The American Dreamers, Stella Mahlke
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Hope, Grace Gu, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
**Five Little Sunflowers Love the Sun,**  
Sophia Kashwan, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School  

Five little sunflowers sitting on dirt;  
the first one said I love the sun.  
All the sunflowers love the sun!

---

**Eating Worms, Grace Gu, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School**

Hope and I are pretending.  
We are bluebirds in a tree.  
If we were bluebirds we would eat worms. But we like macaroni and cheese.

---

**My True Story, Aashi Thawali, CREC International Magnet School of Global Citizenship**

I am at the movis. I am with my Mom and Dad. I am watching Bahubali.  
I am at the park rideing the slide. I am with my big siste. We played on the slide.  
I went to Jumping Johny’s! I was with my mom and Dad. I played games I had a Happy Birthday for Ziya!  
I went to Home Goods. I saw mrs. Hrmony I was with my mom. That was funny! Ha Ha Ha!  
We hear the alarm. WE line up quietly to the fier door. I was with my friends. It was fun! I was doing a fier dril.  
Me and zoya are having a tea party. I was at my house. We had such fun.  
I was moving to a new house. I was with Manish and Chachu and mom and day and for rabbeit!  
And me of course! And Yola! I was doing some moving to me new houowse!  
Thank you for reading my true story. I hope you lernd I about me.
A Giant Pizza Man: Lessons on Self-Defense, August Vernon
Squadron Line School

A ginet pizza man was ubowt to eat me intl I kiked him in the fase.
A ginet pizza man was going to threw me in the grbeg but I made him trip frist.
A ginet pzza man olmost kiked me but I took A (big) bite of him first.

I Love My Mom, Aria Pulk,  
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
I love my mom.
My mom has orange hair.
When I hug her it makes my heart warm.

The Pillowfight, Yosof Hassan,  
CREC Discovery Academy
When I was doing a pilo fiyt my bruthr slist me and I was bleding. I went to the cichin and I got a bandayd.

Untitled, Johannes Schaffoener,  
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
First Grade

Tiger, Olivia Galdi, Norfeldt Elementary School
Deep into the Sea,
Saanvi Jahagirdar, Catherine Kolnaski Magnet School

If you ever imagined to dive deep into the sea,
Just think about how wonderful it would be.
Before you dive into the sea,
Don’t forget to wear your diving suit, snorkel mask,
flippers and scuba set.
Take a deep breath and SPLASH!!!
You dive into the sea.
Look at all of the colorful creatures and think about a rainbow,
And just imagine if you were born into the sea.
Just think about the bluey green waves splashing around you.
Just think if you were one of the sea creatures like starfish, octopus,
crab, stingray or a turtle near you.
And imagine the colors that you would have on you!
Look at the creatures that live in the coral reef,
So far and deep that you can’t believe!
Have fun taking pictures of the different creatures that surprised you.
They look so awesome and so are you!
Wiggle your flippers and swing your arms up and down,
Until you get to the top of the sea and you are back on the ground!
Mother Nature is so powerful and wonderful at different places,
Let us all SAVE and THANK her for all her beautiful faces!

When I Grow Up…
Triston Alvarez, Reggio Magnet School of the Arts

I want to work for Apple. I want to design their phones, computers, and technology. During my free time at home, I like to make my own Apple products and add my own craftiness. I also like to read about Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. It made me very sad when I read that Steve Jobs passed away in 2011. I would have really liked to meet him.

I want to design an iphone for kids. It would be safe, have kid-friendly music and filled with apps that are fun and where kids can learn things. Funny videos and favorite movies are some other fun features that I would include. First, Daddy says that I need to work on my typing. Mrs. Bansok my media teacher is beginning to teach us about computer coding. Mommy says that I can only spend a certain amount of time on electronics. So I have to make the most of my electronics time.

Apple products and their technology is the best! They have the most talented people in the world.
**My Bike, Graham Gietzen, North East Academy Arts Magnet School**

Blue and white.
Silver stripes.
Shiny reflectors.
A bar and two circles.
I hop on!

Up hills.
Down hills.
Around corners.
Through puddles.
I ride fast!

Bumpy Roads.
Crunchy leaves.
Curvy corners.
I brake and skid!

I love my bike!

---

**One Little Leaf, Kara Xiao, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School**

One little leaf fell off of the tree,
Off of the tree, off of the tree.
One little leaf fell off of the tree,
And bumped his head on the ground.
Ah! It was cold!

---

**Santa Goes to Space, Kimaya Kolhe, International Magnet School for Global Citizenship**

Once upon a time in winter on Christmas Eve Santa was riding his sleigh, it accidentally took him to Mars.
He thought there were people, but there weren’t. He looked around but couldn’t find any people on Mars. Then one present accidentally fell into one of the holes and a squiggly hand came out. It was a aliens hand. The alien captured him and took him to the King to show him. But the King looks like Santa because the King has a fat belly, and a mark on his hand, the Queen looks similer too because Santa has blue eyes like the Queen then they realized that Santa is there son they lost many years ago. The Queen and King were thrilled and they gave many gifts to him. And that day was Santa’s best Christmas ever. Then he went back to deliver presents he finished in time and love happily ever after.
One simple Summer day, a bunny was born.

He thought he was an ordinary bunny. Until he was old enough to go out on his own. He ate berries and nuts and leaves.

He got bored one day. He never felt bored before. He always had something to do.

He asked his friend owl, “What should I do?”

Owl said, “I do not know. I am bored too.” So owl said, “Can I come on the search?”

“Yes” said the bunny. And a little way on, his friend said, “Do you know my name? You always call me owl.”

“I do not know what a name is. What is a name?”

“A name is a, well, something that you call something” said owl

“So what is your name?” said the bunny. “Muuck.” “Okay, I will be back later. Bye” said the bunny.

“Bye” said Muuck. The bunny went back to his mother. “Mommy, do I have a name?”

“Where did you hear about a name. I never taught you about that.” “Owl told me.”

“Okay” said the bunny’s mother “We can think of a name for you together. Swish?”

“Nah, too oceany” said the bunny.

“Maxwell?”
“Too racecary”
“Stair?”
“Nah, too boring and stairy.”
“Dairy?”
“Nah, that rhymes with Stairy and Stairy is too boring. And, I don’t want to be eaten.”
“The sun is already down.” said the bunny. The bunny looks at the clock. “HOLY MACARONI!!! It’s the middle of the night! Goodbye, I have to go to bed. I will have to sleep on it,” said the bunny and the bunny went home to bed.

He started to talk in his sleep and said, “Okay, first we have to go through all of the names. We start from the top. Swish, Maxwell, Stair, Dairy. What was the first name again? Oh, ummmmmmm, Swish. Actually, that’s a pretty good name.”

The next day, the bunny hops to his mother’s house.
“I have a name! Swish!” said the bunny.
“That is a great name!” said the bunny’s mother.

The bunny was going back to his house when he saw a poster. It said, “Talent Show January 3, 2019. Do a talent or see a talent. In Hartford.”
“A talent?” thought Swish. “I don’t know if I have a talent? Oh well,” said Swish sadly. After a whole week, Swish still felt sad. “I just wish I had a talent.”

The talent show was in three days. Owl can fly, monkeys can climb and swing. Jaguars can run. One day went by. The next day, Swish’s other friend, Bird, came along and said, “I’m going to the talent show. Are you?”
“No, I want to but I don’t have a talent.”
“Well it doesn’t make sense if you don’t do something but you want to do it” said Bird. “I can probably think of a talent for you. Hopping?”
“Nah, but thank you anyway, because frogs can hop and kangaroos too. Bye” said Swish.
“Wait! Wait! Wait! Wait! Your EARS!!! You can swing with them on branches and reach tall things!”
“I’m going to the talent show!!” said Swish.

Swish hopped back to his mother. “Mother, I’m going to the talent show!” he said. Then he hopped back to Bird. “Bird, quick question, what is your name?”
“Matthew” said bird.
“Okay, bye!” said Swish.
And Swish went off to practice swinging with his ears and reaching tall things like reaching fruit from trees like oranges and peaches and mangoes.

The next day, Swish went to the talent show. Matthew was there and Swish’s mother was there, even Muuck was there. Some of his other friends were there too. Gina, the butterfly, Maxwell the leopard, and Adele the jaguar were all there. And that is the end of one story of a huge change to a bunny’s life.

What Does the Turtle “Sea,” Olivia Perlmutter, Anna Reynolds Elementary
I love camping! In the summer, I wake up and yell, "Hooray! We are going camping today!" It is time for a new family adventure.

First, we pack our clothes. Dad packs the gear and our bikes. Mom packs up all the food. Next, Dad packs it all up in the motor home. We're off!

When we get to the campground, Dad sets up the campsite and we go on a hunt for the playground!

We head back for dinner. We usually eat hotdogs and beans. Then I build a campfire with my Dad. When the campfire gets hot enough, we roast marshmallows for S'mores. Eating S'mores is the best part of camping!
The stars in the sky
Oh, they shine so bright
Like little tiny fireworks
Flying in the night

The moon at night shines
And glows
It’s a nightlight for animals
And a sea light for fish

Moonlight and starlight
Are things that all share
Animals in dark dens
And people in their beds
Moon
Watches sun transform
Into darkness
The show is about to begin.

Sky
Listens
To evening secrets.

Clouds want to talk
But their job is to protect
Night sky
Like a superhero.

Tangerine pumpkins
Slowly disappear
Like a magician
Lifting them into the dark air.

Glowing stars look at one other like a wink emoji.
Smooth sky drips darkness like knives spreading
Sunbeam butter on pancakes.

Soft clouds carefully fade into sky like bubbles in a
bathtub.

Tangerine pumpkins stare at the crows flying by like
a scarecrow in a pumpkin patch.
The Snowgirl's Missing Mittens,
Michaela Crooks, Anna Reynolds Elementary School

Ring! Ring! My alarm clock rang. I did not wake up. Then, someone threw a snowball at my window. I woke up. Who is it? I said. Maybe it was just the wind. What are the odds? Someone said. The person threw a snowball again. I looked at my alarm clock. I jumped out of bed. SCHOOL! I forgot about SCHOOL! I quickly put on my shirt and pants and went to school.

When I was at school, I fell asleep and then a snowball went on my face. Ughhhh! I said. I looked out the window and I saw a snowgirl mouthing me to come. So I lied to the teacher and said I had to go to the bathroom so that I could go outside and see what this snowgirl wanted. When I got outside, I saw a snowgirl with a pink hat and a pink jacket. But no mittens. Hi! My name is Annie, what’s yours? Ummm ...Michaela. What do you want? I said. Look, what I want is for you to help me find something. I will tell you when you get home. OK...I said, bye now as I started running back into school. Oh! And I will tell you a secret if you find them she said. OK! I said. Bye again! See you later! We said and I got back to running.

After school, I saw Annie waiting for me. As soon as I saw her, I ran up to her. Alright here, she said I lost my mittens and they were very important because they’re my only way to get back home. Ok here, I said. But why did you choose me? I asked. Because when I was walking around the woods and a bear chased me and took my mittens. Worst of all, I don’t even know where he lives. Pleeeease can you help me? Alright. So what do we need to do? Oh! We need to go to town to look for the bear because he might have gone there. So that you know, what you said about choosing me makes no sense. Sometimes, I lose track of what I am saying and say something else, said Annie.

Back to the question. First, we ask everyone if they saw a bear that came out of the woods. If they saw him, we need to ask where he went so that we can follow him. If we reach his house with him in it, then we need to go in quietly. I hear it’s very warm in there so not me or I will melt. If there’s nothing, we have to look in the deep wood. Deep w...woods?! I’m not going in there! There could be other big strong bears, coyotes and other animals that are dangerous!

Fine, said Annie. We should go to the deep woods first so that we can be done with that. NO! I said. DO IT LAST! DO IT LAST! Fine. Ok, we will do it last. Phew! I said. Could you calm down now?? Annie said. Ok! Ok! I said. Now let’s get to work. After that, we tried everything except going into the deep woods. Michaela, said Annie. We have to go to the deep woods.

AHHHHHHHHHHHH! I said freaking out. Here we go again. CALM DOWN! Said Annie. I fell quiet. I’m going with you. What’s all to fear about? Oh, I said. Sorry. Then, we went into the woods walking for hours. Then, the bear popped out. And Annie saw the mittens on a tree.

AHHHHHHHH! There it is. See, I told you there were bears! Then, the bear started to chase us. Ahhhh! We said. What are we going to do now? We hid behind a tree. Ok. Here’s the plan, said Annie. I will get my mittens and you will let the bear chase you to distract him. Aw come on. Why do I have to get chased, I said. Suit yourself, Annie said. I rather get chased by a bear then get eaten. Wait. What?! I said. Ok. Ok. I will distract him but you’re going to pay. Alright. Then, the bear was coming to the tree so I jumped out. Hey you! I shouted. Huh?! Said the bear. Come and get me, and he chased me around. Meanwhile, Annie was trying to climb the tree but kept falling down. You can do it! I shouted. Then she tried with all her might and got it. Then, I was very shocked to see her flying! Then, I ran out of the woods and said. SHOO! SHOO! You crazy bear! Then, it spotted a rabbit and chased it. When I came out, I saw Annie flying still. When. What. How did you do that? They’re magical. She said. Oh. I said. But what about the secret? I asked. I told you, my mittens are magical. Want to come fly? Nah, I said. I’m already cold and more wind will make me even colder. Well, you deserve this. Then, she sprinkled something on me and I was flying! Wow! I said. This is awesome! Now, two things. One, do not share this secret with anyone unless I tell you to. Two, I am leaving. Ok. Bye! I said and she flew away.

The next day, she came back without her hat. Look, I lost my hat. Can you help me find it please? Ugh. Not again. I groaned.
“Grandma what will we do today?” asked Clara. “Well I don’t know. What do you think we should do?” “I don’t know, but I have heard the word miracle a lot. I was wondering if you could teach me?” asked Clara. “Well of course I can teach you, I’m your Grandma.” “Great, so when are we starting?” asked Clara. “Well I don’t know, maybe now.” Clara and her Grandma finished up shopping and paid for their food. When they got home, Grandma gave Clara a snack and sat down beside her. “You know Clara when I was a child I used to wonder about the word miracle too.” “Really?” “Yes, and my father taught me everything!” “Really?” said Clara. “Yes, now you are going to know what the word miracle means too. “I can’t believe this is really happening. I’m so excited! Mmmm sese sackers are so good.” “Huh?” said Grandma. I said, “These crackers are so good! Sorry, I was talking with my mouth full.”

“Okay, now let’s start. I have a story for you” said Grandma. “Once, a famous soccer player, named Ronaldo, played for team Portugal. There was another awesomely great team, Brazil. Brazil’s team had the most famous soccer player in the world, Pele the great. No literally, the most famous soccer player in the world!” “Really?” “Yup. Portugal was winning by 2. Brazil was losing because Pele was sick. Them the most amazing thing happened, Pele dashed on the field, stole the ball from a Portugal player and scored a goal. The crowd went wild as the last few minutes of the game were going by. Brazil now has 4. Again, Pele takes the ball dribbles, and passes the ball to Daniel. Daniel, the team captain, passes it back and Pele scores a goal! A tie game. There was only 2 minutes left on the clock. Pele played hard. He was dribbling and passing like crazy. He was working with his team. Again and again he made passes. Finally, he stole the ball from a Portugal player and took a shot. Goal! 19 seconds was left on the clock, Pele was amazed with his team. Just a few minutes ago his team was losing and then he dashed on the field. He scored 3 goals and now Brazil is winning. While Pele was thinking Portugal stole the ball from a Brazil player and was dashing toward the goal. Pele suddenly looked up. He saw Ronaldo and the ball at his feet. ‘Oh no,’ said Pele. He ran hard and fast and challenged Ronaldo. Ronaldo dribbled from one side to the other, but Pele read his moves. ‘Not this time Ronaldo!’ he said. Pele put pressure on Ronaldo hard. Finally, Pele got the ball and kicked it right through Ronaldo’s feet. He dashed toward the other team’s goal and scored at the last two seconds! Game Over!”

“So, what was the miracle?” asked Clara. “The miracle was that Pele’s team, Brazil, was losing because Pele was sick, but then he dashed on the field and scored 4 goals!” “Wow, that was an unbelievable story and the miracle was amazing.” “Now that I know what the word miracle means I have a miraculous story too!”

“Once there was a little girl who had a horse, named Sugar. The horse was playing with a Jolly Mega Ball. All of a sudden, the ground started to shake. There was a loud boom and the horse looked over her shoulder and toppled down over the ball. A few minutes later the little girl came down to check on the horses after the earthquake. She noticed her mare was on her side. ‘Oh no,’ she cried! ‘You must have toppled over the ball and fallen when you heard the boom. I must call the vet at once!’ A few moments later the vet arrived. ‘Oh my, it looks like she fractured her leg,’ said the vet. ‘I’ll take some x-rays to be sure.’ ‘This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me,’ said the girl. ‘Let her get some rest,’ said the vet. A few hours later the vet called back. The x-rays confirmed that Sugar had fractured her leg. The girl couldn’t sleep that night. I’m just going to go down to the barn, the girl thought. ‘Hey Sugar,’ she said. The mare nickered to her. ‘I’m just going to get you some food,’ she said. ‘Here you go girl. Oh my gosh, you’re standing! You’re okay. I have to tell the vet! I’m so excited, yay! I’m going to tell my parents. Good night girl.’ The next day the vet came over. ‘Wow, you’re way more than lucky, and I mean way, way more than lucky. It’s a miracle she healed all on her own overnight.’

“That is a miracle,” said Grandma. “The horse was hurt and after a day it was cured. That’s incredible!” “Oh, our groceries, I forgot about them!” said Grandma. “I’ll help unpack the groceries,” said Clara. “Thanks,” said Grandma. “I can’t wait to share our stories with my kids when I grow up!” said Clara. “Great, now help me with these cookies,” laughed Grandma.
All About Big Sisters,
Isabel Stanco, CREC Discovery Academy

Chapter 1: Introduction
OMG Who is the cutest in the family? Who is the most kind in the family? It’s the BIG SISTER!!! Did you know if you are the big sister you are usually the first one born?

Chapter 2: Playing
You should play nicely with your younger sibling. It does not matter if it’s a boy or a girl, you should still be kind to them when you are playing with each other. Did you know that when you are a big sister it is a big responsibility? That is because you have to keep an eye on your younger sibling. That doesn’t mean you have to put your eye on them, it means you have to watch them.

Chapter 3: Being Kind
You should be kind to your younger sibling everywhere you go. You can also help them out, because it is kind and it is the right thing to do. Did you know if you are kind to your younger sibling they would like to play with you?

Chapter 4: How to be the loved one
These are the steps to be the loved one. The first step is to help. The second is to be nice. The third step is to share. If you do these things, you will be the loved one. Did you know love is very important?

Chapter 5: Conclusion
Now you know how to play, how to be kind, and how to be the loved one. I will leave you with a thought. Being a big sister is very important. It’s a lot of work but it is also worth it. I hope you enjoyed the book! Thank you!!!

Being A Good Big Brother, Leon Pinto, Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School

In this book you will learn about being a good big brother. Have you ever wondered what it is like to be a big brother? The author of this book is one so he’ll teach you!

Things you NEED to remember:
1. You need to be quiet while baby is taking a nap or going to bed!
2. And remember to play with baby nicely.
3. That baby cannot play a lot of things you would like to play like soccer.

Younger members can mean annoyingness:
If you are used to peace and quiet, you might be annoyed at first. A baby cries a lot and a few months later your baby will probably be giving orders. But don’t worry you’ll get used to it!

Things you cannot do:
I know that sometimes a baby can be bad but you cannot be bad back! I do not take a toy away, even if the toy is yours just let the baby be and the baby will drop it in a few minutes. Do not hit, punch, or kick the baby or else you will be in BIG trouble!

Tips:
1. A baby can be very noisy so you might want to go to your room and read a book.
2. Always stay out of the baby’s way

I hope you enjoyed my book! If you’re going to be or are a big brother you should know how to do it!

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All About Monkeys,
Arnav Malpure, CREC International Magnet School for Global Citizenship

I am going to teach you about monkey’s. Monkey’s are one of the animals who live in the rain forest. But sometimes monkey’s get in danger by hunters called poachers. They like to cut down trees but the monkey’s live in the tree so that is their problem.

Monkeys like doing… Monkey’s like being curious, swing in trees, love bananas, have good ears. Monkey’s say “ohh Ohhahahhhy”. Male Monkeys have fat cheeks, strong tails, brown skin.

Poachers long ago use to cut down trees which hurt the monkey’s and that’s why monkey’s are dying. People need to stop the poachers from cutting down trees. Poachers used to kill monkey mothers to make it easier to steal their babies. After the poachers get the baby monkeys, they sell it for lot’s of money and most monkeys die before they reach their new owner. Monkeys are also getting extinct.

Monkeys swing in trees only because they live in the trees and they stay safe. They also get their food up there. Monkeys also only come down if they are sure that no animal is there. Sometimes monkey’s have to leave the baby behind and they just leave to get food. Sometimes the baby get’s stolen by poachers.

Poachers are people who cut down tree’s and steal monkey’s for lot’s of money near the road. Thankfully mommy monkey’s teach her babies how to escape or hide from poacher’s. Poacher’s make fires in the forest because they cut down too many trees at a time which makes forests turn into roads.

Monkeys can get killed by hunters called poachers. They do everything to cut down rain forest trees. They also break the law. They only cut down trees for money. But monkey’s live in the trees so now poachers take the monkey’s for more money and they kill the mother to steal the baby.

Monkeys move by many ways through trees—on there tails and hands. Babies move by sitting on the dad’s back. If they fall off the tree, they are experts at climbing the trees before anyone comes. But if the baby falls, the parents will have to get down like a flash to get the baby because baby’s do not know how to climb trees.

Mother monkey’s can give birth to only one baby at a time. She can get 7 babies in her own life time. Male monkey’s only come to live with a female because then there will be more support for the baby. They want a baby but the only trouble for the parents are some times they are busy so they can not take care of the babies.

Male monkeys cheeks are super fat. Male monkeys are super sensitive about their part of the forest because of there babies. Male monkeys only meet female monkeys because of the baby. Male monkeys are super sensitive about their baby because they care about the baby.

So that is all I can tell you but you can find more monkey books at book stores, libraries.
Third Grade

Line Painting Inspired by the Music of Mr. Ottaviano,
Lillian Parker, Charles Wright Elementary School
The Leprechaun’s Magical Maze,
Ava Rose Ansley, Buttonball Lane Elementary School

There were three kids, two boys, and one girl. Their names were Lucy, Cole, and Billy. They were all great friends.

It was Sunday, and in two more days it would be Leprechaun’s day! The three friends decided to meet in the park. None of them wanted to go back to school. They all played and talked until they had to go home. “Bye guys!” Billy shouted as he left the playground. Then Lucy left, and then Cole left. Then the playground was empty and it was five o’clock.

The next day everyone went back to school. Lucy, Cole, and Billy were all in the same class. Their teacher, Mrs. Rose, dressed up as a leprechaun! “Alright class, you have a fun assignment for leprechaun’s day!” Mrs. Rose said. “You may have a group or you can work on it yourself. I want you all to make a leprechaun trap.” Everybody was so happy! Of course, Lucy, Cole, and Billy were a group.

After all the children got out of school the three friends walked together to their homes. On their way back, they heard something swoosh through the leaves. The friends stopped and looked into the leaves. They could see a tiny green person! “It’s a leprechaun!” the three friends shouted. They couldn’t believe their eyes! It was a real leprechaun! It froze as if it was scared to death. They kept very quiet as they watched to see what he would do.

Soon the leprechaun ran away. After the leprechaun ran away they ran to Lucy’s house and discussed the leprechaun. “I’ve heard legends about leprechauns” she told her friends “A long time ago a man discovered leprechauns. The man got rich and famous! He put all the leprechauns he could find in a big cage in almost every zoo! The leprechauns got angry and rescued their friends. They got so mad they made it even harder to get the gold on the other side of the rainbow. They made it into a maze! In fact, it is the hardest maze in the history of the world! The only time you can enter the maze is on Leprechaun’s day. Anyone who ever entered the maze never came back!”

Leprechaun’s day finally arrived. At school they all checked the leprechaun trap but they were sad to see that they hadn’t caught a leprechaun. Later on, when they were walking home from school, they saw a leprechaun again! The leprechaun froze for a moment but then started to run! “Follow that leprechaun!” Lucy shouted. But when they turned around the leprechaun had disappeared! “Oh man” Cole said as he kicked a clover shaped rock and instantly disappeared! Lucy and Billy ran to the rock he had kicked and examined it. It looked like it had some sort of symbols on the top. Lucy and Billy swiped their hands across the rock, and they too vanished!

They fell into the ground and went through a rainbow-colored portal, falling deeper into the portal every second. Soon they hit the bottom with a thud. They heard Cole yelling at them, “Are you guys ok?” They looked up and saw Cole. Then they looked around and they saw a green wonderland with fields of four-leaf clovers everywhere! All throughout the fields there were pots filled to the brim with gold and rainbows coming off of them. “Wow!” they all said in awe.

Ahead of them they could see the leprechaun running away from them. He had an orange beard, sparkly green shoes, and a cute little green hat. He had super expensive jewelry on him. Leprechauns can buy whatever they want with all the gold they have! They all stood up and continued to chase the leprechaun. Soon they caught up with the leprechaun. Cole grabbed the leprechaun, picked him up and held him against his chest so the leprechaun would not be able to get away. Then Billy and Lucy started to ask him a bunch of questions. One of their main questions was, “How do we get out of here?” The leprechaun refused to talk. “Tell us how to get out of here or else we will never put you down.” Lucy threatened. The leprechaun scowled. “Fine I’ll tell you! The only way to get out of here is to go through the magical maze and find my pot of gold! And the way to get through the maze is to use your power of friendship!” the leprechaun replied. “The entrance to the maze is on Mr. Leprechaun Street. You will see a big sign that will say welcome to the leprechaun’s magical maze!” “Thank you for helping us” Lucy said. “Cole, now you may put the leprechaun down.” Cole opened his arms and let the leprechaun go. The leprechaun trotted away.

They headed down Mr. Leprechaun Street and they saw the entrance to the maze! They held hands and ran into the maze together. While they walked through the maze they saw people still stuck in the maze! All the people were trapped in huge leprechaun traps and none of the people stuck could get out! They saw almost over 100 people stuck! “I really don’t want to get stuck in here forever!” Lucy cried. “Yah!” The two boys agreed.

They all kept looking around and they saw a mysterious small door. Lucy ran ahead and tried to push on the door, it almost opened. Then Cole and Billy came over and pushed with her. They kept pushing until the door finally opened! They all looked inside, it looked like another portal. “Should we go in?” asked Cole. They all agreed to jump into the portal. They held hands and all jumped in at the same time. “Ahh!” They all screamed together. They fell through a rainbow-colored portal and when they were half way down they all passed out.
When they fell to the ground they got the wind knocked right out of them, and so when they woke up they could hardly breathe. Their vision was blurry but they could just make out a very wide space in the distance. They shook their heads and realized they saw the end of the maze in sight! They looked around once more and the portal they took was the only way to get to the end of the maze, they had used their power of friendship! They all stood up and ran to the end and saw the leprechaun with the huge pot of gold in his hands! “Congratulations! You’re the first humans ever to get out of this maze!” He handed the friends the pot of gold. It was huge with so much gold in it! Then very slowly they started to drift into the leprechaun sky. They landed on the human ground and they all hugged each other. Then they divided the gold into equal amounts and each one of them went home. They all learned that their friendship can get them through anything even the hardest maze in all the world! They had so much fun they wanted to do it all over again! Besides, they already knew the way through the maze. What could go wrong?

_Peru vs USA: The Big Day,_
_Luciana Mesias, CREC Aerospace and Engineering Elementary_

One chilly fall afternoon, my brothers and I got picked up early from school because… it was time to go to the SOCCER Game in the big STADIUM. It was Peru vs. USA and at first I didn’t know who to vote for. My mom is from the USA and my Dad is from Peru, so they told me that I could vote for both.

When we got home it was time to change. We slipped on our Peru jerseys and my mom did my hair with blue and red bows for USA colors. Once my dad was ready, we put on our warm jackets and hopped in the car.

We started to sing Peruvian songs in Spanish. It felt like we got there quickly. I was so excited to see my whole family, like my cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and great grandpa. We parked then we all hugged and kissed. It was 4:00 PM and the game was at 8:00 PM.

I asked my mom, “Why did we get here so early?” She said, “because we are going to hang out with our family and it’s called ‘tailgating.’” We were eating, playing, playing soccer, and plus my whole family was on the news.

Then it was 8:00 PM. Time passed by really fast because I was having so much fun. We went inside the stadium. I was so excited! The game started. No one made a goal, but both teams were doing really good, especially the goalies. So when 45 minutes passed, it was half-time. Then it was the 2nd half. After 15-20 minutes USA scored! My mom started to scream. I was so happy too. There was only 4 minutes before the game was over. I thought USA was going to win, but guess what…Peru actually scored!

GOOOOOOOOOOOOAL! It was a tie. Either way, I was still happy. When we got out of the stadium, we went to the cozy car and went home. At home I got on my pajamas and slept with a perfect dream.
I Am,
Cameron Perillo,
Squadron Line School

I am from Rebels
Light sabers hitting each other
Creating an X
BANG! BOOM!
Brown capes flying in the air
You are not a Jedi!

I am from nature
Light green grass swaying in the wind
Caterpillars crawling in the wet soggy grass chomping on green leaves
When I lay in the grass at night
I look up and see light blue glowing stars
Shimmering in the sky

I am from books
All different kinds
Fantasy, mystery, poetry, and folktales
When I read
Words dance across the pages
Performing for me
Bringing me happiness

I am from math
Equations floating on the page
All kinds
Addition – subtraction – multiplication
– division
Solving for answers

I am from soccer
White and black pentagons
Covering my round ball
As it soars into the net
After my foot hits it as hard as it can
The crowd cries, “GREAT GOAL!”

My Favorite Part of the Day, Charlotte Saul,
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School

My favorite part of the day was when you weren’t away
and I was here
You would be with me asking me to play
But now you are gone
So I will sing this song today
My favorite part of the day was when you weren’t away
So we could play and play and play until the sun went down
Now I’m here waiting for you to come back to me
When are you coming? When are you coming? Where are you going?
Where have you been? Where are these places?
So now I sing
My favorite part of the day was when you weren’t away
I’m here to see you and now you are here

Overlapping lines, Tiffany Huang,
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Heroes,
Benjamin Bates, Central School

The year is 1944. My brother has gone to serve in the army. His name is Sam. Mine is Jo. The Germans have taken over France. Life isn’t the same when your brother isn’t there to support your family. He used to milk the cows and tend the field. There is no way to communicate besides writing letters and mailing them, so I have to write one and send it to him.

Several weeks ago, I overheard arguing between my mother and Sam. I couldn’t make out what they were saying, so I crept out of bed and into the hallway and peeked through a crack in the door. There was my brother and my mom. I could see a tear roll down my mother’s face when my brother said he was going to war in France. Sam said that he was going on a ship to get there.

I walked as slow as a turtle back into my room. I laid down and thought about what would happen to my brother. I couldn’t stop thinking about it. That night, I didn’t get a lot of sleep.

The day my brother left for war, I woke up at 5:00 am. My brother stepped out of the house with a duffel bag. I didn’t even want to go out there. I didn’t want to see him go, but I knew I had to say goodbye. Slowly, with a tight feeling in my chest, I stepped onto the porch. I closed my eyes. I tried to keep the tears in. It was hard, but I was strong. After my dad died, my brother was the man of the house. Now it was my turn.

Dear Sam,

How are you doing? Things are going well at home. I’m weeding the garden and milking the cows. I’m feeding the dog too. I miss you. Come back soon.

Your little brother,
Jo

As the days went by, my heart ached. The waiting was more than I could handle. Every day I’d hope for a letter to arrive, but each day as the sun set my heart hurt a little more. I was starting to think Sam had been killed.

Finally, the mail carrier walked down the long dirt road. I prayed he would drop a letter from my brother. As he came closer, I shut my eyes and prayed harder. Then a voice said, “Here you are, sir.” I opened my eyes. I grabbed the letter and ripped the envelope.

Dear Jo,

I am doing well. Thank you for your letter. I see you are turning into a little man helping Mother around the farm. Here the food is terrible. I miss Mother’s shepherd’s pie. I have been practicing the harmonica and thinking about home. I promise I’ll come home as soon as I am able.

Your big brother,
Sam

It wasn’t just a letter I was reading. It brought joy to know he was still alive and strong. Living without someone that has been there since you were born is not easy. I missed talking and playing with Sam. I wondered if I would be able to do any of those things again, but I needed to have faith.

Omaha Beach, 1944

As water crafts sailed on the horizon near Omaha Beach, 19-year-old Sam Baker and his comrades prayed that they would survive.

“We are in enemy range! Brace for impact,” screamed the captain. Rat-a-tat-tat-tat. Screams filled the air as man after man fell dead. The only way for Sam and his fellow soldiers to survive was to get in the shark infested water.
Thankfully, Sam was a very good swimmer. Sam saw hundreds of people dead as he swam ashore. Shells flew over his head. He ducked near some rocks, and then he saw his friend, Zach, from Vermont running across the sand. A bullet zipped toward Zach. Sam turned his head. Zach had been hit. Blood gushed all over him. Sam tried to shoot his rifle toward the sound of the machine gun. A bullet pierced through Sam’s arm. Sam screamed in pain, and a medic ran across the sand. The medic ran so fast that sand flew everywhere. He patched Sam’s arm up. Sam laid near a rock. He saw six American tanks roll onto shore. One after another burst into flames. They were hit by heavy fire. As Sam looked back to see the flames, a thundering sound boomed like a pack of 100 elephants and the ground shook. Everything went black like open space.

Vermont, 1944

Days and weeks passed. I kept telling my mother I was sad that another letter hadn’t come. She told me to think positively. While I was getting lunch, I heard sobbing from my mother’s room. I stopped at the doorway and tried to figure out what was going on. I didn’t make a peep. I was so nervous about why she was crying. Was she sick, or was she worried about Sam?

Just then, my dog ran by. He bumped my leg and it made a thud. My mother quickly dried her eyes and turned her head. I asked what was wrong. As she began to answer, her voice squeaked. I said, “Don’t worry. I know why you are sad.” I told her that I was scared about Sam too. We both needed to think about good things and wait for Sam’s next letter.

Weeks later, I was walking back from the barn. I wiped sweat from my forehead. The sun sizzled as I plopped onto the porch. I loved relaxing in Sam’s old chair. It reminded me of my brother.

In the distance, I could see what looked like a man with a sack walking toward the house. As I looked closer, I realized it was the mailman. I sprung out of the chair. Could this be the letter my mother and I have been waiting for?

My heart started to pound and I sprinted to the end of the dirt road. The mail carrier handed me an envelope. The outside had my name. I rushed inside.

“Mother, Mother, come quickly!” I tore open the envelope. My hands were shaking.

Dear Jo,

I hope you and Mother are doing well. I have some good news and some bad news. Things are going better in Europe. We are starting to get ahead of the Germans. My friend Zach was shot and lost his life on Omaha Beach. On that same day, I was shot and the medics had to amputate my arm. The good news is I am coming home. I can’t wait to see you and Mother.

From,

Sam

I remember the day that my brother said that he was going to war in France on a ship. I remember when he said goodbye. That felt like 1,000 years ago. I remember when I was working on the farm like a man. I have matured a lot in a short time. As I held Sam’s letter I thought it was a miracle. He was finally able to come home. I started to cry happy tears and that went on for hours. I felt like my insides would burst with excitement that he was coming home. I kept reading the line of the letter that said Sam was coming home. I was in disbelief. I imagined my brother stepping into the house and as soon as he was there I would jump on him and ask him everything about the war. I would tell him what happened at home and how much I missed him. I bet my brother would notice I have grown up. I have a feeling when he comes home he will start to cry happy tears and say how much he missed me too. In a way we are both heroes.
Pow! Into the net, there goes the ball. Soccer is a very popular sport and is played all over the world. Have you ever played soccer? If you would like to learn more about soccer keep reading.

**Game time!**

Positions are very important for soccer, here are all of the positions.

There are three defense positions, center, right and left. Defense is important because these players protects their team’s goal! There are three midfield positions, center, right and left. Midfield plays defense and offense. There are also three forward positions, center, right and left. Forward tries to score goals. Finally, goalie stands in front of the goal and blocks the ball so the other team doesn’t score a goal.

**Uh, Oh What About Rules?**

There are two different types of rules in soccer, ones you should do and ones you should not do. Rules you should do are: go to the ball and kick the soccer ball toward the goal. Another rule you should know is spread out away from your teammates. You want to do this so one of your teammates can pass to you instead of the other team getting the ball and scoring a goal. If you pass to your team your team could score a goal!

Rules you should not do are: do not push or trip people however you can nudge people to get the ball from the other team. Another thing you cannot do is push people down on the ground because then the other team will get a penalty kick. A penalty kick is a free kick and they might score a goal!

**Awesome Equipment!**

If you are at a soccer field and you are wearing the wrong clothes, now what to do? Well here’s a list of things you need at a soccer game: a uniform, cleats, a soccer ball, and a water bottle to taste something cold especially if you’re sweaty.

**Exercise Time!**

Exercises are very important before a game. They help you get better at soccer for your game! One exercise is dribbling back and forth in one tiny area. You can practice this at a game, during soccer practice or in your backyard! Another exercise is passing the ball to someone else. That helps you get better at passing the soccer ball to your teammates.

**You Have to Know Some Skills**

Skills are very important for soccer because skills will help you play soccer better. One skill is when someone comes up to you and tries to steal the soccer ball from you, you could kick the ball to the side change direction and go to the goal. Another skill you can do is pull the ball back behind you and dribble to the goal but make sure that nobody from the other team is behind you or else they will steal the ball from you.

**Conclusion**

One thing I know for sure is soccer is very fun and easy to learn. So why don’t you go outside and play some soccer now that you know how to play!

**Glossary**

Penalty: somebody doesn’t follow the rules
Nudge: pushing someone lightly
Uniform: cleats, socks, shorts, and shirt that match your teammates
Walk a Mile in My Shoes, Myra Green, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School

The Ocean Blue, Caroline Berling, Tootin’ Hills Elementary School

Inside that wondrous paradise,
Comes a leak of adventure,
All starting from the sandy beach floor,
Like a reveal of inner beauty, all down from beneath.

The seaweed drifts through like a gift from the sea,
Opening up a wonder, down from beneath.

And the dolphin’s eyes twinkle like a pool of stars,
Opening up a wonder, down from beneath.

And in the single curve of the patterned seashell,
Lives a wonder, down from beneath.

The water flows right up to your feet,
Like a bubbling river of curiosity,
Letting you discover the wonders, down from beneath.

The sun shines so daringly like a spotlight on the beach,
Leading to a performance of the furious waves, that echo your name.

And in those single laughs that emerge from your mouth as you watch that wondrous river,
The thought trickles down your soul and spine like a memory,
In which showing you what would have been,
For you could just step into that one paradise…
The ocean blue.
Christmas at my Nana and Papa’s house seems like it is out of a movie because it is so magical. Relatives are dressed in many shades of red and green. They are cheerfully gathered together to celebrate the holiday, all giddy with joy.

My favorite part of Christmas is when my Uncle Tom brings out his guitar and everyone forms a circle around him to sing Christmas carols in my grandparent’s dining room. Desserts are in the center of the room on the table and my many cousins, aunts and uncles are gathered around. We look like a festive human wreath. My Uncle merrily plays for the crowd of family members. Even though not everyone knows all the words to each song or can sing in tune, we all love this musical tradition.

My Uncle Tom has always been extra special to me. I am told I was a “fussy” baby and that no one could hold me except my Mom. I would scream even when my Dad held me! The only exception to my cries were when my Uncle Tom cuddled with me. Is it possible that even as a baby I knew how caring, kind and generous my Uncle could be?

In addition to being a musician, my Uncle Tom can also fix, create or design a space. I got to spend time with him each Saturday for about four months as he and my Dad turned our basement into a play room for my older brother and me. I would, I’m told, calmly sit on Uncle Tom’s lap and comfortably be with him before they could get started on the project. Those quiet times together were just the beginning of our sweet relationship.

As soon as I was old enough, I would grab my guitar at Christmas and plop myself right next to my Uncle Tom when it was time to start playing and singing. I don’t know how to play guitar but that didn’t seem to bother anyone, especially the musical talents of my Uncle.
This past Christmas was different, though. The family was together as usual; however, we were missing one very important person. My Uncle died just two months earlier from cancer. There was no strumming on a guitar and there were no Christmas carols.

My Uncle Tom holds a special place in my heart. He gave strong, loving hugs that comforted everyone, especially me! His smile was warm and friendly and could brighten anyone’s day. I miss him and think about him a lot. I am so happy I did get to learn about his talent on the guitar and know him. My Uncle Tom has passed many gifts to my older brother and me. We try to be as kind and helpful as he was. We are also taking piano lessons so we can continue the harmonious ritual of having Christmas music during the holiday with our large family. He shared his love of music with us and we hope to honor him when we have Christmas once more.

Ladybug,
Amelia Ditzel, Woodstock Elementary School

Black dots like freckles.
Wings, cherry-red
Eyes a grain of sand.
Little legs move like sugar ants.
Where do you come from in the winter?
When all the other bugs have died in the cold?
Why are you still alive? Ladybug...

Cold snow outside but you are warm,
On the sunny window above my bed
Wearing the sun’s rays like a suit
I feel the need to pick you up.
Only you- I would never pick up another bug, but you.
Why?

Dare to Dream,
Andrew Alemany, Anna Reynolds Elementary School

The glowing stadium lights glittered in the air like stars in the night sky. My brother and I walked towards Rentschler Field, taking in the stadium standing before us. The cold air grew warm as the arena filled up like air in a hot air balloon. Cheers erupted into the night as the home team took the field. I looked up at the beckoning stadium and wondered how many people had come with a similar purpose. A smile painted my face, as my heartbeat raced, quicker by the second. I pinched my arm, my brain not yet realizing this was really about to happen.

As we walked into the stadium, fans decked in red, white, and blue stretched before us. We climbed stair after stair, until we spotted our seats, tucked into the top section. Once we settled into our row, we joined the crowd, chanting, “Thank you Landon!” My USA shirt peeked out from behind my jacket, as steam from my hot cocoa mingled with my breath, disappearing into the night. I squinted towards the field as cold air licked my eyes. Banners featuring his frame festooned the stands behind one of the goals, while a large banner with the word Legend, and Donovan’s number, 10, fluttered nearby. The referee’s whistle pierced my ears, signaling the start of the emotional game. I smiled up and whispered, “Thank you, Dad!” I could tell a good game was underway.

Jozy Altidore struck first, skimming the post and sending the ball into the right corner. Just minutes in, the US took an early lead. But Ecuador got the message. It was game time. Ecuador fought back with grit and determination, alongside their opponents. The soccer ball danced across the field from the crisp passing on display by both teams. As halftime neared, USA still led by one!

Once the game resumed, all eyes were on Donovan, waiting for their turn to say goodbye. Flags waved boldly, celebrating unity and greatness. The energy of the stadium was strong just like the US. As time approached, the crowd grew louder with anticipation. But each time the ball rolled out of play, only an expectant silence blanketed the field.

Finally, the moment had come. The crowd erupted with mixed emotions, tears drowned out by the loyal applause, as the captain’s band came off the arm of Landon and slid onto the arm of Jozy Altidore. Landon raised his arms into the air, signaling “Thank you.” Surrounded by a standing ovation, one of the greatest soccer legends for the USA stepped off the field. As Landon took his last steps on the field with grace, he knelt down and said a quick prayer. When he reached the sideline, a high-five and a quick embrace ended the legend’s career.
The rest of the game was pretty low key. Ecuador scored as five minutes remained on the play clock to tie the game.

When I see the familiar jersey hanging in my closet, it reminds me of that night. Hearing the crowd buzzing, the lights bringing the stadium to life, and seeing Landon Donovan walk off the field...it reminds me to dare to dream.

My Dad is Awesome,
Aryana Patel, Tootin’ Hills Elementary School

In life, there are people who put imprints on your heart and make you into a better person. My dad is one of those people to me. My daddy will always be there for me. When people see my dad’s caring personality it makes them think about what caring really means. My dad’s wise ways of teaching will help sprout everyone in my family into bright, intelligent people. Moreover, my dad’s judicious use of his brain always knows what’s best for me.

My dad has an exceptionally caring heart. He can always put himself into other people’s shoes. For instance, my aunts have told me that when my dad is driving to work he always calls them to check on what’s going on in their life. This matters because even though he is the youngest sibling in the family, he still is looking out for them. In addition, after he comes home from work around 6:30pm, he finds me in my room. I love how he picks me up with his soft, but wrinkled hands and lifts me onto his back as if he was a horse. With his gracious face smiling, he starts neighing, “Neigh! Neigh! Neigh!” After that he always plops me onto my flower covered bed, and we laugh together there while holding hands. This might seem like a little thing, but it matters because my daddy knows that we both had a long day, and it’s good to end the day with a little fun. I can’t leave out the time when I felt like my heart was going to sink down and down into my body when my mom and brother were fighting. My mournful feeling wouldn’t escape from my body because all I could hear was the deafening shouts of disagreement. My stomach started to rumble, my palms got sweaty, and I closed my eyes. When I opened them, I felt comforting arms holding me close. I looked up, and I saw my dad’s gentle eyes looking at me. Then he just said seven meaningful words, “You don’t deserve to listen to this.” Just from those words I knew that he could really understand what I felt like. All of these examples prove that my dad has taught me the power of empathy.

My dad teaches me about everything. He makes sure I understand what I’m learning. For example, one time my dad spun the shiny, green and blue globe so fast that all the countries turned into blurs of mystery. Then he pointed his strong finger straight at Ethiopia. “Do you know about this country?” he asked me in a robust voice. I said, “No.” Staring into my eyes, he started to say facts about Ethiopia like, “Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa and one of the oldest in the world.” This might seem like a little thing, but it matters because it shows that my dad makes sure that I know about our world. Also, my family members ask me questions when they come over, and I always answer them correctly to their astonishment. Then they always say, “Of course! Your dad
must have taught you.” They know that my dad has a superb way of teaching, too. Even when we read books together we both look forward to it because we know that it will be fun, and there will be a learning opportunity. For instance, when he reads a sophisticated word like demure, my dad will say, “That means quiet, modest, and reserved.” Not only does this show that my dad teaches me about everything, but it also shows that he makes sure I understand what he’s teaching. That makes him a very loving man, too. Truth be told, my daddy has taught me all of what I know today.

My daddy has always known what’s best for me. It’s like he can read deep into my soul. I remember when I was at Disney World waiting and waiting in the colorful line of people. When I saw the rollercoaster decorated in all sorts of magical things like flowers and ribbons zooming by, my stomach started fluttering like there were thousands of butterflies in there. My awareness and anxiety triggered me, and my pink cheeks kept growing like bright red roses. I started to shake. My dad right then gently placed his hand on my face and told me in a soft voice, “Everything is going to be fine.” He looked into my jittery eyes and gave me his hand so I could hold it. “You can trust me. I know what’s best for you,” he comforted. This matters because when my dad saw my nervous actions he knew that something was wrong. Lastly, I can’t leave out the time when my dad saw I had a shallow voice with cracks in it he knew that something was wrong. Right then he knew that I had to tell someone what I was thinking. He came over to me and asked me what was going on. I know my dad must have a powerful soul to read someone else’s soul. My dad’s affectionate and ardent soul will never leave his heart.

I wouldn’t be the person I am today if it weren’t for my dad. His way of always being there when I need him means a lot to me. His caring heart is endless. My daddy’s pure ways of teaching are terrific. And my daddy’s prudent brain knows what’s best for me. Reflecting on all of his traits, I realize that I owe so much to my daddy.

**Hurt Chipmunk,**  
_*Charlotte Diviney, Squadron Line School_*

Ellie felt the cold morning breeze on her face as she skipped down the sidewalk, leash in her hand, attached to her dog Shylie. Shylie was not like other dogs. She was a hunter and a helper, also intelligent. Just then, rain started pelting her face. Shylie stopped and sniffed thoroughly.

“Come on Shy,” Ellie said gently as she gave a soft tug on Shylie’s leash. “Oh, what is it girl?” Ellie finally gave up on trying to get Shylie to move. Shylie cried with a hint of growl mixed in which worried Ellie.

*What is Shylie trying to tell me? There’s nothing here,* Ellie thought as she peered into the woods to see if there was something. “There’s nothing here girl. Let’s go,” Ellie commanded but Shylie ignored her.

Then, Shylie nudged something with her nose. Right there and then Ellie saw it. A little hurt chipmunk on the edge of the sidewalk.

“What do I know about animals Shylie? I can’t help it,” Ellie sighed. Tears fell out of her eyes and made the whole world blurry. “I’ll try,” Ellie finally said. She then touched the little chipmunk. After a few strokes, the chipmunk had accepted her. Ellie picked up the little chipmunk and brought him home. As she stepped in the house, her parents scolded her for bringing a wild animal in the house.

“Mom, Dad you don’t understand. Shylie found this little innocent creature on the side of the sidewalk and wouldn’t leave until I helped it,” Ellie argued.

“Put it outside now!” Dad instructed.

“Fine,” said Ellie who had a magnificent plan. *I’ll build a little nest out of straw in my treehouse. Or maybe I will cut out some of the tree to put him in,* Ellie thought as she stormed out the door. After the big project was done, Ellie transferred the chipmunk from the haystack to the nest in the oak tree. Shylie guarded the tree at the bottom so nobody could hurt the chipmunk any more than it already was.

“You’ll be safe here,” Ellie assured the little chipmunk. “I’m going to call you Chubby,”

While Chubby was adjusting to where he would stay for the next couple of days, Ellie fixed him some water and fruit. Ellie also brought him a bandage for his leg. Chubby didn’t eat. Chubby didn’t eat his food for 3 days.

*How can I help a chipmunk eat if I don’t know how?* Ellie asked herself. *Google. Google knows everything.* In a second, Ellie was on the computer searching how to feed a baby chipmunk. There was nothing that helped. *This means it’s up to me to figure it out,* Ellie thought. *Tiny pieces. That might help with digesting.*

Moments later, Ellie was in the kitchen chopping up fruit and water. Ellie figured out Chubby really liked this meal.

“What are you making?” asked a voice that was very close. Ellie looked up and saw her mother peering over her shoulder, looking at what she was making for Chubby.

“Oh-uh-uh nothing,” Ellie stammered, worried that if she told her mom there would be consequences.
“Well you’re making something for someone,” Mom said. Ellie sighed. Her mom had a point.
“I’m helping the chipmunk you told me to let go,” Ellie blurted out, so she could get it over with.
“What? Say it more clearly,” Mom commented.
“I’m helping the chipmunk you told me to let go,” Ellie repeated more slowly.
“Mom I’m helping it. You don’t understand. Shylie told me to. She wouldn’t leave until I helped it,” Ellie cried.
“Ellie,” Mom said fiercely.
“No,” Ellie stormed out the door with Chubby’s tray of food in her hands. *How can mom say no to a little baby chipmunk? She loves animals,* Ellie thought.
“Here Chubby. I’ll keep you hidden until you can go,” Ellie told Chubby. Chubby gobbled down his food in an instant. “You’ve gotten good at eating,” Ellie said. She was very glad she had done well helping Chubby, and that he was better, although she was sad that she would have to let him go soon. “I’ll miss you when you’re gone,” Ellie shed a couple of tears as she heard her mom yell her name. Ellie scrambled inside.
“What are you doing out there?” Mom asked. Ellie was paralyzed. She couldn’t tell her mom she still has Chubby.
“What are you doing out there,” Mom repeated.
“I can’t tell you,” Ellie cried.
“Tell me now,” Mom said calmly.
“I’m helping the chipmunk,” Ellie said in a paralyzed tone.
Mom thought for a minute like she always did. “Oh. OK. Thank you for telling me,” Mom finally said. *Mom must have given up! Thought that would be more intense,* Ellie thought.
After April, May, June, and July went by Chubby was more than better. He was magnificent!
“Ellie how’s Chubby?” Mom asked.
“He’s great!” Ellie replied. Ellie’s parents had finally given up and let her help Chubby.
“Well is it time?” Mom asked. Ellie sighed.
“Yes, he’s ready to go,” Ellie said.
“Go get him, and we’ll put him where you found him,” Mom instructed. Ellie had grabbed a basket. Chubby was so excited too, he jumped right in the basket without the assistance of Ellie.
“Ready,” Ellie called to her Mom.
“Let’s go,” Mom said.
Once they got to the spot Ellie had found Chubby, Ellie took Chubby very carefully and put him on the edge of the woods. Chubby’s leg still had a little bald spot with a scar.
“Bye,” Ellie whispered as she started tearing up. Mom hugged her, as they watched Chubby scurry off. That was when Ellie knew she would never see him again. And that she was like Shylie. A helper.
After winter came and went, Ellie went up to her treehouse to sit near Chubby’s cavern. She heard something rustle in the straw. Ellie went over to investigate. There was a chipmunk. Then the little critter turned its body to show Ellie his leg. That was when Ellie saw a little bald spot with a scar. Ellie started crying.
“Chubby!” Ellie cried.
Fifth Grade

Coby, Lin Zhang, Greenwich Academy
Mom and Me,
Kiersten Sipe, Greenwich Academy

We walk along
Dirt dusty trails
Leaving home behind
Just mom and me
In early morning

Singing softly
In the grass
Sleek and shiny
With dew

Just mom and me
In silence
In this early morning wood

No poem ever could describe
The songs we would have sung
This day
In the woods

The poison oak
Bows down their heads
Careful are we
Of the streams

The creek below our feet
Mom and me
We cross

The ballerina tutus
Standing by the edge
Are too pretty
To pick

The silver dragonflies
Land on a stem
To cover in dew
And sparkle
Just for mom
And me

Girl, Abby Ditzel, Woodstock Middle School
This is the story of a mouse named Raspberry. Raspberry was on the way to her friend Chelsea’s house. She was in her best outfit—a pink tutu with two pom-poms that attached to her skirt. Her shoes were pink with raspberries on them, but her favorite part of her outfit was the necklace her parents gave her when she was a baby. It was gold and had her name engraved on it in fancy handwriting. She never took it off because actually she got a job as an author! She missed her parents very much. They worked with the CIA so she never knew where they were. Raspberry had lived with her Grandma since she was 10. It was her mission to live her parent’s legacy and make them proud. She was all dressed up because Chelsea had set up a double date for them!  As she was driving it started to downpour. Her car was a convertible (and the top was down) so she got drenched!

Raspberry said, “Hi—I'm Chucky.”
The other said, “Hi—I’m Jack Harrison.”
Raspberry said, “Hi my name is Raspberry.”
Chelsea said, “And I’m Chelsea.” They decided they were hungry, so they went out for dinner.
Chelsea said, “You two can sit at that table and we will sit nearby.”
They sat down and Jack asked, “Do you have a job?”
“Yes. I am an author. I got a job yesterday. Do you have a job?”
“Yes. I work at a bank,” Jack answered.

“Have you been thinking about your next book topic?”
“Yes. It will be about a spy who needs to keep her identity a secret.”
“Sounds interesting!” Jack said.

After they ate they all said their goodbyes and the boys left. Chelsea asked, “Well, how was it?”
“It was great. Jack was nice and we made plans for next week!”
“That’s great. Chucky and I decided that we’re going to see a movie next week!”
“Fun! I should go—looks like a storm is coming and I don’t want to get stuck in it!”
“Sounds good. Thanks for coming ... and good luck on your first day on the job!”
“Thank you!” Raspberry said.

The next day Raspberry woke up, got dressed, and started her drive to her work. She pulled out a map of her location because the CIA wanted the base to be secret. She was told to shred the map when she arrived. She saw the building with the correct address that looked normal. She parked her car and went inside. When she walked in she found the inside was very old. It was dusty and the ceiling paint was peeling off. A woman sitting at the desk said, “Show me your card.” so Raspberry took out her card, the woman scanned it, looked at her computer and said, “Follow me!”
Raspberry asked, “What’s is your name?”
“Carrie. It’s nice to meet you”

Carrie led Raspberry to a wall in the back of the room. Raspberry said, “What am I supposed to do with the wall?”
“Put your hand on it and when you hear a beep, take it off and the wall will open. The Chief will be waiting to talk to you,” said Carrie.
Raspberry put her hand on the wall, the doors opened and she saw the Chief. When she walked, the door closed behind her. The Chief said, “Follow me and do what I say.”
“Yes Chief,” she said.
Enter this room, sit in that chair and take out your card.” Raspberry did as she was told. The Chief said, “You will now be known as Agent 007.” “Yes Chief,” Raspberry said. “Your assignment is confidential. You will be trying to kill a man called Jack Harrison. He’s planning to steal $100,000,000,000 from a bank on Mozzarella Road. He works at the bank and plans to steal the money and drive it to an unknown location. You need to find out where he’s going and then kill him and recover the money.” Raspberry was shocked that the guy she just went on a date with was a criminal about to steal an enormous amount of money—and she’s supposed to kill him! She was disappointed, sad and overwhelmed. “Are you ok?” asked the Chief. “Yes I am. I am just thinking about how I can do this,” Raspberry said. “We’ll give you your weapons tomorrow.” Raspberry went to the gym and started to lift weights. She had many thoughts racing in her head like “What if I can’t kill him because I like him too much? I can’t fail my first mission! Then again, he lied to me but I also lied to him. How can this be?!” Raspberry finished lifting weights. She went home, ate dinner, showered, and even though it wasn’t easy, she went to sleep. She woke up at 5:30am the next morning. She put on all black clothes—no pink at this job! She went downstairs, ate breakfast and tried to figure out how she would complete this mission. Raspberry realized she would never see Jack again because the date they planned was next week. If she successfully completed the mission, he would be dead. She got in her car and drove to work. When she arrived, she scanned her card and went into the Chief’s office. She sat down and the Chief said, “We wish you the best of luck. Since this is your first mission, we will move you up a level or down a level depending on your success. We hope you will be moving up soon!” “Chief, I hope you don’t mind me asking...have you ever fallen in love with the person you meant to kill?” “Yes I have. Why?” “I know Jack Harrison and I could use some advice.” “I’m sorry that happened. My advice is to remember that we do things for the safety of the country and no one has the right to do bad things. We don’t know why Jack is making bad choices, but you have a choice to save the world from a dangerous criminal.” “Chief, I suppose killing one person is better than making millions of people suffer. I know I will move on somehow.” “That is a smart decision, Raspberry. When it happened to me, I was devastated and even though I still feel sad about it, I know in my heart I did the right thing.” “Thank you Chief for your advice.” “Of course. You should probably go now and complete your mission. Agent 007—good luck!” “Goodbye, Chief.” Raspberry left the room and got into a black CIA car and drove to the bank. She entered before the bank closed and quickly went to the bathroom and hid there until the bank closed. She saw Jack trying to open the vault. Quietly, she took out her gun and walked to him. She kept thinking about what the Chief said and at that moment, she made her decision and shot him. She walked over to him and saw that he wasn’t dead. Jack was in shock because she shot him with a medicine that made him fall asleep. She carried him to the car before anyone saw. When she reached the CIA, she put handcuffs on him. When he woke up she said, “Sorry Jack. I have to do my job. I don’t write books I work with CIA and you’re under arrest.” She brought him inside and Chief was waiting for her. He said, “Well done Agent 007. You completed your first mission and you moved up the ranks to the highest level in training. Congratulations!” Raspberry was so excited to see what was next for her. She held her nameplate necklace and looked up to the sky. She knew her parents would be proud.
Splash! Sploosh! The splashing noises rang in my head as I threw the rocks into the Connecticut River. I gazed at the river shining in the early Autumn sunlight. The waves of the greenish blue river slowly moved as the wind moved. I was almost hypnotized by the swirling currents and the steady hum of the babbling rushing. The powerful thrushes of water pushed and pulled in a growl of warning. I squinted my eyes and looked around. Where could everyone be? I heard the splashing noises of rocks, the faint hints of talking, and followed it around the bend.

"Omar don’t get too close to the river!" I heard my dad yell.

"I’m not!" Omar groaned. I saw my brother, Omar, and my youngest brother, Yusef, throwing rocks and laughing. Not surprising, they’re always together talking and teasing until the tension builds. They get into fights, ending in Yusef’s tears and Omar’s pouts. Then they forget all about it and start over again.

Omar was ignoring the warning, teetering on the edge of the river that seemed to be taunting him. The river was hungry and trying to get Omar to join him. I thought to myself if he joined the river, that would fine by me, I would enjoy some peace and quiet for once. I smiled and moved away creating my own peace, just throwing rocks from a faraway spot.

"Haha! I threw it farther than you," Omar mocked my youngest brother. Yusef lunged closer and chuckled the rock at Omar. Omar dodged it, with his back leaning into the river and sneakers sniffing at the water’s edge. My parents were talking unconcerned, my mother was holding my little sister’s hand as she was bending down to examine the dirt with her free hand. I was gazing at the river, the logs of the bear damn, and thinking about the age.
of the river. The Connecticut River emerged 10,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age, rushing forward and
unearthing fertile soil to welcome life. The first natives used the river for navigation and trade, but also for the fertile
hunting and farming lands it provided. The river is immortal with power to give life and take life.

I heard a small splash, a rush, and a pull, but didn’t think much of it, after all it was small. Little did I
know, my youngest brother’s eyes grew wide as he watched the river attempt to suck Omar in and bury him under
its arms of waves. Yusef’s mouth grew in size, wider than his eyes, wide like his silent terror. Omar was moving his
arms to try and swim, but not a strong swimmer, he looked like a terrified chicken, facing the knife, about to be
dinner. Yusef heard Omar’s small splashes cycling under the waves as Omar tried to signal for help with his arms,
hands, and fingers, slowly sinking out of sight. My youngest brother fought through the shock and silence, and
finally decided to speak up, “MOMMY, DADDY LOOK, HELP HIM NOW!”

My mom turned white, the fear climbing around her face and eyes, like a hungry lion’s target. My dad
turned around and I saw the horror in his face as he looked into the river, into the heart of the blue green monster,
roaring greedily. His eyes bulged out, his arm hairs started to stick up as he got goosebumps, and his body geared
into motion.

My dad RAN to the river and jumped in, batting furiously at the rapids. Two ladies rushed from the other
end of the bend to see what was going on. I stood back to let my dad get Omar out, holding my hand on Yusef’s
chest feeling the rapid tick tock of his heart beat. My fingers sinking into his t-shirt giving us comfort at the same
time. My dad dug into the water, pulling up branches of the currents. He reached Omar, and dragged him to the
shore like a lifeless piece of driftwood. The Connecticut River howled in fury as it watched my father stand him up.
Omar was all wet, his chest was heaving and neck cranking up as the water and the contents of his belly spurted out
of him in heavy gasps. My Mom knelt behind him as he crumpled down onto her lap. She comforted him, pushing
his wet matted hair back, as she tried to wipe away his struggle of this day. Everything that was in his stomach was
now in front of him on the ground. My dad was soaking and dripping, breathing in patches. He pulled out his phone,
it was in his pocket, soaked. My dad sighed, his phone in now broken and all the pictures he took of us at the
Connecticut River were gone, but none of that mattered.

Omar was still coughing up sick, trying to catch his breath. I was disgusted, not with the mess, but with the
river, with him for not listening, with Yusef for not acting, with myself for not seeing, and wishing earlier, for him
to be washed away into quiet. I snapped, “OK, you’re going to be fine, just stop coughing!”

He looked at me helpless, like a wounded animal. I turned away, I knew I was wrong. I had no right to that
anger. I tried to lower my tone “Wow, that water must have been salty.” I thought in my head, I should have told
him I was glad he was OK, glad he was still with us, but that was all I could manage.

One of the two ladies said, “Thank God it wasn’t too late.”

The other one echoed, “Someone died last week, you are a lucky boy!”

My Mom told everybody that we should just go home now, so we did. I was shocked about him falling into the
Connecticut River, but at the same time I wasn’t shocked at all. After all, he was warned about not going too close to
the river. The river rushes, as it has for thousands of years, hungry waiting for life, to give it and take it. Even if I
couldn’t say it, I was glad Omar was spared, hopefully a little more cautious and aware.

Deep, Dark, and Hollow, Natalie Chin, Eli Terry Elementary School

Slipping out of bed, Nora scampered down the hall. The creaking stairs made her cringe with every step as
she pushed open the door. Dodging snowflakes, she ran toward the dying cherry tree. Frantically digging around the
roots, she pulled a small rusty object from a tiny hole in the roots. It was too late. From the Saner house came a deep
raspy voice. “Your time is up, girl...”

Abigail awoke to the sound of her alarm clock. Peeking outside, she shuddered at the sight of the old Saner
house. Who would live there and not fix it up? She stared at her reflection in her beaten, old mirror. Her curious
eyes and crooked nose gave it away. Tumbling down the stairs in a slothful heap, she dashed out the door towards a
tree. A lovely cherry tree that seemed to never lose its petals. Slumping next to its base, she watched a robin flutter
onto its precious limbs. She let her fingers run through the soft ground. Suddenly, her fingers bumped into
something hard.

An odd-looking root. It was shockingly captivating, like a beautiful blossom spreading its petals.
Examining the root, she noticed a small hole. Letting curiosity take over, she felt around. She fit a finger around an object and exposed it to the fresh, summer air. It was a bronze ring with letters on the rim. Peering closely at the ring, she attempted to interpret what it read. Who... ever... finds... this... ring... is... "What’re you doing?" said a nasal voice erupting from behind Abigail. It was her neighbor, Ernest Saner. An old man with bushy eyebrows and a big nose. “What is that you have there?” he asked. “Nothing, sir. Just an old ring,” she muttered. “Do you know whose it is?” Chuckling to himself, the old man shook his head. “Well, that is a nice ring. Looks familiar, but it is not mine. Nobody’s that I know of. You should keep it, wouldn’t want to put it to waste,” he said, rolling the words off his tongue. “Oh, I couldn’t do that. It could be somebody else’s. They might be looking for it. I’ll just leave it here,” Abigail confirmed. “No!” Mr. Saner yelled. Abigail frowned. “I mean, it’s old, it has probably been lost for years. Keep it,” he urged. That was strange. It’s almost like he was forcing me to keep it. Is there something I don’t know? And how does he know that it’s old? But... should I really suspect an old man? Maybe he’s just crazy.

Walking inside, she tried to read the last word. She could barely make out the fading letters. C... u...? This was the only non-interpretable word on the ring. Sitting down at the table, she thought about the oddness of this town. Everyone seemed to look at her as if she was some sort of monster with warts. Suddenly, banging on her kitchen window, was a sweet old lady that everyone in this town knew. “Don’t go disappearing like my Nora! That strange man is behind that,” she said worriedly. As she scampered off, she gave a nervous glance towards Ernest Saner’s house. What’s going on? Abigail wondered. And who is Nora?

Once inside, she couldn’t resist the urge to check out Mr. Saner’s house. She wound up standing in front of that old run-down house that belonged to her very own neighbor. Little by little, she began noticing all the strange things about Mr. Saner’s house. Strolling down the neighborhood comes who? None other than Ernest Saner. “And what’re you doing here again? It is a nice day. You kids should be playing. Not watching old men walk towards their houses.” he chuckled. “Oh, no, sir. I was just—” Abigail stuttered. Mr. Saner interrupted. “It’s fine. A lot of people do this sort of thing. I find it quite amusing!” he giggled as if he had a sort of bubbly substance in his throat.

Spotting a car pull into her driveway, Abigail ran back into her house, through the back door, and into the living room. She sprawled herself across the couch and opened up a random book, trying not to act conspicuous. Abigail’s mother walked in with the clack sound of her heels trailing behind her. As her mother was preparing dinner, Abigail snuck out of the room. She looked out the window and something she had never seen jumped out at her. There was quite a stomach-curdling sight. There were three strange looking lumps on the trunk of the cherry tree. And they happened to look a lot like faces. Demented faces. Then, she remembered the ring. And the word she couldn’t quite make out. She rummaged through her desk and pulled out the rusty, old ring. C-u-r-s-e-d?

Grabbing a water bottle, she held it close to the ring. C-u-r-s-e-d?

Cursed! Abigail ran down the hallway. The same hallway that Nora had once ran down. That old man is behind this. Abigail ran to Ernest Saner’s house and pounded on the door. “Open up! You need to help me!” Abigail pleaded. The old man opened the door and cocked his head. Mr. Saner had a puzzled look on his face. “And what’re you doing at my house this hour?” he asked. “I know what’s going on. Let me in and I’ll explain,” Abigail insisted. The inside of his house looked much better than the outside. Though it was still in need of a fix. “Well, I know that it happens to be a family heirloom,” he admitted. “And you should know my family is not normal, so, according to my knowledge, it is cursed,” he said, drawing the words out like a knight taking his sword out of his hilt. “And that the pressure is now laid on you,” he said in a gleeful voice. “Before you, the curse was on Nora. I’m sure you’ve heard talk of her around town. Poor Nora!” he said in a mocking voice. Leading Abigail towards the door, he rumbled, “That ring is the key. Souls are trapped in that cherry tree. You have to free them. When the tree starts dying, the souls are fading. If you don’t free them on time, either do a sacrifice, become part of the tree, or let it die, and the souls will fade.”

With that, he pushed Abigail out of the house and slammed the door behind her.
Jews Worldwide, Sadie Kritzman, Bugbee Elementary School
**Home of the Brave: Extended Ending, Jack Reynolds, Litchfield Intermediate School**

The following poem was written as an extended ending to *Home of the Brave* in the style of the author Katherine Applegate.

**LONG TRIP**

The sky is crying large snowflakes as our new van bumps along the road.

It is very tight with Mama and Ganwar and his girlfriend, Ella and Aunt Nyatal And Hannah too all crammed into a too-small space.

But I am excited, because today, we are going to visit Lou.

Mama told me it would be a long trip because the airplanes were too much cost but I do not mind so much. It is better to be close to friends and family than to be alone with strangers. I know what it is like to be alone.

I feel a tap on my arm. Hey, says Hannah, her eyes wide. I think I forgot to mention I have motion sickness. Suddenly, she twitches and her Happy Meal ends up on my lap. I am realizing that this motion sickness might be a problem.

**PROBLEMS**

It is a long time before the van is cleaned, but it still smells like throw-up Happy Meal.

I have a fresh pair of pants but they let the cold in like the unlucky doorman in one of Hannah’s ghost stories.

I wish it was the summer when the sun warmed my face and the flowers bloomed. But summer is not for a long time. Longer even than this trip.

If we are going to see Lou, Mama had told me, we will have to go during your winter break.

At first this had confused me like all America things but it made me smile for I was going to see Lou!

Happiness tickles my belly and I finger the photos in my pocket and I wait for Lou.

The wait does not last long. Hannah, I say. She looks at me. She is looking less green which is good. Can you tell me a story?

Sure, she says, her face making a smile. She told me once that she wants to be an author when she grows up to share her stories with the world.

She had a look on her face then like the look I had when Mama came back or when Ganwar met Ella. It is a look that means more than happiness. It means joy. It means love.

She has that look now and it tells me that I have done a good thing. Maybe I will take a cookie when I get to Lou’s for my good deed.

**HANNAH’S STORY**

_There was once a man._

*He wore a long necklace that granted him great powers._

He could have destroyed cities burned buildings filled the world with hurt but he didn’t.

When there was a fire, he put it out. When there was terror, he made it better. When there was turmoil, he set things right.

He was a hero.

I think about Hannah’s words and about how I could have used a hero how Lual and Father could have used a hero and things could be right again.

But they wouldn’t. I would have Father and Lual but there would be no Gol. No Hannah. No Ella. No Lou.

I stare out the window at the endless snow and for the first time I don’t see burning cold terror covering the ground and the not-dead trees.

I see a white blanket wrapping me to America to my home.

I close my eyes, and for the first time, I don’t see the men with guns or Lual and Father laying dead or Mama bleeding in the bush.

I see Gol. I see Mama leaving the airport. I see Lou from the top of the tree. I see Hannah. I see Ganwar and Ella sharing a hug.

I feel right. I feel at home.
A Letter to Shane Dawson,
Selena Claudio, CREC Discovery Academy

January 8, 2019

Dear Shane Dawson,

I always thought that growing up would be amazing, but in your book, *It Gets Worse*, I realized things do get worse. I see there are some problems I may have to deal with that I don’t have now. Although you told me struggles I will have to deal with, you also taught me about how I can solve those problems, and how people I let into my life can help me out. I believe your book is not only funny, but is very helpful to me as a 10-year-old just waiting for adulthood.

In your book you told about the many insecurities you had in high school. For example, in the essay “Human Trash” you showed how it was to be obese and seen as “different.” You also showed how people like your friends and your mom, who you seem very close to helped you through these tough times. You showed me a few ways to deal with certain situations when I get older. Because of your book, I know to look to people that I trust including my friends and grandparents when I’m in a difficult situation. I believe that your book went deep into the fact that no matter what problem you are in, you can always ask someone for help. You just have to find those people that you trust.

Thinking about your childhood helped me to think about my own. Sometimes I am sad and feel bad for myself. I am very close to my grandparents who raised me. You see, they took me in and took care of me after my mother decided she was too busy to take care of a child. This makes me angry, but I have to focus on the positive. I have grandparents who loved me enough to be parents all over again for the second time. I can keep into perspective that everyone has struggles that they need to work through. I need to remember that compared to your childhood, mine is easy and I am truly lucky I have the family that I do.

Your book was not only helpful but reminded me of a time in my life. In your book you showed how you lost your grandma and she was very important to you. She encouraged you in many ways but after she passed your mom helped you deal with her passing away. When my great grandma passed away, I was devastated. I was very close to her and even attempted to teach her English, as she only knew Spanish. When my grandpa told me the news I did something that was similar to what you did in your book, and I talked to my grandpa about it. He told me about how she was in a better place and how she was in pain which would be what anyone would say, but it comforted me. I thought of this while reading your book because in a lot of situations you would talk to someone. In the essay that talks about your grandma’s ghost it reminded me of how I handled my own great grandma’s death.

Ever since I read your book I have turned to my friends and grandparents for advice. Sometimes it takes courage to do that, but *It Gets Worse* showed me that it is okay to ask for help. I believe your book was not only a comedy, but showed us another way we all think of ourselves, even if we are different. It also showed a different perspective of solving problems that may come across when I’m older. I do believe the problem of being different in some way will come along in my life, but I can’t really think of it as a problem if I want it to get better. Even though your book is called *It Gets Worse*, I know that your book was made to show us ways for things to get better.

Sincerely,

Selena Claudio
Sixth Grade

Yellow Days, Elsa Nocton, Mansfield Middle School

It all seemed to circle around me, spiraling out of order. Now, it never seemed real. Flashes of color, and suddenly I’m here. Life, made up of billions, there’s me standing in a speck of it all, not understanding. I guess life is supposed to feel this way. Rushed. Empty? Where did all the depth in my life go?

I see myself—sunny, bright, cheerful, little me, walking across the same bridge, conquering the same battle, imagery scattered across my mind. I am still there, sinking into life, I pick up my feet one at a time, to move along. It hasn’t always been like this, worried to go to class, seen in the halls. I feel as if a million eyes stare down at my every move. Why? If I say the wrong thing, I feel I won’t be liked by anyone.

“Talia?” I glanced up at her, trying to collect myself. She looked at me. “What are you so afraid of?” she said sincerely. “I don’t know,” I said blankly. “What does this feel like? Putting all this upon yourself—it must feel exhausting,” she said. I stared up. Gently, I smiled. “No. It feels—” I stopped. Her smile almost glowed with heart, it warmed mine. She stared into my eyes, smiling. “It’s okay, you may go on.” I nodded back. “It—it feels like nothing, a deep, deep nothing.” For a second, I thought maybe I could overcome this. I stared at the floor, wondering how many others had sat here before, feeling just like me. I took a deep breath. “Everything feels uncomfortable like I don’t belong—the kids, the people.” I clenched my hands, and rubbed them against my legs. “Yes?” She said. I looked at the clock, and the objects around the room. It reminded me of my grandmother’s house, filled with old raggedy toys, and colorful candies, a light sprinkle of dust coating everything in reach. A room full of soft colors

Truly Me, Talia Lee, Thompson Brook School

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and shapeless words. She smiled fondly at me and glanced back at her. “It is actually hard—everything, but it doesn’t feel that hard to me.” She slowly nodded back at me, trying to understand how I felt. “But what are you scared to do wrong?” My lips flinched. “I—I thought if I don’t act like others nobody will like me.” I resisted saying this for a second. “But you’re a great person. You are.” In my eyes it was almost like an angel had been speaking, her iridescent glow illuminated my heart. “I think I am now,” I say, hesitantly.

She looked deep into my eyes, took a breath, and continued. She slowly nodded again. “You are—you really are, I know you,” she said. We both stared at each other, it seemed as if her eyes were mirrors reflecting off my feelings, and her silent words were songs to my ears. Her eyes and smile carried a soft and light complexion, her smile was deepening. “Alright Talia, well time is up.” “Okay, thank you,” I said. I opened the door to the sound of waves fogging all noise. I walked through the white painted walls. Everything was different. A new perspective came over me—my eyes had opened.

I smiled at the sound of my mother’s voice. “Hey, you’re back!” Mom said. “I’m gonna go see her for a quick second.” I nodded, half smiling. They stood in between the door and the office talking about me. “Are you ok? She was good, right?” The sound of her talking blurred, and I thought to myself, before I said, “Yes, I’m just loosening up.” We opened the car and got in. Right before I clicked my seat belt, she turned back to me and said, “I know this is only your second meeting with this counselor, but I just wanted to ask how you like her.” I took a deep breath. “Yeah, I like her,” I said. Finally, the rest of the ride home was quiet. “Thank you by the way.” I said. “Yeah, sure,” she said warmly. I arrived home to the comfort of my bedroom. I laid down on my bed with a soft blanket covering me and I sat on my white sheets, computer open, with my face glowing through the night, poetry traveling through my bloodstream. It flowed out of me like a river, fresh and clear as day. My words harmonized in my mind, and as stressed as I was, my thoughts settled to the bottom like the snow in a snow globe capturing a winter evening. The thought of a panic flushed my cheeks. Distinct heartbeats were my map to follow in a maze of calming myself, and my poems were the tools of my escape. My thoughts patterned in a rhythmic, steady motion. Sounds played in and out of my ears, and all I could focus on was the thought of melodies and words that mingled in my mind and the sense of peace and joy that circulated around. Sounds collided to the tone of my heartbeat, like fireworks brightening the clear night sky. I saw how every whistle had a purpose to enroll with such a light touch of pleasure.

It was morning before a single blink, everything was normal. The light from the early Saturday sun was peeking into my window, slowly rising from the mountains. I awoke first to watch the sun rise, and the glistening houses glow off in the distance. It looked almost too good to imagine. The trees were swaying to the sound of the birds chirping, singing along to their tune. In the clearing fog I could see myself standing within the trees and fields. Feel the wind. Touch the sky, and reach for the stars.

It felt as if the wind was blowing through my body with a secret key I didn’t have, opening up my spirit so that I could empty my heart to somebody. I wish my eyes glared off a look to see who I could really trust. I thought that if I collected my feelings, they could fly off along with all my weights and worries. I wanted this so bad—letting go. Maybe even exhaling brought an end to the hurting. I thought for a while before I walked back inside. I thought about how one’s words could shift my eyes to see the color, how only a gleam of her mind was enough to cure. The live spirit she gave, and the gentle words that were spoken. I didn’t know shapes could be molded, or even minds. That lady who was only sitting in her office talking to me, had changed my perspective, of somebody you would think I know. Myself.

School sent my nerves spiraling. I’m not sure how to act, and if anyone has been looking at me, and I was really nervous. I didn’t want to soften to somebody who would run their knives right through me. At school I didn’t want to hide, but somehow it became that way. Personality is something I should not resist, but lately it’s been hard to even know who I am. I am covering up something, and have no clue what is beneath that. I am trying to find myself after swimming over so many waves, trying desperately to catch my breath. At school, I feel overwhelmed. Everyone is trying to find themselves, when I think I already have. I try to have confidence, more strength, as if these were medicines for me to take.
“It doesn’t feel heavy to me.” Me? I said that. I thought it was the truth, maybe nothing could compare? Light building blocks are what I felt, and despite what you might think, I feel weightless, and free. I am finally at my highest point.

I capture everything with my eyes, life and its tall buildings or mellow countrysides. I watch and observe. Especially people. I see life, and it is incredible. In my head this replays every second, I can hear my poetry. My body is very sensitive to things around me, like a magnet picking up voices and messages. Torn images echo like sirens around my head, me trying to fill in that empty space. Unknown voices recall memories in my head. It is all in my head. It revolves around, and it makes me wonder, how much do I really know? Just truly Talia. Me.

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**The Last Ditch,**
Anna Tevelde, Crystal Lake Elementary School

Here I am, my lungs are hurting, and my legs seem to be vibrating. The cold pool water isn’t so chilly anymore. I squint at the scoreboard, looking through the crowd of people in front of it. 32.49, it read.

I can’t believe I made it here.

“Anna!” my coach screamed over the roar of the crowd, who were on their feet, up in the stands, clapping their hands off. They were excited how there was a four-way tie for first place among 12 and 13 year-olds in the very bright blue pool. I stood up, suddenly hot with anxiety. I walked over to her.

“Lane four, heat ten,” Hannah, my coach said, raising her eyebrows. I gave her a small smile, despite the fact that I had been dreading this moment for weeks. It was my last chance, my last shot. I was in a ditch; a last ditch.

I walked over to lane four and stepped into the tenth place in the line of ten girls, sighing. I looked at the small girl with a red swim cap and blue goggles, in the front, shaking in fear, her left foot planted on the step to get onto the block.

I watched her as she mounted the block, still shaking. Sweat dripped down my face, it was scorching in the pool arena.

Ella stepped in line after me. “Are you ready for this?” I asked her.

“Of course I am,” she replied.

We did our secret handshake, and whispered together, “Let’s do this,” because that was the way it went. I looked to the left, then towards the stands, spotting my mom, my aunt, my little cousins and my brothers. I was third in line now.

Almost there, almost there and then it’s done, I thought. The two girls in front of me went; then finished. Time seemed to move faster than normal. I exhaled sharply, but Ella put a sweaty palm on my shoulder, “You can do this,” she said. My hands shook with fear and I wanted to run away from it all. But no matter how hard I squeezed my eyes shut, I stayed there, acting like a fool for everyone else to see.

A few short whistles signaled that I was supposed to get up on the block, so I did. I listened carefully for a whistle, a long one this time. It was sharp and loud, but the voices of anxious parents and excited swimmers made it difficult to hear. I wobbled on top of the block, then planted my feet, stiffly, just the way my coaches taught me. The official called into his mic, “Heat ten.” He paused, and the other man stuck a long arm out. “Take your marks...” He clicked a button, causing a hard sound signaling us to dive off. I pushed off the block, hoping all the reaction time practice would pay off.

The tips of my fingers hit the water first. Then my wrists. Then my arms, my head, my neck. And followed my whole body. All of my fear washed away. I was home.

As I reached the surface my face flew out of the water taking in a big breath. Each stroke was faster. My feet were kicking hard, but I felt like I wasn’t even trying. I reached the red line in the middle of the pool. I got to the second set of flags. As I flipped at the wall, I caught a glance at the scoreboard. 0:16.32, it read. Good, I thought. I pushed off the wall, with an extra dolphin kick, a small grin painted on my face.

My arms gracefully pulled through the water, rippling it to waves. For the first time, I peeked at the people in the lanes next to me. I wasn’t afraid of them; I just kicked harder.

All of a sudden, I saw the wall in ahead of me. I hit the touch pad hard. So hard my hand would’ve hurt if I wasn’t pumped with adrenaline.

So here I am, my lungs are hurting, and my legs seem to be vibrating. The cold pool water isn’t so chilly anymore. I squint at the scoreboard looking through the crowd of people in front of it. 32.49, it read.

I can’t believe I made it here.
Little Adventures, Mary Lynch, Mansfield Middle School

Looking back, I realize that those small hikes, those little walks along the trickling stream with my family, were important to me. I felt at home with the breeze and the birds, with the trees and the river, with my dog, Lefty trotting by my side, with my parents falling behind me as I raced down the trail.

Those little adventures called to me, begging me to get lost in their dense forestry, to race the river’s roaring current, to leap over rocks and fallen logs, with my dog still dashing beside me. Those adventures pleaded with me to go where the house faded from view and I didn’t feel the comfort of home anymore. (It felt good, sometimes, to get lost.)

One adventure called to me particularly loudly on a windy, cold day, a day where the snowflakes sprinkled the ground like stars. Leaves crunched beneath my feet and snow wound around the ground, almost as if someone way up high had shaken salt everywhere.

Lefty twined around trees and vaulted happily over fallen branches and clumps of leaves. He barked wildly, urging us to run with him.

I smiled and slipped my hand into my Dad’s hand, then my Mom’s, slipping, too, into memories. As I held my parents’ hands, I remembered the first time that they took me hiking.

Even then, my tiny, slightly grubby toddler hand clutched at my parents’, enveloped in their much bigger hands. We stomped through the snow, and my giggles echoed through the lively woods. My father swung me onto his back, and I clung to him, my legs swinging wildly.

Now, many years later, on the same trail that I had been on all those years ago, the vivid green ferns reached for my ankles, groping blindly, and snow-sprinkled logs wandered by my feet. The breeze soared by me.

My mother gave me a smile and squeezed my hand. I grinned.

“Are we almost there?”

“Almost.” My father looked back down at me.

Indeed, we were. We neared the frozen, glass-like stream. It was glistening with frost and a thin layer of snow. I quieted and slowed, as if a single step or a whisper, even, would shatter the silent moment. The whole forest seemed to stop moving only to watch the river, frozen in movement, with icicles dangling from every tiny waterfall. The sun danced and twirled like a ballerina on the frozen water’s edge, and tree branches bowed over the silent scene protectively.

I wanted to run on it, to glide on it. I wanted to surf on frozen waves and race the frozen current. But I knew it was too thin and would shatter like glass.

“Remember when I did that?” Mom laughed, her face lighting up in sweet memories. “My foot went right through.”

Dad chuckled behind us, resting his hand on my shoulder.

I wondered if we could keep going, to the ancient cars, old and broken down, where moss bloomed on the rusty windshield, or to the old graveyard, where names still weaved through age-old stone, or keep going, still, to where the trail ended, and there was nothing left but an endless forest of emerald leaves and an icy white blanket warming (in a way) the cold barren ground.

I looked up at my parents, hope lingering still in my eyes, which spoke for me; Could we keep going?

My dad looked at my mom and a smile tugged at his lips. “We have time.”

Happiness pulled a smile to my lips then, and I gave chase to my dog, Lefty, who was barking wildly at a squirrel that was chattering a storm in the trees.

We neared another trickling stream, and I joyfully leapt over it, stopping only a moment to wait for my parents before dashing away again.

Only minutes later, we reached the ancient graveyard and a cool breeze kissed our cheeks gently.

An old stone wall barely stood, so fragile it looked like a single tap would bring the whole thing crumbling down, stone after stone after stone. Inside the stone wall, gravestones loomed in the eerie fading light, sprinkled with fluffy snow.

I looked up at my parents, hope lingering still in my eyes, which spoke for me; Could we keep going?

My dad looked at my mom and a smile tugged at his lips. “We have time.”

Happiness pulled a smile to my lips then, and I gave chase to my dog, Lefty, who was barking wildly at a squirrel that was chattering a storm in the trees.

We neared another trickling stream, and I joyfully leapt over it, stopping only a moment to wait for my parents before dashing away again.

Only minutes later, we reached the ancient graveyard and a cool breeze kissed our cheeks gently.

An old stone wall barely stood, so fragile it looked like a single tap would bring the whole thing crumbling down, stone after stone after stone. Inside the stone wall, gravestones loomed in the eerie fading light, sprinkled with fluffy snow.

I stepped silently into the quiet grove, leaves crunching beneath my feet. Age-old names looked up at me from the gravestones. And dates, those too, blanketed stone. 1783. 1764. 1781.

“Look!” My dad called, standing over another one. “This one was probably a soldier in the Revolutionary War.” An American Flag lay at his feet, and I bowed and straightened it.

Over the trees, a sunset illuminated the forest, casting shadows that crawled eerily along the branches. It signaled an ending to the little adventure that had called us here.
Breath, Amber Wojenski, West Woods School

The warm feel of the grainy sand on my feet
The sun on me
The new beginning has begun. It’s smiling on my back.
The luminous tides are summoning me.
The towering house is casting an ominous shadow on the ground.
The morning sun has come.

The smoothness of solid stones on my heels
The pokes of gravel on my nose
The warmness of the earth on my feet
The North Carolina waves are requesting me.
I inhale the seaside air.
It leaves a tingle of salt on my tongue.
The shells snug in the sand jut out like a pin in a haystack.
The waves are vivid blue, and they are descending like a brick to the water.

The whites of the waves meet my toes,
Like a friendly embrace.
They are like two old friends that have met once more.
The water circles my toes then back off leaving seaweed on my foot.
With boogie board in hand, I take to the water like a fish to the sea.
This is where I am designed to be.
I drift with the waves, some big, some small.
I swim out to the horizon. I hear nothing but the reassuring melody of the waves.
Crash, crash, crash

A wave comes bigger than I ever imagine, it is coming towards me.
I turn on the ultramarine and amethyst colored boogie board.
Then the pressure on my back feels like 1,000 sledgehammers pounding on my back, taking my breath away.
I am now the ocean’s rag doll. It hurlds me forward and backward,
Turning me in any which way it can.
I feel my back touch the sharp shells of the sea, a burn like laying down on a bed of needles.
My hands, my feet are no longer mine, but belong to the sea.

My last movements are not mine.
My last thoughts gone empty.
A feeling of incapacity has rushed over me like an ocean to a grain of sand.
I have no power.

Then the familiar grainy feel is on my lips.
I lift my head with the only bit of power I have left.
I can breathe again.
Moments pass I am laying there on my back in the sand.
I look back at where I came from.
A lengthy way beyond from where I am.
Then I make the trackback.
I leave only footprints, take only memories, for that will make me lighter.
Dreamers, Rebecca Willett, Crystal Lake Elementary School

My name is Keyshia Margaret Mason.

I studied myself in the bathroom mirror. I couldn’t go out of the apartment until I assured myself I had everything. Black sweatshirt with a hood that covered my face? Check. Black sweatpants? Check. Black sneakers? Check. Everything matched everything, so in the dark I would blend in, unnoticed. I didn’t bother to tell Daddy where I was going. He was already passed out on the couch, a bottle of gin slipping from his hand. I quietly snuck across the room, careful not to make much noise as I silently opened the door and tiptoed out of the apartment building. The night air took me by surprise and sent a series of shivers down my spine. I strolled down the street, my hands in my pockets, enjoying the night air. The stars gave off a mesmerizing, twinkle-ish glow and for a minute I thought about heading back and grabbing my camera. That’s what I would have done about three years ago. It hurt to remind myself of that time. It hurt to remember. But the memory was taking over, and I couldn’t stop myself from drifting back to it.

Daddy was happier then when it was Mama, Daddy, and me. We had ourselves a fine home, with a good old mutt named Coretta. I winced at the memory of a slightly younger me with cute puffy pigtails, snapping pictures of everything and playing chase with my Daddy. I would giggled in a pretty sundress, have tea parties with my friends, living a life many young black girls only dreamed of in Orlando, Florida, 1966. Now it all feels like a dream.

I bit my lip, and the taste of blood sent me sprawling back to reality. I squeezed my wrist, hoping to forget, anything to be rid of the memory I had just visited. I gazed up at the stars and wondered if my life would ever be the same. My Mama’s voice ran through my ears. Go catch those stars Keyshia don’t ever let your dreams disappear. And I laughed at those words. Silly Mama, didn’t know about the real world ‘till it was staring at her down the barrel of a gun. My Mama believed in humanity, mercy, and love. When she was pushed down, she would get back up again. Again and again, until the night she didn’t, and everything I had gone crumbling down.

That’s when I trashed the pigtails, the tea set, the bright sundresses, my hundreds of photographs... everything that reminded me of the times of love and light. But I kept my camera. Inside was one last roll of film. Quiet, dark, still – I left it undisturbed, frozen in time. Memories held hostage on a black roll of plastic. That’s when I became a living shadow, shadowing the old me, peeling away the layers that made me the girl I was, into the girl I am now.

My name is Keyshia Margaret Mason. I was born on Jun 15, 1953. I am scared of light. I’m scared of people. I’m scared of guns.

Bailey the Brave, William MacKnight, East Shore Middle School

Imagine driving out to the woods to a place you have never been before only to be kicked out of a car by the person you love. Now you’re alone, scared, and helpless. What do you do? Do you just give up, or do you fight with everything you have to stay alive? I’m going to tell you the story of my dog Bailey, and her choice to fight to survive.

Bailey was born about three years ago at a puppy mill in Alabama. She was born in a kennel and would be kept in a kennel for the rest of her time there. She was not allowed to play or run or be out of her cage until she was old enough to start having her own puppies. Although she was still a baby herself, she was forced to have her own litter, and even then, she was kept in a kennel just with a little more room to nurse her puppies. She was pregnant with her third litter when her owners discovered the puppies she was carrying were not pure bred but instead a mix of two different Coonhound breeds. Then, the unimaginable happened. She was driven out to the woods and just left there. They just pushed her out of the car and drove off, leaving her scared, alone, and abandoned.

Bailey had a choice to make: she was either going to give up, or fight to survive. She chose to survive, she searched for shelter and made herself a little home by digging out the dirt in a hill, she then started to nest and try to make herself and her puppies a safe shelter. She then had her puppies, although she did everything she could only two of the puppies survived. I can’t imagine what she must have been thinking, she must have been so scared. Even though she only had two puppies that were alive she kept the rest of them clean and would try as hard as she could to get them to nurse, all while trying to protect them from the other wildlife in the woods. Eventually one of the other animals succeeded in taking one of her puppies, but as fate would have it, that’s the thing that saved her life. Someone from town saw the animal holding the lifeless puppy and ran into the woods to start searching for the mama dog and if there were any more puppies. Bailey was found with her surviving puppies and brought to the town vet where they attempted to treat her many medical conditions. The vet realized they didn’t have the means or
money to save her and started asking around, trying to find someone to take her and her puppies. Finally, a staff member came in and told the vet about her cousin who worked at a nice shelter in New York. They made some calls and Bailey and her two puppies were off to New York.

When they arrived in New York her puppies were given the names Luke and Reddie, and they were easily adopted out to other families. Bailey had done such a great job taking care of them they hardly needed any medical procedures. But Bailey on the other hand grew sicker and sicker by the day. She had a severe case of heartworm, malnourishment, and a bad infection. The staff at the shelter noticed that without her puppies Bailey was growing tired of fighting, they said it looked like she was just giving up. Without her puppies she had lost the reason to fight. So, because of this the shelter put her up for end of life foster instead of regular adoption, this meant that they would try to find her a home to spend whatever time she had left being as comfy and as loved as possible. While all this was happening to Bailey, our family was deciding it was finally time for us to get a dog, I was so excited. My mom was looking online and she saw this really cute French bulldog named Yoda. We jumped right in the car and drove to New York to meet him. It was listed in the ad that he needs to be around people all the time. My mom thought that would be the perfect fit for us since she works from home. We got to the shelter and asked to see Yoda, when we met him he started barking and jumping and just freaking out, the woman who worked there told us oh he must not have had his medication yet that’s why he was acting that way. My mom decided that dog would not work for our family because she didn’t want to take a chance with us kids in the house if he started to freak out. The woman then walked us around to show us a few more family friendly dogs. As we were walking we all stopped at Bailey’s cage to see this beautiful dog staring up at us with the prettiest brown eyes. My mom asked the woman her story, and by the time the woman was doing talking, my mom and sister were in tears and I had this pain in my stomach that no dog should ever have to go through that. We talked it over as a family and decided we would foster her for whatever time she had left because we knew she needed care during treatments and love her as much as we could and love her we did! When she came home she didn’t know how to play or walk on a leash. Simple dog things she never learned by being in a kennel her whole life, or she would hide and bury herself with leaves outside because that’s what she was used to from her time in the woods. We thought it was our imagination, but it looked like she was feeling better. She started eating, playing, even running. We brought her back to the vet for another heartworm treatment and picked her up the next day, when they walked Bailey out to us she ran as fast as she could and jumping towards us and licking our faces and wagging her tail. Then we heard the best news ever: they did an ultrasound and bloodwork and the tests showed she was getting better. We could not believe it, we brought her back for three more treatments and she made a full recovery. The shelter asked us if we wanted to adopt her and without hesitation, my mom, sister, and I all yelled YESS!! She’s the most amazing dog ever and I’m proud to be her owner. She learns little things new every day and her cuddles are completely worth it.

In conclusion, even though Bailey didn’t have the best beginning, it didn’t mean that that’s where her story had to end. Bailey fought to survive for her puppies facing impossible odds but kept pushing through for the love she had for her babies. But then as Bailey was sick, just as she was about to give up, she met our family who loved her unconditionally which then gave her the will to fight gain. She fought for her own life finally, all because of her family. My dog Bailey is so brave and has faced so many things in her three years of life, I’m just happy to be able to make however many years she has left the absolute best possible.

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**Circumference/Diameter=Pi,**

**Paul Westerberg, Vernon Center Middle School**

Math is everywhere.

Fibonacci, Pi, Ratios, they all make up the world.

Pinecones, for example – their spirals are 8 and 5, 21 and 13, 34 and 21. They follow the Fibonacci pattern: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, etc.

Right above it is a tree – the circles’ circumference.

Well, if Pi goes on forever, then circles keep getting bigger and bigger.

But all the digits are already there, so there are no new ones continuing on.

Describing infinity is a very impossible task, seeing as there is no such thing as everlasting.

Not in pine cones, not in trees, not in toys.

Not even in numbers.
Seventh Grade

The Moonlight, Joanna Raczkowski, Smith Middle School
He Waved,
Stella Mahlke, Schaghticoke Middle School

In the clunky,
red boots atop a twirl of black cement,
waiting
for some bus.
Beside a splash of churning grass,
reaching above
the edge of his hill with a shedding tree,
a blue mailbox
and a tall brother.
He waits.
Wind combing thick clouds
ripples above the street, gyrating dirt beside red boots.
“Hear that?” His older brother asks. “It’s the school bus!”
And so the big red boots spring to
meet this bus.
A stray cat screech
vibrates about the street.
A mammoth orange block
halts to a stop.
It’s the school bus.
Raising a hand,
waving,
he scouts an empty seat.

He looks out the window and waves to the shadow of a boy
drowning in a dusk sweatshirt.
Stout home and a frail porch,
twine swing spilling from a tree,
beside a limp jump rope,
and rubber toy lonely under clotted leaves.
Waves to a mother who peers
through a small, yellow window
on the second floor and a father
who is gone to the factory.
Waves to the drawing
of his astronaut guarding
the refrigerator
that sometimes reeks of wet socks.
Waves to the neighborhood with Tom and Georgie,
their rusty laughs, lost teeth. And the
wobbly wood plank he
can bounce on, tumbling into the murky puddle
that they dug on a thick, rainy day
where they retrieved frogs and splash.
Waves to the broken, haunted house they
crept up to on Halloween, knocked on the door
and scurried away
in a billowing cape, dropping the Snickers bar
gone by the next morning.
Waves to a bird’s nest
too high in the tree.
George, his older brother, lifted him to
see the petite blue eggs
he wanted to bring to his mother to place in her jewelry box, but they shattered in his hand.

Waves to the sign that says, Latimer Rd., now eclipsed by an ivy embrace.

Action figure he dropped on the walk home from Dairy Queen, the Super Man they never found, never saved.

Waves to their spot, where they clustered together on an orange morning and watched the red sun slither up the mountain. Tree — split by lightning from the storm that made them sleep in the basement floor in little grey bags, cocoons.

Waves to the road he and Todd and George scrambled down on a lazy hot day, exploring the grassy lumps they ran up and down.

The market with glistening tomatoes and pockets of flowers that we press on our nose, the post office with brilliant stamps and the itchy barbershop with a spinning sign on top of the pink bakery where lacy croissants, like little handfuls of snow rested in fogged glad displays, the ones they got after church on Sundays. Gnarly bench he rested on with Grandmama and saw the ducks peck at warm bread. The lake they spent the short Saturday at, in a red swimsuit, eating chewy, white sandwiches atop compact grey sand, splashing clear water at pink Father. Forest they passed in the blue car when they went to the record store with a dusty gum ball machine.

Waves to the new road they turn onto. Narrow and traced by tall grass and sighs with handprints. They glide to the tall red building of stacked bricks.

“School!” They say.

So he waves, waves at the school, where he spent his time with numbers, adding and subtracting. Where he learned the letters that are swallowed by words. Where he practiced arithmetic and language arts. Where he studied and took tests. Where he learned and forgot. Where he got a new report card with clinical cumbres and rigid print, taking the space of the old drawing of the exploring astronaut.

He put his hand down and followed the students inside where the lights blinded him, the walls swallowed him red boots and all.
The sun beat down hard on my back as I ran. The wind caused my shirt to flow behind me. The sand squished in between my toes as I hoisted them up and down.

*Up..... Down*

*Up..... Down*

*Left...... Right*

*Left...... Right.*

The waves were splashing in contrast to my running feet, sending tickling droplets on my legs. The breeze felt good flowing through my hair, as if trying to blow away my worries. The sun kept me warm in a balance to the cool ocean waves. My legs burned in protest, but I didn’t stop. I continued on with the tide flowing in harmony with my breathing.

“Don’t you just love these little guys?” The Man had asked looking at the hermit crabs crawling around in the sand.

I had stopped walking long enough to look at the little shells moving around. “Oooooh!” I squealed, being only five at the time. We each picked one up and named them for a day, building castles and forts for them.

I shook my head trying to clear those memories. They would do nothing but make my head feel swollen, with my heart aching. Instead of thinking of these bittersweet memories, I focused on my breathing keeping pace with the ocean tide once more…
The sun was starting to set as I slowed down a little. My breathing had become ragged and uneven after minutes or hours of jogging, trying to leave everything behind. I hadn’t stopped before for fear it would all come back to me...

Through the crack in my door, harsh, quiet voices had traveled like a stream into my unwilling ears. The Woman raised her voice at the Man, as he paced angrily away, casting a frustrated shadow across the opening in my room. I hugged the covers more tightly pulling them up and over my head, hoping I could block it all out and it could all go back to the way it was before she brought that other man into the house. Before the angry voices filled the halls late at night. Suddenly, I coughed before I could even think of stopping it, giving my spot away. The voices quieted down and the floor creaked as something came over to the entrance of my room. Then it sighed.

That was 5 years ago, I was just eight. Now I’m thirteen going on fourteen.

The sky became darker and more vibrant as the sun was lowered into the water. The wind started to bite, different from the welcoming breeze it was once was. The ocean now became rougher as if infuriated that I hadn’t left yet. I crouched down and sat in the sand ignoring the tide soaking the sand beneath me; including my shorts. I breathed in the fresh salty mist of the sea. As I sat, I watched the birds fly into the waves looking for a final bite to eat, then returning home to their families. Tears sprung into my eyes as I watched, and I knew I was about to exactly do, what I didn’t want to do; remember...

In just that moment, I couldn’t take it anymore. I tore down the hallway, wrenched open the door and went to the only place that gave me comfort since these hushed voices arrived in reality and my troubling dreams — the beach.

And that’s how I started to run, run away from all the problems I just couldn’t handle anymore. The dam had broken and all of it came rushing out drowning me.

I winced at the sharp pain the memory gave me. My perfect family was a lie. A lie now discovered. One more thing I had to face. Suddenly I knew what I needed to do. I didn’t want to.

I pushed myself off the ground, brushed myself off of all the sand and my emotions and started walking. The sun now behind me, warming my back, as a job well done. The ocean and breeze had settled down. The ocean kissing my feet as I walked, the breeze hugging me.

When the door opened, I found a tear-stricken face staring back at me. The woman smiled and hesitantly hugged me as if I was there one moment and gone the other. Like a painful reminder of earlier. I knew trying to escape from my troubles was not the answer, I just had taken a while to realize this. Now I was going to help, not make it any harder…I was going to fix this…Starting by forgiving...

*Diamonds on Leaves, Hebah Habib, Martin Kellogg Middle School*
The day after I found out my grandma had had a stroke, my parents dropped me off at my grandma’s house. The day I saw her at the hospital was August 17, 2018. That was one of the worst days of my life. Then my grandpa drove me to the hospital. My grandma told me I shouldn’t go to the hospital because she didn’t want me to see her like that. I personally didn’t want me to see her like that either but I wanted to say goodbye just in case that’s what it came to. When I got to the hospital I cried the whole way up the elevator. I stopped crying immediately after I got up to the third floor because I didn’t know if my grandma could hear me since she was in a coma. The doctors said they couldn’t tell if it was a stroke or an aneurysm since there was so much blood. I felt like I was watching a sad movie but instead it felt like I was the one in the movie. I got to see so much family I hadn’t seen in so long even though it wasn’t under good circumstances. Although I tried my best not to cry while I was in the room about less than five minutes later I was balling my eyes out. With it being rainy out it didn’t help but make my mood go down. We were there for about three hours before we decided it was time to go because it was getting dark.

The next day we went early in the morning. We drove down to the hospital and it was basically the same as yesterday, crying and seeing more family I haven’t seen in a really long time. There were a million thoughts going on in my head that day like, “Will she be ok,” and “When is she coming home?” I was a mess that day, crying more than yesterday. I cried in waves at the hospital.

That day I couldn’t help but think of all the memories we had together and hopefully have more to come. The day was basically the same as yesterday except today we had to step out of the room so the doctors could do a test to see if she could breathe on her own, the results were negative which made me cry more. Later that day I heard the monitor start to beep because her blood pressure was dropping, a team of doctors started coming in. We were all told we needed to step out of the room. They were close to calling a code but they were able to give her medicine to get her blood pressure back up to normal. I was crying way more than I had been earlier because that had frightened me. I was waiting for someone to say to me “Everything’s gonna be alright,” but no one did. My grandma said that it might have been her telling us she’s safe now. But I was convinced that she was wrong and this wasn’t her time. We went home to get sleep knowing we would be at the hospital early in the morning.

The next day I stood there crying holding her hand because all the chairs were taken. I remember asking my grandma, “Are you gonna make it through the day?” and her reply was, “I don’t know.” I stood most of the day crying except for about an hour when a bunch of doctors came in to test her to see if there was any brain function. Later that day when we got the results and we were all holding hands hoping for the answer we wanted. And of course, it wasn’t the answer we wanted, she didn’t have brain function, which meant she was brain dead, and her organs were shutting down. The rest of the day I held her hand thinking about the good times we had together. The doctors came in asking if we wanted them to take the ventilator out now and immediately I replied, “No, I need to say goodbye first.” Shortly after I said my goodbyes to her I held her hand while they were disconnecting tubes and taking the ventilator out. I stood there the whole time when they took the ventilator out, until it was the end. Everyone made a circle around the hospital bed holding hands. I was the start of the circle. About two minutes later the nurse had finally came in and turned the monitor off. For the rest of the day, I just cried wondering when the day would end. At the beginning of the day I had a great-grandma and at the end of the day I didn’t.
With trembling hands, he shook us awake and ripped our sheets off. A stream of blushing light splashed from the window onto the puckered mattress. We slowly blinked as our father looked down at us and muttered, “We’re going to church. Get yourselves up.”

“Church?” I mumbled, as I lifted my head in John’s direction. We hadn’t been to church in years. Not since Mama passed.

“Church. Let’s go.” And he staggered out of the room grasping his dusty cap.

My younger brother John and I rose up with swirling heads and fuzzy bones. Simultaneously, we stretched and inspected our room — what would we wear?

I tugged out a shrunken shirt from the bottom drawer of the dresser. But as I began to shut the drawer, something caught my eye. I peeked back inside to see the old photo of Mama smiling at the pudgy little baby that was me. My heart reeled. I kicked the drawer closed, hot blood rushing to my head. What would she think about us going back to church? I grimaced and turned to face John.

“Think this’ll work?” I asked, holding the shirt up, and he shrugged.

Browned eggs for breakfast, atop pale bread. A mug of starchy milk from the mean cow outside. Then Father beckoned us into the bathroom, one at a time, rusty scissors and a slim comb. I squatted in the barrel sink like a piglet while he dumped water on my head. He breathed shakily as he chopped at my hair. I watched the old sun-bleached hair slide down the drain.

As we left, we locked the door, though we sure didn’t need to. Through the fence, with heavy hearts, above tangled roots, past the creek, we made our way. Below a purple sky, painted with thick, flat clouds, I smelled the sweetness of dead crabapples and dry flakes of dirt. The dirt that slowly drifted through the air settled,
once again, on our faces. Farmers watched us pass, scowling in confusion. Children froze in their play, pausing to spy and whisper. We did not speak of the people or of why we were returning to the church house. We just headed up the road, one shoe in front of another, eyes fixed on the horizon, between the sky and the earth.

Inside the small church house we took seats by the door. We hid our faces. Tucked them down between our shoulders into the wool coats that itched. Rather than meeting the judging eyes of our neighbors, I watched feet pass. Shiny heels, like little bugs, dusty heels, like flowered bread. I noticed Father’s work boots, slashed with mud, laces undone. John’s shoes, so big they flopped like wet laundry as he shook them up and down. And mine, too small, clumped like anxious horse feet against the hardwood floor. Loafers passed, some flat, some all shined up with dainty laces and a pointed tip, like a determined slash of ink on vacant paper. Some shoes made a loud crack when they plummeted onto the floor, and some were soft, like rain after four or five days, sloshing in miles of mud.

Looking down at these shells that all of our feet lived in, I began to think that these shoes said something about the people who wore them. Inside, our feet all pretty much looked the same. But these shoes that covered those feet up, well, I began to consider what our shoes said about us to the other feet of those who shared the dusty, footprinted floor. I sighed and pushed my head deep into the dark jacket, so I could hear just a blur of the words passing from the minister’s mouth. In the middle of the service, little children raced by to use the restroom. Their mother, holding tightly to their hands, peered back at us, at father, for perhaps a beat too long

A few short men with clear glasses and pleated outfits passed with wicker baskets. Father moaned, then reached into his pocket as they neared. I watched the man’s knuckles whiten and webbed fingers grow rigid as he held the basket near us. His face hinted a grimace as my father’s scar-stained hand neared to drop a coin in. The man nodded, peeking inside and shaking his head as he went to the next row of stiff benches. I looked up at my father, but his face was deeply hidden in the jacket. Intuitively, I pressed into his muscled shoulder as glassy bright shoes passed, clinking on the floor like dainty wine glasses.

When the service was over, we were quick to stand, ready to go work the farm in a listless silence. Whether we spoke of this day again, I knew for sure that I would clean all our shoes.

Just then a stout woman stopped us with a warm, neighborly smile and planted her soft hand on me and father’s shoulders. We froze.

“I’m just so glad you decided to come. It was really great to see you again. It was a real pleasure. Please, join us again next week.”

We nodded and untucked our heads. Under the embracing sky, we strolled home to a pleasant lunch, together. And as I watched father sweep the porch, I saw his stiff face break into a grin. A loose whistle drifted out of his teeth and his heavy boot pulsed on the floor, knocking up the dust around him.

Later in the evening, I retreated back into my bedroom where I opened the bottom drawer. I looked at Mama inside the photo, her sprawling smile, shoulders thrown back broadly. I glanced down at her shoes, tattered and used, but she didn’t seem to care. And neither did we. That’s when I decided that we should go back again next week. I heard John and Father in the living room laughing and playing Checkers, and I remembered Father whistling with his broom. Mama wouldn’t want us to hold ourselves hostage in this house and bury our faces into our coats, disappearing from the rest of the world. As John hollers out his victory, I realized we had a good day today. And if these shoes we wear do tell a story of who we are, then maybe I won’t clean them after all. They’re perfect the way they are.

_Her Changing Story,_
_Sarah Fortin, Amity Middle School_

As an avid writer, Riana wrote many stories, each relating to her continuous fight for love. In them, the protagonist always won, therefore giving her self-confidence that she too could gain this prize she ever so wanted. In her dreams the characters in the stories helped her achieve her goal, yet right before she could achieve it, right before she could reach what glistened like sunshine on a water droplet, she woke up. Even so, Riana continued to write.

Riana’s parents were not her real parents. She was adopted, abandoned on the city streets of New York. Her non-biological parents had another daughter, about four years older than Riana. Her name was Julie and they loved her. And when Riana tried to please them, they either ignored her or told her to be quiet. Riana dreaded the waking hour of the morning, when she would be pulled from her dream.

Stepping out of bed, Riana wished on the morning Sun for the thousandth time for her parents to love her as they loved their true daughter, Julie. As she left the window reluctantly to get ready for another day, she heard a voice.
“Oh sure, wish all you might, Riana!” the window loudmouthed. “I don’t mind. Not at all.” Riana shook her head; she was hearing things. But when the window spoke again, she knew it was real. “You should really have some kind of courtesy toward your elders. Believe me I know.” It’s voice seemed to be coming from the window sill.

“Well, uh, I suppose I’m sorry, Miss-?”

“Wreggina, Wren, no Miss please,” the window said. Riana’s brow furrowed. In her story the girl’s name was Wreggina, and she imagined that she would sound just like that. Realization hit her.

“I wrote a story about you!” she began excitedly.

“Well, duh, how didn’t you know that?” Wren asked. “And I’m down here, not up there.” Wren began waving her hands. “On the window sill!” she called. Riana looked down. Right there in front of her was her notebook, turned to the page where she wrote Wreggina’s short story. Riana gasped and jumped back. For standing on top of the notebook was a small girl.

“You’re…real? Did you come out of that book? Who are you?” Riana babbled. The girl on the notebook looked up and put her hands on her hips, rolling her eyes.

“Are you honestly asking those questions? Can’t you see I’m alive?” she asked, looking down at herself. “And yes I came out of the book, where do you think I came from?” Riana backed away from the sill, terrified of the small girl that she could squish like a bug if she wanted to. “What year are we in?” Wren asked.

“2017,” answered Riana.

“Oh, no, I’m not supposed to be here yet. It must not be my time,” she said sadly, and turned away. She took a glass bottle out of her pocket, staring at it.

Riana cleared her throat loudly. Wren looked up. She had forgotten Riana was there, as she was intently pondering whether to drink the contents of the bottle or not.

“Well, I guess this is goodbye, Riana.” Riana shook her head. This made no sense! Wren couldn’t leave. Riana’s smart mind went to work. If she could figure out one good reason for Wren to stay…

Wren uncorked the bottle. A puff of smoke eased itself out, finally free. It lingered, seeming to dare Wren to drink it. Wren blew the smoke away from the bottle’s rim. She put it up to her lips and drank. When Wren opened her eyes, she expected to see herself in the world of her book again. She did not expect to see Riana too.

“Oh, Riana! You must have gotten sucked into my world!” Wren said. Suddenly there was a noise. Wren whipped her head in the direction of the door, with a look of alarm and fear on her face. “Morgan,” she whispered. She hastily turned back to Riana, who was surprised herself. Tossing her a bottle, Wren said, “Quick, drink it!”

Without question, Riana drank the contents inside. Wren took out another bottle for herself and drank. As soon as she finished the bottle, Wren hopped down from the window sill, her heart racing. Right before Wren hit the ground, she became human size. Riana had turned to the size Wren used to be.

Wren placed Riana on the window sill, telling her that Morgan, her sister, was coming. Riana remembered that Morgan was written to be the story’s counterpart of Julie. Morgan burst through the door.

Riana watched Wren hand over some pieces of paper to Morgan. She snatched them out of her hands clomped out of the room, slamming the door behind her. Wren spun around in her chair to face Riana. “Something just came to me, and it’s awful,” she said, scared. “When the story ends, it starts over with its characters. But any extra people or animals don’t come back to restart the story. They die. Which means we have to get you out of here before the story ends!”

“Well can’t you just send me back?” Riana was starting to panic.

“I can’t send you back. It doesn’t work like that. You need someone older and more experienced than I am. Someone like my sister,” Wren stated. Riana’s head snapped up with an idea.

“Then we’ll get Morgan to help us and send me back! We’ve got about a quarter of the story to do so,” Riana said, smiling. But Wren was already shaking her head.

“She would never help us,” she responded. “She hates me.” Riana was not discouraged.

“But she doesn’t know me. I can persuade her,” Riana said excitedly. “Turn me large again and I’ll get Morgan.” Wren handed her a bottle out of her pocket, and Riana drank it. Riana walked out of the room, navigating the house as if it were her own.

She casually strolled up to Morgan, looking her straight in the eye. Morgan was not happy about this. Riana grabbed her notebook and pencil out of her pocket, which she keeps in case of emergencies. Riana stated, “I’m going to write a story about you.”

“Fine,” Morgan responded. Riana smiled. She knew Morgan would love to be the center of attention.

“What if I told you I can write a story working off of five words that you chose before you chose them?” she asked.
“I’d say you can’t. But I’d definitely challenge you to,” Morgan answered. Riana nodded and began. After ten minutes, she had a short story.

“Now say five words.”

“Ok. Rabbit, trumpet, crate, apple, basket.” Morgan smirked. But when Riana showed her the story, her smirk turned to a look of horror. Riana’s story had every single word in it. “Are you some kind of sorcerer?” she asked.

“No quite. I created you. I know more about you than even you do. That’s how I knew what words you picked. Now I need you to help me. I need you to send me back to my world, or I will die and you will never have any more days of living your story. It’s up to you,” Riana stated matter-of-factly. That wasn’t entirely true. If she died, Morgan would survive. But still, she needed to get out of here, and fast. She could tell they were almost at the end of the story.

“I suppose I could. I won’t be losing anything, and besides, you just changed my point of view of things. It might actually be for the best,” Morgan declared. Riana was surprised but did not show it, wasting no time in getting Morgan to Wren’s room.

They ran into her room with very little time remaining. Riana hugged Wren quickly.

“Bye, Wren,” she whispered. She looked back at Morgan. Morgan quickly looked at her sister and said, “I’m sorry.” Without waiting for a reply, she handed Riana a piece of chocolate and waved. Riana took the hint and ate the chocolate. Riana was whisked away and no sooner was she back in her dorm. She looked at the notebook on the window sill and smiled. The words had been changed, rewriting the story altogether. This time Morgan was Wren’s ally, not her enemy. At the end, it said, ‘We’ll miss you Riana — M & W’

“I’ll miss you too, guys,” she whispered. Riana heard the bell for the first class but didn’t care. Now that she fixed their problem, she knew she could fix hers. Life was starting to look a bit brighter for Riana as she grabbed her backpack and left her dorm.

A Thin String,
Hebah Habib, Martin Kellogg Middle School

It was the last day of fourth grade and I was visiting my kindergarten classroom for the last time. I would be going to middle school next year, a whole new giant puzzle to decipher. It seemed like just yesterday my small five-year-old self was tentatively walking down the hallway for the first day of kindergarten. As I walked down that same hallway once again, I remembered how it used to feel, to be free and happy. It seemed like right now I was feeling the exact opposite. I was worried about how to let go, a thin string seemed to have been attached to me, it was tugging me from one school to the next. I knew that coming back here would only make the transition to middle school worse. As I reached the end of the hallway, I hesitated in front of the door before placing a shaky hand on the knob and turning it.

Click

I felt as if I had got younger by so many years. Each memory from the past seemed to flit and twirl in front of my eyes. I could see myself at a table with my friends, our thin and tiny fingers attempting to grasp a pencil and write our names in uneven scratchy cursive letters, practicing because we believed that we were princesses in training. I could see myself on our bright rainbow carpet, whispering to my friend about that cute boy in room 205 who I thought would be my prince, while the teacher sings a song about the happy days of sunshine and flowers. I gaze out the window and see myself on the swings remembering how I felt like I could swing so high that I could jump off and grow enormous pink wings, flying so high and fast above theuffy white clouds that I looked like a pink angel, dashing through the soft fields of pale spun sugar. And the sounds, the sounds of chatter and songs, of ideas and friendship, remind me of the excited and happy little girl I used to be. I could see myself five years younger, in the corner, whispering to my friends about how it would be when we went to middle school, how we would be famous and wear makeup and how we would throw parties every day after school and become princesses overnight.

The thin string had broken, pulling me back to my now old elementary school.

I would have to leave and try to forget. I would have to leave and try to forget the days of friendship and tutus and dreams that were never broken left floating above our heads that were full of love, kindness, and innocence. I would have to forget it all in order to leave this place I had used to call home. As I thought about it, I felt myself getting older once again, and I realized, that that whole time I had lived my life looking forwards, never staying in the moment only dreaming of the future to come. And I knew that from that day onwards, I would at least have to try to stay in the moment, making the best use of all of my time because it seemed that now it was slipping in between my fingers and into the vast sky above.
**Scars of Hope,**  
*Yaeyoung Min, Schaghticoke Middle School*

I tried to focus on the hectic streets of Pusan, South Korea. However, my mind kept on tripping on the numerous scenarios that could arise within the next ten minutes. My mom and I were heading towards an enormous building that explicitly said Pusan National University Hospital. I looked up to the lofty blue sky and could see an airplane flying across the firmament leaving a puffy streak. My hands were shaking like they were under control of an earthquake. I knew the likelihood that this experience could turn out ghastly was adequate. My heart was beating fast like a drum as I noticed fragile patients all around the perimeter of the tedious hospital. It’s harsh when children have to receive surgery. In fact, children end up having their most dreadful nightmares there. I’ve realized it’s like your fear blows away the flame of your candle. I knew I would never be normal because that was just who I am.

You may be pondering, “Why does she have to have surgery?” The honest truth is the fact that its intricate like knotted yarn. When others asked me, “Why are you so different?” I felt so frightened to embrace who I was, so in the end, I always constrained myself with a silent “I don’t know.” However, it’s okay to accept who you are. Sure, it might be difficult, but that’s just one of the million obstacles you undergo for being different. I have a genetic disorder called hereditary multiple osteochondromas. It’s a disorder where you have multiple bumps around your body. These bumps cause physical pain and stifles my daily activities. Every day, there is a person with HMO (the abbreviated version of hereditary multiple osteochondromas) who is underestimated of their full potential. Society states: If you are different then you also get treated differently than others. Unfortunately, this was my destined fate. I was never included when I was in elementary school and was always left out. Being censored and abhorred initially lowered my self-esteem continuously. I tried to push the shadows out of my head but they shrouded in the back of my mind.

“Hey, do you want something to drink?” Mom asked in concern. Turns out she can read minds because I was at the point of crying. We stood in front of a vending machine, looking at a variety of drinks, from sweet to refreshing.

“Uh yeah, I’ll take orange juice,” I replied in a hoarse voice. My mom took out her purse and dumped out three grubby coins. Plopping the coins one by one, the machine made a crescendoing sound and at the last coin, a chilled can of orange juice popped out of the machine.

Gee, why is Pusan so scorching hot?

The moment I stepped into the hospital, I felt revitalized like a charged battery. I could feel the cool, gusty wind of the appealing air conditioner on my face. The instant I stepped into my reality was the instant I saw humanity. Everyone was different and I could see that no one was perfect, and in that way I felt more accepted in this community than in my school. There were short and tall patients; young and old; sick and getting better. On some of the faces I could see concern and abjection and I could see the look of hope on others. The title in front of me was humongous; it read Pusan Orthopedic Center.

**Candle,**  
*Sueyeon Choi, Worthington Hooker Middle School*

As the last bell of school rang, the kids walked out from the classes. The hallway was crowded with shoutings and backpacks. People ran toward the front gate or the parking lot. I watched the yard through the window in the hallway. There was silence breezing through the empty space.

I stood up and went up the stairs. Only my footsteps echoed on the staircase. As I stepped into the uninhabited third-floor hallway of the building, I put my hand in my pocket and reached for a familiar key. When I faced the room, I unlocked the door and went in. The room had no window and a flickering LED lamp was the only light in the dark room.

The violin case was standing by the music stand. I put the violin on my shoulder and the music sheet on the stand.

A bumping sound disrupted the mellifluous melody of Tchaikovsky. My fingers stopped, and the hallway light poured into the room. There was a girl standing on the doorway.

My eyes met a pair of gray eyes. It was my first time seeing gray eyes. They were more beautiful than I thought. She had light brown hair which looked golden under the light. I couldn’t take my eyes off hers. But she didn’t seem uncomfortable. She was looking at mine, too. My blue eyes with black hair always attracted people to me, and I usually hated it. But this time, it was different. I almost liked the way she looked at me.

“Hi,” her voice was clear and vibrant.

“Hello,” I murmured.
“I’m Darlene, I’m new here,” she said as she held her hand in the air. Her fingers were lean and straight.

“Welcome,” I said shaking her hands. “I’m Chan Niccolo.”

“Oh, like Niccolo Paganini?” She asked, then I nodded.

“I like to play his piano caprice. Such passionate melodies.”

One day during lunch, she came across the cafeteria to my table. She stood in front of me and declared, “Let’s join a music competition.” My body froze as I heard it. My brain played the memory from my childhood. I remembered the scene where I was falling with my mother’s arms tightly wrapped around my body. Although it had been ten years since then, I could still hear the thudding sound under me and the shout of father as he ran toward us. My view only held the gray sky with wet clouds. The grasp of Mother’s arms became weaker. Her fingers, that used to play the violin, lost their nerves. A month later when father and I met her in the hospital, I realized that she would not be able to be the violinist I knew before. It’s my fault, I thought. The guilt grew larger and larger, I wanted to ignore it by ignoring the music. But I couldn’t. The desire didn’t seem to have an end like a desert.

“Darlene, I’m sorry, but I can’t,” I replied, trying to act calm. I had thought about playing in front of people before, but whenever the thought came up, I pushed it down. The fact that I was lying to mother about the violin was haunting me.

She nodded and said, “Everyone gets nervous in competitions. It’s okay.”

I wanted to ask her so many things, but I couldn’t. The noise of kids in the cafeteria faded away, and her words were replayed inside my head. I imagined the scene, us playing together.

“If you don’t say anything, will it be a yes?” She asked, and I didn’t say anything. She smiled and sat next to me.

One night my mother came into my room and turned on the light. I turned from the desk to her direction. As she sat on my bed quietly, I saw a letter into her bag. It was from the competition’s staff. The staff might have sent a letter to get a guardian’s approval. I felt overwhelmed. Thoughts and other lies came up to my mind. She found out. What should I do? What would I tell her? Should I make up another lie? Why did I even start playing the violin? Did I choose the violin instead of my mother? Do I even feel sorry about the accident? It can’t be happening. Though a part of me always knew that she would find it out one day, and I was trying to calm down, I couldn’t do anything but panic. Her voice was blurred.

“Chan, it’s alright,” she said with her soft voice. I felt her hand in mine. “Now I understand why you wanted to be alone. I am so sorry, Chan. I should have realized it a long time ago.”

“No, I am the one who should be sorry. I’m the one who hurt you. It was my fault.” My voice was trembling.

“It was not your fault,” she said.

I lifted my head up so I could see her eyes. It had been years since I looked into them. They were soft, warm brown. Her eyes were so deep and seemed that they could embrace everything in the world. After a pause, she said, “The music is for you, Chan. Admiring and attempting it is not selfishness.” As soon as she said it, I felt my head blank. I suddenly realized that she always had been the one who lighted me up. When I used to listen to her playing, I wondered how her bow was flying so lightly, how her fingers were dancing on the strings, and how she was so free playing the violin. But now I understood why. The music was the freedom.

A month later, on a night in October, Darlene and I took a walk. It was after our duet practice, so I was carrying my violin case. She was wearing a white sweater, and her brown hair was highlighted with the pure white color. Her eyes gleamed like the night sky of autumn—clear and starry. As we turned around a corner, we found a piano painted in blue in an entrance of a park. A note echoed when she pressed a key.

“Did you know why I was playing the piano?” She quietly asked, but I said nothing. Then she kept talking. “My brother—he was sick. I wanted to help him, then I found out that he liked music. So I started to play the piano. But actually, I wasn’t really good at being cheerful and bright. It was hard for me to feel and enjoy the music. But when I saw you—when I listened to your playing, everything started to change.” Her voice became bigger. She lifted her head and looked into my eyes. “It was like you lighted my whole world up.”

As I heard it, I looked at her for seconds. Then suddenly I put the violin case down and took it out. I started to play Chopin’s ballad, remembering when she once said that he was her favorite composer. I just put everything I had on the violin. I wanted the notes to reach her. I wanted them to express something that I couldn’t simply say into words.

I looked at the night sky. Unlike other cloudy nights, the sky was clear deep blue. The moon and the stars illuminated as if I was in the sea. The clouds were the soft waves of the sea, and there was only me, the violin, and Darlene under the water at the moment. My violin gleamed dreamily by the starlight. It was like magic.

There were two types of people in the world; The candle and the lighter. The candle lit the dark and shined beautifully, but every candle needed a lighter. There were two people in my life who helped me to get the
glimmer—mother and Darlene. Darlene had inspired me like the air triggering the fire, and hearing that I was able to share the flame with her was wondrous.

After the last note, I put the violin down from my shoulder.

“Do you remember what I said about the competition?” She asked and I nodded. “I want to play this with you.” I couldn’t help myself, but to smile.

Months later on a winter day, our competition was held. We were more than satisfied with our playing. We enjoyed the music with all of our heart, and the people seemed to, too. We didn’t care about the perfection of techniques or the grade. We only hoped that the music reached the people. Sometimes music transcended words.

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4:30 AM: I’m groggy, but awake
I refuse to open my eyes
I don’t want to know how early it is
I slept at 10:10 PM, I can feel my under eyes getting darker
So I close my eyes and make an attempt to lessen the creases under my eyes

4:37 AM: Curiosity consumes me,
I check the time on my phone
I know any attempts of going to sleep are futile
My day has already started
So I act accordingly and chortle at anime memes

6:20 AM: I hear my mom going downstairs
I think of the events the day will hold
More specifically: my homework. Then anime and manga
My priorities are completely skewed
I feel ashamed

7:30 AM: My headphones are in, the music is blasting
The scenes outside blur with how fast the car is moving
I’m in my own world. One with no consequences
I can’t hear my dad saying my name, he says it louder
He rips the headphones off my head—I’m in this world

8:30 AM: Homeroom is full of chatter
I can see someone being bullied in front of me
Just because he is doing some unorthodox activities. Enjoying himself.
I want them to stop. What did he do?
But I’m a coward. So I watch idly in shame

12:51 PM: Lunch is chaotic
I used to use the library as a sanctuary
Now that all of my friends are here, it’s just as bad as the cafeteria
I confide in two of my friends about what’s on my mind
Knowing that I’ll only talk to ⅓ of them after middle school

2:45 PM: I have finished my work
I’m not done working though
Once I’m done, another encumbrance remains incomplete
So I work
And work.

4:10 PM: I have arrived at my house
The first thing I do is check for updates on my favorite shows
Doing such is routine, my priorities are still those of a 13-year-old
But I feel no shame, I have an excuse:
I should have a bit of self-indulgence before I spend the rest of the day working

10:25 PM: I capitulate to my insatiable need for sleep
So I factor in all the events the next day will hold
And artfully procrastinate, very much aware that I will not work for as long as I plan tomorrow
I brush my teeth, make wudu, pray twice, and go to bed
Knowing that the next day will again start too early and end too late
And I will have no control over it

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The Endeavors of My Day,
Hana ElMaghraby, Two Rivers Magnet School

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The Voice of Summer,
Jacqueline Schmeizl, Home School

Sun wakes from the clouds, reflecting a mural on the lake, painted with a shaky brush.
Cool breeze blows through leaves, whispers to us,
“It is here, it has come, golden, sun-ray-woven Summer!”

Sun-warmed strawberries melt in my mouth, fingers stained juicy red.
Sticky peach juice runs down my chin
Every bite tastes like summer, sweet summer.

Waves chuckle under a canoe’s bow laughing with the fickle wind.
Amber-winged dragonflies dance to the song of dipping waves.
A gosling procession, fluffy with down, is herded away from me by their mother.
The smallest chirps to me, unfazed, “Summer, summer, summer.”

Clothes smell of suntan lotion
Grains of sand shift underfoot.
Tangling hair on a roaring motorboat,
Saying, whooping, yelling, shouting, “Summer, summer, summer, summer!”

An eager breath turns embers gold
Fire shines light on s’more-painted faces
Fireflies fill the air like stars
Fans whir, cicadas buzz,
A symphony filled with the spirit of Summer
summer summer summer summer.

The Noble Peacock, Audrey Finn, Memorial Middle School
I am walking down the hallway. Everybody is staring. I know why. Does it matter? Should it matter? I’m not blind. If anything, my weakness makes it easier to see through people. I walked to my locker and took the angry birds lanyard off my neck. The shiny key was so bright I could see the reflection of myself in it. Brown hair, hazel lit eyes. My acne speckled evenly. I stuck the key in the locker and grabbed my binder. More kids stared. I felt shy today.

Whatever, I thought. I wasn’t shy. I saw my friend from my PE class and gave her a hug and she said, “Oops remember hands to yourself. Self-control remember?”

I remembered but I thought today could be a skip day, just like my mom does with her “diet.” Yeah, I thought. Just like her diet.


“Hi!” A girl says.

The tone like she’s talking to her little sibling who just asked her for help. I don’t need to hear the baby toned hi’s so I walk away from her without saying hi back. I’m not helpless. I didn’t choose this.

I walk into PE and I am welcomed by the PE teacher who smiles and says hello.

She doesn’t do it like the girl from the hall. It’s relieving to me.

In PE we worked on focus and “hands to yourself.” I’m not good at that.

My friend Lil and I shared the hula hoop so that Mac could throw bean bags into it.

“Yay! Hugggg!” I screamed with joy and threw my arms around Lil. “No! NO! Hands to yourself! Hands to yourself!”

My aide walks over and pulls me off of Lil and takes me into the hallway. The kids in classes turn toward my loud eruption. Staring. Staring. Again. I scream.

“STOP!”

The kids from the nearby classroom quickly turn their heads toward the front of the classroom and I hear, “No need to draw attention to it guys,” as the teacher walks over to the door and shuts it with a soft click.

I ask my aide on the way back to the gym.

“Will I always be put in groups where kids stare at me?”

This happens every day in hallways, stores, in public and more. That is how it feels. What it is like to get in their head. I am far off from the way they feel but the representation is to show that disabled students and adults are stared at, stereotyped. I am a student. My friends and I help in adapted PE, eat lunch with the students and I am frequently
with two of the students outside of school. There are many different ways that you can communicate, whether they talk or not. One way is to talk to them. Use clear, respectful language when talking to someone with disabilities. It should be just like talking to one of your friends. Communication in life is a key structure.

I see many students in the hallway of my school, they are staring at a disabled student, transferring into a different wheelchair, or walking down the hall with their aide, many kids are just curious. There are often the students who know what is going on and just stare because they are stereotyping. Meaning they are thinking in their head and often not even meaning to stereotype, but they might be thinking. “They can’t do everything we can.” Stereotyping is natural, but, while there are limitations, it is actually very easy to include everybody. For example, we were doing bowling in PE class, and there was a student in a wheelchair who was bowling. I had one kid come up to me and say, “He can bowl!” I was shocked by this, and responded, “Of course he can. Just like me and you can.” Some disabled children can’t talk, others have difficulties learning, but we all have weaknesses. So why is more attention drawn to disabled students? There are several ways to include disabled students, and it could all start with people taking the extra step to include them. I have been in adapted PE for a few months now, and one of the tasks in that class is making sure that the activity you plan works and includes everybody.

Ms. Ottman said to my friend and me that, “Everyone has weaknesses and differences, some can be inward that are non-visual, and some can be outward which are the differences you can see.” Her words show that people are all the same whether they are disabled or not. Everybody has a disability when you think about it. Physical or mentally. They are our struggles. They are what make us people. Nobody is perfect, but the world and our differences as a whole is what makes the world perfect. Life isn’t always fair. It isn’t fair to those who are treated less than a person, it isn’t fair to those treated like children, they didn’t choose this. It isn’t fair to those people being judged, bullied, and stared at for being human.

The Hood, Sabian Anderson,
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

March 14, 2018—3:30 pm
He ran. That’s what he was good at. He ran from Tony Ramirez, the biggest boy in his school. He ran on the Track and Field track. And now, he was exercising his talent, running from the sirens that were chasing him, wanting to hurt him for a crime he didn’t commit.

March 14, 2018—3:15 pm
Jason walked into his Uncle Bernie’s corner store after school. He pulled his hood off of his head and walked to the cramped freezer section in the back of the store. Bernie was his father’s brother and usually gave him snacks for free. He grabbed an iced tea and a granola bar and sat in an empty chair behind the counter.

“How’s school, J?” asked Bernie in his usual dull tone.

“It’s fine. I got the scholarship to UCLA.” He texted his father and told him he’d be home in 15 minutes.

“Congratulations.” Jason finished his after-school snack, and slipped his hood back onto his head. He tucked his phone into his waistband and started to make his way from behind the store counter. “Tell your father he sti—”

Bernie was cut off by the chime of the door. A tall man in a black hoodie walked into the store, the hood still on his head. Jason took a quick glance over at him and noticed three things: The man was black, he was wearing the same plain black hoodie as Jason, and he had a gun. The man pulled the gun out of his waistband, lifted the gun, and shot Bernie in what Jason hoped was the shoulder.

“Get outta here, kid,” the man calmly said. Jason was frozen to his spot. The gunman tucked his weapon back into his waistband. He went behind the counter and attempted to open the register, but it wouldn’t budge. He got angrier, muttering the words to himself, “I’ve gotta get outta here.” He lifted the heavy register with an exasperated grunt and slammed it to the floor, leaving a large dent in the chipped linoleum flooring. Jason snapped out of his trance. He glanced at Uncle Bernie’s motionless body on the floor and saw the gunman scooping as much money as he could into a paper bag. Jason ran out of the store, the chime making the shooter glance upward for a quick second before going back to stealing the money.

March 14, 2018—3:25 pm
Jason began a fast walk to his apartment complex about 12 blocks away from the crime scene. He stopped to catch his breath once he got to the other end of the street, and made the mistake of looking back at his uncle’s store. He saw four police cars sitting outside with the sirens blaring. The few police officers that got out of their cars put up yellow tape and began searching, while the other two police cars pulled off in Jason’s direction. He began
walking back towards his house, and the sirens started blaring again. People began to pull over to the side of the road, allowing the cruisers to pick up speed. Jason picked up his pace and turned the corner. He was about halfway down the street when one of the two cars came speeding around the corner.

March 14, 2018—3:30 pm

He ran. That’s what he was good at. He ran from Tony Ramirez, the biggest boy in his school. He ran on the Track and Field track. And now, he was exercising his talent, running from the sirens that were chasing him, wanting to hurt him for a crime he didn’t commit. He took a turn to the left and hopped onto the fence and began climbing. Without much effort, he hopped down and began a run through the abandoned lot on the other side of the fence. He slowed and turned to see two fully uniformed police officers charging toward him yelling things like, “Stop” and “We just want to talk.” But Jason didn’t stop because he knew better. He knew they wanted to do more than “just talk.” He kept running until his legs were on fire. That’s when he heard it. A loud bang and a sharp crack, the sound of a car window shattering into small refracting bits of glass and light. He turned the corner at the other end of the lot, and the feeling of a bullet whizzing by his car and the snap and crack of it missing and hitting a tree made him more determined to make it home that night. He pulled his phone out of his waistband and began to dial his father. And that’s when he saw it; the entire end of the street was blocked off for construction.

“Hey, son,” answered a booming voice over the phone.

“Uh, Dad, I need your help,” said Jason frantically.

“What do you mean? What did you do now?” Jason told his father the whole story. Just when he was finished, the officers rounded the corner, gun in hand.

“I didn’t do anything,” Jason said.

“Then why did you run?” said one officer. “Because you chased me.”

“What’s that in your hand?” Jason remembered he was still on the phone with his dad.

“Son, what’s going on?” asked his father. Jason could tell he was getting more worried.

“I- it’s my phone,” Jason stammered.

“I don’t believe you,” said the second officer. Jason could tell by the way the officer said the words that he was nervous, probably only a few weeks out of training.

“Put down your weapon, sir,” said the first officer. Officer Davis, Jason could see on his name badge.

“Now, sir. We don’t have to shoot.”

“DON’T SHOOT!” exclaimed Jason. “It’s just a phone.” People surrounding the buildings began to look out of their apartment windows.

“Put the weapon down.” Jason began panicking. He thrust his arm forward to show the officers that he as telling the truth. Trees and windows cracked and splintered as a body fell.

Just one.


Flares,

Piper Mecca, Vernon Center Middle School

The crickets are chirping and there is a quiet sound of the forest whispering in my ear. As I stare up into the sky, the horizon pulling my gaze in, I long for the signal to shoot from the tree-line. Every night a flare gun goes off in the distance, always on time. I’m starting to wonder when it will go off, the anticipation itching at me. The moon has only just risen into the black night lighting up smoke drifting high above the trees. As the nocturnal animals are corning out, an owl hoots and some twigs snap in the distance, but I never break my stare with the sky. A cool wind blows by, and I wonder if I should put on my jacket, no, I can’t risk missing the flare.

Suddenly the first flash of light streaks through the darkness. The glowing red sparks fly through the stars like a volcano erupting. It is followed by a high-pitched sound almost like a whistle. The sound echoes off the trees, holding the sound longer than the real thing. The last bit of light falls down beneath the trees and the sound stops ringing. It is done. It is the only thing that keeps me going every day. The reason I get up in the morning and fight, because I know there’s someone else out there. There is hope.

I do remember the world before and what it was like. I took it for granted. Always worrying about things that don’t really matter like money or objects. It’s all gone now, and all we have left is striving to survive. This all started when the bombs dropped. Once the bombings started the chaos started. The whole world was in ruin. I have
never seen another survivor of this war, but I know there must be some other living things. Some animals have survived, maybe other humans did too.

The day this all happened I was with my mother. There was no warning from the government. No warning from anyone. There had been tensions between the countries leaders as always and the people with power always wanted more. These leaders controlled bombs that could blow up all of Asia with just one of them. It was just one, then a chain reaction blew up the planet formerly known as Earth.

I remember seeing through the car window a cloud of smoke on the horizon. Within seconds a bright light caught up to us and it was the most blinding light I’d ever seen; brighter than the sun. The next thing I know I’m waking up in agonizing pain and my mother was dead, and now I’m on my own. I moved out into the forest and set up my camp. As far as I know I am the only survivor besides the person who sets off the flares. I’d like to find who is firing these flares, but I know it isn’t safe. There have been mutations since the bombs. Animals that are disfigured and hungry.

Only little things could live through the blast. Just like the dinosaurs only small creatures survived. Explosions wiped out any food I would be able to eat, so I taught myself how to hunt. I cook mainly squirrels and rabbits, but sometimes I can take down a mutation. Like a rabbit all twisted and grotesque, oozing green pus. There are bigger mutations deeper in the forest. I’ve seen some like a deer with three heads, or a bird with a beaver tail and teeth. I fear even deeper in the woods lies something worse, so I stay in the safety of my camp abandoning whoever cries for help.

I prepare to watch the flare again tonight. The squirrel is cooking on the fire and my folding chair is all set up for the show. It’s just after sunset, and it seems too long of a wait. I shake away the doubt I have. The flare is always on time. It will come. My eyes search the sky and my ears listen to the crackle of my fire. The cool wind blows by, but still nothing. It’s late.

An hour goes by, no sign of the flare. Did they forget? Have they run out of flares? They do set one off every night. I stare into the lonely night sky for a few more minutes with false hope, before putting out my fire and setting up my sleeping bag. I lay down in warmth, in the safety of my camp. I can’t help but wonder what happened to the person sending flares. I hope they aren’t in trouble.

I wake up the next day to a burning bright sun and the remaining birds on this planet singing their soft tunes. It’s just dawn, but the sun already illuminates the sky. The day moves to night and I am exhausted. At nightfall, I find myself waiting for the flare that never comes. I start to worry that the sender is hurt or dead or a mutation has got to them, or they simply gave up hope. I decide not to give up hope, never imagining my actions, I find myself packing for a trip in the morning to the flares. Who knows if they are still there or even alive. What is the point in surviving if there is no one to survive with. I guess being lonely is a silly reason to make an expedition. But I have to try.

Sleep does not come; my mind is on tomorrow. I mentally prepare myself for the day ahead. Surprisingly, I sleep. With the morning light waking me from my slumber, I grab my things. With determination I stare towards the forest. I’m going to face my fears and without realizing it, my feet start making their way to the trees. I take one deep breath as I am engulfed in trees and other woodland life of the forest. I mindlessly make my way through the wilderness. I don’t even realize how far I’ve gone. I just keep walking.

The fear of what I’ve done seeps in. There is no turning back now. I focus on the task, realizing I had forgotten how beautiful the forest is. The sunlight shimmering through the treetops, calming green colors surround me, crunching leaves beneath my feet is like music to my ears. See, this isn’t so bad. However, just as I think this thought, my ears pick up a startling noise. Behind me I hear a consistent crunching of leaves. Footsteps of someone or something following me. I stop in my tracks and the footsteps stop, too. My heart is pounding in my chest and fear hits me like a brick wall. I slowly turn my head. About ten feet behind me is a figure watching me. At first, I think about going to them. I think I have finally found another survivor as I looked at the silhouette, but the hopeful smile soon fades from my face realizing the thing I’m staring at isn’t human. A mutation, it resembles a person, but its body is bent in a zig-zag shape. It looks as if every bone in its body is broken, and it was covered in dry blood. I stare into its bloodshot eyes and it just stares back.

Without hesitation I break into a run, sprinting through the trees, weaving in and out, fearing for my life. Then suddenly the perfectly timed steps behind me just stop, but I don’t. I take a look back and once I feel safe, I stop to catch my breath. I wonder who that was before they became like that and why were they following me? It was so broken and horrified, it can’t be human anymore.

My feet just keep marching through the terrain for the rest of the day, until I see a clearing through the trees. Without thinking, I run out into it. I’ve done it. I have reached another person, I survived, but the feeling fades. Something isn’t right. In the center of the field is a giant machine. I cautiously walk up to it in disbelief. I
don’t want it to be true. The very thing that gave me hope, the thing that kept me going, the thing that I risked my life for was an automated machine that reads, “Flare Dispenser.”

I fall to my knees. No! There was supposed to be someone here. Everything goes numb. The sadness overtakes me and cool icy tears run down my cheeks. What if I am the only one left? This piece of machinery that once gave me hope for life now left me empty and alone lying in a field, far from the safety of my camp. Staring up at the night sky, I felt dehydrated, hungry, hopeless, doomed and completely alone. All I hear are the crickets chirping and there is the quiet sound of the forest whispering in my ear.

Writers Write, Layla Montgomery, Ledyard Middle School

Writers write the thoughts that no one dares to speak.  
Their bravery is not often heard in their words.  
Their sentences do not speak their tales,  
Endings never end.  
Beginnings never start.

Their life is not an open book,  
But it’s read like one.  
Words telling stories that only some will read.  
Some... not many.

Rules are bent.  
Some freedom can be found.  
A vision that only they can see is created.  
A path they wish to take.

They write for you,  
Or maybe for themselves.  
A way to show their thoughts.  
A way to organize their problems or their wins.  
Writers write a million words inside their heads.  
Words that will never be seen,  
Words that will die in the mind of their creator.

Words hold more power when they are true or meaningful.  
Two different things sometimes.  
Writers must decide what their words hold,  
What they do.

Writers sometimes write to feel their words,  
To truly understand them.  
Words on paper are more believable,  
They often hold more truth.

But lies are harder to spot in text,  
No signs to give it away.  
An easy way out for liars.

Writers must be careful.  
What they share could be used against them,  
Words written hold power in other mouths.  
Still, writers will write.
Ninth Grade

Peace Drum, Cormac Nocton, E.O. Smith High School (10th Grade)
The sound of mispronounced, choppy French drifts through the open door of the pantry and I can make out a few words of the script that my sister and her friends are practicing. I smile as I search for costume accessories. I always love costuming my sister’s projects for school, and this shortened version of Cendrillon, the French Cinderella, is no exception. I just need to finish Cinderella’s rag dress, and then we’ll be ready to start filming.

I open a white cabinet, looking for an apron to add to a simple dress for the costume. The metal cabinet drawer slides open, but instead of an apron, I see a neatly folded, colorful quilt. I reach in to grab it and feel the cold, soft cotton against my fingertips. Holding it up to the light, I admire the perfectly random assortment of rectangles, held together by invisible stitches of thread. A pumpkin patch lies next to a lovely field of pastel lilies which provide a contrast to the pile of red and orange maple leaves on the material beneath them. Examining the quilt, my eyes pause at a familiar pattern: a group of rabbits gardening in a field of sunflowers. At first, I cannot remember how I recognize the fabric, but as I scan over the other patterns I feel my thoughts spin backwards as flashes of memories consolidate in my mind…

“Can we pick out a doll now, B.B.?” The tulle skirt of my navy-blue dress bounced against my legs as I jumped up and down in excitement on the oriental carpet, twirling around my grandmother’s legs.

“You can choose any one you would like,” B.B. began to say, a smile forming on her lips. But before she had finished her sentence, I had already skipped across the room to the secret door hidden in the wall beneath the television with my sister following right behind me.

I touched the brass doorknob, and the tiny door swung open with ease. Warm air from the long closet surrounded me as I stepped inside. The closet was narrow enough that if I reached out my hands, I could touch both side walls at once, but I figured there must have been at least 25 feet in front of me. I was able to stand upright, but my sister had to duck her head. The air was musty, and I could see specks of dust floating around the old light bulb hanging from the ceiling. Ahead of me were dozens of identical pale blue boxes organized by type: afternoon tea party dolls, ball gown dolls, Dolly Dingle dolls, and story-dolls. Just looking at the boxes made my heart flutter as I pictured the porcelain dolls waiting inside. When I grabbed the nearest box, I stumbled slightly under its weight as I tried to position it in my arms.

When I had managed to maneuver the large box out of the closet and into the living room, I placed it down on the antique carpet and brushed off a thin layer of dust, revealing the familiar script words, the name of the company, printed on the top: Bette Ball Dolls. My sister and I leaned over the box in anticipation as B.B. gently lifted the lid, revealing a beautiful doll inside. I peered over the side of the box, and let out a small gasp as I looked into the doll’s large glass eyes which reflected the light from above and gave her a life-like gaze. Her rounded cheeks were painted a rosy peach, her lips were frozen in a soft smile, and her perfectly curled, golden-brown hair cascaded gently down her shoulders. The doll looked as if she had been made yesterday, her feet still wrapped in the bubble wrap she had been packaged in at the factory.

“Can I hold her, B.B.?” I asked my grandmother, dying to admire the doll more closely.

“Of course you can, Clara, but be careful with her,” B.B. responded as she lifted the doll out of her tiny home. My grandmother’s hands were frail, but she held the doll with strength and care. I looked up at my grandmother and noticed her blue eyes sparkling in the light. As she passed the doll to me, I felt the soft cotton fabric of the doll’s dress. I laughed, seeing that the fabric displayed a scene of rabbits tending to a garden of sunflowers. I admired the dress, noting all the small details, from the tiny pearls on the ice blue bows to the delicate pattern of white lace tracing the edge of the collar.

“She’s so pretty!” I said, clutching the delicate doll. “Did you really design her?”

“Yes, I designed all the different dolls for your grandfather’s importing company,” my grandmother explained to me, a touch of nostalgia tracing her voice.

“You had the best job ever! I want to design doll dresses when I grow up,” I told her.

“Who knows, maybe you will,” she said, winking as her bright eyes creased in a smile…

“Clara, have you found the apron?” My sister’s voice breaks into my thoughts, jolting me into the present. I look down at the beautiful quilt in my hands and pause before responding, not quite ready to put away the memories still simmering in my mind. Suddenly, as if the memories had lit a match inside my brain, I realize how I want to make the Cendrillon costume. I quickly search for a bag full of fabric scraps as patterns and diagrams begin formulating through my mind. I reach into the bag, pulling out the pieces of material from inside. A smooth, triangular piece of textured blue velvet, a stiff, cream-colored scrap of cotton, a soft rectangle of bright red felt. With each piece of fabric, the diagram in my mind grows clearer. With a grin, I answer my sister. “Actually, I’m going to sew a new dress—from scratch.”

“With what material?” she asks.

“Scraps of fabric,” I tell her, “like a quilt.”
Emma’s Car,
Oliver Llanos, Ridgefield High School

Emma’s car is not a normal car. It is the car of a lawyer with the mind of genius. The car of a person so cool she makes ice seem hot. And while it doesn’t have any special powers, when I enter it I feel like I’ve entered a parallel dimension. A dimension where a black Toyota Rav4 holds the keys to endless possibilities. When I’m in Emma’s car all the worries of life drift into the notes of the songs played on one of the many CD’s stored in the glove compartment. I could be transported to an Aerosmith or Nirvana concert. Shouting “Dream On” at the top of our lungs. A light shower could turn into a hurricane. It’s almost like anything that I can imagine becomes reality. All limits that prohibit me on earth seem irrelevant when I’m in Emma’s car.

I will never be able to forget the last time I spent with Emma in her car before she went off to grad school. It was a beautiful summer day. We left around 1:30, not truly understanding that this would be the last time for a long time that I would see that car again. But all the sadness put aside, we continued on our final adventure. We drove for twenty minutes listening to our favorite CD’s along the way. We finally arrived at the record store. A place we were familiar to. Like clockwork we swept the store for great deals and records we found intriguing. While she was unsuccessful I stumbled upon an Adam Bryns record. It was the perfect way to begin our morning.

As we retreated to Emma’s car to continue our conquest we realized that we were hungry (like Goldilocks and the three bears hungry). So we drove to Chick-Fil-A where we feasted on crispy chicken sandwiches and freshly made waffle fries with every bite lathered with Chick-Fil-A sauce. As we returned to Emma’s car satisfied with the meal we had, we planned the final part of our grand adventure. We were to explore the world of Goodwill. A land of dreams and wonder. As we pulled into the parking lot, I had a feeling that we were about to hit the jackpot. I was correct. We found one of the best items imaginable, an old record player. As we checked out I knew this would be the thing she would remember me by while she was away.

We drove home with all our spoils. Our records and record player. Our stomachs full of chicken. But even with the satisfaction of a successful day I knew something would soon be lacking. It was at that moment that I realized that not only was I losing my transportation for adventures, but I was also losing my best friend. I never had a better friend than Emma.

Nobody had ever listened to me ramble on about issues of the world. Nobody would debate me with such tenacity and level headedness as Emma had. It was almost as if I was losing my only place of solitude. As we got home we hugged each other and life moved on. Eventually she moved away and there was a sense of loss.

It’s like Emma’s car is a secure place. Like a force field I am protected from the judgement and scrutiny of the world. It’s also a place of honesty. A feeling that whatever I say in Emma’s car, stays in Emma’s car. Things said in Emma’s car seem to have more significance than in the real world. Almost like anything said means more than life itself.

Since she’s been gone it feels like a part of me is missing. Like the empty spot in the driveway is the empty spot inside myself. And when she returns and I hear the sound of the same Rav4 I feel complete. There truly must be something special about Emma’s car.

Matthew 5:17, Zachary Garfinkle, Amity Regional High School

Jacob was fated to open the door the moment that the bullet entered his father’s skull. On the night of reckoning, he was full of the same righteous anger that had fueled him for over two decades. His driving force, the fury had kept him faithful and tethered to his daunting goal. No earthly force could have prevented him from achieving his aim; his hunger for vengeance outclassed all natural obstacles in life. Jacob thought incredulously that he could be under the protection of a God that had seemingly long abandoned him.

His father had been a pious man. A lot of good that did him, Jacob thought bitterly. Though Jacob had been young when his father was murdered, he had vivid memories of clasping his hands in prayer between rows of pews. He had always felt welcome in the Church of New Brunswick; the congregation had always cared for Jacob like a second family, especially after the loss of his father. He felt a guilty pang in his stomach, remembering his abandonment of the church. Despite their fervent efforts, the churchgoers could not restore his faith in a God who let his most devoted followers die young, and he decided to leave for good.

As he gazed at the house, Jacob longed for what had been his. The dilapidated porch creaked under Jacob’s feet. To his surprise, the front door was unlocked. As he stepped inside, he was greeted by the unwelcoming buzzing of nocturnal insects.
Jacob hesitantly tiptoed across the shifting floorboards and into a dimly lit room. His eyes immediately moved toward an elderly man slumped in a blood-red armchair. His hair was as white and thin as the cobwebs that overlaid the walls. The object of Jacob’s focused hatred sat there sleeping without a care in the world.

“Merkis,” snarled Jacob. The old man awoke with a start, his eyes darting around the cluttered room wildly in an attempt to locate the source of this sound. His eyes focused on Jacob and widened fearfully.

“You’re his child,” Merkis stated undoubtedly, though Jacob noticed the tremor in his voice. He had likely been dreading this moment for decades, always having to look over his shoulder. Good, thought Jacob.

“Three hundred dollars doesn’t get you very far, does it?” sneered Jacob.

The old man, now standing, shook his head submissively. Jacob irritably wished that he would talk. In Jacob’s mind, his father’s killer had been preserved at forty. It felt strange to antagonize an old man. Despite his rage, Jacob felt disconcerted, gazing upon his surroundings. Jacob’s apartment, infamous for its roach problem, seemed heavenly in comparison to Merkis’ living arrangements. Numerous wine bottles were piled haphazardly in the corner.

Both feared to bridge the empty silence. Though Jacob had planned and eagerly anticipated this moment for decades, he felt lost and unprepared. Both men blinked anxiously and rapidly at each other as if they were communicating via morse code during the silence.

“You know why I’m here,” Jacob said. Merkis’ hands shook uncontrollably as the stress inflamed his arthritis. Jacob paced agitatedly around the room.

“I still can’t believe you were never even put on trial,” Jacob ranted. “You walked free while my father paid the price. For what? A few hundred bucks?”

“I’m sorry,” Merkis apologized feebly and ineffectively. To Jacob, Merkis’ sincerity was questionable at best.

“The rodents in this house should be disgusted that they have to share a home with vermin like you.” As if his own hateful words were exacerbating his rage, he became overcome with anger and he spat in Merkis’ face. The old man flinched initially, then quietly wiped the spit off of his cheek. Jacob’s expression of loathing morphed into one of confusion. There was no retaliation, no indignation; Jacob realized that all of Merkis’ pugnacity had been long gone. He was a broken-down shell of his former reckless, criminal youth. Jacob was now approximately the age Merkis had been when he killed Jacob’s father; the murderous cycle continued to turn.

“Have you kept the murder weapon?” interrogated Jacob. Merkis nodded meekly. At Jacob’s orders, he walked over to a cabinet in the kitchen. He removed a small, cold metal safe, dusty from disuse, and placed it on the counter.

“Open it,” Jacob demanded, deliberately staring intently at a spot on Merkis’ forehead. Jacob feared that if he made eye contact, he could not go through with his mission. He felt his resolve weaken with every passing moment. He wanted to get this over with quickly. The old man regarded him with a look of pity. This infuriated Jacob, temporarily vanquishing any feelings of sympathy; how dare Merkis pity him? He was in no position to do so.

“This won’t bring your father back,” Merkis told him mournfully before inputting the code. “Take it from me… this will only bring ruin.”

“Why won’t you let me be?” Merkis beseeched him. He widely gestured at his surroundings. “Look around! Karma has ruined me.”

“I am your karma!” roared Jacob. “This is fair; an eye for an eye.” The vehemence in his voice, however, did not mask the trembling of his upper lip. The elderly man gazed at him, a plethora of thoughts swirling in his head. He had attained sagacity in his old age, but he knew better than to lecture Jacob.

“You took everything from me!” howled Jacob. “Every day of my life has been tainted by you. You destroyed two lives that day, and you sealed your own fate.”

Jacob regarded the pistol in his hand with a mixture of disgust, fear, and fascination. This small object brought so much devastation to his life. He wondered what his life could have been like. As soon as his father was killed, Jacob’s life was just a vessel for his revenge. It truly was poetic justice that he would avenge his father with the very instrument of his destruction.

Why was he hesitating? He had been oscillating between a desire for revenge and a desire to grant the old man mercy. If he were any sort of man — if he cared about his father even one bit — he would have put a bullet in Merkis’ brain ten minutes ago. He had come here chasing some catharsis; some closure. He now realized how impossible that was. In some sick twist of fate, perhaps orchestrated by a cruel, unforgiving god, he had to abandon his lifelong goal or kill an elderly man.

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Jacob’s musings were interrupted by the shrill screeching of sirens. His heart leaping out of his chest, he raced to the window to see two police cars rapidly approaching the house. Jacob clenched his fists. He murmured a string of curses, mentally reprimanding himself for neglecting to close the blinds. His tunnel vision had blinded him.

“Get up,” he demanded. The old man grunted as he struggled to rise. Jacob repressed the urge to help him up. He escorted him to the door, holding the pistol against his temple. He stepped outside to face the police.

The cacophony of sirens was so much louder now, drowning out the sound of his racing heartbeat. Jacob’s face was illuminated by a blinding blue light while Merkis’ face was covered in red.

“Release the hostage or we’ll have no choice but to fire!” warned an officer. Jacob squinted against the flashing lights, tightening his grip on the pistol. He pressed it up against Merkis’ head with greater force, his index finger brushing the trigger. In response, two officers turned off the safety on their weapons.

The old man gave Jacob one last pleading look of desperation. It conveyed several complex, tangled emotions simultaneously; fear, despair, and paradoxically, a hint of acceptance.

The resounding boom of the gunshot was heard across the entire town. His arms extended to his sides, a man lay prone on the ground like a cross.

Two lives were ended that night. One man was convicted of murder and rotted in prison, while the other left behind a trail of blood as he was dragged off of the rickety porch by his ankles.

In the following days, the neighbors would talk amongst themselves, tentatively glancing at the house with morbid curiosity. They would whisper about the crimson stains on Old Man Merkis’ porch. In the following months, futile attempts to sell the house would be made. In years past, dauntless children would sneak into the accursed place on dares. Generations of vermin would breed, age, and die, perpetuating and honoring the house’s legacy of death and squalor. The town would face hardships, and Merkis’ house would witness them all. It stood blissfully unaware of the bloodstained history contained in its walls in its inanimate indifference. Immortalized in its bloodstained past, it would stand tall but ruined for decades more. When it would finally fall, it would collapse without warning in the night, its wooden skeleton crunching sickeningly.

Concealed,
Melina Wetzel, Fairfield Public High School
I see her,
Standing there,
On the stage,
Shiny, perfect satin ribbons dance around her lean calves
Encasing a hideous inside of raw material; rotting wood and paper mache
She smiles,
I smile, then mold creeps up from her shoes, engulfing her.
Shiny, perfect lip gloss bursts with crimson color
Then again, a deep red also batters her toes.
Her cakey foundation and tights hide all imperfections
As she piqués on the hard boxes
It pricks me which expands into an ocean of blood
She is still smiling and in the whole theatre I am the only one crying.
Gasping for air as I drown in tears
Standing there,
I see her; happy and broken.
Loneliness. Anger. Frustration. I vented out my mood; writing. My questions were like a virus in my mind. They created a cloud of confusion that sent raindrops down my face. My feelings, on a perfectly arranged palette, were mixed mercilessly together to form a puddle of color that no other human eye had seen. My fingertips sought counsel by skimming through my dog’s fur, although rather absentmindedly. I sobbed once more into my pillow, and then barricaded the questions and their unwanted feelings into the abysmal depths of my mind. Why can’t I be like everyone else? The reverberating thought demanded. My brain had won the sadistic war—at least for a while.

No, I was not surrounded by darkness. Rather I was in an ocean, vast and unfathomable. I was learning a foreign language, and my journey for knowledge was mine and mine alone. I heard the term “disabled” over and over again, replicated in different tones, different moods each day. Who was I? Doctors made it seem like I was physically challenged, and only that. I felt, however, that I had more than a handicapped designation. I wasn’t weak. Incapable. Decrepit. I thought of myself as determined. Persistent. Strong-willed.

People, though, throw around “crippled” carelessly. Thinking that it defines the noun as only one definition. I was just a fifth grader then. I observed how people looked at me. I pondered my true identity, but no answers came. My doleful desire of being “normal” had become an urge inside of me, and I felt a need to write my thoughts on paper.

As I stared out a window, words still forming into sentences in my mind, a vivid illusion triumphed yet again. I imagined an archetypical girl, running like the wind. I could hear my feet pounding across the pavement, feel my muscles strong and unyielding. Why could my brain conquer such a tranquil feeling, a piece of my integrity, just from a hope? With these longings, I could forget the physical pain of reality. They would, however, produce a powerful sense of yearning. When I gazed outside, I felt like a child hoping for a precious toy. It was more than wanting to be like everyone else, it was a void that caused pure desperation for me. Would I ever be able to run or walk without pain? I contemplated this question along with many similar ones, but the more I considered my query, the more I sank into a confounding sea of forlornness. I struggled to stay afloat, above my doubts, but put little energy on treading water. I started to become addicted to those questions of nonconformity, and I hoped that through my pen I would find an answer.

I wrote a paragraph my mind had composed: My dog and I running down a hill, pain-free. This, though, only erupted a volcano of even more lava-hot questions. Shouldn’t I be happy with who I am? I am not wheelchair bound, so why do I find my burdens, physical and emotional, too heavy to carry? Why do I even want to run? These unleashed, untamed thoughts haunted my mind and still lurk about, echoing in me even today.

I am able to walk, and am an A+ student who has kind, caring friends. That is how some people at school see me: a normal person. They probably wonder why I need an electric wheelchair for longer distances. There is only one answer to this: pain. Agony that hovers over me, threatening to become worse if I take advantage of my body. Misery that transports me to a different mood, a different atmosphere than my peers. Discomfort that creates distractions. Inflammation that makes me forget about school and have little energy for friends. Pain that becomes unbearable when I have to move. That is when I worry people see me as something else: weak, disabled.

I understand. I have watched videos of myself running. In that epoch of my childhood, my arms flailed as I waddled quickly through the soft, uneven sand on a beach. The sand was just another struggle in my young life, and I had many yet to come. As I was moving through the sand, my mind saw an eminent runner, but this image was masqueraded by my physical affliction. I am handicapped and different. I have overcome so many obstacles, though. So doesn’t that make me stronger?

On Friday, June 24, 2015 my ways of viewing life changed. My physical therapist, Nancy, suggested it would be easier for me to use a power chair for long distances at school. On that day, we went to the school so I could sample my new chair. For one of the first times, I could actually run—kind of. In my wheelchair, I could dash from one place to the next in the highest speed. Although my wheelchair would announce my disability broadly, I was not only shy but content with my new contraption. If I was in an abundance of physical misery, I could elude my pain by speeding along. My revered questions, however, were still unanswered. Maybe, I hoped, by writing out my problems onto paper I could solve that puzzling predicament.
Writing was like my sport, and similar to an athlete that has an impulse to play, my fingers itched to dance across the keyboard and express my feelings. Vigorous thoughts caused my fingers to soon fly, racing toward the finishing line. These words produced a feeling of peace inside of me, and when my provoking questions were all written down, I knew I had uncovered what I had desired. Who I am.

Writing characterizes what my true identity really is. It is more than a crutch, a wheelchair, a walker. Instead of putting a band-aid on a wound, writing, I know, is strong enough to heal the hurt and confusion inside of me. I don’t have to run to be happy, I learned from writing. I can swim, play saxophone, sing. I can read, laugh, and I can write. I am only disabled at heart if that’s how I look at myself. What I am is what I make myself.

Because you Could,
Abigail Bajorek, Rockville High School

Because you could
It’s your reputation
Not mine as it seems
Nor the perpetrator at risk

Because you could
Cover the headlines
And hold in such powerful words
My mouth sealed shut with glue

Because you could
Get away with your unlawful actions
You found it right
To protect yourself rather than I
Whose story needed to be heard

Because you could
And decided not to speak out
Keeping this secret
Like a gray cloud hanging over my head
The bluebird that wants to escape my heart

Because you could
Protect your name and their’s
They will escape the inexcusable
And deny that in any way, shape, or form
They did wrong

And just because you could
My memories will lurk in the shadows of my mind
And I will bury my head in shame knowing
That the person I went to
Would rather defend their image than my hope

And like the one who hurts others
And like the one who breaks us down
Because you nor I opened up to the proper authorities
You...will remain unpunished
And I silent
Tenth Grade

What Stands Still, Isabelle Busch, Greenwich High School
The Telescope, Or: The Story,
Sam Harris, Home School

In my travels I have known much. It almost makes me angry when I meet some mind which has not absorbed like mine. A group of minds? Insufferable, practically. Who am I, though? I have experienced everything, but I know nothing. I cannot know. Knowledge isn’t for humanity—it’s for window panes, or stars, or planets. Knowledge isn’t for bodies like me.

I have been entertained by those who are a part of me. I am Everybody; the embrainment of humanity. Shakespeare. Da Vinci. Eventually, You. The more humans die, the more memories intensify my consciousness. The more traits I gain. My mind becomes dustier and my synapses grow thicker, like snot. Though who am I kidding when I mention my genius? My poetics and thespianism and my artistry and science? I am equally stupid. I am nothing. I am all races and genders and orientations, but I had intended to present as a vaguely asexual white man on the night which I would like to relate.

There are these artifacts out there. Figuratively, they’re prisms, sort of. A hundred thousand baby boomers know well the triangle with the light beaming into it from the left and the rainbow bursting through and out onto the right. So does Newton. They’re like that. From what I’ve been told, the world is text, but these artifacts, they take in all their surroundings’ variables and make them textual light; it’s hard to explain. Sometimes they take the forms of, well, window panes. Stars. Planets.

This club of three or four boys found one in telescope form. They lived in Oregon, in the United States. I remember when their grandparents died: Specifically, I remember their memories (American childhoods, factory jobs, the Second World War, housewifery, and child-rearing) entering me. These teenagers thought they had knowledge. They read a lot of genre fiction. They frequently played Dungeons & Dragons. They knew each other very well, and they had attempted to summon infernal beings together on three separate occasions.

This club would meet up in a lighthouse at which one of its members had been told to work. That member’s parents had wanted to instill some sense of responsibility. Prior to my interaction with these kids, the one that was actually supposed to work and monitor the lighthouse discovered a telescope in a chest somewhere in a corner of this lighthouse.

I felt this tug in my heart and this squirming in my brain when the telescope was unearthed. I felt this exploding out. I felt that whole Oregon town become inkier and more confused and poetic. The first time this particular kid, named James or something like that, looked through the telescope, the town seemed to lose all that could be experienced physically about it and gain merely that which could be read about it. James then read his world: words made up objects. Instead of viewing walls, he read the word “wall” where the walls should’ve been, projected against a two-dimensional white backdrop. Instead of experiencing flooring, ceiling, chests, chairs, doors, he read it all. Instead of legs, “legs;” instead of hands, “hands.”

Or, at least, this is what I speculate happened. This is what these artifacts tend to do to people. It turns their worlds into stories and just expands outward. James never should’ve called up two of his “club-member” “friends” to come over to the “lighthouse.” Against James’ wishes, they looked through the “telescope.”

I should’ve known better than to go over to that Oregon knot of text that had been tugging at my heart and squirming in my mind. Still, I knocked on the door of the lighthouse which I had sensed was the source of the anomaly.

This teenager opened the door and stared at me like I was some sort of flaming god. Tears came, and then the vomit. His friends rushed downstairs, still shaking from having just become flesh made word, and found their friend James floor-bound, unconscious. I can only imagine how my body must’ve seemed as a body of pure text: every dead mind in human history converted to text and force-fed to a pair of human eyes in a matter of seconds. Infinite words in all directions constantly: How can one respond with anything other than a seizure?

Panicked and screaming about the apocalypse, one of the boys shoved me out of the way and ran off into the distance. The one remaining muttered something about the one that ran, how he, Tom, had left him with a human-sized silo of seizure-inducing language.

I have neglected to tell You why indeed I was there. I had never felt that tugging and squirming before. I was not experiencing a human’s death, no, there were no memories which I could absorb. This was something else. I stepped into the lighthouse for the first time. The kid opposite me then said his name was Dave. Dave was covering his eyes.

I apologized for the seizure and asked Dave if there were any others in the lighthouse.

Yeah, he said, there’s…there’s…

He couldn’t remember his friend’s name. I asked him, with the Conan Doyle in me chewing the situation for all it was worth, whether he had ever heard this friend read.

Come to think of it, no, he said.
Well, Dave, I said, you seem to be adjusting to a world of text well. Your friend probably couldn’t read. How would he live in this town now? He’s been extinguished from having ever existed. How did you know that it’s all words now? he said. My fingers of verbs buried themselves in my linguistic pockets and my mind of nouns thought. And thought. I’ve seen this before, I said. Knowing I’d never get any consciousnesses from this town again, I began to head toward the door and told Dave not to worry. I told him that stories sustain us. Before he could ask at the expense of what, I was gone.

Dave experienced this funneled feeling, as if his whole being was getting abridged. James was cut. Tom stopped running (cut). Dave lost most of the lighthouse’s vocabulary and felt vaguely embalmed. Turning around, Dave read nothing but a story everywhere. A story, forever and ever: In my travels I have known much. It almost makes me angry when I meet some mind which has not absorbed like mine. A group of minds? Insufferable, practically. Who am I, though? I have experienced everything, but I know nothing. I cannot know. Knowledge isn’t for humanity—it’s for window panes, or stars, or planets. Knowledge isn’t for bodies like me...

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**Day of Hearts, Carley Simler, Rockville High School**

Red and pink streamers hung limply from the ceiling. Carnations poked out of backpack pockets, and tacky messages were scrawled on each paper heart strewn across the lockers. It is only imaginable he was smiling as he walked down the frenzied hallway. As he listened to the jumbled squealing and outcries of scrambling students. As he peered into classrooms while teachers continued on with their lessons. He knew what was to happen if he was caught; if someone saw him sauntering down the hall, while he silenced everyone in his way. While teachers taught the class their final lessons on bravery. But nonetheless he walked down the hallway with no destination in mind, smiling with each passing heart.

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**Mundane Moments, Noor Rekhi, Greenwich Academy**

I think, out of everything, I’d like to remember mundane moments. Not especially the graduations, birthdays, or firsts, but some of the simpler times. Like on the hottest day of the summer, when the air conditioning is broken, and you sit with all your friends in a cluster in front of the open refrigerator and just enjoy each other’s company. It doesn’t really matter if the humidity makes your hair spread out frizzy or that the sweat beads lining your spine causes your shirt to cling to it uncomfortably, because it’s summer and it’s so simple and sweet to be there.

Or even when you sit down for dinner with your family over shared food. And someone cracks a joke, and it doesn’t have to be really funny, but everyone laughs and smiles and repeats it for the rest of the night. It’s not a firecracker event, life-changing and thought-provocative nor is it genius slapstick from a Letterman monologue. But instead, at its core a nice night to eat food and be surrounded by people you love.

And even a smaller gesture, like when an old friend texts you out of the blue to ask how you’re doing. Or when a stranger gives you a compliment about your dress or your hair or your smile. Or when a friend saves you a spot at the lunch table. Or when your teacher comes early in the morning to help you learn math.

I think I’ll keep these memories of mine etched in the back of my mind, like the lines drawn on my palms. Because they never really were mundane.
The sound of your fist hit my door,
along with the aggressive jiggle of the doorknob.
What followed was the sound of a key turning in the door,
which I forgot I had given you.

Your feet paced around my apartment,
almost as if the hardwood would break under your stomps.
I had never seen you with such anger,
but that suddenly changed when your hands
wrapped around my neck.

Everything about you used to be so peaceful.
Your fingers would dance across my face,
tracing their way down my cheeks and onto my neck.
Your sandy hair tickled my body,
those ocean blue eyes swayed in the trance of mine.
You were the calm of my storm.
I always gave you the nod,
your green light to go.

Now I lie with your unwanted body on mine,
your fingers shattering my face,
forcing their way down my cheeks and onto my neck.
Your sandy hair made my body shiver,
those ocean blue eyes sending a wave of worry into mine.
I gave you a shake of the head,
your red light to stop.
As the light flickered from green to red,
you ran through the light,
speeding past the signal.

My contract for childhood oblivion had ended, retracting the promise of protection. Of course, women must reach an age where they submit to the idea that danger is a reality. The contract does not specify when it will terminate, whether a girl must grow up at five years old, or eighteen. But it will end, it does for everyone. Count six women in a room and one has most likely experienced the results of a concluded contract.

Criteria that call for the termination of protection:
1. Young
2. Old
3. Minimum to no clothing
4. Fully clothed
5. Intoxicated
6. Sober
7. Single
8. In a relationship

The night bled a black, hazy ichor, as the humidity stuck hair to the back of my neck. My older brother halted behind some shrubs while our dog relieved himself. I continued to our dad’s house, the walk only two streets between our parents’ homes. We had made this trek thousands of times over several years. Tonight was hot, and I had shrugged off my light jacket for the relief of my camisole, against my mother’s orders to stay covered up while
outside. But this route was less threatening than the neighborhood cats. My footsteps may have well created this street. A songbird sang its lullaby and I swiveled to catch sight of the performer.

When I turned on my heel to continue, I slowed. An unfamiliar car was rolling towards me from down the road. A sense of unease washed over my bones; no one came into this neighborhood unless they lived here. I strained, but saw no license plate. My stomach roiled. Two men sat in the front, a third silhouette in the back. I felt my sweat bead on my skin. Their eyes roamed over me, the car slowed, pulling to my side of the road. I had stopped altogether when three doors swung open ten feet away, a leg had stepped out in my direction. I could feel the need to run, my instinct to turn back or escape to the house behind me repeated in my head, urging me to move. But panic paralyzed my legs. My nails dug into my palms, as I attempted to hotwire my body with pain. Then their eyes shot behind me, I craned my neck to see my brother and our dog step out from the bushes. I heard, before I saw, the doors slam shut. I felt the car speed by, and finally, I felt myself release a breath that burned my lungs. My nails released the flesh of my palms. Silently, I pulled my jacket over my shoulders once more.

On the path between my homes, I wondered if it was ever truly safe, if security ever existed. I came to the conclusion that it did not when it came to girls like me who walk alone.

A year later, my aunt took me to Coney Island where women and men alike embraced femininity in a parade. The shore breeze had tried and failed to blow away the glitter that kissed my shoulders and cheeks. A woman in whimsical clothing sashayed by, and if she had whispered in her frosted lipstick that she was a siren who had crept out of the ocean minutes earlier, it could only be a fact. When a little girl had asked if I was a faerie, I smiled and told her to keep it a secret.

I was still looking at the girl who was giddy while she walked away, when panic surged in my throat, caused by a wandering hand. That hand forced cold chills down my spine, my stomach plummeted. My head snapped around, trying to catch any glint of pleasure derived from finding out the secret of what an underage girl feels like. My body burned with a violent coldness that made breathing impossible until I latched onto my aunt. I returned home, where I felt no safer, and scrubbed the glitter and the residue of touch off my body until it was raw. That day I realized safety had a list of conditions. I learned that being alone held dangers only women thought about.

When traveling alone, women must:
1. Keep keys between knuckles
2. Cross streets to avoid strangers
3. Move only in light
4. Wear clothing that will not call attention to oneself

The public I had naively believed to still be protected by. There should have been too many eyes watching so girls can breathe easy. There were too many eyes, but they watched the girls knowing a crowd is easy to hide in. To not get caught. Being alone caused anxiety to close up my throat, especially at night. Now in addition, I would hold my breath through crowds, squeezing my shoulders together and wincing at accidental contact.

Warning: Termination of contract may cause
- Anxiety in public
- Panic in crowds
- Panic when alone
- Paranoia
- Trauma

Indeed, safety has terms and conditions, and girls are not under its jurisdiction.

*Uncounted For, Meghan McAuliffe, Rockville High School*

“Good morning, Quinny.”

97 Words Left

Every day I try to say the same words to her, to keep at least one constant in her life. Quinn squirmed and opened her amber eyes and stared right at me. Her fawn colored hair lay effortlessly across her cheekbones and a soft smile appeared on her face. She mumbled something in a hushed tone but I disregarded it. I used to keep track of her words when she was younger, making sure she didn’t go over the limit but now she rarely even talks so I don’t have the need too.
Husband had already left for work and son was at school so it was just me and daughter home as usual. I had gotten myself ready and went to go check when there was a knock at the door. I cautiously went over to it, and saw a man outside holding a clipboard.

“Hello is this the household of Henry Wallace?” He demanded, trying to look behind me into the house. I responded with a nod and he added “Is he here? “Although I would enjoy taking all your words this morning, I would prefer to speak with someone who is rational.”

“My apologies, Henry is out at work.” I’m not actually apologetic...It’s nice being home alone with my daughter.

90 Words Left

“OK and your name then?” He asked, taking out a pen and clicking it to write on the page on his clipboard. “Renee Wallace.” Which I don’t know why I feel the obligation to tell you.

88 Words Left

“OK Renee, well I’ll come back when I have someone of my level to speak to.” He speaks descending away, clipboard and entitlement in hand.

I nodded and shut the door in front of me. Right, because apparently, I’m not even worthy to speak to. The words stung but I was used to receiving that treatment, as every woman or girl is. Not a surprise he was looking for my husband, it’s not like anybody comes to see me or my daughter.

I went back into my home and proceeded to the kitchen to cook up a decent breakfast at the least, but most of the groceries were gone. I realized that a trip to the market was necessary and sighed with disappointment. The market would be the ideal place for one thing: conversation.

I peeked into Quinn’s room and noticed her lying in bed reading one of Williams school books. She must have spotted it laying on the floor in my son’s room, eager to be read. Women aren’t supposed to read or have any type of education, but Quinn has such a strong fascination with reading I allow it in secrecy, not even my husband knows, as he agrees with the government’s policies. He thinks of Quinn as nothing, and doesn’t put in any effort to help her so I am in charge of that.

“Good read?” I asked as she hid the book behind her pillow putting on a mischievous grin. Don’t let your father see you doing that. He for sure won’t allow it. She put a questioned look on her face and pointed to my shoes.

86 Words Left

“Market. Need eggs, milk, and bread. Come?” I love to get you out of this boring house as much as I can. She nodded and carefully began to lace up her shoes.

80 Words Left

We started our retreat off to the market and I prepared myself for the crowd I was about to enter into. We walked because it was close, and the fact that not I nor any women could drive anymore. The way there was short enough, but occasionally government officials stopped women to question them—and that was always a fear. The fear of questions being asked and no words allowed to be spoken.

We entered the pathway and saw all the stands of men selling their goods. They yelled out phrases trying to gain passerby’s attention and failed to account their annoyance by it. The air smelled sweet of bread, lamb, and chestnuts and the rich air grew thick with smoke.

I walked up to the vegetable stand and picked up three husks of corn and handed them to the worker. It was a man as expected, and he didn’t seem to take the fact that I, a woman, was there very kindly.

“What do you want?” He demanded no hint of friendliness detained in his voice. I pointed to the vegetables and he gave me a little laugh, “Oh I need to hear you say it.”

I know what you’re doing. “Three husks of corn, two peppers, seven carrots, and four tomatoes.” I said in a bland voice, “Please.” Also for you to learn some respect.

68 Words Left

“Much better and I’m going to need your name.”
“Renee,” I sighed, “Renee Wallace.” Again, why do I feel the need to answer your questions without hesitation.

65 Words Left

“Okay Renee now here is the corn, anything left to say?”
I look at him with disgust and mutter “Thank you.” Before yanking the bag out of his hands. Thanks for the food, not for the attitude.

63 Words Left

There’re certain types of men in the world today. There are the few who sympathize with women’s struggles and the ones who think it is right and enjoy mocking women making them use their words. That man was clearly the second one of the two.
I looked down and Quinn was tugging my hand, pointing to the baked good station with cookies and other sweets that enjoy to please the children’s eyes. I shook my head but she began to nod hers and got a saddened look in her eyes as if she was about to have a fit.
“Quinn, no.” Tears welled up in her eyes and a pout appeared across her face. “Can’t today, not enough money, soon.” I know you really deserve this, but your father doesn’t give me permission or money to buy you treats.

52 Words Left

Quinn and I walked over to the next tent which was filled with quilts of all different colors. The array of beauty was pleasing to the eye, but the pricing was a match for its beauty, high.
Quinn eyed the same quilt with a lilac flowered pattern for a while as I looked around, not breaking her gaze from it. I could tell she really wanted it but knew there wasn’t a high chance of receiving it.
I asked the worker, “How much?” Please be cheap and please don’t lie to make me pay more.

50 Words Left

“For what?” He mumbled.
Sighing, I pointed, “The lilac quilt.” The one my daughter is staring at so adamantly, it’s pretty clear.

48 Words Left

“Oh, that’s thirty dollars.”
Quinn’s birthday was coming up and I knew that she really wanted that quilt but I just didn’t have the money for it, but I did have the words.
“I don’t have thirty, but I can have twenty for it please.” Please, please let this work.

35 Words Left

“Do you at least have twenty-five for it?” He questioned.
“No more than twenty, sorry,” showing my twenty-dollar bill. Twenty is reasonable, just let me have it. If I was a man you would be fine with it.

30 Words Left

“Fine take it.” He grumbled, snatching the money from my hand.
I reached up for the quilt and saw Quinn’s smile appear on her face. After receiving it we decided to begin our journey home with a good amount of my words used up for the day.
On our walk home we walked next to each other in silence. I wish I could tell you how much I enjoy being with you. I wish I could tell you we will somehow persist through all of this---
We walked the majority of the way home, until we saw a man approaching and I knew he was a government official from his jacket. Everything’s fine.
“Where are you going woman and child?”
“Home.” I whispered, pointing to the direction of my house. Why are you asking?

29 Words Left

“I need more details,” he demanded, staring straight into my eyes.
“Two roads past the Sycamore tree is our home.” I said in a flat voice. Just let us be please. I know what you’re doing, trying to use up all my words just for your amusement. Not in any way thinking of the problems it causes me.

21 Words Left

He looked towards where I was describing and nodded in approval, gesturing us to be on our way. We continued on our way home and finally reached the house as Henry pulled into the driveway in his car, with William behind him.
“How was the market?” William asked, noticing our grocery bags.
“Good, fifteen left.” I answered pointing to my bracelet. How considerate of you to ask, I’m trying to raise at least one good man.

15 Words Left

“Fifteen already?” Henry questioned, without an actual sense of caring in his voice.
“A lot of talkative people today.” I stated, with a hint of annoyance. And I don’t look forward to hearing your complaints.

10 Words Left

Ten words left now but I don’t mind, I’m home and ready for the night to come, not much talking left. After dinner I go to put Quinn to bed. “I love you Quinny, goodnight,” as I do every night.
“Me too,” she whispered her last two words.
You deserve so much more.

5 Words Left

I always saved those last words for her, no matter what my plans were for the day. I trudged into the living room and Henry questioned how many left. I held up five fingers and he strolled over to me.
“Well then, I guess goodnight,” he says, and after a moment of silence he repeats it grabbing onto my arm tightly. “I said, Goodnight. I love you.”
I stare straight into his eyes and whisper “Goodnight, I-” don’t love you.
Eleventh Grade

Woman of Dots, Mejah Edney, CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering High School
The Waffle House in East Atlanta,
Michelle Mulé, King School

The waffle machines
Melodically slap

A reliable rhythm,
A steady beat
Among the loud laughs
And redundant shakes
Of far-off blenders.

Tired boys
In dirty dress shirts
Sloppily harass
Their coke bottles
And scarf down hash browns with ketchup.

At the next booth over,
A boy laughs,
A daring and spontaneous shriek
That falls readily in line
With the strange song
Of midnight workers
There for the extra pay.

Cheerleaders fix their skirts as
Makeup smears and laughter dies,
Flecks of mascara strewn across
Pale cheeks like flutters of black snow.

As the windows become cold with late night air,
The boys filter out in small groups,
Strutting through the yellow door
In their untamed shirts
And red Georgia caps.
They climb into their second-hand
Pickup trucks
And Jeeps
Painted with
The sloppy emblems
Of Senior Year.

The cars give
A shake of uncertainty,
And each boy goes home alone,
Praying on the way to get good
News from his dad’s alma mater
In a small sealed delivery,
A white envelope in a sea of red.

Imposter,
Venecia Fultz, Rockville High School

Lopez made me Hispanic by default
Regretting being assigned to a culture fiend,
my mother thought it would encourage me to learn
only making me think of my mirror.
My native tongue hates me so much.
It refused to work with me.
Taking off days when Spanish projects were due,
and family reunions were scheduled.
“You’re mother should have taught you.”
I wonder if my mother cries at night,
just like me knowing
I slaughtered the root connecting our family back to the
motherland.
Fultz makes me the roadblock of our ethnicity.
I wonder if my mother
regrets having a pale-skinned baby that never let her
culture
sweep beneath her wings.
I am Puerto Rican
But if you talk to me in Spanish,
I will get lost in the wave of
Nosotros somos uno y nunca seremos iguales.
But don't quote me—
I Google translated that too.
I wonder if my mom hates me
I tell her
“Mom i’m not faking if i feel something.”
My two left feet force my body to the dance floor
Doing the silent three step bachata
my heart drops,
along with my aunt,
because Marc Anthony shared the same land
as my native ancestors
My voice sings the un poquito,
song lyrics I know from
Daddy Yankee, Farruko, Nicky Jam
Mom you raised an imposter,
but I don't fake what I feel
even if what I feel I can't understand.
Diary #12, Sophie Spaner, Valley Regional High School

The phone doesn’t ring anymore. It’s not a matter of it being broken or disconnected, it’s just that people don’t really call anymore. It’s no great loss; I was never good on the phone. My voicemails were always much longer than they needed to be, a bit broken, with pauses, interspersed with a mild nervous stutter. So I guess I’m okay with the phone not ringing. Some things need to go when it’s time to go.

My neighbor is twelve years old. He is overweight, with rolls of skin falling over the sides of his shorts, which taper in towards his knees. From his knees, his legs bow out. He wears sneakers with two white stripes down the side and a mesh tongue. They used to be clean, but he’s had them for a few years. His name is Matty, which really sucks for him, because everyone calls him Fatty Matty, even his friends. Matty has two friends. One is named Alex, and Alex is a very tall boy who cries a lot. He has long hair, all the way down to his shoulders. The other friend is named Marco. Marco is also very tall, with very short hair, cut close to his scalp. The three of them always hide in my bushes and talk loudly. Matty, Alex, and Marco.

Matty was the last person to call me. It must have been nearly three weeks ago when his frisbee landed on my roof. I asked him why he didn’t just come over and knock on the door and he said that his mother suggested to call first, in case I had company or didn’t want to be bothered. I asked him why a phone call was any less disruptive, and he replied that he would have come over, if not for his mother. So I told him to come over and help me get it off the roof, but someone in the background called for dinner, so he said he would pick it up on his way home from school the next day. I said okay, and he hung up. From then on it’s been mostly telemarketers and scam calls. I’m sort of a target audience for that sort of thing, I think. They target old people and people who don’t really know how to use technology, which would be me. Despite this, I’m not gullible, so I don’t pick up. There are so many messages in my voicemail. The machine wouldn’t stop beeping, so I cut the wire. It doesn’t beep so much anymore.

The summer is always the loneliest because usually, in the winter, the mailman can stay and chat for a while. Everyone is at work, so I am the only one that he stops and says hello to, and I give him a glass of tea or coffee, whatever he wants that day, and he smiles and it’s sweet for a moment but then he has to go. But in the summer, people are home from work to spend time with their families and all of a sudden, the mailman has places to be and people to meet, and he has to make sure the people are happy and that they get their mail on time. I hate the summer because it is too hot and I don’t have air conditioning, mostly because my window unit broke two summers ago and I can’t decide which new unit I should get—partially because each one has its own merits and features, but partially because I don’t really know how to set up an air conditioner and I’m scared that I’ll mess up the parts and it’ll explode. Or maybe not all of the parts will be there, in which case I’ll need to contact the company, which I really don’t want to do. Instead of going through all this hassle, I just open the window at nighttime and in the day, I stay in my kitchen with the lights out because it’s the room with the least light. I have curtains hung over the window—nice curtains, a gift from someone, I think. They have a pattern of lavender flowers all over them. I like them a lot. I went to bed thinking about my curtains.

In the morning, I woke up on my back. I always sleep on my side, but I woke up on my back. I don’t know how it happened. I don’t move in my sleep, at least, I don’t think I do. I’ve never woken up on my back before. Oh well. I suppose new things happen all the time.

I rolled out of bed, wearing some stupid t-shirt that I’ve had for ages. It said, “All Hail the Northern Trail” across the chest in a font that I don’t like. I don’t even know what the shirt means. I don’t remember buying it, but I don’t have the heart to throw it out. I must have liked it at some point in time. There’s a hole in the armpit, around the seam where the sleeve is sewn on. The text is faded, crackling, like paint on an old vase that’s kept in a case in some museum, but no one looks at it because there are more interesting things just around the corner. I wore the shirt and I walked downstairs and poured myself a glass of tea, because that’s what I like in the morning. I opened my curtains, even though it was summer. The sun was barely awake, but still beat down, relentless, even through the glass. I noticed that my curtains were completely faded on the other side. The lavenders that danced across the inside were muted and dusty on the exterior.

Outside, Matty walked to the bus stop, leaning backwards from the weight of his backpack. He was walking alone. There were two other kids at the stop already: a boy, maybe 15, with a striped sweatshirt and big shoes, and a little girl, not more than eight or nine. Matty crossed the street and joined them. I looked back to his house. His mother was watching from their living room window, face peeking through the peeled blinds. Neither of the other kids talked to Matty. They waited for a few minutes, then the bus came by and they were gone. I closed my curtains.
The doorbell buzzed. It seemed louder than usual. I knew it was the mailman—two days ago, I ordered a lamp online. It is a nice lamp, but I don’t know where to put it. Mostly, I just order things so I can have some company. I supposed that I would just put the lamp with the four other lamps that I had ordered in the last month or so, along with the file cabinet. Most of my files just sat on top of the file cabinet, but it felt nice to have anyway, in case I ever wanted to think about organizing everything.

I walked to the door, still wearing that t-shirt. The mailman wore a blue uniform, just like always. I liked that. He was starting to grow a beard. That was new. I didn’t like that as much, but he seemed happy, so it was fine. I signed for my package and invited him in. He declined, saying that he had “places to be, people to meet.” Then he complimented my shirt. I said okay and he left. The truck sputtered a little before finally taking off to somewhere far away. At least down the block a little further.

And so I spent the day as I usually do. I read the ads in the newspaper, looking for something new that I might want. I read the same books that I’ve read one hundred times before. I flipped through channels on the television, but I only have six channels and two of them are Spanish channels and I don’t speak Spanish. Then I admired my lamps for a while, then I listened to music for an hour or so. It was a nice day. It usually is. I live free of interruptions.

Then somebody knocked at the door and things were different than they usually are, and I knew it wasn’t the mailman because he had already come and he never visits twice, so I was confused and curious, but scared, because that’s just how it is.

I looked through the peephole and saw Matty. He was looking to each side, a little nervous, a little antsy. I opened the door.

“Hello Matty,” I said. He jumped back a little.

“Hello. How are you today?”

“I’m well, Matty, how are you?”

“I’m fine. I was wondering if I could get my frisbee back now,” he asked. So I said yes, of course, and I let him inside. He looked around, still a bit frantic. I asked if he was okay. “I’m fine.” He paused for a moment. “You sure have a lot of stuff in here.” I told him that I liked all of it. “Okay,” he said, and I showed him upstairs.

“We can get your frisbee from the roof.” So I opened the window in the upstairs hallway and I lifted one leg out, then the other, then my torso, and my head. His frisbee was resting nearly on the gutter. I reached for it and climbed back inside. Matty smiled. I don’t see Matty smile often. We walked back downstairs and I offered him something to drink. He said sure. I poured him a glass of iced tea that I had made the other day, with mint leaves floating on the surface. I don’t really know if they actually change the flavor, but they look nice. He liked it and said it wasn’t very sweet but he liked it that way and that his mother always made it far too sweet. I poured him another glass.

“I should be going soon,” he said after finished the second glass. “My mother will want me home, even though it’s technically summer. Today was our last day.” He slid out of his seat and stood up, ready to leave.

“All right, Matty. If you ever need help again, just give me a call or come right over. Even if you just want more tea. I’ll make more of it.” He smiled. I don’t see Matty smile too often. He trotted home, his backpack looking lighter than it had before.

The next morning, the phone rang and things were different than they usually are, but that’s just the way it is.

An Open Letter to Colleges and Universities Who Email Me,
Autumn Munsell, Granby Memorial High School

Dear Colleges and Universities who want me to pay tens of thousands of dollars to attend your school,

I’m not mad. I promise, no hard feelings here. I get it, you want me to attend your school because you need money so you can expand your campus and entice the next generation of high school juniors with your shiny new library and campus transportation system. Everyone needs money nowadays; gone are the days when penny candy was truly penny candy. I understand that you are looking for bright new students with heavy pockets and eager brains, but please could you not act so desperate? Since I read my emails religiously, I never miss a message from Adelphi University who, according to their admissions office, “already consider [me] a leading candidate for Adelphi University.” Columbia College is also wondering why I have not responded to the twenty-six emails they sent me, enticing me to visit Chicago. I do not trash every letter or message I receive because I realize that in order to get a job and not die of starvation on the frigid streets of New England I must go to…college. (Dun Dun
DUUUNN!) However, all I ask of you College of Saint Rose, Emmanuel College, Fordham University, and the rest, is to stop with the constant email overload and let me decide how and where to spend my money.

After being inundated with your email, I decided to do some research into college admissions. I fell down the rabbit hole that is the internet and learned that this electronic overload began almost fifty years ago. In the 1970’s, the company College Board and the other 5,300 higher education systems in America fell in love. Their relationship was perfect; the universities and colleges would buy the names and personal information of test takers from College Board. These businesses would then send information about their schools to every mindless PSAT taker who had even the slightest bit of interest in any of the majors offered at that specific college. “Oh, Sarah drew a dolphin when she was three, she’d be a great marine biologist,” says the University of Hawai’i. Fifty years ago, the whole transaction was fairly harmless because it helped misguided teenagers find some peace within the storm that is adulthood. However, the true intentions of higher education systems are much more corrupt now and place the wandering American teen as the victim.

This may be news to you, Woodbury University and Curry College, but the website College Transitions has exposed your trickery to the world, or at least to a large percentage of American high schoolers. College Transition explains the purpose of your deceitful letters stating that, “More marketing leads to more applications which leads to a lower acceptance rate which leads to an increased “selectivity” ranking.” Surely my lack of emails and letters from Cornell and Princeton is due to my area’s slow internet and the U.S. Postal Service mixing up my address, not because I lack selectivity. A college’s “selectivity” rating is important because it enhances the university’s brand; Harvard would not be Harvard without its 5.6 percent acceptance rate and Donnelly College would not be Donnelly College without its 100 percent acceptance rate. If a university has a prestigious profile, then the schools will receive more alumni donations, be able to recruit respected and well-known professors, and infuse the idea of competition into every teenager's brain.

Harvard continues its prestigious legacy through the writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau, one of their numerous and very notable alumni. I’m sure many of you have heard of Thoreau since Harvard has not failed to include him in their notable alumni list, which also showcases Barack Obama, Helen Keller, and Bill Gates. What makes this old geezer so interesting is that he refused to follow an institution that he did not believe in. “Civil Disobedience,” one of his most popular pieces, is about his retaliation against the American government and his support of the people's free will. Thoreau is not buying into the government system, literally and figuratively. He did not pay his poll tax for six years because he disagreed with America’s stance on the Mexican War. Thoreau was thrown into prison for one night because of his refusal to pay, even though someone came forward the very next day to pay the tax for him. In “Civil Disobedience” Thoreau explains, “If others pay the tax which is demanded of me, from a sympathy with the State, they do but what they have already done in their own case, or rather they abet injustice to a greater extent than the State requires.” I believe that Thoreau’s stance on the refusal to pay taxes is similar to my refusal to buy into the application tricks that colleges play on unsuspecting teenagers. If I disagree with the institution of higher education and refuse to pay for college or their applications, then other bamboozled teens will take my place and pay for these expenses instead of myself, HA suckers. But, what these young adults don’t realize is that they are aiding an age-old system that has abused their hopes for better education by stealing their application dues and refusing them entry.

Our national government does not state that children must attend college; however, their parents may decree it as law. If the newest generation of free thinkers and rebels says “no more higher education,” then what would happen to Rollins College and the University of Delaware and Clark University, and Stetson, Providence, Lawrence, and Montana State University? Their alumni donations would decrease in number and in frequency, professors would steer clear of that school and their snooty legacy would be tossed out the window. On the other hand, how would this newer more rebellious generation fare in the world’s brutal workforce without the guidance from the four-year stepping stone that is college? According to The Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2016 people 25 years or older who had at least a bachelor’s degree had a 2.6% unemployment rate, while those who had graduated high school, but not attended college, received a 5.5% unemployment rate, which is more than double the percentage of people with a bachelor's degree. I was not overly excited or concerned about these statistics since the numbers were both below ten percent. But then I discovered exactly how many people these percentages embodied. The Pew Research Center in Washington D.C. commented on the growing millennial population saying that, “In 2016, there were an estimated 71 million millennials (ages 20 to 35 in that year).” Pew Research Center gave me the information I needed to calculate the number of Millennials, both with and without higher education, who were jobless in 2016. In 2016 there would have been 1,846,000 people 25 years or older who were jobless even though they were college graduates, also there would have been 3,905,000 people 25 years or older who were jobless with only a high school diploma. This adds up to 5,751,000 young unemployed people who are roaming the world’s unforgiving streets looking for a help wanted sign on any neighboring McDonalds. If the new generation of rebels
and free thinkers refused to go to college out of principle, then they run the risk of being a part of the unlucky 5.7 million young adults. However, even if they do exhaust their college funds, take out loans, and work their butts off to become writers, mathematicians, therapists, teachers, or musicians they are not promising you a career.

You have left me at a crossroads. If I attended a respectable university, then I am abetting an enemy of the youth, one that coerces high schoolers with rainforests worth of letters. Also, I do not receive a money back guarantee from Ithaca, Emerson, or NYU if I become one of the unlucky 1.8 million unemployed college graduates. On the contrary, if I do not attend a college, university, or any other school of higher education, then my chances of unemployment double. However, I would be refusing to take part in the vicious cycle of higher education that started because of greedy companies like College Board and selfish, exclusive Universities like Stanford, MIT, Yale, Syracuse, and so many more. Deciding where to go to college is one of the most important decisions in a young person’s life. Thanks for making it easy.

Sincerely,

An innocent unsuspecting 17-year-old, “Damned if I do, Damned if I don’t”

American English: A Means of Exclusion,
Michael Cherny, William H. Hall High School

“Why can’t Sapta shop at Macy’s on her own?”
“We live in America, call her Grandma.”
“Fine: why won’t Grandma shop at Macy’s without us?”
“That’s better...because the clerks can’t understand her through that damn Israeli accent. It’s just easier, better, less embarrassing if I’m there so we don’t have to worry about her being misunderstood, or even mocked.”

United States of America: The land of opportunity. Wrong. American culture is shrouded by a false veil of opportunity, concealing intense fear of other cultures. Millions of immigrants have entered our borders in pursuit of better lives, the so called “American Dream.” To the consternation of many immigrants, American culture is riddled with intense xenophobia.

American pride has led to the ostracization of foreigners. Weapon of choice: language. The consequence of American jingoism has metastasized to the xenophobic atmosphere present today, having since escalated into a contemporary epidemic. When my mother moved to America as a toddler, her parents, aware that their accents made them unwelcome in established American communities, bought a house in the immigrant neighborhood of Valhalla, NY: A town of aliens; a city of foreigners. Forced to live in the shadow of the dam its inhabitants were brought to America to build, residents of Valhalla were sentenced to be forever inferior, never to be accepted as Americans. Their crime: an accent.

The language restrictions present among immigrants made my grandmother unable to find work that would accept her. Despite being trained as a teacher, she was viewed as inferior to more fluent English-speaking applicants. Without regard to aptitude or education, immigrant applicants are immediately disregarded because of their accents. Command of language prohibits the most qualified applicant from job opportunities.

An American employer will always argue that the immigrant is not the more qualified in a reservoir of applicants. They will leave the person struggling to stay afloat with the justification that the immigrant “wasn’t as smart.” The employer mistakes poor diction for poor

Homemade, Sophie Spaner, Valley Regional High School
intelligence. The immigrant “doesn’t make any sense” in comparison to American applicants because they lack the fluency to express their ideas in words as well.

The only hope that immigrants, defined by their accents, have in achieving in the workplace and the societal acceptance they came to America in pursuit of is their children. Like many other children of immigrants, my mother was taught to identify as an American—not Israeli-American, never Israeli. The child of an immigrant’s role in the family is to play American Ambassador: the respectable, American public face of their foreign family. Although their parents look American and act American, they will never be accepted as American due to their ‘odd’ dialect. The child of an immigrant, exonerated from the constraints of an accent, is the bridge and final stop on the way from foreign to domestic, responsible for assimilating their family to American culture.

Hearing other stories similar to my mother's experience growing up as an American immigrant, taught to hide and be ashamed of her identity, I wonder: to what extent does language play in the perception of foreigners as aliens, not immigrants? How can America continue to innovate if there is such a strong societal connection between fear and foreigner? In the West, immigrants to the US struggle to be accepted into American society due to language restrictions. However, this is not the case in Eastern culture. Li Jin, professor of Modern Languages and Chinese Studies, distinguishes between the American view of foreigners and the Chinese—a culture welcoming of immigrants, accents and language restrictions in all (Jin). She notes that Chinese culture values the verbal barriers synonymous with foreigners, considering these struggles a commendable effort to learn Mandarin. In China, immigrants are able to achieve economic and social mobility, due in part to a cultural notion that accent does not equal inferior.

Even if their fluency is imperfect, the culture in China perceives an immigrant’s effort to learn a foreign language as worthy of respect and trust. Welcoming foreigners into domestic acceptance is a mindset absent in America, where language restrictions are used to sustain a power structure that hedges foreigners out.

The power structure created by the nuances of American language effectively exclude, creating a system where the jobs and social standing of the middle class are protected by the English deficiency inherently present in foreigners. The exclusionary hierarchy of language in America is one that is less commonly present in Eastern society (Haugen).

People from Eastern countries tend to not be afraid of their lingual differences. Without concern for how Americans may think of their accents or if I will understand them, the parents of my Chinese friends speak confidently to me, skipping—rather than stumbling—over the English words they do not know.

My friends who grew up in America react with sheer embarrassment to their parents’ lack of syntax; I can see it on their faces. My friends are quick to correct their parents’ mistakes, followed by an apology directed toward me, as though their mother’s grammatical error is a crime. Even though the Chinese parents do not seem phased by their minor stumble, my American friends are ashamed of their parents’ lack of command over the English language.

The American way, making immigrants feel inferior due to their lack of control over language, needs improvement. Prevention of the harmful use of immigrants’ accents as ammunition in exclusionary attacks is needed. This is no new idea: George Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language” and William Lutz’s “The World of Doublespeak” call for a solution to counter the use of language to exclude those with less command over English: Reform through the removal of oppressive language.

Despite meager results from calls to reform the exclusive nature of the English power structure, I see hope in the Internet. Computers have become widely accessible to Americans in recent years, opening up doorways of opportunity and qualifying the computer as a more apt defense against corrupt language than literature. Technology presents many opportunities for adaptive defense against the power structure constructed by language. Between programs that correct your grammar, websites and videos that explain how to converse at high levels of discourse, methods of communication like email that mask accents, and apps that can translate entire bodies of text from one language to another in seconds—evading the elusive subjection of vulnerable people by language has never been more realistic. The internet allows my grandmother access to shopping that her accent had prevented her from. The internet provides opportunities, otherwise denied, for American immigrants.

America has long been revered as a melting pot of different cultures; the American shores a haven for immigrants searching for opportunity. One day I hope this will be true. One day I hope my grandmother will have the confidence to walk into a Macy’s without fear that her accent will be used to prevent her from shopping, even if she can do so online. One day I hope we will live in a society that values the linguistic struggles faced by immigrants. One day.
I flick the cap off the black ballpoint pen, twisting it between my fingers. The pen suddenly squirms out of my hands, as if it doesn’t want to touch the papers in front of me, and falls to the floor. “In order to purchase this property, you must sign the agreement, Jacob,” states Mr. Arnold slowly. I can hear a twinge of annoyance in his voice, as if he feels I don’t understand what he is saying. He motions to the papers at my fingertips, paints a signature in the air, and nods as if to say it is my turn to perform this simple task. I can feel the heat of embarrassment rising from my left fist into my cheeks, revealing itself in a ruby hue. He would never understand that practicing my “English sounds” is a daily practice, as I stand in front of the mirror and force myself to have meaningless conversations. But compared to Mr. Arnold’s razor-sharp English, mine is bent, bruised, and broken.

Focusing on the task at hand, I place my pen back at the beginning of the first line. *I, Jacob Popkin, agree to all the terms and conditions involving the sale of the Berkline Drive property.* I reread this line again, the words “Berkline Drive” imprinted on my eyelids, reminding me of my dream of beginning my own furniture business. I would put down my life’s savings in this promised land so I could stand on level ground with an American businessman. With the purchase of this property, I would be putting on a suit and carrying a briefcase. But I have to wonder, is the immigrant under the mask enough? Will I ever be treated with the same respect as an American?

“Sir,” I mumble, “would I be able to look around the space one more time, to be sure?” I can feel my Polish accent creeping in, threatening to grasp my vocal cords and reveal who I really am. Mr. Arnold stares into my soul, peeling back my layers of insecurity.

“Be back in this office in 15 minutes,” he demands then pauses, waiting for validation that I understood his instructions. Like a child being scolded by an adult, I nod quickly and exit the office.

A wave of musty Tennessee air seeps into my lungs as I climb up the steps leading to the main factory. The doors tower over my head, like the gates to a castle. Stepping into the openness of this space feels familiarly foreign. It feels like the day I opened the doors to my life in America, in what was called the George Brother’s Garage.

I first stepped into what I called home four years ago in Springfield, MA. The car garage was lined with splintered panels of dark wood and interrupted by a single window. Caked dust blanketed the windowsill like an accidental shade, never allowing my eighteen employees and I to escape the eternal dusk. We spent every waking hour in this cramped space, eating, sleeping, but mostly working. During the hotter months, we took turns assembling the backbones that would become chairs and completing upholstery for the cushions in front of our single desk fan. We worked tirelessly, trying to make my dream of creating the world’s largest furniture business, The Berkline Corporation, become a reality in a cramped garage titled by someone else’s name. We weren’t seen as anything more than immigrants who would never amount to the prestige of a businessman. The strength of Mr. Arnold’s voice halted my thoughts. “Mr. Popkin, I’ve given you ample time if you would like to purchase this property. I have brought you the documentation you must sign.”

In the factory castle, I begin to pace the great expanse of the floor, each floorboard speaking to me with conviction. One shouts something about persistence while another yells trust, and confidence. “I remind you, ample time,” he says, plonking the stack of stapled papers in my arms, along with the pen on top.

“Thank you, Mr. Arnold, for this opportunity.” I speak with confidence, each syllable revealing my lack of American birthright. I pick up the pen once more, grasping it tight. My hand shakes with the force of an earthquake as I place it at the beginning of the solid line across the bottom of the page. It stands alone among the blankness of its white surroundings, accompanied solely by the date where I rewrite my future. There will always be the fear which eats its way from the pit of my stomach to the tips of my ears. The fear that I’m not enough, that I’m not worthy of the same jobs that an American citizen is able to obtain with ease. But I can’t deny my vision: The Berkline Furniture Corporation, sprawled across every newspaper. With a slightly trembling hand, I scribble my signature across the line, allowing the black ink to trail off, filling each millimeter of emptiness. Filled with a newfound sense of importance, I watch the slanted ink dry, a sharp, but confident, juxtaposition against the perfection of the typed font.
Twelfth Grade

Women, Desaray Chapman, CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering High School
The Song of the Universe, Sarah Lewis, William H. Hall High School

I have heard the song of the universe
and it is the strangest thing,
deeply unsettling,

exactly as you’d imagine it: full

of contradictions
and a sense of familiarity.

I hear the whistling of wind through
an empty mountain pass
when you stand alone amid the snow,

so far away from the road,

and the cars’ blinking imitations of fire,

the darkness above scoffing at their hubris;
as if plastic could capture the sun.

Here in this field,

this place that is so different from other places,

so empty,

bereft and barren,
you are transposed onto a moonscape

in shades of white and blue,

no longer a passenger on the SS Gaia,

alone but for the stars,

so vastly remote

so infinitely beautiful.

Even with your clumsy mittened fingers

you try to pluck them from the sky

like overripe peaches
to taste them

as the wind breathes its empty song into your ear.

A lonely sound,

a sound of absence.

Or is it?

I hear the faint cacophony of a party

echoing in a hollow space,

voices pitched strange and low,
thrumming with excited purpose,

the distance too far to make out the words.

I can feel myself wanting to descend

into those cavernous shadows,

down and down into the dark
drawn by the rumble of voices
pulsing through the inked air,
a clamorous noise,
a wild exaltation,

building to something

uproarious,

dissonant,

wonderful.

“A sound but not in government”

Or is it?

I hear the sound of distant music,
an orchestra tuning up from far away,
al all discord and promise.

I wonder what movement those phantoms play now;

if stars can implode long before they leave our sight,

relatively gifting us their ghosts,

we are certainly beyond the overture.

I wonder about the finale.

Will it thunder with cannon fire and drums?

A cosmic rendition of The Year 1812 that shatters the stars,
an exaltation of destruction,

fireworks and fury.

Or will it lull us,

all saccharine and slowness,

into a sentimental end?

Swelling violins,

the warm embrace of brass,
clased hands,
gasped breaths,

the first adagio of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony Number Six,

Allegro Non Troppo,

beautiful and achingly sad,

a melody once bursting with splendor,

now quiet and meditative,
a lamentation offered again and again

until the final overlay of notes

fold one over the other

into a perfect cord

which rings throughout creation

and leaves us frozen in its wake.

Perhaps it will be more gradual;
a ballerina in a music box,
the center, the star,
her little song winding down,
each of her perfect revolutions

slower,

and slower,

losing none of her grace,

until finally,

she stops.
The first thing I remember is the steady rhythm of Beth's thumb rubbing circles on the back of my hand as my guidance counselor told me to breathe. It was so strange to me then, of course I'll breathe, as I matched my inhales to the cadence of my friend's circles.

When I was first told that Saf was dead, I didn't waste any time before I started crying. I was gasping immediately. I felt as though if I kept crying, I could pour out my grief. I wanted to stop hurting, but I was drowning. I thought it was painful then, before the news had even sunk in.

I was still wearing my gym clothes. Gray joggers and socks with no shoes. I sat in one of the guidance counselor's offices, the one I'd never met before. I thought, when I was called out of gym, that it was about classes next year, APs, student leadership, anything. But, when I first got to the office, the secretary said, "You're not in trouble." I didn't think I was (and they denied it) but I was in trouble. I was standing on the brink of a storm, and I didn't know what was about to hit me.

Initially, I didn't understand what she meant. Dead. Of course the guidance counselor didn't use those words. She said, "Sapphire passed away last night." She passed. Sign your passport, get your late pass, pass this onto Mr. Garcia, would you? Passed. Sapphire has passed.


Don't call her Sapphire. Call her Saf. Beth's circles. Beth, rubbing circles on my palm. Beth's voice playing with the guidance counselor's. Words I don't remember. Words I didn't listen to. Words that washed over me with the news, Saf is dead, crashing over me every time I stole a breath. Saf has passed.

Where did she pass to?

I called my mom. I sat in another counselor's office—the same seat where I sat with my mom when I first transferred to this school. Where I called my mom then saying, please get me, come take me home. Where I put the phone against my ear that day, and it felt tacky against my red cheek and my sticky crying.

"What's wrong?"

Saf has passed.

"Do you remember Saf?" Saf is dead. "Dark, curly hair? Looks like Teddy?" Saf is gone. "She passed away this weekend."

A pause. "Oh God. Oh my God I'm so sorry."

My principal was there. My guidance counselor was there. I put the phone on speaker. My principal spoke slowly, quietly, respectfully—so adult, so in control—as he solemnly explained the storm to my mom, and my mom made plans to take me home. But I just listened to my mom's tender, tenuous voice. I breathed it, for the time being.

After the principal left, and I'd hung up, and my dad was on his way to come get me, I stayed in my guidance counselor's office, a room away from my friend and her circles. I was still drowning. I felt like I was choking. Like every time I tried to gasp between sobs I inhaled another wave.

I remember my guidance counselor saying to me, "Maria." Pause. "Do you know what we're supposed to do in a time like this? Do know what our first response should be?"

Stick together. Breathe.

"We should pray."

Pray?

A lifeline. He doesn't pray with me; he doesn't offer—I'm sure he's not allowed. But his words are so poignant. "Breathe." So irrelevant, all I can do is breathe as I wait for the tide to go out. "Pray." So relevant. Pray for Saf. Pray for her family. Pray for her friends. Pray for Beth, sweet Beth, rubbing circles on my hand. Pray for something in the past. Pray that God had intervened in the moments before Saf's death. Pray for something that's over. Pray for something decided long ago. Pray to be heard. Pray to say something. Pray to beg God for something I'll never know if He gave me.

I go back to the other office and I sit next to Beth. I listen to her talking to another girl I don't know, but who I guess knew Saf. They tell stories. Saf loved bagels, they tell me. She ate them every day in her painting class, pulling out her bagel at the same time each day. Beth tells her story about how every day at three in the same painting class, as Saf ate her bagel, they would talk about food. Rubbing circles on my hand, Beth talks. This time I hear her words. They sink into my skin. I absorb them as everything else washes over me. Tiny Beth's big laugh in a quiet room.
Our counselors ask us who else needs to be told. I am one of the first, I guess. We give them a list of names of all of Saf's friends, our friends, who all need to be told in a quiet space.

I see one of my friends, Dot, walk in; her braids are piled on top of her skull, and her head is raised, alert and sensing the storm. And I see one of my other friends, Jo, come in, her white earbuds wrapped around her phone. She ducks her head each time an administrator walks past. I see my sweet, quiet doe-like friend Tory, but not her bold, sturdy sister. She looks incomplete, Tory, without her other half, and right then I just know that it's unfair, that it's wrong that she has to weather losing Saf without her sister.

Then, I see Teddy, and I ache for how much he looks like Saf. Every time his head whips back and forth, watchful and scared, his dark curls bounce around his pale face. His eyes dart from administrator to administrator. He looks confused, anxious.

I feel so sorry for them. The tide is about to come in, and I have nothing that will float for them. I watch them wade into the water, and I wait. I listen to stories. I so desperately want to hug them; I want their comfort and I want to support them, but I wait.

I watch Tory run out. She's crying so hard. Little Tory, small and gentle. Her face contorts like she's laughing, but her face shines. Jo is reserved; she doesn't cry. She wanders around the offices, clutching her phone, looking lost. She can't see through the rain.

I remove my hand from Beth's. "I'm going to go check on them," I tell her, and I ease open the door.

Dot falls into me. With the force of her entire body, she falls on me. She tucks her head over my shoulder, and I tuck mine behind her neck. We're sobbing. Our tides intermix. Our waves crash against each other. She doesn't speak, she just cries. Quiet Dot, reserved Dot, fierce Dot, boisterous Dot: she cries.

We walk into the conference room. We're all playing this game of musical administrator's offices. Quiet, Saf has passed; breathe, in one. A speakerphone and the principal in another. A circle of friends sitting together in office chairs in the last.

I sit next to Tory and I take her hand. I lean on her. Jo hands her tissues. Teddy comes in. Sweet Teddy, shady Teddy. Private, ironic, I-didn't-think-he-cried Teddy. His face isn't contorted, it isn't red, and he doesn't look like he's crying. He only has a handful of jeweled tears streaming from his eyes. Saf's twin, no longer a twin. No longer a look alike.

Saf is passed. I take Teddy's hand, too, gripping his on one side, Tory's on the other. Rubbing small circles now in each of their hands, like Beth. I take in how the room heaves in time with us.

We don't talk. We take the beating. We gasp. We go through tissue box after tissue box. We rest our heads on another's shoulder. We rub circles on the other person's hand. We don't tell each other we'll be alright. We don't begin to wonder why. But we sit together, and we wait, and we don't think the tide will ever go out again.
Acanthocephala,
or a spiny-headed worm,
a parasite
characterized by a proboscis.
Long tubular mouth
armed with spines
it pierces the gut wall of its host.

I wonder when he started,
when he first came in contact with the gut
filling parasite.
Does it burn?
I stay away from basements and bars,
lakes and lagoons,
because that’s where he drank from.
Knowing you’re not supposed to swallow,
too obsessed with fire sliding down on an
empty stomach
to stop.

Acanthocephala attaches itself with hooks
which may be of two shapes:
1. Longer and more slender.
The same way he began to look,
“Fuck your dinner,
I didn’t come for what was on the plate
anyway.”
2. He didn’t come for the people around the
table either.

The shorter, stronger hooks
jet out from the parasite’s base,
tearing into whatever flesh is close by.
“Dance recitals are for dads that are too sober to say,
no.”

The host’s gut it is currently occupying no longer
provides enough;
acanthocephalan needs more, needs
new flesh,
a new host to prey on—
it can’t wait much longer.

Acanthocephala is in the coffee you drink on your
way to work.
It’s on our dirty laundry,
and makes a sticky mess on our kitchen floor.
It’s in the way your eyes look through me,
so consumed with the parasite latched to your liver
you can’t hear me tell you about my day at school,
or my college graduation.

Acanthocephala forces its host to
commit suicide in order to occupy a new host.
So when you died I wasn’t surprised
to see it floating in my own glass.
Zippo's Inferno,
Phoebe Chung, Rockville High School

She toyed with the lighter, flicking the flame on with a click and killing it just as quickly. Lighter in one hand, chin in the other, she talked as dry as the desert.

“It really ain’t that bad,” she drawled, clicking it on and letting it linger a bit longer.

He stared at the flame with pursed lips. His pupils followed it, and she flicked the lighter off to watch its reflection disappear from his eyes.

“To you, maybe,” he says, his mouth barely moving. Funny. It was as if he thought it would end up in his mouth, somehow. “Why do you even have that? Smoking is bad for you.”

“It’s Jackie’s.” She flicked it on again and leaned forward—climbed over the table, in fact—to wave the flame in front of his face. He leaned back as far as he could go, tipping the chair. His teeth clenched.

“Please stop.”

“What, you scared?”

He didn’t give a reply. It wasn’t a question deserving of one, especially when she already knew the answer and decided to antagonize him anyway. She flicks it off and pulls back, and he unfreezes, gradually. His fingers automatically move to rub the bumps of his scars. Old habits are hard to break, especially when you’ve had them since childhood.

“I figured I should tell you.” She positioned herself to sit on the table, arms resting on her knee and head resting in her arms.

“Tell me…?”

“Before Leo.” She lifted her chin toward where his fingers were. “How long you had those?”

Almost immediately—probably without him even knowing, she thought—his hands moved to cover the scars. “What does Leo have anything to do with this? And none of your business.”

“C’mon, you can tell me ‘bout ‘em. I won’t spill.”

“No. Answer my question.”

“Yes.”

She froze him with a disdainful glare, flicked the lighter on again and leaned forward. “Then I guess I’ll just have to make ones I know about.”

He felt all his hairs stand up and beads of sweat crawl down his skin. The flame, however small it may have been, seemed to grow longer and blaze bigger in his eyes. For a split second, he felt how hot it was, and that was enough.

“Wh—hold on! Okay! I’ll—I’ll tell you!” She flicked it off and leaned back. “God. I’ve had them since I was a kid, okay?”

“From?”

“My village burned down and...yeah. I thought I was the only survivor but...” She nodded.

“Leo was there,” she said, as if it answered his previous question.

“Yeah.”

“Hm. Y’know, I like fire. It’s pretty.”

“No, it’s not. It destroys things.”

She laughed. “Oh, you silly Rosebud. You wouldn’t know, stuck in the dampest corner where no flower can grow.” Her voice was silver and poison, and when she raised her eyes to watch him, her gaze pierced him right through. His stomach flipped. His mother always called him that. It was the last thing she said to him before she shoved him into the remains of the moss tree.

“H-how did you...”

“Smoke is bad...to you, maybe.” She smiled then, and it was the worst thing he’d ever seen.

“But not to the Devil.”
To my Daughter, Julia Somma, Rockville High School

To My Daughter:

I feel almost scared writing this to you. The thought of you, of having my own family, is so far off into my own future it seems like a lifetime away. After high school, after college, after working for a few years and being lucky enough to find someone I want to spend my life with—then comes you. And right now, I don’t even know what college I’m going to, let alone exactly what degree I’ll come out with on the other side, but my world is changing. Unfortunately, our ideologies have been reduced to 140 characters or less. In 2018, we marched, we protested for human rights, for reform. We saw “Me Too” become a part of our lexicon. And I think of you, my warm tiny bundle, because this year I have experienced a change in the narrative of women, and I wonder how different your story will evolve from the one that is developing before my eyes.

Have I ever told you how much I love football? Not just watching the Packers on television, but actually playing? Fifth grade, throwing lob passes to the boys at recess, begging Grandma to let me play on their team. But she told me no, told me I was too small and dainty for muddy cleats and brown leather, that I should try cheerleading instead. So I stood on the sidelines, cheering on the boys who told me my skirt looked cute, watching them do the things I wasn’t given the opportunity to do. Is that really praiseworthy?

In tenth grade, I took engineering class. Rudimentary stuff, the six types of simple machines, how to solder an electrical circuit, even making robots that could pick up and relocate ping pong balls. So I told Grandma I wanted to go to school for engineering. I wanted to major in biomedical so I could help people the way I’ve always wanted to. She asked, “Why not just be a nurse?” I say that is not the same thing, so she tells me the sexual harassment statistics for women in engineering. She asks me, “Is it worth it?”

And I ask her, “Is it worth it?” Is it worth my not doing something I love because other people’s definitions of feminine don’t match mine? Am I supposed to change my entire life, choose my own career path, based on what is more readily accepted of women? She tells me I can find other things I enjoy doing; this isn’t about strength, it’s about safety. So I ask her when gender norms became a deciding factor in my safety—all I want to do is help people. I wish I could say I’ve only heard the comments from her, but the girl who saw me walking out of my engineering class sophomore year told me, “Boys don’t like girls who can fix things—why do you?”

My daughter, when you turn seven, and you ask me to join our town’s football team, I will let you play. When your little fingers grab at the dancers in the nutcracker, and your eyes go wide at their intricate pink tutus, I will let you dance because whatever activities you enjoy will hopefully not come with any gender label. Do not let narrow minds tell you otherwise; being strong is just as feminine as painting your nails because, my daughter, strength is beauty.

Grandma will have her own stories to tell you. Mostly my adolescent blunders for your entertainment, I’m sure, but still stories, and many of them won’t be about herself. I dance on the line between learned versus innate behavior, but we are quiet people. And not in the sense that we can’t be loud and have fun, but in the sense that none of us truly say what we are thinking. It’s not a side effect of being humble like the people who exploit modesty try to convince me, and it’s not innate that my tongue freezes behind my clenched teeth when I’m scared to speak; it’s a repercussion of learning that I should be scared to voice my opinions. Right now I’m in a country screaming for freedom of speech so loudly that no one hears anyone else talking. And I’m not saying Grandma taught me to be scared; I’m saying Christopher Plakson taught me to be scared, and Ronald K. Crumpley taught your Grandma in 1980. We were not born with hands that quiver when someone asks you for your conflicting opinion, or jaws that lock when people spew hate at you and the people you love; we were taught by headlines of girls murdered for saying no, by gay bars being the site of too many civilian casualties. We learn silence as the only response to violence because saying yes and biting your tongue is less painful than a bullet in your chest. Daughter, I hope when you grow up enough to accept and love and act on every part of yourself, I will not have to fear for your safety. I know it’s hard to change opinions when they’re all written in permanent ink, so I leave you this:

*When your grandmother realized she was lesbian it was 1975 in Birmingham, Alabama. She didn’t speak a word about it for another decade.*

*When your aunt’s boyfriend sexually abused her it took her three years to say something.*

*When a boy put his hand up my skirt at a party without asking I got up, feigning my friend had called for me in another room.*

*I am sick and tired of seeing girls being taught different ways to fight off violence, whether sexual or grown from hate, instead of attackers being taught what they do is wrong. But I am no optimist, so all I can ask is that unlike us—you use your voice.*
Daughter, whether your voice is louder than all the instruments in a band, or softer than a hummingbird’s wings, I want you to know that the only thing I will tell you to do with that voice is say what you want to say. Write your own narrative, your voice the quill that leaves feathery swirls of yes’s and no’s on the page, our last name and curly hair the only things you don’t get to decide for yourself. I hope you are a better version of me the way Grandma tells me I am a better version of her; Volume III in our family’s story, fighting the battles I wasn’t strong enough to fight yet. And I know you will be courageous, whether it’s with pigtail braids and pink ribbon or a buzz cut, because being a woman does not make you innately weak, and the way you look does not define your femininity. When someone says you do something like a girl, take it as the compliment it should be—your sheer strength rewriting what it means to be a woman.

*Enough is Enough, Alexander Nordlund, Glastonbury High School*

"Despite everything, I think people are really good at heart."—Anne Frank

Today is the last show of nine.
I am Nazi #2 in the community theatre production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.
I am alone and confined to the corner of the dressing room
with a prop rifle heavy against my uniform.
I'm trying to take shelter in my headphones
Listening to Magical Mystery Tour,
checking my Snapchat news,
texting my girlfriend, and finishing up my PreCalc homework.

I read about Parkland on my Newsfeed now and how many teens have died—
and I think I am going to be sick.
The girl who plays Margot is glad they got the shooter.
Anne can’t believe he went to Subway and McDonald’s after the massacre.
The kid who plays Peter puts on his foundation without a word and
Gabbi, the director, chirps that it’s going to be a full house, likes my hair slicked back, makes sure my arm band is on properly so the audience can see my swastika.
She tells me to be more aggressive,
to push and shove and scream
at her Frank family.
The crowd will be crying for real again.

And I do not want to be here
in this costume tonight storming the Annex.

My mom tells me that I scared her—

She fought back tears as I looted the dressers,
broke picture frames and ripped papers.
Yesterday, the crowd booed me as I took my bow.

A half an hour before curtain,
Leonard sneezes into a rag in front of me.
Coughs up some phlegm.
He says he might have pneumonia.
He plays Mr. Dussel, the dentist.
He is a sixty-seven-year-old Vietnam Vet
who hates the end scene
because he doesn't want to “hold hands with us faggots.”
Wants this country to be great again
Doesn't see it happening with “all these Goddamn snowflakes.”

"You are a quiet one, Alex."
Tells me I'm sketchy.
Thinks *I*m dangerous.

Then Mr. Dussel/Leonard asks me if I am doing any more productions.
I ignore him and listen to Nirvana on Spotify.
He answers for me though:

"You're probably too busy writing death threats to do plays...You look like a real shooter."

I pretend to not hear him.
And then Mr. Dussel says he oughta "call Homeland Security."
And he laughs at me.
And I say nothing.
And all the rest of the cast lets this exchange go by without protest.
Unlaced,
Sarah Lewis, William H. Hall High School

She tugs on the uniform, much too large, Number 27. The fabric is coarse and stiff, despite its sleek white appearance. She glances up in the mirror as she gathers her hair into a ponytail so tight that it pulls the skin of her forehead taught, achieving the look of many mothers on the PTO: Tired skin stretched slightly too far over the skull to seem natural. She thinks enviously of the perfect ponytails of her teammates, beautiful in their severity, and stares with miserable disdain at her own lank strands. With a sudden epiphany, she runs for her mother's vanity, where in the second drawer she knows there to be a tube of mascara. Her hand shakes as she brings it towards her right eye, her face contorting with concentration. In one deft motion she snares her wispy eyelashes and tugs them painfully upwards. Satisfied with the results, she tries again. The wand arcs towards her eye, the prongs stinging like nettles and jeers, and tumbles from her hand to a sharp exhalation. She gazes at herself in the mirror. Two eyes stare back, one clear, the other clouded and red. But the job is only half finished. Slowly, she picks up the wand.

She runs onto the field bearing a lumpy soccer ball that was unearthed from the depths of the attic, her ill-fitting hand-me-down cleats scuffing further in her haste. She sees little white doves flitting about the field, and begins to sense a tightness in her chest, a profound sense of joy and purpose. She quickens her pace with renewed confidence.

Up close, the girls are not so much doves as swans, lovely vicious creatures constantly preening and pecking. Still, she steps to take her place among the ranks of perfect girls, with perfect uniforms, and perfect, savage smiles.

Practices consist of fast plays full of sweat, stumblings full of blood, and isolation. Trips, shoves, and fouls, are not called; the resulting injuries are nursed discretely and in private so as not to incite such attention again. She says nothing, for she knows injured girls are destined for the bench.

Games approach and pass. Each one finds her perched on the edge of her seat, splintering wood digging into her restless legs, anxious for a word from the coach, though only silence meets her ears. Until one day, a finger is crooked in her direction. In her ecstasy she forgets to check her eagerness; she bounds towards the coach as a kicked spaniel would and desperately tries to keep the color from her cheeks as laughter shrills behind her. She smiles at the coach, pulse racing, waiting to receive her position on the field, her sole chance to prove her worth on the team and secure a place in the feathered order...

“Take off your cleats, our midfielder forgot hers.”

She feels her shoulders begin to crumple, the small plywood structure of hope fractures and tumbles down.

She silently begins to unlace her shoes.
Honorable Mentions

Kindergarten

Piper Collins
Eleanor Ritchings
Robin Shapiro
Mira Scholefield
Andrew Most
Charley Farvia
Nathan Witherell
Emma Baker

CREC Discovery Academy
Annie E. Vinton Elementary
Squadron Line School
North Street School
North Street School
CREC International Magnet School
Annie E. Vinton Elementary

Eleanor Ritchings
The Chicken That Tried To Get A Banana
Annie E. Vinton Elementary

Robin Shapiro
The Magical Cat
Squadron Line School

Andrew Most
How to Make a Gingerbread House
North Street School

Charley Farvia
How to Take Care of a Puppy
CREC Discovery Academy

Nathan Witherell
My Basketball Day
Annie E. Vinton Elementary

Emma Baker
Nuggling
Squadron Line School

First Grade

Nandha Muthukumar
Math Time
Environmental Sciences Magnet School

Cameron Bezler
The Bear and the Bug
Braeburn Elementary School

Lilliane Talit
The Mouse That Refused
Braeburn Elementary School

Kaylyn Wilson
This Dog is Out of This Earth
Montessori Magnet School

Connor Claffey
How to Make a Snowman
North Street School

Steven Creaco
The Kid That Didn’t Want to Go to School
Anna Reynolds Elementary

Second Grade

Autumn Wagner
Blizzard
CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering

Madison Satterfield
My View
Franklin Elementary School

Jackson Gregg
Baby and the Ski Trouble
Tariffville School

Michael Interlandi
Gobble Gobble
Anna Reynolds Elementary

Isabella McCarthy
Summer Vacation
North Street School

Cornel Matarrese
The Christmas Miracle
Central School

Antonia Seals
The Road Trip
Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School

Keira Godden
Uni and the Two Kittens
Annie E. Vinton Elementary

Madison Satterfield
A Trip to Remson, New York
Franklin Elementary School

Ameen Habib
All About E.B. White
Anna Reynolds Elementary

Jovanni Santiago
All About Fortnite
CREC Discovery Academy

Genevieve Christensen
All About Kittens
CREC Discovery Academy

Braydon Kelley
All About Myself
CREC Discovery Academy

Owen Trythall
All About Weather
Central School

Noah Jangula-Mootz
Awesome Manatees
Central School

Brooke Danko
Clearwater Marine Aquarium
Lake Street School

Zachary Gardner
Gabby’s Fun Birthday
Franklin Elementary School

Alexander Sevigny
Mini Golf In Maine
Franklin Elementary School

Ariella Wagan
My Daddy and I
Franklin Elementary School

Samantha Sorensen
The Black Bear
North Street School

Lily Hyde
The Snow Day
Franklin Elementary School

Jillian Stangarone
Walking Down a Runway
CREC Discovery Academy

Tripp Beisigal
Water Park in Disney
Franklin Elementary School

Hayley Friar
All About Coral
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts

Madisyn Mack
All About Dolphins
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts

Nayan Varma
Dinosaurs
CREC International Magnet School

Elaina Alves
Fishing with My Dad
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts

Alexander Sevigny
Bears
Franklin Elementary School

Cash Miner
Eagles
Franklin Elementary School

Evelyn Cone
Flowers and Me
Central School

Annabelle Hobbs
Look into My Eyes
Anna Reynolds Elementary

Ameen Habib
One Shiny Night
Franklin Elementary School

Landon Esposito
Reindeer Reindeer
Franklin Elementary School

Mason Bogue
The Bears
Lake Street School

Noah Jangula-Mootz
The Yellow Leaf
CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering

Grayson Gibbons
Twilight
CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering

Noah D’Emmanuelle
Twilight
CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering

Autumn Wagner
Twilight
CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering

Lily Hyde
Winter’s Trip
CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering

Sanchaya Vribanarayanan
You and Me
Crystal Lake Elementary

Linden Davis
All About Fortnite
CREC Discovery Academy
### Third Grade

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy Caudle</td>
<td>I Am</td>
<td>Norfeldt Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riya Banerjee</td>
<td>Malala Yousafzai – A Hero for Girls Everywhere</td>
<td>Riya Banerjee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fionna Woody</td>
<td>Paradise</td>
<td>Juliet W. Long Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina Kreft</td>
<td>Rubix Life</td>
<td>Salem School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Mauldin</td>
<td>The Camel Story</td>
<td>CREC Discovery Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley Leonard</td>
<td>Where I Am From</td>
<td>Central School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail Graham</td>
<td>Where I Am From</td>
<td>Central School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Cohen</td>
<td>Ozzie</td>
<td>Tootin’ Hills Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Carty</td>
<td>Rainy Reflection</td>
<td>Eli Terry Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cole Alesio</td>
<td>The Howling Wolf</td>
<td>Squadron Line School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fifth Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily Fridman</td>
<td>A Giraffe’s Tool Box</td>
<td>Weston Intermediate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Gonzalez</td>
<td>Aurora Borealis</td>
<td>Buttonball Lane Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Hyde</td>
<td>Galaxy Portrait</td>
<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lulu Ploog</td>
<td>Just Believe</td>
<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Jakubcin</td>
<td>Look Above</td>
<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nithish Jayaraj</td>
<td>Pagoda in Nature</td>
<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloise Warden</td>
<td>Africa Sunset</td>
<td>Phillip R. Smith School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trisha Dalavi</td>
<td>Eiffel Tower/Paris</td>
<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scout Fishkind</td>
<td>Mandalia</td>
<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Tompkins</td>
<td>My Personal Galaxy</td>
<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livi Kaine</td>
<td>Serene</td>
<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phineas Connell</td>
<td>A Tribe of Orcs and a Magic Map</td>
<td>Braeburn Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aidan Lang</td>
<td>A What Now?</td>
<td>Lake Street School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sixth Grade

Isabella Batista - Braided Beauty
Ariana Pourkavoos - Hello!
Melina Velendzas - The Death of Art in School
Melina Velendzas - A Leap Towards Balance
Brandon White - Calvin
Eva Fellin - Four Wheelers
Emily Pennington - Just Walk Forward
Connor Hildebrand - Scavenger
Emma Avcolle - Stars
Ela Bansal - The Hidden Lamb
Summer Zachos - The New Old
Ava Passon - Chicken Trouble!
Canaan Montlik - Power
Tene McFarlane - The Magical Kingdom
Reagan Acevedo - Rose
Matthew Arnold - No Homework!!!
Alex Barontelli - Video Games Can Increase Future Skills
Paisley McKenna - Manipulating Perspectives, Emotions, and Scarves
Allie O’Shea - Butterflies and Stitches
Brianna Johnson - Chasing a New Beginning
Lincoln Martindale - Khaki Shorts and Stolen Food
Logan McVeigh - Lava
Hazel Wilensky - Miranda Sings Live After a Six Hour Drive
Kevin Sardo - North Carolina
Bobby Shipman - Over Tunisia Hill
Evan Lionberger - Rocky Neck
Oliver Morrison - School Competitions: Brutal or Beneficial
Joyce Zhou - Soul of the Mountain
Luke Smith - Sting
Evan Poole - Technically Polite
Elijah Gibson - Teen Activists
Bianna Milliken - The Hardest Goodbye
Peter Morand - The Next Big Wave
Ava Curtis - The Oak Island Mystery
Dabi Lee - The Night Sky
William Sudnick - When You See a Tree
Maura Perry - Away
Elsa Nocon - Bandaid
Olivia DiFilippo - First Snow
Megan Armstrong - Kindness
Mia Davi - Lost
Roan Fothergill - Opportunity
Emma Golembeski - Rain
Gemma Chiangi - Shapeshifter
Madelyn Geyer - The Best Gift
Kiera Jacobi - The Ghost Within Us
Spriha Dharan - Who I Wish to Be
Kate Littler - Twilight on the Water

Seventh Grade

Emily Gu - Fighting for Our Home
Virginia Luciano - The Un-Cur able
Nyaira Small - Vengeful Perception
Sophia Papp - Closure
Jolie Gefen - What Max Would Want
Abigail Comtois - Captain Tory
Madelena Graves - I Have a Dream of Peace
Timothy Curtiss - Lesson in a Box
Ryan Eaton - Night at the Graveyard
Arianna Vincenzo Garnsey - Oscar and Alphonse
Melody Kettle - Sucker for Pain
So fia Spencer - The Heart of Bracelets
Daisy Fording - Setting the Butterfly Free
Ajon Thompson - Dear RJ Palacio
Truman Brodeur - Interview Essay: Louise Brodeur
Ashlee Perkins - Interview Essay: Ronald Parkyn
Ellie Holden - Goodbye
Quinn Geier - Aleppo

Amity Middle School
Amity Middle School
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
Coleytown Middle School
Coleytown Middle School
Killingly Intermediate School
RHAM Middle School
Talcott Mountain Academy
RHAM Middle School
Killingly Intermediate School
Killingly Intermediate School
Coleytown Middle School
Bedford Middle School
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
RHAM Middle School
RHAM Middle School
Greenwich Academy
Schaghticoke Middle School
Sofie Green-Perez  
Sebastien Yanac  
Jazmin Vivar-Atarama  
Julia Anderson  
Grace Sullivan  
Nora McConville  
Alex Pond  
Selenia Fuentes  
Lauren MacKinnon  

Rain  
The Lunatics of Branford Fire Department  
A Locked Door  
Down Under  
Ease  
Stars  
Empties  
Girly Baseball  
Stereotypes  

Rebecca Huang  
Meena Behringer  
Edwin Anthony Cardona  
Any Santa Lucia  
Natalie McClure  
Lucia Wang  
Julia Healey-Parera  
Amelia Sanchez  
Jamie Field  
Uzoma Ihieme  
Alexander Almagro  
Jacob Hultgren  
Cai Ouellet  
Damian Till  
Luka Jarso crack  
Blythe Greene  
Shrikar Seshadri  
Prasidda Pandey  
Aiden Cincotta  
Olivia Hamelin  
Genesis Torres  
Olivia Laurie  
Holden Escabi  
Mikayla Leskey  
Samantha Seepersad  
Angelina Pires  
Sydney Crockett  
Meena Behringer  
Colin Willour  
Anishka Perera  
Lillian Westerberg  
Ana Caliz-Ritz  
Shrikar Seshadri  
Parker Hughes  
Duncan Witek  
Catie Field  

Untitled  
Colors  
Friends  
Spirited Away Triptych  
Sunset  
Lost  
Silver Veins  
Cold Metal Reflects  
Laika  
The Visitor  
Attack is the Key  
Freedom at Last  
Hearing it All  
The Jaws 6.0  
Thorns  
Alive Again  
Hurricane Maria: The Advantageous Hurricane  
The Man Who Saved Washington D.C.  
Performing for Hundreds: My Journey to the Top  
Suddenly Caring  
Disappointment  
Life of a Queen  
Starruff  
The Lodge  
The Wolf  
Sunkissed  
The American Dream  
Colors  
I’ve Been Built Up  
Abducted by Screens  
Knowledge  
Tanlines and Storybooks  
The Boomerang of Kindness and Cruelty  
The Rain  
Welcome to 9-11  
Welcome to Me  

Aryan Iyer  
Clara Bloom  
Gabby Price  
Sabrina Porter  
Victoria Rodriguez  
Alexa Esparza  
Kaylin Maher  
Anna Keeley  
Cali Miville  
Alexander McKinnis  
Kaili Jacobsen  
George Karacsonyi  
Erica Lapreay  
Lauren Ji  
Megan Sullivan  
Beatrice Rogers  
Jackson Macdonald  

The Paris of the East  
Mulberry Silk  
Oblivious Like a Poet  
The Man in the Night  
A Letter from her Blade  
An Ode to Reincarnation/An Ode to Reincarnation: Imagined  
Ballerina Doctor  
Cemented Away  
Generation Z  
I Am Not What Others Think I am  
My Forced Closed Mind  
Preserved Forever  
The Bright White Stitch of a Dark Cloth  
The Growing Ocean  
Waves of the Black Tsunami  
You Are My Muse  
Carcinogens  

E.C. Adams Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Schaghticoke Middle School  
Greenwich Academy  
Canton Middle School  
East Granby Middle School  
East Granby Middle School  

Amity Middle School  
Greenwich Academy  
Woodrow Wilson Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Franklin Elementary School  
Bedford Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Metropolitan Learning Center  
Mansfield Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
E.C. Adams Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
CREC Greater Hartford Academy  
Killingly Intermediate School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
CREC Greater Hartford Academy  
Silas Deane Middle School  
Vernon Center Middle School  
Henry James Memorial School  
City Hill Middle School  
City Hill Middle Scholl  
Greenwich Academy  
Mansfield Middle School  
Talbot Mountain Academy  
Vernon Center Middle School  
Mansfield Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
E.C. Adams Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School  

Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
New Canaan High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Ridgefield High School  
CREC Civic Leadership High School  
E.O. Smith High School  
Rockville High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Rockville High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School  
Wethersfield High School  

Ninth Grade
Tenth Grade

Abigail Vartanian
Emma Yarrows
Noor Rekhi
Eliza DeGiacomo
Carley Simler
Ashley McCauley
Allison Blume
Emma Blanchet
Cormac Nocton
Paige McKenzie
John Kelleher
Krista Mitchell
Sam Harris
Isabelle Fauteux
Makayla Gorski
Abigail Vartanian
The Box
Clean Slate
3 AM Thoughts
A Trip to Paris
Exclusive Access
Glitch
How To: Fix Your Family
One in Billions
The Haunting of Georgia Raine
Yellow
Your Jokes Were Never That Funny
Kynthos’ Raven
Braille Words
I’m Disappointed in You
Key
Prayer
Scorpius
The Eyes that Would Damn You
The Fall is Almost Over
The Price of Touch
When the Sun Rises

Eleventh Grade

Chloé Poteau-Fleurizard
Michelle Mulé
Edgar Rodriguez
Evan Syme
Megan Meyerson
Venicia Fultz
Bryanna Rivera
Carissa Horton
Ananya Srivatsav
Mary Rose Maughan
Ashley Fischer
Michael Ansong
Derek DiTomasso
Celia Kove
Charlotte Smith
Nicolas Pacelli
Abigail Perkins
Kaitlyn Mead
Joseph Chatterton
Michelle Mulé
Katrina Doherty
Michael Iasalvatore
Nate Rivera
Bennett Rodriguez
Marian Chen
Samantha Sims
Juliana Hu
Lauren Mahler
Janice Hall
Sophie Spaner
Rose Kitz
Elicia Adcock
Abigail Lateer
Lucas Boothroyd
Sydney Winakor
Thomas Rhoades
Alexis Grant
Alicia Chin
Julia Madonick
Indira Alic
Gabriel Miles
Carissa Horton
Airhead.
Stormy Coast
Loyalty
A Beginning
A Disturbing Neighbor
Chasing Cars
Currency
Fragments of the Universe
Lock and Key by Sarah Dessen: An Alternative Ending
Move Along
Replaced
Save Yourself
Stroke of Nostalgia
The Cost of Escaping
The Guiding One
The Hero of Osorenth
The Sea at Sunset
The Waiter
There Are No Winners in War
Thomas
Toxic Beauty
Two Worlds
Upload Error
An Open Letter to the Future
How Accents Tend to be Perceived in Society
Last Night
Neutrality on Race Equality and its Effects
The Weight of Literature
Transforming Political Culture with Simple Syntax and Diction
What Reading is to Me
#1 Average
A Body to Run For
A Cure
A poem for people afraid of the future
Barn
Bloom
Elusive Emotion
Fear
Friends with Unfavorable Ends
I Don't Want to Break Your Heart, But I Fear You're Breaking Mine
Lost in Time
Nature’s Chi
Plants

Rockville High School
Stafford High School
Greenwich Academy
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Berlin High School
Rockville High School
E.O. Smith High School
CREC Greater Hartford Academy
Rockville High School
Stafford High School
Home Schooled
Rockville High School
CREC Greater Hartford Academy
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Suffield High School
J.M. Wright Technical High School
King School
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering
South Windsor High School
Greenwich Academy
Rockville High School
Manchester High School
Rockville High School
South Windsor High School
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Glastonbury High School
New Canaan High School
New Canaan High School
Notre Dame High School
Rockville High School
Ellington High School
Rockville High School
King School
South Windsor High School
Notre Dame High School
Rockville High School
Granby Memorial High School
William H. Hall High School
Cooperative Arts and Humanities HS
William H. Hall High School
South Windsor High School
William H. Hall High School
Glastonbury High School
Valley Regional High School
William H. Hall High School
Montville High School
Tolland High School
Rockville High School
Montville High School
Rockville High School
Manchester High School
William H. Hall High School
William H. Hall High School
CREC Academy of Science and Innovation
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Twelfth Grade

Fibonacci Staircase
A Vow
A Winter of Love
Becoming Beautiful
Enamel Cruelty
Hero in Disguise
If We Did It
Mindless
Origin Myths for Rain and Roses
The Ice Tray
The Sculptor
The Things We'd Never Forget
The Trapdoor
Through the Glass
West Boggs
What Really Happened
Yellow
A Red Hoodie and Brown Hair
Amber
An Analysis of Woody Allen’s Directorial Style
Balancing Act
College Essay
College Essay
College Essay
Death with Dignity
Don't Touch Me
Grandma and the Stubborn Chicken
Hiding Who I Am
I Am
Me: Whether I Notice It or Not
Nothing Lasts Forever
Now I'm Dangerous
People Are Scary as Hell, Man
The Stereotypes and Archetypes in Middle Earth
Visionary of the Strange and Unusual
(860) 657-9672
A father
And Then There Was Light
Baby Brother
Creation Story
Departure from My Mind, but I Still Build Thoughts
Ghost Girl
I Can't Come to School Today—I Think I'm Feeling Gay
Lambency
Life?
Marlboro
My (Zombie) Country 'Tis of Thee
Out of Love: Golden Shoel in Two Parts
Runs in the Family
Summer: To A Child
The Strays
Valkyrie
Vivitrol
When the World Says Goodnight

William H. Hall High School
Montville High School
Glastonbury High School
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Manchester High School
Wamogo Regional High School
Manchester High School
Suffield High School
Wethersfield High School
Lyman Memorial High School
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Suffield High School
Rockville High School
Ellington High School
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Rockville High School
William H. Hall High School
Notre Dame High School
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Wamogo Regional High School
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
Ellington High School
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Cooperative Arts and Humanities HS
Wamogo Regional High School
RHAM High School
Wamogo Regional High School
Notre Dame High School
Notre Dame High School
Notre Dame High School
Notre Dame High School
Rockville High School
Glastonbury High School
William H. Hall High
Granby Memorial High School
The Gilbert School
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Glastonbury High School
Manchester High School
Glastonbury High School
Granby Memorial High School
Glastonbury High School
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Rockville High School
Manchester High School
Granby Memorial High School
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Montville High School
Rockville High School
Suffield High School
2019 Teacher Honors

**Platinum**
Victoria Nordlund  
Rockville High School

**Gold**
Kim King  
Annie E. Vinton Elementary
Jeff Helming  
Anna Reynolds Elementary
Kimberly Kref  
Franklin Elementary
Vincenza Paluso  
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering
Dana Johnsen  
Greenwich Academy
Rockelle Marcus  
Mansfield Middle School
Tina Rembish  
Fairfield Ludlowe High School
Caine Schlenker  
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Carol Blejwas  
William H. Hall High School

**Silver**
Marcy Rudge  
Annie E. Vinton Elementary
Melissa Champagne  
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Sarah Worley  
CREC Discovery Academy
Elizabeth Roy  
Burr Elementary School
Meg Smith  
CREC Discovery Academy
Rebecca Snay  
Juliet W. Long
M.J. Hartell  
Talcott Mountain Academy
Sarah Moulton  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
Deborah Weinberg  
Manchester Middle School
Michelle Dimeo  
Glastonbury High School

**Bronze**
Nancy Montemerlo  
Central School
Nicole Harold  
Squadron Line School
Moira Honyotski  
Central School
Danielle Norden  
Bugbee Elementary School
Doreen Scibelli  
CREC Discovery Academy
Lesley Turner  
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Shelby Schlotter  
Weston Intermediate School
Elizabeth Salafia  
Gideon Welles School
Kathi Gundmundson  
Vernon Center Middle School
Peggy Bruno  
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Richard Hribko  
East Shore Middle School
Tara Achane-Miller  
Mansfield Middle School
Phillip Day  
E.C. Adams Middle School
Yvonne de St. Croix  
Schaghticoke Middle School
Jason Efland  
Suffield High School
Lucy Abbott  
Notre Dame High School
Cara Quinn  
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering
Amanda Flachsbart  
South Windsor High School
Mindi Englart  
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
2020 Connecticut Student Writers Magazine Submission Form

An electronic version of this form is available at http://cwp.uconn.edu/student-writers-magazine-submission-form/

Please visit http://cwp.uconn.edu/ct-student-writers-magazine/csw-submission-guidelines/ for submission guidelines and a printable form.

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Only 1 Submission in each Category.

Artwork is welcome separately or with submissions. No class sets, please.

Certificates of achievement will be awarded to published authors and to those receiving Honorable Mention.

Submissions should not exceed 1,500 words.

No submissions will be acknowledged or returned due to financial restrictions.

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

Title of Piece: ___________________________________________________________

Student: ___________________________________________ Grade and Age: __________

First Name Last Name

Home Address: ___________________________________________________________

Number and Street Phone: __________________________

Email: _________________________________________________________________

City, State, Zip Code

School (Full Name): ______________________________________________________

School Address: __________________________ Phone: _________________________

Number and Street

City, State, Zip Code

Teacher (Full Name): __________________________ Email: ______________________

Principal (Full Name): __________________________ Email: ______________________

Student’s Signature/Date: _________________________________________________

Teacher Approval:

□ I understand that plagiarism is punishable by law and I certify that this entry is my own original idea and work.

□ I am familiar with this student’s writing, have read this entry, and am satisfied that it is their own work.

Guardian Signature*/Date:

□ I give permission to the Connecticut Writing Project to print my minor’s writing if it is selected for publication.

*Guardian signature must accompany electronic and mailed submissions.

A SIGNED COPY OF THIS FORM MUST ACCOMPANY EACH SUBMISSION

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For more information, contact: Marcy Rudge rudgems@mansfieldct.org, John Martin jmartin@wethersfield.me, or Megan Murphy megan.e.2.murphy@uconn.edu.

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

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

110
An Old Story, Phoebe Chung