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov famously conducted several experiments on a field of psychology called Classical Conditioning. In his experiments, he would introduce a piece of meat to dogs, and they would salivate naturally. Then, while the meat was introduced to the dogs, Pavlov would ring a bell at the same time. As Pavlov continued this pairing, the dogs learned to associate the sound to the meat. Eventually the dogs learned to salivate to the bell alone.

The meat an unconditioned stimulus and the salivation an unconditioned response. No one taught the dogs to salivate when they saw meat. The sound of a bell would have been a neutral stimulus, one that does not create a response. But the dogs were conditioned to connect the two, making a conditioned response, to the ex-neutral stimulus, now a conditioned stimulus.

Anyone who has trained a dog before might think Classical Conditioning sounds a bit familiar, but the name for conditioning by reward is Operant Conditioning.

- Estelle Chen

Book Nook

You may have heard of the classic series, *The Adventures of Tintin*. This series follows a young boy named Tintin, along with his faithful dog Snowy, as they travel the world solving mysteries. From stories about undersea treasure to flying to the moon, this series never fails to amaze me or make me laugh. I encourage each and every one of you to check out just a single book in this series, and I promise you that you won't regret it. For those of you who enjoy movies as well, Tintin has also been created into an animated movie starring famous actors such as Daniel Craig.



- Shruti Vadlakonda

Sources

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- *What's Happening?*
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- Peach Cobbler
 - [Peach Cobbler Recipe | Paula Deen](#)
 - [Best Peach Cobbler Recipe](#)
- Corn Dogs
 - [How to make corn dog without corn meal](#)
 - <https://www.annefoodie.com/2018/02/How-to-make-homemade-mozzarella-corn-dog.html>

About Us

Hey! The Comet team consists of seventeen middle schoolers who are passionate about writing, editing, and the arts. Contact us at thecometnewsletter@gmail.com; we would love to hear feedback!

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