

# THE WIRE

WEST POTOMAC HIGH SCHOOL

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This issue's cover photo is courtesy of photographer Larry Towell and Magnum Photos. The photo, taken by Towell in 2012, is of eight-year-old Christina Boils on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Oglala, South Dakota. We are very thankful for Mr. Towell's permission to use this photo, an image we feel perfectly exemplifies the "Mouse in the Soup" article it accompanies.

## *Letter from the Editor: Margaret O'Meara*

Dear Wolverine Community,

Welcome to *The Wire's* first issue in the "news-magazine" format. To keep up with the way readers want to have experience print content, we have decided to transform the traditional "broadsheet" newspaper we have published in the past over to this new format, with more in-depth feature articles and integrated graphic design. We have contemplated this change for quite a while, and we've decided 2015 is the year for it.

We are really proud of what we have done here, and we hope you will feel the same.

Margaret O'Meara  
Editor-in-Chief

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# *Mouse in the Soup: Life on the Reservation*

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**Chantel Nestell**  
*Reporter*

Imagine yourself in a trailer with no heat while it's below freezing outside. You barely have enough food to feed yourself and your family, and nearly every household has about three to four kids. Food, called "commodities," comes from the government, which include packets of instant eggs, milk in cans, and many other packaged and processed foods that very few would find appealing to eat.

That was daily life for me when I lived on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

Living on the reservation is complicated and hard. Many people struggle with alcohol and drugs. On the border of South Dakota and Nebraska lies a little town called White Clay. The phrase "Alcohol Is The Enemy" is found on posters everywhere, while people who have lost hope stagger around the streets and pass out.

Poverty is one of the main struggles on the reservation. With jobs being scarce and kids dropping out of school, there are barely any jobs and hardly any education is happening. This poverty affects the children and the elderly far more than the eye can see. With no jobs there is no

money, with no money there is no electricity, and with no electricity there is no heat.

Drugs are commonly used throughout the reservation, and everybody knows somebody who is a drug addict. Why do so many people there turn to drugs? It's simple: they just give up, stop caring, get depressed, and begin to believe that drugs will solve their problem. "People think that drugs are the only way to be happy," says 16-year-old Robert Looks Twice, who lives on a nearby reservation, "but it's the exact opposite."

Alcohol is usually the first resort because of its cheapness in White Clay. Native Americans are at a higher risk than other minority populations for heavy drinking, binge drinking, and alcohol dependence — this risk is even greater among Native American women. A study carried out from 2002 to 2005 reported that 107% of all Native American age groups suffered from alcohol use disorder, compared to an average of 7.6% across all other ethnic groups reporting the same.

The most commonly used drug is marijuana because of its ready availability. Native Americans are more likely than any other ethnic group to engage in illicit drug abuse, particularly in the age range of 12 to 25 year olds.

Physical and emotional abuse are also very common on the reservation. 1/10 of Native Americans (12 or older) are victims of violent crime annually. The rate of aggravated assault among Native Americans is roughly twice that of the country as a whole.

Let's take a look at another place, a world that could not be any farther away from the reservation, both physically and culturally: West Potomac High School in Alexandria, VA. A that school holds over 2,500 students, with great academics, sports, and extracurricular activities. Walking through its halls, you immediately notice the many different minorities in the school: Hispanics, African-Americans, Ghanaians, Russians, and so many more.

What you don't see, interestingly enough, are Native Americans at WestPo. Native Americans account for less than 2% of the total U.S. population, which is not really that small a number, but are rarely seen off the reservation. I can tell you, as one of maybe five native people here, 2% of WestPo is not Native American.

Why is that? They just can't seem to escape the poverty-alcohol-crime-prison cycle of the reservation. Unlike West Potomac, education is not taken very seriously on the reservation.

Teachers get paid an extremely low salary, and tend to be very demoralized and disorganized. Most parents don't make their children go to school that often, so the kids get behind on their school work and start to fail. Most students usually drop out at a very young age: the dropout rate on Pine Ridge is over 70%.

Houses on the reservation mostly include poorly built trailers in isolated areas or bunched together in one place. The Pine Ridge Reservation does not have any banks, discount stores or movie theaters. There are no public libraries

on the reservation except at the Oglala Lakota College located in Pine Ridge. Since there are very few shops on the reservation, the jobs are tough to get. Many families struggle to pay the rent of their houses.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death on the reservation. The suicide rate on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is more than twice the national rate and the teen suicide rate is four times the national rate. Many people on the reservation struggle with depression because of many reasons. Some of the problems may include drug abuse, alcohol

abuse, assault, violence in the household, or even abandonment by family members.

I was born on the Pine Ridge Reservation and lived there until I was nine years old. Like most of the natives I described above, I lived in a poorly built trailer with



A typical home on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

seven other people. We barely had any food, and when we did, it would go fast.

It was hard being a child on the rez. No one made me go to school or do my homework. No one really cared about my education or my future, except my grandfather and one of my closest aunts who runs a coffee shop across the street where I lived. Still, I looked forward to school for only one reason: they had food. My family would let me stay out late when I was young, not really paying attention to whether I was home or not.

I was exposed to alcohol and

drugs at a very young age, and the adults around me didn't seem to care too much about it. Drunk people and second-hand smoke was a norm for me everyday. My family, like many others, was full of violent relationships, and was I taught to stand up for myself

when someone picked on me. I got into a lot of fights with the other kids, usually as a result of seeing violence between our loved ones. There were rivalries and feuds between families that have lasted decades and are still going on today.

Packs of dogs constantly roam around the rez;

sometimes you'd see them get hit by a car and you couldn't do anything but watch them die. Back in October, a pack of them attacked and killed an eight-year-old girl. Drive-by shootings and other gang violence were (and still are) an every day part of life. For a little girl, the rez could be a pretty scary place.

Or a really funny place, depending on your sense of humor. I remember one time I was sitting at the kitchen table, looking at the bowls of bean soup we were about to eat. All of a sudden, a mouse

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# THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC OF SPRINGBANK



## Duncan Hoag *Reporter*

Physically and psychologically separate from the rest of the school, the Springbank Arts Building has long stood as an important part of West Potomac High School's collective student consciousness.

Unlike most places on campus, Springbank is dedicated to the arts and all forms of creativity in general. This mentality of creativity becomes apparent when viewing the painted murals adorning the walls, or the colorful designs above classroom doors indicating which arts related subject is taught there.

Whether students are taking photography, studio art, computer graphics, music, theatre, or any other classes taught there, it is the creative spirit of the students and teachers that help

make Springbank what it is today: a popular Arts Center that lives up to its literal name, with a culture all its own.

One reason for Springbank's appeal can be traced to its diverse selection of courses, which cover a large range of subjects within the arts that puts it in an altogether different category from the Quander and the Gunston buildings.

"[Over here], students don't have the same academic pressures they face in Math, English, or anything else," said studio art teacher Mr. Adam Sanchez. "They have an environment where they can think freely and create. We can focus solely on art."

"While they don't face the same kinds of pressure," computer graphics teacher Amy Stoll added, "core class knowledge are still a major part of what we do here. The arts amplify the mean-

ing and put into direct application the core subjects such as Math, Science, English, History, etc. Students don't even realize they are using math and engineering skills when they are designing a sculpture, composing a photograph or painting, or doing a technical drawing."

Elaborating further on Springbank culture, Sanchez also reiterated the closeness of the building and its various artistic departments.

"Let's say a kid is taking a band class, or a kid is taking an orchestra class. If we have to do something with them, they're easily accessible," said Sanchez.

Band student Zachary Carter said, "It gives students the opportunity to be more creative, because it gives them the chance to do things like orchestra, band, theater, and art." Carter also noted "there are more classes that

have a larger focus on having fun.”

Self-expression is another pillar of Springbank, a characteristic that allows students to show who they are in whatever way they want to show it.

“It’s kind of a place where people can relax and express who they are,” Guitar II student Daniel Diaz said about the atmosphere of Springbank.

Although Springbank has existed for a long time, a relatively new addition has arrived in the form of the Annual Arts Extravaganza. The first one took place last February, and it was generally considered a smashing suc-

cess. With the second one scheduled for February 2015, the Arts Extravaganza looks like it’s here to stay.

“I think it’s awesome,” said Sanchez. “I think that in the same way that the football team has football games and the basketball team has basketball games, I think that it [the Arts Extravaganza] solidifies the idea that art is extremely important here at this school.”

However, Springbank is not just separated from the school in a psychological sense. Unlike the Quander and Gunston buildings, which have a connector physically binding them together, Spring-

bank is completely separate from the other buildings on campus.

Sanchez stated the importance of this separation, saying that “One of the benefits that we have is that it [Springbank] is completely separate from the other buildings,” and that this separation allows people to “fully engage in the various types of art forms.”

Sanchez also noted that “ever since they named it the Springbank Arts building, it sort of took on a persona, or a responsibility even, that it would be the main focal point of the fine arts here at West Potomac High School.”

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# Despite Increase of Women Gamers, Misogyny Still Reigns



Anita Sarkeesian, creator of website Feminist Frequency, critiques the culture of video gaming and how women are portrayed and treated in them.

**Jensen Wainwright**

*News Editor*

In a previously male dominated culture, women are slowly making waves in the video game world. More girls are playing console video games than ever, and the percentage has jumped from 23% to 28% within the last year alone, a significant 5% jump. In general, female gamers has inched from 46% to 48% since 2010. The ways women have entered the industry aren't only in players, but in the critique of the culture itself of video games, and how women are being portrayed in them.

Anita Sarkeesian is the leader of this very discussion, running the website titled Feminist Frequency. On this website, she makes videos discussing women in video games, and how mostly, they are sexualized background characters, and how gender stereotypes are continuously reinforced. Sarkeesian also brings up how women are being harassed in video game forums and servers, say-

ing they are yet another unsafe space for women.

This harassment has stemmed majorly from GamerGate, a movement claimed to be centered around the ethics in "video game journalism", but has really transformed into violent attacks against women in the industry. Starting with the accusations by Zoe Quinn's ex boyfriend that she had been "sleeping around" to gain industry connections and positive reviews of her game, "Depression Quest." It then quickly accelerated into the attack of women. The attacks included Sarkeesian, and female game developers Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu. Not only receiving verbal threats, some women's personal information was leaked, causing them to flee their homes, and fear for their lives.

Not only women have been critical of GamerGate, some men have stepped forward too. In one instance, Felicia Day, Wil Wheaton, and Chris Kluge all made posts critical of GamerGate. The catch here is that Felicia Day was the only one targeted for harassment after her very extensive blog post

was published. Days address was posted in the comments section of the post. This further asserts that GamerGate is majorly against women, and their place in the quickly evolving video game world.

The way women are portrayed in video games is only reinforcing sexual and societal stereotypes. Men, are portrayed as big, strong, and dominate are shown in a good light, and the argument that this is negative towards men is invalid. I do not remember a time where being shown as the dominant party was a bad thing. But being shown as the helpless, weak, and oversexualized party, now I can remember a time where that was a bad thing. That time is now, women who are only shown as prostitutes and “bitches” in games such as Grand Theft Auto, are only showing the number of very small minded men in video game culture what to expect from women, and that is sex. Men are taught in video games that

“The way women are portrayed in video games is only reinforcing sexual and societal stereotypes.”

girls are a reward. Beat the level? You get the girl!

While some people may argue that women aren't shown in demeaning ways, or that it does not affect women, since we don't play video games. The latter is simply, and statistically false, if the time was taken to actually look at statistics of girl gamers, this would be well known and accepted. To most men, women aren't shown in demeaning ways, because they don't know what demeaning to women is, and they don't know the impression it is making onto our society of women. This leads to a lack of self esteem, especially from the girls who do not know how ridiculous this culture truly is.

This is not to say if you play video games you are an evil person; what it does mean is that you should, be aware of this culture, and the oppressive role it plays on women's daily lives.

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# Taking Higher Risks

Changing minds, changing times: A look into the drug culture of West Potomac as seen through the experiences of one student

**Taylor Haas**  
*Reporter*

Within 15 minutes, she started to feel it. The euphoria and happiness intermixed with periods of an intense energy high, but too quickly; it normally took closer to an hour to feel something. Her jaw was clenched and she couldn't control the painful grinding of her teeth, sucking on lollipop after lollipop to make it less noticeable. Her friends began to notice her eyes rolling back into her head when she would talk and when the crash finally came, it came hard. She felt depressed, irritated with anything people said to her. Hours after the concert had ended she sat up unable to sleep, ears still ringing and lights and patterns from the show flashing whenever she closed her eyes. Both during and after everything had been heightened, almost to the point that it was no longer enjoyable. From the beginning she knew that something was off.

This November, students throughout Fairfax County took part in the 2014 Youth Survey, a "comprehensive, anonymous, and voluntary survey that examines behaviors, experiences, and other factors that influence the health and well-being of the county's youth." This 210 question survey is administered each year to Fairfax County students, and several weeks ago the results of the 2013 survey were released to the public.

35,278 8th, 10th, and 12th graders partook in the 2013 survey, with a total of 32,439 being deemed usable to analyze the habits of Fairfax County students regarding drug and alcohol usage, se-



xual activity, nutrition and mental health. The general survey for Fairfax County found that alcohol and marijuana were the most frequently used substances, with 19.3% of students (36.2% of seniors) having drunk alcohol in the past 30 days, and 21.0% (38.2% of seniors) having smoked marijuana at least once in their lifetimes. In the West Potomac High School Pyramid specifically, overall marijuana usage in the past 30 days was reported at around 15%, with a percentage of nearly 30% of 12th grade students.

While these two substances could be called staples amongst high school students and their percentages of use are not shocking, some believe that there are shifting trends in perspectives and usage trending more towards use of harder drugs such as LSD, Ecstasy and pure MDMA.

One West Potomac senior spoke anonymously about her perspectives on drug usage as well as her own experiences with these illegal substances over the past

several years. In addition to alcohol and marijuana, she has taken Ketamine, an anesthetic commonly known as "horse tranquilizers", which she describes as, "Kind of like getting drunk except faster because you snort it. Your body feels more grounded to the ground and you sometimes lose feeling in your body in a way." Her experiences with cocaine left her feeling confident, if only briefly, and she felt the desire to "just like go fishing, do random things because you have so much energy." She says she saves ecstasy and pure MDMA for raves.

This student estimates she has attended 15 EDMs ("electronic dance music") concerts, a little over half of which she took some form of mood enhancer beforehand. "When you're rolling everything feels so good and you just want to hug people, you just want to love people. You're united with the people around you and very happy. Then there's the second part of it where you're very energized and it's like so-

# for the Next High

mebody gave you a huge energy boost... The music controls the way you feel, whether it's pumped up or slower and mellow."

Through these shows she has developed a system: before taking a drug received from dealers with which she has a standing relationship or from friends of friends, she mixes the contents of the dealer's bag before asking him or her to take a pill or capsule themselves. She drinks orange juice before hand, water during, and afterwards takes 5-HTP vitamins in order to calm herself down throughout the crash.

WebMD describes these vitamins, as "a chemical by-product of the protein building block L-tryptophan. 5-HTP is used for sleep disorders, depression, anxiety, migraine and tension-type headaches, fibromyalgia, binge eating associated with obesity, premenstrual syndrome (PMS), premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and along with prescription drugs to treat seizure disorder and Parkinson's disease."

These precautions are meant to make safer a drug which she does not perceive as particularly harmful. "I think if you don't take the proper precautions, if you don't do your research, if you don't do it with the right people, it can be

dangerous." Although her most recent experience with MDMA was coupled with extreme side effects, she credits this to lackluster precautions as to who she received the drug from and cocaine

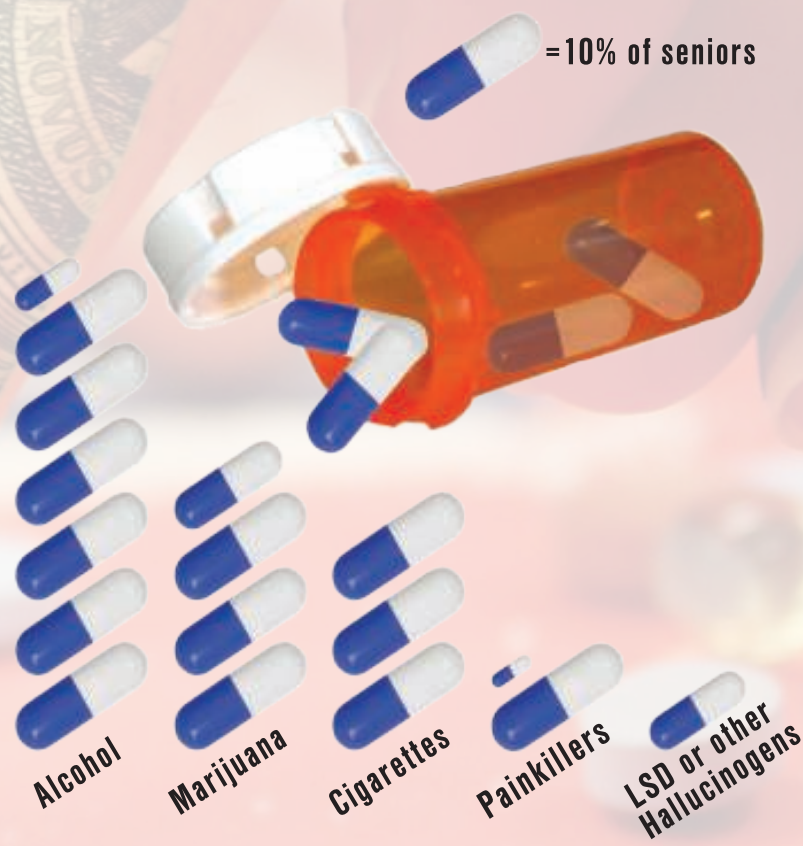
countywide trends that we're seeing in drug use... I'm seeing a trend of less use at school, which on the one hand is a good thing because students are respecting the Student Rights and Responsibilities, on the other hand if they haven't changed habits of actual use it's concerning because it just means the problem has gone somewhere else. So we take that youth survey... very seriously." He explained that drug trends tend to differ with socioeconomic status, with more expensive drugs such as cocaine, heroin and synthetic marijuana being present in greater quantities in the more affluent parts of Alexandria such as McLean and Langley. "There are certainly great pockets of wealth in

our school so that sort of makes you worry, does that mean in those pockets it's a possibility and it could be happening? That's something we look out for."

And while the school has measures in place to reduce drug usage in school and in the community, Mr. Case added that the reality of high school is that if students want to find something drug wise in today's society they will be able to find it, regardless of whether they attend public or private school or where they live.

## Alcohol and Substance Abuse Among High School Seniors

Based on FCPS's 2013 Youth Survey



and amphetamines she believes were used to cut the MDMA. "[Sometimes] people will ass stuff to harden the pill or they can add stuff to Molly to make more money."

The question is, are experiences like these typical patterns of high school substance usage, or changing trends in drug culture? West Potomac Principal Alex Case spoke in an interview on substance use among West Potomac students, based on Youth Survey results and his own perceptions. "Marijuana and alcohol [use] is up, and those sort of match some

# HUGH VS. THE WORLD

## THE DBQ HAS GOT TO GO

**Hugh Moffitt**  
*Opinions Editor*

For on-level and advanced history classes alike, DBQs have become the norm in essay writing. They were first implemented in 1973, in lieu of the traditional free-response essay on AP US History exams. Administrators were unhappy with students' half-hearted attempts on the traditional essay, and decided to add more structure and guidance, with the goal of improving scores.

Essentially, what they did is turn essay writing into a formula. Plug your thesis here, your transition word there, your details over there, then add some fluff...and you have an essay. To make things easier, they include documents to use in your essays. This way, you no longer have to actually know what you are writing about!

Just like algebraic formulas, if you make an error in the structure of the essay, you get penalized. It takes the creativity out of writing. Writers do not have the liberty to decide how they form their argument; that is dictated in the rubric. For this reason, writing a DBQ seems like writing someone else's essay. And if you start reading a lot of DBQs, you will notice they all sound pretty similar.

The fact of the matter is, good, creative writing cannot be boiled down into an equation. Instructing students how to write DBQs will not teach good writing skills or critical thinking; it will do the opposite. It will teach kids DBQ writing, not actual, real-world writing.

The DBQ Project, an initiative founded to spread the DBQ across the country, believes that the DBQ is about much more than essay-writing. The project is guided by five core beliefs:

- Our questions are interesting.

- Our background essays and documents are engaging and understandable.
- Our units go beyond engagement and require analytic reasoning, and students like the challenge. There is nothing like success in an authentic, demanding task. As Thomas Paine said, "What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly."
- Our questions demand that students take and defend a position.

What the DBQ Project and many other education professionals argue is that the DBQ is really a device to help students learn how to think. Despite my fundamental disagreements with the idea of teaching others to think, one must ask the question: why is the DBQ better for critical thinking than free-response essays? My answer: they are not.

According to the DBQ Project's website, the following are reasons that they believe students like DBQs:

- All students need to learn how to think.
- Learning to think requires practice.
- Thinking is hard work.
- Thinking is clarified by writing.
- Thinking is for everyone.

First, how can they claim that their questions are interesting? These are essays about a subject: history. If the DBQ was truly an effective learning measure, it would not really be about their prompt, it would be about the subject.

As someone who just wrote a long, dry, DBQ based on Buddhism in China, I can attest to the fact that the background essays and documents, are, in fact, the furthest thing from engaging. Moreover, I would argue that there is little less engaging than reading a 9th century Confucian scholar's poorly translated opinion on Buddhism.

Also, how can anyone believe that a DBQ requires more analytic reasoning than a traditional essay? In preparation for a DBQ, one studies how to write a DBQ, whereas in preparation for a free-response essay, one studies the subject matter. Apparently, structuring

and developing your own argument without a template, using only your prior knowledge of the subject requires less analytic prowess than skimming though pre-selected documents and writing an essay about one of two opinions allowed by the prompt, which leads me to my next point.

Their questions do demand that students take and defend a position. One of two positions, for or against, are the only options made possible by the prompt. For example, consider this real DBQ prompt from the 2008 AP US History Exam:

- Analyze the ways in which the Vietnam War heightened social, political, and economic tensions in the United States.

So, what are our options? We have none here. The position we are forced to take and defend is already in front of us -- you can't argue that tensions were heightened. While most of us accept that as historical certainty, that doesn't leave any room for critical thinking. All the writer has to do is formulate a thesis. If proponents of the DBQ really want to teach students how to think, why do they not just let them do so on their own, outside of the protective constraints of a DBQ format?

I propose the DBQ be eliminated from AP Exams. The goal of history class is to teach students history. Why then are we using an essay that requires little knowledge of the subject at hand as a major grade in the course? The DBQ is basically an English assignment, and a poor one at that.

# ***Mouse in the Soup: Life on the Reservation***

*Continued from Page 5*

**Chantel Nestell**

***Reporter***

popped its head out from one of the bowls, crawled out, and skittered away. Apparently, after my cousin cooked the soup, she set the pot in the sink so she could serve it up into the bowls. At some point, when none of us were looking, the mouse had run out and somehow fell into the sink, landing in the super-hot soup.

To this day, I'm still surprised that the mouse lived.

And that's what life on the rez is like. Through all the really tough times and hardships, people still manage to be brave

and get by, despite how much trouble they get into. Just like that mouse. The world they live in may be full of pain and heartache, but even in the most unlikely places, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation still has hope.

"There are two roads in life," says Robert Looks Twice, a young Lakota man who lives in Pine Ridge. "There is a muddy road and an easy road. The rich kid takes the easy road. The poor kid takes the muddy road. While the poor kid is on the muddy road, he builds up strength to become a warrior."



The sun sets over Wounded Knee, SD, on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Wounded Knee was the site of one of the worst massacres of Native Americans by the U.S. Army in 1890.



**Hannah Graham & Bobby Merritt  
Forever Wolverines**

