

Episode Thirty-Three: Looking Back and Moving Forward: Senior Edition

Ad Aster Transcript

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Judy: Hey, Asterisks. Welcome back to another episode of Ad Aster. For those just turning in, Ad Aster is the youth led podcast of the literary magazine Aster lit, which focuses on cross cultural connections within the writing world. I'm your host, Judy. I'm a graduated senior and a current associate editor and podcast team member at Aster Lit. And I want to give you all a heartfelt welcome to episode 33, looking back and moving Forward. Senior edition. Today we are joined by two wonderful guests. Can you guys please introduce yourselves?

Kate: Hi, I'm Kate. I'm, a rising junior in college and I am the former podcast director at Ad Aster and I'm so excited to be back. I haven't been on an episode in a while. I am very excited.

Joyce: Cool. my name is Joyce. I'm a managing editor at asterlit this is my first time being on an Ad Aster episode, so that's pretty exciting. I'm also a graduated senior, rising freshman in college.

Judy: yeah, I'm so excited to have you guys both on the episode today. Welcome to Ad Aster so we haven't actually been doing a finderscope check in in so long, so I was thinking we could bring it back today. So how has your guys' reading and writing been lately?

Joyce: Kate, do you want to go first?

Kate: Oh Sure. I, haven't been writing so much lately, but I have been reading a lot because one of my summer goals is to read a lot. And lately the book I've been reading is called Entangled Life. It's a non fiction book all about fungi and mushrooms, which is very quirky and it sounds a little bit gross, but it's actually so fascinating and it's really beautifully written, by a guy named Merlin Sheldrake, who is a mycologist. He studies mushrooms. So if you guys are interested in a really beautifully written, beautifully illustrated and niche book, I would recommend that one.

Judy: That's. That's really cool.

Kate: Yeah, it's so fun. What about you, Judy?

Judy: For me, I honestly haven't been able to write or read as much as I would have liked lately because of, you know, senior year, and I just finished exams like 5 days ago I think, so everything's been...

Kate: Congratulations!

Judy: Thank you! So everything has been very stressful. But I am planning on writing and reading more, like this upcoming summer. So I'm like, currently just making an entire bucket list and I'm gonna be making like a TBR of all the books I want to read, hopefully, and I hope I can get to writing. What about you, Joyce?

Joyce: Nice.

Joyce: Yeah, I think I'm kind of in a similar boat as you.

Joyce: I found that with Burnout, it's a little difficult to be creative. so I've been taking a little bit of a step back from writing, and I'm now trying to introduce it back into my routine a little bit. but, yeah, in terms of reading, I haven't really been able to finish a book in a while. But I think the most recent book I read was, Real Americans by Rachel Kong. And that's like a realistic fiction or not realistic fiction. Maybe. It's like, It's like a fiction book with. like, mostly realism, but also, has a little bit of that fantasy element in it. and that was for my, like, AP Book club unit. so, yeah, I think I've just been trying to get back into the routine of reading and writing after having stepped away from it for a little bit.

Judy: Yeah. Oh, my God. That's really cool. I'm definitely gonna check that book out and add it to my TBR. So, you know, since it's summer now and we just finished our previous academic here, what do you guys think? Like how was your experience? What would you do if you could redo it again? You know.

Joyce: That's a nice question.

Judy: Yeah.

Joyce: I, think for me personally. So my last academic year was my senior year of high school. and that was kind of the year where I was like, okay, I'm graduating, so I'll do everything that I want to do. And in some ways, that worked out really great. I, was able to join choir, which I hadn't been able to do in the past few years due to, like, not having space, my schedule. so I was like, you know, finding a new artistic community and being part of a new activity at school, and also involving myself, like, within the school, more like student council, et cetera. but that also meant that I had such a busy senior year. and I was like, whoever told me that second semester, senior year would be, like, just chill and that I'd be relaxing Lied to me. I was so busy, like, I never had a break. so I guess it's kind of this bittersweet feeling of. Or not necessarily bittersweet, but,

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Joyce: like, strange feeling of. Like, if I could go back, would I chang things? Probably not. But I also, like, went through, like, I really went through it. like, trying to balance that with school and College apps was not fun. so, yeah, I guess my, like, maybe, like, I don't know if I'd do this differently, but my advice to other people would just be to, like, don't overload your senior year. like, do things that will make you happy, but also, like, give yourself some room, to just relax and like, recover.

Judy: Yeah, I definitely agree with what you said. To be honest, like, senioritis really hit me hard. I, like, got really burnt out. And I guess, like, even though I had, like, work and I joined other extracurriculars that I've never been a part of before, and I was, you know, exploring other subjects and doing all these new things, even though I was burnt out. Like, my advice would be to, like, you know, rising seniors now is, really try to find the balance and the time management between having fun and relaxing and, you know, getting a break. Because really, after, you know, you've been running this track for so long, you really do need it. And you're not going to get it in senior year, unfortunately. But you really do need to try to give yourself a break while also not procrastinating or overworking yourself. So finding that balance was hard. I didn't find it, but I hope other people do, hopefully when they're in their senior years. so what about you, Kate? How was your previous academic year?

Kate: Yeah, it was, so that was my sophomore year of college. I think that when people think of senior year, they think senioritis. And I think sophomore year is probably associated with like, the sophomore slump. I do feel like sophomore year is kind of like a weird limbo state because freshman year, everything is so novel and exciting and you're going out and meeting everyone is a new face and everything is a new opportunity. Every building is completely unfamiliar. But sophomore year, things start to come into a little bit more of a steady rhythm, which was on the one hand, really nice and, reassuring. Cause it kind of makes you feel like, oh, this place is becoming my new home. But on the other hand is also like, what am I supposed to be doing now? Because there is, once you come down off of that freshman year high, you start thinking about your future and then that all, like, comes crashing down on you. And sophomore years is the kind of weird part of college, I feel, where you're not sure if it's too early, too late, just. Right. So all of these thoughts were had during my sophomore year. I honestly don't think I would do much very differently if I had to pick a thing I think I would say I would push myself more to get off campus because after that first year on campus, getting to know it, it can start to feel like more of a bubble. And so I think that I could have pushed myself to get out into the surrounding college town and city more and experience more new and unfamiliar kinds of events rather than just going to the same the same kinds of events that you might find on campus, which are still great and fun. But I think it would have been cool to introduce more diversity into that experience and also get to know the area around the campus that I'm on.

Judy: You know, something you said really reminded me of like, you know, whenever I remember that college is actually about learning and I'm not just going to have fun and like meeting new people. It's scary. Like I actually need to take tests and take courses and it's just gonna be a repeat of everything I hate about senior year. But hopefully it's gonna be good. I mean, does it feel different? Like, does it feel like you have more freedom and more time to like choose what you want to do or you want to try?

Kate: That's a really good question. To be totally honest. I think it depends on the person and their attitude going to college. but even if you're not expecting it, I think it's always good to keep an open mind about how you might change and how your priorities might change. Because I found in my first year that my priorities had totally shifted in ways that I hadn't

expected. for example, like in high school, my experience was just like what you just described to the like, just tasks, exams, classes, and that was pretty nonstop. And then I came to college and because college becomes like your whole life, like classes, your home, your friends are around you 24/ 7, I realized that my priorities kind of shifted away from schoolwork and towards spending time with new friends and having new kinds of experiences. Not to say that I didn't prioritize my schoolwork, but I just found that I was spending more time on different kinds of activities. So I kind of think that I actually achieved a better life balance in college. So I hope that happens to you guys too.

Judy: I hope so. It's scary. Maybe I'll be able to find the balance

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Judy: I couldn't find in senior year. Okay, so now that we've, you know, reflected a little bit on, you know, our previous year, what are you guys planning for summer? What do you guys want to do? And especially for Joyce and I like how are we going to be preparing for college?

Kate: How have you guys been spending your summer so far? Have your summers begun?

Judy: For me, I mean, technically, it should have five days ago after I finished my first exam, but I'm still easing into it. What about you, Joyce?

Joyce: Yeah, for me, I ended school a few weeks ago, so I've spent that time traveling. Like, I went to Korea for the first time.

Judy: O yeah, it's really cool.

Kate: You. How was it?

Kate: Was it super hot?

Joyce: It was pretty hot. I came back, to the bay, and I was like, wow, it's so cold here. Even I never thought that before. but yeah, it was really nice being in the city, honestly. Like, rather than being in a whole new country. It just kind of felt like I felt more of the city ofurb difference. more.

Joyce: But yeah, I really enjoyed, just being there, kind of being away from the things that, like, I've been surrounded by for the past four years, and just, like, you know, allowing myself to kind of relax without thinking, like, overthinking too much.

Kate: That's so good.

Kate: I'm glad to hear it.

Joyce: Thanks.

Judy: I really hope I can go to South Korea 1 day maybe not this summer, but.

Kate: You're gonna get it.

Judy: So. So how do you guys plan on spending this summer?

Kate: Well, my summer actually started in May because my school year in college ended the first week of May. So I've been in my summer vacation for a couple of months now almost, which is great. My summer break has been spent doing, research in a college lab. So at my current school, and I do cognitive science research, which is right now a lot of research with social cognition that I find really fun. And a lot of my friends are actually also on campus or nearby doing similar opportunities for research or, just work. So that's been nice because I get time to spend with them as well.

Judy: That's so cool. That is. Joyce, do you want to go first? How are you planning to spend summer?

Joyce: Oh, yeah, sure. I think it kind of really hit me, a few weeks ago that this might be, like, the only summer, like, ever where I'll have just no obligations. or, like, because, you know, throughout college, like, presumably, or throughout high school, I've been pretty busy with, like, programs, like, you know, just trying to, like, do some extracurriculars, etc. and then in college, like, presumably, I'll have a lot of stuff to do as well. so this could be, like, the only summer ever for the rest of my life where I really have like a chance to just so I've been trying a not to over commit to anything. I've been working like two part time jobs just to try to like you know, support myself. But I think that has just beent the majority of it like working and trying to meet up with friends that I might not be able to see for a while. and yeah, trying to stay out of this mindset of toxic productivity and thinking oh, I need to get ahead, I need to do everything and just really allowing myself to like say no, I need, I need this time to rest and recover.

Judy: Yeah, I actually agree with what you said. I mean I feel like this is, this might be. I mean we don't know for sure but it could be the last summer where we're actually able to just you know, have fun or relax. For me, I'm thinking more of it as it's the last summer where I can feel like a kid, you know, I mean I don't feel, I wouldn't feel like an adult with personal like, sorry, I mean responsibilities and like having to you know, do all these different things. so I've been mainly just spending it thinking of things I want to do. I've actually started making like this bucket list where you know, I there are things I want to do because now I can so like learn how to drive and get my driver's license. But also I just get really tish. I want to get really tless and do things I used to do when I was a kid like you know, play Minecraft again or Sly Robloxx or make slime or you know like I really want to relive these moments and get this feeling of nostalgia from when I was younger. U. and yeah, I just, I've been trying to like think of like things I want to do and make like this huge bucket list and hopefully by the end of summer I'll have everything ticked. That sounds so fun.

Kate: This slime really just brought back so many memories that was so big when I was a kid.

Judy: That's a cool idea.

Kate: I wish I had done that this summer before my college like first year because going back and revisiting old memories would have been so, so fun because

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Kate: your last, your last carefree child summer.

Judy: yeah. So I just, I want to spend it feeling like a kid again I guess. And this summer, the slime idea, actually I got it when in January. I had like the most like horrendous stressful you know, like session of my entire life. I had finals and college jobs at the same time. So it was very, very stressful. And yeah, and I guess this is like a coping mechanism. My mind always like. Like I get the urge to do something I used to do when I was a kid just to feel like, oh, it's fine, I'm all good, I'm still a kid, you know, So I just got the sudden urge to do slime. And I couldn't, obviously, because I was really busy. So to make myself like chill or calm down a little bit, I was like, okay, you know what, I'll keep it for summer. Like, I'll do slime in summer if I really want to do it that bad. And that's where the idea of like getting things I used to do when I was a kid and doing them all in summer came from. So. Yeah, sounds really childish, but I hope it's really fun. Actually, Kate, I have a question for you. do you think it's better for us to spend summer productively or just having fun and doing that thing?

Kate: Basically, I think that for me, this summer before college, I spent kind of doing a mix. Like I, worked a job, but it was a very chill job. I was the summer camp counselor at my high school for our elementary school division and middle school division. So it was like a job. I still had responsibilities, but it was very sweet and fun and wholesome and I just spent a lot of time with friends. I think that the good balance between the two is nice, but not doing productive things in the way that you might be used to doing them in high school to get yourself out of this mindset that productivity or doing valuable things with your life only takes like certain forms. Because I think in high school, like, you can become used to a certain kind of task or project being meaningful. And that's not always the case. So I think that really that was the best way for me that I could have spent that summer. And if you're up to taking on even more, I think that another good way to spend your summer is to learn something that you're really interested in that maybe you haven't had a lot of time to dedicate to or that you see yourself wanting to try out in college just because doing something for the fun of learning it before you get to college can help you like, I think, develop a healthy attitude for when you actually are there.

Judy: Yeah. So on that note, I mean, do you think we should start like looking into classes right now and looking into like opportunities on campus, maybe writing opportunities in particular. Like should we start looking into it and like stressing over it right now or should we wait until on campus?

Kate: Yeah, only if you find it fun. Like I found some things really fun when it came to preparing for college and other things were like kind of scary or overwhelming. Like I loved

scrolling through our extracurricular directory and just checking out what is out there. But that was just because I thought it was fun. It's cool to see like all the pun names and figure out like what people on campus like to do and what I might see myself doing. But that's just because I didn't find that stressful. If you find it's stressful, it can always wait. And you think it even is more maybe even better if you find it stressful to wait until you get to campus. Because you never know what the actual experience will be like. So sometimes like the preparation will all go to mo anyways and so you should just do it if you find it fun because you don't need to find it useful. It may not be useful. Yeah, that's what I have to say.

Joyce: I think sometimes this fairies on the school.

Emma Zhang: Right.

Joyce: Because for my college course registration is actually pretty soon.

Kate: Oh wow.

Joyce: Yeah, they like required you to like figure out your courses by like. Yeah, I think like a few days ago.

Kate: Oh my gosh.

Joyce: Yeah, I was.

Kate: Are you all set for the fall semester already?

Joyce: not yet. Because they have like this planning assignment I think, and then you have to get your schedule approved before you can register in a few weeks. So yeah, I was kind of U because this was in the middle of while I was traveling, I was like trying to figure it out, like what did I want to major in? Like I have no idea. but yeah, I think but like you mentioned K. I think I did try to like find u, like excitement in that and tried to have fun. So I think that definitely helped a lot.

Judy: O m glad, yeah, that is different.

Kate: I forgot that that could be the case for me. My freshman year we had to do course registration within the first like two days that we got to college. And that was so hectic because I don't think any of us had even seen what the courses were ahead of time. So we were all scrambling. so yeah, there's definitely pros and cons to both, to both approaches honestly.

Judy: whenever my like college sends me like one of those big emails and they're asking all these things, I Just, I get so stressed because I'm, like, trying to understand and I feel like I'm in an act reading exam or something, trying to understand everything and what they want for me. But yeah, I think, I mean, I've definitely fell into, like, the, what's it called, like, habit of looking for just interesting classes that sound interesting and not even looking at, like, the

requirements I need for a certain major that I want to do or even look at what major I want to. Like, I don't even know what major I want to do.

Kate: Like, that's totally fine. I once heard a statistic, that most college or like, the average college student will change their major three times. And I definitely know so many people who have fulfilled that statistic or gone beyond. So don't worry too much about meeting requirements. I think my freshman year I just started up by trying to just do fun classes and I definitely don't regret having done that.

Judy: What has been your favorite class so far? Like, oh, for the most random class you've ever taken.

Kate: The most sweats.

Judy: Sorry, random class you've ever taken. Because I remember, I think I saw like a reel of someone saying they took a class that was about Beyonce or something like that.

Kate: Yeah, I think my school actually has a class on Beyonce. I like it, but it sounded so interesting. And I actually know someone who is in that class and they really enjoyed it. I, have to say I don't think any of mine are that wacky. I'mnn try and think of the most interesting. Let's circle back. I need to go and revisit my transcript and figure out what classes I've taken. Because at this point it's all a blur. But there have definitely been some similar.

Judy: but then, like, how would you, like, I mean, how did you end up declaring a major or realizing what you wanted to do if you did? I don't know if you did end up declaring major.

Kate: Yeah, I did actually.

Judy: Okay.

Kate: A while though, so totally valid question. I came into college as an English and neuroscience double major. And then I really quickly made a lateral move, and I decided to do cognitive science instead of neuroscience. And then later on I decided after much thought, and a lot of time to switch to humanities. There's a major called humanities rather than English. and the reason why I made those changes was because, mostly because of, like, the major requirements, just the administrative difficulties of double majoring with se certain combinations of majors. And also I found their curriculums or their requirements. I found A little bit more diverse and interesting and I think I'm very happy with that. But I know many people who have yet to decide or are definitely still on the fence, and I know many people older than me who are still thinking of changing their major. So it's definitely very fluid.

Judy: You know, on that note, we actually did had a question sticker on our Instagram account and we asked people if they had any questions, you know, about college admissions or college in general. And we got a question that was like asking is the admission process different if you're a humanities major? So that's a good. You think you could answer that?

Kate: Sure. do you guys have any idea if you would consider yourselvesma humanities majors?

Judy: Honest, I don't know.

Joyce: For me personally, I applied English or Comparative literature to, I think every school I applied to. so yeah, I don't know if the process itself is different. Some schools, like the school that I'm going to has different colleges for, and then there are like different majors within this college. So I'm in like the liberal arts college there. But like for instance, if you were a computer science major, you'd have to apply like to the school of Computer Science. so it's like a little bit different, I guess. But I wouldn't say it's like a humanities versus STEM thing, but rather just like, I think those kinds of majors that are in different schools tend to be like engineering or like music or like

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Joyce: art, like very like specific niche majors.

Kate: Yeah, I think that's definitely true. It depends on the school. Even if, the US system is also different from UK or other international schools because, some schools require you to stick with your major and they have very specific program requirements. That wasn't the case for me. But I do think one thing to consider if you're applying to a school that will take it is maybe if you're doing something artistic or creative, submitting a portfolio, like a creative writing portfolio or an art portfolio or whatever applies. If that's something that's really important to you. Also, sorry to go off track, but I thought of my answer. I think the wackiest title of a course I've taken is Fear, Suffering, Anger, Love. The Buddhist Philosophy of Mind. Which was really interesting I thought last spring, and I had a lot of fun. It was very quirky.

Judy: That actually sounds very interesting. Yeah, I would love to take that class. Wait, okay, so on the like Q and A, we also got a question that says, what's the difference between international and domestic Admissions. So I was thinking maybe I could, you know, just share a little bit of my experience. But I don't think there is s much of a difference, between admissions in terms of what you need to submit. Like, the requirements for both international and domestic students is basically the same thing. So if, like, domestic students need to submit, like, extracurriculars, their transcripts or ACT scores, I think maybe the only thing that's different is ielts. Like, do you guys need submit an IELTS score or. No.

Kate: I was technically international because I am a US Citizen, but I was applying from Korea, where I grew up. I don't think I had to do.

Judy: That, though, was the process. Did you think it was different for you than domestic students?

Kate: I think that not altogether like you were saying. I think it would be different for someone who wasn't a US citizen, like me, because then you also have to jump through hoops like visas. and it depends what school you're coming from and where you want to go,

because the requirements different. You might need to take different kinds of exams. But I think, that something, like, whole wholly different.

Judy: Yeah, I'd say maybe, like, the only difference is, you know, if you're an international student, you're kind of moving on this track, like, on your own, because kind of, like, if you want to study abroad, you're like, the entire world is open in front of you. Like, you could choose literally whatever country you want, right? You could go to Italy, you could go to Australia, you could go to the UK you could go to the US So you're looking at all these different admission paths, and you're choosing which one you want to, like, go through. And so you're learning about all of these on your own. And then, also, like, for me, I didn't have, like, someone at school who could support me through the entire process. So I had to, like, I had to, like, teach my counselor how to do certain things, like how to write a recommendation letter or how to do these kinds of things. I think it's like, it's not much of, like, the admission itself is different. Even colleges, I think, like, they don't differentiate as much. If I, like, heard correctly, like, international students and domestic students have their own pools. but, like, there isn't much of a difference except the experience itself. Like, having to do the extracurriculars, take certain exams. Maybe you're gonna need to, like, you know, take extra exams, like the ielts. I know I did have to do that. But, as the admission Process itself. It's not that to. So that's all I have to say. Do you guys have any other thoughts or things you want to share?

Kate: Do you guys have any, reflections or thoughts about how you're feeling about colleges? I don't know if we've done, like, a general share, and I can share, like, maybe some general thoughts about my. How I feel. Entering college as well.

Joyce: M. I think, it's a little bit of an interesting feeling, I'd say. one thing that I think you never really understand until you experience it is that, people will tell you, like, oh, you're going to experience a lot of heartbreak throughout the admissions process. But I think a lot of the time you won't actually believe them until it happens. And then you're like, oh, like, you know, this is a lot more devastating than I expected it to be. so even if, like, the schools that you're getting rejected from, like, 95% of people get rejected from, I think that can still be, like, mentally tough and, like, it's okay to let yourself experience those

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Joyce: emotions. and, like, yeah, to go through that process and, like, have some grace with yourself.

Judy: but, yeah, I think for me, I'm excited because it's this new chapter, and I've been hearing a lot about it. Like, I've heard people say college is the best years of your entire life. Like, it's the golden age or whatever. So I've been excited to experience that and experience, you know. And you found freedom, I guess, whether it's academic or personal. but it is scary, and I am a little bit scared and nervous about it. first of all, I don't know how the classes are gonna be. I feel like maybe there's, like, a certain jump or, like, especially in freshman year, it's gonna feel a little bit different in classes, may be more challenging, or maybe you're

gonna need to rely more on yourself. so that's scaring me a little bit, especially after senior year, because senioritis sent me so bad. but, like, I'm just gonna spend summer having fun, trying not to think about it, I guess. But, that's all I really have to say. I think it's a mix of, being scared and m happy at the same time.

Kate: Yeah, I think that's totally normal. I think that's what I felt to going into college. I was really excited because I knew that I had this sense that there was this huge change coming. And I think looking back, I do feel like A totally different person. And I look back with a lot of fondness at who I used to be. But I was also super scared before entering college like you guys because it is such a new experience for me. I was moving to a new country and I wasnna be very far from my family in a totally new place. And of course college itself, no matter if it's five minutes away or half a world away, is already very new and scary. But looking back, I don't think I needed to be very scared. At least for me. I found like an immediate home and familiarity with where I was and people were so welcoming and the experience is really like college is scary for everyone. So people try to do their best to help you acclimate and adjust and I think it really works out.

Judy: M. That's so great to hear.

Kate: Like Min.

Judy: Okay, so I can just end the episode here. But Joyce, do you have anything else you want to ask Kate? Or anything you want to talk about? You know, anything you want to share?

Joyce: Honestly, not really. I think I've said this of what I want to say.

Judy: Okay, that's great.

Judy: Hi guys. Editor Judy here and I just wanted to quickly hop on and share with you guys a conversation that ah, Kate, Joyce and I had off camera because I felt like it really did describe senior year in a metaphorical yet accurate way. Which is that senior year is going to feel like a waiting room where you're just waiting for your life to move forward. You're often gonna feel a bit robotic. Stagnant. Still. During your senior year, you're doing the things that you've always been doing, like studying for exams. If you're in extracurriculars, then you're just carrying out your role. But you don't really feel like you are achieving much. You don't really feel like your life is progressing. You're just waiting. You're waiting for colleges to reply to you. You're waiting to know what's gonna happen next, where are you going next, where is your life headed in general? And then once you get this information, at the end of senior year, that's when your life is finally back on track and you feel like yeah, I'm finally getting out there, I'm finally doing something with my life. And that can actually get depressing really quickly. So my advice to rising seniors listening to our episode is to really just make sure that you introduce new aspects into your life. Whether it's learning a new hobby or trying out new experiences or even if it's just a new study method that you're gonna be trying out, that could really make a difference, even if it's achieving something that's

minimal or not, you know, as great as, oh, my God, I just got into college. But, it can really help, you know, help you evade that feeling of stagnancy. Is that even a word? I'm not really sure, but anyway, I would like to introduce you guys to another guest in today's episode, which is Emma Z. She was an EIC at Astrolit and she is now a graduated senior and drivesing freshman in college. She couldn't join us during the recording session because of the time zone difference. So I will just be playing a voice clip that she sent me where she's going to share with us her thoughts, tackle some of the questions that we did in this episode, and she'll also be giving you guys her advice. So let's, let's get into it.

Emma Zhang: Hi, I'm Emma and I'm an outgoing editor in chief of Asterlit.

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Emma Zhang: And I'm really excited to be here as I just finished the college application. It's officially senior summer. Summer before freshman year of college. And I have a lot of thoughts. I couldn't join for the actual meeting because I'm in China. but here's a voice clip. So I think part of what we were discussing were what we were planning to do in summer and this summer. I honestly was just thinking about how I've always felt so pressured to do so many things. but this summer I really just want to focus on my own intellectual passions because I think when there is a pressure to achieve or a pressure to create, like, output, it kind of takes away from just like being in a stew of your thoughts and really deeply diving into something and thinking about it all the time in a way that doesn't necessarily have to lead to a product, but is really good for your overall understanding and, like, the way you come to realize your life personally. So I'm trying to read a lot and reconnect with a lot of subjects, such as, like, math and philosophy, of course. I want to read a lot of Eastern and Western philosophy, starting from the very ancient to the very modern. I've been reading a lot of Plato lately in Aristotle because that's the very foundation of Greek philosophy. Like, there's this famous quote that basically all of. All of Western philosophy is just footnotes to Plato. So I really want to be able to read that from the very beginning. And it's been very interesting and very fruitful. And I've been making a lot of connections between philosophy and literature because philosophy is so focused on language as well and expression and how we're able to make sense of these ideas in life, which is kind of very similar to writing. this is also something Plato actually touches on about how like there's, and his like idea forms. There's different types of creating something, like creating a bed. There's creating like the perfect image of the bed. There's creating the actual bed, there's creating an artistic vision of the bed. that was a little bit of a ramble. But basically I think philosophy and literature kind of do the same thing. And I've been realizing that a lot more as I read philosophy. Also I've been thinking a lot about higher education, and globalization and reading some of the works of recent Nobel laureates of econ because I just want to be more immersed in that. also trying to like read more of Don Dewey because he's a pretty interesting figure in terms of educational philosophy. and, and I know in college I'm going to be bombarded with a lot of options of things to do. So I just want to ideologically prepare myself to stay true to what I'm passionate about. Will also be able to be immersed in a new environment. So I think that like having the time to build up this foundation of what I truly care about will make the transition easier

because I can just go from that instead of being very scattered brained right as I walk into the door. yeah, so too was about reflecting on the previous senior year. honestly, senior year was kind of crazy. It really shouldn't have been this crazy, but it was. I don't really know if I ever senioritist in the sense that most people do. like chilling after things are done. I probably definitely should have. Like I was fine after like December, but I somehow was still and like the mood of doing a lot and just being very chaotic. I was pretty stressed all of senior year actually. Like even about like normal things or like just like things that are happy in a part of life. Like I just wanted to fit so much into my life that it ended up being kind of crazy. Like I remember like the week leading up to graduation. I was like so stressed because I wanted to make CHDs for everyone. Like it's literally like a good thing. Like I definitely should enjoy making cards, but I was like, oh my God, they need to be so like eloquently written and beautifully decorated. I need to put like every ounce of my soul into them. Like, Emma, like, you need to chill on some sense. Like if you don't chill on the academic sense, please chill on the personal sense. But I just, I don't know, I sort of didn't.

Emma Zhang: Yeah, it was kind of weird because now that I'm in China it feels like it's not exactly like part of my life. Well, it is obviously, but it's not part of the ending that is high school. And I almost wish that I gave myself more time to create an ending. but yeah, in middle school and in high school we had to write letters to ourselves. And I got them back at the end of high school and just reading them there was like this day where I walked around school at night and I like sat under this like lamp and I read them and I opened them for the first time and it was just like this really weird feeling of like, feeling that like time has like folded in on, on itself. because I was reading about all of the desires and hopes of my 8th grade self and it's like I've kind of realized a lot of them.

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Emma Zhang: and I should be more proud of myself. But the journey almost like folded in on itself. And now it's just the end and just the beginning. And I felt like I could really grasp exactly what I had done. But I guess I had done it in eighth grade or ninth grade. Me's eyes. So it was kind of beautiful. But I also didn't really know if that was exactly the end day I was looking for. I did start a new extracurricular second semester senior year sort of. I started a philosophy organization and I'm still doing stuff with that now and probably will continue on doing that during college. But yeah, I just did not need to be this stressed. I don't know what I was doing. oh, also this summer, like I'm also hopefully. Well I am, but I don't know if it's gonna last. Doing the journalism fellowship, which I'm pretty excited for. I just want to be able to like think about my life more. Like I feel like a lot of times I either want to get something out of it or I like have such a very clear direction on what I think about. I just don't notice the day to day. Like I don't notice the public transport systems. I don't notice like the like small distinctions in education or just like little cultural differences that make that actually seem very small. But in like harbor very deep values in a place. So I just want to think about the world more basically. and in terms of college apps, oh, my God. I have so many thoughts on this. It's been kind of insane. but I think with writing essays, I found this, like, kind of way to conceptualize it. So there's like, two parts of the essay. There's the

content and there's the angle, or the angle I'd also like to call the skin. So the content is usually a strong, like, crux of your motivation or why you care about the world or what you're doing, why you're doing what you're doing, etc. Like, the actual content of what you want to say. And the skin is the unique form or angle about how you go about it. And you know, when you have a good, like, skin, when the content becomes even more potent after you write it in that form and you just feel like it expresses it in a more impactful way, but you know its words when it kind of obscures the content or makes the content less impactful and harder to digest. So, for example, maybe your content is, Well, maybe you. Your content is like, five things you want to say about yourself. This is directly from my Stanford essay. But, like, I think it was about, like, my love of, like, translated literature. It was about m. My, like, need to. To make meaning out of things. what else did I talk about in that essay? But the skin was basically like, this tie dye thing that I witnessed in China. So it was like, writer, write a leather, Write a letter to your, future roommate. And I talked about how when I was in Yuunan in China, I saw the indigenous people do tie dye, and they did it in a really cool way where they knotted little strings together, in the cloth. Like, they would create these, like, knots, and then they would put it into a cauldron and stir it around, and then they would undo the knots and where the knots were, like, knotted would. Would obviously be white, but the other parts would be tie dyed. so that I made the connection of the cauldron being all of Stanford and the little knots being like our, like our dorm. And like, like, we would. In these dorms, we would, like, I don't know, marinate about each other's, little quirks and little things about ourselves so we can bloom even better. I don't know if I'm explaining this very well, but in general, I think it's like the skin makes your essay truly unique, but you obviously Want the skin to help you convey your content better. and I think on applying early to a school, apply early to a school you think would take you and you're also very excited for. This doesn't mean apply for less good of a school but just a school who will really appreciate you. And you know that you have like a slight edge for some reason. For example if you worked with a professor at that school or if you know that that school lacks applicants like you but also likes applicants like you. Like for example Stanford loves quirky experimental humanities kids because they're like pretty STEM focused a lot of times and get a lot more STEM students. So but if you're very quirky and experimental as aities kid you also fit their like experimental kind of value and that would make them more likely to take you. and also being able to get into a school that you're very excited about but you have a slight edge in just makes you a lot less stressed going into regular decision because December and January is a bad time and like the less streessed you are the better because like everyone is kind of freaking out. Everyone's kind of like talking about early decision, regular decision. Everyone's grinding their like 11 essays and if you want to cut their are 11 applications and if you do get in

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Emma Zhang: early you can cut your 11 applications to like three or like two or whatever. yeah. What else do I have to answer? I think some of my biggest fears going into college is that like socially it will be kind of complicated and fragmented. I just don't really know what to expect in a college setting. I think I'll be fine because I truly do love talking to people but I

just don't really know what to expect. I'm also kind of unsure about how to balance like writing with potential other career aspirations or even figuring out what those are. especially because I know the school that I'm going to is pretty pre professional so I really hope to maintain like a very deep rooted humanity part of me. But yeah, just thinking about that of all fears during high school that weren't actually a serious issue. Actually I think that all my fears were a serious issue. Like I think that if I were, if I was worried about, if I was worried about it, it affected my life in some way or affected my development in some way and getting through that is very important. Like even little like social things that like do not matter. I think it does matter when you're 16 and like you truly want to feel like you know what you're doing. In that sense you want to be confident like that I don't. I think that all my fears were valid. advice to my younger self. I would say don't stress. But I think after my senior experience I kind of realized I love stressing. Like not in the sense that like stress is a big part of like, well, it is a big part of my life. Not in the sense that it's like a big part of my identity. But I do think that sometimes it's good to stress because it shows that I truly care and I have like, like my stress comes from a place of care. And I don't think I take myself too seriously in this stress. Like I will sleep, like I will eat. Like it's just it's more of a, like a self guided pressure to do things well and to do things the way I want them to. I mean I think I was kind of okay in high school. I think also I think I would really want to emphasize like build your support network really well because I didn't really realize how important the friends that I'm really close to and are able to call at a moment's notice mean to me. And like I definitely did care a lot about my friendships in high school, but trying to care about them more consistently and realizing that they truly do make my whole life better. Like when I'm happy socially and I, my friendships are great, I can also put a lot more effort into my work and just other aspects. Yeah, honestly, I don't feel like any of it is that serious, but it's as serious as you want to make it. And I think the obvious piece of advice is do what you're passionate about. But I say also do what you think that you can't do. Because I truly do think that like everyone could love every subject if they approach it from the right angle. And there's just so much to be out there to be like explored. And especially in high school, you're not really chained down by anything. So that's like a really good time to explore. I know I almost like was mad at myself for being a little bit too scatterbrained in terms of my different intellectual pursuits. But I realized that it's better than just tunneling on one thing and realizing I never really knew what the other things were about. So yeah, u, be passionate. Dream big. Explore. Love your friends. Keep your friendships close. Well, keep your friendships not far. But like, like also, also get to know like a very large range of people, even if they are going to be your best friends. And also, like, just like subjects, like, I truly think you can love every person if you also approach it from the right angle. but yeah, like, don't worry too much about little things. Just try your best and things truly do work out. Persevere. apply to the same thing four times even if you've already been rejected three times. Sometimes it actually does work out. True example. yeah, thanks for having me.

Judy: So thank you so much for joining us for this episode. It couldn't have been possible without you guys. For more, follow us on Instagram at Aster do lit and check out our website astterlid.org for transcripts and more. Stay tuned for Our latest issue, issue 14 Meridian through the link in the description or find it on Aster's official website. And I want to thank

you, Joyce and Kate, for joining me for this episode. I had so much fun talking to you guys today. And you know, hey, thank you so much for bestowing your wisdom on us, you know, and helping us prepare for college. And Joyce, thank you so much for joining me. and yeah,

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Judy: thank you too. Thank you both.

Kate: It was so fun to be back.

Joyce: Yeah, it was so fun being on this episode Thanks, guys.

Judy: I would totally love to have you guys again for a different episode, we should think. Bye. guys.

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