

ICA Newsletter

ISSUE 1 | JANUARY 2026



The above pictures are from ICA membership drive, held in September 2025. The event was successful with more than 100 people attending the occasion. This event was open to all, both members and non-ICA members.



Pictures taken during Holiday sweet distribution by ICA!

Book Recommendations for a Teenage Girl – by Subhi Ramamoorthy-Vaswani (Seventh Grd)

It might be cliched, but as the days get shorter and colder (which is a terrible combination, if you ask me), there is nothing quite like curling up in bed with a good book. So as a seventh-grade girl, here are my top five suggestions for you this winter. 1. *The Hate U Give* by *Angie Thomas*: This was an amazing book. I bet you've heard of it, and if you haven't, why are you still reading this and not at the library? Basically, Starr is a high school student living in a "ghetto" neighborhood where all sorts of bad things happen. And when her best friend gets shot by a police officer, it just gets worse. The drama will keep you on the edge of your seat! 2. *All My Rage* by *Sabaa Tahir*: I almost placed this one first, it was so good. There are two kids - Salahudin and Noor. Salahudin is a second-generation Pakistani struggling with the death of his mom and his sorry excuse for a father. Noor is an immigrant from Pakistan, whose family is dead and lives with her mean uncle. The two *used* to be friends - at least before an embarrassing incident when they were younger - and after so many years they come together to save the motel Salahudin's mom created. 3. *Everything, Everything* by *Nicole Yoon*: I read one book by this author before, and didn't enjoy it, but this one blew me away. Madison is technically a high school senior, but due to a disease called Severe Combined Immunodeficiency, she hasn't stepped outdoors in her life. At least, until a boy moves in next door...4. *Truly Devious* by *Maureen Johnson*: If you're looking for a mystery, this is the one. Stevie is a girl who is into investigations and detective work. So when she gets into the elite Ellingham Academy for her talents, she is overjoyed. Because many years ago, a criminal named Truly Devious kidnapped Albert Ellingham's wife and kids, asking for ransom money. Now, present time, yet another death occurs, this time one of Stevie's classmates. Lucky for them, they've got a junior detective right on campus. 5. *Paper Towns* by *John Green*: *Paper Towns* is another great mystery. Quentin has been in love with his next-door neighbor, Margo Roth Spiegelman, since she moved in. But after one crazy night in high school, she disappears. Quentin, alongside a few friends, set out on a Margo Hunt, determined to find her, no matter what.

"Nearing the End of her life in India" – A Micro Essay – by Dr. Manisha Sharma

My mother is quite perfect in health. That is when you consider her age, her varied ailments, layered with multiple layers of kinship ties, social facades, her anxieties about events beyond her control constantly playing hopscotch with her escalating heart rhythm, fluctuating her blood pressure. Her incessant worries, her fears. Emotional isolation in her tiny room filled with innumerable fears.

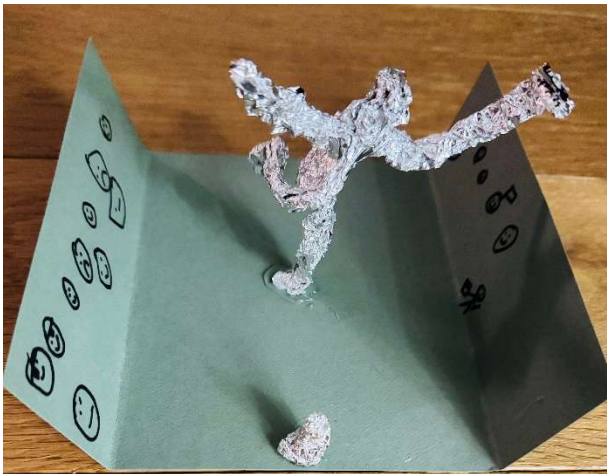
Now, she isn't really afraid of the inevitable, something that I struggled with growing up. I must have been nine or ten, that age when you really start thinking. It was a pleasant evening in Calcutta. Mummy, and my two younger sisters had just experienced an hour-long celestial show at the Birla Planetarium. Outside the real sky quickly enveloped in summer dusk, wrapping up tightly with clouds. I felt so claustrophobic that I wanted to tear up the clouds, the sky and be free. Of course, I never shared this with anyone then. I would realize much later that my epilepsy, diagnosed when I was four, made me ultra-sensitive to changes in weather. Gloomy days still shove me into a depressive state.

It is the same freedom that Mummy must have, I argue on a what's app call with my younger sister who still lives in India. It's her karma; we can't do anything about it, she repeats like advice on loop, several times during our call. Isn't it our present karma to change the situation? I rest my case.



← by Ajita Rajput (9 yr)

Football stadium made with paper and aluminum foil.
→ by Sharvil Banerjee Singh (9 yr)



How free is your FREE WILL? – by Soma Banerjee

How many times have you regretted making the wrong choice? Please don't look at your spouse. That's not intended here. My writeup is based on the everlasting, vibrant and unresolved debate on freewill. Does freewill exist? Are you in charge of making your own independent choices without social, biological and environmental conditioning? My understanding of "freewill" stands on the knowledge that I have gathered flipping through the pages of different books under philosophical as well as scientific genre. So, let's look at it through different lenses of spirituality, philosophy and neuroscience. The following views are based on specifically two different texts from "Determined: A Science of Life Without Freewill" by Prof. Robert M. Sapolsky and "Gospel of Sri Rama Krishna".

Two different views on Freewill: 1. *The world is deterministic and there is no freewill.* 2. *The world is not deterministic and there is freewill.* Out of multiple views on freewill, I specifically picked up these two since they both stand on a common ground that a deterministic world doesn't stand on freewill.

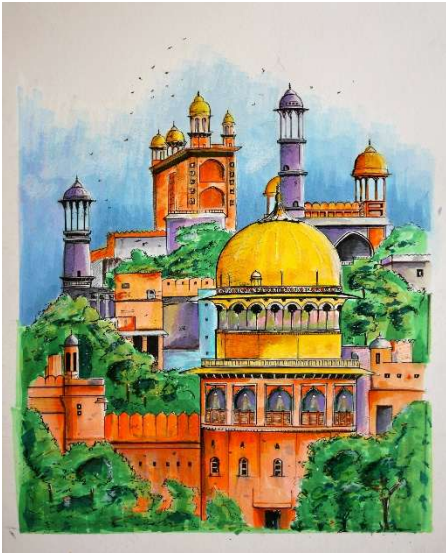
For every physical action, the respective muscles get stimulated by a neuron having an action potential. That neuron had its action potential because it was stimulated by the neuron just upstream to it. And the cascade goes on. Now the challenge for the believers of freewill comes when we must find the master neuron that started the chain of triggers and establish that the master neuron's actions were not influenced by whether the individual was tired, hungry, stressed or in pain at that time. To believe in freewill, it needs to be established that the master neuron's freewill functioning is not affected by the individual's genes or the regulation of those genes caused by the childhood experiences, or by the levels of hormones that the individual was exposed to as fetus, when that brain was being developed and the culture in which the individual was raised. Scientific evidence cannot show that a neuron or a brain's generation of behavior is independent of the sum of its biological past.

Similarly, the "law of Karma" says every action is tied to "cause" and "effect". Actions taken in the past being the "cause" directs the present, which is the "effect". In the same fashion, present is the "cause" of the future. If past, present and future are all tied to this chain of "cause and effect", then where is the space of freewill?

The answer was provided by Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the spiritual master of Swami Vivekananda and whose life stood on direct experience of diving deep into the divine with absolute surrender. Contrary to many religious teachers who stick to one tradition, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev explored multiple paths or religions, not as a philosopher, but as a seeker who wanted to experience God in every form. His teachings are not just about religious devotion but about breaking barriers and showing that the essence of all religions is the same. He approached the question of free will, giving the example of a goat who is tied to a stick with a rope at its feet and left to graze in the field. How far the goat can go to graze is dependent on the length of the rope. However, if the goat keeps grazing at the farthest of its reachability, at some point the goatherd will lengthen the rope!



In October 2025, ICA organized a musical evening by hosting the Green Room Tapes Collective Trio - featuring Srinath Nair, Debarpan Dhar, and Sameel Sikkani – who brought their soulful blend of Ghazals, Bollywood melodies, and original fusion.



← Painting by Piyush Jaware

This alcohol marker painting depicts a Jaipur Fort in India, showcasing the country's rich architectural heritage. "I find alcohol markers to be quite a hassle-free and forgiving medium" - Piyush

The ICA Newsletters aim to promote creativity among the members through different art forms. We thank all those who contributed to this newsletter.



ICA Committee is thankful to the community for being supportive towards the food donation drive initiatives.



ICA Executive Committee (2025-2026): From right to left, Vijay Kalivarapu (President), Santosh Rajput (Board Member), Poonam Dubey (Vice President), Soma Banerjee (Secretary) and Meera Vaswani (Board Member). Sachin Selvaraj (Treasurer) and Sanjay Thangavel (Board Member) are missing from the above picture. Picture taken during Diwali Night co-hosted with Indian Students' Association (ISA) at Iowa State University.

To save paper, the upcoming issues of the ICA newsletter will be sent out as electronic copies.

Upcoming ICA Events: ICA Art and Cultural Show (Jan 24, 2026 | Sat | 11:30 am - 3:00 pm)

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our members, sponsors, and the City of Ames Commission on the Arts for their generous support.