

The BASH

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BAS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



Mock Trial, Real Skills

Shaindy Weitzner and Rachel Vishnever

We object to the view that taking advantage of resume-boosting opportunities is only for overachievers. Bnei Akiva Schools offers a great variety of extracurricular activities, each enhancing students' learning in an entirely different way. Mock Trial is one of these programs; it is a simulated courtroom experience, where students act out legal roles like lawyers and witnesses in a fictional case. Mock Trial is especially unique since the students get to alternate between being Crown (the prosecutor) and Defense (the accused - terms learned from this club) for the same case.

Bnei Akiva Schools enrolls each year in the Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN) Competition, with one team participating from Ulpna, and one team from Or Chaim, both led by legendary Ms. Sterlin. The

OJEN Competition allows students to take skills learned in the club and prepare roles developed throughout weekly meetings, to compete in a mock case against other schools from all across Ontario at the Ontario Court of Justice. The competition results are determined by current judges at that courthouse, who act as the judges for the mock case. Students in the competition receive feedback from these judges, which can be very helpful even if one is not interested in pursuing law, as the skills gained through this experience are universal.

Earlier this semester Mock Trial teams from both Ulpna and Or Chaim took a trip downtown to the Ontario Court of Justice. We had the amazing opportunity to visit many different courtrooms, and to watch active cases in real time. The cases varied from

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Editors

Coby Berger
Baruch Gold
Raphie Sayegh
Shaindy Weitzner

My Experience Volunteering with Roman Baber



Credit: Bernard Thibodeau, HOC-CDC, 2025

Mia Aptowitz

Roman Baber is a former MPP of Ontario, and a current member of Parliament for York Centre (Ulpana and Or Chaim's riding). From February 2025, until the federal election in April 2025, I volunteered and went canvassing with him and his team, which was an incredibly eye opening experience. Most of my time volunteering was spent door-knocking (canvassing). I went door to door, meeting constituents, introducing them to Roman, handing out flyers, hearing which issues were important to them, and sometimes explaining how Roman would address their concerns. I saw firsthand what it took to run a campaign.

Right from the beginning, Roman was very kind and approachable. He took time to explain exactly what needed to be done, and how to do it, making sure that each volunteer knew that he would always back them up on whatever they needed. One moment that stuck with me was the first time I went door knocking with Roman, and we needed to get to the other side of a fence (of a public area). Instead of calling someone else to fix the problem, he hopped over the fence and unlocked it for the

volunteers to walk through. It was a small thing, but it made him feel like a regular person, instead of the boss of all the volunteers. He was willing to get involved and make things happen, alongside his team.

Volunteering wasn't always the easiest. There were many doors slammed in my face and people yelling at me to go away, which could have been discouraging. But seeing how well Roman handled situations with people who weren't his biggest fan, with patience, friendliness and respect showed me that it didn't matter what a few people thought, and that I should just keep going and doing what I enjoyed.

Along the way, I met many incredible people, including many young, like-minded conservatives, dedicated volunteers and other members of Roman's campaign. When Roman won his seat, I was so happy for him, and it felt good for my hard work to go towards something important. Even now, Roman and I are still in contact. Although he is busy being an MP, he is always happy to help out his volunteers, support them or guide them when they need it.

Overall, volunteering made me

"All Clubs Belong In YOC"

Michal Podcoritov

"All Clubs Belong in YOC..." Now that is something you will never hear me say. However, if you really take a moment to consider that statement, there is a lot of truth to be found.

At the beginning of the year, I kind of wanted to be a girlboss and I decided to join DECA. Little did I know this wouldn't work and was just a waste of time and brain cells that I could've used on deciding my outfit for Shabbaton. So, let's just start from the beginning: I walk into the club fair, and I see DECA. I want to join, and so I do. There was no indication that I had to take an exam and then present my ideas, so I didn't know I had to study. Generally, it sounded really easy to me, even when I found out about the exam. I can totally study something that was interpreted by Jeff on Quizlet with 167 flashcards and Samantha with 97 flashcards with completely different material. It felt like I had about one week to prep, so I "girl-mathed" the whole math part on the test; for "profit," just count everything the boss earned throughout the year. Please don't actually do that, or you will get no further than Mr. Rapp's office (where you take the test). Also, there was no proctor in the room, except for the security camera. If we were not such upstanding representatives of Ulpana it would have been very easy to cheat. But, we listened to the rules, and we didn't get anything but a "good job" from the leader of the group. And you could say, well, why didn't you just ask people who have done it before?

want to get even more involved in politics, and it showed me how meaningful political volunteering can be. Being part of a campaign, celebrating Roman's win, and seeing how much every interaction mattered to him, really solidified the idea that every single vote counts, and every voter matters to him. It gave me a

Unfortunately, and this happens with other clubs as well, the YOC boys dominate this club. I don't know them well enough to have their numbers (not that a UO girl should ever have the number of a YOC boy). Moreover, a lot of the study sessions were held at YOC during lunch, which I am fairly sure is illegal for me at that time of day. DECA was a miss from the beginning, and I should've just stuck to knitting or something more accessible.

But is my story the exception or the norm?

Around the halls of UO, it is agreed that a number of girls in grades 9 and 10 would be more likely to join these clubs but there is a major burden in the way: the daunting commute. After all, UO to YOC is about 2.1 km, which is about a 30 min walk. In a vacuum, this is fine. But when you get dismissed at 5:15 and have to make it for the start of a club at 5:30, that math doesn't really math.

That said, there are some brave individuals who brave the trek from UO to YOC for the prestigious Model UN club. Uniquely, Model UN requires you to think and speak on your feet. However, it is much harder to think on one's feet when you are still trying to catch your breath from the tumultuous journey from school to school. As a result, UO students reported that they were fatigued and stressed, which didn't help them in their performance, but rather weakened it.

But, hey, are you really going to forgo opportunities to brighten your future because of a half an hour walk? Probably not. But could we at least consider hosting these clubs at Ulpana at least once or twice a year?■

sense of connection to the political process, and an appreciation for just how much goes into running a campaign. Finally, it showed me that even small actions, like door-knocking, can make a real difference in politics.■

Weizmann Safe Competition Experience



From left to right: Lily Spiegel, Maya Onona, Sarah Ibghi, and Gabi Breitbart

Sarah Ibghi

This year, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the 2026 Weizmann Safe Competition alongside my teammates Gabi Brietbart, Maya Onona, and Lily Spiegel. Together, we designed and built a safe called Air Weizmann, inspired by the physics involved in air travel and airport systems.

The catalyst for our project came after traveling to Vancouver for the first stage of the competition. While preparing for the trip, we realized how many different principles of physics are involved in every aspect of air travel, from baggage systems to airplane movement to airport security. Wanting to combine creativity with scientific concepts, my team and I decided to design a safe based on the experience of traveling through an airport.

The objective of our safe was to release an airplane from a starting point and guide it safely to a marked landing spot without obstructing the runway. Throughout the project, we incorporated several physics principles. We used centripetal force to transfer the "baggage" from a cup,

created an electrical circuit with UV lights to symbolize clearing airport security, and applied magnetism to land the airplane precisely in the designated location.

This project would not have been possible without the guidance and support of our dedicated physics teacher, Mrs. Monica Chocron. Her encouragement, patience, and knowledge played a major role in our success and helped us strengthen both our understanding of physics and our confidence throughout the competition.

When we arrived in Vancouver for the regional competition, we competed alongside many talented teams, including several from Yeshivat Or Chaim. As the only girls' team representing Ulpanat Orot, we felt both honored and nervous. Despite the pressure, we were proud to represent our school and demonstrate the hard work we had invested in our project.

One of the most memorable parts of the experience was meeting Dan Gelbart, the first-ever winner of the Weizmann Safe Competition. Hearing about his journey and achievements inspired us greatly and motivated us to continue giving our

best throughout the competition.

During the regional competition, our team successfully cracked two out of five safes, while our own safe was cracked only twice, which was considered a strong achievement. Although we did not expect to win, we were thrilled when we were announced as the Western Canadian champions of 2026. As a result, we were selected to advance to the international competition in Israel the following month.

Unfortunately, due to the war in Israel, the in-person international competition was cancelled. After all the effort and anticipation, we were deeply disappointed. Later, the organizers announced that the competition would instead take place virtually over Zoom. At first, my team and I were unsure whether participating online would feel as meaningful, but we ultimately decided to give it our full effort and participate anyway.

The virtual competition turned out to be an incredible experience. We had the opportunity to meet and speak with teams from Israel, learn about their safes, and hear about the different physics principles they used in their designs. It was especially meaningful to connect with students from across the world and even practice our Hebrew while speaking with them.

During the international competition, our team successfully cracked every safe, while only one team was able to crack ours. In the end, all our hard work and determination paid off, and we were honored to win the international competition against many outstanding teams from around the world.

Participating in the Weizmann Safe Competition was truly an unforgettable experience. It taught us many valuable lessons about teamwork, perseverance, creativity, and resilience. Most importantly, it showed us that even when circumstances change unexpectedly, determination, collaboration, and passion can still lead to success.■

FROM PAGE 1

Mock Trial, Real Skills

Shaindy Weitzner and Rachel Vishnever



petty crimes to extreme charges, like manslaughter. This was an enlightening trip, allowing us to better understand how the legal system works, and it was especially beneficial for students who are interested in pursuing a career in Law.

Not only were we able to witness real trials, but students also had the opportunity to have a Q&A session with experienced judges and lawyers. This allowed us to further our knowledge of the Canadian legal system, and get perspectives on what it is like working for the Law.

The information and connections did not end there. For the Mock Trial teams at both Ulpana and Or Chaim, working lawyers, along with Ms. Sterlin (a former lawyer), assisted and guided both schools in their preparations for the Ontario Justice Education Network Competition.

Mock Trial powerfully builds upon both students' knowledge and vital skills. It is a great way to improve one's public speaking, debate, and analytical abilities. If you have not yet joined, it is never too late, as we could not recommend this club enough!■



You're Listening to Modern Music Wrong

Eyal Benjamin

One of the biggest criticisms of modern music is that it feels less unique, less experimental and overall worse than music from previous generations. Whether or not this is entirely true, there are clear reasons why so many people feel this way. Of course over time there has been a change in style of music, but the actual quality has not decreased. The rise of streaming and social media has fundamentally changed not only how music is consumed, but also how it is created and rewarded.

It's easy to dismiss this as the ramblings of someone who thinks they belong in the 70s, but there's actually some truth to it. The facts are simple: there is really, really good music from the past. Every year, an old song resurges in popularity, perhaps helped by the likes of a TV show or movie, like Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill". Some artists' songs, like Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean", return to the spotlight every year, and some remain popular even after all these years. I dare you to find me someone who doesn't know Britney Spears's 1999 timeless classic "...Hit Me Baby One More Time".

You may be asking: Is older music simply better? Yes and no. Before the internet, fledgling artists couldn't simply upload a video of themselves to the entire world. Nor did they quite have the ability to write, record and produce a song on their own. Rather, this required the backing of a major label. Now, anyone can create songs in their bedroom. This is how Billie Eilish, one of the most successful artists of our generation, got discovered. The increased accessibility of music means artists are no longer handpicked because they are better, more skilled, or more talented. Yet, this lack of a filter means that the music scene has become over-saturated with second-rate songs and singers.

Another reason, easily overlooked, is the survivorship bias. Obviously,

all older music doesn't exceed the quality of that of the current generation. That's where the survivorship bias comes into play. Time acts like a sieve, filtering out the amazing, timeless songs from an ocean of mediocre ones that sound dated within a few years (or were never good to begin with). This is why everyone knows The Goo Goo Dolls' song "Iris" but David Bowie's "The Laughing Gnome" is less popular to the masses, even though Bowie is a more well-known artist than the Goo Goo Dolls. Even songs that may have been massive hits get filtered out by time; only the best remain.

Before getting into the deeper effects that the modern era has had on music, it's important to understand just how different the industry is from the one that existed before it. For decades, music was built around

with a specific monetization scheme in mind. Spotify pays per stream, but the interesting part is that they count a stream as 30 seconds of play time. If I were a label executive and I wanted to maximize profit, the way I would go about it is simple: shorten the songs. This pattern can be seen across today's music landscape, especially in many rising pop acts. For example, KATSEYE's (who were recently nominated for Best New Artist at the Grammys) song "PINKY UP" runs for just over two minutes; reflecting how modern releases are often optimized for quick, repeatable listening. At the same time, there is growing attention toward artists who resist this trend. For instance, Noah Kahan's new album, "The Great Divide", has been widely praised for not only its exemplary quality of songs but also for the average song being

This shift also changes what makes a song "successful." Social media obviously plays a huge role in our era, and a track's quality is often judged by its ability to go viral. That means it needs an immediate hook, a memorable moment, or, most importantly, a trend attached to it to make it go viral. Songs that take longer to develop, or rely on gradual builds and instrumental or lyrics, are at a disadvantage because they are way less likely to go viral. The result of this is a tendency toward safer, catchier songs; in other words creativity is discouraged. There's also a visibility issue for smaller or rising artists. To get to a level in your career to be able to confidently release the music you want to, you have to have a solid foundation that allows you not to have a huge hit and not fade to obscurity. For example, Conan Gray is often praised for strong songwriting and emotional depth, but his work hasn't broken through the mainstream because his music isn't designed to go viral. The perceived loss of artistic depth in music comes less from the artists themselves but rather because of an environment built on producing a viral track as opposed to experimentation.

In the end, modern music is not necessarily worse than music from the past, it's just a different world. The shift in culture and method of consuming is ultimately what caused the change. The internet has made music more accessible, allowing countless aspiring artists to share their work without the need for the backing of major labels. This caused an oversaturated market filled with mediocre songs but it also opened the door for talented musicians. The beginning of the streaming era and the death of the physical song is the monetary reason for the change and shortening of music. The reason older music often seems better is partly that time preserves only the most memorable songs, while today's music is still being filtered. Great music still exists in every era, but the way it is created, promoted, and consumed has fundamentally changed. ■

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"The perceived loss of artistic depth in music comes less from the artists themselves but rather because of an environment built on producing a viral track as opposed to experimentation."

physical sales. Artists made albums, people bought records or CDs, and labels invested heavily in musicians they believed could succeed long-term. Today, music is consumed almost entirely through streaming platforms where profit is generated per stream rather than per album or song sold (though physical sales still play a big role in certain markets). This shift may sound minor, but it fundamentally changed what kind of music gets rewarded and, therefore, made.

One of the clearest ways that music has changed in the modern era is in song length. In 2023, the average length of a hit song was under three minutes. Compared to 1990, when it was over four minutes. Since Spotify (or similar apps) is the main way people digest songs, music is made

five minutes long. Ultimately, the shortening of songs is not random. It is the result of a system that rewards shorter, catchier songs: the faster a song captures you, the more valuable it becomes. The structure of music has changed because the economy behind it has changed.

Something I'm sure everyone has heard people say (and probably feel themselves) is that songs sound the same. The shift away from albums and towards individual songs is a major factor in this. An album-centred culture allows for longer, cohesive projects that allow room for experimentation, transitions, and slower or more unusual tracks. Nowadays, people consume albums less and rather discover tracks through playlists; in other words, the playlist has subplanted the album.

For Good?

Sari Schwartz

As Hollywood gets less and less creative, and victim-mentality becomes more prevalent, movies have taken a new turn. Movies like *Cruella*, *Maleficent*, and *Wicked* all exhibit the same theme: Bad guys can't be bad guys if they are sad. These kinds of movies introduce you to a bad guy who is obviously bad, then shows you that they are not actually bad, because they were sad children. This narrative is not only incorrect, it is dangerous. By saying that if a villain had a tragic backstory they are "not bad," movies teach us that morality is relative, that revenge is a valid excuse to hurt someone, and that understanding bad people is an acceptable replacement for punishment.

If a person's morality depends on the mentality they had when they committed the sin, there would be no such thing as a sin; everything would be moral. In the live action movie *Maleficent*, she does not curse the baby Aurora because she is inherently evil. No, it is because Aurora's dad was a bad boyfriend who used Maleficent for her wings. I am not saying I do not feel bad for her. No one wants a toxic boyfriend who is using you for your wings. But that does not make baby-cursing okay! Granted, she does have a redemption arc at the end of the movie. But the movie still teaches that baby-cursing is okay if the baby's dad is a jerk. The movie teaches that it is okay to do bad things if you have a good reason, and that the outrage equals righteousness. That bad things are justifiable. That maybe if she had no reason to curse the baby it is bad, but since *Maleficent* was only cursing Aurora because she was hurt in her youth, it is fine. And people are buying it! A 2023 Barna Group Poll shows that 60% of Gen Zs believe that "what is morally right or wrong depends on what an individual believes." The content we intake leaves impressions on us, and content like this does not leave the best impression.

In the live action movie *Cruella*, we learn that Cruella de Vil originated as a girl named Estelle who worked for

a Baroness who (spoiler alert) killed her adoptive mom. Upon discovering this, Estelle turns to her alter ego named Cruella and plots to absolutely, utterly, completely and totally destroy the Baroness's life. One slight problem, that is not how we deal with people who do bad things. In the democratic world, we have this magical thing called a justice system. It means that people who commit crimes are allowed to present their case to try to prove they did not do

"movies teach us that morality is relative, that revenge is a valid excuse to hurt someone, and that understanding bad people is an acceptable replacement for punishment."

the crime, but if the Judge or jury rules them to be guilty they get punished. In a legal, safe, moral way. Sure it is flawed, but it is better than individuals believing their vision of justice is the only good one. Movies romanticizing revenge teaches that revenge is not only acceptable but encouraged. That as long as someone did something bad, we can do bad things back to them. If everyone abided by this rule, democracy and morality would fall apart into a world of chaos and violence.

In the Broadway play and movie remake *Wicked*, we watch as a young green girl turns into a young green sorceress despised by the world for no reason. Oh, except that in the original *Wizard of Oz*, she terrorized munchkins and kidnapped an innocent girl for her shoes. It is possible, even likely, that the Wicked Witch of the West has some kind of traumatic backstory. After all, no one wakes up on a random Monday

morning deciding to be evil (unless they are a psychopath). But looking through a criminal's childhood, giving them therapy, even helping them see the error of their ways, while praiseworthy, does little to actually prevent crime. Punishment has five goals: deterrence, incapacitation, rehabilitation, retribution and restitution. While understanding may rehabilitate a person to be fit for society, it does not deter other criminals, it does not incapacitate repeated offenders, it does not provide the victim(s) with retribution (in a structured, moral way, not an individual, emotional way), and it does not restore what was taken or hurt. Movies like *Wicked* provide the false and overly idealistic narrative that understanding individual criminals will stop crime as a whole. But understanding every criminal does not undo every criminal's crime.

While many movies have pretty ideas about "no villains, only misunderstood victims," misunderstood victims can still cause a whole lot of suffering. Causing others to suffer is not a trauma response society can accept. Movies promoting absolute acceptance of such responses will only lead to less moral accountability, acts of individual revenge and replacing punishment with understanding. Sympathy is admirable, but misplaced kindness is dangerous, and promotion of misplaced kindness can only lead to destruction. ■

Films Referenced

Maleficent

Directed by Robert Stromberg
Walt Disney Pictures | 2014 | 97 min | Disney+

Cruella

Directed by Craig Gillespie
Walt Disney Pictures | 2021 | 134 min | Disney+

Wicked

Directed by Jon M. Chu
Universal Pictures | 2024 | 160 min | Prime Video

Wicked: For Good

Directed by Jon M. Chu
Universal Pictures | 2025 | 137 min | Peacock

The Wizard of Oz

Directed by Victor Fleming
MGM | 1939 | 102 min | Crave

Wicked (Broadway)

Music & Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz
Book by Winnie Holzman
[2003] 2 hr 45 min

Clouded Judgement: The Issues of Teen Vaping

Eli Scharf

Did you know that statistically, people in YOC have vaped before? Now, I'm not calling anyone out, but according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 25% of teens have vaped before or are addicted to vaping. Look around your community, school, or camp; a quarter is a lot. This is very real, close, and terrifying.

Teen vaping is not just a short-lived trend but a trend creating short lives. It has become so widespread that the reality of it is far worse than people realize. It has become normalized. It harms the body and mind and needs to be taken much more seriously.

According to Triton Sensors, "bathrooms have become a key hotspot for students to smoke within schools." In my own experience, I often see strong smells or clouds of smoke lingering in the air of public bathrooms. It isn't hidden or secret; it's common and familiar. That moment of realization of how truly common it is made me realize how normalized it has become.

The popularity of teen vaping isn't a coincidence, rather, it became like this because of how companies have designed and marketed vapes with methodical intentions. They look harmless, feel harmless, and deceive teens into thinking they are harmless. They taste like fruit, like candy, and are packed with bright colors and catchy phrases. These appeal to kids and teenagers, not adults for whom they are intended. Have you ever seen a 75-year-old man puffing on some Lemon Lime? That's what I thought.

Now, what exactly is so wrong with vaping? I'm sure you have heard it's harmful, but why? For a consistent vape user, one vape cartridge lasts around 1-1.5 weeks, with each one

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Why Education is Important in Judaism

Mia Aptowitzer

Education has always been one of the most important values in Judaism. For thousands of years, Jewish communities around the world have placed a very strong emphasis on learning, questioning and studying. To Jews, education isn't just encouraged or seen as a 'nice thing to have', but it is considered essential to having a meaningful life. Knowledge is viewed as part of our purpose in life. There are many reasons why education is such a central Jewish value, including the importance of learning Torah, the way that Jews have to prove themselves in society, and the need to pass things on to the next generation.

First, learning Torah is considered a central mitzvah. Studying Chumash, Gemara and Halacha is not just something that big Rabbis or scholars are supposed to do, but it is something that every Jew is expected to do; not just once, or only when they are young, but always, throughout life. Judaism places an importance on wisdom and intellect, and learning is seen as never ending. Have you ever heard a Jew saying that they have learned all of something and have nothing more to learn from it? No. That is because Judaism recognizes that we always have something more to learn. In Judaism, learning doesn't mean reading something once and understanding it; it means questioning, having a discussion, a debate, listening to other opinions, or pushing back, until you understand it. Pushing back on what we learn until we understand it leads to us having a deeper understanding of our religion, our sources, and the world. Because of this, learning is seen as an ongoing staple of Jewish life.

Second, education plays a big role in ensuring the survival of the Jewish people by passing the values, knowledge, tradition and laws on to the next generation. Jewish parents have a responsibility to teach their children about Judaism, traditions and the world, so that these ideas contin-

ue in the future, and are passed down to their children. This comes directly from a Mitzvah in the Torah. In the Shema it says, "Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up," meaning: teach your children always. By educating younger generations, Jewish communities ensure that our beliefs, practices and cultural identity stay intact. The tradition of teaching the younger generations has helped us preserve our religion and our heritage, each time we have been persecuted.

Finally, education is important for Jews because we are judged harshly and subjected to antisemitism. Therefore we need to work that much harder to prove ourselves, and prove that we are just as good and as helpful as anyone else. People say that the Jews don't contribute to society, we only take. So we need to do that much more just to be seen. Or people say that Jews are greedy and constantly after other people's money, even though more money goes to Israel than goes to any other country in the world, showing that we are actively giving away our money to help others. We have to do that much more to disprove stereotypes. Throughout history, Jews have been constantly judged based on biases or have been discriminated against, so education has become a way for us to show our ability, intellect and contributions to the world. Because of this, Jewish communities placed a strong emphasis on academics and wisdom. Education became not just a tool for growth or knowledge, but for overcoming stereotypes, discrimination, and gaining respect from others. This resulted in education being deeply rooted in our religion, so that future generations will be able to prove themselves to the world, like every other generation has had to do.

In conclusion, education is so important in Judaism because learning Torah is a key mitzvah, because it helps the continuity of the Jewish religion, and because historically, we have had to prove ourselves in society more than certain other groups. By valuing learning, Jews are able to not only grow spiritually, but also are

able to gain knowledge that helps us succeed and contribute to the world, while keeping our traditions intact. Therefore, education is a responsibility of each individual, as well as the community as a whole, to ensure that we continue to learn, grow and reap the benefits of being an educated people.■

Five Pillars of the World

Chana Liya Yagudaev

Imagine the world not as a chessboard of rival nations, but as a towering skyscraper held aloft by five indispensable pillars. It hinges on irreplaceable functions that sustain the interconnected global economy, security, and architecture. The Five Pillar Model includes the United States, China, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. Each nation dominates a critical domain, creating a web of interdependence rather than outright rivalry. This model explains why the system endures the threat of crisis: disrupting one pillar risks collapse for all. These pillars interlock through mutual dependencies, including the petrodollar system, where oil trades predominantly in U.S. dollars. This was established in the 1970s after the oil crisis, and it compels global oil buyers to acquire dollars, which exporters like Saudi Arabia recycle into U.S. Treasuries, reinforcing dollar dominance and funding American downfalls. Through dealing with de-dollarization efforts by the BRICS nations and Saudi openness to the yuan or euros, the petrodollar remains a backbone of tying energy (Saudi Arabia), finance (Japan and the U.S.), and manufacturing (China).

Pillar One: United States, Military, and Dollar dominance. The U.S. is not that strong, but should be thought of as the indispensable muscle. With a defense budget larger than that of any other country, unmatched naval reach, and a nuclear triad, meaning the U.S. gives three different nuclear options, which makes its defense system stronger and more flexible, America still has enormous power.

Recent events show that even U.S. strength has limits and faces real challenges in several regions at once. But is this a true sledgehammer? The dollar's status as the world's reserve currency is amplified by the petrodollar system (See section on Saudi Arabia). There is one thing we are most certain of: The U.S. of 2026 is not the U.S. of 1995. It is a force in transition. Under President Trump's reelection pivot, the U.S. sheds its "world cop" cape for "offshore balancing," propping up allies while laser-focusing on China. National Security Strategies from both parties agree: the AI-semiconductor arms race decides the century. Billions flow into the CHIPS Act export bans of China's access to high-tech parts, forcing its tech plans to slow down. The US is teaming up more closely with Israel for top cyber defenses. For example, the U.S. and Israel work closely on cyber defense, missile defense, and new military technology, making Israel one of America's most important security partners. But money troubles hurt. Interest payments on the \$35 trillion US debt are now as big as the entire defense budget, so Japan's purchases of US bonds are a key way to keep borrowing cheaply.

Pillar Two: China, Manufacturing Juggernaut. No country in human history has industrialized as quickly, swiftly, and massively as China has. Picture a colossal engine humming at the heart of global civilization, that is China in 2026. Today, China is not merely a large economy; it is the backbone of the world's manufacturing supply chain. China not only produces goods and services, but it also powers the planet. Over 30% of all manufactured products, from the smartphone in your pocket to the batteries charging your electric car, the pills in your medicine cabinet, to the solar panels lighting homes worldwide, bear the invisible stamp of Chinese factories. Your daily life, no matter where you live, runs on China's output. Disrupt it, and shelves empty, prices soar, and econ

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The Importance of By-Election’s

Mia Aptowitz

Recently, several members of the Conservative Party of Canada have ‘crossed the floor,’ to join the Liberal Party, strengthening the party, and almost giving it a majority (as of March 12th, 2026). These MPs have switched parties without their constituents (voters in their riding/ area) having any say. Floor-crossing happens when an elected Member of Parliament leaves the party that they were elected under and joins another party; this can significantly shift the balance of power in the House of Commons. Voters often elect an MP not only based on their character, but also based on their party affiliation. When an MP switches parties after being elected with a certain party, the representation that the community receives no longer reflects their views and ideologies. Think of it like lending someone a white shirt and expecting to get the same shirt back. If they returned it dyed blue, it would no longer be the same shirt you bought or agreed to lend them.

One way that we can protect voter representation is to require a by-election whenever an MP crosses the floor. A ‘by-election’ is when there is an election only for one specific riding, instead of for the whole country. So that riding has another election for their MP, but not the rest of the country. A by-election would ensure that the constituents can still have the representation they choose, when an MP crosses the floor. For example if there is a riding with an NDP MP who crosses the floor to the Liberal, the riding would have an election for the voters to decide if they still want their MP, who is now a Liberal, or if they want a new NDP MP.

An important note is that this is not a biased argument. The same rule should apply if an MP is crossing to the Liberals, Conservatives, or any other party. The goal of by-elections is to ensure that the constituents are

truly being represented by the party that they elected. Requiring a by-election would also reinforce the idea that MPs serve the people who elected them, and a political shift should be agreed upon by the voters themselves. For all of these reasons, by-elections should be mandatory when an MP crosses the floor.■

FROM PAGE 5

Clouded Judgement: The Issues of Teen Vaping

containing as much nicotine as seven packs of cigarettes. The part that the user never realizes is that nicotine and smoke don't just pass through your system and go away. Studies show that it destroys your developing brain, destroys your heart, destroys your lungs, and makes every day harder, as cravings distract you at every moment. And over time, you stop using the vape, and the vape starts using you.

Teens joke about vaping, talk about the new flavours, and the cool tricks they do with the smoke. But no one jokes about the coughing, the inability to exercise, or the tightness in their chest. And worst of all, when the harm catches up to you and you push through the withdrawals of quitting, it will be too late; the effects are already there, and they aren't leaving.

Teen vaping has started through companies marketing towards teens, has been normalized through significant use, and has proved to be very harmful to the bodies, developing brains, and lives of teens. I think the perfect world for teens is not one where drugs are normalized, not one where the social norm demands self-harm, but one where teens embrace their personal health and positive actions.■

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You’re Listening to Modern Music Wrong

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Conan Gray
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The BASH

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Writers:

Mia Aptowitz
Eyal Benjamin
Coby Berger (Editor)
Gabi Brietbart
Baruch Gold
Avinoam Friedman
Sarah Ibghi
Jeremy Kanner
Adi Nussbaum
Sheli Palvanov
Michal Podcoritov
Eli Scharf
Raphi Sayegh
Joseph Samson
Sari Schwartz
Ester Vishnever
Misha Vishnever
Rochelle Vishnever
Shaindy Weitzner
Chana Liya Yagudaev
Binyamin Zahavi

Editors:

Coby Berger
Baruch Gold
Raphie Sayegh
Eli Scharf
Shaindy Weitzner

Teacher Supervisor:

Dr. Saltsman

FROM PAGE 4

Five Pillars of the World

omies crumble to a halt. Four decades of state-driven reform turned China's coast into megafactories; Shenzhen alone now outproduces entire continents in electronics. Its industrial output rivals the U.S, EU, and Japan combined, forming the unbreakable spine of global supply chains. This is China's pillar, the relentless engine no one can unplug without the world grinding to a halt.

Pillar Three: Israel, The Sharp Brain of Global Innovation and Defense. Forget the size, Israel's strength lies in its mind and its military power, which together shape its individuality. Israel is a small country in terms of land area, about the size of New Jersey, with just 10 million people, but punches far above its weight through a battle-hardened ecosystem of tech, cyber, and intelligence that no one else matches. It is the world's research and development powerhouse per GDP, where military service feeds straight into startups, spawning AI drones, unbreakable firewalls, and signals intel shared in over 100 countries. Israel's "combat lab" proved its edge: since 2023, targeted operations powered by AI have neutralized Iran's proxies, including Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and bases in Syria. These strikes reshape the Middle East, promoting China and Russia to reassess their strategies because both countries depend on the region for energy, influence, and strategic partnerships. Further, Israel's tech scene is exploding with startups earning \$9.5 billion in funding in early 2025, including Google's massive \$32 billion buyout of Wiz for super intelligent cybersecurity. The U.S relies heavily on this expertise, enacting laws to establish innovation units in Israel for real-world testing of military technologies. In cybersecurity and AI-driven conflicts, Israel's precision outperforms conventional forces. It is a powerhouse trading brains for bridges, proving smarts can spark peace.

Pillar Four: Saudi Arabia, The Energy Valve That Powers the Planet. Saudi Arabia is well known for its oil supply, but that is not the only thing they sell. Every economy on Earth runs on this energy. As OPEC+'s swing producer with unmatched spare capacity, Riyadh can flood markets to crash prices at \$60 a barrel or squeeze supply to spike them past \$120, rolling shocks through inflation, shipping costs, and global growth. No U.S. energy expansion matches this level of control. At the heart? The petrodollar system: since 1974, a U.S.-Saudi deal made oil trade only in dollars, nations must stockpile USD and pour billions into U.S debt, fueling America's power while locking in dollar supremacy. Meanwhile, under MBS, Saudi Arabia is trying to prepare for a post-oil future through Vision 2030, investing heavily in AI, sports, and futuristic projects like NEOM. At the same time, Riyadh is carefully balancing relationships, relying on U.S protection, selling oil to China, and even moving forward toward an alliance with Iran. IMEC, a mega trade route from India through Saudi Arabia and Israel to Europe, makes it Eurasia's trade boss, rivaling China's BRI. Saudi Arabia controls the valve! By controlling how much oil it sends to the market, Saudi Arabia can influence global prices. When it increases supply, prices can fall, and economies can grow more easily. When it cuts supply, prices rise, and countries around the world feel the impact through higher fuel and shipping costs.

Pillar Five: Japan, The Silent Financier Holding it all Together. Japan wields quiet power through money, not missiles or any violent weaponry. Japan is the least visible and the most underestimated. It does not project military force beyond its borders. It does not manufacture the world's consumer goods. It does not sit at the center of a diplomatic drama. It is a stable, aging, quiet democracy,

and that is exactly why its financial role is so easy to overlook until the moment it moves, at which point the entire global financial system shakes. Yet, often Japan is not thought of as dangerous or taken seriously. As the globe's top creditor with \$3.7 trillion in net foreign assets, it owns over \$1.2 trillion in U.S Treasury (the largest foreign stash), recycling trade profits to fund America's endless borrowing at low rates. The yen carry trade amplified this: cheap yen loads fueled global investments for decades until 2025 hikes unwound it, sparking U.S yield spikes and \$1.7 trillion market wipeouts overnight. Japan is in debt at 235% of GDP, and an aging population pulling savings home, Japan hits by using its bonds as "trade leverage." Stable and restrained, Japan keeps the dollar afloat. When it shifts funds, it does not need an army. These pillars are not just powers; they are the fragile gears of our global chessboard, moving together or pushing us off the board.

These five nations, the U.S muscle, China's factories, Israel's brains, Saudi Oil, and Japan's cash, do not just compete; they lean on each other like pillars holding up a roof. The U.S needs cheap Chinese goods and Saudi fuel. China needs Japan's dough and Saudi energy. Everyone requires America's protection and Israel's technology. Pull one away, and the whole place shakes like a Jenga tower. It is a risky balance, but it keeps the world spinning in 2026. Change is coming, debts rise, tech races heat, oil shifts, but for now, these pillars rule. Watch them closely, our future rides on how they hold.

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