

Getting to know your Dean: Mrs. Ghazal

By: Layann Abood and Shuroke Alhaj

We see her in the hallways every day, but how well do we actually know the woman behind the title of “The dean of students”? At Universal School, we all know Mrs. Ghazal as the person we go to when we are in trouble. But is that really all she is here for? Beyond the role we see every day, there's a whole story, a personality, and a whole person behind who she is. Getting the opportunity to sit down with Mrs. Ghazal showed me how much thought, faith, sincerity and love she pours into everything she does. Her mornings start most peacefully. Before any alarm, the first thing she does when she wakes up is check the time to see if it's Fajir. It sounds simple, but it reflects how naturally her day is connected to her faith. There's no rush, no chaos, just her aligning herself with Allah (SWT) before she even steps into the responsibilities waiting for her. That same calmness and steadfastness carry into how she approaches her role at school. One of the biggest things that drives her is the amanah she feels toward her students. She takes her responsibilities seriously because she believes every action she takes affects someone's life or someone's day. That pressure does not scare her, but instead motivates her. It keeps her disciplined, even on the hardest days. She wants to be fair to everyone and do right by the students who trust her. Even though her job is nonstop, she still wishes she had more time to build stronger relationships with students, because she values understanding who we are beyond just our behavior or academics. Even on her busiest days, she has habits she

sticks to. No matter what is happening, she always checks her emails, including on weekends. So if you have ever emailed her and she didn't reply, yes, she is ignoring you. (Sorry, Mrs Ghazal). So if you have ever emailed her and she didn't reply, yes, she is ignoring you. (Sorry, Mrs Ghazal). This keeps her connected and makes sure nothing falls behind. Over time, she's also learned how much patience changes everything. One habit she's proud of is staying calm before reacting. Instead of letting stress take over or letting a student bother her, she gives herself a moment to breathe, which she says has made her a better person overall. She has also shared that she used to be a perfectionist. Being too hard on herself, always trying to get everything done, and doing so perfectly. Now she is trying to be more gentle with herself, letting things be good instead of impossible. When it comes to uniform, specifically makeup and hijab, she had one of the most beautiful pieces of advice. She said hijab is purely for the pleasure of Allah, and that our beauty is already there without anything added. With hijab on, she said, “Your beauty shines from your face itself.” The way she said it made it feel genuine and heartfelt, not like a lecture but more like something she really believes. One of the strongest parts of her story is why she chose Universal. She said she chose the school, but she also feels like Universal chose her. Being here changed her life in ways she didn't expect. It brought her back to the goodness of Muslims at a time when she needed to see it again. Every day, she sees it in the staff she works with, the families she interacts with, and the students she guides.

She's grateful to be a part of a community that feels real and meaningful. Before students graduate, she hoped every single one of them would hear one message at least once: believe in yourself. Trust that Allah has a unique plan for you, and don't forget that you are a noble creation of Allah. That reminder hits different when it comes from someone who truly means it. Balancing Islamic principles with modern student life isn't always easy, but she does it by remembering her own journey. Knowing Mrs. Ghazal, she wasn't always Muslim, so she knows firsthand how much mercy and patience can impact someone who is still figuring things out. She's watched students grow, mature, and transform over the years, and she knows that as long as we stay close to the straight path, Allah will guide us through whatever challenges or Trends come and go. She believes that even though the world keeps changing, our principles never stop being relevant. Mrs. Ghazal said that if she wasn't working in education, she would see herself doing interior renovation or redecorating. She used to constantly move furniture, paint rooms, and redo spaces just to make them feel better. And honestly, it makes sense because now she does the same thing just in a different way. Instead of changing rooms, she changes hearts, minds, and futures. She even jokes that her current job is just “renovating minds”, including her own. Her comfort treat is a Qamaria pistachio latte, but if she could come buy it with a slice of her mom's Cherry pie, she said that it would be her version of heaven.

The Hadith that inspires her the most is the one reminding us that true strength isn't overpowering others. It's controlling ourselves when we're angry. She knows how hard that can be for students and adults, but she believes the strength it builds is worth it. We asked Mrs Ghazal to describe herself in three words, but she couldn't, not because she didn't know what to say, but because she's more focused on how Allah sees her rather than how she labels herself. She hopes Allah is pleased with who she is and how she acts, and that thought guides her more than any description could. Talking to Mrs. Ghazal, I made it clear that Universal isn't just a place she works, it's a place she loves, serves, and grows with every day, and after seeing the side of her, it's easy to understand why she means so much to our school.



Behind the Screen: The Impact of Social Media on Self Esteem

By: Haneen Alayoubi

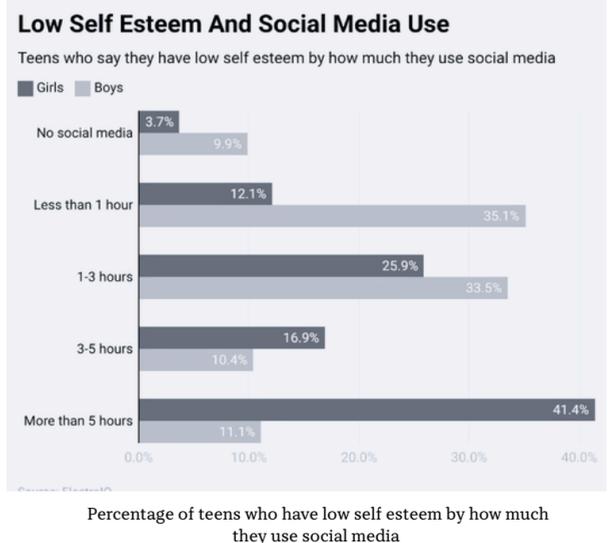
In today's age, social media is heavily integrated into our lives, especially for the younger generation. Social media has transformed communication and self expression for the world, allowing users to have daily spaces to share moments of their lives. These platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, allow people to form their identities in the narrative they choose to be seen in on their social pages. This blurs the lines between reality and fantasy in social media, allowing users to absorb unrealistic ideals or expectations while also impacting perception. While these social platforms offer many opportunities and are a great creative outlet, they also raise serious mental health concerns as they continue to become more influential - particularly self-esteem issues. One of the many side effects of constant social media usage is constant comparison. Through viewing carefully edited images and videos that only highlight success, wealth, perfection, and happiness. Rarely will there ever be posts highlighting failure or struggle, creating the illusion of living flawlessly. Users often forget to zoom out the camera lens from the snapshot of perfection and fail to realize that there are still flaws behind the camera. This is referred to as “upward social

comparison” by psychologists, where individuals compare themselves to those who they believe are doing better. Gradually, this can minimize the success of these individuals in their eyes due to the idea that there is always someone doing better than them leading to lower self esteem. Studies have shown that frequent exposure of this idealized content affects younger individuals most, especially those who are still developing their sense of identity. Another major contributor to declining self-esteem is the pressure surrounding physical appearance. Social media promotes unrealistic beauty standards through filters, editing tools, and trending aesthetics that often alter natural features. As users scroll through images of seemingly flawless bodies and faces, it becomes easy to internalize the idea that looking a certain way is necessary to be accepted or admired. This pressure is especially harmful for younger users, who may begin to feel insecure about features they once never questioned. Over time, this dissatisfaction can lead to deeper issues such as body image struggles, anxiety, and a constant need to present a “perfect” version of oneself online. Alongside appearance-based pressure, social media has also created a culture centered around validation.

Likes, comments, views, and follower counts have become measures of popularity and success. When posts do not receive the expected amount of engagement, users may feel overlooked or unimportant, leading them to tie their self-worth to online responses. This can shift confidence away from personal values and achievements, replacing it with a dependence on external approval. As a result, self-esteem becomes fragile and easily influenced by numbers on a screen. Despite these negative effects, social media is not entirely damaging. When used intentionally, it can provide spaces for creativity, connection, and support. Many individuals find comfort in online communities that promote honesty, mental health awareness, and self-acceptance. These platforms can help users feel seen and understood, especially when they engage with content that reflects real experiences rather than unrealistic ideals.

As social media continues to play a major role in daily life, awareness becomes essential. Learning to recognize unrealistic portrayals, setting boundaries with screen time, and focusing on authenticity can help protect self-esteem. While social media allows people to share their lives with the

world, it is important to remember that self-worth should not be defined by comparison or online validation.



Did You Know?

Studies have found that taking just a one-week break from social media can significantly improve self-esteem and reduce feelings of anxiety and comparison, showing how strongly daily scrolling affects the way people view themselves.

Matcha Madness

By: Dania Younis and Rahma Farraj

In Bridgeview Illinois, a lot of people love getting vanilla matcha, and there are a few places that everyone compares. The main spots are Al-Hamawi, Sada, and Jazwah. Each place makes their vanilla matcha a little differently, so it's easy to notice which ones taste better, which ones are sweeter, and which ones are just okay. Because of that, people in the area have their own favorites and opinions.



Alhamawi Matcha



Sada Matcha



Jazwah Matcha

Al-Hamawi is definitely the top choice for most people, and it's easy to see why. Their vanilla matcha tastes good every single time, and it's never too sweet. The vanilla flavor is smooth and mixes well with the matcha, so nothing tastes weird or off. It always hits the same way, which is why it gets a 10/10. A lot of people say this place sets the standard for how vanilla matcha should taste.

Sada comes in second with an 8/10. Their drink is a bit sweeter than Al-hamawi's, but it's still pretty good overall. Some people like the sweeter taste, and others think it's a little too much, but most agree it's still worth getting. If someone wants a vanilla matcha that tastes more like a treat, Sada is a good option that's still consistent and enjoyable.

Lastly, Jazwah gets a 7/10 because their vanilla matcha isn't the favorite. It's okay, but it doesn't stand out as much as the other two places. Sometimes the flavor isn't perfectly balanced, and it just doesn't have that wow factor. Still, it's a common stop for many people in Bridgeview, especially when they want something quick since it's right next to the school.

If You Could Add a New Lunch Item, What Would It Be?

By: Fatima Beg

If You Could Add a New Lunch Item, What Would It Be?

Last week, students got the chance to vote on which new lunch item they would want. While this poll won't change the actual school menu, it gave everyone a chance to dream a little (and get hungry in the process).

Mskhan Rolls Take First Place

With a huge 60.6% of the vote, Mskhan Rolls were the clear favorite. Students loved the idea of a quick, tasty option they could grab between classes. Many called them "the perfect lunch upgrade."

Ramen in Second

Taking 22.5%, fresh ramen came in second. Students liked the idea of a warm, customizable meal especially on cold days.

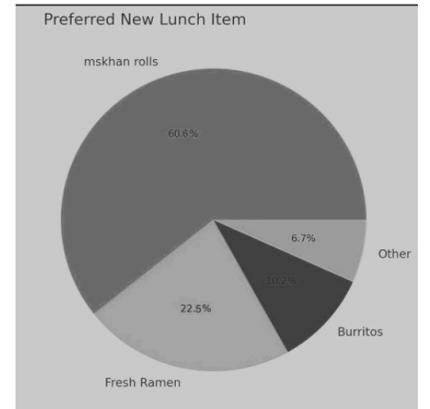
Burritos Claim Third

10.2% of students chose burritos, noting how flavorful they could be. Though it didn't top the list, some said they'd still love to see burritos in the cafeteria one day.

"Other" Ideas Add Creativity

Finally, 6.7% voted "Other," suggesting everything

from sushi to fruit bowls to dessert waffles. Clearly, students have lots of delicious ideas. Even though this poll won't affect the school's actual lunch menu, it shows one thing for sure: our students have great taste. And if these results prove anything, it's that Mskhan Rolls have officially become the school's most wanted imaginary lunch item.



The most preferred new item



Photo from @FalasteeniFoodie

A Day Without A Phone: Unplugging

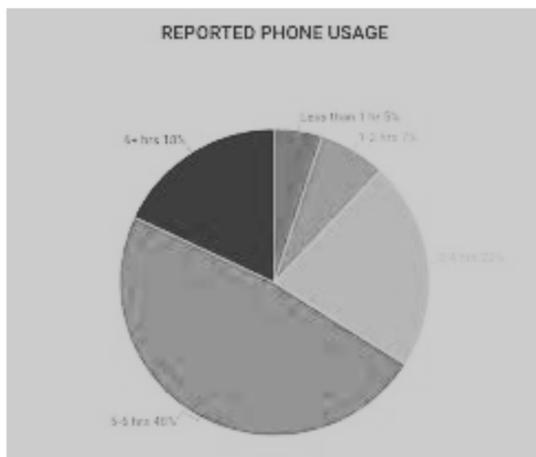
By: Sarah Hamdan

Many of us in today's society use phones regularly, whether the purpose is for texting or entertainment; each use contributes to an excessive amount of screen time. "The average teen spends 7 hours and 22 minutes looking at screens each day" (Exploding Topics, 2025). So, when someone suggested in Media and Culture the idea of a day without a phone, although it was suggested as a joke, it intrigued me. I wanted to test the theory, especially on a school day. The only exception was for texting or school purposes, no entertainment, whether that was social media apps or mobile games. The experiment was successful, reducing my usual 7 hours of screen time to just 3 hours.

Here are some significant changes I noticed from this experiment: I was more content with myself and the lack of dopamine that I had constantly strived for. Whenever I wake up, I instantly reach for my phone to check for the latest news or go on Instagram, but instead, I turned off my alarm and followed my usual morning routine. The difference without the phone was that I could be present in the moment, rather than putting on music or watching a video when getting ready, I simply enjoyed the morning view of the sun rising and the quiet. On the car ride to school, I looked around at my surroundings for once, rather than looking down at my phone. At school, I

was more engaged in discussions with my friends and more present in class, immediately diving into my work rather than procrastinating and saving it for later. When I got home, I spent time with my family, instead of being stuck up in my room and spending it on my phone. I even made time to bake cupcakes for my family and friends to bring the next day.

A day without a phone taught me to be in the moment, rather than keeping my face stuck to a screen. This is an experience I recommend to everyone; the time our phones take up could be used for more productive purposes. You could go back to that hobby you haven't done in a while, reconnect with friends and family, read a book/quran, etc.. There are so many things to do and so little time; life is precious, and it isn't worth our phones taking up most of our time. Even if it may sound absurd, try it for one day and see what comes of it!



A report on the average person's phone usage per day.

Did you know?

Australia passed a social media ban for teenagers and children under the age of 16 in December, which applies to companies including Instagram, X and TikTok. The measure is intended to reduce the "social harm" done to young Australians and is set to come into force on December 10, 2025. Tech giants will be up against fines of up to A\$49.5 million (\$31 million) if they do not adhere to the rules.

Source: Statista



Darfur Refugee Camp inside of Chad

Understanding Sudan's Forgotten War

By: Jenean Abughoush

The UN has described what is happening in Sudan as the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with over 150,000 people being killed and about 12,000,000 having to flee their homes. There is famine and genocide, with families being killed and displaced from their land, but it is barely talked about in discussions. How did all of this destruction happen, what caused it, and how can people worried about Sudan help and support?

Before talking about the present, we have to understand the past. This all started in 2019 when a coup overthrew the president during that time, named Omar al-Bashir. After the overthrow, civilians advocated for a democracy. A joint military-civilian government was then established, but that too was overthrown by a coup. The two men who were in charge of that coup were General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the armed forces and currently the country's president, and his second in command, RSF leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. Both these men ended up disagreeing with each other on the direction of the country, and a shooting between the two occurred on April 15, 2023. Now, these

two generals are fighting over control of Sudan, leading to a civil war.

RSF, which is an army that has taken over parts of Sudan, has the goal of transforming the mixed-race country of Sudan into an Arab-dominated area. In doing so, they have committed heinous acts of genocide towards the people, with armed men raping and sexually assaulting children as young as 1. Thousands of people were murdered in el-Geneina city with people suspecting that the RSF's mission is to ethnically cleanse the Massalit people. The WFP (UN World Food Programme) has even stated that more than 24 million people are facing acute food shortages in Sudan, with almost 80% of soup kitchens having been forced to shut down, leaving millions of people hungry and desperate to survive.

But how can we help? The best way would be to donate to local charities and foundations that are trusted and known to provide for Sudan. If you are unable to, then the next best thing would be to spread awareness. Make sure people understand what is happening so the people of Sudan don't have to suffer in silence any longer.

Varsity Wrap- Up

by: Adam Alsilwadi

The 2025–2026 varsity teams had a strong year filled with growth and hard work. Our athletes stayed dedicated in every practice and game and continued to improve throughout the season.

This year, the team made it to the regional semifinals, showing how much effort and teamwork went into every game. It was

unfortunate that we couldn't win regionals for the third year in a row, but the players showed heart and fought until the end.

Even with the tough loss, there were many standout moments, big plays, and strong leadership from our athletes. The season proved that the program keeps growing, and everyone is motivated to come back stronger next year.



Boys Varsity Soccer Team

Teachers Dazzle During Underground Spirit Week

December 15–19, teachers dressed up and showed their creativity during our Teachers-Only Underground Spirit Week. Teachers secretly showed their school spirit all week long, starting with Iconic Educators Day on Monday, followed by Y2K Time Travel Tuesday, Career Swap Day on Wednesday, Favorite Subject Throwback on Thursday, and wrapping up with Alma Mater Day on Friday. From Ms. Rachel and Mrs. Frizzle to Mr. Ratburn, neon to college hoodies and classroom throwbacks, this covert celebration was full of fun and creativity, while keeping it top secret!



Inside the Huddle: Student Athlete Spotlight

By: Amal Almaflehi and Ayah Aldeiban

Universal's student-athletes prove that sports are more than just competition; they're about connection, character, and unforgettable memories. We caught up with players from girls volleyball, girls basketball, boys soccer, and boys basketball to hear what drives them, what challenges them, and what they'll never forget.

Girls Volleyball:

Laila Murrar 11th grade: I've been playing volleyball since I was a kid.

Q: What's one personal goal you set at the beginning of the season?

A: Learn how to backwards set.

Q: What's your favorite memory of this season?

A: Celebrating with the other team after losing.

Q: What advice would you give to younger players just starting?

A: Be outgoing, don't be shy, be loud, learn communication.

Q: What is the hardest position?

A: Setter. Their role controls where the ball goes, and has power over the court.

Q: How do you help the team stay focused?

A: Yell at them or dance it off.

Q: What is something you regret or could have done differently?

A: Quitting a week before the season ending, "I should've quit earlier."

Taleen Abunajim 11th grade: I grew up always playing sports especially basketball since my brothers all played and we'd spend a lot of time going to games or watching. But in 7th grade, I tried volleyball for the first time and instantly got hooked.

Q: What's one personal goal you set at the beginning of the season?

A: Going into any sport is consistency, and putting in my all through every game and staying focused no matter the situation.

Q: What's your favorite memory of this season?

A: Celebrating with the opposing team even after a really long day and a pretty tough game, it just showed how much we can enjoy the moment no matter the outcome.

Q: What advice would you give to younger players just starting?

A: Not be too hard on themselves and to focus on having fun while learning. Volleyball takes practice and patience, and is more of a mental game before it is physical. So don't get too lost in the game.

Q: What is the hardest position?

A: Setter. They have to think fast, move constantly, and make quick decisions to set up every play.

Q: How do you help the team stay focused?

A: By always trying to keep the energy up.

especially when things get stressful.

Boys Soccer:

Ameen Joudeh 12th grade: I got inspired by my cousin who plays division 1 soccer at Loyola. Growing up he was a role model for me and introduced me to soccer.

Q: Favorite player and why?

A: Aaron Wan-Bissaka who plays on my favorite team Manchester United. I always liked him as a player but I became inspired by him after one of my best friends Hamza Martini told me that I play like him. He is known for his slide tackling which is my favorite thing to do on the pitch.

Q: How do you want to be remembered as a teammate?

A: As someone who everyone and anyone can relate/connect with. I hope to be a role model for the upcoming generation after I graduate.

Q: What advice would you give to younger players just starting out?

A: Enjoy every moment and make sure you put in all the effort and extra training in order to reach your full potential.

Q: What do you love most about this sport?

A: I love that I am able to play with my younger brother and that I was able to coach my other brother on the middle school team.

Ibraheem Joudeh 10th grade: My brother inspired me to play soccer. He started before me and we played together when



Ameen and Ibraheem Joudeh



Taleen Abunajim and Laila Murrar

we were younger. I loved it since and never grew away from the sport.

Q: Favorite player and why?

A: Eden Hazard. I used to watch him a lot and he reminds me of myself in how I play.

Q: How do you want to be remembered as a teammate?

A: A teammate who left everything on the field and motivated everyone to stay confident and give their all so the whole team could succeed.

Q: What's the funniest thing that's happened during practice?

A: We all jumped the fence before practice and then we all realized it was unlocked the whole time.

Q: Describe your coach in three words?

A: Encouraging, disciplined, passionate.

Q: What advice would you give to younger players just starting?

A: Have fun and enjoy the game while you have it. Don't let your teammates control your game and never give up on the sport.

Q: What do you love most about this sport?

A: The friendships you make on and off the field, and the memories that stay with you throughout your life.

Girls Basketball:

Mimouna Almaflehi 9th grade:

Q: Favorite player and why?

A: LEBRON JAMES.

Q: What's the funniest thing that's A: happened during practice?

A: Noor Musleh fell while practicing three man weave.

Q: What advice would you give to younger players just starting?

A: Keep pushing yourself and when you're tired learn to rest not to quit.

Q: What's one thing people don't see that happens behind the scenes?

A: Us begging the coach to put us back on the court.



Mimouna Almaflehi and Yara Ulayyan

Q: What's something most people don't realize about basketball?

A: How much focus and decision making every player needs usually in just a split second.

Yara Ulayyan 9th grade

I started playing because Universal didn't have a Soccer team.

Favorite player and why?

Stephen Curry or LeBron James because they're really good players and have amazing skills. Curry makes hard shots look so easy.

What advice would you give to younger players just starting out?

Keep trying and to never give up, consistency is key.

What's something most people don't realize about basketball?

Basketball isn't just about hooping and scoring, it's about effort, discipline, and dedication.

Boys Basketball:

Adam Amra 11th grade

Who's your favorite player and why?

The most inspirational basketball player I have watched and learned from is Jamal Ibrahim, he has motivated me and believed in me when nobody else did. While many factors go into my all time favorite player, I would have to say that my #1 favorite player in the world is myself.

What's the funniest thing that's happened during practice or a game?

The funniest thing that happened was when one of our teammates fell to the ground while running and said his liver was going to pop.

What advice would you give to younger players just starting out?

Always grind, even when you win you need to humble yourself and keep your head down.

What's something most people don't realize about basketball?

A lot of people don't realize the skill and effort that goes into basketball, a common misconception is that if you're tall, you're automatically a great player, but that's not the case. Also all the work that is put into it, 7 days a week multiple hours a day. Everyone sees the end product, but never the process it took to get there.

Ahmed Massad 11th grade

Q: Who's your favorite player and why?

A: My favorite player I've watched is Konrad Dziwulski. He is a big inspiration and teaches me a lot I have learned from this game along with Malcolm Cherry. Keeping in mind all these people who taught me and motivated me, my all time favorite player is myself.

Q: What's one personal goal you set at the beginning of the season?

A: One personal goal I have is to generate a lot of the teams points and make regionals.

Q: How do you want to be remembered as a teammate?

A: I want to be remembered as a leader and a teammate that can facilitate the ball and make my teammates better, getting them more involved.

Q: What advice would you give to younger players just starting out?

A: Have a lot of confidence, if you don't, you will hesitate and you won't score or help the team

Q: What's something most people don't realize about basketball?

A: The amount of competition there is in different levels of the sport. Basketball isn't just skill, it is much more than that. You must put in a lot of effort, hard work beats skill.



Adam Amra and Ahmed Masad

Viral Tiktok Food Reviews : Yay or nay?

By: Haneen Alayoubi and Daliyah khalil

As you scroll on Tiktok, there may be some trending food options in your area that you want to try. However, not all of these food items are worth the hype. We tried and rated some popular food items on Tiktok to see if they're really worth your money.



Chopped Cheese

We tried the Chopped cheese sandwich (NOT the ocky way) from NYC Halal Eats . The sandwich was big and it was enough for 2 people to share. It also came with a side of fries, and was filled with melted cheese, charred peppers, and smoky meat. The sandwich was also juicy and the overall cost was around \$15. The overall rating was a 9/10.

Dubai Chocolate Pizookie

Our final item was the Dubai Chocolate Pizookie from BJ's. We were excited to try this dessert, however once



we actually tried it, we were pretty disappointed. The kataifi on top was barely cooked, it was soft and not very crunchy. The kataifi tasted odd in the pizookie because it was just sprinkled on top. The cookie itself

was very good, however it just tasted like a decadent double chocolate cookie. The pistachio sauce on top did not add any special taste, in fact, it was almost tasteless. Overall, the Dubai chocolate flavor was just not there. There are other pizookies that are much more flavorful. The Overall rating was a 5/10.



Cookie Butter Latte

The popular cookie butter cloud latte at Dunkin Donuts is a delicious sweet way to have a small pick me up after school, before work, or even before a home game. This drink was smooth, creamy, and slightly spiced. The cookie butter flavor in the cold foam was silky and not overpowering. The coffee was also not too strong. The overall rating was a 9/10.



Triple Dipper

The Triple Dipper from Chili's was a pretty large plate. The plate came with very stretchy, big mozzarella stick. They were lightly breaded and were very filling. The honey chipotle tenders were heavily coated in sauce and were fried extra crispy. They did not have much flavor other than the oney chipotle, and they were slightly dry. Finally, the sliders were kind of dry, and they were pretty small, there was overall nothing special about them. The overall rating for this meal was a 7 /10.

The Bubble

By: Amani Shatat

We live in a bubble

A bubble made up of protection and safety

A place we feel entitled, a place we feel loved

We look at the news and turn it off

The bubble is working

We don't understand the severity, so we turn it off

Turn off the news for safety and comfortability

But when we look at ourselves in the mirror

Do we understand the outside world?

Do we understand the depth of deception it takes to create a bubble of ignorance?

Or is it too late?

It is never too late.

Turn on the news, learn

Learn how to become anew

Learn to use cognitive abilities to fight deception

To fight the genocide

To fight the wars

To fight the ignorance

Inspired by Mrs. Nazeer and Mr. Alabd



It's Cold Outside! Winter Activities to Keep You Active

By: Lina Albashirah and Dania Idhelieh

As the weather gets colder and the days get shorter, many students are starting to look for fun ways to enjoy the winter season. Even though everyone has their own preferences, there are several activities around school and in the community that can make the winter months more exciting.

One of the most popular winter activities is ice skating. Many students enjoy going to local rinks with friends, taking pictures, and trying new tricks on the ice. Skating is a fun way to stay active during a time when most people stay indoors. Even beginners can join in, and it's a great excuse to drink hot chocolate afterward. Another activity students look forward to is winter movie nights. When it's too cold to go outside, gathering with friends or family to watch holiday movies is always a favorite. Classics like Home Alone, Elf, and The Polar Express help everyone get into the winter spirit. For students who prefer being outdoors, winter hiking is also an option.

Local parks and trails look completely different, covered in frost or light snow. It's peaceful, relaxing, and a great way to get fresh air. Playing outside in the snow with your friends and family is also one of the best ways to enjoy the outdoors in the winter.

Lastly, many students love simple winter traditions like baking cookies, or in school charity drives. These smaller activities help bring everyone together and make the season feel special.

Winter may be chilly, but there are plenty of ways to make it enjoyable. Whether you're skating, watching movies, enjoying the outdoors, or staying cozy indoors, there's something for everyone to look forward to this season.

Winter Activities Close to Home

Snowboarding / Skiing / Tubing

- Villa Olivia (Bartlett, IL) – Snowboarding, skiing & tubing
- Four Lakes Alpine Snowsports (Lisle, IL) – Snowboarding & skiing
- Wilmot Mountain (WI) – Skiing, snowboarding & tubing
- Humboldt Park Sledding Hill (Chicago, IL)
- Dan Ryan Woods Hills (Chicago, IL)
- Swallow Cliff Woods Hills (Palos Park, IL)
- Palos Hills / Palos Heights Local Hills
- Naperville Sled Hill (Naperville, IL)
- Bolingbrook Sled Hills (Bolingbrook, IL)

Family-Friendly Movies You Can Stream Now

- The Wild Robot
- Paddington in Peru
- The Twits
- Dog Man
- Migration
- Kung Fu Panda 4

Winter Baking: 'Smores Cookies

These S'mores cookies are full of gooey marshmallows, crunchy graham crackers and of course lots of melty chocolate!

Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 10 minutes
Chill Time: 1 hour

Servings: 20 cookies
Calories: 123 kcal
Author: [John Kanell](#)

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour 180g
- 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp corn starch
- 3/4 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 10 tbsp unsalted butter room temperature
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup light brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1 cup mini marshmallows OR marshmallow bits, divided
- 1 bar Chocolate 1.55oz
- 4 Graham crackers 56g

Instructions

- Roughly chop the Graham crackers and Hershey's bar, then tear the mini marshmallows in half. These marshmallows are one of the best parts of the cookie but they will puff up and get a bit out of control if you don't halve them.
- Combine the flour, salt, baking powder, baking soda, and cornstarch in a bowl then whisk together and set aside.
- Using a stand or hand mixer, beat butter and sugars in a bowl until creamy, about 2 minutes. Add in egg and vanilla and until combined. Scrape the bowl down and mix once more.
- Gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture, beating on low speed until just combined.
- Reserve a handful of the torn marshmallows and set aside then add the remaining marshmallows, chocolate chips, and Graham crackers to the dough and mix on low until just combined (do not over-beat).
- Refrigerate dough for an hour or more.
- Heat oven to 350F. Portion out roughly two tablespoon sized pieces of dough. Roll into balls and place on a parchment-lined baking sheet, spacing about 2 inches apart.
- Bake at 350° for 8 minutes then top the cookies with the reserved marshmallow and Hershey's bar pieces then return to the oven for 2-3 minutes to finish baking. IF a some cookies had a blowout because of a few too many marshmallows to you can corral them back together with a round cookie cutter or a knife.
- Leave on pan to cool completely.



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