

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



“There is
no single
word”

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When I look back on the 2016-17 school year, the first thing I will remember — and I suspect much of the VHS student body would say the same — is the presidential election and the first five months of the Trump administration. It was a pivotal election regardless of how you look at it, but for many high schoolers it was also the first election that we have followed in any substantial depth.

Of course, HUM isn't a political magazine — it displays student artwork from the past school year. However, such a magazine should reflect the conditions under which that art was created, should it not? If it has been a dark year, would it really be appropriate to publish a jovial magazine? While it might seem naive to claim that student literature and artwork are accurate representations of the sociopolitical climate on Vashon, based on the commonalities that I saw in many of the 90-plus submissions that we received for HUM it might be just as naive to claim that there is no correlation. The dynamics of the election and the political goings-on in the White House since then have, for high schoolers, had more direct an impact on our everyday lives than they ever have before. I know this from personal experience; I know it from talking with friends; and I know it from the in-class discussions, the sudden proliferation of “This is an inclusive space” and “Hate has no place here” posters and student walkouts and protests.

According to long-established tradition, the editor of HUM chooses one word that reflects the year in student artwork, and that word is displayed on the front cover as the theme of the magazine. But what about the 2016/17 school year's biggest storyline — the election — has been traditional? And can it really be encompassed by one word?

Some might say “chaos” is a fitting description, but (regardless of the fact that “chaos” was also the theme for a 2014 issue of HUM) keep in mind that World War III has yet to occur, so let's save “chaos” for next year. While there

is admittedly no single word that can accurately represent everything that has happened this year, we wanted to express the feeling of not-knowing that seems to accompany every piece of news from the White House. More simply put, we wanted to express this: “?” (You may have noticed the illustration on the front cover resembles a question mark.)

With a question mark as our starting point, we were able to identify four major categories that accurately described the past year using student art.

In our first section, “Uncertainty,” we attempt to portray the collective perception of being on the precipice of something catastrophic — a perception that has permeated our Pacific Northwest liberal bubble since the minute Donald Trump took the lead in the 2016 presidential election, and has been repeatedly reinforced by signs of international instability — Brexit, the conflict in Syria, tensions with North Korea, and numerous terror attacks abroad. More than an indictment of the status quo, “Uncertainty” is a concern for the future that can give rise to a sense of panic and sometimes helplessness.

Our second section, “Enigma,” draws parallels more closely with Donald Trump himself — his erratic behavior, his contradictory statements, his at-times-intriguing rambling. We model this through written pieces that describe and discuss things or ideas that can't necessarily be understood from an outside perspective.

Our third section, “Daze,” represents the overwhelming feed of controversy after controversy that numbs us to the point where it seems like Russia rumors are routine, and scandal stories are standard operating procedure. We are left no choice but to take it all in and hope for the best.

In our last section, “Entropy,” we attempt to break the mold. Just as Donald Trump ousted a refined politic in favor of crude unpredictability, so too did we try to exclude pieces of writing that clearly conformed to the conventions taught to us in our K-12 education. We selected pieces that were more abstract — though still high quality — and not fully understood in the context of real-world parallels.

But for me, perhaps the most salient way in which this magazine embodies a question mark is the very process of selecting student work for publication, and the self-doubt that has accompanied it. I am a junior in high school. I have never taken a college course, much less one pertaining to literature. I don't even read as much as I probably should. Yet displayed here on the following pages is the byproduct of my attempt to distinguish the best student literary work. In case you disagree with my selections, you can always find me hiding in my fallout shelter.