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Special thanks to Abigail Chipman for designing this year’s cover art, as well as the inserts by grade, using selected student work.

Thanks, also, to our special guest judge, Elsa Nocton, for her participation in selecting this year’s winning art pieces.

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Honorable Mentions

Teachers of Published Authors & Artists

Teachers Honored for Multiple Student Honorees
Foreword(s)

Creativity takes courage.
—Henri Matisse

When Matisse wrote this, he was most certainly describing the pangs of creativity, but 21st century students have more than the personal creative struggle to overcome. They must also must jump over the hurdles of a carefully measured education where learning is converted to data tables, aligned with standards, and neatly checked off on a rubric. It is indeed a courageous act for students to find their voices and tell their stories.

This year there were over 1,700 submissions from Connecticut student writers. This means more and more educators are encouraging writing beyond the test in their classrooms. This, too, is nothing short of courageous. Matisse, no doubt, never imagined that his words would be interpreted in this way, that finding the space to be creative would take as much courage as the act of creation itself.

How wonderful it is, then, that in turning the pages of this magazine we are witness to a strong movement of narrative and imaginative writing; we are witness to the curiosity and inquisitiveness of young minds—and witness, as well, to the dedication of teachers and families across the state who continue to value writing outside the confines of packaged prompts, rubrics, and standards.

Marcy Rudge and Susan Laurençot
Editors-in-Chief

Addressing the issue of student motivation to write, Thomas McCann challenges the purveyors of rubrics and standardization, as well as the risk averse and uncreative among our profession. He writes that students will not be motivated to write when we offer them “a rigid template … and detailed rubrics” for writing and assessing their writing. Instead, writes McCann, “preadolescent and adolescent learners will energetically tackle the same sort of questions about equality, justice, responsibility, freedom, compassion, love, and loyalty that Shakespeare and thousands of other writers have grappled with for generations.”

If we give them the opportunity.

The teachers whose students appear in the pages of this 28th edition of Connecticut Student Writers magazine provided this opportunity. We find poems, stories, and essays from five year-olds to eighteen year-olds that deal with everything from sleepovers at Grandma and Grandpa’s house to wakes for the deaths of grandparents (as well as a father). We read about running through fields with a beloved dog and bringing a beloved dog to a veterinarian for its final moments. Students write about first loves and first heart breaks, divorces, remarriages, births of younger siblings, peer pressure, school bullying, and supportive teachers and parents as well as abusive teachers and parents. There are fanciful stories about turning into dinosaurs and turning into waffles. There are instructions on how to eat cereal and how to enjoy a rainy day. A second grader writes about the genocide of the Native Americans. Another writes about dancing with her father. Students rake leaves and learn to swim. They deal with the mental illness and drug addiction of parents, and learn to accept a new same-sex step-parent. One brave middle schooler writes about their own gender fluidity. The first swear word appears in a fifth grade story; the first f-bomb gets dropped in tenth grade—along with the s-word and a few other choice adjectives. A letter to author Neil Gaiman will bring tears to your eyes (I dare you not to get verklempt!), and the poetry of the high school students will make your jaw drop.

Thanks to the teachers who made these discoveries possible.

Jason Courtmanche
Director of the CWP
Kindergarten

Levi Sigfridson
The Park

Noah Caisse
Santa Came to My House
**Snow Leopards Hunting**
By Yibin Lin
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School

Snow Leopards are dangerous!
They hunt for meat.
They use their claws and jaws.
Snow Leopards battle for food.
They sneak up on their prey.
They eat them
Night and day.

**Rainbow**
By Mackenzie Shepard
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School

A Raindrop Falls
On The Ground
A Rainbow Comes Up

**Pterodactyl**
By Myalee Maxwell
Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School

It’s fun to have a pterodactyl race with your mom.
If you were a pterodactyl you would have a mom pterodactyl.
If your pterodactyl mom wanted to a race with you, what would you do?
All About Gardening
By Lillian Dague
Frank M. Kearns Primary School

I know all about gardening.
I know how to plant a strawberry plant.
I know how to plant a tomato plant.
You put a seed in the ground and let it get plenty of sunshine.
This is how to water plants:
You put water in a watering can.
I hope you liked my book about gardening.
And make sure you plant your food how I did it.

How to Make a Bowl of Cereal
By Aniyah Betancourt
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Elementary School

Step 1: First, pour the cereal in the bowl.
Step 2: Next, pour half of the milk.
Step 3: Finally, eat the cereal with a spoon.

New York City
By Avery Stewart
International Magnet School of Global Citizenship

I went to the theater yesterday with my mom and my grandma. I saw *The Nutcracker*. I saw different colors. I saw a lot of buildings in New York City. I love New York City. The buildings are so tall and beautiful. I saw people who were dancing. There was a magician who wound up people that danced.
1st Grade

Olivia Szablewski
My Dog

Mia Longman
Rainbow
**Polar Bear**
By Cole Smith
Latimer Lane Elementary School

The biggest land predator
Lurks around the Arctic.
With paws as big as a dinner plate,
He waits and waits
For some seals.
The mighty polar bear
Catches one
And eats it.

**Peacock**
By Logan Brown
Latimer Lane Elementary School

When his tail is folded,
He drags it
Like a trailer behind him.

When it’s open,
You see
A bunch of eyes
Staring at you
From within its feathers.

**A Peaceful Night**
By Addison Towle
Burr Elementary School

In the fall, the leaves go crunch, crunch
Under my feet.
The leaves are as spiky as dinosaurs’ teeth.
The air is crisp and the branches creak so quietly.
The trees convey fear, as the wind blows.
Shooting stars go whoosh, whoosh in the night,
Side to side, peacefully.
At night, I am scared, and my heart beats fast.
I breathe slowly, I breathe out hot air.
On the hammock, I rock back and forth,
With the howling wolves singing and crying in the woods.
I know I am safe at home,
At night, in peace.
**The Guy Who Turned into a Waffle**

By Alejandro Casas  
Burr Elementary School

Once a guy named Guy was very MEAN. He had a no good, very bad, miserable life. He was so miserable, he had a personal rain cloud, and it always rained on him. His “to do” list was to pick on people, to lie, to be mean, and to ruin all birthday parties. After completing his list for the day, he fell asleep. One day when he was teasing people, a fairy “poofed” him into her lair, and then she turned him into a ...WAFFLE! Ahhh! Dun, dun, DUUUN ...

The next morning, all he did was eat himself. He kept on eating himself for days and days until the fairy “poofed” Guy back to her lair and turned him back into a human. From that day on, he was never mean again.

The moral of this story is that when you are mean—super mean—consequences may come.

---

**Willie the Hedgehog**

By Amelia Ditzel  
Woodstock Elementary School

Willie is a hedgehog. He really likes milkshakes. He creates interesting milkshakes, like a strawberry, lemon, and potato chip milkshake, and also a blueberry snow cone and cheese puff milk shake. That sounds silly and gross, but they taste awesome to Willie.

Willie thinks his milkshakes will make him a lot of money, so he decides to open a milkshake stand down by the beach. Willis has some wood downstairs in his basement. He builds a milkshake stand and rolls it down to the beach.

Willie rings a bell. Customers come to buy milkshakes. There is a long line. Willie is very happy. He begins to mix up the milkshakes, and the customers give him money. A few milkshakes later, the customers come back and say they don’t like the milkshakes. Soon there is a line of customers that want their money back. Willie’s eyes get watery. He gives all the money back. He does not understand why people do not like his milkshakes.

The last customer comes back for her money. She is a little girl. Willie asks her why people do not like his milkshakes. She says maybe the ingredients are only for hedgehogs. People do not like cheese puffs in their milkshakes.

Willie has an idea. He rolls his stand into the woods where other hedgehogs live. He rings his bell. Hedgehogs from all around come to buy Willie’s milkshakes. They love them. Willie sells his milkshakes for many years and lives happily ever after.
**Bright Nights with My Gido and Nana**
By Daniel Cummiskey  
Squadron Line Elementary School

Every year we go to Bright Nights with my Nana and Gido. I pack my bag, and I run downstairs because I am going to Bright Nights with my Gido and my Nana. And I always sleep over.

First, we go to Nana and Gido’s house. Then, we drive to Bright Nights. Bright Nights is lots of Santa lights, and green lights, and the Grinch lights, and red lights. There are so many colorful lights.

Gido always says that we have to stop at the gift store. Nana always says to pick out an ornament to hang on the tree. That way, we can always remember our time there. Gido lets us look out the sunroof window. He lets us stand up to see the lights. But we can’t tell our mom.

After Bright Nights, we go to Friendly’s. I always get the chicken fingers and a Monster Mash ice cream with no peanut butter cups because my sister is allergic to those. Gido gets a big cheeseburger with tomatoes. Nana gets a fish patty.

Then, we go back to my Nana and Gido’s house for a sleepover. I get my pajamas on and watch a movie. When Nana says it is time for bed, I hop into their bed. Gido and I do flashlight contests under the covers. And he tells me a story. We do it all again the next year. I love my Nana and Gido!

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**My Opinion About Number Zero**
By Peyton Janney  
Frank M. Kearns Primary School

I don’t like number zero because it is less than ten. Ten is better than zero. I do not like number zero. Another reason is because I wouldn’t like to have zero toys. I would be very sad. I do not like number zero so much.

Another reason is because I wouldn’t like to have zero friends. I would be lonely at recess.

I do not like the number zero. It is less than ten. Ten is bigger than zero. Do you not like the number zero?
I am thinking strawberry because I'm hungry, and I remember yesterday picking strawberries from my grandmother's garden. The wind had stopped, and the sun was hot. We collected them in our hands, brought them in the house to wash. Then held them by the stem and ate them, the graciousness of the strawberry tingling my mouth. Sweet, said grandma. Sour, I say.
Bill Flies South
By Abby Ditzel
Woodstock Elementary School

It was getting near winter. Animals began to hibernate and fly south. One day, a small flock of geese decided it was getting cold, so it was time to fly south. I will tell you the geese’s names: they were Bill, Jane, Jay, Marley, Sally and the Boss. The next day, the flock got ready in a “V” shape because that’s how geese fly south. Soon, they were in the sky. There was a problem, though; Bill was not good at keeping the “V” shape. For example, when they were in the “V,” Bill messed it up and turned it into a “U.” The Boss yelled, “BILL, GET BACK INTO YOUR SPOT!”

Bill got back in his spot. He put on a frown on his face. He did not like the tone of the Boss. So, he flew down from the “V.” Nobody noticed. Nobody even cared. So, Bill began to walk. Then he thought, Maybe it was not a good idea to leave the flock. So, he tried to find his friends. He ran along the grass heading south, but his friends were already gone. He walked for a long time. He wished he had not left the flock. How was he going to survive?

The wind began to blow a little, and he was getting hungry. Then, he saw a garden. When he got there he saw all of the seeds left over from the harvest. He thought to himself, this is perfect for me. A little girl was in the garden collecting seeds for next year, and she saw the little goose and brought him inside. She got a piece of cloth and wrapped it around him. She got the seed from her garden and put some next to Bill. Bill was warm and happy.

By now, the other geese had reached their destination. Just then, Bill’s friends Jane, Jay, Marley and Sally noticed that Bill was gone. They were disappointed that they did not notice before, so they talked about it. They decided to help find Bill. They remembered that Bill got yelled at, and he had a frown on his face. So, they thought maybe the Boss hurt Bill’s feelings, and Bill flew down from the flock. They retraced their flight path.

Meanwhile, Bill and the girl were having so much fun. She taught him to play card games like Go Fish, War, and Crazy Eights. They enjoyed their time together by the warm fire munching on seeds. A couple of weeks went by. Bill and the girl became good friends. Suddenly, four geese were at the front door. Bill got out of his chair and went outside. The girl wondered, was this his flock? Before she knew it, they were gone! Every year when it gets cold, and the flock needs to go South, Bill swoops down and waves to the girl. He will always remember how kind she was to him.

Picture Problem
By Gesa Jaaks
Squadron Line Elementary School

Creak! Crack! Creak! Crack! The stairs creaked as Emily climbed up them. Soon it would be school picture day, but Emily did not want to wear a dress! Her mom wanted her to wear one. She bought a special dress for Emily to wear. The dress was pink and red and had purple and yellow bows everywhere. It was tight and uncomfortable. She felt like she was a penguin dressed in a rainbow dress.

So, on school picture day, Emily went outside and put the dress in the mud and stomped on it. She picked it up and stared at it for a long time. It looked normal. So, she put it in the mud again, and this time she went in after it, and rolled on it, and splashed mud all over it. Then, she picked the dress up again and splashed more mud on it. Every time she put the dress in the mud, it dripped off the dress, and it looked clean like before.

Next, she dipped a brush into paint and she splashed it on the dress. The paint just slipped right off the dress and didn’t stay on it. It still looked normal. Emily was mad because she wanted the paint to stick. It was getting close to school time, so when Emily came downstairs, she put the dress in water. She knew her mom wouldn’t make her wear a dripping wet dress to school. Her mom saw it and put it in the dryer. “Emily, I dried your dress. Put it on so you can go to school,” called her mom, happily.

Then, Emily packed a bag with blue pants and a raspberry tee shirt. She put the dress on and said, “Good bye Mom! Good bye Dad!” She took the bag of clothes and raced out the door. Emily thought to herself, Why do they even do a class picture?

Finally, Emily got to school. Her teacher said, “The class pictures will be taken now! If you have to go to the bathroom, go now before we go to get the pictures taken.”
Emily raised her shivering hand to go to the bathroom. She stopped at her locker, got the bag, and ran to the bathroom. She went into a stall and got changed. She put the dress in the bag and walked back to the classroom, but no one was there. She started to run to picture day in the gym, but Mrs. E. yelled, “NO RUNNING!” So, she walked. When she finally got to the gym, her class was in the middle of their pictures.

Her teacher called, “Come on, Emily!”

She jumped on the top riser and said, “Cheese!”

When she got home later, her mom wanted to see the picture. She said okay in a shivering voice and showed her mom the picture. “Why aren’t you wearing your new dress in the picture?” her mom asked.

“I changed,” Emily said.

When her mom asked her why, Emily told her she didn’t like dresses. Her mom said, “You should have told me. I would have helped you pick out something different to wear.”

Emily decided she would tell her mom what she wants to wear next picture day.

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All About Native Americans
By Jack M. Bengard
Tariffville Elementary School

“We take care of our land.”

“We use what we have.”

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Introduction
Native Americans lived a long time ago. They used what they had. These are some of the things that you will learn about in this book.

Boys
Boys did the hunting back then. They used bows, hatchets, spears, and traps to catch animals. Once they made a kill, they tied it on to a stick and brought it back to camp so they could cook it for dinner. Native Americans did not have ovens like we do now. They made a fire and put a pan over it to make it cook. Then, they ate it. Boys also made traps for animals. One trap that they made was by bending down a tree and putting a thin rope around it, so when a small mammal came by, it would fling up into the air. There was also a trap that made animals fall into a hole. First, they would lay sticks over a pit and then layer leaves on top of the pit. After that, they would put bait on top of the leaves. Once the bait was placed on the leaves, they would wait until an animal dropped into the pit. Then, they would kill it and bring it back to camp.

Girls
Girls did a lot of work!! They made huts, and they gathered fruit. They also used stone knives to cut down birch bark. They got playtime, too! They made spears and other hunting weapons so boys could use them for target practice. These are just some of the things that they did. They also cooked, made clothing, and much more!

In the House
If you lived in a hut like Native Americans, there would be curved walls and not that much room. This would be your routine: First, you would go to sleep with a fur blanket. Then, you would wake up, and you would have a little breakfast. After breakfast, if you were a boy, you would go hunting, and if you were a girl, you would work. This is how you would build a hut: First, you would need to get bendable sticks. Then, you would bend them in a round shape. After that, you would take thin string and
something to cut holes in the birch. Then, you would put a piece of birch bark on by poking a hole in the birch and putting the string through it. Then, you would poke another hole and pull the string through it and tie it. For the top of the hut, you would need to do the same thing from the inside. You would need a long string, and you would need to poke holes and tie the birch bark down. Then, you would be done!

**Hunting**

You know that boys hunted, but do you know how they did it? First of all, they knew about their land, so they knew where to hunt. I think it was hard for them to hunt when they cared so much about their land. After they made a kill, they tied it to a stick and brought it back to camp. They would then eat it and share the meat with the other Native Americans.

**Moving Camp**

When Native Americans moved camp, they left their old houses and packed up their belongings. Men went to find a good hunting spot while women collected birch bark to make new houses. After all that, they made the houses, slept over night, and if it was a good spot, they would stay there. But when did they move? They moved when the seasons changed because they needed different materials for when it was hot and when it was cold.

**Fun Fact:** Native Americans hated when a forest was cut down. It was like losing a family member to them.

**The End of the Forest People**

In 1620, the pilgrims arrived in America in small boats. One boat was called the Mayflower. Native Americans were confused because no one had come over to America before. Native Americans helped pilgrims learn to survive during winter. They also taught them how to grow food, and that is how the very first Thanksgiving started, but it was the end of the forest people.

**Survivors**

When winter came, it was very hard for Native Americans to survive if they lived in the North. Their huts broke, and it was hard to gather firewood to stay warm. Native Americans did not have warm clothes. They often used deer fur blankets to help them stay warm. It was also hard to hunt during the winter. They would have to wait for deer to come by and hunt them for dinner. Many Native Americans became ill because of the cold. Survivors were lucky because they would live one more year until winter came again – the hardest time of all!

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**Dancing with My Daddy**

By Caroline Breslav
Squadron Line Elementary School

I leapt out of the car. I flew into the church. *Finally, we’re here,* I thought. It was the Girl Scout Daddy Daughter Dance. The theme was black and white. I was wearing a black and white long sleeve shirt with dazzling hearts and black leggings.

I was greeted by bigger Girl Scouts wearing beaded necklaces. There were black streamers everywhere, and we each got a black and white flower pin. We got our pictures taken and boogied to the dance floor. I got a balloon and started to dance and get silly with my friends.

All of a sudden, the guy on the loudspeaker interrupted us and said, “Let’s do the Hokey Pokey.” We all got in a circle and put our right foot in and out and then our left foot in and out. Each time he said, “Shake it all about!” we giggled. Then we danced some more.

After a while, the DJ said, “Get into another circle. We are going to play a game.” He put a hula-hoop in between my dad and me and said, “Try to put your body through the hoop.” He timed us, and we were fast.

Then, the DJ played a slow song, and I got to dance with my daddy. He held my hand and moved me around the dance floor. He dipped me as the song ended.

After that, we had a challenge. The DJ had us dance with a balloon between our heads. Daddy had to bend down and the balloon kept popping out. We had to keep picking it up and starting again. We both laughed out loud.

Soon, the dance ended. I held Daddy’s hand and skipped out of the church. I will always remember this dance with Daddy!
3rd Grade

Jaylab Robinson
Autumn Foliage
Harry Potter: Spoken Word
By Taj McGlamery
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts

Harry Potter, a young wizard boy
His parents got killed by Voldemort—
He got left by wizards at his aunt and uncle’s door
They treat him really bad and make him wash every floor—
Letters came flying all over the place
Some even came through the fireplace—
He never got the mail but the letters were for him
He was invited to Hogwarts—a school where kids weren’t dim—
The Dursley’s are mean and won’t let him go
But half-giant Hagrid won’t take “NO”—
So he takes Harry and brings him in a boat
To go to Gringotts to get his gold—
He gets a cloak, a cauldron, and a wand
And then his mind takes him way beyond—
When he got on the Hogwarts Express
He was really quite impressed—
He met Ron Weasley, a boy with red hair,
and Hermione Granger who had a lot of flair—
Finally, they arrived at the castle
Getting through the lake was not a big hassle—
When they got inside, there was a wizard’s hat,
It started to talk and told them which houses they’d be at—
He got to play Quidditch even though he was new
Because it was just the way he flew—
The Sorcerer’s Stone is a powerful rock
He had to fight someone who would always mock—
But he was able to defeat Lord Voldemort
With the power of love, which is stronger than scorn

Light Green
By Laura Day
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School

Light green ... It’s a clover the sheep knows.
Light green ... It’s grass the pony paws.
Light green ... It’s in the Northern skies.
Light green ... It’s the color of surprise!
Connor—The Young Knight In Training
By William Sudnick
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School

There was a castle on a rocky mountain. A kind and giving king named King Noah lived there. Fearless knights and intelligent wizards lived in the castle with King Noah. There was a young boy in training to become a knight at the Castle. His name was Connor. Connor struggled with fear. He ran from dragons and ogres. Connor’s teacher was an old and wise wizard named Wist. Connor told Wist that he hated training. Training scared Connor. Training was hard and gave Connor nightmares about monsters.

There was a rude and greedy dragon who the people called Deltor. Deltor was rude because he stole dogs, and cats, and farm animals, too. Then, he ate them. Deltor wanted money. So, Deltor stole money. Deltor sat in his cave and admired his money, yelled at his servants, and looked at himself in a fancy mirror. Once, a person named Joe tried to get his stolen money back while Deltor was looking in the mirror. Deltor turned around and saw Joe trying to get his money back. Deltor grew angry and shot so much fire that Joe turned into ashes.

At the bottom of the mountain, there was a village. The people of the village were poor because Deltor stole from them. The people had very few dogs, cats, and farm animals because of Deltor. Connor daydreamed that he was a fearless knight who slayed Deltor. Connor wanted to help the people of the village. Just then, through the window in the castle, Connor saw Deltor, but because Connor had not trained, he was not ready to fight Deltor. Connor ran to King Noah and the wizard Wist to warn them. “Hide your valuables and pets in the basement!” yelled Connor.

“Why?” said Wist.

“It’s Deltor!” Connor screamed. Connor, Wist, and King Noah ran to get to get their valuables. But it was too late. They watched Deltor fly off with their valuables. Conner sat in his room and thought about what had happened. He said to himself, “It is all my fault that Deltor stole the valuables of everyone.” Then Connor said to himself, “I will make up for what I did.”

Connor went to King Noah and said, “I can make up for what I did.”

“That was not your fault,” said King Noah to Connor. “Now, please go back to your room.”

“Yes sir,” said Connor. He walked to his room. Then, Connor went to see Wist. He went to the training room where Wist was writing. Connor knocked on the door.

“Come in,” Wist said, softly.

“I am ready to train now,” said Connor.

“But why now?” asked Wist.

“I am here because I want to slay Deltor,” said Connor.

“Connor, you cannot slay Deltor. He is just too strong for you,” said Wist. “He will turn you to ashes.”

“But I still want to train,” said Connor. “I will train and practice with grit.”

“What is grit?” asked Wist.

“It is not worrying about making a mistake,” said Connor. “It’s seeing what you can learn from your mistakes. It is getting over your frustrations and fear. People with grit are not victims,” said Connor.

Wist said, “If you do have grit, then show it.”

Connor then trained incredibly hard for his dream to come true. His path to success was not a straight line. It was a curvy and long line. Sometimes his efforts went backward and sometimes forward, and sometimes nowhere. Connor did not give up. He filled canteens up with his sweat. He put the canteens of sweat on his shelf next to his money chest. He admired his sweat. He thought his sweat was like money invested. One day, Connor was training with Wist. They heard a loud roar. Connor dashed to the window of the castle. Flying right toward Connor was Deltor. “Aaaaah!” screamed Connor.

Deltor crashed through the wall and made Connor drop his sword. Connor ran for his life, screaming. Connor saw a supporting post and hid behind it. He looked back at Deltor. Connor saw Deltor knock out Wist. “Noooo!” Connor yelled from the top of his lungs. He saw a nearby dagger. Connor ran for the dagger. He grabbed it and ran back to his hiding spot. Deltor was destroying everything in his path. Conner was waiting for the right moment to strike.
The closer Deltor got, the more Connor was afraid. Soon Deltor was lined up with Connor's hiding spot. Connor knew it was now or never. He leaped in front of Deltor and thrust the dagger into the soft spot of Deltor's neck. Connor blinked, and Deltor was dead. Connor was so happy. He walked over to Wist and said, "Deltor is dead."

"I saw," said Wist. "Good job."

"Thank you," said Connor.

The End

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**Judas Sacremen**

By Grace LaPlaca

East Farms School

**Part 1: Judas Sacremen**

"Goodnight, Mom! Goodnight, Dad!" Anthony was slowly falling asleep. He dreamed about pirates and princesses, but the dream he remembered most was about a volcano. Not just any volcano. This volcano had lava one hundred times hotter and higher than others. A volcano where you could feel the darkness, you could feel the spirit, gripping you and pulling you under the lava. You could feel all this death. In Anthony's dream, he was falling into the volcano. Closer, and closer, and closer, until finally... Anthony woke up. But he wasn't in his bed. He was falling into a pit. A pit with fire at the bottom. A pit of death.

"Ahhhh!" Anthony screamed. He was falling deep into a tunnel with fire at the bottom. He looked down and realized what it was: A volcano! This was the place in his dream! He was only one hundred feet above the lava. Soon, he would burn! When he was less than thirty feet away from the lava, the fire disappeared. The magma had vanished. Instead, there was ice and snow. Anthony froze in the middle of the air. His heart was pounding. Suddenly, a white shadow appeared.

"I have something to tell you. Come here." Anthony was paralyzed. Whenever he tried to move, it hurt. Like a sword thrown right in your stomach. He knew one thing. Whatever the shadow was, it was evil. "What do want from me?!" Anthony stammered.

"I want nothing. But, I have something that you want," said the shadow.

The mysterious figure moved out. She was the most beautiful woman that one could ever see. She had emerald green eyes, a soft smile, flowing black hair, and the best of all, her dress. The dress itself had to be at least 5 feet wide. It was bright blue with diamonds embroidered all over it. She lifted her hand and a picture of a man in his early twenties was spread across the volcano, like a screen you would watch in a movie theater. He wore a toga with a purple belt around his waist. "This man's name is Judas Sacremen. He knows how to cross through the portal of time and worlds, walk on a pit of fire, and swim eel infested waters," said the woman.

"But how will he help me?" asked Anthony. He was starting to calm down.

"Judas can help you get back to your world. He can do anything," she said. She looked down and blushed. "Anything," she whispered. She flashed a light, and in seconds, the light was a staircase. "At the top of this fire mountain, Judas will be waiting for you."

Anthony turned to look at the glowing staircase. He looked back and said, "Thank you!" But when he turned around, she had vanished!

**Part 2: The Spider Pit**

"Don't worry. I'll help you," said a voice.

Judas, Anthony thought.

The voice spoke again. "Just walk up the stairs."

"Okay," shrugged Anthony. There really wasn't anything he could do. So, he climbed until he could see a glimpse of Judas. He had short, chestnut brown hair, with tan skin and green eyes. He looked like a snake in human form.
“I'm sure you've heard of me,” he said with a shy smile.

“Oh, I guess,” replied Anthony.

“Then, trust me and get inside this bag. When the spider king sees you in it, he will have us thrown into his pit of spiders. Little does he know that there is a secret entrance to the next place we have to go in the heart of the pit. This will help us get you back home. Best to stay in the bag for this process.”

“But won’t the spider king separate us when he finds out about me?” asked Anthony.

“No. The king is forbidden to look inside anyone's belongings. Therefore, I will say that it is full of fruit. But even if I say that, he will still throw us in the pit because he is under the orders and laws of Zunia, the ruler of this world. She is queen of all kingdoms in this world. Hey, you better change your clothes. You don't look like you live in our world. It's okay. I have a small toga in my sack.”

He took out the toga. It was purple with an orange belt. It smelled of rotten eggs and sour milk. Anthony felt like he was going to be sick. But he put it on. “Oh, and if anyone asks, your name is Antonio. Anthony is not a very common name here. People could get suspicious and tell someone.”

“Okay,” Anthony said, slowly. He successfully climbed into the bag.

As soon as his full body was in the bag, he felt a fast vibrating. He heard a zoom. Then he heard Judas's voice. “We're here!”

“Whah?” said Anthony. This was a confusing time for him. “How did you do that? I didn't feel us move at all.”

“I know a few tricks,” replied Judas with a grin. “Well, the spider king should be coming around any minute now. Tuck your head in!”

“HEY!” yelled a voice from behind them. “YOU'RE UNDER ARREST FOR KIDNAPPING!”

“But, this bag is full of fruit, not a boy,” said Judas. He was much more calm than Anthony.

“I DON'T CARE! PUT THEM BOTH IN THE PIT!” Two guards appeared with a click of the king's fingers. They looked like trolls. They had warts all over and had horns of dark green on their heads. They lifted Judas and Anthony and threw them into a dark cave. Scitter scitter, scitter scitter. Millions of spiders of all sizes and colors were crawling on Judas. Anthony was glad he was in the bag right now. Anthony could feel a bright light outside of him.

Judas chuckled. “The spider king has lived for many years, yet he does not know about the portal!” Anthony felt a jerk and nothing under him. They were falling!

**Part 3: The Portal**

“This is the last place of your journey,” said Judas.

Anthony slowly climbed out of the sack. “You mean our journey,” corrected Anthony.

“No. I only went with you. This was your journey, your trip.” He paused. “Your destiny.”

He looked far away, but something was different. Different from when their trip started. In the beginning, Judas was just a map back to Anthony’s home. But now, Judas was a friend. Anthony remembered Judas’s shy smile. Anthony had never had a friend like Judas before. He didn’t want to leave him. The look in Judas’s eyes told him that he did not want him to leave either. He shook it off.

“Well, we better get going.” He smiled, but his tone of voice didn’t match. Anthony walked next to Judas. Anthony looked around as he was walking. The place was a beach with palm trees and a bright blue ocean. Anthony felt Judas’s grip get tighter on his hand. He was eager for something, but what?

“What's wrong?” Anthony asked.

“You know something. Just like how you know when it’s night or day. You don’t know what you know unless something amazing happens to you, something that happens gradually. This knowledge may not always be in your mind, but in sad memories. When this knowledge ends, then something in your life ends, too.”
Anthony was very confused. The wheels in his head were spinning like crazy. Judas was so wise, but what did he mean? What could he know when none of it made sense to him? The thought was stuck to his mind like glue. That is, until after a couple miles of long walking ... 

When they reached their sixth to eighth mile, Anthony saw a series of red stones on top of each other. Surprisingly, they formed a square straight up in the sky. Judas's grip was tighter than ever. He started sprinting. When they reached the stones, Judas yelled out mysterious words: “Sulcus everett, cutinhen moore, the portal awaits you, don’t shut the door!”

The ground began to shake, and the stones were glowing like stars, and the portal was there. Suddenly, the woman from the volcano appeared. Anthony ran to her, tears in his eyes. This mysterious woman who had paralyzed him when he first saw her was now so familiar. It was his mom! He ran to her and hugged her so tightly that a boa constrictor would have the same squeeze. “It’s me, Anthony. It’s me!” she said in a soft voice. They walked towards the portal together, hand in hand. Anthony glanced back at Judas and mouthed the words: “Thank you.”

He then knew what Judas had meant. It was love.

The End

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**Gymnastics**

By Catreena Simpson  
Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School

*Introduction*

Do you like Flips and Rolls? Well, this may be the book for you! Because this book is about gymnastics. In this book, you’ll learn gymnastics tips, how to get ready for class, and everything there is to know about gymnastics. So, grab your leotard and shorts and tumble into life as a gymnast!

*What it takes to be a gymnast*

Try putting yourself into a gymnast’s shoes because you’re going to learn what it takes to be a gymnast! In gymnastics, you will have to wear a leotard and shorts or a bodysuit. A leotard is stretchy and fits close. A bodysuit is sort of like a leotard, but the shorts are connected to the leotard, so you don’t have to buy shorts. Make sure your clothes are always clean and neat. If it is cold, you can wear a tracksuit (sweatpants and a sweatshirt). If you’re in gymnastics, your hair should be nice and tidy and not in your eyes. If you have long hair, braid it back so that it’s out of your face and cannot hit either you or your coach. Here’s an interesting fact: leotards are named after a French acrobat named Julie Leotard, who was the first one to wear a leotard. In gymnastics you MUST listen to your coach, or you can literally break a leg! (P.S. Don’t forget to braid back your hair and wear your leotard or a bodysuit).

*Balances*

Balances are another way of stretching. One balance is a shoulder stand balance. To start, lay flat on your back and point your toes. Next, bend your legs and start to lift your hips up. Finally, stretch your legs up and point your toes. The foot balance is one of the simplest balances. Start by raising your foot to your knee. If you want, you can stretch your free leg out for a challenge. A V-sit balance is one of the hardest balances. Start by putting your palms on the ground/floor and point your toes. Then raise your point toes and legs and look at your legs. Then raise your arms and don’t let your back sag. (P.S. Don’t get irritated if you can’t do the V-sit balance. I can’t do it either, and I’m an expert. Just keep trying!)

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, gymnastics is a really great sport and a good way to heighten your flexibility. Maybe you should try gymnastics one day. As I said, don’t get irritated if you can’t do the V-sit balance. I can’t do it either, and I’m an expert. Just keep trying!

See you next time!
Seamus
By Riley Farrell
Squadron Line Elementary School

Seamus is my cat. He is SO CUTE!!!!! Sometimes, I wonder what my house would be like without him. Without my parents screaming, “SEAMUS GET OUT!!!” when he’s always underfoot. The house would be quiet without him.

Seamus is always there when I need him (and sometimes when I don’t). At bedtime, he’s already stolen my spot. When I’m sick, he curls up next to me and purrs. When my friend and I had a big fight, Seamus was right there when I got home.

Seamus is a handsome cat. His eyes are hazel. He has gray fur except for white patches on his mouth, nose-bridge, neck, front and back paws, and belly. His fur is so soft you could mistake him for a pillow.

Seamus is almost always hanging out with me, but when he’s not, he’s got some friends to hang out with. Lucky and Keegan are their names. Sometimes Seamus and Keegan lay together on my mom and dad’s bed. They’re so cute! Lucky and Keagan are sometimes hanging out when I feed them. Although these cats are not friendly, I’m glad Seamus is!

Seamus is an old cat. He is 72! He’s almost always limping because of a leg problem.

Seamus brings my family together. One time, we were all on my mom and dad’s bed, and Seamus jumped up. So many kisses were given to him. He purred in my ear so loud, I thought he was a thunderstorm! My sister and I started hugging him, and he purred even louder. Still, I wish Keegan and Lucky were just like him: cute, cuddly, soft, and lovable.

Nobody knows what the future holds for him, but I hope it’s good.

Bearded Dragons
By Nathan Rahming
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Elementary School

1. Do you know what a bearded dragon is? Well, it is one of the most awesome pets ever! A bearded dragon makes the perfect classroom pet.
2. First, he loves to play. For example, he comes up to the glass to see you. Also, if you come up to the glass, he will move. You will love that he climbs the foam walls.
3. Next, he is not aggressive. For example, his claws aren’t sharp. So, he won’t scare students.
4. The final reason a bearded dragon makes a great classroom pet is because he’s not disturbing. For example, he’s quiet so he will not distract the class.
5. As you can see, a bearded dragon makes a great classroom pet. So, if you are looking for a classroom pet, consider getting a bearded dragon. They are fun, safe, and quiet!
4th Grade

Cheyenne Navikas
Space Odyssey
If You Could Be an Animal
By Ava Sarkis
Squadron Line Elementary

If you could be an animal, what would you choose? Would you be a cat, always ready for a snooze? Would you be a panda bear, sitting in a tree, or a tiny baby koala as quiet as can be? Would you be a falcon, flying in the sky, or a red and blue parrot, simply ready to say “Hi?” So be brave and be strong, as an animal, until dawn.

The Porch
By Stella Mahlke
Sarah Noble Intermediate School

Where our parties are, our holidays, our stories. I sit on my grandmom’s warm lap, her breathing soothing me from the howl of the wild coyotes behind our home.

A home-sewn blanket wrapped tight around my chest, my hand holding a mug of hot chocolate.

I watch the stars pop out of the sky. Paul used to tell me they were broken pieces of the moon. I think they are like small pearls from my mama’s church necklace.

I watch the other children run, catch the ball, and chase the dog. My brother, a book carefully placed between his legs, and a light from our lantern.

These are our memories.
Little Red Rolling Hood
By Madeline Morrissey
Deep River Elementary School

Once upon a time, in a big wide kitchen, lived a little meatball named Little Red Rolling Hood. Little Red Rolling Hood was a cute little meatball with a cape woven out of spaghetti and dyed with tomato sauce. She was quite round and short, but she was a tender, sweet young thing. Her best friends were Snickers, and they loved to snicker.

One day, Little Red Rolling Hood's mother told Little Red Rolling Hood, “Go to Grandma’s house and give her a basket of treats, but stay on the trail, don’t talk to strangers, and watch out for forks!” So, Little Red Rolling Hood started off rolling down the trail. After a while, Little Red Rolling Hood became very exhausted of rolling, and she didn’t pay attention to where she was going, so she accidentally rolled off the trail.

Soon she found herself bumping into a fork! Clang! The fork was out for a walk and was getting hungry. He thought this sweet little meatball looked tasty and her cape did as well! He thought the cape was like a side dish. He just needed to add a little pepper. So the fork said, “Excuse me, where are you going?”

Since Little Red Rolling Hood was so small, she had a little brain, and she had a little memory. She forgot what her mother told her, and she said with pride, “I am going to my grandma’s house to give her the treats in the basket all by myself.”

“Aww, I know where that is, and I know the shortcut. The shortcut is that way,” said the fork, pointing in the wrong direction! So Little Red Rolling Hood went in the wrong direction. (Which was the long way.) As Little Red Rolling Hood rolled away, she heard snickers from behind her. But, she figured it was the Snickers.

When the fork got to Grandma’s house, there was no one in sight, so the fork went in. The fork saw dear old Granny in her little bed made of broccoli wood. The fork thought Granny looked delicious, too, because she was a perfectly cooked sausage.

(Meatballs grow up to be sausages.) The fork decided to hide Granny in the closet and eat her later.

The fork disguised himself as Granny and hopped into Granny’s bed. All of a sudden, the door flew open, and Little Red Rolling Hood burst in yelling! When Little Red Rolling Hood stopped yelling, she went close to the bed. Little Red Rolling Hood noticed for the first time that her grandma had sharp teeth, so she said, “What sharp teeth you have, Grandma?”

The fork forgot to think twice and said, “Better to eat you with!” Little Red Rolling Hood screamed so loud that a broccoli cutter heard and ran as fast as he could to see what was the matter. The broccoli cutter got there right when the fork was getting ready to eat Little Red Rolling Hood. The fork was just about to eat her when the broccoli cutter charged with his sharp blade out in front! His blade was as sharp as a knife! The fork was so scared, he ran for his life and was never heard from again.

(They found granny).

The End

Simon The Crooked Nose
By Yael Grosman
Burr Elementary School

Dedicated to My Grandfather

It was an early spring in 1945. Red Army troops were moving through the German countryside towards Berlin. The men were exhausted by many years of war, missing their homes and families, but they were determined to finally defeat the Nazis.

On a cold day around dusk, one Russian platoon entered a small German village on the edge of a vast forest. They were looking for a roof over their heads for the night and a warm meal. Many times during the war, soldiers depended on the locals’ willingness to share their food. They went from house to house, but the villagers said they had no food even for themselves. The platoon was tired and gave up on finding anything. As they were setting up camp, it seemed like one of the soldiers was out of place. He was walking around in what looked like an aimless day-dream. But no! “Dig here!” he shouted to his comrades, pulling out his little shovel. His friends came to help. In a matter of thirty minutes, they uncovered the villagers’ food stash buried in an old root cellar. There were all kinds of vegetables, cured meats, pickles, and even a barrel of schnapps. The men were very happy with this discovery, and they couldn’t thank enough the private that led them there—Simon.
Simon was an ordinary soldier, except in one very special way. He had always had the remarkable ability to smell very faint scents with his large, deformed nose. He was good at it, even as a child. Sometimes the children laughed at him, but he was very proud of his special gift. While at school, he always knew when his mother cooked his favorite meal at home, miles away. This ability developed as he grew up, and it became very handy during his military service.

One day, Simon’s platoon encountered a large group of German men walking by the side of the road, escorting a horse-drawn carriage loaded with hay. “Hands up!” The Russians stopped them and started questioning them. “Where are you from, and where are you going to? Have you seen any German military around? Empty your pockets.” The Germans didn’t look straight into their eyes, but said they were just farmers, and they were going to the nearby village to help.

The Russian commander didn’t notice anything suspicious, so he told his soldiers to let them go. One German man was so happy to get away that he patted Simon on the shoulder as he was passing by. That was a mistake. Simon’s crooked nose immediately recognized a smell he was exposed to many times before. It was the smell of a German-made gun powder. He quickly walked up to his commander and told him this. Already knowing about Simon’s ability, the commander told the soldiers to stop the Germans again and search the carriage thoroughly. They found a false bottom loaded with weapons.

Once the war was over, Simon went home and put his nose to work again, this time as a police detective, solving mysteries and hard cases. His crooked nose was never something that held him back.

Although this story is fictional, it is based on a true character who my grandfather served with during WWII and recounted to my mother when she was a child.

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**Will the Leaves Win, Or Will I?**

**The Great Leaf Battle**

By Carolena Parker

Anna M. Reynolds Elementary School

Rrrrrumble! I pulled open the dusty garage door and stepped inside. “Caw, c-caw!” the birds called and called like their lives depended on it. I quickly chose my favorite rake; the long, red, light one that was extra bendy and springy. As I stepped back out of the garage, I closed my eyes and breathed in the sharp, leafy scent of fall, fall, fall. I opened my eyes and turned toward the big yard.

“Oh, oh. Oh my, oh my,” I gasped. There were thousands, or maybe even millions, of leaves it seemed. “This is going to take foreeeeever,” I groaned. I gripped the rake tighter, for fear I would faint, or at least keel over. “Whooo, whooooo,” the wind whistled. It was strange, but somehow the wind, firm but gentle, seemed to give me courage. I squared my shoulders and thought, *I’m not afraid of these measly little leaves!* I held the rake tight, but this time it wasn’t from fear. It was from motivation! I took a step toward the yard, and I almost lost my courage again, but I managed to pull myself together.

Scraaaaatch. My first swipe of the rake revealed a nice, clean strip of the fading, green October grass. I smiled a big smile, even though I had a WHOLE lot more work ahead. The wind blew again, sending a flurry of leaves down from the great big maple tree. Scrape, scrape, scrape, I continued on. When I looked up from my raking, I could see that already quite a decent-sized pile had formed. I kept on raking, raking, raking, until my arms grew tired. Suddenly, I realized that my upper body was SWELTERING. I unzipped my sweatshirt, walked across the yard, and tossed it on the picnic table. I instantly felt better.

When I walked back to my rake, I saw that the pile was growing and FAST. After a while, maybe half an hour, I glanced up again. The yard was almost finished! I raked and raked. My arms were begging to be consoled. My panting was as loud as the hurricane of wind that tore through the big maple tree. Although I wasn’t running fast, my heart pounded a billion times a second, frantically trying to push oxygen-filled blood around my stressed body.

I glanced at my sweatshirt nestled on the picnic table and wished I could be as cozy as that. My eyelids were refusing to hold themselves up; they seemed to be made of lead. Though the rest of my body was hot, my hands were cold and clammy and could hardly hold the rake. Even the leaves seemed to be not as sprightly as before; they were no longer whizzing through the air, but limply drifted about randomly. My hair blew into my face and stuck there. Frustrated, I pushed it back, but again it stubbornly stuck on my sweat. Annoyed, I muttered, “How did I get stuck with this job anyway?!”
After another long period of time, I looked up. “YES!!!” I shouted in triumph. The yard was FINISHED! I could now have a long period of time of NO RAKING!!! Finally, I leaned my rake against the tree and dusted off my hands. Sweat ran into my blisters, stinging them. My eyelids drooped, but I was still completely happy that I had finished the yard. As I surveyed the yard, I felt a sense of accomplishment. Only then did I realize how HUGE the great big pile of leaves was.

I felt proud of myself and happy that the yard was nice and free of leaves, except, of course, the GIGANTIC pile of leaves that was in the center of the yard. I closed my eyes and breathed in the fresh fall air. “Whew! That was a LOT of work,” I breathed. I walked over to the garage and put the rake away. My aching muscles were finally able to rest. I felt like I could take a good loooong nap, but first, I wanted to go inside and get some nice, warm apple cider.

A few months later, I was sipping hot cocoa, happy as a clam, with a Santa hat on. I couldn’t believe that it was almost winter! Soon, I’d be shoveling snow, not raking leaves. I wasn’t sure I could handle shoveling. Then, I thought to myself, “If I can rake leaves, I can CERTAINLY shovel snow!” I looked out the window at the bare yard and bare trees. I knew that next spring, after the snow melted, I’d be glad that I did all of that hard work. Instead of soggy leaves in the spring, we’d have a clean yard with tons of budding flowers scattered everywhere. I realized that raking leaves was not just a job that I unluckily got stuck with, but a job that made me feel proud and that had many benefits. “What in the world?” I gasped in amazement. I saw a few snowflakes fall out of the corner of my eye. “Oh boy, here we go again!”

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**Opening My Eyes Underwater for the First Time**

By Avia Hartman

Southeast Elementary School

The water painted my face as I slithered like an eel round and round until I fell like a rock to the bottom. There was going to be a memory from this day, but I didn’t know it yet. I looked at my mom. She was quietly sitting, reading some of her papers. “Mom?”

“What?” she asked me.

“Can people open their eyes underwater?”

“Yes!” she said. I could tell she was annoyed. My doppelgangers suddenly appeared. They started fighting as usual. *Don’t go under,* the Angel doppelganger told me. *Do it! Do it!* the Devil doppelganger shouted at me. I didn’t want to listen to them. I wanted to listen to what I wanted to do. But, they kept shouting. I wanted to listen to the Angel, but I had to do it. I knew that.

My eagerness was too powerful. Excitement poured through my veins. I knew I was going to overcome a fear. Suddenly, the eagerness was so powerful, I jerked. I fell face first in the water. I felt the water pressing against my face, as if saying, *Get back up! I don’t think this is safe.* I had a feeling that this little voice was going to go on for a long time. Ignoring the water, I slowly opened my eyes. I could nearly hear the music that one hears in a movie before something scary happens.

It was very blurry. I could feel the water pressing against my eyes. I could only make out the smallest shapes of the outside. But I had only one thought on my mind. I had done it. But I was in for something that I wasn’t ready for …

My breath shouted to me, *I’m about to explode! About to explode!!!!* I had no choice but to listen to my breath, which was pushing hard at my chest. Frantically, I searched for a wall I could rest my hands upon. My hands finally stumbled on a wall, and I gripped it tightly. Frightened, I pulled myself out of the water that was still screeching at me. Still shouting, *Get back up! This isn’t safe!* I was still very annoyed with the water’s constant shouting. I was happy to get out of the water.

I nearly forgot that I had to breathe. My breath sounded a bit raspy. I thought that was weird since I was underwater. I released an overjoyed sigh. I had achieved a huge accomplishment. I had opened my eyes underwater. All I could hear was the joy seeping through my body.

But my doppelgangers came back. *I knew that you would do it!!!!* My Devil doppelganger shouted at me. Ahhh! *This is the first time I was ever wrong!!!!* My Angel doppelganger shouted. Then, both the doppelgangers disappeared in a whirlwind of smoke.

I knew that I would not only be able to always do it, but I knew that I wouldn’t be scared. I would always be able to do it. But I knew it wouldn’t be easy. But there was something important. I was ready. I was ready to do it again.
I Hoped
By Layla Montgomery
Ledyard Center School

Like the sun hidden behind a cloud,
Like the planets hidden behind the dark night,
I could never see you, but you were there,
Spying, waiting for me to be alone.
Then, you would pounce, as if a cat, and ask me
something,
Something I could not refuse,
Something that would change my life forever.
I knew this,
But yet I did not see you,
Or
Know what you were going to say,
But
I hoped you were there waiting
Until I was alone to ask me that most important
question
Of my life.
I Hoped.

Peace
By Charlie Orben
Burr Elementary School

His paws twinkled in the sparkling sun,
His teeth turning yellow by the minute,
Bugs fluttered around his peaceful body cautiously,
as if they knew something was wrong,
The dark green grass tugged my body down to stay,
and run my fingers through his rough fur,
His eyes with such kindness,
such faith,
such love,
but also forlorn,
yanked my words,
As if happiness,
and sadness,
were being mixed in a hot pot of boiling emotions,
What to say at a time of such sadness,
such sorrow,
such depression,
“He,” my voice cracked,
“he lived a very happy life,” I mumbled.
But as if my family couldn’t comprehend my words
they just stared,
and stayed,
in our tight circle around him,
I was left to face the truth,
that seven years isn’t long for a dog,
Not my dog,
His shadow cast a blanket over my tears,
tumbling down my face like a rock falling off a forgotten mountain

Dying in peace,
not getting put down,
It is a gift my dog received,
opened,
and embraced,
Even at a time of such sadness,
such sorrow,
such depression,
peace filled our hearts.
Up and Down
By Grace Clark
Buttonball Lane School

"Are you sure you want to go on that one?" I ask, eyeing the 400-foot tower above me.

"Yep," replies my best friend Lizzie Parker. "You can do it. It's not like it's your first time going on the Screamer, Megan." I sigh. She's right. I have gone on the Screamer before, but that was when it happened, and it changed my life forever.

Two years ago on the sixth grade field trip, the whole class decided to go on the Screamer, so of course I couldn't say no. At the part of the ride where the rocky cart takes a near vertical drop 400 feet, I had exploded and sprayed all the popular girls with my lunch. Of course, the boys thought this was a riot, but I quickly became the laughing stock of the grade.

I shudder, remembering that unfortunate event. It had taken months to build back my popularity, and even now, I hear whispers of "Barf Girl," as I roam the halls of Bennet Middle School. "Uhh ... I guess I'll try it," I nervously reply.

A strong scent of buttery popcorn wanders around the park, making its way to each person's nose. I look up just in time to see a lightning fast ride whiz by at top speed. The air is filled with laughs, but also screams.

"Can I go to the bathroom first?" I ask.

"Fine," she says. "I'll meet you at the ride."

I hurry off, deciding to just take a walk while avoiding my doom. But, because life never works out that way, the direction I chose to go in is the way to the ride.

"Oh, great, you're here; now we can go on the ride," exclaims Lizzie. As we board the rocky lime green cart I can hear the screams of the other people on the ride. My stomach feels like an ocean in a tsunami. I'm so faint I almost can't feel the familiar lurching of the cart going from 0 to 66 M.P.H. in a split second. It's going fine until the cart slows for the drop. At the same spot I exploded in sixth grade, I can smell the scent of throw-up. But it's not my lunch that's stuck to my hair, face and legs. It's Lizzie's.

The Nightmare at the Vet
By Mikaela Martinez
Tootin' Hills Elementary School

I stared at the calendar, stunned. It was that day, that dreadful day. Today was Vet Day. "Get Sienna ready, Mikaela!" my mom called down. I slumped over to Sienna's crate in the downstairs living room. I grabbed her treats, red leash, blue, extra leash, two towels, and her red harness. I put Sienna's harness on her, slipped through one leg, then the other, before I clipped it together on her back. Then, I clipped the leash on to the silver ring attached to the harness on her chest and tugged to get her moving.

Sienna groaned, as if to say, "Is it time to go already? Can you come back tomorrow?" She looked up at me with big puppy dog eyes. I looked away so she couldn't tempt me. My eyes trailed off around the room, and I saw the wood beam in the middle of the room, the tan couch with hair covered blankets draped over it, and the black wooden coffee table. I turned my head toward Sienna, stared at her, and gave one last tug on the leash. With a groan, she slowly got up. She raised her butt in the air, her head down and her long legs stretched out in front. I could see her skinny body and her big chest, her sienna colored coat and her white, mitten like paws.

"Let's go Sienna. I don't have all day. We have to make it for your appointment on time, instead of like last time," I growled at her. Thump, Thump, Thump. My older sister Caitlyn and my younger brother Jacob came bounding down the stairs, nearly missing the steps. "Do they have to come, Mom?" I whined. "They are going to make it worse."

"Yes," my mom replied. "There's no one to watch them. Mikaela, it's time to go. Get Sienna into the car," my mom spoke softly.
“Okay,” I sighed. I dragged Sienna into the dark blue mini-van, climbed all the way to the back row of seats, and set down one towel for Sienna to sit on. The other I kept, in case she got carsick. Caitlyn and Jacob took the two seats in front of me. My mom pulled out of the driveway and headed off to the Vet’s.

Screech! The car pulled to a stop. We walked out of the car in single file. Outside, the sun blazed in my eyes, but I could feel a nice cool, crisp breeze flowing. There were colorful, bright, eye-popping flower bushes lining the vet’s office. Sienna was fine outside, but inside she was usually a nightmare. “This is not going to be like last time, Sienna, ok?” I whispered firmly into the dog’s ear.

**Two Months earlier**

Vet Day. I dragged Sienna into the vet’s office. Inside it was a bright room, with bright lights, and white walls. Sienna’s claws clacked on the linoleum floor. I dragged and tugged Sienna’s leash. My mom checked in at the front desk, and I tried to steer Sienna clear of that area.

On the desk was a bucket of treats. I calmly walked across the room, giving the treat bucket to the receptionist. “What’s this for? It’s meant to be out,” she said, flustered.

“Trust me, you do not want this out with my dog, Sienna, around,” I replied.

“Oh, how bad could it be?” the receptionist replied, unbelieving. Clearly, she was new.

“Ok,” I said casually, “but don’t say I didn’t warn you.” Squeak! The door from the room on the other end of the building swung open, and out came the nurse, who pleasantly said, “Dr. Grey is ready to see Sienna.” Clearly, she was new, too. No one talks that pleasantly with Sienna around.

My mom quickly walked over to Caitlyn and Jacob, and told them, “I’m going into the vet’s office with Mikaela, so be good.”

With that, I dragged Sienna into the examining room. She remembered this room, you could definitely tell. Sienna skidded on the floor, landing right at the vet’s feet. She quickly dashed back to me, almost knocking me over. “All right, Sienna,” the Vet spoke clearly and firmly. “I need you to get onto the scale.” I put a treat on the scale, and Sienna hopped on.

She was fine until the scale made a beep. Sienna jumped backwards. *Oh boy, I thought. This is going to be a long day.* Sienna is a really sweet dog. Except for at the vet’s. She’s a nightmare at the vet’s. Dr. Grey then took out a tool meant to check your ear. Sienna did not like this tool. She twisted and turned, trying to grab hold of the tool with her teeth and rip it to shreds. By the third part of the check-up, Sienna was Done.

She ripped her leash out of my hand and bounded toward the swinging door. Sienna burst through the door into the main office/waiting room. The first thing she did was jump atop the counter and knock over the treat bucket. Treats went flying everywhere. I could see the check-in lady’s expression. Horrified. All the dogs in the room wriggled free from their owners and feasted on the treats like wild animals. It. Was. Chaos. Owners’ pleadings for their dogs to come echoed throughout the room. The dogs left only one crumb (that a Chihuahua later licked up).

“You get back here, Sienna!” I yelled. Sienna didn’t listen, though. She was finally free. She wasn’t ready to just go back now. No, she had to do much worse. I could see out of the corner of my eye, not paying attention, Caitlyn and Jacob were fussing with the coffee machine, trying to get it to make it give them hot chocolate. Sienna bounded to the coffee machine and knocked it over, creating another feast frenzy for the dogs. The owners yanked on their dogs’ leashes, but it took the owners too much by surprise. Sienna was causing chaos all around her.

“Sienna!” Jacob whined. “We were trying to get hot chocolate!”

Whoosh! Sienna bounded into the ‘Employees Only’ room. She ran up to everyone, sniffing them. She sniffed the tools a lot, too. I just then noticed a slight bulge in my pockets. I reached deep down and pulled something out. Treats! *Maybe I can tempt her to follow me back into the vet’s room,* I thought. “Hey Sienna,” I spoke, trying to draw her in. She whipped her head around to face me. “Look what I’ve got.” I waved the treat around in my hand. Sienna stared and swayed with the treat. I slowly walked backwards, and she followed me. “That’s it,” I said, calmly. “Just follow me.”

I finally got Sienna back into the vet’s room and then flung the treat to the other side of it before I moved to guard the door so Sienna couldn’t get out. Sienna was stuck in the middle. On one side was the Vet and the treat, on the other side was me and the door. Sienna stood there, looking back and forth. Then finally she walked over to me and sat down. I showered her with petting and talked to her lovingly. In one of my hands I had a towel folded up to be a blindfold. I tied it around her while petting her, and I gave her a treat. Then, the vet walked over. I was still petting her, and she was still gnawing on her treat. But she still whipped her head everywhere that Dr. Gray moved. Dr. Gray quickly used the last tool on her, and gave her a clean bill of health. Phew! I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding in.
Present Day

Me and Sienna walked into the vet’s. It was the same as the last visit. Same check-in lady, same nurse, same linoleum floor. This time the check-in lady hid the treats. “No need,” I spoke, smiling. “Sienna is going to be good this time, right, Sienna?”

“Well, how do you know that?” the check-in lady asked knowingly. “I just know,” I replied, still beaming from ear to ear. “I have my methods,” I added. Sienna and I walked proudly into the vet’s room.

It Will Be Okay

By Abigail Baldwin
Coleytown Elementary School

As my family and I got out of the car and started to walk into the yacht club, I could smell the spring air flutter by me. Dandelions swept down to the ground, like the tears slithering down my face. I could see in the distance sailboats going every which way, dancing in the wind. When I saw them, it reminded me of the times we had together. One memory that popped into my mind was when we were sailing together like we were soaring in the sky. He was holding onto me, and I was steering the boat. I felt like we could conquer the world!

As we entered the yacht club, where we were having his funeral, I saw people mumbling and looking at me with a smile, not really understanding what I was going through. My mom whispered in my ear, “It will be okay.” But I knew it wouldn’t. I sat down in a white fold-up chair. So many thoughts of him rushed through me.

I started to remember my grandpa again. The last time I was at his house was also the last time I saw him. Papa was just waking up and his brown eyes were fluttering open. His mouth opened slowly as he said in a soft voice, “Hi, Abigail.” He reached out his trembling hand and squeezed my sturdy hand three times (which means, “I love you”). I could feel my eyes fill up with tears. I didn’t know if they were happy ones or sad ones. I started to see his mouth open one last time. “It will be okay,” he struggled to say. I wondered if it would actually be okay? It was hard to face the fact that he wouldn’t be here forever. I held his hand and squeezed it three times, making sure he knew how much he meant to me.

As I came back to myself, I heard the man that was behind the podium talking about all of his memories of my grandpa, but none of them were like mine. Such as when he said they went out to dinner together and had so much fun. I bet he never slept over at his house and had Papa make him the sweetest pancakes ever. After the man spoke, a lady came up and said how they had been friends forever. All I was wondering was if she knew I’d been a part of his family forever.

I felt a tap on my shoulder, and it was my mom. She had tears flooding her eyes that made me have a feeling the funeral was almost over. When I looked around me, I saw people blowing their noses and crying on each other’s shoulders like they were pillows, not minding what others were doing. But I also saw some people who didn’t even have a tear in their eye. I couldn’t believe how they were like that. Didn’t they know that they wouldn’t be able to see him again for a really long time? Didn’t they know that, for me, he helped me overcome the impossible?

My family and I held hands as we walked to the car, just me and my family. I started to think that maybe it would be okay, even though Papa wouldn’t be there with us anymore. It almost felt like he was right there with us.
At that moment, the happy voices in my head stopped. My joyful sea was now a big hurricane with big death waves. Everything in my body stopped: my loving heart skipped a beat, my lungs stopped breathing, my determined arms gave up, my working brain gave up. I turned deaf and blind, and now I couldn’t see or listen to my joyful sea. Now, I couldn’t say, “I am okay.” Then, the only thing I could say was “Why?”

They told me they didn’t love each other but were now just friends. It felt unreal, a nightmare. It sounded like a kid losing his parents.

When we moved, every second was a horror. Saying goodbye to our neighbors, moving out of my old room, and everything else built a ladder to my happy light and turned it off. When we left, it was very emotional leaving the home I stayed in for six or seven years of happy times. Now, I miss the private street where we could just walk around outside and go on our bikes.

To this day, I still hurt inside at the thought of the time they told me. I felt like I was trapped and wanted to grow wings and fly away. I remember the long walk to the porch steps, confused with every step I took, and not knowing what was ahead. My innocent body was going to be crushed by the words.

Now, my body works again. My arms are determined again. The happy voices came back. My heart is loving now. My lungs can breathe. My light is on. My eyes and ears can now see and listen to the sound and sight of my joyful sea. Now, I can finally say, “I am okay.” I will never let another human being suffer the way I did.
6th Grade

Every Star is born somewhere.

Charlotte Delway
Every Star is Born Somewhere
**The Chickadee**

By Maria Proulx  
Juliet W. Long School

Small,  
but mighty, I zoom,  
I fly, I soar over treetops,  
or the open sky. A mere blur  
of gray, whizzing away, into  
the sunset at the end of the day.  
I am the ruler of the forest trees. I  
glide about however I please. Through  
day or through night, I speed on without  
fright, flying full-force ahead with all my  
might. I plummet, diving down, down, down,  
soar so low, I nearly touch the ground. But…  
Nope! I’m out and about again. When will I stop  
exploring, when ...

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**An Image to Hide In**

By Eliza Ford  
Memorial Middle School

A deep, dark abyss,  
Deprived of hope,  
Deprived of faith in yourself,  
You do not hide what isn't yours,  
You only hide the way you are,  
You’re hidden in an image

You fit yourself in,  
But you’re not yourself,  
You’re gone.  
The person I know,  
Only a stranger to yourself,  
You’re hidden in an image.

They laugh at you.  
You can’t change your image,  
Or can you?  
Some makeup to hide,  
Some hairspray to fix it.  
You’re someone they like,  
But you’re hidden in an image.

You cry all night,  
Wash away the disguise.  
You wash away your image they know,  
Only to show the truth underneath,  
You’re hidden in an image.

You realize it,  
You want a renewal.  
You wash away the image they want,  
And create your own,  
You’re the one with your own image.
We Played On: A Titanic Story
By Juliana Utzinger
Kelly Lane Intermediate School

In honor of the musicians who did play on, and sacrificed their lives for others.

A verse, an iceberg. Each has the power to do anything. But on this night, they both took a turn for the worse.

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Growing up in Lancashire, England was what made me the musician I am today. Life was fun, life was full of music. I was first introduced to music at my church, where I then introduced the hymn, “Nearer My God to Thee,” to the congregation in return. Since that moment in my life, I have always turned to music. The Titanic was one of those opportunities I knew I couldn’t turn down. Me, Wallace Hartley, band master! I could hardly believe it. The experience was amazing, and I grew to adore the other musicians as brothers. How I loved the Titanic!

******

April 14, 1912
11:40 — An Iceberg

I remember hearing it. Like a timpani, one big noise amidst a sea full of orchestral players. One big iceberg against an unsinkable ship. At the time I had no clue what was going on. One minute I was packing my violin up in its case and saying goodnight to the boys, and the next we were running up to the deck and looking at the side of a huge pillar of ice, clinging to the side of the boat. I can’t remember how long I stood there, but I do know that if I was back at the choir, Mrs. Loraine would have told us the time flew by like a songbird, quickly flying to a new tree to sing a new song before we could ever hear the first. That was how the next few hours felt on the Titanic.

A pre-chorus is the part of a song that builds up to the chorus. The chorus is the part of the song that if you were in writing class, your teacher would call it the main idea or the turn in the story. If my journey on the Titanic were a piece of music, I think I would start the pre-chorus right here, because I had a feeling something big was about to happen.

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1:00 — Panic

I had no clue where I was going. Life vest in one arm and violin in the other, I set out to find the boys. Screaming wives and crying children passed by me. Families saying their last goodbyes, creating a crescendo of mourning in my wake. I flew past life boats being loaded with sleeping children and mothers wrapped in blankets to keep warm.

“How could this possibly be happening?” I asked myself. Of all ships, the Titanic was sinking. The “unsinkable ship” was indeed sinking into the Atlantic. Something had to be done. Captain Smith couldn’t keep all of these people waiting for death if they knew it would surely come. Only an hour ago, the passengers were told the ship was sinking after hitting an iceberg. Did they really think that they could save everyone? I mean, I heard it. When we hit that thing, it sounded as if a bomb went off. Even now there was ice all over the deck. Did the captain really think we would all live?

As fast as I could, I ran onto the open deck, searching everywhere to find those familiar faces. There they were! But, what were they doing? I ran over to the rest of the band just as they took out their instruments and began warming up in the middle of a large crowd of people. “What do you think you are doing,” I stammered, as I finally got to the group of young men.

“Oh, just getting ready to play,” young Percy Taylor answered with one drawn out pluck on his cello.

“Come on, guys, are you serious? The ship is sinking! Sinking! And you want to play?”

“You know what old Victor Hugo always said, Wallace. ‘Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent,’” Theo chimed in, sounding wise beyond his 24 years. I took in what he said, and I realized what they were doing, playing for the people. Why hadn’t I thought of that before? What better way to cheer someone up than some Mozart or maybe Bach? It sure cheered me up whenever I was feeling down.

Soon after I agreed, we were packing our instruments back into our cases and looking for a spot to play. “Look over there!” John Hume sang triumphantly in his heavy Scottish accent. When I looked to where he was pointing, I saw it was right on top of the first class lounge and in front of the ship’s second funnel. As I looked over the large open platform, I began running. Running, because I remembered we were also running out of time.

After we had unpacked our instruments, I tuned my violin and faced the boys. “Let’s create some happiness,” I yelled over the crowd. If my journey on the Titanic was a piece of music, I would call this part the allegro.

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2:00 — A Coda
“Okay, now what to play?” I turned back to our band as we prepared to play our first song. Crickets. That’s what I heard.

“Come on guys. What do you think would cheer you up if you knew that you were most likely going to die in about an hour?” I added, before realizing how wrong it sounded.

“A Waltz,” John Woodward sang into the open air. And so, we played. Waltzes and jives, polkas and love songs. We played every song we had always found hope in. The music had a great impact on the passengers from the moment we started playing. It started with the third class passengers teaching folk dances to the second class, and then the first class joined in. It was so beautiful to see what music can do for people when they really need it. It was.

2:15 – A snap. A bang. Water. That was what came. The ship was sinking.

Screams and chaos echoed through the open waters of the Atlantic. We were told that it was every man for himself. Through the chaos, I turned back to the boys and screamed, “I’d rather die with music than without!” Then, out of nowhere, I started playing “Nearer My God to Thee.” And slowly but surely, the rest of the boys started playing with me.

A coda is the ending of the song. If my journey on the Titanic were a piece of music, this would be the coda. We played. We played until we were no longer playing on earth but playing with the angels in Heaven.

Like Shattering Glass
By Carter Sirois
Central School

I opened the cupboard and took out my mother’s pills. “Two a day,” my mother’s doctor had said. “These pills can be addictive. No more, no less.” I pulled off the child safety cap with ease and poured two of the pills into my hand. I squeezed my hand into a fist, took a cup from the cabinet, and held it under the faucet. The water quickly filled up the cup until it was half full. I carefully walked over to my mother, not letting my clumsiness take over. Nothing spilled. I held out my now open hand to let my mother snatch up the pills. It took a minute for her vision to focus on the contents of my palm.

“Thank you,” she tried to mumble as she put the pills in her mouth. She grabbed the water out of my hand with her weak right arm and proceeded to force the pills down her throat. I watched her attentively while she cocked her head back and made a gurgling noise. It used to worry me at first, that she might choke. I realized later that she always had trouble getting pills down her throat. It was not one of her stroke symptoms.

My mother suffered a stroke about three months ago. Since then, she’s had weakness in the right side of her body, slurred speech and sometimes slight confusion. Her appearance had changed, too. One side of her face had drooped, making it hard for her to see with that eye. Through all of this, she still stayed strong and positive. This doesn’t mean that my mother liked the fact that she was disabled. In fact, she hated it. She wanted to get out of the house and walk around, which I knew inside would never really happen again. She forgot sometimes. She used to try to get up without her walker. Without help from Ben or me.

For the first month he helped us out by buying us food and watching my mother while I was gone. One day, I got home from school to find my mother crying and Ben nowhere to be seen. He left me responsible for the health of my mother and me. He left the weight on my shoulders. I have high school. I have friends. I have sports.

I looked at my mother. She gave me her crooked smile, and I returned the gesture. I felt my pocket buzz sending a vibration through my pants and onto my skin. I took my phone out of my pocket. The time read 7:30. The school bus will be here soon. I frowned slightly. I didn’t like leaving my mom home. In fact, for the first week after her stroke, I didn’t leave her side. She had refused to go to a nursing home, so over the week I gathered some money to get her a temporary caregiver. Because my school had not known of the situation, my absence bestowed upon me five absentee slips and a quarter pound of overdue homework. If my school had actually known my situation, I would undoubtedly been given some unwanted attention. I tried to keep it a secret from school … and from everyone.

I crumpled up my Egg-Mcmuffin wrapper and threw it into the trash. I worked for a low wage on weekends and was the one to provide food since Ben left. Even if it wasn’t exactly high-quality food, it still satisfied our hunger. It’s hard to provide with such a low paying job and also study at the same time.

I was afraid my mother would lose custody of me, or rather I lose custody of her. Technically, this would be considered child neglect. My mother understood this and always told me that she could help out, but I wouldn’t let her. She was still too weak.

I gathered my stuff, kissed my mom goodbye, and walked out the door of our small condominium. As always, Jamie was waiting for me outside in the cold January air.
“David, how long does it take to get down those stairs?” he said, only half serious. “We’re going to be late.”

“We’ll be fine.” I said, forcing a smile. Jamie and I have been friends since we were little kids, and we have always been there for each other during hard times. But he won’t be able to help me through the hard times that he doesn’t know I have.

**Sooner or later I will have to tell him about my circumstances.**

Jamie noticed me deep in thought, and for a moment. I was scared he could see through me. I was scared he would know.

“You okay?” he asked.

“Fine,” I said, snapping out of it. Jamie isn’t clueless. He wouldn’t be convinced by a one-word answer. I knew that, which is why I changed the topic.

“Have you applied anywhere yet, you know, for college?”

“Yeah, I actually got a letter back today.”

“Were you accepted?” I asked, half knowing the answer already. Jamie’s smart and well rounded, unless he applied to an Ivy League school, he’ll probably get in.

“Um, yeah I got in. Did you apply anywhere yet?” he asked, turning the subject back upon me.

“No,” I said as casually as possible. I wanted to tell him why, but I didn’t. My mother needed me at home. I couldn’t just leave her. “No, not yet,” I added in order to keep down his level of suspicion.

“Well, you’d better do it soon,” he said, still eying me.

Towns Lane High School was now in sight. The courtyard was packed with disinterested students, dreading the long Monday that was to come. I could not deny that I was definitely one of them.

Our school was pretty big. With over 500 kids in our class, it was pretty packed. I was glad of it. I always preferred big to small. More possible friends to make. Easier to blend in when you want to, which is what I wanted.

**Just blend in.**

This, however, is a big something to ask for when you’re friends with Jamie Collind, the outgoing, good looking, smart, football stud. Not to say I’m not a good athlete who is outgoing, handsome, and smart, because I definitely am. It’s just Jamie beats me out on those traits, times two. Plus, since three months ago, my talkativeness has gone down a bit.

The bell rang, and Jamie and I walked into the school with the rest of the swarm, splitting up to go to our separate homerooms.

As I walked, I let go of thoughts of my home situation and started to think about the school day ahead. Calculus, U.S. History, and Biology slowly started to make their way into my thoughts.

**I have a test today.**

This thought dawned on me and my nerves were increased. **Which subject?** I could not remember. I racked my brain for information.

**Social Studies.**

I had forgotten to study and Social Studies wasn’t exactly my strongest subject. It was on U.S. History, a unit test. This sucked.

When I got to my locker I started rummaging through loose papers and notebooks. At the very bottom I found it, the overdue book I had taken out from the library, *Absolutely Everything On U.S. History*. I opened the book, and my mind, and started to study.

Information flooded into my brain. I concentrated so hard that at first I didn't notice my school social worker tapping me on my shoulder.

I lifted my head up and looked into Mrs. Ralldock's sympathetic eyes, our school principal standing beside her with the same expression.

“David, please walk with us.”
I panted, stopping for a moment to catch my breath. I was racing my dog, Daisy, down the hill. Running past trees and flowers, my sneakers, a blur of blue and white, slapped the fresh dewy grass. For a quick second, I turned my head towards Daisy. She tagged along beside me. I stretched my long legs out further, pushing my body on, wanting to run faster. Faster! Faster! Finally, I reached the end of the lawn and tumbled onto the grass. Daisy dashed to me, her tongue dangling out of her mouth. Her black, furry body glistened in the early-morning sun. When she reached me, I got covered in wet, slobbery kisses.

But the thing is, that’s not me. And I’m glad it is not. Or else I wouldn’t be who I am. Because if I was like that, I would be fast. I would run races. And maybe even win. Sure, I have a dog named Daisy, but I can barely run. And really, I would rather read. Or play with my younger sister, Amelia. Or snuggle with Daisy.

Friday, June 24, 2015

I followed my mom into the middle school and saw my therapist, Nancy, waiting. “Did stretching yesterday hurt your hip?” Nancy asked, seeing me limping.

I shrugged. “It was either that or because I didn’t have my braces on yesterday,” I told her.

Nancy nodded her head. “I’m sorry you’re in pain, Libby.”

I have a physical disability. I am lucky—the doctors thought I would never be able to walk. At first, I needed a walker. Then, after a couple of years, I finally learned to walk independently. But I was still unable to do a lot of things. Thanks to the help of doctors, my parents, Nancy, and also teachers, I was able to overcome many obstacles.

A truck drove in, carrying my new power chair—a wheelchair that is motorized and that I can control. Once we got it situated, they had me move into the chair. After they told me the instructions, I tried it out.

After I did the slower speeds, I tried the faster ones. I pushed the lever, making it go faster. Faster! Faster! The man said that it went five and a half miles per hour, but it could go six. I wanted to imagine that I could run, wind whipping in my face as I crossed the finish line. I knew I would probably not get to that point, but I wanted to feel the speed. I wanted to run in my own sort of special way, in my heart. I bit my lip. I turned the chair towards the man. “Is it possible you could change the speed?” I asked.

As I tried out the new speed, my heart leapt. Finally, I could go fast. My friends would not have to go slower than their own pace to walk with me, like with my old chair. They would have to go faster. As the chair picked up speed, gradually humming louder and louder, I pretended it was the softer sound of my legs running down the hall. I tried transforming it into me running.

I never really was crazy about my old chair. I liked my braces better because I was able to walk on my own. But I understand. My body gets tired more easily than other kids, and if I push myself beyond that point, it causes pain. So I was grateful for the chair. Now, with this chair, I felt like I could control it. If my mood feels energetic or excited, I can go fast. But if I feel sad or tired, I can go slow. I can finally control my speed.

Some people look down at me with empathy. I feel gratitude, but—even though I’m not saying my disability is pleasant or easy—I am thankful that I do not have it worse. Others look down at me and see that I am very disabled. I want to prove them wrong! Or people look at me and think that I am just a normal kid. Even though some days, when I’m in a lot of pain, I would proudly take that title, I am not. I don’t want to be any of those labels.

In the future, I might be zooming around the school, kids looking at me and saying, “Lucky.” And maybe once in a while, if I am too energetic—or my chair is—we might bump into a wall when we are really supposed to be stopped. But, right now, it’s only my chair and me, racing down the hall of a deserted school, with only a few people staring at us. I will have to wait till school starts in the fall.

“How does it feel?” Nancy asks me.

“Good,” I reply, as I return back in my chair with a shy but big smile. I think I love the faster speed because, unlike other kids, I don’t get many opportunities to experience it. That’s probably why I love my uncle’s speedboat. I love going fast, with the wind pulling at my hair and stealing everything I don’t hold on to. This week, I would have all the fast—no slow allowed—I wanted.
was going to Maine, going to my uncle’s boat, in a few days. But then I gulped. I would have to face that horrible speed, slow! My chair would not always be with me. For now, I would have to leave my chair at the school.

Don’t think that I completely adore my chair. Don’t think that I am very disabled or just a normal kid. I am different. You are different. Every creature that roams this earth is different. Special.


Ponder
By Maria Proulx
Juliet W. Long School

The day, a dismal gray, matched my mood. I felt frustration grip my body, starting down at the bottom of my feet and slowly seeping up, up until there was no more room to contain it. Anger had me in its grasp, forcing my nails to dig into my palms, like razor-sharp knives on a quest to discourage me, make me give up. But no, I declared. How could I surrender when I had been slogging through rivers, trudging up hills, trekking miles upon miles? How could I give up that easily? The answer was simple: I couldn’t. I wouldn’t.

As I advanced, my mind drifted back to the old quote: “It’s the journey, not the destination, that matters.” Scowling, I scorned that saying as I continued deeper into the woods. That quote couldn’t be true ... Could it? I thought with uncertainty.

How far I went, I cannot remember. But I recall flopping down on the woodland floor, exhausted. Rain drops gently drummed a beat upon me, creating a tuneless song. There I lay, as motionless as a figurine, until the cool air soothed me enough to continue. Refreshed, I opened my eyes, but something was preventing me from clambering to my feet and continuing: A stupendous creature, its colossal figure looming above me. Antlers identical to wobbly strands of pearls, twisting and winding their way toward the heavens. Slow, steady movements, and thin, tall legs clad in short, stocky fur rustling in the breeze.

“I can’t believe it!” I muttered under my breath. “It’s amazing! It’s extraordinary! It’s a ...” But before I could stutter another word, the animal leapt away, all grace and beauty. I was left gazing into nothing but the spot where the creature had been. My heart had skipped a beat and was currently thundering in my chest. But still, I managed to scramble to my feet and continue on my journey. Trotting home, my thoughts drifted back to that quote. Perhaps ... I was wrong. Perhaps ... the journey does matter more, I pondered as I disappeared into the sunset.
7th Grade

Isabelle Busch
Alone
Window of Imagination
By Fiona Busch
Eastern Middle School

Sometimes I wish, as I breathe onto its panes,
That my breath is the wind, the window, the sea.
I carve a small boat, onto its slippery surface,
Then watch the boat sink,
Oblivious to the fog
That overcomes it.

Then I make a small house,
A shelter to take refuge in
When the world gets cold,
And see it disappear to a safer place.

My finger wet against the glass,
I draw hope in the shape of a bird,
As it flies far away from its cage.

While I rest deep in thought,
I hear the pounding of the rain,
Persistent as it batters each pane.

As the window fogs up,
The sky starts to clear.
The ropes whittled down to a thread of rain.

The traces of the lost drawings
Bleed down the glass,
As they are finally erased at last.

The window is clear
And translucent once more,
The silver light passes through
Within a rainy day’s time.

A Kaleidoscope of Promise
Inspired by Victor Hernandez Cruz’s Side 32
By Maryam Choudhury
Sage Park Middle School

I am glad that I am not
The honing, hazardous blade of a sharpener,
Meticulously mending outlets of the mind,
Never living up to the majestic pencil.
I am glad I am not the laces of a shoe,
A Whirligig,
With no control over who I will become.
How cool I am not a grain of salt,
Looking at the world encased in glass,
Underestimated no matter how vital
I am, trivial and insignificant.
I am an empty glass, half filled with air,
I am a girl who sees the world as a kaleidoscope,
I am a passageway, and the top shelf,
A sheet of paper
With endless possibilities,
Drifting,
Reflective and engrossed.
My heart is the spine of a book,
Flying to the worlds unexplored.
On a plantation, here I am. Abused, battered, tired, and hungry. I look and see civilization, freedom staring me right in the face, and laughing, mocking me. Is right over the fence that I’m bound to never see past. Is a taunter, that white picket fence. As evil as the white devils who brought upon me this entrapment. Kidnappers they are. Killers, they are.

Noth’ng good comes out of their mouths while talking to us black folk. Noth’ng but spouts of hate and fury. What brings people to do as they do? We uneducated black men and women, we stand doing labor, while they’re sticking up their noses while fanning themselves off. Talking about how the weather down here is so:

“Incredibly overwhelming. I can not handle the scorching heat the south has to hand us sometimes.”

I roll my eyes at that statement, while she rambles on in her prestigious southern accent. They wouldn’t know heat if they was in the deserted desert cause dey don’ work. Why women and men wear those heat producing garments and then complain seems like an annoying trait they use for useless conversation with other rich white folk.

They lazy, and never do much for themselves. As far as I know, the work they put in is to buy more of us of color. They sit while I watch without envy. How could I envy such vengeful, close minded, torturous people?

I hear my slave name come through the windows. It’s not a two faced, gentle speaking woman yelling for my “services.” It’s a gruff man with a grey horribly groomed beard that still don’ make him look more hideous than his personality. It just adds to the effect.

“Marquis!” he orders. At least he remembered my name this time.

Sometimes the white folk favor one us. We usually take it. It’s some of the only compassion we get. I miss the days when Molly Adam, a rich wife of Sir Adam, visited this big ol’ mansion. She was a beauty while I blended in with dee crowd. Yet I picked up her attentions. Blond hair and blue eyes that were so average but on her was a sight for sore eyes. My sore eyes which had seen the days of reckoning.

“Hello Mr. Black Man!” she joked, and I didn’t get offended.

“No miss, I ain’t no man yet. Mama usa tell me so. She said not till I gots older,” I said, my grammar terrible.

“You will be a man soon enough, son.” She smiled and I smiled with.

“Well excuse me, miss. You can’t be much older than I.” She laughed.

“Well, thank you, young man. What is your name?”

“ I don got ones yet.” My face fell.

“Well then, I shall call you Marquis,” she said in a dolled up southern accent, which for the first time, didn’t irritate me.

She read to me, few years back. She brought some books and broadened up my vocabulary and some grammar. She was young, no older than a mere twenty-two, while I was a wanton sixteen-year-old boy. Angry with his situation and getting punished for my violence. I guess now, it wasn’t really unprovoked though. I have a right to be angry, but in my younger years, I knew not of my “no escape” situation.

She read these wonderful, poetic masterpieces. *Pride and Prejudice, Jane Eyre.* They were all amazing. She had a certain sparkle in her blue eyes that would glimmer when she read. Her voice dramatic as if reading a script and acting the parts and narratives in a play. I listened closely when she read. Savoring every detail I could about her and the book.

She didn’t gather with the other white folk. Her spirit was light and caring. She thought not about skin color. And I saw in her crystal eyes pity when she looked our way. It was a maternal love she had for us. It was hard to see it dead and gone forever.

In the summer in her year staying here, she caught a fever and it took her away from me. It nearly broke me. I have a suspicious feeling I cared most about her. Not Sir Adam. He was pompous and seemingly abusive. Maybe that’s why she understood us the way she did. Women sometimes didn’t get treated much better than us and it was a shame.

As I hear my gruff master hollering my name, I ponder why I let myself become a man of forced beck and call. I ask myself if I really should endure this much longer. I wonder what would happen if I tried to jump that perfect southern white picket fence
that mocks me so. If I got away, I would have a reason to live for once in ten years since Molly died. I knew my punishment
would be worse than death. They can’t have free black men roaming the streets. They at least have to sell us if they’s gonna let
us go. I looked at freedom. If I lived, if I died. It was freedom either way. Death might be the warm arms I wouldn’t get in this
real world. And living would feel wild. Unlike anything that has ever happened to me.

I turned around from the big enormous white door that held the whites. Running as fast as my legs could take me. I heard him
hollering again.

“Eh, get back here, you worthless piece of uneducated black dirt!”

I heard some shocked reactions in the yard. While some could gossip in this situation, others would stand agape. Shocked with
bulging eyes.

“Marquis is on a suicide mission, Willa!” said a woman I think was Marta.

“Bless his heart. He deserves freedom. He been here longer than most, Mar,” she responded back. And that added to fuel my
fire that wanted to be free.

“GO!” said Daren, my master’s oldest son.

I saw the dogs they kept here when we got “outta control.” And they had vicious looks on their drooling faces. They were fierce
and I couldn’t decipher what dogs they were, as I was terrified to look back. I prayed that they wouldn’t be able to jump over
the taunting fence so I could run.

The lord was not on my side as rocks began to appear on my path. Avoiding those was a hard task, but I somehow managed.
Sadly, though, they slowed me down.

The fence was in arm’s length as I looked at it. It was only a second, but I stared despite where my enemy lay. It was a symbol
for chance, not freedom. As much as I wish it was a symbol of freedom, it was like looking at a pair of die.

I was distracted. I felt staking pain in the back of my neck, and I immediately fell. The teeth still in me. I couldn’t move as I
closed my own eyes to protect myself from horrid sights of my demise. They wouldn’t have a useless black man living on the
plantation for free. I squinted my eyes as there was a breathless Daren looking down at me. He grimaced, seeing the source of
my uselessness. He sighed. I heard him yell as my sight got blurrier. He asked permission for my murder. He got an answer
that I don’ hear but can predict. I saw a gun directed at me as my life was served to God on a silver platter.

True Self
By Lauren Bula
RHAM Middle School

Yesterday was like any other day. McKenna stole my lunch, lied about me, got me in trouble, and many other dreadful things.
But today is different. Of course, McKenna, the richest girl in school, comes to school wearing high heels, a fancy sweater, tight
blue jeans, strawberry red lipstick, black night mascara, and long shiny earrings. She struts down the hallway straight to me. I
can’t help but think to myself, “What’s it gonna be this time? My clothes, my hair, it could be anything.

“Eww!” McKenna cries. “What is that smell?”

“It smells like wet dog!” her friend Erica complains as she walks over to me. “It’s coming from Emma!” she screams.

“Umm, Emma, have you ever heard of taking showers and wearing deodorant?” McKenna says rudely.

“Yes,” I reply, “and I am wearing deodorant right now.”

She gives me an ugly look and strides down the hall with her friends/sidekicks at her side. I look at the time and notice I should
head to advisory, which is my only class that McKenna isn’t in. I get halfway there when I realize I forgot my math book in my
locker. I quickly turn around and head back to my locker.
I open my locker and find a little note taped to my math book. I quickly grab my book and head to class, not bothering to take the note off. As I sit down in advisory, I take a look at the note. It looks like some sort of riddle.

“Make your look into the reverse, bring your true self to the outside and your outside to the inside, hold your hats cause some of you may be in for a long ride,” I whisper to myself.

All of a sudden, everything goes blank. I feel like the world just stopped, but somehow everything is spinning. After a few seconds, the spinning slows down and the world resumes. From the look on everyone’s faces, it looks like I wasn’t the only one who just went through that tragic spinning. I take a look around and realize everyone looks different, including me.


Some people are wearing rags now and some people are wearing pretty tops. But me, I’ve changed the most. I look down and gasp. I’m wearing a beautiful pink gown with a flowy skirt and a sparkly top. My hair is up in a beautiful bun full of my bright blonde hair.

There is a loud scream of horror coming from the bathroom. I run in and see a scary witch-like girl with a long crooked nose and an old-looking wrinkled face. She is wearing the ugliest outfit I have ever seen, and I’ve seen some pretty ugly outfits. She is wearing clothes that look like rags stapled together and that just barely fit her. Her teeth and nails are all yellow and disgusting. She is barefoot and has hairy feet and legs.

“AAAAHHH!” I screech in horror when I see her (well, at least I think it’s a her). “Do I know you?” I ask, fearful of her response.

“You know who I am, Emma!” the now determined girl yells.

“I recognize the girl’s voice, and I realize it’s McKenna. Now that I know, I automatically turn around and try to leave, but I get bombarded by McKenna’s friends/sidekicks.

“McKenna,” they all cry out. “Are you okay? It happened to us, too!”

I notice they look like monsters, too, but not as bad as McKenna looks. I push my way out of the bathroom and back into advisory. I have to find out how this happened. Was it just a coincidence that it happened right after I read the riddle aloud?

I read the riddle again but this time in my head to myself. I know, I think to myself, this must be like a true self spell that when read aloud comes to life. No wonder I look so pretty and McKenna and her friends look so ugly. I force myself to go back into the bathroom to talk to McKenna. I take a deep breath at the doorway and walk in.

“McKenna?” I say. I hear whimpers coming from a stall. “McKenna, the reason you and your friends are ugly is because of me. I accidentally cast a spell on the school that shows your true self.”

The whimpering stops and McKenna screams, “So, the reason I look so ugly is because I’m mean, and it’s all because of you?!”

“Yes, it is,” I reply as calmly as I can. “But you can fix it. All you need to do is start acting more kindly to people like me, and stop treating your friends like they’re your servants.”

“HA!” she says. “You’re hilarious! I’ll never be kind to you freaks!”

“Whatever you say, McKenna. Just know that I will be a nice girl, like I always am, and find a way to uncast the riddle, but until then you’ll be dealing with the true mean and ugly you!” I state as I walk back to advisory. I turn to glance back at McKenna one more time, only to see her giving me the evil eye.

I take a good look at the note again, and then I have an idea; say the riddle backwards! I go over it once in my head and say:

“Ride long a for in be may you of some cause hats your hold, inside the to outside and outside the to self true your bring, reverse into look your make,” I whisper to myself.
The world stops again, and I start spinning. After a few seconds the spinning stops and the world resumes. Everyone seems relieved to be back, especially McKenna. Of course she never thanks me in words, but she doesn’t annoy me as much anymore. McKenna no longer has many friends because Elena and a few others told the school of McKenna’s cruelty, and she was suspended for a week of school. Hopefully she’s learned her lesson. I know I don’t have to worry about her too much. I take today as a reminder to be good on the inside even if you’re not so perfect on the outside.

The day McKenna gets back from her suspension, she is in a state of awe. Everyone pretty much ignores her, which she is not used to. Even though she still has her fancy clothes and everything, she has gone from the most popular girl in school to the least popular girl in school. What can I say? The girl deserved it.

One afternoon, in eighth period, McKenna sits down next to me. I can tell that she is trying to find the confidence to talk to me.

I turn to her and ask, “Can I help you with anything?”

“Who me?” McKenna says, sounding like a nervous wreck. “Um, yeah. I was kind of wondering if we could hang out sometimes. I’m really sorry I bullied you. The reason I did it was because I’m jealous of you. You’re so pretty, smart, and kind. I’m rich, but I’m not all those things.” She looks down like she’s ashamed of herself.

“How about tomorrow after school?” I reply with a smile.

She glances back at me with an excited look on her face, and I take that as a yes.

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A Heart in Stone
By Charlotte Szekeres
Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School

The sun hails a new day from the east. Radiance washes over the vibrant greenery, strewn plentifully across the vale. Night has brought tendrils of silver mist, which now dissipate as rays of light shine over the mountains. The peaks spear the heavens, which blush with warm scarlet and coral. Silhouetted against the vivid colors of the sun, a single figure, poised at the periphery of the valley, stands stone still.

The great fiery orb persists on, ascending into the sky. Now, quite azure, the heavens are draped with wisps of alabaster. Songbirds perched on dew-frosted branches break into a glorious serenade, punctuating the soft sound of the wind whispering through the dense foliage.

Presently, the form that stood in the dawn’s light has vacated its position on the lip of the vale. It has ventured into the wood, the mellifluous harmony of bird calls and humming insects enveloping it. The animal’s sweeping tail disappears into the bracken, leaving no trace behind it but a faint trench in the dust.

Sponge-like lichen carpets the glen floor that the creature now steps upon. This, accompanied by air plants dangling from mossy branches, conceals any noise that would alert any animal of its presence. An occasional parched leaf flutters out of a tree and cracks underfoot. At these times, its eyes dart around, flitting as a lagoon fish does when the kingfisher’s beak breaks the surface of the water. Moments go by before the entity makes the choice to move. And when it does, its gestures are curious and quick.

As the sun rises to its zenith, the being comes upon its destination. Underneath an ancient tree, gnarled roots crawl over and through the soil. Massive flight appendages unfold from the creature’s dual flanks, batting aside the curtains of moss and dried fruits that festoon the sprawling, weathered branches. Weeds and tangled sprays of fig wood form a sheltered alcove through which beams of light filter and cast mottled patterns on the ground. A small hollow in the base of the tree yawns wide, and the creature noiselessly slips inside.
The tunnel is narrow, and the animal has to crouch low to the ground to avoid becoming entangled in the roots that dangle from the ceiling. Nearly a dozen feet down, after countless strides, its ridged talons strike rock. The beast does not have to crouch so much as before, and in the inky blackness, it straightens before continuing.

Stooping under a stalactite, the creature continues forward through the widening cave. A faint indigo glow eerily illuminates the entire cavern, delivered by pulsing swaths of glow worms adorning the walls. Soon, the tunnel darkens, worms left behind. Flashing gold flames cast dancing shadows over the jaggedly hewn stone walls. A small-scale inferno streams from the creature’s maw and lights the dim hallway with flickering warmth.

The cave widens even further, opening into a fire-lit cavern. Slightly tarnished silver braziers are strewn across the perimeter of the room. In each vesicle, gleaming orange coals pulsate with heat. In the center of the cave is a polished, raised column of granite with a shallow indentation carved into the top. The creature, with a subtle beat of its rugged wings, elevates itself to the height of the monolithic stone and surveys the scene.

Placed delicately in the niche at the top of the stone, three pale ovals, all metallic amber, lean against each other. Each one of them fluctuates with tiny blazes, flitting to and fro inside the fragile shell. The creature watches fondly, emerald eyes glinting as the pinpoints of light flash by. She perches on the smooth ledge at the edge of her nest. Scales chafe against the rim of the nest as the reptilian beast curls around her eggs. She warms each of them, tiny flames licking at the flickering ellipses.

One of many nurturing beings in nature, this creature gently caresses and habitually protects its offspring. Through all feral natures and seemingly horrid demeanors, instinct shines through and allows the forgiving side of this animal and most others to be known.

Life is Too Short
By Courtney Jewell
East Granby Middle School

My mom ran out of her bedroom door and burst into tears. She went through the kitchen and into the living room of our apartment. My big sister, Chanell, and I were scared. Chanell was eleven, and I was only six. We wondered what was wrong with our mother. Why was she crying? Was she going to be okay? My sister and I looked at each other quietly, feeling awkward. We were in the kitchen eating our breakfasts and watching SpongeBob. After a few minutes, my mom walked into the kitchen and joined us. We noticed she was wiping her tears away, and trying to make herself stop crying so we wouldn’t be worried.

Then she said, “Get ready. We are going somewhere.”

Chanell and I were confused, but we didn’t ask my mom why she was sad because we knew we might make it worse. We rushed down the back door stairs and into the car. As we were getting in the car, I noticed my mom didn’t buckle my seat belt. So I thought, “This big problem mom is having must be more important than my safety.” But I knew Chanell had my back. She buckled me right up next to her. While my mom was driving, Chanell looked over at me and said, “Everything is going to be all right.”

I lay my head down on my sister’s lap while I held her tightly to feel safe. Then the car stopped. It was only a six-minute drive. I looked out the window and I saw that we were at Hartford Hospital. That’s when my heart dropped.

Chanell immediately started asking questions. “Why are we here? What happened? Is somebody hurt?”

Mom ignored her. Instead, she just got out of the car and opened the door for Chanell and I to get out.

Then mom pulled Chanell aside and said, “When we get in there, I want you to be strong. Your little sister is too young to know what is going on.”
I heard everything that they were saying. I thought, “What do they mean I’m too young? I’m six years old! I think I’m old enough.” While we were walking into the hospital, I saw so many people, all from my father’s side of the family. I started to worry even more. My uncle walked toward me and picked me up. I saw him whisper in my mom’s ear while he was still holding me. I heard what he was saying. He said, “Did you tell them yet?”

Tell us what? I thought.

My mom whispered back, “No, later.”

My uncle put me down. I looked at all the sad people, and I went around giving them hugs. Meanwhile, the doctor walked into the lounge where all the family was waiting. He said, “He didn’t make it.”

Everyone started bursting into tears, even my older sister. That meant she knew what was going on. Someone had told her, but no one told me. I wanted to know so I went up to everyone asking, “What happened?”

Every person I went up to just gave me a hug or said, “Aww ... honey. It’s going to be ok.”

I thought, “Why aren’t they telling me?” I was getting mad, but then I heard my Aunt Janet go up to one of the doctors and say, “Can we see him?”

The doctor said, “Yes, follow me this way.”

So many people ran into the room at once. No one noticed me, so I snuck in there. It was so crowded that I couldn’t see who everyone was looking at. All I heard was people crying and saying, “He lived a good life,” and “I’m going to miss him.”

That’s when I realized that this person must be dead. Now I was even more worried and scared. Slowly, people started to leave the room. I was so close I could see the dead person’s feet. Quickly, my uncle grabbed me and pulled me out of the room saying, “You are too young to go in there.”

I asked him, “Uncle, what happened?”

He replied, “Go ask your mom. I don’t think she wants me to be telling you.”

Then he walked towards my mom and whispered in her ear. I heard him say, “She ran in the room, but she didn’t see the body. Should she see him?”

My mom said, “Yeah, she’s been waiting long enough. She needs to know.”

At that moment, my uncle carried me on his shoulders and said, “Ready to see?”

I replied, “Yeah.”

When he opened the door, my heart dropped. I saw my own father lying there. He looked cold and kind of gray. Once I saw him, I began to cry. I cried for a long time. Then I stopped and thought, “Who is going to be my father now? Who is going to watch me and Chanell when my mom is at work? Who is going to love me like he did? Who is going to pick me up in the air and swing me around like an airplane?”

My uncle just stood there looking at me and said, “It’s going to be okay. It’s going to be okay.”

But I knew it wasn’t. I knew I was only six, and it was going to be hard for me. I wanted a mom and dad, not just a mom and one sister. I wanted us to be a whole family. But I knew it was too late for that.

My mom called Chanell and I over to her and said, “Come on, let’s go. We are leaving.”

When my uncle put me down for me to go, my older cousin called me over. She said to me, “Know that your father will always love you. He’ll be watching over you from the sky.” Those words have stayed with me these past seven years. They are carved into my memory.
After we left the hospital that day, we didn’t say a word to each other on the car ride. When we got home, I saw our breakfast dishes still sitting on the table reminding me of our chaotic morning. My sister and I went into our mother’s room to talk about what happened that day.

My mom said, “People you love come and go. You should cherish the time you have with people because life is too short.” Those words have also stayed in my mind.

When I was six, I learned the lesson that life is too short. You never know when your loved ones will leave you. To this day, I still miss my dad. Recently, my mom said to me, “When you’re 16, I’ll tell you how he died.”

**Dear Neil Gaiman: Letter About Literature**

By Kaleb Platt
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

Dear Neil Gaiman,

Your book, *The Graveyard Book*, moved me because it was about a baby named Bod whose family was murdered, and the baby had no other family or anywhere to go. He crawled out of the house and into a nearby graveyard. I really thought that he was going to die because he was a baby and all alone, but Bod wasn’t alone in that graveyard. Mrs. Owens, a two-hundred-year-old ghost who lived in the graveyard, found him, and because she had never had a child of her own, wanted to keep him and “protect him” (Gaiman 17). But Mr. Owens, Mrs. Owens’ ghostly husband, worried and said, “[H]e is no part of our world” (14). Even so, they decided to take him in, and love him, and give him graveyard powers. Some of these powers included being able to vanish into the shadows, pass through objects in the graveyard, and slip into the coffins in the graves.

I can relate to Bod because when I was three years old, my mom and dad separated. My mom was really upset because she was alone and had to care for me all by herself. She had to feed me and support me the best way she knew how. Then a good-natured spirit came and took care of me just like a second mother. She treated me as if I were her own son, just like Mr. and Mrs. Owens took Bod in as one of their own and raised the boy with love and compassion. The ghosts found it difficult to properly raise a human child. But they tried to give him a normal life, the best way they knew how to. They cared for him, fed him, and taught him his A-B-C’s. The hardest part for them was watching him grow up. He eventually realized he was different and asked the ghosts what happened. They told him, and he was more grateful than ever. He grew up to be a good man, regardless of being raised in a graveyard by ghosts. He had morals, manners, self-respect, and respect for others. The ghosts treated Bod as a normal boy, just as my two mothers make my life as normal as possible.

The reason this book moved me is because it shows readers that you do not need a traditional mother and father to raise you. A family consists of many different things. A family can be a single parent, grandparents, foster parents, or same sex couples, like my mom and my other mom, the good-natured spirit who was there for us when we needed her. As long as you have people who love, care for, and nurture you, then you have a family. This hits close to home because there is really no such thing now as a “traditional family.” My real mother is like Mrs. Owens because she loves me, and Mrs. Owens loves Bod. I think that the good-natured spirit who came into our lives is Mr. Owens because she watches over me and is there for me when I need her. Mrs. Owens gives Bod powers, and my mom gave me powers when I had strep throat for two weeks, and she took off from work for that time, to care for me. Mrs. Owens would sing, “Sleep my little baby oh/Sleep until you waken/ When you’re grown and you’ll see the world/ If I’m not mistaken/... Dance a measure/ find your name/ and buried treasure” (129). This shows that she wants Bod to stay young, but she wants him to live a normal life; my moms want the same for me. Bod never had any problems with ghosts as parents, and I have never had any problems with my two moms, but I know that many children in this situation do have problems. This book can open readers’ eyes into seeing that anybody who loves someone can make a family.
Also, it shows that just because you may think the living situation of someone is bad, because you don’t understand it, that doesn’t mean that’s actually true. Kids can grow up to be wonderful adults regardless of their family or surroundings. The important factor is not how much money you have, but how much love and support you have. There really is no greater lesson that that. I think that’s important to learn at a young age. This way when you meet different types of people from different types of families, you don’t automatically judge them. It taught me to really get to know a person for who they are on the inside first, and I believe that it can teach anyone else who reads this book the exact same lesson.

In the end, Bod loses his graveyard powers because the whole time he was in the graveyard, he always wanted to leave the graveyard, and he got his wish. This means to me that you don’t want to grow up too fast but try to enjoy your childhood. Bod wanted to leave the graveyard and become a man but he did not know that he wouldn’t be able to see his family ever again. When he tries to come back he “lean[s] down to push his head into the grave and call his friend, but instead of his head slipping through the solid matter like a shadow passing through a deeper shadow, his head [meets] the frown with a hard and painful thump” (313). I would feel a hard and painful thump if I couldn’t see my two moms ever again. I wish that I could explain that feeling to some of the world that still has a problem with families that are not a mother and a father who come from a middle class life. A lot of people still say mean things about same sex couples: that they can’t raise a child right or that they will be a bad influence on their child. Or, they talk about a single mother who may work a few jobs to support herself and her child or family. The book, The Graveyard Book, helps make people understand that family is the most important thing in your life. Any type of family.

Sincerely,

Kaleb Platt
8th Grade

Ryan Ignatowicz
Portrait of Izzy
Friendship

By Abby Davis
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

Friendship is that moment when we are hiding in the closet,
Eating chocolate and giggling,
Behind dozens of stuffed animals and clothes,
Failing at hide-and-go-seek with my brother.
Friendship is the secrets that we keep
And the stories that we tell,
The dreams that we dream
And the memories that we share.
Friendship is that time when we couldn't stop laughing
And the teacher had to send us out of the classroom.
It's scribbling in the coloring books
That were meant for children
And throwing glow-sticks in the hotel pool
At 10 o'clock at night, well after curfew.
Friendship is the inside jokes,
And inspirational quotes,
And the idols we both look up to.
It's that bush we drove the quad into
And singing along to our favorite songs.
Friendship is writing a story together
And shouting at an unfair referee during our soccer game.
Friendship is the scrapbook of our adventures,
The pictures and the lessons.
It's racing along the trail behind my house
And taking duck-face selfies in the parking lot.
It's sending letters, along with candy, in the mail
And running around the neighborhood twice on Halloween.
Friendship is wandering the halls after school
With a bag of popcorn to share.
It's playing on her Kindle in Spanish class
And studying together for a test.
Friendship is showing up at her house
At 7:30 in the morning
To bring her to a field trip when she didn't have a ride.
Friendship is doing homework together during lunch
And playing hangman during a lockdown at school.
It's approving of her choices,
Even though she told me she was dying her hair green.
Friendship is having conversations in the middle of the night,
And throwing perfectly good marshmallows in the campfire,
And trying to lip-read each other with music blaring in our ears.
Friendship is chanting before a soccer game
To psych our teammates up
And running through a corn maze only to find our way back to the start.
All the while chanting Wizard of Oz themed songs.
It's screaming in joy through FaceTime when USA won the World Cup
And her giving me singing lessons
Just to proclaim that I am 75% tone-deaf.
Friendship is playing Truth or Dare and Scrabble under her bed
And eating ice cream stolen from her freezer
While her sister begs for us to play.
It's playing soccer with my dog
And jumping in the pool with our clothes on
During a lightning storm.
It's running around the track during my sister's soccer game,
Shouting encouragements at her team.
Friendship is looking out for one another
And supporting until the very end;
We may not be perfect people,
But we are perfect friends!

origami

By Sophie Spaner
John Winthrop Middle School

i used to be really good at origami.
i could fold the truth,
they told me I was a spider
because I could spin one hell of a web of lies.
in discussion,
repercussions
never scared me,
because by the next morning,
i'd have a new name.
not...
not my name.
i can't remember that one now.
my identities were plentiful,
i could release them
like paper cranes into the wind,
just to be littered onto the streets,
forgotten,
invisible.
i folded the photographs from my childhood.
my sixth birthday party soon became a butterfly,
my first day of kindergarten, a fox.
the images had no sentiment attached,
they never really felt like they belonged to me.
they didn't.
i claimed someone else's childhood memories as my own,
i wanted to be that little girl with the
frosting stained dress and the pigtails,
rushing around her backyard with a party hat.
they were crushed underfoot,
crumpled next to cigarette butts and loose change,
softened by rain,
people noticed, but
no one ever did anything to help.
no one ever did anything to help me,
or the past me,
the me that was you, or could've been
the me that took victims,
all of the me's that weren't who they should've been
i wasn't who i should've been.
crushed underfoot, i lay,
with soil beneath my hair to support the weight of my skull,
hardened by experience,
no one has noticed that i released the cranes.
Forbidden Love
By Emily Kline
Amity Middle School—Bethany

At 11:30 in the morning, a lonesome banana named Nick was placed on a kitchen countertop next to some leaves of kale named Taylor. Karen, the stay at home mom, had just purchased them at the store. Nick accidentally rolled toward Taylor because of the way Karen had dropped him there.

Nick felt something next to him. What was it? Was it another banana? Maybe an apple? Maybe this was the soul mate he’d been longing for.

When Taylor felt Nick next to him, he wondered what kind of vegetable he was. Was it a carrot maybe? Cucumber? Perhaps it wasn’t a vegetable like him. Could it be a fruit? There was only one way to find out.

He scooted the best he could to get closer to the food next to him, close enough that they were touching.

Nick finally felt the fruit next to him. Or…No, that wasn’t a fruit! It was a vegetable: Kale! He wasn’t expecting that. This was very exciting for Nick. He hadn’t been with someone since he got separated from the bunch back at Stop & Shop. He was very lonely.

Taylor also soon realized that the food next to him was a banana. This particular banana had the softest peel he’d ever felt. He imagined it was as yellow and as bright as the sun. Taylor had never wished he had eyes more than in that moment.

They tried to scoot closer to each other, but unfortunately neither of them could roll. They were touching just enough to feel that spark, though.

Nick had never been happier. Ever since he’d started growing, he’d longed for someone to be with. Whether it be a fruit or vegetable, he’d be happy. He knew this was him. This was the vegetable he would spend his life with, and Taylor felt it, too.

Taylor was always a hopeless romantic. He’d been in relationships before, but nothing serious like he wanted. This was different, though. This banana might be the one.

Though neither of them were great with words (probably because they didn’t have mouths), Nick and Taylor felt the connection between them. This love was something special, something they needed to hold on to. They had both daydreamed of this day since the beginning.

They were young and in love. Everything was good in the world, at least for this pair. Nothing could stop them now …

Until it could.

Nick suddenly realized that this was kale he’d fallen in love with. A banana and kale? They wouldn’t be together for long. Who would put a fruit and a vegetable in the same dish? Someone who was insane, that’s who.

Soon enough, Taylor knew it, too. They were too different. Sure, they may stay together for a little while, but when Karen decided to eat them? What were they going to do? They vowed to stay together until the end.

Then, they heard her.

“Yeah, Susan! I got a banana and some kale from the store, and I’m going to make it now…. I’m sure it’ll be great! Thanks for the idea,” said Karen, the stay-at-home mom.

Oh no, Nick thought. He thought there’d be more time. He had to save Taylor.

Taylor was thinking the same thing. No, not Nick! Please don’t take him, he thought.

They both tried to scoot in front of each other, tried to sacrifice themselves, but they couldn’t roll.

Karen’s manicured hand reached down for Nick. Taylor realized she had taken him when they weren’t touching anymore. No, please! Take me instead! he thought. But once again, he had no mouth.

Nick suddenly felt cold. Was this what dying felt like? He wasn’t sure.

When Taylor heard the peeling noise, he knew it was too late. Nick was gone. The love of his life, his soulmate, his one and only. He was overcome with sadness, unsure of what was going to happen next.
And, well, Karen answered that for him. She picked up Taylor and quickly turned him on his side. *What’s going on?* he thought. *Is she eating me now? What about Nick?*

Again, his question was answered. Karen took her kitchen knife and cut up Taylor into pieces. Taylor didn’t feel it, he was a vegetable after all, but soon he knew he’d be unconscious like Nick probably was when he was peeled.

Confused and full of questions, Taylor felt himself being moved into a bowl-like plastic container with a sharp bottom—a blender.

But, he wasn’t alone. He felt something, or someone, in there with him. *No,* he thought. *Could it be?*

As soon as his leaves felt the soft banana skin he knew the answer. Nick.

Nick realized that something else had been placed in the blender. There was only one vegetable he knew whose leaf texture would make him feel this way. Taylor.

They were overcome with glee to be reunited again. They didn’t know why, and weren’t absolutely sure how, but now they knew that they would be together till the very end. Just like they wanted in the beginning.

Karen pressed the on button and their souls combined into one delicious kale-banana smoothie. And they were happy.

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**The Blanket**

By Isabel Araya  
Westbrook Middle School

Aster was a mere five years old when their parents frantically tried to find a way to soothe them from the fearsome nightmares of a child’s fanciful mind.

Aster Caldwell hid their fears in laughter, smiled as they were crying, and no one ever noticed. Nightmares were a common occurrence and during one particularly gruesome night of living through their innermost monsters, Aster’s parents became fed up with dealing with the screams. Those dreadful demons who hurt Aster so often would continue to do so unless their parents found a solution. Their mother decided to give them a blanket, something to hold on to when they were lost to the rest of the world.

Piercing screams echoed through the house. Their father, dark bags under his eyes from the countless nights of sleeplessness, gave them a blanket that appeared to serve its purpose. The second it was given to Aster, they stopped screaming. The following weeks were met with an eerie stillness. The only sound being the occasional snore coming from the bedrooms.

Aster would not escape the nightmares just yet. For the world is cruel and its favorite target is an impressionable youth. Some months later, the demons returned to pay Aster a visit. More vicious than ever, they gripped Aster’s peaceful thoughts and twisted them until everything was filled to the brim with horror. The blanket wrapped tightly around them to shield them from the monsters that longed to return to Aster’s mind, but to no avail. A dream laced with the worst sort of fears slipped through the blanket shield.

Their parents had been screaming at each other, using foul words filled with the worst sort of venom that had never been heard by Aster: ones that they would soon become far too accustomed to. Aster had yet to discover how unhappy their parents were with each other, was too young to realize that their mother’s “friend” from work was more than that. Everything would go over Aster’s head for the next few years.

They gripped the blanket tightly, as tears fell, the demon’s hold getting stronger and stronger.

It was three years later when the next tragic event happened to young Aster. Now age eight, they were starting to learn that they didn’t quite fit the word “girl” or even the word “boy.” Everyone seemed to know who they were, except for poor Aster, who only wanted to fit in, or at least understand why all the frilly dresses their mother bought couldn’t make them happy. Aster was drowning in all the confusion. When they tried to ask their mom about it, questions were left unanswered. Their father yelled when he heard. The school’s guidance counselor said that Aster was simply a “tomboy” and would get over herself soon enough.
Despite the dysphoria faced by them, they were tough as nails, and Aster managed fine. But, as eight year olds do, Aster found someone they had a crush on. And it was beautifully innocent, nothing but puppy love. Their love was a key, opening a door to emotions never felt before. Aster was head over heels in love for the first time. However, nothing seemed to go just as Aster wished it would.

Janet was the most dazzling girl Aster had ever laid eyes on. They had made an elaborate plan to woo their love on Valentine’s Day. A note was left on Janet’s desk, where she would find it and fall for Aster. Well, that’s what they hoped would happen.

Aster waited patiently for her to find it. Due to the fact that they had had their nose buried in A Series of Unfortunate Events, they didn’t notice when she did. Janet had taken the note and showed it to some of her friends; giggles came from the table where the children sat.

“I can’t believe that freak likes you!” one exclaimed breathlessly.

“I’m sorry for you, Janet. Aster doesn’t even know she’s a girl! What a weirdo.”

Laughter erupted from the group, causing Aster to look over at them. Janet stared right at them as she laughed along at Aster’s expense. Tears began to well up in their eyes and they bolted, leaving the classroom, the teacher calling their name. Aster didn’t stop until they stood at the entrances to the bathrooms. Girls one read. Boys said the other.

“B-b-but I’m ... not a girl! Or a boy! I-I’m just me!” they sobbed. You could hear each tear hit the floor.

It would be many years before they learned that there are more than girls and boys. Until then, this would be a common occurrence for Aster. From their gender, to the way they dressed, to the color of their skin, Aster would always be made fun of by people. Mocking them for things that are unchangeable.

Later that day, Aster could be found curled up in their closet, bawling their eyes out, blanket clutched tightly and being stained for what seemed like the hundredth time. It wasn’t even completely because of Janet. At some point, Aster will be able to cry on the inside, keeping every true emotion hidden. But that day is not today, for now they will cry countless tears. And the blanket will be there to comfort them, as it does.

After three more years of suffering, Aster is eleven and has just learned a very upsetting piece of news. Their parents are getting divorced. In one week. The news hit Aster like a train, hitting them head on. For once, it wasn’t Aster’s parents yelling at each other.

“How could you? Do you know what this will do to me? Couldn’t you have waited until I left home? Why would you do this to me?” voice cracking on the last word. The questions were endless, with a couple of colorful words thrown in.

As they ran away from the calls of their parents, they remembered the times spent with them. And Aster found it hard to breathe as they recalled those bittersweet memories. One memory was particularly fresh in Aster’s mind. Only three weeks ago, Aster and their mom had been painting together. Often they would paint; Aster’s mother was quite the talented artist. In their head, Aster could hear the laughter that rang out clearly through the house as their father came in and picked them up. They felt as though nothing could make this moment any better. The blanket was on the ground, so Aster’s mom went to pick it up. The paint collided with the blanket with a “Splat!” A large red handprint was visible.

“Oh my gosh, Aster honey, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s ok, Mom. Here, I’ll make one too.” And soon there were three handprints on the blanket. Whenever their parents would fight, they would press their hands to the ones on the blanket.

Storming off, Aster hurriedly went to their room. The slamming of the door echoing through the house. Throwing themselves face first into the bed, grabbing the blanket as they fell. Droplets cascaded down their face, curly hair getting plastered to the side of their face. Crying was familiar to Aster. Far too familiar for such a young child.

Age 15. It is now that Aster knows what gender they are. It is now that they have accepted that their parents simply don’t work together. It is now that they can cry on the inside.

Lying on their bed one summer day, Aster has a Eureka moment. Well, more like a “wait a second, I think I just realized something” moment. Nonetheless, it is a discovery. That stupid blanket, just sitting there at the end of my bed...it’s been with me through everything. It was my only comfort so many times. When no one could help me, it could.

This discovery probably had no effect on the world. But to Aster, to Aster it changed a lot. They were hit with flashbacks, forgotten memories of all the times the ratty old blanket had been stained. Ten years since it was given to them, maybe more. How could Aster have not realized this until now is astounding. If they never uncovered this, Aster may not live the life that’s in store for them.
Every time their parents had screaming matches, when someone would insult them, when Aster would hate them. Even the good times. Handprints that served as a reminder for the last time their parents got along. The blanket had been there for everything and, although Aster wasn’t quite sure how, it linked everything in their life together.

When Aster was seventeen, they met someone. It wasn’t quite like those movies where that person makes everything all fine and dandy. But it sure was magical. Valencia was not nearly as outgoing or as loud as Aster. In fact, she was quite afraid of too much interaction with others. She had absolutely horrible acne, huge buckteeth that had never been fixed with braces, the most unmanageable hair and, no matter how hard she tried, Valencia could never quite be the size she wanted to be. That was how she saw herself. Aster knew that Valencia thought all of that, but they just didn’t see it like that.

None of those things made any difference to Aster who only saw the beautiful person that Valencia truly was. In Aster’s eyes, Valencia was the person whose eyes were the richest of blues and whose laugh sounded as though angels were singing. Her face seemed to have been carved by the gods themselves. Her intelligence was unmatched, as was her musical ability. It seemed impossible that anyone could be so gifted as Valencia. And all of her flaws were still there. Just because Aster knew there was more to her didn’t mean that she was perfect. Valencia was ridiculously clumsy, never quite used to towering at six feet, and she was very reserved. Yet her words, few as they were, were powerful. She was someone who could see Aster for who they really are, not just who they pretended to be, and still liked them for it.

The first time Valencia encountered the blanket was when they made a fort together. Neither of them ever really had a chance to just be kids. Neither one cared if they looked a little odd making a fort at their age. That day was the first in a long time that Aster managed a real laugh.

Aster and Valencia were curled up on their couch together, seven years later, the blanket laid on top of them. It had been many years since the demons had visited Aster. Seven years was quite a long time to be so happy.

“Hey, Aster?” Valencia asked softly.

“Yeah, Val?”

“What would you say if I asked you to marry me?” With that inquiry, Valencia had gotten Aster’s attention. They looked up, eyebrows raised and mouth hanging open slightly.

Gulping, they replied, “I think I might just say yes.”

By Abby Davis
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

The girl who lit the firework ran back to the driveway with us, the ten or fifteen people who wanted to celebrate New Year’s Eve at nine o’clock, long after the sun had gone down, but the night was still young. There were all of the seven kids, plus several adults standing on the gravel path in the cold, waiting out the waning hours of 31 December 2015. We were at a huge party, at our friends’ house, but the majority of the adults stayed inside to share private jokes and create their own memories, while we chose to celebrate with explosives.

Suddenly, there was a loud BANG! Beautiful multicolored sparks drifted through the night sky, illuminating with the stars, before drifting away into nothingness as the firecracker went off. Then someone screamed. I tore my attention away from the shower of fire and looked to see who screamed. “It fell,” I heard my father say.

I knew immediately he meant the fireworks. Without warning, the rockets quit for a second, we all held our breath, but the explosive seemed to have more to say. It spat three more rockets, but none were headed for Heaven. It was chaos. The first one was yellowish gold in color and slammed into the barn, cutting loose a pipe and scaring the chickens to China, and none of us had time to go check on them. The second went in the opposite direction, parallel to where we were standing and bursting into the deserted, seldom-travelled road. But none of the guests were focused on either of those brilliant light shows. We were too busy being focused on the last one, which careened towards us. Some of the people there, at the exact moment of the explosion, were running towards the house, shoving each other out of the way. I heard later that my dad pushed aside my younger sister who was crying out in fright. Some others were diving behind trailers or cars or other people. It’s amazing how when people are scared, they only seem to care about themselves. I’m sure I was running as fast as I could away from that missile, but I couldn’t take my eyes off of it. Perhaps I was the only one to see the golden shooting star explode violently into a million neon green and bright blue specks less than ten feet from where I stood, standing on the same cobblestone driveway that was littered with silly string. Then the ash just faded away into the blackness and the chaos was over. There were no more shrieks, just an eerie silence.
I thought in that moment that our existence is just like that firework. The scientific Big Bang Theory is that there was a huge explosion, and then everything separated: the planets and stars and floating masses of rock. The firecracker reminded me of that, sending the lights off across its own form of galaxy. Once day, will Earth be as invisible and unimportant as those floating ash pieces left in the dark? There are millions of firecrackers just like the one that exploded in front of my face. Is Earth as seemingly nonexistent as one of those tiny little lights in that one firecracker? I watched the few remaining sparks for a moment. They were fading, dancing, chemical lights, catching on the wind and the dimming to rest in the mud and snow that hardly covered the surface of the grass, and in a moment, we barely even remembered what happened. There were only fifteen people who experienced that firework, about fifty people who were told about it, and if I'm lucky, maybe a hundred people will read my words, in a world of seven billion.

**Scar: A Memoir**

By Madison Kroher  
Wintergreen Interdistrict Middle School

It is a faint scar, a small indent beside my eyebrow. For the common observer, it requires optimal lighting and an eye for detail to view it properly. Though it has taken residence on my lower forehead for nearly eight years, it always surprises me when I examine my profile in the mirror. Sometimes, it is a trick of the light, sometimes I recognize it immediately. Whatever the case, it is undeniably there. Tracing the little mark, I can clearly see the event unfold in my mind.

Even as years pass, and my memory blurs with age, I can still slightly see the fish through the murky waters. Slowly, I remove my hand and continue on with whatever I was doing before I was drawn to the mark conjoint with my eyebrow. Life as normal, as if nothing ever happened. But it did, and though memory can be unreliable, like recalling a face of a stranger that had flashed by with a moment's glance, swarming among the choked streets of pedestrians, you could never forget the way you felt in that instant.

It is funny, I once thought to myself, how we use objects as our way to connect to the past. Take photographs, for instance. We remember our deceased relatives through rolls of film or pixels of a camera. We hold our loved ones close through their scent, or the touch of their skin, or the glare of their iris. It is quite humorous that we never seem to savor the moment when it flashes before our eyes, and when we recall the incident, it is as tangible as vapor. When I was five years old, I did not have a photograph to capture the moment in stunning clarity. Nor do people, even my parents, ask me about the small indent, so cleverly hidden in my skin. So, really, I should hardly recall the event.

Since most of our early memories are not our own, but molded into our brains by our parents’ stories, it isn’t a wonder that the incident is a stunning light compared to the black and white tableaux in the interior of my five-year-old mind. Even now, as I stretch the memory into words, the incident flashes through my mind. It was my father’s birthday, in the middle of May. My mother was calling my sisters and me down for cake when I turned on my heel and sped down the hallway. It was with trepidation that I recalled the event. 

Everyone who has ever walked on this planet has seen the world flash before their eyes. Sometimes, it occurs in a split second before a collision, a harsh blow to the face, or maybe even a harsh word from a loved one. Mine was when I fell down the stairs. At first, I felt weightless. Then, I felt the blinding pain. I couldn’t piece together how I had slipped and fallen. All I could remember was the blunt blow to my head that knocked stars into my eyes. The shock was unbearable. The corner of my forehead felt as if it would cave into itself. And I remember the stifled cry of agony screaming in my lungs that hurt the most of all.

The part that followed was the sketchiest in my memory. Whether it was my mother or father who carried me to the car to whisk me to the hospital, I could not be certain. But what I could be convinced of, despite the blur and confusion of the world around me, was the blood. It was a sickening, scarlet color that twisted my insides. After recovering from my fall, it began with a small trickle, easily silenced by a small cloth. But soon, it was more than a red speck on a ragged piece of fabric. It was a complete inundation, an entire deluge of blood that unceasingly poured from the wound above. If I tried to wipe it away, as I did many times, the blood would appear on my hand, and stick with the consistency of red paint. Next came the tears. They began as soon as my mom and I entered the emergency room, where the nurse took my temperature and pulse and gave me a clean cloth. I was scared, and I felt a pang of guilt tug into my chest. It was my father’s birthday, after all, and my parents had been arguing a lot lately. Even at five, I could sense the tension that was palpable between them. I never understood what they would fight about, and I certainly didn’t want them to fight over me. I felt the tears roll down my eyes, feeling helpless and alone. I was squeamish as the doctor applied stitches to my eye, flinching when it stung as the wound was cleaned.
Arriving home, I glanced into the mirror, grimacing at the ugly stitches woven into my forehead. That is the exact same sensation I feel now, eight years later, but with a sense of fascination intertwined. There is also a pang of longing when I think of the night that followed the gruesome tumble. Upon summoning the image into my mind, I recall the horror, the terror, the fright that came with the realization when I first heard my parents argue. I could not describe a single word that was hollered from below. Though the sound was muffled from a shut door and a treacherous staircase’s distance, their voices were entirely deafening.

I moved my finger up towards the scarred area, tracing the stitches even though I was firmly instructed not to touch them. I thought of my mother, who was angry at me the moment I composed myself after the fall. Earlier, I was struck with jarring words and a flash of eyes, a frigid blue. I did not react at first, barely moving a muscle except to take a haggard breath. My mother hardly ever yelled at me. If anything, she yelled at my sister, who was generally more misbehaved than I, and that was for discipline only. But this time, as I felt her penetrating glare send chills down my spine, I felt as if I had done something irrevocably wrong.

I was never really close to my mother. Even during the couple of years after my parents’ separation, when we lived together in an apartment, I never felt that “connection” that I should’ve probably felt, given the circumstances. But it was then, when she yelled at me, her harsh glare, the crippling sense of fear that paralyzed me in that instant that I’d felt closest to my mother.

Even during those strenuous years, stretching from first grade to third, in which I alternated weekdays with her and weekends with my father, it had never occurred to me that my mother was mentally ill. When she and my father were still married, I was too young and my emotional skills weren’t as developed, so it never became apparent to me until a couple of years ago. It was a difficult subject to wrap my mind around. I had once thought it was normal. I assumed that every other child across the world occasionally went without a dinner or slept without a mattress, with only a thin blanket sans pillow. I rarely got any sleep, and neither did my sisters.

I did not have any friends in school, and I did not intend to have any. I had nothing to live for; I had nothing to prove myself as a true human being. I felt as if my soul was a mangled paper bag straggling in the wind, sinking deeper into the impending storm. I’d always trusted my mother and told her I loved her, as any respectful child should. But how is it that innocence and youth could be confused with ignorance, a subservient norm to accept as your own? I had nothing. Nothing but a scar. It was that moment, my mother’s disapproving glare, her harsh words, the sensation of my heart collapsing inside my chest. And I still feel it, a short substitution of emotion, in the very instance I catch the elusive mark in a flash of light. Even without the mark, even if I didn’t remember my slip down the stairs, there were enough memories that remained of my absent mother. And though I think of my past as minimally as possible, it is always that sly scar that slithers into consciousness with a slight tilt of the head.

Here’s the deal with scars; you can try to hide them, you can omit them from your thoughts, but they are still embedded in your skin with a funny or gruesome story in their wake. It has been long enough that I hardly feel affection towards my mother, if it is affection at all. And if I, given the circumstances, ever wanted to remember the days of my early childhood, I could always squint to find the impression beside my eyebrow, stretching into the darkness, the fading blur of memories. And as these years come and go, my mother is not part of my life at the moment. Even though she once had been, that was a short time. She still is my mother, but in a different universe, a realm of infinite possibilities.
9th Grade

Alison Bean
Zen Jungle
Roses
By Alyssa Herman
Metropolitan Learning Center

Crimson roses
grew from the
cuts in my skin.

Planted there
by the one
who said she loved me.

To replace
the blood.

To stop
the pain.

I didn’t like
roses.
I’ve never liked
roses.

Then she left.

She took the flowers
and left only thorns.

I still hate roses.

When I see
her planting roses
in the cut of someone else’s skin,
I feel that my skin is smooth.

No longer are there any holes
in my skin
for her to fill.

And I remind myself that I don’t need roses.

No matter how many bodies
she litters with them.
It seems I have turned bitter.

My mother asked me where the cheerful girl that I used to be went.

I wanted to tell her she was finally ready to be beautiful.

That she realized she needed to be slimmer because the bigger the thigh gap, the more guys she could fit in between.

And if a guy found a girl attractive, they were winning at the game of life because everybody knows pretty people have it easier.

When she asked me where I’ve been for the past few months, for a split second, I considered telling her the truth.

Telling her how I’ve been too busy drowning in my own self pity because all I want is to be alluring, yet I can’t seem to accomplish that.

How I’ll never be content with what I see because the mirror has turned into an enemy.

I’ve been taught by society that the less of you to grab the more someone would want to hold you. Maybe that’s why they never have.

She asked me where that shimmer of light that once danced in my eyes went.

I wanted to tell her that the flames were suffocated by the choked sobs into a pillow of countless nights.

Because the constant gazes from everyone, burn with critique and wonder of whether or not I’m that girl they saw in Vogue, and how I look different in person.

But instead, I told her that I was still that careless little girl with bows in her hair.

That I was just tired from the long days, and how they seem to stretch everytime I blink.

For who was I to ruin her day by telling her that I didn’t get out of bed for a whole week.

That the only time I felt pretty was when I was hungry.

That a little girl musing about how she wanted to be me when she grew up was like a blow to the head.

For I simply lacked the lacking of a heart and feared to be the cause of my mother’s wrinkles, and so I had destroyed that splinter of a chance, like the destructive person I am and probably always will be.

I want to clear my chest, but can’t because the more I lie to others, the more addicting it gets. This thick, inky darkness feels a lot like home.

But something holds me back as if not wanting me to leave, and so I sit here, with my mouth cemented shut.

I can still remember the faint thrill of my first photoshoot, and how at the first signs of discomfort, my stylist had laughed at me.

When I asked her what was so amusing, I remember the causal shrug she gave me as she told me “pretty hurts.”

But does it have to?

It seems I am bitter.
Albert Esting read over Nancy’s shoulder as she flipped through *The Choice of Parenting*, a magazine that served as a guide to purchasing “the right child for you.” After breaking out of college, Albert Esting had gone on to marry Nancy. Now, both of their mothers were starting to request grandchildren, and Nancy had told him she didn’t mind succumbing to the peer pressure, so Albert had decided he didn’t mind either.

“I just don’t know,” his wife remarked, looking at a page that showed what a brown-haired child would look like through their stages of growth, “They say redheads are currently trending, but I really like the blondes.” Nancy was a blonde herself, so Albert knew she preferred them.

“Maybe a lighter-haired brunette,” Albert protested, “that’ll look like a combination of both of our hair colors. That’s pretty trendy.” Albert’s hair was practically black, because that was a trend when his parents were kids. He didn’t really care for it.

“You kinda have to predict the future, though,” Nancy decided. “Like, no one has brunettes anymore, so that could come back into style in a couple of years.”

“So, brunette it is?” Albert said. Nancy nodded in agreement. They flipped to that section of the magazine.

“Boy or girl?” Albert asked, eyeing curly-haired, straight-haired and wavy-haired children.

“Girl,” Nancy said automatically. Albert opened his mouth to protest, but Nancy said, “We can always get a boy later.”

“Fine,” Albert muttered, and tried to think of the benefits of a girl. He could still teach her to like watching football, so he guessed it wouldn’t be that big of a deal. Now that they had decided, Albert logged onto his computer. He opened the website for *The Choice of Parenting* and clicked on the form he would have to fill out to order a child.

“Female,” Albert said quietly to himself as he clicked the pink button. He then selected the picture that he and Nancy had found of a girl with light brown hair. She would be a very attractive child, teenager and adult. Albert knew that although he would not get the exact child in the picture, he would get one that was similar. This was so that no one would have the exact same child, and also because the machines that made the children weren’t 100% accurate.

He selected a few other, more custom features, and finally, Albert clicked the “in twenty minutes” button, even though it was more expensive. He didn’t want to wait. After typing in his bank account number he clicked the enter button, and it made a satisfying *bing!* noise.

“Did you do it?” Nancy asked, excitement in her voice.

“Yes,” Albert said, “in twenty minutes, we’ll be parents.” They quickly satisfied themselves by sitting in two chairs that faced the window.

With each car that passed by, they jumped excitedly in their seats. They were looking for a delivery vehicle from the local nursery. They finally spotted the van. It was dark blue, with the logo for the corporation that had started the new process of childbirth on it.

As the van rolled to a stop in front of their house, Albert raced out the front door to greet the van, and Nancy trailed not too far behind. They waited impatiently for the delivery guy to get out of the van. He showed them a clipboard and a pen.

“Sign, and it’s yours,” the delivery guy said in a tone that made it seem like he did this every day.

Albert grasped the clipboard and barely scanned the document. He instead skipped to the lines where he was supposed to write his name. He signed, and handed the clipboard to Nancy to sign.

“What about the name?” Nancy breathed as she handed the clipboard back to Albert.

“Lily?” Albert asked.

“Sure, sure,” the delivery guy said. “Whatever. I’ve got more orders to fulfill.”

“Okay,” Nancy said with a shrug. “Lily Esting,” she tested the name on her tongue. “Sounds great.” Alfred wrote that on the sheet. Before Albert could hand the delivery guy the clipboard, Nancy gasped, “Wait!” and they both turned to her, impatience
in their eyes. “We should really read the requirements of owning one of these,” she insisted. The delivery guy reluctantly handed the clipboard back to Albert.

“Requirements,” Albert read to himself and Nancy. “You need to devote—what?—practically all of your time to an infant. The next line says you must pay for food, clothing, schooling, hobbies, et cetera.” Albert looked at Nancy and said quietly, “This sounds like a bad idea.”

“I agree,” Nancy said quietly back. Alfred looked pitifully at the van, and then he began to scribble out their signatures. He then ripped the paper in half, and then again, and then again, so it was no longer a formal document, just a pile of shredded paper.

“You know this child is custom,” the delivery guy remarked, eyeing the pile of shredded paper. “We’ll have to, well, we’ll have to put it to sleep. You see, no one else will want it.”

“And we’ll get a refund,” Nancy said, without the slightest hint of a question in her voice.

“Yep,” the delivery guy agreed, and went around the side of the van to climb in. He started it up, and the Estings watched as it drove away.

“That was unpleasant,” Albert remarked in a tone that was slightly positive in an effort to make Nancy stop thinking about it. Nancy just nodded in response. She was too busy staring at the spot where the van had been, and Albert wondered why.

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Rainy Days
By Sarai Mapp
Metropolitan Learning Center

He stared outside his window on a rainy day in September. On days like these, time seemed to slow down and the mood became what he made of it. He had always seemed to find joy and peace of mind during these days. He enjoyed the rain seemingly more than he enjoyed the sunny days. The rain always washed away the pain from yesterday, and as he sat by the main window of his small flat, he felt nestled in by just looking outside into the rain. The window overlooked all of his favorite things: the small and cozy shops that dotted the streets, the park, and the river which ran under this cobblestone bridge. But the best part was that it had a lovely view of the sky and the many sunsets and sunrises.

And now, as he looked out the window at all of his favorite things and the rain, it struck him as a perfect moment. He had a mug of tea in his hands and a blanket around his shoulders, as he drew shapes in the window, and he felt the calmness of the day. Most people associated rain with somber thoughts and gloomy greys. It was true rainy days did consist of grey, but it wasn’t only that. They also consisted of blue, red, orange, yellow, all the other colors, and the ones between those ones as well. And it wasn’t that the colors were gloomy on rainy days, they just weren’t as bright. They were somewhat faded and pastel looking in a calm rainy day way. It was the state between sleeping and awake, being on the line between dreaming and consciousness when it rained for him. Rain was the thing that went in-between calm.

Most people stayed inside on rainy days, recoiling from the wet like a cat does when being thrown into water. They claimed that it was a day to be spent inside. But he disagreed with those claims. He remembered as a child when it would start to pour, he would pull on his rubber boots with his rain coat and run out into the water falling from the sky. He would splash in the puddles that had formed and try to collect raindrops on his tongue, though the raindrops seemed to favor catching on his eyelashes.

By the side of his house there were woods where he had traveled into many times despite his mother’s heeding. He remembered trying to climb the trees and observe how the wildlife welcomes the rain. He saw how the birds settled into their nests, cuddling their children. One time there was a fallen little bird he had found on his way into the woods. It was curled up into itself appearing only as a small brown ball of fluff. He had scooped it up into his little hands and felt its warmth with his own; he had felt its breathing and its small, damp feathers, and in that moment he felt connected to something beautiful. But then, the bird lifted its head and flew off in fright.

He had seen the other birds peering around the woods’ floor, looking to pick out the unlucky worms that the rain had forced up from the soil. He had dug his hand deep into the dirt picking up a handful of wet soil. He just felt it in his hand, how cold, and damp, and lovely it felt to him. How strange it was for him to come to realize that he was holding a piece of the earth, a small but important piece of the world he lived on. He followed the salamanders that slithered near the ponds, leaving them to their own desires when they squeezed their way under rocks. He would laugh in his sweet childish way when the water would splash up in a pond from a dive a frog had just made. Somehow, he always made his way home no matter how far into the woods he went.
He liked to go far because time seemed to be forgotten when he had passed all the ponds and birds. Everything seemed to slow, and he could feel his breaths go out into the air and the rain dropping onto his raincoat. He felt it soaking into his hair when he would look up to the trees. He saw foxes once before when he had stumbled into a field, their fur a red autumn leaf color. They had paused and seemed to stare straight through his flesh and into his soul. They must have been at ease with that they saw, for they continued on, back into the woods. He went to that field many times on rainy days. He had startled a hare and watched its strong back legs carry it into some underbrush. He had watched a deer and its doe feed on grass and plants. He had seen an owl resting in a tree. And, for some reason, he had felt connected to these things by the rain.

As he finished his mug of tea, he wondered how any kid could stay inside, eyes stuck to a screen, with something as beautiful as rain outside. It was livelier to play in the rain than it was in the sun; that’s what he thought anyway. Another memory came into his mind at this. He remembered one of his favorite rainy days. He was a newly minted teenager experiencing new things in life with all the confusion and rebellion that came with the title. It was a weekend day he was supposed to spend inside, but he couldn’t resist the temptation of sneaking out when the soft taps and giggles of his best friends came to his bedroom window. He remembered the sky was a faded grey and blue on their way to wherever they were going. There was fog in the air making all the signs on the highway look mysterious.

A grin had broken out onto his face when he saw that they had ended up at an amusement park. He remembered the pounding their collective combat boots had made on the pavement as they ran around the park, laughing and twirling. It began to rain really hard as they went on the big swing carousel that spun them round and round in the air; however, the park refused to shut down and the rides continued. He had felt like Superman on those swings. He had felt free and alive and happy. He loved the feeling the rain had given him as the swings swung higher. It seeped into his clothes, and his hair, and in his boots, but he didn’t care. He threw his head back and his arms out as he went round in the air swinging through the rain. He wished he could have felt that feeling for the rest of his life because he was sure it was the best feeling in the world. He felt the air and rain on his face. The sound of his friends’ laughter had gone straight to his heart, and he knew he was truly free in his emotions and in his mind because, God, he felt like he could fly. It was one of the best days of his life—filled with food, rides, running, laughing, and yes, lots of rain. They piled into the car that day with soaked clothes and happy hearts.

Thunder crashed, shaking him out of his memories. Lightning made an appearance in the sky, and he thought it was a beautiful thing. He thought many things were beautiful in life, like ballet dancing or road tripping, things he had always found beautiful but had never experienced himself. Life was a beautiful thing, filled with experiences and places and memories he would have forever. His most beautiful memories always involved rain, and that was one of the reasons he loved it. Because rain had made his best memories and marked the places he had visited. It was amazing to him how something so simple in the world could influence his life so much. Rain had helped him grow like a flower in the ground, and he was glad because he had turned into a beautiful flower and would continue to bloom, as long as he had his rain.

Rainy days were like free spirits, and sometimes the free-spirited made the world a better place. Even if it didn’t, rain to him was a gift, and he decided to enjoy it. So he threw on his favorite rubber boots, and grabbed his red umbrella, and took a walk in the rain. He remembered all the good things life and rain had brought him. And as he splashed in puddles on the sidewalk, feeling like a little kid again, he saw a small little baby laugh as droplets of rain fell upon her face, and feeling his heart melt at the sight, he fell in love with the rain all over again.

Away and Towards
By Olivia Flaherty-Lovy
New Canaan High School

The folds of the curtain, billowing back and forth with the steady shuffling of screaming feet behind it, gave the entire scene the effect of an angry ocean. It was almost as though I was digging my feet into the grains of burning sand instead of into the decaying folds of the fabric pressed into my pointe shoes. I could barely make out the little whirlpools of dust that would rise quickly around me as my shoes, tastefully colored black with sharpie, slapped the ground. It looked as though the dust wasn’t dust at all, but a steady blanket, cloaking the floor in a beige mess, which was a little strange for the fancy stage I couldn’t wait to perform in. My sister and I had been rehearsing for months, and I knew, without really knowing, that we would be the talk of the show. I glanced over at Ellie as she bounced excitedly behind the curtain, swinging her arms as though doing imaginary jump rope. Her face was a sort of sickly white, making the makeup on her cheeks pop out. Her dress trailed behind her on the floor, making her tiny five-year-old self seem mystical and slightly dangerous. As though it was possible for Ellie to be dangerous. Usually danger came to her. I caught her eye and she scrambled over, her dress sweeping the dust off the floor like a broom. I could see fingernail marks on her arms from where she had been clutching them.

“Hi,” was all that I could say.
I could feel the nerves bubbling up in my throat, making my voice come out weak and shaky. It was too much. I was trembling so hard the chair was vibrating, the cellist tuning her strings at the front of the stage was emitting a sound like nails on a chalkboard, screeching and clawing their way into my heart. Ellie arched an eyebrow to stare at me quizzically, as if wondering why she was standing here with her fool of a sister while her friends were bereft of her presence in the other room. The nervousness that was clogging my throat suddenly thickened and turned to anger, blistering my mouth and tongue. Ellie made to move, to say something. The words were hovering silently in the air, waiting to crash down on me, but the anger swimming in my throat. The anger, drowning my senses out, was quicker. In seconds, I could see the words, my words, forming shackles that tied my hands to the chair and pushed me away, away, away from my sister.

“Just go away.”

The final word rang through the backstage like a bell. Ellie stared at me, the tears still balancing on her eyelashes, before spinning on her heel and marching away. Before I knew it, I was out of my seat and sprinting through the hallway, my shoes slapping the tile floor, so bright and neat it could have been part of the hospital. The hospital. I stopped in my tracks, thoughts flooding my mind...

“But why?” My childish, high-pitched voice echoed through the hall, where stern-looking men in funny white coats hovered, and other kids in flimsy, garbage bag gowns like mine skirted along beside their parents. My hands were covered in beads of sweat, but I had no idea why.

My father didn’t answer, but I was used to that by now. The silence that had replaced his commanding voice was even more deafening than his anger. I trotted along by his side, stumbling in my garbage bag, clutching the wrapped box my father had picked out. I didn’t see why Ellie needed to get something now, since it wasn’t any holiday I was aware of, but he insisted on it. When I tried to protest, all I could see were his eyes, so much like Ellie’s, a kind of brown that looked like coffee drowning in milk.

“She just needs to be happy,” he had whispered, and the hope in his voice was so strong that I could see it hovering in the air for a moment, before the particles were scattered away by the clinking of a medical cart and the real world.

My sneakers kicked the tile, producing an ear-splitting squeak that sailed along the hallway. I shrank back into the wall, the smell of cleaning supplies overwhelmingly strong, as my father checked his piece of paper again. Really, it was only a room number. Why was he so concerned?

I followed him through a door, then walked straight into him as he stopped abruptly. He was frozen. Honestly, it’s just Ellie, I thought, the image of her scribbling all over our bedroom walls with sharpie playing freshly in my head. How much can she have changed?

I snapped my head up to see her and gasped. Suddenly, there was a brick sliding down my throat, scraping its way to my stomach and stopping all words from even thinking of trying to escape. There were six (six!) needles protruding from her arm, which was so thin the skin was white and papery and looked like it would crack if you touched it. I had been told she would be bald, but the rings of hair that littered her pillow and the floor beside her bed were too many to even count. A jagged red line of stitches snaked across her skull, starting just behind her ear and ending at the top of her head. As I started to move towards her, though, she smiled and asked, “What’s in the box?”

I swallowed nervously and handed it to her, watching as she ripped off the paper and pulled out the toy. Her eyes found mine questioningly, and I quickly stammered a hoarse, “Where have you been? Why are you not back? Yet? Why do people keep bringing us food? Why aren’t you home?”

She looked at me sadly, and I could feel the news hanging in the air before she even said it. I braced myself, ready for whatever excuse she had.

And waited. And waited. Because it never came.

She wasn’t happy. This was my Ellie, and she wasn’t having fun here. I stumbled backwards, reaching blindly for my father, and walked right into the performance director.

“Watch it!”

I gasped. “Sorry! I didn’t mean—”

She glared down at me. Her hair was pulled into a ponytail so tight it looked as if she was pulling her eyes back into her skull. Normally, I would have dashed away in the opposite direction, but tonight, I went through her. The clock was ticking down to the opening, but I walked away from it. Away from the clock. From the director. From everything else.

And towards my sister.
Hero's Journey
By Camille LaRock
William H. Hall High School

It's late afternoon in mid-September, and I've just started 8th grade at KP. I am in the car with my dad and Juliette, and my dad is yelling at me about being late for soccer practice again, when I feel a sensation of oncoming dread—it's going to happen again. My eye starts to twitch, and my mouth opens to make an involuntary laughing/sobbing sound. Dad angrily asks me why I'm laughing until he sees the look on my face in the rearview mirror. I am having a seizure, although neither one of us knows it at the time.

On September 24, 2014, I was diagnosed with epilepsy.

The weeks leading up to my diagnosis were some of the most stressful anyone in my family had ever experienced. Imagine having no clue as to what is going on while feeling, for lack of a better word, possessed. I couldn't describe it then, and even now it's difficult. My father was on the internet 24/7 trying to find what was wrong with me, my mom wasn't sleeping at night, and my brother and sister were just plain and utterly scared. And me, well I was just a wreck. Having a "spazz out" (which I called it before I knew it was a seizure) in school was horrifying. Everyone would blatantly stare, and I would pass it off as a laugh while secretly dying inside. The teachers would pull me aside and ask what was the matter, but I honestly didn't know and couldn't answer them. Once my parents realized something was wrong, the doctors appointments began.

First stop was the pediatrician. I was pretty scared in the waiting room, nervous to find out what was wrong with me. When she called us in and asked us some questions. In the end, she didn't think it was anything serious, just a tic. But she still had us call and make an appointment for an EEG. Thankfully, they were able to schedule it just a few days later.

I didn't even know what an EEG was, so on the way to the appointment I was looking it up on my dad's phone and getting more nervous the more I read about it. They brought me into a small room that had a hospital bed, and attached all these cables to my head with a sticky liquid. As the nurse was putting it on, she said it was good that I had really short hair, so for once, I was happy it was short! She made me do a bunch of tests: blowing on a pinwheel and flashing strobe lights at me. After that, I had to sleep. The results of the EEG showed that I was having seizures.

Next stop was an MRI. Once again, I looked it up and was nervous that I might have to have liquid injected into my arm to highlight my brain. I don't like needles. Fortunately I didn't have to have the liquid, but I did have to lay still for 45 minutes while this enormous and loud machine (think construction site loud) took pictures of my brain.

And finally, on September 24, 2014, I found myself in a neurologist's office at CCMC. It was then that I heard the word epilepsy for the first time in my life. The neurologist explained what was happening in my brain (in doctor words that I still don't quite understand), and said that he would try to put me on medication that he thought might work for me. Everyone with epilepsy responds differently, so he said we might try different ones over time.

Thinking the medicine would "fix me," my family and I started to relax a little (except for my dad—he's a little intense!). Unfortunately, in December, despite trying different doses and different medications, I was still having seizures every night, and felt like a zombie from lack of sleep. The side effects of the medicine were awful, too. I was tired, dizzy, and spent a lot of my time hanging out with the KP nurses. It was then that we decided to go for a second opinion, and I started seeing Dr. Farooq at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital.

At the end of January, I had my second MRI (fluid included this time, unfortunately), and my first long term EEG. I had to stay at the hospital from Thursday to Monday, once again hooked up to all sorts of cables and unable to shower for all those days (I did not smell good by Monday). While I was there, they monitored my seizures—I was having three or four a night at that point—and decided to change my medicine, so they could watch and see if there were any negative effects. Within two days of being on the new medicine, I FINALLY stopped having seizures!

This ongoing experience from the beginning of my seizures, to the first procedure, to my diagnosis, and finally to my freedom from seizures has made me a better person than I was a year ago. I had to mature quickly to accept the fact that I am now living with a medical condition that I will have to monitor possibly for the rest of my life. I also have to be more responsible and remember to take my medication daily in the morning and at night, so sleepovers and hanging out with my friends late nights are not as carefree as they used to be. I also feel more medically educated than other kids my age because most kids have never heard of Epilepsy. I feel like I am on a whole different level of understanding for others and while I've always tried to be helpful to others, this experience has taken that up a notch further. My condition has made me very grateful that it's not something worse, and it is something that can be managed unlike other medical conditions. While I was waiting for the MRI results, my mind was racing that there was something seriously wrong, like cancer or a tumor.

Finally, this experience has shown me that as an adult, I would like to become a Child Life Specialist and work in a hospital. During my stay at Yale, the Child Life Specialist made my family and I feel more comfortable with the situation I was in, and guided me through all the procedures that were being done to me. I want to help kids and their families like she did for mine.
10th Grade

Kaleigh Perkins
(Un)Human
Effects of Acidic Algebra
By Kylee White-Ramirez
Connecticut International Baccalaureate Academy

Formations of unappetizing lines swarm about
while toxic tendrils
of Expo marker
fully saturate my lungs.

Hundreds of intoxicating equations
scripted across crisp, stringent paper
send a crinkle of irritation
across my forehead.

Fermented concepts
stir and permeate my brain,
while I attempt to disentangle
the mess of numbers.

Overpowering and forceful complications
are typed into my TI-84 Plus
that strain my fingers
and arc my back.

Over-populated, sour amounts
send crowds
scampering elsewhere
with horror.

Miniscule amounts
are permitted:
just enough noisy, acidic toxicity
to make it out alive.
Echoes
By Raven Mascola-Snyder
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts

When I tell you that you are beautiful, do not try to tell me that you aren’t.
Do not try to tell me that you are small, or insignificant,
Because you are absolutely glorious, okay?
Everything in this universe is connected,
Everything intertwined, the way our fingers do when I hold your hand,
And this echo of our entire existence in an action so small is not an isolated occurrence.
It is no coincidence.
And to see this, you need only to look around you.
See trees like veins, stretching across blue skies and soft, white clouds.
See them carry life throughout every nook and cranny and corner of our planet.
See veins like trees, reaching around down shoulders and down fingers like branches.
Carrying life throughout your body, just as beautiful and intricate and complex as this earth.

See people, see freckles like stars,
Dotting cheeks and noses and chests,
Decorating delicate skin like glittering snowflakes,
Tracing constellations across the curving landscapes of bodies.
See stars like freckles,
Brilliant, fleeting dashes of light across the infinitely deep darkness of the night sky,
Telling stories of lost loves and found homes.
See caves like mouths,
Echoes on rocks like a voice born in a throat,
Chanting songs of long nights in forgotten tongues
Lit only by a single eternal window to the world.
See mouths like caves,
Full of shadows and stalagmites.
No one knows what monsters lurk there in those dark depths—
Monsters that itch to roar,
To shove away anyone foolish enough to linger by the entrance.
These creatures roam through rows upon rows of glittering jewels,
Diamonds and rubies plucked from the rock at just the right time for the tremors to induce
Fireworks in another human being.

See bodies like planets,
Turning, glowing, unstoppable,
Harsh and powerful, volcanoes erupting at every shift in the soul,
Speckled in craggy mountain tops,
So cold and unreachable, and liking it that way, places never to be touched
And cavernous fissures too deep even for worms,
Because no one should know what lies in the puddles and pools at the bottom.
See planets like bodies,
So loving, nurturing, and alive.
There is no end to the beauty in this,
Dirt, soft and pliable like a mind,
Vulnerable if it is touched just right,
And dead far too easy.

So tell me now, how can you see these echoes, the beautiful intricacies of everything and
Everyone that exists around us, and still think you do not share its beauty?
Sitting in his office, surrounded by medical posters, and books, and the most pitying look I’d ever received in my life, I got a chilling sense that Dr. Martin would be good at breakups. Not that he’d ever—well, he’d be nice about it. That’s all I’m saying.

He’d call you on the phone, ask to talk to you in person—that’s the kind of guy he is, Dr. Martin, he’d do this whole thing in person—say there isn’t a problem or anything, but you should definitely talk soon. And you’d come into his house smiling, maybe even looking forward—looking forward!—to seeing him. He’d seat you on the usual corner couch, ask if you wanted tea. You’d say no, lean forward, ask what he wanted to tell you. You’d be anticipating this conversation beforehand; he’d always make the endless procession of your’s anticipate it, and it was tragic and pathetic and you’d look back on this moment and scorn yourself for it, but Andrew Martin would break up with you and make you look forward to it. That’s the kind of guy he was.

He’d hit you with superficialities first—what a nice way of doing it, that guy, always leaving his guests with anesthetics—and you’d get lulled in, maybe a little inattentive, falling into that grey space of happiness/boredom where comfort lies. That’s when he’d strike. He’d apologize, give you the same look he was giving me now, that I’m not going to say it wasn’t you, because it was look, tell you that this was really great and all, but you need to stop seeing him like this.

“This isn’t to discredit you,” he’d continue, and you’d nod, even though you’d be feeling totally fucking discredited right now, and he’d tell you about the way neither of you has needed the other for a while. “All that’s changing now is the official terminology of our relationship,” he’d say, and you’d still nod, even though something delicate and small was breaking in your chest and your lips weren’t working, and you couldn’t move your face because if you did, you swear to god you’d start sobbing. “You don’t need me anymore,” he’d continue, dropping the words like fucking snow, like he was Jesus on the motherfucking mount, and you’d smile because you’d look like shit if you did anything else. You’d walk out of there with the glibbest expression that ever was, and he’d sit there like he’d just done something great.

Not that that actually happened. I’m just saying. He’d be great about it.

“I’m not saying it’s hopeless,” he was saying now, because even though I was still thinking about women and hot tea and the precise way he’d break their hearts, he was talking about tumors. “But it is something that will take some adjusting to.”

I stared. As if this was a fucking move or something.

“Adjusting,” I said. My voice was steady.

“Adjusting,” he repeated, “because as scary as it may seem, six months is actually quite a long time to have left.”

“That’s true,” I said. “That’s very true.”

“And there are plans for this,” he said. I imagined the words laced with vodka and sleeping pills, smoking revolvers and bloody bridge leaps, and maybe—if I was lucky—a dramatic movie voiceover about how I took fate into my own hands. “For treatment,” he clarified.

I nodded. My face, I imagined, was leveled.

“In a way,” he continued, “this is a very kind disease. I know that’s no consolation, but ... at least you have time.”

I stared at him, then, his remaining years sprawled around the room like a beam of light—no, sprawled around his fingers like a wedding band, like hundreds of wedding bands, like the hundreds upon thousands of no’s he’d give to hundreds of thousands of yes-girls in his lifetime, the countless dumb nods, the no, it’s completely okay, the straw understandings with straw women on the same corner couch where he’d first told them he’d loved them.

I nodded again. Strange, I remember thinking. He’d never even asked me out.
By Sydney Parrott
Rockville High School

Adamma

As I sit on the floor, with my head hung between my knees, I hear the piercing sound of James’s cries. The cries immediately come to a halt when the shattering of a beer bottle echoes through the trailer.

“Adamma, I told you to make that kid shut up! If I hear another peep from him, I promise that you’ll both be in a casket!” my husband drunkenly hisses from the kitchen. I laugh silently to myself because that Pielkop has been saying that every single day since he started drinking the devil’s drink. It’s an empty threat now.

I quickly get to my feet and gaze around me. I am standing in the living room, my least favorite room. The carpet is covered in cigarette ashes and my blood stains. There is one broken rocking chair in front of the TV. The only channel we have on the television is all static, but he tells me to keep it on anyway. There is a flickering light bulb hanging by a long metal wire in the center of the room that shakes every time he slams the fridge door to get another beer. I then turn my attention to him.

Across the room, he sits at the table with a bottle of beer. He stares at me with his cold, bloodshot eyes. He is clenching his right fist because that’s the hand he likes to strike me with. He tells me he can shake the whole trailer when he hits me with that hand. His skin is ghostly white with light freckles. His hair resembles an orange flame. I look away from his glance and make my way to the bedroom. I find James sitting in the corner of the room with tears in his eyes. A part of me wants to hold him and tell him everything will be fine, but he’s very smart. He knows when I’m lying.

“Mum, kedu ka idi?” James whispers as he runs over to my legs and holds them tight. I run my fingers through his curly hair, trying to comfort him.

“Yes, mum is fine. How are you?” My voice is shaky, but I try my hardest to sound convincing.

“A maro,” James answers as he walks over to his bed on the other side of the room. He lifts his ripped blanket and slips in between. Most children fight about going to bed, but James is different. He tells me when he’s dreaming at night, that’s the only time he’s truly happy. James doesn’t just experience problems at home. James also has his hands full at school. Sometimes, I see him coming home from school with bruises all along his face and arms. When I ask him why the kids at school would do this to him, he tells me is because he is a “mutt.”

I walk out of the bedroom and slip into the bathroom, hoping James doesn’t notice that I left. He is terrified to be alone in the trailer. I turn on the bathroom light and stare at my reflection in the mirror. My skin is dark with blue and purple bruises that resemble paint splatters all over my body. My eyes are a bright green that perfectly contrasts my skin tone. My hair is a jungle of curls twisting in all different directions. He doesn’t like when I look at myself in the mirror because he doesn’t want me to remember what I am and where I come from. I look into my reflection anyway.

“Adamma! Get your ass in the kitchen!” He roars. I quickly shuffle to the kitchen to find him standing there with a pan in one hand and a clenched fist in the other. The pan is held in his good hand, so I know what is coming.

“What I tell you ‘bout lookin’ in the mirror? I told your ugly ass to quit looking in the mirror and you didn’t listen!” He screams at the top of his lungs.

I can hear the light bulb in the living room swinging. I turn around and try to run away, but I can feel the blow on the back of my head. I fall to the ground like a crumbling tower. I can feel the blood pool around my head. I see his feet walking away from me, like nothing happened. My vision becomes blurry, then all I see is darkness.

James

Mum is on the ground again. I saw her on the kitchen floor when I was playing with my truck. I play with my truck when Dad isn’t home because he said he doesn’t like when I have my truck. Dad works with trucks at his job. Dad fixes roads with them. Mum has a hole on her head. Sometimes I play doctor with her and clean all the holes on her with a facecloth. Mum says I’m her little angel, but I tell her, “I’m not playing angel. I’m playing Doctor.” She laughs at me because she says I’m funny. Mum is still on the floor. I put my truck down, it’s time for me to play doctor.

Adamma

I can see village, as clear as day! The abundance of maize growing alongside the little huts, the children playing in the bush, it is exactly the same as how I left it. As I step closer to my hut from when I was a child, I see my family. They all are sitting around eating Edikangikong from one bowl. My family never had a lot to eat, but it always seemed enough. The vision of my
home village blurs, as I awake. My husband has not bothered to move me after my brutal beating. I can smell the dried up blood surrounding me. The amount of it makes me wonder how I am still even alive.

“I’ll get you a facecloth, mum.” I slowly turn my head in confusion and find my beloved son standing over me. This is not the first time we have been in this situation. He often is my angel, my angel who scrubs my blood off the floor. I begin to sob uncontrollably as I try to hide my shame from my son. He just turns his head and goes to get my facecloth.

“À ghọ́ tàghìm?” I scream with tears rolling down my face. I can no longer control myself. I have let my son and I down. I am weak. I have let a man turn me into nothing but garbage!

“No more tears mum. It hurts my ears.” My son whispers ever so lightly. His voice is okra soup to my soul. He kneels down by my side and holds my hand. He then begins to wipe the blood from my face. I can see the pain in his eyes; such a young boy has already seen the darkness of the world. He continues to gently dab my face, occasionally stopping to rinse off the blood from the rag in the sink. When he is finished, I grasp his arm tightly.

“Pack your things my son,” I say with all the strength in my body. “We are going home.” James gives me a smile, a smile that you would give someone when you feel sorry for them.

“Mum, we are already home,” he says with kindness.

James

“Mum, we are already home,” I say with love. I feel bad for mum. Dad hits her so hard sometimes. I think Dad was a football player when he was in high school. Maybe that’s where he got his strength from. Sometimes I pretend I’m a superhero, and I can rescue her. Dad drinks this drink that makes him really crazy and strong. When he drinks it, he’s like a villain from one of my cartoons. Mum stands up and shakily walks to her bedroom. I watch her fall on her bed. I hope she has a good nap. I start looking around me. Mum made a mess on the floor. But she told me to pack my things. I wish I had ten arms, so I could do a lot of things at once. I tiptoe into the sleeping room. Mum is snoring. Mum sounds like a car when she snores. I grab my clothes from under mum’s bed and put them in my school bag. I also grab my truck. Dad won’t be happy about that. I hope Dad doesn’t come with us. I hear the door open. I think Dad is home.

Adamma

I think I hear him opening the door. A part of me dies inside because I don’t think I can survive another beating. I look around the bedroom and I see James in his bed taking refuge under his ripped blanket. I begin to sing my favorite nursery rhyme from when I was young, hoping it will stop him from crying.

“Onye mere hwa nebe
akwa
Egbe mere hwa nebe
akwa
Weta uziza wets ose
Weta ngaji nkuruofe
umu nnunu aracha ya
Eh! Eh! amaghim onye
owu”

“Adamma, where the fuck are you?” He hollers as loud as he can. I can see the door knob of the bedroom twisting, and I can hear a scream slip from my lips. James begins to cry.

James

Dad is looking for mum. His boots thump all over the trailer. I don’t like dad’s boots because they are loud and scary. Dad starts to turn the door. The door slams open and makes a loud noise. I don’t like loud noises. Dad scares me so much I have an accident. Dad is holding something in his hand. It is something I saw in the cop shows on the TV when it used to work. They would shoot the bad guys with it. I wish a cop would get my dad. My dad is a bad guy. Dad tells me to get out of the room. He picks me up and hits me like he’d hit Mama. He throws me into the hallway really hard. I hit the wall. I hear a bang. I have another accident. I hear a scream. I start to run. I hear another bang. The tears in my eyes make it hard to see. I run out the door. It’s raining outside. My gym teacher told me I am a fast runner, so I run as fast as I can. I think my dad is chasing me because I heard the door open. I hear Dad scream for me. I don’t stop running, I think I dropped the truck. I hear a bang. I fall face first on the ground. I can’t move. Maybe Dad shot me like one of the bad guys, because I’m a bad guy, too.
The Airfield
By Gavin LaFleur
RHAM High School

Now, to start off, this is not a sad story about someone dying, or a happy one with a person being born or overcoming fear. It’s just a story about a place I like to go. This place may not seem big to everyone, it’s literally just an airfield across the street from my grandparents’ house. But, over the years, it’s grown to be my favorite place.

At my grandparent’s house, it was never like a visiting session, one where you sit down and have coffee and talk about whose car broke down or who is running for president. It was just a “go and do your own thing kind of deal,” one where I never really talked much to my grandpa. But that all changed with the airfield.

It was a place where my brother, my grandpa, and I could just go, and talk, and get away from politics, from gossip, from everything.

I remember the long walks, mostly in the wintertime, when it was 20-something degrees out and snowing, as we froze off our fingers and soaked our sneakers trudging through snow and frozen ground. In fact, they were the perfect days to sit on the couch watching TV or playing video games, but we still went. After a while, it became a tradition; one that we had to do, yet also chose to do.

I also remember seeing the old trash pit from teenage parties, under the big tree house which was just a fat tree with a couple of planks of wood stolen from Home Depot poorly nailed to it.

And I remember the creepy old shed littered with “Do Not Trespass” signs and cameras and junked cars that we had to go and look through every time. And I remember the old deer skeletons and carcasses ripped apart by coyotes that just seemed cool and could never be taken back because if they were, then my grandpa would be sleeping on our couch for a while.

And I also remember standing at the edge of that overgrown dusty little landing strip, in the sweaty hot summer sun, watching many small planes going off and roaring past our heads, taking up skydivers, and helicopters buzzing by carrying their small drones for miles.

But the thing I do not remember is the conversations themselves. That was the great part about this little airfield in the middle of nowhere. The point was to go out there and talk, and that was just what we did, but it wasn’t a place where we had to come back with stories to tell about our adventures. It could be enjoyed and forgotten all in the same place.

And yet every time we went back there, there were more stories to tell, and more memories to be forgotten.

The truth is that I grew up on that airfield, because while the conversations are forever lost, the times spent with my grandpa will be with me for the rest of my life.

The Heart of the Burren
By Mary Grace O’Neil
RHAM High School

When I see my grandpa, I see Ireland.

His blue eyes are like the Irish skies on a clear day.

Ireland follows him around wherever he is. It can be heard in his brogue, or seen in his clothing. My grandpa has always talked about his life growing up in the small village of Bellharbour in the town of Ballyvaughan, deep in the Burren Mountains of County Clare. He speaks of it with a passion. When my grandpa came to America over sixty years ago, he brought a piece of Bellharbour with him.

Then, I became a part of Bellharbour too.

It was a cool and breezy night down by Galway Bay. The stars glowed above the looming Burren Mountains behind me. The Burren Bar was down by the bay after a row of white thatched cottages, just across the lumpy narrow road. Walking towards the open door, the music could already be heard. People could be seen through the golden lit up windows dancing to the music.
Sitting there in the bar in Ballyvaughan after years of trying to imagine what Ireland would really be like, it was just as my grandpa had always talked about: he had always spoke of the talent my family had with music. It was the music I had listened to for so many years with my grandpa. It felt as though I was sitting back in my grandpa’s house of the Irish club.

The room was filled with the sound of the concertina and fiddle. The clicking of the keys, and the fiddle bow whizzed by. I was lost in the fast jigs and reels my family was playing. My eyes watched my grandpa’s fingers drum against the table. The bar was swelling with music and laughter and a drunk pair who had gotten up to dance.

I had never really appreciated where my family came from as much as I should have until the night in the Burren Bar. That night I felt a connection. I did not feel like just another tourist trying to experience Irish culture. It was the feeling of family and a second home. Watching my own family play the music I had only seen strangers play or heard on CDs was an experience I would keep as a treasure in my heart. It was as though the small bar was a beating heart, the music thumping, the glasses rattling and people from several countries enjoying themselves.

Music had brought people together that night, that simple wordless music was the heart of the Burren.

From showing us the small one room schoolhouse where he went to school, Corcomroe Abbey where his parents are buried, the Bellharbour house where he grew up, to the night in the bar, the happiness never left my grandpa once, and it never left me.
Daughter’s Decade in Thirds
By Joyce Hida
Rockville High School

Six.
Licorice tar paved streets
Curl into melting hearth.
I chase glowing ember moments,
Feet hammer into soft earth,
Catch in jars,
Set free.
Mother watches me dance at noon.
And the sun trails her lips
Across fleshy cheekbones
And through the gap in my teeth.
I'm never leaving Mother.

Twelve.
Mother puts stones in my dessert.
Mother takes away my dessert.
Mother is sinner,
Says she sins to turn me saint.
I show her tongue, and cheek
I am spark
Stretch my tendrils to heavens,
Yearn to be fire.
I think Mother is water,
I think Mother knows nothing,
I turn Mother to tinder.
I wish to leave Mother.

Sixteen.
Licorice tar paved streets
Curl into melting hearth.
I cannot wander their endings.
Feet hammer into concrete
I open jars
Carrying faded embers.
Mother watches me sleep at dawn.
Worn as the linen she folds,
She smiles.
Presses lips against angled cheekbone,
And misses the gap between my teeth.

I don't want to do the leaving, Mother.
Not Your Hashtag
By Mechelle Horelick
Rockville High School

October 31st, Halloween.
That time of the year where you
Can dress as anything you want to be.
Costumes line stores left and right
In their own section, complete with
Makeup kits and fake blood.
One look and I saw it.
That damned costume.
“Sexy Indian Temptress” was what the
Costume was called.
On the cover was a white woman wearing a caricature of
A Native American dress complete with a feather headdress.

A few more steps and you have “Sexy Geisha,”
Red kimono going down mid-thigh
With cherry blossoms and dragons to complete
The Asian-ness of the costume.
Turn around and you’ll see a costume for a “G*psy Fortune
Teller,”
“G*psy” being a slur that should be avoided at all costs.
Yet another white woman on the cover,
Scantily dressed and a bandana on her head,
A costume based on a stereotype.
Moving on to the makeup kits!
You got yourself orange body paint, skeleton makeup,
And look at that! A sugar skull makeup kit!
As if the celebration of your deceased loved ones
Was meant to be a costume and not something of
Cultural significance.

Our cultures are not meant to be worn by you,
Dear white girls, as things in your wardrobe.
We are not your weekly makeovers,
Your Instagram pics,
Your YouTube views.
We are more than that.
Us girls, brown and black alike,
Are steel frames, rusting and damaged,
But still standing tall and proud.
We are bombarded by so many things.
Misogyny and racism walk hand in hand behind us,
Reminding us of the things we can’t escape.
We are dirty and ugly and unwanted,
And yet subject to fetishization
For the eyes of white men.

Our cultures are not meant to be
Watered down and commercialized.
Your reasoning that
“Cultures are supposed to be shared
Because America is a melting pot”
Is absolute B.S.
You have no idea what it is like to be treated as
Second-class in a country that you thought was
Better than your own.
Because while you wear our culture on your white skin
To Coachella and feel like you’re so “cultural,”
We minorities are forced to live a life
Different from your own.
We have to acknowledge the fact that we will be
Nothing more than second in line to you and your people
In a system made to debase and dehumanize us.

You wouldn’t understand no matter what you do.
You reap the sweet fruits that we sow,
While we are left with a bitter, barren land.
While you wear our very being down a runway, a place where
People like us are practically non-existent.
Your Instagram makeup looks of:
Bindis and henna to be Bollywood inspired and
Heavy eyeliner and ridiculous eyeshadow and you’re suddenly
an Arabian princess.
Your dreadlocks and “phat ass” don’t make you black,
No matter how many #WhiteGirlsDoItBetter trends in Twitter.
You pathetically attempt being “cool” or “hip”
While ignoring the racism in this country because apparently
“We are all one race. The human race.”

And people will call you out on your actions
Then you’ll go cry your white tears
While a legion of your rabid fans call us
Reverse racists for not letting you dress up
In our culture.
You nitpick and take the parts that you like
But you leave the ones you don’t find aesthetically pleasing.
You won’t take the insults shouted across the street as you walk.
Of being called chink, a Mexican-Asian hybrid,
Of being told to go back to Asia or Africa
Or India or whatever generalization they can make.
You won’t have to be told
To speak English because you are in America,
As if English was the first damn language here.

We will not share
Our culture,
Not when you bastardize it, bleach it,
And rename it to fit you!
Not when white-passing PoCs are
Afraid of practicing their cultures because they don’t want
To be thought as a cultural appropriator.
We are tired of trying to fit your
Eurocentric standards of beauty while you use
Our culture as your accessories.
We will not stand for this any longer.
I will not practice pretend peace just to be
Forgotten five minutes later.
The entirety of our identities has been left
Chopped and shredded and lost in history books,
Ignored to focus on the
Conquests of your people.

White allies,
Thank you for knowing the difference between
Cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation.
But please, dear white girls,
Enough with this foolish behavior.
You cannot take parts in our culture
And not take the entire thing— internalized hatred included.
We will no longer be your
Unappreciated well of ideas.
We will no longer be
Silent, for we will cry into the
Night about this injustice.
And we will not be your
Makeover and wardrobe sources any longer.
If I Were to Have a Daughter

(Inspired by Sarah Kay)
By Anisa Guess
Public Safety Academy

Shaking in her all-black, shell-top Adidas, she plants her sweaty palms on the cool surface of the porcelain sink, with a stomach full of regret and worry. She stares at her reflection, looking deep into auburn eyes that are swimming in pools of tears. Her mascara runs like ink against her parchment skin. She can recall every warning and scolding her parents ever gave her so clearly that she can almost hear it echoing against her thick skull like the deep bass of an African drum, and no amount of hoping or wishing on shooting stars can expel the dark thoughts running through her mind. She tries to recount the steps that led her here, to pinpoint the exact moment she went wrong, but all that comes to mind is her worrisome mother, her features faded by time into an unrecognizable blur. She stares into the eyes of her reflection and makes a vow:

If I were to have a daughter, I will protect her. I will make sure she isn’t a child of circumstance or stereotype. My daughter will be a warrior, her eyes will be wide and kind, her hands will be small, yet strong, and I will teach her how to use them in battle. I will teach her to do as I say and not as I do, for I am not an example. I will vow to never let her sleep angry with her mother or act out of spite. I will teach her her history: Her great grandmother was twenty-one and pregnant raising three fatherless kids, her grandmother was pregnant at seventeen, and now her mother two months shy of sixteen, with no family or a father for her baby, shaking in her cheap sneakers in a gas station bathroom afraid that she has made the same mistake.

I will teach her the faults in our choices and pray she never makes them, even though I know she will, for the apple never falls far from the tree. I will teach her not to follow the smoke to find the boy lost in the fire; you cannot help him. Although your hands are strong, they are small, and when you throw them out into the world to catch love, you will come back with bruises.

I will show her how to stretch her fingers across pages, over borders, and around the edges of the world. I will remind her that things will always find a way to slip through the gaps, and the farther you stretch yourself, the bigger the gaps will be. I will teach her that she should never let any man into her domain or let him make her feel as though she needs him, and I pray that she never meets a man who has the audacity to invite himself into her. If I am to have a daughter, I vow to accept the great honor bestowed upon me. From the day the flower bud of my anatomy blooms into life, allowing a child to fall from my body, I vow to be her Mother.

She looks away from the mirror, feeling the wind come through the open window to cool her tear stained cheeks and bring her back to reality. The timer on her phone lets out a piercing ding, letting her know her time is up. She braces herself and begins to count from ten; her shaking hands snatch the test from the counter, gripping it for dear life, as she feels the walls start to close in around her. Three ... Two ... One ...

Over and Over Again

By Elizabeth Chew
Rockville High School

James

He could no longer remember a time when his body did not demand the constant inhale and exhale of cigarettes and weed. The prick of the needle in his forearm from black market drugs made him feel complete. He wanted to feel anything at all because he had been running away from what had kept him filled with something other than complete numbness. It had been a constant struggle getting out of bed in the mornings without Grace’s warmth beside him, and knowing that she did not want him with her anymore made it even worse.

When he got out of bed, the sky was a cloudy gray, but it did not matter. He would only darken it even more with every puff of smoke released from his lips, killing himself slowly, possibly doing the same to a passerby. It was a sort of torture to live ten minutes away from her, but he needed every ounce that was given. Everything that had happened between the two was entirely his fault and now was the time to let her live happily. That was all he ever wanted for her, to be happy, and that was why he left. Leaning against the dirty brick wall of his cheap apartment, he leaned his head back and looked up at the clouds. They were dark, and rain was ready to pour from them, but he stayed against the graffiti-laced wall and took another drag as it started to storm.
Grace

The weight on her ribs disappeared days ago, and she was now breathing easily as she sat on a lounge chair on the deck, staring blankly ahead at the lawn of her once shared house. She kept a gentle hand on her pregnant stomach, tenderly rubbing in a circular motion, as though she could soothe her baby from the outside. Yet, she always stayed hesitant when doing so. It was also his baby, and she didn’t want to remember him because it always hurt to do so. Everything had been cheerful as he used to comfort her and make sure everything was okay, but then he was once again introduced to drugs, and now she no longer knew where he was. Images flashed through her mind of memories from before, but thinking about them always made her feel worse. Yet, she wanted to feel that way because every petty argument was her fault. He had been struggling with his addiction for so long, and she got tired of it. Every time he relapsed she chastised him for it when all he wanted to do was to recover, and now he was gone. She didn’t even have the bravery to pick up her phone and call him, but yet neither did he. Had he forgotten all about her?

“I know your father isn’t here anymore, but we won’t need him, little girl. I still love him, you know. I still think of him every day, but I can’t imagine he does the same anymore. This is why I’ll have to love you twice as much, and I’m sorry if it isn’t enough,” she whispered, picturing nothing but his gentle personality and bouncy curls.

She sighed, continuing to look at her backyard as the sky started to drizzle. She didn’t run into the rain anymore because that was always something she had done with James, but now he was gone and there was no longer a reason to. When the thunder erupted, sharp pains flowed through her and she gripped onto the arm of the chair, a moment that took nine months to happen.

James

It was a full downpour, and it soaked his clothes as he stood outside, taking it all in: the way the raindrops would land on his skin, the smell and excitement of it all. He had always been a fan of thunderstorms, the nature of them in their entirety, but he loved them even more when Grace said they reminded her of his piercing blue eyes. He remembered her chestnut hair, and the way she would carry the faint scent of cinnamon on her skin. She used to make him feel like he was worth something, that he was more than the guy who sang at local coffee shops for money because he dropped out of college. In their last months together, she always said he would never amount to anything, and as always she was right. He was a man heading nowhere inside of a town filled with nothing, and for once he truly felt the part.

But she was different, always looking for more, always being the bright visionary in his life. Making something out of herself was a personal goal of hers, and she ruined it all by choosing him out of the seven billion more qualified people in the world. He thought back to when he used to be enough for her in a time lost between the smashing of dishes and endless fights, and he questioned if she was ever truly happy with him. Lowering her standards by loving him was the worst mistake she ever made, and he allowed it because he was selfish. Letting out a sigh and pulling the lighter she had taken away numerous times out of his pocket, he set fire to the tiny killer, inhaling its toxins despite the downpour. A phone call interrupted his next drag, and he dropped the cigarette, starting to run towards the local hospital a few blocks away.

Grace

Sweat fell down her forehead as she endured another contraction, her mother now returning, after making a quick phone call, to hold her hand encouragingly. She had been withstanding immense amounts of pain for the last hour, but she could only think of her and her baby staying in the same hospital he had been treated in numerous times for overdosing. Reliving those memories had become a terrible habit of hers, but she couldn’t help herself.

“I called him,” her mother said, softly, brushing back a few strands of hair behind her ear.

She looked at her mother, her face wearing a scowl but the mixed feelings of dread and excitement filling her. It had been a little over nine months since he had been gone, and a few months longer than that since a friend of his introduced him to his old addiction. “I don’t want to see him,” Grace said finally, but regretting the foul taste of those words as soon as they escaped her lips.

“You need him,” her mother stated, offering a sympathetic smile. She sighed and nodded, her hand offering her baby a gentle touch as she covered her stomach before another contraction rippled through her.

James

Running through the rain for the last half hour had left his golden brown curls wet and clinging to his skin. He was tired, but he had been tired for the entirety of the last year where he was becoming old, reminiscing in tattered memories. Fathered by a mix of pills and narcotics and poisons he did not know how to be a father himself. It was impossible to face the sight of Grace, knowing all the hardship he had put her through, but he continued to run faster than his tarnished lungs could take him, away from the now soaked cigarette lying on the ground.
Tears collected in her eyes as she held her small baby in her arms, but she could only picture James as she did. She was practically a copy of her father, and that made everything worse, knowing that despite her mother’s phone call, he still would not come. “It’s just you and I, little girl,” she whispered softly, “but we’ll make it out there. I promise.”

“She looks just like him,” her mother acknowledged.

“I know,” she sighed, “but I can’t afford to think like that.”

Holding her baby closer to her chest, she heard footsteps outside the door, stopping once she caught sight of his blue eyes. She studied the changes in his features as he gaped at her and his new baby. Now thinner, he was wearing a slight scruff, his bright blue eyes a dull color as there were mixes of a cobalt etched in, showing the change in him. She wanted nothing more than for him to walk inside, but he stayed behind the closed door, looking so absolutely broken as he stared at her. Despite the fact that her eyes softened, signaling that she wordlessly apologized and was begging for him to walk into the room, he looked down, away from the eyes he hated and pulled out his lighter, pressing another cigarette to his lips.

When he locked eyes with her all he could feel was the guilt. Pain colored those emerald eyes, and he hated it. He hated the fact that he could no longer love her as he had before, but he also knew that if he entered the room all of their lives would be worse. Gripping onto the doorknob, his hand’s knuckles slowly faded from their tainted white, quickly turning into a flushed pink once he pulled away. Exploring the expression she wore on her face, he tried to decipher if she forgave him or not, but she only looked broken. Her eyes had mellowed at him, a signal he remembered from so long ago that she was close to breaking down and crying. Instead of facing her tears, he turned around and pulled out his lighter. Pressing the cigarette to his lips, he forced himself to forget her over and over again with every inhalation of smoke.

**Abortion Requires Fetal Consent: A Satire**

**By Vy Dinh**

**South Windsor High School**

In light of the Senate’s decision to pass a bill to defund Planned Parenthood in October 2015, we can all agree that this was the most necessary legislation the Senate passed last year, especially considering no government funding has been spent on abortions since 1976. Opponents of Planned Parenthood clearly pose an utterly reasonable argument that Planned Parenthood needs to be defunded because it legally sells aborted fetal tissues to medical researchers—a horrible alternative to just throwing the aborted fetus away. These opponents also completely disregard the other services that Planned Parenthood provides, such as healthcare for women—unnecessary, considering the government spends $500 million on women's healthcare annually, which is approximately $3 for each woman per year, and 13% of working American women receive paid leave; free STD testing—outrageous, seeing as fewer than one-third of Americans get tested, out of which only 110 million are treated with STDs; and sex education—shocking, since the American sex ed curriculum, which is required in 22 states, is so extensive that it consists of preaching at students to practice abstinence for the rest of their lives.

In order to eliminate this injustice against fetuses, I propose to have the Senate pass another bill to require fetal consent for abortions. Any mother who needs an abortion will be required to get a consent form signed by her fetus before she is able to abort it. There is no reason why anyone would object to this proposal since after repealing the bill that defunded Planned Parenthood, it would take the Senate another several months to get a new legislation passed. Refunding Planned Parenthood would be pointless because they would just use this money to provide free abortions, STD testing, and sex education to those who cannot afford these services and have no other resources to rely on. The advantages of my proposal make it very clear that it would succeed in ensuring the fetuses’ rights and neglecting women’s rights to their own bodies.

Since life begins at conception and unborn fetuses are human beings who have the rights that every human being has, allowing them to decide whether they want to be aborted and asking that they give their consent would ensure their right to freedom of speech. It would prove that the decision in Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion, and the Fourteenth Amendment, which gives women equal protection and protects their rights to their own bodies, are unconstitutional and should be overturned. It would also make sure that the government spends no more than $500 million a year on women’s healthcare; $3 per woman is more than sufficient considering women are not getting paid leave so they can work all year round to pay for their own healthcare.
Requiring fetal consent for abortions would establish that if a young woman were to become pregnant, she should accept the responsibilities that come with having a child. This means these women have the responsibility to drop out of school and work two jobs to provide for their babies. Since women who undergo abortions are at risk for psychological damage, especially depression, this proposal would ensure that no woman ever become depressed even if they had to give up their education and sell themselves to labor. It would also prevent the elimination of the fetus’s potential contributions to society in the future. The mothers of popular culture icons such as Tim Tebow, Celine Dion, Cher, and Justin Bieber all considered undergoing abortions before deciding to have their babies. If all women keep their babies, there is clearly a very high chance that all of their children will become famous singers and athletes.

Since there is absolutely no reason anyone would object my proposal to require fetal consent for abortions, those who oppose it are too closed-minded to see these advantages. They might argue that women would not be able to undergo abortions because they would not be able to obtain the consent of the fetus, thus preventing them from getting abortions and violating their rights to their own bodies. Women are utterly wrong to claim that their fetus is a part of their own bodies because the fetus is its own human being as soon as conception occurs. Therefore, fetuses must be required to give their consent since their mothers do not have the right to decide on their behalf. Others might believe that the Senate would not pass this proposal because the government does not have the power to regulate what women can do with their own bodies. They must understand that in order to ensure that everything is done legally, the government is indeed authorized to control every aspect of every citizen’s life.

Does society truly believe that the well-being of an unborn fetus is more important than the well-being of a living woman? I am not pregnant with a child. If I were to have a child, I would have the stability and resources I need to raise it. I would have access to resources besides Planned Parenthood to ensure the health and development of myself and my baby. I would not have to make the painful decision whether to abort my baby or to keep it and throw away all the aspirations I’ve ever had for my own future. Because I would not have to abort it, I would not need to get consent from my fetus. Although my proposal would not apply to me, it would save the lives of those who have no other choice but to resort to abortion and have to somehow find a way to pay for the abortion now that Planned Parenthood is defunded.

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**Absentee**

By Kaitlyn Tonkin

Rockville High School

*A mother should be there to talk to her daughter, to help her pick out outfits, to get her through fights with her friends.*

I was three years old when I left my parents. Well, it was more I was taken away from them. I don’t remember the day, I don’t remember how old Maddie, my sister, was, but I know what happened. It was like any ordinary day: Mom got us ready for school, and Dad got ready for work. Maddie was only a few months old, I assume four or six months old, so she needed all the attention to get ready. I don’t remember that morning at all; perhaps it was so traumatic that my brain erased the whole memory of it, fortunately. I don’t recall knowing anything was really wrong with our life. I had two parents; they seemed to love each other, even though they never did get married. I had a baby sister; my parents had two daughters that they got to call theirs. We had two dogs, a cat, and a fish tank—we had the life that I couldn’t even imagine now.

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*She’s supposed to be there to hold her daughter when she cries, to wipe her tears. She’s supposed to be there to talk about boys, or girls, to gossip. Be there for her little girl.*

My days were filled with preschool while mom and dad worked. Mom was a social worker, funny to think about that now, and Dad worked for a window and door company. They made good money and they each worked one job, contrary to now. My parents never told me things were bad; they never told me that Mommy had a problem, and she never seemed to. She would make dinner for us every night, spending hours in the kitchen just to satisfy her family. She would peel potatoes as I sat on the counter, admiring her culinary skills. Although it wasn’t much, to my three-year-old mind, it was everything. Each night we had a home cooked meal sitting in front of us. Tank and Jake, our dogs, sat at our feet begging for food as Jasper, our cat, slept soundly in a hiding place. Maddie sat in her high chair pulled close to the table as the four of us ate. We were a happy family and nothing could be wrong.

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*I don’t know what a mother is. To me, it’s someone who is incompetent and ignorant. Someone who cares more about breaking the law than keeping her daughter safe.*
I had a pink, plastic Barbie jeep with pink and purple flower stickers that I would drive around the yard as daddy mowed the lawn, or when mommy worked in the garden. I would drive all around the yard as Tank, our huge Rottweiler, who was my favorite, laid in the sun. Maddie was taking a nap in her room upstairs in the house while mom prepared lunch. It was the common activity for me each weekend.

I was having a great time, nothing seemed off. Then I heard sirens in the distance, which was normal. The street we lived off of was busy; it wasn’t rare to hear those noises. And it wasn’t too weird when I saw a few police cars drive down the street. The most it made me do was stop and look, and that’s what I did. I stopped driving my jeep and I looked up. When I looked up, they were stopped in front of my house. Normal families don’t have this happen. I knew something was wrong, but I was too afraid to ask. The men went into my house, and out came my mom. Her arms were behind her body, a weird metal clapsed her hands together. I had no idea where she was going. After the police parked outside of our house, a few fire trucks showed up. The sirens were loud, the trucks were big, and the men seemed really mean. That’s when I started crying. Mommy was being taken away by big scary men in loud trucks, and that has lived with me forever.

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She’s someone who would rather get high than see her daughter smile.

Maddie was hooked into her car seat, kind of. I was in mine, and we were off to daycare and preschool for the day. Daddy had already left for work; today was Mom’s day to bring us. She seemed different today. I don’t know why, but she was just different. I was dropped off at preschool; the teachers were watching her closely, although I never noticed that. Maddie was in her car seat, as mommy carried her inside to drop me off, and back to the car so she could go to daycare. But, Maddie was barely even in her car seat, she wasn’t strapped into it, and she could have easily fallen out. I thought Mommy was just having a bad day today.

While I was in school, learning and playing with my friends, a police car followed mommy to Maddie’s daycare. She was arrested again, a DCF representative took Maddie, and I was soon taken as well. Mom had done too many things wrong, people had been watching her for a while, waiting for the time when she would fuck up again. Things weren’t the same after that.

Maddie and I were taken away from Daddy and Mommy; we weren’t allowed any clothes or toys. The both of us were not allowed to be with just Daddy because he had let this go on for too long when he could have done something, but his love for Mommy surpassed his ability to do the right thing. He fought hard for the both of us, but to no avail, and we ended up with Nana and Pop. I guess that was better than the alternative, which would have been foster care, split up from one another. Nana and Pop essentially became our foster parents. They provided for us as if we were their own children, even though we weren’t.

Maddie and I spent three long years with them; to me it was never ending. Between fights, fits of crying, and trips to counseling offices, I hated living with them. During the three years with Nana and Pop, we could visit with Daddy. It was, of course, in a controlled place, in case he tried to take us back somehow. It seemed like our weekends ending up being filled with monitored visits.

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A mother is not required to stick with her daughter, and she didn’t. But, Daddy did and he tried. That’s more important than someone who failed.

Once we left Nana and Pop, we moved in with just Dad. It was a small, two-bedroom apartment. We had downgraded tremendously from our almost perfect life. Jake had died sometime before we were taken away, Jasper was somewhere with mom, and Tank lived with our uncle. We had lost everything. Dad barely could support us; our grandparents bought us beds to sleep in, toys to play with, and clothes to wear.

Maddie and I fought a lot in our new house; I was still upset at the world for some reason, even though I had my dad back. I was a six year old filled with anger and anxiety. I feared going to school each day, and I never wanted to be left alone. I made new friends and tried new things that I didn’t have the luxury of doing at home.

Soon after we lived with Dad, we started seeing Mom again. She was out of jail, or prison, or wherever she ended up. I don’t know where she lived, but we got to see her at the mall for a few hours. To keep us happy, and to keep us from hating her, she would somehow give us clothes or gifts each time we saw her. I didn’t think about how she had nothing and there was no way that she could possibly pay for things for us.

***

She would rather her daughter play the mother role, for her to cook, and clean, for her to live life as an adult, not as a child.

It was a regular mall visit with Mom. This time Maddie and I were able to go alone with her. She had stayed out of trouble for enough time that she was granted unmonitored time with us. We walked through stores, hardly buying anything, just shopping with our eyes. We were probably giving her ideas for Christmas or birthday presents. We had gone through a few stores before reaching Justice, Maddie’s favorite store. I had just grown out of all the sparkles and sequins stuff, while Maddie was just beginning to like it. We walked around as Maddie picked out a few outfits. At the checkout line, Maddie had asked for some sunglasses. Everything had been paid for by now, and we were just about to leave. Mom grabbed the glasses, tossing them into the bag as we walked out.
That was the first time that I noticed her bad habits first hand. To think that stealing wasn’t even the worst of them is sickening. After being with her the day she stole the three dollar sunglasses, I never really felt comfortable being alone with her. Mom continued on with her bad habits: drug addiction, stealing, and lying, for many years, and it still continues to this day. Stories were often made up. I don’t know what was the truth and how much was a lie, looking back on it now. There were days when she was high while we visited her at her house. Four kids: my two half-brothers, Maddie, and I, and she still managed to slip into a misjudgment mindset and get high off her drugs.

As I grew older, her actions affected me much worse than they used to. She was no longer the perfect mother I loved so much. She was an addict who destroyed her life and relationships with her daughters. I thought there was hope for her, I thought she was getting better. I knew that she had done wrong, yet I still let her in and loved her.

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By definition, a mother is:
1. A female parent
2. A woman in relation to a child to whom she has given birth

It was an icy night, just after my winter chorus concert. Nana was able to go this time, usually she had missed them. It had already been a really harsh winter, and it was only mid-December. We said our goodbyes, Maddie and I went back into the house. I was tired and ready for bed, but I had to wait for Maddie to go to bed before I could. I was responsible for her tonight. Dad was working.

I had this instinct to look out the window, and that is when I saw Nana laying on the ground. She fell on the ice. I threw a jacket on with nothing other than a tank top on underneath, I had dress pants on as I pulled my winter boots on. They were the easiest thing I could grab. I ran outside and down to Nana even though it was extremely icy. We stayed by her side for the next two hours. Dad wouldn’t be home until 10:30, and she refused an ambulance. When Dad got home, he convinced Nana to go to the hospital. I was okay; I somehow wasn’t cold. I was worried about the person who was my mother for three years, not myself. After a few minutes it got real; the police officer came first. The moment I heard those sirens, I lost it. I had been fine for such a long time. I was shaking and crying, and I could not seem to catch my breath: a panic attack. Hearing those sirens, seeing the men who took away Mom for the first time eleven years ago, brought me back to my three-year old-self.

To this day, at age sixteen, it still is hard to hear those sirens and see the trucks and cars when it is an emergency that I am a part of. I still have a panic attack each time, somehow remembering the day she was taken away for the first time.

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She is supposed to hold her daughter, to watch her grow, no matter what the circumstances. She is the female figure her daughter is supposed to look up to and aspire to be.

Even after mom was taken away, I still didn’t think things were that bad in my life. Daddy loved us and I knew that Mommy did too, and that she would be gone for just a little while even though she had been taken away. I didn’t even know where she had gone, but I knew that she would be back soon. And she was. It wasn’t long before she was back home, and things were normal once again.

Today, I know why. She was a great liar and great at hiding what she needed to. It was as if she knew the police were coming to get her on that day. She cleaned the house, making it look immaculate; not a speck of dust was to be found. She was always cleaning, always ready to hide her secret. Once I was older and went to her apartment with her new husband, I realized this trick. She would always tell me to wait one second because she had to clean up something. I would always complain and tell her that there was nothing there, the house was clean, and that she needed to stop being such a perfectionist. Now I realize.

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Mother (noun)-
Synonym: Absence

It was the summer of 2013. Maddie and I were in the south, with our other grandparents and cousins, as usual. We had gone out with friends. It was supposed to be a fun night, and it was, until we got home. “Couple Leaves Children Unattended to Go Shoplifting” read the headline on the online newspaper. I was in denial. Even though her picture was there, with her name, I didn’t believe it. She couldn’t possibly have done that. But she did. It was the last straw for me. My baby brothers, at the time, were only five and three; she left them outside, at night, so that she could steal money and clothes.

It took a few months, but I stopped talking to her and stopped visiting her because of her stupid actions. She wasn’t my mother anymore. She didn’t possess mother qualities to me. She only gave birth to me, which is the only way she is my mother. I didn’t need her to be in my life while she stole, lied, and got high. So, she’s not. I need Dad and Maddie. I am the mother figure to Maddie, but that’s okay because Maddie does not need our ‘mother’. Dad does everything that he can to give his daughters the best life possible, and even though we don’t have a perfect life, we don’t have a bad one. Things could always be worse than they are. It’s not the ideal life, but it is the one we live and we have to deal with that.

My dad is the best person in my life. He went through just as much as we did. He lost the love of his life, as well as his children for three years, yet he still is doing what he can for my sister and me. For that, I am incredibly grateful and thankful.
Michael Li
Rise from the Forest and Spread Your Wings
Words often hide
In straight lines,
Densely packed together,
So close you can almost hear them
Gasping for breath.

A poem is their escape hatch,
Words lining up to flee
Past the walls,
fresh air kissing their faces.

A poem is the jailbreak,
Jubilant words jumping
across the page,
waving goodbye to tired conjunctions.

A poem is the crowded city streets,
The impenetrable forest,
The fairyland and the arctic sea.

Words run free,
Slipping across cobblestone streets or
Floating on icebergs or
Sitting atop thrones.

If you lean in close,
Breath a poem in,
You can almost hear the words
Sighing in relief.
When I was five years old,
I would sit with my mother and cut out
the coupons in the newspaper,
all spread out on the dining room table.
They tell me I couldn’t remember being on food stamps;
I was only a kid.
I remember shopping trips and
shaking white knuckles on the steering wheel.
Cutting milk with water,
cutting juice with water,
eating only mac and cheese, and
picking the marshmallows out of the off brand Lucky Charms.
It would always go bad in a few days.
We’d still eat it.
We would have breakfast for dinner because it was
cheap, and
my mother hated cooking.
Correction:
my mother hates cooking.
So, I learned how to make grilled cheese and French toast.
I learned how to steal food from the cafeteria.
It wasn’t hard because my friends always had leftovers, which is to say I begged them for it.
I knew we had enough at home, but we didn’t have pudding cups, and we didn’t have pretzels, and granola bars, and we never ever had fruit snacks.
I was caught in fifth grade with someone else’s lunch box.
I had already eaten half of it, so they called my mother, who had to call the other kids mother, and I got in trouble for lying, but not for stealing.

I had to learn to wear humiliation better after that,
learn to say I didn’t need it.
I called myself guilty.
The last time I stole something,
I was in sophomore year and trying to starve Myself.
It was an apple off my art teacher’s desk.
I wouldn’t let her offer it to me, So I took it after hours.
These days
I hide my food in the back of the pantry so I won’t eat it all, or won’t eat at all, people tell me there’s a difference.
These days
I scavenge for half eaten lunches with a beast’s eyes I haven’t unlearned.
Hunger is a strange beast.
Makes strange beasts of us.
Teaches us how to howl, and hide, and bury, how to crack open bone and make nothing left feel like a feast you should be lucky to attend.
Hunger follows you even when full bellied, even quenched mouth.
Hunger will always be there behind you if you are given a reason to fear it.
Hear No Evil
By Brianna Perna
Glastonbury High School

“—Hudson, are you listening to me ...?” Hudson whipped his head around to face the speaker—his teacher. For a moment, she stared at him with a look of bewilderment in her eyes, then scrunched her nose in what he assumed was irritation.

_How bothersome._ “Pay attention to what’s going on in class, please.” _They aren't paying me enough to deal with this bullshit._

Hudson winced slightly, but nodded. As she walked away, he realized there was so much he wanted to tell her. He wanted to tell her that he _was_ paying attention, that he could easily recite the laws of sines, and that “bullshit” wasn’t a pretty word. Hey, Miss Walker, no _wonder_ you became a math teacher! Oh, he’d say something just like that, something cold and sardonic, just like her. Something biting enough to make his classmates, who, for the most part adored her, heads’ spin. This, of course, was because they didn’t know how she really felt about them.

But Hudson knew. He knew Miss Walker absolutely _despised_ being a high school teacher, and that she had this hammered-in tendency to silently judge her students based on their ethnic backgrounds. She had never said this out loud, or even made it remotely obvious through any brand of spoken subtext, but Hudson knew because he knew what she was thinking. Actually, he knew what _everybody_ was thinking. Completely unbidden, the thoughts of anybody in his surrounding area flooded through his mind nonstop. It was the kind of power Freud would have sold his left arm for (though he’d be disappointed at the realization that humans focus on more than just sex), but was never graciously cursed with.

In short, Hudson could read minds.

He wasn’t sure how it started, but he was willing to bet his college fund that God (if He was even real) got a kick out of making his life a living, breathing hell. One day, when he was around six, maybe, he started hearing people’s innermost thoughts. The first instance of it happened when he was sent home from school in a fit of tears after twisting his ankle in a failed attempt to jump off the swing-set mid-flight. His mother, who’d rushed out of work to pick him up, hastily got him into the car and pressed an ice pack to his injury. “It’s ... It’s going to be all right, honey ...”

_You’ve got to be shitting me. This brat won’t stop crying, and now I’ve gone and missed my interview ..._

Hudson was shocked. His mother’s mouth didn’t move, yet he heard her voice yelling and swearing in his head. Sniffling, he told her he was sorry he was such a brat, and that maybe there would be more inter-voos for her tomorrow.

There was a brief moment of complete silence before she let out the worst scream he’d ever heard.

Ever since then, he found himself being able to hear the thoughts of others. His friends, his family, his teachers, and even random passersby on the street that he’d never met a second time. He knew of their secrets, their interests, their aspirations, and even their deep-seated hatreds—all without knowing their names.

Just within his calculus class, he knew things he shouldn’t. He knew the quarterback of the varsity football team was struggling with an alcohol problem. He heard the volley of self-deprecation the girl sitting behind him would subject herself to every time she answered a question wrong. He could almost _feel_ the all-encompassing anxiety the cheerleader across from him was experiencing over thoughts of her friends finding out she was gay. But those were just a few examples—an insignificant fraction. In reality, he was being hit with a whole lot more than just a few scattered thoughts at a time. It was more like an endless stream of hundreds upon thousands of little desires or extravagant dreams, and everything in between. It was to the point where he wasn’t sure if he was capable of having his own thoughts anymore; his brain was far too busy processing everybody else’s.

But he wasn’t going to let that stop him. Not this time, anyway. It was about thirty seconds to the bell that would signal the blessed end of calculus, and Miss Walker decided to make the kid who’d just come in from Syria her next victim. “Answer the question, please,” she demanded, tapping her foot impatiently against the tile floor.

The kid froze up and squeezed his eyes shut, his whole body trembling violently. _Help me_. Before he could properly answer the problem, the bell rang. Biting his lip, the boy quickly rose from his seat, clumsily gathered his belongings and rushed out of the classroom.

_Disgusting. This is what our education system is paying for? Hell, if they want me to teach these animals, they’ll have to try learning how to be decent human beings._

Without skipping a beat, Hudson locked eyes with the calculus teacher. Maybe something inside of him snapped. Maybe he was just tired of this old hag’s consistent, unfiltered bigotry. Or maybe there was a part of him that wanted to hear a scream terrible enough to rival his mother’s. “You first.”
Musée de la Vie
By Michael Melnik
Glastonbury High School

There are several galleries within the Musée de la Vie. The entrance to these galleries looks like the facade of the Roman Pantheon; here, however, the white marble entablature is held up by obsidian columns. I have passed between them many times, but never before with what is in my pocket now.

Taking a deep breath, I walk to the first gallery. This gallery has a warm feeling and calls forth images of misty pine forests and tall mountains. The aura of a new world filled with wonders to discover takes hold. At the far end of the gallery hangs a crayon drawing with a baby blue frame. Inside the drawing Thomas the Tank Engine is carrying a young boy and his mother. She is reading a Harry Potter book to the boy, who is holding a Finding Nemo stuffed animal in his arms and appears to be falling asleep. The building in the background is the Mohonk Mountain House, and I know it holds a special place in the heart of the young boy. It was the place where he learned to really use his imagination, and where he formed his earliest memories.

Smiling, I pull myself away from the picture and head down another hall with a polished wooden floor. I reach into my pocket, making sure I still have what I need.

The air feels cooler in the next gallery. The picture here is a pencil sketch in a twisted and gnarled wooden frame. The pencil sketch depicts the same boy, now a few years older, sitting on a large rock with a tall staff in one hand and in the other a book, The Warriors. This time, he seems to be reading the book himself. The Warriors is a book series, which, among others, inspired the young boy to create and act out his own stories in his backyard. I look to the staff, the first of many sticks and swords used to represent characters from the boy’s stories. There are several other sticks and swords propped up against a stone wall behind the boy. Each stick representing a different character that the boy would act as. The one he is holding belongs to Tentalix, the first character he ever created. What memories that staff holds …

I want to keep looking at the picture, but I must move on, so I head through another hallway.

This hallway feels somehow heavier than the last. The candles in this new gallery give off a luminescent glow. This gallery seems like it can’t decide whether it wants to be bright and warm, or gloomy and cold. The walls are the same obsidian as the columns in the entrance while the floor is the same white marble. There are brilliant chandeliers hanging from the golden ceiling, but the light they give off seems dampened and gives the gallery a dimly-lit gloom. The picture here is a magnificent painting that seems to be split between impressionistic and naturalistic.

The painting itself is split in half by a grey fog, which separates two identical young men. The man on the left is sitting on the same rock from the previous picture. At his feet are several pieces of ripped paper. The words “The Seals of Divinity” and “The Imanian Chronicles” can be seen on a few of them while others look like sheet music. The pieces closest to the fog look like sheet music for a piece called Pines of Rome. The young man is reading Les Miserables, but his gaze is focused on the papers at his feet. In particular, he looks solemnly at the one entitled “The Imanian Chronicles.” I feel a sense of longing as I look at the broken piece of the staff from the previous picture next to the paper.

Sick of looking, I shift my gaze to the other half of the painting as I feel inside my pocket. Here the same young man is sitting on a stool holding a pair of navy blue mallets and surrounded by several percussion instruments. I raise my gaze to the stage behind the young man. There’s clearly a production of the musical Les Miserables going on; a man waves a giant red flag from atop the barricade. The young man seems happier in this half of the painting, but then why does so much of the aesthetic in this gallery seem to mirror the emotions of the left half of the painting? I feel a sense of determination as I look at the painting as a whole and I quickly stride away to the final gallery.

The final gallery is white and unadorned. It almost feels like I’ve made a wrong turn into purgatory on my way. The final gallery is a completely sterile white room. The walls bring forth images of hospital waiting rooms, and on the far end of the gallery is a blank white canvas. I hurriedly approach it. I can feel my lips curling into a smile as I rummage in my pockets. I pull out three different objects. One is an even smaller piece of the staff from the previous two pictures; the second is a mallet identical to the pair the young man in the last picture was holding; the last is an ordinary pen. When I reach the canvas I begin to draw determinedly with my left hand, while my right holds the piece of the staff and the mallet together as two halves of one whole.
Domino Box
By Amira Ebrahim
Fairfield Warde High School

I came to the conclusion that his wrinkles were infinite. While sitting on the balcony, the desire to count them silently diminished. A newspaper stayed clutched in my hand, its edges losing their firmness. As far as I knew, my uncle and grandfather assumed I was just waiting until the return of my cousins. The same cousins who would swirl me away to play another invented game. While their assumptions held some truth, there was something else that had brought me to the balcony.

They were sitting face to face on white plastic chairs, and in between them stood a wooden table. Its elegance was barely holding with the scratches, bents, and layers of dust. That was the first time I had looked at that table, similar to how you would look at a treasure buried in plain sight. Seated amongst the dust there was a small box. The top was slanted to form a perfect half of a circle, while the interior was coated velvet. I recall imagining how nice it would look as a bed for one of my dolls. It truly was an enchanting design, and it was hard to imagine that such beauty had been crafted just for housing dominoes. They were spread across the table as the two men played their game.

My uncle's way of looking at the pieces was like that of my father. Eyebrows furrowed, iris scanning, and a mouth moving effortlessly. All concentration, all thought was brought forward on the table. Grandfather though was a completely different story. His eyes, crossed and shot red, were both nowhere and everywhere. That's the thing about how older people are looked upon. Once a certain age is met a new stage of existence opens that consists of just sitting around, waiting for the end. That life is only for the young. And when you're a twelve-year-old, you fall into this assumption, and you start to think that things like getting your first phone or buying something for the first time makes you an expert about the world. Life, though, has a way (a table, a box, a wise old man) of humbling a person. And as I sat on the balcony, it occurred to me that there is nothing more arrogant than a twelve-year-old.

That said, there were some things even my twelve-year-old self couldn't help but notice. Like that my Grandfather was like the leather sofa in the living room, but bent forward. I realized that he was in fact always bent over. And that his white hat was forever perched upon his rounded head along with the traditional galabaya* that was constantly flowing behind him. Suddenly, the wrinkles framing his face weren't the only things that were infinite. The balcony light brought my grandfather into perspective. There were many things about grandfather, about my guidu**, that were eternal.

My uncle's concentration was broken as he smiled and put down his last domino. With that, he shook hands with my grandfather, who grunted and told him good game. As he left, I turned back to my grandfather and saw his hands were clutched to the table as he looked out at the view from the balcony, where the children were running around with the raw Egyptian sun behind them. Somehow, I thought that this was not what he was seeing.

The next thing I knew I was sitting in the opposite chair and picking up dominoes while feeling my grandfather’s eyes watching me. When I looked up, I found him picking up his own dominoes. As the minutes progressed, I realized that the game was more complex than it looked. When my cousins came back, they found my grandfather laughing and me still sitting there, grinning, and losing by a long shot.

*Traditional dress shirt worn mostly by older men.
**Arabic word for grandfather.
I’ve never enjoyed being photographed or seeing pictures of myself; I wouldn’t even know where to find the family photo albums in my house. Maybe I’ve been too captivated by the fleeting present and the vast, malleable future, so that the past slips from my mind. But now, as I reach the end of high school, approaching college and the prospect of being an adult with disillusionment and bewilderment, I’ve found that there is something fascinating about the past, especially in solidified, photograph form. The future exists only in speculation, but the past is certain. Still, the ambiguity of the future, that never-ending web of possibilities, haunts photographs. There is an eerie stillness to pictures of the past that seems to capture everyone in the photo (even in photos of ourselves) as alien to us. We can remember the comfort of existing in that present, but whilst staring back at a fossil of ourselves in this present, the photograph seems foreign.

I found this picture and was captivated by its quiet stagnancy juxtaposed with the latent implication of change. In it, a seven year-old version of myself is on a bike in a vibrant autumn lawn, with my sister standing on a leaf-blanketed driveway. Of course, my physical appearance was one of the first changes I noticed, but I was even more struck by the change in my surroundings. That maroon, Japanese maple tree is no longer there, brought to death by countless brutal winters. Behind the basketball hoop, there is now a wooden swing hanging from a tree branch. The trash cans visible behind me are never put there anymore. Some of these changes are positive, some are more somber, and others don’t matter at all, but still, they all strike at something deep.

I can remember finding toads in that same colorful fall lawn, keeping them in a big, plastic, purple bucket filled with dirt, and supplying them with small insects that I assumed would please their palate. I can distinctly remember two toads that I found together, wandering aimlessly in the overgrown, emerald grass behind the swing-set in my backyard. I quickly snatched them up and carried them over to the bucket. One was small, lean, and youthful. Its movements were sharp and erratic, and it carried itself with a sense of anxiety. The other was plump, lethargic, and had only one eye. It would move only when completely necessary. Sometimes, it appeared to be agitated by its energetic counterpart, but generally it showed little interest in anything that happened in the bucket (which wasn’t much). It seemed quite elderly.

One afternoon, I went over to check on the toads and found the purple bucket lying on its side, probably knocked over by a gust of autumn wind. Interestingly, when I lifted it back up, both toads were still in the bucket, looking as if nothing had happened. The rest of the day, I wondered why they hadn’t left. They must have known that the ground, their freedom, was right in front of them. Or maybe they couldn’t tell? They just assumed the situation was the same, that they couldn’t escape and were walled in. Or did they know they could leave, but chose to stay?

I suppose I could imagine the one-eyed toad staying, but it seemed to me that the other one would surely want to leave. After all, it seemed to be in a constant state of trepidation while in the bucket, whereas the older toad almost looked to enjoy the languor of captivity. A couple of days later, I strolled into the back yard to check up on the bucket. It was a misty morning, and dew leapt from the grass and seeped into my shoes. What I found in the bucket was a bout four inches of rain water and the bloated corpses of two toads floating peacefully at the top of the water like buoys.

Recently, I’ve been thinking a lot about where my life is going. What do I want to study at college? What career makes sense to me? What will I do with myself when I’m on my own. There are so many possibilities, but none of them seem possible. After looking at this picture, though, and thinking about those two toads, who seemed unable to act independently, I’m not sure if any of that really matters. At least not in the way that we think it does. The inevitability of change in one’s life boils down to simple choices. We can accept the change and continue to exist in the vibrant, ever-new present, or we can cling to the warm yet stagnant past.
Honorable Mentions

Kindergarten

Raha Zaghi Boats Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Braydon Wang Jet Fighters Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Blake Boirie My Fat Cat Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Xavier Pfeffer Scooter Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Verity Lovett Komodo Dragon Glastonbury E. Hartford Magnet
Cara Jia Bears Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Luke Grasso How to Set the Table North Street School

Grade 1

Mia Longman Rainbow Braeburn Elementary School
Riya Banerjee The Shooting Star Museum Academy
Taya ChinSang Cat Lady and the Wishing Star Museum Academy
Ruthie Feltenberger Lucy Meets New Friends Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Sevannah Cauley Touch a Ray in a Touch Tank Glastonbury E. Hartford Magnet
Rory Myers Moe’s Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Kaylee Polnik What I Did in Disney Anna Grace Academy of the Arts
Elise Talbott All About Owls Braeburn Elementary School

Grade 2

Danielle Fisher Nature Makes My Heart Whole Squadron Line Elementary School
Sophia Caneira Idea Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Tessa Riloff Figure Skating Squadron Line Elementary School
Jennifer Chen A Clap of Wings Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Janalee Arroyo Mad Girl International Magnet School
Chloe Savastra The Haunted House Anna Reynolds Elementary School
Kylie Weber Fox Finds Friendship Ledyard Center School
Laniyah Simpson All About Taking Care of Babies Glastonbury E. Hartford Magnet
Maddie Hemmerich Beach Birthday Squadron Line Elementary School
Noah Schwarz The Laser Fun Quest Squadron Line Elementary School
Kate Spiesman All About Kittens Coventry Grammar School

Grade 3

Sophia Caneira My Little Angel Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Maeve McGinnis The Four Seasons Museum Academy
Emma Mulligan Ripples’ Best Friend Adventure Burr Elementary School
Erin Warden Catching Santa Reggio Magnet School of the Arts
Daniel Canestra My First Minecraft Day Glastonbury E. Hartford Magnet
Dylan Brown The Mathlete Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Aya Erik-Soussi The Cheese Sisters’ Missing Phones Bugbee Elementary School
Jakob Tottem The First Spirit Awakens Wells Road School
Maren Forrest The Life of Malala Yousafzai Squadron Line Elementary School
Maura Perry All About Soccer Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Akshita Ashokkumar Parasailing Squadron Line Elementary School
Tiago Barreira Frogs Glastonbury E. Hartford Magnet
Grade 4

Alexandra Peto  Match  Burr Elementary School
Gwendolyn Bye  My Hanukkah Recipe  Bugbee Elementary School
Mooku Thaw  A Poem of Rising  Museum Academy
Erez Fass  Cedar Tree  Bi-Cultural Day School
Kate George  Jubilant Joy  Pine Grove Elementary School
Jordan Lang  Lizzy Cruth  Bugbee Elementary School
Samantha Wisniewski  Mercy’s Wish  East Farms School
Aymara Soler  Florins and the Magic Flower  Montessori Magnet School
Stella Mahlke  Warrior  Sarah Noble Intermediate School
Charles B. Wamester  Three Cars Gruff  CREC Museum Academy
Alexander Hyams  The Exchange Student  Norfeldt Elementary School
Lily LaMorey  How Colors Came to Be  Bugbee Elementary School
Myles Fournier  The Fire  Montessori Magnet School
Sarah Skitton  The Flood  Montessori Magnet School
Taeya Allen  My Cat Lucy Looks After Me  Latimer Lane Elementary School
Jacob Cohen  Superstar Uncle  Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Hudson Wingate  Burr School Should Have Team Sports  Burr Elementary School
Kira Fazio  Stop Littering  Burr Elementary School
Alexandra Peto  The Cruel Truth  Burr Elementary School

Grade 5

Ian Liu  I Wish He Had Understood  Burr Elementary School
Sarah Kitley  Man in the Mirror  Ledyard Center School
Mitchell Petreccia  The Monster  Burr Elementary School
Nicole Tehrani  Fall  Bi-Cultural Day School
Chase Markham  No More, No Less  Burr Elementary School
Makena Culligan  A June’s Night  A June’s Night
Maddy Sweet  Cycle of the Clouds: A Nature Haiku  Greenwich Academy
Grace Bateson  Hope  Burr Elementary School
Jake Isakoff  Running the Distance  Central School
Delaney Grimaldi  Sadie the Hero  Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Meghan Gaffney  The Legend of the Starfish  Squadron Line Elementary School
Yazmin Pereyra  Here I Come  Montessori Magnet School
Aubrey Behling  Kidnapped  Squadron Line Elementary School
Sydney Norwell  Me  Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Reece Willison  Croc Hunting  Latimer Lane School
Jack Richter  Blindsided  Burr Elementary School
Jacqueline Schmeizl  My Wonderful Bedroom  Talcott Mountain Academy
Weston LaBrecque  Crossing the Dam  Center Road School
Meena Behringer  The Homework Debate  Greenwich Academy

Grade 6

Patti Kellogg  Cold  Squadron Line Elementary School
Jason Brown  I Got My Cat a Rocket  Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Sarah Suhail  A Vision for Humanity  West Woods Upper Elementary School
Saskia Zimmerman  Summer Night  Middlesex Middle School
Samantha Truszkowski  Trapped  Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Catherine Utzinger  The Escape from Hamburg (Excerpt)  Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Jesly Guo  Shadow Girl  Greenwich Academy
Jack Sherman  The Wolves  Central Elementary School
Alexander Morand  Little Migrant  Central Elementary School
Grade 6 (Cont’d)

Matthew Galiette  Mouse in the House  Memorial Middle School
Emily Senna  College Man  Gideon Welles School
Erin Pizzo  Goodbye Grandma  Gideon Welles School
Sary Baker  The Wreckage  Greenwich Academy

Grade 7

Kieran Yanaway  Deep  Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
Lauren Bula  Memories of You  RHAM Middle School
Ifthath Ahmed-Syed  The Real World of their Bedroom  Sage Park Middle School
Emily Weiner  The Soarer  Sage Park Middle School
Ariana Waterhouse  A Ray of Light  Sage Park Middle School
Camryn Howe  Elegantly Drifting  Sage Park Middle School
Craig Wilson Jr.  Iron Man  Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
Lilly Girling  Leaves Don’t Fall Up  Coleytown Middle School
Simar Grewal  Bleeding Heart  Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
Matylda Biskupski  Intertwined  RHAM Middle School
Elyza Bruce  Lunar Dahlias  Woodbury Middle School
Carson Foley  I Forgot the Eggs  RHAM Middle School
Noor Rekhi  The King and the Joker  Greenwich Academy
Claire Yuan  Her  Amity Middle School—Bethany
Caroline Fording  Seeing Through the Storm  Bedford Middle School
Madison Duplin  Bullied  East Granby Middle School
Elicia Estevez  Dear Roger Dean Kiser  Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

Grade 8

Ella Stanley  Listen to My Singing  Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School
Brant Hadzima  Our Little Town  Salisbury Central School
Victoria White  A Flash of Flame  Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Kara Mahoney  All I Know  Tolland Middle School
Grace Banning  Color Storm  Adams Middle School
Tessa Fieldman  Girl on a Swing  Middlebrook School
Haylee Scibek  Occupied Silence  Tolland Middle School
Stephanie Crocker  Leap of Faith  Leap of Faith
Sarah Davey  Bella’s Tail  Westbrook Middle School
Victoria Randazzo  Dark Losses  Mansfield Middle School
Jesus Rosa  The “Accident”  Mansfield Middle School
Franziska Lee  Midsomer Night’s Dream  Hamden Middle School
Tracy Lu  The Black Birds  Amity Middle School—Bethany
Fiona Stevens  The Screams of My New Reality  Saxe Middle School
Kosta Boskovic  Two Different Welcomes  Mansfield Middle School
Katy Cooley  Seeing Things  Mansfield Middle School
Zan Huang  Teaching Huck Finn: The Risks Outweigh the Benefits  Talcott Mountain Academy
Annika Mathias  Restriction on the River: The Controversy of Twain  Talcott Mountain Academy
Lillian Steinmayer  Huck Finn: The Banned American Classic  Talcott Mountain Academy
### Grade 9

Devin Stout  
The Tourette Life  
East Granby High School  
Olivia Flaherty-Lovy  
Write to Me  
New Canaan High School  
Katherine Sloan  
The Best Medicine  
New Canaan High School  
Juliana Mullen  
The Hero  
Coventry High School  
Yesenia Contreras  
Silence is Our Home  
Metropolitan Learning Center  
Nana Akua Bimpong  
A Series of Things We’ll Never Understand  
Bristol Eastern High School

### Grade 10

Jordan Synodi  
14  
RHAM Middle School  
Kaleigh Perkins  
Half  
Rockville High School  
Mae Santillo  
Metaphors  
Arts at the Capitol Theater  
Destany Lopez  
Where I’m From  
Eli Whitney Technical High School  
Sarah Kavarnos  
The Book  
Medical Professions and Teacher Prep  
Skyler Austin  
Revert  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Lauren Byrnes  
Layers  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Azya Thornton  
The Gray Enigma  
Arts of the Capitol Theater  
Ness Curti  
lows without highs and winter skies  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Danielle Dankiw  
Danielle Elizabeth Dankiw  
Lyman Memorial High School  
(Jonathan Edd Dankiw)

### Grade 11

Roselyne Anyah  
Animosity  
Ellington High School  
Alicia Chiang  
S equitur  
Tolland High School  
Shaila Santiago  
This Work of Art  
Public Safety Academy  
Olivia Sidman  
The Lost Balloon  
Lyman Memorial High School  
Bhaskar Abhiramam  
Three Scoops  
New Canaan High School  
Kaitlyn Mitchell  
The Fresh Cut  
Glastonbury High School  
Michaela Romie  
Black and Blue  
Rockville High School  
Samantha Reynolds  
Darkness  
Lyman Memorial High School  
Madison Palmerino  
Two Minutes  
Woodstock Academy  
Lucille Papile  
The Fallen Explorer  
Granby Memorial High School  
Jordan Weber  
A World Without Color  
Granby Memorial High School  
Cameron Tripp  
The Cabin on the Hill  
William H. Hall High School  
Aditi Joshi  
Culture: Cars, Crows, and Character  
William H. Hall High School

### Grade 12

Stephen Conde  
Then He Spins  
Killingly High School  
Kylie Kearney  
Measuring Time  
Rockville High School  
Hope Frappier  
City Landscapes  
Arts at the Capitol Theater  
Zoe Szolomayer  
Another Chance  
RHAM High School  
Shannon McGinnis  
It’s Dark When You Call  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Mariam Hafez  
Corruption  
Watertown High School  
Adrienne La Forte  
Three Options When the Wall Comes Down  
William H. Hall High School  
Gillian Foley  
Alleviation  
Rockville High School  
Alexis Milunovich  
The World According to Jack  
Greenwich Academy  
Esther Clayton  
Real Walk of Shame  
Choate Rosemary Hall  
Madeleine Olson  
One Day  
Hall High School  
Sophie Guimaraes  
A Favorite Word  
Avon High School  
Ashley Sundara  
The Drive  
CT Int'l Baccalaureate Academy  
Nurun Nahar  
I am Muslim, I am Manchester  
Manchester High School
# Teachers of Published Authors & Artists

## Teacher

<table>
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<tr>
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Teacher
Kelly Cecchini
Donna Koropatkin
Julie Hodgson
Rochelle Marcus
Robert Genaurio
Barbara Marano
Joyce Sidlosky
Heather Candels
Chelsea Marshall
David Adamson
Kerry Liebler
Sara Lang
Shay Pearsall-Lee
Kristen Brown
Maggie Hamill
Brittney Zieller-Bliss
Joan Hjejek
AnnMarie Castle
Barbette Warren
Kelly Price
Caroline Hammel
Jennifer Murphy
Amy Nocton
Megan Coffey
Julie Day
Russell Ferreira
Patricia Bengston
Victoria Norldund
Shirley Cowles
Ann Potts
Stacey Haleks
Susan Ceglio-Tresca
Michelle Walker
Martin Leftoff
Amanda Flachsbart
Chuck Warinsky
Betty Lichota
Darla Strand
Debra Lotstein
Kara Maslar
Kristine Walker
Margaret Griffin
Maureen Billings
Nicole Harold
Tracy Zeiner
Bronwyn Monahan
Jennifer Orifice
MJ Hartell
Nicole LeFave
Amy Grendzinski
Amanda Bellman
Jessica Flaherty

School
Manchester High School
Mansfield Middle School
Mansfield Middle School
Mansfield Middle School
Medical Professions and Teacher Preparation Academy
Memorial Middle School
Metropolitan Learning Center
Middle Brook School
Middlesex Middle School
Montessori Magnet School
Museum Academy
Museum Academy
Museum Academy
New Canaan High School
New Canaan High School
Norfeldt Elementary School
North Street School
Pine Grove Elementary School
Public Safety Academy
Public Safety Academy
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts
RHAM High School
RHAM High School
RHAM Middle School
RHAM Middle School
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Sage Park Middle School
Salisbury Central School
Sarah Noble Intermediate School
Sarah Noble Intermediate School
Saxe Middle School
Simsbury High School
South Windsor High School
Southeast Elementary School
Squadron Line Elementary School
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Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
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Teachers Honored for Multiple Student Honorees

**Bronze Star Teachers**

Patrice Welsch  
Marta Weidl  
Julie Sherwood  
Abe Ammary  
Austin Davis  
Renee Klucznik  
David Polochanin  
Jess Fagan  
Michelle DiMeo  
Caine Schlenker  
Dana Johansen  
Maureen Corbo  
Meghan Barol  
Maryann Lindquist  
Barbara Marano  
Joyce Sidlosky  
Kerry Liebler  
Sara Lang  
Kristen Brown  
Megan Coffey  
Julie Day  
Stacey Haleks  
MJ Hartell  
Jessica Flaherty  
Lisa Jacobs  

Annie E. Vinton Elementary School  
Braeburn Elementary School  
Burr Elementary School  
Central Elementary School  
Choate Rosemary Hall  
East Granby High School  
Gideon Welles School  
Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School  
Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Greenwich Academy  
Greenwich Academy  
Kelly Lane Intermediate School  
Latimer Lane Elementary School  
Memorial Middle School  
Metropolitan Learning Center  
Museum Academy  
Museum Academy  
New Canaan High School  
RHAM High School  
RHAM Middle School  
Sarah Noble Intermediate School  
Talcott Mountain Academy  
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School  
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School

**Silver Star Teachers**

Eliza Sparks  
Barbara Greenbaum  
Brian Jasgur  
Karis Beno  
Nancy de Regt  
Alex Rode  
David Adamson  
Carol Blejwas  

Annie E. Vinton Elementary School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater  
Burr Elementary School  
Burr Elementary School  
Burr Elementary School  
Burr Elementary School  
Ledyard Center School  
Montessori Magnet School  
William H. Hall High School

**Gold Star Teachers**

Marcy Rudge  
Shirley Cowles  
Maureen Billings  
Ruth Macijauskas  

Annie E. Vinton Elementary School  
Sage Park Middle School  
Squadron Line Elementary School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

**Platinum Star Teachers**

Victoria Nordlund  

Rockville High School
2017 Connecticut Student Writers Magazine Submission Form
An electronic version of this form is available at http://cwp.uconn.edu/ct-student-writers-magazine/
Please visit http://cwp.uconn.edu/publications/csw.php for submission guidelines and a printable form.
No submissions will be acknowledged or returned due to financial restrictions.

Category (circle one): poetry non-fiction fiction artwork

Title of Piece: ____________________________________________________________________

Student: ___________________________   _____________________________   Grade: ________
   First Name   Last Name

Home Address: _____________________________________Phone:________________________
   Number and Street   Email:____________________________________

City, State, Zip Code

School (Full Name): _______________________________________________________________

School Address: _____________________________________Phone:________________________
   Number and Street

City, State, Zip Code

Teacher (Full Name):__________________________Email:____________________________________

Principal (Full Name):_________________________Email:____________________________________

Student’s Signature/Date: ____________________________________________________________
   □ I understand that plagiarism is punishable by law and I certify that this entry is my own original idea and work.

Teacher's Signature/Date: ____________________________________________________________
   □ I am familiar with this student’s writing, have read this entry, and am satisfied that it is their own work.

Guardian’s Signature/Date: ____________________________________________________________
   □ I give permission to the Connecticut Writing Project to print my minor's writing if it is selected for publication.

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We prefer all submissions and forms be typed and submitted electronically, but we will accept legible, handwritten submissions and forms by mail (Please submit each copy only ONCE, either electronically or by mail):

Connecticut Student Writers/CWP
Department of English, University of Connecticut
215 Glenbrook Road, Unit 4025
Storrs, CT 06269-4025

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