

American teen

 The World is Yours

10
MUST-HAVE
ACCESSORIES

DORM
ROOM
DECOR

HOW TO
EMBRACE
THE
SINGLE
LIFE

We
explore
Soda
Wars!

Sydney
Milkoyla

on acting,
dancing, and
college courses

Hi Everyone!

First of all, thank you so much for your endless support of our magazine. As much as we love the internet, there are so few print magazines left out there, especially for teenagers. Most magazines and content are now completely digital. So thank you for supporting our publication, it means so much to us.

We also hope you're doing well emotionally and physically after the core of a stressful, quite unexpected pandemic that really took its toll on so many of us, globally. We're still crawling out of it, and some of us are even fighting off Covid-19 symptoms. It's been quite a year to say the least. We hope you have a strong support system around you during these unprecedented times, and send you love and healing vibes.

This is an exciting issue. Our cover model is college student, dancer, and General Hospital starlet Sydney Mikayala. It's rare to meet a Hollywood teenager who also attends college, so she's a real gem and we loved chatting with her. Melissa Cronin writes about the impact the pandemic had on the restaurant industry, we reunite with designer Sammy Handler to see what she's up to, and we also test some bubbly drinks and vote on our fave flavors. This issue was so much fun to put together and we hope you love it as much as we do.

Once again, thanks for all the love... right back atcha--see you next year!

Love,
Rachel

P.S. Don't forget about our website:
www.americanteenmag.com

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LàTeen was founded in 2005 by a middle school teacher and group of students with the goal of creating a multi-cultural youth variety magazine that would encourage teens to enjoy reading.



STAR POWER

Kelsi's Corner

TikTok star Kelsi Davies is known for her paranormal content, choreography, and performance skits that have all gone viral online. Born in Denver, Colorado and raised in Mission Viejo, California, Kelsi's also a psychic medium with a popular YouTube channel where she gives viewers insight into of her everyday life. A proud member of the LGBTQ+ community (she identifies as pansexual), as well as a singer, in this interview, Kelsi dishes about her new single and how her content encourages and inspires.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU HAD THE ABILITY TO CONNECT WITH SPIRITS WHO PASSED OVER?

Ever since I can remember, I knew I could feel spirits and occasionally see glimpses of them. But I blocked it out for a long time and tried to ignore it. Now that I have embraced it, there have been so many life-changing experiences with connecting to the other side. It was really during this past year of exploring my gifts that I realized how much I am able to tap into the spirit world by receiving messages, visions, etc. It can be scary, but it can also be beautiful.

WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING A TIKTOK INFLUENCER?

It is a lot to handle, but it is so cool at the same time. To say that it is part of my career is incredible to me. I've worked so hard building my social media, my name, and creating a positive community. I'm still not used to people asking for photos with me! I'm always like "Oh my gosh, you know who I am?!" It's definitely an honor to have so many people watching and supporting my path... I am forever grateful.

WHAT CHARITIES AND CAUSES ARE NEAR AND DEAR TO YOUR HEART?

Stand Up To Cancer because I have lost loved ones to cancer. Also, Happy Hippie Foundation: their mission is to rally young people to fight injustice facing homeless youth, LGBTQ youth, and other vulnerable populations.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR TODAY'S TEENS?

Always be yourself, it's hard to not act a certain way just to "fit in." But in the long run, it will make you so much happier. Also, never give up no matter what. Don't let people's opinions or negativity alter your path.

TELL US ABOUT HEARTBEATS! WHAT'S THE SONG ABOUT?

My single "Heartbeats" is about an extremely toxic relationship I was stuck in, it was something that really changed me. I wanted to make something so negative in my life into a positive. It was a bit difficult to tap into my past again as it was an extremely dark time for me, but I'm so grateful for everyone who was there for me, supporting me, and helping me turn my past trauma into something more. I learned a lot, grew a lot, and found my authentic self because of it. It is about moving past that toxicity in your life, no matter what it is. Knowing that you do have the strength to get past it and be authentically yourself. The song is available on Tiktok, Snapchat, IG Reels, Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora, and you can watch the music video on my YouTube channel which is Kelsi Davies.

FOLLOW KELSI DAVIES ON TIKTOK AT: KELSIDAVIESS

Photographer: Tim Schaeffer Photography @timschaefferphoto; Hair/Makeup: Christine Hazelhurst @Christine_pro_makeup

Showtime

GENERAL HOSPITAL ACTOR, STUDENT, AND PROFESSIONAL DANCER SYDNEY MIKAYLA SHARES HER PASSION PROJECTS AND HOW TO MULTI-TASK.

By Rachel Sokol

DAYTIME EMMY-NOMINATED ACTOR SYDNEY MIKAYLA CURRENTLY STARS AS TRINA ROBINSON ON THE AWARD-WINNING ABC DRAMA *GENERAL HOSPITAL*. SHE'S ALSO A SUCCESSFUL VOICEOVER PERFORMER AND STARRED AS OLYMPIC GYMNAST GABBY DOUGLAS IN THE HIT LIFETIME MOVIE *THE GABBY DOUGLAS STORY*—WHICH EARNED HER A YOUNG ARTIST AWARD FOR BEST PERFORMANCE IN A TV MOVIE.

WITH SO MUCH ON HER CREATIVE PLATE, WE WERE THRILLED SHE TOOK THE TIME TO CHAT WITH US ABOUT HER CAREER GOALS AND LIFE ADVICE. OH, AND DID WE MENTION SHE'S ALSO A COLLEGE STUDENT? READ ON TO LEARN WHAT DRIVES SYDNEY TO SUCCEED—AND HOW SHE BALANCES IT ALL.

Photographer: Tim Schaefer Photography @timschaeferphoto Hair & Makeup: Alle Fleck @aliefleck

Tell us about your childhood.

I'm an only child, except for my dog, Champ. I grew up in Los Angeles, near Inglewood, home of Randy's Donuts and The Forum. One thing I love about the area I grew up in is its beautiful culture. I definitely miss saying hi to my kind neighbors; I remember some of them being really excited when I would do new acting projects. I had a close-knit group of friends that were like family and for some reason we called ourselves The Chicken Club. We're still friends to this day.

How did you get into acting at such a young age?

My mom is an actress and was in the original cast of *The Lion King* on Broadway. She put me into acting when I was about five because she said I was such a ham and I really loved performing. My parents have always been really supportive, but they've always stressed the importance of education. They made it really clear that an acting career can fluctuate, but no one can ever take away your education. They also only wanted me to continue acting and performing if I was enjoying it.

Dance has always played an important role in your life. Why?

I love to move and express myself. I also feel like dance is one of the only forms of movement that doesn't make me feel clumsy or out of place. Dance allows me to live in the moment and be exactly where I need to be. I find that it's also a really good way to relieve stress and just stay in shape.

How do you prepare for roles?

I read the entire script if it's available. Not only am I trying to learn about my character, but how that character relates to the other characters as well. I read stage directions, try to find subtext...anything that will help me develop a well-rounded persona for the role. Sure we all say words, but underneath those words is the character trying to say something greater and more important? When I audition, I try to convey all those things.

How do you handle rejection in any capacity?

I believe keeping busy can help you with rejection, so you don't focus on what you don't have or what you didn't get. I also try to remind myself that whatever is for me, is for me. I also like to reflect on things, people, and opportunities that I'm grateful for.

What advice do you have for teenagers going through a hard time?

Focus on the positive! Figure out what helps you to get to a peaceful place whether it's prayer, dancing, yoga, meditation, education, music...just the good things in life. There will always be some tough times but just remember to breathe, know that things will get better, and talk to someone you can trust.

What are some upcoming projects you can tell us about?

You can check me out as Maya on Cartoon Network's *Craig of the Creek*, Wolf on Netflix's *Kipo and the Age of Wonderbeasts*, and Olivia on Nickelodeon's *The Barbarian and the Troll*.

What drew you to the role of Trina on *General Hospital*?

Trina is such a lively, complex character to portray. She's smart, fun, and so loyal to her friends. On a lot of levels, I think I have similar personality traits as the character, so of course that drew me in. But I think Trina is a bit more outspoken than I am, and she definitely doesn't hold back when it comes to telling others how she feels.

Who are your role models—and why?

My biggest role model is my mom, whom I truly admire and try to emulate. She is loving, humble and has a very compassionate spirit. My Godmother, Krishna, is also a role model because she has been a constant in my life... she is so incredibly driven and motivated to succeed at whatever she does. I'm really grateful to have been taught and mentored by Wendy Raquel Robinson, who was one of my first acting teachers and still inspires me to this day. I'd also love to work with Ms. Regina King again, whom I had the pleasure of working with in *The Gabby Douglas Story*. She's a force to be reckoned with.

What causes are near and dear to your heart?

I would really love to get more involved with organizations that help women. Whether it's advocating for all women to have access to education or access to free or affordable feminine products, making sure women—and especially women of color—have equal access opportunities is something I'm passionate about. I love to see women thrive and have opportunities to be successful. Through my church I was also introduced to an organization that helps young women in Africa. I also love animals, especially dogs, so I'd like to support organizations that help animals to find good homes.

You just started college at UCLA! Are you excited? What will you study?

I'm so excited! I really can't wait to make new friends and study sociology. I ultimately want to become a producer, so understanding human constructs will definitely help me to create authentic stories and represent people accurately.

FOLLOW SYDNEY ON INSTAGRAM: @officialsydenymikayla

Meet this Musical Family

By Madeline Harrant

THREE TALENTED TEENS—WHO HAPPEN TO BE SISTERS!—FORMED A SUCCESSFUL BAND AND HIT THE ROAD WHILE CAPTURING OUR HEARTS.

HELLO SISTER is a dynamic pop-rock group featuring 15-year-old Grace on keyboard and bass, 14-year-old Gabriella on guitar, and 13-year-old Scarlett on drums. These three teens are making a name for themselves, even having performed an audition on Season 16 of *America's Got Talent*!

When the three sisters are not performing, they're actively involved in school as members of cross country, track and field, and swim teams. When performing live, they draw inspiration from their father Tim, an R&B pop songwriter.

Grace, Gabriella, and Scarlett Mason have released their first ever EP, *Three by Three*, as well as an NFT, making them the youngest music artists to achieve this honor. It was wonderful to speak with them, and learn a bit more about their lives on and off the stage.

TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELVES

Scarlett Mason: We're from Orlando and love performing live locally and in different places. Follow us on social media to find out where we are performing next and come join our rock journey!

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO FORM A BAND, AND WHAT WAS IT LIKE STARTING OUT?

Grace Mason: Our parents were always very big influences. Our dad was in a band when he was younger and he's always playing music around the house. We started learning individual instruments at a really young age and then one day we had this idea to play together as a band and we've loved it ever since.

WHO ARE YOUR MUSICAL INSPIRATIONS?

Gabriella Mason: Our favorite artists are Paramore, Avril Lavigne, Jonas Brothers, One Direction, and more.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT MUSIC THAT MAKES YOU FEEL PASSIONATE?

Grace Mason: To us, music is a means to expressing ourselves. It's a great way for us to bond as sisters and as friends.

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A BALANCE WITH BEING IN A BAND AND STILL ATTENDING SCHOOL?

Scarlett: Sometimes it's hard to have to go to a public school and being in a band, but even though we're so busy it's worth it because at the end of the day we're having a lot of fun doing what we love to do!

WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING TO HAPPEN AT ONE OF YOUR PERFORMANCES?

Gabriella: One time a guitar string broke on my guitar and we were playing an hour show so we had to find a different guitar while Grace and Scarlett just kept playing! It was so hard because we were supposed to keep performing and pretend like nothing happened.

DESCRIBE YOUR FAVORITE AND LEAST FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING MUSICIANS.

Grace: The least favorite part is probably hearing some of the negative comments that we sometimes get. But our favorite part is that we get to share our special bond we have with each other, and we can share our music with the world. The feeling you get when you play live is amazing and we love every minute of it!

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU WANT TO IMPROVE UPON AS A BAND?

Scarlett: We need to share more of our original music. We have written so many great songs and need to share them! Also, we need to keep up with everything on social media! I am not gonna lie, it sometimes gets hard with all of the different social media platforms, but we try our best to keep our followers engaged.

WHAT ARE YOUR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS?

Grace: One of our big dreams is to be able to travel the world on tour. And, of course, like anyone's dream, it's to get big in the music industry and to an inspiration.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO YOU HAVE THAT LENDS ITSELF TO YOUR SUCCESS?

Gabriella: I'd say our biggest strength is we are sisters. We know each other really well and we are best friends! Even on days when we fight—we are close in age, it happens! — we have to eventually make up because we live with each other.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SONG YOU'VE PERFORMED AND WHY?

Grace Mason: Our favorite song to perform is probably 'Still into You' by Paramore because it's so upbeat and fun to play musically!

LASTLY, WHERE CAN PEOPLE FIND YOUR MUSIC?

Scarlett Mason: You can find our music on all music platforms and all our social media is @Hellosistermusic! Our website is hellosistermusic.com



(L-R) Grace, Scarlett, and Gabriella are teens who rock! (Photo: Margot Mason)

TIPS AND TRICKS for Period Pain

By Chloe Gudgin

Period pain is a common experience for those who menstruate. However, they can range in different pain categories depending on your pain tolerance and also how heavy your period can be.

As a teenager, your period will change typically due to your hormones changing constantly and how you are going through puberty.

Menstrual cramps are throbbing or cramping pains in the lower abdomen. Many females have them during or just before they start their period; for some the pain is merely annoying but for others the pain can affect their daily lives. Sometimes the menstrual cramps can cause nausea, loose stools, headaches, or dizziness.

Nadya Okamoto (the co-founder of PERIOD) created a lifestyle brand with Nick Jain called 'August' to better understand period care for those who menstruate. She involved GEN-Z and learned what helped and what didn't help them, and thus, created a more comfortable tampon. When speaking to those who menstruate, they told her what a tampon needed to feel more comfortable and she created that. The tampon is more absorbent and open to fit the natural shape of the vagina. August is a sustainable brand, which offers pads and liners also which are designed with organic cotton fibers and free of plastic.

WHAT CAN HELP THE PAIN?



EXERCISE Light exercise can release endorphins and lessen period pain. You don't need to do an intense workout, but a simple walk around your neighborhood or doing a Yoga Session on YouTube (choose one that is aimed for periods) which will help lessen your period pain.



HEAT Applying a hot water bottle to your lower stomach increases blood-flow and relaxes the muscles that cause period pain. This method is a quick and easy way of releasing the pain as your muscles start to become more relaxed quickly.



REST Rest helps reduce your stress levels and improves your overall health. Stress can play a massive factor on your periods and can actually cause you to have irregular periods, so this is why rest is so important. When you are on your period, your hormones are going haywire and you're finding yourself in pain. The one thing we forget to do that's the easiest is resting. Overall, resting can help reduce muscle fatigue which is a common side effect of being on your period.



HORMONAL BIRTH CONTROL Birth Control is given to those who suffer from painful menstrual cramps. It thins the womb lining and reduces the amount of prostaglandin your body releases, which means that the womb does not need to contract as much as it usually would. You do need a prescription from your doctor before getting birth control. Various types of birth control are available by prescription, so be sure to discuss all options with your doctor first.



MEDITATION/YOGA Meditation/Yoga has been known to help lessen the pain of those who suffer from physical/mental illness. Yoga sessions for those who are suffering from menstrual cramps has been said to help release the tension in your body. Meditation and breathing techniques can help you gain control of the pain in your body.

Photo: Mishra Vaguel

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HOW TO

EMBRACE BEING SINGLE

You may be feeling sad or deflated at the fact you haven't had your first kiss yet or your best friend is in a relationship and you're not—am I right? It could bring up feelings of jealousy, sadness, or even comparison—these feelings are normal. I'm here to tell you how to embrace being single as a teenager.

Being single as a teenager is tough, especially since the entertainment industry is filled with movies and tv shows showing how when you're a teenager you will instantly fall in love with Peter Kavinsky and it go well and you'll live happily ever after.

Well, if you are a teenager or even BEEN one, you'll know that's not true! Everyone is on a different wave of life; some fall in love young and others fall in love later on in life. Some have their first kiss at 14-years-old and others at 24-years-old. Both of those events do not make a difference—it's just as special at 14 as it is in your twenties..

The first thing to do to embrace your single life is: **KNOW YOUR VALUES**. As a teen, you can instantly fall into peer pressure to do what your friends are doing because it looks cool or because you want to fit into the same crowd. But the truth is, if it makes you feel uncomfortable, don't do it. You know your values, you know what's right or wrong, but in those tough times you have to dig deep and truly believe them. You don't have to get

into a relationship because your friends are in one--who cares? You can stay at home studying for a test or watching your favorite show on Netflix because that's what makes you happy. You do not have to follow the crowd.

One of the hardest things you need to do is accept yourself. When you accept yourself for who you are, nobody else can take that away from you. You have learned to love your flaws and your good bits all together without wanting anybody else to tell you that. You have done that all alone and when you commit to that path, that is yours only.

Some of our favorite celebrities choose to be single, from Emma Watson who calls herself 'self-partnered' to Hailee Steinfeld who chooses to work on herself. Being single is empowering and not shameful.

I'm 20-years-old and never been kissed and never been in a relationship, yet I'm still normal. I'm achieving my goals, I'm still breaking down barriers as a female and completed my high school education as a single teenager and I haven't become an ogre! Dating isn't a skill you need to 'tick off' as a teenager to complete the goals society puts into your mind by Disney movies showing us we need Prince Charming. Dating is a choice and a choice that I have decided to wait on.

Also, look at Moana or Merida from the Disney movies, they are two single princesses breaking down barriers not wanting to get married to some man or let a man tell them how they should live their life, instead they choose their own path. That's what being single is all about, is choosing your own path and your own pace.

— Chloe Gudgin

“One of the hardest things you need to do is accept yourself.”

Photo: Hassan Oualbir

SHOP TO IT

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1.99

Frame your face in a new way with cat eye sunglasses from StyleV, sold on Amazon. In general, tiny sunglasses have been a hot trend for awhile now!

TOP Trendy Teen Must-Haves

Typically, teens have a tight budget and a small window to get their shopping done—especially for the holidays. So, it's better to know what you're getting before you even enter the store—or to add to your online shopping cart, if you prefer to do it that way.

Right now, most of our favorite trends are being seen on TikTok, and I used Amazon to pick out these fun finds for teens, but these budget-friendly items can be found almost anywhere. The best news? They're all around \$10.

Compiled by Marissa Mitchell. All prices subject to change and were accurate at press time.

KEEP THE KEYS

You'll be able to spot your car and house keys with ease with a colorful keychain that also makes a great, simple, practical gift.

10.97



PHONE CHARMS

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9.98



SCRUNCHIE HOLDER



8.99

The ultimate VSCO flex. Show off your scrunchy riches.

BRING ON THE THIRST

6.99



STKK's whimsy water bottle that screams "Girls Are Awesome" will hopefully motivate you to be more active and stay hydrated!

JUST NOTABLE

You're never too old for a fun, multicolored pen which makes note-taking in class much more enjoyable. Some on amazon sell for less than \$3, so it's a fab price for a whimsy item.

3.00



CARRY ALL

4.59



A huge purse can be cumbersome and too bulky. Opt for a smaller cross-body wristlet that also adds a pop of color to your wardrobe.

HOW **Reset for Restaurants** the pandemic changed the way we eat out

By Melissa Cronin-Brown

Outdoor seating, limited dining capacity, increased takeout orders, and glass barriers between booths were a few options that restaurants had to utilize during the pandemic. Though some have gone back to their normal way of conducting business (pre-Covid style), many places are still operating with the restrictions for the time being. Managers are using all safety tactics they can think of to keep their beloved guests comfortable enough to eat at their establishments. Of course, there are still the irritated customers who are vocal about their complaints to certain changes. The silver lining is that this isn't completely a turn for the worse; there are some modifications that people who work in the food industry want to see be continued from here on out. These are their stories.

HELP WANTED

Samantha Snyder, 18 of Westlake Village, CA, worked at BJ's Brewhouse & Restaurant for three months before moving out of state to start her first semester at the University of Utah. She had previously worked at a small cafe during high school before the epidemic became our new reality. Once hired at BJ's, she was then able to witness the many ups and downs of what the spring and summertime climate of this popular American franchise had to offer.

“In my opinion, businesses are shorter staffed after the pandemic and treat reservations and seating more strictly,” said Snyder. Having

recently worked with her myself as a fellow restaurant hostess, I can attest to this being very accurate. People used to be able to call ahead and reserve their name to guarantee a table before even arriving to the location. Now there are no Call-Aheads and no reservations made for parties under ten people. Attitudes and confusion often arise when we would share this news with others over the phone, as they are used to the former policies.

TO MASK OR NOT

“It's difficult explaining to people the new regulations without getting negative reactions or feedback.” Snyder continued, “Adapting to the new rules is difficult for both guests and employees, especially when regulations are constantly changing.” Workers of BJ's were required to have masks on if they had not yet received their Covid-19 shots. This left about half of workers donning masks, while the other half walked around bare-faced. Many of us did stop wearing them once the majority eventually became fully vaccinated. With the surge of the new Delta virus variant, we have once again all started wearing masks again (regardless of vax status). Snyder admitted on a brighter note “I think the increased sanitation on things like menus, door handles, and counters is a change that should stick.”



MENU RULES

All hostesses at BJ's have to wash the laminated specials menus once the guests are done looking at them. They are to be wiped down with sanitizer and a clean rag. The regular food and beverage menus are now printed out on computer paper and only handed out by request; if even the slightest food stain or dampness from a water cup is visibly on there, we throw them out. Abiding by health standards to stop the spread of germs, the QR code sticker on the tables to scan for the menus is the most encouraged form of accessing them. Former BJ's server Marley Volk, 19 of Thousand Oaks, CA, left after just a few months as well to focus on her priority--her music internship. She looked back on her time as a waitress and noticed some patterns that were not always so positive. Volk reflected, “BJ's wifi didn't work well, so my guests often couldn't load the menus..” Frustrated, she would then have to walk over to the host stand and grab a paper menu. Sometimes there wouldn't be any available; a worker who had some free time had to track down a manager who could then print out more menus and bring them back up front.

HOURLY CHANGES

Volk noticed another unfortunate change that Covid-19 brought--the shorter hours that restaurants stayed open. BJ's, for example, used to stay open

until 1am on Friday and Saturday nights. Now they close at 11pm, with the exception of staying open until midnight on weekends. “I truly miss the later hours, as nothing stays open after 11pm on weekdays. I'm young and want to enjoy sitting down and eating with my friends, but now we have to call it a night a lot earlier than we would like to.”

The BJ's in Westlake used to also serve brunch such as breakfast items. Ever since the pandemic, this feature has gone away and only lunch and dinner selections are now being served. When asked by management if brunch will return, they simply said they don't see that as a possibility. I have had people call us asking if we are still serving eggs and I had to sadly say we discontinued certain items. “Luckily a lot of people have been really considerate of our changes,” said Volk. As far as masks go, she said that she personally likes wearing them to avoid getting sick from coworkers and guests. Last summer, BJ's had no indoor dining and only patio seating, with a large white tent in the parking lot. I received a call at work this June about a woman wanting to place a reservation for a large group for July of 2022. I was shocked that she was inquiring about something so far off into the future. My first thought was that she was being very overly cautious with trying to make sure a venue is saved way in advance. I was about to question it, but then I realized that it exactly summed up the uncertainty in the world that we all have been experiencing, and still are, each and every day.



Photographer: Menus: Melissa Cronin; Eating: Sam Lion

Disability Inclusion for Beginners

By Marissa Mitchell

Disabilities are physical or mental conditions that can limit a person's movements, senses, or activities. There are various disabilities you can be born with or develop over time, that can affect your vision, hearing, limbs, neurology, and so on.

JULY was "disability pride" or "disability awareness" month which has been slowly gaining more recognition. It's an opportunity for disabled people to celebrate all of the obstacles they have overcome and reclaim their visibility. The disabled community is unfortunately not often featured in the news or media.

FIRST EXPERIENCE

I can remember a time when there was a deaf student in my class for most of middle school, and our teacher suggested all of us auditory students learn the alphabet and a handful of words or phrases in American Sign Language (ASL) in order to communicate with her, as she was our fellow classmate. It was a great idea and it was pretty easy to do. We all were excited to meet her, her interpreter, and to learn a little bit of ASL.

However, once she was no longer in our class and we all went on to high school and college, we kind of forgot about the whole experience. Almost to the point where I just never thought about ASL again or those who have to rely on it. It wasn't until almost two decades later, when me and a friend traveled to Washington D.C. that I was reminded....

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE

When we got to D.C. we discovered that our hotel was attached to a Deaf & Blind school. At first, we assumed it wasn't a big deal since the folks at the front desk were able to help us just fine. But we noticed that almost every hotel guest was hearing-impaired or vision-impaired. It was a foreign environment to us in which we were the minority. We

also noticed the servers, housekeepers, staffers... couldn't understand us when we would request things. They were ASL only, and since we weren't fluent in ASL we were not able to communicate with them. So, we would have to go back and forth to the front desk to get assistance. We complained amongst ourselves that we felt super ignored.

The first day of our stay, we were frustrated that we weren't being acknowledged or accommodated the way we needed. By the second day of our stay, after our naivety passed, my friend and I looked at each other while we both had the same epiphany, and we yelled out: **"THE WAY WE FEEL RIGHT NOW, IS HOW DEAF AND BLIND PEOPLE FEEL ALL THE TIME!"** It was our moment of enlightenment about an otherwise forgotten about group of people.

A flood of examples came to mind of how they are often excluded in the typical environments that cater to the hearing and sighted, such as many restaurants, hotels, stores, theatres... Not to mention, being rarely included on-screen or on-air in the entertainment industry. Though technology has helped bridge gaps in accessibility in the classroom, there is a lot more that we could be doing to help disabled people feel more included and accommodated in everyday life.

MARISSA MITCHELL
is a 27-year-old writer who is finishing doctoral school this year. She is also an insurance adjuster and a small business owner in Southern Arizona.

WAKING UP

The obvious consequence of having a disability is the physical/biological effects of the disability, and that cannot always be remedied. However, we are able to change or prevent the social consequences. Us able-bodied folks rarely think about the lives of people who have disabilities. Unfortunately, the lack of consideration for people with disabilities has contributed to a society where disabled people are ignored. The lack of awareness and inclusion makes it harder for disabled people to function in a society built for the able-bodied. When is the last time you watched a movie where a blind person was the leading star? When is the last time you saw a restaurant help a deaf person place their order? When was the last time you had a co-worker with a disability? These are not coincidences. Oftentimes, people with disabilities are excluded from everyday life, simply because we don't go the extra mile to include them.

BY NOT HIRING DISABLED PEOPLE, CASTING THEM IN MOVIES, OR CREATING ADA-ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENTS, WE ARE CHOOSING TO MAKE LIFE HARDER FOR DISABLED PEOPLE.

While we wait for those sweeping changes, you can always start with something small in the meantime: familiarize yourself with common tools and accommodations so you can be a resource to anyone that needs your help, familiarize yourself with ADA-friendly verbiage so you don't offend anyone, don't assume someone with a disability is less capable or less valuable than you, seek to have a diverse group of able and disabled friends, never make jokes at the expense of the disabled person, always seek to uplift and empower them.

Dorm Room (and Be droom!) Essentials

Back- to-school shopping is in full gear for college students. You're likely been scanning packing lists full of dorm staples like egg crates and extra-long twin sheets.

If it's all a blur, we're here to help with items that will come in handy once you step on campus. Here are some of our favorite dorm-room essentials—and if you're not in college yet, they're great for your bedroom.

Warm and cool

Keep foods warm now and drinks cold for later. Uber Chill XL Personal Mini Fridge/cooler can hold up to 12 12-ounce cans or nine 500-mL bottles. This unit boasts heating and cooling options, keeping contents up to 150 F warm or 32 F cold.



TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SPACE BENEATH THE BED

Put that area under your bed to good use for something besides dust. This Under Bed Storage Organizer Bag from mDesign is an ideal spot to stash linens and off-season clothing. Everything will be contained and dust free. Its clear top makes it easy to see what is stashed inside without opening the bag, and two-way zippers make it easily accessible.



BRING THE OUTSIDE IN

A little greenery goes a long way to making you feel good. Plants and flowers provide memories of home and can lift your spirits if you're feeling homesick. AeroGarden is a hydroponic gardening system that grows microgreens, herbs, and veggies. You don't need sun, soil, or space, making it perfect for a dorm room. You'll get easy, automatic reminders when it's time to water and feed your plants, too.



Dorm Room (and Be droom!) Essentials



Get hydrated

Stay hydrated and be environmentally friendly, too. Fill this water bottle from Astrea with water from your dorm bathroom or the library restroom, dining hall, or quad's water fountain without worry. It filters the water of toxins, leads, and contaminants. You'll be left with healthy and tasty water. Plus, you don't have to litter the environment with a plastic water bottle.

STICK TO A SCHEDULE



Organization can make or break a semester. Stay on top of assignments and manage your time with this Browze Wall Sticker Chalkboard Calendar. This stick-on adhesive scheduler can be used on any clean, flat surface around your room.



THIS MONTH

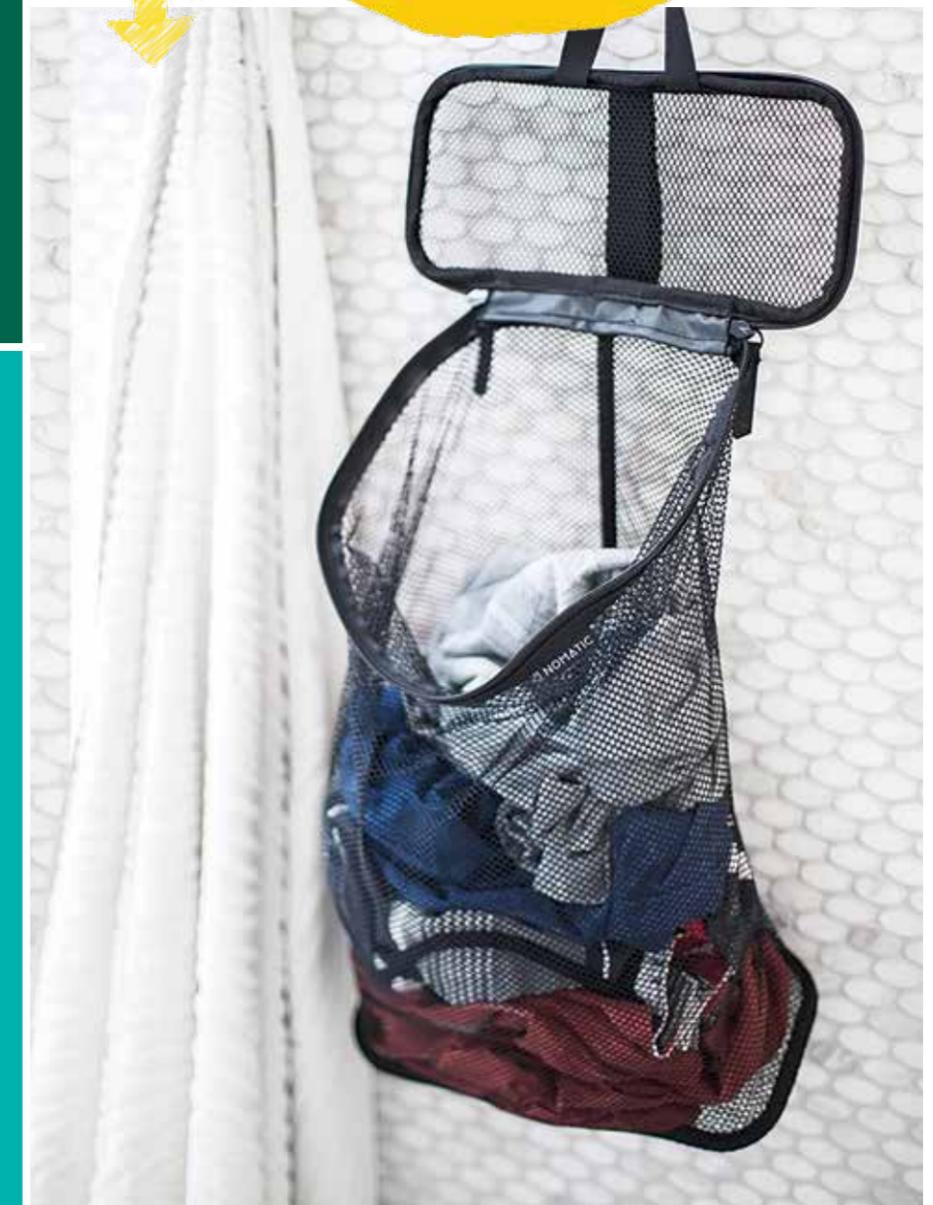


POWER UP

Don't let your devices run out of juice. Keep your phone and tablet powered with this Dark Energy Poseidon Pro Portable Charger. Recharge your laptop and other small electronics, too. The charger's shockproof construction ensures it withstands accidental drops.

MANAGE LAUNDRY

Instead of cluttering your room with laundry, keep things organized. Expand this Nomatic Collapsible Laundry Bag, attaching the hanging strap to a doorknob. Use the handle to lug laundry to and from the laundry room. Once you do laundry, hang it back up or keep it collapsed. It's also designed to fit easily into a travel bag. So, pack it if you're going home and want mom to do your laundry.





Create extra storage space

Create storage that's out of the way. Use the loops on this mDesign Fabric Bedside Caddy Organizer to attach it over a bed frame. The caddy has multiple pockets to keep items close at hand while you're relaxing in bed or studying at your desk.



TYPE IN COMFORT

If you like to use your laptop on your bed, you have to deal with overheated legs or uncomfortable positioning as you type. Say goodbye to those issues. With Traybo Yogibo, you can work on your laptop or tablet with the tray's built-in wooden groove and the soft Yogibo comfort.

STAY CHARGED

AirPods are likely your headphone of choice while you're studying, exercising, or getting to class. Charge yours so you're not without tunes or can talk to dad wirelessly. Compact, lightweight, and portable, this wireless charging station from Cordinate sold on Amazon is perfect for charging wireless earbud cases in your dorm room, at the library, or in class. A rubber base provides a strong grip on tabletops, preventing scratches and damage.



USE A PLANNER

Paving the way to the future has never been more fun. The spiral Erin Condren LifePlanner™ is designed to help you reduce stress, get organized, and achieve goals. This top-notch planner features 2021 - 2022 dated weekly, monthly, and yearly planning; productivity spreads; note pages; stickers; and more. Explore the customization options and build a planner that fits your style and schedule.



Stash your stuff

Getting organized has never looked better thanks to this storage cart sold at JOANN shops and online. The smooth rolling storage unit has three drawers to hold clothes, tools, or anything else you need tucked away. A soft top surface provides even more storage space and can double as a nightstand. Two locking wheels keep the cart securely in place; unlock them for easy maneuvering around the room.

By Señor K

Lately, the competition for your soda buying dollars has pushed bottling companies to create lots of awesome new flavors of carbonated water. In the old days there were only two types of carbonated water: club soda and seltzer. Today, there are so many flavors of soda water that some have names that don't even represent a fruit...like *Dragon Whispers* or *Pixie Lights*.

Other flavors have names that sort of represent a real plant like *Guava Sao Paolo* or *Beach Plum*. Either way, today we are living in a golden age of soda.

Supermarkets everywhere now devote entire aisles to flavored soda water. And it's pretty cheap; an average 8-pack costs just less than 4 bucks. So, to give American Teen readers the rundown on what's hot in the world of sparkling water flavors we break down the major players: *LaCroix*, *Spindrift*, *Bubly*, and *Waterloo*.



SPINDRIFT

Spindrift is definitely on the newer side when it comes to the sparkling water business. Established in 2010, Spindrift has a variety of drinks and flavors. The brand both has regular sparkling water and spiked, but today we'll only be talking about the non-alcoholic drinks. Their most popular flavor is Lemon, and it is for sure one of their best. It's subtle yet smooth taste never disappoints. Their Grapefruit is also great. It tastes fresh and real, with a bitter undertone just like a real grapefruit. And honestly, all of their flavors are excellent. Since their selection is more limited, there's less room for mistakes. Every flavor refreshes and renews.

LACROIX



SODA WARS

SO MANY FLAVORS - but which is the best?
We did a taste test!

La Croix is one of the earlier sparkling water companies. They have been around since the 1980s but their big push to expand was in 2015 when many younger Americans began to buy more LaCroix products. They have some great original flavors like *Mango*, *Key Lime* and *Passionfruit*, as well as some delicious new flavors such as *Limoncello* and *Hibiscus*.

Their cans are simple yet exciting with painting-like designs and a calligraphic font. Their best-selling flavor is *Pamplemousse*, for some reason. *Pamplemousse* is refreshing with a slight bitter taste, but is nothing compared to *Key Lime* and *Limoncello*.

Key Lime is a simple flavor that goes with anything; it has just the right amount of flavor and is always enjoyable. *Limoncello* is La Croix's newest flavor and it tastes like sunshine. *Lemon* with a hint of vanilla, *Limoncello* is perfect to sip on while relaxing by the pool, on your couch, or just about anywhere. But beware: *Razz-Cran* is so disgusting it's deadly. *Razz-Cran*, while the can design is beautiful, tastes like if you put a moldy cranberry in a can of old water. It's sour, bitter, and leaves an awful aftertaste. But in general, La Croix successfully satisfies in most flavors.

Drinks Group Photo: Sebastian Coman

BUBLY

Bubly is the newest of our contenders, established in 2018 by Pepsi. With colorful cans and cute messages on the tabs, we love the look and feel of this brand. Can the taste live up to it? The answer is... not really. Compared to the other brands, Bubly just doesn't satisfy as well. They've got some good flavors; we would recommend *Lime*, *Grapefruit*, and *Blackberry* for their subtle yet sweet and refreshing flavor.

But there isn't anything special about them, either. At all costs, stay away from their *cherry* flavor. Similar to La Croix's *Razz-Cran*, this flavor was just done so, so wrong. It tastes rotten. Overall, Bubly isn't our favorite, but in a pinch it will do.



THE NEW WAY TO LEARN COLLEGE in HIGH SCHOOL

By Senor K

Since the beginning of time the path to higher education has been a pretty standard route. You start in elementary school, go to middle and high school, fill out a bunch of applications senior year, graduate from high school, and finally go off to college.

While this protocol has been mostly successful, it hasn't proved that great for all types of students. In particular students from low-income backgrounds have much lower college graduation rates than their higher-income peers. In fact, according to one study, the college graduation rate of wealthy students is almost double the graduation rate of students from lower-income households.

● The need for change

One big push to solve this problem is changing the institutional transition between high school and college. Instead of the traditional model of educational progression where students finish high school and then subsequently attend college, many high schools are instead starting to offer college credits years before graduation. It's still a little early to do a full evaluation of the success of this model, but early research so far has shown pretty significant and successful growth in graduation rates and especially students from lower income families.

● The Concept

Back in 2002, Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his wife Melinda donated 40 million dollars to launch a new initiative called Early College High School. The purpose of this new approach to secondary education would be to "launch a network of small high schools that would provide college courses and credit to low-income students." At issue was the fact that college graduation rates for students who come from lower income backgrounds are often significantly lower than wealthier peers. The idea was that if these less wealthy students could start the college process both before graduation—and for free—their college completion rates would improve.

To help students even further early on, students meet with a counselor and investigate various career 'pathways' such as medicine, business, or technology. Then students complete

coursework in that field and graduate high school with a diploma and an Associate's Degree. This degree is equivalent to completing two years of college so graduates of these Early College High Schools (ECHS) can complete a bachelor's degree with only two more years of coursework. These pathways are also designed to reflect the needs of the 21st century job market and are created in consultation with major local employers. Cybersecurity and biotechnology, for example, are two fields where there is huge demand for skilled workers and many ECHS's offer specialized programs in those fields.

● Success

Do ECHS succeed in raising college graduation rates? The early evidence is a pretty strong 'yes!' Early college high schools have only been around for about 20 years, so more analysis still needs to be done. However, one major study found that students from ECHS "were significantly more likely" to attend college than students who went to traditional high schools. Other metrics significantly improved as well such as both high school and college graduation rates.

And the concept is starting to expand. Even though traditional high schools still dominate school districts nationwide there are today more than 230 early colleges in 28 states that serve over fifty thousand students.*

The model we have used for decades to organize America's school system dates back to the German model of the late 19th century; so an update has definitely been overdue. Today, with the expansion of charter, vocational, online and now early college high schools, the opportunities for students from all backgrounds to find a path toward educational achievement are finally starting to look more promising.

* A QUICK SEARCH ONLINE CAN GIVE YOU MORE INFO ABOUT ECHS IN YOUR AREA IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT ATTENDING AN ECHS.

Ways to RELAX After a Long Week

Between the holidays, traveling, school, tests, friends, trying to sleep well, eat well, juggling your part-time job with academics, college applications, keeping your room tidy, extra-curriculars and being a good friend/daughter/son... chances are you're pretty darn exhausted lately.

Sleeping well, eating well, and working out are great ways to take care of your body, mind, and soul. But honestly, sometimes you just need a break from it all—a mental health break. Listen to your body if you're exhausted. Too much stress is never healthy, at any age.

You're human, and can only handle so much. Cut yourself some slack. Here are some helpful and healthy ways to unwind after a long, long week. After a 'pause' you'll return to "life as you know it" feeling refreshed and ready to go!

1 ACT LIKE A KID Kids are fun—you know, because you were one once. Whether it's a young cousin or a young sibling, spend some time—preferably outside—with kids under 12 and really, really zero in on them, and give them your full attention. Make a snowman with them, or push them on a sled as smile wide and THEY laugh with joy. Bring your 7-year-old cousin on a walk with you or paint some flat rocks with a super cool kid and hide the rocks around the neighborhood to brighten someone's day. Just keep in mind—this requires real focus to be relaxing, so put your phone down and give the child your full attention. Acting like a kid again and spending more time with a special kid is a mood-booster for sure. Plus, they'll be so excited to spend time with YOU in return. It'll mean a lot to them.

2 TAKE A WARM BUBBLE BATH Do you have a pile of bath crystals someone randomly gave you that you've been meaning to use—but haven't yet! Guess what. Now's that time? It's cliched, but it's true...baths can be pretty relaxing. Fill up a tub with bubbles, a touch of baby oil to make your skin super soft, and a touch (drop or two) of essential oils such as relaxing lavender....

3 ENGAGE IN YOGA Yoga is something some teens love or hate. If you give it a shot, you may find it very relaxing to stretch the body and focus on your breathing. First, throw on comfy clothes and go barefoot. Roll out a yoga mat or a very thin towel as a back-up, although teachers prefer yoga mats for sure. (It's OK if you don't have one.) Sunday morning or evening, before the work and school week starts again, pull up a YouTube video on your iPad and follow along with a teen instructor. We like these particular YouTube instructors/videos: Yoga For Teens | Yoga With Adriene, Yoga For Kids with Alissa Kepas, and Yoga for Teens: Energizing Flow Yoga Class. Once you try some at-home yoga, you may want to enroll in a local yoga class at the gym or a studio.

4 GET A MASSAGE Honestly, it may seem boujee or 'fancy,' but some massage chains or day spas offer gentle body massages for teens—just ask a ton of questions if you've never had one before and let a parent know you want one so they can ask questions as well. (Editor's note: I started getting massages in high school with a licensed female masseuse my mom went to, and trusted. At 17, I found massages very relaxing and I still get them today!) Make sure it's a reputable spa, and clean. Full disclosure: You will have to lay naked under a sheet on a massage bed, but the therapist is a professional who will just lower the bedding to work your back ONLY, shoulders arms, and legs. (They're not looking at, or touching, your private parts.) Massages aren't for everyone, but can be quite relaxing, and since my mom went for them I wanted "in" as well.

5 GET ORGANIZED Wait, excuse me? We said NO MORE STRESS. But hear us out. Let's say for example, your closet is a pigsty and needs to be cleaned out. Set aside just ONE hour on a Sunday afternoon, grab a HUGE tote bag and a garbage bag, and be prepared to tackle that darn closet. Put a party playlist on YouTube and put your phone far away from the closet so it doesn't distract you as you work. One by one, remove the items inside the closet, and try not to get wrapped up in the memories of that item. If you freakin' love it, keep it and put it in the tote bag. Don't like it anymore? Toss it with no hesitation. (Trust us, in 6 months you won't be missing the chipped Hello Kitty bracelet you tossed.) Try to move fast, but also go one-by-one. Neatly stack clothes to donate or give away, put small items like mint-condition, unused journals in the big tote bag. Old, wrinkled, and stained clothes and shoes get tossed. Tell yourself over and over organizing and tossing is good for your mental health and shows maturity as well. Once the closet is empty, wipe it down with gentle soap and washcloths, maybe even vacuum the inside, and neatly put back the items to keep. And yes—hang up the clothes. Voila! Don't you feel great? You did it! Feeling accomplished reduces stress levels.

Photographer: Gustavo Fring, Rodnae Productions



The Follow Your Dream Blanket



The Love and Peace Blanket

Says Samantha: "Teens love our blankets because they are colorful, eye-catching, and so soft! Teens like how they can personalize the blankets with their first name and even their camp's name! Plus, the hand-drawn designs make these look so unique!"

THE WARM FUZZIES

Designer Samantha Handler of Kicks By Sammy launched a new line of cool blankets.

By Rachel Sokol

Back in 2019, we interviewed NY-based designer Samantha Handler, who launched a successful accessories line called Kicks By Sammy. Always a "doodler" and artist, in 2013 she decorated a pair of plain white Keds sneakers with a University of Maryland theme, showcasing her school spirit.

The design was so popular, everyone raved about her talent for creating niche, colorful personalized items, and a business was born.

Today, Sammy's hand-drawn artwork is all custom-made; items available for personalization include iPhone cases, throw pillows, towels, and more.

What's new and popular from Sammy? Soft blankets (can you ever have too many?) that teens love because they're cozy and personalized with Samantha Handler's own hand-drawn designs.

Each lovable blanket can be personalized with the recipient's

name or initials, or a phrase, which makes it extra special. These machine washable blankets come in two sizes: 30 x 40" (great gift for any baby or child in your life) and 50 x 60." They also come in two premium material options: Minky blanket: 100% polyester; very soft and plush with a white back; and Sherpa blanket: silken faux micro-mink front; lusciously soft faux sheepskin sherpa back. These are beautiful keepsake blankets you will cherish forever..



The Fashionista Blanket design

If you purchase a blanket from KicksBySammy, you're also doing something philanthropic. It's always great to give back and make charitable donations. KicksBySammy donates a portion of your online order to The Lustgarten Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research to honor the memory of Sammy's grandmother, her Nanny, Karen Magidson.

For more info, and to place a blanket order, visit: kicksbysammy.com and click "Accessories."

Kylie THORP

Teen Jewelry Designer



Thanks to 'Whatever it Takes' (WIT) NY teen Kylie Thorp launched her own jewelry line.

Teen Kylie Thorp is the founder of Free Roaming Jewelry; which she was able to start thanks to Whatever it Takes (WIT), a non-profit that helps teens launch businesses or social movements while in high school.

She's from New York City and often spends her summers in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. "This provides a great balance with city life," says Thorp. "When I'm not enjoying the outdoors or working on my business, I play soccer and I am the co-captain of the team."

“Through WIT, I have learned so many different lessons through the ‘11 Tips for Doing WIT.’ I can apply them to my own life; tips like ‘Own It’ to ‘Stepping into Your Greatness,’ says Thorp, who also thanks family friend Eva Ostrum for her support along the way.

Thorp always enjoyed art, which is why she wanted to create jewelry. "More specifically, the idea for Free Roaming Jewelry came from my combined love for Jackson, Wyoming and the wildlife there. That

said, the idea came to be while participating in an entrepreneurship class. Then it was just all about hard work and putting myself out there on Instagram to share my products."

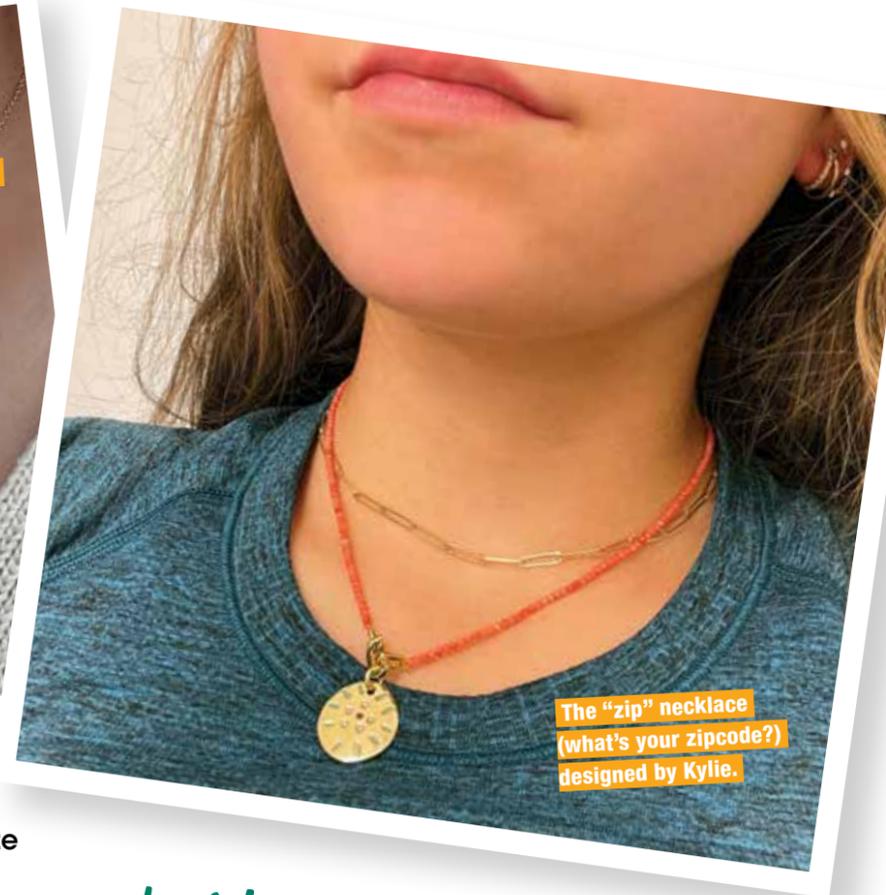
Something special

"I think it's pretty unique that it's a teen-run business," says Thorp about her collection. "I give 15 percent of the profits I make toward sponsoring a fence project in Jackson, through the Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation."

A fence project, she explains, is the removal or modification of a fence to protect animals who are trying to "free roam."



One of Kylie's pendant designs; layering necklaces is a popular trend.



The "zip" necklace (what's your zipcode?) designed by Kylie.

“There's a lot of abandoned, obsolete fencing made of barbed wire that can hurt animals, stand as a barrier to food and water, and affect migration. It's important to me that there is a give-back component to all of our products.”

Career advice

When asked about her career advice for other entrepreneurial teens, Thorp says, "I would share with them how trying something new and launching a business really helped my self-confidence. I would encourage them to seek out programs, communities, and activities that might be a little outside their comfort zone."

Being part of WIT, for example, helped Thorp step outside her comfort zone "and then launching my jewelry company really pushed me into new levels of growth and self-confidence. So, it can't hurt to try something new."

The worst thing that happens is that you don't enjoy what you have started, and that's totally OK, she stresses. "It's good to figure out what you enjoy and are passionate about, and also what you don't like, especially while you are young."

The future

"For the future, I see Free Roaming Jewelry doing more pop-up shops, especially in Wyoming and maybe even in New York City," says Thorp, who just sent off her college applications. "I also see FRJ as more than just a jewelry business; I'm hoping to expand my business to include other accessories like hats and tote bags."

And personally, Thorp's working hard to put herself in a position to play collegiate soccer next year.

"A lot of my friends in school and on my soccer team inspire me. They are all so unique and have different passions of their own. I try to use them as an example in my own life to try new things and experiment, just like I did in starting my own business."

LEARN MORE ABOUT WHATEVER IT TAKES (WIT) AT: doingwit.org

Kylie's jewelry collection can be found on Instagram: [freeroamingjewelry](https://www.instagram.com/freeroamingjewelry). She also has an [etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com) shop.



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