



American students like to write dedications in each other's yearbooks

One of the most important documents in American school life is the yearbook. Many middle schools and junior high schools have them, but usually people think of high school when you say “yearbook”. This book is published¹ every year in the spring, a few weeks before the seniors² graduate³. Almost everyone is excited the day the yearbooks are sold at school. Why? Because the book takes you through all the events of the past school year in words and pictures. Lots of pictures. “Look at us at Homecoming⁴ on page 22!” “Look at Mr. Nelson on our trip to the museum – I had forgotten how mad he was at us that day, look at his face!” It can be great fun to look at all the pictures – but *not* when you discover a really bad one of yourself!

Yearbook is a real class, like History or Math, which the students get a grade for. The staff⁵ of students and a teacher make sure all the different moments and events during the school year find their way into the yearbook. Some of the students on the yearbook staff write the articles, others go to all the different school events and take photos,

some do both. The staff makes decisions about what sections the yearbook should have (or *not* have) or what changes could make this year's yearbook better than last year's. But these books are expensive to make, so students must pay for them. Also, local shops and services pay the yearbook staff a small amount and are allowed to advertise with their company's logo in the advertising section, so a little money is made in this way, too.

Most yearbooks are very similar. There is always a section with one photo of each student. Usually, the seniors' pictures are usually larger than those of the juniors⁶, sophomores⁷ and freshmen⁸, and usually in color. Many yearbooks also feature information about each student next to his/her picture. For example, this could be next to Kimberly Perry's senior picture:

Kimberly Perry – Swimming 10, 11, 12; Soccer 11, 12; Honor Roll 10, 11, 12; Square Dance Club 11, 12; French Club 10, 11, 12; June 20.

¹to publish ['pʌblɪʃ] = to print and then (usually) sell • ²senior ['si:niə] = student in the 12th grade at high school • ³to graduate ['grædʒuənt] = to finish high school • ⁴Homecoming ['həʊm,kʌmɪŋ] = a week of special activities and events early in the school year to celebrate “coming back to school” • ⁵staff [stɑ:f] = people who work together • ⁶junior ['dʒu:niə] = student in the 11th grade at high school • ⁷sophomore ['sɒfmɔ:] = student in the 10th grade at high school • ⁸freshman ['freʃmən] = student in his/her first year at high school (usually the 9th grade)

From this information we know that Kimberly was on the swim team her sophomore, junior and senior years, and she also played soccer. Not only was she athletic but she was also intelligent because she was on the Honor Roll (= the list of students with the best grades). Kimberly danced and was active in the French Club. And what do you do if you want to send Kimberly a birthday card a year after graduation but you can't remember when her birthday is exactly? Just look in the yearbook; her birthday is June 20th.

Typically, the first section of a yearbook is "Student Life". In this section you'll find lots of pictures of students in action. The football team might be waiting to run out onto the field. The Homecoming queen⁹ (who is usually the most popular girl at school) will be smiling at you and you'll be able to read about her date for the evening. You'll probably find pictures of happy or sad basketball fans, acrobatic cheerleaders and dramatic actors and actresses there, too. The yearbook staff tries to put in a picture of *all* of the clubs so that even the less-popular clubs also have their page in the book.

But yearbooks aren't just about extracurricular activities¹⁰. School subjects and classroom activities are also featured, usually in a section called "Academics". Was a new course introduced to the school that year? Then the yearbook staff will have pictures of the new teacher with his/her course. For example, the school might have an exchange teacher from France who is also interested in conservation¹¹. So he might start a Conservation Club and in the yearbook you'll see pictures of this new club. The Academics section is also where you find the pictures of the teachers. (And if a trick was played on a teacher that year, as sometimes happens, you'll surely find funny photos of the "event" in this part of the yearbook!)

Sports are extremely important at every American high school, so there will be a section with pictures of all of the sports activities offered at the school. The tennis tournament will be shown and you can read about the players' wins and losses throughout the year.

One section that is very popular with most students (but not all!) is reserved for "Senior Superlatives". This is the section where senior boys and girls are given special titles in categories like "Most Talented", "Best Dressed", "Best Looking", "Best Body", "Best Sense of Humor" or "Most Athletic". Of course there is always a color picture of each happy award-winner. Some students complain that these awards are stupid and superficial¹²; what does "Best Dressed" or "Best Body" have to do with school or good grades? Others say it's good to have awards like these because they celebrate how unique¹³ students can be. Most students just like to look at the pictures. (And more than just a few students secretly hope *they* will win the award in their favourite category when they are seniors...)

One big tradition is when students exchange yearbooks to write dedications to each other. Some write just a few lines like "Stay cool, dude!" or "Remember the party at my house? God, what a mess. But it was fun, let's do it again!" Others need a whole page or more to tell their friend how important he/she has been during their time together at high school. Especially the seniors start to get a little sad when it's time to write in a friend's yearbook: Many students move to different cities or states after high school and they know they won't see many of the other kids again.

But even if the students *don't* have their yearbook full of dedications, these books are a always wonderful way to remember all the little details of high school life.

⁹Homecoming queen [ˈhəʊm,kʌmɪŋ ,kwɪ:n] = this is the girl in the Senior Class that the whole school voted for to be queen of the Homecoming events; she always wears a formal dress and a tiara or crown • ¹⁰extracurricular activities [ˌɛkstrəˈkɪkjələːrækˈtɪvɪtɪz] = clubs and sports that students do in their freetime after school • ¹¹conservation [ˌkɒnsəˈveɪʃn] = protection of the environment • ¹²superficial [ˌsuːpəˈfiʃl] = oberflächlich • ¹³unique [juːˈni:k] = different from everybody else (einzigartig)

1 Reading comprehension

How much did you understand? Tick (✓) the correct answer.

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| <p>1. A yearbook is published ...</p> <p>a) once a year.
b) twice a year.
c) once a month.</p> <p>2. Kimberly Perry was a member of ...</p> <p>a) the Chess Club.
b) the basketball team.
c) the French Club.</p> <p>3. There Homecoming queen is ...</p> <p>a) always the most popular girl at school.
b) usually the most popular girl at school.
c) usually the prettiest girl at school.</p> <p>4. Yearbook is ...</p> <p>a) an extracurricular activity.
b) a club.
c) a class.</p> | <p>5. In the section Student Life you'll find ...</p> <p>a) cheerleaders.
b) angry teachers.
c) advertising.</p> <p>6. You can find pictures of ... in the yearbook.</p> <p>a) only the seniors
b) all of the students
c) only the seniors and the juniors</p> <p>7. "Senior Superlatives" is a section that ...</p> <p>a) most students like.
b) no students like.
c) all students like.</p> <p>8. A dedication in a yearbook is ...</p> <p>a) another name for the advertising section.
b) when a friend writes something in your yearbook.
c) when the yearbook staff takes a picture of a student.</p> |
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2 Your turn: Your school and yearbooks

a) *Does your school have a yearbook?*

- If yes, do students work on it or is it something the teachers do?
- If no, would you like it if your school had a yearbook? Give reasons.

b) *If you had a yearbook at your school ...*

- What sections of the yearbook would be the most interesting for you to work on if you were on the yearbook staff? Why?
- Is there anything new at your school this year that the yearbook staff could write about, e.g. new buildings, new activities?
- Would you write an article about a special teacher? Why, why not?
- What exchange students could you write about? What could you say about them?
- How much would you pay for a yearbook?
- What would be written next to *your* name in your yearbook? (Think of the example of Kimberly Perry from the text.)

c) *If you want to see examples of what yearbooks look like, just enter the keywords "high school yearbooks online" into a search engine and you will find many different school websites which have put their yearbooks online.*

2 Individuelle Antworten
1. a), 2. c), 3. b), 4. c), 5. a), 6. b), 7. a), 8. b)

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