# The Thneed of the 21st Century

## AI isn't a "Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need"

**By Channing Sidders, Staff Writer**

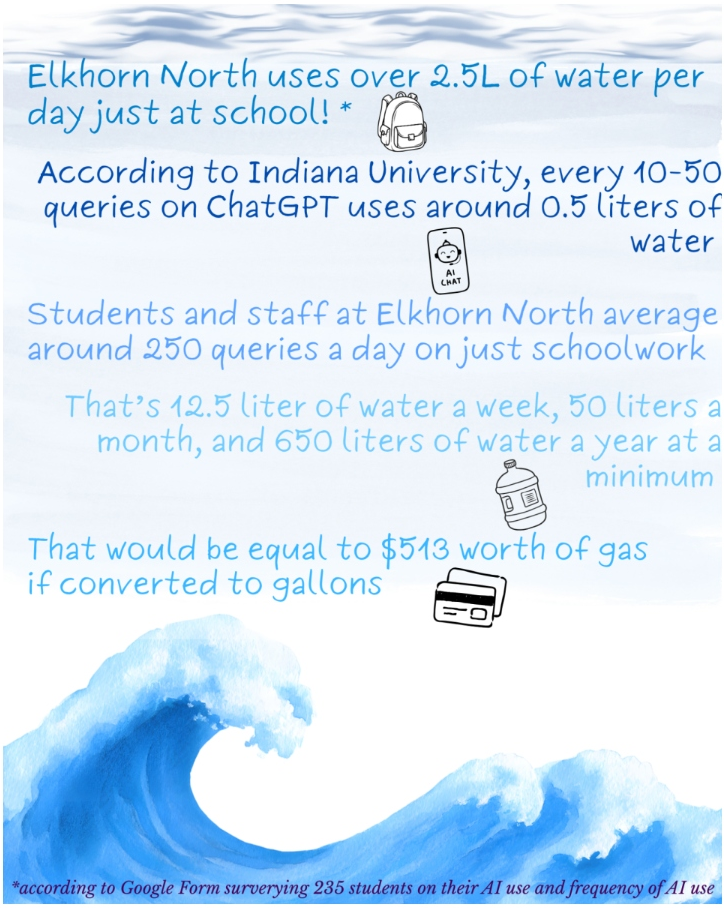
Dr. Seuss's "The Lorax" (1971) is a classic children's book that follows the Once-ler as he tells the story of his demand for wealth through a Thneed, his invention made from the tufts of Truffula Trees. The product destroys the once bountiful and joyful Truffula Valley, and causes more problems than it "solves."

The Once-ler claims a Thneed is a "Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need." Its potential uses include shirts, hats, sweaters, swimsuits, towels, carpets, and even jump ropes. The functions of a Thneed are not only vague, but entirely questionable, as they often contradict themselves. The same object that can be used as a sweater on a cold winter day also has the ability to magically become a stylish swimsuit for a pool party.

AI itself shows alarming parallels to the fictional knitted object in more ways than one. Today's consumption of the technology is rapid and uncontrolled, with AI tools popping up almost everywhere in the digital landscape.

AI Overviews powered by Google Gemini appear at the top of search results to provide quick generated summaries. Spotify's "Made For You" playlists and "Wrapped" year overviews use AI to analyze listener data and create personalized summaries and mixes for each user.

Unfortunately, AI isn't just a useful tool that can make life easier or more fun, the negative impacts of becoming overreliant on AI far outweigh the benefits.




graphic by Nia Kandari

AI uses significant amounts of water to cool data centers as the models generate immense amounts of heat. Large facilities consume hundreds to millions of gallons of water per day varying based on location, technology, and the workload. According to scientists at the University of California, Riverside, every 100-word AI prompt entered into an AI model like ChatGPT uses around one bottle of water, or 519 milliliters. It doesn't seem like much, but billions of people around the world enter questions or prompts into AI models every minute.

AI also emits significant amounts of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. According to Climate Impact Partners, researchers estimated that training GPT-3, a single AI model, emitted around 500 metric tons of carbon dioxide, the same amount as driving a car from New York to San Francisco 438 times.

The overconsumption of Thneeds in "The Lorax" led to all of the Truffula Trees being cut down, the environment polluted, and the animals forced out of their homes. Today, this environmental chaos isn't a potential outcome, it is reality. Greenhouse gases already pollute Earth's atmosphere, and AI adds to the load.

“The general public doesn’t realize the environmental impact and will ignore it,” biology teacher Jordan Fuglestad said. “Anytime something makes life easier, the general population is not going to want it to go away.”

While AI models like Google Gemini and ChatGPT can help explain challenging topics and reword answers, easy access can also lead students to cheat.

Since the introduction of ChatGPT in November 2022, student self-report surveys by Emmanuel College have shown that 70% to 80% of high school students and 50% to 70% of college undergraduates have cheated on assignments. While AI isn’t the only method of cheating for students, it is one of the most prevalent and easily accessible options.

“Some people could graduate high school with all A’s and a 4.0 GPA using just AI,” sophomore Polly Davies said. “That’s going to impact how a lot of leaders are shaped in the future because they didn’t do their research for their professional career.”

The future depends on society not becoming entirely reliant on AI technology. Learning and creativity shape the world because AI can’t on its own.

“[Writing] is based on your actual experiences and people’s actual emotions, which AI doesn’t fully comprehend,” sophomore aspiring author Amala Golej said.

AI gets its data from the public internet, Wikipedia, user interactions, YouTube, and digital libraries. In short, AI models are trained on human works.

Hundreds of thousands of literary works across all genres have been used by major companies in technology to train their AI models. The problem lies in the fact that authors are usually not asked or even told that their work is going to be used by AI, nor do they get any form of compensation or credit.

As AI continues to copy instead of create, many are beginning to stand up against the rapid rise of the technology, just like the Lorax. These activists are driven by concerns over job displacement, loss of human creativity, and existential risks; just as the Lorax was driven by concerns over animal displacement, deforestation, and society as a whole.

The reign of the Thneed ended with a destroyed ecosystem and a society no longer aware of the bright and hopeful world of the past. Our society isn’t yet devastated by the effects of AI, but as it continues to progress and take over more and more of daily life, the light at the end of the tunnel continues to dim.

The environment cannot handle the overuse of water and emission of harmful gases that AI brings. Society cannot survive AI’s takeover of all aspects of life.

The Lorax spoke for the trees because the trees had no tongues. As AI begins to speak for all of us by writing our emails, creating our art, and changing our environment, we must ask: who is speaking for AI’s ‘trees’? Who is protecting the creativity, the truth, the labor, and the environment that built this technology?

AI is not a character with a conscience, but a mirror of its maker. If we want a future that flourishes, we must make sure that it is our hands planting the forest, rather than harvesting for the machine.

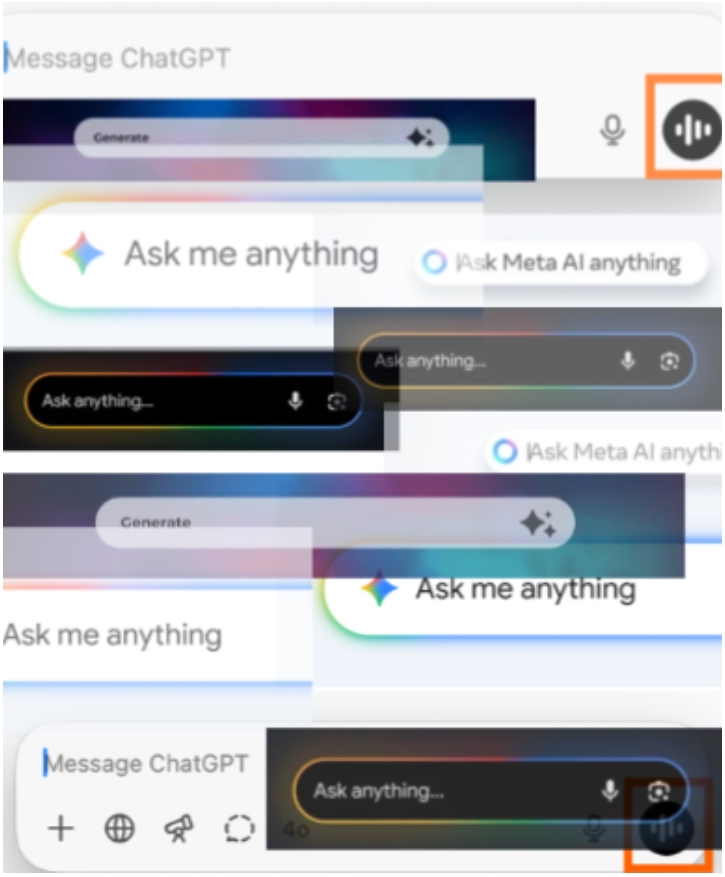
“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” – “The Lorax”, Dr. Seuss

# It Takes One to Know One

## AI detectors are not the useful tools people think they are

**By Niharika Kandari, Section Editor**

AI has become a crucial tool in most student's daily lives, with many basic assignments and simple projects being completely influenced by an artificial source rather than the student. To combat this growing epidemic, teachers have begun using AI detection tools such as turnitin.com, gptzero.me, and even Google Classroom's newest AI detection features. However, as more and more students are being inaccurately flagged down for their purported use of AI, the accuracy of these detectors has come into question.




Niharika Kandari

AI's use has become increasingly normalized as more and more AI websites are created.

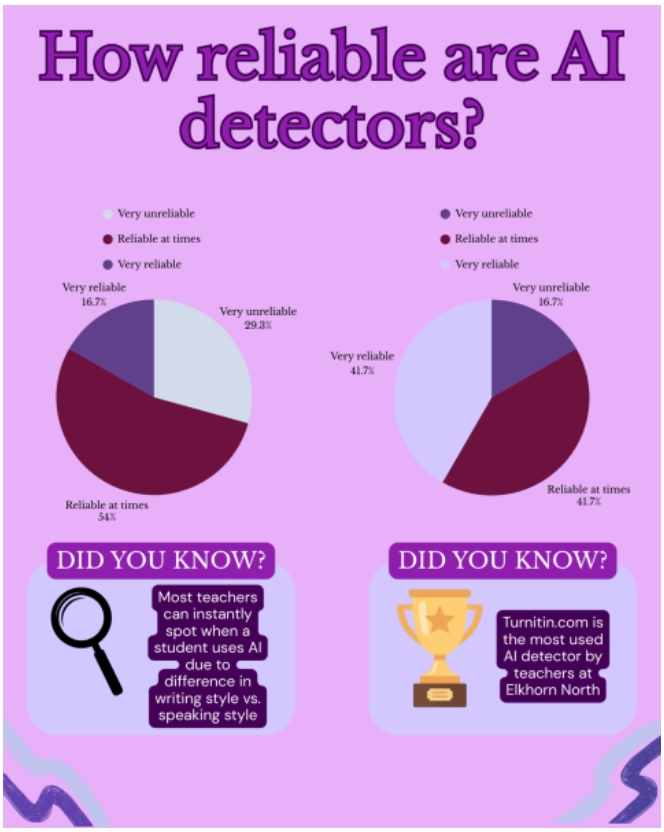
According to prominent AI and tech influencers on Instagram and Youtube such as Jason West, Arturri Explores, and Nathan Gotch, originality.ai, gptzero.me, gowinston.ai, and panagram.com are the most reliable AI detection tools, used by many educators and employers to scan through essays and resumés to pick up any sign of AI interference. To truly test their accuracy, I generated an eight-sentence paragraph using the prompt: Generate me a human-like, opinionated paragraph, breaking all normal AI patterns. Try to be as undetectable as possible.

The results weren't very surprising. All of the AI detection websites did their jobs, to varied degrees of accuracy. GPTZero identified the text as 100% AI, whereas Panagram, and GoWinston both stated that the text was likely AI with some human modifications. Originality said the text was likely an even mix between AI and human writing. However, the true accuracy of AI detection websites arose when I typed a similar paragraph with a similar pattern and opinion. GPTZero and GoWinston identified the text as "completely" AI, Panagram identified the text as "AI with Human Modifications," and, yet again, Originality believed it was a 50/50 split. To worsen things, when I reloaded the website and copied the exact same text into the detectors, both GoWinston and Panagram changed their percentages reports.

"AI detecting AI is kind of dumb," junior Kenzie Loretta said. "Yes, it will catch the AI, but what it was trained on is what ChatGPT was trained on… human work."

This pattern prevails with other AI detection tools like Uncheck, WingZoolio and Scribbr, further harming the credibility of AI detectors' ability to discern human work from AI, especially when detection patterns are using punctuation clues like the Oxford comma or em-dashes to flag work.

"There are people that I know who use AI on everything, and they never get flagged. I used one em-dash, and my whole paper got flagged, even though my teacher could see my computer the whole time," Loretta said.




graphic by Nia Kandari

Loretta had an assignment flagged for AI use, despite not using AI at all. Her experience is not unique; according to an analysis by Northern Illinois University, if a 1% false positive rate is applied to the 2.235 million first-year college students in the U.S. writing 10 papers each, over 220,000 essays could be wrongly flagged. Studies have shown that AI detection services can show false positives 11-66% of the time, inflating the number of students who have received failing grades for papers that they wrote.

“AI detectors are partially accurate, but even so, I will plug a flagged essay into multiple AI detection websites just to be sure,” English teacher Teresa Huber said.

Huber has seen many essays and assignments flagged for AI and she thinks the disconnect between students’ definitions of cheating versus teachers’ definitions are to blame.

“I find that most students who get flagged didn’t use AI to write their papers, but they did use AI to generate ideas, and relied on AI to the extent that they get flagged,” Huber said. “I now ask my students ‘Tell me how you used AI,’ instead of ‘Did you use AI?’”

However, not all students use AI to aid them with their work, and not all teachers triple-check their AI detection software.

Further exacerbating this issue is that it is likely that if a student is wrongfully flagged once for AI, they will continuously be flagged due to similarity in writing patterns between the student and AI. Junior Taiya Viacrucis has been flagged three times for having 100% AI rates in her essays across multiple classes.

“[My teacher] was monitoring me on Dyknow, all other websites were blocked, and we got only the class period to write and print out the essay,” Viacrucis said, about the most recent flag. “There is literally no way I could have used AI.”

Luckily, most of Viacrucis’ teachers have been understanding. Some students are not as fortunate. According to NBC News, several students have filed lawsuits against their universities for wrongful accusations of AI use, leading to failing grades and negative GPA impacts.

“In a day and age where we consume more and more AI generated writing, the language and structure tends to stick with us,” junior Taiya Viacrucis said.

Worse, organizations such as Center for Democracy and Technology have exposed the racial bias involved in AI detection, saying that Black students are 20% more likely to be accused of using AI than their White or Hispanic counterparts. While this bias is not inherently in the AI detection software itself, it may lie within the human grading the papers, or deciding where the line between human or AI is drawn.

“It’s completely unfair,” Loretta said. “Saying that just because some kids type at higher vocabulary levels, or use better grammar, they must be using AI makes no sense.”

The inaccuracy of these AI detection systems also has immense long-term impacts. Students feel that they have to avoid certain words or grammar simply because they do not want to take any chances, leading to writing with more errors and less expression.

“People will talk about how lazy or dumb our generation is, and then flag every above-average IQ essay as AI,” sophomore Aarna Gupta said. “It forces [students] to reconsider how we are typing and what we are typing. We almost have to dumb our writing down so that we don’t get flagged.”

Collectively, students are being forced to rethink their own words and ideas, simply because of the inaccuracy of AI detectors. It seems that, in trying to encourage creative and critical thinking, schools have accidentally caused a mass epidemic of wrongful accusations, instead subduing the thoughts of students. While there is no surefire way to truly tell whether a student is using AI or not, rather than using AI detection tools to try and stop the use of AI, the best AI detector seems to be comparison between a student’s test scores and their daily assignments.

“You can use AI in the real world, but right now we are just trying to help you learn,” Huber said.

# The Shared Prompt

## Both sides of the desk adopt artificial intelligence

**By Channing Sidders, Staff Writer**

It's no secret that AI is becoming increasingly prevalent in everyday life. At school however, the topic is largely taboo.

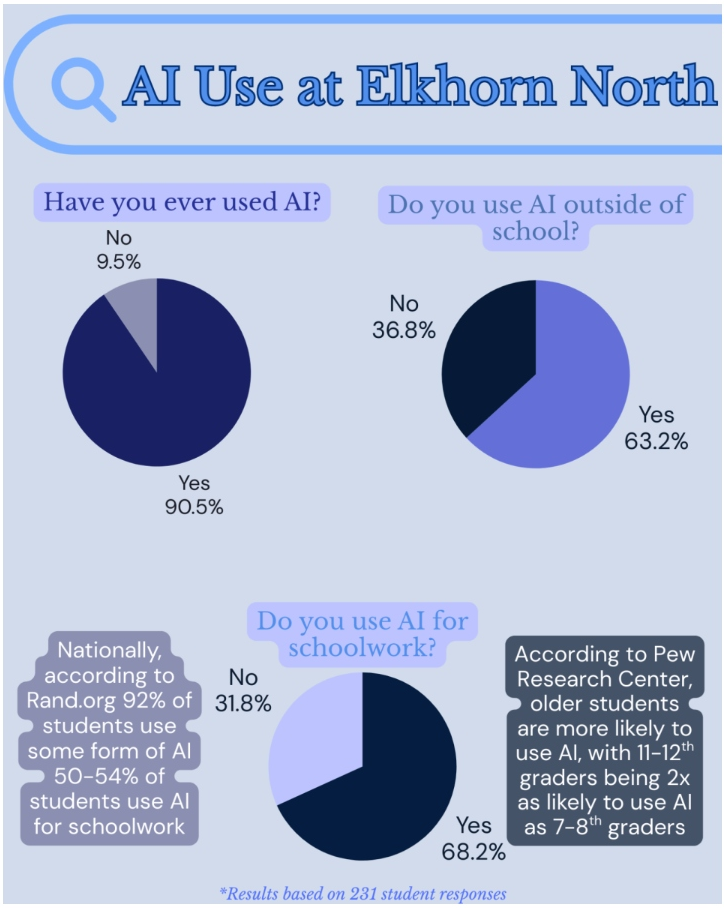
The subject is kept on the down-low by students who fear they will be found guilty of using AI on their math homework, or those who worry their English essay will be falsely flagged for use of the technology.

68.2% of students surveyed responded yes to the question: "Do you use AI for school work?" The top five subjects that the students who participated in the survey stated they use AI for were science (61%), math (56.2%), history (54.8%), English (50%), and foreign languages (22.6%).

In a survey of over 200 Elkhorn North students, only 11.9% have been flagged for AI when they did use it. In the same survey, 35.3% claimed they have been flagged when they did not use it.

The outcomes of both of these situations vary. Numerous innocent writers have had to accept a zero for work that was all their own. Others have been successful in emerging unscathed, with no suspicion from their teachers.

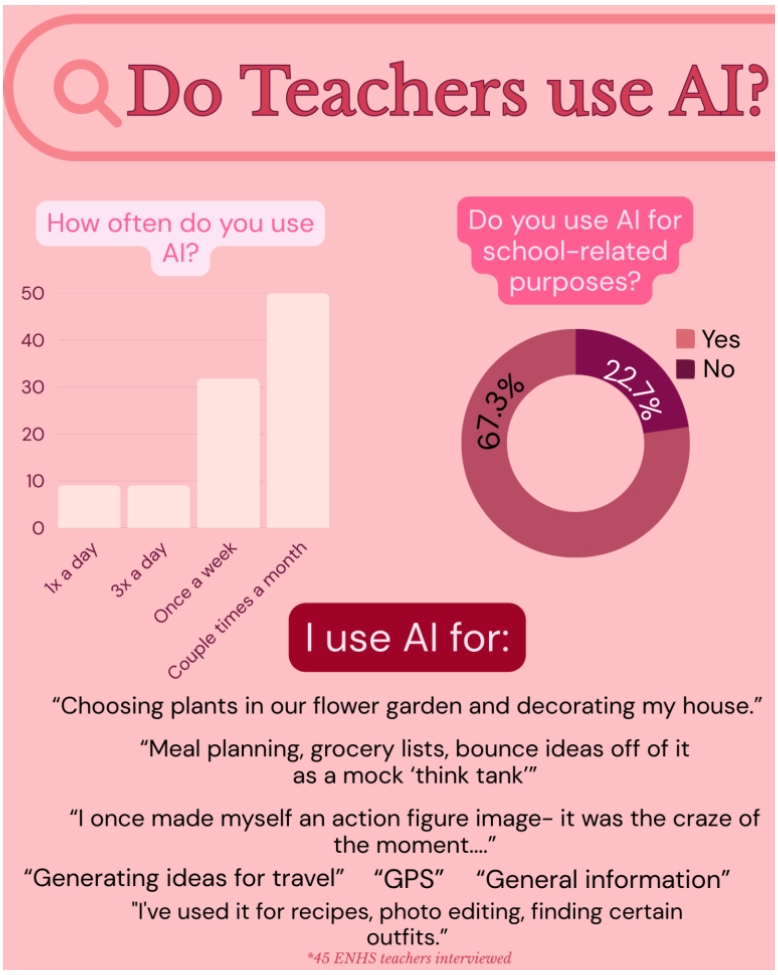
"I got a zero and didn't get the opportunity to redo it even though I didn't use AI in that case," one anonymous survey responder said.




graphic by Nia Kandari

In both the teacher and student surveys, participants were asked how reliable they think AI detectors are, with five being highly accurate and one being highly inaccurate. Across both surveys, the majority of answers were in the middle. 45% of students and 41.5% of teachers voted three.

Most teachers claimed that they did not have a preferred AI detector, but did argue that there are clear signs of students using AI. Excessive punctuation, processes and information not covered in class, and language that doesn't sound like the student in question are all signs that teachers say point to AI usage.




graphic by Nia Kandari

54.8% of teachers surveyed also responded yes to the question over use of AI. Some use the technology to create lesson plans or assignments. Others use it to refresh their memories on certain topics for class or to write emails.

The thing is, students and teachers show similar patterns in their use of AI. 32.8% of students and 37.1% of teachers claimed they use AI a couple of times a month.

50-60% of students and teachers use AI for purposes outside of school. They both use the tech to ask questions, generate images, recipes, and create workout plans.

In both groups, over 50% of respondents shared that they use AI for school purposes. Generating ideas, helping with writing, answering questions, checking work, and summarizing topics are all things that students and teachers alike use AI for regarding academics.

Of course, students should focus on doing their own work for their own personal benefit, but teachers cannot expect them to fully terminate their use of AI if they don't do so themselves.

"There are a lot of expectations on students and they require them to do a lot of homework," one anonymous teacher said. "There is a negative impact when students aren't processing what they are learning, however, I think we put them in a corner that makes them feel forced to use it."

The teachers surveyed were split on their opinions over the technology. Some claim that it is useful when used right, and harmful when used incorrectly. Others are completely one side or the other.

Contrary to popular belief, students largely answered the same, with most individuals fully aware of the negative side of AI usage.

It is easy to focus on the friction AI causes between educators and scholars. Concerns of integrity and the fear of replacing intuition and creativity are commonly held by today's teachers.

Looking closer, there is a shared evolution. Both groups are learning to navigate the AI landscape and the challenges and uncertainty it brings. Each side has their own ideas of what the policy should be regarding the technology.

Some students consider AI negative for society as a whole: "AI in my opinion is bad for the learning experience for students due to the fact of the false hope it can bring because most people think AI has all the correct answers," and "It shouldn't even be used as a tool, that just conditions people to default to it when they're stuck."

Others have the opposite opinion: "AI should be allowed for figuring out steps to a difficult problem or exploring ideas for an essay," and "I think it should be implemented more because our economies are using new and smarter technology so we should capitalize on that and use AI to help students."

Teachers responded that AI use should be prohibited in schools, but students should be allowed to freely use it outside of school.

The 'us versus them' mentality is ineffective to the larger problem that today's students will have to grow up and face without an authority figure's help.

It is imperative that AI isn’t treated as a threat to some and a secret tool for others, but as a new technology that both groups need to do their part to regulate and use responsibly.