A watercolor portrait of a young person with dark skin and large, expressive eyes. They are wearing a red hat with a white band. A yellow bandage is on their left cheek. The background is a textured blue. The portrait is rendered with soft watercolor washes and some darker, more defined strokes for the eyes and hat.

Connecticut Student  
Writers

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### Back Cover

**Man, Michelle Mulé, The King School**



## Forewords

“It’s none of their business,” said Ernest Hemingway, “that you have to learn to write. Let them think you were born that way.” To an extent, Papa Hemingway was right. There’s a lot to learn about writing, on the other hand, (and he wouldn’t like being disagreed with), I think he’s very wrong. Yes, your teachers have shown you the process of revision and maybe have exposed you to stories, poetry, and art that you might not have stumbled upon yourselves, but the truth is, most of you were born writers and artists. This is evident in the work you submitted and by the work published in this magazine. While someone can teach you the mechanics and conventions of writing—characterization, poem or plot structure, setting, or imagery—art doesn’t come from this alone; art bubbles up from our bellies. Your stories and your poetry, drawings, and photos are not about conventions and mechanics; your works reflect the art that lives inside you. So, Papa Hemingway might have known a lot. But he didn’t know everything.

~ Susan Laurençot and Marcy Rudge, Editors, Connecticut Student Writers Magazine 2018

I never made it to my 10<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, or 25<sup>th</sup> high school reunions, but I made it to my 30<sup>th</sup> last year. It was terrific to see so many friends I hadn’t seen in so long, but there were many guys I never would have recognized if I had passed them on the street. Some had aged well. Many had not. Some had gone through difficult times while others had attained impressive professional heights—like state senator!

*Connecticut Student Writers* magazine celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, and like my classmates, it doesn’t look much like it did in 1988. That issue had 850 submissions from the students of 42 different teachers, published 45 writers, awarded no honorable mentions, was 74 pages long, and was typed up by one secretary named Doris using a manual typewriter. There was exactly one piece of art on the cover. The novelist Wally Lamb, who was still a high school English teacher in Norwich, was one of the 18 judges.

This year’s issue received 1,670 submissions from the students of almost 400 different teachers, published 78 writers, awarded over 400 honorable mentions, is 118 pages long, had over 30 judges, and includes more than 30 pieces of art. It was typed up and laid out by a graduate student and three undergraduate interns on two desktop computers. We don’t know who among the judging teachers may someday be a famous writer—but South Windsor English teacher Danielle Pieratti did just win the Connecticut Book Award for Poetry last year!

The event—which includes the contest, the magazine, and the Student Recognition Night—has grown tremendously over the years. In just my 12 years as director, the number of students, teachers, and family members who come to Jorgensen each May has more than doubled to about 1,000 people!

We are thankful to all the teachers and family members who support the student writers, and this year we also thank the Connecticut Young Writers Trust, which dissolved but left its remaining assets and its mission to our care. Their support made possible the printing of the magazine itself. And we also thank the UConn English Department, the Early College Experience program, and the Thomas Dodd Research Center for their support of this year’s keynote speaker, Matt de la Peña, who in 2016 won the Newbery award, a Caldecott honor award, and the National Council of Teachers of English Intellectual Freedom award.

Most of all we want to thank the students themselves for sharing with us their ideas, their vision, and their creativity. Keep writing. You might be amazed to see where it brings you in 30 years!

~Jason Courtmanche, Director, Connecticut Writing Project





## Kindergarten



*Happy Family, Megan Song, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School*

### ***Humpback Whales***

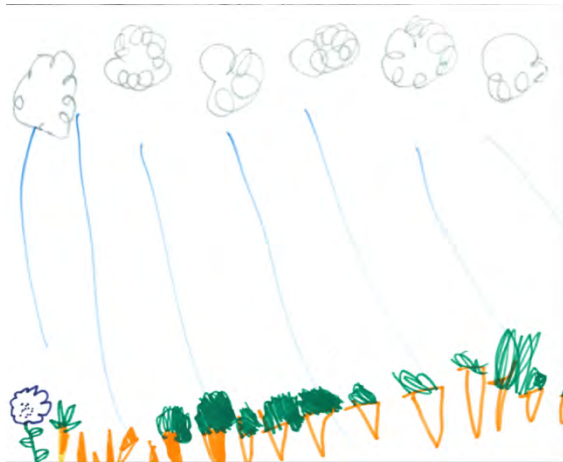
*David Harbec, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School*

Humpback Whales eat krill.  
Humpback Whales have a blowhole  
On the top of their backs.  
It shoots water out!  
Humpback Whales live in the ocean.  
They like to be in a group.  
It is called a herd.  
You might see them when you go out to the sea!

### ***The Zoo in the Sky***

*Graham Gietzen, Northeast Academy Arts Magnet School*

One windy day, I was flying my penguin kite at the park. All of a sudden, I heard a whisper from the sky. It was a rainbow colored giraffe. He was made out of a cloud. He said, "Come visit me in the sky. Come visit the zoo!" The giraffe flew me up in the sky. I saw many unusual creatures made out of clouds. I thought that I was seeing things. But, one licked me on the face! I fed them cloud food and pet them. They felt like cotton candy! They wanted me to stay but it was my bed time. A cloud reindeer brought me home. I went to bed.



### ***Growing Carrots and Flowers in the Rain***

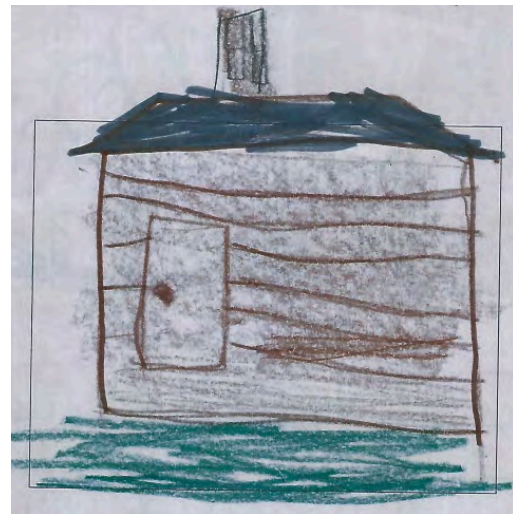
*Barbara Nannini, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School*

It was a rainy day.  
I put flower seed and a lot of carrot seeds in the rain.  
I flew them on the ground!  
The rain came down heavy  
where I flew the seeds.  
They grew and GREW  
until they were the size of a hare.  
Then me, mommy, daddy, and Sophia pick them  
My family put the carrots in a salad. I just ate the carrots.  
I gave the flower to my Preschool friend, Braydon!

### ***My Grandpa's Cabin***

*Graham Gietzen, Northeast Academy Arts Magnet School*

My Grandpa's cabin is a very special place. My brother and me have special adventures there. His cabin was made out of logs. It has a ladder to the attic. It has a big bed and a big fireplace. There were many deer and fish my Grandpa caught on the walls. We rode our bikes around the circle road. We built a fairy village out of sticks, leaves, rocks and puff balls. We had a ride on my Grandpa's red tractor! Its back wheels were bigger than me! Then, we went down to the lake to go swimming! We went minnow fishing. We went turtle hunting. We even scooped snails out of the water with our shovels! I almost fell in the water! At night time, Blue Gills and Minnows were nibbling at our toes. They thought our toes were worms! When we looked up at the night sky, we saw Purple Martins flying home to Grandpa's bird houses. I love Grandpa's cabin!



**Family**, Sylvia Raczkowski,  
 Buttonball Lane Elementary School



**The Woods**  
 Logan Rose, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School

The Woods has trees.  
 The Woods has clouds.  
 The Woods has sky.  
 The Woods has grass.  
 I like to play in the woods

**Who Am I?**  
 Graham Gietzen, Northeast Academy Arts Magnet School

Fireman.  
 Helmet. Boots. Hose.  
 I fight fires!

Policeman.  
 Hat. Badge. Handcuffs.  
 I catch bad guys!

Magician.  
 Hat. Wand. Rabbit.  
 I do magic tricks!

Scientist.  
 Lab coat. Goggles. Flask.  
 I do experiments!

Astronaut.  
 Spacesuit. Gloves. Helmet.  
 I explore space!

Doctor.  
 Stethoscope. BandAids. Bag.  
 I make people better!

Weatherman.  
 Glasses. Bowtie. Map.  
 I tell the weather!

Super Hero.  
 Cape. Mask. Underwear.  
 I rescue people!

Dog.  
 Collar. Leash. Bone.  
 I bark!

Santa.  
 Hat. Laundry Basket. Sack.  
 I deliver presents!

Me.  
 Jeans. Sneakers. Smile.  
 I love to pretend!



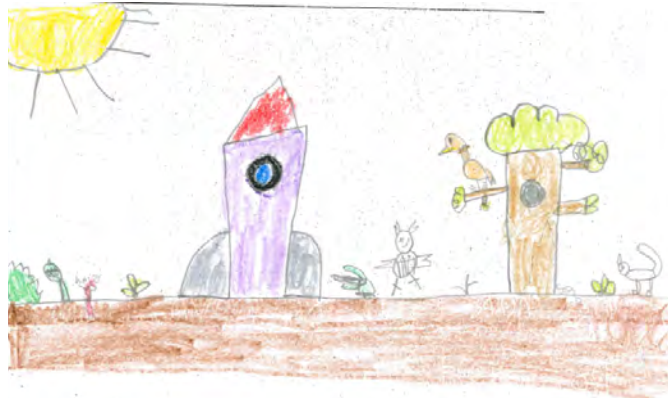
## First Grade



*Self Portrait, Helena Glordano, Braeburn Elementary School*

### ***Owen Goes to Space***

*Noah Jangula-Mootz, Lake Street Elementary School*



Owen is an owl he likes to eat fish and he lives in a tree. And is going to space. But when he got there his roket broke downe because he forgot to put gas in his roket. And in one week he woke up. He was on the moon and on his ship staring rite at him was an Alien. He was shocked. I had never seen a alien before Owen said. And then he went outside to meet the alien but his ship was broken. So he ask the alien to help him to fixe his rocket. So he went to the alien the alien said how may I help you? Well I want you to help me fix my rocket. And the alien said yes so they built his rocket a new way. It looked really good. So the aliens offered Owen to stay the nite so he did. The aliens house was the bigist Owen has ever seen. When Owen got inside he was imasde by all stuff the bed was so soft. The next day his Bracfast was rocks and for luch he had rocks. But for lunch he had his samwich. Then he went to his roket and went to his real home earth. The end.

### ***Ice Cube***

*Abigail Vargas,  
Latimer Lane Elementary School*

It waits  
Being so bored  
Waiting for someone  
To pop it out  
Of its mold.

It wants to be solid  
Like the other things  
So it can be  
Real and liked.

FINALLY!  
It's solid and an ice cube  
But sadly,  
After a while  
It melts  
So, it had to wait  
Again.

### ***Waves***

*Emmet Pendergast,  
Latimer Lane Elementary School*

It's like  
The ocean is  
Breathing  
Inhale, exhale  
Up and down  
It makes sand wet

### ***Ella Loves Bikes***

*Abigail Purviance, Braeburn Elementary School*

There was a girl named Ella. She loved bike riding. Her room was filled with bikes. "I love bikes". When she woke up she went on a bike ride adventure she went up and down hills. She did this with her dad. At the bike ride we had lunch. When they finished there bike ride they traveld to her granma and grandpes haws and had dinner. Then she went to bed. 5 hours later. Then mom and dad and grandma and grandpe went to bed.



### ***Going to Silver Lake***

*Kyla Lunding, Tootin Hills Elementary School*

One sunny day in Vermont, I went to a Lake when we were visiting our uncle and aunt. There were lots of things to do there at the lake. I went swimming first. I went swimming with my sister and dad. I went to the dock first but when I jumped in the water was cold. I swam to the shore as fast as I could. My mom and my baby saw me. My mom says why are you going that fast. I said the water was cold out there but the water in shore was warm. My dad and sister came back. We played with a ball. Next, I wanted to go to the playground. There were lots of fun things to do when I went down the slide a boy threw woodchips at me. I still had lots of fun going on the swings and the slides. I learned how to do the monkey bars. I did the curly monkey bars and the straight monkey bars. I wanted to go back to the water to see if it was warm enough. I went back to the water and the water was a little warmer so I went in! It was fun swimming. It was fun going to the lake. The End.

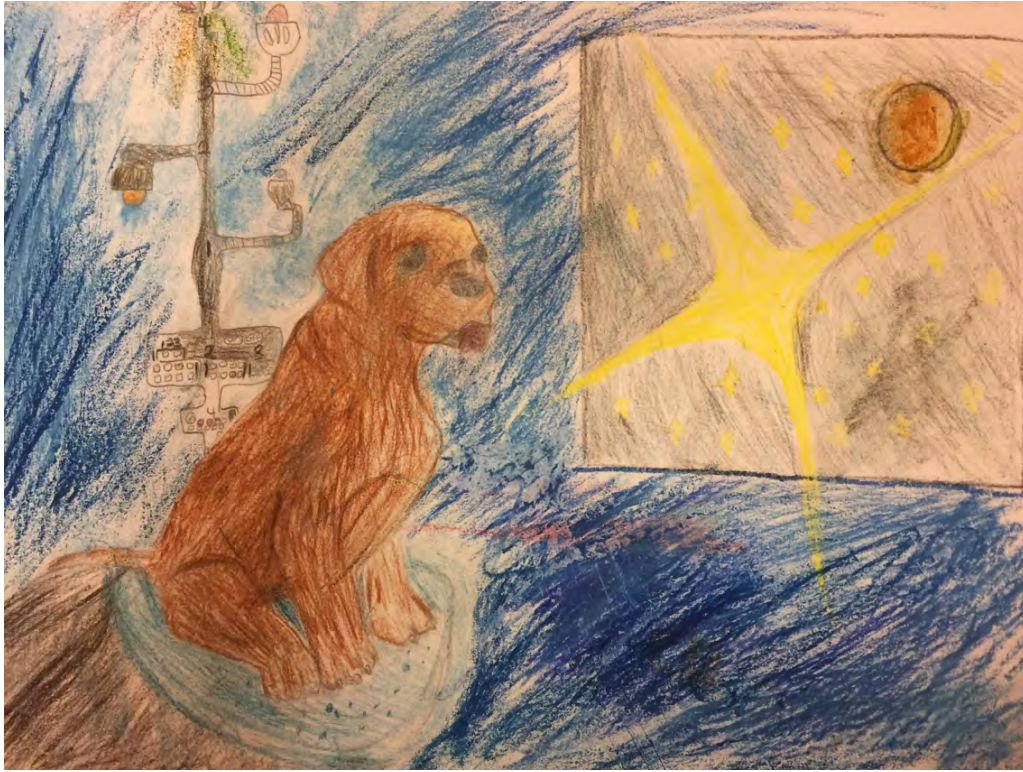
### ***How to Take a Shower***

*Kimberly Cournoyer, Lake Street School*

- First, you get a towel. And hang it next to the shower.
- Next, you turn the water on, to a kind of hot temperature. Then—go in carefully so that you do not slip!
- Third, you put shampoo on you. To wash all the little tiny caterpillar germs.
- Fourth, you put shampoo on your hair and scrub it all around like jelly.
- Fifth, you rinse the shampoo off and turn off the water.
- Sixth, you get the towel on by wrapping yourself up like a caterpillar in a cocoon.
- Seventh, your dad carries you like a princess to your bedroom.
- Last you get your soft and comfy pjs on.



## Second Grade



*The Brown Dog in the Blue Room, Michael Huang, Squadron Line Elementary School*

### *All About Cats*

*Coraline Mihalko, Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School*

#### *Cat Babies*

Are cat babies grown up when they are born? No! When cats are born they cannot see or cannot hear. When cats are born they nibble on their mother cat's body until they find a nipple. They are mammals. They drank milk from their mother.

#### *Cat Type*

Is there only one type of cat? No! There are lots of types of cats. There are Rag dolls and Tabbies. Cats can be black, brown, orange, yellow, they even can be white. Cats can have no fur or no tails.

#### *Cats Need*

Do cats only need one thing? No! Cats need food, milk, love/care, a bed that is cozy. Cats need all these things to survive. They need a litter box. Cats like to be petted. Cats need to be protected.

#### *Cats Like/Do Not Like*

Do cats like everything? No! Cats like food, love, milk, and more. Cats do not like dogs, water, and more. Cats may like the outside, getting stuck in trees, and getting saved. Cats have feelings.

#### *Cats Everywhere*

Are cats everywhere? No! Cats can be almost everywhere. Can you believe that tigers are cats? Cats can be big or small. Cats can be short, cats can be tall. Cats can be here, cats can be there. Cats everywhere! So, you know about cat babies, cat types, cat needs, cat like, cat do not like. Cats everywhere. I love cats!



### ***Great Pond***

*Emory Andrews, Squadron Line Elementary School*

On the steps down to my pond, I can see  
The beauty of forty-six Great Pond all around me

On the path to the door, I find something rare  
A snake slithering through a pushed-out garage board without a care

Glistening ice on the pond spun  
With crystals—is beautiful to me  
Its shimmering layer is like a mirror reflecting the sun  
Growing thicker every day  
Filling me with joy and making me want to play

Snapping turtle  
Snapping turtle  
Don't snap at me!  
Amazing to see swimming  
Its head pops up pushing water back making a ripple  
Right in front of me

Great blue heron  
Come to me  
With all those blue feathers, you look so grand  
You were made for fishing  
You stand tall and steady  
Ready for a marching band

Bats  
Bats  
Flutter and fly  
Don't get eaten by an owl or hawk  
Or else you'll die  
See you in the early night  
As you leave the red barn and take flight

Great horned owl sitting on the tree top  
Eating bats one by one  
Sitting on the creepy tree  
You're so spooky to me

Even on rainy days  
The beauty of Great Pond all around me  
Warms my heart and makes it shine bright  
Like the brightest light I've ever seen

### ***Winter Fun***

*Greyson Kalajian, Squadron Line Elementary School*

Happy on my green plastic sled  
Standing strong on the front curve with feet firm  
Speeding down the snow-covered hill  
Arms spread out to balance  
Knees bent so I don't fall off  
Landing in the fluffy white snow  
Winter fun!

### ***Magic Show***

*Eden Shapiro, Squadron Line Elementary School*

One day I went on a cruise with my nana my pop and my mom and my dad and Robin and Vivian. There was a magic show on the cruise. I went on stage. It was fun and scary. I had to give a robot a wand. There was smoke. I ran off stage. Someone stabbed a girl and cut her in half! At the end, she survived. Robin couldn't come she was too little. The magic show was AWESOME!

### ***The Rainbow***

*Amelia Eichner, Squadron Line Elementary School*

I jumped off of the school bus and saw my mom picking raspberries at the side of my house. I asked my mom if I could pick raspberries with her. She said, "Get your boots on. It's muddy." I walked inside and saw my sister taking a nap so I was quiet. I grabbed my brown boots with flowers, put them on and ran outside.

I started picking reddish-pinkish raspberries that were near me and carefully placed them in a little plastic bowl. They were round and tiny. They were smaller than an inch and so juicy. When I took them off the bush, they felt like I was feeling a ball with no air. They were as soft as a blanket mixed with a pillow. I tossed some in my mouth. They were as sweet as candy.

Suddenly, I felt a drop of water on my head. I said, "Mom, I think it's going to rain." We grabbed all of our stuff and I ran inside with my mom. It was raining hard at first but soon it calmed down. When my dad came back from biking, it was sunny and raining at the same time. I saw him from the window and he waved his hand for me to come outside. I ran outside and he told me to turn around. When I did, I saw a beautiful rainbow. I ran inside to tell my mom and she grabbed her phone. She took a big picture of the rainbow. We were so excited, we ran to tell our neighbors. They ran outside with their dad like us.

One of the sides of the rainbow looked like it landed right in our neighborhood. "Look, a rainbow right in our neighborhood!" I shouted. It was awesome and pretty. It has so many colors like red and blue and green. The neighbors liked it too. We laughed and joked about how there was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It was getting dark and the rainbow faded. We said good-bye and went in. I hope to see a rainbow again because it was amazing!

### ***Amy***

*Elizabeth Urban, Ashford School*

#### **Chapter 1: Amy's Arrival**

Once upon a time, a farmer named Nellie had a farm with two twin horses on it called Dawn and Dusk. One day, Nellie was thinking about a new horse Amy, who was coming today. Nellie saw a picture and description of Amy and said to herself, "Sometimes she disappears unexpectedly."

Nellie heard a rumble of wheels and exploded, "The horse trailer is here!" When she reached the horse trailer and started to talk, the driver cut her off and said in a calm voice, "Amy has disappeared again." Nellie stammered, "C-can't you try to find her?" The driver took a deep breath and said, "We'll try, ma'am." Before the driver left he asked Nellie for her phone number so they could call if Amy came back. By the time she got to Dawn and Dusk's pen it was time to put the horses to bed. After putting Dawn and Dusk to sleep, she went to sleep too.

In the morning, Nellie stormed off to Dawn and Dusk's pen to feed them. She dropped everything in her hands when her phone rang. It was the horse trailer owner calling to say Amy reappeared and Nellie should come quick in case the horse disappears again. So Nellie ran to her car, turned the radio on, and drove to the stable. Nellie thought someone on the radio said her name and when she turned the radio up it was saying "I hope Nellie is listening to this. Amy has disappeared yet again. If Nellie is listening, please turn around." Nellie went home and was so tired she could barely hear the horses neighing for food and water since she dropped it so suddenly. Now she had to go outside and pick it all up and give the horses food and water and tuck them in for the night. When Nellie finally went to bed, she couldn't fall asleep because she was having bad thoughts that Amy would never appear and she would never get there in time.

The next day, Nellie got a call saying that Amy reappeared again. Nellie hopped into her car and drove to the stable, where Amy was waiting. Nellie saw Amy with a red blanket draped over her back and a red saddle. Amy was white all over with a beautiful white mane and tail. At first, Nellie thought she saw Amy's coat glimmer in the sun. Nellie thought the glimmer might be related to Amy's disappearances. Nellie was very excited as she put Amy in her horse trailer. Nellie worked quickly so Amy would not disappear again.

Nellie and Amy arrived home and Nellie introduced the new horse to Dawn and Dusk. Dawn and Dusk sniffed at Amy a couple of times and Amy sniffed them back and neighed three times. She was trying to tell Nellie that she was afraid of Dawn and Dusk and that she wanted to go to her pen. Nellie got Amy settled in her pen and for a couple of minutes it was silent. Suddenly a ringing stung the air and Amy disappeared!

## **Chapter 2: Amy's Adventure**

Nellie ran to Amy's pen and could not believe her eyes. Nellie shouted, "No!" but it was too late. Amy had already disappeared. Nellie did not know it but Amy was a unicorn in disguise. Nellie guessed right: Amy's coat glimmering was related to her disappearing. Nellie did not guess one important fact: Amy's saddle ringing told her to go to the unicorn world to solve the mystery of how she ended up at the stable.

Amy had to figure out how she ended up at the stable. She had two clues: The first clue was that she was asleep when she got towed away to the stable; The second clue was that she was with her mom and dad in the unicorn world but her mom and dad were not at the stable. But most of all she wanted to solve the mystery! When Amy got down the elevator she shouted excitedly, "I got adopted by a girl farmer who has two different horses!" Her mom rushed up to her and said quietly, "Remember to be quieter. We do not want to make a lot of noise. Though I understand you are very excited."

"What is the owner's name and the two other horses' names?" asked Amy's father, always curious about names. "The owner's name is Nellie, the first horse's name is Dusk, and the second horse's name is Dawn," Amy answered.

All of a sudden, Amy saw something orange on the ground. Amy walked over to it and saw an envelope with a note on the outside. The note read: 995-281-5902 IS SAMANTHA'S NUMBER- DANE M. SMITH. "That starts with a nine. So that's how whoever took me dialed a nine first," Amy continued, "Who is Dane M. Smith anyway?" Amy's dad broke into tears "H-he's who stole your p-poor Uncle Roger." Amy got an idea. "What is his middle name? I think I have heard his name before just with his middle name." Amy's dad perked up and answered "Why, you are a genius. His middle name is Mercury like the planet." Amy exclaimed, "He must love horses. Because he has one named Eddie and he won forty-nine contests with Eddie."

Back at Nellie's house, Nellie was panicking and screaming. "I need someone to get Amy back now!"

## **Chapter 3: The Reward**

Early the next morning Nellie made 81 posters to hang up with a picture on it of Amy. The poster read: Missing horse if found please call 449-072-9520. Nellie was very worried because Amy was not home yet.

In unicorn land Amy now had three clues: the first was that she was asleep when it happened; the second clue was that her mom and dad were not taken with her; and the third clue was that Dane Mercury Smith took her. "I know I can solve this mystery!" Amy said in a determined voice. Amy was saying her clues over and over again until she realized there was a note inside the orange envelope. The note said: LCAL ANATSAHM RFO SROHES. "Hmmm, it seems like it is in code," Amy said. "But if it is in code I can't read it. I think I can go spy on Dane if I am careful," Amy thought.

When Amy got to Mr. Smith's house she created a big bush to hide behind near a window. Mr. Smith was a tall man with short red hair. All of a sudden Mr. Smith saw the new bush and burst out of the house and saw Amy and said in a triumphant voice, "So you're the horse that I found underground alone!"

"Yes, and you dropped this," Amy said shoving the note toward him. "You found my lost note!" he said in a surprised tone.

"So why did you take me from unicorn land and bring me to the stable?" Amy asked. "Unicorn land?" Mr. Smith gasped. "I am a unicorn," Amy replied.

"I will explain why I took you later. I need to call Nellie," Dane said. Amy listened while Dane was on the phone talking to Nellie. When Mr. Smith was done talking to Nellie he said "The note in code said call 'Samantha for horses'."

"What are the horses' names?" Amy asked.

"Brenda and Cane," Mr. Smith replied.

"Brenda and Cane are two of my friends!" Amy cried.

Dane said, "I am so sorry I took you. I was trying to call my friend Samantha and when I dialed the wrong number, you appeared. I thought you were lost, so I brought you to the stable. I will tell Nellie to let you free and tell Samantha to leave your two friends where she found them."

Nellie let Amy live at the farm, but Amy could go to the unicorn world anytime. Amy took off her unicorn disguise. The answer to the mystery was: Mr. Smith accidentally dialed the unicorn world passcode on the special pay phone when he was trying to call his friend Samantha. Since he returned Amy to Nellie, Mr. Smith got a reward to visit Nellie's horses and Amy anytime!

### Third Grade



*Silhouelephant, Andrew Garfinkle, Beecher Road School*

#### ***Fall Leaves***

*Amalia Baird, Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School*

“Shwoosh,” the leaves scattered around me. It was a breezy morning in late September, and I was wearing a fleece as red as the leaves that had just fallen and clothes as light as silk.

I turned my head, looked around, and saw the tree in my back yard. I felt a drip upon my head. It dripped down my head and onto the leaves as they fell upon the ground.

Meanwhile, my mom felt like going outside and said, “Love is on the way.”

Later that evening, I unlocked the door and said, “Hello fresh air.”

And I stepped out into the leaves and jumped. I fell into the leaves and made a wet leaf angel.

Suddenly, a whisper escaped from the ground and into the mountains.

I turned my head. A lot of leaves went up off the ground and, suddenly, somebody crept through the leaves. It was mom.

She spoke, but that was it. Mom tilted her head, too. Also, a smile spread across her face, and she screamed, “POP! WOOOOO!”

After she had jumped into the leaves my mom went inside. She closed the door behind her with two hands. Mom bravely closed the door feeling proud and generous.

I ran and gave her a big hug and Love certainly filled the Air.

## ***Rocket to Uranus***

*Aubrey Griskus, Ana Grace Academy of the Arts*



### *Introduction*

3, 2, 1, blast off! Where are we going? Uranus! Have you ever wondered about Uranus? Well, I will teach you about it. Like its rings? What about when it was **discovered**? Let's go learn about Uranus.

### *Where is Uranus?*

Where is Uranus? It's the 7th planet from the sun. It's 1.7 billion miles away from the sun. It's so cold because of its distance from the sun. It's so cold that they call it an ice giant too. It's way colder than your freezer. 318 **degrees** colder than your freezer to be exact. Uranus's rings are made up of ice and rocks.

### *Let's go to Uranus*

Have you ever wondered how long it will take to get to Uranus? Well, it takes 9 years. It's the seventh planet from the sun. Think of that. A year is 365 days on Earth. That would be  $365 \times 9$ . That's 3,285 days on Earth.

### *3rd largest!*

Have you ever wondered how big Uranus is? Well I'm going to tell you. It's the third largest planet in our solar system. It is 31,764 miles, or 11,181 **kilometers** wide. It's bigger than Earth. Try to imagine that. 63 Earths could fit in Uranus.

### *Greek God*

Uranus is named after a Greek sky god and first rule of **mythological** titans. It's the only planet named after a Greek god and not a Roman god. That's from a long, long time ago.

### *Glossary*

Discovered—you find something or someone in the traces of search.

Degrees—a unit for measuring temperature

Kilometers—a unit of length in the metric system

Mythological—a group of myths, especially ones that belong to a particular religion or culture

## ***The Green Blob***

*Lilly Gionfriddo, CREC Montessori Magnet School*

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Rose. She was named Rose because when she was born she had very rosy cheeks. Rose loved putting roses in her hair and her favorite color was red. Rose was always a very good girl and got along with everyone. She never caused any trouble. She loved to play outside and take walks around the neighborhood. Her mother trusted her very much and her only rule was to never go near the really old house at the very end of Dead Man's Lane.

Rose wondered why, but her mother just said that a long time ago an old man who lived at the end of the street had been found lying at the end of the last driveway at the end of the street. When they brought him to the hospital, he couldn't even tell them his name. All he said was, "Stay away from the green blob." No one knew what he meant and he died that night in the hospital before he could explain it. Since then, no one wanted to go near the house or even down the street which was named Dead Man's



Lane after the unknown man. Rose never even thought of going there. In fact, she didn't even know what the house looked like until one day when she decided to just walk down the street and look at the house.

That afternoon, after Rose had visited her friend's house, she passed by the Dead Man's Lane and thought that it didn't even look very scary, so she decided that she just wanted to walk down Dead Man's Lane to see what the really old house looked like. She walked slowly down the lane until she got to the very end of the street and she came to a large black metal fence. She looked through the fence and across the grass and there it was—a run-down and a little bit scary black-and-gray house! When she walked along the fence to the driveway entrance there was a GREEN BLOB the size of a tennis ball, glowing bright green in the driveway! It looked really cool.

Rose was a little afraid, but she really wanted to touch it. She remembered her mother had told her not to go near the house, but the blob wasn't in the house. It was in the driveway. So she bent down and touched it with just one finger and it felt like slime or putty. Then, it began to glow some more and grow slowly until it was the size of a softball. She was a little bit scared but interested at the same time, so she reached out and touched it with her whole hand. Her hand felt tingly all over. The green blob suddenly grew larger until it was the size of a basketball. It seemed to glow even more brightly.

That made her nervous, so she ran home and told her mother and father all about it right away. They were a little upset, but glad she had told them the truth. She didn't get punished, but her mother said never to go there again.

The next day when she woke up she had a red rash all over her body!

"You have red spots on your body? Now we have to take you to the doctor," said her mother. Rose did not like the doctor and she screamed, "Ahhh! I do not like doctors. I am not going." But then the red spots began to grow a little bit larger and they were itchy. She couldn't stop scratching and every time she scratched, the red spots began to grow and hurt even more, so her mother called the doctor and made an appointment right away.

Her mother said she had to go, even though she hated going to the doctor, so she went. After examining her, the doctor told her mother that Rose had the Virus of the Green Blob—a very rare virus. Luckily, she had come to the doctor right away, so she only needed some very special cream to put on all the spots. The doctor told her to go home, put the cream on every day and stay inside and rest until the spots were all gone.

The doctor called the newspaper to tell them that a girl had found and touched a green blob at the end of Dead Man's Lane and gotten a very bad virus. The city had a special worker come to take the Green Blob, which by then had grown to be the size of a giant boulder and was glowing very brightly. He brought it to a special building where it was destroyed before anyone else got the virus.

The city later knocked down the house and renamed the street because it wasn't dangerous any more. The street was renamed Rose Boulevard because Rose was the one who discovered the Green Blob before it grew large enough to spread and infect people all over the world.

Rose slowly got better, and after the virus was all gone and she had no more red spots, she was able to do a lot of fun things like going to the pool and the park and the beach and even the water park with her mom and dad. They all had a great time, and Rose never again disobeyed her mother.

## ***The Amazing Planet Neptune***

*Avery Bronzo, Ana Grace Academy of the Arts*

### *Chapter 1: Introduction*

Imagine that you are living on Neptune. What would happen? Would you survive? Neptune is a gas planet so you can't stand on it. So, the answer is no you cannot survive on Neptune.

What are Neptune's **Properties**? What is Neptune's weather? Well Neptune is the windiest planet. Because it's so cold Neptune has little ice pieces inside of it.

Does Neptune have gravity? How much moons does Neptune have? Find all of those answers in this book!



### *Chapter 2: Properties of Neptune*

Neptune's Color: Neptune is a light blue and it has some light white and purple mixed into Neptune.

Where did Neptune get its name from?: Neptune got its name from the Roman god of the sea.

What is Neptune made out of? Neptune is made out of gas so Neptune is a gas planet like Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus! Neptune also has little ice pieces in Neptune floating around.

The size of Neptune: Neptune is very big across. If you measure it Neptune will be 15,299 miles and (24,341 km). Wow that's bigger than earth! It is the fourth largest planet!

### *Chapter 3: Where is Neptune in the Solar System?*

Neptune is the eighth planet from the sun. Have you ever wondered how far Neptune is from the sun?

Neptune is really far from the sun. Neptune is 2,795 billion miles. Scientists say about twelve years. For example, the **voyagers** took twelve years to get to Neptune.

### *Chapter 4: All about Neptune's moons*

Neptune has fourteen moons. The biggest moon is Triton. Triton is 2,700 km across, which is larger than Pluto! Triton is 55% ice with other ices mixed in. There is also Nereid. Nereid is 841,100 miles from Neptune. Nereid was discovered by Gerard Kuiper. There are a lot of moons and all of them are very interesting. NASA has **discovered** another moon of Neptune. Now Neptune has fourteen moons!

All about Neptune's new moon: The new moon was found on July 1, 2013. They are still trying to find out more about the new moon. Proteus is the second largest moon of Neptune. Proteus is 260 miles and Triton 1,677 miles. The third one is Larissa. Larissa is 120 miles.

### *Chapter 5: The man who found Neptune*

Galileo Galilei discovered Neptune in 1846. He was born in Pisa. He died in Arcetri when he was **suffering** of a fever. He first thought it was a star. But then he saw it move and thought it was a planet. He announced that there was a new planet. He saw it with a telescope. It was the first planet to be used with mathematics. Galileo got very famous and everybody knew about him, because he discovered Neptune.

### *Chapter 6: How long does it take for Neptune to orbit the sun?*

It takes Neptune to orbit around the sun once every 164.79 Earth years, or once every 60,190 earth days. Did you know that it takes 365 days for earth to orbit the Sun? Then it takes Neptune every 60,190 Earth days to do one orbit. That's a big difference! Neptune has only made one orbit!

Neptune and Jupiter are very alike when it comes to orbiting around the Sun. Jupiter takes twelve years and Neptune takes 164.79 years. Also, there are other planets that are the opposite. Mercury only takes eighty-eight days to orbit.

### *Chapter 7: Neptune's Weather*

Cool facts about Neptune's weather: Neptune is the eighth planet from the Sun. So, it doesn't have a lot of sunlight like other planets closer to the Sun. Neptune is the windiest planet. Neptune's weather is 47 degrees Fahrenheit. Neptune has the most extreme weather of any planet. Neptune has a great dark spot. The spot is a giant storm. Neptune was predicted that it was a new planet before it was ever seen.

### *Glossary*

Properties—Properties means all about it. What it looks like what it is made out of Also how heavy it is.

Voyagers—People that take long journeys to space or sea.

Discovered—Something or someone that was found.

Suffering—Undergoing pain, distress or sadness.

Orbit—Orbit means when a planet goes around the sun.

### ***December***

*Andrew Alemany, Anna Reynolds Elementary School*

The month has grown old.

Fighting the cold as I walk to the bus stop  
My breath floats through the air like a kite soaring in the breeze  
Many wearing pants, although some still trying to deny winters arrival  
The branches buckle at the force of the wind

As we grow deeper into the month, the yards light up  
Some of them as colorful as exploding fireworks  
And in our minds, wrapped dreams crowd the tree  
The ice crystals dance to the beat of the chimes  
A night's snow blankets the world around us  
The taste of warmed rich cocoa tickles cold lips  
Monday awakens  
Streets quiet  
Morning alarms silenced  
Backpacks hanging in the closet  
Awaiting the return of school  
In dreams, excitement surrounds the day's plans

Clip Clap,  
Footsteps slowly clamber down  
The staircase creaks  
Promises are whispered

The year is young.

### ***Heart of the Ocean***

*Kristina Kreft, Salem Elementary School*

I will go to the ocean  
It makes my heart warm  
I will look for sea glass  
One by one  
Pink, green, blue, red  
Searching for as many as I can  
I feel my heart pounding with happiness inside  
I see waves bringing me gifts  
Going over the land  
The salty water makes me feel warm  
And cold at the same time  
It comes home with me  
It brings joy with me  
In my heart

## Fourth Grade



*Abby, Abby Ditzel, Woodstock Elementary School*



### ***I Want to be a Dragon***

*Pragnya Jois, Hebron Avenue Elementary School*

I want to be a dragon.  
Really be a dragon.  
Not just pretend to be one,  
But be a dragon.

I want to breathe flames.  
Really breathe flames like a bonfire.  
Not just open and shut my mouth,  
But breathe flames like a bonfire.

I'd see the dewdrops staging races down leaves.  
I'd taste the freshness of leaves.  
I'd hear the wind doing the tango with the trees.  
I'd smell the cool, fresh air flowing like streams.  
I'd feel the wind whispering in my ear.  
I want to be a dragon.

***I Want to be a Dragon, Pragnya Jois,***  
*Hebron Avenue Elementary School*

### ***Murderer***

*Shae Meile, Tootin' Hills Elementary School*

The tornado is going and going and going without a sign of ever stopping and ending this mess.  
Around, around, around and around and around and around and around town.  
Destroying everything in sight without the slightest hesitation to stop.  
The more it destroys the more homes and walls it collects.  
The people rush with screaming children in their arms.  
Screams of death call out to the world with horror.  
The murderer of love has left our town.  
The tornado of death hurts us all.  
All have suffered family death.  
The murderer has left us.  
Revenge will come.  
I will not fail.

### ***Fall Ball***

*Eric Richmond, Oakdale Elementary School*

Leaves are falling to the ground  
Kids are heading to the mound  
Pitcher, chucking, brutal strikes  
Getting hitters with changeup psychs

Hitters slamming the baseballs  
Swatting them crucially over walls  
Running around from base to base  
Feeling lighter, as if in space

Fielders make outstanding plays  
Not just out there lost in a gaze  
Jumping, diving, all around  
And it all started from the mound



*The Magic Sunrise, Claire Abbuhl, Tootin' Hills Elementary School*

### ***Magnum Opus***

*Jack Reynolds, Litchfield Intermediate School*

#### *A LONG TIME AGO ...*

Pluto stepped into his workshop. He scanned the area. In the corner, a shelf of mud and clay pulsed with energy. Pluto smiled coldly, then glanced down at the ebony ball resting in his hand. He finally had it! The last thing he needed to overthrow his brother Jupiter and claim control of the world ...

Pluto strode over to the shelf. Resting on its first level was a sphere no bigger than a grapefruit. It glowed angry red. "Fire," Pluto mused, taking into account the forest that he had burned to the ground to find it. He moved on.

Next was an orb of as deep a blue as the ocean itself. "Water," said Pluto, remembering the journey into the deep that he had taken to retrieve it.

On the next shelf was a triplet of orbs: the first milky white, the next sepia, the last purple.

"Air," breathed Pluto, looking at the white one, recalling falling endlessly through the sky to catch it. His gaze shifted to the two others. "Earth. Magic." He had found those guarded by the ancient Cyclops, deep in his booby-trapped cave.

On the last level of the shelf were four orbs, all pressed up against each other, their bright, swirling hues hypnotic. That's what had driven Pluto insane.

"Metal," he said, looking at a silver one, thinking for a moment about his journey to the earth's core. He glanced to the right of it, at a yellow one, an image of himself stealing it from his no-good brother flashed before his eyes. "Lightning."

Next was one of vivid lime green, which he had snatched from the Forest of Juno. "Nature."

He placed the black orb on the shelf next to one of pure gold. They seemed to repel apart.

"Darkness," Pluto cackled, looking proudly at the black orb. "And ... Goodness," eyeing the golden one that had started his extraordinary expedition. His face contorted in pure disgust. He should've gotten rid of that a long time ago.

Pluto suddenly grinned. He plucked up the golden ball and deposited it into a chest of fine white wood. He looked back to the shelf and summoned metal from the silver orb, shaping it into what the future people of the world would call a padlock. He grabbed it out of the air and locked it onto the chest.

“Goodbye!” he spat. “No ...” He picked up the water orb and raised it above his head. What he was about to do would be much more difficult than creating a mere lock, for he was about to create life itself.

Pluto began to chant. “Oh, masters of water and fire and air, of earth and metals and darkness, I call upon you. Give this force a shape!”

Almost instantly, the air felt different. Moist and humid. A cloud formed at Pluto’s feet, churning and gurgling. It began to condense—more and more so until it looked less like a free-forming cloud, and more like a sphere, and then finally ovoid.

Pluto placed the blue orb back on the shelf and retrieved the black one. He repeated the chant.

Another egg, this time pitch-black, appeared on the floor beside the blue one.

“Ancient masters,” Pluto shouted. “Give this force life!”

The two eggs trembled violently and then seemed to melt together, until a half-blue, half-black egg lay on the floor.

“Ancient masters!” Pluto shrieked. “Give this force a name!”

The room fell silent. Silent except for the whisper of the wind. And the lap of waves. And the crackle of fire in the hearth. And the rustling of leaves. “*We are here,*” they seemed to say.

“What shall you name this creature?” Pluto whispered.

“Its name shall be Night Waves,” the voices said in unison.

Then, the small dirt hut where Pluto lived shook. The egg in the center of the room erupted into dark blue light. “Rise, Night Waves,” Pluto murmured. “Rise!”

The light dimmed. In front of Pluto now sat a small figure— a blue wrinkled head, deep black eyes, flippers for hands and feet, and gills circling its neck. It was pitifully small—just a baby. Pluto picked it up and sat it on a desk in the corner. “You will stay here,” he ordered.

It looked up at him longingly. He knows his creator, Pluto thought to himself, chortling.

“Stay,” Night Waves croaked. Pluto climbed the ladder that led out of his basement workshop and into the kitchen. He stepped over to a metal box and opened it with the flick of his hand. Inside were five compartments containing leaves, sticks, roots, berries, and meat. Pluto selected a small piece of duck and sprinkled some aromatic herbs onto it.

He returned to the basement, duck in hand. He threw it from the ladder to Night Waves. “You shall eat,” said Pluto.

“Eat,” repeated the creature. It leapt off the desk and began to rip apart the duck, wolfing it down in quick, juicy mouthfuls. And as this happened, he began to grow.

“Yes,” said Pluto. “Soon. Soon you will meet your brethren, and we will be unstoppable.” He glanced at the orbs on the shelf, a hint of Night Waves siblings, just waiting to be brought to life.

“Soon,” repeated Night Waves greedily. “Soon.”

### ***Lunch Troubles***

*Gracie Gleason, Tootin’ Hills Elementary School*

I always walk slowly to the cafeteria. I, Maddie Marie, am scared of lunch. I know it sounds funny, but people make fun of my awful looking clothes and my ugly face. Mom says that they’re just jealous, but the way their faces look when they see me tells me that they are disturbed.

As I enter into the lunch line, my heart started beating faster and faster. I could feel it in my chest going back and forth as I started deciding what I was going to eat. The lunch lady was always nice, but I usually didn’t focus on that because all I could do was concentrate on keeping my face covered with my oversized ocean blue hoodie. I would always wear oversized hoodies to cover my arms, my legs, and of course, my face. I am ugly and everybody knows it. I have disgusting greyish-blond hair that ties into 1,000 knots and snarls each and every night. My clothes are hand-me-downs from my big sister Rachel and have many holes in them. Finally, my face is just ugly.

As I exit the lunch line, I make sure my hoodie is pulled tight. I already can hear people whispering about me and they all look away when I walk by as if I am invisible. Then as I pass them, they



all start looking and whispering again. They do this every day so I am kind of used to it. Their words are like nails on a chalkboard and even though you try to ignore the dreadful sound, it keeps getting into your head and you feel like you are going to explode.

As I walk down the lunch room looking for a table with not many people sitting there, I see my biggest problem, the mean girls. I've always wondered why the mean girls are always the most popular girls in the school. Maybe it's their new trendy clothes or their gorgeous faces and curly hair tied up into high ponytails. Their names are Delany, Lily, Mckenna, and Tristin. I always knew that Mckenna never wanted to do all of these cruel things to me that the other girls did. She would always hesitate to be mean to me, but of course the other mean girls always made her do it.

They started to stare at me like I was a dinosaur at a museum. I started to walk faster to the nearest table I could see, but as soon as I started to sit down Lily hollered, "Maddie fattie has a rat named Lattie!" The table cleared like I had a disease. The mean girls sat down with me. It felt strange having them around me. It felt strange if anyone was around me. "First things first," said Delany in a nasty voice. "You will never EVER be like us so don't even try." "Ya, don't even try," replied Tristin. "Maybe she just wants to sit with someone," Mckenna mumbled, "I mean ..." Before she even got to finish her sentence the girls all screamed, "What are you talking about?" This is when things got a little out of hand.

Suddenly, Mckenna invited me to sit at another table to get away from all of the drama. The girls all gave her a look and walked away like angels. As Mckenna and I walked to a seat, the girls followed us. As we sat down, they sat down. As we got up, they got up too! They then said, "We're sorry. We didn't mean anything we said." Was it too good to be true? I knew that they weren't sorry. They all had a "I'm so innocent" face on. In that very moment, Delany got up and dumped her lunch tray on me! I had it. I was done. My face started to turn red. I was about to explode! "WHAT WAS THAT FOR?" I screamed. A teacher came over and questioned us. The girls said that they "accidentally" bumped into me. I knew that they didn't, so I had to stand up for myself. "That's it," I said. "You girls always mess around with me! You have to stop this!" I demanded, "It's really NOT fun having to go to school every day dealing with this!" They all gave me a look, except Mckenna of course. They soon walked away like what they did and said was not mean. I always knew that they were wrong and that I had to stick up for myself sometime, but I did not know that the time would be now. I knew that they were always going to boss me around whether I stood up for myself or not, but at least I had a friend by my side to help me through it.



*Writer's Workshop, Abby Ditzel,  
Woodstock Elementary School*



## ***Peanut Butter***

*Charlotte Christenson, Southeast Elementary School*

Let me tell you something ... and **don't laugh!** Because it's **not** funny!

"Bye, Mom!" I called making sure to show how miserable I was.

"Bye, Honey," her voice echoed back from the mudroom. "Don't open the door, don't answer calls, don't make Henry mad, and, don't fool around!"

"Bye, Mom ... get us a jeep!" Henry's voice called while sticking his head in the cupboard.

"Love you Mom! I need more hair spray!" called Emmett while fluffing and admiring his afro in front of the mirror.

"Get us a dog!" I yelled from the top of the stairs. My eyes traced the swirling pattern that ran down the railing. My brothers yelped in approval, again.

My parents zoomed out for car shopping, anxious to get out of the previous one; the one they were in now was overflowing with Daphne's gum and **reeked** with Henry's famous peanut butter and salami sandwiches

My brothers marched to the kitchen. And in an instant, they were making their lunches, their disgusting lunches! I mean, seriously who puts dried mangos on roast beef! (Don't forget the ketchup!)

My brain told me to go to the cupboard, but my eyes didn't listen. They found an enormous jar of peanut butter. I delightfully hustled over to the peanut butter and maybe, possibly, kind of, accidentally-on-purpose wiped a big glob of peanut butter on Henry's forearm.

Henry boldly struck his arm between the two tables, creating an unstoppable bridge. *Peanut butter won't stop me!* My brain sang. *Not a chance!* I went under his arm.

... Well, I kind of went under his arm.

I shakily got to my feet. Henry's donkey-like cackle rapidly filled the silence. Henry's cackle echoed off the walls like a kid in a bounce house. I felt my eye screaming in pain, but I tried to keep a straight face. My body was still shaking from violently hitting my head on the counter.

Suddenly, Henry, and his cackle, stopped in their tracks.

Next thing I know I'm standing in front of the mirror, which Emmett was once hogging. I was listening to my brother's reflections.

"You look like a demon goat," stated Henry flatly.

"You're DEAD," muttered Emmett's reflection as he pretended to slice his throat with his index finger. I stared at the dark liquid racing its way down my temple. I felt as if my feelings were stars, some flickering brightly, others, whimpering dim light. Fear and pain tied my stomach in never ending knots.

I spent an hour in the E.R; the feeling it stirred up was worse than anything. All the machinery lying about led me to think this room was a secret lab where scientists made inventions to stop the ferret apocalypse. (Believe me, it's GOING to happen!)

Two doctors hurried around the room. One struggling to put a light blue, rubbery face mask over his mouth—that, I hoped, would keep out his old onion breath—another adjusting the dark yellow light above me. Then, as if on cue, the third doctor strode into the room. He gently opened the case that sat on the far counter. That is when my breath started picking up.

Out came a syringe—and an extremely strong scent of hand sanitizer—but back to the syringe. My eyes were glued to the sight of it. The dark silver barrel held a mysterious liquid. My mind was going crazy with ideas: is that going in me? It felt as if the room was shaking, swirling, spinning in every direction.

A steel pole held a rectangular prism that was packed with lights. This contraption stood before me beeping at a fast, but steady pace. Scissors attached to almost invisible strings were on the counter pretending to be innocent. "Now," said the third doctor, showing me the needle as if taunting me. "This won't hurt a bit."

"Yeah, right."

"Yeah, right," he replied sternly. Clearly this guy wasn't too fond of my sarcasm. Then he set to work.

Touching my face with his cold gloves for the last time he exclaimed, "Done!"  
Then, I promised the doctors only what they wanted to hear: "I won't EVER play with peanut butter AGAIN!"  
"Hmm-hmm."  
"EVER!"  
"Hmm-hmm."  
"I hereby declare that peanut butter shall be BANISHED!"  
"I HEARD YOU!!!!!!!"  
We were checking out of the hospital when my mom's phone urgently rang.  
"Mom," came Emmett's muffled voice from the phone "There is a problem ..."

### ***Tap Shoes***

*Maya Louis, Tashua Elementary School*

Tap shoes give me passion and energy to speak up for myself. And they make me want to fight  
for what I want and what I need!  
Tap shoes are one of the brightest things in my life and if someone were to take that away from  
me, darkness will take that light!  
When I lace them up I feel a blast of energy jolting up through my body!  
And power making me want to run around the world!  
My tap shoes look cloudy and all scuffed up from when I do wings or double pullbacks on the  
sides and balls of my feet.  
I love tapping because it lets me be free doing something I love like dancing and I love the music  
beating to the rhythm in my head!  
I love doing group with my really good friends from dance and it makes me feel good inside  
and I feel like it's my home!

Tap shoes,  
When I stomp, a jolt of power zips right up my brain!  
When I hear tap shoes I think of my friends and I knocking on the door and saying "Trick or  
Treat!" and getting handfuls of candy!  
When I listen to tapping I hear greatness swelling up inside the dancer and I see the dancer start  
to smile and then start laughing and it gives me **joy!**  
The sound of tap shoes is like a musical instrument following its music sheet, just like when I  
follow what my teacher gives me!

Tap shoes,  
Will make me **smile** or  
**Laugh**  
**Tap shoes are my life!**

## Fifth Grade



*Winter Wonderland, Maeve Browning, Buttonball Lane School*

### ***Taken by Snow***

*Kate Littler, Ledyard Center School*

A cold draft drifted through the window Millie had forgotten to close. She shivered as it blew onto her side. But it was too cold for her. Grudgingly, Millie climbed out of her warm bed, her warm feet touching the cold floor, and went to close the window. Almost. It began to snow. Harder and harder. Faster and faster. Thicker and thicker. Piling higher and higher. It rose up to the porch, above the first floor windows, flowing through the streets, and piling on roofs. Then it crept through her window as though it had a mind of its own. Like tentacles, it slid through the half-foot gap, down the blue wall, until it was creeping and creaking across the old wooden floor boards towards Millie's feet. Millie backed away slowly until she was pressing herself against the door. But the snow continued advancing. It kept a pace, as though it had all the time in the world. Millie opened the door and tried to sprint away, but was met in a collision with another wave of snow. The tentacles began to rise like giant arms and grabbed her shoulders. Slowly they pulled her into their cold, white folds, taking her away from the only place she had

ever called home. But as the tentacles pulled her down that Christmas Eve, Millie had one last thought. She was being abducted by snow.

Black. Pain. Darkness. Falling. Suffocating. Alone. Cold. It felt awful. Free falling through space. It was like a dream Millie could not wake up from. She wriggled around and felt a sharp pain in her wrists. Millie moved a little more and discovered something unpleasant. Her wrists and ankles were bound with ice chains. *Great*, Millie thought. *Now when I hit the ground I won't be able to save myself and then I'll die.* Just then, Millie hit a fluffy surface, as though landing on an enormous, warm, cotton candy cloud, only to be rocketed up a little by the cushion's bouncy surface. After a few more bounces, Millie stopped and lay on the cotton candy, staring up at the cavernous ceiling. But that's when she noticed two things. First, the warm cloud had melted her icy binds. But what was really big was that way up, there was a purple portal. Millie stood up excitedly, a big plan forming. If she climbed the cliffs on the wall, she could jump and bounce all the way back through the portal to ... where would the portal lead her? Her house? Anywhere was better than here. So, Millie skipped across the floor to the wall. Having no background in climbing, she set off slowly until she fell into rhythm. After almost an hour of climbing, Millie looked up. She hadn't gone very far. She looked down. The cotton candy cloud looked as if it were a quarter. But the portal was still the size of an ant. Millie was tired and wasting her energy. So, she decided she had gone far enough. She looked down, and jumped.

Soft ground. Darkness. Pain in her head. All Millie could remember was leaping, bouncing off the cotton candy, but rebounding across the air that had become a barrier. Millie hit her head, passed out and fell onto the cushion, where she lay now. She tried to turn over and felt her insides burn. Millie flopped down, causing her to see something she hadn't seen in her excitement. Between her and the portal, there was a flaming, transparent green barrier spread from wall to wall. Millie knew she had already been in whatever and wherever this place was for a couple of hours, and that was enough. If Millie didn't escape soon, she would be stuck here. Alone. Scared. Hungry. Doomed. Knowing she would not die like this, Millie scrambled up, ignoring the sharp pains in her body. She stumbled through the fluff until she reached a wall. Then she began to trace the wall with her hand, all the way around. Eventually, Millie came back to the beginning, tired and frustrated. She leaned against the wall for support but fell through blinding white clouds. Millie's last thoughts before she blacked out for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time: She hadn't gone all the way around. She had missed her starting point by several feet, and she was falling again into nowhere.

Millie saw the world flashing through her eyes. At one year old, she walked. Two years old, she was talking. Three years old, she started preschool. Five years old, she started kindergarten. Seven years old, she started Girl Scouts. Ten years old, she went on her first overseas vacation. Now, at 11 years old, Millie was celebrating Christmas by falling through white clouds in pink skies without knowing where she was. Millie watched as more memories came to her. Wanting to get her mind away from the things she loved that she might never see again, Millie flipped over so she was looking down into the eternal clouds. Millie expected the wind to whip her face, but only felt a gentle, cool breeze, as though she was by the ocean. Millie felt herself relax into the air. She stretched herself out. Millie closed her eyes and let herself fall.

Millie hit water. Her bones froze. Her lungs burned for air. Her legs fought to keep her alive. Her head sunk beneath the surface of the water, causing her lungs to burn harder. Millie thought horrible thoughts as she felt her life slipping away. After minutes of fighting, Millie gave in. She slowly drifted to the bottom. *So, this is good-bye*, she thought, as she came to a rest on the sandy floor. When Millie thought she was just about to slip away, a soft nose pushed her shoulder, accompanied by a soft golden light. She opened her eyes with the little energy she had. And there stood a unicorn of a pure white coat with a spiraling gold horn and a fluffy blue mane. The unicorn directed its horn at Millie and a golden sparkly wave poured out and lifted her onto its back. Once the unicorn was sure that Millie was on its back, it swam effortlessly through the water to the surface. Millie's lungs filled with air as the unicorn swam to a pink shaded shore with seashells lining the water. As Millie collapsed onto the sandy shore, she spluttered out a single message, "Who are you?"

Millie's eyes fluttered open to a pink sunset. Suddenly a soft nose came down and nuzzled her fully awake. "I am here to answer your question," the unicorn said in a soft voice. "I am Alfred the Unicorn, the First, One, and Only. But you can just call me Alfred."

"Okay," Millie said slowly, trying to absorb the information. "Where are we?" she asked.

"We," said Alfred, "are in the world of Wherever You Wish. Any place you can imagine is in this land somewhere. But you, Millie, have amazing, strong powers. You can travel between the worlds. We sent those snow tentacles to get you, to see if your powers were ready. No time passes in the other world that is spent here. This was a test to see how well your magic worked. You could go home all along you just didn't know that. The portal was an illusion. And *you* summoned me to save you from the water. You can visit at any time. Good and bad times lie ahead Millie, and you are part of it all. Now, I believe you wish to go home, correct?" Alfred finished.

"What do you mean?" Millie asked.

"I have foreseen many things. You have other powers you must unlock. Now is not the time. You will return soon. An ancient force will rise ..."

"What do you mean, Alfred? What powers? What force? Who?" Millie asked worriedly.

"I told you that now is not the time. You will be summoned when needed. Be aware of the people around you. They could be dangerous. You must go now."

"But ...," Millie said as Alfred backed away. Millie thought about every detail of her home, her family, her friends, her dog, her room. "I want to go home," she whispered. She felt herself vibrating. "I want to go home," she said louder. Millie saw Alfred blurring and the world spinning. "I want to go home!" Millie shouted. The ground rumbled and Millie shot through the air. A purple tear opened in the sky. She flew into it and found herself tumbling through endless space. Head over heels, Millie suddenly plummeted and found herself lying in her bed. Snow covered the streets and stores and homes. Her window was open. Millie leaned back in her warm bed. She didn't know what lay ahead, but she was finally home.

## **George**

*Matthew Gladstone, Weston Intermediate School*

Miracles are something that doesn't happen so often. At the most unexpected time, yet at the perfect time, they happen. After all of your hoping and hoping and hoping, it comes. Like sun coming out of a storm only to make a rainbow, that's what happened that day.

I walked into the stuffy, mustard-yellow room with a few dull chairs in the corner, the feeling of depression in the air.

"I'm ready," the vet said. I handed over George, the cat that has always been there for me. The tears filled my eyes as the thought of George getting put to sleep haunted me, not getting out of my head.

I've had George for as long as I could remember. From the moment I saw his face and his fluffy, wagging grey tale, I knew that he was the one.

"Kitty!" I said, so long ago I could barely speak a sentence, pointing to the little furball, running around like a squirrel trying to find its hole, locked behind the wire door.

"You want this one?" my parents asked, walking up from behind me, as soon-to-be-George jumped up and put his paws on the door, his tail wagging like a dog's.

My mind finally wandered back to reality as I saw the vet walking with George to the back room, wishing I could go with him. That day seemed like it purposely slowed down to the speed of a snail, like every other day was normal, but that day went as long as it could, the clock slowing down by the second. Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick ... tock.

"What happened?" my sister Jordan asked, getting up from the seat next to me, as the vet walked out of the back room.

"We just need your mom's opinion," she said.

“Coming,” my mom said, with a look on her face saying this wasn't good. I tried to think back to the miracles, how they happen so unexpectedly. I wished that would happen today, but I knew what would happen. It wouldn't become one. It was too good to be true.

Later that day, I heard the pain-filled meows coming from the back room, my sister and I crying as we comforted each other in the waiting room. ‘I'm gonna miss his wagging little tail so much,’ I thought. I looked up as I heard footsteps walking through the hallway.

It was the vet. She walked over to us and cheerfully said, “I have a surprise for you!”

“What?!” I said, desperate for anything to get my mind off of this.

“I'll just show you,” she said with a smile, holding George out in front of her

“George!!” my sister and I screeched, running up to him as fast as a cheetah, giving him a squeeze as tight as I could.

“You're alive!” we cheerfully said. “You're alive!”

“Your mom decided to do the surgery instead,” she said with a smile on her face as I gave a hug to my mom.

That day it was a true miracle. The sun burst out of the storm like it has never before. After all of my hoping and hoping, it happened. That day was a true miracle.



*Nine Lives, Elsa Nocton, Mansfield Middle School*

### ***Strides Forward***

*Brooke Strauss, Buttonball Lane Elementary School*

Tension drifted through the air like fog, engulfing my mind with a steady stream of excitement, fear, and hope. I barely felt the soft, dew-covered grass soaking my sneakers. The confident praise of my classmates made my stomach twist and turn and added a greater sense of importance to this dash. This mile run is everything to me. I am known to be a good runner, so my mind tells me I have to be a great runner. So many people know my goal. So many people expect me to be great. So many people will think of me as a cocky person that says but never does if I don't succeed. A lofty goal of under 6:10 makes most strangers doubt that I will have success. I, on the other hand, know that I am capable of this goal and more. I love leaving people in the dust. Whenever I win, I am ready to defend my glory, and when I lose, I am quickly ready for a fierce rematch. My competitive personality is what has made me a great runner, but as I will soon learn it can also be devastating.

In what seems like forever, the glistening whistle is brought to Miss Skene's lips and the shrill sound that follows begins the run. As my body darts forward, I bring myself to a state of intense focus. In about 20 feet I start to get a feel of the pace that I need to go at. I am in line with three of my classmates, all of them boys, whom I call sprinters because they speed through the first half lap but tire soon after that. Anxious that I am not in the front, I speed up only slightly and easily pass the leader. Looking back, I see his defeated and tired face as he slows down greatly. Frustrated, I scold myself gently for speeding up unnecessarily. The power coming from my legs comes straight from my desire to knock this race out of the park.

Passing the checkpoint, I hope for the best. Much to my great relief the shout that matters so much brings me good news. With a lap time of 58 seconds I am on track for glory. More confident than before, I reassure myself that I will not disappoint. Strangely, time goes by so fast but yet so slow as I think nothing and feel everything. One of the reasons why I love running so much becomes clear during this mind-numbing second lap. My flying feet look like helicopter blades churning so fast that they are a foggy blur containing all my effort. As I pass the checkpoint for the second time, I sternly shake myself and demand my mind to turn back on. This is my last lap before my planned speedup in the final three laps. My mind continues its frantic work as I think over last night's plan in my head. "Okay, fourth and fifth laps speed up noticeably, then on the final lap sprint until the run is over."

With my legs pumping furiously, I move closer and closer to the end, to the speedup. A bitter wind chills my sweaty body as I shiver despite the heat of my core. At this point, many kids are walking and talking with friends. I puzzle as they fade away from sight why they could be so low key on this test. Shrugging, I gaze ahead to Miss Skene, timer in hand. As soon as I am close enough to her I questioningly yell, "Time!?" My answer comes two seconds later, "3:05," responds my gym teacher. As calmly as I can, I let the temporary success elate me. With determination, I pass the checkpoint and take two long strides. Then comes the first burst of speed as I start the fourth lap strong. "Bring in the fun, I've got this baby!" I whoop in my head. Grinning, I move forward in huge steps, pumped for victory.

Looking ahead, I gaze forward at the upcoming corner and beyond. My right foot stretches out to move past the corner and my worn sneaker rejects my attempt to get a grip on the cold slippery grass. A millisecond later, my ankle twists and my leg collapses in shock and slight pain. Unsupported, my bottom left limb follows suit, forming the worst straddle in history. My one knee slides forward while the other leg drags limply on the wet earth. Too stunned to even make an attempt to slow my still falling shell, I then feel my chin dig into the ground and spray soil over the rest of my face. For a long second, I lie still, no longer sliding.

Feeling unsure, I sit up on one very grassy knee and look around at my classmates. As I reach to brush the ground from my face, I feel a hot gooey liquid mixing in with the gritty earth. Pulling my hand down I realize that blood is the substance that is now dripping down the edges of my mouth from a banged-up nose. Standing up slowly, I breathe deeply, keeping in the blood for now. Unsurely, I wipe away the blood and continue running along, sucking up the red stuff as I move forward, rather fast for my current state. I wish for this sudden twist to be over. Yet in the back of my mind I have a smidge of hope that I can still finish with an okay time. As soon as my friends are near I try to hide my mangled nose, hoping no one will notice. When I see Miss Skene, I don't even try to hide my despair. There's NO WAY she'll let me continue running, not when I look as if I rolled in the grass like a dog and then applied fake blood for a vampire costume. Slowing down, I halfheartedly jog my last few strides towards her. Clearly concerned the teacher asks, "What happened?" In return, I mumble, "Fell," not bothering to elaborate at all. I am sent to the nurse, disappointed and frustrated.

Trudging to the nurse, I think back to before the run when I had a plan that I thought would help me succeed. Maybe I should have gone slower? But my competitive personality is what makes me who I am and what got me so close to success. Sure, I didn't reach my goal, but this is my personality and I'm never going to change. Life built a fence and stopped me, but I am going to climb the fence and try again. Walking more confidently, I know more problems will come but I *will* conquer them. All of them.





*Sunrise in the City, Ava Zagami, Buttonball Lane School*

### ***Sammy's Song***

*Olivia DiFilippo, Burr Elementary School*

My dad walked into the busy kitchen where I was doing homework with a smile on his face.

"Life as a fisherman is bringing new opportunities," he told me, my mom, and my older brother. "We're going fishing way deep. I just got a colossal boat and I want to take you and the kids along for a few days."

"Ronald," my mom spoke firmly to my dad. "I don't think we should just venture out like this. I mean, Kevin and Tommy have school, and what about Marmalade?" She gestured toward our small golden retriever puppy.

At the mention of her name, Marmalade perked up, saw she wasn't interested, and then put her head down again.

"I want to go," Tommy my older brother joined in, happy to abandon his homework.

"What about you, Kevin?" my dad asked.

All eyes turned to me as I thought.

"Well, I guess," I replied.

"It's looks like you're outvoted, honey." my dad turned to my mom. "So, what do you think? This will be a good bonding experience for Tommy and Kevin."

"I'll think about it," my mom said. "Now, everyone else, back to homework!"

That night as I lay in bed trying to fall asleep, I heard my parents' voices arguing below.

"Why don't you just get a normal job like everyone else? People talk, you know!" my mom yelled.

“Define normal!” my dad roared back.

“Well, I don’t know, a job where you’re not out in the sea!”

“Well, I’m making good money off of this job.”

“UGH!” my mom screamed. “FINE. I’ll go on this ‘expedition’!”

She stomped upstairs and slammed her bedroom door shut. Quietly, I tiptoed over to Tommy’s bedroom. He was awake, playing on his phone, and looked up when I came in.

“What?” he asked.

“Why were Mom and Dad fighting?”

“Because Mom doesn’t want to go on the trip. Other moms talk about how strange it is that Dad’s a fisherman, instead of a lawyer or a banker.”

“How do you know about that stuff?”

“I just do. I’m not as stupid as some people think.”

There was a pause between us. “Do you think Mom and Dad are going to get divorced?” I asked.

“Get out of my room,” he replied, threatening to get up.

I scurried out and walked downstairs to find my dad sitting on the couch, his hand pushed down deep into his hair.

“Dad?” I asked.

He looked up. “Yeah, Kevin?”

“Are you and Mom going to get divorced?”

He stared at me, and his copper-brown eyes punctured into my soul, a picture of him I would never forget. “Sometimes,” he said, “we disagree. But that doesn’t mean we don’t love each other. Just like you and Tommy. Sometimes, things don’t always work out, but we still love each other. It happens. And remember that, Kevin. Because it’s important. I love Mom, and she loves me. And that’s the way it’s gonna be,” he smiled. “I rhymed. Now get back to bed. It’s late.”

I lay in bed and thought about what Dad had said. I remembered the angry conversation that my Mom and Dad had. I thought of how I had read books where families got torn apart like a bridge going up to let a boat come through over one little argument. This didn’t seem like a little argument. I hoped that Mom and Dad’s relationship would heal.

The next day, I woke up to Tommy shaking me awake.

“Rise and shine, sleepyhead,” he said. “We’re leaving tomorrow. And we’ve got to pack and get the tools ready.”

I took a quick glance at my clock and fell back into bed.

“It’s 6:30 am on a Saturday. Do we have to get up this early?”

“Dad says it’s a long day and we have to get our equipment ready first. So, get up and change,” Tommy told me, and walked out of the room.

I pulled on a t-shirt and some jeans and grabbed my shoes. My dad was waiting for me outside.

“So, let’s take a look at your pole. We already know Tommy’s is fine, but I don’t know about yours.”

We walked into the garage and saw that, unfortunately, my pole had bent out of shape, pushed into the shelf by my bait-and-tackle box. I grabbed the pole and threw it in the trash.

“Okay, I need a new pole,” I announced.

“I have some extras to bring along, so that’s all covered. Now come on. Let’s raid the bait-and-tackle store,” my dad told us with a sly grin.

We hopped into his red pick-up truck and drove to the nearest store, where he purchased me a new pole, got extra bait for catching tuna, and some extra tools for fishing. We threw those in the truck and headed home, where my mom was packing up.

“Tommy, will you help me pack?” my mom asked him.

My dad’s face burned. Every time we traveled somewhere, my mom asked my dad to help. Now she was turning to Tom. ‘Oh man,’ I thought. ‘This just got spicier than a ghost pepper.’ Tommy walked over to my mom to help her, shooting a look to my dad that meant, ‘Sorry!’ I wasn’t sure what to think.

The fight was having a domino effect, and with each domino that fell, a piece of Mom and Dad's love did too.

The next day, we got into my dad's car bright and early with our belongings stuffed far back into the trunk, the same with our family happiness. I was worried, and I think Tommy was too. This was going too far. Once we got onto my dad's shiny new boat, we set off without a word. Marmalade was here too, jumping around the deck, and letting the wind get into her coat with pleasure. I must have dozed off, because soon we were far out at sea.

"Come help me over here," my dad called to me.

He was fishing, and I could see he already had a bucket full of tuna. The boat was happy at sea, slowly drifting every two seconds or so. I grabbed my pole and walked over.

"Things have been kind of rough with me and Mom's relationship, huh?" he asked, slowly reeling in his line.

I cast my line out far into sea. It landed with a plop. I nodded and slowly began to reel in.

"I want you to know that we're fine. We're just having a hard time," he continued.

I felt a bite and reeled in all the way until there was a big plump tuna right there in front of me, slowly trying to catch its last breaths before it died. I thought of Mom and Dad. It seemed like their love was the fish, slowly dying.

"Nice one," my dad told me.

I watched the life drain out of the fish's eyes, and then it was dead. Suddenly, I was crying like a baby and it had nothing to do with the fish.

"I wish this never happened," I blubbered through buckets of tears.

My dad, understanding slowly, came over and gave me a hug.

"I know," he said. "I'm sorry."

He began to fish again and I went over to sit down. I wiped the tears out my eyes and took deep, big breaths.

The breeze rustled my hair and I put my hand over my eyes to shield them from the sunlight. The boat rocked back and forth like a seesaw and the ocean water splashed around like toys in a bathtub. It teased the boat, gently hitting against it, then swirled away. The water was pure blue, and I felt at peace. I could tell Mom and Dad felt the same, although they weren't talking to each other. And then, I heard the song.

Imagine someone shrieking on a whistle through a megaphone, and multiply that a thousand times. Then make that shrieking noise beautiful. I heard the song as clear as a bell, and at first it sent shivers down my body, but then I enjoyed it. From far away, I could see the outline of a blue whale's head, coming up for air. Then, as it slowly lowered down the water rippled like electric soundwaves. Mom and Dad, I noticed, had moved so close together.

"His name should be Sammy," I broke the ice.

"Sammy?" Tommy laughed. "That's stupid."

"We've seen Sammy before," my dad said, and my mom smiled.

Then my mom hugged him. And just like that, my family was whole again.

***The Lost Memory***  
*Sadie Smith, Burr Elementary School*

I walked into the nursing home and I saw him.  
Caged in bars made of gold, never to be free.  
Lost, never to be found in a world of darkness.  
But something else,  
Something missing.

Daddy said hello in a gentle voice,  
Even I could barely hear him.  
But he just stared;  
Blankly.  
He didn't remember Daddy,  
He didn't remember anything.  
But he remembered me.  
A wrinkled smile came to his face when he saw me.

Later, we tried to feed him.  
He didn't remember how to eat,  
He didn't remember anything.  
But he remembered me.

When I fed him, he perked up and opened his mouth.

The time came and we had to leave, and he was asleep. We  
Tried  
And tried,  
But he wouldn't wake up.  
He didn't remember when to wake up,  
He didn't remember anything.  
But he remembered me.  
When I touched him, he shot up  
and kissed me goodbye.

Days later,  
I walked into the kitchen,  
Right after Mommy got off the phone and saw her face,  
Red, and streaked with tears.  
"He's gone," she said—  
that was all I had to hear.  
I went to the world of darkness that he has just exited.  
But I didn't believe it. I couldn't.  
I came back, and realized,  
My grandpa, was  
dead.  
He was free.

But he had remembered me, and I would always remember  
Him.  
His lost memory.



*Hidden Faces, Ruby Montañez, Greenwich Academy*

***I Am From***

*Saramentada Sanon, Wolcott Elementary School*

**I'm from the...**

I'm from the rain falling into the ground.  
 I'm from the clear water in the pond.  
 I'm from the coconuts tree falling to the ground.  
 I'm from the wet shell, the cacao beans, which makes sweet brown chocolate.  
 I'm from the iced fresco, colored white, green, orange, purple  
 I'm from the palm tree, green leaf, growing into the blue sky.  
 I'm from the blue and red Haitian flag waving in the windy air.  
 I'm from the blue egg, hatching from my mother's soft cotton nest.  
 I'm from the thundercloud falling like the hard rain.  
 I'm from the sparkling fireworks, popping in the dark sky.  
 I'm from the black watermelon seed sitting in the red, juicy fruit.  
 I'm from the white and gray spikey pufferfish, swimming under the clear ocean.  
 I'm from the bushy mango tree, falling into the green and yellow leafy ground.  
 I'm from the white stars in the American flag.  
 I'm from the hummingbird flying in the beautiful flowers.  
 I'm from the butterfly wings, flying into the air.  
 I'm from the salt falling into the boiling hot pot.  
 I'm from the instruments playing jazzy music.



## Sixth Grade



*Flying in the Wall, Andrea Nystedt, Greenwich Academy*

### **Broken**

*Olivia Piri, Tootin' Hills Elementary School*

The bus screeches to a stop. The sound on the inside doesn't falter. I'm the first to stand up. Cheryl and Pacifica stand up exactly seven seconds later. The crowd watches me step into the aisle and walk all the way off the bus. Cheryl and Pacifica follow behind. I'm the first on the school courtyard. I look around at my so-called kingdom of perfection; Ten seconds of staring at the five-acres that I rule. This is routine. This is my life, which comprised of getting up in the morning, going to school, and then coming home. There is no sleep from the hectic tornado. At least not for me. When I leave the house at seven to go to school, Dad is still sleeping.

I don't think he'll ever wake up.

His day is comprised of getting out of bed whenever he wants to and turning on the television looking for a football game, while beer does the rest. I don't blame him for not recognizing me when I come home. I blame the beer. I don't blame him for the glass bottles thrown at me. I blame the beer. I don't blame him for when I sometimes hide the bottles in the morning and come home to a very angry father. I don't blame anyone. I blame a drink that fizzes the bubbles of sadness. I blame a drink that slowly tore apart the life that I was left with. I blame a bottle of beer, because that's what started it all.

Mom died when I was nine. I have some great memories with her. It was the best life I could ever hope for. But a week after she died, Dad went into a spiraling wave of depressed addiction. It got worse and worse until one day he reached his maximum. And then he never slowed down.

So, in those ten seconds of peace, with Cheryl, Pacifica, gazing at the land I rule over, I think about Mom. I think about our memories.



And then the bus drivers let out the rest of the kids, and they come out in screaming waves, an ocean of squeaky voices and insecurity. I keep the pace I had as I walk right through the doors, the waves crashing up against the walls of the monarchy. Cheryl and Pacifica are behind me. I go right up to my locker, which is plastered on the inside with photos taped up against the door and magnetic pencil holders of all sizes filled with gum, makeup, and books. I put in a special request to Principal Ivory to have Cheryl and Pacifica's locker next to mine. I got my request. Ivory knows I'm the most watched and adored at this school, and if something didn't go my way I'd have the entire school riot against her. And she knows that Mom's dead. But she will never have a clue about Dad.

I hang up my backpack and take out what I need for class, along with my locket. I received it from Mom as a birthday gift. When you open it up, it's a mirror on the top side and on the bottom side, a picture of her and I when I was five. I remember the day she gave it to me, she said, "So you can always look at how beautiful you are, and see the light when times are tough." And I kept it with me. Always. It's the last thing I have of Mom, because everything else was destroyed or thrown out by the beer that possessed my Dad.

But when I am about to put it into a secure pocket in my pencil bag, Cheryl shut her locker and slammed right into me. She knocked everything to the ground, including my locket and me, to the ground. Cheryl looked horrified, as she should be. I pick myself up, and am about to go off on Cheryl when I look down.

My locket had shattered.

I drop right back down and pick up its shards in my hands. It's gone. Our faces in the picture are separated. The mirror has three uneven cracks. The whole thing. The picture's gone. The mirror's gone. Mom's gone. I look up at Cheryl, who's so terrified at what she's done that the faintest tears well up in her eyes. My face feels hot and tears start to stream down. A crowd gathers around my locker, expecting for me to put Cheryl in her place. But I don't. I just stare at the shards of the perfect life I had.

I give up.

Pacifica crouches down beside me. "It's totally okay! I have, like, a million of these. You can pick whichever you want, since I don't really use them anyways."

But there's no replacement that could make this better.

I shake my head.

"Well, okay. How about we glue it back together? I have some super glue right in here, the kind with the brush. The shards aren't too small, and it would be fixed."

But there's no amount of glue that could ever put this back together.

I just shake my head.

Pacifica is out of ideas.

She stands up, opens her locker, and pulls out a ziplock bag. She hands it to me, and I slowly collect all the shards of the locket. All the memories go into the bag, and are put into a safe place in my backpack. I slowly bend down, pick up my supplies, and shut my locker. I take a deep breath in. I exhale. I turn around, with the crowd all staring at me.

"Come on, guys, we're all going to be late to class."

### ***The Invitation***

*Stella Mahlke, Schaghticoke Middle School*

Dark red roads of crayon sprawled over the paper like confused yarn. He hadn't yet decided what the streaks were going to form, so he continued until he did. A harsh tug on the fragile rice paper from the plump crayon tore a gaping hole in the middle of the picture and slashed the thick, woven floor. This paper ripped all the time. Ignoring the combative red line on the floor, young Vaner crinkled the paper, and tossed it in the flickering fire.

At the faint tap of the boat nudging the stilts under his house, the boy knew his parents were home. Most families in this southern Vietnamese village came home in just this way—the slosh of the

water and the familiar tap of the boat. Dad emerged behind Mom and the twins, struggling to hold little Minh who was fighting to get free from his brawny, sunburnt arm. Mom's smile embraced her face and crinkled her skin. Beads of work-sweat and oil dribbled down Dad's temples.

"We got a letter!" Mom exclaimed, waving a shiny gold envelope in the air like a fan.

"A fancy letter! Just look at the envelope!" Dad declared, as he released his fussy child. Mom rubbed her rough finger around the perimeter, demanding that Dad, the only literate one in the house, read the letter.

"It's from Y'su's parents." Y'su and Vaner's older sister had recently married, but Vaner's family had very few interactions with Y'Su's parents so far.

Mom squealed and clapped her hands.

"We are so fancy! Getting a letter from such wealthy and important people!"

"Feel the card! It's thick as a blanket! And the handwriting!"

"Greetings, Voun family! We cordially invite you to dine with us Saturday night. We anticipate seeing you there. The Kus"

"That's tonight!" Vaner yelled, jumping from his mom's lap.

"The language! Like a tongue twister!" Dad couldn't hold back his grin as he read the letter aloud. Mom clapped her hands again, and picked Minh up for an excited kiss. Vaner bounded up and down, shouting, "We're going to a mansion! We're going to a mansion!"

"We would be honored to go!" Dad joked, mimicking a snooty, rich person.

Dad peeled off his shirt, which was dramatically splotted with oil and grease from the kind of work that left his arms and fingers numb. Rapidly, he fished through baskets of crinkled outfits, until coming across his nicest white shirt. Mom squatted next to a bucket, washing her face for the millionth time, then applying makeup.

"I look like a model, don't I, Vaner?"

"Yeah," he answered half-mindfully.

"I'm so proud they invited us!"

"They 'anticipate' us coming! That's good, right?"

"Should we bring something for them?"

"Make your famous spicy rice!"

"It is my best recipe." Mom put the twins, Cam and Lan, in their best floral dresses and trimmed their crooked bangs straight. Afterwards, they twirled each other and sang songs they made up about being rich. Mom dressed Minh in an okra-yellow crocheted suit from Ly, the old woman next door who always kept a fat cigar in her mouth.

"We all look so nice!" Mom exclaimed, resting her head in her hands. "The Kus will take a good picture of us."

Dad made Vaner put on dress pants, or as Vaner called them, "leg prison." After that, he put his son in a stiff shirt that Mom had desperately tried to turn white once again.

"Do I look like a businessman?" Vaner asked, standing on his tip-toes.

"A *rich* businessman," Dad corrected as he lifted Cam up to fluff her bob.

Mom was in a navy dress with faded yellow flowers and stitch lines from holes weaving across the fabric. It had been quite a while since she had worn it. Maybe since the wedding? Anyway, she needed to shave off a layer or two of dust and do some serious patchwork. She spent nearly the whole time restoring its beauty, while boiling rice so she could have something to bring.

"They'll like my spicy rice, right Honey?" she asked Dad.

"Of course!" Dad said, giving her a passionate kiss, like the men in films.

After much hectic preparations, they boarded the boat, and tried not to get their outfits wet. Everyone sighed in relief and smiled a smile that erased their eyes and made them giggle and forget their chapped lips.

"We look so, so great!"

"Look at *them*," Dad remarked in disgust at his neighbors as he picked up the oar. "Living in squalor: metal sheets for roofs, graffiti, tossing plastic bottles into the beautiful water. Ly, with her hand rolled cigars. So cheap! I can't believe she wears that sun hat with all those holes in it."

"And look at Ha's daughter in that dress! Who would put their child in that trash?" Mom said, pointing with her head at the skinny girl with a stained dress.

"Mom—" Vaner started.

"Mother!" Mom corrected, craning her neck, to make sure no one heard.

"Uh ... never mind."

"And what's with the patch work on that house?"

"Our house is made from hand woven, gold-toned straw."

"Maybe the Kus will give us money."

"Don't be rude," Mom snapped. "But maybe."

They took the boat along the foamy, gray delta until they reached a city, where they parked in a little docking station next to shiny motor boats. The streets were packed with dusty locomotives and rickshaw drivers. Hogs escaped from butchers, and kids devoured store-bought candy. Tall buildings antagonized the clouds.

"Do they live in one of these buildings?" Vaner asked.

"No, no, no! You will be surprised at what they live in, my boy!" Dad remarked, raising his hand above his head to show it was bigger.

The pavement scorched their bare feet.

"We should've worn shoes," Cam whined, brushing hair trimmings off her forehead.

"Should we get a ride?" Lan asked, pulling at her tight suit.

"We don't have enough spendings," Dad responded, counting a few folded bills with disappointment. "It would be good to have a driver."

Everyone around them had bikes, jackets, loafers, sneakers, socks, but Vaner's Mom and Dad didn't even seem to notice. Or maybe they pretended not to.

"Are you sure it's okay we didn't wear shoes?" Vaner asked, not sure what answer he wanted.

"Of course! We look so classy, they won't even notice. I can't believe we are almost there!"

After the long, trying walk, they finally reached the borough. Their feet were relieved when they could walk in the wet lawns. Instead of rickety, hand woven boxes on stilts, hovering above a sheet of rank water, Vaner noticed these homes were massive and sprawled out across the neat lawn as if causally taking a nap. They also had arched roofs, exteriors white as Grandfather Bao's hair, brilliant flower boxes, and tidy stone paths. Nobody said anything, although they all noticed a man, a servant, carefully mowing the lawn of the house they were visiting. Slowly, anxiously, they made their way up the neat cobblestone path to the spotless, pale porch with a rocking chair that had never been sat in. The door was taller than two Dads, and thick, made from a wood even young Vaner knew was well out of their budget.

Cautiously, Dad knocked with the gold knocker. Mom confidently put on her red hat with dried flowers in it, then brushed off her dress, before squeezing Dad's hand. Within a matter of jittery seconds, a robust butler with plastic-looking, gelled hair and a blinding, white tunic opened the door. He glanced at their feet. Everyone froze for what seemed like forever. Mom took off her hat, and turned her head from her children. When was he going to let them in? Dad stared at something past the butler, as if he wasn't there, but his lip gently quivered. *What was happening to his prideful family? Why didn't they go in?* Vaner wondered.

It was only then that Vaner realized his Dad's shirt had a brown stain that looked like a profile, and his Mom's makeup was cracked from old age and made her look tired, and how Lan and Cam's floral dresses were faded, and the material looked like paper, and how he could see their skinny, little legs through it, and how his Mom's rice smelled sour, and the bowl that held it was old and varnished in cracks, and how Dad's hair was tangled, and how Minh's suit had holes in it, and how they didn't belong in this palace.

The butler puffed his chest, raised an eyebrow, and scoffed. Dad struggled to reach into the pocket of his stiff pants, and held the shiny invitation card in his purple, bruised hand.



**Torn in Two, Nicollette Chu, Memorial Middle School**



## ***Being Brave***

*Erin Scroggins, Squadron Line School*

In your life, there are many people that you see, and some that you will meet, that seem perfectly normal, but they might just have some special secret that you could never guess. Something that they have been through, something that has made them brave. Bravery is like an onion, hidden under all of those layers of clothing, skin, feelings, friendships, and hardships.

I do not think it is easy to be brave. Some people say that I am brave for what I have been through. Doctor visits, needles, medicine, and surgery. Sometimes I feel brave. Lots of times though, I feel more scared or nervous. Maybe afterwards, brave for just getting through it all. It is really hard to be brave when the things you are afraid of or nervous about are happening. Sometimes I wish it would all just get better on its own, or that I could somehow ignore it. I am sure this is what a lot of other brave people have thought, too. The thing is, brave people don't ignore it. They toughen up. It might be something big, like a health issue or standing up to a bully, but it could also be trying something new for the very first time. There are so many ways to be brave.

I don't know of any special way to get through something scary. Sometimes I just keep focused on all the good things in my life, and tell myself that everything will be all right. Sometimes I feel ready to just get this over with, and the sooner the better. Sometimes I even have to ask myself, "*Is this really something to make a big deal about?*" That thinking helps a lot though, because whether it's something to be afraid of or not, if you are afraid, you just are. Deep breathing can help a lot in those situations. I also find that a special object can make you feel stronger and give you confidence. It could be a favorite stuffed animal or a special good luck charm. Anything you think that helps make you feel stronger and safer and braver can work.

Most people don't realize this, but trust is very important too, and is a big part of being brave. For me, I have to trust my parents and doctors to figure out the best way to help me get better. I trust my friends to make me laugh and help think of other things. For some other people, it might be teachers or other grown-ups, brothers, or sisters, or friends. You might even have to trust yourself a little, to know that you are a good person and a strong person and can face any situation.

So, maybe there is no secret to being brave. But lots of people do brave things every day. People that you may never have guessed, might have been braver than you could imagine. Maybe they have recovered from an accident or have a medical problem and need to get a shot every day. Maybe there is even someone from school who has stood up to a bully. Anything that makes you different in school can be scary, so just being yourself can be brave. Standing up in front of the class to give a presentation if you are really shy is brave. When someone faces any problem or fear and is strong enough to deal with it and get through it, they are brave.

It is not easy to be brave, but there are brave people around us everywhere who have figured out how to push through when things in their life are hard. So, as you meet people in your life, don't forget to take the time to peel back the layers of the onion and get to know someone and their story. You might be surprised.

## ***Free Fall***

*Haley Evans, Gideon Welles School*

"Woohoo!" I laughed as I soared through the air on the swing in my backyard, a gentle breeze slapping my face. It was a beautiful spring day, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. As I swung high above the ground, I realized that I had never seen the grass look any greener. The big round bubbles that my Mom was blowing floated towards my face and stopped a few feet in front of my nose. I felt the breeze gently slap my legs and as I swung, while holding onto the cold metal chain attached to the swing that was keeping me from a fall.



I watched as the wind carried big soapy bubbles towards my face, like the bubbles were riding in an imaginary chariot, on an invisible road that stopped in front of my nose. I wanted them to come closer to me, so close that they popped on my face. But they weren't. I tried my best to ignore the temptation, but eventually crazy, little, five-year-old me decided that I needed to feel one of them pop on my skin. I reached my chubby finger out to one of the bubbles, but it was just out of reach.

I was sitting on the swing, at the highest point in the air. I was so focused on popping that bubble, so focused on feeling the soapy tingle on my skin, that I wasn't paying any attention to my other hand, the one keeping me on the swing and sparing me from a fall. Little did I know that my sweaty five-year-old palm was slipping from the chain. I didn't realize what was happening until I felt the breeze dry my wet hand that was supposed to be grasped on the chain, and by then it was too late to stop myself.

The wind roared in my ears as I fell. The green grass turned to a sadder shade the closer I came to the ground. I realized that I no longer heard the birds chirping their sweet happy song. A chill rushed through my spine as I noticed that my nose was nearly touching the grass. In a haste, I threw out my hands to break my fall. Just seconds after my hands hit the ground my body did too, crushing my right arm under my weight. I felt a lonely tear work its way down to my cheek, and that's when the first raindrop hit my head.

I couldn't move, couldn't do anything but sit there stunned while the overwhelming pain that was spreading in my arm got worse.

My mother's voice shouted, "Honey, are you okay?" and echoed over and over again in my ears. I felt like angry knives were making their way into my arm and trying to cut it open from the inside. I let out a horrific scream, one that rang over and over in my ears, and that's when the sky opened up completely.

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Five minutes later, I was sitting at the kitchen table, a bag of frozen peas resting on my arm. My mother and sister were running around frantically, trying to gather everything they need to prepare for the terrible storm. There were tornado sirens ringing in all of our ears. The storm had broken out in a matter of seconds. It had gone from a beautiful day to a terrible day almost instantly, all while I was falling from the sky.

As I sat in the minivan minutes after, looking out the window and replaying the moment of my mom and sister sprinting around the house in my head, I thought about how much they loved me. My mother had dropped the bubbles she was blowing and scooped me up, her gentle hands wrapping my blonde head in her arms. "Shh, sweetie. It's going to be okay," she had whispered over and over again in my ear. After, she and my sister had been running around like chickens with their heads cut off, trying desperately to prepare for the storm while trying to make me happy. Now, they were in the car driving me to the hospital while rain fell on the minivan.

They were doing this all for me. It was something that, even though I was only five, I could still remember to this day. The way my sister ran around getting what my mom asked her to without one complaint, and the way my mother frantically opened drawers looking for a flashlight while she held the phone to her ear, talking to the doctor about what she should do.

The agonizing pain in my arm was only getting worse. I had it propped on the edge of the car window, trying hard not to think about the pain and focus only on watching the rain falling. It wasn't working. I was starting to get a headache from trying so hard to think about anything than my right arm, so I just gave up. I closed my eyes and re-watched the movie in my head ...

### ***Jupiter***

*Maggie Berling, Tootin' Hills Elementary School*

What if Jupiter was a girl?  
A girl who lived and dreamed  
A girl who woke up to see the sunrise  
A girl whose father pretended to be something he wasn't,  
and wanted to be something he was  
A girl whose mother left her for the galaxy,  
but never found what she was looking for  
A girl whose only friend lived in the forest  
A girl who was illiterate, but drew like her life depended on it  
A girl who lost in every battle that she won.  
A girl who didn't even fight the battle for herself.  
A girl who got in her car and drove to the ocean.  
A girl who stood on the waves and waited.  
Waited for the stars to carry her home again.



***Realistic Woman***, Lilliana Boutin,  
*Tootin' Hills Elementary School*



***The Winter***, Joanna Raczkowski, *Gideon Welles School*

### ***Wall***

*Angelina Wisdom, Grace Academy*

I put up a wall  
That is so high  
You will never see my pain  
Or any of my scars  
I create this character  
And she is perfect  
She's invisible  
I carry on living these two lives  
One for the public  
And one just for me

## Seventh Grade



*Grayness, Mingyue Zha, Amity Middle School*

### *The Little Tin Rattle*

*Lily Helpinstine, Mansfield Middle School*

*Knock, Knock, Knock!*

“Whaaa!” I heard from the other side of the door. As the door creaked open, I caught a glimpse of the Shepard family.

“Oh,” said Mrs. Shepard. “Hello, Bo!”

“Hello!” I replied eagerly, stepping through the doorway.

“Thanks again for agreeing to babysit the kids!”

“Anytime!”

Mrs. Shepard smiled, “Alright, bedtime is at 7:00 for the baby and 8:30 for Wooly and Graceson. Only one dessert, and no T.V. before bed. Got it?”

“Yup!” I answered.

“Alrighty then. See you tonight!” she said, kissing her children goodbye.

After Mr. and Mrs. Shepard left, the air was filled with an awkward silence. Walter was thirteen years old and very wild. His hair was dirty blond and quite curly, almost like sheep wool, so we called him Wooly. Graceson was eight and had green eyes, with dark hair that fell across his face. Barbara was

adorably wrapped in her pink blanket. She couldn't pronounce her name, so she called herself Ba-Ba. We called her Ba, for short.

"Bo. The rattle," Graceson said, startling me out of my thoughts. Ba was crying loudly.

"What?" I asked.

"You'll need the rattle to calm her down," Wooly answered.

"Right, the rattle," I replied, "Umm ... do you know where it is?" Wooly shook his head, causing his curly hair to jiggle, ever so slightly.

I looked in every room, but couldn't find it. I was checking the baby's room upstairs for the second time, when I heard a loud crash. Rushing down the stairs, I was shocked at what I saw.

"Graceson! Wooly! That's your mother's favorite china set!" I yelled. The two rascals were hanging china plates from the ceiling and were just about to use them as punching bags! "Stop!" I cried.

"Awww ... come on Bo. You spoiled our fun!" Graceson whined.

After cleaning up the kitchen, I turned on a T.V. show for Wooly and Graceson.

"Watch your sister while I look for the rattle."

"Fine," answered Wooly, bouncing Ba on his knee.

After checking each room twice, I finally gave up and plopped down on the couch. Ba was still crying loudly when Wooly put her in my arms. I tried to sing to her, but it just made things worse. Sighing, I stared up at the old grandfather clock. *Tick! Tick! Tick!* Then, my eyes drifted to a small room, filled with cabinets.

"What's that?" I said, pointing to the room.

"Oh," answered Graceson, "that's where our parents keep our antiques."

"Here," I said to Wooly. "See if you can get Ba to sleep in her crib upstairs."

"Alright," Wooly sighed as he started upstairs, Graceson trailing behind. Curiously, I walked through the doorway of the strange room. The cabinets were neatly polished, but everything else looked fragile and dusty. The room smelled musty and the air was slightly thick. It was quiet except for the faint cries of Ba from upstairs. There were all sorts of things in the cabinets: books, clothes, toys, paper, pens ... everything. It was a jungle of trinkets. Suddenly, my eyes fell onto a small object in the far cabinet. As I got closer, I realized that it was a little tin rattle. It was small and red, perfect for Ba. Hesitantly, I opened the wooden cabinet and grabbed the rattle from its place next to a book showing Little Bo Peep. *What's the worst thing that can happen?* I thought.

Running into Ba's room, I declared, "Look what I found!" Approaching Ba in her crib, I shook the rattle. Everyone sighed as Ba's crying stopped and she laughed happily. Suddenly, I started to feel a bit ... disoriented. The room seemed to be swaying. *What was going on?* The floor melted into grass underneath me. Before I could understand what had happened, I was standing in a green meadow. I looked around for the children, but I only saw three sheep a few yards away.

As I got closer, it seemed like they wanted to say something. One had big curly hair that was very blond. The second had the darkest wool of the three and his eyes were green. The third was only a little lamb. They almost looked like ... like ... Oh no! I felt the color drain from my face. I was as pale as a full moon. The children had been transformed into sheep! Hurriedly, I looked around for help, but other than the sheep, I was alone. "*BAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!*" they cried. Desperately wishing we could communicate, I picked up the littlest sheep, who I assumed was Ba, and held her in my arms. Not knowing what to do, I plopped down in the grass. My stomach grumbled. *How am I going to feed them lunch?* I wondered. Looking up, I realized that I didn't need to feed them. Graceson and Wooly were happily eating grass as their sister contently lay in my arms. Though they were sheep, they still acted like boys, playing and butting heads.

Looking around, I realized just how beautiful the area really was. A slight breeze ruffled my hair and I could hear the pitter-patter of small critters darting around the woods. Where the meadow ended was a forest of tall trees looming over me like giants. Suddenly, I had a distressing thought. *The rattle! Where had it gone?! How were we to get home?! What if we never got home?!* As a soft noise entered my ears, I realized that Ba was hungry. Smiling, I put her down in the grass by her brothers. I could tell that

Graceson and Wooly wanted to explore, so they led us toward a lush garden filled with blossoming lilacs where Ba fell asleep for her nap. Soon, all was calm and still.

Then, out of nowhere, heavy rocks started flying at us.

“BAA! BAAAA!” cried Graceson and Wooly, panicking. That was the last sound that I heard before a stone hit me in the head and all went black.

After waking, I realized that the children were gone. The only thing left was a long trail of footprints. Some I recognized as the sheep’s, but some were strange, looking almost like wolves’ footprints. Leaping up, I ran down the path hoping that they were okay.

The trail ran through the woods. I didn’t know how long it would go, but I figured I would find them eventually since the footprints were still fresh.

As I was running, I came across a huge, gray castle. I walked through a tall stone arc marked “WOLFENSTEIN.” There were a few guards, but they didn’t see me.

Tiptoeing down the hall, it was so eerily quiet that you could hear a pin drop. Often, I had to hide from passing guards, but I went unnoticed. Inside, it was dimly lit, which wasn’t too surprising, since it was probably the wolf’s castle. It was a bit dreary and the sound of my footsteps were out of place. Almost everything was made of stone. The halls were very gloomy and echoed slightly.

While wandering around the castle’s hallways, I came across a staircase leading to a gloomy room marked “Prison.”

Carefully opening the door, I found the cells to be extremely dark, making it easy for me to hide in the shadows. I whispered, “Children! It’s me, Bo!”

“BAAAA!”

“Not so loud!” I hissed. Suddenly, I jumped as I heard a snore. A large wolf was sitting in a chair near the door, asleep, with a key around his neck.

Stealthily, I grabbed ahold of the key. Slowly, I raised it ever so gently without the slightest disturbance making sure not to startle him in any way.

The key fit perfectly in the cell door’s lock, so the sheep were free in almost no time.

After freeing them, we were tiptoeing together down the hallway, when I noticed a door. Opening it, I found a small table, and to my utter surprise on top of it, was the little tin rattle. Wanting to leave before getting caught, quickly I grabbed the rattle and gave it a hard shake.

Instantly, I was sitting in the Shepard’s living room. All three of the sheep had transformed back into their normal selves. “Children! You’re alright!” I exclaimed giving them each a hug. Looking at them, I could see that they were dazed and confused, so I chose my next words carefully. “Did you enjoy your lunch?”

“Strangely,” said Wooly, “for some reason I can’t remember it too well. Though, —I know this sounds ridiculous—I think it tasted like grass.”

“Oh?” I replied.

Apparently, neither Wooly nor Graceson remembered much about the other land. Interestingly, Ba kept trying to crawl into the antique room, and we had to keep stopping her. She wouldn’t stop wailing and simply cried out, “Rattle! Rattle!” confusing Wooly and Graceson. It seemed that only Ba and I remembered what had happened after shaking the Little. Tin. Rattle.

### ***The Murderer and the Bone***

*Sara Raghavan, Greenwich Academy*

It was September 4, 2118.

The docks were quiet, as they usually were, at the small fishing village of Praiano, situated on the Tyrrhenian Sea. A woman with cropped, sandy hair raced onto the dock with a limp, but in hot pursuit. It was too late. The thief had already boarded her motor boat and was speeding away with a satchel containing a bone marked L.R.T. The boat quickly disappeared into the horizon. The woman with the army cut approached the edge of the dock and cursed into her walkie talkie.



“Leo, it’s Debrah. There’s no hope. It’s a lost cause. We’re never getting it back.” She was right. Though she would never find the bag, I would.

●●●

On the first day of school, September 5, nobody bothered to introduce themselves to a new kid like me. I looked around at the kids in the English classroom. The two girls in the corner of the classroom with matching hair ribbons were chatting. The one on the right secretly didn’t like the other girl with her matching bow. She never said anything about her disliking. Only thought it. And the girl sitting to my right ... Strange thoughts came from her mind. She couldn’t stop thinking about some bone.

Even with the loud chatter of the classroom, I could hear her repeat in her head, “I cannot believe what my mom did yesterday ... it’s so sick, but I love it ... I can’t believe it ...”

I know that it’s a bad habit to look into others’ thoughts, but sometimes it’s useful. Anyway, I stayed quiet that day and studied the brightly decorated room, despite the nagging thoughts of the girl next to me. I looked over to her more closely. She had sleek, long, brown hair and deep, hazel eyes. I didn’t have any friends yet. I wondered if I should introduce myself to her.

“Hello ... I’m Delilah Ankeren and I’m new here.”

“I’m Kathy ...” she said, her brain buzzing with curiosity. The things people think about when meeting new people, honestly.

“Cool, nice to meet you!”

Then our teacher started to speak. “Welcome to English Class! I’m your teacher, Miss Glenn. I hope that your summer has been good, and welcome to Acadia Middle School, to those who are new.”

She then talked about our new project on the book that we had to read over break. She assigned partners and, coincidentally, she partnered me with Kathy. After class, Kathy asked me if I wanted to go to her house after school to get started on the project, and I agreed. The day passed on and soon enough it was time for lunch. I never liked lunch. I always brought my newspaper with me to school in case I didn’t find anyone to sit with, which was the case today. Kathy was nowhere to be found so I sat on a bench and unfolded the paper to read the headlines. I read, “*Body of the victim of the Tyrrhenian Sea Murder is missing, leaving no evidence on site.*” I wonder how something like that could just go missing. The article then said that they identified the name of the murdered person, and that the suspected killer was Loraine Riley Trafford. The mugshot of the suspected murderer depicted a woman with a grayed-brown haircut that went a few inches past her ears. She had piercing grey eyes. I set the paper aside when I saw Kathy standing above me.

“Whatcha reading?” she asked me, “Anything good?” She looked down at the paper and read the headline. She frowned and said, “Huh. Nothing useful, I guess.”

She then took the newspaper and trashed it. I was kind of stunned that she just trashed my newspaper. It’s not like it was hers. She also was still thinking about the accomplishment she was thinking about earlier, whatever it was.

“C’mon!” she said, “I want to introduce you to some of my other friends.” She then introduced me to three girls: Jenny, Lucy, and Amy. Lucy and Amy were the girls in the bows. Amy was the one who didn’t like Lucy, as she was still thinking about it. Jenny seemed perky and enthusiastic on the outside, but on the inside ... she did not like Lucy or Kathy. She only liked Amy. How complicated could this friend group get? They all pretended to be best friends, yet on the inside they were so emotionally cryptic. When we were dismissed from school, I called my mom to tell her that instead of walking to our house, I was going to work on a project with a new friend. She was upset that I didn’t call her and let her know earlier, but she still allowed it seeing as we didn’t have anything planned for the afternoon. Kathy and I walked home, and I was surprised to see that she literally lived across the street from me, yet I didn’t know her. We walked up to her apartment, an old building with chipping cement. We passed through the kitchen where Kathy introduced to me her mom, who was cutting vegetables. She had grey eyes and short grayed-brown hair. She didn’t really have much emotion, and her thoughts were blank, a rarity for most people. Kathy led me to her room. We got to work, but about fifteen minutes later she said that she needed to use the bathroom and she’d be back. While she was gone, I looked around the room. She had a paper lamp hanging from her ceiling and a knitted blanket under her bed. Her closet was only

half closed and I saw ... something that I did not expect to see: There was a bag, a leather bag hanging from the inside of the closet with a very long bone sticking out of it. On the bone was a carving of the initials L.R.T. I noticed that there was no dog in the house. "*L.R.T.*," I thought to myself, "*I wonder what that stands for ...*" Then it hit me. Oh, gosh. Of course, that's who I befriended. I felt a shadow fall over my back. The figure had a knife, confirming my guess. A kitchen knife that had been recently cutting vegetables, to be precise. She thought to herself over my shoulders, "I knew it was a bad idea to keep evidence in my daughter's closet. Now, I must kill you, Delilah Ankeren." I looked into the lady's piercing grey eyes and said, "Hello, Loraine Riley Trafford."



*Embrace, Meena Behringer, Greenwich Academy*

### ***Embracing Change***

*Lorelei Rich, East Granby Middle School*

It was a humid July morning with the grass and hydrangeas still littered with dew. This day was particularly warm in the redneck town of Cincinnati—the town my grandma grew up in, and the town I have learned to love. As the sky painted an orange sun across it, I looked outside across the morning grass and saw the quaint, tiny house my siblings and I used to play in. Anyone could see that its robin-egg blue and titanium white paint was old from endless years of chipping. It was truly a miracle that its fragile frame was still standing after being built by my great-grandfather in the 1950s. As I gazed at this house, little did I know that this day would be a day of growth and new beginnings.

My mother's calm voice snapped me back to reality, "Rosie," she beckoned me to her with my childhood nickname.

I simply responded with, "Coming Mama." I could smell the sweet maple syrup and salty butter wafting from the kitchen tempting me more with each calm, slow step I took towards them. I stepped into the warm room with cold, linoleum floors. Inside, my siblings, cousins, aunt, and grandma all waited in line holding empty plates anticipating a quick end to their hunger with fresh waffles made using our antique waffle iron. My grandpa slowly handed out the steaming waffles with his red face hot from slaving over the iron. Once each received the desired stack of waffles, the line receded as they entered the dining room to consume their favorite breakfast. A tradition in our family is hot, homemade Belgian waffles.

We conversed as we chewed the chocolate chip and plain waffles with an occasional, "What are we doing today?" or "When will we go to the graveyard?" The graveyard is an almost sacred place, a safe haven for the socially-awkward and anxious members of my family. Beneath its rocky soils, it houses the remains of my great-grandparents and a little sprinkle of my great-uncle who passed before his time.

After our scrumptious breakfast, my grandma called a family meeting to address the recurring question of "What are we doing today?" Today was so very different. My grandma called to us in a strained voice. "FAMILY MEETING! FAMILY MEETING!" she shouted as she rang one of the many antique bells scattered around the house.

We all followed the high pitched "ding" of the bell to the living room. Reclining in her favorite chair, my grandma said, "I have called all of you kids here to tell you something very important."

My cousins and siblings all erupted into questions like, "Is it bad news? Is it a treat? Did another one of our relatives die?"

My grandma, always bringing order to the room, steadied everyone with a reassuring, "It's not necessarily bad news." We all let out a sigh of relief. It was true. It wasn't necessarily bad news. We had been trying to sell the house for a long time, but I didn't think we would lose it so soon. My grandma sadly revealed the truth. She said, "We have got a buyer for this house."

Suddenly, I felt my childhood being stripped away like a piece of old wallpaper. My memories of this place were torn into a billion pieces. Each precious hug of my late great-grandmother was ripped away from me. I felt alone. Similarly, my family shriveled like dead flowers wanting nothing more than a few more weeks in this house.

Each of my family members expressed his pain and concern through angered and sad opinions about selling the house.

My cousin cried, "Can't we just have the house for a couple more summers?"

My peaceful grandma quietly replied, "I'm sorry, but this is a substantial amount of money. I don't think another offer will come in if we wait any longer."

After a while, my family members all receded to their rooms hoping to scrape up any lingering memories from this place and store them in their minds like a safe. I remained, still hurt by this knife of change.

Finally, after a few minutes of sitting there, I headed out the door to go visit my great-grandparents. I crossed the street and walked a few meters to the entrance of the graveyard. I passed the old morgue and wound through the stones towards the horses fenced off by the thick barbed wire. Right before the horses, I found the stones engraved with my loved one's names. I crouched over them and expressed my feelings to them. I cried over each stone letting my great-grandparents soak in my never-ending waterfall of tears.

After a few minutes of mourning, I awoke from my state of sadness to find a horse breathing over me, ruffling my hair. I laughed through tears and stroked its fine muzzle. While stroking its smooth, warm coat, I began to grasp the fact that I don't need a house to remember my loved ones. I know that I will always have a piece of them with me wherever I go. I realized that my great-grandma passed on to me the trait of caring too much about the past to let go of anything. Everyone knows that she hated change, and now I know that I despise it, too.

One last time, I knelt before my great-grandparents and said to them, "I know I don't want to let go of you, but I can let go of the house." With that, I petted the horse with the auburn hide once more and

returned to my favorite, forever-loved house. It is the house that I have learned to let go of, no matter how much it pains me.

Later on, I realized that my emotions weren't really about selling an old house, but of letting go of lingering memories attached to that house. I have since learned to embrace change as it comes and goes with each of its peaceful twirls and painful turns.



*Vase and Flowers, Rebecca Huang, Amity Middle School, Grade 7*

**August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

*Meena Behringer, Greenwich Academy*

It was the day that everything started to make sense, and everything started to contradict one another. The day that I learned what would help me a week later, a month later, and a year later. The day that I questioned what I would be a week later, a month later, and a year later.

~

The warm air of summer made the beautiful wood deck burn our feet as we took steps suspended over the clear water. The pink and purple flowers on the side of the wood smelled refreshing.

It was quiet. All you could hear were the fish swimming in pods, never leaving each other's sides. We were in the mountains of Salzburg, Austria, at the only hotel resort on this lake. It was peaceful; no one was there but us and the lake. The lake was gorgeous. The vibrant, translucent, turquoise water shone under the sun. You could see the colors of the schools of fish and could look at your reflection. When you looked up from the lake, all that was there were the mountains, full of luscious green. In the distance was the sun, beaming down on you through the trees, through the water that kept your heart beating and your eyes blinking.

I remember dropping my towel on one of the chairs and running over to the steps that led into the lake. My two brothers and I were all crowded around on the metal steps, each of us waiting for the other to take a step. Our parents sat down on the chairs, hesitant to join us. My mom especially didn't want to go in the water.

And as we decided, all together, to take a step and accept the water's invitation, was when it had begun.

My toes gradually pierced the water. Inch by inch, they rested upon the next step. But I wasn't thinking about taking another. All I felt was cold—icy shards cutting into me like knives, inflaming every piece of skin that dared to enter. It ran through me, fast and furious, cutting off my circulation. The biting water sent something that had never run through me before. A sensation I'd never felt.

In a second, I pulled my foot out of the water and let the sun help my foot to escape. I watched as the water droplets disappeared and felt the warmth spark through my fingertips, enlightening my body. Sun was beaming down on our barely covered backs and made us ache to get into the water. It was hot out—the kind of hot that made you do crazy things. The kind of hot that made you ache for the cold, that made you wish the snow was falling and wish that you could feel it burn your skin.

But then again, the other option was the kind of cold that made you ache for the warmth, that made you wish the sun was beaming on you and wish that you could feel it burn your skin.

I put my foot back in.

And took another step.

My shins were submerged, making the small hairs on my legs stand on edge. I looked down to see them swaying in the water. The cold made my muscles ache but I was raised, no matter how big or how small, to never give up. So, I took another step.

Now the water was up to my knees. The water was so alluring, so enticing. It was still and didn't move until you did, causing the water to splash up and eventually fade away, just like my thoughts about going into the water. I was so excited and now I was so doubtful.

The metal steps were bare and looked warm under the sun but shattered my skin under the water. For a moment, I just stood there. Trying to admire everything and trying to forget about the bitter, harsh cold.

Goosebumps had run up to my shoulder as if there were too many in my legs, and they needed to escape. I shivered, letting the wind encompass me as I breathed it in. No matter what, I am getting in that lake, I thought.

I pulled one foot out of the water and helplessly watched as the water reacted, swaying and splashing. Both of my hands clenched the railing, their grip tightening as I took another step forward. And took another step back.

The water had been up to my hips, halfway through my body. Violent cold came. My body was tense, stinging and bored from the waiting. Its greed for the water was unbearable, no matter how bitter. It needed to feel at peace.

It had been twenty minutes. Twenty minutes. Twenty minutes to not even go down the whole ladder. I swayed my hands in the water, watching it flow carelessly, making circles that never ended.

Then, without my realizing it, my hips were underwater. I wanted to scream with the cold, let everyone know and share my pain. But, instead, I clenched the rails tighter and tighter and tighter until they couldn't take it anymore and my wet hands slipped down the metal.

Before I knew it, I was on the sixth step; my chest had icy daggers penetrating through every piece of skin. When I let go of the railing, my shoulders felt the same way.

I stood on the sixth step, the last step until I couldn't feel the cold. Until it felt like a part of me. Until the water was still.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I had made it this far. I had to go further. My scalp burned from the sun and my hair was glimmering from the light. I counted to three in my head.

One. I turned back to my mom and dad on the deck, who were taking pictures and laughing.

Two. I turned around to my brothers in front of me who were already swimming around in the lake, not cold at all.



Three. I smiled and pushed off from the last step, closed my eyes, and brought my head underwater.

When I opened my eyes, everything was clear. I could see the fish a few feet away from me, swimming in circles. My hair floated aimlessly and that's when I realized it was quiet. All I could hear was the sound of still water moving. The cold had disappeared and warmth surrounded me. This is where I belong. In the water.

Slowly, I pulled my head out of the water for air. Icy cold hit my face again, as my body felt the cold, pressuring me to run for the steps, but this time, I liked the cold.

"Mom, come in!" I shouted to her, as I saw my dad gasp as he began his journey down the steps. She smiled and put her sunglasses down on the table. Kicking her flip-flops off, she came over to the deck.

She put her foot into the water, cautiously, and smiled. And then, to my surprise, she ran. She ran like the wind into the water which propelled her legs so she could take a jump. And into the water she went.

That's when everything changed. That's when I realized what I needed.

Every jump always starts with a small step. A small step that exposes you so that you can't turn back. Because it's easier to go forward than to go backward. But you can't do what everyone else does and go down the steps. You need to take a risk. You need to take a jump.

I looked at my mom again, beautiful, brilliant and fearless. She took the leap and made me realize I couldn't step back and wait for things to just happen. I need to take the leap. I need to show them I can do it. That I am unstoppable. That they should fear me. Because while they inched through the treacherous water, I jumped.

That no matter what they say, you need to prove that they're wrong. That no matter what, you can do it. There is nothing holding you back. You need to prove that you're beautiful, brilliant and fearless.

I vowed that I will always remember how my mom inspired me to be the person I am today.

~the next day~

I ran. I ran like the wind into the water which propelled my legs so I could take a jump. And into the water I went.



*Eyes of the Burning Ember, Riya Bonde,  
Amity Middle School*

## ***Iguana King***

*Jacqueline Schmeizl, Home Schooled*

A ball of light disappears into the waves,  
swallowed by deep blue.  
A golden ship has capsized into the sea.  
I pick my way up the gray rocks  
now colorless and hostile without the light.  
Yellow eyes follow my every move.

I snap on my pocket flashlight.  
Low on battery.  
Its beam flickers, blanketing my surroundings with an uncertain glow.  
A scaly face lies behind yellow eyes  
long, curved talons like crescent moons.  
A striped tail, swishing as its owner slowly approaches me, his whole body swaying up the rocks.  
His head shows a patch of silver scales.  
The crown of a king.

As his condescending eyes survey me, I am transported to the ancient times.  
My flashlight becomes a torch.  
Behind the light, shadows rip at my clothes until only an animal skin remains.  
I am a caveman. And this is my dinosaur king.

The king raises himself higher, his mighty green robes rippling.  
I kneel.  
My intention *was* to glean a closer look ...  
but now I bow down to my ruler.

I pull a dried apricot from my pocket.  
The king sniffs once, and his mouth opens slightly.  
I rip off a piece and set it near his feet,  
an offering to appease him.

He eats it slowly, contemplating my appeal.  
Other noblemen sidle from the rocks,  
unable to resist the intoxicating scent.  
I set a piece out for each of them, wondering if the king  
will invite them to the royal table.  
A foolish duke steps forward, but the king pushes him away.  
The ruler takes all, his sticky pink tongue grabbing the offerings one by one.

My gold exhausted, I turn empty hands to the king.  
He blinks his yellow eyes, giving me another haughty look  
then climbs back to his throne atop the rocky palace.  
I lower my head once, thanking Earth, Wind, and Fire that I got through that alive,  
then walk away ...

*Snort.*

My foot freezes in the middle of taking a step.

I turn around, and the king's yellow eyes send a message through the night:

*I have accepted your offering.*

*But next time, you shall bring more.*

*Dismissed.*

### ***Challenging Books in a Game of Chess***

*Sophia Murrihy, Two Rivers Magnet Middle School*

"No, I don't want to go,

I want kids to read me, I have so many good pages."

But it was too late. That book was banned

The queen had taken out that pawn.

Now the king has one less pawn to save him from the outside world

One less trip on the Hogwarts Express,

One less encounter with Hermione.

One less pawn in a game of chess.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

*To Kill a Mockingbird*

*Winnie the Pooh*

"Why me, not me, don't take me,"

But that book was out of luck

The queen had taken out that pawn

Now the king has one less pawn to fly him out of reality

One less voyage to the Hundred Acre Wood

One less jar of honey with Pooh Bear

One less pawn in a game of chess.

*Where the Wild Things Are*

*The Lorax*

*Charlotte's Web*

"No, please no, don't take me"

That book's last words struggling out

But that book had his time cut short

The queen had taken out that pawn

Now the king had one less area of refuge from his own world

One less travel to Zuckerman Farm

One less word spun by Charlotte

One less pawn in a game of chess.



***The Beauty of Nature, Audrey Finn, Memorial Middle School***

## Eighth Grade



*Untitled, Adriana Ordaya, Grace Academy*

## ***Strange Fruit***

*Hannah Fluckiger, King Philip Middle School*

He was nine years old when he saw his Papa die.

It was August, and the sun shone down hard and unmercifully down on the plantation. The boy sat on the dirt floor of the hut, swatting at the flies that buzzed near his ears and eyes. His small blunted fingers idly fiddled with a crudely carved horse, and he ran the pads of his fingers across the etched mane.

Mama sat in her rocking chair, a pair of trousers in her lap. A small needle darted in and out of the fabric, and she hummed a soft melody as she worked.

The boy looked at his Mama, sitting her chair. Her hair was covered by a brownish white handkerchief and she wore a patched brown dress with a stained white apron. Her feet were bare, and caked in dirt.

The calm was interrupted by the sound of footsteps. Mama stood up, and pushed the boy behind her.

The door opened. A blast of humid air blew into the shaded hut. In the doorframe stood Owen Evans, the plantation owner's boy. His skin was as white as milk, and his hair was as fine and as pale as cornsilk. He growled angrily, his eyes darting around the small room. He was looking for something.

The boy felt afraid. He gripped Mama's hand as tightly as he could. She squeezed back, silently urging him to stay silent. The boy's lip trembled. A single tear spilled onto his cheek, and he began to shake.

Mama hugged him to her side, shielding him behind her. Owen scanned the room, his eyes wide, and his nostrils flared. And then ... He spun on his heel and left, leaving a cloud of dust behind him.

"Mama?"

"Yes baby?"

"What happened?" the boy asked, nuzzling into his mama's side.

"Only the Lord knows," Mama muttered, hugging him close.

"When'll Papa be home?"

"When Master Evans says he's done," Mama answered.

"When'll that be?"

"How'd I know?" Mama asked. "He's out picking cotton. When he gets done, he can come home." She stopped short, her eyes widening.

"What is it?" the boy asked, feeling her tense next to him.

"Stay here baby." Mama replied, her eyes darting back and forth.

"Mama, what's happening?"

"Stay here." Mama sounded scared. "Stay here, and don't leave."

"But—"

"No. Stay. Here."

She ran out of the door, her skirt bunched in fistfuls in her hands. The boy ran too. Mama ran down the dirt road, as fast as a bullet. The boy felt his muscles tense from exhaustion, but he kept running. He needed to see where his Mama was going.

Mama was running to the poplar trees. The trees made the boy nervous, the tops were so tall, and the bottoms so small that he was sure that one day, they'd blow right over.

He heard yelling. He slowed down and crept closer, he could hear talking.

"Should we tie the rope to the tree first?" a voice asked.

"Yeah, nice and high." another voice answered.

The boy stood hidden behind one of the wider trees. He saw his Papa. His hands and ankles were tied and his mouth was stuffed with dirty fabric. The boy wanted to go to his papa. Something told him to stay. He peeked around the tree trunk.

Two men were tying Papa up.

Mama was wailing. "Please! No! No, please no! He has a son!"

The men laughed. "As high as you can!" one said.



Mama began to scream.  
 A man pulled the fabric out of Papa's mouth.  
 "Please! Stop! No!" Mama wailed.  
 The boy didn't understand. What were they doing to Papa?  
 The men tied the rope to a strong branch and fitted a circle of rope around his neck. They tightened it and stood back.  
 Papa's feet weren't touching the ground.  
 Mama screamed, long and loud as she tried to push past the laughing men.  
 Papa made a gagging sound, his face turned purple and his eyes bulged.  
 Mama was crying. The boy was crying, too, but he didn't move. He just watched.  
 After a few minutes, Papa stopped moving, and he hung there, like a broken toy.  
 Mama was sobbing desperately, on her knees in the gritty dirt, shaking with grief.  
 The men laughed and sauntered away, leaving her to grieve.  
 The boy came out from behind the tree. "Mama?" he asked.  
 Mama forced herself to look up at her son, her face swollen with tears.  
 "What are you doing here baby? I told you to stay."  
 "I just wanted to ..." the boy stopped, "Mama, what's wrong with Papa?"  
 Mama looked at him again and a wail burst from her lips. "Don't look baby," Mama sobbed, taking him into her arms.  
 The boy buried his face into Mama's shoulder and cried. He would never see his Papa again.  
 Papa hung there, in the poplar trees for a long time. August faded into September. As a white lady walking down the lane saw him. She covered her mouth with a gloved hand and chuckled, "Well, that's a strange fruit."

### ***A World Between Worlds***

*Alexa Esparza-Finsmith, Mansfield Middle School*

My name is Alexa Esparza-Finsmith. My name carries the hyphen as proudly as it carries any other part, every other part. I believe in the power of the hyphen.  
 The hyphen that separates my two names is a tool of defense. It is a protection mechanism that I have with me, at all times. To me, this hyphen acts as a world in and of itself, separate from my last names, and simultaneously together with them.  
 Esparza. From Mexico, and the *canciones de tortillas* to cool them down right before rolling them up and dipping them into a warm bowl of *frijoles de la olla*. From the late nights spent running around the plaza, eating *papas fritas*, visiting *tías*, laughter running down the street.  
 Finsmith. From America, and the feeling of the chilling cold against my skin, but out there, somewhere in the distance, someone's fire has been going all night long. The scent is alive against the frigid skin of my body. From the fireworks and feelings of the freedom of summer.  
 Throughout my life, I have learned that life is a choice. A constant war between two sides. Always a right or a wrong. Always choosing who I am, today. It felt like I had to choose, between sides, between two rights, and I couldn't tell which one was supposed to be wrong.  
 I have spent my years, interchangeably, in America wishing that I was in Mexico, and in Mexico, trying to grasp at the wisps of time, to make it last, just a bit longer. In Mexico, my cousins ask me to tutor them. To help them pronounce my last name. *Feen-smit* they say. Close enough, but not exact.  
 Then, through the door of the airport, my name changes, once again. *Es-per-an-za*, they say. *Three syllables, not four*, I always think. Close enough, but not exact.  
 When I was eight, I went to a Dual Language/Dual Immersion school (a fifty-fifty Spanish and English program). A school where almost all of my classmates had two last names. And the people in my class could pronounce both of my last names, correctly. Esparza-Finsmith.  
 My hyphen is a safe place. The small dash that separates Mexico from America is not a wall. It is a bridge. And my hyphen, my hyphen is my home. This is my belief.

### ***Beauty Shaped by Pain***

*Danielle Toppa, Franklin Elementary School*

The most beautiful sculptures were crafted from pain  
For then you can capture the goodness  
The most blissful flowers are planted in hardship  
Because it is only when it breaks from the dark soil  
The scent is that much sweeter

When you paint a scene in only black  
You see the importance of color  
Because it is only when we have experienced suffering  
That our hearts think worse than death  
That we truly open our minds and learn to live.

### ***My Mason Jars***

*Saige Landrie, Joseph A. DePaolo Middle School*

Even as a kid I could never really quite grasp the concept of emotions. I tended to bottle things up as if they were in little mason jars and leave them on metaphorical shelves to collect dust. But sometimes I'd brush up against that shelf and send a jar crashing to the floor. I tried catching them, but it was pointless. The jars always shattered, and a violent storm of emotions presented itself.

In that moment, I'd failed to catch another jar and was staring down at its broken remains.

At first, it started off slow. A few silent tears rolled down my cheeks. The urge to pace compelled my limbs to move, and I found myself wearing a hole into the hardwood.

Then little whimpers began emanating from my mouth. I pulled at the collar of my sweatshirt, suddenly hot.

A hand cupped my mouth as I made my way to the bathroom. I was by no means a pretty crier. The rims of my eyes along with my nose turned a bright red, and I constantly had to wipe at my nose with tissues.

It didn't help that I easily got mad at myself for crying, which would spiral into me calling myself names I wouldn't dare utter to another human. The names only made me cry harder.

In the climax of my hysteria, I'd inevitably find myself leaning against the bathtub, legs clutched close to my chest. Broken pleas to make it stop spewed from my lips as sobs continued to fill the once calm silence.

I didn't want any of this. I didn't want to feel so empty, and



*277 Main Street, Julissa Mota, Grace Academy*

pathetic in my every waking moment. I never asked my life to develop into this. What happened? Sadly, there's never been an answer to that question.

It took several moments for me to regain my composure. Tears still fell from my eyes, but I wasn't sobbing uncontrollably anymore.

A faint familiar creaking from the other side of the house caught my attention. It meant someone was home, and I certainly didn't need anyone to see me like this.

I rushed into my room as I wiped at my eyes roughly with the sleeves of my sweatshirt. To mask any evidence of my crying I lay down on my side in bed facing the wall.

"Hon, are you awake?" It was my mom. "I told you the only way you'd be able to sleep at home was if you told me what's wrong."

She was in my room now wanting any type of answer that I couldn't provide.

I wanted to tell her I was playing a game of mental tug-of-war with my emotions, and losing miserably. I wanted to spill my guts right there. I wanted to tell her I felt like a hollow shell of my former self.

But my cowardice took one final tug on the rope leaving me no way to tell her anything.

"I already told you mom. I was just really tired today," I tried keeping my voice level. "I didn't get much sleep last night."

I heard my door softly click closed as I swallowed thickly. A shaky gasp escaped my lips and few more tears tickled my nose.

I hated lying to her, but at the time I didn't want to burden anyone else with my personal issues. I also hated when people treated me like a child who didn't understand anything. In my head, I thought the best course of action was to keep everything stored inside my mason jars. But everything inevitably breaks.



**Ponder,** Grace Gianquinto,  
*Amity Middle School, Bethany Campus*

### *To Hope*

*Alice Youtz, Amity Middle School, Bethany Campus*

The velvety black sky is sprinkled with stars you cannot see  
My dear, I see you reach out, extending your hand as the darkness encompasses you  
Pandora may have opened the cage  
And set hope free  
But as your fingers graze the butterfly's delicate wings  
The butterfly flutters away ... away ... into the darkened void

My friend, I see you grope through the darkness like a blind man  
So, I offer you a flaming torch to guide your way  
The door you seek remains locked  
But here, I bestow you its key

Winter rules the land until Spring topples him from his mighty throne  
And as Winter takes his dying breath, another takes her first  
Daffodils, daisies, roses, and petunias bloom with bursts of hues  
The first breath of Spring  
The lantern in the lighthouse burns bright  
Guiding the barques out at sea  
Like a beacon of hope in the night

My child, I see that you weep  
As you watch the house of twigs, home of the blue jays  
You cry  
For the little blue jay, a weak youngling, cannot fly  
But wait long enough and you shall see  
The blue jay finally lifts its wings  
And takes to the sky  
Finally free

Hope, my friend, my dear, my child  
Hope is so hard to have, yet Hope is a gift to nurture well  
Open your eyes to find  
And see darkness and hope intertwined  
Extend your hand again  
Reach ... reach and you shall be able to touch Hope's wings  
Hope  
Four letters, but worth a million more

### ***The Rose-Colored Dress***

*Ava Gross, Amity Middle School, Bethany Campus*



Pink is a dangerous color. Its secrets are woven into the delicate ball gowns that obscure a lifetime of scars. Pink conceals the hideous truths of even the most exalted creatures.

It is my favorite color.

I put on two outfits every day, one on top of the other. The first is a silk blouse and a short silk skirt. Their rose-pink hues exude grace and luster. The next outfit is a mandate from the queen herself. It is a rough-cut cotton blend suit. When I begin this outfit, I put on a short sleeve t-shirt and a dress shirt. These two layers ensure that the silk is secreted underneath the enamel white shirt. God forbid it should show through.

I arrived at Mrs. Bugal's house with a basket of muffins and a pot of tea. Her house was a small wooden cottage on the outskirts of the castle's property. It looked like something out of a fairy tale with its warm colors and gentle exterior.

"Rose!! I'm here," I shouted.

A vivacious old woman with apple cheeks and deep wrinkles greeted me at the door. Her long red hair trailed down to the floor and accented her sky-blue dress.

"Ebony darling! Oh, how I have missed you," Rose cooed, as she enveloped me in her arms.

We walked to the back of her cottage and sat down on small stools in her sewing room. I had to slouch to keep my head from hitting the sagging ceiling. Rose went to the closet and pulled out two bags of clothes. She handed me one, and I unzipped it slowly, making sure to not let the dress get caught.

The soft, rose coloring and dazzling crystals blinded me as I once again was dumbfounded by the beauty of the dress.

"Why can't I wear this dress?" I moaned.

"But honey you can!" Rose exclaimed.

"I will try it on once, and then we can fit me for the suit," I promised, slipping off my first outfit. The dress looked gorgeous on me, even without all of the curves. If only I could wear this in public.

"Your Highness, where have you been all morning?" Bernard, the royal butler, questioned.

"Oh, you know, out and about," I replied breezily, heading into my mother's royal chambers.

The deep pink curtains impeded all sunlight, and the white furniture looked dull beneath the matte light. My mother had a frighteningly exhilarated look on her face as she turned to meet my eyes. Her hair was done in an Irish up-do with small bangs framing her face. The soft curls accented her slight shoulders, and if you did not know her, you would think she was innocent.

"Edward, how was the suit fitting with sweet old Rose?" she asked slyly.

"Wonderful! I think I'm going to go and prepare for the dinner tonight," I replied anxiously. There was something odd with my mother's manner today.

"Well, I hope your suit is finished by tonight. You will look dashing in it. And I think Penelope would like to have lunch with you."

I groaned as I walked out the door. Penelope was the last person I wanted to see. She had the intelligence of a four-year-old and was as self-centered as a target.

The kitchen had prepared a lovely meal of small finger sandwiches with a side of raspberry lemonade. Penelope was, as usual, fifteen minutes late and looked unkempt with a wrinkled dress and mismatching jewelry. Her smoky eye was not correctly blended nor was her contouring.

"Penelope, how are you doing?" I asked cordially.



“DREADFUL! I could not decide on my outfit. I need to look nice in case something important happens today,” she responded flirtatiously with a wink.

I could not withhold a slight eye roll.

“My life is quite busy at the moment. I cannot go around making promises,” I reminded her.

Penelope’s face fell, and she tried to hide her disappointment by stuffing a finger sandwich into her face. She did not comprehend that obnoxious princesses were not my type.

After an hour of awkward chit-chat, I claimed that I had to go get ready for the dinner tonight that my mother was hosting.

“But you’re a *boy*,” she reasoned. “How long does it take you to get dressed?”

“It takes me a long time, for your information,” I retorted.

When I entered my suite, I noticed my mother sitting stiffly on the loveseat.

“Mother! What are you doing here?” I exclaimed.

“The maid told me that my dress had accidentally been sent to your room. I had Marsala retrieve it, but when I saw it, it was not mine. It’s not yours, is it?” She asked smugly and held up the magnificent pink dress from before.

I hung my head, and the words barely escaped my mouth. In a small whisper I uttered, “It is.”

Mother’s smug expression never left her face. “I know about everything. The secret meetings with Rose. The dresses. You can’t hide from me Edward. Or should I say Eboni.”

Her words pierced me as though a thousand tiny nails had been released into my body. Every word slapped me and left a stinging welt.

“How do you know?” I stammered.

My mother waved her hand and with a snap, Rose appeared where she had stood.

“I think you know.” She grabbed a small wand from her apron and spun on her heel towards the door. “Guards!”

A couple of burly men in royal uniforms came hurtling toward me. I swiftly dodged them and ran towards the balcony where Rose stood.

“What are you going to do with me?” I shouted.

“Nothing. Maybe stone you. Or hang you. But I don’t like boys who are girls,” Rose explained.

Before I could stop myself, I shoved the person I thought was my best friend over the edge. She tumbled down into the rose garden, and I walked away without looking back.

## Ninth Grade



*Streetscape, Isabelle Busch, Greenwich High School*

## Coffee Shop Crush

Andrea Kingrey, Metropolitan Learning Center

I look at the man across the coffee shop. Just his hair makes me smile. It's a deep black with long curls that continually fall into his eyes. It bounces every time he laughs, and I love it. I smile even more as a laugh bubbles from his lips. They look soft and full, a girly, rosy pink. I bite my own, thinking about them touching mine. Softly, I pinch myself.

*Quit it, Jesus. You're drooling. I doubt he'll find that attractive, I think. You don't even know his name, and you're ogling him like a piece of meat.*

*But, still.*

*He's pretty hot.*

I probably look like a schizophrenic doofus over here, but the people here know me by now. I come by every day, and yet I've never seen him here. I look up from my hands to my laptop. I should be writing, but why try when there's something so beautiful *right there*? I let my hands drop from the keyboard and look back to this mystery boy. His skin is blemish-free and smooth, the color of the latte he occasionally sips from. I look back at my tea, taking a sip. I wrinkle my nose in disgust. Cold. Well, that, and the fact that there was nowhere near enough sugar in it. There never is. I put my elbow on the small table I'm sitting at and rest my head against my palm, looking back up at the handsome stranger. Like practically everyone else here, he seems to be another 20-something with nothing better to do but take hipster pictures of his Starbucks cup. Then again, I hadn't seen him take out his phone this entire time. Maybe, just maybe, he's different. Something not completely stereotypical could be a nice change of the usual dating scenery. I let my eyes creep up from his drink to his eyes. Though they're hooded, I can tell they're a bright emerald green. He laughs, and they twinkle. *Jesus Christ, you're turning into an anime character.* Why am I so mean to myself?

I look up, making eye contact with myself in the mirror—my straight brown hair, my pink lips. I should go up to him. I *will* go up to him. Don't even try to stop me, brain—*Ha, oh no you don't.* My mind is flooded with what-if's, along with a piercing headache. I grimace and grip my forehead. I steal a glance back at he-who-apparently-will-never-be-named as I rub my temples. I sigh in defeat and close my laptop. I make a fist and dig my nails into my palms. I'm going. I stand, my chair almost tipping over as it scrapes against the rough, tilted floor. I walk to him, determined. Hearing my footsteps, he turns his stool like a little kid. My fake smile starts to peel at the edges. I panic for a few seconds, the doubt in my mind coming back to bite me, before my realization. My smile is only faltering because of the real thing pushing through. I let it, holding out my hand and greeting the man. To my relief, I don't have to ask his name.

"Hey, I'm Aidan." The words are carefree and happy. His name is beautiful, matches his wonderful appearance. I introduce myself as well, and when he shakes my hand, I get a rush. It feels like our hands just *fit*. I feel like my grin is starting to get a bit creepy, so I tone it down and scratch my neck nervously.

"So, um, I saw you from across the room ..." He stares at me, smiling. However, when I say that, it begins to falter.



*Untitled, Brenda Flores, J.M. Wright Technical High School*

I gulp and keep going. “And, though this is sudden, I know, I just wanted to know if you were ... you know ... available?” I choke out. His smile is gone completely by now. I look at him, closer now. Those bright, happy emerald eyes have darkened with ... is that ... hatred? No, he’s perfect. Please, God, just let him be perfect. Just this once.

“Available? Are you asking me out?” His normally beautiful face turns ugly with anger and disgust. I nod, confused. “Seriously? No! You disgust me!” Nope. Not perfect. Thanks, God. Real considerate of you. “What makes you think I’d even want to be *around* a f\*\* like you?!” He’s yelling now. I back up, hurt more than threatened. How was *this* not one of my what-if’s? My God, I’m so stupid.

“I’m so sorry,” I squeak as I turn, picking up my coat and laptop from the table. I look back to the mirror, glaring at my own face. If I weren’t like this, a damn *guy*, maybe he wouldn’t reject me like that. I run from the coffee shop, angry and in tears.

### ***Friendly Fiona***

*Carley Simler, Rockville High School*

“RAH!”

“Good grief, Sam. You nearly gave me a heart attack.” I smacked his arm as he ran away snickering.

“Grab a bag,” Fiona called. “They aren’t moving themselves.” Sam could handle her. I absolutely could not.

The trunk was packed full, over-spilling onto one of the back seats. Sam and I raced towards the back seat, the usual shoving was involved. I, unfortunately, was gifted the front seat. Which would have been nice if it wasn’t right next to Fiona. Dad had agreed to let Fiona drive us to her parents’ house where we would stay for the weekend while they got a break from us. Fiona called it healthy and necessary bonding time. I said otherwise. Fiona also insisted Dad stay at home for the ride there so she could better bond with us. I didn’t know what a few hours in the car would change about the bond we have already had for four years, but to me it seemed that it would not do much. I watched Fiona slide into the driver’s seat, and I waved Dad goodbye, blowing a kiss and watched as he pretended to catch and tuck it away. “See ya soon, Tilly! Love you!” He called.

I waved him goodbye as we pulled out the driveway and down the street, until Sam let me know from the backseat that Dad could no longer see my waving. I painfully watched Dad blend into the horizon and ached to turn around—but Fiona drove on with no intention of turning back.

Through what felt like hours, we finally made it to Fiona’s parents’ house. It took backroads, a series of giving up pavement for dirt and rocks that spat up, surely denting the car. Fiona poked for awkward small talk—“What’s new?” or “How’s school?”—followed by numerous descriptions of her parents’ house. “Oh, you’ll love it here, they have so much room to run around—I remember how much you and Sam loved to swim together when you two were younger, they are right by the lake and ...” Blah, blah, blah. I half hoped it would be as great as she talked it up to be. As we pulled up the rocky driveway, it was not grand. The house was painted with a faded and chipping gray. Trees towered over us as if gating us in like prisoners. I crossed my fingers and hoped the lake would be half decent to swim in. Fiona smiled and took a deep breath, put the car in park, but didn’t take the keys out. I guess she had no intention of staying long either.

“Come on, Tilly.” She turned to me with that overused smile.

Ugh. I hated when she said that.

“Natalie,” I corrected, but she just smiled again.

I rolled my eyes at Sam. He replied with a shrug. Glad to know I wasn’t the only one feeling uneasy.

Fiona, however, was already at the front door by the time Sam and I unbuckled our seat belts. As we joined her, we were greeted by a rather old woman with streaks of silver in her white hair. Her

shoulders slouched slightly as if weighing her petite body down. She had a shuffle rather than a step in her walk.

“Welcome,” she croaked with the same faded smile, “to our humble home.”

And with that we were strangled into an awkward hug and pulled inside. The inside looked decent. Wood floors, a wood dining table, wood pillars; one match could turn this place into the world’s biggest bonfire. A calendar on the wall marked the date October 9th. Too bad it was only July.

Fiona joined us and gave us a quick tour of the house. Sam and I would share a room of two twin beds upstairs. Fiona’s parents, however, slept downstairs. When we came back downstairs, Fiona introduced us to a man slightly older than the woman we had previously met. He was tall, probably a good six feet if you measured. His shoulders were broad, his graying hair a half circle on the lower portion of his head. The rest was bald. His nose was big, taking up most of his face. I wondered how they looked and acted so normal. As if Fiona hadn’t just barged her way in only days after Mom left Dad. Fiona gave us both a squeeze and waved us goodbye, and waved to us once again before her SUV disappeared from view. It felt like a relief to finally get away from her.

When night crept up on us, the house felt older. The floorboards creaked louder, the doors seemed to slam shut, it was as if every noise escalated by twenty.

“Sam?”

“What is it now, Tilly?” he sighed, rolling over to look at me.

I didn’t answer.

Aggravated, he asked again, “Tilly wh—” He stopped mid-sentence, and I knew he heard it too this time.

Thud, thud. Thud, thud.

“What the he—”

“Shut up!” my whisper boomed through the silent room.

“It’s coming up the stairs.” My voice was shrill.

We pushed our body weight against the door. The thudding went past our room and seemed to fade into the silence, but was back: stopping at our door. There was a knocking.

“Do you want cookies?” a familiar voice croaked.

Sam rolled his eyes. “It was her walking you moron.”

The morning came with ease. When I woke, it was near afternoon.

Sam was already downstairs. I scavenged through the cabinets in search of cereal and settled on Cheerios. I stared out the window in front of the dining table as I munched on my breakfast. Fiona’s father was outside chopping wood. I watched him move in a repetitive rhythm. He heaved the axe over his head and brought it down hard, causing a thunderous boom to follow. I thought of it weird. After all, who chops wood in July? Sam reassured that the winters are cold so it was possible he was merely stocking up. I continued to watch as Fiona’s mom walked over to him. I slurped down my milk. He paused and they talked for a little. Suddenly, she pointed to me. He nodded and began to walk towards the house, dragging the heavy axe along with him. I ran to Sam who had been dozing off on the couch.

“Sam! I was eating breakfast and Fiona’s mom pointed and now he’s coming and he has an axe! We need to go.”

Sam seemed skeptical. He hesitated to move and I could already hear him say it before he replied with, “Tills, there’s obviously some sort of reason behind it. He is not coming to murder you. He’s probably thirsty or hungry. He’s been chopping wood all morning.”

I sat on him and stayed put until I realized he was right. I heard Fiona’s dad in the kitchen, rummaging through the cabinets and fridge. I took a breath of relief.

“Natalie, would you like to help me prepare dinner? Chicken noodle soup!”

The old, gray-haired lady had asked me later on.

I followed her down to the kitchen, listening to her off-key humming.

We started with vegetables. She used a butcher’s knife to cut them. Her chops were both violent and hard. I felt sorry for the poor celery and carrots. She instructed me to watch the broth in order to not let it burn. She had called the old man to dice up the chicken. He, too, had violent chops. Sam explained



that they were old and forgot about knife skills or knife choices. After dinner, I retired to my bedroom. I had been sitting on my bed when Sam had waved a pack of cards in front of my face. We played go fish, old maid, war, and rummy.

“Sam.”

“Yeah?”

“Don't you think they are a little strange?”

“How so?”

“Well, I mean, they are always doing SOMETHING odd. Like Fiona's mom just gives me the creeps.”

“Tilly, they are just being grandparents. Old people are weird sometimes. Go fish.”

The next morning was the last until we were going home. Sam and I began to pack our bags and bring them downstairs in preparation for Fiona to arrive and bring us home. I was excited to see Dad again and longed to go back to my room, although I dreaded spending more time with Fiona. I had been joking with Sam about the dreaded trip when Fiona's mom met us in the living room.

“All ready to go dear?”

I wracked my brain, checking off a list of belongings we had brought.

“I think so.”

When I got in the car with Fiona once again, I watched Sam get into his rightful place in the back.

Looking at Sam buckled in, I remembered the last time him, Mom, and I were together. It was last year. We had been driving to Aunt Fiona's house. I remembered counting the street signs with Sam. Precisely 32, up until the intersection. I remember the car coming too close, and why wasn't Mom screaming anymore? The lights, the tires screaming, the blood—and Sam—Sam not waking up from his dream in the backseat of the car.

I smiled at him and he smiled back. And Aunt Fiona drove on, while the car filled with dead silence.

### ***Hot Fire***

*Remus Green, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

Enveloped in hot fire  
is a jumble of logs and paper.  
If you stand too close, you feel the warmth seep into your pores  
as you stare into the bright blaze and get lost  
until you can't stand the heat and have to step away

On the edge lies a paper, its corners licked by the flames  
it is fading but still remaining,  
yet in a moment it is consumed, shriveling in on itself,  
its ashes flying up into the air like gleeful fairies dancing in the forest.  
Gone forever, whisked away by the breeze.

Like a thought at night, that appears while you drift into sleep.  
Only there for a second, and gone the next.  
Lifting away into the open space before you  
as you try and take it back.

### ***Hiraeth***

*Fiona Busch, Greenwich High School*

This feeling is a selfish thing,  
It has caused my soul to kneel,  
I sit here unaccompanied,  
Except by sentiment's requiem.

The restless night is darker than the coal that  
stains our faces,  
Our wandering is stagnant in the dusk;  
The crippling remembrance of things long  
passed  
Cascades over neglected glamour.

Although we may be alone in our beliefs,  
That does not make them obsolete.  
We are not foreigners of our land,  
As named by the words of a clumsy hand.

Its true name wails for a time long past,  
Our ancient blessings now downcast.  
The winds scream from across the glen,  
Cymru, land of our countrymen.

Where is the light in this dark time,  
Why does our grief remain a staid vine?  
We have no wings to fly astray,  
The penance of weary company.

Their ignorance defiles us,  
Our thoughts and words defining us.  
Familiarity restraining thus,  
Our wardens still observing us.

We are strangers of this time,  
Descended of legends of song and rhyme.  
For many, silence, on the threshold of  
forgetfulness,  
A mosaic of misplaced illusion.

We lack the luxury of renouncing our heritage,  
As the presence of stories told,  
Continue to rasp within our hearts and refuse to  
grow old.

We will rise again as our winds batter us,  
As destined for our future king;  
We are the knights of legends old,  
Of a vast home a few yards from the sea.

We long for its wind to caress our hair,  
But we wonder if it is truly there.  
I have come to a borrowed nation,  
Usurped by the remains of oppression,  
Why do we forget our indignation?

This is the price of solitude.

### ***Trouble in Paradise***

*Carley Simler, Rockville High School*

In a world where playdough is an essential part of one's diet and snot is worn in pride, pineapple is a delicacy. I had been five years old when I fell madly in love with the fruit. I watched my friends choke down spoonfuls of applesauce and fistfuls of pretzels, feeling as though I became a part of a whole new world. I, of course, was extremely mature compared to those babies—I mean, how many toddlers eat pineapple? The answer: not many. And I had accounted for majority in that category.

Snack time was a blessing and a curse for a young, growing toddler. It was extremely important for one to have a snack. If not, the next step led to accepting the increased risks of starving to death. Occasionally, Mrs. Jones would hand out pretzels to help anyone battling whale stomach syndrome to make it through the long, grueling day, but I preferred my beloved pineapple.

I knew exactly which aisle my true love awaited me in at the grocery store. Upon each trip, I would always reassure Mom the location of my knight in that shining cylinder. Mom would always go past the aisle a few times before actually going through it. I craned my neck to peer in each time, on the lookout for any pineapple burglars.

“Mom, MOM!” It usually took a few tries to snap her out of her supermarket trance.

“What is it, honey?”

“Mom that old nana is taking all my pineapple.” I used my handy index finger to single the culprit out.

Instead of stopping her, Mom slapped my arm and scolded me for pointing and assuming such a thing. As consequence for my actions, we did not stop for pineapple. And as consequence for Mom, I pouted and screamed for the whole night.

The next day I had to bring in lousy pretzels. What a downgrade to my ego that was. I couldn’t believe Mom for punishing me for trying to help stop a thief. I sat and ate my pretzels in the corner and vowed to soon trade these sticks of hard bread for my sweet, delectable pineapple. I watched snowflakes pitter from the sky and realized pretzels weren’t going to be my only problem for the day.

It took three days and three grueling journeys through the snow to be rewarded by a fresh stack of Dole cans lining the kitchen counter. Tell you what, those three days were the longest of my life.

And with that, I returned back to my normal, pineapple-crazed self. Mom had even packed me a whole can for snack, warning me to not eat it all too fast or a stomachache was predicted to occur in my future. I swear she’s like some kind of psychic sometimes.

But before I could even take a lick of my golden goodness, Mrs. Jones pried the can from my grasp.

“Hey! Those are mine! Give them back!” I reached and jumped, but Mrs. Jones suddenly grew to the size of the Jolly Green Giant. She looked down at me and gave me a sour smile.

“Maya, you cannot have a can because it has sharp edges that could give you a bad cut.” I felt a bubble burst inside of me. Why was this woman stealing my prized pineapples?

“THEY ARE MINE.” I grew livid at this old-nana-pineapple-stealing-bandit and I became willing to do whatever it took to get my pineapple back. “GIVE THEM BACK.” I scratched her and clawed. This lady was the only thing standing between me and my precious fruit.

“Maya,” she cooed, “Maya, please calm down, you are getting out of hand.”

I gave up and let it all rip. I screamed, so loud, half of the kids in the class must have gone deaf. I felt arms latch onto my shoulders and began to slowly drag away from the class, farther and farther away from my pineapple. Tears blurred my eyes, and I watched as Mrs. Jones smirk and laugh evilly as she towered over my can of gold. I screamed until I heard a door close, and I sat in another room.

I had been forced to sit in that awfully small room until I calmed down. How was I supposed to do such a thing when for all I knew the love of my life sat in the hands of a criminal? Book shelves filled every inch of the crowded room, swarming with at least a gazillion books. A desk sat wedged in the corner piled high with mountains of paperwork that sprawled across. Fluorescent lights beamed an unnatural white on me and it didn’t take long before I got swept away by a tsunami of claustrophobia. After a few more tantrums, I jumped at the opportunity to rejoin the class; the only catch was no pineapple.

I choked down my screams and swallowed my fury. When I had walked back in the room, I could have burned from the heat of the twenty sets of eyes gaping at my existence. I was so desperate to find my fruit, I ran to the trash and shoved my arm down its throat. I dug and ripped my way through empty applesauce containers and abandoned cheese stick wrappers. I didn’t mind touching soggy graham crackers or half eaten apples—as long as I found my pineapples, I was a happy camper. The teacher, not too happy about this idea, hauled me away again; and this time, I was threatened with the chance of having my mom called. I debated my choices in my mature mind and settled on cooling down. One call to Mom would mean no pineapple forever—there was no chance I would let a fit stop me from reuniting my taste buds with my glorious fruit once again.

Mrs. Jones made me wash my hands and sing the ABC's three times before diagnosing me as "cootie-free." I could have washed my hands a trillion times, but I would still be appalled by Mrs. Jones.

She came around with that putrid barrel of pretzels, but I put my head deep into the crease of my elbow before she could ask if I wanted a scoop. My stomach growled extra loud for the rest of the day.

I kept tally of the number of days I had been separated from my glorious delicacy and kept my eyes peeled for any sign of pineapple. I even managed to convince Penelope to give me some out of her pink, Cinderella-shaped Tupperware container on tally number four when I noticed her mom had packed her some. I don't know if I would have survived if it hadn't been for her mom, but I knew one thing for sure—I needed my pineapple back, and fast.

As I longed for another piece, I thought of all the ways to get back my pineapple. Maybe I could ask James, the fastest of the class, to run around the room while Mrs. Jones wrote on the whiteboard; or I could build a trap out of LEGOs that would lock her up until I found them. At recess, I no longer played dolls or 'duck, duck, goose,' I focused on more sophisticated matters. I became a spy and crept around the room in hopes of finding my hidden treasures. I even carried a notepad to blend in and take on my new role. Mrs. Jones occasionally questioned what I had been up to. Thankfully, I as a spy, knew better.

"Just obscuring and drawing different things around the room," I would reply with a sly smile.

She laughed, "You mean obSERVing? Be careful, I wouldn't want you to lose an ear like Van Gogh!"

I searched everywhere and it didn't take long until I lost hope for my fruit. It was like Mrs. Jones put a spell on them so I couldn't see them anymore. I would run my hand across every empty nook and cranny in order to prove this theory wrong. I concluded the only way to solve my problems was to fight fire with fire—with, of course, some help. I recruited James and Penny to be a part of my retaliation. With James's speed and Penny's supply of pineapple, we were unstoppable.

The plan was simple: swipe the scissors off her desk as punishment for her crimes. I watched as Mrs. Jones bent down to tie Penny's shoe, gave the nod, and the plan was in action. James ran over to the desk and sprinted back to the table, passing the scissors to me, and I stashed them in my pocket. Just before Mrs. Jones stood upright, I signaled to Penny for more time. She furrowed her eyebrows and complained to Mrs. Jones it was too tight. This time, I ran to the desk and shoved her apple next to the scissors; in my mind, this was the perfect solution. If I had to eat dumb pretzels, she too would suffer with me. With a smile, I scurried back over to my seat and sat down triumphantly.

It didn't take long for Mrs. Jones to notice something was missing. After all, the next day we made paper snowflakes. I giggled, watching her scramble to find the pair of scissors as I patted the pair in my pocket. It only took days before we devised another plan to take more from that old-nana-pineapple-stealing-bandit. This time, Penny and I took her purple pen and frog eraser top while James explained at length why green apples tasted better than red to the culprit. The time after that, we swiped her empty cafeteria water bottle—good luck staying hydrated now!

A couple weeks went by after our extravagant missions and soon Santa would be coming to town. The more I thought about it, the more I thought about which list I was going to end up on this year. Would I be on the naughty list for eating Mrs. Jones's apple in pride and cutting my snowflakes using her precious scissors? Or because for each mission conducted, I had been the felon? I didn't want to find out.

At recess, only days before Santa's grand arrival, Penelope, James, and I devised another plan to restore our places on the nice list. I couldn't bear to leave my pineapple behind in the process, but I crossed my fingers that Santa and his elves would bring me more than I could count. While Mrs. Jones handed out gifts to the class—green and red ornaments with our names scrawled across in ginormous letters—all three of us ran to the desk to put all of our stolen treasures back to where they belonged. I took care of the scissors, the first goodie we had snagged. Sitting back down in my seat, I scowled at our failed missions. I accepted the cheesy ornament with disappointment and plastered a puss to my face where it stayed for the remainder of the day.

It stayed that way when snack time came along, and I, yet again, pulled out my bland pieces of twigs from my lunchbox. My face shriveled in disgust at the sight of them. I pushed the baggie as far as possible from me and observed what others had brought along. I thought of the reason I had been so

disdained towards eating pretzels. I wondered of the last time I had tried one. As I took a bite of curiosity out of the rod and swallowed, I realized the difference between pineapple and pretzels; one tasted of sweet victory and the other of bitter defeat.

***In the Belly of the Beast***

*Elyssa Grogan, New Canaan High School*

It is in the presence of darkness that our pulses quicken,  
The eternal night raging like an omnipresent warrior of silence.  
Our eyes fixate on the vast sheath of nothingness  
Willing something, anything, to appear and quiet our mental unrest  
That we desperately try to fill with dancing images of colors  
Produced by our mind's need to fill the void with any substance it can.

My vision blurs slowly until everything is filtered out  
Except for the space between each closet door.  
I want to look away and sleep soundly,  
But the shadows' screams are far too deafening  
To accept that what lies beyond them is merely a rack of clothes.  
Instead, they contort into faces of goblins and ghouls  
That jump out and swallow me whole into an eternal night  
Where nothing exists but my thoughts.

It's pointless to fight against being swallowed up  
As darkness will always win.  
Let the belly of the beast become your newfound home,  
Stay there for a while and float down its lazy river of winding insides  
All the while letting your worries dissolve and be flushed away.  
Let its dullness lull you into peace  
Even if just for a moment.

For when the lights flicker on at last,  
All we have left is the darkness left inside of us  
To resist the unstoppable tumble of time.

***A Sailor's Reflections on Inner Turmoil***

*Cormac Nocton, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts High School*

I set my boat in the water, searching,  
Ready to set off to distant lands.  
Can I burn the darkest depths  
Of the waters of my heart?  
Ten feet astern, a seal—  
Dives off its rocky perch,  
Cascading into the tumultuous uproar of the sea.



### *Embers of Glory*

*Hannah Swimm, New Canaan High School*

I hear the gentle pitter patter of icy November rain,  
Outside my car window, falling from big bulky clouds  
Which attempt to hide the sun from the earth.  
Yet the little success the sun achieves,  
Gives a window to a beautiful sunset,  
Peacefully falling over the hill across the street from Waveny Park.  
I am driving home on a Sunday evening after a dreary day  
When I catch this spectacular sight.  
I am reminded of those summer nights  
When there were no clouds to inhibit the sun's full glory.

I am reminded of the last summer night,  
A night when our glory seemed to shine as bright as the sun's.  
That night, some friends and I were walking back from Waveny Park  
When we caught a spectacular sight,  
A sun burning like God had set fire to the sky,  
And the only barrier between his unkempt pyromania and our meager selves  
Was the hill across the street.  
And we, in all our grandeur,  
Were not satisfied simply viewing this magnificent inferno.  
No, we wanted to touch the sun,  
We wanted to brush our fingers against its infinite flames and feel them sizzle.  
And so, we scaled the hill  
Which seemed like a mountain to us that day.  
At the summit, was an even more incredible sight,  
A plot of seemingly undiscovered land,  
An endless plain of grass,  
All our own.  
And the sun danced with our little valley,  
Burning the tips of the grass to a crisp.  
And we, the Kings of the world, danced with the plain's slender flaming blades as well,  
On equal footing with the sun.

But today it seems the sun's endless blaze  
Has been put out by the rain,  
Blown out by the cool autumn breeze,  
In preparation for the harsh upcoming winter.  
And even though the sun's seemingly infinite glory has been diminished,  
the humble spectacle of its rays peeking through the clouds,  
Like dying embers,  
Over our little hill, once a great mountain,  
Is an equally pleasurable sight.  
And perhaps if the sun can tame its wild ego,  
And still glow beautifully through the dreary evening,  
Perhaps we can learn to do the same.  
Perhaps we can settle for slightly less than king of the world,  
And I can survive simply being a high school freshman,  
At least for this one year.

**Tenth Grade**



*Heroes, Sophie Spaner, Valley Regional High School*

## ***Greetings***

*Rachel Charron, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

*“Namaste”*

A study into Hindu art shows the prominent gesture Anjali mudra, flat placed palms facing each other. A reverent hello taught only by the closest of partners, but always shared with even the distant of friends. I used to find such folk, they spoke with simple insight and encouraged my travels. Blessing the direction I walked in. Though by now I’ve realized that we spoke of highly different travels.

~

Within the deeply personal process of aging comes the conceitedly wrapped gift of wisdom. This wise-man’s notion has only seemed to exacerbate over the millennia. And as one of those wise-men, I often find myself in a bad habit of coiling my beard, while transfixing my thoughts on whether I’m truly any more knowledgeable than I was the previous day.

It is a sorcerer’s job, if nothing else, to learn. Then to applicate such, but in ways that are far too unfathomable for the faint of mind, or the young at heart.

So, in the evenings, I go about doing just so, licking my fingers and turning pages. Brustling my whiskers when I come across alchemic spells I hadn’t noticed before, which is becoming quite the difficult occurrence as my library has ceased seeing new editions. To remedy this, I’ve begun making my own Grimoire. Currently it’s primarily focusing on the progression of Merlin, a land snail who’s taken a keenness to my windowsill. He poses quite the formidable silhouette early in the morning, his shell often reminding me of a mandala.

In my turbulent time of solitude, I’ve found it helps best to gather knowledge from the simpler things, like Merlin. Although, this lax state of mind is difficult to maintain, as the dryness on my tongue has nearly driven me bats. It gets no use, as I have no one to click it for. Besides, my attempt at conversation with Merlin just seems to agitate him.

Wisdom can be quite isolating; they don’t tell you this after you purchase your first set of tarot cards. Age can be even more binding, but not even wizards can prevent that. Growing up, I was always taught the best lessons you can learn come from experience. Experiential traveling was the most preferred method. I was told you can go into any country, any capital, any continent, and not know a lick of the language. As long as you know how to greet someone, because a ‘hello’ is the universal language of human connection.

Once, when brown roots still flourished on my scalp, I sought out to become a Shaman. The difference between such and sorcery are discernible, sorcerer’s being a much more avaricious lot. In the course of doing so, I met many friends, but only one partner. They taught me divination and insisted I didn’t look ridiculous with facial hair, showing me that I somehow smiled twice as big after they braided my beard. We shared with each other my first hello, I smiled three times as big. For a short period, the honoring and acknowledgement we gave to each other was the only knowledge I needed. Our palms flat, an indirect kiss.

But it seems with age, as for many other things, comes with forgetfulness. And I have forgotten how to give greetings.

~

I’ve started drinking a lot of black tea. I’ve read it helps with bladder urination. Certain body processes have been underperforming what’s to be typical, so I have a good mind to be concerned. Though it seems all my china cups have repeatedly misplaced themselves, a growing anguish of mine since any right-minded person knows the importance of tea drinking from the right vessel. Themed mugs will not suit!

Once the process of acquiring my scattered teacups is resolved, I get to enjoy my herbal brew. Steam washing my face of blemishes, and the taste is even more rousing.

Tasseography elevates mundane tea time into fortune forecasting. It’s raised my unease of late, since the only imagery I see in my tea grinds are of wheezing slugs.

~

Merlin's been acting depressed lately. A rather short-term annoyance, I'm sure, but it still forces my hand to illustrate quite unpleasant images in my Grimoire. He has a face that can be read far too easily. I'll have to bring it up with him.

It seems I can't find any proper diagnosis on snail psychiatry. My library of works has once again come up short handed. Thanks to it, I've been plagued with thoughts daily to what's even the relevance of my pursuit of knowledge if I can't even aid Merlin. In the makeshift bed I've made him, he looks so inconsequential, like a stomped-on fetus, gawking at me.

I begin taking up most of my free time with learning sign language, a skill I had assumed was self-explanatory. It's a good practice in muscle memory, a shame I tend to forget the signage and end up using the hours for memorizing the curvature to my palms. When I was younger, I taught myself hand readings and all the superstitious beliefs that went with it. Looking at them now, I see my heart line has started blurring. It becomes progressively more difficult to not want to wear gloves.

The home is only as disgruntled as the mind is, a common saying. Putting it to literal use could be strenuous as the term is vague, so I just decided on opening a window. A simple action. And other than the occasional flyby papers as a result of bothersome wind, I've found the airflow to be reinvigorating. If I concentrate enough, I can feel the petals of buttercups tickling at my lips, playful little buds. With my eyes closed and mind centered, I roughly sketch an image into my Grimoire. A buttercup slyly peeking past my lips.

All the windows and doors have been opened, the closest I'll reach to going outside. Merlin's taken a liking to the change as well. In a last attempt, I try giving him a proper greeting, but I'm still unable to formulate the words. Instead, I gently scoop him up and carry him over to the windowsill, giving him a better view at the dawning morning.

Transfixed with the thawing peach of a sky, I barely notice Merlin's small movements, his inching towards the end of the window. He looks back in a way that's sentimental. Floundering in my head space, I feel the instinctive need to pull him back. But I don't.

Flattening my hands, I raise them in unison, facing them to each other. Anjali mudra.

The idealment to strive towards being wise is a philosophical goal that even sorcerers can't physically attain, without driving them to losing their identities. However, there are always lessons to be learned that can lead to furthering one's knowledge, like my new wisdom on saying goodbye.

I bless Merlin's travels and give him a reverent adieu. I can only hope that one day he'd look back on me as his partner.

*"Namaste"*

### ***Rose-Tinted Mirror***

*Abby Lateer, Tolland High School*

I don't talk much with the roses in my bedroom. I used to water them over and over—I was oddly attached to this testament of my acting debut as a townspeople in the school musical—but they are dead now. They sit in a vase on my desk: backs bent, petals drooping, heads bowed to the floor in shame. They are not the best conversationalists, and looking at them makes me sad, so we avoid each other most of the time.

When the roses ask why I don't like them, I tell them it's not fair that something dead should be so pretty. They are fragile, and fragility should not be beautiful. They tell me that it shouldn't be ugly either and curl back into themselves. I call them stupid, but they're not listening at this point. I hate those flowers.

Kara loves them. Kara, who plays the piano and wears eyeshadow the color of the sunrise and puts her head on my shoulder when we ride the morning bus every day. She likes that something can be so lovely even after it is so broken. I think everyone's skin should be see-through, and we could all look at each other's souls swimming around in our chests so nothing would ever be a surprise. Kara's would be

blue and soft. The roses would be brown and not even the rich pretty kind, but all muddy and strange. Dead.

Kara worries about me too much, and I worry about her worrying. She thinks I need to open up more. I think my bed has already seen too much of me—it shakes when I shake and listens when I talk at night to the sky or to angels or to the walls of my bedroom. There are eyes everywhere in here. My whole room watches me spin and spin on the good nights and curl back into myself on the bad ones—back bent, petals drooping, head bowed to the floor in shame.

My furniture worries about me, too. I don't think they've forgotten the time I stayed in bed for one straight week, and I didn't shower or brush my hair or sing in my underwear even once. I spent all my time reading biographies and ignoring Kara, who didn't have anyone to sleep against on the way to school. It was like prison except the doors had no locks.

By day three, my mirror started to butt in. “You cannot find peace by avoiding life,” it told me. “Virginia Woolf.”

“I cannot find peace anywhere,” I replied. The room stayed quiet after that, and when I found it in myself to climb out of bed, the carpet was a little softer for me.

My therapist likes it when I talk about that week. She likes it when I talk about the roses, too, which she took as some kind of breakthrough. “Are you sure they don't remind you of yourself?” she asked. “Are you sure that's not the reason you don't like them?” she asked.

“What I am sure of is that I didn't ask for your opinion,” I told her.

“I'm getting paid to give you my opinion. Do you know what therapy is? That's the literal definition of therapy.”

I called her stupid, too. I think she wrote it down somewhere.

I decided these dumb flowers had caused enough conflict. That night I laid them all out in front of me on the floor and stared them down. They didn't seem intimidated enough, so I crossed my arms, too, just for the effect. “It's time we settled this,” I said.

“There's nothing to settle,” they told me. “You hate us because you think we're weak. You think we're beautiful, too, and you think that shouldn't exist at the same time. We know this already. You've made it very clear.”

“You're wrong,” I shot back. “People don't think you're beautiful and weak. They think you're beautiful because you're weak. On the outside you're something delicate and lovely but on the inside you're just rotting, and it's not fair. They think you're broken and there is some beauty in that somehow, but there isn't.”

“How would you know?”

I paused. I wanted to say I didn't know, but then I remembered those nights folded into myself, those nights with my back bent, petals drooping, head bowed to the floor in shame. And I did know. I knew because I had been them.

I told them this, and they nodded diplomatically. “Oh. Okay. I guess that makes sense.”

“No, it doesn't,” I said, also diplomatically. “Screw you.” But then they smiled and I smiled and for the first time it felt kind of okay to be understood. Even if it was by those stupid flowers.

I put them back on their desk and apologized. “You don't need to be sorry,” they told me. “We know what we remind you of, and it's not easy to like the worst part of yourself. Thank you for trying.” I opened my mouth to call them stupid again, to tell them they don't remind me of anything and it's none of their business anyway, but they had already curled back into themselves. And they were right. All this time, they were right.

We both know it won't help, but I've started putting water in their vase again anyway. I think both of us like pretending to help, even when we know their deadness isn't going away. I've started being nicer to my bedroom, too, even with all of its eyes. They listen, even when I think that's not what I want. And others would, too. That weekend, I invited Kara over to the house. (She had never been inside my bedroom before. I think the walls liked her.) We listened to music and took turns gluing rhinestones and plastic flowers around the edges of my mirror. I think she can tell I can't look into it sometimes and I liked the way the sparkles looked in the sun coming in through my window.



Last week, I bought a new vase of roses, and they sit next to the dead ones on my desk. They enjoy each other's company, and I like having them next to each other: one dead; and one with their backs straight, petals blooming, heads turned up to the sky.

### ***The Orange Tree***

*Ashley Portillo, Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School*

The little seven-year-old girl stares at the orange tree on the other side of her bright green and neat backyard. Moving her pink curtain out of the way, the girl stares down wantonly. The only thing that stands between her and that tree is a small fence about her height. She has always been obsessed with oranges; from a young age, they were always her favorite fruit and she thought no other could compete.

Debating whether she should go downstairs, Ella makes up her mind. Grabbing her shoes and walking down the white carpeted stairs, all the while holding onto the railing, finally being able to reach it.

"Where are you going, sweetie?" A tall woman comes out of the kitchen wearing an apron wondering why her daughter is tiptoeing to the side door leading into the well-mannered garden. Spinning around, Ella puts her hands behind her back; puts her lips in a straight line, and stared wide-eyed at her mother.

"Nowhere. I just wanted to go play outside." She sways back and forth on her legs, something she only does when she is lying.

"Don't lie to me, young lady; I told you, I will have no lying in this house." Gulping and casting her eyes on to her shoes, Ella contemplates whether or not she should tell her mother what she is about to do.

"Ella. Tell me." The sternness Ella hears in her mother's voice makes the choice for her.

"I'm going to get an orange off Mr. Grayson's orange tree." The little girl continues looking down at her shoes as if they are the most interesting thing in the world.

"Ella, you know not to go near that poor man's tree. He does not like it when people take things from him. Besides, you wouldn't want Mr. Grayson to take something from you, would you?"

"No, I guess not," Ella replies, still not looking up.

"Good. Now go wash up; your father will be home any minute." Pouting, Ella does as her mother says.

Later that night, after her father tucks her into bed, Ella can't help but stare at the open window. Having enough, Ella flings the blanket off her and begins her trip down the creaky stairs that will lead her to the sliding back door. Standing in front of the see-through door, Ella reaches for the lock.

Just barely able to reach it, she turns it with a satisfying click. Sliding it open, the little girl walks toward the orange tree, not caring about leaving the door behind her open. Stretching, Ella grabs an orange, pulling it down, and as she peels the orange, she throws the skin on the floor. Right before she is able to bite a slice of the fruit, though, the light to the neighbor's backyard burns bright.

"Little girl, get away from my tree right now." Dread fills Ella when she realizes it is Mr. Grayson, the grumpy old man next door.

"Why are you taking something that isn't yours, young lady?" Ella still has not moved since she peeled the orange, too scared to turn around and face the man. Mulling over what she should do next, Ella drops the orange, runs into the house, quickly locks the door, and speeds into her room before Mr. Grayson can say anything more.

Outside, Mr. Grayson stands on his back porch, a stunned look on his face.

Limping towards his tree, he stares sadly at the now dirt-covered orange. Guilt washes over Mr. Grayson for yelling at Ella, but he is extremely protective of the tree, the tree that reminds him of his deceased wife.

The man can't help but think back to her. He remembers her laugh, her short beautiful hair, the way her eyes twinkled, and her love for oranges. He sometimes even thought that she loved the fruit more than she loved him.

He chuckles, thinking back to the time he jokingly said, out of the blue, to his wife Helen as they were sitting down watching TV as she ate yet another orange, "What is it with you and oranges?"

She replied a little confused, "What do you mean, John?"

"I mean, why are you constantly eating oranges? For as long as I have known you, you have always had an orange in your hand."

This time laughing, his wife replied, "Because they're sweet, like me, and they remind me of happiness."

Helen smiled big and childishly by the end of her sentence. Mr. Grayson pinched her cheeks, breaking into his own grin hearing her squeal, "Why do you want to know anyways? Are you jealous?"

"Me? Jealous of an orange? Please." He scoffs.

"You know I love you, right?" She whispered looking at him with nothing but adoration.

"And I love you."

Shaking his head, Mr. Grayson looks at the tree one more time before going back into what once was an inviting and bright home.

The next morning, Ella knows she is in trouble when she walks into the kitchen to see Mr. Grayson sitting at the kitchen counter as her mother pours him a cup of tea and her father talks to him about what happened the night before.

"There you are, Ella. Mr. Grayson told us about what happened last night." Her father gave her a knowing look.

"Oh, um, I just remembered, I forgot something upstairs. I'll be right back." Coming up with a lie, Ella quickly tries to get out of the room.

"Come back here young lady." Sighing, Ella walks back knowing she will have to pay for what she has done.

Sitting at the kitchen counter, Ella stares at her bare feet, scared to look up at the man she stole from. Instead, she faces her mother and father, acting as though Mr. Grayson is not in the room.

The old man watches awkwardly as the parents lecture and yell at the little girl, disappointed by her actions. Feeling guilty, the man cuts off the parents when he notices Ella's eyes beginning to fill with tears.

"Can I speak with Ella alone?" Hesitating, the parents nod and walk to the living room.

"I'm sorry," Ella whispers, finally looking up at Mr. Grayson.

"Don't be," replies Mr. Grayson, shrugging his shoulders. Confused and shocked, Ella simply shakes her head.

"Follow me; I want to show you something outside."

Standing up, Mr. Grayson walks towards the sliding door, leading him to the backyard, and steps in front of the orange tree.

"My wife planted this tree. Just like you, oranges were her favorite fruit."

"You were married?"

Laughing, Mr. Grayson nods. "Yes, 47 amazing years with my Helen."

The little girl has one question in mind she wants to ask, so she did. "Why are you so protective of the tree, Mr. Grayson?"

Sighing, the man kneels down. Groaning from his aching bones, Mr. Grayson looks at the girl and tells her with tears appearing in his eyes, "When someone you love in your lifetime passes away and they leave something true to their heart, take that with you and treasure it forever as if it were your own."

### ***I Ask the New Generation***

*Chelsey Jara, Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School*

I strongly believe that our generation is just as vital as the generations before and ahead. Although change is inevitable, and something that should be welcomed, I ask that a few things continue. And through this I assume that the generations to come will prosper as prophets of the future.

I ask that you be a thinker and a doer, who not only knows the difference between patience and hesitation, but understands the distinction of ignorance and consciousness.

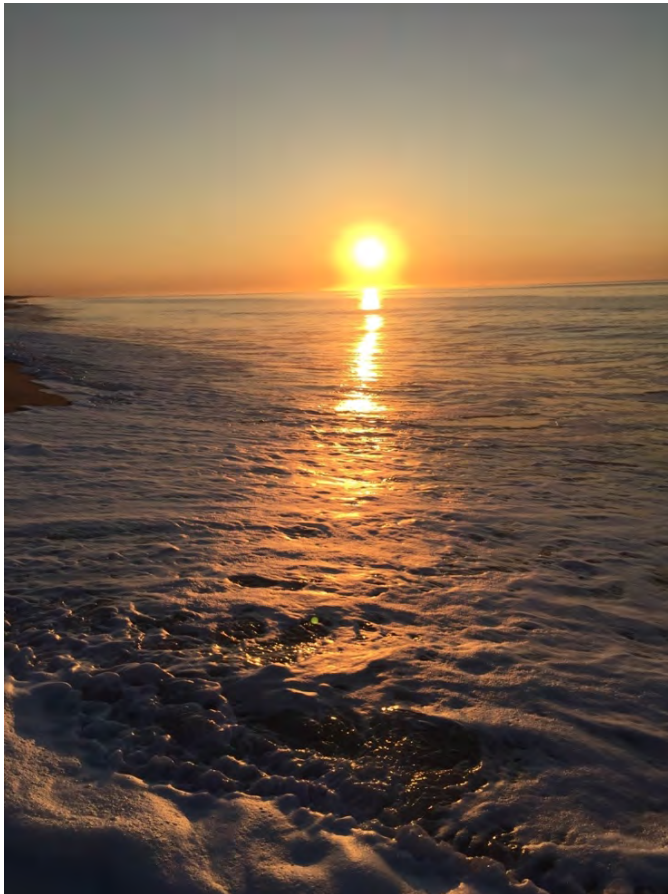
I ask that you never let go of your dreams, but become an idealist with the mind of a realist. Keep your gaiety alive so you can be an inspiration to others that are grim and dull. For that endeavor will give you a fresh outlook to offer others.

Always look for the bigger picture, while demanding all details. Grasp the thought that you not only have the chance to study history, but possibly change it.

I ask that you treasure the opportunities that lie before you, and attempt to aid to those who are unfortunate.

I ask you not to pity or comfort the inflexible and narrow-minded, but to guide them to enlightenment. Refuse to suppress the unfamiliar, instead, embrace it, appreciate, and honor it.

Overall, I ask the new generation and generations to come, to influence, to support, and morph into a renovated time that naturally tolerates, understands, and embodies idealism. Welcome change, take advantage of opportunities, and together our generation will make history.



### ***Holy Man***

*Abby Lateer, Tolland High School*

my teacher says he used to hate math  
but now his voice shakes  
as he talks about radicands  
like a holy man giving a sermon.  
when the world  
snaps back  
into focus  
I stare out the window until I remember  
how much better I like the world  
through tinted glass.  
sometimes it is beautiful  
and sometimes it is twisted  
but it is always some tragic echo of the truth,  
some warped fantasy of a mind  
that can only process life in the extremes.  
I am rotting  
or I am blooming  
but I am never just a seed.  
maybe someday the wild arcs of stories  
will fall away like petals  
and I will talk about my life  
with my voice shaking,  
like a holy man giving a sermon.

***Rising Sun***, Sydney Soucy, Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

### ***The Stars of the Jungle***

*Casandra Hernandez, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

The bitter smell of night herbs and the scent of fresh dew swirl around a giant blue sphere.  
The star is surrounded by nothing but inky blackness and specks of white.  
It stands out like a small blueberry bush in the middle of a huge vineyard.  
It spins alone in the vacuum of space, sounding like a furious gust of wind

coming from the eye of a nearby storm. If you were to cut this particular star in half  
its cross-section would look like one of that of a peach.  
Think of it like thick blue surrounding a giant seed, purple like a lavender flower.

The bright green foliage clinging to its dark brown roots,  
contrasting drastically compared to the rest of the rainforest.  
Birds chirp in the background while the stream crashes against the rock.  
The smell of freshly planted dirt and the smell of Mangos emerges into the air.

Like the forest, the stars too can also smell like freshly wet dew and have it swirl around them.  
And the stars themselves can seem dead but roar back into life after seemingly on its last legs with the  
past of a tragic event behind themselves.

Mother Nature's reach can be seen all around the earth and within the cosmos,  
Which themselves can be beyond our common understanding.  
But sometimes the world decides to make things look similar to things we've seen before.

This is the place where my family tree sprouted, Where the seed of life  
Helped birth me and the ancestors before me.  
Those who braced the harshness of nature in order for me to enjoy it myself.

Like the stars themselves, they both hold energy with life captured in their grips.  
Love and lives that will eventually pass onto another lifeform.  
And when I look at the stars from the shades of the Jungle.  
I think of when my family saw the same sky as I.

### ***To the Tortoise***

*Ellis McGinley, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

So, you think the eagle screwed you over.

You, who has wobbled through the currents of time at one mile per eon,  
allowed the world to flow past you like the waters of the river you squat by,  
ogling without lunging for the minnows,  
nibbling in passive rotations at grass —  
the only thing on earth that moves slower than you.

Your cousins in the Galapagos manage to be impressive in their wretchedness, but you —  
you don't bother with pride, appearance, legacy,  
even the base attempt to surpass decency that haunts most creatures.  
Dawdling mediocrity is your nature, and it is the only one you have ever known.  
You are incapable of crime even if you understood the concept.

There's no space in your shell for thievery,  
your beak too fragile for expressing brute force against anything but a cabbage patch,  
claws, the only weapon you hatch equipped with,  
better suited to soil than the flesh and bone of worthier creatures.

And yet, with all your features of innocence; your half-blind eyes,  
your stub-tail, for decoration more than balance,  
(even god couldn't bear to make you useless *and* ugly)  
the eagle chose you to execute.

And for just a moment of your hopeless life you got to fly.  
You saw a world larger than you,  
understood that an existence contains more than greens and eggs  
and the tedium of faux immortality —  
saw the rocky cliffs below, a mystery to a creature of mud and sand and not much else,  
and before you could even discover the beauty of a question,  
the eagle let go.

And you smashed. Because even rocks are superior to tortoises,  
and the brief, choked-down lunch of a bird is more critical than your entire being.  
The world happens between its belly and your back  
and your neck doesn't even move far enough for you to notice.

***Temporary***

*Margo Shuteran, Rockville High School*

i am not a wallflower, i am just an observer.  
moving in and out of crowded music halls, and football games,  
through the cavernous hallways and classrooms.  
i prefer to watch the show rather than be the actor, or really, i am more like the extras,  
moving from place to place, arranging myself to become a simple background,  
positioning myself to be just another name in this murder machine.  
and then there is her,  
she is not the star, or the co-star,  
but she is not an extra like the rest of us. maybe she is not even in this play,  
*but everyone is in this play,*  
yet, somehow, she is the single star of her own universe, floating in and out of the real world.  
i can see her in my mind now.  
brown sandals with a wonder woman temporary tattoo on her right ankle moving up to,  
jean shorts and an oversized band tee, with arms covered in purple polka dots,  
matching her cropped hair.  
i would not say she is like this on purpose,  
rather, just awash in the dissolution that she is the singular human,  
that there are no other people in existence.  
you can't read her like the rest of us, every day she's different,  
flitting from band to band to book to color to style,  
even her tattoos are temporary,  
maybe in this play she is not the star, but many, a whole galaxy,  
rotating day by day until she becomes all of us in her production, that we never see,  
and she is as real as everyone else,  
yet as fictional as she believes us to be.



## ***To My Mother (Seasons)***

*Ellis McGinley, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

### **WINTER**

I thawed.

School became paradise. I stopped speaking to you willingly, barricaded myself in the heat of my bedroom and only emerged for meals—

a bear in hibernation, not to be trifled with. Occasionally I would wrangle the television from you, in which case our roles would reverse and we would not see each other for hours at a time.

I performed for the first time. You told me it was okay. We were pulled over on the ride home and you were not angry—exasperated, at the most. It was the calmest discussion we had in ages.

On the drives home after that you would complain. I had no grievances to air, and pretended to listen to yours. My favorite part of the day would be leaving you to for the morning bus.

My least was coming home.

My grades began to drop. You noticed, and the complaints I had ignored became sharper, more direct. I thought of it as nagging. You thought of it as helping.

We fought.

Things slipped in February. I was balancing on thin ice, and you seemed determined to crack it, to teach me how failure felt. As stubborn as you, I clung on,

adapted in gradual displays of passivity—skated around our arguments instead of into them.

The snows came late. We became trapped together for days at a time and, slowly, we started to talk.

### **SPRING**

In springtime, I shrunk to half my size.

I fell from the high of winter and failed to stick the landing. I started eating like I talked—always less.

There was no refuge in poetry or my bedroom. My conversations with you were longer than they had ever been, the build-up of words finding release in discussing the mundane on our car rides—

from the parking lot home, from home to the store, we would chat. Argue, sometimes, but not like we used to. I lost the energy for fights. I found the energy to listen.

We watched TV together then, and found our happy middle ground in the misery of the fictional. I did not want to be alone in my room and I suspect you didn't want to leave me. TLC became our favorite channel, to gawk and poke at lives that were not our own.

When you did eventually leave, I would pray. I don't know to who. You laughed again when I told you, but didn't ask why. I think you knew I didn't want you to.

Sometime in the storm, I turned fifteen. You made not one cake, but two, and I finally gorged myself until I felt full again. Gifts were given. I spent the money on little things—a ring I didn't want, a belt I didn't need. A journal I didn't use. You did not question my choices. I think you knew I needed you to and you refrained anyway, so I might learn to do it for myself.

## SUMMER

You chose our town for the tulip trees.

In summer, they came in full bloom, fat seedpods adorning our lawn and sticking to the dog's paws. I was quick to trade them for the city, spending every day off, distant again. The bus became my morning escape, the getaway car from here to my healing. We went over the bus routes and times until I could recite them backwards. You would watch as I got on until you were sure enough to drive away as soon as I left the car,

trusting in your teachings

When you picked me up again, me trudging through the heat and slick towards the A/C of your same old Kia, you, gunning it against rush hour traffic and swearing when some idiot cut you off,

I would watch in the rear view as the skyline disappeared.

In that time and those car rides, I grew to hate our small town, reentering it from behind the pine sap splattered on your windshield like traveling from one world to another. It reminded me of the muck of spring, and I was disgusted with the treetops that couldn't even brush the skyscrapers I would wander under in the day time.

Then I forgave it for the memories I had planted, for its farmland and family-owned corner stores. I became angry when the big businesses threatened our quiet; would've cuffed myself to the trees if I wasn't tired from waking up so early to leave, and if you ever would have let me.

And as July dragged itself into the thick of August and I grew tired of cement and smog,  
I fell back in love.

## FALL

November froze us.

School started. I did not live for it like in winter, but I was not praying to escape like in spring. The view from the windows reminded me of the city I did not want to go back to. I ate lunch again.

The bus came earlier. Our conversations on the ride home shortened until I watched out the window and listened to the tribulations of your days, watching as the bare-branched trees clung to the hardened soil and imagining all the ways you could paint them.

On the night you were late, I waited in the library parking lot until I scraped enough change from my coat pocket to buy an extra-large Coke at the Cumby's next door.

I watched on the sidewalk as they tested Christmas lights on the old pine tree. You texted as the GPS's ETA grew later

and later

and later

and I still stood there until my fingers stuck to the plastic of my soda cup and the ice couldn't melt, the straw fused to my lips,

even after the people left, having not noticed me, and it would have been safe to hide in the library lobby. The pride you gave me was too strong.

Instead, I wrote on my phone until my hands could not move, then let the overworked battery warm my hands. I watched the highway in case you came early  
and I missed you.

In the dark, all the headlights looked the same.

***Gypsy Mothmageddon***

*Sophie Spaner, Valley Regional High School*

there were so many gypsy moths  
that full extermination was not a viable option  
that it seemed like summer would never end,  
their bodies strewn across the sidewalk and the  
edges of the street, their  
fuzzy carcasses partly a victory and  
partly a symbol that the war would never end

the raspberries never came in, leaving legs  
free of minute and clean scarring from  
thorns left untended  
the trees looked like  
winter had plowed through and  
shaken any chance of normalcy to the ground, leaving  
leaves lying dead next to the dreaded thick larvae  
full of green + bark, their  
bite is definitely worse

the neighbors used chemicals—tried using chemicals,  
tried to smoke them out  
lure them in and strike, but in the end  
they were the only ones that had fallen  
with minimal success

their numbers were seemingly infinite  
breeding and birthing and  
destroying, then dying, as I  
suppose most things go  
at this point, it seemed like  
the battle was endless and  
effort was futile, but the  
ad programming for a professional exterminator  
spoke of the light on the horizon

the neighbors found a nest  
encased in a stringy, waxy ivory coat  
they brought a match to the skin  
and watched  
as they fell, writhing  
taking the whole tree with them  
partly a victory  
partly a sign that the war would never end

## Eleventh Grade



*The Fresh Air of Freedom, Carly Barry, The King School*

**Flint**

*Cassandra Eppler, Rockville High School*

No one talks to each other anymore.  
You were always the one to keep the conversation flowing.  
Mom is thinking about leaving us again.  
Dad keeps working late, just to get out of this house.  
You used to keep me up at night, making me tell you fables so you'd fall asleep.  
At first, I only told them when there were thunderstorms.  
I kept adding chapters to it because you never wanted it to end.  
I sleep with your blanket now. The blue one that looks dirty, but soft from Mom's detergent.  
I don't know why I used to tell you to get rid of it.  
I don't wake up to the soft thumping of you jumping off the top bunk in the morning anymore.  
You were my alarm clock.

I hold on to Dad's old aftershave.  
You know, the one you wore for months because you wanted to grow up so damn fast.  
It's in my top drawer, alongside the Superman cape you wore to bed every night.  
So much for growing up. But, like Dad says, I haven't grown up much either.  
I'm still jealous of how you could make him laugh. And that you were always Mom's favorite.  
Looking out the window of your old treehouse I was never allowed in, I can see the barn.  
The framework: charred, the roof: sunk, but the building still stands.  
The air was always so dry, making it hard to breathe when the doors were shut.  
The old barrels of hay stacked against the walls made the perfect fort.  
You always knew how to build a damn good fortress.  
Dad blames me for not being there with you. I blame myself, too.  
I mean, it's a big brother's job to be there.  
I shouldn't have left you alone,  
  
And I shouldn't have taught you how to light a match.

**My Papa's Hands**

*Emma Hazel, RHAM High School*

I do not remember how long ago it was, I was probably five or six. I do remember that when we folded our hands in prayer his were very big and mine were very small.

It is time for bed, but I am not tired. He sees this as an opportunity, and so we go.

Down the stairs.

Out the door.

Down the walkway.

Into the street. Into the night.

To the left is the street lamp that illuminates the night air. Past that lamp is darkness, is dreams.  
To the right is another street lamp.

We walk in one direction towards the light, and when we hit the darkness, we turn around and walk in the other direction. He holds my hand and I hold his and I want to walk forever listening to our footsteps echo off of the houses and the trees. I am usually afraid of the dark, but with him close by my side it doesn't seem as daunting.

There is the dumpster that we carry the trash to. There is the mailbox that we check together.  
There is the bush that I sell acorns and leaves out of. There is the car that I have picnics on. There is the tree that I climb.



We have been on many walks like this, but this one has stayed with me for so long and I do not know why. Maybe it is because in that moment I had realized how special it was that I got to walk with him. I remember feeling existential in his presence, even though I had no understanding of it at the time. I think it would help a lot of people if they went on a walk with him. He would make them feel comforted and loved and understood.

As we walk together, I become aware of the houses around us and the people inside them. What are they thinking? What are they doing? What are they saying?

Our footsteps are light on the pavement and our conversation is deeper than the night sky. I do not want it to end, but I am getting sleepy and the moon is awake, so it does.

Up the walkway.

In the door.

Up the stairs.

Into bed.

He tucks me into Nana Too's old bed with his gentle hands and kind eyes. The bed is springy and the pillows are fluffy. He folds his hands in prayer and lowers his head. I do the same, watching him out of the corner of my eye.

The words that are said hang in the air for a moment and then rise up to Him. Amen. He kisses my forehead with genuine love in his eyes, for this is no ordinary night. This is a night of ideas, a night of dreams, a night of compassion. On this night my Papa is love, and I am love. Our love walks hand-in-hand down the street, past the streetlamp, into the dreams.

He smiles, blows a kiss from the doorway, and turns off the light. My eyes feel heavy with sleep, and I am gone.

### ***Do I Contradict Myself?***

*Olivia Flaherty-Lovy, New Canaan High School*

*"Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then, I contradict myself;  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)"*

- Walt Whitman

Is it possible to believe in a punctuation mark? To believe that they exist, definitely, but to really believe in them, to rely on them so heavily it's impossible to imagine a world without them? Is it possible to have absolute faith in a line, in one thin, flimsy line, especially one that most people don't normally acknowledge? It took me years to realize it, but I've come to know the hyphen like I know the freckles sprinkled across my little brother's sunburn-slicked cheeks in the summer. And what's more, I don't just understand the hyphen now. I believe in it, the way I believe in second chances, the way my grandmother believed in life after death.

I doubt that in a room of twenty people, all of them would know what a hyphen even is. I see the way people's brows wrinkle when their eyes fall on my last name, heard the way their voices crack when they're reading it aloud, unsure of whether there's been a mistake or not. Hyphen, hyphen—what even is a hyphen? According to Merriam-Webster, it's a punctuation mark, used especially to divide or compound words, elements, and numbers, but according to life, it's so much more than that. It's the highly-debated, slightly-controversial stroke of pencil lead that has the unprecedented power to unite thousands of miles of beliefs, religions, lives: anything that shouldn't go together. All the global leaders in the world couldn't accomplish what that thin line can, even if they immersed themselves in a million more emergency meetings and frustrated phone calls, flailing helplessly in an attempt to find anything that could give them a chance for connecting opposing regions or peoples. One hyphen, though, and done—people are going to say "Israel-Palestine" like they say African-American, like they used to say Austria-Hungary.

I never really understood why it was so difficult for others to grasp, though I suppose it's harder when you're not living in a hyphenated world. For me, at least, I've never been able to describe myself without slipping a few of them into the conversation, even if it's just stating my name. "Flaherty-Lovy," I'd repeat, as the harassed-looking college students working the sign-in desks bent over their attendance sheets again. "It's one name." After a couple of minutes, during which time I was painfully aware of everyone in line behind me clicking their tongues in impatience, a flimsy name tag would be pressed into my sweaty palm, the word "Flaherty" sprawled across in untidy lettering. No Lovy. And more importantly, no hyphen.

It took a while to realize something was wrong. It took a million more check-in lines and name tags, a million more uncomfortable conversations, a million more nights spent lying awake, trying to figure out why people expected me to cram my entire identity into one word. It didn't seem fair to try and fit it all in one name; I was half afraid the letters would crumble from the strain of trying to represent so much. I felt like my identity was ripping at the seams, like the hyphen was little more than a frayed bit of thread tying together two worlds that weren't meant to mix. It wasn't just my name that the hyphen was holding together, either. It was everything that hid under the letters, everything that made up my identity—my contradicted, conflicted, one-in-a-million identity. That hyphen was both Ireland and Hungary, and all the stories my grandparents told me blurred into one swirl of family. It was having roots in the skyscrapers that raked against the New York sky and the bare, openness of the Midwest—the way everything seemed to blur and slow in Wisconsin, like time was moving through Jell-O. It was Catholicism and Judaism, the ways my parents' heads both bowed down at the same table as their lips moved in different prayers. That hyphen was me, caught in the middle of the two worlds, struggling to find the line between them. And for some reason no one else seemed to know there was a middle world, a path where worlds mingled and mixed in ways they shouldn't—a path that was my life.

It really is a shame that hyphens are opaque, because if people could see into them, maybe things would be different. Maybe then they'd be able to feel the swell of pride as they ran their finger down the wrinkled spine of an atlas, marveling at the fact that their family connected two cultures 1,563 miles away through twelve letters. Maybe they'd be able to visualize the clutter and chaos of the city mixed with the subtle tranquility of Wisconsin farms, and they too would want to bottle those images to carry with them forever. Maybe, once they'd experienced the scent of pine needles from the Christmas tree mingling with the sizzle of latkes frying in the kitchen, once they had heard the clatter of the dreidel spinning to the floor while they sat cross-legged in front of the fire wearing Santa hats, once their family had roared with laughter after their five-year-old brother started a prayer in Latin and ended in Hebrew, they'd understand.

So, is it really possible to believe in a punctuation mark? I don't know. It could be. But I do know that I believe in the brilliance of Walt Whitman, Ginsburg's lonely old courage-teacher, and I know that I believe with all my will in his Song of Myself. Myself is not one branch of the family tree. It is every branch and every leaf, those that came before and that will come after me. Myself is part of a life that can be lived by choosing not to choose. And in the end, contradiction does not always have to be confliction.

Whitman wrote for me. For us.

Period. And hyphen.

### ***The Little White House***

*Mia Rhodes, RHAM High School*

I climb out of the car, biting my thumb hard. It is a habit I've struggled to let go of, no matter how many times everyone has begged me to stop. Sometimes, it is just my way of holding it all in.

The little white house, surrounded by a bright green garden she used to tend to so tediously, had always seemed to give off a radiant glow. It's been years since I've been here, and I stare now at a dull picture. The house paint is scratched, the vibrancy of the garden dimmed. The new house owners let her

hard work go to waste. Weeds fill the yard and the cracks between the stone walkway that I walked on many times before. Years before.

I feel myself shiver, trying to bring back the warm memories of childhood here, in the brisk December cold.

As I force myself inside, I am overwhelmed with emotions, and the foreign smell of must. They had painted her walls, they had redecorated her living room, they had even added a room to the upstairs. My mother congratulated them on the new addition, but to me it felt like a way to spread out, in what used to feel cozy and comfortable. We knew the owners. It isn't their fault. They simply bought a house and were excited to renovate their new home. On the other hand, they *did* know it was her home. Now it feels more like *their* home.

I peer my head to the left and spot the playroom. Quite possibly the room I was most familiar with. I can't help but crack a smile when I see the old, soft, dark red carpet. I can still hear the laughter in this room. I can still hear the rapid *thud, thud, thud* of our youthful, pounding feet stomping through the house. We were so goofy back then. It felt bare to see the missing yellow toy truck I used to push into my cousin's feet. Sorry, Joey. The memories hit me hard in the same rapid thuds. Sharp and vivid as if from yesterday. This was the room her cat came to sleep in, though she probably didn't appreciate our constant energy. Tinky was her large, grey cat. My cousins kept two of her newborn kittens: Ruby, who looked much like her mother, and Roscoe, a chubby, orange cat who truly takes advantage of his nine lives.

I make my way back through the tight-fitting mud room and into her kitchen. Thankfully, similar to the way she left it. It was beautiful. Large windows that used to project rays of sun onto my back, giving me goosebumps as I ate my mac and cheese. She always made us mac and cheese. I missed the summers we would spend here together. On the counter, I spotted her bird feeder, I had always admired it. It was a homemade bird feeder, a mason jar flipped upside down on a metal, Frisbee-like container with holes around the brim. Now empty, but years ago it was constantly filled to the top with Jelly Belly brand jelly beans. I always wanted the pink ones.

Startled back to reality by a hand on my shoulder. "Sorry to sneak up on you, but we found this in the wall of the bedroom and thought you should have it."

My fingers pinch the edges of the glossy photo-paper. The tears build again, only this time I don't need to bite my thumb: these are tears of joy. It is a photograph, and one I'd never seen before. I check for a date on the back, but there isn't one. I must've been only five, maybe four years old in this picture. I can tell because my little brother and sister look no more than one.

Everyone is there, superficially imprinted on that photo-paper. All nineteen of us in one photo is rare. I am surrounded by all my cousins. All of us, well dressed, standing in front of her little white house. It must've been Easter. We used to celebrate it at her house. The frantic desire to find the "golden egg" seemed like a priority back then. My eyes wander from person to person as I notice a familiar pattern of plush yarn snug around our heads. She'd always crocheted the most beautiful winter caps. We have a closet full at home, though I never wear them out. They hug our heads with the tender love she'd always given us.

I'd been so worried I'd lost her. But I see now she will never leave me. She molded us into who we are with her hugs. She taught us to care and to love. She brought us closer than any family I had ever known. Her arms stretched wide enough to hold us all together. Although it feels as if her hugs have lost their grip on us, she continues to keep her hold on us. We could never drift away from each other, and we never will. She taught us that, in this little white house.

This one's for you, Mary Lou.

Love, granddaughter.

### ***Counting Pennies***

*Selena Muniz, The Woodstock Academy*

The tendency of mistaking  
the stars for artificial street lamps  
on corners of avenues that  
will only lead you to where you began,  
grow faster than the weeds in mother's garden;  
Is the same moment you finally realize,  
you will never miss the city.

A city of mishaps-gone-right filled  
with libraries of beautiful tragedies  
and chins tilted upwards to admire  
constellations of lost souls glittering  
across a navy-blue canvas in attempt  
to outshine the other; astronomy  
was never your strong suit,  
but you would wear it anyways, perhaps  
that was your hook as you reeled me in.

Your kiss is a burning trail of fire  
leaving paths of ash in its wake,  
scattering love bites across bruised flesh  
screaming out like a tea kettle for attention.  
Steam wasn't the only thing rising between us,  
we were passion and lust pronounced into a  
divine moment deep in no man's land.  
A war brewing around us and we  
were the common ground.

My inhales and your exhales; the time  
they became the same was the very instant  
we stopped pretending that what we felt  
was more than the moments we had.  
Collections of nows locked away in a warehouse  
somewhere where blankets of dust coat objects  
to hide the beauty of an epic love story that will never exist.

One, two, there are three aisles in a cathedral,  
a forgotten holy temple in one, unheard prayers  
in the other, and lastly a God that died in a ripple  
of centuries ago. A waterfall of the outcries  
from his people drowned him in the refusal to  
worship his fairy tale lies, experiencing an all too  
familiar curse referred to as "growing up."

We took one glance at the neon splatter paints  
and found the sound of the ocean when no one was there  
to listen. Each wave carried dreams that would recycle themselves  
through the grains of sand, graffiti was dripping on the sidewalks

we were walking and instead of a warning we took it as an omen of hope. Another chance for us to admire as each droplet taps against the window by our bed, each knock being a proclamation to be heard; the whistling of the wind saying, “don’t leave me,” as we planned to walk away, we wouldn’t even spare a glance back in fear that it would cease our steps to freedom.

We could find the glamor in a calamity and the foul in a victory. Perhaps we were just young and naive kids who thought they had it all figured out, the world in the palms of their hands, the ultimate con artists counting pennies ’til the day they die. We talked about ourselves like we were someone else, someone better in a place where the rules were made to be broken and where sanity was the abnormal, an illusion of a broken paradise that we wished to call home.

### **Juno**

*Savannah Rice, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

“If you could refrain from putting your grubby, little hands on my face, that would be absolutely *euphoric*,” I stated in a matter-of-fact tone as Adalio continued to squish my cheeks between his fingers.

“But you look so adorable in your uniform!” he retorted. While I didn’t want to admit it, I had to agree with him for once. He was right. My long, dark hair hung loosely over my shoulders in two braids that nearly reached the top of my waist. My skin, which had a healthy greyish hue to it, made the dark red suit stand out in comparison. My eyes narrowed in irritation at his shenanigans. I was used to it, but that didn’t stop him from getting on my last nerve.

While he wasn’t exactly in the wrong, I hated being doted on, especially by my husband. There wasn’t much ground for me to argue, and I usually was pretty good about just accepting compliments, but I was rather nervous just then. In approximately two hours, I’d be undergoing a ceremony that officially marked me the highest ranking general in our military. That was huge, especially for someone such as myself. A Kajima woman being appointed to the head of a dangerous militia organization? It was unheard of. It simply didn’t happen.

“Oh, stop with the glare and *smile*, Juno. Tonight is a very important event, and you, *Moya lyubov*’ are going to do amazing things with this promotion. I just know it.” The endearing name got me to crack, but only a little bit. I couldn’t have people thinking I was all soft. A small grin touched upon my lips for a moment before vanishing. The smile was disbanded by Adalio’s lips, briefly pressing against mine. “Please, Juno. Don’t be nervous or afraid. I believe in you.” I only gave a nod, letting my mouth close, pressing into a thin line.

The room around me felt as if it were getting smaller and smaller, as if the walls were slowly closing in on Adalio and myself. However, I knew that it was a mere example of my nervousness. “Is the room getting smaller?” I asked in a monotone. Adalio rolled his eyes and lifted his hands, placing them on my shoulders and giving them a tight squeeze.

“No, that’s your ego inflating.” I mimicked his action, rolling my eyes at the comment. It wasn’t even worth a response. He just grinned, giving me a soft pat. “Like I’ve already said, you will do great.”

I nodded my head once more and gave a soft sigh. “Yes, I know. I know I’ll be okay, but there is a serious pestering feeling I have that, well, as some of our younger kin like to say, *shit is going to hit the fan*. Perhaps I’m just being ridiculous, but I can’t make it go away.”

Adalio's expression softened. "Nothing is going to happen to you, I promise. You're well reserved, you're brave, and you're strong. You can handle this, alright?" His words of encouragement only lessened the anxiety by a fraction, but it was always nice to know that he cared so much.

Two hours passed us in a painfully slow manner, building up the anxiousness in my head. As soon as we arrived at the stadium, Adalio was ushered off into the crowd, pushed to take a seat while he was still able to grab one. It was a little ridiculous that they'd encourage such a thing since the lot of us prefer to stand to better see the ceremony. Regardless of the nuisance that the seating arrangements made, I was whisked away without being able to give my husband another embrace.

The room I had been placed in was strewn with stripes of gold and silver. The walls, painted a sparkling white, were littered with different, small paintings; each looking as if they were created by a different person than the last. Crystals hung limply from the ceiling tiles, haughtily shimmering in the bright lighting that casted streams of yellow over the floor. I was alone in the room, left to fix myself up before the ceremony began.

A body-length mirror had been hastily positioned in the far corner of the room, its frame slightly ajar as if it had once fallen over and been dented. Slowly, I walked over to it, admiring the spirals that adorned the glass inside. They were beautifully molded; some of them branched away while others curled and tucked in close to the next swirl. Not only did the frame appear to be slightly damaged, upon closer inspection, the glass itself had been fractured both on the left and the right corners of the mirror.

I glanced into it, ignoring the broken pieces at the top. For a moment, I was mortified. This was the first time in a long while that I had actually taken a good look at myself. My hair was as dark as the sky that surrounded our planet at night, and as thick as a woven bundle of yarn. I reached up to gently run my fingers over it, the silky strand I had chosen stuck idly to my nail before falling back into place. I watched my own eyes in my reflection; black with a deep red seeping just below the skin around them. The pinkish veins lead away from my irises and stopped just above the tops of my cheekbones, it looked like I hadn't gotten much sleep. Though I felt as well-rested as I possibly could.

The feature that stood out the most to me was the mark between my eyes. It started just above my brows, and was in four separate pieces. Two shapes like crescent moons faced towards one another, the tail of them turning downwards into straight lines. A small dot rested just above the end curves of the moons, and below that was a long line, ending with a circular figure. It was the mark of a deity we called Akuana. All Kajima people were born with it, and if an extraordinary act was performed, the mark on that person would be added to. For example, if someone were to overcome a great task, or perform an exceptional good deed, the mark would grow. Almost as if vines branched from it, creating different patterns.

As I stared at my own face, I could see why people often mistook me to be younger than I am. My lips naturally curved into a pucker, almost as if I were always pouting. While it wasn't too bad, it rounded my cheeks out and made them appear much puffier than I would have liked them to be. I was shocked, to say the least. The last time I had actually looked into a mirror, I was much smaller, lankier. My body had filled out to the point that I believed to be true beauty. My hips were wider, my chest was *much* larger and I had grown taller. By now, I could have been at least eight feet. Adalio was eight and a half. It brought a smile to my face, to think of how I was quickly catching up to him. My musings were interrupted by the door gently swinging open, making way for a gentleman in the same, red suit that I wore. His expression showed mild interest as he held the door open. "Mrs. Syreth, it's time. Are you ready?" I flashed a sharp grin. "Of course."



## Twelfth Grade



*Grim Reaper, Sophia Reid, Manchester High School*

### ***Galaxies Apart***

*Azya Thornton, Woodstock Academy*

The day my father brought home a telescope was the day I realized how truly insignificant I was as a human being. He brought it out to the porch of our third story apartment and I watched as he teetered with the levers and the moon lit up his dark skin. I decided then that if my father were a planet, he would be mars; all red rock and dust storms.

I watched his galactic face radiate as I told him how beautiful our planet must look from up there and the crater in his mouth gleamed in agreement. I looked at him and I looked back at the night sky and I couldn't help but feel that the space between us and the cosmos could not compare to the space I felt between him and me.

He had always felt like a foreign planet, too high up in the galaxy to notice an insignificant crater of rock that was me. My father and I were never close growing up, he was as unfamiliar as the void, as the abyss, as the constellation of stars. He was as damaged as the atmosphere, I watched, year after year, as the light in his eyes dimmed. I think his hurt was big enough for the both of us, as infinite as our galaxy.

## ***Investigative Kindness***

*David Hettinger, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

The city streets look gray without raindrops. Nobody thinks to cluster around shop windows, or stand to talk by newsstands. The footsteps and the walking pattern followed by the everyday civilians is all exactly uniform. Around the streets, winding throughout the buildings, civilians nod their heads at each other, even nonchalantly shaking hands without any feeling behind them. Basic business proceeds: a couple purchases food at a market, a passenger acknowledges a cab driver for a ride across town, so many other basics acts, all rendered thankless. Downtown Worcester, Massachusetts has become a place of order.

Among the city's orderly fashion, a police cruiser graced another glum street corner with circulating flashes of red and blue and parallel-parked in front of a small library. Inside roamed a small group of photographers alongside Detective Dey and Special Agent Ronny. They observe a small alcove through the border of caution tape in the non-fiction section. They notice the collapsed books on the ground, one about frogs, another about wall paint, and the other about the uses of cork. No correlation appears between these books and the act of kindness they are investigating.

Detective Dey pulls a cigarette out of his pocket and lights it in his mouth. Before he gets in one puff, the tip of the cigarette is pinched by brawny hands, smothering the smoldering, concealed tobacco.

"This is a No-Smoking Zone, detective," the library guard says gruffly before walking away. Detective Dey lightly grumbles, turning back to Special Agent Ronny, who stands beside him nonchalantly.

"Man, I've been in this department for eight years, and I've never once seen such an act of kindness. This shit is starting to spread like pneumonia."

"I feel like that's just a little bit of an exaggeration, Dey," Ronny responds. "You know there's all kinds of people we've put away."

"Yeah, well those are just members of bigger groups. The Neo-Free-Hugs Squad, the Canadian Averages, all those people. This, there's no connection. From what I can see there's no gang signs."

"You think there's a new gang forming?" Ronny questions.

Detective Dey and Ronny approach a woman who stands perched up against a desk. She turns her head constantly all around the check-out section of the library.

"Ronny, since you got here late, this right here is our witness." Detective Dey introduces the two of them. Ronny very nearly reaches his hand forward for a handshake, but keeps his arm still. "Go ahead and tell Special Agent Ronny here what you saw," Detective Dey requests.

The witness adjusts herself.

"It was some crazy shit. This person is picking up some books from the non-fiction section. Suddenly the bitch trips and drops all of them onto the ground. Nobody lifted a finger. But then here comes this guy from around the corner. Couldn't even see the dude's face, camouflaged by a fedora or something, and he bends down, and picks up her books for her. Even the lady looked shocked!"

"So, it was a man?" Ronny asks.

"Great, that narrows it down to about four billion people," Detective Dey remarks.

"Technically half the population of the city, Dey," Ronny replies.

"Hey, don't you go talking to me like I'm an idiot. Huh, you think I'm a fucking idiot now?"

"Can you calm your boy here please?" the witness asks, sarcastically.

"Grand idea. Dey, let's reconvene here." Ronny pulls Detective Dey over to the non-fiction section.

"Don't you go disrespecting me like that, man. We're partners."

"And I know you have a temper, because you're pretty damn stereotypical in case it wasn't obvious."

"Listen Ronny—," Detective Dey pauses. "Look, before you got here, you should've seen how freaked the people were. There were already people from one of Facebook's documentary crews here making a montage video. This only adds to the rarity of niceness. Who knows how the other nice ones are

reacting to this? They're probably organizing a rally right now offering free hugs and handing out canned goods."

"Or maybe you're just overreacting a little bit there." Ronny slips in his words. Detective Dey pauses to glare at his partner.

"Oh, don't tell me you're going soft on me, Ronny. You received a hug from your Dad one time, and all of a sudden you start turning? That's what got your old man put away in the first place. The way our society is, it's what makes everyone equal. As soon as people start being kind to each other, it offers an advantage. It offers the idea that people can be better than one another." Detective Dey says sternly. "Even so much as a motivational high-five is anathema, you know that. But going out of your way? Stepping into someone else's business to clean up some random mess and then smiling out of line? That right there could almost mean a life sentence."

"Dude, I know the laws. Stop being a dick."

Detective Dey stands, glaring at Ronny. The photographers just behind them add distracting flashes of light during their debate, especially with it being the brightest colors in the library.

"You want me to be invested in this crime, is that it?" Ronny asks. "Whatever, man. I'll take a look over the security cameras. You go take a coffee break, maybe even talk to some people."

"Yeah, because you always get the visual aid."

"That's my specialty, Miss Marple," Ronny quips. He walks away to the back stairwell of the library, leaving Detective Dey and the rest of the police department eager to slap handcuffs onto an anonymous good-doer.

Ronny follows a trail of gray floors, and white spray-painted industrial bricks, leading to a black door. He sits down in front of a computer monitor, rifling through several digital files from the security cameras, looking for that day's date.

In the footage, overlooking the library, was the population of the check-out area before the police came into the picture. A middle-aged woman entered into the non-fiction section. She grasped three books with bland gray covers, the same as all books in the library. She tripped over her own two feet, resulting in other books spilling off of the shelves and Ronny seemed unphased as the suspect entered into the frame. The man crouched down and rearranged the books neatly. He placed down the copy of *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry, that he intended to rent.

Sitting in front of the monitors, Ronny pulls a laminated picture from his jacket pocket. He and his Dad, standing in line for a group photo with the Canadian Averages as he prepares to train as a mole. He smiles, and looks back to look at the footage, sees the woman standing up and accepting the offering of her books. Ronny let go of them, and the two exchanged kind, gentle smiles.

### ***The Lexmark, 2022 Model***

*Julia Pezzano, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

#### **Monday 2:03 p.m.**

"Okay, I need you all to print out your final essay so I can have those graded by Friday, just in time for report cards," Mr. Young explains as the whole classroom groans.

"Report cards, already?" Kathy sighs, annoyed with everything.

"Senior year is not as fun as people make it out to be," Ross says, gathering his papers.

"Don't even get me started ... I have trig homework, five textbook assignments all from Mrs. Hare, a lab in chemistry, plus I have a student council meeting, practice, and work after school," Macy exclaims, trying her best not to panic.

All three get up from their seats and head over to the printer.

"There goes my social life. All I'm saying is I don't have time for anything else," Macy complains, again.

"Macy, you didn't *have* a social life last year ..." Kathy states sympathetically. The printer beeps and clicks as it slowly begins to print the first essay. The warm white paper rests on top, waiting to be stapled.

"Nice work Kathy. Looks like someone deserves ice cream tonight. Woohoo! That essay was pretty informative if I do say so myself," the printer says as Kathy picks up her papers.

"Thank you, Lex. Hopefully Mr. Young thinks so, too." She smiles, stapling her essay before walking away to hand it in.

"Ah, my man Ross, good job buddy. That section you put in talking about Michael Jackson, totally inspiring. #nailedit ha, ha, ha," Lex says as Ross' last page of his essay prints.

"Thanks bro. I tried my hardest ... for once," Ross laughs, looking over the text before heading back to his seat.

"Macyyy, how have you been gorgeous? When are you going to let me take you out, huh?" Lex says awkwardly. Macy's paperwork prints neatly on the top tray.

"Maybe when you get legs, lover boy," Macy says, rolling her eyes.

"So, you're sayin' there's a chance." Lex's electronic screen lights up with hearts floating to the top.

"Stop stealing Jim Carrey's lines. It's giving me hives," she says before strutting away, essay in hand.

"She totally wants me. Who can resist all this?" Lex says as his electronic eyes stare at the wall in front of him. "Someone, Mr. Young for example, should put a TV there. It would make my days off more enjoyable."

#### **Friday 1:54 p.m.**

"Okay class, I've graded all of your essays—on time by the way. Gold sticker for me. Make sure to grab them at the end of class," Mr. Young says, walking behind his desk, grabbing the neat stack of essays.

"I am prepared for the massive amounts of red ink on that paper," Ross whispers, breathing out apprehensively.

"He probably goes through at least three pens per paper," Kathy nervously laughs as people exit the room.

"Take it is easy guys. Senior year will be over in a week's time, and this will be our last in Young's class," Macy says, flipping her hair to the side.

"Freedommm, oh sweet freedomm," Ross sings quietly, making sure only Kathy and Macy hear.

"Amen," Kathy giggles, blushing at Ross's foolishness.

"Kathy Green, Miss Kathy Green," Mr. Young waves her paper in the air like a madman.

"Last essay ever, last essay ever," Kathy repeats with a determined walk to Mr. Young.

"Does she know she will have to write essays in college or ..." Ross says, slightly concerned.

"Let her have this moment," Macy says patting Ross's shoulder. He nods in agreement, watching Kathy examine her essay.

"Ross, please come get your paper," Mr. Young says amusedly. Ross gives Macy a thumbs up before racing to the front of the class, snatching the paper from Mr. Young's hands.

"And finally, Miss Macy Cooper," Mr. Young sighs, realizing summer's fast approach.

"Ah, thank you so much Mr. Young. It's been a pleasure," Macy grabs the paper from Mr. Young and walks towards the door.

"So, angel on Earth, how'd your essay come out? Not to brag, but I gave you the fancy paper. Hopefully that helped your grade ... not that you need it," Lex says, his eyes trying to fixate on something.

"I got a 92, minus eight points for stealing Mr. Young's personal paper, but nice try." Macy rolls her eyes.

"Baby, baby, I was only trying to do my woman good," Lex's monotone voice definitely does not help in this moment.

“We aren’t even dating,” Macy exclaims.  
 “Babe, don’t deny the facts. I know you’re in love with me.” Lex desperately tries to seduce Macy.  
 “Lex, I hate to bring this to your attention, but you’re a printer and I am leaving for college in the fall. Whatever you are trying to do here has to end,” Macy whispers before sharply exiting the room.  
 “But my love, my life has no purpose without you. Your writing makes my day. Without it I’m stuck printing boring word searches about literary figures. I need you,” Lex shouts.  
 “You’re a printer!” Macy yells back from the hallway.  
 Lex’s digital eyes scan the wall. “You know, Mr. Young, if you moved me closer to the projector I could watch soap operas all day instead of staring at this white wall ...”  
 “Yes Lex, I could, but that takes motivation, which I no longer have to pretend I have. Let summer begin,” Mr. Young says, packing his briefcase and throwing on a pair of hot pink sunglasses.  
 “Please, Mr. Young. I am going to have nothing to do all summer long but stare at a white wall,” Lex begs.  
 “Maybe the time alone will serve you well Lex—organize your thoughts or test out the new ink. See you in the fall,” Mr. Young exclaims, skipping out of the classroom door, slamming it shut behind him.  
 “We have a long summer ahead of us, lover boy,” the projector whispers seductively.  
 “We aren’t even dating. I’m only interested in the soap operas,” Lex sighs, suddenly feeling slightly uncomfortable.

**On Being A Woman~ After Marge Piercy**

*Mae Santillo, Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School*

standing behind the bleachers  
 during gym class  
 you tell me what was taken from you.  
 i hold your womanhood between  
 my fingers and allow it to  
 paint my skin the color of your  
 love. misplaced. unrequited.  
 hanging a heart shaped  
 band around your neck.

you are my first introduction  
 to what it means to be  
 a woman.  
 to the idea of giving  
 and receiving in return  
 & wearing your sex like  
 a badge of honor

i wish my worry would  
 stain you like he did.  
 that a part of me would  
 echo through your body.

i wish i had been  
 as brave as you.  
 that when he leaned in  
 to kiss me on  
 new year’s i would  
 have taken all of him  
 in,

i wish i was brave enough  
 to be so unapologetically  
 human. to be so  
 unapologetically  
 female. to be so  
 unapologetic.

### ***The Lament of Orpheus***

Mairead Kilgallon, Greenwich Academy

#### i. to eurydice, before

i'm not saying i'm mad / well, maybe I am / I mean, not at you / but kind of at you / at the gods? / it's their fault, your fault, my fault / the viper's fault / the viper or the fangs? / intent or nature? / i was writing a song for you, for us / did you know? / how could you have known, i'm being stupid / you still make me nervous / i wish i could sing to you to myself / that damn music is the life of me / the death of you, of me / how can there be music without you? / i remember my lyre string was fraying / and i was so worried it would snap / hurt me, hurt you, and then there would be silence / i thought i can't live like that / you can't die like that / but you did and i have to / and what do i do now? /

#### ii. to hades

my lord / i beg of you— / how did i get in? / i hardly think that's important now where is she / she must've checked in / is that the term? / her ankle killed her, a viper's fangs dripping with millennia of evolution / for its survival, but not hers / i sang my way in, if you must know / i turned the rock to flowers with a song, her song / a gate opened, i stepped through and now i am here / i am *here* / my lord / forgive me but *i am here! eurydice!* / where is she, what must i do, i can sing for you, i can turn your palace to flowers if the lady persephone would like / *my lord i am begging you, i will turn the whole world into flowers* /

#### iii. to the ghost, following

has this place absorbed you, your beauty your smile, your *you*? / will you still sway when i sing, will your feet dance in the dirt, on the stones? / or is your foot swollen purple and gray with poison, are you the color of death? / why can i not turn, *don't*, and touch your hands to feel that they are yours, they are mine / turn, *no*, and press my head to your chest and sing along with your heartbeat, did i hear it just then? / or just my footsteps or *your* footsteps? / are your feet touching the ground, i must, *can't*, see / what if you are not you, is a ghost of you better than none of you, i need to see you, hold you, feel you, i can't hear you, where did you go / i see your eyes /

#### iv. to eurydice, after

but i never touched you, you never touched me / the string was cut, my life, your life snapped / the fates grinned and went home for the day / my strings are gone / i'm not mad anymore / not at you, at me / can i ever find you again, i look and i look / and like the space between the stars of the lyre in the sky / i see you close / i reach, do you reach back / and yet you are days and months and years away from me / and i don't think you could even hear me sing to you / but i will sing anyway /

### ***A Prayer for my Sister: After Yeats***

Jaclyn Mulé, Greenwich Academy

The storm withdraws from the morning beach,  
And leaves behind a crowd of seashells, each  
With a belly smooth as a pearl. Beneath  
The glass ceiling my sister breathes  
With caution as she sleeps, perhaps the one  
Wise action with restraint she's done;



And with her morning dreams I pray and wait  
Though perhaps my daybreak prayers have come too late.

Though I've seen her sleep a hundred times before,  
And never pondered it beyond the bedroom door,  
I suppose the seagull spray and blue-foam wind  
Give more than just her dreams the wings to spin;  
Ignited with fragile fire in its veins of light,  
Outside the dawn sky breaks,  
Leaving fair shadows in its wake,  
Exploding from the jaded windings of the night.  
May she gather every breadcrumb of resolve,  
Leave him and his uncertainty to dissolve;  
Yet never lose her hope for something more;  
Which breathes into her heart the will to soar.  
May she leave him first, and not be left;  
And keep her infant dreams of love unbound;  
For if that tender faith were drowned,  
She would awake departed, and bereft.

I hope in time she understands  
That other minds can lend a gentle hand;  
It is no sin to hear the beauty in songs whose tones  
Match the sweetness of your own.  
Glory comes and goes, but I hope she knows  
That pride isn't always wise,  
And only fools cannot recognize  
That tides of envy leave its victims cold.

May my older sister make good choices,  
And ignore the cloud of reckless voices  
That hovers always in her head;  
Yet may she lie in her own disheveled bed  
And learn the value of every fall;  
After all, greatness is never born  
In a rose who lacks a bridge of thorns,  
And never pricks itself at all.

And may, in time, she grow as sage and yet  
Remain as innocent  
As the white-skinned heavens after thunder;  
May in her eyes endure those wild waves of wonder  
That light the shadows of fledgling dreams;  
Dreams that blossom in the day  
And catch the beauty on its way,  
Even in the darkest hollows of the sea.



*Smiling Tree, Sairah Sheikh, South Windsor High School*

## Honorable Mentions

### Kindergarten

Rainbow Flower	Megan Song	Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
How to Find Ladybugs	Delilah Beaulieu	North Street School
Cookies	Daniel Bruno	North Street School
Thanksgiving	Luke Lefebvre	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
Owls	Charlee Martin	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School
Seas	Autumn Morgan	Tootin' Hills Elementary School
My House	Owen Noheimer	Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
The Springfield Thunderbirds	Gregory Ragon	North Street School
My Tree	Salena Senethep	North Street School
My Family at the Beach	Sydney Velazquez	Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Thanksgiving	Hailey Vincenti	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
My Home Poem	Ala Grabarczyk	North Street School
How to Make Friends	David Harbec	Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
The Jungle Friends	Adele Morgan	Tootin' Hills Elementary School
Bones	Derek Mazzullo	Montessori Magnet School
Rainbow Unicorns	Sawyer Perillo	Squadron Line Elementary School

### First Grade

How to Make a Tornado	Carter Blake	North Street School
How Do Cars Work?	Ameen Habib	Anna Reynolds Elementary School
How to Do A Cartwheel	Clara Sundie	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
How to Pick Apples	Sahara Barrow	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
Ski	Ella Panaro	Tootin' Hills Elementary School
All About Frogs	Gabriella Grossman	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
What Are Friends For?	Ameen Habib	Anna Reynolds Elementary School

### Second Grade

A Different World	Quinn DeVoe	Anna Reynolds Elementary School
Rose and the Magic Paint Brush	Cameron Perillo	Squadron Line Elementary School
Chess: The Master Guide	Yash Ponnaboyina	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School
Save the White Tiger	Rayelle Salahu-Din	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
Mittens Versus the Front Door	Benjamin Bates	Center School
The Autumn Leaf	Allison Lang	Lake Street Elementary School
My Adventure with Sofie	Audrey Sheehan	Anna Reynolds Elementary School
The Snake Trouble	Aniyah Betancourt	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
The Best Christmas Ever	Isabela Tippner	Montessori Magnet School
Save the Sea Otter	Anna Berard	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
Who Am I?	Duke Clotey	Academy of Aerospace & Engineering Elementary School
The Planets	Samuel Gorenbeyn	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School
Who Am I?	Daniel Durham	Academy of Aerospace & Engineering Elementary School
Save the White Tiger	Riley Hansen	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
The Diary of Pet Rabbits, a Guide to a Rabbit for You	Juliette Leeman	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School
All About Bats	Marlo "Dixon" Mears	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School
Who Am I?	Amaya Williams	Academy of Aerospace & Engineering Elementary School
Upon a Star	Loretta Marinelli	Ashford School
Spring	Nidhi Vijayakumar	Academy of Aerospace & Engineering Elementary School

### Third Grade

Tsunamis	Addison Girard	Squadron Line Elementary School
Glorious Golden Retriever	Reva Narayanan	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School
Big Beautiful Cats	Elena Sadeghi	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School
Lizard Catastrophe	Charlotte Diviney	Squadron Line Elementary School
Sausage Steve	Tara Mahoney	Latimer Lane Elementary School
Monroe's Story	Jane Carty	Eli Terry Elementary School

The Ripped Up Socks  
How to Catch a Ponzoo  
The Full Turnip  
Pepper and Salt  
The Fancy Gross Restaurant  
Amazin' Abraham Lincoln

All About Rabbits  
How To Take Care of a Dog  
Snow  
Evan

Halloween  
Dancing  
Anger  
I Believe Suicide Should Stop

My Amazing Mom

Cats  
Lexi  
The Exceptional Mckenna  
Be True To Yourself  
The Remarkable Ms. Champagne  
Shape-Shifter  
The Secret to Telling Secrets  
Hoping and Worrying  
The Wrath of Kentucky

Dead and Alone  
Melancholy  
Dead House  
Part of the Pack  
A Single Tear  
Silent Ride  
The New Kid  
The Pawprints Leading Home  
Naoko  
When the World Had Fallen  
The Beach  
The Adventures of Max and Jeff  
The Wormiest Worm of the Worms  
Ex-Princess  
Autal's Journey  
The Big Championship  
Turning Around  
The Dream of Flight: A Big Loss and Little Wins  
The Eagle  
Whitewater Rafting in Montana  
The Time I Caught a Three-Foot Striper  
Goodbye  
The October Snowstorm  
Jingling Bells  
The Trip That Changed Me  
The Kumon Life  
The Last Day  
Waves in France  
Ocean Attacker  
Irish Immigrants

Samantha Dowd  
Isabella Hahn  
Taylor Lawrence  
Emily Nunn  
Aryana Patel  
Zachary Rave-Indranathan  
Jesmarie Rodriguez  
Martha Smith  
Eliza Wagner  
Amelia Ditzel

#### Fourth Grade

Anya Djatiev  
Cassandra Santiago  
Jocelyn Pena  
Aniah Grant

Madison  
Van Valkenburgh  
Danielle Gaboury  
Delaney Soucie  
Tristan Lunding  
Parker Perillo  
Katie Orosz  
Aidan Lang  
Abby Ditzel  
Zachary Myers  
Elly Ouellette

#### Fifth Grade

Lola Beniot  
Luna de Ruijter  
Jack Dietter  
Brendan Gately  
Miriam Grosman  
Kathryn Hegarty  
William Hughes  
Yilian Jiang  
Audrey Madin  
Max Maniatis  
Abigail McLoughlin  
Charles Yang  
Jason Nguyen  
Elsa Nocton  
Ariana Pourkavoos  
Nicole Robillard  
Shruti Sendhikumar  
William Sudnick

Benjamin Willett  
Georgia Caldwell  
Sullivan Clancy  
Gabriella DiGiacomo  
Ziggy Edney  
Isabel Idema  
Aanya Jaiswal  
Phillip Kim  
Peyton McIntosh  
Alessandra Gavrilou  
Peter Morand  
Allie O'Shea

Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Center School  
Scotland Elementary School  
Scotland Elementary School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School  
Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School  
Hebron Avenue Elementary School  
Bugbee Elementary School  
Woodstock Elementary School

Academy of Aerospace & Engineering Elementary  
Squadron Line Elementary  
CREC Montessori Magnet School  
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Elementary Magnet School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School

Robertson School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Squadron Line School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Lake Street School  
Woodstock Elementary School  
Central Elementary School  
Bethlehem Elementary School

Montessori Magnet School  
Burr Elementary School  
Goshen Center School  
Burr Elementary School  
Burr Elementary School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Burr Elementary School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Bugbee Elementary School  
St. Mary School  
East Lyme Middle School  
Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School  
Mansfield Middle School  
Talcott Mountain Academy  
Goshen Center School  
Buttonball Lane Elementary School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School

Burr Elementary School  
Bugbee Elementary School  
Bugbee Elementary School  
Burr Elementary School  
Bugbee Elementary School  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Greenwich Academy  
Burr Elementary School  
Burr Elementary School  
Coleytown Elementary School  
Central Elementary School  
Buttonball Lane Elementary School

Tears of Sickness  
 The Seagull  
 Hat City  
 Why Cell Phones are Bad for Children  
 At the Gate of Heaven  
 In My Name  
 What If  
 Where I'm From  
 Flowers  
 the day he left  
 Winterful Peace  
 All for One Cure  
 O Nebula

Danna Ponce  
 Lauren Savage  
 Bobby Shipman  
 Raymond Zhang  
 Sophia Caneira  
 Richard Chandler  
 Adelaide Culligan  
 Emily Hartmann  
 Emily Kreger  
 Brooke Melson  
 Audra Schliewen  
 Maggie Swanson  
 Amber Wojenski

Burr Elementary School  
 Buttonball Lane Elementary School  
 Tariffville Elementary School  
 Squadron Line Elementary School  
 Mansfield Middle School  
 Discovery Academy  
 Ledyard Center School  
 Bugbee Elementary School  
 Weston Intermediate School  
 Burr Elementary School  
 Thompson Brooke School  
 Burr Elementary School  
 West Woods School

#### Sixth Grade

A Safe Place  
 Crumbs  
 The Grade  
 A Pawn in the Games  
 Haunted House  
 The Fight for My Pearly White  
 Heart of a Snowman  
 Red  
 Tiger Lily  
 Seven Letters  
 The Beach  
 The Interrogation Room  
 Silver Raven  
 Sleigh Riding  
 When Scary Can Turn into an Adventure  
 Late Night Thoughts  
 An Artful Dodger in Disguise  
 Recovery: One Skier's Trouble on the Trail  
 Animals in Arms  
 Wrong Goal  
 Everything Has A Good Side  
 Overboard on the Raft  
 The Sitting Tree  
 The Funeral  
 Storm  
 It Wasn't Worth the Fuss  
 This is Hartford  
 My First Time Bowling Without Bumpers  
 Too Much Drama  
 American Education  
 To My Own Beat  
 Kayaking in Peace  
 So What  
 So This is New Hampshire  
 Edge of Remorse  
 The Fog  
 Love Lives Like a Garden  
 The Dog  
 So This is Amelia  
 Bystander  
 My Yellow Rainboots  
 A Head Full of Stories  
 Rooftop Dancing  
 The Dark  
 Dust  
 In the Stars  
 Shadows in the Field

Aidan Birrell  
 Chloe Erno  
 Skylar Fiske  
 Elsa Franks  
 Cecelia Johnson  
 Kate Kennon  
 Paige Mahoney  
 Nora McConville  
 Helena Robinson  
 Zarin Rizvi  
 Riley Soucy  
 Elena Perez-Toro  
 Christian Wiltshire  
 Julia Anderson  
 Leah Andreasen  
 Photini Bass  
 Brooke Celello  
 Gemma Eves  
 Sean Harren  
 James Keleher  
 Ruby Latta  
 Maddy Lee  
 Lucas Levine  
 Rubie Lomardi  
 Stella Mahlke  
 Bekah Newman  
 Karina Ntoni  
 Hanna Seo  
 Gianna Spindle  
 Jack White  
 Jacob Cohen  
 Madison Deakin  
 Vanessa Fry  
 Ava Galins  
 Sophia Galins  
 Leila Guadalupe  
 Michael Hoffman  
 Ellie Holden  
 Nolan Jacobi  
 Amanda Kelly  
 Hannah Kimmer  
 Stella Mahlke  
 Paige Mahoney  
 Angelia Meile  
 Brady Moorehead  
 Ruby Moretti  
 Olivia Piri

Gideon Welles School  
 Juliet W. Long Elementary School  
 Gideon Welles School  
 New Canaan Country School  
 Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
 Memorial Middle School  
 Latimer Lane Elementary School  
 Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
 Juliet W. Long Elementary School  
 Gideon Welles School  
 Gideon Welles School  
 Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
 Juliet W. Long Elementary School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Woodbury Middle School  
 Greenwich Academy  
 Juliet W. Long Elementary School  
 Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Greenwich Academy  
 Gideon Welles School  
 Woodbury Middle School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Grace Academy  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
 Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Memorial Middle School  
 Woodbury Middle School  
 Woodbury Middle School  
 East Shore Middle School  
 Talcott Mountain Academy  
 Greenwich Academy  
 Woodbury Middle School  
 Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
 Memorial Middle School  
 Schaghticoke Middle School  
 Latimer Lane Elementary School  
 Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
 Juliet W. Long Elementary School  
 East Shore Middle School  
 Tootin' Hills Elementary School

Aurora's Arrival  
A Beacon of Hope and Unity  
Stormy Night  
Fire  
Dreams  
All Grown Up  
Mars

Helena Robinson  
Rhianna Solli  
Laila Stitou  
Grace Sullivan  
Jack White  
Madison Willis  
Calvert Burkholder

Juliet W. Long Elementary School  
East Shore Middle School  
May V. Carrigan Intermediate School  
Greenwich Academy  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School  
Woodbury Middle School  
Juliet W. Long Elementary School

The Omei Island Races  
Seismic Chaos

The Life of Marcus  
Lost and Found  
Wifi-less Dungeons  
Child of the Moon  
The Captain  
Arrow  
Crash  
Escape from Alp  
Colors  
The Voice of Nature  
A Weird Christmas  
I Never Said Goodbye  
Learning to Spearfish  
The Things That I Remember  
Night in a Storm  
Bed of Roses  
Stars  
Invisible  
A Sealed Label  
What Once Was  
The Little Apple  
The Future is Female  
Ruby Falls  
Black Hole  
The Cursed Gift  
Alone  
The Yankee Swap  
One Arm Wonder  
Stuck

#### Seventh Grade

Maeve McGovern  
Matthew Billings-  
Chiu  
Andrew Goddard  
Amber Braga  
Pacey Mahar  
Kayla O'Marra  
Catie Field  
Luke Terry  
Jacqueline Ordaya  
Grace Lupoli  
Lily Anderson  
Samantha Kovaleski  
Logan Lysiuk  
Samantha Spinelli  
Jack Meehan  
Nathaniel Welsh  
Jonathan Ciottone  
Maeve Palma  
Julia Zheng  
Emma Hall  
Hana El Maghraby  
Delaney Grimaldi  
Emma Rhodes  
Meena Behringer  
Melanie Chen  
Mingyue Zha  
Mila Miller  
Violet Bisset  
Micayla Chicoine  
Dylan Spurgeon  
Elizabeth Trouern-  
Trend  
Celia Abbott  
Shrikar Sehardi

Coleytown Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
  
John F. Kennedy Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Saint Mary School  
Two River Magnet Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Grace Academy  
Amity Middle School Bethany  
Coley Town Middle School  
East Granby Middle School  
Region 8 District/RHAM Middle School  
Region 8 District/RHAM Middle School  
Irving Robbins Middle School  
East Granby Middle School  
East Granby Middle School  
Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School  
Avon Middle School  
Clark Lane Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Granby Memorial Middle School  
Region 8 District/RHAM Middle School  
Greenwich Academy  
East Granby Middle School  
Amity Middle School Bethany  
East Granby Middle School  
Amity Middle School Bethany  
Region 8/RHAM Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Region 8 District/RHAM Middle School  
  
St. John School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

The American Immigrant  
The Immigration Line: Bamboo Will Work;  
Steel Won't  
Autumn's Gifts  
The Blind Man  
After the Battle  
I Am a Writer  
Doomsday Clock  
Lucifer  
A Simple Thing  
The Day My Sun Burned Out  
Just Listen  
Fall Found Poetry  
All is Done  
Fine Fall

Mark Chu  
Abby Colella  
Julia Healey-Parera  
Tirna Iqbal  
Jonah Kehew  
Kaylin Laskowski  
Layla Montgomery  
Julia Przech  
Sara Raghavan  
Ryan Tedeschi  
Maya Wells  
Grace Whitmore

Region 8 District/RHAM Middle School  
Old Saybrook Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
East Granby Middle School  
Old Saybrook Middle School  
Old Saybrook Middle School  
Ledyard Middle School  
Irving A. Robbins Middle School  
Greenwich Academy  
Region 8 District/RHAM Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
Region 8 District/RHAM Middle School

Time Doesn't Fly  
The Door is Open  
She Didn't Have a Name

#### Eighth Grade

Zachary Garfinkle  
Galen Dumont  
Paige Siegel

Amity Middle School Bethany  
Mansfield Middle School  
Saxe Middle School



The Doctor of Dusterville  
Bent Silence  
Four Simple Words  
Theatre Trouble  
Two Whole Years  
Assigned Seat  
Age  
The Bronze Apple  
Rainbows in the Hood  
Chance  
A Silent Night

Land of the Rising Sun  
Black and White  
Syrian Poem

Life is Life  
All That I've Lost  
Silence  
What is a Hero?  
The Dream Conundrum  
Blue Jay  
No Face  
Forget-Me-Not

Forever  
Neutral  
All the Madmen

Precipitation  
#AvasNotOkay  
On the Edge of Perfect  
Blast to the Past  
With All My Love And Heart  
Jimothy's Bad Day

Locked In  
The Forgotten Soldier  
Music to My Ears  
Four Years

A Child's Voice  
A Face Filled With Kindness  
I'll Break the Pasta  
Regret  
The Shroud of Turin  
The Cosmos

On This Side of the Rainbow  
Portrait  
Reign Down and Destroy Me

Sebastian

The Kitchen of Remembrance  
Voodoo Doll  
Three Years From Today  
Science and Religion: A Series of Limericks  
The Screams  
Necesito

Jung-Jai Shin  
Sarah Delfino  
Emma Gilbert  
Victoria Cardone  
Alyssah Yater  
Sydney Zicoella  
Jaida Taveras  
Nora Youtz  
Layla Gilliard  
Shani Smith  
Alexa Esparza-  
Finsmith  
Faythe Daly  
Libby Riggs  
Eliza Crook

Noah Anthony  
Ella O'Connor  
Devandra Chin  
Emma Ruccio  
Julian Kage  
Hannah Dang  
Amelia Molin  
Geneva O'Hara

#### **Ninth Grade**

Freja Blomstrand  
Briana Burris  
Remus Green

Sierra Hill  
Meghan McAuliffe  
Ashley McCauley  
Sophie Minella  
Sydni Naylor  
Cormac Nocton

Abigail Vartanian  
Jorge Vazquez  
Jake Walter  
Mykaila Hills

Iris King  
Oliver Russell  
Julia Carpi  
Caroline Fording  
Samuel Harris  
Gabriel Kieffer

Alisha Mirza  
Krista Mitchell  
Micaela Rodriguez

Javy Rose

Carley Simler  
Abigail Vartanian  
Charlotte Watts  
Sammy Wetstein  
Isabel Edelstein  
Jordy Nohpal Garcia

Mansfield Middle School  
Joseph A. DePaolo Middle School  
Killingly Intermediate School  
Irving A. Robbins Middle School  
Killingly Intermediate School  
Killingly Intermediate School  
City Hill Middle School  
Amity Middle School Bethany  
Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School  
Sage Park Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School

Sage Park Middle School  
Haddam-Killingworth Middle School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts Magnet Middle School  
CREC Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
King Philip Middle School  
Sage Park Middle School  
Talcott Mountain Academy  
Talcott Mountain Academy  
E.C. Adams Middle School  
Vernon Center Middle School  
E.C. Adams Middle School

Metropolitan Learning Center  
Montville High School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Rockville High School  
Rockville High School  
Metropolitan Learning Center  
Metropolitan Learning Center  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School  
Rockville High School  
W.F. Kaynor Technical High School  
New Canaan High School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School  
Bristol Eastern High School  
New Canaan High School  
New Canaan High School  
Staples High School  
Westhill High School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School  
Metropolitan Learning Center  
Stafford High School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School  
Rockville High School  
Rockville High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Academy of Aerospace & Engineering  
Metropolitan Business Academy

<b>Tenth Grade</b>		
Guilty of Murder	Michael Ansong	Rockville High School
Astronaut 100589	Alyssa Arends	Woodstock Academy
Winter's Bane	James Glidden	Rockville High School
Nameless	Chelsea Koss	Rockville High School
Greenwich Village Supplemental Interrogation Transcript	Ellis McGinley	Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School
102 Years	Helen Meade	Woodland Regional High School
Cold	Jadyn Moore	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
The Resorts	Michelle Mule	The King School
Clouds	Yewande Oluminde	Metropolitan Learning Center
When the Clocks Strike Midnight	Abigail Perkins	Rockville High School
XO	Nate Rivera	Rockville High School
From the Bottom to the Top	Evan Rodriguez	Notre Dame High School
The Least Thing We Have of	Gabrielle Stevens	Suffield High School
It Is You I Thank	Chelsea Koss	Rockville High School
Journal Entry: 8/29/17	Samantha Sims	Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
Go Love Some More	Sophie Spaner	Valley Regional High School
We Will Never Be Equals	Destin Williams	Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
Bosna, Moja, Domovina (Bosnia, my home)	Indira Alic	Academy of Science and Innovation
Fellow Complexes	Rachel Charron	Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School
The People Who Feel Too Much	Sophia Ciraldo	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Broken Barn	Monica Dillman	Rockville High School
Of Course You Can Love a Zombie: A Golden Shovel	Ashley Fischer	Rockville High School
Icarus	Michelle Gachelin	New Canaan High School
How to Make a Million Dollars	Ian Harris	Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School
What is a Girl?	Mellody Massoquoi	Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
Beautiful Women	Nelani Mejias	Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
The Medina in Morocco	Michelle Mulé	The King School
Visions of Gideon	Agney Redvil	Academy of Science and Innovation
3017	Sara Adler	Bais Yaakov of Waterbury
Sacrifice	Jada Berry	J.M. Wright Technical High School
Atlas	Connor Faughnan	Notre Dame High School
<b>Eleventh Grade</b>		
Lunch with Rex	Sophie Archambault	Woodstock Academy
Open Table	Mia Ferguson	William Hall High School
The Cobbler	Parker Kalafus	The Woodstock Academy
A Single Rose	Maren Beverly	William Hall High School
To My Dearest Paradise	Ana Lujan	Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
Downing the Bottle	Savannah Rice	Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School
Broke Her Even More	Jordan Baker	E.O. Smith High School
Reflecting the Moon	Zakari Brevard	Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School
Cheap Chips	Erica Cardona	Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
Penny	Aracelis Gomez	Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School
Nana's Stories	Brooke Lange	Greenwich Academy
Cardboard Boxes	Ally LaPrad	Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School
Keyboard Warrior	Savannah Rice	Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School
A Flaubertain Dilemma	Holly Richmond	Montville High School
A Number of Mistakes	Cassandra Eppler	Rockville High School
Petra the Piping Plover	Khorbin Kern	Notre Dame High School
Spear of Destiny	Christopher McAuliffe	Rockville High School
The Journey for Freedom	Charlotte McMillan	Granby Memorial High School

Deferent Veneer  
Please  
Internet Ranting—The Growing Epidemic  
The Meaning of Memories  
Carce  
The Most Important Question  
Thanksgiving—Monologue  
Dear Ajit Pai  
Who is she?  
How is Language Used to Transcend?  
Should “Civil Disobedience” Reign?  
Luke  
Dear Straight People  
Strawberry French Toast Forever  
The Bell  
Open Letter to My Loud Ankle Boots  
Open Heart, Open Mind  
The Feast of Nemesis  
In the Groove  
How to Live  
Reflection  
Penny  
  
The Woman in the Corner  
Splinters on the Charles Morgan  
The Soldier  
Asexuality  
Writing Poetry  
Villanelle

Adeba Reza  
Ashton Stansel  
Blake Baskin  
Joan Benson  
Jeriya Collins  
Sydney D’Amaddio  
Katherine Foust  
John Grindal  
Brookelyn Hazelwood  
Nesyaanvella Malk  
Marile Marzo  
Amy Matson  
Vic McMillian  
Alexander Nordlund  
Jouniel Rodriguez  
Kaitlyn Vigeant  
Alexarae Charpentier  
Danny Diaz-Villafane  
Emily Fisher  
Olivia Flaherty-Lovy  
Leann Gardner  
Aracelis Gomez  
  
Nesyaanvella Malk  
Samantha McQueen  
Marissa Minor  
Katelyn Murtha  
Alexander Nordlund  
Mitchell Ransden

Manchester High School  
Rockville High School  
Suffield High School  
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
RHAM High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Granby Memorial High School  
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School  
William Hall High School  
Granby Memorial High School  
Lyman Memorial High School  
Granby Memorial High School  
Glastonbury High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Glastonbury High School  
Lewis S. Mills High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Rockville High School  
New Canaan High School  
William Hall High School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet High School  
William Hall High School  
Rockville High School  
Rockville High School  
Rockville High School  
Glastonbury High School  
Fairfield Warde High School

#### Twelfth Grade

Contagion  
The Mug  
Mirror Mirror  
Dreamer’s Motel  
An Infinite Childhood  
What I Never Ask During Q and A Sessions  
January  
  
Pompeii  
Skin & Bone  
Halloween, A Romance in Five Parts  
The Driver  
Impromptu Obituary of a Writer; A Sestina  
I Am  
Rating of Me  
Hijab  
Focus  
Cover Up  
Statistically Speaking  
I Believe You  
The Root of All  
Fear  
Lauren  
Tulpa  
No Pros Just Cons  
A War to End All Wars  
Crocuses  
The Marlin  
Her Name was Karen  
  
Matthew

Brianna Roque  
Kate Savinelli  
Sairah Sheikh  
Mikayla Silkman  
Grace Bassick  
Ness Curti  
Grace Ellis  
  
Jaclyn Mulé  
Jeden Allen  
Brandon Barzola  
Grace Bassick  
Tanner Bosse  
Ocsana Delphonse  
Shara Donovan  
Hamda Khan  
Molly Kissane  
Elizabeth Neyssen  
Brianna Roque  
Taylor Santiago  
Zoe Sinclair  
Melanie Veliz  
Claire Zopelis  
Tanner Bosse  
Ness Curti  
Anthony Mazzarella  
Jaclyn Mule  
Pema Sherpa  
Julia Pezzano  
  
Bradley Plausse

Rockville High School  
Glastonbury High School  
South Windsor High School  
Nonnewaug High School  
Rockville High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet School  
Greenwich Academy  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
South Windsor High School  
Rockville High School  
Rockville High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Rockville High School  
Rockville High School  
E.O. Smith High School  
Stafford High School  
Rockville High School  
Manchester High School  
Bristol Central High School  
Fairfield Warde High School  
Stafford High School  
Rockville High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Greenwich Academy  
Newington High School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts

Stories Behind an Uptight Man  
Dreaming of Butterflies  
Ridged Roads of Surgical Scars

June Morning  
War is a Drunken Bar Fight  
Sorting  
for those who died in nightclubs and those  
who might  
Julian Assange Revealed a Viking

Natural Opposites  
A Piece of Chocolate  
Petrichor  
Bendicion  
ED SHEERAN INTERVENES WHEN HE  
NOTICES I STOPPED WRITING ABOUT  
MY BOYFRIEND  
Gabriel Golden Shovel  
Georgie Porgie Quite Contrary  
Voices of the Lost  
Soup by the Spoonful  
Lasagna King

Sydney Ruschmeier  
Katelyn Savinelli  
India Arriola

Madison Culpepper  
Luke Dabek  
Stephen Davey  
Sophia Durand

David Hettinger

Grace Hoecke  
Nabila Hoor-Un-Ein  
Samantha Martin  
Elijah Morales  
Julia Pezzano

Diana Priesnitz  
Skyler Pruneau  
Hannah Rich  
Tanya Roy  
Sydney Ruschmeier

Rockville High School  
Glastonbury High School  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet  
School

Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Stafford High School  
Lewis S. Mills High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts

Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet  
School

Granby Memorial High School  
Manchester High School  
South Windsor High School  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts  
Arts at the Capitol Theater Performing Arts Magnet  
School

Rockville High School  
South Windsor High School  
Lewis S. Mills High School  
Rockville High School  
Rockville High School

## Teachers Honored for Multiple Student Honorees

### Platinum

John Wetmore  
Victoria Nordlund

### Gold

Darlene Williams  
Marcy Rudge  
Kristen Chepeleff  
Marta Weidl  
Maryann Lundquist  
Rebecca Liebel  
Ashley Harrington  
Karis Beno  
Kristen Brown  
Mindi Englart

### Silver

Heather Annuziato  
Maureen Billings  
Peggy Bruno  
Cynthia Pezzullo  
Rebecca Snay  
Julie Day  
Renee Klucznik  
Matthew Sierakowski  
Kyle Healy  
Carol Blejwas  
Jeff Schwartz  
Danielle Pieratti

### Bronze

Vincenza Paluso  
Laura Berent  
Gabrielle Young  
Lisa Jacobs  
Missie Champagne  
Danielle Norden  
Ann McFee  
Eileen McIntyre  
Amy D'Orio  
Maureen Corbo  
Melissa Mazzaferro  
Robin Blomstrann  
Jacqueline Bolduc  
Rebecca DiPinto  
Lauren Shafer  
Megan Collins

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**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:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**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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