



Read about the Grammys on Pg. 2

# TIGER TIMES

February Edition



See Valentine's day gifts on Pg. 3

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## Winter Formal

By Addy D.  
Editor-in-Chief

The beginning of February marks a popular attraction for the students of Illini Bluffs—the annual Winter Formal. This year's dance, themed "Starry Night," brought whimsy, elegance and excitement as the students gathered to enjoy their time together.

"It was a lively and classy experience," senior Anna C. said. "The dance brought the theme to life by including a mural of Van Gogh's 'Starry Night.'"

One of the most popular features was the 'Starry Night' artwork. Entirely hand-painted by art teacher Ms. McKean's art club, who spent over a month working on it, helped pull together the theme and served as a popular backdrop for photos throughout the night.

"I was excited for each student to take apart and make it their own," Ms. McKean said. "And, I think that it ended up looking really cool, because each section looks like it was made by a different person, so it's, like, kind of like a mosaic of sorts."

Students seemed to appreciate the effort put into making the overall atmosphere of the dance magical. From decorations to the lighting, music and excitement of the crowd, the environment felt "both fun and formal."



Students pose in the commons for annual Winter Formal photo.

"I liked that people were just genuinely having a good time," sophomore Lily R. said.

Lily enjoyed not only the ambiance of the "whimsical" dance, but also the surprise of winning King and Queen of Winter Formal with her boyfriend, Carson B.

"It was a total surprise," Lily said. "I didn't even know we were nominated."

The couple was dressed in navy blue, with a sequin/beaded feature on Lily's dress, which matched the theme. Some other students stuck to the trend of matching the theme in hues of blue and sparkle, but most just came to enjoy the ambiance and have a good time.

For most students, Winter Formal provided an opportunity to get dressed up, spend time with friends and create memories. As the night came to an end, many students left the dance with photos, laughter, and memories that will follow them long after the decorations are taken down.

"Winter formal is one of my favorite traditions because I can bring my friend from another school," senior Serina S. said. "I get the opportunity to enjoy the night with my friends, and I also just really like to dance."

## Weather Whys: What are polar vortexes and exploding trees?

By Ella D.  
Managing Editor

Just when you thought things couldn't get any crazier, now we have exploding trees! This past month, many people took to social media to discuss the phenomenon of exploding trees, but what are exploding trees, and do they really explode?

During the winter months, trees enter a hibernation-like state to protect themselves from the extreme cold temperatures. This involves multiple cellular changes within the organism. During this process, several changes occur, including cell dehydration, hardening, and shrinking of cells in the bark, as well as an increase in sugar concentration. In doing these things, the tree goes into a state that acts like an anti-freeze super-power, preventing ice crystals from forming, giving the tree protection. Now, what happens when there isn't enough time to complete this process? Well, this is when the act of "exploding trees" can happen, however the trees aren't really exploding. When temperatures plummet rapidly, trees are left unacclimated, causing excess moisture within their bark to still be present. This then in turn causes the moisture to expand, causing a loud popping sound accompanied by a vertical crack down the tree, which is nothing like the AI videos circulating online showing whole trees blowing up like a bomb. This incident most commonly happens when the sun is warm during the day, then the temperatures drop at night, creating a shock to the tree, leaving it with no time to protect itself.

Now that we know why trees may "explode," what causes the temperature to drop rapidly? The most common cause of temperatures dropping rapidly is a cold front. A cold front is a low-pressure system of cold air. Systems and fronts are a complicated and intricate process of weather in our atmosphere. To put it in the simplest terms, a front is the boundary between two different air masses that can include a difference in windspeed, temperature or moisture, then the air out ahead. In terms of cold fronts, it is temperature. A cold front is almost always behind warm air, and when met with the cold air, the cold displaces the warm since cold is denser than hot. This lets the warmer air go higher up into one of the layers of the atmosphere, leaving the cold weather in the troposphere where we are. The reason cold air is more prominent in the winter is because of the polar vortex. The polar Vortex is a large area of low pressure and cold air that surrounds the two poles of the Earth. The counterclockwise flow of air in this allows the

coldest air to stay centered at the poles. But sometimes the vortex can expand, causing cooler air to go south with the jet stream. For additional context, the jet stream refers to the wind speeds and direction high up in the atmosphere. This controls where storms happen, along with pretty much everything else to do with the weather. When the polar vortex expands, and the jet stream changes direction or dips is when there are cold waves throughout the U.S. The reason this almost always happens in the winter is all due to the earth's rotation.

When the earth rotates, different regions experience direct rays from the sun. This is why one place is having a summer season while the other side of the world is experiencing a winter-like season. In the end Winter happens again each year similarly, trees explode every year, causing no harm to humans but damaging trees through increased bacteria and insect exposure.



# Movie review: 'His and Hers'

By **Ashlyn F.**

Voice Reporter

A new Netflix mini-series recently came out on Jan. 8 called "His & Hers." Throughout this story, it talks about estranged ex-spouses and TV anchor Anna and detective Jack, who are drawn back to their hometown, Dahlonega, when a woman is murdered, leading them to investigate the deadly nightmare while suspecting each other of foul play. They then uncover dark secrets from their past involving a high school friend group and resentments that are all part of a complex mystery. Throughout the story, unreliable narrators and multiple twists about who is truly guilty are present, twisting your mind and drawing you in until the end.

Anna and Jack are married throughout this series, but the loss of their infant daughter, Charlotte, causes a major fracture in their marriage. This leads Anna to leave their small

hometown in Georgia for Atlanta, a bigger setting in the same state, and to leave Jack behind. When the murder happened in their hometown, they both happened to be on the spot for the investigation. It reveals deep secrets, including Jack's affair with the victim, Rachel.

The examination intensifies as they both navigate the treacherous waters of their past and present. The discovery of the affair with Rachel sends shockwaves through the already fragile relationship. As they dive deeper, they uncover a web of secrets and lies within their close circle of friends that will change lives. No character is safe, each seeming to have something to hide, while the lines between innocence and guilt blur with every twist. The pressure mounts as they race against time to find the real killer before more lives are lost, and their own secrets are exposed.



# Super Bowl for the girls: Who won big at the 2026 Grammys

By **Jocelyn J.**

Voice Editor

The Super Bowl is next weekend, but in music girls' hearts, their Super Bowl has come and gone. The Grammys were last weekend, and after last year's controversial ending, I was quite worried about this year's award ceremony, but this year there were fewer snubs and single-artist sweeps. There are too many categories to talk about all of them in a small article, so we're gonna talk about some of the bigger categories of the night.

The first big category of the night presented was "Best New Artist." The nominees consisted of Lola Young, Addison Rae, Sombr, The Marias, KATSEYE, Olivia Dean, Alex Warren and Leon Thomas III. This felt like a good batch of nominees that had massive years after some of their breakthrough songs. All performed, and my favorites were definitely Olivia Dean and Lola Young. Lola Young impressed me with her powerful voice and how she changed the song "Messy" from its

upbeat style to a slow piano ballad version. Olivia Dean just felt like a natural performer on stage and had elegance with her performance. I also liked the professionalism Alex Warren had when his inner earpieces were off, so he couldn't hear himself. Instead of running off stage or making a big deal about it, he took them out and continued through the performance. Ultimately, Olivia Dean was awarded the Grammy that night. I think it is well deserved, but not what I expected. Because Olivia Dean's songs came to mainstream media just a couple of months ago, I didn't think the Recording Academy would pick her. I was expecting someone who was bigger throughout the entire year, like Alex Warren or Sombr.

The next big category was "Song of the Year." The nominees were "WILDFLOWER" by Billie Eilish & Finneas O'Connell, "Abracadabra" by Lady Gaga, Henry Walter & Andrew Watt, "Anxiety" by DoeChii, "APT." by ROSÉ & Bruno Mars, "DtMF" by Bad Bunny, "Golden" by KPop Demon Hunters, "luther" by Kendrick Lamar feat. SZA and

"Manchild" by Sabrina Carpenter. The winner of the night was "WILDFLOWER." Now, do I think this was deserved? Yes, but it felt like a sympathy Grammy. After last year's controversy, when people were furious that "HIT ME HARD AND SOFT" won no Grammys, this felt like the Grammys were apologizing. The song was released two years ago and was only qualified for the Grammy after being released as a single in February of 2025. I felt like it should've gone to "Manchild" because you couldn't go a single

place without hearing that song.

The next category was "Record of the Year." The nominees were "luther," "DtMF," "Manchild," "Anxiety," "WILDFLOWER," "Abracadabra," "APT" and "The Subway" by Chapell Roan, with the winner of the night being "luther." I think this was a good winner because of its popularity and influence this year, but I feel like Kendrick is almost just handed the Grammys with no competition. Every year he is nominated, it



Grammys continued on P5

# Fighting the Shrinkflation War

By **Nathan O. and Topher B.**

Voice Reporters

If you attend a school basketball game, you might notice the popcorn bags are smaller than they used to be. This is shrinkflation, a term for when companies reduce a product's size or quantity without changing its price. The goal is often to make items more expensive per unit without raising the shelf price. Other products have faced shrinkflation, but Toblerone is one of the most well-known examples. In 2016, Toblerone reduced the size of its chocolate triangles to manage costs, sparking backlash and jokes about the new "bike rack" design.

Consumers can fight shrinkflation by boycotting or calling out the changes. After Toblerone changed its bars, many posted on social media saying they felt cheated by the gaps and lighter bars. The company responded to the backlash and, in 2018, returned the bars to their original shape. Another example happened in 2021. PepsiCo cut the amount of chips in Doritos bags from 9.75 ounces to 9.25 ounces. Customers noticed and stopped buying the brand. PepsiCo saw a drop in sales and later added 20% more chips to bags and increased the number in multipacks.

## Taylor Swift/Blake Lively drama

By Lillian K.  
News Editors

Most best friends tend to have each other's back whenever situations get a bit sticky, and celebrities are no exceptions. Moving forward, Taylor Swift and Blake Lively are a prime example of this, as they are filling our social media feeds amid the controversy against Justin Baldoni.

In our October edition, we mentioned how "It Ends with Us" co-stars Lively and Baldoni got themselves into this situation, but as for Taylor, it was just pure luck, or lack thereof, due to her ties to Lively. It was the singer's intended goal to stay out of this legal battle, but the government said otherwise.

Jan. 20 was full of drama and jaw drops as the messages between Taylor and Lively were released. To move further into depth, one of Taylor's messages was featured on her new album, "Life of a Showgirl" in the song, "CANCELLED!"

Fans of Taylor viewed the messages between the girls and put two and two together and noticed a key line in the musical piece. The star writes in her verses, "Were you just too smug for your own good? / Or bring a tiny violin to a knife fight?"

At the time these lines were released, these words may have seemed insignificant, but as the media released the text messages, we learned otherwise. At the beginning of the feud between Baldoni and Lively in 2023, Taylor messaged Blake and wrote, "I think this [EXPLETIVE] knows something is coming because he's gotten out his tiny violin." This, of course, refers back to Baldoni.

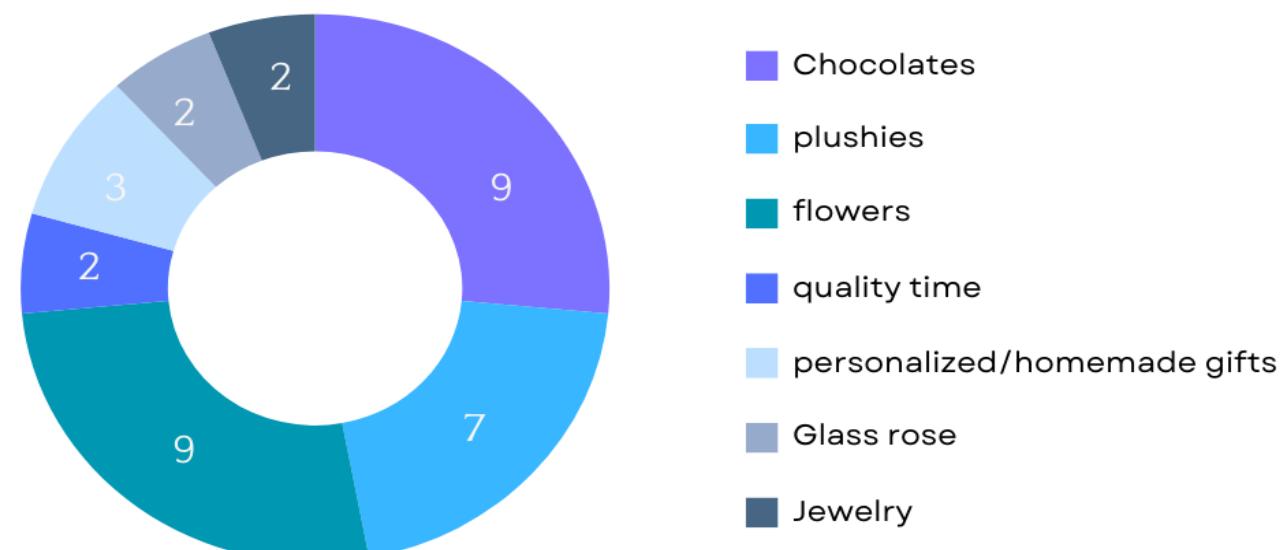
Other messages paint a narrative of the celebs' friendship and the ups and downs they had, but as time went on, clarification between the girls and their feelings came to a conclusion, almost as if they never had problems to begin with, while having each others backs.



## What girls want for Valentine's Day

By Staff

### WHAT DO GIRLS WANT FOR VALENTINES DAY?



By: Serina S.

My valentines wish list is sentimental gifts. I believe love letters, pictures and personal gifts are the best to receive on Valentine's Day because it shows how much the person truly knows you. I think most girls want chocolates and flowers, which is valid! Flowers and chocolates are also on my wish list.

By: Mallory S.



I think most girls would love to receive anything. But my favorite things are personalized gifts including handwriting or photos of you and your person. Jellycats are always cool too!



By: Shayley D.

Me personally I love to get flowers and chocolate which is what most girls want or get, if they don't get that they just want the presence and love from their partner.

By: Anna C.



I think homemade gifts will be the biggest thing girls are looking for from their partner this Valentine's season. Store bought gifts are nice, but will never beat well thought out, homemade gifts.

# Senior column: Wrapped in myself--being my own peace

By: Serina S.

Copy Editor

Coming home and wrapping yourself in your favorite blanket can be the most comforting part of your day — the peace you've been anticipating. Blankets symbolize comfort, safety and warmth. However, just as peace is often sought from a blanket, true peace is something we must find within.

We often expect others — family, friends or partners — to serve as our blanket, shielding us from pain and providing comfort. At the beginning of last year, Mar. 2025, I was going through something and needed support. I confided in one of my best friends and told her information that I wouldn't want to be put down for; she ultimately used it against me and led me to fear trusting other people. It wasn't easy letting someone be as close to me as she was, but eventually I did. After letting my guard down and trusting someone new, I was reminded of why I should only trust myself. In the aftermath, I had to be my own blanket, giving myself the comfort I needed because I didn't feel safe turning to anyone else. Along the way, though, I realized that a borrowed blanket never offers the same comfort as your own. Like a blanket that isn't yours, external sources can't bring lasting peace. Only by cultivating inner calm can we find true peace.

Finding your own peace is like knitting your own blanket: there are complications, steps and even layers. You begin by choosing your yarn, selecting the color, texture and design that you want. Nothing you choose will be perfect for everyone, but it will be perfect for you. Similar to choosing your own yarn, acknowledge your own materials; reflecting on your personality, challenges and strengths without wanting to change. After selecting your yarn, you have to begin stitching. When you stitch your blanket, you repeatedly pull one loop through another, focusing on the way you manipulate your hands and the loops through.



Like continuously pulling loops through one another, Inner peace is found through repeatedly reminding yourself that the qualities you have are perfect just for you. Pulling loops through one another also indicates being "in the moment", or focusing on what you're doing now. As you are knitting your blanket, you are probably going to have a moment when you "drop a stitch," creating a hole. Many people's initial reaction is to become frustrated and restart. A vital part of finding your own peace is to accept that there are complications. Instead of restarting, stitch your blanket back up and keep going.

Your life isn't over, or doesn't need to be restarted, when you do come across challenges. While knitting your blanket, more material is being added. Soon enough, the blanket will grow heavier, making it harder to move and turn. As you advance in life, the inner peace you're searching for may weigh heavily on you. That is a common part of life; it doesn't mean you should stop looking for inner peace. It simply enhances your strength and determination. The final step in knitting a blanket is ensuring the blanket doesn't unravel by sealing the edges. The act of sealing the edges symbolizes the boundaries and order that you have; it represents turning the negative experiences into something secure. Once you seal the edges, the blanket becomes more durable, similar to recognizing your own strength.

In conclusion, finding true peace is a personal journey, much like knitting your own blanket. It requires a lot, as knitting a blanket also does, including patience, challenges, the strength to keep going and accepting imperfections. By setting boundaries and embracing yourself, you can create a sense of comfort and security for yourself. Similar to a self-made blanket that wraps you in warmth, cultivating inner peace provides what no one else can. The peace we seek is not within others, but within the love we have for ourselves.

# Senior column: You should always be your shelf

By: Carson B.

Voice Reporter

I've loved to read ever since I could remember, which was 4th grade. I've read, I don't know how many books since then, but it's at least more than 20. However, I would have to say that high school has been the place where I have read the most books. High school is so short, yet so significant to our lives. We look back at our yearbooks and photos and remember the good times, all our experiences being different.

If I were to describe my high school career, I would think of it as a bookshelf.

My whole life is one big library, a shelf for every year of life, the rows being years, and the books being the memories I have from that era, per se. However, when you look at my high school shelf, some rows are different from the others. The first row has one book, which is not very long, maybe three pages long.

Then you look at the second row, and it's much fuller. That little book is still there, and holds its place, but there are three extra books, much bigger than the little book, which have also seemed to grow in size. The third row has one other book added, with the first book getting bigger in this row, and the fourth row has just one more book. But what does this mean? What is it representing?

My freshman year, I didn't really do anything. I did Chambers Singers, and that was fun, but in a choir full of seniors, you definitely feel smaller. It was sad, and I still look back on that year with distaste because I was so lonely. But in my sophomore year, I tried out for the school musical after leaving a theatre company that summer, and got a lead. Then I joined the scholastic bowl, which I did in middle school, and tried out for the school play. Choir, of course, still had its place, but I was now a bigger part of it with all the people who left.

In my junior year, I joined NHS and did everything I had the previous year, with me becoming a bigger part of the choir. Then this year, I joined the newspaper, became captain of the varsity team for scholastic bowl, and started my 4th year in choir. In my freshman year, I was so scared to find myself and express myself that I kept myself in a box, and I regret that now.

Even though it's sad to look back at, seeing the progression of my personality and social life, I learned an important lesson. That I should just be my shelf, and that's all I need to be to be happy.



# Cheer ends a 'Marvel'-filled season

By: Brody M. and Meadow H.

Voice Reporters

The Illini Bluffs High School cheerleading season came to an end at Oswego High School in the sectional series this past weekend. Even though the squad put on a fast-paced, energetic routine, their season sadly concluded there. However, they are not leaving the season without hardware.

Overall, they had remarkable performances this season, placing first in both game day and routine at the Farmington Invitational, their first competition. At Joliet, they placed second. They also competed at Oak Forest and placed second. And to conclude the season, they got ninth at sectionals.

Despite not ending at the state, the girls still have a lot to be proud of after an amazing season led by the sole senior, Gabrielle G.

"We scored the highest score ever through my entire high school years," said Gabrielle G.

At the Oak Forest competition, they had an impressive raw score of 86.53. Talk about themes and passion and friendships and how they upped their difficulty.

Watching the routine, you can see just how close all the girls are and how comfortable they are with each other.

"Every girl on the team feels like my sister and absolutely amazing coaches," said junior Harlow M.

Before going on the mat, most teams have rituals like ours; they all come together for a little extra luck.

"Every time we go on the mat, we all get into a huddle, put our left foot in, and say a prayer," said junior Madi M.

Other traditions include a pre-routine chant, "Tigers Assemble," based on their routine theme.

Every year, the seniors choose the theme for the routine. This year's choice was Avengers.

"Basically it's my favorite franchise ever," said Gabrielle G. "I've always been so obsessed with all the movies, and I have so many clothes that are Marvel."

And without a doubt, when it was time to assemble, the Illini Bluffs cheerleaders brought super spirit to the mat this season.



Cheerleaders in stunt at competition

## Winter Sports Photo Recap: For more photos, go to [ibhstigertimes.com](http://ibhstigertimes.com)



## Grammys cont. from P2

feels like no one else even has a chance. I felt this especially with "Best Rap Album." Kendrick won the Grammy, but I felt like Tyler, the Creator, deserved it. He put his heart and soul into that album, and I felt like he had no chance just because Kendrick was nominated. I was still happy about the win, though, just because I wanted SZA to get the Grammy she deserved.

The final and biggest category of the night was "Album of the Year." The nominees were "DeBÍ TiRAR MÁS FOTO'S" by Bad Bunny, "SWAG" by Justin Bieber, "Man's Best Friend" by Sabrina Carpenter, "Let God Sort Em Out" by Clipse, "MAYHEM" by Lady Gaga, "GNX" by Kendrick Lamar, "MUTT" by Leon Thomas, and "CHROMAKOPIA" by Tyler, The Creator. The winner was "DeBÍ TiRAR MÁS FOTO'S" by Bad Bunny. I personally wanted Tyler, the Creator, but I feel like I can't accurately comment on the winner because of the language barrier. I think the album's beat is good, and I personally think he deserved it, but I can't comment on the lyrics. I feel like this was really good timing, especially with his Super Bowl performance next week. As much as I wanted Tyler, the Creator to win, I am happy that Bad Bunny won.

Speaking of Bad Bunny, the rapper was not allowed to give a full performance because of his upcoming Super Bowl performance, but other artists held it down for the night. Especially Sabrina Carpenter and Tyler, the Creator. Sabrina Carpenter came out with a dove (that allegedly had an accident on her right before her performance), and sang her bridge on an airplane mike to make the performance feel like it's on an airplane. Tyler, the Creator came out later, marching across the stage singing his song "Thought I Was Dead". He changed his lyrics to match a more family-friendly feel of the night, but over the curse words, he has the construction noises.

On the whole, this year's Grammys felt much less controversial than last year's. The stakes didn't feel as high for me personally as it was last year. I just felt like last year the performances were stronger, and it just felt more competitive that year. Nonetheless, every artist did great, and every Grammy was well deserved.

# Word Search Puzzle

Answers posted at [ibhstigertimes.com](http://ibhstigertimes.com)

## February Word search



Tree  
Jack  
Winterformal  
Shrinkflation  
Exploding  
Cheer

Swift  
Wrapped  
Anna  
Lively  
Grammy



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