

## People &amp; Places

## Education

## TutorScope helps students

## Teens tutor peers online to fill need

SANTA FE, N.M., Jan 20, (AP): When her suburban Dallas high school was forced to move online last spring because of the coronavirus pandemic, Charvi Goyal realized that the schoolmates she'd been informally tutoring between classes would still need extra help but wouldn't necessarily be able to get it. So she took her tutoring online, as well.

Goyal, a 17-year-old high school junior from Plano, roped in three classmates to create TutorScope, a free tutoring service run by high schoolers for other kids, including younger ones. What started with a handful of instructors helping friends' siblings in their hometown has blossomed into a group of 22 tutors from Texas, Arizona, and Ohio that has helped more than 300 students from as far away as South Korea.

"I could foresee that schools were going to go virtual. And with that there were a couple of problems because the interactions between students and students, and students and teachers would be weakened," Goyal said.

TutorScope provides the one-on-one support that teachers have traditionally given while roving the aisles of their classrooms but now often can't because of the time and technology constraints posed by online schooling.

On a night near the end of the fall semester, tutor Avi Bagchi worked with 7-year-old twins Monika and Massey Newman on a reading comprehension lesson about discerning between fact and opinion. During their half-hour video chat, the 16-year-old Plano High School student provided the children from nearby Corinth with examples — it's a fact that the pen is red but an opinion if one doesn't like it — and reined them in when they got off topic a bit: Can't it be a fact that someone holds an opinion?

"I love candy. That's a fact ..." said Massey, "... because it's true," he and his sister said in unison.

Their mother, social worker Sarah Newman, said the twins' TutorScope sessions have been really helpful and have freed up her and her 17-year-old son to focus on their own work.

"With these tutors, I realize they have time," she said. "I think they are very patient with these younger kids, which I do not even have as a mother. I have patience in other things, (but) I don't have patience in the teaching."

## Semester

Newman discovered TutorScope a few weeks into the fall semester on Nextdoor, a neighborhood-based social media app, and signed up her twins for sessions, which can be up to an hour each week per subject.

"At the time I was even looking for tutoring for them, like private tutoring, and every spot that I hit was too costly for those two kids. I'm like, I can't afford it," Newman said.

TutorScope isn't the first nonprofit to offer online tutoring and is just one of the workarounds people have come up with to educate kids during the pandemic, from a teacher in Nigeria who grades homework from around the world to a so-called sidewalk school in Mexico that offers online instruction to children, including some stuck at the border awaiting decisions on US asylum requests.

What makes the TutorScope effort unique is the bond between the teenage volunteers and the peers they're helping.

"We kind of want to keep the whole 'for students by students' thing really prominent since it provides a sort of solidarity. Because everyone is going through the same thing, you know that your tutor is also having the same struggles learning right now that you are," Goyal said.

The group accepts donations from adults but limits volunteers to students, including at least one college undergrad.

Now in their third semester, the TutorScope board has secured nonprofit status from the IRS and persuaded a software company to give them free access to a scheduling platform. Jessica Ding, 16, manages the website and parent emails, Angelina Ehara, 17, coordinates public outreach and social media, and Kaushtubh Sonawane, 16, runs the signup process.

The tutors, for their part, get experience that will look great on a college or job application — no small thing with many other extracurriculars shelved during the pandemic. They also get a sense of whether they might want to teach full-time or run a business or an NGO someday.

New tutors undergo limited training: they watch recordings of tutoring sessions. But Goyal's main request from prospective volunteers is a passion for helping the kids they tutor progress.

"Our system is pretty scalable. The only thing we really need to manage (2,000) students would be more tutors," Goyal said.

Although the pandemic has forced many students to retreat inward, Goyal said working with others on a big project has allowed her to look outward.

"My confidence level has increased," said Goyal, adding that she's made friends with kids from her school whom she's never met in person. Furthermore, running a growing nonprofit "does help with the boredom" of being stuck at home, she said.

## Also:

**NEW YORK:** Hallie Knight, a high school senior from Jacksonville, Florida, has some well formed ideas about where the country is and how she'd like to see it change.

The 17-year-old has won a contest organized by the Academy of American Poets for which students under 18 wrote their own inaugural poems in anticipation of Wednesday's swearing in of President-elect Joe Biden. Applicants for the Inaugural Poem Project were urged to submit work that reflects "on the country's challenges, strengths, and hope for its future," according to the guidelines.

Knight says she "wanted to acknowledge the greatness of the potential for our country at this present moment, and the opportunity we have as citizens to choose what it becomes out of all this chaos."

Inspired by works ranging from W.H. Auden's "As I Walked Out One Evening" to Adrienne Rich's "Storm Warnings," Knight crafted a piece called "To Rebuild" that likens the US to a house that has been severely but not hopelessly damaged.

The work is not complete until the walls protect all who live there, No exceptions. Abandonment of all Unnecessary despair.

Knight will receive \$1,000, and her work — along with the poems of two runners-up — will be featured on Poets.org and in American Poets magazine.



This image released by Peacock shows Amber Ruffin from the comedy series 'The Amber Ruffin Show,' available on the Peacock streaming service. (AP)

## Television

## Exuberant charm lures viewers to her show

## 'Wildly silly' Ruffin earns TV spotlight

By Lynn Elber

If you're someday in need of a plus-one to liven an unpromising party, consider Amber Ruffin. In fact, skip the party and just hang with Ruffin, whose weekly comedy show is proving her to be excellent company.

Ruffin's exuberant charm can and should lure you in to Peacock's weekly "The Amber Ruffin Show," but expect humor that's incisive and impressively deft, including on race, politics and the sunny side of life, such as it is.

A memorable moment from Ruffin's show last fall was a lullaby she sang oh-so-sweetly: "The sun has set, it's time to go to bed. Brush your teeth and rest your sleepy head. When you wake in the morning, you'll rise and do your best. Then in November, your vote will be suppressed."

Trained in improv and a writer on NBC's "Late Night with Seth Meyers" since 2014, Ruffin was ready for her star turn on Peacock: The streaming service ordered 10 additional episodes of the weekly show that debuted last fall, with new half-hours released on Fridays.

Ruffin easily shifts from "wildly silly to incredibly insightful and moving," Meyers said. "There are very few people that can swing back and forth as ably as Amber can, and that's been on full display on our show and even more so on hers."

Tarik Davis, her longtime comedy partner and an actor and singer, is Ruffin's game sidekick through jokes, skits and duets.

The Omaha, Nebraska, native spoke with The Associated Press about her start in entertainment, how

she and other Black women are making their mark, and the book Ruffin wrote with her sister, Lacey Lamar, about routine brushes with racism — and yes, "You'll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey" is funny as well as eye-opening. The interview has been edited for clarity and length.

**AP:** What pulled you out of your hometown and to Chicago to pursue a career in comedy?

**Ruffin:** I used to improvise in Omaha and it was very fun, and we would go to Chicago to do the Chicago Improv Festival, which was a big deal. You set to see real improvisers you only ever heard stories about. So one year I'm there and Charna Halpern, who runs the iO Theater in Chicago, said, "If you move here, you'll have a full-time job within a year." And she was right, I did.

**AP:** Did you know what your ultimate goal was?

**Ruffin:** Everything that happens to me is a surprise. I did not see myself ever going to New York. And when I got this job writing for Seth, I knew people wrote for late-night shows, but you just don't hear a lot about that and certainly don't hear about Black people doing it, so it just didn't occur to me that it was a thing. Then when I got this job, I thought, "Oh, I'm just never going to know what is the next thing." I don't try to guess and I don't try to plan anything. But I have to be trying to do a very good job, because it seems like that what's driving everything is my working hard and hopefully doing a good job.

**AP:** Amid demands for diversity, a number of Black women are coming into their own as successful writers, producers and performers, including you, Robin Thede and Issa

Rae. Why do you think that's the case?

**Ruffin:** Most of the Black women I know take care of what is wrong, and no matter what their job is, they're doing four people's jobs. They're always making sure that everything's taken care of, and when no one else will do it, it falls to us. I think once people started hiring Black women to write on shows, they realized we won't just take care of the things you asked us to hand in. We'll produce the (expletive) out of stuff. I think people are slowly realizing that is Black women behavior, and then once you put some money behind it, whoa, baby, we'll do all the work.

**AP:** Your sister has made a habit of keeping notes on her encounters with racism, at work and elsewhere. How did you decide that would make for a book?

**Ruffin:** When something racist happens to her, she calls me on the phone, and she'll be telling the story and I'll be doubled over laughing and crying because it's hilarious. That's everybody who gets discriminated against, like when you were talking to your boss and he couldn't stop looking at your boobs. I was on my way for a meeting about doing a book and Lacey called and said, "You will never believe this. We got T-shirts at work because we met our goal, and all the supervisors except for me are white and almost everyone else is Black, and the shirts say "#Wewinnin."

**AP:** What would you like readers to take away from her experiences?

**Ruffin:** I hope they look back at what society is and what workplaces are and go, "I've helped create a place where stories like these aren't welcome." (AP)



Geena Davis arrives at the 24th annual Screen Actors Guild Awards on Jan 21, 2018, in Los Angeles. Davis turns 65 on Jan 21. (AP)



Bow Wow



Bryant

## Variety

**HOUSTON:** Rapper Bow Wow apologized after Houston's mayor called him out for attending a crowded gathering at a city nightclub during a weekend packed with concerts as Texas continues to grapple with the coronavirus.

Mayor Sylvester Turner took to Twitter on Sunday to tell the Ohio rapper, whose real name is Shad Gregory Moss, know that the city was monitoring a football watch party Bow Wow was expected to attend.

"Other bars/clubs that are operating as restaurants, beyond capacity and social distancing requirements, please expect visits," Turner tweeted.

Bow Wow also sounded off on Twitter to share his grievances, saying he wasn't paid to appear and that he was there for a friend's birthday party.

"Safe to say the mayor of Houston hates my guts. I can't believe I get the blame for a whole weekend," Bow Wow tweeted Monday morning. "I apologize if I did anything wrong. I love the city of Houston."

But Turner made clear that he doesn't dislike Bow Wow and said the pandemic is not the time for concerts.

The tweets follow a concert at the Houston nightclub, Spire, where police saw hundreds of people waiting to enter the crowded venue to see singer Trey Songz and New York City rapper Fabolous. (Agencies)

**LONDON:** Sarah, the Duchess of York, has landed a book deal for her debut novel for adults, a historical romance fictionalizing the life and loves of her great-great-aunt.

In a promotional video posted Wednesday on her Twitter account, the former Sarah Ferguson said the novel, titled "Her Heart for a Compass," is set in the Victorian era and is "about daring to follow your heart against the odds."

The duchess wore a Victorian-style outfit in the video and described her heroine as strong, rebellious and courageous.

Publisher Mills & Boon, a romance imprint of British publisher Harlequin UK, said the story is based on Sarah's ancestor,

Lady Margaret Montagu Douglas Scott, who fled an arranged marriage and "the confines of polite society."

The duchess said she also drew on "many parallels from my life" for the

love story.

Sarah was married to Prince Andrew, Queen Elizabeth's third child, but the couple divorced in the 1990s. She has previously published her memoirs and

authored a number of children's books.

Her novel, which was written with author Marguerite Kaye, is set to be published in August. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** Harry Brant, a rising model and son of supermodel Stephanie Seymour and publisher Peter M. Brant, has died. He was 24.

The younger Brant died Sunday of an accidental overdose, his family said in a statement to The New York Times, saying "his life was cut short by this devastating disease."

"He was a creative, loving and powerful soul that brought light into so many people's hearts," the statement said. "He was truly a beautiful person inside and out."

Brant had appeared in Italian Vogue and in campaigns for the fashion house Balmain. He had previously released a unisex makeup line with his brother - Peter Brant, Jr — for MAC cosmetics.

"I think people can definitely express themselves in a great way through makeup, because it is all about fantasy and turning yourself into someone you might not necessarily be on an everyday basis, so you kind of get to escape for a night with this new personal," Brant told W magazine in 2016. "That's what I always did." (AP)



Yolanda Adams, (right), listens as Michigan nurse Lori Marie Key sings 'Amazing Grace' during a COVID-19 memorial, Jan 19, in Washington. (AP)