

I believe in star gazing. I believe that it allows for us to appreciate the beauty in life, and it can teach us new values and perspective.

There's nothing like casually laying out on a blanket and staring up at exploding balls of hydrogen gas that are light years away. In high school, I was on my school's Science Olympiad team, and my event for two years was astronomy. Every day after school I would study astrophysics, analyzing light curves and calculating stellar properties. While this may seem daunting and uninteresting to some people, I enjoyed the challenge stars had to offer. In a way, being able to calculate the size of black holes and the velocity of supernovas felt like a superpower. Through numbers, I was able to acquire and experience phenomena going on in galaxies outside of our own.

However, a few weeks before our state competition my astro-abilities began to falter. The formulas that I had been using all year seemed to contradict one another, and I had trouble grasping new concepts. As I was stressing about astronomy in my bedroom one night, my brother came in and asked if I wanted to go to a bonfire on the beach. I declined at first, but after heavy persuasion from my brother's end, I decided to go. I ended up having a great time around the fire, roasting marshmallows and sharing laughs with my friends. But, perhaps the most memorable moment of that night happened after my friends had left and the fire was put out. I was lying on the cool sand, listening to the waves methodically roll onto the beach, and I looked up at the stars, not seeing them through my usual method of numbers or data, but through watching them twinkle and illuminate the silent, night-sky. I was taken aback by the vastness yet simplicity of stars, and this made me appreciate them in a whole new way. I was truly starstruck, and I realized that I was too focused and adamant on finding answers and stressing about their

implications. Because of this experience, I believe that we understand life better when we appreciate its aspects for what they are, not when we scrutinize them to find their meanings.

Ever since my bonfire epiphany, I have made stargazing a regular thing in my life and have grasped new perspectives. I believe that stars, despite their vast distances from Earth, have a very real way of connecting us to reality, surpassing the boundaries of time and space. For instance, the stars that I stand under tonight are the same stars that saw Shakespeare, guided Columbus, and inspired Van Gogh. When I look at the stars, time seems obsolete, and I realize that the far away constellations have seen more of humanity than I ever will. I have a lot more to learn from stars than what the laws of physics imply, and stargazing allows me to recognize and appreciate these new perspectives. This I believe.