

The Comet Newsletter

May 2020

Editor's Corner

Amidst this state of relative turmoil at home, people across the US have been returning to their roots in order to de-stress: cooking, drawing, working out, and even downloading a frenzy of social apps to connect with friends. Personally, I have found myself gazing out of windows in my house lately, perhaps because I feel a twinge of longing that had never been felt. I took a walk with my parents the other day, a rare opportunity, and noticed that the sky seemed a tinge brighter in my eyes. Whether I had had too much screen time, or pollution really had disappeared altogether, I'll never know for sure. But this sense of wonder has stayed with me throughout our time off school -- almost as if a steady rock within the storm.

- Naomi Ling

What's Happening?

Virtual Schooling

Friday concluded a successful second week of CMS distance learning. With this new system of virtual school, students can complete guided assignments (hopefully on time) from the safety of their homes. For more support, teachers are also hosting weekly Google Meet check-ins, featuring the occasional and ever-notable drop-ins from Dr. Shortridge and Ms. Scaife. To commend their tremendous efforts, remember to **thank your teachers and staff** following every virtual class!

Living in Howard County, we are very lucky to have the resources and technology to continue learning from home. Unfortunately, for many schools whose students are mainly from low-income families, online teaching is just not a viable option. Not only are those students deprived of education for a long period of time; many of them rely on the federal free and reduced meals program. Schools in many other places are scrambling to figure out how to safely deliver those necessary meals to students without breaking social distancing recommendations and laws. Although school closures are providing students a safe distance from each other, many believe that they could be doing more harm than good by widening the already deep socioeconomic divide in the national education system. I think I speak for everyone out there when I say, we need this dire situation to end before it causes damage that can't be undone. But for now, we must take this opportunity to be grateful for the valuable access we have to our learning.

Opportunities for Student Volunteering

In the face of this pandemic, students over the world have been stepping up to assist in all sorts of ways. Wondering what you can do in your community? Here are some volunteer ideas that can be carried out right in your own home.

1. **Make face shields for medical workers.** The Clarksville Youth Care Group, a student-run coalition mainly based in Clarksville, has made and delivered over one thousand face shields to twenty-five hospitals in the county. Their goal in the near future is to make a thousand more -- but they need your help! To sign up, simply let them know your interest and acquire the necessary supplies at clarksvillyouthcaregroup@gmail.com.
2. **Make a senior citizen's day.** Love arts and crafts? Send any handmade artwork and letters for senior and nursing home residents to HCAR Cares all throughout May. Details can be found at [Make a Senior Smile](#).
3. **Make your own hand sanitizer for others.** One hot commodity in stores during this time is disinfectants, but you can easily make your own with the help of *The Comet* (see Science Time below). **Bonus:** Maintain social distancing and deliver your concoction to friends and neighbors in need.
4. **Help out a friend or be a tutor.** Regardless of whether we're going to school online or actually sitting in the brick-and-mortar building, classes can be challenging. Take this opportunity to become a tutor for someone in need. Or, if you'd like some help yourself, some of our very own students have created a free tutoring service in exchange for optional donations that go directly to UNICEF. They can be reached at quaranteentutors@gmail.com.

- 5. Donate to local drives or fundraisers.** There are a myriad of fundraisers and drives for food, clothing, and more right here in Howard County. One of these is a fundraiser that uses the donated money to buy meals from restaurants that have either been taking a hit from the decrease in customers or suffered from Ellicott City flood damage. The meals are then donated to places like Grassroots, a homeless shelter. You can find their GoFundMe link [here](#).

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

As humans, we have certain sets of universal good and bad behaviors. One of these behaviors is the tendency to place the blame out of fear on a single person or group during heated situations, such as the current crisis. Subconscious xenophobia and racial discrimination hang over the global state like a fog. Thankfully, the nation-wide Asian Pacific American Heritage Month is rolling on in just in time to clear the skies. The purpose of this event, which lasts all through May, is to remember and honor the sacrifices and contributions made by our country's people with Asian and/or Pacific Islander roots. This year, not only is the month a celebration of diversity, but also a much-needed reminder of the positive influences these countless ethnicities have on America. The holiday brings back memories of a story- a story about a country that was built from newcomers trying their best to understand and respect each other, mixing their cultures together to create a better place to live.

- Livia Zhao, Naomi Ling

Science Time!

With COVID-19, or Coronavirus, still spreading, it's understandable that you want things like hand sanitizer/disinfectants to help keep your hands clean when washing them isn't an option. If stores are all sold out of hand sanitizer you might want to make your own, which is why this recipe will be useful! To make your own hand sanitizer, you need:

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup 99% rubbing alcohol or 190-proof grain alcohol (Don't substitute other concentrations of alcohol)



- ½ cup pure aloe vera gel (preferably without additives)
- 8 to 10 drops of essential oil such as lavender, clove, cinnamon, or peppermint.
- Mixing bowl
- Spoon
- Funnel
- Plastic container

First, you'll want to mix the alcohol and aloe vera in the bowl until completely smooth. If you want the mixture to be thicker, you can add another spoonful of aloe vera, and to thin it, you can add another spoonful of alcohol. Next, add the essential oil one drop at a time, stirring as you go. You'll want to smell the mixture at about eight drops to see if you like the scent or if you want it to be stronger. Finally, funnel the mixture into your container. If you want to carry the sanitizer with you, using a small squirt bottle would be optimal. If you have excess sanitizer, save the leftovers in a jar with a tightly-fitting lid.

Ta-da! You have hand sanitizer! Remember washing your hands is preferable, and only use the sanitizer if you really need to. Stay safe and practice social distancing!

- Julia Goldenberg

Movie Review

There are a lot of great movies out there, but my favorite one is *Cool Runnings* (1993). It is about four Jamaicans who want to go to the Olympics for bobsledding. This is kind of ironic since the weather in Jamaica is hot all year round. They find a former gold-medalist in Jamaica and, with many setbacks, eventually get him to be their coach. The team barely qualifies and becomes an official Olympic competitor. They persevere while getting laughed at to go for the glory. I highly recommend this movie because it is funny, but also inspiring. The main actors are incredibly talented and in my opinion, it is one of the best Disney films.



Leon and Doug E. Doug are among this talented cast.

- Justin Blackman

Cooking

Cinnamon Rolls

Batter: (once combining all the ingredients, roll out the dough into a large oval shape)

- 2 1/4 cups of all-purpose/plain flour (270g)
- 2 tbsp white granulated sugar (25g)
- 1 tbsp of baking powder (14g)
- 1 tsp of salt (4g)
- 6 tbsp of unsalted butter, cubed (84)
- 3/4 cup whole milk (any milk will work) (180ml)

Filling: (spoon the filling onto the dough in an even coat)

- 1/3 cup packed brown sugar (65g)
- 1/3 cup white granulated sugar (65g)
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon (5g)
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter, melted (55g)
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract (5ml)

Once you are finished with the dough and the filling, roll up the dough so it forms a cylinder shape. Once in this shape, cut the dough into evenly small pieces using a sharp knife.

Icing: (Drizzle the icing on top of the cinnamon rolls once it is cooked)

- 1 cup powdered sugar (confectioner's, icing) (120g)
- 3 tbsp. butter, melted (42g)
- 1 tbsp. milk (15ml)
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract (optional) (2ml)

Tips/Tricks:

1. Cinnamon Rolls should be stored in the fridge and will last for about two weeks

2. Grease the pan using butter (no need to buy a greasing spray)
3. You can also use a thread to cut up the cylinder-shaped dough into pieces instead of a knife by wrapping the thread around the dough and pulling on both ends.

I've tried this recipe at home and the result is amazing! Definitely recommend it!

-Shruti Vadlakonda

Sports Time

I am here with a few more fun facts about different sports! First, before 1937, referees in basketball threw a jump ball after every basket. Today, this is usually only done at the beginning of a game. Next, did you know that tug of war was an Olympic event from 1900 to 1920? If it was up to me, I would've kept it in. Also, in NASCAR, most teams use nitrogen to fill their tires instead of air. I couldn't tell you why, but I'm guessing it is something important. Finally, the official sport of Maryland is jousting. I hope these facts were interesting and maybe you learned something!



- Justin Blackman

Ten Questions with Ms. McNees

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

Ms. McNees is a Clarksville Middle English teacher.

1. **What made you decide to become an English teacher?** I've taught many different subjects, but English is my favorite. I love exploring literature and finding ways to analyze text. Teaching the basics of writing and grammar are also quite rewarding. Watching students grow in each of these areas makes English the best subject to teach!
2. **Who do you look up to as a role model?** My grandmothers were incredible

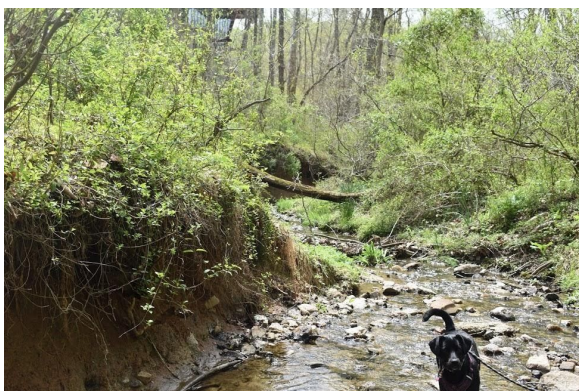
women who took great risks to come to this country. I wish I could speak with them now and learn more about the courage and perseverance it took to come to America. Additionally, they both loved their families very much and always put others first. I incorporate many of their traditions in my family holidays and gatherings.

3. **What is the most rewarding part of your job?** The students at Clarksville Middle School are the most rewarding part of my job. During this quarantine, I miss our interactions in the classroom, and I miss seeing everyone's shining face.
4. **What are you up to during quarantine?** While we are spending this time at home, I am taking care of family, learning an incredible amount of technology, and going outside whenever I can!
5. **Do you have any pets?** I do not have any pets, but I have many hobbies. My favorite hobbies include gardening, fishing, crabbing, boating, and working out.
6. **What is your all-time favorite book(s)?** It is so very difficult to choose my all-time favorite book! I enjoy a variety of genres, but my favorite is historical fiction. The book I love to read to my grandchildren is *The Velveteen Rabbit*.
7. **Do you have any inspirational messages for CMS students in self-quarantine?** While this can be an unpredictable and somewhat trying time, use it to spend quality time with your family, make new traditions, take good care of yourself, read a novel, and maintain your sense of humor. As Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."
8. **Where can students find more English-related supplements online during quarantine?** Some great places to find extra learning materials include Newsela, My Shakespeare, Khan Academy, and The Howard County Library.
9. **What character in the play *Romeo and Juliet* would you want to act as?** If I were to have a part in *Romeo and Juliet*, I would like to be either Nurse or Lord Capulet.
10. **Have I had any grammatical errors in this interview?** I am not looking for any grammatical errors. :)

- Naomi Ling

Photography

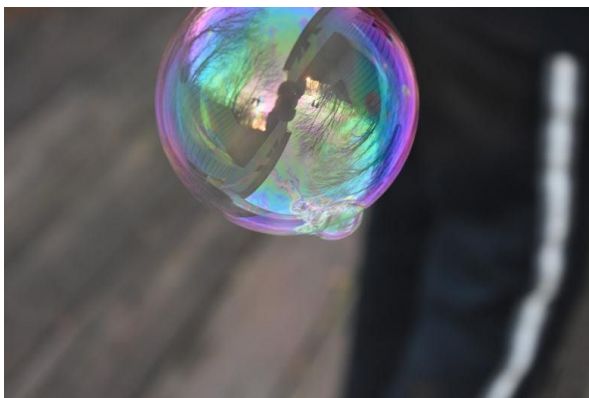
Robinson Hike



Cherry Tree



Bubble



Monarch





Mushroom on a Log

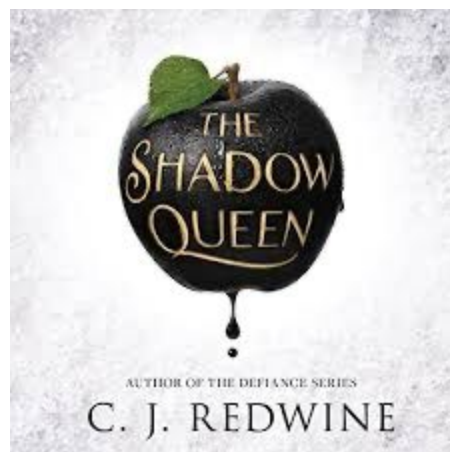
- Lincoln Tripp

Book Nook

A spin-off of the classic Snow White fairytale, *The Shadow Queen* by C.J. Redwine follows crown princess of Ravenspire, Lorelai Diederich.

Trying to reclaim her throne back from her evil stepmother, Irina, who also killed her father, Lorelai must use the one weapon they both have in common -- magic.

However, unbeknownst to Lorelai, her stepmother Irina has struck a deal with neighboring kingdom Eldr's crown prince, Kol, that allows her to get rid of Lorelai. The deal Irina strikes with Kol says that Kol must become her huntsman and retrieve Lorelai's heart in order for her to save Kol's kingdom from a dangerous army. Now, fugitive-at-large Lorelai must outwit not only her evil stepmother but also huntsman Kol, whom she likes far more than she should.



- Shruti Vadlakonda

Sources

- Movie Review
 - [Cool Runnings \(1993\)](#)
 - [Cool Runnings Movie Review](#)
- Cinnamon Rolls
 - [Easy Quick Cinnamon Rolls Without Yeast Recipe | How to Make Cinnamon Rolls](#)
- What's Happening?
 - [10 Ways to Volunteer During a Pandemic](#)

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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